

## The Dream Jar

Once upon a time, or, as we say, once upon a pona, there lived a little girl named Corliss. One day while she was walking in the snow, Corliss heard a sound in the branches of a tree. It could have been an owl, or the wind, or just the branches shifting under the soft weight of the snow. But Corliss never found out what made the sound, because when she looked up, she tripped over something. She squatted and dug down into the snow to find what she had tripped over. She felt it and started tugging: it was like pulling out a tooth. And with a POP! she was sitting in the snow holding in her arms a big glass jar with a rusty lid screwed on top. She wiped the snow with her sleeve. The sun glinted on the glass. It looked really old.

She held the jar close to her face so that she could feel the cold of the glass near her cheeks. Eyes wide, she peered inside. There, inside the jar, was a tiny city! Buildings, streets, parks, even itty bitty cars driving along the roads and itsy bitsy people walking around. Even specks of birds flew around the sky of the upper jar. A whole miniature city bustling there inside the glass! It looked a lot like her city! She wrapped the wondrous bottle under her coat and raced home. She ran into the house, threw off her boots, hopped up the stairs, leaped into her room and slammed her bedroom door. Then she climbed into her pajamas and lay in her bed. She ignored her homework and carefully unwrapped the jar. Looking closely through the old warped glass she saw the itty bitty cars driving through the streets and the teensy tinsy people. She saw city buildings and little cottages on the edges, she saw a flock of pigeons or maybe crows—she wasn't sure—and even a raincloud which passed over and rained on one side of the city. She watched the tiny world until the sun went down. At dinnertime she hid the jar under her bed, came downstairs and wolfed down her peas and casserole, then raced back upstairs. That night she held the jar under her covers and opened the rusty lid. She put her nose close to the opening and she could smell the city air; she put her ear close and she could hear the city sounds. She fell asleep hugging the open jar.

That night Corliss had a dream.

She dreamt that her body shrank to the size of a teeny girl, and this tiny Corliss climbed over the dunes of her bedcovers and up into the open jar. She could see the city down below; it was a sunny day and the few trees dappling the

hills on the outskirts waved their leaves at her in the slight breeze. She realized that she was in a big park just outside of town, and there was an event happening. Dozens of people were gathered around several huge colorful blobs, and children were running around all over the place. She climbed closer. The blobs were poofing up, expanding—it was a hot air balloon race! There was a group of mustachioed men gathered around a sleek balloon silver as a beetle's belly. They were snacking on a pile of seafood and their huge mustaches, draping over their mouths, reminded Corliss of whale's baleen. She turned and watched another group of racers: kids with a balloon painted like a ladybug: they were running around and crashing into each other and filling their basket with junk food. Another group's hot air balloon was woven entirely of hair; the women stood in the basket below, their hair pulled up and strung into the lining. Seven balloons in total were in the race, and when they were all filled to bursting, with a gunshot their ropes were cut and the balloons rose up into the sky like rainbow jellyfish. Below, kids shouted and waved their hands while the adults threw confetti and hollered for their favorites. Corliss watched until the balloons were tiny dots and the bright sunlight hurt her eyes. A pod of old ladies called Corliss over and offered her some noodles from a giant steaming cauldron. One old lady with breath like a cocoon said, "These races have been happening every Summer Solstice for six hundred million years. Perhaps next year you will race with us." Corliss pulled away and did cartwheels and somersaults over the grass until she was far away from the balloon-grounds, and the palms of her hands and feet were stained green. She climbed through the hills until they became blankets.

Corliss woke up.

Was it a dream? She looked close at the jar. Pressed on the top of the glass were six tiny balloons. Where was the seventh? It must've gotten out the opening! She stood on her bed on tippytoe and looked at the ceiling: there was one tiny balloon up there painted red with black dots like a ladybug: the winners! She clapped her hands together and her palms were stained green.

The next night—but it was daytime in her dream—Corliss shrank down and went wandering through the city. She saw a fox trot down an alley and a big snake coiled up in a park. She met an old man who had antlers coming out of his hair and she drank tea in a cozy shop with two other girls. Corliss liked this place.

She went walking and she saw a young girl blowing bubbles next to a yellow

cat. The girl blew a bubble so big that the cat got caught in it and carried up by the wind. Corliss could hear the cat mewling in the bubble, until the bubble got caught in the branches of a nearby tree. The cat's claws made the bubble POP! and the cat was stuck there meowing. Corliss helped the girl drag a ladder to the trunk of the tree but though she climbed to the tippy-top of the ladder she couldn't reach the first branch. Together they waved down a firetruck, and a firefighter with long blue hair climbed the truck ladder, wooed the yellow cat with a treat, scooped her up in her arms, climbed down, and gave her to the girl.

The firefighter asked, "How did this happen?"

The girl said, "You wouldn't believe me."

The firefighter said, "Go ahead."

And the girl said, "My cat got caught in a bubble."

The firefighter said, as she was pulling the firetruck away, "Oh yeah that happened to my cat too."

—And Corliss woke up.

She saw that the jar was open and the lid was lying next to it on the covers. She screwed the lid on tight. She couldn't wait for the next night's dreams.

The next night in the dream jar Corliss met an old woman sitting on a bench. The woman said, "Do you see that fog rolling in?" Corliss looked up, and sure enough, some fog was drifting down out of the hills into the city. "That is the breath from the sleeping dragon who lives out there."

"No no no it's not true it's not true!" said Corliss.

"But it is true here," said the old woman. Then she told Corliss, "This is a dream world, and many things are true here. In fact, here you can even transform. Like THIS!"

Corliss suddenly felt something strange. She looked around her and saw clouds, the blue sky, birds; the bench and the old woman were nowhere she could see. Then she saw trees far below her, and animals scurrying around even farther below. Where was she? She looked down at herself: yellow orange red purple blue green: the old woman had transformed her into a rainbow! She closed her eyes and felt her body. She felt her colors arc through the air, and she felt the warm sun. The way she stretched through the sky felt so open and good. But she felt that something was missing, something important. All here colors were there—what was it? She felt an itching in her two feet, the places where her colors touched the ground. And she felt some part of herself below her feet, like

the roots of two trees. Corliss wondered. She felt deeper. She felt herself bend beneath the earth and realized that this is what she felt had been missing: her body extended into the soil and the rocks in a full hoop. She was a circle and she never knew it! Half of her was underground.

Far below Corliss saw two kids chasing each other and playing. They were running and holding hands, and they ran directly underneath her. Then the kids split up and ran opposite directions until they reached the ends where Corliss touched the ground. They hugged Corliss' colors and got blue and green and red and yellow and purple and orange all over them.

Corliss felt herself drifting, moving with the sun and the clouds. Then she felt a frog climbing up and sliding down her side. "Where are we?" asked the frog. They looked around. They were in a crystal desert, where big crystals grew up out of the ground. They each looked into a crystal and thought, "What beautiful crystals!"

Corliss said, "Mine is all different colors, and smooth, and beautiful!"

The frog said, "Mine is all green, and lumpy, and beautiful!"

They showed each other their crystals and said "How wonderful!"

A thunderstorm flowed in on the sky and as the rains came Corliss started to fade away, and then she reappeared bright as ever when the sun came back—and there was the frog, hopping around in the last of the rain.

"Where did you just go?" asked the frog.

"I don't know," said Corliss, but when she started to think about that, she woke up.

The next night, Corliss shrank down but she had forgotten to tip the jar on its side, so she couldn't climb in. She woke right up.

She fell asleep again, and this time Corliss climbed through her gigantic covers and into the dream jar, where she saw a woman tying a propeller onto the roof of her house. The propeller started to spin, and the lady and her house zoomed off into the sky. While Corliss was watching the house get smaller and smaller, six kids rode up crammed onto the back of a horse, with nets in their hands and binoculars dangling from their necks. "Where are you going?" asked Corliss.

"We fell asleep on Friday, and we woke up on Sunday! Saturday is missing!"

"Well where did it go?" asked Corliss.

"We don't know! We're the Barefoot Kid's Club, and we're gonna find

Saturday! Climb on!”

So she did, and they rode through sunflower fields and moonflower fields, looking through binoculars, wondering if aliens had abducted Saturday. They galloped through a forest with trees that were hollow, trees with no tops that had smoke blowing out of them like chimneys—Corliss figured it was because the earth got so hot with all that fire in her middle. But that part of the forest was too smoky and it made the horse’s eyes water, so they kept going. Soon they found Saturday’s tracks along a creek. Very carefully the kids snuck up on Saturday. Saturday wasn’t suspecting a thing. Saturday looked like a humungous bug, or more like a gigantic hill. The kids slipped inside the hill; it was like a circus tent. They practiced the Barefoot Kid’s Club Neighborhood Circus Show and stuffed their bellies full of peanut butter and honey and banana sandwiches. Saturday shrank and shrank until they all popped out into Sunday again. The horse was gone, so they all walked home together, tired, and Corliss fell asleep under an apple tree...and woke up.

The next night while she was sleeping Corliss saw a dog with two heads trotting down the sidewalk in the dream jar city. It had one head in the regular place, plus another head where its tail should be. The heads on each end of the dog’s body appeared to want to go different places, so it was tugging and pulling and yanking at itself. “I wonder,” she thought, “if it is grumpy because it never wants the other head to eat, because if the other head eats, then a while later the OTHER head would feel burps and then...EWWWWW.” A mother was plopping her small children on top of the dog’s back to take pictures, and both its heads looked annoyed. The next thing she saw was the two-headed dog trot right into a vet’s office. “How strange,” she thought, and kept walking on her way.

She smelled a sweet perfume wafting through the air, and she began to follow her nose. It led her to the most wondrous rose garden, with blooms of all sizes and colors: pinks and yellows and reds and even pale sky blues. She went strolling through the garden, spinning and delighting and leaning her nose into the middle of the yummy flower puffs. Smelling one amazing rose the color of blood, she noticed something. Along the stem were tiny gnomes holding teeny-tiny thimbles and teeny-tiny needles, sewing thorns onto the stem. She leaned in close to one of the gnomes, who was about the size of a big ant, and asked him why he was sewing thorns onto the roses. He looked up at her and shouted in his teeny voice, “To keep you humans from picking them and the other animals

from nibbling the petals.”

“Ah! So that’s why they have thorns!” she said. And she woke up.

The next night in her dream she saw two dogs that looked like twins. It was the two-headed dog, but now they were two separate dogs! The vet had popped it into two! And they looked happy happy happy trotting along right next to each other, panting and playing, and sometimes even leaning against each other butt-to-butt like the old days.

She had a full day of adventures in the jar city, and at the end of the day she was tired. She knew she was in a dream, but she did not know how to wake up. So she went to a shop she had seen on a cobblestone street. This shop had to sign out front that said, “ALL MAGIC ANY MAGIC.” Inside, behind the counter, was the old woman who had turned her into a rainbow! She told the woman that she wanted to wake up. The woman handed her a steaming cup and said, “This tea is full of honey for a glow inside the belly, the walls are made of paper and crows roost in the deli.”

“I don’t know what that means,” said Corliss, “but that’s okay with me!” and she drank the tea.

The woman said, “Your hair is getting sleepy, your head is getting sleepy, your face is getting sleepy, your neck is getting sleepy, your shoulders are getting sleepy, your arms are getting sleepy, your elbows are getting sleepy, your fingers are getting sleepy, your back is getting sleepy, your chest is getting sleepy, your belly is getting sleepy, your butt is getting sleepy, your legs are getting sleepy, your knees are getting sleepy, your toenails are getting sleepy...”

Corliss felt very very relaxed...

And she fell asleep in her dream—and woke up.

Every night Corliss snuggled with the jar and dreamt of going on adventures in the miniature city, and every morning when she woke up she closed the jar up tight and hid it under her bed. She began to write down the stories of her dreams every morning, in a journal that she kept next to her bed. And when she grew up she put some of those stories in a book with a pretty cover, for parents to read to their kids at sleeptime, and the stories in these pages are those.

