

As a journalist, Benita tried to keep things professional with the doctor she was reporting on. But she soon fell head over heels...



The Super Surgeon

Me and Paolo

Cup of coffee in hand, I sat at my desk and logged into my emails.

I want you to do a story on regenerative medicine, read the latest one from my boss.

Going about my job as a journalist, I did some research and one name kept popping up.

Paolo Macchiarini. He was a thoracic surgeon who'd made a name for himself as one of the world's leading regenerative medicine researchers.

He'd constructed an artificial airway made of plastic in a lab, which could be coated in the patient's own stem cells.

It was the first of its kind, and it had the potential to transform lives.

His nickname was the Super Surgeon.

We decided to do a documentary about his work, and Paolo agreed.

He was going to be operating



He wooed me

on the youngest ever transplant patient and we wanted to film it.

Two-year-old Hannah Warren had been born with a rare birth defect and this procedure appeared to be her last hope.

One of Macchiarini patients, Christopher Lyles, 30, had already died after having the procedure.

He'd been diagnosed with tracheal cancer and the surgery was meant to prolong his life, but sadly it hadn't.

When Paolo walked through

the door of the hotel bar to meet me and a colleague, our eyes met.

I felt a little spark run through me.

'It's lovely to meet you,' he said.

I felt myself blushing like a schoolgirl at his George Clooney looks and Italian accent.

Snap out of it, I thought to myself.

After several days of filming, Paolo and I had dinner at the hotel we were staying at.

He wanted to know everything about me and was a great listener.

Then he confided about how lonely he'd been since he'd separated from his wife many years earlier.

Later, when he got out of the lift at his floor, he held the doors open. Then he leant in and kissed me.

I was shocked, but it was so

incredibly romantic.

Oh no, I'm falling for this man, I thought.

As a journalist, it felt wrong. But it was impossible to deny our connection.

We started meeting regularly and I opened up to him.

'My ex-husband is dying of brain cancer and I'm struggling to cope,' I told him tearfully.

'I'm here for you,' he replied, putting his hand on mine.

Soon, my ex passed away and I was devastated.

My nine-year-old daughter had lost her dad.

'I want to do something to cheer you up,' Paulo said.

He got me on a plane and when

we landed in Venice, I was flabbergasted.

He'd booked a luxurious five-star hotel, with flowers and champagne in the room.

'This is for you, my love,' he smiled.

During a romantic gondola

'I want to do something to cheer you up'

CONTINUED OVER...

Miracle worker or MONSTER?

Paolo's web of lies was beginning to unravel...

ride, we confessed our love for each other.

I was swept off my feet. But when we got home, I told him I needed time to myself. Aside from the grief, I was going through a bout of bad health. While I was recovering, Paolo came to visit.

'I got this for you,' he said, handing me a red rose. I was smitten.

We picked up where we left off and continued jet-setting. Money was no object for him. He treated me to the best hotels, the most expensive wine and beautiful jewellery.

I'm living in a fairy tale, I thought.

I was in awe as he went out of his way to treat patients around the world.

He had five phones, one for each language he spoke.

Soon, Paolo came to my place for Christmas.

He handed me a small box containing a stunning white gold diamond ring.

'Is this what I think it is?' I said. Paolo grinned.

I sat there, wide-eyed with shock.

'Yes, I'll marry you,' I said eventually.

Aside from close friends and family, we agreed to keep the engagement private until my documentary aired.

Sadly, Hannah passed away after we finished filming, as she'd suffered complications.

Then I learnt something new about Paolo.

'I'm part of a secret network



We got engaged

of doctors who take care of high-profile clients,' he said.

He claimed to know the Clintons, Barack Obama and Vladimir Putin.

Seeing as he was a world-renowned surgeon, it made sense.

But then a news article was published about him being investigated for scientific misconduct.

He convinced me it was a witch hunt, so I agreed to help him put out statements denying the allegations.

We soon got talking about our wedding, which lifted the mood.

'Let me take over the planning,' he smiled.

I was hesitant, but knowing he had impeccable taste, I let him take the reins. All he asked me to

do was pay for my dresses and the invitations.

He wanted a big Catholic wedding.

'But we're both divorcees,' I pointed out. 'No priest is going to marry us.'

'I'll sort it, don't worry,' he said. After months of looking, he told me he was going to the Vatican because the Pope was a client of his.

He called me with some news.

'Guess what? The Pope has offered to marry us!' he said.

It sounded so outrageous that I didn't believe him.

Can the Pope even marry people? I wondered.

I searched online and found out he'd recently married 20

couples at an event.

It was still hard to wrap my head around it all.

Then, he had another idea. 'You should live with me in Barcelona after we're married,' he said.

'I'm not sure about that,' I replied.

It took a lot of persuading, but eventually I agreed.

I quit my job and Paolo said he'd enrolled my daughter at a school there.

I'd seen pictures of his beautiful cliff-top house and I wanted to visit.

But every time we booked plane tickets, Paolo would cancel them with a lame excuse.

I became suspicious and it caused a lot of arguments.

Two months before the big day, I got an email from a colleague.

He'd found out the Pope

'The Pope has offered to marry us!'



The artificial windpipe



Christopher Lyles

wasn't going to be in Italy on our wedding date.

I realised with horror that our whole day was a sham.

'Why would you do this to me?' I shouted at Paolo.

'There is something I haven't told you,' he said. 'I'm a sniper for the CIA. Being a doctor is my cover.'

I didn't believe a word of it.

I don't know this man at all, I thought.

Sending an email to our 300 guests that the wedding was off was humiliating.

I pretended to forgive him.

But all the while, I was

a message confronting him. *Wow, was all he replied.*

I realised he was a compulsive liar and I was furious.

He must be lying in his medical life too, I thought.

Feeling an obligation to expose him for the con man he was, I wrote an article about what he had put me through.

When it was published, an Italian woman named Ana Paula sent me a message on Facebook.

I translated it and realised she was in a relationship with Paolo.

They had got together three years before I'd met him, and they even had a daughter.

The little girl had been born around the time he'd proposed to me.

I was shocked, but I wasn't surprised.

Then I found out that he wasn't even separated from his wife, a different Italian woman.

He'd been juggling several families for years without any of us knowing.

While I was still reeling from it

all, a new documentary aired about Paolo that shocked the world. As I watched it, chills ran through me.

Journalists and a few of his colleagues had discovered the artificial windpipes were bogus.

As they were an experimental procedure, for legal and ethical reasons, he should have tested it on animals first.

But he hadn't. Instead, Paolo had lied to Andemariam Teklesenbet

Beyene, 39, and used him as a human guinea pig.

Two years later, he'd died after the windpipe rotted and slowly suffocated him.

In total, Paolo had operated on eight patients, and all but one had died.

It appeared he had given them the artificial windpipes, knowing they didn't work.

I was engaged to a monster, I realised.

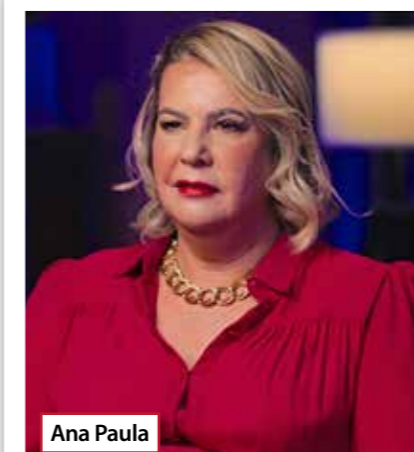
Eventually, he was charged with three counts of aggravated assault and pleaded not guilty.

The case went to trial and I was nervous to see him in court.

However, when I was across the room from him, I felt nothing.

Paolo was found not guilty on two of the counts, but was convicted on one count of

'Why would you do this to me?'



Ana Paula



Me now

Bad Surgeon is out now on Netflix

causing bodily harm. He received a suspended sentence.

However, he tried to appeal it.

It backfired and he was convicted of aggravated assault on all three counts and sentenced to two years and six months in prison.

It was still no justice for the families of his patients. He was fired, but he's still free, awaiting the start of his prison sentence.

He's never once apologised to me or to the families.

It took me a while to stop blaming myself for not seeing his true colours. But like any master manipulator, he was an expert at fooling people.

Now, I'm in a very happy, loving relationship with my boyfriend Martin.

But thanks to Paolo, it's a struggle not to let trust issues get the better of me.

Still, it's nothing compared to what the patients and their families have been through.

What Paolo did was unbelievably callous and evil.

That's why I'll keep sharing my story, because I want everyone to know the real Paolo Macchiarini.

Far from the Super Surgeon, he's one of the biggest fraudsters in medical history.

Benita Alexander

Photos: Nutopia/Netflix/Instagram @bentitalexander_official