

# **STRANGE AWAKENING**



**Edward Drobinski**

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## Table of Contents

Chapter 1	1
Chapter 2	18
Chapter 3	24
Chapter 4	34
Chapter 5	40
Chapter 6	47
Chapter 7	58
Chapter 8	71
Chapter 9	78
Chapter 10	86
Chapter 11	99
Chapter 12	106
Chapter 13	119
Chapter 14	129
Chapter 15	145
Chapter 16	160
Chapter 17	168

## **Chapter 1**

"Damn. I've got to get blinds for that fucking window," I thought as the garish brilliance of the morning sun streamed bullets of punishment into my soft and tender brain. Without utilizing my free will I was now presumably awake and did not remember my identity or where I was and thanks to the impertinent fireball, was also in some degree of physical discomfort. It wasn't mentally disturbing as it appeared that I was in a safe place and I guessed that, most likely, I was probably past the point of no return drunk the previous evening. I guess I'm an optimist. So, I took the scientific approach and decided to get up and hunt for evidence of last night's possible revelry. I was under one thin, blue and white cloth cover, had a pillow and was on a yellow Chinese Chippendale couch. The white embroidered figures sewn into it were frayed and stood up like the first sparse blades of grass in spring, showing intense usage. Right in front of me sat a turned-on television, if that's not a cognitive oxymoron, which sat on some kind of early American table. It was tuned to an early morning quasi news/talk show, the "entertaining" type which blurs or chooses not to recognize the possible differences in the terms. The smiling, cheerful hostess informed me that it was July 12, 1990 and that the banking crisis was deepening. I was unaware of any

## Strange Awakening

### Page 2

personal reason for worry and managed to retain my upbeat outlook. The hostess and two men were discussing this, each with wrinkled brow and seemingly great concern. I could see that neither of the men had a convincing argument for their stated positions and though they used radically diverging rhetoric, each started out their new spiel by saying that they agreed with everything their esteemed colleague had just said. The hostess didn't choose to intervene in any way, contented herself to smile effacingly and at lulls ask pre-printed questions, which didn't bear any relationship to what was previously spoken, from the cards she openly held in her hands. So, I figured I'd do something of more significance; get my old ass moving and go looking for bottles.

Exiting that room, I passed by a few more pieces of early American styled furniture. I'll probably find more reason to investigate them later, but right now my curiosity led elsewhere. I didn't see any bottles on the floor, so I kept moving. I walked directly into another room which was tightly packed with more pre-1830 styled early American furniture with some classic paintings on the wall, kind of a living room I suspected, the conclusion drawn due to the lack of a TV. There were no bottles or glasses strewn about. I went through another door to a large kitchen, with the usual accoutrements and an

## Strange Awakening

### Page 3

attractive floor to ceiling cooking fireplace with a metal spit. There was still no sign of anything.

I bravely took a good look out one of the west-facing windows, hoping nothing belligerent and bright was waiting. I could see a 100 foot grassy area right in front of me and heavy woods beyond that. Looking a bit to the left, there was a mailbox painted dull green with a newspaper next to it. I checked my pocket for keys and found one that worked in the kitchen door and went out for the paper.

I walked down a small gravel path to the mailbox and when I picked up the paper I saw it was called the "*Hunterdon County Democrat*" and that it was addressed to Edward and Diane Jensen. So, I impetuously concluded that I'm probably married and live in a very rural area, at the same time realizing that I could be Diane's lover or son. Guest was another possibility. Intruder. Burglar. Pitied bum. Or, maybe Ed and Diane's daughter. I put my hand in the appropriate area. Boy. For the sake of unscientific efficiency I decided to stick with my first rashly drawn conclusion. I will believe that I am Edward Jensen, until corrected. I looked down the road and saw no people, no cars, no nothing, just trees, trees, trees and trees. They were mostly willows and displayed their full green summer foliage, so I concluded that the TV lady, if not correct, was at least reasonably close on her estimation of the date. On second

## Strange Awakening

### Page 4

thought that depends on where I am. Never mind. This uncertainty is getting to be a huge pain in the ass. I'll stick with her date. I walked back to the front door slowly while gazing at what I might live in. I saw a simple country farmhouse covered in white clapboard with green shutters on the windows. The second floor was topped with a pitched black slate roof, through which three chimneys protruded. An irregular stone basement extended two feet out of the ground. I thought that I might be right where I belonged, as it suited my taste.

I put the paper down on the kitchen table and further noted that the mailing address was 818 Baptist Church Road, Clinton, NJ. Mercifully, the paper didn't talk about the serious banking crisis, which I unwittingly stepped into, but rather carried items of local farm interest and a retrospective page of news printed in the "*Hunterdon Democrat*" 100 years ago and 200 years ago. There was a sheet of paper from a small notebook on the kitchen counter in front of a clock saying 10:00, presumably AM. It said Diane 206/570-6247.

I was beginning to think that I probably should be somewhere doing something, like a job. I considered it a possible jumpstart to my quest, so I called the number.

"Good morning, Diane Jensen speaking."

"Good morning Diane, it's me."



## Strange Awakening

### Page 5

"I hope this is an emergency. I've got three other things to do right now."

Great, she recognized my voice. I said; "No emergency."

"Then call me Saturday." She hung up.

Damn, I hope this one is my sister, but I think not. The best thing I could infer was that she didn't live in this house with me, at least not now. On the other hand I liked the directness of her conversation and considered that this was a voice I could trust, in finding out things like; what am I supposed to be doing and do I have that severe a drinking problem?

It was past time to have breakfast, but I wanted something immediately, so I opened the refrigerator to disappointment. Whoever lives in this farmhouse must not eat breakfast. There was plenty of food available, but none of it looked particularly appetizing in that clear morning light. So, I settled for some coffee with a beer chaser. By the middle of the beer I decided I didn't want to wait until Saturday to call Diane, especially because I didn't know what day of the week it was anyway. So, how could I figure out when Saturday came? I called again.

"Good morning, Diane Jensen speaking."

"Hi, it's me again. I've got to have two minutes of your time right now." When she didn't object I continued; "I'm not lying about this. When I woke up this morning I didn't know who I was or where I am and I'd like to find out right now."

## Strange Awakening

### Page 6

"You're making this up."

"No, I'm not lying. Maybe I'll snap out of it, but in the meantime I'd like some clues."

"Okay, I'll believe you, only because that's too stupid a story for anyone to have made up."

"I don't know what anybody has made up, but I'll bet there's even worse. It's easy, Diane, tell me something I don't know. I don't know anything."

She laughed, "All right, all right. But, I really can't now. You'll be all right. Don't go too far from the house until I talk to you Saturday. You have to take some medications daily. Go find them and make sure you take them every day. Call me again on Saturday."

I quickly inserted, "What day is today?"

"Friday," and she hung up.

I figured that was pretty good. I knew I was basically okay and that if I didn't snap out of it myself I had an information source. I finished the beer and decided to go for a walk, of course, not too far from the house.

I exited the front door, walked down the mailbox path and hit the street. Thousands of trees were all I could see, sitting there in perfect windless silence. I turned right and walked at a medium pace, looking around. Trees again dominated the view, making me think it was a nice place to live. I love

## Strange Awakening

### Page 7

trees. After walking about 1000 feet, I came to a clearing on my right, on which another old farmhouse was perched. I stopped to look at it, also hoping someone would just happen to come out. I was trying to compare it to mine, which was difficult because I didn't fully remember what mine looked like. This one, no doubt, had similarities, as it was a two story structure with a clapboard exterior painted a sickly peeling yellow. Shutters on each visible window were painted a deep green and also were in the process of shedding their unwanted covering. The roof was black slate and all the shades were drawn. Who are they trying to hide from? There's nothing here but trees and me. Oh and that intrusive, intense, headache producing orb. But the shades are also drawn on the west side. Planning ahead? I'd have to find that one out on another day, as after dawdling by the house for a minute or two, there was no sign of activity. There were two cars parked on the gravel driveway and I didn't want to linger, as I didn't want to risk being considered a nuisance. Perhaps we didn't even get along with each other very well.

I continued down the road, still not seeing much of anything except the willows. I suddenly became intensely aware of the dead silence. I expected to and considered it a reasonable expectation to hear a bird or two singing, but the total absence of any sign of life made me wonder what might

## Strange Awakening

### Page 8

possibly be around, scaring the birds away and worse, perhaps watching me.

It wasn't a terribly scary thought, though I'd have to admit a vague eerie feeling. I recalled Diane's warning about not going too far from the house and wondered what "too far" meant. People should be precise when giving instructions. I guess the instructed also has a responsibility to seek clarification. Anyway, I certainly didn't think that I was anywhere near any reasonable concept of "too far." So, I walked further and saw some driveways where no house was visible from the road, heard a few birds and forgot the whole thing. I probably walked a total of two miles to an intersection, still seeing no cars or people. On the corner was an old stone house I wouldn't have minded living in and catty corner from it was a 4000 sq. ft. red barn. Three horses came over to the wooden post and rail fence to see what all the commotion was about. I waited for them to get near me. I said; "Good morning, fellas," and, having made another presumption, I immediately looked in the proper area to see if they were indeed "fellas." They probably weren't, but I decided to call them fellas or guys, anyway. I said; "I've got some important questions to ask you this morning." Two of the horses put their heads over the fence and inspected my upper torso and hands, no doubt trying to find what I brought them to eat. They snorted at me indicating their

## Strange Awakening

### Page 9

level of interest in me sans food and turned away. I called out; "Hey, do any of you know me?" The answer was probably "Yes", as they continued on their path, without breaking stride and walked away. I decided I'd show them the identical level of interest and I too, turned around and headed back toward home on the other side of the road. The trip was a very pleasant, relaxing one, until I again got to the shuttered yellow farmhouse closest to mine, where that deadly silence again set in. It didn't bother me much this time, as I concluded that if it didn't kill me the first time through, it probably wouldn't the second either. I was building up a pretty good appetite by now and since it didn't look like the immediate outdoors was going to be a great source of information, I decided to look around the house and make a huge lunch. The only thing I learned was that whoever lives here, probably rather than possibly me, values their privacy highly and seems to disdain anything modern, as everything there, excepting the microwave, was a copy of something made in another era. I wondered how I knew this. My memory seemed to be selective and ignored the essential in deference to trivialities.

I opened the refrigerator and found seven somethings wrapped in aluminum foil. I opened one and found a hero sandwich with a soft roll, lunchmeat, cheese, onions, lettuce and tomatoes. It was home-made, so someone here must be at

## Strange Awakening

Page 10

least partially skilled in the culinary arts, probably me. There was a pitcher of ice tea and I poured a glass. After a few bites, I took a stroll into one of the adjoining rooms. It was a weird one. It had a white washer and white dryer, suggesting a utility room, but also had a built in closet and a stereo system, which was perched on a large pie safe, with punched tin doors, done in a bird pattern. Records were kept in wooden boxes painted reddish brown, which sat on the floor at the base of the stereo. The fewer C/D's were on the perch with the receiver and the speakers. My taste, or maybe Diane's must be described as eclectic as the selections included the Beatles, John Coltrane, Blue Oyster Cult, the Church, Bob Dylan, Bob Marley, Cream, Jimi Hendrix, Patti Smith, Jefferson Airplane and a 10 C/D collection of classical tunes. There were collections of country songs from the 1930's, 1940's and 1950's, with names no one any more remembered, like Vassar Clements. I put the Beatle's "Abbey Road" album on the turntable and continued my tour.

I went back to the kitchen and took a few more bites of my hero. I opened the kitchen cabinets one by one and saw the expected glasses, plates, cleansers and replacement light bulbs, but most significantly also found a pile of statements from mutual funds, a brokerage, banks and a mortgage company. I felt good when I saw that the \$70,000 mortgage was current, only had

## Strange Awakening

Page 11

seven years to maturity and the total of the other liquid assets exceeded the mortgage balance. I got a strange feeling when I started going through credit advices. One had my name on it and said "Disability Payment" of \$2,000 for the month of June 1990. I'm disabled? No, I can't be. I don't feel disabled. Of course then I remembered that I didn't remember anything essential. The first side of the record ended and I put on the second, my favorite Beatles' side. How did I know that?

I thought about that for a few minutes as the record played and I finished off my sandwich. I couldn't think of a better answer than; "Because it isn't essential." I tentatively postulated a theorem. If I could convince myself that nothing mattered, then I would know everything.

The kitchen contained a very tightly twisted wooden spiral staircase, painted gray and white and was situated behind a door that gave the appearance of being a closet or pantry. It no doubt was treacherous enough to undo a few previous travelers. In the hallway on the other side of the kitchen was the main stairway leading to the second floor. The steps and bannister were stained a reddish brown, the spindles were white and the risers yellow. I climbed and got to a landing with doors to three other rooms. I entered the master bedroom which was rather cramped and had furniture including a Queen Anne canopied bed, a Queen Anne highboy and a darkly stained wardrobe of

## Strange Awakening

### Page 12

indeterminate style, but evocative of a pre-1830 origin. I opened its doors and found men's suits and shirts, so now I knew I was a desk jockey rather than a ditch digger. There were three white painted built in closets lining one wall. I opened the first door and found that it hid a staircase to the attic, on which was scratch-carved MVCCCXII, perhaps dating the house to 1812. I climbed the winding wooden stairs to see an empty attic, whose space was severely cut off on two sides by the sloping roof line. I went back down the stairs to open the two other closet doors to find more men's clothes, women's clothes and underwear, but nothing that looked like it would provide any more useful information, at least nothing I could fathom now.

I was getting tired of being in the house and went back downstairs to the kitchen, where I noticed that the home phone had a 908 prefix, but vaguely remembered that when I called Diane there was another three digit entree. I found the paper with the number and sure enough the prefix was 206. Why is she somewhere else? I'll probably find out tomorrow. There was a 1986 brown, two door Toyota parked outside. I didn't feel like walking again yet, so I went for a ride, no doubt violating Diane's dictate. I drove the way I initially walked and when I got to the closest house, there were two men standing on the porch. I looked toward them and waved, but they just stared at me. That was a strange feeling, but I considered that the two



## Strange Awakening

### Page 13

might be workers or visitors who didn't know me. I continued down the road and made a left immediately after the stone house.

I don't see any houses. On the left is a dense forest probably belonging to the owner of the corner stone beauty. On the right is a thinly wooded spot with water visible through the trees. Upon driving a little further, the hills to my left start to rise. Some houses are visible on the highest elevation. The right becomes a cleared area showing signs of having been recently mowed. Then I saw the sign saying "Spruce Run Reservoir." I took the right hand turn into the facility passing more tended lawn, only now with a fair smattering of mature trees, fifty feet tall and thirty-five wide. After one half of a mile I saw what looked like silver tollbooths ahead. No one was working in the booths, so I stopped the car, to try to locate a sign. When I found it, it told me that some times of the year admission was charged, but not now. I proceeded bearing right and came to a parking area with one other car in it. I could see that if I walked two of four possible directions from here I would have a full view of the light blue reservoir. I took the longer path toward it, passing through more light woods and in some places having the luxury of a concrete paved path. When I got close to the water I became aware of three two hundred foot jetties imposing themselves on

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