

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 just be trying to normalize madness.

"Frank," said the doctor.

"Why?"

"Why, what?" asked the doctor.

"Why are you here?" I asked.

"Frank. 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 as I focus. I can see him congealing as the fog clears. In this non-dream state he looks upset. His face is flat and fuzzy, as usual, with his blue eyes tired and smeary like marbles behind Plexiglas. But they look in sharper focus to me this time for some reason. I can see the swirls in his iris 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 focused like a laser, my legs started churning, body low to the ground, ready to spin away on contact, or juke once and hit the hole – the one that appears for just a split second – I could anticipate it back then. I find that sliver of daylight as bodies fly at each other, 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 sideline.

I find that 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 free 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. I can't see anymore. My neck was snapped back when it 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 the wet grass trying to balance myself so I can concentrate on the black splotch to analyze it further.

I hear a dozen footsteps in my ears, pounding like horses' hooves, vibrating in the dirt beneath the grass. Huge bodies protected in 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 a miracle, the ball gets kicked back into my stomach and I collapse on it. I pull my miracle into me 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 couldn't be certain. I am *so close* to the glorious moment I've dreamed of all my life. Maybe I would be enshrined. A statue.

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 from all angles. 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 and no one noticed.

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. A miracle. He's 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 by taking a knee twice. The snow became drifts of smudgy blackness behind my eyes.

"*Rosen!*" Dr. Stabnow yelled!" He actually sounded scared for 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 like that 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 longer than twenty four hours. I stayed in bed for days after that in the college infirmary. I didn't eat. For days and days the nightmare replayed in my head.

I never played another game.

I dropped out of Notre Dame. My dream of being a scientist, a famous chemist, evaporated like Benzene across an air film 0.15cm thick because a leather prolate spheroid 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 fine until I remembered the sound of the crowd. I'd let them down.

Sometimes I think I'm still trying to wake up. Suddenly 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 wake up, 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 – the normal world, *to see what?* I didn't need 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 much 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.

Slowly I melt into its power, swept away into an ocean of reality unlike any on earth -- a little yellow pill with the power to turn darkness to revelations.

The entirety of the *actual* real world awakens there, the world most real to me – 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 small leap of faith.

Sunlit full-sensory *spirit-leaping* I go into a parallel dimension – a new world that is hidden right here next to the old one.

Even though no one could possibly want this feeling to end, the end comes. Those precious minutes before surfacing. . . the mind is in no condition to count, or even believe in numbers. All illusion. Silly Phoenician angular squiggles representing *nothing* in this world. Not needed here.

Then comes the 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. All is *in*.

Past, present, future, wrapping around me like one sweet cloud of white sugary steam. Snowing over me randomly. All is *in*.

Yes, a permanently recurring Christmas day is here -- near year-end -- a blur of deeply peaceful emotions swarm -- a still-life image of a family, smiling at me somewhere, holding out little wrapped presents they bought me. Beautiful wrapping paper. *Look at that!*

An hour later I can't remember any of the details about the sun -- what I was *thinking* when I was warmed by it. All the gifts, they vanish. Flakes of December-ish snow turn to warm fog steaming into the sky, there, out Stabnow's window. 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 cube without the algorithm.

Three-dimensional chess.

Finding some meaning to existence.

It's all a waste of time.

I was spending a lot of my waking hours writing a suicide note. I couldn't quite 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 in a football game ten 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 Finn 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, one with too obvious of an ending. Who the hell wants to take a drug that in the end makes you feel like you were the boy in *The Giving Tree*?

After unceremoniously dropping out of college Erman fell into a weird scene. He was living in a flat in West Hollywood, bumming a sofa 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 the handsome young ham was out auditioning for some TV

commercial, the pill Erman invented became my life saver, my identity, my way of life.

Dwayne joked later that this new drug should be secretly named after him by creating an anagram from his name -- Dwayne Finn Erman. Just rearrange the letters into "If Man Were Day." A positive message for one and all. But he couldn't figure out what to do with the three leftover Ns to make the anagram complete. Incompletion was part of who I was back then. So for me the 4/5th anagram was perfect.

"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 to us? 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 they didn't need to know?

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. Everything felt complete. No feelings of greed, or jealousy. No urges for money, or to buy or possess anything, or anyone.

No going down into those broken places. No memories that called loudly enough to draw away your raptured attention. No barren dreamscapes that beckon you to berate yourself. No need for anagrams or heterograms or alliterations.

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

Once, just once, I remembered details of the dream after coming out of the white sugary fog of it. This was extremely rare. Usually I would only be left with alpenglow, so to speak. But nothing specific would be left, nothing to hold on to, or walk away with. It was like trying to touch rays of sunlight on a cloudy day. You sense they exist somewhere far away. But that's all you can feel.

But this little round light-yellow daydream was different. I remembered the story of the dream. Not the "non-judgment of all things" of it. Or the fulfillment that pervades all other feelings. That can't be expressed in words. So this isn't *the feeling of it*, just the story:

I found myself in the lobby of a hotel. I said to the front desk clerk, a sweet looking girl in a sleeveless light yellow 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. Dark kind eyes. Her name was Ana. It said so on her name tag. Ana was an interesting name -- the first three letters of the word, anagram. But also a palindrome. Anagrams held some importance to me but I couldn't say why.

Ana looked around sheepishly to make sure her boss wasn't within earshot. "Um, yes, guests have complained a number of times about the conditioner caps," she admitted. She looked at me apologetically. "You might want to try washing your hair with the shampoo twice."

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

"Yes. I know that. Although it also means 'grace' in Spanish."

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

On our walk home we realized we'd found each other because of a malfunctioning hair conditioner cap. Bad manufacturing had become a true gift; a dream come true.

The first time we made love it was oceanic. As it was a thousand other times through the many years to come. Each time we became a swirl of lava merging and forming together, exploding up warm, then falling as one as we found our way to the sea entrance, entranced, translucent, luminescent.

The lava formed an island of us.

The island turned from sun glittering black rock to soft brown soil over time, and from soft brown soil to green seedlings, framed by a coastline of salt-fine sand.

We had a number of children, each one sun grown, water strong. 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 constantly tried to turn children into insignificant functional pathways in the world's autonomic nervous system kidnapped her and put her in school. It was made of large single upright blocks of stone. She turned her into a sacrificial lamb because she was not willing to dance around their stone 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—

each teacher bore triplets that reminded them of her -- smart, stubborn, rebellious, eccentric.

Moreover, the triplets couldn't be gotten rid of. They were not lambs, and could never be turned into lambs. They said they weren't going to attend school until the rules were fair.

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

My angel daughter told me we were all safe now. She flew me on her back straight up towards the sun on wings that didn't melt. I began to laugh and cry at the same time until the world turned yellow bright before me. I was holding Ana in my arms.

My other children were flying close behind.

We flew into the golden chambers, where the timeless and the memory-less meet.

Then we dissolved into one. My favorite daughter had turned us into God. Gods. Perfect. I inhaled. It felt like I could inhale forever.

Why did I remember that one dream 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?

The ecstasy I take away from each dream is real, even if all I'm left with is the color of the shadow of the memory of the feeling. 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 happened. Half of the memories are still-life images; hazy outlines. No beauty exists there. Just gray scenes, like 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 Dwayne Erman's wonder drug. So it wasn't an addiction. It was a choice. My thanks go out to poor lost Erman, 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 aspirin 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. Who would want to stay to vote, or manufacture the pills, or anything else for that matter?

The doctor – the one who kept feeding me my 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 himself. He ran away after the Feds raided his lab.

The government 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. Very few people know about that.

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

Of course, the problem was I couldn't survive in that blissful state permanently. 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 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 re-runs for a few minutes while my food digested a bit further. During the breaks I would stare in awe at the violent vapid commercials luring viewers into what to buy,

to make everything more perfect of course. These things were 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 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? And what was infinite inner-infant illuminated intelligence?

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 Dr. Stabnow I couldn't keep track of anyone else. And didn't want to. Besides, it felt like it would be an invasion of their privacy to actually *remember* someone.

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 as soon as REM came upon me, and then the pill would touch the top of 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 seven 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 legally stick my neck that far out.

My professional 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 good 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. And as far as finding wisdom is concerned, a sheltered man in a dream state wouldn't even know where to begin. God wants us 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? My hope is that someday he can remember his dream-state experiences and find the internal wisdom I feel we all carry within us."

Then Goldorff hit the point, "But if you experience wisdom-creating events without becoming wise, then what do you call that?"

I became more determined than ever to find a chemical alteration to the drug we called, "*i Dream*," so that whatever one experienced under the drug could be recalled when awake, hopefully in as much detail as possible.

I thought again about when Goldorff said, "God wants us to get there without a pill."

But upon further reflection, the fact is wine is still used as a holy sacrament. Peyote grows in the wild as a natural, God-made mind altering substance. The same would be true of psilocybin. Even television can be considered a drug, since it has so deeply altered our natural way of thinking. And on the other end of the spectrum, there is meditation. All of those things seem to be created by, or sanctioned "by God." Then I thought of legal depression medication, which the church has never said a negative thing about. How many priests are on Lexipro? And Goldorff certainly drank his fair share of holy water.

So then why would that kind of God now forbid us to consciously voyage through the mind in search of our own

soul just because the catalyst is a non-addicting pill with no side-effects?

From my professional viewpoint, 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. And my conclusion is based just on the few ragged pieces of experiences he can bring back to us each morning.

I know this is an awfully dangerous thing for a nationally respected psychologist 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.

I'm just notating here what I'm observing. Don't shoot the messenger. But what I truly feel is that someday, if the entire process is handled in the right way, 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 daily in inflexible moral platitudes, and was told how to properly behave in every conceivable social situation from the time she was four years old.

Because she was the daughter of a military man she was a bit of a tomboy in elementary school. Her 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 older 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 disciplines of her home life.

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-one, thrived in grad school at Berkeley, 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 Finn 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 professor of chemistry like Hillary. Although she wouldn't admit this even to herself, she was attracted to anti-four-star General types. (The farther away 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 the 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 apparent 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 in all the world to see his formula, and even occasionally allowed her into his secret lab.

Many would have thought this was foolish beyond reason. 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 opioids like heroin or opium, or even LSD or Ecstasy, THC, or cocaine.

Nor did it dull one's psyche, as do so many anti-depressants or pain killers. She considered all of these dark ugly evil drugs. She had feared and hated all of them growing up under her father's strict guidelines, along with cigarettes and alcohol. And her opinion hadn't changed.

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 humming a Christmas Carol while 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 strictly 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 fifty 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 in rags like he does, 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; she found herself letting go of numbers and elements, and seeing the equal value of dreams and living joyously in waking reality. Not that she *was* suddenly joyous. But maybe someday.

By the third time she took the pill she began to see Erman in a different light. She saw through to *him* while thinking about him 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 he was a good man. As good as her father tried to be 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" she went with him at the same time. 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 in her half-awake state 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 in the strange elixir so forbidden in her father's world -- pure sensuality.

As time passed she eagerly explored her private rogue in her off-hours; this mad scientist with muscles as strong as a soldier's. She felt the gentle expansiveness of being a cloud, not so tightly wound inside a body. She felt herself thin and wispy, wind-driven, spreading out in different directions. Sometimes they became one set of eyes staring at an enormous mobile of night stars turning.

One night they were reduced to a hugging ball of laughter, knowing that 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 realized that long ago. She had never let anyone in. Never allowed anyone to be this close. And she wasn't sure in this reality how necessary it really was.

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 red hair shimmering – these were moments when Dwayne realized *he* was the one who 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 half-mockingly begin to propose to her. Again.

She always assumed it was a full-on 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 unbearably intense over time. At first she was impossibly cold. Then maybe just excusably shy. Even after weeks of knowing her, coaxing more than a perfunctory smile from her was a moral victory.

Hearing her laugh was holy and rare, and eventually became beautiful to him always.

After they became closer from the 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 to the real Hillary, 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 usually receptive. His attempts to become more intimate mostly felt like begging. He didn't like that part of himself. So he would pull back. And that left room for her to move forward.

There was only one way to truly connect with her the way he wanted 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 long moment. She could see that he was lost in her. She felt something possibly akin to love, although she couldn't specifically define it as such. She liked his shaggy hair and his long delicate fingers. 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 but she could imagine. 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. Whether she took the pill or not, made love to him or not, he cast no guilt upon her, he refused to allow her to feel shame. In fact, he made her laugh more than anyone else ever had.

And there were those times in this reality that she would feel the pull of her heart, something she had previously only felt under the yellow pill's chemical influence. 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 first and foremost. She wasn't just a teacher. She was a researcher. This was her true love in this life. Not Dr. Dwayne Finn Erman.

In fact, one day for no particular reason she felt it was time to stop this odd interlude. Time to get back to work.

The aforementioned would-be actor, Andy Woodby, was desperate for money during the time he knew Erman. He had been a non-practicing Christian 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 (matzo ball soup with everything in it), Andy Woodby had little to show for his efforts. He was nearly broke. His wide white Bridget Fonda smile and pool-blue Henry Fonda eyes didn't quite match 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 athletes found their name on The Avenue of the Stars. They had to settle for the Hall of Fame.

What Andy Woodby *would* be forever known for is the man who turned Dr. Dwayne Finn 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 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. And friends.”

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 phone. 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 started to panic about him not responding. She took 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 home. 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 as a concerned friend. It would be a slow process finding the right words.

As she looked for paper and a pen 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 put it in the envelope. Maybe

he wasn't going to send it? She hesitated, but then picked up the letter:

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

Maybe you will hate me when you find this out. Especially if you believe the authorities who will tell you I am nothing but a common street criminal because I'm selling a drug that ISN'T ILLEGAL ANYWHERE.

In the end I was shoved out of the DEA's office with only a warning.

That's the good news.

The bad news is they told me they'd catch me someday.

Suddenly I wasn't an entrepreneur on the verge of starting a non-profit pharmaceutical company. Not a potential savior of the world. I was just another thug. A crook who you mistakenly 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, failing at everything. Everything I do, no matter how noble the attempt, turns into a nightmare.

Now it's time for me to wake up by leaving.

Why not?

The status quo will be saved.

And who will 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. 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 had 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. She found his phone number on his odd looking website. "Andy Woodby, character actor, can play any role." But the overly large picture of his face made him look worried.

Could Dwayne be hiding out there? He never sent the letter! What does that mean?

When she introduced herself on the phone his response very odd indeed. He seemed paranoid. "How do you know I knew Dwayne?" She said she was his associate. Then he said he was sorry he had to do it. Sorry for what?

"Do you know where Dwayne is?"

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

Still alive? How did he know? Maybe he had taken his life after all and never bothered sending her the letter.

She sat in her car after the call and closed her eyes for a long time. Her heart was racing.

If he was going to kill himself how would he would want to die? Suddenly she realized where he would go -- the secret lab. He would probably 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.

She was pretty disgusted, 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 although the pill might be great, the delivery system - me - was no longer viable.

I hoped she wouldn't judge me too badly. It's not that I wasn't planning on killing myself eventually: I figured one of my future experiments would do me in, probably with a long wild jolt, like a rocket ride to zero-g, and a final flash of light.

"If I really wanted to kill myself I'd have flown to Antarctica and laid down naked in the snow. Or parachuted myself down right around the Afghan-Pakistani border with a U.S. flag painted on my forehead. I mean, there are a lot of very logical places to die."

She stood there crying with her arms folded.

"The suicide letter wasn't meant to be seen by you, Hillary, at least not in its current form. It was a work in progress, just in case I ever wanted to go through with it. Besides, I hadn't found the right words yet."

It was a mean and angry thing to say. I thought that would be the end of us.

Instead, she begged me to go to a psychologist. Not just any psychologist which I would have had zero interest in,

but none other than Dr. William Stabnow. Her famous psychologist friend who ran a clinic located a block away from the university where she worked.

I thought about it and realized I had nothing better to do. I wasn't going to try to sell my pills to young adventurers to pay my debts anymore. Hillary was obviously not going to figure out that she loved me in this lifetime. I was back to zero on the game board anyway.

What I found out later was that Hillary had spoken confidentially to Stabnow about me, and about Level B. His interest in me didn't surprise her.

His office was on a side street. It used to be an old Victorian house. Some of the floors were a bit slanted, but overall it was quite a beautiful piece of architecture, kept up well. Very inviting.

The first time we spoke he didn't mention Level B. Instead he asked about my life. And told me about his life as well. It struck me at some point that I wasn't meeting him as a potential client.

Over the next few weeks I got to know the good doctor and begrudgingly began to respect the man. Although anytime he asked me for details about Level B I didn't want to reveal I would just repeat my name and the number of a fictitious dog tag. I couldn't completely trust where he was coming from.

He also interviewed Hillary extensively. He took a keen interest in the way my mind worked, and kept going back to the types of experiences one might encounter in Level B. He tested me and psychoanalyzed me. But I still had not become an official client. He never asked me to pay him.

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 completely confidential research experiment?

What that would mean was 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 be a guinea pig for Stabnow, so he could explore the drug I had created by observing me on it.

That's it. That's all I had to do. And I could disappear from this reality for a while, all expenses paid. I was intrigued.

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

"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 some kind of future mental imprisonment.

The first thing I requested was a fake name while I was there. I didn't want Stabnow using my name in his written reports and observations. And I didn't want the DEA to somehow find out where I was. I wanted nothing more than to disappear as a person of interest. Stabnow didn't object.

It was a curious challenge, to create a new name. Not to be Dwayne Finn Erman for a while had quite a powerful allure.

I rattled a few names around in my head. I decided I wanted the name to have some meaning, unlike my life.

But of course, it would have to be in code, like a metaphor, or a chemistry equation. And also, whatever the

name was going to be, I didn't want it to sound like an outlaw. Because I didn't do anything illegal! And I wasn't doing anything illegal now.

So Jesse was out. So was Mac, Max, Bart, Sam. . . In fact, I wanted my first name to exude honesty and forthrightness. I talked about it with Stabnow and his dweeby priest friend.

"Chemistry equations and numbers won't do it," Stabnow said. "I don't want to turn you into a series of numbers. How about something that suits your personality? You're a very straightforward person. So maybe a name like Frank.

"Frank!" I said. "That's actually not bad. My first name will be Frank."

"Good. As far as a last name, what about something to do with your ultimate goal?"

"What *is* my goal?"

"You tell me."

"Well, optimistically speaking, I would like to think we can eventually rise people up out of this nightmare we call life and experience it on a deeper level."

"Like Jesus," said Goldorff. "He transformed people's lives, he died for their sins, then rose again."

I thought about it. "*Okay*," I laughed. "Rosen. Kind of Jewish too. We need to be fair, father. Don't you think?"

Stabnow laughed.

Goldorff smiled innocently and looked down at his black shoes.

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

Part IV

Dwayne Erman, a.k.a. Frank Rosen, wanted to start the secret experiment as soon as possible. He even 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 was Hillary St. John. I hired her away from the university. Because she was going to be the key to this experiment.

She would be spending all of her time trying to alter the chemical make-up of the drug to make the experience available for recall.

That was our biggest goal, by far. In fact, that was the only reason I was willing to risk funding the experiment in the first place.

At one point early on, Hillary reported that 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 a dangerous thing.

If addiction was not a concern, or if it was somehow seen as a plus to control the masses in some way, all sorts of pharmaceutical Pandoras could fly out of the box.

We realized there was a lot of money to be made either way. That was a Machiavellian moment for us.

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 "Dreamway," or "Relaxnjoy."

DEA and FDA approval would be hard to buy, but a Dow Jones pharma-conglomerate certainly would have lobbying power. W

There were also international implications. 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 his 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 and inexpensive 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 non-addictive memory recall component to Level B it would also be helping Frank, who we all very much wanted to see fully functioning in this reality again someday.

As a chemist, no doubt he was a genius. Historically, there will be no doubt about that either. But he was also obviously a broken man in many ways. He was able to function during the 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 an integration of the enlightened state the drug seemed to create with this waking dimension too, for his sake, as well as for the rest of the world.

Was the mind even 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.

Chemically, the answer might be that we could all

become spiritual masters. All of us. This level of normal would be seen as a very painful and wholly unnecessary way to live.

Part V

I would often come to the observing window and watch him dream. I would leave before morning. He wouldn't want me here. 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 was standing before me. I wouldn't know how to thank him. What he's doing to and for 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 a better reality? Living to survive? Or surviving to live in amazing joy?

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 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, aka Frank Rosen, God bless you. I quit my job at the university to be with you, unbeknownst to you, and to 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 Level B drug I created long ago, it allows one to leave this reality for another.

Great actors can make that altered reality a part of their very soul, for a time. 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.

I lived with Andy for six months way back when. So this part of the story is, let's just say, interpretive, pulled together from bits and pieces discovered later, and exaggerated into the farce that my friend Andy made of life in general.

There's no way he would ever take offense at any of this. He messed things up for everyone and hurt a lot of good people, so he would have had no reason to take offense. Besides that, he's dead.

At times 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 a brief 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, so he had no fear. He probably just muted the sound on his television and opened the door wide.

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 someone at the DEA had a friend at a pharmaceutical company. A company who was very likely desperate to recover from a very bad economy, and whose 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.

Maybe 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.

As Andy went to answer the door maybe he wondered if had he had accidentally ordered a pizza on his phone. He had the app. He was hungry. Hope sprang eternal.

Two men greeted him and pushed him back inside the room. 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. With you being the thing."

Woodby was speechless. He couldn't remember, were these actors from an 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 he'd been on the receiving end of 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.* "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 mask. They looked like ISIS. Did ISIS want to kill Erman?

"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. The thug held it in front of Woodby's face to open it. Then he scrolled through his emails and phone

calls. Then he scrolled through his contacts. Erman wasn't in there.

"Please be careful not to erase my audition voice mails."

"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 feel 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. And 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 the first time and that worked out okay.

"Who are you working for?" Andy mumbled.

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

What they were unwilling to tell 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 Erman refused to let him try.

Erman hadn't even graduated with a degree from Notre Dame because of the fumble thing. He was a drop out. So Woodby had had no interest in trying the pill anyway. Erman couldn't be trusted to succeed at anything.

"I need to know what he did before I tell you anything more," Andy said rather 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? He was also studying how the secret division of the F.B.I. worked. It could benefit his acting career someday.

"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? The DEA said it wasn't illegal. . . at least not yet."

"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. "Do you have a brain in your head?"

Andy repeated, "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? Holy shit!"

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?* Jeez."

"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 him once, looking for Erman. But that was a long time back. He never erased his recent call list. Acting agents were on there. . . Oh yeah, Hillary something.

"I think this is the number."

Part VII

Andy Woodby called *me* asking where Dwayne was! Why should he care? 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. And Erman had disappeared into Frank long ago.

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 bouncing against a hard floor. Then I heard a gunshot.

Part VIII

Woodby made the third page of the L.A. Times.

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 an enemy. The guards were told they might even hire someone to kill me, or my female assistant. So be on the lookout for anyone suspicious.

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 as decoys.

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.

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. Mature beyond her age. 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 psychologist like myself had zero chance to win her over, regardless of how young at heart I was?

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 that, 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 whatever she wanted to. 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.

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, or ever would make. That comforted me somewhat.

But none of us were doing this for the money. We were doing this because it had become 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 and I could become closer someday. I knew most of that would be up to me. I was the one rejecting him. I was what he wanted all along. I just had so many hesitations, all of which still remained. He was arrogant. Pushy. Always staring at me. But sometimes I liked him staring. Over time the fantasy of getting closer to him became *my* dream world. I wasn't sure what would happen if I ever actually had the opportunity again.

In the room and world where he existed now he continued to know me only as some mysterious doctor 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.

What would happen if we both took Level B but then remembered everything afterwards?

Could that ever happen? I couldn't know yet.

For him, remembering his Level B experiences would hopefully mean letting go of his shame about "The Fumble" when he was playing football at Notre Dame. And accepting who his parents were. And accepting who I am, and also who I am not.

Could that ever happen? I couldn't know that either.

All this was going through my mind 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 youthful he was. He wanted me to know that he was not at all a part of the early 1960s. 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 an observant 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 as spy.

“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. “But tell us all the ingredients too. She’s a chemist!”

The waiter laughed. I blushed for the second time.

“We have raw lamb with milk chocolate sauce, and we also have uncaught 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

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 hiding behind a big black curtain that led to the kitchen. These were his colleagues mostly, along with an old neighbor of his before he got divorced, back when he was living in the suburbs. Ten friends in all. Nine of whom had any idea who Erman or Frank Rosen was.

I realize he would rather have spent the evening begging for my attention. But Will was gracious, as always. He laughed. He enjoyed their company.

He told no one about his feelings for me, or the *i Dream* experiment. So the whole thing was rather perfunctory for pretty much everyone there. But still I thought he enjoyed the evening.

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. I need you to know that if we’re going to continue working together.”

“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 love for this man I was working with.

I took his leathery cherub face in my hands and kissed him on the mouth. “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....”

“I couldn’t have said it better myself. Isn’t that romantic?”

"Or safe."

"Yes. That's part of the allure, I realize that.

Will 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. Frank was asleep. Will went in to give him his pill and put his breakfast food in the mini-fridge near his TV.

When Will came out of the room I said, “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. Financially and emotionally we may be coming to the end of the road."

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 rhythm 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. Emotions go 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 cycle over time. In fact, the cycle of heaven and hell in the mind may actually be urgently necessary for our mental health. 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?"

“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 he learns or the things he sees.”

“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 a theory. And 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 really ever be the same? Wouldn’t it at least be better than it is now?”

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

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

“Seriously?”

“I approached it from a completely different angle this time.”

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

“Will, have you ever studied lucid dreaming?”

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

I said, “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, that’s 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 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, or chemistry? And if that’s the case, far more people would be able to access it if all of those options were available.”

“So what's your idea, more specifically?”

“Perhaps there's a way to easily learn lucidity while in the Level B state by studying lucid dreaming while you're awake. We wouldn't have to try to remember everything when we wake up from the dream. We'd be the dream, awake in it. And there wouldn't be one hundred percent recall of every experience there. But it also wouldn't only be a dream anymore. Because we'd be lucid and conscious when the events were happening. It would be reality, a 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, “Do you envision a chemical component to this? Because learning lucid dreaming is not only difficult, but there's no guarantee.”

“Of course,” I said. “But now it's a different theory altogether. Can we find a chemical addition to Level B that keeps us awake and alert while also deeply trancing us out. I'm not saying anyone could ever drive a car or even walk down the street. I'm simply talking about being slightly above the level of a hypnogogic state. The state we enter right at the end of the Level B experience. I'm not sure I g=can get us there. But, like you, I was starting to think I

couldn't get us there by creating a way to remember things.
This is a slightly different angle. Do you see?"

After a sip of wine he said, "How close are you?"

"Either or a month or two. Or never. I mean, if the ideas I've thought through don't work. . . if they all fail, then yes, I agree the experiment is probably over. "

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 like this. Physically I feel good, fine. Everything is working.”

I moved closer and said in a soothing voice. “Tell me more.”

“I am all head, no body. It's wild. It's so comfortable. I am not a physical presence in time as we know it. And time going only forward is highly debatable as well. Although I'd rather not get into that at the moment! But it's dreamlike.”

“I understand! Although not really” I laughed softly. “But I hear what you're saying. You are coherent. Go on.”

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. I am here in my apartment, even though I also know I'm not. 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 that is making me more conscious. And I'm the one that created me, *this me!* I mean, here. The definition of the real me - I see I am that creator, and the definer. I choose the reality, in both realities. I get to choose."

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

"And...Will?"

"Yes."

"Am I in REM state?"

I looked at my polysomnograph. "Yes."

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

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

That was the last thing she said until four hours and seventeen minutes later, when she arose, back here, in a room right next to Frank's.

“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. Even you. It may never be real to me again. Because there’s been a dimensional shift in my thinking.”

“How so?”

“There’s another reality that’s equally true. Neither are illusion. That’s that revelation. *Everything* is true! One doesn’t negate the other. It’s a *multi-reality* hologram. That’s the only way I can explain it. And, I want to flow 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, Will. At least in my mind"

"Okay. Can you explain?"

"I believe so. I'll explain them one at a time."

"Please."

"Okay, first, there is the new 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!

"Then there is also knowing when I am in Level B, that my body is *here*, in a state of being that is slightly above 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, which I can also access that in the dream state, just like I can now. In fact, my memory of this reality in the dream state is quite a bit better than my memories of past Hillary now!

"And then -- as we have worked so hard to achieve, Will -- I now have a memory of the Level B dream I had while in *this* reality, including all the emotional elements experienced while there.

"That's five dimensions."

"Yes, and the sixth time dimension, the sixth dimension, Will, is the future in the dream state -- which is actually knowing there will be this reality when I wake up. And possibly more Level B experiences in the future."

"Oh my. I think I understand now. But might there not be a 'future' inside the dream state? I mean could you be starting over every time you're in Level B with no past memory of the last time? Like an entirely new dream? Or is there a continuum there?"

"I don't know. I think when it's over, it's over. The next time you go to Level B it wouldn't be like the last time you

were there. But, well, that's an interesting question. Actually I'm not sure. . . Although. . . ."

"Tell me."

"Well, I can still feel the *after-currents*, emotionally of Level B, and psychologically I remember what I experienced there. So if I remember all that the next time I go to level B maybe it *will* be a continuum in some way."

"Yes, that's what I was wondering."

"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."

"Really? How so?"

She began laughing. "Oh my God, this is going to sound so trite. I really need to work on this constant judgment of myself. I can see now that I never really understood -- not at all. But the change is there. I mean here. It's about *the feeling* of love, Will. And my thoughts about it. I feel differently. I can feel it more. Constantly. Other drugs may 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? Right now! 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. Or feeling afraid! It's real. It's inside of me. I get it now. But it's more real than that. Will, here comes the trite part -- it feels like *love is more real than no love!* Do you understand that? Do that translate?"

I smiled, "Not quite."

"I mean the mind learns to protect itself by not loving. And that was my 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. It's natural, as long as fear and danger don't exist and awareness does."

"And you don't feel any fear or danger *there*?"

"I am aware of fearful things. But being lucid in the Level B reality has taught me not to. . . not to '*over-fear*.'

"I like that word. '*Over-fear!*'"

"Yes, it's quite accurate. 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. It's fearing when you don't have to. And while fear still exists, and some of that is just healthy self-protection, 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. I can breathe here now! Even though the Level B dream ended and I'm back to me. You see, this is actually who I am now. . . psychologically. I am more of who I was meant to be than I was before, and that's not going to go away. Even if I never go to Level B again. It's logical, and helpful, and good to feel this way. So I don't think I will go back to over-fearing? I like this much better. Regardless of the consequences that come from being this way. Because even if I get emotionally hurt, it's better than the way things were -- I was living half-dead."

She stopped speaking and I paused to consider things for a moment. "Frank. He's going to have an interesting time with this."

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

“When Dwayne 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 soft open arms.

My name and personality had long ago been erased here. 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. Dwayne Finn Erman....

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 out there’ 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.”

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. A friend I didn’t know.

In the state between knowing and wonder my eyes fluttered open, and what I saw was part of the illusory world I wanted to escape from. “*Hillary?* No. No.”

“Please Dwayne, let me tell you some things you will be happy to hear. Don’t pre-judge me. Don’t assume anything. Try to stay at least a little in Level B.”

I gulped down a glass of water, as I normally did when first arising from the other side. 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, Dwayne – I have been the other doctor in your dream all along. I have honored your secret identity all this time. 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 I want to say than that. Much more.”

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, Dwayne. I know you all too well. I know how you must feel right now. I’m sorry. But I want you to know this – I want to see you fully potentialized, not just asleep in a laboratory. 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. Stabnow. She’s calling him “Will” now.

Stabnow came in looking overly spiffy in tan pants, a pressed blue shirt, and a 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. “May I call you Will? 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, and possibly a prison sentence?”

He chuckled, “‘William’ was my grandfather’s name on my mother’s side. She loved him. But she also was an optimist. She figured ‘Will Stabnow’ would be ‘willing’ to take a ‘stab’ at anything. No matter how big the problem. There was always going to be a solution. And I would be the one to find it. And, Frank. . . I didn’t. . . . But *she* did.”

I put down my glass 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 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?”

“In all realities.”

“I don’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. I’m going to find you there and bring you home, but you’ll never have to leave anywhere, ever again.”

Part XII

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

He was caught in a soft open cloud. Caught because he wasn't rising or falling or going in any direction at all.

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

I looked into his eyes until I knew he saw me, 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 – grown in his ability to experience this world. He seemed adept at changing scenes and forms and colors at will. He was far more capable in this reality than I was.

He caught on quickly to the lucidity. He started laughing. I swam over to him through the clouds. He disappeared then reappeared smiling at me. I caught him and kissed him. He kissed me in return. I wrapped my body around his in the gravitylessness, floating in 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 then carried away into light-green sunrise. We were melting through our thoughts like century-old snow falling into a candle. We landed in a land of oxygen-filled wordlessness. We held fast to this supersonic train of time that we had now caught hold of. Smoothly it floated us towards us by the light of a nearby star. 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 racing across the ocean far below us screamed riotously as they rose up and crashed into the 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 as we came to a hillside filled with songbirds 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. Your birds are beautiful!"

"I'm learning the 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 separated, each rising into a hypnagogic state. Just before. . . .

Our eyes fluttered open slowly. We were lying next to each other. laughing quietly to ourselves.

I remembered everything, felt everything. I wanted him to kiss me here in this world. But he didn't.

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 patented pill that we are officially calling, "Reezon ®."

Level A was about to be unveiled to the world and given an official name.

I have studied psychology all my adult 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 it will be far more rewarding to see people gain more self-awareness and develop a deeper understanding about life and the incredible capabilities of the mind.

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 electrodes, and have a great mind like his lay in a bed and dream meaningful dreams, soon forgotten.

I didn't want to settle for a new chemically induced form of wondrous mindlessness. I didn't want to create a new form of isolating entertainment.

Entertainment was what the drug companies were after. They would have seen no reason to evolve the research beyond Level B. 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 also have preferred that people didn't remember anything.

The drug companies would have loved the money made from "billions served" with no judgment attached to the service, as long as sales stayed steady. 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 campaigning on your right to dream.

That's why we wouldn't allow our patented formula to be distributed in any way other than the way we presently designed it.

We want to start slowly. We are going to start it 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 was doing. 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 A consciousness some day in the distant future without the 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 instead and bathe in the water, that is *not* self-preservation, that is slow 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 replanting.

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

We will soon have a chance to become super-aware beings, capable 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.

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. They just *had* to get him back for putting their hired thugs in jail.

They couldn't stand it that he out-thought them every step of the way. He still had -- he always made sure the formulas and patents that had yet to be made public were kept locked in a safe in Dwayne's secret lab.

He dreamed of a better world for all of us – a world where we would not just survive life, but be nourished by it, and find peace.

That kind of world will be far harder to create without him alive.

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 publish this story for you to read. It consists mostly of a series of journal entries written by the three of us separately over a long period of time.

Our goal is 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, and your kindness.

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