

“To Sleep”

“To Sleep”

Demon eyes stare at me
I am not afraid
I stare back
I blink
They blink

I question their existence
I question my own existence
What do they see?
How do I not know?
Demon eyes stare at me

I suffocate

“To Sleep”

I can't breathe. I choke as I claw at my neck, expecting hands to be there, squeezing the life out of me. I gasp as my limbs begin to flail and my head begins to feel a sensation as if it has begun floating away from my body. I am fading I am—alive.

I swiftly sit upright in my bed. A glance at the clock through the darkness tells me it is four o'clock in the morning. The only thing I can see around me are those dim, neon numbers. I place my hand on my forehead to relieve its ache as I gasp for air. Each gasp is a choke as my lungs reach out of my body and rip the oxygen out of the air. My own body, in its fight to survive, is choking me.

I stumble out of bed, reaching out for the wall because an immediate wave of dizziness erupts before my eyes and rushes into my brain. My world is trembling. I trip over and fall onto the floor, panting as I struggle to hold my torso off the ground as my head hangs low and knees knock onto the wooden floor. A thought with no provocation pops into my mind.

Is there a God?

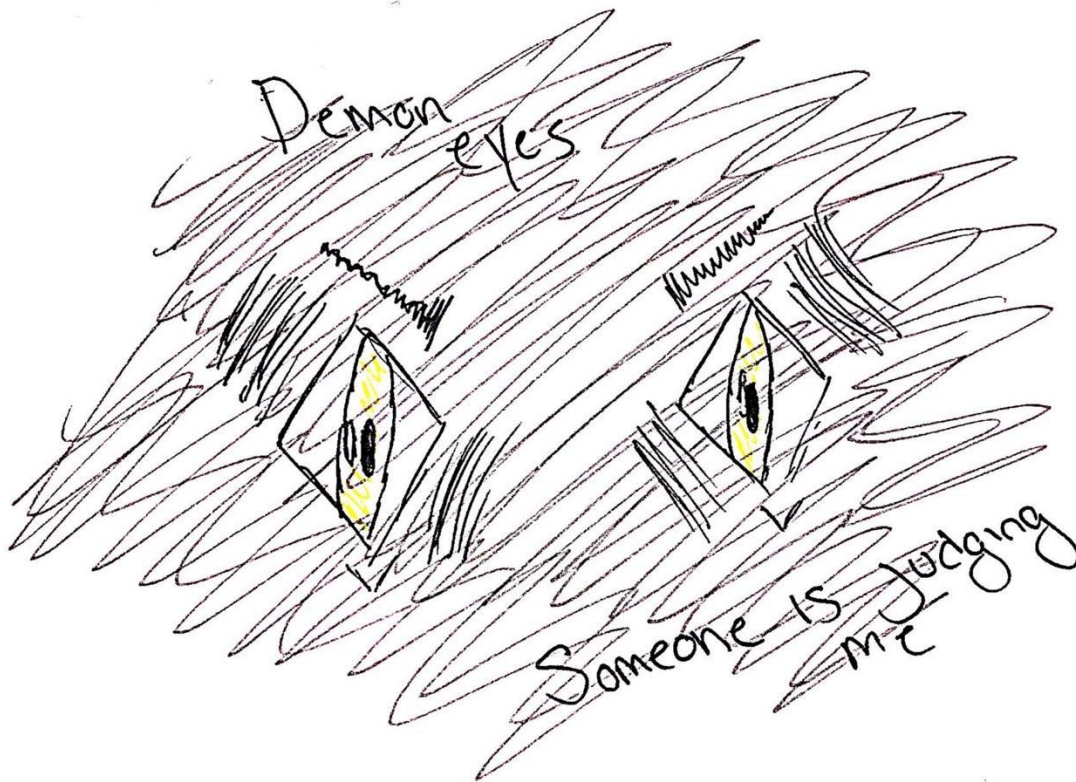
This thought scares me. I do not know where it came from, it is as if it had been put in my mind by someone. My arms begin to violently shake, and finally, they give in, collapsing as the pillars of heaven would at the hands of a cunning sinner; truly an easy feat if someone had enough guts to attempt it.

Suddenly, I realize someone is judging me. I feel it. I attempt to look around the darkness for the eyes of the culprit, but the shaking of the world around me makes me too dizzy.

I brace my head in my arms and curl my body under me as the shaking continues. I feel nauseous. My stomach gurgles to the rhythm of the ground's shaking. I squeeze my head as if it'll keep my brain from bouncing around within my skull. I hear something. I think it is a whisper.

“What?” I exhale, the word barely audible. I hear something.

My chest is caving in around my heart and lungs. I feel it. My lungs crawl through my throat to escape the structural failing of my body. They grip onto my uvula and yank themselves up my throat, making me gag as the shaking worsens. I feel my jaw forced open as my lungs project themselves from my body. I can't tell if I am getting sick or if it is just the feeling of my organs crawling out of me. Soon I am nothing but a flat, crumbled stack of skin that can't support my eyeballs due to its lack of structural integrity, but, I am—alive.



“To Sleep”

How can you say
A dream
Is not
An Experience?

An Experience
Is not
A dream
How can you say?

“To Sleep”

I keep wondering about my dreams, lately. They feel different. They feel more alive than reality. I wonder when I am *really* alive. What makes something real? Why aren't dreams supposedly real? In dreams, we see things we never see in real life. Once we wake up, we have the memory of seeing those things from our dream. How could these memories not be considered real?

This makes me wonder further. How do we see things in our mind that we have not seen in reality? I have never been to Venice, but in my dreams I am floating down the canals as the sweet melodies of violins guide me to an unknown, but greatly desired destination. I always wake up before I reach my destination. How is that any different from reality, though? We all have destinations in mind, but even upon reaching them do we ever really feel the fulfillment we expect to?

I am starting to think reaching a destination in a dream is more satisfying, more real, than reaching a destination in reality. In my dreams, even in my nightmares, I feel more alive than I do awake. I think I even like nightmares more than being awake. Maybe I am dead, and only in my dreams am I alive.

When I die, will life become a dream? A memory that I recall—that never really happened?

“To Sleep”

It begins to rain,
But it is not droplets of water
That tap me but
Cherry Blossoms
That decorate my hair and the ground around me

A breeze rushes through my hair
And the Blossoms begin to dance
Soon soft hands of soft pink petals
Pull me into a passionate
Waltz

I never want to wake up

“To Sleep”

I am dancing with a partner made of floating cherry blossoms. It is surreal; I am standing in a lush field with grass the most beautiful color of green I've ever, or I guess *never*, seen in my life. The sky is a sunset frozen in time. Everything has a pink tint to it. Life is grey compared to the colors I am seeing.

I am feeling the purest happiness; a feeling I can't even remember.

“This might be the best dream I've ever had,” I utter, as the blossoms sway with me. My cherry blossom partner's head tosses back in laughter. Then, I begin to beg the blossoms to keep me there, asleep, forever. My partner's arms wave as if I am making a joke—being silly. This aggravates me. I stop dancing, causing my silhouette of a partner to jerk as if in shock. I realize there had been the sound of chiming bells as I was dancing, because at my sudden stop of movement they cease their angelic sounds.

“Please,” I say lamely. It is all I can muster.

My partner has no mouth or features of any kind. The blossoms are floating before me, moving slowly, as if the air is thick, rotating around where a head would be. The body looks the same way, but near my partner's chest the blossoms seem to beat toward me flowingly, and then away from me. I wonder if the cherry blossom dancer can breathe.

“No,” the word travels toward me, quietly, in the breeze from the direction of the cherry blossoms which float before me as if they can speak.

“But I don't want to go back there,” I say. I shudder at the thought of the small room that is always coated with the smell of some sort of sterilizer. I picture my own, thin body—basically bones—lying helplessly in bed, alone for an eternity. Not only does my physical body give up on me, but it seems as if my mind gives up, too. Again, I hear, “No.”

Cherry Blossoms

passionate
Waltz

the best
dream I've
ever
had



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They blind

How can you say
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An Experience
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“To Sleep”

I look around me. I am in, what looks like, a small village on a ground that looks like it is made of sandstone. Surrounding the few tiny houses that make up the village, as far as I can see, are mountains of dark grey, jagged rock. The sky is a dark blue, yet the village is naturally well lit; it is as if the sun has just set and the last few moments of daylight are shining down on me.

As I spin around and look at my surroundings, I can recall the moment I fell asleep. I was laying in the bed in the tiny, uncomfortable room as my family surrounded me. The smell of bleach burned my eyes as a woman in white cleaned the room around us.

“We love you so much,” they kept saying. I do not know why, though, because I knew that. But, they just kept saying, “I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you.” I fell asleep as they all pet my hair and caressed my arms—a soothing sensations that use to knock me out when I couldn’t sleep as a baby. My favorite song, Mr. Sandman by the Cordettes, was playing on repeat.

As I look around, I spot a few people in the distance looking around as curiously as I am. There is a young girl, a teenage boy, a woman, and in the distance, more people I cannot make out. All of them seem to be standing by themselves, as if everyone had shown up here alone. They are all gazing up at the giant rocks towering above us. Everyone looks calm, almost content; although, no one seems to have a clue about how they ended up standing there.

Suddenly, I feel as if I am being watched; judged. I look up at the mountain of rock beside me. I realize it would be possible to climb it. Without much more thought, I begin to climb. A few minutes into climbing, without ever looking down at how far I have come, I begin to see vines that I grab onto to hoist myself up the rock. The higher I get, the stronger the wind becomes.

Right near the top, I see a wooden sign jutting out of the side of the rock. I grab onto it and yank myself up the rest of the way. *Sandman*, the sign said. Sweating and panting, I throw myself flat onto my stomach at the top of the mountain and let the breeze race over me. Suddenly, I swear I can hear that song I fell asleep to, and my family’s voices, in the distance.

“*Mr. Sandman-*“

“We love you we love you we love you,”

“*-bring me a dream*”

“We will always love you, so much.”

“Get up,” My head snaps up at this. The voice comes from right ahead of me. Above me stands a man, no... Wait, yes, a man. But... In the breeze... He seems to be falling apart...

“Are you the sandman?” I ask. The man’s face is composed of flakey bits of multicolored sand, his features only seem like indents and mounds on his face. His face twists in contemplation.

“Yes, I must be.” He says. His voice is deep and soothing; it is as if his words are pulling me towards him.

“Oh,” is all I reply as I slowly get to my feet. I never break eye contact, and soon realize we are the same height. This makes me feel confident. It begins to rain... Cherry blossoms.

“I’ve heard you want to sleep?” He asks. I raise my eyebrow.

“I am asleep.” At this he tilts his head with a “hmm.”

“Are you judging me?” I ask, my eyebrows furrowing. Then, I continue, “No, I know you are. What is it about me you are judging? What do you see?”

“You don’t need to worry about that,” he says simply. “You are okay.”

“To Sleep”

“I am okay,” I repeat. Something about this phrase makes me step a tad bit closer to the man, closing the space between us to a mere two feet. He is intimidating, but I can’t help but feel comforted by his presence.

“Do you remember your family?” He asks me.

“Of course I do.”

“How do you feel about them?”

I shrug casually and say, “I know they care. It is not possible to be perfect all the time, we’ve all accepted that. They did not judge me for my own lack of perfection, even though in heated moments we would blame each other for stupid things.” I smile. “They even played my favorite song on repeat as I fell asleep. Though, I know that they are sick of it, by now. It was nice of them. It made me happy.” The crumbling man’s face breaks out into a smirk, as if he is trying to hold back a full-blown smile.

“Good.” There is a moment of silence when I think back to the moment that I had fallen asleep. As much as I had hated being strapped down by IVs all over my body, unable to leave, unable see the world, and unable to sleep in my *own* bed in my *own* house, in that moment, surrounded by them all, I had finally felt at home.

“So?” I ask. I did not know what to expect, but I knew the man had more to say.

“Do you have a question to ask me?” He asks. I open my mouth to say no, but no sound escapes. A question suddenly pops into my mind as if put there by someone else.

“Is there a God?” I ask.

“What do you think?”

“I don’t know,” I reply as the man raises his arms in defeat.

“Well, only you can answer that. My apologies.”

“It’s okay,” I say with a silent laugh as the man shifts on his feet, as if he is preparing to say something, but is too nervous to speak. I did not know the sandman could get nervous.

“I hear...” He steps towards me, “you don’t want to go back there. You want to... Sleep forever...” I glance up to the sight of the cherry blossoms falling from the sky. I close my eyes and smile as they softly brush my face. When I look back at the man, his hand is reaching out to me. He has, again, that restrained smirk on his face. I touch my own face lightly, which is usually dry and crisp, but is right now so soft, and take a deep breath. It is nice to be able to breathe without tubes shoved into my nostrils.

“I can make all that go away. No more waking up unable to breathe, no more of any of that. But, are you sure?” He reaches his stretched-out hand even closer to me; his eyes look deep within me as if he is attempting to predict my answer. He looks... Hopeful.

While my first instinct is to reply with, *no, I am not sure...* I... I...

“To Sleep”

Leah Freeman 12

