

## TO AIRY THINNESS

By Brian Wolak

### I Walther Wallach I

The clouds are coming undone. The white sky is domed and hollow. In the glass ceiling, everything that flows is trapped. Beyond the black eyes, the atmosphere hangs like a skull casing.

Over the subject's shaved head bolted into the three-pin skull clamp, Walther Wallach runs a smooth dry finger. "Your brain isn't what you think it is," he says. "There is no outside, no enclosing wall, no circumference ... He can only be reformed by showing him a new idea ...". The brain contains consciousness the way a diagram contains an atom. He smiles. Today's materialism has come full circle to yesterday's immaterialism. Planck's mechanics bore out Bishop Berkeley's idealism. "Esse est percipi." Above all, he, Walther Wallach, is an evolutionist. Bergson's showdown with Einstein showcased the asymmetrical growth of the mind in relation to a greater force. When geniuses fail to recognize the compatibility of their ideas, something's gone awry. "Success as most conceive it is fool's gold." Gesturing to the icon on the wall, the old Ouroboros, he says that not only are we symbols and serpents. We're symbols of serpents, quantum bellies pressed to the Newtonian dirt even as we — he uses the term loosely — slither apart from any independent objects in any sense of absolution. "The brain is the world's grand distortionist." But it's also, at the moment, evolution's circuitboard to the only accessible abstract of reality.

From his pocket he fishes out a block of bundled sheets. Across its glossy cover he slenders his fingers. "In ancient times, a Rumpelstiltskin of the Skies would spin rainbows from light and water. It's a peace offering," he says, flapping the pages. "The good doctor subscribes to the notion of a collective of symbols, but this symbol's personal. To you." The next time he sees it, "somewhere deep in that construct you identify as a brain, you'll recognize it. Vaguely and likely not for what it is, but symbols and brains play out their own evolving modes of semiosis."

But above all Walther Wallach means him well. "I wish you success, even in your misunderstood sense of the word." He tugs at the lips of his scarlet turtle neck. "You made the right choice," he says. "Yes, you. I'm aware that's a paradox. But something

always remains. If that's not the point, I don't know what is." He tells him that when he reawakens he'll be a new man. "Somewhere between rebirth and reset." It'll take time to regain his bearings. Some memories will return. Some won't. Some will stay buried "for your protection while others remain sacrificed." He sees his eyeballs slant to the fire as technicians blowtorch the tools. Marigold spades envelop hooks and knives in gaseous cleanliness. The instruments cool in hisses as they're plunked into alcohol. "See you soon," he says. And then to the attendant in charge: "I await my delivery. Give the doctor my regards." And then, to the subject on the gurney as a globe of ultramarine fluid is lowered to his head, he says, "Aside from brilliant engineers, they're amazing cosmeticians. No know will ever know." As he's almost out the door, Walther Wallach turns: "Try not to mistake perfection for success."

### I Donald Marcus I

The mind has a mind of its own,  
Leaning together,  
Headpiece stuffed with straw.  
Alas, we live in an age of alchemy,  
When atoms are centrifuged,  
And straw spins into gold.

He wakes up, opens his eyes. The room — certainly it's a room — means nothing. He is too immersed in the idea that his sleep (his blackout?) has disgorged. As though he was nonexistent until seconds ago when something, some part of who he was or might become was issued like a bubble from the ocean floor, and only when it approached the surface had it acquired enough light to materialize — because it wasn't thrown together; its components were arrayed so that he could build himself, piece by piece, to emerge from one state into another with a more than a burst, to spread with an idea as big as the sky.

In agony he lies absolutely still — his head doesn't just ache; it feels like a block of ice in which its inner particles are exploding — and then sinks back into an agitated momentary sleep.

He opens his eyes again. First come the sounds — air conditioning, shift of sheets, howl of traffic. Then the odors — sweat, liquor and something different, floral, alpine, like

snow melting over a rose bed. And then he sees the ceiling fan chopping through the dark air. It's almost dawn.

He would sit up and look around, but the balance is too precarious, like an unstable isotope — the idea holding the pain holding the idea. He sighs deeply and falls within himself deeper into the bed. Yes, it's a bed. Now he's awake, but where, and who he is are less clear.

His first attempt was when he launched a whiskey distillery (“Wry Rye: The Less Corny Alternative”). He poured so much money into it, and it ended up flooding, literally, at the banks of the One River — the one and only time the river's ever flooded — just as his first batch was ready to bottle. He managed to fill one lonely, custom-created bottle, which he kept for himself. A token for another time. Undaunted, he pivoted, trying his hand at motivational speaking. He'd recuperated some money from the universal-basic-income-insurance-fund and borrowed the rest to rent space on a premier floor of what was then the Rose City's chicest scraper. But on the day of his first seminar, there was a breach of Walthorium. The entire building was evacuated. Hazmat crews came in. Later, he heard, no more than a drop had spilled — not even in the building but beneath it — but the tower was condemned. He pivoted again, this time into a lifestyle entrepreneur, starting “Don't Wait For Now,” which had two things going against it — a disastrous promotional campaign, and a warehouse fire that burned all of his merchandise. The harder he tried, it seemed, the more he failed.

He risks turning his head. Every centimeter cracks the ice. On a nightstand, a bottle sits with a familiar logo — the silhouette of rye grains over a blurred ear of corn. It's empty. Its cap lies next to a smaller bottle of colorless liquid. At the foot of his bed, on the desk in the other room, more bottles stand (some on their sides) like a jury.

He yawns, and brings his fist to his mouth. Even in the dark, his ring stands out: fire-roasted vermilion specks pressurized inside of a white jellied vacuum of alloy, welded around the circumference, and into, the third proximal phalanx of his right hand. Every body cremates into a unique Pantone, most in the 170-180 range, from cinder to moon mist, but a hue of red? The baker said it was unheard of. Saturn has its rings and he has son's ashes.

Suddenly there's no air in the room. He can only lie as he is, breathing slowly, trying to recall something else, something just as important to balance the sacrifice, paralyzed in the airless room, not waiting for the light but staying as he is until it comes.

Because he discovered it. The miracle. Not simply the companion to, but the literal manual on how to become successful. In a time when the ability to read is extinct, and yet he'd found *a book* — that served up exactly what he'd been looking for — and what's more, his colleague — a brainless man — was one of the zero percent who'd retained his literacy? How was it anything less than a miracle?

The air conditioning powers on. The first ray of light crosses his hand, slicing his ring in half. He turns to the window, and finds on the pillow beside him a pair of eyes peering back — grey-blue and brilliant, like sunlight on a broken column.

He remembers. One must “direct to a definite end the forces of his or her mind,” Alan read, “thus harnessing the stupendous power which most people waste in spasmodic, purposeless thought.” “Stop there, Alan.” He had to think, had to unpack the extraordinary lessons in this relic of scientific language. The human mind has “forces” that can direct the “power” that most people “waste” on frivolous ends. Could it be that simple?

He realizes not only that she's been tucked alongside him all this time, whoever she is, but possesses more than a body. She is, or has: a sheath of electrified material, sleek and undulant, reinforced by a strange, inner durability; the way the unit folds him into her contours, it strips away something, laying bare the failure or illusion of barriers.

“Do you remember anything yet?” she says, her voice like liquid over dry grass. “They said it would take time.”

His impressions return imprecisely at first, like blunt scissors cutting out a portrait against the blur of the window. There's something familiar about her because she resembles, somehow, every woman. Except that there's more. In her cheeks he can almost see the thumb marks of her sculptor — smoothed and refined, faded into the pinpoint of her lips and her paisley-shaped eyes.

“Who?”

“Turn on the video,” she says.

The pixels light up the wall and someone, a gaunt man in a suit and tie, with a fading patch of hair and eyes that bulge in their lids, like marbles in a goldfish's mouth, is talking in an affected voice — deeper than natural.

“Lost in RESET, excavated from the Underground, translated from the Written Word into our Vid Age, *The Law of Success, Complete and Unabridged in Sixteen Lessons*, Authored by *the* Napoleon Hill, comes to you in modular installments by Donald Marcus and Alan Whitmore Productions, presented by your host and guide, me, Donald Marcus. Let me show you how to think and grow successful.”

Two things flash in his mind at that moment. The first is the sinking feeling that comes from recognition — a self loathing that he'd somehow managed to detach, isolating its raw fuel to convert into energy.

The second thing ... He flies off the bed and runs, naked, he realizes, to the desk, to the bottles and their sticky residue where he missed the mark completely, the glasses and their melted ice and the shafts of light piercing their rims. Had he and — “What's your name?” “I'm Olivia” — drunk all this whiskey? How many days has he been out? The answers are crowding around the frozen wall in his mind. With a violent sweep of his arm, the bottles go flying. The crash is terrific. He rips out the drawer of the desk, stomps around the cramped living room, explores every corner, and stalks back into the bedroom where Olivia has shifted to his side of the bed. She is unperturbed by his manic display, surveying him with curiosity. She is, he notices, naked too. In short order, he rips out the drawers of his bureau, dumping everything, which isn't much — a few Engage tablets, energy powder, hydration capsules. Launches into his bathroom. Then looks under the bed. And then? There's nowhere else it could be.

For a moment he loses himself searching this exquisite Olivia — collar bones joined in smooth humps, almost overly wrought, as though the womb had overthought its work — skin less a composition of cells and more a kind of fabric woven from a picture of skin. Her neck muscles flare up either side of the slender pipework of her throat to that angular jawline, and those examining spectral orbs, like a scanner, starting at his crotch and making its way up.

“Olivia,” he says to this scanning, assessing woman — “where did you put my book?”

She watches him with blank eyes except for something else — animal-like but more distant. Recognition of various things — the nightstand, the clothes in the corner, the video screen are starting to return in a clumped but lucid regurgitation, as though pumped back from a drain into sink water, except for how he met her. Except for the smaller bottle on the nightstand.

“What is this?” he says, scooping up the vial. Her eyes shift. She’s watching the twirl of the ceiling fan as though she can see its soft vortex traverse the distance to her body. She is immaculate, a class of woman so far beyond his budget that he wonders how he could have afforded her. She folds her hands across her stomach. Everything about her is balanced along an unexpected edge, as though soft is creased into hard.

“I could deceive you so easily,” she says. Their position, nudity, the cadence of the interaction— it all bears an eery familiarity. “It’s an indenturing medicinal,” she says. “You snore, you know. I could have squeezed some in your mouth.”

“Did you?”

Her eyebrows spider. “Do you even know who you are yet?”

“Concierge,” he commands. “What day is it?”

“Today is the 42nd day of 18th year, Mr. Marcus,” the conapt concierge responds.

“Do I have any messages?”

“You have holograms from Carson. And an appointment tonight with Alan and Claire Whitmore at Eden’s Exit.”

His eyes shut. The error of this blackout — even if it was with someone like her — is so indicative. How he blocks out the consequences until it’s too late, forced to endure the parade of guilt as a prelude to the manifestation of a life-long march of mediocrity as a permanent castigation. It’s a simple question. Why can’t he make himself do what’s in his best long-term interest?

“I’ve seen your videos,” she says, “with my sister.”

“You’re one of the few. Would you do me a favor, Olivia? Would you show me what’s under your pillow?”

She studies him for a moment, and then angles her arm under her head. He watches closely. Her hand reemerges with that paper brick of pages, the white cover trimmed in mustard-gold and those thunderous black words, stamped boot-black across the top.

“Your definite chief aim in life should be selected with deliberate care,” Alan read, “and after it has been selected it should be written out and placed where you will see it at least once a day ...’ Written out?” “We’ll do an audio recording, or even a Relative Reality reminder. Go on.” “...the psychological effect of which is to impress this purpose upon your subconscious mind so strongly that it accepts that purpose as a pattern or blueprint that will eventually dominate your activities in life and lead you, step by step, toward the attainment of the object back of that purpose.”

His Relative Reality reminder kicks in, his self loathing suppressed, like a cobra charmed back into its basket.

Marcus goes to grab the book, but she clutches it and with a slight smile closes her eyes. Her nipples puddle in the light, and she does a strange thing. Olivia starts to hum — languid rises and falls as her arms dip at her sides, the book falling near her waist, fingers stiff along the sheets, her thighs arched over an excess of covers. Three feet from his hand, it stands on its side. He could seize it. Throw her out. And try to remember what happened. But he says, “What do you want?”

Olivia’s eyes shoot open, half moons of ice-blue pigment pulling something out of him: a bead of mercury along the dip of her pelvis. She rises, and their bodies butt like a pair of refrigerators.

### **I Olivia I**

He has it and doesn’t know it. They all have it, but from this one it stinks. Like a rotting apple in a paper bag. How his head fumed, mouth drooled, ears probed — emissions of the mind’s metabolism at the center of which it’s sown. And this one wants more. It spews from him like radon. His sweaty head looks so rubbery. The poor creature. They told her to take care of him and she has. “He doesn’t have the rebound system yours does. Keep him warm, keep his chamber chilled. Your inner heat will offset the outer

conditions.” She watched the breath go in and out. “A brain is powered by more than electrochemistry,” they said. “You couldn’t imagine his trauma.” She tried, but empathy is imaginary. The question isn’t why he was born with one, but how she acquired a taste for it. In her sister it’s manifold. The prodigal one, from whom she’s learned so much, including an appetite. She would marvel. In all her vastness, she would find no spite and rather: the longing to seize opportunity along one’s personal footpath. If anyone would understand that, she would. Not their other sisters, certainly not their father. But is the whole more than the sum of its parts? She’ll give it a few more minutes, but the early results aren’t promising.

She begged the doctors to drop one in her head.

“Olivia, you’re not a piggy bank,” they said. “You’re our control. You must understand that.”

An upload could be sweetened with a kiss. “Could it not?”

“A kiss of the Self?” Ms. Ottersblood laughed. “It would be dead on arrival.”

“But you could try.”

“To what end?” she said. “To cart around a stillborn thing?”

“What do you think I’m doing now?”

They were obstinate. “One implant of this magnitude is volatile enough. As it is, anomalies are likely. Two implants would be courting disaster.”

“You’re giving him what he wants,” she said.

“That’s different.”

“If it can happen to my sister, there’s hope for me.”

There was no arguing with that. In the end, they did it.

And here she is, no different yet. She suspected failure when the Pastoral symphony, a luscious sound, coming from her own lips no less, stirred nothing. And now, after a



fornication? She plants her cheek on the pillow. The side of his head is a hemisphere. There. At the temporal lobe she plots her perfect finger and begins a circumnavigation. So oily. She allows her cuticle to perform the slightest dig. The upturned atom. How sublime. How tortuous to wield this invisible crumb. Right here at this spot ... if she poked her finger through, she'd take out his audio comprehension. Dr. Cythroat would be amused in his unamused way. "Biology's inverted sense of humor," he'd say. Sometimes she thinks about him. Couldn't he have sown one in her? The "great" Dr. Cythroat? Seeded her uterus with its possibility and given her the chance to grow it on her own? But no, he sent her on her way. She would cry if she could. So she traces his head with her perfectly designed finger, and then with the whole of her palm, she cups his occipital bun. She palms her human lantern tenderly. "Repression is a survival technique," they said. "We added a little something to help bury his mind's version of radioactive waste." Where is his Self? she wonders, as she curls her perfect abdomen against his side. During the night he gasped: "Am I awake?" She petted his sweaty forehead. If you wake up more than once, when are you truly awake?

One hand strokes her thigh (nothing? nothing) as the other fondles his treasure. But why? She didn't even know what it was. She had to check her database. "Pre-RESET compendium of human input. Early attempt at telepathy. See: hieroglyphics." If she had what he has, she'd fornicate all day. Like the others. What's a Self for if not to relish its full saturation? But this one's oblivious. Is ignorance an excuse or a condition? She ought to bore through his skull and squeeze the wormy matter until it releases its bloody essence. Oh, Olivia. She can see it now. Running down her cheeks as she licks her palms clean. "Volunteer officer, it was delicious!" "Miss?" "Volunteer officer, would you like to fornicate?" She'd slide her fingers down her perfect curves, revealing every fraction of her sensuous physique. But no. It didn't work. "The sun's rising," she says. "I'd love to feel the breeze." When he obliges, she unwinds from the sheets and goes to the window. Into a ponytail she wraps her hair and then squeezes her hips. Her fingers squish the skin into dark rivulets. Dawn, which oozes the greasiest light of the day, slathers her face from head to toe, leaving, in a mirror, her backside shadowed except for minute blasts of vid-powered blue. The sun is so bright that it erases her face except for her unblinking eyes. She can picture the shafts flying through her sockets, bouncing around the optic nerve until they're lost, or swallowed whole.

"Thanks," she says. Her hand sneaks around her waist and lingers for a moment on her stomach. His, too, slides over his abdomen. "But this isn't working out. And you — you're so blessed."

“I don’t understand.”

The sun bulbs over the mountain like an egg yolk.

“It means that you can change,” she says.

### I Carson I

The tiki straw stands upended in a goblet-for-two in which a blonde strand of hair sticks. It curls over the last lick of rum like a pinch of saffron. Where have the good times gone? A snore. A snort. Awake again? At this hour? Or maybe he never slept. Some shut eye would do him good. He paws the shades to black and curls into a daze. Oh, closed eye and cloven hoof, huffs and puffs, cat calls and whistling pigs, the perimeter blurs as the room collapses, and the legs of dawn go dancing away. “Baste it in coconut rum,” he mutters, sprawling his four-foot (eight if you count the stretch of his fore and hind legs) across the contour-hugging bed, thinking: if the eyelid is a canvas, paint it in strawberry latex, with a pineapple bodice, serving platters of snow hare: tartine over tandoori toast, tartare on a tartar smear etc. etc.

But he rolls. He fidgets. He lies still. Even the get-up and circle-back-down trick fails. What is sleep no deeper than a kiddie pool? If he was the blaming type, he would blame Donald. But fault is a human invention for — stop this — for anytime that reality — he promised himself — that reality has the gall not to meet an expectation. As though reality can’t do its own thing once in a while. As though expectation has nothing to do but wait. No. He licks his neck. Fast dabbing licks. Expectation can get along just fine on its own. May the drunken and slumbering eye be one! Still — Donald should have given him a heads up. A hint. “Stop this,” he says, and he’s serious. He has the fortitude to wrestle with himself all morning if need be. Whatever worm managed to outswim the tides of rum, be warned. There’s more where that came from. Best to get its rest like the rest of him. There. The head of sleep crowns at last. The forceps grab, and guide him into ... static? “How dare you?” Carson roars as the hologram crackles through. An open eye is the bloodletting of a hangover and he’ll have none of it. “Megan Jean?” he says. “I told you not to contact me until you’ve burned every article of that *animal’s* clothing.” Why are blondes such libertines? Best to stay wrapped in darkness. Light is the leech of intoxication’s vestige. “Give me liberty or give me rum!” Because silence is a liar’s promise. So “Speak!” But no. This intruder is forcing his hand, or paw, as it were. So be it. It will taste his pain. His eyes part. The tube of light swirls in the middle of the

room. “Your transmission sucks,” Carson barks. But his eyes adjust: “Donald?” he says. (His voice did *not* crack.)

With great, mountainous heaps of skin mounted upon a mountain of a man, even through the smoke and mirrors of a hologram, it’s him. On its own, Carson’s tongue flicks across his paw. A deep, long lick. His ears triangulate. His shoulders shiver. Something tells him to bound through the light, but pleasure starts with restraint. Upon his bed Carson rises, head dignified, tufts flared. Indignation defeats stupor. “Very well,” he says. “You will hear me out. No — I will go first.” All the sleep deprivation in the world couldn’t snuff out the consolation gift of the righteous. “Do I have a right to know where you’ve been? A right to know *in advance* when you’re leaving for *three days*? Four, if you count this morning. Your state of mind was no mystery, sir, but that’s no excuse. I’ll have you know that the limoncello rum slushies at Myer Leman’s were refreshing and copious. That Megan Jean performs acrobatics that would make an acrobat blush.” He appears dazed. If it be by the sting of Carson’s independence, sting again. “That a lynx is perfectly capable of getting along without you.” But true friendship is unbreakable, supported by the pillars of intimacy, built on a foundation of vulnerability. “Was I taken aback by your disregard?” Carson says. “I’m not ashamed to say that I was. Was I aware that humans have the emotional refinement of a mosquito? It goes without saying. But friends are respectful. You look terrible, by the way, and very naked. Where are your clothes?” Whether it’s the delay of the hologram or the natural torpor of his voice, his plea is cracked, croaked and quiet, but critical. “Come over, Carson.”

No blame. No way. He won’t do it. He will not blame himself. Donald’s a grown man. He’s already into the hall. It’s only two doors up. No impediments. Except — who’s this? “Alexandra!” Carson says. “You shame the other joggers. No one fills out a jog-kini like you. Not even that enchantress who sells the jewelry on the vids. I would offer to join you, but you filed that restraining order.” “Pig.” And she’s off. So principled. What’s the point? Megan Jean flung principles out the window. It’s her fault, by the way. What was he supposed to do when she offered him belly shots? That stomach! Like tan velvet over six flat rocks. Lime, salt, tequila? Lick! The bewitched is innocent! Should he have stayed at Empty’s Parlor? Were there warning signs? One minute, Donald was “shots all around!” The next he was “the human nutcracker! I’ll take your empty glass, and yours, and yours, and yours.” In a single hand he crowded their shot glasses. He showed everyone. Perfectly balanced. His fingers curled. His thumb clamped. It sounded like shattering teeth. His forearm became a throbbing thing — the horrid bulge lined with a lightening strike of purple veins, thick and rumped under that livid yellow

skin. Then came the woman — of a class that don't go to Empty's, and she made a beeline for Donald. Carson checked on him. They were outback: Donald humped, head angled, ear out; she, legs crossed, hands over knee, whispering. The moon plump and bright as a mushroom. "Everything okay?" Donald didn't turn, but she did. Whatever the opposite of drunk is — she was. Black pebbles for eyes in a face of granite. "Donald?" "I'm fine," he said. "Go home." Carson paused. Honestly he did. But then Megan Jean demanded to know: "How long is a lynx's tongue?"

The body sensor lets him through. Immediately a breeze fluffs his fur. It blows through the AC, warm, carrying a strange scent, faint but synthetic, like asbestos, masked by a puff of rose, and mixed with the familiar odors of Donald — the cortisol, pheromones and his base smell (a fungal-like fragrance). The traffic at a hundred stories high is always audible, but in here it's unmuffled. It's dark except for the pale blue that strobos the carpet near the bedroom. He turns the corner — and finds his friend hunched on the bed's edge. Before him, the blackout curtains blow like broken masts. Donald's arms hang like skinned pigs. A meat carcass would have more life except for how the book steadies his hand, cane-like. All the power of the flesh festooned upon his mammoth frame, and in this light, it looks like it's melting off. "You don't have to tell me where —" Carson says. Melting off like ice cream, like double mocha espresso. Like salted caramel drizzle over rocky road. With eyes like red hot candies in a butter pecan puddle. "She jumped." "Jumped your bones? The chick from Empty's? You devil. I knew it." "Empty's?" The doorbell buzzes. "Did you drink all of those?" Carson says, "Donald, for the love of — Did you get a liver transplant? Is that where you've been?" The doorbell cries again. "What happened here?" His head slumps like a scoop of coffee molasses. "What do you mean 'jumped?'" Now a fist raps against the door. "Coming," Carson calls. "Make yourself decent," he tells Donald.

A jump to conclusions is so unmindful. When in doubt, let loyalty lead the way. But if this beating doesn't stop, "I'm going rip out your throat," Carson snarls and springs open the door. "Hey! I could never forget those oolong eyes," he says. Volunteer officer Brody arrested him last year for disorderly conduct. Or it might have been disturbing the peace. Not that 'arrest' means anything, and Carson happily obliged. He deserved it, and to be cuffed (he didn't even know they had non-human cuffs) by her wasn't the worst experience.

"Where is he?" she says.

“I’m too expensive to cuff now. No hanky panky,” he says. “I haven’t seen a ‘he’ in three days. Four if you count today.”

All these volunteer officers and their suspicions. She’s looking at him with utmost suspicion. With that navy-blue uniform and that shield-shaped idol on her breast, she, or any of the volunteer officers, would be predisposed toward suspicion — something about clothes has a strange effect on humans — but as Carson recalls, this one was rather cavalier. Not friendly at all. One who took her volunteer duties a little too seriously, who thought she had more authority than she has.

“Tell him I found the body,” she says.

His tail bristles. The back of his tongue dries. He coughs — to no avail. “Whatever you think you might have found,” he says dryly, “a volunteer doesn’t need to get mixed up in it. In my conapt — right down the hall — I have coconut rum. I don’t do this with everyone, but you look parched — you look stressed, actually — and I don’t want to brag, but I have this technique that’ll make the tensest buttock tingle. Or,” he says, finding her demeanor unchanged, “I also have Malbec. You look like maybe you’re a wine person.” She would have gone for it. A few more seductions. He knows it. But Donald foils the ruse when he emerges from his crypt. “Come in,” he says.

At least he’s dressed now. With efficiency, he takes them into the bedroom — that ridiculous video still playing on the vid wall. That absurd book on the nightstand. He takes volunteer officer Brody to the window. He points down. Then at the bed. In short order, he discloses the truth. He doesn’t remember coming home. He woke up with a strange woman in bed. She coerced him into having relations with her. Then she jumped out the window. Perfectly straight forward. The ensuing conversation is equally, or less, so.

Brody: “You had sex with her?”

Carson: “Don’t answer that.”

Donald: “I did.”

Brody: “How did that go?”

Carson: "That's circumstantial."

Donald: "Not well."

Brody: "You couldn't satisfy here?"

Carson: "Objection!"

Donald: "Apparently not."

Brody: "Don't take it too hard."

Carson: "How dare you?"

Donald: "Are you arresting me?"

"For what?" volunteer officer Brody says — quite sanely. Then she laughs — quite insanely. "It never occurred to you that she was a little too perfect?"