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Tags: [dreams](#), [child/parent](#), [corporeality](#), [husband/wife](#)  
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I am in bed, on my back, staring at the ceiling. I'm not too sure how long I've been in this position. So I turn to face the clock. It reads eight-thirty-two AM. As if that would tell me anything. I close my eyes: an image of her face. Her name? After the slightest of delays, the syllables form in my mouth. Ca-tha-ri-na. Her lingering smell dispels doubt. I am in her bed, her apartment. I trust my nose and not my other senses—not my memory, not my reason. If not for smell, which I never experience while dreaming, everything else but, and which is so acute when I am awake, I would have no criterion to distinguish moments of imagination from moments of actual experience.

I am in the shower. Catharina and I are making love. In my imagination the viewpoint is an other's. Billie is watching us. It is through the eyes of this eleven-year-old girl that I see this. Catharina's daughter. I open my eyes. I smell soap. I remember now the dream I had last night. I shut the tap and get out and dress.

My hair is still wet when I reach the school Billie attends. At the main office I ask for her. They ask me who I am. I tell them that I am her mother's lover. They look embarrassed. I look like a 'foreigner', so the woman at the reception corrects me, 'You mean her fiancé'. 'Yes of course', I say. 'Billie is not feeling well', she tells me. She asks if Billie's mother had sent me. Billie had called her to be taken home. I tell them that I am unaware of all that. I am detained while another woman fetches Billie. When Billie appears she verifies my claim. She too uses the phrase 'mother's lover', but they do not correct her; they only look embarrassed. Billie calls me Ahmad. Billie telephones Catharina. The woman asks for some identification. I show her my Malaysian passport. She hesitates and almost asks me what I am doing here in Sydney, but Catharina finally comes on the line. Catharina confirms that it is all right that I take Billie home. They permit us to leave.

In the car I ask Billie if she had a bad dream last night, and if that is the reason she is not feeling well. She asks me how did I know. I ask her to tell me the dream. She says, 'I dreamt that you and Mommy', then stops.

In the apartment we wait for Catharina. We do not talk. Billie paces. I look at the mantelpiece clock. Catharina enters. She is upset. Catharina and Billie are holding each other. Billie is quiet, and Catharina asks, repeatedly, gently, what's the matter, sweetheart. She leads her daughter into the kitchen. I cannot hear them. But Catharina has poured a glass of juice, which I can smell.

Catharina and I are in bed. Her lamp light is on. She is sitting up and has a magazine in her hands, which she glances at occasionally. I am facing the other way, my head sunk in the pillow. It is twelve past one in the morning.

I find myself in the kitchen, standing by the sink chopping vegetables. I look at the reflection in the window and notice Billie entering. She asks what am I doing. I turn around and face her. I do not say a word. She starts to tell me about her dream. She winces as she tells me that she saw me bleeding between my legs. We are silent for forty seconds. Billie says she's never seen a man's penis before. She says she's seen a boy's thing a couple of times, and once in pictures saw a man's thing. She averts her eyes downward from my face. I place the knife against the base of my penis, and with one movement dismember myself, then offer it to Billie.

My eyes open. I smell Catharina. She is asleep, the lamp still on, the magazine on the floor. I wake her, she sits up and ruffles her hair. I am leaving the bedroom just as we hear Billie crying. I tell her that Billie and I have been having the same bad dreams. When we enter Billie's room she is sitting up, her legs apart, the covers off, blood seeps through her underwear. Catharina embraces her. I try to reassure Billie but she does not hear me. She clings to her mother.

The rest of the night I cannot sleep except for moments. Before it is time for Catharina's alarm I get out of bed, and go to Billie's room. I kneel beside her, and wake her with a kiss on her nose. She looks at her digital clock and whispers, 'Ahmad, what are you doing up so early?' 'You won't have any more of those nightmares', I promise her. She doubts me. 'Are you dreaming now?' I ask. 'Of course not, silly.' 'How do you know for certain', I ask. There is a pause. 'Because I can smell you.' 'And I can smell you too', I say. She closes her eyes. I ask her if she is feeling better. She mumbles. I kiss her once more and leave.

Billie's next period came without incident. Some months later, Catharina asked me to marry her. I sometimes tell myself this story when I awake and she is not beside me in bed, having already gone to work, perhaps, and I am unsure if she is indeed my wife, and I her husband. This would be the tale of a fabulist, if not for the fact that I can smell her on the pillow. Then I telephone her, but she almost never answers her mobile, so I lie in bed and study the ceiling, wondering, waiting for her to return my call.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Lee Weng Choy.*