

DREAM

Recently, I had an unusual experience. Vampires don't sleep, so we don't dream. Whatever mechanism allows or requires the human brain to create dreams is something that goes away when we relinquish our humanity. In the absence of dreaming, dreams have taken on the quality of a magical myth to me, a Holy Grail of experience. It's one of the things that I miss most about being human, though I doubt that I truly remember the experience.

Most likely, my "memory" of dreaming is something I've fabricated from what I observed while watching Bella sleep when she was human. She talked in her sleep nearly every night, speaking from her dreams of whatever was on her mind.

The first time I heard Bella talk in her sleep, I had already developed a misguided interest in the human girl. I was struggling with myself, trying to decide what to do about it. Already, I'd begun to feel helpless against the new and unrecognizable emotions bombarding me. I was at her window, desolate and unsure, preparing to abandon the crazy notion that she might ever love a monster like me, when Bella said, "Edward."

Something fundamental changed in me that night, a slippage occurring along some fault line in my soul. It is a mystery how vampires change, what causes the major shifts of personality or character that happen in our kind from time to time. Carlisle has told me that any extreme emotional event can alter us permanently. Whatever the biology of it, when Bella said my name in her dreams, a transformation began in me.

I could feel the change happening and it's hard to describe. It moved through my body in a rush akin to the coloring of Bella's neck and face when she blushes. I felt everything I knew myself to be

begin to turn upside down. When it was over, I knew that I was no longer the man that I had been, but something more. Realizing that my feelings for Bella might be returned in some small part had unleashed that mysterious force that alters us forever.

Renesmee dreams. Bella told me the first time she held Nessie as she slept, that she'd put a hand to the baby's cheek. Renesmee was "showing" Bella her dreams even when unconscious. The images Bella saw in our newborn child's mind were a fusion of beautiful moving colors and forms. I'd seen them too in her first few days, though I could see the images without touching her skin. Sometimes at night I still watch Renesmee's dreams when I am longing for the comfort of sleep and dreaming. I imagine that I remember dreaming myself.

One night recently, I ran into the Olympic National Forest on my own, Bella having taken Renesmee hunting only a few days earlier. I'd wandered a bit farther afield than I had intended, almost all the way to Oregon. Perhaps the run itself was what I'd come for more than the animal blood. Running gave me time to think.

My life had transformed so completely in just a few short years. I'd found, fallen in love with, and married Bella; we'd unknowingly created Renesmee; I'd nearly lost both mother and child during her birth; I'd changed Bella; and my family had stared down the Volturi. As I sat down on an old stump to ponder the remarkable changes in my life since I met Bella, inexplicably, a story of a far different life began playing itself out in my mind.

It was very much like a dream. The narrative seemed to come from outside of me, taking its own direction, but I was living in the action, both watching and feeling it. In this dream, which couldn't have been a dream, I found that I had an extraordinary friend...an elephant. Strange, right?

She was an Asian elephant, a female whose name I never learned. She responded to me when I spoke to her and placed her enormous trunk against my chest in greeting. I could feel her rough, pachydermal skin and smell the earthy scent of her. She exhaled air through her trunk into my face as I stroked her mottled, gray-brown trunk, blowing my hair off of my forehead. Then she carefully wrapped her muscular appendage around my arm and guided me further into the forest.

I cannot remember a time when animals did not run from me in terror. Indeed, no animal has been a part of my life for 110 years.

Whether dream or veracity, this was a most extraordinary experience, for this enormous mammal was not afraid. More than that, I felt the presence of a special bond between us, almost as if we were family. I followed her solemnly through the trees until we reached a quiet, green meadow, where much to my surprise a menagerie of creatures was gathered.

As we entered the clearing, a young giraffe began ambling toward us. Likewise, a tufted lion stepped out of the forest and padded softly in our direction. A tigress followed. Two striped zebras and four white horses stood grazing nearby and raised their heads at the sound of our arrival. When they spied us, all six pirouetted in perfect synchronization—though one of the horses seemed hampered by a painful limp in his left rear leg—and trailed the other creatures across the clearing. Additional species followed suit... two single-humped camels, four spotted dogs, a tame black bear, six housecats in various colors, two lop-eared bunnies, four sheep, two goats, and a female mountain lion, the latter of which showed no greater fear than any of the rest, though her species was my favorite prey.

When all of the animals had gathered in a large circle around us, my elephant friend nudged me gently with her trunk and we strolled slowly together around the circle, each animal stepping forward in turn as if to greet me. The giraffe bent her sinuous neck to me and

tasted my arm with a lap of her long tongue. The mountain lion lay down and rolled onto her back, her huge paws dangling in midair. The horses raised their right front legs as if to shake hands or salute.

The four dogs leaped continuously over one another's backs as if they were being juggled by unseen hands. After we completed this miraculous circuit of greetings, the elephant lowered herself onto her front knees in a bow.

When she rose, she wrapped her trunk around my waist and lifted me off the ground. I was strong enough to compel her to put me down, but I didn't because I felt no fear. Somehow, I knew that she meant me no harm. With a fluid motion, she turned my body upside

down, opened her legs gently between she bobbed her times and began to pockets of my shirt

Finding them reversed the wrapping her trunk releasing my legs, me upright before on my feet. She had



mouth and took my her great jaws. Then head two or three poke about in the and trousers.

empty, the elephant procedure, around my waist, and then turning setting me carefully no words, but I felt

something akin to disappointment in her mind. Suddenly, I knew that she'd been looking for sweets! I began to chuckle and she raised her head and blasted a loud honk, as if laughing with me.

With my friend, the pachyderm, and I leading the way, the animals fell in behind us, single-file, and followed us through the forest until we came upon some ancient-looking, overgrown railroad tracks. I counted fifteen, faded-red boxcars parked on the tracks, many of which were open and had heavy wooden ramps propped against them. An old-fashioned steam engine at the front of the line and a

quaint, antique caboose at the back sandwiched the boxcars together.

I stopped to gape, but the animal menagerie continued toward the train, swerving around me in two columns. As if moving to silent music, they ambled to their assigned carriages and loaded themselves up the ramps. The elephant nudged me to follow her into an oversized boxcar with gold letters on the faded red paint. In my heart, I knew that I could not board that train. This was not my life.

Sadly, I turned to retrace my steps toward my home and family. After walking thirty yards, I pivoted around for one last look. The ramps were gone and the boxcar doors were closed. On the side of the elephant's carriage were stenciled some letters in deteriorated gold paint:

...he Gr at stS w on Ea h!

I blinked rapidly, not believing my eyes, and suddenly I found myself back where I'd started, sitting on the mossy stump. I smiled broadly and felt an intense joy sweep through me. Though I knew the fantasy had not been real, I was grateful to have experienced it.

As I stood to prepare for the run home, I heard the sound of an elephant's trumpet call and the tinkling of organ grinder music fading away into the distance.

Edward

