

Sample chapter from

Dreams
of
Eighteen

by Benjamin Gayle

Dreams of Eighteen

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1. **January**

05 January

Walking through a store-room at work. I think this is a grocery store. There is a large box in the middle of the aisle that I have to go around – an animal cage. As I try to squeeze past it, between the box and a storage rack, a small animal approaches from the direction of the store. It looks like a deer and doesn't seem to have noticed me. It continues on through the store-room and out the other side. I wonder where its mother is, and hope she isn't loose in the store again. I sigh and go out to look for her.

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Refurbishing and testing a cat, a rabbit, and some other, much larger, animal. They have all been rebuilt with new parts, ready for another lifetime of service. The rabbit is brown with large teeth. We have been feeding it breakfast cereal, toasted oats, but I worry that it needs a more balanced diet. The cat is white with long curly hair. It doesn't seem to act like a cat except that it is watching the rabbit; I worry that it might try to eat the rabbit. The other animal is the size of a baby T-Rex. It is eating anything that moves. If we don't stop it, it might waste all of our other accomplishments.

07 *January*

Swapping file cabinets. The old cabinet is dark with rusty drawers that are sagging under the weight of their contents. The new cabinet is beige, but I don't see how it is any better than the old one. She helps with the transfer. We pull the old cabinet out from its recess where it stands on a concrete pad, and set the new one in its place. She will now use the old cabinet. I don't understand why we did that.

11 *January*

Pushing a full shopping cart. Someone tells me that a teacher wants to see me at the library, so I head in that direction. On the way, I push the cart into a narrow elevator with blue tiles on the floor and a toilet at the far end. I park the cart next to the toilet, out of the way, to make room for others. I wonder if this full shopping cart is too heavy for the elevator, but the elevator operator doesn't seem to be concerned. Two men and a woman enter the elevator. One of the men starts talking to me; the other is the teacher that I am supposed to see. He comments on my name and how my name is my brand. It sounds as if he is trying to talk me into something. He is wearing a silvery fuel jacket and tells me that I will need to wear one also.

Later, working with a group in what looks like a hotel room. We are on lock-down, not allowed to leave the room, during some external crisis. When it is all over, I try to clean up but the others get in my way. I go to another room to get bottles of beer which I bring

back, open, and set down on a table in hopes that will keep them out of the way. It doesn't. I continue to put up with them, hoping they will leave soon.

12 *January*

Going on a field trip. Two men and a woman take me to a bar. We have to perform an unfamiliar ritual that has cultural significance here. A miniature white pagoda sits at one corner of the bar. It holds liquid and a wooden stick with a carved bulb at one end. One of the men takes the stick, dips the bulb into the liquid, and shakes some off onto the hands of the other man. Then he turns to me. I follow the motions of the other man: receive liquid, rub hands together, touch back of neck, and touch lips. The woman does not participate.

Two small dogs sit on stools at the counter, begging treats from customers; the woman says that is traditional. We have some snacks and drinks that I don't recognise while the woman eats a round chocolate-covered cake.

I am distracted by activity across the street at a building with a sign that says 'Bear and Beer'. Customers enter through a strange gate that extends outward on rails. The front opens as it rolls out and closes again after the person has entered. The customer comes back out in a bear costume. One of my companions tells me that customers have to wear the costume to enter and be served.

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Arriving at a new place. I am not sure if I will be living here, working here, or both. A woman leads me through, pointing things out, but she doesn't explain much. Some of the inside of this place is also outside – stone block building surrounded by neatly-tended lawn and flowers and bushes. Heavy wooden double-doors lead into the building. Living and working spaces are all mixed together here. I think the woman expects me to understand what to do without further instruction or explanation. Community meals are in a separate room under a red blanket. I don't know what the sleeping arrangement is. I wait for an invitation before participating in anything.

I think I recognise one of the men as a former co-worker and ask him. He is the same man, but he worked at a different company than I had remembered. He seems happy and productive, but doesn't participate in the group activities – a loner. Maybe he doesn't fit in either. I try to learn from him and follow his example without crowding him. I see him use a machine on wheels to trim the lawn; it looks more like an old car than a tractor. I try to help by trimming some by hand without getting in his way. I'm not sure what else he does because he doesn't stay in one place for long.

I am left alone to find my own way. I wander through lawns bordered by piles of dead leaves, some racks of equipment, small machines, wire baskets. I stop at a stack of front scoops for bulldozers and wonder why there are so many of them. Someone tells me that it is meal time, so I go back to the community meal room. There are some people under the blanket already. I don't feel comfortable or welcome, so I go back to wandering

around. I have gotten food elsewhere, some from the loner; I don't know where the rest came from. I don't think this situation is sustainable.

. . .

Ordering drinks. I am standing at a high counter with a window where the bartender is. I can see her at another window, around the corner to the right. I tell the bartender *whiskey* and pay – fifteen cents. I take my drink and go around to the left to a room with rectangular tables, irregularly spaced. I approach her as she is sitting down with her drink. She is upset about something and says *go away, freak*. She has never called me that before. I tell her that I don't want to be left all alone. She shakes her head. The other people in the room are watching us. I sigh and turn to go, unsure now what to do with my drink.

Walking home in the dark, I am confused about where I am going. I remember three places, and think I should stop at the nearer one to get supplies to carry to the other. I think the third place is my sister's – I don't want to bother her. I'm not sure I want to make the detour for supplies, either, so I keep walking up this steep asphalt-paved path. It varies in steepness and it is littered with gravel, making walking difficult. At the top of the hill, it goes under a bridge.

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Riding bicycles with a group. We are exploring when we come to a path that leads down a steep hill. I can't tell what is down there. One person volunteers to

ride down to check it out. He calls back to us to come down to join him – there is a lake down there. We all go down, asphalt turning to dirt through sparse trees. There is a small recreation area here, and a few other people in a group around the shore to the right. They are playing catch with a dog. Some of my group want to go swimming. While they are in the water, everything changes. Instead of standing on the shore of a lake, I am now inside a building. My companions and all of the bicycles have disappeared. I am looking into a long narrow room through a wall of glass. The walls that are not glass are painted in murals – barn doors on one end, and a series of faces on the long wall, portraits outdoors with lots of yellows. The other end of the long room is another glass wall that overlooks a swimming pool. Three people walk through the room, discussing the sale of the building. Somehow, I know this place used to be different.

13 January

Creating and testing drawings. They all have the same words and the same image of a famous singer, but various people come through the studio putting their own personal touches on them. The singer is helping and supervising. I have to plug the drawings in to make sure they work before they are personalised, but run out of power cords. I have to wait for some of the pictures to be finished so that I can re-use their cords. As I am squatting down to reach the power outlets underneath a table, my pants slip down and my shirt rides up – I have to re-adjust my clothes each time. While I am wait-

ing to plug in more drawings, I see some vaguely familiar people. I find two boxes full of plastic bags of broccoli under one of the tables. I hand them to the singer; maybe she will know what to do with them.

. . .

Coming home to a different house. I don't remember being here before. A narrow asphalt road cuts a ledge into a hillside. The parking area is level with the road, and the house is built into the hill below it. The bathroom is an array of glass stalls on the hill above the road; they look like telephone booths. A narrow stone stairway with stone walls leads down to a door that opens to the left. I follow her down the steps, both of us with full shopping carts that barely make the turn at the bottom. I don't know how we got the carts down the steps.

. . .

Waiting in a hotel lobby. I don't know what I am waiting for. I start a conversation with a woman who has a presentation set up. There are a few of these presentations grouped together – a mini trade show. I know that she represents some company that is selling something, but I don't understand what that is. Another woman shows up and talks to her. Her supervisor, the man in charge of all of the presentations, comes out from the dining room and announces that it is time to pack up, then immediately returns to the dining room. He has a physical deformity that causes his head to be tilted back on his neck, and his shoulders rock back-and-forth as he walks. The woman I have been talking to

says that this is her last show, and encourages me to make acquaintance with her supervisor because he will need to find someone to take her place. I wonder if I would want to do that. She also encourages me and the other woman to take some of the give-aways – items in hard plastic boxes on circular racks around her displays. I get a pocket calendar and a calculator. She says the things are in plastic boxes for security reasons, but offers no further explanation. She packs up quickly, hauls her cases out the front door, and loads them into a pickup truck.

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Visiting a resort. I am just here for the day. Others plan to stay for a week or more. One man here has invested in a boat and tells me that he will make money with it. I am skeptical of his plan. He has already lost four-hundred and sixty-two dollars on the deal, but that doesn't seem to concern him. He says he has researched maritime contracts and is confident that he can make money with them.

14 January

Watching a vehicle testing session. All of the vehicles are on rails. Braking performance and collision avoidance are key measures. The vehicles are arranged on the rails in a particular order and monitored as they are run up to speed. The order of the vehicles changes each time. I don't understand the purpose of this because all of the vehicles are mounted on flatbed rail cars, not rolling directly on the rails themselves. The vehicles

include a tractor-trailer, a passenger bus, a car, and a motorcycle with a sidecar. A man wearing a helmet straddles the motorcycle while a dog is strapped into the sidecar with clear plastic tape.

. . .

Sitting on the floor at a library. It is all one open room lined with shelves of books and empty in the center. I don't recognise what the colorful design on the carpet in reds and yellows represents. I am worried about my reading performance, that I am too slow. A woman tells me that there is one speed – I either read or I don't. I don't understand what that means.

18 January

Waiting at a restaurant. I have been here with a group of co-workers for what seems like a long time. The chef comes out to call for the largest group to be seated – not us. We have to keep waiting.

. . .

Watching an insect crawl out from under the printer. Its dark body contrasts with the white plastic. I run to get the hammer to smash it, then miss several times before I get it. Another different insect crawls out from under the printer, then crawls back under before I can reach it with the hammer. I consider moving the printer to get to it, but worry that there might be more under there than I can handle.

19 *January*

Forming letters out of wire. I have to complete the alphabet in thin silver strands. Then I attach the wire letters to keys on a typewriter, a slow and tedious process. When I type, the typewriter outputs formed-wire letters and words that I have to carefully attach to a piece of paper.

21 *January*

Looking for the flashlight. She calls me into the bathroom, upset about something. Entering the bathroom, I see a white plastic panel leaned up against the left wall; I don't know what that is for or why it is there. She is standing straight ahead, holding the cover from the toilet-tank, and looking down at the toilet as it sprays water from underneath – it looks as if a pipe is leaking. I reach for the shutoff valve and turn it, but the water keeps coming. It is too dark in here for me to see what the problem is. The lights are not working, so I go to get my flashlight, worrying about not having a functional toilet to use.

Out of the bathroom and into the living room. Here is an unfamiliar machine in the middle of the room, a black frame with various pipes and wires and controls – it is also leaking. The water flow stops when I turn some valves on the pipes. I have to figure out what this thing is, why it is here in the living room, but there isn't enough light.

By the time she calls for me again, I have forgot-

ten about the problem in the bathroom. I still have to find the flashlight. I look around but don't see it here in the living room. It might be in the bedroom, but it is even darker in there. I have to guess and feel my way around, and eventually find it on the floor in a corner. I take the flashlight with me to the bathroom and shine it on the leaking pipe. It is leaking below the shutoff valve, so I will have to trace it back to the basement to find where to turn it off.

. . .

Riding with her on emergency calls. We start out inside at a counter where she buys supplies – only what she knows she will need each time. I don't know what she is getting, but it seems to be a familiar routine for both her and the man behind the counter. We go out through silver-framed glass doors to a narrow parking lot, then get into a small white car that is parked downhill from the store. She drives. I don't know where we went, maybe I fell asleep. We repeat this over and over again, getting different supplies each time.

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Retrieving materials to fulfill work orders. I walk through rows of gray-painted metal racks, looking for what I need, avoiding other workers as I go. I have to read the labels on the shelves and boxes, verify that the contents of the boxes match the labels, then again to be sure. This time I get a small metal enclosure in a cardboard box. I have to lift the top off of the enclosure and install things into it. I don't know what it does. The top and base are keyed with slots for wiring, but I have

trouble aligning them so that they fit back together. Another time, I can't find what I am looking for – the shelf where it should be is empty.

. . .

Studying something. I sit at a small desk in a carpeted corner of a larger indoor space that looks like a department store. I have thin printed books, notebooks, planner, and a backpack. Others come and go, between studying and other activities. I'm not sure what this is, but I think it has something to do with one phase of a project that I need to complete. I have a different advisor for each phase. All of them coordinate with each other, though their cooperation is limited. I think they are as much rivals as collaborators.

I get up to do something else, stuffing my things into my backpack and dropping it onto the floor where other backpacks are piled up. I don't know where I went or did, but I have returned. My backpack is easy to find in the pile because it is the only purple one. When I sit down and open it, the contents are a disorganised mess – I have to sort through all of it.

A woman comes up to talk to me. I think she is my advisor for this phase. I recognise her because her eyelashes and eyebrows are braided; I have never seen that done before. I have to refer to my notebooks and planner to answer her questions, then counter with questions of my own that she cannot answer. She says that she does not have programming access, so she has to confer with one of the other advisors. I think she intends to use my questions as leverage against him. He sits in a

car in a parking lot on a hill, looking down at the building.

22 January

Boarding a transport. I run up elevated ramps and walkways that move and separate and rejoin as I go. There are no curbs or railings, and I have to dodge trucks and trains as they load cargo. I have to help secure the cargo: a cloth bag filled with paint; a hose connects to the bag from above; a plastic basin underneath. We have to strap it all to a pole with plastic zip-ties.

. . .

Meeting a group and exchanging vehicles. I have to drive somewhere else, alone. At a remote site, I have a disagreement with another man about a temperature sensor. He says that I am biased because I went to school with the person who designed it. I fill my shirt pocket with samples and leave.

24 January

Arriving at a walled area. The indoor and outdoor spaces are decorated mostly in reds. I see familiar items in disarray – something has happened. I think I should leave a note to acknowledge that I was here, for others to find later, maybe tomorrow. Then I move to another location, perceived safer, where I can re-evaluate this changing situation.

26 *January*

Pumping water out of holes. I have to dig down, scooping gravel and sand with my hands, to push the hose deeper in. The black plastic hose is attached to a red plastic canister. There is also an engine that does the pumping; I have to start it but don't know where it is. Another man is doing the same thing, emptying holes and barrels and flower pots. I don't know why we are doing this, but the sun will probably finish the job later today.

27 *January*

Visiting the local velodrome. It is empty. The track is cleaner and smaller than I remember. I wander through, looking for the library. It used to be upstairs, but now there are only classrooms and a larger room that serves as cafeteria and recreation area. A few students are also wandering around. Some of them are working on their bicycles. I ask about the event schedule and someone tells me that it is posted downstairs; I must have overlooked it on my way in. I go back downstairs, coming out at one end of the track. I notice that the infield is domed, a raised mound. Around to my right is the office area and main entrance. A man comes out of an office to greet me as if he is expecting me. I don't know what he wants from me. I know I have visited here before, but forgot about it. Maybe I can practise riding here. I still haven't found the schedule.

. . .

Waking up in the night in my room upstairs. I go down to the front door to look out to check the weather. It is dark and clear, but I hear thunder in the distance. She is also awake, working outside in the shed beside the house. I am compelled to do something other than go back to bed, so I start on a network upgrade project.

When I return to my room and flip the light switch on, the ceiling fan starts spinning. The fan has not worked for years, and I have been hanging things from the blades. Now it is all wrapped up and locked up; I will have to fix that. The cable I need to use to connect to the network is coiled and zip-tied. I will have to find the tool to cut the ties, then route the cable through the coffee table that I had mounted on the ceiling.

I go out of my room, around a corner of the house, and through a narrow and dusty hallway to the storage room. I worry that the door won't open, that I should have gone the other way. The door sticks, but opens with some effort. I find the toolbox, get the tool that I need, and go back to my room.

Later, I stand downstairs at the front door, listening to the thunder, feeling anxious and uneasy. I think something is about to happen, but I don't know what that might be.

. . .

Lying on the floor on a blanket. I don't recognise this place. Two dog dishes are on the floor across the room, but I don't see a dog. I get up, look around, and find two men at the front of this house. I follow them as they go down a steep slope of mud and gravel, hanging

onto tree trunks as I go. They are working on something at the bottom of this slope, where their pickup trucks are parked blocking the road.

. . .

Attending a dog show. The dogs are kept in blocks of small white buildings, two levels high, around a park. I might as well look at the dogs while I am here, but find that I can only look from outside the buildings. A woman tells me that judging will be at 15:30 – too late; I will have to leave before then. I walk around looking, and end up inside a house that looks like a restaurant. I don't want to eat, so I continue walking through, looking for an exit. A stairway goes around to the right and up.

28 January

Working away from my home station. A man comes up to me and asks if he can borrow a circuit board, to use to compare to something else. I say *yes – they are in a rack at my workstation*. He either doesn't understand where it is, or doesn't want to get it himself. I don't want to get it for him, but he won't go away, so I drop what I am doing and walk back to my workbench to get the circuit board.

. . .

Watching an interview before a bicycle race. There is no sound, so I don't know what they are saying. In the race, on a bicycle, I am involved in a crash. Debris on the road in front of the group makes the road impass-

able. The rectangular sticks look like fresh-cut lumber. We didn't see them in time because of the fog. Spectators help to clear the debris so the race can continue.

I am injured, unable to continue, so I ride in the team car. The driver is going fast, too fast to be on the road with the racers, and too close in this fog. I panic when I see riders stopped, blocking the road. The driver manages to stop in time, avoiding a crash, but resumes driving too fast and too close when the racers move on. He looks at me as he is driving, saying it is amazing that we didn't crash. I have to tell him to look at the road ahead, not at me.

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Sitting in the recliner, I notice two insects buzzing above and around me. The small one looks like a tiny bee with a yellow-and-black body. The large one is a bumblebee. Neither one worries me, but I have to deal with them anyway. A swat with a rolled-up advertisement takes care of the small one. I follow the large one to the kitchen where it lands and takes off repeatedly, hopping from one surface to another. When I swat it, it falls to the floor, stunned but still moving. I have to smash it with my foot, making a gooey mess on the floor next to another smashed insect that looks like it used to be a fat hornet. I can't decide whether to clean up the messes or leave them as warnings to other insects.

29 January

Walking to work. I stop at a place along the road-

side where water is pooling in a drainage ditch. It fills, then overflows, increasing volume and pace as more water comes. I think there must be a rainstorm upstream and worry that I will get wet and cold when it reaches here. I did not bring a jacket. If I am soaking wet when I get to work, I won't be able to do my job. I see debris in the road, large pieces of cardboard, so I run out to get it and pull it out of the road between cars. The traffic is light but it seems a long way to run to get there and back, or maybe the cars are moving faster than I thought.

The debris morphs into packaged merchandise, and the road becomes a plant-floor space where forklifts drive between piles of things. Two large cardboard boxes belong there, I find, when I attempt to move them. A plastic bag containing two silvery plastic pillows looks out-of-place, so I try to find where it belongs. I wander through and find an area with other merchandise stacked on shelves and hanging on racks; it looks like a store. I don't see anything exactly like what I have, so I put it down next to one of the shelves – close enough. Two men approach, calling me names, harassing me. I don't know who they are, but they make references to where I live and a radio. I try to ignore them and walk away.

About the Author

Benjamin Gayle was born in Richmond Virginia, and has lived in the western mountains of the state for most of his life. Educated in math and electrical engineering, he has worked in a wide variety of capacities including factory automation in automotive manufacturing, and designing motor control systems for a drives manufacturer. He has been an amateur cyclist and bicycle mechanic for more than thirty years, and an amateur radio operator (N1NP) for nearly twenty. Reading was an early passion, followed by writing in his early teens, though that was set aside for decades for career and other responsibilities. He currently works a part-time job while continuing to write.

He has also produced *Spectrum*, a broad overview of the music of composer Charles Irving Gayle, available on CD.

Sample chapters and more information are available at www.AntonomasiaProductions.org.

Books by Benjamin Gayle:

The Turtle Test
The Frost Bug Dreams
Dreams of Sixteen
Dreams of Seventeen
Dreams of Eighteen