




# The Sleeping Solution—Part Two

by *Doctor Carolyn Fern*

n the last issue, Dr. Fern shared surviving transcripts from the early meetings of “The Insomniacs Club of Arkham” which she observed and recorded at St. Mary’s Hospital. At the end of Part One, most of the group were about to try a novel remedy for insomnia—Dr. Zee’s Amazing Drowsiness Powder—which an attendee recommended, promising to report back with their findings next time...

APRIL 25, 6:02PM

*Mandy T:* Looks like it’s going to be a thin crowd today. You and me and Dr. Fern. We’ll give the others a minute. It was raining hard when I walked over from the campus library. April showers...

*Lawrence H:* After last time, I wasn’t sure I was coming back. Buck is too oily for my taste, and my word, he was laying it on thick, wasn’t he? I’m all for chasing the almighty dollar. But there are ways to do it without being slick and vulgar. I thought





snake oil salesmen went the way of the buffalo. But what do I know?

*(The sound of footsteps and voices approach from the hallway, along with trills of loud laughter.)*

*Buck S:* Howdy, folks. Look at the gang I found loitering in St. Mary's lobby and raising a ruckus. It's a reunion from last week! I don't see grumpy Angelo. But the rest of us are present and accounted for.

*Ravi P:* This is going to be the easiest meeting ever. Nothing to complain about.

*Timmothy J:* I am in total agreement. Maybe we can knock off early and get a nip at the Nightingale. I get a powerful thirst when the sun refuses to shine and I'm off work.

*Imelda D:* They don't open their doors until later.

*Timmothy J:* Mrs D.! Color me shocked. You're the last person in the world who I expected to join me for clandestine activities.

*Imelda D:* I enjoy the music. Harold and I were great jazz lovers. I still am. And a drop of libations does a body good on a rainy night. Warms the old bones. Usually, I'm too exhausted to even think about entertainment after dark. But I must admit, I feel invigorated.

*Timmothy J:* My invitation is open to whoever else wants to tag along. I'll knock on the secret door and see if they answer. We'll try our luck. Maybe we can tickle our noses with a glass of bubbly in the land of golden pillars, silver tinsel curtains, and ostrich feathers. If not tonight, then soon...

*Buck S:* See? What did I tell you? The samples worked!

*Mandy T:* Did everyone who tried Dr. Zee's powder feel equally satisfied with the results?

*Mary A:* I was happy.

*Jerry J:* That goes for me, too.

*Buck S:* We're all still alive as far as I can tell. I guess the experiment was a success. Right, doc? What's that? I can't hear you. You aren't allowed to say. Breaks some hospital rules. I've never been much of a rule-follower. Just ask my former teachers.

*Mandy T:* Dr. Fern is here as an observer. And she's been kind enough to keep notes of everything we say.

*Buck S:* I'm only having some fun. There won't be many transcripts now, anyhow.

*Mandy T:* Why?

*Buck S:* There's hardly a point having an Insomniac's Club if there are no insomniacs. Our work here is finished, as they say.

*What if the  
magic dust runs  
out of... magic?  
You're all back  
to square one.*



*Lawrence H:* What if it doesn't last?

*Buck S:* How's that, Larry?

*Lawrence H:* Lawrence, if you please. I'm simply posing a question. How do you know Dr. Zee's powder will continue to work. Maybe the cure is temporary. It may wear off. What if the magic dust runs out of... magic? You're all back to square one. Then what?

*Buck S:* It helped me for the whole week. That hasn't happened in years. You can't see a good thing when it's in front of your face, Lar—Lawrence. Try to be happy for once, even if it kills you. (*laughing*)

*Mandy T:* I think Lawrence brings up a good point. We've gone through all this trouble forming our club. We shouldn't be so quick to end it before we can confirm our success. Now, I'm not saying we will continue to meet forever. But what if we agree to keep coming back for a month?

*Buck S:* On one condition.

*Mandy T:* Name it.

*Buck S:* You and Lawrence take Dr. Zee's. I've got a great big box of samples in my bag. If we've all taken the powder, then we can compare notes. But seriously, folks, I promise to provide you with enough Dr. Zee's to get through the month. You can pay me now or write me an IOU. I don't care. I'm feeling generous. How about it? Do we have a deal? Oh, still nervous?

Well, pick up *Tales from Nevermore* and pay to get some yourself, if you can't trust me!

Mandy and Lawrence accepted Buck's offer. Unfortunately, the fire consumed most of the next month's transcripts. Surviving fragments, as well as my own memories, testify to the surprising efficacy of the sleeping powder. Symptoms of insomnia disappeared for everyone. Several new members joined the Club just to obtain Dr. Zee's Powder without going through the mail. During this period, the first reports of side effects started to appear. Users complained of waking with headaches; others stated "odd", sour, or metallic tastes lingering in their mouths.

However, the most disruptive side effects were the nightmares. They all had them—dream visions notable for their vividness and the strong emotional responses which they elicited. People reported difficulty ridding their minds of these frightening surreal images—constant thoughts of them haunted their daily life. However, none of the participants said they would stop taking the powder because of it. Sleeping well was worth it, they said. At least at this stage.

Below are a few (scorched but readable) excerpts from the first month-long period of taking Dr. Zee's.

—Dr. C.F.





*Imelda D:* The kitchen window opens itself. A pink claw reaches over the sill. An inhuman arm covered with scales and... they look like bumps... red and black blisters... the arm is steaming. I want to run, but my legs... I move as fast as I can. I hear the thing crawling over the sink, water splashing on the floor... I was washing my dishes when the window went up. The thing falls on the floor behind me, dragging its body, scraping along. I reach the bottom of the stairs. It's getting closer. The claw touches my [damage] scratches me to the bone [damage] the tearing is like ripping cloth. [damage] Harold, I say [damage] How can you [damage]

*Ulysses W, Handyman, Housepainter:* My ladder is on fire. I climb up on the roof to escape the heat. There's another man up there. I don't know him. But he's got nails, roofing nails, hammered into his body. He doesn't seem to care. He's smiling, coming toward me, his arms spread to hug me. He's bloody. The man keeps saying my name. Ulysses. Ulysses. Don't you know who I am? Come to me now. C'mon... His eyes glow like red embers and they smoke.

*Buck S:* I must've eaten too much cheese before bedtime. A worm dream. Ain't that strange? Worms inside me, under my skin. A-crawling, a-crawling. Too much cheese will do that, right?





*Speaker Unidentified:* ...sinking under the waves, and I'm the one who warned the captain not to sail. Is that a sea serpent? The ship is cracking apart. The wood splinters, and we're diving in the water which is warm like a bathtub. It's sunset. No land in sight. [damage] brush against my legs. Cold and [damage] these cold cables [damage] the stars are unusually bright. The moon is icy white. I think I might live, but [damage] and deeper and deeper I sink. My lungs ache. I'm in black water. The moon is gone [damage] darkness [damage] darkness and tremendous pressure.

*Mandy T:* Lost. I know I'm inside a maze at this point. I try to tell myself it's only a game. But I hear them coming for me, and I know they're only rats. But how many are living in this library?

*Timothy J:* Burying me alive in this graveyard. I'm tied up from my ankles to my armpits with thick nautical rope. I spit the dirt out of my mouth. Another shovelful [damage] I am screaming.

*Ravi P:* My boss threatened to fire me today if I didn't get the cobwebs out of my head. Sitting at my desk, I couldn't shake the nightmare. Last night, I woke up to a man of shadows standing at the foot of my bed watching me. Who is he? Why won't he leave? I couldn't move. Waking up was like a dream, and the dream I'd had was real. How would I know the difference?

*Lawrence H:* You wouldn't. None of us would know. The dangerous part is [damage].



As the nightmares continued, Club membership grew. Many new arrivals wanted to try the powder simply to enhance their dreams. Rumors of the extraordinary intensity of Dr. Zee's nightmares drew the adventurous who yearned for heightened states of "nocturnal exploration." Buck was open for business, selling boxes of powder on a card table he'd set up in the lecture room. The self-styled "nightmare tourists" didn't stick around to participate in discussion. They bought their powders and left immediately.

Objections were made by a few of the original Club members; Mandy T. was the most vocal. She asked me to limit the size of the Club, which I am unable to do under the hospital guidelines. While I admired her ethical questions, I explained that my role was to observe only. She wondered if acting out the nightmare scenes in group time would be therapeutic and help to diffuse their potency. I encouraged her to follow her instincts and put the matter to a vote. The group decided to try this "experiment within an experiment."

—Dr. C.F.





JUNE 13, 6:21 PM

*(Jerry J leans forward over the engine of an invisible truck. He is acting out his latest bad dream. In it, the Model T he's repairing turns into a monster that devours him. Jerry is nervous and sweaty as he commences his pantomime. Mandy is guiding him through the reenactment.)*

*Mandy T:* What happens next?

*Jerry J:* There's a slippery substance dripping over everything. Not oil. It's saliva. When I realize what it is, I pull my hands back—

*Mandy T:* Don't forget to keep acting it out, Jerry. We're all here for you. You're safe.

*Jerry J:* Disgusting. But my hands are stuck. Then my lamp goes out. I'm in a dark garage.

*(The lights in the lecture room flicker at this moment, causing the group to express great alarm.)*

*Jerry J:* What the heck—

*Mandy T:* Keep going, Jerry. I'm sure it's only Arkham's power acting up with these thunderstorms. Please continue.

*Jerry J:* Teeth. This engine has teeth like a... a... a steel crocodile. Chomping on me. I hear voices calling my name. I always hear them. Sometimes they're too quiet

to understand. But I can make out my name among the whispers.

*Ulysses W:* I always hear somebody calling my name in my dreams, too.

*Imelda D:* So do I.

*Mandy T:* Do the voices always know your name?

*(Several Club members answer at once)* Yes! Yes! They always say my name!

*[The next portion of the transcript is missing.]*

*Mandy T:* Then, we all agree. The voice or voices call us by name. And in every case, we are being pursued and then attacked by a creature of monstrous origins. We defend ourselves, often violently. This pattern, this almost ritualistic scenario repeats itself on a nightly basis in various forms for each of us, every night, without exception. How can that be? Dr. Fern, can you—

*Lawrence H:* I'm quitting. No more Dr. Zee's for me. Sure, I'm sleeping fine, but my life is falling apart. I'm jumpy as a jack-rabbit, terrified of my own shadow. Before, I was tired, but now I'm seeing things, hearing things... I even *smell* things that aren't there. I haven't believed in monsters since I was a child. But I'm forced to believe in them now. I've got no choice. I see them every night in my

*Worms inside  
me, under  
my skin.  
A-crawling,  
a-crawling.*



dreams. And I'm beginning to think they've followed me in my waking life, too—

*Mary A:* Did you hear that? Did anyone else hear that? There's something out in the hallway.

*Timmothy J:* Shush. Listen: it's slithering along the floor.

*(They all listen as the lights flicker again.)*

*Mandy T:* Buck, is that a gun? What are you going to do?

*Buck S:* Kill it. I'm going to kill it once and for all.

*Dr. Carolyn Fern. Psychologist:* Buck, put the gun down. You don't want anyone to get hurt.

*(Buck ignores this and rushes into the hallway, firing his pistol once, twice, three times.)*

*Lawrence H:* My goodness! He really did it!

*(Ravi, Manny, and Ulysses chase after Buck, wrestling him to the floor, taking away his weapon.)*

*Ravi P:* There's nothing here, Buck. Calm down. We've got you.

*Manny G:* He shot the floor. And he put one in the wall.

*Buck S:* I hit it. I know I hit it. It went around the corner before you guys came out here. I saw it.

Following the incident with the gun, the police were called. Buck was taken away. He seemed calmer, but he tried to get the police to let him bring his Dr. Zee's with him to the station. They didn't. When Dr. Fern went to collect Buck's belongings, all the boxes of Dr. Zee's were gone.



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Because of everything that happened in Arkham during the following months, meetings continued but remained sporadic. But Buck never returned. Many members stopped taking Dr. Zee's either because they were worried about their worsening nightmares or because the powder now failed to achieve predictable results, even if it were ingested in much higher dosages. The mail order business had ceased operation. Ads no longer ran in *Tales from Nevermore*, while some even complained to the staff. Members still taking the remedy rationed their dwindling supplies. Chao's was the new order of the day, and shakeups befell every aspect of life in the city. After repeated requests from Mandy T., Dr. Fern advised Club members who were still taking Dr. Zee's to stop. Club meetings continued to be scheduled, but only a small number of attendees bothered to show up. Eventually the hospital informed Dr. Fern that the lecture room had been reserved by another, larger group. Dr. Fern offered referrals to any members seeking further treatment. No one took her up on it.

—Dr. C.F.

While most of the later transcripts were destroyed, this one singed excerpt remained:

*Timothy J:* I'm up all hours, I guess. But I don't always know it. I fade in and out like a weak radio signal. It's like I'm dreaming, but

I'm awake at the same time. Mesmerized. Difficult to explain how I feel... numbed... spectator to my own actions. Unable to control my [damaged]





## CONCLUDING STATEMENT FROM DR. CAROLYN FERN

In sleep we are vulnerable, physically and psychically. The sleep state has fascinated people since the dawn of human consciousness. Omens, portents, and visions often arrive in the theater of our dreams. Our minds bloom when we are sleeping. We travel outside our physical bodies. Are we dreaming our waking life? Is dream life any less of a reality? Do other dimensions exist within and without these boundaries? Who can say what influence they might exert over one another. I have no concrete answers. Only more questions. New suspicions grow inside my own imagination that have frightening consequences. We need to study this subject in greater depth. It is stranger and more complex than I first thought: How to find a way out of the dark that our ancestors stumbled through with lit torches and trembling limbs, mouths



gaping in awe at every revelation. We do not know what we do not know. I pose a simple question: Which real is real?



## ATTACHED POSTSCRIPT STATEMENT FROM DR. CAROLYN FERN

In the aftermath of the Insomniacs Club of Arkham, I had no contact with its members. With one notable exception. Many weeks after the group finally disbanded, by coincidence I ran into Buck S. in the most unusual of places. It was a Sunday morning, unseasonably mild for winter, and I was out for an early walk at the edge of Arkham Woods, when I spotted Buck wandering on a footpath alone. His appearance was striking, gaunt and sallow, and I did not recognize him at first. Despite the higher temperatures, he was underdressed for the weather, wearing no coat or hat. He must have been tramping about off-trail because his clothes were mud-stained. I heard his voice before I spotted him, which was odd, because he appeared to be quite alone. Given the violent outburst the last time I saw him, I approached with caution. Once I announced myself, he stared at me blankly until he recognized me. Then he came forward rather quickly, trudging through the melting snow, and smiling. His hair stuck up on one side of his head and looked wet.



"Dr. Fern, how nice to meet you again," he said.

"It's good to see you, too," I said. "How are things going?"

He laughed at this. "Oh, fine. Fine."

Then I noticed he was barefoot. His feet looked raw from the cold and beet-red.

"Where are your shoes?" I asked.

Buck glanced down, surprised. "Somewhere around, I'm sure." He drew in a deep breath and his gaze went to the trees. "Beautiful day. I feel refreshed and renewed. Every day I do."

"Buck," I said, "would you like to go someplace warm? Join me for coffee maybe?"

He shook his head. "I've got too much to do."

We were silent there together for a while, Buck still smiling and brushing his shirtfront.

"I can't sleep," he said finally. "Ha ha! Don't you see? Did you ever try the powder? Weren't you curious?" He didn't give me a chance to answer. "I haven't slept in four months. I counted the days today. Four months and not a wink. Ha ha ha. Do you believe it? I keep a calendar." He searched for it in his pockets. "Left my jacket on a branch back there." He gestured to the thicker, snow-laden woods. "Only I'm never tired anymore. Never ever. It's them that takes getting used to." He hooked his thumb over his shoulder. "Don't look. They'll only hide. I haven't gotten comfortable with them yet. Ha ha ha. Enjoy your walk. I'll be on my way."

"Wait, Buck."

But he was moving off, breaking into a

slow run as he got farther from me. Flapping his arms, head thrown back. He was laughing. Howling with laughter. "Hahahahahaha."

I thought I heard someone else, too. In the woods. A faint faraway voice but clear.

"Carolyn," it said.



*S.A. Sidor*

