

FAMILY FRIENDS, FIENDS AND FABRICATORS

By

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## CHAPTER 1

Catherine, now Katerina, Papadopolis gazed at the statute of Klause Ranselhoff in front of the university that bore his name. The stone likeness of the little known 19<sup>th</sup> century Revolutionary yet again came to life. He was in the habit of speaking to the head of the drama, music and performing arts department in a mixture of German and Greek. The former language was one which Katerina learned to absorb the original writings of Goethe, Einstein and Marx. Greek was inflicted on the 21<sup>st</sup> century Revolutionary by her ultra-conservative second generation Hellenic ‘parental units’ who would only tolerate aspirations of their daughters if they involved becoming responsible housewives, statue-loving lawyers, by the numbers teachers or non-musical doctors. Or, of course, restaurant owners who cooked dinners in Manhattan for the Jews who made the jokes, the Italians who did the singing or the Irish who wrote plays that kept the customers coming in before of after the shows.

Normally, the stone statue of, ‘Uncle Klaus’, the German freethinker who had fled Europe in 1848 after the most noble, intelligently designed and kindest revolution in European OR American history against oppressive kings and capitalists had failed, started off the conversation with Katerina. But this time, he remained silent, seeming to be more contemplative than expressively conversational.

“So, you’re recalling past times in Texas where you Germans were the only Palefaces who the Comanches liked and respected because you never went back on your word with them?” inquired the forty year old Renaissance woman with crow’s feet around her tired eyes. Her prematurely grey hair still flowed down her back, its shape varying according to wind, rain and humidity rather than any predesignated style. “Or the days when you refused to join the Confederacy because along with the freedom they promised for poor whites oppressed by Northern invaders, the ‘Rebel laws’ still allowed slavery?” she continued feeling a cold wind from Canada blowing through her thin scarf and weather-beaten jean jacket. The latter still bore the ‘I Love New York’ button she kept from her life downstate in New York City which had new meaning after she ‘cashed out’ and moved her focus, and career building vocations to perhaps more learned and certainly less pretentious Upstate New York. “Or is it just because it’s October?” she went on the the statue of the old fart revolutionary, came to life because of her. Between her and the likeness of Uncle Klause appeared multicolored leaves which had decided to liberate themselves from the trees. She noting the sombre warm grey sky above her that sheltered the citizens below it from extremes in hot and cold weather when it was bright ‘happy’ hue of cloudless blue. “It is October she noted. :A month where things change and disruptions happen, historically anyway,” added the middle aged woman who had not an ounce of fat on her body due to hyper-exercising the muscle between her ears far more than the musculature below her thin skinned neck. “Maybe, Uncle Klause, with that year round defiant and somehow happy smile go share with whoever is open to feel it, you’re recalling ‘some ole good times there that ain’t fergotten’?” she sang with a voice more enthusiastic than melodic to the tune of ‘Dixie’ in her best German.

This time, 'Uncle Klaus', one of the few survivors of the Nueces River Massacre inflicted on anti-slavery and Pacifist German immigrants by Confederates who had been their best buds before the 'War of Northern Aggression' for refusing to join the Rebel Army, provided no answer or commentary to Katerina. Katerina recalled his gut wrenching diary explaining why and how, out of moral and political necessity, Klaus Ranselhoff after his miraculous escape from the grey-coated Confederate firing squad, joined the Union Army as a doctor rather than a weapon bearing soldier. Treating Johnny Rebs with just as much commitment as Billy Yanks during and after the War. Converting a plethora of brainwashed soldiers into intellectual warriors dedicated to the cause of Pacifism.

A burst of wind turned Katerina's eyeline to a window on the second floor of the most austere and heavily walled structure on campus. The clock on top of the Student Union Building hit noon, striking out 'Hafa Nahela' rather than the first eight notes of Beethoven's fifth symphony. She recalled how that alteration in musical selection was the result of the Jewish Students Society and their rich American born parents convincing the money-hungry University Administrators that because Beethoven was German, he was and therefore a Nazi. A month before that, the 'get motivated here!' Flight of the Valkurie music from opera composer Wagner was removed from the clock tower loud speaker, as it was considered 'an emotional trigger' that 'disrupted' young 'sensitive' millennials with its intensity and call to sacrifice for a cause bigger than them. But, such was inevitable since the students' enabling parents paid good money for their kids to be in an environment where they were spared exposure to points of view that weren't their own. And the 'hardship' of having to work for their accomplishments. God, or rather Goddess permitting, no American kid should be oppressively 'challenged' into leaving his, her or their comfort zones. And as anyone with any 21<sup>st</sup> century 'enlightened sense' knew, the purpose for contemporary education was to provide the snowflakes with the opportunity to have 'stressless self-love infused explorations'. And, of course, never to be punished for slacking off in their studies by being inflicted with a grade lower than a B.

After yet another failed attempt to figure out core reason why 95 percent of her students were a severe disappointment to most of the older ones, and to themselves. Katerina's eyes were directed to a plaque being removed from the entrance to the Student Union building to the cheers of sign holding students. 'What does not kill me makes me stronger' it read. Such was, of course, interpreted as another Fascist slogan from a philosopher who (as apparently no one anyone in the 'demonstration' cared to investigate) had lived long before Hitler and was kinder to animals and people than any WOK 'justice fighter' now. "Yeah, I know," Katerina said to Uncle Klaus, feeling his anger and sadness. "Soon they'll take down your statue because you're male, white and, worse, assertively open to working hard and being open to all kinds of thinking so that the Truth can emerge and be implemented."

"Yes," Klaus seemed to say to Katerina, in five languages she was fluent in, and several more she didn't recognize. "But it's your turn to be a misunderstood and effective dinosaur," the statue of the old man said to the still, in ways that mattered anyway, young woman.

With that, still (by some miracle) Professor Katerina went on her appointed rounds, entering the administration building whose stones echoed thoughts, aspirations and presence of past scholars, then heading up the stairs as the sound of her footsteps echoed against the walls.

Upon entering the meeting room, Katerina's eyes were drawn to the only chair left, In front of it lay a stack of documents awaiting her perusal. The folder encompassing it bore the Ranselhoff University seal in bold, eye-opening blue and yellow calligraphy. Her attention though was pulled into several black holes which absorbed and extinguished light, vitality and..humor, that most hard earned accomplishments of the human soul. Indeed, the cloud of dull out disease permeated the air, its most toxic precipitation falling on the faces of the male faculty who, more than ever, were procedural, lifeless, non-expressive, anti-humor and simplistic. Old and deceased men, and women, in spirit long before their time. Comfortable in their coffins, as emotionally sterile as they were spotlessly clean, not knowing the difference between sterile and clean. An affliction which reminded Katrina of who she had been before aspiring to taking on her present position a faculty member in the drama, music and performing arts Departments.

Cold laser beams of condescension and anger came from all of the heads of the departments sitting comfortably in their leather chairs. All except for Paul Alberghetti, Dean of Medicine, who rise to his feet when Katerina dared to enter the room. His big, and sincere, smile fit well inside of his still brown beard, both of which were contrasted in hue and expression by his pressed white lab coat. He bellowed out a hearty 'welcome' to Katerina in his father's native Italian, his mother's Irish Gaelic and finally in the most boring and least expressive language spoken at the University, Middle America English. Not caring about the rolling eyebrows and disapproving sighs of his learned, mostly unilingual, colleagues.

"So, now, we can finally proceed to the business at hand...and paw," a small framed, weak in everything except intellect white haired, frail old man at the head of the table said to an audience who had overgrown puns, and, truth be told, wanted the University President retired ASAP, to put the old man out of their misery. Katerina took her place, feeling half of the eyes of her fellow department heads looking at her with condescension and the other half with resentment. "As you all know, our financial luxury liner Queen Mary has been now deemed the Titanic, and we're about to hit an iceberg unless we do some new structural organization with the crew." President T. Robert Williams said with a lingering twang of North Carolinian diction in his high pitched voice, pushing his left upper lip upward thinking it to be a joke, getting laughter from its expression only from himself.

"Yeah," dull out disease, made even worse after the students and faculty spent more time with their computers than with other biological beings, four or two legged," Katerina thought, but did not say.

“As we all know, by bets we lost, at the bar or at home on Saturday afternoon, our first place Panthers on the football field and basketball court came in dead last this year, rolling on the floor with their exposed bellies while every other team in the division walked all over us,” Williams related, still thinking himself to be witty, to which Katerina emitted a polite chuckle through a cordial smile for the old school Professor who was on the verge of being ‘retired’ back to his Dixie farm by younger Northerners who considered a Southern accent to be a sign of naïve ignorance. Paul did the same. “Which resulted in less attendance at the games, less sponsorship by sporting goods companies and a deficit of 30 percent in our operating budget,” the Dixie-born and raised Professor-Farmer said in the manner of a Boston banker. “And as you can see by the endowment contributions being down, on page 22, section 3a,” he continued, turning the pages on the copy on the spread sheet in front of him. “We are, as my grandpappy in Georgia would say, stuck in a much of deep red cow dropping,” he said, realizing that that his restraining from profanity and the reference to ‘red’ being as much of an economic as a Bolshevik reference went unnoticed.

“Indeed,” Russell O’Leary, Baltimore born head of the economics and business administration schools added with an upturned chin and English accent he still maintained after doing one semester of training at Oxford long ago, when he had a full head of hair and a brief stint of knowing that humility is a pre-requisite for having wisdom. “Due to inflation, escalating overhead expenses, diminishing applications from foreign students,” he pontificated. “And the state mandate to lower the quota for allowing lucrative investments from alumni in exchange for extra consideration for their substandard progeny to enter the undergraduate and graduate divisions.”

“You mean the rich, famous and to their minds anyway blameless Alumni to buy their dumb, lazy and entitled kids a slot here,” Paul offered, politely. “We need medical students who will dedicated doctors,” he said with conviction. “To cure diseases of the body.”

“And maladies of the soul,” Katerina offered.

“Pathologies like being evil, selfish and self-serving?” offered Carl Edelstein, the once rich Professor of Philosophy and Ethics and now EX-head of Theological studies who was now living check to check, after his spending his first fortune to cure his wife of cancer and losing his brother to a variant of ALS which the neurologists were still trying to find a new name for. “Don’t you think, Doctor Alberghetti, that Hippocrates would be ashamed of doctors today who give lip service to the Oath to serve everyone in need they say but do not take seriously? And who THINK they are God, but can’t come up with medical miracles, even when they’re well paid to do so? Because...”

“Most of the sea-unworthy crew are still men, and don’t listen the few women who are in the research labs,” threw in Suzzane DeFoe, head of Gender and Diversity Studies, as tired of the ex-Navy Captain putting nautical metaphors into every speech as he was indignant about women being allowed into the Naval Service at sea. She sported an outfit which from head to toe was from the men’s section, the only feature about her that was

womanly was her round chin, tapered eyebrows and ‘bitchy’ high pitched voice that penetrated though without invitation into anyone’s ears “When was the last time, other than Marie Curie of course, a WOMAN got a Noble Prize for Research and making it into the HISstory books? Very few! And NO trans women in this century or the last one not even being nominated for any Nobel Prize.”

“‘Cause there weren’t no trans women anywhere in the last century and a tiny percentage in this one!” Mike ‘don’t dare call me Michael or I’ll deck you’ Pickering, the head of Physical Training Studies slurred out of his fat lips and double chin, his condescending words flowing out over his oversized Bubba belly. “Problem with this place is that there ain’t enough alumni who graduated from here who got high payin’ jobs and reputations in high places ta advertise where they got their learnin’ and citizen papers.”

“Including your non-paying super star athletes with scholarships who didn’t make it into the NBA or NFL,” Suzzane reminded the ex- Green Bay Packer line backer who was retired from the big leagues after a injury to the knee, and truth be told, head, after his second game. “Because—”

“---We didn’t give them and the other students here, an education of the Soul, the creative Soul, that is,” Katerina offered, feeling more blame for the current economic situation as anyone else in the room. Making the mistake of letting everyone else see that in her face and downturned eyes.

“You mean the effective Souls?” Paul Alberghetti countered. “Who integrate well into society as it is, rather than trying to re-design it.”

“And economically sustainable souls,” Milton Freeman disciple John O’Leary, the spitting image of President Williams as a young man, added as an economist who never believed the Cree expression that Palefaces are ‘those who have gone mad in the search for money’. “Who know how to make money, for themselves, and us.”

“And moral ones, who aren’t all about themselves,” Professor Edelstein threw on the fire about to set Katerina’s soul and department into ashes, aiming the flames directly into Katrina’s eyes “OR their ‘artistically inspired’ Visions about how to change people and the world. Turning out starving artists and deluded revolutionaries who are more ‘innovative’ than popular, successful or, as is the scoreboard now for all of us in this God FORSAKEN world, rich.”

Katrina felt a tense, accusational silence coming at her from everyone, including Paul. In desperation, she looked towards an elder, a mentor, and a friend. “What do we do now?” she said, silently, to the statue of Ranselhoff, who was busy addressing young women bearing signs demanding a new name for the university, Harriet Tubman U, the first choice this week. President Williams interrupted her silent discourse with a clearing of his hopefully not cancerous throat.

“So,” Katrina said to the congregation. “We have to downsize somewhere, and still remain a place of learning and innovation, instead of just being a job training school” she continued, envisioning what would happen in her department was the first on the chopping block.

Paul offered a suggestion, as if reading everyone else’s mind, and perhaps heart. “Maybe a few of your social and creative experiments can be modified, financially that is.”

Katerina recalled the most recent experiment that disrupted, according to some, and enhanced, according to others, the lives of students attending the voluntary ‘independent study and inner exploration’ course in her department. One in which she had devised as a prelude to expand it outside of the University to High School for younger people and ‘Mastery’ sessions for adults who had halted their institutionalized training/education. The ‘step inside another person’s life’ program which went beyond traditional method acting course and boys having baby dolls strapped to their chest so they could experience what their pregnant girlfriends would be in for if they got knocked up.

After assessing what characters and people the enrolling students hated most or didn’t want to be around, Katerina would blindfold them, then have them be dressed as the personas they hated, or were afraid to become, and set them out into a group of other volunteers, requiring them to do something hard as someone else before they were allowed to be released from being that other person. Many of the volunteers were offspring of Katerina’s faculty members. With the promise, mostly from the desperate parents, that stardom and affiliation would await them with Katrina’s special training techniques and contacts with ‘people of power and influence’ in the Big Crab Apple.

O’Leary’s daughter, Ashley, became a Mall Brat who was more obsessed with fashion and popularity than taking care of anyone else, most notably her infirmed grandmother and cancer-ridden mother. Never once did Ashley tend to her mother’s needs at the hospital or her grandmother’s request to visit her for more than 20 seconds at the nursing home where she eventually died of despair and neglect. As ‘Auntie Edna’, Ashley’s long blonde hair was pinned to a short curly white wig, appended by a big, ‘so yesterday’ dress, and a bag tied between her legs which was filled with apple juice that did smell like (or perhaps was) urine that spilled out between her legs. Ashley was required to be “Auntie Edna’ till she got all of the other volunteers to hug her. Which she eventually did.

Katerina looked at O’Leary’s angry eyes, recalling that when Ashley passed the course with flying colors, she abandoned the aspiration to become a supermodel, rich economist or wife to a rich business mogul and switched her major to Nursing, spending her life afterwards as a caretaker for ailing elderly people at the end of lives for shit wages....And being ok with smelling like a toilet at the end of a hard day of working. A success according to everyone except Ashley’s father.

Coach Pickering was the next parent to deal with. After ‘Iron Mike’s’ son white, male and super macho son Curtis (his star quarterback) had become a member of a gang that

beat up non-white people as well as fags, trannies and trans 'misfits' of any color, he was arrested. The judge offered the finally convicted kid the option of going jail for a decade, the Army for two years, or a semester with 'Soul Doctor Katerina'. Curtis' assigned task to graduate from HER 'jail' was to be clad as a First Nations woman, with heels, make up and long black hair on his head with nothing on his normally hairy face and body under his neck, required to have everyone in the group dance with him, including Auntie Edna. After finishing and being offered the chance to shed the female make-over exteriors and become a free man again, Curtis lingered at the sight of himself as a woman, and decided to be one full time. His macho Dad didn't appreciate his becoming a trans woman, and nearly killed the lad, but his mother did acknowledge Curtis' real persona as Christine. Of course Coach Iron Mike Pickering blamed the losses on the gridiron on Curtis' absence from the field, and being 'distracted' by the 'death' of his son and his wife's departure.

Professor Edelstein's son Allan was whiz-geek at mathematics and theoretical physics, who as a kid, held a view that science could explain all reality and save humanity from the hardships of such, without the help of any Deity people imagined to be real. The germaphobe was a shy lad, who was so mechanically declined that in shop class he hammered more nails into his fingers or those still remaining on his instructors' hands, than into the wood he intended them to go into. He lacked assertion in real life too, choosing brains to balls as a way to solve any problem. His assignment in assertiveness training involved his father sending him to 'Katerina school', where Allan was assigned to be Socrates having to YELL reason, compassion and logic into volunteers who were told to be Fascists, assigned the task of beating up Socrates verbally and, without drawing any blood or using gut aching fists, physically. The application of brains AND balls, and putting fear of harm to his own self, led Allan to become confident, bold and...religious. After successfully taking a course in shop class for high schooler who never wanted to graduate, Allan declined the scholarship at MIT to become an astro-physicist. Allan decided to become a carpenter. A defender of the weak Missionary It landed him in third world 'shitholes' places where there was no shortage of houses to reconstruct and lack of Faith, returning home with one and half legs after standing up to the wrong bad guys, and volunteering to go back again to the same shitholes. Something his father pleaded him not to do, since no Edelson for 3 generations didn't have a doctorate in SOMETHING.

Suzzane's young girlfriend, Olga, had turned into a lesbian, and potential wife for the head of the Gender Studies department in her early teens, after being gang-raped by her boyfriend, uncle and brother. After being cast as a woman who stands up to her male assailants and finds love with the right man in a play Katerina wrote for her, Olga figured out that just because someone has a penis, that does not make him the devil. Olga's growing her hair out again, and choosing to love women between the ears but not between the legs didn't please Suzzane, who had her own issues with being pushed into being a feminist, lesbian and all-around bitter soul.

Katerina's reminding her fellow ivy tower eggheads about the positive things that happened when she, through her comprehensive 'life transformation art classes' were halted by each parent. With a promise to 'deal with those events in private' Or maybe



not so private. In any case, blame was going around and, Katerina being Katerina, it had to end somewhere. “OK,” she finally told all of the faculty members, and their still standing Boss. “The first cut in the budget will be my salary. ALL of it.”

“And the royalties you are getting from the books you’re writing, and films you made, which are bringing in a whole lot of money?” Suzzane challenged.

“Probably more than she told any of you, or me,” Iron Mike added.

“Or any positions she held when working in other departments,” O’Leary threw in, after which she looked to Paul. “Which was how much, Doctor Alberghetti?”

Paul took in a deep breath, then looked and into Katerina. He predicated his thoughts on the matter with, “Hard working colleague to brilliant colleague confidentiality---”

“----And who is the hard working researcher doc and who was the brilliant one?”

O’Leary interjected to Paul, then Katerina. He fell back in his chair, stroking his chin, demanding an answer before any more proceedings would happen. As did everyone else, including President Williams and, with eyes in the back of his now rotten-egg covered stone head, Professor Emeritus Ranselhoff.

Katerina pulled back her lips, recalling the days when she had been a researcher at the medical school working her way up the ladder with primal passion and an abundance of luck when proving her biological theories correct at the lab bench. Then the celebrated ‘blue’ period where she realized that she was as dead in spirit as the dull out virus afflicted faculty, and students. Unable to find a rodent model for that disease or cure for it using anything in the lab, on the liquor store shelves, under the sheets with men OR women or with the ‘magic potions’ distributed by Pharm Reps on the streets or in the drug stores. But, as all lecturers who do more than just read the overhead knew, or should know, Katerina Papadopolis, Ph.D., M.D., and H.B.A.R.P. (human being, aspiring Renaissance person) had to provide one line summary of the numerous things she had done when at the medical school in her 20s, in limbo in her thirties, and now in her early forties. And, not to be forgotten, what she had done in life and what life had done to her before hitting the big two O.

“We do what we have to, are Called to and want to. Sometimes all at the same time, on a good day, anyway,” her one size maybe fits all reply to the numerous accusations thrown at her. Leaving everyone in the chamber, room and/or coffin to decide for themselves what that meant. And realizing that she now had to find another way to feed own belly, while at the same time still trying and needing to feed others’ minds and souls.

## CHAPTER 2

Paul Alberghetti gazed at the return address on the standard sized-letter on his super-sized desk in his unofficial pint-sized office at 'The' Ranselhoff Medical School. He allowed his glance to be caught by a gold framed photo of a middle aged tastefully overweight blonde woman with an 80s shoulder length 'big bob' and undersized 'Betty Crocker' blue eyes. The woman's face was caked with make up, her hand on her chin displaying a ring on the fourth digit and a loving smile that pulled you into her and would never let you go. "So, Laura," the Dean of Medicine said to his first wife, who he married to while when he was merely 'Mister' Alberghetti. "Good news from the Medical Association this time about more funding we need and awards for excellence they think we deserve?" The photograph of Laura gave him no answer.

Paul could hear the trumpets and kazoos circulating around his ears pull his attention to the next framed photograph, displaying a thin Eurasian woman with long black hair and a naturally beautiful profound face without an ounce of 'happy' in it. "And you, Dannielle," Paul asked, showing his (in his mind anyway) second wife the second latter from the National Institute of Health, as he leaned back on the surplus asset easy chair he had pilfered from the warehouse before another faculty member's kid, or mistress, could get a hold of the four hundred dollar item for twenty bucks. "Bad news about cuts in funding from D.C., LosT Angeles or Singapore that will make our job of finding affordable cures for expensive diseases harder, but, hmm...maybe more interesting?" The mother of his second set of potential (but mostly disappointing) geniuses provided no reply in elegant Hong Kong-Oxfordian English or melodic Cantonese. "Ask her," Dennielle seemed to say with a finger that pointed to her left, and another photograph and another letter, unopened, this one from the Ethics division of the Medical association.

"So," Doctor Paul (as he requested to be called, but seldom was addressed as such) asked the woman in a plain white lab coat which didn't match her face, intense fire in her defiant eyes, authentic 'these were really worn at Woodstock' jeans and weather worn cowboy boots with scuff marks made by real horses rather than pedals on urban pick up trucks or SUVs. "Even more restrictions on what we are allowed to do in the research lab, treatment rooms and O.R.?"

"And restrictions of what and who we should be with our patients and fellow 'professionals'" Paul heard from a voice behind him, audible by his biological ears all too clearly. The third 'experiment in love, lust and companionship' in the photograph materialized behind Paul and approached him. Katerina snatched the envelope out of his sweaty finger, opened it and placed it in front of Paul's life-tired eyes.

Katerina laughed, then read the words that horrified Paul. "Big brother and sister are officially reprimanded you for having 'unprofessional, boisterous, inappropriately expressive and jarring emotionally disturbing behavior to your patients, students, the certification officers at the Medical Association office and the NIH funders from Washington at their last sight visit here'. Meaning that you were...being openly honest, common sense caring and overly expressive with your heart as well as expansive with

your brain. Doing medicine and research that is practical and affordable instead of what the non-elected 'experts' say is proper and state of the art. And doing it with people you know and trust instead of the book-smart but real-life dumb lemmings who are officially qualified and licenced."

"Which got you thrown out of the Association, and the Biomedical Research department," Paul said turning to the most innovative and therefore unpopular and dangerous faculty member of the Research division he rose up in. Which Katerina left ten long years ago. Who was ridiculed for her insistence on diverting her research into diagnosing and curing Dull Out Disease, an affliction where the victims become lifeless, boring, humourless, religiously expressionless, pleasantly passive and therefore controllable by those above them. Which Katerina insisted was the most insidious and contagious soul (and eventually) mind and body killing disease in North America. Which led her to being exiled out of academia for 4 dark years before emerging into and becoming head of the Drama, Fine Arts and Music department across the campus.

The mirrored reflection of a plastic paneling in the North Wall of his windowless secret hideout office inflicted on Paul a real time, real life picture of himself as a rebellious neohippie youth who had indeed become 'a suit', literary and figuratively. But there were other issues other than why and how he had aged 30 years since the 'required by mutual necessity' split with Katerina, the latter having become...somehow 20 years younger, in the ways that mattered anyway. The first issue that came to mind to the renegade researcher turned administrative dean was not how his third and most interesting 'one and only soulmate' Katerina had found him, but why?

"I just wanted to thank you for your understanding, support and honesty in the 'too academically cool to sweat' hot box," Katrina said by way of explanation for the meeting of the faculty heads in the President's board room," reading Paul's real agenda. "And wanted to give you...this," she continued, reaching into her knapsack which reeked of horse sweat as much as she did and handing him a paperback book.

Paul put his 600 dollar glasses on to read the cover of the weather-beaten soft cover volume with a two dollar price tag on it. "The World as I see it," he said. "by Albert Einstein."

"Al to his friends, and comrades," Katerina reminded him. After which she pulled out a supersized zip log bags jam packed with sugar loaded dollar store treats Paul recalled liking before he fell into the habit of obtaining more healthy for the body but less fun for the tongue snacks at the more expensive health stores. "And some more chemical than candy treats," Katerina went on.

"Which you, and your horses, cats and dogs need more than I do," Paul replied, noting Katerina's thin waist under a belt which was notched as tight as it could go, and hearing the rumbling of her empty stomach, smelling a burp of acetone from her mouth.

“I want and need you to have this,” Paul said, pulling out a check from the breast pocket of his 150 dollar shirt. “Given that you’re donating to the University all of the royalties from your books and films, and deferring your salary as head of the Department of Arts, to buy musical instruments for your students, while ignoring the needs and wants of your own biological instrument,” he continued, pointing to her severely underweight torso and thin legs while ramming the check into the breast pocket of her jean jacket. “And I won’t take no for an answer!” he insisted.

Katerina looked at the check, smiled, then stared into and through Paul’s ocular portholes. He felt himself seen through, examined and diagnosed. “I can’t take this,” Katerina said, tearing the check up. “A matter of honor, I suppose.”

“Stupidity!” Paul yelled out.

“Necessity,” Katerina’s reply, offering no other explanation as the details, averting her eyes. “Einstein said that every scientist, and probably artist, should know how to be, and probably become, a...” Katerina broke into bold, confident and unbridled laughter again. “...Shoe maker!” she said, proudly showing Paul the repair work she had done on her boots, now more patches than original leather, making her footwear more functional and aesthetically colorful.

“Then,” Paul said after a long pause, gazing down at his polished responsible Oxfords. He turned to the pictures of his other past (and periodically present) beloveds, turning them away from his stare, and Katerina’s. “Will you accept this?” he asked, placing his shivering hands on Katrina’s firm shoulders. He edged his way towards her lips to kiss them, for reasons that he never found in any neuroscience research paper. She turned her head to the side.

“Maybe, later,” Katerina said. “After our transformations are complete, and we sustain ourselves by honest rather than less than completely honest ways to make a living,” she delivered to her ex-lover and perhaps still friend, with a prophetic wisdom that scared more than informed the ‘science has an answer for everything’ underaged Dean of Medicine. “Right, girls?” Katerina said to the photos of the women who also competed for Paul’s heart, mind and soul. Which of those three Katerina he wanted as they were, and which had to be transformed, Paul didn’t know.

“The candy isn’t loaded with any hallucinogenic magic pill that will bring you the freedom, wisdom and maybe not publishable yet kind of Enlightenment that I just jumped into,” Katerina assured Paul as she turned away from him towards the door that Paul thought had been locked behind him. “But the placebo effect does work, if you let it,” she continued, opening the door to the abandoned hallway in the oldest wing of the University. A maze of circular hallways which, so the construction workers who found every excuse to demolish it said, was haunted by the ghost of Klaus Ranselhoff. “After all, its harder for a rich, over-awarded or comfortable man, or woman, to get into heaven than for a camel to get through the eye of a needle,” Katerina, who was nearly put into the psych ward for speaking with that founder’s statue said as she stepped into the rotting

wood and asphestos walled underground hallway. "Right?" she said to the ghost who was still alive in her mind, and then to Paul.

"Theoretically, yes, I suppose, putatively," Paul's reply, as he saw the woman who needed his lifeboat more than she imagined walk down the hallway. She sung a tune he didn't recognize which reverberated against the walls such that it seemed like she was accompanied by a quartet of harmonic background vocalists and a dancing band of instrumentalists. Paul assumed that the music he was hearing between his ears was due to his not having slept more than two hours in as many nights. But despite or perhaps because of those biologically based hallucinations, he found himself in love with Katerina in ways he had never experienced. The kind which was so deep that it could never be consummated. Or understood by anyone, including himself.

## CHAPTER 3

On October 29<sup>th</sup>, Sean McCallum celebrated his 21st birthday in his present bodily form on planet earth, that torso having the right proportion of muscle, bone and fat to be perfectly 'cool' by any generation's standards. The combination of happy and carefully bred genetics featured a chiselled chin and generously thick chin-length brown hair, with blue eyes that shone more brightly than even Frank Sinatra's at the Soho bar which still featured autographed photos of the beloved crooner on the wall. The strippers from Queens and the aspiring Broadway singers from the 'hinterlands' West of New Jersey who entertained Sean and his fellow upper crust buds paid for the honor of being present with cash and 'special favors' at his 'coming of age' fifty dollar a glass finally legally allowed drink party.

The next day, the mathematical genius who decided to share his gift for prediction of future events with Wall Street Investors rather than NASA or the World Health Organization got a special delivery package from his second foster Mom, reminding him that he was now without a father, along with a bill for his funeral expenses that she refused to pay.

Sean celebrated Halloween in the McMaster Funeral home in Great Neck, Long Island, clad in a pair of black jeans, with matching shirt and newly purchased biker boots of the same hue. With eyes that were trained to never cry, he sat in the first row of the viewing room, his billionaire father's casket closed, staring at the picture of John 'Johhny' McCallum. A three year old photo of him featured a smile of confident victory when Sean's father was at the height of his third super-successful career and, to those who thought they knew him, life.

Ever since Sean could spell 'business', his father no less than 5 times a week reminded him that it's 'a smart business man who knew when to get into a new business.' And to 'always keep more than one iron on the fire because the others will grow cold and caustic on you one day'.

'I Did it My Way', according to his father's Will, echoed through Sean's aching ears no less than ten times in a row. "What goes up, goes down, down and down," he said to the smiling picture of his balding Dad, whose likeness reminded him of how he would look in 20 years, unless he could get some extra-strength Rogaine and got hair transplants sooner rather than later .

Sean McCallum recalled that his father's fall from grace at the Pharmaceutical Company bearing his name was due to putting all of his eggs into developing a new confidence building anti-depressant basket, a patented drug dubbed 'Utopia'. A 'body, mind and spirit' wonder med which turned out to do more harm than good below the neck, and caused more misery than bliss between the ears in the third stages of clinical trials. "I also recall that you sometimes said that a smart man knows when to get into something, but a smarter man know when to get OUT of an endeavor, investment or relationship," Sean muttered to the photograph. "Advise you didn't take."

Sitting alone in front of the closed casket as Gentlemen and Jackass Johnny's only son, and benefactor of a considerably large life insurance policy, Sean realized that others needed to mourn, as well as to kiss his ass as the new owner of McCallum Pharmaceuticals. Such was a position thrown upon Sean despite the fact that he barely passed High School biology. With of course the help of his father's personal donation to the science teacher, And even more personal threat to the Principal that if Sean was thrown out of school for his being 'disrespectfully and destructively independent', his school would be thrown into bankruptcy.

A roar of non-understandable conversation in the hallway outside of the viewing room drew Sean's attention. His life tired twenty one year old eyes beheld a herd of black-clad mourners, a third of them whispering, a third of them silent and the remainder competing with each other for who could sob the loudest. Sean pushed the evolving tight fist in his chest downward, refusing to let his baby blue oculars shed anything more than two barely noticeable tears. Though most people in his generation went by the creed that if you felt it, you were allowed to 'express it', Sean refused to let the intense ball of angst with more rage in it than a black hole burst into his, for better or worse, well controlled heart.

The funeral director organized the men and women in (mostly) black to line up with slight gestures of his hands and the kindest of spoken words, looking impatiently at his watch after they complied.

After saying goodbye to Johnny with a myriad emotions and languages, each of them turned to Sean, taking his hand into their, crying on his already soaked shoulder or gazing into his young eyes. Such reminded Sean that just as glory is fleeting, so is one's time above the ground, or on top of those crawling on it to scratch a living. Some of the mourners tried to remind Sean that the fire at his distanced Old Man's cabin in the Aderondacks in which he was burnt to death was really an accident. Some assured Sean that his second foster Mom, who had disappeared a week before the fire that burnt Johnny in his sleep (while sleeping with his sister in law), had nothing to do with his death. Some said that if they had known his father was in financial trouble, be it with the mob, the IRS or the plunging market, they would have bailed him and McCallum Pharmaceuticals out.

The mourners in the back of the line wearing suits made of mismatched black pants, as well as shoes and jackets purchased in second hand stores rather than Madison Avenue clothing emporiums advised Sean to do whatever he could to quench the story emerging from nose reporters lingering outside the funeral parlor. Some of whom were working with the theory that two of his ex-wives and his business compediters conspired to have his last meal of deer meat chili contain more 'Utopia' powder than meat or beans. And that he hung himself, then set a fuse to the pile of kindling to go off twenty minutes later.

Last in line, but the most wanted by Johnny's sole surviving son was Renata, an old before her time hunchbacked German woman who had been more of a mother to Sean than any of the women the lad was asked to call 'Mommy'. In a soft voice amplified by

intensity in her eyes, she proposed that IF the suicide story was true, it wasn't cowardice that drove 'Don John' to take an exit from life, stage left, but that it was a courageously self-delivered mercy killing. To no small degree for having endured the constant nagging and clever gaslighting from Johnney McCallum's recent gold digger wife who he still remained loyal to, despite her being 'out' till 2 AM with no explanation as to where 3 nights a week.

The music finally stopped, replaced by a benediction straight out of a Hallmark greeting card catalogue delivered by a Protestant Minister in a workingman's suit sporting a CEO's Italian leather shoes on the podium. The eulogy that followed highlighted Johnny's accomplishments as a great chef, successful restaurant owner, innovative playwright, beloved State Senator, brilliant biologist, bold capitalist adventurer and, of course, loving father and husband.

Sean clenched his fist so hard that it drove bleeding impressions into his palms at what was NOT put into the eulogy. The truth about how the McCallum family fortune and fame started, and grew into a tall tale too good to be real, but which everyone, including Sean felt compelled to believe. When the 'tell the people what they want and not need to know' was over, the Minister left the podium. The funeral director flicked a switch on the wall. To the tune of flatly played Bach and the direction of the funeral director's expressionless assistants, the mourners exited the room, walking slowly at first then briskly as they noticed the tables in the lobby were being overloaded with gustatory delights. The dishes from no less than 10 countries were as tasty to the tongue as they were appealing to the eye.

After Sean said a 'see ya soon, but maybe not so soon if we're lucky' to his father, he joined the crowd of mourners who had been his father's friends, enemies and, perhaps for the right reasons, admirers. While trying to fill his mouth with food so that he would not have to emit any words from it that he would regret later, he was approached by mourners of all classes and Callings as now head CEO of a Pharmaceutical Company. A Company that they claimed, with their financial help and innovative scientists rescued from oppressive governments and Big Pharma abroad, would get back on its feet again. Making the 21 year old Sean the youngest and most biologically ignorant Big Pharma Mogel in the world. Who would be awarded the Nobel Prize in Medicine for finding and implementing THE cure for cancer, ALS, MS, heart disease and of course the insidious disease which kill slowly as well as painfully---depression and regret.

It was the latter, regret, which was already finding its way into Sean's body, mind and spirit. Regret for not being ON TOP in a world where you were number one, or number nothing. And being given more money into his pocket than nurturing hugs around his waist. Particularly by any 'Mommy'. Or even Renata, who held back from him, even now, where he came from, be it a far away planet or an intersecting dimension. Or knowing the real reason why he was born to an always distance father who was never a Dad, but one who insisted on his only son being a success as perceived by the world as it is



## CHAPTER 4

Something all Irish sailors knew was that if you are in the middle of the Atlantic and three quarters of your supplies are about to run out, best go turn around and head back to Dublin, as King Neptune only warns you about bad seas leading to worse one only once. Something all Captains knew was that if you return to the Emerald Isle, before bringing back goods from the New World, your reputation with sailors, investors and your family who claimed that you had no idea how to even paddle a rowboat would go to shit, and you'd find yourself planting potatoes. An offering of courage to King Neptune and his Olympian companions would buy you more favors in the form of good winds and calm waters than praying to the gods or singing their praises. And, despite its violating the (and still more operative than extinct law of the seas that women had no place on a ship, most particularly as a skipper, Katerina Papadopolus was now a Captain.

“We’re barely half way through production on this film and have maybe one tenth of the money we started with,” Assistant director John Kal Harroldson reminded Katrina in the privacy of her trailer, as the rain poured into the bucket on the floor of RV that left the used car lot with every thing functional 10 days and 40 pages ago. “And the investors, broadcasters and distributors say that unexpected bad weather, bad attitude from actors and bad diseases that spread through the main cast and crew is no excuse for being late on delivery. While bad money hungry agent demand that their main actors to go back to doing high paying mainstream productions next month,” continued the top graduate from Emerson Film School whose ‘classical’ education in how to make a movie was as useful as tits on a bull when he left the studio feed lot and began working on real sets in the wilderness of indy filmmaking. “We do have completion insurance, in the event that we have to bail on Flagstaff Conspiracy, right?”

“Right here,” Katerina said, reaching into her briefcase then pulling out a personal credit card that had one last roll of the dice left in the available balance. “And right here,” she continued with a confident and defiant smile, pointing to her heart, which was pumping harder than ever in the what was supposed to be heat provided trailer under an authentically beaded imitation Dakota leather fringed coat, an underlying weather rather than designer ripped and faded jean jacket and her cleanest dirty shirt. “I’ve never had to bail out of any film production I started. Never even envisioned not being able to complete it. And never delivered anything more than 2 weeks late. Because, it is true. ‘If you build it’, even with baylor twine and used lumber instead of custom made rope and top of the line Siberian lumber, ‘they will come.’”

John sighed, pulled back his head, ran his fingers through whatever was left of his prematuring greying hair and then leaned into towards his boss, and ‘post grad’ professor. “Katerina,” he said, addressing her by her first name, for the first time instead of ‘Doctor Kate’ or her preferred form or address which evolved around her, ‘Promethia’. “‘Field of Dreams’, even with Kevin Costner and a safe G rated message for a safe G-rated time, didn’t do so well at the box office, on the tv screen, or even with streaming now, if you can still find it.”

“For this generation, and the last one, yeah,” Katerina volleyed back. “But for future generations, ‘Field of Dreams’ will last forever. Starting with your kids, and continuing with their kids, and so on, and so on, and—”

“—Enough fucking so ons!” John screamed. “But even if that’s true, what makes you think that Flagstaff Conspiracy is going to make it into the editing room, and ANY screen seen by anyone except judges at a film festival?”

“Because it tells the Truth!” Katerina blasted back. “The truth about a how the biomedical research and clinical world is married to the military-industrial complex! And that a divorce is still possible, so that medicine and research can be about curing ailments of the body, mind and spirit. And doctors can CREATIVELY and EFFECTIVLY deal with their patients as people rather than ‘health care consumers’. Biomedical science as it is, and how it should be!” Sensing that the underpaid and weary crew outside the trailer was listening to what Captain Katerina was saying went on to review the main plot points in the film, she opened the window and related the story of the film, with firey passion, dark reality based thought provoking humor, and...accuracy regarding the world the former ‘wonder researcher and doc’ left, so that she could save herself and those she left behind, most notably Paul. It was a story about how corrupt Docs and Researchers worked with even more corrupt government agencies, large corporations and Aryan White Supremacists to create a cancer causing virus that they were testing on selected populations of First Nations men, women and children, while developing cures for and vaccines for the disease which would be dispensed to selected friendly, White, and Christian populations just in time for the a bankrupt formerly Nazi run Pharmaceutical Company to collect after the faked research on rats was released, big on the stock market. With their selected recognition-starved scientists to winning a Nobel Prize or two. All the while denying to ‘shithead’ or truly independent countries. “And,” she reminded the stray curious cast and crew that had emerged into an angry crowd. “The heroes and heroines in the story know that the biomedical world has been infected by greed for money, fear of being sued and dull out disease. The latter being...”

“Something that makes us boring, lifeless, procedural, humorless and expressionless,” the appended the cast and crew, many of whom had been Katrina’s students. Some with a sense of being reminded of how insightful the diagnosis or Dull Out Disease was. And some being its ‘too much information, I don’t want to think or revolutionize anything’ victims.

“So,” John asked. “Are we going to keep going? Even when the gas tank is nearly empty? With you using the last bit of YOUR blood to put into the empty tank?”

Katerina paused, putting her folded in prayer hands in front of her cold lips. Inspired by and in the service of the heroic, thinking characters in her previous films and books, which actually DID sell in a progressively non-heroic and less-thinking era, she let her soul feed her mind, and filter the essence of it into her aching brain. “Some times doing the Right thing becomes the necessary thing,” she finally uttered to the ‘do we have to know this for the exam’ as well as ‘we have to feed our mouths and the mouths of our

kids, which you don't have!' faces staring at her. "All of you will be paid, at the appropriate rate. In the currency of money, exposure of your work to the world, and education so that you can change the world around you or, if you want, and I don't hold it against you, fit happily into the world as it is." She handed the credit card to John.

"Everyone gets paid up today, and for the rest of the month!" she commanded him. "While I do some re-writes. Give me three hours, alone."

"We're due to start shooting again in two hours," John said. "And the sun is going to marry than be squashed under the horizon in..." he said, pointing the setting sun.

"Fine!" Katerina blasted out. "Give me half an hour and...I'll give you all..." Katerina said, the next set of promises the reduced in number cast and crew, kept behind mad then confident laughter. "...Something we all will be proud of!"

With that, Katerina motioned for 'Sir John' to leave the trailer, then shut the trailer door behind him. "I'm open to any suggestions," she said to the congregation outside. "And, as was written in the Magnificent Seven, I'll shoot anyone who says anything about giving up. And, as that movie offered us," Captain Katerina continued to the exhausted sailors who were working for and who she was also working for. "You fight more effectively when you fight so hard and long that you forget what you're fighting for." With that, she opened the window even wider, despite or maybe because of the cold wind coming through it. As she sat down to do a massive re-write in record time, Katerina recalled her association, which some considered as colorful as an relationship, with now by the numbers Doctor Paul Alberghetti. She looked up at the faded wood paneling still miraculously on the trailer, and heard the evening her and Paul saw the Magnificent Seven.

She recalled herself smiling with an extra dose of Enlightenment at hearing Yul Brenner saying 'You have to keep fighting till you forget what you are fighting for', Paul saying afterward, "Life is a dance, not a battle." She recalled him saying it with caring and musical eyes. But still 'establishment' ones. In an establishment which he was a part of, which, according to her best suspicions, may have requested him to do what he could to hide more truths about his chosen profession than to reveal. Why had secured funding been so decimated, then withdrawn? Investors were after all fickle, but...would Pagan Capitalist Emperor Ceasar fund a Democratic Christian revolution? "Maybe I should picture Paul as a villain in this script?" she pondered. And put into action as she let her fingers lead her writing brain and compassionate mind into re-writing the last scene that had to be shot at this location, today. With, some other options for future scenes.

## CHAPTER 5

Munching on a ham and cheese sandwich at his laboratory desk while the subordinates in his highly skilled medical team decided to do Chinese buffet at the café down the street, Paul glanced at an election ad for Governor Tom Jackson, a once hard line ‘I won’t pay for anyone else’s health care’ Republican who saw same sex marriage as ‘a relationship where both parties were saying lifetime vows to the devil as well’. A military man who wanted to initiate the draft for all ‘19 year old male and female snowflakes’ as a cure for Millennialism disease. Looking at Jackson’s face, Paul recalled golden horse riding treks through the Birsheers with ‘Cowboy Tom’ where they shared stories about life, sports and cold beans with a brotherly connection that Paul, as the only penis bearing sibling in in family, valued more than anything else. Paul had connected and related to Tom’s soul at the deepest levels with virtually every belief, value and aesthetic. .

But three years ago, something happened to, and some might say for, Tom. His daughter Wendy came home from the Middle East two days after being discharged with painful injuries incurred by enemy fire as well as good ole boys and their drunken pastor back at the base for her valuing the love of women more than the that of men. Those injuries became life threatening once she got state-side. Aside from the memories of being gang raped by soldiers who took a pledge to protect her and combatants whose job was to put her lights out, Wendy finally touched American soil with a contagious viral infection, stage three pancreatic cancer and a woman who she had married. Wendy gave her betrothed more love as a wife than Tom provided as a father and his wife as a mother. Though Master Sergeant Wendy’s tunic was more covered with medals than naked cloth, a snafoo at the VA, left the pride of ‘this woman’s army’ with the kind of health care coverage that most civilians had, with a history of pre-existing conditions that prevented her from getting adequate health care. That care was available, for the rich and elite, which didn’t include Wendy.

Her father Tom railed against the Insurance companies and his LGBT-phobic colleagues in the State Assembly, and against God as well. None of them, including Jesus, dropped in the help Wendy when she was alive, or on her way to a THEORETICALLY better place at her funeral. The Die Hard Right Wing Christian Capitalist Republican turned into a Socialist, Pagan LGBT activist who, as well, sided with PETA when it came to using horses in rodeos, or even being ridden by humans. Cowboy Tom championed everything ‘WOK’, including allowing fifth generation Black drug dealing prisoners getting special pardons and \$30,000 compensation for their ancestors being slaves from hard working, pale skinned, second generation Italians such as Paul. Whose ancestors were not even in the US until half a century after the Civil War was over. And who said that it was permissible for able bodied, mediocely talented Millennials to live on inflated Welfare checks when they hit 21 so they could ‘investigate their inclusive and expanding artistic potential’.

“So, Tom,” Paul said to the photograph of his former friend, who now championed causes which were diametrically opposed to his own. A situation which was visiting him in the flesh through another one of the few friends he still had. Who was looking at the

lab which gave him purpose, a way to earn a living and, what Paul valued most---the opportunity to use his advanced intellect to weed out Mother Nature's most interesting biological secrets, even if it was against the Heavenly Father's Will.

"Interesting lab you have now," Katerina said as she nodded her head in a strange kind of approval. "State beyond the art," she continued, with the kind of happy smile on her lips and in her voice he always wished she could find. But there was something in her eyes that reeked of another 'normal, well adjusted' citizenry trait---hidden agendas.

"Yes, 'art' being the operative word?" Paul inquired, laying down his sandwich in mid bite. "You want me to create a drug that will make distributors, funders and viewers fall in love with your films and books?"

"Which, maybe you have already developed, then layered on the print of your grant proposals that found its way through the fingers of 'the man' on top, which found its way through liposomal technology into their brains and what's left of their minds?" Paul anticipated Katerina saying. But out of mouth came something else, as she leaned into him.

"I can immortalize this lab, and its owner, Doctor Paul, if you let me...hmmm," she said.

"If I what, Katrina?" Paul challenged, leaning back on his chair, noting that Katrina never called him 'Paul', for reasons she never revealed, and never 'doctor' as they were of equal rank in the Biomedical Establishment until she left it.

Katrina put her hand over her chin, 'hmme'd' several times like a Professor taunting a knowledge hungry student and in a Sherlock Holmes manner more hammy than his own sandwich meat, paced to the calendar featuring their still (though now for different reasons) mutual hero Jonas Salk posted on the wall. "You need someone to house-sit this mansion of magnificence while you and your staff are at the Neuroscience meeting?" she said more as a fact than a question, pointing to the next week's empty slots for experiments to do and work schedule for the staff.

"With you as a housesitter?" Paul enquired in the same declarative tense.

"Who, maybe, can keep your research going so you can stay a week ahead of the competition?" Inspector Katerina proposed. "And a week ahead of the diseases you're sworn by honor and paid by salary to cure? Before those diseases infect or kill..." she counted on her fingers quickly. "...Too many patients to count."

"Yes," Paul replied, reinforcing the walls to his inner thoughts and agendas which Katerina was so good at piercing through. "But...you said that you have a new canvas now. A new Calling.

"Yes, to enliven the collective human soul instead of the body," she said. A statement that usually meant 'just the body'. "You get them up out of the hospital beds and

wheelchairs with all of this equipment,” she exclaimed with a strangely excessive admiration, admiring all of the investigative machinery, while taking pictures of it. “And I get them dancing with....”

“...The screenplay you want to film here next week?” Paul’s investigative mind hypothesized, then put forth.

“Between me and my trusted biology-theatre majors keeping your work going, the work that, if you remember, you and me started in labs that were a lot more rustic than this one,” Katerina proposed edging her way closer to him in body and mind. “And, well, didn’t these guys, and gals, say that fresh eyes can always see what tired, overworked and well experienced eyes can’t?” she continued, pointing to posters of scientists who DID make it to the big time in the lay world, including Einstein, Ramon y Cajal, Marie Curie and most particularly Nicola Tesla. “And I promise to not feed the lab rats any treats that would interfere with the experimental meds you’re giving them,” she promised with a big grin.

Paul considered the proposition. And envisioned what giving Katerina the keys to his home away from the legal residence would do with the equipment, and the images obtained from it. And recalled what some of his own students were still oscillating between obtaining an Ph.D under him and an H.B.A.R.P (human being aspiring Renaissance person) degree on Katerina’s most recent project. An expansion of the ‘science better humanize and humorize before it does more to humanity and for it’ books of her own, and others, she had given to Paul to ‘save his soul’.

“Here is it,” Katerina said plopping the script for Flagstaff Conspiracy on Paul’s desk. “To get the visuals to work, I need this location. Your lab is perfect for the story I want and need to tell. And...if you have a few bucks to invest into the film, which I will guarantee be paid back to you in six months three fold, to support this place, keep those who you openly and secretly love comfortable and...”

“...No one else would let you have access to their locations,” Paul said, angrily, due to the very real possibility that Katerina would blackmailing him about the mistress (herself) he loved more than his current unlovable wife. But there were other reasons, he dared not tell her. “And you lost your funding from your ‘Science for Humanity’ investors, including...”

“—The medical associations and the companies they support!” Katerina blasted back. “Which you have influence with. Which---”

“---I can’t use,” Paul replied, with downturned eyes.

“You mean you won’t!” Katerina blasted back. With a firey intensity in her eyes that penetrated through the thickest walls around Paul’s mind, brain and, if indeed there was such a thing, Soul. “Will you help me with this?!”

“Yes, I’ll help you,” Paul said after deep reflective pause, looking at the first page of the script.

“Yes!” Katerina exclaimed with glee. “Yes! Yes! Yes!” she continued, dancing around the lab.

“By not letting you shoot this here,” he said handing back the script after thumbing through the pages, recognizing too much in the pages that he had seen before in Katerina’s work. “And strongly suggest that you do not shoot this anywhere else.”

“Which you are suggesting to other parties to not be shot!” Katerina shot back.

“Yes,” Paul confessed regarding the most truth relating story about the biomedical world ever written. “Because...”

“...You want to protect me from the suits, DOCTOR Albergehti?”

“Protecting you from yourself,” Paul said, gently placing his palms around Katrina’s shaking shoulders.

“You mean protecting yourself and your business, medical and military colleagues from ME!” the next blast, as Katrina threw aside Paul’s arms with enough force to nearly pull them out of the sockets.

“Yes,” Paul replied, emptying his wallet and pants pockets of cash, offering them to her. “But...in the meantime, take this and---”

“Buy a respectable dress, get a respectable profession, get a comfortable life!!!?” Katerina shot back, pushing his extended hand and heart back into his face. “Let you buy my a comfortable and happy future?”

“If you still can have one,” Paul said. “If not...”

“Yeah, I know, I’m headed to the nut house, the grave or---”

“A cliff you’ll jump over, or be pushed over,” Paul offered, placing the money into her hand.

While Katerina was processing it all, her open palms clenched into a fist. Which she held up to Paul.

“Go ahead, please,” Paul said. “I do deserve that, and more.”

“Which is why I’m NOT doing it,” Katerina countered as she stormed out the room.

The loud thud on the door closing behind Katerina penetrated Paul's ears and shot waves of pain up and down his spinal cord. He looked up to the 'Wall of Great Ones', saying to the scientists who he admired, and wanted to be admired like, "We do what we have to do so we can do what we are Called to do!" he proclaimed to them. From each of their eyes came... 'Maybe'.



## CHAPTER 6

It was a long, tiring day for Sean listening to fast talking super-animated MBAs in black suits showing him income graphs, financial spread sheets and pitching conflicting business plans. Broken up by monotone blabberings from white lab coated Ph.D.'s doing flashing presentations on a screen. Neither subset of professional staff at McCallum Pharma didn't know how to, or purposely avoided, explaining the benefits of their drugs in language that the 'inferior' folks who would be taking the drug could understand. But as the heir to of his father's Pharmaceutical Empire, Sean had to maintain the appearances of a multi-lingual Emperor. He listened to the pitches from both camps with an erect back. Scratching his hairless chin in professorial manner and respond with 'interesting', 'we'll take it under consideration' and 'we need to take it under further consideration before moving ahead with it', not knowing who 'we' were, could or should be. After the day and early evening of being pitched by the dukes and duchesses was done with, he lingered in his father's oversized chair staring up at a portrait of its former occupant.

"So, " Sean said to the mogul who he never addressed as Dad, Pop or even 'Father' as he found yet another box of condoms hidden in the recesses of the left drawer of the large, polished beyond perfection work desk. "Maybe your escorts knew more about how life worked financially and biochemically than the MBAs, Ph.D.s, and MDs you officially hired?" he speculated. "And, if I'm right in assuming they were all female escorts, maybe it is true that behind every great man there's a bright and un-recognized woman?" His glance was pulled into the posters of Albert Einstein as a young, over-confident scientist and an old, humble and constantly self-examining old humanitarian. "And you, Albert," Sean went on, leaning back on his chair, adopting an authoritative 19<sup>th</sup> century Prussian Aristocrat accent, bordering on mid 20<sup>th</sup> century Gestapo officer. "I always found it interesting that your most productive scientific year was 1905 when you were working with your first wife, Mileva. Or perhaps, under her?"

Older Albert seemed to say guilt-infused 'yes'. Younger Al shot back a 'glory, power and money, is something you take, not ask permission to get, a mathematical fact as true as E equals M c squared,' reply regarding the source of his celebrated discoveries.

"Yeah," Sean said, still in a quandry about how to make himself as honored, influential and rich as his father was. The ticking of the cookoo clock behind him reminded him that his time on the throne of McCallum Pharmaceuticals was limited. And that most likely sooner or later, the bird would pop of his house and say cookoo, then turn around to dump his final wad on him. But Sean had more to worry about than how to avoid imaginary shit being dumped on him by a bird who had scared him as a kid when that clock was put into his room by, so his father said, Bavarian governess Renata.

In front of him lay projections of McCallum which a hired economist said would happen if Sean didn't develop a wonder drug as well as a wondrous persona to sell it. Not only would Sean be broke, but he would probably be experiencing the enlightenment only obtainable by poverty in jail. Dear Old Dad, the most popular CEO in Big Pharma had

made many enemies on his way up the ladder and, as Einstein and Sean knew all too well, 'what goes up must come down'. Unless of course another player was to come into the game. Or you redefined the game so that the six things you could do well were more needed than the 600 things you sucked at were incorporated into it.

'Coach Sean' contemplated the matter, wondering what superstar he could bring into his losing team so that he wasn't tossed down into the minor leagues, or thrown out of the stadium entirely. The bird emerged yet again from his house, saying 'cookoo', then retreated back before Sean could grab him by the throat. Why he didn't was out of respect for Renata. She was in the hospital now, in need of a wonder drug that would save her from losing even more function of her arms, legs and eyes. As well as the ability to voice insults at doctors whose medications seemed to make her life even more painful and unlivable with every new 'remedy;'

Sean opened up the birthday card delivered to him, labeled 'for your eyes only', in beautiful Bavarian calligraphy which, for a magical 10 minutes a day, Renata was able to put onto paper. How it got there, Sean didn't know. Inside was a picture of his dad when he was a young father, a two year old baby in his arms. With him was a woman whose face seemed familiar. But for reasons he didn't know. Her face was circled with red ink and which seemed by the touch and texture of it, to be partially blood. "Brilliant brain on both sides of her brain", was written below it in scribbled German. "Like you still could be."

Sean immediately called the hospital to get a better explanation for the contents on the card. When he got the nursing station, asking for Renata, Sean was referred to the head nurse. He asked about where Renata was, and how she was. A long silence followed, then, "I'm sorry, Mister McCallum, she...."

"...Is out of her misery?" Sean asked, taking in a deep breath and holding it, perhaps as an offering to a God he found himself wanting to believe in.

"Yes, we hope," the reply. "The details being...."

The nurse related the details to Sean in medicaleze, knowing him to be a Big Pharma mogul who of course was as medically astute as the scientists working under him. Between the five syllable words that sounded coldly technical, Sean (who could barely spell 'biology') surmised that the degeneration occurring below Renata's neck had reached up into her most important muscle, the one between the ears. An irreversible process, according to modern science. Something no mortal could do anything about.

All that was left was for Sean now was to follow the example of his father and honor the memory of his surrogate Bavarian German mother. And find out who the woman in the photo was, using the cryptic clues Renata wrote on the back of the card in a secret language he and she invented when he was a kid. A language which Sean understood very little of now that he was 'all grown up'. What he would do for, or to, the mystery woman, that would be for later.

## CHAPTER 7

Katerina placed the final bulb, a Santa doll with Groucho Marx's face on it, on her Christmas tree, "So, this one you don't break, Prometheus, ok?" she said to the only family member who she was to share the holiday's with. The ginger feline with an third ball under his skin that the vet didn't know about meowed a begrudging 'yes' to her. And then to the rotating ball of the master of comedy who said of his third, and best, wife, "She got more of my jokes than any other women in my life, theatre students or producers did.

"And these cookies are for him, not you," Katerina, Groucho's most dedicated disciple, said to the cat, laying down a plate of Oatmeal raisin cookies from the reduced sale bin at the dollar store whose expiration date was well before the previous Labor Day under the mangled bush masquerading as a Christmas tree. After discouraging the 12 year old going on 2 turnings of the seasons cat from stealing the cookie, she reached into her pocket. "But this is for you!" she promised the feline, juggling in front of him a bag of cans containing of his favorite cat food. "And, the way this year is going, for me too," Katerina said as she looked at the ingredients on one of the cans, finding, surprisingly, more sort of natural biological products than chemical preservative and artificial flavors.

The still adequately and happily fed Prometheus leaped up at the bag of cans, pulling them down to the ground, staring at the label with more intensity than Katerina did as she emptied out a teaspoon of puree from one of the cans in front of his whiskers. According to the movements of the cat's neck and wide open eyes, the best and most optimistic guess of any humanoid was that Prometheus was reading the ingredients in the can while gobbling it down. Or maybe he was focused on the picture of a happy cat on the label. In any case. After which he opened his mouth and leaped for the half of the can that was still filled.

At risk of getting her hand ripped open again, or a growl of disapproval from the only companion at her Thanksgiving dinner table and July fourth picnic that year, Katerina picked up the can, her nostrils being overwhelmed by a familiar odor that, truth be told, elicited something strange between her legs radiating up her spine. "Catnip in the can or in the food," she noted, and gave voice to. "Or some other pheromone to drive you crazy that you can smell, but never eat. Making you hungry for what's maybe not so good for you once it's in your belly and digested." The words felt prophetic, as if she was sensing something in her future self which was, truth be told, something a whole lot more appealing than her past self, that past self getting an abundance of what she wanted but not a whole lot of what she needed.

She looked up at the cracked ceiling of her current dwelling, noting that the small dark cracks were giving way to enlarging streams of black. Then to the Styrofoam lined walls of the trailer which were now letting in the sound as well as the cold of the early winter winds. Then to the light bulb above her which flickered then shorted out after, bringing the illumination of the surplus assets production trailer she had recently moved into 24/7 into. But, the darkened cave did allow the light in. It shone upon a table on which there

were a stack of papers Katerina intended to keep in the dark until absolutely necessary. Prometheus leaped on top of them, rolled over, and summoned his human servant to 'service' him with pets, food or another one of her 'tell me what YOU know about the world, Professor Feline' talks she was indulging more each day after her Uncle Nick, the only Hellenic elder in the family who was Alive big A, between the ears, had passed on to an afterlife which HAD to be better than the realm of the so-called 'living'.

"I know," Katerina said as she stroked the cat's belly with her left hand, reviewing the mail that had come in over the last few days with her right. "First notice, Second notice, Final notice," she said while rifling through the over due bills for utilities at the trailer park, companies supplying her recent production. as well as forwarded mail from the University legal department bearing the names of her worst enemies which most certainly were not Christmas cards bills. Along with invoices from the University maintenance department for damages Prometheus had done to her office, which was to be shut down due to complaints from right wing asshole students and left wing 'snowflakes' about the 'offensive' cartoons posted on the wall containing the escalating number of 'emotionally offensive trigger words' "At least they haven't taken away my car," she said, looking out the window to be sure her two decade old clunker was still there. "So," she said to Prometheus. "What do YOU want Santa to give you for Christmas? Besides a horny but spayed female cat who you can mate with to spawn imaginary babies who will take over the world and do no doubt a better job at running it than any of your human subjects have been doing?"

The cat seemed to think about it, for a second or two, then turned to the door, pawing at the half rotted wood, to use the litter box in the delapidated 'cateo' set up for him outside. Katerina got up to let him out, grabbed hold of her semi-legally obtained shotgun and looked as always to the right and left to be sure that the truck or waiters from the China Gardens restaurant sent out to get more 'mystery meat' for their highly esteemed chow mein were elsewhere. And that the Satanists who had hung around the park weren't on the prowl for a feline sacrifice to satisfy their Underground dwelling master. And that the owls, eagles and coyotes stayed on their side of the wilderness-civilization line, content to eat mice, goffers or each other.

After Prometheus' much enjoyed ritual of evacuating his bowls, the cat dug into the ground under the trailer, pawing at a mouse he would bring home to his favorite human. "Good cat," Katerina said to him. "But this time kill it rather than bringing it in as a gift to me half eaten but still alive, because..."

Before Katerina could share her pragmatic philosophy about how to be in the world but not be of it, she heard something from the real world, with real ear. Her stare as well as the business end of her shotgun was drawn to something emerging out of patch of suddenly appearing ground fog. "Who goes there!" she yelled out to the 5 foot shadow-blob ghost who, with each step, grew another 1 inch height, and became a fifth more muscular in width, with an elongated ski hat slinging a large bag over its back. "Identify yourself!" she screamed out as the, as it seemed to be, 'Santa Ghost' advanced into the last portion of the winter fog, then halted.

“A Christmas deliver for you, Professor Doctor Katerina,” it said in a male voice, followed by a bell ringing.

“Which you will leave right there, ‘Santa’ said in a deep, baritone voice. “ And how did you know I was a Professor and Doctor?” she replied, knowing that the descriptor of the latter was in her past, and the former was about to be a reality well before the Spring semester would commence.

Santa did a ‘ho ho ho’ Promethius bolted from the cateo, attacking the red and white clad visitor from the overly bearded mystical North. After screaming out ‘an ouch ouch ouch’ laced with expressive expletives that that get any Santa in even the most hip R rated shopping mall barred for life from keeping his job, he fled into the woods, throwing back to Katerina a bag in his wake.

The cat returned to Katerina, a piece of ‘Santa’ underwear in his mouth which he laid at her feet. He rubbed his thankfully not blood covered back along her shivering ankles. He meowed a ‘so, what’s up doc?’ her way, to which she answered after intense moments of shock, reflection, gratitude and caution. “An offer that neither of us can refuse.” Looking up to the sky, to a God she had been working for but never really trusted, Katerina said. She looked at the contents of the burlap foul smelling bag, smelling a plethora of her favorite Christmas munchies in it, along with gift certificates cash and checks allowing her to get a whole lot more on Black Friday and beyond. “Thank you, I think...hope anyway.”

## CHAPTER 8

Paul Albeghetti always made a Christmas habit of connecting with people he loved, had loved and, according to his antiquated and ‘so yesterday’ 19<sup>th</sup> century morality, those who maybe loved him. His private celebration of the holiday where he desperately held on to old traditions which had become expensive, mechanical, irrelevant and destructive began on December 20 and promptly ended two days later. His yuletide gifts to friends, family and colleagues who he needed to stay on good terms with in the upcoming year were sometimes made in his workshop at home, sometimes bought from workshops overseas and sometimes came from the most exhausted organ in his body---his heart. The latter sometimes involved re-enforcing white lies that made people feel better about themselves and the world. For his special friends, he gave them an even more special gift---the Truth, which would, for an undefined time, make them feel very uncomfortable.

His last yuletide gift giving was a visit to Katerina’s ‘Laboratory of the Creative Soul, i.e., her still not given away office as chairperson of the soon to be phased out Drama and Fine Arts department at Ranselhoff University. He came well prepared to have Katerina throw the Teddy Bear back into his face, her cat to demolish the ‘We Shall Overcome’ singing tan colored toy mouse, and a heated discussion regarding why she should accept the gift card from himself for three months of food she LIKED and the name of an absentee patron (in reality, himself) in the Adirondacks who needed a ‘responsible, mature and animal a loving’ resident to look after the an animal rescue acreage in the woods to look after, rent free, in exchange for ‘not letting the mice, methheads or gentrification relators’ take it over.

Upon entering Katerina’s office through the open door, he spotted a series of checks on the desk payable to Katerina for the kind of money Paul never had, nor even dreamed of having. He found the three and a half legged mismatched chairs replaced with top of the line chairs and couches. Contracts from publication companies and distributors lay in a pile labeled ‘this time I choose who to reject.’ Along with paid in full receipts for from the electric company, costume suppliers, musical instrument manufactures and A level actors who previously had been ‘otherwise occupied’ a month ago.

Katerina entered the office clad head to toe in attire which had no rips, no tares and no stains, and wearing something Paul had never seen on her. “That smile,” he commented. “Is it because you won the lottery, convinced the US Treasury to value stale onions and rotted potatoes from your garden into krugerands, robbed a bank, or...”

She proudly presented a brochure to Paul. :”McCallum Pharmaceuticals,” she said with an arched back and upturned chin. “Who has a new manager with a new vision for curing maladies of the body mind and PARTICULARLY the soul,” Katerina continued, flipping the page to a glossy photo of a confident young Captain at the helm. “With me in charge of the division curing and awakening the collective human soul. Through...”

“New drugs that can sure dull out virus, which neither you nor any other scientist have been able to identify?” Paul said as he helped himself to a glance, then a careful look at

the new owner of the Company, allowing himself to become absorbed into his soul on the young man's terms. "And this...different looking new CEO is going to---"

"---Work with me to get my films produced and my books published again, particularly the ones about what science is doing to rather than for humanity," Katerina interjected with confidence, spilling over into arrogance.

"In exchange for what?" Paul inquired, thumbing through the brochure boasting about the 'new and improved' products McCallum was now investing in. Some of which he recognized as minor variations molecularly and otherwise as old failures which had as much effectiveness as sugar pills with (according to the rumors anyway) still to be investigated side effects. "You do know who you are dealing with," he said. "McCallum Pharmaceuticals, which---"

"---Is under new management," Katerina assured him. "Which, if I put in a good word for you, will be able to fund your expensive and visionary work as well as mine."

"In exchange for what?" Paul asked, yet again.

Katerina pulled in her lips, averted her eyes then looked at Paul as a complete and contented soul, her left intuitive and right logical brain working together rather than against each other. "Sean wants my input and, on my own terms, control of innovative medications that I'm not allowed to share with you, but I...can, if you want to bring you in to this goldmine of unlimited research funds, which I know YOU don't have, bring you in as a...yes...partner."

Before Paul could figure out what was going so 'right' with and for the woman he always loved and hoped to share a Nobel Prize with, he found in his hand a contract, placed there by 'Professor -Maestro Katerina'. Its print was small. Its language very legal. "I'll have to think it over," he voiced as his initial assessment. "But,:" he continued, glancing at the face of the new Captain of the USS McCallum battleship in the war against human and animal pathology, seeing something familiar in his face. "I've got to think about it. And get back to you."

"Soon, I hope," Katerina replied. "For your sake."

## CHAPTER 9

Mildred Prescott was cursed and blessed with a name, and upbringing, that required her to be responsible, intelligent, kind and, as a result of the aforementioned, a buzz kill. At least when she was at work as the comptroller of McCallum Pharmaceuticals who had survived three bosses and as many booms and busts. The 60 something 'anchor' that kept the company from sinking, hitting an iceberg or running aground in the sea of fluctuating medical products and policies for their distribution presented herself to her new boss, Sean, in her usual presentation. Grey midi pencil skirt with matching shoulder pad containing jacket, sensibly high but still elegant pumps, understated pearl earrings, shoulder length auburn hair professionally put into a bun with inch inch white roots and, of course, a 300 page spread sheet in her hand that she gently yet firmly placed onto the new company owner's desk.

'The financial statements for the last year, and current revenue available for the next quarter, Sir,' she stated with a slight bow. "Submitted so your projections for R and D will not put our company into our company into the red like some of your predecessors and so we can legally go forward into the black."

Sean didn't know the difference between red and black in finance, and with regard to hot women he dated on his vacations in New Mexico and Nevada, didn't care about that color distinction in the women who he paid to give him 'private tutorials'. Yes, he looked at the summary sheet on top, and thumbed through the rest of it. But through the mirrored reflection of the window in front of him, he focused his real attention on Mildred's wrinkle-less face. It was made so, (according to the rumors young Sean heard from the half-opened door in his bedroom from his father and his buds when they got drunk in the beer and cigar smoke filled kitchen on 'card night' when his second wife was out with 'the gals') not with botox or congenital facial nerve paralysis, but because Mildred knew how to tastefully smile like a dignified professional. Yet, she but never laughed. However, according to what dear old dad boasted after emptying a bottle of Scotch, Mildred could, when required, make any man howl ecstasy when working overtime at the office. Or have pictures of herself in carnal bliss with any married competitor or regulatory official who 'deserved to be blackmailed for being an asshole or an idiot in the marketplace'. Sean's Dad also claimed that he knew how to turn the bookworm librarian into a temptress whose manual for unbridled passion would be banned from ANY library. And that he placed on the poker table his willingness to secretly reveal how to turn the 'Mother Superior who kept the company from going to hell' into a harlot who would whisk you up to the stars for his most favored associates, be they male or female.

As Mildred voiced the relevant figures and projections in a monotone rhythm that, if not for its assertiveness, would put you to sleep, Sean wondered why his father didn't leave that 'manual' on how to unlock Mildred's chastity belt to him in his Will. Or why dear old Dad could do anything he wanted with women, beyond of course overpaying them with real affection. Sean let his imagination paint a picture of himself under the sheets with Mildred, discovering who she really was. And maybe even figuring out who he



really was, or could be. Looking at the mirror at her high buttoned blouse, seeing big breasts under them. Imagining her hair loosened hair swirling around her head igniting every spec of air it hit, her legs kicked out in an undulating dance inviting every part of him to enter into the palace door between them. Sean's mouth opened as the visualization acquired two, three then four dimensions of sight, sound and smell. By time it reached the faculty of taste, his tongue extended, a third leg emerging in his crotch. It was then that the guard dog at the pleasure palace wacked him in the head.

“Hey, ‘Sir’!” Mildred said slapping ‘real world’ brains into Sean’s head with her backhand. “This consequences of ignoring these financial figures, clinical results and research data are serious!” she asserted, both as a Mother Superior forcing ‘love and gentility’ into a day dreaming parishioner kneeling in church As well as a genuinely caring mother who just saw her favorite son put his hand on a hot stove in preparation for placing his face on it as well. “If you don’t listen to me, and own up to the decisions you made, we’ll all be on the street! Eating from dumpsters on roads that even have your name on them because you spit on others who you called garbage.”

Something in Mildred’s face, and more notably in the remark about being homeless on streets bearing the McCallum name made Sean listen. He heard the voice of the woman who had first scolded him with that metaphor about dumpster diving. Someone who wasn’t Mildred, or his Nurse-maid Renata, who came into consciousness again.

“Ok,” Sean said, looking up at Mildred, feeling the need, and personal satisfaction, of being sincere. “I’m listening. Really.”

Mildred smiled, warmly this time, then sat in front of Sean, adjusting the pillow on the chair so she was a equal level to his eyeline. She took the spread sheet in hand, thumbing through the pages to the first of the ones attached to a red tab. “I do see that you did approve and allocated funds to develop new drugs to treat staph-resistant infection. Overseen by the very qualified Doctor Ralph Oliver.”

“Which I did,” Sean replied. “A very qualified man,”

“And alternative efficacious cancer treatments with, as studies showed thus far, less side effects than conventional chemotherapy,” Mildred continued, flipping to a page marked with a yellow tab.

“Overseen by a well qualified WOMAN, Pricilla DeMore,” Sean politely asserted. “Who had breast cancer, and who is a woman of color,” he continued, with pride. “And whose current sexual preferences are alternative, like drugs she is developing.”

“Yes,” Mildred replied after a tense pause. “Our advertising department is pleased with that economically wise ‘coincidence’”

“Because Doctor Pricilla is the right person for job, of course, Right?” Sean confirmed, replacing the wink of his left eye with the subtle smile and ever so slight nod of the head he had observed in his father with ‘intricate’ negotiations.

“Right,” Mildred conceded after a contemplated pause. After which she clawed at a black tab, opening up to the section of the book within it. She gazed at it with consternation, then anger, then slammed it in front of Sean’s face. “And her!” the old before her time woman blasted at young man who refused to grow up. “Katerina Papadapolis” she read, fumbling the name with a WASP accent.

“KatErina Papadopolis,” Sean shot back, rolling of the r’s and accent on the right syllable according to the Greek tongue twister’s Hellenic origins. “A brilliant Hellenic soul,” he said with his index finger pointed upward in the manner of his father, who perhaps was eating oysters and caviar with the angels but most likely was having his liver fried with onions for the devil’s breakfast in hell. “Who is well worth the, yes, an even large investment I already made into her work, on our behalf.”

“Our behalf or your personal ‘project’, Sean?” Mildred challenged, addressing her boss for the first time since he turned 18 by his first name. “You gave her a substantial Christmas bonus there, Santa,” she continued, pointing to the Santa hat and suit on the coat rack by the door.

How Mildred discovered that it was Sean who made the special deliver pre-Christmas gift to KatErina did concern the new CEO of one of the largest Pharmaceutical companies in the Northeast. He thought how to ask her, but was short circuited by Mildred leaping to her feet, placing her hands on the desk, then staring at and into Sean’s ocular portholes, way down into his brain.

“You’re letting an ex- rebel scientist who became an ultra indy artist into the top teir of our operations,” Mildred pleased. As a chief operator!” she yelled. A non-team player who---

“---Is going to be very useful,” Sean calmly asserted with his voice, letting his talking index finger ram the affirmation into Mildred’s angry and terrified face. A face that now had tears running down its reddened cheeks. back.

“Our agenda and, according to everything I know and have researched about her, ‘Katerina’s’ are very different,” Mildred replied, pushing Sean’s hand aside. “As you well know, or should know!”

“For now, Professor Doctor Mildred Prescott,” Sean assured the Ph.D. in biochemistry and professor at New England Medical college who had been ‘demoted’ by circumstance and numerous failures of her own as an independent scientist and artist to becoming a financial administrator in a large corporation. A matter he would deal with later.

“You’re thinking something...very dangerous here,” Mother Mildred said to Sean letting her extended index finger fire in the accusation. “And...personal?” she challenged.

Sean averted his eyes, gazing at the picture of his father, recalling the picture of the woman with the ‘big brains on both side of her head’ Renata had sent him as her final ‘gift’ before her passing due to still undetermined causes. “We do what we have to do, and are called to do, and sometimes they merge into what we have to do,” he informed Mildred, while secretly informing his father of the secret brewing in his head. Mildred, if that was her real name, decided to not respond.

“So, Sir,” she said, returning to her assigned passionless station, picking up the stacks of spread sheets.’ “Will that be all?”

“For now,” Sean stated, staring into space. “Thank you,” he said to Mildred with the utmost courtesy, and of course a slight bow of the head.

Mildred bowed even lower, with her eyes, turned around and opened the door. She lingered her back turned to Sean, then shut the door abruptly behind her. Perhaps closing the jail door on herself, or on Sean. Time would tell which would be the case.

## CHAPTER 10

John Kal Harroldson always wanted to be a film director. A Creator big C who worked hardest between the ears to discover, create or stumble into a Vision and have everyone else do the details to make it happen. Just like, according to Fran Beecham, the genealogist in Soho he paid good money for, his great great grandfather Sitting Bull. But John's real talent was to be a 'detail man'. A 'doer' Indian, like Crazy Horse and the other warriors who did in Custer and numerous other Custers the history books didn't record. A second officer Spock to Captain Kirk who would never get a starship of his own. And, in this incarnation, and mostly White skin, a supporter for indy Creator Katerina Papadapolis who inspired, informed and enlightened her. An 'Old Timer Veteran Sergeant' over a decade younger than Katerina but centuries older in wisdom, reason and knowing the consequences of spontaneous 'gotta go with the moment' decisions. And knowing how to 'suggest' to the Captain of the ship how to avoid hitting icebergs without making it sound like an order.

John looked over the newest draft of the script he was assigned to organize into a shoot with eyes that felt different than usual. Or maybe it was what he saw that forced him to think differently about Or the new title for the most intense, accurate, humor infused and humanistic examination of the Military-Industrial-Medical-Complex as it is, and should be.

"So why is your 'Flagstaff Conspiracy', the title we both agreed on now 'Arizona Medicos'?" John inquired of Katerina.

"We got big money, big names and we need a big bang title," she replied while typing out revisions for a 'newly defined' act 1.

"And a big infusion of money from Big Pharma?" he challenged.

"Which requires, to make a bigger impact, a more subtle way to tell the story," Katerina answered, pointing to the new poster. "With a romance story in the middle of it, structurally that is."

"Right," John's reply as he glanced at the promo poster featuring docs who were cordial and friendly, total professionals, whose pleasant faces fit perfectly atop their pristine white coats. "With, what, YOU as one of the stars in front of camera this time?" he noted regarding the call sheet.

"The public will get the Truth from the horse's, or rather cantankerous mustang mare's mouth," she smirked.

"Who is spending half her time in a Big Pharma lab in real life, working on---"

"—Medicine for the brain and body. Promethidol, whose formula I can't talk about," her reply. "But I know will work. In tandem with the Promethidol delivered in the script

between the lines. The medicine that'll cure the most widespread disease which underlies most of the rest of the maladies afflicting humanity. Learned helplessness variant 3A, depressive-passive disorder and imitation of status quo behavior types 1, 2 and 5A."

"And this Promethidol, that you developed in the university lab where you negotiated with God and Mother Nature before you left it?" John pressed, noting but saying, that Katerina's manner of relating dull out disease reeked of her having acquired it.

"Due to lack of funding from traditional sources," Katerina related. "And..."

"...Inability of the soul dead eggheads who had more letters after your name to verify that your discovery of a new world wasn't just in your own head?" he interjected.

"Ascoltate your answer clearly, without artistic metaphoric jibberish, please" her reply, in professional medicalize.

"Great act out!" John exclaimed, noting that she was 'in character' as a tunnel visioned linear medical 'thinker' (or rather follower), "And the punch line is?"

"I still don't understand your meaning, or comment on the literary subtext," she volleyed back, eyes on the screen she was putting letters onto, which she allowed and then encouraged him to see. Letters which, to John, seemed to be in words that were 'on the nose'. Pleasant to the ear rather than constructively disruptive to the mind. And accurate to what the speaker was intending. Something Katerina never did.

But, this was act one after all. John knew that Katerina Papadopolis, HBARP (human being, Renaissance person) was planning something very big. Maybe one of those Trojan Horse things the Greeks were very good at. Infiltrate the kingdom of the suits, spend their money on your Cause, then just as it looks like they accepted your gift of submission, blast them with ideas and ideals which educate, enlighten and empower them to become liberators like you are, joining your cause. And you.

After John reasoned that this had to be the case, Katerina nodded 'yes', So did the third brain between them which said to John...'trust her'. A command he had no problem obeying, and following through with.

## CHAPTER

There were a lot of things you could say about Paul Alberghetti's deficits as an expressive and joy promoting human being, with a double doctorate in Buzz Kill Studies. True, whenever a big scientific breakthrough in the research world emerged, he was the one who advised caution before it went out to the public, even when the known side effects were far less devastating than the disease itself. True, even during his two weddings he danced with the bride with proper steps and never 'shook a wicked hoof', enjoying seeing his soon to be ex's dancing free form with their ex's. And, true, even when his most favorite songs from his favorite memories championing his favorite

political causes in his adolescence were played at a concert, he never did 'the wave' with his hands and never sang along with the front stage performer. And, so tragically true, when the theme song for Katerina's new movie was put on the big screen at the star studded Graduation ceremony musical extravaganza at Ransellhoff U, with her as the main performer, his soul could not allow his brain to sing along with his mouth, wave with his uplifted hands or dance with his feet, which were still firmly on the ground. Though some say they were stuck to it with nails inserted by his own hand.

But, in the back of the adoring and mesmerized crowd, Paul Albergheitti smiled at Katerina. Ever watchful of her, the exuberant audience and the magical dynamic of the moment. Indeed, Katerina was getting everything she wanted, but was it what she deserved? Young folks with purple hair, middle age attendees with grey hair and over sixty old farts with no hair felt the music from Flagstaff Conspiracy, recalled the rough cut of that was sure to be a blockbuster hit, with happy smiles. Yet Paul felt himself being the protector of the flock. The one watching for wolves their current shepherd, Katerina said didn't exist. Yes, Paul was yet again the unpaid 'worry wart' who could not celebrate with the crowd or the Liberator on stage.

Paul self observed himself pitying those who did the wave with their raised hands, sang along with the star on stage and danced when the music beckoned them to do so. . Even though he wanted to and needed to. How so he didn't want to be a buzz kill! But, maybe Katerina's music, songs, films books and new medication she was developing at McCallum Pharma could cure him.

"One can hope, that 'physician heal thyself' is something that can really be done," he said to himself in a normal voice that was drowned out by the music. And to the God he used to believe in but was still in service of. And finally, he ascolated those profound words to the five students surrounding him who still remained in his underfunded and soon to be abolished department. Foreign students whose knowledge of English were confined to what to do in the laboratory and medical library. Bright kids at home who were considered geniuses here who, despite his encouraging them to get out and experience the world that lived life rather than studied it, would remain in the comfortable yet somehow necessary jail he had sentenced himself to.

But even Paul could translate that credo from the artistic Greeks to the Hellenic scientists and technicians of their time into Chinese, Korean and Hoch Deutch, it would still 'not compute'. But, to quote 'The Hospital', a 50 year old movie which educated rather than entertained Paul, 'someone has to be...responsible.'

Yes, the diagnosis was confirmed as Paul observed, noted but didn't feel Katerina's joy on stage. Even when her eyes found his, and she gave him a big smile, which he returned with one that was manufactured rather than felt. Doctor Paul had evolved, or devolved, into someone who is of service to people and humanity, rather than someone who loved anyone. A price to pay to be a distributor efficient compassion and scientifically verified truth? Something he would pass on to his kids, if he had any. Thankfully for them, he still didn't.

## CHAPTER 11

Mildred Prescott faked being happily startled at her surprise 65<sup>th</sup> birthday party which Sean had set up for her. It started with her new young boss, and pupil, handing her an envelope after summoning her into his office, informing her that it was an ‘important legal document requiring your attention and appreciation. It was followed by a horde of employees flowing into the room breaking out with “Happy Birthday” in perfect three part harmony, followed by something that always made Mildred uncomfortable--- applause. Her smiles of appreciation to the young hot shots in the scientific arts and the art of selling the science to the public were as polite and mistrusting as the blandness of the customized birthday wishes on the eight by eleven card they and every top or headed towards the top level employee in McCallum Pharma had filled up. ‘Personal’ greetings that a mentally retarded AI computer would pop out based on being over-programmed by procedural code writers. “Best”. “Have a Good One”. “Greetings to a special lady.” But there were some signatures, mostly from those at the top of the pyramid in the presumably ‘we are all in this together’ but in reality vertically integrated company which belied the real reason for the party. Such as “You were our hero.” “A life well lived.” “You have done a lot.” And finally, “Time to be your own boss and let life take care of you.”

“So, thank you all for your, ya know, like, totally appreciated greetings,” Mildred said to the congregation, infusing ‘millennial talk’ which she found repulsive to her own ears but required for the listeners to hear. After which she threw with her eyes an stare at and into Sean which said, “Bit I am not ready to retire!” But also...”Why are you doing this to me, when I’m your only real friend in the room?”

Sean had no idea how Mildred found out about the surprise party before any of the attendees did. But, Mildred was getting old and deserved to have some rest. After all, East Indian wisdom and practical philosophy said that the first 20 years you learn it, the next twenty you do it, the next twenty you teach it. Then the last twenty, you leave it. Even though, biologically anyway, Mildred was ten years away from being eighty. But, she was a life tired seventy who would have difficulty, frustration and heartache if she continued here 20 year stint of being a mentor, teacher and task master to anyone, particularly at McCallum Pharma, which was heading into a new, upward direction.

“I do have one question to ask you all, dear friends,” the arthritic, wrinkle faced, more white than brown or grey haired self made Iron Maiden asked anyone who would answer. “Where’s Professor Doctor Maestro Katerina?”

“Working in her lab,” came from someone in the back of the crowd. “Refining her new dull out disease medication.”

“Which we can market as an anti-agent elixir!” Sean declared. “Inflict on the world that needs it.”

“You mean offer, Doctor Sean,” Mildred, interjected with a tilted head and extended index finger.

“Of course,” Sean said with an uneasy smile, wondering why all of a sudden Mildred was addressing him by a title she had earned but he hadn’t.

“And Katerina’s new film, it’s going to make a million once it hits the big screen,” another voice bellowed out.

“Billions,!” Sean exclaimed.

“As long as it stays true to her soul, and to the story,” Mildred reminded Sean, then everyone else.

“Of course, Professor Mildred!” Sean assured the hunchbacked woman, placing his large hands on her small, shaking and, as he felt them, fragile shoulders. “My contacts will see that it and the next films and books she comes up with will be the most popular film in history,” he assured her. “But for now...a celebration of life!”

Sean realized that he had slipped into using words that could be misconstrued to mean a funeral rather than a blissful retirement for the woman who made it possible for him to be King Pharma, but who stood in the way of his most personal and important agenda. He noted in the back of the crowd Richard Baldino, Ph.D., Esq., a lawyer scientist whose education was paid for by mob money who had ‘creatively’ paid back his student loans, suddenly blasting in. ‘A long life to continue in blissful, pain free happiness!’

“Yes!” Sean declared with an upwardly extended right hand, while motioning for the culinary staff he had hired to wheel in a cake.

The 65 candles on the white frosting on the cake which simply read ‘Happy Birthday Professor Mildred.’ illuminated the room, casting a dark shadow on the birthday girl’s face. “Make a wish!” Sean beckoned. Turning her frail body with his large hands her towards the cake, instructing her to blow out the candles.

Mildred gave Sean the dirtiest look he imagined possible from the woman who had been his ‘second nurse maid’. But, he was doing it all for Mildred’s own good, even more so than his ever growing clandestine agenda.

Mildred took in a big breath, then blew at the candles. They didn’t go out. She tried again, blowing out no more than 4 of them. Then took in another breath, blowing out another two. Four more attempts resulted in the remaining candles defiantly staying ablaze, daring her to try again. But by the fifth try, she had run out of steam, and wind, then breath.

Sean looked at his watch, noting the passing of time which pushes young people to achieve ahead of and despite Father Time’s agenda, and ticks down once strong horses to



be put out to pasture. He stepped in, showing that he was assisting Mildred in blowing out the candles, extinguishing them all for her, 19 seconds after they were set ablaze. He then embraced Mildred as a child who has had to become the adult in the family once the latter had reached the end of her time.. He of course didn't tell any of his young associates, or still beloved Mildred, that he had specially ordered the candles to remain ablaze for a prescribed time, slated to go out twenty-five seconds after they were lit. A secret which Mildred would never find out, if she knew what was good for her. And him.

## CHAPTER 12

It was one of those days for Katerina, and not because summer had come way too quickly and with such ferocity of sweat inducing heat that crept in between torrential rains. A ‘trench day in the back lines’, as she called it. Prometheus, her cat, had decided to water her new sheets in her built for comfort rather than cost effectiveness of construction bed and her hair while she was sleeping. The plumbing in her new dwelling which the relator promised was state of the art, made a statement of waterless defiance when she tried to take a shower and put on the new washing machine she that had been purchased for her. And her new car, which had four working cylinders that actually pumped up and down in the same rather than their own rhythms, wouldn’t start.

“So,” she said to the feline gazing through the screen door apologetically to her as she re-entered the door to the, according to her recollection anyway, condo for which the rent was paid for the next three months. Smelling of urine and gas from the flooded engine Katerina picked up the mail from the mailbox next to her front door. “Rule of threes, which ends with...” she muttered to herself as the box fell off its hinges, spilling its contents into a puddle of water left behind by a torrential rain the night before. “Rule of fours...which means that the fifth time is the charm,” she continued as she rifled through the soggy but still readable envelopes.

The cat meowed something that sounded like ‘yes’, or maybe it was ‘hey feed me, and take me to the vet so he or she can figure out why I can’t hold my urine like I used to’. The feline nuzzled around Katerina’s naked, sweat-soaked calves as she opened up the first envelope.

“Hey!” she exclaimed regarding the promotion from “Doctor Felix’s Feline Fare”, advertising their new brand of cat food which gives you ‘four times the flavor’ of their competitors but, if you read the fine print, a quarter of the volume for merely twice the price of ‘commoner cat food’. “OK,” she said to the picture of the tuxedo black and white cat wearing a lab coat, stethoscope and old timer professor glasses. “Put a scientific name on ground up chicken beaks and well water and you can sell it as ‘quality processed avian meal and 100 percent aqua’. But, hey, sometimes we have to put some sugar coating on the pill of medicine that people need to take.”

Katerina ranted on to Doctor Felix, and Prometheus, about her newest variation of medication that would cure Dull Out Disease, empowering, educating and enlightening two legged patients of all ages, even the Millennials. A double ringed, readily absorbable carbon compound with the hydroxyl group of the fifth carbon in ring one and a hydroxyl group on the second ring at carbon 2 rather than 4. Neither Prometheus nor Doctor F understood what she was talking about, but they somehow know what she meant, and how she was feeling about her work finally getting cleared by the FDA and sent out to the marketplace through McCallum Pharma. And, with her name on it as the discoverer..

The next envelope was from the McCallum Pharma. She opened up the envelope, expecting a check to be enclosed but instead it was a bill to be paid by her to the FDA for an investigation of the drug, and to...many, many others. Others who sank into deep depression after taking Katerina as prescribed, who had friends who committed suicide after taking the drug and ten cases of brain tumors which developed in the mind-soul awakening elixir. Tumors which were very similar to those she wrote about in Flagstaff Conspiracy, the fictional expose of the Medical-Military-Industrial complex.

“This has to be hate mail, a sick joke from a competing company or some shithead from somewhere who’s gaslighting me,” she muttered to herself, wiping yet another layer of sweat from her already drenched brow. She turned to Promethius, who backed away from her. “Sean told me that all three clinical trials showed efficacious results with NO side effects other than light heartburn, mild non-diabetic increases in blood glucose, an INCREASE in libido and some diarrhea in people who preferred to have prunes for breakfast instead of pancakes. Afflicting no more than three percent of percent of the test animals AND human volunteers, and four percent of loose stools in 3 percent of the patients, no shit!”

Promethius was as much as a loss as to why something in the lab and in clinical trials that went so well went to shit once it went out into the world. A call to the individual at the legal division at McCallum confirmed that the letter was real. As did the verbal confirmation from Sean’s new secretary. Veronica, a cold and, by the sound of her voice and the number of ‘likes’ and ‘ya knows’ she inserted into her speech, Millennial power addicted bitch. Who lacked the grace and inner beauty Mildred had exuded, informing Katerina that Sean was ‘like totally unavailable until, ya know, further notice’

“And there’s another matter you should know about,” Veronica added at the other end of the phone. “Doctor Meastro K,” she said sarcastically. “Rumor has it that you’re being, like, ya know, totally cancelled by everyone in the entertainment biz, because of what was in the Director’s Cut of Flagstaff. Which was offensive, slanderous, racist and...”

“A Director’s Cut I never did or saw!” Katerina blasted back, breaking out into a cold sweat.

“And the university you still, like, have a faculty position in is, like, ya know, gonna give your office and department to someone else,” Veronica continued.. “Someone who’s a lot cooler and WOK. Is that true?”

“It can’t be!” Katerina yelled into the phone. “These rumors have to be...”

“Real, according to every thing I know, and Sean’s been told,” Veronica interjected in ‘adult’ talk. “There’s an expression from Einstein, I think, that says---”

“---I know..Every scientist should know how to be a shoemaker’,” Katerina recalled and gave voice to through shivering lips.

“And know how to lick the shit from the bootheels of those who you put down, offended, insulted or, like, ya know, disappointed?” Veronica’s reply. With a question mark at the end which was as declarative and imperative as any accusation, or reality. “But in the meantime, wishing you luck and, like, have a nice day.”

The click on the phone from Veronica blasted into the through every bone in Katerina’s shaking body. What was happening? Who should she call to verify what was going on? ‘Of course,’ she told herself, and Promethius. “After you reach the top, you’re going to meet once again, the people you said goodbye to while you are falling down.” One name came to mind, and soul to ascertain what was going on, and, perhaps someone who could say ‘why’.

## CHAPTER 13

Paul had never seen Katerina so subservient, and logical. “So, maybe you could re-connect to your first profession so I could figure out what my next profession should be, Father Alberghetti?” she said to him on bended knee in his lab, after sneaking in. “And maybe you can ask God to forgive me for whatever I’ve done?” How I acted dishonorably? And did dishonorable things after I left the lab. And left you, Father Alberghetti? And after I made you leave your first profession and...?’

Katerina the rest of her offenses with a mouth buried under Paul’s neck, like a child. A child who had, for real, needed. They included using Medical Research Council money for literary and cinemagraphic explorations. Advising keen scientific minds to consider trying to find cures for defects in the collective human soul. And, between ‘projects’ and temporary corporate funders, getting paid to write term papers for students enrolled in Paul’s courses and the ones that she had taught. Paul of course knew about them all, but he pretended to know nothing about her past offenses. They were, of course, misdemeanors against man, which paled in comparison to Paul’s felonies against God and humanity. If indeed those two of Paul’s servants who he had pledged allegiance to in the seminary were working with rather than against each other.

But, as former Father Paul knew, he was now on his own in a Promethian world. Not under the mandate of any God or gods, but at the mercy of the clock. And events in the material realm which demanded action at the timetable of Nature or its human inhabitants. “So,” Katerina said to Paul. “The drug I developed for dull out disease and learned helplessness worked in my lab, and yours. On the rats and the, well, people we conned into taking it. Why didn’t the newest generation of it work like the older one? And why did the laws of Nature change so much? And the laws of human behavior in the art world? Tell me, please, Father Paul? Even though you don’t do much of anything about the ills of the Universe, you know so much about why they exist. So tell me what you know, and what you can do about it, or I’ll...” With that, Katerina grabbed hold of a vial from the shelf, taking a syringe in hand, then kicked Paul into the wall, nearly knocking him unconscious.

“Your newest brand of insulin,” Katerina noted, identifying the code on the label. “One shot into here and it’s over, outside of course, since I would never implement you in this...liberation,” she exclaimed with relief. After which she pulled a pre-prepared band over her arm, and inserted the needle into a vein, injecting its contents slowly.

Why or how Paul got brains in his fingers, which not only knew but did something, he didn’t know. He grabbed the needle just in time for Katerina to stop at woozy, and faint into ‘happy’.

One thought riffled through Paul’s mind and soul. “Those who are a danger to themselves or others need professional care. Better to have Katerina in a safe medical facility than in the depths of hell, or wandering around as a ghost.”

## CHAPTER 14

It was a series of accidents that put Katerina in a series of three psych wards that used drugs which sedated her into the kind of depression that didn't allow her to end it all, but suffer even more for still being around. Through the list of contacts that he shared with no one at McMillian Pharma, Sean found her. "I'm determined to make things right by her," he said to his new, much younger and far more adept to learning than teaching new Mildred, Veronica Campbell as he showed his ID at the security entrance at 'Paradise Gardens, a restored sanatorium which was being converted into a state beyond the art psychiatric CURING rather than 'treating' facility'.

"So, who named this place Paradise Gardens when the only thing growing here are, like, ya know, plastic plants, with weeds growing out of the patches of dirt between new construction sites?" Veronica inquired of the security guard at the front desk.

"Da previous owner, Priestess Yolanda Epstein, an overaged WOK snowflake who thought that seeing, smelling and drinking tea made from flowers could " answered now security guard Mike Galaut The 'receptionist' had been a former NFL defensive lineman on Sean's father's favorite team. His ability to earn a living again in the gridiron after his knees were shattered along with a head concussion that made him 'cookoo for cocoa puffs was restored by Sean's dad and patented but still not released yet medications made by 21<sup>st</sup> century machines instead of rancid left over from Woodstock 1970 seeds. "But now that yer boss or, if a play yer cards like a winner instead of a liberal flake power bitch loser, yer future hubby there will let you name this place," continued the MAGA hat wearing clone of the business tycoon who coined the acronym, but with a full head of shortly cropped hair and a few more functionally intact brain cells under it. "Me and yer Dad knew that you got a lot of smarts in the knoggin, but naming new places and new miracle drugs ain't one of them, Sean. Am I right, or am I right?"

"Yeah, Uncle Mike," Sean replied. "You're right."

"And am I right about you havin' somethin' special going on with Veronica here, somethin' more special than yer old man, and truth be told, me, me when I had more brown in my hair than white, with Mildred?" he inquired with a raised left eyebrow.

"You're right," Sean admitted as fact, looking at Veronica with genuine affection that felt like what the love songs said was love. "You're very right, Uncle Mike," he continued to his godfather. One of, to be accurate, many men who were given that awarded title by his father in exchange for desperately wanting a male friend he would like and trust, And others he desired special favors from. Favors the new Pharma Emperor was finding out about more each day regarding how and why his father decided to base his extensive multi-business empire from a, to be truthful about it, grade B Pharmaceutical company.

"So," Iron Mike said to his 'godson', interrupting Sean's special moment with future Emperess Veronica. "The patient you sent here is in the Presidential suite, which, today is..." The ex-football star wrote out the directions to the room on the back of one of his

personally signed Super bowl photos of him receiving a trophy for his being admitted into the Hall of Fame. One that had been photoshopped by his doctors when he was a patient in Paradise Gardens, perhaps as part of a special treatment to convince the brain damaged gridiron star that the world had not forgotten him. Inserting memories in his head of events that didn't happen. Something Sean's Dad was highly skilled at. And which young Sean had also learned, as a result of genetics. And fine tuned, and in secret sessions with his Dad, with tricks of the trade the lad promised to never reveal, at the expense of being haunted by his father or having demons burst up from hell to cut off his dick, scalp him bald and burn his charming 'baby blues' from the eye sockets.

"So," Iron Mike said to Sean as he was time travelling in reverse, yet again, and using the secret destinations he had revisited as a launch pad to a bigger, bolder and 'satisfied in all ways' future. "Game clock is ticking down. And if ya linger here, the ref upstairs is gonna penalize you ten, or maybe twenty yard this time again."

"Got it, Coach," Sean said to one of his godfathers, as a godson. Looking at the hard working middle aged work horse with something he never had for even himself...respect. With that, he looked at the directions on the photograph, taking Veronica under the arm and escorting her to the latest room designated as 'the Presidential Suite.'

"So, who are we going to see?" inquired the 20 something brunette bombshell whose stunning beauty was over matched only by the number of degrees she acquired in human behavior and abnormal psychology. "It isn't Mildred, is it?" she pressed, gently.

"No...she's retired," Sean replied, confident that even if it was his father's old flame and his new assigned mentor, Veronica would see no reason to restore either of Mildred's positions.

"So, we're going to see a brother you didn't tell me about?" Veronica speculated. "You know, that if I were, like, ya know, an Adlerian, I'd like totally have to believe that you had an older brother who made you feel like shit, or a sensitive younger brother who you treated like shit."

"No," Sean said. "I'm my father's only son."

"That you know about," Veronica pointed out.

"Maybe, maybe not, but..." Sean said as he let go of Veronica's arm, opening the door indicated by the map Iron Mike in the new and improved experimental as well as scientifically SOUND Psych facility.

Veronica hesitated to go though the door, as the hallway was underlit and narrow with a low ceiling. "No, geniuses first, please," she said, fear in her eyes, her chin quivering. "I'm..."

"Claustrophobic?" Sean offered.

Veronica nodded in the affirmative.

“Yeah,” he replied, confident at finding out yet another problem with Veronica that he could perhaps correct sometime with his charm or some other miracle med the overpaid researchers under him could come up with. “I’ll have to speak with the construction crew about this. But in the meantime, I want you to please come with me. We can conquer our fears together.”

“And what are YOU afraid of, Sean?” Veronica pressed, thinking that finding out would be untying the last knot which was holding back the rest of his love for her.

“I’ll tell you that when we get to the Presidential Suite,” he said, reading with an acknowledging her thought on the matter. “Please, for now anyway, close your eyes.””

Veronica complied, giving her hand to Sean. “I trust you.”

“And I..ya know is that I...Lo...Lo...Lo....” he stuttered.

“Love me?”she inquired with extreme anxiety regarding his answer.

“Yes,” he replied, confirming it with a kiss on her quivering lips that turned them into a smile, which he felt coming onto his face with three times the warmth and depth.

Sean broke out into ‘Follow the Yellow Brick Road’ to Veronica, his notes more on tune than off. Her harmony keeping the song and dance on track. Upon arriving at a less narrow hallway, and opening the door to the Presidential suite, he turned to Veronica. “We’re here,” he said. “With a very special and important n value who we will make useful to us, and herself again.”

“You mean a person, who...” Veronica said as she carefully opened here eyes. They beheld a woman sitting on a four thousand dollar lounge chair, her arms restrained by diamond studded ropes. A forty going on ninety patient with straggly red hair in a luxury suite providing the patient with everything except consciousness of where she was. “This ‘n value’, test subject or guinea pig is....someone who bleeds like us when cut,” she said, pointing to slashes on her wrists. “Someone who when hit,” she continued, after which she pounded a reflex hammer on her knees, ducking from a kick, followed by a growl from the woman’s mouth, . “She’s telling us to fuck off.”

“But can’t because of what OTHER facilities did to her, after she did a whole lot of harm to herself,”, Sean said. An n value in our newest study who....”

“...Has a face that....” Veronica flashed on, seeing her own reflection in the mirror in front of the woman “Looks a little like mine,” she speculated regarding the sadness and compassion in the woman’s face. “But looks a whole lot like...someone’s mother.” Sean’s beloved said as she turned to him.



“Someone else’s mother!” Sean said as Katerina turned to him, with eyes that went from being loving and compliant to radiating primal . He broke out into a cold sweat. His mind and soul beginning to have a mano a mano fight to the end with each other.

“Or...your mother?” Veronica flashed on, examining the facial features of Sean and the mystery woman. “With a face that says...!”

“Nothing I want to hear again, from her or you!” Sean blasted out, self observing his hand slap Veronica in the face. “And you will say NOTHING about this, me or her to anyone!” he continued, throwing Veronica across the room, bashing her head against the wall. Then choking her. “If you say you love me, you will not say anything about this n value. This specimen of selfishness who abandoned me when I needed her most. This specimen that I and we will do with as I see fit and as justice sees fit. Yes, my love, my...”

From Veronica’s mouth, no words, no air. From her rotating eyes,, confusion which merged into a fixed stare and blast of anger. From deluded ‘n value’ Katerina, a laugh, then coherent words. “Now I see who and what you are, ‘son’” . She broke out into song, with a very conscious voice very unexpectedly. “You always hurt the one you love.” Very much on key.

Thinking fast, and pharmacologically, Sean cut the restraints on Katerina’s arms, then moved her over to Veronica’s, placing his mother’s hands on his future now dead wife’s throat. He retrieved a syringe of more ‘yellow number 5’ from one of the compartments of a case from his coat pocket. An unnamed potion his father had patented, or perhaps stole from the Nazis, but never released to the public. And which, according to Mildred’s tall tales, was used by covert Black Ops operators oversees to convert un cooperative prisoners into compliant informants. He jabbed the components it into Katerina’s veins, wondering in the back of his turmoil infested mind why the last dose didn’t last as it normally did, or who had underdosed her before his visit.

Katerina fell back into semi-consciousness, stating ‘please make the nightmare stop, Master, again and again holding onto her aching head..

“Mother. I will give you the blue and red vials, that will awaken you to be conscious in MY and ultimately your service, but in the meantime, we’ll keep this incident where you attacked and killed my fiancée as our secret. Do you agree?”

“Did I really kill someone?” Katerina muttered, seeing the impression of black ink from her hands on Veronica’s pale neck .

“Yes, you did, Mom,” Sean assured her. “But,” he said as he hugged Katerina with a constellation of conflicting emotions involving love and hate, tears running down his beet red face. “I can protect you, if you do as I say. For both of us. If that is ok with you, Mom.”

“Yes, my...son,” she said, looking up at him...”My..”

“...provider and master, and friend,” Sean assured ‘mother dearest’. “Who with MY contacts brought you up in the art and science world, and who is putting you back in your place now for what you did and didn’t do for me,” he thought, but didn’t say. He kissed her on the cheek, With his other hand he injected her two injections of ‘special medication’ of his choosing into the catheter in her shaking left arm. He pulled away, just before her teeth were about to take a chunk out of his lips, those choppers biting her own tongue instead. “You can talk with this,” he said, pulling a pen from his breast pocket. “Words of my choosing this time. And, now fully yours. Right?”

This time, Katerina’s nod had no defiant agendas behind it. Finally, Sean had a family of his own again.

## CHAPTER 15

There were two noble traits which Katerina Papadapolis had, a source of pride as much as pain. Implanted into her Hellenic brain and genetics, hiding in areas that she could never find to extract, was the fact that if you were Italian Catholic, you apologized for rain. And if you were brought up Greek Orthodox, you apologized for not being Catholic enough. With that guilt not being disposed of with a confessional to ANY priest, rabbi or shrink. The second part of her nobility was that she never learned that in the process of trying to serve or please others, no matter how intelligent and far thinking you were, it was inevitable that you pissed off or disappointed others. And now, it seemed that those others included EVERYbody, Most importantly Sean.

“There’s something I want you to do for me, Mom,” Sean said as he served her breakfast at the supersized table in his house, what looked like an cheese, pepper and ham omelet but which smelled and tasted like yellow chalk and rotted leaves to her recently self-mutilated tongue.

“Anything,” she said to the son who she was told died in the car crash along when she was 23 and he was no more than 5. “You know,” she assured Sean, still smelling the fumes of the burning wreck along with the stench of the rancid flesh emanating from the wounds in both legs, her right arm and her chest that lingered while she was in a drug induced coma for two months. “I didn’t know you were still alive! Your father, and everyone else around me in the hospital said you were dead. And as for the funeral...and where they buried what was left of your body.”

“Dad knew what was good for you, and what you could handle,” Sean said, refilling her plate with something that looked like hash brown potatoes but smelled to Katerina like another one of his ‘special spices’ which had an aroma she could not define. “And since you were driving the car, drunk.”

“Was I?” she gasped, the strange aroma of the omelet in her dry mouth resembling blood and puss, along with something else that repulsed her. “I don’t remember. I just remember going to a party that he insisted on going to at his place, drinking two glasses of what I was told was non-alcoholic champagne to celebrate his...Then...I woke up in...”

“He didn’t tell the Cops that after you stabbed him in the chest, three times, you took his car keys and kidnapped me, saying that if he isn’t going to give you half of his money, you’ll take away all of his kid,” Sean pounded at and into Katerina’s face. She envisioned everything he said. “A kid who is interfering with her career to enlighten all kids everywhere! You remember the one sided argument you had with him...”

As Sean described that fateful night in the beach-house, Katerina’s mind constructed the details. As a new movie she had never seen. Or one she had forgotten. One which

formed an image in ultra high definition black and white which burst into blindingly bright color when he rammed a picture into her averted face. “My father, Johnny, loved you!” he said of the 20 something heavily bearded man with long straggly hippie hair.

“And I loved him!” she blasted back, recalling the good times with . “Before John decided to run away and become...”

“Him!” Sean shot back at Katerina, ramming a picture of his father as the son his grandfather wanted him to be. Clean shaven, with a gentleman’s haircut and a suit. Taking on the reins of McMillan Pharmaceuticals with a new name, and a new mission. Which included taking care of the son Katerina assumed was dead.

Memories of baby, then toddler Sean came to Katerina’s mind yet again. Images that she saw, felt and smelled in those nightmares she had experienced for two decades. The ones that made her wake up drenched with sweat even on the coldest Upstate New York nights with the windows wide open. Which were, on occasion, relieved when she had ‘good’ dreams where she met her son as a full grown alive man. Which turned into nightmares again when she not only renewed her loves with him, but made love to him.

As Sean continued to describe past events before his ‘death’, Katerina didn’t know if she was having one of those nightmares again. Or if she was still in the drug induced coma. Or if she was in the land of the living. In any case, she wanted it to stop. With shaking hands and weakened legs that gave way, landing her on floor unable to get up again, she grabbed hold of Sean’s waist. “What do you want me to do?” she said, the only thing her eyes being able to fix on being his warm, hurt and angry eyes. “Tell me! Please.”

Sean helped her up. She shivered with the most intense cold she had ever experienced.

“Yes, it is cold in here,” he said with a compassionate tone in his voice that was part Sean’s and part his father’s, in the good days anyway. “And, I think we need to warm ourselves by the fire..” He placed his large, caring and warm arms around her shaking torso, leading her to the living room. “With some special firewood,” he continued, placing her on a warm, comfortable chair in front of the fire place loaded with logs that refused to give way to igniting despite the generous kindling under it. “This,” he said, placing a handful of papers from a pile next to her into her hands. “If you will do the necessary and required honors.”

Katerina looked down at the papers, noting that they bore her name. “My manuscripts? Works I haven’t published or filmed yet,” she noted.

“And shouldn’t,” Sean said with an assuring voice. “So that you can start over again. With you absolving yourself of all the wrongs you did, and wrote in here. And we can...start fresh with what’s good for me, my dead heartbroken father, and..yes, you” He uncovered a pile of fresh notebooks, then placed a pen into her hand. “Or else...your life, and the lives of whoever you still love, or think you love, will be even more painful and agonizing.”

Katerina somehow felt it was the hand of God that touched hers. With a commandment she had to obey, knowing very well that life, or perhaps Sean himself, or God, or perhaps all of the above would extract the worst revenge on her or those she still loved. Perhaps the 'other' John, her valued student AD and mentor. Maybe Paul, the honorable man who got away, to save his own ass from her toxic energy. Or, her cat Prometheus, she considered after she heard, heard or maybe imagined hearing, a familiar meow from somewhere in the room when she wasn't looking at Sean.

"Fine, ok," Katerina said as she put one manuscript after another bearing her name, along with the hard drives that had them stored on computer, into the fire. The flames burst up, turning the room warm, then comfortable. Then hot with a cold touch to it as the rest of the works from her former life were converted into ashes. Which Sean made go away by hugging her and singing her to slumber.

## CHAPTER 16

It was a busy day for Paul at the lab trying to figure out Mother Nature's biological secrets so that the diseases God created to torture His 'most favorite creatures' could be at least minimized. Some breakthroughs in three lines of neurological pathologies and cancer investigations had fallen his way, providing his three post-docs and two grad students with enough bench work to keep them active during the day and results from that bench which gave them lots of data to write up into research papers that would graduate them to junior faculty members and forward progress on their theses.

But what caught Paul's attention most that day was a special promotional package that had arrived from McCallum Pharma by special delivery to his mailbox along with those of selected other senior investigators.. They contained of course laminated pictures of researchers at their lab benches discovering and administering the latest miracle meds and newly improved old standbys made by the company. Those researchers of course having ultra-clean clean lab coats and the latest in fashion wear underneath them . With faces that were both smiley and handsome enough to belong to Hollywood actors, all of them looking bright, alert, well rested and free of any mental or physical challenges. And NO fire or intelligence behind the eyes. And graphs showing upward trends in good stuff and downward trends in bad stuff which didn't include any margins of error which make the upward and downward trends statistically and otherwise meaningless. It was supplemented by a book about the McCallums, a glowing biography of a family of brilliant, generous and hard working 'Anti-Sackler rags to riches' pharmacological moguls who championed 'lab bench to bedside' delivery for three generations, the most recent of them being Sean.

But there was one face which was painfully familiar on the back of the promotional bio. Through the fashionable bob of blonde highlighted hair, tightening of worry lines on every corner of the face, thick glasses and 'very happy with the way things are' non-Promethian smile, and pen name of Kate Pappas, Paul saw Katerina Papadapolis, By the vacant and defeated look in her eyes, Katerina had given up on seeing herself as she really was, and should be.

Paul was thankful that Katerina was still alive, as when he went to visit her in the Pysch ward, he was told that she had somehow found her way to the tenth floor and took a leap down to the pavement in the dead of night. Her body mangled into unrecognizable pieces while her soul (according to the institution's Interfaith Spiritual Advisor anyway) flying up into the heavens to a better place or, failing that, a less agonizing incarnation. But what she had become now was worse than dead. A read of the bio she wrote about Sean and his illustrious family was not only lies, but was written in a literary style that lacked humor, vitality or Life. But is was an 'easy' simplistic read that was penned by a hand which was afflicted with Dull Out Disease , spreading that virus which cajoled people into lazy or no thinking. And passing on that 'comfortable' affliction which made them willing consumers of unneeded expensive goods and sheeple who could not come up with, along with being repulsed by and fearful of, any original innovative idea, or ideal..

Paul self observed himself smelling the mild chili he had brought in for lunch. Then the mixture of various chemicals from the lab outside his door always open 4 by 5 foot 'office'. A mixture of acetone, isopropyl alcohol, phenol and manure cleaned out of rat, mice and rabbit cages. But another odor infiltrated his nostrils, before opening up the bottle it came in. He reached up to the bottle of Promethia-II which had been made by McCallum Pharmaceuticals according to her spec that lingered on his shelf A free sample of the, as promised on the label, 'scientifically formulated drug that would enliven and enlighten even dull out disease afflicted scientists' from her own lab at McCallum alongside the first vial out of the factory which she gave to Paul six long months ago, which he never used. Or distributed to others. Particularly after the Prometia-II induced cancers, depression, liver degeneration, incurable depression and non-reversible suicide popped up in the general public. To far more than the extent of 'shit happens in rare cases with anything' one percent of the population that the medical world, rightly or wrongly, accepted as biologically inevitable 'collateral damage'. Collateral damage occurred in no less than 38 percent of the patients in all tests conducted with Promethia II, even more in the animal studies Paul had done when contracted by the National Institutes of Health 'an 'anomoyous company' for big pay to keep HIS no frills, low budget yet somehow productive lab going. Katerina never suspected such would happen given the clinical trial reports of Promethia II she was given, when working for McCallum Phara. As well as observing none of those effects on the lab animals she had tested it on, including Promethius and herself.

Paul opened up the bottle of commercially available Promethia II pumped out by McCallum's machines Upon opening it, he detected an aroma that was different than the sample he got from Katerina's own one person lab when there. Katerina's personally made sample was bitter, like 'good for you' ginseng. Mass manufactured McCallum pills smelled like 'only a highly trained Zen Bhuddhist can't eat just one' candy. He looked at the expiration dates on both vials, seeing that they both had 'active patented' ingredients with no difference in non-medical components. He smelled a rat, the kind that did not walk on four legs and ate garbage when in his apartment building, dying homeless people when in the alleyways or formulated pellets when raised for research purposes in a lab.

Paul's eyes were drawn to the out dated gas chromatograph analyser that Cho Li, a grad student more skilled in machinery than matters biological, had somehow converted from being useless junk only good for a movie prop or a sci-fi spaceship panel in the theatre version of Star Trek into a state beyond the art, and science, devise that would tell you what chemicals were in or not in a medication. He leaped up from his chair, interrupting the heavily gloved Cho while the animal fearing scientist was injecting rats with coded materials, his nose winching at the smell of the rodents. "I'll take over that job," Paul said his most skilled, and valued, machine repairman and whose skills in matters biological were average at best.

"But Professor Doctor Albergetti," he said with partially bowed head and an accent fresh off the boat from Beijing. "You have more important things you must do."

“Not as important as you telling me what is in these two vials,” Paul said to him, handing him the two samples of Promethia II. “The most important job in the world now. Mine anyway. And...after that...”

Paul turned his attention to the rodents in cages waiting to become n values, munching on pellets in a safe, comfortable cage. “Sorry guys, but we’ll have to suppliment your food with something that’s good for you,” he said to the new Group A regarding Katerina’s home made concoction of Promethia II. “And, if I’m right, something that’s not so good for you,” he informed Group B. “And, to all of you,” he continued to both groups, with regret as well as atonement. “If God is a rat, I know, I’m going to hell. If she’s a cat, maybe I might wind up in Heaven. And if God is a figment of my imagination or yours...” he reflected on deeper maters regarding both truth and practicality. “God help us all.”



## CHAPTER 17

Sean expected that eventually it would be found out that the drug bearing Katerina's favorite god, ET or rebellious Atlantian manufactured by McCallum machinery caused rather than caused disease and death in rodent studies, and that the medication from Katerina's privately owned machines was significantly beneficial. But not today, He didn't know or recognize the masked presenter of that data promoting that hypothesis when he barged into his office. Or what he would do about the lone, and unarmed, messenger who somehow snuck his way through three security checks and finally through 'Veronica 2', a new secretary who was half as beautiful as Veronica 1, but twice as crafty in detecting a liar and four times more forceful in throwing him against a wall and bashing out his, or her, teeth. "Before this goes public, I need to know why?" the unexpected visitor in a lab coat bearing the McCallum logo said, calmly, after Sean had the chance to look at the files he dumped on his desk and demand that he look at it, at gunpoint.

"And you are?" Sean inquired with an arrogant smirk, behind which was a dry mouth with shattering teeth who seemed new to firing any weapon other than a water pistol or paintball shotgun. "Some science-FICTION crack pot who wrote up this false data, stole or had specially made a McCallum logo and slapped it on the cleanest lab coat you could get from a 'gently used' rack at the Salvation Army store, 'doctor'..." Sean pushed his way to read the writing on the nametag of the unexpected whose face was hidden by a surgical mask that was not the same hue of blue as the legitimate workers at McCallum. "Doctor..."

"Paul Alberghetti", the intruder said, whipping off his mask. "The researcher who---"

"---Did the initial study on the drug named after its discover, the former and now disarmed 'Maestro Doctor' from doing any more harm Katerina Pappadopolus," Sean said. "Which others confirmed. For which we, and the public, thank you. And as you know, we have recalled all of the Promethia II out there. Including anything else that masochistic sadistic bitch put out in the world to 'enlighten, empower and educate' humanity."

"Including her unpublished manuscripts, published books, and films, which you probably took from the safe in her old place?" Paul said. "Which I have copies of..."

"Where?!!!" Sean interjected, snapping up to his feet, somehow finding solid ground with them.

"Somewhere safe,:" Paul replied, pulling himself back, allowing his arched back to slide into a chair while helping himself to one of Sean's cigars, then lowering the business end his pistol. After coughs that the very ex-smoker expected but endured, he puffed out circles of smoke that he sent Sean's way, placing a white then grey halo around his already black aura. "And some place where she can be who she was, and should be." he

demanded,. Pauk continued, re—aiming his gun at his head rather than the heart. Then his testicles, which he seemed to value even more

“Someone who you, so she confessed to me, on MY timetable, rejected, and discouraged,” Sean countered. “Katerina Pappadopolus HBARP likes being Kate Pappas. She’s comfortable, secure, taken care of, and me being the son who...” Sean held his tongue, realizing that he had given too much away without getting anything back in return.

“Son, who is taking revenge on his mother?” Paul said, the light of realization opening up his eyes, and heart. “What the fuck did she ever do to you!” he screamed into Sean’s sweat soaked face.

“Nothing!” he boomeranged back with twice the amplitude of intensity. “Which is what you will become! To the world and to yourself!” Putting a large bolus of money where his mouth was, Sean pressed a button under his desk. An alarm went off, startling Pall into looking for its source, giving Sean enough time to snatch the gun from his hand. Firing it at Paul Then finding all the chambers empty. Sean burst into laughter. “Yeah, you Docs believe in ‘above all do not harm’ but do not harm and you up doing nothing. And being nothing. And in twenty seconds, you, my NOT so dear almost step dad, will be escorted into jail, a psych ward that no one ever gets out of or a grave with an unmarked tombstone or..”

“A personal hell between my ears courtesy of one of your special toxins that you’re unofficially developing with the Department of Defense?” Paul, who apparently had an even more powerful ace up his unarmed sleeve. shot back as footsteps from hallway escalated in number and intensity en route to the outer regions of Sean’s office. “The one based in Washington, Moscow, or maybe....”

“----Places you don’t know about and never will!” Sean delivered with laser precision into Paul’s fire shooting eyes. In German, the language of his ancestors who, as NOT reported in the McCallum biography written by Kate Pappas. Ancestors who were more Aryan than honorable. Who were experts at passing on their vision of Master Race superiority to their progeny, and eve more expert in hiding it as hip, cool liberal WOKE.

With a flick of his three ounce index finger, Sean directed the sunglassed three hundred pound thugs in paramilitary uniforms to escort Paul out of his consciousness. And most importantly, out of Katerina’s.

## CHAPTER 18

“It’s a happy happy world for obedient boys and girls,” the white rabbit sung to his mistress Katerina as he hopped onto the night-table table in front of her bed to eat some more special carrots and mushrooms that had been put into her salad and steak delivered by room service. In a rubber room cell which had become her new presidential suite. With a view from the window she had drawn onto the wall that now revealed the bustling Metropolis of the Big Crab Apple. Christmas at Central Park South to the eye, and the stench bearing a mixture of gas fumes and roasted chestnuts. The rabbit pushed a pen into her hand with its front paw then, after a swift kick of his hindlimbs, flung a legal pad into the air. It landed it in front of Katerina’s tired eyes. He repeated his song... ‘It’s a happy happy world’...this time with three part harmony added.

“I know,” she said, : “A happy happy world for obedient boys and girls. But what are you, a boy illusion or a girl fantasy?” she inquired, trying to get a look at what was or wasn’t between the rabbit’s happily hopping hindlegs.

The rabbit had no answer, leaving Katerina with the responsibility and honor of determining which gender or dimension the white hare identified with. But what she did know was that the more she wrote, the more her hungry belly was fed, and the more the dingy windowless rubber room got bigger and more luxurious. As to what to write, Sean had sent in another template for her next novel. It was based on facts about Sean, his family and the wonder drugs the company under his command which he designed were about to release. Whether they were fact or fiction didn’t seem to matter to Katerina, “I could have AI do it but you are so much better at writing than me or any other human or any computer program I know, Mama,” Sean wrote on top of the fourteen point summary page of the 150 page document. Whether that was true, Katerina had no idea any more since the soul expanding process of channelling ideas, ideals and human expressions into words had degraded into putting on paper markings that seemed to no more than letters connecting words that connected sentences in a logical stream that obeyed the laws of grammar and the new patron she was assigned to. But, there was one thing she was thankful for, which she related to the rabbit after he or she finally obeyed her request to keep the happy singing down in volume and exuberance. : “He called me ‘Mama’ this time, like he did when he as a boy,” she related to the big eared rodent. “A boy who....:”

The images in her mind of the car accident disconnected her brain from her mouth, and whatever consciousness she still had with that construct she recalled as reality. This time, the movie in her mind inflicted a three D scene of the screeching of the car as it bashed into the a tree, The cries of a four year old behind with his hands extending to her arms as the smoke from under the hood burst into flames that were more cool than hot. Then the world spinning around her as she was pulled out of the car from the front seat by the strong arms of a fireman. Another fireman struggling to pull the boy out of the back seat, trapped in place by the safety seat belt, Then a bright light of the ambulance and a paramedic informing her that her husband, who was in the passenger seat, and son were ‘crispy critters now.’ Because while driving she was becoming so absorbed in

Beethoven's Ninth playing on the radio than the nine foot sheet of ice in front of her. And that 'the good dye young, and the selfish linger on.'

The recollections in her head then went to seeing lights above her in the hospital after being admitted to the ER. She recalled being into a coma for a week. Then after waking up from it, demanding to be released by blackmailing the doctors and nurses in Intensive care for having seen them use the beds around her for carnal hetero AND homosexual pleasure carnal, getting walking out of hospital and into a world where every place she went, she met a dead end as to finding her son, be it his live body or gravesite. And the whereabouts of hippy dippy guitar virtuoso hubby John. Who she found out through a the only honest, and highest paid, detective she hired had a family of his own. Which fled to places unknown.

It was that day of not finding John or her son when freedom loving, free-spirited and thrill seeking Katerina dedicated herself to serving humanity by never serving or pleasing herself, The day she 'grew up' according to some or, as Paul said to her on many occasions, shut herself up into her own coffin, A coffin which now was more psychedelic than normal for the now anti-drug and anti-weed and anti-booze scientist and artist.

With eyes closed, sitting most uncomfortably on the bed provided her, noting every bump and broken spring in it, Katerina felt a sharp pain in the upper portion of her writing hand. She looked at the source of the painful twinge that forced her eyes to be closed, expecting to see a flying cockroach with a stinger. "Alright K," she said to the bug she envisioned in Kafka's 'Metamorphosis', which she was able to produce as a short film that had an intelligent, and therefore small, fan club, most of its members of course being from Europe. "Tangerine Man with wings or..."

But when she opened her eyes, she beheld a human face on the enlarged insect. One that had a name. "I'm Mildred," it said in a lower registered voice that sounded more male than female. "And we both have to get out of here fast, before things get worse for someone you love more than you can ever love yourself," the old woman continued, blood on her white hospital gown.

"Sean?" Katerina blurted out as the presidential suite lost its furnishing, and view of the outside world, pushing herself up from the 'bed' onto what seemed like her feet.

"Yeah, him too," the elderly Messenger said. Her golden halo diminished with each word said. Katerina felt her own two feet on the floor rather than three floating on a cloud of fog.

"Can we take him with us?" Katerina said regarding the White rabbit in the far corner of the rubber room-scratching his chin, still doing his happy dance.

“Sure, if you need to,” the visitor to the cell which now had an open door to it said as she whisked Katerina out of the holding cell. Katerina saying a ‘till we meet again’ to her long eared perhaps gender neutral friend.

## CHAPTER 19

How Mildred knew where Paul was, and how to drug the guards outside of his private hospital suite was something she kept to herself. But she did make it through, with a Katerina who now knew who she herself was. And who she didn't want to be. Someone who would grow up to maintain the Papadapolis Traditional Greek ultra-Orthodox traditions. Someone who restricted the entire stockpile of compassion and concern for family only and, if they were Greeks or moldable Catholic Italians or Irish, an inlaw or two. Someone who kept the status quo, not wanting to change the world and ALWAYS being concerned with above all 'what would people think'? Those people being upper ups in matters of wealth, political position and 'bankable' celebrity. Those people who valued breakthroughs in science or the art according to how much prestige and/or wealth they brought in. Someone who endured the trials and tribulations of life on earth for an eternity in Heaven having breakfast, lunch and diner with family at a table where laughter was forbidden, the joy of discovery was punished and musicality was restricted to 'non-offensive' tunes akin to 'soft rock', otherwise known as stagnant, putrid mud. A culinary after-life experience of the good old 'happy' days of childhood and adolescence which Katrina, who unlike her other siblings who never left the old neighborhood, recalled as being hell.

"I wonder what my family would think of me now," Katerina asked Mildred, while she punched in a code to enter a room in darkened hallway featuring nothing on its walls. Upon opening the door, they then snuck into through the even more darked room to the cot where Paul was lying down, his back to both of them. "Yeah," Katerina voiced again. "I wonder what my 'really wish I married someone else' parental units in 'Heaven' and siblings who are doing everything they can to move into a duplex next to them there would think of me now."

"Because of what you did for the world and your son, when you thought he was dead, or what you did UNDER him when he reconnected with him?" Mildred inquired, flashing on her phone to retrieve a small plastic bag from her vaginal orifice. One most of the men she worked for thought was closed for the duration of her anti-romantic life after 50. "Feeling guilty for what we did or didn't do in the past is a luxury neither of us are allowed right now," she continued, pulling out three syringes labeled for the first three letters of the alphabet in English, Russian and Hebrew. "Hold onto Paul's mouth, because this is gonna hurt."

"I know," Katrina noted, feeling the lingering pain from her own medications in both arms and buttcheeks. "But can I tell Paul what's in them?"

"You didn't tell the rats you woke up from the dead with it," Mildred replied as she pushed air out of the syringes. "But it worked. Let's just say it's a formula that you both made possible. And the world needs now more than ever. Which, well...."

"No one is going to make money with?" Katrina proposed, pulling up the hospital gown over his black and blue legs. "Unless....well..you can become the official boss of the

company you controlled from the position of never being an official boss? For my son, his sperm donor and...his sperm donor and...?"

Mildred kicked Katrina in belly, preventing her lungs from stating anything more in spoken words, or indulging in any more discoveries in matters of relation, science or politics "Hold him still with your left hand, and with your right, put it over the slumbering prince's mouth, Cinderella, " the old woman said to the not so old one. "This is going to hurt!"

"Along with him biting into my writing hand, which needs to be taught a lesson for everything you say I had written for my demon seed," Katerina said as she put her outstretched right hand over Paul's mouth. "Such as..." Katerina's confession about how she had used her artistic, scientific and humanistic talents for those who saw humanity as a source of wealth and servitude were halted by what she felt on Paul's lips and nostrils. They were cold, no air coming in or out of them. As for his eyes, which required glasses to be useful from the time he could read anything beyond 'Dick and Jane' books, the pupils were fixed and dilated, looking at nothing in front of or behind them. When feeling for a radial pulse, Katrina noted a tattoo on his arm, three zeros followed by the same number of 6's.

"My fucking God!" Katerina gasped. "He's...."

"Dead," echoed into Katerina's inner ears, but not her conscious mind while Mildred tried to revive the corpse with slaps on the face, pounding of the chest and 'wake up' expletives yelled into Paul's eyes "And none of that rejuvenation of soul juice will bring me back," he said from above her and Katerina feeling the appendages of his astral body, perhaps seeable by other 'ghosts'. "Tell Mildred that without things working below the neck, nothing can function between the ears, At least in the dimension that you're still cursed and blessed to be trapped in. But....at least here I don't have to pay rent, worry about where to get my next meal or research grant, or endure boring, lifeless, humorless, expressionless dull-out-disease faculty meetings that made me wish I was dead.," he realized and gave voice to in a language was audible between the ears but now audible with them. "The Silence here, it's sustaining. But...."

While Katerina and Mildred tried to revive him with all the medical tools and emotional intensity they had access to, Paul realized something. "I've heard that during this transition period, I can still do SOMETHING for and to you folks in the realm of the living," he said to himself as the door opened up, three guards in paramilitary suits armed with weapons and two larger orderlies in clean white lab coats with loaded syringes pushing themselves in. "Which maybe can start with...." He thought.

Ever since seeing the documentary about Mohammed Ali, Paul always wanted to 'sting like a butterfly and sting like a bee'. Putting such into action, he flew in between the assailants, creating waves of intense heat and walls of metaphysical steel, causing them to stumble upon each other. The soldiers' silencer loaded guns fired hot led into their own flesh, turning them into whining babies begging for their mothers. Mildred comforted

them as a mom, then snuck pills into their mouth, singing them into an uneasy but deep sleep. The syringes in the manicured hands of the orderlies released their contents into their causing them to fall unconsciously into each other's arms with romantic smiles, their lips falling onto each other as they slithered into a blissful slumber.

“So, what those gay bashing shitheads who were in charge of making my ‘retirement’ in this ‘nursing home’ comfortable are dreaming about maybe IS what they secretly wanted all their lives,” Mildred noted, taking out a camera from the inside lining of her blood soaked hospital gown. “I gotta get a picture of this!” the elderly woman who regained the defiance she was harboring as a younger one said, after which she took picture of the macho lads in homosexual ecstasy.

“And what about this?” Katrina demanded to know regarding Paul.

Mildred took in a deep breath. “Let the dead bury the dead. The living take care of the still living,” she said, after diving deep into her intelligent and now stronger than ever tortured soul.

“Who the fuck said that!” Katrina demanded to know.

“Jesus,” Mildred shot back at her. “And,” she continued looking up at the ceiling and then the upper region of each of the walls. “Paul. Who we’ll still have access to speak with, and be spoken to by him, for three days, in my experience and to my knowledge”

“What fucking knowledge!!!” Katrina yelled at and into Mildred.

“Metaphysiological investigations and...some still to be assessed experiences,” the head heavy older woman offered the excessively emotional young one, pulling her away from the corpse, then locking the dead of body and soul inside of the cell, Mildred then placed a ‘quarantine’ sign on the door. Three seconds later a loud explosion echoed through the rotting walls of the former ward reserved for ‘experimental’ patients whose survival would disrupt the status quo of the world outside, shaking them into rubble.

“So,” Paul said to himself, his ghost still able to hear the thunderous blast, observing the ceiling inside and outside the door becoming fragments of a new war-torn floor, startled by all of it. “No one can even die in peace in this place?!!!” his ghost yelled out, heard by none of the living as they took the journey to wherever he was, or would be going. “Go to the white light,’ he advised the newly non-walking dead. “Or if the abyss in front of your frozen in place eyes is black, follow me And if I lead you to the wrong worm hole, well, you can sue me in our next incarnations.”



## CHAPTER 20

The Lincoln Memorial Auditorium had a long history of celebrating the accomplishments of living and dead scientists, artists as well as politicians who would be immortalized as heroes after their demise for generations to come. The speakers on stage included such greats as Albert Einstein, Luciano Pavoratti and Jimmy Carter. On this auspicious night the Ted Talks of Ted Talks featured Sean McCallum, whose personal efforts and state beyond the Art had saved billions from dying from a brain-killing cancer epidemic that had, before release of their wonder drugs, killed a mere two hundred thousand people, most of whom lived on other continents with light colored skin. And which nearly killed no less than 56 children whose parents lived in the White House or 'worked' as (according to the rumors anyway) elected officials in the Senate Capital building. Most importantly, McCallum medications were able to save twice many mistresses, boy toys, and illegitimate offsprings of movers and shakers.

There was no shortage of celebs from all walks of life in the audience, including the key members of the Nobel Prize choosing committee whose single votes were worth ten of any of their supervising members. By the end of the night, they would decide who would get a six figure paycheck and a medal which would the recipients and their progeny could use to justify any 'defective behaviors' they engaged in on the way to saving humanity from itself.

The President of the (theoretically anyway) United States stepped onto the stage, attempting to make his arthritic over 80 year old legs seem like appendages which were primed to have a televised one on one basketball with his opponents in the upcoming election. "We are here to acknowledge the accomplishments of Sean McCallum, who not only built on but expanded the legacy of his father, grandfather and immigrant great grandfather who came to this country with five cents in one pocket, and a medical physiology book in the other. Turning them both into a lot more, which we, who are still in the land of the living, in complete good health, with a few lingering effects of old age," the rapidly balding Pres said as he rubbed his hand over his mostly hairless crown. "But, as they say, and maybe is true, no grass grows on busy streets".

The 'bald is not only justified but beautiful' remark got a jovial chuckle from the elder male members of the audience, the well follicled younger audience members bearing penises rather than vagina forcing their shaking lips into a forced smile.

"But, seriously," the presumably most powerful public figure in the world continued after riding the laugh. "Accomplishments in politics, economics, the arts and everything else are not possible without our being alive to implement and enjoy it. And our being alive, particularly here in the United States," continued the man who benefited greatly by having a large portion of deaths occur in China, with the Chinese writing off the majority of the American debt due to an American company saving their biological asses, "And of course all over the world," he added to not be identified as an "America first, last and exclusively' isolationist president. "But all of that we put aside to honor, and thank, none other than Sean McCallum."

A rousing applause overtook the room, echoing and amplifying itself on the chandelier overloaded walls of the Concert Hall. The old president shook the hand of, then hugged, the young pharmaceutical mogul who, without any formal education, had personally supervised research that saved the world from the epidemic bearing a Chinese name, and who would, as a self made biomedical genius, allow people to grow up healthy and with all of their faculties, including 82 going on 102 year old Presidents.

Sean got a hard on after dismissing the President and standing behind the podium the applause getting even louder. Every member of the audience standing on their feet, even more erect than after the Prez took the stage. “Finally, Dad and Granddad,” he muttered to himself. “You have to be proud of me today. I have the world in my hand, in our hands, despite you calling me a loser who’s best kept away from the family business. I can finally come to the Thanksgiving dinner table wherever you are as someone just as good as you. No, someone BETTER than you. And this time I call the shots. Say what big boobed Barbie waitresses serve us. And what they put on the table. Including mashed potatoes flavored with onions and salsa instead of milk and butter. Curry flavored sausage instead of bland, whiter than fucking white bread white meat, and cranberry sauce with berries containing peyote and TOP quality cocaine instead of WWII surplus Pervatin. And...”

“

Sean saw, smelled and tasted his variety of Thanksgiving culinary delights, served on the naked chests of thin waisted waitresses who looked like 21<sup>st</sup> century pawn stars rather than large hipped, short haired 1960 and 1942 movie idols, until the applause finally diminished. He took in a deep breath, looked up at the adoring and now captive crowded, and requested as a King, Pope and AI webmaster that they sit down with minimal motions of his fingers. They of course obeyed. Except for two women in the back row and cloud with a human shape between them. Katerina and Mildred, both gussied up for the occasion as high end sensuously clad ushers, worked their way up to the stage from opposite side of the auditorium, unnoticed by everyone. The ghost, having the ability to be seen by whoever it wanted to be seen by, meandered, his way down the center row towards Sean.

The sight of a very alive below the neck and Alive between the ears Katerina as amplified by the lights to her side caused Sean to studder incoherently through Sean’s shaking lips. Upon seeing Mildred’s face, a stream than river of urine running down his pantleg. “Yes, it’s us,” Paul said as a ghost as he reached the front row. “And we’re still alive. Two of us anyway.”

Sean’s entire construct of the world was shocked. He had carefully orchestrated though his connections in the entertainment world Katerina’s rise from respected B level independent artist to A line super star, then deflated the balloon just as quickly by suggesting, paying, cajoling and when necessary, blackmailing the REAL movers and shakers in the film and literary world to exile her into being cancelled. The hidden cameras he put in Katrina’s latest ‘presidential palace’ recorded her being rescued by

Mildred, forcing the matter into plan B---blow up everyone in or near that rubber room just at the time of escaping. Regarding Paul, three EEGs after the overdose of insulin he was given confirmed that he was dead, Sean's newest 'Veronica' confirming that there were no such things as ghosts.

But Paul, as a very living ghost, remained directly in front of the stage, motioning his presumed dead female cohorts to proceed to the stage, disappearing in the wings. The lights dimmed. Sean made a run for it but stumbled on stage. "You aren't supposed to be here Katerina!" he said Katerina, whose face was scared but still recognizable. Then he turned the same of Mildred. "You aren't real, Mildred! You killed yourself, remember?" He then turned to Paul, who spoke to him through orbs. "And Doctor Paul Albergehti, YOU! I killed you!" He could hear his voice echoing everything he has said to the 'dead'.

Sean reached into his pocket, pulled out all the money in his wallet, along with every credit card there. "All of you," he whispered. "Go away, please."

"We will," Katerina replied, into his earl

"And so will they," Mildred added, pointing Sean towards the shocked and angered audience as the house lights came up.

"Sooner than later," Paul added as the audience, starting with the President, began streaming out of the auditorium.

"Hey!" Sean pleaded with his followers, fans and funders. "It's a gag! A play a..."

"Show that none of us are buying tickets to, not anymore," the President said. The ghost of Veronica, sneaking in behind the evacuating crowd repeated it. "And you need help."

Whether Katerina and Mildred heard the for real departed secretary Sean had killed, such was academic. Paul observed the two still very much alive, though severely injured, women, administering medication to him. Promising him, 'wherever he was', that he would not become another n value.

Mother, child and godmother exited the stage, leaving it to the next deserving awardee or charlatan.

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