

6

Discovery

Wayne returns with a bottle of ketchup and a carton of milk, and dives headfirst into dinner. With a cheeseburger in one hand and fries in the other he alternates bites at a blinding speed.

“Wayne, you might want to chew your food before swallowing it. I read that it aids in the digestion process,” says Cindy.

“What are you a doctor? It’s ground beef. It’s already been chewed.”

Wayne continues his feeding frenzy while Cindy watches Charlie at work, mesmerized by the intensity of his focus. His concentration is visceral, and puts her in a tingly trance. His hands move so gracefully, and his handsome face glows radiantly despite the unflattering fluorescent light that shines on it. Cindy has a nearly overpowering desire to kiss him. Not a timid peck on the cheek, but a deep and suffocating connection. The kiss she envisions is biological and spiritual; existing in that elusive space where chemistry and idolatry confer recklessly in the hopes of curing all the evil in the world; where a small chance is wagered against a bigger chance, and the kissing ones who beg with their lips for salvation pray that

the other will reciprocate in harmony. Cindy has been in the basement a hundred times with Charlie, and each time it draws her closer to him. But on this night Charlie appears grander in her eyes than he has ever been; he possesses a determination that makes him irresistible. Is the sonic gun a big idea? That she does not know, but she, as a professional in the sales trade knows that conviction is easily as important as genius, and Charlie is intense in his conviction. She hears a voice in her head, begging her to seize the moment or else lose the game forever. She fumbles with her emotions like a burglar trying to open a lock with the wrong combination. Her mind floods with compulsive thoughts. She is as parched as a desert and Charlie is water. Yet, she postpones her drink, and in doing so stands drenched in a storm of regret. As Charlie did only minutes before, she misses a perfect opportunity.

Charlie stands up abruptly, and Cindy falls to earth like an elephant in a vacuum.

“Friends, Romans, countrymen lend me your ears. My work is done,” says Charlie.

“One question,” says Wayne.

“What is it Brutus?”

“Never mind. It can wait.”

“All right then. Is everyone ready? Here goes nothing.”

CLICK...⊙EEEEEEEEEOOOOOOOOααααααααααEEEEEEEEEOOOOOOEEEEαααα
EEEEOOOOEEEEEOOOOEEEEααααOOEEEE...

The click of the gun’s on/off switch sets it in motion. A rumbling low hum quickly accelerates toward the upper reaches of the audible frequency spectrum; then disappears as it climbs above twenty thousand kilohertz. The Trio stands motionless waiting for something to happen.

“Hey, I think it’s working,” says Charlie without the slightest proof of anything, and therefore carrying the subtle inflection of a question.

“I don’t think it’s working at all. I don’t hear anything,” says Wayne.

“Of course you don’t think it’s working, cause you’re not a dog,” Charlie says.

“Are you sure it’s turned on Charlie? I don’t think I hear anything either,” says Cindy in her best maternal voice.

ANOTHER DUD BY CHARLIE

“Wayne, did you say another dud by Charlie?”

Wayne responds as if he has seen a ghost. “No, I didn’t say another dud by Charlie. I, I thought another dud by Charlie.”

“Wayne, think of something. Just think of it, don’t say it.”

“Like what?”

“I don’t care. Anything!”

THE RAIN IN SPAIN FALLS MAINLY ON THE PLAIN.

OH MY GOD, Cindy says, or rather thinks.

YOUR LIPS DIDN’T MOVE, thinks Charlie.

YOUR LIPS AREN’T MOVING EITHER, thinks Wayne.

WAIT A SECOND, thinks Cindy.

THIS IS WEIRD. THIS IS CRAZY, thinks Wayne.

I THINK I'M READING YOUR MIND, **thinks Cindy.**

WE'RE READING EACH OTHER'S MINDS, **the boys think in unison.**

THIS IS AMAZING, **Cindy continues.**

IT'S THE GUN! WE CAN READ EACH OTHER'S MINDS BECAUSE THE GUN IS PUTTING OUT SOME KIND OF SIGNAL, **Charlie thinks.**

OH MY GOD, **thinks Cindy.**

THAT'S WEIRD DUDE, **thinks Wayne.**

IT'S PUTTING OUT SOME KIND OF FREQUENCY, SOME HIGH FREQUENCY - A FREQUENCY OF THOUGHT, **continues Charlie.**

Their minds take off with excitement. They are kids again, on the playground, unfettered, and unable to stop their thoughts from being heard.

IT FEELS LIKE I'VE WOKEN UP INSIDE SOMEONE ELSE'S HEAD, **thinks Wayne.**

Then Cindy: SOMEBODY PLEASE TAKE MY PULSE TO MAKE SURE I'M NOT DEAD?

Charlie: IT'S AN OPEN CONDUIT TO A WHOLE NEW LEVEL OF CONSCIOUSNESS.

I'VE SEEN STRANGE THINGS BEFORE, BUT THIS REALLY TAKES THE CAKE, **continues Wayne.**

WHAT WAS THAT WAYNE? YOUR THOUGHTS ARE A LITTLE FUZZY,
thinks Cindy.

CHARLIE, YOU'LL BE THE TALK OF THE TOWN ON THE FRONT PAGE OF
EVERY PAPER, thinks Wayne.

IT MUST BE SOME FREQUENCY OF THOUGHT, Charlie thinks. IT'S
CONNECTING OUR MINDS.

After a few minutes the conversation begins to normalize, as if mind reading is a natural and normal way to converse. Charlie notices differences in how Wayne and Cindy project with their minds. Wayne's thoughts modulate, and Charlie senses vibrant colors swirling with each word he projects. Cindy's thoughts are soft, fuzzy and veiled. He hears them clearly enough, but their transmission has the quality of communication coming from outer space, stuttering and breaking up in short random intervals.

For Charlie, a dense curtain has been lifted; or rather it disintegrated the nanosecond that the gun's signal attained the necessary altitude in frequency. The frequency opened a door to an entirely new world – an infinite three-dimensional space in his head - and Wayne and Cindy appear as islands suspended within it. The space is warm and pulses vibrantly, yet there is no sun to warm or illuminate it. Time is distorted, seeming to move slowly. Charlie remembers reading a biography on Ted Williams. Ted could slow down a pitch with his mind, allowing him to see what had been thrown based on the rotation of the baseball's laces. Control through concentration - this is what Charlie is feeling. Inside this new world, this other world, his abilities extend beyond basic telepathy. He wonders what he won't be able to do in time

and with experimentation. Some minds are better than others. So goes the hierarchy of the other world.

As the fury of discovery calms, Cindy finds herself exerting a significant amount of energy to govern her thoughts. She touches Charlie's presence in the other world and welcomes it with an open mind, but there are some thoughts she wants to keep to herself, at least for now. She catches herself starting a thought about her feelings towards him, and changes the subject quickly. But the mind has a mind of its own, and a second thought pushes to be born:

CHARLIE I WANT TO TELL YOU THAT I'M... STOP! STOP! NOISE! CAN'T THINK IT. OKAY BETTER. CHARLIE I MUST TELL YOU... NO, CAN'T SAY IT. STOP. BARBIE DOLLS. BARBIE DOLLS. BARBIE DOLLS... YOU ARE SO... NO, NO, NO, NO... QUIET. STOP THINKING. CONTROL CINDY. CONTROL.

CINDY, ARE YOU OKAY? asks Charlie.

DID I HEAR BARBIE DOLL? adds Wayne.

Cindy seizes the gun from Charlie and turns it off.

"Hey, why did you do that?" Wayne protests.

"Cindy, are you okay?" asks Charlie.

"I'm fine. I, I ..." Cindy stutters while her mind is racing. God, I nearly gave myself away, she thinks. I need an excuse to make an exit. I can't let Charlie turn that thing on again. "Guys, I hate to say this but I totally lost track of the time, and I have to go. My parents are out of town and it's nearly midnight. If I don't walk the dog within the hour I'll have a major mess on my hands."

“Who are you, Cindyrella? How can you leave at a time like this?” says Wayne.

“I have to get home, and Wayne, so do you. Like right now. Charlie needs sleep. He has to go to work tomorrow. I’ll give you a ride. Charlie, go to bed. That’s an order,” she says with a smile. “And promise me something, okay? Don’t use the gun by yourself, at least not until you know more about it. Who knows what could happen. You could faint and bang your head. Promise?”

“What am I going to do, read my own mind?”

“That would be an interesting adventure in self-analysis,” laughs Wayne.

“I promise. Now go. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Wayne, come on!” implores Cindy on her way up the stairs.”

“Yes mother.”

Alone in his basement Charlie’s head is spinning. This can’t be real. He pinches himself to make sure he is not dreaming, and then pinches himself again. No, he is wide-awake. A disturbing fact percolates in the back of his mind: he has no clue how the gun works. It’s a *complete accident*. He imagines himself standing on a stage speaking to a room full of important-looking people. A man in the back of the room shouts out a question: “Mr. Childs, how does the gun work?” Charlie hesitates and the man fires another question: “If you don’t know how it works what use are you to us?” *Go ahead, answer the man*. Charlie closes his eyes and shakes his head to erase the scene from his mind.

There is a world of difference between ‘might be’ and ‘is.’ Given reasonable proof science will accept and embrace ‘is.’ Science is not at odds with the supernatural world. It simply does not accept extraordinary

claims until proven true, and naturally the burden of proof rests on the shoulders of the person making the extraordinary claim. Science evolves, and its iterative nature ensures its survival. There was a time when men of medicine knew that blood-letting cured sickness; when astronomers knew the earth was the center of the universe; when witches not germs caused epidemics; when cartographers knew the earth was flat; the list goes on and on. All are cases where known truths were revised to reflect new data and scientific understanding. It may take a little time, but eventually the best facts available convert a reasonable mind.

Belief in mind reading and other extra-sensory powers has existed since antiquity. Paranormal powers were ascribed to people who purported the ability to communicate with gods, ancestors, spirits, and other supernatural beings. There are five classes of paranormal activities: telepathy, clairvoyance (including pre and post cognition), psycho kineses, reincarnation, and hauntings. The Society for Psychical Research was founded in London in 1882. The organization's U.S. doors opened three years later. The SPR was the first systematic effort to organize scientists and scholars for sustained investigation of paranormal phenomena. Its stated mission:

“To examine without prejudice or prepossession and in a scientific spirit those faculties of man, real or supposed, which appear to be inexplicable on any generally recognized hypothesis.”

Years later in 1957, J.B. Rhine organized The Parapsychological Association (PA). Its stated mission:

“To advance parapsychology as a science, to disseminate knowledge of the field, and to integrate findings with those of other branches of science.”

Parapsychology had indeed evolved during those seventy-one years; it was no longer a mere “examination,” but now a self-decreed, full-blown branch of science. At the time the PA was formed there was gathering momentum supporting the scientification of paranormal belief, and in the 1970’s, parapsychological research was at the top of many prestigious University funding lists. In 1978, a survey of 1,100 college professors found that only 2% of survey respondents believed that ESP was “impossible.” 34% of those same professors agreed that ESP was either established fact or “very likely probable.” After its peak in the late 70’s, fascination with the paranormal shifted. The digital age brought with it a new set of fringe frontiers for science to explore – mainly in the area of human enhancement through technology, also known as Transhumanism.

Charlie is a man of science, and like most men of science he considers ESP a myth; a hopeful fairy tale people believe because they want to, or because they have been coerced into believing so, not because of reasonable proof. Mind readers and future seers frequent talk shows on T.V. and appear on the covers of popular magazines, but when you examine the facts surrounding their claims there is always a plausible explanation or some trick involved. These so called paranormal phenomenon turn out to be illusions created by people so sure of their beliefs that they will do anything to convert others to their way of thinking. But now, Charlie has a new fact to consider. He, Cindy and Wayne did something he firmly believed impossible - they read each other’s minds.

7

One For All

Cindy and Wayne ride in silence. They know what they are thinking. Wayne turns on the radio, and turns it off five seconds later. Bloomfield Avenue is oddly desolate. Wayne's senses are on alert; he feels the tiniest bump in the road and hears the air rushing around the aerodynamic side mirror of Cindy's Volkswagon Passat.

"VW. You can really feel the road...German engineering," says Wayne.

Cindy chuckles.

"Handles well too." Wayne continues. "How many horsepower does she have?"

"I have no idea," says Cindy. "And she is a he by the way."

"Feels more like a she to me - soft, well-appointed leather interior, automatic transmission. Definitely a girl."

Cindy changes the subject. "Wayne, maybe you should have stayed with Charlie. I hope he's not toying around with that thing."

"That thing? That thing will make him famous. Don't worry about Charlie. He's fine."

Cindy pulls up to Wayne's house. "Here you go. Home sweet home. Tell your mom I said hello. Have you talked to her about getting your own place?"

"No, I haven't broached the subject yet. I hate the thought of her living alone."

"Why? She's a big girl. Maybe she'll find a boyfriend."

"That's what scares me. Do you remember the last one, Bud?"

"He wasn't that bad."

"The guy drank a twelve-pack every night. His last name should have been Weiser (ha, ha). I'll see you tomorrow Cindy."

"Hey Wayne, do us a favor and make sure Charlie gets to work on time. I'm holding you personally responsible."

"I'll drag him kicking and screaming if I have to."

Cindy and Wayne rely on each other in the way siblings do. They jab at each other daily, but when it comes to important matters they always have each other's backs. Wayne presents himself as a bit of a slacker, but his ability to act responsibly is formidable. Wayne reads people well – easily recognizing the subtle differences in tone of voice that impart the true meaning and urgency in their otherwise indecipherable words. His sensitivity is a gift, but it often leaves him mercilessly bound to the wishes of others. Attuned-ness often makes it difficult to say no. Cindy knows this, for she too possesses great human insight. She loves Wayne, in particular his ability to pick a fight and end it before any punches get thrown. Wayne is indeed an instigator, but he never tries to dodge the consequences of his actions. Wayne is good at taking the fall. It gives him a sense of purpose and fulfills his desire to matter. He has bailed Charlie and Cindy out of trouble on many occasions. Cindy remembers

one night in particular - that night - two years ago when Wayne went above and beyond the call of courage.

Marijuana and drinking don't always mix well, especially if combined with driving. But on this particular evening Cindy, Charlie and Wayne drank from the bottle of irresponsibility big time. The Devils were playing the Rangers at Continental Arena in the Meadowlands. It was the playoffs and Wayne had scored great seats along with a quarter ounce of pot to make brownies for the occasion. They ate them in the parking lot and washed them down with a pint of Black Velvet before heading into the arena. Over the course of the game they each had three or four jumbo beers (Cindy can hold her liquor). Needless to say, by the time the game ended they were lit, trashed, and loving life. Always the grown up, Cindy insisted she was the most sober, and therefore the most qualified to drive. Charlie and Wayne were in no condition to argue.

The Garden State Parkway can be murder, especially if you are impaired. There are no traffic lights, and the serpent-like bends in the road take a devilish pride in seeing you fall from Eden faster than Adam if you do not have full control of your wits. In car accidents time slows to a crawl. Images flash before your eyes. Life goes black, and then (assuming the crash is not fatal) you wake up, perhaps upside down and in a ditch; a trickle of blood running down your temple.

Charlie's first thought after recovering from the shock of the accident was "Am I dead?" Cindy's first thought was "Oh my God I'm going to lose my license." Wayne's first thought, which he spoke out loud, was "I'm going to puke." They pulled themselves from the wreckage and checked each other for injuries. For ten minutes they stood in the grass purgatory between north and south on the Parkway. Wayne, the consummate glass half full guy (and as baked as an apple pie), commented

on how soft and green the grass was. Charlie politely told him to shut up. Flashing lights arrived like a cavalry of executioners. By now Cindy was nearing panic. Her blood alcohol level had to be well over the legal limit. The lawman can be fooled, but not the Breathalyzer. Charlie told her not to worry. Wayne was cooking up his own strategy.

“Are you kids all right? Is anyone hurt?” asked the first officer to arrive at the scene.

“I think we’re okay,” replied Cindy.

“What happened?” asked the officer.

Wayne jumped in. “I was cruising down the P-way, minding my own business when a deer jumped out in front of my car. I swerved and almost saved it, honest. Next thing we’re in this ditch. Shit my car is messed up!”

“That’s not true officer,” protested Cindy. “I was driving. We were coming home from the hockey game.”

“Have you kids been drinking?”

“Heck no,” offered Charlie.

“Whose car is it?” asked the officer.

“Mine,” said Wayne (it was in fact his car).

“And you were driving?”

“Indeed I was,” Wayne said with enough pompous pride to provoke.

“No, I was driving officer!” demanded Cindy.

“Hey babe, I don’t need you to bail me out. I’m fine. It was the deer not the beer.”

By this time a second cop car had arrived on the scene. The policeman in-charge called the officer over. Charlie didn’t know what to do. Wayne was intent on taking the fall for Cindy. He was envious of Wayne’s bravery, but he couldn’t convince himself to intervene. Suspecting what was going on, the second policeman turned to Charlie.

“Son, who was really driving the car?”

Charlie hesitated and then looked at Wayne. Wayne caught his glance and quickly looked down at the ground, waiting for Charlie’s reply. Charlie knew the answer he had to give.

“He was.”

“I think we have a possible DUI here. The girl is trying to cover for the registered owner. I think they have all been drinking. Get the machine and let’s get some numbers.”

“It was the deer, not the beer. You don’t need to test me,” Wayne reiterated.

“Okay son, I heard you the first time. Everything is going to be fine. We suspect you’ve been drinking and we need to see where your blood alcohol level is.”

“Dandy Randy Mr. Policeman.”

Cindy grabbed Wayne by the arm. “What the F do you think you are doing? You’re going to lose your license. You don’t have to do this Wayne. I’m a big girl. I said I’d drive!”

“Cindy, we don’t have time to argue. I can walk or take the bus to work. You have sales calls to make. If you lose your license you can’t work. We once said one for all and all for one, remember? This one is for the all. Now shut up. That’s an order. Zip it!”

“Wayne I can’t.”

“It’s done. It’s my choice. Move on. By the way you’re paying the fine.”

Cindy turned her back to Wayne. She was caught in a cross fire between shame and relief. Wayne watched her walk away. Her figure was a far cry from the ‘pipe cleaner’ he knew as a kid. She was the sister he never had. He enjoyed the safety of admiring her beauty without the slightest lustful inclination. To this day the trio never speaks about that

night, the court appearances that followed, or any of the other unpleasant consequences. It happened. It is done. They moved on.

8

Restless Night

At 1:30 A.M. Cindy climbs into bed. She stretches and wriggles on her soft mattress. She pulls her comforter up to her nose and shivers in delight while waiting for her body's warmth to heat the cold air beneath the covers. She touches herself, and then decides she is definitely not in the mood. But as tired as she is, and as much as she needs to sleep, she cannot. Part of her lingers in the mind reading world, that other world. She wonders whether mind reading is such a good thing. Of course there are positive possibilities, but the dangers weigh equally on the other end of the scale. Like the issue of privacy, which revealed itself in Charlie's basement a couple hours ago. She imagines a futuristic world where peoples' minds are interconnected, and she shivers at the vision. An image of The Borg from Star Trek flashes in her mind.

She thinks about the moment before their remarkable discovery when she and Charlie were alone and Wayne was looking for ketchup. She deliberately threw an "I want you" look in his direction – a tractor-beam stare designed to communicate her best intentions. But he did not respond. She did recall that he lifted his head and looked over in her

direction, but nothing more indicative than that. She is confounded by her inability to read him. Aren't women supposed to have the radar? Why is my screen blank? she thinks.

Cindy is the boss of her life. She makes choices and stands by her guns. She projects control and makes those around her feel safe. Choice is her anchor and birthright. Her first mind reading experience shook her very foundation mercilessly. She was not herself, or in control; she felt vulnerable and violated. The sharp blade of the frequency pressed against her throat and offered no choice but to share the thoughts that expressed her desires. As Cindy finally nods off to sleep she makes a choice not to use the sonic gun again until after she talks to Charlie about her feelings. The thought of announcing her love involuntarily feels dangerously wrong. The trueness of her commitment demands better treatment. With her mind filled with resolve she falls asleep.

Wayne is having difficulty sleeping as well. The mind reading experience was euphoric and left him craving more. The real world looks dusty and listless in its aftermath. Boredom looms like a slave-master and his mind turns to Jenny Lewis, the girl who broke his heart (ten years ago). At times of boredom Wayne reaches into the memory bank of his heart and conjures up her ghost. As painful as it is, it serves the necessary purpose of injecting life into unbearably dull moments. A memory of passion is better than no passion at all.

Love is the fourth wonder of the universe; the first being chance (of course); the second being science (chance codified); the third, choice (the chance dance).

First love is the purest form of love. To write a treatise on the subject of love, or even a simple sonnet, write about first love. It is the single most accurate depiction of love's bite on the body of the human

condition. First love hits like a bolt of lightning out of a calm blue sky and then tortures its victim relentlessly, in a manner worse than the most twisted mind could concoct. It refutes without question the existence of a benevolent maker. First love is more responsible for pain and suffering than all the tyrants, wars and calamities in history added together and raised up to the power of ten.

Wayne's gift is music, although he makes a living working for his uncle's landscaping company. He picks up new instruments with ease, and improvisation is second nature. Drumming was his first love (Jenny his second), and his skills and resume are impressive. He led the Bloomfield High Marching Band to three consecutive state titles, and he won every percussion competition he entered. During his sophomore year he formed a progressive rock band called Dark Science. The band's limited popularity didn't do their skills justice.

Jennifer Lewis was the captain of the cheerleading squad, and arguably the best looking girl at Bloomfield High. The odds of two people from opposite ends of the teenage social spectrum getting together are never good, but as the New York Lottery claims, "Hey You Never Know." In the social ecosystem known as Bloomfield High, Jenny and Wayne shouldn't have had a chance. The barriers were too high and too many. Wayne was one of the best high school drummers in the state of NJ, but to Jenny that wasn't currency.

Teddy Rivers played drums for The Retones, a hot and rising progressive punk pop group. Teddy graduated from Bloomfield High three years ahead of Wayne. Every student at Bloomfield High had a copy of a bootleg recording of the band that Wayne had circulated anonymously. The band's song "Sort of a Happy Ending" was the school's unofficial anthem. Teddy and Wayne played together a couple times when Wayne was a freshman, and when Teddy graduated he gave Wayne a pair

of drumsticks and made him promise that he would keep playing “no matter what.”

The Retones were having a showcase performance at The Velvet Cage in NYC. Top executives from the major recording labels were coming to the show. It was rumored that Clive Davis was stopping by. As chance would have it, Teddy fell violently ill the morning of the gig. He woke up with a 106-degree fever and was rushed to the hospital. The doctors thought he had contracted spinal meningitis (he thankfully did not); however, Teddy would not be playing that evening. The band conceded that they would have to cancel the gig, but Teddy insisted otherwise. “I know this guy at Bloomfield High, Wayne Wagner,” he said with some effort. “He’s an amazing drummer, and he has our material down cold. You don’t have to cancel the gig. I know he’ll play. Just call him.” So the band’s manager called Wayne, and he said yes.

Wayne rose to the occasion. It was his moment to shine and he was not about to let the solar system down. Midway through the set Wayne felt the gravity of eyes upon him. He peered through the lights into the audience. There was Jenny. She was standing front and center, her eyes fixed on him. The set rolled on but Jenny’s eyes never wavered. Wayne was caught in the tractor beam of girl worthy of her own constellation. The band ended the set with *Sort of a Happy Ending*. The crowd gave the band a ten-minute standing ovation.

Back stage after the show a half dozen record company big wigs stopped by to congratulate the band. “We’ll be in touch,” they all said. The lead singer was signing autographs for the fans, and the lead guitarist lit a joint. Wayne was sitting on a red leather couch absorbing it all, enjoying every last fleeting moment. He knew that by tomorrow, or the next day, Teddy would return and he would just be the guy who filled in. A champagne bottle popped and Wayne got sprayed in the face. He wiped

his eyes with a towel and his view of the world changed. Jenny was standing there. Tonight was Wayne's chance and he would seize the moment.

"Don't you go to Bloomfield High?" she asked cautiously and squinting slightly.

"Yes, but I don't usually admit it in public."

Jenny chuckled. "You were great by the way. I didn't know that you played."

"The band asked me to fill in at the last minute. Teddy got sick or something this morning."

Wayne was stunned by Jenny's beauty, and Jenny was sunbathing in the aura of his moment. The Hollywood divorce is inevitable, but for the time being she was all his. Wayne was starving for a slice of New York City pizza and asked her if she wanted to come along with him. She said yes. He asked her to wait a minute while he said say goodbye to Charlie and Cindy (he also needed to borrow some money). Charlie and Cindy were sitting at a table sharing a beer Cindy bought using her foolproof fake I.D.

"Hey you two," Wayne said casually, and trying his best to hold back a grin.

"Well, if it isn't the man of the hour," greeted Charlie. "You were awesome!"

"I'm so proud of you," added Cindy as she gave Wayne a big hug.

"Thanks guys. You're not going to believe this, but Jenny Lewis and I are going out for a slice of pizza, and I have like two bucks in my wallet."

"The part about you having no money I believe," said Charlie before turning to Cindy. "Do you have enough money to get us home?"

"Plenty," she replied.

Charlie opened his wallet and gave Wayne a high-school prom king's ransom: forty-eight dollars. "May good fortune be on your side my friend."

"Yea, good luck," added Cindy.

"Thanks," and off Wayne sailed into uncharted waters.

And so their first date was pizza and coke in the West Village. Wayne and Jenny dated for six months. Wayne was madly in love. He proposed to her a thousand times in his mind, and a couple times for real. Jenny loved Wayne back. She loved that he wasn't mainstream. She loved that his house was a quarter the size of hers. He was a necessary love for her, but unfortunately not a permanent one. Wayne didn't see it coming. He did not understand how her love could exist one day and vanish the next. The pain from a broken heart lingers, and Jenny extinguished Wayne's passion for music - wiped clean by the wrath of unreciprocated love. Wayne was not the type to channel hurt into art. Breakup songs would never be in his repertoire.

If Teddy Rivers had not gotten sick that morning, Wayne would probably not have connected with Jenny, and his life would have gone in a different direction. Call it what you will - fate, karma, destiny, chance - but Jenny was never planned, nor did Wayne have a choice to love or not to love. Love is often described in mystical terms because the how, when, where and with whom we fall is out of our control. Love is pure chance. Wayne was never bitter toward Jenny. He did not regret their first date, their last, or the heartache that followed. On the infinite cosmic timeline there is little difference between six months or sixty years. Wayne would have preferred sixty years, but he was glad he had loved at all. The less fortunate never get a taste.

Mind reading has an intoxicating effect on Wayne. The thoughts he hears come dressed in melodies. The drone of the sonic gun is tranquil and familiar, like sleeping in his own bed after years on the road; and it sparks his creativity. It makes him dizzy and slightly nauseous, but the benefit is well worth the discomfort.

Wayne has not played drums in a decade, but at 2:53 in the morning he goes down to his basement, picks up the sticks Teddy Rivers gave him, and he plays. The rims of his eyes fill with tears as he races around the kit. He wakes up his mother (and half the neighborhood). She sits up in bed and listens. Tears fill her eyes too. She had not realized how empty the house had been over the years without the rat-tat-tat of her son's gifted playing. She never asked him why he stopped because she isn't the prying type. Wayne plays for forty-five minutes, strolls upstairs to bed, and falls into an ocean's deep, blissful sleep. He is finally over Jenny after waiting patiently for ten years.

The third member of the trio cannot sleep either. At 4:11 A.M. Charlie is wide-awake. He dozed off for a short time around three o'clock only to be awakened by an unsettling dream. The dream was so real that an hour later he still isn't sure it was just a dream.

Charlie was lying awake in bed (or so he thought) when an apparition appeared in the form of an old man; decrepit, wearing a robe, and holding a walking stick. His eyes were bandaged. Charlie thought he must be blind. Charlie politely asked who are you? No reply. Seconds later, the apparition spoke with a voice that reverberated as if Charlie's room was an immense gymnasium.

THERE ARE LIMITS TO WHAT MAN CAN ACHIEVE
UNKNOWN ARE BEST LEFT THAT WAY
SLAVES OF INFORMATION TOIL TO KEEP PACE
HUMANITY IS LOSING THE RACE
IN THE END MAN HAS ONLY ONE REFUGE
THE SANCTITY OF THE MIND

Charlie does not believe in the supernatural, yet somehow he sensed that the apparition was not of this world - not your typical REM riff on reality. The feeling made him uneasy, and the apparition's message more so. Charlie is a man of science, and science has everything to do with disturbing "unknowns," and in doing so advances humanity. "Sanctity of the mind," what did that mean? Was it a warning, or a premonition of sorts? Was the ghost referring to the sonic gun? Questions, questions and more questions, and Charlie was in the uncomfortable position of not having answers. But it was just a dream after all, so Charlie did what any sane person would do. He shrugged it off and tried to sleep again. But he could not. The incomprehensible dream reminded him that his gun was just an accident.

He wants to go downstairs and turn on the device, but he has never broken a promise to Cindy, and he does not want to break one now. Besides, he thinks, what good will it do reading my own mind? The TV is on, and he surfs the channels. The gun's mystery continues to gnaw at him. He is convinced there is a scientific explanation, but he has no idea where to begin looking. He considers calling Tripp, but remembers that he has no phone. He laments having to deliver mail in a few hours. Work seems trivial, but he cannot afford to lose his job, not yet anyway.

Charlie pushes his frustration aside for the moment and recalls the mind reading experience. *It feels so good.* A rush of temptation to use the gun nearly overpowers him. *Come on, just do it.* He wants to go back to

the other world, his other world. Mind reading is only the beginning, the tip of the iceberg, of what he can do there. The other world is like a virtual world, and Charlie its omnipotent programmer – the only one with access. During the mind reading encounter earlier, Charlie discovered that he could control the transmission of his thoughts, and even block those of others. He can also increase their volume by thinking louder. He wonders what it might do to a person if he were to project as loudly as possible. Charlie thinks of his father, and entertains the possibility that the sonic gun might allow them to speak in some way. *I bet he'd have an idea or two about how this thing works.* The other world has many secrets – secrets that are for him, and only him to discover. But Charlie is a perfectionist, and unanswered questions about how the device works will rob him of all personal glory. *It's not fair.*

Charlie peruses a biology book that has been collecting dust on his bookshelf. He searches for pertinent information on the human brain and nervous system. He learns that the brain feeds only on glucose, which explains his uncharacteristically powerful sweet craving. An hour later, and no closer to understanding, he decides to make breakfast – pancakes drowned in maple syrup. His sweet tooth is aching.

Charlie is cracking an egg into the powdered pancake mix when an idea comes to him. He pulls a business card from his wallet. The card of a man he met at the convention where he met Tripp.

Will Dearborn
Director of Special Events
United States Patent Office
1-800-123-4567

Charlie fiddles with the business card nervously. Given the hour he is sure he will get Dearborn's answering machine, and he decides to rehearse the message he will leave. "Hello Mr. Dearborn. My name is Charlie Childs. We met at The Invention Convention in Boston six months ago. You gave me your card. I am calling to ask for your assistance with an invention I just completed. I don't want to give details over the phone, but if you call me back I promise you won't be disappointed. Please get back to me as soon as you can. Thank you very much." After a couple run-throughs Charlie picks up the phone and dials. He gets Dearborn's answering machine as expected, but freezes when he hears the prompting beep. *What are you doing? When he calls back what are you going to say? You don't know how the thing works. You will look incompetent, and he'll probably take the device from you.* Charlie puts the phone back in its cradle. Perhaps I should wait until I have a few more answers, he thinks.

There is a period of ten minutes during the wee hours of the morning when it is neither day nor night; when Dracula makes a beeline to the safety of his dark coffin; when ninety percent of the world's bagels come out of the oven. And it is during these ten minutes that Charlie gets some sleep, precious little sleep. He would have slept longer, but the smoke detector goes off. His pancakes are on fire in the frying pan.

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Brand New Day

Wednesday morning Cindy wakes with Charlie on the brain and a headache. She pops two Tylenols and heads to the shower. She remembers her resolution about not using the mind reading device until “after,” and the throbbing lessens. There is a window in the shower that looks out over a park. The park has a playground and the sun is reflecting off the steel slide. It reminds her of playing with Charlie as kids. Twenty-two years have passed since the day she met him. On this particular morning the memory is disturbingly vivid, to the point of surreal.

Whether it’s the warm water, the fragrance of shampoo, or simply the anticipation of a new day, people have ambitious thoughts in the morning shower. Today, she decides, is the day she will talk to Charlie. Her struggle to contain her feelings the previous evening heightens the urgency. She shudders at the thought of how awkward it could have been if Charlie had learned her secret telepathically, with Wayne standing right there. Or worse, in the garble of the mind reading world her message could have been distorted. She wants her confession to be better planned

and clear in its delivery. She wants to control the moment, not be controlled by it.

She considers exactly how to tell him. What will she say if he doesn't reciprocate, how will she retreat to save their friendship if she needs to? She contemplates when to tell him. The three of them meet at Miller's Tavern every Wednesday night. She will insist on walking him home at the end of the evening and tell him then.

Cindy spends thirty minutes in the shower and her skin has the wrinkles to prove it. She is turning off the water when she remembers that weeks ago she agreed to go on a double date this evening with her cousin, her cousin's boyfriend, and an out-of-town friend visiting for the night. I'll just cancel, she thinks hastily. No I can't do that, my cousin planned this a month ago. Damn it, I should have never accepted. It is rare that Cindy misses Wednesday with the boys, but they will just have to understand, the date being a favor and all for her cousin. It also dawns on her that the boys might bring the gun with them, and she definitely wants to avoid that situation. Having the conversation with Charlie will have to wait until tomorrow morning. She will see him first thing before work. The thought of not seeing him until then makes her uneasy.

10

The Best Things Are Never Planned

In 1887, two men named Michelson and Morley had an idea. The laws of physics dictate that if you throw a ball from a truck traveling at 100 miles per hour the velocity of the ball (to an observer on the stationary ground) will be 100 mph + the speed of the ball. They hypothesized that the speed of light would also have a measurable relative speed. Comedian Steven Wright has a joke:

“I was at a job interview, and the man asked me if I had any questions. I `said yes, one. If you are in a car traveling at the speed of light and you turn on the headlights, what happens?” The man said, “I don’t know.” So I said, “I don’t think I want to work here.”

Michelson and Morley devised an experiment. Using a sophisticated device they measured the speed of light traveling in the opposite direction of the earth’s rotation and light traveling with the earth’s rotation. They hypothesized that the difference between the two

speeds would be twice the speed at which the earth rotates. But they found no difference, and the experiment was deemed a failure. The entrenched scientific establishment mocked Michelson and Morley, and their findings were dismissed. Years later, Einstein reviewed their work. Rather than dismissing their findings, he learned from their failure. Perhaps the speed of light was a constant. This was Einstein's starting point.

Christopher Columbus had it all wrong. He was trying to find a shorter route to Asia by sailing west across the Atlantic. The cartographers of the day knew his journey was folly, but as legend goes Chris was a handsome guy, handsome enough to convince Queen Isabella to fund his expedition. But had it not been for the uncharted North American continent, Chris, his three ships, and their crews would have run out of food and perished in the Pacific. Instead he discovered America. America is an accident. Accidents are the offspring of Chance. Columbus Day is a celebration of Chance.

Charlie is Columbus standing on the shore of a new world scratching his head. It is not Asia, but it looks ripe with possibilities. He is Einstein examining Michelson and Morley's experiment, trying to find truth amidst failure.

As Charlie emerges from his house the next morning Wayne is waiting to escort him to work.

"Hurry up Charlie, you're going to be late... Good morning. You look terrible by the way."

"Thanks."

"Didn't you get any sleep?"

"Are you kidding? You slept after that?"

"I know, it's amazing - a mindreading device. You're a genius."

“But I don’t even know how the thing works.”

“It works.”

“Yea, but how can I be a genius when it was a total accident?”

“Charlie, the best things are never planned. Don’t you know that?”

Yes, why the self-doubt? You had the idea for the dog whistle. You had the know-how to build it. You set the table. You created the conditions for discovery. Did Einstein invent the speed of light? Did Fleming invent penicillin? Did Franklin invent electricity? Did Columbus invent America? No, they were all discoveries. Discovery is the result of action. You built the gun. Not to take credit because luck factors into the equation would be foolish. He remembers a James Joyce quotation that his twelfth grade science teacher hung on the classroom wall:

A man of genius makes no mistakes. His errors are volitional and are the portals of discovery.

Charlie remembers how confident and formidable he feels in the other world and it makes him feel a little better. He remembers the pain of injustice he experienced at college, and his latent anger fortifies him further. He thinks of Cindy, and how she makes him feel safe, and important. She never passes judgment, makes him feel less than he is, or demands a shred of proof. He knows that she loves him unconditionally, but he is confused by love’s many flavors. Not knowing whether her love is platonic or romantic, he never considers that it can be both. Charlie has to talk to her - to wait a day longer will be suicide. If she says she doesn’t feel the same way then so be it. They can still be friends. *Yea, right.* Still, it is better to know the truth than meander in the grey twilight of uncertainty. He plans to tell her that night at Miller’s.

