

# Pleasant Dreams

by

**Jed de Sousa**

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There was little warning, save for the split second rush of wind as the bat creased the air. It came around full force against Marie's skull, shattering the left side of her face and felling her instantly. It is doubtful that she felt much pain. It is even more doubtful that she would have recognized the stranger who crept up behind her in her pantry.

Half a world away in Thomaston, Nebraska, at that same instant, Greta is demonstrating the fine art of baking sugar cookies to her granddaughter. They take turns rolling the dough and dusting each sticky blob with a shimmery rain of sugar. The kitchen smells heavenly. The little girl looks up to grandma with eyes that want to see everything, take in everything.

No one knows him as Dennis, only as Shine. The city morgue will come to know him as John Doe before the day is over. Laying in a pool of his own vomit, he clutches his stomach; the pain is excruciating. Shine looks down at the gaping knife wound to his gut, inflicted by a competitor who didn't like the idea of being undercut by a few dollars for the same amount of crack. Lying on the ground in an alley only a few yards from the busy sidewalk, Dennis can't find the breath to call for help.

In Summit, Vermont, George and Eileen are enjoying the first day of their vacation, waking up late and taking in a brunch delivered to their room. Along with the meal comes the latest issue of *USA Today*, both which George inhales and sets aside. Eileen babbles on about where she thinks they ought to go today while George goes fishing in his mind. The front page screams a headline about a prominent celebrity brutally gunned down in a random homicide, and both George and Eileen are oblivious to each other and the world.

Kayla stands by the roadside, expecting the 10:25 bus to be by shortly. She takes a brief look at the page of the book she is reading, trying not to make eye contact with a man walking toward her from down the sidewalk. Another person waiting for the bus? Maybe. He's just standing there, too. Suddenly, a blue sedan pulls up against the curb in front of her. Kayla's world goes dark as her head is covered by a cloth sack and she detects the rusty sound of an old car door swinging open. She is pushed headlong into the car and the sound of tires squealing echoes down the avenue. Hands clench around her throat and the sound of brutish laughter is the last thing she hears before she passes out.

In a crowded Atlanta airport, passersby sit and wait for their flights, barely taking notice of the evening news, which is playing on television sets placed throughout the terminal. Passengers stand in line at the metal detectors; others herd like cattle to board at their gate. Those going nowhere for the moment sit glassy-eyed watching the TV, glossing over the flashy graphics and perfect faces, waiting for something more entertaining, perhaps a clever commercial they haven't yet seen. The news of Marie, Dennis, Kayla and others like them will be read by talking heads and seem as commonplace as baking cookies or going fishing. The world will not notice their passing and it is a fair bet that they will never be mourned.

And so ends another day in America. Pleasant dreams.