

## **The dream**<sup>1</sup>

One of the sweetest dreams I had was of the prettiest little girl who loved me with all her heart, when I was still very young myself, perhaps 6 or 7. I recall she was about my own age, maybe younger. I had forgotten all about her until one day, on an impulse, I thought of visiting my favourite spot in the Botanic Gardens.

This was the “5-dollar tree,”<sup>2</sup> a grand old tembusu (*Fragraea fragrans*), which blossoms twice a year, in May and in October. When it blossomed, it was beautiful, like the cherry blossoms of Japan. It was an unforgettable experience, because its picture is permanently etched on the back of every Singapore five-dollar bill.

After gingerly balancing my walk on the low branch, I would straddle on the branch’s lowest curve, and happily imagine a boy’s dream of a being powerful warrior on a horse or dragon. Then, she came along, the sweetest friendly face I remembered, and with a gentle friendly voice. She came up to me like she had known me for a long time.

“So, what are you dreaming of?” she would often ask whenever she visited me at the low branch of the tembusu. At first, I thought her presence was intrusive and annoying. She distracted me from my grand dreams and grander deeds. She forced me out of my dream, just to be with her.

As time passed with her frequent visits, and our laughters and smiles deepen our familiarity, that space around the low tembusu trunk became the heart of the whole garden. For, it is where I learned the sweetest love we could ever know.

We all grow up, learn to work, work to live, live to love. Then, we had children and a house of our own, and my wife and I lived and loved our work of teaching and healing others to be their true selves and to be happy. Old dreams were forgotten, and new dreams visited me.

With my regular falling asleep happily with lovingkindness to all those whom I love, my dreams, too, are often happy ones, of old friends, of kindly teachers and meditation, of wandering around in ancient temples, and even interacting with divine beings whose presence can only be said to be blissful beyond words.

It was one October in the evening of my years that, on an impulse, I decided to visit that 5-dollar tree, just to see it in blossom again. Or, perhaps, just to see if the tree was still there, and how close to the ground the low branch was, and that it had not broken and fallen to the ground.

And there she was, this sweetest looking woman, about my age, but she looked so familiar, as she sat on a mat near the low branch. She seemed to be meditating, but she smiled as I approached. That encouraged me to draw closer, to greet her with a smile and some kind words.

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<sup>1</sup> I had this dream during my afternoon nap on 16 September 2015. It seemed to have been a childhood experience, perhaps the sweetest of my childhood dreams. However, as I wakened to the day, it seems to be more a dream, a very sweet dream that I will remember forever.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ghettosingapore.com/the-5-dollar-tembusu-tree/>.

*The dream by Piya Tan*

When I asked her, "May I sit down?" (There was just enough space for two on the mat.) She gently replied, "Of course, you may." Then, our conversation began, or what I can remember of it. The familiarity was warm, I felt no need to start off with any small talk. So, I straightaway asked her:

"Have we been friends before?"

"I've been alone all my life..." she softly replied, cushioned with that deeply familiar smiling eyes.

"But you look so familiar..."

"People our age begin to look familiar, but memories can be deceiving, you know." And now that familiar tease in her tone.

"I feel like we've known each other for a long time."

"Yes, it feels that way. You've heard of karma, right. It's nice to chat with you, too."

Perhaps, I must have mistaken her for someone I knew dearly. The doubt just passed, as the day grew with exchanges about the beauty of the tree and the place. And occasionally, she would ask if I was truly happy. It was as if she knew what was going on with my life. Very soon, we were laughing, and she was smiling with those familiar warm bright eyes. She did not seem to age when I looked into her eyes.

Finally, in the sweet blush of twilight, I asked her, "When can we meet again?"

"Whenever you like. I will always be here."

When I came again the following week, eager to speak with her, there was no one there. It was almost as if the tembusu was on a desert island floating on an ocean of stillness. Then, I noticed there was a piece of paper stuck in the grooves of the tree bark. From the note, in beautiful feminine writing, her voice seemed to warmly echo with these words:

"Yes, dear, we met when we were young. When our innocence saw no difference between us, but oneness in true friendship. I remember all our meetings and talks, how you, too, laughed and smiled with me.

You were the most attentive person I knew. I've spoken with other boys, but they did not yet know what true love is, much less to talk about it, or to share precious moments together. We were all very young then.

But you and I knew true love well beyond our age. We were always looking into one another's eyes. So we truly knew one another's heart. This is love at its most precious and pure.

I'm happy you still remember us after all these years. Age does not seem to have dimmed the love we knew. In fact, it seemed to be always there when we spoke again together. That's the way I want it to be. That's the way it should always be.

We may never meet again here, but our memories will always keep us together, and happily together. Whenever you look into the eye of your beloved, you will see me there. I am the love you have always known, the love that you are, the love you will always know."

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