

Beyond Dreams

*"A dream is a wish your heart makes
When you're fast asleep
In dreams you will lose your heartaches
Whatever you wish for, you keep
Have faith in your dreams and someday
Your rainbow will come smiling through"
(Cinderella)*





CHAPTER I

"Now, that's enough!" Mr Miller thundered. "Christopher Alexander Walker, I WILL NOT accept your behavior any longer!"

"But..." Chris tried to answer back with his eyes barely open and with such a defying voice... "Don't you dare! Christopher Alexander Walker, I am tired of you! You've been sleeping in my class! Where are you thinking to be? You're no longer a child, or maybe...you are? You're in High School now. I will speak with your legal guardian, and we'll see then!"

"No, sir!" Chris replied while the other first-year students giggled.

"Silence! All of you! And as for you, Christopher Alexander Walker, DE-TEN-TION! You know what it means... After all, you're used to it. You may even win first prize for that. And what's more, you must write an essay on Mark Twain by 5.00 pm. In case you don't know, we were focusing on his letters. I will be waiting for you in my office. And you'd better write something intelligent; I wonder if you can, though."

Chris disliked that man, especially when he called him Christopher Alexander Walker. Mr Miller reminded him of the Minotaur or even a

worse kind of creature. He always knotted his blue tie so tightly around his neck that Chris wondered how he could breathe. And then he always wore that black waistcoat over a horrendous jacket that was worn out near his pockets. "All right, Mr Minotaur" Chris thought "Teachers like you make me hate school."

The bell rang.



CHAPTER II

Chris rushed into the school library. Small and cozy, with the heating constantly on full blast, it made you want to sleep. Not really what he needed now.

"Good afternoon, Mr Winnie! I am looking for an old edition of Tom Sawyer. I need to write an essay on Mark Twain; I have to figure out where to start. Well, you know..."

"What happened, Chris? Not detention again..." Mr Joseph P. Winnie, the school librarian, was the only one Chris would trust at Hannibal High School. Chris looked at him straight in his eyes. "Don't worry, man! I was young like you are now, and something in your eyes tells me you are not a bad guy. Just not focusing on school, eh? Is it love, I wonder?"

"Please, Mr Winnie! I need that book as soon as possible. I was supposed to meet someone after school. Instead, I am here in this boring library, no offence".

While Mr Winnie was looking for the book, Chris sat down and took his mobile to call Avery. "Oh, no! Please! No, no, no!!!"

"Shhh!" said Mr Winnie from aisle 3. Chris couldn't believe it! His phone was dead! How could he tell Avery he could not meet her? Not today, after the sleepless night to finish writing that poem for her. He wanted to cry and be somewhere else. Mr Miller kept shouting at him: "YOU NEVER LISTEN, THAT'S WHY YOU ARE FAILING MY CLASS, WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO WITH YOU?!" Chris wanted the whole world to know he was not the boy everyone thought he was. Yes, maybe he was a troublemaker and from time to time quite sly, but having no parents to look after him didn't mean he was a rascal.



CHAPTER III

Avery was different and Chris had a crush on her

"What a wonderful vision to see.

The two of us, just you and me.

I'm thinking of you when you are away,

I'm trying to make you stay..."

Those words kept echoing in his head. They were the reason why he had fallen asleep in class. He had been awake all night to finish writing the last part of this poem.

"Here you go. Hey, man, seeing you working like this is sad. Why don't you follow your dreams?"

"Why? No one will understand me. For the whole world, I am just the rebellious freshman who doesn't pay attention in class and only thinks about making a mess."

"Do you think you are that kind of person?"

"Not really, but who would believe me if I said that I read at least one book a week, write poems, and want to enter a poetry competition?"

Mr Winnie put a hand on his shoulder and said "I would. Actually, I believe in you. But you'd better start reading this if you want to complete your essay in time."

Mr Winnie left, and Chris was stuck in his thoughts. Would Avery forgive him if he didn't show up today? There was nothing he could do. No one to inform her. He had no alternative: he needed to write that essay so he turned on his laptop and opened the book Mr Winnie had handed him just a few minutes before, and he started reading the preface. Not that it was boring, but being so sleepy didn't help him much. Chris tried to concentrate and kept reading until page 8 where he read:

To Dan Beard, in Cincinnati:

HARRIWERE HOTEL, May 1, 1873.

Dear Dan,

I take my pen in hand to inform you that I am well and hope these few lines will find you enjoying the same God's blessing.

The book I am writing is still full of damnable grammar errors and deadly spelling inconsistencies; when my hurry is over, I will reread it and decide about Aunt Polly. But be a friend and say what you think about this chapter, as I am stuck and can't decide. This version needs to be more convincing. That's why I am writing to ask for your opinion.

Pray for me and try to write to me (to this hotel).

Regards and best wishes to the family.

Truly Yr Friend

M.T.



CHAPTER IV

"I didn't know about another version of the book." Chris carried on reading what looked like the 15th chapter of Tom Sawyer, his favorite one:

Aunt Polly knelt and prayed for Tom so touchingly, so appealingly, and with such measureless love in her words and trembling voice that he was weltering in tears again long before she was through.

Then Aunt Polly suddenly got up and took the framework with the sacred picture from the wall, and drying her tears, she said: "Oh my dear Emily, I'm sorry that I wasn't able to protect your son. I failed, again. As I had failed to protect you from Jonathan." Tom noticed that she wasn't looking at the holy image but at the back of the painting. He could see it was a portrait of two young women sitting by the river. They looked somehow familiar. Perhaps one of them was Aunt Polly. However, hiding under the bed, Tom could not see every detail. He was struggling to understand more, when suddenly Aunt Polly exclaimed: "Oh, Jonathan Sawyer! You made us suffer then, and you are still hunting us! Dearest

Emily, how could your husband change so much from being a kind and selfless young man to becoming so cruel and irresponsible as an adult! Oh, how I miss those careless days by the river together! He was such a clever boy back then... Afterwards, everything changed. Oh, if only he hadn't drunk so much..."

Chris stopped and got curious. This version of the chapter was different! It caught his attention, and he read on to find out more.

Ever since she met him, Emily liked Jonathan and did everything she could to make him smile, even when he began fighting against his demons. But Emily's kindness and patience were not enough: only alcohol could provide temporary relief from his emotional discomfort.

When she got pregnant, she knew from the beginning that things would be difficult. After her marriage, Jonathan began to drink even more. And that was the first step towards hell. Economic difficulties became evident, considering that Jonathan, having lost his job, no longer made money to support the newborn family. To make things worse, he got into serious trouble when stealing became his only solution.

Emily knew that she couldn't tolerate that situation. Her sister Polly was the only one by her side and helped her through every decision she had to take. Then Tom was born. The baby cried a lot and soon showed he

was not easily tamed. The more he cried, the more Jonathan would get mad and fall into alcohol. And then one day he left, never to be seen again, and slammed the door shouting: "I am a failure as an artist, man, and father." Emily cried a lot. She was pregnant again. Her physical and psychological pain made her feeble, and Emily repeatedly asked her sister Polly to take care of her children, in case something would happen to her. And something terrible happened: she died giving birth to Sid. It was then she made Polly promise: "Look after my children". She knew perfectly that she could not count on Jonathan. Then Emily passed away. "Oh, Jonathan, if only you had not thrown your talent away and hidden behind the bottle! You ruined your life, my sister's life, and your family! You made her die!" said Aunt Polly. When Tom heard those words, he instinctively emerged from under the bed, as white as a sheet. In the dim light, Aunt Polly was startled and about to faint. She thought she had seen a ghost, but Tom hugged her and sobbed: "Aunty, now you have to tell me what you know." It all happened so soon. She had been crying for him, and now there he was! Right before her. That little rascal! She wanted to scold and smack him, but she hugged him back instead and started crying. She opened a drawer and took out a letter without saying a word. It was from Villerville. Aunt Polly said: "I am sorry Tom. It will be very painful". First she told him about her sister Emily and then she said "This is the only thing I have which belongs to your father." Tom

had not interrupted her, but then he grabbed the letter from her hands, and he started reading very eagerly:

Dear Polly,

I know how much I made you all suffer. I don't expect you to understand, but I am begging you not to destroy this letter and one day, please give it to my dear Tom.

I know how I treated my devoted and sweet Emily. I know I made her suffer. And with her, my beloved son, too. I apologize to you for this, and I hope you will forgive me one day. When I left Missouri, I didn't realize what I was doing. Alcohol was my master, but soon, I started to feel how despicable I was. I had thrown all I had away: my talent, family, and life.

When I arrived in Europe, I started a new life. I met a lot of artists, among them Édouard Joseph Dantan. I started by wandering around Europe, and eventually, I settled down in Villerville, where I began to paint. I was thrilled again when I saw someone could appreciate my skills, and I was able to sell my paintings. But still, I can't find peace because the memory of my young family keeps hunting me. I have not touched a bottle for ages and don't intend to touch one anymore. I miss you all. I miss my Emily. I miss the days we spent by the river when my demons hadn't visited me yet. Please forgive me. And if my son one day wanted to meet me, tell him I live in Villerville.

Yours faithfully

J.S.

As soon as he finished reading, Tom had tears in his eyes. He wasn't sad, though. The feeling inside him was just anger. "My father is a coward! How could he abandon us? How could he do this to me?" All Aunt Polly could say was: "The choice is yours now."

"Come on, Tom! Be a man!". Chris would not meet his father either. He knew well what it meant, what it was like when people looked at you as the son of a man who had done what his father had. It was hard to carry on and fight prejudice. Hiding in his oversized hoodie was an option. Then Chris moved on.

Tom didn't think twice and replied: "No, Auntie, I don't wanna know anything about that filthy liar! I am fine, even without him. Aunt, you are my family! Please, don't send me away! I promise I will be good! I don't wanna live anywhere but here, with you".

Aunt Polly burst into tears at those words. She couldn't believe that Tom could open up like this with her, especially knowing how much she had to struggle daily considering his bad temper. Then, there was silence and a long, tender embrace. They both needed it.

"Oh, sweetheart, I'm sorry that I never show you how much I love you, but, you see, it doesn't mean I don't care for you. There are so many

things we could do together." Tom lowered his eyes to the yellowish planks of the wooden floor. He hoped Aunt Polly would not ask many questions about the fact he had run away. At least not now.

"Mmmmm, I think you and I will have a lot of things to talk about, starting from your silly decision of running away," Aunt Polly said while trying to understand his sheepish look. But instead of questioning him, she started chuckling when she saw how bad he felt about it.

"You see, dear aunt, I would like to stay here tonight, but...."

"But?" echoed Aunt Polly, sounding curious and sorry simultaneously.

"Huck, Joe, and I are hiding on Jackson Island. We just wanted to forget about our problems and create a new world, a world just for the three of us where we could be the protagonists and just like pirates do, we could face destiny and defeat it counting on our friendship."

Aunt Polly didn't quite understand, but she was struck by Tom's courage to open his heart and tell her the truth.

However, she remained silent to show Tom she was into his tale. He knew it, and so his eyes glowed. He moved on, adding details about his adventure on Jackson Island. He sounded confident and calm, as if Aunt Polly was not only an adult but his best friend, in other words, someone he could trust and tell everything to.

Even if it was so late, neither of them was sleepy. On the contrary, they were eager to know more. Tom wanted to know everything about his

parents. He asked her so many questions... Not even Mr Dobbins would have been so obstinate. The night was quiet, and their voices were the only sound when suddenly there was a noise. It didn't come from Aunt Polly's room. Were they steps? Perhaps voices? The sound was getting louder and clearer...



CHAPTER V

Mr Winnie's steps got closer and his voice became louder and louder: "CHRIS!-CHRIS! It is late, and we are about to close. Do you want to spend the night here?" The library was empty now.

Chris slowly opened his eyes and looked for Aunt Polly and Tom, but all he could see was a book before him. "Oh, sure, Aunt Polly!". Mr Winnie gave him a stern look: "What are you talking about? Do I look like Aunt Polly?"

"Sorry, Mr Winnie! I... I fell asleep again. I was dreaming. What time is it?"

"It's 4.58! I know you were dreaming. I hope your dream was a pleasant one, at least"

"Are you kidding me?! I must hand in this essay by 5. Oh, no! Please, please! Tell me it's not true! I want to hide and rush to Jackson Island!"

Mr Winnie touched Christopher's shoulder: "You don't need to hide. Don't worry! I know you are not that bad after all. I have written an essay for you! And now, go! First, Mr Miller and then, young man... I guess that

girl sitting on the bench is waiting for someone... a young boy named Chris."

Chris's eyes were wide awake now. New vigor in his veins! "Sweet dreams are made of this. Who am I to disagree?" he sang, taking his laptop, grabbing the paper, and flying away as fast as the speed of light.

"Mr Winnie, you are my hero!"