

# THE GROOTERS



**Book 2**

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## The Grooters Book 2

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Boss gained awareness feeling cold, completely wet and sensing a lot of wind all around him. He took a deep breath, opened his eyes and saw that he was holding onto an iron ladder that was built into a mountain wall.

Thankfully, Boss had tried out *via ferrata* before, but this track looked very challenging, especially with this weather as the iron steps got very slippery.

He looked down: it must have been at least 500 meters straight down the mountain cliff. And he looked up: he could see the ladder for another 20 to 30 meters, and then it disappeared into the clouds.

Boss was very glad that his security belt was hooked to the solid metal rope that ran parallel to the ladder. But he knew he couldn't let go of his grip because he would fall down two meters and bang against the mountain wall, and that would hurt big time.

"Is this a situation that I really dream about?" Boss wondered as he noticed the circle with the star engraved on the iron steps. "Maybe something went wrong with Dimenport's machine this time?"

Given the fog and clouds further up, he told himself it would be safer to climb down the ladder, rather than up. So, he started to step down slowly, but after seven or eight steps, he realised that the ladder ended abruptly.

"Looks like that answers the question as to which direction I am supposed to climb," Boss mumbled to himself and started to climb up again.

The ascent was slow, and physically very challenging, but finally he arrived at the top of the cliff. He was relieved, at least for a few minutes. The fog was very dense, and he could hardly see ten meters in front of him. Fortunately, he identified some kind of path and decided to follow it.

"It must lead somewhere," he reflected.

It was still raining, Boss was completely soaked and very tired, but stayed confident that something would appear sooner or later.

After approximately a fifteen-minute walk, the path ended at the foot of another mountain wall that was too steep to climb without any adapted equipment. Or ladders.

"What do I do now?" thought Boss. "Going back is not an option, and with this fog I cannot see anything in any direction."

He remembered having seen a movie where the hero was told to trust his intuition to get the right answer.

In his case, Boss felt that the right answer was left. And he argued to himself that the right would always be left if it turned out that the left wasn't right.

So, he left to the left, and walked slowly on the stony landscape along the mountain wall.

But it turned out to be a dead end, in the sense that if he took two more steps over yet another cliff that was now below his feet, he would literally be dead, and that would end this Dream World travel.

“Whatever trick my intuition played on me, I am glad that I have the right left.”

Boss backtracked to his decision knot and chose the only direction left. Which turned out to be right.

After a few minutes, he could hear a strange noise that appeared to be fairly close. Boss moved in the direction of the sound and shortly thereafter he could recognise a door at the foot of the cliff. It looked like somebody had just opened it.

Boss entered and was greeted by a man in his forties:

“Sorry that I did not walk out to greet you. The weather, you see...”

“Where am I? Who are you?”

“Welcome to the Cliffside Research Centre. My name is Rasmus and I work for Professor Zeitdehner who runs this centre. She is expecting you.”

“Expecting me?”

“Yes, but first I suggest that you take a warm shower and put on dry and clean clothes.”

“That sounds like a plan,” said Boss, freezing and seeing the water from his clothes that started to drip on the floor.

“Do you want to take a dry or a wet shower?”

“Dry shower? Showering in dry martini, you mean? But it is not my birthday.”

“No, a dry shower without water.”

“Never heard about that, but one thing is sure: I just took a very long cold and wet shower outside, so I wouldn’t complain if I can avoid more water at this stage. Cold at least.”

Rasmus led him through some corridors and they arrived at a door with a small inscription: “SHOWERS”.

They went in and Boss was slightly shocked when he saw several women walking around naked or half-naked.

“Looks like we took the wrong door, Rasmus, this must be the women’s showers.”

“The women’s showers?” asked Rasmus looking confused at Boss.

At that point he saw two men coming out of the showers, naked as well.

“You don’t have separate showers for men and women?”

“No, why would you need that?”

“Well, um... maybe because one could get aroused by watching the other gender naked?”

“Yes, and?”

Boss’s freezing prevented his brain from finding any further arguments to counter those rock-solid answers.

“The dry showers are to the left, and the wet showers to the right, you can choose,” said Rasmus.

“How do these dry showers work?”

“They work very much like normal water showers, but instead of water coming out of the shower head, it’s electromagnetic waves.”

“And do I need some kind of soap?”

“No, the electromagnetic waves are programmed to bombard and disintegrate the dirt atoms, so you just have to make sure they access all the parts of your body.”

“I look forward to try this,” said Boss.

“The additional advantage is that you do not lose any unnecessary time to dry yourself after the shower.”

“Thank you.”

Boss took off his clothes, doing his best not to focus his attention too much on the beautiful girls walking around naked in the shower room.

The dry shower was unusual for Boss who could clearly feel something happening on his skin, even though he could not see anything. It was a nice tingling sensation and after five minutes, he felt reinvigorated, warmed up and clean.

He walked back to where he had put his clothes, and Rasmus told him:

“Here are your clean and dry clothes.”

“Wait, how is that possible?” asked Boss, “They were soaked only a few minutes ago.”

“We use a similar process to the dry shower, and clean and dry the clothes quickly with electromagnetic waves.”

“And they smell good, too!”

“We finish off with spraying on some old-fashioned *primavera* perfume.”

Then Rasmus guided Boss through some more corridors to a lift that they took up to the top floor. That floor was very different from all the others in that the walls and ceilings were wooden, and there was a nice carpet on the floor and stylish sconces lighting up the walls.

Rasmus said:

“Professor Zeitdehner’s office is at the end of the hall, straight ahead. I leave you for now. Good luck with everything.”

“Thank you, Rasmus.”

Boss walked down the hall and knocked on the impressive wooden door with the golden handle screwed on for that purpose.

He heard a female voice saying: “Please enter!”

Boss entered and was greeted by an elegant woman, slim and red-haired, probably in her mid-thirties. She was wearing an appealing white dress cut like a trench coat.

The office was very cosy, resembling a mix of a private library and a living room: wooden interior with bookshelves up to the ceiling and an open fireplace at one end of the room.

The smell of the fire was a welcoming contrast to the cold wetness outside. The rain was pouring down the windows, where the view was probably stunning, but today there was only fog to be seen.

“Welcome to the Cliffside Research Centre” said the woman, “you can call me Angela.”

“An angel up in the clouds,” remarked Boss smiling at the beauty in front of him, “please tell me more about this centre.”

“Maybe you’d like some tea first?” she asked.

Boss’ English ancestry couldn’t say no to that, especially after the cold rain episode he just went through.

“That would be lovely, Angela.”

“With scones, I presume.”

“How did you know that I like tea and scones?”

“We know everything about you. Actually, it’s only you knowing about yourself, as everything you experience here in Timove and your other Dream Worlds is a product of your own subconscious, of your own imagination.”

“And I like to imagine tea and scones after a rainy day out?”

“That part isn’t imagination, it’s culturally ingrained: the English part of your DNA craves tea and scones from time to time. But the research centre setting, that’s your imagination.”

They sat down and Angela poured some tea for both of them and they had a scone each. With strawberry jam and cream, obviously.

“Delicious,” said Boss, “now, tell me more about this place.”

“This is a top-secret research centre focused on developing time travel technologies.”

“So, this odd location is because of the secrecy?”

“Yes, this is a remote place in a remote mountain in a remote country, that you cannot even see by airplane or satellite. We bought it from a bearded guy called Lin Baden. A funny chap.”

“Aha, this was the place where he was hiding, no wonder the guys who sell themselves as the good guys did not find him.”

“In my view they are clowns on both sides,” said the red-haired professor. “Anyway, this place is perfect for our purpose. Even mountain climbers are extremely rare here, and if they come in the vicinity, we use some advanced camouflage techniques that the previous owner taught us. And the weather is like this for about three hundred days per year, so we can work undisturbed most of the time.”

They sat down on the leather couch in front of the fireplace.

“Time travel, you said?” asked Boss, obviously very interested in hearing more.

“How far have you come with the development of this technology?”

“The OTC-machine has been operational for over a year now.”

“OTC?” It reminded Boss of some finance course from university, but he thought there was probably no connection with over-the-counter derivatives, although some derivative equations may have been necessary to solve the time-travel enigma.

“Yes, the *Observational Time Capsule*, which means that you can travel back in time and observe historical events without being able to change or influence them. This chronology protection is good, otherwise you could easily screw up your own existence because everything is interconnected.”

“Wow!” exclaimed Boss.

The beautiful professor took a pause for a few seconds, then continued:

“We have a big team of historians who are now re-writing the official history from A to Z. Old schoolbooks can soon be recycled. The bad forces have managed to twist historical information into their favour by using various means, so that our current history books are either inaccurate or plainly wrong. In any case, most history books are severely biased towards negative events.”

“Are you able to travel into the future as well?”

“Yes, the same technology works to travel to any point in time whether past, present or future.”

“I understand,” said Boss, “but what’s the point of travelling to the present, where you already are?”

“Good question. Most of us are only present in one place at a time, except maybe a few Indian yogis who claim to master bi-localisation. The OTC enables us to do live remote viewing, which is nothing more than an advanced version of Google Street View, where you can only see historical photoshopped images. We aim for the real stuff, to see people’s interactions on those streets and in the buildings, with sounds and smells as well.”

“Cool. This sounds very voyeuristic though.”

“It’s in the name of science. Now, what regards the travels into the future, our aim is to collect information about how we could solve today’s environmental issues to assure the continuity of the human race.”

“I have a question: when it comes to the future, aren’t there an infinite number of futures? You can’t travel to all of them, can you?”

“I am delighted to hear that you practice some clear thinking, Boss. You are totally correct. There are indeed an infinite number of potential futures. So, we have built an advanced algorithm that calculates the futures that are the most likely to occur. Think of it as a huge probability tree. Then we travel to about a dozen different futures to better grasp the important tipping points of historical timelines.”

“Smart.”

“When it comes to travelling into the future, the OTC works very similarly to Professor Dimenport’s Dream World Teleporter that you came here with, except that you cannot interact with the people and scenes like you are interacting with me now. Hence *Observational* in OTC.”

She continued: “The danger with DWTs is that those interactions could potentially lead to spacetime collapses.”

“Like if we would have a baby together?” asked Boss all the while undressing the sexy red-haired professor in his mind.



“You wish. Actually, no, you don’t wish to have a child stuck in an alternative future without you.”

“So how can I reach this specific future? It would be my dream to work in this research centre with you.”

“And what about Heidi and Tamara?”

Boss wasn’t used to others being able to read his mind, forgetting that all this takes place in his own mind.

“Do I have to choose one specific future? Can’t I jump between alternative realities? Like spending half a year here with you and half a year in Steamaru? I like variety, and maybe you do too.”

“You mean quantum jumping? I like your train of thought. In theory, we know that quantum jumping is possible. However, in practice it seems as “impossible” as teleporting. But I’ll put a team to work on that.”

Boss certainly knew through Leo that teleporting was possible, but neither of them could perfectly explain how it works.

“I like this research centre and now start to grasp the importance of the goals you have set yourself.”

“Indeed, we are very busy, but we are a good team here, we have a lot of fun and it is very motivating and interesting to push human knowledge forward like this.”

“So how does this OTC-machine work more concretely?”

“Let me show it to you. We have a machine next door.”

Professor Zeitdehner stood up and took Boss gently by the hand and they walked into the adjacent room. The room was fairly big, also with a nice wooden interior. In the middle stood a capsule that looked a little like a jet fighter cockpit, except that the hull was all made of wood, apart from the windows.

Pointing at the capsule, Angela said: “This wood is over five-thousand-year-old; an archaeologist friend of mine sent it to me from Egypt. That kind of wood exerts a timeless influence on the machine.”

“Amazing,” said Boss, “so how does this technology work?”

“Through intention. You just take a seat in the OTC, put on a headset with electrodes, and you think of the exact time and location you want to travel to. Then you will see a historical film appear on the screen in the cockpit. The only thing you need to do is to push the PLAY-button so that the images stabilise and the film starts running.”

“Sounds easy.”

“And when you have seen what you wanted at one place/time, you only think of your next destination and you will be brought there instantaneously by the pushing the PLAY-button again, as it works as NEXT-button as well. Like on a video player, you can also fast forward and rewind at your leisure if it happens that you did not land at the exact historical time you wished,” said Zeitdehner pointing at the two buttons with double arrows. “FYI, everything is recorded for further analysis by our research team.”

“And how do I do to get back here?” asked Boss.

“You just push the red square STOP-button, to the left of the PLAY-button.”

“OK,” said Boss with a kid’s smile, “now the question that you could probably have expected: can I try the OTC?”

“That’s why you’re here,” said Angela giving Boss a sensuous kiss. “This is your dream. You can have anything you want.”

Boss could evidently imagine a few other interesting scenarios with the hot professor, but right now he was mostly eager to try out the *Observational Time Capsule*.

He sat down in the comfortable leather seat inside the cockpit, and Professor Zeitdehner gave him some additional instructions and clarifications.

“Normally, you should be able to feel the meaning of what people say, even if they speak languages that have died out or any other languages that you do not understand.”

“How does that work?”

“Through feelings, in the same way as some people are able to communicate by telepathy with animals or with deceased people.”

Boss knew that was true. Modella had tried to explain how she was able to communicate with her grandparents or other deceased persons. And Goldilocks had told Richie and Webbo about her ability to communicate with animals. Through feelings.

“One more thing you need to be aware of: we discovered that some malevolent force appears discreetly on screen every time something evil happens, and as you know, history is unfortunately full of such events.”

“What does it look like?”

“You will recognize some kind of grey-black shadow above the respective scenes in the film, and the size and darkness of this shadow is proportional to the calamity of the events.”

“Maybe you have an example?”

“Yes,” continued Angela, “you will have a small shadow over a farmer working for a lord in the Middle Ages, and a bigger shadow if a person gets murdered. Worse, the

screen becomes almost black if you visit a gulag or other similarly dark places throughout history.”

“Thank you for warning me,” said Boss. “I have visited the holocaust and the atomic bomb museums, but I guess I will get another kind of exposure with the OTC.”

“Yes, you will,” said the stunning professor, “and I hope your insights can help you and your Grooters friends find clues from history so that we can rectify the course into the future.”

“I’ll make sure to pay attention to what I see.”

“There is one last thing I want to tell you before I let you go: we have finetuned the OTC over the last year to help you land at the right place and time. For example, if you think of Atlantis or Babylon and do not know their exact temporal or geographic location, the OTC will take you to the culmination period of those cultures.”

“Understood,” said Boss.

“Good luck,” said Angela with a smile, then she gave Boss a long kiss before she closed the door of the capsule.

Boss had always been very interested in history, so he was very curious to get a first-hand look at the historical events, and see if there were any differences to his current knowledge of past events.

“So much to be seen,” he thought, “the best is probably to start way back in time, then move forward.”

The computer initially suggested:

*Location: Queensland, Australia*

*Date: 96’178’932 B.C.*

Boss pushed the green button and a film appeared in front of his eyes: it was a jungle-landscape and there were plenty of dinosaurs all over the place. This was very much like he had imagined the world to be at that time.

“Looks like the archaeologists and the filmmakers got almost everything right. Except...”

Then Boss thought about the dinosaurs’ extinction, and a new date was proposed to him on the screen.

*Location: Yucatan, Mexico*

*Date: 65'512'881 B.C.*

Again, he pushed the green button, and another film started. "Aha!" he exclaimed. "Now I understand why most dinosaurs died out. Pretty obvious when you see this..."

Then his thoughts travelled to Atlantis.

*Location: Cadiz, Spain*

*Date: 10'243 B.C.*

He pushed the button and yet another film appeared in front of his eyes. Atlantis was the most magnificent city he had ever seen. It was so beautiful, and so were the people living there. They all seemed very happy and healthy. The architecture was monumental, and Boss could feel the harmony all around, and there was also plenty of trees and flowers.

"What went wrong?" he thought, and suddenly a new date was proposed.

*Location: Cadiz*

*Date: 9079 B.C.*

Boss could see the city of Atlantis sinking into the sea and the screen became darker and darker.

"A clear victory for the evil forces," he thought. "So sad, that incredible city. I don't understand exactly why it happened though."

Next, Boss thought of the building of the pyramids in Egypt, and the computer suggested the following.

*Location: Giza, Egypt*

*Date: 2566 B.C.*

He pushed the green button again.

"Hmm... interesting," thought Boss, "I am not surprised to see that they used some kind of levitation technology. There are not many other ways to explain how these huge stone blocks could have been moved up on the pyramids. But how does that technology work exactly? It looks so easy. And why have we lost that knowledge?"

Many questions would remain, even after this amazing journey. Maybe Professor Zeitdehner would have some additional answers.

After that Boss decided to visit the other six original wonders of the world. To him, the hanging gardens of Babylon were the most beautiful, but the lighthouse of Alexandria was the most impressive. He wondered whether the evil forces had the

ability to steer natural disasters, as earthquakes had destroyed most of the Ancient Wonders.

Boss's journey continued through Antiquity: he saw how the Chinese started to build the Great Wall, he saw Athens at its cultural peak, and as for Rome, he can now also confirm that the Eternal City was not built in a day.

Boss was like a kid in a candy store. He found it so interesting to follow the evolution of great cities and civilizations, most of which have only ruins left: all around the Mediterranean, but also the Sumerians, Incas, Aztecs, Mayas, Ayutthaya, Angkor Wat, Khajuraho, and many more. He had always wondered how day-to-day life was in those civilizations. Now he understands everything much better.

The trend is quite obvious: a great civilization rises, they seem to live in peace and harmony for a while, but somehow bad forces always manage to destroy most of it, leaving only sparse ruins of all the good and beautiful that these cultures had built.

Boss was mostly impressed by ancient Russia where people seemed to live peaceful lives in villages in harmony with nature. But here again, evil forces managed to infiltrate Christianity at the end of the first millennium A.D.

Boss realised that not only had those evil forces managed to destroy magnificent civilizations, on top of that they had managed to erase the details of their successful living from the history books, leaving mostly only mentions of wars, murders and miseries.

For example, he remembered how fuzzy the official description of the history of Russia is for the period before year 1000 A.D. It's the biggest country on Earth, there can't just have happened nothing before that.

The Vikings sailed across the Atlantic. Then came the Middle Ages, with the construction of castles, churches and cathedrals. This time, the evil forces lost a battle as the architects of that time managed to build such beautiful and powerful buildings that they still stand a thousand years later. So incredible was their building knowledge that almost all modern-day architects are clueless as to how these cathedrals were erected.

After that came the Renaissance, with new inventions and works of art. Florence was blooming. Then Columbus sailed across the Atlantic, half a millennia after the Vikings.

The Spanish and the Portuguese took over Central and South America. The English soon caught up with North America and the rest of the world and started to build their empire. The French cut off royal thinking.

Of all the places in time, the twentieth century was certainly the most event-rich, for good and for bad.

So Boss watched the first cars and planes, the sinking of the Titanic, the first World War, the roaring twenties in Shanghai and New York, Germany in the 1930's, the

darkest of the darkest times during the Holocaust and the Second World War, rock and roll debuts, Dallas 1963, the first Moon landing, followed by Woodstock, and two decades later the fall of communism and its related wall, the release of Mandela, New York 2001, and finally the reopening of the American embassy in La Habana, and the Cuban embassy in Washington.

Then Boss switched his intention to have a look at his own history. “A drop in the ocean of time since the dinosaurs,” he told himself. “But I need to see this.”

He saw his birth, the first few years as he grew up, the car accident, the Pact signed with the Grooters. “Already over twenty-five years ago,” he thought. He then saw himself struggling through school, going to university, launching various start-ups... then the film slowed down as he saw himself – or in this case didn’t see himself – having dinner with Heidi in the *Blinde Kuh* dark restaurant in Zurich.

After that, Boss saw himself meeting Leo at the hotel, then driving back to Geneva and welcoming Leo and Professor Dimenport landing in Richie’s spacecraft. Later, he could see the Grooters reuniting in his parents’ house, then their travels to Singapore, Sydney, Hong Kong and Morocco. And San Francisco. Back to Geneva again, eating fondue at the *Bain des Pâquis*. And finally, back in the *Dreamcockpit* secret basement of his parent’s house where he could see himself sleep in the *Dream World Teleporter*.

Then the image paused, and a big red triangle came up on the screen: “Warning! You will now see images of your future. Do you want to continue?”

Under that question, Boss could see two buttons: *YES* and *NO*. He felt like entering the kind of websites where one first has to confirm one’s age. And he wondered if the *NO*-button had ever been pushed.

Boss hadn’t really thought about the consequences of being able to see his future. He reflected that because he was already in the future, it couldn’t hurt to see more, especially that these images would be in ‘view only’ mode. If he were having a cheeseburger anyway, he could as well have a double cheeseburger, so he pressed *YES*.

He regretted that decision.

What he saw was terrible. The screen played scenes where the Grooters were travelling to a new destination where they got trapped and killed one after the other.

Fortunately, he remembered his discussion with Professor Zeitdehner about alternative possible futures, so he forced himself to think about a future with a more positive outcome.

The scene changed to yet another battle with evil forces, but this time the Grooters managed to beat them.

After that, something strange happened: the screen turned totally black for a short while, then it went completely white, as if the computer was resetting. Then some absolutely amazing scenes followed. It was as if people were waking up from a trance or a bad dream: he could see soldiers stop fighting in the Middle-East and looking perplexed at their guns and asking themselves: “Why am I doing this?” He could see them hugging their former enemies.

Boss noticed how couples stopped yelling at each other, employers stopped abusing their employees, politicians started to work together instead of against each other, people stopped numbing themselves with drugs. He then saw millions of people quitting their boring jobs and starting to do things that they loved to do where they could use their creativity to its full potential.

Gardens were blooming, houses got decorated, new creative buildings erected, ugly ones demolished. People were doing more sports and taking better care of themselves and talking positively about each other instead of gossiping.

“Wow!” thought Boss. “This is amazing!”

Now his brain was running in overdrive, so he decided this would be enough for today. He pushed the *STOP*-button.

The door of the *OTC* opened, he stepped out of the capsule, still shaking from all the events he had seen in the last two hours.

“Wow, all seemed so realistic,” he told Professor Zeitdehner.

Angela came up to him and gave him a warm hug: “I think you got some enlightenment from that travel. It is emotionally draining. Now you get a better sense of the powers you’re up against, and should be able to draw a few more conclusions as to why certain things happen.”

♪ *Kunde jag vrida tiden tillbaka – Lisa Ekdahl*

“Yes, talking about that, why do you think events like the fall of Atlantis happen?”

“Our preliminary research findings are that most civilisations, having been built on poor foundations, despite the grandeur of their architecture, will crumble sooner or later.”

“What do you mean by poor foundations?”

“By that I mean civilisations that do not understand the importance of humbleness, and the bigger and more successful they get, the more arrogant they get. And arrogance leads to downfall.”

“You think it’s as simple as that?”

“Yes, what is not simple, though, is to find out how to build a fully harmonious civilisation, because there are so few examples of that, and for those who managed quite well, the records have been meticulously deleted.”

“I understand.”

“But that’s the whole challenge with Cliffside Research Centre: to identify the main factors necessary to create and sustain a thriving civilisation.”

“Anyway, it was the most amazing journey I have ever done. And it raises even more questions.”

“Yes, you will see the world with different eyes from now on,” said the red-haired angel. “Let us go into my office again. I think you need to wind down and relax for a while.”

“You are right. It was indeed an emotionally difficult journey. No wonder that I feel disorientated: I am in the future, travelling to the past, some of which is my present. After that, on to the future of my present, then switching to another future before heading back to the future where I am now present with you, Angela. Although my real present is in the past.”

“My dear Boss, it sounds like you are suffering from T-lag.”

“T-lag?”

“Yes, in the same way as your body needs to readapt to a new time-zone after an intercontinental flight – what you call jet-lag – your brain also needs to readapt to getting back to the present after time travels. T-lag is time travel lag.”

“The present? But I am still in the future.”

“Whatever. Now, I have some presents for you that should help you focus on the present moment.”

Professor Zeitdehner opened the globe next to the sofa in her office: it was a hidden bar full of bottles and glasses. She took some ice cubes from a mini-fridge located in one of the bookshelves.

“Cognac with ginger ale. One of my favourite drinks. It will help you relax. Cheers.”

“Cheers!” said Boss.

They sat down in the sofa, then Boss asked Angela:

“Those first images from my future...”

“Yes...” She knew what he was talking about as she had followed everything he had seen from her own computer on her desk. Like Dimenport’s machine, the researchers at Cliffside Research Centre had found a way to video record the OTC time travels.



“Those images were very gloomy, but as they came up first, does that mean that that specific future has the biggest likelihood to occur?”

“If our algorithm is right, then yes. I had a look at the probability tree and the likelihood for the positive outcome is just slightly lower than the one for the negative outcome.”

“So how do we tip the probabilities in our favour?”

“By being more positive,” she said with a spark in her eyes. Then she leaned forward to kiss Boss again.

They continued their discussion for a while, then the attractive researcher took Boss’ hand and led him into another room next door. This room had an elegant mahogany canopy bed.

“Let’s see if I can manage to have you focus on the present,” said the red-haired goddess and opened her trench coat, under which she wore... nothing. He gladly accepted his present.

Boss had kind of expected to wake up in the lab with the Grooters around him, but instead he was woken up by the kisses of his fantasy red-haired lover.

“Good morning, Boss”

“Good morning, Angela. How come that I’m still here?”

“Probably because you haven’t yet got all the answers you came for.”

“I am not sure what more answers I can expect here.”

“Tell me more about what you saw in the cockpit yesterday. Was there something strange in one of the scenes, or something that jumped out for some reason?”

“Now that you mention it. Yes, there was a man in one of the Nazi concentration camps. I think it was Buchenwald. He seemed to call out for help.”

“They all needed help in there, didn’t they?”

“Yes, I know, but this man somehow tried to tell me that he had an important task to accomplish for humanity, and that he absolutely needed to get out of there alive.”

“Interesting. What more did you perceive?”

“I think his name was Karl Blitz. This was still in the early days before the outbreak of WWII. The camps were ugly, but it would become far worse. I had the feeling that he said something like “I can help you win over the evil forces”. What do you think?”

“Very interesting. This means that we might need to change the name of the OTC, as it now goes beyond pure observation if people can communicate with you across spacetime.”

“Wait. If he can communicate with me, then I should also be able to communicate with him?”

“In theory, yes. In practice, chronological protection should prevent you from being able to do that. It means you would be able to completely alter history.”

“Maybe it wouldn’t hurt to alter some parts of history. But how could I communicate with someone from the past? And even if I manage to get in touch with him, how can I help him escape from the concentration camp?”

“If you fill me up with some more of your creative energy, then I may come up with additional ideas,” said the provocative researcher, gently stroking Boss.

That was something that appealed to Boss whatever ideas would result. What doesn’t one do for science? He embraced Angela again, and they rolled into another very hot love-making session.

An hour later, happily exhausted, they continued their conversation.

“So, any new inspiration?” asked Boss.

“I think so.” answered the glowing red-haired. “If we for the moment exclude the possibility of physically travelling back in time to bribe the camp guards or whatever else would be required to get him out, then we only have the inception solution left if we want to help him.”

“You mean like remotely planting an idea in his mind that could help him escape? And by remotely, I mean both in terms of space and time.”

“Yes, I believe that with enough focus and willpower, it should be feasible.”

“Does this mean that we can change history?”

“Science has still not found out where people’s ideas and hunches come from. So, they might as well come from people like yourself – living in the future – and communicating with them across time, to give them the answers they need to sort out a relationship, choose a job or... escape concentration camp.”

“If you’re right, then this is not a minor revelation, thank you so much professor,” said Boss, kissing his brainy lover.

“It’s my job. And I would say that this was rather a pleasurable teamwork.”

“It sure was,” said Boss and kissed Angela again. “But even if I manage to plant an idea in his mind – what kind of idea or solution should I give him? I don’t know how to get out of a concentration camp.”

“That’s something you will need to brainstorm and research with your Grooters’ team,” said the beautiful professor and kissed him back.

Then he could hear Leo’s voice.

*“Welcome back, Boss. Only one DWT left. We are all very eager to hear what happened to you.”*

**BOSS PIBOLODARI – SECOND DWT – 19.02.2018**

## Part 18

## Blitz

Geneva, Switzerland, 19 February 2018

“Wow, that was intense!” was the first thing that Boss could say as he woke up on the bed in the *Dreamcockpit* laboratory in the basement of his parents’ house.

The Grooters watched Boss’ adventure in Timove together, fast-forwarding the part where he sat in the OTC, as that hadn’t been recorded by Dimenport’s machine.

“What did you see in the *Observational Time Capsule*?” wondered Verity.

“This may take some time to explain. I have a lot to share, and then there is something that we will need to discuss together. So, I suggest that we go up in the living room.”

“Good idea,” said Modella, “I can prepare some coffee and cakes. And my *maté*, of course.”

“I’ll go for cookies and a hot chocolate,” said Verity.

“I’d love to try your *maté*,” said Richie.

“Me too,” said Boss, “and in the meantime I’ll light up a fire in the fireplace.”

It was still winterish outside and the fire gave that kind of cosy atmosphere that makes winters enjoyable. And best of all, the fire reminded Boss of his recent encounter in Timove.

The Grooters had just come back from two wonderful weeks of skiing vacation in Megève, and on the last Saturday, for his birthday, Richie had chartered a Zeppelin NT airship that lifted them up to a high mountain top from where they jumped into the powder snow and skied down to the village. Modella had opted for a monoski, Leo was snowboarding, and the others used regular skis.

Back in the living room with refreshments, Boss’ recounting of his OTC experience helped the other Grooters puzzle everything together.

“What a story,” said Verity, slightly jealous of Boss’ amorous success.

Finally, Boss also told them about the man in the concentration camp. There was a long silence, then Richie said:

“It feels like our quest is about to take a new direction...”

“Yes,” said Webbo, “but the first thing we need to decide is whether we want to put our energy into trying to help this guy. I mean, there were millions of people in a similar situation.”

“I think we should trust Dimenport’s machine,” said Leo, “which means that we need to act on the clues that we receive from our Dream World travels. I vote for helping the man in the concentration camp. What was his name again?”

“Karl Blitz,” answered Boss.

“Blitz like the German word for lightning?” wondered Verity.

“Yes, and like in *Blitzkrieg*.”

“This is the kind of challenge I like,” said Richie.

“I’m in too,” said Modella.

“Are you in because of Richie or because you want to help the one-in-a-million guy?” Verity whispered to her.

“One can have several reasons for doing something,” she answered, sure of her decision.

Then Webbo addressed Boss:

“So, you mean that we – here in 2018 – shall answer an SOS call from 1938?”

“Yes, I guess that’s what it boils down to. I admit it sounds like a tough call, but we don’t know what that guy has in store for us. Everyone in?”

“We are,” said the Grooters in unison.

“Great, then let the brainstorm begin,” said Leo.

“Have I understood correctly,” asked Modella, “that the goal of the game is to plant an idea in Blitz’s head which will enable him to escape the concentration camp?”

“Or several ideas,” added Richie.

Boss, who felt that this was his project – and he was the boss anyway – took the lead:

“First of all, we would need to know more about the ins and outs of Buchenwald. We are lucky that it’s still before the war, as I am sure that will make our task easier – if at all feasible.”

The other Grooters nodded.

Boss continued: “Webbo and Verity, could you take some time online to gather as much information as possible about Buchenwald and Karl Blitz?”

“Sure will, and in the meantime you guys can see if you come up with some initial ideas,” said Webbo and they both went into Boss’ father’s office to hack and memorise a part of the Internet.

“Is there a way for him to get hold of a shovel so that he can build a tunnel to escape?” wondered Modella.

“Aha! The classical prison escape plan,” said Leo, “I think it will depend on the layout of the camp. Anyway, we will probably have to think a little bit further outside the box.”

“Out-of-the-box thinking is your domain, Leo,” said Boss. “What do you suggest?”

“Can’t Modella contact Blitz? Even if he survived the holocaust, he must be dead by now.”

“It’s not so simple,” answered Modella, “the deceased person must want to get in touch with me. And Blitz doesn’t know me. Neither did Fuconcius, but either he knew I was coming before he died or he just found me by chance because I stayed at the monastery the days after his death.”

“We’ll find more ideas,” said Leo, “but first I need some data to feed my creativity. And maybe a beer or two. I think it is wasted time to start the brainstorm before we’ve heard what Webbo and Verity have to say.”

“You’re probably right. Let’s just try and recap all the clues we got so far and what other steps we’ll need to take,” said Boss.

“Brilliant idea,” said Modella, “things have been quite intense in the last few months, especially in January.”

Richie and Leo nodded.

Boss went down to the basement to get the flipchart Professor Dimenport had used to explain how the Dream World Teleporter works.

Back in the living room, he said:

“The first serious lead we got was from Mr. Pong in Buenos Aires last October when he told Modella about Fuconcius. The newly-turned ghost then led us to some shamans in the United States, first Lowlight Nightowl, then Goldilocks Dove who told us about the Crystallica secret weapon.”

On the chart, Boss drew keywords with arrows between them.

“After New Year I got a new lead from Heidi, which led us to Professor Dimenport whom we found in Burma thanks to Webbo’s remote viewing. Richie’s *Ei in the Sky* spaceship helped us repatriate the professor to Geneva where he assembled the machine we now have here in the basement, with which each one of us can do three Dream World travels. So far, we’ve done eight out of eighteen. And we’ve found the first two crystals, in Sydney and Marrakesh.”

“Thanks for the recap, Boss,” said Modella.

“Now, let’s look at the clues we’ve got in the Dream Worlds so far.”

Boss drew a simple table with six columns indicating the name of the Dream World, who travelled, clues for Crystallica, lessons learned for the Pact and any results obtained, and where.

<b>Dream World</b>	<b>Who?</b>	<b>Clues</b>	<b>Lessons learned</b>	<b>Results</b>	<b>Location found</b>
Adrenaland	Leo	Ticker in car	Fun/adrenaline	Crystal of Beauty	Sydney
Shoparadise	Verity	Message in Verne book	Romance		
Moovia	Modella		Sports		
Flirtown	Webbo	Message in cinema	Relationships education	Crystal of Creativity	Marrakesh
Arrendee	Richie		Research		
Steamaru	Boss		Card Game		
Geneva 2061	Verity	‘Rio’ written on the Wall	Laws	<i>(Crystal of Love)</i>	
Timove	Boss	Blitz’s SOS call			

“We also got a ‘real-life’ clue from the Crystal of Beauty,” added Webbo, “which gave us the key to decode the message in Flirtown, and enabled us to find the Crystal of Creativity in Marrakesh.”

“Thanks for that, Webbo,” said Boss, “as for the clueless boxes for Moovia, Arrendee and Steamaru, they don’t necessarily mean that there weren’t any clues, we may just have missed them.”

“Not sure,” said Boss. “Let’s hope we get further insights in our coming Dream World travels. We still have more than half left. So, to summarise, our three main goals at the moment are to:

- Continue to collect knowledge and ideas that can help us fulfill our Pact, meaning anything that can solve the issues of disease, poor finances, addictions, sexual problems, job dissatisfaction and lack of love.
- Find the remaining crystals to build Crystallica. We still do not know the total number of crystals, but supposedly there are at least six of them.
- Help Karl Blitz escape from Buchenwald concentration camp.”

“Do you think there is a link between Blitz and Crystallica?” wondered Modella.

“I don’t know,” answered Boss. “There is still so much that we don’t understand; let’s just hope that the puzzle pieces will fall into place once we get more clues from our Dream World travels.”

They all admired their first two trophies standing on top of the fireplace. And imagined what it would be to have six or more of them there.

A little later, Verity and Webbo came back.

“So, what did you find?” asked Leo.

“Not very much,” answered Verity, “but maybe it will be enough. We found Karl Blitz. He died in Buchenwald in 1943.

“Poor man,” said Modella, “five years in that place.”

“Yes, and before that, three months in a Vienna prison and another three in Dachau concentration camp.”

“What else did you find out about him?” asked Boss.

Verity continued: “He was born in 1897 in Czernowitz (Chernivtsi) in the eastern part of the Austro-Hungarian empire; it lies in today’s western Ukraine. His family was Jewish and his mother tongue was German, although several languages were spoken in that city at the time.”

Webbo relayed: “After the First World War, he moved to study chemical engineering in Vienna where he lived and worked until the Nazis arrested him just four days after the *Anschluss* in March 1938.”

“Did you find out more about his life in Vienna, especially in the 1930s?” asked Richie.

Verity took over again: “He worked for quite a long time for a patent office and then bought an optician shop that was confiscated when he was arrested.”

“Any family, relatives or close friends in Vienna?” wondered Modella.

“Yes, he had a relationship with a German non-Jewish woman, although they were not officially married and did not have any children. Her name was Klara and if I understood correctly, they were very much in love. I think he had a brother in Vienna as well, and a few friends.”

“And did you find out anything about his personality?” asked Boss.

“He seemed to have been a very joyful man, he played mandolin, was good at telling jokes, and liked to teach. Apparently, he was one of the rare people back then who could clearly explain Einstein’s theories of relativity.”

“What do you mean, ‘back then’?” asked Leo. “I still haven’t found any really clear explanation of Einstein’s theories.”



“I think he used the analogy of airplanes instead of trains to explain relativity, which gives a better 3D perspective,” said Verity.

“Wait!” said Modella. “Didn’t Einstein too work in a patent office?”

“That’s correct,” said the walking encyclopedia. “But he worked for the Swiss national patent office in Bern, whereas Blitz worked for a private patent office in Vienna to sort out legal disputes that his clients had with companies such as Philips or Telefunken.”

“Well,” said Boss, “if Karl Blitz was at that time able to explain the theory of relativity better than anyone can do today eighty years later, then his brain must have functioned fairly well and he might actually be right when he says that he can assist us. For my part, I am now fully convinced that we need to help him.”

“Too bad he is dead,” said Webbo.

“As a certain Schrödinger tried to explain to us,” said Leo, “I think we’ll need to be a little flexible about this dead or not dead thing if we want to succeed with this challenge.”

“I agree with you Leo,” said Richie, then turned to Webbo: “You’re good at hacking computers, Webbo, what about trying out some history hacking for a change?”

“History hacking?” asked Modella.

“Yes,” continued Richie. “As Professor Zeitdehner suggested to Boss, if we manage to plant an idea in Blitz’s mind that will help him escape from concentration camp, then we will have done actual history hacking.”

“But how do we know if we have succeeded?” asked Verity.

“Very simple,” said Boss, “we would then certainly find more information about him online. By the way, is he on Wikipedia?”

“No,” said Webbo. “The little information we found about him was in the Vienna city archives and on the blog of one of his fellow inmates who survived.”

Then Richie came up with a crazy idea: “Webbo, does your remote viewing work through time as well?”

“What do you mean?”

“Like, can you remotely view where someone was and did, not right now, but in the past?”

“I had never thought about that. Let me do a quick try.” Webbo went back to the office, closed the door, and came out again about ten minutes later.

“And?” wondered Richie.

“This is so cool. I think I found a way to see past events, not only present ones. I tried it with my Kenyan grandfather who died when I was about 8 years old. I took a random date a few years before he passed, I chose March 8, 1983. And I saw him visiting some relatives in Kisumu in Western Kenya on Lake Victoria.”

“Which means you could see Blitz in 1938 as well?”

“Unfortunately, not. Like for the professor, I need to have met or have seen a photo of the person I try to locate, and I did not find any photo of Blitz online.”

“OK, it was worth a try,” said Richie. “Maybe we can still need your new skill later.”

The other Grooters continued to interview Verity and Webbo about what they had found on the Internet.

“So, how was life in the concentration camp?” asked Leo.

“You don’t want to know,” answered Verity who had probably read more about that in the last hour than most people do in their lifetime. She looked quite depressed.

“But we need to know as much as possible if we want to come up with an escape plan for Blitz,” said Boss.

“Sure,” responded Verity, and took a big breath. “Life in the concentration camp was hard, even in the early days. People died daily, many of them took their own lives, some drowned in the latrines and others were executed for disobeying orders.”

“Ugh,” said Modella.

“I told you.”

“Did you learn anything in particular about Blitz in Buchenwald?”

“Only that he was the appointed accountant. The guards had found that they could earn some money by allowing a little underground economy to thrive inside the camp.”

“This is good news,” said Richie, “it means that they are open for bribery. Anything else?”

“In the early days of Buchenwald, a notary came regularly to sort out the sale of Jewish assets.”

“Great,” said Boss, “I think this is already a good foundation for our brainstorm. Karl Blitz’s SOS call came from November 1938. Ideally, we have to get him out before the outbreak of the war. In any case, the sooner, the higher our chances of success, as concentration camp prisoners only get weaker and weaker with time. So let the ideas flow!”

There was a short moment of silence, then Modella exclaimed:

“Music!”

“What do you mean, music?” asked Webbo.

“Music helped to free Nelson Mandela.”

“Yes,” said Verity, “but I am not sure Blitz can stage a full Wembley Stadium and broadcast it to 600 million people all over the world, as was the case for Mandela’s 70<sup>th</sup> birthday tribute concert in 1988.”

Richie came to Modella’s rescue: “No, but music is structure, and structure means that people – even Nazi concentration camp guards – can think more clearly and it also softens their hearts.”

“So, one idea you want us to plant in Blitz’s mind is to use music to escape?” Boss asked Modella.

“Yes. Maybe there is a way for Klara or his relatives to smuggle in his mandolin into Buchenwald?”

“Sounds like a plan,” said Boss, “but I fear it won’t be enough. We’ll need something more practical on top of that.”

Verity continued:

“I read somewhere that in those early days there were two Dutch guys based in Vienna, van Buren and Gildemeester, who helped with the release of various concentration camp prisoners. It feels like they would be the right kind of people to get in touch with.”

“For that, Blitz needs to be able to write to someone outside the camp,” said Leo. “Verity, do you know if inmates were allowed to send and/or receive mail?”

“Very sparingly. And all the letters were read by the Nazis.”

“Which means he would need to write the letters in a way not to wake their suspicion. Maybe he could write referring to his brother or a friend in the letter, but meaning himself?” said Leo.

“Ingenious!” said Boss. “That could work.”

“And what about incoming mail?” asked Verity, “I understood that almost all of it was stopped by the Nazis.”

Leo had an idea for that too: “If the people writing to Blitz include stamps, money or something else of value, that will be taken by the Nazi guard reading the mail. But! If that guard wants more money to flow to him, he needs to keep the letters coming and going from Blitz and the people he communicates with, so that they continue to send valuable stuff to the guard.”

“It feels that something like that could really work. Thanks Leo,” said Boss.

“He gets released, then what?” asked Richie.

“Then he’d have to flee abroad quickly. That was one of the jobs that the Dutch guys did: to organise travel documents and visas, especially to England.”

“And what about his love Klara, if she is German, she’d probably not be very welcome in England.”

“You’re right,” said Boss, “but our main goal is to get Blitz out of the concentration camp and out of Nazi territory. Then I’m sure he’ll find a solution to reunite with Klara.”

“Yes,” confirmed Leo, “and now we’ll just have to weave all these ideas together and agree on the exact words we want to plant in Blitz’s mind.”

“What do you suggest?” asked Richie.

“The first thing is music. Blitz has to ask Klara if she can smuggle his mandolin into Buchenwald.”

“Then?”

“Then Blitz needs to also ask Klara to have the Dutch guys prepare the travel documents he will need, most likely to England. And when these documents are ready, he will need to have the notary get in touch with the Dutch so that they together can organize the practicalities of his release.”

“It’s a long shot, but it could work,” said Verity.

“Talking about practicalities, how do we practically plant these ideas into Blitz’s mind – at the right time? Which would be just after his SOS call of November 1938.”

“Our best chance,” said Webbo, “is for us to create a field of intention and that we all think simultaneously of sending this message to Blitz.

“Good idea,” said Boss, “so let’s summarise the exact message we want to plant in Blitz’s mind. I propose something like this:

*“Music. Music. Music. Ask Klara to smuggle in your mandolin. Then have her contact van Buren and Gildemeester, two Dutch men in Vienna who help prisoners escape, so that they can organise travel documents to England for you. When the documents are ready, pay the notary so that he organises the details of your release with the Dutch. Good luck.”*

♪ *Alla Turca – Paris Perisinakis*

“We might as well send the message straight away,” said Boss, “and I suggest we resend it at least once to make sure he gets it.”

“Good idea,” said the other Grooters.

They removed the living room coffee table and sat down in a circle in front of the fire.

“Let’s hold each other’s hands,” said Modella.

For about half an hour, they all focused on Karl Blitz at Buchenwald in November 1938 and imagined the message travelling back through time and being implanted in Blitz’s mind.

“Great,” said Boss. “Now let’s have dinner and focus on something else. Tomorrow we can send a ‘reminder’ to Blitz and then I think we should wait for a few days to let History re-write itself.”

“Don’t shout victory too early, Boss,” said Verity. “This history hacking is something that has never been consciously tried, as far as I am aware, and might not be as easy as we would like it to be.”

“You are correct,” said Leo, “but this is the kind of experiment that I like, something you’d probably never get a research grant for.”

“And tomorrow we’ll continue with our Dream World travels?” asked Modella.

“Yes, Leo is up next,” said Boss.

Leo arrived in a white corridor. Nothing on the walls, no people, no windows. Just a long corridor. He looked back behind him: that direction of the corridor was a dead end, and straight ahead the corridor just went on. He had no choice, so he started to walk ahead.

After a few minutes, the corridor ended in a big white room with three white doors and a computer screen on a table in the middle of the room.

On the screen he saw the circle with the star. He touched the screen and a new page came up:

*Welcome to Drugstorie  
Please choose your favourite drug*

“Wow, that’s the kind of list you don’t want to show your mother,” thought Leo, as a long list of various drugs appeared on the screen, many of which he had never even heard of.

He was intrigued by a few of them and after some hesitation, he chose to click on *Creativity Pill* and suddenly a green light lit up above the central door.

Leo opened that door and walked into what looked like a normal doctor’s practice. He wasn’t surprised that the drug would be given by a doctor...

There was no one there, so he sat down in an armchair and looked out the window where he could see a city centre with its normal hustle and bustle: cars, buses, pedestrians, shops, advertising, road works, etc. The buildings were grey and so was the weather with a cloudy sky and rain pouring down.

A few minutes later, a gorgeous female doctor entered the room with her even hotter assistant. When Leo saw that double bomb impact, he regretted that he didn’t go more often to the doctor.

“Hello Leo,” said the doctor, “my name is Doctor Essa, but you can call me Dottressa. And this is my lovely assistant, nurse Wendy.”

“Very lovely, indeed,” thought Boss as he mentally undressed the extremely attractive blonde assistant in her white leather uniform.

“It is a pleasure meeting you, Dottressa. And of course, you too, Wendy,” he said turning to the lovely assistant.

The doctor continued:

“Before we let you loose on your first trip, I just wanted to give you some quick background information on Drugstorie.”

“I look forward to hearing more.”

“A few years back, scientists were able to crack the addiction nut, and they finally understood the main reasons why people take drugs. On top of that, they were also able to develop new drugs without any unwanted side-effects like hangover or other physical or psychological dependencies.”

“So why do people take drugs?”

“People fall into drugs or any other addictions like work or shopping to compensate for something else that is lacking in their lives.”

“Lacking?”

“Yes: most of the time people are lacking affection or a mission in life. And the bigger the lack, the stronger the need to compensate, which is why children from unstable families tend to fall easier into the drug trap.”

“Is it really as simple as that?”

“In theory it is simple, in practice less so.”

“I know what you mean,” answered Leo thinking about his parents and wondering what they were lacking because they seemed to have everything one needs.

“The good news is that in our dream dimension, people have managed to set up their lives so they’re not lacking anything.”

“But drugs clearly seem to still be around.”

“Correct. However, drugs as a compensation are no longer needed.”

“Yes, here we only deal with fun drugs as a form of entertainment,” added Wendy looking Boss straight into the eyes and sensually stroking his arm.

“Ready?” asked Dottoressa.

“I am ready,” confirmed Leo.

“Good. Now the thing is that for the *Creativity Pill* to work at its best, you need to be very relaxed. Any creative work or imagination is always best done in a relaxed state.”

“I know, many creative artists claim that.”

“Great,” said Dottoressa, “the pill takes about forty-five minutes to show full effect. So, after Wendy has given you the pill, she will also help you to relax.”

“Help me to relax?”

“Yes, the normal way we go about with our male patients is to give them a shoulder and neck massage, followed by a gentle blow-job to make sure you will be totally relaxed when we let you free. If you don’t mind, of course.”

“That sounds like a heavenly program,” said Leo, thinking that he could imagine more rigid doctoral procedures.

That being said, Dottoressa left the room and Wendy came up to Leo with a small silver plate on which there was a glass of water and an orange/green pill. Leo swallowed the pill and drank the water.

After that Wendy started the special treatment and Leo told himself that such treatment could only be beneficial for one’s health. That’s what doctors and nurses are here for, our health, isn’t it?

More than half an hour later, Leo was so relaxed, he could hardly stand up from his seat.

“Good,” said Wendy and opened the door to the street, “have fun and remember that you are on drugs.”

Boss raised from his seat and walked out of the practice, throwing a last glance at the enticing nurse’s décolleté.

The hallucination started quickly: the raindrops had changed into various colours, as if they had fallen directly from a rainbow. The dull grey atmosphere was now full of colours and it looked like someone had poured astronomic quantities of cocktail drinks on the pavement. There was a beautiful rainbow, but it was upside down with both ends pointing up towards the sky.

Boss walked around town. Everything was different: the traffic lights were blue, purple and pink. The STOP signs were pentagons instead of octagons, white and red, instead of red and white.

The NO ENTRY signs were blue and yellow, with the yellow as a vertical instead of horizontal bar. YIELD was heart-formed instead of a boring triangle. Most street signs were either pink or light blue. Danger signs were purple or orange.

Boss’s head was spinning completely.

Streets were not straight. Neither were the buildings. As if Antoni Gaudi, the General Architect of the Universe, had designed most of them. While on drugs.

Public busses had dark windows, UV-lights and full-power disco music inside. Cars had everything between three and nine wheels, most of them looked hand-made and were creatively built, painted and decorated.

Some street artists were wearing suits and tie. Others wore various uniforms, and people in general wore catchy colourful clothes. Many also wore electric lights or LEDs, some blinking, some not.

The buildings turned bright and adopted funny shapes. The most impressive building was a conic-formed glass tower with a mix of offices and private apartments.

The shop windows were in many colours, and some were translucent with humorous Chinese shadows moving behind them.



In the cafés and restaurants, people ate and drank from coloured plates and glasses of all shapes, with bright tablecloths, napkins and furniture.

It was not only that people, buildings, vehicles and things looked weird. People were also acting weird. Some were climbing on the sides of buildings, others singing in the rain... The funniest of all was to hear people talk: some were speaking in verses, others were singing out everything they said, others still used bizarre terms to describe ordinary things: *yellowbent, four-wheeled pet, roof-fitted container, law-challenged citizen.*

And some were talking backwards or with scrambled words:

*“Doing you are how, man hey!”*

*“The nam, who era uoy ingdo?”*

A lot of this reminded Leo of the French *verlan* slang language, where they speak with inverted syllables. Crazy indeed.

He also caught a few people having serious philosophical discussions with penguins and ostriches.

The level of creativity was amazing, but then Leo realized that it was only his brain playing tricks with him, all this was not real. Which was maybe a good thing, because it was very intense.

Anyway, Leo sat down at a café terrace and ordered a WTC cocktail. A few minutes later, the cute waitress, who was wearing a yellow top with a pink mini-skirt and orange stilettos, came back with a rectangular glass with a blue drink inside.

“This is our most explosive cocktail,” she said.

Leo opened his wallet and found a \$11.66 note, which corresponded exactly to the amount of the tab. He looked at the other notes in the wallet: \$38.16, \$71.02, \$104.94. Smart, he thought, they have made notes that include the general sales tax, so people do not need to walk around with plenty of unnecessary coins.

He looked in his other pocket and found an orange mobile phone with no screen, only five big buttons, numbered 1-3-5-7-9. It looked like a children’s or senior’s phone.

Leo pushed the first button, and out of the loudspeaker came a song that he hadn’t heard for a long time.

♪ *I’m Going Slightly Mad – Queen*

He wondered whether Freddie Mercury had taken one of these creativity pills...

Then he pushed the second button, and a news channel came up:

“The time is 27.72 and here are the latest news. Miscellaneous: yesterday, on October 44<sup>th</sup>, of the current year BFCP, two middle-aged men were arrested because they were not smiling on the bus. Science: researchers at the *Collaboratories of Paint University* invented three new colours last week: *rown*, *klack*, and *pellow*. Sports: *Lion Forrest* won the last edition of underwater golf tournament in Shark’s Bay. The time is now 27.75, next news at 29.04.”

Leo pushed the button numbered 5 and some disco music started to play. He pushed the button again, and on came next song, rock music this time.

“Cool,” he thought, “I wonder what number 7 is for?”

He clicked on the fourth button and could hear a feminine voice:

*“Phone o’clock, tick tock,*

*Whose number do you want to unlock?”*

Except for the doctor and Wendy, he did not know anyone in Drugstorie, so he told the machine, surprised that he was also talking in verses:

*“This feature is really trendy,*

*I am sure it can call Wendy.”*

After some bizarre ringing tone, he could hear a sexy voice answering:

“Hi Leo, how are you coming along?”

“The most amazing trip of my life so far! I am testing my new *PlayingPhone* and thought I should call you to thank you for your great job earlier today.”

“You are welcome. I get pleasure out of these treatments as well, very much so. Another thing: when you feel that the effects of the *Creativity Pill* start to fade, just go back to where you came from, the address is Red Lane 69, in case you get lost.”

“Great, thank you so much Wendy.”

When Boss pushed the last button, the 9, a holographic screen came out from the top of the telephone. An energetic music video started to play in mid-air and could be seen from various angles. He realized that this was a new kind of Internet connection, and thought he must do such a video call with Wendy next time, and ask her to undress during the call.

The rain had stopped, and Leo could now see that the asphalt was in many different colours, which made it easy to recognize one street from the next.

But after a while, he saw the colours starting to fade, the streets straighten out, the buildings getting back in shape, and people starting to act bored and boring again.

So, he decided to head back to the Red Lane, which was no longer red when he arrived at the door.

The door in question led back to the white room with the computer, and not to the doctor's practice, as he had hoped.

Again, the screen asked him to choose a drug. This time, Leo knew straight away which one to choose, and he clicked on *Electric Brain Stimulation (EBS)*. This time, the green light lit up over the third door and Leo opened it.

He stepped into a darker room with some dimmed red lights. There was some kind of red leather dentist chair in the middle of the room and various apparels on either side. The whole looked like a mix between a dentist's practice and a research laboratory.

As there was nowhere else to sit, Leo decided to recline on the dentist's chair.

Suddenly a door opened. Dottoressa and Wendy walked in, this time both dressed in suggesting red outfits.

"Dream on," Leo told himself.

"Welcome back," said the sexy doctor with a smile. "I heard you enjoyed last trip and hope you will do the same with this one."

"I look forward to next surprise..."

"As you might know, all kinds of pleasure are linked to the brain, and this time we are going to stimulate the pleasure source directly," she said gently tapping her fingers on his head.

"It will be a pleasure to test that," said Leo.

"What you will experience will be very intense, so we need to fasten you to your seat for security reasons. Nurse Wendy will take care of that."

"Wendy knows how to take care of her patients..."

"We figured that you like Wendy, so she will be starring in the program that we will play to your brain in a moment. Just follow her instructions and you will have the trip of your life."

After Dottoressa had uttered these last sentences, Wendy started to secure Boss's wrists and ankles to the chair that was built for that purpose. The leather straps were tight, but did not hurt.

Then Wendy put a special headset on Boss's head. It was composed of a dozen small electrodes.

Dottoressa left the room and Wendy checked the restraints a last time. The blonde gave Leo a kiss on the mouth and said:

"Now, just close your eyes, and I will see you soon in your wildest dreams."

She went over to the monitor board and switched on the EBS.

*Leo looked down the cliff.*

*“It must be at least half a mile down to the bottom. And it’s quite windy, Wendy.”*

*“Yes, it is. That’s added fun,” confirmed the blonde adventure girl. She gave Leo a kiss, took a few steps back, then she ran off the cliff shouting: “Follow me!”*

*Leo did as he was told, knowing that the slightest hesitation would kill him, as he needed some distance from the cliff for a good base jump.*

*The free fall/flight was short but very intense – one of the best adrenaline kicks one could ever get. Leo opened his parachute just in time, and glided down in the middle of the amazing mountain scenery.*

*That gave him some time to reflect on what was happening to him. He now found himself in a dream within a dream and he wondered whether there would be any perception differences between the two dimensions.*

*Then he realised something: if this EBS was a drug, then the professor’s machine could be qualified as a potentially addictive drug as well. It seems like the professor was aware of this and therefore had told the Grooters that they only had three wishes. But what if they went for more, now that the professor had decided to step aside?*

*Wendy had now landed on a clear spot next to the river at the bottom of the valley. Leo managed to steer his parachute there as well.*

*“Wow!” he told her after landing, “this is the most incredible experience I’ve ever had!”*

*“I knew you would like it,” answered the blonde, “now let us get ready for the river rafting.”*

*They put on the gear, pushed the boat into the water, grabbed two oars and were quickly down fighting with the rough white waters. It was a long and exciting descent, but eventually the waters turned calm and clear. They tied the boat to a tree, walked ashore then downstream along the river for a few minutes.*

*Leo thought they’d probably be done with the adrenaline stuff for the day, which he wouldn’t mind. Then Wendy showed him a building on the other side of the river.*

*“That’s our hotel,” said the crazy blonde.*

*“And how shall we get there? Do we need to go back to the boat? Why did we stop on this side of the river?”*

*Wendy just smiled at Leo, and after another few minutes of walking, they came up to another wide river. Then the blonde girl told him:*

*“OK, first we need to cross this confluent river. Then, on the other side, there will be what we need to cross over the main river to our hotel.”*

*“What? But this river is almost 100m wide.”*

*They walked a bit further, and then Wendy said: “Here, take this.”*

*“Shall we pole-vault over this river?”*

*“No, highwire, I know you like that.”*

*That, at least was true, thought Leo, remembering his accomplishment in San Francisco.*

*Walking on a highwire with a long stabilising pole felt like a child’s game compared to his recent suspension bridge highlining. Leo still enjoyed it very much, though.*

*Wendy had jumped up on the wire first, and Leo was following just a few meters behind. He was absolutely amazed at the ease with which Wendy walked the line. Somehow, he could feel an unexplainable connection with her as they both crossed the river on that highwire.*

*Once on the other side, they walked a bit further, and behind some trees, she pointed at two big devices and said: “This is how we’ll cross, at least the major part of the river, to reach the hotel.”*

*“No way!” said Leo looking at the catapults standing at the edge of the river.*

*“Air way,” responded the sex-positive girl. “For your convenience, it will only shoot you until a dozen meters from the other side, you’ll need to swim the rest.”*

*They climbed up in the catapults, Wendy showed Leo how to sit, then she counted:*

*“Make sure you land with your feet first. Three, two, one!” And they were ejected something like ten meters in the air and thirty meters across the river.*

*They landed with a big splash, then swam ashore, kissed each other and walked up completely soaked into what Leo thought looked like a very nice luxury resort.*

*They checked into a room, and Wendy told Leo with no room for misinterpretation:*

*“Let us take a shower, then I want you to fuck my brains out, I got so horny from this adrenaline.”*

*Leo looked Wendy deep into the eyes, increasing the electric desire between them, then he told her:*

*“Don’t worry, Wendy, I will take care of you. But maybe we should censor the next few paragraphs so that the reader doesn’t get too aroused?”*

Leo woke up again in the red dentist's chair.

"So, how was your little trip?" asked Wendy in a teasing way.

"Well, I can understand that people get addicted to stuff like this."

"You just had sex with a computer."

"But it felt so real. Better than the real stuff."

"You mean better than me?" asked Wendy and started to stroke Boss who was still restrained to his seat.

"You are not real either, unfortunately."

"But I could become one day. And that only depends on you and your Grooters friends. Actually, you need to save me from this dimension of weirdos. To make sure that you do not forget me, I thought I'll give you another special treatment before you leave."

And then the over-zealous nurse was all over him again...

*"Only one wish left," said Webbo, standing in for Leo behind the monitor.*

### **LEO BERGER – SECOND DWT – 20.02.2018**

"Wait, wasn't I supposed to test one more drug? There were three doors."

"Apparently not this time," said Modella.

"Maybe it's a hint that we shouldn't abuse of drugs?" said Verity.

"OK, fair enough," admitted Leo.

Then Verity asked him: "On the screen we could see your interactions with the doctor and her... 'wild' nurse... but what happened when you were on the first pill? The only thing we could see was you walking around in a boring city, and having a glass of lemon juice in a café."

"Yes, and what happened when you were for such a long time on the red chair?" wondered Modella.

Leo smiled – and then began to recount the whole experience he had under the influence of the *Creativity Pill*. And as the dream within the dream could not be recorded with the machine, he also told the Grooters about his EBS trip and everything that had happened during that dream, except a few details towards the end. He didn't specify that his protagonist on the EBS trip had also been Wendy. He just said it was another sex-crazy woman.

A bit later, he whispered in Boss' ear: "I can definitely recommend *nursex*..."

"Thanks for the recommendation, Leo. By the way, *nur Sex* means 'only sex' in German."

They laughed hilariously and the others wondered what that was about.

Geneva, Switzerland, 21 February 2018

After breakfast, Leo told the other Grooters: “Since Verity’s travel to the future Geneva of 2061 and her discovery of how the Crystal of Love was stuck in that dimension, I have pondered a lot about alternative dimensions and would love to share with you my findings so far.”

“And we’d love to hear them,” said Verity.

They gathered in the living room where Leo stood in front of Dimenport’s flipchart. He had already written down the four main topics he wanted to cover:

*DIMENSIONOMICS*

- 1) *Definition*
- 2) *Identifying and categorising dimensions*
- 3) *Inter-dimensional communication*
- 4) *Saving princesses*

He started: “The first thing I want to clarify is the definition of ‘dimension’. We have the three space dimensions: x, y, z, and the dimension time. But the dimensions I want to discuss today are the ‘other’ or ‘parallel’ dimensions, like our Dream Worlds for example. Anyone thought about what makes a dimension a dimension? And what differentiates one dimension from another?”

The other Grooters remained silent.

“OK,” continued Leo, “here is the definition I’ve come up with: *a dimension is a place in space and time where living beings can communicate with each other.*”

“What do you mean by that?” wondered Modella.

“I mean that within a specific dimension, people can communicate with each other, but not with other people who are in other dimensions.”

“Can you give us a few examples?” asked Verity.

“Sure. Actually, in the second step I want to go through all dimensions we know of, then you can test the definition for yourselves. Let’s start with the main three temporal dimensions: past, present, and future.”

“I think I get it,” said Webbo, “so people in the present cannot communicate with people in the past or in the future.”

“Exactly,” confirmed Leo. “For example, you can’t just pick up your phone and call me two years ago. Or call me in 2029. You can only call me in the present, our present time.”



Leo then drew a horizontal line on the flipchart.

“For simplicity’s sake, let’s say that this timeline stretches 200 years: between 1918 and 2118.

First, we have the past, meaning all events up to this day in 2018. He put a mark in the middle of the line and noted a 2 there below the year 2018. Then he put a 1 on the left to indicate the past, and a 3 to the right to indicate the future. These are our first three dimensions. What other dimensions do we know of?”

“The beyond,” said Modella.

“Yes, but remember, we have ‘beyond’ in both directions.”

“How so?” wondered Richie.

“Let me show you.” Leo drew another horizontal line below the first part of the upper line.

Again, he put two marks showing the years 1918 and 2018.

“If we look at a timeline from the perspective of a human’s lifespan, the time between those two marks represent a well-lived life of 100 years, almost like Nelson Mandela.”

“OK,” said the other Grooters.

“What dimension do we go to after we die? And what dimension, if any, were we living in before we were born? Let’s give those dimensions the numbers 4 and 5. When we die, do we return to the same dimension we came from or are these two separate dimensions?”

“I don’t think we can tell that for sure,” said Richie. “But wait, Modella, this is your turf.”

“I can only communicate with people in dimension 4. I hadn’t really thought about dimension 5 before birth.”

“As for death,” asked Verity, “would you differentiate the dimensions of heaven and hell? The church and Hollywood seem eager to do so.”

“What do you think?” asked Leo turning to Modella.

“I wouldn’t differentiate between heaven and hell, those are more like different addresses within dimension 4, in the same way as Las Palmas and Yakutsk are two different addresses on Earth.”

“And one person’s hell can be another person’s heaven,” added Boss.

“Yes,” continued Modella. “Now, the way I understand death is that there are at least two different dimensions after we die, in the sense that we first stay in one dimension, before moving on to another dimension.”

“So, you think I should add another dimension after the 4<sup>th</sup>?” asked Leo.

“Yes. Which means our pre-birth dimension is now 6.”

Leo added a 5 to the right of the 4 on the horizontal line, and replaced the pre-birth dimension 5 with 6.

“Is dimension 4 then some kind of purgatory or waiting lounge before moving on to a more permanent dimension 5?”

Modella answered: “It’s a bit more complex than that. I’d say that people in dimension 4 still have some unfinished business to take care of before they can move on. In any case, I’m only capable of communicating with dimension 4, not dimension 5.”

“Very interesting,” said Richie.

“As for dimension 6, before birth, that’s kind of a riddle because we never remember anything before we were born,” said Boss.

“What about *déjà-vu* and past lives?” wondered Modella.

“Well, if we assume that there is truth to the reincarnation theories,” said Webbo, whose Indian culture supported such beliefs, “then it means that dimension 6 must somehow be linked to dimensions 4 and/or 5. Actually, 5 and 6 could be the same dimension, or maybe even 4, 5, and 6 are all one-and-the-same non-body dimension between reincarnations?”

“You could be right about that,” said Richie.

“Would that dimension be where our soul lives?” asked Verity.

“Maybe,” answered Webbo.

Leo continued: “Let us again think of communication: except exceptional people like Modella, most of us cannot communicate with people in dimension 4, and Modella can’t even communicate with those in dimensions 5 and 6.”

“Great example, Leo, I start to be able to validate your definition,” said Richie.

“Thanks,” said Leo, “what other dimensions do we know of?”

“Our dreams at night,” said Boss.

“Yes,” said the Grooters lecturer. “And actually, I think we have two last main categories: the dimensions of our imagination that we go to when we sleep, and when we are awake.”

“What about lucid dreams?” asked Verity, “are they the same dimension as the night dreams?”

“Excellent question. Lucid dreams are like regular dreams with the difference that we are aware that we are dreaming. And this awareness makes it possible for us to steer the dream in almost any direction we want. I’d say they are both sub-categories of the same dimension: sleep dreams.”

“Sounds good to me,” said Webbo, “and I suppose our Dream World travels fall into that category as well?”

“Yes,” confirmed Leo. “So, we have dimension 7: regular night dreams, 8: lucid dreams and 9: Dream Worlds. I’d say that the only thing that differentiates lucid dreams from our Dream Worlds is that our Dream Worlds are machine-induced and also better reflect our true desires.”

“I have another question,” said Webbo. “What about astral travel? We’re kind of half-asleep when we astral travel.”

“Good question, Webbo,” said Leo. “Let’s add astral travel to the waking category. Which makes it dimension 10. What other dimensions can we access when we are awake?”

“Does daydreaming count?” asked Verity who was quite proficient at that.

“Yes, it does, because you project yourself into another dimension that does not exist. For example, you may daydream about yourself with a lover travelling around the world. Both of you can communicate with each other in that dimension. But you, the daydreamer, cannot communicate with whomever you are daydreaming about. Unless both of you use telepathy.”

“Too bad,” said Verity.

“That makes daydreaming dimension 11,” said Webbo, trying to keep track of all the dimensions that had been uncovered so far.

“Is that all?” asked Modella.

“No, there’s one more very important dimension.”

“What is it?” asked Boss.

“The fictional dimension. Dimension 12. Fictional characters can communicate with each other, but not with the readers. Or the other way round.”

“Are you sure?” asked Richie.

“Well, that brings us to the next chapter of this Dimensionomics lecture: are there ways to communicate between dimensions? But before we move on, let’s ask ourselves if we have covered all major possible dimensions.”

The silence of uncertainty was floating in the air.

Then Webbo said:

“What dimension are we in?”

Leo answered: “I’d say dimension 2, in our case Geneva-Switzerland-Europe-Earth-year 2018.”

“But if we are in dimension 2, in which dimension are the readers? Let’s say a reader based in Geneva in 2018.”

“Yes, what dimension are the people reading or watching this in?” wondered Modella.

“Got it!” said the librarian. “We are in fictional dimension 12, and the reader is in the ‘real’ dimension 2 in 2018.”

“How do you know which dimension is real and which is fiction?” asked Richie.

“Fiction tends to be more fun!” said Modella, thinking about her amazing adventure in Moovia.

“Good point,” said Verity. “That explains why so many people want to escape to more fun dimensions.”

“You mean like in A-ha’s music video *Take On Me*?” said Webbo.

“Yes, I’d say that video sums it up, and our lovers are also stuck in other dimensions.”

♪ *Take on Me – a-ha*

“Which means it is time for us to understand how we can bridge those dimensions,” said Leo.

“You’re the bridge expert, Leo,” said Boss, referring to his Golden Gate slacklining feat.

They took a short break to let their brains digest all that had been discussed so far. Webbo and Richie played a round of Tetris, a game they never grew tired of.

After the break, Leo started by summarising the main dimensions they had identified, with their respective categories:

#	Dimension	Category
1	Past	Time

2	Present	Time
3	Future	Time
4	Death 1	Non-body
5	Death 2	Non-body
6	Pre-birth	Non-body
7	Regular night dreams	Sleep / Unconscious
8	Lucid dreams	Sleep / Conscious
9	Dream Worlds	Sleep / Conscious
10	Astral travels	Awake / Imagination (own)
11	Daydreaming	Awake / Imagination (own)
12	Fiction	Awake / Imagination (someone else's; or own, for writers)

“Now,” he continued, “let’s move on to the third part: are there ways for us to communicate with people in other dimensions?”

“This is where *Dimensionomics* start to get fun,” said Richie. “Modella is a living example that there are ways of communicating between dimensions.”

“Yes,” said Leo, pointing at his list, “but let’s proceed systematically: are we aware of any people from the past, dimension 1, who have been able to communicate with people in the present, or in other dimensions?”

“Yes!” exclaimed the other Grooters, all remembering Karl Blitz’s recent call for help from the year 1938.

“Well,” corrected Leo, “technically he communicated via Boss’ Dream World in Timove, so it was rather a dimension 1 to dimension 9 communication, and then Dimenport’s machine helped us communicate from dimension 9 to dimension 2, or 12.”

“That’s very interesting,” said Boss. “So, our Dream Worlds are kind of ‘places’ where people in other dimensions can communicate with us?”

“Yes, kind of like the phone switches they used in the early days to connect speakers with each other.”

“That’s a good analogy,” said Verity.

Modella intervened: “And if people from the past can communicate with us in the present, then that means that people from the future can also communicate with people from the past. It wouldn’t make sense that the communication would only go one-way.”

“True. What else do we have?” asked Leo pointing at the list of 12 dimensions.

“People from the past can also appear in our night dreams, I suppose,” said Verity.

“You mean like old friends, or deceased family members?” asked Webbo.

“Both, I guess?”

“But the question is to what degree they are able to actually communicate with us,” said Leo.

“Good point,” admitted Verity, “which means that lucid dreaming and our Dream worlds are much better for inter-dimensional communication.”

“Indeed.”

“That made me think of something,” said Richie, “maybe we should clarify what communication means? Because Verity could communicate with the shop owner in Shoparadise, but could not send her tee-shirt back to the dimension where she came from...”

“... because she didn’t know her IDRN,” joked Webbo, remembering the funny scene in the Riccalut shopping centre.

“Do you know your own IDRN?” Verity asked Webbo.

“You got me.”

“Interesting,” said Leo, “which means we have verbal communication, but also various forms of physical communication, like touching, or sending things to each other.”

“Yes,” said Webbo. “It’s like holographic videos or quantum teleportation: they’ve managed to teleport tiny pieces of information for the moment, but not physical things or living beings.”

“Well,” said Boss, “simply getting information from one dimension to another is a game-changer.”

“Any other inter-dimensional communication that we are aware of?” asked Leo.

“What about children’s ‘imaginary friends’? They are clearly communicating with people in other dimensions, aren’t they?” asked Verity.

“I suppose those imaginary friends would fit into the last two dimensions, daydreaming and/or fiction?” said Richie.

“Well, in any case, I’d say they are most likely products of their imagination,” said Modella.

Leo then pointed to the last topic he wanted to cover: *4) Saving princesses*.

“That’s the crux of the matter, isn’t it?” said Boss.

“Yes,” said Leo. “So, the goal is simple in theory: it’s about us creating the Dream Worlds we’ve visited, and meeting our respective princes and princesses.”

“It feels like we somehow need to ‘merge’ our present dimension with those Dream World dimensions,” said Webbo.

“Yes, but how?” wondered Verity. “Anyone ideas?”

The other Grooters stayed silent.

Leo continued: “How have people throughout history managed to meet their life partners? Their dream boy or dream girl?”

“I guess many have daydreamed about them?” said Modella.

“But I daydream about love all the time, and see where that’s got me,” complained Verity.

“People often report meeting their partners when they least expect it,” said Richie, not expecting what was soon to happen to himself.

“So, we need to focus on something else, to allow this ‘merge’ of dimensions to occur?” tried Modella.

“Yes, but first, we also need to get clear on what kind of partner we want, don’t we?” asked Webbo, thinking about his training in Flirtown.

“Or partners,” added Boss.

“Yes, what if we want more than one partner?” asked Verity.

The elephant was out of the rabbit hole.

The other Grooters felt that what Verity had just said struck a chord.

“Well, if people can love more than one of their children, maybe they can love more than one life partner?” said Modella.

“Good point, Modella,” summarised Leo, “and I think that one stick in our wheels to attracting the partners we want, is that we are not yet 100% clear about what kind of partner – or partners – we want in our lives.”

“I suppose our Dream World travels are here to help us clarify that, aren’t they?” said Modella.

“Yes, I think that too,” said Leo. “So, let’s first continue our Dream World travels before we continue our brainstorming on how to attract our dream partner(s) into our current reality.”

“Thanks for this lecture, Leo,” said Richie, “it was definitely mind-expanding.”

“You’re welcome. As we’ve seen, we don’t have all answers yet, but it feels like we’re on the right path.”

“Yes,” concurred the other Grooters.

“Wait,” said Boss, remembering his trip to Timove. “There is something that is missing.”

“What?” asked Leo.

“Dimension 3, the future. The thing is that the future is uncertain, meaning that in theory we have an infinite number of timelines forking out of our present year 2018.”

“Good point, Boss,” said Leo and went back to the flipchart. “For simplicity’s sake, I will only draw two more lines forking out from our present, 3.1 and 3.2.”

“To what degree do these futures differ from each other?” asked Verity.

“Good question. Have all of you seen the film *Back to the Future II*?”

All the Grooters nodded.

“Great. So, when Marty ends up in the alternative 1985, you see how different that 1985 was compared to the 1985 he grew up in. And all this just because of one small fork in the road back in 1955. Same with Tamara’s 2018 Steamaru, which looks nothing like the Oamaru we know in our current timeline.”

“Great examples,” said Webbo.

Leo continued: “Another example: Verity, you have now travelled to two of your Dream Worlds. Which means that for you, Future 3.1 could mean living in Shoparadise, wherever that is. And Future 3.2 could be Geneva 2061, while Future 3.0 could be you just continuing to live the life you live at the moment in Hong Kong, without any major lifestyle changes.”

“Now that Tirvey split up with me, I don’t think I’d opt for Shoparadise. And maybe there will be an even more awesome Dream World coming up in my next travel?”

“That’s perfectly fine,” said Leo, “It’s like visiting several cities before deciding to settle in one of them. Such is the power of Dimenport’s machine.”

“Let’s think here for a moment,” said Boss. “Wouldn’t Shoparadise be dimension 9.1 and Geneva 2061 dimension 9.2?”

“3 squared equals 9,” said Webbo. “The future on steroids. That’s the power of Dream Worlds.”

“Some serious lateral thinking going on here,” said Richie. “Love it!”

“I agree, with you Richie,” said Boss, “it feels like this *Dimensionomics* topic could turn out to be a very interesting rabbit hole.”

“Yes,” confirmed Leo. “We’ll need some time to wrap our heads around all this.”



## Part 21                  Rio

Geneva, Switzerland, 28 February 2018

Another day at Boss' parents' house in Geneva. The Grooters had taken a week off to digest Leo's *Dimensionomics* course and to do additional research linked to the happenings and Dream World travels of the last few months.

They were enjoying their breakfast. Richie broke the silence:

"I woke up early this morning, couldn't sleep. Maybe due to my Brazilian heritage, I have felt bothered by Verity's clue in her last Dream World: '*RIO*'. My birth city. So, I asked myself: if someone wanted to lead us to Rio, but didn't give us any further instructions, then the crystal must be hidden in a fairly obvious location. And I can only think of one such place."

"*Christ the Redeemer*?" tried Verity.

"Yes, *Cristo Redentor*, our national icon. So, I had a look at Wikipedia... and guess what? Paul Landowski, the architect who built Christ the Redeemer also built the Reformation Wall in Geneva!"

"What?" exclaimed Boss, who thought he already knew everything about his home city.

"You heard that correctly."

"So, you think one of the crystals is actually hidden in or close to the statue in Rio?" asked Modella.

"It could be worth checking out," said Richie. "Webbo, can you locate any crystals in the statue?"

"I told you that my remote viewing doesn't work with crystals."

"But can't you just try and scan the statue and see if you feel any anomalies, even if you can't clearly see a crystal," wondered Verity.

"OK, I'll give it a try," said Webbo and closed his eyes for a few minutes. Then he went on: "I just scanned the surroundings of the statue on the top of the Corcovado Mountain. Nothing... And then I scanned the statue itself, from feet to head and fingertips."

"And?"

"Nothing... except at the top of his head: there my scanning turned foggy, so it could very well be that a crystal is hidden there."

"Cool, we may have found the fourth crystal," exclaimed Modella.

“We’ve identified a possible location,” said Webbo, “but it feels like it is going to be extremely tricky to extract it from there. I mean, it is one of the *New 7 Wonders of the World*. There are tourists all day long and doing some brain surgery to Christ may not be the most popular thing around.”

“Put like that, indeed, it seems like we have a minor challenge in front of us,” said Modella, “what about trying something at night, when it’s closed to visitors?”

“First of all, the statue is illuminated at night and I am sure that there are security cameras as well. It’s not like crime in unheard of in Brazil and vandalism has already been done to the statue in the past,” said Richie.

Then Boss lifted his left arm and showed his watch to his friends.

“Yes?” they wondered.

“This is my daily reminder that nothing is impossible. If Mankind can build functional square cogwheels, then Mankind can certainly also find ideas to get hold of crystals hidden in statues.”

“What do you suggest?” asked Verity.

“Leo?”

“Yes, yes, I’m here. And I happen to have just connected a few neurons that could help us solve this enigma. Basically, I see two possibilities for us to access the crystal in Christ the Redeemer’s head.”

“Tell us!” said Modella.

“The thing is that we need to divert people’s and security cameras’ attention while we proceed with our surgery. So, my first idea is to get the help of David Copperfield or some other exceptional illusionist who can stage a temporary ‘disappearance’ of the statue that will give us time to find the crystal.”

“Well, if Copperfield managed to make the Statue of Liberty vanish, which is almost 3 times bigger if you count the pedestal, then it should be a child play to do it with Christ the Redeemer.”

“Yes,” said Webbo, “but even if he were willing to cooperate, it would take months to prepare the trick and to get permissions for the show and there are always risks of people backstage seeing us.”

“Very tricky, for sure,” said Boss, “Leo, what’s your second idea?”

“To use cloaking technology.”

“If the technology is sufficiently advanced, it could work, although it is going to be a high-risk operation.”

“Brain surgeries are always risky operations,” added Richie, who knew a little about this as his father underwent a brain surgery after his stroke two years earlier, unfortunately without success.

“Even if you manage to find a cloaking device, how do you plan to get to the top of the statue?” asked Modella.

“Leo?”

“Me again? If this continues, I will start to charge for my services. It would really be cool to be able to teleport invisibly, though. That would have spared me many problems in the past.”

“So, what do you think?” asked Boss, “Can you teleport yourself on top of Christ the Redeemer?”

“Although the landing area is not very big, and that I have to count with some wind, I am confident that I can do it. However, I am less sure about the surgery part. Shall we just drill a circular hole in the head and hope that the crystal is easily accessible? And what if the cloaking doesn’t work properly?”

“Webbo?” asked Boss.

“Me again? I’ll start to charge for my services if this continues. Let me guess... you want me to hack into the camera security system that protects the statue.”

“Can you do that?”

“Unless they use quantum cryptography, which I believe is very unlikely, then yes, I can neutralise the security system without triggering any alarms.”

“This should make the whole operation easier,” said Verity.

“Yes,” said Leo, “but I am still not too confident about the extraction procedure.”

“That sounds like manual work,” said Richie.

“I’ll need some tools, but yes, some manual work is certainly involved.”

“Robots are better than humans when it comes to most manual work,” said Richie.

“Except artistic manual work,” added Verity.

“Yes, except artistic work. For the time being.”

“So, what’s your point, Richie,” asked Boss.

“Just relax and let the robots do the work.”

“Enlighten us,” said Modella.

“As I might have told you, I invest some substantial amounts in promising start-ups and technology firms. It happens that I acquired two firms lately, one specializing in self-flying airplanes. And another in building multi-purpose drones.”

“Aren’t self-flying airplanes drones as well?”

“Technically, yes. But I use the term drone for smaller electrical flying objects with propellers. Like the ones that will soon deliver your mail and pizzas.”

Leo added: “I have even heard of a drone project where they planned to deliver the *apéro* by drone. Imagine sitting in the sunset on a beach or in a park and then straight from the heavens comes a chilled bottle of wine and some snacks or tapas. Isn’t that cool, or what?”

“Sure is,” said Richie, “but now listen carefully: here is my plan: in my research centre in Québec, where they built *Ei in the Sky* which helped us get Professor Dimenport out of Burma, we are currently testing a long-range self-flying private jet.”

“Tell us more,” said Modella enthusiastically. Models tend to like private jets.

“So, my idea is to fit that plane, *Lady Turingia*, with one of our latest ‘driller-drones’, *Droon*, that can easily land atop the statue and do the necessary surgical operation to extract the crystal.

“Isn’t Québec-Rio quite a stretch?” wondered Boss, “won’t you need to refuel?”

“Only at Rio’s airport. Because the plane doesn’t carry any passengers or heavy cargo, it is lighter and can fly further. On top of that the fuel tank is bigger and we have also fitted the roof and the wings with solar panels. So, we could theoretically fly back and forth without refuelling. But we will refuel so that we don’t wake any suspicion.”

“And what happens when the plane lands in Rio?” asked Verity.

“We’ll just park the aircraft at the smaller Santos Dumont airport that is the closest to the Christ and from there *Droon* can fly over the bay until it reaches land and then fly straight up on the Corcovado Mountain where the statue stands.”

“Isn’t it illegal to fly drones at or close to airports?” wondered Modella.

“Yes, but it won’t disturb anyone at night. Still, we’ll want Webbo to numb down the airport radars while *Droon* does its job.”

“But can your private jet just fly around like that without any pilots?”

“Please let me introduce you to Bob and Rob, my AI pilots for this special mission. They have both passed the Turing Test with honours. Everything looks normal when you see the cockpit window.”

Richie showed the Grooters a photo of them on his smartphone.

“Another big advantage of letting robots do the job is that we don’t expose ourselves to the danger of getting noticed.”

“So, you mean that they can communicate with air traffic control without them noticing anything strange?”

“Yes, I’ll go and call my team in Québec and have them prepare *Lady Turingia*. It will probably take them a fortnight to fit *Droon* and do a test flight and test surgery, but that’s the kind of mission they have been trained for.”

“Cool,” said Leo.

“And once I know the exact day and time of the operation in Rio, I can do a little hacking and pre-program our invisibility window,” said Webbo.

“There is still some risk that someone on the street sees the drone and calls the police,” said Verity.

“No risk no fun,” said Leo.

“And we’ll then need a similar setup here in Geneva so that *Droon* can fly from the airport and deliver the crystal to us here.”

“Isn’t it safer to just have one of your crew from *Lady Globalia* pick it up?”

“Human beings are less reliable than machines,” said Richie.

“All this sounds very similar to ordering a book on Amazon,” said Verity.

“Yes, the only difference is that we order a crystal from the Amazon country. The principle is exactly the same, except that I plan to automatize absolutely everything, without having to involve any human courier services.”

“I would rather say,” added Boss, “that if successful, then this operation might qualify as the most elegant robbery of the century.”

“I wouldn’t call it a robbery because the crystal doesn’t seem to belong to anyone,” said Modella, “nor is anyone aware of its existence. I prefer to call it a treasure hunt.”

“By the way, did you know that Blitz has met with Christ the Redeemer several times?” said Boss.

“What?” exclaimed the other Grooters.

“Yes, but Blitz is a little aggressive and last time they shook hands, Christ lost a finger.”

“I got it,” said Modella, “you mean that *Blitz – lightning* – has struck the statue.”

“Several times. Just mentioning it so that we take the weather conditions into account; we don’t want *Droon* with the crystal to be struck by lightning.”

Richie went to organise the initial steps with his researchers in Québec. He came back two hours later, telling Webbo:

“Here’s the planned date, three weeks from now. Please have the following day as a backup, in case the weather is not good on that planned day.”

“Thanks, I will organise everything on my side.”

Leo then told them: “Thank you for all this. I suggest we put a temporary halt to our Dream World travels until we’ve got hold of the crystal in Rio.”

“Good idea,” said Boss, “I think most of us may have some personal business to catch up on, and then we’ll continue to do research and creative thinking for our Pact.”

“You’re the boss,” said Verity, “and when the boss orders things that make sense, we’re happy to follow the orders.”

Geneva, Switzerland, 22 March 2018

“Wake up, Boss!” said Richie.

“What? It’s 3.30 in the morning.”

“We just got a parcel delivery.”

“So, it worked?”

“Yes.”

In the preceding weeks, Richie and Webbo, with the help of the Québec team, had silently been planning and executing the ‘robbery of the century’.

*Lady Turingia* had left Canada in the morning of March 19<sup>th</sup>, and had landed late in the evening in Rio. That night, *Droon* had left Santos Dumont airport to fly to the top of Christ the Redeemer’s head, releasing *Sergio*, the small rover which performed a successful surgery, removed the crystal and even made sure the surgery hole was fixed afterwards so that no one could suspect anything. Then *Sergio* hooked onto *Droon* again and they flew back to the airport.

And just two hours later, *Lady Turingia* had taken off from Rio with destination Geneva, where it landed last night. And, like in Rio, *Droon* took off in the night from the airport and delivered the crystal to Richie and Webbo in the garden of Boss’ parents’ house.

It had then successfully flown back to the airport and *Lady Turingia* is scheduled to fly back to Québec first slot in the morning.

They woke up the other Grooters too, and all gathered in the living room.

“This is so exciting,” said Modella.

“I agree,” said Verity, even if she was still yawning, tired after they had all celebrated her birthday the evening before.

“Richie, you have the honour of opening the parcel,” said Boss.

“I’ll delegate that honour to Verity, let’s say it’s a slightly belated birthday present from Webbo and myself.”

So, Verity was handed the small parcel and took out a leather pouch, and then extracted a wonderful green crystal from it. The absolutely exceptional thing was that there was a little tree inside the crystal.

“Wow!” exclaimed Boss, “Richie, you’re excused for waking us up in the middle of the night.”

Inside the pouch, it was written: *Cristal da Natureza*.

“*Crystal of Nature*,” translated Richie, although most Grooters probably already guessed the meaning.

“We love you, Brazil,” said the Argentinian model. “Exceptionally, I’ll dance a Brazilian dance with you tomorrow once I’m properly awake. And we’ll drink caipirinhas.”

“You’ll get a dance with me too,” said Verity to Richie. “And so do you, Webbo.”

Like with the other crystals, there was an accompanying message:

**Indiferent ce faceți, amintiți-vă să vă distrați!**

“What language is this? And what does it mean?” wondered Modella.

“I think this is Romanian,” said Verity. “But I am not completely sure what it means. Let me quickly check my translation app... OK, here we go:

**Whatever you do, remember to have fun!**

“Thank you, Verity,” said Boss. “Does anyone know why the message is in Romanian?”

“Easy,” said Richie, who had done the most research on the statue, “Christ the Redeemer’s head was sculpted by a Romanian sculptor, Gheorghe Leonida.”

“I’d say that was kind of a fun challenge,” said Richie, “what do you think, Webbo?”

“Totally.”

“So, now we can continue our Dream World Travels?” asked Verity.

“Yes,” said Leo, “and I think Modella is up next.”

“Great, but can I wait until tomorrow? That will give us some time to review the whole Rio chapter today, and get a better feel for the Crystal of Nature. And I owe someone a dance...”

“Sounds good to me,” said Leo.

♪ *Frente a Frente – Chico & Roberta*



Modella gained awareness on the square of a village and did not need much convincing to tell her that she was in a Dream World.

Although the houses were in traditional Mediterranean style and could have been built anytime in the last 500 years, the cars on the streets were mind-boggling. First of all, their frames were all made out of wood, then their shapes were very different from each other as they didn't seem to be bothered by any necessities related to aerodynamic vehicle design.

And on top of that they were lacking a feature that Modella had taken for granted in automobiles: wheels. None of the cars had any wheels. But they weren't really flying in the skies either, just hovering a few decimetres above ground.

The cars also had beautiful engravings in the wood, each one of them was truly a unique piece of art.

Because they had ditched wheels, asphalt had become superfluous, so roads were built more nature-like with stones and gravel.

Then a car with a big circle and a star engraved on the hood stopped next to Modella. A handsome man came out, walked up to her and said:

“Hi, I'm Rocco, your *amant*.” He gave her a kiss on the mouth.

Thousands of thoughts suddenly flushed through Modella's mind: “*Amant*? What is this supposed to mean? What about Richie? Where am I? And why do I feel so attracted to this guy?”

Like a gentleman, Rocco opened the passenger door of the car and told Modella: “Jump in, I'm hungry, let's go for lunch to an osteria up on the hills just outside the village.”

“Where are we? It feels like Italy.”

“Correct. Alba. *Piazza Rossetti*.”

Modella had always felt a special attraction for Italy, but hadn't understood why. In her early twenties, she had worked as a model for three years in Milan and then, after her long architecture studies in the US, she had found a job in Argentina, where the family on her father's side comes from.

After a ten-minute drive – or flight – or whatever, they stopped in front of an osteria in Barbaresco, strategically located with superb views of the surrounding hilly landscapes.

She had already drunk Barbaresco wines, but had never been here before. When she lived in Milan, she had rather vacationed on the coast, San Remo for the music festival, or Portofino for its luxury, or further south for the beaches.

“I love wine-growing regions,” said Modella.

“And I love you,” said the Italian seducer.

Modella blushed.

“It’s your Dream World, remember,” said Rocco.

They sat down on the terrace and the waiter asked them if they wanted an aperitivo.

“*Si, un Campari Soda per me per favore,*” said Modella using her fluent Italian.

“*E un vino bianco per me, grazie,*” said Rocco.

The waiter gave him the wine menu and left to prepare the drinks.

“Don’t we get a food menu?” wondered Modella.

“No.”

“No?”

“Here you eat whatever you are being served. Daily, the chef selects the freshest ingredients from the market, or whatever he or she feels like cooking that day.”

“But what if I don’t like something?”

“Why wouldn’t you like something? Especially here where you get some of the best food in the world.”

“Well... hum...”

“You see, you don’t really have a valid reason for not liking something. I think more restaurants all over the world should have such a menuless system. It forces people to be more open-minded, to try out new foods. It saves them a lot of decision-making brainpower, so they can relax more. And the cooks can cook the way they enjoy it, allow room for creativity, use seasonal products and don’t need to bother with special requests from spoiled customers.”

Modella was intelligent enough to recognise a common-sense argument when she heard one and looked forward to the surprise menu.

Then she asked Rocco: “What do you do in life?”

“I do research and teach world cultures at one of the oldest universities in the world, in Bologna.”

“That sounds interesting.”

“I am passionate about it. And that’s one of the reasons I love you. Next to your exceptional beauty, of course.” He leaned over to give her another kiss.

“What do you mean?”

“I love the natural blonde hair from your mother’s Swedish side, and your brown eyes from your Argentinian side. The most fascinating part of my research is to try and identify the character traits inherited by Grooters like you.”

“Tell me more...”

“Yes, take my wife Rosalinda, for example: she is half-French, half-German. Guess where her love for cars and classical music comes from? And her charm and good taste for interior design?”

“I’d say the first two would be rather German traits, and the latter two French ones.”

“Exactly.”

“And that’s for the positive traits. We also inherit negative traits and my research tries to find solutions on how those can be minimised.”

“Very interesting. But isn’t this *amant* thing typically French?”

“It certainly is and it is up to each one of us to choose if we see it as a good thing or not.”

“But I am not French.”

“Are you sure?”

“Well... My father’s father immigrated to Argentina from Italy, where he married an Argentinian woman.”

“Argentinian?”

“Now that you mention it, I remember my grandmother telling me that her mother was originally from France.”

“There you go. Which means that your DNA is probably 1/8 French. And it seems like you have inherited this French cultural aspect of *amant*, like a Korean has kimchi in his DNA or an Australian his Vegemite.”

Modella was embarrassed to admit it, but she was clearly in love with Rocco, while at the same time knowing that she belonged to Richie.

“Love is a minefield...” she thought, then asked him:

“And what about your wife? Is she OK with this?”

“Some couples tell each other everything, while others don’t ask any questions. When it comes to true love, we just want our partners to be happy. In my case, Rosalinda understands that, I don’t hide anything. She knows I’m with another woman this week-end. But she doesn’t ask me for any details. And I don’t ask her anything either.”

That all sounded good to Modella who wondered how to best tackle her true feelings for Richie, whom she still had to conquer, in her current reality, not only in her dreams.

A tasty vegetable soup to start with, followed by several dishes of dried meat, chicken, pasta with white truffles, more vegetables, local cheese, and the inevitable tiramisu for dessert. All that was washed down with a white Arneis, then a great local Barbaresco.

“This was succulent,” said Modella afterwards.

“See,” said Rocco, “you seldom get bad food in Italy. So, you can eat everything.”

“You think that my love for Italy and its food is due to my grandfather’s Italian roots?”

“It is not what I think, it is a scientific fact: you inherit half your genes from your parents, which means a quarter from your grandparents. And ancestry DNA tests can nowadays even give you details about which cultural traits you have inherited from each of your forefathers.”

“Really?”

“Yes, let me show you. Just leave a little saliva on this spoon.”

“OK.”

Then Rocco took that DNA sample, put it on his smartphone, opened a specific app, and a few seconds later showed Modella her ancestry lineage: 40% Italian, 28% Swedish, 22% French, 10% Russian.

“What?” she exclaimed.

“Yes, such ancestry tests often surprise us. One explanation could be that you have some French ancestry on your mother’s Swedish side as well. She’s from Stockholm and the royal family is Bernadotte and has a long historical link to France.

And probably some of your Swedish family was Russian as well.”

“Maybe that’s where my grit comes from. And I thought I was simple 50% Swedish and 50% Argentinian.”

“This is just the DNA part of you. Then you have to add the influence of the environments you have lived in. In your case, Swedish, Swiss, American, Italian, Argentinian.”

“No wonder that men don’t understand me. I can’t even figure out myself.”

“That’s what makes my research so fascinating.”

He took her hand, and they left the restaurant and went for a walk among the adjacent vineyards.

“What a wonderful experience,” said Modella. “Thank you, Rocco.”

“The pleasure is shared,” he told her and gave her another kiss, this time a longer and more passionate one.

They strolled back to the car and he said: “Let’s drive down to Tuscany, you’ll need to be back there by tomorrow night.”

Modella wasn’t sure what Rocco was referring to, but she knew she liked Tuscany.

In the ‘car’ Modella put on her playlist of Italian songs so that she could truly immerse herself in the Italian experience.

♪ *Sharazan – Al Bano & Romina Power*

They were in Italy, so like with the food, they took it slow, drove on countryside roads and stopped at a cute little bed & breakfast to spend the night. And next door was a lovely trattoria where they went to have dinner.

“This is quality of life,” said Modella, “I wish I would come here more often. Thank you, Rocco.”

He smiled as if he knew something more. Something he didn’t want to reveal to her... at least not yet.

“Tell me.” She said. “What do you think is the main thing that we humans must change so that we can live our dream lives like we Grooters have now got a glimpse of through our Dream World travels?”

“Humans must learn to mind their own business.”

“You mean not to gossip?”

“Gossip is just one example of someone who does not mind his or her own business.”

“Please explain.”

“Every individual should focus on finding out what makes them happy, instead of comparing themselves to others, which only leads to destructive judgments about others and about themselves.”

“OK.”

“What people need to understand is that every single individual on this planet is unique thanks to our inherited DNA and to the influence of the environment we were born in, grew up in and lived in later in life.”

“Then there are individual interests and tastes that come from our specific life experiences?”

“Yes. And we all have unique sets of skills that we need to put to use to make the world a better place.”

“So, what’s the solution to gossip and intolerance?”

“First, to find your ‘element’, a mix of what you love to do, what you’re good at, and what the world needs.”

“A lot of people struggle to find that, don’t they?”

“Yes, but a competent career adviser can help get you on the right path.”

“That’s what my friend Boss also told me. And the second thing?”

“The second thing is to be intelligent enough to understand that what makes another person happy can sometimes be the total opposite of what makes you happy.”

“Example?”

“It’s all about tolerance. In the past, people didn’t tolerate people who were physically different, like Blacks or Jews. And today – I mean in your early 21<sup>st</sup> century – far too many people don’t tolerate people who think or behave differently to their own beliefs. Like homosexuals or people who have open relationships or people who dress differently from the norm.”

“You’re unfortunately right about that.”

“The true turning point of humanity is going to be when people start to mind their own business, focus on their own happiness and tolerate people who are different from themselves.”

“Sounds like common sense.”

“Which I’d wish would be more common. The first step is to acquire some cultural intelligence, meaning getting to know your own culture and then to learn about other cultures.”

“That’s why you do cultural research?”

“Yes.”

They finished the tasty dinner; this time a truffle risotto had been their main treat. After that, they went to their room and Rocco took out a small leather suitcase.

“What is that?” wondered Modella.

“Let’s call it an educational kit,” said Rocco.

Modella wasn’t sure what he meant, so he explained to her that every time they met, he gave her a sensory experience that would make her a better architect. Most of the time, this included putting aside the sense of vision for a while, so that she could focus on her other, often underdeveloped senses of hearing, smell, taste and touch.

So, one time he could have her listen to various sounds of animals and nature, and she had to guess what they were. Another time he would give her a blind wine or chocolate tasting. And at other times, she would have to smell various smells from fruits, flowers or other things in nature.

Modella was very eager to know what was in store for her tonight. Rocco put a blindfold on her.

“Tonight, we are going to feel building materials. Let’s start with stones.”

He kissed her, then put the first stone into her palm.

Modella felt it with both hands, then said: “Granite.”

“Correct. Which colour?”

“How am I supposed to know the colour with a blindfold on?”

“Sounds like you’re not ready for the advanced course yet. Let’s get the basics first, learn to differentiate the main stone categories.”

Rocco gave her the next stone. Modella felt it.

“This must be marble.”

“Right. What about this one?” he said, handing her the next stone.

“Brick?”

“Good. This one?”

“Concrete?”

“Almost. It’s actually mortar. Next?”

“This must be some kind of limestone.”

“Yes.”

For some reason, Modella got very aroused by this unusual geology/architecture class, and it didn't help that Rocco let his hands slip around her waist and on her breasts, and his breath tease her neck.

"What about this one?" he asked her.

"Wow," exclaimed Modella, surprised, "that one was bigger." She thought it could be another kind of marble, because it had a very smooth surface. But the shape was cylindrical. It was slightly cool to the touch.

"No idea," she admitted.

"Try and feel its energy."

"Still not sure," she said.

Then Rocco sat down next to her, took her hand with the stone and gently caressed her upper thighs with it. "Are you sure you can't feel its energy?"

"What about now?" asked Rocco, gently rubbing the stone on her pubis, while at the same time kissing her neck.

"Modella, are you there?"

"Yes..." she said, breathing heavier and heavier.

"Can you feel the energy? What kind of stone is it?"

"Not sure..."

"What about now?" he said and slowly penetrated the cylindrical stone into her vagina, "don't tell me you can't feel its energy now." He continued to kiss her on the neck.

"Yes," said the blonde beauty, "I can feel the energy... but you need to give me a hint, I'm still not sure what stone it is."

"It's green," said Rocco.

"Jade? But whatever it is, please don't stop..."

"Yes, it is jade. This is a small present from me, you can keep it."

"It's not that small..." thought Modella, taking over the stone movements from Rocco who continued to kiss and caress her mouth, neck, and breasts.

"I think we'll continue the lesson another day," he said and released Modella from her blindfold. He looked her into her beautiful brown eyes that at this stage were already at the back of her brain.

"Why aren't all architecture classes like this?" she wondered.



They now opted for a more horizontal position and their passionate love-making went on until the late hours of the night.

The morning after, they drove on to Tuscany, where they had a nice lunch in Florence, and walked around there in the afternoon, after which they drove on south out of the city. Winding roads again, and suddenly Rocco stopped the car, in the middle of the countryside not too far from San Gimignano.

“Strange,” thought Modella, as there was just one property on the other side of the road: a gate with a small road leading up to what looked like a nice country mansion.

“Time to say good-bye,” said Rocco. But I look forward to see you again next month. And he gave her a kiss.

“Wait,” she, “where am I? What is this place?”

“This is your home, Modella.”

Rocco stepped out of the car and opened the door for her. Reluctantly, she exited, hugged him, and then walked towards the gate of the property.

“You have the keys,” he told her. He waited until the gate started to open, then he drove – or flew – away.

Modella walked up the short distance to the house. Then two children came running towards her.

“Hi mom,” one girl said in Spanish and the other in Swedish, “how was your weekend?”

“Wonderful,” she responded honestly and hugged them both.

About the age of seven or eight, both her children were blonde, but one daughter had blue eyes and the other brown eyes.

“Which probably means...” thought Modella and looked up to the house entrance... where Richie was standing.

She sent the kids off to play in the garden, walked up to Richie, and hugged and kissed him.

“Did you enjoy your weekend?” he asked her.

“I certainly did,” said Modella with a glimpse in her eye.

“You look really happy,” he said.

“I am,” she answered and kissed him again.

“I love to see you happy like that. Shall we explain to the children where you were? And where I sometimes go?”

“Yes, let’s do that.”

Richie called Evita and Sanna, and they all sat down on the terrace in front of the house.

Richie told them: “Mom and I wanted to share a few secrets with you.”

“What secrets?” asked Sanna.

“We think you are old enough now to understand a few things about adults. First, there is this thing called sex, that has two main purposes.”

“We know that! To make babies,” said Evita.

“And to have fun and give each other pleasure,” added Sanna.

“I’m not surprised...” said Modella smiling at Richie.

Richie continued: “OK, girls, you got us there. What you may not know, however, is that mom also has sex with another wonderful man called Rocco, which is why she was away over the weekend.”

Modella intervened: “But it’s about much more than just sex. Rocco is an old friend and we share memories that complement my relationship with your father. Rocco also teaches me many interesting things.”

“Like what?” wondered Sanna.

“World cultures for example, but also geology, and many other things.”

“That sound great!” said Evita.

“And your father also has a lover he sees from time to time when he goes on his business trips.”

“What’s her name?” asked Evita

“Emily.”

“That’s a beautiful name.” said Sanna.

“And Emily is a very beautiful woman, too,” said Richie, “which is why I like her. But she is very different from your mother, and gives me experiences that complement what I experience with your mom. Unfortunately, Emily is very busy at her work, so I don’t see her very often.”

Modella then added: “So, dad also has sex with his personal assistant, Christella.”

“That’s also a beautiful name,” said Evita.

“Yes, and Christella is not only very attractive, she is also a gem of an assistant who supports dad at work, so that I have more time to be at home in the evenings with all of you. Like your mom, Christella is blonde, but she has blue eyes, like you, Sanna.”

Modella kissed her wonderful man, then summarised: “The main point we wanted to make is that our responsibility as parents is to be happy so that you can be happy too. And when we see Rocco, or Emily and Christella, that makes us happy and we hope that you can feel that happiness too.”

“We can,” said both Sanna and Evita, and hugged their parents.

“Your friends’ parents may have different things that make them happy, which is perfectly fine too.”

*“Only one Dream World travel left, Modella.”*

She recognised Leo’s voice. She was back.

### **MODELLA D’ALLEMO – SECOND DWT – 23.03.2018**

This time Modella couldn’t count on Richie being out on an errand. And indeed, he was sitting there with the other Grooters in the lab, but playing with his smartphone. She wondered if he had seen the last scene.

“Let’s all take a break before we watch Modella’s travel,” said Boss.

“I’ll prepare some tea,” said Verity.

“Sounds great,” said Webbo, “I’ll help you.”

On the way up to the living room, Richie managed to talk separately to Modella: “I’d like to take you out for dinner tonight.”

“So, you saw the last scene?”

“No, I missed the last few minutes. But someone told me something while you did your travel.”

“Who? What did they tell you?”

“You might be aware of how women are good at keeping secrets... in circulation.”

“Verity!”

“Yes, Verity told me the verity about our encounter in Moovia.”

Modella blushed.

“And I just want you to know that the feeling is shared. Can I take you out for dinner tonight?” added Richie.

“I’d love to,” responded Modella enthusiastically.

Her heart was racing. She hoped he wouldn’t change his mind after seeing her Italian dream.

He didn’t.

For dinner, Richie had chosen *Le Bar des Bergues* in the famous *Hôtel des Bergues* in central Geneva, next to the water where the lake turns into the Rhône river. The elegant couple perfectly melted into the luxury setting.

He ordered a *Kir Royal* for Modella and a *Vodka Martini* for himself, with Finnish vodka obviously.

“Information asymmetry,” she said.

“I know, I know.”

“Yes, you now know everything – or at least a lot – about my secret dreams. Whereas I just know that you’re into gambling, investments and research centres. And on top of that you can see the future so you already know how our relationship is going to turn out.”

“I can only see the short-term future – and not always very clearly when my own emotions are involved. And it seems like you’ve already built our future, anyway,” said Richie, referring to Modella’s latest Dream World travel.

“Although we’ve been in touch per e-mail, we hadn’t met since your life upgrade when you moved away from Geneva shortly after our Pact.”

“I felt something special when we met again here in January.”

“So did I.”

“But we were also just like old friends...”

“Aren’t we supposed to be best friends with our life partner?”

“Yes,” said Richie and held Modella’s hand.

“Tell me a little about your past conquests, I mean you can’t have been short of women interested in you... why do you think it didn’t work out?”

“Given my situation, I have indeed had quite a few opportunities and proposals... but I haven’t found any woman who truly understands me. My Grooters side, I guess.”

“Now you do.”

“I know and I can feel it.”

“Me too.”

“So why don’t we just start building?”

“Building what?”

“Your dream life.”

“And yours.”

“And mine.”

“Where shall we start? I just know that your dream – or rather one of your dreams – involves a research centre on an island.”

“Wasn’t Moovia an island too?”

“It was. Or is. Or will be. Or whatever.”

“And what about the mansion in Tuscany?” wondered Richie.

“That seems like a more realistic goal. In a first phase.”

“You mean we should go real-estate hunting?”

“Or you prefer island-hunting? Do you know any islands where you can ski, play golf and lay on the beach on the same day?”

“The only place I can think of is Corsica. In early spring.”

“Hmm... But we can’t just move to Tuscany or Corsica or elsewhere and leave the other Grooters at the moment.”

“You are right, Modella, even though we can afford it, it feels like we need to earn it first. And that means solving the Pact we have with the other Grooters.”

“I agree. Which doesn’t mean that we cannot enjoy the journey, she said looking him deeply into the eyes.”

“Yes. In the meantime, home is whenever I’m with you.” he said and leaned over to give her a kiss.

Even though her senses were more acute in her Dream Worlds, there was a special sweetness to this kiss, because it was real. And it was genuine.

“I have taken a room upstairs for the night,” said Richie.

“You’re mine,” said Modella.

They had a wonderful dinner, catching up on some stuff they hadn’t dared to tell each other since they met again in January. Then they left the restaurant to take the lift to the room.

Modella woke up wondering where she was. Then she saw the circle with the star.

“Am I dreaming?” she thought “Don’t tell me that yesterday was just a dream.” Then she realized something... And called out: “Richie!”

And she heard an answer from the bathroom.

Richie had just woken up for the day, taken a shower and shaved.

“You almost got me on that one,” said Modella.

“How did you know?”

“Well, everything in the last twelve hours has been like in a Dream World. Except...”

“Except?”

“Except the traffic noise outside.”

“Well observed, Modella,” said Richie. “We are on our way to building these Dream Worlds, but indeed there is much more work to do. Let’s have breakfast here in the room, then we’ll go back and join the other Grooters at the house.”

“Sounds good,” she said and gave him a kiss.

After breakfast, they drove back to the Pibolodari house and went straight down to the *Dreamcockpit*, where the others had just gathered.

“Are you sure you already want to do your third Dream World travel, Verity?” asked Leo. “You are aware that it’s your last chance to pick up any clues for your Pact as well as clues for your own love life.”

“Both Boss and I seemed to get more powerful clues in our second travel, so maybe I can bring back even more valuable information for all of us?”

Secretly, Verity was envious of Boss’, Leo’s and Modella’s sexual encounters in their Dream World travels and she was determined to have similar experiences this time around.

“I vote for letting her go,” said Webbo, who probably feared his own second travel, and wanted to postpone it as long as possible.

“Me too,” said Boss and Modella almost at the same time.

And Richie nodded in approval.

“Great,” said Leo, and showed Verity to the bed in the lab again. This time she chose an academic journal whose title was incomprehensible, and its content even more so. She fell asleep in less than five minutes.

Verity heard someone next to her saying: “Good morning, Verity.”

She opened her eyes and needed a few seconds to realise that she was in yet another Dream World. She sat in some kind of vehicle and looked out at a reddish stony barren landscape.

Next to her sat a handsome guy driving and she directly noticed the circle with the star on the steering wheel.

“Hi,” said Verity, a little more at ease than when she arrived in her previous Dream Worlds. “Who are you? Where are we?”

“My name is Xylon. Welcome to Mars.”

“I didn’t know I dreamt of going to Mars...”

“Now you do. Remember, your most authentic dreams are deeply hidden in your subconscious, which is why you often get surprised by your Dream World travels.”

“And why is the steering wheel in the centre of the car?”

“Because we couldn’t decide if we should drive on the right or on the left-hand side of the road here on Mars. This solution has the added advantage that I can have two women next to me when I drive,” said Xylon jokingly.

“Sounds distracting...”

“But today you have my full attention.”

“Shouldn’t at least part of your attention be on the road, or rather on the landscape in front of you, as I can’t distinguish any particular road.”

“My co-pilot, Nelson, takes over when I get too distracted.”

“Nelson?”

“Yes, my AIPA: Artificial Intelligence – Personal Assistant.”

“OK.”

“Nelson jumps into any hardware that I currently use. And right now, it’s autopilot; at home it’s butler services, and wherever I am, he can advise me on anything as he has access to the II.”

“II?”

“*Interplanetary Internet*,” said suddenly a voice in the vehicle’s loudspeaker. “Hello Verity, welcome to Mars. I am Nelson and look forward to help Xylon answer any questions you might have.”

“Hi Nelson, nice to meet you.”

Verity didn’t know if she should call this vehicle a car, or a rover, or something else.

“Meet Jones,” said Nelson to Verity, “he is what we call a *Transmartian Camperover*.”

“Hi Verity,” said another voice in the loudspeaker. Now Verity was confused. This was weird. She thought she was alone with Xylon, and now they were four of them. And apparently Nelson could read her mind.

“You’ll get used to this,” said Xylon, caressing her gently on the arm in a reassuring and slightly intimate manner. “Nelson and Jones will only interfere when I don’t have a satisfying answer to give you. Or just to say hello.”

“Where are we heading?”

“We are almost there.”

“It feels like we are wearing some kind of spacesuit, it is very comfortable, but so thin.”

“Yes, that may seem strange to you,” said Xylon, “the only additional thing we need if we want to wander outside is a pair of gloves and a breathing headset.” He pointed at the glass bowl devices behind their seats.

“Well, you certainly look sexy in this outfit, I must admit,” said Verity.

“And so do you,” said the driver and gave her a kiss.

“Are we kind of... together?”

“We’ve been married for three years. I’ll soon show you where we had our wedding.”

Once they had driven over the ridge of the next hill, an amazing view opened up in front of their eyes: a stone city with sumptuous buildings could be seen towards the other end of a flat valley.

“These buildings must be gigantic,” said Verity, judging by the distance they still had to cover to get there.

“They are indeed,” said Xylon, “this is one of the main cities on Mars, called Marstone.”

“Aptly named,” said Verity.



“Yes, as Mars has such an abundance of stones, it was and still is the most practical building material here. And thanks to the lower gravity here, it is easier to construct high-rise buildings than on Earth.”

“How many people live in Marstone?”

“Three million.”

“3,071,187,” intervened Nelson.

“Thanks for that precision,” said Verity.

They drove closer to the city and now she could better grasp the size of the city. She thought that the population density was probably close to her current home city, Hong Kong, but the feel was rather something like Dubai. Or rather, a mix of Dubai and Luxor.

“0.891 density correlation with Hong Kong,” added Nelson.

Verity was a little annoyed by this lack of privacy. And she couldn't stop herself of thinking that Nelson was annoying, so now Nelson knew that Verity found him annoying.

“So, what do you think?” asked Xylon.

“Impressive. Very impressive.”

Now they drove into the city and Verity noticed some kind of symbol language written on the buildings. Although the symbols were very different, they still reminded her of the Egyptian hieroglyphs that had challenged her linguistic skills while she was living in Egypt as a teenager.

“These symbols make me think of the Egyptian hieroglyphs,” she told Xylon, “but they are different.”

“They are called *Bliss Symbols*.”

“Funny name, and why are they chiselled into the stone of almost every building here?”

“For the same reason as in Egypt: to stand the test of time.”

“And what is written there?” Verity thought she could guess the meaning of some of the symbols, but she wasn't able to understand the message of the full texts.

“Most of it is the history of Mankind, describing where we come from and also summarizing our most important pieces of knowledge. So, if for any reason something happens to us, the people who come after us shall remember.”

“Is it only on the outside of the buildings?”

“No, on the inside as well.”

This was amazing, thought Verity, not only useful, but on top of that it turned the buildings into pieces of art.

Xylon continued: “Like in Toronto on planet Earth, there is a vast network of underground halls that connect the buildings, so that one can move anywhere within the city without needing to go outside.”

Verity had never heard about the underground structures in Toronto, but knew that Canadian winters were rather harsh, so it would make sense to find creative solutions for that.

Still, there were quite a few people walking outside in their spacesuits, for building maintenance, or just for recreation.

“Wonderful,” she said.

Then Xylon drove down a ramp into an underground garage. In the garage, he drove into a parking box, whose door closed behind them. Verity could see a red light on the wall in front of them.

“Just wait a little,” said Xylon.

A few seconds later, the light turned green, which didn’t really make sense to Verity who was used to earthly traffic lights without any wall in front of them. Then she heard a click at the vehicle doors.

“Now it’s safe to step out,” said the Martian, “welcome to Marstone.”

They stepped out of Jones, walked through a door, and into a corridor where they found a lift. When they stepped out of the lift, there was an indoor mall-like plaza with shops and restaurants. She felt like being in one of Las Vegas’ casinos. And there were even casinos.

But it was different. More genuine, somehow. Tricky to describe. Now Verity could see the *Bliss Symbols* more clearly, and not only on the stone walls of the building, but everywhere else too: from shop names to restaurant menus, everything was written in these symbols.

“Tell me more about this symbol language,” she asked Xylon.

“It was invented on Earth in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the beginning, it was only used to help speech-impaired people communicate. Then a few forward-thinking individuals realised that it was actually the most logical written language that existed, and could hopefully have a broader use. So, they learned it, studied it, improved it and managed to convince most nations on Earth to use it for future interplanetary communication.”

“There seems to be some elegance to it,” said Verity who, thanks to her photographic memory was familiar with many languages, not just the nine ones that she spoke fluently.

“Yes, and once you learn a few basics, you will be able to even better admire the elegance of this symbol language.”

“I am hungry. Shall we eat something?”

“Let me take you to a restaurant upstairs. With a view, it’s a great spot to watch Martian sunsets.”

Xylon led her to another lift. And after quite a long ride, they stepped out into a restaurant with big windows overlooking Marstone and the adjacent raw landscapes.

“Stunning,” said Verity, looking down on the barren landscape of the red planet.

“Actually, this is the place where we got married.”

They sat down at a table next to the window so that Verity could have a perfect view of the reddish city and landscapes outside, while Xylon had a perfect view of... his wife.

“You must be thirsty,” he said and ordered two beers while the waiter gave them the menus.

“You even have beer in Marstone?”

“They have most of what you need and like here. Except deep-sea fish. Most come from the agricultural biodomes just outside the city.”

Verity looked at the menu. “Don’t tell me anything. Let’s see if I can decipher any of these symbols.”

The beers came. They clinked their glasses, and had a short refreshing moment of silence.

“Pure pleasure,” said Xylon and smiled at his beloved polyglot. She studied the symbols on the menu for a while, then said:

“This one looks like a bird, is it chicken?”

“Yes.”

“And this one looks like something with four legs... meat?”

“Well done.”

“Don’t tell me that this is pizza,” she said pointing at a circle “cut” into six pieces.

“It is.”

“And this looks like a cocktail glass.”

“Yes, that’s the list of alcoholic beverages.”

“Is this one for vegetables?”

“Indeed, and the symbol clearly indicates whether the vegetable grows above ground, or below ground.

“Amazing! And what’s the circle with a line underneath?”

“Food. Literally ‘mouth above earth’.”

“So, this must be drinks,” concluded Verity showing a similar symbol with an additional wave in the circle.

“Correct,” said Xylon and then helped Verity to translate the other symbols that were not as obvious.

“This is one of the coolest languages I’ve ever come across,” she exclaimed. “And how do you pronounce these symbols?”

“It is like written Chinese, so you can pronounce and speak it in different ways depending on your mother tongue.”

“So, what’s the official language on Mars?”

“A slightly simplified version of Esperanto.”

“I thought Esperanto was already simple and so much easier to learn than most other languages.”

“Yes, but 21<sup>st</sup> century linguists made it even simpler.”

“But how come I couldn’t understand what they were saying down in the mall?” Because, like most hyperpolyglots, Verity understood Esperanto quite well.

“Oh, that’s a Maori dialect, the mother tongue of people here in Marstone. Other cities here on Mars speak other languages, but they all use the Bliss symbols for writing and simplified Esperanto to communicate between each other. In the same way as English is used on Earth for international communication.”

“That explains why I saw so many people with greenstone pendants around their neck. A friend of mine has one too, although he is not Maori.” Verity thought of Leo, who had probably bought it on a teleportation trip across the Tasman Sea.

“Yes, these stones are beautiful, especially when carved the traditional Maori way. They emit some kind of peacefulness.”

“Maybe that’s why New Zealand is one of the most peaceful countries on Earth?”

“Maybe. Although there are probably several explanations for that.”

“I guess you’re right.”

“I’d love to buy one for you too. But you’re in the same situation as when people die: you can’t take anything with you from this Dream World. And by now you know that you’ll need to create this Dream World so that I can give you this gift. And many more...” He gave her a kiss.

Their late lunch had been long, and in the meantime the sun had set over the Martian landscapes and it had started to become dark outside.

“Let’s go home now,” said Xylon.

Hearing that felt strange to Verity. This meant that in one alternative future, maybe Dimension 3.27 or 3.81 as explained by Leo, she lived on Mars with this handsome man whom she hardly knew anything about.

They took the elevator down again, walked through various malls and corridors, and then entered another lift and the ride up was almost as long as the one to the restaurant.

They stepped straight out into a fairly big apartment with big windows overlooking Marstone from another perspective.

“Welcome home!” said Xylon, hugged Verity and gave her a long and tender kiss.

Then he opened a bottle of wine and they sat down in the sofa looking out at the city lights. The electric lights on Mars had a special warmth to them that Verity had only seen on rare occasions on Earth.

“Tell me more about you, Xylon. Where do you come from? Where were you born? What do you do in life?”

“I was born here in Marstone forty years ago. My parents, on the other hand, come from Earth, where they actually both went back for retirement a few years ago, after having lived almost fifty years here on Mars. Both are from New Zealand; my father is Maori and my mother a Kiwi from European descent.”

So, like herself, Xylon was an ethnic mix, thought Verity.

“I am also a mix. My father is French-Chinese and my mother Japanese.”

“I know.”

Verity had forgotten that the people she meets in her Dream Worlds know all about her, even more than what she knows herself, consciously at least.

Xylon continued: “What you need to understand with Aotearoa/New Zealand is that it was the last climatically habitable place on Earth to be settled. The Maoris arrived from Polynesia at the beginning of the first millennium, then the Europeans followed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

“Yes, and?”

“And that means that New Zealand, seen from an evolutionary perspective, is a *cul-de-sac*, a dead-end street, which it remained until the first humans move off Earth, first a few to the Moon, then bigger populations here to Mars. Modern space technology gave Kiwis and many other people a new sense of purpose, and many New Zealanders were among the first waves of settlers to Mars, where Marstone is the oldest city.”

“Fascinating,” said Verity, “so Mars is just the next logical step of human expansion?”

“Yes, and as we talk other planets like Venus and Saturn are starting to be colonized. And the first manned ships destined for outside our solar system have already left.”

“So, what do you work with here?”

“I am a knowledge keeper.”

“A librarian?” asked Verity, deducting that possibility due to the quantity of filled bookshelves in Xylon’s – or their – apartment. No wonder she found love with someone like this.

“Sort of,” said Xylon, “I’ll tell you more tomorrow.” He took Verity’s hand and led her into the bedroom.

Like in her other Dream Worlds, Verity’s senses were heightened in Marstone, and a simple kiss almost gave her an orgasm.

Her lovemaking with Tirvey had been interrupted by Professor Dimenport, and she hadn’t met any intimate partners in the 2061 Geneva, so this experience was the most intense of her life. Maybe it had something to do with the low gravity? Anyway, the sex she had with Xylon in 0.38g was beyond description, and both of them slept very well afterwards.

Verity was gently woken up by a tender touch on the cheek and a slight whisper from Xylon: “Wake up, Verity, we are going on an excursion.”

She hadn’t expected to still be in her Dream World, so this was good news. It was still dark outside. A quick shower, then they jumped into their spacesuits, had a short breakfast then grabbed gloves and breathing devices, and took the elevator down to ground level.

“Where are we going?” asked Verity.

“To broaden your perspectives.”

She thought her perspectives were already quite broad, but then she remembered that one can always learn more at any stage of life. Even when one has a photographic memory, something which came in handy here in Marstone where Verity could easily remember the Bliss symbols so that she can explain them more in detail to the other Grooters upon her return.

They walked into a small room with another green light, where they put on their gloves and breathing helmets. Xylon helped Verity to adjust her helmet so that it was air-tight. Then the light turned blue and another door opened to the outside.

“OK,” thought Verity, “so the green light is when a room is safe with breathable air; and the blue light signals that one’s breathing device is operational and that it’s safe to wander outside.”

Xylon took her hand and they walked out on the “streets” of Marstone, which they hadn’t bothered to flatten more than necessary because all vehicles were off-road rovers anyway.

“What a feeling,” thought Verity, “I am walking on Mars.”

Xylon could feel her enthusiasm and pressed her hand a little more.

Due to the number of high-rise buildings, the city was fairly compact and they just walked for fifteen minutes until they reached the foot of a hill on the outskirts of Marstone.

“If we walk fast enough,” said Xylon, “we should reach the top before sunrise.”

It was quite a big hill and it took them about half an hour to get to the summit. Verity had expected to be exhausted, but to her surprise it felt quite easy. She wondered if this was the Dream World effect, or the lower gravity effect. Or both, or maybe it was just her walking on clouds after last night’s physical and emotional highs.

Dawn was well under way and they sat down on a bench where Xylon held Verity in his arms as far as their helmets would allow. The sunrise was stunning, so different from Earth, but still magical.

“What do you think?” asked Xylon.

“The view reminds me a little of Victoria’s Peak in Hong Kong where I live. Have you been there?”

“I have never been to Earth,” he responded.

“Then you must come and visit me. I’d love to show you around, at least to all the places where I’ve lived. By the way, how long does it take to travel to Earth?”

“Just a few weeks, depending on the seasonal distance between Earth and Mars. The record, currently held by one of our best pilots here in Marstone, is 17 days, 8 hours and 26 minutes. But the average travel time is around 28 days.”

“That gives you time to catch up on some reading and star gazing,” she said looking into Xylon’s mysterious eyes.

“Now let me tell you a bit more about this city and my job as a knowledge keeper.”

“I’d love to hear more,” said Verity.

“Remember how I told you that most of Humanity’s knowledge is engraved in our buildings?”

“Yes, and I cannot forget these symbols. What did you call them again?”

“Bliss symbols. Well, there’s more to it than just these inscriptions.”

“How so?”

“The whole city is like a giant memory palace.”

“Please explain.”

“This is why I wanted to take you up here where you have a big-picture view of the city. As you can see, there are hundreds of buildings in Marstone. 861 actually. With an average of 3,567 people per building.”

“OK.”

“And each of these buildings represents a body of knowledge. One building is anatomy, one is painting, one is architecture, another babies, another food, another law, etc.”

“So, it’s not just random buildings developed by real-estate sharks?”

“No. Everything has been wisely planned. Gladly enough, we have managed to learn from human’s mistakes on Earth, and we’ve put measures in place to prevent all forms of speculation.”

“Do you mean that all the buildings serve as educational memory pegs or memory reminders to people?”

“Exactly. Every building – in the public areas – has been designed to remind us of a specific part of our body of knowledge.”

“Could you give me an example?”

“Yes, the building where the restaurant is,” and Xylon pointed at one of the highest skyscrapers below, “is the one where all our knowledge about food is stored. And the building next to it has all the knowledge about drinks.”

“That’s why I saw so many photos and paintings of food-related topics on the walls, even in the elevator?”

“Yes, that is a constant knowledge reminder to the people walking through the building. But it goes further than just the paintings. There are thousand-years old recipes engraved on the columns in the halls, there are planting instructions for



vegetables in the ceiling, and the architecture of the hall is a reminder of the optimal mix of foods for human digestion.”

“But when you ‘read’ the architecture, you need to know what you look for?”

“Of course, in the same way as many indigenous people on Earth read their landscapes for knowledge. Such systems have been used for thousands of years among people who did not have any writing systems. So, this here is a form of hybrid system, if you will, because it includes a writing system.”

“But when you have writing, you don’t need those memory pegs any longer?”

“Wrong. This keeps your brain and memory fit and is also a great alternative for knowledge intake, even if you like books.”

“So do children learn this basic structure in school?”

“Indeed, they are all taught this structure, and then they can decide to learn more about some topics depending on their interests and chosen careers.”

“And what precisely is your role as a knowledge keeper?”

“Like a librarian, my job is to constantly add new knowledge as it becomes available, and adapt old knowledge, and sometimes even discard no longer relevant or erroneous knowledge.”

“That must be a lot of work.”

“It is, and I am glad that I also have a fairly good photographic memory like you.”

“Do other cities on Mars have a similar memory palace architecture?”

“Yes, they all have a similar structure in the sense that they cover the whole body of knowledge. But their buildings will look very different depending on the local city culture and architectural style. And also, every city has some kind of specialisation, so they have larger buildings for the knowledge related to that specialisation.”

“This structural aspect is very interesting. Given my photographic memory, I have so much knowledge, and my brain seems to be able to retrieve most of it like an Internet search engine. But I wouldn’t know if my knowledge about plants is placed to the left or to the right of my knowledge about trains or fashion.”

“In that sense, most people on Earth have a huge mess inside their brains. The result is that they feel lost to a certain degree, some more than others.”

“Lost?”

“Yes, when you don’t know what you don’t know,” said Xylon.

“Of course!” exclaimed Verity. “That’s the power of a full-picture memory palace: you are aware of all the knowledge that exists and know where to find what you need.”

“And that overview is part of our regular education for children here on Mars, along with reading, writing and counting.”

“I have another important question,” said Verity.

“Sure, tell me.”

“It feels like humans are really struggling to get out into space, I mean we haven’t even had anybody going to the Moon for almost fifty years. What do we need to do differently?”

“I’d say there are three main things you can do.”

“What are they?”

“The first thing is to include Indigenous knowledge. Whether you are aware of it or not, many Indigenous people on Earth sit of very valuable knowledge that they will only share once they are treated as equals. So colonial arrogance will not get you up in space.”

“And the other things?”

“Another problem is that space enthusiasts seem to be overly focused on technology. Technological innovation will still be required, but so will social innovations. For the moment, there is hardly any society on Earth that can be considered fully harmonious. And humans are unlikely to be allowed to go and settle on other planets until they have learnt to live together in harmony on their home planet.”

“I hadn’t thought about that,” said Verity.

“Finally, the last thing that needs to happen is to think out-of-the-box when it comes to space technology. And by that, I mean finding better transport solutions than putting people on a pack of dynamite. Smoother and faster technology will be required. So that we can travel to Mars in less than a month.”

“Any hints that could help us think out-of-the-box?”

“Yes, you need to think in terms of energy and emotions.”

That reminded Verity about Aaron and Aurora’s *Ei in the Sky*, which clearly seemed to use a very different kind of technology. A more female kind of technology.

“Thank you so much for these insights, Xylon,” said Verity.

“For the last two points, maybe the best way to summarise them is that the aim should be to avoid both explosive technologies... and explosive human temperaments, like anger or jealousy. It is very unlikely that you will go to space at all as long as you haven’t fixed those problems.”

The sunrise was really beautiful and triggered feelings that Verity had never felt before. Maybe it was due to the thin atmosphere, or to Xylon’s presence, or to her heightened senses?

Half an hour later, they started their hike down to central Marstone again.

“I have a surprise for you,” said Xylon.

“What is it?”

“Patience... you’ll see when we’re back home.”

They walked back into the transit room. Red light. The exterior door closed behind them. And a few seconds later, the light turned green. They took off their helmets and gloves, then found their way to the lift up to the apartment.

Verity hugged Xylon: “Thank you so much, this was an amazing experience.”

“You’re welcome. Your happiness is my happiness.”

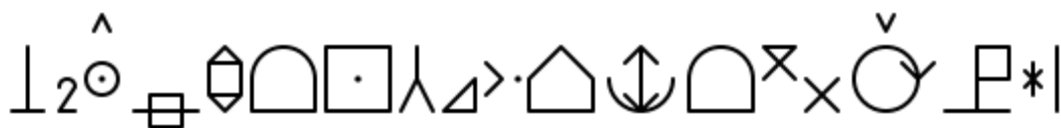
They kissed.

“So, what’s the surprise?”

Xylon went over to the bookshelf, took out a book, opened it, and extracted a small paper. It looked like it had been used as a bookmark.

He gave the paper to Verity.

It was a sentence written in Bliss symbols:



“What does this mean?”

Xylon took Verity in his arms and together they went through the meaning of each symbol, so that Verity could understand the whole sentence:

**You will find the Crystal of Knowledge in a statue  
at the oldest university in the United States.**

Then she said: “I may have an idea which statue is being referred to. That should make it fairly easy. Thanks, Xylon.”

“You’re welcome.”

“By the way, I have a surprise for you too.”

“What could that be?”

“I think I’m pregnant.”

“That’s wonderful!” said Xylon and hugged Verity for a long time.

Then she asked him: “How is all this possible?”

“What do you mean, possible?”

“I mean that I am here, on Mars, in the year 2088, pregnant and still looking like I was 35 years old, although I was born in 1982.”

“There are three possible explanations for this.”

“Three!?!”

“The first one is that you have managed to stay young at heart and in body by having a healthy lifestyle and probably taking some kind of anti-age hormones.”

“I know that some companies of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century were working on immortality projects. But I didn’t know they were so close to succeeding.”

“The second possibility is that you chose to put yourself into a sixty-year hibernation. By the way, the knowledge and technology that allows this were invented around the year 2025.”

“And the third possibility?”

“The third possibility is what you would call time travel. We prefer to call it chronological teleportation. So, in the same way your friend Leo is able to teleport from one place in space to another, people can now teleport themselves from one place in time to another.”

“But doesn’t that disrupt the time-space continuum?”

“Under certain conditions, yes, but not when you’re teleporting into the future, which ends up to be exactly the same as hibernation, except that it’s instantaneous.”

“This means that my dream is to live on Mars... in the future?”

“Yes, just be aware that once you’ve travelled to the future, you can’t go back. That’s the beauty of Dimenport’s machine: it gives you a test drive so that you can get a better feel if this is a future that you’d like to subscribe to.”

Verity hugged Xylon for a long time. Then she said in a naughty voice: “Maybe I need to feel a little more to what extent I like this future...” and she kissed Xylon again and took him to the bedroom.

*“Welcome back, Verity,” said Leo. “That was your last Dream World travel. We’re eager to hear the details.”*

### **VERITY BLESSE – THIRD DWT – 24.03.2018**

“Thanks,” said Verity, still a little groggy. Xylon’s last words still resonated in her mind: “... *if this is a future you’d like to subscribe to...*”

That was a powerful question.

She shared her impressions with the other Grooters and they watched her Martian travel together.

Then Boss launched the discussion: “So, what new things have we learned?”

“That Verity is pregnant,” joked Webbo.

“Very funny,” said Verity.

“That we should easily be able to get hold of our next crystal,” said Modella.

“We’ll call it easy – or not – once we have the crystal in our hands,” said Boss. “What else?”

“This memory palace technique sounds very interesting,” said Richie. “Could that be the future of education?”

“I think we should look it up and see if we can learn more about it,” said Leo.

“Anything else?” asked Boss.

“The various ways to travel into the future,” said Leo, “sounds like a fun twist to my teleportation.”

“Yes,” said Richie, “I’ll keep my eyes open for organisations that work on immortality and suspended animation. Anyone a clue on how chronological teleportation would work?”

“No...”

“I don’t even perfectly understand how my spatial teleportation works,” said Leo.

“Too bad I can’t travel back to ask Xylon all those questions,” said Verity.

“Tell us, Verity,” said Boss, “how do you feel about the three different Dream Worlds that you’ve now visited? Shoparadise, Geneva of 2061, and Marstone.”

“All were great in their own way.”

“If you had to choose one of them, which one would you ‘subscribe to?’” asked Richie.

“Probably Marstone. But I’m not sure, it’s a pity I can’t test drive more Dream Worlds.”

“This smells like addiction...” said Modella, “Who said you can’t try out more Dream Worlds?”

“Dimenport,” confirmed Leo.

“Are we sure it doesn’t work a fourth time?” asked Webbo.

“Let’s look at the big picture, here,” said Leo. “Our first goal is to use these travels to find clues to build Crystallica. And to find any additional insights that could help us fulfill our Pact.”

“That’s true,” said Verity.

“The second thing is that these travels can be very addictive, and I certainly know what I’m talking about,” continued Leo thinking back at Adrenaland and Drugstorie.

“Yes, I think we need to be careful with any potential addiction,” said Modella.

“We sure do,” said Boss. “Also, we need to get clear on what this machine really does: it helps us access our subconscious.”

“You mean our imagination?” said Verity.

“I guess so.”

“Dolly Parton didn’t need a special machine for that,” said Modella, and the resident Grooters DJ turned on the music.

♪ *Imagination – Dolly Parton*

“Good point,” said Boss. “Which means that Dimenport’s Dream World Teleporter is nothing more than an ‘imagination booster’.”

“Albeit a very powerful one,” added Leo.

“We can find inspiration from each other’s travels, too,” said Webbo.

“And from all the books we read, films we see, and things we observe,” said Verity.

“Indeed,” said Boss. “So, in practice, Verity can continue to travel to various Dream Worlds in her imagination, until she finds one that she really likes.”

“But how many Dream Worlds do I need to test drive?” she wondered.

“This sounds like an *optimal stopping* problem,” said Webbo.

“Optimal stopping?” asked Modella.

“Yes, an algorithm. 37%.”

“37%?”

“That’s when you have to stop searching and start leaping.”

“But if there are an infinity of possible futures, 37% of infinity is still infinity,” said Richie.

“In such a situation, you just stop at 37% of the time interval you have given yourself.”

“How does that work?” asked Verity.

Webbo continued: “It’s like house hunting. Let’s say you give yourself a month to find a new house – or decide on a Dream World or whatever – then you look at various options for the first eleven days. 37%.”

“And after that?”

“After that you buy the next house that comes up and that is at least as good as the best of the options you’ve seen before. It is scientifically proven that this leads to the optimal choice.”

“Your house analogy sounds a little easier, though,” said Verity, “because you can just move into the house. In my case, I cannot just move to Mars.”

“It’s not as different as you think. Before moving into a new house, you may need to do renovation works, sometimes major ones. In other words, project management.”

“That’s my cup of tea,” said Boss. “Once you have made the decision about which house or which Dream World you want to live in, then the renovation – or Dream World building – simply boils down to project management where you use reverse creativity to reach your goal.”

“One house renovation still sounds a bit easier than building a new city on Mars,” said Verity.

“Agreed. But the basic principle is the same.”

“So, you mean that accessing parallel dimensions is simply a question of project management?” asked Leo.

“Yes,” said Boss.

“But it’s bordering impossible...” said Webbo.

“That’s what motivates me.” said Richie.



Geneva, Switzerland, 24 March 2018

“It feels too simple,” said Leo.

“What do you mean?” asked Modella.

“The Crystal of Knowledge. Do you really think that it is just hidden in the John Harvard statue? No riddles, no vague descriptions, no 38m high statue to reach up to and do brain surgery on?”

“There is only one way to know,” said Richie.

“It’s not quite as simple as that,” said Boss. “We would still have to proceed with a minor operation to extract the crystal, which could be translated as vandalism.”

“That wouldn’t be the first such attempt on that statue,” said Verity who had memorised the Wikipedia page of the statue.

“No, but we want to draw as little attention to us as possible.”

“So, what do you suggest?”

“Maybe it is time to try out those new cloaking technologies that we considered for Rio?”

“In any case, we need to neutralise the campus cameras,” said Richie, “Webbo?”

“If Zuckerberg can hack into Harvard’s computer system, then I can too.”

“Maybe they’ve improved their security in the last 15 years?” said Verity.

“Sure, but any system that doesn’t use quantum encryption isn’t safe against Webbo.”

“I wouldn’t think they use such encryption yet,” said Leo, “but I would be interested to understand what makes it so difficult to hack quantum encrypted systems.”

“Because they hide the data in parallel dimensions, which makes it impossible to hack,” answered Webbo.

“Impossible?” said Boss and just showed him his wristwatch with the square cogwheel.

“Let’s focus on the crystal, shall we?” said Richie. “Do we all need to fly to Boston for this?”

“If we’re able to get hold of a cloaking device, we shouldn’t need to all fly there,” said Boss.

“In which part of the statue do you think the crystal is hidden? Webbo?”

Webbo closed his eyes... then said after a while:

“I can feel something in the plinth, behind the seal on the northern side of the statue.”

“This still sounds too easy,” said Leo.

“Webbo, can you check straight away if you can numb down the campus security cameras?” asked Boss.

“Sure,” said Webbo, opened his laptop, played around for a few minutes than said: “I’m in. I told you.”

“Great,” said Boss, “which means that we may not need a cloaking device. But we would still need to do it when there is no one around.”

Webbo and Richie, who had both studied in Boston said almost simultaneously: “5AM on a Sunday morning: it’s statistically the quietest time, when the last students have gone to sleep and before the first tourist busloads arrive.”

“Well, it’s Saturday afternoon today, so we’ll have to do it next week-end,” said Verity.

“No worries,” said Leo, “that gives us some time to make sure we plan the trip properly.”

“So, who’s going?” asked Boss.

“If Leo needs to stay here to operate the machine for the next Dream World travels, he can’t go. And then the next traveller cannot go either.”

“Verity has already done all her travels, so she could go to Boston,” said Modella. “On top of that our favourite librarian is the most knowledgeable of us all, so it would make sense that she retrieves the Crystal of Knowledge.

“And if we’re taking *Lady Globalia*, I need to be on board,” said Richie. “And I have studied at Harvard, so I know the campus and Boston quite well.”

“I’ve also studied in Boston,” added Webbo.

“Webbo is up next for a Dream World Travel,” said Leo.

“But Webbo needs to be on hold in case we need him,” said Richie.

“You might as well take him with you, then,” said Boss, “and if you need extra backup, Leo could always teleport over. We’ll put the Dream World travels on hold for a few days.”

“What about the cloaking device?” wondered Leo.

“Let me call the people who are working on it,” said Richie. He did, and came back fifteen minutes later: “Sorry, the cloaking device still needs a few months before it’s ready. So, we need another plan. Ideas?”

“Why don’t you just put up a canvas, fake that you are painting the statue, and then one of you operates on the statue behind?” suggested Leo.

“The distraction technique. That can work. Actually, that sounds fairly easy. We just need the right tools.”

“This is what you need,” said Leo, who had professional burglar knowledge. He listed a number of tools and explained how to use them. Verity memorised everything.

The Grooters spent the next few days to buy the appropriate tools to ‘operate’ the statue, as well as organising the event in minute detail, including contingency plans in case there would be any unexpected problems.

Verity, Richie, and Webbo decided to fly to North America a few days ahead of their Sunday morning stunt, to accommodate for jet lag and to visit the campus, so they would know exactly what to do and where on the night of their crystal operation.

Once they had boarded, Verity asked Richie:

“It’s your alma mater, Richie, what do you think? Isn’t it ironic that on the one hand Harvard has the “VE-RI-TAS” motto, and on the other hand its most well-known icon, the statue of John Harvard, is nicknamed the “statue of the three lies”?”

“I agree with you. Good observation. For most businesses and institutions, there tends to be a mismatch between the face they show to the outside, and what is really happening on the inside.”

### *Boston, United States, 1 April 2018*

The plan worked to perfection. In order not to attract too much attention, they flew into Worcester airport in central Massachusetts. It was worth an additional hour in the car to get to the Harvard campus. And Verity really liked Worcester’s city seal, it reminded her of the one crystal that she had held in her hands, but that was still stuck in another dimension.

No one was around on Sunday morning, and the crystal was where they expected it to be: behind the *VERITAS* seal of the plinth of the statue. Verity had the honour of removing the seal that reminded her very much of her own name.

The whole operation took less than twenty minutes and they managed to put back the seal so no vandalism suspicions would be raised.

Once they had jumped into the car and were heading back to Worcester airport, Verity couldn’t hold her curiosity, and immediately opened the leather pouch.

Their fourth crystal! This time it was a blue-coloured crystal within a light bulb.

“Interesting that this is also a light bulb, like the Crystal of Creativity,” noted Verity.

“Kind of makes sense,” said Richie, “because the more knowledge we have, the more associations we can make and thus the more creative ideas we can get.”

“Look, there’s a message as well,” she said and read aloud:

**Books represent only half of human knowledge.**

“Leo was probably right when he said that this felt too easy,” remarked Webbo.

“So, you think we’re missing something here?” asked Richie.

“Could be.”

When Verity held the Crystal of Knowledge in her hands, she felt a powerful energy running through her body and almost like an explosion of light in her brain. That made her literally feel the power of knowledge. It also made her realise that she was lacking knowledge about how love truly works, and it made her think of *Ei in the Sky* and Aurora and Aaron. If they were able to lift a spacecraft with the power of love, they must have quite a good understanding of love.

So, she asked Richie:

“You said the *Ei in the Sky* research centre was in Québec?”

“Yes, what about it?”

“I just got an intuitive feeling I need to meet Aurora and Aaron so that they can explain to me how their love technology works. It may give us clues for the Crystal of Love.”

“Hadn’t thought about that, it’s a great idea, Verity. Why don’t you just rent a car and drive up there from here. Should take about 7 hours. And then you can catch a regular flight when you’re done and join us back in Geneva.”

“Sounds great, I’ve never been to Canada.”

“I’ll send them a text straight away,” said Richie, “it’s a bit early to call on a Sunday morning.”

Even before they reached the Worcester airport, Richie got a reply from Aurora: “*We can meet Verity at the Château de Frontenac tonight. We’ll book rooms. Looking forward to meet her.*”

“*Thanks, Aurora,*” replied Richie, “*her name is Verity Blesse. She’s lovely, you’ll see.*”

Then he turned his attention to Verity:

“All good, you can meet Aaron and Aurora at the *Château de Frontenac* tonight. Your investigations will serve us all, and will definitely help us with the Pact.”

Once at the airport, Verity gave Richie the Crystal of Knowledge, hugged him and Webbo, then rented a car to drive to Canada, while Richie and Webbo boarded *Lady Globalia* to cross the Atlantic again.

Verity stopped for an early lunch in Freeport, Maine, where she had one of the best lobster sandwiches of her life, with an equally amazing-tasting clam chowder.

“This day started well, continues well, so I’m eager to see how it will end,” Verity thought to herself, happy to be in discovery mode.

Driving through the thick forests of Maine, Verity thought a lot about how enigmatic love was, and couldn’t understand how hardly anyone seemed to have been able to wrap their head around that mysterious emotion, so that people could experience love and all its wonders without the relationship drama that it is more often than not associated with.

She arrived in Québec City just before sunset and easily spotted the majestic hotel towering over the city.

Although the Saint-Laurent river still had a few ice blocks in it, spring seemed to be well on its way.

Checking in at the hotel reception, there was a message from Aurora asking if she wanted to join them for dinner at eight o’clock. She replied that she’d love to, then went up to her room for a power nap and to take a bath to relax after the long drive.

Before taking the elevator down to the restaurant, Verity looked herself in the mirror. And was very pleased with what she saw, wearing a black qi pao with golden flowers and plants embroidery. That dress woke up her ancestry part from the Middle Kingdom.

Then, a few minutes after eight, she walked into the hotel restaurant. Aurora and Aaron were already there. A beautiful couple, almost as she had imagined from Leo’s and Professor Dimenport’s description of them. Without their futuristic pilot outfits, though.

“Welcome to Québec, Verity. Did you have a good drive?” asked Aaron.

“*Merci! Oui, j’adore voyager,*” said Verity in the local language, one of many places where she could use of her exceptional linguistic skills.

They continued in English though because Aaron was from Arkansas and his French was still a bit rusty despite Aurora being from French-speaking Trois-Rivières, about mid-way between Québec City and Montréal.

“So, Richie told us you wanted to learn more about the *Physics of Love?*”

“Yes, as you know Professor Dimenport has invented a machine that has enabled us Grooters to access our Dream Worlds where we get clues to find crystals that we will need to form Crystallica, a device to prevent bad things to happen, and to accelerate good things into this world.”

“Yes,” said Aaron, “we had a long chat with the Professor aboard *Ei in the Sky* in January. A fascinating personality. Glad to hear that his machine works.”

“Now,” continued Verity, “the problem is that one of those crystals, the Crystal of Love, is stuck in a dimension which seems to be in the future. The year 2061, in Geneva, to be precise. However, we don’t have the luxury to wait for another 43 years to figure out how love works.”

“We may be able to help you with some knowledge,” said Aurora, holding her partner’s hand.

“That would be amazing.”

The waiter came to take their order and soon brought some appetisers and wine and water.

Then Aaron started: “We got a major breakthrough in our research once we started to think about love in terms of physics. In terms of energy to be more precise.”

“Energy?”

“Yes, love is an e-motion, which stands for energy in motion. So, how does that energy move?”

“Good question...”

“Well,” said Aurora, taking the relay from Aaron, “let’s imagine a typical love story: two people feel attraction for each other, they get to know each other, and they do things for each other that make them feel loved and appreciated. And the love grows as they do more things together, and work on common projects to start a family and/or a business together, build a house or travel the world.”

“That sounds like a nice love story,” confirmed Verity.

“Now, at all of these stages, the energy moves a little differently. First, let’s take the attraction phase. Here, it is an attractive energy, like two magnets. That’s why we talk about attractive people or magnetic personalities. The thing to understand is that this is only one ingredient of love, and by itself, it is not love, just attraction.”

“An example maybe?”

“Yes, who’s your favourite actor?”

“Theo James.”

“OK, so if you were to meet Theo at a party and he seduces you, you would probably ‘fall’ for him?”

Verity blushed in confirmation.

“By falling, we here mean stuff like fall on a bed and doing things together. Now, let’s switch to physics: this attraction phase is about *horizontal attractive energy*,

which often leads to horizontal physical debates. Unfortunately, far too many people misinterpret this part of love as being in love, and then they can't understand why they fight with their partners so much."

"Is it because the other components of love are missing?" tried Verity.

"Exactly," said Aaron, taking over from Aurora. "The next component of love is, from a physics perspective, the exact opposite of falling in love: it's about 'rising in love'. It is an uplifting energy, and this gets closer to what love truly is. Have you ever felt that uplifting energy?"

"I think I have, but I've never really understood what triggers those great feelings."

"Have you heard of the *Five Love Languages*?"

"No."

"Dr. Gary Chapman came up with this insight after having counselled thousands of couples. It's the fact that we are all 'triggered' by different things that our partners do and that make us feel loved and appreciated. And he put these things into five broad categories, or 'languages': 1. *Words of Affirmation*, 2. *Acts of Service*, 3. *Gifts*, 4. *Quality Time*, 5. *Physical Touch*."

"More precisely, how does this work?"

"Well, when someone 'talks' to you in your specific love language, then you feel loved, you literally feel uplifted. And this is the second component of love: an *uplifting energy*. Which category do you think you belong to? What do you need to feel loved: for example, someone giving you compliments? Or helping you out with errands? Or giving you gifts? Or spending quality time with you? Or physically touching you often?"

"Great question, I had never thought about all this. I now realise that I feel very touched when someone compliments me. But I also feel very much loved when someone spends time with me, just talking and discussing ways on how we could improve the world, for example by brainstorming topics like love and trying to find solutions to better understand it and spread it."

"There you go," said Aurora, "and know that these love languages also function in non-romantic situations. And now that I am aware of your love languages, I can consciously choose to compliment you for having the courage to come here to Québec by yourself to try and elucidate some of the mysteries of love."

"Thanks," said Verity, feeling good from that compliment.

"And we'll also want to remind you of your stunning beauty, Verity," said Aaron, "you radiate a wise and intelligent form of beauty, which is very rare."

To that, Aurora added: "And because we know you need quality time, we will not just call it a night straight after dessert, but stay and chat for as long as you feel."

Verity felt like in heaven. She could first-hand confirm the uplifting energy she was now experiencing simply because they had pushed precisely the right kinds of buttons in her. The power of knowledge at work.

“And are there any other components of love?”

“Yes,” said Aaron. “Let’s maybe use the analogy of a helicopter. The horizontal attractive energy gets pilot and co-pilot together. Then the main rotor system is the uplifting energy of the love languages that enables the helicopter to lift off vertically and hover above the ground. I’ll let you guess what is missing.”

“A *forward-moving energy*?”

“Exactly. For a helicopter, that thrusting energy comes from the small back rotor.”

“And for romantic relationships?”

“That *forward-moving energy* comes from having common goals, working on common projects. Making children and building a family is a common romantic project, but it’s not always sufficient for long-lasting love.”

“Why?”

“Because we all have different values and interests and passions in life. And if our partner is not aligned with those passions, we will feel frictions and frustrations in our lives. Put differently, we believe that true love also has some kind of ‘doing business together’ component. The key is that both of you have to love that business or activity.”

“OK, so let me rephrase all this to make sure I’ve understood the *Physics of Love*.”

“Yes, please do,” said Aurora.

“First, we have a *horizontal energy*, an *attractive energy*. Second, we have an *uplifting energy*, which literally makes us feel lighter, feel loved. And third, we have a *forward-moving energy*, a common goal or project.”

“You see, love isn’t that complicated,” said Aaron. “And as we are talking about energy in motion, where would you say these three energies run through your body?”

“I think I know,” answered Verity. “The *attractive energy* would probably be in the groin, the *uplifting energy* in the heart, and the *forward-moving energy* in the head/brain.”

“You’re a fast learner!” exclaimed Aurora.

“I’ve been told so...”

“All that means,” continued Aurora, “that if your goal is a wonderful romantic relationship, then you should aim at increasing these three energies. Once you are aware of them, it’s quite straightforward, although it may require some work depending on what stage you are in life. Some people will need to work on their



attractiveness, others need to find a goal or purpose in life. And almost all need to improve their loving skills, meaning customising their love to their partner's love languages. So, a first step may be for you to learn more about these languages."

"Yes, I'm supposed to be good at languages, but there you caught me."

"Don't worry, life is a learning journey."

"Out of curiosity, how did you apply these love energy insights to building the *Ei in the Sky*?"

"Good question," said Aaron. "If you remember what we just said, two steps are quite obvious: first you use magnets for the attractive energy; and the forward-moving energy comes from the head, right?"

"Yes."

"In other words, you can use your mind to move the spacecraft forward. This is no longer science-fiction. Already five years ago, some scientists were able to move a drone by mental power."

"And what about the uplifting energy?"

"That's the trickiest one. There are two conventional ways of generating lift. One is to use a lighter-than-air gas like hot air, hydrogen or helium. And the second method is to use brute force like rotors or rockets, eventually combined with wings, as for airplanes."

"It didn't look like *Ei in the Sky* uses any of these methods."

"Indeed, it doesn't. I'll let you ponder that question with your Grooters friends: what is the technology equivalent to the love languages? Unfortunately, we cannot share that secret just yet. The world is not ready for it. Even Richie does not know how *Ei in the Sky* flies. That was part of the deal when we sought an investor: someone not looking for personal fame. Someone supportive, but at the same time willing to let go of control. We're so thankful we found Richie."

"My personal aim is just to find love, a life partner, not to build a spacecraft. That being said, I'd love to discover new planets. And I think some of my Grooters friends will be eager to brainstorm about this. It feels like we are so close to discovering a few major insights."

"We wish you all the best," said Aurora.

"Thanks. So, is this all I need to know about love energies?"

"This is just theory," said Aurora. "If you are open to it, and wish a practical approach that will help you better understand and embody this knowledge, I invite you to follow us up to our room after dinner."

Verity could feel where this was going but was actually very attracted to both Aaron and Aurora.

“I am here to learn,” answered the Asian beauty.

They finished dinner and went to up a few stories to Aaron’s and Aurora’s room. Once they had entered the room, they had a drink together on the sofa, continued to chat for a while. Then Aurora took Verity’s hand and they stood up. She put herself behind Verity, held her arms around Verity’s waist, and whispered in her ear:

“You are so beautiful, Verity, a form of emotional virginity that we both feel extremely attracted to.”

“Thanks...”

Aurora continued, now slowly raising her hands to feel Verity’s breasts. “So, if you are open to it, please let Aaron and me take care of you tonight. Relax, and try to feel the energies in your body, then we’ll explain more afterwards.”

Verity managed to convince her shy self that this was an experiment, a unique life experience. She had never had sex with two people. A good thing is that this was not filmed on the professor’s screens. No one would know. She didn’t cheat on anyone. She had nothing to lose.

She turned her head to offer her lips to Aurora, in a sign of acceptance.

♪ *Dreams of Aurora – Frank Borell*

The girls made out for a while, then both Aaron and Aurora slowly undressed Verity, and lay her down on the bed. After that, Aurora kissed most of her body before going down on her, while Aaron kissed her lips and neck and massaged her breasts.

Verity was in heaven, this time physically. And it had only started. All the time, both Aaron and Aurora complimented Verity on how attractive she was and on her courage for taking on a new experience.

A few minutes of this intense treatment led Verity to the brink of climax. She felt her basic instinct taking over, and managed to deliver Aaron’s wonderful manhood from his pants, eagerly starting to prepare it for what was to come.

Her first orgasm didn’t deter her from getting more. Aurora had felt Verity coming, and slowly started to switch position with Aaron.

She kissed Verity, fondled her breasts, and Aaron teased her clitoris for a time until Verity begged him to penetrate her. Verity could feel how both of them, although themselves taking pleasure from this, were 100% focused on her.

Their lovemaking continued for a long time until it came to a natural end. Never in her life had Verity had such an exceptional sexual experience. She felt so light, as if hovering on a cloud.

♪ *Your Love Has Lifted Me Higher and Higher* – Rita Coolidge

As they lay together on the bed. Verity said: “Thank you so much, I think you woke up a part of me that was dormant.”

“We are so happy we could share this time with you. Do you think you now have a better understanding of how love works?”

“I think I do, but let me repeat it to make sure I’ve understood it correctly.”

“Please do,” said Aurora.

“First, there is the sexual attraction. The horizontal energy. I am physically attracted to you, and you are attracted to me. But physical attraction alone is not sufficient for such a quality experience.”

“We agree. Go on,” said Aaron.

“The second ingredient is the vertical uplifting love energy that you gave me by, I think, ‘speaking’ my love language and focusing on my pleasure.”

“Yes,” confirmed Aurora, “and how do you think the third component comes into play? The forward-moving energy? The mental part?”

“I am not completely sure,” admitted Verity.

Aaron answered: “We think it is the fact that our respective goals are very much aligned, we are going in the same direction, meaning elucidating the concept of love, and applying it so that we can experience loving human relationships... and travel to other planets. That’s the forward-moving energy.”

“So, it’s the mix of these three energies that you think we call love?”

Aurora tried to explain: “Love is a very complex phenomenon, and we don’t claim to have perfectly understood every aspect of it. However, we believe these three energies are important components, and we know that knowledge has enabled us to build an avant-garde spacecraft.”

“Well, you have certainly convinced me,” said Verity in her post-orgasmic radiance.

“To summarise,” said Aaron, “an old master once defined love as *letting the other one have what the other one wants.*”

“The problem is knowing what we truly want, isn’t it?”

“Yes, but that’s where your Dream World travels come into the picture,” said Aurora.

“Now I get it!” said Verity. “The machine cuts through our fears and rigid social rules to let us see clearly what we truly want.”

“Exactly,” confirmed Aaron.

“And if we look at it from the three energies perspective, I see that I want attractive partners (horizontal energy), I want to feel uplifted (uplifting energy), and I want to work together with like-minded people on a common goal (forward-moving energy).”

“You’ve learnt your lesson well, Verity,” said Aurora.

“Thanks to both of you.”

“You’re welcome,” said Aurora and Aaron. They hugged Verity for a long time and she went back to her room, her mind racing with joy from this otherworldly experience.

Before she went to bed, she sent an email to the other Grooters, doing her best to explain the three energies of love.

Then she slept like a baby and woke up refreshed, still ecstatic from the previous night’s events.

Lying there in her comfortable hotel bed, feeling her tingling body, she had a major realisation: that she had not been in a Dream World last night. That the events had been for real. She had actually experienced Dream World-like mental, emotional and physical stimulation.

Somehow, she could now feel that the Crystal of Love was within grasp. Because if the Grooters’ goal was to find a bridge between their current reality, and their Dream Worlds, then Verity definitely felt she was getting closer to the other shore.

It’s as if a weight had lifted from her chest. Since her teenage years, she had been chasing ‘The One’ true love. She now understood that love did not necessarily need to come from one and only life partner. She felt so relieved. If ‘The One’ shows up, that’s fine, but now she knew that there were other ways to experience genuine love too. What a relief.

She showered, had a generous breakfast then walked around the Vieux Québec feeling like a feather, before taking the evening flight back to Europe.

On the plane Verity pondered what had made the experience with Aaron and Aurora so amazing. And then, as she saw the first morning light short before landing again on the Old Continent, it dawned on her: it was because Aaron and Aurora didn’t egoistically keep their love to themselves, like most couples do. Instead, they were aware that not everyone had been as fortunate as them to get dealt Steamaru’s *love card* in life. So, they shared it with others when an appropriate opportunity arose.

In the same way, Verity now felt compelled to share her *knowledge card* about love, as well as all the other knowledge her photographic memory had stored over the years. And she would probably need a whole university to share all her knowledge. It would never have crossed her mind to start her own university, but now she realised

that she had access to both a solid *money card* as well as an *entrepreneur card*. She decided she would talk to Richie and Boss about it.

Geneva, Switzerland, 3 April 2018

Back at the Pibolodari house, all the Grooters rejoiced at their fourth crystal, that they had also placed on the mantelpiece in the living room. But, more importantly, they were very eager to hear about Verity's report from Québec.

Verity told them everything, well, almost everything, and they spent the whole day trying to wrap their heads around the emotion of love and the *Physics of Love*.

Before dinner, Modella took Verity aside and asked her: "What exactly happened at the *Château de Frontenac*, Verity? You don't look the same. Despite your jet lag, you're absolutely radiant. I want to know more."

"Well, give me a few days to process my emotions, then I'll tell you more."

"Deal," said Modella.

After dinner, Leo said: "Webbo's up for a Dream World travel tomorrow."

Webbo woke up sitting at the back of an auto rickshaw that was zigzagging like crazy in the heavy traffic. As he had been riding such a vehicle plenty of times before, he would normally not be worried, but in this case the driver was taking more risks than he should. And the fact that he was wearing a helmet was not really reassuring, because rickshaw drivers usually don't wear any.

Then he saw the circle with the star at the back of the helmet and relaxed a little.

"I should be able to get you there on time," said the driver, accelerating again, almost getting squeezed between a bus and a truck.

"Where am I?" asked Webbo.

"Beautiful Rajasthan, in the Blue City."

"OK," responded Webbo, reminding himself of the city's real name, Jodhpur. He hadn't been here before, but had seen photos of it, and learnt about the local maharajas' history.

Finally, the three-wheeler turned into a road with less traffic, going up a small hill. After a while, they turned into a domain where a sumptuous palace emerged in front of them. The massive building was illuminated by the morning sun, making the yellow-golden coloured sandstone shine in a unique way.

The vehicle stopped in front of the multi-columned huge portico with some of the biggest hanging lamps Webbo had ever seen.

He thanked the driver, took his luggage and walked towards the entrance. A middle-aged man, elegantly dressed in traditional local style came to meet him.

"Welcome to Splendour University, Mr. Maraj. My name is Deepak Pushpa, I am the dean of this school."

"Nice to meet you, Mr. Pushpa," said Webbo.

"Let me show you your room. I'll be very busy today as it's the first day of the semester and I need to welcome other new students as well. So, I'll let your roommate explain how things work here at Splendour University. Your roommate is a second-year student, so she knows her way around and can answer most of your questions."

"She?" wondered Webbo.

They walked through the marbled-floored lobby and up to the second floor, and along a corridor. Deepak knocked on a room door.

A beautiful Indian girl, about Webbo's age, opened the door.

"Hello Sarika," said Deepak, "this is your new roommate, Webbo, from Bangalore."

"Nice to meet you," said Webbo, extending his hand.

“Welcome to Splendour! And to Rajasthan, my homeland,” said Sarika with a warm smile.

“OK, I must leave now, Webbo,” said Deepak. “But will see you soon again.”

“Nice meeting you, Mr. Pushpa.”

Sarika closed the door. Webbo did a quick search in his cerebral database but could find no picture of a girl with such graceful beauty as Sarika. Some form of radiance that was difficult to describe. Even though she probably felt that he was not at ease with her extreme beauty, she did not say anything. It was actually quite a common thing among first-year students. They needed some time to accommodate to this very unique school.

Sarika showed Webbo the fairly spacious room with a big canopy bed in the middle.

“Here is your wardrobe, and there is your desk,” she said pointing to the right-hand side of the bed. “Mine are on the other side of the bed. And the bathroom is just here,” she continued, showing him a very luxurious bathroom with marbled sink and golden tapware.

Webbo noted the big red hearts above their respective desks. Sarika’s heart had a few smaller hearts attached to it, two in the middle, a few others outside. The heart above Webbo’s desk did not have any attachments. He wondered if these hearts were some kinds of symbols. And he was intrigued about the fact that the hearts all hung upside down.

Inspecting the bathroom, he looked himself into the mirror, recognising his younger self, somewhere in his early twenties.

“And there is just one bed?” wondered Webbo.

“Yes, and as you can see, it’s a maharaja-sized bed, so there is plenty of room for both of us.”

Webbo was still very confused, this was so different from his old dorm room in Boston, where he had done his undergraduate studies. Sarika was so relaxed, she felt so confident, anything Webbo didn’t. Although he had improved a little since his training in Flirtown.

“Don’t worry,” she said, holding his hand. “We’ll take things at your pace. It is normal to feel a little overwhelmed in the first few weeks here. What are you studying?”

“IT. And you?”

“Architecture.”

“This must be such an inspiring environment for studying architecture.”

“Yes, you’re right, this is a wonderful place. However, our study specialisation is only part of a bigger picture. We learn much more here at Splendour.”

“Like what?”

“Compulsory topics that everyone has to study include household management and Kama Sutra. Also, we have to do physical exercise every other day. Keeping fit is important for our well-being and self-confidence, and will help us concentrate better on our studies.

“Household management?”

“Yes, everything from cooking to laundry and interior decoration, gardening, and so on.”

“So, there are no servants here?”

“We all serve each other. One day you will be a waiter, one day you will be the person eating. Everyone does their own laundry and dishes.”

“And what are the main subjects that people study here?”

“Apart from architecture, landscaping and gardening, we can study interior design, fashion and cooking. And various forms of artisanal work, like jewellery, furniture-making and stone sculpting. And ayurveda, of course. There are also a few engineering students, and IT students like you. This is a graduate school, so all of us already have foundational knowledge in each of our fields. But we’re here to learn to become masters in our respective professions.”

“Wow!” exclaimed Webbo, “And how many students study here?”

“About 500. Let me just change dress and then I’ll take you for a tour.”

Sarika, as if modesty was not in her vocabulary, undressed in front of Webbo, who could now confirm her perfect curves. She then put on an elegant blue saree with golden embroidery.

“OK, let’s go,” she said, taking Webbo by the hand.

“I have so many questions,” he told her.

“And I hope to have as many answers. Start with your biggest questions. Let’s sit down and have a tea in the arcade with a view on the gardens.”

“Sounds like a great idea. What a wonderful environment,” said Webbo, feeling inspired as they walked down the sumptuous corridors and out on the terrace overlooking the gardens.

“Hi guys,” said a beautiful waitress, “what would you like to drink?”

“Let’s have two of the house’s speciality mocktails, please,” said Sarika.

“Sure.”



“Thanks, Sonia!” Then she turned to Webbo: “Sonia studies architecture with me. Now, let me hear your questions.”

Webbo started hesitantly: “Well, I think my main confusion is around this room and bed sharing.”

“That’s part of the education here. We learn not only a specific profession, we also learn to become future husbands and wives.”

“Sorry, I’m so used to genders being separated.”

“I know, and that’s the power of this school: to teach students of each gender to better understand and feel comfortable around each other. The aim is that we become the best life partners possible.”

She could feel Webbo’s shyness.

“As I already said, we will take things at your pace. You will have a lot to study, and once you learn more about relationships and sexuality, you will feel more confident. And just so you know, it’s not a question of if, only when.”

Webbo was not sure what she meant with that. Did she actually mean that sex was guaranteed with her? He switched the topic.

“So, what year is it now?”

“Does that really matter?” answered the Indian beauty.

“Well... now that you mention it...”

“You see. Time shouldn’t matter as much as we think. Here at Splendour, we aim for timeless beauty and experiences.”

“You certainly seem to do a good job at it from what I’ve seen so far.”

“Yes, and you’ve only seen the tip of the iceberg, there is much more to Splendour than meets the eye,” said Sarika with a glimpse in her eye. “Here the rabbit hole goes as deep as you’re willing to explore.”

“That sounds promising,” said Webbo. “And why do you think they take in IT students like me? It feels like it’s more of an artistic kind of university?”

“True IT is an art too. And you are not just any IT student. You are Webbo. There are so many ways you can contribute to the school. For example, you could help us architecture students program better architecture design software, because the ones we have are not very user-friendly.”

“I hadn’t thought about that.”

“No, but for you to be able to do that, you need to understand how the existing software works and what aspects we architecture students are struggling with. That is one reason why they put both of us as roommates, so that we can share important knowledge.”

“Well, I’d love to help you any way I can. And what about the engineering students?”

“They are mostly here to learn to build Vimanas.”

“Vimanas?”

“Yes, ancient flying chariots and palaces. They’ve found and dusted off plans for these flying machines. Some of these plans date back several thousand years.”

“What? Did India already have flying machines thousands of years ago?”

“Yes. We’ve been led to believe that it’s all mythology nonsense. But recent flying tests are debunking those myths, I mean the myths that mythology are only myths. A lot of that stuff was real.”

That made Webbo think of the flying carpet he and Boss tested in Morocco.

“I understood it was only the gods that were able to use such flying machines?”

“Call us gods then if you wish. But it’s just science and a lot of tinkering.”

He could certainly fit Sarika into the goddess category. Her grace, femininity and wisdom were out-of-this-world.

Webbo, remembering Professor Dimenport’s orders, continued to ask questions.

“What about this building and its architecture? It’s probably the most majestic building I’ve ever seen. In my eyes, it’s more beautiful even than the Château de Versailles.”

“I agree, although it is actually much smaller than Versailles, with less than 400 rooms. It is Indo-Deco architectural style, a form of Beaux-Arts style from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. A former local maharaja employed thousands of people for fifteen years to build it because it was a difficult economic time in the region, so he probably saved many of them from hunger. It started off as a residence for the maharaja and then his descendant came to the conclusion that he did actually not need all those rooms, so he turned part of the building into a luxury hotel and a museum, and continued to live in one aisle. Then, at his death, he willed the whole building to be transformed into the school that we are now attending.”

“What a fascinating story. And how come the maharaja decided to convert it to a school?”

“He had started other schools in the past and was aware of the importance of quality education. Next to being inspired by a fictional school in the United States that aimed at students improving their relationships, he was also inspired by an existing school in

Russia where students did almost everything by themselves: accounting, cooking, cleaning, and even building a new wing for the school.”

“So that is why there is so little staff in this school?”

“Yes, and the teachers too, help out with gardening and cooking or other things. Even the dean has a hands-on approach. And we all use our respective talents and skills to help each other efficiently. You help me with your IT magic, I help you to design your future home. And we help each other with daily household tasks.”

Webbo started to become a little more relaxed now, as if the university culture impregnated him like by osmosis. Again, Sarika held his hand and he could feel a powerful warm energy flowing into his whole body. He thought that if only her touching him like this made such an effect, then what would happen if they touched more, made love?

“You will discover that soon enough,” said the goddess at his side. Webbo had almost forgotten that he was in a dream world and the characters playing in it knew everything about him and could read his thoughts, like Boss’ superpower in the real world.

He told her: “It feels like Splendour is a more practically oriented university, with actual physical output of food, furniture, decoration, clothes, buildings, etc.”

“Good observation. Yes, our teachers are very good at explaining the important concepts of each trade, without delving into endless theory. So, students learn fairly quickly. That being said, it’s a lot of work, true beauty is in the details.”

That made Webbo think of the typical intricate Indian wedding dresses with all the detailed makeup and jewellery.

“And what do you reckon is the most important thing that you’ve learnt so far here at Splendour?”

“To cure my jealousy.”

“What do you mean?”

“We cannot live life to its fullest if we treat other people as our property, and take poor decisions based on negative emotions. We women have been abusing our sexual power for too long, setting up sexual barriers that end up hurting ourselves as much as they hurt the men in our lives.”

“So that explains why I feel some form of relief being around you? You are so relaxed.”

“Yes, once all these psychological barriers are dropped, it enables much healthier human relationships,” said Sarika and gave him a kiss.

“And how do you rid yourself of jealousy?”

“With education and compassion. It takes time. Jealousy is a form of fear. Think of parents trying to help their children get rid of the fear of darkness. Children imagine all sorts of ghosts and may not want to turn off the light. Then we simply have to explain to them that there is nothing to fear. Same with jealousy, which is a fear mentally constructed and linked to our property/possessiveness mindset. It’s not a real fear like the fear of heights, which is a healthy fear that can save your life.”

“That sounds fairly simple.”

“Yes, in theory it is simple. But in practice, it’s trickier. For me, it took almost six months to erase my jealousy. However, I have the feeling that you are not the jealous type, so it may go much faster with you.”

“Probably the San Francisco effect. On average, people are quite open-minded there, and I’ve lived there for almost a decade now. Oh, and I had some training in another Dream World experience, on another planet called Dewal.”

By saying that, Webbo felt confused, especially after what he had seen in the mirror: his younger self. Which means he had a first level of training being older, and now he is a student again, for the second level.

Sarika felt him: “Isn’t it great how anything is possible in Dream Worlds? You can start over, younger, but still with some accumulated knowledge and wisdom from a parallel dimension.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, in one dimension, you are currently 36 years old, using the Dream World Teleporter with your Grooters friends in Geneva. And you dream of a parallel dimension, which is here at Splendour University in Jodhpur, where you are re-living part of your younger years being a student. In a much more interesting setting than the ugly walls of MIT.”

“I must say this is really cool.”

“And you haven’t seen everything yet...” said Sarika teasingly, and gave him another kiss.

“Another question,” he said. “What does a normal day look like here at Splendour?”

“We wake up fairly early, shower, have breakfast. Then we have classes and study our respective fields until early/mid-afternoon with a short lunch break. After that we do sports, or do some other creative pastime, and help out wherever the need is. There is a form of roster so that we all help out with kitchen, cleaning of common spaces, etc. The time after dinner is spent with your roommate and/or with other students with whom you feel a special affinity and want to get to know better.”

“How come I feel such a strong affinity with you, Sarika? Is it pure luck that I got such an exceptional roommate?”

“With the right knowledge, luck is no longer luck.”

“Not sure I follow.”

“The university administration does in-depth compatibility tests before they assign roommates to each other. The matchmaking accuracy is quite impressive, almost all roommates get along very well with each other.”

“That’s incredible.”

“No, it’s science. Once you take jealousy and possessiveness out of the equation, human relations become more fluid, and you’ll see that although we share room, it’s not a golden cage, you’re free to meet other students, or teachers. And so am I.”

Those last few words stung a little, Webbo obviously feared that he would lose Sarika. Was that jealousy kicking in? Then he reasoned that she’s not his property. And there are plenty of fish in the sea.

That led him to ask:

“And who was your roommate last year?”

“Igor from Irkutsk in Siberia. Engineer. And a wonderful lover, he opened my mind and my body in ways you cannot imagine. He was a last-year student and has now graduated and moved to St. Petersburg where he got a job. As you have seen, this school has about half Indian students, and half international. I love variety.”

“I’m glad you’ve had such great experiences.”

“And I’ll make sure that you will have too. Now, although we are naturally compatible, we still have to get to know each other and learn how we can become the best possible partners for each other during our time together.”

“Tell me more.”

“Have you heard of the *Five Love Languages*?”

“No,” replied Webbo, forgetting that Verity had mentioned them just the day before when she explained the Physics of Love to the Grooters. In any case, it couldn’t hurt to get another perspective on these enigmatic love languages.

Sarika explained:

“It’s basically about customising your love to another person, because every person needs to be loved in a unique way. In the old days, people expected that their partners are able to read their minds and guess what they like. Sure, that works maybe for 10% of lucky couples. But not for the rest. Here at Splendour, we think that a more mature approach is to teach our partners what we need to feel loved.”

“So, how do these five love languages work?”

“To name them quickly they are: 1. *Words of affirmation*, 2. *Acts of service*, 3. *Gifts*, 4. *Quality time*, 5. *Physical touch*. The common error people make is that they often

expect other people's love languages to be the same as their own. This leads to many misunderstandings among couples.”

“And what are your main love languages?”

“My biggest is *Acts of service*. Now, that can mean a lot of different things for a lot of people. Some feel loved when their partner brings them tea in the morning, or helps take out the garbage or run errands. In my case, I feel loved when people support me with anything that can help my architecture career.”

“Like the architecture software improvements you mentioned?”

“Exactly. But it can also be smaller things, like just listening to my ideas around architecture, or buying some cardboard I can build my models with.”

“OK.”

“Then I also have a second love language that's quite strong for me: *Physical touch*.”

“I think we share that language,” said Webbo.

Sarika, who had felt Webbo's reaction when she touched him earlier, was not surprised to hear that.

“Yes, we share it, but we both will want to be touched in different ways, at different places.” Then she took his hand and put it at a specific point on her lower back. “Remember that place and you'll make a girl very happy,” she said smiling.

Webbo reciprocated and put Sarika's hand on the inside of his left forearm.

Then she showed him a few more hot spots, and said: “These are just the low-hanging fruit.”

“Any forbidden fruit?” asked Webbo, now in a playful mode.

“As a principle, no. However, some things simply don't turn me on. Spanking for example. So, you'll need to learn how to play the instrument.”

“An exceptionally beautiful instrument, indeed, that I am eager to soon start experimenting with to see what sounds come out of it.”

Sarika smiled at him and Webbo was relieved that he could have such open conversations with her.

“However,” he said, “I don't think *Acts of service* are my language. Rather *Quality time*.”

“I'll keep that in mind,” said the Indian goddess. “Because I love to see happiness in my partners. What kind of *Quality time* do you think makes you the happiest? Doing sports together? Cooking together? Hiking or sightseeing together? Sex? Just talking?”

“The last two ones I guess, one of which would cover two languages at once.”

“Yes, and if you don’t mind talking about some architecture stuff, then we could cover your *Quality time* and my *Acts of service* at the same time!”

“Hard to imagine a bigger win-win,” said Webbo, and this time he took the initiative to kiss Sarika.

“Now, let me show you around.”

They took their empty mocktail glasses, went to the kitchen and washed them up. After that, Sarika showed Webbo the main library, which was as elegantly decorated as the rest of the palace, with some Art Deco hints, which made sense because that was the period when the building was constructed.

“It’s not a huge library, but I can assure you that it’s extremely well curated and has some invaluable gems in it. I will let you discover it more in detail on your own.”

“Sounds good.”

Then Sarika showed him the billiard room, the pool and spa facilities, and the various lounges where students and staff met for intellectual conversations. The restaurant, a convenience store, and, very relevant for Webbo, the main computer room.

There were no regular classrooms, only smaller rooms or workshops or studios, many of which were in new adjacent buildings, like Sarika’s architecture studio, which she and her colleagues had built last year. A few years earlier, the architecture students had helped the engineers build a big shed, and workshops for the artisan students. They had to be very careful about the architectural harmony so that these annexes fit in well with the main building.

As they entered the architecture studio, Webbo could see several students working on creating cardboard 3D-models of future buildings. Sarika approached one of the male students, gave him a kiss, then said: “Webbo, this is Archie, we started studying at the same time last year.”

Ouch, that stung a little too. “Maybe I have more jealousy to work on that what I expected?” thought Webbo.

“Nice to meet you,” said Webbo, reaching out his arm, “I like the model you’re building.”

“Thanks, nice to meet you too, Webbo. Welcome to Splendour,” said Archie, “Sarika mentioned you would arrive today and was very eager to meet you.”

Then Sarika gave Webbo another kiss.

That girl had clearly resolved her possessiveness issues. She continued:

“Archie is from Australia, with both Noongar and Wiradjuri ancestry.” Webbo noticed that the Australian Aboriginal student had a skin of almost exactly the same colour as his.

Then Sarika showed her own architectural model she was working on at the moment. It looked like some kind of French *château*.

“You’re correct,” she said, “this project is about building a *château* in southern France which would become a sister school to Splendour, with a similar curriculum, but more adapted to European culture.”

Then they walked on to the jewellery workshops. “This is some stuff we are good at, here in Rajasthan,” said Sarika. There were maybe two dozen students concentrating on their tasks to create magnificent jewellery, like some Sarika wore.

Webbo noticed several gold bars laying around in the workshop. He pointed at them: “And are you not afraid someone will steal them?”

“They have no big resale value any longer. We have an abundance of them since all the world’s banks started giving them away. They finally realised it would make more sense to create beautiful jewellery out of them than to keep them locked into safes ten meters below earth. Common sense has started to replace human greed and irrationality.”

They then went back to the main building to have lunch.

“I feel I’m starting to get your taste for guys,” said Webbo.

“Good observation,” said Sarika. “Isn’t it wonderful that we all have different tastes? However, having certain main preferences doesn’t mean one can’t try something else. It’s like with cities: you may want to live in a specific city that you really like. But that doesn’t prevent you from travelling and discovering other cities.”

“I’m glad to hear you say that, Sarika,” said Webbo. “Because I have also spotted a few other ‘cities’ here that I may want to ‘visit’ someday.”

“So happy to hear that. Please let me know if you want me to introduce you to someone you fancy.”

“I’ll keep that in mind. So, tell me, the hearts above your desk: I suppose there is a specific meaning to them?”

“Yes, the big heart represents me. And the three small hearts inside are my current partners. That’s Archie, whom you’ve met, as well as Lode from Belgium. And you... And the small hearts on the outside represent my former admirers, for example Igor. I look forward to see you fill up your heart as well.”

“Me too, and I’m pretty sure I can already add one in the middle...” said Webbo and kissed Sarika.



After lunch, they washed up their own dishes and went to one of the lounges for a tea. As they walked along the corridor, Webbo had a quick glimpse into the adjacent spa, and asked Sarika:

“Is everyone completely naked in the spa?”

“Of course.”

“But...”

“But what?”

“Well, I’m not used to that.”

“That’s the whole point why it is compulsory to be naked in the spa: so that we get rid of our respective body complexes. It’s like in Finnish saunas.”

“I’m not sure I could...”

“Avoid an erection?”

“You got me.”

“Everyone in there has seen erections before. You’ll get used to it. And you’ll soon be able to control yours. Let’s meet at the spa later this afternoon. But to deserve it, you need to do some sports first. It’s a great recipe to give you more confidence.”

“I look forward to that,” said Webbo.

And Sarika added: “Here at Splendour we do efforts to become the best possible person we can be for others, so that their subconscious can relax. Which means that if there is something that annoys you with me, you need to let me know. We’ll talk it through and I will do what I can to improve.”

“OK,” answered Webbo, amazed at the emotional maturity of his stunning roommate.

“Or, if you have a wish you want to share with me, don’t keep it inside. That’s very important because our subconscious mind is a true perfectionist. If it feels that something is not quite right, it will search for an answer or a better solution, which takes up energy and brainpower. And, if overloaded, creates stress. Our subconscious can only relax once it has found that answer.”

“What a piece of wisdom, Sarika, thanks.”

“Perfection has many colours and luckily, we all have different tastes. Some like natural beauty, others more refined beauty with jewellery like here at Splendour, some like tight clothes, some loose, some like dark eyes, some like blonde hair. The important thing is that you are perfect in your partner’s eyes. So that he or she can fully relax in your presence. Because otherwise our busy subconscious will stress and work in the background trying to fix whatever it perceives is wrong with their partner.”

“I like you,” Webbo said honestly, secretly asking his subconscious if Sarika had any flaws. No answer.

Sarika blushed a little, then continued: “So, being relaxed is rule number one for quality lovemaking. And speaking the truth is the best way for your and your partner’s subconscious to relax. In other words, honesty and open communication are very powerful aphrodisiacs.”

“Wow...”

“That means that you have to get to know your needs and preferences well, then communicate them clearly to me and others. Again, remember that most of us are not like your friend Boss. We don’t have the superpower to read people’s minds. So, you have to clearly say what you want. Or somehow show it.”

“Understood.”

“If you want a shoulder massage, tell me. If you need time alone, tell me. If you want to fuck me in the playrooms in the basement, tell me. And I’ll do the same.”

“Actually, a shoulder massage would be very welcome right now to help me digest and embody all the information you’ve just shared with me.”

Sarika gave him a kiss, then stood up behind Webbo’s chair and started a sensual but firm shoulder massage, transferring some of her powerful feminine energy to him.

Webbo was in heaven.

“Also, remember you need to start reading the Kama Sutra as soon as possible, because we have a study tour to Khajuraho in a fortnight. Maybe we even could do some practical exercises before that.”

Webbo went to the library and browsed the shelves. He was not surprised to *find The Harrad Experiment* there, and several versions of the *Kama Sutra*. He decided to start with the *Vatsyayana* version, studying it for two hours before joining a yoga class with exercises that were specifically geared at getting the needed body flexibility for practising the Kama Sutra. After that, he joined Sarika in the spa.

“Feels good, doesn’t it?” said the naked goddess in the warm pool at his side.

“It certainly does,” said Webbo, struggling not to get an erection despite all the attractive women around him.

“Yes, I love to come here regularly.”

“What is the most important trait you look for in men?”

“If I had to choose one trait, it would be that I look for men who are truly honest with me. About their feelings for me. And about our relationship. About their own flaws. About their careers and goals in life.”

That gave Webbo the courage to tell Sarika frankly:

“With all you’ve told me today, and reading the Kama Sutra, and now the spa...”

“You need a release?” anticipated his wonderful roommate.

“Yes.”

“That’s why I’m here. What about we go back to the room and I give you a blow job and then you show me a thing or two you learnt in the library earlier?”

“It sounds like a deal.”

“Relax, stay in the spa and I’ll go and prepare the room. Then join me in fifteen minutes.”

“Sure,” said Webbo wondering what she meant with ‘preparing the room’.

Then she graciously exited the water and left the spa.

Webbo joined her in the room shortly thereafter. As he opened the door, he felt the room transformed, Sarika had worked some Indian magic: flower petals were spread out on the bed, soft music was playing in the background, and he could smell wonderful incense and a few candles were lit as the sun had just set.

♪ *Kyon Ki Itna Pyar – Udit Narayan, Alka Yagnik*

Sarika had put on some light jewellery and a mostly transparent outfit of silk and fine garment and Webbo wasn’t certain if it was only underwear or if it was a daring evening dress.

The sensuous girl approached Webbo, gave him a kiss, and started to rub her body against his, then slowly went down on him...

She certainly knew some tricks, thought Webbo, that was the best blow job he had ever received.

After the release, which she eagerly swallowed, he gave her a kiss and told her:

“Thank you, Sarika. Now it’s my turn to take care of you.”

Two hours of lovemaking later, they dressed again and went down to the restaurant for dinner.

“That certainly woke my appetite,” said Webbo.

“Mine too!”

Despite being a newbie, Webbo was satisfied with the orgasms he had given Sarika earlier.

“So, are we boyfriend and girlfriend now?” asked Webbo.

“We don’t use those terms here at Splendour, as they relate too much to possessiveness. We prefer to say that we are each other’s *admirers*, because we believe that admiring a partner is the most important thing in a relationship. If you don’t admire at least some parts of him or her, you are dishonest and shouldn’t be together.”

“I like that word,” said Webbo, knowing that he was genuinely honest with himself when he said that he admired Sarika. Not only her exquisite beauty, but also her smile, kindness, playfulness, architectural talents. And probably other facets of her that he was eager to discover.

“Yes, and because we invite students to be open with their feelings, we have mostly open admirers, here. Not secret admirers.”

They enjoyed their dinner; the restaurant was full and Webbo spotted a few other women he fancied. He was a quick learner and remembered that he needed to be open with his feelings and tell Sarika if he wanted her to introduce him to someone.

“Tell me...”

Again, the dream goddess anticipated what he was going to say.

“... which one?”

“The brunette with the long hair over at the table there,” he said pointing to the left.

“She is stunning,” said Sarika. “You have good taste. Her name is Chantal, she is from France and studies jewellery here. Like you, she’s a first-year student, but arrived a few days ago, so I got to talk to her a little while we were on the same gardening roster.”

“Maybe I can get some use of my rusty French, then.”

“Sure.” She took Webbo by the hand, and went over to introduce him to Chantal.

“Hi Chantal, how are you doing?” said Sarika. “This is my roommate and one of my admirers, Webbo. He would love to get to know you.”

“*Enchanté*,” said Webbo, extending his hand to Chantal, “*je suis Webbo*.”

“*Enchantée*,” replied Chantal, looking Webbo into the eyes. Then she turned to Sarika.

“Thanks for the introduction, Sarika,” after which she addressed Webbo:

“I look forward to get to know you and speak some French again. Tomorrow afternoon, three o’clock here?”

“*Je me réjouis*,” responded Webbo in high anticipation.

As they left the restaurant, Webbo told Sarika,

“I can’t believe that she said yes, especially that we are roommates, and she’d certainly seen us kissing.”

“Here at Splendour, women, and men too by the way, are taught not to reject advances, unless we have a valid reason for doing so. Instead, we are taught to respect other people’s needs, including romantic needs. Now, when you date Chantal tomorrow, don’t be disappointed in case you find that you do not have enough common interests. If that’s the case, I’ll present you to other girls you like. Come, I’ll show you something.”

Sarika took Webbo by the hand and led him into a TV-room, or rather a tiny cinema room, with sofas and plenty of cushions everywhere.

“Great, no one here, let us sit down in that sofa,” she said, and turned on the screen with her smartphone, seemingly using it as a remote.

She then sat down, squeezing in next to Webbo.

A video started, with the dean speaking in the garden in front of the school.

“Dear new Splendour students, welcome to our school. I would like to take this opportunity to explain the importance of frictionless relationships, especially between girls and boys. Our understanding is that sex is a common right and a basic need like food or housing. So, when someone comes to you and shows romantic and sexual interest, please understand their situation and think how you would react if that person was asking for food, of which you have an abundance that you can share. We have filmed a few possible scenarios to give you ideas on how to handle similar situations when they arise.”

Webbo could see the words *First Scenario* written on the screen.

The scene was at the bar of the school, where there seemed to be some kind of cocktail party, lounge music came out of the loudspeakers, and all students were nicely dressed up, and the room was almost full.

A handsome guy approached a very attractive girl.

“Hi, I am Sonu.”

“Hi, I am Sonam, nice to meet you.”

“I find you very attractive and you are physically my type of girl. I’d love to get to know you more.”

“Thank you for the compliment. Unfortunately, you are not my type. Also, I do not have space for additional admirers at the moment.”

“No worries, I will not bother you again,” said Sonu and turned around to walk away.

“But wait,” said Sonam, holding onto his arm. “Let me introduce you to some of my friends. For example, what do you think of her?” She said pointing at a gorgeous blonde girl standing at the bar.

“A beautiful woman, but not really my type...”

“And what about the one standing alone in the left corner there?”

Sonu paused for a moment. She was a discreet beauty that did not jump out straight away. But there was something he found intriguing about her.

“Hmm... she looks interesting. I’d love to get acquainted with her.”

“Great!” exclaimed Sonam and took Sonu by the arm and went over to introduce him to her friend Yami.

### *Second Scenario*

“Hi, I am Sonu.”

“Hi, I am Sonam, nice to meet you.”

“You look gorgeous tonight and are physically my type of girl. I’d love to get to know you more”

“Thank you. I also like what I see,” answered Sonam. “Let’s find out if we are compatible.”

They got to know each other over a drink, but came quickly to the conclusion that they had some diverging values and tastes, and incompatible life goals as well.

“Don’t worry,” said Sonu, “I am sure you will find a better match soon. I promise I will not hit on you anymore.”

“It was still a pleasure to get to know you. I like your body. Maybe we could still meet up from time to time to exercise some Kama Sutra?”

“I’d love to. Let us explore how good our physical chemistry is. And I am sure we’ll each find emotional chemistry elsewhere.”

“Sure, what about tomorrow night?” said Sonam, caressing Sonu.

“Look forward to!”

### *Third Scenario*

“Hi, I am Sonam.”

“Hi, I am Sonu, nice to meet you.”

“You caught my attention and you are physically my type of guy. I’d love to get to know you more.”

“Thank you, Sonam, and you certainly look ravishing. I do already have two admirers. However, you’ve woken up my curiosity. Tell me more about you.”

Sonam and Sonu got to know each other for a while, and it turned out that they had a common passion for watches and the concept of time.

They talked and talked, and joked and flirted, and at the end of the evening, Sonam got her Sonu she’d been fantasising about...

Sarika turned off the screen and kissed Webbo.

Then he said: “I wished romantic relationships would be as smooth where I come from. What do you reckon are the main ingredients to make them as frictionless as they are here at Splendour?”

“Very good question,” said Sarika. “I think one main reason is that all students are beautiful here, all in their own way, which means that there are not a huge quantity of guys hitting on a small number of attractive women. Instead, the game evens out and no one is overwhelmed. On top of that, everyone has far more awareness and knowledge of each gender’s needs. Because everyone is fairly good-looking and has inner confidence, there is less jealousy to disrupt the relationships.”

“Anything else?”

“Touching. Oxytocin. This is so important and we have made it part of our culture to touch each other with tenderness as much as possible. The advantage is it makes people relax and there is no unhealthy horniness by men or unhealthy sexual barriers by women.”

“That truly makes sense: if our touching needs are met in healthy ways, those needs will not have any unhealthy outlets like is often the case in many cultures where people do not touch each other regularly. What else?”

“Lastly, I’d say intellectual curiosity and sex positivity play a big role as well. These are values shared by all students and staff here at Splendour. Otherwise, they would have chosen another school, not one teaching the Kama Sutra.”

*“Welcome back, Webbo,” said Leo.*

Webbo's mind was racing. Was this real? No, but it could be. He wanted it so badly to be real. There were no futuristic not-yet-invented technologies that were necessary to set up a place like Splendour. Only a mindset shift.

He reminded himself that he was a hacker. And now he got motivated to hack the human mind to tear down all the psychological barriers that kept us from being happy and living life to the fullest.

### **WEBBO MARAJ – SECOND DWT – 04.04.2018**

As they all eagerly watched Webbo's second Dream World Travel, Boss noted:

“This is mostly interesting, Webbo. I think you've tapped into a dream pattern shared by a lot of people.”

“Which is?” he asked.

“The dream of ‘starting over’ as a younger self, but with one's older self's knowledge and wisdom; those insights often lead to choosing a different path. A time fork, in other words.”

“I hadn't thought about it in that way, but I guess that would be my biggest dream of all: being able to start over, with a better education.”

“Yes, but we also have to honour the path we've actually taken. Would you have become the genius IT hacker that you are if you had been studying at Splendour?”

“Maybe. Maybe not. But the aim of Splendour is that we become masters in our respective professions, as well as in lovemaking.”

“Good point,” said Verity, who could feel the truth in what Webbo just said.

The Grooters took the evening, as well as the following day to discuss what an optimal university could look like.



Richie woke up in a comfortable sofa in a sumptuous salon with wide windows in three directions. He saw the circle with the star on the small table in front of him on top of which stood two glasses of champagne and some appetizers.

He concluded that the second glass must belong to his sofa neighbour, a very attractive, sexy and elegant young woman. She had brown hair and crystal-clear blue eyes. She wore an elegant black cocktail dress with matching stockings and high heels. And to crown everything, the expensive-looking jewellery around her neck matched her amazing blue eyes. Richie himself wore a tuxedo.

“Hi Richie, my name is Emily.”

“A pleasure to meet you, Emily,” said Richie looking a second time at the beauty next to him to make sure he was not dreaming. Well, unfortunately he was actually dreaming, but decided to enjoy his dream to the fullest.

“What is this place? Are we on top of some kind of skyscraper?” wondered Richie. But then he took another look out of the windows and noticed that the whole room seemed to move slowly, which is normally not the case with most buildings which are anchored to the ground.

He looked at Emily again: “Are we on an airship?”

“Yes,” answered the stunning brunette. “The ultimate luxury of traveling since they invented non-explosive hydrogen and managed to tweak the laws of gravity a little.”

“What a view! Beautiful landscapes. And it looks like we are heading towards a city a few miles ahead?”

“Yes, EC.”

Richie had never heard about a city called EC – or maybe Emily meant *EASY*? Never mind, he would soon find out.

He forgot the landscapes a mile below and lost himself in the ocean of Emily’s eyes instead.

Like himself, she was a very rich heiress with plenty of time to take care of herself and her various charitable foundations.

As they flew closer to the city, Richie recognised the skyline and told Emily:

“But that is Washington DC, isn’t it? What did you call it?”

“EC, Washington EC.”

“EC?”

“Yes, *Entertainment Center*.”

“I don’t understand. Am I somehow about to visit a Dream World replica of the capital?”

“It is not a replica,” said the girl in a mysterious voice.

Fortunately, Richie had memorised Leo’s course on *dimensionomics* so he understood that what he was experiencing was one possible future, out of an infinity.

Now that they were flying almost straight above the city, Richie could with absolute certainty recognize the historical monuments of Washington DC.

“Not a replica?”

“The year is 2051.”

“Well, at a first glance, it does not look very different from today. I mean 2018.”

“You will have a chance for a second glance quite soon,” said Emily. She put a hand on Richie’s lap and looked him deep into the eyes: “You will like it.”

“By the way, where did we board?”

“On the third floor of the Eiffel tower. They have some good champagne there too.”

“What? So, we’ve been airborne for a few days?”

“We have indeed. A rather pleasurable Atlantic crossing, I must say,” said Emily, hinting to the fact that they had not only been reading books in the last few days. “We will arrive in a few minutes.”

The airship anchored at the top of the Washington Monument.

“Wait,” said Richie, “aren’t we supposed to land on firm ground?” Then he figured that they might just take the elevator down.

“Here,” said Emily giving him some kind of harness.

“What is this?”

“Put it on, like I do. And you take my high-heels.” She handed him her shoes.

The door of the airship opened and they walked over to a small platform from where a cable was stretched down towards...

“You must be kidding!” Richie shouted at Emily.

“This is fun. Just make sure that you activate the break after you’ve passed the fountain on the South Lawn. I’ll go first. Count to fifty, then you follow me.”

Richie did as he was instructed. It was an amazing ride that probably didn't take more than two minutes. The other end of the zip line was fixed to the South Portico of the White House, where they both landed smoothly, with an additional dose of adrenaline.

"My shoes, please," said Emily when Richie arrived, as if these kinds of stunts were the perfectly normal thing to do in tuxedo and cocktail dress.

They had turned one of the windows into a door, so they entered straight into the Blue Room.

Richie adjusted his bow tie, took Emily by the arm and they walked on to the Red Room, where a cocktail was waiting for them.

Given his status, Richie had once been invited to the White House to have dinner with the president and some of his staff who were working on projects linked to one of Richie's businesses.

He was offered a tour of the premises so he knew what the White House looked like. Overall, very elegant settings, but kind of boring, he had thought at the time.

Now, whatever was waiting for him, one thing was sure: the journey itself to the White House had not been boring. He couldn't have imagined a more stylish arrival.

From what he saw during the few seconds of his approach, the exterior of the building hadn't changed.

Richie wondered who the president would be in the year 2051. Maybe a woman? In any case they don't seem to worry too much about security procedures. Or were they some kind of exceptional V.I.P. guests who had full clearance to come by wire and have dinner with the president?

Finally, he told Emily: "I think you owe me some explanations. The White House! Do you have any insider connections here?"

"No, just expensive taste."

"And what kind of entry is this? Straight from the Washington Monument?"

"Not everyone takes the South Portico entrance."

"Are we going to eat with the president? And who is the president now?"

"Don't worry about the president."

"Is he here tonight?"

"No, he's at the Pentagon."

"What is he doing there?"

"His job."

They sipped their drink, while Richie was trying to puzzle all this together and at the same time trying to enjoy the fact that he was having a drink with an exceptionally beautiful woman in the Red Room of the White House.

“Relax, Richie,” said Emily and gave him a kiss. “This Red Room is just a tiny foreplay of things to come.”

That sentence did not decrease his puzzlement.

An immaculate waiter came to greet them and asked them to follow him into the State Dining Room next door.

It had just turned dark outside and the staff had lit candles in all the rooms and hallways of the White House, as well as on the tables of the dining room.

“Very romantic,” said Richie and squeezed Emily’s hand.

There were already a few other people sitting at some tables, but the room hadn’t filled up yet.

Richie couldn’t have imagined a more elegant setting or a more beautiful woman at his side. Emily’s eyes reminded him of the extremely rare blue diamonds.

Once they were seated, he said: “OK, what’s the catch? This looks like a regular fine restaurant.”

“It is.”

“So, is the president no longer living here? Has he moved somewhere else?”

“I told you. He now lives and works in the basement of the Pentagon.”

“What’s his name?”

“XCF-83.6.2.”

“That’s a cute name, always thought of naming my children something similar. Just joking.” Richie finally understood. “You mean that the president is now a computer.”

“Yes, and he has been in office now for twelve years. Although technically that is not totally accurate, because he has been upgraded a few times since 2039.”

“That’s the advantage of computers. Always upgrades. Never downgrades like it sometimes happens with human presidents.”

“I agree and XCF-83.6.2 has done an excellent job so far. No humans can compete with the quality of his work.”

“So, what’s the White House now used for, except for eating?”

“It’s a whole luxury entertainment complex. The main building, the former Executive Residence, where we are now is a hotel with a bar, a snack and a fine dining restaurant. And a ball room for special occasions.”

“And what about the wings?”

“The West Wing is a huge night club including several rooms with different styles of music.”

“I can’t believe it. So, there are now people dancing in the oval office?”

“No, that’s the cigar lounge. But they are dancing on the big table of the former Cabinet Room.”

“What about the East Wing?”

“The East Wing is a calmer place with cafés, a bistro, the old cinema and a big library.”

“I look forward to see that.”

“I’d say it is a far better way to use such a nice public building.”

“I agree. You’ll need to take me for a tour after dinner.”

“It will be a pleasure. And I’ve booked a room upstairs.”

“Great, but I am not sure I’ll be able to sleep after the adrenaline kick I just got.”

“Who talked about sleeping?” said Emily, a naughty look in her eyes.

The first dish was served. An exquisite salad with vegetables and shrimps.

“Delicious,” said Richie.

“The vegetables are all grown in the White House garden.”

“I can taste that they are really fresh.”

They enjoyed the food and the wine for a few minutes, then Richie’s curiosity took over again:

“Now tell me, Emily, what triggered these big changes in Washington?”

“New recruitment procedures.”

“Recruitment?”

“Yes, the White House regularly had some hiring issues over the decades and centuries, so thirty years ago the nation’s best minds came up with some ideas on how to prevent such issues from reoccurring in the future.”

“But aren’t recruitment errors inevitable in all kinds of organisations?”

“No more than car accidents. And both these issues have now been relegated to the history books. All problems have solutions. Except maybe the travelling salesman problem. Although the solution could be quite simple: just get rid of salesmen.”

“What was the solution for better hiring?”

“The first part of the solution was to let robots do the jobs that they do better than humans. And with improving AI technology, those kinds of jobs came to include the presidency of the United States.”

“Fascinating. But not completely unexpected.”

“The second part of the equation was to hire people based on their actual competencies, not based on how loud they are or how much money they have.”

“I have another question,” said Richie. “I have obviously noticed your exceptionally beautiful eyes, but then I also observed the other people around here in the White House as well as on the airship. It seems like everyone has beautiful eyes. What’s the trick?”

Emily paused for a moment, then she said: “I have five explanations for this.”

“Five? I understood that it was just a few lucky people who happened to have beautiful eyes?”

“In the future, it’s you who decide if you want to be lucky or not.”

“OK, so what are the tricks?”

“The first trick is positive auto-suggestion meaning that you repeat to yourself several times a day something like ‘I have beautiful eyes’, in the same way as Muhammed Ali repeated to himself ‘I am the greatest, I am the best’ even before he actually was.”

“Yes, I’ve heard that story.”

“The second trick is to regularly lay down outside, preferably in nature, and to look up at the sky, imagining beams of light coming into your eyes from the sky and making them beautiful.”

“OK.”

“The third trick, as we’ve discussed tonight, is to find a career you love so that you focus on positive thoughts most of the time.”

“Fourth, linked to the previous point, is to do the best you can to surround yourself with beauty: nature, elegant buildings and beautiful people. Your eyes appreciate all that.”

“And the fifth trick?”

“Last, but not least, a lot of uninhibited sex makes your eyes very beautiful and attractive. Don’t take my word for it, just observe the eyes of some porn stars, and draw your own conclusions about other people who have beautiful eyes...”

“So, I guess that a combination of all these tricks is the best recipe for having beautiful eyes?”

“Yes, both for men and women. And you need some patience, this process takes months or even years.”

After dinner, Emily first showed Richie the East Wing, which was full of people in the cafés, some were queuing for the cinema, and others enjoyed the calmness of the library.

Then they walked over to the West Wing.

“What an electric ambiance,” observed Richie.

“Yes, a lot of energy here,” said Emily, “partly because a lot of them take this new mushroom drug called *Atomush*. Puts you in an explosive state of mind! Do you want to try?”

“I don’t feel such a need after our earlier adrenaline kick, I must say.”

“I understand, me neither,” said Emily, giving Richie another kiss and slightly rubbing her body against his.

They danced in the Cabinet Room for a while. It was packed and quite wild, a few people even danced topless on the big table that was historically used for more serious purposes.

Then Emily showed Richie the “ballads” room, where romantic music was played and couples were dancing intimately with each other. That reminded Richie of the 1980s “slows” trend in France that had unfortunately disappeared in the decades after.

He invited Emily to the dance floor.

For several minutes they danced without talking, letting the tenderness toward each other sink in. They kissed. And after a while, Richie said:

“What a wonderful surprise, thank you so much Emily.”

“I have one more surprise for you tonight. And then tomorrow I’ll take you to the Capitol.”

“The Capitol?”

“Yes, the biggest and most luxurious casino resort on Earth.”

“Well, the guys in there have always been gambling with other people’s money.”

“All that changed since they raised the Statue of Responsibility on the West Coast.”

“Liberty and Responsibility?”

“Yes, true liberty requires responsibility. And nowadays people take full responsibility for their health, their education, their career, relationships and happiness.”

“What’s the other surprise? I like surprises, especially blue diamond-eyed ones.”

Emily blushed although she was perfectly aware of her exceptional beauty. She took Richie by the hand and led him back to the hotel in the former Executive Residence where they had ‘landed’ and dined.

They took the elevator up to the top floor.

Emily put a finger on the doorknob. A green light turned on and she pushed the door open.

Richie had expected a regular hotel room and that’s what it looked like except that there was a big curtain that cut the room in half.

“It isn’t very big,” said Emily, “and I promise, next time we’ll take the former President’s Room. But this room has another advantage.”

“What kind of advantage?”

“A former First Lady once made this room soundproof so that her husband could play his saxophone without disturbing the neighbours. That’s the official version, at least.”

“What’s behind that curtain?” asked Richie.

Emily put a finger on his lips and then she put her lips on his and they kissed again. Then she said: “Now it’s your turn to take care of me.”

She opened the curtain and Richie discovered the other part of the room, which contained a very interesting selection of “play tools” for adults.

“Is this a room you booked through *KinkBNB*?”

“It is,” said Emily, full of naughtiness in her eyes.

Richie saw a blindfold on one of the racks, went to take it and put it around Emily’s head so that she could no longer see.

“Good girls shouldn’t see what’s happening next,” said Richie. “Let the play begin!”

He started by giving her another kiss. On the neck.

They gave each other a lot of pleasure that night, and fell asleep exhausted a few hours later.



Richie woke up in a comfortable sofa in a sumptuous salon with wide windows in three directions. He saw the circle with the star on the small table in front of him on top of which stood two glasses of champagne and some appetizers.

He concluded that the second glass must belong to his sofa neighbour, a very attractive, sexy and elegant young woman. She had brown hair and crystal-clear blue eyes. She wore an elegant black cocktail dress with matching stockings and high heels. And to crown everything, the expensive-looking jewellery around her neck matched her amazing blue eyes. Richie himself wore a tuxedo.

“Hi Richie, my name is Emily.”

“A pleasure to meet you, Emily,” said Richie who slowly got rid of his initial dizziness and got a strong sense of *déjà-vu*.

“What is this place? Are we on top of some kind of skyscraper?” hiding the fact that he already knew the answer.

He looked at Emily again: “Are we on an airship?”

“Yes,” answered the stunning brunette. “The ultimate luxury of traveling since they invented non-explosive hydrogen and managed to tweak the laws of gravity a little.”

“What a view! Beautiful landscapes. And it looks like we are heading towards a city a few miles ahead?”

“Yes, DC.”

Richie wasn't sure he had heard right, did Emily say *DIZZY*? Never mind, he would soon find out.

He forgot the landscapes a mile below and lost himself in the ocean of Emily's eyes instead.

“So, what do you work with?” he asked, expecting her to tell him that she was a rich heiress taking care of various charities.

“I work at the White House.”

“Aha,” thought Richie. “Then I heard correctly, she actually said ‘DC’.”

“And what do you do at the White House?”

“I do some coordination work.”

“Enjoying it?”

“That's the least I can say. Yes, very much.”

Then she leaned over, kissed him, and after that whispered in his ear: “My wonderful First Gentleman.”

Richie knew that he could probably be seen as a gentleman but was still surprised by Emily calling him that. Did she have several gentlemen? Wonder what her Second Gentleman looked like.

Richie was as confused as during his last airship trip.

As they flew closer to the city, Richie recognized the Washington DC's skyline.

"So what year is this?"

"2051," answered the stunning beauty.

Richie now started to understand what had happened to him. Somehow, he must have landed in a similar Dream World, but with a few small differences. Or maybe the differences would turn out to be bigger than he thought? In any case, this was in line with Leo's *dimensionomics* explanations.

A woman came up to Emily and said something to her in a language that Richie did not understand. Then she left again.

"So, you have some hidden language talents," Richie told her.

"Yes, a requirement for my job."

"And what language was that if I may ask?"

"Piscataway."

"Never heard of."

"The language had been extinct for quite a while."

"You mean that you have been able to revive an extinct language?"

"Yes, it was quite tricky, we had to rely on old documents from some of the first settlers, cross-check those with surviving similar languages and cultures, and then use a very advance language-building software that was able to fill in the missing pieces."

"That's amazing."

"Yes, and hundreds of other languages throughout the world have been revived in a similar manner."

"So now you're bilingual?"

"I speak a few other languages too, but yes, most importantly I am fluent in the capital's both local languages, English and Piscataway, which is an Algonquian dialect."

The airship anchored at the top of the Washington Monument.

Richie and Emily went through the same adrenaline trip as the day before, and Richie enjoyed it even more this time, as he was less scared and knew what to expect.

And like the day before, they had a drink in the Red Room, before dinner. The only difference was that people regularly came up to Emily, addressing her by her first name, and discussed some kind of issue, mostly talking Piscataway with her, but sometimes also English.

This made sense to Richie, because Emily was working at the White House.

Again, they had a wonderful dinner in the State Dining Room, and no one came up to talk to disturb Emily.

“It’s quite a lot of work, but it’s fun,” she told Richie.

“I bet it is,” he said. As Richie hadn’t noticed any major differences compared to his visit the day before, he drew the conclusion that Emily was probably some kind of hotel manager. But then he thought... “Wait, she didn’t call the place ‘EC’ this time.” So, he asked her:

“I visited the White House a few years back, but it seems that a lot of things have changed.”

“Yes, a lot has changed indeed. The State Dining Room is now the staff canteen. And the West Wing has been renamed *The Cockpit*, and the East Wing *First Nations Center*.

“A rather nice canteen, I must say.”

“It’s the White House, after all.”

“And the Executive Residence?” asked Richie.

“Unchanged. For practical reasons, the key staff lives here.”

“So, this is not an entertainment centre,” thought Richie. “It is just a differently organised White House. Which means that the president is most likely not a computer this time around.”

“And who is the president nowadays?”

“Mrs. Johnson. I’ll introduce you to her a little later tonight.”

Like the day before, they enjoyed their luxury dinner including the same fresh vegetables from the White House garden.

After dinner, Emily took Richie by the hand and led him to the second floor. They stopped in front of the President’s Room. Emily put her finger on Richie’s mouth, then she opened the door.

“What!” exclaimed Richie. “You can’t just walk into the President’s room like that.”

“I’ll take you for a tour of the wings later, but first I want you to fuck me.”

“In the President’s room?”

“Stop asking questions,” said Emily, kissed him and began to unzip his pants.

After all, Richie was just a normal man, and when a sex bomb wants to have sex with him in the President’s Room of the White House, then who cares about its legality? “Certainly a daring White House staff woman, that’s for sure,” thought Richie.

They spent a very pleasurable hour on the President’s bed. Then they dressed again and walked down to the entrance hall, and headed to the former East Wing.

The First Nations Wing was very nicely decorated in traditional American Indian style. It gave the place a completely new feel.

“Very successful cultural mix,” said Richie.

“I agree with you,” said Emily. “This Wing has been very busy in the last two decades.”

Then they walked over to the former West Wing.

“That’s where my office is,” said Emily.

She showed him around several offices of the Wing that was now called *The Cockpit*, from where the President and his staff were steering the country.

Here, much less had changed, except maybe the fact that the decoration was less sterile, and had more of a feminine touch, more colours.

“Kind of makes sense,” thought Richie, “if the President is now a woman.”

Then they walked toward the Oval Office.

“I promised you I would introduce you to the President,” said Emily.

“And I really look forward to meet her,” said Richie enthusiastically.

They entered the Oval Office. Richie thought it was weird that Emily didn’t even knock on the door.

The interior decoration had changed substantially, it was now a very pink-themed interior.

“No doubt that the President is a woman,” thought Richie.

But the room was empty.

“Looks like she isn’t here,” said Richie to Emily.

“We’ll just wait for her, then.” Emily locked the door behind them.

“What are you doing?” said Richie. “Are you totally insane? First the President’s bedroom, and now the Oval Office...”

Then it finally dawned on him. “Emily... you are the President of the United States.”

“Yes, I am, Mr. Johnson. And you are my wonderful First Gentleman.”

She kissed him, then closed the curtains, and said:

“Now I give you an executive order to fuck me on my desk. For some reason, this power makes me horny all the time.”

She turned on the music loud enough so that the neighbours wouldn’t hear.

♪ *Être une femme – Michel Sardou*

Richie obliged and once again took care of the sublime creature that was governing the United States of America.

Again, Richie woke up on a sofa in a sumptuous airship with Emily at his side. He pretended that he didn’t know her - which he probably didn’t because who knows what her role was this third time.

He still enjoyed the flying fox from the Washington Monument to the White House balcony.

“Welcome home!” said Emily once they had landed and he had returned her stilettos. They entered the Blue Room.

Again, the White House seemed familiar while at the same time Richie could feel that something was different. Like the previous times, they had a wonderful luxurious dinner, with the difference that they helped wash up their own dishes.

“That was strange,” thought Richie. “So Emily can’t be the President this time around, she must have a much lower position. But who cares? She’s still as stunning.”

Emily could feel his interrogation and told her the reason was the same as for Webbo at Splendour. This was a community of equals. That being said, people who enjoyed household tasks lovingly did more than their fair share so that the others could focus a little more on the purpose of the community.

They walked over to one of the lounge rooms to have a tea, then Richie asked her: “How was your trip to France?”

“Wonderful, I visited a few châteaux in the Loire region where they are implementing a similar model to the White House. I am so glad we’ve been able to serve as inspiration to others.”

“Model?”

“Yes, community model.”

“Please explain.”

“Over the last two decades, the world has moved from various forms of centralised power to autonomous villages, towns and neighbourhoods.”

“Really?”

“Yes, finally people realised that political centralised power was far overrated, so they stopped following many bureaucratic orders, stopped paying taxes, and instead started to organise themselves on a local level.”

“And that worked?”

“The transition period was a little tumultuous, but the situation has now stabilised and we can see far happier and fulfilled people everywhere who have joined like-minded communities.”

“I don’t understand: if there is no central power, what are all these people doing here at the White House. It feels as busy as always.”

“You missed a few details. Let me show you around.”

They walked out on the balcony and Emily pointed down at the vegetable gardens that stretched far out beyond the South Lawn. Richie realised that a former First Lady would have been very proud of the seeds she had managed to sow.

“A much better use of that garden, isn’t it? Instead of having noisy old technology landing there.”

“Wait... there are no fences!”

“Exactly. That’s the point. Only people who unnaturally cling onto power need fences and security guards. Gone. And now we can breathe.”

“That’s amazing!” exclaimed Richie. “But if the White House is no longer a centre of power, what is it?”

“Well, actually, it kind of still is a centre of power, but not the power of brute force. I’d say it’s a centre of power of wisdom and knowledge.”

“I’m not sure I get it.”

“The trickiest thing with decentralised power is that all communities and neighbourhoods have to find their own unique purpose, which to some degree is

linked to the history of each place. And ideally that purpose needs to be reflected in the main building or place of the community.”

“I guess the choice of main building was an easy one when it came to the White House? So, what’s the community’s new purpose?”

“It will be easier if I show you.” Emily took Richie by the hand and they walked over to the West Wing.”

Why wasn’t he surprised when they headed straight for the Oval Office? However, he didn’t expect what he saw inside: the President’s famous desk was gone. In its place, there was over a dozen armchairs placed in a circle at the centre of the room.

“That old desk represented unhealthy individualism. And this is how we now meet, like in the old days on this continent.”

“We?”

“The Council of Elders.”

“You don’t look elderly.”

“You’re right, I’m only 38, but have been lucky to inherit some wisdom from my past lives. And I have spent the last twenty years thinking about solutions for humanity.”

“A beautiful altruist,” said Richie. “Tell me more about this Council. Sixteen chairs?”

“Correct. Four of which are for Native Americans. Four for elders with European ancestors. Four of African descent. And the remaining four for the rest of the world.”

“Very interesting.”

“And half women, half men. The youngest member is 21 and the oldest 134.”

“What? 134 years old?”

“Yes, the thing is that nowadays people live much longer, quite a few past 120, because they experience much less stress from the system and live much healthier lives.”

“Wow, and what does this Council do exactly?”

“We have complementary competencies and we advise communities from all over the United States, and sometimes abroad as well, as I just did in France. We are thinkers with a big-picture perspective and most of the time we are able to find solutions for the communities that turn to us for advice.”

“But you don’t have any executive powers?”

“We don’t execute anything or anyone. We leave such words to the history books. We prefer to talk in terms of creation and we help communities create environments where all their residents get their needs met.”

“And how do you convince these communities to follow your advice?”

“By clearly explaining their options: if they continue with a status quo, this is what’s likely to happen. And if they follow our advice, we estimate that a far better outcome is possible. We backup our advice with solid scientific data.”

“Could you give an example?”

“Sure. One of our main pieces of advice is to make walkable communities. Walkable communities use up far less resources like iron, glass, petrol, etc. And car-based societies lead to more loneliness, not even talking about the social costs of poor health and accidents.”

“That sounds wise.”

“We believe so.”

“But what about the freedom the car gives to people?”

“Good point. Once you join a well-organized community of people that you love and like to be around, and share interests with, you will want to stay in that community. Not commute to a place where the grass is greener. And when people want to travel, which still is a big human need, they use more elegant forms of transportation as you have experienced yourself with the airship we arrived in.”

“Yes, and I’ve observed many others around, as well as a few luxury cars on the roads. No wheels?”

“We’ve moved friction technology.”

“Just wondering,” said Richie thinking about the sixteen chairs, “are such big meetings efficient?”

“Valid observation. Indeed, we don’t promote unnecessary meetings and this circle is only used a few times a year or when there is a major crisis. At other times we use far smaller circles, and often one-to-one meetings, or we send each other quick messages.”

“OK.”

“The other thing to understand with this big circle is that compared to regular meetings, it’s main purpose is to concentrate thinking energy, which comes from the unique setup.”

“The setup?” Wondered Richie.

“Yes, what does a circle within an oval look like?”

“Of course, an eye!”

“Exactly. So, this setup enables us to see things more clearly, and come up with unexpected solutions.”



“This is fascinating. I like how your goal is to make sure that everyone’s needs are met.”

Saying that, he still felt a little disappointed that the desk in the Oval Office was gone, because he had an urgent need... Emily could feel that and said: “Don’t worry, our community here at the White House has thought of all the needs of the residents.”

She kissed Richie and took him by the hand, “Let’s go down to the basement.”

The West Wing playroom was as elegantly decorated as the rest of the building with several cosy lovers’ alcoves, as well as some more public areas where a few people were already making love as they entered. Emily pressed her body against Richie’s and held her hand where good girls aren’t supposed to.

Then she said: “What do you feel like?”

“Right now, just you and me in an alcove. After that we’ll see how things evolve.”

“Yes, *l’appétit vient en mangeant*, something I learned from my recent trip to France.”

*“Only one Dream World travel left,” said Leo.*

## **RICHIE JOHNSON – SECOND DWT – 06.04.2018**

The Grooters watched Richie’s Dream World travel together, fast-forwarding certain scenes like they now got used to as sex seemed to be omnipresent in a vast majority of their dreams.

“This is interesting,” said Boss. “It almost looks like Richie got three trips for the price of one.”

“I’m glad I came back after the third groundhog day, as theoretically there could be an infinite number of them.”

“To be precise, only a portion of infinity, because the other portion are futures that don’t qualify as your Dream World futures,” said Leo.

“I can’t argue with such accurate scientific thinking,” said Richie.

“I’m interested in understanding why this happened,” said Modella, slightly jealous of Richie’s new brunette. But she had her own *amant*, Rocco, and was not really in a good position to judge him.

“The way I grasp this,” said Boss, “is that Richie’s subconscious hasn’t made up its mind about whether it wants the future president to be a computer, a sexy woman, or a Council of Elders.”

“You’re probably right about that,” said Richie. “All options have their pros and cons.”

*Geneva, Switzerland, 7 April 2018*

Now that all the Grooters had made their first two Dream World travels, and Verity all of hers, they decided to pause for a few weeks to do additional research and also see if they could find a solution to help Karl Blitz.

The Grooters had resent their message to Karl Blitz several times, on average once a week since their first attempt in February. And they regularly checked the Internet to see if there was some new information on him. Nothing. He still died in the Buchenwald concentration camp in 1943.

So, Modella said: “We need to change tactics. For some reason, what we’re doing doesn’t seem to work.”

“Agreed,” said the others. “Do you have anything to suggest?”

“What if we send the message to Klara instead? She has much more room for action, given she’s not imprisoned.”

“That’s a really good idea,” said Boss, and the others nodded.

“The great news,” added Webbo, “is that although we have ‘lost’ almost two months, we can still send our message to November 1938, so our initial failure should not affect them.”

Again, the Grooters sat in a circle in the living room, focused their energies on Klara and sent her the message about smuggling in the mandolin to Karl, and getting in touch with the two Dutch guys.

“Good,” said Webbo afterwards. “Let’s re-send the message again tomorrow and the day after, then once a week.”

A fortnight passed. Still nothing.

Leo told the others: “We need to completely switch off, take our heads out of trying to force things to happen. And let the Universe play its role.”

“Sure,” said Boss, “and do you have any ideas of what we could do concretely?”

“I do, actually, we need to take on some manual job. No, not the kind you’re thinking of, Modella.”

Modella blushed.

“But...?” wondered Verity.

“Let’s rebuild the hut!” said Leo.

“What?” said Webbo. “We are adults now.”

“There are no laws preventing adults from building tree huts,” replied Leo.

“Will we all fit in there?” asked Boss.

“Where’s our architect?”

“I’m here,” said Modella.

“What do you think?”

“Let’s walk over to the former treehouse and take a closer look.”

“Over twenty-five years since we built that, no wonder it’s in ruins,” said Verity as they approached it.

“The trees have grown even bigger,” noticed Richie.

Modella looked at the remaining rotten planks that once were the young Grooters’ pride.

“I’d say we disassemble what’s here, make firewood out of it, and then start from scratch.”

“But are we sure we want to build a new hut?” asked Webbo. “Who’s going to use it?”

“More people than what you might think,” said Boss. “First, there are my nephews, although living in New Zealand because my brother fell in love with a Kiwi girl, they tend to come to their grandparents’ place for the summer, to escape the southern hemisphere winter. However, they will not come this year because they’ll instead visit my parents in Singapore, which is much closer for them.”

“OK, sounds good,” said Richie, “anyone else?”

“Yes,” confirmed Boss. “There are actually two families, one next door, and one three houses down the street, who have children I’m sure would love to use the hut. And so would probably other children in the neighbourhood.”

“That’s so nice of you,” said Verity. “Normally neighbours don’t talk to each other.”

“Adults tend not to,” said Boss, “but children do, if they get the chance.”

“Great,” said Leo. “Then our work will not be for nothing, and I’m sure even adults could have fun in a hut. Back to you Modella, what do you reckon, should we build the same size as we did back then?”

“Well, the trees have grown and could probably support a slightly bigger structure, and we are grown-ups now, and where adults fit in, children will fit too, although

bigger might be less cosy. So, what I suggest is that we make it just big enough for all of us to fit in, which will be only just a little bigger hut than our original one.”

“Cool,” said the other Grooters.

“I’ll go back inside and make a quick drawing of what the hut could look like,” said the Grooters architect.

Modella did that and showed the others. “What do you think?”

A wave of nostalgia flushed over the Grooters, all very eager about this project. “Looks great,” said the others in unison.

Modella then spent some time to figure out what materials they would use, and the quantities, then she got back to the others again.

“Here is what we’ll need. Both building materials and tools.”

“You’re an angel, Modella, thank you so much,” said Boss. “I’ll grab Richie and Webbo, and we’ll go and buy what is needed. I’ll first check in my parent’s shed if they have any tools we can use.”

“Looks like I can add another tree house on my CV,” she joked.

The adult Grooters, feeling like kids again, then spent the next ten days building and decorating Hut 2.0.”

They were quite satisfied with the result and were certain the hut would come to good use in the coming summer months, be it for meditating, brainstorming, or doing other things adults do...

### Geneva, Switzerland, 3 May 2018

The Grooters were still in their incubation phase, waiting for new clues and answers, both for the last few crystals, as well as for Karl Blitz.

Richie decided to take the day off and go to town. Normally, he would drive, but he was so fed up with the Geneva traffic that he decided to take the bus instead. Bus lanes were quicker.

Reflecting on that, he came to a clear conclusion, something that most bankers are very reluctant to admit: that money does not solve all problems. If money could solve the Geneva traffic congestion, then it would have been solved a long time ago.

Richie realised that owning a car was a luxury of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and now the luxury of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not needing a car. He dreamt of living in a place where he had all he needed within walking or cycling distance.

He walked around the old town, then to the *Parc des Bastions*, and sat down in front of the Reformation Wall, where he could see the four statues and read the huge text that Verity had seen in her Dream World of Geneva in 2061.

### *POST TENEBRAS LUX*

He reflected on its meaning and was now more than ever convinced of the importance of the Grooters' Pact and mission.

Suddenly, he heard a man about his age sobbing on the bench next to him.

"Are you OK?" he asked him.

"Yes, these are tears of joy, it's the happiest day of my life!" said the man.

"I'm glad to hear that," said Richie, "do you mind me asking what makes you so happy?"

"Yes, please come over," said the man, inviting Richie to sit next to him on his bench. "My name is Alexandre,"

"I'm Richie."

Alexandre continued: "The thing is that I have an 8-year-old son who has cerebral palsy."

Richie had heard about that disability, but did not know much about it.

"Sorry to hear that," he told the man empathetically.

"He has been completely speech impaired since birth, so I've never been able to communicate with him..."

Richie, although not having any children of his own, could imagine how heartbreaking such a situation must be for a parent.

"... until yesterday."

Richie was surprised: "What? Do you mean that you're now suddenly able to communicate with your son?"

"Yes! And that's why I'm so over the moon today. I had to go out for a walk, digest all this, vent my emotions. We live not far from here, I'll go back to my wife and son shortly, but I needed some alone time to process all this."

"That's amazing," said Richie, "what enabled you to communicate with your son?"

"A symbol language."

“And how does it work?”

“It’s a language of logical symbols, and my son points to the symbol he wants to ‘say’. The first words he chose to show us were ‘*Maman, papa, je vous aime.*’”

“How wonderful!” said Richie, and as Alexandre started to sob again saying this, Richie offered him a tissue.

“Thanks, and sorry for being so emotional.”

“You have nothing to be sorry about.”

Then Alexandre stood up and said: “I have to go. It was a pleasure meeting you.”

“Likewise. May I ask you the name of that symbol language?”

“Sure, it’s called *Bliss Symbols*.”

“OK, thanks, I wish you all the best.”

“*Merci*,” said the man and walked towards the gates of the park.

Richie, still on the bench in front of the Reformation Wall, wondered about that strange but positive encounter. Then he took out his smartphone and searched for *Bliss Symbols*.

He found a few informative websites, even a *blissary* dictionary where he could look up a word and see the equivalent Bliss symbol. And even create his own symbols. Most of them were very intuitive, he thought. He wondered who had invented this language, and found the inventor’s Wikipedia page, a certain Charles Bliss.

“What!?!” exclaimed Richie, almost out loud. He couldn’t believe what he just read. Straight away, he contacted the other Grooters and told them to get back home as quickly as possible. He walked out of the park and threw himself into the first taxi he could find.

As they gathered on the terrace of the house in the lovely spring weather, the other Grooters were confounded as to what was up with Richie.

“I guess you owe us an explanation,” said Boss.

“I do. Well, earlier today, I sat on a bench in the *Parc des Bastions*, and got to know a man who was blissfully happy because he had found a way to communicate with his 8-year-old son, who has cerebral palsy, for the first time of his life, thanks to a symbol language.”

“A symbol language?” wondered the resident hyperpolyglot.

“Yes, it’s called *Bliss Symbols*.”

“And?” wondered Webbo.

“That symbol language was invented by a holocaust survivor...”

“Are you saying that...?”

“Yes, Karl Blitz, alias Charles Bliss because he changed his name during the war.”

“So, he didn’t die in the concentration camp in 1943?” asked Verity.

“Nope, he died in 1985, almost 88 years old.”

“This must mean that...,” said Modella.

“Yes,” said Richie. “It worked! Klara found a way to get him out of Buchenwald. He fled to England, then Canada and Japan before meeting up with her in Shanghai where they spent the war years before moving to Sydney in 1946 where he in 1949 published his *Bliss Symbols* language.”

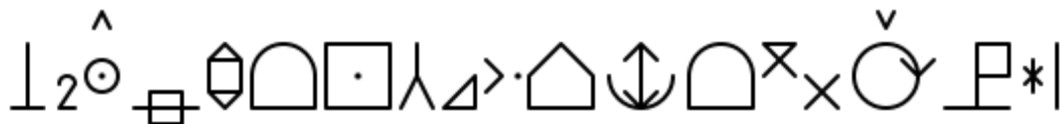
“What an incredible story!” said Leo.

The other Grooters all checked their laptops to make sure Richie wasn’t joking with them, and to see what those symbols looked like.

“Wait,” said the Grooters librarian, “this is the same symbol language as the one Xylon showed me on Mars in Marstone.”

“What?”

“Yes, and you remember the hint for the Crystal of Knowledge in Xylon’s message?” Verity accessed the video file of her Dream World travel to Marstone, and paused on the moment where Xylon showed her the message:



The other Grooters compared those symbols to the Bliss symbols websites they had just found online, and could quickly decipher the message from Marstone.

**You will find the Crystal of Knowledge in a statue  
at the oldest university in the United States.**

“You’re right, it’s the same symbol language. So, you think that this language will be used on Mars?” wondered Modella.

“I think Xylon told me that it was a universal language, literally, and that it was used to communicate on and between various planets in the universe, not only in our Solar System.”



“If that’s the case,” said Boss, “then our small history hacking helping a chemical engineer escape from a concentration camp may have had far bigger repercussions than we could ever have imagined. Let’s celebrate!”

Boss went down to the basement and came up with two bottles of champagne. Modella helped him to organise some snacks and they all toasted to their first successful history hack.

Somehow, this win felt bigger than the four crystals they had found so far, although all achieved milestones were welcome.

The following day, they all spent some time to go through the websites and documents linked to the Bliss symbols.

The librarian linguist with photographic memory got extremely fascinated by her newly discovered symbol language, so she spent a few hours learning the 5,000 symbols, then she gave the other Grooters an introduction course so that they could better understand the underlying logic of the language.

They marvelled about some of the language’s features, for example, one could see straight away if a certain vegetable grew under or above ground. And it was the first symbol language they had come across that could also express emotions and other abstract things.

Leo, on his side, was researching another aspect of the language. He was intrigued by the fact that Bliss symbols could help speech impaired children to communicate. He shared his insights with the other Grooters.

“How come that these children with cerebral palsy cannot read normal language, but they can read Bliss symbols?”

“That’s a mystery wrapped in an enigma,” said Boss.

“There must be an explanation,” continued Leo. “What is it with these symbols that is so different to our alphabet-based languages?”

“Well,” said Verity, “if you really think about it, most words in alphabet-based languages are completely arbitrary. Why does the three-letter combination C-A-R mean a four-wheeled vehicle? That’s completely illogical. And that same letter combination has a completely different meaning in French.”

“You got a point there,” said Webbo. “So, you mean that most of our languages are illogical?”

“That must be the logical conclusion,” said the Asian beauty.

“But languages are still beautiful and we can create songs and write books and communicate with each other,” said Modella.

“Yes, but our languages also lead to misinterpretations, communication problems, abuse of power, and major difficulties to learn new languages. The genius Charles Bliss had understood that and worked on a solution.”

“I guess we could learn languages much faster if they were logical,” said Leo, who was the most linguistically challenged of the Grooters, being fluent in only English and French. That being said, given his constant teleports all over the world, his passive comprehension of many other languages was fairly good.

“Exactly,” said Verity. “Like Esperanto or Bliss symbols.”

“But Bliss symbols are only written,” noticed Webbo.

“Let’s think out-of-the-box,” said Leo. “What if we think of this cerebral palsy disability from an interdimensional perspective?”

“What do you mean?” asked Modella.

“Remember the *dimensionomics* lecture I gave you in February?”

“Yes,” nodded the other Grooters.

“Well, isn’t then a child with cerebral palsy in a similar situation to an old person with Alzheimer’s?”

“Of course! You’re a genius, Leo,” said Boss. “Indeed: if we assume that a person with Alzheimer already has one ‘foot in the grave’, or more specifically, that parts of their brain already seem to have moved on to the next dimension, while their body still remains in this dimension...”

“... then,” relayed Richie, “children with cerebral palsy have a similar situation, in the sense that their bodies are in our dimension while their minds still seem to be stuck in the pre-birth dimension they came from.”

“Which means,” said Verity, “that this Bliss symbols language is an interdimensional form of communication!”

“Exactly!” confirmed Leo. “So, it helps us communicate between our present dimension 2 and the pre-birth dimension 6 that we covered in the *dimensionomics* course.”

“But why does it work? And how?” wondered Modella.

“We still need to figure that out,” admitted Leo.

“An IT way to look at it,” said the tech wiz, “is that in the case of children with cerebral palsy, there was problem with the ‘download’, and in the case of Alzheimer people, there is a problem with the ‘upload’ into the next realm.”

“Or some kind of chronological asymmetry where minds and bodies are not downloaded or uploaded at the same time,” added Richie.

“Yes, in other words: a bug in the system.”

“Bugs can teach us a lot, right Webbo?” asked Leo.

“Oh yes! A coder learns through bugs every day.”

“You guys rock,” said Boss. “If normal people would hear your conversation, they would certainly wonder what you have smoked or what kind of mushrooms you just ate.”

“Or what kind of *Creativity Pill* we just swallowed,” joked Leo, thinking back at his adventures in Drugstorie.

“Great,” said Leo. “Then I think we can continue with our last Dream World travels tomorrow. Who’s up next?”

“You are,” said Verity, eager to see the other Grooters catch up with her.

When Leo gained awareness, he realised he was in the middle of a jungle.

“Where am I?”

Because he had teleported to so many places in the world, he started to have a sense of where he was and could often differentiate one jungle from another. And in this case, he could feel that he was somewhere in the Pacific. The Pacific Ocean was Leo’s playground, where he had thousands of remote islands he could choose to teleport to.

However, with only vegetation all around him, he didn’t know exactly where he was. So, in which direction should he walk? Common sense told him to walk downhill, sooner or later, he would end up at the ocean.

His intuition was correct and shortly thereafter he noticed the circle with the star engraved on a coconut tree. About half an hour later, he saw a building that he recognised as a typical Polynesian Tahitian *faré*. But he would need to see more to identify the exact island.

Quickly, he saw that it was not just an isolated house, but a complex of many small and some bigger *farés*, all built of natural materials, and linked between them by simple covered pathways. Suddenly, an exquisite Polynesian woman appeared and walked towards him.

“*Ia Orana*, Leo. *Maeva* to Tahiti. My name is Vatuva, your partner.”

“My partner?”

“Yes,” said the Polynesian beauty and gave him one of those kisses that would normally electrocute an elephant.

“We run the *Purotu Research Centre* together here, but that sounds a little too formal, so people tend to just call it the *Beauty Factory*. By the way, *purotu* means everything linked to beauty and attractiveness in South Pacific Polynesian languages.”

“*Beauty Factory*?”

“Yes, that may sound a little industrial, but not all industries are bad. We like to liken it to a diamond polishing factory, because we take in raw ‘diamonds’ and ‘polish’ them so that they turn out like true goddesses.”

“So, it’s a beauty centre for women?”

“Yes, but not one that only treats the surface.”

“But if you have students, it’s a school as well?”

“In practice we are a small university, doing what universities do: education and research. But given our, let’s say, unconventional approach, we label ourselves as a research centre and the students are technically volunteering for various scientific experiments. Which is not completely false, by the way.”

“Unconventional approach?”

“You’ll soon understand.”

“And how come I see many men around as well, if it’s a beauty school for women?”

“For several reasons. First, men are good at research, and have the curiosity required to advance knowledge that can help make women even more beautiful, with less effort. The research results are very much in their interest too.”

“OK.”

“Then men also give us input to what they like in women, what they find attractive. And if women know that, they can more confidently take the steps to become more attractive in men’s eyes, which make them feel more feminine and desirable.”

“Interesting.”

“Also, we don’t think that gender imbalances are healthy, and both students and staff like myself love to have men around here to create such a balance.”

“Yes,” confirmed Leo, “gender imbalances often create problems.”

“Finally, men here have the important task of loving the ‘raw diamonds’, which is a big part of the polishing process. It takes a lot of discipline to become truly beautiful, so twice a week, the girls get a treat for their efforts.”

“A treat?”

“Yes, they can pick their choice from our Top 10.”

“Top 10?”

“Yes, the Top 10 of most handsome guys. Who are all tens by the way.”

“I’m curious about what the Top 10 list consists of.”

“Curiosity is good. Well, on the list this month we have Kiwi rugby players, American actors, African kings, Finnish car racers, Greek gods, Brazilian samba dancers, swimmers, Norwegian skiers, Italian men as well as Australian surfers.”

Leo wondered if he would count to the last category.

“Yes, you do,” said Vatua, gently rubbing herself against him and giving him a kiss. “And although my ego wants to keep you all for myself, I have realised that I actually feel happier if you sometimes make other women happy too. Treasures should be shared. And while you’re busy, I may pick a ten from the list as well. Win-win.”

“This sounds like paradise. And what has your research found that men like in women, apart from them looking smoking hot obviously?”

“It’s more subtle than that. Smoking hot may last for a fuck or twelve, but the attraction vanishes quickly if the physical beauty is empty inside.”

“So how do you fill it?”

“With education and meaning. A well-educated woman is always more attractive. Doesn’t need to be high university degrees, but overall well-read and having various skills and interests makes her more attractive.”

“And what about meaning?”

“That’s so important. A good man doesn’t just want a pretty face to look at, he wants that pretty face to be happy doing things she loves. It can be anything that fills her heart and mind with meaning, be it to work for a cause, to design clothes, to garden, to sing, to paint, to dance, to teach. Whatever it is, if it’s genuine, so not a boring job she just does for the money, then she will look much more attractive in his eyes.”

“That makes total sense.”

“And it works both ways. A guy just pumping iron and doing a soulless job will not be a match to the women we educate and embellish here.”

“I understand.”

“To get back to the diamond analogy: we think that humans are a little like diamonds in the sense that they have many facets that need polishing. Diamonds have fifty-eight facets, and we think an interesting human being should have about the same amount. We call it the *Diamond Theory*. Imagine how wonderful a person would be with fifty-eight polished facets: a well-trained body, an interesting mind, various skills, speaking several languages, plenty of interests and hobbies, etc.”

“That does have a potential downside, doesn’t it?”

“What?”

“The fact that one life partner alone is quite unlikely to match all these facets.”

“Yes, we’re perfectly aware of that, which is why part of our education includes teaching women about possible healthy alternative relationship models.”

“You mean that the classic monogamous model may no longer fit everyone?”

“Did it ever fit everyone?”

Leo realised to what extent he and most other people had been brainwashed to the only relationship model we've been sold, and how hard it was to think out of the monogamy box.

But the more his Grooters quest went on, the more he understood that there can be healthy alternatives for those who may not fit the classical box.

Leo felt like in heaven. Vatua presented him to some of her colleagues, in his eyes also true island pearls. Their names were Heiata, Maeva, Ravanui and Tuahine.

♪ *O Vai – Vaiteani*

Then Vatua explained that although this research school/beauty centre was small with only about three hundred students, it had free online courses that were taken by millions of women worldwide.

“So, it feels like you're making a big impact in the world.”

“We, Leo, we. Isn't promoting genuine beauty a worthwhile goal?”

“It certainly is,” said Leo, kissed Vatua, and went on, “I'm interested in the research aspects, so what else can be done for beauty research apart from cosmetics improvement?”

They walked into one of the buildings, into what looked like an office.

“This is my office,” said Vatua and closed the door. They sat down on a couch, then the Polynesian goddess continued.

“One of the main insights that our researchers build upon is the Golden Number, or Golden Ratio if you prefer. Beautiful people's faces and bodies are more symmetrical, more structured. Like nature.”

“And how do you create that structure?”

“This beauty-building should start even before a child is conceived. The parents need to truly love each other. By the way did you know that Tahitian used to practice infanticide in the old days before colonisation?”

“That sounds horrible.”

“It was. So, when a child was born with some minor defect, they killed it to keep up beauty standards.”

“Ouch,” said Leo.

“In the meantime, recent research has proven that if parents do positive visualisations and lead a healthy life, that minimises the probability of any birth defects. Then, once the child is born, a loving upbringing is also of uttermost importance.”

“What can the girls do for their beauty when they grow up?”

“When they grow up, as well as during the rest of their lives, girls want to nurture their femininity. Some aspects are cultural, and many are individual. It is important that each woman finds her own personal twist on femininity.”

“Very interesting,” said Leo, who obviously appreciated Vatua’s unique feminine touch, which included a form of inner confidence that he believes can only come from sexual liberation.

“Research here looks into all the classic factors that we know influence on beauty: exercise and nutrition, positive self-image, etc. But we go much further and try to better understand how love, pleasure and discipline can make you more beautiful too.”

“How did you come up with all these ideas for new areas of beauty research?”

“One of the things we’ve done is that we have observed which categories of women tend to be on average more beautiful.”

“So, you have a Top 10 for women too?”

“Kind of. For research purposes. Just know that this list is only statistical, and there are of course gorgeous women in other categories as well. The key here is for us to understand why these categories have on average higher numbers of beautiful women. Ready?”

“OK. I’m ready.”

“Models. Actresses. Lawyers. Porn stars. Singers. Dancers. Ice skaters.”

“Not a complete surprise, I can certainly agree with that list. Has your research found out what makes these women so beautiful?”

“To a large extent, yes. When it comes to models, the main explanation is that these women simply take care of themselves more than the average woman, and they have a fairly good self-image. What you focus on expands, so if you focus on being beautiful, you’re more likely to become beautiful. That being said, in your dimension, far too many models get inflated egos and get stuck on the outer aspects of beauty.”

“But not every woman can or wants to become a model.”

“No, but whatever they do in life, every woman can be as beautiful as a model. In their own way. Look at me. I’m a nerdy researcher.”

“I like to look at you. And to talk to you.”



“Nowadays, more and more women are beautiful in all walks of life. In part thanks to the research we do here,” Vatua said proudly.

“And what about actresses? How come some of them are absolutely stunning?”

“Positive self-image is even more important for them, as moving pictures can’t be as easily photoshopped. It is also a profession that requires a lot of discipline and intelligence.”

“Is that why lawyers are on the list too?”

“Yes, that’s a tough profession that requires structured thinking. And we know that structure makes beautiful. That being said, our researchers also believe that being true to one’s values also has its influence on beauty. And many female lawyers sincerely want to fight injustice through their profession.”

“So, determination makes beautiful as well?”

“Yes, being aligned with your inner values creates energy and that gives you a very unique radiance.”

“What about porn stars? In their case I guess intelligence does not top the list of reasons leading to beauty.”

“You’d be surprised, some of the most beautiful of them are very intelligent. The main factor making porn stars so attractive is the higher number of orgasms they get compared to the average woman. Orgasms tend to flush the body of its ugliness. The horizontal industry stars also have a more positive body image.”

“Yes, but we can’t all just fuck around the whole day like porn stars do?”

“No, but most of us can do more efforts to combine business and pleasure,” said Vatua and touched Leo in a very unprofessional way. Then she kissed him again.

“I certainly would not have any objections to such a combination,” said Leo. “And I guess your students appreciate the combination of studies and pleasure?”

“Yes, sexual exploration is a compulsory topic here, because sex is an important component in beauty. Quality sex.”

“And I understand you create the caring environment necessary for that exploration?”

“Yes, that’s part of this institution.”

“Sounds great.”

“The thing to understand is that unhealthy relationships result from women having to build up sexual barriers the whole day, and men walking around sexually frustrated. Even just a small neck and shoulders massage now and then would make a world of a difference.”

“Makes sense,” said Leo, who got the hint and stood up behind Vatia and started to give her a shoulder massage. He continued: “And what about singers?”

“Harmonious music is structured. This has been proven scientifically. And singers are constantly exposed to this structure that make them more beautiful. Simply listening to a lot of music, like Modella does, helps. But even better is to sing as well. However, not all women are destined to become singers.”

“Lastly, dancers? To which category I suppose we can include ice skaters.”

“Yes. The beauty of dancers comes from their structured body movements. Dancing is also a form of physical exercise, and physically active women are on average more radiant. As long as they don’t become too competitive and overdo the physical efforts, especially in sports.”

“Wow! These are really wonderful insights. So, the main determining factors for beauty are self-care, a positive self-image, discipline, intelligence, determination, physical exercise, being true to one’s values, orgasms, music and dance.”

“That’s a pretty good summary. It is also important to note that not all women should jump into the abovementioned professions and think that it will make them attractive. Instead, they need to align with their own version of femininity, and with their individual skills and interests. In other words, there is not one rule fits all.”

“Except the rule of the Law of Physics: the importance of being aligned with one’s true values. Alignment creates energy.”

“True,” said Vatia and kissed Leo again.

“Another important thing, one which is linked to a positive self-image. We teach our students to program their subconscious to become beautiful women.”

“Program their subconscious? How do they do that?”

“It’s quite simple, actually, but it needs consistency and perseverance. It’s about affirming a few times a day that they are beautiful, attractive, feminine, sexy, etc. And they also need to visualise themselves having become who they want to be.”

“And how, specifically, does that visualisation work?”

“The key is to imagine themselves in settings where people, especially men, give them compliments, and want to pursue them because they are so attractive. They have to imagine themselves feeling desired, feeling fulfilled doing a meaningful occupation, raising a family, etc.”

“So, a combination of positive affirmations and visualisations?”

“Yes. That shoulder massage felt so good, thanks Leo,” said the stunning researcher. “Next, I want to take you on a tour of the different buildings of this school and research centre.”

“Sounds great,” said Leo.

“But first, I need to thank you for your massage.”

The outgoing Polynesian got closer to Leo, kissed him again, then unzipped his pants and went down on him, first giving him a heavenly blow job, then letting him penetrate her until they both reached very satisfying orgasms.

They adjusted their clothes, then Vatua said tongue-in-cheek: “Beauty therapy is an ongoing work. And we need to lead by example. OK, let’s go.”

“I’m eager to discover the campus,” said Leo.

They walked out of the building they were in, then Vatua said:

“So, the building where my office is, is the *main administrative building*. In the adjacent building, we also have an *office for career guidance* to help our students identify life areas that they are passionate about. Because there is nothing more attractive than a passionate person.”

“I agree.”

“And the building next door on the other side is our *research building*. A big part of the research is to better understand how human emotions work. Which is why we have a whole annex called *Emotional Maturity Centre Squared*, just here behind the main research building.”

“Squared?”

“Yes, because the building is square, and also because emotional maturity is such an important component in true beauty, so we square it to underline its importance.”

“Aha!”

“Next, we have the main *campus cafeteria* and its *restaurant* that we use for etiquette classes.”

“Etiquette?”

“Yes, here we teach our students how to eat properly, but also how to move with grace and cater for guests. Posture and smile are two important ingredients we teach here.”

“And this next building?”

“This is the *fashion centre*. Here we teach the girls how to dress tastefully. We teach them colour theory, and that they need to match the colours of their clothes to the colour of their hair, eyes, and skin. Different cuts will also fit different body types better. There’s a lot of trial and error here.”

“So, they can’t just copy the fashion of celebrities?”

“Certainly not. Celebrities often have very different styles and colours that fit them. And by the way, with a few exceptions, most celebrities are quite clueless about what clothes fit them well.”

“You mentioned colour theory?”

“Yes, if you look at a colour wheel, we need to work with similar colours, for example mixing red, orange and yellow. Or with complementary colours that are placed opposite on the colour wheel.”

“Complementary colours?”

“Yes, there are three primary colours: red, blue and yellow. So, if you mix two of them you get the complementary colour of the third primary colour. For example: mix red and yellow, you get orange. And orange is the complementary colour of the remaining primary colour, which is blue.”

“That sounds simple.”

“It is. So, when it comes to fashion, we need to choose colours that are similar to or complement the colour of our hair, eyes or skin.”

“OK. And how come that white seems to fit most people?”

“Because we all share white teeth and white sclera in our eyes. However, white can also feel clinical, or cold in winter.”

“Winter is nothing you need to worry about here in the South Pacific.”

“No, but we love colours. There is a colour spectrum for a reason. We don’t understand why people are so obsessed with various shades of grey. How boring.”

They walked on.

“And this building looks more like a regular school?”

“Yes, these are the *classrooms* where more theoretical knowledge is covered, everything from parenting, to sexuality and relationship models.”

“And the two buildings next door?”

“One building is the *arts centre*, where different forms of art are taught and trained. And the other building is the *craftmanship building*, where students learn pottery, jewellery-making, sewing, furniture-building, etc. Not everyone learns everything, but everyone learns everything they love or want to try out.”

“Cool, and what about the buildings next to the water?”

“That’s the *spa and sports centre* where they can swim in the lagoon, play tennis, do yoga, gymnastics or boxing.”

“Boxing? Seriously? I thought this was a school to enhance femininity.”

“It is. Believe it or not, there are actually at least four good reasons for women to start boxing.”

“So many?”

“Yes, first of all it helps us get rid of our inner frustrations and unwanted emotions, like jealousy. Then it makes us sweat, it’s physical exercise that will make us feel good and satisfied with ourselves. On top of that, boxing wakens up our fighting spirit. I mean that metaphorically, it’s not about starting to punch people you don’t like or don’t agree with. Finally, when we pour our frustrations into a punching bag, these are all frustrations that we don’t need to hit into future lovers and life partners. Or family, or business partners,” she ended, giving Leo a kiss.

“What kind of frustrations are you referring to?”

“That’s very individual. We all tend to have various things that frustrate us in the world: injustice, dishonesty, greed, paternalism, individualism, pollution, corruption, abuse of power, ugly architecture, bureaucracy, men abusing their business and physical power, etc.”

“Most of what you listed frustrates me.”

“Maybe you should consider taking up boxing too? It’s useful for men too.”

They walked on.

“And the two bigger buildings to the left?”

“That’s the *student rooms*. Each student has their separate room, where they can sleep and study undisturbed.”

“By ‘study’, I suppose you include the weekly treats you mentioned earlier?”

“I suppose so too,” said the sexy researcher. “We encourage our students to be honest with their sexual and emotional needs, because always trying to hide their true feeling takes up a lot of energy. And that energy could be used more productively to create the feminine goddesses they want to become.”

“Sounds like a dream school.”

“We also teach the girls to make it absolutely clear if they fancy a specific man. They don’t have to literally hunt the men, just let them know in no uncertain ways that if the man in question likes them too, then they are open to play and have fun.”

Leo wondered how societies all over the world would look like if a similar mentality was adopted everywhere.

They walked back to the cafeteria building and had a vanilla smoothie.

Leo continued his interrogation, aware of the importance of gathering as much knowledge as he could, to share with the Grooters upon his return from this paradisiac Dream World.

First, he realised something: “Tell me Vatua, this is my Dream World where I am supposed to find some clues about addictions. But I don’t see any excesses of alcohol, speed driving, or various mind-enhancing drugs like I did in my previous Dream Worlds. How come?”

Vatua smiled. “This place is much more about addictions than what you think.”

“How so?”

“Has it ever come across to you that you may be addicted to beautiful women, Leo?”

“Busted, I guess. But is such an addiction bad? I mean it’s not heroin or gambling or alcohol.”

“Any addiction can be problematic. Unless... you manage to turn it into a positive purpose.”

Leo reflected for a while, then said: “You mean that with this school and research centre, I have managed to turn a potentially destructive addiction into a meaningful goal?”

“Exactly. And so have I,” admitted Vatua.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, I am. Listen, just take any average 20-year-old girl, with her cocktail of anxieties, bitchiness, lack of confidence, lack of knowledge, poor judgment, poor self-image, slightly overweight, etc. Just a normal young woman.”

“OK.”

“Now, after on average three years in this school, she will have become a beautiful, charming, confident, knowledgeable, kind, competent and positive woman. This is about far more than looks. The women that graduate from *Purotu*, will become amazing sources of inspiration for their sisters, as well as for their future daughters, and even sons.”

They looked at each other, had a sip of the vanilla smoothie, and laughed at themselves: two recovered addicts doing good for the world, while still managing to indulge in their addictions. Vatua admitted that she had suffered from severe nymphomania before she started *Purotu*. Although she still enjoys sex, she is much more grounded now.

Then Leo went on with his questions:

“So why is beauty for women so important?”

“Helena Rubinstein once said that there are no ugly women. Only lazy ones.”

“Yes, and?”

“Subconsciously, men know that if a woman is ugly, it is because she is to some degree lazy – mentally and/or physically – and if she is too lazy to take care of herself, how can the man then expect her to take care of their future children?”

“Really?”

“And the same is valid for men. If they can’t take care of themselves, how can women expect them to take care of a family?”

“Doesn’t what you say put huge pressure on those men and women who struggle to live up to the beauty/money standards?”

“I wish it was otherwise. But this is deeply-ingrained biological programming.”

“OK.”

“There is another thing: when a man looks at a truly beautiful woman, he can relax. Because of the structure I mentioned earlier, which is the same structure found in nature, or in exceptional architecture. When you sit and look at nature or a beautiful cathedral, your stress level drops. The same is true for beautiful people.”

“What about obese women? Can they come and study here, and you turn them into beautiful goddesses?”

“We are just a small school with limited capacities, and in the same way as Ivy League schools do not accept students who cannot read and write, students coming here need to be motivated. They don’t need to be perfect, but they need to prove genuine motivation and willingness to learn. We also tend to prioritise girls who later wish to teach others what they’ve learnt here.”

“So are obese women doomed?”

“No. We have extensive free online courses that aim at helping anyone become more beautiful. The thing to understand with obese people is that their problem is often linked to some childhood trauma, many of them were sexually abused at a young age.”

“That is so sad.”

“I agree. We can’t change the past, but we can change the future, there is hope for everyone. Then, next to the obvious facts that they eat badly and don’t do any physical exercise, another contributor to their obesity may be their lack of cultural identity. Which is why there are more obese people in New World countries like Australia or the United States.”

“So, what can they do?”

“Seek their ancestry roots, maybe start to learn the language of some of their ancestors, read about their history, etc. Every person’s journey is unique. We can only share what has worked for others based on our research.”

“And how do aesthetically challenged women and poor men find life partners?”

“Like attracts like. They settle for less. Put differently, they live a form of lie their whole life and this is then reflected in unhappiness, disease, cheating and divorce.”

“But there must be more to relationships than just looks and money?”

“Glad you asked. Yes, there is, and this research centre looks at the whole picture of beauty, both outer and inner.”

“Tell me!”

“Once you start to think in terms of energy, it will be easier to understand how love and relationships work.”

“Energy?”

“It has now been a scientific fact for over a century that when two or more magnetic domains in a metal point in the same direction, then energy is created.”

“But we are not pieces of metal.”

“We seem to have enough metal in our bodies for these Laws of Physics to be applicable to humans too.”

“What does this mean practically?”

“It means that when a man and a woman decide to build a life project together – in other words, when they start to point in the same direction – then energy is created.”

“The energy of love?” asked Leo but already knew the answer as he could feel the magnetic attraction between both of them.

“Yes, that’s one aspect of the energy of love. The full picture is a little more complex. So, very often when a relationship breaks apart, it is because the partners have started to point in different directions.”

This reminded Leo of what Aaron and Aurora had explained to Verity.

“OK, I understand it from a theoretical point of view. Could you give me a few concrete examples?”

“Sure. Pointing in the same direction often means building something together. It could be a family with children, or a house project, a travel project, or an artistic project. Or a business, which is our case with *Purotu Research Centre*.”

“Interesting.”



“This common direction fuels the love over the long term. Sure, I like your surfer body. But if we wouldn’t have common interests and challenges, our love for each other would fade away after a while.”

“I had never thought about love as a common project.”

“Far too few people do that actually, although it’s the key for long-term successful relationships.”

“And we’re about to change that.”

“Yes. It is also important to understand the difference between men and women. A man’s identity is on average much more strongly linked to his profession than a woman’s. There are of course exceptions.”

“What does that mean, precisely?”

“It means that if a man has a professional career that is important to him, but that he can’t feel the support of his partner because she is not interested in that project and only wants to make children, then the relationship is doomed. Men and women are then, at least partially, pointing in different directions. Even if he wants a family too.”

“OK.”

“Note that this is not just some random relationships advice. It is physics. And obviously, if the man is not or only mildly interested in his woman’s family or own career project, the Laws of Physics will also break up that relationship with 100% certainty.”

“What can couples do to make sure they point in the same direction?”

“Communicate. Communicate. Communicate. And the better you know yourself, your own values and the direction you want to head in, the easier it will be for you to explain that to prospective partners.”

Suddenly, a gorgeous woman approached their table. She acknowledged Vatua, then looked Leo straight into the eyes and said:

“Hi, my name is Tevahine. I’m up for a treat. If you’re game, let me know, I’m sitting over there.”

“Hi, Tevahine, I’m Leo. You look gorgeous. Please give me a few minutes to think about it.”

Tevahine walked back to where she was sitting with some fellow students at the other end of the cafeteria.

He looked at Vatua and said: “Did that just happen? Did that girl just come up to me, and asked for sex in front of you?”

As if nothing out-of-the-ordinary had happened, Vatua took out her tablet to look up something. “Let’s see... Tevahine... yes, my records show that she’s done her assignments and definitely deserves a treat. You’re lucky, she’s a third-year student.”

“I don’t know what she looked like in year one, but she certainly looks very attractive now,” said Leo. “But what about you? Is that fine with you?”

“I am a mentally, emotionally and sexually fulfilled woman, Leo. After work, I’ll prepare dinner for us, you can invite Tevahine too, if you want. Now, go and make a student happy.”

Leo gave Vatua a quick kiss to reassure her (and himself) that they were together whatever happened. Then he stood up, and walked over to Tevahine.

She presented him to her girlfriends, then both of them left the cafeteria to go to Tevahine’s room.

“Vatua told me you are a talented singer as well?” said Leo.

“I like to sing,” said the island beauty.

“Want to sing something for me?”

“Sure. It’s an old Tahitian legend.”

♪ *Terehe – Sabrina Laughlin*

Leo could feel some powerful ancestry in that song. It was so beautiful. And when Tevahine had finished singing he told her:

“What a beautiful song: I think it gave me both goose bumps and tears in my eyes at the same time. You have to perform to greater audiences.”

“You think so?”

“I am absolutely certain. Share your talent with the world.”

“Thank you.”

“Whatever this school was teaching, the results were stunning,” Leo thought to himself, while undressing the curvaceous beauty, first in his mind, and soon thereafter on her bed...

*“That was your last Dream World travel, Leo,” said Webbo, standing in for his friend, overseeing the experiment.*

**LEO BERGER – THIRD DWT – 04.05.2018**

Geneva, Switzerland, 6 May 2018

A few days later, the Grooters were having dinner at a lakeside restaurant in neighbouring France, just half an hour's drive from Geneva. Suddenly, Boss got a message and the other Grooters could see that he was worried.

“What was that about?” asked Leo.

“Heidi again. It seems like we're up for another challenge.”

“Not sure we want to hear,” said Verity. “But you need to tell us anyway. Have they captured the professor again?”

“No, but they threaten to tell the Brazilian authorities about the crystal we kind of stole in Rio.”

“What? How can they know that? What else do they know about us?”

“You probably don't want to know,” said Boss.

“It's your cursed Heidi, again,” said Leo.

“Yes, but remember she helped us find the professor who helped us find the crystals...”

“She's clearly playing on both sides,” said Webbo.

“Maybe she doesn't have a choice,” tried Boss, who still was fond of her.

“Well, it doesn't look like we have much choice either,” said Verity. “So, what's this challenge about?”

“Water falls... barrel,” said Boss.

“Niagara?” asked Richie, “That should be feasible, many people have survived.”

“No, Victoria Falls.”

“Oops...”

“If we see it from the bright side, we don't need to spend energy choosing a location this time around,” said Modella. “Where are the Victoria Falls?”

Because his mother was from Kenya, Webbo was the one who knew most about Africa. He said:

“The Victoria Falls between Zambia and Zimbabwe are twice as high as the Niagara Falls. And only about half of the attempts at Niagara were successful.”

“Has anyone tried to make the Victoria Falls in a barrel?” asked Modella.

“Not to my knowledge.”

“That no one has even tried is not a good sign.”

“Yes, but we’re the Grooters,” said Richie. “We should somehow be able to make it work. We could just put Leo in there, who then teleports somewhere else before the barrel hits the bottom of the falls.”

“Except,” said Boss, “that they want one of the girls to do it.”

Silence.

Then Leo said: “The way I see it, it doesn’t really matter who we put into the barrel, the main factor is going to be if the barrel can withstand the fall in the falls, as well as the current in the rapids below, until we can rescue it.”

“If it’s still in one piece,” added Webbo.

Both Verity and Modella were pale. And Richie was clearly very worried that Modella would have to do it.

They spent some time online to read about barrels and waterfalls. It seems like luck played a certain part in the daredevil’s survival. Or maybe even a big part.

“OK,” said Boss. “I think the first thing we need to decide is whether Verity or Modella is going to do it. There is nothing worse than being in the unknown.”

All the Grooters agreed about that.

However, unlike for their last challenge where Leo had volunteered, none of the girls seemed very eager about this suicide mission.

“Let’s toss a coin then,” suggested Boss. “And here is the way we’ll do it: I’ll toss the coin a maximum of five times, and the person who wins three times goes into the barrel.”

Verity and Modella nodded.

First toss: Verity won. Second and third toss: Modella won. Fourth toss: Verity. Final toss: Verity won.

“That’s probably what they call ‘winner’s curse’,” said Verity. But then something unexpected happened.

“Let’s think through this clearly,” said Leo.

“What do you mean?” said Boss.

“If luck is part of the game, then we should choose the luckiest of them to go into the barrel.”

“And?”

“And the luckiest of both seems to be Modella. Because she was not chosen, her survival estimation is closer to 100%. Whereas Verity’s survival probability is probably closer to 0%. So, if we think rationally, Modella should go.”

“But you can’t change the rules like that,” complained Richie.

“It is important that we take the most rational decision,” said Boss, approving Leo’s clear mathematical thinking.

He also reasoned to himself silently that love overcomes everything and that Richie’s love for Modella would make him go beyond the possible to make this work safely for her.

Boss continued:

“The good news is that the first woman who made Niagara in a barrel survived. The bad news is that we have to do it before the end of the month. The deadline is midnight, Geneva time, May 31<sup>st</sup>.”

“That gives us three and a half weeks,” said Leo.

Then Boss turned to Modella: “How do you feel about this?”

“For some reason, not as bad as I would have thought, but I am still very far from confident about it.”

“Good. Rest assured that we’ll do anything in our power to help you make this succeed.”

“Yes, I know, thank you.”

“So, Modella, can I confirm to Heidi that we’re up for the challenge and that you will do it?”

Modella looked at Richie, was silent for a while, then said:

“Yes.”

The Grooters drove back to Boss’ parents’ house. They had a brainstorming session straight away when they arrived.

This time, Richie launched the discussions: “Boss, did Heidi give any more instructions for the challenge?”

“Just that we need to film everything, both the closing of the barrel, and the opening, or at least the survival of the ‘traveller’. And we need to launch the barrel from Devil’s Pool, just at the edge of the falls.”

“Devil’s Pool?” exclaimed Leo.

“Yes, named so for a reason, I guess,” said Webbo, “It’s a tourist spot when the water is low from September to January.”

“Which means the water will probably be high now end of May,” said Richie. “But that may have advantages too, it’s better to fall in a lot of water than on rocks.”

“So,” continued Boss, “how shall we make this work?”

“Annie Edson Taylor, the first woman at Niagara, used a mattress inside the barrel.”

“That sounds like a rather good idea,” said Modella.

“Yes,” said Boss. “However, it will most likely not be enough. Webbo, can you calculate the impact speed at 100m versus the 50m of Niagara?”

“In any case,” said Richie, “we’ll have to assume that that speed is beyond survival, which leaves us only two options: either somehow manage to slow down the speed, or minimize the impact.”

“This sounds like the barrel would need parachutes and airbags,” said Verity.

“As far as I’ve understood, that would not be against rules,” said Boss.

“Or we could use rocket technology to slow down the barrel just before impact,” said Leo.

“Rockets in water? Parachute in water? Airbags in barrel?” asked Webbo sceptically.

“I’ll put my research teams to work straight away,” said Richie.

“This is going to be the most high-tech wine barrel in the world!” said Leo.

“We have no choice,” said Boss.

“What else can we do in the meantime?” asked Verity.

“*La nuit porte conseil,*” said Leo, “let’s sleep on it and see what more ideas we can come up with tomorrow.”

“Wise suggestion,” said Boss.

Modella was so happy that she had Richie’s comforting arms to hold her that night.

### The day after

At breakfast, Boss put out another idea:

“I think it would be good if Modella did some kind of emotional therapy to help her get rid of as many fears as possible, especially the ones directly linked to the barrel project.”

“What do you mean?” asked Modella.

“Well, if you have issues like fear of confinement, fear of heights, fear of death, or any other similar fears, there are various methods to make these fears at least partially go away.”

“You think that will help?”

“Yes. And I know a professional here in town who can guide you through this process.”

“Good idea,” said Richie, “I’ll go with you, Modella.”

“Thanks, Richie.”

“Anyone else has further ideas?” asked Leo.

“An additional thing we could do,” said Leo, “is to ask ourselves several times a day what more could help to make that barrel trip safe for Modella.”

“*Ask and you shall receive,*” said Webbo.

The day went by, Modella started her emotional training and Richie discussed in length possible solutions for the barrel with his team of researchers.

And the next morning, Leo told the other Grooters:

“Last night, while you were sleeping, I teleported to a few of my favourite spots where I regularly go to find inspiration. I saw two sunsets and three sunrises. Beautiful.”

“So, did you find any inspiration?” asked Richie.

“I did indeed.”

“Tell us.” said Verity.

“It’s funny I hadn’t thought of it earlier, because this is an area of my research that has taken up a lot of my time in the last few years.”

“And…”

“I thought about the fact that some people survived Niagara, while others not. Because they are all subject to the same Newtonian Laws of Physics and should therefore either all have survived or all have died.”

“Yes, but they also have protection from a barrel.”

“Agreed. But not all. At least five people have survived without any aid in the fall. Hurt, but not dead. How do you explain that? How would Newton explain it?”

“Luck,” said Webbo, “pure luck.”

“And how do you explain luck?”

“That’s the point with luck,” said Webbo, “it’s impossible to explain it.”

Leo asked Boss to show Webbo his wristwatch with the ‘impossible’ square cogwheel.

Then he continued: “With Newton’s Laws only, I agree, but several centuries have passed since that apple fell on his head, so maybe it’s time for a knowledge upgrade?”

“Knowledge upgrade?” wondered Boss. “Maybe you can get to the point?”

“The point is that if regular laws of physics cannot explain the real results that we are observing, then we need to find other laws that actually can explain those results.”

“So, you have new theories on physics?” asked Modella, who had a survival interest in this discussion.

“Yes, I call it the *Physics of Emotions*.”

“The *Physics of Emotions*?” wondered Verity. “Never heard about, and I’ve read a lot.”

“The overarching principle is extremely simple: take the analogy of a hot-air balloon: positive emotions ‘lift you up’, like the hot air in the balloon; and negative emotions literally ‘weigh you down’, like sand bags weigh down a balloon.”

“That’s it?” asked Boss.

“That’s it. The rest is just about learning to better understand the full spectrum of emotions so that you can maximize the positive emotions and minimize the negative ones.”

“Does that mean that we can fly? Or at least levitate?” wondered Modella.

“Theoretically, yes. But at the moment our goal is just to fill you up with enough positive emotions so that you can survive the barrel impact at the bottom of the Victoria Falls. And, at the same time, we’ll need to empty you of as many negative emotions as possible.”

“Is that the work I started to do with the therapist yesterday?”

“Yes. So, continue with that.”

“What more can I do?”

“I’d recommend you to focus on boosting yourself with positive emotions.”

“And how do I do that specifically?”

“First, you need love. And I know Richie loves you. Both of you should spend quality time together in the next three weeks.”



“We love you too,” said Verity.

“Thanks, Verity! What else?”

“After the emotion of love, the next positive emotion you want to build up is the emotion of joy. Music, for example. I had for a long time wondered why there weren’t more injuries and death caused by stage diving at concerts. And it seems like only my *Physics of Emotions* can explain this: it is the uplifting music that enables this phenomenon.”

“Yes, music is powerful,” confirmed Modella, who was passionate about music.

“So, Modella,” continued Leo, “listen to as much music as you can. The harmony and structure of quality music will make you stronger. Make sure you listen to your all-time favourite songs as much as you can in the coming weeks.”

“That certainly brings me joy,” she said. “Is there anything else I can do to maximize my joy?”

“Many things can give us joy, and one of the most powerful is probably sex. Quality sex.”

“I guess you’re right,” said Modella. “One literally feels lighter after sex.”

“Yes, that’s the *Physics of Emotions* at work, or rather, at play. Now, the next three weeks are not a time to be shy. You’ll have to aim for the most powerful orgasms of your life. Ask Richie to fulfill your wildest sexual fantasies. Your survival depends upon it.”

“Noted,” said Modella with a grin.

This whole discussion reminded Verity of her verbal and physical discussions with Aaron and Aurora in Québec City not so long ago. She started to connect the dots about things that could be done to beat gravity.

“Are there more things I can do?” wondered Modella.

“Yes,” said Verity. “I read a book where they described the importance of visualising the end goal you want to achieve. In your case, you may want to try and visualise yourself stepping out of the barrel alive and hugging us all after that and celebrating the event. Such a visualisation may actually be the difference between life and death.”

“Thanks, Verity, please remind me daily to do it.”

“I will.”

“Anything else?” asked Modella.

“Anything that can help you feel lighter,” said Leo. “It could be taking care of some overdue admin stuff or clean up and order your closets. If you like it, do meditate and go out in nature. Only you can know what is most likely to make you feel lighter. It is important that you are radically honest with yourself about all this.”

“Thanks, Leo.”

“Salt water is also uplifting,” added Verity.

“True,” said Richie, then turned to Modella: “How does a vacation in Zanzibar sound?”

“That sounds much nicer than jumping into one of the world’s largest waterfalls.”

“The warmth and the salty sea will help you lift your moods as high as possible,” said Richie, “and you’ll be fairly close to the Victoria Falls to avoid any travel tiredness that would weigh you down. ZNZ-VFA is only about a two-hour flight.”

“I like that plan,” said Modella, and kissed Richie.

“Let’s take the therapist with us and already fly down to Africa tomorrow,” said Richie.

“Shall we come with you?” asked Verity, who wouldn’t mind some beach vacation either.

“Modella,” said Boss, “that’s your decision.”

“Even if I will want to spend a lot of private time with Richie, I’d love to have all of you guys around.”

“Then we can fly to Victoria Falls a few days earlier to prepare everything,” said Boss.

“Thanks, guys!” said Modella who could feel the importance of all the Grooters’ support at this stage.

Richie’s best research brains had suggested to add a parachute feature to the barrel, although they only rated the probability of it being deployed successfully to around 50%. Still worth a try.

Then they analysed various mattress materials and chose the one with the biggest shock absorption quality. They also suggested that Modella wear a motorcycle helmet, a bulletproof vest with a life jacket above it, as well as construction worker boots.

And that she be equipped with a James Bond-like small oxygen tank and breathing device in case she gets stuck longer than expected under water. Also, she would have a detector device in the barrel so that the rescue team could locate her if needed. And a small waterproof radio-emitter for communication with the other Grooters.

Lastly, if the barrel were to break, she would have a self-inflating buoy that she could grab onto in the rapids below the falls. All this was a tight fit into the barrel, but tight was good as she didn’t want to tumble around inside the barrel. She would get enough tumbling anyway.

Richie's researchers had also analysed what the best barrel material would be. Would wood, encircled by super strong steel, survive the impact? Or was a more modern, lighter material better? Which one would best absorb the shock? Both options had advantages and disadvantages, and they decided to go for a classic wine barrel, slightly bigger than usual so that it could fit Modella and all the equipment.

The next tricky thing to organize was getting the barrel to Devil's Pool without getting arrested on the way. Richie reckoned his electric helicopter *Helectria* would be able to do the job.

Leo suggested they do it at sunrise before the tourist masses come. Everyone agreed.

They chose May 30<sup>th</sup> as their date, to give as much time as possible for Richie's team to build the barrel and gather all the equipment, and also so that they would have a day to spare in case something went wrong.

Richie had hired a professional guide to take them to Devil's Pool. Their plan was quite simple: pilotless *Helectria* would deliver the barrel to the pool. Then they expected the police to chase *Helectria*, which would land far away once out of electricity. And just a few minutes later, a regular helicopter would pick up the barrel from the water downstream, and put it on firm ground.

Webbo was positioned with a powerful camera on the Zimbabwean side just opposite Devil's Pool.

Boss, Leo and Richie helped Modella into the barrel, while Verity filmed them at short distance.

Just before closing the barrel, Richie kissed Modella, and asked her:

"How do you feel?"

"More zen than expected," she answered. Richie prayed that her feelings were correct.

"That's good," said Leo. It's very important to have a sense of inner peace before attempting things like this. Otherwise, you need to abort."

They pushed the barrel into the stream on the right-hand side of the pool.

Then everything went very fast. They were in radio contact with each other, they could hear Modella screaming during the fall. Webbo confirmed that the parachute had opened, but then got caught in the water. Hopefully it was enough to sufficiently slow down the fall of the barrel.

With all the mist at the bottom of the fall, they couldn't see the actual impact. They lost radio contact with Modella.

They waited and waited, and got more worried after each minute passing.

Then suddenly, when their hopes seemed lost, an intact barrel emerged from the water a bit further downstream.

♪ *Back to Life – Fidel Wicked*

While the barrel was under water, they couldn't communicate with Modella. But now they could hear her again:

“What a ride!”

“Are you OK?” asked Richie.

“I guess I am, my arms and legs hurt a little, though.”

The rescue was tricky, but Richie's pilot was exceptional. Richie had made sure to put all the resources at his disposal to make sure Modella survived.

The helicopter lifted up the barrel and put it down close to where Webbo was standing and watching the happenings. Webbo, and Leo, who had teleported over the falls, helped Modella out of it. She hugged them both and they all jumped into the helicopter, leaving a note on the barrel:

### **Victoria Falls... The Grooters Rise**

Back on *Lady Globalia*, Richie's on-board doctor examined Modella and said:

“A few bruises on the legs and arms, but she'll be alright again in a couple of days.”

“You are our hero,” said Boss to Modella.

“It's a miracle that I survived,” she said.

Leo, who had already teleported back to Geneva and was following the conversation over the Internet, said: “Not a miracle, not luck, simply a thorough understanding of the *Physics of Emotions*.”

“Thank you, Leo,” said Modella. “I guess I owe you one.”

Webbo uploaded the film, and about an hour later, Boss received an email from Heidi: “Well done, guys.”

He got the feeling that she seemed almost happy for them.

Thanks to *Lady Globalia*'s long-range capacities, they were already back in Geneva that same evening, but tired after the very long flight.

For once, they simply ordered pizza, and the conversation at one point turned to who was going to do the next Dream World travel.

“I’d say Modella is worth having her turn in paradise,” said Verity.

The other Grooters nodded.

“Thank you, guys, just give me a few days to recuperate, then I’ll be ready to fly.”

Modella woke up feeling very light, feeling well. She opened her eyes, looking down at some landscapes below. First, she was a little frightened, as she was not sitting in an airplane or helicopter. Neither did she have a Rocket Man-type of outfit like Richie and Leo in Arrendee.

Then she noticed that she could move around in the air, and she did not fall like a stone. She was flying!

“What an exhilarating feeling!” she told herself and tried out various pirouettes and accelerations.

She hadn't taken any classes on learning how to fly, although she may have subconsciously learned a few things from various song lyrics. So, she was literally learning on the fly.

♪ *Du kannst fliegen – Linda Föh*

Once she had started to master the main moves and how to stabilize and change altitude and accelerate and decelerate, she could better focus on what was beneath her.

“Where am I?” she wondered. The fact that she was in a Dream World was obvious, given her inability to fly in real life. And she soon got that confirmed, seeing the circle with the star in a wheat field in the country landscape below her.

That symbol reminded her of the mysterious crop circles she had read about, a mystery still unsolved as far as she knew.

Then she saw someone flying up toward her. It was an old, but still good-looking man.

It seems like she was not the only one having the ability to fly.

“Hi,” she said, as the man hovered in her proximity.

“Hi Modella, welcome to the Augusta Stretch, my name is Christopher. I am sure this place will stretch your imagination.”

The old man, maybe somewhere in his early eighties, reminded her of someone. She couldn't put her finger on where she had seen him, so she bluntly asked him.

“Thanks, Christopher. There's something familiar about you.”

“Yes, I'm Christopher Alexander.”

“Of course!”

He was Modella’s favourite architect and urban planner, in her mind a genius, with a capacity of clear thinking equalled only by very few people on this planet. He had been a major source of inspiration during her architecture studies, as his focus was on understanding how to build towns and buildings where people feel good.

Unlike most architects, he was looking at the big picture of the built environment, so he was equally interested in town planning and in building design. For Modella, that made intuitively sense, because every building is part of a landscape or townscape.

“Where are we?” she asked him, as she didn’t recognize the villages that she could see beneath her, and she had never heard of the Augusta Stretch.

“We are in your imagination,” he said jokingly.

“No need to remind me of that,” she said, doing another pirouette in the air, to confirm, mostly to herself, that she was very much in a Dream World.

“We are in Western Australia, on the south coast.”

She thought of the town of Augusta near Cape Leeuwin, the southwestern most point of the Australian continent.

“Ah! I know of the town of Augusta, which must be a bit further west, but why do you call the place the Augusta Stretch?”

“Because it stretches from Augusta to Port Augusta.”

“That’s quite a stretch indeed,” said Modella, guessing it must be at least 2,500km, over 1500 miles.

“Yes, about two thirds of the southern coast of Australia. It remained almost uninhabited until the 2030s, then new sustainable development projects were launched to properly settle this area.”

“I had always wondered why this region had not been developed more, because most of it has a decent climate with sufficient rain. At least the western half of the stretch.”

“Well, they found out that the local Aboriginal people had used some powerful white magic to prevent development in this part of the continent. They did not want it to be turned into another ugly Gold Coast or other automobile-focused suburbia with unhealthy architecture.”

“So, what triggered the change?” asked Modella as she could clearly see that the region was full of villages, small towns and a few bigger urban centres.

“I’d say a combination of factors. First, the Aboriginal Elders realised that ‘Country is lonely’, it needs more people to take care of it. And that isn’t only the case in Australia. It was reckoned that many bushfires in Southern Europe were also due to

the fact that farmers had moved to the city, leaving an insufficient number of people to take care of the land and forests in the countryside.”

“Somehow all this makes sense. What else triggered this change?”

“Overall higher ethics in the construction industry, simpler legislations, as well as better quality education of urban planners and architects.”

“Yes, all these changes sound like they would contribute positively to a nicer built environment.”

“Ah, and also some new laws preventing real estate speculation.”

“Finally,” thought Modella, who was fully aware of that problem in her profession.

“If you don’t mind,” said Christopher, “let us land somewhere and talk more over lunch. At my age, I shouldn’t be flying around so much any longer.”

“Sure,” said Modella. “Now that I have the big picture, I’m curious to see what’s on the ground.”

They flew down toward the coast.

“Let’s land in the Kambarang village centre,” said the old man.

“Wow!” said Modella as they approached and made a turning descent above the cliffs.

There were quite a few people walking on the promenade along the cliffs, supposed to be some of the most spectacular in the world, some parts of the cliffs are over a hundred meters high.

They found a nice restaurant on the promenade overlooking the Great Australian Bight.

“As you can see, this place has become very popular since people learnt to fly,” said her Dream World guide, pointing at the fenceless cliff edge where people took off and landed.

“Can everyone fly?”

“Yes, like swimming lessons, it’s now compulsory to learn at school.”

“It’s an absolutely amazing feeling, I must admit, better than sex!” said Modella uninhibitedly.

“You still need sex to make children,” responded Christopher in a matter-of-fact way.

“Another question,” said Modella, who remembered the importance of asking many questions in her Dream World travels. “As we flew over the now built-up landscapes



in this part of Australia, I felt I could recognise some of the patterns you wrote about.”

“Indeed, it turned out that my theories were sound, and now most urban planning strategies incorporate at least a few of these patterns in new town developments.”

Modella remember having been fascinated by Christopher Alexander’s book *A Pattern Language* that he and his team published a few years before she was born.

“That being said,” admitted the old man, “my knowledge alone has been insufficient to develop towns with harmonious architecture.”

“So, what was missing?”

“Some theories around proportions and the Golden Number, as well as Greek and Roman architectural orders and various insights from other great cultures of human history.”

Modella observed the buildings in Kambarang and although some aspects reminded her of European architecture, there was more to them, the buildings felt genuinely Australian. So, she asked Christopher:

“But there must be something more.”

“There is indeed: Indigenous knowledge. Although most Aboriginal cultures of this continent did not have architectural buildings as we conceive them, they had tens of thousands of years of knowledge about Australia, and have worked together with non-Indigenous planners and architects to mould our built environment into a genuine local new Australian architectural style.”

“The result is amazing,” said Modella enthusiastically. “I can feel very positive vibes that I have only seldom come across in the real world.”

Modella then asked Christopher, as they sat and people-watched the cliff promenade: “People look so healthy, radiating, is that the effect of flying?”

“Only in part,” responded the genius architect. “Flying is more like sex or physical exercise in general: it is positive for your health, but by itself not sufficient for emotional stability and enduring health.”

“What are the other ingredients?”

“Nutrition, obviously, which you are already aware of. But there are many other things, too. For example, social connections have been proven to be the most solid health predictors throughout many health studies over the last few decades.”

“And how can social connections be facilitated?” Modella knew that schools and universities were fairly good for that, albeit not the online versions, but once out in the “real” professional world, she found it much more difficult to get to know people and have quality social connections.

“Third places.”

“Third places?”

“Yes, places like this which are neither home nor workplace, where people can meet.”

“But we already have quite a few cafés, pubs and bars and restaurants.”

“I know, the problem are the unwritten social rules and inner fears of people that prevent them from talking to strangers.”

“So, what’s the solution?”

“See, here for example, the bar next door is a place where you can go if you just want to meet new people. There are no ‘cliques’ and you are welcome to join any conversation at any time. Other people will approach you too.”

“OK.”

“Then there are places specifically for single people, or people who want to find new intimate partners.”

“Another third place is parks and playgrounds and barbecue sites where families with children get to know other families.”

“That’s more common in real life.”

“Yes,” confirmed Christopher. “And finally, there are third places like the restaurant we are sitting in now where you go to have more in-depth conversations with someone, be it for romance, for business, for education, or any other purpose.”

“I guess we can file our conversation under ‘education’?”

“I’d say so, as it is my wish to share all the knowledge that I have gathered during my long career as an architect and urban planner.”

“Thank you,” said Modella genuinely. “Your books have been a major inspiration for me during my architecture studies and I use at least some of your patterns in most of my professional projects.”

“I am glad to hear that, because I think that somehow my understanding of architecture was a little ahead of its time.”

“Yes, Christopher, you were at least half a century ahead of your time. But as we see with Nikola Tesla, sooner or later mainstream people end up catching up with geniuses.”

“Thanks, Modella. I guess the main thing that most people do not understand about the patterns of *A Pattern Language* that I wrote, is the psychological unease that our patterns solve. And these architectural patterns lead to better health. Because when these patterns are not followed, people in a city street or in a building will not feel relaxed, they will stress. And stress causes disease.”

“More precisely, why is it so?” asked Modella, hoping that Christopher would be able to share some important insights that could benefit the Grooters’ Pact, and thus her parents and other people as well.

“You see, every human being has a subconscious mind that analyses everything, and has an incredible capacity to identify and feel when something is wrong, be it with a building, a landscape, or a person’s dress or behaviour.”

“I can confirm that,” said Modella, who, like the other Grooters, was more sensitive to the environment than the majority of people.

“Now, identifying that something is wrong, that’s the easy part. The tricky part is to know what alternative would put our subconscious to rest, what would create inner peace in a given situation. And that’s the research my team and I did for several decades. Unfortunately, it only covers architecture and urban planning, but the basic idea of patterns is applicable to all fields of human endeavour.”

“Maybe you could give one or two examples of your patterns?”

“Sure, take T-junctions. When you drive and arrive at a T-junction, your subconscious will feel more at peace than at a regular four-way intersection. And accident statistics confirm that they are much safer. Roundabouts are a great alternative, too.”

“And for architecture?”

“One of my favourite patterns is the one about the importance of having windows on at least two sides of every room. The reason for this is that our subconscious feels that there is something wrong when there is not sufficient light and it is hard to read other people’s facial micro-expressions.”

“But how is that linked to health?”

“Very good question, young lady. As I said, our subconscious registers all these subtle problems, and when it identifies something that is wrong, it puts itself into solution searching mode, which takes up a lot of brain energy.”

“And what are the consequences of that?”

“The same as for a computer where there are plenty of programs running in the background: they slow down the computer, and eventually the computer crashes. And that’s when diseases, accidents or death kick in for human beings. The computer slowing down are warning signs that need to be taken seriously and addressed.”

“Unfortunately, our knowledge on how to address health issues are not very good.”

“That’s your task to find out with your Grooters team. I hope to have contributed with a few pieces of the puzzle.”

“You definitely have, Christopher. Thank you so much for your time and insights.”

“You’re welcome. To summarise, the subtlety of the patterns in *A Pattern Language* is that they identify and resolve psychological conflicts linked to urban planning or

architecture. And as long as the causes for these conflicts are not removed, we will have both inner and outer human conflicts in the world.”

“I understand.”

“That’s why we have so many quarrels, or worse, without any obvious explanations. Resolve the patterns and quarrels should dissipate. And learn about *feng shui* too, I think it complements my own work.”

“I am well aware of *feng shui*, but it’s not that easy to get perfectly right.”

“You need to combine it with more knowledge, like the pattern language.”

“This is so helpful, thanks Christopher.”

“Thank you for listening, Modella. And know that the Augusta Stretch is not only your Dream World, it is my dream too. That’s the kind of world I always wanted to build.”

Last time she checked in the real world, Christopher was over 80 years old, and would probably no longer be around to see the Augusta Stretch and Kambarang being developed, but she made a pact with herself to do whatever she could to share his knowledge so that one day, this continental paradise could be built.

Christopher could feel her thoughts and said: “Yes, my days are counted now, but you can reach me in the next dimension should you have any important questions that you think I can answer.”

“I know,” said Modella, feeling so fortunate about her superpower to communicate with deceased people.

With no further words, he affectionately put his hand on hers, then stood up, walked up to the cliff edge, started to hover, and then flew away toward the ocean horizon.

Modella sat on the restaurant terrace for a good while, meditating about their conversation. Then she rose too, and walked around in Kambarang, taking in the surreal surroundings, watching people and carefully observing the architecture of the buildings, trying to understand what made them so beautiful and harmonious. The great thing is that she could now fly around and see the town and buildings from above, from all angles and perspectives, far better than just watching a drone footage. Flying was an architect’s and town planner’s dream ability.

She came to the conclusion that the Aboriginal artwork on buildings was the main ingredient that made this place unique on Earth. Additional harmony was created because people were dressed with clothes having Aboriginal paintings on them.

But there was more to this place. The gardens had no fences, which allowed the kangaroos to come and mow the lawn whenever they felt like. Modella also observed how black swans were helping people to extract weeds from their flower gardens. That long neck was certainly useful for such tasks!

And one resident she stopped to have a chat with showed her the small birdhouses she had installed for micro-bats who eat up thousands of the notorious Australian *mozzies* (\*mosquitoes) every night so that they don't bother the human species. Modella was also told that the reason there were now so many trees in this formerly arid region is that they renamed the *Nullarbor Plain*, *Arbor Essence*.

“Could the name of a place have such a huge impact?” wondered Modella.

Expecting to hear Leo's voice soon, she took the opportunity to fly more and re-live that incredible sensation as much as possible before her return. She then flew over the cliff edge, down to the ocean surface where the waves were crashing into the cliffs, then out at sea a bit further where she could spot whales and dolphins.

“What an extraordinary feeling!” she told herself. “I can fly!”

Back with her feet on the ground at the top of the cliff, she thought to herself: “But how does this flying actually work? There must be an explanation?”

Suddenly, a handsome Aboriginal man walking by told her: “There are explanations for everything in this universe. *Kaya*, I'm Waugal, by the way.”

“*Kaya*, I'm Modella, nice to meet you. And where can I find these explanations?”

“Well, libraries contain a lot of knowledge. Book libraries, digital libraries and the Internet, as well as natural libraries.”

“Natural libraries?”

“Yes, many explanations and answers can be found in landscapes and in nature, even in the sky dome at night. These are the libraries that have been used for tens of thousands of years by Indigenous people all over the world. And then there's the Dreamtime library.”

“Dreamtime library?”

“Yes, explanations that you get through your dreams, particularly lucid dreams. We've used this library for a very long time on this continent.”

“Fascinating,” answered Modella. “So, I'm actually in the middle of the Dreamtime library right now?”

“Yes, you are. Welcome to our world,” confirmed the Indigenous man.

“Now, if this is the Dreamtime library where I can access answers? I'd like to understand more how people are able to fly here – without any technological help. How does it work? And will we ever be able to fly like this in our waking lives?”

“Yes. Remember someone said ‘*This, and much more you can do.*’?”

“Jesus, I think,” answered Modella, also remembering her *WOW* boots in Moovia.

“Exactly. So, walking on water is just a small example of many amazing things that humans can do.”

“Which means that flying, too, will one day be feasible, for us, mere mortals?”

“Yes,” confirmed Waugal.

Modella pushed on with questions: “So, what do we need to know and understand?”

“First some basic physics. How does a hot-air balloon work? Why is it able to fly?”

“Some lighter-than-air gas lifts up a small weight.”

“Yes, now, as you can see with hot-air balloons or airships, you need a huge amount of such a light gas, be it hydrogen, helium or hot air, to lift a tiny mass, the basket or gondola with a few people in it.”

“OK.”

“Now, let’s switch our thinking from regular physics to the *Physics of Emotions*.”

“Yes, I’ve heard of that,” said Modella, clearly remembering Leo’s teachings before her recent waterfall stunt.

“It’s simple: positive emotions lift us up, negative emotions weigh us down.”

“That sounds logical.”

“It is. And like for hot-air balloons, you will need a huge amount of positive emotions to lift up a small weight of negative emotions. Simple maths.”

“So, the reason why humans cannot fly in our dimension is that they have too many negative emotions weighing them down?”

“Precisely. There are a few exceptions. Some Indian yogis manage to levitate, and a few of our Aboriginal medicine men have been able to fly. But these are extremely rare cases that one has not been able to record because these people vibrate on far higher levels than most humans.”

“Can you give me an example of a negative emotion that prevents us from flying?”

“Emotions are linked to beliefs. So, if you for example stand on a rooftop or on the edge of a cliff and don’t believe that you can fly, then you won’t be able to lift off. Your fear to fall is too big, and your few positive emotions are not sufficient to let the ‘balloon’ soar skywards.”

“But it feels impossible to achieve this in waking life.”

“You see, that’s your limiting belief, a major negative emotion that is a fulfilling prophecy.”

“You got me. So, what can we do?”

“Learn to fly.”

“Sure, but last time I checked learning to fly was not on schools’ curricula.”

“I grant you that. But it should be and will be in a not-too-distant future.”

“So where can I learn to fly?”

“Music. Dreams. Books. Dreams are obvious. This is what you are doing now. And even once you’ve used up your credits with Dimenport’s machine, you should learn lucid dreaming so that you can come back here or elsewhere in the Dreamtime and train your flying skills.”

“And what about music?”

“Haven’t you noticed how many song lyrics talk about flying?”

“I certainly have.”

“Well, some of these songs are clear or sometimes hidden instruction manuals with pieces of knowledge that will help you solve the flying equation.”

“Really?”

“Yes, so you need to analyse, not only the subtle meanings of the lyrics, but also the structure of the melody, and how they fit together.”

“Many of my favourite songs involve flying,” said Modella.

“For a reason,” said Waugal.

“And what about books,” she wondered.

“Like songs, books too contain pieces of the puzzle. Check with your librarian.”

Modella thought of Verity. She must certainly have come across some books that may contain hints. Librarians have so much knowledge, but we must ask them the right questions.

“Thank you so much Waugal,” said Modella and gave him a big hug.

“You’re welcome, I’m glad more people are starting to catch up with our knowledge about the Dreamtime.”

Modella walked around to discover more of this wonderful place. She came to a small park, with a little lake in the middle. She sat down and reflected on her feelings, especially those linked to flying.

Then she told herself that it would be even more amazing to fly with someone she loved. She had read in a book on lucid dreaming that she could create anything she wanted in her dreams.

So, she thought: “Maybe I could have Richie come over for a visit?”

A few moments later, she heard a voice behind her: “See what a gorgeous woman I found in the park.”

“Richie!” exclaimed Modella, jumped to her feet and gave him a hug, followed by a kiss.

“You called me?”

“Yes, kind of. Richie, you must experience this exceptional feeling of flying, and without any technological help.”

She kissed him again, then took his hand and started to run until both of them lifted off the ground.

“Wow!” said Richie. “This is so cool, and what a sensation, I’m feeling so light.”

“I absolutely wanted you to experience this,” said the beautiful blonde architect.

They embraced in the air, then held hands and flew higher up above the small coastal town, then over the cliffs, out over the ocean where they could spot whales spitting out water right below them in the turquoise waters.

♪ *Su di Noi – Pupo*

Then they flew back over firm ground, over the vastness of the fields and forests that connected the hundreds of villages in the Augusta Stretch.

*“That was your last hopping,” said Leo.*

“Woow!!!!” screamed Modella when she woke up. “That Dream World definitely stretched my imagination. What a feeling! I can fly!”

### **MODELLA D’ALLEMO – THIRD DWT – 05.06.2018**

As they watched Modella’s latest Dream World travel together, Modella whispered in Verity’s ear:

“Trust me, this is better than the best sex you’ve ever had.”

“Seriously?”

“Yes, it’s an indescribable feeling of lightness, I hope you’ll be able to experience it one day.”



Verity reflected on what Modella just said and thought back on her discussions and experience with Aaron and Aurora in Québec. Then she realised that flying must have to do with the upward energy that they described, and that people feel when they are in love.

“So, maybe flying is something like love on steroids?” she told Modella.

“Maybe. In any case the English word *love* is a perfect anagram for the French word *vole*, fly!”

“Yes, and sometimes you need to open the fly to access love,” said the naughty blonde, and they both giggled.

Geneva, Switzerland, 21 June 2018

Again, the Grooters took some time off to brainstorm solutions for their Pact and get an incubation period for new inspiration to come before they ‘used up’ their last three Dream World travels.

The Grooters had just started their breakfast on the terrace of Boss’ parents’ house when Verity said:

“I had a very weird dream last night.”

“Tell us.” said Modella.

“I dreamt I was at Stonehenge, but somehow not the ruined version most of us know of. Instead, it was complete, as if new.”

“Maybe you dreamt about an ancient time just after it had been built a few thousand years ago?” said Leo.

“No, wait... it gets weirder. There were kangaroos jumping around Stonehenge.”

“What?!” said Webbo. “This certainly sounds like one of those totally irrational night dreams that we all have from time to time.”

“Yes, I’ve had plenty of those dreams,” said Verity, “but this one felt more real, more like a lucid dream.”

“Real?” asked Webbo. “You must be kidding. Kangaroos jumping around a non-ruined Stonehenge. That sounds typical of a night dream where weird scenarios are built in our minds.”

“What makes you think it’s real?” wondered Modella, ignoring Webbo.

“Because I received a clue in the dream.”

“What kind of clue?” asked Boss.

“I met with a group of Aboriginal people who were sitting around a campfire in the centre of the Stonehenge circle.”

“What?” exclaimed Leo.

“And what did they tell you?” asked Modella.

“They told me to *look up ‘up’* on world maps and that would help us find the Crystal of Curiosity.”

“Cool,” said Richie. “We have a name for our next crystal!”

“*Look up up?* How’s that for a strange message?” said Leo.

“Remember that the clues to the crystals can’t be too obvious so that bad intentioned people don’t find and decipher them,” said Boss.

“Well, one thing is sure, this clue, if it’s a genuine one, is very far from obvious,” said Leo.

“Ok, guys,” said Webbo, “I think we’ll need to do some Internet digging if we’re to solve this riddle.”

So, after breakfast they all spent some time on their computers and then gathered in the living room after two hours to see what they had come *up* with.

Modella and Boss hadn’t found anything special, except two small localities in New South Wales and Queensland named Stonehenge. Not too surprising, given the Union Jack on Australia’s flag.

But Verity and Leo were more upbeat because they had stumbled upon some very interesting facts. Verity’s photo reading skill had enabled her to go through a few hundred more websites than the others within the same timeframe. And Leo, because of his exceptional map knowledge and out-of-the-box thinking abilities.

“Tell us, what did you come up with?” said Boss.

Verity started: “I now understand why my dream felt so real.”

“Why?” asked Modella.

“Because the place I described to you earlier really exists.”

“What?” exclaimed Richie, “A Stonehenge in Australia?”

“Yes, a full-size replica.”

“You must be kidding. Those stones are four meters high,” said Webbo.

“They are indeed. Built in 2011, close to Esperance, a remote town 700km from Perth, on Western Australia’s south coast.”

“Kind of strange,” said Modella.

“Very interesting,” said Boss. “Webbo, can you check if there’s a crystal hidden there?”

“Probably not, as we’ve already found one in Australia, and this construction is very recent.”

“Check anyway.”

Webbo did and as expected he couldn't locate any crystal there.

“OK,” said Boss, turning to Verity and Leo. “What else have we got? Anything regarding this *up up* clue?”

Verity continued: “Yes, first of all the name of the place where the Esperance Stonehenge is located is called *Myrup*. I found out that the suffix *-up* means ‘place of’ in the Noongar Aboriginal language, which is the language spoken in the whole southwestern corner of Western Australia, from about 100km north of Perth and down to Augusta in the south and beyond Esperance in the east.”

Leo took over: “We looked up a map and there are plenty of places in that part of Western Australia that have names ending with *up*. But only in that part of Australia.”

“But didn't the Aborigines in your dream tell you to look up ‘*up*’ on a world map, Verity?”

“Yes, but the world is quite big.”

Leo jumped in: “Fortunately we got a lead, the kind of lead that seems obvious, but only in hindsight.”

“What kind of lead?” wondered Modella.

“As we looked at the names of various places in southwestern Western Australia, we stumbled upon two uncommon locality names: *Denmark* and *Bornholm*.”

“*Bornholm* is a Danish island, south of Sweden,” said Modella, whose Scandinavian knowledge was the best of all the Grooters because of her Swedish ancestry on her mother's side.

“You're right, Modella,” said Verity. “So, we looked up Denmark on the map and found out that there are tons of names of places in Denmark, the country, ending with, you guessed it... *-up!*”

“Thumbs *up* for that discovery,” said Webbo.

“That can't be a coincidence, can it?” asked Richie.

“What do you think?” asked Boss, “that the Crystal of Curiosity would be hidden in one of the towns in Denmark having a name ending with *-up?*”

“That's *up* to us to find out,” said Verity. “But there are simply too many places in Denmark with such names.”

“We need additional information,” said Boss.

“Which we might already have,” said Leo. “Remember the clue Verity received when she was in Shoparadise?” He wrote the sentence again on a piece of paper.

**A crystal is buried a ship's length from the ship on higher ground.**

“You think that clue concerns the Crystal of Curiosity?” asked Modella.

“Well,” said Boss looking at the four crystals on the fireplace. “We’ve found the other crystals, if we include the Crystal of Love, so the hint Verity received in Shoparadise must be for the Crystal of Curiosity. And a Jules Verne book about going to the Moon is certainly linked to curiosity.”

“Let our curiosity guide us to find out,” said Leo, who was especially eager about this crystal because all the research he did was truly ‘curiosity-led’.

“Well, then,” said Boss, “let’s line *up* all the clues we have at the moment: Stonehenge, a place ending with *up*, most likely in Denmark, and the crystal buried close to a ship.”

They all spent more time on the Internet trying to come up with more ideas on how to solve this puzzle. Nothing.

“Let’s have lunch,” proposed Leo, “to let our brains sort out this mess.”

“Idea incubation. You’re a genius, Leo,” said the others.

“Everyone can use idea incubation to get almost any answer they seek.”

After lunch, Modella realized something: “I remember from my Swedish history class that Denmark once occupied southern Sweden for a fairly long period of time before 1658. Maybe we should extend our search?”

“Good idea,” said Boss.

Leo had a look at the map of Scania for a while, then confirmed: “Indeed, there are several place names in southern Sweden who also end with *up*. Not as many as in Denmark, but at least a dozen. Still tricky, but if it’s Sweden, then this narrows down our search substantially.”

After another frustrating hour of online search, Modella shouted: “I got it!”

She had of course the non-negligible advantage of being able to read the websites written in Swedish, and had finally managed to solve the riddle.

“Are you sure?” asked Boss.

“Yes, three out of three.”

“What do you mean?”

“1. Stones; 2. A place ending with *up*; 3. A ship. On higher ground.”

♪ *Higher Ground – Rasmussen*

She showed them a satellite picture on her screen. It was obvious.

“Where is this?” asked Verity.

“It’s a megalithic ship-shaped monument called *Ales Stenar*, or *Ale’s Stones*, postal code Löderup, in the south-eastern corner of Scania in southern Sweden.”

“Cool, it looks really nice,” said Verity.

“I visited the place once with my parents when I was a little girl. I just remember the breathtaking location, slightly elevated above the sea. And guess what you can see from there on a clear day?”

“The island of Bornholm!” exclaimed Leo, confirming his incredible geography knowledge.

“Yes.”

“Well,” said Boss. “I’d now say that the final verdict is with Webbo.”

Webbo closed his eyes and remote-roamed the area around the monument that comprised 59 megalithic stones. Then he said:

“The clue from Shoparadise was correct. I can sense a crystal about sixty meters from the north-western tip of the ship.”

“Yes!” exclaimed all the other Grooters at the same time.

“Take it easy, guys,” said Verity. “We don’t have the crystal in our hands yet.”

“I suggest we don’t lose a minute,” said Richie. “Let’s drive straight to GVA and take *Lady Globalia* for a swing to the tropical part of Sweden.”

“Good idea,” said Boss. “And Leo, could you already teleport there to give us some details about the location?”

“Sure, I’ll do that. And send you some photos.”

“Thanks,” said Modella.

Then Leo went up to his room, packed his usual backpack, and teleported straight north to Sweden. Although the cardinal directions are quite irrelevant when it comes to teleportation wormholes.

Half an hour later, he called Modella, who was on her way with the other Grooters to the airport:

“Absolutely beautiful place, indeed, and although far less crowded than Stonehenge, there are quite a few tourists around, I’d recommend we do the operation by night, the

location is accessible around the clock. By the way, they seem to be preparing for some event.”

“Thanks, Leo,” said Modella. “Yes, I’m glad it isn’t Stonehenge. The event is for *midsommarafton*, midsummer night, Sweden’s most important holiday, to celebrate the longest day of the year. It’s tomorrow evening. Let’s stay an extra day, it could be a wonderful night.”

“Not a cloud in the sky here,” said Leo. “And not too hot, either.”

“Nothing beats a true Swedish summer day, when the weather plays its part. We’re due to take off in about thirty minutes, then a two-hour flight to *Sturup* and once landed, we should need less than an hour to get to you.”

“*Sturup*, you said? Another place with *up*?”

“Yes, that’s Malmö’s airport, the main airport in southern Sweden.”

“Sorry, my knowledge about airports is very limited, I prefer teleports,” said Leo.

“Yeah, just brag... And did you know that even Copenhagen’s airport has a name ending with *up*: *Kastrup*.”

“Appropriate names for airports, I must say.”

“I agree, and much shorter than to say Malmö or Copenhagen International Airport.”

“Cool, see you soon,” said Leo. “I’m going to grab a shrimp toast and a beer.”

“Christella booked us rooms in Ystad, that’s as close as we could find anything,” said Richie.

“Thanks,” Richie, said the others.

### *Ystad, Sweden, 21 June 2018*

All the Grooters gathered in their hotel in Ystad in the early evening. Leo had managed to buy two shovels before the stores closed. Now they could have a good dinner, then just head out to Ales to dig up the crystal once it got dark.

They had rented a small van so they could all fit into one vehicle. Shortly before 9PM, they drove to Ales, so they could still catch the sunset.

“It’s absolutely wonderful,” said Verity, as they walked up the small hill to the megalithic stones.

The others nodded, all of them stunned by the setting with perfect views over the Baltic Sea.

“If *midsommarafton* is tomorrow, how come there are so many people here tonight?” asked Webbo. “That might make our operation a bit trickier.”

“I hadn’t thought about that,” said Modella. “But I just realised that today is the 21<sup>st</sup> of June, which is the actual summer solstice, the longest day of the year when the sun perfectly aligns with the megaliths.”

“And?”

“And there are plenty of sun-worshippers who come here to celebrate this event specifically.”

“Oh, no,” said Leo. “It looks like there is a group who have set up tents exactly where we are supposed to dig.”

“Well, in that case, we can only wait until tomorrow,” said Modella. “It forces us to stay and celebrate both the summer solstice and *midsommarafton*.”

“Aren’t they the same?” asked Verity.

“Not exactly, *midsommarafton* is always on a Friday evening, and the summer solstice always on the longest day, usually the 21<sup>st</sup>, whatever day of the week that happens to be,” explained Modella.

As the sun got closer to the horizon over the flat Scanian landscape, the Grooters could first-hand observe how it aligned with the ship-shaped megalithic monument.

When the sun sets at the bow of the ship, which points northwest, it is summer solstice. And when it rises at the stern it is winter solstice in December.

Although all the Grooters had read about all this on the Internet, it was still emotional to actually experience it for real.

Once the sun had set, and the days of the coming six months would get shorter and shorter, the Grooters drove back to their hotel in Ystad.

“Don’t worry, guys,” said Modella, “this gives us time to prepare a great picnic for *midsommarafton*. I suggest we celebrate it out at Ales Stenar, and then dig up the crystal in the night, after everyone has left.”

The morning after, they strolled around Ystad, and bought everything they needed for the picnic: *knäckebröd*, potatoes, herring, salad, and very importantly, the succulent seasonal Swedish strawberries. With vanilla ice cream, of course.

And luckily, they could take a few bottles of beer and akvavit from *Lady Globalia*’s well-stocked bar, so they didn’t have to queue at *Systembolaget*, as it was the alcohol-monopoly’s busiest day of the year.

They drove out to Ales Stenar mid-afternoon.

Again, they took in the beauty of the surroundings and Webbo placed a small stick in the grass where they were to dig later that night. This time, there was no one camping on their digging spot. Actually, they decided to have their picnic exactly on that spot



to make sure no one would put up any tents there that night. So, they extended a few blankets, and placed the ice coolers and picnic baskets there.

Modella explained the midsummer rituals to the other Grooters, because only Richie was aware of this North European tradition. They found it funny how the Swedes, both children and adults were dancing around the midsummer pole, neatly decorated with leaves and flowers.

The other Grooters could feel how this event resonated with Modella. Living abroad, she hadn't often had the opportunity to celebrate Swedish midsummer properly, especially in Buenos Aires, where it was winter in June.

Modella gently pushed the other Grooters into the dancing rings around the May pole that had been erected on one side of the megaliths. After a few drinks, they all danced eagerly. Family and children's songs slowly made way for more disco-style music as the evening went on.

### ♪ *Främling – Carola*

It was one of Modella's finest midsummers, and she was convinced the others enjoyed it too. There was still a hint of daylight at 11PM, but then they got a few short hours of night. The midsummer party went on until late, and the last group of people only left at 2AM.

"Fine," said Modella. "Let's all go for a swim to sober *up*, then let's go dig *up* that crystal."

At around 2.45AM, they armed themselves with shovels and went to successfully dig up yet another crystal. Soon thereafter, they could see some daylight at the horizon.

"Let's stay here and enjoy the sunrise," said Richie.

"Good idea," said the others.

Then Verity said: "Modella, you solved the riddle that enabled us to find this crystal, so you'll have the honour of opening the package."

"Thanks, Verity, but I could only solve it thanks to your Esperance Stonehenge dream," replied Modella.

"In ice hockey, we call that an assist," said Richie, whose Finnish DNA had been fired up thanks to the night's drinking.

"Why don't both of you open it then?" suggested Webbo.

The Grooters girls eagerly opened the tin box they had just dug up, in which they found another leather pouch. The brownish Crystal of Curiosity had the form of a ship's sail, mounted on a wooden ship hull shape. And with it came a message.

### **Let your curiosity show you the direction.**

The sun rose before 4.30AM, and a little after that they drove back to Sturup. Except Leo, who teleported straight back to his bedroom in Geneva. They were glad Verity hadn't drunk very much so she could drive them safely to the airport. They boarded *Lady Globalia* which could take off when the first morning flights were allowed to leave.

On the plane, Boss, the only Grooters speaking German, pointed to the fact that the word for curiosity was literally 'new-greed' in German.

"Yes, and in French there is a saying that curiosity is a bad habit," added the Grooters' living encyclopedia.

"Let's take a step back," said Richie. "I think there is much more positive than negative about curiosity. Like fire or a knife, it can also have negative effects, but most of the time, curiosity is positive. Just think about the *Curiosity* rover on Mars."

The other Grooters agreed and felt a sense of peace about that crystal too, and its importance for the soon-to-be-completed Crystallica.

Geneva, Switzerland, 23 June 2018

Back in Geneva, Boss put up a map on one of the walls in the *Dreamcockpit* and pinned the places where they had found their first crystals: Sydney, Marrakesh, Rio, Boston, Scania.

Five crystals were now decorating the fireplace in Boss' parents' house.

They kind of had already found another crystal as well – the Crystal of Love – right there in Geneva's old town, but it was stuck in a parallel dimension, and that was a really hard nut to crack even with Leo's *dimensionomics* insights.

"How many more crystals do you think there are?" asked Modella.

"Difficult to say," responded Boss. "We are certain there are at least six of them. I guess then we'll see if six are sufficient to fire up Crystallica."

"Wait," said Leo. "We've found crystals on all continents. Except Asia. It kind of makes sense there would be one hidden there as well. What do you think?"

"I just hope there isn't one in Antarctica, it's too cold there," said Verity.

"Agree with you, but we can't exclude it."

“Well,” said Richie, “if there is a crystal frozen under tons of ice, then I am not sure that even my technology can help us retrieve it.”

“OK,” said Boss. “Let us just assume that the remaining crystals are hidden in milder climates. Then in which countries do you think that could be?”

“Definitely Asia,” said Verity.

“Yes, that would make sense,” said Leo.

“But Asia is fairly big,” commented Richie.

“What about sub-Saharan Africa?” said Webbo.

“And Central America?” added Modella.

“We can’t rule out any of them yet,” said Boss. “Do we have any additional clues?”

“Not for the time being,” said Leo, “I think we need another incubation period.”

“And a beer.” said Boss.

“Didn’t you get enough at *midsommar*?” asked Modella.

*Toledo, Spain, 8 July 2048*

The ambiance in the room was very serious, one could feel some kind of weight but at the same time some immense excitement. On the one side of the table sat a panel of middle-aged persons most of which already had grey hair. And on the other side sat a young couple, about thirty years of age.

The man in the middle of the panel told them:

“Are you absolutely sure you want to do this?”

“*Si señor,*” responded the young man.

“And you, Ms. Eltiempo?”

“*Si señor,* we have trained several years for this.”

“So, you are aware that if you decide to go on with this, you will officially be declared missing after midnight today? Mr. Cadadia?”

“*Si señor,* we are perfectly aware of that.”

“But we are absolutely convinced that the importance of the mission is worth it,” added the young woman.

“And you have understood that the injection will mean an irreversible change in your DNA?”

“*Si señor,*” they both responded simultaneously.

“As for you, Ms. Eltiempo, you are aware that you will no longer be able to become pregnant.”

“*Si señor,*” answered the attractive woman, thinking that that problem has its advantages too.

“And you know that after midnight you will no longer be able to reach out to us for help.”

“We are perfectly aware of that too, *señor,*” said the woman.

“Have you said goodbye to all your friends and family?”

“Yes, we have,” said Mr. Cadadia. Ms. Eltiempo nodded in confirmation.

“So, both of you are now ready for the injection?”

“*Si señor.*”

♪ Назад в прошлое – *Korgstyle*

Geneva, Switzerland, 8 July 2018

Boss had read somewhere that one could put intentions out to the Universe, especially before going to bed in the evening. He had done that for the last fortnight, telling himself 'I will make a lucky encounter'. But nothing had happened.

Then one day, as he went for his usual morning walk to the bakery to buy bread, croissants and *pain au chocolat* for the Grooters team, an elegant car with blackened back windows stopped next to him. The driver's window went down, and a very attractive woman spoke to him.

"Hi, my name is Reversa."

"I'm Boss."

"Are you from here?"

"Yes, but my mother is English."

"I'm from Spain, as you can probably hear on my accent."

An utterly charming accent, thought Boss, reminding him of the two singers from the band Baccara.

The peninsular beauty continued: "When was the last time you did something for the first time?"

"A few months ago," answered Boss thinking of his first Dream World hopping with Dimenport's machine.

"Are you spontaneous?"

"Sometimes," he answered diplomatically, thinking that was a rather unfair question to a Swiss person.

"Listen," said Reversa frankly, "it's my birthday today and I want to make it something very special. Can you take the day off?"

For some reason, Boss could not read her mind. Was she part of the extremely few people who had nothing to hide? Or did she play black magic on him? He felt a warm feeling in his heart and trusted his intuition. Reversa must be a good person. Maybe this was the lucky encounter he had been waiting for.

"Yes, I can, just need to let someone know that I do."

"A life partner?"

"No."

"Good, then jump into the car."

"But wait, don't you have any friends you want to celebrate your birthday with?"

“If I had, I would probably not have asked you to join me. I’ll explain more later.”

After a ten-minute drive, they crossed the border into France.

“Promise you bring me back this evening?”

“Promised!” said the enigmatic beauty. “Don’t worry, we’ll not be going very far.”

After just a few minutes on the motorway, Reversa exited, then drove past a residential area and into a wooded area.

Boss noticed she had some very upbeat music playing. But it was music he had never heard before.

Then she parked the car.

“That wasn’t far indeed,” said Boss.

“It’s just our first stop today.”

They exited the car and paid for the entrance to the small amusement park that had big trampoline nets in the trees, several meters above the ground.

“Isn’t this for kids?”

“In our hearts, we’re all kids,” responded Reversa. “And something tells me you could use some of this to shake off your Swiss and British seriousness.”

“You may be right on that one,” said Boss, aware of his ancestral flaws.

And like kids, they jumped around on those nets for at least an hour, it was one of the most fun workouts Boss had had in a long time.

“Now,” said Reversa, “see if you can kiss me in the air while we are at our highest jumping point.”

Boss was up for the challenge: “What doesn’t one do for a birthday kid?”

“Wonder who is the kid here,” thought Reversa to herself, thinking about her real age.

He embraced Reversa on the skyward way and they both fell exhausted into the nets.

Then she said: “OK, I think we deserve a *crêpe* now.”

Back down on Earth, they had some very tasty *crêpes*. They couldn’t choose between salty or sweet *crêpes*, so they had both. Boss had a cheese and ham *crêpe*, followed by a chocolate one. And Reversa had a mushroom tomato *crêpe*, with a honey one for dessert.

“So, tell me, Reversa, what do you do in life?”

“I am a volunteer.”

“What kind of volunteer?”

“A volunteer for a long-term research project. What about you?”

“I’m an entrepreneur”

“In what field?”

Boss explained that he was a serial entrepreneur, and he had sold his latest venture last year and was now also... volunteering on a research project. He did not give any further details for the moment about his Grooters Pact, Dream World travels and current search for crystals.

Feeling that he hadn’t told her everything, Reversa said: “Maybe I’ll manage to convince you to tell me more by the end of the day.”

“Likewise.”

Boss felt that this mind wrestling between enigmatic personalities could become a very interesting day indeed.

They got into the car again, the Spanish beauty reversed the car from the parking lot and drove up the Salève mountain where Boss had only been a few times despite its closeness to Geneva and the amazing views over the city, the lake and the Jura mountains on the other side.

They strolled around at the top close the *téléphérique* arrival station.

“Magnificent, isn’t it?” said Reversa.

“It sure is,” said Boss, proud of his hometown below.

“Let us look at this view from a more interesting perspective.”

Boss wasn’t sure what she meant. But she just took his hand and led him back to the car. She opened the back door, and they both sat down in the backseat. Then she said:

“I’ll take you on next adventure, but for that, we need to feel a little lighter, so I thought, if you don’t mind, we could have a little birthday fuck here first?”

Boss didn’t mind, and got to experience the peninsular heat that held what it promised. Once they were done, Reversa exited the car and opened the trunk and took out some paragliding gear.

“Put this on!” she said in a commanding tone.

Boss obliged despite feeling a slight fear, this wasn’t a Dream World with no consequences.

“Don’t worry, I am a licensed paraglider,” she said, feeling his slight reluctance. “I will take care of you. We’ll fly tandem.” She showed him her license.

They helped each other carry the equipment to the take-off area.

“Trust me,” she said. Boss did, but maybe shouldn’t have.

Once they had prepared all the paragliding gear, they ran down the hill and as they took off, Reversa said: “Hold on tight!”

Reversa had music on a loudspeaker, a song that Boss had never heard before.

♪ *Hold On Tight – Aespa*

“Strange,” he thought, “because it’s such an upbeat song.” He asked his ephemeral partner:

“I like this song. How come I’ve never heard it before?”

“Because it hasn’t been released yet.”

Boss thought that Reversa may have some insider connections in the music industry, but he was wrong.

What an amazing feeling, thought Boss, both the adrenaline, and the unidentified feeling he felt for his birthday friend. Was it love?

As they were well into the air, the crazy Spanish woman shouted: “*El tiempo vuela!*”, time flies.

Boss did his best to relax and trust his perfect paragliding partner.

“Do you like it?” asked Reversa.

“I sure do!” exclaimed Boss, thinking that this feeling wasn’t too far off from a what he had experienced flying with Tamara in Steamaru.

He had expected them to land at the foot of the mountain and take the *téléphérique* back up to pick up the car. But Reversa apparently had other plans.

Instead, they gained in altitude, and flew back across the border and landed in a field in the Genevan countryside, not too far from where *Ei in the Sky* had landed back in January.

“What about the car?”

“Don’t worry, I’ve organised two taxi drivers to bring it back to Geneva.”

“If we don’t get caught by the police, you promise me to tell me your secret this afternoon?”



“I promise. If you promise me to tell you more about your current research too,” said Reversa.

“Deal.”

They quickly took off their paragliding outfit and hid all the equipment behind a wall, then walked into the *Auberge du Cheval Blanc*, right in time for a well-deserved lunch.

Boss thought the police may come and arrest them any time, but then he also thought they may already have started their *apéro*, as it was a Sunday. So, if it truly was his lucky day, it should be fine. Besides, how could they prove that they had been paragliding, especially as Reversa had made sure to wear an elegant outfit with high heels.

And he knew the restaurant owner because he had come here often with clients and dates over the years. Everything seemed normal.

They ordered a bottle of wine from the adjacent vineyard.

“Not too many transport miles here,” said Boss, proud of the tiny Genevan wine industry.

“Good wine too,” said Reversa after their first toast.

“The truth now,” said Boss.

“Ask me.”

“Is it actually your birthday?”

“Yes, it is. And unlike most birthday celebrations, it is actually my birth day.”

Now Boss was confused.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, when people celebrate their birthdays, it’s actually not their birthday, it is X number of years after their birth day.”

Boss was still confused.

“So, if I follow your reasoning, it means that you were born today, July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018? Come on, Reversa!”

“You heard and understood me correctly.”

The waiter took their order and brought some bread and olives as appetizers.

“Well, I don’t understand.”

“I was born today.” And she showed him her ID card.

“Fake?” wondered Boss as he saw the *Fecha de Nacimiento: 08.07.2018*. Today!

“No, that’s actually an original. But I have a fake too that I need for obvious reasons.”

She showed him another ID card: *Fecha de Nacimiento: 08.07.1988*. “This one, I have to update every five years. To stay credible.”

“Your turn.”

“Wait, I still don’t get it.”

“You’ll understand better after a few glasses of wine,” said the Spanish beauty.

“Now, what’s your secret, what are you working on?”

“At the moment, me and a few friends are trying out an experimental machine.”

“What kind of machine?”

“One that shall help save the world.”

“And you believe that?”

“I want to believe it.” Then he explained the Dream World travels they had been doing in the last few months.

“So, you’re truly volunteering on a research project as well?”

“I told you so,” said Boss. “Now tell me more about the volunteer work you do.”

If Boss’ story was true, then her story was not much further out there in terms of believability, so Reversa decided to share the truth with Boss.

“I ‘was/am/will be’ born today at around 8.00PM in Sevilla. My upbringing was what I consider fairly normal, loving parents, an older sister to learn from, and I lived most my life in Spain. Until the reversal.”

“The reversal?”

“Yes, in the year 2048, exactly 30 years from now, on my birthday. In 2043 I was looking for a job and found that they needed volunteers for a special research project in Toledo.”

“I’ve been there, one of my favourite towns in Spain,” said Boss, then pushed her further: “So, what was this research about?”

“A research centre in Toledo had invented a process for reversing human beings’ timelines. And they needed volunteers to test it.”

“I am not sure I really understand what this reversal means in practice.”

“Very simple,” answered the brunette. “This evening, you will go to sleep. And wake up tomorrow, July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2018.”

“Yes,” said Boss. “So what?”

“Well, in my case, I will also go to bed and sleep tonight. The difference is that when I wake up ‘tomorrow’, it will be July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018. And the day after, July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018. And so on.”

Boss was very hard to impress. Especially after all his adventures this year with the Grooters. But this was one of the most mind-boggling things he’d ever come across.

“I think I need some more wine to let that sink in.”

Boss’s brain went in overdrive mode to try and figure out the practical life consequences of a person living in reverse mode.

“Do you age in the same way as normal people do? Although your net age is zero, if I count correctly, you must be sixty years old.”

“I told you it’s my birthday today, and yes, you’re right, it’s my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday!”

“But you look closer to 35?”

“Well, by 2048 they had solved most of the aging problems, and I have been fortunate to benefit from that knowledge despite going reverse.”

“So, you’ll turn 89 in ’89 when the Berlin Wall falls?”

“Except that for me, the Berlin Wall will seal up and will not fall until 1961 when I’m 117 years old, if I want to live that long, which I am not sure I want. In any case I don’t want to live longer than 1946.”

“Yes, and you’ll be 109 in ‘69 for the first Moon landing. By the way, will we get back to the Moon before 2048?”

“No spoilers, sorry.”

So, Boss said: “Prove to me that you’re from the future.”

“Easy,” said the enigmatic beauty sitting in front of him.

Boss thought it may not be that easy to prove.

“OK,” she said. “Take a piece of paper and first write down the exact time and date, 12.18PM, today July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018. Then write:

“Reversa’s mother’s name is Vinta and her father’s name is Gerare. Then sign below, fold the paper and leave it in the middle of the table.”

“Well,” said Boss. “Easy to remember” thinking about his social skills and the memory techniques he had learnt to remember people’s names.

“So, to prove that I come from the future, here is what is going to happen: I will activate a special device that will erase your memory of the last few minutes of our conversation. I can assure you that it’s a very effective device, you will not even

remember highly emotional things, which tend to be the things that are easiest to remember.”

“Like what?”

“Like me wanting to fuck you in the toilets of this restaurant after our lunch. Today’s adrenaline made me extremely horny and I like you, and it’s my birthday,” she said with a not too innocent smile.

Then she took out her mobile phone, and said: “Sorry, just got a message, give me a few seconds.”

“Sure,” said Boss.

“Thanks.”

She wrote what Boss thought was a quick reply to someone, then put back the phone in her bag, after which she then looked Boss deeply in the eyes.

“Boss, I guess you now have your proof that I come from the future.”

“What do you mean?” answered Boss.

“What time is it?”

“12h21” he said looking at his watch.

“And what are the names of my parents?”

“How am I supposed to know that?”

“Because I have not only told you their names, but on top of that you have written them down.”

“What?”

She hinted at the folded paper on the table. Boss took it and read.

“Convinced?”

“Wait, how is that possible?” wondered Boss, trying hard to remember when he wrote that, and trying to recall their conversation of the last few minutes. Blank.

“It’s a not-yet-invented technology that I use in urgent situations so as not to compromise my identity,” said the woman from the future.

“And how does that work?”

“When I took out my phone to respond to a message, which you don’t remember either, by the way, instead of writing a message to someone, I actually typed in the amount of time to erase your memory, in this case the last 3.5 minutes of our conversation.”

“3.5 minutes? What else did we speak about?”

Reversa only smiled.

“You got me said Boss,” hoping this was not an early case of Alzheimer’s. “And do you plan to lobotomise me at the end of the day so that I forget all wonderful things that have happened today?”

“No, take it easy. I hope to leave some sweet memories for both of us today. I can feel that you and your Grooters friends are good people and will only use the knowledge that I share with you for the benefit of humankind.”

Their lunch arrived, a succulent mushroom risotto for Boss, and the famous *filets de perche* from the lake with pommes allumettes for the hungry lady.

They enjoyed their lunch in silence for a few minutes, then Boss said:

“I am still trying to get my head around what your life must be like, how your lifestyle is ‘living in reverse’. Does that mean that you only can make ephemeral encounters like ours today? Because tomorrow will be yesterday for me and tomorrow for me, we’ll be two days away from each other.”

“Correct. It felt very weird in the first few months, even two-three years. But now, after 30 years pointing in the opposite direction to almost everyone else, I am kind of used to it. But my heart has ached more than once after having met some wonderful people along the way, and not having been able to see them again.”

“Almost?”

“Yes, there are a few other volunteers out there as well, although I only know one in person, Renato. He is my temporal anchor and lover. We reversed at the same time, exactly 30 years ago. We meet from time to time but need to be active in different countries so that we remain discreet. And to better fulfill our mission.”

“So, it’s only the two of you who reversed?”

“There were a handful before us, and we keep in touch with them as well, but remotely as they are on other continents. But these relationships help me keep sane.”

Boss could understand.

“And money?”

“We do have the obvious advantage of knowing which lotto numbers will turn up. Unfortunately, banks don’t pay out back in time, so I do quick jobs for cash and take that cash with me to yesterday.”

“And while you will be heading back to the dark ages, I’ll be heading into an uncertain future. Why did you choose to volunteer this very special time travel? I mean, you already know what’s coming, unless you slept in your history lessons.”

“Maybe I listened too much too the Beatles when I was younger. Joke aside, I’m actually passionate about history, an obvious requirement for this mission and the reason I chose to volunteer was that I believe in yesterday and was intrigued to see if yesterday ‘*love was such an easy game to play*’.

“Love is certainly an easier game to play when you’re only around for a day and don’t have to live with any consequences.”

“True, but I haven’t met anyone yet who hasn’t enjoyed my company,” she said with a sexy look. “However, more importantly, I wanted to take this timely opportunity to see if I could meet someone in the past and share specific pieces of knowledge that would help rectify the course of humanity. Because half a spoiler is that the next 30 years, in your direction, are not the brightest.”

Boss thought of the various warnings Goldilocks and other people had given the Grooters. And of his *Observational Time Capsule* travel in Timove.

“And? Have you found anyone?”

“Maybe. The uniqueness of my situation, however, is that I will never be able to see the fruit of my work. So, I have to work on faith, and trust my intuition that my decisions and interactions will have a positive impact on the future.”

“What you’re doing is very courageous and selfless,” said Boss.

“Thanks.”

Dessert came and went.

“Next question: if this is a scientific research experiment, and you certainly share knowledge with the other volunteers, do you have a way to communicate your findings to the research centre in 2048 that sent you out?”

“No, not yet. But that’s part of the mission and challenge: to gather as many insights as possible so that we better understand the concept of time and so that we can find a way to communicate across time.”

That reminded Boss of Leo’s dimensionomics theories as well as the Grooters communicating with Karl and Klara back in 1938.

Reversa continued: “From my end, I can only hope that the changes I’ve brought about will at some point end up in a future technology where we can reliably communicate across time. And if they get in touch with me, I’ll know we have succeeded with one of the goals the research project set itself.”

“May I ask you if you have met anyone in the last 30 years that you have fallen in love with?”

“Oh, several, and it feels like I may have to add one more on that list soon. You force me to give away another spoiler: in 2048, most people are what you would call polyamorous. For us, it is perfectly normal to have more than one intimate partner

during our life, even several simultaneously. Because every human is a very complex being and we cannot expect one single partner to fulfil all our needs and desires.”

“Yes, I think that movement has slowly started in some parts of the world in the last few years. But it’s still very rare.”

“Yes.”

“What if true love could cross the boundaries of time?” Boss asked Reversa, thinking about a wonderful girl he had a crush on back at university in St. Gallen, and whom he could no longer find because she had a very common name and was not on any social media.

“I believe it can,” answered Reversa.

“Then we are equally motivated to find an answer. And if I’ve understood correctly, you’re gone after midnight?”

“Yes...”

“So, what I suggest is that we share as much knowledge with each other as possible until then, to increase the chances that one of our teams – The Grooters or your volunteer team – find a solution to this temporal brain and heart teaser. Do you mind if I take you to our headquarters so you get to meet the other Grooters too?”

“I’d love to,” said the southern beauty. “But before we leave, I want to remind you of the second part of our conversation that you missed because you were distracted by my *decolleté* and did not remember what I said.”

Reversa stood up, whispered something in Boss’s ear, then went to the bathroom.

The taxi drivers had driven back Reversa’s car which now stood ready in front of the restaurant. On the way back, she tried to explain.

“I’ve been told that I am borderline nymphomaniac. But every time passion starts to heat up, the border gets blurry, so I don’t always know on which side of the line I am.”

“For your information, you have crossed the border twice already today.”

“It’s not easy for me, I hope you understand.”

Boss laughed internally at the kind of situation he dreamed would occur more often in life. Then he said:

“Don’t worry about any borders or any lines, except maybe when you put on make-up.” And he kissed her again.

Back at the Grooters' place, Boss introduced Reversa to everyone and Modella and Verity were happy to have an additional woman in the house. However, they got quickly disappointed when they learned that they would never see her again after midnight.

Reversa marvelled at the crystals on the fireplace mantel that the Grooters had managed to collect. Five so far. They explained the story and meaning behind each crystal to her.

Then she said: "So, it's only the Crystal of Love missing now?"

"Yes, we believe so, and frustratingly enough that crystal is here in Geneva, but locked in another dimension."

"Geneva certainly has the safest safes in the world," Reversa joked, "because hiding a crystal in another dimension is the best way to keep it safe from people with bad intentions."

Verity, who felt particularly in tune with the Crystal of Love, said: "That's an interesting and I guess very correct way of describing it. Any ideas on how we could create or access the dimension it's in?"

"Tell me a little more about that dimension."

"Well, it seems like the dimension in question is the future. More precisely, Geneva in the year 2061."

Verity described what she had seen during her second Dream World travel.

"That sounds like an amazing future, and must clearly be in another timeline, because the 2048 I come from is very far from what you're describing, although theoretically only 13 years apart."

"We just have to wait 43 years," said Webbo.

"It's not as simple as that," said Reversa, "because you need to make sure you're heading for the right kind of 2061, not the one I almost reached before reaching the conclusion that I better go back and fix things."

"Was it that bad?"

"You don't want to know."

"So, how do we specifically create the kind of future that Verity saw in her Dream World?"

Leo intervened:

"It not completely straightforward. First, what is the likelihood that we'll be able to replicate, after 43 years of labour, the exact Geneva that Verity saw? And second, 43 years is a long time, a luxury that we do not have. So, we'll need to find a dimensional shortcut."



“How?” wondered Modella.

“The key to love,” said Reversa.

“Just take the key from the Geneva coat of arms,” joked Webbo.

“What did you say?” exclaimed Boss.

They all went out to look at his car’s license plate with the Swiss and Geneva flags.

“Saint Peter’s keys,” said the living encyclopaedia. “Which you’ll find on the papal coat of arms too.”

“The key to love?”

“Or the key to flying?” added Webbo. “Because you certainly cannot fly with only one wing,” he said pointing at the half eagle on the coat of arms.

“For your information, it’s a female eagle,” specified Verity.

“Half a chicken, as it had been funnily described by some humorous residents already two hundred years ago,” said Boss, who knew the history of his city quite well.

“If St. Peter is involved, it may be the key to paradise?” said Richie.

“The main cathedral in Geneva’s old town is named *Cathédrale Saint-Pierre*, or St. Peter in English,” said Boss.

“Very interesting,” said Reversa.

Boss continued: “And Jesus is on the cantonal coat of arms too: one of his christograms, *IHS*, within a rising sun, and *Post Tenebras Lux* written underneath.

“That guy is everywhere,” said Leo, thinking about the Cristo Redondor and the Crystal of Nature they had found in his head in Rio.

Then Leo suggested something surprising:

“So, if we find the key to flying, we may find the key to love and how to access the Crystal of Love? Or the other way round?”

“Wow! That certainly is a creative stretch,” said Modella. “And what’s the key to flying?”

“You got some keys in your Augusta Dream World, didn’t you?”

“Yes, but I’m still stuck on the ground.”

“Let’s have a drink and some tapas before dinner, and instead let Reversa talk,” said Richie.

“Great idea,” said Modella. “I’ll organise that, you guys stay put and listen to Reversa.”

Boss, who despite spending the whole day with Reversa, still had more questions to ask her.

“Please tell us more about your main mission. We have understood that you are heading back to the past to change specific events. But which ones precisely?”

“*Muy bien*,” said the Spanish beauty. “My main mission is to head back to the early 1980s and make sure that a specific book will not be published.”

“Why?” asked Leo.

“Because we think that it was the main trigger to the 2020s worldwide pandemic that decimated a lot of people.” Reversa did not reveal more.

The librarian intervened: “So, you think that fiction authors not only predict the future, they can actually create it?”

“We are certain of that, although we don’t always understand why certain books like *The Wreck of the Titan* become reality, while others don’t.”

“Are you sure there are no other factors that triggered the pandemic as well?” asked Richie.

“There certainly are, but we have to work on those we are sure of. There are so many other gloomy books describing pandemics or various forms of apocalypses, starting with the Bible, whose authors don’t seem to understand their own writing, that *In the beginning was the word*.”

“So, what do you plan to do?” asked Webbo. “Kill the author, or just burn the manuscript?”

“I haven’t decided yet, there may be other options, too.”

“Like what?”

“Convincing the author with logic that he shouldn’t publish it. Or somehow make sure that he never writes the book in the first place.”

“You think that will work?”

“It’s tricky,” said Reversa. “I’ve had a lot of time to ponder the question in the last 30 years since my reversal.”

“And?”

“Maybe the world needs a pandemic to wake up. Like some countries needed an atomic bomb to wake up.”

“Two,” corrected Verity, who could still feel the echo of those bombs in her DNA.

“You’re right, two.”

“Now, if this train of thought is correct, what is the minimum number of casualties needed for people to wake up?” asked Richie.

“Let’s think clearly for a minute before starting new wars,” said Boss. “I’d say that the atomic bombs may have been necessary to set a stop to Japan’s expansionist arrogance, but on the other hand it didn’t make of Japan the kind of Dream World we’ve seen a few glimpses of lately.”

“That’s a very good point,” said Reversa. “And why do think that Japan did not turn out to be an earthly paradise?”

“Because of a lack of knowledge,” intervened Verity. “I simply think that neither Japan, nor any other country on Earth has the required knowledge to create a heaven on Earth. Yet.”

Modella arrived with the drinks and the tapas.

“*Gracias*,” said Reversa,

“*De nada*,” answered Modella, glad to be able to speak her mother tongue. Or father tongue, to be more precise.

“I still think you should stop the author,” said Verity. “It will be easier to create some paradise if we don’t have to fight major pandemics at the same time.”

“I agree with you, Verity,” said Reversa. “Which is why I’m still motivated by my original mission. And by the way, my colleagues and I also make sure to eliminate other major threats on our journey, be they books, media disinformation, political or industrial corruption, or other things we believe will make the future worse.”

“I guess you’re pretty busy then,” said Richie.

“You bet. And I’m so glad that people like you help us to gather the necessary knowledge to create a wonderful world.”

“It feels like you are making our job easier,” said Verity.

“We like to think so,” said Reversa, “which means that with every day that passes, if we are successful in erasing historical issues, that will make it easier for you guys to set the direction for humanity’s future, and steer us away from the future I came from.”

All this made Boss think of his experience in Timove and his statistical discussions with the lovely Professor Zeitdehner. Maybe Reversa and her team was the key to tilting the statistics in their favour?

The Grooters and Reversa clinked their glasses, had some tapas, enquired more about Reversa, then showed her the *Dreamcockpit* downstairs.

After that, they had a wonderful dinner together, everyone asked her questions about the future, some of which she answered, but most of which she avoided, claiming that

the future was not set in stone and that she was on a journey to change it, and did not want to confuse them with inaccurate information.

One thing she was fairly sure about, she shared: “OK guys, here is one spoiler: in the future you will have showers that recycle the water, which means you can enjoy long showers with good conscience for the environment and for your wallet.”

“Now you’re talking!” said Leo the inventor. “Any hints on how we can make such showers possible?”

“Yes: how do they shower on the *International Space Station*?”

“Obviously. So many ideas are like... why didn’t we think of that before?”

After dinner, Boss took Reversa to his room for another round of bodily interactions with the ultimate one-night-stand. Indeed, Reversa, due to her unique reversed life, had to make the most of her time with her ephemeral lovers.

But it was not selfish love: she was on a mission to spread love, because she thinks that the problems of the past, as seen from 2048, are in main part due to a lack of love between humans.

So next to her main goal of stopping dangerous literature, she decided to spread love one night and one person at a time. OK, sometimes two or three people at a time. The borderline woman claimed that all that sex kept her young. Which it did.

After some very satisfying orgasms for both of them, lying together in bed, Boss told Reversa:

“Can I ask you for a favour? It’s quite personal.”

“Sure.”

“When I was at university, I met this stunning girl who studied two years below me. We lost contact, but I can’t help regularly thinking about her.

“So why don’t you just get in touch with her?”

“I don’t know how to find her.”

“What? In today’s hyperconnected world?”

“Yes, the thing is that she has a very common name, Pia Schmidt, and on top of that she’s probably married by now. She was always very discreet, and doesn’t seem to be using social media. Actually, that discretion is one of the reasons I had a crush on her. I have also asked university friends who knew her as well, but no one has heard from her in the last ten years.”

“When did you last see her?”

“2002, the year I quit university in St. Gallen.”

“You could try a private detective.”

“I fear he may find her...”

“Fear? I thought you wanted to get in touch with her?”

“Yes, but I fear that she may look old now, be fat, and have a family with kids.”

“It is not unlikely that will be the case. Know, however, that not all women get fat and ugly after childbirth. Actually, some can remain very attractive even beyond their sixties,” the sexagenarian told him with a glimpse in her eye.

“Fair point,” he laughed. “So, what do you suggest?”

“Leave it up to me.”

“Leave it to you? But we’ll never meet again.”

“Don’t worry, I have a plan. It’s an additional challenge that will keep me going until I hit the eighties in my nineties. Or when I hit my nineties in the eighties. Also, I think I owe you that because you truly made my day, it’s not every day one celebrates one’s birth day.”

“The pleasure was shared,” said Boss honestly. “I am so lucky to have met you.”

“We meet people for a reason, a season, or a lifetime.”

With those words, at the sound of midnight, Reversa disappeared into yesterday, continuing her journey back in time.

Having known Leo for so long, Boss was not the least concerned with someone disintegrating right in front of his eyes. That their destination was another place or another time did not really matter. But he would miss Reversa. He took out his smart phone and entered the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2048 in his countdown app. Maybe he could have a chat with her in Toledo before her reversal. 10,949 days to go.

