

I Have to Take the Milk Home

The house is more of a hut. A little blue hut next to the beach, but my dream place to live. The fluorescent street lights let off a bright, blue light; however, not bright enough to justify staying outside. A gust of wind whips me and I hurry inside toward safety.

The hallway lights flicker on when I enter, sensing my movement. It's as if the only hue that my eyes react to is blue. Every shade of every carpet and wallpaper and photo is blue. Light blue floors, lighter blue ceilings, and dark blue walls. I take a cautious step, in which the floorboards creak. I cringe. Any possibility of stealth that I had before is gone now.

A dim light shines from the next room, which no movement comes from.

I inhale and hold my breath in as I peek around the corner. If someone is in there, they might hear my breathing. Careful not to creak the floorboard again, I slowly crane my neck until one eye can see into the room. An old, musty fridge sits in one corner, flanked by an equally old oven and a long-retired dishwasher.

The wooden, four-person table is accompanied by a familiar figure. Extremely familiar. In a flash, everything about the past six months floods back and I realize something:

I'm in a lucid dream.

I seat myself in the seat opposite of the boy with the ruffled hair that should be brown. He's wearing the same blue Pepsi t-shirt that he's been wearing every night in my past six months of dreaming. His usual "Buenos Noches, Luna" mug is sitting in front of him, full of coffee. I always wondered how he came upon that mug. Luckily, his eyes were blue in the first place, so I can still admire them in their natural form when they look up into mine. He leans back in his chair, letting his hands relax in his lap. Those blue eyes crinkle around the edges as his face forms into a wide smile. "Hey, Erica. How are you?"

Usually when I'm dreaming, I try to conceal the fact that this is a dream. This time I decide to act differently. "Want to hear a secret?"

He lifts one eyebrow and shoots me a quizzical look, daring me to continue.

"We're in a dream right now." I state, laughing a little about how carefree I feel.

He laughs back. "Why are you telling me this?" And this time he raises both eyebrows, sitting back up for a sip of his coffee.

"I don't know. I just wanted to see what you'd say." I justify weakly. He looks particularly nice tonight, and something feels special.

"Can I tell you a secret now?" He returns the question. "One that I've never told you before?"

"Only if it's that you'll come visit me in real life." I say.

He frowns. "I only wish." And the pain in his voice makes us both go into a quiet moment of contemplation about the past six months. The secrets, my parents' controlling ways, his complete cut-off from my life. Our eyes snap back to each other's at the same moment, and we watch the blue flickers of the three-wick candle snap around in the reflections of our eyes. "My secret is that I'm in a lucid dream also."

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“What?” I almost shout, jumping out of my seat and advancing in his direction.

“Careful!” He shouts. “The coffee!”

“Right.” I swiftly step away from the table. Every dream ends with my skin burning from a cup of spilled coffee. The dreamlike sensation wakes me up in real life.

I exhale, calming my beating heart. “Before anything else happens, do you have a poem for me?” I sound a bit demanding, but I’m just making sure that I can hear it before the spill occurs. Every night he writes a new poem for me.

“Tonight’s is special. It might clear things up.” He clears his throat and begins:

“With every spilled cup,

My dreams are waking up.

You still think you’re far,

But you’re wrong.

I’m crossing the mar.

My dear, it won’t be long.”

He stops, waiting expectantly for a response. Expecting me to have some revelation.

“I’m not sure I understand.” I say.

“Think about it.” He tells me, and a familiar look of mischief crosses his face. Before I can stop him, he bounces up and the coffee falls over, splashing onto my skin. I tense, bracing for the searing pain, but it doesn’t come. In fact, it’s freezing. “What’s happening?” I ask, as my toes start to freeze. Then my feet, then my shins. I’m frozen solid up to my waist.

My abdominal starts to freeze and he’s still standing there with a bewildered look glued onto his face. He runs over as my chest starts to freeze and lays a soft kiss on my lips. A hot drop tries to survive in my stomach, but blends into the cold almost instantly. “I’m coming for you, Erica. Don’t worry. I know these dreams are hard for you. They’re hard for me as well. Watching you burn every night? Freezing isn’t much better.” I barely catch his last words as my brain is turned to ice. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

I’ve never frozen before.

I wake with a jolt, and the ice melts away instantly. I’m sweating in my bed like a glass of ice water. My clock flashes the word “PARK” in digital letters. Strange. My clock is only supposed to display numbers. Clicking the lock button on my phone, the time reads 6:50 in the morning. I might as well get up. My mom will come to get me in ten minutes anyway if I don’t. My parents run a tight schedule for me ever since the ‘dirty affair’ as they call it.

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The springs creak as I push myself up and over. Sitting on the side of my bed, I throw my hair up into a scraggly ponytail. Looking into the mirrors of my closet doors, my dark brown hair is ratty-tatty and my skin is pale. My dream has left bags under my eyes. What did it mean? It seemed real, but it's impossible for people to dream together, isn't it?

My thoughts are interrupted by my mother opening my door and immediately gasping. She runs to my side, "Have you been dreaming again? Sweetheart, you look terrible. You can't keep having dreams about him." The way she said 'him' dripped with disapproval.

"I can't help what I dream about, mom." I say dryly.

"No, but if you'd stop thinking about him during the day it'd probably do you some good."

"Yeah, well sorry." I'm not sorry.

Her voice turns into that 'smart-adult' voice. "Your father and I just have your best interest at heart."

"Well David's some big-shot engineer in Granada now, so don't worry about him being here anytime soon." I reassure her for the 100th time. She cringes as his name.

Her smile turns genuine. "Would you like some breakfast? I made our Saturday pancakes."

"Okay." I agree and get up. When I walk past the television, it turns on and a man yells, "...park!" when we catch him mid-sentence. My mother finds the remote and presses the off button, commenting on how strange it is that the TV turned on without anyone touching it.

Park?

She places a tall stack of steamy, fresh goodness in front of me, syrup on the side to accompany it. "So," my mother begins, eager to tell me how she has already packed my day with plans so that I have no freedom. "I think that today we should go on a long walk through the soccer field, then go swimming at the YMCA for a couple hours, and then make a fancy dinner for your father. Do you think he'd like shrimp or steak? And which side dishes?" The plan always ends with a fancy dinner for him.

Just then, an emergency message lights up on my phone. It's labeled "Blue, blue, blue!" I open the frantically buzzing text and it reads: "Park! Park! Park!"

"What does it say?" My mother asks when she sees my eyebrows furrow.

"It's a bunch of random letters." I lie guiltlessly. Why does the word 'park' keep showing up in strange situations? What's so special about the park today? 'Blue, blue, blue'?

"That's interesting. So, what about dinner tonight?" Mom is back to our tedious plans already.

"How about I go shopping for dinner?" I ask, taking her by surprise. I never offer to go shopping, mostly because they keep such a close watch on me. "I haven't driven in forever and I need to clear my mind from that awful nightmare from last night."

I knew I had her at 'awful nightmare'. "Okay, sweetheart. Just this once. I'll make you a shopping list while you get ready." I clear my plate and get dressed, almost shaking in anticipation of

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being completely relieved of my family for once. I throw on a red t-shirt from Coldstone and a pair of dark blue athletic shorts. I sprint out the door, calling 'goodbye' over my shoulder.

I pretend that I'm a young mother during Black Friday. I grab my cart and collect items for tonight's dinner like a professional shopper. I get in and out of Kroger in twenty minutes, which I'm sure is record time for such a long list.

Time to go to the park.

The day is beautiful and bright, yet no one is out here. In fact, there's no trace that any human has been here recently except for a single book sitting on the table. Is that book for me? Should I go look? I slowly slink toward the book, afraid that the owner will jump out of nowhere.

The book is for me. The cover has a slip for a picture, and the picture is of me. Intricate designs of green and blue waves curl and smooth along the space surrounding my photograph. The occasional sparkle catches my eye as I open the book. On the inside cover, a picture of David and I laughing like monkeys makes me smile. Big letters let me know that this album is called, "The Poetry of David Berlanga: From Dreams to Reality".

I begin reading the first poem and realize that it is his poem from the first dream that I had after we were broken apart.

"How do you like it?" A familiar voice calls from behind me.

I whirl around. He's standing there. David. He's the same as the last time I saw him. Tall, tan, and dressed in his blue, Pepsi t-shirt and khaki shorts. His lips curl up in a shy smile, and I realize that my jaw is wide open. I shut it quickly and stand to go greet him properly.

When we break apart from our hug he says, "Well, it's certainly nice to see you in a color other than blue."

My jaw drops again. "So... all along... those dreams..."

He flawlessly recites the dream from last night.

"You know, you aren't a very impressive poem-writer." I tease him, and we laugh together like the monkeys in the front of the album.

"That's okay," He says. "Because I'm good at sending you secret messages, and that's all that matters now."

"You have something to show for all that engineering school now." I say, and chills go down my spine, as I can now see our futures in full color.

"Do you have time to stay here with me for a while?" He asks hopefully.

"I wish I could say yes, but we'll have to wait. I have milk in the car."