

The Incredible Distance Between Sleeping and Waking

by niceguyted

"It's okay," she says. "It's okay. You were just dreaming."

That's how it starts. Every time.

Then she tells me, "You were screaming."

I don't remember screaming. But maybe I was. Maybe that journey between sleep and waking is so much that I can't help but scream. Maybe it's just that long. I look up.

I'm lying down, my head is cradled in her lap. She's naked. So am I. I see her face, somehow rightside-up, even though that's impossible from the way we're positioned. She smiles at me and pulls a lock of hair off my forehead in that tender way that only lovers can. We'd recently made love, though I don't remember it.

She has almost-black eyes and auburn hair and round brown nipples that are always taut — as though in anticipation. I don't know what color auburn is. I just know that's the word that comes to mind when I look at her hair.

She calls herself Mama Legba, and so does everyone else. I call her Jane, because that's her name.

The words are always the same, but the forms differ: We're not always in bed or at home. Sometimes we're in an apartment; sometimes a house; sometimes on a cabin porch. But she always tells me that it's going to be okay and that I was screaming just before I woke up.

That's how I know I'm dreaming.

We sit at the breakfast table, still naked because it's always that perfect in-between season here, freshly-made omelets, coffee and grapefruit juice in front of us. I don't remember her cooking, or even walking over to the table, for that matter.

But here we are, at home, just finished with breakfast. I'm washing the dishes and placing them on the drying rack and she's humming some Bach as she putters around, never far from me. I don't remember eating or even being hungry. She can make the most exquisitely soft and dulcet sounds with her vocal cords.

"Jane," I say.

"Hmmm?" Still humming. No break in the melody.

"Why don't I remember eating breakfast?"

She stops humming. Our eyes meet.

And I wake up. Screaming.

Every time.

I've been to every damned headshrinker on the East Coast and a handful of psychics in Sedona and nobody can tell me why I always wake up screaming and why I'm never hungry. So even if you think your explanation is crazy, doc, lay it on me. I've heard 'em all.

