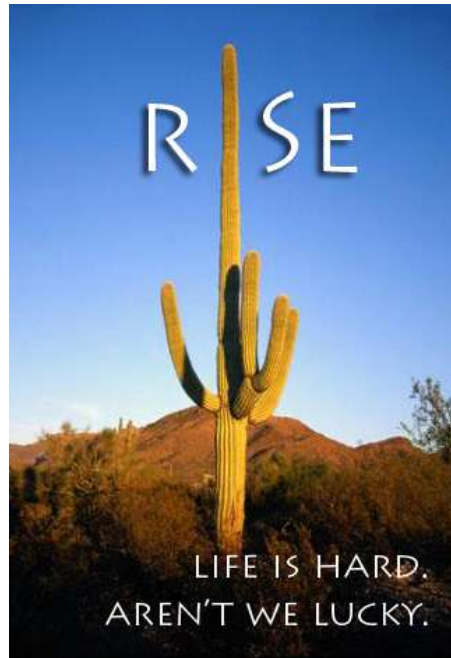


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A television series created by Russell Martin and Lydia Nibley

**A sexy and rule-breaking doctor, who has recently moved to Rise, Arizona with her new husband and two teenage daughters, discovers that the experimental medication she is prescribing to her patients surprisingly lifts their libidos, their spirits, and their passion for life—and that when it comes to drugs and sexuality, things are never simple.**

What if a drug tested by a pharmaceutical company as medically “legitimate” also affected the body, mind, and spirit in a combination of ways not everyone is comfortable with—making sex more intense and pleasurable, stimulating libido, increasing empathy and feelings of love, and alleviating fear? Would the FDA sanction it? Would the DEA stay away from it? Would society approve of it? And would it make life better, worse, or just more maddeningly complicated?

***Rise*** is set in the fictional contemporary town of Rise, Arizona, and mines the richly connected relationships of its ensemble cast of characters to explore subjects of enormous interest—the complexities, curses, and blessings of sexuality, as well as the universal desire to find real fulfillment and *feel good*. Like people everywhere, the characters in ***Rise*** are willing to take risks as they seek satisfying and meaningful lives, risks that often have downsides, whether they acknowledge them or not.

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The search for an expansive and pleasurable life has often led to the intriguing intersection of pharmaceuticals and sex in our recent history, as well as our past:

- Miners from a Welsh coal-mining town who took an experimental drug for heart pain reported that the drug induced strong penile erections—and an otherwise failed medication became Viagra, a drug now taken by millions of men for ED and by men and women as a recreational enhancement of sex;
- Chemists experimented for decades with ecstasy (MDMA), a psychoactive drug that induces feelings of well being and open-heartedness, and provides clarity, insight, and a lack of inhibition. The drug was eventually criminalized, yet its therapeutic benefits continue to be studied and many health professionals are working to make it legally available again; and
- Healers and magicians throughout time and around the world have pursued aphrodisiacs and psychotropics made from sacred plants, the sex organs of animals, and a wide array of substances believed to open people to their larger potential and enhance vitally important pleasures.

The characters of *Rise* are profoundly affected by the many curses and blessings of sexuality as they explore the truth that sex can be a great gift and that it can also utterly fuck up your life.

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## KEY CHARACTERS

■ **Dr. Belle McClellan** is a powerful and sensual woman who takes the challenges of twenty-first century medicine head-on and rather recklessly. Recently married and eager to make a fresh start, Dr. Belle McClellan and her husband Tony Roybal have moved from Los Angeles to Rise, Arizona with Belle's two teenage daughters. Belle is a city girl at heart, a refugee from a large research hospital, yet she quickly finds her place in intimate small town life and an internal medicine practice she thinks she can run exactly as she pleases—side stepping many of the laws and ethics that govern her profession.

Dr. McClellan is challenged when patients in her new practice report life-changing side-effects after taking an experimental allergy medication called SDM8—some for the better, and others much for worse. Belle is intrigued by the sense of emotional expansiveness and the increased libido her patients report, and rather than being rigidly concerned about potential negative effects or misuse of the drug, she provides it to patients who, she believes, have other medical, emotional, and even recreational needs.

In championing SDM8 and the way it broadens and deepens human experience, Belle runs her practice like a frontier doctor who makes up the rules as she goes. She understands that she puts her license to practice at risk, yet she believes that her

greatest responsibility as a physician is to her patients' total health—every aspect of their wellbeing—and that supporting them in taking chances may be a key to helping them live well.

■ **Antonio “Tony Junior” Roybal** is Dr. Belle McClellan's husband. Tony grew up in Rise and once hoped to never live there again. When Tony and Belle have conflict, the sparks fly, and when they are in sync, they engender sparks of a different and much sexier kind. Tony is big-hearted, funny, emotionally labile, and eagerly throws himself into the challenge of becoming an exemplary step-father to Belle's two daughters.

Tony, an experienced reporter recently fired in the midst of a scandal at the *Los Angeles Times*, takes on the management of the town's newspaper when the editor suddenly dies. Tony is invigorated by doing battle with his new boss, the owner of the local paper and with corrupt local officials in order to try to do some real good for a change. Tony is determined to turn a paper that is currently a silly local rag and the mouthpiece of its owner into a real news organization that investigates important issues and local stories. He's conflicted about Belle's need to keep the impact of the drug under wraps and believes his journalistic ethics requires him to take the subject head on. It is impossible to keep the secret of SDM8, and explosive revelations seriously threaten Belle's practice, and throw the town into chaos.

■ **Kat and Valerie McClellan**, Belle's 15- and 13-year old daughters. The two girls spent their early years on the west side of Los Angeles, and are horrified to find themselves living in the back of beyond. They can't believe their mother has fallen in love with and married a “Mexican,” and they are entirely grossed out by their parents' sexually charged relationship—even the very few bits of which they are aware. Kat's life changes when she connects with pregnant teenager Melody Shavers and again when she privately discovers crystal meth. Kat's younger sister Valerie has secretly taken to her stepfather, although she denies it to her older sister. When Tony overhears Valerie talking to friends about “her parents,” he's moved by her budding acceptance of him, even though he knows there's a long way to go.

■ **William Lee** is a pharmacist—a handsome, starchy man in his early thirties, who hates being forced to dispense birth control pills or STD treatments, and who, on Sundays, becomes “Pastor Lee” at a small evangelical church where he and the nineteen members of his congregation await the Rapture and are utterly determined not to allow any sexual funny business in the meantime. William struggles to keep secret the fact that his wife left him for another woman—he claims he's a widower, in fact—and he believes that sexuality is foremost a test imposed by the devil to sort the wheat from the chaff. He's driven mad by Dr. McClellan's moral relativism; life is *not* colored in shades of gray as far as he's concerned, yet he does view the notoriety that SDM8 increasingly brings to Rise as an opportunity to launch a larger career as a television evangelist, which he attempts to kick-start with a Sunday-morning radio show on a local country station.

The cultural wars play out combatively but also with real humor in Rise, as people experience the very personal impact of legal and illegal drugs, and decide either to embrace or reject the idea that mood- and mind-altering substances have a place in their lives. William Lee is a soldier on the front lines of these culture-wars, and feels that nothing less than the future of the world is at stake.

■ **Ruth Lawrence** operates Rise’s video store—complete with a private back-room where the films she offers meet her customers’ interests of myriad kinds. The widow of a doctor who served the town for decades, Ruth knows and protects many people’s secrets. She sold her husband’s practice to Belle McClellan and is her close friend, and at times she tries to be Belle’s conscience as well. Ruth hasn’t been a great mother to her own children, and finds it easier to provide mothering to friends in the homey refuge of her garden and painting studio—and hers is a humane and lusty wisdom. Ruth’s late husband Jim was her great love, and she hasn’t recovered from his death, but when she finds an unfinished letter from him in a box of papers in his office, she senses his posthumous encouragement for her to seek a sexual relationship again, even if it has the potential to disappoint, and even though she is battling recurring cervical cancer and isn’t sure how much time she has left.

■ **Dr. Richard Harkins** is an ambitious pharmaceutical company executive and research scientist who comes to Rise bent on securing his personal fortune through managing the SDM8 project, but who discovers a quirky desert lifestyle—and Ruth Lawrence, who at last offers him what he truly desires and believes he deserves. Richard’s relationship with Ruth blossoms powerfully, despite her illness, and the two forge a unique connection in the time they have together.

The pharmaceutical company becomes aware of the gold-mine in a bottle it unwittingly may have created, but also tries desperately to keep the emotional effects of the drug quiet until the clinical trial is completed, for fear of being shut down by the FDA or DEA. The town of Rise develops an underground reputation as a New Age hot spot and a place associated with sexual expression, which creates considerable backlash among the more conservative members of the community.

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## RECURRING CHARACTERS IN SEASON ONE

■ **“Tony Gordo”** and **Estela Roybal**, Tony Junior’s parents, are in the midst of a public and very histrionic separation after forty-six years of marriage. Tony Gordo does his best to drive Estela mad with jealousy with his notorious flirting and occasional flings. For her part, Estela is a *curandera*, a traditional healer who cures *mal de ojo*, “evil eye,” *espanto*, *susto*, *mal aire*, and an array of maladies with treatments that are decidedly unlike those employed by her daughter-in-law. Estela prays to the Blessed Virgin to rain torments upon her husband, and gleefully tells anyone who will listen that she left her husband because his “chorizo” is so small, and because a woman can only take so much—or so

little. This bit of gossip is meant to keep women away from Tony Gordo, and the two remain quite obviously in love, despite the fireworks.

■ **Carlos and Jill Muñoz**, in their late twenties, are two of Belle’s patients. Carlos, a laid-off copper miner and a big, tender bear of a man, experiences the amazing side-effects of SDM8—which are rapidly changing his life. Married to Jill right out of high school, Carlos is in love with his wife in powerful new ways and is desperate to become a father. Jill keeps the fact that she takes birth-control pills secret from Carlos, and works to sustain the fiction that she is actively trying to become pregnant. Jill wants a bigger life, but one without the constraints of motherhood or the need to grow up. Carlos’s effusive new desire for her—and for a deeper emotional connection to her—feel smothering, and she considers leaving him not long after SMD8 begins to transform him into the kind of husband many women dream about. But Jill prefers local playboy Todd Phelps, with whom she’s having an affair. Her secret trysts with Todd are becoming increasingly risky just as Carlos’s sudden and unexplained death raises huge concerns about the safety of SDM8.

■ **Melody Shavers**, the pregnant sixteen-year old member of William Lee’s congregation whose hymen is still intact is a young woman enthralled by her first taste of romantic love with her boyfriend, but is now terrified by the consequences and hopeful that Dr. McClellan can make the baby go away without an abortion—because that would be a terrible sin. Melody’s life is further complicated by the fact that she is unsure whether her pregnancy was caused by her boyfriend, Todd Phelps, or her father, Monroe Shavers.

■ **Todd Phelps**, in his early 20s, is a player by anyone’s estimation. It’s not rare for auto mechanic and petty-thief Todd to see several women—and at least one high-school girl—at a time, and, for their part, the women find Todd’s cowboy affectations and tight jeans, and the impressive package they contain, quite irresistible.

■ **Aldous Krug and Juan “Johnny” Baca** play important roles in Rise. Aldous is a locally renowned psychic and gardener and was a Catholic priest before he came out and crossed over to the softer New Age. Juan is a deputy sheriff and a recovering alcoholic who attentively performs his often menial, but sometimes dangerous job. He regularly faces the challenges posed by the homophobia that hasn’t, by any means, abandoned the town of Rise, yet he views himself not as a gay cop, but rather as a man who finds his life’s purpose both in his relationship with Aldous and in his efforts to put something of a human face on law enforcement.

■ **Mitch and Elizabeth Lamar** flirt with the swinging lifestyle for a time and then throw themselves into it full throttle. Thrice-divorced Mitch is a lawyer who is representing Estela Roybal in her never-ending divorce from Tony Gordo. Elizabeth is Belle McClellan’s office manager and has a life-coaching business on the side. Mitch is neither aberrant nor wildly experimental, but he does enjoy wearing a bit of women’s lingerie on “dress-up” nights at home. And Elizabeth has delightfully discovered that an

exploration into the breadth and meaning of her own sexuality is far more fulfilling than crash dieting, meditation, or Pilates has ever been.

■ **Amber Nicholson** comes to town as the drug rep for the pharmaceutical company that is testing SDM8 and she also promotes a range of drugs Bell uses in her practice. Amber is a powerful young woman with a big sense of herself who has gotten in over her head by adding the selling of controlled substances to her job description. Dressed to the nines, she travels with a car full of medication samples and boxes of pamphlets as she calls on doctors throughout the region. Under her car's seats is an illicit drugstore of impressive proportion. Being a drug rep is the perfect cover for being a drug dealer, and at first, the line between the two seems an easy one to cross.

■ **Connie Lee and Suzanne Wynne** are William Lee's ex-wife and her lover. Pastor Lee makes surreptitious trips to Phoenix that seem for a time to involve the kind of dirty dealings evangelical Christians in denial seem to do best. Yet it turns out that William has been meeting with Connie, whom he still loves and respects. He bombards her with Biblical injunctions, but she counters his arguments articulately and is also deeply apologetic for the hurt she has caused him. Theirs is a continuing love story of an unusual kind and William can't help but also care for Suzanne, Connie's new partner, as well. Everything William strongly believes in is undermined in subtle and dangerous ways by his friendship with the two women, and he is forced to wrestle with his beliefs head-on when Connie and Suzanne ask him to father a child for them.

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## THE TOWN OF RISE

In Rise, people either know, or think they know, everyone else's business. Despite massive layoffs at the nearby open-pit copper mine, there are enough new people in Rise to support businesses like the Wine Bar Café and the updated coffee shop that try so hard to be hip. A small new-age enclave and a clothing-optional hot-springs resort are dramatic new additions to a rural culture in which conservative congregations swell on Sundays, and where businesses still post Bible verses on their marquees.

The dramatic beauty of the Southwestern desert surrounds a contemporary American town that includes the shabby-chic of adobe, rough lumber, corrugated tin, and doors and windows painted in bright hues. The place is neither too gritty or bleak, nor is it romanticized. Rise is grounded in the real world.

People listen to music that reflects a strong sense of place and the eclectic tastes of its characters—with a mix of cholo-punk, roots folk-rock, country, norteño dance music, and alternative rock. It's a sound track for having sex in the back-seats of cars, your bed, as well as a bed or two you may not belong in.

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**IMAGES FROM RISE**

