

Awakenings

(Drama) (1990)

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Major Characters

Dr. Malcolm Sayer.....Robin Williams

A very shy and gentle research neurologist (a person who studies the brain and nervous system) who comes to work at the Bainbridge Hospital, where there are many patients who have been in a sleep-like (comatose) state for 30 or more years.

Eleanor Costello.....Julie Kavner

A sweet nurse at the hospital who supports Dr. Sayer in his work with the hospital's patients.

Leonard Lowe.....Robert De Niro

A patient who has been basically "asleep" at the hospital for three decades (from 1939 to 1969), who is dramatically woken by the use of an experimental drug that Dr. Sayer decides to try.

Dr. Kaufman.....John Heard

The head of the Neurology Department at the hospital who is very cynical about trying to wake the comatose patients.

Mrs. Lowe.....Ruth Nelson

Leonard's mom, who agrees to let Dr. Sayer try to wake her son.

Lucy.....Alice Drummond

Another patient at the hospital, who has been asleep since 1926!

Paula.....Penelope Ann Miller

The daughter of one of the hospital's patients, who meets Leonard while visiting her father and begins a brief friendship with him.

Plot Summary

This is the true story of a well known neurologist who decided to use an experimental drug in the late 1960s to see if he could "wake" a group of patients that had fallen into a sleep-like state in the 1920s and 30s, due to a horrible disease that had spread mysteriously throughout the United States. In ways that are still not understood, this disease, caused by a virus, attacked the brains and nervous systems of the people who became its victims.

In 1969, Dr. Malcolm Sayer (who, in real life, is the neurologist and author, Dr. Oliver Sacks), took a job as a clinical neurologist treating various patients at the Bainbridge Hospital in New York City, even though he had had no experience dealing with actual people. Sayer is a kind and very caring person who wanted to do more than just keep this mysterious group of patients alive, and thus with the encouragement of nurse Costello, he decides to experiment with a new drug called Dopamine, that had been approved for Parkinson's disease (another illness that effects the nervous system), but had never been tried in patients that suffered from this so-called sleeping sickness.

Amazingly, the first patient that Malcolm gives the drug to, a gentle middle-aged man named Leonard who had fallen asleep in 1939, slowly awakes from his 30 year sleep. Soon, Malcolm convinces the hospital that all the sleeping patients should be awoken with the Dopamine, and at first, it looks as if a genuine medical miracle has taken place. But of course, the patients must face the reality that they have all slept through most of their adult lives, and that they are no longer the young people they were when they had last fallen asleep. Even worse, it eventually becomes clear that Dopamine is not as miraculous as it was first thought, and slowly but surely, Malcolm, the hospital staff, and of course Leonard and the other patients, must face the possibility that their long and mysterious sleep could still return....

Some Words and Expressions that You May not Know

*Dr. Malcolm Sayer arrives at the Bainbridge Hospital,
to begin a new career as a clinical neurologist.*

Look at this car; It's gotta be a Ford.

Note that "It has got to" ----> "It's gotta" in rapid speech.

Come on, let's go!

The most common and versatile phrasal verb in English, often taking on the meaning of words that surround it. Here, meaning hurry up!

When will he be well?

In this case, "well" means not sick.

The Bronx.

One of the five major boroughs, or sections, of New York City, and the borough where Bainbridge Hospital is located.

I can connect you to the cafeteria, but then they'll have to page him.

Note that "to page" used to mean to contact a person over a loudspeaker system, but now it can mean to contact a person directly, thanks to small paging devices people carry with them.

I'm here to apply for a research position in your neurology lab.

In this case, a "position" is a job. A "neurology lab" is a laboratory where scientists study the nervous system (nerves and the brain).

This is a chronic hospital...the position is for staff neurologist.

A "chronic hospital" is a hospital for patients who have medical or psychological conditions that are basically permanent or very long lasting (A chronic disease can last forever). A "staff neurologist" is a doctor who works treating patients with neurological problems.

It was an immense project. I was to extract a dekagram of myelin from four tons of earthworms.

"Immense" means huge or extremely big. "To extract" means to remove from, or separate. A "ton" is 2,000 pounds, and an "earthworm" is a common worm, which is a very small tube-like animal (A dekagram is a tiny unit of measurement, and myelin is a very scientific word for material that surrounds a nerve. You won't use it unless you become a neurologist!).

It will never work. We're totally understaffed here.

If a place is "understaffed," there are not enough workers to do all the jobs that need to be done.

You're clearly looking for someone with more of a clinical background.

A doctor who has a "clinical background" is one who has worked with patients in a medical clinic, as opposed to laboratories doing research (A clinic is an office or building where patients see doctors).

There must be 100 more applicants that are suitable for this position.

An "applicant" is a person who applies or tries to get something, in this case a job. If a person is "suitable" for a position, they are appropriate or at least qualified for it (Note that Dr. Sayer had *only research* experience, and had almost never worked with real people!)

You took a pulse, you took a temperature, you did a diagnosis.

A "pulse" is the beating of blood moving away from the heart, usually felt by a doctor at the wrist. A "diagnosis" is a statement or analysis, often after a doctor has looked at a person's medical condition.

You see, Doc, we got MS, Teurette's Syndrome, Parkinson's disease.

"Doc" is a slangy but common way of referring to a doctor. "MS" is the disease multiple sclerosis, which attacks the muscles. "Teurette's Syndrome" is a condition in which patients can't control their nervous ticks (shaking) or emotional outbursts, and thus they will often scream obscene words without being able to stop. "Parkinson's disease" is a chronic nervous disease in which usually older people begin to constantly shake and lose control of their bodies.

We call this place the garden, because all we do is feed and water them.

A sad line. Some of the neurological patients are not even aware that they are alive, and thus the hospital staff only need to feed them and make sure they get enough water.

I reside at the Brooklyn Psychiatric Hospital.

"To reside" at a place is to live there. "Brooklyn" is one of the five boroughs of New York City, and a "psychiatric hospital" is a hospital for patients with serious emotional or psychological problems.

Prior to that, I was a person.

"Prior to" means before.

After observing Lucy, Dr. Sayer becomes convinced that the sleeping sickness patients are alive inside.

She was brought in late last night; Here's her file.

A "file" is a collection of records, papers and various documents that describe a person's past.

Dementia of unknown origin, unresponsive.

"Dementia" is a psychological term that refers to a person who is without any emotional interest (it also can mean crazy). The "origin" of something is where it comes from, or its original source.

They say she has always been as she is now, with no response or comprehension.

"Comprehension" is another word for understanding. The person being described does not respond to any human or outside stimulus.

If she batted it away, I might call it a reflex.

"To bat away" something is to hit or strike it so that it moves away. A "reflex" is a critical word in medicine that refers to the automatic movement of a body part in response to an outside stimulus (such as when a doctor gently hits your knee, and your leg rises in response).

Sorry. If you were right, I might agree with you.
A very clever line!

She borrows the will of the ball.

A person's "will" is their intent, determination or desire. Normally, we would say that only living things have wills, but not objects like balls.

You're trying to make a good impression.

"To make a good impression" is to act in such a way that the people you are with think that you are a good or admirable person.

Will you see to it that Dr. Sayer's patients that are waiting outside are rescheduled for tomorrow.

"To see to it" that something happens is to make sure that it happens.
"To reschedule" a meeting is usually to move it back to later in time.

I prefer your explanation, and I'll look after things until it settles down.

In this case, if a situation "settles down," it becomes calmer or more peaceful and stable.

Yes, I'll hold.

The verb that is used when a person asks you to wait for another person, while you are on the phone.

Yippee, we're in orbit!

"Yippee" is a child's way of expressing excitement. If a space ship is "in orbit" around a planet, it is circling it.

That Nestle chocolate flavor is out of this world.

If something is "out of this world," it is extremely good, or in this case, delicious (Nestle is a huge chocolate company).

Time to recharge with Nestle's Quick.

In this context, to "recharge" a person is to feed them in order to give them energy (Nestle's Quick is a type of chocolate milk).

Must be all that jell-o they gave you.

"Jell-o" is a type of light dessert that is made of fruit.

This is atypical schizophrenia.

If something is "atypical," it is not typical, but rare or abnormal.
"Schizophrenia" is a well known psychological condition in which people have trouble understanding reality and the world around them (It is also popularly seen as the condition in which certain mental patients have two or more personalities or self-identities).

Atypical hysteria, atypical nerve impairment.

“Hysteria” is a highly excited emotional state, often marked by fear or great upset. “Nerve impairment” is damage to the nervous system so that it is not working as it should.

No change of therapy recommended.

In this case, “therapy” refers to drugs that are taken, although it can also refer to psychological counseling.

You would think at a certain point all these atypical somethings would amount to a typical something.

If two or more things “amount to” something else, they are equal to that something else when combined together. This is Dr. Sayer’s way of saying lots of strange symptoms together might be, when combined, a normal symptom of another disease.

Encephalitis Lethargitis.

Very medical and Latin term for a disease of the brain (encephalitis) that makes people very unresponsive or lazy (lethargic).

I found the connection! They all survived encephalitis years before they came here.

In this case, a “connection” is something that two or more people all have in common.

Encephalitis Outbreak Reaches Epidemic Proportions: Record Death Toll.

This is a headline in a newspaper: An “Outbreak” of a disease is a sudden spread of that disease to many people. An “epidemic” is the spread of a disease throughout the population, and “proportions” is another word for magnitude or size. The “death toll” is the number of people who have died from it.

The Mystery Malady; Alarming Spread of “Somnolent Fever.”

A “malady” is another word for a disease or sickness. If something is “alarming” it is very scary or disturbing. “Somnolent” is a scientific word for something that causes people to fall asleep.

How are they? :: Just as you described them back then; Insubstantial as ghosts.

“Insubstantial” is weak, or refers to something that is not solid.

You’re in an acute stage of the illness.

“Acute” means severe, serious or dangerous.

In this case, “stage” means part of phase.

Years went by before these strange neurological symptoms would appear, but they did.

“Neurological” refers to anything that has to do with the nervous system. A “symptom” is a sign of a disease, such as a fever or cough.

They could no longer speak in most cases. Some families went mad.

Note that in this case, “mad” means crazy, not angry.

What are they thinking? :: The virus didn’t spare their higher faculties.

A “virus” is a tiny biological organism that causes disease. “To spare” something is to save it, and in this case, “higher faculties” is a poetic way of referring to a person’s intelligence or ability to reason.

The alternative is unthinkable.

If something is “unthinkable,” it is too painful to think about.

Dr. Sayer explores different ways to awaken his patients.

I’m all for fixing this place up, but what are we doing?

“To fix up” a place is to improve it or make it nicer.

I have a hunch.

An excellent word for an intuitive feeling or belief.

The visual field just stops. There’s a void. No pattern, no rhythm.

A “visual field” is a technical way of referring to the area that can be seen without moving. A “void” is an area of complete nothingness or emptiness. A “pattern” is a regularly repeated series of colors or shapes or sounds, such as a square pattern on a floor. “Rhythm” is a pattern of specific sounds in music.

Slowly he got worse. He’d be sitting at his desk in a trance for two hours, then he’d be OK again.

A “trance” is a semi-conscious state in which a person doesn’t move or respond to the outside world. It’s as if they were asleep, though their eyes are often open.

He never spoke again. It was like he disappeared. Later that year, I took him to Bainbridge. It was November 14, 1939.

It’s interesting to note that once these patients fell asleep, they were described to others as if they had disappeared or even died.

Don't tell me! It's one of your statues!

"Don't tell me" is a common thing to say excitedly, when you want to tell another person that you have discovered the answer to a problem or mystery. Here, it's said in a sarcastic or joking manner.

It's the strobe light. :: You're wrong. This is me saying his name to him.

A "strobe light" is a high-powered light that flashes on and off very quickly.

This is one of the most beautiful arias ever written.

An "aria" is a song sung by one person in an opera.

"Call me Ishmael..."

These are the famous and first words in the book *Moby Dick*.

I want you to try and **respond** when I speak your name.

"To respond" to something is to react to it by saying or doing something afterward.

They only move to music that moves them.

Note that "to move" can be physical (moving a table from here to there), or emotional ("this music moves me"), in which case a person is emotionally touched or effected by what they have heard or seen.

There's something else that reaches him doctor. Human contact.

In this case, "to reach" a person means to emotionally touch or effect them.

I'll stop and you **take over**. Understand?

"To take over" doing something is to take charge of it, often after somebody else has been running it.

His gaze, from staring through the bars has grown so weary, that it can take in nothing more.

A "gaze" is the act of looking at something very attentively, often without blinking, for several seconds or longer. "To stare" at something is also to look at it, without turning away.

"Weary," means very tired, often from suffering emotionally.

As he paces in cramped circles, over and over, his powerful strides are like a ritual dance around a center where a great wheel stands **paralyzed**.

"To pace" is to move back and forth. If a room is cramped, it is small, with too many things stuffed inside. "Strides" are big movements forward, and a "ritual dance" is a traditional one that often is part of a religious ceremony. If a person is "paralyzed," they cannot move.

Dopa. It's a synthetic dopamine.

A well-known type of artificial drug that stimulates the brain
(Dopa is the short or slang name for this type of drug).

With the development of the L-dopa, we can promise
the Parkinsonian patient a more normal life.

A "Parkinsonian patient" is one who has Parkinson's disease,
which causes the person to shake and lose control of their body
(L-dopa is a particular type of dopamine drug).

I'm curious if you've come across any patients with encephalitis.

"To come across" something is to see or meet, often by accident.

"Encephalitis" is a disease that inflames or damages the brain.

By administering L-dopa...

"To administer" a drug is to officially give it to a patient.

Do you think a simple Parkinson's tremor taken to
its extreme would appear as no tremor at all?

A "tremor" is the act of shaking. If an argument or example is "taken to
its extreme," it is presented as the most extreme form in order to make
an example or a point ("Political instability, taken to its extreme, could
cause the government to fall...").

Suppose there's a patient with all the Parkinson's compulsions,
the hand tremors, the head bobbing, the ticking...

"Suppose" is a common way of starting a sentence if you want a
listener to imagine a possibility that hasn't happened yet.

"Compulsions" are behaviors that people do, even if they don't really
want to. "To bob" is to move up and down, and a "tick" is a physical
shaking that a patient can't control, such as an arm that always moves
to scratch their head, even when they don't itch.

Might they all cave in on themselves, and in effect, turn a person into stone?

If something "caves in," it falls down or collapses.

I'm just a chemist, doctor, you're the physician.

I'll leave it to you to do the damage.

A "chemist" is a scientist who works with chemicals,
and a "physician" is another word for a doctor.

You know, Freud believed in miracles, prescribing cocaine like it was candy...

Freud was an Austrian doctor who founded modern psychology.

.....and we all believed in the miracle of cortisone until our patients went psychotic on it.

“Cortisone” is a well-known drug. If a person is “psychotic,” they are emotionally disturbed, and often unable to understand reality.

With all due respect, I think it’s rather too soon to say that.

A common way of starting a sentence if you want to be respectful, but you also plan to disagree with what was just said.

I read them all dutifully, soberly. All 30 cases had Parkinson’s. Mild Parkinson’s.

To do something “dutifully” is to do it with respect and care, and to do something “soberly” is to do it carefully (sober is the opposite of drunk or inebriated). If a case of a disease is “mild,” it’s not strong or serious.

Your patients haven’t moved in decades.

A decade is a period of 10 years.

You know better than to make a leap like that.

A “leap” is a long jump, and in this case, refers to a leap in logic (For example, You should not think X is true just because Y is false).

The family’s consent. Signed.

“Consent” refers to legal approval, in this case, to allow Dr. Sayer to experiment with the L-dopa drug.

His symptoms are like Parkinson’s, but then again, they’re not.

The outward signs of a disease. In this case, such as their shaking or inability to control their body.

What do you think it will do? :: I’m not sure, because it was designed for a totally different disorder.

A “disorder” is another word for a disease or medical condition.

At 200 milligrams, he showed no response.

Maybe the acid in the orange juice neutralized it.

A “milligram” is a unit of measurement that is commonly used with medicines. “Acid” is a chemical substance that can burn or destroy what it touches. “To neutralize” something is to take away its power, or possibly even kill it.

I don’t think I could deal with losing 30 years of my life. Could you?

In this case, “to deal with” something is to be able to accept it emotionally.

***Leonard is awoken by the miracle drug,
and soon all the patients are returned to life.***

It's a Polaroid. It takes a picture in less than a minute.

A photography company that is famous for a type of photo that develops automatically just a couple minutes after taking the picture.

Try this. Splendid, that's wonderful.

A somewhat British word for excellent or great.

Leonard, that's not wading, that's swimming.

"To wade" in water is to step through it slowly, or with difficulty.

Leonard, the tide is coming in.

The "tide" is the water level on the beach, that rises and falls over the course of a day under the influence of the moon.

That's the periodic table of elements. I can date my introduction to science by that.

A basic text of science that lists the chemical makeup of all the elements of the universe (hydrogen, oxygen, etc...). "To date" an event is to identify when it began in history.

It's the universe at its essence.

The "essence" of something are those things that make up its most fundamental or important part or aspect (The essence of democracy is the right to vote for who will control the government).

I'm not very good with people. I wish I could say that I had a more rudimentary understanding of them.

Another word for basic or fundamental.

What did she say? :: That you are a kind man, that you care very much for people.

"Kind" is a good alternative word for nice, sweet or gentle.

The pharmacist says that to put all the others on the same dosage as Mr. Lowe would be \$12,000....a month.

A "pharmacist" is a person who distributes prescription drugs.

A "dosage" is the amount of a drug that is taken.

I can't go before the board with that, doctor.

The "board" refers to the Board of Directors of the hospital, which is a group of several people who set general hospital policies.

The few patrons that this hospital has already has given what they can.

In this case, a "patron" is a person, most likely rich, who gives money every year to support the hospital.

We'll have to convince them to give more than they're accustomed to giving.

If a person is "accustomed to" doing something, they have done it often or are used to doing it.

There was extreme rigidity of the axio-musculature.

"Rigidity" is stiffness, or the inability to bend or move (Axio-musculature is a very medical term for the movement of muscles in the body).

This is a gross impairment of the posterior reflex, an anatomical dysfunction that is a brain-stem type of rigidity.

"Gross impairment" is severe or extreme damage. The "posterior reflex" is a medical term dealing with the body's reflexes, or it's reaction to outside stimulus. "Anatomical" refers to the anatomy, or body, and a "dysfunction" is a condition in which something fails to work well.

What's most striking is the profound facial masking...which we now know should not be confused with apathy or catatonia.

"Striking" is a powerful adjective meaning dramatic, attracting attention or very noticeable. "Profound" means very deep or important. "Facial masking" is never used, though here it must refer to the tendency to cover up the characteristics or emotions that are usually seen in a person's face. "Apathy" is complete lack of interest, and "catatonia" is a medical term that refers to a person who seems to be in a coma, or who does not respond to the outside world.

Some things could reach him....but these awakenings were rare and transient, lasting only a moment or two.

In this case, "to reach" means to actually communicate with, or perhaps touch emotionally. "Transient" is a useful adjective meaning short-lived, or passing quickly.

The rest of the time he remained in a metaphorical , if not physiological, equivalent of sleep, or even death.

A "metaphor" is a figure of speech which should not be taken literally (i.e.... "he's drowning in money"). "Physiological" refers to the physical body. If two things are "equivalent," they are equal.

It's a fucking miracle!

Note that "fucking" is a vulgar but common adjective used to express emotion such as anger or great surprise.

I need some dye for my hair.

A product that is often used to change the color of hair.

What year it? :: It's '26, silly.

Note that years from at least 1920 to 1999 were shortened to the last two numbers, but it's not clear that people will say '02 for 2002! "Silly" means foolish or not serious, though in this context, to call a person "silly" can be a term of affection.

And it touched off one of the wildest, loudest...celebrations in history.

"To touch off" something is to directly cause it.

"Released from bondage and ridicule after seven destitute seasons..."

This is a passage from a book describing a baseball team. "Bondage" is a dramatic word for slavery, and "ridicule" is the act of making fun of others. "Destitute" means extremely poor, and in this case, a "season" refers to a sports season (The baseball season is during summer).

That's a tire. :: I know it's a tire. I'm not an idiot.

A very common word for a stupid person, a fool or a jerk.

They're treating me alike an asshole. :: We'll take care of that.

A vulgar insult word to describe a mean or abusive person.

Don't get me wrong, doc. It's a nice place, but after the first hour, it loses something.

"Don't get me wrong" is a colloquial way of saying "Don't misunderstand what I am saying." If a place "loses something" after the first hour or two, it becomes less interesting.

The Museum of Natural History? :: No, it's just a lot of dead stuffed things.

A dead animal that is "stuffed" is filled with material to make it look better when it is hung on a wall (To stuff is to fill).

Is it legal again? :: Yes, for some time.

This conversation is referring to alcohol, which was illegal in the United States from 1919 to 1933!

A RobRoy on the rocks. :: Can you make that a virgin RobRoy?

If a drink is "on the rocks," it is served with ice (A RobRoy is a type of alcoholic drink, but I had never heard of it). If a drink is "virgin," it is served without alcohol (although normally it does have it).

I work the night shift at this diner.

At a job, the “night shift” is the hours that are worked at night (perhaps 4PM to midnight).

For a moment, I see him like he was, you know, before the stroke.

A “stroke” is a cut-off of the blood supply to the brain, which often seriously injures the brain, and makes it difficult for people to speak.

I receive medication. Without it, I’m sort of like your father.

Another word for medicine.

He was granted a divorce from you in 1953.

“To grant” is a very official or legal verb meaning to give.

My parents are dead, my wife is in an institution, my son has disappeared out West somewhere. I feel old, and I feel swindled! That’s how I feel!

An “institution” generally means a large and long-standing organization such as a business or school or church, but in this context, it refers specifically to a hospital for the mentally disturbed. If a person has been “swindled,” they have been cheated by others, often in the course of a business deal.

He never talked about girls before. Certainly never had anything to do with them.

If a person has “nothing to do” with another group of people, they never have any contact with them.

What I feel is the joy of life...the wonderment of life!

A rarely used but poetic word for wonder, mystery or even beauty.

I don’t know if this is depression....or mania.

“Mania” is a type of extreme emotional excitement, that is not particularly rational and often lasts only a short time.

Leonard struggles to lead a normal life, but soon it becomes apparent to all that the miracle drug has its limits.

Look, I’m not a criminal. I’ve committed no crime. I’m not a danger to myself or any others.

“To commit” means to do, and is specifically used when discussing a crime or a suicide.

Mr. Lowe, are you at all aware of the **unconscious hostility** your **exhibiting** toward us right now. :: How could I be aware of it if it's unconscious?

If a person has "unconscious" thoughts or behavior, they are not aware of them. "Hostility" is anger or disrespect. "To exhibit" something is to show it to others. Leonard's response above is very clever.

I would do all the things that you people **take for granted**.

To "take something for granted" is to use or enjoy it, without appreciating how valuable it is, or how it could be taken away. People usually take basic freedoms for granted.

They said that there was **insufficient data** at this time and that continued observation was necessary for a complete **diagnosis**.

"Insufficient data" is an official way of saying not enough facts or information. Here, a "diagnosis" is a complete medical evaluation, to determine whether Leonard should be able to leave the hospital.

Leonard, I don't think that we're **out of the woods** yet.

To be "out of the woods" is a good little colloquial expression which means to finally be out of danger or out of a difficult situation.

It's an **experimental drug** and we need time to **evaluate** things.

An "experimental drug" is one that has not yet been proven to be effective. "To evaluate" something is to determine its worth or value.

He was quiet and **polite** and respectful.

"Polite" is another word for nice, or well-behaved and respectful.

He was never **disobedient**. :: Because he was **catatonic**, Mrs. Lowe.

If a person is "disobedient," they are disrespectful and refuse to obey orders. If a person is "catatonic," they are in a comatose state, which is basically like being in a deep sleep.

It's not us that's **defective**, it's them!! We're not in crisis, they are!!

"Defective" means badly made or not working as it should. It usually refers to machines, though here Leonard is talking about people.

They'll never be **healers** until they realize this and they start to see the problem. We're not the problem. It's them!

"To heal" a person is to make them physically or emotionally better. The noun "healer" is not nearly as common as the verb.

Those **ticks**, his **paranoia**. You think these are signs of normal behavior?

"Ticks" are nervous uncontrollable body movements, such as constantly winking or scratching. "Paranoia" is the belief that somebody or something is trying to seriously harm you.

The fact is, doctor, that I have 20 psychotics up there refusing to eat, and they have no idea why they're refusing to eat.

A "psychotic" is a person who is mentally or emotionally disturbed or sick.

Dr. Sayer, Mr. Lowe is not the messiah of ward 5.

A "messiah" is a great religious leader who it is thought can save people. A "ward" is a specific division or floor of a hospital.

He wasn't resurrected, he was administered a drug...a drug that has fallen short of its somewhat miraculous reputation.

If a person is "resurrected," they are brought to life from the dead (Christians believe Jesus was resurrected). If a person "falls short" of their goal, they fail to accomplish it. "Somewhat" is a widely used adverb meaning in some degree or measure, or possibly slightly. If a drug has a "miraculous reputation," it is believed that it can lead to medical miracles.

I sympathize with him, I tried to accommodate him, but I will not let him endanger the health of the rest of the patients of this hospital.

"To sympathize" with a person is to feel sorry for them. "To accommodate" a person is to try and do what they want you to do.

Someone's trying to hurt you? Who? :: One never knows, someone I least expect, I expect.

A clever use of language, in this case, of the verb to expect.

Leonard, every patient on this ward thinks there's a plot against him.

A "plot" is a plan or conspiracy by a group of people to harm or even kill another person (It is also the main story of a book or film).

All these things you're experiencing are the side effect of that, and they're making you behave that way.

"Side effects" are the unintended results of something. Some drugs can work well, but have negative side effects that are as bad as the disease.

Your medicine can be taken away. You can wake up in the morning and it won't be there. :: Get away from me!

One very direct way of telling a person to leave.

He has acquired some ticks, but he is not as consumed with his appearance as the effect it may have on the other patients.

"To acquire" a medical condition is to become effected by it.

To be "consumed with" something is to be obsessed with it, or to be always thinking about it.

We'll be working with this dosage, he's aware of this, and he's prepared for any effects.

"Dosage" is the relative amount of medicine that is given to a patient.

That was lovely, Lucy. :: I learned that song a long, long time ago.

A British word for pretty, beautiful or delightful.

How are you? :: Never better.

Leonard's colloquial way of saying he is doing very well.

Don't give up on me!

A way of asking a person to continue to support and have faith in you, even if the situation looks bad. Here, Leonard is asked Dr. Sayer to still try and help him despite the increasing severity of his ticks.

It's like a light switch goes off. Something has to happen to bring me back.

In this case, to "bring back" a person means to wake them up so that they will become conscious again.

It gets to be like I'm not a person anymore. Just a collection of ticks.

This is Leonard's way of describing what it is like to be him when the drugs starts to not work so well.

What I do mind is knowing that they shouldn't be there.

Note that "to mind" is usually in the negative (meaning "it doesn't bother me"), but that when used with "do," it can be used positively.

Learn, learn, learn form me!!!

This is Leonard's desperate plea to Dr. Sayer, so that he (Dr. Sayer) will discover how to make the drugs effective again.

I let everybody down!

"To let down" a person is to disappoint them. Common and useful.

I'm grotesque. Look at me. Tell me I'm not!

A powerful adjective to describe something that is horrible or disgusting to look at.

***Dr. Sayer reflects on what has been learned, and
the critical importance of human contact.***

Life is given and taken away from all of us? :: Why doesn't that comfort me?

"To comfort" a person is to make them feel better or more secure.

The summer was extraordinary. A season of rebirth for 15 patients, and for us, the caretakers.

If something is “extraordinary,” it is exceptional or well beyond what is normal or usual. A “rebirth” is usually a spiritual or physical reawakening. “Caretakers” are those people who take care of the weak.

Now, we had to adjust to the realities of miracles.

This is Dr. Sayer’s way of saying that sometimes miracles are not as amazing or hopeful as they appear to be at first.

We can hide behind the veil of science, and say it was the drug that failed....or that the patients we’re to cope losing decades of their lives.

A “veil” is a thin piece of cloth that is used to cover a woman’s face, or in this case, to hide behind in general. To “cope *with*” something is to accept or deal with it as well as possible (Here, Dr. Sayer drops “with”).

The reality is that we don’t know what went wrong any more than we know what went right.

A very common way of starting a sentence when you want to clarify a confusing situation.

What we do know is that as the chemical window closed, another awakening took place...

This is Dr. Sayer’s way of referring to the patients as the drug began to lose its effectiveness and their brains began to shut down again.

[and]...that the human spirit is more powerful than any drug, and that is what needs to be nourished.

“The human spirit” is a poetic general expression that refers to the love and determination within people. “To nourish” something is to feed it, so that it will grow strong.

These are the things that matter.

“This is what is important in life...”

The car’s over here. :: What do you say we just walk?

“What do you say” is a common colloquial way of starting a sentence when you want to suggest a possible plan.

Awakenings

Some Possible ESL Questions for Class Discussion

1. If you had been “asleep” for 30 years, would you have wanted to be woken up?
2. If you had been in that catatonic state, would you have wanted to be conscious of people visiting you, or completely unconscious of everything?
3. Was Dr. Sayer right to experiment with the L-dopa drug before it had been officially approved for sleeping sickness?
4. How would you describe Dr. Sayer to a friend?
5. If you had fallen asleep in 1926, or 1939, and woke up in 1969, what would have amazed you most about how things had changed?
6. Why do you think Leonard became so angry at the hospital staff? Was he justified to rebel the way he did?
7. What was Dr. Kaufman’s attitude toward the patients? Was it justified?
8. What did Dr. Sayer ultimately learn from Leonard and the other patients?