

CANCER DREAMS

BY
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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Paul –small statured feminine gay man

Lucas – tall, thin gay man

Dark stage and the voice of LUCAS is heard

LUCAS

And what about my throat cancer? If my friend Paul who died of cancer eighteen years ago were alive, what would he tell me? You know, I could create a dream about Paul. What dream could I have about him? He would appear looking like his old self – with his subtle makeup and his hair sprayed in place. And smiling. We would be in the clouds. It would feel like we were floating in a powder blue sky amidst large white clouds. I would hug him and tell him, “I’m sorry I never got to say ‘I love you’ before you died. I hope you knew that.”

Lights go up. PAUL and LUCAS standing at the side of the stage.

LUCAS

Where are we?

PAUL

I can’t tell you. It would destroy the illusion. Just enjoy the tranquility. Let’s walk over to those clouds. We can sit on those clouds over there and we can talk.

They walk to center stage. There are two plastic see-through chairs covered with cotton balls.

LUCAS

How can we sit on a cloud?

PAUL

Even though it’s a visible mass of condensed water vapor floating in the atmosphere, it is able to mold to your body and make you think you’re sitting in a most comfortable chair.

LUCAS

What? Where did you learn that?

PAUL

I've been studying science since I arrived. Don't be afraid of falling.

PAUL sits down, but LUCAS is tentative. Finally he sits.

LUCAS

You're right. It feels great, like I'm weightless!

PAUL

Okay, you must have a million questions, but first I want to ask you: 'What have I missed?'

LUCAS

Well, the biggie was my marriage to Neal in November, 2008. Marriage for us LGBT folks had been legal for about four months. We're still not living together, but it works for us. And then a month after the wedding, my mother fell. I had her move in with me and got six hours a day of help. Guess who one of the caregivers was?

PAUL

I don't like guessing games. Who was it?

LUCAS

Melinda, a cousin of our mutual friend, Sy. And she was great!

PAUL

Wow! I can't imagine that. And how long did your mother live with you?

LUCAS

Seven years. Then she moved to San Diego into an assisted living facility near my sister, Elyse, because her dementia had gotten worse.

PAUL
Just like my mother.

LUCAS stands up and points.

PAUL
(with a dismissive gesture)
Don't worry about that cloud. It's probably just *threatening* to rain. That darkness isn't bad. That expression, *a black cloud hung over our lives*, is a fallacy.

LUCAS
I thought that was a simile or a metaphor.

PAUL
No, darkness gives us depth. Gives us a chance to see contrasts. That everything isn't beautiful and perfect all the time.

LUCAS sits down.

LUCAS
Oh, and I retired at sixty-five and became a writer! I've published six books! And plays, too. But this past year has been a disaster. I was diagnosed with throat cancer. It's supposed to be highly curable, though.

PAUL
Oh, thank God. I wish I had received that kind of news. And what about our friend, Sy? What's happening with him?

LUCAS
No change except that he is going broke. He's surviving on residuals from *Murphy Brown*, *The Wonder Years*, *Roseanne* and mainly, *Frazier*. He misses you. You were a big part of his life. And despite the way he eats, he is healthy!

PAUL

Isn't it ironic? I tried to take care of myself better than you or Sy, yet I was struck down by cancer. Anyway, that's enough about you. It's your turn to fire questions at me. What do you want to know? I don't know how much time I have here.

LUCAS

What was it like before you died?

PAUL holds LUCAS's hand.

PAUL

You really want to know? You're not dying, right?

LUCAS

No, I don't *think* so, but just in case, it would be nice to know. Were you in pain? What were you thinking about?

PAUL

I wasn't in pain. It happened so quickly. As soon as my heart stopped, the rest of my body shut down immediately. So, I didn't have a chance to have my life flash before me, as it were. The only thought I had was relief.

LUCAS

Does that mean you were happy to die?

PAUL

Happy isn't the right word. I just accepted my fate. You know, when I realized that all those supplements, prayer groups, healers and alternative doctors were useless, I changed.

LUCAS

I know you changed, Paul. You became a different person. But that person shut down emotionally.

PAUL

Yes, but you have to understand that the old Paul couldn't cope, and I thought that if I created an alternate self, *he* would be strong enough to be okay with wearing a colostomy bag that collected my waste and would be able to go to cancer support groups. Even though it was terminal, I thought this new powerful Paul could give me a few extra months.

LUCAS

Boy, I couldn't tell at all from the way you were acting. So distant. At times you were like a zombie

PAUL

My plan failed, Lucas! This new Paul never acknowledged the original version. And this strength that I prayed for never really materialized. I'm afraid it was a fiasco.

LUCAS

Paul, did you just give up and not care if you died?

PAUL

Why do you have to ask me that? During that whole period after I was diagnosed, I searched for reasons to stick around. I looked for milestones, but I came up short. So much of my life revolved around my bowels and the pain I suffered.

LUCAS

But it looked like you had had joy before that in your life. All those years volunteering at the LGBTQ synagogue. And you were an excellent audiologist. And we had fun. Remember, when I dragged you to see *The Exorcist* and we waited in line in the rain?

PAUL

That was the last time I ever saw a horror film.

LUCAS

Didn't you enjoy going to those fancy dinners with Sy? You hit every hot spot; Jimmy's, Houston's, and anything Wolfgang Puck!

PAUL

Why are you telling me this, Lucas? You're not thinking. Do you really think I just gave up? That I had a suicide wish? No! I had a terminal diagnosis. I was weak. The cancer was engulfing me. There was nothing to fight against. It was like I was dead already.

LUCAS

When my lover, Scott, was dying of AIDS, he told me, 'Lucas, I'm just hanging on because I want to make sure that you and my parents are willing to let me go.' Did you experience any of that?

PAUL

To be honest, not really. My mother had dementia, so I didn't worry about her. My father was strong. Who else was there?

LUCAS

Me and Sy!

PAUL

I wasn't thinking about you guys not being able to handle my death. I knew you'd be sad, but I assumed that it would pass.

LUCAS

But it *didn't* pass, Paul. We still think about you. You left a big hole, and you never let us in all those weeks before you died.

PAUL

I don't know what to say. I can't change what I did. If and when you are near the end of your own life, you can handle things however you like. There is no hard and fast rule that we all have to follow.

LUCAS

Shouldn't we go? Those dark clouds look pretty scary to me.

PAUL

You scared? That's a first. My goodness, you traveled to Europe on your own, had back surgery without fear, dressed up in drag at your Golden GB parties in front of the rabbi and your relatives and led services at our synagogue including giving a sermon. I can't imagine anything terrifying you.

LUCAS

Well, this throat cancer is terrifying me.

PAUL

Is it really?

Lights flicker followed by the sound of a light rain.

LUCAS

This is amazing.

PAUL

It's all natural. And it actually happens once an hour. So rejuvenating. I love it! I never have to wear much makeup and it helps shape my hair. It is freeing. I think that's why I haven't aged since I got here eighteen years ago.

LUCAS

I hope this isn't anything like *Lost Horizon* where if you try to leave Shangri-La like the actress, Margo, did in the movie, you become your real age!

PAUL

Leaving isn't an option.

LUCAS

Is there anything else you want to warn me about if and when I myself die?

PAUL

No, I think we've covered everything. I don't get many visitors. I think you may be the first. I hope I've helped you. You've always had a good amount of luck in your life, so I think you'll do fine recovering from your cancer. And one last thing. If you remember this encounter happening, tell Sy I miss him too.

LUCAS

Oh, Paul, I have one last thing. You know, recently everyone is using the word *transitioning*. When you died, did you feel like your soul was leaving your body. I think *transitioning* sounds comforting, as if you are going to a new place.

PAUL

Lucas, to tell you the truth, I don't remember. I was so frightened about death. You know all this stuff about the unknown? I thought I believed in God, but after my terminal diagnosis, I wasn't sure. This death thing was very quick. Thank goodness, I didn't feel any pain.

Lights flicker and PAUL disappears. LUCAS gets up from his seat and addresses the audience.

LUCAS

I wanted to tell him 'I love you,' but
I missed that opportunity again. And now
the dream is over. I need to jot down
some notes about what I recall about
Paul. What we talked about. How I was
transported to Paul's heaven. I know he hadn't
told me the location, but what else would you
call it, except *heaven*? And . . . didn't we
each have closure?

LUCAS smiles with this memory as the lights dim.