

# Dexter's House

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Ralph never knew quite why he went into the Plaza hotel on that bright summer afternoon. He had passed by the place so many times without ever going inside and each time he did pass, his intrigue grew. The building almost seemed to call out to him. It was as if he was meant to go there and become a part of something, something big, bigger than him, bigger than his pet rabbit, bigger than his Ford Focus, and perhaps bigger than space and time itself.

All through his time in school, which by now was more than just a few years prior, Ralph had never been the brightest spark. It was due to one of his teachers that he made it through at all. French teacher as well as his class tutor for two years, Mrs. Dunne always came down hard on Ralph and it was because of this that Ralph ended up with the half-decent results that he managed to acquire.

Despite living alone, being single and having no children of his own, Ralph very much is and has been a family man. He enjoys and loves each and every moment he has to spend with family members. He may have come to the Plaza by himself though today he is and will be in no way alone.

From the moment he entered the hotel, Ralph felt that things weren't quite right. He had been instantly hit by a chill. He didn't know where this chill came from or why he may feel it but feel it, he certainly did.

'How are you, sir?' Ralph greets an elder gent dressed in a tuxedo who passes in front of him.

'Good evening, young man,' says the man in reply while raising his top hat, 'the fire is burning strong in the lounge, you must be freezing being so underdressed for this cold weather we are having.'

Complete confusion seriously hits Ralph just as strongly or possibly even more so than the chill he felt a moment or so ago had. It wasn't just what the old man said; it was also the surroundings that created confusion — a candlelit chandelier hanging from the lobby ceiling. The lights on the walls are oil lamps. A nearby grandfather clock tells the time at 11:40 and a large banner behind the reception desk reads 'Happy New Year.'

All this when the reality he has come in from is that of a bright summer afternoon, this is as if he has stepped into something, something odd, something not as it should be or perhaps something exactly what it should be.

Before Ralph could make any queries, he was sure he could see Mrs. Dunne walk right into the lounge that the elder gent had spoken of. It has indeed been some time since Ralph finished school; in fact, it has been ten years since Ralph had cause to be within the walls that educated him and at this moment, his former tutor looks just the very same as Ralph had remembered her to be. She hasn't aged a day.

Ralph followed on into the lounge. Sure enough, the large fireplace was sporting a strong fire. Table candles provided a low level of light. A black grand piano sat on a small stage to one end of the lounge. At the bar, Mrs. Dunne sat alone.

'Hello Mrs. Dunne, it is good to see you,' it wasn't really, but growing up, Ralph had always been taught to be polite.

'Do I know you, kind sir?'

'It is Ralph, Ralph Taylor; you were my tutor ten years ago.'

'Ten years ago? I believe you have me mistaken.'

Before Ralph could dispute that, a man walks into the room, grabbing his attention. This man moves towards the piano and sits at it before speaking. 'Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, I hope I find you all well on this New Year's Eve.'

New Year's Eve? What is going on? Ralph, for some reason or another, just felt like he should say thank you to the lady next to him as if it was the right thing to do then leave that particular meeting at that, so he did.

'My name is Dexter', continued the man by the piano as he began to play, 'and welcome to my house, welcome to Dexter's house. For tonight is a special night. It is a night where the past, present and future all come to live together as one, so relax, take a load off and enjoy this night for what it is, for what it was and for what it forever will be.'

Night? It is not night, it is mid-afternoon, or so at least it should be.

After a few minutes, Dexter stops playing the piano. He gets up and approaches Ralph, who by this

time had indeed moved away from Mrs. Dunne and was now sitting alone sipping on a beer. Ralph was looking for answers and reckoned that if he was going to get any answers, then they were likely to come from this Dexter person.

Dexter holds out his right hand. Ralph takes that hand and shakes it just before he would ask a question.

'Can you tell me what is happening here?'

'Well, people have gathered to celebrate and hopefully have a good time.'

'Celebrate what?'

'New Year's Eve, of course.'

It was definitely looking like the answers Ralph sought were not going to directly come his way.

Dexter continues to speak, 'you shouldn't question why or how Ralph, just go with it and enjoy.'

There was a momentary pause before Dexter asked a question while looking around the room, 'is there anyone here apart from Mrs. Dunne that you recognize?'

Once again, Ralph was confused. How does this Dexter person know Mrs. Dunne? How does he know of the connection with Ralph? How does he know Ralph's name? He had not introduced himself. Adding to all that, when he did look around and when he thought about it, there were some people in the room that seemed more than familiar to Ralph.

Dexter wasn't going to leave Ralph too long to think of how some of these people seemed familiar to him. Glancing over at two men sitting together at a small table in the centre of the room Dexter would ask Ralph a question.

'How about these two men? Do they seem familiar to you?'

They did look vaguely familiar. One of them was slightly more familiar than the other. The two men appeared to be in their early to mid-twenties.

'The man with the dark hair, he looks like a young version of my grandfather.'

'Ralph, he is your grandfather, and so too is his fair-haired companion.'

Ralph's heart began to beat a little quicker and his eyes opened wide with surprise. 'No, how can that be?'

'Just go with it, my friend. Tonight is no ordinary night. All of us here, we are in a very special place. Try and enjoy your time here, and since you are here, why not go over and say hello.'

Ralph never knew his dad's father. His grandfather William had been a policeman and had died when Ralph's father was just fourteen years old. Ralph was quite close to his other grandfather, Patrick. Ralph had become particularly close to Patrick in the couple of years or so before his death, so seeing both his grandfathers' sitting together as young men came as quite a shock.

However, Ralph did as Dexter suggested. He walked over to the two men at that small table, introduced himself, first name only, and asked if he could join them. Dexter went back to the piano and began to play some more.

The conversation Ralph had with William and Patrick would be one that would stay with him for many years to come and even though there was no mention of the relationship between the three men, there did seem to be an awareness of an unspoken connection.

A young man would soon approach Ralph and ask him if he could have a minute of his time. Ralph said good evening to both William and Patrick, and they both wished him well, then Ralph moved to another table and sat with the young man who had approached him.

'It is so good to see you again' speaks this young man as a tear rolls down his face.'

Looking into the young man's eyes, Ralph could see something very recognizable; he could see some sort of an odd resemblance. If Ralph had really met his grandfathers as young men, then this guy he now is with, is this young man Ralph's future son? Or possibly even his grandson? Before Ralph could ask those questions, Dexter began a countdown from ten and when he reached zero, there was a great big 'happy new year' cheer throughout the room and at this moment, things began to move as if everything was going in slow motion for Ralph.

What would happen in this moment is a return of sorts for everyone in the room. They all would return to their own moments in time. For Mrs. Dunne, she returned to school and was about to become tutor to a brand new class, a class that would include a young Ralph Taylor.

Ralph's grandfather William would return to being on traffic duty in 1937, where he would meet a stubborn young woman on a bicycle. Together they would have twelve children, eight boys and four

girls, one of the boys, would, of course, become Ralph's father.

Back in 1943, Ralph's other grandfather, Patrick, would meet the woman that he would marry, and together they would have three daughters, one, of course, being Ralph's mother.

Ralph's own returning moment would have him find himself once again standing out in front of that hotel. It was of indeed a warm summer's day just like it had been before he had entered. A young lady approaches and stands next to him. Ralph turns his head towards her.

She looks at him and asks, 'are you going to go into the place, or are you just gonna admire it from out here?'

Ralph smiles then speaks 'I may just go inside, would you by any chance like to come in with me and join me for a coffee?' ...