

i Dream

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Part I

I had memories, but only in brief flashes. No true continuum from birth to here. There didn't seem to be any point to what I was experiencing. No meaning to anything.

Of course, the doctor says that's normal for everyone. But the doctor could also be trying to normalize madness.

"Frank," said the doctor.

"Why?"

"Why, what?"

"Why are you here?" I asked.

"I'm watching you sleeping. And you look peaceful, even though I know you're going through so much."

"How are you communicating with me?"

"The same way I always have. When you're in the hypnagogic state I appear to be a doctor to you so you'll believe me, trust me."

"Who are you really?"

"To you I will always just be a doctor. To other 'yous' I am so much more."

"No," I moaned from my golden fog. "I mean, who are you *really*. . .in non-dream? What do you want from me?"

"I'm someone who. . ." the doctor paused calmly, "All I want is to learn from you."

The door slams. Doctor Stabnow comes in. This is one doctor I know is real. He's my buddy, my provider. The lights become less dim. I can see him congealing as the fog clears. In non-dream he looks upset. His face is flat and fuzzy, as usual, with blue eyes tired and smeary like marbles behind Plexiglas. But they look in sharper focus to me now for some reason. I can see the swirls as separate living chains of cells. I am reminded of the rings of Saturn for some reason. I notice the spaces between his teeth. I can see the individual hairs of his silver eyebrows – one of them is trying to escape, shooting upwards, curling away from its obedient brethren – a rebel like me. Although comparing myself to an eyebrow might sound a little crazy... I admit that.

"Okay, Rosen, it's time to take a walk and shake it off."

"It's Frank."

"Rosen is your last name, remember?"

"Oh yes, yes, very funny, wasn't it, how that happened?"

"So Frank, you need to come out of it now."

"For what reason?"

"It's been a little too long. My idea of giving you a stronger dose so you would remember everything when you awoke was not only counter-intuitive, it was a mistake, pure and simple. It won't happen again. Come now! Get up. Please!"

He tugged at me to rise. Not easy to move an ex-football halfback like me when I'm setting my mind against it.

Back there at Notre Dame, I was so ecstatic to carry that ball in my arms and run, no one could bring me down. My

mind sharp as a laser, legs churning hard, body low to the ground, ready to spin away, juke once, and hit the hole – the one that appears for just a split second – I could anticipate it back then. So I time the break just right, I find that sliver of daylight, then I feel the middle linebacker's arms start to wrap around me ten yards downfield. I take my free hand and push his helmet away to escape, tripping for a moment as I find a way out of his grasp. I can feel his fingertips slipping off my left hip. Then, there it is, I'm free... an open channel all the way down the sidelines.

I find the extra gear, arms and legs pumping like a steel cylinder, a massive engine. No one dares to get in the way now, until, suddenly I'm blindsided by the safety.

I feel a massive jolt... truck slams into my head. I black out for a moment, my nose and jaw absorbing lightening as I fall down a long tube of darkness. The flash comes again as my head slams against the ground. I don't remember exactly how the ball came loose, but it squirted out while I was still in mid-air – as I was going unconscious, before I exploded down onto the wet grass face first – I remember now, it was raining that day.

I grope around frantically while keeping my legs moving. I can't see anymore. My neck was snapped back when I hit the ground. There's a big black splotch in front of my eyes that I doubt is real but it's blocking my vision. I'm sitting up on to the wet grass trying to balance myself so I can concentrate on the black splotch to analyze it further, but somehow I feel the ball kick back into my fingertips. I pull it towards me. Of course, the shape of the ball is too unwieldy, it spins against my palm, squibs out and wobbles away.

I hear a dozen footsteps in my ears, pounding like horses' hooves, vibrating below the dirt beneath the grass. Huge bodies, protected in their armor, leap over me as if I

were nothing but a small boulder in their path. I manage to get up on my hands and knees and stumble towards the sound of wind-milling legs.

Then another miracle, the ball gets kicked into my stomach, and I collapse on it. I pull the orb into me like a dome of oxygen until it starts turning warm against my hands. I try to make myself heavy and unmovable. My body closes around it like a vice. It fits snugly into the space under my ribs.

Bodies pile on top of me. Hands grab at my neck, yank at my legs, pull at my eyes through my face mask. The ball is like my egg. I'm trying to lay on my egg until the refs can see its mine. We're on their five-yard line, maybe the eight. Easy field goal to win the game if I can hold on until my egg hatches. I wait for the whistle to blow. I hear a high pitched ringing in my ears. Was that the whistle? The ringing doesn't stop so I assume it's just my head about to explode.

In the biggest college game of the decade, with barely a minute left in the game, I had slithered and juked and then rocketed eighty yards before being tackled, or run over by a tank. I was, and *am*, so close to the glorious moment I've dreamed of all my life. Maybe I would be enshrined. Yes, it's all a beautiful memory now. I hope I can remember it tomorrow.

The egg! Something terrible was happening. The pile was four players high on top of me. Huge hands were reaching for the egg and pulling at it; it began to stretch, almost like taffy in that first moment. Then I felt my stomach hit the grass flat, there was a momentary asthmatic feeling in my solar plexus, then I lost my breath entirely. The egg was gone.

I heard the whistle blow. I heard the crowd boo. They had stolen my egg from me.

They say it was one of the greatest plays they'd ever seen – a brilliant run, a massively violent tackle, a knock out. A fumble. But the ball gets kicked back into the runner like a magnet. Like magic. He must be magic. He holds on. The refs gather around and try to untangle the pile.

But underneath the chaos, Jamsey Haynesworth of Michigan had ripped the ball away, and was now prancing around on the fifteen yard line with the ball held high above his head.

Haynesworth, not even the guy who made the tackle, becomes the hero. They will never forget his name... in Michigan.

It began to snow. They ran out the clock. The snow became drifts of smudgy blackness behind my eyes.

"Rosen!" Dr. Stabnow yelled!" He actually sounded scared from some reason.

After the game I ran right past the locker room, straight to my dorm.

My face was hot; not even the snowballs they threw at my head could cool me down. Stars twinkled on and off in my brain like distant Christmas tree lights. I usually felt beat-up and bruised after a game, and I always felt like I never wanted to play another game again. But that would only last for a day or two. This time I slept and woke, and then slept far longer than a day. I stayed in bed for days more in the infirmary. I didn't eat. For days and days the nightmare replayed in my head.

I never played another game.

I dropped out of school. My dream of being a scientist, a famous chemist, evaporated like Benzene across an air film 0.15cm thick because a football evaporated from my hands a week before.

I would never be forgotten in the hallowed halls of Notre Dame. I was infamous.

As years went by life became a series of failures. It felt as though failure was my out-breath.

Everything would be going just fine until I remembered the sound of the crowd. I'd let them down.

Sometimes I think I'm still trying to wake up. I become conscious, and the ball is still under me. The egg didn't abandon me. It was all a weird very long dream. Get up off the grass, hold the ball up in the air and absorb the adoration! Take that, Haynesworth of Michigan! Now get out of my dream!

"Rosen! You have to awaken *now!*" the voice urged me. "Remember, in the reality you're in the more you try to figure things out, the less you know."

"*It's Frank!*" I screamed, laughing, thinking it was the funniest thing I'd ever heard.

Laughter always comes just before the ending.

A leap of faith – to open my eyes in this world – *to see what?*

I didn't want to see anything or anyone. Dreaming is so much easier for those with nothing to live for.

Thankfully, I never get much time to think anymore when I'm awake. It's great. I go through my routines quickly.

Then, at some point in the middle of the night, someone gently squeezes my cheeks into the space between my jaw, until I hold my tongue out, expecting the pill to drop, with its familiar sweet taste. And there it comes. The pill quickly melts down my throat. Sweet chalky taste at the end. So delicious, as is the expectation.

Then slowly *I* melt – into its power – swept away into an ocean unlike any on earth by a little yellow pill with the power to turn darkness to revelation.

The entirety of the real world awakens there, the world most real to me now – where colors stun me and bring me to my knees with awe and reverence. People are bathed in a golden glow of kindness you can almost trust – you *can* trust, with a leap of faith. *Sunlit full-sensory spirit-leaping to a parallel dimension – a new world that is hidden right there next to mine. Equally real.*

Even though no one could possibly want this feeling to end, it comes – those precious minutes before the end, that the mind is in no condition to try to count. Here comes hysterical laughter, tears of insane laughter, until sometimes I can't even catch my breath.

I pretend I am only breathing *in*. Expanding. Everything is a recirculation, circular breathing.

Past, present, future, wrapping around my consciousness like a cloud of white sugary steam snowing over me.

Yes, a permanently recurring Christmas day – a blur of deep emotions. A still-life image of a family, smiling somewhere.

But hours later I can't remember any real details about the sun, like what I was *thinking* when I was warmed by it. All the gifts, vanished. Flakes of snow turn to warm fog engulfing. There will be no sleigh ride to grandma's house.

Waking up is hard to do.

No one shows you how to live in the reality we've all been dumped into.

It's a place inside a game where nobody wins.

I hate games like that.

Rubik's cubes, three-dimensional chess, finding some meaning to existence.

It's all a waste of time.

I was spending a lot of time writing a suicide note. I couldn't find the right words.

I wanted there to be a logical point to my untimely demise, so no one would think I killed myself over a fumble that happened untold years ago.

Or because my raven-haired mother and my huge blonde-haired unshaven father cared more about screwing each other in all possible meanings of that word than they did about bringing up their lone child.

So I blamed it all on my girlfriend. Of course.

I'm not the first.

In fact, Dwayne Finch Erman did the same thing. But his girlfriend saved him. Erman was the prototypical "mad scientist." I often think he is the doctor in my dreams, but it doesn't make sense that he could be. He was a genius chemist. A rebel. A rogue. He created a pill. A pill that would have made all of Tim Leary's chemically induced episodes look like a mere child's fairytale.

After unceremoniously dropping out of college he fell into a weird scene. He was living in a flat in West Hollywood, bumming a bed off of a would-be actor named Andy Woodby. Erman was a distant friend of his.

There, in the safety of Woodby's squalor, while he was out auditioning for some TV commercial, the pill Erman invented became my savior, my identity, my way of life.

He joked later that this new drug should be named by creating an anagram -- Dwayne Finch Erman -- mix the letters to, "If Man Were Day." But we couldn't figure out what to do with the extra "n" and "c" to make the anagram

complete. Incompletion was part of who I was back then. So in that way the anagram was perfect.

The pill was all consuming.

“If man were day” *all the time*, what would we become? Beings without darkness? Or sleep deprived?

What would we be now if no darkness had ever come? If the apple had never been eaten because there was no snake. . . because temptation was unnecessary... because humans were untemptable... because they were already so complete?

This drug, this little yellow pill, only produced dream-like dramas with beautiful endings. No bummers. No bad trips. No lasting physical side-effects. No reason to ever hesitate. No reason not to take it again and again.

There were no worldly desires in that yellow pill reality. No feelings of greed, or jealousy. No urges for money, or to buy or possess anything, or anyone.

There was no going down into those broken places, no memories that called loudly enough to draw away your attention, no barren dreamscapes that beckon you to berate yourself.

Most of the experiences were purely ecstatic, others were epiphanies, revelations.

Once, I actually remembered clear details of the experience after coming out of the white sugary fog of it. This was extremely rare. Usually one would be left with alpenglow, so to speak – a sky of pastel colors after the sun had set. But nothing specific would be left to ponder, nothing to hold on to, or walk away with. It was like trying to touch rays of sunlight from a memory of it.

But this dreamday was different. I remembered everything.

I found myself in the lobby of a hotel. I said to the front desk clerk, a sweet looking girl in a sleeveless light blue cotton shirt, "Have you ever gotten any complaints about the fact that the hair conditioner in the bathroom is impossible to squeeze out of the little bottle?"

She had dark hair and a pixie smile. Her name was Katie. It said so on her name tag. She looked around sheepishly to make sure her boss wasn't within earshot. "Um, yes, a number of times," she admitted. She looked at me apologetically.

"You know, the word, 'Katie' in some languages means 'to share dinner,'" I said. "Were you aware of that?"

"It takes a pure form of awareness to know that," she said. "So yes."

We chose a lovely café downtown. Wine was served. We tried to eat but we were laughing the whole time and we couldn't chew. Because we knew. We just knew. Pure knowing.

On our walk home we realized we'd found each other because of a malfunctioning hair conditioner cap. Bad manufacturing can be a gift from the universe.

The first time we made love it was oceanic. As it was a thousand other times through years to come. Each time we became a swirl of lava merging and forming together amidst the rainy grass, exploding warm and falling as one as we ecstatically found our way to the sea. The lava gave way to an island of us. The island turned from barren sharp black rock to soft brown soil, and from soft brown soil to green seedlings, framed by a coastline of salt fine sand. The green seedlings -- we had a number of children. One of those children, my second daughter, grew especially close to me. At the age of five she followed me everywhere and told me she wanted to be just like me when she grew up.

But then a group of people that didn't like kids and constantly tried to turn them into insignificant functional pathways in The World Monster's autonomic nervous system, kidnapped her and hid her in a school made of a large single upright block of stone, and turned her into a sacrificial lamb because she was not willing to dance around the monolith.

In just a few short years she was gone.

I mourned her death, until one day out of the blue, she came back to earth as an angel. She waved a magic wand over the teachers who had sacrificed her to their Lord and gave them an ironic gift – they each bore triplets that reminded them of her -- smart, stubborn, rebellious, eccentric. Moreover, the triplets couldn't be gotten rid of. They weren't allowed to attend school unless the rules were fair.

The teachers quickly passed away – they were all annoyed to death.

My daughter told me we were safe to leave now and she flew me on her back straight up toward the sun on wings that didn't melt. I began to laugh and cry at the same time until the world turned golden bright before me.

I lived with her and her beloved mother, with her siblings, my other amazing children, flying close behind.

We flew into the chambers of reality where the timeless and the memory-less meet. Then we dissolved into one. My favorite daughter had turned us into God. Gods. Perfect.

Why did I remember that one time so vividly? That was the big question. Was it because the dream cycle went through an entire lifetime? Or was it because of some slight chemical alteration of that one pill?

I've had hundreds of "experiences." All different. All beautiful. But I can't recall any of those as well as the one just described. All I know is the ecstasy I take away from each of them is real, even if all I'm left with is the color of the shadow of the memory. It's beautiful, even when it's completely gone.

In "real life," I only have only a handful of memories that I can recall before the age of nineteen. I've never been able to remember much because my brain came to the conclusion that "not much ever happened" back then. Half of the memories are still-life images; hazy outlines. No beauty exists there. Just gray scenes, hovering cumulus clouds.

You think I would turn into a drug addict with all the incentives to do so. With a pill this amazing and a life so mundane. I know it sounds like I've already become one. But technically, chemically, there was no known addictive qualities or side-effects of any kind to Erman's wonder drug. So it wasn't an addiction. It was a choice. Erman, my dear alter ego. My thanks go out to him, wherever he dwells.

His goal in this awful earth reality was to sell this wonder drug to a huge drug company like Johnson and Johnson someday. Eventually Erman imagined them distributing it for free with every bottle of Johnson's baby powder, or Vaseline jelly. (The "for free" part would of

course go contrary to every cell of J&J's corporate soul.) Erman was as naive as he was brilliant.

Leaving reality legally and joyously, with no side-effects (except seeing what a sham this reality is) would be deeply troubling politically.

The doctor – the one who kept feeding me the little yellow pills just after I fell asleep – was the real mystery for me. Who was he? Or she? It couldn't have been Erman. He ran away after the Feds raided his lab.

They didn't know about the other lab, the secret lab, where the original formula was written on yellow stick-it pads on the wall next to his desk.

The "mystery doctor" knew about the secret office though, and knows the formula, and keeps those pills coming to me like clockwork.

The only problem was I couldn't survive in that blissful state. When you eat in a dream nothing gets digested. Before it gets to a cellular level the food disappears like a soap bubble. And you can only feed someone with IVs for just so long before the experimenters start feeling like Doctor Frankenstein. Only Erman would be okay with something like that, and he wasn't calling the shots around here.

So I had to come out of the dream each day to eat, and to move my muscles so they wouldn't atrophy. These were boring times. I would wake up alone with a tray of organic food waiting for me. In the corner was the treadmill and two thirty-pound weights for upper body exercise. Knowing the drill, I would eat and use the toilet, then watch TV for a few minutes while my food digested a bit further. I would stare in awe at the unrelenting violence and the vapid commercials about what to buy to make everything ever more perfect – nothing that *I* needed anymore – nothing I ever wanted in the first place.

I would force myself to run on the treadmill – apropos for a life going nowhere – then I’d shower and floss and brush my teeth with lots of mint toothpaste to wake up my mouth – since the rest of me was still a bit groggy. My mind was still trying to understand bits and pieces of the last dream, like what was gyroscope googolplex referring to? Then I’d shower and change into clean clothes supplied to me by what I called, “the crew.”

After a while I stopped being curious about who the crew was. Except for the mystery doctor and Stabnow I couldn’t keep track of anyone else. And didn’t want to. It felt like it would be an invasion of their privacy to actually *remember* someone. I was overly sensitive to everything, unless I was *too* awake. Then I was about as sensitive as a New Yorker in a shopping mall.

When the hands pointed to 10 p.m. on the wall clock I’d get ready to drift down into my natural state of sleep, only to feel my cheeks being touched and the pill touch my tongue.

Of course, I had lost track of days by now. For a while I wrote down how many times I had to cut my nails, assuming each time was about ten days apart. But then I lost interest in counting.

I was free.

Part II

The experiment with Frank Rosen was approaching the one year mark.

We were keeping alive an otherwise hopelessly suicidal patient who volunteered for what we are still calling a research project. Not at all trying to be immodest here, but I was probably the only psychiatrist on earth who could have saved him. I was the only one willing to stick my neck that far out.

My special niche before agreeing to oversee the *Frank Rosen - i Dream* project was working with wayward teens. My hope was that this pill of Erman's could help teens too someday, but only if it could be powerfully altered. Because so far the wisdom and emotional intelligence grasped during one's experience under the influence of the chemicals did not have a lasting effect. That was the one drawback. But it was a very big one.

In fact, I would point out to Frank during his waking hours how amazing life was. I would point out that his experiences under the influence of the chemicals were just further proof of that: look what the mind is capable of experiencing! But somehow, the epiphanies and wisdom gained in the altered state never quite translated into hope for a better life or a more aware existence in this reality.

My spiritual, and in some ways ethical question, posed to my friend and neighborhood priest, Father Goldorff -- who to his credit didn't mind being deeply challenged philosophically -- was, "Why should we limit ourselves to only this plane of 'reality' if we know there is another accessible reality that is a thousand times more wondrous and beautiful?"

His response was, "Whatever the life experience may be, whether awake, or in a dream, or under the effects of a chemical substance, my belief is that only suffering, and learning from that suffering, can truly sculpt wisdom into the human soul. Without suffering, and finding the strength to overcome that suffering, there can be no lasting impression."

To which I countered, "Only suffering, and overcoming that suffering, can create enough inner wisdom and insight to vault one into the mystical state of awareness Frank lives in constantly when he's "high."

Goldorff said, "God wants you to get there without a pill."

I said, "How can you be so sure God cares how we get there as long as we get there?"

And then Goldorff hit the point, "Wisdom is something remembered and shared with others. If you can't even remember the supposed wisdom you just learned, then did you really learn wisdom at all? And if you experience wisdom without becoming wise, then what do you call that?"

These dialogues, along with so many other reasons, left me determined to find a chemical alteration to the drug we called, "*i Dream*," so that whatever one experienced under the drug could be recalled, hopefully in as much detail as possible.

When Goldorff said, "I'm just not sure God wants us to get there by using a drug, that's all," it seemed to be his final argument.

My response was, "Even according to the scriptures, wine is used as a holy sacrament. Peyote grows in the wild as a natural mind altering substance. So does psilocybin. Aspirin relieves headaches and allows us to refocus the

mind. So does coffee. Even television can be considered a drug, since it has so deeply altered our natural way of thinking. And meditation. And depression medication. All of those things seem to be created by, or sanctioned "by God." How many priests were on Lexipro? Goldorff certainly drank his fair share of holy water.

So then why would that kind of God forbid us to consciously voyage through the mind in search of our own soul because the catalyst is a non-addicting pill with no side-effects?

In my view, what Frank was experiencing was a far deeper reality than the one he was born into. Most humans have never experienced that level of spiritual or sensual or emotional depth.

I know this is an awfully dangerous thing for a doctor to say (then again, what good is having a great reputation if you can't use it to go against the social moral codes and ethics of the day, especially when it's for the for the good of mankind?) but here it goes:

In the right hands, and with the right chemical alteration so that one can remember the phantasmagoric revelations they experience *after* they awaken, this method of internal processing could lead to personal fulfillment beyond one's wildest dreams. It could even lead to what one might call spiritual enlightenment, and evolve all the way to something as improbably fantastic as peace on earth.

Hillary St. John was raised in Alexandria, Virginia. She was the daughter of a four-star General. His father had also been a four-star General, and a close friend of Eisenhower. Under the strict watchful eye of her father, Hillary was bathed in inflexible moral platitudes, and was told how to properly behave in every conceivable social situation from the time she was two years old.

Because she was the daughter of a military man she was a bit of a tomboy in elementary school. Her long red hair would fall into her eyes as she worked up a sweat playing soccer. Her blue eyes blazed with victory when she kicked a goal just out of reach of the boy playing goalie.

But by the time she was in high school her hair had turned slightly darker and her blue eyes became fixated on books and more books -- anything to take her away from the strict realities of home, and the expectations of her father and mother.

Words and numbers. Formulas and long calculations. Her face became pale from not spending time in the sun. Even during the summer months her studies never ceased. It was an acceptable escape. Her natural beauty was covered by modest clothes and downcast eyes. She had very few human interests and no close friends.

She graduated Yale at the age of twenty, thrived in grad school, and was just beginning her career as a young up-and-coming professor of chemistry at UCLA when she met the rogue of rogues, Dwayne Finch Erman.

Erman knew exactly how to sweep her off her feet. At first, he didn't try, which, as we all know, is a highly effective tactic.

Basically, he was too distracted with his own chemistry experiments to care.

His second tactic was, he dressed like a bum and only shaved when his unshaven-ness began to look like a beard and started to itch. This anti-peacock mating tactic made him strangely and vaguely appealing to a straight-laced repressed grad student like Hillary. Although she wouldn't admit this even to herself, she was attracted to anti-four-star General types. (The farther from father the better.)

Dwayne's third tactic was his willingness to discuss his personal philosophy: he didn't believe in rules or laws, except for the ones he created for himself.

The fourth way was most effective of all – it was when he offhandedly told Hillary that he had a PhD in chemistry, which led Hillary St. John to believe that his wealth had something to do with research experiments he was doing in his field. She was insatiably interested in other people's research.

In reality, he was just a street alchemist, selling his homemade drug to suburban teenage kids with lots of cash.

His fifth lure to attract the unsuspecting Hillary St. John was no illusion, no mystery. His ingenious instincts, and reckless way of approaching theoretical problems allowed him to understand things about chemistry that Hillary had never considered before. He was able to impress, and connect with Hillary in a way very few people in the world ever could have.

But these five things were dwarfed by Dwayne's sixth way to sweep Hillary St. John off her feet: It came in the form of a little yellow pill.

The pill became Hillary's secret study – first by studying Erman when he was under its influence; then by

studying its chemical make-up, because he allowed her alone to see the formula, and even occasionally allowed her into his secret lab.

Many would have thought this was foolish beyond reason. Why would he trust his secret to a chemically-induced romance? But he trusted her. He trusted her with absolutely everything.

She was surprised to find the formula was not addictive. It had no properties that resembled far cruder unrelated drugs like heroin, opium, or even LSD, Ecstasy, THC, or cocaine. Nor did it dull one's psyche, as do so many depressants or pain killers. These were all considered dark ugly evil drugs. She had feared and hated all of them growing up under her father's strict guidelines, along with cigarettes, alcohol, and even coffee.

Before meeting Erman she would have resisted any personal urge to explore something this radical. She was brought up to say no to everything that might offer her any out-of-bounds pleasure. In-bounds pleasure was defined as singing along with the national anthem at a football game or putting presents under the tree at Christmas.

But she had seen Erman transform himself from a big-boned brooding bum huddled in a gray overcoat into a gentle joyous genius brimming with energy within minutes after this pill went down his throat. Finally, her curiosity got the best of her.

What added further to her curiosity was that Erman mentioned that his "Level B" experiment, as he called it, might change the entire world for the better one day.

He proudly added that he had already formed a company, but he didn't intend for this company to ever go public, or be sold to some big pharmaceutical conglomerate. He was going to keep all of this clean and easy and direct.

By the people, for the people. There would never be stockholders, and never be a board of directors. He needed just enough money to live simply. He estimated the wholesale cost of a thousand pills to be about twenty five dollars.

She thought to herself, this man could make billions, but what difference would that have made in his life? He would still dress like he does, in rags, and drive around in his ten year-old Subaru. All he wants to do is play with chemicals and create things, good things, even great things. He had lots more ideas too. The yellow pill was just his first idea.

It took him a long time, but he finally seduced her. Not as a lover, but as a fellow rat in a wild science experiment. When she finally allowed herself to succumb to the pill's magical formula it didn't disappoint. In fact, she became a different person within an hour – one prone to wonder, and prone to doubt all previous perceptions of reality; she found herself thinking “from the heart,” letting go of numbers and elements, and seeing the equal value of dreams and waking reality.

By the third time she took the pill she began to see Erman in a different light. He was truly a brilliant guide in this other reality. She felt something stir in her. She saw through to *him* while she was under the drug's spell – and what she saw was a sensitive half-boy, half-man. A man who carried a great loneliness. A man who masked some deep sense of failure with radical bravado. But overall, she saw that he was a good man. As good as her father in many ways, just a different type of good.

She also noticed how naturally strong he was – nothing like the other chemists she knew. He was quite tall. His hair was brown, with long curls that were always uncombed,

Einstein-like. Did he look like that on purpose, or did he just not care? And his brown eyes, when she looked closely, without quickly turning away from her instinctive fear of intimacy, were flecked with orange and a starburst of hazel. Odd eyes. Almost paint splattered. Sun speckled. The Rorschach splash looked like fear chemically transforming into genius.

By the fifth time she went to “Level B” with him she found herself feeling something that was unimaginable to her in the other reality. It wasn’t love, but it was an inner stirring. When she was near Erman she found herself far more open sensually than she had ever been before. It began with a reasonable desire to be closer to him. She wanted to stand by him, to see what he was doing, and stay near him to observe what he was thinking, and assess how he came to his conclusions. He seemed oblivious to her attraction at first, which allowed her to come still closer. Then there was the moment when their faces were so close that she wondered if she should kiss him. Then one day she did. She allowed herself to drink the elixir so forbidden in her father’s world.

As time passed she eagerly explored her private rogue, this mad scientist with muscles as strong as a soldier’s. When he put his hands under her clothes he would gently melt through her, straight down into a core place, a place where she had been afraid to let anyone go, including herself. He was like liquid lightning and she was his cloudburst. She felt the gentle expansiveness of being a cloud as well. She felt herself thin and wispy, wind-driven, spreading out across the air effortlessly in all directions, dissipating into a dreamy orange glow as the sun began to set, until they became one set of eyes staring at an enormous mobile of stars in turning.

In the end they were reduced to a hugging ball of laughter, knowing where they had been could not be traveled to by any other human beings on earth.

Yet.

In “reality,” she realized “Level B” was a choice. Just as sensuality was a choice. And sometimes, in fact, many times, she chose not to go to either place. She was not a naturally warm or compassionate person. She had never let anyone in. Never allowed anyone to be this close. And wasn’t sure in this reality how necessary it really was.

Although the drug was giving her more than glimpses of what it would be like to open herself up in the real world, it was more like a dream than a revelation. When Dwayne was gone for days at a time she didn’t miss the pills, and most of the time she didn’t miss him either. She was busy teaching and doing research. She didn’t mind the reality she was creating for herself in the world of non-dream. In fact, when the pill was offered to her during her work week she always steadfastly refused.

On special weekends, when she invited Dwayne to her modest apartment, and answered the door in her chiffon blouse and jeans, with her blue eyes twinkling, and her auburn hair shimmering – these were moments when Dwayne realized *he* had become addicted. To her.

The “Hillary Addiction,” as he called it, was the only thing other than the drug itself that brought Dwayne Erman to his knees. Quite literally. Since usually when Hillary’s door opened to him he would bend down on one knee, and, wetting his lips out of nervousness, he would begin to propose to her. Again. He was always serious. She assumed it was a joke. What a rogue he was. What a rebel, with such a wicked sense of humor. She would invite him in for tea, and

discuss organic chemistry, and the politics of the school faculty, as if nothing else had ever happened between them.

His attraction to her had grown over time. At first she was impossibly cold. Then maybe just excusably shy. But even after weeks of knowing her, coaxing more than a perfunctory smile from her was a moral victory. Hearing her laugh was truly rare, and eventually became beautiful always.

After they became closer from “Level B” experiences she would sometimes let him look into her eyes for more than an instant. In the slate blue waves beyond the iris he saw a bridge. As he looked closer he came to believe he was meant to cross over that bridge someday, which would lead him to a long wordless ocean that didn’t yet exist. They were supposed to create it together.

He eventually found himself desperate. But she was not often receptive. Usually his attempts to become more intimate felt like begging. He didn’t like that part of himself. So he would pull back.

There was only one way to truly connect with her the way he longed to. Usually after dinner on those special weekend nights he would casually put a small yellow pill next to her plate. She would look down and consider it for a moment. She could see that he was lost in her. She felt empathy. Something possibly akin to love, although she couldn’t specifically define it as such. She liked his shaggy hair and his long delicate fingers. She wished she had fingers like that. There was something compelling about his sarcastic smile, his rough loud voice. Because she also knew his mind was pure and rather innocent about the world, and was working at levels of thought no one could imagine. No one but her. She admired him. Yes, that was the word she could best relate to.

There were no demands coming from this gangly man that would have in any way reminded her of her father's brute insistence that she follow his ways. Whether she took the pill or not, made love to him or not, he cast no guilt, he refused to allow her to feel any shame. In fact, he made her laugh more than anyone else ever could.

And there were those times that she would feel the pull of her heart, something she had previously only felt under the yellow pill's chemical influence -- perhaps it was an unconscious resonance from the altered dream experience that had nestled somewhere inside of her like a prayer, the exact words of which were not remembered. She might then open up to him, kiss him gently, until by morning he was happily asleep in her arms.

But Hillary also had her career to consider. She wasn't just a teacher. She was a researcher. This was her true love in life. Not Dr. Dwayne Finch Erman.

In fact, she thought, it was time to stop this odd interlude. Time to get back to work. And Dr. Dwayne Finch Erman would have to be the sacrificial lamb.

"I'm sorry Dr. Sacrificial Lamb," Ms. Hillary the Saint stiffly began one day. "But it's time that time itself becomes a bonfire upon which our previous relationship must be tossed. There will be no sacrificial prayers, chants, or dances. It's too late for that. I have work to do."

The aforementioned would-be actor, Andy Woodby, was desperate for money during the time he knew Erman. He had been a waiter at a Jewish deli for over a year, but other than gaining a bit of unwanted weight from free meals of potato pancakes, kreplach, and "Mishmash," which was matzo ball soup with everything in it, Andy Woodby was still nearly broke. His wide white Bridget Fonda smile and pool-blue Henry Fonda eyes didn't quite translate over to the quality of his acting, which one famous acting coach compared to the acting abilities of Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris when they starred in "Safe at Home." Neither of those handsome gentlemen found their name on The Avenue of the Stars. They had to settle for the Hall of Fame. Andy Woodby would not be joining either distinguished assemblage. Ever.

What Andy Woodby would be forever known for is the man who turned Dr. Dwayne Finch Erman over to the authorities. Soon after the DEA visited Woodby at his L.A. apartment, the DEA raided Erman's lab then took him away. Woodby was paid a few thousand dollars for snitching. It kept him in acting school for another month and paid for a new set of head shots. But of course, Hollywood quickly taught him that the difference between those purchases and throwing the money out a tenth-story window was zero.

Hillary St. John didn't find out what happened to Erman for many days. She had thought about contacting him and asking him if they could just go back to being professional associates. His work was fascinating. She had the thought that if she ever had free time she might even like to play around with the chemical combinations of the

formula. For what reason she hadn't quite assimilated in her mind.

She texted him: "How are you, dear friend. Sorry if I hurt your feelings the other day. Can we be professional about this?"

She realized after she sent it how horrible it sounded. She was terrible with words that had to do with emotional expression. He didn't respond.

She texted him again the next day. "I didn't quite mean let's be professionals. I meant let's be associates."

That seemed no better. But she thought that he might least respond to that and get the ball rolling.

After a full week of no contact Hillary took a bold step. She called his cell. She had to leave a message. "Call me. I considered adding a smiley face to the last text."

That was awful. But it got the point across without confusing her intentions.

After two weeks she got concerned about him not responding. She made the boldest move yet. She went to his apartment and let herself in with a spare key he had given her long ago. He had hoped she would use it often, but this was the first time.

No one was there. She opened the door slowly. The room was dark so she found the light switch. As she looked around she gravitated towards his messy desk. She thought she might write him a note to let him know she was there, but just as a concerned friend. It would be a slow process finding the right words.

As she looked for paper and a pen to write the note she noticed her phone number was written on the top of many of his calendar pages. Sometimes in reverse. Sometimes in code – one used the letters of the alphabet, replacing the numbers in the same sequential order: CCD-AFHH.

Then she saw a letter. It said “For Hillary” on the envelope next to it. He hadn’t even bothered to put in the envelope. Maybe he wasn’t going to send it? She hesitated, but then picked up the letter:

I will make this cold and unemotional, which basically describes our relationship when we’re not digesting heaven together. I am going to kill myself.

You will hate me now, as you find this out. Especially if you believe the authorities, who say I am nothing but a common street criminal because I’m selling a drug that isn’t illegal.

I was shoved out of the DEA’s office with a warning that they’d “catch me” some day. Suddenly I wasn’t an entrepreneur on the verge of starting a pharmaceutical company. Not a fledgling CEO. Not a potential savior of the world. I was just another thug. A crook that you fell for, but never really loved. How could you? Why should you?

If you had really come to know me you would have laughed at me. I’m just fumbling around in this reality. Everything I do, no matter how noble the attempt, is stolen from me and turned into a nightmare. Now it’s time for me to wake up by leaving the only dimension where a nightmare exists. Why not? The status quo will be saved. And who will really ever care?

She felt a tear fall for the first time since she was six years old, when she fell off her bike and broke her arm.

She pulled herself together and drove around the city, almost randomly at first. She stopped at a restaurant where they had sometimes eaten together, but why would he be there now? She wasn’t being logical. Why did she drive

here? It made no sense. Someone who writes a suicide note and disappears is not likely to be found eating in a romantic restaurant.

She tried to remember the actor's name where he lived rent-free before finding his own place. Weird name. "A would-be actor," Dwayne used to laugh. Because it was some kind of word play. Yes, Woodby. Woodby. She found him listed on Google, looking for auditions. "Andy Woodby, character actor, can play any role." Could he play the role of snitch? She found his phone number on the website. When she introduced herself the response very odd indeed. He seemed paranoid that she knew who he was and that he knew Dwayne. Then he said he was sorry. Sorry? So this was who turned Dwayne in to the DEA.

"Do you know where Dwayne is?"

"Of course not," he said with his voice sounding a bit shaky. "I don't want anything to do with him, understand?"

She sat in her car after the call and closed her eyes. Her heart was racing. Suddenly she realized where he would go - - the secret lab. It's how he would want to die -- he would take an overdose of some cheap pharmaceutical drug, then take "Level B."

He would go out shining.

Part III

Hillary didn't seem all that thrilled to see me when she found me alive and well in the secret lab, eating fried chicken with my feet up on my desk, watching the original version of "The Day the Earth Stood Still" on my plasma TV for the sixtieth time. I think she was pretty disgusted when she saw me, actually. She expected to find me dead. Instead, she realized it was just my new and improved way of inviting her out for dinner. It confirmed for her that the pill might be great, but the delivery system - me - was no longer viable.

I hoped she wouldn't judge me badly, and it's not that I wasn't planning on killing myself eventually: I figured one of my future experiments would do me in, probably accompanied by a shock wave and an unexpected flash of light.

She should have realized that if I really meant to kill myself without her finding me I would have chosen a better place than my not-so-secret lab. Maybe I'd have flown to Antarctica and laid down naked in the snow, or travelled to the Afghan-Pakistani border with the U.S. flag painted on my forehead. I mean, there are a lot of very logical places to go to die.

The suicide letter was not meant to be seen by her, at least not in its current form. It was a work in progress. I hadn't yet found the right words.

After she found me, she begged me to go with her to Dr. Stabnow's clinic, located a block away from the university where she worked.

After spending a few days in Stabnow's clinic, I got to know the good doctor and begrudgingly began to respect the man. And I think he started to feel the same respect for me. So I told him about "Level B," after initially refusing to acknowledge that it even existed. Hillary was the whistleblower. But any time Stabnow brought it up, I just repeated the name and the number of a fictitious dog tag.

Maybe that led him to believe I was insane. And maybe in those moments, clinically speaking I was. But he just kept at it day after day until he brought out the sanity I had hidden inside me for so long. I even admitted that the suicide note was something more than a work in progress. I had seriously considered it for a few days. But I chickened out.

He also interviewed Hillary extensively about who I was during the time she had known me. He took a keen interest in the way my mind worked, and the types of experiences one might encounter in "Level B." He tested me and psychoanalyzed me using every tool at his disposal.

Then, maybe a month into our marathon rap sessions he asked me a simple question – it seemed fanciful at the time – would I like to change my identity and stay in his clinic as part of a secret research experiment? As a person, I would disappear. No more DEA looking over my shoulder. No need to make a meager living as a chemist / street drug salesman. All expenses would be paid. There would be nothing to do except explore the drug I had created, keep myself alive with their dedicated help, promise under no circumstances to go suicidal on them, and talk to Stabnow about what was happening to me each day.

That's it. That's all I had to do. And I could disappear from this reality for good! Amazing. I was intrigued.

Priest Goldorff was there serving as a witness the day I agreed to disappear. Stabnow wanted an impartial observer to legally record that I had accepted this offer of my own free will. Whatever that means.

“Free will” seems like an oxymoron, does it not? Because to be truly free, it’s usually “will” that you have to let go of to get there. Conversely, when you find the will to take action, or fulfill some goal or dream of any kind, it almost always leads to mental imprisonment.

For instance, after all my efforts I expected Hillary to love me back, didn’t I? I expected something. That’s prison, not freedom. A prison with an image of a brilliant naked woman on the wall is still prison.

“So Dwayne, what would you like your new name to be?”

It was a curious challenge, to create a new name. I rattled a few ideas around in my head.

“I want the name to have meaning, unlike my life, but of course, it would have to be in code, like a metaphor. And also, whatever the name is, I don’t want to sound like an outlaw. Because I didn’t do anything illegal. After all, the DEA let me go. I’m not a wanted criminal.... So I want my first name to exude honesty and forthrightness.”

“Chastity?” offered Goldorff.

“That’s a girl’s name! What the hell do I look like to you?”

Goldorff was struck dumb by my meanness. But I just wanted to be frank, as I always was. Only when I took “Level B” did I actually care about hurting someone’s feelings.

Suddenly I knew what my name should be: “Frank!” I said. “My first name will be Frank.”

I was on a roll now, so I moved forward, considering a last name “Optimistically speaking, I would like to think we can eventually rise up out of this mind-induced and mind-defined nightmare we call life and experience it on a deeper level.”

“Like Jesus,” said Goldorff. “He transformed himself, he died and rose again.”

“Yes, kind of... *Wait. That's it!* – Rosen! The perfect Jewish name for Jesus.”

Stabnow laughed.

I said, “Goldorff I underestimated you. You’re a theological genius.”

He smiled innocently and looked down at his black shoes.

“Frank Rosen!” Dr. Stabnow repeated back to me. “I like it.”

“And if you didn’t like it, why would I care?” I added. It was fun being mean. I don’t know why, but sometimes I just enjoyed being a jerk.

“I knew you would come up with something better than Dweezle or Moon Unit,” Stabnow replied, laughing. “What in the world was Zappa thinking?”

Stabnow always wanted to be “hip,” but bringing up the names of Frank Zappa’s children was just showing his age. We were in the golden age of hip hop and country soft porn. His teenage patients didn’t even know who Zappa was. They’d grown up on large doses of Taylor Swift and iCarly. That meant it was highly unlikely they had ever heard any tracks from “Hot Rats.”

Part IV

Dwayne Erman, a.k.a. Frank Rosen, wanted to start the secret experiment as soon as possible. He fantasized about never returning to the outside world again. We knew the pill itself wasn't addictive, because, honestly, at some point we had all tried it. Except Goldorff. And although the experience was indeed brilliant, sensual, and spiritually enlightening in many ways, it was not something any of us felt the physical or psychological need to try over and over again. Just like vacationing in Europe, as brilliant, sensual, and enlightening as it might be, would not be addictive to the point of it ruining or running your life. Most tourists would not automatically give up everything they knew and everyone they knew and move there. Even if you lived in North Dakota. Or Long Island.

My new assistant, Hillary St. John, spent hours on end trying to alter the chemical make-up of the drug to make the experience emotionally translatable, and available for recall, on this side of the reality spectrum. That was our biggest goal by far. In fact, that was the only reason I was willing to risk heading the experiment in the first place.

But so far the only chemical substances that seemed to help with the "cross-over," as we called it, were highly addictive. This was not the point of our work, although we realized in the wrong hands it would become quite dangerous.

If addiction was not a concern, or if it was somehow seen as a plus, all sorts of monsters could fly out of the box.

We realized there was money to be made either way. We wondered briefly whether even addicted humans on

“Level B” might not be better off than they are now. But that was a Machiavellian moment.

The worst fear we had was, what would happen if the addictive version fell into the hands of less moral people than us? We would occasionally discuss it in a cold logical way, to see what steps we could take to prevent it.

First, of course, there were drug companies that would sell their corporate souls to be able to market “Level B” as the super star of anti-depressants. Possibly name it “Zontek,” Or “Xylin.” Drugs that began with the letters “Z” and “X” were in vogue these days. Or maybe they would go more folksy and call it: “Dreamway,” or “Relaxnjoy.”

DEA and FDA approval would be hard to buy, but a Dow Jones pharma-conglomerate certainly would have lobbying power over the agencies, especially if a majority in Congress were still in the drug lobbyists’ pockets. With campaign cash and sample pills, game on. The results can be overwhelming when capitalism and politics share a common goal.

There were also international implications. My assistant and I weren’t naïve enough to only think ethnocentrically about our secret experiment. No matter which country controlled the patent, even dear old America, there would be the obvious temptation to make an international power play using the drug to its advantage. What if controlling the drug’s distribution, and controlling who was allowed, or forced, to take the drug, cemented one country’s power over the rest of the world?

We were determined not to let this kind of thing happen. But like Einstein and $E=MC^2$, the road to hell is often paved with good intentions, and innocent vagabonds like Frank Rosen tended to wander down the road with eyes closed.

Therefore, we patented not only the original formula, but every one of our failures to alter it. If we did come up with a version where lucid memory was part of the experience our next goal would be to make the pill available, inexpensive, and socially beneficial right from the start. That way not even criminals would find it profitable to illegally distribute it.

The fortunate thing for the world was, we didn't care about becoming billionaires, or even millionaires. We just wanted to create a better world. Even Frank. No one on board cared particularly about the money.

Our more immediate goal struck closer to home. If we found a way to combine a memory component to the psychological experience of the drug without the addictiveness it would also be helping Frank, who we all very much wanted to see fully functioning in this reality again someday.

As a chemist he was a genius. Historically, there will be no doubt about that. But he was also obviously a broken man in many ways. He was able to function by day by reviewing our chemical research and pointing out flaws or potential pathways, but anything having to do with emotions – personal relationships, love interests, or even random events like discussing sports would bring about a refusal to speak and a disinterest in the work.

None of us were interested in creating a dream-zombie by keeping him alive and drugged for the next fifty years. We wanted to create a powerful integration of the enlightened state that the drug created in this waking dimension, for his sake, as well as for the rest of the world.

Was the mind psychologically capable of intaking such information and remembering it while awake and

functioning normally? That was a question I was fighting in my own mind. And was normal a good thing or a bad thing? Clinically the answer is, normal is good. It creates a surviving social network among us, like a hive of bees.

Chemically, the answer might be that we could all become spiritual masters. All of us. This level of normal would be seen retroactively as a very painful and wholly unnecessary way to live.

Part V

I would often come and watch him dream. I would leave before morning. He wouldn't want me here if he knew it was me. He would hate me if he knew I still cared for him, but only as a friend. I guess I'm not capable of more unless I'm drugged with him, and seeing reality through clearer eyes. I may as well admit that shameful truth to myself. Yet, even without the pill's influence, I can't seem to stay away from him.

I don't know what I would say to him if he stood before me. I wouldn't know how to thank him. What he's doing to himself, and at the same time for the future benefit of the world strikes me as beyond brave, and beyond important. What we have here is a decision that needs to be made as a human race. The decision is based on multiple choices: Pain or ecstasy? This reality or dream reality? Living to survive? Or surviving to live? If we could sustain our existence with food, water, basic exercise and medical care, while spending our time exploring the realities of what our mind is capable of at "Level B," we would quite possibly never suffer need to suffer again. Life and death, suffering and joy, would all be put into a perspective so broad as to make everything "holy." We would surely evolve our minds into a greater instrument for good than we could have ever imagined, instead of settling for the reality you and I know today.

Dwayne Erman, now Frank Rosen, God bless you. I quit my job at the university to be with you and join the team here. You were wrong about me. I want to help both you and the world in a meaningful way. Actually, let me evolve that sentence and be more emotionally honest. I want to love both you and the world in a meaningful way.

Part VI

Acting is a strange profession. Much like the drug I created, it allows one to leave this reality for another. Great actors can make that altered reality a part of their very soul. They can internalize the role. Andy Woodby, on the other hand, could only read lines, not much more than that. No one would give him serious work.

At times like this Andy cursed his looks. He thought, "I'm far deeper than my Bridget Fonda smile and Henry Fonda eyes. What do I have to do, scar my face with a knife to prove it?"

In the opinion of others in the industry, while the scar may have added the illusion of depth and substance to the man, once he opened his mouth he was doomed.

So when Woodby heard the knock on his door that fateful Saturday afternoon he probably didn't even pause for a moment to wonder who it might be. He had no hope, he had no fear. He probably just muted the sound on his television and walked over to open the door.

On the other side of Los Angeles, a meeting had taken place. I don't know how they found out about Level B, or me, or Andy, although it's not all that hard to connect the dots when you have unlimited amounts of money and the DEA in your back pocket.

Although the facts will forever remain sketchy, it seems that one of Erman's teenage consumers who'd tried the little round yellow pill had a father who had an important position at a pharmaceutical company. A company who was desperate to recover from a very bad economy, and a stock price that had fallen sixty percent in a year. A company whose CEO had too many stock options and was

becoming too illiquid to continue to pay for his Bel Air house with the circular driveway.

The CEO would be looking for a new blockbuster drug that would put the company back on top. Just think about all the happy shareholders. Yes, he would do it for the shareholders.

It was a Machiavellian moment.

Andy answered the door wondering, had he ordered a pizza? He couldn't quite remember. But hope sprang eternal.

Two men greeted him and pushed him back inside the room. They were dressed in gray suits. Their masks and gloves were black. The door was quickly shut by one of the black gloves. This was not a pizza delivery.

"All we want to know is where he is, then you won't get hurt," one said. The other added, "Otherwise, we're going to have to make a mess of things."

Woodby was speechless. He couldn't remember, were these actors from the audition from a week ago telling him (with the strangest practical joke of all time) that he got the role of "space criminal"?

Or maybe they had the wrong apartment? He would gladly point them in the right direction, perhaps for a small fee.

Suddenly he received his very first real punch in the face. In acting school there were plenty of fake punches. This didn't feel anything like that.

His neck snapped all the way to the right and he weakly crumpled to the floor and began to scream for help but it came out more like a cry.

"Where is he?"

"Who? Where is who? No one else lives here but me!"

Andy mumbled out of a slightly loosened set of teeth.

"Erman."

“Erman? Jesus man, how the hell would I know?” Andy was starting to panic through his tears. *Damn Erman.* He should have known he’d be the reason for this. *“I haven’t seen him for months. Maybe a year. I have no idea.”*

“No emails, no cell calls?” the thug who hadn’t hit him asked the question, but it was in a muffled tone through his black stocking mask.

“No. Why the hell would he contact me? He probably knows I’m the one who turned him into the DEA. He’d be the last guy in the world who would give a shit about me.”

“You don’t think we know it was you who turned him in?”

Wait a minute, Andy thought, maybe Erman hired these guys! Whose side were they on?

One thug found Andy’s iPhone sitting on the dresser in his tiny bedroom. Inside the phone all the past voice messages from his agent were frozen in time. He hated to delete any offer for auditions, even if he had been turned down for the part long ago. The thug scrolled through his email and phone contacts. Erman wasn’t in there.

“Please be careful not to erase...”

“I’m not sure he knows anything,” the other thug interrupted.

“Then why the hell would they have been so sure?”

Andy was feeling exonerated now and said calmly, *“Who are ‘they’?”*

A new thought entered his mind. Maybe Erman was a crook, maybe he should try to help them find him. He didn’t felt guilty for turning him in the first time. That’s mostly because Erman ate what little food Andy had in his refrigerator without ever replacing it. He also ogled Andy’s girlfriends and constantly tried to sleep with them. He couldn’t be trusted. He was a jerk.

Andy had made a few thousand government dollars from turning him in while managing to kick him out of his. He remembered that fondly.

“Who are you working for?” Andy mumbled, doing his best detective imitation.

“None of your business, you fucking giraffe.” Andy was tall.

What they were unwilling to admit to Woodby was that they were working for one of the largest pharmaceutical firms on earth. And its stock price had lost another five percent on Monday. It was a hell of a bad year. People talked about 2008. This was worse.

“Are you with the FBI?” Andy asked, with his jaw still stinging and his neck stiff from a now out-of-place vertebrae.

The thugs looked at each other and almost burst out laughing. But the smart thug (relatively speaking because the other thug was *really* dumb) said, “Yeah, we’re from a secret section of the FBI. We don’t need to show badges or anything like that. We just need secret information. Important top secret information to help the government.”

The other thug nodded. Dumb as he was, he caught on. “It’s a government red alert priority right now to find Erman. And it’s your duty to help us. You could go from being a moronic giraffe to a national hero overnight if you help us find him.”

“What did he do *now*?” Andy was stunned. He thought Erman was just a nut who had accidentally invented a little yellow pill he refused to try. Erman hadn’t even graduated with a degree in chemistry because of the fumble thing. He couldn’t be trusted to make anything good.

“I need to know what he did before I tell you anything more,” Andy said impudently.

He was gaining confidence, knowing they were all on the same side. He loved his country. Plus he felt important now. They needed him. And this was the FBI! Would the FBI actually be desperate enough to let him in on a national security secret?

"It's about the drug," the smarter one mumbled through his mask. Why would the FBI wear masks? These guys must be *really* important.

"Level B?" Andy mumbled. "Why?"

"Let's get out of here. This is going nowhere."

"We should bring him back with us," said the dumb thug.

"Too dangerous," droned the other.

Andy said, "The DEA let him go, you know. There weren't any illegal substances in the pill to arrest him for."

"Yeah, well, you see, kid, he claims to have invented it, but he lied. The government invented it," said the relatively smart thug.

"The government did?"

The dumb thug nodded in agreement. But he was getting impatient. This was taking way too long.

"But then why do you care about Erman? If the government already has the formula?" All the intelligence Andy acquired came from studying movies. But he couldn't quite follow this plot.

"He was a spy."

"Really? *Really?* For who?"

"They paid him a *lot* of money."

"Was it China? I hate China."

"We can't really say."

Andy nodded. This was serious.

"Okay, let me try to help," Andy said.

The thugs backed off and sat on his ratty couch as Andy scrolled through his iPhone for the number of Erman's straight-laced girlfriend. What was her name? She'd only called Andy once, looking for him. She seemed panicked. Oh yeah, Hillary something.

Part VII

Andy Woodby called *me* asking where Dwayne was! Why should he care now? I thought he didn't want anything to do with him anymore.

When I questioned why he wanted to know, he said the FBI was there in his apartment. They were looking for him. But I was suspicious. The DEA had let him go. Andy was the one who had turned him in.

I asked him if he'd asked to see their badges? That's when he whispered, "No, they're from the secret section of the FBI."

Suddenly I heard a thud. Then the phone crashed like a piece of tin, it sounded like it bounced against a hard floor. Then I heard a gunshot.

Part VIII

Woodby made the third page of the L.A. Times. I'm sure he had hoped to make the papers as a thespian, not a murder victim. The final act was over.

The first thing I was concerned about after I heard the news was whether the thugs could trace Woodby's call to Hillary. I felt fairly confident they wouldn't be able to trace Erman to this location. But I thought Hillary might be in serious danger. So I had her move into the complex downstairs from where our offices were.

I also hired two security guards to watch the building, telling them that a psychotic patient of mine had become paranoid and now saw me as the enemy. The guards were told they might even hire someone to kill me, or my female assistant.

But the smartest thing I did was to hire two other security guards to hide out in front of Hillary's old apartment for a month.

Sure enough, the two twin thugs showed up there the following week. They were searched by my security guards and found to have masks and gloves in their pockets along with loaded pistols. They never made it into the apartment. They're in jail now, charged with the first-degree murder of a very bad actor.

The company they worked for claimed they had nothing to do with ordering the thugs to hurt or kill anyone. They had only requested these newly hired employees to find out what they could about a rumored new experimental drug they were excited about and willing to pay handsomely for, even before FDA approval. The firm had very good lawyers. The thugs didn't. Poor thugs.

We felt the danger had passed. But we did keep the security in force at the office for another six months. Psychologically, fear has a way of creating more fear.

Hillary was undeterred and unfazed by the threat to her life. She remained under my employ as a chemist, looking for what we now termed the “carry-over equation.” This was the Holy Grail.

Speaking of Holy Grail, we met with Goldorff the priest right after Hillary moved into the office complex. He came to my office at our request. I was in my leather chair where I usually analyze my patients. Hillary and Goldorff sat on the couch next to each other, where my patients usually sit. They looked like an odd couple, to be sure. Hillary was dressed in a business skirt and white blouse. She hadn't yet changed into her whites. Her hair was styled. She wore heels and a gold necklace. Goldorff when not preaching was a sloppy dresser with a bit of a paunch. We sipped our coffee.

Hillary looked at Goldorff very intently and said, “In your view, do you think it's ethically questionable to attempt something like this?” She had not been privy to my original conversation with Goldorff. I assumed he hadn't changed his mind. Wisdom in a lab? I wasn't optimistic about his response, but we were all open to ethical concerns and wanted to log it in our records whether his response was positive or negative.

“In my judgment, from what you're telling me, it has the potential to save the human race.”

I was a little stunned by his response. Hillary seemed relieved.

Then he added, “But of course, in God's judgment, well, that's another thing altogether. I just don't know.”

Hillary became more animated, “May I just add, if millions or *billions* of people could overcome their pain and trauma, and instead find peace and inner contentment, what

would God's concern be? In that state, no one would tolerate war, I assure you. Love would be far more accessible. War would be inconceivable. Empathy would be commonplace, even when there was extreme disagreement. Why would God not approve of that?"

"Well," Goldorff responded quietly, "we are not taking into account God's design. God's plan for us. And what this might do to alter it."

Hillary asked, "Then doesn't every invention since fire have the potential to alter God's plan?"

"Maybe fire *did!*" Goldorff laughed. "That's my point. I can't know. I'm not God. I'm not even God's messenger. I'm only His servant."

Goldorff added, "I also think about this: Can anything humans do alter God's plan? Or is it all part of the plan? Or does He not have a plan, as such? Is He just watching us? Or perhaps waiting -- to see if we can get it together? I really don't know."

"Well, the question may be moot," Hillary said quietly. "Because, so far all of my attempts to find the carry-over equation have ended up destabilizing the original chemicals. Either the pill becomes ineffective, or addictive, or capable of negative experiences. None of those alterations are worth "crossing-over" into this reality. The world already has enough of those drugs. I'm sure God isn't happy with a lot of them."

Goldorff asked, "What do you think the fired CEO was thinking before he hired those thugs? I mean, what was his motivation in all this? Just money?"

I thought about it for a moment. Someone in my profession has to be able to put themselves in anyone's shoes. We're supposed to be able to explore the dark side without judgment, so we can glean some modicum of

wisdom from the process. I'm not sure gleaning wisdom is always the end result. But I decided to try my hand. "I think it was ultimately about more than money. The controller of this drug even in its present form could use it to attempt to have power over the rest of the world.

"What if Zeus had no other Gods to compete with? What if he was the supreme and only ruler? Would he rule for ill, or for good? I think he would become so bored with controlling things, and become so unthreatened, that he would become good, eventually. His only motivation at that point would be to oversee and care for the world that he was the God of.

"But compare that scenario to what is happening in the real world today, where inevitably we are on course to wipe each other out with all the wrong kinds of chemistry.

"I guess what I'm saying is, if we control the collective mind before it finds a way to destroy everything, then we will be the greatest saviors of all time."

Goldorff seemed concerned. He steered the conversation to a far more pragmatic subject. "What about registering patents, and the like? Have you done that? If this falls into the wrong hands. . ."

"We're patenting things as we go along. Even the failures. So no one else can use any of what we're doing without our legal permission. We've formed a company – *i Dream*, LLC. It's co-owned by Erman and my company equally. Unknown to Erman, my company includes Hillary as a partial owner. Because *i Dream* will never make a penny unless Hillary comes up with the additional chemical formula that can transform "Level B" out of the dream state and into something real. And if Hillary can't do it, no one will. Because frankly, there's not another chemist in the

world I would trust with the information and the knowledge she's accumulated."

Goldorff nodded and said, "Wondrous indeed, this world of ours." He then shook our hands and wished us the best. His hand was warm and pliant. Behind his spectacles was a kind face, his thin hair, what was left of it, was graying slightly. We wondered aloud after he left if he had any curiosity at all to try "Level B" himself? But of course, it wouldn't have been appropriate to ask. At least not yet.

Hillary came to seriously doubt her ability to find “carry-over equation.” She knew employing a great team of chemists from a big university would give us a far better chance to find the formula, if a formula actually existed. But she agreed after what happened to Woodby that we just couldn’t take that risk. We trusted Goldorff to keep our secret. After all, he’d been in on this since the beginning. And we trusted Erman, of course. But no one else.

I encouraged Hillary every chance I could. I told her I had no doubt she would find the answer. But I had my own motives: Hillary was a beautiful girl. Brilliant. Polite. Respectful. And, emotionally cold and unreachable. Therefore, well, I have to admit, it was hard for anyone of any age to resist her. And I was basically the only person she saw in her free time.

What did it matter that a sixty-five year old divorced psychiatrist like myself had zero chance to win her over, regardless of how young at heart I was, or how hip I was about today’s youth?

Of course, I could also tell she was falling in love with a living zombie dreaming his life away in the next room.

But, despite this, one night I asked Hillary to dinner. She accepted, choosing the following Friday as the date. Oddly, she even chose the restaurant. Did she have an inkling of my motivation? Or did she think we were going to discuss business? I allowed her to think that was the case.

And she allowed me to think whatever I wanted to think, as long as it wasn’t the truth. Because I wasn’t the only one trying to set someone up. I had no idea Hillary was setting me up.

Part IX

Will Stabnow was a good man. I trusted his intentions with Dwayne, and trusted our professional relationship. However, I had signed no contract. I didn't need to or want to profit from anything, even if I could succeed at finding the carry-over equation. His generous salary, and his promise that I would own a percentage of *i Dream* if we succeeded, dwarfed what I had been making as a professor. That comforted me somewhat.

But none of us were doing this for the money. We were doing this because it was our life's work. I had other motives as well, I admit. Recognition in my field, if I were to actually deserve it. But, also, if I was honest with myself, I wanted to see if Dwayne could become real to me – here, in this world.

Up until now he continued to know me only as some mysterious doctor in his dreams. I could help him, and communicate with him, right as he was going under, or just before he was fully awake. But I was merely a voice. I was never visibly present in the room. I couldn't take that chance. I felt certain that if he found out it was me he would either feel hurt and angry, or feel desperately in love with me before I was ready, and before he was ready. I knew who he was capable of being "under the influence." But I wanted him to become that in the real world. Could that ever happen? I couldn't know. Could I respond in kind if he was that person? I couldn't know that either yet.

For him, it would mean accepting his shame about "The Fumble," at Notre Dame; accepting who his parents were; accepting who I am, and also who I am not.

That was my mind-set the night I went out to dinner with Dr. Stabnow.

Unfortunately, I had not been honest enough with Will to tell him how I felt about Dwayne. Maybe he had an inkling of it. But our discussions remained business-like throughout our time at work.

“You look lovely tonight,” Will beamed. He was wearing jeans and a dinner jacket. His thick silver hair was a tad too long, another attempt to show how hip he was. He wanted me to know that he was not at all a part of the 1950s. He was “now.” I admit, I always thought his attempt to stay “current” with the culture was a part of his charm.

I blushed at his compliment. He took that as a good sign, as a psychiatrist might. But actually I blushed because it made me uncomfortable, not flattered. It was becoming obvious to me he had asked me on a “date.” I had far different intentions. I also knew a lot of other people were listening at this moment to everything he said.

“So....” I stammered, trying to think of a question, hoping to move the conversation off of me. He was very good at talking about himself when he wasn’t with patients.

“Hillary, I have something to discuss.”

Just then the waiter came by.

“Oh would you like to order first?” Will asked.

“Yes, that would be good.” I wasn’t at all hungry, but I was playing my role.

“Would you like to hear the specials?” the waiter asked us. It was quite a fancy restaurant I had chosen for the occasion – Will’s favorite, I knew.

“Of course!” Will blurted. “She’s a chemist!”

That’s the second time I blushed. This time from the embarrassment of how bad his joke was.

“We have lamb with chocolate sauce and endives, and we also have chopped sea bass in seaweed.”

“What?” Will mumbled, his eyebrows furled.

The waiter was unfazed by Will's gastronomic horror. It sounded completely disgusting – but that was the point.

“We also have the chef's favorite – oxtail soup with spaghetti and meat sauce.”

“Oh my God!” Will cried aloud. He tried to hold back an embarrassing laugh.

At that moment twenty people burst from every corner of the restaurant.

“*Surprise!*” everyone screamed at once. The waiter, a budding actor, began to shake his head and laugh. He had pulled off his comedy routine without breaking character.

“But my birthday isn't until Wednesday,” Stabnow stammered.

“It's close enough, Will. And we were all able to get together tonight, so here we are!”

Will was flushed and visibly shaken at the timing of this surprise party. He had been prepared to tell me how he felt about me. But his friends didn't know that. And if they did, they would have probably tried to stop him.

“Sweet sixty-six!” someone yelled out.

Some of them had already been drinking for an hour before the time came to hide behind a big black curtain. These were his colleagues mostly, along with an old neighbor of his before he got divorced, back when he was living in the suburbs. There were about ten friends in all.

He would rather have spent the evening begging for my attention than have all these people – strangers really – celebrating an age that he was dreading. Sixty-six sounded so much older than sixty-five. But then again, he once told me that starting around fifty, every year sounds so much older.

Will was gracious, as always. He laughed. He enjoyed their company. No one had the slightest idea what he was

doing after-hours seven days a week. He told no one about his feelings for me, or the *i Dream* experiment. They suspected nothing regarding either.

When the party was over he offered to walk me to my car. I could feel the tension.

“Hillary....”

“Dr. Stabnow. I need to tell you something urgent before you say another word.”

“Go ahead, my dear. I rather dread my end of this conversation anyway.”

“I’m in love with Frank. With Dwayne Erman. I need you to know that if we’re going to continue working together. Because, it’s not a completely professional situation for me right now.”

“Ah yes, I rather suspected,” he whispered, his eyes looking downward. “Well then, your timing was excellent. You have saved me from making a terrible fool of myself.”

“Conversely,” I said. Something clicked. Something I learned from the other side... my heart suddenly opened. I felt so much admiration and sympathy for this man I was working with.

I took his leathery cherub face in my hands and kissed him. “I am flattered,” I said, “and honored by your admiration. You are a brilliant, charming, and handsome man....”

“And you’re in love with a half-dead man dreaming his life away....”

“Yes, exactly. I couldn’t have explained it better myself. Isn’t that romantic?”

We both began to laugh. Some of it was the champagne. Some of it was an acknowledgement, and a sense of relief, that everything was clear between us with no harm done.

Back at the office we found everything in order. It was a Friday night. I was tired. Dr. Stabnow was organizing his notes. Then we went in to give "Frank" his pill and put his breakfast food in the mini-fridge in his room. The lights were dim.

When we came out of his room, hidden away in the recesses of the office suite, I said to Will, "Shall we try?"

His eyebrows raised up. Then he saw two yellow pills in my hand. We had never experienced the other side together.

Our friendship grew in powerful ways that night. I realized by knowing him in the other world that he had a beautiful way of seeing life. He was a child at heart with the deepest wisdom of anyone I had ever met. Right at the end, he saw me laugh for the first time. He saw me joyous, like the little girl I never was.

I trusted him to know me like that.

The next time we visited Will's favorite restaurant the waiter was real. There were no people hiding behind the black curtain. Will had invited me again, but it was for a far different reason.

After looking through the menu for a few minutes he said, "It's not going to work, Hillary. I have to be honest with you. I just don't believe it's possible. We may be coming to the end."

He paused to watch my face. I had just been thinking about ordering the salmon salad. But his words redirected my thoughts like a car crash.

"I know that's not what you want to hear, and I am not saying I've lost faith in you; nothing could be farther from the truth. But I can't help coming back to the fact that the psychology of the brain has a natural flow to it. The brain is a muscle that reacts to chemical stimuli. A muscle acts, and then rests. The brain needs to re-set before the next step forward. It goes from a heaven realm to a hell realm in cycles throughout the days and years of our life. Sometimes within a single hour. I am beginning to doubt that any chemical, any drug or series of drugs, can permanently cut off that hell cycle over time. Maybe humans may need hell to see heaven clearly. It's like breathing in and out. It's love and hate, it's war and peace...."

"*Stop!*" I was getting agitated. "I thought we were way beyond this, Doctor." I called him "Doctor" on rare occasions when I was upset with him. "The brain is mostly chemicals. But the mind is mostly what? *What exactly is it?* Is it a processor of the brain? Or a window to reality? Or a window to madness? A mirror? A camera? Half devil, half angel?"

“No, that’s my point!” He leaned towards me now. “Unless you ply the body with so many chemicals that the mind never awakens to this reality ever again, we can’t change the mind into something different than what it is. Even if we find a way to have Frank grow psychologically from the lessons and epiphanies in his ‘Level B’ dream states after he awakens, we still have to expect that the mind will go back to its natural cycle, despite the lessons learned.”

“That’s your theory, Will! At this point, we can’t afford to trust a theory, or give up on all of this now because of your theory, or mine. But ask yourself this – even if you’re right and emotional cycles are a part of the human condition, if we become aware *in this reality* of the emotional and spiritual lessons that come to us while in the ‘Level B state,’ would the world ever be the same? Wouldn’t it at least be better than it is now?”

Will didn’t answer my question. I could see the wheels spinning.

“Besides, I think I’m on the verge of something.” I said quietly.

“Seriously? A chemical break through?”

“Technically, yes. But I approached it from a completely different angle this time.”

“What’s is it? Tell me!” His pessimism about the experiment vanished.

“Will, have you ever studied lucid dreaming?”

“Yes. It’s a learned art form, and a difficult one at that.”

“But if learning how to lucid dream could be chemically induced, in combination with the ‘Level B’ formula, then with a little effort on the dreamer’s part. . . .”

“Yes, interesting, go on,” he whispered.

“In some eastern religions they claim their normal waking state is the illusion, and their dreams are real. What

if they're right? What if this reality is not *the true* reality? What if *the* reality is... that place, that place we go in Level B?

"What if it's waiting for us with open arms, willing to accept us any way we can get there? Meditation, lucid dreaming, trance, chemistry? And if that's the case, far more people would be able to access it if all of those options were available."

"What exactly have you found?"

"Perhaps a way to easily learn lucidity while in the 'Level B' state. We wouldn't have to try to remember everything when we wake up from the dream. And there wouldn't be one hundred percent recall of every experience there. But it also wouldn't exactly be like a dream anymore. Because we'd be lucid and conscious when the events were happening. It would be reality, just as much as this reality would be reality. One would not exclude the other. We would simply learn to be conscious in both."

Our lunches were placed before us. After the waiter left Will leaned over and said quietly, "If your idea works in the lab obviously Frank would be the test subject."

"Yes, of course," I said. "But then he'd know. . . ."

"You're thinking you will have to reveal your role to him if he's going to be lucid. Frank will find out you've been here all this time, ever since the very first experiments began. And you think he'll hate you for having had that power over him, while at the same time having rejected him in this reality long ago."

"Perceptive, Doctor."

"Of course," he allowed himself a small smile. "Well, I can tell you, knowing Frank the way we do, if you explain to him what you've explained to me, it will only inspire him to accept the challenge of being your guinea pig. It would be like a reverse Romeo and Juliet! Yes. Funny. Everything is

mirror opposite. He decided to leave this reality. You are making him a potion to bring him back.”

I thought the analogy was clever.

Then he added, “Isn’t that romantic.”

After a sip of wine he said, “How close are you to knowing?”

“Fairly close. Maybe a month, maybe two.”

“That’s remarkable. We’ll have to start preparing. This is a whole new paradigm.”

“When should I tell him – that I’ve been the doctor?”

“Wait until you’re closer, Hillary. Wait until you’re sure.”

I questioned if my feelings for Dwayne were real or if they were just another case of someone wanting what they can’t have, until they can. I was such a cold fish. My heart was so closed to life – this life, most of the time. I wanted the lucidity experiment to work as much as anyone, for personal as well as professional reasons.

Part X

Hillary is one of the few “great people” I ever had the pleasure to get to know. Her integrity is impeccable at all times. Therefore, I should have known she would try the new drug before giving it to Frank, or anyone else.

The fact that she invited me to oversee her journey was also not a surprise. The fact that I didn’t stop her *was* the surprise.

This was bordering on unethical – allowing a young chemist in my employ try a new drug that I had asked her to create. But her confidence blinded me. It always did.

The first few hours were spent with Hillary in a deep state of sleep. My polysomnograph was recording relatively normal sleep patterns. But then she began to speak to me while still sleeping!

“Will, I am here! It’s easy to learn to be present. Physically I feel good, fine. Everything is working beautifully.”

I moved closer to her. “Hillary,” I said in a soothing voice. “Tell me more.”

“I am all head, no body. It’s wild. It’s so comfortable. I am no physical presence in time. And time is debatable as well. Although I’d rather not get into that at the moment!”

“Understood!” I laughed softly. I sensed that was the correct empathetic reaction.

There were early signs of dehydration. She stopped to wet her lips. I noted that in my journal and waited patiently.

Her voice lowered, “What I’m experiencing is the past, present and future, all of it, in what you might call the present moment here in my apartment, but it’s more than that. It’s like time is a hologram. And I’m observing through

it. But I'm also more than all of that. Because I see how it all flows together. . . . I'm the overseer. . . . I remember I took the experimental pill an hour ago. And I'm the one that created the cross-over equation. And I'm the one that created me, this me! I mean, the definition of the real me - I am that creator, and the definer."

We were recording the session on video, but I was also scribbling down my own observations. Things I was thinking that I might not remember later.

"And...Will?"

"Yes."

"It's obvious to me that I'm dreaming. But, am I in REM state?"

I looked at my polysomnograph. "Yes."

"Good. This is really good! May I journey a while without speaking, or do you need more information first?"

"No, go ahead. Let's see what you remember... after."

That was the last thing she said until four hours and seventeen minutes later, when she arose, back here.

“The mind can be a beautiful miraculous thing. It can save us using the same chemical pathways it uses to destroy us.”

This is how she began her videotaped de-briefing.

She continued:

“I think we’ve found what we’re looking for, Will. The lucidity while in ‘Level B’ was incredible. There is a disorienting part too – because I remember being *there* so clearly that *here* isn’t all that is real to me anymore. Even now. It may never be. Because there’s been a dimensional shift in my thinking.”

“How so?”

“There’s another reality that’s equally true to the one here. Neither are illusion. That’s that revelation. *Everything* is true!

“It’s a *multi-reality* hologram. That’s the only way I can explain it. And, *I want to ride the waves between all six places.*”

I thought perhaps she was becoming psychologically disoriented, especially since that last sentence was accompanied with such uncharacteristic exuberance. I quickly became concerned.

She mused almost to herself, “In a way, I can see the future.”

“You can see the future?” My face must have revealed how stunned and puzzled I was.

“From there, I can. In a way.”

“Tell me more.”

“There are six dimensions of time and reality.”

“Okay. Can you explain them?”

“I believe so. One at a time?”

“Please.”

“Okay. First, there is the lucid present in the ‘Level B’ dream state.

“Then there are the past events in that dream, which can be recalled in the lucid dream state. Even now.

“There is also knowing when I am in ‘Level B’ -- that my body is *here*, slightly below the hypnagogic state, in this reality. It’s sort of a parallel present state.

“There is also, of course, the past I have in this reality. I can also access that in the dream state, just like I can now.

“Then -- as we have worked so hard to achieve, Will – I have a memory of the ‘Level B’ dream I had while in *this* reality, including all the emotional elements experienced while there.

“And, the sixth time dimension is the future in the dream state -- which is actually knowing there will be this reality when I wake up!”

“Oh my. I think I understand now. But might there not be a ‘future’ inside the dream state?”

“I don’t think so. I think when it’s over, it’s over. The next time you go to ‘Level B’ it wouldn’t be a continuation of the last time you were there, and moving into that future time. It’s totally new. Because everything you experienced since the last time you were in Level B will affect where you begin and where you go there. Just as Level B will now affect and change this reality, and this me. Both are true. Both are part of the other. Total continuity. And, yes, I remember it clearly!”

“Tell me.”

“Well, first of all, I can still feel the *after-currents*, emotionally, and psychologically of what I experienced there. Look, Will, I can detail out more of the specific memories, and imagery, and stories if you need me to. It will take a while. But I need to tell you about something far more important and powerful than any of that.”

“Okay, please go on.”

“I am no longer who I was.”

“How so?”

She began laughing. “Oh my God, this is going to sound so trite. I really need to work on that judgment of myself. I can see now that I never really understood -- not at all. But the change is there. It’s about *the feeling* of love. I feel differently about it. I can feel it. Other drugs temporarily evoke love as a chemical experience too. But it usually doesn’t translate once the chemicals wear off. But Will, *my ability to love* -- you see? She put her hand over her heart as if to prevent it from escaping, she took a deep breath, and her eyes became teary. “I can use that word, ‘love,’ without blushing, or smirking. It’s real. I get it now. It’s more real than that. Will, now it feels like *love is more real than no love!* Can you understand that?”

It took me aback for a moment. But then I understood:

“You mean the mind learns to protect itself by not loving. And that’s our normal state as an adult. But the brain’s natural chemical response to the world when things are safe, and when we’re conscious of what life is giving us, is love? Is that what you’re saying? Love is natural, if and when fear and danger don’t exist and awareness does. And you don’t feel fear or danger *there*? Is that it?”

“Yes. Being lucid in the ‘Level B’ reality has taught me not to fear there, but also, Will, not to ‘*over-fear*’ here!

“I like that word. ‘Over-fear!’”

“Because the fear I’ve felt my entire adult life caused even *more* fear, *unnecessary* fear, that’s what I mean by ‘*over-fear*,’ which I am now aware of for the first time. And while fear is still in me to some degree, it no longer rules me. I’m no longer a bubble girl. Bubble wrapped in fear. I’m out of the bubble! Out in the open air. Even though the ‘Level B’ dream ended and I’m back to me, here. This is actually who I am now.... I am more of who I was meant to be than I was before. And I like this much better, Will. Regardless of the consequences that come from being this way. Because the other way was living half-dead.”

She stopped speaking and I paused to consider things for a moment. “Dwayne. He’s going to have an interesting time with this.”

I saw her face change as a new thought entered her mind.

“When Frank takes this new drug....” She stopped and smiled.

I laughed, “You’re going to take it with him.”

“Yes.”

I wrote some final notes in my journal and said nothing further. I noticed that her diminishment of fear also created an adventurousness, a surety, that was more than simple confidence. It was a *willingness* to be adventurous, possibly beyond logic. I tried not to allow my own emotions to enter into the equation. I would have to settle for playing the role I was most familiar with: an observer between two worlds.

Part XI

I was falling, as I had so many times before, into a cloud with open arms.

My name and personality had long ago been erased. There were barley names left for anything.

I realized that the hum of music I heard in the air was more real than sound. It possessed life and light. It was the sound of me. "Frank..." At least, in my currently named life.

I tried to look out through the clouds, out into the gray swirl of mental constructs taller than skyscrapers – *this* was what they called 'the world' when dreams weren't real enough.

"Frank?"

"Yes, doctor," I smiled.

"I'd like you to come out early today, Frank. We have something to discuss. I am even going to reveal to you who I am today."

It was hard to care. It had been so long since I cared about anything concerning my life on that side of existence. But I felt some level of what might be called excitement perhaps, in the doctor's voice. And I didn't want to be unsympathetic to an old friend.

In that state, between knowing and wonder, my eyes fluttered open, and what I saw, I was sure, was part of the illusory world I wanted to escape from – a place where all the disappointments and fears and sadness and failures still lay hibernating.

"*Hillary?* No. No."

"Please Frank, let me tell you some things you will be happy to hear. Don't pre-judge. Don't assume anything."

I gulped down a bit of water as I normally did when first arising. There was no giddiness this time. I breathed deeply and wiped sleep from my eyes as I sat up.

“Let me be honest with you right from the start, Frank – I have been the doctor in your dream all along. I have honored your secret identity. I believe in what you and Dr. Stabnow are trying to do. I’ve helped protect you. And, truly, I have been working on your behalf every day since the beginning. But there’s much more to it than that.”

I stared at her blankly, trying to eject all the feelings I felt for her. I couldn’t go there again.

“I can see through those mirror eyes of yours, Frank. I know you all too well. I know how you must feel right now. I am sorry. But I want you to know this – I want to see you fully potentialized, not just asleep in a laboratory with electrodes taped to your head. I want to see you come alive, in this world, for me.”

I was trying to process which dimension I was in, and which one she was in.

She turned on a small microphone clipped to her shirt. “Will? Can you come in?”

Will? Oh yes. Stabnow. She’s calling him “Will” now. This was going to turn into a discussion about their little lab rat -- me.

Stabnow came in looking overly spiffy in tan pants, a pressed blue shirt, and thin red tie. “Frank! What wonderful news we have for you today!” he exclaimed with a broad smile that seemed to also betray concern.

“Will,” I interrupted. “What kind of name is ‘Will Stabnow?’ Isn’t that disconcerting to your patients, especially the paranoid ones? Did your parents do that on purpose to freak people out?”

“William was never supposed to be shortened to Will. My parents always made sure everyone called me William. But then you go to college and I guess all hell breaks loose.”

“Didn’t they know they were setting you up for ridicule?”

He chuckled, “‘William’ was my grandfather’s name on my mother’s side. She loved him. But she also was an optimist. She figured if people called me ‘Will Stabnow’ it meant I would be a brilliant thinker and I would be ‘willing’ to take a ‘stab’ at anything that might work, at any time. Even ‘now,’ No matter how big the problem. There was always going to be a solution, somewhere somehow. And I would be the one to find it. And, Frank, I didn’t... But *she* did.”

I put down my cup of water.

Hillary said, “May I tell you why we’re here now, Dwayne? I think you’ll be happy about it.”

I rubbed my eyes.

“I’ve found an answer. For you. For us.”

I was supposed to be on my tread mill right now. Thinking about Hillary and me in the same breath made me feel like I was back on the tread mill without even having to move. Not a pleasant thing.

“It’s an alteration to the pill, Dwayne. I’ve added something to the equation. It’s going to bring Dwayne back to me... And me to you. Because I’m going to join you.”

“Join me where?”

“All realities.”

I didn’t get it.

“She found the cross-over equation, Frank. And she’s already tried it. It works! It works better than we ever could have imagined.”

“When do we start?” I said, still not fully understanding what the goal was.

“Whenever the two of you decide.”

“Tonight!” Hillary said, with her eyes blazing. “Twelve hours from now.” She looked at her watch. “At 9 pm.”

She leaned forward and looked straight through me, “I’m going to find you, Dwayne Erman. And bring you home.”

Part XII

We were under water, flying, breathing calmly and fully. We were searching for the top of the sky. It was a long way up.

I taught him to look out through the clouds, out into the gray swirl of mental constructs taller than skyscrapers — *this* was what they called ‘the world’ when dreams weren’t real enough.

“You have to allow lucidness to enter through. It’s like running and being afraid your legs are going to fail under you, Dwayne, because you’re running too fast and you can’t see where you’re going. But run right through it until the clouds begin to evaporate.

I looked into his eyes and knew that the Dwayne I used to know and loved in this dream dimension was here with me. But he had also grown here — in his ability to experience this world of dream-illusion. He seemed adept at changing scenes and forms and colors at will. He was far more capable in this reality than I was.

I swam over to him through the clouds. He disappeared then reappeared smiling. I caught him and kissed him. He kissed me in return. I wrapped my body around his in the gravitylessness, the buoyancy of the cloud mist. I nestled myself around his tee-shirt while he held me in his arms. I felt his muscles contract around me and pull me closer. I had my eyes closed, but then I realized, *no, open your eyes. Open your eyes.* Then the sky closed in on us. We fell together like rain drops.

We were in what could only be described as feathers of clouds.... There were darting streaks of purple and deep blues fraying the edges of everything, there beyond our

touch, where the light was. We drank the rain and tasted the glow surrounding us. He kissed me just below my neck and told me my shoulder tasted like vanilla and salt. His neck tasted like basil and pepper.

We were carried away into a light-green sunrise. We were melting like century-old snow. We held fast to this supersonic train of time we had now caught hold of. Smoothly it glided us up into the vast eternal night of space. Bubbles floated towards us from the nearing stars. Whispers clung to the edge of a sunbeam, seen from a window in an old castle overlooking a thousand miles of earthscape. The white caps on the ocean far below screamed out riotously when they rose up and crashed into near rocks. That's where we came from. We could never have survived there now. How did we make the switch from floating in the currents to landfall to watching together from a safe place high above?

Our journey continued onto a hillside filled with birds and sunflowers. Dwayne was sitting away from me, watching the birds glide. I was watching the sunflowers shimmering in an otherwise imperceptible breeze.

I said, "We can be together even when our attention is focused in two different places."

I heard him from where I was, even though no sound came from his mouth.

I said, "Your world is beautiful too. The birds are beautiful!"

"I'm learning movement," he said earnestly.

I had one last question before the stars brought us home:

"Dwayne, do you know where we are right now?"

He hesitated for a moment. Then he looked at me: "Yes. Dreaming together!"

“Yes! We need to remember this when we awaken. Can you do that with me?”

I wondered, would we have full emotional recall when we woke up? I was ruminating on that as we spun into the vortex, and then a hypnagogic state. Just before....

As our eyes fluttered open slowly we were lying next to each other. I remembered everything, felt everything. I wanted him to kiss me. But he didn't. So I kissed him.

He looked at me and said, “I remember what I learned from watching the birds fly.”

Part XIII

We are on the verge of releasing information about our new combination pill that our company is officially calling, "Reezon ®" Level B was about to be adopted by the world and given a new name.

I have studied psychology all my life. Worked hard to get a PHD. Made very good money in my practice spanning almost forty years. But I never became a multi-millionaire. It will be odd to become that now, but far more rewarding would be to see people gain more self-awareness and develop a deeper understanding about life, the earth, love, and each other. I never liked what we originally did to Dwayne. I never wanted to be a part of a world that would be hooked up to wires and lay in a bed and dream meaningful dreams, soon forgotten when they came back to their meaningless existence. Although one could also certainly define TV or movies in this way, I didn't want to settle for a new chemically induced form of mindlessness. I didn't want to create a new form of entertainment.

Entertainment was what the drug companies were after. They would have seen no reason to evolve the research. In fact, they would have quickly realized that many people would prefer not to remember anything. And still others with political or personal agendas would have preferred that people didn't remember anything.

The drug companies would of course have loved the money made from "billions served" with no judgment attached to the service, as long as it sold. No need for them to be loyal to one form of the drug over another. Without the newly added chemicals that allowed for lucid dreaming we could have ended up with a world full of zombies ruled by a

few rich drug lords posing as CEOs, billionaires acting like dictators, or Congressmen advertising themselves as free agents.

That's why we wouldn't allow our patented formula to be distributed in any other way than the way we presently designed it. We want to start slowly. We are going to start it off as a tool for psycho-therapy. It will begin as a professionally guided experience. Hopefully, over time, the world will welcome a new breed of humans.

That's *my* dream. We will help create a breed of humans that won't be subconsciously trying to dull their emotions until life ends, like Dwayne. Like Hillary was doing in her own way. Like we all do on some level.

The key question really comes down to this: Can humans evolve to a "Level B" consciousness some day without this drug? If so, the even bigger question is, can we survive as a species until then? Can we afford to wait?

Here's the critical thing I want the world to remember:

If someone offers you a handful of seeds in the desert, and gives you enough water to grow the seeds, but you decide to *eat* the seeds and drink the water, that is *not* self-preservation, that is suicide.

It seems to me, this is what we've done with our natural resources, as well as with the potential of the human mind. We have never explored our full capabilities to expand it into something beautiful and sustainable, because our individual fears and desires get in the way. We eat the material world's offerings without re-planting. Without giving back.

My hope is that slowly things can change, using every psychological tool at our disposal, including chemical intervention.

Because there is no “**Life B.**”

We have a chance to become super-aware of even *more* than love, more than awe in this dimension of reality. We have a chance to become the most highly evolved form of ourselves.

We will soon each have the opportunity to permanently recognize that potential, and act upon our deepest hopes and dreams.

Part XIV

They killed Dr. Stabnow.

He was shot while walking home from his favorite restaurant after dinner.

They broke into his office, trying to find the formula, or at least some pills to analyze. Even one pill would have been enough. But the only thing they managed to steal was a copy of his notes and a very personal history of our initial research.

He dreamed of a better world for all of us – a world where we could survive life, and be nourished by it, and find peace. That kind of world will be far harder to create without him here.

Dwayne and I are now in hiding, and will remain so until we create a clear plan about what to do from here.

In the meantime, we will try to help you all as soon as we can. Believe us, that is our only motive.

Until then, please, seed the desert with your love, your awareness, your kindness, and your best intentions.

Do not keep the seeds for yourself, or devour them out of greed or desperation.

I promise you, *I promise you*, the seeds will bloom.

The End

– GM