

Chapter 3

Wednesday 9th October 2075 - Holisticorp HQ

05:55 hours - The Ivory tower

Martha sat in her office atop the Ivory tower staring vacantly out of the expansive window at the dawn glow. It had been a long night. *Damn Emerald!* Martha had not expected this. *How did she find out?* Martha knew it was presently irrelevant but a point she would have to address none the less. *If Emerald found out, then it is discoverable.* Martha glanced at the clock. *Five minutes. Now, let's see.* She paused, considering the correct tack. *Yes, that's it. Make sure the press annihilates Emerald and Dieter before they have an opportunity to defend themselves or discredit me. Hint at irregularities over the last five years or so. Broaden the media speculation and the press will muddy their credentials for me.*

‘Computer; collate and investigate all projects with which either Emerald McKenzie or Dieter Fredric have been involved over the past five years. Report *all* irregularities, no matter how apparently insignificant.’

Martha stood, straightened her already perfect appearance and left her office fully prepared.

05:57 hours

Kathy Fircgella was standing in the washroom just metres from the Ivory Tower's pressroom. The thought of being one-on-one with Martha English had seen her popping to these toilets a number of times since she had arrived, though this visit was just a final make-up check. In the mirror above one of half a dozen vanity units that lined the wall, Kathy stared at her reflection. *Eyes? Good. Big and sexy. And a good match for the hazel. I like this colour.* She noticed a small gap in her eyeliner, leaned in, retouched it and straightened again to check the

look. *Better. Lips? Full and fat. Sexy, little, not-glowing button nose and cheeks awash with orgasmic glow.* She smiled to check her teeth for lipstick then smiled for real at the gleam of the white against the deep plum of her lips, ‘You’re ready girl.’

The statement brought back the awesome immediacy of the impending interview and she panicked again, her bladder urged a dash across to the cubicles but she resisted.

‘Come on, Kathy, you know you don’t need to go!’ she scolded aloud as she stared hard into her own eyes in the mirror. ‘You’re the youngest independent reporter ever; voted sexiest on-screen personality for the last two years and have a shelf full of gongs to prove your worth. Get it together honey. It’s just an interview.’ Kathy took her PCS from the vanity unit, packed her cosmetics and pulled the door handle.

‘Kathy!’ Steve’s voice burst through her earpiece as she left the toilet.

‘Go ahead.’

‘Where are you? Martha’s on set.’

‘Just coming, a little bit nervous I think.’

‘Runny bottom again?’ Kathy ignored him and entered the pressroom, her hand outstretched to greet Martha.

‘Mrs English.’ Kathy stepped with an air of confidence, but only an air, towards the legend. Already seated in one of the two chairs, Martha was dressed in a very elegant jacket, fully buttoned to under her chin and a long black skirt. Had it not been for her obviously female curves and long blonde hair cascading over her shoulders, she could have been mistaken for a Priest. To Kathy, she looked austere and forbidding.

‘Miss?’ Martha asked, receiving Kathy’s handshake.

‘Firgella, Mrs English; Kathy, Kathy Firgella, I, Hello,’ *Shut up, Kathy; don’t start babbling now.*

‘A pleasure to meet you, Kathy. I’ve seen your work, very professional. That, however,’ she pointed to Kathy’s hair and smiled, ‘would probably be described as not quite so. You still have a make-up clip in your hair.’

Kathy flushed a little, pulled it free and took her seat as Steve counted the interview in from the studio.

‘Five.’

‘There’s a small section.’

‘Four.’

‘Showing last night’s events.’

‘Three.’

‘And then we’ll come to you.’

‘Two.’

Martha nodded and brushed something from her forearm.

‘One.’

Kathy turned to face the camera.

‘In unexpected events late last night, at an undisclosed Holisticorp site, miss Emerald McKenzie and Mr Dieter Fredric, both Holisticorp employees, were pursued by guard dogs but evaded capture after they were discovered attempting to tamper with the Anti Cancer Vaccination. The dogs, an extra security measure for the tankers containing the ACV, were equipped with dog-cams. My apologies for the picture quality.’

The shaky images of Emerald and Dieter exiting the warehouse slid onto the screen closely followed by additional footage taken by other cameras located in the compound grounds.

‘These pictures clearly show Dieter Fredric on one of the tankers, the very same tankers that are destined for shipment to the entire FSN. Currently, we have no details of what they were doing or why but warrants *have* been issued for their arrest. We’re here at the Ivory Tower for a statement from the head of the Holisticorp Foundation, Mrs Martha English.’

Martha looked slightly tense, as she should, although inside she was calm. She began, ‘As many of you are already aware, miss McKenzie has been my personal assistant and close friend for many years. Dieter Fredric was a trusted company Labtech. Their motives are as yet, unknown. I am greatly distressed that these two formerly loyal people would betray my trust and deliberately try to harm the innocent citizens of the FSN. You all want answers. Unfortunately, I am powerless to supply any for you at present but let us hope that they are caught soon and will enlighten us.’

Kathy had been a little awed when Martha had agreed to give a statement, however, it was going well. *This could be award-winning stuff, make it good, Kathy!*

‘Mrs English, exactly how many of the tankers have been affected and in what way. And most importantly, will the anti-Cancer inoculation still be distributed?’

‘Only one of the tankers appears to have been tainted which is only a tiny percentage of the batch. The uncontaminated tankers will depart

as soon as the police give us clearance and, unless President Rush deems it necessary, there will be no change in the distribution schedule. Naturally I shall examine the contents of the affected tanker and in addition, I shall conduct a full investigation into any other projects that these two have been working on over the last five years or, to which they have had access,’ she replied sincerely, pausing for a moment before continuing, ‘The results will of course be published for the world to see but until then, I would not like to speculate further.’ Kathy’s instincts kicked in. She had *the* Martha English on the spot and she was being more than co-operative.

‘Mrs English, surely five years is over cautious?’

‘At Holisticorp, what we put on the market today, could have started its life up to five years previously, such are our methods of ensuring perfection of our products. Being over cautious, as you put it, is a small price to pay for the health and peace of mind of our customers. Holisticorp takes pride in our reputation of excellence in all fields. We would be seriously failing in our duty if we did not give this investigation our full attention. Now if you will excuse me, I have many matters to which I must attend.’

Kathy faced the camera and delivered her final oration.

‘Well there we have it, once again man’s best friend appears to be the dog, or rather, two dogs to be precise. Onyx and Toffee seem to have unwittingly foiled, what appears to be an attempt to sabotage the anti-Cancer inoculation. However, as Martha English has stated, as soon as the police give the go, the trucks roll to every corner of the FSN. The long awaited *Death of Cancer* will begin on Inoculation day as planned.

What’s the purpose behind McKenzie and Fredric’s attack? That remains unclear but the public can rest assured that Mrs English will be thoroughly investigating as a public safety precaution and will leave no stone unturned in her search for the truth. Meanwhile if anyone sees either of the fugitives, please contact the police immediately; under no circumstances are they to be approached, they are armed and considered dangerous. This is Kathy Figgella reporting for 2S2N; Sovereign States Net News, from the Ivory Tower, Holisticorp Foundation Headquarters.’

Wednesday 9th October 2075 - Bala, North Wales

15:00 hours

The high drama of the last few days had taken its toll, so when Dieter awoke it was almost twelve hours later. In the afternoon light spilling between the half-drawn curtains, for a few seconds, he was twenty again; lazily listening to the sound of the birds in the tree outside the window, then Emerald stirred beside him and the present flooded in. He grabbed his robe and headed for the bathroom.

Emerald awoke fully as the bathroom door closed and instantly felt the crushing guilt of their failure. *We've achieved nothing, our privileged positions lost and millions will suffer.*

For a couple of days shock controlled them both, they felt abandoned, lost, but late Friday evening Dieter turned on netnews for the first time and whilst watching a report of their attempt, he realised they'd been taking personal responsibility for too much. 'We couldn't have known about the dogs, Em'. We're grieving *in* failure, not because it's our fault.'

The next morning Emerald awoke with a new purpose, dressed and stepped down into the kitchen. Holding a bottle under the kitchen tap, she looked through the window at the garden shrubs drooping under a multitude of rain-heavy cobwebs. Puddles rippling in the morning breeze filled the hollows in the cinder path to the gate. *It must have rained all night. I did sleep well!* The bottle filled, she took her coat from the peg and pulled it on as she memorised a path from the safe routes map that Thomas had thoughtfully left pinned to the back door, then left for a walk.

When she returned Dieter had prepared breakfast. As they ate Dieter told her about the happy times he'd spent in the cottage as a child. The cottage was wonderful; deceptively spacious and almost untouched since his grandma had passed away. Her haphazardly placed nick-knacks still furnishing every room gave it a cosy atmosphere and, thanks to Thomas, everything they needed was there, from soft beds to pots in the kitchen.

Tuesday 22nd October 2075 - Inoculation day

08:30 hours

With pre-Inoculation day festivities constantly transmitted across the FSN, Emerald had become more agitated and restless and the cottage had got cleaner and cleaner. Powerless to prevent the imminent catastrophe and with nothing left to polish, her stress turned to coffee and GK's. Dieter had also kept himself occupied and *had* appeared composed but since they'd got up, he had banged his head coming down the stairs, closed his hand in a draw and spilled his coffee down himself; his mishaps a clear sign that now even his stress had begun to show. He joined Emerald on the couch and they sat silently watching the queues of smiling faces, all lined up to accept the much-hyped virus, as 2S2N pursued the story of the century around the Sovereign Nations. Citizens from all corners of the territory related feelings of joy and relief at the imminent defeat of cancer. Every emotional response to the ever-interviewing reporters confirming, Martha had attained saviour status in the eyes of the people.

It was late afternoon when Dieter stood to pour them each a Brandy and was the first to break the silence, 'The woman who gave the world the Death of Cancer versus the duo who attempted to sabotage her efforts. I think we can probably say that from now on, it's all uphill! I always did like a challenge I suppose,' As he passed the half-full glass, he added, 'When do you think it will start to show an effect?'

'Long after this Brandy has an effect on me I hope!' She downed the drink, held the glass out for a refill and continued through Dieter's nodding acknowledgment, as the liquid glugged from the bottle. 'As our original analysis suggested, D', there is no way of telling exactly when, or how severely; it could be anything from one victim with an itchy lip to millions with bleeding pustules! And look at them all, hundreds of millions of people, everyone in the FSN unwittingly lining up to play Russian roulette! And if that's not bad enough, think of how this will affect the gene pool! This one event could damage the human race for ever. I feel awful.' His eyes mirrored her own sadness.

'Me too, but it's too late to do anything about the ACV. We've been tried and found guilty by the media, and we have almost no one we can trust. The best thing we can do now is...'

Emerald finished for him, 'Get back involved! We have to find out more, do more! We have to figure out how to deal with the great, untouchable Martha English!'