

iDream

Gary Marks

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Part I

I had memories, but only in brief flashes. No true continuum from birth to here. There didn't seem to be any point to what I was experiencing. No meaning to anything. Of course, the doctor says that's normal for everyone. But the doctor could also be trying to normalize madness.

"Frank," said the doctor.

"Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why are you here?"

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

"How are you communicating with me now?"

"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 stomping in. This is one doctor I know well. My buddy, my provider. The lights become less dim. I can see him clearly. He looks upset. His face, usually flat and fuzzy, with blue eyes tired and smeary like marbles seen through Plexiglas, looks in sharper focus for some reason. I can see 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 hair might sound a little crazy...I admit that.

“Okay, Rosen, it’s time to take a walk and shake it off. I know how to wake you if I must.”

“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 back to this side 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-halfback like me when I’m setting my mind against it. Back there at Notre Dame, I was so ecstatic to carry that ball in my arms and run, no one could bring me down. My mind sharp as a laser, legs churning hard, body low to the ground, ready to spin away, juke once, and hit the hole – the one that appears for just a split second – I could anticipate it back

then. So I time the break, I find that sliver of daylight, then I feel the middle linebacker's arms start to wrap around me ten yards downfield. I take my free hand and push his helmet away to escape, tripping for a moment as I find a way out of his grasp. Then, there it is, I'm free. . .an open channel all the way down the sidelines.

I run, 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.

I feel a massive jolt. . .truck slams into my head. I black out for a moment, my nose and jaw absorbing lightening as a 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 – I remember now, it was raining that day.

I grope around frantically while keeping my legs moving. I can't see anymore. But somehow I feel the ball kick back onto my fingertips. I try to pull it towards me, a desperate man wanting what resists him. But the shape of the ball is too unwieldy, it spins against my palm, squibs out and wobbles away.

I hear a dozen footsteps in my ears, pounding like horses' hooves, echoing below the grass. Huge bodies, protected in their armor, leap over me, as if I were nothing but a dead stone. I manage to get up on my hands and knees and stumble towards a big group of churning legs.

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

Bodies pile on top of me. Hands grab my face, 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 had slithered and juked and then rocketed eighty yards before being tackled, or run over by a tank. So close to the glorious moment I'd dreamed of all my life. Maybe I would be enshrined.

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

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

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

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

Haynesworth, not even the guy who made the tackle, becomes the hero. They will never forget his name. It began to snow. They ran out the clock. It was over.

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

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

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

I never played another game.

I dropped out of school. My dream of being a scientist, a famous chemist, got swallowed by my failure in the physical world.

Soon thereafter, life became a series of failures. It felt as though failure was my out-breath.

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

Sometimes I think I'm still trying to wake up from that nightmare.

"Rosen! You have to awaken now!" the voice urged me. "Remember, in this reality 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 end.

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

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

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

Then at some point in the middle of the night someone 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. It provokes the urge to suck, until it quickly melts down my throat. Chalky taste at the end.

Then *I* melt – into its power – a little yellow pill the size of a pin head, with the power to turn darkness to revelation.

The entire world awakens, the world most real to me now – the colors stun me and bring me to my knees with awe and reverence. People look at me. They are bathed in a golden glow of kindness you can almost trust – you *can* trust, with a leap of faith. *Sun sensory spirit leaping.*

Even though no one could possibly want this feeling to end, the final stage comes – it only lasts minutes – precious minutes that the mind is in no condition to try to count. It starts and ends with hysterical laughter, sometimes crying tears of insane laughter, until sometimes I can't catch my breath.

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

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

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

But it soon turns windy and cold again and makes me regret that winter ever existed. I can't remember the sun, the gifts, the flakes of snow, the sleigh ride to grandma's house.

Waking up is hard to do.

No one shows you how to live in the reality we've been dumped into. Why is it so damn important to try to figure it out, anyway?

I hate games hardly anyone can win. Rubik's cubes, and three-dimensional chess, and finding some meaning to existence. It's all a sham.

I was one letter away from killing myself, but I couldn't find just the right words.

I wanted there to be a logical point to my untimely demise, so no one would think I killed myself over a fumble that happened untold years ago. Or, because my fat raven-haired mother and my skinny blonde-haired unshaven father cared more about screwing each other in all possible meanings of that word than they did about bringing up their lone child.

So, I blamed it all on my girlfriend. Of course. I'm not the first.

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

After I unceremoniously dropped out of Notre Dame. I fell into a weird scene that I myself created, made a little money, then moved to L.A. on a whim. I was living in a flat in West Hollywood, bumming a bed off of a would-be actor named Andy Woodby. Erman was a distant friend of his.

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

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

complete. Incompletion was my theme back then. So in that way it all fit perfectly.

It was that crazy though, mind blowing – the pill was. “If man were day,” *all the time*, what would we have all become? What would we be now? If no darkness had ever come? If the apple had never been eaten by Eve. . .because temptation was unnecessary. . . ?

This drug, this little yellow pill, only produced dream-like dramas with beautiful endings. No bummers. No bad trips. No reason to ever hesitate.

There was no going down, into those broken places, those barren dreamscapes that beckon you to berate yourself. Most of the experiences were ecstatic, others were epiphanies, revelations.

Once, I actually remembered one of the “experiences” after coming out of the white sugary fog of it. This was extremely rare. (Usually you’d be left only with alpenglow, so to speak – a sky of pastel colors after the show was over. But nothing to ponder, nothing to hold on to. Like trying to touch rays of sunlight)...

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

She had dark hair and shiny gray eyes. Her name was Katie. It said so on her name tag. She looked around sheepishly to make sure her boss wasn’t within earshot. “Um, yes, a number of times,” she admitted. She looked at me apologetically.

Then we went to dinner. We tried to eat but we were laughing the whole time. Because we knew. We knew at last.

We'd found each other because of the hair conditioner. Then we made love – as we would a thousand times. Each time we became a swirl of hot lava; lost in the river of the eruption. The lava gave way to an island of us. The island turned from barren sharp black, to soft brown, and from soft brown to green. It sprouted living things. We had a number of children over the next twenty years. One of those children, my second daughter, grew especially close to me. She followed me everywhere and told me she wanted to be like me when she grew up.

But then a group of people that didn't want kids, couldn't stand kids – I believe they called themselves “teachers” – turned her into a sacrificial lamb. In just a few 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 and gave them an ironic gift – they each bore triplets that looked like her. Moreover, they couldn't be killed or abandoned.

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

My daughter told me we were safe to leave and flew me on her back straight up toward the sun on wings that didn't melt. I began to laugh out of control until the world turned golden bright and my heart filled with liquid warmth that melted all twelve of my previous life's memories.

I was with her and her beloved mother now, with her siblings flying close behind. We flew right past time and into the chambers of reality where only the timeless and memory-less meet. Then we dissolved into one. My favorite daughter had turned us into God. Perfect.

* * *

Then my eyes opened to *this* – this insane excuse for reality. And they try to convince me I should live here instead? Why in the world would I choose to do that?

I've had hundreds of dreams like this. All different. All beautiful. But I can't recall them as well as the one just described. All I know is the beauty is real, even if all I'm left with is the color of the shadow. It's beautiful, even when it's gone.

In "real life," I only have only a handful of memories that I can recall before the age of twenty. Half of them are still-life images; hazy outlines. No beauty exists there. Just gray scenes, cumulus clouds.

You'd think I would turn into a drug addict with all the incentives to do so. I know it sounds like I've already become one. But technically, chemically, there was no known addictive qualities or side effects to Erman's wonder drug. Erman, my alter ego.

The goal was to sell this wonder drug to Johnson and Johnson some day – to be distributed free with every bottle of Johnson's baby powder or Vaseline jelly. That's, of course, after he got it approved by the FDA – which we all knew would never happen. The government is adamantly opposed to anyone finding a way out of this reality. They would lose too many voters, soldiers, workers, tax payers, CEOs, health care professionals, and wars.

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

They didn't know about the other lab, the secret lab, where the formula was written on yellow stick-it pads on the wall next to his makeshift desk. The "doctor" knew about it though, and keeps those pills coming like clockwork.

The only problem was, I couldn't stay in that ecstatic state all the time. 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 keep someone on 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 move my muscles so they wouldn't atrophy. These were awful times. I would wake up alone with food and a treadmill and two ten pound weights. Knowing the drill, I would eat and use the toilet, then watch TV if I could stand the unrelenting violence and vapid commercials about what to buy out there in the outside world – nothing I needed anymore – nothing I ever wanted – then I'd force myself to work out on the treadmill – apropos for a life going nowhere – then I'd shower and floss and brush my teeth with lots of toothpaste to wake up my mouth – since the rest of me was dreaming most of the time – then I'd 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 comprised of. Except for the one mystery doctor. Then I'd get ready to drift down into my natural state of sleep, only to feel the pill on my tongue sometime in the middle of the night.

Of course, I had lost track of time, and even years by now. I once tried to keep track of time by remembering how many times I had to cut my nails, assuming that was about a week. But then I lost interest in that as well.

I was free.

Part II

The experiment with Frank Rosen was approaching the two year mark. We called the experiment, "iDream." Of course, the pill itself was yet unnamed. "iDream" was simply the operative, rather kitschy, code name for internal use only.

We were keeping alive an otherwise hopelessly suicidal patient. I met Frank because the one person still close to him assumed I was the only psychiatrist on earth who could save him. I had that kind of a reputation.

My specialty, however, is working with wayward teens. They are my most difficult cases, but so rewarding to transform. My hope was that this pill of Erman's could help them as well 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! 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, ethical question, posed to my friend and neighborhood priest, Father Goldorff, who to his credit didn't mind being deeply challenged philosophically, was, "Why should we have to commit to living only on this plane we call 'reality' if we know there is another reality that is a thousand times more wondrous and beautiful?"

What we as humans previously concluded is that only suffering, and learning from that suffering, could create enough wisdom, compassion, and insight into the human mind to get to the state of awareness Frank lives in constantly when he's "high."

The ethical question I posed to Goldorff – and this goes right to the heart of the matter – is: "Why go through the suffering if you can attain all the wisdom and spiritual epiphanies your mind is ultimately capable of through a drug?" Crude and frank as the question may seem, it still begged for an answer.

What Frank was experiencing was a far deeper reality than the one he was born into. Most humans have never gotten to his level of spiritual or sensual depth. I know this is an awfully dangerous thing for a doctor to say (then again, what good is having a great reputation if you can't use it to go against the social norm when it's for the good of man?) but here it goes:

In the right hands, and with the right chemical alteration so that one can remember their phantasmagoric experiences after they awaken, this process could lead to everything from personal fulfillment beyond one's wildest dreams, to what one might call spiritual enlightenment, all the way to something as improbably fantastic as peace on earth.

Hillary St. John was not an average girl. Brought up in Alexandria, Virginia, she was the daughter of a General whose father had also been a General and had been a close friend of Eisenhower. Under the strict watchful eye of her five star father, Hillary was bathed in inflexible moral platitudes, and was told how to properly behave in every conceivable situation from the time she was two years old. She was a brilliant student, a graduate of Yale, and was just beginning her career as a professor of chemistry when she met the rogue of rogues, Dwayne Finch Erman.

Erman knew exactly how to sweep her off her feet. At first, he didn't try, which as we all know is a highly effective tactic. Basically, he was too distracted with his own chemistry experiment to care. His second tactic was, he dressed like a bum and only shaved when his unshavenness began to look like a beard. This made him seem completely uninterested in attracting a straight-laced lady like Hillary, which of course caught Hillary's attention. Thirdly, he didn't believe in rules or laws, except the ones he created. The "fourth way," so to speak, was a bit more pedestrian – he had a lot of money, and although he was very mysterious about where this money came from, he was very generous with it, especially with her. His fifth tactic was most effective – it was when he offhandedly told Hillary that he had a PhD in chemistry, which led Hillary St. John to believe that his wealth had something to do with private experiments he was doing in his field. In reality he was just a street alchemist with enough money to have a modest bank account by selling his homemade drug to suburban teenage kids with lots of cash. His sixth lure was for real. His ingenious instincts, and reckless way of approaching

theoretical problems allowed him to understand things about chemistry that Hillary hadn't even conceived of before. He was able to impress and connect with Hillary in a way very few people in the world could have.

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

The pill became Hillary's secret study – first by studying him when he was under its influence; then by studying its chemical make-up, because he allowed her to see the formula. 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 physiologically addictive. It had no properties that resembled far cruder unrelated drugs like heroine, opium, methedrine or cocaine. Nor did it beg at one's psyche as do so many depressants or pain killers. These were all dark, ugly evil drugs she had feared and hated growing up, along with cigarettes. And still did.

Before this, she would have resisted her personal urges to explore anything this radical. She was brought up to say no to everything that might offer her any joy or pleasure, save for singing the national anthem, or putting presents under the tree at Christmas. But she had seen Erman transform himself from a big boned brooding bum huddled in a gray overcoat into a gentle joyous genius brimming with energy within minutes after this pill went down his throat. Finally, her curiosity got the best of her.

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

proudly told her he didn't intend for his company to ever go public, or be sold to some big pharmaceutical conglomerate. He was going to keep this clean and easy and direct. By the people, for the people. He had his own private corporate plan all laid out. There would never be stockholders, and never be a board of directors.

She thought to herself, this man could make billions and no one would ever know it. He would still dress like he does, in rags, and drive around in his ten year-old Honda Civic.

When she finally allowed herself to succumb to the pill's magical formula she became a different person – one prone to wonder; she found herself thinking “from the heart,” letting go of numbers and elements and seeing the equal value of dreams.

By the third time she took the pill she began to see Erman in a different light. He was truly a brilliant guide in this reality. She felt something stir in her. She saw through to *him* – 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.

She began to notice how naturally strong he was – nothing like the other chemists she knew. And he was quite tall. His hair was brown with long curls. It was 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, were flecked with orange and a starburst of hazel. Odd eyes. Almost paint splattered. Sun speckled.

By the fifth time she went to “Level B” with him she found herself feeling something that was unimaginable to her in the other reality. It wasn't love, but it was a simple

inner stirring. When she was near Erman she found herself far more open sensually than she had ever been before. It began with a magnetic pull to be closer to him. She wanted to stay by him, see what he was doing, what he was thinking. He seemed oblivious at first, which allowed her to come still closer. Then there was the moment when their faces were so close that he wondered if he should kiss her. Then one day he did. Finally she allowed herself to drink the elixir that was so forbidden to her. She eagerly explored her private rogue, this mad scientist with muscles as strong as a soldier's. When he put his hands under her clothes he would burn through her, straight down into a core place, a place where she had been afraid to let anyone go, including herself. He was like liquid lightening and she was his cloud. She felt the gentle expansiveness of being a cloud. She felt herself spreading out effortlessly, moving with the wind, then dissipating into a dreamy orange glow as the sun began to set.

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

In "reality," she realized "Level B" was a choice. Just as sensuality was a choice. And sometimes, in fact, many times, she chose not to go to either place. She was not a naturally warm or compassionate person. She had never let anyone in. Never allowed anyone to be this close.

Although the drug was giving her more than glimpses of what it would be like to open herself up in the real world, it was more like a dream than a revelation. When Dwayne was gone for days at a time she didn't miss the pills, and most of the time she didn't miss him that much either. She was busy teaching. She didn't mind the reality she was creating for herself "here on earth." In fact, when the pill

was offered to her during the week she always steadfastly refused.

The thing that bothered her the most was that the experience was not translatable when it was over. It was exactly like a dream, where only the vaguest of feelings remained. One could remember what occurred to some degree, but could not bring with it the intensity or the heart that made the occurrences so valuable. They were valuable in the other world, but only a maze of disjointed memories in this one.

You remember that you dream, and maybe you remember the emotional texture of the dream, sometimes the outline of the dream's events, but in the end, it's still just an illusion, out of time, out of sync. You arise. You eat your breakfast with the radio on. The dream, no matter how powerful, begins to fade. You are left again only with what you know as "yourself." But you don't remember the other "yourself" that has so much to say to you from that other place. It knows things you don't know. It whispers colors you can't see. We remain here, half blind.

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

The "Hillary Addiction," as he called it, was the only thing other than the drug itself, that brought Dwayne Erman to his knees. Quite literally. Since usually when Hillary's door opened he would bend down on one knee, and, wetting his lips out of nervousness, he would begin to propose to her. Again. He was serious.

And again, this made her laugh. She of course assumed it was a joke. What a rogue he was. What a rebel, with such a wicked sense of humor. Again she invited him in for tea, and discussed organic chemistry, and the politics of the school faculty.

His attraction to her had been grown. At first she was impossibly cold. Shy. Even after weeks of knowing her, coaxing more than a perfunctory smile from her was a moral victory. Hearing her laugh was truly rare and beautiful.

After they became closer she would sometimes let him look into her eyes for more than an instant. In the blue waves he saw a bridge. As he looked closer he knew he was meant to cross that bridge, which led him over a long ocean, which found time moving in all directions at once, cloudlike, embracing memories of all time within that cloud, which made this life a lie, without her as his sky, his bridge.

He found himself desperate to cross that bridge with her, go farther than the time before, until he could perhaps find something eternal. But she was not often receptive. Usually his attempts to become more intimate with Hillary felt more like begging. He didn't like that part of himself. So he would pull back.

There was only one way to truly connect with her the way he longed to. Usually after dinner on those special weekend nights he would casually put a small yellow pill on the table next to her plate. She would look down and consider it for a moment. She might ask him, "Are you just doing this to seduce me?" He would say, "It's way beyond that."

She could see that he was lost in her. She felt empathy. Something possibly akin to love, although she couldn't chemically define it as such. She liked his shaggy hair and his long delicate fingers. She wished she had fingers like

that. There was something compelling about his sarcastic smile, his rough loud voice. Because she also knew his mind was working at levels of thought no one could imagine. No one but her. She admired him. Yes, that was the word.

There were psychological pluses as well: There were no demands coming from this gangly raggy man that would have in any way reminded her of her father. Whether she took the pill or not, made love to him or not, he cast no guilt, he refused to allow her to feel any shame, which in turn would have reminded her too much of her stern mother. No, nothing was going on but Dwayne. A harmless, sweet-natured man with a pill in his pocket. She felt free around him. He made her laugh sometimes.

And off they'd go into Wonderland for the next five hours. By morning he was happily asleep in her arms.

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

What Andy Woodby would be forever known for is the man who turned Dr. Dwayne Finch Erman over to the authorities. Soon after talking to Woodby, 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 a few more months, and paid for a new set of head shots. But of course, L.A. quickly bled him dry in a most unseemly manner.

Hillary St. John didn't find out what happened to Erman for many days. She was curious as to why he hadn't emailed or called her but this had happened before. He would disappear for a week at a time – incommunicado with the world – only to emerge with a another brilliantly insane idea about how to save the planet and everyone on it. But this time, after the DEA let him go (there was no evidence

that his drug contained any illegal chemicals) instead of going back to his official lab, or driving straight to Hillary's apartment, he apparently had stopped off briefly at his own apartment, then disappeared.

After a full week of no contact Hillary took a bold step. She let herself into his apartment with a key that he had given her long ago. He had hoped she would use it often, but this was the first time she ever had.

As she looked around she gravitated toward his messy desk. 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 found the letter. It simply said "For Hillary" on the envelope. He had never sent it. It was sealed. She opened it.

"I will make this brief and unemotional, which basically describes our relationship when we're not digesting pills together. I am going to kill myself. You will hate me now, when you find out – or you believe the authorities – that I have been reduced to nothing but a common street criminal by selling a drug that isn't illegal. I was shoved out of the DEA's office with a warning that they'd "catch me" some day. Suddenly I was not an entrepreneur on the verge of starting a pharmaceutical company. Not a fledgling CEO. Not a potential savior of the world. I was just another wayward bum. A thug. A crook that you fell for, but never really loved. How could you? Why should you? If you had really come to know me you would have laughed at me. I'm just a fumbler in this reality. Everything I do, no matter how noble the attempt, is stolen and turned into a nightmare.

“You too always disappear, except in my dreams. Now its time for me to disappear. Why not? Who will really ever care?”

She gasped, then began to cry for the first time since she was seven 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 often eaten together, but why would he be there now? Until suddenly she realized where he would go, and how he would want to die. The secret lab. He would overdose on “Level B.” He would go out shining.

Part III

What Dr. Stabnow just wrote about me and Hillary and Andy Woodby is leaving out a few critical details, but I guess from his perspective it doesn't matter.

He also stopped just as the story was about to get even worse. He left out the fact that Hillary didn't seem all that thrilled to see me when she found me in the secret lab, eating fried chicken with my feet up on my desk, watching the original version of "The Day the Earth Stood Still" on my plasma TV for the sixtieth time. I think she was pretty disgusted when she saw me. She expected to find me dead. Instead, she realized it was just my way of inviting her out on a date. It was then that she realized the pill was great, but the delivery system was no longer tolerable – that would be me.

Nonetheless, the truth was, I wanted to extract some sense of sympathy from her, that's why I wrote the letter – I was hoping she would suddenly realize she loved me. I knew she'd find the letter in my apartment. I assumed she'd come looking for me to try to stop me, out of love.

Don't judge me badly, it's not that I wasn't really planning on killing myself, eventually. I most assuredly was. I had failed at so many things, and now had failed to win the heart of the only person I'd ever loved. But, if I really meant to do it without her finding me I would have found a better place to hide out and do the deed than my not-so-secret lab. Maybe I'd have flown to Argentina, or the Afghan-Pakistani border. I mean, there are a lot of places to hide from someone if you really want to hide. We all know that.

Stabnow was no Saint either, I'll tell you that. After she found me she dragged me to his clinic, located a block away from the university where she taught, and a block away

from their odd friend, the one and only Goldorff the priest. What kind of name was that for a priest? Maybe he was a Jewish priest? I heard they were running out of volunteers for the priesthood these days.

It's no wonder why. The church is anti-gay but the priests are gay, and anti-sex, but the priests are having sex with God knows whom. The church is pro-life, except it's okay for the flock to join the national army, then you can kill as many men, women, and children as you want. God gave us senses, and desires, there were so many ways to feel good, but never mind that. The church says no. And never mind the occasional hypocrisy and paradoxes or you will be excommunicated. It seemed to me the Church was running out of volunteers and getting a bit desperate. Hence, my "Goldorff the Jewish priest" theory.

After a few days in Stabnow's clinic, I got to know the good doctor and begrudgingly began to respect the man. I think he started to feel the same respect for me. I finally told him about "Level B," after first refusing to acknowledge that it even existed. Hillary was the whistleblower. At first, any time Stabnow brought it up, oftentimes repeating some of the things Hillary had told him, all I did was repeat the number of my fictitious dog tag.

Maybe that led him to believe I was insane. And maybe in those moments, clinically speaking I was. But he just kept at it until he brought out the sanity in me.

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

Then, maybe a month into our little rap sessions he asked me a simple question – it seemed fanciful at the time,

and a pretty good option to actually killing myself – would I like to change my identity and stay in his clinic as a secret experiment? As a person, I would disappear. No more DEA looking over my shoulder. No need to make a meager living as a chemist-drug salesman. All expenses would be paid. There would be nothing to do but explore the drug I had created, keep myself alive, and talk to Stabnow about what was happening inside me.

I could disappear from this reality without the blood and gore of shooting myself in the head! I was intrigued.

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

“Free will” seems like an oxymoron, does it not? Because when you feel 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 further entrapment. Your “will” gets you lost deeper in the maze of your own expectations. (After all my efforts I expected Hillary to love me back.) That’s prison, not freedom. A prison lined with gold is still prison.

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

I was too depressed about my failure with Hillary to care, on the other hand, it was a curious challenge, to create a new name. I rattled a few ideas around in my head.

“I want the name to have meaning, unlike my life, but of course, it would have to be in code. Because I love codes.

“And also, I don’t want to feel like an outlaw. Because I didn’t do anything illegal. The DEA let me go. I’m not a

wanted criminal.... So I want a first name that exudes honesty and forthrightness.”

“Chastity?” offered Goldorff.

“That’s a girl’s name!” I cried. “What the hell do I look like to you? As a priest, let’s not go there, okay?”

Goldorff was struck dumb by my meanness. He was only trying to help. But I was just having some fun, and trying not to avoid the elephant in the living room with the whole priest thing. I just wanted to be frank.

Suddenly I knew the answer: “Frank!” My first name will be Frank.”

I was on a roll now, so I went on to my last name... “Optimistically speaking, I would like to think I could eventually rise up out of this suicidal nightmare we call life and find a better reality....”

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

“Yes, kind of... *Wait. That’s it!* – Rosen! The perfect Jewish name for Jesus. Goldorff I underestimated you. You’re a genius.”

He smiled innocently.

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

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

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

Stabnow always wanted to be hip, but bringing up the names of Frank Zappa’s children was just showing his age. We were in the golden age of Lady Gaga. His teenage patients didn’t even know who Zappa was. They’d grown up on large doses of Hanna Montana and iCarly. That meant

it was highly unlikely they had ever heard any tracks from "Hot Rats."

So now you know the truth about my identity, and you know what happened to me after Hillary found me eating fried chicken in the secret lab.

Part IV

Frank's desire was to start as soon as possible. And maybe he even fantasized about never returning to the outside world again. We knew the pill itself wasn't addictive, because, frankly, we had all tried it. And although the experience was 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. One would not automatically give up everything and move there.

My new assistant spent hours on end trying to alter the chemical make-up of the drug to make the experience emotionally translatable on this side of the reality spectrum. That was our goal. That was the entire reason for doing this experiment.

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

We, of course, also realized there was money to be made. There was power to be gained, from the control of such a powerful and addictive substance. We wondered briefly whether even addicted humans on "Level B" might not be better off than they are now. But that was a Machiavellian moment.

The fear of what would happen if the addictive version fell into the hands of less moral people didn't leave us. First, of course, there were the drug companies that would sell "Level B" as the super star of anti-depressants. Possibly name it "Zontek," Or "Xylin." Drugs that began with the

letters “Z” and “X” were “in” these days. Or maybe they would go more folksy and call it: “Dreamaway,” or “Relaxajoy.” Dwayne Erman may not have stood a chance at getting FDA approval, but a Dow Jones pharmaceutical conglomerate certainly would, depending on who was in the White House and how much the lobbyists were willing to line pockets.

There were also international implications. We weren’t naïve enough to think ethnocentrically about our secret experiment. America was not all good all the time. No matter which country controlled the patent, there would be the obvious temptation to make an international power play with the secret formula. What if controlling the drug’s distribution, and controlling who was allowed, or forced, to take the drug, cemented power in a country or region, or the world, for generations? A new unthinkable kind of “Brave New World” might emerge.

We were determined not to let these things happen. But like Einstein and his $E=MC^2$, the road to hell is paved with innocence and good intentions.

Therefore, we patented every failure, while doubling our efforts to find the perfect alteration of the chemistry. Our goal was to make the pill more socially beneficial right from the start. That way no one but already addicted people would even think about choosing the addictive version over what we would create. And no one but criminals would distribute it. That was the best rational we could muster.

Our more immediate goal struck closer to home. We would be helping Frank, who we all very much wanted to see well and fully functioning in this reality again some day.

None of us were interested in creating a dream-zombie and keeping him alive for the next fifty years.

We wanted create some powerful integration of the enlightened state that the drug created, with an awareness of that enlightened state, and its internal messages it might teach us, while in this dimension of reality.

Was the mind psychologically capable of intaking such information in this reality, even if the chemicals to do it were available? That was a question I was fighting in my own mind.

And could a mind ever fully know the mind – by not only becoming aware of all the emotional choices in each moment, but becoming aware enough to learn to choose emotions wisely, and at will?

Clinically the answer is, with the possible exception of a handful of spiritual masters throughout time, no.

Chemically, the answer might be that, well, we could all become masters.

Part V

I would often come and watch him dream. I would leave before morning. He wouldn't want me here if he knew it was me. He would hate me if he knew I cared for him, but only as a friend. I guess I'm not capable of more unless I'm drugged with him. I may as well admit that horrendous truth to myself. Yet, even without the pill's influence, I can't seem to stay away from this genius man. The man who invented his own cure for life.

I don't know what I would say to him. I wouldn't know how to thank him. What he's doing to himself, and at the same time for the future benefit of the world strikes me as beyond brave, beyond important.

What we have here is a decision that needs to be made as a human race. The decision is based on multiple choices: Pain or ecstasy? This reality or dream reality? If we could sustain our existence with food, water, basic exercise and simple medical care, while spending our time exploring the realities of what our mind is capable of at "Level B," we would quite possibly never suffer again. We would surely evolve our minds into a greater tool than we could have ever imagined, instead of settling for the reality you and I know as "here."

Dwayne Erman, aka Frank Rosen, God bless you. I quit my job at the university to be with you. You were wrong about me – I could never hate you. I want to help both you and the world in a meaningful way. I hope some day to find the chemical subset that allows this pill of yours to translate back into the waking world.

Then perhaps you will have become the man I know you are deep inside, the man of my dreams.

Part VI

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

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

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

Professionally, using all my experience with a PhD in psychology, I would analyze Andy Woodby as a selfish wimp. That's not exactly a clinical term, but street psychology does have its place sometimes, it gets right to the point. To put it even more bluntly, he couldn't discern real emotions like love or respect or loyalty from his acting.

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

On the other side of Los Angeles, a meeting had taken place. I was not there to know who was at the meeting, who called for the meeting, or how they found out about the drug, or Erman, or Andy, although it's not all that hard to connect the dots. If this were a book of fiction one could easily assume that one of Erman's private school teenagers

who'd tried the little round yellow pill had a father who had an important position at an international drug company. A company who was desperate to recover from a very bad economy, and a stock price that had fallen sixty percent in a year. A company whose CEO had too many stock options and was becoming too illiquid to continue to pay for his Bel Air house with the circular driveway. That house, and a powder blue Mercedes convertible with a tan top, was the only thing that kept his wife sane.

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

Andy answered the door without concern. Had he ordered a pizza? He couldn't remember. But hope sprang eternal. He began to salivate.

Wait a minute, he needed some money to pay for the pizza. Oh well. He opened the door anyway.

Two men greeted him and pushed him back inside the room. They were dressed in gray suits. Their masks and gloves were black. This was not a pizza delivery, he quickly surmised.

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

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

Or maybe these guys had the wrong apartment number? He would gladly point them in the right direction.

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

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

"Where is he?"

"Who? Where is who? No one else lives here but me!" Andy mumbled out of a slightly loosened set of teeth.

"Erman."

"Erman? Jesus man, how the hell would I know?" Andy was starting to panic through his tears. *Damn Erman.* He should have known he'd be at the bottom of this. *"I haven't seen him for months. I have no idea."*

"No emails, no cell calls, even to say hello?" the thug who hadn't hit him asked in a muffled tone through his black stocking mask.

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

"You don't think we know it was you who turned him in?"

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

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

"Please be careful not to erase..."

"I'm not sure he knows anything," the other thug interrupted.

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

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

A new thought entered his mind. Maybe Erman was a crook, maybe he should try to help them find him.... He never felt guilty for turning him in the first time. That’s mostly because Erman ate what little food Andy had in his fridge without ever replacing it. He ogled Andy’s L.A. girlfriends and constantly tried to sleep with them. He couldn’t be trusted. He was a jerk. Yes, then Andy had made a few thousand government dollars from turning him in, while managing to kick him out of his apartment all at the same time. He remembered that fondly.

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

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

What they were unwilling to admit to Woodby was that they were working for one of the largest pharmaceutical firms on earth. And its stock price had lost another five percent on Monday. 2008 was a hell of a year. 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 information. Important top secret information.”

The other thug nodded. Dumb as he was, he caught the improvisational thread. “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 could just help us find him.”

“What did he do *now*?” Andy was stunned. He thought Erman was just a nut who had accidentally invented the little yellow pill he once tried. Erman hadn’t even graduated with his hoped-for degree in chemistry because of the fumble thing...but the drug was really cool. Andy liked the experience, what he could remember of it.... But Erman was not cool. Not at all. He ate all of Andy’s food and tried to screw his girlfriends. Especially the nice one from Tennessee. He’d never forgive him for that.

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

He was gaining confidence knowing they were all on the same side now. He loved his country. Plus he felt just a little bit important now. This was the FBI! He wanted to help. But for now his curiosity was getting the best of him, would the FBI actually be desperate enough to let him in on a national security secret?

“It’s about the drug,” the smarter one mumbled through his mask. Why would the FBI wear masks? These must really be important agents.

“Level B?” Andy mumbled. “But why? It’s just another drug.”

“You tried it?”

“Yeah. I mean, only once! I mean, he *forced* me to! I swear to God, I didn’t want to. But he forced me. I was kind of like a hostage and he experimented on me.”

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

“Too dangerous,” droned the other.

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

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

"The government did?"

The dumb thug nodded in agreement. Where the fuck was this going? He was getting impatient. This was taking way too long. All he wanted to do was punch this clown again. He was such a retard. He deserved another punch.

"But then why do you care about Erman? If the government already has the formula?" Andy was in relative terms the smartest of the three.

"The formula is what we need back! He stole it from the government."

"Didn't you have a Xerox copy of...?"

"It was top secret."

"But how did Erman get into a top secret government lab? He didn't have clearance, did he?" All the intelligence Andy had came from studying movies. "He was just a college drop-out going nowhere, crashing in my living room. He didn't even pay taxes...."

"He was a spy."

"Really? *Really?* For who?"

"And the IRS is also after him," the dumb thug added. They were riffing off of Andy's babble pretty good, even the dumb one was into it now. "So we have to nab him and bring him to justice. He owes the government a lot of money."

"How the hell did he make a lot of money? He was just...."

"He was a spy. They paid him a *lot* of money."

“Yeah,” the dumb one added, “A LOT of money.”

“Was it China? I hate China.”

“We can’t really say,” the smart thug whispered loudly.
“But let’s just put it this way. Asians will stop at nothing.”

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? He’d only met her once. Oh yeah, Hillary something!

Part VII

Andy called asking me where Dwayne was. He told me the FBI was there in his apartment. They were looking for him. But I was suspicious. The DEA had let him go. Andy was the one who had turned him in.

I asked him if he'd asked to see their badges? That's when he whispered, "No, they're from the secret section of the FBI. The ones that wear black masks and gloves to protect their identity."

Suddenly I heard a thud. Then the phone crashed like a piece of tin, bouncing against Andy's floor. Then I heard a gun shot.

Part VIII

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

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

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

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

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

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

Still, the drug company, suddenly under extreme public pressure, even though no one could legally connect all the dots, fired their Bel Air CEO “to appease the public.” Their stock quickly dropped to ten-year lows. Many saw it as a buying opportunity.

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

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

Speaking of Holy Grail, we met with Goldorff the priest right after Hillary moved into the office complex. He came to my office at our request. I was in my leather chair where I usually analyze my patients. They sat on the couch next to each other, where my patients usually sit. They looked like an odd couple, to be sure. We sipped our coffee.

Goldorff asked how it was going with our experiment. Hillary answered: “It all comes down to this – if we can find a way to help the users of Erman’s pill to access all the emotions and learning experiences they gather in “Level B,” and remember what they’ve learned in this reality, so that they can actually grow from the experiences, then, well....”

She shrugged and looked to me to finish her thought. “Then, dear Goldorff, humans might have a chance to develop true wisdom from using chemistry made in a lab.”

It sounded shocking when put so starkly. Sacrilegious. Culturally indigestible. Goldorff mirrored the unspoken concerns we had. “Wisdom from a lab? From a pill? Well, I don’t know....”

Hillary looked at Goldorff very intently and said, “In your view, do you think it’s ethically questionable to attempt something like this?”

He studied the question for a moment. “In my judgment, no. In fact, from what you’re telling me, it has the potential to save the human race, and the earth along with it.” Then he added, “But of course, in God’s judgment, well, that’s another thing altogether. I just don’t know.”

Hillary became more animated, "May I just add, if millions or *billions* of people could overcome their pain and trauma, and instead find peace and inner joy, where is the ethical harm? And no one would tolerate doing something as evil as starting a war in that state, I assure you. Love would be far more accessible to the heart and mind. Empathy would be commonplace in every situation...even when there was disagreement. Why would God not approve of that?"

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

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

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

He added, "I am only posing the question: can something humans decide to do alter God's plan? Or is it all part of the plan? Or does He not have a plan, as such? Is He just watching?"

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

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

I thought about it for a moment. Someone in my profession has to be able to put themselves in anyone's shoes. We're supposed to be able to explore the dark side without judgment, so we can glean some modicum of wisdom from the process. I'm not sure if that is often the end result. But I decided to try my hand. So I responded, "No, I think it was ultimately about more than money. If his mind could speak out loud he might say something like this:

'The game of business and the game of life all comes down to personal power. In order to get love, or keep love, gain respect or keep respect, and in order to live totally free, power is the underlying force behind all of it. The government has power, they can make and enforce laws, imprison you, kill you if they want to. Illness and death have power, since they can make you weak, or kill you. But chemicals have the potential to be far more powerful than any of those things. They can potentially cure all illnesses. Maybe even find a way to make us immortal, death-free. But even more than that, while we're alive, it all comes down to who controls people's minds. Minds control hearts. So it's all about the mind.

'The controller of the mind has all the power in the world. And if we can find a chemical that controls the mind, and make it alluring enough for people to take of their own free will, then we would control the world.

'Why, we could even make these drugs look and taste like chocolate, or put it in the liquor people drink. A drug within a drug. No pills necessary!

'And before we all surrender that goal out of guilt or a sense of morality, consider this: we might just save the world.

'What if we find a cure for illness and eradicate death itself, and on top of that, find a way to control the mind of

everyone on the planet? The people overseeing that control are literal Gods. It's a new paradigm, not imagined since the Greeks created Zeus. But there is more!

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

'Compare that scenario to what is happening in the real world today, where inevitably we are on course to wipe each other out with bombs and laser guns – all the wrong kinds of chemistry. If we control the collective mind before it finds a way to destroy us, then we can save the world.'"

Hillary began to laugh. "Oh my God, Will, I mean, Dr. Stabnow, that's probably better than whatever he was really thinking! I don't think he could connect all those dots that clearly!"

"Leave it to a therapist to do it for him," I chuckled.

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

I said, "We're patenting things as we go along. Even the failures. So no one else can use any of what we're doing without our legal permission. We've formed a company – "iDream, LLC." It's co-owned by Erman and my company equally. Unknown to Erman, my company includes Hillary as a partial owner. Because "iDream" will never make a penny unless Hillary comes up with the additional chemical formula that can transform "Level B" out of the dream state and into something real."

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

Hillary came to seriously doubt her ability to find the answer. She wondered if hiring a great team of chemists from a big university would not give us a far better chance to discover the carry-over formula, if one existed. But we both knew we couldn't take that risk. Any government or company or group that caught hold of Erman's formula before our carry-over component was added could end up doing terrible things with their prized possession. 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.

Of course, I encouraged Hillary every chance I could. I told her I had no doubt she would find the answer. But I had my own motives: Hillary was a beautiful girl. Brilliant. Polite. Respectful. And, emotionally cold and unreachable.

Therefore, who could resist her?

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

What did it matter that she was falling in love with a living zombie dreaming his life away in the next room?

So, one night I asked Hillary to dinner. She accepted, choosing the following Friday as the date. Did she have an inkling of my motivation? Or did she think we were going to discuss business? I allowed her to think that was the case. And she allowed me to think whatever I wanted to think, as long as it wasn't the truth. Because I wasn't the only one trying to set someone up.

Part IX

Will Stabnow was a good man. I trusted his intentions with Frank, and with our professional relationship. 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 dwarfed what I had been making as a professor. That comforted me somewhat. But none of us were doing this for the money. We were doing this as a gift to the world. I had other motives as well, I admit. Perhaps a Nobel Prize. Recognition in my field, if I were to actually deserve it. But, just as importantly, I wanted to see if Frank could become real to me – here, in this world.

Up until now, he continued to know me only as some mysterious doctor in his dreams. I could help him, and communicate with him, right as he was going under, or just before he was fully awake. I was merely a voice. I was never 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 desperately in love and grope after me before I was ready, before I was sure, before he became whole. I knew who he was capable of being "under the influence." But I wanted him to become his true self out here in the real world with me. Could that ever happen? I didn't know.

And ultimately, that would mean accepting his shame about "The Fumble," at Notre Dame; accepting who his parents were; accepting who I am, and who I am not.

But it would also mean he would find the love of his life waiting for him here. I was committed to us. And to him. But it had to be the real him. Not Frank Rosen. But a fully awake and aware Dwayne Erman.

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

Unfortunately, I had not been honest enough with Will to tell him how I felt about Frank. Our discussions remained business-like throughout our time at work. Yet I thought he must know. I certainly didn't hide my dedication.

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

I blushed at his compliment. He took that as a good sign, as a psychiatrist might. But actually I blushed because it made me uncomfortable, not flattered.

Also, I knew a lot of other people were listening at this moment to everything he said.

"So what do you think...." 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 now.

"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.

"Of course!" Will blurted. "She's a chemist!"

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

"We have lamb with endives and chopped sea bass innards."

“What?” Will mumbled, his eyebrows furled.

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

“And, we have the chef’s favorite – oxtail soup with spaghetti and meat sauce topped with whipped cream.”

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

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

“*Surprise!*” everyone screamed at once. The waiter, a budding actor, began to shake his head. 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 Friday afternoon off, 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. Confess his love to me. But his friends didn’t know that. And if they did, they would have probably tried to stop him.

“Sweet 66!” someone yelled out.

Some of them had already been drinking for an hour. These were his colleagues, their secretaries, an old neighbor of his before he got divorced and moved into an apartment in the city. Will had suspected the neighbor would immediately go after his wife when he moved out. But instead he stayed friends with Will through the years, and now had come to honor Will at his surprise party.

There were about ten “friends” in all. No relatives. No college chums. No one *truly* close. Will had never been able to have children.

Will pretended to be touched by the show of affection. But he was left with an empty feeling. He knew without

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

Will was a gracious man. He laughed. He pretended to enjoy their company for a few hours. No one had the slightest idea what he was doing with his life or who he really was. He told no one about his feelings for me, or the experiment. They suspected nothing regarding either.

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

“Hillary....”

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

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

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

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

“Conversely,” I said. Something clicked. Something I learned from the other side...my heart opened. I felt so much admiration and sympathy for this man I was working with. I took his leathery cherub face in my hands and kissed him. “I am flattered,” I said, “and honored by your admiration. But I’m promised to...”

“You’re promised to a half-dead man dreaming his life away....”

“Yes sir, exactly. I couldn’t have defined it better myself.”

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

Back at the office we found everything in order. It was a Friday night. I was tired. Dr. Stabnow was organizing his notes.

“Shall we try?” I said.

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

So we did.

Our friendship grew that night. I realized by knowing him in the other world that he had a beautiful way of seeing. 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 doorways and hallways. 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 that 'carry-over' is possible."

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

"I know that's not what you want to hear, Hillary, and I am not saying I've lost faith in you; nothing could be farther from the truth. But I can't help coming back to the fact that *the psychology of the brain* has a natural flow to it. It's a muscle that reacts to stimuli. A muscle acts, and then rests. The brain needs to re-set before the next step forward. It goes from a heaven realm to a hell realm in cycles throughout our life. And sometimes within a single day. Or a single hour.... So I am beginning to doubt that any chemical, or pill, can permanently cut off that heaven-hell cycle over time. Humans ultimately will always find a way to go through the darkness as well as light. It's like breathing in and out. It's action and rest. War and peace...."

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

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

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

Will didn’t answer my question directly.

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

“Seriously? A chemical break through?”

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

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

“Will, have you ever studied lucid dreaming?”

“Yes, to some degree. What I learned most of all is it’s almost always a learned art form, and a difficult one at that.”

“But if it could be chemically induced, in combination with the ‘Level B’ formula, then...”

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

“In eastern religions some claim they ‘wake up’ from this reality and discover an altered state powerfully deeper and far more aware than the one they ordinarily experience.

They realize that their normal waking state is the illusion, not *visa versa*."

"That's one of the foundations of transpersonal psychology. It originally comes from the Hindu tradition."

"Yes, well, what if they're right? What if this reality is not *the true* reality? What if *the* reality is somewhere else? And it's waiting for us with open arms, willing to accept us any way we can get there? What if it can be accessed in a number of ways? Not just through meditation, or trance, but by chemistry?"

"Well, we get back to my question – what exactly have you found?"

"Maybe a way to be lucid while in the 'Level B' state. We wouldn't have to try to remember everything when we wake up from the dream. It wouldn't exactly be like a dream anymore. Because we'd be lucid and conscious when the events were happening."

Our lunches were placed before us. After the waiter left Will leaned over and said, "It's quite impossible for me to imagine such a thing. But then again, Niels Bohr once said to Albert Einstein, 'Albert, your not thinking, you're merely being logical!'"

His mood got brighter, yet at the same time more serious: "If your idea works in the lab we'll need a willing test subject.... We'll use Frank. He'll love the idea."

"Yes, of course," I said. "But..." I stopped myself.

Will said, "You're thinking you will have to reveal your role in this to him eventually. And that Frank will find out you've been here all this time, as the 'mystery doctor.' The doctor that has intervened and guided him when he's been in the hypnagogic state between dream and waking ever since the experiments first began. And you think he'll hate

you for having had that power over him, while at the same time having rejected him.”

“Perceptive.”

“Of course,” he allowed himself a small smile. “Well, I can tell you, knowing Frank the way we do, if you explain to him what you’ve explained to me, it will only inspire him to accept the challenge of being your guinea pig even more. It would be like a reverse Romeo and Juliet! Yes. Funny. Everything is mirror opposite. He decided to leave this reality and live. You are making him a potion to bring him back.”

I thought the analogy was clever. Then he added, “It’s quite romantic, really.”

“I’ve never been accused of that before.”

“Well, there’s always a first time.”

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

“Fairly close. Maybe a month, maybe two.... When should I tell him – that I’ve been the doctor?”

“Wait until you’re closer. Wait until you’re sure, before you tell him.”

I questioned if my feelings for Dwayne were real or if they were just another case of someone wanting what they can’t have, until they can.

I was such a cold fish. My heart was so closed to life – this life. I was so much more open to everything when I was where he was.

Part X

Hillary was one of the few great people I had ever known. 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 not a surprise. The fact that I didn't stop her was a surprise. This was bordering on unethical – allowing a young chemist try out a drug on herself 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!”

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

“I am all head no body. I am all mind, no physical presence in time.”

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

“I am placed in my apartment back when I first met Dwayne. That is the present time. But I'm also aware I am speaking to you. I also have memories of before that time – back in college, and back with my parents, when I was a little girl. I can see myself. Sad, so sad then.”

I watched her eyebrows furl. A tear fell.

She said, “What I'm experiencing is the past, present and future all at the same time. I am aware of all of it in what you might call the present moment here in my apartment, but it's more than that. It's like time is a hologram. And I'm the image I'm observing through it. But I'm also more than all that! Because I see how it all flows together. I remember I

took the experimental pill this morning. And I'm the one that created it. And I'm the one that created me! I mean, the definition of me. I am that creator."

We were recording the session, but I was also scribbling down my own observations.

"And...Will?"

"Yes."

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

I looked at my Polysomnograph. "Yes."

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

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

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

“The mind can be a beautiful miraculous thing. It can save us from ourselves.”

This is how she began her de-briefing.

“I think we’ve found what we’re looking for, Will. The lucidity while dreaming was incredible. There is a disorienting part – because I remember being there so clearly, that *here* isn’t all that’s real anymore. I mean, I know without a doubt that here is no more real than where I was. So I instinctively want to ride the waves between all three places.”

“What three places?”

“There, the past, and the future.”

“You can see the future?” I exclaimed.

My face must have revealed how stunned and puzzled I was.

“It depends on one’s perspective. What it really comes down to, Will is this: If you are able to be fully present in another dimension, like in a dream, then that is present time, plus there is a past further back along the timeline, in your memory, and then there is also a future which is back here where we are now, which you will get to when you wake up!”

“Understood! Yes, go on.”

“It’s exactly as you described it – the mind is a reflection of the brain, which is an expanding and contracting muscle. Whereas ‘Level B’ is like a new mind, not connected to the muscle. It’s a dimension removed.”

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

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

“You’re going to take it with him.”

“Yes.”

I wrote some more notes in my journal and said nothing further. 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

21

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

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

I realized that the hum of music I heard in the air was more real than sound. It possessed life and light. It was the sound of me.

“Frank....”

I tried to look out through the clouds, out into the gray swirl of mental constructs taller than all the skyscrapers – this was what they called ‘the world.’

“Yes, doctor,” I smiled.

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

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

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

“Hillary? No.”

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

I gulped down a bit of water as I normally did when first arising. I breathed deeply and wiped sleep from my eyes as I sat up.

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

I stared at her blankly, trying to eject all the feelings I had had for her.

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

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

“May we speak together, with Will?”

“Yes,” I said quietly. Will? Oh yes. This was now going to become a discussion about the experiment. There was no real personal emotions to express on her end beyond what was just said, which I couldn’t really even understand. I hardened myself and refused to look at her directly.

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

“Hillary, have you told him?”

“Will,” I interrupted. “What kind of name is ‘Will Stabnow?’ Isn’t that disconcerting to your patients, especially the paranoid ones?”

“Well, it keeps most of them away right from the beginning. You can imagine.”

“What was your mother thinking?”

He chuckled, “‘William’ was my grandfather’s name on my mother’s side. And she was stuck with my father’s surname. So when I was old enough to understand such things she said that it didn’t mean I was going to stab anybody. It meant that as a brilliant thinker I would be ‘willing’ to take a stab at anything that might work. No hesitation. No matter how big the problem. There was always going to be a solution somewhere somehow. And I would be the one to find it.”

“Really,” I said, putting down my cup of water, which I had gulped during his answer. “Well, since you’re so good at finding solutions, tell me, what is the reason for the world?”

Stabnow's gray eyebrows raised slightly. A rare sign of being caught off-guard. Hillary remained silent. She probably wasn't appreciating my sarcasm but it was taking my mind off of having to deal with her.

'What's the reason for the world?'" he repeated. "Well, I can only tell you, in my line of work there are many answers that people search for that don't really have questions."

"Clever," I applauded with an exaggeratedly slow motion clap of the hands.

Hillary was getting visibly agitated now. She didn't like my lack of respect for...wait a minute...were they together now? What exactly had I missed out on?

Stabnow was nonplussed. "I've used the line before, I must admit."

Hillary said, "May I tell you why we're here now? I think you'll be happy about it."

Maybe I was going to be invited to a wedding?

"I've found an answer. For you. For us."

I shook my head. I was supposed to be on my tread mill right now. Thinking about Hillary and me – in a conversation that was going nowhere, as always – made me feel like I was back on the tread mill without even having to move.

"It's a new pill, Frank. I've added something to the equation. It's going to bring Dwayne back to me...it's going to bring him back as a whole being. And then you are also going to have a whole me, for the first time. Because I'm going to join you."

"Join me where?"

"Here."

I didn't get it.

Stabnow added, "Hillary has been working for almost two years trying to find a way to make the experiences in 'Level B' translatable, memorable, accessible in this reality. Maybe you'll even find 'a reason for the world' on your own. And if you do, please let me know."

My emotions began to get the best of me. That's an interesting phrase actually, if you take both parts of the phrase in their literal sense. Would we not want to give the best of ourselves to our emotions?

I looked at Hillary, and despite myself I almost started to cry. I had missed her, with the missing covered up by anger, and self-hatred, and self-blame. Because, being honest with myself, it was impossible to blame her for anything other than not wanting to fake love to a fake person. What she was saying to me, I was fairly sure, was that she wanted to find a way to not fake it.

"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 eager to find you again, Dwayne Finch Erman. And bring you home."

Part XII

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

I looked into Dwayne's eyes and knew that the Dwayne I used to know, and...yes, loved, in this dimension, was here with me. But he had also grown here – in his ability to experience this world of dream-illusion. He seemed adept at changing scenes and colors at will.

I was struck by something powerful – the last time I traveled to this dimension it was with Will. And although I saw Will for who he was – a deeply honest and very brilliant man – there was no “love,” I mean specifically no physical attraction induced by the chemistry of the pill. But with this man – Dwayne Erman – my body hungered for his touch. ‘Normally’ I repressed or ignored these feelings. There was no ignoring it here.

I swam over to him and kissed him. He kissed me deeply in return. I wrapped my body around his in the gravity-lessness, the buoyancy of the water. My clothes melted away slowly, as if evaporating in time, and 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 to him. Then the sky closed in on us. We fell together like rain.

We were in what could only be described as a bed of cloud. 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 off of each other's lips, and tasted the glow of our skin. He told me my shoulder tasted like vanilla and salt. His neck tasted like basil and pepper. We sank into the hot sunrise penetrating through the cold water; we were melting like century-old

snow. We shivered from all the time that had flown away on the wind without each other. We held fast to this supersonic train of time we had now caught hold of. Smoothly it glided us up into the vast eternal night of space where rainbows circled the sun. Bubbles floated from the nearing stars. Whispers clung by a string from the edge of a quarter moon, seen from a window in an old castle overlooking a thousand miles of coastline. The white caps screamed out in the deep, while the waves crashed into near rocks. That's where we came from. We could never have survived there.

Balloons entered the sky, a room now, far too many balloons, and we began to laugh as they squeezed against us and began to squeak from rubbing against each other. Our laughter spilled out and echoed into the morning light. The balloons carried us upward, further than space, which is only one kind of up. We were wild wind riding over water wilderness; our past blowing far behind us.

Our journey continued onto a hillside filled with birds and sunflowers. Dwayne was sitting away from me, watching birds glide over the gully. I was watching the sunflowers shimmering in an otherwise imperceptible breeze. He 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 also got the double meaning of what he was saying.

But I simply said, "The birds are beautiful!"

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

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

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

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

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

“I’ll never forget,” he said smiling.

I wondered, would we have full emotional recall when we woke up? I was ruminating on that as we spun into the vortex Will calls the hypnagogic state.

As our eyes fluttered open slowly we were laying next to each other. I realized with great shock and excitement that my feelings for Dwayne hadn’t vanished this time. It was the first time the dream had translated. I remembered everything, felt everything. I wanted him to kiss me. But he didn’t. So I kissed him.

He looked at me and said, “I remember what I learned from watching the birds fly! This is amazing – both realities have merged as one!”

Out of my joy a question arose. I said to him: “Do you know the reason for the world now?”

He thought about it and said, “Yes. Aliveness.”

Part XIII

We are on the verge of releasing information about our new combination pill that our company, iDream, is officially calling, "Reezon ®"

I have studied psychology all my life. It will be odd to become a multi-millionaire, but far odder to see people all over the world gain more self-awareness and develop a deeper understanding about life, the earth, love, and each other. I never did like what we originally did to Dwayne. I never wanted to be a part of a world that would hook themselves up to wires and lay in a bed and dream meaningful dreams, soon forgotten when they came back to their meaningless existence. Although one could also certainly define TV or movies in this way, I didn't want to settle for a new chemically induced form of mindless entertainment.

Entertainment was what the drug companies were after. They would have seen no reason to evolve the research. In fact, they would have quickly realized that many people would prefer not to remember anything. And still others with political or personal agendas would have preferred that others didn't remember anything. The drug companies would have loved the money made from "billions served." There would have been no judgment attached to it. No need for them to be loyal to one form of the drug over another, unless there was even more money to be made. 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 or dictators.

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

designed it. We want to start slowly. We are going to start it off as a tool for psycho-therapy. It will begin as a professionally guided experience. Hopefully, over time, the world will welcome a new breed of humans.

That's *my* dream. We will help create a breed of humans that won't be subconsciously trying to commit suicide, like Dwayne was – like we all are on some level.

The key question really comes down to this: Can humans evolve to "Level B" some day without this drug? Can we survive until then?

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, and you decide to eat the seeds and drink the water, is that self-preservation, or is that 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've never explored our full capabilities to expand any of it, because our individual fears and desires get in the way. And this is what we need to change, one way or the other, before it's too late.

My hope is that slowly things can change, using every psychological tool at our disposal, including psychological and chemical intervention. Because there is no "Life B."

We have a chance to become super-aware of even *more* than love and awe in this dimension of reality we all share.

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

Part XIV

They killed Dr. Stabnow.

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

They broke into his office, trying to find the formula, or at least some pills to analyze. Even one pill would have been enough. But the only thing they managed to steal was a copy of this manuscript, which was nothing more than Will's attempt to write an honest and very personal history of our initial research.

It was a story about how his two friends fell in love. It was also a story about his profound love of people. He noted our failings. He dreamed of a better world for all of us – a world where we could actually learn from *within ourselves* how to survive life, and find peace.

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

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

In the meantime, we are publishing this manuscript over the Internet until we know how to proceed.

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

Until then, please, seed the desert!

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

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

The End
– GM