

29: Dreaming Alice

Alice and I are walking on the desert together. There is no trail, so we are skirting around lots of prickly-pears pointing angry spines at us. While giant saguaros watch suspiciously, cottontails scurry to hide, but stop in their tracks, freeze, then stare at us with one eye. Numerous lizards streak by.

I ask her, "Can you see the future?"

She looks at me strangely as if I'd said something shocking. "No," she answers, "But I think logically and that makes me skilled at understanding what the natural consequences might be when people make certain choices. I'm not always right."

"So you can't tell me how long I will be here?"

"No, I can't. Can you tell me why you are here?"

I'm surprised by her question. I wonder if she is asking it to avoid elaborating on her answer to me about understanding the future.

"I don't know," I say. "To paint, I guess. I'm not here by choice."

"So you don't know who put you here?"

"No, I don't. I thought it might be you."

She laughed. "You seem to be making the best of it. Am I right?"

"What else can I do?"

"I don't know. I would do the same thing you are doing if I were in your place. But now you know that you can dream your way out of your cell, because here we are walking on this awesome desert. Isn't the sky beautiful today?"

I look up into its blueness at the huge billowing white thunderheads scattered across the sky. Indeed, it is stunning. When I look back at the earth we are standing before something shockingly strange. It's a bed high above the ground mounted on what looks like up-rooted trees. It reminds me of an Indian burial stand, but it is a bed with white sheets and pillows. There are prayer flags and other objects hanging from the branches of the nearly leafless tree trunks. Instead of roots at the bottoms of the trees, there are animal claws gripping the earth.

Mouth open, I stand before it in awe.

"Don't be surprised," she says. "This is a dream."

“Right,” I say. We walk under the bed and sit down in the shade. There is a cool breeze and the ground beneath us is sandy and soft. A little ground squirrel happens upon us. Surprised by our presence, it shrieks loudly, turns and runs. We laugh.

She begins to communicate with me again and I become aware that she is not talking but transferring information to me from her mind to mine.

She continues. “I can’t see the future, but sometimes it seems that I do. I am not like other people. Most humans don’t think through the choices they make because they are acting out of fear, or they’re drunk. Or perhaps they are hypnotized, or just plain stupid. When they are stunned by the consequences of their actions, they look for someone else to blame. But there is more to it than that. It has to do with their feeble intent to control everything around them.”

“I don’t like to use the word ego, but for lack of a better word we can call it that for now. There really isn’t anything called an ego. If you think there is an ego, show me where it is. Ego is a process, not a thing. The ego process only wants to avoid suffering at all costs. But by trying so hard to do that, it causes more pain and chaos. Control that the ego seeks is an illusion. Only an ego would think it can control things. But it never really does. People are generally idealistic, not pragmatic. They think they are the center of the Universe so they can demand perfection. And they want it now!”

I can feel my forehead crunching up as I try to decipher what she is saying. I’m wondering if she means I could have prevented being abducted and brought here.

She stops and looks at me and sees that I am staring at her with this concentrated look. Then she laughs.

“You are beautiful,” she says through giggles. “Not only your outward appearance, but inside too. I’ve never met anyone who has received her destiny as gracefully as you have. Most people would be angry and climbing the walls trying to get away, but you are making the choice to cooperate with the inevitable. You take advantage of your situation rather than fight against it. That is why I am so interested in you.”

“I never thought of it that way,” I say. “But are you telling me I could have prevented being brought here in the first place?”

“It’s possible. Tell me what led to your being captured.”

In a matter of seconds she had the story without me uttering a word.

“Possibly you could have made some different decisions on that day, like calling the director of the museum at his home before you went. You could have done any number of other things to change that event. But to be honest,

I think you would have only put off the inevitable. There really aren't many things we can control. We can choose how we accept what is happening. I'm not saying we have to like it, but it is what it is. Fighting to change something usually leads to more distress."

"It's complicated, because we can do things to improve our lives, but we first have to realize what is happening. Most people don't realize what is happening, but decide they don't like something based on their unique way of viewing things colored by their beliefs. Then they act extravagantly to make changes without understanding what it is they are changing."

"That's crazy. Strong belief systems are rarely effected by facts. Almost everyone in the world relies on their belief systems, even super intelligent people. You are different because you didn't waste time trying to change your situation. You started off by gathering facts about where you were. You haven't spent a lot of time asking why. You just got busy living life right where you found yourself to be. I can't say it enough: when people think their belief systems are true they perceive a very limited world."

"The people who brought you here must have done a lot of research in order to pick just the right person for their plan."

"What plan is that?" I ask.

"I don't know. I can tell you that I don't believe they mean you any harm. I can't say why I think that. It's just a hunch. I think you will be released and there will be great things in store for you after this."

"What makes you think that?" I ask.

"I guess I am arrogant enough to say I only encounter people who are on magnificent journeys. People whose destiny it is to contribute great things that benefit the world and its inhabitants. The paintings you send out of here touch people in unique ways. The messages are embedded in the images. But it's not just the images. It's also the way you paint them."

"Seriously?" I respond. "I'm only a teacher. Not a master painter."

"Oh stop that!" she snaps. "Do you think Leonardo Da Vinci thought he was a master painter? If he did he would have painted more. What about Van Gogh? He died being rejected by everyone. In fact, he died from a self-inflicted wound. I don't think he thought very highly of himself. Humans are conditioned to believe that thinking highly of oneself is a sin, while at the same time believing they are made in the image of a god. It's crazy-making!"

"Okay. What am I supposed to get out of this discussion?"

"Nothing, absolutely nothing at all." She stares at me, her green eyes are shining and she's smiling like she might laugh out loud any minute now.

Suddenly I wake up from the dream and find myself lying on the blue sofa

in the desert studio. Was I dreaming with Alice? I look at the rainbows on the walls, and they are beautiful. The whole space is beautiful. Alias comes bounding in from the cat door and leaps on top of me, purring loudly. He mashes on my body with his front paws. I can see that his life is a miracle. That all life is. But even being a miracle, our lives are never protected from suffering. It can be lessened, but that is about all.

I don't know if Alice is right about the possibility that I might be let free. I think that I've learned to accept that there is a chance I will never leave here. Never go back to my former life. That something terrible could go wrong with this whole operation. But what I've come to understand is that this has always been true about life on this planet. So I don't see any reason to ruminate over my present conditions.

After Alias and I have breakfast, I start sketches for a painting of a bed raised up to the sky. A name came to me right away. I will call it *A Place to Dream Up a Storm*. I only make one study, then start painting in oils. I find an image on the internet of a huge thunderhead in an ultramarine blue sky and choose that for a reference. All the rest I make up as I go along. I work on the sky, thinking that if I don't get this right I'll start over before I dive into doing the detail work of the bed and trees. I end up working on it for three days before I'm pleased with the clouds. While I allow the oil paint to dry and before adding the next layers, I spend time lying on my back on the top of the tool shed looking at the spectacular Southwestern sky and the billowing thunderheads. I love monsoon season.

The painting goes faster than I thought it would. It's the first time in a long time that I've done a whole painting in oils. I didn't feel the need to work out the composition in fast drying acrylics, even though I'm somewhat disturbed by the toxicity of oil paint. But this studio has an amazing ventilation system, and *The Powers That Be* have provided me with Gamblin paint which is less toxic than other brands. I use Ivory hand soap to clean my brushes.

As soon as the painting is finished I place it outdoors to dry and store the tubes of oil paint in an airtight plastic container.

I've given myself a lot of time to think about what Alice shared with me in the dream. She was right that I haven't put a lot of energy into trying to escape. I've thought things through and know I'd be wasting time and energy trying. I'm not sure what has made me act this way. At first I thought they were giving me happy pills, but I'm now positive I am not being drugged – no common side effects. So maybe I'm content to be here because it is a peaceful place.

Plus, in so many ways I am enjoying myself because of the time I have to

work on art. With the garden and Alias, the visitations from Alice and Romero, and of course, Max, I know I'm settled in for the long haul. My desire is to take full advantage of the opportunity and paint furiously like a mad woman, only taking breaks to deal with the plethora of weeds in the garden that the rains have brought. Where do they all come from?

