

PROLOGUE

The weather was uncharacteristically warm for a July day in Vancouver, British Columbia. It suggested that an afternoon at the beach would be possible, without needing an extra dose of antifreeze. However, Pamela Williams knew that the paperwork waiting at the office relegated the beach trip to the realm of fantasy, at least for today. Perhaps tomorrow if the weather held.

She maneuvered her aged Honda Civic-VX through the light traffic on Crispin Street. Every time she entertained serious thoughts about trading the car in for a more recent model, she was reminded that the VX gave better gas mileage than anything else on the road, save for one or two of the new expensive hybrids. Besides, it was reliable and rarely required more than routine maintenance. It had been built to perform and to last. With proper care and a bit of luck, she expected to get 200,000 miles out of it.

The weather buoyed her spirits, not that she needed this help. Her steady boyfriend of two years had recently proposed marriage. She had accepted eagerly. They had moved in together and were saving their money for the down payment on a house. Her fiancé was Pierre Dupre, three years her senior and a well-established bond broker in the local office of a major Japanese investment bank.

As icing on the cake, she had learned only this past week that she was pregnant. In town, only her doctor and his office staff knew. She had not even told Pierre yet, awaiting the right moment. She wanted to be sure that he was not marrying her for the wrong reason. Yesterday, in a short note, she had announced the happy news to Professor Tusch, her former undergraduate advisor.

Even though it was Saturday and not a required work day, she was energized. When she first joined, L'Academie Internationale de Scientifiques (AIS), she had an entry-level position in the Travel Office. For that, she was over-qualified. She held a Bachelor's degree from Thornton University with a double major, Accounting and Anthropology. She was objective to a fault, scrupulous in collecting evidence, analytical in her evaluations, and experienced in problem solving. In the course of her rather routine work, she had come across several suspicious financial transactions, including invoices from non-existent companies. The amounts involved had been rather small, but her

investigation led to the dismissal of a staff member. The Academie made it clear that they took fraud very seriously. A related, though unintended, consequence was that she was promoted to the Finance Department where she was a junior account executive. In her new role, she had uncovered several irregularities in the area of Meetings and Expositions that might or might not be innocent. Her intuition told her that she might be on the trail of something much larger. If the present irregularities led to a wider pattern of fiscal mismanagement, she would document the pattern and present it to her superiors at the Academie. She believed that if this came to pass, her value to the organization would be recognized and rewarded. She had her eye on becoming Director of the Finance Department one day.

The Academie sat on a prized parcel of land just northeast of the intersection of Hornby and Crispin Streets in the Near West End of Vancouver. The property was the former site of Norfolk Park. The Academie was careful to retain the entire park for its campus, undisturbed except for the footprints of its four thirty-story buildings.

Until quite recently, history has largely ignored the existence of the AIS. It is appropriate at this time to rectify this oversight by summarizing the birth and maturation of the Academie.

The AIS was founded in Paris, France, on 23 September 1827. There were four charter members: Jons Jakob Berzelius (Swedish), Humphry Davy (British), Leopold Gmelin (German), and the person at whose invitation they had gathered, Madame Marie-Anne Lavoisier (French). This organizational meeting took place in the library of Madame Lavoisier's home.

Berzelius was chosen as the first Rector of the Academie. Madame Lavoisier steadfastly resisted all attempts to name her as Rector. However, she readily agreed to become the first Permanent Secretary (P.S.). Her prolific letter writing skills made this a natural choice. She retained this position until her death in 1836.

In the early years, the Academie had no home anchorage. It drifted with the winds and the tides. The Headquarters' location was largely dictated by the Rector's residence. Its gypsy wanderings lasted until 2 September 1886 when, at the invitation of Wilhelm Ostwald, it began a twenty-four year residence in Leipzig, Germany. During these

German years, the most stalwart supporters of the Academie were Jacobus van't Hoff (Dutch), Svante Arrhenius (Swedish), and, of course, Ostwald. This was a period of robust growth in the membership of the Academie, with new members being recruited from across a broad spectrum of scientific disciplines. Naturally, the German hosts insisted on renaming the Academie as “Der Internationale Akademie von Wissenschaftlern (IAW).”

The leaders of the Akademie always kept a weather eye on the geo-political scene in Europe. Early in the 20th Century, they did not like what they were seeing. Thus, in 1910, they welcomed an invitation from William Ramsey to relocate the Headquarters to the University College, London. The name was changed once again to “The International Academy of Scientists (IAS)”. In 1923, King George V bestowed on the IAS a permanent royal charter as a not-for-profit educational organization.

The Academy remained in London, growing in numbers and prestige until 1936 when the leadership again sensed impending turmoil in the geo-political climate. It prompted yet another relocation, one that most members hoped would be the last. This time, the Academy migrated to Western Canada, specifically Vancouver, B.C. Appropriately, the Academy chose to mark this occasion with a return to the original name, L'Academie Internationale de Scientifiques, (AIS). Madame Lavoisier would have been pleased.

The four high-rise buildings on the campus of the Academie are named in honor of the founding members: Lavoisier (Executive), Berzelius (Operations), Davy (Policy and Planning), and Gmelin (Parking, and, on the upper levels, some offices). Distributed among the four buildings are residential apartments for visiting scholars and selected high-ranking members of the Academie.

While the founding members of AIS were all essentially from the same academic discipline, the term “Sciences” was always interpreted generously to include all of the “Natural Sciences”, *inter alia*, Archeology, Astronomy, Biology, Chemistry, Ecology, Geology, Mathematics, and Physics, and their various branches, as well as the applied sciences, Computer Science, Engineering, and Medicine.

These days many technical societies are struggling with the problem of declining membership. Some have addressed the problem by redefining the membership

requirements, lowering their standards and thus artificially inflating their numbers. Not so the Academie where admission continues to be by invitation. Such is the prestige of the organization that an invitation to join is much sought after and few are those who decline the invitation.

Membership in the Academie has recently edged over the 200,000 mark. The AIS staff in Vancouver number 3,000. There are six regional offices strategically distributed around the world, each with its own small staff. The annual budget for the AIS is of the order of \$600 million. Total assets are estimated to be \$1.5 billion. As might be expected for a not-for-profit organization of this affluence, the finances are truly Byzantine.

The AIS holds one general meeting each year, usually in the late summer. In odd-numbered years, the site is Vancouver, B.C. In the even-numbered years, the site is variable, with attempts made to rotate the meeting among the six geographic regions.

The highest award conferred by the Academie is the Lavoisier Medallion that features Marie-Anne on the front side and Antoine on the reverse.

Pamela drove in through the main entrance to the campus. As was her wont, she saluted the busts of Antoine and Marie-Anne, on their plinths at the main gate, she on the right and he on the left. It reminded her of the distribution of iconography in Catholic churches, Mary on the right and Joseph on the left. She had learned the niceties of altar etiquette in high school from the good nuns of the Order of St. Stephan-Stoned: when facing the altar, Mary took her rightful place and Joseph got what was left. Pamela wound her way through the peaceful and bucolic campus to the Gmelin Building. She followed the ramps up to the fourth floor and parked. While there were many empty parking spaces on the first three levels, they were reserved for “the brass” and whatever distinguished guests might be visiting. She had learned during her first week on the job that parking in restricted space was a mortal sin.

With so few people around, it seemed silly to lock her car but, from habit, she did it anyway. Then she rode the elevator down to the ground level. She strolled leisurely across the campus toward the Lavoisier Building. She soaked up the glorious warmth, the bright sunshine, and the fresh air. Deep down she resented the fact that she had to spend most of her working hours in the artificial atmosphere of air-conditioning and fluorescent

lights. She sometimes wondered if she might not have been happier becoming a forest ranger. But then, she would never have met Pierre.

In Lavoisier, she signed in at the front desk and rode the elevator up to the fourteenth floor where her office was located. She noted in passing that, of the six elevators, in two banks of three, elevator F was still closed off with yellow tape and labeled “Out Of Order”. It had been thus since at least the time she started working for the Academie. Rumor had it that they were waiting for vital replacement parts from overseas. In the interim, they could have torn down the building and rebuilt it, complete with a full set of working elevators. Like most other people who used the building on a daily basis, she had concluded that elevator F was a lost cause and would never again be in service.

As she moved smartly down the corridor toward her office, she rummaged in her purse for the keys to her office. She looked up just in time to keep from colliding with Kirk Manheimer, the Head of Security for the Academie. He was blocking the way into her office and apparently had been waiting for her to arrive.

Kirk, with his Teutonic bluntness, greeted her, “You are late. Hallowed wants to see you first thing. He sent me to collect you.”

She knew that Merlin Hallowed was the assistant to the Executive Director of the Academie. She wondered what he wanted at this hour on a Saturday morning. *Moreover, was her work schedule so predictable that they knew that she would be working on a Saturday, and what time she would arrive? If not that, then was she under surveillance?* She forced her paranoia back down under the rock from which it was trying to escape.

Kirk’s long stride forced her to hurry to keep up with him. He pushed the up button for the elevator and stood at attention staring off into space. She knew that it was futile to ask Kirk what Merlin wanted. Even if he knew, he would not say. She spent the waiting time admiring Kirk’s physique. He stood six-foot- two and weighed well in excess of two hundred pounds. It was known that he had an undergraduate degree in electrical engineering from the Technical University of Berlin. Instead of advanced study, he had been seduced by the world of bodybuilding and male modeling. He had the body of a professional weightlifter, and could have been a serious contender for the top prize in the Mister Universe contest. He carried nary an ounce of fat. His khaki uniform was starched beyond reason and appeared to have been custom tailored. You could not do justice to

that body with a uniform off the racks. Had he been less intelligent, he might have had to earn his living as muscle for the mob. Had he been more intelligent, he might have carved out a career in the movies or in politics in a West Coast state.

They rode up to the 28th floor without exchanging another word. Kirk rapped smartly on the door to the office of the Assistant to the Executive Director and, without waiting for a response, opened the door and escorted her inside. Hallowed was behind a desk that, in size, could have doubled as an aircraft carrier. He was just finishing up some paper work that he put into a green folder and consigned to his Out Box.

Hallowed rose and greeted her warmly, “Pamela! Good morning. It was good of you to make time to see me on such short notice.”

“Nothing good about it”, she noted to herself, “Your Storm Trooper left me no choice.”

He motioned her to a seat and then spoke to Kirk, “Kirk, please get us two coffees, one black with one sugar for Ms. Williams, and one with cream and no sugar for me.” Kirk did a smart about face and left the office.

She noted the easy way in which Hallowed used the Head of Security as his errand boy. *She wondered if that was a bit of theater for her benefit or whether it was normal behavior.* Also, he knew how she took her coffee. *Was he hyper-observant or just a fanatic about details?*

He rummaged among a collection of folders of various colors on his desk looking for his “Black Bible” as the staff called it. It was a six by nine loose-leaf binder in which, it was said, he kept detailed records of the failings and transgressions of everyone he knew. It was a thick volume. No member of the Academy had ever been able to look at the contents, but its very existence frightened them all.

While he searched, she took the opportunity to study him. He was in his middle fifties, and of medium height and weight. He was of Scandinavian stock with thinning blond hair. He was known to have an undergraduate degree in Psychology from the venerable University of Basel in Switzerland. His eyes made one believe that he would be a big winner in most high stakes poker games. She knew from his reputation that he was a Type A personality and had not reached his present level in the administration by being stupid, soft, or sentimental. If you were so unfortunate as to find yourself in his

way and did not move aside quickly, he would cheerfully run you over. Most of the time he was a masterful administrator but, at other times, he exhibited a quirky sense of humor.

He was also known to have a number of idiosyncrasies. One of the more bizarre was that he was adamant that his first name be spelled without the tittle over the lower case letter I. Those who thought that this was simply a frivolous affectation soon learned that he was quite serious. Some stopped using his first name altogether. Some truncated the name and used only the initial letter. Some tried spelling it Merlyn but soon gave up when they found out that this pissed him off. Others solved the problem by writing it all in capital letters. Even so, the Academie went to considerable expense retrofitting first typewriters and then computer keyboards with the extra symbol.

MERLIN found his Black Bible, a six-ring binder, about two inches thick, with a sturdy black leather cover. It was a tool he used to intimidate both staff and members of AIS alike. It was reputed to be a collection of the dossiers on all of them, recording not only their histories and accomplishments with the Academie, but also, more damning, listing their shortcomings and transgressions. It was the local equivalent of the last judgement. Just then, Kirk arrived with the coffees. With the amenities out of the way, MERLIN got down to serious business. He found the relevant page in his Black Bible.

“I see that you have been poking around in the accounts of the Meetings and Expositions Department. Why?”

She responded, “I came across a few irregularities in their accounts. I am following them to see where they lead.”

He shook his head solemnly, “We know about those. Our internal auditors have already chased them down and they all lead nowhere.” He lied smoothly. “They are dead ends. Why don’t you just stick with what we are paying you for?”

With the directness of the reprimand, her blood pressure rose and her face flushed. She tried to hide it by taking a long drink of her coffee. *How did he know where she had been “poking around”? Was she getting too close to something really sensitive?*

He followed up his original attack with one from a different quarter. “While our auditors were working, I had them audit your accounts. They report that there are unaccounted funds in the amount of \$100,000.”

At this, she almost choked on her coffee. Without giving her a chance to recover, he pressed his advantage. “We here at AIS take embezzlement very seriously. If you don’t have a convincing explanation, you are in serious trouble.”

She felt as if Kirk had picked her up, raised her over his head, and body-slammed her to the floor. “This is all bogus. Let me see the auditor’s report.” She reached for the black bible to see the evidence for herself.

Deftly, he pulled it back out of her reach. “You will see it soon enough, in the disclosure phase, when we go to trial.”

“It has got to be a mistake. I never took any money. If I had \$100,000, would I still be driving the beater that I am?” This was true. *She considered possible explanations. The first was that the auditors had made a mistake. Not very likely! The second was that someone in her department had cooked the records to make her look like a criminal. But, she was not aware that she had made any enemies of that caliber. The third was that she had messed up the bookkeeping. Minor mistakes were possible but nothing of this order of magnitude. She was always careful about her work. The fourth possibility was that there had been no internal audit, and that this was all a fabrication, designed to provide an excuse for getting rid of her. She recognized the paranoia peeking out again from under its rock.*

His smile was just short of venomous. “If you were smart, you would tuck the money away and not raise suspicions by any sudden extravagance. The only mistake was yours in thinking that you could get away with this.” He sipped his coffee before he made his next thrust. “However, it does not need to come to a trial. We are a beneficent and forgiving organization. We know that there are times when fallible human beings, unable to resist temptation, will do things that they will later regret. If you will write a letter confessing your guilt and promising to repay the money on a mutually agreeable schedule, we will not litigate this matter. Of course, you are finished here at the Academie, effective immediately. However, we will write you a plain vanilla letter of recommendation, with the understanding that you will never speak of this matter to anyone.”

Too late, she was beginning to muster a counter attack, “This is all a crock! I will hire a lawyer and sue for false dismissal, defamation of character, and gender discrimination.”

Now the smile verged on the satanic. He lived for moments like these. “You do that. Our pockets are deeper than yours and we can afford the best in representation.” True enough, although he knew that the AIS often aimed for cheap rather than brilliance when choosing outside legal help. The threat of litigation was a bluff. There was no way that the AIS would ever take this to court.

The Academie was at this moment mired in two high stakes cases, of which one had been ill advised and was going badly. On that matter, his opinion had not been sought nor had his advice been taken seriously, so he was on the side of the angels. However, he was not content to remain on the sidelines as a spectator. Only recently, he had elected to interfere anonymously in the process by tasking Jeremiah Price to reveal a crucial piece of evidence to Janet Fleming, the Chair of the Board. Hallowed knew that Janet had the tenacity of a pit bulldog. He was counting on her to get every bit of mileage out of this evidence.

“If you choose to take this to the courts, we will not only win but also ruin your professional reputation, your finances, your future job prospects, your health, your emotional stability, and the rest of your life.”

She knew that they could do that. So much for the image of the Academie as beneficent and forgiving! But she wasn't about to plead guilty to something that she had not done. She needed time to find some way out of her dilemma. She wondered about the prospect of taking it to the media. But, above all else, she had to talk with her mentor. “What about severance pay? What about a continuation of medical coverage?”

He was enjoying her discomfort very much. “No and no! However, we might cut you some slack if you tell us who put you up to this. As embezzlements go, this was a fairly sophisticated piece of work. While you are a good accountant, you are not good enough to have pulled this off solo. Who was pulling your strings? Was it the Rector? Or perhaps the Chairman of the Board?” The two members of the Academie he mentioned were high on his list of people he wished he could discredit by implicating them in some criminal activity.

She greeted these suggestions with a derisive laugh. “You are in the advanced stages of dementia. How do you know that it wasn’t Herman Steckler, the Executive Director, or Magda Korbel, the long-time mistress with whom you recently broke up?” Water-cooler gossip sometimes comes in handy. Now she had more reason than ever to consult with her mentor.

He pursed his lips and shook his head. “If you are going to be intransigent, we have nothing more to talk about.”

“If you think that you have heard the end of this, you are seriously mistaken. But I will go and clean out my office, and be gone by this afternoon.”

“I regret that it has come to this.” He really did regret the fact that she left him no choice. He knew that he had to put an end to her snooping once and for all before she stumbled upon those things that must never be revealed. “We cannot allow you to go back into your office. Security, you know. We have already changed the locks on your office and files. We have confiscated your computer and all of the electronic files. Any personal items left behind will be boxed and sent to you. When we are finished here, Kirk will escort you from the building.”

Kirk came to life and moved behind her chair. MERLIN caught Kirk’s eye and signaled him with a quick bob of the head. “Kirk, please escort Ms. Williams from the building and see to it that she never sets foot on this campus again.” Having given Kirk his marching orders, he locked the Black Bible in his desk and returned to his collection of file folders. He had already dictated a memo to be distributed to all of the staff on Monday morning to the effect that Ms. Williams had left the employ of the Academie on Saturday for personal reasons and that the management wished her all the best in her future activities. Once she was pruned from the Staff, he did not give her another thought.

She rose and left the room with Kirk. She was stunned at how fast one could go from being on the top of the world, to being at the very bottom. She walked as if in a trance while her mind groped futilely for any solution to her problem.

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A routine traffic patrol found Pamela’s car, abandoned in the breakdown lane at the peak of the Lion’s Gate Bridge early on Sunday morning. Her keys were in the ignition;

her purse was on the front seat. There was gas in the tank and the vehicle was in sound mechanical condition.

There was no sign of Pamela Williams. Three days later two fishermen found a body floating in the Salish Sea about fifty miles west of the Lion's Gate Bridge. The body was bloated and completely unrecognizable. The Medical Examiner identified it as Pamela Williams from dental records. The obvious conclusion was that the death was a suicide. The Medical Examiner signed off on it as such.