

Chapter 1

The Orange Juice

I reached into the refrigerator and drew out a carton of orange juice. This'll taste great!! thought as I wiped the sweat off my face. About to perish from thirst after scrubbing down my RV during the hottest part of the afternoon, I felt so thirsty I didn't even bother to pour a glassful. Instead, I turned the carton up and took three big swallows. The golden liquid felt cool as it ran down my throat, and it tasted so-o-o-o... Then it hit me. Something was terribly wrong with the taste and the texture of that juice.

I glanced into the carton in my hand, and my stomach lurched. "Ugh, yuck!" I exclaimed, as I rushed toward the sink and retched. Floating on top of the orange juice was the most awful-looking green slime.

Suddenly, I couldn't stand being anywhere near that foul liquid. "Get out of here," I yelled. Dashing to the front door, I threw the carton out into the roadside.

Then I sat bolt upright in bed. "Get out of here!" I yelled again.

My wife, Sharon, grabbed my arm. "John, what's the matter?" she asked as she sat up beside me. "You're in bed. Who do you want to get out of here?"

I looked at her. The moonlight shining through the curtains revealed a worried look on her face. A lock of hair hung across the left side of her forehead. I put my hand over my eyes and shook my head. Reality returned gradually.

Sharon's arm slipped around my waist, and she snuggled up to me, but she didn't say anything. She just laid her head on my shoulder and patted my arm with her other hand.

Now wide awake, I felt my forehead. It was clammy. I could feel an inward shaking - my whole body quivered from an unknown dread.

"I guess I had a bad dream."

"Do you want to talk about it?" Sharon asked.

I opened my mouth to tell her, but the words stuck in my throat. A cold chill spread across my body, and my muscles tensed. Was the dream prophetic?

I could tell that Sharon felt the tension, because her hand tightened on my arm. "What is it, honey?" she asked again.

DARK LIGHT

I lowered my face and rubbed my fingers across my forehead once more. “I... I... I can’t talk about it now,” I stammered. “Let’s try to go back to sleep.”

Sharon sighed and laid back down with her head on her pillow. A few minutes later, her slow, even breathing told me that she had gone back to sleep. I turned over and tried to follow her example. The attempt was useless. Sleep evaded me the rest of the night, like clouds evade the sky over the Sahara. Was God trying to tell me something?

The horror of my nightmare didn’t pass. As I stared into the darkness, an awful thought hit me. John, your life is like that dream. Self-deception can twist your mind. What you think is pure could be polluted.

Tossing and turning, I couldn’t believe that a mind as sharp and clever as mine could be deceived. I shut my eyes and still seemed to taste the green slime. When I opened them, I glanced out the window and saw the first streaks of dawn. But inwardly, the darkness of midnight pressed hard. Was this strange nightmare from God or Satan? I sighed audibly, and this awakened Sharon.

“What’s wrong, John?” she muttered, half asleep.

“That dream. I’ve been awake for hours. I can’t shake off the dreadful feeling.”

As she turned toward me, I extended my arm. She laid her head on my shoulder and snuggled close. For years we’d begun each day this way, praying together.

“Would you like to tell me about your dream first-or pray first?” And then she added, “I’ve never seen you so distraught.”

“If I told you my dream, you could pray more intelligently.”

A long minute passed before I could begin. I had just finished telling her the disgusting details when we heard footsteps and then a loud knock at the front door. We both knew who it was - our friends Karen and Irene, who had come to Germany with us from the United States. They were the last people I wanted to see right then, but I pushed aside my feelings and called, “Just a minute. I’ll get my robe.”

I wasn’t prepared for what I saw when the door opened. In spite of the short distance between our RVs, they were both out of breath, their bathrobes skewed about their bodies like they’d thrown them on in a windstorm as they flew out the door. Fear was written all over their faces.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

DARK LIGHT

“We have to talk.” Irene, past sixty, spoke with a strong German accent.

“What about?” I asked.

I looked into her face for a clue, but all I could read was that she was dead serious about something. Even Karen, young and vivacious, looked solemn. I couldn’t have been less prepared for Irene’s answer. “I had a terrible dream last night. Haven’t been able to sleep since then. Finally, I woke Karen and told her. We thought we ought to tell you.”

My stomach lurched the way it had when I saw the green slime on the orange juice. I wasn’t sure I wanted to hear her dream. In fact, I knew I didn’t want to hear it, but I couldn’t tell her to just go home. Finally, with a glance toward Sharon, who had just entered the room, I said as casually as I could, “Sit down and tell us about it.”

They both sat down, and Irene took a deep breath. “Karen and I were driving our RV, following you and Sharon in yours. We were driving down the autobahn.”

Karen interrupted, “You said we had just spent the past evening urging a group of people to get ready for the Lord to come.”

“Yes, yes.” Irene nodded her head vigorously. “Anyway, before long, we came to a long tunnel. I can remember noticing the sunlight disappear on your motor home as you entered the tunnel. The next moment, we were both inside. We’d gotten halfway through the tunnel when the lights went out on my RV. I looked ahead and saw the lights go out on yours too. All was black darkness. Fortunately, there was no other traffic inside the tunnel either direction.”

Irene paused. Her next words came out slowly, evenly, almost like she was thinking about each word as she spoke it. “John, we were totally in the dark!” She punctuated the word dark with her voice, then continued.

“We couldn’t see any light at the end of the tunnel, either. Panic-stricken in the total darkness, I was afraid I’d hit you in the blackness. Grabbing my CB radio, I called frantically, ‘We can’t see our way to go forward.’ Then I screamed, ‘We must turn back now!’ and the scream woke me up.”

Irene leaned back in her chair, but she didn’t relax. She kept her eyes on mine. I looked at the floor. Nobody said a word, and it seemed that I could feel the silence crawling over my skin.

“Well, what do you think?” Irene said at last.

I’d been dreading that question. “I don’t know.” I glanced over at Sharon. “But I think I need to tell you about a dream I had last night.”

DARK LIGHT

“You had a dream too?” Irene and Karen said the words together.

I told my dream-about coming in hot and sweaty from washing the RV, about reaching for the orange juice and taking three huge swigs, and about how good I thought it tasted until I paused for a breath. Then I described how awful it looked and how I retched and gagged and threw the whole lot out the front door.

When I was through, we all sat back in our chairs and looked at each other. Except me-I looked at the floor. My eyes were focusing on a spot of dirt on the white kitchen tile. It seemed to have legs and a body, like a spider. Then I became aware that everyone else was looking at me. I looked from one to the other, but no one spoke. I knew they expected me to say something.

Finally, Karen broke the silence. “John, you’re the leader of this group,” she said. “What do you think?”

That question was the hardest one I’d ever faced in my life. The answer I feared tore the foundation out from under everything I’d done for the previous ten years. After another moment of silence I said, “Maybe God is trying to tell us something.”

Again there was a long silence. Then Karen came up with the next obvious question - the one I knew we were all thinking but afraid to ask. “If God is trying to tell us something, what is it?” When I remained silent, she continued. “Could it be that all this time we’ve thought we were doing God’s will, we’ve been blind and have been traveling down a crooked way in the wrong direction?”

Still unnerved by the vivid dream, I inwardly agreed with her. But my pride would not allow me to admit it. Attempting to sound confident, I countered, “If God has not been leading us over the years, why would He have answered so many of our prayers?”