DR. SILENCE

Excerpt

Written by

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Murmurs from a civilized gathering take us into...

INT. BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

A sharply tuxedoed male silhouette straightens his bowtie. Adjusts his cufflinks. We don't see his face yet, but this is a man who looks *sharp*. Beyond the wings of the stage is...

—A BALLROOM—

...set up for a black-tie gala. Ornate florals. A high-tech screen suspended from the stage. Elegant guests file in.

Our silhouette scans the crowd— then the texts on his phone. No response to: "WHERE ARE YOU?" "YOU SAID YOU'D BE HERE."

Wsssshhhh.

He hears whispers behind him. Turns— but there's not a soul there. Just the red light of a digital wall clock: 7:46PM.

Strange. He shakes it off. Reorients on the crowd. *Showtime.*

INT. BALLROOM - LATER

-Our still faceless silhouette holds court with well-dressed DONORS. His words transfix, then elicit laughter (MOS).

-A SIGN: "EPIONE ANNUAL GALA".

-A woman holds THE WORLD'S HEALER, an ego trip in a dust jacket. Our silhouette scribbles "Silence" on the cover.

-Our silhouette hams for a TikTok live stream with young attendees. It elicits a stream of heart and mushroom emojis.

-He shakes hands with BOARD MEMBERS. He has a rhythm, a momentum. Everyone orbits *his* gravity center.

An uptight woman, JULIA RICHARDSON (late 40s), surveys his performance with approval. He offers her a fist bump— she taps her watch instead.

Beside her is BRANDON, a mid-20s genius in defiantly casual attire. Our silhouette pulls off his DeepMind A.I. ball cap. He tousles Brandon's hair playfully— but tosses the cap to Julia decidedly before heading towards the stage.

Julia and Brandon share an intimate eye roll. She returns the cap. Brandon yanks it on, aggravated.

ARTHUR (PRE-LAP)
Social Services pulled him out in front of the neighbors...

LATER...

The guests watch the **ONSTAGE SCREEN.** A confessional video shows an anguished ARTHUR HENLEY (30s). Ex-military. Ashamed of his own vulnerability. Anger pulsing in his veins.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
It was the gas. I couldn't stop seeing it under the door, through the windows... I would do anything to keep my son safe. *Anything*. But we were in the basement for six days before the cops broke in. Now he lives in fear of me. *I* live in fear of me. I *am* my PTSD and there's no way out...

The video feed and stage lights cut out.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
My friends, the Co-Founder of Epione and Chief Medical Officer of its Neuroscape Psychedelic Division... Dr. John Silence!

The crowd goes wild as the lights return and we see our silhouette - our hero - for the first time:

DR. JOHN SILENCE (mid-50s). The James Bond of psychedelic neuroscience. His shave is close; his eyes, bright and curious. They tease the brilliance behind them, and the wolfish ego. The kind that either convinces people to change the world... or to drink the Kool-aid.

DR. SILENCE
A psychiatrist takes a fall while skiing. She goes to the hospital and the x-ray shows a broken leg. To which the doctor says: "Don't worry: it's all in your body."
(laughter)
When a bone breaks, we see it, we set it, and it heals. When the mind undergoes a trauma, we know that something has broken. TikTok has dissected every trigger known to man - which includes the fact that I only said "man" there.

The audience laughs. His showmanship is magnetic.

ON SCREEN, an image of a ‘NORMAL STATE’ brain appears. Neural pathways are confined to certain sections. (Think a map showing distinct regional airline flight activity.)

DR. SILENCE (CONT'D)
But treating the actual source of trauma is another story. Our mind’s conscious state is rigid. It clings to order and old stories, and only something radical can change it once it makes itself up. Ladies and gentlemen... that something radical is *psychedelics*.

ON SCREEN: another brain image with an explosion of pathways. (Think a map showing every flight path in the entire world for an entire year.) The crowd oos and ahs.

DR. SILENCE (CONT'D)
These are not “party drugs” offering a fleeting high. Psychedelic medicine allows compartmentalized regions of the brain to talk, makes repressed memories readily accessible, and snowballs neurological connections that would be impossible in 30 years of conventional talk therapy. These connections remain long after a psychedelic experience is over, meaning that these medicines can literally change the way we think.

ON SCREEN, video of a psychedelic therapy session. Dr. Silence and a female psychologist observe Arthur— curled into the fetal position on a bed with a mask over his eyes.

DR. SILENCE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Hopeless after decades of therapy and medication, Arthur came to our MDMA-assisted therapy for PTSD trial as a last resort.

ARTHUR (VIA VIDEO)
I see it now... the fear... It’s part of me... but it *isn’t* me...

DR. SILENCE (VIA VIDEO)
Breathe. The fear can’t hurt you anymore, Arthur. But you must confront it to let it go...

Dr. Silence’s voice is soothing. Calm. Arthur cries in relief as his tattooed, muscled body rocks back and forth.

ON STAGE:

DR. SILENCE (CONT'D)
After two MDMA-supported sessions, Arthur reported a significant reduction in intrusive thoughts, the ability to manage acute hyper-vigilance and an enhanced level of emotional connection that he hadn't felt in years. Six months later, he no longer meets the criteria for PTSD and is ready to regain custody of his beloved son.

IN THE AUDIENCE, Brandon frowns at the picture of Arthur and his son now onscreen. Their happy finale. At the same table, Julia frowns at the vacant seat between her and Brandon...

DR. SILENCE (CONT'D)
But Arthur's success is just one example of a watershed moment. Psychedelics are producing astounding results in the treatment of depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety, palliative care, *addiction*...

Brandon pretends not to notice Dr. Silence's pointed glance.

DR. SILENCE (CONT'D)
Once approved by the FDA, our trial will usher in the first federally legalized psychedelic in American history. And with its fusion of pharmacology and therapeutics - and unification of the brightest minds in science - Epione will secure its status as *the* global leader in mental health care.

The room cheers. Dr. Silence smiles proudly, until—

Wsssshhhhhhh.

Through the applause comes the same whispers from backstage. Dr. Silence squints against the lights. The audience's mouths don't move. No one else seems to hear them.

DR. SILENCE (CONT'D)
...uh, sorry.
(joke re: champagne)
Sofkie, did you change the molecular structure of the Veuve Clicquot again?

Among the dress Oxfords and heels is a sock and sandaled foot. It belongs to DR. OLEXA SOFKA, "SOFKIE" (70s). His casual footwear belies that he's one of the world's foremost psychopharmacologists - or perhaps testifies to it.

SOFKIE
Ah, so you see the dancing pink elephants too?

DR. SILENCE
Epione's brilliant, idiosyncratic Dr. Olexa Sofka, everyone!
(applause)
I'd like to acknowledge our good friends at the FDA for their, ehem, *enlightening* trial guidelines. And our generous donors for funding this very significant champag— er, research. Surely, I'm forgetting others. I know they'll forgive me. Find the clinical psychologist at your table if you can't.

Does the applause for him ever stop? In the nosebleeds, a man imbibes the crowd's laughter with a covetous frown. DR. GABE ADLER (mid-50s), a long-time rival.

Brandon now clocks the vacant seat at their table. As Julia steps away with her phone, her calm morphs to concern...

WSHHHHHHH.

Dr. Silence winces as the whisper sound intensifies.

DR. SILENCE (CONT'D)
Uh, let's change the world!

Applause rains down, but it's muffled by the now insistent whispers, which take us—

—SMASH CUT TO—

INT. DR. SILENCE HOUSE - STUDY - LATER

—Dr. Silence downs a stiff gin. His distress is acute; the whispers, now thunderous. He clutches his head and scrunches his eyes, as if erecting some psychological dam.

Then a single goosebump appears on his arm... followed by another, and ANOTHER... Dr. Silence's dread grows as the goosebumps snake upward, headed straight for his throat.

Backing away from himself, Dr. Silence bumps into his desk. A glass award heralding “PIONEER IN PSYCHIATRY” topples. As it hits the ground, Dr. Silence’s psychological dam breaks—

—and we ROCKET INTO—

DR. SILENCE’S MIND:

—a nightmarish vortex of “mental noise”.

Viscerally, think: a deaf infant whose first hearing aid has been turned on in the middle of a Rammstein concert.

Visually, think: Neo perceiving The Matrix. But instead of code, it’s a “superhighway” of vibrating energies; foggy, half-seen figures; and fleeting, half-remembered images.

And in contrast to a dispassionate stream of 1s and 0s, this “superhighway” is defined by pure, irrepressible terror. A churning tapestry of darkness and fear.

(Called **DR. SILENCE’S SIGHT** from here on out.)

On the center “median” of the “traffic” stands a petrified Dr. Silence. Or some ethereal, vulnerable version of him.

(This version - seen only in his “sight” - will be called DR. SILENCE’S HIGHER SELF.)

Dr. Silence’s Higher Self searches for an exit. But unlike Neo, he has no clue how to stop bullets... let alone whatever THIS is. One step off the median and he will be STAMPEDED.

Then, up ahead, he spies a WOMAN on the median’s edge.

DR. SILENCE’S HIGHER SELF
...Eva?

The woman (EVA, mid-40s) smiles back at him like she has a secret he couldn’t understand.

Then SHE LEAPS—

DR. SILENCE’S HIGHER SELF (CONT'D)
—NO, WAI—!!!

—AND IS OBLITERATED.

Dr. Silence screams. He sprints towards where Eva was—

—but a WALL OF PULSING DARK ENERGY shoots up through the superhighway “traffic” to block him.

Dr. Silence runs, but the wall pursues him. Just as it's about to overtake him—

—he is yanked backward, sucked out of the "superhighway" like an inverting black hole, into—

—*WHOOOOOOOOOOSH*—

THE STUDY

—reality. Dr. Silence lies in the fetal position. He trembles violently, mentally crippled with shock.

What just happened HAS NEVER HAPPENED BEFORE.

A hand touches his back— he jumps!

It's Julia. She's shocked - SCARED - by the sight of him...

...and she's sobbing.

JULIA
Somebody already told you?

Dr. Silence just stares back, unable to speak.

CUT TO BLACK.