

Andreas Pritzker

Dropped out of Time

A Narrative from the Future



The protagonist of this story is Damian Trank – the great-grandson of Gerold Trank, whose narrative was recounted by the author in *Time Reclaimed*.

The year is 2085. Damian Trank's brain gets damaged in an accident. Thanks to the possibilities of modern medical science, it can be restored, but the memories are lost. Although there are ways to alleviate the patient's situation, Damian is unable to cope with this loss, until a book written by his great-grandfather in the 1990s points him in the right direction.

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1

He woke up, feeling only emptiness. He opened his eyes. Everything was blurry. Then something happened with his eyes, and he began to register what he was seeing.

He registered something white, and the word “cabinet” came to his mind, just as the words “something” and “white” had a moment earlier. He registered a sound, which caused his head to roll to the side. The word “door” came to his mind for what he saw there, framed in a “wall”, hanging from “hinges” – yet more words that came to his mind. Opposite the hinges was a handle that was slowly being pushed downwards.

The door started to turn on its hinges, opening a crack, which then grew wider, slowly wider, revealing a figure, a figure that then moved closer, growing larger, a figure in white, the figure of a woman, a nurse, a human being with a face, a face with eyes, brown eyes, calm eyes that were moving closer, and lips, red lips that were moving, opening to reveal teeth, then opening again to reveal a tongue moving between the teeth, right in front of his own eyes.

The lips moved and sounds escaped them and he understood that the lips were saying something, that they were trying to communicate with him: “Damian Trank... your name is Damian Trank... Damian... Trank.”

The nurse had moved, she had moved closer then moved away again, she had moved her head and her arms, and even her face had moved. And he realized that he could move too. He turned his head. First to the right, where he saw a nightstand between himself and the door, then to the left, where sunlight was streaming in through a window.

The window was open, and more sounds could be heard from outside – birds singing, crickets chirping, human voices speaking, all soft, muffled by the distance. He registered various other things beyond the window: green treetops above which fluffy white shapes called clouds floated in a vast blue expanse that seemed so far away, the sky.

He registered all the things he was seeing and he knew their names, yet he couldn't make sense of anything at all. He closed his eyes, and the words that had emerged from within him floated around behind his closed eyes in a swirling chaos; they were like snowflakes, rhythmically dancing about as they drifted down to the ground, each one independent of the others.

The notion of “color” then came to him. He opened his eyes, registering the colors white and beige in the room. The blue and green outside the window were colors too. And something inside him said that such colors could only be discerned in daylight, and that daylight comes from sunlight.

He felt a deep bewilderment take hold of him. Although he could register the things around him and he knew their names, he had no idea what they meant for him or how they related to him. He desperately wanted to know more, a process which would require what were known as questions. Questions would lead to answers. But he had none at his disposal. He grew desperate. He could feel how deeply desperate he was – so desperate that water ran from his eyes. He knew that he was crying and he felt disconsolate, until he finally sank into a consolatory nothingness.

*

When he woke up, darkness filled the room around him, as well as the vast space beyond the room's window. He knew that it was nighttime. He registered the passage of time,

and the fact that there were changes inherent in that process. And now he began to recall what he had seen before everything had sunk into darkness, not only registering the individual things, but also connecting them in his mind, continuously grasping new concepts.

It was an exciting process. He registered similarities – the nurse's clothing, the room's ceiling, and the clouds had all been white. And differences – the sky had been blue, not white, and the treetops had been green. The nurse's voice, the birdsong, and the crickets' chirping were all sounds – but different sounds. Both the door and the window were openings in the walls of the room in which he found himself. He grasped the concept of space – there was space inside the room, and that space continued even outside the room.

Each new realization gave him a sense of satisfaction. The door opening was vertical, he himself was horizontal. The nurse had moved, and so had the clouds in the sky, and even the treetops had moved gently back and forth. He himself could move – he could turn his head, raise his arm. Only the cabinet and the walls of the room stood motionless; he could use them to orient himself and discern the movements of other things.

And then he registered the fact that he was thinking – that this was a process happening in his mind. He, Damian Trank, was lying in a room, at nighttime, thinking ceaselessly. He asked questions and he found answers, but these answers only brought more questions, so he once again surrendered himself to the pleasant nothingness.

*

When he returned to the world of things, the darkness was gone. Instead, there was brightness all around him. He registered the fact that the light was coming in through the window and, finding it uncomfortable, he turned his head

towards the door. Two figures were standing there – the nurse and a man who now turned to her and said, “He’s awake; he’s responding to the light.”

Damian realized that this man must be a doctor, and this meant he must be in a hospital, lying in bed in a bright room, presumably not well – although illness was generally accompanied by pain, of which he felt none, except when the sunlight hit his eyes.

The doctor took his, Damian’s, hand, looked at him, and said, “Damian Trank, say something – repeat after me, ‘I am Damian Trank.’”

He felt his lips move and he heard a sound come from within himself, yet the doctor just shook his head. But then he heard himself say, “Damian... Trank.”

“Excellent,” proclaimed the doctor. He smiled at the nurse, and she smiled back. “Stay with him and help him start talking,” said the doctor as he left the room. Damian heard himself repeating, “Stay... with... him.” He could feel his lips moving, his tongue too. He could speak.

“That was Dr. Meister,” said the nurse. “Dr. Meister’s a master – he brought you back to life after your terrible accident.”

“Dr. Meister... brought... me back... to life,” said Damian, with no idea what the nurse was talking about, but nevertheless unsettled by her words – they had sounded like an explanation, yet ultimately hadn’t explained anything.

“You need to eat now,” said the nurse, taking a bowl and spoon from the bedside table, then removing the spoon from the bowl horizontally and holding it out towards Damian’s mouth. “We brought you out of your coma yesterday and took you off the IV drip; you’ll get only pureed foods for the next few days, but then you can start having normal meals again.” Damian understood only the individual words, without grasping the meaning of the complete sentence; he sensed that it related to some important process.

He felt the saltiness of the puree on his tongue, and then it was swallowed. He noticed that his stomach was disagreeably empty and wanted to be filled. "And now the milk," said the nurse, lifting his head up with her hand and bringing a cup to his mouth. A sense of happiness immediately came over him - the milk was delectable. The earlier uneasiness was still there inside him, but it was now overtaken by this good feeling.

2

Damian sat, fully dressed, at the white metal table near the window, waiting for Dr. Meister's morning visit. He was waiting for the master who had brought him back to life – without him even asking. He was anxious to hear more details about what had happened. Nurse Mara had always amicably refused to discuss it with him, saying, "When the time is right, the doctor will explain everything to you." Today, she had ceremoniously declared, was the day that he would find out more. "You were basically like a newborn when you woke up here," she had added. "But with your ability to speak and your already-developed motor skills, you've greatly expanded your cognition of the world over these last two weeks."

The only thing he knew was that he was at the Schinznach Brain Clinic. He looked out at the clinic's gardens and saw the impeccable, lush green lawn stretching down to the riverbank, studded with bushes and flowerbeds and ringed by tall old trees. The clinic was nestled in the woods; a row of trees formed a canopy of shade above the footpath that ran along the riverbank.

He wondered what sort of view would be seen from the window of his home office. As if on demand, a photograph came to his mind that had been snapped by someone, presumably himself, looking out the window from his desk. It too showed the green treetops of stately, broad-leaved trees, in front of a two-century-old red-brick building, with fragments of additional similar middle-class buildings visible in the background.

Something in his memory told him that European building regulations required all houses in a village or town district to