

After that incident, I began taking three outings a week, one hour a piece, 7 ½ minutes to get there, 7 ½ minutes to get back, and a 45 minute lesson in self-defense and butt-whooping. For so long I'd been so focused on the adults being the enemy that I hadn't realized that people my age could be even worse. No one knew what happened to those girls and guys, and I, personally, didn't care. We were advised that cameras were now installed in all restrooms in the public area of the restroom.

On top of all my other names, I became known as the girl who took out nine people with my fists in the girl's bathroom. Sometimes it was nine and other times it was 15. My hopes of being able to make a single friend during my time in the Modules were completely crushed after that. The lunch room would practically clear out when I arrived, so I began taking my food to go. I worked on my dissertation day and night, which gave me free clearance into the lab. Since I was experimenting on myself, it was literally day and night, as even as I slept, I kept a tape recorder running to monitor myself, both on and off the mind-enhancers.

I was fast accumulating all this knowledge into my consciousness that had previously been locked into my sub-conscious and only accessed through the mind enhancement drugs. It excited me. It sickened me. It amazed me. It scared me.

Everything they had implanted in my subconscious brain when I was 13, 14 years old when I'd had no awareness. I ran out of my karate class one day when I was facing an opponent to perform the moves we'd been instructed, and I began doing all these moves I'd no recollection of ever having learned.

But how well-rounded was I? I went to a restaurant, one day, and knew every single ingredient and exactly how they'd prepared it. The piano in the auditorium drew me toward it, and I played Tchaikovsky like I'd been doing it my entire life. I tested my computer skills and hacked into the government system and learned the H school stood for Health and Home, as well as the address the Commander had already provided me.

It was during one of my Clinicals when our supervising Doctor went into cardiac arrest and I laid him out and performed open heart surgery, on the spot, and everyone looked at me like I truly was some kind of freak, when I locked myself in my room for three days with meds I'd stolen to try to shut my brain down. I wound up having a bad reaction and getting my stomach pumped. Something you *never* want to experience.

They believed it a suicide attempt and wanted to get me into an inpatient rehabilitation center, the place my Dad had gone and never come back the same, and this caused me to react badly.

"I swear, I was only trying to shut my brain down. It's the mind enhancers," I told my Psych. "They give me insomnia. If you don't believe me, use your truth serum."

Well that did it. No one was supposed to know about that, and I realized my mistake after I said it, due to being in a pure-reactive state.

The President of the school was brought in and the Psych spoke to him as though I wasn't sitting right there with ears.

"We believe she may be experiencing a psychotic episode. She keeps rambling on and on about how she couldn't get her brain to shutup, so she kept taking sedatives to try to make her brain stop, how she performed open heart surgery and can play Tchaikovsky and knows black belt karate, and now she is showing paranoid tendencies in accusing us of using truth serum."

I could not believe this was the little mouse of a man Psychologist that I had trusted. "I wasn't accusing you of using truth serum. I told you to use it so you can know I'm telling the truth. That's what they use in movies." I was trying to sound calm and reasoning, but it was difficult because they had me restrained to the bed, and being restrained to the bed reminded me too much of being restrained to the bathroom floor, and restrained during my total body paralysis my first day here, and I was nearly throwing up my panic, because of how much there was.

The President gave a nod of his head, and the MD took out a needle. I let out one heck of a blood-curdling scream, and then just as the President was leaving, I yelled, "I found out the formula. The formula for the Mind Enhancers so that people can remember what they learned even when they're not on it. I figured it out and I've been testing it on myself. It was for my dissertation."

The MD stopped coming toward me. The Psych stopped rubbing his hands. The President of the School stopped walking out the door, then slowly turned.

"Does it work?" he asked.

"Yes, but it has an adverse effect with the type of sedatives I took."

"What did you take?"

"Some over the counter drug I got at Rite Aid." I sure as heck wasn't going to admit I'd taken it from the lab."

"You should have had staff monitoring you. Real trained professionals."

"And let them get their hands on my formula? Peshaw!"

"Where is it?" he said, and his eyes looked greedy.

"Let me loose and I'll get it."

He provided the signal.

"Sir, I really think that she needs to be evaluated in an inpatient facility for a few days," my Psych-I-will-never-like-again said. He threw me to the dogs the moment I mentioned the serum. I'd had to hear his anxious twittering about losing his job like a mouse caught in a trap.

"You idiot, we *are* an inpatient facility. She lives here and we're a fully-trained and operating medical facility."

The voice was also telling me the President's motive to take the credit for himself in developing the formula that they'd spent years trying to find.

I took him to the mail room.

"What's it doing in here?" he said tensely.

"I was sending it to the Denver office for them to fully test it, before I finished my dissertation.

"Why? We could have tested it here?" he said, hardly able to contain his anger.

"Was I mistaken? I thought Denver, being the main headquarters, was where it had to get approval first prior to testing?"

He addressed the mail clerk. "We're looking for a -."

"Manila envelope."

"About -."

"This thick," I held my hands an inch apart

"That's addressed to the headquarters in Denver."

"Colorado?" the mail clerk said.

The President growled, "Move out of the way, I'll find it myself." He wasn't a happy man, and what he said and shown on the outside was only two percent of everything he had to say on the inside, believe me. He had a potty mind.

"Is there anything more you need from me, sir?" I called to him.

He grumbled and cursed, so I helped myself out, and went immediately to the phone.

"This is Garrett."

"Hello, Garrett. It's Cat." Finally I'd gotten my chance to say that.

"Cat? How did you get my personal cell – never mind. I don't even know why I bother asking. You in trouble?"

"Now what makes you think I'd be in trouble? Maybe I just called to say hi."

"Because I know you," but his voice was good natured.

"I've got something here for you that the President of the School is trying very very hard to get his hands on."

"What is it?"

"Anyone ever tell you that you don't provide confidential information over the phone? When can you be here?"

"Do I have a time limit?"

"I have a feeling that if you wait too long, the President will have me in an interrogation room to try to get this information."

"I'll be there as fast as I can. This better be good, because I'm going to have to call off a very important meeting."

"I'm not good enough?" I said with a pout.

"You're much more than that. You're my greatest weakness."

"I'm not leaving the facility, so don't let them tell you I'm on an outing. I've never seen the President this way before."

"Are you in danger, Cat?"

"I'm not sure," I said seriously.

“You still got the ring I gave you?”

“Yea, why, you want me to punch them with it?”

He chuckled, “No, there’s a little button on the underside of the ring. If anything happens or you find yourself in danger, press that button? Only press it if there’s a problem.” Then he hung up the phone before I could say anything.

I went to my room and found the ring in the back of my underwear drawer. I looked on the underside and, sure enough, there was a button.

I sat on the bed cross-legged for a couple hours, reminding myself time and time again that he told me not to press it unless something happened.

I pressed it. Oops.

The purple gem of the ring opened up and I saw the reflection of my face in a camera lens.

I nearly peed myself when I heard, “Something happening?” in his voice, coming through the ring.

“It was an accident,” was all I could think to say. I pressed the button as quickly as I could while he was in the midst of cursing at me, and it became just a simple purple gem again.

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A knock came at the door. Assuming it was the Commanding Officer, I opened it wide, to find, instead, the President (Principal) of the school, and a couple other people standing in the background acting like they were there for a purpose other than being the President’s bodyguard or worse.

“Sir, so what’d you think?” I asked.

“About what?”

“The dissertation?”

“It wasn’t there. Denver hasn’t received it yet, so they’ll be shipping it back as soon as they receive it, but what I need to know is if you have another copy?”

“No, I don’t,” I said, acting disappointed.

“How can you not have another copy? Is it on your notebook?”

“No, I didn’t type it yet. It’s all handwritten. As I told you previously, I wasn’t going to finalize it until after it had been tested on a control group other than myself.”

This didn’t seem to make him too happy. “Well, if you’ve been using it on yourself, you’ve had plenty opportunity to mix it yourself, so just write down the formula and we’ll go from there.”

“It’s a very complex formula. I do not have it memorized.”

He exploded, “So you’re saying you sent your one and only copy of the formula to Denver and didn’t have brains enough to hold onto a copy, in case it never got there?”

I remained silent and dropped my head, like I was humbled, and pressed the button on my ring, until he demanded I answer him.

“The dissertation isn’t due until August 1<sup>st</sup>, so as far as I’m aware, I’m not required to turn in *anything* until that date. It’s not finalized. I need the proper permissions first. Without the proper testing, it’s nothing more than a theory. If there’s an issue with that, take it up with the handbook.”

“Speaking of the handbook, I’m pretty sure we have strict policy enforcing that without a prescription, students are not to use any type of medication from the lab. Am I to assume correctly that you’ve been mixing this in the lab? Jerry,” he called out to one of the guys in the hall, pretending to study the paint. “What’s the repercussion for that per the handbook?”

“Transfer and/or termination.”

“You better pick your brain apart for that formula and give it to me by 1300 hours, and I will possibly consider your transgressions forgiven,” he said.

“Well I certainly never imagined God would look like you. That’s disappointing. How about this one? You will *not* get that formula until I am graduated and certified, and if you even consider transferring or terminating me, you will never see that formula.”

“Are you threatening me?”

“No more than you are me.”

“You listen to me, little girl. I have ways of getting exactly what I want, and I want that formula, whether you’re prepared to give it to me or not.”

“There *is* no formula. I told you that in order to protect myself from being shot up with another needle and transferred to a suicide ward.”

He spit and sputtered, and his face bulged like a zit about to explode. “I’ve got a much better place for you than an institution, and you’ll stay there as long as it takes to get the information I want.”

He beckoned for the three Guards to grab me, while answering his ringing cellphone. “Sir . . . yes sir . . . an hour? . . . No, no inconvenience at all . . . Who? . . . Absolutely, I’ll arrange her schedule for a meeting if I can track her down. . . . Sorry, sir, I meant when, when I track her down . . . May I ask . . .”

He stared at his phone like he wanted to smash it, then slowly eased it to his pocket.

“We’ll have to pick this up at a later date. The Commanding Officer of High Intelligence will be here in an hour and he wants a meeting with *you*,” he said as though *you* was referring to a bunch of maggots.

“That’s excellent news. He must have gotten the formula and now wants to come here and personally congratulate me. I’d say it’s been nice knowing you, but my parents taught me never to lie. Please close and lock the door behind you. I wouldn’t want anyone going through my stuff when I’m gone, but then again, I suppose that’s what the cameras are there for,” I said happily.

He suddenly straightened and began looking around the room.

I hung out in HR until I got the call to report to 1302. I practically skipped there, carrying the dissertation I'd hidden in the lab. The secretary had my coffee all ready for me.

"Yay, you got large cups."

"Well, the coffee guzzlers of today aren't like the coffee sippers of yesterday."

"That's for sure," I said, taking a couple swallows of the freshly brewed coffee. She just shook her head, smiling at me. "Is he ready for me?"

"Go right in."

The door hardly closed and I wasn't even seated when I said, "So did you fire him?" with a huge smile.

"Catina Salsbury. Need I remind you of the suit?"

"Sorry, did you fire him, Sir?"

He sat back and chuckled, "I don't think it is a good thing that you are knowing my soft side too often, as you come to expect it, thereby eliminating your fear of me."

"I was never afraid of you before, sir."

"Look at you, your eyes are absolutely swirling with mischief. It turns your eyes a darker shade of blue."

"You heard and saw what happened, right?"

"I did, but it really wasn't necessary to provoke him. Any other person would have been quaking in their shoes when confronted with such a situation, and shut their mouth."

"Then let's be happy I'm not any other person. I don't quake."

"Careful, Catina, there's a fine line between confidence and arrogance and you're bordering on arrogance. Need I remind you of your moments of panic and hysteria that make you human, just like everyone else, and not immune to fear?"

"I'm pretty sure those are *not* the times I'm being considered human, and more often the times that somebody is trying to tell me I'm having a psychotic episode. I don't even fall for it anymore, the line's been used so often. I know I'm right when someone starts referring to my having psychosis because it's their own paranoia that they'll be losing their job."

"That's an interesting theory. Does that mean when you feel like you're being watched and someone starts bringing up schizophrenic symptoms, this makes you believe even moreso that you're being watched?"

"Yes, because the normal response would be for people to reassure me I'm not being watched. In the absence of their reassurance is their confirmation."

"That's a bit black and white thinking. What you're saying is if no one complimented you, then they're confirming that they don't have anything to compliment you on, or if no one says they love you, then they're confirming that they hate you."

“No, I’m speaking accusations only. So, for example, if I accused you of hating me, and you didn’t deny hating me or reassured me that you didn’t hate me, rather told me something entirely off topic, then you’re confirming my accusation, because it is natural for someone to deny false accusations.”

“It’s natural for people to want to deny accusations, in general, whether true or false. It’s a matter of pride that determines whether they will deny it or not. Using your same example, you accuse me of hating you, you’ve rifled my pride, so I’d be more likely to tell you you’re being ridiculous or acting crazy, than to lower my pride and give you the compliment or reassurance you’re seeking.”

“So you brought us completely off topic from my original question to avoid having to answer it,” I said.

His eyes glinted. “That’s because I shouldn’t have to tell you that’s confidential information.”

“So is what I have here sticking out of my arm pit?”

“I’m not playing your little game, Catina.”

“Call me Cat.”

“I call you Cat, you want me to call you Catina. I call you Catina, you want me to call you Cat. You’re exhausting.”

“Then why did you give me a ring that provides me direct contact to you? I see only one ring on your hands, so unless you’ve given out a bunch of cellular rings, ha ha, get it, cellular rings? That must mean I’m not all that exhausting.”

“You’re letting this get to your head, and that concerns me. You’re usually a very level-headed person, if not, too serious, at times.”

That changed me. Back to my former self that came after the former self. ‘I’ll maintain level-headed as soon as people stop trying to stick needles in me, send me to psychiatric institutions, harass me for a formula that belongs to me, and when that harassment doesn’t work, threaten that I will be terminated or transferred if I do not provide it, then implicate some kind of interrogation techniques to force me to provide it.

“Would you have preferred me to cower and shake and give in and give him what he wanted out of fear of the consequences? And as far as your stupid ring and your inappropriate involvement in my life, I don’t need either one. I can protect and take care of myself and I don’t need you or anyone else to do so. I make my own way.” I threw the ring at him. “If you’re not going to take care of him, then I will. Good day, sir.”

“He’s being forced to resign. I didn’t mean to upset you. Cat can come back out and play. I was being insensitive and wasn’t thinking how upsetting all of this has been to you. Why don’t we get out of here for a bit, relax, and you can show me what you’ve been meaning to show me?”

“For all the trouble it has caused, I think I will just burn it, and forget I ever wanted to help the system that is caving in just on the basis that I might have something. There’s nothing in this world that isn’t corrupt, and there’s no telling who can or cannot be trusted. I’d rather play it safe and trust no one. And don’t you dare start talking about my symptoms, because I’ve seen and heard enough the past 24 hours to prove it. I’m getting out of here and I’m going where the tests tell me to go, and I will make it so that I don’t work beneath anyone. You stay away from me.”

“Cat, I jumped when you said jump, boarded an emergency flight that took four hours, took care of a situation, all over confidential information that you wanted to provide me. I’d like to assume, you felt you could trust me with it. You come in here, full of mischief over a serious matter, when I am in uniform and it is my responsibility to ensure that mischief is only directed in the right and appropriate places. I can’t believe I’m explaining myself to you. *Sit down!*” he yelled.

“No.” I opened the door. “And don’t call me that. My name is Catina.”

“Catina Salsbury, by order of your Commanding Officer and your superior, you get back in here this instant.”

I smiled at the receptionist who was standing with paled features. “He’d make a wonderful father, don’t you think? Coffee was great. Much appreciated.”