The Perfect Subject

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

The routine use of drugs by the military is well-established and has been since World War 2. All sides to performance enhancing drugs, but perhaps Nazi Germany is best known for developing the methamphetamine that was supplied to troops as “Germany, Awake”. But the next generation of drugs were those that altered the minds of soldiers – that might enable ordinary men to become killers.

The problem with war is that ordinary men are not killers. In World War 2 even men hyped on meth would rather shoot over the heads of the enemy that have the death of another human on their conscience. Now, in the 21st century, the task was to find a drug that allowed new behaviors to be suggested but did not leave the soldier in some kind of stupor.

I was not involved in this work and I did not want to be. It was reworking old solutions – making soldiers work harder for longer, but not making them better. I was working in nootropics, which are drugs designed to increase cognitive ability – it seemed to me the very opposite of the drugs proposed. But I was playing with the minds of people – I cannot deny what I did.

The military always need proof. They like to see things work – to watch bombs going off blowing things to bits, or bullets tearing things apart. They love tests, and they like watching the action - from a safe distance, of course. The problem with testing mind drugs is that proof of concept has to be using human subjects.

Where does the military go to find such people? They have their own “volunteers” – prisoners stuck in the military penal system sometimes serving life sentences and looking for any way out, or at least a reduced sentence. They felt that they had found their man. They described him as “The Perfect Subject”.

It seemed that Lucas Sylvan was just the kind of psychopath that they were looking to create, but as one of the developers said – “That is just the point. We don’t want to experiment by turning a timid person into a brave and ruthless killer. That would be dangerous. We want to prove it by turning somebody like Lucas Sylvan into the very opposite of what he is. If we can see it work in reverse, we will be satisfied that the mind can be modified.”

I understood that he was in custody having been sentenced for “gross insubordination” but it was much more complex than that. On an overseas posting he had killed a number of civilians in cold blood. The army had moved swiftly to cover it up, which meant only buying off two soldiers as others had died with the secret. It was in the interests of nobody that this ugly thing had happened, so quite simply it hadn’t. All that was required was that Lucas Sylvan be locked up (which he was) and he stay that way (which could be arranged).

Lucas Sylvan was ready to volunteer regardless of the risks. He was in a military prison for life and any chance to step outside that place was something to be pursued. He did not look like a monster – he was fairly small of stature, but his otherwise boyish face had a look of barely veiled menace about it.

“The opposite of what he is” sounds like a challenge, or sounded like it to the team ready to manipulate his mind. What is the opposite of Lucas Sylvan?

“We need to show that he is prepared to risk physical injury, even extreme physical injury,” said one. “We need people who will be willing to chop their own left arm to be able to kill with their right.”

“But we need to select a pattern of behavior that is very different, but obvious and observable,” said second.

I was not about to make any suggestion beyond confirming that whatever traits we were trying to develop, they should be placid – or the opposite of aggressive.

“A transsexual. A transsexual exotic dancer. Somebody committed to their craft – being the best dancer that she can be.” I cannot even recall who suggested it, or whether it just developed from talk around the table. I thought it was a joke, but the other observers nodded in approval. They were deadly serious about it.

As I say, I had no hand in it. I was just the technician giving effect to the test they demanded. It is important for peer review of research and development to have people not directly involved assessing clinical factors and overall performance. That was my role. I had no hand in the suggestions planted into the head of Lucas Sylvan. All I did was to prepare him as the subject, and let others set him on the path chosen by his commanding officers.

I had never met Lucas Sylvan before I administered the drugs. I had viewed video of his exchanges with guards and assessors so as to know what to expect. He seemed an unpleasant person, and that was borne out when I pumped the measured dose into him. I tried not to look at him, but I could sense the violence in him, just as if he were a tiger in the room with me. When he drifted into the catatonic state I was relieved.

The “suggestion” had been pre-recorded and it was quite involved. It included details of a childhood he never had, and his early feelings of gender dysphoria. He wanted to play with dolls and to grow his hair long. All his friends up to high school had been girls, which was what he wanted to be. Then later in high school he was bullied and so he joined the army to make a man of himself. It was not my voice, which was just as well.

I have to say that I felt no sympathy for him as I watched him twitch in his stupor. He was absorbing everything, and it was clearly disturbing him. Even with those closed eyes I could see that he was wrestling with these new memories and thoughts.

My thoughts were that here was a person who needed to be subdued. As time wore on the sense of danger that his presence had given before, slowly dissipated. As the recording ended, so did his dreams and his struggle. It was clear that he was asleep.

It seems incredible, but as I looked at his face while he lay it already looked different. There was a sense of peace. Even with his stubble there appeared to be a more feminine look to him, as if a new way of thinking could produce physical changes.

I took the opportunity to leave and head back to my quarters to sleep and refresh, but when I came back to the clinic I was greeted by an excited assistant.

“It is a total success,” he said. “Sylvan woke a few hours ago a changed person and with no memory of how he got here. He is asking to meet the person in charge. I told him that you would be in to see him as soon as you got here.”

We had left him to recover in a hospital room rather than a cell, but it was secure within the facility. Still, he had no sense that he was a prisoner.

“I don’t understand,” Sylvan said in a voice that sounded nothing like the man I had met the previous day, and barely sounded like a man at all. “Have I had an accident or something?” I don’t seem to be hurt?”

“There is nothing to be concerned about,” I said, running with the story we had prepared. “You had an anxiety attack yesterday. We learned all about your gender dysphoria. We understand completely. You are not the first soldier to go through this. The army does its best to help people through this. That is why I am here. If you want to transition then you don’t have to leave the service if you don’t want to, but we can offer a discharge if that is what you want?”

There were tears appearing in eyes suddenly wide and less than masculine. It was the best sign of success that I could imagine. The question was as to whether this drastic alternation of the mind was transient or sustainable. That was what we needed to know.

“It is true. I am transgender,” Sylvan said. “I always have been. I should have disclosed it when I signed up, but the truth is I was fighting it. I felt like a freak. I wanted to be like everybody else. The army seemed like the place for me because that is what the army wants to – that everybody should be like everybody else.”

“Well, you can’t fight your nature,” I said with compassion that suddenly felt genuine. “As I said, we will support you. Your condition is familiar to us. We have a program that can be followed. We offer counselling and hormone replacement. Is that what you want?”

“God, yes,” he said. “I feel I can’t live a moment longer as Lucas. It is not the real me. I want to be Lucia so badly. Lucia, but please call me Lucy.”

The last words were said in a voice that was so feminine it gave me a start. I could imagine that some transwomen would spend years developing a voice like that, but it seemed to have just sprung into existence.

“Well, look Lucy – I heard enough last night to sign you off as a genuine case, so I can put you on blockers and estrogen immediately and we can look at arranging an orchiectomy as soon as possible.” It was a rushed process designed to draw a response. If there were any reservations, we were about to hear them.

“Oh goody,” he said, with a smile and with his hands together in front in the posture of a prayer, or a prayer answered.

I inserted subcutaneous slow-release capsules in each armpit. There was no protest. In fact he was quivering with excitement.

“To be honest I am not sure that I can stay in the army,” Sylvan said. “I don’t want to take advantage. I was just hiding here. To be honest I have always wanted to be a dancer. That is not a career option in this service, is it?”

“No,” I said. “But discharge is a process and while we can start that for you now, while you are in the army we will look after you. We always look after our own. Even when there was a policy against transgender people in the armed forces, we never gave up looking after them.”

The point was that we wanted to make sure that what we had done to this dangerous man was effective. Once we were satisfied that he no longer presented a danger we were prepared to release him into the general populace, but while maintaining a watching eye for some time to come. Was this transient or sustainable? That was the question that still needed to be answered.

As I explained, I was working in nootropics, and I returned to this work leaving others to deal with Lucas now Lucy, Sylvan. In those final weeks in the army Lucy was listed under that name and issued with women’s underwear beneath standard fatigues and a set of female number 1s in which to take the final salute. Believe it or not, even in Trumpian times the army had a policy to help transitioning soldiers, and by all accounts Lucy benefit from this.

The army has the capacity to keep an eye on veterans, and if they sign up for post-discharge support programs as Lucy did, that is easy do. There are VA facilities in every state and major city, and all that was required was that the reports be copied to our neural research division. I did not take much notice of what came in until a little more than a year after I last saw this subject. I was asked to track “her” down and give an assessment. Those seeking proof were ready to move to the next stage and that meant my sign off.

Then they raised the possibility of experimenting with reversal. Could the mind altered by the drugs I helped develop be changed back? In the case of this subject that seemed a hazardous idea, but I was prepared to look at it … back then.

I went out to Las Vegas where the local VA hospital was in touch with Lucia Abigail Sylvan, ex US Army. They provided me with a residential address and a place of work, a small strip club that I understood was quite classy by local standards. It appeared that Lucy had achieved her ambition of being a dancer – the exotic dancer as had been the original implanted suggestion.

It was late in the day so I decided that Lucy would be at work, and I went to the club.

If “classy” was referring to the succession of attractive strippers and their costumes and performances, then the show seemed to justify the title, although I claim no expertise. I was on the lookout for Lucy but as the dancers were going through their third costume change it seemed to me that she was a no show. I approached the man referred to me as the manager and asked him where I could find Lucy Sylvan.

“That’s her up on stage now,” he said.

I looked across at the dancer on the long stage jutting out into the audience. She was tall and statuesque, with long blonde hair and large breasts, down to her G-string which seemed to be hiding nothing except the mound you would expect on a woman. Her face was made up but not heavily. She had a natural beauty that you would expect of a woman, and not a man. Yet there were features that suddenly seemed familiar.

I asked to visit her back stage and the manager escorted me there.

“Do you remember me, Lucy?” I said.

“Yes, I do,” she said. “You were the man I revealed my secret. You were the man who set me on this path. You were the man that saved my life.”

She had been naked minutes ago and she now wore only a robe. She stepped over to me and embraced me, her full breasts pushing against me in a way that simply had to cause me to become aroused. Bu there was such genuine warmth in that hug that it made me feel dirty. I had not saved her, I had been a party to a huge deceit that had seen the death of a human being to be replaced by this creature manipulated by an institution of violence, because that is what the army is. I felt terrible.

“I understand your performance for tonight is over. I know it’s late, but can we find somewhere to talk?” I said. It was already apparent that the transition was well advanced and that “reversal” was not wanted and would be difficult to achieve even if it was.

“Sweetie, this is Vegas,” she said. “There are hundreds of places open. Drinks, a meal, coffee, bubble tea, ice cream? You choose.” She expertly twisted her blonde hair and secured it with a clip that made it seem even more glamorous. In jeans and boots with a flouncy blouse she looked like a goddess in denim.

We found a quiet place to talk, and I listened to her story. After that first charge of hormones before she left the base she had received regular estrogen and blockers through VA. She had dropped the blockers after her orchiectomy. “Dancing is just too difficult with balls hanging where they shouldn’t be.” I was shocked to learn this. A true reversal was now impossible.

Using the retraining grant available following discharge she attended a small dance school where she learned the basics. She said that the dance instructor was a truly generous person, ready to accept a soldier want to be both a dancer and a woman, and to help her be both. Others in the class were the same – generous with their understanding and their patience. “I know now how lucky I was to have such people around me so early in my transition. Plenty in my position are not so fortunate. I learned that being a woman is a state of mind, but presenting as a woman is the way you carry yourself. It is a dance that girls grow up know, but a girl like me can only start to learn when she starts living her true life.”

She went to Las Vegas with another girl from the school, and she was able to keep the fact that she was anatomically male a secret from almost anybody. They got chorus-line work for a while. “It was strenuous and demanding,” she said. “Worse than a five-mile run with a full pack because it was that every night.” Looking at her it was hard to imagine what she may once have looked like as a soldier.

“The thing about dancing in a strip club is that it is easy and there is also the chance to build roles and be a little interpretive. We do our own choreography. The only requirement is that it excite men, and it seems that I have some knowledge of that. I can’t recall ever being attracted to women, but maybe I was, because I certainly know what a man wants to see from a woman.”

It seemed hard for me to ask but I felt that I should. What about sex?

“I am saving up for my surgery,” she said. “I have met plenty of transgirls who have sex – some of them an awful lot, but that is not for me. I want to have sex with a man who thinks of me only as a woman, and I can’t be that until I get rid of what I have. Sure, I do private dances, and sometimes I use my hand or my mouth if he is prepared to pay the big bucks. Surgery is expensive. But when I get my pussy I want it to be special. It is my prize for all this effort, and you don’t want to soil your prize, do you?

The look she gave me melted my heart. There is no other way to say it – I was prepared to be hard hearted to do what I had to do, and now it was water.

She was close to achieving her dream. Did it matter that this was a dream manufactured by those I worked with? What were the dreams of Lucas Sylvan. Perhaps he dreamed of murder and the destruction of lives, or maybe he dreamed on nothing and just wreaked havoc? But here was a gentle and loving soul – graceful and pretty, in her own way. What she dreamed of was happiness, and I expect that involved love and surrendering herself to a man who loved her.

“How much do you need to pay for the operations?” I asked her.

“Actually, I have enough, but I just need to pull together what I need to cover myself while I take leave from work. They don’t want to lose me. I have said that I need some surgery but it will be weeks off work and I am on my own.”

“I can help you with that,” I told her.

It must be the first time in my life that I acted on impulse. I tend to scorn people for doing that. I believe in analysis and planning, and making decisions with care and reason. This was one from the heart. It just seemed the right call, and it was.

I knew that it would set me against the army, but I was ready to deal with the consequences when thy happened, in whatever way I could. What I knew more that anything was that Lucy had to become the women she now wanted to be, and that meant fully transitioned and post surgery. At least like that I could say to the army that reversal was not a workable option.

The way she was thinking, reversal would have been worse than death.

You may say – “but she is not she. The person she was would be entitled to reversal. What about him?” But if you knew him you would not ask. He was a monster. She is an angel.

We found a clinic and I rented a place nearby. I was there throughout the whole thing. I was at her bedside while she wept tears of joy when she first looked at the bandages. I held her when she went through the first dilation, and later I was there to help her through each dilation after that. It was so intimate and personal that seemed impossible that we would not be drawn closer together. And she needed time before she could even get close to the physicality required to return to dancing. That meant weeks just sharing a home together, almost as if we were husband and wife.

I had to call back to base. I lied and said that Lucas/Lucy had not been found yet, but I was very close. It might even have been the first time I lied about anything, but as far as I knew it had worked.

I had paid for the surgery by funds transfer, so Lucy’s savings which were largely in cash, seemed to allow us to stay under the radar. But time was running out. I had a contract with the Department of Defence and I would have to reappear.

We were on the very edge of arranging that. There would be a new ID for Lucy. I could set her up and then finish my contract. We could be together forever. It is what we both wanted.

But then I turned up at our rented unit and there was Lucy with a man. He was not in uniform but I recognized him as one of the assistants to an officer engaged in our program. Lucy had made him welcome. He was sitting on the sofa with a bottle of beer while she made him the sandwich she had offered in her usual thoughtful way.

“You are a hard man to track down, Doc,” he said. “And it looks like you have found Lucy. Can I just say that from the look of her, reversal is going to be difficult.”

“Impossible,” I said. “I was just preparing a report to that effect.”

“Well, I am not that is going to wash with the brass,” he smirked. “Some say the project is not complete without reversal.”

“Reversal?!” Lucy was standing behind him looking distressed, while he was oblivious to it.

“You know who we are talking about,” I tried to reason with him, even though I knew he was just following orders making logic irrelevant. “Who would want that person back, even if it could be done. But it can’t. She is a woman now.”

“It ain’t for you and me to decide,” he said, as if it was a phrase he used regularly.

I barely noticed what Lucy did until it was done. Her pale manicured hand reached down and took him by the chin, lifting his head slightly before twist it violently towards me. In a flash she had broken his neck. I was looking at his dead face – an expression of shock and puzzlement at the same time.

She let him slump across the sofa.

“He was going to ruin our perfect dream,” she said. It seemed like the complete excuse to her, but I was horrified and I had to conceal it. She rushed to me and I hugged her, and the moment that she was in my arms I could forgive her anything.

That night she drove his car with his body in it to a dangerous stretch of road, while I followed in our car. She put him in the driver’s seat and we pushed the car off the road down a steep bank.

She wanted to proceed with our plan as if nothing had happened, and we did. But something had happened. Lucas Sylvan was never found, and I finished my contract. We are living together now, as husband and wife.

I love her, but I cannot forget what she did, so quickly and so easily. It makes me think that there is still a thread of Lucas Sylvan inside the woman who is my partner in life. He was the perfect subject, and now he is my perfect wife … I hope.

The End

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Erin’s seed: “The military have come up with a drug that makes people very docile and credible, they'll believe almost anything they are told and they want to test it on condemned criminals. One convict who is "volunteered" for the program is told that he is a transsexual exotic dancer and it turns out he's really good at it too. The program ends and the higher ups want to change him back as part of the test. But the researcher running the program helps Candy escape. She goes to Vegas to work and earn the money to finish the physical transformation but the military tracks her down …”.