

## EPISODE 5

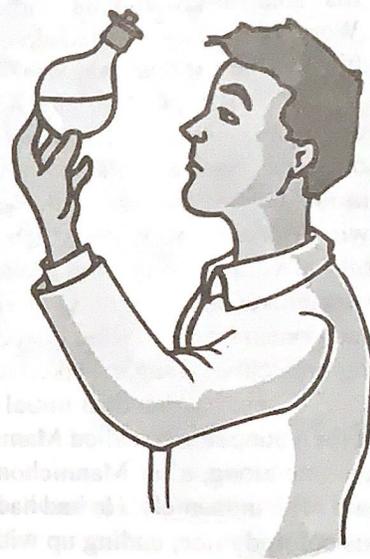
IRWING SHAW

### THE MANNICHON SOLUTION – 2

Back in the laboratory, he carefully anointed the new mouse with tobacco tar, noticing meanwhile that the first mouse was still happily frisking in its invigorating suds. He put the mouse he was carrying down in an empty glass dish, its sides just a little too high for jumping. Then he poured some of the mixture with dioxotetramercphenoterogene 14 in it over the new mouse. For a moment, nothing happened. He watched closely, his face six inches from the glass pan. The mouse sighed and lay down quietly and died.

Mannichon sat up. He stood up. He lit a new pipe. He went to the window. He looked out the window. The moon was sinking behind a chimney. He puffed on his pipe. Somewhere here, he sensed with his scientist's trained intuition, there was a cause and there was an effect. The effect was fairly evident. Two dead mice. But the first mouse, the white mouse, that he had put into practically the same solution, had not died, even though the stain had remained in its fur. White mouse, yellow mouse, yellow mouse, white mouse. Mannichon's head began to ache. The moon disappeared behind the chimney.

Mannichon went back to the table. The dead yellow mouse in one pan was already stiffening, looking peaceful in the clear, clean-looking liquid. In



the other pan, the other yellow mouse was surfing on the pure Floxo suds. Mannichon removed the dead mouse and put it into the refrigerator for future reference.

He went back into the mouse room, now tweaking at eleven decibels. He brought back with him a gray mouse, a black mouse and a piebald mouse. Without bothering to stain them, he put them one by one into the solution in which the two yellow mice had died. They all seemed to relish the immersion. Mannichon put all three control mice back into portable cages and then stared hard and long at the yellow mouse, still basking in its miniature Mediterranean of foamy, never-failing Floxo.

Mannichon gently lifted the yellow mouse out of the suds. He dried it thoroughly, which seemed to irritate the beast. Somehow, Mannichon got the impression that he had been bitten again. Then he carefully let the yellow mouse down into the pan in which his two yellow brethren had died and in which the three varicolored control mice had sported.

For a moment, nothing happened. Then, in his turn, the yellow mouse in the middle of the pan sighed and lay down and died.

Mannichon's headache made him close his eyes for 60 seconds. When he opened them, the yellow mouse was still dead, lying as it had fallen in the crystal-clear liquid.

Mannichon was assailed by a great weariness. Nothing like this had ever occurred to him in all the years he had been serving the cause of science. He was too tired to try to figure out what had been happening, whether it was for the better or for the worse, whether it advanced detergents or put them back 100 years, whether it moved him, Mannichon, closer to Cancer or back to Floor Wax and Glues, or even to severance pay. His brain refused to cope with the problem any longer that night and he mechanically put the dead mouse next to its mate in the refrigerator, tabbed the gray mouse, the black mouse and the piebald mouse, cleaned up, wrote his notes, put out the lights and started for home.

He didn't have the Plymouth tonight, because his wife had needed it to go to play bridge and all the buses had long since stopped running and he couldn't afford a taxi, even if he could have found one at that hour, so he walked home. On his way, he passed the Plymouth, parked in front of a darkened house on Sennett Street, more than a mile away from his home. Mannichon's wife had not told him whose home she was playing bridge in and he didn't recognize the house and he was surprised that people would still be playing bridge at two o'clock in the morning and with the curtains so tightly drawn that no beam of light shone through. But he didn't go in. His presence when she was playing bridge, his wife said, upset her bidding.

"Collect your notes," Samuel Crockett was saying, "and put them in your briefcase and lock it. And lock the refrigerator." There were now 18 dead yellow mice in the refrigerator. "I think we'd better talk about this someplace where we won't be disturbed."

It was the next afternoon. Mannichon had called in Crockett, who worked in the laboratory next door, at 11 A.M. Mannichon had arrived at the lab at 6:30 A.M., unable to sleep, and had spent the morning dipping everything yellow he could find into the solution, which Crockett had begun calling the Mannichon solution at 2:17 P.M. It was the first time anything had been called after Mannichon (his two children had been named after his father-in-law and his mother-in-law) and Mannichon was beginning, dimly to see himself as a Figure in the World of Science. He had already decided to get himself fitted for contact lenses before they came to photograph him for the national magazines.

Crockett, or "Crock," as he was called, was one of the young men who drove around in an open sports car with lascivious girls. It was only a Lancia, but it was open. He had been top man in his class at MIT and was only twenty-five years and three months old, and he was working on voluntary crystals and complex protein molecules, which was, in the Vogel-Paulson hierarchy, like being a marshal on Napoleon's staff. He was a lean, wiry Yankee who knew which side his experimental bread was buttered on. After the long morning of dipping bits of yellow everything (yellow silk, yellow cotton, yellow blotting paper) in the solution, with no reaction whatsoever, and executing more than a dozen yellow mice, Mannichon had 'felt the need for another mind and had gone next door, where Crockett had been sitting with his feet up on a stainless-steel laboratory table, chewing on a cube of sugar soaked in LSD\* and listening to Thelonious Monk on a portable phonograph.

There had been an initial burst of irritation. "What the hell do you want, Flox?" Crockett had said. Some of the younger men called Mannichon "Flox" as a form of professional banter. But then Crockett had consented to come along, after Mannichon had sketched out the nature of his visit. Enlisting Crockett's help had already paid off handsomely. He had had the dazzling idea at 1:57 P.M. of introducing drops of the solution orally to various colored mice, ending up with a yellow mouse, nearly the last of the batch in Mannichon's cages. The white

mice, the gray mice, the black mice, the piebald mice, had reacted with vigor after a few drops of the solution, becoming gay and belligerent. The yellow mouse had quietly died twenty-eight minutes after its drink. So now they knew the solution worked internally as well as externally. However, Crockett had not yet come up with any ideas on how to erase the telltale ring that remained after the solution was used to take out stains. He didn't seem to be too interested in that aspect of the problem. But he had been impressed by the way even the smallest portion of dioxotetramercphenoterrogene 14 had reduced the stubborn Floxo suds and had complimented Mannichon in his terse Yankee way. "You've got something there," he had said, sucking on an LSD sugar cube.

"Why can't we talk here?" Mannichon said, as Crockett made preliminary moves to get out of the laboratory. Mannichon punched in and punched out and he didn't want the personnel department coming asking him why he had taken half a Thursday afternoon off.

"Don't be naive, Flox," was all Crockett said by way of explanation. So Mannichon put all his notes in his briefcase, arranged on shelves all the apparatus and supplies they had been using, locked the refrigerator and followed Crockett out into the corridor.

They met Mr. Paulson near the front gate. "Crock, old Crock," Mr. Paulson said, putting his arm fondly around Crockett's shoulder. "My boy. Hello, Jones. Where the hell are you going?"

"I—" Mannichon began, knowing he was going to stutter.

"Appointment at an optician's," Crockett said crisply. "I'm driving him".

"Aha," said Mr. Paulson. "Science has a million eyes. Good old Crock." They went out the front gate.

"Aren't you taking your car, Mr. Jones?" the parking-lot attendant asked Mannichon. Four years before, he had heard Mr. Paulson call Mannichon "Jones."

"Here," Crockett cut in. He gave the parking-lot attendant a cube of LSD sugar as a tip. "Suck it."

"Thanks, Mr. Crockett." The parking-lot attendant popped the cube into his mouth and began to suck it. The Lancia swooped out of the lot onto the highway, Italian, the Via Veneto, national magazines, the Affluent Society, open to the sun, wind and rain. Ah, God, Mannichon thought, this is the way to live.

#### NOTES

\*LSD - lysergic acid diethylamide, a synthetic drug causing heightened sense perception, anxiety and hallucinations.