

Frank Tilsley

The  
DREAM

Even if dreams can show us the future, this dream did not make sense. Must I never pass a lorry on a clear road?

Can a dream show us the future and give us the opportunity of changing it? It is hard to believe. If we can see the future in a dream, then surely the future already exists. If it does, then we are not free to act in the ways we wish to, we are not responsible for our own lives.

Before I tell you the dream, I must explain a little about the context. It was the summer of four years ago, and I was driving my family back from Italy through the south of France. My son had not yet learned to drive, my daughter was too young, and my wife doesn't drive at all. I had been at the wheel for the best part of three weeks. Perhaps I was tired; perhaps I could think of nothing except cars. We spent the night of the dream in a town called Tain l'Hermitage.

Now I'll tell you the dream. I was sitting in a big, powerful, cream-coloured car, and I was driving at high speed through the country. I was coming to a bend in the road, and in front of me, there was a very large lorry.

My foot reached out towards the brake, but it could not find it. I looked down: there was no brake! Worse: my hands held empty air. There was no wheel for them to hold. There were no controls of any kind. Already we were almost into the back of the lorry.

I shouted in fear. Then I heard a calm voice coming from my left, and I turned my head. A stranger was sitting there. He was a cheerful man of about forty. He was wearing an expensive shirt, and on his head, he had a red hat. I couldn't understand what he said; he spoke very quickly in French, and my own French is not very good. I didn't, in fact, care what he said. My eyes were on his clean, fat hands, which were holding the wheel. This car had its wheel on the left. He, not I, was in control.

We drove safely round the bend. He turned the wheel slightly to place the car in the middle of the road. He was going to pass the lorry. The road stretched straight ahead. It was bright in the sunlight and it was quite empty.

Only one other person was in sight; a woman was sitting outside a small house with white walls, and this house was almost exactly ahead of us. She was sitting by a table putting some flowers in pots. She wanted to sell us some, and waved them at us.

This sight, for some reason, filled me with a terrible fear. The flowers made me think of death and our final resting place.

At this moment, we were level with the lorry and ready to pass it, but then the lorry began to turn away from the side of the road, towards our car. It appeared that the driver was doing this on purpose. The stranger by my side shouted loudly and tried to move out of the way. There was a terrible noise from the back of the car, and then an explosion. The earth seemed to turn over, and the noise of flames burned in my ears. At that point, I woke up in fear.

I was very worried by this dream, and could not sleep again. It seemed to have a message, and I wanted to explain it.

Even if dreams can show us the future, this dream did not make sense. Must I never pass a lorry on a clear road? The road to Paris is always filled with very large lorries. Most of them come up from Marseilles, and I always have to pass them when the road is clear; I can't drive slowly behind them forever. No, this was not the meaning of the dream. At its heart was some kind of fear. I had to recognize my fear, and then I could forget all about it.

I thought about my driving during the last three weeks. I tried to remember all the lorries and all the small white houses. I thought of all the cars, which were painted cream. I remembered nothing of any great interest. I had imagined that the road in the dream must be in France; it was long, empty and straight. But then I remembered that we had passed the lorry on the right. So the dream was about a road in England; in England all cars keep to the left. Immediately, I remembered something.

Two years before this, I was travelling in the north of England. An American and I were making some radio programmes. He had brought his car from America, and of course, the driver sat on the left side. The brakes

and other controls were also on the left, but the colour of his car was not cream.

The American was a careless driver, and often passed other cars against my advice. Remember that I was in a better position to see: I was sitting on the right. Once, just after Nottingham, he played chicken'.

You probably know about 'chicken'; it is a game that is played on the roads. It is becoming more and more popular in America, because long journeys are often very dull. You just move your car into the middle of the road and stay there.

When another car appears, it comes towards you in the middle of the road. The driver who turns away is the chicken. Quite often, neither driver turns away.

I expressed my displeasure at this game in language that the American could not fail to understand. We did not play it again, but it had probably left its mark on my mind. So then, when I was asleep, I experienced it all again in a dream. I also remembered something else while I was having breakfast. When we played 'chicken', it was an uncommonly windy day. We stopped at Chesterfield, and the American bought a hat. It was a black hat, not a red one, but in dreams, details are not always exact. After this, I forgot about the dream until the afternoon.

The big French lorries often play their own game. They stay in the middle of the road, and you can't pass them. You have to stay behind them. Sometimes you have to follow them for endless kilometres, although the roads are almost completely empty.

This afternoon we were following a large vehicle, which was making terrible noises. When I blew my horn, the driver moved to the side of the road, but it was the wrong side. He was driving along on the left, instead of keeping to the right. There was enough space on the right for me to pass him. But to do that would be wrong. So I just followed him for a few kilometres and I told myself not to pass him.

I considered the situation from every point of view. I could certainly turn my car more quickly than he could turn his lorry. It was a very big, heavy lorry. Could I, perhaps, pass him quickly on the right before he could do anything? If he turned to the right, though, he could easily kill us all. He probably wanted a bit of fun, but he might want an accident. If he killed us, nobody would say it was his fault; the law would be on his side.

The road ahead was quite empty, and went on for many kilometres. I drove more slowly until some distance separated us. Then I increased my speed as much as I could. I drove towards that empty space beside the lorry. My car was moving at about 110 kilometres an hour.

The front of my car was almost level with the back of the lorry. Then I saw something that knocked the breath out of my body. On the grass beside the road, a woman was sitting outside a small white house with a table of flowers!

For the first time in my life, I changed my mind while I was preparing to pass another vehicle. My foot went down hard on the brake. The car rocked from side to side. From behind me, I heard the sound of a horn. Another car was following us at a high speed. I knew its colour before I saw it; it was cream.

I pressed hard on the brake and turned the wheel slightly. I was just able to move in behind the lorry without touching it. The other car passed us and the driver blew his horn wildly. It reached the lorry - and then the lorry turned towards it.

For a moment I thought that the car was going to pass the lorry safely; it was moving very fast. Then the front of the lorry just touched the back of the car. It was only a light touch, but it knocked the car towards the side of the road and the woman at the table.

The driver of that car knew exactly what to do. With the greatest skill, he turned it back into the middle of the road. His control was wonderful, much better than mine. He waved angrily at the lorry driver and drove quickly away in a cloud of dust. He was soon out of sight.

We stayed that night in Fontainebleau. A big car was standing outside the hotel, and the back showed signs of damage to the paintwork. It was a cream car, and so I looked for the driver. He was not wearing a red hat or an expensive shirt.

He was a young man from Paris - not like the driver in my dream. He spoke good English, so I asked him if he would like the number of that lorry. I had noticed it, and I was happy to give it to him. But he only laughed; the law won't help you if you pass on the wrong side of the road. To him the whole thing had been a game.

'It tests your skill,' he said. 'If the car is powerful enough, you can do it. But you couldn't do it, not in your car.'

I didn't tell him about my dream, my reason for not passing the lorry. There was no time; he was in a hurry and wanted to reach Paris quickly. It made me think, though. I don't really believe in dreams, of course; but something saved us all from a terrible death.

- THE END -

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