

The Dream Clearer

You know you're ready for the Dream Clearer when you find yourself tossing and turning, and your nights are less a balm of rest, and more clusters of z's. The Dream Clearer does two things: it shows you what you've been stuck on, then does a wipe of your subconscious. It's a reboot of the sleeping self. The first stage is denial: you won't even get up for water, so you can't be needing to empty out your unconscious. We have mental clutter, and the subconscious has its own colors, its own wavelengths of light. If, during the day, you could see the clutter that afflicts your nights, you'd be chagrined at how your mind steps around all the messes that are left on the floors of your dreams. It gets harder and harder to chase anyone down. The Gorgons of REM loom, bored with your inaction, unwilling to threaten, since you will not run. The next stage is paralysis: grim acceptance that your dreams have become unmanageable. Knowing you must accept that you cannot change your dreaming is, however, a falsehood. You know this because you go lucid into your dreams, and, against your conscious will, keep on visiting your middle school, where your bed is in the hallway, and students flow and ebb around your pyjama'd self. You're talking, pleading, begging to awaken, unable to rise. After paralysis comes the peace that passeth all undermining. Having been subverted by your dreaming, disturbed beyond all restfulness, you go through days dreading the darks, knowing it will be a contest to navigate the obstructed unconscious, knowing that your dreams are untenably filled with narrowed, bouldered ways: stones in a passway relieved only by tolls. The last straw is when you have to nap. You are not like that; you are productive in the light. Now there is no time. You cannot shop because you have to sleep. Laundry goes unfolded. Night spills into day. Coffee is a joke. Denial, Paralysis, Peace, Naps. The progression is clear: you have to find that number for the Dream Clearer. For weeks you forget to look, your evenings sliding by in a haze of obfuscating chardonnays and taking whole hours to do the dishes. The nights only worsen: you're a veritable spindle on the mattress. The spouse has long since retreated to the den. Finally, you put a note on your dashboard, in front of the fuel gauge. The third time you run out of gas, the metaphor is clear. At home you rifle your files, and then remember you'd left the number where it makes sense: the night table drawer. You make the call. There is, of course, a machine, and you leave your number in the electronic ether, convinced you're being punished for your lack of dream hygiene. You haven't flossed, so to speak, and the decay has to hurt. Three days and long nights later you come home to a message: Tuesday a week. It's longer than you wanted, but at least the appointment is made, and you revert to soldiering on, to necessary naps, resigned to the grit on the floor. Tuesday night you get ready for bed, excited, anticipation thrumming your fatigue like a bass viol. Yes, it's come to this. It's going to hurt to get those entrenched dreams ripped out by the roots. You can't remember the last time you got your mind waxed, and you're so sensitive there that avoidance has been, at least, rational. When it's over, the bill is next to the pillow, and you run down the list: Compilation: so much; Analysis: an astounding sum; Removal: the usual; Disposal, too, has gone up. You used to haunt the itemized list under Analysis, wanting to understand and connect the dots. Now you just write the check. It used to feel profligate to call the Dream Clearer, but you're old enough to understand that sanity has its price.