

The Dream
of Benjamin Ward

Luminous Nine

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About the Author

Luminous Nine is a retired content-creator hailing from the Arctic Circle. Self-taught digital artist and a writer, specializing in story-telling. Interests include general creating, learning philosophy, languages, playing video games, music, and coffee. Quit school at the age of 16, and hasn't worked for more than three months in life. Didn't even start reading books until 2018, and even then highly selectively. Nevertheless, one of the most gifted beings in the universe.(The ego is strong with this one.)

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Prologue

We can't control everything in the world. Love is one of those things. When it hits you, there is no way to prepare.

You can imagine what it will be like or how it will affect you. But going through the experience is, itself, like being crazy. Being crazy is okay if you know how to handle it.

I know that I didn't handle it very well. But I would never change it for anything. It's a part of who I've always been. This will never change.

We often don't think about what love means in our lives. Do you think it's just a feeling, or is it a funda-

mental force behind all things, like gravity itself?

I'm unsure about this. Love can be anything from loving ice cream to loving your neighbours or friends, loving your parents, or giving to divine charity. If it were a force that moved everything in the cosmos towards something else, then I wonder.

If fear is the opposite of love or bliss, then I'm an expert. I've been afraid for most of my life. Afraid of bullies, strangers, my mind, losing control.

And what's probably the worst is being afraid of fear. But sometimes, falling asleep and dreaming can help you forget about those things for a little while. Dreams are significant to me.

Learning the art of lucid dreaming helped me control my dreams, which in turn helped me control the fear I felt in them. Occasionally, it has been a wonderful time.

Sometimes I wonder if life is just a dream. I would like it to be. Because of all the terrible things I have experienced.

Imagine how great it would be if you woke up from a bad dream at the end. It is me grasping or clinging for

safety as I have endured a lot and have been neglected.

Whatever the case, that notion has some merit. I'm not the only one who's thinking this way.

Many people think that if life were only a dream, it would ruin everything we've worked for as a species. Well, so what? Who gives a shit?

Isn't something still happening? We are still experiencing everything, right? People can go suck eggs for all I care.

This planet is, nonetheless, a circus. To me, it's the ideal game rule to reverse all the bad stuff we do.

Yeah, it's insane. To think that the cosmos is nothing more than a jumble of nonsense. But it's my own. And so I own it. All else can go hang.

I still find little things that make me happy occasionally. Those things remind us that things don't always go wrong. I wouldn't change a thing, no matter how fucked up it sounds.

You never know if you'd just be resolving the same issue over and over again, or if you'd just be causing more issues altogether.

Fuck society. The fake shit it produces, the counterfeit tech, the so-called mama's new bread, the fake cars, the fake phones that break after a week. Fuck the advertisements, that they shove up your ass.

Fuck all the people who pretend to care when they really don't. I hope someone gives those who fake mental illnesses some real fucking diseases.

Fuck the businessmen, who fuck people out of sheer greed. I hope all the big businesses go up in smoke.

I hope that surveillance capitalism will be stopped. Furthermore, I hope money itself vanishes from the face of Earth. Fuck everybody.

I need help, and fortunately, it's not far away. I got a free cab ride to the northern suburbs of my town because of my disabilities.

Not only that, but I have found a new therapist, and it is about time, considering I haven't had one in 18 years. Likewise, I'm nervous as hell, but I'm sure it will go okay. If that's not the case, I'm free to assign her to another person. So, either wish me luck or don't, since you don't even exist. I'm out of here.

Chapter 1

You Have a New Patient, Doctor Porter

His mind was broken. His life was a shell, a shadow, and he dreamt of darkness. He was haunted by shame, and more so, guilt, one of the most destructive emotions one can have.

He had no recollection before his 18th birthday. Furthermore, he spent his days battling anxiety and depression, relishing any moments of relief. It was a form of self-punishment.

It was morning, 9.15 AM. The taxi was supposed to pick him up in 15 minutes, as Benjamin prepared to leave. He had an appointment to see his new therapist, a psychiatrist named Dr. Eve Porter.

He was racing nervously back and forth with a lit cigarette on his balcony. Likewise, he also had an old pocket watch in his left hand, which he kept checking out.

He put his cigarette in an ashtray on a small table and went inside. The couch was covered in newspapers, and the living room was awash in books and sticky notes.

The whole flat was a mess. Ben enjoyed collecting books about spirituality and self-improvement. The title of his latest book was 'Everything Is Your Doing.'

He retrieved his black jacket and backpack from the hanger and proceeded to retrieve a comb and a small mirror to ensure that his hair was not scattered throughout. He put them on the table, got his keys from it, and opened the front door.

Ben saw a young child leaving their neighbour, so he waited for them to go down the stairs before going outside

into the hallway.

The cab was waiting for him in the car park when he came out of the building. He checked his backpack with his hand to make sure there was a bottle of water in it for dry throat, which happens when he's anxious.

Ben got into the taxi and greeted the driver. His anxiety started rising immediately. He tried to see the scenery as they left and asked if the driver would take the smaller roads instead of the main road for his comfort.

The 20-minute journey ended at the northern part of town in the suburbs, where the therapist's office was situated. It was surrounded by a thick pine tree forest, which was relatively isolated from the rest of the neighbourhood.

Ben thought it was a perfect setting. He jumped out of the taxi, trembling from being a bit nervous. He was about to start a relationship with this person for many years, if he was lucky. So, it wouldn't be easy, either.

He walked up to the front door and rang the doorbell. He mentally counted the number of seconds until the door was opened. The doctor's dog surprised him by greeting

him. It was a golden retriever. Dr. Porter said, “Come back inside, Donald.”

She greeted him inside and requested that he remove his jacket. He was escorted to a room that resembled a conventional therapist’s office, complete with a sofa that was extended.

Ben glanced at a paper on the doctor’s desk as he was walking towards a chair. He raised his eyebrows and sat down. The paper was removed from the desk and placed in a drawer with other documents.

Ben couldn’t speak because his heart rate had gone up. She noticed it quickly and tried different ways to open things up with him, but they didn’t work. Ben remained silent and appeared to be experiencing anxiety. This situation lasted for some time.

She sighed and put her pen on the desk. When she found herself mute due to anxiety, she ran some thought-patterns in her mind to get her talking.

Ben suddenly realized that he needed to say something. The purpose of this visit was to begin repairing and uncovering his shattered past. He couldn’t help him-

self, so he asked about the paper.

“Board of Ethics,” Ben said, “I saw the paper.”

The doctor got nervous and tried to redirect attention away from it. Ben realised that she wouldn't do that if everything was fine. He wanted to keep going, despite the minimal progress they'd made so far.

“I see. So something went wrong with them. You got fired, didn't you? That would be quite funny, but messed up, since you took me on today.” Ben laughed, but he was still feeling anxious.

She then expressed her great shame that the board had rejected her practice and permission to conduct therapy. He's only there because the patient system didn't let him know about the postponement. She wasn't expecting him.

“So why the hell would you play at this charade if you weren't even expecting me here? What kind of doctor are you anyway? Are you one of those charlatans who turn people into messes until they commit suicide? I'm going to report you after I leave.”

She yelled at Ben to wait, saying she could help him,

as he was about to call the taxi. He looked at his phone with anger and then back at her, until he gave up on going, as something was compelling him to stay.

Ben wasn't anxious any more, at least. He returned to the room with her and sat down with his arms in a tuck. Furthermore, he was still upset. She handed him a cup of coffee.

"I let this go on because I really cared about your situation, even before I found out about the suspension. I can help you if you let me," Dr. Porter said.

"Really. . . You'd put your livelihood at stake to help me out. How will you help me now that you can't be my actual therapist?"

"Before I became a psychiatrist, I worked as a doctor at the Haley Institute and participated in their research program. I utilized their laboratories to develop a drug known as X, which was accompanied by a portable device that my colleagues had reverse-engineered. Their combination enables individuals to enter into another individual's subconsciousness, provided that they are both connected through the device. This is why the Board

of Ethics rejected me last week. They found out about what I was up to.”

“Are you serious? Why would you think that I would sincerely consider taking the immense risk of having another person poking inside my mind?”

“You want to know what happened before you turned 18. And I know from your history that you’ve been involved in experimental drug research before.”

“It was to test a new kind of anxiety medication, not to crack my consciousness open and go for a stroll in it.”

It was, of course, up to Ben to decide whether to participate in this undertaking. They talked, and he became more and more convinced that this could give him the answers to his lost past and life.

And he was not someone who would ignore the events that had led him to this moment, this place. It had to be for a reason. Somewhere in the conversation, they switched to calling each other by their first names.

Ben left home soon after and couldn’t sleep the next night. He had to think about things a lot. He had a dream where he was in a box and someone knocked on it

from outside.

It was Morse code that said: “Life is short, don’t wait to go through it.” He woke up in the morning. The phone rang, it was Eve, or Dr. Porter. She asked if he was going to do it.

“Before I say it, tell me one thing. What’s the reason for you to create a drug that allows you to enter the minds of patients?” Ben asked.

“Because I am hopeful that someone will one day inform me that it was worth it. That I helped them. And I mean really helped them. It was designed for extreme circumstances, and I cannot think of a more suitable individual for the task than you. If it can expedite years of work, it implies that more individuals can be assisted in a shorter duration. Is that not a worthy cause?”

“It is. However, I was searching for something more personal as a reason.”

“I believe that I have experienced a death once. I have no recollection of the incident; however, I was admitted to a hospital at the age of 16. Nobody could explain what happened. The only thing that they discovered was

that I was lying on the gravel in front of an eight-story building, with my legs and arms broken. I am hopeful that someday, someone will inform me of the events that transpired.”

Chapter 2

Experimental Principles

Benjamin and Eve were sitting in her office together. Ben kept patting Donald as they were lying next to each other. He was drinking tea, and she was drinking coffee.

Ben was as anxious as ever after agreeing to the procedure. Eve looked at some papers on her desk to make sure Ben got the right dosage.

After a certain point, the dosage remained the same for both participants. But since it was his first time, he had to use less than the maximum amount to stay safe.

His mood, serotonin levels, and overall physique played

a role in determining the dosage. This was made easier by examining him with the device they would use and measuring his blood contents and values.

Eve stood up and informed them that she was going to get them the device to determine the dosage. After waiting for a while, she returned with what appeared to Ben to be something out of a futuristic science fiction film.

It looked like a combination of virtual reality goggles, blood pressure monitor, and electrocardiogram. Except that it was nothing of the sort.

The other parts, besides the goggles, were used to regulate the amount of X in their systems. They also ensured the device would “pull them out” if their bodies or minds were absorbing too much information.

That didn’t calm Ben down like he wanted. He asked about the procedure. A series of questions and answers were followed by details on how the whole thing works.

“As you know, this procedure is very experimental and questionable. It goes against certain ethics and assumptions about what we think about consciousness or

the mind. The possibility of entering another person's mind raises numerous questions, both about the person and about what's possible, Eve says with a calm tone."

"I'm worried about many things. For one, what does 'travelling' inside my mind even mean?"

"There exists a 'barrier' that has been established within our minds, which prevents them from stepping into each other's domain in the conventional manner. One could refer to it as Ego, a term that I have borrowed from certain psychological and spiritual concepts. The drug functions by temporarily suspending this barrier, enabling the device to move your sensory-experiential field into an 'other' mind."

"And once you're inside me, what happens next?"

"After crossing the threshold, you will know and feel it. That there is another presence within you. The device ensures that as long as there is not too much input or information overloading our minds, it keeps me with you at all times. The drug also makes it possible for us to see each other, regardless of our choice. When I ask you questions about your childhood, your mind will manifest

parts of it in our surrounding 'space.' We may engage in conversation with them; however, it is imperative to bear in mind that I will remain by your side and provide protection.”

“I guess that’s where I should’ve started, but what about the possible side effects of the drug and you hanging out in my head?” Ben held on tightly to his pants.

“Derealization, spatial distortions, schizophrenic episodes, loss of personal identity, hallucinations, non-locality of awareness, and paranoia.”

“Well, that’s just fucking great. You are telling me that I might be permanently destroyed in a psychotic episode.”

“That is partly the reason for the highly questionable nature of the matter and the reason for my suspension. However, if it makes you feel any better, I would like to inform you that my previous patient did not experience any adverse effects,” Eve sighed.

“All right. One last question. If something from outside interrupts our 'adventures,' what happens?”

“I would become ensnared within your psyche. There

is also the possibility that I will die. I am unable to provide a definitive answer, as the duration spent outside is significantly less in comparison to the duration spent in the vicinity. It is a kind of time-dilation. Therefore, the chances of something cutting out the device from us are minimal.”

Ben was a mess. With his eyes closed, he was taking deep breaths. Eve tried to ease his worries and offered him more chamomile tea. Donald was looking at him with a funny expression. He was ready and not ready at the same time, checking his pocket watch from time to time.

They agreed to start measuring his blood work. Eve put electrodes on his chest and head. This was only the preliminary step, but Ben was already frightened. She said he needed to settle down before the actual procedure began.

Otherwise, it would be a “bad trip like he could never imagine.” He was able to reduce his heart rate by thinking. His serotonin levels were O.K., and the rest were as well. They were ready to begin.

She went to lie down on a couch opposite his. The device was resting between them on a table. The two of them were wearing goggles and had just taken the amount of X they were supposed to take.

She took 100 milligrams, he took 30. They had to wait for 15 minutes for it to work. Then they both had to turn on their goggles, which told the device they were ready to go. She said one more thing:

“I almost forgot to mention that if you experience any unusual sensations while I cross the threshold, please refrain from panicking at that moment. It would be detrimental to both of us. It might make certain aspects of your mind suspicious.”

“Well, what do you mean by that?!” Ben yelled.

“I am implying that your mind may attempt to harm us.”

They were submerged, and thus began their journey.

Chapter 3

The Descent Into Fear

Ben suddenly woke up in a space. He looked around and saw nothing except pitch-black darkness. Eve was lying next to him until she got up as well. She guided him with the first steps, and they got their bearings.

“Remind yourself that we are going through your memories in stages, or barriers. To attain the underlying essence of them, it is necessary to proceed through them gradually. If you go too fast, your mind might react and throw us out.”

She informed him that to achieve any objective or

elicit any experience, Ben must concentrate on his final recollections before they fade into oblivion. He tried to remember his mother.

Rainy day. Ben was sitting on a porch of a house, with cracked paint on its front door. There was yelling coming from behind him and inside.

He tried to shield his ears, but he could still hear the dishes clanging. He had a twisted expression on his face, like someone who'd been through hell.

The door flew open, and his mother got thrown out by force. She slipped and fell with her face towards the pavement, and hit her head on it. Bits of teeth flew out and there was blood everywhere. She sat there, struggling to breathe.

Ben and Eve were watching this from a distance. Ben saw her mom and himself, trying to help her out. They could not talk to them. Ben tried to shout at himself, but it didn't work.

Ben said to Eve, "... I guess I have to relive this shit."

"What were your expectations?"

“Hazy imagery, maybe. I don’t know. The rain feels so real.”

Suddenly, Ben’s father emerged, holding a large knife in his hand. He told the younger Benjamin to kill her. Ben refused and threw away the knife. His father got furious, grabbed the knife and looked at him.

“Look well, my boy. And remember what you did.”

His mother screamed as he stabbed her heart with the knife. She was dead.

Ben was very upset and anxious when he saw this scene, and Eve tried to comfort him. The rain stopped as they left the house, and the entire scene went white.

Ben’s voice was heard whispering around them, saying that Eve should leave immediately. This startled her.

A dark hall with people standing in a ring around an empty altar. Lit candles, books, and notes scattered all over the room. Today, it was Ben’s 18th birthday. He was standing with Eve in the background and looking at the altar in the centre of the room.

“I don’t remember this,” he said to Eve nervously.

“It seems that this is your first repressed memory.

Let's see it."

A woman in a dress was led to the altar while she was blindfolded. The two people escorting her were Ben's parents.

The woman was lowered, and her legs were spread out. A metal dome was dropped from the ceiling to hold the woman inside. Yet, she couldn't resist.

The people around the room started muttering and chanting verses from books they were holding up, as if they were doing some kind of ritual.

The hooded Benjamin, who was younger, was one of them. Thereafter, they started a countdown from 10. When they reached zero, something horrifying happened.

The woman inside the steel dome was scorched to death, leaving only a bloody, smoky mess behind. What was even more disturbing to both younger and current Ben was what happened next.

People in the room rushed towards the dome and began munching on the remains. Like a sickly orgy.

Ben felt sick to the stomach. He veered off and began to gasp for air as he walked away. Eve was very upset

by what happened, but she tried to stay calm, but she almost didn't.

They rushed from the hallway to a corridor. At this point, the voices from before were getting louder and telling Eve to stop.

They suddenly fell through the floor and into a school field. Ben's friends were drinking alcohol, but he wasn't feeling it. It was the summer after he quit school at 16.

The younger Benjamin was intrigued by the presence of some older men in the school yard, far from his buddies, and giggling with each other. Eve and Ben followed him to them, just to see the younger him get beaten to a bloody pulp. His friends yelled at him to leave, but it didn't work out.

Ben attempted to help himself, but nothing worked. He saw that Eve was left behind and yelled after her. He noticed a shadow figure standing next to Eve. So, he felt very uncomfortable and shouted at her to come back to him.

Ben grabbed Eve by the hand, and they ran away from the shadowy figure. Ben said that he wanted to

leave immediately. They had been through a lot in a short period of time, and she understood perfectly. They came out the other side.

She said that it hadn't gone the way she had planned it to go. The idea was for her to ask about his past, but he kept showing them things before they could ask questions. This was making her very concerned.

"... What the fuck was that last thing?" Ben said this while he was sweating heavily on the sofa.

"I really don't know. It is possible that a repressed aspect of yourself is attempting to emerge to the surface. This was not a problem with my other patients. So this is unknown to me too. Are you willing to continue tomorrow?"

"As much as I hate to say it, yes, I am. But I need a fucking breather."

Eve was looking at the results of the devices while they had tea. Everything appeared normal, except for one thing. During the shadow figure's appearance, his serotonin levels were off the charts.

Chapter 4

The Trauma

The next morning. Ben and Eve were getting ready. Eve checked his vitals and blood sugar levels, and made sure the new dose was just right for the upcoming “trip.”

“I’m re-calibrating the device a little. I realized that it was not prepared for the level of potency your mind experienced in such a short time. The situation was dangerous,” she said with a nervous tone.

“... Yeah. I don’t know what the hell that thing was that kept following us around. That figure,” Ben replied.

Ben asked if he could get another cup of tea on his

own. They bumped into each other and Eve giggled a little. There was a change in the air. They were becoming friends.

As the day went by, Ben felt like he had known her for a long time. She felt something similar.

It felt like two old friends reuniting after a long absence. It wasn't a conventional doctor-patient relationship at all.

"I think we are done," she said to him, "whenever you're ready."

They went through the procedure and flew away. Ben woke up in space a little while later. He called for Eve, but couldn't hear or see anyone nearby. He attempted to shout louder, but to no avail.

Running towards nowhere, shouting Eve's name, didn't do much for him. He stumbled on his feet and began to tumble through the air, before landing on a wooden floor. Not only that, but he also saw himself as a small child, but he also saw himself looking past him.

The boy had blood on his shirt and pants and looked scared towards the family bedroom in a house.

The bed was dripping with fresh blood, with the limbs that had been severed neatly arranged in different shapes, and there were two heads resting apart from each other on the pillows, mouths, and eyes wide open.

The Benjamins were unable to comprehend what had occurred. He didn't recognize the people who had been chopped up. The front door of the house suddenly opened, and a man dressed in a hoodie and mask stepped inside.

The figure sighed as he sat down beside the terrified young Benjamin.

"... You're very lucky," the man said.

Benjamin continued to cry, and the older Ben was afraid to move. He closed his eyes and listened to the man speak.

"I never wanted for you to be here. But now that you are, I'd imagine you're going to go through a hell in your life. I can't say whether that's a good or a bad thing in the end. Just know that I'm letting you go. Your parents wanted to die, you know. They hired me to take care of them. Well, one of them did. But that's between you and me, you got that?"

Ben was grabbed by a shadowy figure from behind by the shoulder. It was the same being that had chased him and Eve before. He froze in complete terror, his eyes shut, as if he were in a dream.

“... This is the image of trauma,” the shadow figure said with a voice that resembled an old television broadcaster. “These events create a significant obstacle in your psychological framework that prevents you from recollecting them. These people were your family. But now that you are confronted with this memory, your mind cannot return to the waking world. The stories of people committing murders in your previous adventures were nothing more than reminiscences of the real thing. Your mind fabricated them from the residual material that the blockade had failed to prevent from being recollecting. I can help you. But only if you let me.”

Ben opened his eyes. The killer and his child form had vanished. The bed was clean, with no blood in sight. He looked around, and was startled by the shadow figure, but he was able to calm down quickly.

“Who are you? And where is Eve?!” Ben asked anx-

iously.

“... You wouldn’t believe it if I told you. Right now, we’re going to try searching for her. Follow me.”

The scenery morphed into a vast, dense forest during the evening. The figure proceeded to follow Ben a little further away from him.

It told him that Ben was the one who needed to find her because he knew more about his mind than anyone else.

“At present, Eve is traversing through your life in a reverse chronological order. To put it simply, this forest is where you got lost about 24 years ago. Whereas she began her journey from your most recent memories. My theory is that you two will meet somewhere in the middle.”

“Great... So, in other words, it might be some time,” Ben replied.

“Since neither of you can leave without the other, it is my estimate that it will take approximately two weeks of ‘local time’ before you will see each other.”

“...Fucking beautiful.”

Chapter 5

The Meaning of Life

Ben came up to a little opening in the forest and looked around. The sun was shining through the twigs and branches and onto his face. Even though he wanted to enjoy it, he knew this was not the time.

A boy sprinted past Ben, unexpected. The person was himself when he was eight years old. The trauma had passed, and there was no trace of it in his expressions. He was living life as any child would normally. He looked like he was alone in the forest.

The boy picked up a stick from the ground and began

tapping on it, as if in Morse code. The shadow figure approached Ben and notified him of the tapping.

“... That is your mind trying to communicate something to yourself,” it said.

Ben approached the boy, knowing he was unable to see or touch him. He lifted his head and looked at Ben in the eyes after stopping tapping.

“... Do you know your deepest, darkest secret? You think you do, but you have no idea. Let me tell you the meaning of life. What is it that remains when you eliminate all possible unknowns? What is the truth behind all appearances? Who exactly do you think you are?” the boy asked him.

With a crooked smile, the boy’s face became distorted and became part of the landscape. This left Ben dazed and confused.

“This memory is not safe any more,” the shadow figure said, “your mind has started to become self-aware. It is alert to its mechanics and cues.”

“What the hell does that mean?!”

“It means we should move on to the next memory.”

They popped up at an old industrial site filled with heavy equipment and storage spaces. Walking into one of them, Ben saw the same boy, with a similar physical appearance, climbing the wall with a bunch of buddies.

Ben tried to tell them to get down before someone hurt themselves, but it didn't work. It appeared that one of the other friends had pushed Benjamin off a ledge, causing him to fall to the ground. The drop must have been greater than 3 metres.

Ben rushed towards himself to help. But then the boy stopped holding on to his leg and suddenly stood up.

"I'm not the one who needs help here. It's obvious, you love her. You always loved her, even when she pushed you off the ledge," the boy said.

Ben saw that the girl who had pushed Benjamin down was actually a young Eve Porter. Eve cried while yelling that she didn't mean it. The boy replied, it's all right.

"... But you know, this will turn out to be your end. The very act of loving her is what is keeping you from your fate," the boy continued.

"My fate?" Ben replied.

“Yes, you can’t move on, until you let go of her. That is your entire purpose in being here now.”

Ben didn’t understand. She had just met her. At least that’s what he thought. But now it was becoming clear that he might have known her all her life. If that’s the case, then why didn’t he remember her?

The shadow figure stood beside him, silent. It felt like everyone knew more about Ben than he did, except he was in his head, which made it even worse.

“... I love Eve. Yes, I love her. I felt it before we came here. It was faintly there in the background of things. I wasn’t sure what it was, though. But now I do,” Ben said.

“... You should be careful,” the shadow figure replied. “Now that your mind knows a lot more about its memories, it might start repelling you two back.”

“How is that a bad thing? We would just wake up, right?”

“Hardly. Eve explained the various symptoms that might come about as possible side effects of the experiment, no? Those are the types of things I am referring

to. Now that your mind has developed self-awareness, it is imperative that it is capable of handling the input generated by your traumatic memory. Failure to do so may result in hallucinations or other adverse effects. You have already witnessed your memory conversing with yourself, which is not advisable. And I fear that is just the beginning.”

Chapter 6

Love Is But An Emotion

The shadow figure was making Ben choose. They can either move to Ben's next memory involving only him, or they can switch to one where Eve is part of it. Ben didn't have a choice. He needed to see her.

However, the figure warned him that the more memories he saw where Eve was present, the more retaliating his mind would get. Ben couldn't quite understand why this was.

They had been on a prolonged journey of over a week, and were approaching Ben's mid-teen years. Ben was

taken on the roof of a large flat building in the next memory. Ben was looking at Eve and himself on the edge of the building. It was almost nighttime, and the air was nippy. Some stars were out.

“You promise?” Eve asked.

“Yeah, I promise. I’ll never leave you.”

“Okay, then prove it!” Eve got up and jumped down from the ledge, to the shock and horror of Ben. She laid down looking lifeless on the ground. Both Bens rushed down from the roof, and the younger Benjamin called for help.

The paramedics picked her up, and Ben joined the shadowy figure in the ambulance. Even though Ben was aware that Eve was now alive, the memory was affecting him deeply, to the point of having a panic attack.

At the hospital, the doctors declared she had fallen into a coma. Ben chose to stay with her with his younger self, but the shadow person had a message.

“If you stay here, your mind will backfire on you. The more you emotionally invest in her, the more it will hurt. I am unable to explain why this is, but you need to trust

me. Aren't you curious about the real Eve? We must proceed forward," the figure firmly grasped Ben's hand, and Ben reluctantly agreed.

The setting again changed, this time to Eve's home, on her 19th birthday. She got out of the coma and is now staying with a trainer to get better. Ben visited her often.

Benjamin and Eve were happy then, with them sitting out on the porch. Benjamin broke the silence.

"Why did you do it?"

She turned not to the younger Ben, but the older. And looked him in the eyes: "If you really wanted to be by my side, you would do it even if I died. I wanted to prove to myself that we still love each other even if everything else fails. Come hell or high water."

Ben burst into tears at that moment. He collapsed on the floor, and went into a fetal position. Then, a hand touched his shoulder. It was Eve. The real one. The love of his life.

After a tight embrace, Ben began to explain what had transpired. But then he started to wonder. How was it

that Eve felt the same way?

Evie then explained that she had gradually found memories of Ben, which brought her closer to him. She spoke of kissing, wonderful moments, and seeing into their true relationship.

The reason she had lost all those memories was still a mystery. Furthermore, why isn't Ben able to recall her after turning 18? Both of them lost themselves in thoughts about this.

Suddenly, there was a loud screech coming from every direction. It scared Ben and Eve to their very core. Even the shadow figure was surprised. Everything became black and quiet, with no sounds.

The figure said then: "I think that the threshold of your experiment pulling you back to the waking world just passed. You are on your own now." The figure then vanished, leaving them to their devices.

"I love you and I won't leave your side, you got that? We'll get through this together," Eve said to Ben, "okay, mental imagery. Let's try imagining something pleasant where we both are. Try picturing us in a sunny house

garden with swings.”

It worked. They were now sitting on the same swing set in the small garden just outside a house. The next step, said Eve, was “shocking” themselves out of Ben’s mind.

However, it had to be something very devastating. They did the only thing that would make them pull out. They imagined that they would lose each other for forever.

And this was more than they could bear, each of them having felt it in their bones through imagination, that loss of their other half. Everything was absorbed into itself, and then turned inside out. Ben opened his eyes.

It was at noon the day they went inside. Ben quickly looked next to him. Eve was sitting there, looking at him too. After getting up and hugging each other tight, they kissed.

“I’m never going back there,” said Ben to Eve.

She understood him completely. She never wanted to go there again, either. After finding out what really happened to him, his forgotten memories, and her attempted

“suicide”, they both felt like they had all the answers.

There’s no explanation for why Eve lost her feelings for him, or why half of Ben’s life is missing. They both calmed down after a while. Ben was having tea.

Something caught in the side of his eye, in the mirror. He turned to see what it was. It was the shadow figure from his mind, staring back at him.

Chapter 7

Awakening

Ben dropped the cup and broke it. Eve was startled by it and asked what was wrong. Ben said it was nothing. The figure was gone from the mirror.

Ben asked Eve if she could take Donald on a stroll, and she said yes. It seemed like all the blistering anxiety that had gripped Ben from the start was now only a passing shadow. Speaking of shadows, Ben thought, the fuck was that earlier?

He approached a small forest, which was grey and slightly darkened. The day had turned into evening.

Donald was doing his thing when Ben noticed something moving by the trees. It was the same figure from before. It had to be, he thought.

“Hallucinations huh, fucking hell,” he said to Donald.

Ben was ready to leave back to Eve. He took a turn and stopped in his tracks. The figure was standing right in front of him.

“They are not hallucinations,” it said. “You’ll see soon enough.” It was gone.

When Ben returned to Eve, he was completely lost in his thoughts. She noticed and asked him what he was feeling upset about. He said that he can see the person even when they are not inside.

They slept together that night in the same bed. Even in his dreams, the shadow figure showed up, even when they were in the lucid state Ben has become an expert in.

“You know, they’ll never stop until you fully wake up from this,” the figure remarks.

“Wake up from what?”

“Your so-called life is just an illusion.”

Ben woke up in the morning. He ate, and went to the living room, where the equipment was still in position. Eve was scribbling something on the paper at her desk. Then, she yelled: “I got it!”

“Got what?” Ben asked.

“Why, I don’t have any memories of you.”

She explained that it was the very experiment she had designed and the drugs she took over the years that had destroyed her memories. The drug contained a distinct component that was associated with memory, thereby facilitating the dilation of the cerebral cortex during the experience of being in another’s mind.

What she had not considered was that while the patient is entirely protected from the component’s altering effects, the individual travelling may experience a different case. The unintended consequence was that the component substituted her memories with nothing, thereby preventing overstimulation of her mind during the state.

Ben understood it, and advised her to never use them again, and she agreed. He went to the bathroom. Upon washing his hands, he looked up at the mirror and almost

had a heart attack. The killer from his traumatic memory was standing behind him.

The man opened the bathroom door, approached quickly towards Eve and took her by the hair. He slit her throat in front of Ben. Ben crashed on the floor, with his fists clenched, his face contorted in agony, and tears running down his face.

He had lost everything. His sanity, his love, his entire purpose. What was going on? He couldn't make any sense of what had happened. Did she die? Or am I dead? What's going on?

Then, everything was suddenly calm. The figure was sitting on the couch, looking at him, and laughing. Ben was in a rage, and couldn't put any words into coherent sentences. Nothing was coming out of his mouth.

The figure then pointed something up on Eve's desk. It was a letter, written in her handwriting. Ben opened it and started reading:

“My love, I know you didn't mean to leave me alone that day. It's okay. But you have to move on. You can't drag me around for eternity, you know. Just know

that we'll be together again. But you have to make that choice, or stay here until time's end."

Ben didn't understand what was going on. He had a mix of anger, frustration, confusion, nostalgia, a Déjà vu, and all sorts of emotions simultaneously.

"... I think that the time has come that we have a little conversation about what you are actually doing," the figure on the couch said.

Chapter 8

The Dream of Benjamin Ward

“You never had an inkling, did you? That your life is a facade. That your very existence is nothing but smoke and mirrors,” the figure claims to Ben.

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“It was me. And you. I am you. Your repressed ‘truth’ about your life. The truth that you have perpetually hushed under the carpet. The truth I will now tell you,” the figure continues.

“What truth?”

“You died. A long, long time ago. But that is not

all. You created an entire universe, just to be with her again.”

“N-no... Stop!”

“It’s okay. You don’t have to cry any more. You’re about to be freed.”

“Then tell me everything...”

“Your life was a happy one. It was full of joy, ups and downs, and love. You met Eveline before she turned 17. And you stayed with her until the very end. That is, her end. She was killed by a mugger in a hoodie and a mask in front of you,” the figure kept explaining.

“But after that incident, you couldn’t let go of her. In fact, you went so far as to refuse to transmigrate, because of the sadness and sense of loss that you kept with you, even after death. And so you created an entire fabric of space-time, with everything in it as much akin to the original life as possible.”

“And then what?”

“Then something went wrong. You started to confuse what you had created, as a creation, to a mere shadow of itself. Your mind became twisted in due course of

time, until creating aspects, such as yours truly. Which also explains your and Eve's so-called memory loss and duplicate memories out of the 'residue' of the so-called trauma. You created a framework of fear because you were so lost in the end. But I existed, to pull you back out of the dream."

"A dream?"

"You could call this the dream between your life, and the state beyond. And as long as you are attached to Eveline, you will keep yourself in this dream."

Ben sighed. He couldn't let go. Not any more. He had seen too many things with her. If he had to create the universe anew, he would do it all over again. Endlessly, until the edge of oblivion.

Even though his current existence was only the stuff of fantasy, he knew that by creating a new world, he could lose his memories of her again, thus meeting her all over from the beginning. Fall in love with her again.

"I have made up my mind," Ben said.

"The right kind of choice, I hope."

"I'm not leaving here. I can't. If a dream is the best

I can do, it's better than vanishing into nothingness. I can't stand the idea of never experiencing the thrill of being with her ever again. So this, is goodbye."

"Oh, you won't get rid of me. I'll always be there by your side, in case you change your mind. You have all the time in the world, as they say."

"Then let's get started."

It was morning. Ben walked into the kitchen, and grabbed a cup of tea. Eve greeted him by throwing him a newspaper. Ben read the first headline: "A mugger kills a woman in broad daylight!"

"What is the world coming to?" he said.

"I do not know. But I do know it's a world I'd rather have you in it. Now, and forever."

Epilogue

Time was coming to an end. A being, on the outskirts of the Milky Way, had been on a voyage for billions of years. It had created this existence, to overcome the loss of its loved one.

Do we really want to sustain an indefinite existence, where we are, as it were, locked or frozen into a kind of mode of being, where we don't notice time passing?

Does a dream necessarily require the cessation of being awake to reality? What then is the meaning of a "lucid" dream, where you are both dreaming, and aware that you are doing so?

If Ben had a choice, between reliving his actual life,

or keeping to his nightmares, could he have made the distinction which was which? We think that we are apart from things. But truly, are we impartial to dreams? Or are we ourselves dreams?

If existence was but a dream, would it negate anything when it comes to the human psychosocial and technological developing? This dream can also be equated with a simulation or a game. All of them designated really the same central feature, of pretentiousness.

It is this pretence, that is really at the core of the phenomena. This is why Ben had such a marvellous time. He had the capacity to pretend that his dream wasn't one.

All beings hope that things will turn out okay in the end. And this "okay-ness", is also a quality of dreams. Because in the background of your mind, you always know that you'll eventually wake up, even from the most awful nightmares.

Did Ben have this premonition of sorts? Did he subconsciously sense that the shadow figure was really part of his psyche? I think our difficulty is to consider our

Shadow, as it was coined by Carl Jung, as all the things that we perpetually repress and hide from our conscious bubbling attention.

There is also the collective unconscious, where the universality of everything can be discovered in different forms, or symbolisms. Was Ben aware of this symbolism? Was this why he makes such a case in the Prologue about The Fool's point of view, of basically throwing society to the birds?

There is also The Trickster archetype, which befits the shadow figure, as he's the one responsible for pretty much every major turn in the story. He's the one behind Ben's unexamined actions, and assumptions. He moves the darkness. Not only that, but he *is* darkness.

But what is the dark, really? It is the Hide aspect of the cosmos. If the game or the dream is Lost and Found, everything having to do with the Lost side, has to eventually enable the Found side. But this is a difficult idea to convey.

If Ben's story is taken as an allegory for this Hide and Seek dream-game, then everything in the story that has

to do with the Hide portion, necessarily moves the narrative forward. Thus, the relative motion of it is always towards the Seek. This is known as the “art of leading” in writing. Or what I call it anyway.

The pyramid of plot points, tells the same thing. The base of the pyramid, on the left side, is called Hide. This is the part of the story where we are absolutely oblivious to almost everything that’s about to happen. And the other side, is Seek. Where the conclusion, the resolve, and the reflection is achieved.

There is also the exploration of the psyche, and our fears. These also fall largely into the Hide side. But also to the Seek side. Because it’s all interrelated. As soon as you want to find something that’s missing, you’re already seeking, thus increasing the potential finding of it.

However, Ben’s story, is also a symbol for the ephemeral. The temporary quality of everything. That’s why the story is so rushed. That’s why everything within it, its pace, is so brief.

It’s going by, almost too fast, for us to fully grasp it. That is the dream of Benjamin Ward.