



SUZANNE FLEMING

THE UNIVERSITY

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By

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THE UNIVERSITY - synopsis

Daniel Jackson worked relentlessly to make his company, Weizmann Pharmaceuticals, one of the most influential in the world. With iron-man will he drove the international expansion programs and spearheaded the push for increased export markets. Weizmann's wonder drug, *Changed World*, hurled a tsunami of cash into Jackson's already exploding bank account.

Winning was everything to Jackson and his trademark strategies were intimidation and bribery. Daniel's personal fortune is jeopardized when two academics claim *Changed World* is a modern-day snake oil.

The reputation of one of Australia's most prestigious universities is attacked when it is linked to Weismann Pharmaceuticals, and the production of deadly Sarin gas for a Middle Eastern Paramilitary Group. A spectacular cover up has disastrous ramifications for Jackson and the Vice-Chancellor.

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CHAPTER 1

Murder was not a realistic option, but it felt good to contemplate it. Berry smiled and settled back in her chair. Killing Bernard Simpson would be so easy she thought. All she had to do was to wait in his office until he returned from a faculty meeting and stab him with the dagger hanging on his wall. She was tall, strong, and worked out. She ran three kilometres every day. He was a weasel who would have trouble fighting off a ten-year-old girl.

Bernard was also a coward. Berry knew he'd buckle at the knees, pee his trousers, and then cry for his mother. And why not, she was probably the only person who loved him. When it came to loveable, Bernard had little going for him. He was the stereotypical social introvert. He was bald, plump, and his pasty complexion accentuated his teenage acne-scars.

Bernard was as appealing to women as a pig-eyed, mummy's boy.

Berry knew Bernard was a religious fanatic. Somehow that made attacking him an even more appealing prospect. Berry had graphic information about how Bernard treated his former wife. When Berry was still in private practice, Ruth Simpson had been one of her clients.

Ruth Simpson was happy to discuss her then husband's religious obsessions. Every morning he woke at six and prayed for an hour alone. While his wife prepared breakfast, he sat in the kitchen and read the bible aloud. Ruth Simpson was a non-believer, but she quickly learned to keep her thoughts to herself.

As a younger woman, Ruth tried to explain to her husband, the difficulty she faced taking the bible seriously. It had not been easy for her to find the right words, to talk about her feelings. Because English was her second language and while she spoke it well, she did have trouble expressing her deeply held fears, and explaining her spiritual beliefs.

Berry had been shocked by Ruth Simpson's revelation that Bernard frequently hit her and called her an ignorant sinner. He punished her for weeks or until she agreed to pray with him to seek

God's forgiveness.

Ruth understood that forcing her to pray for forgiveness gave her husband an ego-rush that made him feel like one of the Lord's true foot soldiers.

Ruth Simpson was smart woman. She had no trouble trading shallow words for redemption. Especially if it saved her from weeks of punishments that included food deprivation, and her husband withholding money, and taking away her liberty.

After six counselling sessions, Ruth made the decision to leave the marriage. She walked away from their beautiful home, found a job waiting tables in a strip-club, and lived in a converted garage that had no running water. Most women would have struggled with the transition, but not Ruth.

To her poverty was a state of mind. By her calculations, the loss of her middle-class life was nothing compared to the independence she gained

from walking away. The fancy house may have provided shelter from the natural elements, but it gave her no protection from emotional abuse and religious tyranny.

Ruth's weekly wage was enough to pay the rent, put food in the pantry, and it allowed her to cover her household bills. Being in control of her personal destiny was a priceless gift she had given herself. And the cost had only been determination and courage. To Ruth's amazement whenever she tested her courage, she discovered, her ability to overcome fear expanded twenty-fold.

Berry sighed and closed her eyes. The desire to murder Bernard evaporated into a warm glow. Knowing she had helped Ruth Simpson made her feel good. She smiled and settled down to mark the assignments piled high on her desk.

Outside in the hall, Billy Newman hesitated, then knocked gently on the door. He shuffled his feet to overcome his nervousness.

"Come in." Berry called out, "The door's open."

Billy inhaled deeply and turned the handle. He hadn't rehearsed what he would say. He was just going to play it by ear. Relax man, he told himself. Don't let her see she's anything more than your lecturer. The fact that she's sexy and bloody smart, means nothing to you man, he reminded himself.

Berry Eliot wasn't beautiful in the way his workmates expected a woman to be beautiful. Most of his mates had been raised on the skinny-blond-blue-eyed propaganda machine. They were hard wired into the Barbie imagery.

He pushed the door open and smiled. Berry looked over the top of her glasses. "Hello Billy. Do come in." she said, gesturing towards the visitor's chair. She waited for him to settle then said, "Well this is a surprise." Her voice was bright and friendly. "How may I help you?" she asked.

"Actually, Doctor Eliot, I was hoping you could give me some feedback on how I'm doing."

"Doing? You mean in the course?"

"Yes ma'am. Am I doing okay?"

“Billy you’re doing remarkably well. I would have thought you could tell that from the comments on your assignment, and the excellent marks you’ve achieved.” She tilted her head to the side, then added, “Maybe you don’t trust marks as a genuine benchmark for achievement.”

“It’s difficult for me ma’am.” Billy looked serious, “When I lay bricks I can see if I’ve done a good job.” He frowned. “With bricklaying it’s easy to assess the quality of the work. I can tell when I’ve done a great job.”

He paused and studied her. “It’s different with Uni stuff ma’am. I haven’t been doing it long enough to know the difference between a good job and a bad one.” A broad smile flashed across Berry’s face. “I don’t want to just do a good job, ma’am. I want to be up there with the best.”

Berry nodded. She knew exactly what he meant.

“Ever since I was a kid, I’ve always wanted to be the best. Hard work doesn’t scare me ma’am. I’ll work till I drop, but I need benchmarks. I need to be able to compare my work to the master tradesmen. That way I can see for myself where I fall short, and then I can work out how to improve.”

He settled back in the chair. “I used to spend a lot of time visiting buildings constructed by the great tradesmen. So, I could study the techniques they used. I mean really study them. Then I’d work out how they did it. I spent hours practicing and often I’d only manage to get one small detail right.”

Billy shrugged, “Still it paid off in the end, because there aren’t many jobs I can’t do well now. I’ve never talked about it to anyone, but my bosses could see my work was getting better and better.”

Billy lowered his eyes. “One old timer told me my work reminded him of some of the European masters.” Billy stopped talking. Faint colour showed through his deeply tanned skin. “I’m sorry ma’am, I sound like a damned prat. I didn’t mean to brag. I’m just having problems working out how to be a better student. I really want to do well.”

“I know you do Billy. And I completely understand how difficult it is if you don’t have clear benchmarks. A great deal of trust is required during the early stages of academic life. Students rely heavily on their teachers to give them feedback on their progress.”

Berry smiled. “It’s a less than perfect system Billy. And it’s a slow and frustrating one. However, there are tangible ways for you to be able to test your own progress. It’s a formula I’ve used for years, and one I still apply to my own work.”

“A formula?”

“Yes. An easy one to remember. But it requires total honesty Billy. There’s no room for ego and self-importance if you want it to work.”

“I’m not sure I get it ma’am.”

Berry looked over the top of her glasses and studied him. They were so alike. So keen and impatient to be the best. She remembered how she had asked the same questions. She still questioned the validity of a system that failed to identify exceptional ability and did not recognise genius when it walked through the door.

She blamed the system’s flaws on human ego. Many academics were so blinded by their own vanity, that they actually thought they were divine storehouses of knowledge. They believed

themselves to be infallible. They saw their students as brain-slaves. Living organs to transplant their ideas into.

They used their students to gain immortality, and to them, students were nothing more than human achieves. It was a perfect way to ensure their ideas were never challenged and they remained intact.

Berry shivered, folded her arms, and inhaled deeply. She knew these people were anything but infallible. They were extremely imperfect, self-appointed, priests-of-science. They were flawed academics, who wanted to freeze the human race in a time warp. Berry called them the FEFs; flat-earth fanatics.

“Billy you have huge potential. Your research results are impressive.” Berry smiled and nodded gently. “While your ideas are unique and still require sound testing, they’re highly plausible.”

She gave him a moment to take in her comments. “Look, I know you’re unsure about your future career path Billy. But I believe you will end up developing new pathways that others will follow.”

Billy frowned. “I think you'll have to explain it more.” He said softly.

“The results from your controlled study and your arguments are highly persuasive. Sure, they're only preliminary findings, and the sample group is fairly small, but I'm willing to bet that you're on the right track. You just need more time to prove your theory.” Berry watched him processing her comments. She settled back and waited.

“Really?”

“Yes. Really.”

Billy's eyes sparkled. “I just know most people with mental health conditions don't need more pills to get their lives back. They need new ways to reconnect with life.” He sighed. “I haven't told you the whole story” he said, “I think I should.”

“Only tell me what you want to Billy.”

“I've done some additional research with a mate of mine.” Berry raised her eyebrows slightly.

“A mate?”

“Yeah. He's a Neurologist. He's discovered some

pretty amazing stuff. Like the fact that changes take place in the brain's physical structure when people take drugs over a long period of time." Billy looked serious. "And I'm not talking about Chrystal Meth, and shit like that. Plenty of scientists know about that stuff. No. I'm talking about legal drugs. The rubbish doctors are prescribing all the time.

It's scary Doctor Eliot. We're making people's brains mutate." Billy inhaled deeply. "In a few generations the human brain could end up almost useless."

Billy's eyes widened, "Sure humans will still walk and talk, well sort of, but they won't be able to problem solve or think critically. And that's because the human brain will be fucked up. We'll be like trained monkeys. Worse in fact. More like programmed robots."

Billy shook his head. "Imagine what would happen ma'am, if humans become robots. Machines programmed by special interest groups, like marketing companies at best, radical terrorist groups at worst. It's almost too bloody scary to contemplate isn't it?"

Berry remained silent for a moment and then

leaned forward, “tell me about your friend Billy. Is he someone you trust completely”?

“Trust how?”

“To do the proper research, and not sensationalise his findings?” Berry paused, then added, “or steal your work and misrepresent it as his own?”

“Totally trustworthy ma’am.” Billy smiled broadly, “He’s a regular good guy. He’s not a glory hunter. He’s as worried as I am about the possibilities.” Billy shook his head. “No ma’am he won’t tell a soul about his work until he is certain of his findings. He still has a long way to go before he can be one hundred percent certain that his work is legitimate.”

Billy nodded. “You can be sure his work will be exact science ma’am.” He smiled broadly. “We’re going to go into practice together.”

Berry tilted her head slightly. “Really? Now that is interesting.” She returned his smile. “How did you and your scientist friend meet?”

“In the cradle actually. We’re first cousins. His

mother is my aunt. My mother's sister." He chuckled, "We've been blowing stuff up since we could walk. We were the stereotypical mad scientists. Our parents were always scared to leave us home alone, because they thought we'd burn the house down." He laughed.

"Dr Jeckle and Mr Hyde hey?"

"Worse."

"So how come he went straight into science, but you chose the building trade?"

"My father was in construction. He wanted to have Newton and Son on the letterhead, I guess. My dad always said, 'Get a trade son. You'll never be out of work if you've got a trade behind you.'

Billy paused, "He was a great guy, and I wanted to be just like him. So, I went to trade school and the rest is history."

"What made you move on?"

"Once I could do it better than most of the other tradies, it just stopped being challenging for me." He hesitated for a moment and then added.

“When Dad died, we didn’t need the letterhead anymore.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. He worked in a high-risk environment. He knew the dangers. He would have died much earlier if he’d worked a desk job.”

Billy shook his head. “He was happy right up to the end. It was pretty hard on my mother though.” Billy looked intently at Berry. “She wasn’t well educated. She was a country girl. The daughter of nineteen-fifties Polish immigrants. Her father believed a girl’s job was to stay at home and help to look after the men in the family. She left school when she was twelve years of age.” He swallowed hard. “But she read a lot. Everything she could get her hands on in fact. When she was a kid, she used a torch to read under the bed covers at night.

My mother is a very intelligent woman, but she isn’t a rebel like her sister. Her sister left home as soon as she could. She got a job and paid for her own education.”

“Your aunt encouraged you to come to university?”

“My mother and my aunt. They knew I needed big challenges and they wanted me to make something of myself. When I was a kid my mother made sure I read books. She loved watching Leon and me study. Leon’s my cousin, the scientist. Mum was always giving us stuff to use in our chemistry experiments. Dad told her she was just confusing me.”

“Confusing you?”

“He said she filled my head with useless stuff. He wanted me to get a trade, as a sort of insurance policy. He’d been through wars and he’d seen starving families.”

“He didn’t want his wife and children to experience what he had gone through growing up in Poland.” Billy paused for a moment but held her gaze.

“My dad was a good man ma’am. A real practical bloke. He wasn’t into books and fancy education. He thought it was a waste of time because corrupt governments could take it all away and leave you with nothing.”

“As I said, he just wanted me to have the skills that would guarantee I’d always have work.”

Billy smiled. “But you know, I think he’d have been a little bit proud of the fact I managed to get into university. He’d boast to his mates at the pub. But he’d never tell me he was happy I was doing “girlie” work.”

He paused again. “He wasn’t the type to show emotions to his kids; thought it was a sign of weakness.” Billy fell silent.

“Your father gave you good advice Billy. Your construction experience has given you first-hand knowledge of real people. It has taught you valuable lessons that most academics never learn. I think he was right to call it a “girlie” lifestyle, but he just missed the mark a little. The mind is every bit as powerful as the sledgehammer.” She looked at him and smiled. “We need to handle both well in life.” Her smile developed into a laugh. “God, I wish I could throw a twenty-pounder. There’s a certain academic I’d like to knock off his pompous perch.”

“Really ma’am?”

“Oh yes Billy. Really. One of my colleagues could do with a king-sized flattening to puncture his inflated ego and reduce his body mass.”

Billy laughed with her. “I’ll give you hammer throwing lessons if you like.”

“Thanks. I have a meeting with him in ten minutes. If it goes like all our other meetings, I just might take you up on the offer.”

Billy stood and extended his hand to her. “Thank you for talking with me Doctor Eliot. I feel better now.”

“Thank you for dropping by Billy. I’ve thoroughly enjoyed chatting with you. And please believe me when I say you’re doing brilliant work.” She shook his hand and walked with him to the door. “Your Dad would be very proud I’m sure.”

“Thank you ma’am.” His eyes fixed on hers. “It’s great being able to talk with you. Can I come by again soon? I’d like to tell you more about Project X.”

“Project X?”

“That’s that Leon and I call our research.”

“Of course. I’m keen to hear all about it. Now you’d better hurry to you next class. You don’t

want to be locked out of the lecture hall.”

“No chance of that. In the four years I’ve been coming to Uni, old Marty has never started on time. He’s not like you ma’am. He doesn’t give a damn if students attend his lectures or not. He often forgets to attend them himself.”

Berry laughed again. “It’s amazing isn’t it? The university is like a home for special people. A sort of village for individuals who make their own rules and play God with other people’s lives.”

“I can’t think of another work environment where the employees decide when, or if, they’ll attend for duty.”

“It’s a bit like a home for the frail aged and the socially inept all rolled up in one.” She frowned. “It’s a system built on the Peter Principle.” Berry shook her head slowly. “My God. What hope is there for the future?”

Berry opened the door and watched him walk down the passageway. She knew the reason the system worked in spite of itself, was because students like Billy could think creatively and they dared to take risks.

The Billys of the world would press on and make the really important discoveries. They're open to new ways of seeing, Berry thought, and this gives them a depth of understanding that many academics lack. Billy, and people like him, didn't need to be told how to think. They just needed to be encouraged to trust their own ability, and to be allowed to try out new ways of doing things. In their own way and in their own time.

Chapter 2

“Good morning Bernard. How’s life in the Ivory Tower?”

“And a very good morning to you too, Doctor Eliot.” Ignoring her comment, the Faculty Directory said, “Thank you for making time to meet with me at short notice.”

He gestured to a cluster of visitors chairs arranged in a semi-circle in the conservatory; a modern addition, built on a whim when the university’s building and assets manager identified an end of year under-spend. Rather than returning the funds to the consolidation account he had offered them to the Behavioural Sciences, Faculty Director. Three hundred and fifty thousand dollars to undertake a few minor refurbishment projects. The conservatory swallowed the funds entirely.

The extension was a charming addition to an already grand office suite. Constructed almost entirely of glass it provided a spectacular view of the manicured lawns and gardens, of which the university was so proud.

Berry glanced around the office and smiled when she saw Bernard's favourite artefact. A magnificent Japanese sword mounted on a cedar wall plaque just inside the doorway. She thought, for the second time that day, how easy it would be for someone to enter the office, grab the thing from the wall, lunge at his fat body, and kill the bastard.

“You look happy today my dear.”

“Do I?” She walked to the lounge area and settled in a heavily padded chair. Berry glanced at him. “And why wouldn't I be happy Bernard? I have a great life and a clear conscience.”

“A clear conscience is the most valuable thing a human can possess.” He studied her for a moment. “A rare thing indeed.” He said, settling himself opposite her.

“Then I am a fortunate woman, aren't I?”

“You most certainly are my dear.”

“So what's so important that it couldn't wait until the faculty meeting tomorrow?”

Bernard cleared his throat and fully extended his

bulk in his chair. “I want to discuss an extremely generous research grant.” He paused and moistened his lips with his tongue. An image of a large bluetongue lizard flashed through Berry’s mind. “A grant that will allow us to study the benefits of a number of new drugs that are designed to help people with mental illnesses become active members of society again.” he added.

“Interesting. And just who has made this generous offer?”

“Weizmann Pharmaceuticals.” His tone challenged her to comment.

“And what exactly will the research entail?”

“Investigating effective ways to help people who are suffering from severe depression. The new drugs will help them re-engage with society in a way they have only dreamed of.” Bernard sounded excited. “This money will allow us to develop a program that will help countless numbers of individuals who currently live, or more accurately exist, without any hope of ever having a normal life. We will be able to ...”

“Spare me the lecture Bernard. I teach the course,

remember.” Berry said cutting him off. “What sort of strings would be attached to the money?”

“Strings? There are no strings.” She knew he was annoyed, but she didn’t care.

“Oh, come on Bernard. A pharmaceutical company wants to throw money at us and there are no strings.” Berry said, slowly moving her head from side to side. “The cash will have three-inch steel cables attached to it.”

“You’re wrong Berry.” He protested.

“Bernard take off your glasses and give them a good clean. Pharmaceutical companies are not into philanthropy, they’re into profits. Big profits.”

Berry stood and gazed through the glass. “And what about academic integrity? And pure and unbiased investigation? How would we maintain those rather important research principles?” Berry’s eyes demanded an answer. “Give me the name of this kind-hearted benefactor?” she challenged.

“I understand your concerns and share them of course.”

“Sure, you do.” she said sarcastically.

“Other universities successfully manage sensitive research grants Berry. There is no reason why we can’t too.” His tone was patronising, only he confused it with being gentle.

“The name Bernard. You still haven’t given me the name.” She demanded.

“I told you Weizmann.”

“Who at Weizmann’s”

“Daniel Jackson.”

Berry’s face instantly paled. “Kyle’s father?”

“Yes.” He said weakly. “The fact he is Kyle’s father will not cause a problem though.” He added unconvincingly.

“Of course, there’s a problem. His son is one of my students. I couldn’t do the research; there’d be a conflict of interest.” Berry sat down again and stared at him. “That’s it isn’t it? You asked me here to tell me you’re taking me off research.”

The director returned her stare and then nodded.
“I’m sorry Berry. There is no other way.”

“There are many other ways Bernard. You just don’t want to look at them.” She pushed her body back in the chair. “So, am I being relieved of all my projects?”

“I’m afraid so.”

“And teaching? Is that to go too?”

“Of course not. You’re an excellent teacher. We need you.”

I’m also an excellent researcher Bernard.”

“I know. But we have to protect the university.”

“From whom Bernard?” her eyes hardened. “You or me?”

Chapter 3

The lecture hall fell silent when Berry stepped up to the rostrum. She looked out at the sea of faces. The hall was packed, and the students were waiting for her to start. She reached over to the control panel and flipped one of the switches. Instantly the smart-board behind her lit up.

Berry watched the small monitor in front of her and then spoke. “Today’s lecture is about Research Ethics in Australian universities.”

A murmur rippled around the room. “Yes, I know. I had scheduled another topic; What Drives Individuals to Act Kindly Towards Others?”

I hope you’ll accept the unannounced change and agree ethics is too important to overlook. I have uploaded a presentation of the scheduled lecture to the Virtual Classroom, along with an audio file and lecture notes. You can download them at any time. The podcast can be downloaded to your MP3 player, so you can listen to the entire lecture at your convenience. If you have any questions, I will be happy to respond to all your emails.” She paused and then asked, “To ensure you’re in

agreement with the topic change let's have a show of hands."

Berry stepped back and watched. Only one student kept his arms firmly on his writing console. Many of the students added a verbal vote as they raised their hand. "Thank you." She said softly, "Let's begin."

Berry spoke for forty minutes, explaining the reasons why a genuine arms-length separation between funding sources and research professionals was essential to maintain integrity and unbiased findings. She spoke about the nuances that must be identified in relation to grant-donor motivation, their social position, and power; all of which have the capacity to exert influence.

She explained the need to examine the personal and business affiliations of all the parties concerned and stressed the importance of identifying donor expectations.

Berry presented a wide range of simple examples to demonstrate each point and she spent a considerable amount of time showing the students how easily independent research, and project boundaries can become blurred when a close

relationship exists between the funding body and university personnel.

She went to great pains to show how to identify the potential danger zones and helped the students understand how easily research outcomes can be altered by external and internal influences.

A flood of relief swamped her when she finished, and a barrage of questions broke out. They told her she had done her job well.

The session ran thirty-five minutes overtime and it would have continued, if one of her colleagues had not arrived to commence a new class. Berry packed up her stuff and hurried outside where she found many of the students assembled in a small courtyard a short distance from the lecture hall.

Jessica Andrews, Kyle Jackson, and Thomas O'Reilly called to her and asked if she would join them in the undergraduate's coffee shop. They wanted to ask her a few more questions about the lecture material.

“Sorry guys. No can do. I'll have to take a rain-check. I might be able to catch up with you tomorrow sometime though. Call me.” she said and returned to her office.

The corridor was dim, but she could see someone sitting in the waiting area and hurried towards them. “I’m sorry to have kept you waiting; the lecture ran over time.” She dug into her briefcase and fished out her keys. “Come on in.” she said.

The man rose and followed her into the office. “No need to apologise. I was running late myself.” He watched her unpack her case and smiled. “Still having trouble time framing lectures hey?” He sat down without waiting for an invitation and stretched his legs. “How come you can’t just chuck the rabble out, ten minutes before the session’s official end time?”

“Give me a break. As if you’re much better. I still remember all the times you made me wait until you ended your class.” She dropped into her chair and grinned broadly. “It’s great to see you Nick. How was Europe?” She didn’t wait for an answer. “When did you arrive home? Coming back here for a while?”

“Hey, steady on. Got back on Saturday. Europe was great.” He paused and then added, “And the answer is no. I’m not coming back.”

Berry looked disappointed. “I thought you’d change your mind after you had a break.” She

picked up a paperweight and rolled it around in the palm of her hand. “So, what brought you here today?”

“You.”

“Me?”

“Is that a problem for you?”

“No. Of course not.” She lowered her eyes. “Why would it be?”

“Oh, I don’t know. Perhaps you’d rather close doors and end chapters.”

“Come on Nick. You’ll always be my best friend. Sure, we’ve closed doors, but friendship endures. And you’ll be included in all the new chapters I write.” She smiled. “Hey, you’re stuck with me; like it or not.”

“Good. Now how about you take me to lunch at the Staff House? They won’t let me in anymore; unless I’m the guest of an esteemed academic.” He laughed, and then added. “I miss the Staff House. I have to go to the supermarket now. And cook even. Not having meals on campus is the thing I’ll miss most.”

“Really? I thought you missed my company.”

“I’m still in that club. I don’t need university permission to renew my membership every year.” He winked at her. “Unless of course you’ve decided to withdraw privileges too.”

“Idiot.” Berry took her jacket from the narrow cupboard beside the packed bookcase. “Come on then. Let’s eat. I’m starving.”

They walked in silence, both enjoying the beautiful grounds and each other’s company. Nick watched the students sauntering around. He knew he would miss them.

They found a vacant table on the balcony, overlooking the duck pond, and ordered roast turkey with cranberry sauce. Instead of the usual house wine Nick ordered a bottle of Françoise Feuillat-Juillot, chardonnay.

“My God Nick. What’s the occasion?”

“Graduating from university.” He raised his glass to her. “I’m finally leaving the hallowed halls behind.” He tapped her crystal flute with his. “I’m off to explore unknown territory.” He added.

“Scared?”

“A little.”

“Good. You’d be a fool not to be a little scared.”
She sipped her champagne and looked at him.
“You’ll be Okay.”

“God I hope so.”

“It’s a huge step Nick, but I know it’s one you had to take.”

“What about you?”

“What about me?”

“Don’t you ever feel like walking away?”

“You know I do. Often.”

“What keeps you here?” “The students.”

“And the research?”

“There is no research.”

Nick frowned. “What do you mean?”

“I’m off the research program.”

“What?” Nick coughed. The wine went down the wrong way. “I don’t believe it.”

“You’d better believe it my friend. It’s true.”

“But why?”

“Money.”

“They can’t pay you anymore?” He looked puzzled.

“No. Nothing like that of course. Regardless of what the press says about the university being broke, you, and I both know it’s in good shape.”

Berry shrugged and sipped the wonderfully mellow liquid. “Funding source conflict.” She continued. “Big Drug Company. The CEO, who is also a major shareholder, is the father of one of my students.”

“So, drop the class. Get a replacement teacher.”

“Not an option.” She held his gaze. “Bernard wants someone else to take over the research. He’s already found a replacement.” She paused for a moment, “Someone who doesn’t have my hang-ups about money and interference.” Her brow creased, her eyes smouldered. “It’s a bloody joke Nick.

This drug company is notorious for trying to buy favourable research outcomes. Jackson, the CEO, founded the company. He's the biggest shareholder. He and Bernard are good buddies."

"Go to the Vice-Chancellor."

"Sure Nick; brilliant idea. The VC is Bernard's best friend. He's really going to support me. If I make a fuss and become a problem to him, I'll be out the door in a flash. Even though the VC is only acting in the position, he's an ambitious, hypocritical, asshole who actually believes he owns this place." Berry told him about the Weizmann sponsorship. "So much for unbiased outcomes." Her eyes moistened. "I'm hurt at the moment, but I know by tomorrow I will be angry. Very, very angry. And then I might do something I will live to regret."

"I'm sorry Berry."

"Don't be. I'll be fine." She swallowed hard and dabbed her eyes with the table napkin. "Perhaps I need this Nick. Maybe it's time for me to move on too."

"Private stuff doesn't have the same kudos as an institution like this one. It's a young field, but it's

full of promise.”

He covered her hand with his. “And it’s not run by old stuff-shirt bastards. You can be your own person in the private sector. Shits like Bernard are driving more and more fine academics out Berry. Sandstone buildings, one-hundred-year- old rose gardens, and stained-glass windows don’t cut it anymore.”

“Excellent minds are leaving because the new generation of smart-people can see through the veils.” Nick gave her a reassuring smile, “They are choosing independence over old school ties. They are not willing to trade their integrity for the dubious ethics Bernard Simpson and his cronies peddle in the name of tertiary education.”

“You’re right to leave Nick.”

“And you?”

“I’d leave tomorrow if I could take my students with me.”

“You can. Set up a private university.”

“Fees Nick. Most of my students could never afford the fees I’d have to charge to be viable.”

“Then find private companies to sponsor scholarships.”

“It’s a nice dream Nick.” She moved her hand from his and smiled. “No. I need to look for another solution and if there isn’t one, then maybe I will just have to get over it and stick to the knitting I know; teaching.”

Her eyes lit up suddenly. “There’s more than one way to skin a cat Nick. I can work with my brightest students and help them do groundbreaking research.” She paused, thinking of Billy and his cousin. “I have a few brilliant people in my classes.”

“I’m sure you do. In fact, I’m sure you were the one who identified their ability in the first place.” He looked serious. “Don’t waste your own brilliance Berry. Get out and follow your own dream.”

“Problem is Nick. I’m not sure what dream I want to follow.” She shrugged. “What the hell, I might give up teaching all together. I could become an investigative journalist and do an exposé of this place. Tell the world what really goes on here.” She chuckled. “And I’d do a number on Bernard Simpson. I’m sure his former wife would love to

tell her story to the media. It would make great TV viewing.”

“That’s a great idea. You could take it to the press”.

Berry looked serious for a moment, but then a bright smile lit her face. “Or I could just kill the bastards.”

Nick laughed. “Sure, that’s also a possibility. Not necessarily, one I’d fully endorse. But, it’s certainly an option. Maybe you should only consider it as a last resort.” He shook his head and smiled affectionately. “Please don’t ask me to help you though. That would place a serious strain on our friendship. You know what a coward I am.”

“Thanks Nick. I knew I could count on you to bail out when the going gets tough.”

“Tough is fine, but suicide just isn’t my thing.” He stood and pulled her to her feet. “Be careful Berry. The university is a powerful institution.”

Chapter 4

Berry waited for the late arrivals to take their places before she spoke. “Right people let’s get on with it shall we?” She looked at Billy but directed her comments to the group. “If you’ve checked your emails you would have received your last assignment result. And my comments. Did anyone not get their work back?”

“I didn’t get mine.” Kyle Jackson said, leaning back in his chair and cupping his hands behind his head.

“Really Kyle? When did you last check your email account?”

“A couple of days ago.”

“I emailed the assignments last Friday Kyle. I sent it to your student account and to your Hotmail address. It should have arrived Kyle.”

Frustration pierced her voice. “Why don’t you use Trudy’s PC to check your accounts again.” She pointed to her assistant’s desk.

“Sure miss. I can do that.” Kyle stood. He wasn’t faking the attitude. He sauntered over to the desk, swung his body upwards, and sat on it. He punched the on-button with too much force and waited for the machine to boot up.

Sarah watched in silence, but Berry could tell from her body language that she had something on her mind. “Does anyone want to talk about their results?” Berry asked, making eye contact with Sarah. “Feel free to air any grievances you may have.” She paused. “I suspect some of you may think I have been less than generous with my marks.

Sarah looked embarrassed; her voice was soft but firm. “I think you have given me a good mark. Thank you.”

“You deserved your mark Sarah. You worked hard for it. I was extremely impressed with your project. Well done.” Berry said, turning to Billy. “And what about you Billy. Are you okay with your final mark?”

“Absolutely ma’am. It’s much better than I expected.”

Kyle returned to his chair and gave her a challenging look. “I think you did a lousy job marking my work.” He stared at Berry, his face tinged with red from the anger he wasn’t doing anything to hide.

“And why is that Kyle?”

“You’ve given me a B minus.” His eyes narrowed, “And you’ve advised me I’m in danger of failing the course.”

“Perhaps we should discuss this in private Kyle.”

“No way. I want you to tell everyone why you’ve got it in for me. You always give me low grades.” Kyle stood and folded his arms across his chest. He was a tall young man and he knew exactly how to use his body to intimidate people.

“I am very happy to discuss the matter with you Kyle.” Berry said without hesitation. “I just think that it is better to talk about student progress privately. That way we can examine the situation in depth and identify the knowledge gaps.” Berry spoke gently and sincerely. “We can work together to develop a few useful strategies that will help you to move forward again.” Berry sighed heavily. “I have an obligation to formally

advise students when they are in danger of failing to meet the course requirements. I left a number of messages on your voice mail asking you to call in to the office, so we could discuss your progress.”

Berry’s eyes remained locked on Kyle’s. “You didn’t respond to any of my messages, so I had to email you the notice.” She turned to the other students. “I think we might have an early coffee break folks. Kyle and I need to talk. How about we meet back here in one hour.” The students started to pack up their things, relieved to escape the tutorial room.

“Let’s not.” Kyle yelled. “Let’s talk now. I want everyone to hear why you discriminate against me.” He lunged forward. “Explain to them why you hate my father so much that you want to hurt him by failing me?”

Berry remained seated and looked directly at him. “Kyle that is a serious accusation.”

“You're dead right it is.”

“We need to discuss this alone.” She paused for a moment and then added. “And then perhaps you need to lodge a formal complaint against me with

the Dean of Students.” Berry stood and faced the group. “I’m sorry but I will have to cancel today’s tutorial. I will schedule a replacement session as soon as possible.” The students started for the door. Berry turned to Kyle. “Mr Jackson, please remain here. We need to have a serious discussion.”

It was dark when Berry finally left the office and walked to the staff car park. Her vehicle was on level six; two floors below the roof. She sighed as she exited the elevator and realised the parking level lights were out. The emergency lamps cast an eerie pale glow across the bays. She looked towards her vehicle and noticed a large male leaning against the driver’s door of her old model Lexus. It was difficult to see his features in the poor light, but something told her he wasn’t a staff member. She couldn’t think of any of her co-workers who could pass for a wrestler and carried an iron bar around with them.

Berry gripped the handle of her briefcase and spun around. She raced back to the elevator, which was still standing at level six. She punched

the door opener; her throat muscles tightened and breathing was difficult.

The doors opened instantly and once inside she punched the close button with her fist. The man sprang towards her, but the thick aluminium panels snapped shut before he could grab them. Berry applied her full force to the close button to stop the doors from being re-opened from the outside. She punched level one with her left hand and gave thanks to a God she didn't really believe in.

The elevator moved effortlessly downwards and when it stopped again, she jammed her briefcase hard against the door frames to hold them open and to break the laser beam. She raced into the foyer, dragged a visitor's chair into the elevator, and wedged it between the two open doors. Satisfied she had decommissioned the unit she grabbed her case and sprinted along the hallway.

Berry knew the building like the back of her hand, so she didn't have to waste time getting her bearings. She raced up a flight of stairs, turned

into another corridor and wrenched open an external door that led to a suspended walkway. It connected the main administration building to the staff offices. She used her swipe card to enter.

Berry went straight into the common room and sighed with relief when she saw the standby light on the coffee machine was glowing. She poured herself a cup of the strong liquid and sipped it slowly while she assessed the situation.

Calmed by the coffee and the familiar surroundings she picked up the staff phone and called Security. They answered on the third ring. She smiled when she heard Hank's loud voice on the line.

“Hi Hank. It's Berry Eliot here.”

“Hi Doctor Eliot. You're working late. Is there a problem?”

“No. Not really. I was just in the parking station and noticed a strange person wandering around. I think he's a building contractor or something. I thought I'd let you know just in case he's not authorised to be on the grounds.”

“We don’t have any contractors working here at present Doctor. All the new development projects were wound up before the new semester started.”

“Oh really? Well then you might want to check it out.”

“I’ll go over there now. Thanks for letting me know. We can’t have strangers wandering around without proper authorisation.” Hank said.

“We had a spate of break-ins during the summer vacation and the police said a professional gang was doing over all the large universities and colleges in the region.”

“Well, I’ll leave it with you Hank.” She said casually. “I’ll probably see you when I go back to get my car.”

“If you’re going home now, I’ll walk over with you.”

“Great. I’ll meet you on the path outside the staff building.” Berry said, “I’ll be there in five.” She hung up the phone and drained the coffee mug. Having Hank as an escort made her finally relax.

Chapter 5

“Berry there’s a Mr Daniel Jackson on line one for you. Shall I put him through?” Berry’s assistant Trudy called through the intercom.

“Sure Trudy. I’ve been expecting a call from him.”

“So, you do know him? He said he wasn’t sure you would.”

“I don’t actually know him, but I certainly know of him. Put him through, I’m just in the mood to talk with the illustrious Mr Jackson.” Berry sat back in her chair and inhaled sharply. “Berry Eliot.” She said into the phone.

“Doctor Eliot, this is Daniel Jackson.” He paused to give her time to be impressed by the name. “Kyle Jackson’s father.”

“Mr Jackson. How may I help?”

“I’d like to talk to you about Kyle’s progress. I was hoping you would agree to have dinner with me one evening this week.”

“Unfortunately having dinner with a student’s parent is against university policy sir. All academic staff are required to maintain an arms-length relationship with students and their families.” Berry said. “I’m surprised you don’t already know this.”

“I am aware of the policy doctor. However, as I would like to discuss another matter with you, I just thought we could talk over a nice dinner. And we could also discuss Kyle’s progress.”

“I’m sorry Mr Jackson. It’s out of the question. I’m happy to arrange a meeting in my office. Tomorrow at one-thirty would be good for me. If you’re free then.”

“Let’s make it tomorrow, then. It is just a shame I won’t have the pleasure of sharing a fine meal with you.” There was a slight pause. “Perhaps another time.”

“Certainly not while Kyle is a student at the university Mr Jackson. Thank you for the invitation just the same.” She said sincerely. “I will see you at one-thirty tomorrow sir.”

“I’ll look forward to it.”

“Good-bye Mr Jackson.”

“Good-bye Doctor Eliot.”

Berry replaced the handset in its cradle. “I can’t wait Mr Jackson.” She said aloud. “What gave you the idea that I could be bought off with a fancy dinner and an overpriced bottle of wine? Bad move Mr Jackson. Bad move indeed.”

Shortly after her phone rang again. “Bernard. What a surprise. What’s happening over there in the sandstone halls of fame?”

“Nothing changes very much over here Berry. It’s a predictable environment on this side of the rose garden. It makes life a little easier to manage, even though some people may consider it somewhat dull.”

“Some people like me you mean?”

“Now, young woman don’t go jumping to conclusions. I was not inferring you would find life over here dull. Quite the contrary. I suspect you would soon have us all dancing in the hallways.”

“So, Bernard, what’s really on your mind? Cut with the chit-chat and get to the point. I’m sure you’ve got as much work to get through as I do, so don’t waste your time with the comedy routine. It’s not your style.”

“Some people could easily be offended by your manner Berry. People who don’t know and understand you, could easily confuse your upfront attitude with rudeness.”

“People like Daniel Jackson?”

“Daniel Jackson. I’m not sure about him. Perhaps he could work you out without too much trouble. He has a son. I am sure he knows how the modern world is put together.”

“Bernard are you going to tell me why you called. I’m guessing it has something to do with Daniel Jackson. I just had a call from him.”

“So, Daniel has phoned you?”

“A few minutes ago.”

“I hope you were nice to him.”

“Nice? No, I wasn’t particularly nice to him, but I was professional.” Berry felt her anger rising. “So, what’s all this about?”

“Daniel phoned me at lunchtime. It seems Kyle is not doing well in your class. Is that true?”

“Yes, it is true Bernard. I emailed him an In Danger of Failing notice. I had a meeting with him this afternoon to discuss ways for him to get on top of his overdue assignments, and to listen to all the lectures he should have already downloaded.”

“He’s a good lad Berry.”

“He’s a bad student Bernard.”

“His family always pays his fees upfront.”

“So?”

“So, they are extremely valuable to us.”

“More valuable than academic integrity?”

“Academic integrity is not being discussed here.” Bernard paused. “However, losing the support of a very influential family is.”

“Let’s not go there again Bernard. You and I have already had this conversation. I am prepared to work with this student to find ways to help him get on top of his problems. I’d do that for any student who is falling behind. I don’t care if they’re from a wealth family or they live in a trailer park. But I am not prepared to give anyone marks they don’t earn.” Her frustration was reflected in her tone.

“Kyle Jackson is a lazy student. He thinks his father can buy him a degree. He spends more time in the university bar than he does in the lecture halls. He never submits assignments by the due dates. He expects preferential treatment.” Berry paused for a moment to consider her words carefully. “He thinks his father’s wealth gives him an advantage.” She sighed heavily. “I’m sorry Bernard, but I can’t do anything to get him over the line. He must do that himself with hard work.”

“You are being too rigid on this Berry. You could give him a helping hand.”

“I will give him a hand. I’ll give him an extension on all his overdue assignments and I will show him how he can improve his work and study

habits, but I will not do his assignments for him. And I will not give him marks he hasn't earned." She waited for Simpson to respond.

"You should at least review all the work he has already submitted. I'm sure if you look hard you will be able to award him a few additional marks."

"Bernard for God's sake. Poor quality essays and late lodgements will always mean low marks. If Kyle was a bloody genius, and he managed to score ninety- five percent for every project, late lodgement penalties would wipe out at least half of his final mark. Are you telling me to disregard the late lodgement penalties?" Berry demanded.

"I'm suggesting you make an exception for the past work. I know Kyle will get all his work in on time from now on."

"And how do you know this Bernard?"

"His father has given me his assurance."

Berry was seething. She had trouble speaking. "So, you and Daniel Jackson have been talking."

Her voice was a notch higher than normal. "Did you check Kyle's progress status Bernard?" She

snapped. “If you did, you’d have a pretty good idea of how bad his work is. Did you read the assignment lodgement reports?”

“I have looked at Kyle’s report and I completely understand why you are reluctant to modify his results.”

Berry cut him off. “Modify them?” She screamed. “You can’t be serious. Please tell me this is a joke Bernard. An elaborate test to see if I would succumb to academic fraud.”

“It is not a joke Berry. I want you to review Kyle Jackson’s marks.”

“Well then Bernard you need to send me a formal instruction that spells out exactly what it is that you want me to do. When I get it, I’ll pull together a re-mark panel and they can go over all his work.” Berry paused a moment. “Send the instruction Bernard. And you can tell your friend I don’t give a shit who the hell he is. I am not going to cheat for him or his bloody son.”

“Calm down Berry.”

“I won’t calm down Bernard. You may not care if I commit fraud to save Kyle’s sorry arse. But I

sure as hell do. Think about it Bernard. The university has a penalty system for a damn good reason. How can you negate that? Students who submit their work late without requesting a formal extension, deserve to lose marks.” She said.

“Most students get their work in on time. They give up their social time. They pull all-nighters. And they make sacrifices. What gives you right to trivialise their efforts? They deserve to be rewarded for taking their degree seriously.”

“How dare you suggest a student, who treats the whole thing as a game, be rewarded for trying to gain an advantage he doesn’t deserve.”

Moisture formed on Berry’s eyelids. “No way is it going to happen Bernard. I believe students deserve to know that hard work does pay off.” She paused and then added softly. “It’s our job to show good students their hard work will be rewarded.” Berry closed her eyes tightly and counted to five.

“Kyle Jackson’s work is consistently below an acceptable standard. I’ve had to interview him twice about plagiarising assignment content.

Three of his assignments were plucked straight off a dodgy Internet site.”

Berry struggled to suppress a second scream. “Kyle Jackson is a cheat Bernard. He is a disgrace to his family. If you want to do them a favour, you’ll tell them the truth about their darling son. Get them to sort him out before it’s too late.”

She didn’t wait for him to reply. She hung up the phone, slumped forward and put her head on the desk and gave up on suppressing the scream.

Chapter 6

The Dean of Students gave Berry a sympathetic glance when she entered the room. He knew she was a great employee and one of their best teachers. But he and the Vice-Chancellor had a job to do. As unpleasant as staff interviews sometimes were, they had to be done. It was still the most effective way to assess a situation and decide on the most appropriate action to be taken.

“Thank you for coming Doctor Eliot.” the Dean said. He pointed to a chair.

“No need to thank me Randle. I’m as keen as you are to clear this mess up.” She nodded at the Vice-Chancellor to acknowledge his presence.

“You are aware Daniel Jackson has lodged a formal complaint against you?” The Vice-Chancellor asked. His voice was hard and accusing.

“Yes I am. The Human Resources Manager contacted me yesterday. He sent me a copy of the complaint.”

“It is an extremely serious accusation Doctor.” The Dean said. “Because of the gravity of the complaint I have decided to investigate the matter myself. Do you have any objections to me being involved?” the Dean asked.

“Not at all. It’s a comfort to know you’re involved Randle. I know how much you value the university’s reputation. I know you will do everything in your power to be fair.”

The Dean nodded and turned to the Vice-Chancellor. “Murray you’ve read the complaint and I know you have already spoken with Bernard. What are your views, and do you have any questions for Doctor Eliot?”

“I would just like Doctor Eliot to tell us her version of the story. Daniel Jackson claims his son has been discriminated against. He claims you have unfairly assessed Kyle’s work and as a result he may fail his course.” Rage turned Murray Foster’s face crimson. “Because you have treated Kyle Jackson with contempt the lad is now in trouble with his course.” He glared at Berry, “What do you have to say in response to these accusations Doctor?”

“I have never treated Kyle Jackson unfairly. If anything, I have been lenient with him. I’ve given him more than the usual number of lodgement date extensions for his assignments.”

“I’ve suggested ways to help him identify his strengths and weaknesses.”

Berry inhaled. “And twice I arranged additional tutorial support for him, as well as booking him into a number of study skills courses. He did not attend any of these sessions.” Berry looked directly at Murray Foster and held his gaze.

“This is all documented in his Student Activity Report. Just look it up on the university’s system.” She shook her head slowly. “The problem is that Kyle just isn’t trying. He doesn’t take the work seriously.”

“It’s almost as if he believes there are two sets of rules; one for all the other students and another for him. He thinks his family name is all he needs to get a degree. He makes no connection between the standard course work he submits and his final assessment result.”

The Dean nodded. “How is he in class? What sort of attitude does he have toward you and the other students? What’s his attitude to the work?”

“In a word. Casual. Most days he’s friendly, charming even. However, these past few weeks he’s become rude, disruptive, and belligerent.”

“Have you lodged a formal complaint about his behaviour?”

“No. I wanted to try to sort it out myself. I had a short session with him yesterday; to deal with one of his outbursts, but he only stayed five minutes. He said he had an important appointment to go to.”

“Tell me about his outburst.”

Berry told them about what had taken place during the tutorial. She didn’t embellish the story in any way. She stuck to the facts. “As much as Kyle can be a handful, I actually like the guy. In a way I feel sorry for him. He’s a typical Rich-Kid. He has potential, but I don’t think he will ever achieve a quarter of what he is capable of. He doesn’t have the passion to learn. He knows everything he wants in life will be delivered to him on a platter. It’s such a waste.”

The Dean nodded in agreement. “It’s a common problem for the young people from wealthy families.” He turned to the Vice-Chancellor. “I believe we should simply disregard this complaint Murray. I’ll contact the father and tell him we’re completely satisfied that there is nothing to support the claims his son has made. I will advise Mr Jackson to encourage the boy to undertake study skills training.”

“I’ll tell him we expect his son to visit the Student Support Officer at least twice each week, until such times as his grades improve.”

The Vice-Chancellor remained silent. The Dean’s comments made him angry. Berry and Dean Cambridge exchanged a brief glance and waited. Finally, he rose and turned directly to Berry. “Young woman I am not entirely convinced that there is no substance to these extremely serious accusations.” His cold eyes narrowed. “However, as you appear to have covered your tracks with detailed entries in the Student Reporting System, I will have to use other methods to get to the truth.” He turned to the Dean. “Randle when you contact Mr Jackson please tell him our investigation is ongoing. Tell him all of Doctor Eliot’s students will be interviewed separately.

We will find out directly from them how she had treated his son.”

“That is a highly unusual step to take.” The Dean said. “The fact that you and I are handling this matter, instead of the HR department is a departure from standard practice. It’s certainly not general protocol.”

“It may be unusual Dean Cambridge but considering the serious nature of the allegations I believe it is a highly appropriate way to deal with the matter.” The Acting Vice-Chancellor moved toward the door, then turned back to address Berry directly. “You will continue your teaching duties Doctor Eliot; however, I am advising you that you have not been cleared of this charge. It is my intention to fully investigate the matter, and if I have any doubt about your professional conduct, you will be dismissed without further warning.” He glared at her. “Do I make myself clear?”

“Perfectly. Totally clear.” Berry said firmly.

“Well then, good day to you both.” Foster paused in the doorway again. “I am assigning Howard Driscoll to the student interview project.”

“Project sir?” Berry said.

“Yes Doctor Eliot. Project. This matter will be managed with all the resources I have at my disposal to ensure we have a successful outcome.”

“You mean an outcome you want”, Berry said under her breath as she watched the Vice-Chancellor disappear into the corridor.

Chapter 7

Beth Brinkley's home was an immaculate federation cottage, with a charming shaded, garden surrounding it. In the front garden two magnificent Japanese Cherry trees formed a shade canopy for the thick carpet of bluebells and snowdrops that covered the ground. Deep clusters of rich emerald club moss clung to the stone wall. A lovely old sandstone bench offered an invitation to visitors to rest a while.

A heavy brass, cello shaped, knocker was fastened to the panelled front door. The rich red, semi-gloss, paint was a delightful touch, Berry thought. She waited for the door to open.

Beth Brinkley greeted Berry warmly and led her into a large sunroom that had been converted into a well-equipped office. Leon and Billy were sorting through large stacks of computer printouts. They smiled when the two women came in. Berry had come at Billy and Leon's invitation. They wanted to talk to her about Project X. When the initial introductions were made, Billy suggested they walk to a nearby

coffee shop to talk. Beth insisted they have lunch together first. “I’ve made a chicken salad and baked fresh bread.” She smiled, “We can’t have you working on an empty stomach Doctor Eliot.”

Beth was a gracious host, and the food was superb. Berry was pretty sure the meal was a cover, so Beth Brinkley could observe her.

She wanted to be sure that Berry was the right person to help her son and nephew with their work.

She knew their work was highly significant and she did not want some street-smart academic passing it off as her own.

Beth Brinkley was warm and friendly during lunch, but both women knew she was conducting her own risk analysis. “So, Doctor Eliot you’ve been at the university for some time?”

“Nine years full-time. I was a part-timer for seven years before that, when I was in private practice.”

“What sort of practice were you in?”

“I was a Consulting Psychologist and Behavioural Scientist. A mix of counselling, therapy, and research projects.”

Berry waited for Beth to take it in. “I had some long-term contracts to design and deliver professional development training for mental health professionals.” Berry smiled at Beth. “I wouldn’t say I’m expert, but health professionals trusted my advice, and respected my methods enough to ask me to help them with their cases.”

“I am impressed doctor.”

“Berry. Please.”

“Berry? An interesting name.”

“Short for Hawkesbury.” Berry smiled, “My parents were keen sailors. They spent a lot of time on the river.”

Beth’s smile faded. “Billy trusts you a great deal.” She said seriously. “He told me he spoke to you about the work he and Leon are doing.”

“He only gave me the briefest overview, but enough for me to believe they are moving along the right track. I’d like to help them set up more

control groups. They need a wider sample to give their research enough substance for health professionals to take them seriously.”

“So you think their work could end up helping people?”

“Absolutely.”

“Do you agree with their hypothesis that too many medical professionals prescribe drugs that negatively impact on the people they are prescribed for?” Beth watched Berry’s reaction. “And do you agree that most of these people end up drug dependent?” Berry nodded for her to continue. “Of course, the most disturbing consequences are the physical changes that take place in their brain.”

“These changes can’t be reversed because the DNA is permanently altered, and the new genetic code is passed on to the next generation.” Beth studied Berry to gauge her reactions to the theory. “The brain has in fact mutated. And I mean permanently.”

Berry smiled gently. “I agree entirely, and I understand your concern that the guys work will be hijacked by an unscrupulous operator. I am not

one of these people Beth. You can trust me too.”

“I believe we can Berry. I have done a few background checks on you. Sorry.” Beth said raising her shoulders and grimacing. “You’ll be glad to know I received great feedback about you and your work.”

“No need to apologise. If our positions were reversed, I’d be digging deep too.”

“I am deeply impressed by your commitment to ethical conduct, and how you have applied it in your own professional life.” Beth smiled warmly. “I read a number of reports about how you challenged your peers on ethical practice and demanded change. It can’t have been easy for you to stand your ground at times. You certainly took on some important people.”

“I did.” Berry nodded. “When it comes to ethics, I believe we’re all equals. Job titles and social standing are meaningless. There are no rankings for ethical standards. A practice is either ethical or it is not. Maybe doesn’t cut it.” Berry sighed heavily, “Lazy people use maybes. They do it to create smoke screens and to confuse others.”

Beth nodded her agreement. She liked this woman and knew they would work brilliantly together.

After lunch Berry, Leon and Billy walked to a small coffee shop at the end of the street. The sun was shining so they sat outside. While they were waiting for their order to arrive

Leon smiled at Berry. “My mother likes you.”

“I’m pleased, because I like her too. She’s very proud of you both. And she wants to protect you from unscrupulous people who would take advantage of you.”

“I know. She’s concerned some snake-oil operators will get hold of our work, make a fortune, and do nothing to help vulnerable people.”

“I share her concern Leon. There are a lot of opportunists out there.” Berry said.

“And that’s why we need your help Doctor Eliot.” Leon said earnestly.

“What sort of involvement do you see me having?”

“We were hoping you’d help us expand our sample size.” He smiled. “And design better analysis tools for us.” Leon looked a little embarrassed.”

“I know that is a lot to expect because we can’t afford to pay you.” He paused then added, “Billy and I just don’t have enough experience, and your systems are considered the best.”

“I would like to help you. And don’t worry; I don’t expect to be paid.” Berry grinned. “Getting the results into the public arena will be reward enough. I know a number of people would be willing to be part of your control study. I’d be happy to ask if they will help us.”

“That would be great.” Leon said.

“I’m sure some of their friends and colleagues will help as well. Your sample size needs to be at least two thousand.”

“That’s a lot of people.”

“It is, but it’s doable.” Berry said confidently. “I think you should also run an advertisement in the local papers and invite the public to join the program.”

“Do people respond to newspaper adverts?” Billy sounded surprised.

“Yes they do. Desperate families are willing to do anything to help their loved ones. The university runs print media and radio ads all the time to recruit people for their research projects.”

Berry spent three hours examining all the major facets of the methodology. She studied the data collection tools Leon and Billy were using and suggested ways they could improve them. She also advised them on the best way to conduct the initial interviews and how to measure progress.

She stressed it was essential to have a system in place to plot each participant’s progress-milestones and accurately record their journey.

Berry made a list of all the documentation they needed to present their research findings for peer review. These included detailed and accurate case notes for every participant. Berry said they needed to maintain complete historical records that recorded each person’s emotional state when they joined the program and every variation they displayed throughout the course.

She explained that it was also necessary to record each participant's general health and motivation level. She said they needed to capture data about the type of social involvements the participants were engaged in, and to keep a detailed record of their interaction with other people, including their family members.

Berry told them they would need a system to measure any identified variations. She stressed that it would be the team's responsibility to record anything that might indicate an individual was losing interest in their activity. If that happened, they would have to conduct face to face, interviews to establish the cause of the interest loss and motivation decline.

Berry asked and answered questions for three hours and then offered to join the team. She said she would create appropriate tracking tools, redesign the progress tracking systems, and revise the analysis methodology. She also offered to provide on-going advice to Billy and Leon.

At seven p.m., she said goodbye and drove home; exhausted but exhilarated. When she turned into her cul-de-sac street and pulled into her driveway, she noticed a dark coloured vehicle parked

opposite her house. She knew it didn't belong to a neighbour or a regular visitor. She used her remote to activate the door and guided the Lexus into the garage. The vehicle across the road pulled away from the curb and drove off at a speed that exceeded the local limit.

The next morning Berry arrived at work early. She checked her emails and then started to prepare a few new lesson plans. Around nine o'clock she walked over to Randle Cambridge's office. It was a perfect spring day and the birds were busy in the trees. She stopped at the duck pond and watched the tiny ducklings take to the water, under the watchful eye of their proud mother. Berry crossed the arched footbridge and continued along the pathway leading to the administration offices. She slowed in front of the circular building that housed the two most prestigious suites. The Chancellor's and the Pro-Vice Chancellor's accommodation were the grandest on campus.

She admired the way the elements of ancient and modern architecture had been exquisitely combined with spectacular results.

Every time Berry looked at these remarkable landmarks, she was reminded of Dame Margot Fonteyn, her favourite ballet dancer.

Inside the Dean's office, Berry slouched on his aging leather sofa. "I just don't get it Randle. How can this be happening?"

"Immense power and wealth are a potent mix Berry. The vice-chancellor craves power and he is willing to go to extraordinary lengths to get it."

"I've been thinking of resigning."

"Why?"

"I don't want to work for an organisation that is completely corrupt and hypocritical."

"Corruption and hypocrisy are inseparable partners. They depend on each other for their survival."

"How can you stand to be a part of it? You're a good man Randle. How can you stay here?"

"I do everything I can to make sure our courses are the very best. I work hard for the students and

the teaching staff. That's something I can do most of the time. As for the corruption I was hoping you would help me change that."

"Me?"

"Yes you. They win if you run away. I can't do it without your help."

"For God sake Randle. What can I do? They've got it in for me. You know that. If I stay, they will eventually fire me anyway. I'll be disgraced, and I'll never get another teaching position".

"There's no institution on the planet that will want to hire me. I'll be damaged goods."

"I won't pretend Berry. Everything you say is true. Foster, Simpson and Jackson are going to do everything in their power to discredit you, so they can terminate your employment. But, you and I know the truth." He gave her a thin smile. "The truth will always prevail. In the end the Jackson trio will be exposed."

"How?"

“You go to the media and tell them your story.” Cambridge said. Berry was initially shocked, but then burst out laughing.

“It’s not funny Berry. It will be very messy, and your name will be dragged through the mud. Albeit temporarily, but you will have to live through a few pretty awful months.”

“Everyone on campus will be talking about you. They’ll all have an opinion about whether you’re fit to teach. The students will probably behave badly in your classes because they’ll decide you’re not worthy of their respect.”

“Now that’s an appealing prospect.”

“It will be a nightmare. But eventually you’ll win back all that respect, plus gain a whole lot more after the truth is revealed.”

“I don’t know if I can do it Randle. I’m not that courageous.”

“But you care passionately about your students. Here’s a wonderful opportunity to fight for them; and for the students who will come to us in the future.”

“I’ll think about it.” She tried to smile but failed.

“I promise.” She reassured him.

“I won’t pressure you, but if you stay, I’ll be beside you all the way.”

Chapter 8

“Whoo-hoo. We’ve reached two thousand.” Beth yelled across the room. She hung up the phone and grinned. “Two thousand.” she repeated. “It’s bloody amazing. We can start allocating the participants to the activities, and then we can get stuck into the research without any more hold ups.” Leon and Billy gave each other a high-five.

“Let’s take a break boys.” Beth said. “From now on we’ll be lucky to get five minutes to ourselves. Prepare to eat all your meals at your desks and don’t even think about time out for social activities. Number crunching, and data matching will be as close to a fun night out as you’re going to get.”

“And what about sleep? That goes too I guess.” Leon said.

“Not completely. You can have four hours each night. It’s a well-known fact that humans only need four- or five-hours sleep. We’ve just been brainwashed to believe we need much more.” Beth smiled. “If anyone has a problem with these new conditions, please speak with the Human

Resources Manager when he returns from his intergalactic travel next year.”

Beth swung her chair around to face Leon and Billy. “On a more serious note, all our teachers have each agreed to accept fifteen participants in their classes.” Billy and Leon slapped each other on the back and yelled at the top of their voices. “But that’s not all. The teachers have also offered to work for free for the next six months.”

“That’s fantastic news Aunt Beth.” Billy said. “A six months tracking period will give us some excellent data.

We’ll be able to record people’s progress from the beginning and see just how their new creative activity impacts on their recovery.”

“Billy, I think it’s time you stopped calling me Aunt Beth. We’re partners now, so I think Beth is probably more appropriate.”

Billy smiled. It was good to have his Aunt involved in their work, and he was pleased she was treating him as an equal. He was immensely proud of her. She had been a successful medical researcher for more than three decades and her work was highly respected by local and

international health professionals.

Beth had presented her most recent paper called *Drugs - Damage – Healthy Brains* at the Global Neurological Conference in New York. It caused quite an uproar when the international media networks reported extracts from her hypothesis. They ran stories about her claim that long-term use of many prescription drugs caused irreparable damage to the human brain.

Reporters had a field day with her comments that general practitioners did not really understand the drugs they prescribed. Beth had stated that most doctors used the propaganda material produced by the drug companies to assess the drugs they gave their patients. She also said that most of them had no idea how the drugs worked.

Twelve months ago, Beth agreed to do a short television interview to share her ideas with the wider community. It was one of the few things she regretted doing.

The day after the interview went to air, she was swamped with abusive phone calls and emails from doctors who claimed she was a dangerous quack. The callers said she was grossly ignorant and they told her she would cause additional

suffering to people whose lives were already damaged by their mental health condition.

The hostility eventuality died down, but Beth promised herself she would stay quiet until she had conclusive proof that pharmaceutical companies were the problem. Not the solution.

Beth led the way into the sunroom that now served as the project's headquarters. It was a large, pleasant room, with huge windows overlooking the garden.

The three of them spent the morning making lists and placed the participants into small groups. They assigned each person to an appropriate course. The activities included creative writing, short film production, painting and drawing, sculpture, music, photography, creative dance, spinning and weaving, history, computers and social studies. When the classes were full, they worked on the DIY programs; soft furnishing design and production, furniture restoration, gardening, dressmaking and wooden toy making.

When each participant was placed in the course that best suited their interest and ability, Beth

developed a training calendar and contacted the teachers to make sure they were ready to start their programs.

She spent the next few hours phoning and emailing everyone to confirm their course start date, venue, and session times.

“We should phone Berry and tell her the good news.”

“Don’t call her at work Beth. It’s against university rules for her to have a close relationship with any of her students. She would be in big trouble if anyone finds out she’s helping us.” Billy said with a concerned edge to his voice. “You should know that Aunt Beth.”

“Of course. I just wasn’t thinking. Excitement can do that to people.” She paused and looked at him closely. “I’ll leave it and wait until she calls us this evening.”

Something about Billy’s concern made her wonder if Berry was more than a senior lecturer to him. Beth didn’t know how old Berry was, but guessed she was in her mid-forties.

Billy was still a boy to Beth. Thirty is so young,

she thought, even for a young man who had spent much of his adult life with mature adults and working with down-to-earth Aussie blokes.

“Don’t do this to yourself Billy.” Beth thought. “Life is complicated enough. Don’t make it more so by falling in love with someone who is years older than you.”

Billy sensed his Aunt’s mood change.

“What’s up? What’s bothering you?”

“Nothing much. I’m just concerned that our little project might end up being Berry’s worst nightmare. She may regret the day she ever offered to help us.”

It was Billy’s turn to look worried. “She is talking a huge risk, isn’t she?”

“Yes she is.”

“You understand the university system. Is there any way she could get their approval to work with us?”

“As you are no longer one of her students, she can’t be accused of giving you preferential treatment. I know she has the right of private

practice. She told me she still sees a number of her old patients. She could always add Project X to her consultancy list.” Beth frowned. “But from what I know of the Bernard Simpson he will make her life hell, with or without, formal approvals.”

Beth looked at Billy. “It’s pretty complicated really. Universities must protect their staff and their students.”

“They impose rigid rules to ensure the merit system is not compromised. It would be very easy for a lecturer to inflate the marks of a student who is a relative, friend or work colleague. Favouritism is something that must never come into the teacher-student relationship.” Billy looked distressed. “Don’t worry about it. Berry is a big girl. She knows the risk she’s taking. She will make sure she protects herself.” Beth said.

“I hope so.” Billy said quietly. Beth knew instantly that that her nephew was in love and the knowledge made her uneasy.

“Come on we’ve still got a lot of work to do. We need to wrap up these phone calls and finish off the new forms and documents. Berry gave me the

reworded Consent Form and she added a number of paragraphs to the Project Profile.”

“We’ll include these in the info pack we give each participant when we sign them up.” Beth divided a bundle of papers and handed them to Billy and Leon.

Randle Cambridge walked into the Staff House and looked around. He saw Berry sitting on the balcony. Smoking. A bad sign. He knew she only resorted to cigarettes when she was extremely anxious. He went over to her and pulled out a chair. “Expanding your share portfolio by buying up all the available Benson and Hedges stock hey?”

“I warned you that I was a weak woman.” She smiled and stubbed the half-smoked cigarette into an ashtray.

“Thanks for agreeing to have lunch with me.”

“Always a pleasure to be seen with a beautiful

woman. Even one who is a self- confessed nicotine addict.” He said cheerfully. If their colleagues weren’t around, he would have hugged her.

“So, what’s the big thing you want to tell me?”

“Firstly to check that my Right of Private Practice schedule is still active. Then to ask if I can add a new client to the list of external projects I work with.”

“It is still current, but as for adding a new client, you know as well as well as me, that the Vice-Chancellor must approve any additional companies, or individuals, you work for outside the university.” He gave her a long look.

“Will that cause you a problem?”

“A big one. As soon as the VC sees who the client is, he will reject the request.” She reached into her bag and pulled out her cigarettes again. “Just in case this gets a bit difficult to negotiate.” She said as she placed them on the table and smiled at him.

“Perhaps you should start at the beginning and fill me in. Then we’ll see if I can help you.” His browed creased, “Although in the light of the fact

that the VC is still gunning for your scalp, I don't expect he'll be particularly cooperative no matter what your request is."

"I know. Bad timing is a strong suite for me. Bad timing and pissing people off. Two of my finest skills."

She drew out a cigarette but didn't light it. She rested it on the ashtray and looked up at Randle.

"I want to help three people who are working on a special research project, which if they are correct, will prove that some pharmaceutical companies are causing long-term damage to people with mental health conditions."

"Research that's right up your alley hey?"

"Absolutely. It will be like going home for me." Her eyes pleaded with him, "I really want to do this Randle."

"You may have to choose between your job here and this project Berry. I don't think you'll be able to pull off a formal approval from the VC. He just won't back you. Especially when he finds out what the project is."

“I don’t have to tell the specifics of the work. That’s protected by intellectual property laws. He will only know I’m working for a small and rather insignificant research group.”

“OK. Suppose he does allow it and then he finds out what you’re doing. Your head will be on the chopping block.”

“So will his Randle.” Berry said. “When the research findings are released, Professor Murray Foster and Daniel Jackson, will both be wiping layers of thick mud from their arrogant faces. And I’ll be clapping all the way to the Professional Ethics tribunal.” She grinned. “I’ll be there to cheer when they are publicly shamed.”

She paused and then added, “It will be a happy day when our illustrious Acting Vice-Chancellor is sacked for gross misconduct.”

“Revenge is sweet they say.”

“This is not about revenge Randle. This is about putting the system back on the mountain where it belongs. People who drag it down should be unmasked. Society deserves better. People have the right to know their sons and daughters will get a fair go because they’ll have ethical role models

while they're undertaking their degrees.”

Berry's eye flashed with passion. “How in God's name can we produce graduates, who will behave ethically in their professional life, if the people who run the bloody show are unethical bastards?” Randle knew she wasn't making a speech to impress him; her words came from her heart. Academic integrity was her driving force.

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