



“NO GOOD DEED”

A Short Story by
LANCE WOODS

Based on the podcast series
produced by



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Prologue

One type of character I enjoy writing for *SuperHuman Times* stories is the villain — or, I should say, former villain, since they no longer function as such in this world. It's said that the best stories have villains who are more interesting than the heroes opposing them. In this case, I wanted to tell a story of someone who tries to do the right thing, but is so desperate to do it that he pursues the wrong course of action, with disastrous results. To accomplish this, I needed his path to cross with that of someone who could be persuasive, helpful, and even a little seductive.

Thus, Scalpelle was born — although, as we begin this story, the aging villain is very close to death. Nevertheless, her skills at manipulating a naïve mind, like that of Doctor Victor Schellenger, remain intact. That's one reason I'm hoping we can get the script for this into the studio someday. She's one of the few *Times* characters who make me want to write a flashback story just so we can see her in her youth.

If you enjoy what follows, I just might.

SuperHuman Times™

“NO GOOD DEED”

A Short Story by

Lance Woods

In her prime, she called herself Scalpelle.

Her experiments terrorized and murdered some of the world’s mightiest superhumans.

She was one of the world’s most despised supervillainesses.

I remember the first time I saw her: in London, laying in a hospital bed in Saint Burgess Hospital, old, medicated and dying.

I was her doctor. I saved her life.

I should have killed her.

She'd checked in under an alias, Angela Capri, but I suspected her true identity because, underneath the sagging skin and wrinkles, something about her looked familiar. Her real name was Elspeth Munroe. I confirmed it through a DNA match from a blood sample that I secretly delivered to a colleague in the Ministry of Superhuman Affairs, where they maintain such files on those who have committed crimes against humanity and superhumanity. In case you ever wondered, she truly held a medical degree. It wasn't just some title she bestowed upon herself. That fact didn't reflect well upon our profession. I was surprised that my colleagues at Saint Burgess didn't recognize her sooner. Then again, she'd been out of the public eye for decades, since before superhumans started turning away from super-crimefighting (and super-crime committing) to assimilate themselves into other professions during the Big Shakeout.

But I knew it was her. And, when her case was assigned to me, I told her so.

She wheezed a chuckle in what might have once been a delicate English accent. “If you are waiting for a denial, Herr Doctor Schellenger, don't.” My native German accent seemed to amuse her. “And your smuggled blood sample would be inadmissible in court because it was improperly obtained and analyzed. You would lose your license to practice medicine. You would be ruined.

“I'll just be dead.”

My turn to chuckle. “You didn't leave the warmth of a tropical hideout in Costa Rica just to succumb to discovery *or* emphysema.”

“All those damned cigarettes,” she said. “God, I could use one now.”

“You risked exposure to come here. Why?”

“Because I have nothing to lose, Herr Doctor. And you have everything to gain.”

“What?”

She closed her eyes and said nothing more. Her monitors told me she was still alive.

I got the hint. I was dismissed.

“Victor, your work in cellular rejuvenation is the reason I wanted you to come here from Berlin,” the deep, warm voice said. “If your experiments bear fruit, the benefits to the world, and to this hospital, will be tremendous.”

Ernest Cooper, M.D., KBE, was one of the most caring and knowledgeable surgeons I’d ever known. As Saint Burgess’s Chief of Staff, he had a well-earned reputation for mentoring the doctors under his command; the medical breakthroughs achieved by many of his students contributed greatly to his receiving a knighthood. I felt honored when he invited me to join the hospital to take my research to the next level.

However, I needed a very tall ladder to reach the it. “There’s no chance of getting my trials approved?”

“I’ve shared your results to date with members of the hospital board and the Ministry of Health,” Doctor Cooper said. (He never allowed us to address him as “Sir Ernest”, having felt that he’d actually earned his medical title.) “It’s all politics and public relations. Even with informed consent, the board doesn’t want Saint Burgess to be perceived as turning its patients into guinea pigs.” He added, with some hesitation, “The questionable press surrounding your Miss Capri isn’t helping, either.”

“And for that, they’re willing to sacrifice a serum that can restore nearly any diseased cell in a human body.”

“I know. A person would have to be a fool not to want that serum. The line of volunteers would stretch through the main lobby and out the door to Canada.”

I imagined that line coming from another direction.

I saw it potentially coming from Costa Rica.

“I’m sorry for barging into the lab, Doctor Schellenger, but I need to speak with —”

“Pardon me while I save this, Nurse Mayfield. What brings you here?” I knew why.

That’s why I was hiding in the lab, updating my files, transferring them from a tablet to a micro memory card.

“Doctor Schellenger, as Chief Nursing Officer, the nursing staff’s assignments are my responsibility. So you can imagine —”

“Excuse me, I have to get something from the printer.”

She followed me across the lab. She was a middle-aged woman of some breadth, and her agility surprised me. “You can imagine my surprise when Nurse Christopher informed me that you, rather than my nurses, will be delivering all medications for one Miss Angela Capri for the duration of her treatment.”

“That is correct.” I ejected the micro memory card from the tablet.

“May I know why you felt it necessary to circumvent my authority?”

“Have you reviewed Miss Capri’s admission records?” I opened a locking cabinet, extracted a case, opened it, placed the micro memory card inside with several others, then replaced it and locked away everything.

“Not in detail.”

“Had you done so, you would have read that, upon admission to the hospital, she requested that I personally supervise all aspects of her treatment. That includes the administration of any medicine and seeing to her comfort until ... well, until she ... expires.”

“Why?”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Why would a dying woman come to Saint Burgess to be treated exclusively by a doctor who isn’t even a permanent member of the staff here?”

“I’m curious about that, too, Nurse Mayfield. By treating her, I hope to find out.”

“I just find it odd that you’ve both drawn a considerable amount of attention from the media, you from your research, she for ... well, for what she used to do.”

“Allegedly.”

“Perhaps she feels the two of you share a common —”

“Speaking of attention, I’m sure there are other patients and matters in this hospital that merit yours, Nurse Mayfield?” I’d never attempted to dress down a nurse before, certainly not one of the fine nurses of Saint Burgess, and I dreaded the response to my attempting to land the biggest fish in our nursing sea.

The fish glared at me for a moment, then swam out of the lab, to my relief.

“A consent form?”

“Yes. I imagine you didn’t use these too often in your work.”

My frail patient squinted at the pages I’d printed out minutes before. She read all of it carefully, and some of it aloud, so I knew she was able to comprehend it. “Not very discreet, Herr Doctor,” she said. “What will you say when the hospital file clerks ask questions?”

“It’s not for the hospital’s records, but for mine,” I said. “Even though you’re volunteering for this, I must document your informed consent before I begin administering the serum to you.”

“I have read enough reports about your research to have confidence in you, Herr Doctor. That’s why I sought you out.” She looked at the I.V. bag in my hand, which was filled to one-third of capacity with my clear serum. “Is that it?”

“As you can see, it resembles ordinary saline and is labeled as such. I’ve set the infusion pump to deliver a dose every twelve hours. I, and only I, will personally change the bag.”

“What will the nurses and other doctors on duty say?”

“They know that I am to administer your I.V. and medications. But if you need them for anything else, use the button on the bed rail to ring them.” I placed a pen on the tray that traversed her bed.

She picked it up and slowly, weakly signed my form, which I quickly folded up and pocketed. Then, I hung the bag from the I.V. pole beside her bed and prepped the tube to her arm. “I’m going to insert your catheter now. I’m sorry if this hurts.”

She smiled. “Liar.”

I poked; she barely registered feeling it. “I suppose I should expect a little punishment for doing a good deed, since it’s against my nature.”

“What do you mean?”

“Helping you test your serum and save lives. Any pain I experience might be called penance for any suffering I caused.”

“Very spiritual. I never imagined someone like you believing in things like atonement, judgment ... or God.”

“I once thought of myself as a god, like so many in our profession. You know how we can get.”

It was all I could do to not yank the catheter from her arm and abandon the entire caper. “How dare you refer to medicine as ‘our’ profession? We share no common bond. I’ve read about your ghastly experiments on superhumans, the forensics reports on the -- the remains. It would have been one thing to defeat and carve up some unlucky superhero adversary. But you sought out and kidnapped superhumans who *weren’t* heroes, just ordinary citizens, and you murdered them.”

“I did what was necessary to learn what made them superhuman,” she whispered, “to synthesize those elements for new treatments, new vaccines for the human race ... to use what made superhumans better to make us better.”

“But when science proved that super-powers couldn’t be synthesized, that they’re based on individual body chemistries, you didn’t stop your ‘experiments’.

She coughed, then continued; her weak voice gained a tiny edge as she admonished me. “There was a time, before you were born, when superhuman and human populations were nearly equal. Superhumans could have eclipsed us, *conquered* us. I couldn’t let that happen once I realized their powers could never truly benefit the human race. I learned their weaknesses by any means necessary, found ways to control my subjects, even destroy them to save humanity.”

“Nothing you did served humanity. You are an abomination.”

“An ‘abomination’ you are now secretly turning into your own experiment. To save humanity.” She coughed a bit more.

“Isn’t that what ‘our’ profession is about, Herr Doctor?”

“I must say, Victor, two months ago, I would have considered Miss Capri terminal.” Dr. Cooper sounded genuinely pleased by my report.

“I’m quite surprised myself,” I said. “Her emphysema is still quite severe, but her breathing is less labored and she tells me she actually feels stronger. Too bad her desire for nicotine is stronger, too.”

“There is one concern I have,” Doctor Cooper said, “something Mayfield brought up. One reason I called you in here.”

“What did Saint Burgess’s chief angel of mercy tell you, sir?”

He smiled. He’d worked with Nurse Mayfield long enough to know that her dedication, while admirable, could occasionally irritate. “Only that Miss Capri appears to be in considerable pain. And that she’s refusing morphine.”

I knew that her pain was caused by a side effect of the serum, but I couldn’t get her to accept painkillers either. She wouldn’t tell me why. Thankfully, before I could try to stammer out some kind of reason to Doctor Cooper, the intercom on his desk went off. “Yes?”

“Inspector Laurel is here, Doctor,” his assistant in the outer office said.

“Thank you, send him in, please.” He rose. I followed as a man about ten years younger and thirty pounds lighter than Doctor Cooper walked in. He wore a conservative three-piece suit and carried a trench coat over his left arm.

He extended his right hand. “Good morning, Sir Ernest. Inspector Thomas Laurel, Scotland Yard.”

Doctor Cooper smiled and gave the inspector’s hand a hearty shake. “Ernest Cooper, Chief of Staff. ‘Doctor’ is fine, sir. This is my associate, Doctor Victor Schellenger.”

"Ah, yes, the researcher you spoke of on the phone." He swung around to me. "Pleased to meet you, sir."

"Likewise." We shook hands.

Doctor Cooper motioned to one of the chairs in front of his desk and Laurel sat down.

"I'll try not to take up too much of your time, gentlemen," The inspector said. "Is Doctor Schellenger aware of the reason for my visit, or did I arrive too soon?"

"No," I said quietly.

"I was about to tell him when you arrived," Doctor Cooper said. "The other reason I asked you to join me, Victor. I'm sure you know that Miss Capri's presence in the hospital is still creating a media stir."

"Yes, for some reason, everyone seems to think she's this 'Scalpelle' villain who's been in hiding for years. I'd give anything to find out how the press even knew she was here."

"More than likely an orderly or janitor offering a tip in exchange for cash," Laurel said.

"Your call was most welcome, sir, I can tell you."

"I'm hoping your inquiry will flush out the culprit," Doctor Cooper said.

I resumed my seat, perplexed. "Doctor Cooper called ... you... for an inquiry, Inspector?"

"Not an inquiry, sir. I was just hoping you'd allow me to ask your patient a few questions. I understand she's improved considerably in recent weeks."

"True," I said, "but I wouldn't want to expose her to any undue stress." She might have revealed the secret behind her improved condition.

"I'm hoping the inspector's questions will reduce stress on Miss Capri," Doctor Cooper said, "and on Saint Burgess."

“You see, Doctor Schellenger, every connection the press is making between Miss Capri and Scalpelle is purely circumstantial. She’s about the right age, she’s spent many years in a country with which England has no extradition treaty and —”

“But,” I argued, gently, “an international criminal would have no reason to return to a country where she could be prosecuted.”

“Precisely, sir,” the inspector said. “That’s why I’d like a word with Miss Capri – to prove conclusively that she *isn’t* Scalpelle.”

“And once Scotland Yard tells the world that Scalpelle is not alive and well at Saint Burgess,” said Doctor Cooper, “the media will let us get back to the business of healing.”

“What do you say, Victor? Shall we ‘exonerate’ the nefarious Miss Capri?”

“Then, I inherited my grandfather’s estate in Costa Rica and have lived there ever since.”

Even with a touch of strain in her voice and an occasional cough, the bitch was utterly charming. She’d regained enough strength to operate the controls of her bed and the television in her room, and she’d exchanged her generic hospital gown for one of several silk-like nightgowns from Harrods. (All right, I ordered them. It was the least I could do to thank her for abetting me.) As she sat there chatting with Inspector Laurel and Doctor Cooper, she looked more than comfortable — she looked regal.

And that scared me, but I didn’t let it show during her interview.

“What was your grandfather’s occupation, ma’am?” Inspector Laurel asked.

“He was a doctor. His field was — what is it called? – super-cellular biology.”

“Superhuman medicine?” the inspector asked.

“Yes,” she said. “I never formally studied medicine, but I spent so much time with him as a child, I became fascinated with it as a distraction. That’s how I learned about Doctor Schellenger’s research. I’d hoped to offer myself as a ‘lab rat’ for his work, but he tells me England has laws against ...” She interrupted herself with a rapid series of coughs, combined with a wincing look.

Doctor Cooper drew closer to her bedside. “Miss Capri, if you’re in pain, we can get you some —”

She held up a palm to decline. “No. No morphine or sedatives, Doctor Cooper. I know it goes against your training, but, as I told Doctor Schellenger, I have always dealt with pain on my own terms.”

She smiled at us. “Besides, at my age if I take something to make me sleep, I may not wake up.”

“If she has her way, she’ll be chain-smoking again in no time,” I said. “Against doctor’s orders, of course.”

Doctor Cooper and Inspector Laurel chuckled at my prognosis as we convened in the corridor outside my patient’s room following the interview.

“I hope she put you at ease, Inspector,” Doctor Cooper said. “If you’re through with me, I should get back to work.”

“I’ll just have a quick word with Doctor Schellenger and be on my way,” the inspector said, extending his friendly hand again. “Thank you for your cooperation, sir.”

“Certainly. See you later, Victor.”

“Sir.”

Inspector Laurel waited until Doctor Cooper entered a nearby stairwell before turning to me. “Doctor, would you mind accompanying me to the lobby? I have just a few more questions.”

“Well, I ...” I had no idea what he wanted, but it gave me a chill. Still, I didn’t want to appear evasive. And besides, “Miss Capri” had passed the acid test. “I need to make my rounds soon, but I have a few spare minutes.” I took a step down the corridor, starting toward the elevator bank.

He walked beside me. “Doctor, I’ll be frank with you. Miss Capri is only one of the reasons I came to Saint Burgess today.”

“Oh?”

“Your research that she mentioned. I learned something of it myself while preparing for today’s interview. Got you into a bit of trouble back home in Germany, didn’t it, sir?”

I sighed. “A typographical error. I made the mistake of telling a reporter that my serum was based on a phenol solution against cellular degeneration. He misinterpreted it and wrote that I called it a ‘final solution.’ As with all such things, it went viral.”

“I can imagine that phrase didn’t play well. But surely, the context —”

“— was understood by most,” I said, “but not by a handful of activists and politicians who got my funding cut off. Luckily, Doctor Cooper had enough faith in my work to invite me here. Of course, now people think Saint Burgess is harboring a mad scientist.”

“You or Miss Capri?” the inspector asked.

“Sorry?”

“No offense, sir, just joking. In a way, though, it’s too bad for you that she *isn’t* Scalpelle.”

“Why?”

“Well, she was a brilliant, if twisted scientist, from what I’ve learned of her career. If she were your patient, maybe she could pay her hospital bill by helping you with your research.

“Imagine that: Scalpelle *helping* people.” The thought made him chuckle.

I chuckled, too, as best I could under the circumstances.

Days flowed into weeks. My patient continued to show amazing progress, despite the fact that she fought agony with each dose of the serum. Still, she wouldn’t accept painkillers.

“Painkillers could neutralize the serum,” she said, “reverse its effects.”

“I’m sure they won’t.”

“*I’m not.*” The strength behind her tone of voice startled — no, frightened — me. “I want proof. Let me see your research notes. Your formulas. Everything. Perhaps I can figure out a way to make the healing process less painful.”

“You’re kidding.”

“Don’t physicians like it when their patients take an active role in their treatment?”

“Your “patients” weren’t very ‘active,’ as I recall. Besides, there’s no way I could explain your presence in my lab.”

“I don’t need to go to your lab,” she said. “You could bring your lab to me. On that tablet of yours.”

“I don’t use this tablet for my research. It’s my diagnostic tablet, the one I take on rounds.”

“There are ways to get me what we need.” She groaned. “Unless, of course, you *enjoy* watching me suffer.”

I said nothing. Truthfully, I wasn’t sure how to respond.

It made her laugh. It was a throaty, deep, almost hearty laugh, the most robust sound I'd heard from her lungs since her arrival.

“I knew there was something about you I liked, Herr Doctor.”

“Solitaire?”

“Solitaire, Nurse Mayfield,” I said. “I thought it odd, too, but since Miss Capri is still refusing painkillers, she wants something to take her mind off her discomfort.” I watched the icon on the tablet screen gradually fill in as I downloaded the Solitaire app. “I installed a few other games, too, in case that doesn't engage her.”

“How can you watch her suffer so?”

“It hasn't been easy. It's, um, a spiritual thing for her. Very personal. I'm not at liberty to disclose anymore. But if you've seen her chart, you also know that she's also continuing to regain strength, so there must be some method to her madness.”

“And she wants to play solitaire?”

“It's a harmless habit, Nurse Mayfield. She certainly can't smoke anymore.”

“Hasn't stopped her from trying to tap me or my staff for cigarettes whenever we change her bedding,” Nurse Mayfield grumbled.

“Hopefully, this tablet will give her a craving for FreeCell.”

She eyed the tablet with curiosity. “Is that one of ours, Doctor?”

“Yes, courtesy of our friends in I.T. They wiped it clean for me. She told me she wanted challenging games, so they installed some of their favorites, too. I can only pray that everyone is clothed in them.”

“I still don’t like it. Her entire stay here has been unusual. The bizarre accusations about her past, your tending to her personally —”

“You don’t have to like it, Nurse Mayfield. You don’t have to like, or do, anything unless Miss Capri rings for assistance. Until then, we’ll leave her alone with her Solitaire. Won’t we, nurse?”

With a deep, heavy sigh, she trundled away, leaving me to wonder if I should test-drive the games I.T. downloaded or just let her be surprised. Maybe she would have a heart attack and die, thus removing everyone’s concerns.

But probably not, I figured. My serum was working, keeping her alive.

It was keeping her alive.

I reminded myself of that small triumph as I unlocked the cabinet and reached for the box of micro memory cards.

Another month passed. My patient played a lot of “Solitaire” on the tablet, which in fact contained the notes and formulas for my serum. She would “play” throughout the day, then return the tablet to me in the evenings so I could incorporate her contributions into my lab work. Then, in the mornings, I would introduce her modifications of the serum into her I.V., and we would monitor the results. It was like having a lab partner back in secondary school.

If your lab partner was Heinrich Himmler.

But the serum continued to work, to my amazement. “You were right about the proteins,” I told her during one of our routine morning exams. “They were the key.”

“Just so.” She’d told the admissions staff she was ninety when she checked in, but no one would have believed it on this day. With the weight she’d gained over the past few months, her

smile was less skull-like and almost attractive. “I’ve had no complaints since you stopped my pain last month.”

“Since *you* stopped it, you mean,” I said in a hushed tone, hoping that she’d follow.

“Play along, Herr Doctor Schellenger,” she said, almost purring with her raspy, but audible voice. “I’ll make you look like a god to those nurses outside, even to that behemoth Nurse Mayfield.” She coughed a bit. “Did you bring me those new ‘Solitaire variations’ you discovered?”

“Yes, I’ve loaded them onto the tablet for you. It continues to be promising, but of course, we still have a long way to go.”

“We? No. I have just one journey ahead of me.”

I knew that but hadn’t told her.

“Our serum has limits,” she said. “My emphysema remains advanced and incurable. I will die. But you bought me enough time to help humanity.”

“Well, now that the publicity surrounding your stay has died down, you should have no trouble leaving the country to go home.”

“That would be nice.” She looked at the tablet and reopened the Solitaire app. “But before I can leave for Costa Rica, I have to make it out of hospital.”

“Not long,” Doctor Cooper said as he gazed at the floor of my patient’s hospital room. “Ninety minutes, perhaps, before the other nurses found her.”

“We’ll have a better idea once we’ve gone over the hospital’s security recordings,” Inspector Laurel said.

I’d rushed from my home to the hospital in record time upon receiving the call from Doctor Cooper, who was also in my patient’s room with us and the police, staring down in disbelief at the twisted body that lay on the floor beside the bed.

“I was — I spoke to Miss Capri just a few hours ago,” I said, panting as if I’d run the distance to Saint Burgess. “That couldn’t have been more than — just before she — before she was ...”

“Murdered, Doctor,” the inspector said. “I’m no coroner, but the broken neck and the body on the floor are good indicators of homicide.”

“The poor woman,” Doctor Cooper whispered.

I nodded. “Poor Nurse Mayfield. What was she even doing in Miss Capri’s room? I changed her I.V. before I left.”

“The nurses on duty say she responded to a ring from Miss Capri,” Doctor Cooper said. “That was the last they saw of Mayfield until another nurse came in and found her.”

“At first glance, it would seem that Miss Capri managed to get the nurse close enough to strangle with the I.V. tubing,” the inspector said. “Then she put on Nurse Mayfield’s uniform and waited for the right moment to sneak away in disguise.”

Doctor Cooper shook his head. “A ninety-year-old nurse?! How could *that* get past us?”

“She’s been getting past us for six months, sir,” I said. “Making us believe she was *just* a ninety-year-old woman. And I made it possible.”

My voice must have trailed off because neither Doctor Cooper nor Inspector Laurel asked for more details. “We did find one thing in here that may help us find her.” He held up one of those plastic evidence bags.

Its contents startled me. “Her tablet! That is, my tablet — rather, it’s the hospital’s tablet that —”

“It’s evidence, Doctor,” the inspector said. “We’ll have to take it in for analysis.”

“I doubt you’ll find any, Inspector,” I said. “She used it only to play Solitaire.

“And other games.”

I don’t remember how long I sat in my darkened lab after that. The light from my diagnostic table cast an appropriately sinister glow upon the room. I did nothing but feel angry at my patient and sorry for myself. I was torn between confessing the whole affair and just destroying any evidence that my research ever existed. But Doctor Cooper would have become suspicious, and the ultimate result would have been the same.

“Victor.”

Even when he was quiet, Doctor Cooper’s deep voice had the authority to startle me.

Before I could reply, he moved from the doorway, into the lab, toward me, smiling.

“Lock up, go home, get some sleep.”

I shook my head. “I should have let her die.”

“That isn’t what our profession is about. If it were, this wouldn’t be your second home.”

I think I chuckled and nodded.

“Will you still be able to continue your research? I mean, while Inspector Laurel’s men are holding onto that tablet you loaned Miss Ca--... your patient?”

“That was an extra from I.T.,” I said. “I keep my research on a separate tablet from that and the one I use on rounds. Plus, I stored much of my work on micro memory cards. Thank God they’re still locked in that cabinet by the microscopes.”

“Except that card.” He gestured to a spot behind me.

I turned around and, to be sure, there was a single memory card on a nearby table. I knew that all of my cards were locked up.

The one from her tablet?

“That’s odd,” I said. “I thought it was secured.”

“You’re just tired.”

“Yes. I won’t stay long, I promise. Thank you, Doctor.”

“Good night, lad.”

I watched him walk away and thanked God for such a caring mentor, and cursed myself for betraying his trust.

I inserted the card into my diagnostic tablet.

Three folders appeared on the screen: one was the Solitaire and games folder I set up; one was a folder where we saved our work on the serum; and one was labeled, simply, “Open Me”.

I clicked on the folder, which held a single video file.

I clicked on that, and she appeared, courtesy of the tablet’s camera. I was impressed that a 90-year-old woman knew how to use one. Her voice was strong, her expression steady, as she spoke.

“My dear Doctor Schellenger: I hope you don’t mind that I left this memory card with our modifications to the serum in your lab. I let myself in with the late Nurse Mayfield’s key card. She kept it in her uniform. With her cigarettes. I’m grateful to her for both.

“But before leaving, I felt compelled to tell you that, while we were seeking a way to make the serum pain-free, I sneaked in a slight variation to your formula.

“After I ultimately die from the emphysema, your marvelous serum will mutate, becoming the medium for a highly contagious virus.

“It will kill any superhuman who comes into contact with my corpse.

“Since their kind is everywhere now, my remains are bound to encounter a paramedic or mortician who will start things rolling. Of course, now you can never share our wonderful serum with the rest of the world, or tell the authorities what I’ve done without destroying your career. But after our good deed kills all superhumans, you’ll live to see your serum fulfill your dream, our dream: to serve humanity.

“Forever yours, Herr Doctor ... Angela Capri, a.k.a. Elspeth Munroe... M.D.”

“She was here all along?”

I spun around to face a familiar shadow in the doorway. A thinner shadow wearing a badge on his belt approached behind him.

For the first time, I heard the voice of Saint Burgess quaver. I knew it was from disappointment.

“And ... you *knew*?”

A few weeks later, I received another message from Scalpelle, one I’m sure she had no intention of sending. It was in the *Times* (*SuperHuman*, not London’s):

Headline: “Scalpelle Dies in Costa Rica.”

Subhead: “Former supercriminal burns to death in massive fire.”

Her entire estate burned down. Her body was completely incinerated, almost past the point of identification — and best of all, her accursed virus was consumed with her.

The cause? Smoking in bed.

Superhumans were safe.

And me?

Using Saint Burgess to conduct unauthorized research. Charges pending.

Facilitating Nurse Mayfield’s death. Charges pending.

Numerous ethical violations. Charges pending.

Revocation of my medical license ... inevitable.

I have a miraculous barrister who has been able to keep me out of prison on bail until I’m officially charged with something. Scotland Yard has my passport, of course, and they have me under constant surveillance. They’ve even come here and searched my flat a few times. I don’t know what they expected to find; I’ve told them everything.

Well, not everything. Not about the other serum I created, the one I planned to introduce into my patient’s I.V. in the event she attempted to turn her “good deed” into an opportunity to deceive me or harm others.

Not that she deserved it, but I designed it to kill quickly & painlessly.

Not that I deserve it, but as I push the plunger on the syringe, I hope I’m right.

After all, no “good deed” should go unpunished.