

Eric Seiley

The B Side of the Moon

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The Three Talents of John Dupree

Six months ago, I had exactly two talents: overwatering my succulents and frightening people when I initiated sales calls. It was my face that did it. I mean, I'm not deformed or anything. And some people even look on me like I'm handsome, in an unconventional sense. Though I do tend to look very stern without effort, and even downright sinister when I smile. Which helps exactly zero percent when trying to sell bibles across America's rustic Bible Belt. Where sadly, my mug isn't often well received -- more like a demon trickster or wolf among God's flock of pious, church going people. Anything but your average travelling salesman working for the Bosch Company out of North Texas, Oklahoma and Tennessee. But my boss, Peter Stamp, thinks, once I find my groove, my schtick, I'll be able to turn the whole thing around and be one of his top sellers.

"You have the right attitude, for sure, my son. You just gotta fix how people see you." Peter kept saying, "Use your looks to your advantage. Figure out how to read what motivates people, make them trust you, and then use that harsh disposition of yours into convincing them not only buy from you, but right away or else they're going to hell!"

So I kept trying despite the fact that I wasn't making much money. I tried to explain my facial tics away at first -- like a good defense attorney addressing a jury, fighting to keep his client off death row. "It's just a byproduct of my genetics and upbringing," I'd explain. "I'm eastern European, you see, and prone to looking stern."

When that didn't work, I tried flirting. Playing off my "dangerous guy" looks while tapping into some secret yearning every woman has and most men want. But that didn't work so well either. At least in sales. It did help generate a few "fall of Eve" moments with a couple of housewives, if you know what I mean. Which felt rushed and made me feel dirty for satisfying my itch. Not to mention one or two dates with a few cowgirls down at the local country western bar I liked to frequent, called Shoeshine Charley's. But they went exactly nowhere. I even had a tryst one late night after close with the owner and part time bartender, Cheryl, in the back room. I liked it I guess, had she not up and kicked me to the curb before I could even pull my jeans back up, saying her husband, Charlie, was sure to show up any second to pick her up. I buttoned up quickly and made sure I didn't meet Charley.

So my talents were getting me very far. Which meant, I was stuck and not likely to accomplish anything important. Not until my third talent showed up. That's when things really began to happen. With my third talent, I began to *monetize* for big gains. Setting the stage for bigger accomplishments. Even love.

It happened like this. I was in Mineral Wells one evening for a few sales calls when the news reported a huge thunderstorm, category five, was descending. Pushing my Oldsmobile Cutlass as fast as I could out of town and across route 281 to outdistance the incoming storm, my Olds ended up being struck by lightning. Which lit up the entire vehicle and we glowed for, like, twenty minutes after. I swear it did. But surprisingly causing no harm to my person. I just glowed, inside the Olds, like the

world's biggest light bulb. All the way home when the car and I seemingly returned to normal.

Feeling a bit rattled, instead of heading home, I instead drove straight to Shoeshine Charley's for a few "calming" drinks. And found my night took another upturn when Cheryl, apropos of nothing, made it known she wanted me to take her home that night cause her husband, the eponymous "Charlie," had decided to go hunting with a few buddies down in Lubbock rather than tend bar with her. You get the picture. I was agreeable, though feeling a bit sleazy about it all. Still, I took her home.

But when I woke up, I realized something had changed within me. Something I couldn't ignore. I now had the ability and talent to sense *where* people were going to die. Not when, mind you. Or *how* so much. But *where*. Which might not sound very practical, but you'd be surprised how well it can be applied when there's a will.

My first reading was Cheryl. Cheryl had just rolled over and grabbed my "special" place to entice a little morning wood, when I looked at her and blurted out, "Ipswich, Florida. Back of a pickup truck going high speed down the freeway. You fall out and get run over by pursuing police vehicles."

"What?" Cheryl growled in surprise, letting go of my "Jimmy." "That's how you react? What the hell!? What does that even mean? Is that some kinda news you heard? You know my parents live in Ipswich. Not to mention I'm from there. I grew up there. And I still go back to visit. So what's all this bullshit about me being run over by cops in Ipswich, Florida?"

"It's something I happened to flash on just now," was all I could say. Which I had. I suddenly had a clear image of Cheryl standing unbelted in the back of an open bed pickup truck – the kind with its wheels jacked up high off the ground and one of them giant redneck rebel flags flying from the roll bar. Then the truck takes a sharp,

unexpected left turn and Cheryl flies out, landing on the gravel road where she's subsequently run over by two patrol cars chasing behind. I probably shouldn't have described what I was seeing to her, but I did.

"What is this?" Cheryl asked taken aback. Not sure if I was having a go at her. "If this is some joke, or your way of getting me out the door, it's pretty terrible. And when is this horrific incident even supposed to occur?"

"I don't know. But you don't look much older than you do now."

"Which is?"

"Uhm, forty-five?"

"Asshole," Cheryl spat, getting out of bed and reaching for her jeans off the floor. It didn't take her but five minutes to get dressed and be gone. Calling back over her shoulder as she left, "you weren't even that good of a lay, you prick!"

Despite Cheryl's reaction, it turns out there are people who will pay cash to know *where* people die. I connected with Bobby O'Shea, a life insurance salesman whom my boss Peter recommended, and started joining in on sales calls. Then, when I received a vision, which was often, I'd simply relay what I saw like the grim reaper of death -- my stern look and shocking information (like a "bad cop") propelling more than a few customers to turn to Bobby (the "good cop") and not only ask for life insurance, but demand a higher premium payout should my visions occur sooner than later. Bobby loved it. And paid me ten percent cash, right off the top, for every policy he locked in.

And then there was this quirky nighttime E.R. doc at Lubbock General, Dr. Leon Fitzer. Who loved it when I passed through his emergency room once or twice an evening to look over his patients. If I saw any dying in his E.R., I'd tell him right away and he'd get them up and out to another hospital. He didn't pay cash, but he did offer loads of

those free prescription narcotic samplers collected from the med reps. Which I'd take and sell for twenty a piece down at Shoeshine Charlie's. Though not on the nights when Cheryl was working. She didn't like drugs in her place and would've skinned me alive if she knew what I was peddling.

So all in all, after my third talent developed, I started to make some pretty decent amount of money. And I suppose could've gone on this way for a while, till I found myself sitting on a bench in Mercy Park watching several Gen Z hippies practicing fire baton twirling and fire breathing one overcast afternoon. While I wondered why I never flashed on any of them dying in the park by fire, this beautiful woman, dressed down like they do whenever they want to go unnoticed – all baseball hat, bulky U of T sweater, jeans, and white tennis shoes – came over and sat down next to me at the other end of the bench.

"Sunday afternoon, two o'clock, May 17th, 2027," she spoke out loud and clear.

And when I looked over discovered she was staring right at me from under the brim of her cap. "Excuse me?" I replied, but then flashed on her and blurted out, "A boat cruising Lake Tahoe's south shore at Emerald Bay." Like we were two cold war spies giving question and answer code.

"What an odd response," she laughed. "I don't think anyone has ever responded that way before. What's your name?"

"John. And yours?"

"Bailey. Like the liqueur—Bailey's and cream."

"Are you sweetly intoxicating too?"

"Oof. If that was a pickup line, then damn!"

"It wasn't that bad."

"It was a little bad."

"Bailey?"

"Yes, John?"

"What did you mean when you said Sunday afternoon, May 17th, 2027, at two o'clock?"

"I'm sorry. It's a unique skill I have that's very off putting to others. I can tell the time a person will die. And then I compulsively have to tell them. My apologies."

"No apologies necessary. I don't believe in fate so I feel pretty safe from your pronouncement." Well, that wasn't entirely true. Of course I believed in fate. I was practically living it every day. But I was also trying to impress a very beautiful woman with my stoicism. Breed an air of mystery, you know? I mean who knows? Maybe we'd end up in bed together later.

"But you said something unexpected in reply," Bailey mentioned. "You spoke about a place. Lake Tahoe, I believe. Why?"

"I also have a unique talent. I can tell *where* someone is going to die. As in, you're going to die on a boat in Lake Tahoe."

"Not when, perhaps? Just where."

"Exactly."

"Interesting."

"Most people don't think so. In fact, most people are creeped out by such information."

"I'm not most people."

"You can say that again."

“Now if you’d said I would die sitting on a bench watching a bunch of young people twirl fire batons and blow fireballs out of their mouth, I might’ve been a little more upset.”

“Or if you’d said Friday, August 1st, 2025, at...” I checked my watch, “2:25pm, then I probably would’ve been disturbed too.”

Bailey smiled. I smiled. I liked being on the same wavelength with another human being. Someone who wasn’t automatically frightened of my looks or talents. It was a first for me and all the more pleasant since she sounded smart too.

“Well, Bailey, since I apparently have a couple of years ahead of me, and we’re on the south side of Fort Worth and not in Lake Tahoe, can I interest you in joining me for a cup of coffee?”

“I think I’d rather have an actual drink. How about we find a bar nearby.”

“I happen to know one not too far away. Do you like country and western?”

“Not particularly. But beggars can’t be choosers, right? So lead the way, oh omniscient one.”

“Gladly.”

Sitting in a back booth at Shoeshine Charley’s, I fell in love. Truly. Bailey and I talked for hours in such an easy way, about everything, I started to believe that old cliché – how we must’ve known each other in a previous life. And that love at first sight was possible. And if I missed my guess, Bailey was feeling the same despite my stern looks and unusual talents.

“Don’t take this the wrong way, John, but I need to make another prediction.”

“Yeah? Shoot.”

"I don't know why I'm saying this, but I really like you. And I feel connected to you in a way I never have with anyone else. If you can believe that."

"I can. I'm sure you can tell I'm feeling the same way."

"You are?"

"Very much so. In fact, it's so unusual, I can't help but wonder if....well..."

"Go ahead and say it. I think I know what you're thinking."

I told you she was smart. "Well," I said, "I can't help but wonder if this is a scam. If you're just setting me up for something. I mean, it's not like I attract a lot of beautiful women with a face like mine. Or get along with other people easily. And if you're an escort, I certainly can't afford you. I'm sorry if that offends you."

"Not at all. I can see how it could come across that way. But I promise you, that's not the case. I'm not scamming you. And I am definitely not a call girl. Though I suppose that's what someone would say in my position. How could you know after having just met me a few hours ago."

"Mind you, I don't get that vibe from you. And I'll believe you if you say you're not running a number on me. But like you said, we just met a few hours ago. How would I know?"

"I guess you really can't. So let me go out on a limb here and be vulnerable. I feel close to you. I feel connected somehow. I've never been in love before, but I hope this is it. Because, for some reason, I feel completely safe and happy sitting here with you. Like time has stopped and I only want to be with you. I don't want it to end. So, I'll play this any way you wish – slow, fast, whatever. And I promise, I won't leave unless you want me to. Or if you don't feel the same."

"That has to be, hands down, the most wonderful thing I've ever heard in all my life."

Bailey reached across the table and took my hand in hers, looking deep into my eyes. I felt the electric sparks. I felt the sincerity and love. "I say, let's take a chance. From this moment on, let's be together."

"As long as you promise me one thing."

"What's that?"

"Be honest. In everything. Trust me, I can take it. I can take anything as long as you don't try to deceive me."

"Done."

Our smiles never faltered even a fraction as we sat the afternoon away talking about the future. Places we could go. Things we could do. The life we could experience together. "Just not Lake Tahoe," Bailey laughed. "Agreed," I replied, feeling a sense of peace and satisfaction unlike any I'd ever known.

"Time's growing short, John," Bailey said. "How about we get out of here and go back to your place. Or mine if you like. I have a pretty nice penthouse downtown."

"I'd like to that. And I'd like to see your place. My place isn't all that nice."

"Done."

We stood and I dropped a bunch of twenties on the table for the drinks. Then I took Bailey's hand and we headed for the door. That's when I saw Cheryl -- standing behind the bar, staring daggers, looking truly and completely pissed off. I hadn't realized she'd been working or I'd never have come in.

"Oh shit," I said.

"Oh shit?" Bailey inquired.

“The bartender. She and I...well, we had a night together not so long ago. Before I met you. I wouldn't have brought you here if I'd known she was coming in tonight.”

“Gotcha,” Bailey said looking over. “Well, damn, John, she looks angry as all hell. You must've really done a number on her.”

“Not intentionally. It wasn't that serious. But things did take a turn when I read her death and told her where it would happen. She didn't take it well.”

“Believe it or not, I understand. I've had similar experiences. Should I go over and talk to her? Explain what's happening. Girls have a way of knowing the right things to say to each other.”

“No. I think we should just get out of here. Quickly.”

“HEY ASSHOLE!” Cheryl screamed. “WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING!? YOU THINK YOU CAN SELL DRUGS IN MY BAR?! YOU THINK YOU CAN JUST COME IN HERE AND PARADE SOME WHORE AROUND IN FRONT OF ME AFTER THE SHIT YOU SAID TO ME?! LIKE I'M SOME WEAK WILLED BITCH WHO CAN'T HELP BUT FALL FOR YOUR CON. YOU THINK I'M NOT GONNA HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY ABOUT IT?! NO!? WELL, I THINK YOU MESSED WITH THE WRONG LADY, ASSHOLE!”

The bar went silent. How could it not. Everyone turned to watch as Cheryl came around the bar holding a pump shotgun – the late night bar variety with the barrel obviously cut down. Looking more pissed and crazy than I thought possible. Apparently Cheryl had her own unique skills to contend with.

I started to say something while pulling Bailey behind me, but then Cheryl racked a round into the barrel -- a very distinctive sound that froze everyone in the bar and made

me realize how serious her intentions were. I turned to Bailey to tell her to run, but then we locked eyes.

“Oh no, John! Oh no!” Bailey cried out. “Friday, August 1st, 2025, at 7:35pm.
Friday...August 1st...2025. At 7:35pm!”

I cried out too cause I’d flashed as well. “Oh no, Bailey. Oh, no! Shoeshine Charley’s in Fort Worth, Texas.”

The shotgun blast exploded, deafening everything in the room. And was the last thing I heard. Staring deeply into Bailey’s eyes, trying to tell her, “I love you. I truly do. I’m sorry we ended this way.”

The End.