



A surgeon's wife awakens from a terrifying dream warning her of awful things to come. Something terrible is happening to her body that not even scientists can diagnose. If the answer is found you will get a frightening glimpse into the future.

False Awakenings

By Emma Aragon

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FALSE AWAKENINGS

HAS THIS HAPPENED TO YOU?
PRAY THAT IT DOESN'T!

A Medical Mystery Novel

EMMA ARAGON

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Chapter 1

The bedroom was completely dark. All Emily could see was the amber glow from the nightlight in the hall. Her bladder stinging-full, she got out of bed and walked down the hall to the bathroom. The Persian carpet runner under her bare feet felt silky. She didn't need to turn on the bathroom light; there was the small nightlight, and anyway, she knew her way in the dark. Lifting the edge of her nightgown, she thought she saw something dark and bulky in the sink. Leaning closer to look, a shock exploded in her chest with a thundering shudder. What she was looking at was a human head. And it was hers.

She tried to scream past her gagging throat but could only manage a croak.

"What the hell," Roger grunted, rolling over and taking half the bedclothes with him. Oh, thank God, thank God, she'd only been dreaming. She lay very still, shivering, and listened to her frantic heart. The dark bedroom, lightly scented with her rose-perfumed lotion, was there: the faint amber glow, the memory of the carpet under her bare feet. The little clock beside the bed blinked its seconds. She counted her heartbeats: 130 but slowing.

She looked up at the high, vaulted ceiling, striped faintly with the outside lights, and waited for dawn. What was the matter with her? she wondered. Her psychiatrist, whom she hadn't seen for a while, had told her that dreams were

significant, especially if they were vividly remembered. In fact, he told her that if she was totally unaware that it was a dream, and that it seemed to be truly happening, there was actually a name for a dream like this, but she couldn't remember it.

Carefully, she approached the dream again: the half-light in the bathroom, the strange, heavy lump in the sink, the blood, the face...and with sudden horror she remembered that her own face, lying there in the cold sink, had been *smiling*. Oh God, she thought, her eyes thick with tears about to spill, something is really wrong with me. And then, with a powerful thrust of her mind, she pushed the thought away and told herself, it was only a dream. Only a dream.

At 4:30 a.m. exactly, Roger got out of bed and headed for the bathroom, scratching the thick, sandy hair on his head. He must have an early surgery this morning. She watched him go into the massive, remodeled marble bathroom and wondered why, in her dream, she had gone down to hall to one of the other bathrooms. It was smaller, darker. She thought of the master bathroom, now ringing with running water and the general sounds of Roger taking a shower. The bathroom was huge with ice-white marble floors, a walk-in shower tiled with pale-green seahorses, enormous warmed towels.

When she was a teenager, Emily had dreamed about being wealthy, and now she was. Those were just two of the five bathrooms in the house.

Five bathrooms and a maid to clean them...a dream come true. A dream.

Still shivering, she put on her white fleecy robe instead of her rose silk one and walked down to the kitchen, running her hand along the smooth, curved balustrade for balance. She was still shaky. The fragrance of coffee drifted up from the faithful coffeemaker, set for 5:00 a.m. She desperately wanted to have a cup by herself. Well, she mused, that wouldn't be that hard because usually Roger wouldn't say much, anyway...just pick up the paper from the front porch and head for his car in the garage. She knew he'd get his coffee at the drive-through Starbucks on the way to the hospital, as usual. He always had a lot on his mind, she thought...especially if it was a difficult surgery. He worked only on spines, and a mistake could be deadly.

She looked around the large kitchen which was beginning to glow with the rising sun: the white cupboards with glass fronts, the black granite countertops, the breakfast bar with its modern, hanging lamps, the windows that faced the lush backyard with the catalpa tree and its spring popcorn blossoms. Her life was beautiful, complete. Why should she have such a terrifying dream? It meant nothing, nothing, she told herself as the very memory of it raised goosebumps on her arms.

"Sorry, babes," Roger said, sweeping into the kitchen with his usual energy, trailing a faint cloud of scented body wash and minty toothpaste. "I'll be late getting back tonight. Two surgeries and

then one of those Wednesday meetings. Don't wait dinner for me." He gathered up his wallet and keys and paused. "You look sort of out of it. Are you feeling okay?"

"I'm fine," she said, and then tried to joke, "You're just not used to seeing me without my makeup."

"Yeah, you're probably right," he commented, walking through the foyer to the front door and grabbing the newspaper. He didn't even remember that she rarely wore makeup. Coming back through the kitchen, he kissed her lightly. "See you later," he said and disappeared into the garage, as he did every morning.

"Go out and heal the world," she called after him, as she did every morning.

"I'll wage the battle," he called back, as he did every morning.

She sat for a few minutes with her cup of coffee cooling between her cold hands. The day stretched ahead of her, empty. Well, not exactly: she had the flats of petunias to pot, and she wanted to prepare the soil for the begonias she was planning on placing. around one of the fountains in the back garden. But suddenly she wanted to talk to someone, to share this dream, this anxiety.

She was hesitant to tell Roger about this. Sitting alone in the sunny kitchen, she suddenly wondered what had happened to the easy, enjoyable times they'd had together...listening to his tales of the operating room, the time an addict had stormed into the emergency room and taken armfuls of drugs before security got there, the

time a baby was born in the elevator... She loved listening to him. They rarely had much time to talk, but it was always interesting. She enjoyed reading and cooking and gardening (with her own little fully equipped potting shed) and it had seemed enough...a perfect life.

All her life, shyness had kept her from developing many friendships, and she didn't think she was really close to any of the few women she knew. Her mother, a chain-smoker, had died of lung cancer when Emily was twelve years old, and her disinterested, alcoholic father had given custody of Emily to Addie, her godmother in Minneapolis and then disappeared from their lives. Maybe he had died, too...who knew? Addie had done her best to raise Emily, and Emily loved her very much, although she never thought of her as a mother. Addie was always happy to get a phone call from Emily, but Emily didn't want to worry her.

Maybe she should try calling Laura, the wife of one of Roger's colleagues. She guessed that Laura was probably the best friend she had. They occasionally had lunch together and had gone shopping together a couple of times, often ending up at a farmer's market where Emily loved to shop on Saturday mornings when Roger had business at the hospital. Laura had seemed interested and happy to know about the different kinds of vegetables, especially squash, that were displayed there. She even called for a recipe for one of the squashes. Of the women she knew, Emily definitely felt the most comfortable with Laura. With a hand

that felt a bit steadier now, she picked up her cellphone and called Laura's number.

To her surprise, it was out of service. Had Laura changed her number? That was odd because they sometimes texted each other. She wouldn't have moved without telling Emily, would she? Emily's anxiety rose back to freezing levels. She thought back. When was the last time she'd seen Laura? She thought it might have been at the Christmas party that she and Roger always held for his doctor friends and their wives. The big, historic old house had looked like an indoor Christmas card, dimly but warmly lit in every room and garlands of lights decorating windows and doors. Caterers carried trays with glasses of champagne and tiny, exquisite snacks. She'd seen Laura sparkling through the crowd in a sequined, turquoise dress, a glass of champagne in her hand. She'd noticed that Laura's blonde hair was astonishingly bright...almost white. She must have gotten a new dye job. But before she could work her way over, Laura had disappeared, slipping out of sight among the laughing, drinking people.

And then her hostess duties made her so busy that she never searched for Laura again. She'd call her in the morning, she thought at the time...ask her how she'd enjoyed the party. Roger expected her to meet the guests, so she always worked up the courage to greet everyone with a smile and an offer to help themselves at the buffet. Roger introduced her to people she didn't know and would probably never see again, but she was able

to keep the conversations going. The latest snowstorm was a handy topic.

But that was over four months ago, she thought with a touch of guilt. Had she been that busy with the garden, which was coming to life after the last snow melted? She often wondered about herself and her memory, which lately seemed hazy, as if there were holes in it. Well, Laura hadn't called, either she thought. So...where was Laura?

Maybe she'd try calling Harriet. Harriet was the wife of one of the doctors Roger particularly admired, but Emily, personally, didn't like Harriet all that much. Harriet tended to flaunt her wealth in a way that Emily found annoying. When she and Roger met Harriet and Andrew for dinner one night in Little Italy, Harriet had made a show of displaying her new ring to Emily.

"Look at what Andy got me for my birthday," she said, holding her hand out, the enormous jewel sending out sparks of light. Emily didn't even know what the gemstone was, but she murmured, "Beautiful," while Harriet held her hand out for an inordinate length of time, turning it to catch the candlelight. Later she made an ostentatious demonstration of adjusting her coat with its lush silver fox collar while Emily thought, isn't wearing real animal fur illegal?

But now she thought that maybe she should call Harriet and ask about Laura. Had Laura become ill? Or maybe *died*? Don't think that way, Emily told herself as Harriet answered. In an artificially distinguished voice, as if she belonged to the royal family, Harriet said, "Good morning, Emily dear."

Of course...her name would show up on the phone, but she thought "dear" wasn't on it.

"How ...what...have you heard from Laura lately?" she stammered, a bit ashamed that she hadn't talked to Harriet for several weeks. Maybe a month or two?

"No, I haven't," Harriet answered. "I do believe the last time I saw her was at your *divine* Christmas party. Not that I like Laura all that much," she added. "She's just not my type."

Emily blinked. Well, then Harriet wouldn't know much. "I just haven't heard from her for quite a long time," she said. "Do you know why her phone number is out of service? Has she moved?"

"How should I know?" Harriet answered, her voice dropping to the temperature of an ice chip. "She was at your party telling everyone about the Lexus she'd bought herself for Christmas. And then she...just wasn't there. I suppose she went home. In her new Lexus."

Oh brother, Emily thought wearily. Harriet and her better-than-thou attitude and now her jealousy. "Well, I was just trying to get hold of her and can't figure out what happened."

"Good luck. I have to run... my housekeeper is at the door."

"Bye, thanks," Emily said, but Harriet had already hung up.

Emily stood there with the phone in her hand. Maybe she'd feel better if she went out to the potting shed and got her hands in the dirt, but instead, she sat back down at the breakfast bar and clasped her hands in an attempt to stop their

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trembling. So, what was her problem? Why did she feel so alone? Why couldn't she sleep without nightmares?

Chapter 4

After that wonderful night, he began giving her gifts (an amethyst bracelet, a book of love sonnets by Shakespeare, dozens of white roses.) They continued the glorious times in his bed, where she learned new ways to give both him and herself unbelievable pleasure, although he always took her home afterwards. She never asked or even wondered why; she was only so happy to be with him and overjoyed that he kept coming back, wanting to be with her. Sometimes she wondered if he remembered telling her that she was the girl he was going to marry.

But finally, as they sat together one evening on his front porch swing, admiring the sunset through the autumn trees, he took her hand, kissed it, and slipped a large, brilliantly faceted diamond ring on her finger. "Please," he said against her lips, his breath warming her face. "Be my wife." She thought she couldn't be happier as he took her face between his hands and tenderly kissed her.

Addie was almost beside herself with joy. The quick wedding at the courthouse, though, with the official and the witnesses was a disappointment. She had always dreamed of a lavish wedding, everything in white...the flowers, the bridesmaids, but, as Roger said, what was the point of a big, splashy event? Both her parents were dead, Addie, the only older woman who really cared about her, was in Minneapolis and was recovering from surgery. Emily had only a handful of friends, and they had all graduated, gotten married or taken on

jobs; most of them had returned to other places, often far away, where they'd lived before going to school. Her housemates had a little party in the dining room of the house when they found out she was officially engaged. But that was all the celebration there was.

She forgot her disappointment, however, when they went to Italy for a glorious two weeks. Emily had never been out of the States, and she never dreamed she could be this happy. Italy was the most wonderful place she'd ever seen: sunshine every day, the tiny, shadowed alleys in Venice, the rides on the canals.... She had never eaten such marvelous food; the coffee was the best she'd ever tasted. They had dinners under the soft midnight skies of Rome. She almost lost her breath at her first glimpse of Michelangelo's statue of David, standing in pure white splendor under a brilliant skylight. They wandered through a ruined monastery at sunset, exchanging kisses behind the crumbling but majestic columns.

She remembered the warm wind whipping through her hair as they drove down the winding Amalfi Coast, the sea foaming a thousand feet below them. And she would never forget the long climb to the rim of Mount Vesuvius, with its wisps of steam still curling out of its dangerous depths. Best of all was the *riposa*, the nap after lunch that every Italian seemed to expect. Those were the heavenly times in bed. She remembered those two weeks as the happiest days of her life.

About The Author

Emma Aragon has written since childhood, filling her school notebooks with fantasy stories of dramatic rescues and mythical beasts. As a young adult, she sold short stories and articles to romance magazines and religious journals. She is also a published poet who has won a prestigious award from *The Southern Poetry Review*. This is her first novel.



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