

The Unconscious Drifter

A BOOK OF DREAMS



UJJAYANT SINHA

The Unconscious Drifter: A Book of Dreams by Ujjayant Sinha

Published by Ujjayant Sinha

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ujjayant Sinha was born in 1992 in New Delhi, India, and while growing up, had to often move from one city to another. He now lives in New Delhi and works with artificial intelligence at a technology company. Beyond his professional pursuits, Ujjayant is an avid amateur photographer and also takes pleasure in both running and indulging in a good book. He is drawn to a variety of stories and binges books, shows and movies, Japanese manga and Korean dramas. In 2022, he ventured into the realm of fiction writing. *The Unconscious Drifter: A Book of Dreams* is his debut work, reflecting a fusion of stimuli from the twists and turns of life and the surreal landscapes of dreams.

*To my friends, thank you for playing your part on
the stage of my mind.*

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INTRODUCTION

In July 2022, while in quarantine recovering from COVID, I felt an overwhelming urge to write as a means to cope with the suffocating feeling of confinement and the stress of work and daily life. In the middle of one of those nights, I lay wide awake, wondering what to write about. I had never attempted to write fiction before and was at a complete loss.

Then, a realization hit me—I had been narrating my dreams to friends for the past several years. The colorful mishmash of my subconscious starred me, friends, acquaintances, and fictional characters in various roles. My narrations always ended in laughter, as my friends found it hilarious that all my dreams were so absurd and vividly detailed.

The plotlines were diverse: ranging from amusing, such as taking a hippity-hop trip to Indonesia, to the sinister, like a detective intently pursuing a stone-cold killer.

That got me thinking: why not share them with others out there? Why keep these chuckles limited to my friends? So I began shortlisting the ones I wanted to write about, aiming to capture their true essence without embellishment. Ironic, considering dreams are all made up by our minds anyway.

In retrospect, I suppose the inspiration that I found on that gloomy night came from craving moments of light-heartedness, and chronicling my dreams as amusing short stories felt like the perfect escape. The whole notion felt so absurd that it made this pursuit even more fun. At that time, writing short stories also looked much simpler than attempting to write a full-blown novel. Of course, I had severely underestimated the thought and effort this project needed, but the pursuit of turning my dreams into tales became a joyous endeavor.

Within the pages of this book, you'll find strange and unreal worlds, diverse in nature. Each dream stands independently, yet some characters weave through them, contributing to their unique contexts and situations. As you glide from one cosmos of surrealness to another, you might even find the reader in you picturing yourself as the protagonist of these bizarre stories.

1. WHERE IS RICK?

I was having breakfast at a serene resort in the middle of a forest with my friend Rick and his family.

The vibe was idyllic – the food and drinks were delicious, exotic birds chirped in the background, and a musician strummed an acoustic guitar as we dined. Bliss.

Out of the blue, a gang of criminals barged into the property. They rushed straight to Rick, lifted him up in the air and took him away. By the time we understood what was happening, the gang had already vanished. We ran out and found no trace of their get-away vehicle. “Call the police!” yelled Rick’s mother to the resort staff.

The police soon arrived and launched a search operation, going through every nook and cranny of the forest. They kept at it for hours, but couldn’t find a single clue.

“We will keep looking,” the chief inspector assured Rick’s parents on call. Everyone was stressed and worried, but there was nothing to be done right then. I thought I would go to my room and get some rest.

As soon as I entered my room, I got a call. My eyes grew wide as I read the caller’s name. It was Rick!

“Bro! I need some anime recommendations. I finally finished

everything on my watchlist. What have you been watching lately? Anything worth checking out?" he asked.

I scratched my head. What is he saying, I thought. "Where the hell are you? You just got kidnapped and you are asking about anime recommendations? Have you been drugged?"

"Eh?"

"Where are you?" I pressed again.

"Home. Where else would I be? I just woke up. Did you see one of your insane dreams again?" he snickered.

"What?" I said, sounding more puzzled than he had been a few seconds ago.

"Wait wait, hang on. I am getting a call from a client," Rick hung up before I could say another word.

Flustered, I called him back immediately, but couldn't reach him. I heard a familiar message informing me his number was outside of the network's coverage area.

What had just happened? This was bizarre and absurd. Best not to tell Rick's family about the call, I thought. I then went to my bed and fell asleep.

The next day, the police resumed their search. They had brought more officers, dogs and even a helicopter and went deeper into the jungle. However, neither the gang nor Rick were anywhere to be found. The chief inspector returned to the resort. With a lowered head, he said, "We haven't been able to find your son yet. I am sorry." Rick's mother slumped on her chair.

Suddenly, my phone rang. Once again, it was Rick! This time, I called out to everyone and held up my phone's screen, where his name was flashing. They all stood up, surprised.

"Pick up the phone and turn on the speaker," said his mother.

I followed.

“Hey bro, what’s up? I have been swamped with work,” Rick greeted me like nothing was wrong.

His mother looked on, speechless.

“Where are you? I called back yesterday after you hung up. But I couldn’t reach your number,” I said.

“What? What do you mean? I didn’t call you yesterday,” he said, puzzled.

I glanced at Rick’s mother. We both looked baffled. “Rick, you got kidnapped yesterday morning and called me late in the afternoon asking for anime recommendations. You must have been drugged!”

“Kidnapped? Did you see another one of your crazy dreams again? Dude, I have been working 14-hour days this week. I didn’t have any time to call anyone or watch anime,” he said, sounding annoyed. All the people in the room looked at each other, bewildered.

“Hello? Are you there? Hello?” spoke Rick.

Suddenly, my phone rang again, even as I was on the call with Rick. I looked at the screen and froze, mouth wide open. The screen flashed: “Rick calling.”

I had no clue what was happening. How can I get a call from a number when I am already on a call with that same number? I couldn’t understand anything. I looked up at Rick’s family, who looked as perplexed as me. Rick’s mother gestured to me to receive the new call.

“Sorry bro, I had to hang up yesterday. It was an important client. I have been trying to pitch to them for weeks,” Rick began. We heard the ferocious clap of thunder and lightning and the frantic clashing of bells as he spoke.

“But didn’t you just say that you have been swamped with work this week and didn’t get time to call me?” I asked, dumbfounded.

“What? I have been chilling all week and watching anime all night. Were you talking to someone else?” he replied.

“But you just said a moment ago that you have been extremely busy! And how did you call me a second time when I am already on a call with you?!” I asked, exasperated, slamming my hand on the table.

“What do you mean, a second time?”

“You called me again from the same number and I am still connected to the first call!” I said.

“What are you talking about? How can anyone call from the same number twice at the same time?” he responded.

“Bro, are you still there?” said the first Rick out of the blue. We all jumped.

Okay, there must be multiple Earths in existence, and the Ricks from those worlds were calling my number, I thought quickly, feeling certain. There was no other possibility.

I looked at the others. It was clear all of us had arrived at the same conclusion.

“Aeee Rick! Take out the garbage,” we heard his mother shout on the first call. “Coming!” responded the first Rick.

At that moment, I woke up from the dream.

2. THE DETECTIVE

I was mingling with the crowds at a big football field, which had been turned into a Durga Puja pandal. The night seemed mystical, with a clear sky full of shining stars. A grandly decorated structure on one side of the field housed majestic idols of Goddess Durga and her children. An aromatic smell emanated from the lines of food stalls, and people dressed in colorful clothes excitedly walked around, thoroughly enjoying themselves. It was a sight to behold.

Suddenly, the joyous atmosphere was pierced by a shriek of panic: “Murder!”

I looked around quickly and saw a hysterical woman standing some distance away from me, near the structure that housed the idols. Chatter ran through the onlookers. It seemed she had spotted a corpse right behind the structure. Soon, a crowd gathered near her. The police arrived in a few minutes.

“Let’s call Pal Saheb,” someone suggested. “He will surely solve this mystery.”

Pal Saheb was a well-known private investigator who had risen to fame after solving several tricky cases that had confounded even the police. He reached the scene in minutes, dressed in a plain white dhoti and kurta. He greeted the police officers on the spot, went up to the corpse and walked around it, studying it from

every angle and bending down a few times to inspect it from up close.

“Hmm,” he muttered as he continued assessing the body.

“This person is the latest victim of the serial killer that I have been trying to catch for months. In fact, I had just been tracking him when I received news of this crime and then ended up here.”

The chief inspector, who was also at the spot, was surprised at the quick analysis. “How can you be so sure?”

“This killer strangles his victims and arranges the corpse to point in the direction that he intends to go in. This is his way of taunting us,” said Pal Saheb.

Indeed, the poor woman lay on the ground with her arms extended above her head, and her palms joined together.

Following the body with his eyes, he pointed west. “The killer has to be somewhere that side. The corpse is still warm. He couldn’t have gone far. Let’s go. We need to hurry.”

As Pal Saheb started taking hurried steps toward the road that led west, two children followed him with a dhak (drums) and bell, playing their instruments loudly and dancing around him.

That seemed strange to me. “Does he plan on announcing to the killer that he is on their tail?” I said to myself out loud. But no one else seemed bothered, so I joined the crowd that had started following Pal Saheb and was increasing in size.

As the detective kept moving ahead calmly, his followers grew more energetic with the rising intensity of the children’s music. I felt a rush of adrenaline when, all of a sudden, an invisible force belted out an electric, high-tempo sitar melody in the background, as if we were all in a movie.

Suddenly, Pal Saheb stopped in his tracks and held up his hand, motioning to the group to stop. I was sure we hadn’t moved

too far from the festival ground, but we found ourselves at the edge of a dark, dense forest. The sitar music grew more fervent.

“There is something suspicious here. I can sense it,” Pal Saheb said.

“Alright, let’s spread out and start searching,” the chief inspector announced. We all got to work, moving in different directions.

We then heard someone scream, “There is a body here!”

“Over here!” yelled another.

We rushed toward the direction of the sound. Pal Saheb and the chief inspector had already reached the spot. They flashed a beam of light toward the ground. A man in a white kurta lay dead beneath a tree.

“The killer has murdered another person. He has been strangled. We were too late,” said Pal Saheb.

“Hmm,” the chief inspector said, grimacing, and looked away. “This killer is very smart. He is two steps ahead of us.”

“How many has he already murdered, Pal Saheb?” asked someone from amongst the crowd.

“Based on the cases I have come across, 12 people so far,” replied the detective.

No one said a word. The music slowly died out as our hearts sank. But Pal Saheb looked as composed as ever. His face showed resolve: he was certain he would find the criminal.

“The killer has to be somewhere in this forest,” he said.

“But this place is too vast. From where do we even begin, Pal Saheb?” asked the chief inspector.

Suddenly, we heard a whistle, and then someone shouted from afar, “There is something here! Quickly!” The sitar music reso-

nated across the forest once again as the whistle blew repeatedly.

We ran toward the sound, and I gasped at the scene we had reached: A group from the search party was standing near a dome-like structure with a trapdoor, in a clearing in the forest.

“This must be the killer’s hideout!” exclaimed Pal Saheb. He then turned toward the crowd.

“Everyone, grab something sharp and get that door open.”

The people quickly picked up some heavy sticks and rocks from the ground and started thrashing the trapdoor.

All of a sudden, the dome collapsed and the ground under the structure caved in, revealing a deep pit beneath. Dust flew everywhere, and we were all blinded and coughing. Someone in the group grabbed a wall of the pit while trying to reorient himself.

“There is something here,” he yelled. “It’s soft.”

“What is it?” asked Pal Saheb.

“I can’t see clearly,” he replied, moving his fingers around some more and trying to identify the object.

“But it feels like skin. It’s a... hand! Aaaaaaaah!” He screamed and jumped back.

We slowly approached the pit. The dust had started to clear now. As we all looked down, a sense of panic rushed through me: there were human hands buried along the walls of the pit!

People started trembling, and several collapsed. Pal Saheb fell to his knees, and the chief inspector walked back several steps in alarm, halting against a tree. Both of them were visibly shaken.

This was not the killer’s hideout; it was where he hid the bodies of his victims. No one had the courage to count the corpses that we had just uncovered. The killer was not two, but 10 steps ahead of us, and he was nowhere to be found.

At that moment, I woke up from the dream.

3. BACK TO HIGH SCHOOL

I was sitting outside a conference room in my office, anxious and alone. The bigwigs seated inside were deciding on punitive action against me after I had a conflict with the leadership.

After what felt like hours, a person I didn't know exited the room and told me to go home and wait for instructions. I nodded and left.

The next morning, I received a courier, sent by my company. I opened the box and found a letter, along with a very familiar uniform. The letter read:

Dear employee,

In light of your recent actions, the company has decided that you are to go back to high school, attend the final year and clear all your exams. You will be allowed back at work only if you pass the exams for all subjects. The company has already paid your admission fee.

This parcel also contains a uniform. It may seem familiar to you. That is because it is the same uniform that you wore back when you were still in high school.

All the best.

"What nonsense is this?" I shouted. How could they do this! This seemed beyond reason. However, I had no choice but to

comply.

I put on the uniform. It had been over a decade since I left high school, and I had clearly grown since then. The clothes did not fit comfortably at all. I groaned.

The next day, I showed up at my old high school. I entered my allotted classroom and took a seat in the middle of the room. None of the students paid any attention to me. It was extremely awkward sitting with kids who were almost half my age. The tight uniform didn't help, and I struggled to sit properly.

The teacher entered. It was the same lady who had taught me math all those years ago, and she had not aged in the slightest.

She glanced over all the students. Her gaze lingered on me for a while, but she didn't react. She then turned toward the blackboard and began writing down the syllabus for the final exam. It was mind-boggling: we had to cover 17 chapters in English, 25 in physics, 27 in chemistry and 50 in math! It was never this intense back when I was in high school, I thought.

I picked up the math textbook and flipped through the pages, sighing. Nope, I am not going to put up with this, I decided. I am not going to pay any attention in class. I am already an adult.

The teachers too were indifferent to my presence. I often skipped school and bunked classes freely.

High school seemed more taxing than my office work.

Time went on, and the finals were just over a month away. I remembered the warning letter from my company and began panicking. The syllabus was gigantic, and I had not studied a single subject all year. The exam schedule was insane too. They were all spaced just two days apart, and I had to clear all four subjects! Suddenly, I felt a sense of dread.

I quickly penned a letter to the National Exam Board, urging them to alter the schedule to provide more time between consec-

utive exams. Surprisingly, they agreed to this student's demand—something they are known never to do. Now we had gaps of five to seven days between all exams. I felt major relief and decided to give it all I had.

The next day, I went to school and pleaded with my classmates to share their notes with me. They helpfully agreed. I studied hard, day and night. I solved question papers from the past five years. I took extra caution in English, Physics and Chemistry, and made sure to cover all important topics.

Finally, we were two days away from the first exam. I felt fairly confident. I will not be amongst the top scorers, but I will definitely make the 60th percentile, I thought.

Suddenly, I realized that I had seriously messed up. I had completely forgotten to study math!

I jumped out of the chair with my hands in the air. "Aaaaaaah-hhhhh!"

There was no way I could salvage the situation. Even though math was the last exam, I had to cover 50 chapters, and I had only five days after the previous test to prepare for it. I would not be able to study more than five chapters in those days.

I checked the schedule to see if I could make time to study during the breaks between the other exams. When I saw it, my mind went blank. The first exam was math! I had been checking last year's calendar without realising! "Aaaaaaahhhhhh!" I screamed.

At that moment, I woke up from the dream.

TO YOU, THE READER

I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart that you chose to pick up this preview of *The Unconscious Drifter: A Book of Dreams*. Your time and interest mean the world to me.

Truth be told, I never really planned to be an author. Writing this book was how I felt like I had won against life's challenges that all of us face, from burnout at work to failed personal endeavors.

I wanted to create something of substance that would give me long, sustainable happiness and would remain a source of pride throughout my life. I hope that the quirkiness of these stories offers you contentment as they have done for me.

If these stories brought you joy, could you spare a moment to share your thoughts? Your review can help others discover the same happiness you found within these pages. Please click here to leave your review: [CLICK HERE.](#)

And if you have friends and family who share your passion for captivating reads, consider passing this preview along. Your recommendation might brighten their day too.

Once again, thank you.