

Chapter 1 ASLEEP

I woke up, and everyone was staring at me. Silent and expressionless, they looked like weary passengers observing a stranger who had fallen asleep on a train. Not that I found this odd, as I had indeed fallen asleep on a train, but why had their collective gaze fallen on me? Why weren't some of them looking out the window, reading a book, or quietly talking amongst themselves?

Perhaps they thought I was homeless? A plausible conclusion, after all, I hadn't bathed since leaving the States and had been living and sleeping in the same clothes for a week. I'd also developed a nasty habit of dozing off during the day, a result of going to bed late, often drunk, and the cross-border passport checks that awakened me late at night.

My best friend and I had contemplated this trip to Europe throughout high school. We didn't think we could afford the journey until we discovered the Eurail Pass. Available to students for only a few hundred dollars, the ticket would grant us unlimited travel by train. We concluded that if we spent our days touring historically rich cities, and slept on trains at night, the pass would cover the cost of both our lodging and travel. Furthermore, by choosing a route that repeatedly crisscrossed Europe, we could maximize our travel distance, thus providing us ample time for sleep. The plan meant sacrificing beds, pillows, and warm showers, but we didn't care; such hardships would be exploited later when recounting our tales of wild adventure.

A key topic in planning our trip was whether to bring our girlfriends. This was a matter of great importance to me, as being a pale, lanky, and socially awkward kid, I wasn't the type to find an overnight love interest in a nightclub or cafe. If I wanted a woman to sleep with on this trip, I'd need to bring one along. This wasn't a burden shared by my best friend. Besides being handsome, charming, and perpetually doused in masculine-scented perfumes, he spoke with an Italian accent that compelled women to purr. Fortunately for me, having recently found his one and only true love (of which there'd been a number over the years), he agreed we should bring them along.

Both my girlfriend and I were thrilled; her parents were not. Declaring their intent to keep their daughter safe, they prohibited her from coming along. I knew their concern was not that she'd fall from the back of a Moped or trip down the stairs of the Colosseum, but that she'd be spending her nights with me. Presuming their daughter was still a virgin, there was little hope of changing their minds. Besides, one can't argue with safety, and her parents already knew that.

Realizing that I would now be traveling alone, I suggested that my friend abandon his girlfriend as well. I reminded him that this was our trip, the one we'd planned for years, and that I should have never requested we bring the ladies along. I described how the two of us shared the same wavelength of thought, often predicting each other's next words, and urged him to consider how this connection between us would make his girlfriend feel.

Without giving him time to respond, I answered, "She'll feel unwanted and left out, like a stray dog following behind two men whose conversation she can't understand."

Pausing, just long enough for him to comprehend the depth of her loneliness, I lowered my brow in confusion and added, "How could you do that to her... to the woman you love?"

As expected, he brought her along, and in so doing altered the nature of our much-anticipated trip. This would no longer be the adventure of two high school best friends, but the adventure of two high school sweethearts.

The title of *stray dog* had just been transferred to me.

This fact was confirmed when our journey was unexpectedly cut short at a train station in the heart of Vienna. Having just arrived from France, I was orienting myself to the city map when he approached from behind and asked to speak a word. His voice was deep, a tone he reserved for only the most serious conversations, and as I turned, I noticed his girlfriend was watching from across the crowded platform. Whatever he said next, wasn't going to be good.

Placing his hand on my shoulder, he took a deep breath and explained that due to unforeseen circumstances, he could no longer continue forth on our journey. I searched his eyes for justification. Had there been a fire? The death of an aunt? It wasn't his father's heart again, was it? With his hand still resting on my shoulder, he explained that his girlfriend was having her period. It was a bad one, very messy, blood everywhere.

I looked at him in disbelief, "Are you fucking kidding me? We've been planning this trip for years!"

He didn't respond but instead continued to explain that he needed to be there, with her, for her, to support her during this difficult time.

"Difficult time? It's a period! She has one every month! Don't you think she can handle it on her own!"

Again, no response, just an apology. Then, as quickly as we arrived, he bade me farewell as they boarded a train to Milan. They intended to stay at his parent's house until she recovered from her illness.

Left standing on the train platform, angry and alone, I contemplated my next move. Rather than unleashing my anger on a wayward pigeon, I boarded a train to Stuttgart. I would visit my grandmother. I didn't know very much German, and she didn't know very much English, but that didn't matter; she communicated with smiles, hugs, and various forms of chocolaty indulgence. Hers was the universal language of love spoken by grandmothers worldwide, a dialect that is understood by children everywhere, and I was eager to hear what she would say.

The train to Stuttgart was full, but I eventually found a spot in which to wedge myself. Each compartment was designed for groups of eight passengers, with four sitting across from four others. I didn't care for this arrangement since every time I looked up, I was met with the disapproving scowl of the elderly woman who sat across from me. The two of us were almost touching knees, which made avoiding eye contact with her practically impossible. However, with no other seating options available, I settled in and resigned myself to her glaring judgment.

As the train pulled out of the station, I closed my eyes and became drowsy. The hypnotic clackety-clack of the wheels and the gentle rocking of the passenger car soothed my agitated soul. The only opposition

to my slumber was the vertical seat back and the padded headrest that urged me to slouch, but my exhaustion, combined with the warmth of the passengers beside me, outweighed my discomfort and before long I was fast asleep.

When I awoke, I had that foggy and euphoric sensation one experiences after emerging from a deep and peaceful slumber. I believe this is the body's way of saying *thank you, thank you for giving me that, I really needed it*. I took a big breath of the musty air, tainted by the odor of a thousand previous travelers, and slowly opened my eyes.

It was at this moment that I discovered everyone staring at me; but why? If they didn't think I was homeless, had I been snoring? Had I said something in my sleep? I turned to look out the window and recognized the rolling hills that signaled our approach to Stuttgart. *We must be close*, I thought, *which meant I must have been sleeping for hours*. As I continued to awaken, I noted a chill in my upper chest and body, a feeling much different than the cozy warmth I'd experienced earlier. I surmised the temperature in Germany must be cooler and made a mental note to dig my sweater out of my backpack once we arrived.

Still in the process of waking, I reached up to wipe the corner of my mouth, and as my fingers slid across my chin, I immediately recognized the slick substance they encountered. Looking down at the saliva covering my fingertips, I discovered the source of my chill. From my collar to my crotch, from one armpit to the other, the front of my shirt was drenched in enough drool to fill a beer stein. The excessive volume of liquid indicated to me that my salivary glands must have been pumping since the moment we departed Vienna.

Time began to stretch as my mind kicked into overdrive. Had these passengers been watching me this entire time? I stared at the floor. I imagined the viscous strands that had been hanging from my lower lip and how they must have swayed in unison to the trains' rocking motion. I visualized how each strand took its turn stretching and thinning before snapping into freefall. I considered how my audience had been exchanging glances and smiles while elbowing all the others, directing their attention to the slobbering kid from America.

I wanted to disappear, but there was nowhere to go, so I just sat there and waited for the train to arrive.

The awareness and mental connections that are made in the human brain during an event like this are astounding. Moments earlier, I was oblivious to the truth. I was enjoying my post-nap fog, wondering what my spectators found so interesting, feeling the odd chill in my body, and experiencing a host of other sensations one gets when riding aboard a train.

These were all disjointed thoughts with no association between them. But in that split-second I touched my chin, the pieces of the puzzle slammed into place: The saliva on my fingertips, the lack of sleep, the rocking train, the staring passengers, the straight-backed chair, the over-padded headrest that pushed my head forward, and the evaporative cooling that caused the chill in my chest. It all pointed to the fact that I had drooled. Even facts I disregarded earlier made a second appearance, like the musty odor I attributed to past travelers, which I now realized was the stench of digestion wafting off my chest. These facts were floating around in my head, randomly bumping around, until the secretion on my chin gave

them a shared context. That was the missing link that caused all these disjointed thoughts to coalesce into a single horrifying realization.

To me, this is one of the most interesting things about awareness. How facts that seem unrelated can rapidly become associated provided the necessary connections are made. And that is what this book is all about, awareness. Awareness of how I was asleep in my life, much like I was asleep on the train. I slept through a decade's worth of time. I slept through my first marriage and an entire career. I dreamt I was successful and doing everything right, while failing to comprehend, I'd been drooling and doing everything wrong, that is...

until I met my second wife, the psychiatrist.

Much of what I talk about in this book is embarrassing, immoral, and in a variety of ways leaves me wide open for judgment. I spent the better part of my life keeping these stories secret, ashamed to admit them, and fearing the judgment they would bring. I've since learned I can't control the thoughts of others, no matter how hard I try. People can and will find a reason to judge me, whether it is something I control or not. This realization, and the ability to free myself from the judgment of others, is just one aspect of my awakening that has benefited me profoundly.

But before I present the messy details of my life, I'd first like to introduce you to the little lady who made this transformation possible.

Chapter 2 THE PSYCHIATRIST

I met my second wife on a dating website. It was the picture of her straddling a full-size Harley Davidson in black leather that first caught my attention. *A petite, spikey-haired, bleached blond woman riding a motorcycle like that would have to have a fair amount of courage and adventure*, I thought. I wanted to know more.

Her profile was curiously unlike the others, which often read as if they'd been copied and pasted from one another. There was no talk of sipping wine before a warm fire, dancing barefoot on a sandy beach at sunset, nor anything else requiring the services of a *man who knows how to make a lady laugh*. Instead, hers spoke of training squirrels, associations with Tinkerbell, and the thrill of taking Sully and Petey out for a ride in the mountains. I recognized Sully as her motorcycle from the caption on her picture and concluded that Petey was the stuffed emperor penguin she had strapped to the backrest.

This woman had no bounds. She claimed the ability to wrangle any power tool built by man, expressed a desire to rule the world, and voiced her refusal to date any guy who still lived with his mom. How could I not go on a date with a woman like this? She was quirky, odd, looked great dressed in leather, and obviously could handle a motorcycle more than twice her size.

I decided to write her a message. I wrote that, although I enjoyed her profile, I was concerned by what I perceived as an apparent wild side. Therefore, before asking her on a date, I wanted to inquire whether she spontaneously danced on tabletops, as this could potentially lead to my embarrassment at formal dinner parties.

I laughed as I wrote that last part. I imagined a dining hall filled with guests seated at a table built for a queen. Near one end sits this little lady, restlessly squirming in her chair while tugging at the bodice of her overly constricted gown. Sitting across from her, her new boyfriend periodically breaks conversation with others to cast his stern-faced glances in her direction. Desperately wanting his support, yet feeling his disapproval, she becomes increasingly fidgety with the passing of each course of the meal. Then, no longer able to contain herself, she surrenders any hope of a lasting relationship and stands in her chair. Taking one small step up to the table, she pauses to acknowledge her guests with the slightest of bows, and then, with a mischievous grin, erupts into an Irish folk dance with such vigor and fury that her pumping legs send dishes flying and guests scrambling while leaving her humiliated boyfriend splayed out on the floor mumbling something about wishing he'd never asked her out.

The imagery left me in stitches. In just two sentences, I had crafted one of the most brilliant introductions ever made by man. Who else, but me, could have written such an imaginative, creative, and charming masterpiece? Pleased with my work, I reread my message, and while still chuckling, I hit send.

As is often the case, I regretted writing the message the moment I sent it. What the hell was I thinking? I knew better than to introduce myself to this woman with an attempt at humor. I could already see her perplexed face as she read my email. She'd think I was serious. She'd think I was an idiot. She'd think I was actually concerned that she'd dance on a table at a formal dining event. How could I have screwed this up? Three months of searching for just the right woman only to fuck it up with a childish-sounding email. My god, was it even possible to make more of an ass of myself?

The next day, a message popped up in my inbox. She'd responded. I expected her to suggest I drown myself, or perhaps take some time to grow up before attempting to converse with women again, but she did none of that. Instead, she told me that she had indeed done a spontaneous table dance, and this is how I met Fredi, the woman who would eventually become my second wife.

Little did I know that this woman would begin a process of waking me up that would span a decade and continues to this day. She would help me see connections between different aspects of my life that I had been blind to, often because they were indiscernible through the lenses of my own beliefs and philosophies. These revelations would not only change my life but would lead me to re-evaluate everything I knew to be true about myself and the man I'd become.

It is a process that feels much like giving yourself a lobotomy with a fork.

But how could such a dramatic change happen? I mean, I wasn't a teenager, I was 40 years old. I had life experience. I was a decorated cop with an excellent service record. I was one of those *get-it-done* kinds of guys who *got it done* before anyone asked. I initiated and drove the development of several crime prevention programs, helped shape department training as an instructor in multiple disciplines, and excelled in every assignment I'd been given. Hell, I'd even been chosen as SWAT team leader! I wasn't the type of guy to stumble my way through life; I was a winner. I lived in a nice house, drove an awesome car, and saved enough money to go on vacation whenever I wanted. So, how on earth could she have turned my life around, most notably in a positive direction?

Fredi would later describe it to me like this. *Intelligent people are often the hardest ones to treat. Their brilliant minds create intricate defense mechanisms that serve to rationalize their dysfunctional thoughts and behaviors. This is why some of the most successful and educated people, who appear to have everything one could want or need, end up leading unhappy and unfulfilled lives.*

I liked the way she phrased that, intelligent people, clever minds, intricate defense mechanisms. She's describing a special dysfunction exclusively reserved for smart people, which means I must be smart... let's go with very smart.

However, as I reflect on the lessons I've learned, the issues I've confronted don't exactly resemble the construct of a genius. Instead, my dysfunctions look a bit like a child's sandcastle, and my defenses, like the three-inch moat built to protect it. This begs the question, if my dysfunctions were so simplistic and poorly defended, then why hadn't I noticed them before? It's not an easy question to answer, which is why I wrote this book.

Let me start by saying that up until now, I've painted myself as a relatively successful person, and I suppose in many ways that's true. I've accomplished a lot during my lifetime, and in general, have achieved almost everything I set out to do. I've always attributed my success to the following set of philosophies:

- Life is tough – you've got to fight for what you want
- The secret to success is never giving up
- You must stay strong and not let things bother you

I've championed these philosophies to my friends, my family, and even had one inscribed on the back of my personalized police *baseball card* that our Chief requested we hand out to kids. I considered them winning principles, grounded in optimism, and designed to all but guarantee success and happiness. I was certain that as long as I kept fighting for what I wanted, everything would fall into place, at which point I could relax and enjoy the results of all my hard work.

Had you told me that my winning philosophies were instead a part of my intricate defense mechanisms, I would have laughed while reiterating my accomplishments to prove you wrong. For this is how certain I was that my approach to life was correct: to challenge my winning philosophies was simply... absurd. But you already know where this is going, so let's put aside my philosophies and start the tour of my sandcastle.

The first thing you need to know is that I get along with everyone. I'm not one of those guys who judges other people...

Chapter 3 I JUDGED YOU AT "HELLO"