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—Readers' Favorite

# SNOOZE



## A STORY OF AWAKENING

Sol Luckman

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PRAISE FOR *SNOOZE: A STORY OF AWAKENING*,  
WINNER OF THE 2015 NATIONAL INDIE EXCELLENCE®  
AWARD

“*Snooze* is a moving story ... a multi-dimensional, many-faceted gem of a read. From mysteries to metaphysics, entering the dream world, Bigfoot, high magic and daring feats of courage, this book has it all ... I highly recommend *Snooze* for all ages. It’s an exciting journey within.” —Lance White, author of *Tales of a Zany Mystic*

“*Snooze* is a book for readers ready to awaken from our mass cultural illusion before we self-destruct. *Snooze* calls out for readers open to the challenging adventure of opening their minds. It illustrates, in intriguing story form, the possibilities that imagination, dreams, visions, paranormal experiences, respectful relationship to nature, and non-linear thinking may hold the keys to resolving the ecological, economic, social, and political deadlocks we are currently experiencing.” —Merry Hall, Co-Host of *Envision This*

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“*Snooze* is without doubt one of the best coming-of-age, awakening books that I have ever read, and it had me entranced from the beginning to the end.” —Ingrid Hall, Author & Freelance Editor

“This was the first novel I had ever read by Sol Luckman but I will certainly be reading more of his work now. I would recommend this to all readers as the story truly holds a lot. It was deep, it was humorous and it left nothing to be desired.” —OnlineBookClub.org

“*Snooze* is a captivating coming-of-age tale about a gifted boy traveling to a fantastical realm to save his father ... Thanks to author Sol Luckman’s writing ability, *Snooze* can be enjoyed by readers of all ages, despite being aimed at young adults. Right off the bat, the writing is engaging and captures the attention.” —Indiereader.com

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For my beloved Peeps, who inspired and encouraged this tale

“I, Chuang Chou, dreamed I was a butterfly, fluttering hither and thither, for all intents and purposes a butterfly. I was conscious only of my happiness as a butterfly, unaware I was Chou. Soon I awakened, and there I was, myself again. Now I do not know whether I was a man dreaming I was a butterfly—or whether I am a butterfly dreaming I am a man.” Zhuangzi



SNOOZE

A STORY OF  
AWAKENING



PART  
ONE



DREAMS





As a kid, Max often dreamed of flying. Not that he always remembered his dreams. But the ones he managed to wrest, often in fragments, like bits of sand dollars washed ashore from the aquatic world of deep sleep, invariably involved flight.

Sometimes he was a passenger aboard some kind of craft, such as a fighter jet or the Space Shuttle. Fittingly, his father had been borne aloft high above the earth's surface both ways.

Virtually everything Max could remember about his father, Captain Thomas Diver, Navy pilot and celebrated NASA astronaut, had to do with flying—starting with the occasional spin in the Captain's private Cessna out over the Everglades or down around the Keys.

There were the model airplanes gifted for birthdays and Christmases the two of them, so alike in their attention to detail, painstakingly pieced together and painted.

There were the elaborate paper planes and jets, like flying origami, often featuring complex designs in ink, left by the "Tooth Fairy" or "Easter Bunny."

And of course, Max would never forget the kites they designed, assembled and flew together for hours on end, like condors riding endless thermal currents, out over the breezy Gulf beyond Cape Carnival.

With the squish of sand underfoot and the salty wind in his hair, squinting in the sunlight, chest thumping with excitement, Max would work the string to his father's exhortations—"Higher! Faster!"—while feeling absolutely in the right place at the right time.

Years later, even after graduating Salutatorian and enrolling at an Ivy League university, kite flying remained Max's signature memory of his father, preserving a feeling of fleeting bliss—one that, like an imperfect but beautiful crystal, was created only to be shattered.

Naturally, there were dreams that didn't include his father. Most of them, actually. Alone, Max had parasailed high above turquoise waves, hang glided over tropical forests, sailed over rugged canyonlands in hot air balloons.

Such dreams were indeed captivating. Still, the dreams Max loved best involved no special equipment, no technological support, no hitching an aerial ride, no "crutch."

These were the dreams where he *himself* flew. Actually *flew*. No sails needed. No wings necessary. No engine required. No wheel, no stick, no throttle to interfere with the purity of the experience.

In defiance of gravity, or maybe somehow working *with* gravity, he would simply lift off. There was hardly any effort required. Or if there was effort, it wasn't of a physical kind—it was entirely *mental*.

It was like ... meditation. Though he didn't know a lot about meditation in those days. Later, as a young man beginning to grasp intellectually what he had started doing naturally, he would jokingly refer to the process as "beditation."

Flying in his dreams was an exhilarating, breathtaking experience, sometimes literally, that tended to leave reality wanting, like riding a roller coaster compared to mowing the lawn.

His dreaming heart fluttered like a sparrow as his body rose up out of bed and hovered in mid-air, head almost touching the ceiling, for a few seconds or minutes.

Sometimes it took a while to recall how to direct his flight. The steps involved first *intending* to go somewhere, then *allowing* himself to go, then actually moving—mentally—in the *opposite* direction.

As he came to understand the weird, counterintuitive mechanics of dreams, Max discovered that down was up, up was down, right was left, and left was right.

When he was a pre-med student studying anything but medicine, he would also learn that, in the world of dreams, outside was inside—and inside was outside.

Not only that, but in the world it was possible to access through dreams, time was no arrow shooting forward (as it seems to be here) but a traversable *landscape*.

In such dreams taking place in a parallel reality mirroring our own, to simplify things somewhat, your current location is the present, the past lies behind you, and the terrain ahead is the future.

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But as a kid dreaming of his own world, Max knew none of such finer navigational points that applied to the dream world beyond.

There was no pressing need—and in any case, grasping that in inverse-reality dreams, feeling and intuition are *physical* senses, while sight, hearing, touch and the like are more like *bunches*, would have been like studying calculus before mastering arithmetic.

As a kid just dreaming, all that really mattered to Max was knowing how to move about, which required only the rule of opposites.

To be a flyer, he soon realized he had to be a diver—a joke that wasn't lost on Maxwell Andrew Diver, an uncommon boy not only in his abilities but also in his intelligence, even at a tender age.

At which point, diving, he would zoom out the window (physical barriers usually posed no obstacle in dreams) and dart up and off like Superman in pajamas in the direction of his desire.





“Wake up, Snooze! You don’t want to be late for school again!”

His father’s baritone urging was accompanied by the comforting smell of Old Spice and the firm, warm pressure of his large, manly hand on Max’s forearm.

“Snooze” was an old nickname, bestowed on him when he was just a toddler by his father, who possessed a kind, if wry, sense of humor.

Max had justly earned the epithet. As a boy, he slept as much and as often as he could—and literally could fall asleep anywhere, anytime, if he put his mind to it.

Concerned that his son might have an illness, Max’s father had once taken him to see a specialist, a Navy doctor considered an expert in sleep disorders, a man named Dr. Morrow with a vaguely European accent, angular features and owl eyes behind round, wire-rimmed glasses.

Max spent a surreal night in the Navy hospital undergoing an array of scans and tests with scads of electrodes attached like tentacles to his little body. But even under these difficult circumstances, he was able to fall asleep easily and remain so until morning.

Dr. Morrow concluded that Max didn’t suffer from narcolepsy or hypersomnia—though there were some anomalous readings in his results indicating extremely heightened brain activity during sleep.

Max remembered Dr. Morrow removing his glasses and biting one of the silvery arms in a perplexed gesture as he commented in low tones to

his father, “Honestly, Thomas. I haven’t seen anything like it. But I don’t think your son is sick. To the contrary.”

“To the contrary?” his father had said.

“Let’s just say he’s ... *gifted*.”

Until this moment, Max had never thought of himself as particularly gifted. If anything, his propensity for sleep, as much as he loved to doze, was often a burden.

This was especially true on school mornings when his father awoke him in the middle of a riveting dream. His dreams were always at their most vivid toward morning when he entered the deep, visionary rhythms of REM sleep.

Eyes rolling like magic marbles behind his eyelids, moving faster and faster as his flight speed increased, often he would find himself high above the earth, which resembled a blue-green ball on a vast carpet of black velvet.

Occasionally, if his velocity managed to reach what he came to think of as “critical mass,” there would be a flickering followed by a tremendous flash of light, like an electric strobe exploding. Once or twice, he actually found himself at the edge of what seemed to be a different world.

But this was as far as it ever went. He never got to explore this startling new frontier because, inevitably, he was woken up out of his dream.

“Come on, Snooze. Get your clothes on. Your oatmeal’s getting cold.”

“What’s going on? Dad? Where am I?” he would ask sleepily, disoriented.

“You’re in bed. *Still*. You’re going to be late for school if you don’t hurry. Time to get a move on!”

Fortunately, his father was willing to overlook a little oversleeping, because Max was a hard worker and nearly straight A student, once he shook off the drowsies and applied himself.

For his part, Max was willing to overlook the fact that he disliked oatmeal, grinning and bearing each unpleasant bite, because he really loved his father—who was all he had and did the best he could—and dared not disappoint him, on purpose, over a trifle.





**M**ax, whose sense of humor was every bit as dry as his father’s—so dry that his classmates, misconstruing his jokes, chided him for being too serious—liked to describe himself as “an only child of an only parent.”

He never knew his mother, though oddly enough, he felt he understood her ... perhaps too well. Besides looking alike, with the same wavy hair and bony, almost Asian facial structure, they formed an oddball dynamic duo: the poster child and poster adult for “weirdoes” everywhere.

His mother had been a maverick anthropologist specializing in cryptozoology—a fancy word for the study of mysterious, officially unacknowledged creatures such as the Yeti, Chupa Cabra, and Loch Ness Monster.

As a scientist studying animals other scientists held to be, at best figments of the collective imagination, at worst hoaxes, Dr. Cynthia Holden Diver—despite winning a number of prestigious academic awards, including two Fulbrights—had known firsthand what it was to be an outcast, ridiculed and marginalized by her peers.

Never mind that, as a tireless explorer and field researcher, she had produced an impressive body of evidence for the existence of hominid cryptids—aka, Bigfoot—including dozens of eyewitness accounts, enormous footprint casts the size of snowshoes, and fur samples with unknown DNA.

The evidence never seemed to matter to those in power, who had already made up their minds and did what people typically do when their worldview is threatened by new data: they attacked the messenger.

When he was ten years old, Max gave into curiosity about his mother by sneaking a peek at her personal effects, which his father kept in a scuffed Seward travel trunk beneath his bed.

Inside, he found her throwback, horn-rimmed reading glasses; a chestnut-colored suede satchel; binoculars; a gold and onyx hairpin patterned after an Egyptian scarab; a red alpaca wool scarf; a broken compass; knee-high safari boots worn to almost nothing at the heels; and a torn blue rain poncho that smelled of grease and mud.

It was strange—and unsettling—to think that a whole life (his own mother's, at that) could boil down to half-forgotten oddments molding away in the darkness of a hidden chest.

The most intriguing item Max discovered was a leather-bound book, which turned out to be his mother's field journal containing a veritable bestiary of pencil illustrations of strange creatures, in addition to many pages of notes of a complex scientific nature in her feverish handwriting.

At first glance, the handwriting sent shivers down Max's spine. It looked virtually identical to his own hurried, barely legible script, which usually earned him a C for Neatness (or lack thereof) on his report cards, his lowest grade by far.

Max never *intended* to be messy with his writing, which he could read just fine, years later if necessary, even if his teachers couldn't. He merely found that his active mind tended to move too fast for his hand to keep up with. Obviously, his mother faced a similar dilemma.

Inside the journal's front cover, as a kind of private epigraph and guiding philosophy, she had penned a quote from the renowned psychologist Carl Jung: "I shall not commit the fashionable stupidity of regarding everything I cannot explain as a fraud."

Though Max loved and respected his father more than anyone else alive, in most ways he more closely identified with his mother.

His father was the proverbial *insider*, a folk hero, a golden boy who could do no wrong—whereas mother and son were quintessential *outsiders*, quirky individuals with eccentric notions and substandard handwriting. Max wondered if she, too, as a child, had trouble coloring inside the lines?

He always visualized her as a slightly irreverent young woman, fresh out of Yale graduate school, as she appeared in the framed photograph that graced the mantelpiece of the Diver family (such as it was now) home on Tupelo Street.

In the photo, over which Max sometimes caught his father in the melancholy act of reminiscing, his parents were captured arm in arm,

smiling and in love, next to Captain Diver's red and blue Cessna Skyhawk parked on the sun-drenched tarmac of nearby Cape Carnival Jetport.

His mother looked like a cover girl with her olive tan, white teeth, hazelnut eyes, and lustrous, auburn hair. Only her slightly raised nose gave away something a little left of center in her character, some inherent rebelliousness, a sassy gene that made her go her own way—even if it meant flying against the flock.

Twelve years her senior, his father was tall, robust, and in the prime of his life and career—with the barest hint of gray in the tips of his cropped brown hair. He looked like a statue of a Roman emperor with his square chin and noble bearing. Fittingly, the Skyhawk was called the *Tempus Fugit*, Latin for “time flies.”

According to Max's Aunt Nadine, whom he sometimes questioned whenever she babysat in matters regarding his mother, rather than burden his father with memories that could only depress him, the photo had been taken around the time of their engagement.

The two had met barely six months earlier—while flying, no less. When not hunting for Bigfoot, his mother was an avid amateur pilot who owned and flew her own rebuilt (as in, by *her*) Cessna 150J, christened, appropriately enough, the *Rara Avis*, Latin for “strange bird.”

She had contacted his father via radio on sighting the *Tempus Fugit* off the southern coast of Florida one Sunday afternoon. They had exchanged words about a storm coming in from down around the Keys and somehow, before their aerial chat ended, managed to make a date for dinner the next weekend.

The rest was history. To say the two were made for each other would be an understatement. They seemed destined to meet—and fated to live together happily ever after.

Had they known what the future held in store, Max couldn't help but ask himself, would they still have chosen to marry and have a child?





**M**ax was there when she died. He was the reason she died. He had to live with that. Her candle went out in childbirth. It seems like a cruel joke by the universe, but sometimes a child sees his first light at the exact instant his mother sees her last. It just happens sometimes—and unfortunately, it happened to Max.

As he learned years later when he was old enough to understand such things, there had been “complications.” He was positioned in an abnormal way (imagine that); there was an emergency procedure to save him; his mother wouldn’t stop bleeding; and she passed away right there in the hospital.

In the blink of an eye, what was supposed to be a joyous occasion, for all involved, turned into a life-altering tragedy—for all involved.

Strangely, Max was born with the caul, which means there was a removable membrane like a rubbery bubble of skin attached to his newborn head. Throughout history, and with gut-wrenching irony in Max’s case, children entering the world this way have been considered extremely lucky.

In Roman and medieval times, such babies were thought to be very special indeed, even marked for greatness.

There was a legend that anyone in possession of a caul could never drown, which made cauls highly valued by sailors. Others believed cauls could defend against sorcery and witchcraft. People would preserve and sell them, turning them into charms for protection.

By the time Max was born, such superstitions had been replaced by another superstition: having a caul signified one in possession of supernatural capabilities, such as ESP or the ability to heal with touch.

True, Max was “gifted,” to borrow Dr. Morrow’s phrase. And the nature of his gift did seem to be somewhat supernatural—at least in the sense of being above and beyond what is considered “natural.”

This fact Max had proved to himself by the time he turned twelve. His birthday was typically celebrated, if one could use this term for an occasion that elicited such ambivalence, not least in himself, in conjunction with New Year’s Eve on December 31<sup>st</sup>—even though he was technically born on January 1<sup>st</sup> at the stroke of midnight.

Throughout his eleventh year, Max’s dreams had taken on a more ... *intense* quality. The colors were brighter. The sounds were crisper. He could actually feel the wind in his hair and eyes as he flew and flew right up until his father gently nudged him awake.

“Time to wake up, Snooze! Get dressed while I prepare the oatmeal.”

Then, right around the time Max noticed the beginnings of facial hair and pimples, when he had shot up three inches in as many months over the course of the fall and his voice started to crack and deepen, otherwise known as adolescence, his dreams abruptly shifted from Technicolor to, well, *real*.

He would dream of flying through rainclouds and wake up wet from head to toe. This caused his father to assume, naturally enough, that his son had wet the bed. But he hadn’t. He had never wet the bed, not even as a young child.

Or dreaming, he would zoom through a thick jungle dodging sinuous vines and huge fronds—only to wake up with strange bits of plant matter stuck in his hair and what looked like grass stains on his pajamas.

Could he be sleepwalking? Maybe. But that hardly explained some of his dreams—especially the ones he woke up from clutching bizarre, out-of-context objects from the dreamscapes he had just visited: *sacha inchi* seeds from Peru, a tattered prayer flag from Tibet, an obsidian arrowhead found behind the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan.

He placed everything he retrieved from his dreams in an old Lego box he had found one day, while waking, in the attic. The box he hid behind the stack of sweaters in his closet. He wasn’t willing to share these objects, given their strange provenance, with anyone just yet.

In trying to make sense of his increasingly confounding sleep experiences, Max was forced to consider the possibility (admittedly, troubling) that his dreams no longer stemmed from a virtual reality—but were actually taking place somehow. He had proof now, stashed in an old Lego box.

Remembering the epigraph to his mother's field journal, "I shall not commit the fashionable stupidity of regarding everything I cannot explain as a fraud," he began to understand it a little better.

It seemed to be addressing scientists, many of whom appeared to believe that anything real had to come with an explanation, as if nature somehow owed them that—or else it wasn't real.

This "scientific" mentality appeared deeply flawed to Max, especially in light of his dreams, not to mention all the mysterious phenomena that obviously were quite real, if still barely fathomed.

Visions. Reincarnation. Telepathy. Telekinesis. Levitation. Spontaneous combustion. Time travel. UFOs. Ghosts. Apparitions. Poltergeists. *Bigfoot*. For personal reasons beyond simple curiosity, during the first half of sixth grade when his dreams began to turn concrete, Max read every book in the library on such topics.

All of these mysterious occurrences, and many more, had been documented and studied by thousands of people for hundreds of years—yet most modern scientists acted as if they couldn't sweep these phenomena under the rug fast enough.

The alternative approach, of course, which his mother had obviously chosen, was to embrace (or at least, strike a truce with) life's mysteries. This required allowing yourself not to be able to explain something, temporarily anyway, and be okay with that—a tall order for big brains.

The more time went along, and the more dreams of an apparently tangible nature Max experienced, the more questions he had. Not infrequently, he found himself wondering about his caul.

Aunt Nadine had shown it to him once. She had been there at his birth—and despite her grief at losing her younger sister, had thought to save and preserve her nephew's caul, which remained in her keeping almost two decades.

"Do you mind if I hold it?" he asked, examining the thin, translucent membrane—folded, dried, and shrunken with age—in his aunt's hand.

"Not as long as you're very careful," she replied, placing the caul gently in his palm. "Those things are as rare as hen's teeth."

It was light, diaphanous, and almost weightless—like brittle plastic. In a sense, it was all that remained, physically, of his mother.

"Time to give it back," said Aunt Nadine. "You've held it long enough. I'll put it in a safe place."

"Why was I born with the caul, Aunt Nadine?"

"Because God made you that way."

"But why did God make me this way?"

"God moves in mysterious ways."

Max had been assured his caul had nothing to do with the "complications" that took his mother. At the very least, that was a relief.

But did his caul have anything to do with his being so complicatedly ...  
“gifted”?





In his mother's honor, vowing not to commit the “fashionable stupidity” of ignoring things he didn't understand, Max performed a brave act of nonconformity by accepting the possibility that his dreams might be exactly what they seemed: real.

This got him in the first real trouble of his elementary education and succeeded, finally, in making him a genuine pariah in the cruel, survival-of-the-fittest microcosm that was sixth grade.

Max wasn't just an only child; he was also a lonely child. The other kids at school, from the beginning sensing he was “different,” even if they couldn't put their finger on just how, tended to retreat into their little cliques and keep him at arm's length.

His coping mechanism was to seek solace in books, in whose company he learned a great many things but cultivated no friendships. Inevitably, he came to be thought of as something of a bookworm, an unflattering image which his glasses—acquired by prescription when his vision started blurring—certainly didn't help.

Nor, for that matter, did his choice of “weird” reading material—lately books about the paranormal, supernatural, and unexplained—which his classmates judged as harshly as scientists with big egos and closed minds, dubbing him “Mad Max” behind his back.

Only the fact that he was the son of a well-known astronaut, and thus indirectly famous, spared him, for a while, from utter social annihilation.

Not surprisingly, Max felt he had no one to confide in about the unconventional quality of his dreams. Certainly not Aunt Nadine, who

would think he was in league with the devil and, gossip that she was, blab the story to anyone willing to listen.

Whenever he considered telling his father, he always stopped just short of doing so. Captain Diver was busier than usual flying solo missions in the Skyhawk he described cryptically, when Max inquired, as “related to Naval intelligence.”

“Naval *intelligence*?” said Max one morning over oatmeal. “Isn’t that an oxymoron?”

“Ha, ha. Believe me, I’ve heard that one a few times.”

“So why are you flying so much, Dad? And if it’s *official* business, why are you in the *Tempus Fugit* instead of a Navy plane?”

“I’m afraid that’s classified.”

“All the good stuff is.”

To his enormous credit, Max’s father never held his wife’s death against his son. If anything, he seemed to love him more for having lost her, maybe because mother and son were so alike—and not just in physical appearance.

“Something on your mind, Max?”

“Why do you ask?”

“You tend to crack jokes when your thoughts are serious. Are you sleeping okay?”

“Do I seem like I’m not?”

“You look a little tired. There are circles under your eyes.”

“You can see them through my glasses?”

“I’ve got pretty good eyesight. Remember your father, the astronaut?”

“But you’re older now.”

“I’m not older. Just better.”

This was the way the two typically communicated, through playful banter, skimming along with their words, both careful not to break the water’s surface and enter deeper territory.

For better or worse, Max resisted the urge to share his dreams with his father, the one person in his life who might have understood them, and instead, just before Thanksgiving break, made the mistake of confiding in Ms. Bridgewater, the school counselor.

“You think your dreams are *what*?” she asked, sitting upright and alert in the chair across from his in her little office two doors down from the cafeteria, when he began to relate his odd experiences.

“*Real*?” he answered with the tone of a question, suddenly unsure of himself.

Trying to remain professional, Ms. Bridgewater patted her permed blonde hair and put on a strained, lipstick smile. “Max, honey. Dreams are not real.”

“None of them?”

“Not a one.”

“How do you know?”

“I just do. Everybody does,” she commented with the kind of nervous laugh people sometimes use in the presence of a slightly “unhinged” person.

“Zhuangzi didn’t,” said Max, plucking up his courage.

“Zhuang *Who?*”

“Zhuangzi. A Chinese philosopher. He’s the guy who couldn’t figure out whether he was a man dreaming of a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming of himself.”

“Under no circumstances, Max, does an obscure philosopher’s question prove the reality of dreams.”

“People have had visions in dreams that came true, Ms. Bridgewater. Did you know that? People have seen things in dreams they couldn’t have known about otherwise.”

Before responding, Ms. Bridgewater drew a deep breath. “Max, I’m going to put this as plainly as possible. This dream thing is totally in your head.”

“Just hear me out, Ms. Bridgewater. I’ve got proof. I find things in my dreams and bring them back.”

“Things?”

“Objects. Objects that don’t belong in Florida.”

For a moment, she appeared on the verge of debating the point—only to decide at the last instant not to add fuel to the fire by encouraging him. “That’s impossible, Max. But I have to give you credit: you have a *very* lively imagination!”

This she said with the obvious intent of ending the conversation and sending Max on his merry way. She turned back to her desk and straightened her cup of pens and holiday poinsettia with the tips of her painted fingernails.

When Max didn’t budge, she turned back and asked, “Is there anything else you’d like to discuss today?”

This would have been the moment for Max to cut his losses—to grin, shrug, and treat the whole subject like a bit of make-believe that just got out of hand. That would have been the wise, the prudent thing to do.

But Max had far too much of his mother’s feisty nature for that. And nothing got under his skin like being talked down to by an adult who knew less about the topic of conversation than he did.

In addition to the characteristics already mentioned, there were two other important aspects of Max’s dreams, especially many of the ones he had been having for the past several months leading up to his twelfth birthday.

First, many of his recent dreams involved temporal displacement, or

time travel. Such dreams undeniably took place in the past or future, sometimes the distant past or future, other times closer to the present.

And second, a lot of these dreams were even more striking than usual because they featured actual people Max knew and apparently real events from their lives—in the past or future.

The previous night, clear as day, Max had dreamed of Ms. Bridgewater as a young girl of ten or eleven with torn blue jeans and dirty bare feet. “You grew up in the mountains, Ms. Bridgewater, didn’t you?” he said.

“Why, yes, I did, Max. Near Johnson City, Tennessee. A long time ago.”

“You lived on a tobacco farm. Back in the days when there were many small tobacco farms in the mountains. When lots of people still smoked cigarettes before it was proven that smoking causes cancer.”

“That’s right,” said a surprised Ms. Bridgewater in a thin, faraway voice. “I did.”

“But not your father,” continued Max. “Even though he farmed tobacco to make a living, he hated cigarettes because he suspected them of having caused your mother’s lung cancer.”

“How do you *know* all of this?”

“Your house was purplish, sort of U-shaped, surrounded by a tall boxwood hedge. Your mother died in the big bedroom overlooking the deck.”

“Max, have you been talking with my sister? Did she *contact* you for some reason?”

“I can imagine how you must have felt when she was gone. I’m sure you didn’t know what to do with your feelings. You lived beside the tobacco field, which was separated from the woods by a tiny creek. In the fall, you preferred hunting chinquapins to helping your father in the tobacco.”

“How do you know about chinquapins? They don’t tend to grow this far south.”

“That was where he caught you smoking right after she passed away. Red-handed. In the woods where there were chinquapins. He tanned your hide that day. He grabbed a hickory switch and whipped you until you bled through the legs of your jeans.”

“I never told *anybody* that story. Not even my sister. *How* did you know about my daddy whipping me, Max?!”

He could sense that his story had deeply upset Ms. Bridgewater, whose face was bright red from a mixture of anger, shame, and sorrow.

Being brutally punished by her father for smoking after her mother’s passing had driven a wedge in their relationship, one that had widened over the years—to the point that for nearly two decades the two hardly ever spoke before he, too, was gone.

## SNOOZE

Max was unaware of these subsequent details. But intuiting that he had accidentally poured salt on a still open wound, he felt genuinely sorry to have revealed the contents of his dream in such a sudden and unexpected fashion.

Realizing with a start that Ms. Bridgewater was in tears, her head bobbing in her hands, he stood up and approached her hunched form.

He was in the process of touching her jerking shoulder and apologizing, when she looked at him with bloodshot eyes and said, “Go back to class.”

“I’ll need a note.”

“Here it is,” she said, scrawling it out and handing it to him.

“Thanks. I’m sorry, Ms. Bridgewater.”

“Go now please.”

Max exited the office, closing the door gently behind him, and stood in the echoing hallway for a moment with his note and a heavy heart. Under no circumstances had he meant to cause Ms. Bridgewater any more pain; he just wanted her to believe him.

Before returning to geography, he reached in his pocket and fished out a handful of miniature chestnuts, known as chinquapins, he had thought to use as evidence, and dropped them in a trashcan.





In the aftermath of Max's encounter with Ms. Bridgewater, Thanksgiving had been the calm before the storm. He spent it with his father, who had most of the long holiday weekend off from "classified" missions in the *Tempus Fugit* and was in excellent spirits.

"Be sure you don't eat too much turkey, Snooze," he had joked while carving the enormous, sizzling bird. "All that tryptophan might make you sleep forever. You know what tryptophan is?"

"You mean the amino acid released by protein during digestion that helps produce serotonin and makes you sleepy?"

"God, you're so much like her," his father said, as if to himself, with a smile that somehow managed to be both proud and wistful.

"That's a big bird for just two people."

"I think we can handle it."

Max and his father had flown kites on the unseasonably cool beach in the afternoons, treating themselves to hot chocolate at their favorite little stand on the boardwalk, before returning to evenings of leftover turkey sandwiches (which did make Max gloriously drowsy) and old reruns of *Star Trek*.

"You remind me of Captain Kirk," he remarked to his father, suppressing a yawn.

"Seriously?"

"Seriously."

"Well, now that you mention it, you remind me of Dr. Spock."

“Seriously?”

“Seriously.”

Max made the Vulcan symbol of blessing by parting the second and third fingers of his left hand. “Live long and prosper.”

“And boldly go where nobody has gone before!”

For three nights running, Max hung on as long as he could—snuggled against his father’s side smelling Old Spice on the couch in front of the TV—before the sleep of a blessed day took him and he was carried like a sack of beans down the hallway and tucked in bed.

But on Sunday, the air started going out of Max’s emotional balloon when Captain Diver had to fly another mission and, just after he left, Aunt Nadine landed in their home with a thud to babysit. “I’ve asked your father I don’t know how many times to get a desk job,” she said, bustling in the door with her suitcase, by way of hello.

“Why?” asked Max, dispensing with formalities himself. “He would hate it.”

“For starters, he’s no spring chicken. And you’re only getting older.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“A young man your age needs a strong masculine presence in his life, Max.”

He had followed her into the guest bedroom, where she plopped her suitcase on the bed and glanced several times around the room to get her bearings. She had a way—half annoying, half comical—of looking out of place wherever she was.

“But under the circumstances,” she continued, removing her jacket and hanging it neatly in the closet, “I think he’s probably done the best he could. Lord knows being an only parent is no cakewalk. That said, I don’t know what he’s doing down there halfway to South America in that puddle-jumper. I can tell you one thing: he’s not delivering the mail.”

Max had spent enough time around Aunt Nadine to realize she often spoke around what she really meant to say—and he had developed a fairly keen ability to read between her lines.

In this case, she was trying to communicate that since Max had already lost his mother, it was irresponsible of his father to risk his neck on a regular basis, when he could snap his fingers and take an administrative job with NASA that would be a lot closer . . . and safer.

Max spent a subdued, depressed evening with his aunt, who read her Bible and wouldn’t let him watch *Star Trek*, and then all heck broke loose Monday morning when school resumed.

He had a sinking feeling in his gut, a premonition of something bad about to happen, as he walked, backpack heavy with books, under the swaying palm trees the six blocks—four down the beach and two back from it—to John F. Kennedy Elementary School.

On entering the grounds, his intuitive sense of a storm on the horizon grew stronger. People seemed to be giving him funnier-than-usual looks.

“Hey everybody, it’s Woo-woo Maxwell!” Doug Biggins, JFK’s best athlete and resident bully, greeted him in the crowded hallway near the lockers to a round of conspiratorial snickering from those listening. “Got any visions for us today, Woo-woo?”

“Woo-woo” was a new nickname. Max was wondering where it came from, and what exactly it meant, when he was sternly tapped on the shoulder and turned to find Mr. Priestly, the principal, scowling above him. “Max, I need to see you in my office.”

“Right now?”

“Right now.”

Gossip travels fast in any school. Bad news in particular has a way of exceeding the speed of light, so that everybody seems to know everything before anyone has uttered anything.

Exactly how the whole student body knew about Max’s meeting with Ms. Bridgewater would remain a mystery. He suspected word had traveled via the teachers’ lounge to select students’ ears, and thence along a whispering grapevine until it was common knowledge he had freaked out the school counselor with his spooky talk.

Ms. Bridgewater, suggesting that Max suffered from a “severe mental disorder,” possibly schizophrenia, and might be in need of medication, had reported the incident to Mr. Priestly, who was concerned enough to take immediate action. “You understand, Max,” he told the bewildered eleven-year-old seated in his office, peering at the boy over his spectacles, “I’m just trying to do the right thing here.”

“But Mr. Priestly, I didn’t do anything wrong.”

“You acted very strange, Max, and frightened Ms. Bridgewater.”

“I didn’t mean to. It just ... happened. I’m sorry.”

“How long have you been having these ... *dreams*?”

“All my life. Well, ever since I can remember.”

“And you think they might actually be ... *real*?”

Max knew it was absolutely the wrong thing to say, even though it was the truth, as soon as he spoke the word: “Yes.”

Mr. Priestly’s pale moon of a face seemed a bit shaken by Max’s frank response. “It doesn’t strike you as odd that you can’t tell the difference between reality and ... *dreams*?”

“But I *can* tell the difference. This is reality right now.”

Mr. Priestly appeared to consider this new information for a moment. “Is there any history of ... mental problems in your family, Max?”

“None that I know of.”

“I’m going to have to contact your father.”

“I was afraid you’d say that.”

“It has to be done.”

“He’s on a mission right now.”

“A mission?”

“Navy stuff.”

“When will he be back?”

“Tomorrow.”

“Okay. I’ll be in touch tomorrow. You can go now.”

Max stood and was halfway out the door when Mr. Priestly called after him. “Max?”

“Yes, Mr. Priestly?”

“Try to be ... normal.”





“Why so pale and wan?” a voice with an exaggerated British accent inquired as Max slumped against the school wall at recess. Nearly all the other boys were engaged in games of physical skill, mostly basketball and soccer, which never much interested Max.

Squinting in the slanted sunlight of early December, he looked up at twin reflections of himself in Tuesday Monday’s saucer-sized glasses.

In both distorted images, he stood out as puny and unathletic, pathetic and defeated, with his own fairly large glasses like bug eyes and wooly hair ruining any chance of ever being able to consider himself attractive. “Why so pale and what?” he asked.

“Wan,” answered Tuesday in her normal accent, grinning from ear to ear with big teeth in a natural manner that struck Max as unnervingly ... genuine. “It’s poetry. It means lifeless.”

“You got that right.”

Tuesday Monday was the smartest student at JFK—and it wasn’t even close. Especially in language arts, the teachers were unanimous in thinking she was some kind of prodigy. She knew the answers even to the trick questions, usually before they were asked.

She had paid the price for her precociousness by being ostracized as the resident nerd ever since she showed up and enrolled, fresh in from somewhere faraway, like Oklahoma, in fourth grade.

Max had never actually had a conversation with her. He wasn't sure why—but he suspected himself of having judged her, like the others, simply for being different.

Now that the shoe was on the other foot and he was being judged, he felt a tinge of hypocrisy, which produced a hint of shame that reddened his cheeks.

Against a backdrop of kids running helter-skelter and making noise, Tuesday was still grinning quietly above Max in patched corduroys and Birkenstocks, staring down at him with enormous gray eyes framed by her own curly hair, sort of a yellow ochre, snailing down the sides of her plump, lively face.

"You ... feel like sitting down?" asked Max, politely if a little awkwardly, indicating the sidewalk beside him.

"Sure," she replied, plopping down in yoga position, legs crossed and back straight, not even touching the wall. "So, do you really have dreams that come true?"

"Is that what you wanted to know?"

"It's one thing I wanted to know."

"Is that what they're all saying?"

"Not all. Some of them."

"I bet it's not all they're saying."

"No. It's not."

Something in her relaxed tone and body language, which seemed utterly devoid of anything resembling a hidden agenda, made Max feel comfortable opening up—at least a little. "Technically, my dreams don't usually 'come true.'"

"What's so special about them?"

"They, uh, they're ... *real*."

"You mean lucid dreaming? Where you figure out, while dreaming, that you're in a dream?"

"How do you know about lucid dreaming?"

"My mother's an old hippy. We've got all kinds of reading material that's off the beaten path, if you get my drift."

"I get it. Look, Tuesday, I don't mind talking about this stuff with you. To be honest, it's kind of a relief. But you've got to promise you won't say anything to anyone."

"I promise. Cross my heart."

"Good. Where were we?"

"Lucid dreaming."

"Right. Well, as far as I can tell, based on my research ... That's a funny thing for a kid to say, isn't it?"

"You mean the 'based on my research' part?"

“Yeah.”

“Kind of geeky?”

“Yeah.”

“I’m cool with it.”

“Great. Anyway, as I was saying, lucid dreaming is when you simply become aware of the dream, right? Sometimes this happens naturally with people, but there are also techniques you can use to cultivate the ability.”

“Like remembering to look at your hands in your dream? That’s what Carlos Castaneda’s teacher, Don Juan, instructs him to do.”

“Who’s Carlos Castaneda?”

“A psychedelic writer. My mom has his books.”

“I don’t know. I never tried looking at my hands. I guess I just did it naturally.”

“I tried it.”

“And?”

“Didn’t work.”

“The thing is, Tuesday—why on earth were you named Tuesday?”

“Care to venture a guess?”

“You were born on a Tuesday?”

“Bingo, Ringo.”

“And your last name really is Monday?”

“Kind of wild, huh?”

“Actually, I sort of like your name. It has a nice ring.”

“Thanks. I like it, too. Care for an Altoid? They’re curiously strong.”

Max had seen but never tried Altoids. “Thanks,” he said, accepting a little white mint from the red tin and popping it in his mouth. Sure enough, it was curiously strong, just like the label said.

“If you think about it, Max, we’ve got more in common than not having any friends.”

“What else have we got in common?”

“We both have only parents. I know about what happened to your mom. I mean, your father’s a celebrity. There’s a biography and everything.”

“You actually read it?”

“Yeah. You?”

“No. I figured I already knew most of it. Where’s your old man?”

“Long gone.”

“Dead?”

“Not that I’m aware of. I never knew who he was. I don’t think my mother did either, if you get my meaning.”

“Something to do with the hippy thing?”

“Exactly. She used to live in a commune in New Mexico. She’s changed a lot over the years, though. We get along pretty well.”

"I get along with my only parent, too."

"He seems like a good man. His biographer spoke highly of him."

"Let's just hope he keeps his cool tomorrow. He's not going to be a happy camper."

"Parent-teacher conference?"

"Worse. Parent-principal conference. Do you think I'm crazy, Tuesday?"

"Crazy? As in schizophrenic?"

"You heard?"

"Everybody did."

"Of course. Ms. Bridgewater really has it out for me, doesn't she?"

"Seems that way. What did you *do* to her?"

"I didn't do anything. I just ... I just saw some stuff from her past that upset her."

"In a dream?"

"Yeah."

"Let me get this straight, Max. You're not just lucid dreaming; you're also seeing *visions* in your dreams?"

"If that's what you want to call them."

"Wow. That's super cool."

"You really think so?"

"Definitely. Absolutely. I'd *love* to see visions like that. Who wouldn't?"

"Uh, everybody except you?"

"What did you see concerning Ms. Bridgewater?"

"It's not important. There's more, Tuesday."

"More?"

"About my dreams. I ... bring stuff back."

"Stuff?"

"Things that don't belong here, in Florida. Objects totally out of context. I have a box full of bizarre items hidden in my closet."

"Like what?"

"A Venetian Carnival mask. Some kind of antique Celtic bracelet. A tiny ceremonial statue from Easter Island."

"For real?"

"For real."

"Far out! This is *way* more than just lucid dreaming, Max."

"That's what I've been trying to tell you. So what's the verdict? You think I'm crazy?"

"Actually, not at all. I'll side with Emily Dickinson."

"Emily Dickinson?"

"Come on, Max. We just studied her. *Much Madness is divinest Sense ... To a discerning Eye ... Much Sense—the starkest Madness ... 'Tis the Majority ...*

## SNOOZE

*In this, as All, prevail ... Assent—and you are sane ... Demur—you're straightway dangerous ... And handled with a Chain."*

Max reflected for a moment. "So if I understand, a lot of so-called insane people are perfectly sane?"

"It's the way things are."

"And the crazy people actually run everything?"

"Exactly."

From inside the school building, the bell suddenly rang, loud and shrill, signaling the end of recess. Over the course of his talk with Tuesday, possibly the best conversation of his young life, Max had completely forgotten he was at school. "I really enjoyed chatting," he said.

"Me, too. I like to chat."

"We should do this more often."

"Then let's do it."

They stood up and started inside to algebra. "And Tuesday?"

"Yeah, Max?"

"How about we be each other's friend?"

"Deal."





**M**ax examined his hands with their long, graceful fingers waving like pale sea grasses in front of his face from under the covers and, though he was still in bed, instantly knew he was dreaming.

Breathing from the bottom of his diaphragm, like yogis are taught to do, and pushing down with his mind, he floated up and hovered, weightless, staring beneath him at his own sleeping form with its bushy eyebrows, incipient whiskers, and two unsightly pimples at the base of the elongated chin.

Otherwise, in sleep, his face was perfectly smooth and relaxed. Besides the slight undulation of his breath, only his eyes were moving, jitterbugging manically under malleable lids.

In one of many epiphanies, small and large, he had experienced over the course of his dreams, Max realized those eyes were watching him even as he was staring at them.

With this thought, he glanced at the window, outside whose curtains the first, barest hint of daylight was beginning to drain the pitch out of the sky. Knowing his father would wake him soon, he made the most of what was left of the night—zipping out into the cool December air in his pajamas and heading south toward Cuba.

As he approached the Keys, little tropical islands dotting the Straits of Florida like emeralds he had flown over numerous times in real life, dawn was streaking the sky with yellow rays. His cheeks could feel the warmth of the sun surging up against the vast Atlantic horizon.

At that very instant, his peripheral vision registered a small craft tailed by an even smaller one on course to intersect his line of flight in the eastern distance.

Speeding up while adjusting his flight pattern, he approached the two aircraft at a sharper angle—realizing after a few seconds, with a jolt, that the lead plane was the *Tempus Fugit* piloted by his father!

The red-and-blue-striped Cessna Skyhawk was veering farther and farther east in an attempt to outrun a nasty squall preceding a nastier storm, resembling a dark octopus with spinning tentacles of clouds, blowing up from down around Puerto Rico.

Max found himself fighting the wind as well and instinctively fell in behind the *Tempus Fugit*, taking advantage of the draft like a race car driver to lessen his wind drag.

In the same motion, he became aware, once again, of the other aerial object tailing the Skyhawk—which was now roughly parallel to him at a distance of maybe two hundred yards. Imagine his astonishment when he grasped that it was no aircraft, but another person sailing through the wispy clouds beside him!

On seeing this most bizarre sight, the first thing he thought of was a story he had once read about Padre Pio—a devout Catholic priest who bore the stigmata, or Christ’s wounds, and was reportedly able to bilocate, or be in two different places at the same time.

Padre Pio, who later became a saint, was sighted by multiple eyewitnesses flying alongside Allied fighter jets during World War II, when he successfully kept the pilots from bombing a beautiful church that was no longer occupied by Axis forces.

The figure flying alongside him in his dream was still too faraway for Max to discern his (or her) features. But it was obviously an adult human flying headlong, arms outstretched, at high velocity against the wind just like him.

The storm was gaining quickly. As a group, like a phalanx of birds, the three fliers adjusted their trajectory northeast toward the island of Bermuda in a last-ditch attempt to escape the fast-approaching, spinning darkness.

Coming within a hundred yards of the other airborne person, Max made out that it was a young man—and as he got even closer, unless his eyes were playing tricks on him, he found himself staring at . . . himself!

Well, himself at eighteen, or thereabouts. Even under emergency weather conditions, Max was relieved to see that he turned out well, actually handsome, with a male version of his mother’s attractive face, no glasses, and a decent physique under faded jeans and a gray Maroon University sweatshirt.

“So that must be where I end up going to college,” he thought.

## SNOOZE

The older Max took no notice of his younger avatar, remaining singularly focused on the *Tempus Fugit*, which seemed to have lost its sense of direction and was now sailing directly *into* the storm's swirling vortex.

Max, the young boy, felt that he had to do something—but he didn't know what. He zoomed up and over the Skyhawk until he was peering down into the cockpit, where his father was adjusting instruments and repeating himself into his radio, which appeared to have gone dead.

Max shouted and shouted and banged and banged on the cockpit with his fists, but his father couldn't hear him. As they neared the outer edge of the vortex, their speed steadily increased—until there was a thunderous BOOM indicating they had broken the sound barrier.

The stormy light began to flicker in searing, multicolored strobes as the wind buffeted the three fliers left and right. The light looked like electricity riding cyclonic currents; Max could feel it, brisk and tingling, like peppermint on his skin.

Instinctively, agonizingly, he was forced to let go of the Cessna and allow it to careen forward at exponentially increasing speeds into the center of the vortex, spinning in a three-sixty as it went, with the older Max hot on its tail.

There was a nearly blinding flash, like a small atomic bomb detonating, and the *Tempus Fugit* disappeared into the impossible brightness like a stone dropped into a raging wildfire from above.

The older Max, with an alarmed but determined look on his face, hesitated briefly—before shooting forward, following Captain Diver into the empty center of the vortex, and likewise vanishing with a flash from sight.







“Wake up, Snooze! Come on, buddy. It’s just a bad dream.”  
Max sat bolt upright in bed, shaking and gasping, only to find his father seated beside him with a concerned look on his chiseled face that sported a two-day growth of salt-and-pepper beard. “Dad?”

“It’s me, Max. I’m right here.”

“Oh, Dad!” Overcome with emotion, Max grabbed his father’s neck like a three-year-old and tried, unsuccessfully, to hold back the tears. “I thought I’d lost you!”

“It’s okay. I haven’t gone anywhere.”

Slowly, Max composed himself, noting as his eyes dried that the room seemed brighter than usual. “What time is it?” he wondered aloud.

“A little after ten.”

“Ten? As in, o’clock?”

“I got a phone call from Mr. Priestly early this morning right after I got back—”

“From your ‘classified’ mission?”

“Yes. Look, we don’t have to talk about this right now. Do you feel okay? You were squirming pretty hard there with some kind of nightmare.”

Max felt his chest, drenched with sweat, inside his damp pajama top. “Yeah, I’m okay. I’m fine. Really. Why did you let me sleep in?”

“There was no sense in waking you earlier. I’m going to take you to school with me after I get cleaned up.”

“So that you can look good for your parent-principal meeting?”

“At least smell good.”

Never had Max appreciated his father’s quick wit more than just then.

“I suppose you’re wondering what’s going on with your son?”

“That’s ... putting it lightly. Care to enlighten me, Max?”

“I didn’t lie to Ms. Bridgewater, if that means anything.”

“It does mean something. Go on.” When Max didn’t continue, his father tried to reassure him. “Look. You’re my child. We’ll get through this. If this is some kind of ... *mental* problem, I’ll do everything in my power to help.”

“It’s *not* some kind of mental problem. The only people who have mental problems, it seems, are Ms. Bridgewater and Mr. Priestly.”

Captain Diver actually laughed out loud. “I’ve definitely felt that way about my superiors before. I just didn’t have the guts to say it.” Another silence ensued. “Tell me, Max, what’s this about your dreams? You think they might actually be *happening*?”

This question, like ice water splashed in his face, immediately called to mind the terrifying dream Max had just lived through—and he burst into tears again.

“Did I say something wrong?”

“No, Dad. You never say anything wrong.”

His father laughed again. “Well, that’s good news. I was beginning to feel like I’d been born with my foot in my mouth.”

“You seriously want to know about my dreams?”

“I think I need to know about them.”

“Okay. You asked for it. They’re *real*. That’s what they are.”

“Your dreams are real?”

“Yes.”

“All right. I’m going to do what your mother always urged me to do and suspend disbelief for the moment. Just for the sake of discussion, how exactly are your dreams real?”

With the exception of his most recent dream, which he kept to himself, Max proceeded to relate the progression of his dreaming career: how his dreams began, how they intensified, how they started to cross the line into the waking world, and how lately they had centered on actual people and scenarios.

He had simply dreamed of a painful episode from Ms. Bridgewater’s girlhood, he explained, and made the mistake of sharing it with her out of the blue when she wouldn’t believe that his dreams weren’t just dreams.

“I can see how something like that would upset a person,” admitted his father.

“Me, too. Now. I said I was sorry. I’d take it back if I could.”

“You realize, Max, all of this sounds a bit farfetched?”

“People used to believe the earth was flat. They considered the idea of a round earth ‘farfetched.’”

“Yes, I know.”

“I’ve got proof,” said Max, getting out of bed and fishing the Lego box out from behind the sweaters in his closet.

Once again his father attempted to keep the conversation as light as possible. “Look,” he quipped, “I like Legos as much as the next guy. But I hardly consider them proof of anything.”

“Ha, ha.”

“What am I looking at?” asked Captain Diver, staring at the brown *sacha inchi* seeds about the size of marbles his son had placed on his outstretched palm.

“Incan peanuts.”

“Incan ... peanuts?”

“From Peru. And this,” said Max, showing him the wooden carving resembling a skeletal alien with a goatee, “is a Kava Kava Moai statue. From Easter Island.”

“Easter Island?”

“It’s ceremonial.”

“Where did you get these things?”

“Exactly. Here’s a Tibetan prayer flag. This is a Carnival mask from Venice. This obsidian arrowhead was found near the Pyramid of the Sun ...”

“Wait a second. Are you trying to tell me you brought this whole box of things back from your dreams?”

“Not all at once.”

His father sat still and quiet for a long while, maybe thirty seconds, digesting this new information. “Nobody gave you these things?” he asked finally.

“Nope.”

“And you didn’t ...”

“*Steal* them?”

“I was going to say *buy* them. I don’t believe you’d steal anything.”

“Think about it, Dad. My allowance wouldn’t even cover the shipping.”

His father smiled and said, “Touché.”

“So do you believe I’m crazy?”

“I ... don’t know what to believe.”

“You think I’m lying?”

“No. I definitely don’t think you’re lying.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Well, first I’m going to have a chat with Mr. Priestly.”

“He’s going to tell you I’m crazy.”

“Probably.”

“Then what?”

“I’m going to speak with Dr. Morrow.”

“Great. He’ll probably put me on some kind of ADD medication that will make me truly delusional.”

“I’m not so sure about that, Max. Let’s just say Dr. Morrow’s area of expertise is ... *aligned* with the sort of thing you describe.”

“Aligned?”

“That’s all I can say about it.”

“More classified business?”

“I’m afraid so.”

“Wonderful.”

“Sorry. I wish I could tell you more.”

“Me, too.”

“So, are you ready to get on with our day and put the unpleasant part behind us, Max?”

“Ready as I’ll ever be.”

“Good. Hang in there. I’ll grab a quick shower and make us some oatmeal. I’m starving.”



**T**hat Friday, the last day before Christmas break, in celebration of the holidays, there were no afternoon classes and everybody was enjoying a glorified post-lunch recess until school let out at three.

Max, who had endured the dreaded parent-principal conference (which led nowhere and decided nothing) earlier in the week, was still waiting for his father to have a chat with Dr. Morrow and deliver his verdict on his son's mental condition.

In the meantime, Max and Tuesday were seated at their usual sidewalk spot discussing subjects well beyond the general purview of sixth grade. "Want an orange?" she asked. "I've got one in my bag we could split."

"No thanks. I'm not hungry."

"So tell me again exactly what you saw in your dream," she said, excitedly popping an Altoid in her mouth and offering the tin to Max.

"It was some kind of vortex," he said, accepting a peppermint absentmindedly while attempting to articulate the intense imagery of his recent dream in which his father—and apparently, an older version of himself—disappeared into the eye of a hurricane. "It was like a gigantic whirlwind. Some kind of ... portal."

"You mean like a dimensional doorway—a stargate?"

"Yeah. Like a wormhole leading somewhere else."

"Groovy!"

"I guess. It was actually kind of terrifying. You know, Tuesday, I never realized you had a tattoo."

Her grass-stained corduroys had slid up her calf to reveal a small, beautifully intricate mermaid, with hair like twisted Celtic knots and ornate scales like ancient armor, just above the inside of her ankle. “My mom gave it to me. Because of my middle name.”

“Which is?”

“Serena. As in ‘siren.’”

“You mean like a police siren?”

“No, dummy. Like the mermaids who trapped Odysseus.”

“The Greek sailor?”

“One and the same.”

“Your *mom* gave you that?”

“She’s an ink artist. Among other things.”

“It’s really good. I mean, if you like that sort of thing.”

“You don’t like it?”

“That’s not what I meant. I really do like it. I just had never thought about tattoos much.”

“We come from different worlds, don’t we?”

“In some ways.”

“So what did you look like?”

“Come again?”

“At eighteen. In your dream.”

“Oh. I ... I was wearing an old gray sweatshirt with ‘Maroon University’ in maroon letters on it.”

“Seriously? That’s an Ivy League school. And it’s at the top of my list of colleges. They let you design your own curriculum.”

“That would suit you well.”

“It would suit you well, too.”

“Maybe.”

“Hey, Woo-woo! Get up off your butt and come play some hoops with the boys! Or would you rather just sit there like a sissy?”

The protective bubble created by Max and Tuesday’s conversation burst as Doug Biggins walked right through it into their shared airspace. “Don’t you want to play, Woo? We need another sacrificial lamb for the opposing team.”

Despite his brawn, athletic prowess and perfectly groomed blond hair, Doug was far from stupid. For a bully, he had a surprisingly big vocabulary—and was an expert at getting under one’s skin.

“I think I’ll pass,” said Max.

“Pass what? Gas? That’s called flatulence,” said Doug.

“Piss off, Doug,” said Tuesday.

“Or you’ll do what, little miss four-eyes? Hit me with a sonnet?”

“Leave her out of this,” said Max.

“Or *you*’ll do what? I’d love to see what Woo-woo Maxwell could do to me.”

Here was yet another occasion, eerily similar to his disastrous interview with Ms. Bridgewater, when Max clearly grasped, in no uncertain terms, the polarized choice being presented to him.

Either he could kowtow to Doug’s superior strength and say nothing, which might save his hide while merely damaging his pride; or he could throw caution to the winds and stand up for himself and his friend, the devil be damned. “Hold my glasses,” he told Tuesday, removing them and handing them to her.

“Put aside this masculine ego crap, Max. It’s not worth it. He’s going to cream you!”

“*Masculine* ego? Obviously, you never knew my mother.”

Sensing a fight brewing, a crowd of children—distorted and out of focus owing to Max’s myopia—had stopped playing and gathered like murmuring vultures along the sidewalk.

Doug stood nearly six feet tall and once had actually dunked a basketball, which made him a living legend at JFK, where he ruled the playground with a heart of stone and an iron fist. “Get him, Doug!” someone yelled.

Max went down on the grass like an autumn leaf with one punch (which he hardly saw coming) to the left eye and bridge of the nose—at which point the crowd erupted in guttural urgings like drunken bettors at a prize fight.

“Is that all you’ve got, Woo?” said Doug, towering over him. “I’ve seen punching bags offer more resistance!” He kicked his fallen opponent’s ribs with the toe of his sneaker. “Get your puny ass up and *fight* me!”

With his good (so to speak) eye, Max watched dazedly as an orange struck Doug, though not hard enough to faze him, on the side of the head just above the ear. “Get away from him!” yelled Tuesday, who must have thrown the orange.

“I’ll deal with you later, four-eyes,” Doug snarled at her.

Max had never been in physical combat before. After the initial shock of being punched and kicked, like diving into arctic water, everything went sort of numb. In fact, he temporarily passed out.

During his unconscious state, it dawned on him that the primal, ferric taste on his tongue was blood. In his mind’s eye, he touched his left nostril and saw the glistening red on his fingertips. There it was—his own blood, pressed right out of his membranes.

Perhaps it was the blood, or the shock of seeing it, that pushed Max’s sleeping self over the edge. Somehow he found himself standing again. He

had the distinct impression he was sleepwalking. Sensing another drubbing, the crowd went wild with hooting and hollering.

As Doug approached like a heavyweight intent on delivering a knockout, the world suddenly slowed down. With crystal clear vision, Max found himself watching everything in super slow motion, as he sometimes did—accidentally, as it were—in his nighttime dreams.

During the time it took Doug to rear back and propel his fist forward, Max was able to compose himself. He didn't technically move, except to breathe deeply with his diaphragm, as the same vaguely luminous body he sometimes moved about in while dreaming seemed to step out of his skin and deflect Doug's blow with a forearm.

The alarmed look on the bully's face was priceless. Max's Dreambody—a term he would learn years later—proceeded to strike him, at lightning speed, multiple times like a black belt: under the chin, in the collarbone, across the back of the head, in the ribcage, in the abdomen.

Doug went down on both knees, wheezing with the wind knocked out of him and defeated for the first time in his life. Max's Dreambody stepped back into his own astonished skin and mysteriously disappeared from his sight—which straightaway reverted to blurry as he became wide awake.

Just like that, the fight was over. Apparently, nobody except Max had seen anything. Rather, they had watched as Doug tossed backward and forward like a ragdoll, then doubled over and collapsed to the ground.

Doug's actions were so bizarre and exaggerated many of those assembled thought he was goofing around and merely pantomiming a fight—especially since Max was just standing there playing the spectator with the rest of them.

"You really are a freak!" Doug, obviously in pain, managed to gasp.

It took a minute for the reality of the situation to sink in on a collective level. Then, somebody went in search of Mr. Lipton, the science teacher, who was supposedly supervising the playground.

"You okay, Max?" asked Tuesday, stanching his bleeding nose with tissues from her backpack.

"I'll be fine."

"You look terrible."

"It's nothing. Really."

"Here. Put these on," she said, sliding Max's glasses onto his sore face.

"Ouch!"

"Sorry."

"It's okay."

"That was incredible, Max."

"What was incredible?"

"You know what was incredible."

## SNOOZE

“You mean you saw that?”

“I don’t know what I saw. I saw something, that’s all I know. And it was pretty incredible.”

“What are you doing?”

“Getting you the heck away from these savages.” Tuesday had scooped up Max’s backpack with her own and grabbed him by the arm and was resolutely leading him away from the school grounds.

“But school isn’t out yet, Tuesday.”

“It’s out for us.”

“Where are you taking me?”

“Home. I think it’s time you met my mom.”







**M**ax and Tuesday waited for the adrenaline rush of the fight with Doug to subside, perhaps ten minutes spent walking away from the beach toward downtown, before speaking again. “You sure you’re okay, Max?” she asked finally. “It looks like you’re starting to get a shiner.”

“Seriously? I’ve never had a black eye before.”

“You remind me of one of those dogs with only one white eye.”

“Thanks. That makes me feel a lot better.”

“I think your nose has stopped bleeding, though.”

“Count your blessings. That’s what I always say.”

“You realize there will be repercussions for skipping out like we just did?”

“What’s the worst they can do, Tuesday? Suspend us? Personally, I could use a break from that Animal Farm.”

“A literary reference! I didn’t know you had it in you, Max!”

Despite himself, Max tried to laugh—which nearly doubled him over with pain in his ribcage. Instead of laughing, he wheezed like a smoker. Tuesday stopped grinning and said, “He kicked the crap out of your ribs.”

“He sure did. I hope they’re just badly bruised and not broken.”

“You think you can make it?”

“How much farther?”

“Seven more blocks.”

“I’ll give it my best shot. Here, let me carry my own backpack.”

“No way.”

That was just as well, since he probably couldn't have managed. After another couple blocks in the direction of downtown, Tuesday commented, as if speaking out loud what they were both thinking, "Doug Biggins. What a dingleberry."

"My sentiments precisely."

"He's the one who's going to get in real trouble, you know."

"You think?"

"Absolutely. You didn't do anything."

"We both know I did something, Tuesday."

"That's true. But nobody else does. What *did* you do?"

"Heck if I know. It just happened. Things just happen with me."

"I'm starting to understand that."

"What did you see?"

"I'm not sure, Max. It was as if your ... spirit stepped out of you and took out Doug."

"That's what I saw, too."

"Has that ever happened before?"

"Nope."

"Did you mean for it to happen?"

"No. Well, maybe a little. I don't know, Tuesday. Maybe I am a freak."

"Stop badmouthing my friend or I'll find another orange to throw."

"That was a great shot. You hit him square in the head."

"I know! Could you believe it? I've never thrown anything at anyone in my life!"

The two children had entered what Max's Aunt Nadine would have called a "sketchy" part of town, with somewhat rundown houses lining the streets and generally less green and more litter than was to be found in his upscale suburban neighborhood.

Max felt a ripple of anxiety as a tall black man wearing a green hood, low-riding jeans and untied Nikes approached on the sidewalk. "Yo, Tuesday, how's it?" he said.

"Gordon!" she exclaimed. "Where've you *been*?"

"Nawlins," he said, which after a couple of seconds Max decrypted to mean, "New Orleans."

"Let me see that last tattoo Mom gave you. Do you mind? I never got to look at it dry."

Gordon, who looked about thirty, smiled a congenial smile bright with silver and gold teeth as he pulled up his sleeve to reveal an impressive tattoo of a raven in flight with the sun in its beak. "Dat's some fine work," he said. "Your old lady's got talent. And she's fine, too. You tell her what I said."

“I will. It really is gorgeous,” said Tuesday, who explained to Max, “The design is based on an Athabaskan legend of the raven who gave light to the world.”

“Athabaskan?”

“Native Alaskan.”

“Who’s yo friend, Tuesday? He looks kinda rough.”

“I’m sorry. Gordon, this is Max. Max, Gordon.”

“Nice to meet you,” said Max.

“Same here. You alright? I hope the other dude looks worse. Or did Mistress Tuesday open a can on you from jealousy?”

“Oh, stop it!” laughed Tuesday. “We’re only friends. Let’s just say the other fellow won’t be picking on Max anymore.”

“Good. That’s what I like to hear. Ya’ll take care, now.”

“You, too, Gordon!” said Tuesday.

Max had a sense, not unlike that of his dreams, of entering a parallel universe related to, yet distinctly different from, his everyday world.

The uncanny sensation of slipping into an alternate reality grew stronger as they covered the final three blocks to Tuesday’s house—which, from the outside, looked more like a haunted house than a place where normal people lived. Well, maybe not *normal*.

A rambling, three-story, white Victorian with mahogany accents, the Monday home struck Max as more of a magic gingerbread house in a primeval forest than a real residence on a contemporary street corner.

Yet despite its two medieval turrets and three bay windows seeming to lean out and peer down over them like bulbous eyes, the overall feeling the old relic of a place gave Max was one of exhilaration rather than apprehension. “We’re here!” announced Tuesday.

“You actually live here?”

“I take it it’s a little different from your place?”

“That’s putting it mildly.”

Tuesday’s hair bounced as she skipped up the uneven wooden steps onto the slanted porch that was home to a small forest of potted plants, many of which struck Max—who had never seen most of them before—as ... exotic.

Experiencing an unexpected energy surge, he climbed the steps and followed Tuesday in the front doorway, where they were immediately met by a huge black tomcat with exceedingly long whiskers.

Tuesday set the two backpacks on a nearby beanbag and scooped up the tomcat, scratching him behind the ears—which, judging by his loud purring, he enjoyed tremendously. “Max, this is Merlin.”

“Hello, Merlin.”

“Take him. He won’t hurt you.”

Max, who had never had a pet of any kind, could only think to say, “Are you sure?”—before Merlin was in his arms staring up at him impatiently.

“Scratch him behind the ears.”

Max started scratching—and Merlin started purring.

“I can tell he likes you,” said Tuesday.

“Tell him I like him, too.”

“There’s no need. He understands English perfectly well.”

If the vortex from Max’s dream had *seemed* like a different world, the inside of the Monday home *was* a different world. But he had very little time to take it all in, other than to note a particular smell like that of old books mixed with boiling herbs and fresh paint, before he was greeted by the owner of the house.

With waves of scarlet hair framing her Botticelli face and a multicolored scrollwork of tattoos too complicated to process decorating both graceful arms to the wrists, she emerged like a sunlit ruby from behind an Arab-looking curtain on the other side of a shelf stacked with antique tomes.

“Max, this is my mom,” said Tuesday. “Mom, this is Max. You remember, my friend from school. He needs your help.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Ms. Monday,” said Max, almost too flabbergasted—by everything, but especially Ms. Monday—to speak.

“Good gracious,” she said, foregoing formalities and ignoring, for the moment, Max’s injuries, as she stared intently at him with Tuesday’s same incisive gray eyes. “Your aura is *huge!*”

“My aura?” Max managed to respond.

“The subtle energy field around your body,” said Ms. Monday. “It’s absolutely enormous—and almost blindingly bright. I’ve never seen anything to compare.”

“Mom,” said Tuesday, reprovably. “Can we get to his aura in a little while—like, after we tend to his wounds?”

“Right you are. How on earth did this happen? He looks awful!”

“He got in a fight at school.”

“Well, judging by the look of things, he didn’t win.”

“Yes, in fact, he did. That’s part of why he needs your help.”

With any other people and in any other situation, Max would have been irritated at being discussed in the third person to his face like a toddler. But for one reason or another, it didn’t bother him, coming from these two kind people in that one-of-a-kind house.

And then, just as he was able to identify the odd sensation of gratitude in his heart for having someone besides his father sincerely care for him, he blanked out cold from shock and exhaustion on the hardwood floor.



**M**ax awoke from a mercifully dreamless state, only to find himself unable to see—at which point he realized something cool and clammy was covering his eyes.

He reached up and discovered what felt like some kind of giant leaf draped across his face. When he removed it, sure enough, it turned out to be a wilted white cabbage leaf, slightly damp from water and smelling vaguely of vinegar.

He was stretched on his back on a bright bed in a bright room, whose specific details remained blurry without his glasses. Palpating his ribs where he had been kicked, he discovered the area had been bandaged with a poultice, which left his fingers slightly sticky.

“You’re awake!” Tuesday’s unmistakably cheery voice came from the indistinct figure that had just entered the room.

“Where am I?”

“My room. Mom and I carried you up here after you fainted. You weigh more than you look.”

“How long have I been out?”

“Barely an hour. Just long enough for us to tend to your bruises. The eye already looks better.”

“Really?”

“White cabbage. It’s marvelous for facial bruises. You just break the ribs and submerge it in hot water with vinegar. Fortunately, your own ribs aren’t broken.”

“How do you know?”

“Kinesiology.”

“Kinesiology?”

“Muscle testing. It’s a way of asking the body what’s happening with it. You can even muscle test on behalf of somebody else. Your ribs are just bruised. We put some arnica in the poultice to help with the pain and swelling.”

Tuesday came into focus as she sat down on the bed beside him. Despite the harrowing ordeal at school, and her best friend collapsing in her living room, she looked typically upbeat. “Here. These should help,” she said, taking the cabbage leaf from his hand and sliding his glasses on his face.

Instantly, his surroundings coalesced into a chaotic menagerie of a bedroom (so different from his own Spartan quarters) that appeared to have grown up organically, rather than being planned in any deliberate way.

There was a telescope on a tripod beside the tall bay window. There was a guitar featuring a Celtic pattern on the cushioned window seat. There was a ceiling-high bookshelf haphazardly stacked with classics from Dickens to Dickenson.

There was an incense burner on a coffee table flanked by two mismatched beanbags. There was a paint-stained writing desk with the crusted remains from Tuesday’s breakfast of Irish pudding still in the bowl and an Earl Grey teabag still in the mug.

There were dozens of shoes scattered on the floor, none of which seemed to be near its mate. There were what appeared to be theatrical costumes strewn hither and thither. And there were exactly—Max counted them—twelve helium-filled balloons still nearly full stuck like colored gumballs to the ceiling.

“What do you think?” asked Tuesday.

“About what?”

“My room.”

“It’s ... bright.”

“You like it?”

“Yeah. I like it.”

“Me, too.”

Anticipating more pain than he ended up experiencing, Max sat up stiffly.

“How do you feel?” wondered Tuesday.

“I’ve felt better. Overall, though, things could be worse. You play guitar?”

“I’m learning.”

“When was your birthday?”

“How did you know I just had a birthday?”

“The balloons. They’ve barely even deflated.”

“Very astute and grounded of you. Perfectly Capricorn. I’m Sagittarius.”

“So when was your birthday?”

“Monday. December sixteenth. Jane Austen’s birthday.”

“Who’s Jane Austen?”

“To be so smart, you don’t know anything about literature, do you?”

Max had to laugh, even though he expected his ribs would pay for it. They did—but not to the extent he feared. “You didn’t even have the decency to tell me, your one and only friend, that it was your *birthday*?”

“You had a lot on your mind.”

“Like what?”

“Uh, like the parent-principal meeting? Or have you already forgotten what had to be the worst week of your life?”

“Not the worst week. My first week was my worst week.”

“Right. Got you. Okay, the worst week you can remember.”

“I still can’t believe you didn’t tell me it was your birthday.”

“Sorry. Feel up to going downstairs? Mom’s brewing some bilberry extract in the kitchen.”

“For what?”

“You. It fortifies capillaries and stabilizes the oxygen in your system to help bruises heal faster.”

“I thought science wasn’t your strong suit.”

“It isn’t. This is herbology.”

Max’s shoes were nowhere to be found, so he followed Tuesday in sock feet. The upstairs had the feel of an old castle. You never knew when you might bump into a suit of armor (which Max literally did in the hallway) or a restless ghost (which, if one was about, kept to itself) emerging from one of many mysterious doors.

From the foot of the staircase, Max and Tuesday could hear Ms. Monday in the kitchen speaking with someone on the phone: “Yes, I realize it’s school policy to sign out students when picking them up early.”

Max’s ears pricking up, he whispered, “Oh my God. She must be talking to—”

“Hush,” said Tuesday, cutting him off and listening intently.

“You’re right, Mr. Priestly,” continued Ms. Monday. “The fault certainly wasn’t Max’s or Tuesday’s—and I trust they won’t get in trouble for my mistake. I simply forgot to sign them out when I arrived at school. I assure you it won’t happen again.”

The two kids waited for her to hang up, then waited a few more seconds, staring at each other hugely and exultantly from the bottom of the staircase, before trying to look casual entering the sunlit kitchen.

“I see you’re up and about, Max!” said Ms. Monday. “Your eye’s looking better. How are the ribs?”

“A little sore, but I’ll be okay. Thanks for your help, Ms. Monday.”

“Please. Call me Maizy.”

“Who was that on the phone?” Tuesday wondered as innocently as possible.

“Mr. Priestly. He called asking where the two of you had gotten off to.”

“Oh.”

“And I explained that when *I picked you both up from school this afternoon*, I unfortunately forgot to sign you out. A simple mistake on my part.”

“Thanks for covering for us, Mom.”

“You’re welcome. But don’t make this a habit, young lady. The world may be shades of gray, but that doesn’t mean I enjoy having to lie.”

“Don’t worry. It was just a really bad scene.”

“And I want to hear all about it. But first, Max, sit down and drink this,” said Maizy, pouring a steaming, purplish concoction from a pot on the stove into a mug, which she set on the kitchen table. “Bilberry extract for your bruises. It’s still piping hot. Be sure to blow on it.”

“Thanks, Ms. Mon—I mean, Maizy. For everything.”

“Don’t mention it.”

Max sat down and blew across the surface of the mug. The smell, almost sweet, could have been worse. The taste wasn’t bad either, sort of like spicy herbal tea.

“I added a few drops of stevia,” said Maizy.

“Stevia?”

“A natural sweetener from a tropical plant. It’s three hundred times sweeter than sugar and doesn’t cause diabetes.”

“Or tooth decay,” added Tuesday, flashing her big white teeth.

“I can see that,” said Max, who continued sipping the extract while taking in his surroundings. The kitchen—which was practically glowing, being on the same side of the house as Tuesday’s room, and also featuring high ceilings—displayed a similarly organized chaos.

Pots and pans hung from a rack suspended above an island beside the stove (three of whose gas burners were in use brewing pots of who knew what), which occupied the space between two sprawling countertops nearly covered with enigmatic clay crocks and drying herbs laid out on towels.

The thought occurred to Max he was sitting in something rather like an alchemist’s laboratory, or even a witch’s kitchen—when a large, soft and furry presence pressed up against his calf. Looking down between his legs, he discovered Merlin’s green eyes staring up at him like two stars shining from a field of black.

“He wants to spend time with you,” said Tuesday.

Max picked up the massive tomcat and, setting him in a comfortable position on his lap, proceeded to scratch him behind the ears, eliciting a deep, satisfied purring and causing the animal to close his eyes and, apparently, drift asleep.

Meanwhile, mother and daughter joining Max at the table, Tuesday began recounting the story of the fight with Doug. When she got to the part where Max went “out of body,” she paused and looked at him as if asking permission to share this part of the tale.

“It’s all right,” said Max. “Go ahead.”

Tuesday finished the story, describing from her point of view the luminous figure that stepped out of her friend and proceeded to offer a twenty-second clinic in the art of self-defense.

Maizy had remained silent during the entire narrative, staring at Max with virtually unblinking eyes that seemed too old, energetically, to belong to a relatively young (and admittedly, attractive) woman with blazing red hair and tattoos decorating much of her fair skin.

Initially, he felt uncomfortable under the weight of such intense scrutiny. But realizing there was no ill intent in it, only compassion mixed with curiosity, he began to return the gaze, examining Maizy even as she examined him.

This was how he managed to see that all her tattoos were actually one huge tattoo—of some kind of gigantic, perhaps prehistoric bird.

From talons that terminated around Maizy’s wrists, the bird’s wings stretched up her arms to her shoulders, where the bird’s body was inked, culminating in an ornate head, eyes and beak encircling her neck in a manner that seemed to stare with her at whatever she was seeing.

“Your tattoo,” said Max almost as a question.

“What about it?” asked Maizy.

“Is it, by any chance, a thunderbird?”

“Now, that’s very interesting.”

“I told you Max was gifted, Mom,” put in Tuesday.

“What’s interesting?” asked Max.

“You’re the first person ever to guess what my tattoo is without having to be told. I don’t suppose you were born with the caul?”

It was Max’s turn to find a question very interesting. “How did you know that?” he asked.

“How did you know about my thunderbird?”

“I didn’t *know*. It was just a lucky guess. My mother believed thunderbirds were real. The memory just popped into my head.”

“So you believe thoughts like that just ‘pop’ into your head?”

“It’s an expression.”

“But just for the sake of argument,” continued Maizy, “where do you suppose intuitive thoughts ‘pop’ into your head *from*?”

“Well, science says all thoughts occur in your brain. Maybe thoughts pop into one part of the brain from another part.”

“Ah, science.”

“What about it?”

“Mom has pretty strong opinions on science,” said Tuesday.

“I suppose I do,” said Maizy. “Let’s just say science only sees what it wants to see.”

“Meaning?” asked Max.

“That there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in science’s philosophy.”

“*Shakespeare*,” whispered Tuesday.

“You’re talking about the notion,” said Max, processing the thought aloud, “that there’s an intelligence, some kind of consciousness, outside of us that we tap into with our brains like a radio picking up radio signals?”

“That’s exactly what I mean.”

“It’s a fascinating theory. Personally, I’ve always suspected it to be true. It just makes sense. And it sure explains a lot of strange phenomena.”

“Like intuition?”

“For starters.”

“You’re quick, Max. I’ll give you that. But you’ve yet to scratch the surface of your potential. You think you were born with the caul by accident?”

“I have no idea why I was born like that. I take it you do?”

“Not really. But I certainly don’t believe in accidents.”

“Mom tends to speak in riddles,” observed Tuesday.

“You still haven’t told me how you knew about my caul,” said Max.

“You have a double aura. It’s quite rare. That’s why it’s so large.”

“And a double aura indicates I was born with the caul?”

“It can.”

“You really can see my aura?”

“Plain as day.”

“What does it look like?”

“Think twin rainbow eggs.”

“Tell me something else about ... about who I am that I might not know,” said Max.

“Okay. Give me your hand.”

“My hand?”

“I promise I won’t bite.”

## SNOOZE

Max gently set down Merlin, who wasn't happy to be let go in the middle of his repose, as he yawned and butted Max's leg with his forehead.

Maizy held Max's palm with long fingers and black fingernails about a foot in front of her face and nodded as she found what she was seeking.

"Just as I suspected. You have two life lines."

"What does that mean?"

"You live a double life."

"You mean, like, a spy?"

"You know what I mean."

"Because of my dreams?"

"You live in two worlds, Max. All of us do, to varying degrees. But for one reason or another, you've blended the worlds so totally they've both become real and you've literally become two people."

Max was wondering if Tuesday had let slip to her mother his recent dream featuring an older version of himself flying in formation beside him—when his friend, who had no small intuitive ability herself, said, "I didn't tell her anything, Max, if that's what you're wondering. You asked me not to."







“Tell you what,” said Maizy. “I’ll make us some fresh juice and a snack and we can reconvene on the back porch to chat a bit more about this stuff. Metaphysics requires a lot of energy. Are you two hungry?”

“Starving,” said Max.

“Ditto,” said Tuesday.

“In the meantime, perhaps Max would like to see the garden?”

“I’ll show him!” said Tuesday.

She led him back past the stairwell, through the cavernous living room (where Max slipped on his shoes), past a smaller room that appeared to be Maizy’s tattoo parlor, onto a screened and furnished lanai, out a side door, down some steps, and into some kind of urban ... farm.

Most of the backyard was cultivated in neat circular installations, ringed by large rocks, of different species of plants. There were many plants Max didn’t recognize, but among those he did were beets, broccoli, cabbages, and carrots.

“Permaculture,” explained Tuesday, noting the quizzical expression on her friend’s face.

“Perma what?”

“Max, is it just me, or am I always having to explain things to you?”

“You’re always having to explain things,” he said, kneeling at the edge of a circle and touching a large white cabbage with a finger to verify that it was real. He had never seen an actual farm before—much less one like this.

“Do you really want to know what permaculture is?”

“I asked, didn’t I?”

“Fair enough. Permaculture is a system of growing food based on year-round agriculture that relies on renewable resources and an ecosystem that’s self-sustaining.”

“Translated?”

“You let nature take care of you all year while taking care of it without a lot of pesticides.”

“Cool. I love new ideas.”

“Actually, it’s really old. It’s the way things were done for centuries. What do you think?”

“I think it’s amazing,” answered Max, standing back up and inhaling deeply. Just being in the Mondays’ garden was invigorating. “Even the air out here is like food.”

“I know what you mean.”

“They just let you do this? The city, I mean?”

“They don’t like it. Sometimes they fine people. Mom says we’ll know the world has truly changed when people start receiving citations for *not* growing gardens in their yards.”

“Hey, guys!” Maizy called, as if on cue, from the lanai. “Snack is served!”

The two children ran, laughing, back through the garden, up the steps, and onto the porch. Max felt utterly exhilarated—and had completely forgotten about his injured eye and ribs.

Maizy had set three glasses of practically fluorescent green juice and a large plate of cheese and fruit on a glass-topped coffee table. She sat in a wicker chair as Max and Tuesday plopped down on a matching love seat and started feeding their faces. “Wow. This juice is ... different,” said Max.

“You don’t like it?” said Maizy.

“I do like it. A lot. It’s just really ... *fresh*.”

“As fresh as it gets. I just juiced it.”

Max tasted the strong, mineral sweetness of beets and carrots. “Is everything in here from your garden?”

“Not everything. The apples and jalapeños are from the Saturday farmers market. And I grow the wheat grass on the front porch in a dry spot for better drainage to limit mold.”

“Wheat grass?”

“It’s a superfood,” said Tuesday. “It contains more nutrients than just about anything else.”

“And it’s just ... *grass*?”

“Yes, basically. It’s fantastic for decalcifying your pineal gland,” said Maizy.

“Doing what to my pineal gland?” asked Max.

“Decalcifying it. The pineal gland is your third eye, the seat of mystical power in ancient wisdom traditions that many Hindus still mark with a *bindi*.”

She pointed to the center of her forehead. “It’s said to be the exit point for *kundalini*, the serpent-like energy of enlightenment that travels up the *chakras*, or major energy points, along your spine. Descartes thought the pineal gland was where the soul resides.”

“A French philosopher,” explained Tuesday.

Not everything Maizy was sharing was Greek to Max. Over the course of his “paranormal” reading, he had encountered many of these concepts before, in one form or another. He just had never understood how to apply them, in any practical way, to his own experience. “Why would I want to decalcify it?” he asked.

“Because fluoride, chlorine and other toxins in our water, food supply and even toothpaste harden, or calcify, the pineal gland, making it less functional,” said Maizy. “This should be of particular interest to you, Max, given your ... proclivities.”

“You’re saying that certain foods, like wheat grass juice, can increase psychic ability?”

“That’s exactly what I’m saying. In fact, nearly any kind of green, leafy vegetable will help.”

“And other things, like chemicals, decrease it?”

“You are what you eat.”

“Far out. I always thought food was just ... food.”

“Unless it’s soul food,” quipped Tuesday. “Speaking of, these are really flavorful apple slices, Mom.”

“The cheddar’s good, too,” said Max.

“It’s raw,” said Tuesday.

“Glad you’re enjoying everything,” said Maizy. “Now, let’s talk a little about your astral body, Max.”

“My astral body?”

“Do you realize you often repeat things back to people as a question?”

“Sorry. I guess it just gives me time to think so I don’t sound stupid.”

“That’s a curious conversational strategy.”

“I think it’s kind of endearing,” said Tuesday.

“So what’s an astral body?” asked Max.

“It may be what you saw during your fight. Though I have to admit, I’ve never heard of one popping out in the middle of a crowd like that during broad daylight. Usually, they’re solitary aspects of our being, confined to our dreams—and sometimes daydreams.”

“I see it in my dreams as well. Come to think of it, I *was* dreaming. I was out cold for a minute there—and then I got up sleepwalking.”

“That doesn’t surprise me.”

Max felt the by-now familiar nudging against his leg, reached down without even bothering to look, and set Merlin on his lap for another scratching.

“Tell me,” said Maizy, “do you ever see a silver cord attached to your astral body when you’re dreaming?”

“A silver cord?”

“You’re doing it again.”

“Sorry. Well, yes, now that you mention it. But it’s more like a thin ribbon. It’s almost invisible and seemingly can stretch forever. What is it exactly?”

“It’s the connection between your waking and dreaming selves. It’s made of the same subtle energy as your aura and *kundalini*. The Taoists called this energy *chi*. If you can visualize the silver cord right now, where would you say it attaches to your physical body?”

“To my pineal gland—my third eye?”

“And where does it connect to your dreaming self?”

“To the back of my head, I’d say, though I can’t actually see the connection point.”

“Textbook. It’s all just textbook, Max. You really are astral projecting. Is there anything particularly strange about your dreams?”

Tuesday actually burst out laughing at this question—and Max couldn’t help following suit. There with a full belly on the room-temperature lanai overlooking the permaculture garden on a gorgeous December late afternoon, the psychodrama that was Max’s life suddenly seemed surreal, absurd, and hilarious beyond words.

“I gather there’s more to this story,” said Maizy, which only made the two children laugh harder, to the point of doubling over and slapping their knees as they wheezed.

“That’s putting it lightly,” Tuesday finally managed to say between fits of giggling.

“Would you care to clue in your mother?”

“Do you mind if I tell her, Max?”

“Be my guest,” he laughed. “If she doesn’t think I’m a freak by now, she never will.”

After a minute, the two kids were able to compose themselves. While Max scratched Merlin and—prompted by Maizy—finished off the last of the cheese and fruit, Tuesday, with her typical literary style, proceeded to weave Max’s history of increasingly bizarre dreams into something resembling a short story.

Max listened along with Maizy, nearly as fascinated as she was, as his own life was laid out in the third person—starting with his earliest notable dreams, continuing through his learning how to bring objects back from

the dream world, and ending with his latest visionary dream of himself and his father disappearing into the vortex.

When Tuesday finished, Maizy remained quiet for a moment, then said, "That's some heavy stuff. Does your father know all of this, Max?"

"Most of it. Now anyway. Everything except my last dream."

"What does he make of it?"

"He's still making up his mind."

"I think you should pull a card."

"A card? What kind of card?"

"A Tarot card. It's a form of divination, a way of comprehending oneself better in the past, present, and future."

"Like palm reading?"

"Something like that. Would you like to pull one? It could shed light on why these things are happening to you."

"Sure. Why not."

"Tuesday, honey, please go get the little deck. I think it's in the parlor."

Tuesday was only gone a few seconds, before sitting back down and handing her mother a small black deck called *The World Spirit Tarot* and an accompanying booklet explaining the significance of the individual cards.

Making space on the coffee table, Maizy shuffled the deck several times with practiced fingers, before spreading out the cards facedown.

"Now, run your hand over the cards," she instructed Max. "Don't touch them. Just feel them. Ask your higher guidance to help you select the one card that most clearly speaks to who you are and who you are endeavoring to become."

Max suppressed the "scientific" urge to laugh off this ritual as superstitious foolishness. Recalling the epigraph to his mother's field journal, "I shall not commit the fashionable stupidity of regarding everything I cannot explain as a fraud," he resisted reaching a premature conclusion regarding something about which he knew virtually nothing—and instead, opened his mind and did as he was counseled.

Merlin suddenly stirred from sleep, opened his eyes and watched with Maizy and Tuesday as Max ran his hand over the cards, trying to "feel" them with his fingertips and asking for "guidance." Selecting a card that seemed "hot," for lack of a better way to describe the odd sensation, he carefully pulled it from the spread.

"Flip it over," said Tuesday.

He did. The card showed a muscular blue man hanging from a tree limb by a rope attached to one foot, grasping an arrow behind his back with both hands, his long black hair dangling down into a sunken whirlpool the same color as his skin.

“What does it mean?” Max asked, seeing the serious look on Maizy’s alabaster face framed by coils of scarlet hair.

“It’s the Hanged Man,” she said in a distant, philosophical voice. “That certainly explains a lot.”

“It really does,” said Tuesday in a similar tone of amazement and respectfulness.

“The Hanged Man?” asked Max. “That’s bad, right? I mean, it can’t be good to be hanged?”

“It’s not that simple,” said Maizy. “Would you like me to read about this card?”

“Do I have any other choice?”

“You always have a choice.”

“Okay. Fire away.”

Maizy opened the little booklet to the page that discussed the Hanged Man and read, “Suspended between worlds, the Hanged Man links heaven and earth. He is a visionary, a shaman, a mystic. His connection with the ethereal realm imbues him with psychic powers.”

“So I’m supposed to be some kind of modern-day medicine man?” Max asked incredulously.

“Try to think about it in a more nonlinear way. This card is *not* you; it merely speaks *to* you, offering insights wherever they apply. Shall I continue?”

“Sure.”

“When the Hanged Man appears,” Maizy went on, “some element in your life is on hold. You may feel vulnerable and be questioning things you’ve taken for granted. Your world may even feel upside down ...”

“You got that right,” interjected Max.

“But have faith. Allow yourself to be in suspense; let go of having every answer. It may not make any sense to you now, but a reversal of ideas could be what’s needed.”

“Is that it?”

“No. There’s a little more. Shall I finish?”

“Please.”

“The Hanged Man often asks for a sacrifice in exchange for wisdom. Feelings of being trapped persist only as long as you cling to your usual perspective. If you are willing to give up some belief or attitude that no longer serves you, your reward will be worth it. You will gain a deeper understanding of your life and, with this new perspective, old dilemmas and problems can be resolved.”

While Maizy was reading, Max instinctively saw the vortex from his dream as the whirlpool into which the Hanged Man’s hair was dipping. The arrow behind his back suggested someone who could navigate in two

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different directions, or worlds. He shivered, though it wasn't cold, with the sense that the card really was speaking to him.

"There now, Max," said Tuesday with her usual cheerfulness, which she somehow managed to maintain even in the face of adversity. "That doesn't seem so bad, does it?"





To say Max had a lot to chew on during the ride back home would be a vast understatement. He sat in the passenger seat of the Mondays' Winnebago, with Tuesday behind and Maizy at the wheel, staring up through citrus trees lining the sidewalks at an immaculate early evening sky, miles away in his mind from South Florida.

He had just had a condensed education—and it didn't take place at school. While many longstanding questions had been answered by Maizy, in one way or another, his thoughts were spinning like river eddies with even more questions.

The biggest question, of course, transcending physics and the realm of *how* he was able to do the extraordinary things he did, remained firmly rooted in the realm of metaphysics and begged an answer to *why* he could do these things.

He could still remember the last words, echoing in memory's chambers, Maizy had read aloud.

*The Hanged Man often asks for a sacrifice in exchange for wisdom. Feelings of being trapped persist only as long as you cling to your usual perspective. If you are willing to give up some belief or attitude that no longer serves you, your reward will be worth it. You will gain a deeper understanding of your life and, with this new perspective, old dilemmas and problems can be resolved.*

What kind of "sacrifice" was required of Max to gain wisdom? And how could he shift his perspective enough so he no longer felt a victim of his seemingly haphazard gifts—and might harness them by becoming their master?

"I bet your mind's racing," commented Tuesday, as if she had been listening to his thoughts, placing her hand on his shoulder in a supportive gesture.

"You can say that again."

"But I won't," she joked.

"Don't forget Joseph Campbell's words of wisdom," said Maizy.

"You mean to follow your bliss?" asked Tuesday.

"That, too," said Maizy. "But I was actually talking about another quote."

"Who's Joseph Campbell?" asked Max.

"A famous writer on comparative mythology. He said, 'Opportunities to find deeper powers within ourselves come when life seems most challenging.'"

"That sounds about right."

"He called periods of 'trial by fire' like yours the 'Hero's Journey.'"

"I'll buy trial by fire. But you can keep the hero part."

"Well, you're certainly not the *villain*," interjected Tuesday in an impromptu literary analysis of Max's character. "So you must be the hero."

Max directed Maizy through the ritzy residential neighborhood of Oceanside to his sprawling, one-story, ranch-style house, which seemed as wide as the Mondays' three-story Victorian was tall. The two dwellings struck Max as like water and fire: elementally incompatible.

"We do live in different worlds," he told Tuesday, observing with new eyes the manicured, cookie-cutter, unreal quality of the toy houses and lawns along Tupelo Street.

"It doesn't matter. If you get bored with yours, you can come over to my world anytime you like."

When they pulled in the driveway, Captain Diver's Jeep was nowhere to be found. Max figured his father was out looking for him—and was going to be royally displeased with his son even more than he already was when he returned. It was almost six o'clock—and Max was supposed to have been home soon after three.

"I'd invite you both in," said Max, "but I don't think my dad will be in a very entertaining mood when he gets home. He doesn't even know about my fight yet."

"God. I forgot all about that!" said Tuesday.

"Me, too. Almost."

"You won, at least."

"At least. I do have some things for the two of you, though, if you don't mind waiting here just a second."

"We can do that," said Maizy.

Max grabbed his backpack, exited the van, hurried inside his house (which, compared to the Monday's funhouse, felt empty in more ways than one), tossed his bag on his bed, retrieved the Lego box from his closet, and found what he was seeking.

"These are for you," he told Maizy, dropping a handful of *sacha inchi* seeds in her palm through the open van window. "They're from Peru."

"Incan peanuts!" she exclaimed. "I've never eaten dream food before."

"Me neither," Max laughed.

"You know, they may not look like much," said Maizy. "But they're the food highest in Omega-3 fatty acids on the planet. Which means they're really, really good for you. Thanks, Max."

"You're welcome, Maizy. Thank you."

"You're welcome."

"And this is for you, Tuesday. Happy late birthday. I thought it would go well with your hair." He held out the Celtic bracelet from his dream. "I brought it back from Ireland, I think."

"Mom and I are both Irish!" said Tuesday. "Well, our ancestors were."

The bracelet, which looked to be a mixture of interwoven white and yellow gold, was thin but extremely intricate—like a braided rope or multi-stranded helix of DNA twisting in two tones around itself endlessly—and fit like a charm when she slipped it on her wrist.

"That's some bracelet!" said Maizy in an astonished voice.

"Is it real? I mean—is it an antique?" asked Tuesday.

"I'm not sure," said Max. "Maybe. Probably. I retrieved it from some kind of archeological dig."

"It's cool. I mean, it's ... beautiful. Breathtaking even." Uncharacteristically, Tuesday seemed nearly at a loss for words. "Are you sure you want to give this to me? It must be worth a lot."

"Money, I have, or at least my dad does. But friends, not so much. I want you to have it."

"That's incredibly generous of you. Thanks for this, Max. I'll never forget it!" She reached out the window and hugged him. Awkwardly and self-consciously, Max returned the hug.

"Is that your dad?" asked Maizy. "I believe that's him."

Max's heart sank as he immediately let go of Tuesday and tried to compose himself. The new white Jeep pulled up alongside the old black Winnebago. It occurred to him that even the two families' vehicles were polar opposites.

Captain Diver cast a quick eye on his son as he got out of the Jeep, assessing with military efficiency whether Max was okay, despite the watermelon hue around his eye, and what might be going on with two strange females parked in his driveway. But keeping his thoughts and

emotions, whatever they were, in check, all he said was, “I see you’re home.”

“Yeah. Sorry for being so late. Dad, this is Tuesday from school and her mother, Maizy. This is my dad.”

Never one to be shy, Tuesday said, “Pleased to meet you, Captain Diver. I read your biography.”

“You *read* my biography? Don’t you have better things to do?” he joked. It was a classic Diverian icebreaker, delivered with ease and authenticity, and everyone laughed, relieved. “Pleased to meet you, too. Lovely bracelet.”

“Thanks,” said Tuesday, seemingly unsure whether to divulge that Max had just given it to her.

“I’m Thomas,” said Max’s father, shaking Tuesday’s mother’s hand.

“Maizy.”

“I know. I’ve seen you occasionally at PTA meetings.”

“Oh, I hate those tacky things. I only attend when my guilt at not having attended reaches a certain level.”

It was Thomas’s turn to be made to laugh. “Same here,” he admitted.

“Look. I’m sure you and Max will discuss today’s events. But I want you to know, from my perspective, he’s a great kid.”

“I realize that.”

“And he’s my best friend,” added Tuesday. “Please go easy on him, Captain Diver. Nothing that happened today was his fault.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

When the Mondays left them standing alone in the twilight driveway at last, Max’s father turned to him and asked, “So, is that your girlfriend?”

“No. Just my best friend.”

“She’s got potential. Wait a few years. I bet she’ll look like her mother.”

He never once asked about the bracelet, though he surely registered that Max had given it to Tuesday. Probably, being fair-minded and not in the least covetous, he figured it was Max’s to give to whomever he liked. “How’s the eye?”

“Could be worse.”

“Do you want to talk about it?”

“Yes. But not right this instant—if that’s okay with you. I think I just want to be alone this evening.”

“Would you like something to eat?”

“I’m not hungry.”

“Fair enough.” His father draped a muscular arm around his shoulders and Max smelled the familiar, comforting scent of Old Spice. “But I’m here if you need me.”

“I know. Thanks, Dad.”

“Don’t mention it.”

In his exhausted dream that night, in which he could feel his eye socket and ribs throbbing, Max found himself walking through a dense forest at dusk.

Glancing at his hands, he was surprised to discover they were perfectly blue. When he looked behind him, his silver cord shimmered its way back through the dark trees until it was lost from sight.

He came to a clearing, where a natural whirlpool, seemingly lit from below, cast glowing reflections of ripples all around.

Kneeling beside it, his long hair, perhaps wet from rain in the forest, in whose branches he could hear the wind, nearly touching the water’s steaming surface, he was greeted by a blue face that he mistook for his reflection—until he realized the face was making independent movements that didn’t correspond to his own.

“Thank you for coming,” said the blue face, which otherwise, except for the *bindi* in the middle of the forehead, was identical to his own face. “I cannot express how glad I am you received my message. He desperately needs your help!”

“Who?” asked Max, not knowing what else to say.

“You must come to him. I cannot do this alone.”

“Do what alone? Who *are* you?”

“My name is Max,” said the blue face, just as a howling wind bent the forest and extinguished all the lights—and Max sat bolt upright in bed with the early morning sun glowing behind the curtains.





## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Sol Luckman** is a prolific visual artist and acclaimed author of fiction and nonfiction. His numerous books include the international bestselling *Conscious Healing: Book One on the Regenetics Method* and its popular sequel, *Potentiate Your DNA: A Practical Guide to Healing & Transformation with the Regenetics Method*. Sol is also author of the *Beginner's Luke* Series of seriocomic novels that hilariously foreground the role of imagination in creating our individual and collective reality. Characterized by Reader Views as a “modern-day *Alice in Wonderland*” and by Apex Reviews as a “mind-bending journey through the mind of the ultimate iconoclast,” *Beginner's Luke* is also, as award-winning author Sean M. Poole has written, “a transformational novel, a manic manual of self-discovery, self-invention and renewal.” View Sol's paintings, read his blog and learn more about his work at [www.CrowRising.com](http://www.CrowRising.com).

Here ends this free excerpt from Part I of *Snooze: A Story of Awakening*. The rest of the novel extends through three additional Parts, for a total of 485 pages, during which Max experiences a variety of challenges and adventures most of us could only ... dream about.

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Thanks—and sweet dreams!

