

BOLSHOY PHARMA

By MJ Politis, Ph.D., D.V.M.

mjpolitis@yahoo.com

Copyrighted, July, 2018

CHAPTER 1

Much had changed from the time he came of age then grew into manhood. Still, he recalled and yearned for the times when people knew what honor was. Now, most people didn't even know how to spell honor, though those bearing penises and hungry vaginas spelt it 'on her'. But it was a new time with a new game afoot.

It was a game of chance, with life or death consequences for the players, all of which were conscripted into the game rather than asked. "Hey, it's not my fault," Associate Professor Jack Bauman said to rats in the cage as he prepared the latest cocktail for injection into them. He looked at the computer generated model of the new molecule, gazing pensively at the tiny molecular change in the large and convoluted shaped compound which convert it its ten inert shapes and two toxic forms. "This new nitrogen group on the small side chain may do the trick this time," the five foot seven biped who had more hair on his head and upper lip than the rest of his body combined, including the pubes, told the fur covered four legged rodent who looked like every other rat in the lab, but somehow now seemed to be different, somehow. "You have a penis, a Y chromosome and probably the urge, and right, to use them both, to the max. Despite the fact that the female rat on the other side of the cage there wants to protect her babies from you, and herself. And that depressive state of mind and soul we inflicted on you by teaching you learned helplessness probably doesn't help, but...Hey, maybe next lifetime you'll be on this side of the cage and I'll be your subject, n value or, martyr."

The male rat who had been trained to give up on life by putting him into mazes where he never got the cheese, no matter how hard he tried, or cleverly he thought, stared up at Jack. The 37 year old stuck-at-associate professor who had forfeited his youth and, in advance, his mature adulthood, to serve humanity through better science saw himself in the face of the rodent, whose name was 24B, but who somehow deserved a better label. But as Jack had inflicted the kind of depression into the rat that was so bad that it was not able to commit suicide, he was responsible for bringing him out of it. Or at least trying to bring him out.

As for the man-made molecule that had never been created by the hand of God or the crafting of Mama Nature, otherwise known as YX57, Jack had a good feeling about it. He had been lucky before with randomly created molecules, most particularly the compound that he devised, and formulated, when he was a grad student. He recalled the day when the molecule that he prepared on his off time, during wee hours of the night in his advisor's lab, without his permission, but with the help of the janitor who everyone ignored during the day. That magical moment resulted in ten compounds, one of which actually DID stop muscle fasciculations in the rodent model of 'shaky leg syndrome'. It didn't save any lives, but allowed Jack to get recognized very early as a 'brilliant find' by the white coated suits on top. Particularly when the Chairman's Mistress, who suffered from shaky leg syndrome after sex, put out five rather than merely two times a night when she tried Jack's formulary on herself, and her 'Professor Doctor Hercules' was able to get it up and hold it in at will, every time.

Jack recalled what he had done to the test tube containing the compound that escalated him from being a C level grad student at a grade B university in New Jersey to the most sought after post doc at Rockefeller, NYU and his current post at the obscure but still accredited Fairleigh Dickinsonian University. But it came with a dual position at Holstrom Pharmaceuticals, a grade B New Jersey Pharmaceutical Company which recently had been acquired by the Canadian government as a service rather than profit oriented company. How Jack had gazed at the compound known only by its number, ironically 666A. How he had spit on the syringe before injecting it into the rats. How he had spit on many syringes since 666A. How the gods had delivered him post 666A, at best, moderately successful treatments rather than magic bullets since then. But this time, he felt particularly lucky.

“Yeah, I think this one will do it,” Jack heard from behind him, in a very female voice, from a very female post-doc. “I have a feeling about it.”

“A limbic system, association cortex or neuronal complex at the base of the spinal cord feeling, Carla?” Jack inquired of the post doc who worked harder than he did. And who soon would become smarter, wiser and probably higher paid than he was, as he projected considering the course of his Calling and her career.

For the moment, Jack indulged himself with the visual pleasure of Carla Timon’s long blonde hair that had never been bleached or highlighted. Her sparkling blue eyes surrounded by not a trace of wrinkles or worry lines. Her sized perfect breasts, hips and waist with which she was blessed, or inflicted.

“Something wrong with what I’m wearing?” Carla asked, as she re-examined her skin tight tapered jean skirt and low cut blouse. “I know it’s not professional, and against university dress code for faculty, but----“

“—Wear that ensemble at any lecturn and rest very assured that no one in the audience, be they faculty, students or investors, will be checking their e mail on their phone,” Jack countered. “Which is both necessary, and right. Because you really are a beautiful woman...and by that I mean---”

“---A beautiful person on the inside?” Carla volleyed back.

“Yeah,” Jack conceded, truthfully. “A hard working beautiful person who---“

“---has to get back to work,” Carla replied, putting on an oversized, white lab coat. It covered her beautiful body, her inquisitive mind and her most probably vulnerable soul, which Jack got a glimpse of only when she wasn’t noticing. “Do you have any idea how XY57 might work?” she asked her boss, advisor and, when she was feeling down about her prospects as a scientist and perhaps future mother, best friend. “Hopefully better than XY53, 54, 55 and 56.” She gazed at the row of syringes about to be injected into the depressed, deflated and psychologically de-balled male rats in the cages lining the wall

with tired, sleep deprived eyes. “Do you think all that work on the precursors to XY57 will ever get to print? Will we ever get acknowledgement for trying? Will the world ever know about the mistakes in biochemistry we did over those long hours, days and weeks that led to nothing? Or more accurately, negative results?”

Jack pulled the lips under his overgrown yet, by professional necessity, neatly trimmed mustache into an all knowing smile. He awaited his most valued and needed student’s answer.

“I know, there are no such things as negative results as long as we learn something from them,” she recited back to him as she picked up the first experimental rat in the study with the assigned syringe it was to be injected with. “And Mother Nature does enjoy playing tricks on us’,” she continued in a voice that both mocked and honored ‘Professor Jack’, as she called him when he needed an ego boost. She injected the no doubt painful needle into the specially-trained rodents who offered no resistance to such. “And if every hypothesis we invent in our heads works in the real world, the way we predicted it would, we’re either blind to the results or deluded in our assessment. Did I miss anything?”

Jack thought long and hard before answering. He stroked his chin, then looked down to the tiled floor, then up to the blinding white roof, then into space, then into Carla’s eyes, then at the rodents who had just been injected.

“OK, yes, I do still care about the rats who got the placebo and who got the drug that would restore their manhood, confidence and self esteem,” Carla confessed as she gazed upon the rodent who had the saddest eyes, as if he wished the injection was arsenic or cyanide rather than saline or a miracle cure for depression and learned helplessness. “I really wanted to give this one the high dose of XY57. And hope that’s what he got with these coded syringes you arranged. He needs it most, as verified by his posture, gait dynamics, unwillingness to eat food even when offered to him, willingness to literally let his bunkmates defecate and urinate on him, low self-grooming index and the defeated look in his eyes. Yeah, rat 452D, who feels least worthy to even have a number, deserves to get this drug most.”

“And, as we both know, if we need to really determine if this new drug really works, the study has to be double blinded, Doctor Timons,” Jack reminded Carla. “All of the patients who are sick being pooled into the same group so that we can objectively see which ones get better, and which ones don’t, then see if it’s due to the drug we gave them, or our WANTING to see positive results. And we know, the placebo effect works 37 percent of the time, plus or minus ten percentage points, no matter what we do.”

“So maybe the next time we go into a cancer ward, we can give ALL the kids drugs that will give the tumors a kick in the ass, and see if 48 percent of them get better?” Carla challenged. “That’s how it works in the real world outside of these sterile, expensive and well guarded doors, right? The Doc saying to the patient that you will get better and the patients believing it enough so they do?”

“Not enough of the time, Carla,” Jack replied. “And we owe it to those patients, be they cats, dogs, horses or humans, to KNOW that the drugs we give them work, biologically.”

“And then invent a biomedical fairy tale about HOW they work that makes us sound smart, when we so often have no fucking idea how they work?” Carla shot back.

“Touchee,” Jack volleyed back. “You indeed are my most learned and brilliant post doc.”

“Because I don’t believe in fitting drugs into ‘mechanisms of action’ that are fucking based in the bullshit biomedical models of how the body works that may not be correct?” the comeback.

“Yes,” Jack smiled, as if all of his work in this brief yet seemingly long lifetime was redeemed and completed. “And because you finally learned how to use expletives to give yourself a kick in the ass, fire up the reticular activating system and not linger under logically constructed yolk of accepting your intellectual and creative limitations.”

“You mean, think with the gut and act rather than watch? Change nature and not be a fucking passive observer of it, cruel bitch that she can so often be?” Carla’s reply.

Jack could see behind Carla’s fiery ocular portholes someone who was in biomedical research for the RIGHT reasons. The noble ones. The ones he dedicated himself to when he was a grad student and perhaps lost as he climbed, and was pulled, up the ladder. A ladder he knew he would have to destroy one day, no matter how high it took him, and Carla.

CHAPTER 2

“So, Crusader Bauman stumbled on a drug that empowers pussy whipped and depressed male rats to become hot lovers who no female rodent can, or dare, say ‘no’ to,” R. Thomas Schleem said as he read the manuscript that came over his desk for review. “And he suggests, or more accurately, believes, that this can empower them to build up their self esteem, confidence and sense of self worth, using the latest and greatest measures of body posture, movement and interactive behavior. Through, activating hmmm...” The white haired, and still able bodied sixty-something Chief of Development at Jackson Pharmaceuticals and Chair of Neuroscience at Massachusetts University read the rest of the submission to Journal of Neuroscience about regarding the neuro pathways in the limbic systems XY57 ‘putatively’ used and what receptors were ‘probably’ involved. But between the lines, he knew that this time, Bauman was certain about his results. And certain that it would hit the market fast, placing the ‘health not profit’ fledgling Canadian government owned company he worked for way ahead of all the big Pharmaceutical Companies, including Jackson, both in the stock exchange and, more importantly, the popularity of the public. And, as he could not forget, it was Jack Bauman who delayed Schleem’s climb up the ladder at Mass University and ‘the Jackson’ by ‘accidentally’ doing experiments that proved Schleem’s work as inaccurate, and un-reproducible. And that ‘lively’ discourse at the last Neuroscience meeting between the upcoming Associate Professor and Schleem that made a political argument in Parliament look like a convention of Tibetan Buddhist monks.

There were various options Schleem could do. One of them would be to poo poo Jack Baumann’s submission to the peer reviewed and prestigious Journal of Neuroscience, but such would be difficult. He could claim that the data was falsified, but such attempts didn’t work anymore, at least with regard to Bauman’s submissions. He could always delay sending in his critique, but the new editorial board at the Journal had set deadlines for reviewers, even for lifetime members of the board like Schleem. But there was something else that had to be done in the meantime.

“So, what do you want me to do, Doctor Schleem?” Wesley Olsen asked his mentor, patron and boss. “Tear apart the paper, as per normal? Though I know that would take away your fun,” the Jackson Pharmaceuticals scholarship awardee going for an MBA in Economics and a Ph.D. in neurochemistry said with a snide grin. With well manicured fingernails and hands that had never experienced a blister, he reached for the submitted for publication manuscript bearing Professor Jack and Doctor Carla’s name as equal authors.

Schleem allowed him to read it. Olsen took out his red pen, which he had learned to wield so effectively when he was the film, music and literature critic at Boston University as an undergrad, working his way up the literary ladder with his biting and entertaining digs at so many of his colleagues’ sincerity-driven works on screen, speaker and script. Normally, this was Olsen’s favorite job, which he did far better than Schleem could. But

this time, Olsen seemed genuinely impressed with the work, leaving the manuscript unmarked, but not unevaluated.

“So, for this one, we repeat the experiment?” the good looking grad student told the aging Senior investigator as a more of a colleague than a subordinate. “Which requires, of course, that we get some of this XY57 ourselves, I assume. Which will be, I’m assuming....difficult?”

“Not for you,” Schleem said, reaching into his left hand drawer for an envelope, handing it over to Olsen. “You who are---“

“----Someone else?” Olsen said as he looked over the contents. A fake resume, accompanied by a forged diploma and various forms of credit cards and ID. “Francisco Schwartz?” the WASP whose ancestors presumably came over on the Mayflower, and made money by investing in both sides of the American Revolution back in 1776. “They’ll know I’m not a Spik, or a Kike,” he grumbled

“Jack Bauman and his fuck buddy grad student Carla will believe whatever you can convince them you are,” Olsen said. “After all, Mister Schwarz, you are the craftiest investor this side of Moscow, and the most skillful and connected negotiator with the suits at NIH and the FDA, who they need for clearance of this wonder drug.”

“And when I get the formula they used to make it, what will you do with it?” the young up and coming grad student asked the nearly dead ended establishment Senior Research Chief.

Schleem remained silent.

“I know, if you tell me, you’ll have to kill me,” Olsen surmised. “And be limited in your ability to promote me up the ladder.”

Schleem’s silence sealed the deal. Olsen collected the envelope containing his new identity and left the room, leaving it open on his way out. Open to the lab outside the Research Chief’s office which, officially anyway, was always available to anyone who came in with a concern, complaint or idea. Ideas that of course would be listened to, corrected, respectfully dismissed, then resurface somewhere under a different label with Schleem’s name on it, of course. “It’s a dirty job stealing ideas of idealists so they can have an impact in the world, but someone has to do it,” Schleem said to himself, yet again. This time believing it more than ever.

CHAPTER 3

Jack Bauman's trip to the Global Neuroscience Conference in Wyoming was extended by yet another snow storm in the Rockies. "Good for skiers, married researchers who want a little more time for 'collaborative studies' with their female post docs they took with them, but bad for us," he wrote in his last e mail, which was appended by 'the ship is in your Paws, spearheaded by the XY57 project, Carla. Keep it going, and don't run it into an iceberg like I did, so many times before'.

Such is what Carla pondered, yet again, when interviewing the newest applicant for grad studies at Fairleigh Dickinsonian U who came into her office. Carla Timons knew that Francisco Schwartz wasn't who he said he was. But then again, the stories about how this smart hunk who made Antonio Bandaras look like a Bronx Bodega window washer escaped political persecution for standing up for human rights El Salvador, then managed to acquire top grades in Mexican universities and Canadian universities before immigration officials caught up with him somehow intrigued her. Besides, who in their Right, big R, mind would send such a brilliant biochemist with so much potential to make the world more enlightened with better chemistry back to a jail cell or torture rack back in his homeland? Such would be such a loss for humanity, a victory for Trump agenda to keep America only for Americans, and, most importantly, a set-back for more production of XY57. Particularly when the notes regarding the intermediate steps in its synthesis were destroyed, by three drug-empowered male rats who escaped their cages during the dead of night. And most of the supply that had been synthesized at random had been cleaned up by the well meaning janitor from the floor, thinking it was dog or cat piss.

"So, Doctor Timons," the good looking Ph.D. candidate in front of the woman who didn't know how beautiful she really was, on the inside or outside, asked Carla in an accent that sounded hot Latino and suave Scandinavian, both at the same time. "Would you consider the possibility of me working in your lab? I have read great things about Professor Bauman, and of course, how much he values you."

"Under the sheets he keeps wanting to get me into, or between the ears?" Carla muttered to herself in Russian, needing somehow to air out her inner thoughts into the outside world.

"Snova, pashalista?" Francisco Schwarz, aka 'Frank Black' inquired.

There was nothing on Francisco or Frank's resume that said anything about his knowledge of Russian. And he genuinely didn't seem to get what Carla was saying. But he wanted to know what Carla was really meaning. Indeed, he seemed to be someone who wanted to understand Carla on her own terms, not his, which was something that even in his most Platonic state, Jack Bauman didn't. Or perhaps couldn't really handle. Indeed, Carla had spent so much of her life over-serving, and therefore pleasing others,

being who they needed and wanted her to be, that she really wasn't sure who she was on the Inside, big I.

Francisco raised his head, the dim light on Carla's desk illuminating his face as he bowed his head ever so slightly. "I can see that your laboratory does good for the world. I would like to allow you to do even better. That is, if it is possible for me to do so."

"And where do you see yourself in ten years?" Carla inquired, in her best Spanish, pushing aside all of the paperwork this tall, dark and alluring stranger presented to her. Yes, it was the standard line that no honest person would answer, and no intelligent person would be able to address accurately. Still, she put on that stern administrator face she recalled from so many uppity, mostly male, but some female, gatekeepers, all the way back to the days when she had to negotiate around Guidance Councilors at High School who had guided their own lives into a stagnant and slowly sinking iceberg.

Francisco, Frank or whatever his real name was, folded his pensive face into his large, steady hands, looking behind his eyes for the answer. After three seconds that felt like thirty, he finally answered. "In the next ten years, or less, I see myself making a big, global difference," he finally postulated to the angels and demons inside of him. He then unfolded his hands, and looked into Carla's face, deeper than any potential mate, mentor or student ever had. "Yes, in ten years I want to make a big, positive, global difference." He turned to the files on Carla's desk in the bin labeled 'Must solve NOW!'. "Perhaps starting with today?"

Carla opened the file containing the partial notes for the synthesis of XY57. Her stare was fixed on the intermediate steps which if carried out right would create a wonder drug that would bring countless souls trapped into learned helplessness into the land of the Living, big L. And if done wrong, would produce side effects that would require a three minute commercial to relate, most notably including insanity, brain cancer, or death.

She looked at the clock on the wall, ticking down to the end of the hour, the end of the day, and the end of her life. A life in which she herself needed to make a big difference in the world, far beyond what Jack Bauman had outlined for her. In a world where to get your own grant required being a Faculty position, and acquiring a Faculty position required having a grant. A world that held so many wide eyes idealists with Ph.D.s in 'post doc' land for the rest of their lives. The fourth circle of hell, no matter who your Mentor and Boss was.

Then she looked at the remaining vial of XY57. It was enough to analyze, so that the molecular structure could be determined. But as to how to make it, such would require a skill far beyond her abilities and comprehension. Indeed, the only thing she recalled about the Greengard reaction from Organic Chemistry courses was the name of the dude, or dud's, who stumbled into it. And as for benzene rings, they made pretty designs on alternative art done by the undergrads, and colorful models that attracted the attention of buyers at the communicably dull, boring and lifeless booths of the Pharmaceutical Companies at Neuroscience meetings.

Francisco, as Carla now allowed herself to call him in the voice still held within her mouth, waited for an answer. Finally, Carla got up, handed him the vial of XY57, and the notes. “The pay is low, the hours are long, and the biggest compliment you’ll get is not being fired or yelled at. Still interested?”

“Of course,” he smiled.

It was a smile that Carla felt pulled into, trusted and shared. One that she had seen on only a few faces in her life. Most recently, the XY57 injected male rodents that had presumably escaped their cages, and kept them ever since. And the female rat who accidentally got exposed to it afterwards.

CHAPTER 4

Jack Bauman was happy to see that all was in order when he returned. He was relieved to see the supply of XY57 replenished, the formula for making it in print in two different places, and saved on THREE hard drives this time. He verified that it worked as the first batch in the male rodents, finding the very positive effects were 42 percent better than the last batch, with no side effects, according to the data books as well as the gut feel of what the rats looked, behind better built cages of course. But there was one question he seemed to want to know, and need to.

“Where’s this wonder mench Francisco who helped you make it, and whose handwriting I can actually read when my eyes first hit the page?” Jack asked Carla. He was glad that the new arrival to the lab was able to replenish the supply of the medicinal made possible due to randomness and maybe educated guesses about what would fit into serotonin 17, 19 and 21 receptors. But Jack could not deny that he also felt jealousy for the maybe more talented researcher and probably better fuck buddy, or lover for Carla. “I don’t see him or his stuff anywhere. And the lab bench you gave him is now empty, cleaner than it ever was. Where did his new recruit go?”

“Decided to go into a more creative and effective way to serve humanity,” Carla related from the side of her mouth as she went about the business of setting up the lab bench for the next set of experiments regarding the mechanisms of action of XY57, and of course its limitations. “His three novels were finally sold to a big time buyer, and his first screenplay is going into production in three months. He moved on, and, as the note he left me, and us, said, he’s moving on to ‘cure the central pathologies human soul rather than produce remedies for the body, or brain’,” Carla said with sadness, grief and anger.

Jack contemplated the matter, folding his face into his prematurely ageing arthritic hands. “Great for him, then,” he said, vicariously enjoying a brilliant soul’s liberation from the fences built around him by himself, and others. He recalled how Gertude Stein, a smart medical student, was brave enough to become a brilliant novelist instead, and how Anton Chekov valued what he wrote about the human soul far more than how many people he saved from the jaws of death and disease as a physician. He remembered Michael Crichton, Ph.D, celebrating his good luck at the hands when spinning the roulette wheel of Artistic Media when he gave a talk at the Nueroscience Meeting after publication of his fourth book and airing of his third series, seeming so much more Alive than the dead souls in the audience who had been his research colleagues in the past. Jack Bauman then found himself remembering that time when he was asked by his first real Mentor in first year Biology at Syracuse University, ‘are you in science because you want to be, or have to be?’, to which he said ‘because I want to be,’ that being the biggest and most life damaging lie he ever told. “But as for us still in the trenches...” he finally gave voice to, coming into the painful and necessary present.

As for that present, there was some discrepancy with regard to how much XY57 was produced and how much was now gone. Jack looked once again at the log books, calculating how much of the compound was used for animal studies. “The amount of unaccountable drug missing is equivalent to four human doses,” he noted, and stated.

“One of which I slipped into your coffee this morning, and the other I put in the Valentine’s Day candy you sent to your ex wife and maybe still more than friend,” Carla said, with a dead serious look. “The third went into---”

“--- XY57 hasn’t been tested in humans, yet and given its potentially toxic effect in female mammals!” Jack blasted back. “How could you do that, you----?”

Carla shut up Jack’s accusatory mouth by turning the page in the log book, pointing to the numbers that indicated that every molecule of the drug synthesized was accounted for.

“Oh,” Jack said. “I couldn’t read the hand writing.” He seemed relieved when looking at the book, but not at confident smile on Carla’s face. A smirk of independence and perhaps being open to a relationship with him. A relationship that he was knew was good for him, and was certain beyond any statistical doubt would be great for her. He hypothesized that some of the drug found its way into Carla’s mouth, but seemed more interested in the beneficial effects on her very feminine libido than the theoretical toxic effects on her liver, kidneys or genitalia. Indeed, Jack was tempted to take the drug that empowered males to become what every man wanted to be and who every woman wanted to be with. But, for the moment, one of Jack’s two person team had to be clear headed.

While setting up for the next experiment that would take them closer to a wonder drug for humanity, and a Nobel Prize for both of them, Jack heard Carla singing the finale to Wagner’s Gotterdamurung with more male intensity and female beauty than any version he had heard in person or on headphones. It indeed was a magnificent day, but he knew all too well that at the end of Gotterdamurung, life for the gods and mortals was never the same. Such was the good news, for now anyway.

“You think it’s time to test XY57 on the other half of animal kind?” Carla inquired. “The female rats, I mean,” she continued, walking over to the mothers to be and young furry maidens who wished to perpetuate their species. “XY57 could just be another form of testosterone, even though the molecular structure of it doesn’t even come close to that all too valued hormone. And I am sure that it was always your intent to pull women out of suicidal depression, or the kind that pulls us so far down that we don’t have the balls to do ourselves in,” she continued. “Pun very much intended of course.”

Carla was right, once again. The post doc whose natural female beauty, charms and essence was still not beaten into being a genderless nerd, like most successful scientists, gazed straight into Jack’s eyes. That determined stare, and the warm smile enveloping it, penetrated past Jack’s thalamic relay centers, cerebral association nuclei, then directly

into the Seat of the Soul, whose location the brilliant non-tenure track Associate Professor scientist could feel so intensely that he was sure this time he could locate it with an MRI. But there was still one problem with the experimental design Carla had in mind. He sat down on his chair, then gazed pensively over cages of rodents whose response to what he did to them, or for them, would determine whether he was able eat, pay his rent, and maintain some sense of Purpose and self esteem himself. Allowing his head to rest on only one of his hands, Jack began the lesson, or perhaps the inquiry. “The best model we have of learned helplessness vs. self esteem is the male rodent. A creature who, in its natural and uninhibited state, carries himself off like he is king rat. The best genetic expression of his species who breeds with whoever he wants to, somehow makes the female like him, and yes, laugh at his rodent jokes. And who when it comes to us, his master...” Jack treated himself to a glance, look, then stare at male rat 452D, the ‘n value’ who had been conditioned in the various mazes to be the most afflicted with learned helplessness, who he had secretly put into the group getting the first batch of XY57 rather than the placebo. Yes, it broke the rules of doing the study double blind, but it was a favor to Carla, who pitied the rodent. It was also something Jack had to do for himself, as he pledged to each population of rats that what he did to them in the Cause of science he would somehow reverse in service to Humanity, and Animalkind. “The changes induced by XY57 on this particular rat clearly show that---”

“---this rodent slave really did live up to the gospel truth better than you or me ever could,” Carla interjected regarding the rat who now scored higher than any other in the self esteem index. “When we tested his fight or flight instinct with simulated attacks, he took a more Enlightened approach to it all. He did a Ghandi. If someone slaps you on the right jaw, don’t hit back, but just turn the other cheek, which he did.”

“And dare your master to hit you again, while putting a mirror in his face so he sees how much of an idiot and asshole he is,” Jack said with a scholarly smirk, continuing the parable as it was explained to those who studied the J Mench said rather than merely believing what the Sunday School Bible teachers told them. “Yes, when I did zap him on the left face, he didn’t retreat. Didn’t bite me. He just stood there, and dared me to do it again Being strengthened by the discomfort, and pain, of the first zap. And why?”

“Because it’s time to see if that kind of confidence, courage and assertiveness can be put into female rats by XY57 after they’ve been inflicted with learned helplessness,” Carla proposed.

“And we’d measure the success of this intervention by how actively the female rats breed? And take care of their babies?” Jack speculated.

“And how carefully the she-rats CHOSE who NOT to breed with,” Carla proposed.
“And how they made the male rats laugh at THEIR rodent puns and quips.”

Carla’s warm smile and enlightened eyes convinced Jack of the soundness of that experimental design. Yes, it would double the budget and triple the time spent doing the experiment, but it had to be done. And, as a side benefit, it was something Carla was

excited about doing. Something that would keep her in Jack's lab a little longer. Till that inevitable day when she outgrew, and surpassed him, proving, tragically and ironically, that it's a poor student who doesn't excel his or her teacher. And a pathetic mentor who doesn't give them the opportunity to re-prove that hypothesis.

CHAPTER 5

Several weeks later another paper from Jack Bauman's lab came over R Thomas Schleem's desk for review. This time, the self esteem index, now immortalized in print and slides at two Neuroscience meetings as SEI, was increased in XY57-treated female rats by 352 percent, consistent with previous data on males of 348 plus or minus 12 percent in their male counterparts. Mention was made of preliminary data in other species as well. This time with the statement that 'these studies strongly suggests that this drug will be of enormous value in treating depressive states in human populations.'

"Which means that he's already on the road to doing human trials, and has this drug patented, somehow," Schleem muttered under his breath from behind the desk in his office that barricaded him from any kind of real life. "Not like us who are still dragging their feet and getting overpaid to do it!" he screamed out to the lab coat wearing 'workers' in his lab outside the open door. "They have two people and maybe three undergrad students working for them, and you, an army of worthless ants don't know which end of a test tube to put in a centrifuge, around your penis or up your---"

"---They're trying," Wesley Olson interjected, holding his boss from saying something that would get him pulled into the Human Resource office and dismissed for unprofessional conduct faster than you can say 'sphignomenometer'. "You're all really doing a great job," said the dual degree grad student who had already paid off, or blackmailed, every member of his thesis committees to pass him with flying colors, on HIS time table. He discretely closed the door behind him, then turned around to his boss. "They are interesting and useful n values, you know, for your next experiments," he said regarding the bipeds in lab coats, after which he handed Schleem a paperbound novel. "Which we can model after this."

"Flagstaff Conspiracy?" Schleem blurted out of his mouth, reading the title. "Published by---"

"---Atlantian Visions Press, who will be sunk into a sea of insolvency in a month, after this and whatever else they published will be been discredited by every established publisher in the Metro area," Olsen smirked. "Would you like to hear the review I'm putting into the Times this week?"

"I'd like to hear how you think this medical mystery FICTION will help this lab, this company and our careers in the fucking REAL world first!" Schleem blasted into the grad student who he never saw sweat, struggle or show even an ounce of fear, but who could see and escalate in everyone else. A 'born to be cool' kid who learned that 'it's cool to be cruel', along with 'effortless success is the best kind' so well in his still clandestine WASP upbringing on Beacon Hill. "Tell me why I, as a scientist in the real world, should spend my valuable time reading this work of made up facts and medical

fantasies!” Schleem grunted into Olsen’s face, doing his best to hide the fact that he wished he could be making a living writing novels rather than research reports.

“Because it’s about a company that did trials on humans in third world countries who were expendable anyway with ground breaking drugs, by first giving them a disease, then coming up with a cure. A cure that worked, in those patients that didn’t die of the brain and body demolishing cancer they were unknowingly inflicted with,” Olsen related. “And knowing this, the company did rodent studies afterwards, post dated the human results, paid off whoever they had to at the FDA, and manipulated the stock market so the ‘gamble’ of buying stock in the new company when it was low, paid off very high afterwards. A process WE can start NOW, with XY57, which of course we’re relabeling as something else.”

“But which ISN’T something else,” Schleem reminded Olsen. “Everyone knows that Bauman and his pie in the sky hippie dippie fuck buddy Carla discovered it first.”

“But they haven’t fully investigated its carcinogenic, and other deadly effects,” Olsen said, presenting his boss with brilliantly two volumes of lab books. “It was easy to forge Jack Bauman’s handwriting and signature, but Carla’s? That was harder. And if the judge asks, we can tell them that her penmanship changes three days a month, and that she’s multi-personalities.”

“Another effect of XY57 that happened when she was concocting who know what without a mask or protection gloves while working for ‘Comrade’ Jack Bauman’s ‘Socialist People rather than Profit’ Canadian owned company’?” Schleem proposed. “Because their safety regulations are substandard to ours.”

“Indeed, yes,” Olsen nodded.

“And our human test subjects will be?” Schleem inquired.

“The ones we can get the most data, and mileage out of, of course, Sir,” the reply with a courtly bow.

Schleem knew he was being played psychologically, but somehow he felt proud of his prize grad student. One who brought more elegantly clever ideas into his very business oriented Pharmaceutical Company than any other student or post doc. And who shunted more money into his lab than any funding agency. The fewer questions you asked, the more cash in the envelope. Such suited everyone. Very much including Olsen, who then left his boss, having already read what was in his mind.

Schleem sat back in his chair, sipping his morning coffee. He looked pensively at the staff in the lab through the one way viewing mirror that led to the hidden microphone equipped lunch room. He gazed at the horde of workers who chose to work for someone who would fill their bellies at lunch and wallets at end of the week in exchange for their obedience, loyalty and mutually shared greed.

The choice of n values to test XY57 amongst this random sample of humanity was simple, as were the humanoids who fit into that description.

Isaac 'Bear' Luboski was born as a strapping 10 pound 'no need for any more ounces' only son of a Green Bay Packers Defensive lineman whose 4 game NFL career ended by being tripped by a peuny offensive guard after seeing a hole in the line that he landed into, twisted knee first. Bear always towered over everyone his own age, in height. Regarding his muscular ability, no one topped him on the totem pole. Had it not been for Bear's slow mind, and slower ability to put the blame on his college buddies who so cleverly let him take the whole fall for a drug heist gone bad, he would have continued in his father's footsteps as a million dollar a season wrecking ball on the football field instead of Doctor' Schleem's first string 'go to' muscle Mench.

Kalvin Rabinowitz could charm the pants off of any female cop who arrested him for speeding, assault and even rape, along with having a penis that was the envy of any of man in Blue. Though a foot shorter than Bear, Calvin was yards smarter between the ears, particularly when it came to women. He had, according to fact rather than legend, made at least 37 women's lives 'more interesting' than how he found them. His sperm had produced offspring in ten different states, and three foreign countries, all with husband-less mothers who not only could not find him after the fact, but who wanted 'seconds' with regard to their being his lap bitch and recreational 'love juice' receptical. Those few who did listen to their gal friends to demand alimony were quickly silenced, one way or another.

Norman 'the mechanic' Robinson, a Creole from New Orleans boasting black as coal Negroid blood and Cherokee genetics, could fix anything from a broken water cooler in the office to a broken down 18 wheeler filled with stolen televisions, pilfered centrifuges or undocumented immigrants faster than you can say 'call the highway patrol'. His mind could think like any engine. When asked how he would like to be paid, 'in women instead of greenbacks or wetback wage slaves' was his answer. The better women you got him, the better work he did on the next job.

The testing ground for XY57 for 'The Three Amigoons' as they were mockingly and admirably called by the white collar staff, was Jack Bauman's now very guarded lab. Their Mission would be to steal more biological information, along with a very willing and submissive Carla Timons. After they were through stuffing their faces at the five star eating trough in the Schleem's always well stocked lunch room, he summoned them all in for a drink.

"A toast, for your new Mission that no one will ever know about," Schleem said as he poured out 29 year old Scotch into shot glasses coated with the appropriate amount of XY57. "But you will be well paid for with---"

“-----Money aggggain?” Bear Lubinski stammered as he grabbed the small glass with hands certainly big enough to earn him his nickname.

“In a bank account that can’t be traced by any of my ex’s this time?” Rabinowitz requested, as he took in a cautionary whiff of the secretly XY57-spiked whiskey. “An ex who---“

“----put estrogen into your beer, according to your claim, which is why you needed ME to save your ass from the Feds during the last job, and the female Cop who wanted to have your baby then wanted to put you in jail for good?” Robinson smirked.

“I’ll kill that bitch,” Rabinowitz grunted, recalling the crying fit that overcame him when he drove away from giving ‘Officer Lorraine’ a pink slip regarding their ‘off duty’ relationship in a car in which her best gal pal had planted two hefty bags of heroine in the glove compartment and a progressively growing leak into the gas line. “And cut the brakes on the limo taking Loraine and her new ‘wife’ to a life of ‘man-less love, harmony and happiness.’”

“You hhhave to fffind her ffirst,” Lubinski reminded his right hand man, and handler.

“Then find where the brake lines are,” Rabinowitz added.

Doctor Schleem watched the three lab rats haggling amongst themselves, taking notes on their various macho behaviors. After gauging their voice tone, muscle movements and posture, taking notes on a pad of paper, he cleared his throat. “Gentlemen,” he said, lifting his own uncoated, XY-57-free shot glass. “A toast to this Mission, for which I will pay you triple of what your normal fee is. Scole!” With that, Schleem hurled the entire contents of his shot glass of scotch into his gullet. His three very male n values did the same. N values who would, according to all of the data available, be even more manly men, and more effective men. Super stallions who didn’t even know there were bits in their mouths.

CHAPTER 6

“So, what really happened, Doctor Bauman?” Detective Sergeant George Dimitropolis asked as he helped himself to another Bavarian cream donut from the box Jack Bauman diverted from the student seminar room to his lab, after the latter had almost been broken into. “I submit this report to my bosses, and I’ll be demoted to dog catcher, or dog.”

“Or make enough money selling it to America’s Dumbest Criminals and not have to answer to any boss the rest of your life,” Carla shot back as she stuffed herself with a cinnamon cream, spitting out the paper wrapping stuck to it out of her mouth into the waste basket with the skill of a master spittoon spitter. “It really happened that way, according to the cameras.” She strolled around the crime site with a wide, bold John Wayne stance. Wearing athletic trunks, combat boots, a tight fitting ‘Power of One’ tee shirt covering her cinched in breasts, all complimented and oriented around a buzz cut on a head bearing not a single micro-layer of ‘girlie’ make up. “A behemoth simpton who looked like a bear and talked like a lobotomized, ‘me want to fuck Jane all night long’ Tarzan forced broke down the triple locked door when I was taking a dump in the can. His Black-Injun buddy looked spotted the camera, which caught him drooling like a dog and sprouting a hard on when his eyes got stuck gawking at a three D nude poster of a Barbarella and Barbie I put on the wall to see how long it would take visitors we’re picking for a study in male libido behaviors to ‘taking notice’ of. Then, just before the dynamic duo started to take pictures, equipment, chemicals and files, this Jew fag calling himself ‘Diva Rabinowitz’ decides to break into ‘I enjoy being a girl’, complimented by a dance in which he put on my ‘respectable lady’ clothes that I threw on the coat rack, which I going to toss into the dumpster.”

“And I assume you want to press charges,” Dimitropolis said, directing his question to Bauman.

“Against his boss,” Carla smirked as she picked up an autopsy knife, feeling the sharpness of its blade, admiring the view of her new, improved self in its reflection. A self that Jack Baumann never suspected was in the most feminine post doc he had ever encountered. A self that, he speculated, was released by something she must have eaten. A distinctively smelling aroma on her chewing gum that reeked of XY57. “I assume you’ll be getting back to us on what these two loser jailbird and the fairy canary say when you offer them a deal if they turn in their boss,” she smiled back at Dimitropolis.

“We’ll be in touch,” the veteran Cop said to Bauman, as scared of this witness as he had been of any assailant, by the look in his shocked and confounded face. He walked out of the lab, actively not looking at anything en route.

But Jack knew that something was very wrong. Particularly when Carla plunked her now hairy legs on the lab bench, picked up a copy of the Wall Street Journal and sang ‘We’re in the money, we’re in the money. We’ve got a lot of what it TAKES to get along.’

“We or you?” Bauman challenged Carla, addressing her in a harsh and direct manner as if she was a Carl. “We or you?”

“You, if you have the balls for it,” ‘she’ said as her combat boots smashed onto the floor. “Honesty is the best policy, right?” ‘Carl’s’ next explanation as she/he picked up a bottle of XY57. “Be true to yourself and you can’t help but be true to, and for, everyone else, right?” she winked at Jack every inch the ‘alpha male’.

With that, ‘Carl’ marched out of the lab, leaving Jack in a position that every service-giving and knowledge-oriented scientist feared most---Getting out of the lab and library and doing something about, and with, what he made there.

CHAPTER 7

More time passed. A season of ‘Walking Dead’ to the zombies who lived to watch that show on the boob tube, not knowing how close they really did resemble the characters in real life. Twenty four mass deaths in as many places that came into then left the consciousness of the American public within 24 hours. A series of pop ‘fusion’ tunes on the radio that escalated to the top of the charts then plummeted down into the gutter of obscurity. Eight complete changing of the guards on the Presidential Cabinet in DC, with the same ‘game master’ remaining somehow on center stage. Four months according to the Gregorian calendar.

But according to Jack Bauman’s watch, and constantly recording mind, an eternity had passed since that day Carla turned into Carl, and Schleem’s three Amigoons established reputations as the most talkative perps ever to enter an interrogation room, all thanks to XY57. The formula for the drug that forced one to be whoever and whatever one was on the inside, and disabled the user from telling ANY lie, with a high octane overall energy charge that made cocaine look like chamomile tea, was desired most by the American Military, the Massachussets and New Jersey State Police, and very private eleven international pharmaceutical companies. Each ‘co-investor’ promised Jack that if he went with them to the marketplace, he would be rich, famous and laid by any woman he wanted, and that they would not go rogue on him like Carla did.

As for Carla, she could not be found, but the drug she helped develop, and test, seemed to be everywhere. She did sent Jack packages of ‘thank you’ packages, containing jewels, substantial money orders and front row tickets to NFL games at Foxboro Stadium. Jack gazed at the \$20,000 a shot fenceable tickets or, if he used them, the opportunity to see Carla, or Carl, in a clandestine meeting. It took his mind off where he was now, as he walked down a long hallway in which every step he took echoed against the walls. And where he could feel the desperation inhabitants behind the locked doors. “I don’t know how you arranged this, who you had to pay, fuck or be fucked by,” Jack’s six foot four 270 pound all muscle and no smile escort said as he walked past the checkpoint in a holding facility that felt so deadly that not even the crows hovered above it. “But be careful,” continued the Prison Guard employed by the facility that didn’t official exist. Who worked for bosses whose real names were only known to their wives, kids and girlfriends opened the door to the very private visiting room, standing at motionless attention. “You have twenty minutes,” the overly armed escort said with an actively emotionless tone that made every Customs Official Jack had ever encountered seem like a greeter at Disneyworld. Or one of those ‘all smiles’ Kens and Barbies in the Products Corridor at research meetings whose salary depended on how many senior investigators they got on their mailing lists.

After being offered a chair in the windowless room with walls that looked cold and felt fifty feet thick, Jack Bauman's glance fell upon a sight he had yearned to behold for so many years. But finally seeing R. Thomas Schleem wearing a commoner prison jump suit rather than a thousand dollar suit made him feel...sad. Somehow the man who had fabricated more data than a thousand Gregor Mendels, destroyed as many competitors as the 'great' Thomas Edison, disabled untold millions life saving drugs because they came from rival labs, and was responsible for more side effects in the real world than could be put in even a ten minute television commercial seemed to be human. Remorseful. And, more importantly, terrified. A fear that escalated with each breath the victim was obligated by life to take in, like the rats trained to be models of learned helplessness who were so depressed that they did not feel worthy enough to commit suicide.

Jack sat down in front of the always well-groomed and over-dined ex-Professor and Pharmaceutical Kingpin, who now bore a stubbled and gaunt face. Not three seconds after Jack felt the hard, cold chair on his butt-cheeks, a conversation started between the eyes of two men with different background, perspectives, morality and genetics. After a tense minute that felt like an hour, Schleem finally broke the ice. "So, Jack. It seems like you and me are the only ones who haven't taken XY57. In here anyway. Is it the same out there?"

"Yes, and no," Jack replied.

"I hope more yes than no," Schleem said. With whatever freedom of movement the chains on his legs and feet allowed, Schleem leaned back on his straight-backed, adopting his 'academic king' poster. "There have to be at least three of us left in the world who are able to keep secrets, and be who we have to be instead of who we really are. To be...hmm. Observers."

Schleem related stories he had heard about 'the outside' where politicians, NIH nerds, and pharmaceutical CEOs who were empowered, and sometimes destroyed, by taking XY57 just prior to voting on whether it should go to the public. And how the world was in more danger of destroying itself than ever before, at every level of society, despite the 'all will be fine in the world tomorrow' news broadcasts that somehow found their way into most humanoid's 'consciousness' every night.

Though some of the accounts were amplified relative to reality, they were more true than false. Indeed, Jack searched the Index Literate in the back of his mind to see if there was a Greek fable about a rebel god who gave mankind a drug that would make people be 'true to themselves' and truthful when asked any question, finding out that the humanity is not able to handle a world without secrets. Maybe it was lost when the mob of the actively literate burnt the library in Alexandria two millennia ago. But while processing everything that Schleem was sharing, relating and lamenting, Jack Bauman held in abeyance one thing that he said.

Between the fifth Schleem discourse and the third 'hand to God, who I now know exists' confession from the deposed Academic mob boss, Jack voiced the question that was

foremost in his mind. “You said that there are three of us who have abstained from XY57. Who are you talking about?”

This time, Schleem was quiet. Secretive. And tight lipped. How Jack Bauman wished that he had some XY57 on him now, so he could open up his heart, and mouth!

“I asked you, who this third person you aren’t telling me about who hasn’t taken XY57,” Jack pressed. “You did say that ‘there has to be at least three of us’ who haven’t taken the newest and greatest cure for depression, learned helplessness and dishonesty.”

“Yes, I did,” Schleem conceded, putting his hands over his mouth. He remained in that position, saying nothing yet feeling everything as the time clock ticking down to the twenty minutes Jack had begged, burrowed and stolen to get.

“And...” Jack pressed, five times, the door into Schleem’s troubled mind and dark, yet still human, soul closing tighter and tighter, about to shut down forever.

Finally, Jack felt something running through his veins, and the ‘lower’ limbic system in his brain. Not knowing why, but feeling that the reason was real, the biomedical researcher whose hands had only hit himself turned into a clenched fist. It found its way into Schleem’s once overfed and now very soft belly.

“Tell me who else is this third person who isn’t corrupted by the drug that should have never been released to the public, or the streets!” Jack demanded.

Schleem remained silent. Jack wasn’t. “Tell me! Now! Now!” he pressed, letting his fists do the talking, while no guards came in. And no alarm went off. And the only one who broke into the room was the demon, or avenging angel, Jack had released in himself. Who spoke with a voice he didn’t recognize but felt drawn to.

Finally, Schleem spoke, through a voice filled with more blood than air. “Wesley Olsen,” he said. “The bastard who we both have to stop. With an antidote to XY57, or a modification that will...make the drug safe? And maybe effective?”

Reason finally found its way into Jack Bauman’s brain, mind, then soul. He pulled his fists back, sat on his chair, and listened to what Schleem was trying to say with his eyes.

“Yes,” Jack said to the question Schleem could not give voice to. “I think that if we both work together, we can fix this.”

“I PRAY we can,” Schleem replied. “Before it’s too late.”

It was not the kind of deal Jack was looking for, but the only one available.

CHAPTER 8

The Dragon Slayer weaponry in the shop window lured Carla away from her appointed and self-initiated rounds with yet another distributor of XY57. “You can’t always get what you want,” with all too familiar ‘golden moldies’ musical accompaniment blasted into Carla’s ears and innermost brain once inside the kind of shop she would avoid culturally in her pre-XY57 life and any kind of need in her new one. “Bullshit!” she yelled back at the speaker once inside the Salvation Army store she wandered into as the volume went up on yet another 60s classic playing for shoppers of the same biological age who searched the store for bargain basement clothing they hoped would make them look like upscale Neemand Marcus shoppers. “Mick Jagger and the rolling in dough Stones got what they wanted AND needed! And they didn’t even have to ‘try sometimes’,” Carla sneared, finally taking into her shaking hand the toy lance in the window, which no doubt was extracted from the Halloween section that expanded to occupy the entire store in October, and contracted down to a mothball reeking section of fantasy outfits designed for adults who couldn’t handle being responsible grown ups. “I AM getting what I want, and fuck what I need!” The spear found its way into the second paw, oversized ‘so last century’ PA speaker, smashing it into bits that faded into the distant and hopefully forgotten past.

Normally, such an action would yield two overweight security goons from the back coming out and requesting the assailant leave the store through a mouth of half eaten donuts. And that assailant’s picture being taken by curious and under-accomplished shoppers who vicariously relived their real, or imagined, hippie rebel days through others. But this was a different era. An XY57 eon in which you did what you felt, and felt the consequences of what you did soon afterwards. No one moved in on Carla when she growled at them, followed by full expression of every racial slur she had avoided and was repulsed by in her former life. As for the spectators with cameras, they offered not only a downward bow of obedience to their Amazonian intruder, but the ownership of their phones as tribute. “Yeah, act like an asshole, be treated like a saint. It does work,” she whispered to herself with not only a fresh realization that defied every rule had learned as Carla the Crusader, but newfound pride as Carla the Conqueror.

Moved away from yet another one of her deeply seeded and thought out agendas, Carla grabbed hold of the most delicate ‘Kuntry music loving’ Buckle Bunny within sight of her wide open blue eyes. She pulled the bleached blonde beauty into her strapped in breasts, and kissed her on the mouth. Then the once very feminine and bashful scientist demanded, with eyes then voice, that the babe give her tongue back. This time, Carla did get the lustful affection back. And without having her tongue getting bit, or a punch into her groin that, for the moment anyway, didn’t contain a penis or scrotum. That, Carla imagined and planned, would happen very soon. Sooner when the next paycheck from

her now legitimate fence for XY57 would come in. And Wesley Olsen's always did pay on time, demanding nothing of his new business partner in the manufacture of the most popular drug on the black market or the pharmacy shelves than merely 'an open mind to expansive opportunities'. A clock above her struck noon just as Carla ripped the first layer of second hand or maybe misfitting first hand clothing off the captive maiden she was about to consummate a relationship with, and maybe by some miracle, have a kid with who she could abandon.

A realization from the world outside of immediate gratification hit Carla. "Shit. I'm late! And if there's anything Wesley Olsen hates more than someone who's trying to fucks him over, it's someone who's fucking late."

In the lapse between wants and 'gets', all of Carla's senses went into overdrive. Her tongue tasted the salty pizza she gobbled down after she left her loft. Her nose smelled the gallon of sugary strawberry ice cream she then pilfered from the vender two blocks beyond it. The skin on her chest felt the rough coarseness of the chain link shirt she had ripped off the statue of ancient Brittan rebel Budika at the museum she stopped off to admire, then become. Her fingers felt the knuckle sandwich she had given the security guard who tried to take it away from her. Her feet recalled the vibration of the potholes she felt through the wheels of an Indian Motorcycle she commandeered at a red light, demonstrating to its Paleface suburban banker rider how one can and should ZOOM from point A to point beyond where anyone can find you. Her ears recalled the sirens of the five Cops who tried to catch up to her, and fifty tourists who cheered her on, thinking they were witnessing the filming of a movie.

Then Carla recalled something in her head that was aching, itching and draining, all at the same time. She reached into her 'medicine pouch', pulled out a capsule of XY57, threw it down her dry as dust throat, and felt alright. Until she realized that it was her last pill. And her only supplier was Wes Olsen, who she was working with, who she was late to meet, for the third time. A collaborator who enforced the 'three strikes and you're out' rule to everyone. To be postponed only when he redefined the game, on his terms of course.

CHAPTER 9

“So, what we do now?” R Thomas Schleem asked the man behind the wheel of the Hearst taking him away from the holding facility that didn’t exist as he pushed his way out of the no frills coffin bearing his name. “I know you can tell me,” he continued, pulling the ‘all parts for medical research only’ label off his toe.

“And why the fuck should I?” Chauffer Jack Bauman sneered back from under a black cap, under which there was a head of hastily cut and dyed hair, under which lay a hairless upper lip. “You got us into this mess by trying to corner the market on MY miracle drug! A miracle drug that was designed to free people from learned helplessness.”

“But not the primal evil impulses inside themselves, apparently,” Schleem replied. He flicked on the radio, glancing admiringly at his own makeover, which added hair to his head and face, white to his grey mane and age to his face.

Jack was treated to the latest news report. Another mass killing at Columbia College uptown, two restaurant ‘cleaning sessions’ done by identified gunmen at a fast food joint downtown, and a commentator whose serious rendition of the events turned into dark humor then “but the good news folks, we cleaned the intellectual pasture of ten sacred cows who were spreading bullshit and turned sixteen fat cows into dog meat which will be served up with onions and a whole lot more spice than they ever had in real life at my new joint, Cannibal Carl’s!”

“Or Carla’s,” someone in the radio studio said, after which a group laugh overtook the speakers, escalated to a roar.

Jack turned the radio off, but not before feeling Schleem’s shaking hand on his tight, sweat soaked wrist. A hand that conveyed fear as well as remorse. “Irony,” Schleem said. “You and me working on an antidote for all of this. But before we set up shop in whatever lab you have set up somewhere you, very wisely, haven’t told me about, and thankfully Wesley Olson doesn’t know about, I need to know one thing.”

“The formula for the next five drugs that I have in my head, but haven’t put onto the page?” Jack blasted back. “One of which---“

“---is a super hair growth formula that will enable you to grow back that trademark mustache in a day instead of having to wait two months, so you don’t feel so naked and exposed?” Schleem smirked.

“This isn’t a joke,” Jack sneered back as he slithered around the corner, doing his best to avoid being spotted by two sun-glassed FBI Agents having coffee, and hoping that running the yellow light wouldn’t get him pulled over by the Cops. “This is serious. There’s a drug out there that puts urges before conscience or pre-thought, a dis-inhibitor of the limbic system, and maybe soul, in low doses. One that enables people to be able to be top dog in the jungle they create in intermediate doses. And in high doses---“

“---Makes you feel not only empowered, but entitled. Entitled and required to be more important than everyone else. Everyone else who becomes expendable, then dead,” Schleem interjected, with deadly seriousness. “The perfect and indestructible soldier, if the military or the mob gets it.”

“Which we have to become,” Jack replied. “Without any XY57.”

“And without knowing which of us is the idiot and which of us is the asshole who started all of this?” Schleem replied. “And who’ll have to employ both God and the Devil to stop.”

“Or take their place,” Jack concluded, contemplating why everyone at the holding facility he had paid off with the false stories he gave them delivered beyond his expectations.

“So which do you wanna be in this Passion Play?” Schleem inquired, stroking his chin. “God or the Devil?”

“Whoever I have to be,” the reply said with a blank stare, in a realm in which hell had taken over earth, with no heaven above, and an ‘out for lunch until further notice’ on Heaven’s Gate.

CHAPTER 10

“So, tell me why Jack Bauman and Thomas Schleem got out of the hole, and are on a road trip trying to discover who they are while THINKING they can save the world,” the new head of Drug Development and Distribution at Jackson Pharmaceuticals asked the bound and recently un-gagged prisoner in front of his desk behind a very locked door with all curtains drawn.

“You mean HOW my boss got your boss out,” Carla Timons replied. “To which I still say I don’t---“

“---Know or recall?” Wesley Olsen interjected, wacking Carla on the right then left side of her chin. “Do you know who you are lying to, Carla!” Wesley Olsen grunted as he pointed to no less than five doctoral diplomas on the wall bearing his name. “DOCTOR Wesley Olsen.”

“Honorary Doctor, you mean, after you paid off the Institutes and Universities to give you a title,” Carla noted through a voice nearly drowned out by another volley of blood spewing from her not yet completely toothless mouth. “And I swear by everything I once held sacred, I don’t know how Jack got Schleem out, and I don’t know where they’re going. And...” Tears started to stream down Carla’s cheeks, stinging the bruises on them. Her chest developed the kind of tightness she had never experienced before. Her skin oscillated between felt cold, painful and transparent, all at the same time. When glancing at her shaking hands they seemed to belong to someone else. Her confused mind could not grasp hold of the five different agendas competing for dominance of her soul. Everything in front of her eyes seemed to be a flat, one dimensional television screen. But one object remained in center stage.

“What are you seeing, Carla?” Wesley asked her, this time with a kind voice. But with a left face that was unstoppably angry, a right face that was irreversibly sad. Then a right face that became enraged while the left side acquired the kind of depression that XY57 had relieved in the rodents and, in the lower doses she had first experienced, herself. “I can bring you out of the abyss,” the next words from Olsen’s mouth, as he drew up syringe of special stash from his drawer, injected a quarter of its contents into her arm, then cut Carla lose from the arm restraints. “I just have to connect with your limbic system. Activate the septal nucleus and reticulo-activating system, then utilize those well developed connections you have to the hippocampus and association neo-cortex and, everything will be alright. Those connections that YOU discovered in your brain mapping thesis and activated during your brilliant and unappreciated tenure with Jack Bauman.”

Carla found herself not only flattered, but empowered as Olsen, who never took a single biology course in his life, described the pathways, neurotransmitters and feedback systems she had formulated as an unnoticed grad student then verified when working as an underappreciated post-doc. Then activated when working with Jack Bauman using drugs they both designed, with of course some help from Mama Nature.

Carla felt Wesley's hand stroke her wrists, activating those pathways in her own brain that led to pleasure centers she was now visualizing, and feeling. "I'm sorry that my goons roughed you up, and that I had to. But there was no other way to break you out of a neurological feedback loop that would have put you into irreversible seizures you would not have woken up from," he said by way of explanation. "You do believe me, don't you?" he continued as he stroked Carla's black and blue cheeks, then ran his finger along her bleeding lips. "You do feel my healing touch, don't you?"

"Yes," Carla self observed herself saying, then believing as the entire visual field in front of her became a blur of White Light.

"And now, my transformative touch?" he continued, as Carla felt something penetrate into the space between her legs that had not been violated by any man, truth be told, and possibly accurately remembered.

"What's going on?" Carla screamed out, losing consciousness of her physical body and connecting to...something else which she was not familiar with. "Where am I?"

"Here and now," the reply echoing from three different walls of the windowless chamber which now oscillated with each breath.

"Who am I?" Carla heard her say, in a voice she didn't recognize, but a tongue she still did.

"A most interesting n value," she heard from the other side of the fourth wall, which opened up into a room of spectators. All men. All wearing lab coats. All taking notes on whatever was happening to her.

"And trusted guide," came from Olsen's mouth in a dark fog that surrounded her, then pulled her into a vortex of black, after which there was...nothing. Except for Carla hearing her former partner in distribution ask her questions she didn't recognize, and her answering every one of them, appended by 'Yes, Master'.

CHAPTER 11

Jack Bauman's thoughts were supposed to be about using science to save the world from the Pandora's box he had opened. Instead, he agonized over Carla. Worried about her. Pledged to himself that if he was going to save anyone, it was her, above anyone else. So she could ignore and ridicule his sexual advances. Make him feel like the dejected kid who could never get a date in High School. Make him feel like a stallion who was unworthy of breeding, who would find a way to castrate himself. But for the moment, the hard science based pragmatist who could not suspend disbelief when watching anything fictitious on screen found himself being the star in his own movie, hoping it was a feel good thriller in the end and not one of those art house downer tragedies where virtue was rewarded by getting fucked over by the best of friends. His objective in the current scene was to go back to obtain as much raw material as he could to develop an antidote to the wonder drug Mother Nature, God or perhaps the devil had thrown into his lap.

Sneaking into the lab that used to be his home was the first step towards that, as a short haired, clean shaven Hispanic janitor after normal working hours, Jack Bauman noticed that the slacker students who took his seminars for the easy A rather than the freedom to discourse, argue and discover were working overtime. Each of them were focused on manufacturing as much XY57 as they could for their new boss, pocketing portions of the final product for themselves when the over-sized, over-muscled and well armed 'glass cleaners' were not at the vicinity of their station. 'Big Bro's' gazed upon and into every onlooker who was in visual range of his picture.

"Wesley's eyes. They look possessed," assistant Janitor 'Tomiso' Schleem noted to his formen, 'Juan', in Mexican Spanish, the only language other than scientificeze that he and his former rival had in common. "Just like Hitler."

"Or Donald Trump," Jack replied as he collected the paper and toxic garbage dumped by the arrogant, former slackers he once pitied, and now feared. "There is nothing more dangerous than someone who believes his own bullshit and can make everyone else believe it too."

"And more electable, and..." Tomiso replied, getting lost in the eyes of the picture of his former lieutenant who was on his way to being king of both the Pharmaceutical Industry and Wall Street, one 'honorable degree' away from the Presidency in a special election called for by a populous under the influence of or seeking XY57.

Tomiso froze, as motionless as the rats trained to be models of learned helplessness when confronted with an electric prod, lab cat, or a septal-rage induced fellow rodent. Such was noticed by one of the glass cleaners in the white coats, who reached for what looked like a stun gun or perhaps something stronger strapped to his hip.

Knowing what had to be done, and putting it ahead of schedule, the always sure-footed Jack Bauman fained stumbling over three of the XY57 drugged students working near a bunsen burner. Upon entering the room with his clean up after hours clean up cart, he had originally thought of using as n values for the antidote he would develop during the off hours. But for the moment, he needed them for something else.

“Excuse me, por favor. I sorry,” he pleaded in the illiterate, helpless, wetback immigrant victim voice he secretly looked down in the ‘good old days’ when he was the senior investigator of the lab, and had a cushy job as a Professor in that, yes, mostly American and all White Department.

As planned, the bunsen burners fell into the trash bins, setting them on fire. As anticipated, the fire alarms went off. As expected, the neo-Hippie hipsters who were always plugged into ‘love is all you need’ music on their ipads were the first ones making a mad rush towards the door that could accommodate only desperately fleeing humanoid at a time. The rest of the biped rats, and potential subjects to test the cure for XY57 on, abandoned ship as flame gave way to smoke.

After Jack was trampled by the last of the runaways, he reached up for the fire extinguisher that he had hidden behind the hood the day he was requested by the Department Head to turn in his keys, and found it missing. “I got it,” Schleem said, as a hero and humanist, his hands firmly on the extinguisher as he put out the fire. “You alright?” he asked his fellow Janitor in Spanish, as a fellow aristocrat.

“We will be, if we get to work fast,” Jack replied. How Schleem knew about the whereabouts of the hidden fire extinguisher, Jack didn’t know, or care. Of primary concern, and focus, in this scene in a movie so bizarre that he had to believe it to be real, is that everything he came in to get would go out with them, and that the whereabouts of the new lab he would set up was not known to anyone else. Especially Carla, the still absent and accidental patient who he wanted and needed to cure of XY57 disease more than anyone else.

CHAPTER 12

“So, this is how Ramon y Cajal got started, Doctor Bauman?” R Thomas Schleem asked his host as he looked at the new facilities where he and his new colleague in Corrective Medicine were required, and thankfully determined, to pull off a biochemical miracle. “It’s a....cabin, in the woods,” he noted, sneezing yet again at all of the green outside that found its way into the dusty air inside.

“No, Tom,” Jack Bauman said, addressing his new Collaborator by the name he insisted now on being called. “It’s a shack, in the bush,” he continued as he set up the first distillation column from the from the supplies taken from his lab in town, putting it alongside the three boxes of pilfered chemistry supplies from four local High Schools along the way after hours that Jack somehow knew how to break into. “Ramon y Cajal said that the only way he could come up with neuro-scientific insights that would go beyond the well-equipped labs in Switzerland and Germany was to go FORWARD to his roots in backwater Spain. But in the meantime, it would be really helpful if you could help me unload these things instead of imagining all the things I did here when I was a kid trying to find Advanced states of consciousness through Native American herbs when I was a kid, Divine Enlightenment through books when I was an undergrad, and happiness with women who----”

“---never gave you as much as Carla did, between the ears or between the legs?” Schleem said, feeling it come from a place that, so he was told and ready about anyway, was empathy. “Like that blonde bombshell at the convenience store we got supplies at who asked you for directions, looking at you like she wanted to have your baby. Or be your non-pregnant baby for as long as you want or need. A Carla prototype and replacement who----“

“---Carla doesn’t know about this place!” Jack affirmed, holding back far more than he was saying. He quickly cleared the half rotted kitchen ‘table’ and the elevated old door he had used as a bed of the leaves and moss than had found their way inside the still unused shack that somehow avoided the bulldozers contracted by shopping mall developers or druggies looking for a place to shoot up. “I think. I mean, I never talked about it,” he continued, unloading the rats he had ‘burrowed’ from the animal holding facilities at Fairleigh Dickinsonian U, and a three cages of mice taken from the back door of a pet store who were, most probably, being sold as snake food. When looking into the eyes of the rodents he had saved from unnecessary scientific experiments and the gullet of pet snakes, he became lost in a world of his own, yet again.

“Never talked about this place with Carla, or them, Jack, eh, I mean Doctor Bauman?” Tom asked. “She could have been listening.”

“No, she wasn’t!” Jack barked back. “Carla always respected my time alone with the experimental animals.”

“Respect?” Tom Schleem. “That’s an illusion. Like altruism. Something we do, or say we do to please ourselves. Like Max Stirner said in the book you over-read in this dump when you thought it was a cave, ‘love is the highest form of self interest, right?’”

“I didn’t know you read Stirner’s book, Tom, eh, I mean, Doctor Schleem,” Jack replied, as shocked about that as he probably was when he found out that his most trusted, respected and loved protégée Carla was out on the streets undoing everything noble he ever did, or tried to do, in the lab.

“There’s a lot you don’t know about me,” Schleem gently shot into Jack’s face, and soul. “And a lot I don’t know about myself,” he continued, gazing into his own mind, brain and, as he was discovering it really did exist, soul. Then Schleem heard something frightening. Something he had never experienced before, having been, unfortunately, in control of most of the events, people and feelings in his life. It was scary, more frightening than anything he experienced, including handcuffs being slapped on his wrists, the door closing behind him in the first holding cell, and the penile processes that his fellow inmates used to ‘message his colonic hemorrhoids’. And more terrifying than a horde of wolves outside the door howling, as if they were waiting to eat alive the two legged varmints who invaded their last refuge in an ecosystem that was now more constructed lumber than woods.

“It’s called Silence, big S, Tom,” Jack said, laying his firm hand on Schleem’s shaking shoulders. “It’s scary at first, but it sustains afterwards.”

“And in the meantime?” Schleem asked his partner and he hoped protector and guide in this journey from having been a privileged asshole into becoming an endangered idiot.

“Arbeit macht Sie frei,” Jack replied, in Einsteinian German.

“Yeah,” Schleem replied, recognizing the quote as the motto above the entry gates at Auschwitz. With that, he rolled up his sleeves, then reached deep into memories of the brief period in his life when he was a grad student required to figure out how to complete assigned experiments, clean the glassware in the lab, clean the shit out of the rat cages and know the difference between discoursing and bullshitting at a thesis defense. Armed with that Ancient yet somehow recalled memory, he and Jack commenced to formulate and test the most likely antidote to XY57. Theoretically, the extra carboxyl groups Jack considered most important for its receptor binding and the amine replacement for hydroxyl on the central carbon ring Schleem proposed would do the trick. The rest would be up to Mama Nature, and of course, the rodents who awaited

dosing with XY57, enjoying grain pellets, cut up potatoes and glances at the agonizing bipeds on the other side of their cages.

CHAPTER 13

“It’s a simple question,” Wesley Olsen inquired calmly of the woman in front of his desk. “Where did Thomas Schleem and Jack Bauman go?”

“I don’t know, really,” the reply from the interrogatee asserted though a fresh wave of tears. “The last time I saw them was at the convenience store where I...” The rest of the answer, and feelings behind it, lay somewhere behind the third volley of tears streaming down her face.

Wesley Olsen pondered how to extract out any more information from the goon who had once been the womanizing, man’s man Calvin Rabinowitz. Transformed into a man who yearned to be a woman by XY57, then express converted into being a woman with Olsen’s connections to the famed “Transcendence Institute” in the once rough and tumble mining town of Wilcocks, Colorado. Should he be ‘bad Cop’ and demand that ‘Kali’ retrace her steps and dive down into deep, dark memories of what she had observed, but not noted, about Bauman after busting Schleem from the very underground Big House, threatening to rip out the hair extensions in Kari’s head and pull back all follow up hormone and surgical treatment, ensuring her that she would regrow hair on her face and a penis between her legs? Should Olsen become ‘caring and sharing’ Wesley, who could gently cajol any mother into handing over to him every dime or her children’s college fund, or those children themselves if he fancied such?

“Just give her time, she’ll remember,” came from a real life Cop next to a balling Kali, covering her face with shaking hands. “Unless whatever drug she got made her into,” Detective Sergeant, now Captain, George Dimitropolis continued as he sensed, then saw another transformation overtake Rabinowitz. The tears abruptly stopped. Dimitropolis pulled her hands down, revealing blank eyes, a lost mind behind it.

“Catatonia, category 2Ba,” Olsen noted, coldly and accurately. “Which---“

“---Is another one of those ‘rare’ side effects of XY57?” the new head enforcer for Olsen, who had been Schleem’s enforcer said, getting hot under the collar. “The drug that I ran into when I arrested YOUR thugs trying to steal it from Jack Bauman’s lab. The drug that found its way OUT of the evidence room at the Precinct and into----!”

“----Yes, I know. The souls, minds and bodies of two of your best Patrolmen and your favorite son,” Olsen lasered back with a condescending eyeroll.

“Or what’s left of their souls, mind and bodies!” Dimitropolis grunted back.

“Which we’re fixing right now, George,” Olsen assured the well armed and very dangerous Cop whose face reeked of both fear and primal rage. An unpredictable set of reflexes elicited in rats by ablating specific nuclei in the septal areas of their brains, or set up in human models with two drugs that Jackson Pharmaceuticals could not market or publish anything about in the pre-XY57 era. “They’re getting the best care they can get,” Olsen continued, observing the ‘n value’ in front of him reach for his gun with one hand, the fingers on his other hand closing into a clenched fist. “Or, if I don’t continue to monitor their progress, they could get the worst care, or none at all.”

Thankfully, Dimitropolis still has a reasoning cerebral cortex. One that had been empowered with a small dose of XY57, without his knowledge of course. And one that had not been fried by it. Then again, Olsen pondered, as Dimitropolis loosened his fist, sat down, and strapped the holster over his gun, reasoning brains are useful ones as long as they are well motivated. But before dealing with matters between a detective who wanted to be Police Commissioner or Attorney General, and a humble MBA biomedical products distributor who wanted to be God, there was the elephant in the room to be dealt with.

“What do we do with ‘her’?” Dimitropolis asked regarding a now catatonic Kali Rabinowitz. “She’s become useless as an informant who remembers anything about her mark. Even more useless as a seductress.”

“Maybe, or maybe not,” Olsen considered. “There’s a man who she could turn around, I think.”

“Thomas Schleem? Even if he doesn’t recognize Rabinowitz with the facial surgery you had done on him, he’s---“

“---irrelevant now. But someone else is very, very relevant, and a most interesting ‘n value’.”

“I hope the hell you aren’t talking about me,” Dimitropolis barked out. “I’m no n value. Or research subject.”

“Indeed, yes,” Olsen replied, feeling Schleem’s ‘guardian demon’ overtaking his mind, as his body felt even more comfortable in his former boss’ chair. “You are no n value or research subject.”

“That’s good to know,” the reply.

“But you have become a very uninteresting necessity,” Olsen replied, taking out two shot glasses from the cabinet behind the desk, then retrieved a bottle of special brew from behind the standard fare used for mundane clients. “Metaxa, your favorite.” He offered the left, then the right one to Dimitropolis. Both were refused, until Olsen sipped from

both glasses. “To, both of us being uninteresting necessities. A dirty and procedural job but someone has to do it, right, George?” the toast, offered with the utmost respect.

After a thoughtful moment, Dimitropolis lifted the glass to his lips. Sipping its contents, he smiled. “Very, very good,” he said, in Greek.

“No, great, like we are, and well become,” the reply as Olsen drank a healthy swallow of the Greek liquor that made him want to barf at the smell of it, faking a smile. Faking as well, as George drank the rest of it, that he himself had taken the antidote to the additional XY57 that was in the drink. Just enough to empower the unknowing and booze loving Cop to become a powerful Duke or Prince, but never a King. Or if so, a very, very dead one.

CHAPTER 14

“True Love is something so special, and gentle, that it can only be shared by two women,” Carla recalled from somewhere in her past, maybe something Jack Bauman has said during one of their philosophical talks, or read in the small, worn paperback books he kept between Lenninger’s Biochemistry and Kendal’s Principles of Neuroscience as she looked around her new cell. This holding facility was different. It had windows, a view of the mad and beautiful city down below, a big screen tv on which she could view the lies that people below believed and wanted to believe, and a hostess serving up the all of her favorite foods, all of which she was super hungry for due to her having been ‘fasted’ for the last two days.

“Come and get it,” her server said as she emerged from the kitchen, took off her jacket, blouse and bra, then laid down next to her on the bed-sized couch. To the tune of an improvised acapela strip tease tune from a past era, she loaded the content from her tray, coconut cream pie, quiche and mashed potatoes, tastefully over her naked chest. “Come feast on and of me, with your fingers if you have to, but your tongue if you want. And I KNOW that want this,” the blonde hostess who looked familiar said. “My name is Kali, and I am your server and servant tonight.”

Carla didn’t know why, but she felt attracted, drawn and pulled into Kali, what or whoever she was. But why? Was it that Carla had become more male than female thanks to XY57 and needed to consummate her new gender identification with a woman so...feminine? Or was it that Carla was still woman enough inside to appreciate the love of another woman? She didn’t know. All she knew was that her stomach was rumbling, her blood sugar was crashing down seizure levels, her blood was probably ketotic due to breaking down fat, and that ‘lost to the world’ feeling that mystics felt when fasting was hitting hard. And, Kali was a Vision any mystic in search of Angelic Enlightenment would jump at, and into. With each bite of food spread over Kali’s chest, neck and inside of her legs that Carla took with the cutlery her fingers, and tongue, had become, ‘Carl’ and Carla fell under the vixon’s spell.

Kali was a very interactive Vision. She anticipated every fantasy, fetish and hidden desire in Carla’s openly emasculated yet still feminine head. From being sucked dry and hard from the nipples, to being caressed gently behind the knees, to fainting with a knife shaving what hair remained on top of her head. Just as the last bit of the mane remaining on her head was imaginarily shaved off, Carla heard herself being asked one question. “Do you trust me, my love? My Comrade in Arms, Legs and anything else you find appealing and relevant?” She recalled answering yes, then nothing else until what felt like a little while later. Enough of a while for all of her clothing to be off, with her arm under

Kali's back, Kali, or whoever she really was, emanated a snore that merged into a rattle, breathing softly, with a grin of fulfillment, satisfaction, and...relief. And an open bottle of pills next to her, several capsules spilt on the floor next to her pale white angelic fingers.

"What just happened?" Carla asked herself, wondering what went into her belly, head or soul. Whatever it was, it left. Leaving behind in its wake a full view of a single key dangling from an open corner of Kali's purse. Upon further examination of the keys, they were to an El Dorado, parked in front of the building. Which could be accessed now by a door to the Presidential suite which was cracked open. With no one outside.

Pushed by an urge that felt partially XY57 created, and partially by something in her natural biology, whatever that was really was, Carla self observed getting into Kari's clothes, covering her, as she now saw it, hastily and un-tastefully chopped off hair with a scarf, and slithering out the door. What she would with her hard earned freedom she didn't know, but there was one stop she had to make to fulfill old responsibilities before moving on to a liberated life, or a quick death.

CHAPTER 15

“So, how did you find me?” Jack Bauman demanded of Carla when he appeared at the door to his shack, now laboratory, deep in the bush.

“The question, maybe, is why I found you,” her reply as she sniffed what was going on inside, then tried to push her way in for a look, only to be held back by Jack’s outstretched, very unwelcoming bear like paw.

“To figure out how to put an amine group where it’s supposed to go instead of where this fucking mind of its own molecule wants to put it, I propose, Jack,” Schleem grunted from inside. “Who’s out there Tom?”

“Tom? Jack?” Carla pressed as her knocks on the burst into pounding. “I know that you said that sometimes you have to make a deal with the devil or the lower demons so that Mama Nature reveals some of the laws of nature to you that God deems not knowable by humanity yet, but---“

“----You have a lot of explaining to do!” Jack blasted at Carla upon opening up the door and begrudgingly allowing her entry.

“Which she will, after she figures out how to do the final stage of synthesis in this antidote, Jack. You did say that if anyone understands Promethian biochemistry better than Lenninger, Greengard or Krebs did, it’s her,” Schleem noted from the back of the shack that had been converted into a first rate laboratory. “And...” he continued while taking bold and fast footsteps to the door. “When you have one chance to shoot a bullseye into an unstoppable beast, you give the gun to the best shot whoever she or....he is,” he continued, not believing how Carla had changed since the last time he set eyes on her.

“Yeah, I turned maybe a little more male than I thought I was, or wanted to be,” Carla replied, taking off the scarf, stroking the two- inch mop of hair on her head. “Any chance we could cook up something that could let me grow my hair out like the girl I think I was, or the woman I know I should be?” she asked, sheepishly. “Or,” she pondered, smelling something familiar on the left side of the lab bench on the North side of the cabin. Rushing in, pushing her former boss and prior adversary into a wall, she confirmed what was in the beaker by smell. “XY57!” she proclaimed, sticking her finger into it. “If I can have just a little more, I can feel like a real man, or whatever else I used to be before this withdrawl thing happened,” she said. “Just on small taste, to confirm that you guys are cooking it up right this time and---”

Before Carla's finger hit her tongue, Jack grabbed hold of her wrists, hard.

"So, XY57 is addictive," Schleem noted.

"And can be suicidal," Jack added, absorbed in the vicarious sorrow of seeing slashes in Carla's wrists.

"Like the song says, 'Suicide is painless, it brings on many changes.'" Carla related, and confessed. "And it's an experimental urge that----"

"---Requires that we have to add a cofactor or additional alpha binding receptor region to the molecule we've been working on, Jack?" Schleem inquired.

"Don't ask me, ask her?" Jack said, moving aside, folding his hands onto his nose in thought, reflection and prayer.

Schleem shared the graphic of the Savior molecule that, theoretically anyway, would save the world from the unexpected side effects of Jack Bauman and Carla Tomkin's Wonder drug. Carla glanced at the drawing, done with pen rather than computer print out, then circled a few additional regions of the string of atoms convoluted in upon itself in patterns that somehow still honored the basic laws of linear chemistry. She asked to see the notes used to synthesize the compound that had been never produced in nature, and made some corrections in the ingredients used. "I think that will do it for those mice and rats you probably injected already, and maybe even...hmm."

"---You?" Jack said, and asked.

"Yeah," Carla said, picking up a vial of XY57. "Gotta put your body where your hypothesis is, right? Science without boldness is what, technology?"

"Or death," Schleem brought to the table. "There are other n values we can use. Like Calvin Rabinowitz. Or, if he got that sex change he demanded to have in prison from the judge at trial, Kali."

"Who may have done herself in already," Carla said, recalling the events after the love making she witnessed, participated in, but didn't process upon leaving the Presidential Suite.

Schleem and Bauman had no choice to but agree to that observation. And to the necessity to begin synthesis of their new compound, particularly after Carla helped herself to two heaping spoonfuls of XY57.

CHAPTER 16

“Finally!” Wesley Olsen exclaimed as he read the headline on the Wall Street Journal in his expanded and now better guarded office at Jackson Pharmaceuticals. “You’re legal now. In a month, accessible to everyone, and more importantly...all mine!” he continued to his most beloved. “And I dub thee...X-Calibre! Do you like that?”

The vial of XY57, with some sugary coloring added to the formulary to please the overpaid patent attorneys, didn’t answer. But then again, if it did, Wesley would have been one of its victims rather than its master. He contemplated self testing, or at least tasting, the drug that had made him rich, then powerful, but he reconsidered.

“Yeah I know,” he said to the multitude of molecules in the vial of the newly packaged product bearing an Arthorian label which, according to the behavioral psychologists in the graphic department, appealed to the empowerment place in men, women and anything in between. Including the last woman who suffered unnecessarily under his watch. Her picture materialized in his head when he looked closely at the power maiden on the label.

“You see? I put you through hell, but I made you immortal,” he said in absentia to the woman whose likeness was used for the eye catching and soul-grabbing gun and spear toting Warrior on the X-Calibre label. “The artist really captured your eyes, there. Eyes that I made possible, you know. And should know. Wherever you are now. Which I do know the where of,” he continued. “After, of course you did MY bidding, even though you thought you were doing yours.”

Wesley didn’t quite know what name to use when addressing this woman. As a sales person, he knew that to engage any client, mark or partner, you had to drop their name into conversation every three sentences. Every two if the deal was going South or cold. But Wesley was done with this partner. Still, out of habit, or respect that was pathologically still attached to his intentionally dehumanized soul, he slipped into addressing her by her name.

“So, you decided to do yourself in before I could promote you to the next level UP. A great trick, Kali. A trick that I’m sure you’ll carry on to some next lifetime. And Kali, my favorite pawn and partner, who I really was tempted to fuck after your sex change surgery, I will see you again. Or bring you to me. After all, figuring out the biology of life this lifetime through pharmaceuticals is easily. Negotiating the way through the afterlife to find out where you’re hiding out now, that’s a little harder.”

How hard that would be, such was something Wesley would deal with later. Along with, so his shrink said, the guilt for doing things to Calvin Rabinowitz’s body and soul that caused him to become Kali, then an informant, then a corpse by her own hand. Such

were the inevitabilities of war, or business, the former of course being the diversion from 'boring' morality that had more honor in it.

CHAPTER 17

"Rome wasn't built in a day," Jack Baumann recalled from those credos he pilfered from the standard rolodex for very standard students who hated or feared anything beyond standard. "But if the Barbarians give you 24 hours notice, you get your construction workers moving at Warp 18 and yourself at Warp 26," he found himself remembering from those courses where it was him and six students in a windowless room. And indeed, the theory did fit the data this time.

"We actually got it done!" Thomas Schleem stated as he proudly glanced at the 100 vials of anti-dote to XY57, which went from computer generated molecular structure to tested-effective in 120 rats in a record 16 days. "And to you goes the honor of naming it, Professor Jack," he said with a Jeffersonian bow to his friend, colleague and savior John Adams.

"Yes, please, Professor Jack," Carla, now very much her real 'Service to Humanity before HER' self again thanks to the protective and reversal effects of the concoction.

Jack didn't know what to say, particularly as he was being addressed as 'Professor Jack', a fictitious old coot in the New Mexican desert in his favorite novel, who claimed to be JFK, having survived a faked assassination, and incarceration by the Mob and Illuminati, about to make the political comeback of the Century. But in the world that is truer than fiction, it was the first time this real life Professor Jack actually considered naming something he discovered, or formulated, after himself. He recalled, yet again, Ramon y Cajal, the most artistic, brilliant and humble neuroscientist who ever lived, who discovered so many structures, stains and neuroscientific phenomena, none of which bore his name. Yet, the perhaps cold hearted Purkinje, named key impulse conducting fibers in cardiac tissue after himself, assuring him and his discovery immortality. And Langerhan's discovery of the islets in the pancreas which made insulin were far more remembered because his name than the appearance of them under a microscope, perhaps making it popular, fashionable and 'fun' to investigate the dynamics of diabetes. Herz allowed a 'constant' to be named after him. Ohm's law regarding passage of electricity in wires and blood in the cardiovascular system was used far more frequently than if the discoverer of that magic and universal Flow equals pressure over resistance had not given it some kind of emotion-arousing label.

"So," old friend Carla Timons and new one Thomas Schleem voiced in unison as Jack imagined his accomplishments being linked to him in perpetuity. The birds outside the cabin seemed to chirp the same sentiment, as did the Ancients through the Silence which Jack now heard louder than anything else, finally.

Doctor Carla pulled a sharpie out of her pocket, Comrade Schleem placing an old piece of cardboard from under the lab table in front of the first batch of 'whatever it is'. Both pushed Jack in front of the display. "We need a name, Jack," Schleem said. "And not a number this time, molecular Maestro Baumann," Carla added. As Schleem set up a camera for a photo op, Carla flicked her ipad onto Beethoven's Ninth, the first movement.

"Ok, already," Jack conceded, allowing his tight and tired face to ease into a smile. "We'll name it," he said to his colleagues. "You," he continued, to the molecules which seemed to be dancing for him in Brownian motion within the vials. "Ludwig!" he exclaimed.

"That is highly irregular," Schleem pointed out.

"And doesn't make sense either," Carla added.

"Not according to Beethoven!" Jack exclaimed, looking around him as to where the ghost of that Master and friend he had forgotten about for so many years finally made himself felt, but of course not seen. "Who's listening to us right now! After all, when two or more of us humans, and a hundred or so rodents are gathered in his name, he, Ludwig that is, is there also."

"Who's telling you to name this drug after him?" Schleem inquired with that 'we better get you seen for your own good' look.

"Yeah, naming this new drug Ludwig is....crazy?" Carla interjected. "And sort of, like, dumb."

"Indeed it is," Jack replied, feeling something inside himself that he never thought possible. Liberation of the Spirit, big S. The artistic Spirit that he put on hold the day he decided on that fateful day when he was a 21 year old undeclared major in college with a C plus average because he sampled more people and course than he aced, that he would buckle down, get straight A's in his science courses, and make it into medical school. Graduate school if necessary.

Finally, Jack felt inside of himself the Liberation he tried so desperately to teach his students. That Liberation which made you feel big and small, light and heavy, whimsical and intense, all at the same time. That Liberation which enabled you to let any piece of data come into the brain and find not only its natural slot, but its Divine Place, as you danced and battled your way on the Tao of Life that changed with every step, since Liberated souls are always effective ones in transforming the universe. Yes, all agendas felt like they were merging. The world would be saved from XY57, a drug that made every desire an irresistible and distracting agenda. Allowing and compelling people to grab for what they want, ignoring what they and everyone else really need. 'Ludwig' would counteract XY57 and, according to the behavioral activity observed in the XY57 reversed rodents anyway, and Carla's transformation into her Real Self, allow

people to aspire to climb to the top of the mountain, but to the top of a REAL mountain, without stepping on anyone else's toes, hands or fragile egos. All that was left was the task of getting it out there. A simple task, given the plans Schleem and Carla cooked up, using the template for XY57 distribution which, unfortunately, had been so successful.

Yes, all was well with the present and future world until, the present barged into the door, bringing in the worse elements of the past. The front door shook, then the back one as the intruder pushed as hard as possible to get in. "We know you're in there," Wesley Olsen announced, with surety. "And what you're doing. Let me in and---"

"---tell me what we're doing, and who 'we' is and we'll think about it," Schleem blasted back. "And by the way, you're fired," he yelled back to his former employee, trying his best to hide his desperation with humor as he put every object of appreciable mass in front of both doors.

"I quit, 'Doctor Schleem,'" the snide reply. "Long before you even thought of firing me, or yourself. Now if you'll let me in, I won't have to call in my friends to make you open these doors. I'll give you ten seconds."

"He sounds... intense," Baumann said, Carla hugging him for dear life.

Olsen began the countdown outside. Carla's shaking body went into tremors then edged its way into carrying her into an unstoppable panic attack. Jack tried to hug the fear out of her, as the protector he always wanted to be to and for her. But there was something else going on with Carla that he didn't anticipate.

The countdown proceeded to 'two', followed by a phone call Olsen made to the choppers above and fleet of Cop cars below. All of them verified their location location with their engines, sirens and bullhorns.

"We have to let him in," she said, seeming to be thinking and feeling something she didn't want to tell Jack, but would have to. "After all, I did sort of invite him here, I think." She opened the door, pushed Jack away into a harsh encounter with hard wall, then slithered into the background, hiding whatever she feeling, and doing, from everyone. "When I---"

"---spilled the beans about what you knew about this place, and Jack's probable plan to Cali Rabinowitz and the recording devise I put into the room, though Carla probably doesn't remember doing so, to be fair, accurate and, experimentally anyway, honorable about it all," Olsen smirked. "I need some time alone with these losers, suckers and deluded idealists," he said into his phone. "Fall back, and monitor."

Whoever it was on the other end of the phone answered 'affirmative' in a voice that couldn't be more military, aggressive and cold.

“So, now that we’re all together, there’s an offer I want to make to all of you,” Olsen said as he perused the vials of antidote, the rats in the cages all sharing food with each other and his favorite pawn, admiring her new very feminine wardrobe. “And especially you,” he said as he stroked Carla’s man-length mop of hair which she stopped combing back in manly ‘Superman’ fashion. “With some time, attention and real caring, I, who are closer to your age than Jack ever was or will be, can give you the kind of love you need.”

“You don’t know what love is!” Jack grunted, pushing his prematurely arthritic legs up from the floor, into a lurch at Olsen. A lurch that was held back by a gun Olsen pulled out of the holster under his Woodstock Fashions jacket.

“You don’t know what real love is either, Jack,” Olsen related by way of an ever harder retort. “Neither do you, Doctor Professor Schleem,” he continued to his former boss. “Both of you are more in love with your work than you can be with any woman.”

“Or in love with women who share my love for the Work,” Jack shot back. He looked to Carla for support of that contention. Carla’s lowered head and disappointed smile gave him that answer to the question he never asked, but perhaps should have, a long, long time ago.

“Carla’s more interested in men who are men, and not old scientific machines whose hearts are as sterile as their non-musical souls are inexperienced. Who even when they’re dancing, analyze the kinetic dynamics of intrafusal and extrafusal muscle fibers,” the young Olsen said by way of explanation, to both Baumann and Schleem. “Isn’t that so, Carla?” he asked, turning into the what and who which had become the real prize of the moment, and perhaps the whole XY57 affair.

Carla hesitated. The agonizing silence the followed forced Jack to reconsider the terms, tone and real intension of every relationship he ever had, or imagined having. Finally, Carla did answer. “A girl has to do what girl had to do,” the beautiful young woman said to the pre-maturely aging and common looking Jack. She turned to Olsen, who Jack perceived as the most handsome and supportive ‘catch’ a young woman could have, or formulate. Just as Jack imagined the kind of ideal children Carla could produce with Wesley Olsen, but never with him, she walked slowly and intentionally to Olsen. She put her arms around his thin, muscular waist, pushed herself up on her toes, pursed her lips against his, and kissed him.

The kiss lasted for an eternity, as Jack felt it. When Carla withdrew from it, there was a special kind of smile on her face. One that Jack hadn’t ever seen on her.

“So,” Wesley Olsen said, as he smacked his lips. “What is this smile I’m seeing on you after you gave me tongue,” he said with pride. “And...something else?” he continued, seeming to feel something far less appealing in his mouth, then throat, as something seemed to go down his gullet.

“Oral XY57,” Carla replied with a wide smile. She retreated FORWARD to Jack, wrapping her small, thin arms around his admittedly oversized waist. “With some other additives, which can be reversed, with regular treatments over the next few years of...” She looked around the room, picking up every vial within grasp. “Something that may be in this, this, this...or, yes, indeed, this which—“

“---Give me that!” Olsen screamed as he reached for the last in the series of vials. He swallowed it, then looked at the label. “Estrogen!!!”

“An experiment in perspective,” Carla offered. “From me, and Cali.”

“Do you know what you did to me! And to yourselves!!!” Olsen grunted in a voice that started out as gruff then emerged into a higher, more feminine pitch, perhaps due to a placebo effect, or perhaps not. Jack didn’t know, or at this point care as he continued the his part in the plan improvised or perhaps pre-made plan by Carla.

“As long as you let us treat the world for its ills, we’ll treat you of your new maladies of mind and spirit,” Jack said.

“And body,” Schleem added. “When you start sprouting breast, losing your hair, developing old man wrinkle everywhere, and becoming a victim to every urge your primitive limbic system shoots into what you think is a well developed cerebral cortex.”

“Urges that are from past lifetimes as much as anywhere else, of course.” Jack offered.

“Theoretically anyway, or...maybe not so theoretically, Wesley,” Carla said. With that, Carla packed up her things, and left the cabin, disappearing into the woods.

“Where is she going?” Wesley Olsen screamed out. “Where the fuck is she going?”

“Away from all of us,” Schleem said.

“If she knows what’s good for her, and us,” Jack interjected.

“She will be back, right?” Olsen desperately asked.

Jack felt every finale of every Western come through his head, feeling the music this time instead of just recalling the notes. Maybe Carla would be back, but maybe not. In any case, the world was saved, for the moment. And maybe somewhere in that world she would find a way to become accomplished and happy. Ludwig, the ghost of Beethoven who made his presence felt by Jack, and even Schleem, seemed to agree.