

Remembering Dreams

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I see a lot of deer when I take my dog Harley for walks. I can't remember there ever having been so many before. Used to be just a couple every now and then if you were lucky. Now you come to the end of this block of suburban houses along the edge of the forest preserve, and you see five of them hanging around the line of lawns out back. The smallest flicks his soft head about squeamishly, running ahead of the rest with ears shaped like butterfly wings flattened back. He jacks up his front legs, juts out his young chest, and sets one black, bulbous eye straight on you. It looks as though this one tiny deer has already been enlightened with his entire destiny and is determined to stay on path.

They gallop so quietly. Out of nowhere you'll see the tallest, thickest buck of the group—his antlers huge and branching—standing still at the edge of a row of backyards, in the deep shadow of the trees. I'll say, "Look, Harley, look at the deer," not even whispering, and the buck will hold his ground until we're close enough that Harley could take a little nip out of his knuckle-bone. Then he rears up, the smooth, silky muscles of his flanks flexing so that his tan coat gleams, and he runs on past us with a strange silence over the dark, smooth grass.

It all started last spring when Harley and I walked along the dirt path between the woods and the kids' football field. Suddenly I had this unavoidable sensation of being watched. I looked back and two long, quiet faces peered up at me unafraid, just staring from their gentle, precarious stance inside a sunlit grove along the woods' edge. I found myself thinking of this old faded picture I used to stare at as a young child at my grandmother's house.

Right before she left for the army, a teenage-version of my mom stood over a dirt path like the one I stood over now. She wore a hot pink shirt and a pair of white hot pants with one slim hand outstretched before her, bidding the cameraman closer. A young female deer had curled its thick lower lip over

my mom's welcoming fingertips. They tell me now this was at a Wisconsin Dells Zoo. Could that deer have been me before I was born? My dad used to tell me I picked my mom out from heaven before I was born.

So when a multitude of those ever-alert eyes started following me around all over the South Side of Chicago, constantly lifting those long, gentle heads towards me, as though they'd been expecting me for some time, I began to contemplate the true nature of these mystical beings. This kind of graceful animal has always haunted me since my earliest memory of a dream. I couldn't shake this crazy notion that they were trying to tell me something. Could it be that they carried human souls within them, that God had sent them over the earth to tell us of our own destinies? And if He had, why don't we ever stop to listen?

Late one night that summer, my boyfriend Mark and I drove down an abandoned road, the damp air like a vacuum all around us, the twin pale beams of light before us our only illumination into the path ahead.

"Look! Over there!" he whispered hoarsely, pointing at the side of the road. There, the object of his fascination silently raised a taut, dancer-like face from its long, fragile neck and peacefully gazed back at us as we sped past. I got this sick, queasy kind of feeling down in my gut, as though this gentle creature had been waiting patiently to confide in us some deep dark secret. Maybe it was a future child of ours, or maybe it was a distant relative long dead. If only we hadn't been so involved in our mad rush to some destination I can't even remember, to stop along the abandoned road and listen to the soft whisper of a forgotten deer, of a forgotten dream.