

THE ANALYSIS OF A NIGHTMARE

RAYMOND BELLAMY

Table of Contents

THE ANALYSIS OF A NIGHTMARE.....1
RAYMOND BELLAMY.....1

THE ANALYSIS OF A NIGHTMARE

RAYMOND BELLAMY

This page copyright © 2002 Blackmask Online.

<http://www.blackmask.com>

BY RAYMOND BELLAMY

Professor of Education, Emory and Henry College, Emory, Va.

A FEW nights ago I experienced a very interesting nightmare, and, immediately on awakening, I got up and recorded it, analyzing it as fully as I was able. This is the first nightmare I have had for several years, and I never was especially addicted to them. Two years ago I made an introductory study of dreams,[1] and at that time dreamed profusely, but recently I have been dreaming very rarely, and when I do dream the experiences are not at all vivid. I use the term "nightmare" in a somewhat popular sense to mean a painful or frightful dream accompanied by physical disturbances, such as heart flutter and disturbances of breathing, and followed on awakening by a certain amount of the painful emotion which was a part of the dream. Accepting this definition, the experience which I have to relate was a typical nightmare. A few words of explanation are necessary to give the proper setting for the experience. At present I am teaching in the summer school at this place and my wife is visiting her folks; during her absence, in order to keep from getting too lonesome, I invited one of the young men in the summer school to come and room with me and keep me company. With this as an explanation, I shall copy the original account of the dream as nearly as possible, making a few corrections of the barbarous language I used in the half-asleep state.

[1] At Clark University, 1912-1913.

On the night of August 9, 1914, I went to bed at 11.40 o'clock and was soon asleep. About 3.40 in the morning, the young man, F. K. S., roused me and I awoke weak, scared, and with a fluttering heart; he said I had been making a distressing sort of noise, but he could not distinguish any words. Immediately, I judged that the dream was caused by my lying on my back, and in an uncomfortable position. As a rule I do not sleep on my back, but for some reason I had gone to sleep that way this time. Also, it had been raining when I went to bed, and I had put the windows down, and the ventilation was bad.

The dream, as nearly as it was remembered, was as follows: I was with somebody in a buggy and we drove down a hill, across a little stream, and up the other hill, where we arrived at our destination. I seemed to find trouble in getting a place to hitch, and I had to take the horse out of the buggy and I think take the harness off. I distinctly remember that in the dream this was a hardship to me, as it would have been in waking life, for I am not a good hand with horses, and do not like to work with them. All this is very hazy to me, and I do not know with whom I was driving, but think it was a lady, possibly my wife. There were other people at this place and other horses and buggies. (Could it be called a case of reversion to childhood, in that there were only horses and buggies and no automobiles?) There is a break in the dream here, and we were within some kind of a building where there was a crowd of people. As it seems now, we were around some kind of a rotunda, but this is very vague. The important part seems to be that there were two people, a man and a woman, who were talking very stealthily and earnestly to each other, and they soon drew me into the conversation. It runs in my head now that the man was my father (who has been dead for some years), though I am not sure about this, while there is no recollection of who the woman was. Now it appeared that there was some woman in the crowd who had some peculiar evil influence over every

THE ANALYSIS OF A NIGHTMARE

one and whom everybody feared. This man and woman were planning to slip off from this wicked woman and meet me and the one with me on the road, and in some way, which is not now clear, we were to circumvent this bad woman and break her power. The man explained and explained to me that we were to meet at certain springs which were at the side of the road, but it seemed that I could not get it into my head where they were, and I was afraid I would not stop at the right place. At last I thought I knew where he meant, and told him that I would stop there and wait until he came up, but then I happened to think that he might be ahead of me anyhow, and could stop and wait for me; then I was sure he would be ahead, for I remembered that I had to harness and hitch up the horse and his was all ready. And now we seemed to be getting our horses, and I remarked to him that I was not a bit good hand at working with horses, and he expressed his sympathy that I had this work to do.

Here was a second break in the dream, and I was standing in a hallway, looking through a window into a room. In this room sat my wife and the evil woman whom everybody feared. She had learned our play (I was conscious of this in the dream), and was determined to have her revenge, and prevent us carrying out our plan. She had hypnotized my wife, and had her scared so that she was in great mental agony. I heard her saying, "Now you are a big black cat," or something much like this, at any rate making her think she was a cat and at the same time leaving her partly conscious of who she was. This woman looked exactly like a woman who lives in the neighborhood where my wife is now visiting and of whom she has always been somewhat afraid because of her sharp tongue and unpleasant ways. Immediately, I was filled with a great fear for my wife and with a raging anger against the woman. I broke out into calling her all kinds of names, especially saying, "You devil, you devil," and trying to get through the window to her. I tore out the screen, but had a great deal of difficulty in doing so. When I had finally succeeded in tearing the screen out, I threw it at her head, but she did not dodge, but sat boldly upright and seemed to defy me. Then I tried to jump through the window to get to her, but was so weak that I could not do so; this seems strange since the window was not more than three feet from the floor. I was making unsuccessful attempts to get through, and was railing at the woman when S. awoke me. I awoke weak, and for some time continued to feel frightened, though not enough so to keep me from talking and writing out the dream. I got up and put up the windows (since the rain had stopped), and about this time a very fair explanation of parts of the dream came to me. I immediately told it to S., in order to keep from forgetting it, and then decided to write it down, which I proceeded to do.

Parts of the dream seem to analyze very nicely, but there are parts which seem to resist analysis; I did not try to force the analysis but gave only the part which came spontaneously. In the first part of the dream I was driving in a buggy, I crossed a creek and had trouble with unharnessing a horse. Several times recently, I have mentioned the fact that I never liked to work with horses, even when on the farm at home. I do not remember of having mentioned this fact on the day of the dream, but Mr. C. had stopped in to call on me that evening and had mentioned that he drove in in a buggy. I had not seen the buggy and had wondered what he did with it, and had not remembered to ask him. He had also told me that he was going to a place called Yellow Springs; I knew about where Yellow Springs are, but could not quite place them and had tried to figure out what direction he would go. This seemed to come out very clearly in the dream, when I was trying to find out where these unknown springs by the side of the road were. I had related during the evening how I recently fell into a creek with my clothes on and this probably accounted for the creek over which I drove in the dream. In the dim second part of the dream, the rotunda seems to have resembled the chapel of the new college building which is being builded, and about which I was talking that afternoon.

The last part of the dream seems to have been the important part, and in it several of the Freudian mechanisms show up very plainly. Just before going to bed, I had read an article about Vera Cheberiak, the Russian murderess of the Mendel Beilis case, and how she is now engaged in suing different people for slander. The article had described her as coolly and impudently sitting up in court and seeming to realize her power over her enemies, and it had also made a point of the great fear in which she is held. I had read another article about the city of Salem, which has recently burned, and I had remembered that it was the "witch" town of colonial days where people were supposed to be turned into black cats. I had read still another article, descriptive of country life, which described how a man had climbed a tree after a cat which was eating young robins. I had just a day or two before received a

THE ANALYSIS OF A NIGHTMARE

letter from my wife, which contained the news that she was going to visit this woman whom she fears, but whom she must visit because of their social relation. As already mentioned, the woman in the dream looked just like this one, and it will readily be recognized that the dream woman was a condensation of Vera Cheberiak, a Salem "witch," and the woman whom my wife fears. The fact that she was hypnotized into thinking she was a cat would naturally accompany the Salem witch, and the cat in the apple tree, concerning which I had read, might also have entered the dream. Aside from these, there is another element which may have been instrumental in causing my wife to be punished by thinking she was a cat. I once saw a woman who was suffering from melancholia who thought she was a cat, and her mental suffering seemed to me to be about the keenest of any that I have ever observed, this possibly caused the dream-making factor to represent her as thinking she was a cat. The hall, window and screen are also easy of explanation. That evening I had examined a window which opens from our bedroom into a hall, and had wondered whether we would continue to keep it curtained this year or take the curtains away. When I put down the windows to keep out the driving rain, I had had trouble with a screen much as I did in the dream.

The heart of the dream seems to be in this last scene. That morning (it was Sunday) I had very unwillingly, and from a sense of duty, gone to a tiresome and long-drawn-out church service. I had become so fatigued during the service, and so disagreed with some of the things the preacher said, that I was conscious of a mild desire to swear and throw something. I had humorously mentioned this fact after the service, but there was quite an element of truth in the jest. The dream gave me the chance of my life to fulfil this desire, and I seized the opportunity by breaking into a stream of profanity (not very successful profanity, I fear, as I never use it when awake and therefore was not in good practice) and throwing the screen at the woman. But was there not a deeper meaning than this in the dream? I think so decidedly; it seems that it would be a lot of trouble to construct such a tremendous nightmare just to give me an opportunity to swear and throw something, because a preacher had been somewhat tiresome. There was evidently a deeper and more subtle wish which was also fulfilled. That evening I had walked up the railroad track with a crowd of young people and where the paths crossed we had all split up and gone different directions. Two young ladies had gone back to their boarding places across the campus, and I had suggested to the young fellow with me that we go along with them. However, he objected, and we walked back down the railroad track. Now, it had occurred to me that he probably thought I was not within my bounds as a married man when I wanted to walk back with these young ladies; something of the same idea had come to me that day when some one had said in a conversation, "Professor B. is the most satisfied man on the campus whose wife is away." I had wondered if they thought I did not care for my wife and vaguely wished I had some way of showing my love for her, and, more than that, these suggestions had very naturally made me wonder if I really care for her as much as I should. I could not have asked for a better opportunity to serve and show my love for my wife than the dream gave me, and at the same time it assured me of my affection for her. There is still another element of repression in this and that is that I have for some time been wanting to forcibly express myself against the unpleasant ways of this lady whom my wife so fears. In the dream, I very freely and fully followed this desire.

This far I can go in the analysis and feel sure of my ground. It will be noticed that I have not resorted to symbolism, and have made very little technical use even of the Freudian mechanisms. I could very easily plunge into symbolism and more elaborate analysis, but should I do so I fear I would be in the same condition as a bright young scholar who made an elaborate study of Freudian theories. He expressed himself by saying that it was a "chaotic inferno." This analysis will seem very unfinished to many of the well-trained readers of the JOURNAL, and so, in a way, it does to me, but it may be interesting as the work of a layman rather than a trained physician. I have not used the word "sexual" in this paper, but the reader can judge for himself if the impulses would come under this heading, either in the more narrow use of the term or in the broader meaning which Freud has given it. For myself, I see no possible objection in employing the word "sexual" in this connection.

The uncertain parts of the dream are as interesting in a way as the others. Why did I not know with whom I was riding, and why were the persons with whom I talked more certain in their identity? Here, of course, is the place where it would be easy to find a repression if such existed and I believe if it did not exist. Whether there is such a repression there or not I do not know, but I see no necessity for considering that there is one there just because

THE ANALYSIS OF A NIGHTMARE

there is a dim place in the dream. In the study which I made of dreams a year or so ago, I became convinced that there is a principle of dream-making which has not been noticed. I will throw out a suggestion here in the hope that some one will study it further, but will give no elaborate discussion in this paper. Briefly, it is that only those things appear in a dream which are necessary to express the meaning of the dream. A few illustrations may make this clear. Every one has noticed the rarity with which colors and sunshine appear in dreams; I have found, however, that colors and sunshine always appear if there is any necessity for their doing so. Some one dreams of a melon and looks to see if it is ripe; he sees the red color; he dreams of a stream which he thinks is a sewer and smells it to see if it gives off an odor and finds that it does; he dreams of pulling his fishing line to see if there is a fish on it and senses the pull of the fish; I have examples in abundance which go to indicate that taste, smell, tactual, kinaesthetic, color sensation or any other kind will appear in a dream when they are called for to complete the meaning of the dream, but they are not common because they are very rarely needed. Even in waking life we rarely think in these terms. If this little principle prove true, it would be easy to understand why certain parts of a dream are dim without going to the doubtful process of positing a repression. The persons in the dream were not recognized simply because there was no need for them to be; the dream expressed the pertinent meaning just as well without them as with them. They were observed just as many of us would observe the occupants of a street car in waking life; we could possibly not describe, even partly, any one of the occupants of the car which we used on our way to the office or home.

Before leaving this nightmare, I want to call attention again to the somatic elements. I was lying on my back and in a cramped position, the air was closer than usual, and my circulation was naturally deranged. When I awoke I was strongly inclined to give the physical elements a large amount of the responsibility for the dream, and I have not found occasion to change my mind in this matter. I think that even the inability to jump through the window in the dream was caused by the weak and exhausted state of my body, due to the poor circulation and cramped position.