

A Dream Workshop on a tropical island is the setting for stories and poetry that convey profound truths about human existence.

The Myth of Seeing

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The Myth of Seeing

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ONE

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Don't get me wrong I love to look,
As a Kansas girl I devoured the beauty
Of cherry blossoms

Delicate pink petals twirling
Through vibrant air gently down to
Touch my face

Stared for hours at the window
Of the clothes dryer
Colors tumbling round

Delighted in that buzzing bee
Each golden hair erect
Wings translucent peach

So obsessed, I got a degree in seeing
Yearning to discover the inherent mystery
Of shapes in space

Went to the worlds museums
Voraciously sucking objects
To the bone

Don't get me wrong I love to look
It's just that I stumbled in the vicinity

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Of a Guru

Suddenly my eyes failed me
Falling to my knees and weeping for joy my
Head touched the floor

When imagination returned
I heard myself ask,
"Why am I here?"

With that beautiful smile
He looked straight in my eyes and said
"*Who* wants to know?"

Virginia tried to sit still. It was the first day of a “Dream Workshop” some new-agey thing in Hawaii. Just yesterday she had been in a small town in the Midwest. Life had gotten so safe, predictable, and excruciatingly boring. Her dad had made the comment. “Everyone here knows you,” he had said. Virginia ran out of his house and hid behind the garage to smoke.

People in this town *don't* know me, she thought. They knew my mom when she was alive—always perky and pleasant. They have all kinds of opinions about me because I have dreadlocks and work at the animal shelter and make weird paintings. But they don't know me; hell I don't even know me. She dragged sullenly on her smoke. She knew if she didn't get out of town immediately chances are she never would. What were her goals, her dreams? At twenty-eight she felt like her life was on autopilot, rolling by without her consent. One night she dreamed of going on a retreat. When she woke she had typed “dream” and “retreat” on her laptop and this Dream Workshop caught her eye. It was a meditation retreat that focused on dreams. A silver-haired guru named Celeste was the

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teacher. Dad had forbidden her to go. Determined, she broke away, and was now sitting uncomfortably on a meditation pillow.

Just being on an island away from home had made her feel excited, but now she doubted her decision to come. On the website Celeste had looked joyful, wise, holy. In real life she seemed absent-minded, unorganized, goofy. Virginia wondered if her cats missed her. Sitting in one place doing nothing, what was the point? "Your real existence is deeper than anything you look like, deeper than what you see, hear, taste, smell, or feel," Celeste was saying. She had on a thin white tunic over white stretchy pants and looked like she had been born cross-legged. She rambled on to about twenty jet-lagged people in the balmy open-air room. She did seem sincere. Virginia tried to get over the way Celeste looked and acted.

Mosquitoes buzzed in Virginia's ear, and bit her vulnerable legs. She tried to ignore them and listen to the teacher. "There is a very fine line between your dream life and your waking life. Your true identity is hidden in that fine line." Virginia took a deep breath and heard the rhythm

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of the ocean outside. She might as well go along
for the ride.

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I am clipping grass around a stepping-stone. I really like this stone; I found it at Island Hardware where they have all kinds of wonders: exotic plants, garden gates and rattraps. (And Hardware stores are one of my favorite places, but that is a whole other story) I discovered it in the corner of the store near the fruit trees with burlap bags binding their delicate feet.

The stone is amongst lots of stepping-stones, some have hummingbirds molded into them or honeybees or gnomes. My stone is round and bears sacred geometry, an eight-pointed star. The large garden here on the Dream Workshop grounds needs some stepping-stones, but my frugal nature got the best of me and I limited my purchase to one. In the garden there is one step leading nowhere. Or one step that leads in an infinite number of directions.

I am clipping the weeds from around this one stepping-stone with my purple handled garden shears when everything comes to a halt. There is an incredibly familiar feeling. There is no sense of time in the usual context but instead an indelible feeling that *this is the only moment that has ever*

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existed. I have been crouching over with my butt up in the air snipping a weed from around this particular stepping-stone so many times before. The same frozen moment of snipping will occur multiple times in the so-called future.

I am out of time.

They say 70 percent of us have these déjà vu experiences: driving back home after work, licking the spoon when making brownies, putting on your underwear. Frozen moments leading nowhere...or in an infinite number of directions.

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If you understand how all objects are
perceptions
And all perceptions are thoughts
You have arrived

You can take off your seat belt
Stretch your stiff legs
Stand up
Get off
The cramped plane going nowhere

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I could have been born anywhere to anyone
Welcomed with flies on my face
Bottle-fed with duties
Missing organs, limbs or
Overlooked amongst the decor

Any name could have been mine
Baibin, Alsoomse
Stephania, Miho, Simon,
Adisa,
Joe

Maybe I chose this birth
Maybe not

All of a sudden
I am
Here

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Blur
Two orbs staring at me
Everything out of focus
No clue as to where or
Who I am

The orbs turn out to be my mother's
Eyes. She welcomes me, names me
Diapers and dresses me

Where is the choice in all this?

My script seems to unfold slowly, yet
What Joe *sees*

Is always

What Joe gets

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Put on the kettle of Wisdom Teachings
Brew the tea of spiritual practice
Sweeten it with intuition
Enjoy the One
You really are

The website advertising the retreat advised, “don’t sleep through your dreams.” He decided to attend a Dream Workshop on a remote island. Always interested in the dreamtime of the Aborigines and Tibetan Dream Yoga, Joe thought the trip away would help his tension. When he got to the island he liked the looks of the old plantation house surrounded by swaying palm trees and so close to the ocean you could hear the roar of the waves.

He sat in a circle of ten dreamers all bright-eyed and ready to dream. Two that caught his attention were Virginia a thirty-something with dreadlocks, and Zeoc, who looked like the man who slept one hundred years under a tree. He had a long white beard, and long hair pulled on top of his head in a white topknot tied with purple ribbon. His feet looked dirty and callused but his purple cotton pants were clean. The rest of the group was stressed-out city people, like himself. A dream retreat would kill two birds with one stone; learn something and get some sleep.

The teacher liked to talk about her guru and her guru’s guru. She asked them all to share one

quality that best defined themselves. Most of the people said something like, "my sense of humor," or "my artistic ability." When it was his turn, Joe felt his stomach knot up. What defined him? He wanted to make a good impression on these dreamers "I am not afraid of taking risks," he blurted out. What was he saying? He was the most conventional guy he knew, sitting in his cubicle at Viacom staring at his screen. He heard Zeoc say, " I have legally not paid taxes for 53 years," and Virginia softly telling about how she rescues cats doomed for death. But Joe's attention was consumed by his own tightness.

Sleep was scheduled like work. You had to remember your dreams and keep a dream diary and then talk about your dreams to the group. A big accomplishment was "lucid dreaming," a dream where you know you are dreaming in the dream, also known as conscious dreaming. Joe thought he might have had some dreams like that but the memory was fuzzy. He went to his allotted room where the biggest cockroach he had ever seen shuffled drunkenly out from behind the bed. Everything was lazy on this island; even the birds rambled about on spindly bird legs instead of flying.

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He fell onto the soft futon, dog-tired, and dreamt of a huge angry woman chasing him with a knife. He ran down streets among houses in what seemed like ancient Europe. He was ducking into doorways out of breath; she followed on his heels, chasing him with a vengeance. He woke in a sticky sweat, scribbled the dream in his diary, and fell back to sleep.

*row, row, row, your boat
gently down the stream
merrily, merrily, merrily
life is but a dream*

“In your dream, face your fears” a Tibetan Yogi with kind eyes told him, “take this magic weapon as your talisman.” Joe reached out for his weapon. He expected to feel metal but instead it was flimsy wood—a Popsicle stick! He remembered the joy of running up to the Popsicle man’s truck as a child. He always chose the Dreamsicle, vanilla ice cream wrapped in orange sherbet. The Popsicle man’s eyes looked just like the yogi’s eyes. How could this puny stick help

him? At that moment, the angry woman with wild eyes appeared from behind the Popsicle truck, this time with a machine gun. He took off running as fast as he could but his feet were cannonballs scraping across the cement. Joe felt the smooth flat Popsicle stick in his palm. It could never defeat the angry woman; she was running after him, her eyes blazing with a hateful vengeance. The sound of his leaden feet on the pavement was so loud it woke him up.

The scraping turned out to be his roommate Zeoc struggling to breathe from across the room. Damn, it was almost time for morning meditation; he would have to relate that inadequate dream to the group. He was sure Virginia would think he was weak when she heard it, but they had all made a promise to tell the truth. Tell the truth...*how can a dream be the truth?* Mad at Zeoc for waking him up, he shouted, "Zeoc, wake up!"

Zeoc woke with a grin and reached for his dream diary, "I love this Dream Workshop." Joe swatted angrily at the incessant mosquito buzzing in his face and scraped down the hall to take a shower.

If I start thinking, I will never get to sleep. Instead of thinking I do this. I close my eyes and look at the huge movie screen lit up by these shining orbs. How can I look when my eyes are closed? Well, you use the same eyes you use in viewing a dream. All of our looking, whether in a dream, a daydream, or when awake, comes from the same place—consciousness. Just close your eyes and look. What is playing tonight? Maybe it is just a flicker of a color, a yellow speck. The thing to do is stare at it until it becomes something.

Believe me if you stare at it, it will become something. If a flash of yellow appears, follow that yellow. Stare at it and perhaps it becomes a banana. I want that banana. I have got to have that banana. But what is this I see lurking behind that palm tree? Alas, there is a sly smiling monkey that beats me to it. He deftly grabs the prized fruit and scurries off to Amsterdam. I waste no time in following close on his little heels. And so the dream unfolds. I see what is before me and follow it. I am asleep.

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For a thousand thousand years
Utter peace
Vibrant slumber
Immaculate repose...then

The smallest ripple
A subtle movement
Much slighter than a breath

Quiver of yearning

Hibernation is over
The heavenly dance begins
All hell breaks loose

I love to nap. After a morning of teaching these dream students, the body-mind needs a break. I snuggle in and let myself go. Go, go, go... deep asleep. Where I don't see anything at all, no world, no weeds, no monkey, and no dreams...mmmmmmmmmmmm

The Experiment

Let's imagine a scientist came up to you and said, "I want you to participate in an experiment. In this experiment you will have to give up your family and friends. You will have no country and no place to call home. You will be blind and deaf and not be able to speak or feel anything. You won't smell or taste anything either, in fact your whole personality will be eliminated. But you will still exist."

Would you volunteer for an experiment like that?

Yet we so willingly fall into the refreshing calm that waits just beneath the flow.

Zeoc tossed and turned. Tonight he couldn't sleep; he had visions of the war lighting up the dusk of his mind. He heard Joe across the room scratching his mosquito bites. "Joe, are you awake?" "Yeah, I can't sleep even though this bed is on the floor, it's still too soft." "What we're sleeping on is something called Memory Foam," Zeoc said. "I don't like it," Joe grumbled.

"What is a figment?" he said drowsily. "Huh?" "What made you think of that, man?" "Today Celeste was talking about how everything we do in this life is just a figment of our imaginations." "Oh right, like how real a dream is when we are dreaming it." The moonlight was now pouring in through the window slats. Zeoc noticed a gecko on the ceiling whose throat looked like it was inflating in and out like a balloon. "But when you wake up, what you thought was so real, was just your imagination." "Figment Schmigment, this retreat is making me looney," Joe said as he rolled toward the wall.

"I guess it's like my memories of the war," Zeoc said, "I can live in them or I can find that quiet place in my mind and rest there." "Or you could

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actually live in the real world," Joe snorted. There was no response. He heard Zeoc snoring in time with the waves. He was gone.

"That was a weird conversation we had last night," Zeoc blurted, as he got ready for morning meditation. "Huh?" retorted Joe, "What are you babbling about?" "Our talk about figments and all that, remember?" Joe looked at Zeoc. The old dude must be off his rocker, he thought. "I was out like a light last night, we didn't have any conversation." Zeoc weakly pulled on his shorts. "You don't remember us talking about what Celeste said about the waking state being a figment of our imagination?" "Come on, or we'll be late," Joe said and they hurried out. "I don't remember any conversation last night." "Hmm, it must have been memory foam."

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Had a dream
We spent a precious
Glitch of time together

It was the quality of feeling that was so poignant

Recognition
Deep deep relaxation

Familiar in the most profound way

A Dream Workshop on a tropical island is the setting for stories and poetry that convey profound truths about human existence.

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