

## **The Language of Dreams**

The living do not see what the dead see.

A fleeting pinpoint in the flux of space and time—that is what the living see. They gather the tiniest shards of a shattered past into their memories and, with the thinnest lines, sketch colorless images of the future. But the dead see all that has been, all that is, and all that will be. Doubt not. I know whereof I speak, for I am dead.

The living work in the light of day and sleep in the dark of night.

Not so the dead. Until they cross over, they dwell in the gray between time and eternity. They do not sleep but wake. And while they wake, they work, not with hands but with hearts. They work to right their wrongs, so that they may be at peace and then pass beyond. Believe me. I know, for I am dead.

The living talk at one another and keep on talking. Rarely do they listen.

When the living speak to the dead, the dead hear. But when the dead speak to the living, the living do not hear. The living have not yet learned to speak or listen; the dead have. Not

through signs, nor visions, nor speech can the dead speak to the living, but only through dreams. I know, for I am dead.

When I was among the living, I made a discovery. I discovered the precise center in the brain where contentment resides. Furthermore, I deduced exactly what chemical compound would stimulate that center and render the human subject perfectly content with his or her lot in life. I thought my work would eliminate all human discontent, all longing, all contention, and thus would usher in an era of universal happiness and peace. Oh, what fools are the living! I was wrong.

Now that I am dead, I see my discovery would allow the master to tyrannize the slave, the strong to exploit the weak, and those-who-have to deprive those-who-have-not. The oppressed would remain forever content with their lot and have no reason to rebel. Where there is no urge to change, all reform, discovery, and innovation cease. Now I see what I could not see before: discontent is God's greatest gift to humankind.

Before I cross over, I must accomplish one thing. I must eradicate every trace of my discovery from the face of the earth. If I fail, I shall become the greatest scourge that ever smote the human race. Oh, may I succeed, for only then shall I cross over in peace.

Yes, yes, I know. You doubt my words. Why? Because you are living. And the living cannot comprehend. But the dead know. Trust me. I understand, for I am dead.

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"I had the strangest dream last night," Dulcie Dromer said.

"Hmm," Dalton Rayne, her analyst, answered from his leather chair, if you could even call that an answer.

"Nothing actually happened in the dream. I just saw Dr. Weismann holding a folder."

“A dream fragment then.”

“No, I don’t think so. That was the entire dream. But it was unlike any dream I’ve ever had. It had something numinous about it. Something otherworldly. When I woke up, I had this eerie feeling that I had visited another realm.” Just talking about it sent a tingle down her spine.

“And what do you think the dream is saying?”

“I don’t know . . . He was my mentor. Almost like a grandfather. He was eighty-two, but in great shape. Perfect health. They said he died of a heart attack. But I had my doubts. They never did an autopsy. Maybe the dream is telling me something about his death.”

Dalton Rayne set down the pipe he liked to hold but did not smoke during his sessions. “Dreams are always symbolic statements about the dreamer. Perhaps the dream is telling you that your need for a mentor has died. It is time for you to strike out on your own.”

“Maybe. But the folder seemed significant. It must have contained his secret research on satisfaction centers in the brain and how to influence them. He shared his work with me and, as far as I know, mentioned it to just one other person, Dr. Steele.”

“You said that name with a sneer.”

“Well, I don’t like Dr. Steele very much. You know what he did? He took the research of my friend Amalia and published it under his own name without giving her any credit at all. But I guess I’ll have to learn to live with him. When Dr. Weismann was here, Steele was the number-two man, but now that Dr. Weismann is gone, Steele is number one.”

“You were saying you thought the folder significant.”

“Yes. In his will Dr. Weismann left me his intellectual property. But after his death, his home computer was wiped clean. There was nothing on it. Perhaps the dream is telling me to find out what happened to his work so I can continue it.”

Dalton Rayne shook his head. “More likely it’s saying that his work was lost with him. It’s time for you to develop your own folder, so to speak, to find your own original line of research.”

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The living chase after mere semblances of the good, for they do not see the good itself as the dead do. When I was alive, I sought to advance the welfare of humankind. Yet in my blindness I would have destroyed it. The man who murdered me and stole my work deemed fame, wealth, and power good. Upon his death he will think otherwise, I assure you.

The living feed on phantom fruits that only increase the hunger they promise to satisfy. But the dead have eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Their eyes are open, and they are like unto gods.

Impure are the hearts of the living because they see and crave mere imitations of the good. When the dead see the good itself, they desire it alone. That sole, all-consuming desire is purity of heart. Blessed are the dead, for they are pure of heart.

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“Any interesting dreams this week?” Dalton Rayne asked, resting his cheek in the palm of his hand and the suede elbow patch of his tweed jacket on the arm of his chair.

“Only one,” Dulcie Dromer answered. “Again it was more like a snapshot than a movie. A single image. I saw a vial with the label *Tincture of Aconite Root*. And, just as after the last dream, I awoke with an uncanny sense of the supernatural. There was something dreadful, something awesome, about it.” She felt a shudder run through her entire body.

“Aconite root. I’m not familiar with it.”

“Some people think that, taken in very small doses, say, one or two drops, it fights the onset of colds and the flu. But half a tablespoon can cause respiratory paralysis, ventricular arrhythmia, and cardiac collapse.”

“Well, that’s not much to go on. Any idea how to interpret the dream image?”

“I’m wondering if that’s how Dr. Weismann died. Just a little bit of that stuff could have given him a heart attack.”

Dalton Rayne ran his hand over his bald head. “Well, as I told you last week, I’m quite sure this dream is not about Dr. Weismann. It’s about you.”

“But why would I dream of aconite root? And why would the dream image be so powerful? I don’t have any experience of aconite or any associations with it.”

“Maybe it’s about finding the right balance in your life.”

“How so?”

“Since you no longer have a mentor, you have to establish yourself as a scientist in your own right, which will take great effort and dedication. But too much work will kill you, metaphorically speaking, just like this aconite stuff. Life can’t be all about work.”

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The living act but do not see and do not know. Although the dead see and know, they cannot act—except upon the dreams of the living. Why dreams? Because in sleep the living come closest to the realm of the dead. Sleep is their nightly practice for dying. In sleep the living see darkly, as in a mirror. The light of day hurts their eyes, and so they dwell in caves. In sleep they rest their eyes upon dim shadows, the phantoms of dreams.

The blind lead the blind among the living. But in death the people who walked in darkness see a great light. On those who live in the land of the shadow of death light has shined. The dead must work while there is light, yet they can work only through dreams.

When death lifts the veil from their eyes, it lames the dead. It trades strength of limbs for sight of eyes. Imagine a dead man lying on a cot, sitting in a wheelchair, or standing with a crutch, but not walking, and you will have an image of him. Yes, the living are blind; the dead are lame.

The dead speak an unknown language, an arcane tongue, the images of dreams. Let those who have ears to hear, hear.

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“I had another dream, sort of like the other two,” Dulcie Dromer said at their next session. “But this one had an action. A single action. I saw a bottle of red wine, about one-fourth empty, corked with a stopper and sitting on top of a liquor cabinet. Next to it stood an empty wine glass.”

“Mhmm,” Dalton Rayne said, stroking his goatee.

“A left hand appeared—I couldn’t see whose—and held the bottle by the neck while a right hand unstopped it. Then the right hand emptied the contents of a small flask into the bottle of wine and restopped it. At that, both hands withdrew from my field of vision.”

“That doesn’t seem much like the two snapshot dreams to me.”

“When I woke, I had that same mysterious . . . no, *mystical* . . . impression of something from beyond our world, something transcendent.” She felt an almost electric current shoot through her body, just remembering it.

“But there is nothing unearthly about a bottle of wine.”

“I’m not talking about the content of the dream, but the origin. Dr. Weismann drank one glass of red wine religiously every day. For his health. I wonder if someone poured tincture of aconite root into his wine to cause a heart attack.”

With his index finger Dalton Rayne pushed his wire-rimmed glasses, which had slipped down, back up to the bridge of his nose. “Now wait a minute. Let’s respect the integrity of the dream image and not go mixing different dreams together. Besides, you’re a scientist, and there’s no scientific evidence of life after death. You can’t possibly believe in those religious superstitions.”

“I didn’t say I believed in them. But why do I keep having these dreams? They give me an overwhelming feeling of both fascination and dread.”

Dalton Rayne sighed. “Dreams tend to repeat themselves until you get the message. You keep wanting to take them literally as being about Dr. Weismann, which means that you are not understanding them. Instead, you should interpret them symbolically as being about yourself.”

“Well, how would you understand it?”

“We’ve been talking about how you can come into your own professionally while finding the proper balance in your life. It could mean that when you work, you work wholeheartedly, but when you play, you should play with the same involvement. Don’t water down the wine, so to speak.”

That interpretation did not convince her.

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Rob Steele refilled his glass, his third scotch so far.

“I’m glad you all could make it,” he said to three of his guests standing at the hors d’oeuvre table.

“It’s a wonderful Christmas party, Dr. Steele,” a lab assistant replied. “And this sixth-floor apartment is simply stunning.”

“Oh, this isn’t just the traditional office Christmas party. We’re also celebrating my promotion to department head and honoring our dear friend Mort Weismann, whose shoes I hope to fill.”

Just then Dulcie Dromer stepped up to join the small group.

“Dr. Weismann was a wonderful man,” a research fellow said.

“Yes, and a good friend,” Rob Steele replied. “You know, I consulted with him on a paper I’m about to publish. I don’t mean to boast, but I wouldn’t be surprised if I won a Nobel Prize for it. I think I have discovered the global-satisfaction center in the brain and worked out the formula for a drug to activate it. Soon it will be possible to take a pill and experience perfect contentment. Human misery and suffering will be eliminated. For the first time in history the human race will be happy.”

“That’s incredible,” the research fellow said.

“It’s so exciting,” the lab assistant added.

“This is history in the making,” a young professor declared.

You’re lying, Dulcie thought and took a big gulp of wine from her glass.

“Excuse me, Dr. Steele. Where’s your restroom?” she asked.

“Upstairs, at the end of the hall.”

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About to exit the restroom, Dulcie stopped. Didn’t her mother teach her better? No, she really shouldn’t. But, then, curiosity only kills cats. When she opened the medicine cabinet, she



saw a beta blocker, a statin, a fibrate, various antihistamines and decongestants, a cough suppressant, and tincture of aconite root.

Oh, my God. The dream. It's true.

Walking back down the hall, to the right she noticed Dr. Steele's dimly lit home office, with a sliding-glass door to the balcony. On his desk sat an open laptop. Below, the guests chattered, and the music played. All alone on the upper floor, Dulcie stopped. Dare she? There was no one to see her. But what if someone came up and caught her? Perhaps she could make up an excuse, even if nothing came to her at the moment. After the aconite, though, she had to know. She had to. No matter what.

Dulcie hurried behind the desk, shook the mouse, and clicked on the map of the hard drive. Music. Games. Photographs. Videos. Various technical programs. And documents. Scores of documents.

Wait. Did she hear footsteps down the hall? Someone might be coming.

She ran her forefinger over the wheel of the mouse, quickly scrolling through the documents. Mostly work-related files.

There. One entitled "Satisfaction Center." She opened it and began skimming the text. Almost the exact words Dr. Weismann had used to tell her about his research. That had to be it, the file that was wiped from Dr. Weismann's home computer.

Oh, no. Footsteps for sure. Someone was coming. Rummaging frantically in her purse, Dulcie found a flash drive. She stuck it in the laptop, copied the file onto it, and then deleted the file from Steele's machine.

After two more scotches, Steele himself was staggering up to use the restroom. Perhaps he saw Dulcie out of the corner of his eye. He kept walking at first, then stopped, and backed up.

“Hey, what are you doing there?” he cried, slurring his words.

“Uh, I was just going out on the balcony to get a bit of fresh air.”

She pulled out the flash drive and clutched it in her fist, then opened the door and stepped out into the night.

Steele started after her, bumped into the desk on the way, and then followed her onto the balcony.

“What do you have in your hand, behind your back?”

“Oh, this? It’s just a cigarette lighter. I was going to have a smoke.” She was careful not to show it.

“Let me see it.”

“Dr. Steele, I think you’ve had a little too much to drink. Why don’t you go back inside and let me enjoy my cigarette?”

“You were looking at my computer. Now you’re holding something small in your hand. It’s not a cigarette lighter. Is it a flash drive? Why, you were stealing my research!” He shouted the last sentence loud enough for the guests below to hear.

“No. It’s not yours. You stole it from Dr. Weismann.”

“That’s a lie. I merely consulted with Dr. Weismann.”

“He told me he consulted with you. The research was his. You must have killed him and stolen his work. I saw the tincture of aconite root in your medicine cabinet.”

“That’s outrageous. You tell that lie to anyone else, and I’ll sue you for slander,” Steele said, pointing his finger at her but wobbling from side to side.

“He left his intellectual property to me, but his home computer was wiped clean. And now his research shows up on your computer.”

“Give me that flash drive, or I’ll have you fired. I’ll ruin your career. I’ll see that you never work again.” He was shaking his fist now, still unsteady on his feet.

“I’m going to expose you as an impostor. Instead of going to Stockholm for a Nobel Prize, you’ll be going to prison for murder and theft.”

“Give me that flash drive, or I swear to God I’ll throw you off this balcony.”

“This research is mine now. You’ll never get it back.” Once again she felt the tremendous charge of energy from the dreams.

Steele lunged at her, wrested the flash drive from her hand, but in his drunken state lost his balance and fell over the thin wrought-iron railing. Shrieking, Dulcie saw him hit the pavement headfirst. The guests below must have heard her screams as a pool of blood spread out from his skull.

A second after Steele hit the sidewalk, the flash drive he had been clenching bounced into the street. An eighteen-wheeler ran over it, crushing it to bits.

Twenty minutes later the police took Dulcie Dromer into custody. It all happened so fast.

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“Where am I? What has happened?” Rob Steele said. “An excess of light blinds my eyes, yet I see more clearly now than I ever have. Within, I have passed from darkness into light, but all about me is gray. What manner of place is this?”

“Welcome to the abode of the dead,” Mort Weismann greeted him.

“Oh, what have I done in my blindness? I now see my hunger for fame, my greed for wealth, and my lust for power for what they are: empty vanities. What was I chasing? Things more insubstantial than the morning’s haze, a whiff of smoke in the air, or the foam on the crest of a wave. What a fool I was!”

“Do not be disturbed, my brother. Only the wise can see their former folly.”

“You still call me ‘brother’ after what happened?”

“Here all is forgiven the living, who know not what they do. At last my work is finished. Yours is just beginning.”

“I am eager to set about it. My only desire is to put things right.”

“Do not forget the one wrongly accused of murdering you and stealing your work.”

“I will do everything within my power.”

“Your power is that of the dream. Use it wisely. I must cross over now to eternity, where I shall meet you again. Peace be with you, my friend.”

“And with your spirit. Farewell.”

At that, Mort Weismann embraced Rob Steele.

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“Thank you for posting my bail,” Dulcie Dromer said. “I could never have afforded it.”

“Well, I remember what it was like to be in the early stages of a career. Just don’t skip out on me, okay?” Dalton Rayne said, joking.

“Don’t worry.” Dulcie laughed.

“So, how are you doing after everything that has happened?”

“Well enough. I mean, even though I didn’t like Dr. Steele, I certainly didn’t want him to die.”

“Yes, that was a terrible accident.”

“And I’m very upset that Dr. Weismann’s research has been lost forever. I think he was counting on me to continue his work.”

“But you will develop your own research interests in time.”

“Maybe I should be worried about the trial, but I’m not. They can’t prove that I pushed Dr. Steele off the balcony, and now that the flash drive is destroyed, there’s no evidence that I stole anything from his computer. I have a strange sense of peace about it all.”

“Well, I’m glad to hear that.”

“I had another dream last night. In it Dr. Weismann and Dr. Steele were talking together. I don’t know where—it didn’t seem to be anywhere in the real world. And then they embraced. When I woke up, I was filled with a heavenly peace. It was sublime.”

“Very interesting.”

“I guess you were right. Two dead men can’t embrace. So the dream can’t be literally true. It must be symbolic.”

“Yes. I suspect that Dr. Steele represents ambition, which ultimately killed him, and that Dr. Weismann represents the wisdom gained from experience. It’s good to be ambitious—to have high professional goals and to strive to reach them. But that ambition has to embrace and be embraced by wisdom. Perhaps that is what you’ve learned from this whole experience.”

“Perhaps.”

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The living do not see what the dead see. Although the living are blind from birth, there is no sin in that. Their blindness is not a sickness unto death. When they die, the mud will be washed from their eyes, and they will see. There is nothing hidden that will not be revealed: what is done in darkness will be brought into the light; what is told in secret will be shouted from the rooftops. Yea, the lamp will be taken from under the bushel basket and placed on the lampstand to give light to all in the house. Let those who have ears to hear, hear.

*Glossary of Names*

Mort: short for Mortimer (from *morte mer* = dead sea). By itself Mort means “dead” (French).

Weismann: wise (*weise*) man (*Mann*) (German). He is a dead wise man.

Dulcie: sweet (ultimately from Latin)

Dromer: dreamer (Dutch). She is the sweet dreamer, whose dreams become sweet only in the sense that they turn out to be true.

Dalton: valley (*dal*) town (*ton*) (Old English)

Rayne: counselor (Germanic). He is a mundane counselor, incapable of a spiritual view of things.

Rob Steele: homonyms for to “rob” and “steal”

Amalia: work (a Latinized form of a Germanic name). Perhaps she identified herself with her work, which Dr. Steele stole from her and published under his own name.