

This book is about the failure to achieve dreams, and the healing journey to be able to dream and thrive again. This is a tale about love and betrayal, braves and murderers, kidnappers and heroes, but most of all, these are stories about the greatness of the human spirit and how we can all rise from our circumstances to a better self.

I Had A Dream

-from brokenness to freedom-

by Pablo Kohn

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Based on True Events

I
HAD A
DREAM

*from brokenness
to freedom*

A novel by

PABLO KOHN



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Prologue

Thursday, November 25, 2010, Los Angeles, California

One hundred and sixty blue solar-powered LED lights accent the imposing Vincent Thomas Bridge against the darkest night.

The sound of helicopters rumbles the ground. Ten yards before the bridge's side span, an accident blocks both sides of the freeway. Seaside Freeway, the artery that links Long Beach with San Pedro, makes its way across the five-mile government-operated island.

The traffic accident has both the media and the government on edge. The bridge's importance in the West Coast economy and the country overall is incalculable. It is the bulkiest point of entry in the west, handling a quarter of all cargo coming into the United States. Terminal Island, home of the Port of Los Angeles, is one of the most guarded pieces of land in US territory: patrolled by the US Coast Guard, Los Angeles Port Police, Los Angeles Fire Department, Homeland Security, US Customs and Border Protection and Los Angeles County Lifeguards.

Helicopters from the Police department scan the area at low height while four others from local TV stations hover to report live. According to reports, the accident was caused by a reckless driver who fled the scene. An eighteen-wheeler lies overturned and ablaze. The truck driver has been rescued from the burning truck, but his identity and condition remain unknown.

...

Summer, 1973. Somewhere deep in the forest of South America.

Back in the day, before ATMs, mobile phones and other modern commodities, store owners used to go around the countryside collecting payment of goods they had sold to farmers in installments.

Manny, a successful young businessman, and Juan, his best friend, and personal attorney, reached a crooked wooden gate after driving the narrow backroads of the countryside for hours. A shack was sitting at the end of a neglected front yard with an abandoned car on the right side, chickens wandering around, unattended field machinery, and two pigs resting in a little pond that had accumulated after last night rain.

The farmer was a regular client at Manny workshop, and a few months ago had bought a used pickup truck from him in small installments. Manny and Juan were about to get out of the pickup when they saw three mad dogs charging toward them from around the house, barking menacingly.

“Never mind them,” shouted the farmer’s son as he emerged from the house. “Barking dogs don't bite.” He was a skinny, disheveled teenager, clearly high. “Stupid dogs . . . Good for nothing!” He said stumbling between words. “Just last night, someone stole tools right in front of their noses.” The angry young man looked at his dogs in disgust. “Do you think they even barked? Stupid animals. They eat more than me and are completely useless. Beware of dogs that don't bark.”

Manny and his friend looked at each other in bewilderment. The kid must have noticed because he quickly added, “Excuse my manners, Mr. Manny, good morning.” He extended his hand. “My father was expecting you. He had to run to town to take care of some urgent matters, but he told me you were coming.” He rubbed his nose nervously, an excuse for his rattled hands.

“Thank you, Mr. Gonzalez, I appreciate it,” said Manny, understanding the problematic financial situation farmers were going

through since rain had been an elusive guest this year. “So, how is the truck running?” he said, trying to lighten the mood.

“The truck is good, but the drought is making our lives miserable. Plantings are dying.” The teenage drug-addict replied trembling, failing to keep his own body under control. “It rained a couple of downpours last night, but nothing significant.”

“I know,” Manny replied, and Juan nodded. “It's been a difficult year.”

“You have no idea,” said the teenager awkwardly. “But I don't wanna hold you off. Let me get your money.” He went inside the house.

Minutes later, the young drug addict came back, gun in hands, shouting. “You want money? Here is your money, bastard!” At the time he started shooting wildly at close range.

Manny and Juan tried to run for cover, unable to fully comprehend what happened.

The gunman ran out of ammo, dropped the gun, and fled to the forest.

Juan realized that one of the shots reached his arm. The pain was growing stronger, to the point he could barely keep his composure. Looking around, confused, he saw in the corner of his eye that Manny was collapsing to the ground. Juan ran to catch him in his arms, imploring for a help that would never come. He looked down in horror to see his friend fading away.

Manny looked at him peacefully. Struggling to breathe, he was able to articulate something, “did she know...” he murmured. But Juan couldn't quite understand. “Did she know how much I loved her?” He powered through the pain. Wondering out loud, he voiced his final breath to heaven, “will she ever know...?”

...

Chapter 1

Sometimes I dream about them, or it is just the memory of things. The smell of freshly cut grass, the earth when it starts to rain, the rhythm of leaves hitting the ground, the carelessness of children's laughter, the antics that will never come back. Life was so simple; we did not know it was the best time of our lives.

“Good morning, sunshine.”

What is life, but the reconstruction of past things? The consequences of the decisions we have made, and the memories we have left to live with.

“Another beautiful day, the Lord has made.”

Her voice brought me up.

“This morning couldn't be any brighter,” she continued carelessly. “Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise, my mamma used to say, and God, she was right.”

She was talking to someone that wasn't me. However, she didn't bother to wait for an answer either, just kept going with her senseless monologue.

“Up, up, up, sleepyhead, we are burning daylight,” she said overexcited. “Don't you love this time of the year? Holidays put everybody in a good mood. This morning someone even held the elevator door for me, can you believe it? And this weather come on! It couldn't be any more perfect. It is cold outside, but the sun still manages to give us a nice, warm hug.”

She kept bustling around the room with a verbiage of meaningless clichés when in a single stroke opened the heavy blackout curtains. A ray of heat came through the room like a laser, slashing the darkness in its path.

“Did I ever tell you I love mornings? It’s like a new beginning, a new chapter. Every single day brings the unparalleled opportunity to give it another try. This morning before I got up, the Lord told me, ‘Meshone, this is my gift to you. You go, girl! and make the most out of it.’ Well, not exactly in those words.”

Jesus, what’s wrong with her? Someone, please, make her stop. Anyone...?

“Good morning, beautiful.”

Tangled in my thoughts that I almost missed it.

“You are right. It is a beautiful morning.”

That is when I heard his voice for the first time; slow pace, deep tone; the most pleasant voice I had ever heard in my life, containing the cadence and wisdom that only a thousand years can give to someone.

“I was asleep, counting the seconds to see you.” He quipped.

So much for wisdom. First, what you just said doesn't make sense. Second, does anybody even know I am here? What is this place? Where am I?

“You are gorgeous today, Meshone, matching this beautiful morning.”

The old man continued down the pathetic road.

“I love the flowered scrubs, very festive. Wait, those are new scrubs, aren’t they? Are you dressing up for me, young lady?” A mischievous tone entered his voice.

She did not bother to turn around. “I’m not dressing up for you, old man,” she replied sharply. “Plus, I stopped being young, right after the Ice Age.”

“Oh, don’t be modest, Meshone. I love this Carmen Miranda look on you.” He made an hourglass motion with his bony hands; at the time he was fighting to get up.

“Carmen Miranda? Okay, you are officially an old, old man. And I’m anything but modest. There is a difference between modest and real; I take real any day.”

“I love your pragmatism. If only I were a few decades younger.”

“You’re making a fool of yourself.” She let a faint grin creep through. “What are you, eighteen?”

“More like eighty.”

“You wish.”

“All right, guilty. But you can’t hide behind that cold, professional look, young lady.”

Clearly, the old man was enjoying making her uncomfortable.

She stopped her duties around the room, turned around, and in a cheesy, soap-opera voice, said, “You’re right, Mr. Zinfandel. Please, don’t make it more complicated than it already is.”

Like a kid on Christmas day, the old man lit up. That was all he wanted, to lighten her day, to make her smile.

Getting all professional again, she commanded as she was leaving the room, “Now, be a good boy and keep an eye on your roommate, would you, please? I’ll be back soon to check on him—and you, as well.” With that, she left to continue her rounds.

I watched this silly scene from the seclusion of myself. I wanted to speak, to move, to scream, to run, but my body did not obey me. *Why am I here? Who are these people? Who is this guy, and what’s up with that stupid name, Zinfandel? That sounds just about right for a drunken old man.* A thousand questions hammered my head.

I couldn't make sense of anything. Every time I tried to recall what happened, flashbacks flooded my head in confusion. High-pitched noises. People running. Rumbling metals, blood, and a sound that made the earth tremble. My head was like a blender, crashing all memories. I was crawling through the pain, drowning in a swamp of broken images and anger.

Chapter 2

Sunday, November 28, 2010

An hour after breakfast, the old man with a wine name came back from his morning walk, took off his jacket, pulled a chair to the side of the bed, and continued with what seemed to be an unfinished conversation. “Okay, where were we?” He sat and reached for his coffee.

The morning was pleasant. The sun coming through the windows warmed the room nicely, while the coffee steam danced up from the cup. The old man looked at the young patient, wrestling with unanswered questions. *Who works on Thanksgiving? Is anybody looking for you, is anyone waiting for you to come back home?*

Enchanted by the aroma of the freshly brewed coffee and the coziness of the fall morning, he unintentionally slipped into a time he didn’t want to remember anymore. A life abandoned so far in the past that the memories had faded almost completely, but not the emotions. They were as vivid and raw as the first day. Children starved to their bones, covered in mud and snot. Women, stripped down of all dignity, freezing in the Syrian desert. Worthless corps piled up, burning up to the black sky. Like an overflowing lake pressing against its dam, the images were too heavy, too many, too painful to allow them to resurface.

A twinge in his chest brought him back to the hospital room; he looked down to the inert hapless young man. “I know you’re in there. I know you can hear me,” he said tenderly to the patient in a coma. “I know you’re lost in a dark valley, searching desperate, maybe even afraid. But don’t be mad. Anger and resentment are bad companions; they only cloud judgment and makes matters worse.”

The old man pursued in his crusade, talking like a father to the son he didn’t have anymore. He coughed roughly, his throat was dry, and

his chest ached. He looked down and sipped on his coffee. “Listen to me, son. This situation, this hospital bed, is just a temporary stage in your life.” Passionately, he persevered. “For good or bad...; for good and bad, nothing lasts forever. ‘This too shall pass,’ said the wise...”

“You know he can’t hear your preaching, right?” Meshone walked into the room.

“Preaching...” Mr. Z chuckled, looking at her like a kid caught red-handed. “I wish I had the wisdom to do it.”

Meshone, the busy nurse, was in her early-fifties, 5 foot 2, 150 pounds. African American single mother of two, struggling to make ends meet. Her big white teeth and voluptuous lips have forgotten how to draw the most incredible smile you’ve ever seen. Her hair was short, pulled back into a small ponytail; she had neither the time nor the money to take care of it. Born in the small, rural town of Theodore, Alabama, founded in 1890 but acknowledge by the census until nearly a hundred years later; she had become too familiar with setbacks in life.

“I believe he is somewhere in there,” the hopeful man advocated. “He might be lost, but I do believe he is fighting the fight of his life.”

“Preaching again, old man.” Meshone was not impressed with the display of hope and emotions. “I know you are an optimist, but facts are not in your favor, Mr. Zinfandel. You are wasting your time.” She sentenced as she continued taking note of the readings in a clipboard.

“Time . . . the urgency of time.” He nodded. “When you get to my age, the sense of time and urgency changes, my dear. It is never a waste to hope for the best and act accordingly.”

“Be my guest,” Meshone refuted unengaged. She had seen too many of these cases in her long RN career. “Let me know when he answers back,” she said, then left to continue her rounds.

Mr. Z. bent over the young patient. “Don’t worry about her, my friend. Once you get to know her, you’ll find her to be one of the most amazing persons you’ll ever meet. I know you can hear me. Follow my voice to the surface.”

Mr. Z drained his coffee and gazed blankly out the window, all the way into his past. Memories came rushing back, frenetically dancing around his mind. Faded old engrams became alive in front of his eyes. Somewhere between thoughts and wounds, the old man slept away, drifting into an era of suffering and darkness he wanted to forget, but couldn’t completely let go.

Chapter 3

Belarus 1928

Ten years after the War to End All Wars, the old continent was deeply submerged in an unparalleled depression. Hopeless, starving, and sick, people aimlessly wandered, searching for ways out of their devastated lives.

Bladimir was fifteen years old, five foot ten, black hair, blue eyes. His family was in great financial need. His dad, a high-ranking military officer, wanted him to have better opportunities or at least not starve to death, like most of his peers. To join the army was the best and only option for his young son. However, the idea did not sit well with Bladimir. “I will find a way, Dad. I’ll find a way to help, Mom,” he promised.

After months of struggling with food, money, illnesses, and even his father, he started to entertain the notion of leaving his home. Amid one of his many sleepless nights wrestling with the burden, he finally gave in to the painful reality: he must bid farewell to everyone and adventure into the unknown.

He walked for ten long days, the 350 miles through the ravaged land of peasants, to the port of Klaipeda, Lithuania. His heart was racing, and his spirit was open to the unexpected, but his broken soul made his eyes leak through the cracks. More than once, he questioned his actions, doubted his steps. More than once, he was ready to turn back around. “I will find a way to help,” he had said, and he was determined to keep his word.

In Klaipeda, he embarked on the first cargo ship sailing for the New World, where he worked his ticket to the promised land.

Life at sea wasn’t pleasant. Even the merchant giant was no match for mighty Poseidon. Even the most straightforward task of sweeping

the floor was deceptively challenging. After his chores he would walk to the boat's stern, lean over the edge, and stare for hours, following with his eyes the ship's wake in the water east, all the way home. He teared up thinking about his family, his friends, his home, and the only life he had ever known and was leaving behind. He had gambled it all to chase nothing more than uncertainty.

Day after day, Bladimir would work from dawn to dusk, shower, dinner, walk up to the stern and reflect in silence, staring at the starry sky for the longest time.

One evening after dinner, he was strolling toward the stern as he'd done for days when an idea lit up in his soul. He stopped, gazed left, to the stern, then looked to the right, to the bow. Looked back to his left, held his breath, and walked right ahead, to the very edge of the bow. The wind in his face blew away all doubt. He took a slow, deep, long breath, closed his eyes and held it in, until there was nothing but hope in his lungs.

It was a simple change, invisible to the rest of the crew. Nonetheless, it completely changed the journey. From that day on, after work, he walked to front of the ship instead of the back. He looked forward instead of backward. He started exploring the endless possibilities of the future instead of dwelling on the unmerciful stiffness of the past.

After a month, two weeks and three days on the ocean, Bladimir arrived at the busiest port of South America, the last urban conglomerate of the continent. With no farther place to go, he disembarked in the young and prosperous Buenos Aires.

Chapter 4

Hospital

Mr. Zinfandel got lost in the story. He unconsciously tried to sip from his cup of coffee; the emptiness brought him back. He coughed roughly and gazed at the wall clock. *10:30. Just the right time for one more cup*, he thought. He leaned over the edge of the bed to help his tired legs hold his body weight. *Years do not go in vain*; he thought with a smile. His right hand inadvertently grazed the young patient's inert left arm—when he saw a very subtle movement.

Mr. Z stood frozen in the act. He couldn't believe his eyes. Dubious if it was a muscle reflex, the bedsheets, or his eager mind was playing tricks on him. Tentatively, he tried it again. With so much care, almost trembling at the idea, as though the young man's skin might break at the touch; the old man reached out again. And, back again, the patient's left pinky finger moved almost imperceptibly.

In his excitement, Mr. Z started calling for help.

Meshone, who was a couple of rooms down the corridor, stormed in.

“He moved his hand! I saw it. I touched him accidentally, and he moved it. He moved his hands, Meshone, I saw it.” His eyes were wide open, about to pop out of his skull.

“Let me look, Mr. Zinfandel.” Meshone was inspecting the equipment. “I am pretty sure it is just muscle reflex.” Though Meshone was quick to dismiss Mr. Z's excitement, she still dutifully checked the CO2 monitor, looking for any indication.

“No, Meshone, that was my first thought as well, but he responded to the touch. It was intentional; he is trying to tell us something.”

“I do not see any indication in the readings, Mr. Z.” The experienced nurse knew better. “You are an optimist; I’ll give you that. Your mind and good intentions are playing tricks on you. But this kind of trauma is so severe that his swollen brain is trying to burst his skull. We cannot open it yet because of the internal bleeding, plus his heart wouldn’t support a surgery like this right now. We are waiting for the infusions, transfusion, antibiotics, and anti-inflammatories to do their job. He’s in a coma. He cannot move, hear us talk, or know where he is, much less responds to touch.”

“How is it possible?”

“It is quite normal for these types of patients to muscle-reflect to the touch, sometimes.” Meshone lectured him, totally unimpressed.

“No. How is it possible no one came to visit him or at least looking for this guy?”

“We’ve been trying to reach his family, but the accident was so severe that all the documents were lost in the fire. The fact that he was transporting rolls of paper didn’t help. The truck is registered under his name as a sole proprietor, but the info at the DMV does not match any actual useful record. It is not that unusual for some people to keep old or inaccurate information on record to protect their families.”

“Protect...? from what?”

Meshone looked at Mr. Z, incredulous at his naivete.

The centennial globetrotter quickly realized. “What a way to live.”

“Listen,” the experienced nurse felt compassionate for the old soul. “Maybe his family is out of town because of the holidays; or he doesn’t have anyone, who knows? Whatever the case, we are working hard to find someone. Plus, it has only been a couple of days since the accident, and it is a long weekend, after all.”

“What about his phone? Didn’t he have a phone?”

“I heard he did. However, it was destroyed and will take days for the Police to crack its memory if they can.”

The hoper Mr. Z was not ready to give up. “He looks so healthy and strong. Do you think he’s got a chance?”

“To be honest, nobody can tell. Even though he is in good physical condition, he has major traumas, concussions, and other matters to deal with,” Meshone was trying to sound somehow optimistic. “But everything else looks to function well, so who knows?” Even though she knew better. “He is lucky to be alive. However, we don’t know the encephalitic sequelae he might have. So, when or if he wakes up, that will only be the beginning. Nobody can know exactly; it could be months, years, or, never.”

“Or days,” Mr. Z was quick to reply, leaving the door open to a miracle.

“I appreciate your optimism, Mr. Zinfandel, I do. But I have seen this movie before, and more often than not, it doesn’t have a happy ending.”

“But some of them wake up,” the old man said with pleading smile.

Meshone sighted. “The first twenty-four hours after injury will determine the whereabouts of a patient,” hiding behind academics. “If the best scale is 3 to 4 after twenty-four hours, 87% of them will either die or remain in a vegetative state. Yeah, some of them do wake up. But I wouldn’t keep my hopes high. He might not walk or speak or remember anything.”

“Or...” the old dreamer said, still trying to show optimism in arid soil.

Meshone touched his shoulder, turned around, and left.

Mr. Zinfandel was determined to do everything in his power to help the unlucky soul, even if it meant telling stories about strangers from the end of the world.

He leaned over the inert body, whispered tenderly into his ear. “I know you are in there, my friend. You are not alone. Follow my voice. We are waiting for you.” He profoundly believed not only that this guy was able to hear him, but that his voice would guide the lost soul through the darkness to the light.

Later in the afternoon, Meshone came back to the room with two cups of tea. Without words, she put one of the mugs on the nightstand between the two beds and started going through the equipment again. She straightened the bedsheets casually. “How is our patient doing?”

Mr. Z appreciated her good intentions. “He is better than yesterday but not as good as tomorrow,” he said, playing along.

She was not going to argue with him. “Yes, I like his color,” she said. “Maybe he will surprise us tomorrow.”

“Never underestimate the strength of the human spirit, Meshone. You wouldn’t believe what people are capable of if they can only find a reason to fight for.”

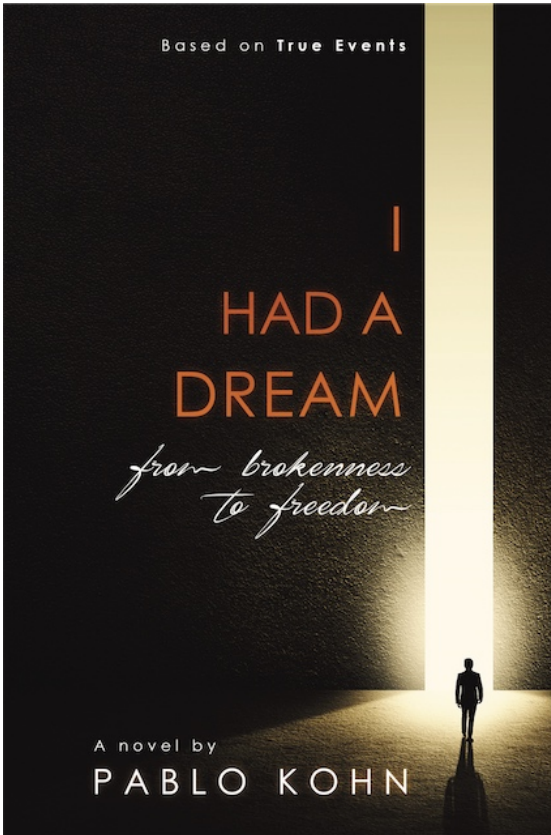
Meshone knew a story was coming, and since her shift was over, she took one of the cups of tea, gave the other to Mr. Z, and walked around the bed to sit on the sofa.

It was a cold, rainy fall evening.

Mr. Z got up, walked to the dripping windows with the steamy cup in his hand, staring at the nothingness across the glass. Seagulls were carelessly gliding, and the mist remained suspended over the cliff; beyond, the Pacific Ocean was rhythmically swinging, as the sun was sitting quietly. “Many years ago,” the centennial storyteller announced, “I knew a girl, Anne,” he said. “She was five feet, one

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hundred pounds, black curly hair, and big blue eyes. You wouldn't believe what had to go through, at such an early age.”



This book is about the failure to achieve dreams, and the healing journey to be able to dream and thrive again. This is a tale about love and betrayal, braves and murderers, kidnappers and heroes, but most of all, these are stories about the greatness of the human spirit and how we can all rise from our circumstances to a better self.

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