**Dreamweaver**

When Marcus found himself standing over his own still form, his first coherent thought was that he had died. His second thought was damning the mussels he had eaten for dinner that night.

The room was swathed in inky darkness save for a slash of moonlight that filtered through a slit in the curtains. It illuminated the body sprawled on the bed, its limbs splayed out like a frog skimming the water.

Marcus moved cautiously, quietly, as if afraid to disturb, well, himself. He nearly leapt out of his skin when the figure, partially hidden by a flannel blanket (*his* flannel blanket), turned on its side and was still.

In the silence that followed, he heard a sound, very faint, carried by the wind through the open window. A woman's voice, singing a song he didn't know, would never know.

She stood with her back to him, clad in flowing dark robes, her hair billowing gently about her shoulders like glossy raven feathers. The myriad of thin silver bracelets that encircled her wrists and her ankles clinked as she lifted her arms and turned smoothly, round and round. The full moon was her audience, its light her spotlight, the crashing waves her orchestra.

She must have sensed his approach for she suddenly stopped, her robes still fluttering about her ankles before she sank gracefully onto the sand.

He froze.

"Will you join me?" Her voice was bemused as she turned her head to meet his gaze. She had an accent, he noted absently, his feet moving of their own accord as her words flowed around him like fine silk and he was lost in her eyes.

"Who are you?" he finally asked, settling in beside her.

"I am a Dreamweaver," she said, smiling. "One of many."

"I've never seen you before."

"No one ever sees us, Marcus," she laughed, the sound captured by his ears to be stored forever in his memory. "We are lone wolves, we are the phone operators of the universe. You speak to us through a network of stars and we connect you with your inner hopes and" —she met his eyes— "desires."

Marcus felt his breath catch and cleared his throat. "What is your name?" he asked weakly.

"I have many names," she murmured, leaning forward to swirl the now calm waters with a pale hand. Her skin was silvery in the light of the moon, and before he realized what she was up to, she flicked him with the cool water, her eyes crinkling at the corners as he gaped in shock. He retaliated quickly by doing the same, and her unadulterated laughter floated up into the still night. She was radiant, he thought, smiling with her. A thought occurred to him.

"What about nightmares?"

The Dreamweaver's laughter faded, replaced with a heavy silence. He wished desperately he could retract his question to see her smile again.

When she finally spoke, it was bitter. "We're not responsible for those," she replied tersely, sweeping aside a lock of hair that had fallen across her temple.

Entranced by the movement, Marcus caught her hand and she looked at him in surprise. Still holding her wrist, feeling the delicate bones move beneath his fingers, he was suddenly unsure of what to do, reacting purely on instinct. He lowered their hands and found he greatly disliked whomever, whatever caused her pain, resented their residence in her mind, and wanted to dispel the deviation of her thoughts.

He didn't deserve to touch her like this, he thought, running the backs of his fingers down her cheek. Intimate. Familiar. Neither of which he was with her, but he couldn't seem to stop himself. When she leaned into his touch, her eyes drifting shut, his doubts vanished.

When he kissed her, he was lost forever.

As the sun rose over the horizon, Marcus awoke and almost suffocated. He jerked his head out of the unyielding, sorry-excuse-for-a-pillow and found himself alone in his bed.

Was it all a dream?

He searched his memory for the Dreamweaver, recalling her laughter, the clinking of her silver bracelets, but as visions are wont to do, the memory of her face kept slipping through his grasping fingers, fickle water depriving the parched soul.

"What can I get you?" Laurie greeted him with her usual smile as he strode into the eatery down the boardwalk in a daze.

"I'll have a coffee, please," he said, thinking the caffeine would sort him out. "Black."

"Coming right up." Barely five feet tall, her honey-coloured hair twisted into a simple knot on the back of her head, Laurie turned to operate the shiny red espresso maker behind her. Even as he watched, she stole a discreet glance at a gaggle of friends chattering to his left and nearly grinned. Laurie loved her gossip.

"Did you see a woman on the beach last night?" he asked when she handed him his order.

"I see plenty of women on the beach," she said. "This is a public area, after all."

"No, she was—"*A dream*. *A goddess*. "—singing."

"There aren't any singers round these parts. Save for my radio and my shower." Her brow furrowed. "Why do you want to know?"

"I met someone."

"Do I know you?"

"It's Marcus," he said, surprised.

"I'm sorry." She shook her head. "I don't know a Marcus."

The Dreamweaver visited him in the night. He felt her presence before she laid her hand upon his shoulder. Instantly alert, he swung around and took her wrist. "I thought you had left me," he whispered, gazing at her.

She shook her head silently, taking him into her arms. Time slowed for Marcus, but it wasn't enough. It was all too soon before she released her hold on him and he yearned for her warmth.

"I love you," he said.

She smiled sadly, running her hand down the side of his face as he had done to her the first night they had met. "You don't love me, Marcus," she said. "You don't even know me."

"I want to know you," he replied fiercely, taking both of her hands. "I want to know everything about you, if you'd let me."

"I am a Dreamweaver."

"I know that, darling," he said, confused. "What are you getting at?"

"I weave dreams for others," she began. "And I weave dreams for myself. And all dreams end when someone wakes up." A single tear streaked down her cheek. "Dreams don't last forever."

Marcus felt a surge of alarm, tightening his hold on her. His voice wavered. "What are you saying?"

"Good night, Marcus," she said, kissing his mouth. "May we meet again in another dream."

**Word Count**: 1,114