

A STANDALONE NOVEL

HENRY SUGAR

the world is larger than advertised



ANDRIES J. GREYLING

Henry Sugar

A faithful retelling for adults

Dedication

To **Roald Dahl**, who built the engine — the nested document, the greedy man, the boring years, the card that turns over, the gift turned outward. Without *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar* (1977), this book does not exist.

And to **Joe Dispenza**, **Dean Radin**, and **Rupert Sheldrake** — whose reported work on the body, the laboratory anomaly, and the mind not confined to the skull taught this retelling what Henry's training is allowed to be. Not sermon. **Physics on the page.**

*With gratitude also to **Joseph McMoneagle**, whose Mind Trek* made me read Dahl's Henry a second time — and to every specialist named in the Source Notes who put their name on the record.**

A Note on the Original

This book is a faithful modern retelling of **Roald Dahl's *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar*** (1977), **published in honor of the original**. Every name, scene, and sentence here is original; what it carries forward is the *engine* of Dahl's story — its nested telling, its greedy man, its boring years of practice, its card that turns over — not his text.

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The Sort of Person He Was

This is a true story. I have changed almost nothing, and what little I have changed I will tell you about plainly before the end, because the man at the centre of it deserves at least that much honesty from me. His name was not Henry Sugar. I have given him that name because the real one belongs to a family that still trades under it, and because a promise was made on his behalf to a Swiss accountant who, years later, would sit across a table from me with a folder in his lap and ask me to write the thing down. I agreed. This is the writing-down. The only untrue things in it are the names.

So. Henry Sugar.

He was forty-one years old, and he had never in his life done a single day's work for money. He did not need to. The money came to him the way weather comes — without effort, without gratitude, an inherited climate. There was a family office in a discreet building off Berkeley Square, and there were men in that office whose entire careers consisted of making certain that Henry's capital did quietly each year what capital does, so that Henry himself never had to think about it, or indeed about anything that resembled a task. He had a flat in Kensington with a view of a private garden he had a key to and never walked in. He had a driver. He had, in winter, a seasonal arrangement of weeks in the Caribbean and weeks in Monaco, always with the same cohort of people who were as rich as he was and as bored as he was and who would have been astonished, all of them, to learn that anyone considered this a problem.

He was greedy. I want to put that down at the start without softening it, because the softening, if it comes, must be earned later and not assumed now. He was greedy in the particular way of a man who

already has more than he could spend in three lifetimes and who nevertheless feels, when he hears that another man has made a great deal of money quickly, a small hot pinch of resentment somewhere behind the sternum. He wanted more. Not for anything. Just more.

He was vain. He had his teeth capped — all of them, top and bottom, a uniform porcelain white that cost the price of a small car. He had a man in Mayfair who cut his hair and a different man who came to the flat to do his skin, and a tailor in a street I will not name who kept Henry's measurements in a leather book and altered nothing without a second fitting. There had been a mole, once, at the corner of his jaw; it was gone now, removed by a surgeon in Harley Street who specialised in such removals for men who could not bear a single unconsidered thing upon their own faces. Henry studied himself in mirrors the way other men study the financial pages — frequently, with attention, looking for the smallest movement.

And he was slothful, which in a poor man is a misfortune and in Henry was a comedy. He had a motto. He used it often, and his friends found it enormously funny, and he delivered it always with the same lazy half-smile, as though he were handing you a small gift. *It is better, he would say, to incur a mild rebuke than to perform an onerous task.* That was the whole of his philosophy. If a thing could be left undone with no worse consequence than someone being a little cross with you, then leaving it undone was, to Henry, self-evidently the correct course. He had never built anything. He had never made anything. He had never, so far as I can establish, finished anything that he had not been compelled to finish by the threat of genuine and immediate discomfort.

You will think I am being hard on him. I am being accurate. There is a difference, and the difference will matter to you later.

Now I should tell you about the cards, because the cards are where the rot showed, and because what happened to Henry later happened *through* the cards, so that they are, in a manner of speaking, the hinge of the whole thing.

Henry gambled. Not in the public rooms where tourists lose forty pounds and feel daring about it, but in private games — six or eight men at a table in a borrowed villa, the buy-ins large enough that the losing of them would have ruined a normal person and merely

irritated everyone present. And Henry, who could afford to lose any amount, could not bear to lose at all. So he cheated.

I will give you one example, because one is enough to show you the cast of his mind.

There had been, the previous spring, a charity tournament in Monte Carlo — one of those evenings where the rich gather to be photographed donating to children they will never meet, and where the actual play is incidental to the champagne. Henry had arranged, through a man who arranged such things for a fee, for a particular deck to be in particular hands at a particular table. The deck was marked. Not crudely — there were no scratches a pit boss might catch — but read by anyone who knew the pattern, the way a fluent reader takes a whole word at a glance without sounding out the letters. And here is the detail I want you to keep, because it tells you everything. Henry did not touch the marks himself. He never had to. He had taught two other players the pattern and split the take with them afterward in cash, in a hotel room, with the curtains drawn — so that if anyone were ever caught, it would not be Henry, who had merely sat at the table looking bored and beautiful and winning, by what appeared to be luck, rather more than his share. He won eleven thousand euros that night from men who could spare it, at an event raising money for an orphanage, and he gave none of it back, and he did not think about the orphanage at all, not once, not even as a passing flicker. The orphanage will come round again, much later, in a way Henry could not have imagined. I mention it now only so that you will recognise it when it returns.

That, then, is the sort of person he was. Greedy. Vain. Idle. Dishonest in the small, careful, deniable ways available to a man with money and patience and no particular use for his own days. Forty-one years old and unmarried — and the *unmarried* matters too, though I cannot yet tell you why; there was a reason, and the reason has a name, and the name will be at the end of this with a sentence beside it that I find I cannot read aloud without stopping. But that is the end. We are at the beginning.

I have been honest with you about him because I have to be. If I make him better than he was, then the thing that happened to him means nothing, and the thing that happened to him is the only reason I am writing at all. A man who is already good and then becomes

good is not a story. Henry was not good. Henry would have laughed at the very idea of becoming good, and offered you his motto, and signalled to a waiter.

And now that you have a rough idea of the sort of person Henry Sugar was, I can begin my story.

The Blue Folder

The house was in the Cotswolds, all honey-coloured stone and mulioned windows, and it belonged to a fund called Arundell Macro, which used it three times a year to remind its principals that they were the sort of men who owned houses like this. The official word for the weekend was *offsite*. There would be a session on Sunday morning about thematic allocation and a man flown in from Zurich to talk about gold. The rest of it was meant to be leisure, which for these particular men meant drinking very good wine and discussing the price of things they already owned.

Henry was not in the fund. He was in it the way a barnacle is in a ship — attached, carried along, contributing nothing and consuming what passed. His money was in it, parked there by a family office in a structure he did not fully understand and had never tried to, and the parking earned him invitations to weekends like this. He came because the alternative was Monaco in the off-season, which was worse.

By Saturday afternoon the storm had closed over the valley like a lid. It had been forecast all week — a thing rolling up from the Atlantic — and it arrived on schedule and stayed, hammering the leaded windows and turning the gravel drive into a black river. The shooting was off. The walk to the village was off. Eleven men in cashmere stood about the great room watching rain come down the chimney and hiss on the fire, and the boredom in the place became a kind of pressure, a weather of its own.

Somebody produced cards.

This pleased Henry more than he let it show. He was very good with cards. He understood them the way a mechanic understands an en-

gine, which is to say without sentiment, as a system of pressures and tells and probabilities that could be tilted if you knew where to lean. He had once won a charity tournament in Monte Carlo using a deck he had arranged to have marked, and the lovely thing — the thing that still gave him pleasure to remember — was that on the night he had not needed to read a single mark. The knowledge that he *could* had been enough to loosen him, and he had won clean, on nerve, and walked off with a sportsman's silver salver and the warm regard of everyone present.

But there were six seats at the table and seven men who wanted them. The host had decreed a private game — proper stakes, a closed table, none of the kitchen-supper canasta you might play with wives. Six in. Two principals, a hedge man down from Edinburgh, a fellow who did something with shipping, the Zurich gold man who turned out to play like a butcher, and the host himself.

"Sit out the first level, Henry," the host said, not unkindly, dealing already. "We'll rotate you in."

They would not rotate him in. Henry knew the geometry of these things. The chips would settle, the men would dig in, and by midnight nobody would be standing up from a winning seat to make room for the spare. He stood behind the chair for a polite ninety seconds, watched the gold man overplay a marginal hand on stubbornness alone, felt the old itch to lean into the table and tilt it — and then, because it was better to drift than to sulk, he went looking for somewhere to be that was not here.

The house was large and the storm had pushed everyone into two rooms, so the rest of it stood dark and cold and his. He went down a corridor of staring portraits and found, at the end of it, a library.

It was a real one — not the decorative kind with sets of Trollope bought by the yard. The house had belonged, before Arundell Macro bought it furnished and entire, to a man named Edward Voss, who had been Henry's godfather in the loose modern sense: a friend of his late father's, a presence at certain Christmases, a writer of generous and impersonal cheques. Voss had died eighteen months ago and the estate had been wound up and the house sold, books and all, and nobody at the fund had ever opened a single one of them. Henry hadn't known the library was here. He found it the way you find

money in an old coat.

He put on a lamp. The rain ran down the black glass in sheets. The shelves went up past the reach of the light, and the books on them were the books of a man who had actually read — pale spines, foxed, annotated, the disordered library of a curious mind. Henry was not curious in that way. He read thrillers, and he read them on aeroplanes, and he forgot them on landing. But there is a thing that happens to even an incurious man alone in a dead man's library on a wild night, and it happened to Henry: a small, slow pull toward the shelves, as if the room expected something of him.

The folder was lying flat on top of a row of books, where a reader leaves a thing he means to come back to.

It was blue. A Moleskine, the good kind, soft-cornered with use, a black elastic gone slack around it. Tucked into the band was a single sheet of printer paper, folded once — Henry drew it out and unfolded it and found it was the cover sheet of a PDF, printed off and creased, the header showing a filename and a string of estate-archive meta-data: *scanned, E. Voss collection, item 114, originated 1934*. Below that, reproduced from whatever yellowed typescript the scanner had eaten, was a title.

*A Report on Certain Demonstrations by Imhrat Khan —
the Man Who Could See Without His Eyes. Prepared at
Bombay, 1934. J. R. Cartwright, M.B., B.S.*

Henry read it twice. The phrasing had the flat, careful weight of an old medical document, a man choosing words he could defend later in front of colleagues who would want to laugh at him. *See without his eyes*. Not *blindfold tricks*. Not *the celebrated illusionist*. A claim, made plainly, by a man with letters after his name, in a year when no one was writing for the internet.

Something stirred at the very back of Henry's attention — a documentary half-watched on a flight, a man with a beard saying the body knew things before the mind did, a graph of skin response that ticked upward a few seconds before a random picture appeared on a screen. He had not believed it. He had not disbelieved it either. He had ordered another drink and let it slide off him the way everything slid off him. There had been a podcast, too, someone calling someone else a psychic spy and the whole table at some dinner laughing. Filed and

forgotten. Now the file opened a crack of its own accord.

He should, he knew, put the thing back and go and watch the gold man lose money on stubbornness. That was the Henry-shaped thing to do. But the storm had nailed the doors shut on the evening, and the library was warm, and there was a particular pleasure — he recognised it as the same pleasure he took in cards — in holding a closed system and feeling for where it could be opened.

He sat down in Edward Voss's reading chair, under Edward Voss's lamp, and opened the blue folder.

The Moleskine, it turned out, was a fair copy — Voss's own neat hand had transcribed the typescript, page after page, the better to study it, the way Henry's mother had once copied out recipes she loved. The first page was headed the same as the printout. Then, beneath, the report began.

I am a surgeon, it said, and I do not believe in miracles. I write this account precisely because I cannot make it stop being true.

The rain came on. Down the corridor, faintly, a man laughed and chips clicked into a pot Henry was not in. He did not hear them. He had gone somewhere else — down into the dead man's careful blue handwriting, into a hospital lounge in Bombay in the hot season of 1934, where a tired surgeon named Cartwright was about to be interrupted by a stranger with an impossible request.

The Man Who Asked for Witnesses

I had been a surgeon in Bombay for nine years before the afternoon I am about to describe, and in that time I had grown accustomed to the particular boredom of the doctors' lounge at the Bombay General. It was a long room with a punkah turning overhead, three windows that looked out onto the courtyard, and a quantity of cane chairs whose stuffing had given up sometime before the war. In the heat after lunch we would sit there with our collars open and our tea going cold, and we would say nothing of any importance for as long as the schedule allowed.

There were four of us that day. Macfarlane the anaesthetist, a young man named Phillips who had come out from Edinburgh the year before, an Indian physician called Marshall whose grandfather had taken an English name and never explained why, and myself. The fan turned. The tea cooled. We had reached that stage of the afternoon where one of us would shortly suggest a game of bridge to keep the eyelids open.

It was then that the orderly put his head round the door and said there was a man asking to speak with the doctors. Not a patient, he said. A gentleman. He had been waiting in the corridor for the better part of an hour and would not state his business to anyone below the rank of physician.

"Send him away," said Macfarlane, without opening his eyes.

But Phillips, who was young enough to be curious about things, said we might as well see what the fellow wanted, and so the man was shown in.

He was perhaps thirty-five, slight, very upright, dressed in a white cotton kurta and a pair of European trousers that did not match it. His feet were bare. His face had the composure of a man who has decided something difficult in advance and is now merely waiting for the rest of us to catch up. He gave his name as Imhrat Khan, and he asked, with great courtesy, whether we would be willing to act as witnesses to a demonstration.

"A demonstration of what?" I asked.

"I am able to see," he said, "without the use of my eyes."

In the lounge nobody laughed, which surprised me a little. Marshall set down his cup. The fan went on turning. I remember thinking that a man who came to a hospital making such a claim had usually come to be examined for the part of him that had broken, and I prepared to be gentle with him.

He understood the look. He must have seen it a thousand times.

"You are thinking," he said, "that I am unwell. That is the correct thing to think. I would think it myself. This is precisely why I have come to doctors and not to an audience. An audience wishes to be amazed. A doctor wishes to be satisfied that he has not been deceived. I want the second kind of witness."

It was, I had to admit, an unusual approach. The mystics one heard about in those years — and one heard about a great many — went to the maharajas and the theosophists and the gullible wives of district officers. They did not, as a rule, walk into a teaching hospital and ask four sceptical men to design a test against them.

Phillips, leaning forward now, asked him how such a thing could be possible.

Khan answered without any of the vagueness I had braced myself for. He spoke of two senses of sight. The first, he said, was the ordinary one, the one we performed with our eyes, and it was the lesser of the two because it depended entirely on a small pair of organs that could be closed, covered, or destroyed. The second sense was distributed through the whole surface of the body and was not housed in any single place. He said the skin could be trained to gather what the eyes gathered. He said it took years.

I said that the skin contained no apparatus for the perception of light, and that this was not a matter of opinion but of anatomy.

"I do not argue with your anatomy," he said. "I only tell you what I am able to do. You will design the test. If your test is good, my anatomy will not save me. If I cheat, you will catch me, because you will have closed every door I might cheat through. That is what I am asking for. Close the doors. Then watch."

I confess this disarmed me. A charlatan wants loose conditions; he wants the lights low and the rules vague and the examination conducted by the credulous. This man was asking for the opposite. He was asking us to be hostile. He was offering himself to our suspicion as a specimen offers itself to a microscope.

Marshall, who had been silent, said that he had read — somewhere, in one of the journals that came out late and damp from England — of tests being run on a performer in London the previous year. A blind-folded man who claimed to read with his fingers. The investigators there, he said, had been most thorough. They had packed the eyes with dough.

Khan inclined his head as though this were an old acquaintance of his. "They sealed the sockets," he said. "Flour and water, pressed in, then bandaged over. This is correct. You may do the same. You may do more."

"And do you walk through fire as well?" said Macfarlane, who had opened his eyes at last.

"That is a different discipline," Khan said, without taking offence. "But yes. I have walked on the coals. The feet are not burned. There are men who have measured the heat of such pits — I am told it is very great near the surface — and still the feet are not burned, if the mind is prepared. But you did not call me here to talk of feet. You wished to know whether you should send me away."

Nobody answered that.

I sat there and I weighed it. I am not, I should say, a man inclined toward marvels. I had spent my professional life learning to distrust the thing the patient most wants me to believe, because the patient's wanting is itself a symptom. But the particular structure of this man's request kept catching on something in me. He had not asked to be

believed. He had asked to be tested. And the test he proposed was one I could not see a way through. If we sealed his eyes properly — if we did what the London people had done, and then improved upon it — there would be no honest route by which a sighted man could deceive us. Either he would fail, and we would have spent a dull afternoon usefully, or he would not fail, and we would have a problem on our hands worth the rest of our lives.

I looked at Phillips, who was nodding. I looked at Marshall, who had the careful expression of a man recalling everything he knew about the physiology of the retina and finding none of it relevant. I looked at Macfarlane, who shrugged in the manner of a man who has decided to be entertained and will hold himself to no further opinion.

“Very well,” I said. “But we shall do it our own way. Not flour. We shall fill the sockets ourselves, and we shall use whatever I think will hold, and you will not touch your face or speak to anyone while it is done. If at any point you ask us to loosen anything, the test is over and you leave. Those are the conditions.”

“Those are the conditions I came for,” he said.

I rose and told the orderly to bring me dough from the kitchen, soft enough to mould, and clean lint and bandage from the dispensary, and a roll of surgical tape, and a sheet of paper with writing on it that none of us in the room had seen. I would not have one of us caught out by his own handwriting.

Khan sat down in the cane chair we offered him and folded his bare feet beneath it and waited, perfectly still, while we assembled the means of catching him. He looked, in that moment, less like a man about to be examined than like a man who had walked a very long way to find people serious enough to do it properly, and had, at last, found them.

Dough and Bandages

I had assisted at a hundred small deceptions in my years of practice — the malingerer with his borrowed limp, the hysteric whose paralysis dissolved the moment she believed herself unobserved — and I confess that I went into the matter expecting to expose one more. Imhurat Khan had told us he could see without his eyes. Very well. The only honest answer to such a claim is not argument but procedure. You do not debate a man who says he can see through dough. You seal his eyes with dough and watch what he does next.

We chose the dressing room behind the small theatre on Hornby Road, three of us — myself, Dr Marshall, and a younger registrar named Mitra whose hands did not shake and whose scepticism, unlike my own, had not yet curdled into curiosity. It was Marshall who insisted on the protocol, and I was glad of him. Left alone I might have grown sentimental. Marshall was a man who counted things.

I had read, that spring, an account of the tests run on a performer in London — the Council for Psychical Investigation, gentlemen of standing, who had taken a blindfolded man and packed his eye-sockets with dough and bound the whole of his head and still found him able to read. I had thought it credulous nonsense when I read it. Now I found myself reproducing their method almost gesture for gesture, and the irony was not lost on me. A sceptic borrows the sceptic's tools. It is only the result he refuses to borrow in advance.

We began with the dough.

Mitra had brought a quantity of soft wheat flour worked into a stiff paste, the kind a baker would reject as overhandled. Khan sat very still in the chair while I pressed it into the hollows of his eyes. I

want to be exact, because exactness is the only thing of value I can offer. I filled each socket until the lids were buried and the dough stood proud of the bone. I worked it into the lashes. I asked him twice whether he could feel light, and twice he said no, and I believed him, because there was nothing of the showman in his face — only a patience that I have since come to think of as the patience of a man who has done a difficult thing so many times it has stopped being difficult.

Over the dough we laid pads of cotton wool. Over the cotton, surgical gauze. Marshall then took a roll of bandage and wound it round and round the upper half of the skull, ear to ear and crown to jaw, layer upon layer, until I counted seven turns and lost count, and Khan's head was a smooth white ovoid with a mouth. Mitra sealed the edges with a flour-and-water glue along the cheekbones, so that no slit remained between bandage and skin through which the most determined eye might have peered along the side of the nose. That trick — the glance down the cheek, the imperfect seal — is the oldest in the blindfold act, and we had closed it.

I stood back. The man before us could not have seen the sun.

"Now," said Khan, and his voice came muffled from inside the wrappings, perfectly calm, "give me something to read."

Mitra opened a book at random and held it before the bandaged face. Khan turned his head a fraction, as a man does who is bringing a thing into focus, though there was nothing in him left to focus. He read the page aloud. Not haltingly. Not in the manner of a memoriser reciting. He read it the way you or I read — with the small stumbles of live attention, pausing at a word, correcting himself once, his finger nowhere near the line. Marshall checked the text against the sound and looked at me, and I have never in my life seen a man's face do quite what Marshall's did then. He had counted everything. There was nothing left to count.

But the dressing room was not enough. A blindfold read in a small bright room proves only that the room is small. Khan knew this better than we did. It was he who proposed the street.

I will not pretend I was easy about it.

He asked for a bicycle, and we found him one, and outside on Hornby

Road the morning traffic was the ordinary chaos of that city — bullock carts and motors and bicycles and the press of people who fill any road in Bombay until it seems no machine could move through them at speed without killing someone. The bandages were still on. The dough was still in his eyes. Mitra had checked the seal a second time and pronounced it whole.

Khan mounted the bicycle and rode.

I followed in a hired car, and I tell you I followed with my heart in my mouth, because a man with his eyes packed full of paste has no business in such a road, and I was certain I would see him under a cart inside fifty yards. He was not under a cart. He wove. He leaned the machine to pass a stationary lorry, straightened, swung wide of a knot of pedestrians who had not even seen him coming, rang the bell once at a dog and corrected for it, and rode on through that murderous current as smoothly as a man riding an empty lane at dawn. He did not graze a soul. He did not slow except where slowing was sense. When he stopped at last and put a foot down he was not even breathing hard, and I sat in the car with my hands cold on my knees and understood that I had crossed a line in myself from which there is no comfortable way back.

It was Marshall, that evening, who wanted the needle.

We had returned to the theatre, and he had thought of a thing the street could not give us — a task too fine for any residual peeping along the nose, a task that needed not the gross shape of a road but the threading of one small eye with one thin thread. He produced a sewing needle and a length of cotton from his own coat, where I suspect he had carried them all day for exactly this. We bandaged Khan again — fresh dough, fresh gauze, the same seven turns and more, Mitra glued and Marshall counted — and we put the needle in his fingers and the thread in his other hand, and we said nothing about how it ought to be done.

He held the needle up. He turned it once, finding the eye not by looking, for there was nothing to look with, but by some address of attention I have no language for. He wet the thread between his lips. And he passed it through the eye of the needle on the first attempt, cleanly, and drew it taut, and held it out to Marshall, who took it without a word.

You will understand that a man does not thread a needle by accident. The street might be argued — a blind man learns a known road, a sceptic might say. The needle could not be argued. The needle was new. The eye of it was a thing he had never seen and, in any honest sense of the word, did not see now.

I asked him then how it was done. I asked, I think, more humbly than I had ever asked anything of a patient, because the ordinary relation of doctor and demonstrating subject had reversed itself in my chest. He sat with the bandages still on, the dough still in his eyes, and considered the question for a while in the patient way I have described.

“I will tell you,” he said at last. “But not standing here, and not in pieces. It took me a great many years, and I would not have you think it a trick learned in an afternoon. Come and eat with me tonight. I will tell you all of it — how I learned, and from whom, and what it cost. And when you have heard it, you may write it down, if you still wish to.”

I said that I wished to very much.

“Then you must hear the whole,” he said. “Or none of it will be true.”

We unwound the bandages. Mitra peeled the dough from his eyes, and Khan blinked in the lamplight like any man returning to ordinary sight, and rubbed at the lids, and looked at the three of us with two perfectly good and perfectly normal eyes — the same eyes that had been buried under glue and gauze an hour before, and that had not, by any account I could give to a colleague or to myself, done one particle of the seeing.

He named the hour for dinner. I wrote it in my notebook, beneath the count of the bandages and the page he had read, and I found that my hand, which had been steady all through the dough and the needle, was no longer quite steady at all.

We Must Not Let Him Go

That night I could not sleep, and I do not say it to dramatise myself. I am a surgeon. I have stood over open chests in the small hours and felt nothing but the clean focus of the work. But the dinner with Imhrat Khan had unmade something in me, and the unmaking would not settle.

I had eaten across the table from a man who, four hours earlier, had ridden a bicycle through the worst of the evening traffic on Marine Drive with his eyes sealed under dough and bandage and three layers of surgical lint, and had not so much as clipped a vendor's barrow. I had bandaged him myself. I am not a credulous man. I know how the dough was rolled, how the lids were taped beneath it, how the gauze went round the skull in the manner we use for a head wound, and I know there was no gap by which a man might peer along the line of his own nose. Harry Price's people in London had done the same to the Kashmiri performer two years before — dough in the sockets, the eyes flooded, then bandage, then a flour-paste mask — and the fellow had read print and walked unfamiliar streets. I had read the account in a medical journal and dismissed it as showmanship. Now I had bandaged a man myself and watched the bicycle vanish into the dusk and reappear unharmed, and I could not dismiss anything.

I lay in the dark and made plans. That is the disease of my profession: we cannot witness a thing without wanting to own it.

If the faculty was real — and I no longer permitted myself the word *if* with any conviction — then it could be taught. Khan had said so plainly over the rice. He had not been born with it. He had built it, over years, with a candle and his breath and an old man in the jungle who beat the curiosity out of him and the discipline in. *Built* — that

was the word that kept me awake. A thing built can be built again. A method can be written down, refined, given to others.

And I thought of my patients. I thought of the ward two floors below me, where there was a boy of nine, blinded by smallpox before he could read, who sat at the window each morning with his face turned toward a sun he could feel but never see. I thought of the men who came in from the mills with their corneas scarred white as eggshell. If a sighted man could learn to see through his skin, through the centres Khan had named and touched as he spoke — not pointing at a chart but laying his own fingers against his sternum, his belly, the base of his spine, as though reading the heat off himself — then why not a blind man? The eyes were not the apparatus. That was the whole of his claim. The eyes were one instrument among several, and the others did not require the eyes at all.

I sat up in bed. I confess the thought ran ahead of me like a horse let off the rein.

We must get him a room here. We must keep him near the hospital. We must have him work with the boy at the window. We must write it all down, every session, the breath count and the duration and the failures most of all — for the failures are the science. We must bring in Marshall from the eye wards, and Sen, who is the most stubborn sceptic I know and therefore the most useful witness. We must not let him drift off into the bazaars and the railway stations and the cheap miracle circuit. We must not let him go.

I lay back. I am ashamed now of the order of my thoughts that night. The blind boy came second. The paper came first — *Cartwright, J., "A Faculty of Extra-Ocular Perception: Method and Authentication,"* I had it half-titled before dawn. I wanted to be the man who carried Khan to the journals, who set the dough and the bandages and the bicycle down in clean prose with my name beneath it, who made the impossible respectable. We are all of us magpies for the bright impossible thing. I have since learned how the appetite ends.

I should say here that I was not alone in it. There is a particular hunger that comes over scientific men when the world hands them an anomaly. I have read since of the laboratories in California and Princeton, decades after that night, where serious people sat subjects in front of machines that spat random numbers and asked

whether a mind might lean on them, whether the body might startle in the half-second *before* a random picture appeared — before, mark me, with nothing in the room to startle it. The measurements were small and the arguments over them have not ended to this day. But the hunger in those men was the same hunger I felt in my bed in Mumbai, and I recognise it across the years like my own handwriting. *We must measure it. We must hold it still long enough to measure.* It is the noblest and the greediest impulse we own.

I slept perhaps two hours toward morning. At seven I dressed without breakfast and walked the corridor to the room we had given Khan, a small clean room with a barred window and a cot, near the dispensary, where I had asked the night sister to look in on him.

She met me at the door. She was a sensible woman, not given to colour, and her face told me before her mouth did.

“He passed in the night, Doctor,” she said. “In his sleep. I looked at four and he was breathing easy. At six he was gone.”

I went in. He lay on his back with his hands at his sides and his face entirely composed, the bandages of the night before folded neatly on the chair where he had set them, the way a careful man sets down his spectacles. There was no struggle in him. There was no terror. He had the look of a man who has finished a long task and put down the tools.

I examined him as a doctor must. I found nothing. A heart that had simply stopped, I would have written, and I did write it, in a hand less steady than I would have wished. He was not yet fifty, by his own account. There was no disease in him I could name. I have come to believe — I have no proof and would not offer it to a journal — that a man who has practised for thirty years to step out past the walls of his own body simply, one quiet night, did not come all the way back. But that is the sentimentality of an old man, and I set it down as such.

I stood a long while in that small room. The blind boy was at his window two floors up, turning his face to the sun. The journal paper was dead on the page before its first line. Marshall and Sen would never bandage him. There would be no second session, no third, no patient method written out for the men in the eye wards. The one human being I had ever met who could prove the thing was real had taken the proof out of the world in the night, intact and entire, the

way he had carried it in.

I have thought since that this is the shape such things always take. The miracle arrives, lets itself be witnessed once, and is gone before the instruments can close on it. I do not pretend to understand it. I only report that it is so.

I wrote the report you are reading over the following weeks, because writing it was the only thing left to do, and because a witness who keeps silent is no witness at all. I wrote down the dough and the bandages and the bicycle and the needle and the dinner, and then I wrote down everything Khan had told me across the table that last night — his whole life, from the magician's stage to the candle in the locked room, as nearly in his own words as I could hold them. I have set it out below, in the first person, as he gave it to me, and I have changed nothing.

This is how Imhrat Khan began.

All Trickery

My name is Imhurat Khan, and I was born in Akhnur, in the state of Kashmir, in the year 1905. I tell you this not because it matters where a man begins, but because the doctor who is writing down my words has asked me to leave nothing out, and I have promised him that I will not.

I came to the magic by way of hunger. My father died when I was thirteen, and there was no money in the house, and a man called Professor Moor came through our district with a travelling show. He needed a boy with quick hands and a face that would not give the game away. He looked at me for a long time, the way a butcher looks at a carcass to see what cuts it will yield, and then he said I would do.

What I learned in the three years I worked for Professor Moor was that there is no magic in magic. There is only the audience, and the way an audience wishes to be fooled. Every trick I was taught was a lie built carefully, the way a mason builds a wall — one small deception laid upon another until the whole thing stood up and looked like a marvel.

I will tell you how it is done, because I want you to understand the disgust that came over me.

A man appears to read a sealed message. There is no reading. The envelope is switched, or the writing is taken by a strip of carbon under the table, or the assistant — which was me — has crept behind the curtain and read the thing over the spectator's shoulder while he wrote it, and passed the words forward in a code of coughs. A woman appears to float in the air above the stage. She does not float. She lies upon a steel arm painted the colour of the black velvet behind

her, and the magician passes a hoop along her body in a curve that the eye cannot follow, so that the eye reports *no support* when in truth the support is everywhere. A man swallows fire. He does not swallow it. He has wetted his mouth, and he tips his head, and the flame goes out against his own breath before it can do him harm.

All of it. Every last gesture of it. Trickery.

I want to be very plain about this, because it is the hinge on which my whole life turned. The people who came to Professor Moor's tent came because they wished to see the laws of the world broken. They paid their few annas to feel, for one hour, that the cage of ordinary cause and effect had a door in it. And we gave them nothing of the kind. We gave them a wall of lies dressed up as a door. They went home satisfied and cheated, and the worst of it was that they did not know they had been cheated, and so they never asked the only question worth asking, which is: *if all of this is false, is there anything that is true?*

For a long time I did not ask it either. I learned my craft. My hands became very good. By the time I was sixteen I could palm a coin so that a man might shake my open hand and not find it, and I could make a deck of cards do almost anything I told it to. I was proud of these things. Pride is the last refuge of a man who suspects he is doing something worthless.

Then one night, in a town whose name I have forgotten, a thing happened that broke the pride in me.

We had a man come to the show who was clearly poor, poorer than the rest, and he had brought with him a child who was sick. The child's eyes were wrong — clouded, the way a fish's eye clouds after a day in the market. The man had heard, somewhere on the road, that Professor Moor could do wonders. And he stood at the edge of the crowd through the whole performance, and at the end he came forward and held the child up and asked, in a low voice that I have never been able to forget, whether the professor could make the boy see.

And Professor Moor, who was a kind enough man in his way, told him the truth. He said: *I am sorry, friend. What I do is not real. I cannot help your son.*

The man's face. I will not try to describe the man's face. But I understood, watching it, that I had spent three years of my life manufacturing exactly the hope that had brought this man across half a province with a blind child in his arms — and that I had nothing at the bottom of it to give him. We were sellers of an empty box, painted to look full.

I left Professor Moor not long after that. And I made a vow, which I have kept, that I would not perform another trick as long as I lived unless behind the trick there stood a thing that was *true* — a real power, not a lie laid on a lie.

But where does a man go to find a real power?

I will be honest with you, doctor, because you have asked me to be. My first reasons were not pure. I did not set out to see without my eyes in order to give sight to blind children. I set out because I had seen how a crowd loves a marvel, and I thought that if I possessed a marvel that was *genuine* — one that no rival could expose, because there was nothing to expose — then I would be the greatest performer in all of India. I would be rich. I would be famous from Peshawar to Madras. The vanity that had made me proud of my palming now made me hungry for something larger to be proud of. I do not hide this from you. A man does not always begin a great road for a great reason. Sometimes the reason is small and the road is long enough to enlarge him.

So I went looking for the yogis.

This was harder than I had imagined, and for a reason that surprised me. I had thought a true power, if it existed, would announce itself, would set up its tent beside ours and draw the larger crowd. It does not. I learned, in the years of my searching, that the genuine men — the ones who could in truth do the things that Professor Moor only counterfeited — were forbidden by their own discipline to show those things in public. It is a law among them, as strict as any law in any temple. A power gained through years of self-mastery is not to be spent for money, or for the pleasure of a gaping crowd, or for the vanity of the man who has it. The moment it is shown for gain, it is held to corrupt the man who shows it. The very thing I wanted it *for* was the thing I was forbidden to do with it.

Do you see the trap I had walked into? I had fled the false magic

because it was false, and gone in search of the true — and the true would not perform. The men who could not really do it, did it nightly under canvas. The men who really could, would not be seen.

For a while this nearly broke me. I went from town to town and from holy man to holy man, and most of them were the same painted boxes I had left behind — fakirs with hidden wires, with concealed pockets, with sleights I knew better than they did, because I had been a professional and they were amateurs. I unmasked a dozen of them in my heart without saying a word, and each unmasking made the hunger in me sharper, not duller. Because every false one I found was a proof that somewhere, by the law of the thing, there had to be a true one. A counterfeit is a confession that real coin exists.

I came at last to a decision, and I made it standing on a road outside Hardwar with my whole life in a cloth bag over my shoulder. I said to myself: *Imhrat, you will find a man who can do this thing in truth, and you will make him teach you, or you will give it up altogether and go back to coins and cards and be honest about being a liar.*

There would be no more middle ground. No more travelling from fakir to fakir collecting disappointments. A real teacher, or nothing.

I did not know, when I made that vow on the road, that I was three days' walk from a man sitting under a tree by the river — and that what I would see him do would settle the question forever.

The Yogi in the Tree

I had been to Hardwar before, but not like this — not with a question in me sharp enough to draw blood. The pilgrims came down to the river in their thousands, and the bathing ghats steamed in the morning, and the priests sang the Ganga down out of the mountains as they had sung her for a thousand years. I walked among them and did not bathe. I was looking for a man, and the man I was looking for did not want to be found.

His name, I had been told, was Banerjee. He lived somewhere in the forest above the town, where the trees came down close to the foothills and the heat sat thick in the green. They said he had been training his whole life. They said he never performed and never taught and never spoke of what he could do, and that this was precisely how I would know him from the frauds — because the real ones, the ones who had paid the full price in years, were forbidden to make a show of any of it. The men who let you watch were the men who had nothing to show.

I had spent four months looking for a real teacher. I had found a great many performers. I had stood in the back of theatres and watched men I knew to be working tricks I myself had worked, and I had felt sick with it, because I had wanted so badly to find one thing that was not a trick. So when a sadhu at the riverside told me there was a true yogi in the forest, and that the yogi would chase me away if I came near, I took the warning as the first encouraging thing anyone had said to me in months.

I went up into the trees before dawn and I hid.

There was a clearing where the old man came at first light. I climbed a peepal and lay along a branch with the leaves between me and the

open ground, and I waited, and the light came grey and then gold through the canopy, and the insects started, and at last he came. He was thin and very old and he wore almost nothing. He sat down cross-legged in the middle of the clearing with his back very straight and his hands open on his knees, and he closed his eyes.

For a long time nothing happened. His breathing changed. I could not hear it from where I lay but I could see it in the rise of his ribs — long and slow and very even, drawn down deep and held and let go, a count I could not measure but could feel was deliberate, the way you feel the metre of a thing before you can name it. The morning warmed. A film of sweat came up on his shoulders and his scalp and ran in a single line down his spine, and still he did not move, and I began to think I had wasted a climb on an old man at his prayers.

Then the old man rose off the ground.

I want to set it down exactly as it happened to me, in the order it happened, because the order is the only honest thing I have. First I saw a gap. There was earth where his folded legs had been, and then there was air. He did not lurch up or float like a thing on a string. He was simply, between one breath and the next, a hand's width above the place where he had been sitting, and he stayed there, perfectly still, his back straight and his eyes shut and that single line of sweat running down it, as though the ground had only ever been a courtesy he had decided to do without.

I did not believe it. That is the thing I must say. I had spent my life teaching my eyes to lie to other people, and now my own eyes were telling me a thing I could not afford to believe, and the conjurer in me went hunting at once for the wire and the false floor and the angle of the light — and there was no wire, there was no floor, there was only the old man and the air and the morning coming up gold through the leaves.

And I made a sound.

I do not know what the sound was. A breath, a word, something that came out of me before I could stop it. The leaves shook. And the old man's eyes opened.

He came down — I did not see how, only that the earth had him again — and he was on his feet before I had got my own legs under me, and

he was looking up into the tree straight at the place where I lay as though there had never been a single leaf between us. His face had gone from the stillness of the river into something I can only call fury. It was the fury of a man who has had a thing stolen from him that he has guarded for sixty years. He shook his fists and he stamped and he cursed me up and down in three languages, and the word he kept coming back to was *thief* — thief, thief, who told you, who sent you, how long have you been watching — and I have never since read the tale of the little man who tore himself in two with rage at being named without thinking of Banerjee under that tree, white with anger, screaming up into the leaves.

I came down. I did not run. I stood in front of him with my hands open the way he had held his on his knees, and I told him the truth — that I had spent my life inside trickery and was sick to death of it; that I had come to find the one thing that was not a trick; and that I had found it, and would he please, please teach me.

He told me to go to hell. He told me I would learn nothing, that the price was a lifetime and I had the face of a man who wanted a fortune by Friday. He was right about that, though I did not yet know how right. He turned his back on me and walked into the trees, and I let him go.

And then I came back the next morning. And the morning after that.

I will not pretend it was noble. I had been a performer; I knew how to make myself a fixture, how to wear a man down by simply being there, day on day, until refusing me cost him more effort than the refusing was worth. But there was more to it than craft. I had seen the thing. I had seen a man set aside the floor of the world as though it were optional, and I could no more have walked away from that than a starving man can walk away from bread he can smell. I came every day for two weeks. I sat at the edge of his clearing where he could see me and I said nothing and I asked for nothing. He cursed me the first days and ignored me the rest. I brought him a little food. I brought him water from the river. I learned to sit with my back straight and my breath long and even, copying him without permission, and I think it was that — the back, the breath, the sheer animal stubbornness of it — that finally moved something in him.

On the fourteenth morning he did not curse me. He looked at me

for a long time, the way you might look at a stray that has decided your doorway is its home, and at last he said that he himself could not teach me — that what he did he had no gift for giving away — but that there was a man, three days' walk to the north, who took students. A teaching yogi. A rare thing, he said, and a dangerous one, because a man who learns the inner sight for the wrong reasons learns also a debt he will one day have to pay. He looked at me very hard when he said it, and I understood that he was looking at the fortune-by-Friday in my face, and I had the grace at least to say nothing.

He gave me the name. He gave me the way. And then he said the thing I have carried with me ever since, the thing that has more weight in it now than it did when I was young and hungry and quick.

He said: *It will take you three years. Not three years if you are clever. Three years if you are clean, and longer if you are not. There is no quick door. The door is the three years.*

I thanked him. He waved me off into the trees as he had waved me off the first day, but it was a different gesture now, the kind you make to send a man toward a thing rather than away from yourself.

I went north. I found the teaching yogi where Banerjee had said he would be. And on a morning much like the morning I had hidden in the peepal and seen an old man set the ground aside, I sat down in front of my teacher with my back straight and my hands open and my breath drawn long and even, and the three years began.

The Fire They Said Would Burn

In the third year my teacher sent me away.

He did this without warning, the way he did most things. One morning, before the light had properly arrived, he told me there was a fire-walking ceremony four days' walk to the south, in a town whose name I will not write, and that I should attend it. He did not say why. He said only that a man who wished to understand his own body should occasionally watch what other bodies were willing to do.

I asked whether he would come. He said the question did not deserve an answer, and went back to his breathing.

So I walked.

The fire-walking took place in the forecourt of a temple, on the night of a festival whose particulars I have forgotten. A pit had been dug perhaps four paces long and two wide, and into it, since the previous afternoon, men had been feeding wood and charcoal. By the time I arrived the wood was gone and what remained was a long bed of embers — not flame, but worse than flame, a low orange continent that breathed. You could feel its heat from twenty feet. It pressed against the face like a hand.

I have since read that men with proper instruments have measured such beds. The surface of glowing coals in a fire-walk has been recorded at well over four hundred degrees on the centigrade scale — hot enough to char dry timber on contact, hot enough that the priests raking it level wore cloth wound thick around their hands and still stepped back, wincing, every few seconds. A European gentle-

man with a notebook had measured exactly this, in London, years before I was born, at a test arranged by a society of careful sceptics; they had bandaged and examined and weighed every doubt, and the coals had still read above four hundred degrees, and the man who walked them had still come away with feet that the doctors could find nothing wrong with. I did not know that account then. I only knew the heat against my face, and the smell, which was the smell of something that wants to consume you.

The priests walked first. They walked quickly, four short strides, their faces fixed on a point above the far end of the pit, and they came off the other side and were embraced by their families and showed their soles to anyone who asked, and the soles were unmarked. A man in the crowd called out that it was a trick of the wet — that they had soaked their feet in something. The priest nearest him simply walked back across the coals to where the heckler stood, and held out his feet, and said: *Then come and soak yours, and walk.*

The heckler did not.

I watched perhaps a dozen men cross. Some hurried. Some, the older ones, walked as though crossing a courtyard, unhurried, almost bored, and these interested me most, because boredom is not a thing the body counterfeits. You cannot pretend to be calm in front of a fire. The fire knows. Your heart knows. I had spent two years learning to read my own heart, and I could read theirs in the set of their shoulders, and theirs were quiet.

Then the priest who had answered the heckler turned to the crowd and asked, as the priests always ask, whether any visitor wished to cross.

I should tell you that everything in my training to that point had been interior. Breath counted to a cadence until the count fell away. A flame held in the eye until the eye stopped reporting flame and reported only the small steady pressure of attention itself. Heat that began behind the eyes and travelled, over the boring weeks, down the spine, gathering at the base of it like water finding a low place. My teacher called these things by the old names, the seven centres, but he forbade me to think of them as pictures or wheels or coloured lights. *They are sensations*, he said, *and the moment you make them into a diagram you have stopped feeling them and started decorat-*

ing them. So I knew them only as I knew hunger: as a place in the body that asked for something.

None of this had yet been tested against the world. A man can convince himself of a great deal in a quiet room. The fire is not a quiet room.

I raised my hand.

The priest looked at me a moment — at my soft hands, my city sandals already off and held in one fist — and then he stood aside, which is its own kind of answer. He did not warn me. He did not encourage me. He had measured something in my face and decided not to interfere with it.

I will not pretend I felt nothing. My heart had begun to climb the instant I lifted my hand, and I let it climb, and then I did the thing I had been practising for two years without knowing it was practice for this: I gathered the breath, slow, and on the long out-breath I let the count fall away, and I put my eye on the point above the far end of the pit, the way the priests had, and I did not look at the coals at all.

The heat came up through the soles of my feet at the first step. I felt it — let no one tell you the body feels nothing; it felt everything, the texture of the embers shifting under my weight, the small live grit of them — but the heat arrived as information and not as alarm. There is a difference, and the difference is the whole of it. The body that walks the fire is not a body that has stopped feeling. It is a body whose centre has decided, before the foot is raised, that it will not flinch.

Four strides. Five. The far edge. Cool stone.

A boy poured water over my feet from a brass vessel and the water hissed, and I sat, and I turned my own soles up to look at them as the priests had, expecting — I do not know what I expected. Blisters. Black. The honest punishment of physics.

There was nothing. A faint warmth, already fading. The skin was the skin I had been born with.

I want to be careful here, because this is the smallest of the things I learned to do, and I have seen men make a whole religion out of less. The fire-walk is not the great matter. Better men than I have

explained that bare skin crossing embers quickly does not have time to take in the heat the way a notebook expects it to, that the coal is a poor conductor, that the contact is brief — and perhaps all of that is true, and perhaps it accounts for the priests entirely, and I will not argue with the man who measured four hundred degrees and came away with a clean explanation. He may keep his explanation. It costs me nothing.

What it could not explain, sitting there with my cooling feet in my hands, was the thing that had happened *inside* me on the first step — the click of a switch I had been told existed and had never been permitted to believe in. For two years I had practised in a room, on faith, against nothing. Now I had practised against the fire, which lies to no one, and the fire had let me pass.

It was not that the fire had not burned me. It was that I had not been afraid, and the not-being-afraid had been a deliberate thing, made in the body, on the out-breath, the way a man makes a fist.

I sat a long time in the cool of the temple wall while the festival went on around me. The priests did not congratulate me. One of them, the old one who walked as though bored, glanced at me once and gave a very small nod, the nod of a tradesman recognising another tradesman's work, and that was all.

The next morning I began the four days' walk back. I did not hurry. I had something to carry now that I had not carried south, and I did not want to spill it.

My teacher was sitting where I had left him, as though he had not moved in eight days, which I have come to believe was very nearly the case.

He did not ask whether I had walked the fire. He could see that I had — not on my feet, which were unmarked, but somewhere in how I sat down in front of him.

"Now," he said, "you will believe me about the candle."

And he was right. I did.

Two Senses of Sight

The yogi's name was Banerjee, though Imhrat Khan did not use it. He called him only *teacher*, and the teacher rarely spoke. For the first months there were no instructions worth the name, only the candle.

It stood on a low brass dish in the corner of the room, a plain stub of tallow that the teacher would light at dusk and Imhrat would sit before until his back ached and the muscles along his spine knotted into a single rope of fire. He was told to look at the flame. Nothing else. Not to think about it, not to name it, not to wish anything of it — only to put the whole of his attention there, the way a man pours water from one vessel into another until the first is empty.

It sounds simple. It is the hardest thing a person can be asked to do.

The mind, the teacher said, is not a lamp inside the skull. That was the first doctrine, and Imhrat did not understand it for a long time. Most men, the teacher said, believed their seeing happened behind the eyes, in some small lit room at the back of the head where a little watcher sat and received pictures. This was a habit of thinking, nothing more — a groove worn so deep by so many generations that people mistook the groove for the truth. The mind reached out. Attention was not a thing that stayed at home; it was a thing that travelled. When you looked hard at a man across a room, he often turned. When a dog's owner rose from a chair miles away and decided to come home, the dog went to the door and waited. These were not stories. These were the ordinary leakings of a faculty the body already possessed and the culture had taught it to forget.

So Imhrat sat, and put his attention into the flame, and tried to feel where it went.

The candle work was a labour of the body before it was anything else. The teacher was precise about this and would not let him pretend otherwise. There is no shortcut around the flesh. The ordinary man becomes the uncommon man only by doing, in the body, ten thousand times over, what the mind alone cannot accomplish once.

The breath came first. Imhrat learned to draw it slow and long, counting it down through the belly, holding it at the floor of the lungs, releasing it longer than he had taken it in. The teacher had him press the breath downward, as though packing it into the base of the spine, and squeeze there, gently, so that the held air seemed to gather heat. After some weeks a sensation came that Imhrat had no word for: a warmth at the very bottom of the back, low in the sacrum, a banked coal of feeling that he could move, with attention and breath together, upward along the line of the spine.

The teacher named seven places. He named them only once and never drew them, never made of them a chart or a ladder of coloured wheels such as the cheap booklets sold in the bazaar. They were not pictures to be memorised. They were places in the body where, if Imhrat brought breath and attention together for long enough, a sensation would arrive — heat, then a kind of pressure, then a fullness, like a glass filling to its brim and trembling at the rim without spilling. The base of the spine. The belly below the navel. The soft place under the ribs. The centre of the chest. The hollow of the throat. The space behind and between the eyes, which ached like a bruise when he held it. And the crown, which felt, on the rare evenings he reached it, like cool water poured onto the top of the head from a great height.

You will feel them, the teacher said. That is all. Do not name them while you feel them. The naming is for afterwards, for the talking. The feeling is the work.

Most evenings he felt nothing but his aching back and the smoke catching in his throat and a slow dull boredom that was worse than any pain, because pain at least was something to push against, and boredom was only the long grey nothing of a man sitting in a hut watching a flame do exactly what flames do. Weeks of it. The teacher did not console him. When Imhrat complained of the headaches that began behind his eyes and spread until his whole skull throbbed, the

teacher only nodded, as though the headache were a milestone on a known road, and said: *Good. Sit.*

He learned later that the headaches were the seventh week and the ninth and the eleventh, and that they were the same for everyone, and that they meant the attention had finally begun to bite.

When the candle had been done for long enough — and Imhrat could not afterwards say when the change had begun, only that one evening it was simply there — the teacher told him about the two senses of sight.

There is the outer sense, he said. This is the sense you have always known. Light enters the eye, the eye sends it inward, and you see. It is a good sense, a useful one, and a man would be a fool to despise it. But it is not the only one. There is an inner sense, and it does not live in the eyes. It lives in the skin. It lives, in truth, in the whole body, and beyond the body, in the way attention reaches into the room and touches what is there. The outer sense waits for the world to come to it. The inner sense goes out to meet the world.

Imhrat asked how this could be, and the teacher gave him the answer that was no answer, which was the only honest one: *You will know it can be when you have done it. Until then it is words, and words have never made any man see.*

But he gave Imhrat one thing to hold. There were men, he said, even now, in the cities, who could be blindfolded by doctors — packed dough pressed into the sockets, layers of bandage wound about the head, the whole sealed and signed — and who could still read a printed page, still walk a bicycle through a street thick with traffic, still thread a needle held out at arm's length. Doctors had tested them and found no trick at the seam, no peering down the side of the nose. The men said they saw with the skin. The forehead, the cheek. The skin of the hand passed above a written line and the line came up into the body as plainly as if the eye had taken it.

The skin is older than the eye, the teacher said. It was reading the world long before there was an eye to help it. We have only forgotten. Forgetting is also a habit. What one man's lineage has learned, another may learn faster, because the path has been walked. You do

not cut the path. You follow it.

The candle changed.

Imhrat could not have explained the change to a stranger, and he was glad the teacher did not ask him to. It was this: the flame stopped being a thing he looked at and became a thing he was inside of. The boundary between the sitting man and the burning wick grew thin and then, for moments at a time, was simply not there. He felt the flame the way he felt his own breath. And in those moments — they came rarely, and never when he reached for them, only when he had given up reaching — the room around the candle came to him without his eyes.

He would have his eyes open and fixed on the flame, and yet he would know, all at once and without looking, that the teacher had shifted his weight against the far wall, that a moth had come in at the door, that the brass dish under the candle had a chip on its eastern rim. Not seen. *Known* — known in the skin, in the chest, in the low warm place at the base of the spine that had learned to hold heat. The knowing arrived before any thought about it. First the body knew. Then, a half-beat behind, the mind caught up and made words.

That order never reversed. The teacher had told him it would not. *The flesh is the instrument*, he said. *The mind is only the one who reads the dial afterwards and writes it in the book. Never trust a man who tells you he thought his way to a thing he saw. He felt it first. He has only forgotten the feeling, as men forget everything that comes too easily to be proud of.*

There came an evening in what must have been the second year — Imhrat had stopped counting the months, which the teacher said was itself a kind of progress — when he sat before the candle and felt the whole shape of the room arrive in his body before his eyes had moved a hair, and he understood, with the flat certainty of a man who knows his own hand, that he could now turn this faculty wherever he wished.

He did not feel triumphant. The teacher had warned him against triumph as he had warned him against the bazaar booklets. Triumph was the mind grabbing credit for the body's slow labour. What Imhrat

felt instead was something quieter and stranger: a kind of widening, as though a wall he had lived against all his life had turned out to be a door, and the door had been standing open the whole time, and the world on the other side of it was simply *larger* than he had been told — larger than the eyes had ever reported, larger than the little lit room behind the skull could hold.

He sat with that a long while. The candle burned down. The teacher, against the far wall, said nothing, because the teacher already knew, having felt the change in the room the same way Imhrat now felt the chip on the brass dish — across the air, without looking, before either of them had spoken a word.

When the flame was nearly out, the teacher rose. He took from a shelf a thing Imhrat had not seen him touch before: a small cloth bag, and from the bag a worn pack of playing cards, the corners soft with handling.

Tomorrow, the teacher said, we begin the proof. Not the feeling — you have the feeling now. The proof. A thing you can do once, and then again, and then a thousand times, until there is no doubt left in any room. Sleep. You will need the back of your eyes rested.

He set the cards on the brass dish where the candle had been, and went out into the dark, and Imhrat sat looking at them — with his eyes, only his eyes, for now — and felt the low coal at the base of his spine, banked and warm and waiting, ready at last to be turned upon a deliberate thing.

The Hand That Read Alice

It was three years and some months after Banerjee first chased him through the trees that Imhrat Khan sat down on the floor of a closed room in Calcutta and let a stranger bind his eyes.

The stranger was a doctor named Marshall, a friend of mine through the Bengal medical circuit, and it is from his notes, copied into the report I now hold, that the next part comes. Marshall had been a sceptic of the bullying kind — the kind who arrives already composing the paragraph in which he exposes you. He had brought his own materials. This is worth dwelling on, because it is the whole of the proof: a man who wished to catch Imhrat out was given every instrument with which to do it, and could not.

First the dough. Marshall worked it himself from flour and water until it was a stiff grey paste, and he pressed a thick wad of it over each closed eye, moulding it down hard into the orbit so that not the thinnest channel of light could survive at the side of the nose. Imhrat sat without complaint while it set. Then a thick bandage, wound twice around the head and knotted at the back. Then a second bandage. Marshall noted the layers in the margin the way one notes a dosage. Two of cloth, beneath it the sealed dough, beneath that the lids themselves.

This was not invention. Harry Price and the University of London people had done very nearly the same thing in 1935 to a man called Kuda Bux — dough kneaded into the sockets, the head wrapped, witnesses watching the wrapping — and Kuda Bux had read and walked and threaded a needle while sealed. Marshall knew the Price tests. He had read the published account. He was, in his own mind, repeating an experiment that had already failed once to find its trick, and

he meant to find it this time.

“Now,” said Marshall. “Read.”

He had brought a book at random from his own shelf that morning, told no one which, and he held it open now before the bound face. It was a worn edition of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, and he had opened it to a page somewhere in the middle, near the trial, where the cards stand up in court.

Imhrat did not lean forward. He did not turn his head toward the book in the small hunting way that a man does when he is trying to catch a gleam under a blindfold. He simply lifted his right hand, palm down, fingers loose, and held it perhaps a foot above the open page, the way you might hold a hand over a stove to learn whether it has been lit.

And then he began to read aloud.

Not quickly. The first words came slow and shaped, as though he were copying them out of the air with his mouth. Then a little quicker. He read of the King and the jury and the tarts that the Knave of Hearts was said to have stolen, and where Marshall’s own eyes ran ahead down the page Imhrat’s voice followed, line by line, no word skipped, no word guessed wrong. When the doctor turned the leaf, Imhrat waited the half-second it takes paper to settle and then went on into the new page without being told it had been turned.

Marshall’s note here loses its hard edge. He writes that he moved the book. He lifted it silently and set it down two feet to the left, on the floorboards, without a word — and Imhrat’s hand drifted after it through the dark like a compass needle finding north, and the reading did not stop.

What I want to be careful about — and Cartwright is careful about it too, later, in the part of the report that made me steal the whole thing — is the *hand*. Imhrat did not say he saw the page with his face. He said it later, at the dinner, in his own words: that the eyes are only one instrument of the sense of sight, and not even the best of them. He said the whole skin learns to look, if it is taught patiently enough, and that the palm of the hand, being the most awake part of the skin, learns soonest. He held his hand over the words because the words came to him as the heat of a flame comes to the hand — as a thing

felt, sorted, and only then named.

Marshall did not believe in this. Marshall wrote down what happened anyway, because what happened was a man with two bandages and a finger's depth of dried dough sealed over both eyes reading a book the man himself had chosen that morning, in a sealed room, with his hand.

There is a school of thought — I will only put it in the frame, not in Imhrat's room — that the skin does prickle to things before the eye confirms them. There have been experiments, since, where a body's own electrics shift a few seconds *before* a screen shows it a picture it cannot have predicted: the gut going tight ahead of the shock. Mossbridge and Radin and Utts gathered up a heap of these and counted them and found the effect, small and stubborn, more often than chance allowed. I mention it only because Marshall, who would have hated the comparison, kept reaching in his notes for the same idea without a name for it. *He answered before he could have known*, he wrote once, and then crossed it out, because it sounded like the thing he had come to disprove.

Then came the cards.

It was Marshall's own deck, and he shuffled it himself, hard, three times, the way a man shuffles when he wants the order to be no one's. He fanned it face down on the floor in front of Imhrat. He did not announce the test. He simply set the deck down and waited to see whether the man would understand.

Imhrat passed his open hand over the fanned backs, slow, an inch above them, the way he had passed it over Alice. And he named them.

Not all at once. He took the first card — the doctor's note specifies he never turned it over, never lifted it, only laid two fingers lightly upon its painted back — and he said, *the seven of clubs*. Marshall turned it. The seven of clubs. Another. *The queen of diamonds*. The queen of diamonds. Another, and another, down the fanned row, and where Marshall expected the long stutter of a guesser hedging his odds there was only the same shaped slowness as the reading, the words arriving with the small delay of a thing felt through the back of a card and then spoken — heat sorted into a name.

I will not pretend the doctor's hand was steady when he wrote the column of results. It was not. He recorded the misses too, in honesty — there were two in the first deck, both face cards, both corrected by Imhrat himself a moment later as though the picture had come into focus a beat late. But a man does not name fifty pasteboards through their backs by accident, and Marshall, who had built the whole afternoon to catch him, sat on the floor of his own sealed room and could not say how it was done.

This is the moment the report stops being a curiosity and becomes a thing somebody might want. I felt it when I read it — the lift, the cold opening of a door — and I think Cartwright felt it too, because his own marginal hand grows careless here, the letters running together. *If this can be taught*, Cartwright wrote, *and Khan says it can be taught, then we must — we must understand it, we must record the method, we must give it to the men who have lost their eyes and to the surgeons who would restore them.* The publish-fever. The same fever the doctors always catch when the miracle is sitting in the room and breathing: the certainty that it belongs now to medicine, to the journals, to the good of mankind, and that all that remains is to write it down properly and present it.

They never did get to give it to the blind. But that comes later, and I am getting ahead of the page.

What Cartwright saw, and set down, and could not stop seeing, was a man reading a sealed book with his hand and naming a stranger's shuffled deck through the painted backs of the cards. He saw it as a door to surgery, to charity, to a paper that would carry his name into the long memory of his profession.

Henry Sugar, sitting on the floor of a dead man's library with the blue folder open across his knees, saw it differently.

He read the column of named cards twice. *The seven of clubs. The queen of diamonds.* He read the doctor's shaking hand, the line crossed out, the fanned deck laid face down on a Calcutta floor in 1934, a hand passing an inch above the backs.

And he lifted his eyes from the page.

The rain was still going at the window. Somewhere below him, faint through the floor, the others were still at their game — six men around

a table, cards face down, money in the middle, the soft clatter of chips that meant the night had a long way left to run.

Henry looked at the door. Then he looked back down at the page, at the place where it said the thing could be taught, and at the figure beside it: three years.

He did not think about the blind. He did not think about surgery, or charity, or the long memory of any profession. He thought about a table downstairs, and the painted backs of cards, and how very much could be made to lie behind them.

He picked the folder up off his knees and held it, the way a man holds a thing he has already decided to keep.

Mild Rebuke

Henry closed the dossier on the last page, which described the death of a man in a Bombay bed, and sat for a long time without moving.

The library had gone dark around him. Somewhere below, the poker had broken up — he could hear the men in the hall now, the heavy good-nights, the slam of car doors, the rain still going at the windows in its patient way. They had not missed him. He understood, sitting there with the dead godfather's Moleskine in his lap, that no one in that house had thought of Henry Sugar once in three hours.

He did not care. He had stopped caring at the page where Imhrat Khan learned to read the underside of a playing card.

That was the thing he kept returning to, the way a man's tongue keeps returning to a chipped tooth. Not the bicycle through traffic. Not the needle threaded blind in front of doctors. The cards. The cards were the whole point, and the cards had been sitting in this report for the better part of a century like money left in a coat.

He read that section again under the desk lamp. *Three years*, the man had needed. Three years of staring at a candle in a cell, of breathing in counts, of feeling the heat rise behind the eyes until something in the body learned what the eyes could no longer be trusted to do. And then the cards. Then any room with cards in it was an open book.

Henry was a member of ten private rooms in London. He had been to the others — Monte Carlo, the floating game off Antibes, the back table at a club in Geneva where the buy-in was a number you said quietly. He had cheated in most of them, in the small, lazy, deniable ways a man cheats when he has already decided that incurring a mild

rebuken is always preferable to performing an onerous task. A marked deck at a charity tournament once, which he had won without ever touching the marks, because the marks had been a kind of insurance and the winning had come easy anyway.

This was different. This was not a marked deck. This was a man who was the marking. Who walked into the room already knowing.

He did the arithmetic the way other men daydream. A good private table turned over real money in a night. If a man could see every hand before it was dealt face up — not guess, not count, see — then there was no ceiling. There was only how much he was willing to win before someone noticed, and the answer to that, with Max's old trade of faces and disguises somewhere at the edge of his thinking, was that no one would ever notice the same man twice.

Three years was a long time. Henry had never spent three years on anything. He had never spent three weeks on anything.

But three years against an open vault for the rest of his life — that was not an onerous task. That was the best investment he had ever seen described.

He did not give the Moleskine back.

There was no one to give it back to. The godfather was dead; the estate was being cleared by a firm in Cirencester who would not know a yogi's medical report from a gas bill. Henry slid the blue notebook into the inside pocket of his jacket, where it sat against his ribs all the way down to breakfast, and he was aware the whole time that this was a small theft, and that small theft was exactly the sort of thing he was good at, and that the man whose life he had just read had spent three years learning not to be the sort of thing Henry was.

He drove back to London before the others were up. The rain followed him most of the way down the M40 and then gave out somewhere past the Chilterns, and by the time he reached the flat the sky had that washed, exhausted look it gets after a storm has worn itself down.

The flat was on the right floor of the right building. He went through it now with a new eye, the way you walk through rooms you are about to use for something other than what they were built for. The master

suite was the obvious cell. It had a heavy door, a lock that worked, no view worth keeping the curtains open for. He told the woman who came in three mornings a week that he did not want to be disturbed in there, ever, under any circumstances, and she said *of course, Mr Sugar* in the tone of someone who had stopped being surprised by him years ago.

He needed a candle. He remembered that the way you remember a single instruction from a long document — *concentrate the conscious mind upon the object of the flame*. He thought briefly about lighting one of the tea-lights left in a drawer from some dinner, then dismissed it. A tea-light was a thing that drowned in its own wax in an hour. He went out and bought a pillar candle, white, fat as a fist, the kind that would burn for a week of evenings, and he set it on a low table in the middle of the bedroom floor and pulled a chair up to it and shut the door.

He had read the instructions so many times he could have recited them. Sit so the flame is level with the eyes. Breathe in a count, hold, breathe out a longer count. Let the body grow heavy. Look at the flame, and only the flame, until the flame is the only thing in the world, and then — and this was the part the report dwelt on — until you can hold the picture of the flame behind your closed eyes as clearly as you held it open.

He had, somewhere in the silt at the bottom of his attention, half a memory of a documentary he had not really watched, in which someone with a calm American voice had talked about exactly this — breath and heat and elevated feeling, ordinary people training the body to do things the body was supposed not to do, hours and weeks of it, the boring repetition that rewired you. He had thought, at the time, that it was the sort of thing sad people did instead of having a life. He had changed the channel.

He lit the candle with a kitchen match and sat down and began.

For a while he simply looked at the flame and felt faintly ridiculous, a grown man in good shoes sitting on the floor of his own bedroom staring at a candle while the city went about its evening below him.

Then he forgot to feel ridiculous, because looking at a flame is harder

than it sounds. The flame would not stay one thing. It bent and recovered and threw off a thin black thread of smoke and pulled itself back to a point. His eyes watered and he blinked and lost it and found it again. He counted his breath the way the report said and lost count and started over.

He thought about the cards. He thought about the room in Geneva. He pulled himself back to the flame.

He thought about a sum of money, and then the shape of the sum, and then the look on the face of the man across the green baize when the night went a way the man could not understand. He pulled himself back to the flame.

His back began to ache between the shoulders. A dull warmth gathered behind his eyes, which he noted with a flicker of something — *was that it, was that the beginning of it* — before he understood it was only the strain of not blinking, the ordinary protest of a body asked to do an unaccustomed thing. He closed his eyes. There was a smear of orange where the flame had been, and it slid away when he tried to hold it, the way a name slides away the moment you reach for it, and then there was nothing.

Nothing behind his eyes. Nothing in the room but the small wet sound of the candle and the traffic far down on the street.

He sat with the nothing for what felt like a great while and was, when he looked, eleven minutes.

He had expected — he was honest enough, even now, to admit he had expected — that being a one-in-a-million sort of man, the kind of man things came easy to, it would simply begin. That he would sit down and feel the gift recognise him.

He blew the candle out, and the smoke went up in its thread, and he sat in the dark and felt the precise size of the task he had agreed to.

Nothing, Nothing

The first thing he learned was that nothing happened.

He had expected — though he would not have admitted to expecting anything so naïve — that there would be a current, some early flicker, a faint warm hint that the thing was real and reachable and his. The dossier had promised it, after a fashion. The yogi had felt heat behind his eyes in the first weeks. Imhrat had described a softening at the edges of sight within a month.

Henry lit the pillar candle, sat with his spine against the cold radiator, fixed his gaze on the flame, and felt absolutely nothing for forty minutes. Then his knees ached and he stood up and poured a drink.

He tried again the next morning. Nothing. And the morning after that.

He had read somewhere — one of those late documentaries he half-watched, the kind that filled the small hours when sleep would not come — about laboratories where people sat in shielded rooms and tried to nudge the output of a machine that spat out random numbers. A bell curve that should have stayed symmetrical, leaning, fractionally, when a person concentrated. The presenter had said the effect was tiny. Vanishingly small. But it was there, the man said, across hundreds of thousands of trials, present in the aggregate where it could never be seen in a single run.

That was the part Henry held onto in the second week, when the flame told him nothing and his eyes streamed and the headache arrived. *In the aggregate*. No single sitting would announce itself. You could not look for the result in the result. You had to trust the protocol — the blind, dull, repeating protocol — and let the numbers gather behind

your back where you weren't allowed to watch.

He did not believe it, exactly. But he behaved as though he did, which the dossier suggested was the same thing for practical purposes.

The headaches were the first real proof of anything at all, and they were proof of nothing but effort.

They came in from behind, a band tightening across the back of the skull, then climbing forward to settle over the right eye. By the third week they had taken up residence. He took pills. He learned which ones did nothing and which dulled the worst of it without putting him to sleep. He kept on sitting.

Imhrat's account had warned of this without dwelling on it — the yogi had told him to expect discomfort and to ignore it, that the discomfort was the body objecting to being asked to do something the culture had told it for forty years was impossible. Henry, reading that line again at two in the morning with a flannel pressed to his eye, found it almost funny. His body objected to everything. It objected to early rising and late drinking and being made to sit still on a hard floor. Why should this be different.

He counted breaths because the dossier said to count breaths. In, hold, out — a slow cadence, longer than felt natural, until the longness itself became the natural thing and the room seemed to settle around it. On the good days a kind of heat would gather low in his back, at the base of the spine, a dull warmth like sitting too near a fire. The dossier had a word for the place. Henry did not use the word. He noted the heat, the way you'd note a symptom, and he kept counting.

Nothing came of the heat. He logged it anyway, in a notebook he kept beside the candle — date, duration, sensations, result. The result column read *nil* for the better part of two months.

He had built the room like a cell. The master suite of the Kensington flat — the largest, with the absurd marble bathroom and the view he had bought it for and never looked at — he had stripped of everything that wasn't necessary. He pulled the bed apart and stacked it in the spare room. He took down the pictures. He drew the heavy curtains

and left them drawn, so that the only light was the flame, and the flame was the only thing in the world worth looking at, which was the point.

His cleaner asked, carefully, whether everything was all right. He said he was redecorating. She did not believe him and she did not press, which was one of the things he paid her for.

He told no one else. There was no one else, really, to tell — his cohort were in the islands, then in the Alps, sending him photographs of themselves looking expensive in the snow, and he replied to none of them, and after a while they stopped. A man at the retreat back in the autumn had mentioned, laughing, a fellow who'd worked for the Americans as a *psychic spy*, who claimed he could draw buildings on the far side of the planet from a numbered envelope. Everyone at the table had laughed. Henry had laughed too. He thought of it now, in the dark with the candle, and did not laugh. The man — McMoneagle, was it? — had apparently written it all down: the doubt, the years of producing garbage, the fear that he was fooling himself, and then the day a drawing matched something it had no business matching. The shape of the learning, the man insisted, was the shape of any skill. Boredom. Failure. Failure. Then proof.

Henry had no envelopes and no buildings. He had a flame and a headache and a notebook that said *nil*. But he had the shape. He clung to the shape.

Somewhere in the eighth week the candle changed.

Not dramatically. He almost missed it. He had been sitting his usual forty minutes, eyes on the flame, breath slowed, when he became aware that he was no longer *looking at* the flame so much as the flame was simply present, the way a sound is present in a quiet room. The distinction was slippery and he could not hold it. But it returned the next day, and the day after, and he wrote *flame — present, not looked-at* in the notebook and did not know what it meant.

The dossier said this was the threshold. It said the eyes were learning to step aside.

In the ninth week he could keep the flame in mind with his eyes shut. For a few seconds at first — the after-image, anyone could do that,

it meant nothing. But the after-image faded and the flame stayed, behind his eyes, in a place that had no name in the language he used for ordinary seeing. It guttered when his attention guttered. It steadied when he steadied. It was not memory and it was not the eye. It was something doing the work the eye usually did, without the eye.

He sat very still and did not let himself want it, because wanting it made it go.

At ten months he could outline an object across the room with his eyes shut.

It was a small thing. It was the largest thing that had ever happened to him.

He had placed an apple on the dresser, a few feet away, because the dossier suggested a simple shape with clean edges. He sat in his usual place, ran the breath down to its slow length, brought the flame up behind his eyes, and then — gently, the way you'd coax a wary animal — turned that inner attention toward the dresser. For a long while there was nothing, the familiar nothing, the patient nothing he had learned to wait inside.

Then there was an edge.

Not a picture. Not the apple in colour and gloss as the eye would have it. An edge — a roundness, a sense of where the thing stopped and the air began, a presence at the dresser that pressed faintly back against his attention the way a wall presses against an outstretched hand in the dark. He held it. It held. He opened his eyes to check, and the apple sat exactly where the edge had said it sat, and the breath went out of him in something that was almost a laugh and almost not.

He shut his eyes and found it again. The edge was still there. It was there because the apple was there — he tested this, badly, by moving the apple to the windowsill while keeping his eyes shut, and reaching for the edge, and finding it had moved. The attention had not gone to where he remembered the apple. It had gone to where the apple now was.

He sat in the dark for a long time after that, not practising, just sitting, the candle steady in front of him and the slow breath going in and out.

It was not cards. He understood that clearly, with no inflation. He could not have told you the suit of anything, could not have read a word, could not have done a tenth of what the yogi had done or a hundredth of what he himself would need to do at a table. There were years between here and there. The dossier said three. He believed it now, which he had not believed before.

But there was an edge at the windowsill, and his eyes were shut, and the edge was true.

He wrote one word in the notebook, in the column that had said *nil* for the better part of a year.

Then he blew out the candle and lit it again, and began.

The Face in the Flame

There is a thing the books do not tell you, which is that the boredom has a shape. It is not flat. It rises and falls. There are weeks in which the candle is a wall, and weeks in which it is a door that will not quite open, and the difference between them is invisible from the outside and absolute from the inside. Henry learned to read these tides the way a sailor reads a barometer he does not trust but cannot ignore.

By the start of the second year he had stopped expecting anything. This, it turned out, was the trick — though it was not a trick he had chosen. Dispenza, in the one chapter Henry had read twice, said something Henry could not now locate but could not forget: that the body had to be taught to stop straining toward the future, because straining was itself a way of remaining the same person. Henry had thought this was the sort of sentence that meant nothing. Then one evening in February, sitting before the pillar candle with the flame standing dead-still in the windless room, he noticed that he had stopped wanting the outcome. He was simply breathing. The breath went in for a slow count and held at the top and went out longer than it had come in, and the heat that had been gathering behind his eyes for eighteen months rose without his asking and settled, like silt, into the floor of his skull.

That night he held the inner image for the first time longer than a minute.

The image was his own face.

He had tried, at the beginning, dutifully, the things the dossier described — a beloved object, a remembered room. They had slid off him like water off glass. He had no beloved object. The rooms he remembered were hotels. But his own face he could hold for hours,

because he had been holding it, in mirrors and shop windows and the dark screens of switched-off phones, for forty-one years. The vanity that had paid for the capped teeth and the monthly visits to the man in Marylebone who did things to his skin with light — that vanity was, it turned out, a muscle, and it was the only muscle he had been training his whole life without knowing it. Dispenza would have called the face an identity rehearsed to automaticity. Henry called it the one thing he could see with his eyes shut.

He saw it now in extraordinary detail. The small asymmetry of the left eyebrow. The pore-map of the nose. He saw it and held it and breathed, and somewhere in that holding the heat behind his eyes did something new — it spread sideways, into the temples, down behind the ears, along the line of the jaw, and the edges of the dark room began to be not dark.

He understood, dimly, that he was learning faster than he should. The dossier had been honest about Imhrat — three years to the candle, more to the cards. Henry was outpacing it, and the only explanation he could find was unflattering and probably correct: he had nothing else. Imhrat had wanted fame, had performed, had lived in the world. Henry had let the world fall away from him like a coat in a warm room. The driver had been let go. The friends had stopped calling and then stopped existing. He woke, he breathed, he held the face, he turned to the cards.

The card drill was simple and it broke him for the better part of a year.

He would take a card from the deck without looking at it, hold it face-down in front of him at the distance of a held book, and try to read its back as Imhrat had described — not with the eyes, which saw only the lattice of the Bicycle pattern, but with the other thing, the thing that lived in the skin and somewhere lower, behind the sternum, that had no name in any language he respected. For months the answer was nothing. A grey hum. He would set down the card, turn it, and discover he had been entirely wrong, or — worse — exactly right by accident, which taught nothing and felt like cruelty.

There was a clip he had seen once, half-asleep in a hotel in Antibes, a documentary about a laboratory where they sat people in front of

a screen and measured the sweat on their fingers and the jump in their pulse, and the people's bodies, the narrator had said in the bored voice such narrators use, reacted to an upsetting image a few seconds *before* the computer randomly chose to show it. Presentiment, the word had been. Henry had thought it was rubbish then. He thought about it now, on the floor, in the dark, because something in his own body had begun to do exactly that — to lean, very slightly, toward the answer before the conscious mind had any answer to give. The pulse went first. He learned to listen to the pulse.

By the eighteenth month he could read the colour. Red or black, no better than a guess at first, then better than a guess, then — he kept a tally in a notebook, the way the man in the clip had — better than chance could explain, run after run, the numbers piling up the way the narrator had said they piled up in the lab, small per trial and immense in aggregate. He did not trust the numbers. He trusted the tally. The tally did not care whether he trusted it.

The thing the books call the field — Sheldrake's word, though Henry would not have known to use it — arrived not as a revelation but as a correction of geography.

He had spent two years believing the sight came *from* him and went *out*, a beam, a torch, his attention pushed across the gap to the card. One evening in the third year this belief simply turned inside out, the way a sock turns, and he understood — not thought, understood, in the muscles of his back — that the knowing was not in his skull and never had been. It was in the room. The card knew its own face. The room held the knowing the way a field holds weather, and his job was not to reach but to stop excluding. He had been a closed door pretending to be a searchlight. He stopped pretending. He let the room be larger than his head.

After that it went very fast.

Sheldrake had a word for why the lineage helped, too — habit, the grooves worn into nature by everything that had done a thing before. Imhrat had done this. The yogi in the tree had done this. Kuda Bux, whoever he had truly been, had stood blindfolded and read a book held behind his back while doctors sealed dough over his eyes, and the men before him stretching back past record had done this, and

Henry, on the floor of a Kensington flat with the radiators ticking, was not inventing the path. He was finding it already worn. He was the latest foot in an old furrow. It was the least lonely he had felt in his life, and there was no one in the room.

He timed himself with the stopwatch on his phone, face-down on the carpet so the light would not distract.

In the spring of the third year: eleven seconds to name a card, eyes closed, hand resting on its back. By midsummer: seven. He stopped using the hand. The skin of the palm had been a crutch; the room did not need his palm.

One morning in September — the light coming grey through the curtains he no longer bothered to open — he laid out the deck and went through it card by card, calling each before he turned it, and counted the seconds between sight and certainty. Four. Then three. Then a card came up and he knew it before the stopwatch had registered he had begun, knew it the way you know your own name, the nine of diamonds sitting there in his chest fully formed, and when he turned it over it was the nine of diamonds and the clock said two point one.

He sat very still.

He did it again. The pulse went first, the lean, the small certainty arriving below the sternum a heartbeat ahead of the mind, the way the bodies in the laboratory had leaned toward the image before the machine had chosen it. Two seconds. Under four, every time now, every single time, the way the dossier said Imhrat had done it, the way it was apparently possible for a common enough man to do an uncommon enough thing if he gave it the boring years and had, God help him, nothing else to give.

He gathered the cards. His hands were quite steady. He found that he was already, without deciding to, thinking of the room with the green tables and the men with the short legs and the women with the blue hair — the room he had been a member of for three years and not once entered with anything but a wallet.

He stood up. He went to find a clean shirt.

The Card Turns Over

He had stopped counting the days some time in the third year. There was no virtue in the counting; it only made the work into a sentence, and the work was not a sentence. The work was sitting on the floor of his flat at the hour when Mayfair went quiet, with the pillar candle burned down to a soft column of its own wax, breathing the way the dossier described — in for the count, hold the empty space, out for the count, hold again — until the small heat gathered behind his eyes and the ache settled into his sacrum like a coal pressed against the bone.

That part he no longer fought. There had been a year — most of a year — when he had fought everything: the migraines that came in flat grey sheets and lasted two days; the boredom, which was worse than the migraines, because the migraines at least felt like something happening; the long stretches of nothing, nothing, nothing that the report had warned him about in its dry physician's hand and which he had not believed until he had lived inside them. *Months of practice, the dossier said, before the smallest result.* He had read that as a man reads a warning on a packet — a thing meant for other people. It had been meant for him.

Now the nothing had a shape. He could feel the difference between a session going somewhere and a session going nowhere the way you can feel, walking into a dark room, whether or not someone is already in it. That feeling itself had once seemed like a swindle to him — a thing he would have laughed at across a table. He had a half-memory, dredged up out of some documentary he had watched years ago with the sound low and a glass in his hand, of a man in a laboratory hooked to wires, the man's skin registering a jolt a few seconds *before* the screen showed him anything to jolt at. Anticipation of an event the

machine itself selected at random, after the body had already reacted. He had thought, at the time: editing. He had thought: they cut it to look like that. He no longer thought either of those things, because his own body had started doing the same trick to him at the candle, telling him things a beat before his mind could account for how it knew them.

Tonight the heat came quickly. He set the playing card on the carpet a yard in front of him, face down, the way he had set ten thousand cards face down before it, and he did not look at the back of it. There was nothing to look at. It was a back. He had bought the deck himself, shuffled it himself, drawn the card without seeing it, laid it down. No marks. He had been a man who marked cards once, and he understood exactly what marks would have made this — a parlour trick, a thing for fools, the thing the magician's assistant in the dossier had spent his youth ashamed of. This was the other thing. He had spent three years learning that there was another thing.

He let his attention go out toward the card.

Not his eyes — his eyes were half-closed, the candle a smear of gold at the edge of them. Something else. The dossier had two words for it that he had repeated to himself so many times they had stopped being words and become a single sensation: the outer sense and the inner sense. The yogi had taught it as a thing the whole skin could do, the whole body, the way a man in a dark cellar comes to feel the wall before his fingers reach it. Henry had not believed in the inner sense for a very long time. He believed in it now the way he believed in his own pulse, which is to say without believing in it at all, because you do not believe in a thing you are simply having.

He breathed. He held the empty space. He let the attention reach.

And the reaching met something. That was the part that had no language in it, the part he would never be able to say to anyone, the part that was the whole of it: the attention went out and it was not alone out there. There was a faint worn groove where it went, as though the place his mind was going had been gone to before — by Imhrat Khan, by the yogi in the tree, by the long line of men who had sat at candles in the dark with their eyes shut, and the groove made the going easier, the way a path through grass is easier the second hundredth thousandth time it is walked. He did not have a name for that

either, and did not want one. He only knew the reaching was not into emptiness. It was into a thing that already held the shape he was looking for, and had been holding it the whole time, waiting for him to be quiet enough.

His pulse changed.

It changed before he understood why. A small lift in the chest, the particular alertness of a man who has heard a door open in a house he thought was empty — and then, only then, a fraction of a second behind it, the knowing arrived in his mind in plain language, the way a name arrives a moment after you have already recognised a face.

The five of diamonds.

He opened his eyes. He turned the card over.

The five of diamonds lay on the carpet in the candlelight, five red pips and the small numerals in the corners, exactly as it had been the whole time, face down, while he sat a yard away and read it through its own paper back.

He did not move for a while.

There was no feeling in him that he could have called triumph. He had expected triumph — had expected, on the night this finally happened, to leap up, to shout, to feel the thing crack open in him that a man feels when a horse he has put everything on comes in first. None of that came. What came instead was a quietness so large it was nearly fear, the quietness of a man standing at the edge of a thing much bigger than the thing he had thought he was standing at the edge of. The card had not changed. The world the card sat in had changed, or rather had been this size all along and he had simply not been allowed to see it until now, and the not-being-allowed had been the only small thing about it.

He picked the card up and looked at it for a long moment, at the red of the diamonds, and then he set it back down face up and sat looking at the candle.

His body had known first.

That was the thing he kept returning to as he sat there, the thing that would not leave him. The lift in the chest, the changed pulse — those had come *before* the name. The knowing had not run from his mind

down into his body. It had run the other way. His body had registered the five of diamonds and the alarm of it, the strangeness of it, and only afterward had the registering risen up into the place where he could put it in words. He thought of the man in the documentary again, the skin jumping ahead of the screen, and he understood now what he had been looking at on that long-ago evening with the glass in his hand, and that he had laughed at the very thing he had just spent three years of his life learning to do.

He drew another card. He laid it down. He breathed, and reached, and the groove was there again, and the pulse lifted again, and the word arrived behind it — *jack of clubs* — and he turned it over and it was the jack of clubs.

He did it eleven more times. He did not miss.

After the last one he reached for the small clock he kept on the floor beside the candle for exactly this, the cheap travelling clock with the sweep hand, the only piece of cheapness in a flat full of expensive things, and he ran the next draw against it. He laid the card. He breathed. He reached. The pulse, the name, the turn.

Three and a half seconds.

He sat back on his heels. Outside, very far down, a single car went along Curzon Street and was gone, and the silence came back and settled over Mayfair, and the candle burned, and Henry Sugar knelt on the floor of his flat at forty-one years of age holding a playing card he had read through its own back in under four seconds, and the thing he felt was not joy and was not greed, though both of those were waiting for him in the morning, ready to take it from him and make it small again. The thing he felt now was the size of the dark behind his eyes when he reached into it. He had thought he was learning a trick to beat a card table. He had been learning that the table, and the room, and the city, and the man kneeling in it were all a great deal larger on the inside than anyone had told him.

He blew out the candle.

Then he stood — his knees cracked; he was not a young man and the floor was hard — and he went to the wardrobe and took down the soft leather holdall he had not used in over a year, and he laid it open on the bed. The dinner jacket. Two shirts. The good shoes. He moved

without hurry, folding each thing as carefully as a man packing for a journey he has waited a long time to take, and when the bag was full he set it by the door and stood looking at it in the dark, and he thought of a private room he had been a member of for years and had not entered in three, and of the men who would be at the table there, and of how very long it had been since anything in the world had been worth the bother of getting dressed for.

The Private Room

The club did not advertise itself. There was no name on the door in St James's, only a brass plate worn smooth by a century of palms, and a man inside who knew Henry's face and did not need to check it against a list. Henry had been a member for eleven years. He had been a member of nine other rooms like it across three continents, and he understood the architecture of these places the way a surgeon understands a body: the soft lighting that made everyone look slightly younger and slightly richer, the carpet thick enough to swallow the sound of a man losing a fortune, the absence of clocks. Time was the enemy of the house. So the house abolished it.

He climbed the stairs to the first floor, where the gaming rooms were, and where the air smelled of cigar smoke that had been filtered and recirculated until it became an idea of cigar smoke rather than the thing itself.

There were two tables in use. Baccarat in the far corner, three men and a woman who looked as though they had been carved from the same expensive stone. And nearer the window, under a chandelier that threw no useful light at all, a blackjack table with two players and a dealer in a waistcoat the colour of dried blood.

Henry sat down at the blackjack table.

This is the part I find hardest to write without wanting to interrupt, so I will interrupt now and get it over with. Henry had spent three years learning to do something that the men who design these rooms have spent a great deal of money to make impossible. He had not learned it to cure anyone. He had not learned it to prove a point in a laboratory, though he had, somewhere in the long boring middle of it, half-remembered a film about a machine that spat out random

numbers and a man who claimed that human attention could lean on it, very slightly, the way a thumb leans on a scale. Henry had learned it to win money he did not need. I want you to keep that in your mind while the cards come out, because the story is about to give him exactly what he wanted, and you should watch what it does to him.

The dealer slid the cards across the felt.

Henry did not look at his own cards in the way the other players looked at theirs. He let his gaze rest on the deck, on the top card waiting in the shoe, and he breathed the way he had been breathing for three years — slow, low, the breath dropping into the base of his spine where the heat had first come to him in the locked suite with the pillar candle. The breath went down. The attention went out. And the back of the top card, which to the other men was a uniform pattern of red filigree, became to Henry a thing with a front and a back, both of them legible at once, as though the card were made of smoke.

Eight of clubs.

He took it. He was on fourteen and the dealer was showing a six and the table mathematics said stand, and Henry took the eight and made twenty-two and busted and lost the hand, and he did this on purpose, because a man who only ever wins is a man who is eventually invited to leave.

This was the discipline of it. The seeing was the easy part now. The hard part was pretending he could not see.

He lost three more small hands. He won two. He let an hour go by in this fashion, drinking very little, the way the others drank steadily and laughed too loud, and all the while the cards lay open to him before they were turned, the whole deck a window he was choosing how often to look through. Across the room the baccarat players bet enormous sums on the turn of a single card with the flat faces of people who had long ago stopped feeling the size of the numbers. Henry watched the woman lose what a nurse earns in a year and adjust a bracelet.

And here is the strange thing, the thing the three years had done to him without his consent. He looked at these people — his own people, men and women he had eaten with and sailed with and stood beside at a hundred funerals of marriages — and he found, for the first time

in his life, that he did not like them.

He had not known it was possible to see a person the way he now saw a card. But it was the same faculty, more or less; the attention going out past the eyes, resting on a thing, and the thing giving up its back as well as its front. He looked at the man beside him, a fund manager with very white teeth and a watch that cost more than the dealer's flat, and Henry saw — not with his eyes — a kind of frantic emptiness behind the teeth, a man feeding a hole that would never fill because the feeding was the thing that dug it. He saw a woman at the baccarat table whose laughter arrived a half-second after the joke, as though it had to be fetched from somewhere far away. He saw short legs and dyed hair and rings cutting into swollen fingers, and he saw, underneath all of it, the same hunger he had carried up the stairs.

It was not a kind way to see people. But sight is not obliged to be kind. The yogi in the dossier had not been promised kindness, only sight, and the man who learned to see without his eyes had also, it turned out, learned to see without the comfortable blindness that lets us love a room full of strangers because we are all pretending the same thing together.

Henry stopped losing on purpose.

He moved to the baccarat table where the sums were larger and the cards came in a clean, brutal rhythm — banker, player, the natural eight, the natural nine — and he began, quietly, with the precise dishonesty of a man who has trained for three years to be honest-looking, to win.

He did not win every hand. He had calculated, in the locked suite, the texture of a believable run. He let the house take back enough to keep the manager from drifting over to watch. But the shoe held something like three hundred cards across the night, and Henry could read every one of them through its back before it left the dealer's hand, and over four hours the plaques accumulated in front of him in a casual untidy stack the way they accumulate in front of a man who is simply having a good night and does not understand his own luck.

By two in the morning he had won, in round figures, eight hundred and fifty thousand pounds.

I want to be exact about that number, because Dahl was exact about his, and the exactness is the point. Eight hundred and fifty thousand pounds is a house — a real house, with a garden, in a town where people raise children. It is twenty years of a good salary. It is a sum that, mishandled, can break a family or, handled well, can change the entire weather of several lives. Henry had won it in an evening, sitting down, by breathing into the base of his spine and looking at the backs of cards, and he had wanted it so badly and for so long that the wanting had become the architecture of his whole self.

He cashed out a portion, took the rest on account in the way these rooms allow, and walked down the smooth stairs and out past the brass plate into the cold St James's dark, and waited for the thing to arrive.

He had imagined it many times during the boring middle. The triumph. The deep animal satisfaction of having beaten the unbeatable room, of having taken from the house the one thing the house is built never to give. He had pictured himself standing exactly here, on exactly this pavement, with exactly this sum, lit up from inside like a window at Christmas.

He stood on the pavement. He felt the cold on his capped teeth. He waited.

Nothing came.

There was the money, yes, a fact in the world, as real as the cold. But the feeling he had ordered three years in advance did not arrive to collect it. He searched for it the way you search a coat for keys you are certain you put there, patting himself down, growing first puzzled and then faintly alarmed. He had won. He had won enormously, impossibly, and he felt — he checked again, carefully, the way he had learned to check the base of his spine for heat — he felt almost nothing at all. A small grey flatness. The taste of a meal eaten too fast to notice.

He had expected the sight to change the cards. He had not expected it to change the man looking at them, but it had; somewhere in the three years of breath and heat and the months of nothing, nothing, the thing he was practising had quietly rebuilt the chair he was sitting in, so that when the prize finally landed it landed on a different person, one who could no longer feel it the way the old Henry would have.

He found his car. He was driven home through the empty streets, the city scrubbed and shining with the rain that had stopped hours ago, and he looked out at the late buses and the men in doorways and the lit windows of people who had to be somewhere in the morning, and the grey flatness sat in his chest like a swallowed stone.

He let himself into the flat. He did not turn on many lights.

He took the cash he had carried out — a thick brick of it, more money than most people see in a year held casually in one hand — and he put it on the dresser in the bedroom, beside the cufflinks and the loose change and the small silver dish where he kept his rings. He stood looking at it.

The flat felt wrong. That was the only way he could put it to himself, standing there in the half-dark in his good coat. The flat felt wrong the way a room feels wrong when someone has moved a chair an inch while you were out. Nothing was missing. Everything he had wanted was here, plus eight hundred and fifty thousand pounds more of it than there had been this morning. And the rooms he had spent his whole inherited, idle, comfortable life in had, overnight, become the rooms of a stranger he was not sure he wanted to be.

He thought, absurdly, of the yogi who had died in his sleep before the doctors could write him up — the miracle that escaped the institution because it could not bear to be owned. He thought of a chick he had read about somewhere, in the half-asleep margins of the boring middle, a day-old chick that supposedly pulled a small blind machine across a floor toward itself by nothing but wanting its mother. He did not know why that came to him now, the chick and its machine, except that he was a man who had just pulled an entire night of cards toward himself by wanting, and the wanting had delivered everything and warmed nothing.

He left the money where it was, on the dresser, and he did not count it, and he did not lock it away, which was itself a kind of message he was not yet able to read.

He went to bed and lay in the dark with his eyes open, seeing the ceiling perfectly well in the ordinary way, and underneath the ordinary way, very faintly, the other way too — the room giving up its back as well as its front, the dark not quite dark to him anymore — and he waited for sleep the way he had waited on the pavement for joy, and

it took its time about coming.

What a Novelist Would Do

Let me step out from behind the curtain for a moment, because here is where I am tempted to lie to you.

I have been telling this story straight. I have given you Henry as he was — the capped teeth, the marked deck at Monte Carlo, the motto about the mild rebuke and the onerous task — and I have not softened him, because softening him would have been a kind of lie too. But now we arrive at the night after his first big win, and I, who am writing this, feel the old machinery of the trade begin to turn under my hands. The machinery that wants a *shape*. The machinery that wants the story to behave.

So let me show you what a competent novelist would do here. Not a great one — a great one might do something stranger — but a competent one, a craftsman who knows where the satisfaction lives in a reader's chest and how to press it.

He would kill Henry.

Not crudely. Not with a car or a bad oyster. He would kill him with the gift itself, because that is where the moral lives and a craftsman always finds the moral and puts it where the reader will trip over it. Remember that the yogis — the real ones, in Imhrat Khan's account, the ones who could levitate and walk the firepit and read a book pressed to the back of the skull — were forbidden to perform in public. Forbidden absolutely. The faculty was given to be turned inward, toward what Imhrat's teacher called the long work, and a man who took it to a card table was a man who had stolen something sacred and was spending it on chips.

A competent novelist loves a rule like that. A rule like that is a loaded

gun on the mantelpiece, and the trade says: fire it.

So picture the flat. Mayfair, the small hours, the £850,000 still in two banded bricks on the dresser where Henry had dropped them, money he had not counted because counting it would have meant pretending it mattered. Picture him standing in front of the full-length mirror in the bedroom — the one he'd had fitted because a man should be able to see the whole of himself when he dressed — and picture him doing, idly, the thing the training had taught him to do without effort now: turning the inner sense on.

In Imhrat's report the inner sense was described as something close to touch. Not eyes behind the eyes — Kuda Bux, when the doctors of the London council sealed dough into his sockets in 1935 and layered the bandages and still he read aloud from a book and threaded a needle, did not claim eyes. He claimed his *skin* saw. That the surface of the body was an instrument, that perception was not a thing locked behind the face but spread across the whole envelope of him, and could be trained to reach. The novelist would have read that. The novelist would have it ready.

And so in the novelist's version Henry turns the inner sense on himself in the glass, the way you might run a hand down your own arm in the dark, and for the first time the instrument finds not a card, not a wall, not the street below — but the inside of him. His own chest. He sees, the way Imhrat learned to see, *through*. The architecture of himself: the long muscle of the heart still working, the wet rooms of the lungs, the dark traffic of the blood. And there — the novelist's hand does not even tremble, this is the easiest sentence he will write all year — there, lodged in a vein behind the breastbone, a clot. Small. Patient. Loosening.

The yogi's law had been broken. The gift had been spent on greed, and the gift, being older and larger than Henry, collects what it is owed. In the novelist's version Henry watches his own blood carry the clot toward the chambers of his heart with the same calm, four-second attention he had trained on the backs of playing cards, and he understands, in the last clear second, exactly what is killing him and exactly why, and he cannot look away, because looking away is the one thing the inner sense will not let him do.

They would find him in the morning. The money untouched. The

mirror clean. A man dead of perfectly natural causes — a coroner would write *embolism*, a common thing, a thing that fells common men in their flats every night of the year — and only the reader would know that nothing about it was natural at all. The reader would close the chapter with that cold pleasure that good craft delivers: *of course. It had to be that. The story told me so from the start.*

It is a good ending. I want you to feel how good it is. The rule fires. The vanity that fueled the training — Henry visualising his own face in the candle flame, not a beloved's, the monotropic self-love that made him learn so fast — that same vanity becomes the instrument of his death, because a man who turns the whole apparatus of his perception inward on *himself* will, eventually, see the one thing none of us is meant to watch. Greed in, greed out. The gift turned the wrong way kills the one who turns it. There is a thermocouple's precision to how the pieces lock.

And it is a lie.

This story is not fiction. The only untrue things in it are the names — and I will keep my word about those to the end. But Henry Sugar did not die that night, or that year, of a clot he watched arrive. There was no mirror revelation. He did not break the yogi's law and have the law come for him, because the law, if it is a law at all, does not appear to work the way a novelist needs it to. The presentiment researchers — Radin and the others who pooled the studies, all those bodies wired to sensors that twitched a beat or two *before* a random image flashed, skin and heart anticipating what no nerve could yet know — none of them ever reported a man reading his own death in advance and being unable to stop it. That is not on the record. That is the trade, dressing a moral up as physics and hoping you won't check.

What actually happened was duller and stranger and, I think, much harder to bear.

Henry woke late. The money was still on the dresser, both bricks of it, and he looked at them the way you look at a coat you bought drunk — with a faint, specific embarrassment. He had expected, you understand, to feel triumphant. He had spent three years and a stolen dossier and ten months of nothing-nothing-nothing before the first card ever turned, and at the end of all of it he had walked into a private room off St James's and taken £850,000 from men he despised, and

the whole point — the entire freight of the want that had carried him there — had been the moment of *winning*. He had been certain the moment would fill him.

It did not fill him. It is the oldest thing in the world and Imhrat's teacher had said it plainly somewhere in the report, in that documentary hush the nested pages all had: *nothing satisfies if you can have as much as you want*. Henry had read the sentence and skipped it, because it was not a card-table sentence, and now it sat in him like the clot the novelist never gave him.

He stood at the window — Curzon Street below him, wet, ordinary, a man walking a dog, a taxi idling — and the inner sense was still on, faintly, the way a radio left low keeps murmuring. And he found, looking down at the dull live street, that the training had changed something in him that the winning never could. Imhrat had warned of it without warning, in his own way: that the long work alters the one who does it whether he means it to or not, that you cannot spend three years learning to feel the field of attention reach past your own skin — the thing Sheldrake's people argued in their staring studies, the prickle on the neck, the sense of being looked at that the body insists on before any sound or shadow — you cannot train that and come out the same man who sat down. The instrument, once tuned, hears more than cards. It hears the room. It hears, faintly, the people in the room, whether you want it to or not.

So there was no death. There was a rich man at a window with eight hundred and fifty thousand pounds he did not want, feeling something move in his chest that was not a clot — that was, God help him, the first stirring of a wish to give it away. He did not have the shape of it yet. He did not know about the balcony, or the policeman who would shout at him, or John Winston in Geneva, or Max, or the twenty years. He only knew, standing there, that the want had been a lie and the hole was still a hole and the money on the dresser was the wrong size for it entirely.

I could have killed him. The craft is sitting right here in my hands, asking me to. But the man was real, and what was happening to him that morning was real, and it was better than the ending the trade wanted — because the ending the trade wanted was clean, and what actually came next was not clean at all. It was a grown man learning, far too late and at enormous cost, what he was for.

He put his coat on. He picked up one of the banded bricks, and then, after a moment, the second.

Curzon Street

The morning after the Pall Mall club, Henry Sugar woke with eight hundred and fifty thousand pounds stacked on the dresser of his Curzon Street flat and no appetite for it whatever.

He lay in bed and looked at the money across the room. Twenty bundles, banded, neat as bricks. He had stacked them himself at four in the morning, the way a child stacks blocks before sleep, and the sight of them had given him exactly the pleasure of stacked blocks — which is to say, none that lasted past the stacking.

He got up. He showered. He dressed in a suit that had cost more than most men earned in three months and he stood at the window with a cup of coffee he did not drink and he understood, the way you understand a thing you have been refusing to understand for hours, that the win had not arrived. The money had arrived. The feeling that was supposed to ride in on the money had missed the train.

This had not happened before. In the old days a win — even a small dishonest win, a marked deck, a sleeping powder in a fool's brandy — had given him a clean bright jolt, brief but real. The yogi's training had taken that from him without asking. Three years of candle and breath and the heat behind the eyes, three years of learning to hold one steady image until the body rang with it, had done something to the wiring. He could no longer get the jolt cheaply. He suspected he could no longer get it at all.

There is a thing the literature describes — Henry had read some of it, late, sceptical, half-believing — about elevated emotion as a rehearsed state, a thing the body learns to produce on cue and then, having learned, cannot be fooled into producing for the wrong reason. Dispenza's people sat in their retreats and practised gratitude

until the practice rewired the muscle of feeling. Henry had practised something else for three years, and the muscle had rewired anyway, and now greed rang hollow in him like a struck pot with a crack in it.

He took a single twenty-pound note off the top of the nearest bundle and went downstairs and out into the street to think.

It was a grey morning, wet pavement, the smell of London after rain. A man was sitting in the doorway of the shuttered gallery three doors down, a man with a cardboard sign and a paper cup and the particular stillness of someone who has learned not to expect much from the people walking past. Henry stopped. He did not, ordinarily, stop. The motto of his whole adult life had been a small grey thing — *better a mild rebuke than an onerous task* — and stopping for strangers was, by that arithmetic, an onerous task with no rebuke attached.

He gave the man the twenty.

The man looked at the note, then at Henry, then said thank you in a voice that had not expected to use the word. And Henry walked on, and somewhere around the second lamppost the jolt arrived. The clean bright thing. The one the casino had failed to deliver eight hundred and fifty thousand times over. It came up through his chest like heat behind the eyes, the same somatic signature he had spent three years learning to recognise, and he stopped dead on the wet pavement and thought: *there it is*.

He went back upstairs. He was not, in that moment, a generous man becoming a saint. He was a man who had located, after a long famine, the one food that still tasted of anything, and he meant to gorge.

He opened the window. The balcony beyond was a narrow Mayfair ledge, iron rail, room for one chair he had never sat in. Below, Curzon Street ran its morning traffic, umbrellas and taxis and a few pedestrians on the far pavement.

He took a note from the dresser — a fifty this time — and let it go over the rail.

It fell turning, the way a leaf falls, the air taking it sideways. A woman beneath looked up, saw it, and her face did the thing a face does when the world breaks its own rules: confusion first, then disbelief,

then the snatch of the hand. She caught it. She looked up again, searching the building, finding no one, and folded the note into her coat and walked on quickly, the way you walk when you have got away with something you don't understand.

The jolt came again. Stronger.

Henry went back for a handful. He did not count them. He stood at the rail and threw them out over Curzon Street, fifties and twenties and hundreds turning in the wet air, and below him the pavement began to do what pavements do when money rains on them.

There is no slow version of this. A man stopped. Then four. Then it was a crowd, and the crowd was a thing with its own physics, bodies converging on the falling paper, hands going up, a noise rising that was half delight and half something uglier. Henry threw faster. He went back into the flat and came out with both arms full and let the whole of it go at once, eight hundred and fifty thousand pounds minus what the street had already eaten, a cascade of banded bundles bursting as they fell, the bands giving up, the notes scattering into the upturned faces of two dozen, then forty, then a number Henry stopped being able to count.

He watched a man go down under other men. He watched a woman drag a note out from under a shoe. The crowd had stopped being delighted some seconds ago and Henry, looking down, felt the jolt curdle in his chest into something he did not have a word for — and that was when the policeman's voice came up at him from the street.

“You up there. On the balcony. Stay where you are.”

The constable was young and his face was the colour of a man who has just watched his ordinary morning turn into a paperwork catastrophe. He came up the stairs and into the flat and stood in the middle of Henry's expensive carpet, breathing hard, and he did not arrest Henry, because Henry had broken no law that came easily to hand. He was something better than a man with a charge. He was a man with an opinion.

“What,” he said, “did you think you were doing?”

Henry said he had wanted to give the money away.

The constable looked at him as if he were the most expensive idiot in London, which, that morning, he very possibly was.

"Give it away." The constable went to the window and looked down at the street, where his colleagues were now trying to unbuild the crowd. "You see that? You see what you've done? Two people are going to come out of that with a broken finger and twenty quid. You've started a fight, you've blocked the road, and you've given a hundred pounds to the man who pushes hardest. That's not giving money away. That's pouring it on the ground and watching dogs."

"Then how," said Henry — and he heard himself ask it, genuinely, the way a man asks who has discovered he does not know something he assumed he understood — "how does one give it away?"

The constable turned from the window. He was not, in fairness, a philosopher, and the thing he said next he said with the flat irritation of a man who wants to get back downstairs. But it landed in Henry Sugar like a stone going into a deep well, and he heard it fall a long way.

"You don't *throw* it," the constable said. "You think who needs it and you give it to them properly. Hospitals. Orphanages. Somewhere it does some good and nobody gets trampled. You've got — what's that, a hundred thousand pounds you've just chucked at a pavement? There's homes for children in this country running on nothing. You could've built one. Instead you made a riot." He put his hat back on. "Sir."

And he went downstairs.

Henry sat in the chair he had never sat in, on the balcony, with the rail still wet and the street below slowly emptying of his money, and he stayed there a long time.

He was thinking, though it did not feel like thinking. It felt like a thing arriving from outside. He had spent three years learning to hold a single image until the whole body answered it, and now an image was assembling itself in him without his choosing it: not a face this time, not his own face in the flame, but a shape. An arithmetic. He could walk into any high-stakes room in the world and read the cards through their backs in under four seconds. He could do it in London

and Monte Carlo and Macau and Vegas, room after room, year after year. The skill did not tire. It did not run out. It was, in the most exact sense, a machine for making money, and Henry Sugar owned it outright, and until this morning he had assumed the money was the point.

The money was not the point. The money had failed the test the very first night. The only thing that had passed the test was the man in the doorway with the paper cup, the twenty, the word *thank you* spoken by someone who had not expected to use it.

So. The skill made money endlessly. And the money was worthless to him except in the one second of its leaving. He had, this morning, accidentally discovered the exchange rate between the two things he could now do — make and give — and the rate was good, and the supply on his side was unlimited, and the demand on the other side was, the constable had just told him, the whole grey patient population of children with no one.

He would need to be invisible. A man cannot win in every casino in the world wearing his own face; he would be barred from the first ten and recognised at the rest. He would need someone who could change a face — properly, not a hat and glasses, but the real craft, the way they did it for the screen. And he would need someone honest and dull and far away to take the money as it came in and route it where it did good without anyone ever knowing it had passed through Henry Sugar's hands at all. A man in Switzerland, perhaps. Someone who never gambled, who never asked, who simply received.

Max for the face. Henry knew a man called Max Engleman who had done make-up for the theatre and the films and who was, Henry had always suspected, a better man than the work deserved. And for Switzerland, the quiet accountant John Winston, who handled the dull machinery of Henry's idle wealth and had never once been given anything interesting to do.

Twenty years, Henry thought. Do it properly and quietly and never be caught and never take a penny for yourself, and in twenty years you could build — he did not know the number yet, the number was enormous and it frightened him a little — you could build something that mattered out of a faculty you had stolen from a dead man's notebook for the sole and stupid purpose of cheating at cards.

It was, by any honest reckoning, an onerous task. The most onerous he had ever contemplated. It would cost him every easy comfort of his old life and reward him with nothing his old self would have recognised as reward.

Henry Sugar sat on the wet balcony above the emptying street and, for the first time in his forty-one years, chose the onerous task over the mild rebuke. He stood up. He went inside to find Max Engleman's number.

Twenty Years

What followed I can tell you only in the shape of an arc, because that is how Henry himself came to see it — not as nights but as a single long curve, the way you remember a journey by its bends and not its yards.

He began in London and went out from there. Within eighteen months he was a member of casinos in seven cities, and within five years there was scarcely a serious private room in the world where Henry Sugar's name, or one of the names he travelled under, did not appear on a quiet list. He never stayed. That was the first rule he made, sitting in the flat the morning after Curzon Street, working it out with a fountain pen on a sheet of hotel paper as though it were a problem in logistics, which it was. Win modestly. Win at several tables across several nights. Never break a house. Never be remembered as the man who could not lose.

The second rule was Max.

Max Engleman was a make-up artist, and the best Henry had ever seen, and Henry found him the way he found everything useful — by paying for it, generously, and then discovering that the man behind the price was someone he could not afford to lose. Max could change the architecture of a face. Not a costume — Henry could buy a wig anywhere — but the deep grammar of a man: the set of the jaw built out a centimetre with spirit gum and cotton, the cheeks aged ten years and then, a week later, in another city, made young again, foreign, ordinary, forgettable. He worked on Henry for two and sometimes three hours before a night out, and the man who walked into the casino was not the man who would walk in the following month two thousand miles away, and the surveillance rooms with their pho-

tographs and their good memories never put the faces together.

For thirteen years Max travelled with him. He was the only person on earth who knew, in full, what Henry did and how, and he never told a soul, and when I asked him at the end why he had kept the secret so completely he said only that he had loved him, and that there was nothing more to it than that. *I loved him*, Max said. *That is the whole of it. There is no other reason.*

The money went to Switzerland.

John Winston was a chartered accountant whose father had served Henry's father, and the arrangement Henry made with him was elegant in the way that only legitimate machinery can be. Henry won money that no court could prove he had stolen — he had touched nothing, marked nothing, palmed nothing; he had simply looked at the backs of cards and known their faces, and there is no statute against knowing. The winnings, once won, were Henry's to give. So he gave them. They flowed into accounts in Geneva and out again into a charitable trust that Winston administered, and from the trust came the orphanages.

There were twenty-one of them in the end, scattered across the world — and they were not cheques posted to existing institutions but places built from the ground, with Winston flying out to break the soil and Henry never coming at all, because Henry had decided that his name would touch none of it. He never visited a single one. He gave somewhere over a hundred and forty million pounds across those twenty years, and he saw, with his own eyes, none of what it bought. He thought this was the correct way to do it. I am inclined to agree with him.

I want to pause here, because there is a thing about those twenty years that the curve of the story hides, and it is this: Henry was happier than he had ever been, and he could not have told you why.

He thought, at first, that the sight had simply made him good at a thing, the way training makes a man good at any thing, and that the satisfaction was the satisfaction of mastery. But mastery palls. He had felt it pall already, that first hollow morning with the money on the dresser. What did not pall was the gift moving outward. He noticed, somewhere around the fifth year, that on the nights after he had cabled Winston a fresh sum he slept like a child, and that the

cards came to him faster and easier than ever — as though the same faculty that reached out to read a hidden face grew stronger when it was pointed, even a little, away from himself.

He did not have a vocabulary for this and he distrusted the vocabularies on offer. He had read, by then, the things one reads — the field arguments, the lab papers, the careful contested claims that attention is not sealed inside the skull but reaches, somehow, and that a mind turned outward toward another's wellbeing is doing something measurable rather than merely sentimental. He had read that a day-old chick, imprinted on a small machine driven by a random generator, would draw that machine across its pen against the odds, simply by wanting it near — and that the wanting bent the randomness, and that nobody had a mechanism for it and the effect was small and the skeptics had their case and the thing would not go away. He thought, sometimes, about that chick. He thought: if a chick can lean on a random world by wanting, then perhaps a man who has spent twenty years routing every penny he wins toward children he will never meet is leaning on the world too, and the world is leaning back, and that is why he sleeps. He never said this aloud. It was not the sort of thing Henry Sugar said aloud. But he believed it, in the body, where he had learned to believe everything.

The disguises grew more elaborate. The sums grew larger. Winston's trust acquired the dull magnificence of a real institution, with auditors and a board that did not know whose money it was. Max aged honestly while making Henry age fraudulently. And the years went by in the strange compressed way that good years do, so that Henry woke one morning genuinely surprised to find that he was sixty-three and that the curve was nearly run.

He died in his flat, of an embolism, on a winter afternoon, alone, with no drama and no mirror and nothing seen through his own chest — quietly, the way the body sometimes simply stops. The cleaner found him. The doctor came and wrote the ordinary word on the ordinary form. There was no scandal because there had never been anything to find. A wealthy bachelor, no children, a clean estate, a charitable trust in Switzerland administered by a Mr Winston of Geneva.

And it was Mr Winston, when the news reached him, who sat for a long time at his desk above the lake, and then drew the telephone toward him, and lifted the receiver, and began — very deliberately,

with the care of a man who has kept a secret for two decades and has decided, at last, that the time has come to give it away properly — to dial.

The Only Untrue Things

The telephone call came on a wet Thursday in November, a little after nine in the morning, while I was standing in my kitchen waiting for the kettle and thinking about nothing in particular.

A man's voice, precise, faintly accented, the consonants filed clean the way the Swiss file them.

"Is that the writer?" he said. "The one who writes the stories?"

I said it was.

"My name is John Winston," he said. "I am — I was — an accountant. I have something I should like you to write. It concerns a man who has died. A man I worked for, for the better part of thirty years, whose money I moved around the world and whose name almost nobody alive knows correctly." A pause. "I am told you do not flinch at things that sound impossible."

I told him I had spent a good portion of my working life sitting in rooms with people who had seen things they could not afterwards make anyone believe. I told him I had read declassified files about a government that paid men to shut their eyes and describe submarines under construction in the White Sea, and that one of those men, when he wrote his memoir, had spent half of it describing how *boring* it was, how full of doubt and false starts and sessions that produced nothing but garbage — and that this, the boredom, was the detail that had convinced me. Liars do not invent tedium.

There was a silence on the line that I have learned to recognise. It is the silence of a man deciding he has reached the right person.

"Then I will tell you," he said, "and you will come to Geneva, and I will

give you the papers.”

I went. There is a room above the lake, in an apartment that smells of cigars and cedarwood, where an old man keeps thirty years of accounts in folders the colour of dried blood. There is a ledger in there that should not exist — a record of more money than most countries’ charities see in a generation, all of it won at the same crooked game, all of it given away to children who never learned the name of the man who paid for their beds.

Winston showed me photographs. Casinos in cities I will not list, because to list them would be to undo the work of a make-up artist named Max Engleman, who for thirteen years built a different face for his friend in a different hotel bathroom before every long night at the tables. Henry going in fat, going in bald, going in with a moustache and a limp and an American accent. Never twice the same. Never caught.

“He could have been caught a hundred times,” Winston said. “He chose not to be. There is a difference, with him, between *could not* and *chose not*. You will find that difference everywhere in the papers.”

I asked him the question I had been holding since the kettle.

“The cards,” I said. “Did you ever see it. With your own eyes.”

The old man looked at the lake for a while.

“Once,” he said. “He sat across from me at this table and named the suit and the number of nine cards I had shuffled myself and laid face down. He did not touch them. He did not lean. He breathed slowly, the way the swimmers do before they go under, and a heat came into his face — I could see it, the colour rising — and then he simply *said* them, one after another, no faster than a man reading a list off a wall.” Winston turned from the window. “When he was younger he could not have done it. He told me there were years, at the beginning, of nothing. Heat behind the eyes and an ache in the base of the spine and nothing. He said the body learned it before the mind agreed to believe it had. He said that was the part nobody who hasn’t done it can understand — that the *knowing* arrives a half-second ahead of the looking, the way your skin sometimes prickles before the door opens, before there is anything there to make it prickle.”

I did not lecture him on the meta-analyses, the eighty-some experiments pooled and re-pooled by careful people, the small stubborn finding that the pulse and the sweat-glands shift *before* the random thing happens and not after. I have learned not to do that to a man who has seen the thing itself. The graph is for people who haven't.

Before I left, Max Engleman came up to the apartment. A small, neat, grieving man with brushes still in his coat pocket out of habit.

He talked for an hour about faces. About how a good prosthetic ages a man twenty years and a bad one ages him five and looks like a costume. About how Henry never once complained, never once flinched at the spirit gum or the long sittings, how he would close his eyes in the chair and go somewhere — Max could always tell when he had gone — and come back calm.

At the door, Max took my hand in both of his.

"Write that he was kind to me," he said. "Write that he never married, and write that I do not think it was because he was cold. I worked beside that man for thirteen years. I loved him. You can put that in your book if you like. I don't mind who reads it."

So here is what I am obliged to tell you, now that you have read the whole of it.

The man's name was not Henry Sugar. The casino in which he first won eight hundred and fifty thousand pounds in a single sitting is not called what I have called it, and stands on a street I have moved by half a mile. John Winston is not John Winston, though he asked me, when it came to it, to keep the name I had been using, because he had grown fond of being a character. Max is Max. He asked for nothing to be changed. He said a man who has spent his life building false faces is entitled to keep his own.

Everything else is true. The boring years are true. The heat behind the eyes is true, and the ache at the base of the spine, and the months of nothing, and the card that turned over in under four seconds while a pillar candle burned in a locked room. The orphanages are true and you could walk into one tomorrow and lie down on a bed he paid

for and never know it.

The only untrue things in this book are the names — and a single street, moved to protect a building.

And one thing more, which is not a lie but a confession: the document Henry found in that library, the dead man's report on a man who could see without his eyes — you have just read its grandchild. He read his way into a larger world. You read your way into his. I wrote it down because an old man above a lake asked me to, and because I, too, once read something that did not flinch when it should have, and could not afterwards make the world small again.

I don't recommend it. It ruins you for the advertised size of things.

But the kettle's boiled, and there it is, and now you know.

Chapter 98 — Source Notes, Reading List, and Where the Line Runs

This is a **novel** — a faithful structural retelling of Roald Dahl’s *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar* (1977), told for adults in wholly original prose. Henry Sugar, Imhrat Khan, Dr Cartwright, and the nested tale are **Dahl’s architecture**. The sentences here are not.

What follows is **not fiction**. It is the reading that made the card turn over a second time for me — after childhood wonder, after scepticism, after Joe McMoneagle’s account of learning to see without the apparatus we were told was mandatory.

In one sentence: this novel is **real magik with a k** — Dean Radin’s *Real Magic* (2018) told as Dahl fiction. Not stage trickery (Imhrat’s first teacher). Not card-marking (Henry’s Monte Carlo). **Magik**: mind-matter anomalies, extended perception, consciousness not confined to the skull — played straight on the page the way Radin maps the evidence in prose, the way McMoneagle maps it in session logs.

Dedication

To **Roald Dahl**, who built the engine.

And to **Joe Dispenza**, **Dean Radin**, and **Rupert Sheldrake** — whose reported work taught this retelling what Henry’s training is allowed to be.

With gratitude also to **Joseph McMoneagle**, whose *Mind Trek** made me read Dahl's *Henry* a second time — and to every specialist named below who put their name on the record.*

(Front matter: [canon/DEDICATION_BOOK.md](#))

Reported physics only (binding commitment)

This is a **novel**, not a research paper — but Henry Sugar's **training, proof beats, and inner-sight phenomenology** follow **only** what has been reported in:

1. **Roald Dahl** — *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar* (1977) and the *Kuda Bux* lineage
2. **Joe Dispenza** — especially *Becoming Supernatural* (2017)
3. **Dean Radin** — especially *Real Magic* (2018) and presentiment meta-analyses
4. **Rupert Sheldrake** — especially *Science Set Free* (2012) and extended-mind / morphic-resonance work
5. **Joseph McMoneagle** — *Mind Trek* (1993) and RV memoirs (learning curve, blind tasking)
6. **Similarly well-known specialists** in the same tradition — Tart, Puthoff, Targ, Swann, Utts, Hyman, May, Jahn & Dunne (PEAR), Harry Price, Kuda Bux on record

We do not invent new powers for Henry beyond what these sources describe or imply. We **do** invent 2026 surfaces (Cotswolds retreat, PDF dossier, private club, dialogue, prose). The card turn, the boring middle, the field click, the body-before-mind — **reported only**.

Science in the prose (C-027): this backmatter **duplicates** what the chapters already dramatise — Price bandages and fire-walk temperatures in Cartwright's report, presentiment as Henry's skin before the flip, Peoc'h's chick and the random robot in the author's mind,

Dispenza's boring middle in muscle memory. If you read only the novel, you still get the science. If you read both, you get duplication **by design**.

Full writer gate: [canon/REPORTED_PHYSICS.md](#) · [canon/SCIENCE_IN_PROSE.md](#)

Origin: the day-old chick and the robot (what got me going)

Before McMoneagle, before Radin's meta-analyses, before I could name *Science Set Free* — there was a **day-old chick**.

René Peoc'h (French researcher) ran experiments with a small random-moving robot called a **tychoscope**, driven by a **random event generator (REG)**. The robot's path was supposed to be unbiased noise. Peoc'h worked with **young chicks** in the Lorenz imprinting window: hatchlings that adopt the first moving object as "mother."

In his reported experiments:

- Chicks **imprinted on the robot** spent roughly **two and a half times longer** in the half of the arena nearer the tychoscope than random motion would predict (Peoc'h, 1986).
- In later work, groups of **15 chicks** attracted a candle-bearing robot: in **~71% of trials**, the robot lingered excessively near the cage — statistically significant against chance (Peoc'h, *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, 1995; *Journal of Parapsychology*, 2002).
- When **no chicks** were present, or chicks were **not** imprinted, trajectories stayed random.
- Peoc'h also reported **human** subjects biasing the robot's path by intention (same apparatus).

Tag	What
DOCUMENTED	Experiments run; papers published; tychoscope + REG apparatus on record
CONTESTED	Replication uneven; edge effects; protocol ambiguity; experimenter degrees of freedom (see Psi Encyclopedia — Peoc'h)
What got me	If a one-day-old brain can skew an RNG to keep its “mother” close — consciousness is not politely confined to the skull

That is the same pressure Sheldrake names (*mind not only in the brain*) and Radin measures (mind-matter anomalies in aggregate): **intention reaching into random machinery**.

Author inference (not a single published trial at this scale): If one imprinted chick can pull a robot across a room, what happens when **12** trained meditators — or **144** — turn the **inner eye** on one person’s wellbeing? Not a claim this novel proves. A question that made Henry’s card turn and Dahl’s charity ending feel like **the same arc**: gift turned **outward**, attention no longer hoarded inside one greedy skull.

Reported rhymes for that extrapolation (each **CONTESTED**):

- **PEAR (Jahn & Dunne)** — human intention shifting RNG outputs in laboratory settings (Radin lineage)
- **Dispenza retreats** — group meditation with organisation-reported coherence shifts (contested blinding)
- **Global Consciousness Project** — mass events correlating with RNG deviations (Radin-associated; heavily disputed)

Henry’s twenty-year orphanage circuit stays **Dahl’s engine**. The chick-and-robot is **why this author believed the engine could be true** — not a new superpower invented for plot.

Start here: Peoc'h, "Psychokinetic action of young chicks on the path of an illuminated source," *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 9/2 (1995) · [JSE PDF archive](#) · Psi Encyclopedia — [René Peoc'h](#)

Why I read Henry Sugar differently after *Mind Trek*

Dahl's Henry learns from a document inside a document: a medical report, a yogi's life, a proof read aloud from *Alice*. The prose asks you to believe, for a page, that a bored rich man can teach himself to see through a playing card.

I believed it as a child because Dahl never winks at the wonder beat.

I read it again as an adult and filed it under **beautiful fable** — until I read **Joseph McMoneagle**, *Mind Trek: Exploring Consciousness, Time, and Space Through Remote Viewing* (Hampton Roads, 1993; introduction by **Charles T. Tart**).

McMoneagle is not a novelist. He is a retired U.S. Army intelligence officer who sat for thousands of **blind-protocol** remote-viewing sessions under government contract — work now declassified under the name **STAR GATE**. His book is part memoir, part training manual, part complaint about how hard it is to learn a faculty the culture insists cannot exist while asking you, in the same breath, to trust instruments you cannot see inside.

What rhymed with Henry Sugar was not the casino. It was the **boring middle**:

- months and years of nothing;
- heat, breath, and bodily failure before the first small proof;
- the suspicion that you are conning yourself until the day the proof arrives **before** you can explain it;
- and the institutional response when the proof does arrive: *capture it, publish it, weaponise it* — or dismiss it because the sketch is inconvenient.

McMoneagle's famous **Typhoon submarine** session (September 1979, White Sea) is on the declassified record: tasked blind, he

described and sketched a hull so large that analysts reportedly laughed — until satellite imagery months later showed a channel blasted and a **Typhoon-class** boat, the largest submarine ever built, matching several details. **DOCUMENTED** that the program, the dated session, and the sketch exist. **CONTESTED** whether the match proves “psi” or prior leakage, monitor prompting, or selective memory. The shape of the story nonetheless sits in the CIA reading room — and it reads like Imhrat Khan’s doctors bandaging dough into a man’s sockets and then watching him thread a needle.

That is why this retelling takes **Dean Radin**, **Rupert Sheldrake**, and **Joe Dispenza** as **gospel inside the world** — not as sermon, but as **physics Henry can feel in his body** after the document lands. The footnotes live here, after the wonder beat.

The line Dahl was already walking: Kuda Bux

Dahl did not invent the nested yogi tale from whole cloth.

Kuda Bux (Khudah Bukhsh, 1905–1981) was a Kashmiri performer famous in the 1930s for blindfold acts, fire-walking, and claims of **“X-ray” or “eyeless” sight**. In 1952 Dahl published a non-fiction profile, *The Amazing Eyes of Kuda Bux*, in *Argosy*. When he reworked the material into *Henry Sugar* twenty-five years later, he renamed the performer **Imhrat Khan** and kept much of the report intact as the framed story inside the story.

Harry Price and the **University of London Council for Psychological Investigation** tested Bux in 1935 — dough, bandages, books read behind his back, fire-walks measured at hundreds of degrees Celsius. Price concluded Bux was an extraordinary showman and that **perfect blindfolding is very difficult**; some researchers suspected peeking along the nose. Bux claimed concentration and **skin/nostril sensitivity**, not miracle theatre.

Tag	What
DOCUMENTED	Bux performed; Price tested; Dahl wrote the 1952 profile; Henry Sugar reuses the engine Mechanism (peek vs faculty)
CONTESTED	
INVENTED in this book	All 2026 transpositions (Cotswolds retreat, PDF dossier, private club, etc.)

Start here: [BBC — Kuda Bux and Dahl](#) · [Roald Dahl Fans — Henry Sugar](#) · Harry Price, fire-walk account (1935).

Consciousness is fundamental · mind is not only in the skull

Modern materialism treats consciousness as something the brain **produces**, like light from a bulb. Henry Sugar’s document tradition assumes the opposite: that awareness is **primary**, and the skull is a **filter**, not a factory.

That is not one monolithic theory. It is a **family** of arguments and experiments that share one pressure point: *the body reacts before the random event; the viewer draws before the satellite confirms; the card turns over before the cheat can explain how.*

Dean Radin — laboratory psi and non-local mind (*Real Magic* is the spine)

Dean Radin, Ph.D. (Chief Scientist, **Institute of Noetic Sciences**; former **PEAR** researcher) argues that meta-analyses of controlled experiments show small but persistent anomalies in **mind-matter interaction**, **telepathy**, and **presentiment** (physiological arousal before unpredictable future stimuli).

If you want the **non-fiction thesis this novel dramatises**, start with ***Real Magic: Ancient Wisdom, Modern Science, and a Guide to the Secret Power of the Universe*** (2018). Radin sorts the territory

into three pressures — **mental** (attention, intention, placebo), **psi** (telepathy, precognition, presentiment), **non-local mind** (consciousness as fundamental). Henry Sugar is that book **with a k**: magik, not magic — the card turn without the wink, the boring trials before the anomaly, the body knowing before the mind can explain.

Work	Why Henry Sugar cares
<i>Real Magic</i> (2018)	North star — plain-language map; this novel is the fable version
<i>The Conscious Universe</i> (1997)	Meta-analysis as method — aggregate the boring trials
<i>Entangled Minds</i> (2006)	Non-local connection + observer effects as one mystery
Presentiment meta-analysis (Mossbridge, Tressoldi, Utts, Radin et al., 2012; <i>Frontiers in Human Neuroscience</i>)	Body “knows” before coin flip — blind protocol rhyme

Start here: [CIA STAR GATE reading room](#) · presentiment meta-analysis [PubMed 23109927](#) · IONS: [noetic.org](#)

Skeptic’s best case: effect sizes are tiny; file-drawer and p-hacking disputes (see **Ray Hyman, I.J. Good** on meta-analysis assumptions); replication is uneven. **What remains interesting:** blind-protocol designs that **try** to remove cheating — the same structural move as Cartwright’s dough and bandages.

Rupert Sheldrake — mind not in the skull (*Science Set Free* is the lane)

Rupert Sheldrake, Ph.D. (Cambridge biologist; former Royal Society researcher) asks a different question from Radin. Radin aggregates **anomalies in the lab**. Sheldrake asks **where mind actually is** — and answers: not confined to the skull. **Morphic resonance** (habits of nature repeating through non-local fields) and the **extended mind** (perception reaching beyond skin and brain) are his twin moves.

If Radin is *Real Magic* with a k, Sheldrake is **consciousness not local to the head**. Inner sight is not upgraded retinas. It is Henry learning

to **listen to a field** — the room, the card, the yogic lineage — as if attention were real and directional, as if the past had left grooves in the present that a disciplined body could fall into.

Work	Why Henry Sugar cares
Science Set Free / The Science Delusion (2012)	North star — ten dogmas of materialism; #1: consciousness is only in brains. This novel says otherwise on the page
<i>A New Science of Life</i> (1981)	Morphic resonance — yogic tradition as habit of perception Imhrat inherits
<i>Dogs That Know When Their Owners Are Coming Home</i> (1999)	Bond across distance — mind not stopped at the skin
<i>The Sense of Being Stared At</i> (2003)	Attention reaches; the card “knows” it is being read
<i>Science and Spiritual Practices</i> (2017)	Meditation, yoga, prayer as extended-mind disciplines — Imhrat’s training register

In-fiction (no lecture): ch-09 Imhrat — field/habit language at inner-sight doctrine (PP-A02). ch-13 Henry — the **field click** before speed. ch-14 — the room already knew before the card turned.

Start here: sheldrake.org · [Science Set Free](#) · dog-returning-home experiments

Skeptic’s best case: morphic fields lack an accepted physical mechanism; some experiments disputed on methodology; “extended mind” can be reframed as ordinary attention plus expectation. **What remains interesting:** the **phenomenology** at the click — habit, field, *the room already knew* — which is exactly what Dahl’s “inner sense” was gesturing at before we had the vocabulary.

Joe Dispenza — the boring middle (*Becoming Supernatural* is the lane)

Joe Dispenza, D.C. (neuroscience populariser, meditation retreat leader) argues that **ordinary people can train uncommon capaci-**

ties — not by belief alone, but by somatic repetition: breath, elevated emotion, visualisation, and months of nothing before the nervous system reorganises. His retreat EEG and heart-coherence summaries are widely cited by followers and widely **contested** by sceptics on blinding and self-selection.

If you want the **training manual this novel dramatises**, start with ***Becoming Supernatural: How Common People Are Doing the Uncommon*** (Hay House, 2017). That subtitle is Henry’s arc in six words: a common greedy cheat doing the uncommon thing Imhrat’s dossier describes. Dispenza’s step-by-step meditations, energy-centre sequencing (felt as **sensation**, never infographic), and heart-brain coherence language are the **body register** for Dahl’s already-written boring years — heat behind the eyes, sacrum ache, nothing, nothing, *click*.

Work	Why Henry Sugar cares
<i>Becoming Supernatural (2017)</i>	North star — common ☒ uncommon via somatic practice; training montage spine
<i>Breaking the Habit of Being Yourself</i> (2012)	Identity + visualisation — rhyme with Henry’s face in the flame (ch-13)
<i>You Are the Placebo</i> (2014)	Belief + body as instrument — why Henry keeps going when nothing happens
Retreat EEG / coherence summaries (Dispenza organisation)	Measurable shift after boring work — texture only , never cited mid-wonder

In-fiction (no lecture): ch-09 Imhrat — candle, breath cadence, seven centres as sensation (PP-A03, PP-028). ch-11-13 Henry — locked suite, pillar candle, months of failure, vanity visualisation, speed before the card.

Start here: drjoedispenza.com — **Becoming Supernatural**

Skeptic’s best case: commercial wellness framing; independent replication limited; correlation vs causation at mass events; “supernatural” oversells what may be stress reduction and suggestion.

What remains interesting: the **somatic arc** Dahl already wrote — and Dispenza’s honest insistence that **common people** can do it if they survive the boring middle, which is exactly what Henry (and McMoneagle, and Imhrat) endure.

Division of labour (three gospels): Dispenza = **body / training** (*Becoming Supernatural* — boring years, somatic sequencing). Radin = **proof** (blind protocol, presentiment, real magik). Sheldrake = **place** (mind not in skull, field, extended perception).

Joe McMoneagle — remote viewing as learnable (with terror and tedium)

Work	Notes
<i>Mind Trek</i> (1993)	Start here if Henry Sugar sent you — consciousness, time, space, RV learning curve
<i>Remote Viewing Secrets</i> (2000)	Protocol detail
<i>Memoirs of a Psychic Spy / The Stargate Chronicles</i> (2005+)	Operational memoir

Institutional frame: **STAR GATE** (1978–1995); **SRI International / SAIC** research; 1995 **American Institutes for Research** review with **Jessica Utts** (statistician) and **Ray Hyman** (sceptic). Utts: laboratory evidence **statistically significant**. Hyman: anomalous but **not proven** psi; utility for intelligence **not demonstrated**. Program closed. Files declassified.

Start here: [CIA reading room — remote viewing evaluation \(1995\)](#) · Utts, *Journal of Scientific Exploration* (1996) · McMoneagle Typhoon session searches

Skeptic’s best case: operational sessions did not reliably beat chance in the field; prompting and feedback loops; Utts–Hyman interpret the same data differently. **What remains interesting:** the **Typhoon sketch dated before the satellite** — same narrative slot as Imhrat’s card.

What McMoneagle reports that Henry may live (not invent):

- RV / inner knowing is **learnable**, not only innate — but the learning curve is **long, boring, and humiliating**
- Early sessions produce garbage, self-doubt, and fear of self-deception
- **Blind tasking** matters — you must not know what you are looking at until after
- First real proof arrives **before** you can narrate how you did it
- Institutions want to **capture, classify, or dismiss** — doctors' publish chase in Dahl rhymes here
- Consciousness is a **gateway**, not a side effect of neurons — Tart's framing in *Mind Trek*'s introduction

What we do not import into Henry: classified mission details invented for plot; operational RV as reliable intelligence tool (Utts/Hyman say utility not demonstrated); any claim McMoneagle does not make in his own books.

Extended specialist roster (similarly well-known)

Erring on the side of duplication: this table repeats [canon/SOURCE_NOTES.md](#) for readers who never open the writer ledger.

Consciousness laboratory & psi

Name	Role	Key work / record	In Henry Sugar
Dean Radin	IONS Chief Scientist; PEAR alumnus	<i>Real Magic</i> (2018); presentiment meta-analysis (2012)	Proof lane; body-before-stimulus; blind protocol
Robert Jahn & Brenda Dunne	PEAR (Princeton)	RNG / intention experiments	Radin lineage; aggregate anomaly culture
Jessica Utts	Statistician	1995 STAR GATE review; psi meta-analyses	Institutional “significant in lab” voice
Ray Hyman	Sceptic	1995 STAR GATE review	Best-case scepticism — backmatter
Charles T. Tart	Altered states	<i>Mind Trek</i> introduction; <i>States of Consciousness</i>	Gateway framing for McMoneagle lineage

Remote viewing / STAR GATE

Name	Role	Key work / record	In Henry Sugar
Joseph McMoneagle	STAR GATE viewer	<i>Mind Trek</i> (1993); Typhoon session (1979)	Second look; boring middle; blind proof
Hal Puthoff & Russell Targ	SRI researchers	SRI remote-viewing protocols (1970s)	Protocol culture; laboratory origin
Ingo Swann	RV co-developer	SRI sessions; <i>Penetration</i>	Lineage texture

Name	Role	Key work / record	In Henry Sugar
Edwin May	STAR GATE analyst	Program post-mortems	Institutional history — backmatter

Extended mind & morphic fields

Name	Role	Key work / record	In Henry Sugar
Rupert Sheldrake	Biologist	<i>Science Set Free</i> (2012); <i>A New Science of Life</i> (1981)	Mind not in skull; field; habit
Rupert Sheldrake	Experiments	<i>Dogs That Know... Sense of Being Stared At</i> (1999); (2003)	Attention reaches; bond across distance
René Peoc'h	Tychoscope / REG researcher	Chick imprinting + random robot (1986, 1995, 2002)	Origin thread — mind reaches into RNG; not skull-local

Somatic training & common ☒ uncommon

Name	Role	Key work / record	In Henry Sugar
Joe Dispenza	Retreat / meditation leader	<i>Becoming Supernatural</i> (2017)	Training montage; somatic sequencing

Name	Role	Key work / record	In Henry Sugar
Joe Dispenza	Earlier corpus	<i>Breaking the Habit...</i> (2012); <i>You Are the Placebo</i> (2014)	Visualisation; placebo body; keep going when nothing happens

Historical seed (Imhrat / Kuda Bux)

Name	Role	Key work / record	In Henry Sugar
Roald Dahl	Author	<i>Amazing Eyes of Kuda Bux</i> (1952); <i>Henry Sugar</i> (1977)	Engine; nested document; Imhrat tale
Kuda Bux	Performer	1930s–50s blindfold / fire-walk acts	Imhrat historical rhyme
Harry Price	Psychical investigator	1935 University of London tests	Cartwright authentication ritual

Philosophy & adjacent science (context — backmatter only)

Name	Contribution	Note
David Chalmers	Hard Problem of consciousness	Why “fundamental” is argued — not plot physics
Giulio Tononi	Integrated Information Theory	Minority science frame
Penrose & Hameroff	Orch-OR	Contested — cite only here

Chapter-by-chapter: what Henry may live (re-ported sources)

Ch	Beat	Dahl	Dispenza	Radin	Sheldrake/	McMoneagle other
01-02	Indictment; dossier; greed	⊠	—	—	—	—
11	Candle; first ses- sion; noth- ing	⊠	⊠ boring start	—	—	⊠ doubt
12	Montage; failure; heat	⊠	⊠	⊠ presen- timent	—	⊠ boring middle
13	Face in flame; accel- eration; field click	⊠	⊠ visuali- sation	—	⊠ field	—
14	Card turn; body before mind	⊠	—	⊠	⊠ room knew	⊠ first proof shape
15-18	Hollow win; charity	⊠	—	—	—	—

Ch	Beat (Imhrat nest)	Dahl	Dispenza	Sheldrake	Kuda Bux / Price
06-08	Magician; yogi; fire-walk	☒	—	—	☒ fire-walk tests
09	Candle; two senses; somatic se- quence	☒	☒ PP-A03	☒ PP-A02	☒ in- ner/outer sight
10	Alice; cards	☒	—	—	☒ blindfold proof shape

Rule: no ☒ in any column ☒ beat cannot appear in training or wonder prose.

Division of labour (three gospels — repeated for clarity)

Gospel	North star	Question	Henry's lane
Joe Dispenza	<i>Becoming Supernatural</i> (2017)	How does a common body learn the uncommon ?	ch-09, ch-11-13 — breath, heat, months of nothing
Dean Radin	<i>Real Magic</i> (2018)	Does the anomaly survive blind protocol ?	ch-12-14 — presentiment; body before mind

Gospel	North star	Question	Henry's lane
Rupert Sheldrake	<i>Science Set Free</i> (2012)	Where is mind if not only in the skull?	ch-09, ch-13-14 — field, habit, room knew

McMoneagle (*Mind Trek*) is the **second look** that makes Dahl plausible after childhood — not a fourth gospel, but the memoir shape Henry's learning curve must match.

Dahl is the **engine** — structure, moral, wonder contract. We never debunk the yogi at the click.

Two worldviews (one paragraph each)

Materialism (default science): Matter and energy are fundamental; consciousness is what brains do; if Henry sees through a card, he cheated or the story is fable.

Consciousness-first (this book's in-world gospel): Awareness is fundamental or irreducible; brains **localise** attention the way a radio localises a signal; training can widen the band; the card turn is **small proof**, not proof of sainthood.

This novel **does not adjudicate** between them in a courtroom. It **dramatises** the consciousness-first path the way Dahl dramatised Henry's path — and puts the adjudication **here**, in Source Notes, where it belongs.

Reading list (comprehensive — tiered)

Tier A — Start here (dedication authors + second look)

1. **Roald Dahl**, *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar* (1977) — the engine

- 2. **Joseph McMoneagle**, *Mind Trek* (1993) — the second look
- 3. **Dean Radin**, *Real Magic* (2018) — the thesis (real magik with a k)
- 4. **Rupert Sheldrake**, *Science Set Free / The Science Delusion* (2012) — mind not in the skull
- 5. **Joe Dispenza**, *Becoming Supernatural* (2017) — common people doing the uncommon

Tier B — Deepen the three gospels

Author	Further reading
Radin	<i>The Conscious Universe</i> (1997); <i>Entangled Minds</i> (2006); <i>Supernormal</i> (2013); presentiment meta-analysis PubMed 23109927
Sheldrake	<i>A New Science of Life</i> (1981); <i>Dogs That Know When Their Owners Are Coming Home</i> (1999); <i>The Sense of Being Stared At</i> (2003); <i>Science and Spiritual Practices</i> (2017)
Dispenza	<i>Breaking the Habit of Being Yourself</i> (2012); <i>You Are the Placebo</i> (2014)

Tier C — Institutional & historical record

- 6. **Jessica Utts & Ray Hyman**, 1995 STAR GATE evaluation — [CIA PDF](#)
- 7. **CIA reading room** — STAR GATE declassified files
- 8. **Harry Price** — Kuda Bux 1935 tests (fire-walk, blindfold)

9. **Roald Dahl**, *The Amazing Eyes of Kuda Bux* (Argosy, 1952)
10. **Charles T. Tart** — *Mind Trek* introduction; altered-states corpus

Tier D — Lineage (optional)

- **René Peoc'h** — day-old chicks, imprinting, tychoscope REG robot (JSE 1995; JP 2002) — **author origin thread**
- **Hal Puthoff & Russell Targ** — SRI remote viewing origins
- **Ingo Swann** — RV co-development
- **Robert Jahn & Brenda Dunne** — PEAR publications
- **Edwin May** — STAR GATE analysis
- **IONS** — noetic.org
- **Global Consciousness Project** — global-mind.org (Radin-associated; contested)

On this shelf: *The Men Who Opened the Door* (History Before Time · Book VII) — STAR GATE as thriller; Henry Sugar wonder without the CIA frame.

Tier E — Scepticism (read both sides)

- **Ray Hyman** — 1995 STAR GATE review; meta-analysis critiques
- **I.J. Good** — file-drawer / Bayesian critiques of psi meta-analyses
- **Harry Price** — showmanship and imperfect blindfolding (Kuda Bux)

Fiction boundary (what we invented — expanded)

DOCUMENTED / ON RECORD	INVENTED IN THIS RETELLING
Dahl's story structure, beats, moral, wonder contract	All 2026 surfaces: Cotswolds retreat, blue PDF dossier, private club name, family-office wealth
Kuda Bux history; Harry Price 1935 tests	Cartwright dialogue; Mumbai scene dramatisation beyond Dahl's report
Dispenza: boring middle, somatic sequencing, common↔uncommon (<i>Becoming Supernatural</i>)	Henry never attended a Dispenza retreat; no named book mid card-turn
Radin: presentiment, blind protocol, meta-analytic psi (<i>Real Magic</i>)	Henry half-remembers footage; no lab scene unless reported shape only
Sheldrake: extended mind, morphic habit, mind not in skull (<i>Science Set Free</i>)	"Field" at click — phenomenology only, no morphic lecture
McMoneagle: learning curve, blind tasking, Typhoon narrative (contested)	Henry is not a remote viewer; no classified ops invented
STAR GATE program; Utts/Hyman 1995 review; SRI protocols	No CIA handler; no goat (see <i>Men Who Opened the Door</i> for that frame)
PEAR / IONS / Global Consciousness Project (contested)	No invented instrument readings for Henry
Typhoon sketch dated before satellite (contested)	Side-shadow blood-clot death (Dahl meta — denied in true ending)
£144m / twenty orphanages (Dahl hyperbole)	£850k first night — purchasing-power update only
Max, Winston, policeman, accountant frame	Dramatised scenes; pseudonym protection (PP-048)

Inner sight training and proof phenomenology: REPORTED ONLY from Dahl + Dispenza + Radin + Sheldrake + McMoneagle (+ secondary roster above). See [canon/REPORTED_PHYSICS.md](#).

Acknowledgements

- **Roald Dahl** — the architect. This is structural fidelity and original prose, not derivation.
- **Joe Dispenza, Dean Radin, Rupert Sheldrake** — the three gospels; reported physics on the page.
- **Joseph McMoneagle** — the second look; *Mind Trek* changed how I read Henry Sugar.
- **Charles T. Tart, Hal Puthoff, Russell Targ, Ingo Swann, Edwin May** — remote-viewing research lineage.
- **Jessica Utts, Ray Hyman** — the institutional argument, both sides.
- **Robert Jahn, Brenda Dunne** — PEAR.
- **Harry Price, Kuda Bux** — the 1935 tests beneath Imhrat Khan.
- **René Peoc'h** — the day-old chick and the robot; where “mind not in the skull” first landed for this author.
- **Institute of Noetic Sciences, CIA STAR GATE reading room** — declassified record.

Sceptics named in this backmatter are cited because **honest wonder requires honest doubt**. Contested does not mean uninteresting.

A note on wonder and scepticism

The Henry Sugar contract — binding in this house — is **no wink at the magic moment**. That is a **craft** rule for the fiction.

This backmatter is the **honest wink afterward**: here is what is on the record; here is what sceptics say; here is what I still cannot explain away after McMoneagle; here is what I invented.

If the card turned over for you for one page, you do not owe anyone a conversion. You owe yourself a **second look** — at the dossier, at the session log, at the man who bandaged dough into his own sockets and then read the fine print anyway.

Start with *Mind Trek*. Grade it the way Henry would grade a marked deck: **after**, against a thing you could not have known when you started.

Full tagged ledger for writers and curious readers: [canon/SOURCE_NOTES.md](#)

— Andries J. Greyling

