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**AUTHOR'S AGENT**

Susan Schulman  
A Literary Agency  
454 W.44<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York, NY 10036  
Tel 212 713-1633  
Fax 212 581-8830  
Schulman@aol.com

**THE HYPNOTIST**

by

Allan Havis

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## CHARACTERS

**Larry Wexler**..... .55 years old, lean, laconic psychologist & hypnotist  
**Mimi Hadley**..... neurotic, 45 years old, Wexler's newest patient, sunglasses  
**Richard Hoisington**..... .60 years old, agent for the National Security Agency  
**Bruce Dykstra** ..... late 50s, extroverted, narcissistic, glasses & moustache  
**Roxie** ..... .British, sexy, 40s, a lot of wild blonde hair  
**Sally**..... New Yorker, attractive 40s, scarf around her brown hair  
**Madeline Cohen** .....attractive redhead, 40 years old, Wexler's patient  
**Lexie Wexler** .....Wexler's 21 year old daughter, and college student

## PRODUCTION NOTE - DOUBLING CASTING ASSIGNMENTS

### A play for five actors

The same actor with a modicum of differentials should play both Hoisington & Dykstra.  
 The same actor with a modicum of differentials should play both Mimi Hadley & Roxie  
 The same actor with a modicum of differentials should play both Sally & Madeline Cohen

## SETTING

A professional office in Baltimore, showing a waiting room and a connecting room for hypnotherapy. The décor is spare, tasteful and lighting frequently subdued.

**The time is the present year mid spring**

## SCENE ONE

**(The hypnotist office in Baltimore with leather furniture, wood table sporting flowers in a vase, watercolor landscapes on the wall, perhaps an aquarium off to the side.)**

WEXLER

Good afternoon. May I take your coat? Looks like a lot of rain today.

(He does)

Did you use the garage?

HADLEY

Yes.

WEXLER

Remind me to validate your ticket before we end the session.

HADLEY

What if I forget?

WEXLER

Then I'll remind you.

HADLEY

There is a heavysset man hanging outside your office entrance.

WEXLER

Oh, really?

HADLEY

Extremely heavy. Like a sumo wrestler in moth bitten, cardigan sweater.

WEXLER

I'll walk out with you at the end of our session.

HADLEY

Thank you. I'd appreciate an escort to my car.

WEXLER

Certainly. Either my receptionist or I will go with you.

(Pause)

We are scheduled for an hour according to Jasmine. And I thank you for filling out a very

detailed questionnaire.

HADLEY

She doesn't look like a Jasmine.

WEXLER

I gave her that nickname. Her legal name is Ruth. Do you prefer Ruth?

HADLEY

Too biblical.

(Awkward silence)

An hour?

WEXLER

Yes. Up to an hour. Depending on today's success.

HADLEY

That is too much, Doctor. We need space to find intimate time.

WEXLER

That's a lovely way to phrase a complex thought.

HADLEY

Are you flirting with me?

WEXLER

Not at all.

HADLEY

You're blushing.

WEXLER

No, it's just that the A/C isn't working today.

(Trying to double back on his train of thought)

I would have said we need time . . . to find intimate space.

(Her cell phone rings and she looks to see the caller's ID)

I'm just playing with words.

(Pause. She gives him a stern look)

HADLEY

I have to take the call. Do you mind leaving the room?

(Wexler frowns quietly as Hadley puts the phone back into her purse)

I'm not rude, Doctor. My sister's rude. I'm just direct.

WEXLER

I admire direct people.

HADLEY

No you don't. I don't think you admire many people. Or do you?

(Pause)

Do you prefer Michelle Obama to Laura Bush? Or Laura Bush to Hillary Clinton? Do you like First Ladies or delinquent ladies?

WEXLER

That's amusing.

HADLEY

Of the three ladies, which one had the most dismal sexual life in the White House?

WEXLER

I really don't know.

HADLEY

You mean you don't care?

WEXLER

I don't care.

HADLEY

Sexual pleasure is supposed to increase with age – for women who lie about their age.

WEXLER

Good to know, Mrs. Hadley. Are you nervous? Uncomfortable?

HADLEY

I was. Not now. Are you uncomfortable?

WEXLER

I'm uncomfortable when people wear sunglasses indoors.

HADLEY

Dear Jesus, I didn't know they were still on.

(Takes sunglasses off)

WEXLER

You've had therapy before.

HADLEY

I think that's very private information.

WEXLER

That's what Dr. Northrop told me.

HADLEY

Dr. Northrop?

WEXLER

Yes, Dr. Eugene Northrop.

HADLEY

Oh shit. You talked to him?

WEXLER

I did. He made the referral.

HADLEY

I'm not here for therapy. That's ludicrous.

WEXLER

Why is that ludicrous?

HADLEY

I'm here for hypnosis.

WEXLER

Hypnosis is therapy, Mrs. Hadley.

HADLEY

Not for weight loss. Please call me Mimi. That's what my hairdresser calls me.

WEXLER

You're not here for weight loss, Mimi. But we can address that issue too.

(Looks over his clipboard quite casually)

Was my assistant mistaken?

HADLEY

I never spoke to your assistant.

(She removes her sunglasses and shows a bruised left eye)

WEXLER

You have an addiction.

HADLEY

I have an *infliction*. Eugene told me *you* have an *addiction*.

WEXLER

Dr. Northrop said no such thing.

(Turning on a lamp)

It won't help if we are contentious, Mrs. Hadley.

HADLEY

I agree.

(Pause)

Why don't you display your college diploma? All I see are these inane watercolors.

WEXLER

My diplomas are behind my desk in the next room.

HADLEY

Didn't you go to Yale?

WEXLER

Yes.

HADLEY

So did my husband. He knows you.

WEXLER

I don't know your husband.

HADLEY

Neither do I. Isn't that tragic?

WEXLER

What is his name?

HADLEY

Oscar Hadley. Calhoun College at Yale. He said you're Jonathan Edwards.

WEXLER

That's right. I don't remember Oscar Hadley.

HADLEY

Calhoun was a slave owner. What's wrong with Yale, Dr. Wexler?

WEXLER

Mrs. Hadley . . .

HADLEY

Oscar Witherspoon. Oscar's birth name was Witherspoon but he's taken his mother's

maiden name after Oscar was written out of the family will. Oscar has a prosthesis leg.

WEXLER

Yes, I think recall Oscar Witherspoon.

HADLEY

Oscar's a good man, all in all. 23 years of marriage. Oscar runs a successful investment firm. But he lost all interest in sex. What are hedge funds and are they legal?

(Pause)

I guess you never attend Yale reunions? You can fly to Hartford and take a shuttle.

(Pause)

What sort of hypno-physician are you, Dr. Wexler?

WEXLER

I'm a serious therapist, Mrs. Hadley and I don't come with your health plan.

HADLEY

Well, that means we have to do three quick sessions and be done.

(Laughing at her throwaway joke.)

I saw a movie on Netflix yesterday where a grandfather forces his grandson to shoot a squirrel.

WEXLER

An unpleasant image.

HADLEY

Exactly. It's on my mind all day. I think Donald Sutherland played the grandfather. That old actor with the eyebrows. Always playing weird monsters while smiling like a Nordstrom's shoe salesman.

WEXLER

It's time we get started please. Dr. Northrop emailed me your medical records. You're an alcoholic with some damage to your liver, Mrs. Hadley. He writes that you occasional black out and you have a DUI on your license. Can we please identify what we are focusing on?

HADLEY

Yes, that is so true. We must focus.

WEXLER

You're here in my office to stem this dependency and also work on your driver's responsibility. After all, you put others on the road at risk.

HADLEY

I do. You're so right. And I'm acting like a teenager. But really, without dependency we

all die.

WEXLER

That's not true . . . and it's a bald rationalization.

(Pause)

Why are you really here?

HADLEY

My attorney said I should see you to fix everything that is wrong.

WEXLER

Is that right?

HADLEY

He's not your typical lawyer. Far from it. He doesn't have business cards.

WEXLER

Have you ever been under hypnosis before?

HADLEY

Yes, once. At a Las Vegas hotel. He was an entertainer with a cape and I volunteered. He had me walk like a duck and I think my sleeveless evening gown was removed at the MGM Grand Hotel.

(Laughing)

My husband has the video on his cell phone.

WEXLER

Yes, well, I'm not a Vegas entertainer and that form of hypnosis is not reputable.

HADLEY

You look like a hotel entertainer.

WEXLER

(Adjusting room lighting for a softer atmosphere)

Hypnotherapy has been shown to be more successfully experienced by people with a particular porous personality type.

HADLEY

Porous?

WEXLER

What happened to your eye, if I may ask?

HADLEY

I walked into a revolving door.

WEXLER

I don't believe you.

HADLEY

I'm not paying you to believe me, Dr. Wexler.

WEXLER

I can only treat you if you find your honesty, Mrs. Hadley.

HADLEY

I make you angry.

WEXLER

Yes. But we need to accomplish something today.

HADLEY

Okay. I'm all honesty.

WEXLER

If you've a trance-friendly personality then we can move forward. Alcohol dependency tends to help this treatment, but you must respect the process. Relaxation can help access your unconscious mind so as to find the root cause of your addiction.

HADLEY

Of course.

WEXLER

Using hypnosis to examine your lifestyle . . .

HADLEY

My lifestyle?

WEXLER

Lifestyle . . with better coping strategies free of alcohol.

HADLEY

And my speeding habit. I drive my Porsche like a nuclear missile  
(Making a noise sounding like Zoom, Zoom, Zoom)

WEXLER

One malady at a time, Mrs. Hadley.

HADLEY

You must call me Mimi or I'll cry. Any more points on my license and off to Maryland

Correctional. I've seen my share of women's prison films.

(Wexley takes out from his desk a novelty prop – the five suspended metal balls in a tight row)

WEXLEY

This is Newton's Cradle. Science classes love playing with this. Great demonstration of transferred motion. Now no more talking please.

(He sets one ball in motion which hits the other four balls)

HADLEY

Oh what fun.

WEXLEY

(His finger to his lips, shushing her softly)  
Sit back in your chair, Mrs. Hadley. I'm going to count to ten. Then I want you to count from ten backwards to one.

(Pause)

One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Seven. Eight. Nine. Ten.

HADLEY

Ten. Nine. Eight. Seven. Six. Five. Four. Three. Two. One.

WEXLEY

Keep watching the swinging balls.  
Watching all the balls at once.  
Keep watching please.  
It is pleasant and restful.  
The speed never changes.  
You like the sound of my voice.

Your breathing never changes.  
Everything is so even.  
Keep watching the movement.  
Watching each silver ball.  
So restful and pleasant.  
The speed never changes.  
Your breathing never changes.  
Everything is so relaxing.  
Good. Wonderful.  
So good.

(He lowers his open palm just under her eyes)

You are very relaxed and the chair is like a cloud.  
 You are feeling wonderful.  
 Life is beautiful.  
 Everything is lighter than a balloon.  
 The balls go freely.  
 Like planets and heavenly spheres.  
 Mrs. Hadley.  
 There is no speed.  
 There is no velocity.  
 There is no rushing.  
 Your eyelids are heavy  
 Close your eyes.

(She closes her eyes)

Your eyes are heavy.  
 Cup your eyes with your hands.  
 Go ahead.  
 You'll feel better.

(She cups her eyes)

Mrs. Hadley.  
 Mimi.  
 Please know.  
 I care about you greatly.  
 Your Porsche doesn't race.  
 Your car wants to cruise.  
 You want to be safe.  
 You want to enjoy  
 Without speed.  
 All the scenery  
 All the landscape  
 All the memories  
 When you drive  
 Your Porsche

HADLEY

It's a red Porsche.

WEXLER

Your red Porsche.

HADLEY

Tomato red. Convertible.

WEXLER

The last thing  
You ever want to do  
Is to speed like a demon.  
Say that you want to behave better.

(From behind her chair, he puts his hands over her hands.)

HADLEY

I want to behave better.

WEXLER

Yes.

HADLEY

I know I should behave better.

WEXLER

Yes.

HADLEY

God will punish me if I don't behave better.

WEXLER

God will not punish you.

HADLEY

God strikes me with a branch.

WEXLER

Not anymore. From this day forward.

This I do swear.

(Pause)

Why do you feel bad about yourself?

(Pause)

Tell me.

HADLEY

I'm jealous of everyone. Rich, beautiful, aloof.

(Pause)

I like cocaine, champagne and sex. I really like cocaine.

WEXLER

Cocaine will kill you, Mimi.

HADLEY

Cocaine . . . is my friend.

WEXLER

Cocaine will kill you.  
Oh yes it will.  
I'm serious Mimi.  
I'm deadly serious.  
Do you understand?

WEXLER

Yes.

WEXLER

Together, alcohol and cocaine will kill you.  
It's time to stop.  
Today.  
You can stop. You will stop.  
That's the time, Mimi. Today you will stop.  
Cocaine and alcohol are not natural.  
I'm going to put on some music.  
Mozart. A sonata.  
The music will cleanse you.  
After you hear the music, Mimi.  
When the room is totally quiet.  
You will have stopped hating yourself.  
You will begin to love yourself.  
And loving yourself means  
No more cocaine.  
No more alcohol.  
No more poison, Mimi.

(She takes a deep breath. Wexler puts on a recording of a Mozart sonata)

End of Scene

## SCENE TWO

### Lecture at the Lennox Society of New York.

#### WEXLER

Dr. Herbert Spiegel, who died in 2009 was a psychiatrist and a great advocate in the field of hypnosis. For a brief period he was my mentor. Famous actors sought him out to reduce their stage fright. Spiegel held a regular table at Elaine's restaurant in Manhattan adjacent to the Woody Allen table. Spiegel once said: "We're in debt to the quacks for keeping hypnosis alive until the medical community started to investigate what a useful tool hypnotism is."

(Pause)

This was a generous thing to say. Spiegel had grouped people into three categories according on "hypnotizability" and ranked them. Lowest scores are "Apollonians." Apollonians are not responsive to hypnosis or make very poor subjects. They're rational, guarded, and inhibited; they won't suspend critical judgment and are not trusting. I was married to one.

At the other end are the "Dionysians." These individuals are trusting, imaginative, and creative. They are ruled by the heart and make truly superb hypnosis candidates. Some Dionysians can slip spontaneously into a "trance" state. Hence, highly excitable and easy to inspire.

(Pause)

In the middle are the "Odysseans," who make acceptable hypnosis subjects. They swing between head and heart.

(Pause)

To be candid with you tonight, I type myself as Dionysian. At least that's what Dr. Spiegel thought.

## SCENE THREE

**The hypnotist office, later that week. Wexler enters his office waiting area, having gone to the restroom, and sees a man waiting on the couch.**

HOISINGTON

Dr. Wexler?

(Pause)

It's such a pleasure to meet you. I called yesterday. Did you not get the message? My name is Richard Hoisington.

WEXLER

My receptionist has been ill the last two days.

HOISINGTON

I'm sorry. Do you have a few minutes this morning?

WEXLER

For a consultation?

HOISINGTON

Yes. I'm very compulsive.

WEXLER

Did someone make a referral?

HOISINGTON

Yes.

WEXLER

(looks at his watch)

I have a few minutes.

HOISINGTON

That's fine.

WEXLER

Who referred you?

HOISINGTON

Dr. Barbara Goldman. An eminent psychologist.

WEXLER

I don't think I know Dr. Goldman.

HOISINGTON

She's with the Federal Government.

WEXLER

Oh?

HOISINGTON

I'm with the NSA.

(hands him a card)

The National Security Agency.

WEXLER

Do you have badge or a photo ID?

HOISINGTON

(Wane smile, shows a badge)

Please don't feel awkward. The NSA needs your support. If you would be willing to help us, consider our gratitude.

WEXLER

How can I help you?

HOISINGTON

(Ever so sweetly, understated, smooth)

I know that you see yourself as a patriot. Can you please lock your waiting room door? This is a sensitive conversation.

(Reluctantly, Wexler goes to door and locks it)

You have a patient - who works for the NSA.

WEXLER

Not to my knowledge, Mr. Hoisington.

HOISINGTON

Well, naturally, she wouldn't be telling you who her employer is. That would be a breach.

(He takes out a small photo from his suit jacket)

She has been with the agency for seven years and has high clearance. She was once my supervisor and mentor.

WEXLER

I'm very uncomfortable with this.

HOISINGTON

Dr. Wexler. We believe that she might have given some sensitive files to WikiLeaks or another overseas venue. The internet is an open sewer. Nothing has been made public just yet.

(His cell phone has a text message and is distracted for a moment)

How do we know this? We know. We always know. Only three people have access to these files. I am one of the three. The other agent who had access died after a bout with cancer prior to the leak. Your patient is the remaining agent. The likelihood is strong that she is the leaking agent.

WEXLER

I don't think I can help you. My patients are protected by medical confidentiality laws.

HOISINGTON

Yes, HIPAA compliance. But the courts love to step in when needed.

(Pause)

We can have you meet with our team in Fort Meade if you prefer. I'll drive you there and buy you lunch along the way..

WEXLER

No. I'm not going to Fort Meade with you.

(Pause)

May I please ask you to leave?

HOISINGTON

Her name she gave your office is Madeline Cohen. She's been your patient for six months.

(Shows the photo of his patient)

WEXLER

I don't want to know anything more.

HOISINGTON

She told you that she works for Merrill Lynch Brokerage. That's not true. Maybe she worked for Merrill Lynch twelve years ago, but . . .

WEXLER

(Unlocking and opening the door to signal him to leave)

I've another appointment in a few minutes, Mr. Hoisington.

HOISINGTON

She's Jewish. Legally separated or nearly divorced. Has a teenage son Jonah. I went to his Bar Mitzvah. She's trying to quit smoking and trying to lose weight. Maybe you find her attractive? I certainly do.

WEXLER

Do you have a subpoena?

(Pause)

Must I lodge a formal complaint, Mr. Hoisington?

HOISINGTON

Why would you bother?

WEXLER

Because this is clearly harassment.

HOISINGTON

I'm not harassing you, Dr. Wexler. All I am asking for is your cooperation in this investigation. You might be able to even protect Madeline from serious harm. You needn't act like a spy to engage in this request. Just be a Good Samaritan. I know you are. I've talked to Mrs. Hadley about you.

WEXLER

Mrs. Hadley?

HOISINGTON

Yes. Mimi and I go to the same Methodist church. I know her for several years. She's so funny and unpredictable.

WEXLER

You really have to leave my office.

HOISINGTON

Doctor, Madeline Cohen might embarrass our government and perhaps endanger the lives of several agents. We cannot make an intervention until we know if she has released files. If you help us, we avoid overstepping.

WEXLER

No.

HOISINGTON

Take my card. Put it in a safe place. Use it when the right moment happens.

(He puts the card into Wexler's hand)

You built a very impressive therapeutic practice. It would be ruinous to see it fail.

WEXLER

Is that a threat?

HOISINGTON

Not at all.

WEXLER

(Opens door all the way)

This visit never happened, Mr. Hoisington. Or I'll contact my attorney.

End of Scene

**SCENE THREE**

**The hypnotist office, the next day. Coming in from the street, Wexler enters his office waiting area and sees a woman waiting on the coach. It is Madeline Cohen.**

COHEN

Good morning.

WEXLER

Good morning, Madeline.

COHEN

I had my first uninterrupted sleep in five years.

WEXLER

Wonderful new.

COHEN

I know. I feel so much better.

(Pause)

Am I here early?

WEXLER

No, I'm late. Caught in traffic.

COHEN

Bad accident right off I-95.

WEXLER

Yeah, I heard on the radio.

COHEN

I haven't had a cigarette in two weeks, Dr. Wexler.

WEXLER

That's great, Madeline.

COHEN

No electric cigarette either. No nicotine patch.

WEXLER

Outstanding.

COHEN

I've cravings particularly at social occasions.

WEXLER

We have to accept little victories.

COHEN

Yes.

WEXLER

I tell my daughter that all the time.

COHEN

How is she doing?

WEXLER

Quite well. Lexi's at Bennington. Senior year.

COHEN

Vermont is ideal for students. Get them out of the city.

WEXLER

Snow.

COHEN

Snow is good.

WEXLER

My ex-wife didn't agree but in the end this was a good decision.

COHEN

I didn't know you were divorced.

WEXLER

I thought I told you before.

COHEN

You still wear your wedding ring.

WEXLER

I put on weight and it won't come off.

COHEN

Have you tried soap and water?

WEXLER

Every day.

COHEN

A jeweler can saw it off, you know. It's not dangerous, Dr. Wexler. You still have nine fingers. You look like Robert De Niro, did anyone ever tell you?

(She smiles warmly)

WEXLER

Let's go into the other room and get started.

(They cross through a door as we see the office in sectional view. Cohen sits in the comfortable lounge chair. Wexler dims the lights and then lights a candle)

COHEN

A scented candle helps.

WEXLER

Sandalwood. Your favorite?

COHEN

Yes.

WEXLER

Getting comfortable takes practice.

COHEN

I dreamt last night that the world was shrinking into a small ball - the oceans had turned . . . a fiery red. Like the Rapture. And there was Jesus returning to earth. His robe was stained and his hair unwashed, matted like a Rastafarian. He moved like a dancer and he reached out to others like they were blind and deaf. I dreamt that I should just die. But someone blamed me for the idea. Can I keep going?

WEXLER

Yes. This might help you relax.

COHEN

I had to know my inner mind. My true heritage. I cried so hard that my pillow was drenched. I never understood Jesus. I had been taught to be skeptical. Christ never lived. What kind of Jew was He? What kind of Jew am I?

(Pause)

The dumbest questions filled my empty head in the middle of my dream. And my tears kept coming. And when Jesus approached me he had a lit cigarette. His lips were quivering but the cigarette was secure between his yellow teeth. The Son of God with an unfiltered

cigarette. When will it end?

WEXLER

When will what end?

COHEN

Things we fear?

WEXLER

I wish I knew.

COHEN

I hate being a stock broker, Dr. Wexler. I'm no better than a money changer.

WEXLER

Our world needs money changers.

COHEN

Oh, that's just bull shit.

WEXLER

Okay it sounds like bull shit.

COHEN

The economy is so rigged. We manipulate stock and bond prices. Pension plans are misused.

WEXLER

Still, we have a free market, sins and all.

COHEN

What do you tell your daughter?

WEXLER

About what?

COHEN

About the dirty side of money.

WEXLER

I tell her we need health. We need love. And we need money.

COHEN

Does your daughter love you?

WEXLER

Yes. I think so.

COHEN

Then you're luckier than me.

WEXLER

Maybe I am. Maybe not. Maybe we should try for quiet now.

(He dims the lights and silence fills the room)

Let's begin with the Newton's Cradle. I think we're talking too much.

COHEN

(Sweet smile)

Silence is golden.

WEXLER

Let's count numbers, Madeline, okay? Sit back in your chair. I want you to count from ten backwards to one.

(Pause)

Whenever you're ready

COHEN

Ten. Nine. Eight. Seven. Six. Five. Four. Three. Two. One.

WEXLEY

Keep watching the swinging balls.

All the metal balls at once.

It is pleasant and restful to watch.

The speed never changes.

MADELINE

(Her voice has changed in softness)

The speed never changes.

WEXLER

Your breathing never changes.

Everything is so relaxing.

Good. Wonderful. Soft.

So good. So calm. Perfect.

(He lowers his open palm just under her eyes)

You are very relaxed and the chair is like a cloud.

You are feeling wonderful.

Everything is lighter than a cloud.

The balls go freely.  
 Like planets and heavenly spheres.  
 Madeline. All is well.  
 There is no speed.  
 There is no velocity.  
 There is no rushing.  
 Your eyelids are heavy  
 Close your eyes. Rest.

(She closes her eyes)

Your eyes are heavy.  
 Time to  
 Cup your eyes  
 You'll feel better.

(he cups her eyes)

Madeline.  
 Your Mother doesn't smoke  
 You told me that many times  
 That's why you liked to smoke  
 You want to be free  
 You want to enjoy  
 Step out  
 Forget time  
 All the pleasurable nights  
 All the working days  
 The smoke in your mouth  
 Is utter poison  
 Bitter tasting, nauseating  
 Poison kills slowly  
 But it kills eventually  
 You live for your son  
 No more cigarettes  
 No more matches  
 You want to stay high on your cloud  
 The softest cloud in the bluest of skies  
 From this day forward  
 You will stay a non-smoker  
 Nod if you understand me.  
 Nod if you agree.

(She lowers her head and nods. We hear Mozart without seeing Wexler play the sound equipment to start the music. Wexler brightens the lamp on the dimmer switch. He studies

Madeline's face intently. He could very well be in love with her. He moves a few hairs from her forehead and eyes. She seems not to notice what he's doing.)

WEXLER

I am going to ask you to wake up.  
When you awake you'll feel wonderfully refreshed.  
You'll feel like you had a wonderful cruise.  
Your body will feel light and at ease.  
You'll sense that you are very successful.  
In everything that you do.  
In every promise that you made.  
You deserve this good feeling.

(Pause)

I'm going to count to three  
When I'm done  
you will open your eyes.  
One. Two. Three.

(She opens her eyes and smiles)

COHEN

I think I love you, Dr. Wexler.

**End of Scene**

## SCENE FOUR

### **Lecture at the Lennox Society of New York.**

WEXLER

Dr. Spiegel has linked one's ability to roll his eyes upward as another indicator of hypnotizability. The quality of thirst is also interesting to notice under the realm of hypnosis. Further, tactile sensations approach a dimension outside of normalcy.

(Pause)

Beyond the possibilities for misuse and danger, lies the question of the ethics using the trance as a healing tool. Will a person become dependent without the continued use of this non-prescription therapy? Will a person addictively seek this "curious" state of consciousness? Is hypnotherapy a virtual drug without end?

**End of Scene**

## SCENE FIVE

**(A small weekend party at Wexler's friend Bruce Dykstra's apartment - with Roxie who is British and Sally who is a lifelong New Yorker)**

DYKSTRA

So this woman who I might have slept with five years ago starts to text me several times a day and I try to ignore the basic message.

ROXIE

Is there any more vodka, Bruce?

DYKSTRA

No. There's gin.

SALLY

Texting you? You never text anyone.

DYKSTRA

I did care for her. She was very diminutive and childlike.

SALLY

You got carpal tunnel.

DYKSTRA

I felt like her father or her estate attorney.

SALLY

You don't even know how to send a fucking text, Bruce.

DYKSTRA

It was very hard to get into bed with her or to shower with her. Very large hips and breasts. She always sang Lauren Hill hip hop.

ROXIE

Lauren Hill is so 1999.

SALLY

That's when I last had an orgasm.

ROXIE

Can't you keep any secrets, Sally?

SALLY

Secrets make me promiscuous.

DYKSTRA

(Downing a drink)

That's why I don't remember anything sexual but she swears we made love a dozen times. Wouldn't you remember if you slept with someone a dozen times?

ROXIE

If there isn't any bloody vodka, Bruce, don't you think you should go to the corner store and be a good host?

SALLY

Did Larry fix you two up?

DYKSTRA

I think he did.

SALLY

He's a great matchmaker. Right, Larry?

WEXLER

I don't match friends up.

SALLY

You introduced me to that Pilates trainer.

WEXLER

Did I?

SALLY

You sent us a group email as an introduction. He was bi-sexual.

WEXLER

(giving some ground)  
And bi-lingual.

SALLY

A liberal Democrat.

ROXIE

You know I gave up on liberal Democrats ten years ago, cupcake.

DYKSTRA

So I slipped her the apartment key one weekend when I was out of town. And that is something I never ever do. After a month of ignoring her texts I went on another business trip and the little scamp sold all my furnishings on Craigslist.

ROXIE

Larry, how is your daughter at Bennington?

WEXLER

Straight A's so far. She has a nice boyfriend too.

DYKSTRA

Did I tell you this story before?

SALLY

No but I think it would make a great comic opera.

ROXIE

There are no more comic operas, Sally.

SALLY

I didn't know your daughter goes to Bennington. Isn't it a hippie college?

DYKSTRA

Hot tub seminars and graphic novels by candle light?

ROXIE

Big tuition, classroom without walls, and no transcripts.

DYKSTRA

Nineteen year old nymphs massaging the feet of their acting teachers during summer barn rehearsals.

ROXIE

Bennington doesn't give letter grades

WEXLER

Students can choose to get grading or written narratives from their instructors.

SALLY

That's why I'm struggling in my life, I never got a written narrative.

DYKSTRA

Aren't you embarrassed that our country wiretaps European heads of state?

ROXIE

Hell, fucking Brexit was caused by bloody British politicians.

WEXLER

It's a mess, Roxie.

DYKSTRA

Still, our country's snooping looks so evil.

ROXIE

We do so to protect the Middle East.

DYKSTRA

How do we protect the Middle East, Roxie?

ROXIE

By eavesdropping the next ISIS plan.

(Kissing Wesler's check)

Right, Larry?

WEXLER

I don't know.

ROXIE

We listen to conversations like jealous lovers.

SALLY

You say that because you tend to get very jealous.

ROXIE

Me?

SALLY

You, darling.

DYKSTRA

Loved the Quixotic journey by Edward Snowden . . . from Hawaii to Hong Kong, then straight into the loving arms of Moscow.

ROXIE

You don't think he's a hero?

DYKSTRA

I think he's a schmuck.

ROXIE

He's the boy who didn't cry wolf.

SALLY

Well maybe he did cry wolf.

DYKSTRA

Who is the wolf?

WEXLER

Our government.

DYKSTRA

You don't like Big Brother?

WEXLER

I had a snoop from the NSA visit this week.

SALLY

Really?

WEXLER

Asking about one of my patients.

SALLY

Wow.

DYKSTRA

Fuck it. I support the NSA.

ROXIE

When did you get to be so goddamn right wing?

DYKSTRA

When it took forever for the IRS to pull ACORN's tax status.

(Noticing that ACORN reference is missing others)  
Snowden could have been discreet.

WEXLER

Discreet?

DYKSTRA

He's playing for headlines and got what he wanted. Fame. Royalties. An Oscar awarded documentary and an Oliver Stone movie. Got his girlfriend to live in Russia.

SALLY

Headlines give you so much and so little.

DYKSTRA

He could have gone to Ecuador. Stayed closer to his time zone?

ROXIE

Moscow has such gentle winters.

(Pause)  
Who else needs a drink while I'm pouring?

DYKSTRA

*Moi.*

ROXIE

Larry, aren't you drinking tonight?

WEXLER

No. I've a long drive.

DYKSTRA

Your fabulous country home?

WEXLER

Yes.

DYKSTRA

Alone? Why not invite Roxie?

WEXLER

I'm not her type.

ROXIE

Says who? You once loved Britain.

SALLY

This was an informal blind date tonight, Larry. How thick are you?

WEXLER

I'm not dating these days.

ROXIE

(laughing)  
It certainly shows.

WEXLER

Thank you.

DYKSTRA

You survived your divorce with great dignity, Larry.

SALLY

If you were a Broadway actor, you'd get a Tony.

ROXIE

Larry . . . you have to have some libations.

WEXLER

When I drink, it impacts my work on Monday.

ROXIE

Nonsense, Dr. Wexler.

WEXLER

Am I the target tonight?

DYKSTRA

That's right.

ROXIE

The man with the swinging hocus pocus pocket watch.

SALLY

Larry helped me with my kleptomania last year. Give him a break.

ROXIE

You're pulling my leg.

SALLY

I was arrested for shoplifting. Barnes and Noble. Larry saved me. Now I use the library.

ROXIE

A hero in our midst?

SALLY

He treated me with a few hypnosis sessions.

DYKSTRA

Very impressive, Larry.

ROXIE

Would you do me next? I'm serious.

WEXLER

Come to my office, Roxie.

ROXIE

Give me a taste tonight, would you please?

WEXLER

Treatment is not party entertainment.

DYKSTRA

I beg to differ.

SALLY

Why do you need treatment, Roxie?

ROXIE

Nymphomania.

DYKSTRA

Seriously.

WEXLER

You're all making this very uncomfortable.

DYKSTRA

Three years ago you put me under and it cured my sugar addiction. I didn't go to your office.

WEXLER

I should have known better.

DYKSTRA

You wouldn't bill me. You do things for free for your friends, Larry. Give her five minutes and we'll all be good citizens. I'll throw in Raven football tickets.

WEXLER

No hypnosis if others are watching.

DYKSTRA

Sally and I will leave the room.

SALLY

Now?

DYKSTRA

Yes.

SALLY

I want to watch.

DYKSTRA

It's like watching people have sex. Rude beyond words.  
(He grabs Sally's hand and they leave the room)

ROXIE

I feel like a teenager playing seven minutes in heaven.

WEXLER

Do you really need treatment?

ROXIE

I've a sexual problem. I lack judgment..

WEXLER

Have you been in therapy for this?

ROXIE

For about a year. I tried Sexual Anonymous meetings too.

WEXLER

How promiscuous are you?

ROXIE

Are you looking for numbers?

(Pause)

About fifty men a year.

WEXLER

One every weekend?

ROXIE

Yes and then a two week vacation. I'm serious, Larry. I'll try hypnosis. I don't know if it will make things worse.

WEXLER

It's better to do this in my office.

ROXIE

Please?

(warm smile)

Do you want me to lie down?

WEXLER

Just relax and sit up.

ROXIE

Like this?

WEXLER

Fine.

ROXIE

Do you have a prop?

WEXLER

I don't need a prop. We'll just focus on the candle. It wants your attention.

Let your mind fall onto a cloud.  
 A cloud of comfort, your hidden space,  
 Peace. You've earned gentle peace, Roxie.

(He moves a few inches closer to her)

Let's count numbers, Roxie, okay? Sit back in your chair. I'm going to count to ten. Then I want you to count from ten to one. Backwards.

(Pause)

One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Seven. Eight. Nine. Ten.

ROXIE

Ten. Nine. Eight. Seven. Six. Five. Four. Three. Two. One.

WEXLEY

Keep watching the candle  
 It is pleasant and restful to watch.  
 The flame never changes.

ROXIE

(Her voice has changed in speed and softness)

The flame never changes.

WEXLER

Your breathing never changes.  
 Everything is so relaxing.  
 Good. Wonderful.  
 So good.

**(Lights change to denote passage of time. Wexler is much further from her now)**

ROXIE

Oh, gosh. How long did I sleep?

WEXLER

About five or ten minutes.

ROXIE

Under hypnosis?

WEXLER

Yes.

ROXIE

And you watched me while I was under?

WEXLER  
Yes.

ROXIE  
I feel so energized.

WEXLER  
That's good.

ROXIE  
Where are Sally and Brucie?

WEXLER  
In the next room.

ROXIE  
You are good at this. I'm tingling.

WEXLER  
Would you like some water, Roxie?

ROXIE  
Yes, thank you.  
(He gets some water from the nearby bottle)  
I felt your inside. How is that possible?

WEXLER  
You felt guidance but it is your mind in control. If we have a few more sessions once a week, you'll have a good foundation.

ROXIE  
What does that mean exactly?

WEXLER  
You'll have better judgment about physical intimacy.

ROXIE  
Can I ask you something before they come back in?

WEXLER  
What?

ROXIE  
How did your son die?

WEXLER

Highway accident.

ROXIE

Were you with him?

WEXLER

No.

ROXIE

I'm so sorry, Larry. I know it wasn't that long ago.

(Pause)

Brucie said before you arrived that Adam had a mood disorder.

WEXLER

Very cruel of him to talk about Adam.

(Pause)

Four years ago.

ROXIE

Sally knew your son.

WEXLER

She hardly knew Adam. Please, let's change the subject

(Sally and Dykstra enter)

SALLY

I met Adam at the Service Dogs Celebration at the Hilton?

ROXIE

We're all making Larry very uncomfortable.

DYKSTRA

I'm sorry for your loss. Honest to God.

SALLY

Yes, Larry. Forgive me for bringing this up.

DYKSTRA

I haven't done any parenting in my life. Never coached little league. Never stayed up all night with a kid fighting a fever.

WEXLER

I have a daughter. I'm still a father.

DYKSTRA

And you donate time to the local children's hospital.

WEXLER

I should be going home.

ROXIE

Could you drive me home, Larry? Please?

WEXLER

Can't you catch a cab?

(Pause)

I don't know . . .

ROXIE

It's raining. Please.

WEXLER

I'll get my car and meet you by the door.

ROXIE

Thanks.

(Wexler exits with coat on)

SALLY

He's weirder than ever.

DYKSTRA

You sense it?

(Sally nods gently)

I feel terrible.

SALLY

Wasn't Larry on anti-depressants?

ROXIE

Did he forget his cell phone?

(Grabbing it from the coffee table, hands it to Roxie)

DYKSTRA

That must be his.

ROXIE

What happened to his son?

DYKSTRA

Adam was institutionalized after he was kicked out of high school. The boy had multiple personalities – like a male version of Sybil - and Larry found a special facility by the interstate about an hour from Baltimore. Larry visited every weekend but his marriage was falling apart. When he began to miss the regular visits, Adam had a meltdown. He broken a window and slid down from a rope of tied sheets. Adam tried to cross the interstate and was hit by a truck.

ROXIE

Oh Christ.

SALLY

At least Larry was dedicated to Adam. His wife's a bitch on wheels.

DYKSTRA

Yeah.

SALLY

So Larry tried to kill himself with pills.

DYKSTRA

His office assistant got to him in time.

SALLY

I don't think you really take in how bad this hit him.

DYSKTRA

I've been Larry's friend for 20 years.

(Larry's car horn)

I take care of my good friends.

ROXIE

It's time for me to go too. Goodnight.

DYKSTRA

Goodnight.

End of Scene

**SCENE SIX**

**A month later at a quiet restaurant. Wexler and Hoisington face each other awkwardly.**

HOISINGTON

The restaurant is brand new and has a three star review in the Baltimore Sun. Order anything on the menu.

(Pause)

I know many weeks have sailed by and I was hoping to get to you sooner than later. I had an illness. A skin condition similar to shingles. I'm better now, than you for asking.

(Pause)

Don't make me do all the talking. A glass of wine?

WEXLER

I told you never to call me.

HOISINGTON

I didn't think you really meant what you said.

WEXLER

Are you a clown?

HOISINGTON

No. No one at the NSA are clowns.

WEXLER

I answered everything in the last email. I told you there was some room for me to oblige your agency, but there are limits.

HOISINGTON

We have to focus, Dr. Wexler. There are indications that she duplicated an embargoed file over the weekend.

WEXLER

I will retain an attorney.

HOISINGTON

What good will that do?

WEXLER

You can't violate my practice and my personal life.

HOISINGTON

That's the furthest thing on mind. But really, you've violated your own practice, Dr. Wexler. You've brought in patients through inappropriate online methods. You were audited by the IRS three years in a row. You co-authored a journal article which turned out to be plagiarized. You know I'm not making any of these things up. And of course, you've had sexual relations with your patients.

WEXLER

What?

HOISINGTON

Are you really surprised?

WEXLER

You're out of your mind.

HOISINGTON

We have documentation. Sexual affairs. We have photos. Videos. A witness/victim. You'll lose your license to practice in Maryland and anywhere in this country.

WEXLER

Yes, I was audited for underreporting income and there was a contested issue with a journal article. But I was cleared in both instances.

HOISINGTON

Do you want names?

WEXLER

You have no names.

HOISINGTON

Mimi Hadley this year. Tanya Johansen two years ago. And a young girl Rhonda - barely

over 18 years old in 2012 who was still in high school. She has a several last names because of a paternity suit and you began treating her while she was a minor.

WEXLER

What the hell do you want?

HOISINGTON

I want Madeline Cohen.

WEXLER

Blackmail?

HOISINGTON

The NSA doesn't blackmail citizens.

WEXLER

But you just threatened to destroy my license to practice.

HOISINGTON

I just want to treat you to a nice lunch at my new favorite Baltimore restaurant.

WEXLER

Rhonda Garnett is a delusional girl. You can get her to say anything. She's clinically schizophrenic.

HOISINGTON

And Mimi Hadley? You continue to treat her.

WEXLER

She tried to kiss me after the second treatment.

HOISINGTON

Photos are unforgiving. They're on my iPhone.

(Pause. Places cell on table)

I'm only asking that you give me an hour over lunch . . . please don't lose your appetite. Clams are one of the many wonderful foods that ward off depression. Many analysts at the NSA are manic depressed.

WEXLER

I can't eat.

HOISINGTON

Is it warm in here? We could eat outside – there's a little patio in the back.

(Pause)

Madeline Cohen gave us a new viewpoint on what is upsetting her and this has helped NSA

process what is unfolding. What is unfolding, you ask? What is the issue? What are the stakes? How good are you at hypnosis?

WEXLER

What are the stakes?

HOISINGTON

They're very high. We think all that is needed is having Madeline find peace. What is troubling her at the root? And can you not give her solace, Dr. Wexler? She needn't take this any farther.

WEXLER

Are you now asking me to make her less angry?

HOISINGTON

I'm asking you many different things, Dr. Wexler. The odds are that she continues to copy classified data.

WEXLER

And you can't remove her from her post?

HOISINGTON

We can but that will be an aggressive action without justification. More to the point, the worry is that if it is indeed Madeline Cohen stealing files, she's not distributing to WikiLeaks or any other open source website. So this is less about a whistleblower and more about an agent for another nation. It's more dangerous for her. For us. And now for you.

(Pause)

Assuming that she's not responsible for duplicated files, her career can be protected and all is good. That's one powerful way how you can help her.

(Pause)

But for now, our hands are tied. You can ask her basic questions. While she is under hypnosis. You work on her cigarette habit and then move on to files. I can write the script, if need be.

WEXLER

And if she gives me no answer . . .

HOISINGTON

You won't know until you ask her. But if she unaware then we drop the matter.

WEXLER

And if she confronts me?

HOISINGTON

You are a hypnotist. She can think anything when she awakes.  
You tell her she was in a fantasy. This is your world.  
Your banter.

WEXLER

I don't think I can do this, Mr. Hoisington.

HOISINGTON

You can. You will. It will not be against your code of ethics. You're not forcing her to commit an action.

(Pause)

But if she confronts you – give her my name. Richard Hoisington. And then you dial my phone number. She will take my call. And you stay in your office until the call is concluded.

**End of Scene**

**SCENE SEVEN**

(The next day. Wexler and his daughter Lexi meet at a café. They are in mid-conversation as the scene starts)

LEXI

You lost weight.

WEXLER

Have I?

LEXI

You look gaunt, Dad.

WEXLER

I had a little intestinal flu – you know – that bug going around.

LEXI

You don't take care of yourself.

WEXLER

Actually I just joined a fitness club down the road.

LEXI

You hate exercise.

WEXLER

Less so now that I listen to my iPod. On the elliptical trainer and downloaded all of Kanye West.

LEXI

That's hysterical.

WEXLER

I like to wear canary yellow spandex there. I get noticed.

LEXI

The older I get, the more I see the boy inside you.

WEXLER

That's rather beautiful. I'm glad you decided to come down for the long weekend.

LEXI

I got an internship. I told you about it over the phone and now it's solid. It starts the second week of May and I can meet the team this weekend.

WEXLER

That's wonderful, pumpkin.

LEXI

It's with an environmental agency. Non-profit with good support from the Maryland Clean Air group.

WEXLER

What about the Vermont apartment?

LEXI

I'm subletting it for the summer.

WEXLER

You're cool with that?

LEXI

For a short time. Yeah.

WEXLER

So, you want your old bedroom?

LEXI

No, Dad. I'll move into the apartment with my boyfriend.

WEXLER

I thought it was over with Justin.

LEXI

It was just a brief . . .

WEXLER

Vacation from one another?

LEXI

You can say that. We're back again. He has a job at a website firm.

WEXLER

I'm happy to hear this.

LEXI

You don't seem happy.

WEXLER

You see it?

LEXI

I think so. Big issues?

WEXLER

Yeah, maybe.

LEXI

Mom?

WEXLER

Not Mom.

LEXI

Adam?

WEXLER

Not Adam. Business. The government.

LEXI

Tax trouble?

WEXLER

I wish.

LEXI

Let me help you.

WEXLER

Honey, I don't think you can make this any better.

LEXI

Put it on the table.

WEXLER

You were good about helping me before Lexi and this is not as bad as your brother's death.

LEXI

I'm not handling Adam's death well.

WEXLER

Neither am I. Neither is your mother. It's painful to think about but he suffered so much.

(Pause)

I might need to leave Baltimore.

LEXI

What?

WEXLER

My practice isn't thriving since his accident. There are other factors right now with my clientele. I could join Stanley's office in Seattle. And I like the West Coast.

LEXI

You're withholding something, Dad.

WEXLER

No, Lexi. Sometimes change is good.

(He sees something is wrong with Lex)

I shouldn't have said this much.

(She is about to cry)

What's wrong?

LEXI

I'm in trouble.

(Pause)

My lit professor - the chair of my honor's thesis. Roger Beaumont.

WEXLER

What about him?

LEXI

You met him, Dad.

WEXLER

Did I?

LEXI

You said he was a colossal asshole.

WEXLER

So?

LEXI

He got personal after Christmas – I thought it was my last semester at school. Beaumont apologized the next week. He's married with kids.

WEXLER

Wait, wait, wait a second. Are you saying you had an affair with Beaumont?

LEXI

Not an affair. It was just one evening.

He's older than me, for Christsakes . . .

LEXI

I can still report him to Bennington.

WEXLER

Oh, Lexi – please say this is a joke.

LEXI

It's not a joke. I'm just a little stupid some times.

WEXLER

Did you tell your Mother any of this?



WEXLER

It's crazy.

LEXI

I'm a human being and I'm capable of great stupidity.

(Pause)

It's not the end of the world.

(Wexler is speechless)

Dad?

(She strokes his eyebrow or cheek. He tries to smile)

Dad?

(She hugs him and he places his arms around her)

We're both in some trouble. Not to worry.

End of Scene

## SCENE EIGHT

**(Academic lecture at a medical society)**

WEXLER

Hypnosis Therapy – Can this treatment be dangerous?

(He shows Newton's Cradle as light catches the silver balls in motion)

Hypnosis can be abused. Individuals who submit themselves to the control of another for therapy or medical help run the risk of being manipulated. . If the therapist is unscrupulous, he or she may take advantage of an unsuspecting patient. The hypnotized patient is in a state of trust and suggestibility, which makes a human being quite vulnerable.

(Pause)

Our medical community remains fascinated by the creation of Sybil. Certainly the most famous patient of hypnosis in American society.

(Pause)

Fifty years ago, Dr. Herbert Spiegel saw “Sybil” - Shirley Mason - after Mason's therapist, Dr. Cornelia Wilbur asked Spiegel’s assistance - since schizophrenia was the primary diagnosis. Siegel examined Sybil and sensed that she was quite susceptible to hypnosis. He built a rapport with Sybil and became a surrogate therapist. The breakthrough happened with hypnosis. There was a running subconscious dialogue patient and doctor. The gist of the breakthrough occurred in one single exchange.

(Pause)

In one of Spiegel’s sessions, Sybil asked the doctor, "Well, do you want me to be Helen?" That is a fascinating key to the mystery of identity. Role playing, you see, unlocked the door to the illness. Language that was both true and fictional, unlocked the door to healing.

### **End of Scene**

### **SCENE NINE**

**(Wexler’s office, the next day. Madeline Cohen enters)**

COHEN

I sent you several emails. I hope that you don’t think I’m badgering you.

WEXLER

I only got one email, Madeline.

COHEN

Maybe I’m in your spam.

WEXLER

I’ll check later.

COHEN

I guess what I'm about to say is surprising but really you should be pleased.

(Pause)

This is my last session.

WEXLER

Why?

COHEN

Because I think I've accomplished my goals. And because I feel very dependent on you.

WEXLER

Well, even if you reached your goals, you're not dependent.

COHEN

Dr. Wexler, I have to leave Baltimore.

WEXLER

Really?

COHEN

Some pressing family issue.

WEXLER

I hope nothing is terribly wrong.

COHEN

My mother had a stroke. She is a widow. I'm an only child.

WEXLER

I'm so sorry. What about your work?

COHEN

There's a Merrill Lynch branch in Syracuse.

WEXLER

Well, that is convenient for you.

COHEN

Yes. I'm very lucky. I wish my luck would stay with me.

WEXLER

I know that mood.

COHEN

I feel very close to you, Dr. Wexler I have to say it, even if it distances you.

WEXLER

I feel close to you as well.

COHEN

Why do you seem jittery?

WEXLER

I couldn't sleep last night. I was thinking about you actually.

COHEN

Because you sensed I was terminating?

WEXLER

Probably.

COHEN

Do you place your hands on my shoulder when I go under?

WEXLER

Once.

COHEN

I recall that you did . . . once, Dr. Wexler.

WEXLER

We do best by words, and periods of silence. That is full suggestion.

COHEN

Could we try the session today without music?

WEXLER

Certainly.

COHEN

I think it will be symmetry. Balance. How we began. There was no music our first session. How we should end.

WEXLER

All right.

WEXLER

Yes. Good. Let's start. Close your eyes and we'll count ten numbers. Let's do this

silently today after I say three numbers. I'll count in my head and you will count in your head. Ten. Nine. Eight.

(Silence)

The air has spirit. It has personality. We forget this. We breathe in the universal. We orbit the sun. We forget this. We breathe in time. In unison. We all do this. We are never alone. Orbiting the sun. We know at night our eyelids get heavy. But we orbit the sun without any effort. We're traveling at great speed but we feel no momentum. Our legs sometimes get heavy. The planet is flying through space and we know that life is safe. Life will always be safe. Safe for our children. You enjoy this well-being and the gentle heaviness rising up. Your arms are pleasantly tired now. Your back and neck. Your mind floats like a water lily. You are feeling these wonderful sensations.

COHEN

(Slow and mellow)

Yes. Yes.

WEXLER

And there is movement from here to Syracuse. And this is as gentle as the circling around the sun. Summer and winter. Syracuse beckons you and your family. It's not a waterfront town like Baltimore but you will like New York State. And it will be good to continue your ban on smoking there just as you stopped smoking in Maryland. Can you say yes?

COHEN

Yes.

WEXLER

Madeline, have you quit smoking for good?

COHEN

I quit. For good.

WEXLER

For good. Completely.

(Pause)

And you are staying with Merrill Lynch?

COHEN

I have to say that. Yes.

WEXLER

You are a stock broker.

COHEN

I'm an analyst.

WEXLER  
What kind of analyst are you?

COHEN  
Big data.

WEXLER  
Are your feet still heavy, Madeline?

COHEN  
Yes.

WEXLER  
Are you still tired?

COHEN  
Yes.

WEXLER  
Do you like the NSA?

COHEN  
No.

WEXLER  
Do you know what the NSA is?

COHEN  
Yes.

WEXLER  
Does the NSA like you?

COHEN  
No.

WEXLER  
It's not a good fit, Madeline.

COHEN  
No. It's not.

WEXLER  
Maybe it's like cigarettes. Maybe it's time to quit.

COHEN  
Quit? Quit my job?

WEXLER  
Yes. Quit the NSA.

COHEN  
I can't quit.

WEXLER  
Are you in trouble, Madeline?  
(Silence)  
Madeline?  
(Pause)  
Are you in trouble at work?

COHEN  
I don't know. I might be. I might be. I hope not.  
(Pause)  
No. No. I'm going. I have to go. It's time to go.  
(She rises from her chair)

WEXLER  
Madeline, please sit down.

COHEN  
They have so many instruments.

WEXLER  
Yes.

COHEN  
My boss has all my passwords.

WEXLER  
At Merrill Lynch?

COHEN  
Where are my feet?

WEXLER  
Sit down, Madeline. I need to wake you please. Sit down. Please.

(She slowly sits)  
Sit into the upholstery. I need to talk to you.

(Pause)

I know that you're an analyst for the NSA.

(Paus)

Are you in compliance with the NSA?

(Pause)

Are you following protocol with the NSA?

(Pause)

Just say yes or no?

COHEN

Yes.

WEXLER

You broke no rule with the NSA?

COHEN

I broke no rule.

WEXLER

Good Madeline.

(Pause)

This is very good news. You should feel good about the news too.

(Pause)

When you awake you will feel light and free of any burden. You will feel rested. You will remember everything which we talked about. I need you to remember everything, Madeline. You can do that. This is important.

(Pause)

I need you to be awake.

COHEN

I am awake.

WEXLER

You awake after the count.

COHEN

(Seemingly in a trance, but now her eyes are open)

I am awake. I hear what you're saying.

WEXLER

What am I saying, Madeline?

COHEN

My job, my shitty job, it's total hell.

WEXLER

I was approached by your supervisor, Madeline.

COHEN

Who?

WEXLER

An NSA office came to my office, Madeline. I was pressured to get to you or lose my license. Do you understand what I'm saying?

COHEN

(She can't keep her eyes open and closes them)  
Yes, I understand.

WEXLER

Are you working for the NSA?

COHEN

Not any more.  
(She rises again and walks a few steps)

WEXLER

Do you know the risk we are facing?  
(Pause)  
Madeline?  
(She finds her way to the wall and leans against it)  
Sit down.  
(He walks towards her)  
Do you know the risks?

COHEN

I was married. It's hard on my son.

WEXLER

I'm talking about your work with the government

COHEN

You mean a lot to me. I told you . . . I love you.

WEXLER

You trust me and you confuse that with love, Madeline.

COHEN

I'm moving away because of you.

WEXLER

I'm not making you leave Baltimore.

(He leads her back to the chair)

I can say to the NSA that you told me nothing happened with security breaches.

COHEN

You're not to blame. It's my lifestyle.

(She sits down)

It's so hard to be a single mother.

WEXLER

It was Hoisington who came here, Madeline.

(She turns ashen. Her eyes close)

He gave me his phone number. Can I call him while you are here? Do I have your permission?

(Pause)

Madeline? I'm going to ask you to wake up. When I count to five, you will sit straight up in your chair and be fully awake. You will remember everything we talked about.

(He touches her forehead gently with his finger)

One. Two. Three. Four. Five.

(She adjusts her position. Her eyes widen)

Are you okay?

(Pause)

Madeline?

COHEN

I'm moving away because of you. Because of our affair.

WEXLER

What affair?

COHEN

My son found out. You left a message on our home phone.

WEXLER

What affair?

COHEN

My son's very attached to his father. I told you this before. He doesn't want me to date other men – for the time being.

WEXLER

Your son thinks we had an affair?

(Pause)

That's ludicrous.

COHEN

Larry, we spent several nights together. Maybe you think this is an ironic.

WEXLER

What? Honestly . . .

COHEN

Is this your way of controlling your vulnerability?

WEXLER

Madeline, we never saw each other outside of this office.

COHEN

When I met your friend Roxie, it didn't occur to me that you have a lot of problems.

(Pause)

Maybe you're in a terrible depression. I've met a lot of men like that. Still, you were so generous and magical with each session.

(Pause)

My ex was damaged by serving in the military and I understand when horrible things happen to a man. I feel for you. I know you'll never get over your son's death. I owe you so much and I can't seem to repay you. Leaving is easier.

(Wexler leans into his hands, covering his eyes. Totally confused)

WEXLER

None of this can be true.

COHEN

We have photos together, Larry. Look at your cell phone. Look.

(She shows him photos on her phone and he half turns away)

WEXLER

Madeline, I'm . . .

COHEN

You told me you loved me. You said I meant the world to you. You're a hypnotist, Larry. You're the magician with the calm, reassuring voice. You told me more than once that you would devote your life and all your being to me.

End of Scene

**SCENE TEN**

**(WITH HOISINGTON IN WEXLER'S OFFICE)**

HOISINGTON

Have you every hypnotized yourself, Dr. Wexler?

WEXLER

That's not possible.

HOISINGTON

No, actually it is possible. You can enter into a meditative state and plant your own seeds.

WEXLER

Did you Google that, Mr. Hoisington? Or did your team consult with the Surgeon General?

HOISINGTON

Maybe you do yoga?

WEXLER

Quit screwing with me.

(Pause)

She's moving to Syracuse end of the month.

HOISINGTON

I know.

WEXLER

That was a surprise.

HOISINGTON

Yes, it was.

WEXLER

Did you make that happen?

HOISINGTON

No. It was her choice. Horrible city. Syracuse. Snows all year.

WEXLER

Is she in great trouble?

HOISINGTON

Not yet. But we can't close the case.

WEXLER

I did ask her questions about the security leak.

HOISINGTON

I know.

WEXLER

How do you know?

HOISINGTON

We have surveillance, Dr. Wexler.

WEXLER

Then you know. She didn't steal anything. There is no leak. As far as I can tell, she's safe.

HOISINGTON

What if she lied to you?

WEXLER

You can't lie under hypnosis.

HOISINGTON

We think she's lying to you.

(Smiling)

What if she pretended to be under hypnosis?

WEXLER

That makes no sense. She always connects with each session. She stopped smoking.

HOISINGTON

I would feel so much better if you would tell me she **did admit** to copying the files. And her motive for copying.

WEXLER

But that didn't happen.

HOISINGTON

According to what you heard.

WEXLER

Look Mr. Hoisington, what's the fucking point of making me do this when my findings don't conform to your wish list?

HOISINGTON

Ideally, you would have confirmed the obvious to me and that would have been what was

required. I need to make a compelling case to my supervisor. Now, however, we're left with shipping her out and keeping her under tight screws. She can't get in more difficulty living in Syracuse. That doesn't solve the mystery. Doesn't the mystery bug you too?

(Pause)

Not a happy resolution, Doctor. But maybe you wish to say anything else?

WEXLER

Say what?

HOISINGTON

You have other observations about Madeline?

WEXLER

No.

HOISINGTON

Something personal?

WEXLER

What?

HOISINGTON

From the heart?

(Taps Wexler's shoulder like an old college roommate)

Are you in love with her?

WEXLER

No. What the hell's wrong with you?

HOISINGTON

This hurts. You're in denial. You convinced yourself that nothing happened. Self-hypnosis.

WEXLER

You're such a prick.

HOISINGTON

She's a beautiful mature women. You're having an affair with her. Life's been lonely after your divorce.

WEXLER

I did your bidding. Get out of my life.

HOISINGTON

She loves you, Doctor.

WEXLER

Did you hear that from her?

HOISINGTON

No. Of course not. We have eyes and ears on you. Night and day. How could you not sense that?

WEXLER

If you think you know all these facts about her, why do you need me to parrot what you think?

HOISINGTON

To make certain the data is reliable.

WEXLER

You're insane.

HOISINGTON

No. Just tenacious.

WEXLER

But we are done.

HOISINGTON

No.

WEXLER

What the hell more do you need?

HOISINGTON

We have to monitor this for an indefinite time. Madeline will phone you. You'll phone her. Soon you'll see one another again.

WEXLER

She won't be telling me anything that you don't already know.

HOISINGTON

Probably, but we can't drop this.

WEXLER

And if I leave Maryland?

HOISINGTON

Are you planning to go somewhere?

WEXLER

Yes.

HOISINGTON

You mean to say, leave with your office?

WEXLER

Yes.

HOISINGTON

That would be an ill-advised idea, Dr. Wexler. Trust me to navigate the straits of these turbulent waters for you.

WEXLER

My patients have told me that you're making me part of an investigation. This is the end of my practice.

HOISINGTON

Not necessarily.

WEXLER

I'm going to Seattle to join a medical center partnership.

HOISINGTON

Seattle's quite far from Syracuse, my friend. But . . . we'll stay in touch, wherever you might go.

WEXLER

I'm glad Snowden threw a brick in your face.

HOISINGTON

He threw a custard pie, Doctor. It was embarrassing but we can cope.

WEXLER

I don't think you can cope. He's high on your extradition list.

HOISINGTON

Let's just say that Snowden broke the law and has to find refuge in Moscow.

(Pause)

Are you in love with Madeline?

WEXLER

No.

HOISINGTON

She thinks you are. She has said so to one of her friends. I think you are in love with her and that's not a terrible thing to embrace.

(Pause)

I'm sincere. I'm capable of sincerity

(Pause)

Are you telling friends or colleagues about our conversations?

WEXLER

No.

(Pause)

But you're monitoring my phone and computers so you must know if I am telling people.

HOISINGTON

Not really. You can have walks on the waterfront, beyond the reach of buildings. I know you like boats.

WEXLER

I think this is our last conversation.

HOISINGTON

Maybe.

WEXLER

And . . .

HOISINGTON

And . . . you'll wonder if it were better to continue to work with me.

WEXLER

I'm a therapist. I'll always have a therapeutic practice. Unlike you, I actually help people.

HOISINGTON

Let's hope so, Dr. Wexler. Honest to God. Let's hope so.

End of Scene

## SCENE ELEVEN

**Dream scene. In front of a red curtain inside a Las Vegas hotel nightclub stage.  
Theme music – Dave Brubeck’s *Take Five* - with pre-recorded lounge host  
introducing hypnotist Dr. Larry Wexler.**

### *LOUNGE HOST*

*Ladies and gentlemen, The North Las Vegas Marriott is proud to now introduce a master of mesmerizing, the very entertainment hypnotist and magician from Baltimore – Dr. Larry Wexler.*

### WEXLER

Good evening. Isn't it?

(Pause)

I think the mike is a bit loud. A soft voice is big stick. You either love or hate Baltimore, folks.

(Pause)

I've seen some of you before in the lobby and if you think you know my act – well, you have an excellent memory. I mean to flatter you. The truth is that, whether we know it or not, we are asleep and awake at the same time. We walk and talk on auto-pilot. We are zombies in beige corduroy Dockers. We are hypnotized all the days of our lives. So I will hypnotize you and cure you of ugly vanity. From Omaha, Boston, Seattle, and Little Rock?

Where are you from? What happens in Vegas . . . Like a trail of toilet paper sticking to the heel of your shoe, after tonight, you will go home with a telltale memory.

(Signals to dim the house lights)

When your spouse greets you at the door with a kiss, are you responsive?

Spouse - such an odd word as it mixes sponge and louse equally - when your lovely spouse cheers you after a day in purgatory, that's hypnosis.

(Lights continue to dim)

When you decide to get a facelift, that's hypnosis.

(He lights a candle on a slender stool)

We respond to a seed planted. The art of language, ladies and gentlemen, is the buried message. The secret behind the lie. The lie behind the dream.

(We hear a metronome)

I'm just an entertainer and will ask for stupid, asinine volunteers to come onto the stage

(Sets up a very large model of Newton's Cradle. Rear lights go up and we see in silhouette three people on chairs and if it is hard to put them in silhouette they should be blindfolded)

Essentially, we are as fragile as egg shells and teen rock stars.

(Sets up three paper bags by the feet of his volunteers)

When you hear me count back from five to one, you will empty your pockets of everything valuable and put them inside the paper bag by your feet. Five, four, three, two, one.

(They all empty things into the bags)

Thank you.

(Thunderous canned applause)

Since you feel wonderfully refreshed with empty pockets, I ask that you piss on your memory To obtain this state of bliss - a state you were born into – you need to each kiss one another on the ass. Or on the face. Now.

(They kiss one another on their face awkwarded while Wexler collects the bags)

End of Scene

## SCENE TWELVE

(Wexler and his daughter Lexi meet at a café. They are in mid-conversation as in a previous scene between them)

LEXI

Justin and I are planning a small wedding, Dad. Is this going to upset you?

WEXLER

When?

LEXI

In six months.

WEXLER

Were you going to elope?

LEXI  
He wants a big wedding.

WEXLER  
What do you want?

LEXI  
I want you to walk me down the aisle in a tux.

WEXLER  
Nothing stuns me anymore, darling.

LEXI  
Will you wear a tux?

WEXLER  
Yes.

LEXI  
You don't own a tux.

WEXLER  
I'll buy a tux.

LEXI  
Are you leaving Baltimore?

WEXLER  
No.

LEXI  
Mom said you were packing leaving.

WEXLER  
She's got it wrong.

LEXI  
Mom's never wrong.

WEXLER  
Sometimes she is.

LEXI  
You don't look well.

WEXLER

I'm fighting a bug, I think. I took a few weeks off from work.

LEXI

See a doctor.

WEXLER

I will, honey.

(Pause)

I don't know if I can do therapy anymore.

LEXI

You're a genius at helping others.

WEXLER

Not anymore.

(Pause)

I had a bad dream about losing my therapy practice.

LEXI

Mom told me the government got to you.

WEXLER

How does she know?

LEXI

An agent interviewed her about two months ago.

WEXLER

And she told you . . .

LEXI

Only recently. I didn't know. Is this all true?

WEXLER

More or less.

LEXI

What do they want from you?

WEXLER

I don't know anymore. I thought I was helping. They said I could be of help. I don't think I helped anyone. Not in the least. By helping I saved my practice. But I failed at that. Since Adam died I can't do anything right. I

(Pause)

I had a horrible dream last night.

LEXI

You always have nightmares.

WEXLER

Yes, but this time it was very real and I was drenched in sweat. I was performing as a hotel entertainer in Las Vegas.

LEXI

Oh Christ.

WEXLER

I was doing dumb stage tricks in black tie.

LEXI

Is the government taking your license away?

WEXLER

Yes. Any day now.

LEXI

Can't you find a good lawyer and fight it?

WEXLER

No, I can't find it. I think I must have entered into a relationship with a patient.

LEXI

You think?

WEXLER

I have no memory. I'm blocking. I'm disassociating. I've lost control.

LEXI

On you on medication?

WEXLER

No.

LEXI

Don't lie to me, Dad.

WEXLER

I'm not lying. Maybe I've hypnotized myself.

LEXI

Is that possible?

WEXLER

Anything is possible.

LEXI

You've been in a tailspin since Adam became hospitalized. It's understandable. I've been bouncing off walls too. I know Mom treats like you worse than shit. You get no love from women.

WEXLER

How do you know, Lexi?

LEXI

I know. I just know. And then you go inside your crazy cave of loneliness.

(Lexi gets up and walks a few steps away)

WEXLER

Where are you going, Lexi?

LEXI

I took some Amblin for anxiety. It makes me walk at odd times.

WEXLER

Amblin?

LEXI

I can't sleep. I used to be so content at night. I went down like a baby.

WEXLER

Are you seeing a doctor?

LEXI

Of course I am. How do you think I get the medication?

WEXLER

You can't take those prescriptions, honey. They're dangerous.

(Mimi Cohen enters the space)

COHEN

Larry?

WEXLER

Madeline?

COHEN

Your assistant said I might find you here. I need to see you. Am I intruding?

(Pause)

Is this your daughter?

LEXI

Yes, I'm Lexi. Who are you?

COHEN

A patient of your father. A special friend too.

LEXI

Do you two need to be alone? Dad?

(Wexler is very confused)

COHEN

Could you please give us a few minutes?

LEXI

Sure. I'll window shop across the street.

(She stands)

I'll come back for you.

(She exits)

COHEN

I miss you, Larry. You don't look good. I can see you're not eating or sleeping. It's very hard to finish this move. I don't think I can move with my son and not talk over something with you. . I never was so stuck in my life before. We trust each other. You and me. It's instinct, isn't it Larry? Whatever you can remember just adds to the importance. And if you can't remember, I understand why. Your assistant told me that you're planning to leave Baltimore too. Are you in serious trouble?

WEXLER

Yes, I'm in serious trouble.

COHEN

All because of me?

WEXLER

Do you want to the truth?

(Pause)

Yes, because of you.

COHEN

You're the last person on earth I would ever hurt.

WEXLER

It's not your fault.

COHEN

Hoisington is a shit.

WEXLER

Yes, he is.

COHEN

Clearly he bugged your office. And your home. You were under 24/7 watch. Everything taped. One day he'll get his.

WEXLER

Let's hope so.

COHEN

Our government has forgotten the constitution and the Bill of Rights. Hoisington is just a cog in the machine. It's not that he's evil, but his motivation doesn't include protecting people. Institutions get the protection. Corporations get the protection. Do you know what I mean, Larry? Hoisington is not a patriot. He's not a Good Samaritan. He's the first one to get on a life raft ahead of women and children. His children hate him. I was once his supervisor. I trained him. The irony is unbearable. He owes me so much. Promotions came his way. Now he lords it over me. Do you know what I'm saying? You look so numb.

(Pause)

I have powerful feelings for you.

WEXLER

How can you say that?

COHEN

I'm telling the truth.

WEXLER

You don't know me at all.

COHEN

Larry, I know a lot about you. I learned more than you can guess. I know all about you and you hardly know me. It helped us along the way. And I never told you. I have an entire dashboard of things all about you. I don't really buy and sell stocks. A dozen years ago I

did.

WEXLER

Are you that dangerous to Hoisington?

COHEN

No. Not at all.

WEXLER

Then why is so maniacal about you?

COHEN

Jealousy? Or he's trying to impress someone upstairs at my expense? Or . . . maybe he's using me to throw suspicion off of him? He might be on the open market. Selling to state actors.

WEXLER

I don't want any more of this.

COHEN

I understand.

WEXLER

So what do you want?

COHEN

You.

WEXLER

I'm not well, Madeline. I'm doubting everything. My memory is shot to hell.

COHEN

Give me your hand.

WEXLER

Why?

COHEN

I want to touch you.

WEXLER

(Extends his hand)  
My hands are cold.

COHEN

(She holds his hand)

Yes. You helped me beyond quitting cigarettes. You got rid of my panic. I don't know how you did it. And maybe you just took it and made it your panic.

WEXLER

I'm worried about my daughter.

COHEN

Yes. When I'm with you I think of my grandmother. I don't know why. But I loved her so much and she took care of me when my mother was sick. And when my grandmother fell ill I took care of her for a solid year. She loved me more than my mother. I knew that right away. And she was so Jewish and sentimental. We don't see that anymore in people. I know you have that inside you, Larry. Something very pure and emotional. You showed me a glimpse of it six weeks ago.

WEXLER

I have no memory of being intimate with you, Madeline.

COHEN

You don't have to remember everything.

(She reaches out to him and kisses him on the lips)

That's okay.

WEXLER

It's not okay.

COHEN

I remember for both of us and that's all that matters.

(Pause)

You can come to Syracuse.

WEXLER

No.

COHEN

You can't stay in Baltimore. They will drive you crazy.

WEXLER

I know.

COHEN

But you don't trust me . . .

WEXLER

I don't know if I can trust myself, Madeline

COHEN

Then tell me, please Larry . . . where are you going?

WEXLER

I . . . I . . . have to go somewhere.

COHEN

You told me when we first met in your office that you were so very alone as a kid. And you hid in libraries half of your life. You still are so alone. You were bullied, Larry. That's all that Hoisington can do. He can't steal your life. You own your life. You're a good therapist. You helped me. And I owe you more than you'll ever know. And it's crazy that we have to talk about everything in a brightly lit restaurant. I don't care. I'm happy to catch you. And we are going to see each other again. And no one is going to prison. And I can even be your stock broker at Merrill Lynch and remove my commission rates.

(She laughs sweetly)

Look at me, Larry. I love you. Fuck it, I really do love you.

(She reaches over the table to kiss him)

I see a smile. Are you smiling?

(He telegraphs the slightest of smiles)

That's the Mona Lisa smile. Can I please see your Robert De Niro smile?

(Lexi returns but is hesitant to interrupt)

WEXLER

I don't look like De Niro.

COHEN

I know. It's a joke.

WEXLER

A joke on me?

COHEN

No, Larry. It's just a joke.

WEXLER

Madeline . . . you are a beautiful woman and I apologize if I did anything wrong. I do think I love you, can love you, be closer to you . . .

COHEN

Let's go to the waterfront. We can call Hoisington on my cell and put him on speaker phone. He won't expect the call and we'll keep it short and simple. Then we throw the phone into the harbor. We win. Everything bad and awful ends today. We start something wonderful. I want to marry you, Larry. Say you'll marry me. Say it like you

fucking mean it. Count to ten backwards. I'm not a spy. You're not a spy. It's so easy.  
And then we will be lighter than a cumulus cloud. Easier than counting to ten.

(We hear Dave Brubeck's *Take Five* as lights shift)

**End of Play**