



The Sleeping Solution—Part One

by *Doctor Carolyn Fern*

The following excerpts are from the surviving transcripts of “The Insomniacs Club of Arkham.” The Club was a locally organized self-help group formed early last year. Members met regularly on Sunday evenings in the lower-level lecture hall of St. Mary’s Hospital. Attendance for a typical meeting numbered around ten.

Records show six members marked as “present” at every assembly. After nine months the Club disbanded.

Since it is a St. Mary’s policy that staff be assigned to all groups using the facilities, I found myself a guest at their get-togethers. My unofficial role within the group began as that of a neutral, silent observer and de facto stenographer. Only during later events

did I feel an ethical obligation to intervene, and this action was taken with the greatest reluctance after several participants repeatedly asked for my professional help.

As the group's name suggests, their purpose was to provide a friendly forum for sharing stories, mutual support, and possible strategies—including non-traditional methods—in the battle against sleeplessness. Sadly, many of the transcripts were destroyed in a small office fire at my house (cause unknown), when I took the files home to make a second copy for future research. I have done my best to preserve these remnants in the hope that they might convey the essence of the group and the startling changes I witnessed. I tried to limit my comments to the necessary bridges and gap-fillers needed to provide context to this often-fractured narrative. Where my words do occur, I have enclosed them in parentheses for clarity.

I am publishing this evidence as a warning to the public. The editors of *Tales from Nevermore* kindly agreed to make this information available to mitigate any responsibility on their part in the advertising, promotion, and sales of Dr. Zee's Amazing Drowsiness Powder. It should be noted that more conventional news sources refused to print these data, citing their shocking and bizarre nature. I draw no conclusions and offer no scientific theories as to what happened. Read on and be your own judge. But please note that some readers may find the following report to be unsettling, with implications that reach beyond the Club itself.

—Dr. Carolyn Fern, Psychologist,
St. Mary's Hospital
(Arkham, Massachusetts)

TALES *from* **CUPID'S BOW**

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For the sake of personal privacy, only first names and last initials are used. In cases where permission has been given, the occupation of participants is noted.

—Dr. C.F.



FIRST MEETING JANUARY 10, 6:05PM

Mary A, Seamstress: I don't mind going first. What it's like for me is my body feels tired, but my brain is awake. It's like I'm on this cliff next to the ocean. I'm walking along a path in the fog. Over the edge, I hear waves crashing against the shore. I know there's dark water out there, and everybody's on the beach asleep on the soft sand. But I can't get there from where I am. There's no way down. I'm stuck on that ledge, staring into the fog. I feel lonely and tired.

Manny G, Truckdriver: For me, it's daylight when I go to bed. I drive night routes around the city. Ice deliveries. At home I make my room as dark as possible... shades, curtains. I even glued newspapers over the window. It's dark. That's not the problem. It's my driving. I can't stop. Soon as I start to fall asleep, I dream I'm in my truck behind the wheel, dozing off. I snap awake in a sweaty panic, my heart banging with a "Boom-Boom". I think I'm



speeding off the highway into a ditch. A bad wreck. Soon enough I know where I am. But it keeps repeating...

Ravi P, Payroll Clerk: Me? I'm a run-of-the-mill night owl. The trouble is I can't sleep during the day because I work, or I'm supposed to be working. Don't tell my boss, but half the time I'm staring out of the office in a trance, nodding off. I must yawn a thousand times a day. I should own stock in a coffee company, I'd be rich. Maybe one day I'll float away on a river of java. I know I look like something the cat's dragged in. I drag, too, let me tell you. But then night rolls around and "Hoot! Hoot!", I'm up. I do puzzles. Draw pictures. Cook. I reread last week's newspapers. I go for long walks. Pal, I've tried every trick out there. No luck. I'm a human owl.

Imelda D, Widow, Former Teacher: I never had this problem when I was younger. Fell asleep like clockwork. It's only since my husband died. I don't get out much anymore. My eyesight isn't what it used to be. I can't see well after sundown. I even fell twice. Now I stay home with my cats and listen to the radio. I wish I saw more of my grandchildren. My daughter says I think too much. I keep all the lights on inside the house and wander from room to room. I don't know what I do. But I'll tell you that when I look outside, I see things sometimes, things I know aren't there... my bad eyes... I get worked up over

nothing. At bedtime my head's full. When Harold was alive, we'd talk. Now it's dead silence. I'm glad I have my radio. I take catnaps, but that's it.

Mandy T, Researcher: Oh, I'm different from you, Imelda. I've had trouble falling asleep for as long as I can remember. It haunts me like an old friend, although friend is the wrong word.

Lawrence H, Occupation

Withheld: I'm not sure I belong here. Not that I don't have trouble sleeping, I do. I'm convinced there's nothing to be done. Accept your weakness, or condition, or whatever this is. I'm sorry, but I don't think I'm going to get better. None of us will. No doctor has cured me yet. Facts are facts. Some people can't sleep, period. We must learn to live with it. How we live is what's important, a matter of evolutionary adaptation.

Buck S, Traveling Salesman: Folks, I've got to be honest with you, it's positively uplifting to be surrounded by so many fellow sufferers! Don't laugh. I'm glad I'm not the only one! Being on the road comes with the territory in my job *literally*. Strange beds every night, an irregular schedule, grabbing meals when I can, always on the move... Heck, it's a wonder I don't run into myself. Now, I don't know about you, but I've got real pressure on me. And talk about worries? Sheesh! If I don't sell, I don't eat, and neither would my family, if I had one. I think about

that. I surely do. If only I could find rest! But enough about me and my problems. I want to hear what you all have to say. It's so darn interesting! I've got a feeling I'm going to learn a thing or two.

*It's like I'm on
this cliff next to
the ocean. I'm
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path in the fog.*

Mandy T: I agree. We can't give up. As a little girl, when I struggled falling asleep at night, I'd read. If it weren't for insomnia, I'd probably have a different job, maybe a whole different life! Not that I don't love reading and doing research. But the sub-

ject of sleeplessness has fascinated me forever. That's why I decided to organize this group. I want us to help each other. To hear about what works and what doesn't. To discover new ideas and, if we're lucky, a few solutions.

The fire spared the early transcripts of the Club history. Similarities arose in the stories people chose to share. Patterns emerged. To avoid redundancy, anecdotal evidence suggested that work schedules, travel, and poor sleep habits ranked highest among causes and aggravating factors. Yet some cases remained harder to explain. Though many were tried, no home remedies were successful. Relief was at best temporary and unrepeatable. People inevitably returned to their beds unable to obtain adequate rest. Until April when a breakthrough came from an unexpected source.

—Dr. C.F.



APRIL 18, 6:27PM

Timmothy J, Dentist: Sometimes I think I'm a mushroom, you know? Silent, white, and fleshy, nestled in my bed, night after night, slightly damp under my covers. Almost glowing in the dark forest. What? I'm the only one? (*laughs*) I guess so. But still, that's how I feel.

Buck S: That's wild, Tim! It makes me wonder if you're a fan of that magazine, *Tales from Nevermore*. I picked up a copy on a whim. Like you, Mandy, I'm a reader in the wee small hours when counting sheep turns monotonous and *still* the dreams won't come. Well, the stories in that mag are weird... and of questionable origin—and honestly, I'm more of an action fan. Anyway, I came across an advertisement for this natural botanical blend designed to help folks like us. Dr. Zee's Amazing Drowsiness Powder. I was skeptical, believe you me. But I was curious, too, so I sent for some. How often have I said I'd pay a king's ransom if only I could get a decent night's rest? My friends, this product works! It's simple. You mix a spoonful with ordinary tap water. Stir. Perfectly odorless, tasteless... oh, maybe there's a slight salty tang like getting seawater in your mouth when you're frolicking at the beach on a summer

day. But last night, for the first time in ages, I slept like a corpse. One minute my head is hitting the pillow, and the next thing I know—it's morning. Today I'm a new man! Refreshed, relaxed, and worry-free. Dr. Zee's does it for me!

Angelo D, Barber: (*waves at Buck*) You're all wet. (*points his finger at Buck who withdraws and mouths, Who me?*) I don't think you're on the level, pal. You work for them or something?

Buck S: Work for them? I'd be downright proud if I did. I'm telling you *this stuff* works. Look how much energy I have. (*Buck stands up and does jumping jacks.*) Want to see me run around the hospital? I can do it. Let me show you.

Mandy T: Please don't. That's not necessary. I think we all want to believe you. It would be so wonderful. What Angelo is trying to say is that what you're telling us sounds too good to be true.

Angelo D: I'm saying he's a no-good liar.

Buck S: Buddy, I admire your skepticism, I really do. And I refuse to be offended by your insults. Because I know where you're coming

from. You're sick and tired of being lied to. Am I right? I agree! I don't want to drink some cockamamie elixir that's going to blast me into oblivion. Or make me drunk as a skunk, because it's nothing but cut-rate

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hooch in a newfangled bottle. No, sir. See, I sympathize with you because we're all in the same boat.

Angelo D: I'm not in your boat, though we're all sailing on a river of what's coming out of you!

Buck S: Whoa! Easy there. Know what this is? *(He opens a leather satchel and holds up a handful of small white paper envelopes.)*

Ravi P: Free samples?

Buck S: Bingo! Give that man a prize.

Angelo D: You just happen to carry around free samples of this medicine in your bag of tricks?

Buck S: You *are* a suspicious one, Angelo. No, as a matter of fact, I do not carry around free samples of Dr. Zee's Amazing Drowsiness Powder normally. But there's nothing normal about today. Since I had the good fortune of discovering this little botanically blended miracle—not a medicine, Ang—I took the initiative and contacted the manufacturer. It wasn't Dr. Zee but a close associate, and I told them about our gloomy group of sleepyheads and asked if they would be so kind as to send me a few free samples to pass around at our next meeting. They delivered these babies right to my doorstep. How's that for customer service? *(Buck stands up in front of the group.)* Any takers? *(He steps closer, moving from person to person.)* They won't bite, I promise.



Ravi P: Give it here. I'm willing to try anything once, if it won't kill me.

Buck S: There's a brave soul! Here you go, Ravi. Take your pick. Dive right in, the water's fine. Woah! Don't take it now, for heaven's sake. I don't want you to fall asleep in your chair, though I'm sure you wouldn't be the first person to nod off in this stuffy old lecture room. *(Buck spins on his heels and, smiling, winks at Dr. Carolyn Fern before turning back to the group.)* Who wants some?

Mary A: Is it safe?

Buck S: As safe as a bowl of Brussels sprouts or green beans. Odorless, tasteless, and it mixes with water like a dream. Friends, look at me. Do I seem sick to you?

Mandy T: I'm not sure we should be administering any... remedies... without a doctor's approval— *(Mandy looks at Dr. Carolyn Fern.)*



Seven of the ten members present took samples and promised to report back at our next session.

—Dr. C.F.

*Read the unsettling conclusion to
"The Sleeping Solution" next issue!*

S.A. Sidor



Buck S:—Administering? I'm not doing that. I'm sharing free samples of a perfectly safe product I ordered through the mail. If it was dangerous, would that be allowed? Of course, it wouldn't! Seems I'm causing a kerfuffle this evening, when all I want to do is help my fellow insomniacs. Though I no longer consider myself to be an insomniac.

Jerry J, Mechanic: I don't see the harm in it. If you want one, take one. If you don't, don't.

Manny G: Sounds fair to me. Every man decides for himself.

Imelda D: And every woman.

Buck S: That's the American way! Don't be greedy. I've got ample supplies, but they aren't exactly loaves and fishes. The proof is in the pudding, they say. Everybody got enough?

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