



The SPEISENSTEIN Files

6. Writing the Wrong

Audley is relaxing in a deep leather armchair in the Corinthian splendor of his London club. He and the MD of Nostrum Pharmaceuticals have survived the unique combination of bad food and good wine traditional in such establishments and are enjoying a glass of Graham '75 in front of a crackling log fire.

"Its certainly worth a go," Audley says. "I would try the Annals. Witherington is the editor. A good man. Would be sympathetic if you covered his expenses generously. You know how it is."

"How long will it take to get a supplement out?"

"Difficult to say. Depends a lot on the authors. Got to persuade them to cough up first, I'd say."

"We could offer an incentive."

Audley nods. "Bigger the better."

Dear Dr Speisenstein,

I hope you returned safely from your visit to Wales. It was good to have the opportunity...

... so successful that, in response to the request of a number of participants, we are arranging for the proceedings to be published as a supplement to the Annals...

... to the generosity of Nostrum Pharmaceuticals I am able to offer you the sum of \$1000 on

receipt of your text.

Yours sincerely

W StJ Audley

Speisenstein is on the line to Audley.

“Do me a favor. Leave me out of it. It’s a waste of time. Look. We did three crazy experiments on this Ectopol and got negative data. Negative. It’s a waste of time.”

“Witherington will be unhappy.”

“Yeah. Well he just gotta be.”

“Why don’t you ask young Joe Smith to write it? Good training for the lad.”

“Joe? You crazy or something? You don’t know that boy. He couldn’t even write his own name?”

“Anyway, think about it, Spicy. I’d be greatly obliged.”

“OK. I’ll think about it.”

“Joe, you’re just about the laziest goddam slob I ever met. I don’t know how I put up with you so long.”

“Sir?”

“All those stupid experiments you keep doing. Why in the hell don’t you ever sit down on your butt and write them up?”

“Writing was never my thing, I guess. I kinda get blocked as soon as I get a pen between my fingers.”

“You can’t go on like this for ever, Joe. A scientist has to be a writer, just as much as a novelist. Come to think of it, some scientists...”

“OK. I promise I’ll get down to some heavy duty writing as soon as I finish this next batch of experiments.”

“Yeah. Always the same story -- ‘After the next experiment.’ You remember those studies you did on that stuff Ectopol or something for the Welsh meeting? Why don’t you turn them into a little paper -- just for the practice?”

“You gotta be joking. They were nothing studies. Anyway they were all negative.”

“How ‘bout if your goddam fairy godfather gave you a thousand bucks to do it?”

Dear Dr Smith,

Llandiniogg Congress

Thank you for your prompt contribution. This has now been forwarded to the Editors for the customary peer review. On behalf of Nostrum Pharmaceuticals, I have pleasure in enclosing a cheque for \$1000.

Yours sincerely,

W StJ Audley

Joe is standing to attention in front of Dr Speisenstein’s desk, white in the face.

“No. I just don’t understand it. The letter from Dr Witherington just says that, in view of the referees’ comments, he regrets he is unable to accept the paper. You want to read the comments?”

“No way! I don’t need to be told by KI Witherington or anyone else that it was a junk piece of work.” Speisenstein slams his fist on the table and shouts at his secretary. “Get me Witherington on the line. And make it quick.”

“I don’t know what to do with that thousand dollars,” Joe says. “You see, I spent it already.”

“Do with it? Do with it? You keep it. They owed it to you. But let that be a lesson to you. You gotta learn the lesson to write your data up the right way. Hell. Didn’t I tell you just that?”

“But...But if the work is bad?”

“All the more reason. Now just get outta here. I wanna talk to Witherington. I’ll give that KI the KO.”

“I tried Dr Witherington,” says the secretary. “They say he’s away. Had a business invitation to take a holiday with his wife for a week in Venice, Italy. If it’s urgent, you can reach him at the Danieli Hotel. You want me to call?”

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