

ANATOMY OF DECEPTION
Heart of the Healer Part 2

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CHAPTER 1

The inscription on the gravestone featured one line, bolder than the name or the faith of the departed. "The only Real rest is in motion Itself."

"Fly in peace, John Baldino," the mourner said in a soft voice, muffled by the winter wind that echoed more silence than gust, more future than past. "See you later, Doc." He kept a watchful eye out for the procession behind him. Such consisted of 'commoners' who were there for more legitimate purposes.

Jack caught a glimpse of himself in the reflection on the freshly-polished stone. "John, are you still in there?" he said to himself. "I know the ER surgeon after the 'accident' that killed me. He did a good job on my face or, more accurately, my nose, but I'm still not comfortable with it. By accident or 'coincidence' I may look like this 'Jack McFarland' guy on my new driver's license, but even I can see that it's still...me."

The procession approached, closer and closer, They wore black suits to honor death. White shirts and blouses to show off the black. Far more than Jack McFarland expected came to mourn the death of the honorable, likable and even respected medico John Baldino, M.D., Ph.D., his now buried identity. The procession included Baldino's patients, students, nurses, and even fellow docs. Then there were the strangers, who didn't look like lawyers, but something more insidiously powerful.

"Movie producers," John told himself whimsically. *"Or literary agents. My death was the story of the year. I entered a burning building after that terrorist attack, and saved ten trapped people, twenty-five according to the News magazines,"* he pondered, hoping no one was listening to the conversation with himself between his ears. *"Who would have thought that a suburban doc with twenty-five years of experience in a Lower Westchester kvetch clinic would spend his last hour on earth stitching up wounds, arteries and bones with nothing more than an emergency medical bag and a head full of smarts? It would be nice if all of it were true. The intended plan was to find an accident and be its victim, not its hero. A man who knows too much about life on this side of the rainbow, and Oz, is too dangerous to be allowed to live. John Baldino had to die, but..."*

John felt the wind interrupting the dialog between his mind and soul through the bottom of his kilt. The traditional pattern and length dated back to the times before the Industrial Revolution invaded the Highlands, complimented by a walruss Mustache on his upper lip. *"I better keep my mouth shut if I'm going to pull this Scotsman thing off,"* he thought to himself. *"Facejob or no facejob, someone in that crowd is going to see John Baldino's eyes in Jack McFarland's face. Maybe McFarland, the trauma patient that DIDN'T make it, can look into the world of Doctor John Baldino's legacy and not be stared back at. But sometimes it DOESN'T pay to be too careful. And it was my choice to come here, I think."*

The instructions from John's underground contact were explicit. Erica Fisher-Burger, MD, PhD arranged for John's reconstructive facial surgery, found the accident site and even ghost-wrote the obituary. John's former fellow resident, friend and one-time lover knew how organized international terrorism worked, and how organized anti-terrorists had to fight it. Only she knew where John's 'superspy

even without a cape' brother Vincent really was. Only she knew that Vincent was between wars that were not reportable to the standard news outlets. And was not the deceased victim of the one that had just ended. For the moment, all John was told about his brother's whereabouts was that he was on the way to foiling another plot to destroy the world by forces Jack McFarland, Ian Flemming or even Oliver Stone on a paranoid brand of Ganja could only imagine. The orders as to what John Baldino would do next, as himself risen from the grave or as Jack McFarland, ultimately came from Vincent but reached him through Erica now. A woman who was now also officially dead, but very much Alive big A, in John's distant and recent past.

As for the distant past, Erica had been a fellow brilliant-beyond-measure medical student who rose up the medical ranks after graduation with John who, for better or worse, was already married to a woman who he loved nearly as much as his work. Erica was at that time married to a man who not only loved but understood her. The so far Platonic relationship between John and Erica ended when 'don't make me tell you about my undercover work as a Cop' husband was reported missing in action. She faked her own death so she could go underground to find him, disallowing John, for his own good, to follow her into 'the places of change' he was not equipped to handle. Not a day passed since she kissed John a fond farewell two decades ago that he didn't think of her.

Erica had never lied to John Baldino, in the past or in the present...or so it seemed. Her actions, as a live doctor as well as a nameless anti-terrorist operative, were innovative and heroic.

A few months ago, John had experienced debilitating headaches, tremors and hallucinations due to, so he was told, a brain tumor that would kill him in a fortnight. The ever-ready workaholic genius doctor-researcher took his first vacation in twenty-five years at an off season resort. His last act of effective compassion was to write memoirs about the people and patients who made him, rightly or wrongly, the so called 'brilliant doctor of the mind, body and soul' others claimed he was. While knowing all along that he had been sheltered from the suffering and death afflicting others, both in his comfortable practice in Westchester county, and in 'the places of change and turmoil' overseas. Such places included where his brother Vincent was continuing the family tradition of fighting against evil men, and women. On occasion Vincent asked John to provide medical intel about bioweapons which were supposed to not exist. On other occasions, John was asked to provide his brother, and 'superspy' parents, with antidotes to save the innocent. And, on still other occasions, the Pacifist doctor whose fist punched into only himself and no one else, was asked to provide bioweapons that could 'inactivate' (though not officially kill) the most horrible terrorists and dictators on the planet.

After writing poetic and accurate memoirs about key people in his past, John would go out to the pier to do some fishing at the resort where he was the only occupant. It was there that he was visited the people he wrote about, some from the land of the living and some from the land of the dead, unable to tell the difference. His ability to function deteriorated daily. But with sheer persistence the anti-military doctor soldiered on to complete writing his last textbook about the human condition as it was, and as it should be. From the perspective of an overeducated and oversheltered doctor who had promoted himself to being a Spiritually awakened 'mister'.

In reality, John did not have a brain tumor, but was being given mind altering drugs by a sophisticated organization of White Supremacists who made the Illuminati look like an international chapter of the Elks. He was watched by video cameras and hidden mics, as well as the ears of the very single and love-starved landlady of the resort, who were waiting for him to reveal to the 'ghosts' he saw, his clandestine biomedical discoveries as well as whereabouts of his brother, and Erica, made possible by specially formulated medication. The prime operative putting 'A-137', a state beyond the art mind altering and brain destroying elixir, into John's food and drink, causing John to go mad, was Cathy. The landlady of the off season resort, who fell in love with him. It was a relationship that was mutual. Till John put all the pieces together and abandoned his 'above all do no harm' policy, determined to get Cathy to spill the beans about what she and her cohorts are doing, no matter how much harm he had to exert on her.

But Cathy had fled the coup, leaving John with Erica, who came along just in time to give him the antidote to 'A 137'. She invited him to finally join her as an officially dead scientist who knew what science could do TO as well as for, humanity. But John did come out of the experimental cage the terrorists put him in. He could cross the life-death line, conversing with the dead with more ease than those on top of the grass could. And because of his brilliantly artistic rather than logically impersonal medical mind, he was able to find humanistic solutions to biological problems. And be a powerful warrior for Good against the organization known as BITE (Brotherhood of international terrorists elite) and other groups of 'elite' people who wanted to annihilate or enslave other populations of 'insignificant' humans.

John's recollection of his discovering Cathy's treachery, the exiting of his 'above all do no harm' mandate, and Erica's enlisting him into Common Cause was awakened by solid colored sedan screeching their way to the gravesite, from all sides. "Feds," John muttered to himself with a Scottish roll to the tongue. "Or worse, " he continued in his own Westchester County-altered Bronx diction as one of the G-men and/or hit-men gave him a ten second stare the exposed legs under his kilt.

"He likes my legs, I hope," John thought, thankful that the head Fed didn't recognize his face. *"At least I hope he's not gay....Hell, I hope I'm not. I haven't been anyone but John Baldino, M.D., Ph.D., for..."*

John caught another glance at himself in the reflection of another tombstone, a black laminated slab that served more as a mirror to the mourner than a marker for the deceased. Through the overgrown dark brown mustache on his upper lip, rouge on the sunken cheeks and rather handsome and shapely bare legs under the wind-blown kilt, there were still wrinkles around the eyes and chin lines that said 'face over fifty'. Yet John's eyes were still that of a child, pure in spirit, not hardened by pain or hardship.

The primary emotion that hit John as the procession approached, then surrounded, his grave was vulnerability. "Maybe it's the clothes," he thought as he felt the emotions, accusation and threats from everywhere, and everyone, even though no one seemed to notice his presence. "Kilts are so...open," he noted with the writer's pen in his head, jotting it all down as fast as his eye scanned the group of friends, colleagues and strangers that seemed like a crowd now.

"We are gathered here to pay tribute to John Baldino, M.D.", the priest pontificated as the ashes of the a corpse of an unidentified man, or perhaps dog, was sprinkled into the ground below. "A friend, physician, healer and salt of the Earth who will be missed by many communities. The community of medicine, the community science and the community he lived in..."

"Where the hell do I live now?" John thought as the eulogy went on in words sincerely written but mechanically delivered. "I'm supposed to be dead now, but I'm supposed to find Erica and then Vincent, then, somehow, save the world from getting destroyed by a Terrorist Organization that knows more about biological weapons than scientists do. And what's worse, they know how to dull the human spirit with drugs, wirelessly-transmitted electrical frequencies and, according to Erica's latest theory, top forty musical melodies and lyrics. It's bad enough that AM radio programmers are killing the collective human soul with sound waves, in the form of top-forty hit melodies. Maybe they don't know how devastating to the expansive soul 'happy' tunes are, or maybe they are the victims of the poison they inflict on the public. And as for the Internet, who really can say what subliminal messages are getting spread out there? It's bad enough that kids these days are flattlined into geekdom by computer games, or fascinated with inflicting cruelty on their fellow humans with guns, knives, chains or cleverly designed words put on the computer screen."

"And then there's the ultimate conspiracy...mischief infused into people who should initiate revolution. Keep people thinking that they're making big, major holes in the System's Wall by kicking their heels up at the country bar dance floor, or getting drunk on illegal booze or zonked on 'smuggled' drugs, and you have them

dead tired and submissive by Monday Morning after a hot weekend of partying...And then there's the--"

"Ego!" a familiar woman's voice spoke softly and assertively from behind, causing John to turn away from his thoughts, agonies and speculations to its source.

Erica never looked more determined, and interesting. Of all the mourners, she alone wore orange, the color of courage. Underneath the tight jeans and spandexed top lay a figure a 22 year old model would die for. But between the bangs of the platinum blonde wig, eyes that would kill anyone who dared look at them with the wrong reason, or motive.

"It's only an egotist that comes to his...or her..own funeral, me lad, Jack," Erica said out of the side of her mouth to John with more of a Irish Brogh than Highland roll to the tongue.

"Or someone who wants to see what I really did leave behind," John countered. "I had to see what my old life was all about."

"And..." Erica added, letting John fill in the blanks.

John was struck by something he never had seen in the faces of the people who came to send his soul to 'a better place'. He knew them all too well from his pathologically comfortable, overly sheltered and highly accomplished life as a biomedical researcher and clinician. "My life experience so far has been...small, I think, Erica," John noted about his now officially-ended life. "John Baldino may

have been the biggest status symbol for Westchester General Hospital and Columbia Institute of Neurological Research, but his life was small. A plethora of research papers that got over-rated and a lot of patients who were cured as much by Mother Nature as by 'Doctor John'. Curing people in a small part of the world where nothing really changes. But..." trying to find a cure within the disease, he speculated again. "Doing what you can within your safety zone is a start, right?"

"As long as you keep on moving," Erica countered, with a strangely assertive, yet clandestine, subtext.

"What do you mean by that?" John dared to look into her, despite the risks of being looked at himself.

"And what do you mean by that?" the woman of Fire and Warmth slurred out from the side of her mouth. Her gaze was held hostage by the flesh revealed by the wind blowing John's kilt upward. "Black on gray is such bad color coordination, and that Scottish plaid is so...Irish," she noted. "Though, I have to admit, from the thighs down, you do look like a very hot lad....or lass." A hidden agenda grew behind her eyes.

"I'm impressed," John sighed, with a Scottish accent that felt convincing, to him at least.

"A man's legs always look more sexy than a woman's after we reach the big 35," Erica noted, enviously.

"I thought our relationship was going to be...professional, Erica."

"First, John, I have to know if that surgeon took off some flesh between the legs after he finished rebuilding your schmucked up your nose and cheeks."

Jack smiled.

"How does it feel, not being the one wearing the pants?" Erica asked with a whimsical smile.

"It's a bitch. No pun intended...But it does feel...different," John noted, then gave voice to, turning his back and gaze from Erica's stare.

"There's gonna be a lot from here on in that feels different, John."

"In what way do you mean....?"

John turned around. As quickly as Erica had appeared, she vanished. In her wake, she left a whiff of perfume that said 'yes' in John's reconstructed nostrils. In his hand, she left a note that said 'Absolutely!'. On the envelope, inserted under his belt, "Place of Change Number One" scribbled in Latin. The colorfully curved cursive handwriting was only understandable to a Pre-Microsoft physician-trained eye. A glance of its contents was even more cryptic, beginning with "Beaver goes to college with Tonto and shares a Tombstone pizza".

"The SouthWest," Baldino surmised.

"Flagstaff, Arizona", echoed from behind him. Was it Erica? Was it the wind? Or

was it yet another case of crossing the life-death line, a warning from a ghost beckoning, as translated into 'still in human body form' talk, "All that enter here, lose all fear, or pay the consequences!"