

# That Crazy-Ass Willy Wonka Boat

by Laura Preble

Did you ever see Willy Wonka, the movie with Gene Wilder in the title role? I absolutely loved him in that part—equal measures sugar, spice, and a whipped frenzy of weirdness. One of my favorite scenes in the movie is the demonic boat ride Wonka hosts for his factory visitors. They all step onto this tricked-out gondola and cozy up for a nightmarish faster-than-light rush down a tube peppered with disturbing images: a chicken with its head cut off, a snake, a set of frightened eyes with forks sticking out of them (oh, wait...I think that's Luis Bunuel...and the dead chicken might just be because I'm hungry....) Anyway, the images are creepy, ghoulish, not sweet at all.

I feel lately like I'm on that boat to nowhere with scary images popping up when I least expect them. I am searching for something...I am looking for direction. And like the passengers on the Wonka boat, I am hurtling toward some destination unfamiliar to me, unknowable to me. *There's no earthly way of knowing/in which direction we are going*, Wonka sings sweetly before working up to a fever pitch of maniacal screaming: *And the rowers keep on rowing/ and they're certainly not showing/ any signs that they are slowing!* My rowers keep rowing along, and I have absolutely no idea where I'm going.

I have ideas bubbling, percolating, begging to be given attention, but I've lost my internal navigation. I used to be absolutely trusting of my inner voice; if an idea felt right, it was right. Now, because of events such as massive rejection and a mighty yawn from the universe in general, I question every instinct, I second-guess every sign. I am on the boat, the rowers are throwing their backs into it, but I lack even a rudimentary map.

I've had dreams of late, and I know the answers must lie there, but I wake up before I get the message. Two were very clear,

though: I saw a meditation space cleared for me, candles, a statue of Kwan Yin (and no, I'm neither Chinese nor Buddhist), and a blue-and-white patterned quilt waiting for me to sit still long enough to catch some clarity. In the second dream, I was crouched under a bruise-purple sky on a field of battle. I held a World War I-era weapon, an ancient black-iron spear with a spring, and I was told to load balloons onto it without popping them, and then I was to fire the balloons at some unnamed target. I felt that my life was threatened, and I could not for anything figure out how to load balloons through a spear. If you know, please give me a hint.

I think I should probably be quiet, and let the war play itself out, wait for the boat ride to be over, and then maybe Kwan Yin will tell me what the hell is going on.

