

The Dreamers

The rules of the dream realm are as follows:

Never destroy a dream.

Never sleep.

And most importantly– *never* be seen by a nightmare.

I recited the rules over in my head, as I leapt, from dream to dream, like a child playing hopscotch. The dreams took the form of a blurred bubble; each one shimmering a colour of its own– at the slightest touch, it rippled and bobbed. I– a Dreamer–had the job of *shaping* the dream; I infused *hope* into them. It's rare to be picked as a Dreamer; only the writers, the escapists, those with ideas the world wouldn't understand, were plucked from the safety of their homes, and *forced* to be a Dreamer.

It sounds like a paradise; an elusive place, where you're unbound by society. But mark my words. I am, you are– we all are *cursed*. You'll know if you're selected. There are stages– starting small. Somedays, your face seems to rearrange itself. Your muscles feel heavier, the wind seems to ignore you. Then, it escalates. Days pass like people in a crowd– life becomes a lagged motion picture that you watch from a tv screen, someplace far from here. And when you think it's begun, it's already ended. *It's already got you.*

Finally, I found myself gazing upon a dream. It wandered carelessly towards me, chiming the sound of a bell. The bubble twinkled a brilliant bright light, and smelt of cinnamon gingerbread men. Swiping my hand away, a sweep of gold dust clung to my palm. The dream was warm– like a knitted quilt blanket. I molded it in my arms. Until, faintly, in the distance– the wet snapping of bones echoed. In alarm, I looked up, releasing the dream from my grasp... *Is it?*

My fists clenched. My jaw tightened.

In horror, I turned around slowly. A stout boy quivered behind a bubble, frozen. My stare moved from his gawking face, and was met with the growling, dark beast that stood before him. The nightmare– it had seen him.

Then, it saw me too.

Never destroy a dream. Never speak.

Foolishly, I took the twinkling yellow dream, moulding it into something sharp, squealing and shrieking as I bent it, like an absurd balloon animal. *Never. Speak.* “Hey...” I swallowed my terror. “Uhm, eat this!” my trembling voice echoed throughout the realm.

I couldn’t let him be *engulfed*. Would it be cruel, or self preservation?

I hurdled the spiked dream into the eye of the nightmare. *Never. Destroy. A dream.*

It burst into a firework of golden light, littering itself into a thousand dull pieces, smashing at the entity’s feet with a clash.

The beast howled, clutching its eye in agony with one dark, clawed hand; its shrills echoed throughout the Dream Realm– announcing to the other nightmares. I sprung, bouncing off of dreams like trampolines. I took hold of the boy’s wrist– the thunderous steps of the Nightmares furiously hunting us down. The realm seemed to twist and bend around us; what was once a familiar landscape warped into a maze. Walls of dream bubbles towered over us; rather than shimmer, they released dark ribbons of smoke. The air became thick, each step became like sludging through jelly. Fumes of fog sifted, rising to my shoulders; I could barely see my own hand.

The boy waddled behind, the haze dragging him down as he buckled. I sighed and ran back, shrieking at him to stand up, to even *move*. His words distorted into the sound of a broken record player– his face sagged to one side as his voice seemed to slow down and stretch.

In the midst of decoding his warnings, a globule of brown tinted, warm drool trickled into my hair.

Blinking the substance out of my eyes, wiping it away, the Nightmare smirked smugly. Beady red eyes held pictures of merciless suffering.

“Pluegh...” it puffed, rolling out its green tinged tongue, like a carpet, whilst a cloud of pungent breath pooled into our faces.

Rows of yellow teeth sat crooked, glittering shards of dreams were wedged in the various concaves of his mouth. Crawling out came the rancid scent of a polluted river and rotted fish. With an outstretched finger, it pinched the boy and I by our capes– swinging us precariously into the dark void of his jaws.