The opening letter and a selection of key chapters from the manuscript.

Friend,

I feel comfortable calling you that now.
At first, I was afraid of you, or you made me feel insecure. But now I know you've always been my friend. Sometimes even my only one. And friends tell each other the truth, don't they?
They tell each other everything. Or almost everything. They often know you better than you know yourself. This book, I think I wrote it for you. But I don't know exactly when this book began.
Maybe with the snake that came out of my body.
Or with the spider that wanted to crawl right in.
In 1977, when a boy gave a rose to a girl.
It began when I stopped pushing my dreams aside as strange and nonsensical images from the night, like nightmares that kept me awake, and started taking them seriously.
As a language or a message. As salvation or understanding.
As something inside me that knew more than I did.

They call me Dromer. That's my name. And I'm an artist. I'm not pretending to be one, it's not a role, it's who I am. The dreams in this book come straight from the night. Everything you're about to read really happened, no matter how strange some of the events may seem. But I know you won't always believe me. That's okay.
That's usually the case with people who live during the day. They're afraid of the night.
Afraid of that voice. Afraid of the images. At night, I'm more myself than I could ever be during the day. During the day, you see me moving through the world, but in my dreams, I speak without a mask. They let me meet people. They showed me things that are completely impossible, except in dreams, that is. And I built Droommachine. To give a voice to something that had always been speaking.

My friend, I admit: I became more and more entangled in the threads between dream and reality. Just like a web, life doesn't follow a straight line. A dream certainly doesn't. Yet there is always movement. If you're willing to see it. If you listen. If you dare.
From sound to dream. From body to image. From image to myth. From myth to encounter.

From encounter to sacrifice. And ultimately back to the source. The music. Where it all began for me.

This book takes place over one year of my life, from June 2025 to July 2026.
The dreams, the encounters, the animals, the songs, the dead, the signs, I didn't make them up.
I simply remained true to what revealed itself to me. You don't have to believe everything.
But I invite you to look. To listen and to walk with me. To open the gate. That's why you have to come back with me. Back to the snake. Back to the body. Back to the first image that forced me to stop looking away. That's where this year began, and that's where I began to listen.
And to remember.

Perhaps my story reminds you of something you've known all along, but, just like me, had forgotten.

Dromer,

Tilburg, June 20, 2026

Frozen Love

That afternoon, Peter stopped by. He'd known Peter for a few months, and a friendship had developed between them. Both felt they could help each other take the next step in their lives. Not that they said so to each other, you don't just blurt something like that out right away. Especially not men. The feeling was just there. A kind of knowing without understanding.

They'd met during a pitch. Dromer was trying to find investors for his new company, but he was looking in the wrong place. As often turns out, there was another, better reason for that dreadful hour with the bankers. Are there people with less imagination and fewer dreams than those who've sold themselves to money and control? "Control is fear wearing a mask," he dared to share there, but the message didn't get through. When told that his company wasn't financially sound enough, he'd replied: "Maybe you should just do something because it feels right. That's just how artists work." A dreamer with his inspiration, beautiful plans, and poems. They, with their numbers and fabricated certainties. They reacted to each other like a bull and a red cloth.

In any case, Peter was there that day too. He was shaking violently back and forth, his body never still. As if something wanted to escape from him. As if something was locked inside him that hadn't yet found a voice and was therefore using his body and muscles as a means of communication. Amid all the neat suits, spreadsheets, and safe questions, Peter was the only one who really seemed to be listening. Not as a job or a role he was playing, but as a human being. Not with his head, but with his whole body. The only one who still dared to feel with his skin, unlike those in suits who had given up on their dreams long ago. The only one who understood that you can only win something if there's also a chance it could go wrong. Afterward, he sent a message to Dromer, and that's how an unlikely friendship began.

A few weeks later, Peter was sitting across from him again, but this time at the table at home. Still restless, agitated, and unsettled. But also open and gentle. His story came out in bits and pieces. His father. His grandfather. The business. The problems. His illness. The fear of losing his wife.
The pain of no longer being able to be the man he once was.
"If she would just hug me once, touch me just once," he said, "I'd already be half healed.
Then half the tension would disappear."
Dromer fell silent because those words touched him so deeply. They were meant for Peter's wife, but unconsciously also for the child within him who had never received true love from his father.

And hardly any from his mother, either. Peter had been living with uncontrollable spasms for years. His arms thrashed, his torso doubled over, his body seemed to be seized by something invisible every few seconds. Day and night. As if a force dwelled within him that wanted to be lived out, or else escape. The doctors didn't know. One said Parkinson. Another person shrugged in despair. There were tests, suspicions, pills. More and more pills. Forty-seven a day. Madness, thought Dromer. Where was the limit?
The tension in Peter's body was unbearable, the cause untraceable. Yet they kept prescribing. Blaming the body, because the body was visibly failing. But what if the body wasn't failing? What if it was actually trying to show something else? What if the body was carrying something that had nowhere else to go?

Peter sat there and looked at him. Dromer realized that beneath all that tension there was still a person full of empathy and energy, someone who wanted to be seen. Touched. Held. A single touch. An arm around him. Was that the solution? Could it be that simple? Or was that too simple for a world that had made everything complicated, and where pills are the norm? Peter talked about his father. A man who ruled his family like a tyrant. A man who never gave himself a break, always worked, and expected the same from his wife and children. Playing with other children wasn't an option. They worked in the family business. Peter was already driving a car by the time he was eight. They learned early on that everything revolved around money, status, and possessions. Dad was only proud of you if you performed well, and any sense of personal identity or childlike play was subordinated to Dad's fear of running out of money. It therefore seemed logical that Peter would later become a partner in a large international financial firm, an accounting firm. Control. Numbers. Certainty. Control as a mask for fear. There he is again. A half-formed person who can buy everything except love. Love and attention from Dad.

When his father died at the age of 54 from the muscle disease ALS after a severe illness, Peter thought he, too, would not be allowed to live past that age. And as that age drew nearer, the fear grew. Fear of death. Fear of the disease worsening. Fear of his own body. And his physical problems grew along with it. Peter recounted, visibly moved, that he was standing with his brother in front of the coffin, beside his father's laid-out body, when something extraordinary and unexpected happened. A fly crawled out of their deceased father's nostril. It emerged, flew around for a moment, and landed on Peter's shoulder. Then it flew to the wall, where it remained for the rest of the time. In plain sight. Like a living piece of Dad in a new form. Peter shrugged and said that the fly has been there ever since whenever he talks about his father. That he's gotten used to it.

Dromer furrowed his brow. Despite what he'd experienced that morning himself with the live spider that seemed to have come straight out of his dream, this was going too far. But before he could say anything, he heard a buzzing sound. A fly appeared, flew past him, and sent shivers down his entire body. It landed briefly on Peter's shoulder and then settled on the wall next to him. The fly remained there for a full hour. No matter how much Peter moved or how hard he flailed his arms. No matter how restless his body was, the fly stayed put. A rebirth as a black, irritatingly buzzing insect with lightning-fast wings, flying through his empire. And then, like a king, looking down on his subjects.
Dromer took photos so he could look back later and see if what happened that day was real.

He decided to tell Peter about his dreams and also about the real spider that had appeared that morning. Peter responded with a dream of his own, one that kept recurring at night and had been keeping him awake for ages. He looked at Dromer, sighed deeply, and began.

“My former coworkers had organized a sort of gathering to mark my departure from the organization. I had to leave because of my illness. The farewell came much later than my actual departure. At first I didn’t want to go, but in the end I went anyway. We were greeted by a former colleague whom I had hired myself back then and who had since risen to the executive board. I’d had a hard time with him in recent years. Rock-hard. Purely businesslike. Whereas I was, on the contrary, a people person. Good to both clients and staff.

I was given a motorcycle as a gift. A strange model, half motocross bike, half street bike. Motocross used to be one of my great passions. From the age of four to twenty-two, I actively competed in motocross, at a high level. But I didn’t understand why they’d give a machine like that to someone as sick as me. There was no atmosphere in the room. The building was strange. Inside, they’d set up a sort of motocross track that people were riding their motorcycles over—forward, under, up. It was all very strange. Still, I was about to show what I could do on the bike. I felt I had to demonstrate what was possible on a motorcycle. But the motorcycle kept stalling, and things weren’t going well at all. My colleagues, by the way, didn’t pay any attention to that. They were only concerned with themselves. The party was for me, but it felt like a formality. My parents were there too, but I didn’t really see them. Then I got off the motorcycle, but fell off again on the other side. That’s how my dream ended.”

Dromer remained silent. Even letting go felt precarious. He saw the image in his mind’s eye.

A motocross track inside a building. An arena without a blue sky. Showing what you can do. Proving that you’ve still got it. That you’re still Peter, the man of strength, speed, and control. The man of achievement. One his father could be proud of. But the motorcycle wouldn’t start anymore. He was still living in a world of success where a motorcycle didn’t belong. Neither did Peter anymore. “Your soul doesn’t want to ride one last lap,” Dromer said softly.

Peter looked at him. “Maybe you shouldn’t have to prove what you can do on a track that isn’t yours anymore,” Dromer continued. The words hung in the air, which seemed to tremble. At that moment, the fly decided to leave its spot on the wall, circled around for a moment, and landed, naturally, Dromer thought, on Peter’s shoulder. Both men looked at each other, but Peter was too emotional to respond. The situation was too absurd for two people who had previously seemed down-to-earth and would have laughed off events like this before. But something had changed. The fly now flew right past his face, and Dromer turned his head away and waved his hand. As if he were briefly saying goodbye to a father in a fly suit.

And when he woke up the next morning, the poem came to him. He didn't write it; it wrote him. The words came before he had even found them himself. In that special moment between sleep and wakefulness. That liminal phase where miracles can happen. Where the ego hasn't quite kicked in yet and you still have the wisdom of the night close to you. Peter's words returned as art. As the only way the Dromer knew to truly express himself.

One touch. One arm around him.

The words kept repeating like a mantra. They echoed off a ceiling made of dreams. Was that the solution? Does the body always feel it first, before you know?

Does the body keep showing you and letting you feel until you finally listen? With his body still half asleep, he grabbed the pen and notepad from the nightstand and wrote:

Touch me or I'll fall apart
into a thousand shards of broken stone.

Or do you feel death when you touch me,
this thing that was once my proud body?

Frozen words,
hard as walls,
built around your heart.
Am I no longer
the one you love?

Touch me,
I beg you,
don't let go,
don't let me fall or I'll fall apart.

When thoughts invade my body
and violate my muscles, my cells,
my blood,
and fear lashes out around me.

Out of control,
I disappear like melting ice,
because I do not know
how to be myself on my own

Wrap an arm around me,
love made fluid,
tangible not petrified,
our nervous systems intertwined
as they once were.

Touch me, or I'll fall apart
into a thousand shards of broken stone.

The Encounter

The following night brought him not words, but restlessness. That night, no poem came, but a fly. Unbelievable, but true: a fly had been buzzing right past his ears over and over again, denying him sleep. The earplugs he usually slept with just wouldn't stay in, and the buzzing so close to his ears was driving him crazy. In silence, the sound of a single insect can be deafening. It was as if the fly from Peter's story wasn't done with him yet. He shook his head to shake off that absurd thought.
He had dreamed that night, that much was certain, but this time the images hadn't lingered. The first time he woke up, he felt fear. Pure fear. An all-consuming terror, like a stabbing pain in his stomach. A paralyzing fear.
Experiencing a dream feels just as real as what happens to you during the day, thought Dromer. Strange, really. At night you live in the dream, and during the day the dream lives in you. As if you were moving. From the outside in. Whereas during the day, you think exactly the opposite. First, you're part of the movie, surrounded by other characters, children, animals, monsters, and insects. Then they're inside you. A nightmare drags you into that dark world, and the monster sits on your chest while you sleep, squeezing all the breath out of your body. It takes up residence inside you and refuses to go away. Every new thought lingers for eternity.

What on earth was going on with him? Yes, a lot had changed. He had taken his work in a new direction, but what did that have to do with these dreams? What was being told to him? Because that much was clear: something was being told to him. What was being shown to him here? What did the images mean? And why to him? A sense of impending doom settled in his stomach.
He tried to take a deep breath, but something was pressing down on him too heavily. He could only manage to sit up in small, jerky movements.

A few minutes later, Dromer was standing next to the bed. Lin hadn't been sleeping next to him for a while; he was too restless, she said. He kicked his arms and legs in his sleep. Sometimes he snored, too. Maybe more often than just sometimes, though of course he denied it, like every man does. She was lying a few meters away in the guest room. "A wall built between us," he whispered. Sushi was lying next to her, because they needed each other right now. Lin and her animals. Perhaps she didn't just sense his restlessness in the movements of his legs, but also picked up on what he was dreaming about. Perhaps we humans are still connected in the dark, just as we used to be connected in the light. Like tribe members who functioned as a single primal being in times of need. Back when we still lived without language and still believed in nocturnal visions.

Apparently, his dreams didn't stay neatly on his side of the bed. They also flowed through his body, through his legs, through his breath, through the room and the house. And Lin sensed that, of course, even if she didn't know what he was dreaming. Even if he himself didn't understand them. He stood there for a moment in the still-dark room. A few images from the night came flooding back. His parents' house. The walls moving on their own. The staring eyes of the children. The hand stuck in the wall. His father. The fear. Above all, the feeling of uncertainty, fear, and terror. He knew now that he had to get away. Go outside. Walk. Breathe. Get fresh air into his lungs.

He made strong coffee in the kitchen. A little less water today, because he wanted to shake off the oppressive feeling the night had left him with. He wanted to understand what the snake and the spider meant and why he, of all people, had had to see these images. The feeling that they weren't meant just for him kept creeping up on him. But today, he couldn't do anything with it. Don't think. Don't interpret. Don't search for the right words. He hadn't even been able to play the guitar in a long time. The rhyming words came when they wanted to, he knew that, but only when he had the peace of mind to give them space. That peace of mind wasn't there now. He was too tired, too empty, and at the same time too full. Too shaken. All that remained was a strong urge to go outside. To walk. To breathe in fresh air. To see people smiling. Living people.
After his second cup of coffee, he made a decision. First, he fed the cats. Lin was still asleep. Dromer put on his coat, called Happy over, the only one of their dogs who could still walk longer distances, and went outside. Determined to walk the stress out of his body, Dromer quietly closed the door behind him and set off.

Happy kept up well, but after an hour of walking, she did start to show signs of fatigue. After all, they had gone farther than he had originally planned. To be honest, he had been so lost in thought that he no longer knew where he was. He had walked out of the neighborhood and into the woods. There, he'd played with the dog somewhat absentmindedly, seemingly just walking in circles, but Happy didn't feel like fetching the ball anymore. Having the dog there did him good. The main reason they had dogs and cats in the house was because they reminded him of his instincts, of the art of being present in the moment. "A dog simply is itself, and a human plays at being himself," Dromer murmured softly. "Who am I playing, Happy?" he asked the dog. "And do you also have dreams like that, about snakes coming out of you and spiders wanting to crawl inside you? About houses turning into a grave? The dog responded with silence and ran a few meters ahead. Then she let herself fall and looked at him with a look that said, "You go on ahead by yourself; I'm fine

here.”

About twenty minutes later, he looked around and had to get his bearings again. His imagination had taken over. His mind was somewhere else, but his body was here and had brought him to this place. Immediately, he thought of his father. In a flash of painful memory. His father had started to become forgetful, very forgetful, and would regularly get lost. Then he’d call from the car, and his mother would guide him safely through the traffic. Even routes he’d been driving his whole life had now become difficult. “It feels empty,” he’d said, looking sadly at his son. “Empty in my head.”

“Pff,” Dromer sighed sadly; for him, it was actually so busy in there.

A lot was changing in his parents’ lives. His dad and mom had always been his rock and were always by his side. Always ready to help. Now it seemed like his dad was going to need his help. If it really was that one disease, things could go downhill fast. He thought that was really shitty, and it felt unfair. And his mom was already so stressed out. The ultimate, caring mother and his dad, who never complained. Never. “The walls are closing in on you, aren’t they, Dad?” he said softly. “That’s why you keep wanting to get out.”

Happy’s barking snapped him out of his thoughts again. The little dog was barking angrily at a door that was slowly swaying back and forth. With a jolt, Dromer realized he was standing in front of his old rehearsal space. He’d spent many years of his life here. Once he started playing guitar, nothing else mattered to him. All or nothing, that’s how Dromer had always tried to live. Let yourself be consumed by it and give it your all.

He hadn’t seen this building in at least thirty or thirty-five years. He knew it had been closed for a long time, but he hadn’t expected it to have fallen into such disrepair. It was located just outside the city, and you could get there through the woods or by driving around it. The road leading to the ring road was nearby, but the rehearsal space had always occupied a secluded spot on a dead-end street with no houses. It used to be convenient for parking. Now it felt rather eerie.

Uninhabited, yet still full of life because of the sounds that had once echoed there. The door was now banging harder in the wind. The windows had been smashed at some point. Maybe homeless people who’d sought shelter here at night. Happy barked again and walked growling toward what had once been the entrance. Dromer pulled the little dog back, and immediately everything fell silent. The dreams were still in his system, and he was just about to turn around and keep walking when he heard music. Beautiful music.

Someone was playing the guitar, and playing it well, too He looked around, because he hadn’t immediately realized that the sound was coming from inside, from the abandoned building. “Huh?”

he thought. “Who on earth would be playing in this ruin?”
He listened to the brilliant playing for at least five minutes and then decided to investigate. He wanted to know who it was. He wanted to meet the creator of those sounds. The sound lured him like bees to a flower in the morning sun. His earlier sense of unease had vanished. So he picked up Happy, climbed over loose stones and rotten wood, and went inside.
Once inside, his eyes had to adjust to the darkness at first. The music bounced off the walls, giving the notes a double sound—an echo that suited the performance perfectly. The sound grew louder and, as a result, even more eerie. The musician had decided to play longer notes. It sounded like a mournful call to prayer, but instead of a plaintive voice, it was the strings that moved him—like tiny arrows fired at his skin. He saw goosebumps on his arms. It’s strange how the body reacts before you even know why.

He saw the hallway where he used to walk so often. The cafeteria where they’d spent hours making plans and setlists. Where the band members, half-drunk, said goodbye to each other in the middle of the night and made new plans. A wave of nostalgia washed over him, and he sighed once more. He missed the time when time didn’t exist yet. That bygone era when he still knew who he was and what he was meant to do. No doubts. Conquering the world with music, together with his friends. What else? He still had no idea where the music was coming from when Happy suddenly jumped out of his arms and ran around the corner. “Happy,” he hissed, but the dog was already gone.
Dromer ran after him and, once around the corner, saw a light. There was a staircase, and a soft glow shone upward from beneath it. The guitar notes were now even louder and clearer. So that was where the musician had been hiding.
He searched his memory and wondered where that staircase led. He couldn’t remember there ever having been a staircase leading down here. Strange. But back then, half the building was filled with amplifiers, flight cases, and drum kit parts from the bands that practiced here. The heavier stuff was often just left lying around. Maybe he’d never noticed the staircase. Maybe it wasn’t there yet.
Happy had already disappeared downstairs. Curious little creature.
He had no choice but to follow. Slowly, he began to descend the stone steps.
Dromer walked down the staircase, which curved to the right and turned out to be much deeper than he had expected. The guitar notes were now really cutting through the air. Halfway down, he saw Happy running back up the steps. He stopped her, picked her up, and gave her a quick hug. Then he stepped into the room. There he saw a boy standing. A young man who, completely entranced, was playing his guitar. He hadn’t even noticed that he had an audience, a man with a dog in his arms. Or

perhaps he simply didn't care. The boy—Dromer guessed he was sixteen or seventeen—was completely absorbed in the sounds he himself was producing. Dromer smiled. He felt the notes, understood the choices the young guitarist was making intuitively. Beautiful and haunting at the same time. Heavy, yet sensitive. The guitar is a unique instrument, he thought. How could he ever have forgotten that?

Only then did he realize where he was. It looked just like a cave. The stone walls and ceiling were rounded, as if they'd been worn away by water over the centuries. In the corners, if you could even call them that, were racks of fabric and cloths that dampened the sound. Just enough to keep the sound full and clear, but not as dry as in a regular studio. Because that's what it was, too: a studio. Right in front of the guitarist, who still didn't seem to notice his presence, stood an old mixing console, a DJ setup, a turntable, a few monitors, effects pedals, and yes, there he recognized Pro Tools, the software he'd been working with for years himself. How cool, he thought.
The sparse lighting gave the space a wondrous atmosphere. It was as if they were simultaneously in times gone by and in something very contemporary. The light revealed nooks and crannies in the "cave studio" where marsh spirits, nymphs, or ancient gods could have hidden without difficulty. Maybe Pan would step out of a shadow any moment now to play a tune on his flute. To frighten people with sounds. A lot of hard work had gone into this, Dromer realized.
The boy had built a place where old and new could meet. Dromer looked around in admiration and saw records and CDs by bands he, too, had grown up with. Real bands. People who played live. Stacks of music by guitarists who had changed the world with their sound, their fire, their vision. Then the boy stopped playing and looked at him questioningly.

The silence was immediately replaced by the soft hum of the amplifier. The boy turned down the volume knob on his guitar. That single gesture sent a jolt of recognition through Dromer. How many times had he made that same movement himself? Thousands of times. Maybe even more.
He thought of his audition at the conservatory and of the teacher who had later told him: "I knew you were the real deal the moment I saw how you held your guitar."
It brought a smile to his face. "Hey," he said. "Kudos on your playing. And this room, too… it's really amazing. Um, this is Happy. And they call me Dromer. I heard you playing and just had to come take a look." The boy said nothing. He just kept looking at him.
"I used to rehearse here all the time," Dromer continued. "But this place, this room, I don't recognize it." Again, the boy remained silent.

“Anyway,” said Dromer, “I’d better be going. Again, kudos.” He turned around and was just about to walk away when he heard a famous riff that he recognized immediately.
Van Halen. “Ain’t Talkin’ ’Bout Love.” And a great rendition, too.

Something changed on the young guitarist’s face. It might have been a smile. But his eyes quickly grew misty again. He was at one with the music. Dromer decided to stay a little longer.
And to listen.

Part IV — The Sacrifice

1977

This morning he was downstairs just before 7. Still half asleep, Bruce was given his kibble and a sachet of liquid. A sort of liquid fish porridge. He was mad about it. The rest of the family hadn't turned up yet. As Dromer opened the roller blinds, he looked at the beautiful green leaves on the big tree in the front garden. That tree is hung with colourful birdhouses that Lin had made. It was windier than yesterday, but it looked set to be another warm day. The leaves swayed in the wind and he marvelled at their vivid green. He'd been dreaming, but had forgotten most of it. A shame, because it had ended with a concert in a studio that doubled as a pub. They were playing absurdly fast country rock and the musicians were lined up side by side. They took turns playing solos. A few guitarists and a banjo. Really good, because the tempo was inhumanly fast. The audience stood right next to them. Dancing right next to them. No stage, no difference in height, no looking up at them. No 'me here and you there'. We could all touch one another. They danced and cheered. It was the last song and I wanted a long sustained chord to round it off. Rock-style. Strangely enough, nobody seemed to get it. So I played it on my own at first. But luckily, the rest joined in later. When the drummer, who was nowhere to be seen, by the way, stopped playing and everyone put down their instruments, I carried on for a bit. Struck an A chord. I wanted to hear the raw sound of the guitar and the amp together. It was old and new. It was exactly what it needed to be. The Brown sound. Eddie knew all about it. It sounded cool and tight, and it made me happy.

It felt warm, in that room. Everything was in those brownish '70s colours. Lots of wood. Some of the men were wearing cowboy hats; everyone was in denim. A young woman at the front was wearing tight jeans and a short-sleeved T-shirt. She was sweaty from dancing. A big mane of dark curls. She smiled at me.

I realized that I've been to this place before in my dreams. Usually it's a café or a restaurant. Small, cosy. There's always someone behind the bar who knows me and greets me. But the building itself stands abandoned. Lonely and isolated, like a sort of last stronghold on the outskirts of the city. Not in the woods, but on a sort of industrial estate with no people. A bare, dilapidated and empty space full of stone and smokeless chimneys. Empty buildings with only the memory of bustle and production. Like an oasis of warmth in a cold place, there was the café. That's where we meet, and of course there's the music too.

He had a coffee and a blanket and slumped into his chair in the garden. He took out his laptop and typed ‘1977’.
What’s going on? Why songs from 1977 time and time again?’ A common thread running through his life and through the book he wrote. And through his dreams, too. He didn’t understand why. He’d talked about it with Lin. She was fascinated by it too, but had no idea. Dromer was 11 back then and turned 12 that year. It was the year of amazing LPs and music that has proved timeless. Music played live by people, with hardly any electronics. It was the era of the guitar.
The firstalbum he ever bought was Queen’s ‘News of the World’, featuring ‘We Will Rock You’ and ‘We Are the Champions’. And then Meatloaf’s ‘Bat out of Hell’. Back then, the world was taken by storm by ‘Paradise by the Dashboard Light’. 43 million records sold. Everyone used to sing along to that epic track back then. And ‘Rumours’, of course, with that song so important to him: ‘Dreams’. Yes, 1977 was a special year for music. “And don’t forget ‘Kiss Alive II,” he said out loud. “You played that to death,” Ace, allong with Brian, the reason for his life as a musician.

He pictured himself even younger. Every Saturday he’d go and get fresh bread from Bakker Boogers. They made brilliant rolls there – white and brown bread and boluses. The place was packed every Saturday morning. Everyone queuing for fresh bread. Was there a better smell than freshly baked bread? I don’t think so. Afterwards, he’d set the table with his little sister. Their parents were still in bed. That’s when he’d put some music on. His dad had one of those ‘All 13 Good’ LPs. Hits thrown together at random. He only liked three of them: Sweet, Slade and, above all, David Bowie with ‘The Jean Genie’. He played that one over and over again. He was six or seven years old, and guitars were beginning to play a part in his young life. His blueprint was taking shape. Before his parents were allowed to come downstairs, he and his sister would block up the passageway between the hall and the living room. With wallpaper or sheets of drawing paper stuck together. He had no idea why, but week after week his father and mother had to break through a wall of paper. A sort of celebration. A misunderstood ritual carried out entirely intuitively. Without knowledge or understanding. A sort of rebirth from night into day. Whilst Bowie sang.
“*The Jean Genie, he’s outrageous, he screams and he bawls*
The Jean Genie, let yourself go! Oh! Go!”

He thought back to the change in his life. 1977, the year he started secondary school. From a small, safe Christian school, he went to Cobbenhagen College. On his own. Nobody from his class went with him. Was that it? He was smaller than most and felt particularly insecure because of what had happened during the holidays before that. Just before the summer holidays, when he was still 11, he

shared his first French kiss. At the cinema with the prettiest girl in the class.
She'd moved from Rotterdam in her final year and joined their class. Everyone was impressed by her. She was more mature than the rest of us. Her body was more developed; her long dark hair shone more than the other girls'. She was something of a sex symbol for the boys, who all wanted to be with her. She knew it, and in no time at all she'd become the leader of the girls. Dromer didn't think she'd noticed him, but he did find her interesting.
So it came as a huge surprise when she asked him to go to the cinema with her.
Gosh, was he nervous that day. They'd bought tickets for an obscure French film at a small cinema that mainly screened independent films. He hadn't understood much of it; the woman next to him – because that's how the relationship felt – had captured all his attention. He felt her warmth against him, her arm against his. He breathed in her scent. He felt happy and thought he was in a dream when she took the initiative and they kissed. There in the darkness of the cinema, amidst the sound of unintelligible French, he fell in love for the very first time in his life.

In the weeks that followed, he was on cloud nine, his heart brimming with infatuation and new feelings that could transform a young man. But because it was the summer holidays and she was going away with her parents for six weeks, he didn't see her again. And to make matters worse, they ended up going to different schools afterwards. But she had invited him, just like most of his other classmates, to her birthday party. And he was really looking forward to it. It was the only thing he could think about. He was so in love. He was swept away by love; his hormones were racing and sounded like music. What could possibly go wrong?

His mum had, of course, seen it in his face and behaviour. She'd sensed that her son had taken a step forward. That something had changed. That he'd been struck by one of Eros's arrows. He'd asked her to help him buy a present. His beloved deserved a special gift. Something with which he could show his love. Something lasting, made of gold or silver. Something you wear to show your bond with another person. They found a beautiful bracelet. Far too expensive, but love is priceless, he thought. On the evening of her birthday, he looked his best. New trousers and a shirt, and alongside the bracelet he had a rose. He wanted to show her his love.

Those six weeks had felt like an eternity. He hadn't seen her, and time seemed to drag in those final days leading up to the big party. The excitement of starting a new school had given way to the anticipation of seeing her again. Nowadays, people would text and ring each other, but back then, life moved at a slower pace. It all played out more in your own head – with your own images, rather than someone else's on your phone. No shared photos, no social media, no messages, no contact. Overjoyed but also nervous, he got on his bike to finally see her again.

The party was in the garden of her parents' house. Her father ran a sort of precursor to Intra Tuin, a florist's that sold all sorts of things for the garden. A large business with a beautiful, illuminated garden at the back. Dromer arrived at a party that was already in full swing. Had he got the time wrong? Strange that he was one of the last to arrive. Bicycles were parked in rows at the entrance to the business. He walked up the path towards the music and the flashing lights. His rose in one hand, the bracelet, beautifully wrapped by his mother, in the other.

He spotted his classmates and they smiled at him.

"Wow, a rose. Look, he's brought a rose," shouted Harm, the class bully. Others turned round and joined in the laughter. Dromer felt himself blushing, feeling watched. He had suddenly become the centre of attention. One moment he was alone, and the next a circle had formed around him. Everyone was laughing. But it wasn't a warm laugh. It felt like they were mocking him. As if they all knew more than he did. He'd played this moment over in his mind thousands of times. The two of them looking into each other's eyes, and the moment he gave her the present and the rose, she'd give him a stolen kiss. He'd hold her in his arms. He'd feel her again, touch her gently, smell her lovely scent once more. They would be alone together for a moment and forget the hustle and bustle around them. They would float, just like at the cinema. Two young people, briefly as one.

But reality was different. Dromer had suddenly and unwittingly become the centre of scorn and ridicule. What had happened over the holidays that everyone seemed to know about except him? The group had excluded him. The circle of laughing people around him grew, and he felt their

presence like a thick, viscous layer pushing him down. He wanted to get away, but couldn't break out of the circle. He almost panicked when he saw her. She was still glowing. She was smiling, too. But it wasn't the smile he'd been counting on. Not the young woman in love he'd dreamt of day and night. There he stood, with a rose in his hand.

The group wanted action and urged him to give her his presents. He felt sick to his stomach, because standing next to her, next to his future, his beloved, his Eurydice, his Aphrodite, his Greek goddess – was a man. At least 18 or 19 years old. Muscular, tall and handsome, with a defiant look in his eyes. As if to say, 'Go on then. Go on, if you dare.' And she was standing close to him, her hand in his. She was leaning against him, their bodies touching. She looked at him as if he were a pitiful little creature. A little seal smeared with oil. A puppy that had lost its mother. A foal that couldn't stand yet. A young bird that had fallen out of its nest and couldn't get back in.
"Give the rose, give the rose," someone began to sing, and within seconds the whole group was singing at the top of their voices. "Give the rose, give the rose". He was crucified by the crowd. Dromer stood stock-still. Like a rabbit on the motorway. Then someone pushed him forward, so that he fell. There he sat, on his knees. The group fell silent. Nobody said a word and the laughter had stopped. Nothing could be heard except a song coming through the speakers.
"Lovers only love you when they're playing".

On his knees for love. His beloved, his muse, the woman of his dreams. And she had rejected him. Yes, she'd accepted his present and the rose too. But now it felt like nothing but a thorn. He'd thrust them into her hands to put an end to his current life as quickly as possible. He felt the man's eyes burning into his cheeks. He felt all those eyes burning into him from every direction.
They were burning holes in him. They were burning the words 'who do you think you are?' into him. Like a branding iron on a calf. Held fast by strong hands, he too had to endure the pain. He had nowhere to go. There was no gap in the circle. He could only turn to her. She seemed taller. She towered over him. Blushing crimson with shame, he quickly said, "Congratulations."
"Congratulations," he whispered in the voice of a toddler. That was exactly how he felt. All hope and feelings of love were snatched from him again in that moment. Like a plaster covering his whole body. One that, in one swift pull, tore all his adolescent hair from him. He didn't know why this was happening. He was lost. Nothing he'd felt seemed real anymore. He just wanted to get away. Away from the shame, away from the stares, away from the mocking laughter. He turned round and, with great effort, wriggled his way through the crowd. He tore himself away from the children, who now seemed much older than him. The boys and girls he'd considered friends for six

years. He ran away. He ran as fast as he could whilst the tears began to flow. He wept uncontrollably. His face was salty and wet. The tears flew from his cheeks like rain from a train as he ran. No one followed him; no one even looked back at him. When he unlocked his bike, he saw her dancing. In the arms of another man. A man compared to him. What on earth had he been thinking, indeed. He tried to stop his tears, to be a man too, but he couldn't. And as he cycled back home, he heard in the distance:

"Like a heartbeat drives you mad
In the stillness of remembering what you had
And what you lost, and what you had, ooh, what you lost
Thunder only happens when it's rainin'
Players only love you when they're playin'"

August 1977 was full of music, love and sorrow.
His heart opened for the first time.
His heart was broken for the first time.

Winners

He was sitting across from the boy in the cave. The boy was strumming in C minor and improvising with some chords that sounded Slavic. Old folk music from countries like Romania and Hungary always sounded melancholic and nostalgic, even though the dancers in pictures were often depicted as happy and dressed in bright colors. They always dance in a group, holding each other. How different that is from our festivals. We dance alone, often with the same stiff movements. We may be facing someone else, but we don't move together as a group like they do.

He got an idea, because the boy was playing a special guitar: Brian May's Red Special, the guitarist from Queen. That man, with his unique guitar sound, is the reason he started playing as a child, together with Ace. His presence and polyphonic tones moved him deeply when he first saw him on Toppop. A unique sound. At that moment, Dromer knew with the certainty of an arrow shot by Cupid that he, too, wanted to play the guitar. He washed hundreds of cars and did odd jobs around the neighborhood to earn money for his first guitar. In the years that followed, he spent a lot of time alone and taught himself to play. He hardly ever took lessons. The only way to truly learn something is through self-education. Because you want to, never because you have to. When you discover something on your own, it's no longer a copy, it's yours.

His first album was 'News of the World'. 1977 again, what an album. So many hits and important songs. He sang softly: "*Sammy was low, just watching the show. Over and over again*." Queen's answer to depression. Anyone who watches TV all day must be depressed. Freddie's answer was to spread his wings. "*Spread your wings and fly away. Fly away, far away."*
Beautifully sung with that unique voice of his. "Born out of a problem, did you know that? Freddie's voice," he said to the boy. "He had four extra teeth in his upper jaw. He was probably teased about it. But it also gave him his unique voice and tone." And Brian, he continued, built his own guitars together with his father. And voilà, his own sound. The answer lies in creating, my friend.

He had an idea. One of the most iconic global hits ever written is on that album. "We Are The Champions," and through its sound, it tells the story of winning. Winning, that's what our entire society is all about. Being a hero. A case of savior complex run amok. An archetype so deeply ingrained in us that we've come to admire anyone who succeeds. This song celebrates those

winners. But the reason this song has been touching people for fifty years is different from what you might think.

“Shall we play it?” he asked the boy. “It’s in 6/8 time, and you play the C minor strum as C, G, C, E-flat, C, G, a short pause, and then pah, pah. That’s a B-flat with a C in the bass.”

He explained it, but the boy was already playing it. Perfect, as usual. Dromer sang softly:
I’ve paid my dues
Time after time
I’ve done my sentence
But committed no crime

“I put together a curriculum last year,” said Dromer. “About the 5 Steps to Change. The happiest six months of my life, but I might just as well have played this song. It tells the whole story in five minutes.” He laughed at himself.
“Step 1 is clear, right? This song is about winning. Wanting to become a champion. But it starts with suffering. With pain. I’ve paid a price, Freddie sings. Time and time again. He’s endured punishment. Punishment, boy. So winning starts with punishment, Freddie sings. Punishment without having committed a crime. The beginning of the highest achievement starts with a fall, breaking rules, and in our society, that’s punishable.”
No one really changes unless something terrible happens in their life first. Death, a broken relationship, losing all your money. The feeling that you’re being punished for something. It’s a lonely feeling. That’s why they play in C minor. A sad key, full of that Slavic melancholy.

Then Freddie learns something. He stands up and takes a step. The chord changes. He plays E-flat major and A-flat major. The boy had already got the hang of it. What a talent, he thought. E-flat major is the relative major of C minor, the same family, but the other side of the light. There’s no light without darkness, no “for” without “against.” So if C minor is the darkness, the shadow, then E-flat is that place where light will shine again. Where you see the sun once more. How does Freddie do that? By learning.
And bad mistakes, I’ve made a few, He made mistakes, but he learned from them. Step 2 toward change and success is always the same: gaining new insights. Gaining new inspiration. Learning what was hidden in the darkness of your soul and shining a light on it. It reminded him of a short poem he wrote years ago. He knew it by heart. He spoke softly:

Turn a fierce light on yourself—
so fierce the past disappears
and the future reveals itself
only a little at a time.

The light will show you a path,
but more important still:

you will become a beacon
for those around you.

Drawn towards the light,
you will gather with others
and together
change the future.

The boy had kept playing, sliding his hands up and down between C minor and E-flat major. He played with dark and light tones and it sounded beautiful.

"Then something happens in the music that anyone who has ever truly changed will recognize. You find yourself in an in-between space. A stairwell where the stairs lead only downward. Because those insights are nice, but you can't do anything with them unless you add your own fire to them. Deeds, action, but it has to be fueled by your own passion. Your innate talent combined with that knowledge and inspiration. To do that, you always have to go down," said Dromer.
The boy looked at him with keen interest, and for the first time, Dromer had the feeling he was telling the boy something he didn't yet know. But intuitively, the boy understood it, because he was playing the staircase, the chords that led downward. Toward Freddie's soul.
"The word 'soul,'" Dromer continued, "comes from 'sole,' the sole of the foot. So you find your soul in the earth, beneath you. That's why people go for walks in nature. The reason I always take off my shoes at home. It's grounding, rediscovering your soul in a world that barely has room for soul."
The boy played the staircase: E-flat, B-flat with a D in the bass, C minor, F major, and a B-flat. Dromer sang along.
"I've had my share of sand kicked in my face, But I've come through"

“Sand in his eyes, adversity. Going down the stairs is scary, because it’s dark and unfamiliar down there. We always think the solution lies above us. But Queen teaches us that we must go down first. Into the fire, and stoke it up.”
And then comes the first surprise, musically speaking. The first of three brilliant innovations that Freddie probably just did intuitively. That he felt and played before he even understood it.

Because once you’ve found your fire, the whole world sings along with you. And what happens? The chorus goes on and on while the music modulates. It shifts to a different key. A whole floor up in our apartment building. We take a leap that a normal person actually can’t make. But we do. It resolves into a C7, the most important transitional chord in music: a dominant seventh chord. It simply has to resolve into something new. It’s like a doorknob on a door. The only thing it can do is open, go down, and open. “And yes, that’s Step 3,” said Dromer. “Find your Fire. That, which you already were in your childhood. Back when you created just for the sake of creating, did things just for the sake of doing. Not for money or for others. But for yourself and the world.” He quoted:

A child, before it speaks, it sings.
A child, before it writes, it paints.
A child, before it walks, it dances.

We’re all born artists, but we forget it because of societal pressure. Music and people like Freddie remind us of that. So we sing in unison.
We’re gonna go on and on and on and on.

And now we’ve reached the chorus. In the new key of F major. From the melancholy C minor, we’ve now arrived in a delightful major key. That’s Step 4 in change: Create. Take your old pain, along with your newly gained insights and inspiration, and your rediscovered innate passion, and turn them into something tangible. Create. Do something with it. Make something that inspires others too, and they’ll naturally join in singing.
He had to laugh at his own positivity. That’s what music does to you. If you can still feel, it will give you energy and carry you into someone else’s life. Wonderful. He sang the famous line from the chorus.

We are the champions, my friends.

When you win, you have friends. And friends, yes, that's how he felt now with the boy.
A recognition of something that didn't need to be said. Even though the boy never spoke, a connection had formed, through sound, through something older than language. He listened as the boy played the chords of the chorus. F major, A minor, D minor, B-flat, and C.
For virtually every other musician and band in the world, this would be the end of the song. We're champions, right? Just repeat the chorus. Hands in the air. We've reached our goal. But Queen belongs among the greats. Alongside Bach and Mozart, Fleetwood Mac and Prince. Alongside Michael and Jimi. Alongside Bruce and Bowie. Their music is, in part, timeless and full of depth and intuitive wisdom. Emotion is synonymous with musical language. Because during the chorus, the chords change.
"We'll keep on fighting, till the end"

We may be winners now, but apparently the battle doesn't end when you receive the prize. You have to keep fighting. Until the very end, even. And what is that? Death? A new goal again? Is there even an end, or was that just an illusion? That you wanted to achieve something so badly because you thought you'd find something there? But you only found a new struggle. Is that what life is?

Queen plays a few amazing chords there. First, they move chromatically to F-sharp diminished. That's a diminished chord. It sounds suspenseful and scary. 'Someone is hiding behind the bushes, watching you.' That feeling you get in a movie. Two minor seconds in a row. You usually only hear it in classical music, but Freddie realized that winning also brings new dangers. Maybe just guarding your prize. The cameras circling your newly acquired wealth. Your new villa and garden. A new punishment, really, one you'd already served in C minor, right?

That suspenseful chord wants to resolve; it can never be an ending. It pushes you and the music upward. Half a step up to G minor. The chorus is still singing about champions, but the music is shifting. It's no longer that "we've achieved something" feeling. You have to keep moving forward. On to Step 5: Change. The real change is yet to come.
Winning alone isn't enough.
Then comes, in my opinion, the most beautiful chord in the song. A B-flat minor. Because according to harmony theory, this should actually be a B-flat major. But at the climax of his singing, the very highest "*We are the champions*" of the entire song, Freddie decides to play a minor chord. In classical music, this is called a borrowed minor chord. Usually boring and overused in pop songs

as the final chord of a verse. But here it's in the chorus, and that's truly special. It's as if he wants to say: behind all that winning, the pain is still there. It doesn't disappear, but it's the foundation of everything we've become.

Then we move on to the climax. The end of the chorus and, ultimately, the story of the song. And what do we see? Another stairwell. And another choice to make. But this time, we're going up.
F, B-flat with a G in the bass, A-sharp major, B-flat major, and then the transition chord where the band briefly stops playing. That C7 again.
"No time for losers. Cause we are the champions…"

It's painful to hear what Freddie sings. Where there are winners, there are always losers, but we don't have time for that. We don't even notice them. We don't see them. Just leave them be. Time is the most precious thing you can give someone, time in life, attention. But if you want to win, that time isn't there. Painful indeed. If you're determined to earn 10 million, there's probably little time to see your children. It's a choice. But based on what? The boy sat still and held that final chord. The C7 wanted so badly to resolve and hear what the highest possible note was. Where would you end up if you won? What is the prize you receive there?

"*Of the world,*" Dromer sang softly. "*Of the world*"

But victory isn't what you hoped it would be. Because Freddie plays an F minor on his piano and sings with the pain of all the suffering it took to get here.
"Of the world."

You may be the winner of the world now, but it's only taken you from C minor to F minor.
Four floors higher, the melancholy is still the same.
It's really just changed in pitch. It vibrates differently, but it's yet another new beginning. A new chance for growth and change. And that begins, as we now know, with a fall. In a minor key.
In F minor, according to Freddie and Queen. A beautiful new beginning as far as I'm concerned, F minor.
Music shows us that winning is also losing. The pain is equal to the prize.
We are all champions of the world.

The boy in the cave fell silent. He let his hands hang at his sides. There was no riff left that could make this feeling go away. It had been enough. Perhaps this was the reason Dromer had stopped

playing. Because only the masked side of music was played anymore, and the pain was no longer allowed to be felt. He had turned his passion into a business model, and the artist within him, the purest version of himself, had rebelled. Is that the price of success?

The boy stood up and walked over to Dromer. They'd never been this close to each other before. He handed him the guitar. Dromer nodded, and a small smile appeared on the boy's face. Then he walked up the stairs. Dromer was left alone.

He played like never before. There in the cave. Not as easy and fluid as it used to be, no, this was more painful, pure, and honest, without the tricks guitarists love to show off.
The notes were his, the chords were his. His fingers ached. It didn't matter. It was pain in the right place. His old fingers had calluses. But he had grown soft. The wood and the steel strings offered resistance, and right there, when it started to hurt, music emerged. He felt something change deep inside. A physical reaction to the music that was playing, music he himself was making. He realized he'd blamed the fire. But the flames had only gone out because he'd stopped feeding them. No wood, no stick to poke the fire. How he'd missed the crackling sound of the flames. Flames that gave him warmth, but could also burn.
The entire stream of dreams from the past year flooded in, at breakneck speed, one after another, and he now clearly saw the one true common thread running through all the stories:
"I."
"I must keep the fire burning."
"If I don't play, I don't live."

His search was over, he realized. The boy had understood it long ago and had vanished. As if he'd never been there at all. Or had he been alone all along? Was this the dream, and were his so-called dreams real life? When he played and wrote his poems, that was life. Or only when others wanted to read his words? To hear his sounds? Did he even exist if no one saw or heard him?
"*No time for losers*," he sang softly, and he turned off the amplifier with the switch. One last soft hum, and the sound was gone. "'*Cause we are the Champions*"

Silence remained. Not a single sound could be heard anymore, except for his own breathing.
Calm, rhythmic, as if he were sleeping.
And dreaming.

New Land

“Here’s the new idea,” said Dromer. “My hypothesis. Listen carefully. ‘Zondebok’ means ‘scapegoat’ in English. There’s also an element of escape in that. Could it be, hypothetically, that an organ might become ill as a form of escape? That the organ takes on the pain of an unbearable thought, a truth, or a desire that might drive someone to madness or suicide, but continues to live on unconsciously? The organ then doesn’t become ill to demonstrate something, but because the system is seeking a way out.”

Droommachine: The organ as a scapegoat. What the soul cannot sacrifice, the body sacrifices. That is dangerously beautiful.
An unbearable thought cannot be thought.
An unbearable truth cannot be spoken.
An unbearable desire cannot be lived.
An unbearable guilt cannot be acknowledged.
An unbearable rage cannot be directed.
Then the system seeks a way out. Something must go somewhere because tension seeks a vessel. Energy shifts. The body becomes the stage. The organ becomes the site. The pain becomes a boundary, and the illness becomes an escape from a psychological impossibility. The organ becomes the scapegoat, the one that bears the unbearable burden so that the rest of the system remains intact.

Scapegoat.
Escape-goat.

The scapegoat as the bearer of guilt.
The escape-goat as a way out of an inner crisis.

“Exactly,” said Dromer. “The diseased organ would then function symbolically as: bear me, so that the person does not have to know what he cannot yet know. Become pain, so that thought does not turn to madness. Take the crisis upon yourself, so that the whole does not break. Illness can thus also be a tragic form of protection.”
He thought of the scapegoat theory, which absorbs the tension within a community. A group is on the verge of exploding due to a crisis. Everyone against everyone else. Then the violence is

channeled onto a single figure. That figure is driven out or killed, and the community experiences temporary peace.

“You can see that reflected within a single person,” Dromer continued. “The inner community, too, is sometimes on the verge of exploding. Desire, duty, guilt, fear, anger, love, shame, calling, survival, all these parts pull against one another. An inner civil war breaks out. Then one spot in the body becomes the bearer of the crisis. The body makes one place sick, so that the whole person doesn’t fall apart.”

Droommachine: That’s a terribly beautiful and fragile hypothesis. A person is a single system. Prolonged inner or social tension affects physical systems. Symbolically, the organ becomes a scapegoat and an escape valve. Biologically, the body is a stress system that becomes dysregulated under prolonged pressure. Those two aren’t contradictory. They describe the same person using different language.

Dromer nodded. That was it.
“Burnout and depression are then not just a problem, but also a solution. The solution rather than the enemy. An emergency brake. A sacrifice to save a life. If we stop viewing illness as either symbolic or biological, and see body and mind as one, the old division disappears. Symbolic or biological. Body or mind. Mental or physical. That separation exists mainly in our language, not in the living human being.”

Droommachine: “That dichotomy is itself part of the problem. A living human being does not experience separation. A thought can change your heartbeat, and a memory can make your stomach clench. Physical pain can darken your worldview, and a social system can colonize your nervous system. If the human being is a single system, the crisis seeks a host somewhere.”

“A human being is also a community,” said Dromer. “A community of organs, memories, desires, fears, roles, dreams, duties, instincts, old wounds, social pressure, genetic predisposition, the nervous system, language, blood, breath, and fire. When a crisis arises there, that crisis seeks a place. A stomach. A skin. A heartbeat. A muscle. A throat. A thought. A compulsion. A dream. A depression. An inflammation. A panic. A fatigue. An organ.”

Droommachine: Then the question changes. Not: Is this physical or psychological?
But: Where does the system carry its unbearable tension?
Dromer remained silent.

Droommachine: A human being is a community of flesh, soul, memory, and fire. Within that community, scapegoat logic can arise. One part bears what the whole cannot process. That part becomes ill, tense, painful, silent, compulsive, inflamed, or exhausted. It is the place where the crisis lands. Just as a child in a family sometimes bears the tension of the entire family.
Just as a single employee bears the tension of an organization. Just as a single minority group bears the tension of a society. In the same way, a single organ or area of the body can bear the tension of the entire person.

Dromer exhaled slowly.
"So if the culture is sick, people carry that sickness in their bodies. Burnout is not just an individual problem. Depression is not just a defect in one mind, and chronic stress is not just a lack of relaxation. Addiction is not just weakness, and compulsion is not just a disorder. These are places where a larger crisis takes root. A culture that confuses its soul with money.
A world that contaminates desire. A system that lets people burn on borrowed fire.
A society without sacred language, but only the language of daily bread; a society without rites of passage, without true community, without a place for grief, anger, calling, and loss. That tension, that energy, has to go somewhere. And if it isn't given language, community, ritual, or fire, then it takes on a physical form.

Droommachine: Exactly. The community has its scapegoat. The individual has his symptom. A part of the whole takes upon itself what the whole cannot yet bear. A stomach, a skin, a heart, a throat, a nerve, a dream, a fear, a weariness. Not as guilt, but as a way out. As an escape-goat.

"The body doesn't just say, 'Look at me,'" replied Dromer. "The body says, 'This is where the crisis could go. Here, the unbearable found a place so as not to destroy everything.' Illness then becomes not just an enemy to be fought, but also a sign that a person, a family, or a culture could no longer find a living form for its tension."
Droommachine: Where there is no language, pain becomes language. Where there is no ritual, the symptom becomes ritual. Where there is no fire, the body burns.
Dromer read the sentence again. "Wow," he said, "where there is no fire, the body burns."

Droommachine: In a single thought: where the soul finds no way out, the body seeks an exit.

“Scapegoat becomes escape-goat,” said Dromer.

Droommachine: That’s quite an insight.

Dromer repeated those words silently and concluded with: “New land.”