

Author's Introduction

Malignant melanoma is the most dangerous form of skin cancer. Every year more than 50,000 people learn they have melanoma and more than 7,000 will die from the disease. The incidence rate has tripled in the last twenty years.

We can cure early stage melanoma, but once the disease has spread and progressed to advanced stages, the prognosis is grim.

Medical fiction, like science fiction, takes our best scientific evidence and extrapolates it into the future. Extrapolation isn't scientific in biological systems. It's speculative, and like speculation in general, it's more often than not, wrong.

The use of BCG (Bacillus Calmette-Guérin, a weakened strain of bovine tuberculosis) in the treatment of cancer is not new, and has been a common practice in several malignancies.

Immunotherapy attempts to stimulate the immune system to search for and destroy cancer. The use of BCG in melanoma is a form of immunotherapy that has met with mixed results, and although promising, remains an unproven form of treatment.

Attempts at attacking malignant melanoma at a molecular level are ongoing and promising.

Prologue

Terri Powell stood alone in the elevator as it descended. As the elevator neared the parking garage, her pulse increased and she trembled.

She kept her head facing forward. Her eyes tracked the elevator's blinking LEDs down to the final 'P' at the panel's bottom.

Terri hated the garage. It reminded her of those ominous opening scenes of *Law and Order*, the gunshot—the blood—the dead body.

The elevator car jolted to a stop, and pinged as the doors slid open.

Terri hesitated a second, leaned forward, and stared both ways before stepping into the abyss. She tried, but couldn't forgo the temptation to glance back over her shoulder.

Her four-inch heels clicked on the pavement and echoed off cement walls.

She stopped and took a step back as the elevator doors closed behind her.

Shit. This is ridiculous.

She walked toward her BMW parked in the row of cars, but the short echoes of screeching tires made her freeze.

Widely separated fluorescent fixtures left the cavernous garage dim and deeply shadowed. The air smelled of automobile exhaust.

In silence, Terri glanced first to the left, then to the right.

Nothing.

As she listened to her heels again, she heard something.

Terri stopped. Her heart raced.

Silence.

Thirty yards from her car, she heard it—leather shoes against pavement nearby.

She increased her pace.

The footsteps behind were closer now.

Too terrified to look back again, she bolted for her car.

Five yards from her BMW, the red tail lights of Volvo next to her car shined brightly as the older car backed out. Unable to stop, she smashed into the driver's side door and bounced to the pavement.

The door opened. A middle-aged man in a blue suit got out and reached down for her arm.

"Are you okay?"

Terri scrambled to her feet and assumed the Tae Kwan Do ready position.

The man stepped back in fear, clutching his chest.

Terri quickly looked around.

Nothing.

She brushed her pleated skirt, straightened her silk blouse and took a deep breath.

"Thank you. I'm fine."

He studied her. "What happened? You looked like you were running from something. Should I call the police?"

"No thanks. I'm fine, just my overactive imagination."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. Thank you." She looked at his car door. "Did I damage it?"

He studied the driver's side door and shook his head. "This old thing is indestructible."

"Thanks again."

"I'll wait until you get into your car."

"That isn't necessary."

He didn't move, and then extended his hand. "Abe Cohen. I work in accounting. We're on the second floor."

"Thanks Mr. Cohen," she said, starting toward her car.

Terri pushed the open button on the remote and heard the lock snap. She looked around once more and checked the back seat before she slid in.

She stopped her hands from shaking by gripping the steering wheel.

I can't believe it. Is this what's become of my life?

Chapter One

Emile Gigot watched the wispy St. Lawrence River fog pass over as he stood by the Rue Dalhousie Bridge. The gate was down as the lock into Port de Québec had opened to permit the passage of boats. Entry to the adjacent marina required the use of the lock unless its water level and the river's were equal, at or they were near high tide.

When the last boat motored into the marina, the lock master lowered the bridge and lifted the gate. Emile walked over the bridge and turned left toward the back of the marina. He carried an insulated chest with the blazing orange international biohazard emblem on the sides and on top.

Earlier, Emile, a certified courier, had picked up the specimen from Laval University after he documented his identity three times and signed a stack of forms.

He was to deliver the chest to Aéroport de Québec for the 9 p.m. flight to San Francisco. Its final destination was Genentech Hall in Mission Bay, the University of California's major research facility.

A man and woman watched Laval. They had been waiting for their opportunity to grab the specimen, but security had been too tight. The message had come through this morning. The specimen would leave Laval late that afternoon.

They watched the pickup and followed the courier to the marina.

Emile had three hours to kill.

He phoned his wife to say he'd be in late, and then placed a call to his lover who lived in the marina on a spacious Grand Banks. He was so excited to see her that he failed to notice the couple following.

As Emile stood in front of the closed marina shops, a woman's voice came from behind.

"Do you speak English?" asked the soft female voice with an American southern accent.

"But of course," Emile said as he turned to face the couple. Emile tried not to stare at the stunning blond woman with the palest blue eyes he'd ever seen. He scarcely noticed her tall companion.

She smiled. "You know men...they won't ask for directions."

"Can't find my way around this place," the man said, "why don't they have these damned signs in English?"

Stupid Americans, thought Emile. "Can I help you?"

The man unfolded a scrap of paper. "Sure can. Just point the way to Rue De L'estuaire."

Emile turned toward the city and pointed. "That's easy. It's just on the other side..."

Emile's head exploded with pain and he felt his body sag to the ground. Stunned, he shook his head, but couldn't move. The woman picked up the chest while the man reached under Emile's arm and pulled him upright. Emile was unable to support his weight, forcing the man to drag his limp body to the cement quay. The man looked both ways before throwing Emile into the marina's icy waters.

Weakened, Emile struggled against the freezing water, but in his heavy clothes couldn't swim.

No, not this way, Emile thought as he battled for his life. He felt his head sink below the water. He thrashed and fought for the surface. He tried to scream, but water flooded his throat and lungs as everything turned dark.

The blond flipped open her pink cell phone and pushed a speed-dial number.

“Do you have it?” a voice asked.

“Have we ever failed you?”

“Any problems?”

“None you need concern yourself about.”

“Meet me on the ferry to Lévis at ten.”

“We’ll be there.”