The Formula

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

The Pharmaceutical industry is seen by many as being the very worst example of unbridled capitalism wreaking havoc. Here is an industry that makes money from the suffering of others. And just when it seems that the poor souls suffering from some deadly or debilitating disease cannot have it any worse, this industry can simply put up the price. People will pay to live, or to live without pain. They must pay. Sell the house. Go into debt. Deny the children an education, or even food. Buy the drugs that are needed.

But there are other victims too. There are people like my son, Hank. Hank trained as a chemist because he was interested in science and wanted a career in it. He could have gone into industrial chemicals or metallurgy, but instead he chose pharmaceuticals because he felt that he could do some good there. He wanted to do good.

Here are the other victims of the Pharmaceutical industry. This story is about the death of ideals, or at least one idealist – probably two if you include his friend Max.

I am not sure how they met, but they both worked in very different positions in a large international drug company. Max was in finance and he was on the lookout for a new drug that might allow him to build his own business. He had strong connections with a bank, and he knew how to bankroll research, development and patent costs.

The Pharmaceutical companies tell a story to excuse their bad behavior. They say that with high costs they would not be able to fund new drugs. Profits drive research, and research cures the world of diseases and other conditions. But Max knew the fallacies. They patent future development to stop competitors developing new drugs, then they get new patents of the finished goods to extend the protection and the ability to gouge customers.

In addition, much of the research paid for by drug companies never brings the products to market. If cures are discovered they can be concealed, or even destroyed, if they cannot be turned to a profit. Cures that do not make money can be buried.

Hank had such an abandoned product which he had been working on, and he believed in. It showed positive effects on a number of serious skin conditions. Diseases of the skin may sound unimportant, but for many people they can be physically debilitating, and for many more socially debilitating. There is a significant demand for drugs that alleviate the most sever symptoms.

Hank knew that Max might be interested. Small variations could allow the drug to escape patent protection. Historical research data had been destroyed under company policy on discontinued projects.

Hank was concerned that he would not be accused of theft of intellectual property. My advice to him was to let Max run with it before he handed in his resignation, and then tell his employer that he would be leaving to work on something similar to their discontinued line. That is what he did, and there appeared to be no real protest.

I have considered since, how much that major producer knew about the awful side effects of the drug. We will never know. Records have been destroyed as I mentioned. Hank would have known the people who may have evidence, but Hank is dead now.

But I believe that many of the test results were destroyed even before Hank got to see them. He would not knowingly have brought this product to market if he had any idea of the risks. That was not the kind of person he was.

It was as I said to Max: Hank was too sensitive a person to survive the stress and shame, so he sought what seemed to him to be the only way out. I no longer blame him for that choice.

For a long time, I blamed Max. It seemed to me that he was the one who cut the corners to get the drug to market. The fact is that for the vast majority of new drugs, only “Big Pharma” with multiple products at each stage in the process, have the resources to see out the FDA process in proper fashion.

What they did was that, instead of going through their own process, they used a volume of the drug that had been taken from their past employer, to spike the much milder drug they had already had approved. That was what caused the side effects.

Those effects are well known now. No side effects on men, but in women - sterility in 80% of women and male secondary sex characteristics in 60% of women, when the drug was used over time.

There is no denying the positive effects of the drug. The awful effects of Cirrhosis and rampant eczema were diminished if not eliinated, but the side effects on women were so terrible that the drug was doomed. And with it the business, and the fortunes and reputations of Max and Hank.

Hank took his own life and left Max to face the anger alone. He had no money to fight. He took the blows with his head hung low. I was grieving so much, and blaming him, so I had not one ounce of sympathy. But now I understand how hard it was for him.

Then he disappeared.

I did not hear what had happened to him until I heard the dreadful revenge that had been meted out to him.

Those who hated him and sought revenge were a committed bunch, and desperate for a revenge that seemed apt. The idea was to turn him into what the side effects had made his victims into. He would become a hairy-faced sterile woman. His own drug could not do it, so it would be done with surgery. Apparently, those seeking vengeance included people with the skills to do this to him.

Some years after the trials these people found Max living on the street, now somebody out of the public eye who would not be missed. They threw him into the back of a van and took him to a makeshift operating theatre. There the removed his testicles and fashioned a vagina, and they implanted large breasts on his chest. They injected slow release female hormones into him, but left his beard. He had the body of a hairy woman and the bearded face of a man, just like his female victims.

But for those victims their world was turned upside down, whereas he was no longer a part of the world. So rather than let him loose, they kept him and tormented him through the recovery period.

Apparently, he begged for one of them to do him in, but none would offer him that satisfaction.

Then they offered him to me. It was well known that I held him responsible for the death of my son. The victims they were avenging were not dead. I had the greatest loss. They invited me to take him.

They knew the loss that I had suffered, but by then I had come to realize that, through my son Hank, I was partly to blame. For a small price they offered me his pitiful mutilated body. For the price of meeting some of the costs of their work I could do with him what I liked. They were done with him.

They brought him to me. I am not sure that I knew what to expect. The last time I saw him was still Max the man but hollowed out by shame. When Hank had first introduced me to him all those years ago, I liked him – smallish but energetic and confident. Then the collapse and Hank’s suicide years when I only remember the deeply humiliated young man facing his accusers in Court. Now here was a curled up body, seemingly that of a woman, with Max’s head weeping.

But in the back of the van I had hired to collect him, he genuinely hoped that this would be the end. He did not have the courage or the fortitude to take his own life, but maybe they would do him that favor. Maybe he said as much. Maybe that persuaded his captors that death was doing him a favor.

Perhaps it is the man I am, but I could not do it. Instead I felt only sadness. Only that morning I had read an article about one of those poor women he had damaged, now restored with hormone treatment, depilation, and even an operation on the voice-box. She looked attractive and happy. People had not died. Those who suffered could be repaired. I resolved that Max should have the same opportunity. The very same treatment could be offered to him.

And that is how Maxine came into being. For a while a person wandered around my large home in a trance, barely believing that anybody would be capable of such forgiveness. She said that the pain of having every hair ripped from her body was nothing to what she had endured. She welcomed the silence after the throat surgery, which I had done at the same time as some work on her face.

I told her that she was now a new person. Max was dead. Those who had sought to punish her could now believe that I had done what they would not do. Maxine to start afresh. What would she do with her second chance at life?

She said that she intended to use her knowledge to battle Big Pharma and ensure that drugs not concealed or suppressed, that they were properly tested before release, and well-priced. She had a purpose, and she could do that from my home with its large office suite, if I allowed her to stay.

And she wanted to stay, initially out of gratitude for all that I had done. She knew the pain that I had suffered losing my son, and the role that Max played in that, and that added to the obligation. But the more I talked with Maxine the more I understood how much Max loved Hank, and how much his death meant to him, and so to her. I know that it sounds strange, but I found myself wishing that my son was alive to be a husband to Maxine.

It was not unreasonable, because Maxine had taken to her new body and had become totally feminine. I think that “starting afresh” meant to her leaving everything behind, including any trace of maleness. She took pleasure in dressing in pink frilly clothes. She wanted to be the perfect woman.

But Hank was dead. The only man in the house was me. How could I not fall in love with Maxine?

Right from the start, to express her gratitude Maxine behaved a little subserviently, but I took her by her soft hands and I lifted her up. She could do what she liked around the house to please me, but she had a job to do. She was intelligent and attractive, and in a skirt and tailor jacket and black heels she was a knockout when dressing down the drug lobby.

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| And, without putting too finer point on it, she had a woman’s body fully equipped to please a man, and I was pleased.  Every now and again, when we lay in bed together, she would shed a tear for those who suffered injustice including at the hands of Max and Hank, but she never considered herself to be one of those. To her some kind of justice had been done upon her, and it had transformed her into an instrument of justice, fighting the fight.  I prefer to think of her as my wife.  The End  © Maryanne Peters 2019 | A person posing for a picture  Description automatically generated |

Author’s Note: This story started with a very simple captioned image called “New Life” which spawned a story of the same title. Basically, the cap describes a homeless man who is abducted, feminized and sold off to a foreigner. But somehow, I got the idea to dig into this man’s background and why he had been chosen. There was reference to massive debt and the bank moving in, but why four years of homelessness? It must have been traumatic. And why feminization? If it was a punishment for his past misdeeds, then why that? In my brief story I came up with the idea that he had been in the drug business and had sold something to women which masculinized them. Then the punishment meted out makes more sense (?). I thought that it could be expanded upon.