Three nightmares are as real to my memory as anything that ever happens in “real life.”

The first, when I was three or four, I was walking from right to left, along a street which I might describe now as a set of row houses in a lower-class English suburb, or a string of close-together frame houses at a seedy beach resort. Each house has a porch. On one porch a man is waiting. As I walk by this harmless seeming place and person, as I get “even” with him, suddenly his face blows up as big as a huge balloon. He is Chinese, and he hisses at me.

The second, when I was maybe 23, married to my first (Eurasian) husband. I was desperately unhappy at the time. Our little frame house perched on a hill above a gas station and at night, when the trucks came to refuel the station, I’d wait, in terror, for us all to blow up. The dream is, my husband and I are waiting in front of a movie house for the movie to begin. Twenty or thirty people wait around, moving in the dim, pretentious way people do in art films. One of the people on the street is my father (for the first 30 years of my life, the source of most of my joy and suffering. A short, cute, funny, irresponsible guy who left my mother penniless, but told so many funny jokes I hardly noticed.) In this dream he’s not smiling. He looks at me obliquely and says, “Don’t you know? We’re all dead?”

The third, when I was 33. I was traveling in Europe with my second husband, in the company of a child from my first marriage, a child from his first marriage, and a three-year-old from our own marriage—a union which at this time had already broken up, after eight years, because he had fallen in love with a cute secretary. We had made the reservations for this six-week trip six months earlier, and couldn’t afford to lose the money. It is arguable that I didn’t need a nightmare; I was in a nightmare. The one I had was extra-realistic: after 13 years, it still upsets me to write it. Tom, a smart-ass Aryan blond, is continuing the cruel conversation we’ve been having for weeks. He’s grinning and laughing the way he’s been doing for weeks. He tells me, grinning, “I thought Linda and I would be giving a dinner party soon. I think it’s time for her to meet all our friends.” I wake up, weeping, and tell him the dream. He grins and laughs, and says something awful that I don’t remember.

Most, if not all, my other nightmares fall into a fairly standard world-blowing-up pattern. Before the bomb, I dreamed of volcanoes; after the bomb, the bomb. But
thinking about this now, from a position where—philosophically at least—I've given
up "unhappiness" either as a way to live, or as a position in art, I can see that these
nightmares held more good news than bad.

That first dream—as much as my love of Anna May Wong movies—may have
led me to my Chinaman, who gave me my perfect name, as well as a generous
dose of much-needed glamour to my Eagle Rock, California, life. My father—who
has since gone into a bottomless depression—had, perhaps, to "die," for me to go
on with my own writing and life in a reasonable way.

And as a woman who still has more trouble then she should in forgiving and
forgetting, I am happy to report here that there came a time in "real life" when the
Infamous Linda, Other Woman, was preparing a huge dinner party for her gentle-
man friend, my ex-husband. She had invited all our friends, and they had all ac-
cepted. Except that the day before the party he came in, and laughed, and said
she'd better call the whole thing off; he was getting married to someone else. I joy-
fully give that lady my nightmare; I still think she deserves it.

It occurs to me, maybe these nightmares are the first shifting of the snake's skin, a
vomiting, a purging—a way of getting rid of angst before something happens, so
that when the Eurasian strolls by, or the parent dies, or that blond guy treats you
mean, you can meet the situation with the alertness, equanimity, and calm atten-
tion which I think these events deserve.

I should say that no women have ever appeared as agents of evil in my night-
mare. I take this to mean, not that women are in any way "nicer," but that I have
yet to see men as anything more or less than symbolic forces, brightly labeled ban-
ers in my work.

That Cute Betraying Guy is a pivotal force in The Rest Is Done With Mirrors. I
found a subculture of those men in the pornography business, and “anthologized”
them in the non-fiction Blue Money. They were cheery, decorative, ultimately
powerless. Mothers, Daughters treats my Aryan ex-husband as a cruel caricature.
(Perhaps he really was my dream man, conforming, as he did, to my most flam-
boyant fantasies of the worst male behavior.)

My new novel, Rhine Maidens, has two decent men in it but they are dimly seen,
and not "important." I suppose it might be one of my tasks as a writer, not to trans-
cend these limitations of my vision, but to work with them (maybe even hu-
morously?)—to make them touchstones of the way I see the world?