

Dream

By Lilli Blackmore

Sometimes I don't wake sharply from dreams. Instead, they seep away slowly and I discover that I'm in my bed without knowing how long I've been aware.

I know I was dreaming a moment ago. I can close my eyes and relax and try to see if it will come back. If I'm lucky, I'll fall back asleep and float back into it. But it might have been a bad dream, so I check while I'm awake.

White, twisting trees running down into a pool. Lying on the thin sheets, half in it, I can't tell if it was a dream I'd had before. It might be a memory dream from a dream I'd experienced years ago. Or a dream that had been recycled hundreds of times. Maybe it was an ancient dream that found its way into my mind when I was little, and I carried it with me to here.

I close my eyes and I'm near the slim trees, their roots as long and graceful and deep as a cord of memory leading into the water. Above the water, the dozens of curving pillars look like a sparse dam, or the debris from a storm. But I followed them down below, to the aquatic life of soft yellow sand, green water moss and the blue water that is somehow fresh to drink in the salty marsh.

Maybe I was down there a long time. When I come back up to remind myself of the surface world, I see that it is night. The water has no discernible temperature, and I find myself relaxed and

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floating without effort. I swim forward slowly in the tepid river, the wide, white moon illuminating my course in her maternal way. In here, I can see that I was made to be a water creature. Maybe I'm not a human child at all... but it isn't important. If I think about it too much, the thought might take me away from this place, so I don't wonder.

I am swimming toward something. Someone I need to see. Someone who lives in the water village that is my essential dreamscape, the one with weather-worn wood docks and lighted lanterns on the briny posts. I know how deep those posts go. But I don't know where this is, and I must speak to her.

My body moves, and my hands are on my bed sheets again. I don't know what happens next. Did a noise from outside wake me? Noises can do that when they're so far removed from the dream. Was I asleep? Remembering the dream, or re-dreaming it, or dreaming a new one entirely?

The room is warm, so I pull the sheet away from my legs and up to my neck to wipe away some of my sweat.

I don't know why I would have had that dream. I never saw mangroves in real life. Mostly I saw them in geography books. There's nothing peaceful or calm about the swamps either. Broad wings hover over the water trying to find smaller creatures to eat without being snapped up by still larger creatures.

And yet, if I close my eyes again, I see them. Graceful and white with salt, like a palace dome touching the sand.

The fan makes a low noise, something between a growl and a throaty hum. The cooler strands of air they push down here aren't enough to cool. They're just enough to remind me that cool exists.

Portia was there.

I remember, in the dream, I saw my sister on the dock as I swam in the water.

The clock light, which has seemed cool until now, emits heat from its green glow, reminding me of the neon sign at the bar - a new memory that tumbles past like a dream itself.

I want to put my mouth to the marsh waters. The thought of the taste makes me thirstier.

This room wants to be still and quiet, but the darkness is diluted with the orange glow of the ever-waking buildings around me, and it is hard to tell what's a dream memory and a real memory. It's sleep, I know, that makes things blurry.

But I'm sweating still, and that makes it hard to rotate things into focus. It could have been real. Remember, Portia, when I swam in the water along the dock's edge and you walked on the dock above me? The warm night was a safety blanket and the moon was our night light?

It could have been a repeat dream. Remember, Portia, when we made that indoor tent out of our bed sheets the summer that the fires from miles away rained ash into our backyard and we couldn't sleep outside? I could have dreamed it then.

We woke up hot in our sleeping bags that I'd said were always used in camping, during summer or not. When we lay next to each other, breathing in that stifling air, talking about the fireworks we'd seen two nights before.

No.

A siren from outside wakes me, sharply, and I know that never happened. It was a dream, and I have to get up at four o'clock, in this same darkness, and go to work. The city is hot, and I'm sleeping alone, with the consciousnesses of thousands around me, all moving at their own frequency and none of them available to me.

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