



Introduction

THE ADVENTURES OF MISS B. AND ME

Some dreams you want to remember—and don't want interrupted. Flying dreams. Food dreams. Fuck dreams. Dreams that propel you into suspenseful delight to see what's going to happen next—from up above, in your mouth, to the body beneath you—or on top of you. And then there are those other dreams. You. Alone. In the dark. And whatever that something is, is chasing you. No one hears your scream, and your feet seem to be stuck in quicksand as the whatever your unconscious has unleashed on you devours every last bit of hope you had of escaping. You awaken. Heart racing and brow beaded with sweat. You realize it was just a dream. Comforted, you adjust your pillow and your body position (Mama always told you it was bad luck to sleep on your back!) and drift back off to sleep—only for the dream to pick up where it left off. The whatever it is, is on your heels. Damn.

And then there are the in-between dreams. Neither hopeful nor nightmarish, but nonetheless curious. You want to see and hear more, but you have a reticence. Will it turn nightmarish? Will it just be boring? Is it worth stay-

ing asleep for? You won't be too disappointed if you are awakened by your alarm clock music of Jill Scott singing, "Is it the way you love me baby?" or by finally noticing that your lover's side of the bed is cold—and empty. But you also wouldn't mind staying in this dreamscape to prolong the inevitable—the drudgery of the day's dilemmas: What am I going to wear today? What are we having for dinner? How many emails do I need to return? When is that essay due? How many more letters of recommendation do I have to write? The in-between dream sounds like a much better choice, so you stay asleep. Suspended. Waiting. Until you're awakened from the in-between dream by a knock at the door.



My dog, Bailey, is barking and scratching at the bedroom door. He is ready for his morning walk, pee, and poop. "Is the doorbell broken?" I mumble to myself as I stumble out of bed, grabbing my jeans and shirt from the floor. Whoever is at the door is going to be knocked out by my bad morning breath, but it serves them right for waking me up just when my dream was about to get good. I push Bailey back from the bedroom door and close it behind me, as I run down the stairs, trying to zip up my jeans and button up my shirt. It's Monday morning, so I know it's not Jehovah's Witnesses. The knocking turns to pounding, and I become worried that something has happened to Stephen. I notice I'm barefoot as I reach to turn the lock. Before I can get the door fully open, she blasts past me talking a mile a minute.

"Whew! I thought you were never gonna open that damn door! Don't you know it's cold out there? This is Chicago and I really ain't got no business being here this time of year anyway. I hibernate in the winter."

Adjusting what looks like a scarf draped around her neck, she pauses, briefly, realizing that I'm standing with my mouth agape and wondering who this person is who has just barged into my house. "Oh, baby, I'm sorry. Where are my manners? I just buzzed in here without greeting you properly. I'm Miss B."

She extends her hand. I do not return the courtesy, confused by what is happening. Seeing my confusion but still annoyed that I don't extend my hand to shake, she drops her hand to her side, only to place it on one of her hips.

"Hmmp. And you supposed to be a southerner. Could've fooled me." She begins to dig into what seems to be a purse, but looks more like a gold basket. The word "PANNIER" is embossed in all caps on the lower right corner in black letters. She starts a long string of almost inaudible non sequiturs: "I thought I

had my card down in here somewhere . . . I bet you one of those drones been digging around in my . . . Lord, who done took my last c—.”

We both feel the whip of cold air from the front door being left ajar. She finally looks up from her . . . purse. “Well, ain’t you going to close the door? You letting all the heat out. And it sounds like that dog is about to lose its mind with all of that barking.” I move to close the door while she removes her hat, scarf, and gloves and parks herself on one of our living room chairs. I want to run upstairs to calm Bailey, and take him out for his walk, but he’ll have to wait. I need to attend to the business at hand.

“Ma’am, I think you’re lost. Who are you looking for?” I say in my most respectful voice, but notably tinged with impatience.

She laughs. “Oh, I’m in the right place alright. And if you had a semblance of anything that looked like manners, you would have offered me some tea with a little honey.”

I stare at her with even more disbelief.

“I’ll take organic dandelion if you have it. And put the honey on the side. And that should be organic, too. So many pesticides and chemicals are used these days. It’s scan’less.” She fumbles some more with her purse.

“I don’t have organic dandelion tea. The only organic tea I have is green tea. Would you like some of that?” I say, pinching myself to awaken from what must be a dream.

“From the looks of this house, I thought you were a bourgie Negro, but you can’t be bourgie and ain’t got no organic dandelion tea! Green tea is so last year. But if that’s all you got.” Her side eye is stunningly arrogant.

I make my way to the kitchen and open the cabinet where we keep the tea. I scan the two shelves of tea and there, on the bottom shelf, is a collection of teas in silver tins that I purchased in Portland, OR while visiting some friends. Well, I’ll be damned. Organic dandelion.

I hear a low buzzing sound and then quiet. Buzzing. Quiet. Buzzing. Quiet. Surely, a fly has not survived the winter. I’m almost afraid to peek around the corner to see what she’s doing in the living room. Instead, I focus on the task of preparing this dandelion tea that I didn’t even know I had and trying to find my “bourgie” honey from Whole Foods. Luckily, there is still a little left in the jar in the refrigerator, but it has coagulated from the cold. I scoop a little out and put it in a ramekin and place it in the microwave for a few seconds. The tea has steeped long enough, so I pour it into a proper china teacup and place both on a tray and head back to the living room.

“Here’s your *organic* tea and honey,” I say, sitting the tray down on the coffee table.

She picks up the ramekin of honey, studies it for a minute before sticking the tip of her tongue into it very lightly. “Not bad. And by the way, you need to invest in a good fly swatter. You got bluebottles flying everywhere. You know they say that cleanliness is next to godliness, so I’d say you have a ways to go to get . . . godly,” she says, not looking at me and taking another sip of tea. I say nothing but stare at her with all of the incredulity I can muster. Paying me no mind, she continues, “Okay, so now that we have the pleasantries out of the way, why don’t you run on up and put on some shoes while I enjoy my tea so that we can go?”

“I’m not going anywhere with you.”

“Okay. Sit down and let me explain to you how this is going to go.”

“Uh, no. You are going to stand up and get out of my house.”

The house goes quiet.

Without saying a word, Miss B. stands up and begins to gather her things. She slips on her gloves and then slowly, methodically, wraps her scarf around her neck, winding it round as if she’s stuck in slow motion. It is at this moment that I get a closer look at her face. It is heart shaped. Her eyes are as dark as night, but rather than absorb the light, their glossiness seems to reflect it. Their blackness is a beautiful contrast to her tawny skin tone. On each of her cheeks is a small cluster of moles, similar to the ones on my mother’s face, that resemble constellations on a clear night. Her hair looks as if she stuck her finger into an electrical socket—a blowout kit gone wrong. And to be cute, she has twisted two small bunches of the electrified hair on either side of her forehead such that they drape down toward her eyes to resemble tendrils. Tragic and fly all at the same time. She puts on her coat just as methodically as she did her scarf before bending over to slip on her shoes. I clutch my pearls when I notice that she doesn’t shave her legs. Black mossy patches of hair extend up to her knees. It is then that I catch sight of her ass, which seems to blossom from her body, extended out far beyond any ass I have ever seen—including my own. She squishes her ill-fitting hat on top of her head, adjusting it on either side while pretending to look into an imaginary mirror. After she adorns herself in her outerwear, she takes one last slurp from the tea and moves silently toward the door. My dog’s barking has reached a fever pitch, as if he senses that something is off.

“I hope that you find the person you are looking for, Miss B.,” I say, wrapped in a bouquet of condescension.

She turns and extends her hand—again. This time I oblige. As our hands meet, she says, “I already have.” And with that we are off.