

## Perchance to Dream

By Michael Danese

Copyright 2020 by Michael Danese

#####

The warm early morning light was streaming through a bedroom window. The light streaks danced over a couple, fast asleep. Robert and Mary were peaceful in their slumbers, until Robert began to thrash around.

Suddenly he sat up, gasping and coughing. He was dripping with sweat and his heart was pounding. A startled Mary jumped up and began to hug him. “Are you okay?”

Robert nodded and coughed, then nodded again.

Did you have the dream again?

“Yes, I’m so sorry that I woke you,” moaned Robert.

“I’m just glad that you’re alright,” said Mary.

“I’m okay. I thought I was dying, it was horrible!” said Robert.

“What happened? Who was hurting you?” asked Mary.

“I ... I don’t remember, no, sorry, I can’t remember anything,” said Robert.

“It’s okay. I’ll start breakfast,” said Mary. She pulled her gray wooly robe over her thin shoulders then pulled out her long blond hair. Mary looked much older than her 40 years, possibly due to not getting enough sleep. Today the abrupt wakeup hasn’t given her time to clear her head.

Robert, a slight man of about 45, slowly climbed out of bed. He removed his blue striped pajamas and threw them in a hamper. He ran his fingers through his gray thinning hair and reached for his glasses. “Thank you dear, I’ll be down soon.”

Robert peered bleary eyed at his morning paper. Mary rubbed his neck and said, “are you sure you feel okay? Perhaps you should stay home today.”

“Nonsense!” replied Robert. “Besides, I have an important meeting today. Peter Ash is an important man in society circles. The commissions on his insurance and annuities could be great for us. And, he called *me*! So, no, I’m not about to miss this opportunity!”

Robert finished his breakfast, then carefully chose his wardrobe; a blue pin-striped suit, a crisp white shirt, a red tie, and blue socks. He gave his brown shoes a quick wipe with his polishing cloth before putting them on. He wanted to be at his best for this meeting. Before he left, he said to Mary, “Now, would you buy insurance from this guy?”

Mary chuckled and said, “In a heartbeat! And please don’t forget to pick up the dry cleaning on your way home!” She kissed him and he walked into the garage.

Robert drove from his home in the suburbs into the city. His destination was on the far side of the city, so he allowed himself ninety minutes because he didn’t want to be late. He knew what traffic could be like this time of the day.

When he reached the house, he did a double take. It was a large home with manicured lawns on all sides, and a U-shaped driveway. He didn't expect something like this to be within the city limits, but there it was, and oddly enough, he remembered being here before, perhaps years ago, at least in this neighborhood.

Robert parked and climbed the stairs to the large double doors in the front of the house. He rang the bell and heard it reverberate through the spacious home.

In a few seconds a man answered the door. "Mr. Ash? I'm Robert Clapper, thanks for seeing me today," said Robert.

Peter Ash was a tall man, in his early 50s, with graying hair and a thin mustache. He was impeccably dressed in a fine tailored gray suit and a black tie. He looked like wealth, which Robert certainly appreciated. He reached out his hand to Robert's, "Nice to meet you, Mr. Clapper, but ... this is very awkward," he said.

"Awkward? How so?" asked Robert.

"Well, I have our meeting down for tomorrow, yes, I'm sure of it," said Peter Ash.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, I can come back tomorrow ..." said Robert.

"Nonsense, you drove all this way, please come in!" said Peter. "Here is the thing, I'm expecting several people soon for a brunch gathering. Can you join us, and we can meet after that? Besides, some of my guests could possibly be your future clients."

"That is so kind of you, but I certainly don't want to intrude!" answered Robert.

"Not a problem at all. Please stay. You will enjoy these characters," said Peter.

"Fine, sounds good. One thing, if you don't mind. Where have we met before? I feel like I know you," said Robert.

"No, no, I don't think so. I've been in the papers and maybe you saw an interview with me on the news last year," replied Peter.

"No, that's not it, anyway, thanks again for the invitation," said Robert.

"Well, you came highly recommended. Let's go to the dining hall, I want you to meet Maddie and George," said Peter.

They took the long walk through the hallway, through the inner door, past the ornate living room with a fireplace, past the library with large leather couches, and finally into the spacious dining room with eight places set with fine china. A young couple was there, sipping mimosas.

"Hi, this is Robert Clapper, he will be joining us today. Robert, this is Maddie and George DeSantos, dear friends of my family," said Peter.

George and Maddie are in their late 20s or early 30s. George has close cropped black hair and he's wearing a black three-piece suit with a watch chain in the vest pocket. Maddie has striking blue eyes and shoulder length red hair. She is in a form fitting knee length black skirt, black heels, and a white blouse.

“It is a pleasure to meet you,” said Robert.

“So happy you can join us,” said George.

“Pleasure,” added Maddie.

Jack, a middle-aged short bald man enters the room. He is wearing a white service jacket.

“Oh, Jack, this is Mr. Clapper. He will be joining us. Can you please set another place at the table?” asked Peter.

“Welcome Mr. Clapper. Sure thing, Mr. Ash.” replied Jack.

“Thank you,” said Peter.

“Yes, thank you,” said Robert.

Robert spoke softly to Peter, “I know this is weird, but I’m sure that I know Maddie and George, and I even remember Jack!”

Peter said in a whisper, “I would keep that to yourself for now. I’m sure there is an explanation.”

“Is Maddie’s maiden name McDevitt by any chance?” asked Robert.

“Yes, but how could you possibly ...?” questioned Peter.

He is interrupted by the doorbell. “Excuse me please,” said Peter.

A minute later a man enters the room with Peter.

“Jon! Great to see you!” exclaimed George.

Jon, a tall, thin man of about 40, with flowing wavy blond hair shakes George’s hand and hugs Maddie saying, “It’s been too long!” He is wearing tight designer jeans, a blue Polo V-neck sweater, with a white tee shirt beneath.

“This is Robert Clapper, he will be joining us today,” Peter said to Jon.

“Delighted” said Jon as he shook Robert’s hand.

“What’s your game?” asked Jon.

“My game?” queried Robert.

“Yeah, what’s your deal? What do you do?” said Jon.

“Oh, I consult on insurance and investments,” said Robert.

“What is this, some kinda sales pitch?” Jon joked to Robert and Peter.

“No, nothing like ...” Robert answered sheepishly.

“Knock it off, Jon, but if anyone needs insurance it’s you!” Peter joked back. “Perhaps after we eat Robert can sell you some!”

The doorbell chimed again. Peter excused himself then returned in a minute with two more guests.

“Ah, Lauren and Richard!” said Maddie.

Jon tried to hide a look of surprise, but Robert caught it.

Lauren and Richard are a dapper couple in their 40s. Richard is wearing a gray sweater and a blue sports jacket and tan pants. He has black hair, obviously colored, slicked back and a small goatee. There is some gray mixed into his beard. Lauren is in a tight blue skirt with matching silk blouse. She is wearing blue heels. Her brown hair is made up to look like she doesn't care how she looks. She pays her stylist a lot of money for that look. Her make-up is perhaps a little overdone, and her face looks younger than her years, thanks to her plastic surgeon.

"Lauren and Richard, this is Robert Clapper, he is joining us today," said Peter.

The usual pleasantries and handshakes are traded.

"Robert, do you have any children?" asked Peter.

"No, my wife and I weren't blessed with any, why do you ask?" said Robert.

"Oh, well, Dr. Lauren is a pediatrician in center city. I just thought that if ..." the doorbell chimed again, and Peter excused himself.

Robert is beginning to feel a bit queasy, because one way or another, he is certain that he has met these people before. It finally dawned on him that he has seen these people in his dreams, and with that he let out a slight cough.

"Everything alright, Mr. Clapper?" asked Dr. Lauren.

"Yes, yes, everything's fine," said Robert.

A middle-aged couple enters the room with Peter. "Jim and Janis, please say hello to Robert Clapper."

Again, handshakes and greetings are traded.

Jim looks to be in his fifties, with short, mostly gray hair mixed in with the remaining brown. He has a small mustache and short sideburns. He is wearing black pants and a green sweater. He looks like a former athlete and appears to be quite fit.

Janis is about his age with shoulder length brown hair. She also looks fit. She is wearing a red blouse, tight jeans and black boots. They look like the couple that you would see in their designer running outfits at the park.

"I'm so sorry we're late," huffed Jim, "The traffic was deadly!"

"Nonsense, you're here safe and that is all that matters!" said Peter. "Why don't we all sit and have some coffee? Robert, please sit here, next to me."

"Thank you, Peter," said Robert as they seated themselves around the large table. "I must say something. Since I arrived, I've had this strange feeling, and it just dawned on me. This will sound crazy, but ... well ... I feel like I already know all of you ... from my dreams!"

The groups looked at each other, then chuckled. Jon began laughing out loud.

"Jon, don't be rude!" said Maddie, "I'm sure there is a perfectly good explanation for this!"

“There is,” blurted Lauren, “it’s poppycock! It’s merely his mind playing a trick, like Déjà vu, which literally means *already seen*, you know, like the strong sensation that you already lived through something. That’s all it is.”

“What makes you such an expert, Lauren?” asked Peter.

“I’m no expert, but I minored in psychology in college,” said Lauren, “It’s all bunk, like spirits, ghosts, and visions.”

“Lauren!” said Maddie, “I’m offended by that, because I see a spirit all the time.”

“Your sister ...” said Robert.

“Yes! How could you know that?” said Maddie.

Robert says, “My dreams! I remember seeing your sister!”

“I didn’t know you even had a sister,” said Jim.

Maddie starts to tear up a little. Her husband, George, hands her a napkin and she dabs her eyes.

“Missy was my twin. We were identical. I don’t think I was ever without her,” said Maddie.

“When we were five years old, we were on a family trip in the mountains. To us it was like being with the reindeer at the North Pole! Our mom made s’mores on the campfire. Our dad helped us to build a snowman, and, thinking back, he really did all the work.”

“Maddie, you don’t have to ...” implored George.

“No, it’s okay,” said Maddie. “The next morning, while our parents were cleaning up breakfast, me and Missy walked out onto the frozen lake together. She didn’t want to go, but I told her we would be able to look through the ice and see the fish swimming. Our dad saw us from the shore and frantically yelled for us to come back. As we turned towards him, the ice let out a crack like a shotgun blast, and in a second Missy was sinking. I grabbed her arm and pulled with all my might, but just as daddy got to us, she slipped away. He pulled me by the arm as the ice broke beneath me. He tried to save her, but it was too late. The sight of her blue eyes locked with mine as I pulled her arm is forever burned into my memory. Our dad blamed himself, and his deeply rooted guilt eventually destroyed our family. My parents divorced and he died in his forties. He drank himself to death. But I know that it was really my fault, and two people that I loved were dead because of *me*. But Missy’s spirit is always with me. She tells me all the time that she forgives me. I believe her, but I still feel the pain.”

“It’s all true, she often calls out in her sleep for her sister,” said George.

“I’m so sorry to make you relive that,” said Robert. “And your mother was never the same after that day either.”

“No, she is depressed to this day,” said Maddie.

“Well, it *is* true that twins have a special bond developed in the womb,” said Lauren.

“It isn’t just twins,” said Jim. “Others can have a special bond too. When I was in Iraq ...”

“Jim, please don’t!” begged his wife, Janis.

“It’s fine, Lauren thinks she knows everything! Well, she doesn’t!” said Jim. “My unit was out on patrol. We were embedded with an Iraqi unit. It was a normal day. We hadn’t seen much action lately. We just had lunch and we were walking to the next town. The whole country was a disheveled mess. Streets were torn up, and buildings were in shambles due to the bombings from both sides. Some of the people cheered for us, but we knew that they deeply resented us.”

“As we walked past what looked like the remains of a gas station,” he continued, “my captain said he was going to go and check it out. I told him I would do it, partially out of boredom. The group walked towards the kids playing, and I walked along a wall on the other side of them. One of the kids ran into the group and exploded a bomb that was under his shirt. The wall saved my life, but my entire unit was killed, along with several of the children and Iraqi soldiers.”

Jim held back a whimper and Janis hugged him.

“All dead but me. My captain couldn’t be more than 30 ...” said Jim.

“Captain Nelson!” exclaims Robert.

“Yes! William Nelson was my commanding officer. How could you possibly ...?”

“My dreams! I’m telling you; I know you all!” said Robert.

“I’m beginning to believe you, Mr. Clapper.” said Jim. “Anyway, I see the faces of my fallen comrades all the time. Driving in the next car over, in line at the supermarket, at a ballgame ...”

“There’s no mystery here,” said Dr. Lauren. “Survivor’s guilt coupled with a healthy dose of PTSD is what it is. Very common in these cases. No supernatural mumbo jumbo!”

“Jim doesn’t have PTSD. He’s been through counseling and he’s very well adjusted!” said Janis. “And if Mr. Clapper said we were in his dreams I believe him!”

“Nonsense,” said Dr. Lauren turning to Robert. “Tell me something about me!”

“I, I can’t. It’s all hazy, just fragments. I feel like something bad happened, or will happen,” said Robert.

“Yeah, okay. I don’t scare that easily,” said Dr. Lauren.

“I have no intention of scaring you!” said Robert.

“Robert, listen, I believe you. And Jim, I’m sure that feelings like this can be upsetting,” said Peter trying to smooth the conversation. He took a long sip of his coffee as Jack entered with a basket of toast and muffins. He handed the basket to Peter.

“Jack, your timing is perfect!” said Peter as he passed the basket to Robert, who selected a muffin and passed the basket to Jon, who was seated next to him. The basket circled the table and Richard passed it back to Peter, who was on his right.

Richard then said, “Lauren, I know firsthand that ghosts *do* exist.”

“Do tell!” Lauren said sarcastically to her husband.

“Okay, when I was little, my family went on vacation to an inn in the county,” said Richard. “It dated back to the Revolutionary War. It was a big, old creepy house, like something out of a

horror movie. And to this little boy it was especially scary. My parents wanted to play cards with some of the other guests, so they put me to bed. I didn't want to go because I was scared, but they insisted. I climbed into the bed and pulled the covers up over my eyes. I felt a chill and when I opened my eyes there was a little girl standing next to my bed holding a small white doll. I screamed and my father came up. I told him what happened and, even though he didn't believe me, he let me sleep in their room. The next night, the same thing happened, but this time she tried to hand me the doll. I ended up with my parents again. Luckily we were only there for the two nights."

"Why haven't you ever mentioned that before?" asked Lauren.

"Well, I haven't even thought about it for a long time, I'm sure it was a suppressed memory. Plus, I guess I knew how you would react," said Richard. "There's more. The next day, after breakfast, I was waiting in the hall and my father told a waiter about what happened to me. He thought I was outside and thought that I didn't hear the conversation.

The waiter asked, "Was a white doll involved?"

My father said, "Yes there was."

Then the waiter said, "The story was that during the war ..."

Robert interrupted, "During the war the family that lived there was killed by British soldiers, including their four-year-old daughter, who was found clutching a little white doll!"

"Exactly!" agreed Richard. "And I also believe you about the dream!"

Jon, the single man, who had been quiet up until now, stood up from his seat to Robert's left and said, "I'm a little creeped out by all of this talk of ghosts, dreams and impending doom. Please excuse me. Where is the rest room, Peter?"

"Top of the stairs, third door on the left," answered Peter.

Jon placed his napkin on the table and left the dining room.

As Jon was climbing the stairs, Lauren quietly said to Peter, "You know how sensitive Jon is, we need to change the subject and forget all of this mumbo jumbo."

Peter nodded in agreement.

Robert said, "But it isn't mumbo jumbo, and, you aren't going to like this, but I knew you were going to say that!"

Lauren said to Robert, "Who are you again?"

Robert said, "I'm sorry I didn't mean to upset anyone."

Lauren stood and said, "No problem, it's all in fun. I'm just going to freshen up."

She headed up the stairs and met Jon coming out of the restroom. "Jon, are you okay?" she asked.

Jon replied, "I'm telling you, Richard knows about us, and probably Peter too! I'll bet that guy Robert is some sort of detective and this whole dream thing is a scheme to trip us up!"

“Get a grip!” said Lauren. “He doesn’t know anything, and I can’t have you falling apart on me!”

“I’m not kidding! He knows!” said Jon. “I shoulda never came to this brunch! I wanted to cancel when I heard you two were coming!”

“Well I didn’t know you would be here, or I would’ve made an excuse to miss it myself! Now please calm down and get downstairs!” said Lauren.

When Jon arrived back at the table, Richard asked him, “Is everything ok?”

“Of course, why do you ask?” said Jon.

“Well, you look all sweaty and anxious.” said Richard.

“I’m fine, just a little upset stomach.” said Jon.

“Oh, I’m sorry to hear that.” said Peter, “Can I get you an antacid or something?”

“No ... no, I’ll be fine.” said Jon.

“I’m sorry if I upset you,” said Robert.

“No, please. I’m fine, but I am getting hungry!” said Jon.

Lauren returned to the table and asks, “What did I miss?”

“Jon isn’t feeling well ...” said Robert.

“I’m fine! Now everyone please stop doting on me!” said Jon.

“Okay, he’s fine!” said Lauren. “Did someone mention food?”

“Yes, very soon, my dear,” replied Peter.

Jim, trying to change the subject asks, “Lauren, I think I remember that your office is in the same building as Jon’s firm, is that right?”

“Ah, yes, it is,” replied Lauren, as she snuck a glance at Jon.

“So, you probably run into each other from time to time then?” added Jim.

“Sometimes ...” said Lauren.

“What are you implying?” blurted Jon angrily.

“Me? Nothing! I was just trying to change the subject!” said Jim.

“Oh sure, I know you’re all plotting against me!” exclaimed Jon as his blood pressure spiked.

“Please everyone, please calm down! You all hafta listen to me, my dream ...” added Robert.

“Oh, oh, OH! I get it now! Lauren, him?! Really! I knew it was someone, but *this* weasel!” erupted Richard.

“At least HE *loves* me and treats me like a lover!” Lauren roared back.

“She’s in love with *me*, you bloated windbag!” yelled Jon directly into Robert’s ear, as he was between the two men.



“I’ll kill you! Then her!” said Richard.

“Take your best shot!” said Jon as he grabbed a steak knife from the table.

He lunged at Richard, and, as a startled Robert tried to get out of the way, he swerved right in front of Jon as he lunged, and Jon buried the knife deep into his chest. Robert clutched for it and fell backward onto the table, crashing china and glasses. He gurgled and coughed blood onto Jon who toppled on top of him, pushing the knife deeper.

Robert gasped and coughed, then sat up straight in his bed as Mary hugged him as he continued to cough.

“Oh no, Robert, not the dream again!” she said.

Robert was still coughing as his heart pounded in his chest. Mary tried to comfort him, as she’d done many times before.

“Here,” she said, handing him a glass of water, “take a sip and lie back. I’ll start breakfast, I know you have that big meeting across town today.”

###

Thanks for reading this story.

You can find other short stories by Michael Danese at:

<https://www.smashwords.com/profile/view/Danese>

Connect online:

Email: [danesemc@ptd.net](mailto:danesemc@ptd.net)

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/danesemc>

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/#!/michael.danese1>

LinkedIn: <http://www.linkedin.com/pub/michael-danese/8/101/284>