

## *A Million Distant Shores*

I dreamt, last night, that I was floating on my back on an endless ocean, looking into a night as endless as my soul, brilliantly lit by a giant silver moon. Brilliant white clouds eddied their ways across the night, and every single passing one reminded me of you. If there had been tiny, hoping stars up there, endless millions of miles away, I would have wished for you on all of them, but there weren't. There was only the moon, and then it splashed down into my endless ocean, surged me upward and outward to some distant shore a world away.

I stood there, wet and breathing heavily. There was nothing in that world besides the ocean behind me and the sand glowing passionately all around me as far as I could see, blue-white as snow even though there was no longer any source of light. I scooped up a handful but a breeze I couldn't feel glittered it away and left only a million constellations clinging to my still-wet hands. When I brought my hands to my face, they smelled like you; warm and pink, but the fragrance fled on velvet heels, leaving my wanting more.

I was still wet, and I pulled off the flannel shirt I hadn't realized I was wearing and let my jeans drop to the sand. The ocean lapped up hungrily and carried them away. I crashed into the water after them, not for their warmth or concealment but rather because I realized they would carry your scent, too, but by the time I caught them they smelt only of the sea, and tears, so I let the tide carry them away from me.

I turned my back on them, and waded out of the sea.

I dreamt I trembled there, in that new world naked, and I heard the ocean behind me urging me to walk on, so I did.

There was no moon to see by, only sand glowing for no discernible reason, but the ocean was urgent. I never considered direction except forward, and I walked that way a long, long time.

I dreamt I stopped, then, and turned. The ocean was no longer visible, if it was even still there. All I could see were my footprints, tracing back as far as the horizon, dark patches in that shimmering sand until the wind blew like a lover's whisper across perfect skin and even the footprints vanished.

I continued to walk.

I dreamt I saw a tower in the distance, at first small but larger as I approached, until finally it was so high I could no longer see the top. It was hewn of dark blue stone that glimmered like ancient stars and was warm beneath my hand when I touched it. Not hot, just warm.

I shivered anyway.

A large archway trimmed with rough, silver-grey stones marked the entrance to the tower. Inside, its walls glowed faintly. A silver staircase lined the wall and spiraled up into darkness.

In the very center of the tower, five feet from the ground and five feet in diameter, a blue sphere glowed like a supernova. The moment I reached toward it, it became a silver pole, toppled toward me; I didn't have any choice but to heft it over my shoulder.

I looked up and saw in the darkness a beam of silver-blue light bisecting the tower. It didn't look solid enough to be a bridge, but, then, the pole I was carrying hadn't been solid, either, and it was still over my shoulder. I started climbing; if you'd asked me why, I might have told you I wanted to see that beam of light more closely, but I might have also told you I hoped, hoped, that I might find you at the top of the stairs. I had to be careful on them, for they were steep and roughly carved and I was trying to balance that pole, too, which I didn't want to put down. I don't know why I didn't want to put it down.

I kept going. I don't know how high or long I climbed before I discovered that shaft of light was spilling through a window carved into the tower wall. I put my hand forward as I approached it; maybe I expected it, too, to suddenly become solid, but it didn't. Perhaps, too, I thought it would be warm, that perhaps it would feel evanescent on my skin, but I stepped into it and let it wash over my still nude body, and I discovered there was no warm, and it did not evanesce.

It was just light.

I looked out at the world beyond the window through which that light spilled though it seemed to have no source, but the change on my outlook was its perspective. From my distant height, all that silver-blue sand suddenly looked like ice over a cruel and hostile world. Out in the distance I could see the ocean, and it appeared that the tide was coming in.

I don't know how long I looked out that window, only that all the time I did I thought of you. Your long brown hair and your lovely green eyes; your soft, intoxicating lips and your miles of oh-so-glorious skin; your firm breasts and the small strip of hair between your legs. Your warmth and wetness, and how wonderful it felt to be inside of you, and how much like home. I thought of your skin shimmering with salty sweat as if you'd just emerged from the sea, and I remembered how the ocean tasted like infinite tears. I remembered all those things because when we were together I secreted them away from life and the world; I cherished them, because I didn't know how many there would be. I remembered how it felt when I was with you, how it felt to find a little bit of something me in everything in you, how it felt to fall in you and drown in you and finally, finally, to lose you.

There were more stairs ahead of me, and I wondered again if I would find you at the top of them. Would you still remember me? Would you recognize me? There in that dream I still realized it's been a very long time indeed since last we saw each other, and maybe the world hasn't much changed, but I have.

A broken heart will do that to you.

And now what? You have your life, and I know the rules.

I know I have to let you go.

I don't want to. I don't want to lose those precious few moments I had with you, any more than I wanted, there on those stairs, to set down that long, silver pole.

So I didn't.

I dreamt last night that the tower just seemed to keep growing as I climbed it until suddenly there was no longer anything above me. Suddenly, the rough-hewn stones gave way to dawn like warm velvet, and I found myself standing atop the tower. A fine coating of sand dusted its flat roof, and the wind up there swirled and eddied and stirred those granules to form a sea of dust as deep as my waist.

You were not there.

There was nothing there, nothing at all besides that sand, besides me and that pole on top of that skyscraping tower overlooking all the world.

I waded into that fine mist of sand and approached the very edge of the tower. The grains clung to my skin as I went, and I opened my hand and closed my fingers around a fistful.

The world seemed farther down than I had realized, and bigger. From that height, I could see other oceans out there, more than I could count, and I realized suddenly that I had cried every last one of them on countless other nights exactly like that one.

A tear escaped my eye, down my cheek, and then I watched it fall like a single drop of rain. I wondered if it would make it all the way to the sand before I realized it didn't matter.

I took the pole from my shoulder, held it past the tower's edge and let it drop. It fell at first one end over the other before it straightened to plummet like a javelin until I couldn't see it anymore.

I opened my fist hand, let the wind blow that sand into the darkness; it sparkled and flashed and shimmered. There were no stars in that empty sky but I wished anyway, a million tiny wishes for you on a million grains of sand. I cried aloud at the futility of it all, and then I looked out at all those oceans in that strange, glowing world and I stepped forward. I fell, fell, and as the wind whipped through my hair and dried my cheeks, I only prayed that I would find myself, at the bottom of my fall, floating in the middle of another ocean, looking up at another sky and another moon. Because maybe if I do it a thousand more times on a million more nights exactly like this one, maybe I'll climb those stairs one last time to find you on top of the tower.

And if, after all those nights of climbing and crying and falling, I find you at the top of that tower, will I know how to stop dreaming?

- *Will Entrekin*