



Night before last, I dreamt of a garden. It wasn't just any garden. You might say it was my, um, *dream*

garden. In front of my *actual*

house. (As opposed to my dream house.) Yes, in this dream, my humble front yard in Pigeon Point had become an extravagant garden, with a pond full of sparkling fish, an ancient-looking stone fountain, and a kaleidoscopic profusion of blooming bushes.

There were rose vines climbing up the sides of the house, wisteria spilling from window boxes, bluebirds and cardinals singing sweetly in lemon trees, and butterflies flitting about. In my dream, I stood amidst all this mythic beauty, facing our little house – which was itself, but *not* itself – and a deep, indescribable joy washed over me.

Then I woke up.

I lay there for a few seconds, still awash in this weird, hyper-intense dream-joy... only to be overcome by a painful sense of loss. I hugged my pillow to my chest, felt tears behind my eyelids. Because I knew, certainly and absolutely, way down in my bones, that I would never have a garden like this. Ever.

And then I got up and got over it.

After years of optimistic self-delusion, I have come to accept the fact that I am a woman of very limited energy. Things that many – most? – women tackle with ease (or at least cheerful aplomb) tend to overwhelm me. Housekeeping, cooking, and, yes, gardening... all the usual domestic stuff? Overwhelming. I engage in these activities – sparingly – because I have a family and a decent sense of shame. But the idea of a Big Project – organizing the closets, for instance, or redecorating, or “spring cleaning” – can actually paralyze me.

And it's not just domestic stuff. I am overwhelmed by professional tasks, too. The thought of writing this column never ceases to daunt me – I've been doing it for 12 years, and I still have to gear myself up, every time! – and when faced with an entire issue of this paper to proof, I invariably become sluggish and sickly. Over the years, I've developed a psychological trick that helps a little. I take everything in tiny increments, approaching each part of my job as an end in itself. Thinking about the “big picture” will just shut me down, so I don't. (Example: Now that I've finished this paragraph, my work here is done. See y'all after my break.)

I do not like being this way. I don't like being so low on energy, so easily overwhelmed. And ever so often, I determine that I will change my very nature. I will transform myself – out of sheer will – into the tireless, accomplished achiever I long to be. I even make New Year's resolutions to that effect. “This will be the year I finally...”

But, as it turns out, I am a woman of even less resolve than energy.

I know I'm not the only one who fumbles in the New Year's resolutions department. I blame that on the timing. Could there possibly be a worse time of year for resolution-making than January? The long party has finally ended. We're fat, we're broke, we're hung-over. (Okay, maybe that's just me.) The weather is dank, the world is gray... and we're supposed to hop out of bed with vim and vigor, ready to conquer old demons and take on new challenges?

What crazy masochist came up with this idea?

I don't know about you, but for a woman like myself – one of limited energy, and easily overwhelmed – the making of grand resolutions in January is a recipe for certain failure. So, I

am boycotting this year. No more setting myself up for disappointment. I'm stopping the madness and embracing the truth.

And that truth is this: In all probability, this will not be the year I finally become a fabulous cook. Or the year I finally become an efficient housekeeper. This will, in all likelihood, not be the year I write my novel or become a nationally syndicated columnist. It will not be the year I learn to sew, nor the year I train for a marathon. And I'm pretty sure it won't be the year I create my dream garden.

Are you thoroughly depressed, yet? I'm not. Actually, I'm feeling better! In fact, I just let out a deep sigh of relief. My resolution not to make resolutions is a burden lifted. A necessary act of honest self-appraisal. I'm tired of pretending – even to myself – that I'm ambitious and striving and goal-oriented and all that other stuff we so value here in the United States. I appreciate those qualities immensely, and I'm extremely grateful that others – many others – possess them in abundance. Those people make the world go 'round. But you know what? I'm not one of them them.

I am a woman of limited energy... and easily overwhelmed.

And it's not as bad as it sounds, really. I actually like my life. I like it very much, in fact, when I embrace it as-is, instead of dwelling on all the things I failed to do well last year and *should* do better next year.

Come to think of it... last year was pretty darn good, considering I didn't stick to any of my resolutions.

2011 was the year I made baked Christmas ornaments with my daughter for the first time. (They turned out shockingly well, considering crafts are one of those simple things that usually overwhelm me.) It was also the year we planted three new camellia bushes in our front yard. (No, they don't constitute a "dream garden," but they're taller now than they were, and they're actually blooming! I didn't kill them!)

It was the year Amelia and I read the first three books in Madeleine L'Engle's "Wrinkle in Time" series together. It was the year she played Jiminy Cricket in "Pinocchio," and Angie the Ox in "Guys & Dolls, Jr.," and the year she came in third in the school science fair... with a bit of help from Ms. Easily Overwhelmed.

In 2011, I learned how to make a really delicious gravy for pork chops, and I kept the home fires burning while my husband directed "To Kill a Mockingbird" at USCB. 2011 was also the year we kept *Lowcountry Weekly* running in spite of terrible economic challenges. It was the year I sang with my choir at a very sad funeral and managed not to cry. 2011 was the year I joined the prayer chain at my church, had one of my essays published on a national website, and took my daughter tubing for the first time. It was the year I significantly cut back on cable news watching, and the year I made it to the Y at least three times a week... often four.

Not too shabby, eh?

You'll be reading a lot of articles over the next couple of weeks about Achieving Your Dreams... Reaching Your Goals... Realizing Your Potential... in 2012. And I'm certainly not discouraging those pursuits! As I said, I appreciate the go-getters and record-setters of the world. We need you guys. Go for it! Make us proud!

But this is for the rest of you... the people like me – limited energy, easily overwhelmed – who might secretly, even subconsciously, be seeking permission to opt out of the great American race to the top this year. I hereby grant you that permission by virtue of my status as an obscure columnist for a free newsweekly in a small southern town... who is inexplicably – perhaps brazenly – happy with her life.

Will 2012 be "the best year ever"? Who knows? I'm guessing that, for me, 2012 will be a lot like 2011. And if I don't muck things up with grandiose expectations and unrealistic aspirations, it might even be better.

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