

Chapter One:
The Bion

A lot of guards would stand at the end of the Lion Tamer water slide and scan the pool bottom for loose change. The drop from the beginning was nearly vertical, thus the velocity of riders exiting into the pool we were stationed at often resulted in coins drifting from their pockets down through the five feet of entry water. Lifeguarding was my first job, after leaving competitive swimming I looked for something to satisfy my longing for the sound of restless waves and echoed voices. No place else was as filled with that than the largest indoor pool complex in the country: the waterpark. Nine massive water slides, two children's areas, two large hot-tubs, a bungee-jumping tower and one enormous main pool installed with a wave generator. I had worked there over my final year in high school, graduated, and what seemed to be taunted as the final summer of all time was about to begin

Working at such a giant centre meant working with a giant core of co-workers: fellow lifeguards coming from all over the city of Edmonton to work at the most eventful pool in town. Eventful not only on the guarding side- first-aids, spinals and all- but also in regards to the place's social atmosphere. I didn't know any of the other guards when I first came of staff, most of the senior guards had been working there much longer than I had ever dreamt of, and my shy disposition didn't help all that much either. I did gain some friends, mostly acquaintances, and was actually quite well known despite my obliviousness towards the others. To try and get into the swing of things, I had thrown a few parties earlier that year. Probably the most successful of them was my New Years Day party, which ended up in a train of cars packed with teenagers floating from hotel to hotel- either being thrown out or locked out before we could even attempt to come inside. We ended up settling down back at the mall, renting a small room in its hotel, sneaking the forty or so people that hadn't ditched us in the hours of following the near scavenger hunt to find the lead group. The worst part about it was that the one person I had actually cared about being there, wasn't. Fio Cross. The two of us both worked together and attended the same high school. She had helped me advertise the party, and though we had only known each other a short time, that girl and I had a lot in common

This was six months ago, since then she and I had become best friends, over time began guarding beside each other every time our shifts were coinciding- pretty often seeing as our availabilities just happened to be the same. At the waterpark there were two rotations, bottoms and tuberide, bottoms consisting of six adolescent guards staring lifelessly at a small entry pool at the end of one of the slides, and a seventh end braving the chlorinated urine of the main children's area at the end. The pool's water hadn't been changed since the place opened fifteen years ago. No pool had been changed, just filtered through the system. Fio and I preferred this to the other rotation, in fact refusing to work anything else. Because tuberide, was worse.

The summer was beginning, graduation was a week over and there were only a few more weeks of exams left before high school would be done forever. Meaning that instead of sitting in a rigid desk, the two of us would be standing over these pools for eleven hours a day practically every day. Well, I would be, Fio was leaving for six weeks in Montreal at the start of July. I knew I was going to miss her so I was trying to spend as much time with her as I could. So as usual, the two of us were beside each other on

rotation when the fifteen minutes between rotations was up. I could always sense when the next guard was walking the way from the last slide up to mine. I looked up and sure enough there she was smiling at the kid guarding the wavepool which she passed on route. Depending on the day, my heart would normally skip a beat when I would see her smile, but for some reason not today. I had been falling in and out of a crush on her for a while now, and my last heart wrench seemed to be clearing up. Fio had the most beautiful eyes, usually complimented with a long curl of hair covering just the corner of her face. Her pixie like features seemed to be perfectly carved into ever-blushing delicate cheeks, and any trace in looking on such radiance was cracked with a smile which always made you smile right back. A smile which lit up those beautiful eyes, creasing them just right, so to draw your heart and beating thoughts behind that curl. All right, so maybe I still liked her.

“So what are you doing tonight?” she asked as she approached.

“Trystin and I are making up for last weekend. Are you coming?”. Last Friday night, our friend Trystin had invited Fio and I to smoke up with him, an opportunity I was forced to decline because of my awaiting ride home with my parents. This time, however, I had driven myself in my parents car and told them I would be out for a while after work.

“No, my Dad’ll be here right after work to pick me up,”. Fio’s parents were interesting people, the few times I had met them they had seemed fairly nice. Her mother was very pleasant, keeping a polite nature and an ever-present air of refinement. Fio’s father was the classic gentleman, with the seemingly endless wealth of conversational knowledge and a traditional chin. I had been amazed at how willing they were to support their daughter’s whimsical amusements, picking her up from parties at four in the morning to drive the two of us not home, but to another party. Always there for her to talk to, and in listening to them, it was interesting to hear them really talk. Most kids don’t regard their parents as friends, from the outside at least, it seemed Fio had an extraordinary relationship with hers. However, it isn’t intelligent to keep your parents waiting all the time, no matter how patient they are. “Besides, you know I don’t do drugs,” she was always chiding me, “And I’m going out with Damon tonight,”

“Have a good birthday,”. Early in the day I had taken her out for lunch at this classy Tandoori place called Tradinoe's, the food was a little dry, but the atmosphere was incredible. That’s why I had selected it, Fio was always looking for the image of a place, we’re both like that. When we find a place we don’t like, we avoid it publicly. We call it “boycotting”, doing it over stupid little things like the name sounding 'too' stereotypical of blue collar society or something’s being 'too' popular. As much as we flaunted our false-uppitness, she really was class. And I at least tried to be. I had planned a surprise birthday for her the following night, well, until she found out about it. Well, until I ended up telling her about it. Her friends from school and I did not get along, and inviting them myself was only asking for disaster. I had made reservations at a Mediterranean place downtown, and was crossing my fingers for attendance, and that most of them wouldn’t find out who planned it.

As I walked over to the next slide and waved the guard off to the next spot on rotation, I turned around to check the time. Ten minutes until close, and I was ending at the Screw slide. I actually enjoyed this spot, you could talk with the guard positioned at the Cannon slide right beside me, and could talk to the guard positioned atop of the Cannon with the crude sign-language one develops over time. Slump your body if your tired, smile if your

happy to see them, make faces if your bored, that kind of thing. So time flew by and I mission-impossibled it over to the staffroom so I wouldn't see my boss. After work, the supervisors would always make the guards pick up all of the rented inflatable tubes littering the plastic beach. It usually kept us about ten minutes after work, and unpaid labor just didn't appeal to me. Unfortunately, it really didn't appeal to most others either, so the dash to the changerooms was often too en mass to keep it quiet. That day, however, I made it in and out of the changeroom without sighting a single cross face and sat in one of the staffroom chairs awaiting the rest of the suckered staff.

"What are you doing tonight?", I turned my head to the first of the group coming in the door, they weren't talking to me but I knew them so I decided to invite them out with Trystin and I.

"Sorry man, I've got a date with my bed tonight," yawned the only guy of the bunch. This was Tyler, and his comment was rare, so when he picks the solo sheets as his Friday night destination, you don't argue. Unless your Trystin, who just happened to emerge from the changeroom at that exact moment. I didn't even know he was in there.

"What! Do I have to drag your ass?", Trystin yelled in his gangster mocking voice.

"tomorrow's Jason's Party," was Tyler's response. I looked over to the bulletin board with shaken eyes to find that our long-time supervisor's quitting party was plastered on a poster across the wall. And just like that, all my fears were coming true. Two parties on the same night.

You see, I've been known to blow quite a few nerves while planning a party. In normal, everyday life I am actually very quiet and reserved, barely anything gets to me. Planning parties, is the exception. Every little thing becomes glaring, and as they build up, I become blinded by what seems to be a brightly shining disaster. No one else seems to be able to see it, but every second of tardiness, every random no-show, every ounce too drunk somebody gets, I get that much drunker with frustration. I call it stress, others call the insanity ward. Okay, its not that bad, but I don't get stressed, ever. In the end it would be all right though I decided, Fio's was a dinner, Jason's is the after-party. All this self-bantering ended with Trystin tapping me on the shoulder to get me up and going. The two of us walked out, chatting about the frustrating patrons that always got under his skin and how my lunch with Fio went. We clocked out at the wardrobe area and I tossed my uniform into the two separate piles: white for the shirts and blue for the shorts. We then walked up the escalator, which wasn't working as usual. Every new employee soon discovers that if you kick the side of it just right up at the top, the whole thing jolts to a stop. Those who know never end a ride up the moving stairs otherwise. Today just wasn't our day to do it.

The next shift ending tradition is a gathering in the food court across from the park. Mostly composed of the kids who all went or still go to high school together out on the west end, at the end of the day we all sit on the stools around the ash covered tables until security kicks us off for loitering. Everybody ends up there to say their goodbyes before heading off to their respective parties, clubs or beds. Some even go home to sleep. Strolling over, I could see a few familiar faces, gave a few hugs before Trystin and I made it back on our way out to the parking lot. Another thing every new employee soon learns about exiting the mall are the back hallways. Mostly used for loading clothing stockrooms or entering before opening, the waterpark people use them as a hidden access way from the nearest entrance to the park all day long. Scrawled along the walls dipped

in cheap white paint are the signatures, profanity and graffiti which can never quite be made out. The most likely reason those halls were so popular was that all it took was that one step inside and out came Trystin's cigarette lighter.

We got out into the parking lot and went over to my car. A big old shiny mini-van, and a red one at that. "Where do you want to smoke the weed?", were the first excited words to come out of Trystin's mouth.

"The shed man, it's all about the shed,". Trystin took out about two grams and emptied about a third of it into a rolling paper which I grabbed out of my wallet. I paused for a while as he rolled the joint, and turned on some music.

"Um, Dionne...". Trystin's pet peeve, music while rolling.

"Sorry man,". I turned it off and began pondering on why it was exactly that I had been using 'man' as a directory adjective so often as of late. For the last month, excluding last weekend, Trystin and I had spent every Friday night the same. Rolling a joint and driving where-ever, I guess you could call it bonding. I call it getting high. Once Trystin was finished, we hopped out and walked back through the mall to the other side, cutting through some of the back hallways until we arrived in a small back alley. On any side of us were loading bays, riddled with similar defamation as the hidden access ways inside. Beside the exit was a small garden shed, planted exactly where there was no need for a garden shed. Paranoid of mall security, we checked around and then climbed inside the shed, as always. Out came the lighter and Trystin took the first hit.

Everyone hits a joint a little differently. Everyone always thinks they have a better way to inhale, a way to make them higher. Honestly, I know there really isn't more than one way to breathe, but even I shared in the superstition. As Trystin pulled the fumes back through the blunt, he took exactly three pauses, taking it from his mouth and then returning it to his lips. Each time, it looked like he tried to fill as much of his upper lungs as possible, puffing out his chest a little and squinting his eyes. After he was finished, Trystin passed it over. I'd always taken a different approach. I just just suck it back until my lungs are full, if my throat gets a little too hot, I stop inhaling and take a little bit of fresh air in through my nose and then continue.

"I love how you smoke the joint man," Trystin laughed, "your so focused". Focus is a strange word to hear as your smoking drugs, as I passed it back I began to think about exactly what focus looks like, and then concentrated on how he seemed to be looking.

"You look like a teapot man,". Trystin lost it, laughing out every bit of smoke in his lungs and dropping the joint to the ground. Calming as he picked it up, he handed it back. The smoke was starting to create a haze around the low roof of the shed, trapping the pot so that every breath brought us higher. My head began to float, my legs began to tingle. Trystin broke out laughing again and I remember I was supposed to look focused. The laughter entered my throat and exited my forehead, convulsing my torso apart from my wobbling stance. I past the joint back over and Trystin became entirely serious out of no where, as always, trying to play with my delirious state. It never worked. Not to say that nothing he ever did worked. As he passed it back he commented on how our arms couldn't stop rising, and sure enough, all of the sudden my arms were filled with the sensation of rising. After a few more rotations, we killed the ember and drew open the sliding doors, exiting our illusion in a cloud of smoke.

As I walked back through the mall towards my car, a folding sensation ran through my body, as every step I took seemed to raise my head no higher. We didn't say a word to

each other as we walked, we never did. It isn't smart to talk in public when you're high, if you just kept to yourself you can at least appear somewhat conspicuous. When we got back to the car, I just started to peak.

"Do your legs tingle man?", I replied to Trystin's question with a wide eyed nod, "Bionic Chronic!". It was the nickname Trystin had given his latest brand of weed, and boy was it potent. I pulled out and we drove a few minutes before pulling over to a playground. Driving took a lot of concentration, keeping your focus on the road and ensuring you do everything you would do normally. Beyond the traffic lights that appeared to change in jumping sparks, it went okay.

"So are you and Fio going out yet?". Trystin was always one for tact.

"It's not like that man,". Explaining Fio and I's relationship is always a difficult task. Yes, I liked her. Yes I was attracted to her. Both were aspects of my love for her. The two of us talked about everything, we cried to each other and acted completely crazy to draw smiles so wide on our faces that all anyone around us could do was hold their heads in their hands and exclaim their confusion. It wasn't the comedic content that made us laugh though, it was the release of everything and the total emotional freedom.

Following every useless whim to result in games without rules, and lasting 'in' jokes that one could only understand if they stopped looking for reason. Perhaps that best explains us, we are together without reason, except all those reason so intangible. She makes me feel happy when I'm with her, and I miss her when I'm not. Our touch is affectionate, purely free without intent, we don't want anything from each other, we only accept what we receive and give everything we have. Love exists far more than need, and I believe it is because of our gradual turning to each other. Nothing is forced, I call her and we don't say anything at all, just to be with her. When I see she's hurt, I feel hurt. When I hear her cry, I cry. She's always in my mind somewhere, not as a hindering focus, but as a compliment. A friend I talk about everything but her with. Good friends may date, but bestfriends stay friends until they're married. But how do I say that without sounding too wordy?

"Why not man, you two are inseparable and you obviously like each other,". And then it came to me.

"I don't know,". Okay, all right, I know: not so brilliant. I was high okay?

"Come on man,". Another chance.

"When we first met, we hated each other. Well, not hated, but we disliked each other to an extent that used as little energy as possible. When we finally started talking, it was just friends, nothing else. No attraction whatsoever, believe me, I had never looked at her in that way, ever. But after a while, we started getting really close. I remember, we were talking at her backdoor. I looked at her, and I realized that she was beautiful. More time past, and I realized I loved her. But look man, I'm not 'in' love with her, I can't say that. Look, I've only kissed two girls, both of which I believed I was in love with at the time. Whether I truly was or not, I'm proud of that. If I fall in love, it's a different story. Until then, no, we're just friends man". Well that wasn't too bad.

"Your lucky man, I wish I was a pretty boy-band material guy," Trystin said while squinting again, looking up and then smiling his 'oh well, doesn't really matter' smile at me.

"Whatever man, I know girls that like you,". Of course, I couldn't tell him who, but I did know quite a few.

“Like who?”, he looked at me with such disbelief I almost spilled.

“I can’t say man, but I do. Like I said, whatever man,” I was trying to convince him without knowing what I was convincing him of, realizing that, I changed the subject.

“Where do you want to be in the future man?”

“I don’t really know, what about you?”. He knew I was changing the subject, we were starting to sober.

“I want to write, I want to act, I want to think. I want to start a company, where I research and invent things I can patent and then lease the patents,”. Talking about the future always fills me with such inspiration, I started just gleaming.

“What kind of research man?”. That’s one of the things I really liked about Trystin, he always got into what you were talking about, didn’t just hear you, he participated and made you feel like he was really paying attention.

“You took biology right?”. Explaining my theories always takes a little bit of time.

“Yeah man”

“Okay. You take an enzyme, and design a cofactor to go inside its active-site to change its structure so that once it contacts a specific virus or bacterium, it adheres to it and digests its external layer, killing it or stripping it of its parasitic methods”. I finished, taking in a large breath of air.

“I’m sorry man, I’m still a little high. So what exactly does that do?”. We were sober, but I guess not that sober.

“It’s the cure for all diseases man,”. Trystin looked at me a little weird.

“You’re high man,”. I knew he’d say that.

“No man, think about it. You can design it to adhere to any specific germ, and only that germ”. I don’t know why I persisted, but I think I saw something in Trystin- a glimpse of purity, the light of honesty- I guess I needed him to believe me.

“You know what man, your one of those people who are destined to be remembered, who go off and make big names for themselves. You’ve got talent. Me, I’m gonna grow up, find someone I’ll marry, have kids and a barbecue every week where I have all my friends over. I know that, and I’ve accepted it,”. Trystin looked so serious I couldn’t laugh, that piece of honesty had become a brilliant star lighting every shadow inside of my soul. It was like he had read my mind and filled in all the little empty sections I called insecurity. Like an angel.

“No man. Fuck that man, fuck that”. He smiled that smile. “Look. I have this list, over my life I have noticed certain people who have shaped my fate and given me things I could never repay them for. If I do make it big, I won’t forget their investment.”. Once more, he smiled, and pointed to his chest.

“Me man,”. He was joking, but he didn’t have to. He was already there.

“You know what we should research. How when people get high together, they get sober together. As long as one is at least a little high, he keeps the other at that same level,”.

“What? I’m not high”. Trystin put on his serious face again.

“Cluck that man, cluck that,”. Trystin’s eyes grew, he started laughing again.

“What? Ha ha! Cluck that man, cluck that huh,”. After a while longer, we started up the car again and I drove him home. I dropped him off and turned the car around to go home myself, and thus thought I was stone sober. I turned on my music and started to lose myself in thought. About every few minutes I turned to my right to say something,

swearing there was someone else in the car. A spark-like flash would follow my vision as I turned my head to an empty seat, and for a moment I would wonder where Trystin went. Remembering I had dropped him off, I would lose myself once again in the music and repeat the mistake over and over- and then I started laughing. I remembered I was supposed to be serious.