

SAM'S DREAM

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SAM'S DREAM

Sam had always known that he could fly. Fly in his dreams, that is; he was often flying in his dreams. This morning's dream was particularly vivid. It began with a feeling of great beauty, set in a perfect, early-spring day. The dandelions were bursting out in golden yellow and there was a warm and exciting ambience that foretold of pleasant things to come. Sam was in the country, taking long strides in green fields. Each stride carried him enormous distances, over hedges and rivers, even up over the tallest trees. All he had to do was to push with his feet to take wing. He loved travelling like that, so powerful yet so light and peaceful.

A noise caused Sam to stir then awaken. He lay still, retaining his dream and its tranquillity. He had no need to hurry. Since his Mary had died six years ago he had lived alone, cooking and cleaning, caring for the crumbling old house and small, fenced-in garden that was nicely placed at the edge of town. He was proud of the fact that at eighty he could still look after himself, seldom needing any help.

Slowly the sounds of the day entered his mind. Birds were twittering in the apple tree outside and he could see the glow of sunshine edging over his windowsill. It had exactly the colour of the dandelions in his dream, he mused.

Sam eased out of bed and began his usual morning exercises, stretching and bending, forwards and backwards and from side to side. He then dressed in comfortable trousers, sweater and shoes. As he carefully made his way down the stairs he recalled again the day's early beauty and decided that he would take a quick turn around the garden before making breakfast. A day that began like the continuation of a dream shouldn't have to wait for him to eat his breakfast!

The early morning light dazzled as he unbolted and opened the front door. He stepped outside and twenty years dropped from his shoulders. What a day, he thought, it deserved more recognition than a quick tour of the garden. With a sudden spurt of energy Sam threw back his shoulders, strode along his path and out into the road. Once there he turned to the left and followed the road to the park that lay, sparkling with early morning dew, just around the corner.

What was he doing, he wondered, striding in the park before breakfast, indeed before anyone else was up and about. He must be a little crazy to be doing this.

Crazy or not, he loved it. It was a morning when anything could happen, even flying. He remembered his dream and recalled the glory of it. Bit by bit the idea grew that he should try to relive the experience, to continue his dream even though now he was wide awake.

He would take a little run and attempt a few jumps; if he was careful that wouldn't cause any problems, he said to himself. He hurried further into the park: if he was going to make a fool of himself he wasn't about to let anyone see him doing so.

He found a gently sloping, freshly cut meadow, walked to the top and looked carefully all about him. No one was in sight. He took several deep breaths, then, throwing his head back as he had seen sprinters do, he ran down the incline. Half way down he gave a little leap, repeating what he had done in his dreams just half an hour before. Was it his imagination or was he staying up in the air longer than he had any right to expect? He did feel lighter than normal. He reached the bottom of the slope and stopped, panting only a little. I'll do that again, he thought, pleased with his agility, and moved quickly back up the rise. Once at the top he stood for a while, catching his breath and almost wanting to be seen this time. There was no one about. Well, never mind, he

said. He gulped a last lungfull of air, then, with a little whoop of joy, ran, leaping and shouting, stomping his feet, down the slope. And across the stream. And over the bushes. And almost into the trees that stood all the way over on the other side of the clearing.

He had flown! How else could one account for it? The stream was at least ten feet wide and the bushes must be six or seven feet high. And he had arrived here, perhaps a quarter of a mile distant, in almost no time at all.

Sam sat down with a bump and thought about what had happened. How was it possible? What had actually happened? Did he really get here by flying? He must be imagining things; may be he had had a memory lapse and had simply walked to this spot with his dreams getting mixed up with his thoughts.

He decided to experiment, to try jumping without running, to test himself and his sanity. He stood up and tried a small jump, feeling a bit shaky and more than a bit silly this time. Was something happening? It felt a little like floating; he seemed to lose weight, to be lighter, immediately after jumping. He tried a harder jump. Yes! There was no doubt about it. He was moving up in the air, quite fast at first, then slower as he came almost level with the top of some small trees that were edging the clearing. He drifted back to earth and tried once more, this time stamping down hard with both feet. He rose, up and up, as high as a fully-grown tree. Birds, startled, flew shrieking away from him. He hung at the top for a moment then descended, slowly and lightly, as though he were in a balloon. He repeated his actions, leaping up and down, laughing and shouting as he did so, taking little flights at first, then long flights, sometimes straight up and sometimes along the ground crisscrossing the stream.

Sam's shouts were heard by two early-morning runners. They left their daily route to investigate. Once in the clearing they stared, incredulous, at the sight of an old man leaping about, shouting and crying, behaving like a clown.

Sam saw the runners. He called out as he flew, eager to show off, certain that they would want to join in. They moved timidly closer, looking for the equipment that should be powering the remarkable flights. They saw nothing. Sam, guessing what puzzled them, demonstrated excitedly, turning around as he sailed backwards and forwards, showing them that he had no mechanical help at all. He gestured wildly with his arms and called out that they should do what he was doing. He was much too excited to stop and tell them how! The runners hesitated for a moment, then made a few self-conscious attempts to copy Sam's antics, giggling as they did so. Sam encouraged them. Try harder, he shouted, you can do it; try closing your eyes and make believe you are flying. Almost immediately they succeeded and were in the air. Within a minute they were able to clear the stream and bushes that were Sam's first hurdle. Bounding and leaping, they were soon ricocheting about the meadow, each jump taking them further or higher than before. Full of boisterous laughter they joined hands with Sam, playing Ring-a-Rosy over the bushes and trees. Forty, fifty, sixty yards and more were possible. It was exhilarating.

Time passed unnoticed. Four more people hurried over, attracted by the cries and extraordinary sights. They too looked for rockets or motors but saw nothing. They chased and caught the trio, demanding to know what was happening and how such flights were possible. With much laughter, a few examples and some practice they soon were able to fly. More and more people arrived and were rapidly taught what to do. Very soon the clearing was filled with a throng so large that collisions occurred and people began to move out, away from the clearing, looking for fresh spaces to conquer.

A photographer and reporter panted up with equipment trailing. They stood open-mouthed as people all around flew and skimmed like giant pterodactyls. Shooting rapidly, the photographer

was soon out of film: clutching his cameras tightly he joined in. The reporter chased some of the fliers, shouting questions and taping answers.

A television crew arrived. Taking pictures then flying themselves, recording their own antics as well as those of the many other people. They did not stay long but rushed off to break the story.

News flashes were cut into the local broadcasts. Within thirty minutes they had been picked up and were being shown across the continent then around the world. Within an hour narrators were giving detailed instructions, explaining how to leap-fly, demonstrating how to jump, soar and land.

Normal activities slowed and came to a halt. Everyone who heard about leap-flying tried it. Soon every able-bodied person was making kangaroo leaps and taking balloon jumps, laughing and playing with friends and strangers alike.

By noon Sam was worn out and could manage only short trips. He sat down and watched, giving small cheers of encouragement when someone did something particularly well.

The sun shone brighter and brighter. It was two o'clock before Sam was sought by reporters wanting to learn how the flying skill was found. He explained that, until this very morning, flying had only been a dream for him. He described how the day had begun with a flying dream and how it seemed to have continued as a dream right up until the present time. The reporters knew exactly what he was describing; they too felt a dream-like quality about the day. They hurried away, using flying leaps to speed back to their office.

A wave of blackness suddenly overcame Sam and he almost fainted. He had been up since daybreak, had had no breakfast nor lunch, and had been exerting himself violently for several hours. Emotionally he was drained and could not take any more. He stood up, feeling so light-headed that he knew that he had to eat and rest, but not wanting to leave his many new friends. He moved slowly, trying not to look at the excited acrobats, following the paths to the edge of the park and then shuffling his way along the road to his home. The front door step was almost too high for him to master. He entered, closed the door and sat quietly in the kitchen. After a while he filled the kettle and set it to boil to make tea. He reached for a loaf of bread, opened a packet of cheese and began to eat.

As daylight moved around the world, on every continent and in every city, town and in almost every village people began leap-flying. Nowhere were there any clouds; everywhere seemed to be an ideal day, with a curious, golden, spring-like quality. National holidays were called; it was almost impossible for anyone to resist the urge to fly.

Night fell only too quickly and people went to bed, excited and happy. To be able to fly! It couldn't be possible, yet they themselves had done it! What would the next day bring? How far could they fly if they trained? Could they commute to work by flying? The air would be crowded; aerial traffic signs would be needed. Flying would become a major Olympics event. Maybe people could use sails and fly across the oceans. . . .

Sam did not awake until nine the next morning and then felt chilly and weary. His muscles and bones ached and pained. He had badly over exerted himself the day before. But as he lay in bed he recalled what had happened; the enchanted beginning, the wonderful morning, the crowds of people and the tiring walk home. He wanted, yet feared, to try flying again, leap-flying as it was now called. He got up, carefully, using the furniture to ease his weight from foot to foot as he pulled on his trousers. He needed no excuse to skip his exercises, he must have carried out a month's worth of exercises the day before. He moved gingerly down the stairs, along the hall and out into the garden. He just had to try flying again. He took a small leap. It didn't feel right. He

tried again, without success. Was he too tired? He felt a bit panicky. He must be able to fly. He would feel so foolish if everyone else in the world could now fly and he couldn't. Maybe he just did not have enough energy. He would eat breakfast and try again afterwards.

He went indoors and switched on the radio. Every station he tuned to was discussing leap-flying and giving the latest distance and height records. He switched on his television. Pictures from many parts of the world showed the latest feats. People could join together and lift quite large objects; twenty young men could lift an automobile.

There was a knock at the door. A TV crew with cameras. Sam did not want to talk to them. They wouldn't go away. Sam went outside. They asked him to demonstrate how it had all started, to show them how he had learnt to fly. He told them that he couldn't just at that moment. He explained that he had tried a jump, before eating breakfast, and he had found that he couldn't even move off the ground. He felt too tired: he was eighty, didn't they know? He was sure that he would be able to fly again when he was stronger, maybe tomorrow. They wouldn't let him go and pulled him away from his door. Sam, thinking that they would leave if he demonstrated, gestured people away and took a few painful hops, failing miserably. It was clear to everybody now that something was wrong. Sam said that the day felt different to him somehow. The golden sunshine was missing, and the sun seemed a little cooler. He needed to rest. They should come back tomorrow. Everyone was quiet, even the reporters had little to say, and this time no one stopped him from entering his home. He went inside, shutting and bolting the door and then closing the curtains of the downstairs windows.

In the afternoon his garden and the road was crowded with reporters, news cameras, police and spectators. People were talking together in little groups. Those on the outside edge of the crowd were jumping, taking short flights, just filling in the time until Sam came out.

Sam emerged. He looked so frail under the cameras and barrage of questions. He spoke, but that was not what was wanted. Reporters wanted to record Sam in action and demanded that he fly, saying that he must re-enact the beginning for the world to see and so that a record could be made for posterity. Hesitatingly he stepped away from his door. A space was cleared and he moved onto the lawn.

Sam jumped, achieving no more than a little hop. He tried harder, managing to clear a tuft of grass. He tried once again, with no greater success. Someone tittered and there was a short laugh. Tears came to Sam's eyes. He tried a run and jump only to fall over. The crowd was silent and a fear fell over them. Sam could no longer fly.

Television and radio carried the story around the world. It seemed curious but insignificant; one eighty-year old man was unable to fly.

But it wasn't insignificant. People remembered that this was the man who had first flown and they wondered. They wondered if they, too, might someday become unable to fly. They stopped listening to the radio, stopped watching television and went outside to reassure themselves. Suddenly, like a disease, anyone hearing that Sam could no longer fly was similarly unable to fly. Those who were still flying were told what had happened when they next spoke to someone who knew. They, too, then found that they had taken their last flight.

The day ended in world-wide sadness. People didn't want to see others, to talk to anybody or to go anywhere.

Sam, too, was sad. This was not the way it happened in his dreams. When he dreamt of flying he woke up happy. He decided to go to bed early. He would dream again and maybe things would turn out properly the next morning.

Sam died in his sleep that night. No one knew if he dreamt of flying again. His death was

reported. There was a long, long period of mourning. But that mourning was not for Sam, no, not for him.