

# Village of Dreams

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Illustrations by *Grace*



It begins one day when the shadows are still long on the sand with the sound of a ram's horn. It is a signal from the reader of dreams that yet another dream has been judged significant and now villagers stream to the dreaming place to hear the dream recounted and to participate in its performance.

But first the dreamer goes to the well to draw water and here fate enters in the guise of love. The dreamer's eyes meet with those of a young woman, and since no gaze in this community goes

unobserved, and since she is promised to another, a wheel of fate begins inexorably to turn. Desert law now gives the dreamer three choices. He can leave forever, he can submit to a duel or he can remain in the village provided only he is rendered blind.

He has however heard among the caravans of dreamers in another village who have acquired fame and fortune, so he thinks: Why should I risk my life or lose my sight for the sake of love? Let me rather become famous and wealthy too.

After recounting his dream therefore, he slips away, leaving the community to make what they will of it, and sets out for the other village.

The journey takes longer than he expected. He is caught in a sandstorm during which he loses all his belongings and for days he has no water to drink. He speaks with eyes open to people who have been dead for many years and also to animals. He has no idea of the passage of time, nor in what direction he is walking. One day he looks up and sees small children playing in the sand and around him the tents of a village.

Here he lives as a beggar, surviving on scraps of food that are given to him and sleeping on the sand between the tents; his only companion, a scavenging dog. Sometimes he looks after horses or cleans cooking utensils in return for a meal. At night he lies under the stars and the dreaming that began in the wilderness continues. One time he comes across a man training an elephant to dance using hot embers under its feet. Another time he sees a woman being beheaded in the sand.

As the moon grows, so does a certain excitement in the village. A place in the sand has been marked out with flags fluttering on long poles and wood piled up for fires. On the evening of the full moon, the fires are lit and the people of the village take their places around the central space where musicians are assembled.

The music begins and a man tells the story of his dream. It is about a woman who has been captured by giants. She is rescued by a person with the horns of a ram who rides a horse with wings. The giants are represented by people on tall stilts and their appearance is preceded by the beating of drums and gongs.

When it ends, the audience throw coins and valuables into brass bowls and fire guns into the air so enthusiastic are they. The celebrations continue throughout the night and in the morning, while the sickle of the moon still hangs in the sky, the dreamer comes across the bodies of a woman and two men, their swords next to them, whose blood has seeped into the sand.

The next day a crier announces that a reward is to be offered for dreams that can be performed. After waiting many hours in the sun, the dreamer takes his turn and tells the assessors the dream that he left behind in his village.

Your dream is too simple, they tell him when he finishes. We need dreams in which exciting things happen otherwise the audience will fall asleep; an elephant that can dance for instance; a woman commits adultery; two men fight to the death. In your village you have never heard of such things, so your dream is not interesting.

Realising that there is nothing but misery to be gained in this place, the dreamer decides to return to his home village, walking during the cool nights and sleeping wherever he can find shade, during the day.



He arrives at sunrise to find the dreaming place abandoned and the village deserted. The few people he encounters are unable to tell him why this has happened, nor when the dream performances stopped. There is, he is told, one person who, though he does not himself dream, can still read the meaning of dreams.

The old man is sitting by his tent next to a small fire. He gestures to a place in front of him. Then the dreamer tells him all that has happened to him. When he is finished, the dream reader speaks: When you abandoned your dream and left the village, he tells him, your abandonment and all that happened to you in the wilderness became a part of the dream and joined the mythos of the village. Thereafter the dreaming in the village stopped and one by one, family by family, people found reasons to leave.

And the woman by the well? the dreamer asks.

Her eyes knew three men, the dream reader says. The first left, he says with a slight smile. The second gave his blood to the sand together with that of his opponent. The third chose to stay.

And what of her, the dreamer asks?

The desert sand is insatiable, the old man says, turning blind eyes to the sun.

The dreamer thanks him and takes his leave. The early morning sun sends long streams of light onto the sand turning him into a giant

and giving his dog thin equine legs. When he hears the sound of the ram's horn he joins the crowds streaming towards the dreaming place.

This was a long time ago and the village is now buried by sand but every so often the sand shifts and the name of the dream performance - the only one ever to take place – is revealed, inscribed into the soft limestone of the dreaming place wall.

It is called Village of Dreams.