

I'm dreaming, but I know it's a dream. Wild. I feel better than I've felt in so long, maybe ever. Euphoric, expectant, like something is going to happen and I'm going to love it. I'm so afraid I'm going to wake up. When I think that thought I start to feel the cold flow of dread that is a part of my usual wakeup drill.

I see the door to my bedroom swing open, but I'm not even a little afraid. Good. I'm back in this thing, whatever it is. I wait, but nothing happens. Nobody walks through the door. I get up and move toward the door.

I pass my dresser and mirror, the same one that used to be in the room I shared with Trish. She let me take it with me because Robberberto didn't like it. I look in the mirror.

I'm not even startled when what I see in the mirror is high school graduation day me. I look down and, sure enough, I've got on a pair of Levis and my favorite John Lennon t-shirt, the one with his face and him saying 'you may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one.' Ha. Funny. Trish threw that t-shirt out ages ago. I loved that t-shirt. This is the outfit I wore under my graduation gown. Just like that I see myself wearing the gown in the mirror. Ugh. I liked the jeans and t-shirt, better, and ... they're back.

I walk out into the hallway and look into Lena's room. God, that little one is even more angelic when she's asleep. She stirs and I quickly move out of the doorway. I walk into the living room.

I am startled, this time, but not surprised. Of course Jeebus Morelli would be sitting on my couch holding one of my coffee cups to his lips. He holds it out toward me, a toast.

"Hey, big guy," he says. "Grab a cup of coffee and catch me up. Like, why the hell are you living in Mrs. Glendenning's house? Actually, don't bother. I know everything, I've been watching you. Don't just stand there with your mouth hanging open, dipshit. Get a cup of coffee and come talk to the Jeebus."

I go into the kitchen. I may have gone back to my my 1974 self, but everything in the kitchen is the way I left it last night, except for the coffeemaker being on. Jeebus has placed my favorite cup beside it. (How did he know that? I just got that cup two weeks ago, at the Farmer's Market. It has a picture of Jesus and he's saying, "OMG, you guys, THAT'S not what I said.") I pour a half cup (a full cup just gets cold) and go back into the living room.

"What's it like being dead," I ask him. "And, while we're at it, why did you fucking hang yourself? Not cool, Jeebus." I

could go into details, how much his kids must miss him, how much I miss him, but I won't.

"Dude," he says, "In case you've overlooked it, I'm not dead. In fact, if I'd known I would end up like this after I croaked myself, I'd have done it sooner. Actually, I take that back. I had to go through hell after I did it, and I mean literal hell. This dark pit, just enough light to see all the fucked up people writhing around and trying to hurt each other, moaning and groaning, cursing . . . it was ferociously horrible. Right after I stepped off the stool and my neck snapped - goddamn that hurt - I went flying through this dark tunnel. Before I got to the end I could already hear screaming and carrying on. I came to a stop on all fours looking down into this pit I'm talking about.

"After a minute of freaking out, these three guys, or whatever the hell they were, come up behind me and grab me. They pull me up and start to shove me into the pit. I start yelling, 'Jesus Holy Christ, please help me. Jesus Holy Christ please help me,' over and over. The three guys are laughing like crazy and I'm fighting them off like crazy, and all of a sudden I'm standing on this wooden platform thing looking out over a big field full of wildflowers and birds flying around chirping and shit like that.

"I feel somebody come up behind me, again, and I turn around ready to punch whoever it is and it's this dude that looks like one of those felt figures Mrs. Allenby used to put on her flannelboard when she was doing her storytelling.

"Long, dark, wavy hair, a beard and moustache . . . of course! It turns out to be Jesus, or a dead ringer for Jesus. He's grinning like a mofo and he opens his arms and says, 'Come on in for some love, Anthony. Bring it in here.'

"I'm completely wiped out at this point, and I stumble over to him and he practically has to keep me from falling down. I'm crying like a snotnosed baby, getting his nice white robe all skeezy, and we just stand there. It felt like a half-hour. He was kind of rocking me from side-to-side, like I was a big baby, which I was totally feeling like, and he kept saying, 'You're home, kiddo, you're home with me.'"

"After awhile he puts his arm around my waist and walks me on this path for about a mile, it seemed like, jabbering away with me like we were old pals. 'Anthony this, Anthony that - nobody there will call me Jeebus, I suppose it's disrespectful, I don't know, I don't really care - and he tells me that although everyone is disappointed that I took myself out, they understand and all is forgiven.

"We come up on this building that looks like a small hotel. It's fucking gorgeous, like you'd imagine a French Chateau or something. Inside it's set up exactly like you'd expect. A reception desk, hallways leading off in several directions, elevators, the whole hotel thing. We go up to the desk and this dude with a shaved head and orange robe, like one of those airport monks, hands me a key. The room number is 23, my favorite number. Jesus grins and says he knew that and they saved that room for me.

"Then he tells me to follow him and we go into this dark room. I start to get a little anxious, and he can tell.

"'Anthony,' he says, 'relax. You like movies, right? This movie we're about to see is all about you.'

"Well, now I figure I'm fucked. Now the horsepuckey will hit the propeller. He must be able to read my mind, because he laughs and whacks me on the shoulder.

"'Dude,' he says, 'I've already seen this several times, while we were editing it. It's cool, no worries. No judgment around here. This is just for your edification. We love you to death, man. Sit back and wait while I grab us some popcorn, and then we'll have some fun.'

"A minute or two later he's back with these huge boxes of popcorn and a couple of Cokes. He sees me eyeing the Coke cans and he says, 'Yeah, they're even up here. We're on them to work toward making this stuff healthier, but it's like trying to push a rope. Oh well.'

"A screen comes down from the ceiling over a stage at the front of the room and the movie starts.

"It was all there: Us playacting Jesus storming the moneychangers at the temple, wrecking the cop car, you lowering me through the roof that time . . . all of it, my entire loser life, right up to when I bit the big one. It was weird, because it's like time didn't exist. How could one movie, that seemed like it was over in ten minutes, cover everything? But it did. It was like my mind slowed everything down, outside of time, so that I saw it all, but when the movie was over I looked at this clock on the wall and no more than ten minutes had passed.

"The clock thing was weird, too. What time zone is a clock in heaven set to? Jesus read my mind, again, and told me it was set to Pacific Standard Time, just like I was still there.

"After the movie he asked if I wanted to go get something to eat. I say yes and we walk a couple of blocks to this diner that looks just like Ringo's Diner in Fremont, remember that place? Like stepping back into the '50s when we used to go there.

"There are little mini jukeboxes at each table, and he starts flipping through the selections and pretty soon the Beach Boys come on with 'Good Vibrations.'

"The 'Pet Sounds' album, and 'Good Vibrations' were some of our best work," he says.

"What do you mean?" I ask him. "The Beach Boys were still alive. How is it your best work from up here?"

"For one thing," he says, "'up here' is just plain wrong. It's more like a parallel universe, outside of earth's time and space. I'm just saying that Brian Wilson and those other dudes were channeling some of our best. Mozart had a big piece of it, a lot of that orchestral stuff, some others you wouldn't recognize. Brian said, himself, that it felt like 'something got inside me' on 'Good Vibrations.' Damn straight, something got inside him. Divine inspiration.

"'But, I'm going off the rails here,' he says. 'I really want to talk about your plans, Anthony.'"

"My plans?" I say. "My plan was to fucking obliterate myself, pardon my French. Like I never existed. I felt like I was sucking up air that somebody worth a shit should be using. I couldn't see my own kids for more than a couple days a month, my ex-wife made me feel like I'd ruined her life, kept her from living her dream of marrying somebody who could do something besides re-build car engines and dream up dumbass pranks. None of the people who depended on me to do my job knew how much I hated being in charge of a damn auto parts warehouse. I didn't see any of it getting any better and I figured that, long term, Janny and Danny would get over me and Julieann could finally be able get past the mistake she made marrying me."

"'The real problem was you never got over how your parents treated you, Anthony, especially your dad,' he says. 'He convinced you that a piece of deviant DNA like you should consider yourself lucky you were allowed to sleep with your dog. Anyway, I'm not talking about your successful plan to jump the line and get here before your time, I'm talking about your plan starting right now.'"

"Dude," I say, "I don't even really know where I am. Here's a plan: figure out where I am and why I'm about to have a burger and fries with Jesus Christ."

"'That would be a veggie burger and fries, my friend,' he says, 'we don't eat the flesh of our animal friends here. That whole eating animals thing was a total misunderstanding and it's taken us eons of earth years to get at least a few people back on board with the Garden of Eden Diet which was fruits and vegetables, just like your mama said.'

"'You're back home where you were before you begged us to send you back to earth for another of your adventures in quirkitude. Next time you want to incarnate as the class clown we're going to make you swear under oath you won't leave work early. And hence my question about your immediate plans. It's going to be at least a couple of millenia before you're ready for another reincarnation. What was that last one, anyway. Number 5,607 as I recall, right? Never mind, who's counting, right?"

"'We've got a job for you, Anthony. You owe us one.'

"He reaches inside his cloak and pulls out a little thumb drive. He slides it across the table.

"'When you go back to your room,' he says, 'you'll find a laptop computer. State of the art, by the way. Steve Jobs is on our tech committee and he got us a sweet deal on a bunch of Apple MacBook Airs. I love those things. Anyway, fire it up and take a look at that thumb drive. You'll recognize your old pal, Melvin Blumann, III. It's his personnel file.'

"You mean Blue?" I ask.

"'Whatever,' he says. "What is with you people and nicknames? 'Blue?' What the hell kind of name is that? And, don't get me started on 'Jeebus.' What were you thinking? Anyway, the team of angels and guides and other miscellaneous helpers looking after 'Blue' are putting in a buttload of overtime and they still can't keep up. I figure if you could be sort of a consultant to them, maybe you'll bring something new to the table and the bunch of you can get this guy turned around. He manages to screw up everything we try to make happen for him. Anyhoo, see what you can do. They'll text you on that iPhone you'll find with the computer. You'll see that the last four digits of your phone number are 1111. We know how you feel about 1111. Enjoy your veggie burger when it finally gets here. We need to do a training on customer service around here.'"

"Then he gets up and just vanishes. 'Poof!' Gone."

And, just like that I wake up because my damn iPhone alarm is going off and I used Jimi Hendrix' *Star Spangled Banner* as the ringtone. I'm glad I have a habit of getting up about three hours earlier than I need to. It's going to take all three of those hours to process this damn dream.