



BOOM

by Sarah Ollove

Money is the stuff upon which dreams are built. Instant affluence from hedge funds and Ponzi schemes sends get-rich-quick-plotters salivating. But with most of our wealth tied up in stocks and bonds, paper and credit, it gets more and more difficult to remember the link to physical reality. Revenue now depends upon maintaining an illusion. Once the illusion breaks, assets fall like dominos and corporate empires collapse.

Four hundred years ago, the best — if most improbable — way to climb the ladder was to be transformed into royalty overnight. Such is the subject matter of Pedro Calderón's *La Vida es Sueño* or *Life is a Dream*, which follows the shifting fortunes of a prince imprisoned in his youth and then set upon the throne. In *Fever/Dream*, Sheila Callaghan capitalizes on the rise and fall structure of Calderón's play. She shifts the setting from the royal residence of Poland to a modern corporate building; kings, lords, and servants transform into CEOs, COOs, and temps. This allows Callaghan to turn a 17th century play about the illusory nature of existence into a semi-parable about the current economic situation. Calderón's observations about the precariousness of prosperity and the value of restraint jive with the bitter lessons learned by companies like AIG and Lehman Brothers, who forgot moderation and ruined themselves because of it.

After an unexpected revelation, an elevator shoots Segis, *Fever/Dream's* hero, straight from customer service to the CEO's desk, where he discovers that the penthouse life he envied from the basement hides unexpected pitfalls. Given his next opportunity to leave customer service, Segis is better prepared. Understanding his actions have consequences, he'll forge a new style of leadership that values employees as much as the bottom line. Perhaps a good lesson for recently downsized I-bankers, or for that matter, any of us.



Illustration of Segismundo

TO BUST

La Vida es Sueño

Pedro Calderón de la Barca sits beside Shakespeare in the pantheon of great 17th century playwrights. His 1636 masterpiece, *Life is a Dream* (*La Vida es Sueño*) is a philosophical allegory about free will versus fate. In it, Calderón posits that all existence is an illusion: "For all of life is a dream, and even dreams are dreams." Calderón, a devout Catholic, emphasizes the transience of life on Earth, implying a more permanent arrangement in the afterlife. The basic plot of his masterpiece is as follows:

Rosaura, on a mission to restore her honor, disguises herself as a man, arms herself with the sword of her long-lost father, and sets out with her clownish servant Clarion. They stumble upon the dungeon of Prince Segismundo, whose father King Basilio secretly imprisoned him when it was prophesied that the boy would destroy his kingdom.

Just before the Prince's cousins Astolfo and Estrella claim the throne, King Basilio discloses his son to the court. Segismundo is abruptly set on the throne for a tryout, but he turns violent, killing a soldier and attempting rape. Segismundo is returned to his jail and told that his day as king was all a dream.

Astolfo and Estrella have a falling out over a portrait hidden in a pendant. Rebels find Segismundo and break him out of jail. Battles ensue with shifting alliances. Segismundo ultimately achieves his rightful destiny and helps Rosaura restore her honor.

Besides transporting the story to a different time and place, Sheila Callaghan also radically transforms the language and tone of *Life Is a Dream*. Calderón's text reflects the hyper-rationalistic style of the baroque era, with complex soliloquies that map

the characters' moral and metaphysical conundrums:

"The rich man dreams about his riches, which cause him greater worries; the poor man dreams that he is suffering his misery and poverty; the man beginning to thrive is just dreaming, the man who toils and strives is just dreaming, the man who affronts and injures is just dreaming; and, to sum up, in this world all men merely dream what they are, though no one realizes it."

In place of this dense wall of reflection, Callaghan substitutes her own hip, contemporary argot, reveling in the peculiar vocabularies of business people, accountants, lovers, hipsters, and geeks. Instead of merely talking about dreaming, her characters enter literal dreamscapes which take on magical significance. When Segis' unique vision finally succeeds in *Fever/Dream*, it is a triumph first and foremost of the imagination.