

David Bremner rubbed the space where his wedding ring used to be and stared at the white plastic medicine bottle on his coffee table. He was sitting upright on his sofa, the black-leather three-seater he'd always found comfortable, the same black-leather three-seater he'd received in the divorce agreement, the one Greta hadn't wanted anyway. He was nervous. His fingers clenched and unclenched, clammy. He knew this was wrong, that this transgressed every clinical rule in the book, and yet the words of Harvey Nix wouldn't get out of his head.

David Bremner was one of the lead clinicians at MallerSwann Pharmaceuticals. The company specialised in clinical therapy and medicines for the neuropsychological industry. Stage one trials of the new drug under his control were almost complete. The drug's working name was MS18. It induced a very deep sleep and then stimulated brain-core activity. It had been designed to help repair deep neurological trauma caused by sudden or repeated impacts.

The drug had initially been designed to reduce the onset of Alzheimer's or Parkinson's as an early intervention. But more recently its potential had shifted sideways into the more lucrative field of professional sports, and it had mostly been the motorsport and football industries who'd stuck their hands in their pockets first and deepest. That was where the big money was, according to the executive board at MallerSwann, who'd been quick to diversify their patron list.

There had been fifteen testers in the treatment group and fifteen in the control group, and each patient chosen for the two groups had suffered varying levels of neurological brain trauma. In the treatment group

five patients had shown no improvement, nine had claimed partial improvement of memory function, and then there'd been Harvey Nix.

Harvey Nix was a nineteen-year-old motorcycle racer who'd shown outstanding promise at both the Isle of Man TT and the British Superbike Championship. He'd high-sided his Yamaha coming out of Druids at Brands Hatch and had landed helmet first. He'd been airlifted to Kent and Canterbury Hospital and had recovered well, but three months on he was still suffering from occasional memory loss and frequent headaches.

Nix's team boss and two of his main sponsors wanted him fit and well. They also insisted quite strongly that he volunteer for the trials if he wanted to continue racing. It was generally agreed in the paddock and the racing media that Nix had the talent to go far, and so Harvey Nix had agreed to take part in the trials.

Over the course of the following six months Nix had responded well from several treatments of MS18. He'd not had a headache and his memory loss had been negligible. But his success during the stage one trials wasn't what had gripped David Bremner's imagination. Harvey Nix had disclosed in post-treatment on more than one occasion that after being administered MS18 not only had he had very vivid dreams, but he'd also been able to control them.

"Every rider dreams of winning the TT," Nix had said. There'd been a bright gleam in his eye as he'd relived the unreal experience, staring into middle distance with a creeping grin. "In real life I'd had a couple of top ten finishes, but that drug you gave me made me feel like I was back there. I had more grip on my bike. I had more power. I was able to hug corners more tightly, and slipstream other riders so easily that I just went straight past them." Nix had closed his eyes,

seeing everything in his memory. "I had more time to make decisions, more time to concentrate. Everything was easy. And when I took the chequered flag and climbed up onto the podium, I looked out over a crowd cheering for me and everything was as it should be."

"You remember all this clearly?" David had asked, writing notes.

"It's fading," Nix had replied, opening his eyes but still grinning, "but yeah, I remember it. Only it wasn't like a normal dream, where you feel like... I don't know, a passenger on some weird circus ride where nothing makes any sense. I was there, everything made perfect sense, and I was controlling my riding, controlling others maybe, I don't know. It doesn't seem to make much sense now that I'm awake, does it? But it was all just so... real, you know?"

But David Bremner didn't know. When he slept he dreamt of random nonsense the same as everyone else. Occasionally he dreamt of his daughter Tilly and his son Miles, or their family home before it had been taken away, or scattered things from his childhood, vague glimpses of his parents. But mostly it was nonsense: shopping with cages full of alligators, hiding in empty offices waiting for emails, visiting houses with ghosts behind doorways. Dreams came and they went, and all of them were uncontrollable. Until now, it would seem.

Bremner shifted in his seat. How had Nix described his dreams before? Like being a passenger. That was it. In dreams you were a passenger, along for the ride no matter how nonsensical. Yet after being administered MS18, Harvey Nix had felt like he was in control, controlling himself, controlling others, steering his unconscious mind, and winning.

The divorce from Greta had been horrible. Bremner had been ousted from the large family home

in Surrey and banished to a one-bedroom flat he'd found overlooking the M3. Tilly, now fifteen, and Miles, ten, could now only be seen every other weekend. The flat itself only had two windows, both small and both looking out over the grey noise of the motorway. The old couple upstairs thumped about on arthritic legs, and the young couple next door thumped their headboard against his bedroom wall with exuberant monotony. His life had suddenly become considerably cramped and lonely. He had no space, it was never quiet, and he no longer woke up each morning to see his children.

Bremner had tried to bury himself in his work but it just seemed to make things worse. He worked longer hours to distract his mind and to avoid being in the hollow blankness of his flat. He would sit in his office at his desk drafting reports for the board after each treatment, typing until it was dark outside. But lately he'd become aware of just how much he lingered over his notes on Harvey Nix.

The following week saw another stage one treatment of the same fifteen patients in the treatment group. This time only three showed no improvement, ten showed partial improvement and Nix once again claimed he'd been able to control his deep-sleep dream, returning to victory on the Isle of Man. The only issue now was Katie Fisher.

"I hadn't wanted to say anything before," Katie had said in post-treatment, "because it didn't seem important." She'd fidgeted in her seat, her hands knitted in her lap. "I had this really real dream. I was falling, out of one of those New York high-rise apartments. I remember the panic, the criss-cross of busy streets rushing up towards me. I felt like I was going to die. But then suddenly I seemed to be able to control everything, and I flew."

"Falling and flying are common subjects in

dreams," Bremner said to her, "they can represent -"

"I don't care what they represent. I felt like I could control my flying. I felt... aware. I flew back up to the window I'd fallen from and went back in the room. It wasn't an apartment I'd ever been in before, but I explored it, I went through the drawers, I read the mail to see whose place it was, I even watched the tv. I was there, doctor, in that apartment. I was there."

Bremner had written it all down, of course, and as he'd sat at his desk typing up the report, he'd tapped his finger against his paperwork and thought about it.

On the desk next to his computer was a gold frame containing a photograph, or rather what was left of it, of his family on holiday, taken two years before in Rome. When Miles had mentioned that mum had got a boyfriend, Bremner had yanked the photo out of the frame and ripped away Greta's smiling face. Now the frame contained just Tilly and Miles waving in front of the Trevi Fountain, with a torn edge of white next to a rough oblong of brown backing board.

Repeatedly tapping the delete key on his keyboard, Bremner removed the sentence he'd started about Katie Fisher's alleged dream control. Harvey Nix's comments had already gone upstairs, he could do nothing about those now, but for some reason he didn't want Fisher's notes joining them.

When he'd returned to his flat that evening there'd been a letter addressed to him in his mailbox in the communal foyer. The envelope had been plain white with a single first class stamp in the corner. He knew where it had come from, and it stung to see his name printed above his new address.

He tore open the flap and instantly recognised the royal-blue logo of Greta's solicitor at the head of the letter. Quickly scanning through the neatly typed paragraphs came with pins passing through his chest.

The letter cut eloquently to the chase: Greta wanted more.

Bremner stood in front of his small living-room window. The letter was on the countertop behind him. He sipped whiskey from a hi-ball glass and watched the endless rush of cars on the motorway. He didn't even have the right glass for his single-malt. Greta had kept all the glassware in the oak cabinet, the one he'd bought at auction, the one in which he kept all his rocks glasses. He took another long sip and it all just felt so wrong: his marriage, his life, and now even his Glenlivet.

Bremner had taken his coat off when he'd come in, but now he wanted to put it back on again and go out, just to get out of this god-awful flat. But where could he go? His father had died in a car accident eight years before, and not long after his mother had slipped away in a hospice. It was either here or work. There was nowhere else.

He took an overly long sip of his Glenlivet and closed his eyes. His head swayed and the start of a migraine pumped sharply at his temple. It was too early to sleep but he carried his glass through into the bedroom and lay down on the covers, staring up at the ceiling.

Greta's demands gathered like crows in the shadows of his tiny bedroom, circling in the darkness of his own head when he closed his eyes. Rolling onto an elbow to drink more whiskey only served to make the blackness suck him down deeper as though he was caught in a deep ocean current, and through it all glinted Greta's sour grin. In the morning he threw up.

The solicitor's letter was still waiting for him on the countertop. His head mellowed as he sipped hot tea. He stood in front of the window watching cars whoosh past on the motorway.

Later at his desk, he reread the report he'd prepared for the board. He still wasn't sure why he'd deleted the part about Katie Fisher's dream of falling and her subsequent feelings of awareness and control. Stage one trials were almost complete. There was no reason why stage two trials wouldn't begin soon, but with a much higher number of patients. If MS18 allowed two out of fifteen patients to show signs of deep-sleep awareness, then a hundred might show similar traits if a thousand patients were treated. Why that bothered him so greatly he still wasn't entirely certain.

With a clipboard tucked under his arm, Bremner had wandered the building just thinking. He'd walked past the treatment rooms and through the drug development laboratory, and had taken the lift to the third floor and the part of the building where their intensive care unit was. Its equipment and layout was no different to any other intensive care unit in the country. It was where they studied experimental medicines during induced comas amongst other things. The ICU was not currently being used, and its pristine suite remained in darkness. Bremner stood outside the viewing window for some time until he realised what had been on his mind ever since Harvey Nix had admitted his first revelation of glory and fulfilment during his deep sleep and brain core stimulus.

"Can we talk a little more about what you experienced during your treatment trials?" David Bremner had asked him, when he'd called his mobile phone later that afternoon.

It had been a Thursday and Nix had been at Donington Park, sitting in his pit garage on the first day of practice for that weekend's racing. There'd been a lot of noise in the background, engines roaring, throttles

blipping, lots of shouted communication.

“No problem,” Nix had yelled into his phone, “but you’ll have to speak up.” He’d jabbed a finger into his other ear, and wandered to the back of the garage. “I’m in the middle of a session. I’ve got about five minutes while they fix my brakes.”

“Okay, I’ll try and be brief,” Bremner had said. “Firstly, how are you feeling?”

“Great.”

“No headaches, nausea, flashing lights?”

“No, doc. Everything’s great. You fixed me. I can’t thank you enough.”

“And your memory? Are you forgetting anything, day to day, hour to hour?”

“Nope, it’s all pretty much crystal. We get briefings and press interviews where I get asked a load of questions, you know? But I’m back to how I was before the accident.”

Bremner had paused, unsure of how to be precise in what he was about to ask. The sound of roaring motorcycles flashing past filled his ear.

“Can you tell me anything else, Harvey, about the dreams you had? How you felt like you had control?”

“Jeez, doc, I can’t remember much about that now. I know I was on the Isle of Man and winning races, but I think about that stuff anyway. I’m back to being focussed on my real bike now.”

The roar of more motorcycles streamed past in the earpiece. Engines were still being revved in the garage.

“Look doc, I gotta go, Bernie’s waving at me. Do we need more sessions, ‘cause I feel fine at the moment?”

“Stage one trials are done, Harvey. If and when we go to stage two, I’ll contact you again and see where

we are. If you need anything, you have my number. And good luck this weekend.”

“Cheers, doc. But if I can ride like I dream, I’ll be bringing home a trophy for sure.”

Bremner replaced the phone and sat staring out through his office window. He didn’t need to look at the gold frame on his desk to know how much he missed his children. He thought about the ragged scrap of photographic paper with Greta’s face on it, the one he’d torn out and thrown into his waste basket. So she had a boyfriend now? What next? Have him move in and make Tilly and Miles call him daddy?

Her solicitor’s letter had been clear and concise. What little he’d got in court was apparently too much, and she intended to start clawing some of it back. Child visitation was to be cut back too. He was powerless. His own solicitor had told him that much, and in about as many words too. He slumped back in his chair and felt tears stinging the corners of his eyes. His throat prickled, sharp and dry.

Picking his phone back up, he dialled internally to the treatment pharmacy. It rang twice and then he heard Jayne Fitzgerald’s voice on the other end. Jayne had wanted to run the MS18 trials but Theodore Swann didn’t trust women in lead roles. Her job title didn’t say assistant, but every other term did.

“Do we have any bottles of MS18 left?” Bremner asked her.

He could almost hear her teeth grinding on the other end of the line. She was always angry around him now, like it was all his fault.

“What we have is about to be tagged and logged in the vault,” Jayne told him. He could hear the edge in her voice like he should’ve known that anyway. He did know that, but he needed to ask the question.

“When?”

“End of the week. It’s Thursday today, so tomorrow. Clare will be doing it tomorrow.”

“Can you hold it back for me?”

“I thought stage one was done.”

“It is.” Bremner hesitated, thinking. “It’s to go with my report. Swann wants to see it all together.”

It was a lame thing to say, and he could feel Jayne frowning on the other end of the phone. Jayne couldn’t stand Swann so it was unlikely that she’d go out of her way to double check.

“What time are you there til tonight?” Bremner asked.

“Probably six. Why?”

Bremner looked at his watch.

“I’ll pop down now and pick it all up,” he said, like he was doing her a favour.

Jayne Fitzgerald didn’t respond. He could hear her tapping her fingernails impatiently on the shell of the phone. He waited for her to reply.

“Fine. I’ll have them here ready for you,” she said at last, and put the phone down loudly.

She had a quizzical look in her narrowed eyes when Bremner walked into the treatment pharmacy. They both knew that all experimental medicines were logged in the vault, both during and between trials. For David Bremner to suddenly want them out of the blue was unorthodox, and it didn’t help that he had no logical reason for even wanting them. Why would Swann want them? What was he going to do with them? Bremner hoped that she wouldn’t think of a reason to go to the top floor to find out. And knowing Theodore Swann, he’d probably think it was something to do with one of her cycles if she did.

As promised, she had them waiting on her desk:

two boxes of eight bottles, all in plain white packaging but for a printed label on the short edge of each box so that they could be easily read when stacked.

Bremner picked them up, the last of the batch run of MS18. He told Jayne once again that he needed them for the board report, but she wasn't even listening. She was busy typing something up on her computer. He was lead clinician, after all. What was she going to do, argue?

They exchanged words briefly and curtly about possible dates for the start of the stage two trials, but it was nothing more than small talk. Bremner just wanted to get out of there, itching for the door, and she knew it. She wanted him out of there too.

He collected his coat from his office and drove straight home. There was another letter in his mailbox but he didn't want to know anything about Greta or her demands right now. Climbing the stairs quickly to his flat, he locked the door behind him and knew that one way or another this was going to be a long night.

Cradled by the familiar comfort of his black-leather sofa, he regarded the bottles of MS18 on his coffee table as though the drug they contained was illegal and lethal rather than controlled and medical. The grey noise of the motorway traffic outside was barely muted by the inferior glazing, and hung in the air like an incessantly bored ghost. The only sounds outside the family home in Surrey had been bright birdsong and the wind through the leafy mature trees.

Leaning forward he picked up one of the bottles and studied its label. He'd read it a hundred times before, of course, and knew each ingredient. But now it was different. Now he was contemplating using the experimental drug on himself, and in an uncontrolled environment without supervision. He was about to transgress every code of conduct he knew, and cross

every line of legislation. His career would be over if anyone found out. But it would match his life, so what did it matter anymore?

In his mind he saw Greta, lying in bed beside some new boyfriend. He saw Tilly and Miles tucked up in their own beds just a few metres down the hall. He saw the courtroom. He saw the judge who'd nodded through everything her solicitor had said. He saw the letter still on his kitchen countertop, demanding more from him. He saw the letter downstairs in his mailbox that he didn't even want to open.

David Bremner pushed down on the cap of the first bottle and unscrewed it. He lifted it away and gazed down at the milky white fluid known only as MS18. He lifted the bottle to his nose and gently inhaled like a London sommelier, even though he knew the drug was odourless. The open bottle floated like a pale apparition in front of his lips, the drug it contained designed to be administered via a cannula and an induction pump. Bremner didn't have either. He held the bottle to his lips, took a small amount onto his tongue, and then swallowed. Then he replaced the cap and set the bottle back down on his coffee table.

Settling into the soft cushioned seat of the sofa, he closed his eyes and waited for the melatonin to act first. His patients had been documented as falling asleep within one to five minutes. Deep sleep came three to five minutes afterwards. The intensive brain-core stimulus - and a controllable dream state in the cases of Harvey Nix and Katie Fisher - came between eight and fifteen minutes after that, usually with a duration of six to eight hours.

The sound of the traffic on the M3 outside still came as a shapeless grey noise. Footsteps plodded overhead. Somewhere a door banged closed. And talking, someone was talking, low and indecipherable.

Bremner concentrated on his breathing, slowly in through the nose, hold, then slowly out through the mouth whilst saying whoosh. Concentrate on that, he told himself, until sleep takes over. He tried not to talk to himself, tried not to think, but then he could see Greta's face, grinning from out of the frame on his desk, and from her seat in the courtroom, the divorce hearing playing out all over again. Now he could see Tilly and Miles, sitting on the edge of the Trevi Fountain, except something was different. Their wave was no longer static above their heads, they were waving their arms joyously back and forth as they had done that sunny afternoon. And laughing, he could see them laughing, could hear it now too.

There was a camera in his hands, and he lowered it to see them properly. His children were right there, nestled together and giggling, calling him daddy and asking if he'd taken the picture yet? He nodded and told them yes and they understood. He wanted the two of them to get up and run over to him, and his heart skipped madly when they did.

He knelt and hugged them tightly for the first time in weeks. He looked over their shoulders for Greta but she wasn't there. He was distantly aware of knowing that of course she wasn't there, she was back in his office, lying scrunched up where she belonged in his waste basket.

Joy coursed through him, and the hug fell naturally away, replaced by laughter. He kissed their hair and breathed them in. Then he watched them turn their faces up to his and ask if they could have ice creams. Yes he nodded, and together they strolled away in search of a gelateria.

They spent a whole day together, beneath a blue sky that never darkened towards dusk. They strolled across piazzas beneath wheeling doves that

may or may not have existed, and visited museums and galleries with exhibits that didn't matter. He was with his children, in an unreality where everything made sense, where Greta was kept out and banished to a realm that was forever away.

He woke too early and with tears in his eyes. Pinching them away with a thumb and forefinger, he saw an overcast sky outside his window brightening with the approach of a grey dawn. The images of his happy children began to fade, and he blinked at them rapidly as if he might keep them a while longer, like the visual echoes of a bright sun emblazoned on the back of the eye. What had seemed so real suddenly appeared so delicate and lost, as impossible to hold on to as a midnight ghost.

The bottles of MS18 stood in ranks on his coffee table like pale plastic soldiers. Beyond them he could see the letter from Greta's solicitor waiting like an executioner's despatch, demanding his attention. Reality rushed back in with a sudden jolt. His dream of Rome with Tilly and Miles had seemed just as real as the day in court had been when they'd been taken away.

Then a single dark thought surfaced: drink the whole bottle, return to the fountain, and lose yourself forever in the false reality where Tilly and Miles would always be waiting.

With the onset of daylight he could understand it for what it was, an unhindered and artificially stimulated brain event in the depths of a medically induced deep sleep. But with his eyes closed and dreaming, his subconscious had revelled in this other world, a world devoid of scientific facts and recorded data, a world made better by instinctual desire and parental yearning. He knew that he belonged to the real world - no matter how hard it kicked him, no

matter how much he despised it - he just didn't want it anymore.

Reluctantly, Bremner dressed for work and left the flat, ignoring the letter from Greta's solicitor and the second letter still unopened in his mailbox in the foyer.

There was an email from Greta when he booted up his computer. It was short, to the point, a precis of the second letter: Tilly was pregnant - they needed more money.

Bremner slammed himself back in his chair and scrunched up his face until he thought it might turn itself inside out. He banged his fist on his desk and clicked the email closed so that he didn't have to look at it anymore. He went to the window and stared out at the grey sky and the grey car park beneath it. It was all going wrong. What had happened? From nowhere he remembered Nix's comment about his usual dreams, about how they'd made him feel like a passenger, and how the MS18 had made him feel like he'd had control.

And suddenly there it was, the revelation that everything was back to front. Ever since his divorce he had felt like a passenger, along for a ride that seemed like it would never be over or ever make sense. With the court and the solicitors agreeing every decision between them he'd had control over nothing. The image of Nix's joyous grin came into his head again too, the one he'd worn as he'd remembered his dream of winning the TT. Nix had known it hadn't been real, but it hadn't mattered: it had felt real. That was the important thing. In his dream he'd been in control. He'd won the race.

Bremner slipped out of his office then and made his way through the building, taking the lift to the third floor. The ICU suite remained in darkness. He swiped the door lock with his staff card and went in.

Light sensors detected his entry and blinked brightly on until the room was a stark white. Inside, all the medical equipment awaited its next patient: the physiologic monitors, the control systems, the intravenous poles and the drug induction pumps, the adjustable grey-framed hospital bed in the centre of the room.

Now that Bremner was surrounded by all this equipment, a slew of other important factors emerged. Firstly, in order to go under he would need to administer propofol, but that was kept in the treatment pharmacy under Jayne Fitzgerald's control. He paused, thinking, and then pulled his iPhone out of his pocket and stared at it. A million thoughts soared through his head, each one of them so slippery and fleeting that he struggled to grab a single one. Tapping open his contact list he scrolled down to Jayne's name. His finger hovered over her mobile number. He felt like he was standing at the cliff edge at Beachy Head, one step forward to fall to his death, and one step back to where safety was still an option. Again he saw Greta's face grinning triumphantly. She was holding a solicitor's letter in each hand. And now Tilly was pregnant.

His finger tapped Jayne's number. He held the phone to his ear, listening to it ring. It rang so long he thought she wouldn't pick up. Maybe she was looking at his name on her phone screen and making her own decisions. But then the line clicked and he heard her voice. She sounded in the middle of something and annoyed.

"Why are you calling my mobile?"

"Sorry," Bremner said, "but I need a favour."

She didn't reply.

"Can you meet me at the ICU suite?" Bremner asked. "Please?"

He heard her breathe loudly in and out.

"We're logging data," Jayne said irritably. "It's

got to be done by four o'clock."

"It'll only take a few minutes. Please. I need your help."

She breathed in and out again.

"Fine," she said, and ended the call.

Bremner stood at the foot of the lone hospital bed, studying the gallery of medical equipment, alone in the silent and brightly lit room. The physiologic monitor and the pulse oximeter stood quiet and blank beside the bed head. The apnea and intercranial pressure monitors, two machines that he knew he didn't need, he wheeled away to the back of the room. He picked up a drug infusion pump from the observation desk, attached it to an intravenous pole and wheeled it to the opposite side of the bed. Then he searched the cupboards for cannulas and catheters and a nasogastric tube. The door behind him suddenly clicked sharply open and he looked round to find Jayne Fitzgerald walking in. She folded her arms and stared at him rifling through drawers.

"What's so important that I have to come all the way up here?"

Bremner left his search for intravenous lines and went to her. He held his hands together in front of him like someone religious and for a moment it looked like he was about to say a prayer. Maybe he was.

"I want to ask a favour," he began. "Actually it's a bit more than a favour. It's quite a big ask."

Jayne said nothing, but just scowled at him like she was a teacher and he was a boy in detention.

"I want to perform another test," Bremner explained. "I want to try MS18 on a coma patient."

She stared at him angrily, shaking her head.

"You can't try a stage one trial drug on a coma patient," she said. "You know that."

"I think it might be worthwhile."

“It’ll never get signed off.”

“I can sign it off.”

“But we don’t have a coma patient.”

“I can put myself forward.”

Jayne kept her arms folded tightly across her chest, and seriously studied the man who had taken the job from out of her hands. Her jaw clenched as she realised that this was what Theodore Swann preferred in a lead scientist. For a moment Bremner thought she was going to turn around and storm out. Either that or take a step forward and slap him. Either way she seemed to be summing up some serious thoughts in her head.

“David, I don’t know what you think you’re playing at -”

“I want you to help me induce a coma,” Bremner said, “on myself, and then keep me medicated with MS18. I have enough medication for three months, and I think that’ll keep me in a deep-sleep state long enough to monitor its use for severe trauma. I’ve already checked, we have enough fluids and liquid food here for the gastric tube -”

“You’re serious...” she said quietly.

Bremner nodded.

Jayne glanced round the ICU suite and saw all the equipment that he’d been arranging around the bed. Some of the monitors had been wheeled away. Her frown had lifted but her head was still reeling.

“You want me to risk everything I’ve achieved here to help you accomplish what exactly?”

“I don’t want to be awake anymore,” Bremner confessed quietly. “At least not for a while. You know about my divorce, what Greta’s done to me.”

Jayne’s expression mellowed. Only a little, but it was something. She knew. Not all of it, but she knew.

“It’s unethical,” she said, shaking her head again.

“It’s my decision,” Bremner countered.

It felt like he was pleading. His hands were still knitted together in a gesture of supplication. They’d been friends once upon a time, as colleagues on the same grade before Swann had unwittingly destroyed their relationship by elevating him above her.

“Why should I help you?” she wanted to know. Under the circumstances it was a fair enough question.

Bremner gave her the only answer he could.

“Because I’ll give you all of it,” he said.

“You’ll give me all of what?”

“I’ll step down and hand the role of lead clinician over to you. I can’t do it, if I’m in a medically induced coma. You can monitor everything, record everything. It’ll help stage two trials as well as the route to market, we both know that.”

“But -”

“Please, Jayne. I want to do this. Everything I want is here. I need you to authorise the propofol leaving the pharmacy. I can set up everything else.”

“When do you want to do this?” Jayne found herself asking.

“Tomorrow morning.”

“There’ll be no one else here in the building,” she observed, looking round the suite.

“What are you saying?”

“That you can’t do everything on your own,” she said. “I know I shouldn’t be doing this, but I’ll come in with you. It’ll give us all weekend.”

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The whole building was silent and in darkness when David Bremner swiped his card through the entry system. Jayne Fitzgerald followed him in. She'd been sat in her BMW in the car park waiting for him to arrive. She still wasn't entirely convinced that he was serious about going through with it, and she'd been sat wondering if he'd given this a lot more thought overnight, or maybe even changed his mind. But when his car pulled up alongside hers and he got out, she knew that she didn't have to ask. He had a bag with him, what would normally be called an overnight bag. And what else had he said to her yesterday? That there were enough bottles of MS18 to last him three months? Hardly overnight.

They said nothing to each other as they walked across the car park and approached the main entrance. What was there left to say? The interior lights flashed brightly on as they walked through reception to the lifts. Bremner went directly to the third floor. Jayne went to the treatment pharmacy to collect the propofol.

When she entered the ICU suite Bremner had already changed into his sleep wear, a plain blue t-shirt and boxer shorts. He'd already switched on the physiologic monitors and the electrocardiogram, and had hooked up his intravenous and urinary catheters. On the observation desk Jayne noted that all the white plastic bottles of MS18 that he'd taken two days before were now lined up neatly.

"You're still sure you want to go through with this?" she asked him again.

"I am," he told her. "I've also written up the notes on this part of the trial. I've put you down as lead clinician. You'll be in charge of the whole project from now on. I know how much you wanted it."

"Thank you," she said quietly.

He smiled. He hadn't wanted them to be

enemies, but Swann's decision had initiated the deterioration of both their personal and professional relationship. She smiled back at him too. Maybe now they might at least get some shred of it back.

"I think I've done about as much as I can," Bremner said to her, climbing into the patient bed and double checking all the monitors surrounding him in the small suite. Jayne looked too, and their eyes converged on the urinary catheter lying across the bed.

"I guess you want me to put the tubes in," she said.

"If you could."

"I take it you'd like a local anaesthetic for each one?"

"Please."

Bremner laughed. Jayne laughed too, and probably for the first time in his company for over a year.

"Lucky for you I spent six years on the ward and eight in ICU," she said, and then crossed to the observation desk where she began to arrange everything they would need.

There were two pouches of Welker-Smith's Food Blend, a gastric slurry that would keep him fed for the next twelve days. She would order more on Monday. There was a box of IV fluid pouches next to them. Jayne picked up the central venous pressure line and attached it to the drug infusion pump next to the bed. Then she held out the cannula at the end of the line towards Bremner.

"Would you prefer this in the neck or the groin?" she asked him, with a florid smile.

Bremner winced theatrically.

"The neck, I think," he said. "And yes, I'd still like an anaesthetic."

Between the two of them they connected

every tube and catheter, and checked all of Bremner's physiologic parameters on the monitors. When Bremner finally lay down, Jayne smoothed his tousled hair from his forehead as she would've done to any of her other patients.

"You're sure you still want to do this?" she asked him yet again.

"For science and the betterment of mankind," he lied. "At least that's what I put in my report anyway. You're lead clinician now, so it's up to you what you put down."

"Thanks," she said, sarcastically. "I'll stay here with you until Monday morning, and then I'll have Jessie and Luke take shifts monitoring you and doing your obs. The board won't interfere once we're underway. But if all goes well, you'll be a hero, especially if the money starts rolling in."

Bremner looked at her, expressionless.

"I don't care about anything like that," he said.

"I know."

"I never wanted us to fall out over this either."

"I know," she said again, and then turned to the drug infusion pump to administer the propofol. "I'll wait until you're fully under before I drip the MS18 into the line."

Bremner took a deep breath and then closed his eyes.

"Thank you," he said, but he was already drifting quickly towards sleep.

He wasn't by the Trevi Fountain. And it quickly became apparent that he wasn't anywhere near Rome either. The green banks of a tented campsite ran down to a wide clear river, half hidden by the shade of a

wall of willow trees. Swallows chirped and wheeled overhead. Cows lowed unseen in an adjacent field.

Looking around him, feeling lost and unsure of where he was, he suddenly caught sight of his mother striding happily towards him through the trees, waving an arm high above her head so that he could see her. His father was a little way behind her, cradling a small bag of groceries he'd just purchased from the camp store with foreign francs.

David looked down at his tiny hands, at his thin knees poking out from beneath small brown shorts. He was eight years old again, on the camping trip they'd taken to southern France. He ran to them now, his parents whom he hadn't seen or hugged in over eight years. They hugged him back, a joyous memory he was actively taking part in. He held them longer than an eight-year-old boy usually would.

Together they strolled hand in hand down to the riverbank to paddle their feet in the cool water. From nowhere his father produced three ice-cream cones. David spoke to them with the voice of a child but the head of an adult, one more knowledgeable about the world and what the future held so cruelly for them both. He was appreciative, knowing how a traffic accident would one day take one of them, and a debilitating illness claim the other.

They spent the afternoon exploring the banks of the river, talking and laughing, but he yearned to be away. In the real world he could have taken a bus to the airport at Toulouse-Blagnac, or a taxi to the seaport at Sete, but this new dreamworld offered so many new possibilities with which to experiment and control.

Although he knew that one day he'd return to them, he hugged his parents once more before spreading his arms wide and taking to the skies. From below they watched him soar upwards like a hawk on

a thermal, high into the cloudless blue heavens. They waved until they were ants and then, with outstretched arms, David flew far away, far across the southern tip of France and then high above the glittering blue waters of the Mediterranean, heading for the lush distant coast of Italy.

He didn't know the way, but he didn't need to. The world changed as he required it to change, and he soared high above the ground until the blue waters receded and the green hills and earthy stone of Rome appeared.

Like an eagle he descended gracefully, spiralling out of the sky and flying down through the narrow streets until he came upon the familiar sight of the Trevi Fountain. Tilly and Miles were waiting for him, forever thirteen and eight years old.

David landed, an adult again, and they rushed towards him to call him daddy once more. They hugged him dearly, just as he had hugged his long-ago parents. He was with his family again, in a new reality that made perfect sense, in a place where he finally had control.

Where can we go now? Miles asked him suddenly, his eyes bright and shining. Anywhere and everywhere, David replied, holding his son's tiny hand.

And then the whole world opened up before them like the mouth of a vast yawning creature, a new and magical world which had no restrictions and no limitations. His dream was now reality, and reality now his dream.