

Thank God It's Friday!

by Todd Maupin

It had all been a dream. The notion of cold sweats was ridiculous; nevertheless, they create a real and unpleasant feeling. Their dampening residue aligned with the dream's chilling effect upon him. He shuddered again, at both the feeling of unease and pervading residue. It was ridiculous and he knew it to be so, but it was like the dream had severed an artery, penetrating so intensely as though wounding him. The anatomy of a scene. The anatomy of a dream. Oh well, he knew he would survive, as he always did. Fatal dreams had never been his thing.

True enough, there had been absolutely nothing fatal about his disturbing dream. He had been off at camp with the others. There were the typical summer camp shenanigans, peer pressure, the fleeting romances, the rites of passage, bullying, pranks, the cliques, the alphas, the betas, those destined to become Alpha Delta Phi or Gamma Phi Betas, and the harmonious Greek chorus of Kumbaya around the campfire.

It had all seemed so vivid and detailed, those wholesome events that had flooded his subconscious overnight. Could it have been one dream, or was it several? Maybe he had been binge dreaming? Perhaps it had been a series of dreams that became increasingly more absurd, finally culminating in the dream that finally jumped the shark and woke him up.

His dream or dreams had just been horrifically superficially mundane. Nothing at all deep. No deep cuts. Nothing for Deepak Chopra to cure or overanalyze. He felt as though he had truly been involved in what was happening but had been powerless to alter the course of events. Everyone had been a happy camper and that was that. There was conflict and there were hormones but it all resonated more as a Kevin Costner movie than something Kevin

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Bacon might have done. It was all very bland, no third degree anything, or even worthy of six degrees, but instantly forgettable like something by 98 Degrees. And yet it still haunted him. Why?

He checked his nightstand. His alarm would not be blaring at him for another 25 minutes. He decided not to prolong the inevitable. He would get up, shower and ditch the dampness that was clinging to him. He had earned a headstart on the competition. While he triumphed in the darkness to remain in the black, the rest would be left in the red. As he toggled off his invasive alarm clock, he glanced at the framed photo of his mother next to it on the nightstand. She had always been so supportive of him, defending him to a fault, and certainly responsible for the man he had become, for the path his life had taken. It was a pity she had died so young, but he was proud of her for having died bravely, selflessly.

He stumbled out of his room still in a slight daze, brain and limbs still waking up. His feet and hands tingling, ready for another long day to provide him with an endurance that would not fail him. 95 minutes of full strenuous exertion did not even phase him. Some of that was owed to training, of course. He thanked his mother again for the good genes. That she had been legendary in her own right almost gave him a hereditary supernatural mystique.

In the living room of his apartment, the end table lamps cast weird shadows in the sparsely lit area. He had bought the lamps thinking they sort of looked like the Argonath. Not the Argonauts. How tacky would that have been? He did not recall having left it on but the television was still ablaze and muted. Something with RuPaul was on the screen; nothing he ever did was muted.

The kitchen, more of a nook in combination with a dining area, was as tidy as he had left it. The calendar on the refrigerator cheered him up, the very sight of it thawing the echoing funk that the dream had created. Our minds play tricks on us while we are sleeping. So

what? Why should he fret or dwell on unrealistic nonsense. After all, it was Friday, his favorite day of the week, and nearly halfway into the month. What's more, it was his favorite time of the year, the July, August, September, October, November stretch of months. In addition to being his busy time, it was about being in touch with his roots.

Fire had charred the roots on his scalp long ago, and he had shrugged it off. Vanity was beneath him. Hair was just another distraction, another means to waste time. He was more streamlined this way and capable of maximizing the precious moments. The corporate world was a cutthroat and take-no-prisoners enterprise. Sadly, this was only a microcosm of the world writ large. No one would stop and help you up if you tripped and fell. They would only continue to run and leave you behind to absorb what fate had in store for you.

Tonight would be a big night and he would need his strength. His meals consisted of a ridiculous amount of protein. Nothing exotic or synthetic, just good old fashioned bloody carnage straight from the butcher to him. Sometimes a bit of eggs and cheese to add texture, flavor and a bit of that little extra pretentious *je ne sais quoi* that the French insist makes escargot palatable. Anyhow, protein and lots of it would give him the edge he needed. Showmanship? Perhaps, but Ray Kroc's rise to the top had resulted in much more slaughtering by comparison.

He consumed all of his meals, no matter how casual, on the fine family crystal dinnerware. Admittedly, all of his meals were casual: he consumed them in solitude. Securing his victories, attaining his accomplishments did not come without a certain acumen, but it made for a lonely existence. His livelihood, so to speak, came at the expense of forming relationships with others. Was it his fault that he was so skilled at overwhelming the competition? Kill or be killed.

They do not teach that in business school, only in Glengarry Glen Ross.

The crystal dinnerware. It reminded him of summers at the lake with his parents. Well, his mother at least. His father had never been part of the equation. And that was fine. No doubt he would show up unexpectedly someday, like some infantile twist or plot point. That was just how it went, this existence. Life was not an open book where we have all of the answers laid out before us. Life was something you take in chunks, and the process was meant to be savored. A life was not something to be taken lightly.

Having finished his sumptuous calorie-laden breakfast, he washed the crystal accoutrements with care and surgical precision. Details were everything, even in the smallest of tasks. Ever since he had perfected this aspect of his business model, his career had taken off and he had made a killing. He left the crystal to air dry while he flossed and brushed his teeth. Not that anyone would ever see them. Smiling was not part of his repertoire.

He gazed furtively around the apartment to ensure that no lights or devices remained lit or active. Another framed photo of his dear mother caught his eye from the mantle and he stared back coldly. He would make her proud again today. He would not relent. Success meant perseverance and some lucky breaks and favorable twists of fate and the knife. When everything was clicking, he felt invincible, like he could get away with murder. He inhaled fully to an almost excessive length, and this was all the zen he would need to last him through the night.

Finally, he opened the door, grabbed his keys, machete and hockey mask from the coatrack and started off down the hallway. Jason decided that taking the stairs would be the start of his Friday. The 13th floor had the benefit of seclusion, but the elevator never seemed to stop there.

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