



Margaret J. Wheatley

Dreaming World

A prose poem

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*I am dreaming the world. This world is an illusion. It is not as it appears.
A wise one tells me this.
“It will help you awaken,” I am told.*

In a moment of inattention, I scrape my index finger. It’s a small cut, really nothing, but it throbs painfully. It hurts enough to keep me awake that night. This tiny break in flesh feels the full pulse of my body.

Small cuts.

I’m standing at a newsstand. *Time* magazine has a special issue, “Can the Earth be saved?” We humans have changed the climate and now the planet is responding to our arrogance with violent weather. Next to it is another weekly magazine featuring “Botox,” the new government-approved drug that changes the face of America. It deadens facial muscles and eliminates wrinkles. To look younger, all we have to do is numb ourselves.

The world is an illusion. It is not as it appears.
Can a planet be saved by the numb at heart?

I’m driving behind a big black truck. It’s been “lifted”--raised high on its chassis by big tires and super suspension. The chrome bumper and wheels glitter with exuberance. Inside are three teen-age boys, riding high, torsos dancing together to music I can’t hear. I love watching them as we cruise down the road. They

remind me of how it feels to own the world, those moments when it's all working just for you. Suddenly, I am weeping. The world is not as it appears.

I'm sitting on the caked and dusty surface of a reservoir that has lost its water to drought. The wind raises only dust and I feel grit from the inside out. I notice green growth on the dried surface, but when I stoop to see it, I realize it's not leaves, but algae, the first plant to appear when earth emerged from fire.

The sun sinks low and rose-colored hills appear in the east. Warmed by their radiance, I turn and face west. Cirrus clouds flame passionately, burning at sun's departure. The world is on fire. I am told 'you are watching the world dying' (who is telling me?) In the great turnings of Life, this is the age of destruction. There is nothing to do but surrender. Gracefully. Even in death, life will be beautiful.

I am stunned by this message. I hope it is an illusion.

It is night and I am sitting on the edge of my gentle bed. I open a jar of African honey butter and begin my evening ritual. Slowly I massage cream into my pedicured feet—first the soles, then the toes, then the cuticles. From the jar's label, I learn that this cream has been gathered for me by the labor of women in Zambia and Ghana. I read that my purchase creates work for them and income for their families. I do not know how they harvest honey in Zambia or make the cream in Ghana. But I do know African women, many of them. Often I have stared at their feet with the muscular calluses from never wearing shoes, the flaking skin from never using cream.

In the peace of my bedroom, I imagine them in theirs. I know there is no comparison, not in comfort, not in security, not in fatigue. As the cream soaks into my soles, I picture them in fields, gathering the means for my life to remain soft. They cannot imagine my life. I know them well enough to know I cannot imagine theirs.

At a conference center in the U.S., I am told of the African women leaders who come to meetings there. They are given their own bedrooms and never paired with a room-mate. This is a gift. It's the only time they've ever had a room of their own.

I am dreaming the world. It is not as it appears. Yet I know that I spend more on a morning cup of coffee than half the world has available to live on

for that entire day. Three billion people living on nothing as I walk dreamily into Starbucks.

I am dreaming the world. It is not as it appears. Yet I know that 700 children die every hour from starvation as I watch the cooking channel. I learn to make small cuts in the peel of a cucumber to shape it like a rose. To cut open a mango so the fruit is revealed. To slice an onion so it doesn't make me cry.

But I want to cry. For the world I am dreaming.

I turn off the television and burrow into my pillows. In Zambia just now, the women are rising from their crowded beds. Soon they will walk on hard feet into the bush, carrying basket crowns through the high grass. I hope they find where the bees hid the honey this day.

I awake and clean my coffee pot. The metal filter slices the skin under my nail, but this cut doesn't throb like the last one.

It is late afternoon in my world. The sun is still shining. The wind picks up the dust of drought and makes it difficult to see. There are still a few hours left before the sun illuminates this dust and sets the world on fire. In Africa, my sisters are sleeping now. They too are dreaming the world. It is not as it appears.

I leave them sleeping to go draw my bath. I have been camping and my feet are a mess. I will scrub them clean and rub away the young calluses. Then I will massage them with African honey butter. In my dreaming, I do not know where my softened soles will lead me.



ABOUT MARGARET (MEG) WHEATLEY, Ed.D.

Margaret Wheatley writes, speaks, and teaches how we can accomplish our work, sustain our relationships, and willingly step forward to serve in this troubled time. She is co-founder and President emerita of The Berkana Institute, an organizational consultant since 1973, a global citizen since her youth, and a prolific writer. She has authored eight books. Her numerous articles may be downloaded free at her web site: margaretwheatley.com. For more biographical information, see margaretwheatley.com/bio