



Source: Drew Brown, Knight Ridder, 'US soldiers massacred Iraqis: Congressman', *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 19/05/06.

Tags: [dreams](#), [home](#), [intimacy](#), [security](#), [violence](#)

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The childhood dream was always the same. But please, don't be alarmed, she doesn't place much stock in her dreams, not in life and certainly not in fiction. A sloppy device, to be sure, but (and there is always a but) this may have been the exception that proves the rule, not for its content perhaps but for its monotonous regularity in her life and the numbing comfort she eventually gleaned from that.

There were these fire-breathing dragons and they were making their way from house to house scorching everything in their path. Everybody knew they were coming. You could hear them. They started at the top of each street making their way through the neighbourhood.

It was night-time and we had just finished dinner. No one else seemed overly concerned that we were in the path of danger. I came up with the plan; to hide in the greenhouse at the end of the garden, they wouldn't look there. We'd be safe. It seems they weren't very clever these dragons, more like automatons functioning with a narrow bandwidth of intelligence and almost no initiative. So if we were out of their direct path we'd be fine.

They'd be coming in the back, up the long driveway and as they turned right they'd see the door. We had to get out of that door into the greenhouse. It meant our paths would cross, it was a matter of timing, a precise choreography. We could hear them coming, at any minute they would be here. I was the ship's captain, stoic, valiant and all had passed but one.

I don't know what she was doing there, she didn't live in the house and had not come for dinner for years, preferring the communal dining experience with her peers in the old age home. She was a stubborn woman, set in her ways.

Every night at this point we had this heated, desperate and dramatic exchange:

I would say 'Quick, they are coming, we have to get out'.

And she would declare, 'I never leave the house with the washing up undone'.

I yelled at her, 'Now. You have to get out now.'

'No,' she shot back, 'I'm not leaving it like this.'

'Like what?' I would say, 'Like what?'

She seemed oblivious to their arrival, to the danger we were in, and standing outside at the back door, I was pleading with her to leave because I knew she almost certainly never did the washing up. Why now? Why here? I was caught in the middle, but of what? I was just there, right in their path, a direct hit, my fight or flight instinct had deserted me and I stood there frozen in the face of imminent fire-breathing dragon disaster.

And that was it. That's all it was, night after night. You see, it's not a very exciting, psychoanalytically complex or revealing dream. And please, don't analyse it for her.

She only told you because of the way she has been etched into those driveway bricks, the squeak of the screen door, the feel of the mesh and the sheen of the slate floor, an unforgiving grey. And it wasn't even the best aspect of the house. She remains offended that her potential destruction, or (dare we say its name?) salvation, was situated in that most inglorious passage. Why not the front door? It was much nicer.

They lived at 333 Loombah Street, an auspicious number on a very long road. When they moved in she had picked out the numbers from the local hardware. She scrutinized rows and rows of them, finally choosing bronze-plated, gilt-edged, classical and elegant 3's. Three of them, three times three equals nine. The house was a nine. She was ten, double figures—older and wiser, to be sure.

She held them in place as her dad screwed them on, pruned the magnolia, trimmed the edges of the lawn and swept the path. It was not a handsome house as houses go, more...imposing. A 1940's design with a 1970's renovation, a bad marriage, vows taken in haste and now clearly ill-suited.

Still, once you rounded the back, up that narrow concrete driveway, the garden took over and all was well. It was just one of those accepted blind spots. There were many of them, in fact they were everywhere—those places that you just chose not to see. Every marriage has them, joins roughly met, paint not colour-matched, surfaces unsealed, unfinished. Seems this was the place where everything had run out at once—time, money, love, intention, goodwill.

She could have used the front door but that would have been to go against the grain. It was for formal entrances, new friends, charity collectors, those sorts of people and mostly it was shut. She didn't have a key. Not at ten, not ever, until she left. Should she need one, it was always out, under the mat.

So she always came up the driveway, the back entrance of familiars—dogs, cats, women and children, keenly anticipating the point when the house would end. Where it would become a corner, a sharp edge of caramel bricks, already dated, and she would turn into the place of her nightly rendezvous with the fire-breathing dragons. She'd stop, take a breath, look around, gauge the distance to be covered once more and finally, in she would slip, through the screen door, begrudging, powerless, quietly furious, into an unforgiving grey.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Victoria Spence.*