



The SPEISENSTEIN Files

5. Private Meeting

*“When that eye wash
And a little...” W.S.*

Dear Dr Speisenstein,

I have great pleasure in inviting you to the international meeting on “New pathways in the treatment of arrhythmias” to be held in Llandiniogg, Wales, next June 23-26. The meeting will be held under the auspices of Nostrum Pharmaceuticals plc, whose generous support permits me to offer you first class air travel and full hotel accommodation.

I enclose a copy of the preliminary programme and hope that you will be able to accept.

Yours sincerely,

W.StJ. Audley.

* * *

“So, Spicy, are you going to accept?”

“I’ll go if you go. So, how’s this place Wales?”

“Well worth the visit, I would say. I’m going.”

“OK. That’s a date. I’m not sold on foreign travel; but, at least they speak English there.”

“Think so? What are you going to talk about?”

“Yeah. Problem is I’ve no data on this new antiarrhythmic drug of theirs - Ectopol. Reckon I’ll get Joe to do a few runs with it on our Fleischer paraganglion prep. We got time. I’ll take him along for the ride. He might meet some interesting people.”

* * *

It has been a long coach ride from the airport hotel. We have chattered about the quaintness of the English countryside, the green of the grass, the sense of history. But, coming over the borders into Wales, we have been enshrouded in mist. Conversation has dwindled and finally we are ejected, jet-lagged and half asleep, out of the warm womb of the coach into the driving rain. Across a gravel drive looms the gothic outline of our hotel. Sheep baa out of the mist.

* * *

“Didn’t know this Ectopol was so widely investigated.”

“Mostly in Europe, I think. The clinical side is easier over there.”

“Guess Nostrum are pushing to get it through the FDA.”

“But, hell, the mode of action seems largely unexplored. Fascinating. Did you hear that guy say it has diuretic properties?”

“And the work on aging was interesting.”

“The molecular talk by that Dubois girl was outstanding.”

“Yeah, yeah...what did you think of the saddle of lamb?”

“Awesome! Worth coming for by itself. And the new potatoes and green peas. This mint sauce. Oh my!”

* * *

“...while the clinical importance of Ectopol is established, there remains a great deal to be done before we can be certain of its mechanism of action. It remains only to thank our very gracious hosts, Nostrum Pharmaceuticals, for having given us the opportunity to get together over this very fascinating and clinically so very important topic. I am sure you would all very much wish me to thank them also for their very generous and very unforgettable hospitality.”

Witherington leads the applause and sits down to return to his cognac and petit fours.

* * *

For three days rain has trickled down the leaded panes of our Victorian Gothic residence. Now it has stopped, but the windows are still blanked out with mist. I woke early this morning and sat shivering and finishing my lukewarm kippers in the gloom of the oak-panelled breakfast room listening to the moaning wind. Glorious June! It is Sunday and the last day of the conference. There are two hours to the round table and I decide to take a walk. Soon I am striding past the row of miner's cottages, past the singing from the gray stone chapel and round the cliffs of the slate quarries out of human earshot. Only the sound of the sheep and the curlew and running streams.

Suddenly the mist lifts. An amber sunlight of unbearable intensity floods the valley. And, on the far ridge under a fairy story rainbow, I see two figures walking hand in hand - a tall gangling youth with a pony tail and a girl with long blond hair blowing in the wind.

Longboat Key Health Sciences Institute
Florida, USA