

The Call of Isis

By: Olivia Robertson

CHAPTER 2 **OF DRAGONS & MARES' NESTS**

A man is lying in a trance on the 1830 couch in the Castle library. I am seated by him, notebook ready. I have through suggestion conducted him into a land of vision where he has the power to choose his own way. Now, semi-conscious, he can only hear my voice, a voice that guides if necessary. I give advice that responds to his words as he describes his psychic adventure. The experience, he tells me later, has about a quarter of the reality of waking life. But, unlike a vivid dream, he will remember it afterwards. So far in this session all has gone well. Roderick's aim is to be a Knight of the Grael; his chosen character, Sir Percival. His body, that of a strong middle-aged man, is dimly seen in the golden half-light of an autumn evening that filters through heavy Victorian curtains. But his soul is elsewhere and, in this directed journey, reports back every feeling. I do not leave the psychic voyager for longer than a minute. But I know that in true Initiation, not this nursery flight, he would be quite alone, with no reassuring voice.

There comes a pause. All has been pleasant up to now, as he has described his walk through meadows and groves. But he mentions that the terrain is becoming less verdant, the trees scarcer. The land, he says, is waste. Then comes silence. And the silence is oppressive.

As I paused in my own notes, I project into his mind as far as I can. "What is wrong?" I ask.

"It's a dragon," he says.

I do not laugh. After all, a dragon even about as quarter as real as everyday life must be alarming.

"I can go no further", says the man, definitely.

Now I have to make a decision. Shall I bring him back to consciousness of the library? But in this case he would fail his self-appointed test. And he had asked for my assistance because he had failed himself in just such a test previously; and had bitterly regretted this ever since. So I try to remember what big game hunters do on such occasions.

I say, "Look at the dragon straight in the eyes!".

Though I have faith in my own inspired advice, on this occasion it is not at all successful. Quite the reverse.

"That is much worse," says Roderick. "His eyes are like car head-lights".

"Is this dragon going to attack you?"

"Oh no. He just won't let me pass him. When I go to the left, he is to the left. When I try to get round him on the right, he goes there. I can't get by. It is this dragon that made the land waste". I feel that we may sit here for hours unless something is done. In fact, Roderick seems quite pleased in a gloomy sort of way at being held by a dragon. I do not like to suggest his attacking the beast with a sword, for a particular reason. A few days ago our family had had an argument with Roderick over the value of the life of wasps. He regarded it as his duty to kill any who crossed his path. We always rescued any trapped in the house. In fact a day or so ago when Roderick had been helping my nephew make a bridge, they had disturbed a

wasps' nest. The furious insects had left my nephew alone; but chased Roderick across a field and round the garden, much to the heartless pleasure of my young nieces. I could hardly, then, suggest a St. George attitude to this mammoth reptile. In our group opinion, dragons were as valuable in their own way as knights. One suspected some of us preferred them.

Romantically, I invent a spiritual solution.

"How about flying over the dragon?" I suggest, pleased with the symbolism. The soul must grow its wings.

"No," says Roderick. "I can't. Anyway I don't want to."

There is another silence, but this time a pleasant, creative one. Roderick is clearly very active, though not a muscle of his earthly body moves; not even an eyelid quivers. Then:

"I've done it! " he says with enormous satisfaction. "I've got by! I crawled under him".

I felt this a most undignified way of dealing with a dragon; but have to accept this, as it is what he wants.

"What is happening now?" I ask.

"Funny," says Roderick. "I've found a wand. I'm pointing it at the withered grass and plants, and they are all growing!"

Still I want to know what the vision is all about.

"Ask what the dragon symbolizes", I say.

There is a wait while Roderick asks some invisible Helper. Then: "I am given to understand that the dragon typifies Inertia".

Now I feel that I can start bringing Roderick back. But I cannot leave the dragon unaccounted for. These things lurk in memory unless truly understood.

"Look back," I say. "What is the dragon doing now?"

Roderick reports in a puzzled voice: "There is no dragon . . . Ah! I see his empty skin! Yes - and now I see the fiery spirit of the dragon rising high into the air! This soul, having found its freedom, is rising to dangerous heights in the first intoxication of release!"

And this one episode of a trance experience well illustrates the joys and perils of exploring the depths of inner space. Roderick and I had twenty-six sessions together. He began trance vision finding himself an unborn baby in a cave, gazing upwards through an aperture at his sun-sign, Gemini, the heavenly twins. After sundry ordeals - the Initiation of the Fisher-King, a joust with a black knight on a black horse, he won his spurs of knighthood and rode forth successfully out of our shared trance world - and more prosaically, out of the castle in a car down the avenue.

And all this work began because I learnt to help children change their nightmares into happy dreams.

Does it often occur to most people how important sleep is? How strange that we should be self-aware during the day, and totally lose consciousness at night in a mimic death! Life is short enough as it is. How wonderful if we could live as self-conscious beings both during the day and the night. Then, used to these nocturnal trips into the psychic sphere, we would be prepared for the great journey that every soul must make at life's end. Moreover, grief at the death of others would be softened. For how could we lament the death of a friend, when we might meet that very friend alive and well, during the hours of night, in the psychic sphere?

However, the gap between full waking consciousness and the total oblivion of midnight is too great. Strive as one may, one cannot penetrate the veil of sleep and reach through to the sphere we call 'the unconscious'. But is it forever unconscious? When one wishes to move from one phase of awareness to another, the wisest course is to examine the intersecting zone where two levels meet. And this is the world of dreams. Dreams form the many-coloured veil that separates the psychic realm from our own physical existence. Appearing to be a kaleidoscope of jumbled nonsense yet, when the jigsaw is pieced together, another sort of sense is revealed that has the strange attraction of Edward Lear's 'Land where the Jumblies Live'.

When I had studied my own psychic experiences, I decided that control of that sphere could most easily be attained through dealing with dreams. For, I reasoned, if the first step to spiritual development came from controlling the emotions, it was extremely difficult to do this during physical life. This could lead to unhealthy suppression. The best place to deal with the emotions was on that level from whence they sprang - 'the Unconscious.'

Much emphasis has been placed upon the will in controlling feelings. This is the path of power. The mind uses the will in commanding 'lower self' to obey. However, in coping with the magical world of psyche, one learns that the last thing the soul will take any notice of is a command! Like water, the cunning desires find their own subtle way to circumvent rules and orders. And what is not permitted in waking hours will find expression in nightmares, expressing desire-fulfilment fantasies abhorrent to the waking mind.

The way round this, for me, anyway, was to realise that the psychic world was indeed the Land of Heart's Desire, and that only perverted and denied desires assumed an unhealthy expression. This realization for me sprang from faith that reality itself was harmonious and good; and so all that existed in mind and feeling had its own fulfilment in its appropriate sphere.

Therefore I had to discover what I myself really and truly desired. Not a vague aspiration or sense of duty; not instinct; but what I really desired with all my mind and heart. This required some courage, because I might have really and truly have wanted something bad! But I did not. What I really found I wanted was love and beauty and truth. And I felt that so did everybody else, and so did animals and flowers and every being that existed.

Now this gave me the key to dream control. For I was not, by using my mind and will, forcing my soul to give up anything it genuinely wanted. Rather was I allowing it freedom to express its true nature. One has, in a sense, to coax one's soul into enjoying itself, to choose what it really likes. Hence it has to learn to say 'no' to what it does not truly want. And it does not like nightmares! But this exclusion of the unwanted, the irrelevant, need not condemn that which is rejected. For in a dream if one condemns the apparently displeasing, one may be condemning oneself! The dragon in such a case is given an alarming reality. By killing the dragon or exorcising a demon, one may really be cutting off a part of one's own consciousness. And though such a drastic operation may in some cases be necessary, nonetheless one is left mutilated. It is best to find out what the dragon or demon symbolizes - what it has to say. The demon may not be so bad after all . . .

The usual method in dream therapy is for the patient to describe his dreams to a psychiatrist, and have their psychological meaning explained to him. But in this way he is still 'the patient,' passive. He is not active within the sphere of the dream itself. He hopes, when he is cured, not to have any more nightmares. He still cannot control his dreams.

But I discovered that it is possible and interesting to change one's dreams nearer to the heart's desire. To do this one has to bring more of one's waking consciousness through, to impinge on the dream. And this is best done in the borderland of sleeping and waking, at dawn and at dusk. This is the time of hypnogogic and hypnopompic visions.

And, though I learnt this art when grown up, it is best achieved in childhood. With adults I induced trance, and the experiences were aided by my guidance and help. But with children I only had to advise them what to do during sleep, and they obtained the same effects on their own!

With the children in the Castle, the obvious first step towards curing night-time screaming was to have them sleep together. Nowadays the poor human animal is forced into an unwanted solitude at night, unnatural, especially in early years. A night-light and the company of other children is more humane, especially with the very sensitive.

Take the case of Deirdre. Her reason for yelling her head off in her little dark room was perfectly understandable when explained years later. She said that, up to about the age of eight, regularly every night a company of 'witches' stood about her bed! She could see them with her eyes open. They wore black pointed hoods and long cloaks and stood silently gazing down at her. She insisted that she was not asleep. They would only disappear when she screamed loudly enough to get a grown-up to come and turn on the light.

A similar series of experiences used to befall a friend of mine, Fiona, when about the same age, five or six. But her 'witches' were actively unpleasant, and used to pinch her in an excruciating manner! Again, very naturally, she used to scream. And again the grown-ups did not understand why she yelled. She did not try to explain.

My method of coping with this sort of thing was to accept perfectly calmly the nature of such visitations, without suggesting that the child was making it up, or was unhealthy, or should just forget about it. I would explain that the world of night was completely different from the world of day, but real in another way. So naturally it had different laws. But it was not an evil world. It just seemed so when one was not used to it. I said that as it had its own laws, one had best learn them.

The first rule was to remember one's dreams. The next, was to be ready with rules of behaviour. For instance, when one was chased in that world, it was quite useless - worse than useless - dangerous, to try and run away! For in that place the more one tried to run, the weaker one's legs became, the more boggy the ground. The proper way to travel there was to imagine where you would like to be - say up a tree if chased by a tiger - and then imagine oneself there. And there surely one would be. Children can imagine vividly, and find little difficulty in understanding this. They can easily remember these rules when they dream.

The next law was not to be afraid. And one is only afraid when one hates. And one is apt to hate when one is afraid. So it was a good rule to feel friendly and act politely to every creature one met in a nightmare, however horrific it might appear. It would then, by the rules of this odd place, turn into something most unexpected and wonderful.

Another curious law of the dream world was that when one sent out a call for help, a person would turn up. It was not quite fair to send out a call for help to some particular person, because this might be a grown-up crossing the road at night, who might be distracted and get run over! The most important law of all was that in that night world people talked by thought-feeling. And they did things and made things by imagining. Ah! But there was a more important law! In this mysterious world, much more clearly than on earth, there were no accidents. As in fairy stories, if you behaved it would be nice. If you did wrong - it would be very nasty indeed. And then the only remedy was to say you were sorry at once, and not to do it again.

In this, transmutation of the distorted and unpleasant into what the heart truly desires, I myself like the true meaning of the Nightmare. She is a small white horse who sits in a nest made of tree branches. Like the pouka of Ireland, if misused she can carry one over a precipice. But if loved and appreciated, she may grow the wings of Pegasus and carry one to the stars.