

DREAMS OF REALITY

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It was quiet in the room. The rich wood décor and expensive blue carpet partially muted the soft ticking noise of the antique pendulum clock weighing heavily on the silence. Jarod flinched as each second ticked by, reverberating throughout his nervous system, knowing that he should be saying something but not knowing what to say. He continued to sit in his padded leather chair, with his head turned toward the office window to avoid looking at the man sitting less than three feet from him. He concentrated on the slices of the Scottsbluff Monument he could make out through the partially closed vertical blinds, letting the minutes crawl. The hour had to be almost up—he could not stand much more of this. He wished his girlfriend was more indulgent of his little quirks and had not insisted he see a therapist. Things were not that bad! Now on top of everything else, his therapist wanted him to talk with this psychiatrist. “So, Jarod, can you tell me more about the nightmares?”

“Night—” Jarod jerked his head in surprise and made eye contact with Dr. Rustaff. He was stroking his beard and looking at Jarod with quiet deliberation, patiently waiting for Jarod to open up. “Oh, you mean the dreams. I wouldn’t call them nightmares, as such.”

“I see. Earlier you said,” Dr. Rustaff lowered his gaze to the notebook in his lap and his manicured hands flipped back a couple pages, “that you awaken ‘disoriented and unsure of who or where you are.’ That must be pretty frightening.”

“Well sort of, but not really. It’s kind of like...” Jarod looked off in the distance again, trying to visualize a way to explain it. Through the blinds, he idly watched two hikers making their way up the side of the monument while the words formed in his mind. “As far back as I can remember, it’s been like I’m two people, and the dreams are so genuine that sometimes I’m not sure if I’m real, or if the dream me is real. You know what I mean?”

“I’m not sure that I do,” Dr. Rustaff said without looking up, furiously scribbling notes on his pad. “Can you go into more detail?”

Jarod turned his head to see the psychiatrist making prolific notes. That is just what he needed. Now he was going to be a case study or something. He knew he should not have come. Jarod blew out his breath in frustration and the doctor looked up expectantly from his notations.

“Jarod?”

“Give me a minute to think about it. I’m trying to think of a way to explain things so I don’t end up in a padded cell.”

“Please, take your time,” Dr. Rustaff smiled reassuringly. Shooting the cuffs on his designer suit jacket, he made steeples of his hands and settled deeper in his chair. “I took the liberty of scheduling two hours so we would have enough time to get to know one another.”

Jarod managed not to groan aloud as he surreptitiously looked at his watch.

* * *

“Dr. Rustaff?”

“Yes, Margaret,” the psychiatrist keyed the intercom with one hand, continuing to write his case notes with the other.

“Belinda Hizon is on line three.”

“Ah, very good. Have her hold for a minute while I finish this note, then I will take the call. Thank you, Margaret.”

Dr. Rustaff finished his note and did a quick scan to make sure he had covered everything. He nodded with satisfaction before picking up his phone and pushing the blinking button.

“Belinda, I’m glad you called. A very interesting young man you sent to see me. Not what I expected at all from our consultation.”

“I knew you would feel that way, Dr. Rustaff. I have met with him for six sessions now, but I do not have a clue what to do with him. Any suggestions for me? A diagnosis I can work with?”

“Hmm,” Dr. Rustaff leaned back in his chair and swiveled around to look out the window. “You were right on target about his case being unique. We talked for close to two hours, and I’ve never worked with anyone who appears so well adjusted, yet has dreams so intense, so...”

“Delusional? Psychotic? Jump in here anywhere doc; give me something to work with!”

“It’s not that serious,” Dr. Rustaff laughed into the phone. “While his dreams are somewhat odd, and definitely delusional in nature, they are not debilitating. He still holds a job, has friends, a healthy social life—all things given, the dreams are not so terrible.”

“Tell that to his girlfriend,” Belinda said. “His social life is not all that healthy, according to her. Didn’t Jarod tell you she’s about ready to leave him if he doesn’t get help?”

“Yes, as a matter of fact, he did. But remind me, Belinda, if you will, who the client is?”

Dr. Rustaff listened patiently to the silence in the phone’s earpiece, idly watching the traffic go by outside his office window.

“I’m getting too involved again, aren’t I?” Belinda’s meek voice broke the silence. “His girlfriend, Jessie Altwine, was with us in the last two sessions, describing what it’s like when he wakes up, and...”

“I know, Belinda, I know. It is difficult not to get involved, but we have to distance ourselves from our own feelings and concentrate on what is best for the client. Jarod is not too concerned about the dreams, and overall, he is functioning quite well. I would suggest you work on ways for him to assuage his girlfriend’s concerns and let her know that the dreams are not necessarily a bad thing. They may even be healthy.”

“Do you think that’s the case here? He’s had the dreams since his childhood in an orphanage, only now they are getting much more frequent.”

“It is hard to say without more information, Belinda,” Dr. Rustaff interjected. “He could be dealing with a traumatic decision and he is almost ready to make a breakthrough.”

“Maybe,” Belinda theorized into the phone, “these dreams are his subconscious working out how to make a commitment to Jessie and be able to articulate it, and once he does, the dreams will stop. Is that what you’re saying, Anton?”

“I learned a long time ago, Belinda, that the human mind is capable of extraordinary things, so it is entirely possible,” Dr. Rustaff swiveled back toward his desk and the bemused expression on his face turned serious, “but you should be careful.”

“Do you think he could be dangerous?” Belinda’s voice,,,

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