

Wilderness House Literary Review 15/2

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Coronavirus: What Our Dreams Are Trying To Tell Us

In the first dream I had, I tested positive for Coronavirus. Delirious, I woke up and fell to my knees, praying. I recall saying “No, no, no...” over and over again.

Subsequent nights included dreams in which I was repeatedly trying to call my doctor but getting a “wrong number” or “out of business” message, people in HAZMAT suits chasing me, and suffocation dreams.

I have no doubt that, as COVID-10 becomes the new zeitgeist of our time, my dreams and nightmares are a byproduct of streaming too many virus movies, watching too much news and doing too many web searches starting with “Coronavirus and _____”.

Last night was the most horrific nightmare by far.

In my dream, I had to take an emergency flight out of LAX to see an old boyfriend. We had recently reconnected over social media because of the pandemic and we both agreed that we still loved each other and wanted to be together.

As some sort of small shred of compassion still left in the apocalyptic pandemic world, the government was issuing each citizen a one-way, “final flight” to meet up with a loved one.

We were told that it was the last chance we had to see each other again, as global tourism was shutting down – for good. Once we got to our destination, we could never travel again.

When I got inside the airport, I was shocked by what I saw:

The airport was packed as frantic travelers pushed and shoved and trampled each other to get to their last allotted flight before the borders would be sealed. The world was just hours away from a full and permanent lockdown.

All tourists had gloves and masks. Many had strange, makeshift protective gear – from snorkeling masks to duct-tape-and-plastic-bag body suits, almost looking like body bags. All employees had gas masks and major protective gear from head to toe.

Horrified, I tried to turn around to leave but was abruptly stopped by two security agents in biohazard gear and was strictly told that there was “no turning back.”

I watched the glass doors to the outside seal shut with a sickening, vacuum-like swoop.

As they pushed me with rifles toward the TSA line, I fished in my purse for my passport and government papers, which included more personal information than I had ever given anyone.

I had some kind of special passport – something I applied for that let me travel one last time to soon be with – and quite possible soon dies with – the one I loved.

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The passports were given out by a lottery system and my number was recently chosen by the government.

Airport employees were yelling over megaphones. The National Guard was in place inside and outside the building. Police and police dogs were everywhere.

The TSA was stretched to its breaking point like ropes on a breaking bridge over a deadly river.

As I put my bags down on the security belt, I was told to strip down to my bra and underwear. Before I would protest, a security officer gave me a towel and two women in PPE lead me to a decontamination shower where they handed me a white paper gown and told me to take off my bra and underwear.

(This is quite possibly a memory of a real-life trauma I experienced in my college sorority when I was, along with the other new pledges, awoken in the night, led to shower, told to strip, take off all jewelry and nail polish, and given white sheets to cover us until we were taken to an undisclosed location for a clandestine ceremony – about a topic so secret that if we told a soul, our lips would “wither and return to dust.” Perhaps another piece on this true story later.)

In the airport bathroom, I stepped into a narrow, Plexiglas decontamination chamber and held out my arms as a cold, chlorine-smelling mist sprayed over my shivering body.

I put on the paper gown and was then escorted by a woman to more TSA checkpoints – a kind of X-Ray scanner like the TSA has now that can see through your clothes, but instead of scanning for the typical terrorist weapons like knives, bombs and guns, this one was scanning for bioweapons.

Even though I had nothing on but a paper gown, I kept beeping. I had to go through the scanner machine several times.

I finally made it through the scanner after a long line and was given a green hospital bracelet. I was then told that my belongings, clothes and luggage would be returned to me once I was in my seat on the plane. All I had was my gown, plastic coverings on my feet, and my plane ticket.

On my way to my gate, I was looking around, so horrified and bewildered at what I was seeing that I lost my footing going up the escalator and I tripped. I fell and cut my palm open on one of the metal, jagged stairs. As I struggled to rise at the top of the escalator, a policewoman, a high-ranking male police officer and some kind of high-security airport agent surrounded me and lifted me to my feet.

The gash on my palm was bright red and bleeding. A woman in a hazmat suit took out a scanner that resembles those forehead temperature scanners we’ve become all too accustomed to lately.

“I don’t have a fever!” I said, “They took my temperature when I got here.”

“We’re not scanning for fever, Ma’am,” the high-security police officer said, “We’re scanning your blood for bioterrorism.”

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“What?”

The woman scanned the cut on my palm.

As we waited for the results on the scanner, the police officer said, “Ma’am, you understand that if you test positive, you will be 100% guilty of international terrorism”

I started gasping for air. I wasn’t sure if it was from the shock of what I had just heard or if I was suddenly experiencing a telltale symptom of the virus. As one of the officers readied his gun and another slapped a handcuff on my wrist, I woke up.

I was in sweats, sitting up and panting.

As is often the case when waking up from a vivid nightmare, I was still groggy and was trying to convince myself that the reality I was now back in did not contain elements of my staggeringly frightening dream. But there were some elements. And I was scared.

I felt my forehead – cool to the touch. I turned on the light, got up, splashed cold water on my face, then found a clean towel instead of the used one in the bathroom. I wiped off my face and the sweat from the dream, washed my hands vigorously with bright orange liquid antibacterial soap, then used the clean towel to turn off the water and turn the doorknob.

I gulped some clean water from the glass on my nightstand and got back in bed. I didn’t go back to sleep after that. I didn’t dare.

In an April 5th, 2020 article in USA Today by Alia A. Dastagir entitled “Coronavirus interrupted our lives. Now It’s infiltrating our dreams”, Dastagir writes:

“Experts say dreams are a way for people to understand themselves. Their main function is to process emotions, which for many people have been more intense during a pandemic. People’s waking lives are fraught – fear, uncertainty, and helplessness pervade the day. Those same emotions make respite at night elusive.”

She quotes psychologist Ian Wallace, who says, ‘In our lives... we’re only consciously aware of about 2% of what’s going on around us and the other 98%. Most of that is emotional, and we use our dreams as a way of understanding those emotions...In a situation like this pandemic, where emotions are heightened, people’s awareness of their dreams are also heightened and these dreams might seem more vivid and more scary.’

Perhaps in our waking lives, we can use our dreams as insights into our inner selves as well as the hearts and minds of those dear to us. Coronavirus dreams are certainly scary, but if we can use them as an opportunity rather than something to fear, we can connect with ourselves and others in such a way that could lead to a more compassionate, healed, post-pandemic society.

I plan to document my dreams here and elsewhere, hoping that this will be the case.