

Sociopathic Medicine

by Brianne Fidgety

True love may last forever, but the most I've ever gotten out of a lab assistant is two years, five months, three weeks, twelve days, and fifteen hours. And he was the exception.

Since they've given me my own lab, I don't get bothered very much. Security is tight. A team of interns and secretaries do my paperwork. The official stuff, anyway. I only have to see them twice a week at the most, and that's how I like it.

My office is to the back, a spacious enough room off my auxiliary lab. I only spend time there out of necessity, which is mainly to eat, sleep, or change my clothes. However, I get much more use out of it than my apartment across town, which I inhabit an odd weekend here or there. My work often spans most of the night. A mattress and wardrobe in my office makes more sense.

I work for a major pharmaceutical company, birthing new drugs for mass consumption. These operations are all the same, total rackets operating far below anything resembling legality. They give the reach-around to the FDA; enough politicians are on the payroll to get just about every drug pushed through to the market. The FDA doesn't ask questions. Nobody does. If they did, they'd probably realize that the majority of our case studies done on actual breathing human beings are fabrications at best. Then again, I'm not sure that they even care. Anything to get those stocks up. I'm not complaining, though. The system allows me to do whatever I want.

I'm a genius. Arrogant, too, yes, but I have every reason to be. I "graduated" high school when I was fourteen, which is to say I was shipped off to an Ivy League university on a full scholarship. I have a doctor title before my name and everything. I'm not even thirty, and I've been promoted more times than I can count. That's how I got my

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own lab. Gotta keep the scientists happy, Corporate reasons. They're money in the bank.

Sure, it's been hard sometimes. I don't mean the work -- that part has always been so unbelievably easy for me. It's people that have always been the problem. Due to my exceptional situation, I was placed into single-occupancy dorm rooms. It made for a lonely existence; when most kids my age were out learning social graces and riding in fast cars, I was plugging away over test tubes and lab reports. I never learned the hows or whys of human connection, which seems exhaustingly boring when I really ponder its nature. I can't say that there wasn't a time in my life when I didn't try to make friends, but it seemed that I was strictly off-limits due to my age. I was denied access to all the good parties on campus. I couldn't get a male to come near me, even after I transmogrified from plain girlhood into a hyperly curvy woman. And girls? -- forget it. I may be one, but I don't have time for their games, nor the knowledge of how to play them.

Ultimately, it didn't matter. I had my work, and that's all I care about. Science goes beyond obsession. It infects me to my core; it is the electricity that stimulates my neurons. There is no rush like molecular structure. Nothing gets me off like cold, unforgiving facts. Emotion, conversation, complications -- they all dim the brilliance of molecular bonds snapping and reforming, biochemical reactions, and pulsating instincts buried deep within the empty spaces of every synapse of the human brain. Sex is, as a process, truly amazing. Human interaction is what makes the mechanism malfunction so soundly.

It had been a while since I had had any form of concrete contact with others of my own species the night I found myself in the cadaver lab. I had misplaced my dictaphone, and process of elimination had led me there. It was well past two in the morning, and despite the fact that the facility had long been deserted for the

night, the corpses selected specifically for research purposes lay peacefully, row by row, in their stainless steel beds. They were waiting for tomorrow, when they would get one or more of their organs sawed out for the greater good -- the greater good being some half-assedly engineered wonderpill that would make a lot of a greedy bastards a large profit. The room hummed to the tune of air conditioning, florescent lights, and my quiet breathing.

It was a Saturday night, I remember. It occurred to me that things didn't need to be this way. The bars were closing, and if I wanted my pick of a suitable subject for a one-night stand, the odds were solidly in my favour. My typical aversion to other people had temporarily thawed, but not enough for me to take my chances with the general populace. Besides, it's never as simple as it sounds. He always wants your phone number, a real date, a cup of coffee, to cuddle. So undignified. And you can bet there's no talk of the Periodic Table.

I found my dictaphone on the table, and on my way out, one of the corpses caught my eye. He was still looking very fresh. There was no way to tell how he died, save that it wasn't from a major disease process. He was young, his skin was still spongy and pink. Rigor mortis had set in, but otherwise, he was inviting.

The thought crossed my mind and stayed there. It would be such an easy thing to do, and nobody would ever know. Loneliness was burrowing through every one of my pores. This particular February was fraying my nerves like no other ever had.

But, no. It really wouldn't be a step above masturbation, something which never did much for me. If there was a way to preserve warmth, to coax kinetic motion, and to do away with all the rest, I would be so happy. If only --

I don't know why, but I had a flashback of a show I had seen sometime when I was in college. It was the true-life account of a Mr. Claudius Narcisse, a documented zombie. He had been slipped some Voodoo potion that had been concocted of the venom of a local pufferfish, among other things. The venom slowed his heart and respiration, shrouded his brainwaves, made him appear, for all intents and purposes, dead. In Haiti, bodies are neither embalmed nor buried, just placed into above-ground concrete sarcophaguses. On the night he was laid to rest, the Voodoo priest collected him. Claudius laboured as a virtually mindless drone for the next fifteen years. After his term of servitude had been fulfilled, he was left off in his village, largely clueless to the past decade and a half.

Claudius would never insist that I call him the next day. Claudius would never fall asleep next to me. Claudius wouldn't do a lot of things.

I started my research at once. I practically had to sell my soul to the proverbial devil to get my hands on that delightfully neurotoxic recipe. On the other hand, the ingredients weren't a challenge. I can order anything I want for experimentation, no questions asked.

I tried it out on a Saturday night in a bar downtown. I singled out a particularly noxious subject, one who was attractive enough yet annoyingly overconfident. It wasn't difficult to convince him to accompany me to the lab for a good time. When we arrived, I offered him a drink. Little did he know it was laced with Pufferfish Cocktail, which has the advantage of being colourless, scentless, and tastes only faintly metallic.

He was in a full death-coma within a half-hour of ingestion. I ran a full STD panel. By the time he came to three days later, the cultures were back. He was safe to proceed. I spent the next week feeding and injecting him with a steady diet of chemicals, and, of course, fucking him without discernible mercy. When I tired of him, I

dropped him off in an alley behind an electronics store. The best part was that I never heard from him again.

I've come so far since then, improved on my methods so much. I figured out an easier delivery method of drugs post-zombification. I insert mediports intended for chemotherapy in the subclavian region, carefully snaking the catheter into the superior vena cava so the drugs are pumped throughout the entire body by the heart. Surgery takes forty-five minutes, tops. I run tubing around the shoulder and down to a drip-bag fastened to the back. When I want to actually use my zombie, I inject a type of paralytic into the bag, one that decreases sensation and mimics rigor mortis. But their bodies are always warm. Sometimes they even make sounds. When I'm done, I load them up with succinylcholine, another paralytic, and stash them in an empty storeroom.

Finding victims isn't difficult. This city is full of loner subculture-types; young men out to prove some idiotic point and nothing else are seldom missed. All I've had to do is study up on bands I really don't have a taste for so I can fake my way through icebreaking conversation.

The only problem is that they never last as long as poor Claudius. They're usually dead within eighteen months, their systems doubtless spent from constantly bathing in chemicals. Still, getting rid of the bodies doesn't take much of an effort; I cut them up and feed them to my lab animals. The few that I grew to tolerate were thrown into the incinerator.

The best part is that this doubles as research. Imagine what I can do with this stuff. In time, my company will come to see the possibilities, too. The notion of love, caramelized and dyed on the stovetops of greeting card kitchens, have effectively lobotomized the masses. This way, the burden of sugar-coating is removed from the process. Of course, PR won't present it in such a fashion to the public. They'll

twist it around some seemingly home-spun advertisement; instead, they should be celebrating the triumph of science over emotion. I know I am.

