

Croning

My tongue worries an irregularity, a rough spot, along the gum line of one of my front teeth.

The tip of my tongue is compelled to insert itself in the crack in the tooth, and to work it, work it. The tooth develops some play. It is a bit loose in its socket. It gives way. Out it comes, without any resistance. It looks less like a tooth and more like an undersized brown almond. I examine it in horror, then rush to the mirror, expecting to behold an unsightly gap—the face of a crone.

But though I hold the brown tooth in my hand, in the mirror when I bare my teeth, *there they all are*, all my white teeth, all intact. I know it's a dream, but I don't wake. I stay dreaming, caught in the lucid conundrum of the two irreconcilable teeth which are the one: the rotten one I have shed, and the apparently healthy one I have firmly fixed in my mouth. I feel relief and the sense of having escaped something morbid. *Almost*. The bemusing presence of the browned, broken, almond-like tooth is implacable.

As I am dreaming I am reminded of an earlier dream in which the entire roof of my mouth turned out to be false: a plate, and, once I remove it the actual roof of my mouth feels as spacious as a vaulted cathedral. Reminded of this, within the present dream—which is a sequel, I am comforted that the brown tooth that I have shed is not the 'real' tooth, but a false double, which has atrophied leaving a vibrant tooth in its stead.

The motif of lost teeth in dreams is apparently a common one. Teeth are related to biting and chewing; to maturity and ageing; to talking, to telling the truth and to lying; to smiling and confidence; to flirtation and desirability. Freud himself, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, touched upon tooth symbolism and, though he offered a sexual interpretation for tooth dreams, he insisted that for every dreamer, a symbol refers to different things according to context and personal association—what he referred to as the particular 'psychic situation'.

My psychic situation is that I am *croning*. My friend invented the term. She meant it positively. *Almost*.

Croning is the process of becoming a crone. I'm in it. I looked up the word crone and it comes from late Middle English, via Middle Dutch: *croonje*, *caroonje*, meaning 'carcass, old ewe'. In old Northern French, the word *caroigne*—*carrion*, refers to 'cantankerous woman'. I have decided to embrace *croning*. For one thing, attempts at alternatives require too much time, energy and money. Besides, efforts to resist becoming a crone are prone to almost certain failure. And what is more, the cantankerousness set in some time ago. So, I am resigned. I looked at a recent photo of myself and was surprised at the size of my teeth: I have literally become *long in the tooth*. An old ewe. The hair dye has not been fooling anyone for a while now, so I decided to desist. I *liked* the result. Under the dye I was not so grey as I might have guessed and, moreover, the grey suits my face. It's not so much that I have let myself go, as *let myself go-Patti Smith*.

Maria Kunda, 2018