

# DREAMS OF THE DEAD

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## CHAPTER III

ACCEPTING the admonition of my old friend, as well as taught by my own common-sense, I did not allow my thought to dwell on any mystical matters for three days after the last experience. I busied myself in the most practical ways; nor did I mention to any one the new theories of life and death so strangely communicated to me. I had no wish to be looked upon as a lunatic. Indeed, I had banished the whole subject so entirely from my mind, that it was quite a shock to find myself, in the middle of the third night, again away from my body, and to bear the greeting of my friend:--

"I want you to try your powers of astral vision to-night, and also to accompany me on a little journey."

With these words I felt myself drawn through the air at a rapid rate, and for the first time while in this state realized my power of vision. The figure by my side was a refined image of my friend Barton, who had given me his name in our last interview. In life he had been a lively, jovial fellow whose face had not belied his real character. He had been self-indulgent, sensual, a lover of the grossest forms of animal enjoyment. Now his countenance expressed only care-worn anxiety, sorrow and remorse, but, withal, a patient resignation to fate. Looking away from my companion the air seemed to me full of forms rushing in every direction; but with such swiftness did these figures glide, I could only now and then obtain a glimpse of their faces, and by those I could distinguish I was not tempted to peer closer. Malignant leers, savage scowls, idiotic stupidity and inane smiles, were the prevailing characteristics of all the ghosts that I could see as we swept along. Suddenly there seemed to be a pressure upon my left arm,--my friend was at my right,--and in looking to see what caused this I recoiled in horror. My pen cannot describe the distorted form with the devilish face that forced itself closer and closer upon me. Gustave Doré, in putting on canvas the satanic grins and malicious mouthings of the imps of Dante's "Inferno," does not approach the delirious venom exhibited by this loathsome object now attempting to seize my arm. Barton noticed my agitation, and, with one strange ejaculation, drove my unwelcome neighbor away.

"Who was he?" whispered I.

"That was a foul vampire--the most loath-some form of an astral body. I am sorry you should have seen one of those devils so soon. You will meet with many dreadful shapes, but with few so repulsive as this one just encountered. These astral forms of the dead represent the sum-total of thought contained in each parent brain of the physical body. If that thought in its aggregate has been justly inclined, no matter how much the influence of earthly passions may have led the subject away from spiritual truth, the astral figure will not be abhorrent; it will only call forth pity, and in the purified heart, love. But a large proportion of the flitting shapes now around us, are only temporary forms of mortal men and women who possessed no saving spiritual qualities. These spectres are animated by no higher principle than the simple animal

soul. Hovering near the earth, the little life remaining to them will soon be spent. Others are like myself, trying to conquer earthly desire, that their higher principles may be freed for further spiritual progression. Then a few are empty shells, retaining the animal soul, but whose real selves have already gone to heavenly rest, in order to gain fresh strength for further earthly experience."

Perceiving that my companion did not voluntarily inform me further, regarding what he had termed *the vampire*, I did not press him on that point, though I could not rouse my interest at once to all that was so new to me; for the abhorrent image of the ghoul, with his lolling black tongue and bloodshot eyes, seemed to haunt my thought to the exclusion of everything else. What if, on my return to my room, I should find that cruel beast with my body, helpless on its couch, bereft of its guardian spirit! Barton noticed my disturbance, and gave me some slight comfort by the assurance, that no ghoul, vampire, or dangerous spirit of any kind, could penetrate the aura surrounding an earthly body, unless that aura contained a congenial thought-atmosphere. "These ghosts we see about us are following thought-inclinations toward receptive abodes in the brains of mortal beings, who are at this hour plunged in slumber. They will be busy until waking hours, weaving curious, thought-patterns in drowsy brains; and the results of this idle employment of time-weary spirits will be told as strange dreams by the recipients. I was on a foolish errand of this kind when I first discovered you in astral form."

"And who were the other ghosts with you that night? There seemed to be a throng of airy figures."

"All were astrals of the dreaming dead; but they were not all such spirits as you should encourage. You are not yet blessed with a finished will; and several of the souls present that night would have been most glad to take advantage of any yielding of your intent toward the wrong, to develop any unworthy thought you might cherish."

"Then obsession is a fact?" I asked.

"In very rare cases, yes. When the will of man or of woman is totally weak, it is possible for a strong spirit to enter the body of such an imbecile, for a short time, and use it as an instrument for material pleasure and sin. In cases of alcoholic abuse on the part of subjects with exhausted willpower, the danger is very great that the astral body of some waiting, wicked intelligence may take possession and hold devilish carnival, until a waning vitality calls it back to its own decaying carcass."

During this intercourse of thought, which could hardly be called a conversation, we had been moving through the air with a rapid, though almost imperceptible, motion. I had distinguished nothing above or below me. My attention to the ideas presented by my spiritual comrade were only occasionally distracted by some especially disturbed features of a passing ghost. It is not strange that my whole being was agitated by these new and dreadful revelations of a world beyond human consciousness. I had so much to ask my companion that I could not decide where to begin. Strange to relate, I had now no nervous fears regarding my ability to return to my sleeping body; for my friend assured me a single wish would transport me back, as thought travels with speed quicker than a lightning-flash. This prompted me to ask,--

"Why, then, do we appear to be moving through space? If we, at this moment, are beyond the measurement of time, why should it require this apparent journey to reach the destination you have chosen?"

"Merely to accustom you to astral methods, and to give you a semblance of time in which to observe the myriads of flitting shadows of the dead. We will now return and complete the lesson of the night. I wish you to visit our most aristocratic city of the dead, Mt. Auburn."

In a few moments we were there; but it did not seem like the quiet, beautiful retreat that it had appeared to my earthly sense when I had last visited it; for now the avenues and paths were filled with throngs of airy figures, and what struck me with especial wonder, I could see through mounds and blocks of stone as if they were transparent, and I could perceive plainly the different bodies as they lay in the grave. I asked for an explanation of this, and my friend said:--

"You are new, indeed, to the powers of your abnormal sense. Matter, as it is called, is no obstruction to the clear sight of mind. Yonder block of granite is made up of separate millions of atoms and molecules, but the force that holds them in a concrete mass is mind. The power of mind, as exemplified in your abnormal condition, conquers all limitations of matter. You see everything, now, in the clear light of reality. You are beyond the illusion of earthly sense."

As he finished, we came to a tomb with a row of bodies within, all decently reposing in their coffins, and apparently in a fair state of preservation. On one of these coffins sat the figure of a very aged man with a long gray beard. His features were regular in shape and his expression had a certain tinge of dignity; but upon closer examination his face showed such sordid anxiety, and such gloomy sorrow, that I felt sure here was a case that might teach a lesson. I asked my companion if he knew who he was, and what he had been in life? The reply was:--

"I have talked with him many a time in my visits to this place. My spiritual guide, who has done so much to wean me from earthly longings, and who will do much more, I hope, has counselled that poor old miser in vain. He was in life one of the wealthiest men of the Boston of seventy years ago. He has often told me the story of his lowly origin and how, by self-denial and a keen sense of values, he had gradually accumulated property in land and buildings. In life he was a monopolizer of real estate; a hard landlord and close watcher of his own interests. His only ambition was to accumulate land that promised future profit. Hear him talk now. He is so earth-bound that he cannot rid himself of the sordid attraction, though he has the higher principle of his spiritual nature continuously urging him away. When his body was laid in the grave, a mistaken refinement had placed his corpse in an air-tight casket, with preserving fluids injected in his veins; in consequence of which there can be no estimate formed of the date of time in the future when his astral body will be freed from the chemical action of those selfish brain-atoms. He has seen his sons buried beside him; men who increased his earthly fortune by wise investments, in some of whom the spiritual attributes were so developed that they were not bound by earthly desires. They were capable of the effort necessary to free their higher selves from mundane attractions, in order to enter higher stages of progression."

"Did not these sons strive to awaken the higher principle in their father that he, too, might shake off the illusions of matter?" I asked.

"Certainly they did; and they were aided by angels from the upper spheres, but all such labors were in vain. This form before us, when in material body, was possessed of an extraordinary will; his brain-atoms were like iron in their workings. In life no room was given in his thought to any ideas but those of property and profit. Fate has ordered that as he has sown so shall he reap. Mind is everything! All forms of matter recognized by earthly sense are illusions of thought; but so strong are these illusions that the lower individual expression of the one supreme mind is influenced by them. Thus, in the case of this ghost of a once powerful personality, his thought on earth was so strong in the direction of selfish accumulation of the highest values in mortal consideration, that the particles of matter constituting his vehicle of thought--his brain--were firmly established to move in one direction only. When his higher principle can overcome these illusions, they may be liberated for a real existence. But why should I condemn him, so long as I cannot overcome my own earthly longings? Let us address

this poor, greed-consumed spirit. You will notice that we astral shapes use the same modes of familiar talk that we did on earth. We like to deceive ourselves with the idea that we are still in life, and we actually do have a powerful influence over mundane affairs.

"Good-evening, old friend; I have brought with me an astral form, whose body is still in physical vigor, and now lying in peaceful sleep in its home not far from here. We have not long to stay at this present visit. Will you not tell my friend some of your experiences since first you found yourself free from your earthly body? He asks, has the time seemed long to you?"

"Does he not know that time is measured only by earthly heart-beats, and by the passage of mortal events? In the realms of thought there is no time. By mortal measurement, seventy revolutions of the earth around its parent orb have taken place since my poor body was laid in that cemented vault. Since then I have seen my sons and daughters here around me, clothed, as I am, in astral vestments. The companionship of the different members of my family as they arrived, one after another, was comfort to me, but they would not stay. While on earth they had used my money, accumulated with so much care and shrewdness, benevolently, and were not over-anxious to increase my hoard. The good works of my daughters aided in drawing my sons out of the ancestral ruts; and they seemed lured by fancies that I consider vain, to get away from earth. Their astral shells are still here, but armed with no intelligence. Now I am alone. The few powers of thought left me in my present shape are growing weaker, and still weaker; but I cannot leave interests on earth that owe their whole existence to an energy born of that shrivelled brain below me." With these words he pointed to his own coffin, in which nothing could be seen but a few remnants, though the head seemed still intact.

"Are you conscious of any interests in earthly life, or of any of the purposes of that life, beyond those connected with the gratification of self, which in your case seemed to be summed up in the one object of accumulating fleeting earthly riches?" I ventured to ask. "Or in other words, do your brain-atoms form any pictures, except those relating to title-deeds and money-values?"

"When first I came to self-consciousness in this astral form, I did have dreams of other things; but these dreams faded away before I was joined by my eldest son. I could not understand why he talked of higher realms of being. How can I leave to careless hands the result of all my labors! It is the hidden impulse of my shrewd thought upon the mind of my grandson, a leading capitalist, as I once was, that enables him to hold my property together, and to continually increase it. Let those who will follow what they call spiritual leadings, my only wish is to keep life enough in this shadowy form to help my heirs in their efforts to pile up more gold."

At this point my guide suggested that I should return to my body. He gave me one parting word of advice: "Remember," said he, "everything is mind. You, in your earthly form, are not limited by the matter constituting that form; every atom of material tissue is subject to your will as expressed in thought. Keep that thought in harmony with the ideas given from your real self, the unconscious Ego (a living portion of the Eternal Mind), and you will enjoy perfect physical and moral health. I shall see you soon, and we will take another lesson in the astral light."