

MANIPULATIVE MICROBES, MINDS AND
MORALITIES

By

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CHAPTER 1

Gloria Schmidt, AKA Electra Valkurie, prepared herself to go on stage for a performance she cared little about, but her audience did. “Remember, it’s their fantasy, not mine,” she told herself regarding the love starved men sitting at their tables in the strip club which had changed its name and owners at least twenty times, each of the new proprietors in the ‘association’ knowing how to stay one step ahead of the Cops, and the bankers. Still, working at what was now called the ‘Aspasia Emporium’ was a far more lucrative way to earn a living for herself and provide a home for her legally (but not morally) snatched away from her special needs kids than cleaning hotel rooms at the Hilton or even being a Nurse’s Aide at the hospital where ‘respectable’ people went when they got sick, particularly when they did what some would call ‘unrespectable’ things the night, or weekend before admission.

As the electric fusion rockabilly version of ‘Never on Sunday’ blasted over the loudspeaker, Gloria did a final check on her Woodstock vintage leather fringed Tibetan Goddess costume, noting that with her tired yet still vibrant and desirable 42 year old body that everything would hold during the lyrical Platonic lone dancing, and be flung behind the Biker guarded curtain behind her when the dancing got lustfully frenetic. The corner of her ever opened and, more than any other night that week, thickly masked tigress eyes caught a glimpse of the life-like painting of Aspasia on the sign above sign bearing her name. Aspasia’s oculars gazed back at, then into, Gloria’s, and Electra’s, appended with something incoherent uttered from the ancient Greek philosopher-whore’s succulent lips.

“Hey!” Gloria said back to Aspasia from behind the silk mask covering her face, required for her performance as well as the latest ‘health’ codes downstairs, and transmission of viruses upstairs. “I know you were the cortisan who taught Socrates philosophy in his younger days, and that when the mayor of Athens, Pericles, figured out that you had a great body as well as a super smart mind, he had to have you as his own,” Gloria sneered back at her. “And that you had to trick men into thinking, and acting right so that democracy and enlightenment could have a chance at making a go of it. And that after you entertained the men, and wrote them speeches that made them popular and, somehow, obliged to institute enlightened policies they would never have thought about themselves, you did what you could to educate ‘the woman folk’.”

“Yes, I did,” Aspasia seemed to answer. “And...your problem with me being up here now, above the ads for alcoholic refreshments that kill brain cells and photo-shopped images of exotic world travelled Latino dancers who still think that Spain borders on Mexico, is that---“

“----You are not Aspasia, but someone else,” Gloria whispered back the the illusion which once again became inescapable reality. “A photo-shopped chimera with the face of my new boss’s favorite daughter, the breasts of his second wife, and the eyes of his secret lover boyfriend. Who---”

“---Had to take on the form of some two dimensional image to get you, and everyone else, to notice me,” Aspasia seemed to say. With an Ancient voice that felt like it represented the most intense states of the present and future as well. “So, go out there and do your job!”

“And my job is?” Gloria inquired, noting that her voice was now audible in the world outside her ears as well as between them.

“To entertain the shitheads, assholes and idiots out there,” her boss reminded her in a British accent which oscillated between being ‘clawed me way up them dirty streets’ Cockney Liverpool and ‘one day I will be rightfully returned to my proper station and status when my legal situations get clarified’ Oxfordian London English. “These hard working or want to be working men came here because we offer an essential service,” ‘Lord George’ continued, wearing a cheap suit that he wore as if it was a Brooks Brothers tailor made designer outfit. “They come here for love they are denied at home which, perhaps they do deserve, but most certainly need.”

“I’m not going upstairs with them,” Gloria said as the music leading the last peeler out merged into the, this time anyway, specially-picked by her music one bringing her in. “All I’m doing is becoming absorbed into the dance, in my own way.’

“Yes, and where that way takes you, and others...that’s the magic of this profession, Electra,” Lord George reminded Gloria. “And tonight, it could lead you to...freedom for all of us. Particularly if you please that overdressed and no doubt under-laid gentleman in the front row. Between the trucker who is about to fall into his beer and the coked up Preacher who’s trying to convince Buddha, Jesus and Mohamed that he’s here tonight in their service and not his own.”

Gloria squinted as she tried to see who was between the trucker who, in the right light, looked like Arnold Schwarzeneger before he got into politics, and the town preacher who, in any light, could double for Jude Law or Hugh Grant in any ‘New and excitingly erotic Pope’ flick. The plain looking man between the two magnificent looking ones and NOT maintaining a six foot masked distance seemed familiar. Gloria searched her brain box for where she had seen him before. No, it was not in nightmares about high school teachers who knew nothing about life and tried to convey their lack of knowledge, and optimism, to their student. Nor did he resemble any of the respectable husbands who threw money at her to do a lap dance upstairs after peeling her clothes off on stage for them, an offer she refused each time out of pity for the men as well as empathy for their wives.

Finally, after the plain looking clerk-like nerd straightened his tie, then brushed off confetti from the last dancer that had landed on his crotch, Gloria recognized him. Her eyes opened up, with shock, bursting out of their sockets.

“Yes, it’s him,” Lord George proclaimed. “Professor Doctor and Minister of Health F. Simon Williams. “The man who every night, informs us on the tube with COVID news

that...”

“---I smell as bullshit,” Gloria shot back.

“And he probably, or maybe, believes is bullshit too,” Lord George said. “Bullshit that the government and the big corporations want us to believe so we’re scared into obedience, passivity, non-expressive introverted ‘existence’, and depression that---“

“—leads to killing ourselves and the spark of any life in anyone around us, with his hypnotic voice, soothing tone and assurance that---“

“---he and his colleagues are looking after our safety, and their own bank accounts of course.”

“And underfed egos, and attention-seeking empty lifeless lives, while they spread Dull Out Virus from themselves, to everyone else,” Gloria added, thinking somehow with the same life-PROMOTING mind as Lord George, for the first time since she cajoled her way to be hired on at ‘Aspasia’s Emporium.’

“Dull out virus that maybe you can cure him of, and...maybe...”

“Get him to cure his colleagues of?” Gloria replied. “Not so easy. No one ever fucked his or her way into creativity, or Bliss.”

“But you can open him up, Gloria,” Lord George said, addressing Electra by her real name for the first time. “Get the goods on him, or make him...spill the beans on what is really going on in those board rooms we only get into when we send one of you in as the entertainment.”

Gloria considered the proposition. Then looked to the photo-shopped Aspasia outside the window. She seemed to say ‘go for it’. As Gloria felt herself to finally be at a crossroad where she could not only turn around her own life, but the progressively downhill ‘safety the cost of vitality and humor’ lives of so many. Very much including her two special needs kids, and the ‘scared to death of covid’ siblings who were now taking care of them. And third ‘accident’ she brought into the world who, after too much self isolation, nearly killed himself, twice. And now as so depressed, that suicidal ideations was a step Upward.

CHAPTER 2

Simon Williams' Mensa level IQ told him that 'Electra' was looking at him between peels of her colorful and eye catching garb because he was the only man in the strip joint wearing a suit, and probably with a wallet filled with credit cards that all were in the same name. But, it was a new experience for him. A needed experience, for that night anyway. Particularly after he had visited his long time always bigger than life bud Richard Mansino during that morning at the neurology ward at which he was finally appointed director. And after Williams had chaired a virtual Parasitic Disease Symposium in the afternoon with colleagues from his department which felt just as boring, dull, lifeless and unproductive as any of the ones he had experienced, organized or chaired in the last ten years. And, most importantly, after coming back to the hotel and hearing a strange distant tone from his wife when she reported the events of her day with the same words she used every day when he was away on business trips. No, something was...different with Simon now.

The world that used to sedate, satisfy and sustain him seemed...distant from Professor Doctor Simon Williams. Indeed, even the two appendages attached on his shoulders seemed like someone else's arms. With someone else's hands that flicked one dollar, five dollar, then twenty dollar bills at the feet at Electra as she fired up something inside of him. With every shake of the fringes that adorned her multi-cultured wardrobe, another spark was ignited in him. With a warmth in her smile that forced his upper lips to turn upward.

With every turn she took on the stage in the dance that seemed uniquely her own, Williams felt his feet, soul and heart vicariously following her, then moving with her, then...yes, leading her. Past, present and future seemed to merge into an eternal 'now' as he emptied his wallet, hoping that she would fill his soul with something she had, but he both needed and had forfeited three doctorates ago. Life! Big L. Something the studier of biological life surrendered when he hit the ancient age of 19 while vacationing at his grandparent's house near Cape Cod. That fateful day in the summer after Woodstock when he took a pledge to stop aspiring to be a hip, cool, popular rock star, politician and/or poetic journalist and dedicated himself to getting straight A's in college so he could be a professional scientist.

Ten minutes after Electra had finished her performance, Simon's awareness of something other than the stage came back to his consciousness. Electra went behind the curtain. He observed his feet carry him to the back of the stage, and knocking on the door as the next dancer came into the spotlight. He knocked, three times. "Electra. This is...your favorite admirer," his ears heard his mouth say. After five seconds of silence from behind the 'only authorized personell' sign on the door, 'personnel' and 'authorized' being mis-spelt of course, he took in a deep breath, feeling the stench of liquor and hand sanitizer blended together an aroma of desperation. "Please!" he said. "I want to give you something! My heart!".

Simon was not sure why he said such a blatant truth to a woman who was trained in how

to appear like every dream girl to everyman, or fellow female of the ‘alternative’ persuasion. After ten more seconds of silence from the back room, while Mustang Sally blasted into his other ear from the mundane looking 21 year old ‘cowgirl’ wrangling her way to short term fame and riches on stage, Simon felt yet again..unworthy to be in the land of the Living, big L. Then dead in soul himself. But...more alive than most, so it seemed, as the government ordered isolation and containment policies he was promoting, and well paid to maintain, made...yes, himself more alive than most of the normal citizenry who were self isolating. Living in bubbles. Becoming more introverted, non-expressive, obedient and afraid of any risk than...yes, even himself. It was then that he realized that it was HIS turn to be celebrity king, the life of the party. To be the expert who could save the world from a deadly virus that killed bodies, just like the vibrant musicians and innovative artists rescued the world from samo-samo secure mediocrity of the soul. And death of that elusive entity, soul, which scientists would never be able to define or contain. Or perhaps control either.

“OK, I’ve had enough!” Simon blasted out, noting the dark room filling up with people who were neither social distancing nor wearing masks. “I am a doctor with civic and legal duties in the middle of what officially still is a pandemic. And if you don’t open this door in five seconds...!”

Before he could define the action he would implement to serve the public good, his sense of self worth and...most limbically---a chance to get revenge on the cool kids and dream girl who would not let him into the palace of fun and frivolity, the door opened up. A hand reached out to take his. “Close your eyes,” the owner of the hand commanded in low voice that could be male or female, but by its dominant nurturing presence was probably the latter. “Close your eyes, please,” the voice asked, in gentle tone. “We are all in this together,” in English, Spanish, then German.

“In what together?” Simon asked.

“You will see when you close your eyes and open your mind, and you will see,” the woman said from behind what seemed to be a wall as black as the night, and as big as the sky. “This is a game where Simon does rather than Simon says,” she explained in lilt that seemed to be more of a song than a line of discourse, or musical less dialog. “A game that we all will and must win.”

The competition-hating Simon was won over by the ‘we are all in this together’ pledge. He closed his eyes, opened his mouth, and felt a tongue touch it. A magical tongue with something on its tip that he trusted. And enjoyed. Which led him to...someplace he never imagined possible in any of the eleven universes definable by non-linear science, or logical Buddhism.

CHAPTER 3

It was one of those dreams that every over-achiever knew about, every professional experienced, and no shrink could stop no matter how skilled he or she was with talk therapy, or the newest miracle 'soul masters mind' drugs. Richard Mansino, Ph.D., M.D., Esq, MBA was transported back to High School by his mother, who insisted that he wasn't a real doctor, lawyer or biological industries business man until he got a passing grade in biology and English. And this time, by not sneaking a look into Mister Winston and Mrs. Farnsworth's desk for the key to the exams that he, on his own, got a 95% in, but, due to the extra help of his roaming eyes, scored a 105%. There he was, sitting in the wooden desk meant a lean, short 15 year old, now as a fat, six foot one adult. The first time he took the exams, which was based on medical text books and best selling biotechnology thrillers which he, in his future world, had authored himself, he was able to only score a 68 percent, 70 being the passing grade. Such bumped him into a smaller desk, and the science for jocks and dummy English classes to take more exams on things he already thought he knew. This time, he failed to make the passing grade by ten points, sending him backwards, yet again, sent there by his mother telling the exam monitor 'see, I told you he was a dummy who was always faking his way into thinking he was a genius.'

"Yes, but the independent study project I did in college that...got me into grad school, the best grad school in the country!" Mansino protested as the exam teacher pulled his most advanced university degrees down from the wall, tossing them into the garbage can with a loud thud. "That work was brilliant!" Richard asserted to the condescending teacher, clad from the neck down as an one room schoolhouse schoolmarm from 1880s Montana, and the head of the hippie dream-girl he turned into a woman just before graduation with a magical weekend that thankfully resulted in no offspring of his own nine months later. "I originated that idea on my own! The experiment that will revolutionize brain, muscle and nerve repair forever!" he yelled back to his mother. "And I won't let you stop me from doing it this time!"

"From doing what?" the woman who gave him life but, due to her own mental pathologies and moral failings, denied him the ability to enjoy so much of it, said as she folded her arms with arrogant sadistic satisfaction. "I bet you three more demotions in grade that you can't find the data books, or can't remember what you put in them," she challenged. She opened the door, showing Richard a corridor leading to the lab at Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons where, in the world of the waking and conscious, he had been invited just after his high school graduation, to spearhead the most innovative soft tissue reconstruction research ever conceived of in the Big Crap Apple. "Go ahead!" Richard's mother blasted out with overly inflated nostrils. "Show me that you deserve what you think you earned, and did it without faking your grades, or your research data!"

The latter did hit Richard where he lived, as way back in his mind, there were deeply buried memories of him fudging data to fit his research hypotheses. Hypotheses which turned out to be correct, for the most part anyway. And which got him famous. And

effective as a researcher, clinician AND industrial distributor of many products as well as protocols which improved the physical lives of many, many fellow humans. And, besides, such wasn't anything new. Gregor Mendel after all called a few green peas yellow and vice versa when doing his genetic research a century and a half ago, making possible the science of heredity which was accurate 95% of the time. And as any experienced clinician knows, any theory, mechanism or (as it was called behind closed doors behind closed doors in a university faculty lunch room) biomedical fairy tale which when applied made things better for 95% of your patients is close enough to the truth to be believed in, and passed down to your students.

But, though Richard was confident in his research when a younger lad, he was not so sure about it now that he was at the other side of 60. Though his body was transformed into that of the 25 year old genius he was at the time of his meteoric rise up the biomedical ladder, his older mind was losing the ability to remember OR innovate with every breath he took. His attempts to contribute to the lab where he was overpaid as a scholar returning from adventures elsewhere progressively failed. When asked any biological question, even when they were asked by school kids coming into the lab, he drew a blank. He couldn't find his precious data books, and couldn't identify what slides were from which lab rat. And those lab rats had grown big, old and grumpy in their overcrowded cages, smelling like shit as they got fat, lazy and worthless, just like the researcher who had implanted the miracle devices into them to re-grow injured nerves, not knowing which ones were active and which ones were inactive controls. Finally, the chisel chinned clean tastefully bearded boss of the lab, who Richard admired when he was little Dick, appeared behind him, projecting the image of manhood Mansion yearned to grow up into one day, asking with a trusting smile, "So, what are the results of your experiments? How have you innovated science and advanced biology? What can you show and teach us?"

"Nothin'?" Richard slurred from his mouth.

"Which is what you were then, and are now," his mother sneered as she entered the lab, shooing the disappointed boss away, then dragging his no good genius son out of his chair. Richard closed his eyes, and felt something hard hit his body after a long fall then woke up to a loud noise blasting into his ears."

"Thank God, Christ or whatever is in charge of the universe that it was a dream!" Mansino said as he turned off the alarm beside his real life desk, hoping and praying that it wasn't a dream within a dream. But there was one reality to it all that hit him as the sun blasted into his eyes from the partially open window in his office. He turned away from the light, his stare held captive by a black and white image on the wall. The brain scan was more haunting than any ghost. Particularly because of whose name was on it. "So, this is your brain on whatever life seems to be inflicting on you, Simon," he said regarding his friend. "The last thing I wanted to do was to show this to you, but..."

"---A genius doc-lawyer-scientist has to do what a genius doc has to do?" Richard heard from a female voice behind him. He turned to confirm its source. "Are you okay, Doctor

Mansino?" Ursula Sanchez, his most productive, brilliant and loved graduate student asked him with the warm smile of the mother he wish he had greeted when crawling, or being pulled, out of the womb.

"Yeah," Mansino replied, wishing that the long haired, big brown eyed, perfectly breasted Latino bombshell who always under-estimated her beauty on the outside and her worth on the inside would have called him Richard, or even 'Junior Dick'. Thankful that Ursula could read the hidden secrets of mother nature, but was blind to seeing the lies hidden behind the eyes of successful people such as himself. Thankfully for his sake, his partners', and hers.

"You have to tell somebody the truth about these, Herr professor Richard," the images on the brain scan said with a musical voice, the ventricles surrounded by brain tissue oscillating with the rhythm of the 'song' Mansino recognized from somewhere deep in his unconscious mind, or perhaps a soul that remembered it from previous lifetimes which were more probably real than imagined. "He is not as expendable as you are, and because of that, you were required to do what you did to, and for him," the image on the brain scan bearing Simon Williams' name said, this time in said best friend's voice. To the tune of, yes...the 14th Gregorian chant of doom and impending finality which found its way into the theme for the Exorcist, Mozart's Requiem and every pop song Richard tried to write in his multiple attempts to be a composer of notes as well as manipulator of words. "And all of this means that your job is to.." it continued, after which the lyrics turned into a 'hum', in Richard's mother's voice. Joined by every patient he had lost due to his own 'miscalculations', moral as well as medical.

"Is something wrong?" Ursula asked Richard, putting off the ghosts voicing his final assignment. "Are you alright?" she added, ending the violently shaking of his muscular shoulders with a gentle touch of her finger.

Richard thought about confiding in Ursula but, it was one of those 'if I tell you the truth, I will have to kill you, or someone else will,' moments. It was not the first time that it was appropriate to say that to his students, colleagues, patients or business partners. Something that he wished he had said to Simon Williams.

Still, Ursula required and deserved an answer. A truthful one. Or even more so, a life promoting one. "I'm fine, as you will be," he said, after which he handed her a brochure from the University he had just given a lecture to. "As long as you follow through with your thesis with some new required courses. "Acting, dancing or singing courses," he said, handing her a brochure from a university course he wished he had taken. "The cure for dull out disease which is inevitable in science, medicine and technology. As verified by Chekov, who was one of the only physicians who because of his Work as a playwright and novelist, cured many maladies of body, mind and spirit."

"And as for the patient whose brain scan that is?" she pressed, looking at it with intense interest, fascination and wonderment.

“Shit happens,” Richard said by way of explanation, as he tried to devise a plan in his mind to divert Ursula from the path he had lured her to before she became just as trapped as he, and Simon, was.

CHAPTER 4

It wasn't the first time Gloria felt like she was being watched, filmed or listened to. Still, she had to do her job, and more importantly, her Duty, which for the moment was making feel Simon Williams feel at ease in her bed, and under her spell. Under the influence of her womanly charms and specially formulated tongue loosening tablets he so voluntarily accepted, Simon did indeed give details about how epidemiologists were getting more famous and rich than they should have with the pandemic. And that the number of deaths REALLY due to COVID was far less than what was reported in the news. And the sponsors and government supports of those fear-distributing journalists, and their bosses, were getting richer with each lockdown that bankrupted small, honest businessmen, and women, and drove sane people into despair, hopelessness and a higher incidence in suicide than even Gloria envisioned possible. But as for what the duty and job was beyond getting the goods on the REAL Covid story, the line between such was grey indeed, and more than 50 thousand shades of such.

But making this 'client' talk was easier than unloosening the tight tongues of Lord George's criminal competitors. Simon needed no messaging of special G spots. No licking of his 'manly' parts. And no body contact, at all. Just an open ear, which he spoke to with no eye contact. His eyes were fixed forward, as if talking to a ghost. Or, perhaps, Gloria thought, a priest? Indeed, when she imagined a confessional wall between her and Professor Doctor Williams, her role as 'Father Gloria' rather than 'Sister Electra' was all too clear. He first confessed that he went into science because he felt he had to, not because he wanted to. Then that not all of his publications were from honestly obtained data, as he had collaborators who needed to get funded for REAL ground breaking work, and that harmless medical fibs are required so bigger biological truths can be discovered, and implemented. The details of such were beyond Gloria's medical vocabulary, and when Gloria tried to cajole Williams to explain it in 'common English' he just used more complicated coded words. As for how and why Simon worked his way to the top of the ladder in the Communicable Disease network, he said it was a string of 'good luck blessings from a God he served as a child' then 'traps set by the devil' who he 'did way too many collaborative studies for and with.' Then there was the 'gay' part of his nature which he investigated with a graduate student, for which he was punished with a year of bad, confusing and unpublishable lab data.

"I hope you don't mind me... just talking," the still fully clothed and, surprisingly, clear headed yet still mildly drugged top dog Communicable Disease consultant and celebrity said as he braced his back yet again at foot of her bed. "Something says I have to tell someone about the real COVID story, and..."

"And what?" Gloria asked, with baited breath.

"Another epidemic which is even more deadly, particularly to souls who are Alive big A, Designed by the people who want to control humanity's mind and spirit as well as their bodies and bank accounts," he continued, strolled over to the window five stories about the dark, empty streets.. "Which, thankfully, I won't be alive to see, or be tricked into

implementing, but which..."

"...We can stop?" Gloria asked. "'We' being..."

"Me and you against the world?" Simon mused. "Without whoever is listening to this?" he said to the walls as he perused the room which had been renovated the night before. He put on the radio, as loud as he could, the kissed Gloria...on the mouth.

"What was that for?" she asked, feeling something sincere in his lips, soul and eyes.

"Your job on stage downstairs, and on this stage here is to be all of the dream women we penis bearing schleps we wish we didn't leave, or who left us, or we wish we found somewhere between crawling out of the womb and entering the coffin, right?" he asked.

"We...try," she said.

"And you, succeeded," he said, after which he kissed her, in a way he never kissed his no doubt soon to be divorced wife, or any girlfriend who he wished could have been his wife, if even for one moment. His hug of and with Electra reeked of 'connecting' at the solar plexus, and everywhere else. An embrace which had the most loving elements of tender and tight, light and heavy, liberating and bonding.

Such seemed to throw Gloria off balance. She felt something put in between her breasts by his fingers. Something 'electric'. Something real. Something....cyber.

By the time she realized that there was a thumb drive inserted into the bussom that nurtured so many men, women and, on lonely nights, herself, Gloria saw that the man who gave it was giving himself a gift. "Fuck you, brain cancer!" he declared as he leaped out the open window. Then pushed himself through it like a bird, preparing his soul to fly upward, while his mortal body crashed onto the street below.

"Fuck no!" Gloria screeched out as she tried to pull him back onto the 'safety' of the cliff which was her bedroom for the night. Then looked down as her hands felt Simon's body obeying the laws of gravity. Falling down, and hitting with a loud thud...

"A fire escape!" Simon said from one story below. "That broke my leg! And trapped me here so..."

"...I could bring you back up here, Doc, whether you want to or not!" Gloria asserted as she grabbed hold of a rope intended for entertainment, using it to lower herself down to the fire escape.

"Go back up!" Simon insisted. "Save yourself, and the world, if you can, with that thumb drive."

"Not in my assigned script this week," Gloria asserted.

“And what is in your assigned script then!” he demanded.

“This,” she said, after which she kissed him on the mouth, and blew into his throat another rufie. This one, she hoped, which would loosen his tongue and not lock up hers. A feeling in her gut and somehow activated solar plexus said that her dead end life had been opened. To something....different. Dangerous. And...desired, in ways she never felt before.

CHAPTER 5

Signed into the hospital as Billie Simons, Simon Williams presented himself as a patient who needed special handling. A trans-woman who still had a penis, with a broken leg that needed repair. With the best ID Gloria could get on short notice, thanks to Boris Basilikov, if indeed that was the master Russian forger and ‘importer’ of Ukranian ‘volunteer’ waitresses for the Aspasia’s Emporium and four other strip joints.

It was odd for the homophobic Doc to be posing as a woman, but...a man’s gotta do what a woman’s gotta do. Particularly if he was to be smuggled to the chicken coup in the mountains which doubled as a semi-legal grow op for profit and a people’s radio station for service. Where he would, according to Electra, then Gloria, be able to reveal the truth about the creation and handling of the COVID ‘situation’ to the world. A broadcast platform from which, according to this anti-Illuminati activist, he would be believed. And, ‘Buddha, Zeus, Jesus and the Wizard of Id willing’, he would not be killed, tortured, jailed or, most importantly, tricked into relating biomedical fiction as scientifically verified fact.

But there was something inconsistent with all of these promises, which came out of the mouth of the hospital Doctor who was specially picked to put together the busted bones in William’s recently shaved leg and make the voices in his probably dopamine-loaded brain scurry back to their side of the veil. The dark skinned Euroasian physician spoke to Billie’ in a tongue that seemed to be a mish mosh of Russian, German, Spanish and a more than generous portion of Klingon. The flashing tools he used to push the bones back into place and vibrating probes he stick into his ears, mouth and ass were definitely ‘other century’ medical devices, but from what century and what dimension of reality, that was something that seemed...futuristic to Williams.

But, somehow, this ‘medic’ without an ID who seemed to be trained in at the Starship Medical Academy got Simon back to health. He was able to stand on his own two, freshly shaven, feet. And the demons, sirens and tidal wave emitting ocean under the long, wavy wig Gloria had sewn onto his professional male haircut went on to haunt someone else decided to haunt someone else.

“And now?” Simon asked the very male physician in his best ‘Billie’ voice as he eyed Simon’s feminized body and still intact ultrafem clothing from top to bottom, with the aim of taking her as his wife, girlfriend, or next conquest.

The ‘hospital physician’ pulled back his lips, sexual advancing eyes, and looked downward. After contemplating things Simon dared not think about, he turned his chin upward, then elevated his shoulders in an ‘how the fuck should I know?’ shrug. He then left the room, closing the door behind him with a big thud. One which drove a terrifying earthquake up and down Williams’ spine.

Three intentionally deep breaths later, and one unintentionally delivered prayer to whatever scientifically-unprovable Deity was listening, Gloria entered the room, as

Electra. Followed by a man who Simon didn't recognize.

"The sacrificial lamb, and prophet," she slurred out of a lips coated with glossy red lipstick that glistened under the clinic light as she presented Simon to the rather plain looking autocrat behind her. "And your distributor and publicist, otherwise known as Lord George."

"Lord of what?" Simon challenged, as himself.

"Lord who can have you shot, raped, jailed, ridiculed or cured of whatever cancer they say you have," the man wearing a suit which intentionally lacked a tie shot back.

"And someone who has more connections than either of us do, Doctor Simon," Gloria interjected before Simon shot back to academic scholar regarding the high school drop out who could get anyone into any university without the dean of admission knowing anything about it. "In places that..."

"I, and, maybe you, 'Gloria', don't know about and don't want to know about," Simon shot back, holding back not an ounce of arrogance regarding his accomplishments relative to the 'Lord' wearing a cheap suit, reeking of mothballs, with a breath smelling of cheap booze and probably illegal weed. "But, it looks like we are in this together," he said, in German, with an upturned chin.

Lord George corrected his pronunciation, and grammar. Then appended it by saying, in immaculately imitated 'Simonese', "I'm not the man who has to hide out from his former colleagues as a woman. And who has to redeem himself from sins, mistakes and miscalculations that setting the world backward into the kind of Dark Age of the collective body, mind and spirit that NO Renaissance will get us out of."

Yes, Simon was hit where he lived. For the brief time that he still had to live anyway. With, a burst of good health that the Starship Medical Academy Dog had somehow given him as a gift, curse or...trap.

CHAPTER 6

Dr. Ronnie Heinrick laid her tense back against the soft chair in the green room and closed her eyes. Hoping that the very black, very verile and very illiterate make up expert who she insisted travel with him on her tours of all of the major hot spots, would find a way to make her 60 year old wrinkles disappear for the camera, for her when she looked into the mirror and, most importantly, when he looked at her. Perhaps it was an impulse of pity when she decided to hire Ed Cubina, the Nigerian refugee and UN translator who was about to have his testicals removed by 'real men' in his home country for not using them to court, impregnate and/or rape expendable women. Or perhaps she did indeed feel guilt for having grown up in a country that allowed women to think, speak and, if they could manipulate the system as well as any man, become the Health Minister of her home Province. And to develop a voice that would guilt, intimidate and scare any man, or woman, into believing whatever she said. After all, Ronnie was a learned doctor with the determination of a lioness, accompanied by a politically correct cosmetologist who knew exactly how to make her look like goddess, prophet and 'mom' who never aged, but who could come across as beautifully matronly when she had to.

But as for what the team of Ronnie and Ed did after every television appearance warning the public about the next wave of COVID, and anything else the REAL upper ups wanted them to say, that remained private. Or so Ronnie hoped, and Ed assured her was the case, Still, as the countdown clock to airing dwindled down to minutes. Dr. Heinrick's ever worrying, and vigilant, mind perused the latest event that could ruin her plans, Ed's and the welfare of the Upper Caste she both served and ruled.

"You worry too much," Ed said with a warm smile, his white teeth shining through his big, Santa black lips as he magically put powder, foundation and rouge on her face, converting her into an authoritative mom, a prime love mate for any man seeking a second wife with a mature mind, as well as veteran actress who could play any good or bad girl character from 30 to 70. But there was one thing in Ronnie's face he could not hide. "The camera will see this. You must inflict fear into your viewers and not show it, you know."

"Something you no doubt learned when you were in the Army," Ronnie replied as she squinted her eyes, testing out her new subtle yet seductive eyelashes. "Before you revealed too much about yourself, of course."

"There is a time when one has to be open with the truth," Ed said as his glance was caught by hers. "And a time when those who are too eager to tell the truth must be...educated about the consequences of such," he warned. "After all, the world cannot handle the truth. Such as..."

"Telling people that there are no guarantees in medicine?" Ronnie replied, ignoring the issue at hand. "And that doctoring is educated guess work? And that if we do ten things to deal with a standard medical problem, 7 of them have no beneficial effect at all, two probably work, and one, may be doing some harm?" she said as she emerged from the

make up chair, adjusting her pencil skirt and flared jacket which made her look professional to women and sexy to men. “And that standard line that all doctors hear from their non-medical spouses after a successful day at the clinic. That...”

“...Your patients and the world would have gotten better whether you treated them or not?” Ed, who could barely spell biology, declared with a Santa smile and Socratic eyes.

“True enough,” Ronnie admitted in the room containing only herself and Ed, the ghosts of the patients she tricked, lost or were about to swindle being out of sight and sound. “But...I do need you and your friends to find out ONE thing for me.”

“Anything for you, Doctor Heinrich,” Sir Ed said with a courtly bow reminiscent of the Whitest Knight in Camelot.

“Simon Williams,” she replied. “The last time I saw him he was acting strangely.”

“How so, Doctor Ronnie?” Sir Ed inquired.

“Like...he had nothing to lose,” the female medical media wonder who had everything she ever wanted heard come out of her mouth, realizing the impact of those words. “Which makes him...”

“Not one of us?” Ed asked, as Professor Socrates.

“But one of them!” Ronnie blasted back. “Who has to be found, and...educated, or...”

The door to the green room opened. “Two minutes to air, Doctor Heinrich” a young, eager and well groomed Ryerson film school PA announced through a double mask. “Your teleprompter is set to go. Just as you ordered.”

“Just as someone else ordered,” Ronnie thought but did not say. But in any case, she was part of a select group of people who would save the world. Or if it refused to be saved according to the agreed upon plan, recreated in her image. With those on top overpopulating the planet at the expense of those on the bottom, eventually. After all, those on the bottom had to be put out of their misery. Or tricked into surrendering their freedom, yet again. For, of course, security, safety and ‘assured health’. Things that no thinking person would ever think possible. And no real Alive one would value.

CHAPTER 7

When growing into maturity in Juarez, Mexico, Ursala Sanchez learned a few things. First, do not trust Texan men who boast about themselves too loudly or smile too often. Second, remember that Mexicans have to be twice as good as Gringos when entering white collar professions, and Mexican women have to be four times better than their male counterparts from south of the line. And, more practically, no matter how smart and strong you think your brain is, it is still dependent on blood, nutrients and physical support from the biological structures below the neck. And that said structures do need to be fed.

For Ursala, cooking was always biochemistry that didn't matter all that much. If it flopped, it forced you to gulp down only the food you needed, bypassing the palate, and limiting unnecessary caloric intake. And as for Ursala's constant efforts to be a passable biochemist in the kitchen, she seemed to fail more and more each night, no matter how hungry she was. But there was one mouth that did, usually anyway, eat well at Ursala's house.

"Come on, it's good, Pancho!" she said to the neighbor's dog, 'inappropriately named 'Elton', in her native Spanish. "No onions or garlic in it this time," she related to the hound who usually ate most of what she cooked for herself but, for various reasons these days, couldn't stand to eat and didn't want to ingest. "Come on!" she encouraged the hound who was chronically underfed by the super thin vegan fanatic neighbor who thought that even one ounce of fat on a human or canine body was a prelude to cancer, diabetes and dementia. "I know you're hungry. And if you don't eat it, the cockroaches in the dumpster will. And God knows that they are getting nearly as big as their south cousins down in Baja and Albuquerque."

Suddenly, Ursala felt homesick for the dirt poor village she struggled to get out of, and the family that refused to leave it because of connection to two acres of land that was once part of a fertile two hundred acres owned by her great, great grandparents before that Mexican estate became part of the United States. Her nostrils somehow lost the nauseating smell of the chili she had made with the best ingredients buyable, replaced by an imaginary aroma of her mother's recipe of plain beans, corn and disposable weeds from the road, amplified by whatever was salvageable from the dumpster which made her mouth water, and her spirit fulfilled.

Ursala's arms stopped feeling the chill of the Canadian 'summer', and imbibed rays from a hot sun from behind the clouds which warmed her skin, but never baked it. Her inner ear could hear her Mother singing while cooking, in time with the rumbling of her usually empty stomach. Her inner eye saw, once again, the face of her father proudly putting her on a bus to go North of the Rio Grande, asking her to keep going further North to Canada, where 'the civilized' Gringos were. And to remember that she was smarter than all of her brothers, and him, put together. And to not come back home until she was the first Mexican woman to win a Nobel Prize in anything. Even if it was in journalism, a profession which the political dissident who got into shit with everyone on all sides of

every issue called 'the most noble way to lie invented by man, or woman'.

Such was the last time Ursala saw her father, in the flesh anyway. Still, Fernando Sanchez did visit his daughter in her dreams, and nightmares, nearly every night now. As if he were still alive. The images of such in her now aching head got louder and bigger, until. 'Pancho', or as his undeserving owner called him, 'Elton', barked something to Ursala, waking her up from yet another journey to a place where she could not return from.

"I know," Ursala said in Spanish, at the hound who chose to lick Ursala's hand rather than the pot of food she offered to the emaciated mutt. "I'll give Mama a call. Again. Ask her why I'm such a horrible cook, a brilliant biochemist and...yes, someone who is afraid to go home. And, given what seems to be happening with my bosses at work here, afraid to stay here. Where it's been more about science fiction than medical fact. Where whatever data I give to my bosses, data which to me is inconclusive data, turns out different once it is published, becomes conclusive. For conclusions, well, that, maybe I'm not smart or clever enough to figure out. And don't want to."

Pancho barked again, requesting another lesson in biology and ethics. For his sake, and her mother's and still somehow surviving, by a set of miracles, remaining brothers back home, Ursala was tempted to speak to the dog who, in her mind anyway, was a reincarnation of the canine companion she grew up with. Who disappeared on the day that she stopped becoming a naïve, self-loving, fun loving, happy girl and embarked at becoming a cynical, masochistic workaholic young woman. "Yes," she said. "There is one man who I can trust to tell me what is going on, I hope. And pray," she said. "About the diseases being treated up here, and the dying that is happening at home. The conflicting medical reports I hear from my family and perhaps still friends back home, and..."

"And what?" Ursala heard from behind her, in Spanish. "You don't look so good, Professor Doctor Ursala," Rich Mansino said to her with a stare that never let go of her eyes. The mark, she recalled from her father, of a man who is telling the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Or who is hiding the most dangerous kind of lies. Still, she had to ask one question of her unjustifiably unhappily married mentor, friend and lover.

"Your friend, and my biomedical 'godfather', William Simon, who I didn't see on tv, or the lab, or at the Infectious Disease conference last week," she demanded of Rich. "Where is he?"

This time, Rich averted his eyes, as if hiding the truth from himself as well as her. "The question is 'what' he is now, and the answer to that..."

Ursala waited, yet held her stare steady. No way would she let Rich squirm his way out of this one, or provide one of those colorful, witty and humor inducing answers that didn't address the question. Finally, after a deep breath that seemed to go into every part of his shaking body, Rich looked up, and delivered the arrow. "Our former associate and

God willing still friend, is a necessary experiment now.”

With that, Ursala’s religiously atheistic scientist boss, who negotiated with God so many times when trying to outguess or manipulate Nature turned his head, and walked away. Ursala’s belly shivered when she heard the mild buzz of Professor Doc Rich’s 2020 Mercedes engine turn on. The Pacinian corpuscles in her bell felt the vibration of its smooth wheels going down the road. That earthquake caught inside her sweat soaked torso amplified into cold waves of electric shock that went up and down every shkara of her spine when she noticed two vans from ‘The Happy Plumber’ across the street parked in front of Pancho’s owner’s house. A dwelling that had recently been completely renovated, at an inflated cost, several times by that company. Advertizing their services with a phone number containing an out of Province area code she didn’t recognize, yet dared not ignore, this time anyway.

CHAPTER 8

It was just another day at the office and broadcast tower downtown for Simon Williams, Ph.D., M.D., or more accurately now, at the hopefully radar-shielded chicken coup in Blue Water, BC, population 700 and still dropping for Billie Simons, H.B.A.R.P (human being, aspiring Renaissance person). ‘Billie’, as Simon now seemed to identify himself as, settled in to the ripped but still comfortable chair purchased from the second hand store shop facing the board of third hand mismatched electrical equipment which was converted into a first rate broadcast facility. Voices and signals from it could reach anyone’s home computer on four continents. It had been recently upgraded to put visual images and auditory feed into television screens which normally broadcasted NCIS, National News and reruns of Jersey shore for standard cable prescribers. Camera one was set on the picture of Simon as his former male, professional and famous self, ‘in memorial’, having been killed in a car accident. It was, within seconds now, to be accompanied by tapes he made in the hospital before he expired which revealed the truth about the source of COVID, how it was handled, and why it was more of a threat to the third world now than the rich countries in the world.

Featured for this broadcast was an even more deadly virus which was created to kill the human spirit as well as the body. A soul killing ‘dull out’ virus which would lull all free thinking and Alive souls into submission to upper ups. Something which, according to the lab data anyway, obtained on rats as well as people, inactivated the endorphins which made people think for themselves, and enjoy the challenge of making the world a more Alive place rather than obsessively seek to make it a ‘safe’ and superficially ‘happy’ one. A virus which elicited over-secretion of the ‘happy’ hormone, which was far more seductive and addictive than dopamine or serotonin which, in clinical trials, was able to make starving people think that they were well fed. Obedient people think they were being rebellious, with molecular manipulation far more effective than initiative killing country music or ‘don’t worry, be happy on the man’s terms’ pop tunes. Those who thought they were caring and giving into sadistic, insensitive monsters who inflicted the worst kind of pain on their fellow human beings, or beloved pets. Originally discovered by, yes, the Germans during the early days of the Third Reich, working in the Camps in Western Germany.

‘Billie’ took in a deep breath through ruby red lips just as Gloria counted the officially deceased Williams down through the headphones above the finally detangled earrings on his pierced earlobes. Billie Simons and Simon Williams both prepared to give the public another needed dose of the truth about COVID and other biological agents were about to be used to cull expendable and dangerous populations in the third world as well as here at home. Truth that had to be revealed in stages of course, while the officially dead scientist was still alive.

Yes, when Simon Williams felt a burst of pinecone scented wind coming in through the cracks in the carefully camouflaged broadcast booth on his shaved legs under Billie’s skirt, he felt more...Alive. Indeed, though he was supposed to be dying of an incurable brand of brain cancer which, according to Rich, would drive him both mad and paralyzed

each day, he felt...more Alive each day. While preparing his notes, and rehearsing his 'Billie' voice which was to colorfully accompany the tapes pre-recorded as his former male, scientifically-trusted self, Williams wondered why he seemed to be more...alive than ever. And healthy. And for this very private, delivered with the eyes rather than the mouth, broadcast, he had an unexpected audience.

"Maybe it's the pills I let Gloria Schmidt, or as she likes to call herself now, for the right reasons, Electra Valkurie give me when I wanted to have one last night in the land of the living in her bedroom," he said to the 18 year old barn cat who came into the broadcast booth for her daily treat of stationary soft canned turkey buffet rather than rapidly moving mouse or frantically crawling roach. "Or," Williams added, noting the seeable ribs on the feline who seemed to grow more defiant with every ounce of body weight she was losing daily, then the diminishing male 'bubba belly' on himself which was turning into a girlish size 28 waist. "Maybe when we are really ourselves, especially if it is the last day we'll be above ground, doing what we have to and need to do, our mass becomes energy. An experiment I suggested we try on our most enthusiastic graduate students when they were most passionate about their Work, like..."

Thoughts of Ursala Sanchez came to mind, and soul, in a body that Williams noted was... from painted toe nails to big haired crown, in keeping with perhaps who he really was now. Or always should be. But had dared not consider becoming, or experimenting with, at least in the presence of any other man, or woman.

Williams dared not utter the name of the woman inside of him, for reasons that he could not define. But his 'Billie' instinct said that it was important to keep the identity of the only graduate student who was worthy of the Ph.D. program unspoken, as the only people he really trusted now was the 'woman' inside of him, and the cat who he dared not name, but who no doubt had chosen a name for him. So he could get a secret message to her. "Yes, she'll be listening to this," Williams promised the feline. "Ursala lives each day as if it is her last, and always as. Intensity if her life and, according to the long haired, dirty white robed, overly bearded Socratic messenger in MY dreams, 'it will kill her.' But...what a way to live now, and beyond that inevitable relief, release and terror we call death."

More undiscovered and previously underestimated ideas brewed in between Williams' overly earringed ears, that ill-defined illuminated fog about to merge into a Light of a single unified Vision when....over the earphones came.

"Broadcast window ten minutes, then a special assignment, Billie," Electra said, as down to earth Gloria this time. "Which only YOU can do."

The details were sent to Williams, in a format the biologically brilliant yet cyber-challenged sixty something professor could understand. While Lord George read the count-down to this latest broadcast to the public, back up from ten again, Williams saw a stuffed manila envelope delivered under the door of the locked from the inside windowless chicken coup. Delivered by someone he didn't hear, or sense was even

there. Someone who the cat hid from, and snarled at.

It was like something out of a novel which Williams had read, at the insistence of Wanda Sandfire, a girlfriend who begged him, at the untested age of 18, to follow his passion to become Revolutionary Activist Songwriter rather than a by the numbers, people pleasing, 'above all do no disruptions' respectable scientist. "The Truth About Lying", he recalled from the title of the must read but by necessity self-published book by an author who died in obscurity. Part of the 'Heart of the Healer' series which had too much heart to become popular. The story about an established and, at an older age, finally Enlightened male scientist who had to become a woman to infiltrate the world he had built to get the goods on his former buddies before they would allow not so good things happen to the world that respected, overpaid and worshipped them. About a group of economically vicious White Supremacists investors and attention starved scientists who create a disease, keep the cure on hand, then release the wonder cure for selected populations of their own kind just in time to collect big on Wall Street with money and bigger with Nobel Prizes for fraudulent failed scientists obsessed with making a name for themselves with their blue blood fathers and ancestors. But with proof that everyone, or at least the 73 percent of the world that still was able to think, would finally accept.

It was an offer that only a dying man, or woman, would accept. The third act of a life opera which Simon Williams, as Billie Simons, was now was both enduring and enjoying. And not caring which.

CHAPTER 9

All of the participants in the Tenth International Jonas Salk Conference on Infectious and Communicable Diseases went to school far longer than any of the lay people whose products they used to obtain business class transportation, four star lodging, professional clothing and of course brain-feeding as well as tongue-pleasing cuisine, but it was still about...selling. Each one of the presenters, be they up and coming grad students or heads of multi-doctored labs in universities or pharmaceutical companies, had something to offer their fellow professionals. And, should they be lucky enough to be spotted, the world outside of the convention center and the hospitals who hosted the international conference.

Most of the posters in the oversized convention hall were presented with the most attractive, expensive and eye-catching visuals available. They boldly presented new drugs, vaccines or other medical tricks that would, 'with appropriate clinical trial assurance', rid the world of one infectious agent or another. The explanation of how they worked was presented within the construct of 'mechanisms of action' which neatly fit into decades old theoretical medical fairy tales about how the body worked. But there was one poster that stood out above, beyond and apart from all the rest.

"Interesting poster," New Science Magazine correspondent Gloria Schmidt, sporting a short haired geek bob wig, bushy eyebrows and a more male than female business pants suit, said of a hand written, no-frills and clearly stated for scientist and layman alike model of how the immune system really might work.

"It's an idea which, so far, I think is how we should rethink the immune system," the bold, plainly dressed but wide eyed presenter said with a humble bow and confident voice. "Or consider anyway," Ursala Sanchez continued as she noted all of her fellow grad students, and every member of the faculty of her department being visited by big wig science celebs at their posters. "After all, according to Hippocrates, the role of science is to discover how the human, or animal, body works on its own, and to figure out ways that ANYone can fix it."

"And fixing it requires big, large, money-seeking rather than service-oriented pharmaceutical companies to develop the right drugs of course," Gloria added.

"Not necessarily," Ursala told her, after which she looked to the right, left, behind and to the distance in front of her, to see if any of the 'suits' were listening. "It's my humble opinion that if we..." the wet behind the shaking ears grad student stopped speaking, taking note of a woman in tinted glassed gazing intermittently at her poster with admiration, between peering looks at the 'respectable' posters in the other area of the room. She had long, red hair, an hour glass figure to kill for, and legs that made her look more like more appealing to a male eye than any Pharm rep at the lab equipment sales booths. "Who is your friend? She looks...familiar," Ursala uttered, shutting down her sense of wonderment and open hearted hospitality.

“She...eh...should,” Gloria blurted out of her mouth regarding the very upscale ‘Billie Simons’. “An actress who starred recently in...Medico, Docs Against Profits and another indy film called ‘Healers’, spelt of course with a z. Which maybe you’ve seen.”

“No...I haven’t,” Ursala said.

“Because you’ve been being a Doc who is trying to save the world from itself instead of playing one on TV?” Gloria inquired.

“Gotta be something, I suppose, or try to be,” Ursala Sanchez replied in the manner of a downtrodden Mexican professional who was shot back down into her ‘rightful place’ as a Wetback laborer in the, truth be told, very WASP run country of Canada.

“But, as we both know, discoveries in science and arts,” High School drop-out Gloria said, hoping the words given to her by Billie, and Simon, were correct. “To make an impact in the word, you have to find the truth, prove it to be true, and have it be heard. Which my famous friend, theatrical client and, between us, galpal in the ways the matter most, can make happen, with the truth about what you put up here on this poster, and what you are behind those tired before their time but still bright and wide open ocular portholes of yours.” Gloria took in a deep breath, hoping that ‘ocular portholes’ was the right word for ‘eyes’. Then used her own ocular portholes to look at Simon as he turned around to her. “Right, Billie?”

“Very right,” Simon said, as Billie, while looking into, and through, Ursala, taking off the shades.

Ursala’s mouth dropped in shock, as she seemed to recognize Simon within Billie. “You’re...”

“Alive, yes, for now,” Simon said as his alias as he approached Ursala, giving her a polite celeb hug. “And there’s a lot of work we both have to do,” he said to her as he turned around, allowing Gloria to take a picture of her with the famous actress she didn’t know about. “For posterity,” Simon whispered into her ears by way of explanation. After which he put his hands on his padded hips and asked Ursala to explain to him, and the camera which Gloria secretly put on her, the explanation about her new model about how the immune system worked. With no one else watching.

Meanwhile, Lord George, posing as a penniless street cleaner in a Dickens novel, worked his way between the high class scientists who dropped their cups of complimentary cocktails and paper wrappings of exotic finger food on the floor. Using his highly developed skill as a con man, a bow which broke his back, hiding his face from the Security guards overlooking the conference, as well as the head janitor who would eventually discover his pale white rather than dark brown face, he worked his way towards the most celebrated doc in the hall.

“So, Doctor Heinrich, is there going to be third wave of COVID or the next viral variant

on the way?" a well dressed elderly gentleman academic who no doubt was head of a Microbiology Department at a university whose name he didn't recognize eager to be the next dean asked her Heiness.

"And a fourth?" his younger female competitor pressed.

"And a fifth?" A division head of European Technologies Pharmaceuticals begged to know.

"If people don't obey our guidelines, of course there will be," the Provincial Minister of Health assured them all with a confident smile.

"And we have to keep providing accurate and honest numbers, or course," Lord George heard from a worried man with a short, graying beard and handsome nearly sixty something face. "All of us, right?"

"Of course, Doctor Mansino, as we all have been doing," Ronnie Heinrick replied to the upper ups, after which she gave the bearded upstart Doc whose nametag was not visible a dirty look. "We all are in this together, right Richard?"

"Indeed," Mansino replied. "Especially our departed friend, respected colleague and highly accomplished scientist, Simon Williams. Who----"

"---Developed a stroke, so I heard," Ronnie interjected. "Which explains the broadcasts discrediting all of the work he did in the past, and which we continue to do that are polluting the internet, and broadcast tv. All of this mis-information. So...toxic."

"Yes, misinformation is so...toxic," the Microbiology Chairman said.

"And deadly," his competitor added.

"And...expensive," the Pharmaceutical Chieftain appended. "For the private and public sector, in more ways than economic," he added, after which he lifted his glass up to his lips for another tastefully delicate sip of complimentary wine. "But," he said after putting it back down. "I didn't know Simon Williams turned sick. He was healthy as a horse. A young horse at that."

"Health is a gift that can be taken away from us at any time, for any reason, no matter how much we try to prevent it," Mansino said, after which he raised his glass to his parched mouth, and poured a generous portion of vino into it, averting his eyes.

"It was your misfortune to diagnose him, so I've heard," the European Pharmaceutical Mogul said with an ominous German accent.

"And so I am hearing now," Ronnie added. She diverted her stare at and into Rick, who turned away. Her phone rang. She glanced at the display. "But," she said, putting on the

maternally nurturing smile that made her so appealing to those seeking absolute security from disease, pain and challenge. “The news department again. The show must go on. Mine anyway. Until...”

“You get another replacement just as good as Simon Williams?” the Microbiology Chairman offered.

“Or better, one that is just as convincing,” slipped out of Mansino’s mouth, after which he departed company from his cohorts, and breathed a sigh of moral relief.

Lord George caught no more than half a second’s glance at Ronnie Heinrick’s face, but it was enough to tell him that Mansino had just committed professional suicide. Along with an end of another kind that would come perhaps sooner, and no doubt uglier.

CHAPTER 10

Simon Williams was in shock when he read the headlines on yahoo news the next day on his new hopefully untraceable phone which reported that Rich Marino, a 'research doctor with everything to life for' had committed suicide after being diagnosed with 'mixed incurable viral disease'. Ursala Sanchez took it in stride. "There is no honor among thieves, not these kind anyway," she said in her best Gaelic to Williams in the language of his passionately rebellious maternal ancestors before they became legitimately rich Irish ancestors as the cab pulled up the new Breyerston Research Institute. "And no future in show business or journalism for someone who doesn't know how to bend the truth, or hide who you really are, 'Billie'," she continued in German in the tongue of his perhaps Bavarian grandfather.

"We are in the business of finding and sharing truth, Ursala," Williams replied in clear, Billie voice, in Spanish, seeing in the rear view mirror that the olive skinned, East Indian cab driver looked very English white under the dark foundation on his face, as evidenced by the pale skin that appeared as a rim under his turban. "Scientific truth from scientists who are looking out for all of our health, in a process where we all are working together, for each other," Williams added with a warm and friendly smile, after which she gave the 'randomly picked' cab driver the dispatcher chose to send to the hotel a crisp fresh fifty dollar bill to cover the thirty dollar fare. And a business card with his most recent female persona on it. "And about that screenplay you said you were writing," he said to the driver in a born to the manor in present times and plantation mansion in old times Southern accent," send it here. I'm always looking for stories about people who are stuck in low places who are determined to make an impact in higher places," Williams pledged, as both Billie and Simon.

"I will do that, M'am," the cabbie replied with a thankful bow as he looked over the card whose address was a crematorium for dead animals, contagious biohazard materials and bodies of those who were killed by COVID or government administrators who wanted to keep the public safe from conspiracy freaks who yelled 'fire' in a theatre that was really ablaze.

After sending the driver on his way to a place in his head which was not his job description, Williams gazed at the plain yellow cab as it disappeared into the horizon filled with freshly shined vehicles worth ten times its value in the parking lot that seemed to go on forever. Then out a three layered gate guarded by security personnel sporting the latest fashions in medical protection suits, and paramilitary fatigues designed to make even the nerdiest 98 pound weakling look like a cross between The Hulk on studio purchased steroids and Rambo on Special Forces issued crack.

"So, what do we do now?" Ursala asked Williams in the same way she inquired so many times when she came up with confusing data at her lab bench which didn't prove as right or wrong any of her or his hypotheses about how biology worked. Just as the last bit of grant money had been spent on the experiments. "I'm scared," she confessed as she looked up at mixed contingent of grad students, postdocs and senior researchers walking

down stairs into the lobby of the Institute. As Ursala perceived and observed of her actress boss, all of whom were Williams recognized. They all had that 'we're in the system now and are proud of it' confident demeanor in their gait and on their upturned faces, each one of them. "I'm really scared," Ursala said as she felt their auras and looked into their discerning professional faces.

"Scared of dying before you get the chance to gum down three squares a day as a 90 year old nursing home resident? Jail if we get the right judge? Torture if we get the wrong one? Being thrown out of science as a deluded lunatic before you have fifteen minutes of recognition as an innovative genius?" Williams said, going down the list of things which he had no fear of anymore because of his terminal cancer diagnosis, . "Or..."

"Being a coward when the bullets start flying, and surrendering to the 'man' rather than fighting him, like my father did," Ursala said. "Because...I DO have a long life ahead of me with....a lot to lose. While you..."

"I know," Williams replied. "Have nothing to lose. A gift that nature gave me, through our finally turncoat for the right cause good friend, Rich."

"Who maybe....tricked you into thinking that you were dying?" Ursala offered, from a place inside of her that Williams recognized all too well. That intuitive part of Ursala's special, blessed and cursed soul which enabled her to feel things as they really were without actually seeing them. That faculty she had about biological and medical theories which was always accurate. "Or, no, maybe it's just my imagination," she said, retreating or perhaps advancing into reality. "From reading too many humanistic science fiction novels, and..."

"...Writing them," Williams said. "As I assigned to you in your independent study courses, so that you could humanize science as well as advance it, and so that..."

"I would not become one of you!" Ursala blasted back at Williams, her eyes accusing him of multiple crimes he had committed while being a scientist. Crimes such as allowing his inner soul to be killed, and sterilized, so that he could think logically rather than feel intuitively. Avoiding investigating what humanity needed most, so that funding would be in place for the economically-structured medical system as it was. Not investigating or turning in fellow scientists who fudged, forged, stealing or finagled data now for the 'ultimate good' later, along with of course discrediting investigators who would beat them to press when reviewing their research papers so that one could repeat their experiments and get all the credit by publishing it themselves. And, as he never confessed to anyone except the ghosts who visited him in his nightmares, fudging, forging and finagling scientific data himself.

CHAPTER 11

“The true humanity of a society can be judged by its prisons, and the true nature of a man is never really found until he winds up in jail facing loss or life and/or sanity,” muttered the most recent ‘n value’ test patient in the latest study of the new vaccine against the even newer virus. A microbe that destroyed the soul, mind and body, in that order, if not stopped. But there was one way out of becoming a number in a lab data book, centered around a dot on a flow chart in the room lined with rubber mats lacking any object containing anything resembling a rope, or flesh cutting implement. “Maybe if you hit me, this will be over,” Prisoner number 1 asked number 2.

“But not for me,” the reply from the other two legged human lab rat who had survived five clinical trials so far. And didn’t want to survive another, given the deformities in his once perfectly proportioned limbs, distorted face which was one the perfect image of manly beauty, and voices between his ears who he occasional did win an argument with. “It’s you who has to kill me, please,” Prisoner number 2 begged in a voice somehow connected to inner reason. “Before I...maybe get better, get out of here and, do what the voices tell me to do to my daughter.”

Prisoner 1, as he was becoming to believe himself to be more each day in the ‘grey bar hospital, motel and spa,’ somehow lost the sensation of pain between his ears as he somehow ‘saw’ Prisoner 2’s heart stop beating. And saw, with his real world vision, the still virile fellow lab rat’s eyes pouring out tears of grief, fear and...pride. Knowing that helping others is the best way to help yourself, or perhaps avoid facing the truth about oneself, Prisoner one sat on the inflated foam ‘bed’ and pretended it was a comfy chair in a therapist’s office.

“Tell me about your daughter,” Prisoner 1 asked his roommate. “I’d really like to know, and, besides, whatever you say here to me is in confidence, doctor patient privilege,” Rick Mansino said, feeling himself to be his old self again between debilitating panic attacks and terror induced headaches that made his mouth as dry as dust. “And if the dirty shitheads in clean, white pressed lab coats are listening,” he said to the dimly lit corners of the ‘suites’ ceiling inaccessible by hand or viewable by eye. “Maybe it will make them rethink their position as experimenters and stop the experiment. Or maybe if we...sing something that melts their heart? Like...”

“Like Beethoven’s Appassionato, that Vladimir Lenin forbid anyone to play around him because it would awaken a tenderness inside of him that would prevent him from doing the drastic measures he had to do to eliminate the Capitalist Imperial Cancer from Russia in 1918?” Prisoner 2 replied, assertively. “Which goes like this...”

Prisoner 2’s rendition of Beethoven’s piano work with his voice was as off key and irritating to any ear as his Lenin’s political beliefs about were repulsive to Mansino’s Free Market capitalist democratic Republican principles. But in the interest of maybe making whoever was listening to them turn the microphones on closed meetings of their bosses rather than victims assigned to be broken, or converted, Mansino joined in. He

recalled the notes on the piano as played by his mother before she died of cancer, doing his best to repeat the main ones with his parched throat. As no doubt Prisoner 2's inner ear seemed to be hearing his daughter play that masterpiece which conveyed expansiveness of mind and openness of heart. Fire and warmth, both at the same time.

As Prisoner 1 felt it, the black cloud hovering around the ceiling seemed less oppressive, and stopped pressing downward on him, along with the buzzing coming from above the ceiling with somehow less red light coming out of the dark holes in the inaccessible portions of the cell wall. Mansino let himself believe that the observers listening to him had been inflicted with so much off key music that they had to take a break, pushed out of their offices and into the lunch room by maybe the ghost of Beethoven himself, which seemed to blanket the ceiling, then walls of the cell. Or perhaps the painfully and blissfully exhumed notes out of Mansino and his fellow prisoner had broken their real world listener's equipment.

Prisoner 2, who had been in the 'suite' upon Mansino's arrival, by several months as calculated by his beard length, breathed easier. Such confirmed Mansino's speculative assessment, correlated by the continued lack of 'buzz' above the ceiling and NO red lights emerging from the dark holes behind the light fixtures above them.

Finally the music came to an end, by mutual decision, or perhaps by Beethoven's ghost coming into the cell and informing the players of his notes that it was best performed between their ears rather than with their parched and now sore mouths. And, yes, the Silence was now Mansino's friend. And his roommate's comrade. But, something had to be acknowledged by voice. "So, your daughter," Mansino asked. "Tell me about her."

"Well," Prisoner 2 said, pulling his distorted lips back into a warped but sincere smile. "She's a typical woman in that if anything goes wrong, she takes all of the blame. And if something goes right, it's God or the man in the relationship that made it so."

"Something we condition them to feel or woken up from genetic memory," Mansino added. "And, if I can hypothesize, she's someone who does A plus work at anything she does but grades herself with a C minus on a good day, and an F on a bad one."

"She says that it keeps her humble, and somehow makes her better each day at what she does, and discovers," Prisoner 2 related.

"Discovers?" Mansino asked. "Discovers what?"

"The secrets of nature which allow us to live with it, and, when we are in too much pain or agony, change nature's plans for us," the reply, with a Hispanic accent.

"What kind of secrets?" Mansino pressed.

"Secrets which will benefit everyone," the apparently, by his diction, Mexican cellmate proclaimed. "From Sonora to the Yucatan, and all points north." He looked up to the

ceiling. “Even here! Where the Gringos who play hockey rather than football live! Who will not turn THIS Fernando Sanchez into a corpse, zombie or instrument of evil!” he screamed at any observer listening, loudly enough for their ear drums to be punctured. And their bosses, perhaps in Washington, DC, capital of the country Mansino grew up in and still identified himself as part of.

“And your daughter’s name?” Mansino asked, sensing something ominous.

“The one given to her by Gringos, or by her own people back home?” Fernando asked.

“Whichever you want to tell me,” Mansino asked, in his best Spanish.\

“Elena, who everyone else knows as Ursala,” Fernando whispered into Mansino’s ears. “Who I see in my dreams each night, and she maybe sees in her dreams as well.” Fernando looked up at the ceiling again. “Who is not dead! ”

Mansino was not sure why Ursala Sanchez’s father wanted her to believe he was dead. Above all the members of her family back home in Mexico, he was the one who she missed most, loved most, and hated most for leaving in the dead of night decades ago without telling anyone where he was going, or doing. Leaving a note for her with a request and commandment to ‘keep the Fight Alive any way you can.’

Such was a fight that Mansino was now part of. A tough adjustment for a man who rose up the academic, medical and scientific ladder without having to fight anyone.

CHAPTER 12

Ronnie Heinrick didn't know why Billie Simon seemed like such a natural actress to play a research doctor, or an even more engaging one as a research doc who was about to blow the whistle on the institute her character built, and molded in its image, then saving the world in 2042 while working with her former bosses, foiling an eco-terrorist plot in the meantime. But, it was good publicity for Heinrick's real operation. And the offer to become a producer of Simon's new film without even knowing which end of a camera to aim at the actors or which end of the boom mic goes in front of the actor's mouth and which one goes into his or her ass when he or she says the wrong lines was something she couldn't pass up.

"And, the film will seem authentic with your character saving the future world from itself just like you're saving the world now!" Simon's assistant, whose name 'Doctor Professor Ronnie' had forgotten for the tenth time, said as the media mogul medico doc was presented with a release form. "All it says is that we can use your institute here, your image and your really cool and smart voice after we go to editing, like, ya know, after we do some futuristic window adjustments with furnishing, lab equipment, and ya know, like, totally new kinds of discoveries and diseases, clothing, hair like..."

"Not telling the public any trade secrets of private pharmaceutical companies or research institutes now that are patented," Heinrick spat back as she noticed through the corner of her always perusing lip reading left eye, Billie Simon talking with Paul Clemens. Being coached in how to pipette fluids from vial A to B without disturbing a water:oil interface, how to operate a microscope so they don't break the lenses and the art of gently layering samples of potentially infected material onto petrie dishes like a 'real' scientist, and not the failed high school biology twice actors on the CSI tv shows. By the most trusted, valuable and smartest biochemical lab tech in the building, who could design and create any molecule requested of him, make antibodies to the most unrecognizable antigens on order faster than a novelty pizza joint could pop out yet another culinary mishmash to bake into a slab of thin, overpriced crust and who had as little interest in what would be done with the work other than him being able to go home on time to his presumably single occupancy domicile to breed hybrid dogs, cats and rabbits 'state beyond the art' pet owners. "Is dramatizing for the public last decade's technology and not this one going to be a problem, Electra?" Heinrick asserted, recalling the name of Diva Simon's humble, perky and more endowed in the breasts than the head assistant.

"Like, sure...no problem," Electra replied, with a smiling face which revealed the wrinkles in her no doubt forty year old body, and a consciousness that still hadn't evolved beyond sweet, sauntry and sour if you told her the truth about her 16. "We'd be creating, like, ya know, a future world and a like totally awesome and cool vocabulary too."

"Which doesn't include ya know, like, totally or awesome, but...you can, could and should keep 'cool'."

"Huh, why?"

Heinrich picked up a pen and signed the contract placing her in front of camera in a the future fiction that portrays the facts as she needs to have the public know them today mini-series for a network she would investigate of course, or perhaps already owned. “Cool’ describes someone who isn’t cold, isn’t warm, and who..well, like, ya know, totally get makes other people...hmm.”

“Makes other people what?” Electra asked, feeling fear in her pathetically open heart as her black Goth make up started to smear with fluid emerging from her skin. “Cool people make other people do what?!!!” she now insisted on knowing, driven to accept the answer rather than seeking refuge from it.

Heinrich turned her head, noting its reflection in a mirror, contrasting it to everyone else around her, including, now, finally, apparently famous, strangely familiar, and irresistably desirable to herself Billie Simon. “Cool people make others do the work, sweating, agonizing, doubting and...when things get physical.. bleeding.”

“And, like, ya know dying too?” Electra inquired, with, so it seemed, an unexpected aura of Enlightenment, Liberation and Empowerment. “Cool people make other people do the dying for them?”

“Heinrick felt ‘got’, a cold sweat overtaking her from the inside. With an intensity only matched by the first time she was caught sending in data derived from a research report from a competitor which she tore apart as a reviewer. A competitor who, thankfully, due to favors from friends, and life, was convicted of fraud, then diagnosed as delusionally crazy then found hanging at the end of a rope in solitary after being committed to a high security nuthouse.

“Electra’s’ just being literary,” Simon explained to Heinrich in the manner of ‘adult’ women talking about those of their gender who will always remain ‘girls’ as she sauntered over to Doctor Ronnie with an ultra-feminine gait which seemed too real for any female scientist, or so it seemed to Electra. “We older bird need these young chicks to keep up young, learning and, well, relevant to the audiences today. So we don’t become merely ‘luke warm’.” Billie said to Ronnie.

“Which is another word for ‘cool’,” Electra interjected with enthusiasm to the two academically accomplished but life-inexperienced scientists who had, in their own ways, been burnt out by life, but still had to keep trying to find something new, relevant and Ancient in it.

Ronnie Heinrich once again looked behind her worried eyes and considered her fate, destiny and, as it occurred in her ‘honorably vainer’ moments, legacy for future generations. Billie and Electra asked Ronnie about her childhood, so that the script writers could put authenticity and relatability to all classes of people into her character. It brought back games she played as a precocious always ahead of the crowd and never living in the moment toddler, rug-rat, teen, girl and, finally, woman.

There was clearly a game of chess going on, or was it backgammon? Ronnie was always a winner in any game she played with people's heads, pocketbooks, or careers as she was an expert at making the rules for the game at hand on the spot. And when engaged in conversation, she knew that as long as she drew the conversation, even a friendly one; into an area she knew something more about than the other 'opponent', she could come off as an expert. It was a game she played with her two rival sisters, her subservient brother, her more heart than brains mother and even her corporate ladder climbing father. But as for this game...Electra seemed to be smart enough to rule the top by staying on the bottom, and her 'mastress', Billie, seemed to be someone clever people always lost to...a humanitarily wise mirror. A female Socrates who would not drink the hemlock. And, when you looked deeply into the presumably beloved by everyone in power in Hollywood, New York, Toronto and Vancouver, someone who seemed to have the strength of a ghost. A male ghost who was going to make Ronnie a star in science fiction rather than medical fact. A co-lead in a film about her life, her world, her...legacy.

All sorts of imaginations came to the 'just give me the facts and I'll spin them as fiction as we have to' C plus research scientist in the lab who registered an A plus image in any meeting with a Dean, broadcaster or non-Ph.D. or M.D. holding Minister of Health and Public Welfare. They came to an end when an alarm sounded.

The new head of security, who was clad more like a plain clothes Labor Ready janitor going out for his lunch break, walked up to Ronnie, whispering in her ear while everyone else's auditory attention was on the mind blasting alarm, and their eyes on the doors that locked closed behind them.

"There was another robbery," Dr. Heinrick's functionally illiterate make up man and confidant Ed Cubana said to her while everyone else, including her own people, were gently herded into a safe room by armed men in bio-protection suits.

"What did they take this time?" she inquired of Ed, as she and him allowed themselves to be brought into an abruptly opened door leading to, thankfully, one of the few rooms in the facility where one was allowed to eat, drink and bullshit about something other than work. "What we intended them to steal, I hope?" she whispered as wrapped sandwiches, cellophane enveloped pastry, canned pop and the best imported beer available were placed on the large table in the cafeteria.

"It's a different 'them' this time, Doctor H," the gay Nigerian refugee with a past as a special forces soldier that could land him in a Canadian jail, or back home to an African torture chamber said to his benefactor. "And they took, from vault A234, what we needed to keep most, all of it, but I will see that those rats are caught and dealt with, the way I used to deal with such vermin, Ronnie."

It was the first time that Ed Cubana addressed Dr. H by her first name, despite the various pet names she allowed and encouraged her to call her in 'private scientific sessions'

under the sheets in the hopefully camera-free five star hotel rooms she was offered to stay in while on the road as the 'voice and conscience' of the Canadian Health Care System and the various industries it supported, and answered to of course. But there was something else of more primary concern. A gut feel in Doctor H's belly which was not menstrual bloating or a reaction to the egg salad sandwiches she ate on the road and at home which were so pleasing to the tongue but so rebellious once they reached her stomach. "Who are these vermin?" she asked.

"One of them is someone you know, and the other, someone you should have." Ed snuck a piece of paper into her pocket, He then intermingled with mixed congregation of actors, promoters and scientists, assuring them that their bellies will be well taken care of and that they were to be quarantined together in the state of the art eatery for a magnificent hour long lunch with the best French pastry, gourmet sandwiches and imported spirits available on a budget which is oriented to serve the public's needs before the wants of the dedicated scientists working there. He even added, to a startled Electra and a suspicious Billie, that it could be used as a special effect in the film to be shot there, or anywhere else the studio saw fit to use, find or build.

"Yes," Ronnie Heinrick said to herself as the black as coal African Santa Clause bullshitted with smile showing a mouth full of white teeth to a group of people who seemed to enjoyed being lied to, as none of them could really handle the truth anyway.

But there was one thing that Ronnie had to handle...the two rats who broke into vault A 234, leaving her and her inner circle without the real vaccine against the new strain of COVID which was scheduled to be released, and the even more incidious virus which would destroy the souls of thinking, rebellious and independent people on a world wide scale. Leaving behind, according to Ed's note, two ring dings, stating that 'happy eating is the cure for anything.' Those two rats would indeed pay. The now missing from his 'experiment suite' Rich Mansino. And a ghost who she thought was long gone, fed to the worms or reincarnated into a Down's Syndrome baby at a Nunnery or trailer park free clinic go nowhere wage slave mother, Fernando Sanchez. Whose trained in the fine art of becoming the new Doctor Heinrick scientist daughter, Ursala, was still not in attendance at her classes in grad school, and who missed her proficiency exam there for the third time. Whose lab benches were still untouched and not emptied. Thankfully. Ursala, Mansino's and the University's best student, and Ronnie's self adopted 'Niece' who, God forbid, had maybe been killed! And if the fully scholarshiped student Ronnie Heinrick left more in her will to than to her own daughters, had turned on her most powerful silent benefactor, it was Dr H's duty, and pleasure, to kill her in body, mind and spirit.

CHAPTER 13

“So, do you really think that Dr H will believe the data you left for her at your lab bench when you took your unscheduled sabbatical from science, and the world?” Rich Mansino asked Ursala Sanchez in the fourth hand mobile home nestled in the walkable but (due some intentional controlled forest fires) not drivable to woodland location he had used for hunting in his older years. And for less than legal drug manufacturing to pay for his tuition fees during his tenure as an up and coming scientist as he prepared a triple ommlette for her and the father she claimed was so alive in her dreams that he couldn’t be dead. “Ronnie Heinrick has lots of overly trained and politically naïve supergeeks like Paul Clemens who can manufacture any infectious viruses and any cure.”

“And even more Imperialist media, Capitalist industrial and Fascist government contacts to make the public think that the black plague is harmless, and that the common cold is a deadly microbe that will decimate humanity,” Fernando added as he fried up potatoes with garlic, onions, paprika and cheesy butter sauce. A special dish which, when in the land of the ‘living’, he was forbidden to prepare in the presence of his wife, who warned him about an impending heart attack that would kill him, and thus kill her. “But, as a Communist,” he went on, seeing Ursala’s apolitical eyeroll from the corner of his eye. “I now have to believe in something that religion, an opiate for the masses that diverts them from converting the hell we call earth into something resembling heaven, claims is in control of everything. God.”

“Spirit, you mean,” Mansino interjected, running his hand over his recently self-shaved head, which allowed him to go undetected past the guards and orderlies he and Fernando has ‘inactivated’ with pressure points and injection of the drugs which were intended for himself and his Hispanic ‘cagemate’. “A Higher Paw made possible our escape from the experimental cages from which no n value, being us, comes out alive, or sane anyway.”

“And your knowing where the vaccine that would protect only Ronnie Heinrich and the shithead assholes who work for her, and she works for, while the rest of us ‘expendable’ n values in the world get sick or die?” Ursala challenged her once trusted boss, and now collaborator in somehow saving the world from itself.

Rich paused a moment, allowing the ommlette to turn light brown then almost black under the spatula. After a tense three seconds which for Ursala felt like as many years, he commenced doing ‘culinary biochemistry’ with the frying pan, and continued ‘collaborative studies’ with his dry, beat up but not quivering mouth. “Some things I remembered from ‘Raunchy Ronnie’s’ numerology obsession, and habits when we were doing our research internships, at three different places. The shelves in her old beat up desk in the oversized janitorial closet we used to call our private office spaces as people who allowed to be called ‘doctor’ by the world but never by the technicians who were supposed to be working for were always labeled. The most valuable stuff in her desks was always in drawers marked A234, with impressively calligraphy. Which were locked.”

“But openable?” Ursala pressed.

“Hey,” Rich replied with a smile that seemed to recall good times in the past which, at the time, were more challenging than happy. “How else was I going to find out the addresses, phone numbers and love letters from her guy, and on occasion, girl friends, and a whole bunch of ‘God is good and great as long as you aren’t artistic or expressive’ religious zombies who were no good for her, or her career?”

“At the time, she needed, on occasion, some...guidance,” Rich continued as he with musical hands of a chef worthy of serving up the most Beethovenian symphonies flipped the omelet on top of itself, then flung it onto a plate. “I was the only one who could save her from dull out disease, you know.”

“That microbe works its way from your brain down the spine and into your gut through the asshole, or through the ears as carried by the vector of country, pop and ‘soft rock’ music, which makes us dull, boring, lifeless, procedural, and humorless,” Ursala shot back, adding element of humor or wit.

“And, as we know now, can be given to someone through a virus hidden within specific liposomes which find their way into the part of the brain we THINK is the seat of the soul,” Fernando added.

“That part of the brain being?” Ursala challenged.

Ursala’s biological father and science-provided godfather looked at each other, keeping a secret, so it seemed.

“Something you’ll both tell me when I get older, wiser or ‘more Alive’, right!” she replied. “The seat of the soul in the brain which...”

“We should never be able to discover or define,” Fernando said, as he spatulated out the mostly cheesy grease and some potatoe ‘fries’ onto a plate, smelling its cholesterol raising aroma with a sense of wonderment.

“But we are able to now...destroy,” Mansino lamented with a determined stare which was seeing something Ursala needed and wanted to observe as well. “Biologically, with something other than formulaic sound we call popular music, that occupies brain circuits as we can’t get that mindless, follow the bouncing ball into the depths of passivity and lifelessness. Which of course some call security. Happy. Pleasant. Non-expressive.”

“And worse,” Fernando interjected, sorrow and guilt in his downturned eyes. “Learned helplessness. Like the rats who are so conditioned to ‘accept their limitations’ and ‘assigned by the upper ups fate’ that they won’t exert a single stroke to go an inch to submerged platform in a water tub to save their asses from drowning.”

“People trained to fail at everything,” Mansino added, every one of his facial muscles

frozen into a death-mask. “Accept orders from anyone, never stand up for themselves or others, who---”

“None of us will become!” Ursala shot back at the black cloud enveloping the only two rays of light in her life right now. “You both fought against dull out virus, and more, and won!”

“But I still have those...microbes and conditions still inside of me,” Mansino confessed and related.

“And I’ve had a decade to be ‘experimented with’, after I spent decade trying to experiment with the world,” Fernando added with a voice that seemed to come from an even deeper abyss of despair, guilt and defeat.

“But, nature never gives you a problem without a solution,” Ursala declared, after which she hugged both of her patients, comrades and...in some ways anyway still...protectors. “And if that doesn’t work, we have what you two thankfully star crossed Promethian idealists stole from Ronnie Heinrick’s institute as an antidote,” she said as she looked at the recent needle marks in both of their, so far anyway, big, muscular arms. “But in the meantime....One rule of biology is that if you ignor what is below the neck, the muscle between the ears gets weak, defective or goes destructive on you, right?”

Ursala sat the two men who somehow found her before boarding a plane to Mexico at the three and a half legged ‘dinner’ table, and served them breakfast. Yes, there was a Higher Paw which was allowing many potentially Life saving things possible. But, the law of physics says that for everything that goes up, something has to go down. Or sideways.

CHAPTER 14

Though Lord George never spent, or squandered, a day in film school, he was a natural director for creating fantasy, and real life. Unlike ‘real’ directors, all of his films made money, though admittedly it was not reported to the IRS and the viewers of those flicks, ranging from 10 to 100 minutes, viewed them in very private settings or with only ‘intimate’ friends, or those who they wanted to be sexually intimate with anyway. Being used to working with low budgets, non-union actors and working under assumed names in backwater locations such as Saskatchewan, he was as efficient at production as ‘the only voice I want to hear on my sets is my own’ Clint Eastwood and as contagiously enthusiastic as Quinton Tarantino. Finally, the movie he was making now, at Ronnie Heinrick’s institute, starring said inexperienced dramatic or comedic performer, was going to mean something.

The plan he, Electra and co-star Billie Simons were making was that it was a front to get the goods on what the institute was really doing regarding COVID, and other infectious diseases. And that in editing, Ronnie Heinrick, whose droning, hypnotic, ‘possessed’ and when she needed to do it, threatening voice scared the shit out of anyone who disagreed with her at the other end of the news broadcast, could be shown for what she really was and what she was planning to do in order to make the world obedient to her, and, in the process, as lifeless, boring, procedural and humorless.

But...something happened once the cameras started to roll, and between takes. The government and industry backed doctor who was the definition of restraint in expression or vitality, became something else. Between this nearly last scene in the film, which was rescripted for her alone in front of camera, she yet again was cracking jokes and adding suggestions to the script as spontaneously as Robin Williams or VEEP famed Julia Dryfuss. Cast, crew and even ‘make them laugh but never let them see you emit a chuckle’ Lord George broke out in hysterics. Indeed, these cameras which were intended to make a serious medical drama had turned the trained and conditioned to promote dull out disease with her mouth alone Ronnie Heinrick, Ph.D., M.D., into a source of vitality and the cure for that all too common ailment. But two observers behind camera were thinking it was something else.

“I know that giving people the opportunity to open up their creative mind opens up their soul, but...this is something weird,” more sensible than sensational part time stripper Gloria Smith, still trying to pull off fitting into purple haired colorfully ditzy Hollywood agent Electra Valkurie said to Simon Williams, who was still able to convince everyone, and sometimes himself, that he was famous art house movie actress Billie Simons. “Like the ‘candy’ I gave to you when I treated you for dull out disease in MY one patient at a time clinic.”

“Or...I suggest, a more effective mind opening medication that, well...I was experimenting with in my spare time, unofficially, when I was...” Simon Williams answered softly in his natural voice. After which he put on a very feminine smile

directed at the suspicious stare of Ed Cubala, Heinrick's head of security and all around go to man for everything, who had been bringing Ronnie everything she wanted and needed, most particularly cups of water whether the sweat soaked passion infused actress insisted that she wasn't thirsty. Who, upon receiving the 'Billie Simons loves you best of all' smile, Gloria noted, did indeed produce a hard on in Cubana's left pants pocket.

For the moment, Gloria felt like she was almost about to be found out for what she was. A kind hearted, moral and even religious person in a cold, cruel and morally corrupt world. Something that will lose you the respect, cooperation and support of even your best friends, and most secret admirer and handler, Lord George, whose contacts she still needed to find her two kids, get them back, and go to a place where the corrupt law and her even more corrupt and very legally versed family could not find them. '

But there was something to be celebrated here, and anticipated. Yes, for whatever reason, the demoness perpetuator of dull out disease, through her restrictive and oppressive COVID 'safety regulations' administration activities and the new drug which she was about to unleash on the world, had been converted by something to become an angel of vitality, and truth. Who would, according to logic and all predictions now, reveal the truth about COVID and so many other communicable diseases to the public which would be in line with what Gloria was broadcasting from the still undiscovered chicken coup studio through tapes made by the officially dead scientist who was Heinrick's ally, and eager to please rather than serve friend, Simon Williams. Yes, the real numbers would finally be released and the world. Liberating humanity from fear produced bubbles and into being sane, expressive and open. And a place where being Alive, big A, is valued more than being 'safe' or obedient to the 'masters' above you who say they are looking out for your welfare but are really extracting the best parts of you for their own financial, psychological and political objectives.

Gloria envisioned such a world behind her eyes as Ronnie completed her improvisation, then motioned for the cameras to start rolling for a pivotal scene that now would feature her alone, precluding the need to have a big star such as Billie with her. But two satirical, fact and truth based jokes into the scene, Ronnie fainted.

Rushing to her rescue was Ed Cubala, who lifted her up into his Herclean arms. He motioned to the cameraman with a finger across his neck to cut the scene right there. Then with a courtly bow to Lord George that the shooting for the day is over. He assured everyone that Doctor Heinrick was alright, and that he would take care of her medical needs. All of Ronnie's support staff of real docs acknowledged the situation, except one.

William Simon ran up to see what was wrong with Ronnie, with a sense of urgency and inner intuition which made him forget how a lady walks in heels. Ed held out his hand, halting Simon's progress, this time with a warning 'man to man' to him to go back to head toward the exit door with the rest of the cast, crew and staff. And no hard on in his trousers.

Simon put on his best womanly apologetic smile, then tripped on a cord which was

thrown his way by Ed as he took Ronnie away into a door marked ‘Authorized Personnel Only’ in four languages. Simon then sniffed something on the floor. He emerged from the floor with a used paper cup, kicking it to Gloria, offering her a wink with his overly lashed eyes, and pointing to the invisible watch on his wrist. Simon Williams sauntered out the exit door with the rest of the group as, according to the way the hired help and most of the male scientists gauged at his cushioned wiggly ass, Billie Simons. While Gloria helped clean up the floor in front of her, hoping that the security guards were still being production assistants.

CHAPTER 15

Paul Clemens was surprised at the brilliance of the lab notes left behind on Ursala Sanchez' lab bench and desk after the robbery and her still unsolved disappearance. "That upstart, Wetback Mexican neohippie rebel with her own demented cause figured out a way to bypass the basic laws of chemistry," the wrinkleless, balding yet not yet grey haired small framed forty something nerd said to his boss after obtaining the final distillate from the isolation column. "This yield, this fast, for the mind and immune system modulating agent which can cross the blood brain barrier exactly where we want it to go. Something she named Instant Einstein that, as I tested on culture dishes, grows neuritis from transplanted mice brains faster than anything else I've seen, and in walking mice, makes them smart enough to figure out how to get any food for themselves from any maze we can design, and...almost makes them smart enough to get out of the cage. And enough of it for..."

"...those of us who deserve to become instant Einsteins, and who've paid the dues to be so," the reply from the other side of the isolation hood from Paul's most senior supervisor while glancing at the rest of the photographed data from Ursala Sanchez's private lab. "And an by altering one molecule, an anti-nerve growth factor that can be used on every American Gringo, in a country that history says and every Mexican remembers, stole Texas, California, Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona at the edge of a sword."

"And let's not forget Utah," Clemens added with a playful smile. "The most beautiful American state which is owned by the Mormons, the most pleasantly obnoxious, expressively inhibited and dangerously economically smart Gringos. Whose men, conveniently, gave up the right to have multiple wives when the oil and mining companies in New York made them an offer they couldn't refuse. But, the Mormons did gives us Donny and Marie Osmond."

"Yeah, our most trainable messengers for spreading dull out disease and 'up with people' pabulum during the nearly successful Woodstock Revolution days," Paul's boss noted. "A revolution our predecessors destroyed, diverted and perverted with---"

"---Mischief, in the form of 'get laid before heading out to the streets to protest anything', keeping the 'open for everyone' stage for 'people's' artists competitive and under OUR control," Paul noted as he delighted when looking at the chromatograph reading for the new drug which had the on the biggest scale in the lab, the drug finally had carboxyl groups on the right position of the C ring and no where else. "And of course 'happy' drugs to make you feel like accomplished mountain climbing revolutionaries rather than stoned 'dreamers' sitting on their comfortable asses at the base of the slopes,"

"Which is legal now in your country," Paul's foreign born boss noted, taking out an un-smoked joint from his pocket. "And will still get you hung by your balls, or neck after they've been sawed off, in my country," Ed Cubana said, with an 'interesting' combination of shame, sorrow and delight. "But there is another assignment we have for you," he continued, after which he threw a large, sealed envelope on Paul's empty lab

bench.

“‘We’ being?” Doctor Bonnie Heinrich’s private and most trusted lab tech asked, noting that the handwriting on the outside of the package was both unrecognizable and very male.

Ed pulled back his lips, took in a deep breath, looked around the lab which Paul considered more of a home than any domicile he had ever owned, or rented, then slowly moved his field of penetrating vision to him. “Same team, different coach,” Ed’s reply, appended by the laying of his bear like paws on Paul’s small framed and, as he self observed, shaking shoulders. “Scientists who want to get the Nobel Prize only do so if they let others get the awards in Economics, Politics, Literature and Journalism.”

With that, Ed left the lab with a confident gait, leaving Paul with an assurance that he would not lose his hard earned sense of purpose, and that, perhaps, he might actually become one of the only non-doctorate awarded scientists to receive the Nobel Prize. The life goal that, he realized just now, was what he was born to do, and the only real reason for having come out of the womb.

CHAPTER 16

Rich Mansino contemplated a lot when watching his favorite vintage movie, “Charlie”, with regret and sadness. And it was not just because the star of the film, Cliff Robertson, had a thick head of hair on his head, something that Mansino all of a sudden realized that he would never have again, as the head shave he did on himself to escape the facility where he was to become a perpetual test lab rat apparently went a millimeter or two below the scalp. No, there was something else about the film where a lovable and emotionally vulnerable imbecile is given a magic drug that made him into a genius.

“Charlie lost his ability to love as he went up the IQ scale,” Fernando commented as he brought a bowl of made in China tacos and homemade enchiladas to the table in front of the Rich’s old tv that still had a VHS deck connected to it, perhaps the only one in existence for a hundred miles. containing equal mixtures. “He became a thinker and not a feeler.”

“And felt every pain imaginable by an intelligent mind on the way down when the drug stopped working, and he started to lose all of his advanced faculties and more,” Rick noted, thinking about his once brilliant father’s demise with Alzheimer’s. “There’s nothing more tragic than becoming smart, then knowing you’re becoming stupid, for everyone.”

“But nothing more deserved, for some anyway,” Ursala added as she sat down in front of the TV, stuffing her face with the gustatory delights made by her father. “Like Gringo’s who---”

“---Are about to get smarter because of the neurite growing wonder molecule you discovered?” Rick fired back at his prize graduate student.

“That I made to honor your father,” she reminded him.

“Which didn’t work on him, because the results were temporary, and...after a short while, it didn’t work! And he got worse than before!” Rich growled back.

“Hey!” Ursala blasted back at her once most trusted advisor in science, and life. “It was you who wanted to give it a try, without waiting for long term testing!”

“My father suffered more after being given that wonder drug which, yeah, we both developed, than if he hadn’t gotten it! Yeah, his memory got better, he was able to think faster, and he felt more powerful, but he turned crazy, then...self destructive!”

“Which is why it was a brilliant idea for Ronnie Heinrick and whoever she’s working over, under of with, to get a taste of destructive intelligence, then go down the intelligence and sanity quotient scale,” Fernando interjected softly, as he turned the volume up on the tv, which did more to increase the static in the speaker than the voice of the actors on the square, small screen. “Both of you scientists should know that there’s

no miracle cure for stupid, or magic drug to eliminate ignorance, or its inevitable result, cruelty. But there is one thing we do have to know if we want to deal with the COVID crisis and the other ones about to be inflicted on us. And the pain you seem to enjoy inflicting on Heinrich and her goons, even more than I do.”

“Yeah, I know,” Ursala replied, with downturned eyes. “How long will it take for them to become self centered non-team player ‘geniuses’. And how long will it take for them to become two digit IQ baboons hitting themselves with clubs.”

“And wacking others with weapons other than clubs,” Mansino noted.

Ursala took in a deep breath, collected her thoughts and feelings, and decided to funnel them out as an assuring professional rather than a passion driven biological crusader. “The rats in the study I did with the variant on Instant Einstein, with surplus supplies no one was using, could figure out how to get any food in any maze, yes. And when they got bored with too many pellets and cheese, they turned into vicious cannibals on their best buds, the roommates they had in the cages, or their littermates from birth. And not on new rodents put into the cage with them. Which I told you about, Doctor Mansino.”

“Which I witnessed,” Fernando offered from the sidelines.

“And besides, Simon Williams says he has everything in the institute under control,” Ursala assured both her biological father and her surrogate one.

“Simon Williams, aka now Billie Simons, who you last saw, and talked to when?” Mansino drove into Ursala’s confident ears, and a brain between them which had gotten a small dose of Instant Einstein as an energy boost. A small one with, so Ursala thought, the right precautions.

“Whose production of the film you, Gloria and ‘she’, according to my sources, is stalled right now,” Fernando said, after looking the information up on his phone. “For...’undetermined reasons’, according to this website anyway.”

“And five others,” Mansino added, after perusing his own PC. “And whoever told you that nature never gives you a problem without a solution, and that science can make nature do whatever we really need it to do,” he continued, after which he turned his head downward and his thoughts very inward. “Should be shot.”

“Or sent on a suicide mission to redeem his guilt?” Mansino heard with anger, and conviction, from the person he least expected it to come from. “And face the God he’s been denying or defying for the last thirty years,” still somehow devoted Catholic Ursala said to the man who grew up as an altar boy. An inquisitive lad aspiring to become a priest until he realized the warped expressions ‘tough love’ priests gave to olive and brown skinned tender-hearted boys, and girls. And a man who swore observed his virtuous God fearing father die painfully, the old man believing that he was going to go to hell for daring the challenge, question and demand real answers about life from the

Heavenly Father.

A thought came into Rick Mansino's highly developed intellect and reason fueled brain. Yes, he was...infected, as he felt a strange kind of headache coming on, yet again. A feeling of helplessness and doom amidst a black cloud which got darker even when you illuminated it with fact and blew a light-emitting laser through it. Perhaps due to the many drugs he was given while an involuntary prisoner in Heinrich's holding cells. Or perhaps as a voluntary prisoner as one of the experimenters when he was on the boards of the many institutes and university she owned, or was a part of. Or, maybe something else, as he started to hear voices in his head saying things he could not effectively argue against.

"Something wrong?" Fernando asked Rich as he held his shaking hand against his left temple.

"Where are you going, between your ears?" Ursala gently inquired.

"To hell," Rich replied. "According to the devil I still believe in, even though I know he doesn't exist. In a universe where I've verified that God doesn't exist either."

"He, the Heavenly Spirit, is just on a lunch break," Ursala offered.

"IT is on a lunch break," Fernando admonished his daughter with an upturned index finger. "Spirit is beyond attribute, including gender. When Abraham asked God to reveal him or itself, in a picture, or description, all Yahweh said was that 'I am that I am'."

"Yeah, I know," Ursala said, correcting herself. "Find the Buddha, kill the Buddha, the discover and connect to the Beyond, the closer to the Real, Buddha."

From Rich's perspective, the discourse about trying to comprehend the infinite using the finite human mind, the unseeable with visually-oriented eyes, was necessary in Ursala's continuing evolution and education. And maybe Fernando's as well. But still, he felt condemned to hell, which perhaps was an indeterminate time being around smiling happy Mormons singing praise the Lord hymns at a fourth of July picnic. Or, if the Hindus were right about the afterlife that science could still not figure out, at least several lifetimes of hard time karmic payback after departing the lump of flaccid flesh and aching bones he called his body. For the sins, transgressions and/or miscalculations of turning a blind eye to what Heinrich and her associates were doing. And, perhaps, for daring to think that he could turn passive and 'compliant with the system' maintainer of the status quo Simon Williams into a passion drive revolutionary by so effectively convincing his good friend that he was dying of cancer. Turning someone who was planning for a safe uneventful, non-expressive long life into someone who had nothing to lose. And everything somehow to gain by living each day as if it were his last. A condition which Rich, upon checking in with his aching, shaking and periodically flaccid body, was in right now as well, with death rattles that crept in when he was going into and out of

'slumber'. Whether that condition of dying, and feeling so real that it was beyond verification, was real, imagined, or inflicted by the devil inside of him, such was immaterial now. One agenda had to be met now.

"We have to find Simon Williams, and his peeler girlfriend," Rich gave painful voice to, hoping that only he could hear the death rattle in his lungs. "Who can help us do that?"

Fernando rose to his still somehow strong feet and shut off the tv before the scene where Charlie lost the best part of his intellect, and soul. "The Lord. We have to find, and work with the Lord."

"Fuck you and the Lord!" Mansino blasted back.

"Lord George I mean," Fernando replied, afterwhich he hid his face yet again behind a professorial scratching of his goatee. "Who, I worked with as a co-producer to raise money for a little while, and an actor who...did what he had to do for the cause."

"The cause of making money doing porn for the revolution of course," Rich interjected.

"And so you could eat better than you would have otherwise?" Ursala challenged. "Which I do understand," she said with empathetic objectivity. "Now," her final statement on the matter, as a sadness came over her for yet another loss of innocence. Which, as Rich saw it, was an inevitable price to pay for expanding consciousness, and effectiveness. In a universe where, as Ursala would soon painfully find out, 'heaven watches and earth works.'

CHAPTER 17

It took longer than expected to find Lord George, during the two weeks in which Ronnie Heinrich's voice was used to inform the world about COVID, with her picture on the screen rather than video presence. The world was warned about another spike, and two more variants, but her voice assured each and every listener that if they followed the lockdown guidelines, signed up for the newest vaccine which was now available, didn't congregate in groups of more than five people, stayed within the limits of their home town and section of city, they would be alright. Her seemingly empowered and empathetic voice was perfect. Too perfect to be real, to anyone with a thinking brain between his or her ears. But, with images of the most beloved and trusted of the pandemic celebs, Simon Williams in the Intensive Care unit dying of COVID and the new virus on its way, every law abiding and safety seeking citizen in the (relative to the US anyway) rule loving country of Canada seemed to agree that she was telling the truth. The poles verified it of course.

But for every believer in fact or fantasy A, there is of course a disbeliever. And Lord George was certainly the latter, even with regard to facts and fantasies that he spread himself.

After exhausted searches on the internet, and activation of contacts with people whose current names on their passports didn't match the ones they were born with, nor countries they really came from, Fernando finally located Lord George in, ironically, Prince George. A town which contained hard working people who eaked out a living, and less hard working individuals who of course brought home a lot more at the end of the week.

His new establishment was the Hermes' Educational Institute, a tavern which advertized 'real empowerment for real men' on the door for penile bearing patrons over 18 and in the Christian websites 'conversion therapy that works every time' for boys of all ages whose fathers were concerned that they wanted to become girls, or be with other men. His 'trainers' were the most attractive, manipulative, psychologically trained and church approved women available north of the 49th parallel. Some peeled off their clothing on stage, others opened up their hearts and souls in the bedrooms upstairs. His function there something he related to Fernando with a calm and procedural monotone voice.

"I'm supposed to do...nothing," Lord George related to his partner in so many less than legal activities under dim lights between changes of 'teachers' who knew just how sexually excite the most asexual lads with a wink of the eye as well as just the right exposure of luscious female flesh. He sipped a cup of, by the stench of it and his breathe, was at least 50 proof wearing a pressed white suit which somehow highlighted the blackness in his eyes and passionless heart. "I'm supposed to make no movies. Write no books. Maintain and profit from no conspiracies. Support no causes."

"And what's the profit in that, George?" Fernando challenged, as he adjusted the short old man grey haired wig on his still long black haired head, hoping the camera, the security goons or the clients and patrons sitting at the tables around him would notice.

And praying that the Church Elder ID on his thrift shop suit was not being photographed and scanned. “For a man and a Lord, with your ambition and need to DO something?”

“Fernando, my old friend. Didn’t this COVID thing teach you anything? The people and companies who made the most money were the ones who did...nothing. Sit back, stay home, shut up, and collect money from the upper ups,” he noted. “Making money and having influence, as well as power, comes most easily if you....do nothing. And listen to the upper ups of course.”

“And your upper ups are?” Fernando asked, positioning his face such that the security surveillance cameras would not be able to read his lips, see his clenched fist or make out who he was through his tinted glasses.

“Respectable people now,” Lord George said. “People who, well, are finally letting me into the club. The club of respectable men,” he said as he nodded a hello to Ian Klassan, the most popular TV evangelist on the tube, along with the Governor General of the Province, accompanying an feminine looking 16 year old into his seat, after of course having the ID of the reluctant lad checked by bouncers who had biker ID’s under their shirts. “Yes, when you’re asked to join the legal half of humanity, it’s not the time to say that ‘I wouldn’t want to be a part of any club that would have me as a member,’” the most effective operator of illegal activities Fernando ever knew said with a sense of...relief. And liberation. “Besides, I’m tired of being who I had to be. Particularly during the time when, to fuel both our more altruistic political Causes, I was the king director of porn, and you were the most manly stud and believable actor who ever delivered pizza, tacos or a birthday cake to a lonely young woman who was saving her cherry to be popped by a REAL man. A man’s man. Which I am now more than ever. A man who has power he doesn’t have to exert anymore to get what he wants, and needs.”

“And a man who...well, liked men in ways that real men who own this place, and apparently you, would not approve of,” Fernando said, after which he sipped his non-alcoholic cola, hoping there were no pharmaceutical agents put into it, or vodka to activate the drunk in him which was derived from his Yaqui Indian genetics. “You do remember the movie we made together. With both of us in front of camera, that night in the Big Easy, that studio in the French Quarter, when, well..”

“What night?” Lord George challenged.

“The night that, with the help of a little Guadalajara gold we toked together, you became your true self, and revealed it to me, all night. With the cameras rolling,” Fernando said, after which he perked his lips. “Where we both became our true selves.”

“I don’t remember anything like that...” George rebuked, pulling himself back, turning away from Fernando as if he contained a plague microbe aimed specifically and silently at him and him alone.

“Yes you do remember,” Fernando said with an effeminate soft voice. “And if you

decide to be an ungrateful bitch about it, your patrons and masters at the Governor General's table will remember, and the film will---

“---Not be shown to anyone, please!” Lord George said in a tone that Fernando never heard from him. Begging. Desperate. And, from a soul which was apparently very gullable. “I'll do anything to destroy that film.”

“And the memory of what we shared when shooting, and afterwards?” Fernando said as he extended his gentle, flowing fingers to George's shaking forearm.

“What do you want me to do!” Lord George begged as a guilty and terrified servant.

“Tell me how to find him!” Fernando requested, in Gaelic, a tongue the secretly Irish drug dealer and IRA supporter did understand, presenting him with a picture of Simon Williams as himself and his ‘missing from production’ female persona.

“You're asking a lot,” Lord George said. “I don't think I can deliver on that,” he said, and warned. “And even if you do find him, or ‘her’, there's nothing anyone, including you, can do. I DO have a right to survive!”

“Fair enough. Then where I can find her,” Fernando continued, placing in front of him a picture of someone more familiar to his world. “Electra, Gloria or whoever she really is. Who is about to become...nothing, or someone you or I don't recognize if you don't---

“---What do you want me to do?” Lord George interjected, as if a ‘family first, second and last’ father presented with a picture of his missing daughter about to be sold into sex slavery, or worse. “Where is Electra??” he asked, in IRA- fueled Gaelic.

“With Billie or Simon, I think. And still hope,” Fernando replied in kind with the best brough his Hispanic throat could come up with. “What I, we, need you to do is...” Fernando slipped an envelope under a coaster, and pushed it over to a frantic, confused and, yes, terrified Lord George. With that, Fernando got onto his feet as the Old Fart preacher he came in as, stating for all to hear, “My congregation appreciates a man like you who can and will convert several ‘special’ boys into real men. And with the Lord's speed.”

Fernando walked out of the tavern, conveying blessings and thanks to the peelers, and a business card to the head bouncer with a false address and phone number to call. A diversion which would take them to an alley where, presumably, boys were being taught by men the benefits of keeping affections within one's own gender. To keep the world safe from...diversity. Yes, the hombre who said that a Revolutionary should be honest was buying his own bullshit. As he would have to sell a lot more of it to save a self-deceiving world from itself before it was too late.

CHAPTER 18

“You’ve been promoted!” Ed Cubana said to his latest employee. “A central key player in our new team. Given the magic elixir of the gods that will make any mortal better than she, he, or whatever you now want to call yourself, better, smarter and more clever than you ever were.”

“But...wiser?” chronically balding peach-fuzzed Simon Williams replied, clad in a handsome man’s suit, with a full head of transplanted hair and a tastefully bearded face which, for reasons he didn’t know, had a more chiseled chin, smaller nose and less sloped forehead than what he had when he fell asleep a day, or maybe week, or perhaps month ago. “Stronger with these arms,” he noted of the limbs which were had an extra layer of what he felt was muscles and not thickened skin. “But, still a prisoner,” he continued, feeling the bracelet on his ankle, this time chained to a desk. “In a lab that isn’t my own,” he added, looking around at the over-supplied state of the art equipment in the windowless room illuminated so brightly and perfectly with wall to wall fluorescent bulbs that one could not differentiate between light and shadow.

“From which, with our funding, and the elixir of the gods we’ve been giving you, you were able to find cures for five new diseases, in as many days!” Cubana pointed out, with the boldness of Prometheus and the confidence of Zeus, placing the manuscripts ready for publication in front of Williams, all post dated with regard to their submissions. “Cancer. Cystic fibrosis. Macular degeneration. Heart disease. And, yes, even that incurable of incurable afflictions which allows for legal assisted suicide in five states and three provinces, ALS and Huntington’s Chorea. Patented cures which will finally make the right people rich, powerful and influential, once released after the diseases have been...amplified. And given to enough expendable people of course.”

“But what about the affliction of cruelty, and...self destructive arrogance which makes us the center of the universe rather than its servant?” Williams answered, trying to remember what his real voice once sounded like while he was himself. A humble, hardworking and careful scientist who never let the impulse to be first to press push him to send out data before it was ready, or effectively tested. And someone now who...felt answers to unanswerable questions pop into his head, spoken to him by voices he didn’t recognize, like or, in his rare human moments, trust. “There’s something very wrong with what you, or I, am doing here,” he said. “And something I still am trying to figure out,” he said looking towards the floor.

“Ah! Like how to break out of that ankle bracelet and, as the remote shocker is being serviced this morning due to ‘someone’ having inactivated it last night, chain!” Cubana pushed out with a chuckle. “Like so many of my ancestors from Africa were given as ‘gifts’ when they were offered non-paying employment and the opportunity to experience ‘mastery in servitude’ on the slave ships going to...”

“...Countries where people had White skin,” I know.

“But do not realize, my soon to be dark skinned friend. Not yet,” Cubana said, placing his arm in comradely manner around Williams’ somehow empowered shoulders. “It is time to put those on the bottom back on top, with our other non-white skinned comrades, who represent a fifth of the world’s population, and maybe one fiftieth of the pages in your world history books.”

“The Chinese, of course,” Williams countered, after which he spouted out a five minute summary of history from that region of the world which highlighted everything of significance its innovators did to put themselves on top of the world, and the key things the rulers of that vast, ignored by most Westerners, region did to place them on the bottom of the world pyramid in the 19th and most of the 20th century. “Then there were the Japanese, who used Chinese for biological weapons experimentation.”

“Who will be the first to be...challenged with new diseases,” Cubana said. “Along with Americans AND Canadians who imported slave ‘chink’ labor to build the railroad, then excluded immigration from China for anyone who wanted to come over to ‘the land of the free’ to use it.”

“You shouldn’t punish the grandsons and daughters for their grandparents, or great grandparents...moral miscalculations and inaccurate spiritual perspectives,” Williams countered as he tried to pull the chain off his ankle bracelet. “Or punish ME by making me become one of...you. Someone who you cured of my cancer so I could make you rich curing selective people of cancers that you’ll be giving to everyone,” he continued, recalling the brain scans that was done five ‘black outs’ ago, which Williams verified with black, white and Asian workers as being real. Brain scans which showed increased mass in his cerebral cortex. More neurons which were now, perhaps crashing upon his very mortal skull, giving him headaches and perceptions seen, felt and smelled which he knew were not real.

“I’m not feeling so good now,” Williams said as he held his aching head in his outstretched sweat soaked hand. “And can’t come up with a cure for myself!”

“I am sure you can come up with one,” Ed said. “You were the smartest White mortal we could find. And not afflicted with hormones that real women have which made them bad candidates for Instant Einstein. But, Electra will be comfortable, and safe, as long as you work with us. As one of us. A white male”

“And Ronnie Heinrick?” Williams asked, with the vulnerability and heart worthy of Billie, the woman inside of him who he missed, and desperately needed to connect to again.

“Expendable white flesh,” Ed noted. “And, with some cosmetic work, and perhaps a new uterus, a beautiful woman who can be sold into the ‘pleasure industry’. Who, I know first-hand,” he continued with a shit eating grin. “Could give any man a very pleasurable experience once stripped down to her bare skin, shaking bones, lustfully quivering lips and--”

Before Cubana could describe the apparently ‘new’ aspect of his relationship with his former ‘mastress’, William’s grabbed hold of his throat, pushing the sadistic toxic remarks about his, yes, endangered beloved, back into the Black behemoth’s throat. Wanting nothing more than to see Cabina suffer the way he made others suffer. And at or just before the time of ‘Professor Commissar Lord’s Ed’s’ demise, tearing his heart out. And poking his eyes out. Tasting his flesh and enjoying it. Most particularly because, for a time during his captivity, Williams considered Ed a good friend, and trusted comrade. And, as the voices in Williams’ head now said, this time with an accent from his beloved father and always understanding mother, ‘what gives you a bigger smile than seeing a good friend suffer because of what you did to him?’ ‘What tastes better than to eat the heart of someone who once dedicated it to you?’

The voices got louder and louder, more congratulatory than ever Cubana gasped for breath, turning into, as Williams perceived it, a pale white ghost whose head would be placed on his desk as a paperweight. Or wrapped around the chain of the ankle bracelet which, miraculously, was now free of Williams’ empowered body. For the first time ever, the mild mannered scientist whose temperament made dull out disease poster men Clark Kent of the old Superman series he grew up with seem like a cocaine infused Attila the Hun, charging the gates of Rome at full gallop. Until Williams heard another voice. That of a woman he painfully recognized.

“That’s enough!” Ursala Perez said to Williams as she touched his shoulder. Initiating something inside of Williams which not only disempowered his ability to send once comrade from the days when Williams was working with Ronnie Heinrick and now expendable asset Ed Cubana into the afterlife. But which made him feel...out of control of his brain. His ability to remember what he was just thinking the moment before vanished. His ability to recall Ursala’s last name, or even his own, seemed to vanish in a cloud of ‘fluff’, much like losing consciousness when falling asleep. “This will help you,” he heard from Ursala as he felt a needle go into his blood covered arm.

“And this will help the rest of us,” Williams heard from another voice. Looking behind him, he recognized, somehow, Rick Mansino, who slapped the ankle bracelet onto Cubana’s wrist, then tying the chain around his thick neck, which had recovered the ability to move air between his blood soaked oversized, now distorted, nostrils and his lungs. “Now!” Mansino calmly said to Cubana. “We’re getting Electra and Ronnie out of here.”

“And anyone else who you consider expendable,” Williams heard from a good looking Mexican gentlemen who, as Billie, would be a prime candidate to go out to dinner with and, perhaps if one is experimental, a hotel room afterwards.

“And we’re getting out of here every scientific weapon and ‘miracle’ that the world, or we, aren’t ready for also,” Williams heard, as he felt more like himself, from Ursala. Who he finally recognized with regard to his past experiences with and for her. But who seemed different now. All grew up. Determined. Confident. Effectively smart. And,

tragically, less likable.

CHAPTER 19

The news programs, operating with consent of the authorities and those that were allowed, for whatever reasons, to still exist as 'alternative' outlets for facts, fiction and fantasy, put COVID and related health stories as the third story on their list for the next week, treating the public to the usual fare of about shootings, stabbings and attempts to deal with the 'new' crisis of dead bodies of unidentified First Nations kids at well established residential schools. The week after reported numbers of cases which were encouraging, civil politicians in each province and city trying to outdo each other by being the first to legislate the next stage of re-opening. The week afterwards focused on looting in stores and grass roots protests against companies that made an economic killing with the pandemic. The ones that could be identified anyway.

There were of course still a small number of people on top, and a lot more people on the bottom, the latter allowed to continue struggling day to day with just enough food, shelter and extras to be hungry rather than starved. Those masses of people who had grown fatter, more used to drinking and progressively unwilling to actually get off their asses and go to work somewhere other than to their own home computer had undergone changes which sociologists would speculate about at university faculty lunch rooms and tv psychologists would write about in books that would be owned more than really read. But, it was business back to normal. Especially for Lord George, who finally decided to marry the woman who was now her favorite peeler. Whose clothing purging performances on stage at Aspasia's Emporium were both her fantasy, and his.

"You know what she's telling you with that veil which she's flipping around three times like that, with that naval flag sailor routine," George's female guest at his observation table in the back of the room said to him.

"That she wants the wedding to be at three bells, on Saturday," he answered with voice that fit well into his smiling lips. "With..." he added, flipping the specifics regarding the answer with five circles with a red paper umbrella two dashes with a blue one. "All five of her grandkids there, whether they want to come or not."

"I didn't know Ronnie Heinrick had progeny who still called her 'Grandma'," Gloria said.

"She didn't either, until I found her adopted daughter, and estranged son," he noted with an accomplished smile.

"Like you found my kids, and straightened out all of my legal problems so they could live with me and not their psycho thinks she is more caring than I ever could be aunt," Gloria said. "For which I do want to pay you," she said as she dug deep into her purse and pulled out a wad of money.

"Not like that," he said of the cash that filtered Gloria's way when she was becoming Electra, the film promoter.

“Then in trade,” Gloria said, adopting an Electra accent. “I can wangle a lot more money out of clients by dancing on stage than Ronnie Heinrick can. And without taking anyone upstairs either.”

“Something that you outgrew and which, Ronnie, is growing into,” George said as he fondled the engagement ring on his finger, noting that his betrothed was still wearing hers as she turned the dance into something directed to the clients rather than him. “And NO dancer in any of the establishments I run, or front, goes upstairs with anyone, unless there is real chemistry between them. Or biochemistry.”

“Which there was, and still is, between me and Simon Williams,” Gloria said, looking at the ring on her engagement finger. With an engraving of a molecule on it. One which perhaps was a magical elixir in Williams’ mind, or one he was working on which would, if given in the right doses and the right people, bring enlightenment, empowerment and liberation to those who needed it most. “With you WILL be present for as the best man for bringing us together.”

“Sure,” George said as a friend rather than a Lord. “But who will be wearing the bridal gown and who will be wearing the tux?”

“We’re...still deciding that,” Gloria said. “But as for your outfit, we will ask, and require that..”

“I wear anything I want!” George blasted back. “As the best MAN! Who has a reputation to maintain.”

“Hey, I was just kidding George,” Gloria said to her relieved boss. “Or maybe not, Georgie?” she continued with a lisp, that terrified him. Until she kissed him on the cheek, as a real woman relates her approval and connection to a real man.

“OK then,” George said. “But...” he continued, as from the corner of his eye he felt Ronnie trying to signal something to him. With flag signals that pointed to her belly. “Ah...I didn’t know she was...” he gasped.

“Pregnant, yes,” Gloria said. “And by the happy glow in her eye, and the glowing aura around her forehead, pregnant with your child.”

“Progeny,” he said. “Who, I hope her surrogate aunt Ursala and uncle Richard won’t turn her into a research scientist. And wetback, gender fluid Commie Mexican Pancho Villa wannabe Godpapa Fernando doesn’t turn into....” George hesitated.

“...Into a what?” Gloria pressed, waiting for yet another politically incorrect and offensive

“Someone different that I am, or used to be anyway, and won’t stand anyone else

becoming!” ex-Lord George asserted. “And what she used to be,” he said regarding a smiling, laughing and Alive for the first time in her life Ronnie Heinrick finishing her act. then disappearing into the manufactured fog covering the black backdrop of the stage. “And if either of us become what we were before, you have the right to...”

“Kill you, or her?” Gloria asked.

Lord George took in a deep breath and reflected the proposition. “Yes, if we become destructive to the Cause, whatever that Cause has become now, please kill us, and us only!” he said. “But hire a intelligent hitmen to do it.”

“Hitmen like...who?” Gloria inquired.

“Who go by Latin names, such as a hearty ones that went by the names of Yersina Pesties, Rinderpest and Bacillus Anthracis.”

“Bacteria and viruses?” Gloria replied.

“They’re smarter than us, and, I suppose, have a right to populate the planet also,” he chuckled. “Especially after we’ve over populated, over polluted and over dominated it as a very destructive species that, maybe had to be culled, or reminded of our place, you know.”

“Yes, I do...now,” Gloria said, feeling consciousness of something bigger than herself growing even more inside of her heart, mind and...if Simon William’s still intact penis still ejected sperm, womb. A hopeful thought for an age in which so much could go wrong, and so much more had to be made to go...Right.