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## Night Dream

by Elda Abramson

A dream diary filled with my dreams would make a dark reading indeed.

I wonder, reader, if you ever have happy dreams? I can't remember having one, though there must have been some at some time, don't you think?

Night dreams are where all my anxieties fears and insecurities come out to play.

They have such a good time they return again and again.

The main character in these recurring dreams is none other than Popeye, the sailor man, "I yam what I yam" man. Such a confident little character. But in my dreams he isn't anything like that – my nighttime Popeye is burdened with impossible tasks, which he stoically undertakes. I've never seen him fail or succeed, he just really gets on getting on with it. He's in the Atlantic Ocean, it's a New York ship. He's feeling the weight on his shoulders and then he and the ship fade and I am left with the tension of responsibility.

There is very little variation on the scenario. Here it comes again another night dragging a huge black, white and red ship. There are never any people on the ship, by the way. Then he disappears again leaving me with the feeling the weight of great effort and how very important this task is to be done.

Whenever I see a picture of Popeye, which is not often, I feel chilled to the bone.

There was a Jeff Koons exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery some years ago and it was full of larger-than-life Popeyes. Powerful and disturbing. And just now as I am writing, another scene comes to mind.

When I was about 11 or 12, late one night my father and I drove a long way down the remote country valley to a shack in the woods. My father knocked on the door hoping the hillbilly who does electricity would come and fix ours. There is no answer, then a growl and the door opens a space, a bare lightbulb is shining overhead. Through the opening I see a naked woman asleep on yellowed sheets. This small toothless man dressed in filthy long johns seems aggressive but I don't hear the words he is speaking with my father. After a few minutes the man disappears into the shack and comes back down from the shack steps with a large jug of moonshine. He insists that my father takes a long draw of the stuff and then he pushes it in my face "come on girl, have a slug", and I know I have to do that. And my father isn't going to object. It is a test.

I think we left after having allowed him to overpower us. I guess he came over and fixed the generator, but I don't remember this person in daytime hours.

But remembering that night, he bore quite a resemblance to the old, "I am what I am" man in more ways than one.