

## **"I'm afraid to sleep because I'm afraid to dream." from the play "Who Will Carry the Word?" by Charlotte Delbo**

I'm afraid to sleep because I'm afraid to dream. Night is more frightening than day, because at night, as soon as I fall asleep, I'm alone. During the day, I talk. Gina and Françoise or someone answers. At night, in my dreams, no one answers. I'm always alone and I'm afraid. While I'm falling asleep, I already know what I will dream. I'm afraid. If we've carried bricks during the day, I dream, I carry bricks and they are colder, heavier to my hands than during the day. As like Frozen bricks. And when it's not the bricks, it's the dogs. I try to make detours. I figure out how to get away from the dogs, but they leap far and in one single jump cover the entire distance I've succeeded in putting between them and me. They throw themselves on me—they're enormous dogs. And I feel their warm and repugnant breath, their panting on my face. I am petrified with fear. It's impossible to escape from those dirty beasts.

I reassure myself and tell myself I have to go back to sleep; otherwise I won't make it through the next day. But I'm afraid. I'm afraid that this time it'll be the black mud, sticky and icy when the ice melts as the day progresses and the swamp turns into muck. I swirl in the mud, I go in deeper and deeper and I can't get hold anywhere; there's nothing to hold onto. I want to cry out for help. I hold back, close my mouth tightly because the mud is at level with my lips. I'm so scared, I scream. The mud goes down my throat through my mouth and my nostrils, fills my stomach with a stinking gurgling and suffocates me. Then I really scream, my brother shakes me awake.

The most atrocious dream is the one where I come home. I come in through the kitchen. My mother is doing dishes or she is ironing. I come close: "Mother, it's me! You see, I've come back. Oh, Mother! I still don't believe it. I was so afraid that I wouldn't come back. But it's true. This time, it's true." Mother doesn't turn her head towards me. "It was hard, you know, Mother." She continues her washing or her ironing. She doesn't hear me. She doesn't turn towards me. "Mother, it's me. If you knew, Mother, how many times I dreamt I was coming back! But this time it's true, it's true because I am touching you, I'm touching your hand. Your hand is a little rough—a little hard—you should wear gloves when you do dishes." Happiness flows through me to the tips of my fingers. It's the dream that frightens me the most. At night, you're afraid. In the morning, you want to live."