

Dream Dream Dream

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ONE LEGEND I'VE ALWAYS FOUND compelling warns that if you die in your dreams, you die in real life. This interstitial space between worlds, residing for a time in both, it's hard to believe that an event in one could occur with no consequences for the other, that I could live on after my dream self dies. But then perhaps, like a cat, I have many dream selves. If not unlimited dream selves, at least enough to spare a few.

IN SELENA'S "DREAMING OF YOU," I've always understood it to be the case that it's the power of Selena's dream love for the "You" that brings them together in the seventh verse. So far as we know, no event in waking life has transpired to explain the sudden change in the relationship from one occurring only at a distance to sharing a bed. Perhaps she visited her love in their sleep as well, perhaps her dreams were like a spell, calling a wish to life. Or perhaps the story is much darker, as she closes with the phrase "endlessly endlessly dreaming," which we could take to mean that none of this has taken place in waking life, and she remains alone in her fantasy. Or that through this love all of life is now like a dream.



OR FRANK OCEAN SINGS, “I thought that I was dreaming when you said you love me,” this fantasy event of a love confession — I imagine it taking place in a pool — rendering reality in that moment unbelievable, too good to be true, but then immediately he clarifies, “the start of nothing.”

THAT OSCAR WILDE QUOTE, “The only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about,” but instead dreamed about. I love the idea that I might haunt anyone’s dreams because that seems like a tidy form of revenge, but at the same time I am troubled to have no power over my behavior there. What if I am making a fool of myself? It keeps me up at night.

IN THE SONG THE BROTHERS SING that the only trouble is their longing is so great they fear dreaming their lives away, waking reality eclipsed by a vision of love. I learned that when you're deep, deep asleep, a part of your brain tells the muscles in your body not to move in response to your dream, so that you might lie there still while in your mind you are being chased, taking a test, speaking with a dead relative, sleeping with a former lover or someone you saw on tv. This also is the cause of sleep paralysis, waking before the connection between your brain and your muscles is reestablished. I've only experienced it once, sleeping on a couch in a cabin in Northern Arizona. I did see the shadowy figures I've heard described by more regular sufferers. That whole campsite later burned down, and I never could disabuse myself of the suspicion that there was some connection between the figures I saw and the fire.

JACKIE SAYS THAT WHEN A PERSON is approaching death, they are more likely to be visited by the dead in their dreams, but that these visits come as a comfort, a warm haunting, a slow ferry to the land of the dead.

TOWNES VAN ZANDT SINGS, "Perhaps when you watch all your dream lovers die / you'll decide that you need a real one," but I can't imagine what kind of lover he would have been, and now he's dead too.



IN DREAMS I AM NOT MYSELF. In my favorite dream, I am an owl flying over the ocean, although I don't know that owls are ever so close to the coast. It's night, or anyway it's dark, and I'm looking at the orange lights in the windows lining the shore. A storm is picking up, and a little black bodega bag is caught on the wind, and I'm watching it fly. Then I'm perched on a street lamp rising up from the ocean.

I TELL DAVE I'VE BEEN WRITING this poem about dreams, and he plays "When I Stop Dreaming" by The Louvin Brothers for me. This song is not from the Brothers' most famous album, 1960's *Satan Is Real*, the lost love it describes is earthbound and mortal, over before the song begins. Ira Louvin designed the cover for *Satan Is Real*, which depicts the brothers at a quarry dressed in white suits with straight black ties, an enormous plywood devil set behind them over the rocks, several small fires burning from hidden tires. The brothers face the camera, their arms stretched out, singing. The gesture is inviting, entreating almost, as if they had just opened the door to their home in hell and were asking me to step inside. I look it up, Ira was the one with the drinking problem, he was violent and abusive, his third wife Faye shot him four times but he survived, only to be killed along with his fourth wife, Ann, by a drunk driver in Missouri, 1965. Did Dave say Ira was in fact a Satanist? I don't remember. I read that when the brothers performed together, at times they would switch their harmonizing and each sing the other's part, such that it would be impossible for the audience to determine to whom each voice belonged. I wonder what kind of relief this temporary escape from the self may have provided, or if it only made things harder.

WHEN YOU DREAM ABOUT THE DEATH of a former lover, it just means
you've really moved on, the internet assures me.

IN AN ESSAY ON BEING UGLY, on refusing to pursue a type of beauty that comes through constant, punishing submission to standards designed to test how much pleasure you will deny yourself in an attempt to approximate this toxic internalized fantasy of what it is to be desirable, fuckable, marriageable, Virginie Despentes writes, “I’m not into giving a hard-on to men that don’t make me dream.” I underline it as I read on the train, imagining what it would be if one’s desirability were measured by how much they set you dreaming, how wild they made your dreams.

IN A CAR IN CALIFORNIA I listen to my sister sing along with Nancy Wilson, “These dreams go on when I close my eyes / Every second of the night I live another life.” “These Dreams” might be Heart’s most glittering, technical power ballad. Nancy was sick when she recorded the song, which changed the quality of her voice to something deeper, more gravelly. Producers afterwards asked her if she could just get sick again. Who isn’t compelled by the idea of leading another life? A life without consequences in the one where we need money to live and get sick and often feel misunderstood and thwarted in our desires.



LISTENING TO JACKIE I WONDER if the freedom of our dreams might be the first lines in a map to the nowhere of utopia? Existing at no distance from this world but still outside it, a freedom not from consequences, and a freedom not from each other, but rather from time and self and the state's jealous permission. Or not so much a freedom from as one to. But to what I can't begin to speak.

MERLEAU-PONTY WRITES, "THE FEELING of eternity is hypocritical; eternity feeds on time... Eternity is the time of dreams, and the dream refers back to the day before, from which it borrows all of its structures." To me the way dreams simultaneously combine before, now, and something else neither before nor now does not so much show eternity's limitations, as it shows eternity's constitutive parts, which include us and our days. Dreaming does feel like an eternity outside of time, but then so does waiting to fall asleep, or waiting for a lover's return, or waiting for someone to die.

“ANOTHER NIGHT, ANOTHER DREAM, BUT ALWAYS YOU,” really does it for me as a romantic conceit. I like to imagine what the essential quality must be in this you that makes them recognizable across nights, across dreams, somehow both reliable and mysterious, inescapable and unattainable, always returning but never fettered. “I feel joy, I feel pain, cause it’s still the same,” studio singer Karin Kasar sings and frontwoman Patsy Petersen lip syncs. In the video, which has a typical black and white 90s industrial ambience, the disembodied dream lover is represented narratively as a DJ Patsy listens to every night, up on her Berlin roof with her radio, wondering who and from where the voice emanates, broadcasts. The radio as a metaphor for dreams is a good one, something that perhaps can be explained mechanically but whose explanation feels nevertheless insufficient, failing to account for the mystery of someone speaking to you in your room who is not in your room, this shadow between presence and absence, communal and private, intimate and alone, real and imagined. “Another Night,” was released in the United States the same year Selena’s “Dreaming Of You” was, 1995. Maybe there was something in the air.

MANY ARGUE THAT *A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET 3: DREAM WARRIORS* is the best in the franchise, and I agree. The idea of banding together in dreams through group hypnosis to access your dream powers and defeat an evil that has haunted your family has I think an irresistible, perhaps universal, appeal.

MY SISTER WENT TO LOS ANGELES and got me an autographed *Hellraiser* poster. Ashley Laurence, who stars in the first several of the franchise as our young heroic final girl Kirsty Cotton, wrote “Laura, much love, Ashley,” even though of course our love is one-sided, and flowing entirely from me, rich in love for distant scream queens and poor in basically everything else. I had spent the day in a truck with Dave and all of my belongings, moving across Brooklyn consumed in a dumb August haze in body and mind. He said his life feels like a dream, but neither in a dream-come-true way, nor in a waking nightmare way, just in that here I find myself although I don’t know how I came to be here sort of movement of dreaming, like the whole world is a pool you can’t get out of, your body formless but pruned and weightless as the water you float in, the air cool against your face. That night lightning flashed but there was no rain and no thunder. I guess it was from the heat. I felt a great pressure lift and loom and lift and loom all around me, as if at any moment everything might flicker away. You never know when you’re at the beginning of your marriage until later.

NICOLE TELLS ME HER DREAMS in the morning, she said in one she knew she was dreaming because her grandfather suddenly appeared before her as a young man. I've read that to test whether or not you are dreaming you should flip a light switch and see what happens, as if our minds aren't powerful enough to generate functional dream electricity, when they can create tunnels that never end, children who are not our own but for whom we are nevertheless responsible, lives not ours that we now must survive somehow. The question comes up, am I dreaming?, from this uncertainty around how to test the reality of a situation or proposition, how to verify its truth claims. In The Bangles 1998 single, "Eternal Flame," Susanna Hoff asks of the eponymous flame, "Do you feel the same? Am I only dreaming?" As if the way to confirm the truth of a sense or a sensation is to confirm that it's shared, like the transformation of a secret into a confidence, an intimacy. Do you feel it, too? Or am I only dreaming? Another way to ask the question might be am I crazy? Madness and dreaming do seem to interweave, madness like a sort of dream, dreaming a sort of madness. Are you seeing what I'm seeing? Did you feel that?

SOMETIMES BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN'S "THE RIVER" gets stuck in my head for weeks at a time. The song is about the death of love, the death of a future, an end of something worth living for, the only future that matters which is to say one wherein we are all free from the pressure to sell our labor to live and to get married to avoid a consuming shame. He too poses a question, he asks, as you perhaps recall, "Is a dream a lie that don't come true, or is it something worse?" What is worse than a lie? A death? I worry when I don't get the things I want, the things I dream about, it's because I didn't want them enough, like I can't trust my own measure of my own feeling. I worry that people are always doing what they want to do, really, regardless of any complaints to the contrary, caught in perpetual traps of their own devising. I worry I both overestimate and misunderstand my powerlessness. I want to go to the river too, I want to rest on the banks for a while. I mean forever. But then that's when I understand the river as freedom, it could just as easily be madness or death.

I LISTEN TO NOTHING BUT LUCINDA WILLIAMS FOR MONTHS. This obsession started one horrible day, a regular day after a horrible night, when I heard “I Lost It” for the first time sitting at my desk at work. I left immediately, but of course I came back, I mean it’s work. She sings, “I thought I was in heaven, but I was only dreaming,” which is so sad. “I thought,” being such a sad formation, the uncertain ground of the past betrayed, what you thought you knew, what you thought you saw, that now you see is otherwise. Just before this description she expresses her fear that she might blow away, and that does not sound like heaven necessarily, but does sound like a feeling I experience daily. You too? I mean what holds anything down, when the stolen ground of this earth and the metaphoric ground of ourselves are both so unstable, precarious. Is heaven anything more than a dream? But dreams are dreams, for one thing, because of their impermanence, their irreality, whereas if heaven is real it is certainly forever, that’s kinda the point. There is no end in heaven. Would that a dream could last so long. Perhaps that is what death, madness, love will be. My dreams, instead, are mostly followed by mornings, mornings that are followed by days that are sometimes already ruined by the night before or my own bad attitude. Every day is a new day I tell myself, my new life has already started I tell myself, it’s all here, and I’m here too, right where I need to be, which is all over the place. In recent mornings I have looked out windows to the excessive green of Tennessee leaves, the gravel and stones of Tucson yards, the cold tall trees of California. If I learned anything, which I didn’t, it’s that there is no getting “away from it all,” it’s all always there, I mean where is it supposed to go? That was a real wake-up call, I thought, rushing out the door. The difference between I have nowhere to go and I have nowhere to be but here. In dreams you are where you are, no explanation is required, which is good because no explanation is possible.

I WAS WALKING ON BUSHWICK AVENUE looking at my phone when I got tangled in the hanging ribbons of a memorial constructed around scaffolding and Chase texted me that David Berman was dead. "DAVID BERMAN IS DEAD," he said, which I thought was a weird joke. "Repair is the dream of the broken thing," Berman sang, or still sings whenever I choose to listen, the miracle of recorded sound, always now, always before. So often the truth is not far from a joke. The dream of repair is a joke, everything is broken, what could be more evident? We kiss our friends like our throats are stringed instruments, which they are, and the world burns.

WHAT IF INSTEAD EVERY DAY I just get further from heaven? And should that be the case, then of course the question is begged, then closer to what?

“I WAS DREAMING WHEN I WROTE THIS, FORGIVE ME IF I GO ASTRAY,” sings Prince, astray being the general direction of all dreams, maybe all things sooner or later. I was not dreaming when I wrote this, or what I mean is I was awake in the night in a strange room, but yes of course I was dreaming, I mean I was swimming in fantasies, as I am always. About California and summer and a beauty so great in its face the world cannot possibly go on, a weight so heavy it holds me in place, this place, which must be it, a soft comedown and long night measured in sidereal time and the crystalline laughter of a stranger, about the sway of velvet curtains lightly brushed by nervous fingers, about life in the mountains, life in the desert, these lives I don’t want but could, maybe, if I knew how to want what might be good for me. If you fall asleep on a train who knows where you will wake up. Well you do, if you bought the ticket, that’s how trains work. What you will find when you get there, who I will be, and what difference any of it will make, that’s more of the mystery.



THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DREAMING your life away and dreaming your way into a new life, a new world. Are both equally possible? But then what kind of limit is possibility in the space of a dream? In dreams I walk with you. Dream lover come and rescue me. Dream lover where are you. Dream baby dream.