

OBEY
by Dave Biscella

Camden paced back and forth nervously outside of the the Peterson building, peaking up with anticipation each time somebody exited. Like an impatient lion waiting for its prey, his eyes were glued to the front door. He knew he shouldn't be there, but he didn't know where else to go. He knew he more than likely looked incredibly suspicious, but he had no other options. He walked back and forth frantically in front of that exit for what seemed like hours. College students passing him by one by one, knowing he didn't belong there. But they also knew the look of a desperate man and each one passed by while deciding not to do or say anything.

His ears and eyes perked up each time that exit door opened, like a puppy waiting for their owner to get home, only much more distraught. Then, finally, the right man came out the doors. Camden wasted no time, rushing towards him before his body had even left the building.

"Dr. Ryker," Camden screamed as he made his way to meet him at the doors. He knew any distance between himself and Dr. Ryker could be used by the doctor to make an escape.

Dr. Ryker looked up after hearing his name and his face became filled with fear. He put his head down and started to walk away swiftly as Camden approached him.

"Dr. Ryker, please," Camden pleaded as he chased after him.

Dr. Ryker stopped immediately, accepting that this interaction will not be avoided. "Camden, I'm not sure what part of 'I don't want to see you as a patient anymore' can be translated to 'Wait outside my office and corner me as I leave', but this is highly inappropriate." Dr. Ryker said very sternly, staring into Camden's eyes. "You are no longer my patient. I gave you a half dozen names of other doctors that I highly recommend. I suggest reaching out to one of them. But I must be going now."

“Please, I didn’t know where else to go,” Camden pleaded. This is the reaction he expected to receive from Dr. Ryker, but he knew he had to at least try and talk to him. “I’m begging you, please.”

Dr. Ryker takes a deep breath, knowing he will regret whatever he says next. His options are to deny help to a former patient that he knows needs help or to offer the help and get himself back into a situation he knows he wants no part of. He takes a look around, accepting that he’s in a losing situation either way. “What is it that’s so important, Camden?” The words come out of his mouth before his mind had fully committed to them. After hearing the words he just spoke, he tries to backtrack a little bit. “Let me know what’s going on and I’ll make sure we get you headed in the right direction towards who you need to talk to.”

Camden breathes a big sigh of relief. “Thank you, Dr. Ryker,” he begins. “Are dreams contagious?”

“What do you mean, Camden?” Dr. Ryker asks. “As in, goals or aspirations? I suppose in a motivational poster type of way they can be contagious through leadership and passion.”

“No, like, dreams. Dream dreams,” Camden tries to explain. “While you’re sleeping.”

“Oh,” Dr. Ryker responds, hoping that this interaction is as simple as answering this question. “No, dreams themselves aren’t contagious. However, the overall feeling of a dream may be. If you’re having nightmares due to stress, it’s possible for you to cause stress on the people around you that could in turn cause them to have nightmares as well. Or on the flip side, if you’re in a good state of mind causing good dreams, those good vibes could increase other’s moods, causing the same effect for them. Is that what you mean?”

“Not really,” Camden responds, his skin turning a new shade of pale. The man who had looked incredibly distraught while waiting for his former doctor now looked even more afraid. He knew he shouldn’t be talking about this, and definitely not to Dr. Ryker, but he didn’t know what

else to do. "I'm talking about nightmares. I've been having the same nightmare for a few weeks now. My roommate was on vacation, but as soon as he came back, he started having the same nightmare. The exact same one. Even though I made sure not to mention it to him. It's like it passed on from me to him, but still stayed with me at the same time."

"That's not really possible, Camden," Dr. Ryker interjects. "It's possible you both saw the same movie, or read the same article, that leads to the train of thought that's causing the dream. But the idea of a dream passing from you to him like some sort of virus has no scientific evidence to support that even being possible."

"But it's not just the two of us," Camden continues. "My roommate thought he'd try staying at his girlfriend's place, just in case there was something in the air or whatever causing the nightmare. After the first night staying there, his girlfriend started having the exact same dream. The same nightmare that he and I are having. We never told her anything about it. And she's been having the same nightmare every night since, just like us."

"Camden," Dr. Ryker tries to say calmly. "I'm going to give you the name of a pal I've known for over a decade. He heads up the sleep analysis center here on campus and I'm sure he'd be more than happy to talk to you and give you his thoughts on what's going on. There is more than likely a logical explanation to all of this, and he'll be able to find the common thread that's tying everything together." Dr. Ryker reaches into his briefcase and begins to write the name and number of his colleague.

"Dr. Ryker, you don't understand," Camden says frantically, putting a hand on Dr. Ryker's shoulder. "They're not just nightmares." He looks into Dr. Ryker's eyes and composes himself. "*He* is in them."

Dr. Ryker is overcome with fear. He drops the paper and pen he was writing with, closes his briefcase and begins to walk away swiftly. "Camden, we can't talk about this."

Camden follows after him. "Please, Dr. Ryker. I don't have anywhere else to go."

Dr. Ryker stops instantly and turns to Camden, walking forcefully towards him. "You need to find somewhere else, because I can't. I told you, I can't talk to you about him. Just you telling me he's appearing in your dreams again is already too much. You shouldn't have come here today. Never contact me again, do you understand?"

Dr. Ryker turns and walks away as quickly as possible. Camden stands there in shock, not chasing after him. He immediately regretted this conversation. Even though it turned out exactly how he expected it to, he still knew he never should have said anything. He shouldn't have come today. He shouldn't have waited for Dr. Ryker. And he definitely should have never told Dr. Ryker about the dreams. As he watched Dr. Ryker walk away from him as quickly as possible, Camden knew this was all a mistake.

Dr. Ryker never slowed down. He realized Camden was no longer following him, but he still felt the need to get away from everything as quickly as possible. As he got further away from Camden and closer to his car, his fast paced walk had evolved into more of a sprint. He finally reached his car, threw his briefcase in the trunk and got into the driver's seat. Hands shaking, he finally got the key into the ignition. He didn't know where to go from here, he just knew he needed to get away from here as quickly as possible.

"You talked to him about me," a deep voice says from nowhere.

Dr. Ryker freezes with fear, staring straight ahead. "No, I didn't. He came to me. I didn't say anything."

"I told you never to talk to him about me ever again," the voice said.

"I didn't, I swear," Dr. Ryker pleaded. "He came to me, he mentioned you, and I left. That was it."

"That was too much."

“No, please,” Dr. Ryker begins to frantically sob. “I told him I couldn’t see him anymore. I did what you wanted. He came to me today. I couldn’t do anything about that.”

“I told you to never talk to him about me. He’s part of a plan that is much bigger than you,” the voice says, getting louder and more angry.

“Please, I’ll never see him again. I made that point clear and I’m pretty sure he understands. I will never talk to him....” before Dr. Ryker can finish, he feels a deep pain within his chest. He suddenly feels like somebody is reaching inside him and squeezing his heart. He begins to gag, blood coming out of his mouth as he coughs. His eyes fill with despair. He sees himself in the rearview mirror, looking directly into his own terrified eyes. He accepts that the last thing he will see in this earth is himself dying painfully.

The pain gets stronger and stronger. “You will obey me!” The voice screams, shattering all the windows of Dr. Ryker’s car. Dr. Ryker tries to scream from the pain, but can’t. He tries to struggle, but he can’t move. His insides feel completely crushed. He stares into his own eyes in the rearview mirror as blood begins to pour from them. He should have obeyed him. He can no longer breathe. Staring into his own eyes as if he’s pleading for himself to save him. There’s nothing he can do now. Except for take his last breath.

The struggle is over now.

He should have obeyed him.