

Two More Tries At It

by P. David Hornik (July 2015)

1

I know an astronomer. Once there were only about a dozen people in the world who understood the intricacies of his work; but he kept turning further and further into himself, his own investigations, and now there are even fewer, if any.

When he interviewed me about becoming his editor, I explained that, for my part, I have no comprehension whatsoever of his work. But he said that was all right, as long as I could help with the English. In all the time since he hired me, though, he hasn't written a single thing. Yet I've still had to spend many hours in his study—he says my presence helps his concentration, and he wants me to be on hand in case anything does happen.

There's very little room to sit safely in his study. I'm usually hunched up in a chair in one corner, he at his desk by the window. The rest of the floor is taken up by a peculiar setup, a sort of miniature solar system that he made: round a big sunlike globe on a stand in the middle revolve smaller globes that seem to correspond, more or less, to our solar system. At least there's a little, outer, greenish one that I associate with Pluto, a much larger one with not exactly rings but a faint silver aura that I think of as Saturn. On the other hand, there seem to be a lot more of them—it's hard to count exactly—than in our solar system. And there are a couple—one that's just a blur of daubed colors, almost like a floating rainbow; another that's very strange, not round but sort of cone-shaped, and seems, when it comes near me, to be making a low humming sound—that I can't identify at all.

At any rate, I always have to stay alert, because sometimes one of them flies right at my head and I have to duck. They make quite a racket knocking against the walls; I gather that his wife, whom I sometimes hear clanging pots downstairs, is none too happy with the whole business. He sits motionless by the window, watching his experiment; behind his head a real planet, maybe large, gold Jupiter, starts to glow in the bluish dusk. I feel guilty about getting good pay essentially to do nothing, doubtful about this project of his, and concerned that—well, that all the components of his mind might not be holding together. And yet I can't help getting the feeling, as the night deepens and the room grows dark, with only the sun-globe glowing in the center, the busy little balls flying and knocking—his head a grave silhouette with stars behind it—I can't help at least suspecting that some sort of very

serious research is indeed going on here.

2

I know a mystic. He wants me to interpret dreams for him. I told him I know absolutely nothing about interpreting dreams. He said that's all right, I'm an editor, I can put them into writing.

He has me sleep outside on his balcony with him. The idea is that if he wakes up with a dream, he'll be able to wake me up too, and I'll be right there to "interpret"—write it down, in good English—for him. He says he dreams deeper and purer dreams when he sleeps outside.

This has been going on for a few months; but still he's never woken me up to tell me anything. He says to be patient; these things take time. Mystics, I guess, have to sink very deeply into their minds before they can dig anything out of them.

Meanwhile, there's something to be said for sleeping out on a balcony several nights a week. I usually lie awake a lot longer—he falls asleep quickly—than he; I like to see the stars, feel the breezes that drift across my face and rustle the leaves all down the street.

Not long ago there was a particularly beautiful night with a full moon. The light flooded us on the balcony; the chairs and flowerpots were there almost as if it was daytime. It didn't seem to affect him—he's a strange guy, doesn't say much, very routinized in his behavior; soon he was snoring away. But I lay awake a long time, looking up at the sky.

I must have fallen asleep and dreamed, because it seemed to me that the moon had come very near the earth—so near, in fact, that I'd somehow left the balcony and was walking on its surface. I was ankle-deep in a sea of fog; around me bright-colored planets came floating into view—I thought I could make out red Mars, a large, lonely, bluish Uranus with its little flock of moons. I was in ecstasy.

When I woke up, the fog was still there—it was dawn on the balcony. A strange idea was in my mind: I wanted to tell *him* about the dream so that *he* could put it in some kind of shape before *I* forgot it. But as I scrambled up from my sleeping bag, I found that in all the fog I couldn't make him out; and I must have crawled back into my sleeping bag and forgotten about it.

By now, of course, I'm not even sure that the part with the dawn mist on the balcony wasn't also part of the dream. Or at least, I'm led to think that way by another strange thing that

happened.

Just a few mornings later, when I woke up, he was sitting, with a sullen, annoyed look, on the parapet staring out at the street. He told me that during the night he'd at last had a dream—something he couldn't remember clearly anymore, about being in a rowboat in an ocean—but when he tried to wake me up, I lay like a log and the most he could get out of me was a mutter or two. Wasn't this what he'd hired me for? I was very sorry, and told him so.

Now the peculiar thing was that, as I sat and thought about it, I too began to remember things about the night that had passed. It seemed—I don't know how else to explain it—that I had been with him in the dream about the rowboat; only, if anything, I found myself able to recall it more vividly than he. A northern sea ... ice floating in the water, brilliant red clouds.... Yes, I'd been—by now I was hunched in one corner of the balcony, my head deep in my hands—I'd been there in the boat, sitting across from him, our faces shimmering red! And—yes—he'd handed me something...a pen!...and I'd...*written something!!*... I darted over to the notebook beside my sleeping bag, snatched it up and flapped through it excitedly—and, of course, there was nothing but blank pages.

By this time he was looking at me oddly. I turned to him eagerly, notebook in hand; but when I tried to explain, such a jumble of words rushed up in me that...I just said nothing and looked at him.

Unhappy as he was about my not waking up, he didn't fire me. Another full moon is coming; I know he regards the dream about the rowboat as just a preliminary, a prelude. We keep sleeping out, two dark shapes on our balcony. Around us is the night, listening and waiting.

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