

**ALMOST ASLEEP**

**by Julie Hébert**

The first day's night had come –  
And grateful that a thing  
So terrible – had been endured –  
I told my Soul to sing –

She said her strings were snapped –  
Her Bow – to Atoms blown –  
And so to mend her – gave me work  
Until another morn –

And then a Day as huge  
As Yesterdays in pairs  
Unrolled its horror in my face –  
Until it blocked my eyes –

My Brain – begun to laugh –  
I mumbled – like a fool –  
And tho' 'tis Years ago – that Day –  
My Brain keeps giggling – still.

And something's odd – within –  
That person I was –  
And this one – do not feel the same –  
Could it be Madness – this?

—Emily Dickinson

FIVE WOMEN in surreal dream-beds, sleeping in peculiar positions. THEY roll over in unison. Pause. THEY fluff pillows, then lie down in unison. Pause. THEY sit up, wipe noses, pull noses, lie down in unison. Pause. WARRIOR sits up sharply, quick turn to the left. SHE fluffs her pillow, then the OTHERS follow in unison. THEY ALL lie down except CHATTERER, who sits up, quick turn to the left, and speaks. The OTHERS, except the DREAMER, immediately begin their physical loops and then, with staggered entries, add in their verbal loops. Their verbal loops consist of their first lines plus echoes of some of the CHATTERER's lines. The DREAMER thrashes in her sleep.

CHATTERER: AGAIN APOLOGIZING FOR MY BEHAVIOR. Okay, maybe I was wrong not to be more "Positive!" Excuse me. I thought we were all adults. There was a problem. I commented. He was STUNG, poor man. They laugh when I am STUNG, they make me pay when they are STUNG. There was a problem. I commented. I'm not a bitch. I'M NOT A BITCH. There was a problem. I commented. Okay, okay, I criticized, I criticized, I CRITICIZED. I'm shocked. It's a serious flaw. I'm shocked. A woman without grace. Harsh. Not gentle. I have gall, not good manners. I FAILED. I FAILED to surround him with warmth and acceptance. I FAILED to be his MAMA! I was unforgivably DIRECT. ONCE AGAIN I BLUNDER. ONCE AGAIN I BLUNDER. And he made me pay. He made me pay. He knows the secret rules. ONCE AGAIN I BLUNDER.

WARRIOR: Fuck it. I don't have to hold his wanger when he feels bad. Fuck it. I'm not his mama.

FOOL: Me no say nothing. Nothing.

SLEEPER: Embarrassed. He grabbed me. I forgive him.

The loop is broken by the DREAMER, who wakes up and coughs. Her voice is amplified, preferably with a slight delay. The OTHERS respond to the cough, like an electric shock. THEY freeze then move slowly.

CHATTERER: He grabbed my head under his arm and ruffed my hair... in front of my colleagues.

DREAMER: A foggy night in May dragged under another man's arm.

SLEEPER: Sweatstink.

WARRIOR: In front of everyone.

SLEEPER: Not my brother.

FOOL: He not my brother.

CHATTERER: He's my boss.

WARRIOR: I'm his boss!

CHATTERER: Boss. Boss. Nobody ever says boss anymore. Except to say there is no boss. Liars. Another secret rule. Who's the boss? Spit it out. Who's the boss?

WARRIOR (Matter-of-factly): I'm the boss. And that guy's gonna pay for making me look like a fool. He's got an ego like a Mack truck.

CHATTERER: Unlike you, of course.

DREAMER: A foggy night in May, headlines of my death...

FOOL: Nothing, nothing, nothing. Me no say nothing. Nothing at all.

CHATTERER: AGAIN APOLOGIZING FOR MY BEHAVIOR. Okay, maybe I lost control. A bit. A bit. Hyperventilation in a leader is loss of control in some books. Okay, I criticized. He was wrong. I criticized. He was wrong, and I criticized. So hold a knife to my throat and make me pay.

WARRIOR (Pulls out an invisible knife): Who's gonna pay?

CHATTERER: Why was I born a girl with a mouth and a mind like mine? I'm shocked. It's a serious flaw. I'm shocked.

SLEEPER: Bent over pressed under his arm, I see sweet cakes on the table, half-eaten, and dirty coffee cups. I feel every other person in the room, staring... (Breaks) He wants near my body. My body.

CHATTERER: Oh he likes my body all right. He'd like to have it in a harness.

WARRIOR: Power play. He'll pay.

FOOL: I'm hungry.

SLEEPER: He likes me, it was nothing, I shook and lost my breath and couldn't speak.

CHATTERER: Overreaction. It won't happen again.

DREAMER: My secret my secret is eating me.

SLEEPER: It's nothing.

DREAMER: A foggy night in May, no breath, no voice.

CHATTERER: Why do I feel so sad? He needed a good slap and I gave it to him.

WARRIOR: And then you hyperventilated.

CHATTERER: Once again I blunder. Once again I blunder.

WARRIOR: Fuck it.

SLEEPER: He forgives me.

DREAMER: Men love to forgive women.

WARRIOR: I don't really like holding limp wangers.

CHATTERER: Maybe that's why I can't get a job.

SLEEPER: My mouth. My mouth is numb. I feel my face, aaahhhh, I look in the mirror, Who is that?

CHATTERER: There's just no escaping it, wherever I go, there I am. Different clothes, same face. Different people, same blunders.

SLEEPER: She's so worried in the mirror.

DREAMER: I should be worried.

SLEEPER: Don't look! I feel so much better. (SHE feels her torso)

DREAMER: Look! My hair yanked from behind.

SLEEPER: I like short hair.

FOOL: I'm really hungry. I would like one of those half-eaten cakes right now.

DREAMER: Quiet.

CHATTERER: Quiet? Is something going on? I have no cake.

SLEEPER: He yanked my hair. Stinking smell. Of his armpit.  
I, I, I... (SHE begins to vaguely remember something)

CHATTERER: Quiet. Quiet. I have to pay attention. There's something going on and we all have to be awake and alert and look it in the eye. Where is it? What's going on? I'm ready, really I am. No question. Bravery is not an issue.

WARRIOR (Menacingly): What's going on?

CHATTERER and WARRIOR stare at the SLEEPER.

DREAMER: I remember...my hair...

SLEEPER: I, I, I, I...

ALL (Very softly, staggered): I, I, I, I...

SLEEPER: I forget. (SHE becomes groggy and falls onto her bed)

WARRIOR: Good. You'll sleep better.

CHATTERER: I was prepared. I was open. I was ready. I've done nothing wrong. I handled that well.

DREAMER: The foggy night in May won't go away. (Begins to search through newspapers)

FOOL: Sirloin petite, please. Can I have a Sir Loin Petite? Hello, hello, come in, Sirloin Petite?

WARRIOR (To CHATTERER): You look beautiful.

CHATTERER: I do? That's funny. I've been sick.

WARRIOR: Sometimes between sickness and health, people look more beautiful.

DREAMER: Lovely, lovely suffering.

CHATTERER: I do?

WARRIOR: Yeah.

CHATTERER: I've been sick.

WARRIOR: You look beautiful.

CHATTERER and SLEEPER: Thank you.

FOOL: Garçon!

DREAMER (SHE rocks, smokes and searches newspapers): No one hears me. The pictures are choking me, my throat is filled with pictures. No food, no air, no voice. I'm choking...

CHATTERER: I'm afraid to talk.

WARRIOR: Bull Shit.

CHATTERER: I conquer my fear over again every time I speak. Every time. And in the process of conquering fear I'm not paying attention to what I'm saying, so I blunder and stumble and offend people...which makes me afraid to speak all over again. I'm a danger to myself and others. I shouldn't be allowed to speak.

WARRIOR: I like to be alone and then I don't have to speak so I don't have to speak and then I don't have to worry.

CHATTERER: Strangers are the worst. I feel like Atlas holding up the conversation that at any moment could crush me.

FOOL and SLEEPER begin to sing "You Talk Too Much" very quietly and do gestures in tandem. The song continues through the following scene; when ONE OF THE TWO breaks off to speak, the OTHER continues singing.

CHATTERER: Acquaintances are almost as bad. Friends are okay some of the time. Family, now families vie with strangers for being the worst. Families are fragile and dangerous. I can never remember what they know about me. I don't care if they know, but they told me not to tell them certain things, so I'm always guessing what they don't want to know. For safety's sake I have a rule to strictly avoid talking about anything important.

SLEEPER: I saw a pretty dress today. I'm too grown-up for flowers.

FOOL: I like flowers, I like food. I want food.

CHATTERER: I try to keep my lover from becoming my family, but that's tricky. I'm so used to hiding that I don't trust he means what he says. But he uses the right words. He knows Names. Names of Things. So I have to do what he says, because I don't know what to call it. So, I think it helps when you know the name of something. Gives you an edge.

FOOL (Snaps her fingers, SHE's got it): Sirloin petite! No, that's not right is it? Sirloin petite?

WARRIOR: It never helps to talk about anything.

CHATTERER: Maybe. Maybe not. But I think so. You have to talk. So you have to call it something so you can talk about it. But what worries me is calling it the wrong thing. Then you're in trouble. I think calling things by their right name is crucial, but it's really hard.

WARRIOR: Yeah, it's really hard.

CHATTERER: Yeah. That's what's frightening about talking.

WARRIOR: Yeah. Talking... (SHE spits)

CHATTERER: Yeah.

WARRIOR: Yeah.

FOOL: What color were the flowers?

SLEEPER: Periwinkle...

ALL (Daydreaming; staggered delivery): Periwinkle...

SLEEPER: ...with apple-green leaves on a dark blue background. White raindrops fell on them. It was the prettiest dress I've ever seen.

CHATTERER (Pause; speaks slowly, still daydreaming a bit): Many times I realize I'm not calling something by its right name, but I keep talking anyway.

WARRIOR: Why?

DREAMER: Fear.

CHATTERER: Maybe I'll stumble into the right words if I just keep talking.



WARRIOR: Maybe you won't.

DREAMER: Fear.

CHATTERER: What an attitude! What am I supposed to do, stop talking until I have the thought exactly right? Heavens, that could take a while. I could die before I get out one good sentence.

Song of FOOL and SLEEPER ends here.

I can't think when I'm silent.

DREAMER: I'm afraid of silence.

CHATTERER: You with me?

WARRIOR: No.

CHATTERER: I mean do you follow what I'm saying?

WARRIOR: No.

CHATTERER: Oh. (Silence) Would you like to talk about something else?

WARRIOR: No.

CHATTERER: Okay. (Nervous gesture)

DREAMER (Gesturing with the newspaper): Years Ago! Years Ago!  
This says, By This Time Weeks Ago!

CHATTERER loops "Oh. Okay," and plays her instrument as FOOL performs a solo on her suspended ropes. A peaceful moment of no thought.

DREAMER (To the FOOL): Come here. (FOOL does) Read this.  
(FOOL begins to read silently) Out loud.

FOOL: "Last night a young woman was robbed, assaulted, and raped repeatedly by two men on 24th Street between Church and Noe. Her assailants yanked her hair as she ascended the steps to her home, causing her to fall backwards and split her head open on the concrete sidewalk. One man stated repeatedly, "I am a rapist. I am going to rape you." Fearing discovery the men forced the woman to an isolated area behind tall grass and held her there for three hours before

abandoning her. The men threatened her with a pocketknife found in her purse. The woman reported being able to see police cars cruise the street while she was being raped."

THEY ALL stop their movements and tasks and slowly face outward.

SLEEPER: Yanked.

WARRIOR: Split.

CHATTERER: Abandoned.

DREAMER: One foggy night in May.

FOOL: I didn't know that.

SLEEPER: I know this.

CHATTERER: I know this.

WARRIOR: I know this. So what?

SLEEPER: This is no secret.

DREAMER: This is not my secret.

SLEEPER: Yanked into an armpit. I remember.

WARRIOR: That's why I overreacted today.

CHATTERER (Correcting her): Hyperventilated. It's natural. A natural response. I'm forgiven. It's all right. A small slip. It's all right.

WARRIOR: Why didn't I scream?

CHATTERER: I did. I did. They covered my mouth.

WARRIOR: Why didn't I fight?

CHATTERER: I did. I did. I was bleeding. I was in shock. I fought and I was hit harder. I was unprepared. I thought it was a joke. I thought my friends were playing a joke on me and it would all go away soon.

WARRIOR: I'll never let it happen again. I'd rather die.

DREAMER: NO! I choose not to die.

ALL (Overlapping, not simultaneous): What!?

DREAMER: Floating above my body I looked into the eyes of the rapist who feared killing. I saved my life with that look. I will not be killed now.

DREAMER makes a sound that scares them, perhaps a creaking door. THEY respond in unison.

SLEEPER: Sound shook me awake...afraid and confused...listening. Turn quickly...listen hard...someone walking in the hallway...just Loretta, right?

WARRIOR (A major distraction, repressing the fear with aggression; the capital letters designate a different voice—with one voice SHE invokes the Ratwoman for power, with the other SHE recounts a cartoon fantasy of her prowess): Ratwomen unite. Gather round ancient pussy rodents. We have a tale to tell, only we don't know what it is. (Laugh) I KNOW WHAT NO ONE KNOWS TILL IT'S TOO LATE. I FLIP BACKWARD OUT OF MY SEAT OVER THE HEADS OF SEVEN PEASANTS LANDING SQUARELY IN BACK OF THE BUS. AS THE DOOR OPENS...

Visit me, Ratwoman. Was that you scratching my neck, running blood through the mask? ONE OF THE MEN REACHES FOR A PENCIL IN MY POCKET. I SAY, "NO YOU DON'T BUDDY." Your face doesn't scare me, I haven't seen it. (Laugh) I GRAB THE TWO PENCILS AND STICK HIM IN THE EYES. HE REELS BACKWARD SCREAMING IN PAIN. Who are you, Ancient Cunt?

HIS BUDDY, the pretty, CLIMBS OVER HIM AND TRIES TO GET ME, the insignificant. THINKING I'M ONLY A FRAIL WOMAN, scrabbling up the mountain alone, HE'LL LEARN NOT TO UNDERESTIMATE SHORT, DARK WOMEN. Big Butt, Skinny Fingers, Darting Eyes. I GRAB THE LUGGAGE RACK AND SWING MY POWERFUL LEGS OUT, KICKING HIM IN THE CHEST. Ugly, ugly, she don't care. ANOTHER MAN HULKS TOWARD ME, I HANDSPRING BOUNCE LANDING ON HIS HEAD AND SQUASHING HIM.

Ratwoman don't care 'bout nothin' but eating and avoiding danger.

DREAMER: Run and hide at the mere suggestion of danger.

WARRIOR: Corner the Ratwoman, she'll bite a hole through your face to get out. A hole through your face. She don't care.

DREAMER: She doesn't think well either. She could be misreading the situation entirely and still bite a hole through your face. She's a wild rat, difficult to train.

SLEEPER, CHATTERER, FOOL: We don't care. We like her. We use her. We need her.

WARRIOR: I warn you. No joke. This Ratwoman recognizes sarcasm...

WARRIOR, CHATTERER, SLEEPER, FOOL (To DREAMER): Bitch.

WARRIOR leads CHATTERER, SLEEPER and FOOL in a slow attack on the DREAMER. THEY echo some of WARRIOR's lines.

You want to see skin baby? You want to see tits? You want to see holes? All the holes? Drown in them, suffocate in them. No, you can't come up for air. Yes, I will pull out all your teeth. You want me to be mama? Then we'll pull out all your hair. To start.

DREAMER (Overlaps previous speech): Approaching me bowlegged, approaching me cross-eyed. Staring. Scared. Strained. Tight smiling when I don't know what to do. Fake snarling when I don't know what to do.

DREAMER laughs and gestures. SHE makes the same sound as before. The OTHERS respond to her in unison. THEY hear a frightening sound in a quiet house late at night.

SLEEPER: Just Loretta, right...jiggle on the front door...wind blowing, wind. Listen hard, don't move. Eyes ache from being so open, ache trying to see through walls. Clammy sweat behind my knees, under my arms, in the crook of my elbows. Wishing I wasn't alone. Wishing I was alone. Wishing I wasn't alone. Wishing I was someone else, staring at the clear, dark sky.

DREAMER (To SLEEPER): I am not afraid.

FOOL (Delivering the message to the SLEEPER): I look beautiful.

SLEEPER: Stars twinkling in the night sky. Singing by moonlight. Wading and bathing, bathing and wading in lavender moonlight. Wading and bathing in moonlit waters...I'm not even here anymore.

DREAMER (To WARRIOR): I am not afraid.

FOOL (Delivering message to WARRIOR): I look beautiful.

WARRIOR: I've been sick. I don't have my strength back. I don't have my strength back yet. I'll get it. Or I'll be stabbed. On the street. Late at night. I'll scream and no one will hear me. The police will arrive late, just to take the story.

CHATTERER (Nervous laughter): I'm terrified of making a false move, doing something wrong. If I'm careful no one will notice me. And I can sing in peace.

DREAMER (To CHATTERER): I am not afraid.

FOOL (Delivering message to CHATTERER): I look beautiful.

CHATTERER: I'm frozen. If I'm frozen, no one can hurt me. I won't feel a thing.

Brief loop of the following lines.

SLEEPER: I'm not even here. Not even here anymore...

WARRIOR: I don't have my strength. I don't have my strength back yet. No one will hear me...

CHATTERER: If I'm frozen, no one can hurt me. I won't feel a thing...

DREAMER (This speech, amplified, could be spoken over the previous loop): I damn myself. I am weak in everything save damning myself. I learned it I learned it I learned it well. My lessons in fear choke me silent. Silence has protected me, now silence is choking me. The throat must be opened.

The DREAMER sings nonverbally and quiets the others, who become still, breathing audibly: strange, haunting single notes, sung with conviction. Finally, the CHATTERER breaks this by moving chaotically through the room. The OTHERS make gestural loops. All loops intersect. The following three speeches overlap.

CHATTERER: Panic! Panic! PANIC! Bad bed, dark corridors, no shades, dirty beat-up room, strange people, recurrent mentions of "girls alone...," recurrent warnings to always keep doors locked, complicated explanation for the double and triple locks, bad bed, dark corridor, dimly lit parking lot, broken windows covered by cardboard, cardboard, cardboard, bad bed, dirty beat-up room, strange magazines, bad

records, complicated explanation for the single, weak lock on the door to the street.

SLEEPER: Quick turn to the left. No one. Choking me from the past. He's forgotten me. I'll never forget him. Ever. The smell. His cheap cologne freezes my muscles. Quick turn to the left. No one.

I'm sleeping in circles, circles, all different sizes. All different kinds of circles. I'm sleeping in circles and he's sleeping in lines.

WARRIOR: I'm volatile. I'm afraid of myself. I'm looking for trouble and I know it. I don't think I'm dangerous to anyone here. I'm afraid of myself, but I can probably control it. I could kill with my bare hands. As long as he doesn't bring a gun.

FOOL (Reading through DREAMER's newspaper clippings and throwing them to the floor): Where does all this sadness come from?

DREAMER (Sounds like an announcement in an airport): In case I forget, everybody dies. Many times a day. Very few people die a graceful death in their sleep when they're ninety-five after a three-day literary illness.

FOOL: Right.

FOOL leaps on her rope into the air, the OTHERS drop their loops and focus on her solo.

ALL: Right.

FOOL: If I am dying alive and please and if I am flying—. Oh dear I am falling out of the plane. (The OTHERS laugh) It's not funny.

SLEEPER, WARRIOR, CHATTERER: You will still be the cutest little girl in the world.

FOOL: So if you are flying around with your wings little girl, you will be ready for the show if you die.

DREAMER: If you die...

This triggers the WARRIOR to act out a memory. SHE stares straight ahead. The DREAMER responds to the WARRIOR's movements, even though THEY are far apart from one another.

WARRIOR: Tell me you love me.

DREAMER: Tell me you love me.

SLEEPER: I love you.

WARRIOR: You don't mean it.

SLEEPER: I love you.

WARRIOR: No you don't.

SLEEPER: Yes I do. I really do.

WARRIOR: You better tell me the truth.

DREAMER: You better tell me the truth.

SLEEPER: I don't love you.

WARRIOR makes a slapping motion, SLEEPER responds as if slapped, DREAMER claps her hands together to make the sound of the slap.

WARRIOR: Tell me you love me.

SLEEPER (Turns to face WARRIOR for the only time): Don't hurt me.

WARRIOR (Turns to face SLEEPER for the only time): I can't even hear your voice when your lips move.

BOTH turn to face front again.

SLEEPER: I love you.

WARRIOR: You don't mean it.

SLEEPER: I love you.

WARRIOR: No you don't.

SLEEPER: Yes I do. I really do.

WARRIOR: You better tell me the truth.

DREAMER: You better tell me the truth.

SLEEPER: I don't love you.

WARRIOR (Slap): Tell me you love me.

SLEEPER: No.

WARRIOR: Use your mouth. (Gesture of grabbing SLEEPER's hair) If you use your teeth, I'll break your neck.

DREAMER: I'll break your neck.

WARRIOR: No teeth.

SLEEPER: I wouldn't do that.

WARRIOR: You better not bitch. You better not use your teeth. You better not. (Gesture of pulling SLEEPER's head to crotch)

SLEEPER: Such fat thighs—hairy all the way up—and stuck together. Fat but solid because he's young.

WARRIOR: Be careful, baby. You better make me come, baby. If I don't come, I'm gonna kill you.

DREAMER: If I don't come, I'm gonna kill you.

SLEEPER: His dick's not even hard.

DREAMER: His dick's not even hard.

SLEEPER: It doesn't even fill up my mouth. I'll grab his balls.

WARRIOR: Whatcha doin'? No way. (Gesture of pulling SLEEPER's head away. SLEEPER's head pops back) Stick your finger up my ass.

SLEEPER: No.

WARRIOR: What? You don't like my ass? (Laughs) Look what I found. Your little pocketknife. Too bad, baby. (Repeats) Too bad, baby. Too bad, baby...

DREAMER (Repeats): Your little pocketknife. Your little pocketknife...

SLEEPER starts singing "Fly Me to the Moon."

FOOL (Starts in middle of SLEEPER's song; SHE doesn't work well under pressure): If someone attacks you...if someone attacks you...with



your own weapon...if someone attacks you with your own weapon...if someone...oh, hell! I can't remember it. (SHE writes as much as SHE remembers on the wall)

DREAMER (As SHE continues to gesture): There are no maps, no street signs. There are no maps, no street signs. There are no maps. There are no maps...

SLEEPER begins humming the song.

FOOL: He raped me.

DREAMER: Yes he did.

FOOL: I hate him.

DREAMER: Yes.

SLEEPER (Standing on her bed): I love men. Touching my body. Looking at me. Different from me. My body fits his body like a puzzle.

FOOL: I hate him.

SLEEPER: It was unfortunate.

FOOL: I hate him.

SLEEPER: It was a lesson.

FOOL: I hate him.

SLEEPER: I hate what happened.

FOOL: I hate him.

SLEEPER: I hate him, but I love the others.

FOOL: I hate him.

SLEEPER: I, I love the moonlight.

DREAMER: Secret Poison.

SLEEPER: I have no secrets.

CHATTERER: I can't keep secrets. I'm terrible at keeping secrets.  
 Secrets jump right out of my mouth...

FOOL (To CHATTERER): Shhhhhhhh!!!!

DREAMER: I am choking.

SLEEPER: I have no secret.

DREAMER: I am choking on poison.

SLEEPER: I don't know any secrets.

DREAMER: I hate.

SLEEPER: I can't.

FOOL: I hate him.

WARRIOR: I hate them all. (ALL HEADS turn to her) I hate men.  
 (SHE is ashamed to discover this in herself)

DREAMER: Down to the marrow of their bones.

WARRIOR: Down to their bones—their bone marrow. What is it that makes them so stupid and vicious—their pricks dicks sticks—coming at us sweaty and naked with eyes rolling—floppy dick in hand—fondling heavy hairy balls. Writhing and laughing, fucking children and unwilling women—hitting and bombing and scarring and stabbing—I hate them down to my bones. Down to my bone marrow.

The SLEEPER is in pain. SHE rejects hearing this. For a while.

CHATTERER (Overlapping the end of previous speech): Down to my bones. Down to my bone marrow. They want to kill me and my children—they want to stab me and fuck my dead body in the stinking dark of a hallway while my babies watch and scream—and have their brains burned with, seared with the vision—branded by a man. And he has many excuses, many reasons for his insanity, his violence, his violations—

CHATTERER and FOOL: I hate him—down to the marrow of his bones—I hate him—

CHATTERER: So deeply it excites the cells of my body to remember it—

SLEEPER (Simultaneously): The cells of my body remember it.

CHATTERER: I tingle with the hatred of men—Bigger and Fatter and Stupider and Louder and Hairier and Stupider and Stupider and Stupider—. Why? You fucking idiots—WHY DO YOU DO THE THINGS YOU DO?

FOOL: WHY DO YOU DO THE THINGS YOU DO? I hate you.

CHATTERER: Why do you kill the children and maim the women?

WARRIOR: I want to smash the birth head of all men beneath the heel of my boot.

CHATTERER (Overlapping): I want no male children sloppy brats that they are idiot drooling fumblers that they are—

SLEEPER: No touches no glances no words from men.

CHATTERER: —horrifying set of cells that they are—AWAY FROM ME.

WARRIOR (Overlapping continuation of CHATTERER's speech): I don't want to eat them and devour their poison—vile bile rising from the very marrow of their bones.

SLEEPER: Not from my body.

WARRIOR: Smash the birth head to death.

THEY ALL breathe audibly.

DREAMER: More, before the throat closes again.

CHATTERER (SHE complies almost unwillingly): Stupid thick men—you never got it and you'll never get it—one stick or another one dick or another one gun or another—

WARRIOR (Whispered): Die idiot Motherfuckers!

FOOL: I hate you all.

CHATTERER: Each one—down to the marrow of your bones—

OTHERS (Continuing very quietly through CHATTERER's next speech):  
Down to the marrow of your bones.

CHATTERER: Deeply sinister and wrong you are—Killers and Violators—unknowing and unseeing dick-holders and pushers—sticky dicky mouth fags—suck your own vomit and come and bile and shit—suck it and die—suffocate in yourself as you try to suffocate us in you—you bombers—you flailing idiots in time—mouth and asshole wide open and spewing—you pitiful fucked-up creatures—Die and Die and Die many painful deaths—all torture return to you—

OTHERS (Overlapping, not simultaneous): All torture return to you...

CHATTERER: —who owns it. I hate your mind your body and your soul—down to the marrow of your...

ALL (Not in unison, CHATTERER leading, OTHERS quiet): —bones.  
Down to the marrow. Down, Down, Down. To the marrow. Of your bones. (THEY breathe audibly)

DREAMER: Ah.

DREAMER begins to breathe and feel her throat; something has been dislodged, released. Eventually, CHATTERER and WARRIOR speak, overlapping in whispers.

CHATTERER: What was that? Careful. Harsh. Gonna pay. Gonna pay.

WARRIOR: I'm an asshole, a stupid asshole. Gonna have to pay for that.

SLEEPER: I didn't mean it. (OTHERS stop) I didn't mean it. Don't hurt me.

CHATTERER and WARRIOR resume their loop above and SLEEPER joins in with hers.

DREAMER: Ssshhhhhhhh. Calm. It's all right. It's all right.

CHATTERER and WARRIOR cross to the SLEEPER, sitting at the foot of her bed, the three of them in a row. THEY have a gestural conversation through the next lines, crossing their legs, turning their heads like birds, wiping their noses, etc.

SLEEPER: I like men. Many, many, many men I like very, very, very much.

WARRIOR: I can't really say that I like them.

CHATTERER: I'll, uh, I'll go with the majority on this one. Somebody speak up and tell me what to think about what just happened. I'm, uh, I'm kind of at a loss as to what to say here.

WARRIOR: I don't really like them, but that was harsh.

SLEEPER: Harsh, mean, ugly lies...

CHATTERER: Harsh, unnecessary, not true...

WARRIOR: A little bit true...

SLEEPER and CHATTERER: I don't know what you mean.

WARRIOR: No, right. Too harsh. I'll find another way...

CHATTERER: Something more acceptable...more polite...

SLEEPER: More like that beautiful dress...

DREAMER: Stop! Don't choke me.

WARRIOR: I'll be punished.

CHATTERER: I'll be punished.

SLEEPER: I'll be punished.

DREAMER: Look at my face. Look at my rage. (Repeats)

The WARRIOR turns to look at the DREAMER.

CHATTERER: And yet, you know, uh, there was an unmistakable ring of truth to it, uh...

SLEEPER: To what?

CHATTERER: The feeling.

SLEEPER: To what?

CHATTERER: You're right. It's not practical. You just can't walk down the street feeling something like that. You know, you know I, I, I, I, I, I, I just don't, I, I, I, I just don't, uh, actually think, I just don't actually think something like that is healthy.

DREAMER: Wrong, wrong. Can anyone hear me? (Whispered) Don't run away. Don't shut me up.

FOOL: What's going on? I thought we hated them.

SLEEPER: I like men. Mark, Luke, John and Matt. Paul, Michael, Andrew, Mitchell, Brad. Earl, Percy, Nelson, Oscar. Jose, Jamie, Lloyd, Ellis. Gregory, Ray, Curly, Joe. Ian, Demo and Jesse.

DREAMER (Interrupting): This is not about them. This is about me. I prefer fear to anger. I prefer fear and silence. Say it.

FOOL: I prefer rear sand filence.

WARRIOR: Sorry. I shot my mouth off.

FOOL: I refer rear.

WARRIOR: I'm an asshole. I'm as bad as I say they are. Why pay any attention to me? I'm a fucking asshole with a big mouth.

DREAMER: I hate myself.

FOOL: I ferear fear.

WARRIOR: Once again I blunder.

WARRIOR and CHATTERER: Once again I blunder.

FOOL: I prefear fear.

SLEEPER: Have I blundered?

WARRIOR: Have I blundered?

CHATTERER: Have I blundered?

DREAMER: I have scared myself too much.

FOOL (To the DREAMER): I prefer fear. And silence.

DREAMER: Many ways to open the throat. No blame. (SHE retreats)

FOOL: Skull pain? Skull pain? Skull ache? Skull ache? Skull head....Skull head....Skull head pain....Head pain....Head pain....Headache! Headache, I have a headache!

CHATTERER (Very softly; these words make a soft sound bed for the song that follows): What's the matter with these fingernails—they're completely terrible—I mean they used to be—well they always were paper thin—but not—this flaking—off in strips—painfully thin in hot water—you know this has gone on for months—there was a short hiatus for a few weeks—god only knows what I accidentally did right—then they started again with this horrible affliction—what—gelatin pills—is that it—vitamins—where is the lovely crescent moon at the base of the nail—that delicate female crescent—attacked by slight ill health—slight lack of attention—slight lack of information—can beauty be found in a cookbook—is there a recipe or more—yes—but it's a secret—to be bought bought bought—sought sought sought—fought fought fought. Ah me. My head aches.

SLEEPER (Singing, overlapping the above speech):

Do I dare tell you why  
I cried  
Yesterday for hours

I could not sleep  
I had no dreams

WARRIOR (Joining SLEEPER):

There was a blackness that settled  
And blinded my mind's eye

I could not see  
I felt the blades in my brain

In and out  
In and out  
In and out

Where does all this fucking sadness come from?

DREAMER: A pool of tears, dark blue and very still, fathomless human water.

WARRIOR: I don't like it.

DREAMER: I will not drown. I will not choke. I will not be stabbed to death.

WARRIOR: I don't know that. I don't know what's going to happen.

DREAMER: I never will.

WARRIOR: I was attacked.

DREAMER: It's true.

FOOL: If you're attacked...if you're attacked with your own weapon...and you survive...good! that's the next part...and you survive...very important that you survive...

WARRIOR: I was attacked.

FOOL: And I survived! Very important to know.

WARRIOR: I was attacked. And I survived. I was attacked. And I survived...

ALL participate in a gestural, vocal loop. The SLEEPER continues her singing.

CHATTERER: I've been sick. I didn't sleep well last night. I'm on medication. The signs are *très terrible*. I don't know where I am. I can't find the damn road...

DREAMER: It's true. It's all true. Truth is more than I can hold in my mind in one moment. It's true. It's all true...

THEY are interrupted by a loud ringing. At first it sounds like an air raid, then it gradually melts into the sound of a telephone ringing. During the ringing and the DREAMER's dream, the OTHERS run around the room very quickly, circle their beds several times, then dive onto their mattresses into a sleeping position.

(Very fast) There were four people each at a single bed, packing four suitcases with deheaded gutted fish with scales, layer after layer. I almost finished when I realized my last fish had not been cleaned. I slit its belly and gutted it. There was blood, but it was not messy. I took a large razor-sharp spoon and scooped the head off. I realized I had left part of the head on, and had to finish the job.



ALL sit up in unison; phone stops ringing; THEY gesture in unison.

ALL (Simultaneously): Hello. Oh, hi. No, I wasn't sleeping. Just lying here doing nothing. I'm glad you called. How are you? Good. Oh, I'm fine, fine. Are you coming over? Oh. That's okay. It's just as well. Actually, I'm feeling kind of sick. I think it's that medicine I took for my sinuses. I wouldn't be much fun tonight. (THEY laugh at something he says) Oh. Okay. You're sweet. I'll talk to you tomorrow. Okay. Bye.

CHATTERER (Pause): I'm depressing. No wonder he doesn't want to come over. Who would want to talk to a melancholy, paranoid female? Oh-ohhhhh, she's too moody, oh-ohhhhh, ten-foot-pole time.

WARRIOR: Shut up.

CHATTERER: Thank you, I needed that. I'll see him tomorrow. Everything's fine. Nobody knows.

WARRIOR: Everything's fine. Nobody knows.

CHATTERER: He didn't see me humiliated this afternoon with my head under my boss's armpit.

SLEEPER: Just kidding around.

WARRIOR: Making me pay.

DREAMER: Waking me up.

CHATTERER: He doesn't know my secrets.

WARRIOR: He doesn't know.

DREAMER: Unless I tell him.

CHATTERER: Can't do that. He'll leave.

WARRIOR: Or laugh.

DREAMER: He won't leave...

CHATTERER: He's got his own secrets to protect.

DREAMER: ...but I might.

CHATTERER: Everybody's so busy worrying about themselves, they hardly notice anyone else.

SLEEPER and FOOL: I notice him.

DREAMER: Sometimes.

CHATTERER (Pause): It's lonely at my house.

WARRIOR: It's better that way.

CHATTERER: Doesn't feel good.

WARRIOR: If I'm alone then I'm alone then I don't have to speak then I don't have to worry.

CHATTERER: If I could speak, what would I say?

WARRIOR (Thinks it over for a second): I know I can be attacked. At any moment. I have reason to protect myself. I have reason. I know the truth and nobody wants to hear it. But I don't care, I'm on guard.

CHATTERER: I probably won't get attacked tonight.

WARRIOR: You never know.

CHATTERER: I haven't been attacked in many years.

WARRIOR: So?

CHATTERER: The windows are locked. The doors are locked. It's a safe neighborhood. The bad guys are hurting somebody else tonight.

DREAMER: No. They're still hurting me after all this time.

FOOL: I'm feeling better.

WARRIOR: I gonna doze for a while, so I'll be sharp in the dead of night.

CHATTERER: I'll sit here.

WARRIOR: Good. (SHE arranges her weapons of protection for the night) Stay awake.

CHATTERER: I will.

WARRIOR: Don't leave.

CHATTERER: I won't.

WARRIOR: Play a lullaby.

CHATTERER: I will.

CHATTERER plays her instrument. WARRIOR falls asleep holding her weapon. CHATTERER sings a wordless lullaby.

FOOL (Enjoying the peacefulness): Aaahhhh.

DREAMER: There is a dog in my throat. A golden retriever.

FOOL (Softly): Aaaaaarrrooooooooooooo.

SLEEPER: Sleeping.

DREAMER: No, not sleeping. Silent. I want to speak to the dog.

SLEEPER: Mute.

DREAMER: What do you say, Dog?

SLEEPER: Can't speak.

DREAMER: Yes he can. Dog, speak.

SLEEPER (SHE makes a rusty, scratchy sound coming from a long unused throat): Aaaaaaaaarrrrrrrrrrrrrr.

DREAMER (Joining her): Aaaaarrrrrrrr.

FOOL (joining them): Aaaarrrooooo.

DREAMER: What do you say?

SLEEPER: Nothing.

DREAMER: Why do you say nothing?

SLEEPER: Debris. In my throat.

DREAMER: Cough it up.

SLEEPER: Stuck.

DREAMER: Just a little. Speak a little of it.

SLEEPER: Makes no sense.

FOOL: So what?

DREAMER: Of course not. It's only debris.

SLEEPER: Too much. It's all too much.

DREAMER: Yes.

SLEEPER: Many collisions.

DREAMER: Yes. What is the worst thing that makes no sense.

SLEEPER (Self-mocking tone): "I hate sexz...and I loooooove it."

DREAMER: Last night he touched my thigh.

SLEEPER: Sweetness. Feeling good. Feeling good. Then sticking things into me. Freezing. Freezing up. Freezing inside. My vagina is a minefield. Careful. Hold on tight. Don't let him in...to touch...me. Hold my body tense, fantasy in mind, and no one is home to kiss my lover. From a distance, the ocean approaches. Oh I want it. To come to me. The obliteration. I want it. I see ivory lace and swollen sex and a wall of water above me. I lunge and rock. Ah. Then. The sea surges in me again.

I open my eyes to the mysterious face of a man staring at me. Who is he? Where have I been? I feel caught, like I've cheated. I cry and say, "Do I have something to be sorry for, do I, do I?" And he says, "No, nothing, everything's fine." And it isn't. And we both know it. It's sad. It's so sad.

DREAMER: Why is no one home in my body?

SLEEPER: Horrible pictures tucked into my vagina must not be touched. On my knees, a stinking penis in my mouth, my face forced into the crotch of a vile man. Staring into space, a fat, greasy rapist grunting on top of me, calling me baby. "If I don't come, I'm gonna kill you, baby."

DREAMER: "If I don't come, I'm gonna kill you, baby."

SLEEPER: His penis, so soft. I hate penises in my mouth, I hate pubic hair in my mouth, I hate semen in my mouth, I hate the smell of assholes. I don't want anybody to touch me. Ever. Ever again. Ever. Who bludgeoned me? My mouth hurts. My jaw hurts. My back hurts. My head is bloody and aching. No one helps me. My face sliced open with a hatchet, and no one notices. And I pretend I'm fine, so as not to disturb them. Nice people don't talk about rape, and terror, and dying, and forcing stinking dirty penises into the mouths of stunned young girls.

DREAMER: Help me. I want my body back.

SLEEPER: No one to help. No one to trust. No point in telling. All to fear from soft and open. All to fear from talking.

WARRIOR (Wakes up): Only the truly uninformed believe the world is a good place, but it is all we've got, so I toughen up and move along. I'm nothing special.

SLEEPER: I'm nothing special.

WARRIOR: So I was raped. So what. A boy's uncle beat him with a hose every day because he tried to eat. A girl's father fucked her twice a week, and her mother knew about it. My pain is nothing special.

SLEEPER: My pain is nothing special.

WARRIOR: So I was fucked by two strange guys on the street. So what. Didn't I fuck strangers before that. The rapists left no scars, nobody cut me, nobody shot me, nobody strangled me. Too bad, I got fucked one night. We're talking about one night, hell, about three hours! Poor me, I don't like sex! You think it matters? (Laugh) No. (SHE goes back to sleep)

SLEEPER: I hate myself.

DREAMER: Yes.

FOOL: I love you.

SLEEPER: I want to wear a flowered dress and sing in the moonlight. And forget.

DREAMER: Let the dog sing and talk and tell and talk and talk and remember.

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SLEEPER: No one to tell.

FOOL: Tell me.

DREAMER: The dog will talk and I will show my true face.

SLEEPER: Hatchet slice and all?

DREAMER: Hatchet slice and all.

SLEEPER: Who to?

DREAMER: Who to?

FOOL: Who to?

SLEEPER (A sigh): Ohhhh.

FOOL: I go slowly. Hello. Hello?

SLEEPER: So tired.

DREAMER: Sleep deeply.

SLEEPER: My thigh is my earth, most flesh of all my flesh. What does she hear when I'm dreaming?

DREAMER: Dogs on gravel roads, old three-story houses, delta and oak trees and too much heat and picking pole beans in the garden at twilight, a nameless faceless infant, notebooks and sculptures and funky libraries and old pianos and singing and dancing old women in dirty dresses working real hard. Sweaty days and powdery nights.

DREAMER repeats last line as SLEEPER goes to sleep.

FOOL: I've got it! Filet mignon, filet mignon, not sirloin petite! Hello, come in, I want filet mignon, filet mignon!

DREAMER: Too late.

FOOL: I'm hungry.

DREAMER: What's that saying? If you're attacked with your own weapon...

FOOL: ...and you survive...

DREAMER: ...you are foolish...

DREAMER and FOOL: ...but you will live forever!

FOOL: That's it. I live forever, me live forever! (In her exuberance,  
SHE runs into the wall and hits the deck)

DREAMER: I am foolish. And I will live forever.

FOOL: Me no know nothing.

DREAMER finishes writing the axiom on the wall.

Me wanna be  
Good.  
Just okay  
Okay.  
Selfish Little Girl  
Want pretty things  
Want people  
Go oooooooh  
Pretty little girl  
Oooooooh.  
Me want Pretty Little Girl go away.  
Leave me alone.

Who me is?  
No Pretty Little Girl.  
Just me.

You see me...

Who me is?  
Me hiding  
Behind  
Pretty Little Girl.

Who me is,  
Sad Linda?

Everybody big busy  
For me  
Big parade  
Going on.

But me  
 Still here.  
 Mystery me  
 Still  
 Here  
 Still.

Tired.  
 No perky.  
 Where gone  
 Me?  
 Where gone?

Oh you  
 Linda  
 Linda

Oh you  
 Linda  
 No need  
 Carry so much.  
 Things they is  
 Much easy  
 Much easy  
 Much easier  
 Than you think.

Ah Linda  
 My Linda

How to walk like this?  
 Clear and soft  
 No effort.  
 Here is Linda

Linda is not sad.

As the FOOL climbs into her sleeping position, the DREAMER walks to each of the other beds and gathers a thin cord from each. SHE then proceeds on her way out into the Dreamworld, singing her strange, haunting notes.

CHATTERER (Having resumed playing her lullaby): The Dreamer doesn't know the way out, though she walks it every night. She wades into the Stream of Forgetfulness and remembers what she has



forgotten a thousand times. The dream river licks her feet. Tears from the bottomless pool wash the souls that wade.

Pause.

SLEEPER (Sits up abruptly): You know what I...

ALL HEADS turn to her, then SHE slips back to sleep without completing her thought. The DREAMER exits as lights fade.

END OF PLAY