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Dreaming

by MaryPat Campbell

I awoke at six, as usual. I needed no alarm clock. I was already comprehensively alarmed. This time by the sound of a dog in the distance, barking loudly, frantically even. A familiar sound these days. I've never seen this dog but it only barks like that when ...

A chink of light streaked in under the torn blind. Just about right for 6am I thought. I opened my eyes and gradually made out my surroundings. The bed I share with Salim, a chair, a small dressing table with our books piled on top, a lamp. Grey walls in the grey light. More loud barking under the window, it felt like the dog was in the room.

I wanted this to be a dream that I'd wake from any minute, sweating with my heart pounding as usual, reminding me of my journey to this god forsaken country over land for months, and then by sea. I waited. Silence. Should I switch on the light and investigate? Should I wake Salim and ask him to investigate? I did neither. I decided this must be a dream.

I dream like this, most nights. Alarms, dogs barking, a break-in, high winds churning up the water, or worse, seasick and hanging on, a jolting side to side, up and down not knowing if we will survive. Plenty don't. And still they, and we, come. Every week, every day, for a couple of years now.

How do I know if I'm dreaming or not? Best to turn over, burrow deep under the blankets and try to go back to sleep.

Sometime later, sounds of life inside the building and outside. Voices, showers, water pipes. It's a few hours later I'm guessing. Salim has slept through it all, lucky beggar. No alarm for him this morning. Sleeps like a baby. While I, most nights, twist and turn not knowing if something is happening for real or not. Night terrors, real terrors.

Hundreds of us travellers on this ship, rolling on the waves of sleep like battleships or people lost at sea. My bed is a small ship on the high seas, I am hanging on and I might just survive. It doesn't go away. PTSD they said.

When I wake and realise I'm in bed and not in the cramped boat it takes a long time to convince myself that this time, we are safe.



