

The Moondust Sonatas
Movement No. 1: A Hunter's Moon
Excerpt

Monday September 25, 2006

Chapter 1
William

Okay, listen. I was underground, right? In New York, where I lived. This girl from my building named Vonnie rode the subway with me, screaming metal and blinking lights flowed outside plastic windows. Each block was its own universe, galaxies flew by like graffiti stars.

When our station finally roared in, the doors pinged open, and we went up: out of the dark, humid underground into the city swirling colors. We went to get moondust from this kid named Clyde.

He lived in SoHo somehow, in a second story apartment. The sun still shone. But, time was flying. I was 26 and aimlessly flowing around town. I hustled for the cash I needed, I did anything and everything, but mostly stayed small time: scrapping, small scams, grabbing stuff, selling stuff—things like that. The money sucked, though.

I'd never tried moondust before. It was something new, and new drugs could be real bad. But, I'd known Clyde for years. We ran together, and you can only really know someone when you hustle. So I figured moondust was safe 'cause he wouldn't give me anything heavy. And I figured it was good shit because I texted him, but didn't hear from the dude in three weeks; when he finally got up with me, this morning, he sounded different, and all he'd say was, "You have to try this shit." So I called up Vonnie and told her we were going for a ride. She asked to which stop, I answered the one in her cerebellum. I said get ready and hung up, and got her, and we rode metal underground.

Now, on the streets again, kicking our toes at the sky, Vonnie kept bugging me because she wanted to know what to expect.

"What's this called again?"

"The name ain't gonna change no matter how many times you ask."

We got to his house, rang the buzzer, and clicked up the stairs. When I knocked on the door, it opened, because it was dead bolted ajar. Inside Clyde sat on his couch in boxers and a wife beater, holding a vial of gray powder, with his eyes closed and banging around under the lids. But, he was grinning and crying, and his hand kept going up, moving like he tried to feel something.

We watched him do that for a while, not speaking. Wasn't any need to talk, seeing what we saw.

I swear my pupils dilated out of sheer expectation.

Eventually, his eyes slowed. He breathed suddenly, real deep, and opened his eyes. He dried some tears, then looked up at Vonnie and me.

And all he said was, “You guys got to try this shit.”

Chapter 2

Clyde

I saw God.

God is alien to us, completely. Not at all like they say. They always said God made us in His image, I always pictured Him something like us. God is nothing like us, more like a living sun. But, also so far beyond that. We can't imagine, we can't get anywhere close.

I saw the truth. That's what this drug did, and you can't tell me different. Ain't no language for the feeling. Best high ever.

The first time I took moondust, I was up on Bedford, at some rooftop party. All these arty kids lived in the building. They all did stuff like sound editing or photography. This one dude—he was on *Friday Live Variety*—never saw him. But, people said he lived here. The chubby guy who always fell off stuff.

Anyway, I stood by the ledge checking out the scene and spotted some kids nearby doing what I thought was coke. My product was pure, I was looking to expand my business, and these fools had enough money to pay whatever I asked. Once I realized that I could get top dollar from rich hipsters, I never went back. So I walked over to them, and I pulled out my bag, and I said, “Hey.”

“What?” One of them said, with the hard edge of someone who'd just been interrupted doing drugs.

“Can I join? First lines are free, and my shit is bomb.”

I'm bold so I did this kind of thing, even though it wasn't really done. You didn't roll up on people in the city. But, I wasn't much for following rules, none of these kids were thugs, and I was a hell of a salesman.

First step: Set their minds at ease, make them feel in control. But, these kids' eyes had none of the fear or distrust I expected.

“You got the bomb, huh?” One dude said, mocking. “You think we need you?”

I answered, “I'll put a hundred on mine being better than whatever you got.”

They all laughed. That never happened before.

“I'll take that bet,” another said.

So I opened my bag to start cutting small lines. But, the guy who'd spoken last, a black kid with a neck tattoo, held up his hand saying, “Wait. We aren't looking to do coke, I just want your money. So you're going to try mine, and then you're going to give me a hundred dollars.”

That threw me off. “Coke?”

“No. Moondust.”

“What the hell is moon dust?”

“You’ve never heard of it. But, it’s safe. You’ll have some and pay me for the privilege, because we made a bet. Right?”

I nodded. He took out his baggie, and said, “Sit down and hold one eye open.” And when I did, he dropped powder into my eyes, and my back arched, and I disconnected from my body.

Another world, made of solid light.

When I came out of it, I gave him a hundred dollars and three hundred more for a good amount of moon dust. He wouldn’t give me his phone-number or name.

Before moon dust, I never thought much about religion one way or another. This, however, was G-O-D. But, I didn’t want to philosophize, I just wanted to go back. Only there was no going back. When I took moon dust again, I went somewhere else, into another person’s life: a beggar in Madras.

The third time I took it, I saw the world through the eyes of a Scotsman.

After that, I was a farmer in some hot, sun-dark nation. Next, a shopkeeper in Asia. After that, a homemaker.

I never felt anything like it. Not quite a high, just a wild, fully realized experience. Like, absolutely, 100 percent realistic, I was truly inside other people. But, I couldn’t control nothing, I was along for the ride.

So when my boy William called me up, yammering about how I’d been MIA for weeks, I told him to come here, because we had business to attend. The guy who gave it to me was right, his stuff was better than mine. I planned on fixing that.

Chapter 3

Yvonne

My name is Vonnie and

I’m an actress and I

Tried moon dust ‘cause this guy I knew, William,

He called my house and then came to my door. I was asleep when the phone rang,

And he didn’t notice.

He said we were going on an adventure and

I like adventure so I agreed

And we went into Manhattan.

SoHo is so electric. I was wearing:

Rainbow colored wool gloves, a light white jacket over a red blouse, a green un-slit denim miniskirt, black tights, and black Pumas with red trim.

William, wearing a yellow T-shirt, old jeans, and filthy sneakers. Took me to this guy's apartment, Clyde. Near Broadway. I don't remember which street. But, it was a real dirty apartment.

I would have told this Clyde guy so,
But when we arrived he was so-o f'ed up!

We just stood there, watching him for a while,
He was talking to himself and making noises like an animal.
Then he came out of it.

"You gotta try this stuff" is what he said then.

Do you want to know about me?
My name is Yvonne. It's a silly name.

I tell people that my friends call me Vonnie.
Viola! Instant friends.
Not that I need them, but I like it when people are kind to each other.
I'm a dancer and actress, but I've never gotten paid to act or dance and
I really wait tables and
I stopped auditioning.
Just-can't-do-it-right-now.

I didn't like my parents.
They were uptight.

Okay people, but horrible parents, maybe. I didn't worry about it too much.
Except—and this was important—
I always thought, "Fuck God."

Because most of the reason they were bad parents was their heads were up Jesus' ass all day.
They treated me so badly, kept me prisoner,
Because, "I ignored the Lord's will." Told to me by whom?
Them? And how did they know?

And why did the Lord care so much if my room was clean?

I ran away from home. When they found me, they dragged me home, and things were worse.
I just waited until I was 18, too old to be stopped, and left for good.

“Fuck God” was what I’d think if you asked me if I believed.

I’d say something more polite,

But not really. And I’d do it with relish.

I was so over it. Because God wasn’t even real. The thing that fucked my childhood up was my parents’ imaginary friend.

I believed that until this guy Clyde shoved powder into my eye.

Afterward, all I could say was, “No way” and leave. I just knew I’d never do moon dust again.

Chapter 4

William

It went like this: we sat down on the couch, and he smiled like the serpent. “Ladies first,” he said. Then he started talking to Vonnie, softly, to reassure her.

“Open your eye. Hold it open. Yeah, like that. Okay, don’t blink now.”

He dropped some powder into her eye. Her eyes closed.

Her mouth opened.

She gasped, writhed, and tears came down her face. Her expression read somewhere between ecstasy, horror, and fury.

“Whoa,” I said. “Where is she?”

“Oh man, she’s in Heaven,” Clyde said.

I didn’t take him seriously. Meanwhile, her face kept flowing between joy and rage.

“So, what’ve you been up to?” I asked, to make conversation.

“Pretty much, this,” Clyde answered.

“What’s it like?”

“So far, it’s different every time.”

“Oh.”

We watched Vonnie in silence, for about three more minutes, until she came out of it. When she did, she went insane. Like, horns sprouted from her head. She started swearing and throwing things across the room. Whatever she could grab: a pen, a plastic cup, a bag of potato chips, a dirty plate. Clyde didn’t do nothing, he just stood there. He let her tire herself out. When she did, she started yelling.

“What the fuck was that? You asshole, you couldn’t have warned me?”

Clyde asked, “What could I have said?”

“Fuck you. This is bullshit.”

She grabbed her purse, stormed out, and slammed the door.

In the silence she left, Clyde and I looked at each other. Through the walls, we heard the click of her heels stop, and the sound of Vonnie retching somewhere in the hallway. We studied the door, imagining.

“What’s in this shit?” I said, impressed.

“I... actually don’t know. But, it’s safe though.”

“If you don’t know what’s in it, what makes you sure it’s safe?”

“Trust me.”

“Okay.”

I took a deep breath, and I put my hands to my eye and held back the lids. The lids fought me for control, trying to close. Clyde stood above me and moved gigantic, fuzzy zeppelin fingers right above my eyeball.

Some dust fell into my eye, and it stung like hell. But, only for a split second.

Then I couldn’t feel anymore.

I went down a tunnel, but my body stayed behind.

All of my body’s sensations, like my heart, my pulse, and my skin, felt so far away I quickly forgot them. I was only spirit or soul or energy. Our physical realm was out there, somewhere, but it meant jack to me.

Listen, no way you can imagine that unless you’ve experienced it.

My soul swam in light. In joy.

Not that the word *joy* cuts it. That word is tied to worldly pleasure or happiness, both of which are thin, flimsy tricks, mockeries of what’s up there.

Afterward, you can’t even remember, not really. It’s impossible for your brain to recall a place so far beyond you, something far too big for your mind to hold. You’d felt things you couldn’t dream.

Eventually something changed, and my soul-body connection reset, surged, and drew me back.

I could feel my spine again. My back arched, hard, my eyes opened. I gasped for air.

The joy faded.

“Holy shit,” I panted. Tears dotted my face; later I would learn tears washed away the powder, which is why I’d returned.

“I just saw God.”

“I know,” Clyde said. “You’re welcome.”

Thursday, September 28, 2006

Chapter 5

Justine

By the brownstones of the wealthy on Sutton Street, in one of the few quiet places to be found in Manhattan, a little so-called park comprised only of benches bolted to concrete over the water, and one word written in wild-style fluorescent on a concrete wall opposite the river—I held his hand. The wind whipped through my jacket, and I shivered.

He, Maxwell, worked in the editorial department of *The New York Globe*, moving up the ladder through determined hard work, and we had something, I hoped.

I, Justine, worked for Action, Now! a non-profit organization. At the moment, we fund-raised to aid a humanitarian crisis in South-East Asia.

Maxwell and I lived in New York: I in Harlem and he in Hell’s Kitchen. I loved my neighborhood, its speed and ceaselessness, the children playing on sidewalks and in gutters. I loved Manhattan, its abrasive humanity.

We’d eaten dinner up the street, at March. Now, river-side, we spoke sweet words, told jokes, whispered nothing in particular.

And then he asked, “You never said. Do you want kids one day?”

I answered, “I don’t know. It’s complicated.”

“Complicated by what?”

“Everything,” I said. “You want to explain my future in a soundbite.”

“The kids’ part. Is that complicated?”

“Isn’t it early for this conversation?” I asked, because it was. Very, way.

“Well,” he said, “I like the idea of getting the big stuff out of the way.”

Fair enough. But, still, I decided to answer in generalities. “I think I like the idea of having children, but I don’t think I like the world I’d be raising them in.”

“People have been saying that since the dawn of time.”

“Not true. People have been saying that since the dawn of industrialization.”

“Like everyone was happy before the steam engine. You forgot to ask me if I want kids. Don’t you want to know?”

“To be honest, not yet, not by a long shot.”

“Ask me anyway.”

Sigh. “Max, do you want kids?”

“I don’t know,” he said, grinning. “It’s complicated.”

I play-punched his midsection.

He grabbed me and held me to him, rocking me, and in my ear he whispered, “One day, a long time from now, I’m going to own a little house right by some deep, dark, scary-wild woods. And I’m going to have a wife there, and we’re going to raise three children, who will play in the woods, go to school, and grow up to rule the world.”

“Are you serious?” I asked because I had no idea what to do with this.

“More or less.”

“You’re domestic.”

He didn’t answer, but smiled a bemused smile. In my heart, a whisper of doubt appeared. I would need to mull this later.

Behind us, we heard steps on the stairway leading up to the street above this recessed park. We turned, and saw a man in an outdated, disheveled, gray suit. Gray-shot hair bunched in odd patches on his head, and disquiet filled his eyes. Thin lips, crooked nose. But, still, in spite of everything, he had magnetism, intrigue.

“Can I ask you a question?” he said. “Have you ever wished you could directly experience God?”

The question seemed so ridiculous I didn’t know what to say. Maxwell answered instead.

“Look, pal, we don’t want your Jehovah’s Witness, eight-fold Hari-Krishna stuff or whatever, so go away please.”

“I come from no false religion. What I offer is truth, the real and true experience of God. But, if you want me to leave, I will.”

Maxwell worked for the newspaper, and if a new religious movement stumbled across his path, he had to pursue it. He was waiting for his “big break,” after all. So I understood when his eyes lit up.

“What do you mean by ‘the experience of God’? What church are you from?”

“I am with no religious organization of any kind—they’re all false—which is part of the reason I’m standing before you tonight.”

Oh, and what is the other part? But, I didn’t say anything.

“So what’s this ‘experience of God’ stuff about?”

“This,” he said, and slowly, calmly reached into a shallow coat pocket to produce two small plastic bags, each with a miniscule amount of gray powder inside.

Max snorted. “A drug? Get the fuck outta here. ... No, wait. Is, is that like some new drug?”

“This isn’t a drug. It’s from the angels.” He handed Maxwell the bags. “If you wish to see God, put a small bit of this in your eye, and you will, until you cry the powder out. Do not contact me, you will never see me again. I’m simply a messenger.”

With that, he turned and left.

We sat in slightly shocked silence, listening to his footfalls recede. I said, “May I see?” And I reached for one of the bags.

It contained fine gray powder, and when I held it up to examine it, the baggie weighed nothing at all. It comforted me. I couldn’t explain why.

“This could be huge,” Max said. “We have to get these analyzed right away.” He held his bag up also, studying it.

“You can run off and get yours analyzed if you want. But, this bag is mine.”

Max, shocked, said, “Huh?”

“He gave us two. One for you and one for me.”

“You’re not planning on taking that, are you?”

“No.”

“So why do you want it?”

“Because this has never happened to me before.”

“Okay, but just don’t take it. I have no idea what’s in there.”

“Of course not.” I said, standing up. “You should go. You have a story to chase.”

“Wait,” he said. “Whatever I did or said, I’m sorry.”

Had I overreacted? Whatever emotional truth I reacted to had not distilled yet into a clear grievance, and if I didn’t know why I was irked, maybe I shouldn’t be. So, instead of walking away, I paused.

Max stood up, and put his arms around me. “Don’t leave.”

We went back to my place, and slept there.

In the morning I woke up to find him dressing, rushing off to work. Distracted, he barely even said goodbye.

After he left, I showered and dressed, ate some corn flakes, then got on the computer and read the news. It was an important ritual; in my line of work, current events mattered.

But thinking about news made my head turn to where my purse lay, innocently, on a chair. And inside of it, a small bag of gray powder.

I wanted to hold it again. And so I opened the purse and reached inside. I couldn’t find the baggie at first, and a small panic arose. When my hand eventually stumbled across it, I felt that same inexplicable comfort.

Friday, September 29, 2006

Chapter 6

Maxwell

I left Justine’s apartment first thing in the morning. I was onto something, something that might put my career on an exponential curve.

I’d been working for *The New York Globe* for about two years, building my resume and waiting for a break. Breaks were hard to come by. I thought maybe I’d found my chance when some weirdo in a suit threw a drug in my lap and told me it showed people God. The guy might have been nuts, of course.

I needed to get this stuff analyzed ASAP. I also needed to find users for potential interview subjects. From there, I would play it by ear, investigating based on the leads I would find. When it was all said and done, I’d go to the paper to give them an article—waiting to go to press—that would make me famous and them rich.

I considered it a great pleasure and joy to be engaging in pure journalism. Things had pushed so far out of whack in our industry, every office of every newspaper and cable-news channel was

permeated with an atmosphere of fear and frustration, often closing down. Newspapers shilled for the corporations and parties. Everyone knew readership was down, but no one knew what to do about it. Owners everywhere sold to conglomerates and shady billionaires. Lay-offs left and right. Hard-hitting, truth-telling journalism, daring investigative reporting, and general onion-peeling—these were actively discouraged. As a novelist once wrote, we slid down the surface of things.

Well, here was a chance to do something that mattered. I would crack the right way a story demanding national attention. A story without pussy-flashing alcoholic celebrity bimbos or disgruntled sociopathic football stars. No bullshit, just the shocking, dark, twisted truth. God was now being sold as a drug, and I would get to the bottom of it.

Even though he told me not to, I needed to go after the man who gave us the substance. He would likely be resistant to inquiry, but this is what professionals do. I would start small, only asking the name of the stuff I had. Because even after getting its chemical composition and ascribing a pharmaceutical label, I was writing blind if I couldn't access the drug's street identity. Without that, I had no way in with the users.

But first things first. Go to the laboratory the paper used as a source in an ongoing investigation. They'd made me play courier, which turned out to be a boon, strangely enough. I knew one of the chemists now. When I'd called to see if any staff were working, he answered. That was a big stroke of luck for me, because he said he could squeeze in my job, today. It would cost, he'd said. But, the newspaper would pay, so I didn't care too much.

I decided to take the subway instead of a cab. Despite the cool day, the train car roasted us, and I found myself dabbing perspiration and contemplating removing my sweater.

Right before this became a problem, I was back on the street and down the block toward the building at the corner of 93rd and Amsterdam.

The chemist, Peter, greeted me when I found him in his lab's break area, reading the newspaper, sipping coffee. "Oh, Max," he said. "Hey."

He was a tallish man with a big belly, and a hairline receding into non-existence. Peter waved a few fingers at me, and I could see on his hands the deep grooves and rough patches of a working man. Now in story mode, locked on to that detail, I needed to know why a chemist had a laborer's callouses.

So I said, "I'm curious. How does someone in your line of work develop rough hands like yours?"

"I have hobbies."

"Like what?"

He only smiled. The silence thickened, and Peter sat drinking coffee, reading away.

I sighed. "Okay, never mind. I have something real interesting for you today."

"Do you?"

I put the baggie of substance on the table in front of him. "I don't know what it's called. But, I've been told if you put it on your eyeball, you see God. It's some new kind of drug."

"You put it on your eyeball, and you see God?"

Something in his tone gave pause. “Have you heard of this stuff? What can you tell me about it?”

“It’s nothing.”

“What?”

“Just some stupid joke about a scientist who got a sample in his eye.”

“And?”

“He goes to hell.”

“Well, that’s not really this, is it?”

“Which is exactly why I didn’t volunteer. You want the works on this?”

“Is it possible to rush?”

“I’ll add an extra 20 percent for that. But, sure. Come back in three hours.”

I hailed a cab rather than take the subway back to the office. Once inside the cab’s smooth interior, I engaged to gather intel.

“Sir,” I said to the driver, “can I ask you a question?”

“Sure, sure.”

“Do you ever overhear customers talking about weird drugs? Psychedelics? Something new?”

He seemed hesitant.

“Trust me,” I said, “I’m curious, that’s all. I’ll make it worth your while.”

“I hear the usual. Cocaine, Marijuana, E... They’re sick, these children. Sick.”

“But nothing new?”

“I hear nothing unusual.”

“Do any of them ever mention God?”

“What would they know of God? God does not come in a powder,” he said, waving his free arm. I smiled at the irony.

The ride was quiet, only the squawk of his radio and the ever-present blast of car horns disturbing me. I thumbed the business card of Harold G. Westgate, impatient.

When we got to *The New York Globe*, I paid the driver, then rode the elevator up to my floor. On Fridays like this, the place was relatively empty. When I got to my desk, I dialed the number Westgate gave me, but his office’s switchboard denied his extension and kicked me to a receptionist. I asked for Harold Westgate. They employed no one with that name. A dead end.

I couldn’t write this story without the drug’s street identity.

I set about the task of finding Harold’s personal information online. I wanted telephone numbers and addresses, anything to help me track him down. After a few more dead-ends, I found an address, using a sneaky and somewhat shady web service. He lived in Brooklyn, on Flushing in the Bushwick neighborhood. No telephones listed.

So I called a car and told dispatch to book a round trip.

On the way to Brooklyn, on the bridge, I acted on a sudden urge to call Justine. When she picked up she sounded distant somehow, as if, while speaking to me, she attempted to smile.

Chapter 7

Harold

In my new life as the messenger, I needed to be well-spoken, always. I would dress neatly, in professional attire only.

I rode the train, making a list of the things to do in my new life. I had just taken more steps toward becoming pure—freeing myself of the burden of owning an apartment and having a job. I still gave out my old business card when I spread my love of the Lord throughout this city, however. The card served as an ice-breaker, nothing more, and it did not affect my transition to my new life.

I believed God would be happy with my progress, but it hadn't been enough to be allowed to see God again. I hoped I was working hard enough to please Him. But, I would never know until He allowed me to return.

After I finished my list, I looked around—a mostly-empty train—and dropped moondust in order to pursue my Lord.

When my soul first left my body, I could, as usual, feel the barest whisper of the Angel's song, a beautiful, lingering, holy joy. Then I was a farmer's wife.

This small failure only strengthened my resolve. I only needed to grab a few things from the apartment I was vacating; the remainder were trappings, unnecessary. I would live without possessions, the way the prophets of old did.

How else could I continue, having been confronted with the majesty of God? The stranger who gave me this powder must have been an angel in disguise—claiming to be just a man dying—and the last of a long line who carried this secret through generations. I did not believe him. He was an angel giving me a mission, to teach the world. I would do so by living simply, and spreading God's vision as far as I could.

It sometimes seemed such a far cry from the life I lived before, so strange. But, as always when this happened, I remembered I was building a better world.

When the Morgan Avenue stop came, I got off the train and walked until I reached Flushing, where I rented an apartment over a small diner.

Realizing I would miss both the diner owner and her food, I craned my neck to try to get a glance of her through the window, as I walked toward my door. So I didn't notice the man waiting for me by the doorway until he spoke.

"Mr... Messenger?" he said, after clearing his throat. "You may remember me, you gave me some white powder yesterday, and I need its name."

I turned on him quickly. I remembered him as an initiate I enlightened uptown.

"I told you never to attempt to contact me," I said, quietly, and probably with menace, for he shrank back.

"Easy, guy. All I want is the name. That's not a lot to ask. I'll even buy you lunch."

I looked into his eyes. "It's called moondust. Now disappear."

As he turned to leave, I said, “Never try to find me again.”

“I won’t,” he called over his shoulder. I made a mental note to find an alternative to the business card, which showed my real name. He tracked me that way.

Inside of my old apartment, I gathered the necessary things and placed them in a large duffel bag. I saw God here, and because this site was holy, I resented the necessity of abandoning it.

As I left, I paused at the door, and let my eyes return to the spot of my awakening. I could almost see my former self there, lying on his back, experiencing the nexus of existence.

Then I stepped out of the door, into my new life, becoming an instrument of the Lord.

Chapter 8

Maxwell

My brief meeting with the messenger left me with an intense disquiet. He struck me as a madman.

The good news: now I knew the name, moon dust. The bad news: I had nothing else.

Because enough time elapsed, I went back to my chemist; this story demanded hustle. With that maniac giving drugs to anyone, I couldn’t even be sure I was the only one after this.

Since the car left while I waited for Westgate, I took the L-train back into the city. I got a seat as soon as I got in the car, making notes to myself via pen and notepad and trying to determine next steps. I made little progress. Lacking the underworld contacts I needed for this story, I hoped the chemist could give me something to chase after.

If the chemist wanted more for a big lead, it was possible. I needed to try to score some moon dust myself, on the streets. Buying drugs was never something I did, leaving me dangerously ignorant of the lingo and procedure. Perhaps I could find an apparent drug-den, walk in, and tell of my strange encounter with the messenger, pretending I’d taken moon dust and wanted more.

But first things first. I reached my stop and walked to the lab. This time, when I entered, Peter was leaning over a computer, somehow managing to type furiously and wolf down what appeared to be a roast beef sandwich at the same time.

“Peter, hello,” I said. “How’d it go?”

He finished a bite of his sandwich, chewing slowly, not looking at me. After he swallowed, without looking at me, he said, “Interesting stuff you gave me.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. What you got here, this stuff defies principles.”

“Please elaborate. What kind?”

“Well, the subatomic kind. Actually, every kind—what’d you say it was called again?”

“Moon dust,” I said. “What kind of subatomic principles does it violate?”

“All of them.”

“Meaning?”

“None of my tests work on this stuff. All I can tell you is it’s a complete unknown. It’ll probably end up challenging everything we know about science.”

“Wow,” I said. “That sounds big.”

“Yeah.”

“Can you explain what’s happening?”

“Well, the first step in analyzing something is weighing out a small amount of it. When I went to do that with this stuff, the scale said it weighted 7.68 grams, which surprised me; that’s an extremely high weight for the volume I measured. So I tried it again with the exact same sample, and the second time the scale said 0.42 grams. Third time it said 14.93. So I figured the scale was busted, and I tried a different one. But, those readings were all over the map, too. I went to a third scale, same thing. It wasn’t the equipment.

“I tried quite a few different types of tests. The results were either inconclusive or varied unbelievably every time. Moondust seems to be an impossible substance.”

I said, in a measured voice, “What do you think that means?”

“I have no idea. Beyond that, this substance defies science as I know it.”

“If you had to guess why it defies science?”

“Scientists don’t guess,” Peter said.

“Indulge me.”

“It reminds me of Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle, if that principle governed not only velocity and location of subatomic particles, but somehow magnified itself in relation to a specific substance, affecting atomic makeup, weight, everything.”

“Was that English?”

Silence followed this.

“Please tell me more?”

“The basic idea of the uncertainty principle is that it is impossible to know both the location and velocity of very, very small particles. For some, the basic takeaway is that the observer changes the observed.” He scratched his beard. “It’s an abstract principle that’s acted out on the subatomic level in multiple ways. It has even been shown to violate our understanding of the laws of cause and effect, as well as space-time. It just supersedes them.

“The uncertainty principle raises a tricky theoretical question: If the act of observing a thing changes it on a subatomic level, is consciousness interacting directly with reality? If so, how far does that go? That’s the kind of philosophical leap we scientists rail against. I never took the idea seriously. But, now, having seen moondust…”

“Okay, let’s pause for a second,” I said. I took out my minidisk recorder, the kind used for interviews, and turned it on. “Peter, I’ve followed everything you’ve said, and it’s been helpful. But, I was wondering if you could boil it down? Give me something I can put in an article. We can use your name, or not. It’s your choice.”

“The substance you brought me cannot be studied, at least by my equipment. The results of all the tests I tried to run fluctuated wildly and for no particular reason I can determine. No set of data was ever duplicated, and I mean, not a single datum. It’s almost like I created each datum

merely by looking for it, and it generated itself randomly. You've found something that perhaps illustrates either hitherto unknown subatomic or atomic forces. I can guess about how that is, like saying maybe science needs to rethink the uncertainty principle, what consciousness is, and how it interacts with matter. Or whether we're living in a dream world. All I really know is my life just changed."

"Sounds like we'll be famous."

"Famous? Sure, if that's what you want. Does this really do what you said it does?"

"I sure hope so," I said. "Do every test and analysis you can. Please."

"Sure."

"Good. If there's anything I can do to help, call."

"I could use more of the substance."

"You need more?"

"As much as you can get, yeah. Study requires samples and independent verification. Also, if you can find out how to make it. That's important."

"That's a big ask. But, I'll do what I can. I'll be in touch."

"Good luck," he said.

Outside, I felt like singing for joy. I was about to break the story that a new drug—some kind of religious, farcical experience—was on the streets of Manhattan, that this drug violated subatomic principles—or stretched them or something—and that it would spark a scientific revolution, proving... what? I wasn't sure.

I felt a wave of doubt. I stood there, in the street, watching people walk by, looking up at the skyline. I pulled out my phone, and I called Justine.

Justine told me she was lying on the sofa, watching a movie. Something in the manner of her voice made me able to imagine, vividly, her heavy eyes as we spoke. I shrugged it off, and tried not to think about the fabric of reality.