

Dreamland

by M. Barns

Damien, my boyfriend, talks me back to sleep when I wake up in the middle of the night, he doesn't judge me for being afraid of the dark, or being lost at sea, he simply listens to me breathlessly explaining why I'm awake— again— at 3:32 in the morning. He has real things to be afraid of— real reasons for nightmares. He's watched his friends die in front of him, he's had to carry their bodies away.

But I'm afraid of illogical things. Like copperhead bites in the wilderness, or being electrocuted in the shower during a lightning storm. Things that will most likely never happen to me— things that consume me. I make my friends call me whenever they drive long distances. I calculate how long it would take them to get there with traffic, then start panicking if I don't receive a call within a half-hour of that time. The time is firm to me. My panic doesn't understand traffic jams, pee breaks, or roadside attractions. My anxiety expects a text message when any of these occur, so I know my friends are not dead.

But Damien doesn't panic about these things. He worries about more logical things, like the future, his career, getting married one day and having children. I think he thinks about these things constantly— I don't know this, but I think it. The thing is I crave these fears, these anxieties. But to me they all seem fixed. I will have the fairy tale love affair, I will become a well-known writer, I will teach college-level writing classes and I will have three Rottweiler's and maybe a couple of unruly kids.

I've never doubted these things. I've never worried that they wouldn't fall into place. Instead I worry about what I would take if I had 10 minutes to clear out before a biological weapon hit my house (my dog, my lap top, all the clothes in my dirty laundry— I assume these are the things I wear the most and by default what I should take— and the 5lb bag of rice I have in my kitchen, there is already a case of water in my trunk) how I would get fresh water if stranded in a rescue raft (puncture the eyes of fish and drink the fresh water

from its body, or filter my pee— thanks Bear Grylls) or what I would do if a shark attacked (probably just keel over and die, I honestly don't believe poking them in the eye would do anything other than piss them off. I would rather get eaten by a shark than drown, any day).

I know he doesn't understand why I worry about these things, I'm not sure that I even do myself. I think that one day he'll be the one that'll figure it out, and explain it to me, right before bed, so I don't have bad dreams anymore. But until then he'll wake up in the middle of the night, just to take my manic calls, or tell me bedtime stories right before bed, so I don't have the chance to worry— so my head is filled with stories and memories— sometimes his, sometimes ours. But recently, right before I fall asleep, when the worry usually kicks in, I hear his voice, trailing off into another memory.

