

THE DREAM BUILDERS

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William Sanderson found himself in his dream, only it wasn't his usual lucid dream, it was much more than he expected. And it was one he would never forget. It was a common enough place for him to be. He could smell the juniper. It seemed like a fine spring day, except it wasn't finished.

Sanderson heard a sharp voice behind him. "What the devil are you doing here?"

"Well," he responded, taking a little offense at being so closely questioned, "it's my dream. I think I'm allowed."

"Nonsense." The thin little man practically spat the words out. "I was promised by the architect no one would be using this area until after I'd finished with it." The little man was only about five feet tall. He was only wearing a single white cloth. He had it wrapped around him like a diaper. His dark skin looked like in been outside in the sun for centuries. Its surface was covered in more wrinkles than a shirt that had stayed too long crumpled up on the floor of a bad Chinese dry cleaner.

Bill glanced around. Only now did he notice the room seemed to be filled with backdrops, like large 3D matte paintings. He glanced behind one, only there was no canvas. In fact, there was nothing there at all. It seemed as if the pigments simply floated in the air. "Did you do all this work yourself? It's quite impressive. I've never seen anything quite like it."

The old man squinted at him with one broken eye. "You're a horse's ass."

"You're a rude little cuss, aren't you? Why don't you take a hike?"

"Why don't you piss-off. I'm not leaving until I'm done." He started painting more leaves on the trees. The work seemed impossibly accurate. All the leaves had veins of a slightly different green hue, even though the old man only held one brush. And the branch appeared as to be a heavy brown, almost black color. Only now did Bill notice he wasn't even holding a color pallet.

Bill waved his hand. This was a technique he'd learned over the years to dissipate dream characters. Only the old man stayed right where he was, brush and all.

"That won't work," the old man spat.

"Of course, it will. I just have to concentrate."

"Concentrate all you want butt-face. It's not going to work. I'm not going anywhere. Been here since 1933."

"1933?"

He stopped painting the tree. "That's right, bright boy, I'm dead."

"You're dead?"

He started painting a sign. The detail was amazing. The result appeared as if he'd just painted a piece of lumber white. Bill could even see the grain ... only there was no wood underneath the paint. "You going to repeat everything I say? I hate that. You're an ass-wipe."

Bill was starting to get frustrated. "Look, you bad-tempered little gnome ..." He stopped in mid-sentence. The old man was painting the words of the sign. Only the whole thing was fuzzy. Completely unreadable. A direct contrast to the high detail of everything else the old man had been painting up to this point. "Hey, what is that supposed to say? I can't read it."

"Of course, you can't, bumfuck, I can't write in English."

"But you're speaking English."

"No, dirtbag, I'm speaking Egyptian. You're just hearing it in English."

"It doesn't look like Arabic either," Bill remarked.

"It's not Arabic. I told you it's Egyptian. Arabic hadn't been invented yet when I was born."

"I thought you'd been born in 1933?"

"1933 BC imbecile."

"Hey, look Waldo ..."

"The name's Kneph, not Waldo ant brain."

Bill frowned. "So, Kneph, you're dead."

"You catch on quick."

"I don't understand."

"Okay, look butt-face, pay attention because I'm only going to explain this once. You ever talk to someone you know is dead in your dreams?"

"Yeah."

"Well, that's because this is where the dead go."

"Dreams? Other people's dreams?"

"Like I said, you catch on quick. Now for Anubis' sake, stop bothering me and let me get back to my work."

Bill had an astonished look on his face. The kind which left his bottom jaw on the floor. "So, you make dreams?"

"I'm just the hired help kid, now buzz off. I just do the bright floral work. I'm not good enough yet to do the darker scenes."

"You mean ..."

"Nightmares, yea ..."

Bill stood for a moment, stunned. He'd always thought dreams were the work of the subconscious mind. His mind. He'd even learned to control them. make them do his bidding ... or so he thought. He'd rarely been at a loss for words, but this was definitely one of those times. Behind him, he heard some rustling

in the trees. Bill simply ignored it. After all, painted leaves don't rustle. "I'd move if I were you," Kneph suggested.

Bill ignored him, right up until he felt the teeth sink into his leg. The pain was astonishing. Bill Sanderson turned his head to see his left foot and lower leg in the mouth of a huge crocodile. The creature began pulling him, dragging him across the ground. Bill had never felt this much pain, he'd never even imagined it. With a loud thud, he was now on his back as the huge thing continued to drag him off. Bill scraped frantically at the earth, trying pointlessly to escape.

"I told you ... you should have moved."

Bill squeezed his eyes shut and shook his head.

"What the devil are you doing?" Kneph asked bewildered.

Bill could hardly speak; the pain was so intense. "You would understand. I'm trying to wake up." It wasn't working. Bill Sanderson didn't understand. This technique had always worked before. It had never failed.

"You're a horse's ass," Kneph explained. "You're never waking up, butt-face. You're dead."

William Sanderson found himself in his dream, screaming.