Winter 1957

The Dreamflower

Dick Embs

Western Michigan University

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/calliope

Part of the Creative Writing Commons

Recommended Citation

Embs, Dick (1957) "The Dreamflower," Calliope: Vol. 4 : Iss. 1 , Article 18.
Available at: http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/calliope/vol4/iss1/18

This Fiction is brought to you for free and open access by the English at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Calliope by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.
The Dreamflower . . .

by Dick Embs

There was no doubt that it was an animal.
He watched the huge, indescribable thing lumber awkwardly across the plain. At first he tried to look away and ignore it, but his inherent disgust and loathing of the animal forced his attention back. From his point of view, the creature was a horrible anomaly of nature, a thing to be shunned and despised.

Suddenly it turned, flashing in the sun, and began moving in his direction. Panic seized him, and his whole body stiffened with terror as he watched the thing approach.

_No! Go away!_ he shouted at the monster. _Stop! Leave me alone!_

It was now towering over him. He quailed before its immensity, and would have turned and fled, had he possessed the power of motion. Instead, he could only remain in helpless horror while the thing remorselessly extracted him from his lifelong position.

_I hate you!_ he screamed as it lifted him into the air. _I'll kill you, you hideous beast!_

Mars can be a very dull place.
Ruby stared idly through the little mica window at the Martian landscape beyond. Three weeks ago, the beautiful, fantastic colors of the sky and sand would have thrilled her deeply, but now she scarcely noticed them. Twenty-one days of living in a small pressurized hut in the middle of nowhere had dulled her enjoyment of life.

Her husband, John, was away most of the time collecting various specimens of Martian plant life. Ruby spent the days either dreaming of the distant Earth with all its pleasures and memories, or attempting to drown her loneliness in household chores. Although she still loved her husband, she cursed his work in botany, and even wished that space travel, despite all its benefits for mankind, had never been developed.

A buzz from the airlock startled her. John must be back already, she thought, stepping languorously to the door.

John stumbled through in his bulky survival suit, carrying a large plant of some kind. Ruby shivered briefly from his coldness, and then, sighing, helped him to remove the suit, which was already dripping from condensed moisture. He began speaking as soon as his helmet was off.

"Do you see what I've got?" he blurted.

"What's that?" she asked softly, glancing at the plant in his hands. It looked like a shabby, uprooted cornstalk with very thick, green leaves.

"Don't you know? Honey, this is a dreamflower," he replied, making a gesture which showered her with droplets of water.

"A . . . a what?"

"A dreamflower," he repeated. "It's a native plant, very rare, and
I was extremely lucky to find it. They sell for a hell of a lot back on Earth!"

"Ah—? A lot of money? Lots?" Her voice broke in astonishment. "Imagine what they'll say back at the institute," he said proudly. She looked at the plant in awe. Earth seemed very close to her now.

Hatred burned in his body like acid. He tried to control his disgust just long enough to decide on his next course of action, which he hoped would rid him of the animals—there were two of them now. Filthy, horrible creatures! They were almost pitiful; never at rest, they moved here and there and back again, always unable to find peace, hurry-scurry, never pausing to reflect and improve the soul.

He was not concerned with the new environment they had plunged him into; his body was very adaptive. But it was obvious that they intended to use him as food. Therefore, knowing full well the shortcomings of animals, he evolved a plan of murder. It was simple. First, he would charm them into submission by growing flowers, and after they were helpless, he would kill them. But there was little time. He must act quickly.

It would be best to work at night, for the animals seemed to subside at that time.

"John, come in here—quickly!"

Ruby stood very still in the middle of the room. She was wearing a nightgown, and her hair, still uncombed, hung loosely upon her shoulders. Her bare feet ignored the icy tile. She was oblivious to everything but the dreamflower, which stood in its pot, lighted by the bleak Martian dawn.

It was in full bloom. Huge, pendulous blossoms covered half the plant. They were a deep, royal purple in color, and resembled clusters of orchids, with incredibly smooth petals surrounding long, delicate stamen. Eyes wide, Ruby walked forward and brushed her fingertips across the cool flowers. Their heady, exotic perfume filled her nostrils.

"You need me, honey?" John called from the bedroom.

"Look at the flowers," she said in wonder.

He appeared beside her. "You know, it’s damn strange for a Martian plant to grow flowers. There aren’t any insects here for them to attract."

"And they grew overnight," she murmured.

He shrugged. "You never know what you’ll find next on this cockeyed planet."

She hugged herself for warmth. "Oh, by the way, what’ll we do with the money we get for the plant?"

"Well, I could use it for my research here."

"No! I mean, don’t... " She sighed and began again. "Why don’t we go on a vacation or something? It’d be awfully nice to get back to Earth for a change."

He laughed and clapped her on the shoulder. "Oh, come on now,
honey, what's wrong with Mars? Clean air, no disease, low gravity, etcetera." Then he grew serious. "Ruby, my work here is important, both to the institute and ourselves, and I just can't go running off now. Maybe we can visit Earth next month. Okay?"

"But—" she began, and let her voice trail off. His words seemed to batter her into submission, and she could only nod her head timidly.

He forgot the subject at once. "Better not pick any of these flowers, honey. The plant can't bear fruit without them."

"Bear fruit?"

"Dream-apples," he told her.

* * * * *

His plan was working perfectly.

The animals respected and admired him now. He was sure of that, although his only proof was the fact that they had not hurt him yet. Anyhow, the final task was at hand.

Through some imponderable process, his body began to synthesize several kinds of lethal nerve poisons. He stored these in his roots with great care until his blossoms became ripened fruit, and then gave each a heavy dose of the poison. This was very hard to do, for he did not know how much poison was sufficient, while too much would shrivel the fruit.

But he knew one thing for sure: when the animals dared to eat the products of his labors, they would die quickly, and in agony. A wave of sadistic glee welled up in him. He could hardly wait.

* * * * *

It was very early in the morning. Ruby closed the bedroom door softly behind her and tiptoed into the living room. The light was dim, and she could barely see the dreamflower in its place by the window.

A slight feeling of guilt nagged at the back of her mind. She paused and held her breath, listening nervously to the semi-darkness and hearing nothing but the distant whisper of a vagrant Martian breeze. There's nothing to worry about, she told herself. John's safely in bed and I can see if the dream-apples are coming out yet.

Her hand found a light switch and snapped it on. She squinted through the sudden brilliance and gasped at the sight before her.

The dreamflower was covered by a dozen, bright red spheres that hung from its limbs like big drops of blood. Ruby trembled in amazement and her heart seemed to fill the room with its pounding. She found it hard to accept the fact that a plant could bear fruit overnight.

Still trembling, she stepped forward and examined the alien thing. Its fruit looked exactly like cherries to her, except for the size, which was the same as that of an average crabapple. She grasped one to feel its texture, and it fell easily into her hand, as if it were meant to be plucked.

Temptation overrode her fear. She brought the scarlet dream-apple to her lips and took a bite. After that, she took another bite, deeper this time. When the whole thing was gone, she took another one. And then another.

"Wowee!"
Ruby whirled around and flung her arms toward the ceiling. An ecstatic sense of power and freedom had seized her, and she felt herself grow to tremendous heights, until she was larger than Mars itself. Her hands could crush the little red planet like a biscuit, if she chose. Well, almost. No, not quite; she'd need some more power.

Whirling again, she plucked another dream-apple and shoved it into her mouth. Its pink juice dribbled down her chin and onto the bosom of her nightgown, but she hardly noticed it. She kicked off her slippers and pirouetted barefoot on the cold floor.

John walked into the room, making sleepy, grumbling noises. He stopped dead in his tracks when he saw her.

Ruby stood on her toes, flung her arms upward again, and shouted, "Look at me, Johnny! I'm a nymph!"

“Oh, My God,” he mumbled.

She clasped her hands petulantly. “Well, I couldn’t sleep, and I got so bored lying there in bed and I wanted to try out a dream-apple, even if you told me not to. They won’t kill me, will they?”

“They won’t do anything but make a souse out of you. Now come on back to bed.”

“No!” She stamped her foot and glowered at him. "I won’t go until you promise to take me back to Earth. I haven’t been there for months.”

“We’ve been through that before,” he said, grabbing her arm.

“To hell with your botany!” she screamed at him. “We’re going to sell the dreamflower and use the money for rocket fare to Earth. I’m sick of this rotten planet!”

“Are you coming or aren’t you?”

She wrenched herself free and skipped back a few steps. “I’m going to stand right here by the window, and I won’t budge, ever,” she said vehemently, “until you agree to take me to Earth.” Then, after a moment’s thought, “And I don’t care if some passer-by sees me. I’ll just take off my nightgown and wave it at him!”

He sighed wearily and regarded her defiant pose. “Okay,” he said crestfallen. “You win. I guess it’s about time we went home, anyway. Now will you come with me?”

Ruby stumbled weakly into his arms. The exhilaration had worn off, and a heavy, comfortable torpor had taken its place, pervading throughout her body. But she stopped suddenly as John was guiding her back to the bedroom.

“Just a minute,” she said. “Forgot to thank my benefactor.”

She turned and blew a kiss at the fruit-laden plant. “Oh, dreamflower, baby,” she said happily. “I love you!”

* * * * *

Triumph! An animal was dead at last!

He remembered with joy the events of the past hour. One of the animals, the smaller one, had eaten some of his fruit, and instantly began to feel the effects of the nerve poisons. It had spun around in circles and gesticulated wildly with its upper pair of limbs, as though it were in horrible pain. He had waited eagerly for it to drop
dead, but the other animal had appeared and taken the smaller one away.

Anyhow, the thing must have died in agony. He felt satisfied for the first time in days, and a stimulating sense of victory flowed gloriously through his body, causing his leaf-ends to tremble imperceptibly. After long hours of toil and planning, he had finally killed one of those filthy, disgusting beasts.

But a few bewildering questions began to mar his enjoyment. What were these animals and where had they come from? He had never seen anything like them. They were incredibly large and strong, and had the astonishing ability to change their appearance, which they had done so often that he could hardly tell them apart.

Like all animals, though, they were ugly and despicable. The familiar loathing and revulsion welled up in him again, and now he knew what his mission in life must be. He must grow more tempting, poisoned fruit for the animals to eat.

And he must kill again. And again.

Gamble...

Love is yet a question
Answers still are sought
Gamble!

Life is an alternative
Death is cheap when bought
Gamble!

Roll the dice
Draw your card
Embrace your crystal globe
Gamble!

Take the chance
It may last
So don contented robe
Gamble!

... Sherwood Snyder III