

These Dreams We Are Having

by Tara Cottrell

Welcome, welcome. Naked in public dreams. Well we've all had these. There you are at the grocery store and you suddenly realize, no clothes! Or maybe you've got a shirt on, but that's it. Or a towel. But basically you're naked. No one seems to notice right? But it's only a matter of time before the checker looks at you and says, whoa lady you're naked! I have the ones where I've only got a towel on and it's a really small towel, like a hand towel and there is no way in hell it's going to cover my whole nakedness so I'm standing there wondering, well, what parts are the most critical? Anyway, anyway, this is about you not me. These dreams are because you are embarrassed or ashamed. Yours, well, probably it's feeling ashamed and guilty about what happened last year. You think you should have done something. I don't know if you could have or not. That's not my job, like I told you earlier. I'm just telling you why you're having them. We believe that if you explore your dreams enough in the daylight hours, you can leave them in the daylight hours. I mean, here's hoping, right?

So here we have the airport nightmares. We call them that because most are set in an airport, but really it's a whole transportation genre. You are late for a plane, you are stuck on a train. You are at the wrong airport. Ha ha, well hell, I've done that in real life. Your passport is expired and so on. Usually you are alone. You are running to catch the plane, but your shoes are untied, there is a child in the way, your legs are heavy and stuck. Get out of my way you want to scream, but everyone is ignoring you, reading their crappy paperbacks, flipping through magazines about second rate movie stars. What is stuck to my feet you think? Gum? In any case this is just an anxiety dream which often manifests itself as fear of

leaving the house. Which, we all have to some degree. Really, we should all just stay home. Ha ha. But yeah, think of these dreams as sort of an aftertaste of anxiety following you into the night. That's a horrible metaphor. I hear you're going to Istanbul? With your sister? Your passport is expired. You should get on that.

That takes us to academia nightmares. These are another form of anxiety dream and to be honest we're not sure what to make of them. Strangely, it doesn't matter how long you've been out of school, you'll keep having them. The school dreams go like this — it's the end of the semester and you forgot to go to Algebra class! Like, all year! And you're like, holy shit, I forgot Algebra class, how did I forget? Now I'm going to fail. Or sometimes you walk into class and the teacher, he's passing out tests and saying get out your number 2 pencil and it's the day of the final and you haven't studied a bit. Maybe you don't even have the textbook yet! You're looking around and everyone is getting out their pencils. No one is alarmed but you! I see you smiling a bit. I haven't seen you smile yet. You have a nice smile. For you, these dreams are about disconnection. The only who hasn't remembered the test, the homework, the class itself. The only one who did the wrong thing. All around you are people who are doing just fine. And over here is you. Just you. The one who failed the biggest test of all. That's a guess based on your circumstances of course. I mean, I could be wrong. I have the school ones all the time myself. I wake up and think, thank God I'm not in school anymore, because that sucked.

Bodily damage nightmares! An example is maybe you nightmared that your leg was cut off in say, a garbage disposal accident. And you know, blood everywhere. So those actually aren't so bad in my own personal opinion because we design them not to stay with you the rest of the day. A little gore, and that's about it. I know for example you have one where your teeth are falling out. Not that unusual, the teeth one. In that one you're brushing your teeth right? And you feel they're loose and you look a bit closer in the

mirror and touch them with your fingertip, you know, carefully. And they're all like that — all loose. Oh my God, my teeth! And you're looking in the sink as they all start dropping into the sink, pinging the porcelain, bouncing out. You have one like that right? Yeah, I thought so. Actually everybody thinks that it's a fear of the dentist. But that's not it at all. It's a little more obtuse than that, it means you are afraid of falling apart. Maybe you are. I suppose you wouldn't be on all those meds if you felt whole. There isn't an easy fix for this one I'm afraid. Some dreams, you can change course, change the plot, eliminate characters and obstacles. But there's not a lot you can do about your teeth coming out in the sink. I mean, put them back in? Even in a dream you don't have that kind of power.

Searching the house nightmares. You are in an unfamiliar house, a house from another lifetime perhaps. You know the rooms well, the hallways and windows, the blue bud vase on the mantle. All of it is known and unknown all at once. You have been here before, only you haven't. Maybe you're wandering the halls, desperate to find something. Someone is with you. He's an amalgam of the guy who fixes your car, and your own uncle, the one in White Plains. And this half and half man is telling you that in Italy they never drink Cappuccino after 11 am. Shut up, you think, shut up and help me find what I'm looking for. Really this is your great great great grandmother's house in Prussia. What I am about to say may sound crazy, but since you are a woman, you have been left with the vapors of your mother's life and her mother's life and the mother before that. This is because your mother carried you as an egg long before she set eyes on your father. And her mother carried her as an egg and so on. We think this is why you have these dreams. Your daughter would have had them too. In fact she did sometimes, even though she was a baby. Of course, in them, she's never looking for anything. She's just waiting.

Parent nightmares. If you are a parent you have a whole nightmare

section just for you. These are nightmares about your children choking, about them falling, slipping from cliffs, toddling into the ocean while you sit helpless on the beach, your legs stuck in sand. Earthquakes, tidal waves, natural disasters, bears, angry dogs, choking hazards, child molesters, knives, poorly made strollers that collapse and suffocate. All these dreams are outside your bedroom door waiting patiently for you to go into REM. The love you have for your children, the primal fear that comes with that love, is a wolf at the door and he's foaming at the mouth. Do you like that? I made it up myself. Of course the things you dream will not actually happen, or rarely anyway. It's the things you haven't thought of. That expression, how does it go? In your wildest dreams. There are always things your mind has not yet prepared you for. I think you know what I'm talking about.

Here are the reverse nightmares, which are the worst of all. They are not very well named because a reverse nightmare sounds like a good dream, the reverse of a bad dream. And in a way, they are that. In fact, they are good dreams, lovely dreams really. In them, something awful in your life has been reversed. Your lover has come back to you, your child is alive, your father is not crazy. In these dreams there is a respite from your real world reality. It's a terrible trick. If only you could live there all the time, in that place where everything was as it was before. Don't cry, please don't cry. There. It's alright. We all have them, I'm sorry you are having them, I know how awful they are to wake up from. For years I had them myself. Please don't cry. We're almost finished.

The lake nightmare. This is your own. No one has a nightmare just like it. There you are out in the boat on the lake. With your lover. He is rowing. Your baby is asleep in the cabin through the trees. It is just a little break from the colicky baby who has finally fallen asleep. Just a little break, maybe a half hour. And the faulty heater, that wolf at the door, knows that and will take his chance. The two of you are lying on your backs, both of you bundled in a blanket -

you and a man who is not yours. He is pointing out the spangle of stars in the sky, each constellation. When you sit up, still giddy with stars and with love, and look back at the cabin, it is smoking as though from a chimney. There is no fire in the fireplace, you both know this. You are trying to stand up as the boat rocks back and forth. Your lover is rowing and rowing and you are standing steady in the boat now, impossible as that may be, watching as flames lick the eaves. The floorboards are peeling back, curling like pencil shavings. The little green monopoly houses on the game board in the living room are melting into lozenges of plastic. It doesn't matter if you saw that part happen, it's part of the story now. The tree beside the house is a shimmering pom pom of flame when you finally get to the shore. If only you could run — through airports, through cities, through streets, through space and time, through everywhere and anywhere to get to her. But the sand is already setting around your feet like concrete. The heat is on your face and behind you is the lake, so wide and deep and cold. And you're thinking, if only I could use it to put this fire out.

