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Dream Therapy

When I walked into Dr. Goodman's office last week for our tenth session, he could see that I was angry. My foot tapping, my eyes steely, I stared at the wall above his head.

"You look angry, Mark. What's going on?"

"Well, in our last two sessions, I talked about how angry I was with myself for things I'd done wrong, for letting Roselyn down."

"Yes, and what about now?"

"Now, I'm angry at her, for ways she let me down."

"In what ways did she let you down?"

"By keeping emotionally distant from me, by walling herself off from me."

Dr. Goodman leaned forward. "If you were to have a therapy session with her now, could you tell her that?"

I was puzzled. "Well, yes," I said, "but that can't happen."

"Remember that poem shared about you and her?" he countered. "I believe the title was 'Descend to Me in My Dreams.'"

"Yes I remember. What about it?"

"What if you were to conjure her up in one of your dreams and have a session together there?" I looked skeptical, so Dr. Goodman continued. "I recall too advice you have given to your clients, namely, 'what's the worst that could happen? I think you ought to give it a try. You can have me in the session too, if you wish.'"

After a long pause, I responded, "Alright. I guess I can give it a shot. What have I got to lose?"

"There you go," said Dr. Goodman, his voice brimming with enthusiasm. He was in full cheerleader mode now. "That's the spirit!" He paused, then added, "What else would like to say to her in that session?"

"Well, I think I'd want to talk about how we could have made things better, after we'd first taken the time to get our anger out. Then I'd want to know what she needed from me that I didn't give her, or give enough of. I'd want to talk to her about my hopes and dreams, and listen to hers."

"I couldn't have framed an agenda for your session any better myself. You and Roselyn will have plenty to talk about. Keep in mind that much of your writing since she died has focused on your efforts to engage with her in a kind of therapy to improve and heal your relationship. This is your chance to include her in those efforts, something you didn't get to do while she was still alive. I wish you well."

As I left his office, I felt confused, my head spinning with so many thoughts and emotions. And yet, I also felt excited and strangely hopeful.

For the next three nights, I went to bed determined to dream of Roselyn. She did not appear. I thought I might be trying too hard and decided not to press the issue.

On the fourth night, she entered my dream. We were arguing about the Temple service commemorating the Holocaust against the Jews of Europe by the Nazis. My role in that service

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as a member of the Temple Ritual Committee was to organize six of our Religious School students to each carry a candle up to the front of the sanctuary in memory of the six million Jews murdered in the Second World War. I had selected these students and arranged the order in which they would bring up their candle.

Roselyn said, "You have to call their parents to remind them of the proper dress code for going up to the Bimah. You don't want some of the boys wearing tee shirts or the girls wearing shorts."

"The parents know what proper attire is for the service. Why do I have to remind them?"

"Because you don't want to leave it to chance. It's six calls, it won't take long."

I made the calls and then woke up. Even though we'd been arguing, it had been nice spending some time with her.

The next night she came to me again. We were cuddling in bed, about to make love. Wherever she'd come from, she went back before that happened. I woke up hugging her pillow.

The following night I dreamed I had just gotten home from work. Roselyn was in the kitchen getting dinner ready.

I said, "Do you remember agreeing to counseling for us after our daughter got married?"

"Yes," she replied. "But that was when I was still alive. Now we're in different worlds."

"True enough, but you're here with me now in my dream, so we can have counseling in this dream space. I have a therapist Dr. Goodman, he's very good- no pun intended." She smiled. "He offered to be with us to guide our session. If you want the hospice social worker you saw when your mom died to be there too, you can ask her. That's up to you. I will tell you that I believe Dr. Goodman is fair-minded, so it won't be like two against one."

"That's fine just having him. I trust you on that. I guess I'm willing to try this. So what happens now?"

"Well," I said, "I'll get in touch with him, and we'll either have the session in this dream or a later one."

Roselyn nodded in agreement. Next thing I knew we were sitting in adjacent chairs in Dr. Goodman's office. After introductions, he said the floor was open for us to discuss whatever we wanted.

I began. "Roselyn, you know all those times we got angry with one another?" She nodded. "We rarely talked it through. We'd eventually make up, but not deal with the problem."

"I thought you were OK with that."

"Well, I wasn't! We should have talked things out."

She was quiet, seeming to mull over what I had just said.

"You would shut down," I continued, "when I was angry, you wouldn't let me get through to you. And, when you were angry with me, you often gave me the silent treatment, like your mother did to you."

"I didn't want to waste our time arguing."

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I took some deep breaths before going on. I wanted to find the right words and tone so as to be direct without being overly critical.

"Yeah, I get that. I'd feel that way too sometimes. But, can you see it would have been better, healthier for us to have opened up more to each other?"

She had tears welling now in her eyes. "I suppose so." She paused for a long time. "I was afraid of losing you."

I reached over and took her hand. "I know," I said softly. "My love, I wish you'd said those words to me before. Then I would have told you that wasn't going to happen."

"How can you be so sure? What if you couldn't keep that promise?"

"Fair enough. I would have shown you in my actions. I think I did. I know that we had our share of rough times, but it was all said and done, I was still there, by your side. I chose to be there."

"That's true," she responded. "But what if our opening up drove us apart, and I lost you?"

"You're right, there would be that risk. But I think it's one worth taking, one that might bring us closer together, not further apart. Look, we're having a tough and honest talk now. No one has left the room, and we're starting to connect again on some deep things."

"Yeah, I guess. I have to admit, I thought I'd be upset by this, but for the most part I'm not. I actually feel pretty good about it."

"Me too." I smiled and she smiled back. Dr. Goodman complimented us on our making a good start and said we'd meet again next week.

I woke up then, feeling both exhausted and exhilarated, like I would after having an intense physical workout. I was eager and impatient for our second session.