

Sea Dreams

Contributed by Lisa Burdige

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Â Â Â There's a sea bird over by the bay that knows my thoughts. It says, "Nice girls, beware. Dirty thoughts are dirty. Safe sex safe sex safe sex.Â And monogamy.Â And don't dress like a hooker.Â And you can't go out with that clown makeup on."

Â Â Â I try to ignore it as I walk on, but I have a sneaking suspicion that my mother is sending me messages.Â It makes me wonder, because my mother says she loves me. She says she wants to protect me. She says that she wants me to be protected. I'm sure if I asked her, she'd say: "Don't be ridiculous. I never said anything about clown makeup." But when I think about her, what I hear her say is, "Don't dirty girl don't dirty girl. Don't."

Â Â Â I try to make her voice go away. I close my eyes and focus on the chatter of people around me talking football and the price of housing. I tell myself, don't be crazy, not at the beach.

After I count backwards from 27, I open my eyes. I spot a father play with his little girl by an overturned rowboat.Â I feel as old as the child. In truth, I am as old as the father.Â He reminds me of someone who once hated me and showed it. I want him to fuck me. But if he came close I would cry, "Don't touch me." And I would scream like the whistle of a frantic lifeguard blowing for a drowner.

Â Â Â I stare at him pretending to stare at the water, at the ferry crossing from Long Island at another sea bird that looks a lot like the first. Â

He throws the ball and the little girl laughs.Â But I'm not fooled. He is evil.Â I give him the evil eye.Â He doesn't notice.Â Then he does.Â He looks uncomfortable, shifts the game down the beach, away from me. I watch his ass in his clinging bathing suit and I try not to remember THAT MAN. Even though there's nothing to remember.

Â I sink down on in the sand and tell myself again: There's nothing to remember.Â Â

The sun on the sand feels warm and good, and when I start to doze, I'm thinking:Â Safe sex.Â Safe sex.Â Safe sex. Â

Â Â Â And then I'm lying naked on the beach.Â No, I'm not naked.Â I'm wearing a pair of black suede pumps.Â My toes dig into the sand and the leather, coated by particles of sand, transform into suede. I wonder if I should put on some sunscreen because I am afraid of getting burned.Â But I want the sun.Â I want the sun to be safe. Â

Â Â Â Safe sun, safe-sun, safesun.

Â Â Â I am thinking about safe sun when I feel a cool drop at the base of my spine.Â A globule of something thick and viscous -- it feels white.Â I want more, more wet, white cream.Â Before I can speak, I feel a line of cool gliding up my back. And then big hands smear the cream over my back, rubbing the cream into the muscles in my shoulders.Â I feel the shadow of something big behind me and then knees sink into the sand next to my calves.Â I kick off my shoes.Â I feel hands reaching under my body and rubbing cream onto my breasts, onto the tops of my thighs.Â Â Fingers slip inside me.Â Sticky flesh slides over my back.Â It cools me, all of me except for the soles of my feet.Â A cock hardens and slides between the slippery cheeks of my ass. I lift up and hands tilt my pelvis.Â Angling me.Â Finding a way inside "â€" not exactly gently, but definitely right. My hands squeeze snowballs of sand and I am pink and pink and gold rocking to the sound of the waves, gently lolling.Â There is no blue sky, there is no scorching sun, there is no tension and no fear only blackness and blackness and blackness and then a voice whispers something I'm ashamed to repeat, even to myself.

Â Â Â The incoming tide wakes me up with a chilly shock. I grab my flip-flops, so they don't wash away, and then walk down the boardwalk to the next town and buy an ice cream.Â The cool sweet childhood feeling melts any memories that I don't have. A sea bird stares at me as I eat. I'm nervous that it's the same bird. Maybe it's following me?Â I wish I could relax. I'm on vacation.Â Christ.

Â Â Â When the sun sets, I wander back to my room and fall asleep.Â I dream that I need to speak, but my mouth has been nailed shut.Â I wiggle the nails loosen and then bend forward, shaking them out of my head.Â They lay in a pattern surrounding my toes, like sharpened teeth.Â I wiggle my tongue and hear myself say, "Momma," and then a fog begins to clear, slipping away like a line of purple smoke and I am in a wheat field, my feet pricked by the sharpness of drying straw. Â

Â Â Â I try to run away, but my big breasts flap up, slapping me in the face and blackening my eyes. So I rip them off and toss them into the brush, like empty plastic sacs.Â Now, I have two more holes in the front of my body, which immediately grows short tight, curls -- golden pubic hair.

Â Â Â Boys come out of the woods, their voices beating inside my head.Â I see their mouths move, but I hear the sounds as words written in the blackness behind my closed eyes.

Â Â Â "She has three cunts," they say in unison. Their lips move, but I know it's HIS voice.

Â Â Â I try to make silence by covering my ears with my hands but my ears are also furry.

Â Â Â Two more boys spring up.

Â Â Â "More for us," these two sing.

Â Â Â The five boys stand in a line like toy soldiers.Â They fall to the ground surrounding my toes like starving coyotes waiting to pounce.Â A sixth boy appears.

Â Â Â "Don't forget her ass," he shouts gleefully.

Â Â Â "Momma," I say again, but in my heart I know my mother can't hear me, or if she could, she wouldn't understand.

Â Â Â When I wake up, I don't feel rested. I feel all jittery and tired --almost as if I've run a marathon or had been swimming

all afternoon instead of sleeping on and off.

I throw on some clothes and wander down to the town and end up at a bar by the marina. Outside on the dock, the moonlights brightens the clouds with an exquisite silver glow. Inside the bar, it's strobe lights and Hawaiian shirts -- the seventies revisited. I sit on the deck by the water away from the disco revival and the teenagers sniffing each other's crotches. I'm invisible to them -- too fat, too old, wearing too much black.

Then that Dad shows up, wearing tan khaki Dockers and a knit shirt. He's alone. I see him and my hands reach out to catch the ball he threw on the beach this afternoon. He thinks I'm waving.

"Hello," he says. He strolls over to me, casually stirring a reddish drink with a stick shaped like a hula girl. The bass bounces off the dance floor inside the bar -- a sandy patch of wood marked off by walls covered with netting. He's going to ask me to dance, I think. He's going to want to fuck me. But he's fucked me before; I can see his head over my body, my body below him being pounded, wanting to cry out -- I'm biting my lip to stop myself.

So I say, "I would like to know you. But you look like someone who once hated me. And it wasn't until I saw you today on the boardwalk with your little girl that I even remembered. I don't mean to be rude but your face makes me see things in my head I just don't want to remember. Excuse me for saying so but I would like you to die."

But I don't say that, I say, "You know, I'm not afraid to do almost anything. But there's a place inside me that pops out into the open when I'm touched in a certain way. It's a black place, a void, a question I can't answer and once I remember it's there it sits like a knot in my stomach getting pulled tighter and tighter."

But I don't say that either.

This man picks up his hula shaped cocktail stick and thoughtfully tastes a drip of red drink before he uses it to swirl the ice in his glass.

"Didn't I see you at the beach today?" he finally asks. He's a little bit hesitant, and just for a moment I can almost see him as kind.

There's a jumble in my head, maybe something my mother once told me -- it all seems to be gibberish right now. And, from out on the pilings in the harbor, I can hear that sea bird scolding. I'm a little worried that I don't know what it means.

The man is focused in, waiting for me to respond.

"Did you?" I finally answer him, "I don't remember."