

**Dream Scape**  
**Ashleigh Winstead**

I open my eyes and take in the world around me. It's warm, not hot and not cold, just warm. I sit up and look around. It's nighttime, I can hear the noises of night: crickets playing their spiny fiddles, cicadas humming their cheerful tune, and some kind of exotic night bird letting out a sweet soprano note that reminds me of an angel singing a lullaby. I look around me, trying to figure out where I am. I'm pretty sure I'd gone to bed in my dorm room in Columbus to the serenade of honking cars, sirens and the music playing in the room above mine. But there was none of that here. Nothing but the sweet serenity of nature; God's most wondrous creation.

I slowly get to my feet and for once I don't hear the telltale sounds of getting up. I don't feel like a kernel of popcorn exploding with grinding knees, popping ankles, and groaning bones. I just feel...peaceful. It had been a long time since I'd felt such peace. I looked around me and noticed I'm lying at the base of a tree. I stare at the trunk for a second and put my hand to it and I feel warmth in my chest as a feeling of safety washes over me. I smile and put my other hand on the trunk, letting the warmth sink into both my palms.

I slowly lean towards the tree and put my cheek to it. I gasp and jerk back as I hear a slight "thump-thump," almost like a heartbeat. I stare at that ashen trunk for a second before looking up at the canopy of the huge trunk I'd been sleeping under. My eyes widen and the breath in my lungs freeze as I just stare up, my head feeling like it may roll off my shoulders and down any nearby hill. Above me aren't luscious green leaves, or the beautiful splashes of color of fall leaves. No, the great forks of this magnificent tree extend straight up into the heavens, connecting itself with the vast beauty that is the night sky.

The deep purple sky with nuances of black and the twinkle of white stars was breathtaking. I stare up and wonder fills me. I am awestruck by the majesty and beauty of the sight before me. I hear a rustle and I blink, but the tree remains as it first was, it's slender arms reaching straight into Heaven. As I stare, I lean back in close to the tree and again it feels like the tree has a heartbeat. But suddenly, it feels like the tree shivers. I look behind me, and for some reason I know that is where the sun will rise and I turn, leaning back against the majestic God Tree.

I see the glow that signals morning, that silent spill of gold and crimson that bleeds into periwinkle and rose as it dances with the darker hues of the nighttime sky. I feel the tree shiver again and I look back at it, almost like I'm expecting a person to be there. When I turn again and look at the horizon, I notice that something is off about this dawn. The gold and crimson aren't mingling with the dark violet, black and navy of night, but rather drowning them out, choking the life out of them and taking their place across the sky.

The white stars above shut their eyes, no longer gently blinking at me as I stand under the tree, both my hands clasping the smooth bark. Fear shoots through me as I watch the parade of bright colors take over, like a conquering king taking hold of his land and seeing if it is good. As those stifling hot colors rise up and come closer to me, I press further and further back against the tree, seeking protection and refuge. The crickets have abandoned their fiddle playing, the cicadas are no longer humming gently for me, and that angelic bird that sang its lullaby to me has ceased to sing. It was replaced with loud, booming noises, like drums of war from ancient times and barbaric noises of clashing swords and screams.

I hide my face against the smooth bark of the tree and tremble, my fear consuming me. The colors are so hot as they inch closer and closer. No longer beautiful, like a ruby necklace in a gold setting with a glorious golden chain, but like fire and blood, the heat of battle; the battle for survival. I feel the scorching colors first on my bare toes and feet and then whimper as they climb up to my shins and knees. It feels like I'm on fire, like any moment now I'll burst into flames and become nothing but ash.

I feel the tree behind me tremble and I put my hands up in front of my face, trying to protect both myself and the God Tree. It's no use...I can feel the scalding heat moving higher and higher up my body and I hear the sizzle of the roots of my beloved tree as the heat of those colors touched it. As the blazing colors reach my face, agony washes over me. Pain and fear take hold of me and toss me around like a ragdoll or a piece of paper in a hurricane. I scream, reaching for the comfort and safety of my God Tree. I open my eyes and find my tree is nothing but a skeleton now. No comforting smooth bark, no slender arms reaching into the night sky, and no canopy of stars and cool night. I shut my eyes and give in to the blazing colors that have torn me from my haven.