

DEEP
DREAM

A SPECTACULAR NOVELETTE
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Chapter One

A Morning Ritual



Leo Po.

DAWN. THE first rays of light are entering the room. Still with sleep-crust on his eyes, like every morning Leo Po writes:

The water is about to boil. You love that tea. It makes you so happily awake. But you hear a noise at the door and the bell rings. You turn off the fire and open the curtains to let the sun shine in. You might be thinking: 'Am I ready for this?' Yes you are! You always are! You were born ready! It's all about confidence and deliberation. Be the owner of yourself, believe in your inner side. Strong and connected with the Illusion you are about to create.

Leo Po shares the Illusion.

'Illusion sent to 5 890 057 participants.
84 reactions in 3 seconds!
It's so mysterious...
They love it and cannot wait until tomorrow!
One Illusion per day, what a record!
Thank you for sharing, Leo.'

says the voice of Common Sense.

‘You are welcome’

Suddenly, something moves which breaks his focus as he jumps out of bed. In the opposite corner, not far from the king-sized mattress, a stranger stands, staring at him, hiding a pair of sleepless-night eyes behind mirror glasses.

Leo Po snaps to attention.

‘Who the hell are you?’

‘Good morning. My name is Elena, but call me whatever you like.’

‘Whatever you like, I am not in the mood’

‘Funny one. Don’t you wanna play?’

‘No. Want coffee. Don’t like morning visits.’

‘You look nervous’

‘If I say no, it means no’ ‘Go now or I report the intrusion. I can block you man’

‘So I see. That’s what you like eh? Leaving your door open, then acting like a rude little boy.’

‘Intrusion detected. Please leave Leo Po’s.

Dreaming is respecting other Dreams.’

says the voice of Common Sense in the stranger’s mind.

‘Are you Leo Po?’ asks the stranger ‘If you want me to leave, why don’t you give me that Illusion you were writing?’

‘Don’t you understand? You cannot Zap into my Dream like that, without asking for permission, and expect me to smile at you and, what else... Give you an original of my writings so that you can use it for your sick little games? I suppose you want me to suck you off, too, don’t you? Get out of my house, and don’t bother me anymore! You’ve got five seconds to get the fuck out! One, two, three, four...’

But five seconds run out and the stranger does not move at all. Leo Po’s heart begins to jump. The guy is still standing on the opposite corner of the bed, taking the shape of a long skinny curve.

It barely takes another few seconds before Leo gets the strength to stand up and charge at the stranger, who dodges him by first passing through the next door then disappearing, as if fleeing through a thousand others doors to any other point in the huge platform, maybe to an after party, maybe visiting another victim of his voyeurism, maybe finally returning to his bed, the sweet refuge for all DeepDreamers.

‘Shit’ ‘There really is no privacy anymore.’

It’s true that there is no more space for privacy, or time for quiet boredom. Life has become a successive sequence of actions, sensorial inputs and unplanned situations that do not surprise anyone anymore. A long, playful and exciting game. ‘Thanks to DD’ say some philosophers in the media, ironically. But everyone knows that this motto doesn’t make any sense on its own. What it should say is ‘Thanks to your Desires’. Humanity has finally given in to hedonism.

‘Interview at BIO’

says the voice of Common Sense in Leo Po’s mind.

Without any hurry, Leo stands and searches for a pair of pants in the piles of clothes lying all around him.

‘What a mess’

He goes to the bathroom, and when he comes back, the bedroom is already tidy and clean, with books in the bookcase, writing material at the desk, clothes in the wardrobe, dirty plates and glasses back in the kitchen, and used tissues in the garbage. And with the exquisite baroque room ready for a new day, a freshly ironed suit hangs from the ceiling, waiting for him to get dressed.

Going out of his bedroom, he crosses a long corridor full of columns and moldings.

In the kitchen, the old Italian coffee pot sounds its siren song, and from another door of the corridor appears Benicio, Leo Po’s flatmate.

‘Morning’ says Benicio, with an awakening smile, and the space automatically begins shifting shape, mixing with the Memories of this new DeepDreamer, essentially minimalistic and organic shapes, that add more clashing to the continuous dynamism of the architecture.

Leo Po has already prepared a couple of cups. A bit of milk for himself, a bit of sugar for Benicio. Benicio is a strong man, both as a façade and internally, with powerful ideas, grey eyes and a serious composure. Sometimes his thoughts are too strict for Leo Po’s mornings, but today he would accept anything that could take his mind off the upcoming interview.

Benicio stays in silence for a while, then takes a sheet of paper and starts writing on it. Something appears on his face... Perhaps worry.

‘Have you seen what I shared? I don’t feel like reading all the feedback, could you do that for me, please?’

‘I saw it again man, what a night...’ says Benicio without answering Leo’s question ‘I stopped the trip, everything was quiet and still. You remember what I told you about?’

Leo Po tries to talk but Benicio continues as if he was alone in the conversation.

‘I’ve almost figured out how to find the exact point to pause DD. To pause the rush. No more motion or stirring. No more fears’. All these sentences come out of his mouth one by one, with long reflective pauses, while he looks all around, pointing to the trembling decoration surrounding the room. ‘Pure happiness. The one thing that drives everyone here. No projection. No nostalgia. No anxiety. We would finally get it, we would have complete serenity.’

In the next pause, Benicio looks at Leo Po’s face, as if waiting for affirmation. But nothing comes from his flatmate.

‘Tonight I reached it, it was crazily beautiful, I tell you... Just one stop at exactly the right moment, and it switches off all your thoughts and all the tremblings; and then, the calm.’ ‘I must work on it while it’s still here’. He makes an air-ring

with his index finger pointing to his head. ‘The images are still appearing: Memories of childhood. The blue sea and a feeling: being in my fathers’ arms, feeling peace in his strength.’

Looking at Benicio’s wide eyes, Leo Po realizes he is almost traumatized by the night he has just had. Sometimes the successive dreaming, secondary dreams into the main Dream, most technically known as [To Dream in (Dream 1)], are highly dangerous if there is no strict control. How deep and complex could the hole become if one fell asleep repeatedly while dreaming? Many have gotten lost in the unknown, never waking up. Benicio is clearly addicted, but who isn’t?

‘I’m sure you could find plenty of customers for that’, answers Leo after thinking a moment, adding a big nod of encouragement.

‘That’s what I mean, man. Look at the immense mass of users around us, all these brains working continuously, day and night. Normal people need a rest, and if they don’t get it here, where would they? This is the right place for this. We could do it, you should join me in the research. I’ll get there, whatever it takes!’

‘I know you will. I believe in you. But sorry man, I can’t help you today. Today is a big day.’

Benicio looks puzzled, but then something clicks.

‘That’s right! Today’s the interview, isn’t it?’

‘Yeah,’ concludes Leo with some doubt in his tone.

‘Relax, little mind’ says Benicio laughing with affection, and he knocks on Leo Po’s forehead. ‘Everything is gonna be all right. They can’t say no to such a brain. They need you, man. And worst case, you come back here and we work together: me with my inspiration, you with your knowledge and fancy words. We will become *Nouveau Riche* overnight’

Benicio ends the sentence with a broad smile.

They chug the rest of the coffee and move to the dance room. The place is already vibrating a bit. Leo Po shares some ultrasonic 8-bit music, starting slowly on rhythms but vastly

absorbing the atmosphere. The bit goes faster, as do the room's vibrations, and so do they, moving frantically, with broken rhythms, touching the ground, crawling, climbing and trying to reach the sky. Shoes off, socks in the air, feet down, patting their ears with their feet, rolling, confusing small and discreet. Shirts off. Laughing to themselves. Circular turns until falling, rising, and falling again. Exploding like giants. The right walls sound pom, pom, pop pom. The left: tam, tam, pam, tam. Pants to the wind, neck looking for the chest, but escaping from the trunk, trunk forgetting the hip, hips loving the foot and everything turning and turning on itself in the dancing room. The more freely they dance, the more they feel the space. Dancing is the most effective way DeepDreamers have found to ensure gravity. Gravity ensures them of where they are: at home, in sweet (Dream 1), and no, they do not want to get lost. The fear of getting lost, the vertigo of falling, and the doubts about time and space, are social issues that invade their feelings if they spend too long lost on stillness. That's why they dance. They dance in the mornings, afternoons, and nights. They dance whenever they can. They dance to feel the space, to get a sense of themselves, and to feel alive.

Recovering with the same typical smile, Benicio sees the nervous face of Leo Po showing again, and proposes a partial solution.

'Do you have time?'

'For what?'

'Why don't you join me in the Breathing Session?' 'You never come. It would do you some good for sure, trust me.'

The Breathing Session is an extension of DD that never really attracted Leo. Although he understands it can be helpful for many DeepDreamers, he does not like to see all those enlightened people wasting their time on going deeper, just because they are unable to live a happy and normal life in (Dream1). But

he knows he cannot say no. First, because Benicio always gets from him what he wants, second, because it could really do some good to escape his overly-excited mind.

∞

‘This is the closest to an army you will ever see.’

Benicio loves to introduce his guests with that statement.

‘The only paradise.’

Pacifistic yet tough, every day he thanked the energies that brought him to the Breathing Sessions, a place offering him the spiritual strength he had always been searching for.

‘*The Mecca of today’s feelings,*’ states the brochure. ‘*Keep in contact with your inner light, and live, here and now!*’ ‘*Make your transition into a new level of vibration and point in the direction of your Dreams. Just be happy!*’

Arriving to this place always made Benicio’s hairs stand on end.

Leo has to admit to himself that the view is astonishing, though the landscapes are almost impossible to focus on: A green hill levitates some centimeters in the air, standing by itself in the middle of a flat grey sky. A smooth rain is falling. At the top of the hill, in a silence only interrupted by a monotonous and endless ohm, hundreds are meditating. Most of them are in lotus flower position, others just sitting, lying, standing, or circled in little groups with master guides. The meditation of the DeepDreamers also influences the hill, limiting its movement to an almost imperceptible pace.

While Benicio and Leo Po jump the few centimeters that separate the field from the floating hill and make their way into the crowd, the difference between breathing and sounds starts to shock Leo Po more and more. The arcadian image he had encountered upon his arrival has already faded, and, from the inside, the mood feels different. Realizing the human dimension of the place upsets him.

‘These are no angels,
for God’s sake, just people’

says the voice of Common Sense.

Walking into the crowd he realizes how the kilometric space chaotically keeps order, where every religious fanatic ensures its neighbour space. The further they go in, the more Leo Po’s first “lost paradise” feeling is evaporating. The place is noisy, and has a general smell of sweat. Benicio reaches his favorite spot and without saying a word gets in lotus position. Deciding not to protest, Leo Po imitates his friend.

‘Enjoy the silence.
Breathe intensely and deeply.
Relax your head, relax your neck.

Feel the weight of your arms going to your legs.

Feel your legs and feet connecting to the grass. Breathe intensely and deeply. This is not about the breathing but about your concentration on it. Imagine the air as a red ball entering through your nose and mouth. Feel how the ball goes through your whole body. Experience the effect of the air passing through every part of you.’

says the Common Sense in Benicio’s mind.

It takes him only eight minutes to arrive to (Dream2). His everyday practice is bearing fruits, and he easily starts to lose the notion of time and space. He still feels the surrounding of people though, which limits his peace. Meditation is first of all an ego trip, and in the first stages sensing too many people around will cause any subject to resurface to (Dream1).

But Benicio is already on the way to (Dream3). People finally start to disappear from his world, as he follows a white light; and upon his arrival to (Dream4) neither time nor space have an influence on him anymore. The atmosphere is empty and ready to be filled in.

Inside (Dream4) a fixed image appears: water is coming up to his feet, the white light gets a mediterranean texture. He gets caught for a moment in (layer591/Dream4) with the Memory of an ex-girlfriend, but is able to vanish her with some words of love and acceptance.

‘Channel your feelings and thoughts.
You are the owner of yourself.
Concentrate on the breathing.’

says the voice of Common Sense, which has activated without leaving (Dream4), and quickly takes him back to the trip.

The fall to (Dream5) comes harder and he has to hold his concentration so as not to emerge in a shock. Even so, the original image did not change much: water is now coming and going in waves, as he start to feel the warmth of the sun on his skin.

In (Dream6) reality changes: Benicio feels the rocks beneath his butt, the smell of the sea, and a salty taste. He tries to stand up but his body doesn’t budge, so he keeps going.

By (Dream7) he is finally totally aware of his movements. After looking around him on the empty beach, he realizes with a smile that he is naked, and decides to go for a swim.

Benicio swims a while in short bursts of time, and quickly gets lost in the immensity of the Ocean. His Memory is working: As a child, he and his family made a trip to the Greek islands. The Memories are mostly pictures he had seen throughout the passing of his youth. He remembers, though, feeling the blue all around him while walking the winding streets of an old village, made of a few houses built of white stones.

Another nautical Memory comes to his mind: a boat trip to a restaurant built on the sea. It was from the same trip to Greece, but on another day. The image is crazy, as if inspired

by some romantic painter. He remembers eating some tasty shellfish there. His brother's sandal fell into the sea, but some of the restaurant staff went to look for it (the ocean was not so deep, as the restaurant had kept a natural pool to breed the crustaceans).

On the way back to the island a terrible thing happened: little Benicio fell out of the boat into the sea and had to be rescued by his father. He remembers feeling safer than he ever had. The calm after the tempest. But since then, he had always been horrified of the blue immensity.

Benicio knows this Memory is a fake.

He remembers perfectly making it up long ago by telling it to some childhood friends, after coming back from a perfectly safe trip. But since then it had taken up more and more space in his imagination, ending today in a pathological fear of the sea. The comfort of his father's hug, though, keeps him coming back to that same Dream.

(Dream7) is vacant of humans, just him and the big blue. He is alone as far as he can see, and although he does not know what lives under the water, he feels in accordance with the sealife. The dynamism of the water makes him feel alive, surrounded by the sun-reflected waves, peacefully cradling him and floating him across the borders and stages of (Dream8.9.10.11). The sky is white, the light blinding.

He is completely aware of the power of the waves, they talk to him, and to the moon. They talk to each other. As a sea inhabitant, he naturally understands the speech of the water. After listening for a while, and feeling wise enough, he decides to start asking or at least participating in the conversation:

'How can I stop the turbulence?'

In response a conflict begins to erupt beneath the water, as the moon becomes furious and the waves react. Suddenly, an enormous wave swallows him up, and in hardly an instant he crosses all the stages (10.9.8.7.6.5.4.3.2) back to the lineal

(Dream1), square home, the Breathing Session, and now he feels the hand of Leo Po shaking his shoulder.

‘Sorry. Were you far away?’

Benicio cannot speak.

‘I just wanted to tell you I’m leaving. With all this coffee and my nerves I just can’t concentrate. Sorry about that. But thanks for trying. Remember when you get home to take a look at the feedback on today’s Illusion, please.’

Benicio looks back at him one last time, and in silence concentrates anew on an intense breathing, already aware that he will not be able to go back to such a wild level of the [DeepDream].

Chapter Two

The Interview



Mr. Cinta.

THE TRIP had been extremely brief. It took Leo Po a few minutes to get back to his home in Barcelona, change into his nicest suit, and travel to Berlin. BIO headquarters are located in a monumental marble building that remains stoic. It's an image that immediately surprises Leo Po, who cannot remember the last time he experienced a fixed, solid and quiet architecture. Facing the entrance, a messy crowd is waiting their turn. Leo thinks he will also have to wait, and that the remaining half hour before the interview is not enough.

‘It must be the Customer Service queue,
not the workers’

says the voice of Common Sense.

He keeps walking toward the main entrance beneath the glares of the people waiting.

As he is coming up on the entrance, a gaze-less man stops him.

‘You must be Leo Po.’

Leo Po nods, looking up at the gaze-less man, fit and tall like a body builder.

‘They are waiting for you at Door2’

He makes a gesture as to ask where Door2 is, then realizes the man has no eyes.

‘Keep straight. Left, left, right’ he says.

It takes a while for Leo to find the door, but once there the queue is far more encouraging. Door2 is an enormous metallic wall protected by two gaze-less men. They are strong and tall. Another three candidates are waiting. Leo Po gets goose bumps, He suddenly feels as if he is being watched.

‘Maybe they really have been awaiting your arrival.

That plays in your favor. They are interested in you, and have already been keeping an eye on your performance.’

says the voice of Common Sense.

He feels like someone is looking him up and down but he keeps his composure, and forces himself to look like the easy-going guy he is not. His behavior is not natural at all, his whole body shaken with nerves. Working at BIO would be achieving one of his biggest goals, but if he waits any longer in the queue he will end up running away.

‘Safety first’

says the voice of Common Sense

‘Dreaming is respecting other Dreams’

and so on.

Finally the metallic door opens in an abrupt and noisy gesture. One of the gaze-less men escorts Leo Po and his fellow candidates throughout the whole tour of the factory. They cross long empty corridors with tens, maybe hundreds, of doors.

‘If you are lucky, one of these offices will be yours’, utters the gaze-less man. ‘This area is for normal peoples’ biogra-

phies, an easy sequence of situations -nothing else- nothing creative, nothing too hard to analyze’.

Then they cross an enormous auditorium with almost twenty levels crowded with old-generation DeepDreamers. They are having a big dispute, or perhaps a thousand disputes. The mess disturbs Leo Po, as he wonders how many people are actually working at this place.

‘All of these are volunteers’ says the gaze-less man as they continue walking. ‘Intellectuals,’ he sighs and clicks his tongue. ‘They are here to contribute to BIO by analyzing the morality of every biography that comes in. We would be nothing without them, they know that, and so they keep coming and staring at us as if we could not feel them looking. They really don’t get what we’re trying to do here, you know? I tell you, these people are lost. They spend hours talking about every single Dream. They look like they’re playing, with those pompous faces and their big egos, but this is not a game at all’.

The gaze-less man keeps talking to Leo Po as if they had known each other for a long time; and Leo, who although he cannot quite understand why, feels that making friends may ensure some privileges if he ends up working at the company.

‘This is the Human Resources department’ says the gaze-less man while entering a smaller place, with a few focused employees. ‘These are real workers. Imagine... Having to control all those volunteers and other BIO staff members. We need to keep a good eye on our workers. BIO has a few program to always make sure our workers aren’t putting the biographies of our DeepDreamers at risk. If you work here, be assured that you will be supervised.’

They finally arrive at a little corridor with four different doors of four different colors: blue, red, green and yellow. Each of the candidates is addressed to a different door. Leo faces the red one. A plaque hangs on it: Mr. Cinta 01001101 01110010 00101110 00100000 01000011 01101001 01101110 01110100 01100001.

Once inside, Leo finds a serious man reading at a fake oak bureau. There is a grey and red luxurious cabinet and in the very center of the office, on a colorful chair, sits Mr. Cinta. He has knowledge on his face, and wears thick glasses and a violet jacket. He is reading a file with the face of Leo Po on it and a thousand numbers from 0 to 1. Leo looks at the seat opposite the old man. He waits. Finally, the old man looks at Leo Po, checking his form again, and then returning his gaze to Leo.

‘Ah! Mr. Po, yes?’ asks Mr. Cinta as if he had just realized Leo’s presence ‘Please take a seat, make yourself comfortable’ he continues smiling at Leo Po.

Leo Po takes the seat, and the man offers him a hand.

‘Mister Cinta. Nice to meet you.’ He puts his open hand on his heart.

‘It’s a pleasure’ replies Leo.

‘I see you are from... Barcelona, Mister Po?’

‘Well, I dream mostly in Barcelona, but I am originally from Albania’

Mr. Cinta adopts an inquisitive face.

‘Which post are you applying for Mister Po?’

‘Biographer, sir.’

Now he watches him with arrogant eyes.

‘I don’t want to waste your time, Leo. Can I call you Leo?’

Leo nods and Mister Cinta continues.

‘We have many people interested in this job. Maybe you could help the volunteers?’

Leo keeps his eyes and mouth wide open but does not answer for a while. Is it a trick? This guy must know he is not there to do any volunteering. Hasn’t he heard about his work?

‘Don’t get me wrong... It is a well-paid job, and the level of responsibility is not so high. But a mistake in the Biography sector could be very dangerous. The peace of (Dream1) depends on it’

Leo has to break his silence. He clears his throat.

‘Keep calm, Leo.
Believe in yourself.
It’s just procedure’

says the voice of Common sense.

‘Sir, with all due respect... My training is in writing, I don’t want to spend my life debating. Writing is what I am here for, and although I am sure it’s also an interesting job, it is not for me. This is not my function.’

‘Your function’ says Mr. Cinta not convinced at all ‘And what might that function be?’

Leo feels trapped. If this is a trick, he has already almost fallen for it. He takes a deep breath and tries to stop the rage that is coming up.

‘Nothing easy to explain, sir. As you see in my file, I have spent the whole Dream just writing. I cannot even remember what I dreamed of, because I just paid too much attention to the others. I did not choose that, you know one does not choose every detail... This whole technology is too complicated for that. But you can see in my files that I’ve spent my life sharing. One Illusion each day, it’s a record. I have created characters, scenographies, scripts and images for people all over the platform. And I have millions of followers waiting for my Illusions to arrive to make their day happier, to have a new adventure, to experience the possibilities of a new character. But I’ve had enough of that, I’m ready to get to the next level. If I intend to work at BIO, it is because I think your company can help my writing as much as I can help your company with my writing. I am done with superficial items; I want to start writing Common Sense and I want it more than anything. I’m fully prepared for the Biography department, sir.’

Mister Cinta looks deeply into Leo Po’s eyes, and finally smiles.

‘Well, well, that is what we search for Leo: convinced writers with convincing statements. Do you know the main reason why a place like BIO exists?’

‘Security, sir. Memories, and made up Memories...’ Leo begins his recitation as he straightens up in his chair, ‘as images we see in pictures or nightmares we have as children, make a big impact on our irrational levels. Memories, Desires and Dreams are strongly connected, more than we will ever be able to understand; and through their connection, they are able to create brand new worlds without difficulty. Whoever is able to control them would be able to make up their own reality. But are everyone’s Desires safe enough for the rest of the DeepDreamers? No. Dangerous Dreams exist. That’s why we need BIO. BIO has been storing Dreams since...’

Mr. Cinta laughs and Leo stops talking.

‘I see you know the manual Leo, good enough. But it’s much simpler than that. Think about it for a moment: It’s just Common Sense.’

Leo nods, a bit ashamed.

‘The platform works by itself, however it depends on the constant usage of DeepDreamers, and of course it needs some control to keep functioning properly. The more DeepDreamers we have, the more they spread the word. The more they spread the word, the more new DeepDreamers arrive. And as you know, most all of them stay. In a few days, any area can grow from thousand to millions of connected Dreams. Someone needs to put a bit of order to all that chaos, don’t you think?’

‘That’s why we need BIO,’ says Leo.

‘That’s where the voice of Common Sense comes in, programmed by BIO or any other company of this sector. We could not handle the whole platform alone. There are millions of DeepDreamers! But it’s true that BIO’s Common Sense has the best reputation, known for its perfect balance between individualism and community,’ Mr. Cinta continues. ‘Informatics have always been a mode of control, and there is no reason for a change, less today than a hundred years ago. Now we can prevent any potentially harmful thoughts from plaguing our DeepDreamers. It is as easy as programming Common Sense. Every piece of every

Dream we manage sends out information to our servers, and our people work hard to transcribe all that mass of data into a simple biography. While understanding lives, we can understand Common Sense, and then adapt it before sending it to each profile. That bit of control goes a long way, ensuring the continuity of the [DeepDream]’

Leo Po is listening with his ear hairs on end. The attack of sincerity and the proximity of Mr. Cinta makes him confident about getting the job.

’We are pretty specific in choosing our team, Leo, as you can imagine... So let me ask you another question: Do you know why the first nets were built?’

’Military purposes...?’ suggests Leo Po.

’Exactly. In ancient times, the destruction of any military base led to the destruction of a lot of unique information and technical support. The nets were created as a matter of resilience, to be able to return to their original form after the attack.’

Mr. Cinta leaves a few seconds for Leo Po to process all the information.

’The [DeepDream] must remain a pacifistic world, (Dream 1) a homeland. If someone appears to be encountering images that we deem too dangerous, we must block the server before it harms others,’ explains Mr. Cinta.

’So,’ says Leo Po, ‘as a biographer, I would have a few duties. One, transcribing data into basic storytelling; two, keeping Common Sense up-to-date, and three, if anything suspicious is detected and it is absolutely necessary, blocking dangerous Dreams before they get out of hand.’

’You have understood perfectly, Leo. This facility says a lot about you. But it is a hard task: Dreams can be the worst form of insanity, and impossible to understand. The most dangerous elements do not appear in easy dialogues, or from what people share with others. You would have to be especially aware of actions, and most of all, images. If we want to keep (Dream 1) the place to be, it is essential to avoid Nightmares. A Nightmare from an indi-

vidual DeepDreamer will most certainly enter into another, then this one will take other Dreams, and so on. The expansion of one single Nightmare is uncontrollable, so it is extremely important to keep them offline. In previous networks a few simple errors resulted in the end of a whole system.'

'I see...'

But he doesn't see at all. Leo Po wants to ask how one could identify problems in something that's neither written nor classified. And how would he understand what was of Common Sense or not? Are nightmares always clearly nightmares? Was there a manual to understand the hidden face of everything? A starting point? And how much will he be earning for this job? But he feels all of these doubts will not help him, so he keeps quiet. The dialogue goes on with eyes and gestures, as if Mr. Cinta had detected the concerns on Leo Po's face. A long silence fills the room.

'Any other questions, Mr. Po?'

'No, sir.'

'Then I think we're done. One last thing: Let's keep this conversation between you and me'

'Certainly. Thank you very much for the opportunity, for the explanation and for your time, Mr. Cinta'

'Thanks to you Leo. You seem like a competent fellow. We need more young people like you here. You'll receive a visit soon. Remember to keep the house clean, Mr. Po.'

Mr. Cinta ends the sentence with a hearty laugh, proud of his humor. Leo Po gives Mr. Cinta a strong final handshake and leaves his Dream and the building to go back home through a few hundred doors. He feels satisfied, sure that he nailed it. On his arrival home, he is happy to find Benicio working diligently on the morning's Illusions.

Not wanting to disturb him, Leo opens a beer and collapses on the sofa, with just one question left:

'Where's the party tonight!?'

Mr. Cinta is having a last look at Leo Po's file before classifying it with the others.

'He got the position' he confirms to his colleagues, who immediately build a golden door, connecting Leo Po's house to BIO headquarters.

The work day has finished, so Mr. Cinta puts on his jacket and starts walking the long corridors. He could travel back home in a moment, crossing just one door, but prefers to walk. Now that his muscles are no longer young, he has replaced the never-ending dance he had enjoyed long ago with evening walks. His body has got used to it, and does not ask for much exercise anymore, especially since working at BIO is a privilege that ensures utter stillness most of the time.

Mr Cinta walks down the hallway with a huge grin, greeting some familiar faces on the way, but gets nearly no responses. The sound of the biographers scribbling shares the space with uninterrupted debates of the volunteers.

He then enters the crowded auditorium. The night shift has already started. A debate in progress catches his attention. On the stage stand two main speakers and hundreds of observers surround them, taking notes and muttering opinions.

'It's just jewelry, or at worst a toy. I don't think we should interpret the usage of dog leash as a perversion.' says Mr. Klink, a thin elderly black man.

'If we don't interpret that as a perversion, then nothing is perverting. And if there's no banishment of the perversion, the worst will come. I assure you fellows, it will come! I assume you will let the Nightmare come, Mr. Klink.' answers Mr. Loit, a fancy bald man with a powerful voice. 'The day I wake up and everything has become a dog world, your bell will be the first I ring'

'You must be kidding.' answers Mr. Klink outraged 'Do you hear this guy? He's forgetting a basic notion: Everyone is here by their own free will. They want the liberty that a place like this offers them, and if that man wants to wear a dog leash, my dear Mr. Loit, it's his right as an inhabitant of (Dream 1).'

The surrounding crowd reacts with a noisy *blablabla*. The followers of Mr. Klink and those of Mr. Loit are about to start a fight, raising fists and throwing insults, but as they are all mostly elderly men, the threats do not end in physical violence.

‘Don’t try to convince us with your perfect words of a perfect world, Mr. Klink. The Desire of this man is limiting other Dreams! And that must be signaled!’

‘He is not forcing anyone to take the dog leash. He is not limiting anyone.’ says Mr. Klink calm and convinced.

‘Then why has he always got someone on the other end of the leash? Tell me, why? He is forcing them to take it by a continuous insistence. That must be considered harassment.’

‘Harassment? If they take the leash it is because they want to, Mr. Loit. Most of us want to be masters or slaves. He is just offering them the opportunity to play the master for a day... or a night.’ He pauses. ‘And besides, the dance is far sexier with a dog leash.’

Mr. Klink’s last statement provokes a big round of laughter all around, expanding from both parties. He smiles. Mr. Loit is not happy at all, sending a murderous look to his colleagues.

At that point Mr. Cinta gets on the stage.

Everyone falls silent.

‘Gentlemen, please,’ sounds the strong voice of Mr. Cinta all around the auditorium. ‘Remember: we are not here to get lost analyzing easily solvable cases.’ He snatches up the file causing the debate, puts on his glasses and cannot believe his eyes, but decides to continue anyway. ‘If Alex Marble’s Desire is to wear a dog leash, and this isn’t hurting anyone, then case closed.’

Mr Klink cannot hide a smirk.

‘But now lets look a bit more carefully at this file,’ Mr. Cinta continues.

Mr. Klink and Mr. Loit draw closer and have a long look at the file.

‘Doesn’t this name ring a bell to anyone: Alex Marble?’ Mr. Cinta waits, but no one responds.

‘It’s a fake Dream!’ is shouted from somewhere in the audience.

‘A fake Dream, computer generated material,’ affirms Mr. Cinta. ‘You represent all of these people!’ he points to the audience. ‘My God, volunteers! Our own creation has managed to make a fool of you. We developed him! BIO developed him! Alex Marble was created as bait for dangerous DeepDreamers looking for prey.’ He pauses to adjust his glasses. ‘So gentlemen don’t waste your precious time -*our* precious time-judging a fake character. Just check his biography to see if in his most recent movements he’s actually been abused or not. If so, block the abuser. Case closed.’

‘Yes sir,’ say Mr. Klink and Mr. Loit almost in unison.

The audience starts murmuring again.

Gently, Mr. Cinta walks to the exit. Behind him, the debate re-starts.

‘Everyone that takes the leash is abusing him!’

‘Taking the leash is not abuse. It is a metaphor of the need of belonging we all have, and these general facts, these needs that are in each of us, must be the Common Sense we offer to our DeepDreamers.’

‘But if everyone would abuse him, would that also be of Common Sense?’

Going out through the last door, the fresh autumn of Berlin catches Mr. Cinta. The streets are empty and beautiful. Green turning to yellow, red to purple, oranges and browns. The shapes of the trees have been remodeled, but it is mostly as he remembers it. Although he has seen the evolution of (Dream 1) as it changed into something he could not totally understand, most cities have been forgotten and therefore remained as they were.

He remembers the first years of [DeepDream] with nostalgia. Back then, the virtual platform and its users still had to get used to the changes of vital factors. It was normal to

see people vomiting or fainting, due to the excess of information or of nonsensical images, but still they were fighting for a revolutionary model of life. Investigators in augmented realities had reached one of humanity's most ambitious fantasies: the ability to live in your own Dreams.

The new order took a while to settle in, but finally it arrived through a series of concluding decisions: fixing a day-to-night cycle, adopting a lunar calendar, introducing the dance ritual, and most importantly, releasing

‘the voice of Common Sense’

It had been worth it. The best years of Cinta's life remain as an image of crowded streets and outdoor pleasures. It was a decisive time when sensitive urban developments paired with the advanced techniques of the platform, had led to the usage of (Dream1) as a massive playground for both new and old ideas of collectivity and society. The many utopian projects from the past that had never been taken seriously, finally found their place to be developed. [DeepDream] became the strongest image of a paradise that humanity had ever experienced.

By then, Mr. Cinta and other pioneers decided to never go back to the old world they had left behind, with its miseries and wars. And over the years, committing to full-time dreaming has become almost a requisite to be a DeepDreamer. If you have enough money, you can keep a warm bed and a nourished body on the surface. And money is an easy thing to obtain down here, with so many expensive Desires and wealthy DeepDreamers racing to reach all of them. It's even easier when you are part of BIO.

(Dream 1) has now been flowing for a while but the younger generations have left their mark on it. Most of their life Memories are composed of fragments of old Dreams and Illusions, and that makes it harder to keep the platform in equilibrium. The place has been weakened, and its continuous

trembling is a clear consequence of the overexploitation of its possibilities.

Naturally, forms of amusement have also changed. Almost no one shares public spaces anymore, preferring to travel through internal spaces. The new dynamic architecture and its continues mutation (affected by the DeepDreamers' inputs) is far more exciting for them than the old streets, parks, squares and bridges of ancient cities.

As a head officer at BIO, Mr. Cinta knows there are possibilities to control these changes; but who can honestly say that one generation's ways are better than another's? This is not his fight, and besides, (Dream 1) remains the archetype of happiness,

'where anything you want can happen.'

says the voice of Common Sense.

The empty streets of Berlin are hypnotizing, who knows if more so than before. No panel shows information anymore, and it is easy to get lost. But this is just a selection of Mr. Cinta's best Memories, and who wouldn't like to get lost in their own best Memories?

∞

While arriving home, Mr. Cinta weighs the silence with normality.

'BIO is a great family'

says the voice of Common Sense, to lighten his loneliness.

But walking through his place will always make his smile come back: A splendid loft, with large sofas, an old sound system, and walls decorated with antique manuscripts. Other civilizations tell their stories in languages he would maybe one day decipher. Everything is fixed to the walls, perfectly adapted to the continuous vibrations. His bathroom is the

icing on the cake, containing a bath made of marble adorned with gold leaf.

As another long day comes to an end, he begins with his possible nightly rituals: He opens the tap of the bathtub and salts the water. Once full, he climbs in and finally, after a few minutes, he is able to clear his mind.

Normally he would go out, read, meditate a bit or have a really slow dance before resting. However, this time his penis answers with a tickle, which is soon accompanied by his own caresses, and surprised, he sees how it surpasses the water as a curved hardness emerging from nowhere.

In an attack of irresponsibility provoked by this unusual happening, he lightly dresses and starts to Zap. He decides to navigate around the local ports. Extending too far beyond the search perimeter would sound the alarm and cost him the visit of one or more gaze-less men, and then the need for an official explanation.

Well, by the time they detect it, he may be back home already. Or perhaps at BIO. Anyway, it's better not to take unnecessary risks and keep traveling through the nearby countries.

The first Dream he visits is familiar: an infinite indoor staircase, in Paris he would guess, a building from the twentieth century, perhaps the 80's. He stops a few seconds, trying to remember where he is. Then he recognizes a woman walking up the end of the staircase: Natalie, a colleague from BIO. They had an adventure some time ago, but staying would implicate a long confession: what brought him here, where had he been, why had he been in silence for so long, how is she, how is he...

The second space is not familiar at all. An animal shelter. Since the PETS extension had managed to introduce animals into the [DeepDream], the amount of abandoned creatures was always increasing. But there were also people whose Desire was to take care of them.

‘Lovely.’

says the voice of Common Sense.

Next. Next. Next. He lands in three dark rooms. Next.

Now a crowded one: a couple of sexual exhibitionists have already finished the show and are passing the hat around. Mr. Cinta regrets arriving late but also knows he needs more intimacy and that this kind of entertainment is not for him.

He keeps going. An abandoned port. Old Dreams from the first generation are producing visual noises. And then, finally, and miraculously, a door with a name: Shasta.

Her name (Her? Is he sure it is a woman’s name?), with glitter and glue, next to an old bell. The temptation is too strong... Some names are just shiny. Who is Shasta? An old star? A beloved mother? A geeky youth pretending to be someone else? What does she mean by Shasta? “Is it her stage name? Did she make it up? Is it a joke? What a name: Shasta. The existence of that door moves Mr. Cinta, for whom originality is something to be admired.

Excited, he rings the bell.

She (she!) opens the door and first thoroughly analyzes Mr. Cinta. Their eyes meet, checking each other out in a nonverbal yet noisy communication. He is old, bold and wrinkled, dressed in red velvet. She is thin and around thirty, mediterranean-like, an olive-skinned brunette with jean shorts, a long wool vest; and, to complete the picture, deep brown eyes.

Shasta finally smiles and lets him enter. He takes off his shoes and follows her into a spacious studio. The house is full of light, with big windows, purple walls, and thousands of colorful little items all around: from complex geometrical and abstract paintings to strange objects without any clear function. Everything seems to be moving and changing in slow motion, affected by the presence of a new DeepDreamer. Many items are totally unidentifiable to Mr Cinta, but it appears to him

that all that crap is keeping a strange order. Steel columns are supporting the roof, and some exotic plants are hanging. One can almost see the fixed beams of the sun entering in perfect diagonals, pointing at the flowerpots and the surrounding gadgets.

'Location?'' says Mr Cinta, a bit impressed, while sitting on an Indian cushion.

'Right now this is Prague, sir. Tomorrow who knows' smiles Shasta 'You?'

'Berlin. I haven't got the energy to travel door to door anymore.'

'Berlin... Why such a specific place?'

'That's the way we used to do it. You dreamed where your body was, on the surface.'

'You sound courteous. What generation are you from?'

'First generation. I've been around for a while now'

'Wow, you look pretty good though.'

'Thanks, Shasta. You have a funny name, Shasta. Mine is Mr. Cinta. May I ask you: what are all these... things?'

'Well, I am an artist and healer, Mr. Cinta. Dealing with good and bad spirits. This is my studio, everything I do happens here'
Mr. Cinta smiles.

'Then are all these objects pieces of art?' he says looking at the strange items surrounding him.

'Yes, some of my own work, and also presents from my patients. I keep telling them to stop sending me things, but it never stops.'

'Looks like you're quite popular, Shasta'

All of a sudden they realize three strangers have entered the room without ringing, and are staring at them in silence.

'Shit,' says Shasta. 'Sorry, I am closing the door now.'

But the strangers do not move.

'Intrusion detected. Please leave Shasta's'

says the voices of Common Sense to the strangers.

However, the strangers stay put, as if they haven't heard a thing. Together, almost as if choreographed, Shasta and Mr. Cinta shoo away the DeepDreamers who finally exit through the door just as they came: in complete silence.

'And what do *you* do?' asks Shasta.

'I've been working at BIO for many years now. I am an important part of the net.'

'Impressive. And do you like your job?'

'It is gratifying. Every day you see thousands of lives in progress.'

'Could I come to see one day?'

'Oh, no, no. Don't get me wrong, but it does not work like that. Even if I wanted to, I could not get you in there. It is extremely protected. Even I don't know how many gaze-less men are keeping it safe from outsiders.'

Shasta looks quite disappointed, and stays silent.

'Then tell me about it, what do you like most about your job?' she asks after a long pause.

'Oh, well that would be impossible to say. Perhaps being a first row spectator for countless eccentric appetites. Humanity itself revealing keeps revealing its secrets to you, the same that were hidden for centuries are now part of a huge story you get to read. A thousand stories, little biographies of each life. In fact, this little encounter we are having right now will be entertainment for some of my colleagues, isn't that funny? If I ever tell you a bit of what I have seen... you will know how insignificant you are.'

'I am not insignificant, Mr. Cinta. What makes you think you can say that to me? We don't even know each other!'

Mr. Cinta feels ashamed but then she gives him a little smile.

'I am kidding. It's just that I don't really care about what others are doing. I feel like another monkey in the jungle. That's what I am.'

'I am glad you feel like that, I wish more people would.'

And that's what we want at BIO, to secure freedom for everyone, young and old folks, and to allow them to live the way they choose to.'

'Aren't you tired of speaking about BIO, sir? Don't you have something else to speak about...? Family, friends?'

'But you asked me...'

'Ah no, it's true. *BIO is a great family*, eh? That's what you think, but what about your feelings?'

'Something is wrong with this girl.'

says the voice of Common Sense.

'You are part of all this circuit, aren't you?' asks Shasta.

'Which circuit are you talking about?'

'It's always been like that... People with power surrounded by other people with power. Today they want us to believe we all share the same Dreams. What a joke. But your kind of network doesn't really get to see further past what you already know, or what you believe that you know, does it? And this kills your feelings. You leave all your feelings in the hands of your morality. But are you sure your morality is really you? If you don't even know yourself, don't come here to talk to me about freedom.'

'You are worse than a psychiatrist!'

Shasta looks intensely into Mr. Cinta's eyes, as if trying to steal something, but he keeps avoiding her gaze.

'The big boys who control everyone... That's what you are,' she continues.

'Where is she trying to get you?

Beware'

says the voice of Common Sense.

'I ask you to stop, please, or I will have to leave and report the accusations. I did not give you any right to try your strange rituals on me'

‘You will report nothing. You guys are the modern day censors, that’s what you are’

‘The censors?!’

‘Are you scared of the truth Mr. Cinta? You know I am not the only one who thinks so. My brothers and sisters are getting stronger everyday.’

‘I know not everybody is on board with all of our policies.’ says Mr. Cinta ‘We know about your “family”.’

‘No, we do not.

What is she talking about?’

says the voice of Common Sense.

‘No you don’t. I see it in your eyes, and look at your mouth, are you cold Mr. Cinta?’

‘No I am not. I should go. I did not come here for this.’

‘Then why are you trembling?’

‘I am going now.’ Mr. Cinta stands up.

‘No you will not. You will let me see inside of you, that’s what you’ll do,’

Before heading to the door, Mr. Cinta tries desperately to save his reputation along with that of his colleagues.

‘I like you,’ he lies. ‘You are young and still have values. But don’t get it wrong... If there is an Us, then you are also part of it. We are all censors, Shasta. As long as you accepted to take part in this game, you are. Do I have to remind you of your humanity? We’re not machines, for goodness’ sake. We just have the luck of living in a digital era. But as long as you breathe, you will be judging. It is our judgement which limits each other’s Dreams, not BIO. BIO is there just to be aware of suspicious movements... And not to grant the whim of every DeepDreamer.’

‘You are useless to me.’

‘Nobody forces you to use technology,’ continues Mr. Cinta, as if he hadn’t heard the last insult. ‘They’re just tools. If I

give you a knife now, option A you can decide to kill me, or B, build a house. That's also human history, choosing evolution. BIO is there to bring order to this chaos, and prevent Deep-Dreamers from choosing option A.'

'With your calculated words you are covering for a failed system, sir.'

Mr Cinta has heard enough. He keeps silent, looks one last time at the marvelous slim shape of that powerful woman, turns away and makes a first step toward the door.

'Now, would you please open the door, Shasta,' he says.

'You aren't going anywhere, Mr. Cinta'

'And why is that, Shasta?'

'Because. If you leave, I will let everybody know that the important Mr. Cinta, one of the heads of BIO, is zapping around to fuck some poor, lonely, innocent and defenseless girl. A man with such responsibilities... I could easily block you. You came here for sex, Mr. Cinta, didn't you?'

'Shit.'

says the voice of Common Sense.

'Do you think nobody looks at my Dreams?' he answers quickly.

'I know someone does, but I also know you have good friends up there. I know nobody is checking right now, and it will take a while until they notice anything. Your routine is of no interest to any of your colleagues.'

'Do you think nobody controls your lies, Shasta?'

She laughs.

'I also have friends, Mr. Cinta. Nobody is controlling Shasta if Shasta does not want to be controlled. Do you think you know me? Be careful, I can be your friend or your worst enemy. Your colleagues must be lost analyzing and debating an accumulation of outdated provocations. Informatics is not perfect, sir, not with humans controlling it. Trust me now before it's

too late. Every mathematic accomplishment can be manipulated with the correct magic...'

'Our team is controlling everything. Why do you think I came here? We already knew about you. Now open the door or you will be kicked out' he claims, taking a desperate strategy.

'She's right. You're fucked.
Stop lying.
Let's see what she has to offer.'

says the voice of Common Sense.

'Don't you dare lie to me again! Remember that Shasta reads your gaze. I know far better than what you assume to know about everybody. There are too many of us, too much data going around. Your people are overloaded. That's the main difference between you and me: You don't really know a thing about me, but I just need to look at your eyes to know who you are.'

Mr. Cinta understands he has fallen into a trap.

'Want a tea?' she says as to diffuse tensions. 'I won't hurt you, trust me. But you will let me inside you.'

What could he do? She had dug half of his grave, and now the shovel was left in his hands. His reputation could not be destroyed in one night. He could not destroy a whole life like that. And what could she be planning with a simple tea? Nothing more than an intense immersion, everyday amusement of these young disrespectful DeepDreamers. Besides, destiny took him here, so he would have to accept the trip and try not to go too far. That's it, it's all about self-control, and the story will end as best as it can. He will have time later to find a good explanation for his biographers.

'Be safe'

says the voice of Common Sense.

'Let's have that tea,' says Mr. Cinta, and calmly sits back.

'Wonderful. It'll be ready soon. I knew you were a courteous man.'

Chapter Three

Tea Time



Shasta.

THE WATER finally starts to boil and the smell of ether invades the whole room.

Once served, Mr. Cinta takes the cup in his hands. The blue indigo beverage has a strange viscosity. After moving the cup, it takes a few seconds before some vibrations start to appear, as if the tea is holding back time.

‘Don’t play with your food, Mr. Cinta.’

Mr. Cinta drinks half of the cup in one slurp. The taste is disgusting, but Shasta comes back and sits in front of him, really close, looking intensely into his eyes. Having no chance to complain, he drinks the second half.

‘Great,’ says Shasta. Carefully she rolls a strange cigarette, lights it up and starts walking around the room expanding the dense smoke.

‘It’s ok, we will manage this’

the voice of Common Sense is still there, which gives him a feeling of security. What he does not realize is that this self-calming process is also the first response when fear sets in.

Shasta finishes smoking her cigarette in front of him, sitting in the original position, really close and looking into his eyes.

Then she starts to whistle a long, high-pitched sound, as if calling someone. Soon, the melody starts to take strength. More and more voices start to emerge from the sound coming out of Shasta's mouth.

'She is just trying to impress you.
Do not give her too much space.
Just stay calm, breathe deeply.
It will be ok.
Everything is fine.
B-b-be...'

Obsessed with controlling everything, Mr. Cinta does not realize that the voice of Common Sense is starting to malfunction, as the multiple tones coming from Shasta's whistle start invading his mind. The first colors appear: mostly blues, oranges, purples, all of them in a randomly moving composition of abstract forms.

'Ok. M-m-maybe 's starting...'

The final *-ing* of the voice of Common Sense sounds like a bell in Mr. Cinta's mind.

He looks all around him, now covered by the smoke that is filling the room. All the objects that had always been there are in the same places, but their shadows are changed. They look longer and their shapes are different. Are they human shadows? Is there someone there? The various whistles continue blaring out.

'Did you call some friends?' He manages to ask, then attempts to understand what's going on. Some DeepDreamers, while Zapping must have come into Shasta's room. But this is another kind of presence.

'Go away. We want to be alone'

'Who are you talking to, Mr. Cinta?' asks Shasta.

Hearing her voice just makes him drift further into the unknown. He starts to see the same situation duplicated. One plays out in front of his eyes, and the other in his mind. Though he knows the two situations are different, he cannot quite tell why. Shasta is in front of him, but he can also perceive the scene as an external viewer. The living room, he and Shasta in the middle, sitting really close together while looking powerfully into each other's eyes. When he wants to escape that position he no longer can. His body is not reacting.

Then suddenly something changes in the second image. Although the first situation stays the same, the secondary evolves differently: it starts to smell differently. What is it? Is it the smell of sea? Seaweed?

There is nobody else in the room that smells like ether, nor in the one that smells like seaweed. No, he cannot see anyone, but he can feel them. The light becomes bluer and bluer, indigo as the tea, and it tints all that it touches with blue viscosity. Everything is illuminated now. Except for those shadows over there...

The darker the shadows become, the more uncomfortable Mr. Cinta feels.

They're standing at his back, but when he tries to look at them, his body is still paralyzed.

He keeps trying, but it's all in vain.

There is something terrible about these shadows.

Shifting back to the original situation, Shasta is still looking at him. He feels a bit appeased, as he begins to understand that what is happening is caused by the tea.

And slowly, in a moment of recovered lucidity, the voice of Common Sense says

Try to, try to keep, keep, *pe...*

But then then it starts to sing.

Trykp Pek Tryp Kep
Tryky
Trykepe
Trykepetryke
petrykepy

While the singing continues relentlessly, the anxiety takes hold of all of his senses, and his breathing gets harder and harder to manage, becoming more difficult to deeply inhale. While trying to do so, a crushing pressure pushes into his neck and thorax, as if somebody is choking him with all their might. Are the shadows trying to kill him?

He finally loses control and is horrified.

Anguish makes him painfully aware of the situation.

But his body does not react at all to his fear, it remains paralyzed.

‘Breathe deeply. You are here, with me. It’s my studio, remember?’ In the distance, Shasta’s voice sounds like an angelic chant.

‘Talk to me’

‘I... I c-’

He can’t. It is impossible to breathe, let alone talk. The voice of Common Sense is singing and Shasta starts to sing along.

O’ná kiopero
Solama/ta
Kiopero
Mama

At some points all the verses come together and faster with no single strophe to be deciphered

kioperomamakioperomamakioperomamakiopero
kioperomamakioperomamakioperomamakiopero

The shadows are not hiding anymore. He cannot see them, but their role is pretty clear: they are drummers, playing some sort of ancient instruments. Dark and unknown, he can feel dozens of them drumming on his back. The sound grows louder and louder and louder, becoming unbearable.

While Mr. Cinta's ears feel as if they will blow up, the indigo space is beginning to swallow itself as an immense gravitational pull drags the room toward the floor.

In total panic, Mr. Cinta keeps seeing himself as a third viewer, in the original room with Shasta still so close, looking intently into his eyes, singing, and lighting up strange cigarettes whose smoke she then blows into his face.

And with this double reality of his unconsciousness, with all that information and the unknown making him a god that has lost control of his world, of his two worlds; his body finally reacts, but not by his own wishes.

Very slowly he starts to make curved lines, in motion, from each part of his body, from his index to his neck, from his belly to his mouth, from his knee to his hip. His whole body is in movement, and takes on the rhythm of the drummers, the melodious disharmony of the singing of the voice of Common Sense and Shasta's whistling.

He stands up, and so does Shasta, not allowing him to get too far away from her. But their gazes are not connected anymore, not there, nor in the situation of his mind. And he can no longer return to the original situation.

*kioperomamakioperomamakioperomama
mamakioperomamakioperomamakiopero
kioperomamakioperomamakioperomamakio*

The shadows are unceasingly beating their drums behind him, faster and faster and Shasta and Mr. Cinta begin to dance really close, in a complete trance. Their bodies are extremely flexible and malleable. Shasta keeps coming closer and closer

to him, until they are glued to each other in the most violent way.

While dancing, the space rapidly begins to change.

They cross doors without even realizing it. Mr. Cinta can only see a few occasional reflections of the places that they pass. One door leads them to a room quite similar to Shasta's living room but almost empty. A huge aquarium is in the middle. Mr Cinta sees a few dead fishes floating at the top of the aquarium.

A door appears inside. While opening it, water rises over their feet.

The room is flooded, and many little objects are also floating.

The music goes on and they keep traveling, the hundred rebel drums playing.

A thousand animals start to shout, sounding like heavy artillery. The noise of war is on. Mr. Cinta is in pure ecstasy. The pair dances all around in circles. They carry on like this for ages, in a space without any defined dimension.

Finally a storm delineates the place. All around them, the landscape starts to change fast and continuously, some items appearing and disappearing in a continuous metamorphosis of the five senses.

The air becomes a line, a line becomes a curve; a curve, a bubble, the bubble becomes a rock. The single rock approaches another and creates mountains. The mountains stick to each other creating a range. Rain starts to stagnate and cover the surroundings of the circular space where the dancers are still going on, faster and faster, as does the music. Lap after lap.

Although the falseness of the situation is clear, the effect of the tea is just starting to reach its peak in Mr. Cinta, giving the environment a perfect volume of reality.

She suddenly separates from him, but he cannot stop dancing anymore.

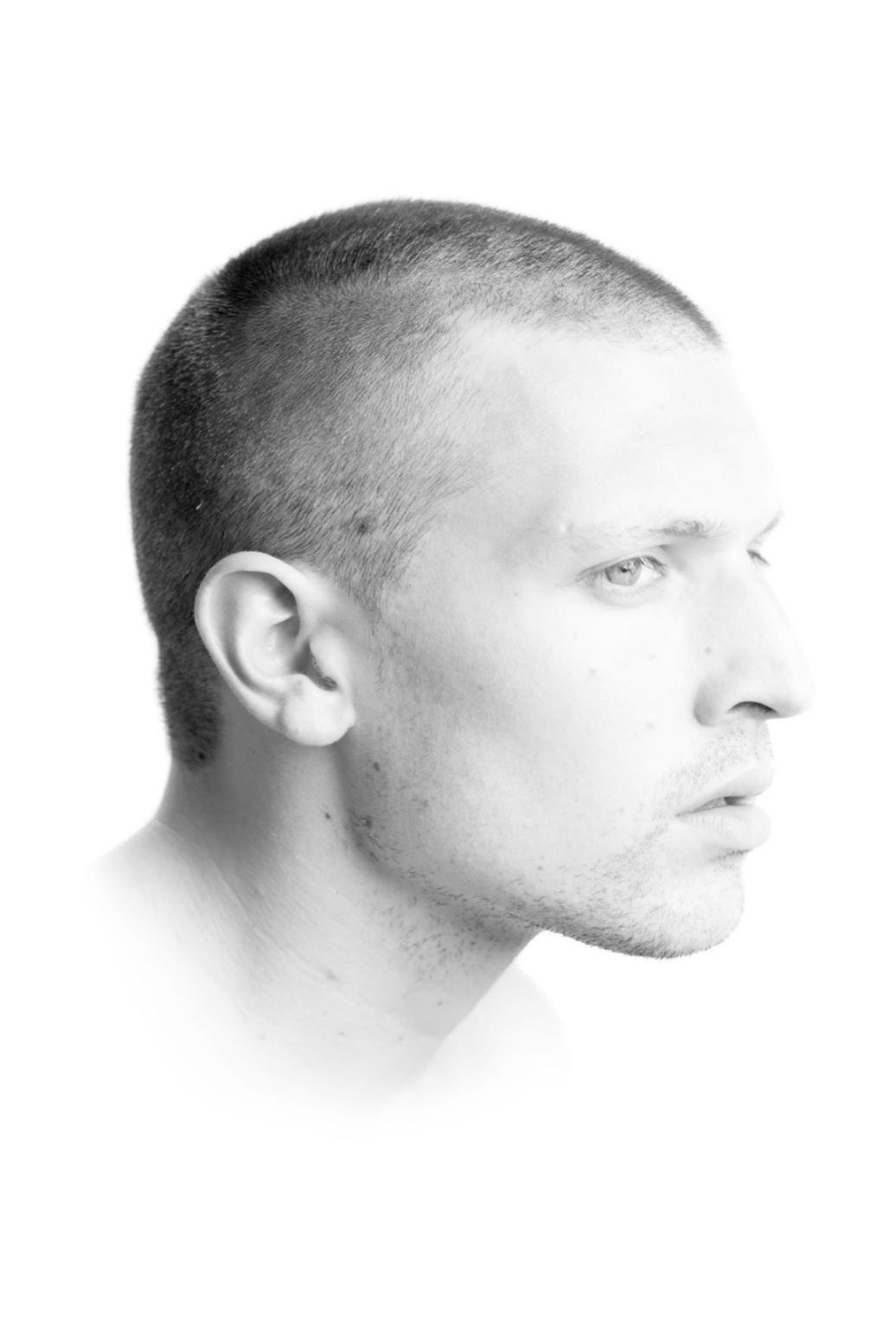
Everything is moving.

Back at his place, the silence is deafening. The water is cold. It takes him a long time to recognize where he is, who he is. When he finally starts to take control of his body again, he first moves his fingers, followed by his wrist and arms. Then, with the last bit of energy he has left, he raises his hand to cover his face, and cries.

The music is resounding in his brain and a voice repeats again and again

‘Wake up. We’re done. The calm will come after the storm.
Wake up. We’re done...’

Chapter Four
The Pajama Party



Benicio.

AT HOME Leo and Benicio are celebrating. Both are excited, sitting on the dancing room sofa. After a few dances and a few drinks, their bodies are ready to go. They have been warming up for the big night. With the *Farewell to Reality* theme, a big amount of DeepDreamers are expected at the Pajama Party.

‘9008119 DeepDreamers are interested in the event.
1785901 have confirmed attendance.
It’s going to be huge!’

affirms the voice of Common Sense.

From where they are sitting, they can admire the new golden door installed by BIO to connect house and office. Leo’s mind is flying softly with the anticipation of the positive changes ahead.

‘You cannot stop writing man, imagine what a crisis for your fans.’ says Benicio.

‘There are other good writers around,’ answers Leo.
‘They’ll just find someone else.’

‘Not as good as you are.’

‘Bullshit. I am sure they are just waiting for me to retire,

and I'm happy to pass the torch. Anyway, I am getting tired and running out of ideas. I don't know if I have anymore Illusions left in me.'

'You are the one talking shit. Look at the numbers you're doing, man. You keep nailing it. I'm the agent here, I know what I'm talking about. It's been years now that your work has appeared on almost every Top 10 of the Most Experienced Illusions.'

'Well, maybe it's time for the DeepDreamers to live their own Dreams. I don't know if I'll have enough energy to work at BIO and try to keep turning out quality Illusions every morning, too.'

'Relax man, don't think about that now. They like it even when it isn't that good.'

'Fuck you.'

'I'm just saying... You know I'm here to keep your work going. You don't need to quit, just a change. We should join forces and create something nice and new. BIO isn't for you, man. You deserve better,' Benicio gives Leo a toothy smile.

'Are you scared Ben? Is it that?' 'I'm gonna be in your mind. I'm gonna be your Common Sense.' Leo laughs nudging Benicio.

'Don't say that, it's creepy.'

'I will know everything you do. I will be the one that controls you,' says Leo, wiggling his fingers around Benicio's forehead.

'Shut up. I hope it's a bit more sophisticated...'

'I was kidding man, of course it will be. Do you actually remember a time without BIO? They won't let me destroy the reputation of such an important company,' says Leo.

'Maybe you shouldn't go to work tomorrow.'

'What are you saying? I am not gonna miss my first day.'

'All right. It's just that... I'm gonna miss you, man.'

'My schedule will be a bit busier, but I'll still come home every night. Besides, we are not a couple or anything, don't start to act like a kid'

'I know, I-'

'You have your own projects too, don't you? What about that idea of stopping the turbulence and all that? You dream big Benicio, go for it!'

'That's what I am talking about.'

'You love me?'

Benicio laughs.

'Fuck you. For sure I love you. That's why I'm not sure you should go to BIO tomorrow.'

'I don't get you man. Are you jealous?' asks Leo.

'I'm happy for you. It's just that, like I told you... I think that you'd benefit from the Breathing Sessions. Come on. Come with me tomorrow.'

'Some people have to work. I don't have time for that.'

'Do you really want that kind of life?' asks Benicio.

'Do you really enjoy wasting your time on trying to recreate your past?' answers Leo.

'Forget about it. Let's just enjoy the night.'

'That sounds like a more optimistic idea.'

'I will find you the best and the brightest. Man or girl?'

'You know it's not so easy'

'Yes, yes, I know. Poor Leo, his little mind doesn't allow him to talk in public...'

'Sometimes I hate you, you know that?'

'You're lovely, you know that?'

'Aren't you gonna close your mouth?'

'Kiss me.'

'Let's go!'

∞

'Look at that piece of shit,' says Benicio.

That little piece of shit has been dancing now for about four days and nights, if that can still be called dancing. With ripped, dirty pajamas, he's trying to move his arms and legs to the rhythm

of music. After each contortion of his body, he falls down, then stands and falls again.

‘Leave it alone,’ answers Leo. ‘He is lost, poor guy.’

‘It makes me sick.’

‘What happened to your karma, Mr. Breathing Sessions?’

Benicio laughs.

‘By judging your friend,
you’re playing the same game.
Allow his innocence.
We become wiser
by forgiving the ignorance
of others.’

says Leo’s voice of Common Sense.

The Pajama Party has no start or end, and many Deep-Dreamers have made it their home. You can recognize them from their look and attitude towards the non-regular visitors, a mixture of pride and decadence. Leo is dancing alone. Benicio has disappeared, for sure talking with some girls. The main hall is enormous, surrounded by dozens of other doors, leading to hundreds of stairs and rooms. It’s hard to see the end of it. The acidity of the music is taking up all of the space, and a trumpet is reverberating off of every wall. The place’s decor is in constant mutation, millions of oneiric images float all around, molding a general impression of curvy comfort. The new generations of DeepDreamers, the primary attendees of this kind of party, are enjoying every aspect of the sensorial inputs.

Leo’s body detects every change that occurs in the music far before his mind. A saxophone is struggling over a tiny tiki tiki tiki tiki ti beat. A grave and feminine voice gives a speech in some lost language. She’s speaking of freedom, and the speech is brought to an end by a breakdown of extremely fast repetitions of futuristic alarms, which makes Leo go

wild without control, dancing on the floor, leaving his legs up to the ceiling and to the thousands of strange images that are floating: open windows with obscure landscapes; gardens crowded with wooden houses; strange characters; castles and ruins. The music finally calms down, resting on an ultrasonic xylophone sounding further and further away, then the final drum riff.

‘Sorry, you’re friend told me... Are you Leo Po?’

‘I...’

‘Hey, Jess, come here! It’s Leo Po in person!’

‘What? Seriously? Are you THE Leo Po? Man, we love your work. We meet almost every morning to experiment your Illusions. It’s great what you do. Don’t ever stop, please.’

Leo keeps quiet, prolonging a long and uncomfortable silence, covered by the music starting again, this time on an 8-bit instrumental.

‘Yes, girls, this is my man Leo Po, the original. Who wants to touch him?’ says Benicio.

Leo Po blushes and looks around. And again that uncomfortable silence.

‘Why the shyness Leo?’

says the voice of Common Sense.

‘Maybe you are made to be alone.’

‘Well, it was nice meeting you, Leo. We don’t want to bother you. Well... Congratulations. We’ll be around, if you want to talk or...’

And after waiting a bit for an answer, to the astonishment of Benicio, they leave.

Why would he always get that stupid face, unable to answer any question? They were really cute, and they knew his work! It was a done deal. He had written and shared thousands of sexual Illusions, but he couldn’t even manage to

have one of his own. Such a fucking loser. Was he asking too much?

‘The right one will arrive.
You are doing fine by yourself.
Solitude is strength.’

says the voice of Common Sense.

All those beautiful people around, sharing a dance, moving their sweaty bodies with the goal of only dreaming deeper, becoming stronger and even more beautiful. Leo can imagine himself following them through the long and bright labyrinth of the platform. At some point, one of these girls or boys, green eyed with brown hair, would turn to him and say

‘Hey, I know you. You were at that party last night... Wasn’t that you, with the black pajamas?’

‘Sure! That was me. You were the one with the Big Foot slippers.’

‘Yes! I couldn’t speak there... All the people and the loud music, but I wanted to talk with you’

‘That’s funny, so did I’

And they would go to a silent venue, fall in love, travel to some forgotten Dreams. No doubts on their mind, having no goal to reach, spending their time writing kitschy Illusions to each other and laughing at their feelings. Then they would get some door to connect their Dreams, and everyday, after his shift at BIO, he would have someone sweet to meet.

‘BIO is a great family’

says the voice of Common Sense.

‘What are you looking at?’ says an upset-looking girl next to Leo Po. ‘Back off. Just dance, man. I didn’t come here to have you slobber all over me.’ ‘Dreaming is respecting other Dreams’.

‘Intrusion detected. Please leave Xi Lin’.

says the voice of Common Sense.

‘Sorry’ says Leo Po and, shamed, tries to find his way back to Benicio. He has disappeared again. It’s been like that the whole night. Leo moves around the different spaces with agility, going out of the main hall to the contiguous rooms. All around, dozens of DeepDreamers are lying on the top of each other, conforming masses of sleepers. One can see from their rolled eyes how far away they are.

In the search for his flatmate, Leo moves to the upper floor. The atmosphere gets darker and most of the DeepDreamers are dancing by themselves. Leo hurries out in search of Benicio, trying to navigate his way through the dark rooms. But a terrible smell finds his nose, and soon, he is falling into a group of sweaty bodies sharing a collective Dream.

‘You are feeling heavier and heavier.

Feel the weight of your body. Breathe deeply...’

sighs the voice of Common Sense.

With no notion of the time passing, he is immersed in the collective Dream, and finds himself in a cold and deserted old train station. It’s nighttime. Inside the big Neoclassical building, the DeepDreamers are on the top floor in a waiting room. Sitting in chairs, around fifteen strangers are looking at each other, or looking into their hands or scratching their heads, before looking back at some other DeepDreamer. They do not make any reaction to the sudden appearance of Leo. The sound of heavy breathing is constant, and the same general sweaty smell dominates the room and its silence. Someone yawns and another huffs and puffs.

‘What are you guys playing?’ asks Leo to an old woman.

‘Nothing.’

‘Then what are you doing?’

‘Nothing.’

‘That’s not boring?’

‘Maybe.’

‘You should move a bit! There is good music out there!’

Leo tries without any success.

‘Why would you move, anyway, if the world is already moving?’

‘Well... the whole thing about dreaming is movement, I mean... Look around you: The world is full of possibilities. There are plenty of things to do.’

‘Working do you mean? But why would you work anyway, if the world is full of workers?’

‘I am not talking about working. I am talking about adapting to the turbulence. One has to do something in his life, to have some goals. I have mine, and I reach them. Tonight I am celebrating!’

‘Why would you try to do anything great anyway, if this world is already fucked up?’

‘I...’

Slightly afraid of the tedious and stoic look of that woman, who did not so much as share a

glance with him at any moment, Leo decides to move before she might convince him. That was

something new. Is this another kind of Breathing Session?

‘Why are these people dreaming?’

asks the voice of Common Sense.

Waking up from that boring Illusion, it takes him a while to get out from under the heap of bodies. He continues his search, and this time reaches Benicio without difficulty. He is on another dance floor, talking to a lonely girl. The music is slower, a flute from outer space is painting a lunar landscape. Such a romantic atmosphere.

‘Ben.’

‘Hey man,’ Benicio is totally wasted. ‘Where were you? I’ve been searching you the whole night. Come here, I want to introduce you to my friend...’

‘Nora.’

‘Yes, Nora, that’s it. Nora, this is my flatmate, Leo Po.’

‘Nice to meet you Leo.’

Benicio raises an eyebrow.

‘Doesn’t that name sounds familiar to you Nora? Leo *Po*?’ asks Benicio.

She considers it for a moment.

‘No, I’m sorry. Do I know you?’

Leo smiles shyly but doesn’t say a thing.

‘You should,’ says Benicio. ‘You have in front of you the best Illusions writer in the whole platform.’ ‘And me, well, I’m his agent, you see. So my role is quite important. And I’m also a programmer... And tonight we are celebrating!’

‘Oh, I love programmers,’ she looks directly into Benicio’s eyes.

‘I need a bit of air,’ says Leo, as he rolls his eyes.

‘What? Where are you going man? I just found you. Stay here, Nora has many friends, don’t you Nora? Don’t leave now, we’re celebrating!’

But Leo is already heading for the stairs.

‘I’ll be back,’ he says, already from far away.

‘Leo!’ shouts Benicio.

‘What?’

‘Nothing.’

Benicio is that kind of intense DeepDreamer that makes them hot. He has all the tricks, he looks natural, as if it was easy for him and not forced at all. He has all of his objectives clearly mapped out: getting deeper, remaining calm, and having fun; and this is apparently very attractive to many girls. They don’t care about real ambition, they want men with clear ideas.

Tonight Leo has had enough. Tomorrow will be his day:

the start of a whole new life. An important Biographer, a writer of Common Sense, which is something that will make girls and boys fell in love even with a shy guy. One day they will know about Leo Po, the Illusionist, the one who writes their Common Sense. Yes, his biography will be a must-read and then they will want to follow him through the labyrinth, and knock on his door. He will open, but only to the best and most attractive. Benicio will be eating from his hand, serving his master. Fuck him. Fuck all of them.

‘Wake up. We’re done.
The calm will come after the storm.’

says the voice of Common Sense.
‘When did I set a new alarm?’ asks Leo.

‘Wake up. We’re done.
The calm will come after the storm.’

‘I don’t wanna wake up. Not hungry at all. Has someone died? Why should I leave?’

‘Wake up. We’re done.
The calm will come after the storm.’

‘Fine, I’ll go home if it’s absolutely necessary. This party is boring anyway, I don’t know what I am doing here. But I’m not waking up. Not tonight.’

‘Wake up. We’re done.
The calm will come after the storm.’

‘What kind of bug is this?’

‘Wake up. We’re done.
The calm will come after the storm.’

repeats the voice of Common Sense.

Leo Po needs to find whoever is in charge. He is almost sure that he’s seen a few gaze-less men controlling the main entrance. They must know what to do, that’s their role, isn’t it? Computers are made to serve the DeepDreamers. But what if they get scared of the bug attacking his Common Sense and shut down his server? He cannot wake up now, not the night before his first day. Not at the start of a whole new era for him, now that he is almost set for life.

‘Wake up. We’re done.
The calm will come after the storm.’

There is no time to waste on wondering. He needs to take the risk and try to find them.

‘Wake up. We’re done.
The calm will come after the storm.’

In a panic, he sprints across the big halls, dark rooms and dance floors without paying attention to anyone else. His own Dream is in danger, the adrenaline of self defense is activated. Once arriving to the main entrance he opens the doors and to his surprise, is instantly soaked. He finds himself caught in the middle of an enormous storm. The landscape is marked with an infinite hallway surrounded by dunes and leading out the sea.

‘Wake up. We’re done.
The calm will come after the storm.’

‘Wake up. We’re done.
The calm will come after the storm.’

Nobody is at the door. Outside, the scene is becoming more and more apocalyptic: the enormous storm is covering everything, the sky is taking the shape of a waterfall. He must go back. There's no way he can go outside. He must find a door. What's the shortest way? Through the main hall. He must be fast. Something is not right at all. He has to maintain control. It's important to stay in control.

Back in the main hall the situation is worsening: the place is in total chaos. Half of the DeepDreamers are running around hysterically, and the other half are frozen in fear, trying to stay in control. What to do when the voice of Common Sense is not there to help them make the right decision?

The music has stopped but the internal noise is in every DeepDreamer, all over the platform.

Chapter Five

The Big Blue



A gaze-less man.

LYING IN bed, Leo Po keeps his eyes shut, hoping he will never have to open them again. It is unbearable to process what has happened. Could it possibly have been real? He knows one can choose their own reality: you just need to be a bit selfish, and imagine something for yourself. Leo is trying his best to create an Illusion that will calm him down, focusing on the cozy feeling of being in bed without having to move a muscle, or even open an eye.

‘Good morning, Mr. Po.
Today is an important day,
first day at BIO’

says the voice of Common Sense.
What a placid voice to hear.

‘BIO is a great family’

‘Ok, ok. I understand. I won’t be late on my first day, that’s not my style.’

In addition to the return of the voice of Common Sense, a homey smell of coffee finally enters the room and makes him brave enough to open his eyes.

‘What the ?’

He finds himself staring at the ceiling, grey and dirty rather than its usual gleaming white. The whole room, normally practically sparkling, with its sunny open windows and its exquisite baroque furnishing, is now a fully enclosed square, made of concrete and covered in mold, spider webs, and a prominent layer of dust.

No longer comfortable, he stands up, goes and searches for Benicio. Once out of his bed he dips his bare feet into the muddy puddle that covers the whole floor. A sudden thud throws him into the water, its resonance making it impossible for him to remain standing for even half a minute. So he starts to dance slowly, shaking his body to the the resonance, and finally stands. As he needs to get his dirty pajamas off, he manages to find an old fashioned suit that looks like it hasn’t been worn for years. He needs to roll up his pants to save them from the water.

When he finally gets out, he finds himself in a corridor which is also grey and dirty. The water is everywhere. But at least the place is now calm. The kitchen is empty. The coffee pot has been forgotten on the burner and the brown liquid is mixing with the dirty water on the floor.

Leo searches around the flat, Benicio is not at home.

‘Weird. I hope everything is ok.’

‘They are waiting for you at BIO’

says the voice of Common Sense.

‘I’m coming. I’m coming. I’ll get coffee there.’

And he opens for the first time the new door, which now is made of cheap plastic materials, instead of gold.

∞

‘Ah! Mr. Po! We’ve been waiting for you’

Upon his arrival, a gaze-less man welcomes Leo Po with a big white smile. He did not meet him on his previous visit. This one is slim and tall, his wrists and ankles escaping from a dirty suit. He’s accompanied by another colleague, shorter and with a big belly peeking out of his green shirt.

‘We have been reviewing your work and it’s quite impressive’ says the shorter one.

Entering the building, he can’t help but notice that it’s not even half as big as he remembers it. The ceiling is so low that the tall man has to stoop down as he walks. He stops for a moment, lowers his face, and takes Leo’s hands, looking deep inside his eyes.

‘Your illusions are so inspiring to us! One publication per day, that’s a record! We’re so happy to have you here on such a day!’

‘Absolutely. Thank you for coming,’ says the shorter one, renewing the march. ‘And what a response we’ve had from the DeepDreamers! These days there can’t be but one who hasn’t tried the great Leo Po’s work.’

‘And whoever tries one, always comes back for more.’

Leo Po blushes. What a warm welcome. He could never get tired of such compliments, but it is true that he has been sharing a lot lately.

‘You’re highly gifted, sir,’ concludes the short one.

‘We’ve reserved a special place for you, Mr. Po.’

Leo Po feels a strange familiarity with the route they are taking, although the scenery doesn’t ring a bell at all. The ceilings are low, held up by drywall covered in holes, with no decoration. On his way he can distinguish a few old panels, worn away with age, missing letters and some totally incomprehensible. In the mess, he manages to make out a couple of different panels with directions written on them: ‘ST RAGE’, ‘FILT RING’, ‘DI TRI UTION’. Then he sees a plaque: “BIO. ‘Storing your Dreams since ’. The year has been erased.

The water keeps filling the whole building and is finally reaching the height of his knees. A smell of sewage permeates everything. The last shreds of wallpaper are cracking and swelling with the water. The magnificence of the place has been reduced to its bare minimum.

Distracted, he collides with a handsome gaze-less man, the papers he has in his hand, which he is trying to save, falls into the puddle.

‘Look where you’re walking, you little...’ the handsome gaze-less man says angrily, snatching up the wet sheets from the dirty water one by one.

‘I’m sorry,’ says Leo, scrambling to help him with the papers.

The handsome gaze-less man is clearly surprised as he looks up at Leo Po’s face. The last sheets flow with the current of the water.

‘Mr. Po! I’m so sorry, I didn’t realize it was you. It’s an honor. Now, go, go! You have much more important duties to attend to than saving my stupid papers.’

The tall man gives Leo Po a pat on the shoulder with a surprising strength, setting him back on the way to his office.

‘It was a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Po. You are an example for us to follow,’ says the handsome man disappearing at the end of the narrow corridor.

The further they go in, the more familiar the place looks.

‘Here we are.’

They stop in a flooded corridor of pink paintings. An old oak door stands in front of them. There is a red plaque on it with a name:

LEO PO 01001100 01000101 01001111 00100000
01010000 01001111.

Leo Po pauses a moment suspiciously.

‘This is Mr. Cinta’s bureau’ he says.

‘Well, now it’s yours,’ says the tall man, with the same big white smile.

‘What happened to him?’

‘We had to block him. He got infected by the nightmare of Shasta, and managed to share it with the entire platform. You see, he had a lot of power here, access to every Dream we store. He managed to make all that mess by himself.’

‘Shasta?’ repeats Leo.

‘You will soon know about her,’ says the short man, looking down.

‘Have a good day, Mr. Po,’ says the tall one, and without further explanation they leave him alone.

Inside, the office is minuscule, and only lit by a hanging bulb wrapped in a paper-cone, as if decorated for a child’s birthday. He has to thread his way between the wall and the desk to get to the chair.

On top of the desk, a file is waiting for him.

‘That’s it. I made it. I am going to analyze my first biography. Mum, look how far I got!’ he says loudly, looking at it with big eyes and laughing to himself. As he sits down, the water drenches his pants, so decides it better to sit atop his desk.

BIO

Human Resources

01110011 01101000 01100001

01110011 01110100 01100001

‘Shasta’

Leo flips through the first couple of pages, a question mark in his eyes.

‘Is loyalty just a mask? Keep your motives clear and enjoy yourself. Worry? No need to, we will always be with you. Just listen to us, just

listen to your Common Sense.

You wake up. Welcome to your studio:
a fake studio for a fake Dream. Look at
the mirror, how beautiful you are. You
should feel fortunate.

Computers never get
such beautiful eyes.

The truth is that they don't get eyes
at all. Now forget the mirror,

Don't be too narcissistic.
It will not help.

There is work to do. You will receive a
few visits today. You are expecting them,
but they aren't expecting you. Random
Zappers searching for sex. We will di-
rect them to you. New generations never
ring, they just enter. But don't give them
attention and they will leave as they came.
If you hear your bell, it is surely an old
DeepDreamer, a first generation with good
manners, awaiting for you to open. That is
the profile you are looking for. (...)

Leo Po keeps reading fast, intrigued by the specificity of
the first biography they assigned him, unaware of the water
rising in the room. A computer with eyes? He has never heard
of such a thing.

(...) Lately, we have experienced too
many treasons from DeepDreamers of first
generation. We need a radical cleaning.

Our best and most trusted men were easily manipulated to give information to dangerous DeepDreamers, sometimes other companies' mercenaries, sometimes just psychopaths or plotters. Mostly beautiful people, with a clear target: important men searching for new adventures: sex, violent appetites, conquests, or any opportunity to display their power. Identifying their fetishes is the best way to push them against the ropes.

We need to know who will always stand for BIO. That is what you are here for: to be hard on our workers and control if they would threaten the privacy of BIO and its DeepDreamers. As they know better than anyone that such perversions are not allowed at BIO (as our policy says: Solitude is strength), until which point will they keep their fidelity to the company when forced to talk? (...)

The pages goes on. The profile of Shasta looks quite clear: she is a computer-generated Dream, programmed to test BIO's workers. But this is not what Leo applied for. He never asked to be involved in the affairs of Human Resources. This is something that is beyond him. Shouldn't he be writing Common Sense already?

(...) Let's just fake a revolution. Build your character. Make them fear for the health of their stability. Make them certain of your intentions of denouncing them. Believe in your power, you're young and cute, they are old and alone. We will give you everything you need. Just listen to us.

We know their biographies so we know their weak points. (...)

The text continues, nothing exceptional happens. A few old men ring the bell, Shasta plays the cute and interesting girl: artist and healer, what a character. Some of them end up revealing compromised information regarding BIO in exchange for either the promise of sex, or promise of keeping their little Zapping trip silent. It is a routine process and once they talk, they will be instantly blocked.

But most of them just have a chat and leave politely, not really having strength for anything else, not wanting to break their crafted routine and stability. The same scene happens again and again. She tediously waits while playing with the objects in the room, listening to the voice of Common Sense as it broadcasts her programmed biography. It's made of easy and repetitive external Illusions used by the one that are controlling her, and only interrupted by the adaptation to the DeepDreamers that ring the bell. Boredom takes over Leo Po's face. But a new element appears on the paper.

(...) the water is about to boil. You love that tea. It makes you so happily awake. But you hear a noise at the door and the bell rings. You turn off the fire and open the curtains to let the sun shine in. You might be thinking: 'Am I ready for this?' Yes you are! You always are! You were born ready!

Leo Po jumps from his desk. He starts toward the door, hitting his head on the dangling lightbulb, and almost trips over a loose tile on the way out. Outside the bureau, at the end of the corridor, he finds the two gaze-less men having a long discussion, walking and then slowing down their pace.

‘Hey, wait! Wait!’ he calls out.

Leo runs the whole way, but they do not stop at any point, immersed in their conversation.

‘I wrote this! I wrote this yesterday! This is mine,’ he says pointing at the biography.

‘True! Another masterpiece! Didn’t we thank you for it?’ asks the tall one.

‘I don’t know. That’s my agent’s job, he handles my feedback.’

‘Well, in any case, thanks a lot!’ The tall one says with the same big smile.

‘They keep appearing everywhere!’ says the smaller gazeless man in astonishment. ‘Do you see how important and useful your Illusions have been for the construction of DD?’

‘I don’t care about that. I don’t want you to be using my Illusions to control people. I write Illusions to make people live and enjoy themselves, not for this!’ Leo exclaims.

‘Don’t come to us with that fake innocence,’ says the tall one.

‘My agent would never agree to this,’ says Leo.

‘We did not get any reclamation from you or your agent, Mr. Po,’ replies the short one.

‘I will have to check that with him. But anyway, why Human Resources? Why Shasta? I did not applied for that. How can I oversee others’ work if I haven’t even done it myself yet?’

‘Take it as an honor, Mr Po. And it’s just for today. We need the best to monitor this situation! With all those volunteers...’ a grimace invades the blank face of the tall man ‘One can never know who is going to do their job and who isn’t. We need someone to control this, and we computers cannot do that job. That’s human work. You are an important link to the net now. Mr. Po, today we need you. Just try to answer one easy question: How are we going to stop the bug?’

‘That’s not an easy question,’ he says loudly ‘And you guys

started this mess. That Shasta you programmed is a monster that has escaped from her cage.'

'We like your style,' continues the short man, 'and we need your help.'

'You created this. I did not. Don't put that on me. Who programmed you? Who programmed Shasta? I need to find whoever is responsible here. Where are the other humans in this place?'

'There is a bug, haven't you noticed?'

'Are you kidding me?'

'They are all hiding, at home, or who knows,' grumbles the smaller one. 'Looks like everyone got their holiday... Volunteers! Biographers! You never know with them. You cannot trust anyone here. Even old Mr. Cinta got corrupted, can you imagine? Humans!'

'You're the only one that came to work, Mr. Po,' says the short one. 'We're thankful and proud to be part of your team.'

'My team? This must be a bad joke... A freshman prank! Well done guys, I fell for it. Now that's enough, everyone can come out,' he shouts around.

The two gaze-less men stay stoic to Leo Po, who cannot fathom how much respect and sorrow they feel for him right now. Do computers actually have feelings?

'Ok,' he finally says. 'You're my team, fine, fine... I will need your help'

'Sure, we're here to serve you. What do you want us to do?'

'I don't know. I don't know. Let me think.'

'Do not worry in excess Mr. Po.'

'What if it was actually them
who decided to share the bug
and flood everything?'

says the voice of Common Sense.

‘What do you mean I should not worry?’ asks Leo.

‘I ask you to keep your composure, sir! I don’t think with that attitude you will find how to kill the bug.’

A school of fishes passes them, the water now at their inner thighs.

‘We know you can do it!’ says the shorter one.

‘We believe in you! You just need to believe in yourself! Do you believe in yourself?’ continues the tall one.

‘I believe in myself’ he says, with a surprising pride ‘It’s just that...’

‘Everybody will read the biography of such a heroic man, Mr. Po. Imagine how famous your Illusions can become!’

‘I was happy enough with the free sharing, with my quiet life.’

‘It will be a new era in (Dream 1).’

‘It’s the opportunity of a lifetime!’

‘Haven’t you dreamed of being a God?’

That last word causes Leo’s mind to take flight. He is easy to please. Of course he had dreamed many times of his work being regarded as a bible, the peak of what he had always wished for. Many nights, lying in his bed before sleeping, he had imagined becoming an example to follow for future generations. The distinction he knew he had always deserved would finally be recognized. The feeling is already so satisfying. What an honor it would be for his most personal reflections to become the aphorisms of an entire society. He would be the archetype for Common Sense! People in trouble will ask: What would Mr. Po do? What would Mr. Po say? What an autobiography he will write! From Leo Po to Mr. Po! “From free sharing to the boss of BIO” or “How sharing your work can make you the king of the world”. He will laugh, remembering his first day, oh what a day! Becoming a hero in just one day. Then it will be the story of a life elbow-to-elbow with the most respected directors of the biography’ companies, part of the club, part of the elite. He’ll

be the boss at BIO and then he will BE fucking Common Sense! That would be more than he could have ever dreamed of.

‘Ok, I’m in.’

The two gaze-less men instantly start walking again in the opposite direction of his office.

‘Hey!’ Leo calls out again.

‘What now?’ answers the tall one, without even turning to him.

‘Aren’t you gonna help me? What kind of team is this?’

‘Sure, you can come for help at any time. We will be at the entrance trying to dry this place up. They need us there’

‘Mr. Po?’ says the short one.

‘Yes?’

‘Be fast.’

‘Just find out how to kill the bug,’ concludes the tall one.

And so, he quickly comes back and sits on top of his desk once again, opening Shasta’s file to a later page.

(...) ‘You are not tired of speaking about BIO, sir? Don’t you have something else to speak about... Family, friends?’

‘But you asked me...’.

‘Ah no, it’s true. BIO is a great family, eh? That’s what you think, but what about your feelings?’

Ok. Now: Attack!

‘You are part of all this circuit, aren’t you?’ (...)

Leo Po skims quickly through the papers. There is something weird about the voice of her Common Sense. Something has changed.

(...) 'Because. If you leave, I will let everybody know that the executive directors of the big and important BIO are zapping around to fuck some poor, lonely, innocent, defenseless girl. A man with such responsibilities... I could easily block you. You came here for sex, Mr. Cinta, didn't you?'

You got him. We got him.

He will stay.

Look at his eyes, he is terrified.

He is lying!

(...)

'Don't you dare lie to me again! Remember that Shasta reads your gaze. I know far better than what you assume to know about everybody. There are too many of us, too much data going around. Your people are overloaded. That's the main difference between you and me: You don't really know a thing about me, but I just need to look at your eyes to know who you are.'

Things are getting strange. She hadn't gone so far with the ones before, and her talks of revolution weren't so convincing previously. Her new diction is as elaborate as Mr. Cinta's. In fact, it's even more so. Had she evolved with the experience? What are the real intentions of whoever programmed her? Did a new programmer suddenly take over?

'Let's have that tea,' he says, and calmly sits back.

'Wonderful. It'll be ready soon. I knew you were a courteous man.'

Open the curtains, the piece begins.

In the next pages, Leo has to force himself to keep reading. The nightmare provoked by that new element: the tea from Leo's Illusion, was giving him goosebumps. He would have never allowed any part of his work to be used in this way.

(...)

O'ná kiopero
Solama/ta
Kiopero
Mama

(...)

Infecting Mr. Cinta was clearly a premeditated act intended to destroy the peace of (Dream 1). The music and fluidity of the nightmare are full of impossible and terrifying images.

(...)

kioperomamakioperomamakiopero
mamakioperomamakioperomamakiopero
mamakioperomamakioperomamaki

(...)

Leo is speechless. The little game of 'friend or foe' that pushes Shasta to go further into Mr. Cinta, brings to life one of the best characters he has ever read. She was planting the seed in the deepest part of Mr. Cinta's Dream, ensuring that he would share the nightmare across the platform. Leo has to recognize it is a masterpiece. Although terrified, he feels a strange sensation: Is it envy? How long had that programmer been writing Illusions? And how will he, a lone Illusion writer, be able to stop that monster?

Look at that blue vomit
all over his mouth.
We got him.
Let's end the ceremony
and start a new age.
The Deep Dream will remember your name
Shasta.
Just say the words.

'Wake up. We're done. The calm will come
after the storm,' says Shasta.

And that's it. Shasta's file has come to an end with the same
terrible sentence that started the whole mess. Leo pushes his
face against Shasta's file.

'It's a lost cause.'

'Believe in yourself.
Be the owner of your thoughts.
Breathe calmly.'

says the voice of Common Sense.

'God. She's lost. We are all lost.'

'Wake up. We're done.
The calm will come after the storm.'

'Not again. Shut up!'

'Wake up. We're done.
The calm will come after the storm.'

'Wake up. We're done.
The calm will come after the storm.'

‘Wake up. We’re done.
The calm will come after the storm.’
‘Wake up. We’re done.
The calm will come after the storm.’
‘Wake up. We’re done.
The calm will come after the storm.’

‘Shut up! Shut up!’

‘Wake up. We’re done.
The calm will come after the storm.’

‘The calm after the storm,’ Leo repeats to himself. How hadn’t he thought of it before?

‘Those are Benicio’s words!’

Leo Po quickly stomps through the flood into the main lobby. He knows the gaze-less men are lost. They have been lost for a long time. All that energy spent in building artificial intelligence for making those good-for-nothing machines. They never learned to make decisions for themselves. But they are good and loyal security guards, and they are his team. But where could he find Benicio? Where could he be right now? Where would he go to celebrate the success of his best work?

There are dozens of gaze-less men in the main hall, clearing out the water with buckets in a perfect assembly line. But the water keeps pouring in, in great waves, ebbing and flowing. The place is becoming a gigantic water container. The shorter man starts to swim. Beside him, a jellyfish comes into view.

‘Stop that, it’s useless!’ he shouts at the gaze-less men as the water rises to his chest. ‘Come with me! I’ll need your help!’

‘Where to?’ asks the taller man.

‘To the Breathing Session.’

They swim together to an adjoining corridor. Leo follows the army of gaze-less men.

‘Wake up. We’re done.
The calm will come after the storm.’

repeats incessantly the voice of Common Sense.

The gaze-less men all seem to know where they are swimming as they traverse the grey labyrinth of dirty water. They pass hundreds of doors before they finally reach one, taking them to a place Leo can almost recognize.

∞

What used to be a green heaven is now a flat, flooded and dirty platform with a lone slope not covered by the water that keeps rising. On the slope, thousands of DeepDreamers seem to be celebrating, dancing in circles while holding hands. In the center of a big circle of dancers, Benicio is preaching to the small crowd.

‘The father gave us the island that will save us from the storm.’

‘Yes my brother!’

‘The rest of the DeepDreamers are at home, peeing their pants, waiting for the bug to wake them up,’ continues Benicio.

‘They are scared, oh yes they are!’

‘But we will wait for the calm, my brothers. We will wait on our island, and the platform will finally be for only those who deserve the calm. Our father will come, can’t you feel him? Can’t you feel the strength of his arms? Can’t you feel his immensity?’

‘I can feel it!’

‘We love you father, we love you’

‘Wake up. We’re done.
The calm will come after the storm.’

‘I can hear his voice! He wants the others to wake up! He wants us to feel the calm. He will take care of us’

‘That’s the truth brothers and sisters, the only truth!’

‘He has heard our prayers.’

‘Yes brother, yes.’

‘He has talked to brother Ben and told him what to do to save us.’

‘Yes, brothers and sisters, he talked to me and gave me the keys to save you, to create a new age for [DeepDream]. He listened to our prayers. We are the sons of the calm after the storm!’

The fanatics keeps dancing, spinning around in circles, holding hands and crying, laughing and shouting in ecstasy. Their eyes extremely wide and full of power, looking deeply at Benicio. He led them to the calm. It’s the day they have been awaiting. The final storm. Their prayers had been answered.

Suddenly, the circle is broken. A runner charges toward Benicio, landing a powerful punch directly into his face. The fanatics surrounding him go crazy and turn aggressive, but an army of gaze-less men can easily detain them. Two of them take Benicio by his arms, while Leo keeps punching his whole body.

‘You liar!’ shouts Leo, ‘you were acting this whole time.’

‘You came, too! You and your friends! We love you all, my brothers,’ Benicio manages to say despite the blood pouring from his mouth.

‘You were my friend!’ cries Leo, who cannot control his fury. ‘You were my only brother.’

‘You will be saved too!’

‘You didn’t want me to be saved’ and he continues hitting him.

The water has risen more and more and is reaching the toes of the fanatics and gaze less men who are observing the spectacle, unable to move.

‘I tried to warn you, Leo,’ says Benicio.

‘You did not! I gave you full access to my texts, and you used them to destroy everything I’ve built.’ Leo, defeated, stops for a moment. Benicio is still blocked by the two huge gaze-less men.

‘Don’t you understand? I just followed my Dreams. Just how you taught me. Don’t you like it? Look how big your Illusion has become! I only made it stronger.’

‘You murderer. I did not write this! I just write silly beginnings of each day for DeepDreamers with little imagination. I should have known that those Dreams of yours were dangerous. I should have reported them long ago. They would have blocked you and I would still be content with my comfortable life.’

‘If no one at BIO had detected me, how would you, shy little Leo?’

‘Fuck you.’ Leo starts swinging again. ‘You used my texts to create a nightmare.’

‘Don’t you understand? [DeepDream] *was* the nightmare. And BIO had already set the stage for me to enter. By following who was using your Illusions, I saw what they were doing. Shasta was only one of the programs they had. Creating computers to control their *own* people. Can’t you see, Leo? They were corrupted from their own foundation! I had to do something. And if you knew how defenseless their systems were. No one trusted each other there. There was no real control. I just saw the opportunity to make my Dream real. To bring the calm to the platform.’

‘I have to kill the bug,’ says Leo with conviction while preparing for one last punch, but he has to stop, looking at Benicio’s horrified expression: his wide eyes are not looking at Leo anymore, but staring behind him, moving higher and higher.

When Leo finally feels the shadow, and turns to look behind him, it’s too late. A gigantic wave swallows up everything around. All the waters become one. The bodies of the Deep-

1
0 floats 0
1 0 0
1 1 1
1

1	0				
1		1	0		
				1	
	0	0			into the water everything sinks
1		0	0		clothes
			0		books
	0	1		1	beds
		1			bath
		0		0	mirror glasses
			1		instruments
		0		1	hidden Desires
					forgotten judgments
		0			masters
					and
		1			slaves

millions of bodies
are having a last dance
DeepDreamers
with Gaze-less men

old and fake Illusions disappear
under the water
lost Memories
traumas
imaginaries

From every corner hidden items re-emerge
the best kept secrets, the ones
they did not throw away they did not recycle
they did not abandon they did not assume
they did not forget

no Illusion is strong enough anymore
no DeepDreamer keeps control

just waves ebbing and waves flowing

The [DeepDream] keep streaming
on the water of the unknown.

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