The Semmelweis Society

Clean Hands Award

presented to

Peter Duesberg, Ph.D.

for your courage and self-sacrifice in safeguarding patient care

by exposing institutional abuse in the medical community

Roland Chalifoux, Jr., D.O.

President, Semmelweis Society

Gil Mileikowsky, M.D.

President, Alliance for Patient Safety

May 13, 2008

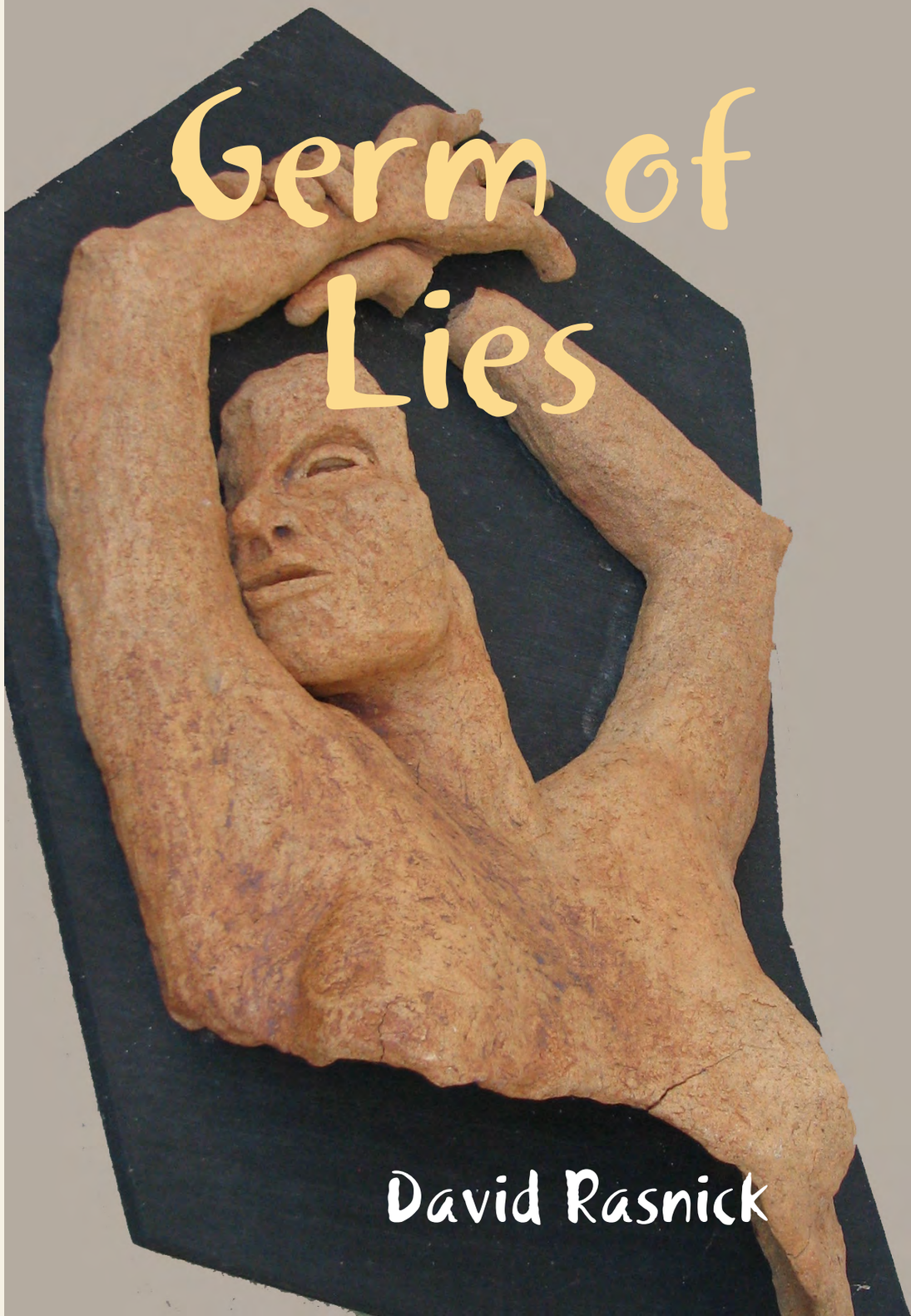
ISBN 978-0-615-25128-8

ID: 3927156
www.lulu.com

Germ of Lies

David Rasnick

Lulu



Introduction to Germ of Lies

by

David Rasnick

I use a combination of real and fictitious people and institutions to protect from direct assault those individuals responsible for the absurd and harmful myths surrounding AIDS: Namely, that AIDS is contagious and it is caused by a virus. Far abler people than I have already exposed their scandalous behavior (see Sources at the back). While many of the institutions are authentic, I want to stress that the Welter Institute for Retroviral Studies is pure fiction, intended to represent the large number of derailed institutions currently working one-way-or-another on AIDS. Stephen Julio is equally counterfeit.

At this point I have to express my gratitude to Joan McKenna of the Institute for Thermobaric Studies in Berkeley, California, for her support and help. Her persistent clarity of thought, commonsense approach, and endurance of institutional conceit, bigotry, and oppression is an example to all of us who are trying to broaden the public debate on AIDS. She is an extremely valuable source of information on AIDS and one of the most knowledgeable people on the subject.

Core's interview with Joan McKenna is an excerpt taken from an interview Harris Coulter had with Joan in 1987; it appears in full in the appendix to his book *AIDS and Syphilis: The Hidden Link* (see Sources at the back).

I want to thank Peter Duesberg of UC Berkeley for his thoroughly professional and tireless efforts to debunk the HIV theory of AIDS. As one of the premier authorities on retroviruses in the world, only he could have marshaled the mountain of evidence that he uses so compellingly and devastatingly to demolish the reigning HIV theory of AIDS.

In the sources at the back, I have included the references to Professor Duesberg's papers that appeared in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Cancer Research,* and *Policy Review* . Jad Adams in *AIDS: The HIV Myth* (see Sources) discusses Peter Duesberg's arguments against HIV in plain English.

Peter Duesberg's comments during a conversation with Alan Haan and Core Fletcher were excerpts taken from Jon Rappoport's interviews (1987-88) with him that appeared in his book *AIDS INC.: Scandal of the Century* (see Sources).

The comments of Raymond Brown which I incorporated into the format of a Congressional hearing were taken from his book *AIDS, Cancer & the Medical Establishment* (see Sources).

Core's factual statements on AIDS, syphilis, and the Tuskegee Experiment which she made to the Senate Committee hearing on AIDS were taken from Alan Cantwell's book *AIDS and the Doctors of Death* (see Sources).

Joseph Sonnabend's remarks were excerpted from the interview Jon Rappoport had with him in 1988 which appeared in his book *AIDS INC.: Scandal of the Century* (see Sources).

The principal source of Gabe Lublin's remarks about the media's coverage of AIDS was Jon Rappoport's book *AIDS INC.: Scandal of the Century*.

Throughout, I have incorporated many of the statistics on AIDS which I took from *AIDS: The HIV Myth* by Jad Adams.

David Rasnick, 1993.

****

The following was taken from *The Book of Lies* by M. Hirsh Goldberg, William Morrow and Co., Inc, New York, 1990.

Dec. 28, 1917, H. L. Mencken wrote a brief article entitled, "A Neglected Anniversary," in which he bemoaned the passing "absolutely without public notice" of "one of the most important profane anniversaries in American history—to wit: the 75th anniversary of the introduction of the bathtub into the US.

Mencken gave a bogus account of the history of the tub. He called it, "a piece of spoofing to relieve the strain of war days."

His little hoax became so widely accepted as fact that on May 23, 1926, he was moved to write a retraction of the original article and to point out how so many others had used his essay for their own purposes:

> I began to encounter my preposterous "facts" in the writings of other men. They began to be used by chiropractors and other such quacks as evidence of the stupidity of medical men. They began to be cited by medical men as proof of the progress of public hygiene. They got into learned journals. They were alluded to on the floor of Congress. They crossed the ocean, and were discussed solemnly in England, and on the continent. Finally, I began to find them in standard works of reference. Today, I believe, they are as accepted as gospel everywhere on earth. To question them becomes as hazardous as to question the Norman Invasion. And as rare.

Mencken, however, went on to draw a lesson from the public's gullibility. "I recite this history not because it is singular, but because it is typical. It is out of such frauds, I believe, that most of the so-called knowledge of humanity flows."

He further noted that what often begins as a guess—"or perhaps, not infrequently, as a downright and deliberate lie"—ends as fact "embalmed in our history books."

****

GERM OF LIES

by

David Rasnick

Core had always resisted categorizing people by profession, but marriage to Joseph Fletcher had weakened her resolve in that regard. Almost from the day Joseph was elevated to Fulbright Professor of statistics at Georgetown University their legally sanctioned cohabitation had sunken into an intolerably boring ritual. For a year she had looked forward to his sabbatical in Tokyo and had come to think of it as a trial separation. She knew it was unlikely Joseph would succumb to the delights of the Orient; further proof he lacked the imagination necessary for sensual fulfillment—particularly hers. Which was unfortunate, she thought, since it would be better if there was no moral advantage for him to exploit when he returned.

Although Joseph had been gone only a few months, Core was already a regular of the Washington cocktail circuit. She made the most of her freedom and twice had allowed a companion to stay the night. Tonight the prospects were favorable that her charm would lead to a similar conclusion. On this occasion she had her eye on the guest of honor, the French playwright Rodin Lovelard…

"Core, would you like another glass of juice?" Rodin said, then sipped his champagne.

"Oh…no thanks," she said, setting the glass down. After casually inspecting the room percolating with dignitaries and celebrities she added, "It looks like we're about the only ones not smashed. I had a friend who used to get mad at me because I thought beer was disgusting. Of course that was long before I discovered the subtle pleasures of a really fine brew. That poor guy wasted a heap of money

on drugs and alcohol, he said, trying to get as loose and uninhibited as I was naturally."

Lovelard offered a weak smile. He had been preoccupied all evening, and responded only tentatively to Core's seductive maneuverings. He was self-effacing and unpretentious; the product of African parents determined to overcome the legacy of French colonial rule. However, the combination of the latent racism infecting the upper stratums of French high society and his outspoken political views made it necessary for him to seek financial assistance outside his adopted homeland. He was likable and very sexy, Core thought. Definitely worth the effort.

"What's the matter, Rodin?" she said in a soft husky voice. "It's your night. People are here tonight because they respect your talent." Core knew that was only partly true. Most of the crowd was there for the free drinks and the gossip, and if they happened to get lucky and find someone to spend the night with, so much the better.

Rodin turned away and fidgeted with the loose change in his pocket. He finished off in one gulp what remained of the champagne. Core had just about decided he wasn't going to answer when he responded in a hesitant voice.

"I'll be glad to get back to Paris," he said examining his empty glass. "I detest these public exhibitions, but lacking Václav Havel's good fortune of having been a political prisoner I have little choice except to prostitute myself if I ever hope to get my play performed. Last year I was in New York trying to raise money, but there was little interest in anything serious or foreign. Comedies and flashy musicals were the only things with a chance of making it. Techno-art is ruining theater. High tech productions are consuming the limited resources we all compete for. You know how many plays I could put on with the money spent on one performance of *Cats*? It's becoming impossible without lots of money. Oh, I don't mean the creative part. That's about the same as always I guess. It's getting it to the public that's so damn expensive. The trick is to get my pretty face on television; then I'll be legitimate. Otherwise you're invisible, not worth serious consideration."

Core moved closer to Rodin but didn't say anything. She felt a strong urge to comfort him. Then as if a cloud had suddenly moved aside revealing the sun, he beamed a smile so warm and sincere that Core was stunned for a moment—she was at the receiving end for a change. She was well aware that she could have the same effect on men when she tried. Rodin's burst of candor had been a release. It transformed him; he was a charming, fun-loving person by nature.

In a playful spirit Lovelard said: “Why don’t you produce my play, Core? You look like a rich American.”

Regaining her balance, she joined in the ruse.

“Sure, what do you need—a hundred thousand or so to get started?” she said, assuming an aristocratic pose. “Let’s see, I could sell one of my summer homes; I’ve been meaning to unload one in New Hampshire…”

“All right, Core,” he interrupted, smiling, “I know you’re not one of the leisure class phonies—why did you come? You don’t seem to enjoy being here anymore than I do.”

“Henry James called Washington the city of conversation,” she responded. “These shindigs are supposed to be where the famous and powerful do their wheeling-and-dealing. The voyeur in me wanted to eavesdrop on some of the clandestine mischief making that goes on nonstop around this town. Except for a couple of interesting newspaper people and that CIA official—and you of course—it’s been pretty boring. How disappointing! Washington is like anywhere else, only more so—a lot of lonely people clumsily trying to get laid but wind up getting drunk instead.”

Buoyed by Rodin’s improved spirits, an idea occurred to Core.

“Rodin, I’m thinking of having some friends over Friday—nothing like this though, we’re not a very sophisticated bunch. Would you like to join us?”

“I wish I could, Core, but I leave for Paris day after tomorrow. Perhaps the next time I’m in town trying to scrap-up a few pennies.”

“Why don’t you come over tonight, then. I can warm up some gumbo and red beans and rice. I know it doesn’t sound like much, but it’s pretty good—certainly a change from all the restaurant food you’ve had to live on.”

“Now how can I turn down such a sincere offer?” he said. “I’ll pick up a bottle of wine on the way, if that’s all right.”

“We’d better hurry, the liquor stores close soon. Why don’t you make it a Bordeaux?”

“I thought you weren’t drinking tonight, Core.”

“A little red wine would be nice…especially after a million glasses of grapefruit juice.”

Lovelard found his inebriated host propped against the bar sucking on her scotch. He wanted to thank her for sponsoring the reception but she was more interested in the young man massaging her right shoulder than with Rodin’s

departure. Another wasted evening, he realized. Core was waiting at the door; she knew he wouldn't get a dime out of that crowd.

Core was determined to reduce the amount of alcohol she consumed. Last night with Rodin she had stuck to that commitment. One benefit of not drinking, she discovered, was that she could have a night life during the week and it didn't affect her work. However, she hadn't taken into account the cumulative effect of the late hours required of socializing. The nonstop weekend had finally taken its toll. An additional inconvenience this morning was having to get up an hour early to take Rodin back to his hotel in Arlington. When she arrived at work she was feeling the effects of only six hours sleep. Core was still at her desk drinking coffee when her best friend walked in and pulled up a chair across from her.

"You know, Core," Tracey said, jumping right to the point. She wasn't one to beat around the bush when there was something on her mind. "This nocturnal gallivanting of yours since Joseph left town is a bit passé, don't you think? Not to mention reckless. You're supposed to be an expert on AIDS, after all, for Christ's sake."

"I know…I know," Core said, swiveling her chair from side to side. "Writing about AIDS everyday for six years will do things to you; and you know how it's been with Joseph and me, lately. If I don't purge the old brain cells once in a while I'd go nuts. Sex just happens to do it for me, Tracey. I'm sure the good people who read *Science Week* have their excuses, too." Then wistfully she added, "At least this job keeps me in TV-dinners and Diet Coke."

Her job was much more than a pay check. Core considered AIDS one of the greatest boons to journalism this century, and was just as certain she was the person to cover it. Lately, however, AIDS news was getting stale, and she was growing increasingly dissatisfied with how routine work had become.

"Okay. I can tell my mama I did my moral duty for the week," Tracey said, then scooted her chair closer to Core's desk. In a lowered voice she continued, "Was Rodin a stud-muffin?"

"Well…I see prurient interests are still alive, if not terribly well," Core said, wanting to share the story with her best friend. "The fund-raiser was a failure and he was naturally depressed. When we got home he was nervous and uncomfortable. Maybe because I'm married or American—who knows? It's hard to believe I was the first white woman he'd ever been with. So, to help things along, I opened the Bordeaux and kept his glass full. After the wine, the gumbo and the

red beans he began to relax, finally. At one point he started complaining how hot Washington gets this time of year. Then I knew what to do. It comes in handy not having an air conditioner in this city if you need an excuse to bare a little skin. I put on the pale blue, sleeveless top you gave me on my birthday. I'm sure you remember it—you squirrel—you wanted to hang on to it. Then we went out on the porch and sat on the swing.

"He wanted to know about the usual things: my job and where I went to school. So we talked about that for a while. He never asked about Joseph, which was a relief. I guess Frenchmen take that sort of thing in stride. Rodin told me about his new play; he hadn't settled on a name for it yet. He said AIDS provided a wealth of material for artistic exploration and was surprised how little had been done. But it wasn't long before the conversation suffered from the closeness and I'm sure the wine helped too…Well, to make a delicious story short, he stayed all night. I took him back to his hotel this morning." Core leaned back in her chair and stretched both hands over her head. "I didn't get much sleep and I've got a busy day ahead."

"Core, doesn't screwin around scare you?" Tracey said without meaning to sound judgmental, but it came out that way nonetheless. Seeing that she had seared a nerve, Tracey paused nervously before thinking of what to say next. "I just can't believe we're *it* : the last generation to grow up not scared to death of sex."

Tracey's beat was mathematics and physics. Medicine and bio-technology were as arcane to her as topology and quantum mechanics were to Core. Both women took seriously their commitment to informing the other about what was going on in her particular field of expertise. So Core chose to view her friend's anxiety in professional terms.

"Don't believe it, Tracey," Core said. "Diseases have certainly influenced history, but AIDS just isn't doing what people said it would. There are some individuals, unfortunately, that take pleasure in predicting AIDS will be the worst catastrophe yet, almost like they're counting on it. But you know, somehow I don't think that's going to happen. AIDS just isn't turning out as expected. I don't know—something screwy is going on but I can't put my finger on it.

"You know what irritates me most? All those fine folks using AIDS for their own purposes. The Moral Majority just pisses me off. And when it came to AIDS, Reagan and Bush looked like befuddled parents embarrassed to discuss sex with their teenagers. We'll have to wait and see if Clinton can handle it any better. But

then I have to admit I haven't done very much to stop the siege mentality AIDS has caused.

"Well, we can't sit here all day, Tracey. I've got work to do and so do you," Core said in a cheerier tone. "When are you leaving for the Pittsburgh conference?"

"Meeting Jeff at the Pittsburgh airport. I thought we'd spend the weekend together before the conference started."

"You talk about my love life. Yours is a real fly-by-night affair. You two are always screwing on the run. Aren't you tired of all those airport trysts?" asked Core, seeking parity in the conversation.

"Sure. But as long as he's based in Denver…" she didn't finish the sentence, just shrugged her shoulders.

"Why don't you find somebody a little closer to home?…never mind, that's your business," Core said, interrupting herself. "I don't want to know." She got up and grabbed her briefcase to leave.

"Well I'm off to pester the AIDS boys for the umpteenth time. Pray to Our Lady of Perpetual AIDS Conferences for me, Tracey. I guess I'll see you in a couple of weeks, then."

Core Fletcher became a professional journalist after discovering that with only a masters degree there was no future for her as an industrial microbiologist. She was certainly bright enough for a Ph.D. degree, but the love affair with her thesis adviser had gotten in the way. Eventually, the relationship with her mentor went sour and she felt obliged to leave the department. She received a masters degree in microbiology from the University of North Carolina as a consolation prize. School had become tiresome anyway and she was ready to get on with her life.

After leaving Chapel Hill, she got a job at McPherson Pharmaceuticals, which was quite a coup for someone with only a masters, and that from a school other than the Ivy League. She figured the reason she was hired was that the company had some sort of affirmative action policy to hire women and hadn't reached its quota. While at UNC, Core had endured a strain of gender abuse peculiar of academe, but she was a little surprised to find that the biases of the university were perpetuated in industry. Her Ph.D.'d colleagues at McPherson assumed that her intellectual powers were inferior to theirs. She was ignored when she tried to discuss her work with an all-too-often less than competent

supervisor. Core had a very good sense of which control experiments were essential to the interpretation of the results, but to her continued frustration and dismay, less perceptive colleagues would overrule her.

It soon became clear that there was only one recourse available to anyone with her meager credentials. If she wanted to pursue a meaningful career in science she needed a Ph.D. However, she had had enough of the bullshit factories that produced her "enlightened" colleagues. So, she left science, such as it was, for a career in science journalism, where she interpreted the discoveries of scientists for the lay reader.

Science is at heart a quest to understand. But the scientists' abilities to apprehend the complex and powerful forces of nature seemed definitive proof—especially to the scientists themselves—that they alone were the ablest judges of their profession and how it affected society. One ought to defer to the experts.

Core knew that this was dangerous bunk. But, despite her previous experiences, she still respected science as a noble enterprise, and believed that most scientists were thoughtful, erudite, and some even visionary. Nevertheless, she wasn't entirely comfortable with society's acquiescence to the scientists. She was acutely aware of their limitations and shortcomings.

Many people picture the scientist as a tedious and colorless individual. They believe a meticulously developed hypothesis guides the elaborate experiments, with the results of all that heroic labor added to the cornucopia of scientific facts accrued since Galileo. This stereotype angered Core; not so much because it misrepresented reality, which of course it did, but that it did such a disservice to science and society by maintaining the gulf of ignorance and suspicion that separates them. Scientists are not the disinterested, absent-minded professors portrayed in the movies and on television. Many have tremendous egos, with appetites for fame and wealth to match.

The majority of scientists, however, are just ordinary people, pleased with doing work they enjoy. The most creative of them have a well developed and unrestrained sense of fun and frolic. Indeed, the principal activity in the better laboratories resembles play—albeit of a high level.

An hypothesis is nothing more than a good question, providing the impetus to work, rather than, as many believe, the guide to eventual success. And to the intuitive scientist, accident, error, and luck are the three most valuable tools of the trade, essential to real discovery.

Core wanted to write a series of articles revealing this ever-present and indispensable human dimension of science which perennially goes unreported. Regrettably, the editors of *Science Week* were interested only in "science"—not scientists.

Two

This year's AIDS conference was being held in the convention center at the Watergate complex overlooking the Potomac. Core was running late so she took a taxi to avoid a parking hassle and was dropped in front of the architectural monstrosity forever linked with Richard Nixon. It was a beautiful day; she would have rather spent it out doors. The air smelled delicious and the cicadas were buzzing their shrill song of late summer. She wasn't looking forward to spending the week inside the Watergate, breathing its artificial atmosphere.

Core had registered in advance. Nevertheless, she still had to wait in line to check in and pick up her ID. Fortunately, the line for names beginning with E through H was moving swiftly. In five minutes she had reached the registration desk.

"Sally, you can keep that packet of material. I don't need any more promotional stuff from the DC Chamber of Commerce," Core said, apologetically.

"Sure honey, don't worry about it," said the soft-spoken Southern lady in the wheelchair. "You reporters don't cause me near the problems them doctors do, anyhow. They act like they're on Candid Camera or something they're so self conscious—oh, you're too young to know about that show. You probably see these doctors all the time but there're strange birds to me. Half of 'em walk around like they got a guilty conscience or something, and they're always making mistakes and I've yet to hear one own up to it."

Since there was no one in line behind Core, Sally felt like talking.

"You know, I've been doing these conventions for a long time. My first one was the Medical Association of something-or-other, and we had so many problems I almost quit 'cause them doctors were running me ragged. One would tell me to do something and before you could turn around, another one would change it.

"Or, if they're not on the list of registrants, they storm in here complaining they sent their registration six months ahead of schedule; but it turns out they hadn't, so they begin blaming the secretaries. Well that excuse was wearing thin

by the middle of the second day, and it dawned on me that not getting that nursing degree wasn't such a tragedy after all. I'm sorry carrying-on like this, but it's nice talking to somebody who listens, for a change."

Sally got back to the business at hand and pulled out Core's registration form. "Ah yes…here we go—Core Fletcher of *Science Week*." Sally's face beamed with recognition. "Honey! I know who you are. I love your stuff. It's like you're writing just for me. I catch up on the latest issues at the dentist's—he's good enough to put 'em in the waiting room. Darling, I hope you don't think I'm being pretentious, but I feel like I understand the things you're talking about."

"Sally, that is the highest compliment anyone can give me. Thanks. Can I get you a cup of coffee? It looks like you're glued to this table for awhile."

"Oh, no thanks. If I start drinking that stuff I won't stay glued here for long. Have yourself a good conference, honey."

"I'll visit some during the breaks," Core said.

From the lobby Core heard a voice on the PA system leaking from the auditorium. The opening ceremonies were just beginning.

"I'd like to welcome all of you to the Fourteenth International Conference on Retroviruses and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome. My name is Fin Shea. I am the conference coordinator and I would like to make a few announcements before the sessions begin. This will be the largest of these meetings to date. There are fifty-three countries represented by over eighteen thousand participants and more than fifteen hundred reporters. As you may have noticed, there are two television cameras positioned at the rear. They will only be used during tomorrow's afternoon session. Please take advantage of our service booths in the lobby. There will be someone present at all times throughout the conference to assist you. If I can be of help myself, my office is located through the doors behind you and to the right, room 102.

"Now I'll turn the conference over to the chairman, Dr. Alonzo Baldassarre."

"Excuse me, is that seat taken?" Core asked, sneaking in the back row of the giant auditorium. The lights were turned down but it was bright enough to see that there were still plenty of unoccupied seats. That was to be expected since the first order of business each morning was usually devoted to housekeeping and administrative chores.

"No. Help yourself," he answered in a low, sensual tone. Core was instinctively attracted by his pleasing voice.

"How did Alonzo get to be chairman again?" she whispered. "I thought after all that grumbling over the program he put together for the Amsterdam meeting he'd be lucky to judge a high school science fair."

"He had nothing to do with the program. It's his position at the NIH that keeps him ever present. Besides, being chairman is an innocuous function. The real power to deal with here is Stephen Julio. You've got to give Julio credit. There aren't many people who could have pressured the Clinton administration into retracting Bush's ban on HIV infected participants entering the country. It was close though. The meeting was almost moved to Amsterdam again to avoid the hassel."

"I know the director of the Welter Institute quite well." she said. "I've interviewed Julio close to twenty times by now I guess."

"Thank you Fin. It's an honor to once again chair this most important congregation of international scientists..."

"So you're a reporter. Who are you with?"

"*Science Week*. I'm Core Fletcher."

"So that's how you say it."

"Yeah, Core—rhymes with story. It's the Greek spelling that throws people. My father named me after Socrates' teacher."

"Shh!" said a bespectacled professor-type who turned to glower at them. "We're *trying* to hear."

"We're disturbing people," he said, "lets go outside to talk, unless you want to stay for the lecture."

"Sure—why not? What I came to cover doesn't really start until tomorrow."

On the way out of the auditorium, Core glanced at her companion's ID badge: Alan Haan, University of California San Francisco.

"Doctor Haan, I..."

"Call me Alan. I'm not a physician, I don't need the constant reassurance."

"Well then, Alan. I made a new friend this morning, maybe she can tell us where to get a Coke."

"Hi Sally. Bored already. Can you tell us where the vending machines are?"

"Honey, you don't have to use those thievin' things. There's a refreshment center 'round the corner, with coffee, tea, juice, and all kinds of soft drinks. And in the evenings, there's a full bar. It's free, just show your ID badge…except for the booze, you have to pay for that."

"Thanks Sally. Can we bring you anything?"

"No honey…I'm all right. See y'all later."

Around the corner turned out to be at the other end of the convention center.

"I wonder how many of these things we'll drink this week?" Core gasped after a big swig of soft drink.

"Too many, I'm sure," he said. "Core, I subscribe to *Science Week*. It's a handy publication and I always read your articles. I have to confess I'm a little jealous of you lady. I mean you're able to penetrate the layers of scientific jargon and get at the essence of what's going on. At times it's all I can do to decipher what my colleagues are trying to say. With your perception you'd make a hell of a scientist."

"I was a microbiologist at McPherson for two years before I got fed-up with being ignored. Nobody will listen to you unless you have a Ph.D. or better yet an M.D."

"You're right about that. What happened?"

"You mean at McPherson?"

"No. I mean, why didn't you go for the Ph.D.?"

"I did. But studying hormones, I was overcome by pheromones—of the human variety—if you get my meaning."

Smiling he said, "Sounds normal to me. Sex is the most matriculated course on campus. Some day it'll be as important to a student's GPA as English and Physics."

"It's pretty stupid to *matriculate* with your thesis adviser," she said focusing on the red and white can in her hand.

"Your kidding…Your *thesis* adviser?"

"Yeah. I don't want to talk about it."

Trying to keep from laughing he said, "Too bad. Such chutzpah should be shared."

After a Coke's worth of small talk, a trickle of reporters descended upon Core and Alan in the refreshment area, signaling the 10 AM break and the impending flood of conferees.

“Alan, it’s going to be shoulder-to-shoulder here in a minute. It’s nice out today. Why don’t we go outside?”

“Boy it’s starting to get muggy,” she said. “I bet we get a thunderstorm this evening…good summertime entertainment. Thunderstorms don’t require much on your part; you just sit back and enjoy ’em.”

“I hope you’re right. I haven’t experienced the cleansing violence of a really good thunderbumper since I left Auburn. I’ve lived in San Francisco ten years. And in all that time we’ve had five pitiful thunderstorms—I counted ’em. One barely qualified by producing a single clap of thunder.”

They were both enjoying the sunny day and the casual conversation. Core had even put the conference out of mind until a noisy group of conferees broke the spell and reminded her of why she was there.

“Alan, what’s your interest in AIDS, or are you just a spectator like me?”

“No…I’m here on business. I’m a clinical microbiologist. I study the pathology of microbial infections. Most of my experience is in parasitic diseases, but I’ve also worked with bacteria, fungi, and viruses. I just finished a sabbatical in Montreal with Brian McAdams. We made some pretty interesting discoveries on the prevalence of mycoplasmas in the tissues and organs of AIDS patients. I’ll present our results tomorrow morning. There are some problems with the HIV theory of AIDS and I’m trying to reconcile the differences between what we see in the clinical lab with what the theory requires.

“The only reason I was invited to speak tomorrow is due to Brian’s one-man campaign to broaden the scope of this conference. The shear weight of his reputation and influence allows him to muscle through the program committee at least one lecture and maybe a couple of posters that challenge the HIV hypothesis. Brian asked me to present the data rather than himself because he is a gentleman, but also to produce as many new faces as he can muster, offering alternative views to the HIV hysteria.”

“Some time ago I interviewed an outspoken Berkeley scientist—an internationally famous virologist…”

“That must have been Peter Duesberg,” he said, interrupting her.

“That’s right, Peter Duesberg. Anyway, he was one of the few dissenting voices in the early days of AIDS to dispute the causative role of HIV. Back then it was called HTLV III and a whole lot of other names. I thought that issue was put to rest.”

“They would like it to disappear.”

"Oh yeah…Who're they?"

"All those who believe AIDS is contagious and have a professional or financial stake in HIV."

"Yeees…?"

"Your reporter instincts are showing."

"You bet your buns. Read the badge: Press. I didn't walk out here with you just because of your blue eyes." *You sure did, honey*, Core admitted to herself. "I don't know if you've noticed, but there are over fifteen hundred reporters here and it's not because science tickles their funny bones, I can assure you."

"Why are they here?" he said. "You'd think that after all these years an AIDS conference wouldn't attract the coverage it did in the eighties."

"AIDS isn't just science," she said. "It's sex and death, religion and politics, and Big, Big money. There isn't a reporter drawing a pay check who couldn't see a story in a combination like that."

"HIV doesn't have a damn thing to do with AIDS…You think that's a story worth telling?" Alan said watching for her reaction.

"It would be one of the biggest in decades—if it was true. But where's the evidence. Look at the program. There are over thirty lectures and close to five thousand posters presented this week, and virtually all of them refer to HIV. I've been covering AIDS since the mid eighties. I've seen fads come and go. The only thing that has remained constant is HIV."

"All of the data presented at this conference are the result of funded research," Alan reminded her. "Core, do you know how difficult it is to get a research proposal funded by the NIH that isn't connected one-way-or-the-other with HIV? I know many internationally respected scientists with reputations in fields outside of AIDS who have never worked with viruses and are seriously thinking of submitting proposals to investigate HIV because that's where the money is. Their usual sources of funding have dried up.

"Those of us lucky enough not to rely on NIH grants are still free to work as we please, but our results are rarely published in the major journals. There is an institutional bias to promote HIV. Even your articles, as good as they are, address only the HIV aspect of AIDS. We don't have an *AIDS* conference, we have an international conference on *Retroviruses*.

"Well it's about time for the session on HIV and AIDS pathology to begin. I guess I better go back inside," he said. Alan didn't really want to leave Core but he wasn't looking for an argument with her about AIDS right off the bat either. That

could wait until later, after he presented his data that conflicted with the entrenched beliefs of the AIDS Establishment.

Core had no particular interest in the first day's sessions. They were the warm-up lectures intended to set the stage for Stephen Julio, who would speak tomorrow afternoon.

"I think I'll stay outside a while longer," she said. "It's too nice a day to spend in a dark, gloomy cave of an auditorium."

"I'll see you later, then," he said, "maybe at the cocktail party Thursday."

"That's where I do some of my best snooping," Core said.

Core had been working her usual long hours, and combined with her recent after dark activities, she needed a break badly. So, she decided to walk home. She chose the route along Rock Creek, the tree-lined gorge separating Georgetown and Washington. It was longer but more scenic.

Core had satisfied herself long ago that HIV infection was the cause of AIDS. However, she parted company with Julio and Gallo and believed that other factors played an important role in the course of the disease. Alan had not changed her mind about HIV, but their conversation had left her strangely unsettled and that puzzled her. Usually, she was able to put her finger right on what was bothering her. She was unable to enjoy the scenery along the way: her mind was on AIDS.

Three

The World Health Organization estimates that there may be as many as 13 million people infected with HIV worldwide. By 1989 130,000 cases of "full-blown" AIDS had been reported. One scientist had even said that by 1997 the death toll from AIDS could exceed that of the Black Death in the Middle Ages that had killed a third to a half of the world's population.

But something was wrong. Regardless of which statistics were used, only one to ten percent of all the persons thought to be harboring HIV actually had AIDS, making it by far the most feeble of the lethal viruses. Yet Robert Gallo, the first spokesman for the official position, insisted that HIV infection inevitably and uniformly resulted in death. Although AIDS patients were living longer than had been expected, Gallo said this was just a reflection of the latency of HIV infection. On numerous occasions Core had interviewed patients who lived 9 years and more with AIDS. The fatality rate had actually stabilized at around 60 percent.

Julio also supported Gallo's hypothesis that AIDS originated in Africa, but both men were unable to explain why 50-60 percent of all AIDS patients were American rather than African.

Knowing Julio as she did, Core was certain that his more strident positions were ego driven and did not result from unbiased analysis. But he couldn't be completely wrong—could he? What about the thousands of other scientists working on HIV? Surely, they were not all participating in one giant conspiracy. Science is supposed to be a self-correcting activity; but Alan was right about one thing: there won't be much correcting going on if you can't get the money to do your work.

Half in a trance, Core walked up the steps of her home in Georgetown, not remembering the details of her walk. The brick town house apartment on P Street that she and Joseph had settled into just before he went to Japan afforded a

measure of relief against the 96 degree heat, but it would still be quite warm inside.

She was determined not to become a slave to an air-conditioner like the rest of Washington. She quickly changed into her cut-off bib-overalls, which was her favorite attire at home and the delight of her male neighbors that made them wish summer would never end. She took to wearing nothing underneath to improve the ventilation. The effect was delicious: it was like being clothed and naked at the same time.

She went to the refrigerator, reached for one of the two beers left by an admirer of the bib-overalls. She hesitated a moment, then put it back and poured herself a glass of juice. She grabbed a couple of file folders, placed them on the kitchen table and turned on the attic fan before sitting down to review what was known about AIDS.

"After 15 years, what can be said about AIDS with some assurance?" she said aloud, trying to focus her attention.

She decided to go back through her files and make a list of those things that she believed few scientists would dispute:

- ✓ There is a vicious *new* syndrome in the world which obliterates the human immune system.

- ✓ The syndrome itself is not a disease and does not kill. However, its actions on the immune system, in particular, leave the body susceptible to a debilitating series of opportunistic infections and forms of cancer which *do* kill.

- ✓ None of the opportunistic infections or forms of cancer are new. Many are rare, but all are known pathologies.

"What do they mean by opportunistic infections anyway?" Aren't all infections opportunistic, Core thought? Oh well. I'll worry about definitions later. "Let's see, what else?. Oh yes…"

- ✓ Routes of transmission of the cause or causes of the syndrome, at this time, appear to be limited to blood, semen, vaginal fluid, and breast milk.

- ✓ HIV (the so-called AIDS virus), while it has many elements in common with other viruses, is a unique infectious agent. HIV is a member of the family of retroviruses, which means that its genetic information is in the form of RNA instead of DNA as in humans. The virus has a special enzyme called reverse transcriptase that it uses to copy its RNA into DNA. Humans don't have this enzyme, so when scientists find it in patients, they use this as an indication of retroviral infection.

- ✓ The period of incubation of HIV is unknown. The time between presumed exposure and onset of symptoms has been estimated at from 6 days to a lifetime. The commonly accepted estimate of the incubation period generally grows by 12 or more months each year. The latest consensus for the latency is 10-14 years.

- ✓ There is no cure or vaccine against AIDS. This has led many to assume a death rate of 100 percent.

- ✓ There are two types of so-called AIDS blood tests available: the original looks for the patient's own defensive antibodies to HIV; the most recent, tests for a dormant form of viral DNA.

The two years at McPherson had taught Core what the AIDS tests were really all about. She was well aware of the speed with which blood tests could be developed and brought to market (as little as two years as compared with ten for a drug). The AIDS tests were commercially valuable in spite of the fact that only a microscopic fraction of the population actually had AIDS. Indeed, the tests were of no use to those poor souls anyway. It was the fear of acquiring AIDS that was driving the profitability of these tests. Core had written a number of articles questioning the usefulness of HIV antibody testing. It was one of the most hotly contested issues of the AIDS debate. All of the tests available suffer varying degrees of false positive and false negative results. It was impossible to make the "AIDS tests" error free. The false positives are of the most concern to those opposed to the mass screening of the American population. Unrestricted,

compulsory testing would lead to a type of clinical McCarthyism: the tragic and erroneous labeling of hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of people. Core shrugged off the disagreeable meditation and continued with the list.

- ✓ Since they target HIV, AZT, DDC, and DDI (all variations on a theme) are among the few drugs approved by the FDA as specific treatments for AIDS. The anti-parasitic agent Pentamidine is often associated with AIDS and is used to treat *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia, a previously rare "opportunistic infection."

It's incredible that this is all that can be agreed on after all these years…after more than 100,000 scientific papers published and billions of dollars spent, she thought.

There was one other point Core could have included in her list on which there is no dispute: AIDS is expensive. It had become an industry in its own right; providing Core and many thousands of others with gainful employment. Direct medical care to AIDS patients would soon reach $16 billion. All other AIDS related costs were estimated at around $66 billion!

"AIDS incorporated" began in April 1984 when the beleaguered Reagan Administration, which had obstinately refused to discuss the "gay plague" up to that point, finally spoke. Margaret Heckler, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, later shipped off to Ireland, held a news conference. She opened by saying: "Today we add another miracle to the long honor roll of American medicine and science."

She displayed not a hint of conscience when it came to introducing Robert Gallo of the National Cancer Institute as the discoverer of a new virus that was the cause of AIDS. Of course Core and her colleagues had known for some time the accolade belonged to Luc Montagnier of the Pasteur Institute in Paris. Some said Heckler had been ignorant of what had been happening and wasn't to blame. But Core believed that the Secretary had been duty bound to find out what was going on before parading Gallo in front of the cameras. To Core, this was just another example of the Administration's brazen disregard for the truth. However, she was aware the press shared in the shame by letting the government get away with so many lies for so long.

Heckler went on to promise that Gallo's discovery would lead to a vaccine against AIDS that would be available in 1986. That date had long since come and gone. The Secretary's stellar performance, no doubt, expedited her move to Ireland and installation as Ambassador to that troubled island.

The news of Washington's belated recognition of AIDS descended upon the drug industry as manna from heaven. Prior to the AIDS bonanza, the pharmaceutical industry had been anticipating a loss of profits. The patents on their most lucrative products were about to expire. The reason for the lack of new patents was that the cost of bringing any new drug to market had risen to as much as $230 million. Even the giants of the industry were finding these costs hard to accept. The lack of promising new candidate drugs in the regulatory pipeline made for an uncertain future industry wide.

The cost to pharmaceutical companies of developing new drugs limited the areas investigated to the most profitable diseases, regardless of their significance to society. The relatively small population of AIDS patients, well under a million in the US, would under normal circumstances place the disease in the limbo of orphan-drug status in most pharmaceutical companies. However, the projected levels of HIV infection meant that at least a million Americans should eventually succumb to the most horrifying plague since the Black Death.

Privately, drug company executives received these sepulchral tidings with much relief and concealed glee: incurable disease is the stuff money is made of. Nor had the possibility of Federal support escaped their notice.

As a result of the conversation with Alan, Core decided to jot down a few of the dissenting points that are bitterly rejected by Stephen Julio and his followers:

- ✓ HIV does not cause AIDS: the virus is just one more opportunistic infection associated with the disease.

- ✓ It is extremely doubtful that "full-blown" AIDS will develop in an HIV infected person unless he or she is already immuno-compromised.

- ✓ HIV, while statistically highly associated with AIDS, has not been conclusively demonstrated to be the single agent which brings about the extreme debilitation and death observable in

AIDS patients. Many scientists include the necessity of cofactors in HIV infection.

- ✓ The vast number of people infected with HIV, or who at least have antibodies to the virus, are not "sick"—that is, they don't have AIDS.

- ✓ The actual outcome of either infection with HIV or the presence of antibodies to the virus is not known.

- ✓ Many more people are surviving full-blown AIDS or pre-AIDS conditions in numbers far beyond expectation.

- ✓ Just as it cannot be absolutely demonstrated that HIV alone causes AIDS, it cannot be absolutely demonstrated that AIDS inevitably results in death.

Suddenly, the kitchen was brilliantly lit for a moment, followed four seconds later by several sharp claps of thunder. Core rarely allowed the summer evening spectacle to go unappreciated. She put down the files, got up, walked to the doorway leading to the back porch and just stood there. The wind-blown scent of mimosas and magnolias was almost incapacitating, and the cool, slightly moist air circulating between her thighs and caressing her breasts produced goose-bumps of pleasure. She wondered if Alan liked standing naked in the rain.

Four

"Mornin' Sally. Wasn't that a delicious storm last night?"

"Honey, thunderstorms are God's way of showing His displeasure with the boobtube. Whenever there's a storm, my husband David unplugs the television and disconnects the antenna. Just last year a neighbor across the street lost her den to ball-lighting during a rerun of Bonanza; and when David was little, lighting exploded his grandmother's TV in the middle of Dragnet. It appears that some programs attract lighting more than others."

"You ought to be on TV yourself, Sally," Core said. Then a familiar voice intruded from behind her—there was no escape.

"Howya doing Core? I knew I'd see you here sooner or later," yelled Joel Senuta, a stringer for the *Washington Post.* Core had given up trying to avoid him. There seemed to be nothing she could do to discourage him. Senuta may not have much of a nose for news, but he could certainly spot a married woman on the prowl.

"What are you doing here, Joel?. You don't give a damn about science journalism. Why don't you go cover something more in your line...like a plane crash. I sure wish you'd quit following me."

"Ah, Core. Don't be like that. I'm on a big story."

"I'm sure you are."

"Come on, Core, listen to me. A visiting scientist working in Stephen Julio's institute is going to blow the whistle on the whole HIV scam, Friday...but I'm going to break the news today!"

"Oh yeah. And how did you happen to get this gem of inside information...and why risk telling me?"

"Core, I wish we could work together on this. I'd like both our names on the byline—yours could be first."

"Why are you being so generous? We've never worked together before. You don't know me—I might go off on my own and scoop you."

He hesitated before begging: "I need you Core. I need your name, your reputation. Anyway, I need help most of all interviewing this fella. You know how these guys talk; you can tell if they're bullshiting or not."

"Which visiting scientist?"

"Will you help me Core? If you say yes, I'll tell you."

"I'm afraid not, Joel. As you pointed out, I have my reputation to consider. No—this one's all yours. I wish you luck, if there's something to it. I have to go."

Fin Shea was introducing the chairman of the morning session as Core entered the auditorium.

"Thank you Fin. This morning's session is entitled Opportunistic Infections In AIDS Patients..."

Alan Haan would be the next speaker following Bill Chaney's overview of the relationship between opportunistic infections and AIDS. Core stood on tip-toes trying to find Alan. She tripped and fell against the shoulder of a Pakistani woman sitting in one of the fold-up chairs provided for late-comers.

Alan saw Core come in, and immediately went to her when he saw her stumble.

"Are you all right?" It was obvious she was not hurt; Alan just wanted to see her again.

"Oh yes, Alan—thanks. I was looking for you, and I wasn't watching where I was going. There are two empty seats over there. Why don't we take 'em?"

Bill Chaney refused to entertain questions, explaining that the time was better spent on the other speakers. After the obligatory applause following Dr. Chaney's lecture, Alan got up and started toward the podium as he was being introduced.

"I would now like to turn the session over to Dr. Alan Haan of the University of California, San Francisco, School of Medicine. The title of his talk is Lack of Postmortem Correlation Between HIV Infection and Organ Pathology. Dr. Haan..."

On Brian McAdams' advice, Alan had deleted reference to mycoplasmas in the title of the abstract he submitted to the program committee. No point in ruffling their feathers more than necessary, he reasoned.

"Thank you, Bill. I would like to begin by acknowledging the debt I and many others owe to Brian McAdams for providing us not only with the facilities and opportunity to develop professionally but also for his enthusiasm and encouragement that eased the frustration of learning new techniques."

Core was listening to Alan's lecture with special attentiveness.

"Since AIDS is characterized by the inexorable decline of the victim's immune defense system, the emphasis was first placed on the discovery of *the* etiological agent present in the thymocytes, in particular, the helper T-cells. The whole world now knows that Luc Montagnier identified a new retrovirus in a few of the T-cells of some AIDS patients. These results were further elaborated upon by Robert Gallo, Stephen Julio, and others.

"The initial problem with HIV was that it could only be detected in an absurdly small percentage of T-cells. Even if the virus killed all of the infected cells, the patient's immune defenses would hardly have been affected. But since HIV remains inactive even in the sickest AIDS patients it doesn't appear to be doing any harm at all. Indeed, the hallmark of retroviruses is that they don't kill cells. So the puzzle was, and still remains, what is the mechanism of lethality? New hypotheses of lethality are promoted from time to time, but the majority advocate a variation on the principle of a secondary effect of HIV infection. Many of these ideas will be presented during this evening's poster session.

"Before showing our data, I would like to emphasize one other point. The finding that macrophages are a far more substantial reservoir of HIV than the T-cells does not clarify the situation since the macrophages are apparently unharmed by the virus.

"I would now like to present our data confirming and extending the observations first made by Shyh-Ching Lo on the correlation between the presence of a new pathogen he identified as *Mycoplasma incognitus* and organ pathology in AIDS patients. We also looked for the presence of HIV in all of the tissues using the commercial tests available as well as gene hybridization techniques. There was none detectable, in agreement with the observations of many other investigators.

"The first slide shows a list of the organs examined. I think you will agree it is quite extensive. We also looked at Kaposi lesions for the presence of HIV and *M. incognitus*. As you can see, the mycoplasma was identified in all tissues which showed pathology. On the next series of slides…"

As Alan gave his presentation, Core wondered if he believed that Lo's new mycoplasma was the real cause of AIDS. Knowing the delicacy of the issue, she was certain that he would not make such a proposal in public—not at this conference. I'll talk to him later about this, she decided.

The rest of Alan's discourse was a detailed description of the histological data identifying *M. incognitus* in the damaged organs of AIDS patients. By way of comparison, he highlighted the total absence of HIV in these tissues.

He was quite prepared to take the heat for his earlier remarks during the question and answer period at the end of his talk—but there were no questions. The usual scurrying about between speakers was absent, and the auditorium rang with the silence of embarrassment. The session chairman ended the awkwardness by announcing the 10 o'clock coffee break.

Watching the frenzied withdrawal, Alan remembered how in 1987 Peter Duesberg's meticulously, well-argued rebuttal to the HIV hypothesis in *Cancer Research* went unchallenged, an occurrence without precedent. Well, at least I'm in good company, he thought as he left the podium.

Alan was on his way to the projectionist to collect his slides when he recognized Core Fletcher and Brian McAdams together, laughing.

"Al," Brian began, "we were discussing your talk and how well it was received by your colleagues." They didn't even attempt to hide their smiles.

"Yeah, yeah. I saw you two appraising my dazzling performance. I'd ask Core for a job and get out of this silly business but I can't spell worth a damn."

"Come on Alan, you have to keep a sense of humor or these guys will whip ya," Brian said.

"I was prepared for a fight…but they ran away, didn't they."

"It's good experience for when you face a confrontation that really counts—and it's coming," Brian said. He then changed the subject. "Why don't we all go for an early lunch? I know a wonderful little Greek restaurant a short walk from here."

"I need to stop by the message center on the way out," Core said. "I'll meet y'all outside in a minute."

Five

Conversation during lunch was a little too chitchaty for Core. Brian and Alan were among the handful of scientists who regularly voiced their opposition to the primacy of HIV. They had exercised on many occasions the dearly won right of all scientists to speak freely and openly, yet in Core's presence they were noticeably restrained. It wasn't because she was a reporter. If there was a truism about scientists, it was that they loved to talk, especially about what they did. No, Core realized that she had become saddled with the position she expressed in print time-and-time again. To these guys, she was on the other side. Her professional pride was wounded. She had become a spokesperson for orthodoxy.

Core was angry with herself for having succumbed to the seductive weight of authoritarian opinion. She had escaped a similar trap at McPherson. It was time to extricate herself from HIV public relations and keep from being identified with any particular faction—theirs included. But the task at hand was to get these guys to open up so she inadroitly interjected:

"You know, the latest is that HIV is probably not responsible for Kaposi's sarcoma. It may be caused by a totally different infectious agent."

Brian and Alan both paused for a moment to switch gears, then Brian responded:

"Many of us have thought that for some time. It may even be that our mycoplasma is the cause—but that is yet to be proven. Labeling a Kaposi lesion a sarcoma was unfortunate since it is hardly a cancer. But of course, there are those who continue to dispute this…more power to them, just show me the data.

"You are no doubt aware," he continued, "that Moriz Kaposi first described the skin condition, for which his name has become immortalized, in syphilitic patients. In fact, the skin lesions in syphilis are indistinguishable from those in Kaposi's."

"And this disease of which I speak, this syphilis too, will pass away and die out, but later it will be born again and be seen again by our descendants, just as in bygone ages we must believe it was observed by our ancestors," waxed Alan, poetically.

"What was that, Alan?" Core asked, rhetorically.

"Syphilis has a long and infamous history," he said. "I was quoting Girolamo Fracastoro who lived in the 16th century. Syphilis got its name from a poem of his, *Syphilis sive morbus Gallicus*—Syphilis, or, the French Disease.

"Would it surprise you that *every* symptom seen in AIDS has been described in syphilitic patients? Don't misunderstand me, syphilis is not AIDS!—but neither is HIV. What likely happens is that an immune compromised person who is harboring the syphilis spirochete eventually becomes symptomatic for the disease.

"In the 1970s and early eighties there was an epidemic of syphilis in the large urban gay communities of New York, San Francisco, and LA. These of course were the cities where AIDS first appeared. It is more than mere coincidence that Kaposi lesions are characteristic of only gay AIDS, and is rarely seen in those who acquire it by IV drug use or other ways.

"You might check-out Harris Coulter's book *AIDS And Syphilis: The Hidden Link*. He argues that all this dither over HIV is because an exotic African virus is more likely to lead to the Nobel Prize than an old war-horse like syphilis."

"The same can be said of the Pulitzer Prize" Core interrupted. "I'm not as uninformed as you think. I know how serious syphilis is, and that it's transmitted the same as HIV. But in the editing room, HIV is news, not *Treponema pallidum*."

"Touché," said Brian. "It appears that HIV has infected society's institutions more virulently than AIDS patients. That virus has commandeered not only the research funding apparatus and peer review process of scientific publications, but even coerces the "free" press."

"Well, I have things to do before the afternoon sessions begin, so I better get going. How much do I owe?" Core said.

"Lunch is on me," Brian offered. "Julio's presentation will be heavily attended. We should go if we want good seats."

Television follows Julio almost as much as the President, Core thought when she saw two of the red-tied and blue-blazered clones of the broadcast media

idling about the entrance to the auditorium. Well, he *is* the spokesman for the administration's AIDS policy, after all.

As she was about to enter the auditorium, Core saw Joel Senuta emerging from the men's room. She hesitated for a moment, fought the impulse to turn away, then called out:

"Joel, wait a minute."

He stopped abruptly, saw Core and produced a big grin, then anxiously approached her.

"Hi there good-lookin," he said, halfheartedly. "It seems every reporter in DC is here for Julio's performance."

"I know what you mean. How's your big story doing…you going to break it today?"

His expression clouded noticeably. Even though Joel was a jerk, Core felt a twinge of guilt for refusing help to a fellow journalist in need.

"No scoop for me, I'm afraid," he said, taking his eyes from hers.

Core really did feel sorry for him. She had often suffered the emotional roller coaster ride that was part of their profession. In the weakness of the moment she said:

"If you still think I can be of help…"

"Thanks Core, but that's not the problem. That scientist I told you about…well his name is Jon Ferenczi. He was removed from the program. He's not going to speak Friday."

"What happened Joel…were you able to talk with Ferenczi?"

"Just for a little while at the Sunday mixer. I was going to see him again today, but he checked out of his hotel last night."

"He went back home then?" she asked, astonished by his apparent lack of interest.

"I guess so," he said, then whispered, "Do you think it's important?"

It was obvious Joel was in the wrong profession. He lacked the perception of a floppy disc.

"No, Joel, he probably left for personal reasons." She lied. Core's professional instincts were suddenly aroused and her previous feelings of guilt were gone. She wanted Joel out of the way so that she could investigate whatever it was he had blundered on. It wasn't fair, but she knew she could do a better job than Joel.

She hadn't thought much of Joel's claim that some unknown post-doctoral scientist was about to bring down the house that HIV built. But the fact that Ferenczi was abruptly removed from the list of speakers was suspicious. She was amazed at Joel's inability to recognize the possible importance of his discovery.

"By the way, what led you to Ferenczi in the first place?" Core inquired.

"To prepare for the conference, I went over the speakers' program with one of the science reporters at the *Post.* She read the abstracts of the lectures to be presented and made some wisecrack about how the least important and controversial speakers are always scheduled for the last day of the conference. The reason she said was that few people stay till the bitter end to hear the last talks. She wasn't going to be there Friday either, but regretted missing Ferenczi's lecture because if what he had to say was true it meant that Julio was terribly wrong and HIV had nothing to do with AIDS. But she laughed and said there couldn't be much to it. Anyhow, it seemed worth looking into at the time."

Core thought Senuta was jumping to conclusions but made a mental note to read Ferenczi's abstract.

"We better go inside before all the seats are gone," she said, trying to break it off with him.

"No…I'm going back to the paper and see what's going on there." He felt small and defeated, and wasn't sure what had happened. He was sick of this alien environment, with its scientists and their talk of disease and death.

Six

Although thousands of scientists throughout the world were working on AIDS, by 1990 the Welter Institute for Retroviral Studies was the largest source of published research on HIV. But in spite of this vast potential for the generation of new data, Julio's previous performances had prepared most of the conferees to expect little more than his usual pitch to the media.

They looked for the time-worn recitation of the Institute's past accomplishments: the discovery and cataloging of the diversity of HIV mutant genomes; improvements in the *in vitro* blood tests for HIV; and the Institute's leadership in the X-ray structural analysis of HIV gene products—the hottest currently being the HIV protease. The pharmaceutical companies were falling all over themselves trying to develop drugs to inhibit this enzyme as a treatment for AIDS.

Nevertheless, Stephen Julio's appearance assured an overflow audience. His declamations were more than mere scientific arguments. As director of the Welter Institute and the principal expositor of HIV doctrine, he set policy, controlled the allocation of AIDS research grants, and defined the limits of permissible scientific discourse. He wielded great power.

The auditorium was standing room only, and Core was among the last to enter. The solemn conclave of the morning was transformed by the afternoon congestion and the TV flood lights into a spectacle. Fin Shea waited for the doors to close, then signaled to someone out of sight.

A vaguely familiar, distinguished-looking man wearing a dark blue jacket and a fluorescent red tie moved to the podium. A black woman standing near Core recognized him, "That's Ted Spender." An omen if ever there was one. The junior Senator from Maryland and recovering Jesuit was to introduce Julio.

The closeness, lack of ventilation, the TV cameras, and the surreal atmosphere gave Core vertigo. She put her notebook on the floor and sat on it.

The air was even worse down there, but at least she could rest and close her eyes. The bizarre conditions were antithetical to scientific discourse. Indeed, the timbre of Spender's peroration took Core back to her childhood, sitting in the church pew listening to the music of the preacher's sermon, oblivious to its message.

"…There are those who say there are no more miracles. Today, we are witnessing God's wrath, but no less His mercy. AIDS is retribution for the unnatural and immoral lifestyle of homosexuality. But God's infinite mercy has made possible this gathering of eminent and talented scientists. Maryland's Welter Institute for Retroviral Studies and its director Stephen Julio are the instruments by which God will spare the general public from the spread of this plague…"

"Can you believe that guy," Core said, rousing from her stupor.

"I didn't know L. Ron Hubbard was scheduled to speak," remarked another exasperated soul.

It was just too much for Core. As she got up to leave the auditorium, the same man whispered, "If we were smart, we'd all be right behind you."

Core needed to talk to somebody who had both feet firmly planted in reality.

"Hey Sally. How are things?"

"I'm doing just fine…but from the way you're hanging your head, things must be kind of sour in there."

"It's the most bizarre session I've ever been to."

Core felt obliged to endure and hear what Julio had to say—but Spender was too much. She decided to watch the proceedings from one of the TV-monitor rooms used to accommodate the overflow.

"Sally, can you tell me where the closed circuit TV rooms are? If I embarrass myself, I'd rather do it in front of a small audience."

"Sure honey. There are two rooms upstairs: 304 and 306. Go down there," Sally was pointing to the far end of the convention center, toward the refreshment area, "and take the elevator to the third floor. Don't get too discouraged, honey. Remember, it's only Tuesday."

"Thanks, Sally. See you after while."

Core chose room 304. Mercifully, someone had turned off the monitor's sound. There were about forty people inside, and they were all laughing and having a good time at Spender's expense.

"Another escapee from Julio's asylum," was discernible above the chatter.

A thin young man with blond hair, probably a graduate student, greeted Core.

"Better living through chemistry," he said, offering her a glass of wine.

"No thanks. It's quite a party in here."

"Yeah. It'll settle down when Spender gets done."

"Julio must be nuts or something having that asshole introduce him. He sure isn't winning points with that bigot," complained a woman sitting near the monitor.

As Core turned to acknowledge agreement, she fixed her attention on the screen.

"It looks like Julio is ready," she said.

The young man looked at the monitor, then shouted, "All right, everybody quiet. Julio is on. Somebody turn up the sound."

At 52, Stephen Julio epitomized the bureaucratic scientist. His hair was now completely silver, but his face still had the boyish, even delicate appearance of youth. Scientists are generally disdainful of ostentation, taking pride in their unkempt, often unorthodox appearance. Julio, however, was unfailingly fastidious about his attire. His public disquisitions were carefully contrived to buttress the shaky reverence with which his colleagues held him, his institute, and its sacred quest.

As normalcy returned to the small TV-room, Core recognized the ponderous, monotonic articulations of the nuncio of HIV dogma. She tried to listen to Julio, but his droning couldn't help but rouse one of her favorite fantasies: She speculated that oral idiosyncrasies, when properly interpreted, could reveal a person's sexual proclivities. From repeated exposure to Julio's allocutions, she surmised that his sex life was likely one-sided, unimaginative, according to Hoyle, with a touch of dishonesty thrown in. In short: his wife Rachel must surely suffer from libidinous boredom.

Core's insulating reverie was interrupted by the crackling applause coming from the speakers that reverberated in the tiny room. The audience cheered more from relief than appreciation, she thought. With Julio's benediction over, she half

expected someone to shout *Play Ball*, signaling the real, though unofficial opening of the conference.

Julio's performance was finished, which meant that Core's work was just beginning. She left the merrymakers of room 304 to their revelry.

Core disguised her dislike for Julio, she hoped, beneath a veneer of professionalism. She had interviewed him so many times over the years that the occasions, though hardly cordial, were at least relaxed and free of confrontation. Core realized that she had worked herself into a rut regurgitating the rhetoric fed her by scientific primadonnas. She received no more respect or consideration from the likes of Julio than she had gotten at McPherson. For his part, Julio scarcely considered Core; she had demonstrated no hostility toward him or the Institute, and her articles generally supported *his* views on AIDS. He tolerated her precisely because she posed no threat. Indeed, he preferred to dispose of his obligation to the press by seeking her in preference to her compatriots.

"Dr. Julio…" She paused for recognition. "Another fine talk rallying the troops," she continued, a demure prevarication intended to disarm the subject of her interrogation.

"Core, it's good to see you again. What's it been…almost a year now…?"

"Just over—the Amsterdam meeting."

"You don't come by the lab anymore, Core," he said with little feeling as he turned to acknowledge a colleague's greeting. The last thing he wanted was a reporter, even if it was Core, nosing around his institute. He preferred to deal with the media on neutral ground.

"I intend to change that real soon," she said.

Core was eager to find out why Jon Ferenczi suddenly withdrew or was removed from the conference, but experience told her she would get no where by asking direct questions. Early in her career, Core's interviews had been journalistic sting operations. She had prided herself in being able to extract the marrow of a story from the most reticent adversary. She decided it was time to dust off those skills. After not more than a moment's consideration, a strategy occurred to her.

"Stephen, I've been thinking of writing a series of articles based on first hand experience of what it's like working in a first-rate research lab. What I had in mind was spending maybe a month or two working as a technician-reporter in several of the more prominent laboratories in the US or Europe. Naturally, the Welter Institute was top of my list."

"Really," he said with an air of condescension. "When do you propose embarking upon this sabbatical of yours?"

Sabbatical! Yes, of course, she realized, that's exactly the way to approach it. She knew that Julio was anything but enthusiastic about her proposal, so she decided to play to his ego.

"Journalism has no past or future, only the present—so ASAP. I wanted to talk with you first about this since I would prefer doing my sabbatical at the world's preeminent center of AIDS research. Of course, if short notice makes this impossible, I will just have to console myself with spending fall in Paris, working at the Pasteur Institute with Luc Montagnier."

Montagnier was at the conference. Julio had only to call Core's bluff and find out from Luc if he had any intention of opening his laboratory to invasion by a journalist. Nevertheless, Montagnier might welcome a bit of good press right now. The continuing litigation over the development and ownership of the HIV AIDS test was still producing embarrassing headlines in Paris and Washington. It was true that Gallo's problems with Montagnier did not affect the Welter Institute, but could Julio afford, even for a moment, the loss of prestige to the Pasteur Institute?

"Core, I think that's a splendid idea," he said. "Give my secretary a call tomorrow and she'll arrange everything. We'll get you in the lab the first of September. Well, I really must run. Talk to you again at the reception."

"Wonderful. Take care," she said awkwardly as he rushed away.

Core was dazed at how effective her impetuous scheme had been. Now all she had to do was explain the subterfuge to her editor Gabe Lublin. She had a selling job ahead of her. Gabe was immune to her charm but suffered from one weakness that she might be able to exploit.

Gabe Lublin earned his reputation as a political reporter for the *Washington Post.* Reluctantly, he was obliged to leave the *Post* after 22 years of politics, alcohol, and high blood pressure. The job of managing editor of *Science Week* was good for his blood pressure; however, it proved a trifle unstimulating for his combative spirit. There was nothing he enjoyed more than exposing bureaucrats for the rascals they were. Core would appeal to the H. L. Mencken side of Lublin.

Having convinced herself that she could handle Gabe, Core decided to make her sabbatical legitimate and expand it to include other laboratories—perhaps Brian's in Montreal, or better yet, visit Alan in San

Francisco. Her spirits were rejuvenated. She was going to do investigative journalism. Her reputation for non-controversial reporting would provide the cover for her covert intentions. At this point, her reason for covering the AIDS conference had become irrelevant; the fourteenth gathering of the elect would provide the venue of her new operations. It had been a very productive day and there was only one thing left to do: cajole Alan into spending Wednesday with her sailing Chesapeake Bay.

Core had always been conscientious about her job and had never played hooky before. However, work had become mechanical and boring, and that on top of an evaporating marriage led to a great deal of stress. Breaking a few rules was a sign she was ready to change her life, but it wasn't clear where she was heading.

Seven

Core looked for Alan among the labyrinth of poster boards. His 6 foot 2 inch height allowed her to eliminate many aisles simply by scanning them. She found him intently studying poster number 873: *Farr's Law Applied to AIDS Projections.*

Core was standing behind Alan and a little to his left. He hadn't noticed her. The poster presented statistical tables and graphs, charting the incidence of AIDS progression in the US since 1982.

"So, the worst of the epidemic is behind us," she said.

Core broke Alan's concentration. He turned ungracefully, momentarily disoriented. When he recovered his wits, he placed his hand on her arm for an instant.

"What a pleasant surprise," he said. "I was just trying to catch a few of these posters between sessions. It's only Tuesday and I'm already saturated. Who could possibly read even half of these things; there are thousands of 'em. But this one's pretty interesting.

"This fellow William Farr way back in 1840 discovered that the rise and fall of epidemics—in his time it was smallpox—followed a normal bell-shaped curve. These guys are applying his method, now called Farr's Law, to AIDS. The graphs show that the AIDS epidemic crested in 1988. If their projections hold up, the total number of AIDS patients in the US should reach no more than 200,000 by the time the epidemic runs its course in 1994, or a little after. Not the millions the public was led to expect. The projection is based on the 1989 definition of AIDS. Of course, as the definition balloons over time, so will the number of cases."

"The authors point out," Alan continued with a twinge of sarcasm, "that even the prevailing tendency to include every condition under the sun as AIDS wouldn't significantly affect their projections. The downward trend in cases will rapidly outpace the attempts of Julio and that crowd to salvage the syndrome that

made them famous *and* rich. I remember an article of yours that said the CDC's own statistics showed a leveling off of HIV infections in 1991. I also remember that in three months they changed the definition of AIDS again to boost back up the number of cases. Just last week three more diseases common to women were added to the AIDS list. Pretty soon there will be only one disease in the world: AIDS."

Alan was finding it difficult to project the hackneyed air of scientific detachment. Core, however, saw his present mood as conducive to her plans.

"Alan," she said, "I have an idea I'd like to discuss with you. But it would be best considered in a relaxed environment."

"I'm easily persuaded into just about anything that's fun," he said.

"Wednesday looks really boring and I'm sick of this ugly building," she complained. "Well…I have a sailboat. Why don't we go sailing tomorrow instead. We can talk about my idea out on the bay, in the sunshine."

"Let's do it," he said with enthusiasm. "Why don't we start now. I'd like a cold beer, how 'bout you?"

"Let's go to my house; I have a couple of beers in the frig," she said. "Besides, we ought to hook the boat trailer to the car tonight for an early start in the morning. We can stop by your room on the way—Oh!…and the deli too. We'll pick up some sandwiches."

He doesn't know I'm married, Core reminded herself as they left for her car. Lots of people are separated, maybe it won't bother him. I'll just tell him straight and see how it goes.

There wasn't much traffic in Washington this late in the summer and Congress mercifully out of town; it took them only fifteen minutes to get home from Aaron's Deli.

"Alan, I forgot to tell you I don't have air-conditioning. I hope you don't mind."

"I never cared much for air-conditioning. It robs you of the experience of summer. I like the fragrance of night air coming through the windows. That's what I miss most in San Francisco—sensual summer nights."

Core pulled in behind the house and backed the car up to the trailer hitch. Alan immediately jumped out of the car and started coupling it to the trailer.

"This looks easy; it will just take a few minutes," he said.

"So you're not a totally helpless Ph.D. Joseph could never figure it out; I always had to do it," she said, forgetting herself.

"Who's Joseph?"

"He's my husband. We're separated—for a while," she said, nervously. "He has a Ph.D. in statistics from Harvard, but can't sharpen a pencil."

"Where is he?" he said, bending over the hitch, plugging in the trailer's lights.

"Japan on sabbatical leave. He won't be back until spring."

Alan finished connecting the trailer and helped carry in the groceries. Core had left some of the windows opened and there was a pleasant breeze circulating throughout the house. It was a two-story brick structure that had been a boy's school in the early 1800s. The rooms were spacious and not overly furnished. The art on display everywhere was varied and looked expensive. One wall was completely covered with books. Alan saw a photograph on the fireplace mantel. It showed a man at the helm of a sailboat. It was no doubt Joseph.

"Well, let's have one of those beers," he said in his best party voice.

"Oh, yeah. Coming right up. Make yourself at home—take your shoes off if you like."

"I think I'll get my bag and put on some shorts. Be right back," he said.

While Alan went out to the car, Core changed into her famous cut-off bib-overalls. Alan hadn't been prepared for Core's revealing attire. She smiled at the look on his face.

"You can change in the spare bedroom, Alan."

He soon emerged from the guest room, beer in hand, wearing a tee shirt and green Bermuda shorts decorated with pink elephants and yellow palm trees.

"My lord!" Core said, truly amazed. "Where did you ever find those shorts?"

"My brother gave 'em to me. They're all the rage on campus—perfect for hot weather, based much on the same principle as what you're wearing."

"Your brother certainly doesn't go to Georgetown. Conservative solids, perhaps a daring stripe or two, sporting the obligatory monogram is the uniform inside the Beltway—well at least for those planing on a career after graduation. People are awfully stuffy around here."

Alan was treated now and then to a hint of Core's full breasts as she moved about. That *thing* she wore was little more than a nod to modesty. He was finding it hard to suppress an erection. The spaciousness of the Bermuda shorts didn't help matters—Viet Nam had broken him of the habit of wearing underwear.

"I'll have another beer," he said, hoping she'd get it.

"We have a Becks dark and a Miller Lite, I think," she said, getting up and in the process revealing more of her charms which only exacerbated Alan's problem.

"I was wrong, there's just a Becks," she said, examining the contents of the refrigerator. "Are you hungry? I can warm up some pinto beans and cream corn from my mother's garden. Let's see—there ought to be some leftover fried chicken in here somewhere…Ah, here it is. It'll just take a minute to warm up."

The mention of food was all it took to deflate Alan's problem. He immediately went to help with supper. They ate out on the porch. After finishing with the dishes and a short walk around Georgetown, they spent the evening on the porch swing, enjoying the silky air of a gentle August evening. As much as they both ached to cuddle in each other's arms—Alan nearly yielded to the temptation several times—they kept from touching. Tomorrow, however, would be different and they both knew it. But Core couldn't stand the strain any longer.

"Well," she said, rising slowly, "we'd better hit the hay. I aim to have breakfast ready at six."

"You fixed supper, I'll cook breakfast. Besides, I bet I beat you out of bed in the morning," he said, welcoming the merciful release. The sexual tension had been just as unbearable to him, but it had been his experience that things worked out best when following the woman's lead. On standing, he produced a lusty sigh as he headed directly for the guest room.

Whether Core realized it yet, Alan knew in his bones that her marriage was over. Its formal dissolution was merely a matter of some paperwork and a few fees.

Eight

Core usually wasn't all that fond of sailing, she could take it or leave it. It had merely been a convenient ploy to entice Alan into spending some time with her. But today was different. She was actually excited with the whole adventure. She could tell that Alan was attracted to her but was probably confused by her marital situation. But she knew the barriers between people had a way of dissolving under the right conditions.

Core and Joseph sailed the Chesapeake quite often when they first moved to Washington. But it had been a while since they had gone sailing. Nevertheless, she expertly backed the boat trailer down the ramp and in minutes they had *Wet Dreams* II afloat.

"*Wet Dreams II*!" Alan said. "I've seen that name in every marina from coast to coast. How many *Wet Dreams I* were there before they started including the second generation?"

"Joseph saw a boat named *Wet Dreams* on one of his visits to the University of Wisconsin. He thought it was pretty clever—poor guy has the imagination of a yuppie. I went with him a couple of times. Madison is a nice campus but it gets too cold for me up there."

"Okay Core. How are things between you and Joseph?"

Core tied off the mainsail and opened the cooler, popped a Coke and took a healthy swig.

"Boring!" she said.

Alan steered south-southeast following the buoys which marked the standard exit from the marina.

"I'll have one of those, too," he said, not pressing the issue.

"We made a mistake getting married," she said, handing Alan the bottle. "I met Joseph right after leaving McPherson—he had just gotten his Ph.D. We just followed the path of least resistance. We sort of provided a captive audience for

each other. We got along, the sex was easy—we mistook a convenient relationship as justification to get married."

"I was married for seven years," Alan said, after a pause.

"Really?" A hint of relief in Core's voice.

"Yeah. Right after I got back from Viet Nam I thought I'd try to live a conventional life for a change. I wasn't too conscious of what I was doing in those days. I just kind of—without knowing—got married. It was an incredibly easy thing to do."

"I'm a little ashamed to say it," he continued, "but my wife put me through school. We got divorced shortly after I got my Ph.D. Of course our marriage was in sad shape long before that. I really wanted to pay her back for all of her sacrifices and maybe make things better, but it was too late. We just grew apart—we should have never gotten married."

"Turn right, I mean starboard," Core said, ready to lighten the mood and focus on the present. She had been honest about Joseph and it had gone well. Alan was understanding, and if anything happened between them now it would be with full awareness of what they were doing. "There's a pretty little cove with a beach about forty-five minutes to an hour south of here. We'll drop anchor there and have lunch."

Core repositioned the halyard as Alan steered due south. After an hour or so they arrived and dropped anchor. The water was unusually clear for the bay—you could actually see the bottom.

Without warning, Core stripped and dived into the calm, clear water. Alan was unaware of what was happening; he was busy securing the mainsail when he heard the splash. It took a moment for the ripples to dissipate before he could see Core's delightful figure disappearing beneath the boat. Not wasting a second, he joined her on equal terms.

"I'll race you to the beach," Core said, then sprinted away.

Alan had swallowed some water on his dive and was at a definite disadvantage in the competition. Nevertheless, he applied himself.

"Too many hours in the lab," Core said, relishing her victory. The brilliance of the sun shown in each drop of water streaming down the contour of her body. She picked a spot in the sand and sat down.

"You beat me fair and square," Alan acknowledged, and plopped down beside her—their shoulders and thighs touching.

"Your boat makes a pretty picture anchored in the cove."

Core didn't respond right away. She was thinking of the first time she and Joseph made love in the sand where they were now sitting. They had shared many good times together as buddies; getting married ruined it though.

"You know, I always swim to this beach, so I never have a camera to take any pictures," she said. "It's all right, though. Pictures don't mean that much to me; I prefer the real thing and the memories."

Core lay back on the sand, providing as much exposure to the sun and Alan as possible. Alan felt giddy and a profound sense of peace lying there next to her. He was intensely attracted to this woman whom he hardly knew. He found it impossible to think beyond the moment and sank into a delicious oblivion.

As if directed by some other will, Alan found Core's hand. She responded with an eager, firm squeeze and turned toward him and gently placed a leg over his thigh. The pleasure he experienced was an odd mixture of electrifying sexual tension and tranquility. They lay there for some time playing the tender games of embrace before Core suddenly bolted upright and just looked at Alan. She bent down, kissed him and dashed off for the boat.

Alan lay stunned for a moment but recovered and was soon in the water closing on her when she submerged. Puzzled, he stopped to think what to do and soon felt a little fish nibbling at his body. Then he realized it was Core and nearly became hysterical with laughter. He tried to sprint for the boat but couldn't escape the little fish—laughter had sapped his strength. He thought he was going to drown just as he reached *Wet Dreams II.*

Core followed him up the ladder, still kissing his legs. Alan plopped down, exhausted. Core was glowing with satisfaction.

"I yield," he said. "I know what it is now to be totally out-maneuvered by superior talent."

Core just smiled and went over to the cooler and got out the lemonade. She took a drink and gave it to Alan.

"Are you hungry?" she asked.

"Starved," he said.

Core put on a tee-shirt which just did cover all the important parts, if she stood still and erect. She began unpacking the sandwiches. Alan responded by unfurling another impossible pair of Bermuda shorts.

"OH MY GOD! I much prefer you just as you are. Do you have to put those on?" she complained.

Alan ignored her and donned the map of the world in all its majesty.

"They were unbiased, the folks that constructed these shorts. Notice the absence of a fly so as not to prejudice any continent or country as to front and back. That is left to personal preference or chance," he said with mock seriousness.

Core took one of the sandwiches and gave it to Alan.

"Thanks," he said, and started on the sandwich before continuing. "What's that big idea of yours that's best considered in the buff, under the sun, or was that just an excuse to play?"

Core hesitated a little embarrassed by the question. She couldn't pretend that amour hadn't been at least part of her intention from the start.

"Well, it seems a bit silly when I think about it," she said.

Although events had progressed just as Alan had hoped, he suspected that Core had been earnest about talking. He was serious now and the sincerity in his eyes encouraged her.

"At lunch yesterday, I didn't buy everything you and Brian McAdams said about the unimportance of HIV in AIDS, but it made me realize just how complacent I had become."

"Don't be so hard on yourself," he said. "It's tough to stay free and independent, especially in Washington. Did you go to the AIDS meeting in San Francisco a few of years ago?"

"No. Gabe—he's the editor—was under pressure to reduce expenses. He put a moratorium on travel that summer so I didn't get to go. I was lucky to make it to the Amsterdam meeting last year."

"You missed quite a show. Luc Montagnier reported data supporting the connection between Shyh-Ching Lo's mycoplasma and AIDS. It was his presentation, in fact, that got me interested in mycoplasmas. Well, Montagnier—the discoverer of HIV for Christ's sake—was ostracized that very day by his erstwhile friends and colleagues for attempting to venture beyond the accepted boundaries of HIV dogma. He's steadily been backing away from HIV ever since."

"That was the same thing that happened to Peter Duesberg," Core recalled. "The whole medical profession is starting to resemble the Inquisition. I don't know what's going on, but I'm going to find out. Alan, do you know an Austrian scientist named Jon Ferenczi?"

"Doesn't ring a bell. Where does he work?"

"He's a post-doc in Julio's lab—or was. He was scheduled to give one of the lectures Friday but withdrew or was cancelled."

"That happens all the time for one reason or another. There's nothing terribly mysterious about it."

"You don't have a reporter's suspicious nature," she said. "A clod at the *Washington Post* tried to get me to help him follow up a lead he had that Ferenczi was somehow going to discredit Julio during his presentation Friday. Joel doesn't know a testicle from a test tube but he *is* a reporter and can tell when shit's happening. Well, I came up with the crazy idea of spending a month or two in Julio's lab and see if I can find out what's going on."

"Will he let you nose around that long? Julio is notorious for preserving the security of his little kingdom," Alan said.

"I have my ways. I persuaded him that my sabbatical at the Welter Institute was preferable to an alternative one in Paris."

"Montagnier of course," Alan said. "You're a crafty one; I'll have to watch out for you."

"I'm not just interested in Julio, I'm going to checkup on all you guys," she said with a playful leer. "Julio has agreed to let me start in September. I just have to talk my editor into it."

"Core, that's a superb idea. It might even start a trend in science journalism. I'd consider it an honor if you would work with us for a time in San Francisco. It'd give me a chance to return your hospitality."

"I had you and Brian in mind, actually," she said.

"Splendid. Are there any more sandwiches? I'm as hungry as a buffalo."

They decided to spend the night on the boat. Core expected the day to end in frenzied love-making, but Alan wouldn't cooperate. It was confusing. He was certainly attracted to her, and was receptive to nearly everything except what she wanted most. Alan could see that he had to tell Core why he resisted and held her gently.

"Core, you know that I work with tissues from AIDS patients. Cuts and puncture wounds are a common occupational hazard working in a pathology lab. I've never been tested for HIV infection—you know my views on that—but it is almost certain that I have been infected by the virus. I..."

Core put her hand over his mouth and gave Alan a long, affectionate embrace, then produced splayed between her fingers, as if by magic, three different brands of condoms.

“I always travel prepared,” she said, smiling. “Your pleasure monsieur?”

Early next morning, Core and Alan hoisted the anchor and set sail for home. The only reason for going back was that they both had promised to meet a host of colleagues at the Thursday evening ritual. They were back in Washington by mid-afternoon. Alan talked Core into a nap, using as an excuse the demanding social obligations awaiting them. The real reason being that he wanted the peace and pleasure of lying with her—social obligations be damned.

Nine

Sunburned and at ease, Core and Alan arrived at the conference's traditional Thursday night cocktail party, sponsored this year by Starlight condoms. Neither really cared much about satisfying their social commitments—they were enjoying themselves too much.

This particular conference lacked the theatrics of previous ones. Militant groups such as the mostly white yuppie-male ACT UP had all but pooped-out a year ago. AIDS was just too long-term a problem to sustain that kind of fleeting intensity. As a result, the festivities lacked the excitement and anticipation of past meetings. Indeed, the number of guests was noticeably down from last year's party in Amsterdam. Core was just about to suggest leaving when Julio and his entourage arrived.

They entered, heads bowed, immersed in discussion. A perplexed woman who apparently had been waiting for Julio pounced on him, pulling him aside and got very animated about whatever it was she was telling him. Core took advantage of Julio's preoccupation with the woman's plight and worked her way just behind and to his left. Eavesdropping had often proved to be a serviceable tool of Core's. She sipped on her drink and pretended to be looking around as she strained to catch bits of the conversation. She nearly spilled her drink when she overheard Julio repeatedly trying to impress upon the woman that he had taken care of the Ferenczi problem, for her not to worry. Then Julio noticed Core and abruptly sent the woman on her way.

"Core, good to see you," he said in an excessively loud voice. She nodded nervously, then turned to join him.

"Gallo and Montagnier should be here any minute. I'll introduce you," he said, startled by her sudden appearance. She had of course met them individually many times over the past six years; but she could not recall ever seeing the three champions of HIV together at a social event. Their egos provided substantial

barriers to collaborating or even cooperating with each other. It might be interesting to watch the interplay, she thought.

Alan had been watching all of it and sensed the time was right to move in.

"What are y'all up to?" Alan said, appearing out of nowhere. Core gave his lower arm a short squeeze as he maneuvered himself between the two of them. He wasn't sure if it was a sign of affection or a signal to get lost. The look of relief in her eyes was his answer.

"Dr. Haan," Julio said, "I hear you gave a most interesting lecture. I'm sorry I wasn't able to attend—pressing business, as usual."

"Yes, well…I'll send you a preprint as soon as I get back to San Francisco," he said, knowing fully well Julio had no intention of reading it.

"Well…Core and I are late for a dinner engagement. We'd better be going," he said, turning to Core for support.

"Yes, we have to rush," she said. "Nice seeing you again, Dr. Julio."

"Alan, I think Joel Senuta may have blundered on to something amiss going on in Julio's lab. You should have heard the conversation between Julio and that…that *twee* miss. Poor Ferenczi must have done something pretty serious to make the top of Julio's shit-list."

"Yeah, I saw you snooping—and getting caught!" he said, giving her a lustful squeeze.

"Thanks for rescuing me," she said, trying to look innocent.

Core was glad that Alan decided to wait until Sunday to return to San Francisco. They spent Saturday doing tourist things. Their first stop was the Viet Nam Veterans Memorial. Alan told Core that his experience in Viet Nam had not been as bad as what others had suffered—especially the Vietnamese. Even so, he had seen enough inhumanity to turn him against war forever. This was his first visit to the Wall and was totally unprepared for the emotional effect it had on him. Core let go of his arm and sat on the grass to give him a few moments by himself with the black monument.

"Boy—what an experience," he said, after walking the length of it. He sat down next to her. "Now I understand what holy places are all about. That stone radiates energy—you can feel it."

She wiped the tears from his cheek with her thumb.

"I don't cry anymore when I come here," she said. "I guess I've gotten used to it." But the tightness in her throat proved her wrong.

Core stood and offered her hand. Silently, they made their way through the trees to the Lincoln Memorial. From the top of the steps, Alan looked east and complained that the Washington Monument obstructed the view of the Capital building.

"That's a long ways," he said. "I've never walked the length of the Mall before—have you, Core?"

"A couple of times. You want to try it?" she said.

"Sure. It's a beautiful day; not too hot."

Alan wanted to see the space museum, so Core led them along the south edge of the Mall. At the Washington Monument, they stopped and had an ice cream.

"I still think it would have been better if the Washington Monument had been built somewhere else instead of right in the center of the Mall," he said.

"Oh, Alan. It's fine where it is," she said.

"What's that building over there; it looks out of place?" He pointed to an old Gothic-looking structure.

"That's the Smithsonian Institution."

"We definitely have to go in there."

They walked a half block without talking. When Alan finally spoke his mood had grown pensive.

"Core, you're the best tour guide a guy could have. You've got to come to San Francisco so I can repay my debt—it's only fair. This week sure has been…" he hesitated, "full, I suppose is the best way to describe it. It's not every AIDS conference I meet a gorgeous journalist. You're really beautiful, Core. I'm not looking forward to leaving tomorrow. It's funny, I have to come twenty-five hundred miles to meet a woman I really like."

"I like you too, Alan. But things are crazy right now. You happened to show up during a crisis in my life. I'm married, and wished I wasn't. I'm just glad Joseph's gone for a while. I took off in the middle of a conference and went sailing—I've never goofed off like that before. I don't enjoy my job like I used to. I'm just a mess. I know what you must think of me. In only a few hours I was trying to seduce you—quite successfully, I might add."

"I'll tell you what I think of you," he said, stopping and holding her with both hands. "In addition to being an extremely gorgeous and seductive woman, you're terribly intelligent and a hell of a journalist. I know it's been only a few days, but that's a reasonable beginning to a relationship, don't you think?"

“Alan, you’re leaving tomorrow. San Francisco is not right around the corner, you know. If you didn’t live so far away…” She gently freed herself from his grasp. “Here, use the rest of my cone to feed the birds.” She took his free hand. “Come on, Alan. We still have a long walk.”

Six hours of sightseeing was all Alan could endure before he got saturated with museums and monuments. Core took him to her favorite Indian restaurant for supper, then they went home.

Core drove Alan to the airport Sunday morning. After he had gone, the rest of the day seemed empty. She thought about going to the zoo to lift her spirits but went to a movie instead—it was a better thing to do alone.

Ten

Core was usually the first one to arrive at the office, but Monday morning she found Tracey Watson nervously pacing about with a cup of coffee in her hand—she rarely drank the stuff she called that foul black liquid.

"Tracey, why aren't you in Pittsburgh?"

She spilt coffee on her blouse when she turned, abruptly.

"Oh, hi Core. I didn't go."

"That's obvious. What happened?" It was clear something was wrong. Tracey never appeared in the office before nine and was definitely agitated.

"Come on, sit down and tell me what's the matter," Core continued in a more compassionate tone as she wiped the coffee stain with a hand full of napkins.

"Core, I have AIDS," she blurted, noticeably trembling. Core was shocked for a moment. She hadn't expected to hear that from her best friend at seven AM.

"You silly goose, people with AIDS are sick. You're as healthy as an alley cat." Core's jocular approach did not have the desired effect. Tracey lowered her gaze and clasped the coffee mug with both hands tightly between her knees and just stared at the tiled floor. Core immediately recognized her mistake and took Tracey's hand.

"Hey," Core said, softly. "I'm here, you can talk to me."

Tracey looked at her, eyes ablaze with anxious desperation.

"I was trying to do the right thing," she began. "All those articles you wrote—how responsible people owe it to themselves and their partners to get tested for AIDS."

"Tested for HIV," Core said.

"It's the SAME THING!" Tracey said, angrily.

Core had changed her position supporting the HIV test four years ago. Since then she had written a number of articles in opposition to the testing of healthy individuals for HIV, but now wasn't the time to argue the point.

"Did you get tested for HIV?" Core asked.

"I got the results back last Thursday. Positive!" Tracey reached in her skirt pocket and retrieved a crumpled computer printout and thrust it at Core. "I haven't slept with anybody but Jeff for two years. How could it have happened?"

Core bit her tongue fighting the impulse to recite the litany of the various routes of HIV infection. Tracey needed a friend, not a seminar.

"Have you talked to Jeff?"

"No. I couldn't. I didn't know what to do…I…I just don't know what to do, Core."

Core recognized the document that caused Tracey and countless thousands of others such misery since she had taken several of the tests herself. So far *she* had won the game of sexual Russian roulette. On paper HIV testing seemed eminently logical and unimpeachable. To some it was the moral thing to do if you were sexually active. But poor Tracey's suffering showed just how brutal the system really was. Without sacrificing any of her sincere concern for Tracey, Core assumed just the right level of professional demeanor appropriate for the situation.

"Tracey, I can't say that I know how you're feeling, but I'm sure I'd be scared out of my gourd if I was in your situation. However, I'm certain you do not have AIDS. And it's very likely that the test you took was in error.

"All the HIV tests have a certain level of false positive results. When they're used to screen large numbers of people who are at low risk of having AIDS, the majority of the positive results are incorrect. You have much less than a fifty percent chance of even having the virus, and you certainly do not have AIDS."

"What do you mean, Core? Those tests are supposed to be pretty accurate."

"Listen, Tracey, diagnostic tests were intended to help a physician diagnose a patient's problem. Doctors know that none of the tests are perfect, so they take that into account when making a diagnosis. The HIV tests are no different. If a patient comes in with AIDS-like symptoms, it would make sense to test for HIV. The tests are also useful in screening the blood supply for the virus. But to look for HIV in healthy people is crazy."

Core grabbed a piece of paper to make some calculations and sat next to Tracey.

"It's estimated that there may be a million Americans infected with HIV. Now there are 250 million people in this country, which means the infection rate is 0.4 percent nation-wide. Of course, the rate varies enormously depending on whether or not you belong to one of the high-risk groups. If you're not in one of those groups, the rate is much less—but we'll go ahead and use the 0.4 percent rate, though it's an over estimate in your case.

"That means that if you take a thousand people, four should be infected with the virus. Pretty clear, so far?"

"Certainly, I was a math major, remember," Tracey said, showing her annoyance.

Core nodded an apology and went on.

"Well, the false positive rate for the HIV antibody test is at least 5 percent. That means that if every one of those thousand people was tested for HIV, fifty would test positive who were free of the virus—FIFTY! But as we already calculated, only four people should really be infected. So you see, Tracey, the odds are greatly on your side that they got it wrong. I tell you what—does Gabe know you're in town?"

"No, you're the only one I've talked to."

"Good, then you don't have to be here," Core said, firmly. "Go on home. I have to talk to Gabe when he gets in, but when I'm done, we'll go to Chuck's and I'll buy you a stout one."

Core was now in command of the situation. Her power to take charge renewed Tracey's confidence and gave her a sense of well-being that she desperately needed.

So far, the morning had given Core no time to savor thoughts of the weekend with Alan. However, after Tracey left, she permitted herself a few delicious memories before facing Lublin.

"Good morning, Fletcher." Gabe Lublin addressed everyone by last name. "I hope the AIDS meeting wasn't too much of an inconvenience for you—interfering with your social life and all."

Lublin found it difficult to separate the personal and professional lives of his employees. It was impossible for him to reconcile the fact that his most productive journalist could be so cavalier in her behavior while her husband was out of the country. Core and the others had learned long ago the best way to deal with his editorializing on their lives was to ignore it.

"Mornin' Gabe. I need to see you when you have a minute."

"Okay Fletcher, give me a chance to get a cup of coffee and join me in my office."

"All right Fletcher, what's up?"

"Something fishy is going on at the Welter Institute," she began. "That incompetent sex maniac, Senuta at the *Post*"—oops, taboo subject, she thought—"got wind of something rotten in Julio's lab. A post-doc working at the Institute by the name of Jon Ferenczi was scheduled to give a paper on the last day of the meeting. Well, he never gave it. At the last minute he was removed from the list of speakers and left the meeting early. In fact, he's already gone back to Austria. Nothing terribly unusual about that; there could be a million reasons for someone going home in a rush. *But*, according to Senuta, this guy Ferenczi was about to expose fraud at the Institute when he disappeared."

Core didn't believe fraud was involved. She could picture negligence or impropriety, even one of those million reasons, but fraud had the desired effect. Gabe put his coffee down, clasped both hands on top of his desk, and for the first time looked Core directly in the eye. She had him nibbling at the bait; it was time to set the hook.

"I didn't pay much attention to Senuta's story until I happened to overhear an exchange between Stephen Julio and some pixie who apparently works for him. She grabbed Julio and irritated the hell out of him. She was upset at being unable to contact Ferenczi as Julio had instructed. She started to calm down only after an exasperated Julio finally convinced her that he had taken care of the Ferenczi problem—as he called it—himself. Then, unfortunately, Julio saw me and clammed up. I think Joel really was on to something this time, but you know him, he couldn't spray paint his own hand."

"Fletcher, what the hell are you talking about? What sort of fraud?" Lublin was agitated but still interested.

"HIV…" Core waited several heart beats. "Joel believed Ferenczi—working in Julio's lab, right under his nose mind you—had discovered that the link between HIV and AIDS was bogus." Core wasn't sure about everything she was saying, but somehow was beginning to believe it. Anyway, she needed to be dramatic in order to persuade Gabe to support her plan.

"Where's that damn cigar?" Gabe began, rummaging about the drawers of his desk trying to locate one of the two Jamaican panatelas he had stashed away, in spite of his doctor. This was a clear sign Core's strategy was working.

"This Ferenczi fellow is back in Austria, right?" Gabe said.

"Yes sir," she responded, feeling magnanimous.

"Ah, found it." Gabe took a few moments to ignite the Jamaican. He made himself comfortable in his high-backed, leather chair and savored the first puffs.

"What's on your mind, Fletcher—what do you want to do?" he asked, finally.

"Julio has agreed to let me have the run of his facility for a month or two on a kind of sabbatical. At the end of my stay I would write a story telling of my experiences and what it's like working in the world's premier HIV laboratory. What I'd really be after, of course, is finding out what's going on—not just what Julio wants us to know. But it's not going to be easy. I've heard the Institute's security is second only to NORAD's. I sure wish Ferenczi was still in town," she added.

After a minute or two of rocking and puffing, he spoke.

"Julio can wait for now. Make up some excuse—like prior commitments or something. Delay your *sabbatical*," he said, glaring at her over his bifocals. "I want you on the next plane to Austria. Locate Ferenczi; find out what he was doing and what happened. If you can't get Ferenczi to tell you anything…well just don't make a fool out of me, Fletcher.

"Now, get goin'. You've got work to do. I expect you to report back to me in ten days."

Core was stunned. It usually took her two days at a minimum to wear Gabe down to the point of seeing things her way. Now she was off to Austria on the flimsiest of reasons to find and interview a man she had never met. Her career was on the line. If Ferenczi turned out to be uncooperative, or even worse a complete dud, she would resign from *Science Week* before Gabe could fire her.

"Oh well," she said to herself, "let's get on with it."

Core called Julio's secretary to schedule her sabbatical and insisted that they not go to much fuss on her account. A small office, one recently vacated, would do nicely. She didn't want to put anybody out, she said. At the conference she had heard that a young scientist named Ferenczi had just left the Institute, and in passing added that Ferenczi seemed an unusual name and wondered what

nationality it was. The secretary volunteered that, “yes a young man named Jon Ferenczi recently left them and had already returned to the University of Vienna.”

Core decided not to press her luck by showing any further interest in Ferenczi and changed the conversation back to the details of her sabbatical before hanging-up. But she had accomplished the principal objective of identifying Vienna as her destination. One of the more reliable pool secretaries helped with the travel arrangements. By noon the reservations were made and Core felt free to keep her date with Tracey. Tracey was not answering the phone. Core left a message on her machine to meet her at Chuck’s at one-thirty. She caught the Metro at the DuPont Circle station, just a block from the office, and headed for Gallery Place.

Eleven

Chuck's Place was a funky little bar, just right for reading and sipping, but especially suited to conversation—no blaring TVs or mind-numbing music. Core ordered a glass of red wine to help collect her thoughts before Tracey showed up. She reflected a moment on the promise she had made to herself, but decided one glass of wine was okay under the circumstances.

Tracey arrived early. She needed something stronger than wine and ordered a Long Island ice tea. They were enjoying the early afternoon break, even though Ferenczi was uppermost in Core's thoughts and Tracey's mind, never far from her predicament. They had uncharacteristically avoided discussing men, a reminder of Tracey's situation, until Tracey couldn't hold back any longer.

"I've decided to get retested."

Core was reluctant to pursue the touchy business of giving advice to her friend, but there was no putting-off the inevitable. Tracey craved reassurance and direction as to what to do.

"That's the thing to do, Tracey." Core put her glass down. "Don't have the same people do it though. If they recognize you they would most likely guess you tested positive and were back to confirm it. I can give you the addresses of some others, if you like."

"Oh, Core! Sometimes you're just too cynical."

"Not cynical, yet—just healthy skepticism. I am mystified by one thing, though," Core said, attempting to maneuver the conversation toward her thoughts, "how willingly people accept just about anything to avoid thinking for themselves. The person reading the news on TV becomes an authority on cold fusion, cholesterol, or computer chips. Television is the only source of technical information for most people—and it's taken as gospel. They'll use particularly dramatic examples: a child who got HIV through a blood transfusion, or a dentist who gave the virus to twenty or thirty of his patients—something along those

lines. They'll present those cases as definitive proof that AIDS is infectious. What's worse: people swallow it. I can't say I'm surprised. What choice do they have? If there ever was an appetite for subtlety and argument it vanished with the buffalo.

"The most recent example of mindlessness is the donor organ story sweeping the country. Two or three recipients of HIV tainted organs died. So the journalists tell us they died of AIDS; implying that organ transplantation itself is merely minor cosmetic surgery. Hell, physicians intentionally give immuno-suppressive drugs like cyclosporin A to transplant recipients to keep them from rejecting the organs. If somebody dies who was infected with HIV, the easiest, most expedient thing to do is to list AIDS as the cause of death. Remember the guy that got the baboon's liver? The operation was hailed a great success even though he died ten days later. Then it was made public that the patient had been HIV positive, implying that AIDS was what killed him.

"Somehow, we have to become a little more critical before we jump to belief. I don't know what it's going to take though. How do you fight television?"

Tracey was feeling the effects of her drink and didn't give a damn about society's problems at the moment; she was more concerned with her own.

"Boy, when this is all over with I ain't having nothing to do with no cock, no matter how gorgeous it is, even if it comes gift-wrapped in an industrial gauge puddin protector," Tracey let fly loud enough for others to hear. "Do you use them things, Core?"

"Sometimes. Not nearly enough. I've been lucky, so far."

"You *shore* have. How come this is happening to me and not you?" Tracey said, letting the liquor get the best of her.

"It's a puzzle to me. But the only man I've slept with who is almost certainly infected with HIV told me so—before we did it of course. I've got to get a divorce. This screwing around—It's just not fair to Joseph."

"When was the last time you got tested, Core?"

"Oh…it must be close to six months, I think. I do it regularly—I feel obligated because of my job, you know. I try to avoid appearing hypocritical." Core blushed, aware of the reality of her life.

"That asshole Jeff, I bet he's a fag," Tracey let fly. "He's been pumpin it fore and aft. I bet he's been doing it with the male flight attendants."

Core wasn't quite sure what to say. It could all be true.

"Tracey, don't you think you ought to wait a while before you guillotine the guy's joy stick—you might not have the virus, remember."

Tracey became pensive and didn't respond until she saw Core's half-empty glass. "Ready for another drink?" she asked.

"No thanks. I better get on home. I'm off to Vienna tomorrow, and I have no desire to cross the Atlantic with a hangover."

"You're going to Europe! That's wonderful. Gabe's paying, right?" she said, feigning a lighthearted interest in her friend's good fortune.

"Yeah, it's business. I've got to interview a guy. If it doesn't work out I'll let you buy *me* a drink."

"What time do you leave?"

"Six PM from Dulles. I couldn't get a flight out of National, wouldn't you know it."

"I'll take you to the airport."

"Oh that would be great, Tracey. I have to be there no later than five, though."

Core paid the check, and Tracey drove her home. Core had a difficult time getting to sleep for worrying about Tracey. She wished she believed in God so she could pray for her. Even though the statistics were on Tracey's side, that was little comfort when a loved-one was involved.

Twelve

The trans-Atlantic flight was tiring but uneventful, with a plane change in Frankfurt. To Core's amazement, she arrived on schedule at Vienna's Wien Schwechat airport. Being on time was a novel experience; it just didn't happen in Washington. However, the airport security was especially tight. It took more than an hour to retrieve her baggage and clear customs. A British lady on holiday told Core that the precautions were likely do to the Vienna fair that was in full swing right then. The festival was an international attraction, which the authorities, with justification, feared posed a tempting target to terrorists. Core searched through one of the smaller bags to find the German phrase book and the $100 worth of Austrian shillings she converted at Dulles.

"Unnecessary baggage, my dear," the British lady observed, "everyone speaks English."

Core wasn't as sanguine, having traveled to Europe only twice before. She kept the phrase book readily accessible in the small shoulder bag. Her anxiety was somewhat relieved when the cab driver spoke perfect English, and according to him, five other languages as well.

"Hotel Bristol on Kärntner Ring please," Core said, struggling with the pronunciation. The driver was quick to oblige, and jumped into a running commentary, describing the points of interest along the way. He waved his hand in the direction of the famous Vienna Woods just north of the city, and apologized for the smog obscuring the view. As they approached the city, Core saw people dressed in traditional costumes, many carrying mighty tankards, filled with exquisite brew, no doubt. Boy, I could sure use one of those, she thought.

"Are you here for the fair?" the driver inquired.

"No. I'm afraid not. I'm here on business."

"Do you Americans do nothing but work? One day your country is going to collapse from exhaustion. You are your own worst enemy, you know. You're all so paranoid."

"Yeah, at the airport I saw how relaxed y'all are—all those *cheerful* policemen with machine guns..." Core retorted.

"We are a target of terrorism, as are many places in Europe. We have many borders, unlike the US which has only two—and Canada might as well be a state," he added, with a touch of sarcasm.

Core barely had time to spit out "them are fighting words to Canadians," when the driver made a high performance maneuver (for which cabbies throughout the world are famous) to clear a busy intersection and came to an abrupt stop in front of the Hotel Bristol.

With an air of finality he said: "We have arrived, madam."

Waiting on her change, she observed the trail of blue-gray smoke they left behind and smelled the familiar, acrid odor of burnt oil. "You need a ring job," was all the tip he got.

A squad of uniforms descended upon Core, and silently, without instruction removed her bags from the taxi to the lobby.

The Bristol was a grand hotel, amid a city of grand structures. The decor evoked the full power of the Habsburg Empire. A string quartet was playing when Core entered. She guessed it was Mozart since Vienna was the city of Mozart. But it was also the home of Haydn, Beethoven, Strauss, Schubert, and many other composers. Core didn't get ecstatic over classical music and wasn't going to burst a brain cell puzzling over it.

Her room, however, was another matter. It was a work of art that appealed to her soul. It featured a black, carved marble fireplace, with expensive oil paintings on every wall. Fresh cut flowers scented the room. The bedroom was equally attractive, but the small canopied bed was clearly not designed to assist amorous activity. The bathroom was done in black tile. At the sight of the luxuriant, oversized tub, Core felt every pore of her body pleading for a bubble bath. She gave in immediately.

She soaked in the perfect bath and sipped a complimentary glass of Schwechater, considered the best beer made in Vienna. She wouldn't have disputed the point had she known. She opened a map of the city. The University of Vienna was about a kilometer or so north of the hotel along the ring. "Good, I

can sleep late," she said, relieved that she wouldn't have to waste time searching for the place.

The strange surroundings and a frightful jet-lag contributed to Core's fitful and fatiguing dream sleep: *She is undressing Alan, but he's wearing Joseph's boots and she can't pull them off, so he gets up and walks out. She comes to a door with a very large doorknob—But then the dream projector freezes on a single frame. She wants to open the door, something important is on the other side, but her dream gets stuck, it won't cooperate. She's aware she's dreaming, and angry the dream won't progress beyond the closed door. The doorknob is just right there; I can reach out and turn it. But that doesn't happen. She tries to will it open—but no go. She exerts more will and feels herself moving through several layers of consciousness as she forces her right hand to grab the knob. But then it vanishes as she tries to turn it, and awakes with her hand in the air, feeling as if it weighs 40 pounds.*

Thirteen

Core decided that walking the kilometer to the Old University Quarter would flush the cobwebs from her mind. She passed the opera house, several museums, Parliament, and a number of very beautiful gardens on the way. Luck was with her and compensated for the terrible sleep. In the first building she entered the receptionist, as everyone else in Vienna, spoke excellent English—she also knew Jon Ferenczi.

"Could you direct me to his lab," Core said, barely containing her excitement.

"I'm sorry but he is not here right now. He has gone home to visit his parents."

"Where do they live?" Core asked, her heart sinking to her knees.

"Salzburg. It's about 400 kilometers to the west."

Core made a quick mental calculation.

"That's about 190 miles."

"I believe that's correct. Maybe you would like to talk with Professor Staël," the secretary suggested.

"Who's he?"

"Professor Staël was Jon's doctoral adviser. He has an office on the second floor. I'll let him know you're on the way."

Core got the room number and raced up the stairs. Room 217 Hans-Peter Staël. She was about to knock when the door suddenly opened. A short, bearded figure greeted her.

"Miss Fletcher, please come in." The accent was thick; he fit the Hollywood version of a Viennese professor.

"Hello, Professor Staël. My name is Core Fletcher. I'm a journalist with *Science Week*."

"Please forgive me. I'm not familiar with that publication. Can I offer you some coffee—tea perhaps?"

"Tea sounds perfect, thanks."

While he was preparing the tea, Core inspected the office. It was one thing to see stuff like this on PBS, but to experience baroque in 3-D comes as a shock the first time. She couldn't tell if the architect had been serious or just having fun.

"The architect was Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach. It's a rather unfortunate marriage of baroque and rococo," he said, as if reading her mind. "This portion of the building was completed in 1712. However, the University is much older. It was founded by Duke Rudolf dem Stifter in 1365. Your first visit to Europe, Miss Fletcher?"

"To Vienna, Yes."

"I can always tell. It's a pity if you're here solely on business," he said, handing her the tea. "It's strange, the first time Americans come to Vienna it's usually on business. However, it's been my experience that many return to satisfy their personal interests once they see the charms Vienna has to offer. Well then, I feel it my duty to be the first to tempt you with the delights of our fair city. Let me begin with a tour of this humble facility."

"Oh, please…I don't want to take up your time," was her instinctive response.

"My dear, you're in Vienna. *Here*, there is an abundance of time. Besides, it would give me great pleasure for my petrified colleagues to see me strolling about with a beautiful, young American. We can talk as we walk, Miss Fletcher," he said, gesturing towards the door.

"I prefer Core, Professor Staël," she said, putting down the cup of tea, having only sipped it once.

"Then you must call me Hans-Peter. I understand you're interested in a former student of mine," his voice echoing in the great hallway.

"I'm eager to talk with Jon Ferenczi concerning his work at the Welter Institute."

"Our Jon must have gotten into mischief or done something very interesting—which is the same thing—for you to come all this way just for an interview. Yes, he's a very bright boy, our Jon," he said in a teasing manner. He wasn't ready to talk in depth about his former student just yet and began the tour.

"The Jesuits ran our university until the mid 1700s, the dawning of the age of the natural sciences. The good fathers were quickly swept aside by the triumphant optimism of the new intellectual movement. Don't misunderstand me, I have little fondness for the Jesuits. They are a brutal, unprincipled lot; not a trace of humor beneath those robes. But alas, the Jesuits' successors, a pantheon clad in white coats, supplanted God in Heaven—a poor exchange, if you ask me. The current crop of scientists foolishly believe their logical, analytical thinking demolished religious dogma, the sin of of the clergy. Little are they aware, *they* are the new priests. Dogma has not disappeared, my friend, it has just become secular.

"This, Core, is the Ceremonial Room of the Academy of Sciences. It celebrates the power of the human intellect," he said, pointing, without looking himself, to the Guglielmi fresco of the four faculties on the ceiling. "Man has now become his own agent to Heaven, without the intercession of the angels or even God's help."

"All this detail is exhausting. How do you keep from getting a stiff neck?" Core said, placing a hand on the back of her neck to emphasize the point.

"We Europeans quit looking to the heavens long ago. We are looking outwards, these days, towards our neighbors. Europe is undergoing a painful rebirth, but I must say, for an old man, I'm quite optimistic about it, though there will be much bloodshed before it's over. Europe was trying to destroy itself the first half of this century. The United States could have, indeed should have, stayed out of the conflagration of the two world wars. Had America not contaminated itself by participating in the sins of Europe, we could have used your moral, ethical, spiritual strengths to heal our wounds. By joining our insanity, you sacrificed your nobility and our hope. The collapse of Yugoslavia represents the most recent tragic chapter in the relentless legacy of the World Wars. I hope that your country resists its natural instincts and stays out of the mess."

"Professor, there's the little matter of Pearl Harbor…" Core interjected.

"The price Roosevelt was willing to pay to join the fun," he responded, sharply. "Sin, after all, isn't anything if it isn't fun—at least in the beginning. America's punishment for its sins has been to take Europe's place as the chief mischief-maker in the world. I suppose all was inevitable, however. Your country was born in original sin: *slavery*," glancing her way as he said it. "Slavery left indelible scares on that magnificent document—your Constitution—and led,

inevitably, to the holocaust of 1861: your Civil War. The social, political, and spiritual ills afflicting your country are rooted in that colossal tragedy and the ten years of Redestruction that followed.

"Europe is repenting the sins of centuries, growing stronger and healing itself, however painfully, while America refuses to acknowledge its transgressions. With the help of all the gods and our considerable history to guide us, I believe we Europeans will choose to steer clear of the American trap. Who knows, maybe Europe will provide the moral and spiritual example America needs to avoid social collapse. We will see."

Seeing that Core was growing tired, probably from a combination of jet-lag and listening to him, Professor Staël decided to cut the tour short.

"You know, Core, the smog, my age most likely—well what ever it is—I just can't go as I used to. Why don't we stop here? Only the newer additions are left, and they are very similar to what you have in your country, anyway," he said, hiding the real reason.

"Why of course, Professor. I'm getting a bit tired myself."

"Not far from here is Cafe Landtmann," he said. "At this time of year Greta prepares the most marvelously refreshing beverage you can imagine. It's called bowle. She soaks berries and sliced peaches overnight in brandy. The next day she pours at least three bottles of dry white wine over the fruit and lets it stand two to three hours. And just before serving, she adds a bottle of champagne."

"That sounds wonderful…lead the way," she said.

"You see that big steeple over there?" He was pointing east.

"You can't miss it. It was the first thing the cab driver described yesterday. It's Saint Stephen's Cathedral, isn't it?" she said.

"It's the great south tower of the cathedral, completed in 1439. It's better than a compass. I know where everything is in Vienna in relation to that spire. Just head straight for it, and in a little while we'll be enjoying Greta's bowle."

The sidewalks were crowded with festive people in colorful costumes. Hans-Peter picked up the pace a little, Core noticed. It wasn't quite lunch time yet, but because of the fair, they might not get to taste the famous bowle. Again, reading her mind…

"Not to worry, my dear," he said, a trifle winded. "The bowle is waiting and Greta has never turned me out yet. Ah—here we are."

They had stopped in the middle of a narrow alley-way, of what appeared to be a residential section. Professor Staël opened a door and they walked in. Core

smelled fresh baked bread and the appetizing aroma of garlic, and could hear the muffled rumbling of voices, familiar to any bar scene.

"We've come in the back way," he said.

They walked into the kitchen. Hans-Peter was recognized, and a voice in German greeted him. He answered in English to signal his companion's presence. The conversation smoothly resumed in English.

"You old dog, it's about time you showed up. The bowle is Greta's best ever," said a man dressed as a chef.

"Carl, I'd like you to meet Core Fletcher," Hans-Peter said, "she's visiting from the US."

"Very interesting country," Carl said. "I have an uncle who lives in Chicago. Which part are you from, Core?"

"The land of suits and ties: Washington, DC."

Just then, a tall, handsome woman with her gray hair rolled-up in a bun walked into the kitchen carrying a rather large pitcher about half full of what had to be the celebrated elixir. Her eyes lit-up when she saw the professor. They spoke in German, and it was obvious that there was more between them than the usual customer-proprietor relationship. He switched to English.

"Greta, I'd like you to meet Core Fletcher; she's a journalist from Washington, DC. This is her first time to Vienna and we're here for the bowle."

She put down the pitcher and took Core and the professor each by the arm and led them upstairs to a perfect little veranda overlooking the main street.

"Greta, Hans has told me about your famous bowle. It sounds delicious," Core said. "If you're not too busy, could you join us?"

The professor was already pulling up a chair for Greta, next to him. Carl was standing in the doorway with a pitcher and three glasses. Core savored the first taste of the delicious concoction. She sampled it again before saying anything. It was, she thought, the most exquisite beverage she had ever experienced. When Hans-Peter tried to refill Core's glass, she politely stopped him as she continued to praise Greta's creation.

"If this is typical of what the Old World has to offer, I may never go home," she said.

Core's genuine satisfaction greatly pleased Greta. The professor placed his hand on the back of Greta's left shoulder as he sipped his second bowle.

“I believe this is the best you’ve ever done,” he said. She just smiled and looked over the railing at the crowd below. An untidy line had formed in front of her cafe.

“I suppose you’ll be going to Salzburg to see Jon. Mozart was born there, you know,” the professor said.

“I’m leaving in the morning. I need to decide, soon, whether to rent a car or take the train.”

“Rent a car,” he said, “you can get there on a tank of petrol. The hotel can make the arrangements. You will follow an old Roman route along the Danube to Linz through a beautiful alpine valley. From Linz, you’ll go directly to Salzburg. The Traun river will accompany you most of the way from there. I suppose you got his parents’ address from my secretary?”

“She was most helpful,” Core said, rummaging through her shoulder bag. “Twelve Getreidegasse.”

“Raphael Ferenczi is the last in his family of a long line of glass-blowers,” the professor began. “The tradition ends with Jon, his only child. The Ferenczi genes may continue, if Jon chooses, but his father’s trade will not. We inherit more from our ancestors than mere genes and skills, however. We acquire their psyche and wisdom through mythology—but that’s a story for another time.

“I suppose your interest in our Jon has to do with his AIDS work,” he said, looking up at Core. “It may come as a surprise that AIDS is not an obsession in Europe. We tend to avoid diving into the water before we know it is deep enough. Remember the hubbub over cold fusion? Cold fusion is to physics what HIV is to medicine. The parallels between cold fusion and HIV are indeed remarkable. Both were unleashed upon the world during hastily called press conferences, and received intense international coverage. Previously unknown scientists—though respected in their fields, of course—were, regrettably, transformed during prime-time into television celebrities. Sadly, none of those gentlemen was prepared for what lay ahead. The perpetrators of cold fusion and HIV are either embroiled in litigation or have other legal problems, and have generally become quite embittered by all the scrutiny they brought upon themselves.

“Since physics is much simpler than biology, routing the cold fusion charlatans was comparatively straight forward. The pandemonium over cold fusion lasted just under two years, you recall. However, the debunking of HIV, I’m afraid, will span 15 to 20 years. When the hour of reckoning does arrive—in the

next few years, I expect—it will expose a scandal of monumental proportions. The public indignation could shake the foundations of America's institutions."

The sun was getting quite warm. Greta chose the moment to extend the awning, while the professor took the opportunity to remove his sweater. After getting resettled, he appeared reluctant to proceed with the discussion but then assumed a conspiratorial posture and forged ahead.

"Recently, a visiting American colleague pointed out a curious connection between cold fusion and HIV, which I think amusing—though probably mere coincidence. I shouldn't even discuss it…it's tabloid stuff—but quite interesting." He paused and took a healthy swallow of bowle.

"Cold fusion had its genesis at the University of Utah, remember. Mormon country," he said in a drawn-out low voice. "Now for the shocker. My friend, who deals regularly with the CDC in Atlanta, Georgia, told me that the policy makers at the CDC are predominantly Mormon. These Mormons, he contends, have a hand in setting the government's policies on AIDS and HIV."

Fearing he was treading on sensitive ground, the professor shifted his position and struck a congenial pose as he stroked Greta's forearm. He could tell Core wasn't entirely pleased with the direction the conversation was taking. She took a deep hit of the bowle, somewhat annoyed by the constant denigration her country received since she arrived. She stood, looked away from the professor and fixed her eyes on the great spire of Saint Stephen's.

Greta nudged the professor and nodded at him in Core's direction.

"I must apologize, Core, for my arrogance and poor taste—the unfortunate legacy of my Germanic heritage. Please forgive an old man."

"You know, it's funny," Core said, turning back around, "the rest of the world is quite knowledgeable about the United States and follows closely what we do. We Americans, on the other hand, engage in national narcissism—the lands beyond our boarders, either military targets or merely places to vacation."

"After all, Core, that's the price Americans pay for being the new Romans," put in Greta.

"The only people I've met who showed no real interest in the US were the Brazilians—maybe it's because they speak Portuguese," Core mused. "I shouldn't be angry, Hans-Peter," she said, looking into the professor's pale gray eyes. "I should be flattered by your interest in my country. Cheers!" She held up her glass and they all toasted the occasion.

"Please, Hans-Peter, feel free to say whatever you wish," she said and sat down.

"Well, now…where were we?" he said.

"The American preoccupation with AIDS," offered Greta.

"Maybe I should talk about Jon for a while," he said. "I knew he and Stephen Julio had a falling-out over some disagreement concerning Jon's research. But I'm afraid I don't know the details. Naturally, when you see him you can find out for yourself. I can tell you a little about Jon, though. He worked with me four years. We studied the enzymology of the tissue-wasting diseases—things like cancer and arthritis. Jon's Ph.D. work was exceptional in every way. He's his own person when it comes to work, but the last to boast. Jon wanted to do AIDS research in your country and chose Julio's lab for his post-doc. I thought he was making a mistake, but I didn't try to talk him out of it. The hottest new areas are always attractive to young scientists—some old ones, too," he said with a twinkle in his eye.

"I told Jon that I thought AIDS research was saturated with all the talent it could handle. Too many people in an area promote shoddy work. AIDS has produced the greatest amount of published garbage I've seen in my lifetime. A free-for-all mentality has replaced the skeptical and reflective character of responsible science. So much talent is being wasted on that damnable disease."

The professor was feeling the effects of the bowle.

"Why do I work myself into such a state?" he complained. "The defense industry has squandered trillions and wasted countless, promising young lives over decades of profligacy. We Europeans share mightily in that disgrace, I hasten to add, my dear Core. I guess I should take some comfort in that I can't see how the mania with AIDS could ever reach such colossal proportions. To most people, science is alien and difficult, so they think we scientists must possess some kind of superior intelligence. The behavior of many of my colleagues these days tempts me to describe them as talented automatons.

"But I'm being too harsh. We push our students excessively during their school years and allow them no time for reflection. We train them in the tools of the trade and sacrifice their ethical and spiritual growth. We provide little guidance in the development of a sense of proportion and propriety. They are behaving in the world exactly as we have prepared them."

The professor had finally spent himself and stopped talking. Neither Greta nor Core decided to pick up the conversation.

“Well, I’m leaving in the morning and I have a car to rent,” Core said. “I want to thank both of you for being so kind, but I should be getting back to my hotel.”

“I’ll have Carl call you a taxi,” Greta insisted.

Addressing the professor, Core said, “I probably won’t be back, so I want to say goodbye, and thanks again for all you’ve done. Maybe someday I can return your hospitality.”

Fourteen

The next morning, after a light breakfast, Core set out for Salzburg—by train. The concierge strongly discouraged renting a car as being over-priced and very unreliable, and recommended the train instead. Recalling a nasty experience driving in Mexico City, she was easily dissuaded. The train left promptly on schedule. Core made herself comfortable, leaned her head against the window and watched Vienna go by. The rhythmic clicking and swaying soon rocked her to sleep. She would awake from time to time and gaze out upon the countryside but continued to doze for most of the trip.

Just outside Salzburg, the train slowed and Core awoke to the dazzling spectacle of the Austrian Alps. The late morning sun was just beginning to win the battle with the alpine mist. The illuminated city appeared as brightly colored packages hugging dramatic spires of granite. Core thought Vienna oppressively flat and heavy. However, viewing this intimate melding of mountains and city evoked a collage of emotions. Core recalled similar feelings the first time she saw Disney World. There is something about the vertical that provokes a sense of magic, she thought.

The trance was broken by the conductor issuing instructions in several languages for disembarking. English was second. Core had not made a hotel reservation. Professor Staël had informed her that the Ferenczi family was very hospitable, and would insist on her staying with them. Still, she felt somewhat anxious dialing their number. Core's nerves were quickly put at ease. Maria Ferenczi answered the phone and Core explained that Professor Staël had given her their number. Maria was thrilled that an American had traveled all that way to see her son. Core could hear Maria shouting in German for Jon and Raphael. After a few moments of excitement, a strong masculine voice with only a slight accent was on the line.

"Hello. This is Jon Ferenczi."

A jet of emotion rushed through Core. Excited relief was quickly replaced by sickening doubt. But the cordiality in Ferenczi's voice soon mollified her apprehension.

"Hello, Dr. Ferenczi. I'm Core Fletcher, a journalist for *Science Week*. I've come to talk with you, if that's all right."

"Where are you now, Miss Fletcher?"

"At the train station here in Salzburg. If…"

"Excellent. I'll be right over to collect you. Go to the river side of the station, I'll meet you there in five minutes."

"Oh!…I'm wearing a black jump-suit with a maroon sash. I'll be standing beside a mountain of black bags. See you in a bit."

The Ferenczis lived above their shop on Getreidegasse, one of the main streets of Old Salzburg. The old town was squeezed between the impressive cliffs of Monchsberg and the Salzach River. The streets were narrow and picturesque and reminded Core of San Francisco, except for the wrought iron signs on display everywhere.

Maria and Raphael were watching as Jon and Core pulled up.

"Mama, Papa—meet Core Fletcher," Jon said, then took Core's bags inside.

"I'm Maria and this is my husband Raphael," she said, taking Core by the arm and following Jon in. Maria had set out a tray of cookies; Raphael was pouring the wine. It was a local product, prized for its fruity sweetness. Core found it not too disagreeable, though her taste was for Bordeaux dry enough to make you pucker. However, she was determined not to get carried away and sipped the wine very slowly.

The conversation consisted of nervous chit-chat for nearly an hour. Raphael showed Core his glass shop, which was truly impressive. All of the objects, from the simplest dolphin to the most exquisite tiara were his proud creations. Raphael's reminiscences bordered on the maudlin. And why not, Core thought, remembering that Professor Staël said the family trade—more art really—of generations would end with him. An emotional recounting was indeed in order. What must it feel like to be the end of something. Core knew a Montana family who had worked their wheat farm for generations, but faced extinction for lack of sons. A prospect she could never completely appreciate; the same as pregnancy for men.

Finally, Raphael had exhausted himself. Core went back up stairs and found Maria busy preparing supper. Core and Jon now had a chance to talk. He

was in his late twenties, which indicated he went straight through for his Ph.D. Core couldn't help thinking that his sandy hair and impossible blue eyes would have fifty years earlier secured his admission to Hitler's SS. Alone with Core, he appeared nervous and avoided eye contact. She shared his discomfort.

"I suppose you're here because of what happened at the conference," he began. "You reporters are like sharks when blood is spilt—you go a little crazy. After I checked into my room on Sunday, I went down stairs to the reception to meet some old friends. But then a guy from some newspaper started talking to me and wouldn't leave me alone. He knew nothing about my work, but insisted that I tell him what I was going to say in my lecture. I was unable to satisfy him.

"At first, I was happy to cooperate. I offered him a preprint of the paper I was going to give and tried to explain it to him. He kept saying, 'No, no. That's not what I'm after. I want the real story.' I asked him what real story he was talking about. He would just say, 'You know…" I would say, 'You mean PCR?' or 'The prevalence of HIV in healthy individuals?' Finally, he got frustrated and left very angry. I have no idea why he was so mad at me."

"That was Joel Senuta," Core said. "He's a reporter for the *Washington Post.* He's as dense as a lead noodle and about as useless.

"I would like a copy of the paper you were going to present, if I could. All I have is your abstract."

"I had to give all the copies to Stephen Julio before I could leave," he said.

Core sighed, disappointed.

"But he didn't think to ask for the computer records, so I brought the floppies with me. They contain all the data and reports."

Core's eyes lit up.

"Could I get a printout?" she said.

"I don't have a computer here. It will take a Macintosh, and the only ones I've seen are at the University in Vienna."

Core desperately wanted a copy of the manuscript but wished to avoid being obnoxious about it, especially after Jon's experience with Senuta.

"Is there any way of duplicating your floppy disks so that I could have copies?" she said.

"I'm afraid you'd still have to find a Macintosh to do that."

Without giving up, Core decided to postpone the matter of obtaining the manuscript for the moment.

“Why did you leave the conference before your presentation?” she said, as the aromas from the kitchen began wafting through the living room.

“Monday I found a note pinned to the conference mail board. It said that my talk had been cancelled. There was no explanation, just somebody’s initials at the bottom. I got very worried. It took me all day to find out who sent the note. It was written on conference stationary so I went to the registration desk for help. A very nice lady named Sally told me the initials belonged to the program chairman’s secretary. With Sally’s help, I finally found her and asked why I had been dropped from the speakers’ list. She said Julio called her and was adamant about having me removed from the program; the Institute had not authorized the presentation of my data. I told her that was crazy. Stephen Julio sponsored me himself for inclusion on the program. So then I went to Dr. Julio to try to find out what was going on.”

Core was concentrating on every word. She refrained from taking notes for fear of inhibiting Ferenczi.

“What was Julio’s response,” she said.

“He was very angry. He said he never approved releasing my data. I went prepared and showed him a photocopy of my approved registration form which included the abstract of my paper. At the bottom was his signature. He was a little put-off by that, but then admitted that he really hadn’t paid attention to what I had been doing and hadn’t read the abstract either.

“Then I got angry and said I wasn’t surprised. He was seldom around and never showed any interest in me or my work. At that point he got very red and I thought he was going to hit me. He said, ‘I want you out of my lab today!’ He got on the phone right then to his secretary and told her to seal my office and lab and get me a ticket on the first plane back to Vienna. I was shaking all over—I couldn’t believe what had happened. I only had a J-1 student visa so I had no choice but to leave. I’m glad to be home—but I’m still not over it. I haven’t even told Professor Staël, yet.”

Core was more intrigued than ever to know what Jon had been working on to cause such a fracas.

“My lord! What did you do that provoked Julio so much?”

“I was studying the prevalence of HIV infection in healthy individuals using the new polymerase chain reaction technique.”

“PCR…sounds pretty innocuous,” Core blurted out.

He was visibly pleased to see she was better informed than Senuta.

"On the plane home I figured out what was bothering Julio," Jon said. "It was so obvious. He and Gallo automatically assume that HIV infection equals AIDS."

"So do the media and most of the public," added Core.

"Julio knew I was using PCR to measure the levels of HIV in blood and tissues. Because of his bias, he just assumed I was looking at samples from AIDS patients, just like everybody else in the PCR group. He expected my data to add further support to the hypothesis that HIV causes AIDS. He thought the issue was settled and that my work would be only a minor contribution.

"*Of course* I knew my results tended to weaken the HIV hypothesis. But I held the misguided belief that scientists relish discovering contradictions—or so I was taught in school. Anyway, I thought my data would lead to many interesting discussions and arguments, and that Julio and the others would be proud of my initiative. I envisioned debates over the best experiments to confirm or refute my results. I was so naive," he said, shaking his head.

Jon was about to pour more wine when Maria said something in German from the kitchen.

"Mama's got supper ready," Jon said. He set the bottle down and escorted Core to the dinning room. Raphael was coming up the stairs and followed them in.

"Oh, Maria, this is a feast," Core said.

"Mama likes cooking for guests—especially if they're all the way from America," Jon said.

"She's never cooked for an American before," Raphael corrected. Then in a private tone to Core: "Mama will be crushed if you don't like it."

"Not to worry," she whispered back.

Jon busied himself opening another bottle of wine. This time a red. The first glass went to Core. She smiled with genuine approval. It had the color and taste of Chianti, definitely to her liking. She allowed herself one glass since she had hardly touched the white.

"Can I help you, Maria?" Core offered.

"No, no. You just sit down and enjoy yourself."

They all sat around the table, overflowing with lamb and pork, yams, greens (probably chard), black beans, sausages on a bed of cabbage, and an assortment of breads. A heavy meal, but Core was hungry, and Maria was more than happy to cater to her appetite.

After supper, Raphael served port and cognac in the living room. Raphael and Jon chose cognac while Maria and Core had tea.

"So, Core," Raphael began, "what has our Jon done to bring you all this way to visit us?"

"Papa!" Maria scolded.

"A fair question," Core said. "At this point all I know is that Jon's work irritated his boss enough to have him removed as a speaker from the AIDS conference in Washington, DC, and sent him home in a dreadful hurry."

There was no evident sign of surprise on their faces. Jon must have told his parents what had happened.

"What I'm interested in now..." Core continued, "Did you get any results or was it just your approach that caused Julio to explode? I'm after details. Don't worry that I won't understand. I used to be a scientist myself."

Jon put down his glass, sat on the edge of the sofa and resumed his story.

"Well, as I mentioned, I was using the very powerful new technique of polymerase chain reaction—PCR—to see if the HIV genes are incorporated *not* in AIDS patients but in the DNA of healthy people. In order to increase the likelihood of success, I used the blood and tissues of healthy individuals who were frequently exposed to AIDS patients or products from those patients. You know, hospital personnel: nurses, pathologists, surgeons and the like. I only used those samples for my study that were negative by the usual commercial HIV tests. As you know, Core, the PCR technique can amplify a target gene a billion fold or more. It is an extremely sensitive assay."

"I know," Core said, "Anthony Fauci used it in an attempt to refute one of Peter Duesberg's arguments."

"That's right," he interrupted. "Duesberg makes the point that since HIV infects less than 0.1 percent of the T-cells it supposedly kills, it cannot be the cause of the massive collapse of the immune systems of AIDS patients."

"And you are right, it was Fauci," he continued. "He used the PCR method to determine that the T-cell infection rate in some seriously ill AIDS patients was 100 times greater than the levels previously reported. Fauci naturally assumed the elevated levels of HIV were responsible for the increased severity of the disease. Of course, he and his colleagues refuse to consider the possibility that the increased prevalence of HIV in the sickest patients was just another of the many consequences of AIDS and *not* the cause.

“In any case, their results haven’t been accepted by all scientists. The PCR technique is so new that all its quirks are not sorted out yet, and the interpretations of the results are frequently the source of heated arguments. In fact, my results are vulnerable to the same criticisms—that is, if I ever get the chance to present the data.”

Maria poured Core more tea. During the interval, Core recognized the tremendous pride Maria and Raphael had in their son. She guessed he was the only Ferenczi to go to university.

“What were your results?” Core asked, wanting to cut to the meat.

“When I began the study twenty-two of the subjects were positive by PCR. But in only thirteen months all but two were negative. Somehow these healthy individuals were able to rid themselves of the virus.” He paused to let Core ponder the significance of what he said.

“What was the sample size?” Core said.

“A hundred and twenty healthy volunteers,” he said proudly and added: “I didn’t limit the study to T-cells, I looked at a variety of tissues. The HIV positive individuals generally had one infected cell per million healthy cells.”

Core nodded approval, and after a moment, spoke.

“You know, you’re not the first to report the presence of HIV infection in a healthy population. Eastern Zaire has something like twelve percent endemic HIV infection but fewer than 500 cases of AIDS. I recall a tribe of Venezuelan Indians with an infection rate of up to thirteen percent—and not one case of AIDS. There are similar reports out of England and France. Even the CDC has compiled comparable data in the US.”

“That’s true, Core, but those studies used the commercial HIV tests which are terribly insensitive compared with PCR. Imagine what the results might be if those studies were redone using PCR. I bet you the percentages would double, if not triple. But there’s no need to guess, the experiment is easily done. In fact, I’d like to do it myself, but there’s little chance of that now.”

Jon stood up and walked over to the window and looked out for a moment, then turned abruptly and addressed the room.

“Don’t you see,” he pleaded, “the trace levels of infection that I found in a number of healthy people argues for a successful immune response to HIV. A time-course study using thousands of people exposed to HIV could settle the issue of whether or not the virus is a serious pathogen.”

Core doubted Ferenczi's work was going to win him the Nobel Prize, but she was beginning to see how it threatened Julio and his empire. One of his own scientists had produced data that could cripple if not demolish the central role of HIV in AIDS. Furthermore, the damage to Julio and the Welter Institute could be evident in as little as a year—at most two—if Ferenczi's proposed experiment was conducted.

"Jon, I really would like to make copies of your floppies. Tomorrow I could take the train back to Vienna and…"

Ferenczi stopped her before she could continue.

"Core, as much as I would like to let you have my data and manuscript—by Jesus, I'm almost mad enough to give it to you—I really can't let you have them without Julio's consent," he said.

"I can't criticize your ethics, though I'd really like to at least see what's on those disks," she said, and after thinking a minute continued: "Why don't you and I both go to Vienna tomorrow and use one of the computers together? I need to be able to tell my editor I've seen your data."

Ferenczi rubbed his chin while he thought and then said, "Sure…We can do that."

Relieved, Core added: "Did you erase your files on the Institute's computers before you left?"

"No. It was good data. I thought it could be of use to somebody."

"Do you think Julio would have erased your data?" she asked.

"He probably would if he'd thought of it, but I don't think he knows much about computers. I've never seen him at a keyboard. It's possible all my files are intact."

"Humm!" she responded, a stratagem beginning to present itself. "Well, Jon, you have been very helpful; now it's my turn," she said as she got up and headed for the dining room. "I insist on helping with the dishes, Maria, and you can't talk me out of it."

Professor Staël was only a little surprised to see Core again so soon, and happy to be of assistance. Jon knew the Macintosh in his lab was loaded with the necessary software to display his files. He quickly made copies of his three floppies and gave a set to Core.

"Here they are, Core. Remember, you can't take them with you, but you can study them all you want—take notes if you wish. Do you know how to work a Mac?" he said.

"Piece of cake," she said and sat down at the keyboard.

To make life easier, she copied the contents of the three floppies onto the hard disk.

"I won't be needing these anymore," she said, giving the disks back to Jon.

The results of nearly two years work were at her finger tips. Jon and the professor watched as she opened the various files.

"My boy, didn't I teach you anything?" Hans-Peter said, pretending to rebuke his former student. "I see you took no time to smell the flowers and talk to the girls. It looks like all you did was work." The professor didn't fool anyone; he was clearly quite proud of his protégé.

Core spent the better part of the afternoon sifting through the mountain of data. Fortunately, Jon had finished a paper for publication which organized and summarized the results. She took copious notes, principally from the manuscript, but repeatedly referred back to the wealth of data Jon had amassed to see if it all checked out. After all, this may be her last chance to see this stuff if Julio had erased Jon's files from the Institute's computers.

Exhausted, Core bade Jon and Hans-Peter farewell, and had a good night's sleep before heading back to the land of suits and ties.

A tremendous thunderstorm welcomed Core home. The feel of the air and the seductive scent of late summer eased the strain of the long flight. She was gone only six days but it felt like a month. It was good to be back.

Sitting on the porch in her cut-off bib-overalls, enjoying the thunder and lightning, Core wondered if the trip had been worth it? She knew Gabe was banking on her uncovering fraud at one of the leading research institutions in the country. Whether fraud was involved or not she couldn't say, but it appeared Julio *was* guilty of a serious breach of professional ethics. Regrettably, she hadn't brought back any documents or other evidence to prove it. All she had were her notes and Ferenczi's story that Julio was suppressing information obtained in his own institute solely because it diminished the role of HIV in AIDS. The sabbatical in Julio's lab was now crucial, Core knew.

"If Ferenczi's files are no longer in the Institute's computers, I'll need to spruce up my resume," she mused and sipped her Coke.

Fifteen

"Welcome back. How was your trip?" Tracey said, forcing a smile.

"My head's still spinning, but I'm glad to be back. How are you doing?" Core said, aware of Tracey's uneasiness.

"As good as can be expected, I guess. I'm just waiting on the results of the second test. They said it would probably be two more weeks before they're ready. The military has caused a big backlog all of a sudden because of the war in Africa. I'm going to take some time off; go see my folks tomorrow. It'll give me a chance to get my head straight."

"I don't blame you, Tracey. Write me when you get there, okay. Say hi to your mom for me. Well, I've got to get ready for Gabe. He's expecting big things. I hope I don't disappoint him," Core said.

"That's another thing, Core. Gabe's been the first in and the last to leave the whole time you were in Austria. We all thought he was about to retire, but he's running around acting like a boss for a change. I declare, he looks ten years younger. What have you two got going?"

"Oh shit!" Core said. "He's expecting a lot. You'll know if it went well if I'm still around after today."

Core gathered her notes, expense report, and composure and went into Gabe's office.

"Ah, Fletcher, you've returned," he said, lighting a cigar and making himself comfortable. Core pulled up a chair off to the side of his desk and tried to look relaxed. Gabe listened patiently, rocking and puffing, as she told her story. His expression was hard to read, though there was no sign of anger or disappointment on his face. Core had typed her notes and given him a copy. He occasionally browsed through the papers as she talked. When she finished, he spoke:

"Not bad Fletcher. Not bad at all. I suppose you went to Austria hoping to find a smoking gun. If it exists, it's right here close to home. No, I sent you to find Ferenczi and sniff the air for burnt powder. I'd say you got a snout full. I wish you'd gotten a copy of his data, but I understand—professional ethics.

"Fletcher, investigative journalism is slow and tedious. I did it for years, you know. You got us a good lead, Fletcher, a good lead. It'll require patience and persistence to follow it through. You'll have to keep what you're doing secret, of course. You haven't told anyone have you?"

"No. Just you Gabe. I haven't even told Tracey what's going on," she said, deciding it was wiser to keep Alan Haan out of the picture.

"That's good. The people around here are not used to this sort of thing. They're not able to keep their mouths shut. When do you start working with Julio? The sooner you get your hands on his computers, the better. It's just a matter of time before he or more likely a secretary will remember to erase Ferenczi's files."

"Next Monday. They're willing to let me haunt the place for a month," she said.

"Great. Remember to keep me informed. I have a few old tricks that might come in handy if you get in a tight spot."

Core left Gabe's office exhilarated. She went in fearing for her job and came out triumphant. You just never know where taking a chance will lead, she thought.

The philanthropist Jacob P. Welter wanted to endow a new research institute near his home in Texas. He reluctantly established the 750 million dollar facility in Maryland in 1986. He believed it essential to locate the institute near the center of political power if he was to satisfy his obsession of undermining the position and authority of the National Institutes of Health.

Welter blamed the NIH for destroying the career of his son Robert. The NIH had quietly dismissed him for allegedly "doctoring" data during a clinical trial evaluating a new drug for the treatment of emphysema. Apparently, Robert had a financial stake in the pharmaceutical company that provided the drug. He was now working in his father's oil company and leaves the M.D. off his business cards.

Welter's new institute needed a director. He valued political acumen and ambition over scientific credentials. The position required someone willing to put the prestige of the institute above all other considerations.

Aware that converts made tenacious advocates, he looked for his man fermenting among the middle-level scientists at the NIH. He searched a year for someone with an ego to match his own, and therefore dissatisfied, eager for an opportunity. He didn't want a well-established scientist who might not accept the exigencies of politics; the man he wanted had to be ethically flexible.

One night in 1987 at a cocktail party Welter overheard two NIH administrators complaining about a disgruntled, middle-aged scientist in charge of one of their retroviral laboratories. His department was always over budget and never managed to produce more than mediocre results. Whenever challenged to account for the limited output and poor quality work coming out of his department, he would plead the lack of support he was receiving. This sounded just like Welter's man. The scientist of course was Stephen Julio, and the two men soon became fast friends.

Julio made the Welter Institute the Mecca of HIV research, and took every opportunity to publicize the fruits of his stewardship. It was his intention to become the Jonas Salk of AIDS. Welter really didn't care what fields of investigation Julio pursued just so long as his institute—not the NIH—was at the center of things. After two years, he allowed Julio to rename the facility the Welter Institute for Retroviral Studies.

To Welter's great delight, Julio's public relations campaign made his Institute more attractive than the NIH to many a young scientist eager to exercise the authority of a freshly won Ph.D. It was not surprising, then, that a renegade or two would crop up among the institute's brethren. Such unfortunates arrived burdened with the naive expectations fostered in graduate school on how to conduct science. These ingenuous free spirits were usually easy for supervisors to ferret out in the otherwise regimented confines of the institute. The bewildered young scientists would be either ordered to desist from unauthorized research or compelled to leave.

Jon Ferenczi had been one such young star, ready to set the world alight with brilliant discoveries. Unwittingly, however, Ferenczi's demure nature protected him against Julio's system of surveillance. It was designed to respond to braggadocio but was blind to quiet plodding. Scientists who displayed no overt opposition to the established dogma were permitted autonomy. As a result, Ferenczi was able to work alone and unmolested for nearly two years.

Core spent most of the first day on the job at the Welter Institute suffering orientation. In addition to instruction, she received an ID badge and a packet of

handouts covering an ocean of dos and don'ts. She was required to give a blood sample that would be tested for antibodies to HIV. She would be tested again sixty days after leaving the Institute to see if she had become infected during the course of her stay.

The instructor repeatedly emphasized the danger associated with HIV and the other viruses present, and that all the security precautions were designed to prevent the removal of the viruses from the grounds of the institute. If that was true, Core thought, why then do most of the rules deal with the control and flow of information? She felt it would be to her disadvantage to raise the point—so she didn't. The last thing she wanted was for people to take extra notice of her or what she was doing.

Now that Core was actually engaged in the surreptitious mission she was beginning to feel pangs of conscience. She wondered if exposing corruption justified deceit. Wasn't her first objective to smuggle out a copy of Ferenczi's files if they still existed, and didn't that amount to virtual theft? But Core was a doer not a philosopher; she wasn't about to waste time analyzing the situation. There was a job to be done.

Julio was out of town, which suited Core just fine. She hadn't had many occasions to use her poker face and wasn't sure it was on straight. She forced herself to look people in the eye when speaking, but couldn't help feeling that everyone knew what she was doing. Julio's secretary took Core's advice of two weeks earlier and settled her into Ferenczi's old office—What luck! The first thing she saw was a Macintosh IIci setting right in the middle of the desk. She didn't look at the computer again until the secretary had gone. She kept the door open while positioning herself in front of the keyboard. There was nothing more natural for a new "employee" than playing with the toys available, she reasoned. She booted up the Mac and studied it for a minute, then opened the file labeled WIRS Systems Guide. All the computers of the Institute were linked together and to a number of outside data banks. The WIRS file also had a tutorial that explained how to use the system.

All project files were password protected, including Ferenczi's. Ferenczi told Core he used his father's name as his password. The experience gained spending the afternoon examining Ferenczi's files on Professor Staël's computer was quickly put to use. Core used the finder to locate file name PCRLimPro.JFER. She typed RAPHAEL and pressed return. "Bingo," she said under her breath as the

screen came to life with activity. After a dazzling display of announcements and warnings, she stared at an empty screen—all of Ferenczi's files were gone!

It took Core some minutes of glaring at the monitor before she saw it. To the right of the window heading PCRLimPro.JFER was an NIH grant number. She now realized that there had been a similar number at the top of Ferenczi's data files that she perused in Vienna. At the time she had been preoccupied with Jon's results and didn't give a damn about the bureaucratic gobbledygook at the top of each document. How could I have been so stupid, she thought. It's always the little things that wind-up being the most important. The NIH funded Ferenczi's PCR work, which gives him and them as much right to the data as Julio. Jon never mentioned that, though I'm not surprised. Funding considerations were rarely uppermost in the minds of the grunt scientists—that is—until they reached the Julio stage.

What I can't figure out is why they didn't delete PCRLimPro.JFER along with Ferenczi's data files. Core wrote the NIH grant number on the inside of the cuff of her left sleeve before closing the file. The orientation lecture made it very clear that all notebooks and computer disks were to be signed out from IPS (Intellectual Property Security). Before going home, everyone had to lock up all notebooks and disks in their desks or return them to IPS. All personnel were subject to search at anytime. Not knowing the details of the Institute's security measures, Core had decided to refrain from carrying any floppy disks with her the first day. It was a good thing, too. The security officers didn't concern themselves with things brought into the facility, but a surly blonde rummaged through Core's bag before she could leave for the evening. If she had been carrying the suspicious floppy disks it would have been necessary to lie about them; that troubled her. She didn't want to get in the habit of lying.

A day's spying left Core perplexed by the sudden emotional swing from the uneasiness she felt in the morning about what she was doing to righteous indignation at quitting time. This question of ethics is a slippery fish—best pursued without zeal, she thought.

Fortunately, the Welter Institute was located just north of Bethesda, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, providing Core an easy commute. Ironically, the drive along highway 355 took her right past the NIH. When she got home, she poured herself a glass of ice tea and called Gabe Lublin, who was still in the office.

"Gabe, you won't believe it. They put me in Ferenczi's old office. It was all cleaned out except for the computer he used. And guess what: all his files are gone—sorry about that," she said, too tired to feel disappointed.

Gabe, on the other hand, seemed positively pleased.

"Well, you don't say," was all he could manage before Core cut in.

"I did find out one interesting thing, though, " she said. "The NIH was supporting Ferenczi's work. Let me give you the grant number."

Gabe fumbled around awhile, trying to find a pencil with a point. He'd become bored with the job some time ago and the result was an office that had become a shambles.

"Hold on Fletcher…no goddamn pencil!" Core heard him mumbling to himself, "I'm going to straighten this mess out tomorrow."

"Okay, Fletcher. Let's have it…Got it."

"Call Don Sakanari at the NIH," she said. "He should be able to give us the poop on that account number."

Core looked up Don's phone number for Gabe, then added, "What are we going to do without Ferenczi's files?"

"I've been thinking about that possibility, Fletcher. I could send you back to Vienna, let you try talking Ferenczi in to giving us a copy. That might even work now that we know the NIH was paying for everything. However, I came up with another idea. Years ago something happened to the computers at the *Post.* Somebody, either intentionally or by accident, had deleted a large number of files. More than half of them just disappeared. Boy, it was wrist-slicing time around there for a couple of days. We called this computer hot-shot. He fixed everything."

After a long day Core's patience was wearing thin.

"Gabe, what has that got to do with anything. The Institute's computers aren't broken. They simply erased Ferenczi's files," she said, testily.

"Take it easy, Fletcher, and listen a minute," he said, good humored. "The situation couldn't be more ideal. You're probably the first person to use Ferenczi's computer since his files were deleted. That means those files are still in that thing, I'm telling you. Everybody thought that kid was a magician who fixed the *Post's* computers. He recovered most of the files that had disappeared. I asked him how he did it. He said it was easy. If the files had been deleted by a malicious person, he wasn't a computer expert, the kid said, or there would have been no hope of finding the lost files. He said when a file is deleted it isn't really removed from the

computer's disk. It's just that the name is gone and the file's space is made available for something new to write over it. If you get to the computer before it's been used too much, you stand a good chance of retrieving the deleted files—if you know how."

Core was finally beginning to see where Gabe was leading.

"Gabe, the Institute is not going to let your expert lay his hands on their computers," she said.

"No—but you can, my dear."

"What! I don't know enough about computers to do what you're suggesting, and I ain't got time to learn, neither," she said, angrily.

"Calm down, Fletcher. I've all ready worked it out," he said. "All you have to do is be a lookout, so to speak. Stay where you are. I'll be right over to lay it all out."

Thirty minutes later, Gabe showed up at Core's, carrying a six-pack of Sam Adams. He put out the cigar before entering, but his clothes still reeked of the thing.

The only known evidence of what happened to Ferenczi was in Austria and Julio's computers. Experience had taught Gabe not to yield to ignorance. The corrupt often hide behind a wall of expertise and credentials. Gabe drew upon the formidable list of contacts he'd accrued over three decades of working for newspapers and journals. Anticipating the worst, Gabe had called Alvarez Binko, a computer jock who wrote a best selling exposé on corporate espionage. Gabe described to him his predicament concerning the computer files and mentioned the episode at the *Post.* Binko confirmed what the young magician had told Gabe about the possibility of recovering deleted files.

Binko offered to help his old friend. Gabe's agent (Core), he said, assured access to the Institute's computers. He suggested a plan, if the need ever arose, where he should be able to extract any of the Institute's files that Gabe wanted. What an extraordinary possibility, Gabe thought, but then emphasized that if he called on Binko, he was to limit his activities to stuff concerning Ferenczi. After all, he had an ethical—not to mention legal—position at stake, too.

Gabe decided to put Binko's plan into effect. Core's part was easy. All she had to do was use one of the networks her computer was hooked to and have the computer dial an access number that Binko had provided. After that, she was to stay on the terminal but switch to a word processing program, for example, while he was on the line. When he finished, he would send a command that would blink

her terminal twice. That was her signal to quit if she wanted. At this point Core opened one of Gabe's beers.

"You know, the Institute's security is pretty tight," she said. "What if they monitor the computers—I'm a dead duck then, aren't I?"

"Binko said if that happens all they'll be able to trace is you contacting an innocuous computer bulletin board used for buying theater tickets and things of that sort. By the way, to make it look legit, you will be sent two tickets to Rodin Lovelard's new play *Virus*."

"Ooh!—What a wee world," she exclaimed.

Core made Gabe take what remained of the beer with him when he left. She was thankful Ferenczi's files had been deleted. Now she would not have to risk smuggling floppy disks into and out of the Institute.

Sixteen

Binko's plan seemed to go well. Forty minutes after establishing the bogus computer link, Core's monitor blinked twice, the signal that Binko had finished. Spying was hazardous—but had its perks, too. Core was looking forward to seeing Lovelard's new play. It never ceased to amaze her how well things always seemed to turn out—that is, until she got home that evening.

Gabe called with what started out to be good news. Binko was able to copy everything in the Institute's computers with Ferenczi's name and the NIH grant number on it. Then his tone became somber.

"Core…Core I don't know how to tell you…so I'll just come out and say it. Tracey Watson killed herself," he said.

"What!" she said, barely audible. Her legs became useless and buckled under her. She crumpled to the floor. "What are you saying, Gabe?"

"You know, she never went to Pittsburgh—didn't tell a soul either. I don't know the entire story, but she left without a word. She was in Rome, Georgia, visiting her parents when it happened. She shot herself with her father's pistol. What the hell could have made her do it? That girl was the cheeriest person in the whole damn office."

Core said, "I can't talk now, Gabe," and hung up.

She sat on the floor and began weeping.

"What the *fuck's* the matter with this *fuckin* world!" she screamed. Crying didn't come easily to Core and in a few minutes she got up, eyes puffy and red, and went outside and wandered about the neighborhood. It was strange how alive she felt and how real and immediate the brick sidewalk and iron railings seemed underfoot and to the touch. As she walked up P Street towards Dupont Circle, she experienced a peculiar false clarity of mind that provided an odd sort of strength. But instead of her usual momentary surrender to sensual euphoria, she regarded the sweet fragrance of the neighbor's roses analytically.

Her mind was ablaze with activity. A bizarre hodgepodge of thoughts raced about, competing for attention and relevance. Her gait would pick up then slow down, following the pace of her thoughts. For an instant, she was charged with energy and toyed with walking all the way to her office and work—on what, it didn't matter. In the next minute, a wave of exhaustion overtook her and she headed home to bed.

The next day she skipped the Welter Institute and went to her office instead. Everybody was talking about Tracey Watson. Only Core knew she had tested positive for HIV and suspected that that was at the root of her suicide.

Core found a letter in her mailbox with no return address but was postmarked Saturday from Rome, Georgia.

> Dear Core,
>
> I'm at my parents' house. I was going out of my mind worrying about the second test, so I called the clinic to see if the results had arrived. The report hadn't got there yet but I know it's positive.
>
> I told Mama I have AIDS—she couldn't handle it. She told Daddy and he went wild, calling me all kinds of terrible things. They wouldn't let me stay in the house. They said I could sleep in the garage. Mama wore gloves and took the sheets off my bed and put them in a plastic bag and threw it in the dump.
>
> Daddy wanted to force me to see the minister, but he would only talk to me over the phone. Mama scrubbed it with gloves on when I got off.
>
> I don't know how much more I can take.

There was no signature.

"Shit!" was all Core could manage to say as she put the letter back in the envelope.

Core took the letter and went to see Gabe.

"Look at this," she said, plopping the envelope on his desk.

"Well, I'll be a horse's neck," he said. "You knew about this, didn't you Fletcher?"

"Yes sir. I had no idea she was falling to pieces, though. I should have paid more attention. She needed me and all I could think about was this stupid job."

"Watson was a sweet kid and a pretty good journalist—well, at least for the kind of stuff done here," he said. "You just never know, do you Fletcher. It's funny, I never would have guessed she had AIDS—she looked healthy as a mule to me."

"She didn't have AIDS any more than you or I," Core objected. "She tested positive on one lousy HIV test—which is quite a joke. A lot people who really do have AIDS test negative."

Core was beginning to feel sick from guilt. She had to get her mind on something else and quickly too.

"Enough of this—Gabe, when are we going to see what Binko uncovered?"

"We're supposed to get the hard copies around lunchtime. It's good—you'll be here when they arrive," he said.

"Gabe…don't you ever worry about going to jail? I mean…haven't we broken the law?" Core said.

"No," was all he said, which was typical of Gabe. It wasn't clear if he didn't fear jail, or that they hadn't broken the law. The ambiguity was comforting.

It was a little after one when the courier finally arrived with the material from Binko. Immediately, Core knew that there was more there than just Ferenczi's research data and manuscript for publication. There were three new folders labeled PCRLimPro but for different investigators.

Alvarez Binko was a thorough professional. In his report he included a glossary which decoded the Institute's jargon. PCRLimPro stood for polymerase chain reaction limited project. The four letters after the period identified the investigator. In Ferenczi's case: JFER. The limited projects category designated work done by visiting scientists: post-docs and those on sabbatical leave. What linked all the PCRLimPro files was Ferenczi's NIH grant number.

"I'm entitled to a LimPro then," Core said. "Gabe, what did Sakanari have to say about Ferenczi's grant?"

"He said it wasn't anything special, just the usual support that allowed post-docs to continue to work and eat after graduation. Ferenczi had won the three-year grant while still in Vienna and took it with him to the Welter Institute. As far as Sakanari knew, the grant was still in effect with one year left before it expired."

"Why are these other people using Ferenczi's grant number?" Core asked, as she wrote down the names of the three beneficiaries of Ferenczi's NIH support.

“I think I know what’s going on,” Gabe said. “What are the funding dates for the other projects?”

“Oh yeah!” Core said. “Support for the three scientists was shifted to Ferenczi’s grant the week of the AIDS conference—but there is at least a year’s worth of data in each file. They’re juggling the books, aren’t they, Gabe?”

“Core, I think you need to learn more about PCR, don’t you?” he said.

“My interest is growing by the minute,” she said. “There’s no reason why I can’t start tomorrow.”

Seventeen

Stephen Julio was back at the Institute and Core made an appointment with him to discuss her sabbatical. Julio suggested that she might be interested in their HIV vaccine research. It involved the latest technology in molecular modeling and genetic engineering. Recently, his own curiosity had shifted to the mechanism of HIV mutation. Core said all these areas sounded interesting. She didn't want to be just a spectator, though, she needed to get her hands dirty if she was going to write an authentic piece about work in a great laboratory. Core emphasized her background in enzymology and said she would like to try her hand at PCR. There she might be more of a help than a hindrance. Eager to be done with Core, Julio praised her choice and said he would introduce her to the PCR group immediately.

They left Julio's office and crossed the courtyard heading for building 2C. Since virulent HIV was used in 2C, the guard examined Core's badge for the vertical blue strip necessary for entry. Julio led Core to room 2C40, where they walked in on the weekly PCR group meeting.

The PCR team comprised the team leader, Janet Blalock, two post-docs, Richard Sanders and Susan Wong (the three scientists on Binko's list) and seven technicians. Jon Ferenczi had attended these meetings. Julio introduced Core and left her to explain what she was doing there and hoped to accomplish. Janet Blalock said she would be happy to have another pair of hands in the lab, and suggested that Core sit in on the rest of their meeting. Core took a chair in back, trying not to be in the way.

For Core's benefit, Susan Wong gave a ten-minute summary covering her efforts to date, then continued from the point at which she was interrupted. She was describing her attempts to improve the detection of HIV in AIDS patients. Following last year's meeting in Amsterdam more and more labs were less

restrained in their reporting of HIV-free AIDS. Susan didn't attempt to hid her frustration and quoted the often repeated joke:

"What's the only virus that is there if you can't find it? HIV. What's the difference between HIV and God? You can always find God in AIDS patients."

"You mean…even using PCR you still can't find HIV in forty percent of the people who are antibody positive for the virus?" said an incredulous Core.

"That's right," Susan said. "What's even more worrisome is the peculiar discovery my old thesis adviser Helga Rübsamen-Waigmann first reported. She studied ninety-one real AIDS patients—not just antibody positive, mind you—but no matter what she did she could not find HIV in three of the patients. Since Helga is a superb experimentalist, her technique was beyond criticism and people paid attention to her results. Over the years the percentage of negatives has just kept growing—it's now up to twenty percent. It makes you wonder."

"Yeah, about HIV," Core blurted. "Did any of you know Jon Ferenczi?"

"Sure. We all did," said Richard Sanders. "He was in the group when I got here. He was pretty sharp when he wasn't screwing up. Kept to himself most of the time."

"I liked him," Susan said. "He didn't talk much but when he did, I thought he made a lot of sense. I guess I was the only one though. He sure disappeared all of a sudden. I understand he went back to Austria."

At this point, Janet Blalock became suspicious of Core's motives. She ended the meeting and excused all but Core.

"Why are you interested in Ferenczi?" she inquired.

Core realized she goofed mentioning Ferenczi so soon; but needing to gain Janet's confidence, she was straight with her.

"I went to Salzburg to talk with him," she admitted.

Sara's cheeks suddenly went pallid. In a few seconds her color returned and she became surly.

"Then you know more about what he was doing than we do," Janet said, then demanded: "What are you after, Core? Why are you really here?".

Now that the cat was out of the bag, she answered.

"I want to know what's going on around this place—why Jon Ferenczi was forced to leave. I spent two days with him and didn't detect a whisper of anything that should have caused his dismissal. There's one more thing," Core added, going for broke, "Why are you, Richard and Susan using Ferenczi's NIH grant money?"

"I think you and I need to go for a cup of coffee," Janet said.

They took Janet's car and found a greasy spoon that was usually avoided by the Institute's big shots.

"Julio doesn't know what your doing, does he, Fletcher? I want you to understand I had nothing to do with any of that Ferenczi stuff. I'm just a lowly team leader—barely senior to the post-docs that come and go around this place. I've been thinking of leaving, myself."

"Why Janet?"

"When you and Julio barged into the meeting this morning, that was the first glimpse I've had of *His Holiness* in more than two months. My position is a nowhere job. I'll never do anything important at the Institute, but at least I'll have it on my resume. All I want to do is leave when I'm ready, and not get thrown out like Ferenczi. He did nothing wrong—except scare Julio it seems. I can't afford to have that happen to me."

"What's the story with the grant?"

"All I can tell you is that several times a month I get memos instructing me to change the account numbers that cover our PCR work. I always assumed the money was the Institute's."

Core showed her Ferenczi's NIH grant number and asked her if she recognized it. Janet hadn't memorized the most recent one but she said it looked familiar.

"Who sends you those memos with the new account numbers?"

"Julio. Well at least they all come from his office. I'm sure he's not responsible for every last one of the avalanche of documents with his name attached."

"You say you change account numbers several times a month?"

"Sometimes every week."

Core was beginning to wonder if the turnover in Janet's account numbers reflected the rate at which scientists came and left the Institute. The PCR group was just one among hundreds. If Janet's group was not exceptional, Julio's novel funding tactic could amount to expropriating millions of dollars per year that didn't belong to him. Core felt sympathy for Janet and told her not to worry, she wouldn't mention a word to Julio about their conversation. After Janet dropped her off, Core went straight to Gabe Lublin.

"Gabe, I think Julio is in deep trouble. Can you get Binko to do another job for us?—*and*, I suspect it's time we started talking to a lawyer."

Gabe didn't hesitate. He immediately got on the phone to Binko.

"Al, you old son-of-a-gun, how are ya. That was a great job you did for us, I really appreciate it. I was wondering, though, if you could do one more thing for us. I'm going to let you talk to the reporter on the story. She'll tell you what she needs."

Core took the phone and explained what she wanted. She asked Binko if they could use the technique they employed last time to get a printout of previous years' projects at the Welter Institute along with all the account numbers. He said that was unlikely since most old accounts were inactive and would have been transferred to storage disks which he couldn't access. However, he said it would be no problem to access the projects that were currently active.

Core informed Gabe that Julio's pilfering of grant money was not limited to Jon Ferenczi. She suspected that he routinely tapped into the financial support of scientists just as they were leaving the institute. It takes most scientists a month or more to establish themselves in their new positions. During the interval, Julio could use the free moneys until the funds were forwarded. Since Julio had access to their grants for only about a month, the fiscally somnambulistic scientists would hardly notice the discrepancies in their budgets, believing they had spent the money themselves.

"It's scary how easy it is to infiltrate the Institute's computer system. I wonder if it's typical?" Core said to Gabe. Their second go at Julio's computers had gone as smoothly as the first.

"The courier should be here…" Gabe was saying just as a young black man with a satchel over his shoulder arrived. Core signed for the bundle, then she and Gabe hurried off to the conference room so they could spread the documents on the large table.

"Jesus!—what a crook," Gabe croaked.

It was all there as Core had guessed. Julio had been shifting the specific operational funds from the budgets of departing scientists into the general overhead accounts of various projects. He had been careful to avoid using the moneys to purchase unusual capital items that were more easily traced.

"Wait a minute, Gabe. I've got a calculator in my office. I'll go get it."

Four hours of calculating, estimating, and down-right guessing produced a grand total of $340,000 of ill-gotten booty for the month of September alone.

"What are we going to do with this, Gabe?"

"I don't know right off, but I'll have our attorneys look at it first thing in the morning. Don't you worry about it. I'll take care of this from here on, Fletcher. Of course, the story's all yours as soon as the attorneys clear us. I believe we've got the goods on old Julio. There's no real need for you to continue going back to the Institute now, is there Fletcher?"

"Yes sir…there is," she said, confidently. "There's a much bigger story than just nailing Julio. I'm beginning to believe this whole HIV thing is nothing but horse hooey. If I'm right, that means the Welter Institute is the horse's ass. I'm going back there tomorrow. I'm going to finish what I started."

Eighteen

Now that Core was apparently free of intrigue, she threw herself wholeheartedly into her sabbatical. She made peace with Janet Blalock, who at first was hesitant to trust her. But, it wasn't long before her enthusiasm and competence in the lab had won Core the confidence and respect of the PCR group. However, it felt odd to her working in a research lab again. Doing science no longer excited Core as it had in the past—the allure was gone so was the sense of importance.

Janet placed Core in the care of Susan Wong. She and her technicians were evaluating white blood cells harvested from AIDS patients around the world. Core persuaded them to include for her benefit cells from individuals with antibodies to HIV but otherwise healthy.

Susan assigned Core the job of running a pair of the programmable thermal cyclers. The machines replicated and thus magnified the viral DNA—if it was present. Core's first step was to burst the cells to expose the DNA. The resulting goo was then treated with an enzyme that digested unwanted protein. After adding short pieces of HIV DNA called primers and a heat stable DNA polymerase, the resulting mixture was ready for the machine.

At the beginning of each cycle, heat was applied to separate the DNA into two strands. After fifteen minutes, the temperature was lowered to allow the added HIV DNA primers to combine with the complementary sections of any viral DNA present in the patient's cells. In the final step, the temperature was raised a little to permit the most efficient replication of the HIV DNA by the heat stable polymerase. At the end of the replication step, the cycle repeated. Using standard solutions containing known amounts of HIV, Core had found that thirty cycles were more than sufficient to amplify trace quantities of viral DNA.

It was fairly easy to tell if amplification had been successful. Once again, heat unzipped the amplified DNA. But this time, short pieces of radioactive HIV

DNA were used instead of the "cold" primers. Then as before, the mixture was cooled to allow the DNA to re-zip. If HIV had been present in the patient's cells, the gel electrophoresis assay would show the radioactive primers attached to larger pieces of replicated viral DNA.

By the end of her third week, the hands-on experience with PCR had convinced Core of the truth of Susan Wong's incredible statement that forty percent of people with antibodies to HIV had no measurable levels of the virus itself. She also confirmed Helga Rübsamen-Waigmann's original observation that the virus was undetectable in a number of patients with full-blown AIDS—in Core's experiment it was fifteen percent.

"Susan…now I'm convinced," Core said. "I can't believe y'all didn't talk with Ferenczi about what he was doing. What did he say at the weekly meetings? He couldn't have been mute for the better part of two years."

"That was very nearly the situation," said Janet, who had been listening by the door.

Then Susan added, "We left him alone most of the time. He *seemed* to be a good scientist but we weren't always so sure. One time he presented some pretty strange results. He claimed that twenty-two healthy people with no antibodies to HIV were nevertheless infected with the virus—which of course made no sense or millions of Americans would now have AIDS. We all gave poor Jon a hard time. It was mean the way we picked at his experimental technique. I remember Richard was particularly nasty to him; insisting Jon had made a really dumb mistake somehow. We never found one though. Jon never said much after that grilling. A scientist can't afford to be too sensitive about criticism," Susan concluded.

"Didn't y'all understand what Ferenczi was trying to do? Did you ever give him a chance to explain?" said an astonished Core.

"What do you mean…of course we did. He was trying like the rest of us to measure the levels of HIV in AIDS patients," responded a puzzled Susan. She, along with the rest of the group, assumed Jon had described a control experiment that had failed. Everybody knows healthy people don't have HIV, was the group's attitude.

Core decided to hold off enlightening everyone as to the significance of Ferenczi's discovery until next week's group meeting—which would be her last.

She spent most of her final week at the Welter Institute interviewing a number of group leaders and section heads. Bill McCallie gave her a tour of building 5A; it was devoted exclusively to vaccine development. He was very up-

beat about the prospects of having a safe and effective vaccine to HIV1 within a year—the other variant (HIV2) would take longer.

Safe was the operative word. As with all vaccines, there was a risk of giving the patient the disease you are trying to protect against. There was never a problem raising antibodies to the virus—for if that were the case, none of the HIV blood tests would work since they look for these antibodies.

There was one other curious drawback to immunizing the population at large: All the so-called AIDS tests will become worthless since everybody would test positive for HIV antibodies. It was impossible to predict the social consequences of such a situation.

Core was struck by the Alice In Wonderland quality of AIDS research at the Institute. Routinely, experimental results were twisted beyond recognition to conform to the canons of the Institute. She was impressed with the tremendous number of talented scientists Julio attracted, but shocked by the mass hypnosis that prevailed. All those proficient hands were but mere extensions of the fancy hardware—but where were the minds behind them? Cooling off in Julio's deep-freeze, she thought.

When Core explained to the PCR group what Ferenczi had done, none seemed to grasp its significance. Ferenczi had deliberately chosen a non-traditional high-risk group of medical workers for his sample. The general good health of the members of his sample easily explained the very low levels of dormant virus in the HIV antibody negative individuals—but the telling result was the high number of positives in his PCR study and their subsequent loss of all trace of the virus. The group was not prepared to accept the necessary conclusion that the immune systems of healthy people successfully combat HIV.

Core also used a computer link to the CDC to compare its statistics with Ferenczi's results. The CDC's own data, however, was even more striking. It showed that among the usual high-risk groups the incidence of AIDS seemed to have no relationship to the incidence of HIV. Up to sixty-seven percent of homosexual or bisexual men were antibody-positive, as were eighty-seven percent of drug addicts and up to eighty-five percent of hemophiliacs, yet the annual incidence of AIDS among these groups averaged only 0.3 percent. Of the more than 900 health care workers reported to have been accidentally punctured by needles contaminated with HIV positive blood, none has come down with AIDS and only one had become positive for HIV.

Core presented the results of a Massachusetts study which showed a much higher incidence of HIV infection in that state's general population than any had suspected—yet, again, there was no corresponding level of AIDS. She also pointed out that the Department of Health was concerned enough in 1987 by all these results to suggest that the 30 million people who had received transfusions beginning 1977 through 1985 be tested for HIV. But their concerns now appear highly unwarranted due to the small number of actual AIDS patients.

Core's audience was totally unresponsive. Belief in HIV was so complete that any other possibility was too alien to contemplate. She understood now the stifling conditions Ferenczi had worked under for nearly two years. Stephen Julio would not be pleased with the article she would write.

Nineteen

While Core was busy on sabbatical at the Welter Institute, Gabe Lublin was investigating the legal ramifications of breaking into Julio's computer system. The attorneys said there was a risk to using the purloined documents, but if Julio raised the issue it would probably backfire on him. The lawyers suggested that the NIH must have documents confirming the unauthorized use of grant money. The magazine would not be liable if it could establish its case using public records. Gabe took an arm-load of the incriminating documents with him as he drove the short distance to Bethesda to see Don Sakanari at the NIH.

Sakanari was aware people played games with grant money. As grants neared expiration, virtually every recipient went "Christmas shopping" to use up any remaining funds. Most of the items purchased were nice to have, but obviously not essential to the funded projects or they would have been acquired sooner. That sort of activity posed minor ethical questions at worst but there was nothing illegal about it. However, Gabe's revelations clearly shook Sakanari. The systematic pilfering of other people's money by one of the world's leading scientists came as a real shock.

It just took a minute for Sakanari to bring up the files on his computer of all the NIH supported research at the Welter Institute. Using Gabe's documents as a guide, it was simple to confirm the astonishing accusations against Julio. Once he knew what to look for, he no longer needed Binko's handiwork and whizzed through a random selection of grant recipients. The story was the same.

Gabe said he was interested in obtaining copies of the NIH's records of all the scientists they supported at the Welter Institute for Retroviral Studies. Sakanari said he would be happy to oblige; all the government required was a copying fee. Gabe asked Sakanari if he was planning to take legal action against Julio and the Institute. Sakanari said he couldn't say just yet; he'd leave that decision to the Director.

When Core returned to *Science Week* following her month at the Institute, she found a pile of mail waiting for her. The only items that interested her were a letter from Alan Haan, a postcard from her husband Joseph, and the two sets of theater tickets to *Virus* by Rodin Lovelard. Naturally, fate would have her hear from Alan and Joseph on the same day. Core wouldn't let the gods dictate to her—she'd read one today, the other later.

She couldn't believe her luck. The NIH invited Alan to give a seminar in mid-December, the same week of the play. He would stay over the weekend and wondered if Core could suggest satisfactory lodging. She jotted off a quick note to Alan saying the Hotel Fletcher was the best in town, providing accommodations for the discriminating man.

Then Core leaned back in her chair and thought about Tracey Watson and the enormity of what she had suffered. The longer she dwelled on the subject, the angrier she got. Core's painful reflection ended when Gabe burst into her office and plopped on the floor a large, heavy box he was obviously glad to be rid of.

"Fletcher, you're free to write," he blurted.

"Mornin' Gabe. What's all that stuff?"

"We're not going to use Julio's files," he said. "The NIH's records are even more damning since they go back five years. It cost *Science Week* a bundle to copy all this stuff but was worth every penny."

Core went to the front of her desk and lifted the box.

"Lord, it must weigh forty pounds," she grunted.

"This is only the first box. There are three more down stairs. I'll have Sam bring the rest up. This one about gave me a hernia."

"Tell him to put them in the conference room, if that's all right?" she said.

"I'll have him move this one in there, too," he said, then sat down before continuing. "You're all right, Fletcher—got good instincts. You should be working for one of the city newspapers instead of this place. When you came into my office that day, I knew you didn't have much on that asshole Julio, but you sure whiffed something. I bet you thought your job was on the line when I sent you to find Ferenczi—you were right."

"Jesus—I knew it!" she yelped.

"But not for the reason you may think," he continued. "It didn't matter if that young Austrian fellow had fizzled-out; but if you'd tried making more out of

that story than was there, I knew I couldn't trust you. Hell, we all get bum leads on occasion, you just have to know when to drop 'em."

Core found Gabe's rare burst of candor unnerving and attempted to steer a new course.

"So…I suppose I should start writing. You want it front of the book or back?" she asked.

"The whole book. You'll have an entire issue to yourself. If you need help, grab anybody who's free," he said, smiling.

"You're kidding—which issue?"

"That's up to you Fletcher," he said, getting up to leave. Then at the door, turned and said, "Oh, did you hear…Robert Gallo finally admitted he didn't discover HIV. The virus he was using had come from Luc Montagnier's laboratory."

There had been single-subject issues before—but never single author. Boy, won't that look good on the old CV, she thought.

Core had spent the morning planning the sections of the solo issue. In addition to the technical pieces, it would include an exposé of corruption at the highest level of AIDS research and the debunking of the HIV myth. Each article would cover new ground with real punch. She couldn't point to the precise instant it happened, but during her sabbatical at the Welter Institute she became convinced that HIV did not cause AIDS. However, in preparing the outline a glaring omission became apparent: Since HIV didn't cause AIDS—what did? She wasn't ready to write just yet. It would be irresponsible and quite likely unproductive to take away the public's pacifier—the great devil called HIV—without providing a plausible alternative explanation of AIDS. Gabe had given Core a great opportunity few journalists would jeopardize, but she was prepared to risk losing it if she couldn't do things her way. Gabe was expecting her to have the stories ready for the presses within a month. She felt two months was more reasonable. Better face Gabe now rather than later, she thought, and marched off to his office.

She explained her concern of presenting an incomplete account of AIDS, which she conceded the public had every right to reject at this point. If the subject were anything other than AIDS, there would be no problem serializing the story. However, after all the years of sanctimonious hogwash, the public deserved as complete and lucid a chronicling of the dreaded HIV and AIDS as she could

deliver. Core's journalistic fervor brought back memories of Gabe's own youthful crusading zeal. He proposed a compromise.

"Fletcher," he said, "I'll give you your two months if you place in my hands the Julio story. I'll hold off printing it for two months, but if I get wind that somebody else is onto this story I go with it, you understand?"

Core had won again. There was little concern that another reporter would even think of going after Julio. Gabe even approved an additional sabbatical but nixed her request for two. She had to choose which it would be: Montreal or San Francisco.

Of course there was no decision to make. Fall was the best time of year in the city by the bay. Core immediately called Alan and talked for almost an hour. She highlighted most of what had occurred since the AIDS conference, but refrained from mentioning what they had learned about Julio. "When things happen, they happen fast," he said. He was pleased that Core was going to work in his lab. Who knows, they might even get some work done, too, he told her.

Core gave the Julio story to Gabe on her way to the airport. As always, she felt she could have written better—she was her own worst critic. Gabe on the other hand was more sanguine about her latest opus. Indeed, her reputation for sterling prose was such that the *Science Week* staff called her One Draft Core.

Core hadn't been back to San Francisco since the big earthquake. She was looking forward to the shear beauty of the place, the restaurants—and Alan.

Twenty

The plane started its initial descent over Yosemite Valley. The gorge was just below Core's window; the majestic falls scarcely visible, owing to several years of drought. Indeed, the little hills and valleys east of the city were still brown—the locals prefered to call them golden. The rainy season was two months away if it came at all, making the state green in the winter and… well, *golden* the rest of the year.

The approach to SFO was as unvarying as the California weather: west across the Hayward hills, then turn right just north of San Jose and follow the bay straight to touchdown.

From her vantage point, Core noticed the traffic on the Dumbarton and San Mateo bridges seemed extra heavy for noon. She thought that if an earthquake doesn't sink California into the Pacific someday the weight of the incessant influx of people would.

Just when it looked as if the plane was going to crash into the bay, the runway appeared and she was on the ground. Core couldn't wait to walk again after five and a half hours in an airplane seat—even if it was in a jumbo jet. She was pleased that airport security had finally relaxed the extra precautions implemented during the second Gulf War. Alan was able to meet her at the gate.

"Hello, gorgeous," he said, sporting another outlandish pair of Bermuda shorts.

Core shook her head and said, "You wore those so I could spot you in a crowd—right?"

"Just in case you forgot what I looked like, I knew you couldn't forget the shorts," he said.

He took her bags, set them on the floor, and engulfed her in a passionate embrace that made them instantly ready for each other. "Let's get out of here," he said.

They loaded her bags into his Mitsubishi and headed for La Cumbre in the Mission District to feast on the best burritos in town. After stuffing themselves, they walked it off in Golden Gate Park—one of the truly great urban refuges.

"It's a shame other cities aren't like San Francisco, where people actually choose to live in the city. But then, other cities aren't as lovely," Core said.

"This place is too beautiful for its own good. It seems anybody who can afford to move here, does sooner or later," Alan said.

"There are more homeless people and panhandlers than I remember," Core observed.

"Yeah, and there are more every day. But you know what's the real killer, the less affluent families are vanishing from the city. Not because those folks are moving up the economic ladder. No sir. They're being pushed out by the wealthy newcomers," he said, then changed his expression. He was in a good mood and wanted to stay that way. He put his arms around Core and whirled her once.

"You can't keep your hands off me, can ya. That's all right, I like physical men," she said.

"See those buildings on the hill over there…that's UCSF, where I work," he said. "I live just a little ways from here…walking distance, in fact. I go for a walk in the park nearly every day—the arboretum is my favorite place."

Fingers of fog were beginning to work their way into the park.

"It must be pretty hot in the valleys east of here," he said. "The fog is really thick and persistent for this late in the year. Why don't we go home and relax a bit? I know how tired you must be after your long flight."

"Aren't you so thoughtful. I know what you've got on your mind, you silly goose," she said.

It wasn't long after they reached Alan's house before they found themselves in bed. Core was deliciously, exquisitely receptive—then it dawned on him:

"We forgot the condom."

"What do you mean we, Booboo…*you* did," she said.

She enjoyed the look on his face as he fought giving up such pleasure. Then, as he was about to get up, she clasped both her legs and arms around him so he couldn't escape and whispered in his ear: "Hey, doc…I ain't scared of that virus no more." Calling him doc was an intentional barb, she knew he hated it. They stayed in bed the rest of the day. During a respite, Core lay prone with Alan admiring her.

“My favorite word is callipygian,” he said, savoring the curves and texture of her skin as he gently stroked her and ran his fingers through her chestnut hair.

“Knowing you, it has to be naughty,” she said, “something to do with the fanny, if the attention you give mine is any clue.”

He had to smile; he was as transparent to Core as mountain air. They lay silently for awhile until Core rolled over and abruptly said, “Don’t you just hate all the music pollution. We’re constantly exposed to it in the restaurants, the grocery store—any store for that matter—and from the neighbors. About the only place you can really be free of it is in your car—that is if you have the will power to keep the radio off. I wonder what people did all those years before electronics. Imagine the peace there must have been.”

“Folks probably sang a lot more in the old days—perhaps to keep themselves company. I sing to myself all the time,” he said.

“Commercial music bugs me. There ought to be a moratorium on it for a week to give everybody a break,” she said.

“Have you noticed what’s been happening to music lately?—it’s getting political again,” he said.

“You mean like rap and reggae?”

“Yeah…rock and roll, too. Sex is a major theme these days. Just watch MTV sometime and see what I mean.”

“I don’t watch that stuff,” she said, looking over her shoulder.

“Oh, you should. Young folks are communicating again with each other through their music. I know it’s mostly blatant commercialism—but not entirely. Madonna uses the system to do what she wants every bit as much as corporate America uses her to make money.”

“A thought just occurred to me,” she said, rolling over. “There’s no way people will ever stop screwing, which means the next generations—God forbid—are growing-up traumatized by what we’ve done to sex. We have been using AIDS to steal sex from the young—and they’re rebelling.”

“Now that’s scary,” Alan said. “There’s no telling what a nation’s youth deprived of sex might do. Where will all that energy go? It’s frightening to think what would have happened if the Puritans had linked sex with death?”

Thinking of Tracey she said, “The Puritans couldn’t have been any crueler than us.”

The sobering conversation affected both of them. Lying naked together felt as ungraceful as Adam and Eve’s departure from Eden.

“Let’s shower and go out on the town,” Core said, gleefully springing out of bed.

“Do you like paella?” Alan asked, realizing how hungry he was.

“I love everything,” she said, displaying flushed cheeks.

“Good. There is a Spanish and Peruvian restaurant on Clement called Alejandro’s. They make the best paella I’ve ever had.”

After supper and a walk along Land’s End, they were ready to call it a day. Still on East Coast time, Core woke in the wee hours of the morning. He had attacked her several times in the night, and now it was her turn to take advantage of his sleep. It was immensely exciting the liberties she was taking while he slept. She began using her mouth and tongue to delicious effect. Alan was beginning to thrust ever so slowly but still asleep. Then she mounted him and had an orgasm as he woke. Alan awoke to delirious pleasure, merging an erotic dream with the real thing. The room was scented with the perfume of sex. Not a word was spoken, just the moaning and groaning of passion which finally ended in a crescendo of ecstasy. They lay silent in each other’s arms and drifted back to sleep.

“Good morning,” she said, opening the curtains. Sunlight filled the room.

“Good morning to you,” he said rubbing his eyes.

“It smells awfully suspicious in here to me,” she said with a mock frown on her face.

“Yeah…I wonder why,” he said, jumping out of bed and chasing her around the room. When he finally caught her, he said, “How about some breakfast?”

“Don’t you do anything besides eat and screw? Let me take a shower first,” she said. Alan joined her, he explained, to conserve water—they were in California, after all.

They had breakfast at the Pork Store on Haight Street. He told her it was the only place a Southern boy could get good grits in San Francisco. After breakfast they walked west down Haight Street toward Golden Gate Park. They went through the park until they came to Second Avenue at which point they headed straight for the UC campus—if one could call it that. It was little more than a complex of buildings stuck on the side of a hill. To save climbing the hill they cheated and took the parking lot elevator to Parnassus. Alan pointed out the new library where Core would spend much of her time. They crossed Parnassus and entered the giant medical complex. They took the elevator to the sixth floor and followed a maze of corridors before reaching Alan’s laboratory.

"I don't know if I could find your lab on my own," she complained.

"Some professors are given tenure simply because they can't find their way out," he joked.

After introducing Core to the two post-docs and the four graduate students working with him, they went to Alan's office to talk.

"Make yourself at home. What little I have is yours," he said, and moved a pile of papers from the only chair available, then grabbed another one from the lab.

"When we met in Washington you were just as pro-HIV as could be. What happened to change you mind, Core?"

She spent the next hour relating in detail the adventures she had only touched on over the phone: the trip to Austria and the discussions with Professor Staël and Ferenczi; the sabbatical at the Welter Institute; the events leading her to repudiate HIV; and finally, her passionate need to understand the true nature and cause of AIDS. She decided it was inappropriate to go into Julio's legal difficulties, just yet.

"Alan, I want you to help me understand AIDS, but I need to know where you stand…what you believe. Is your mycoplasma the cause of AIDS?"

"It's actually Shyh-Ching Lo's mycoplasma. But, no…it doesn't cause AIDS—there's no bug that causes AIDS," was his response.

"You don't believe AIDS is infectious, then?" she continued.

"I'm certain that it is not. You can no more get AIDS from other people than you can catch alcoholism."

"Do you have an idea what causes AIDS, then?"

"I believe so…but I'm not going to try to convince you. You'll have to do that for yourself, the same as you learned to reject HIV as the cause of AIDS," he said, looking even more serious.

"I understand I have to do it myself, but I'd like your help," she pleaded.

"I can give you some references and books to get you started. Our library is really world class with everything on-line," he said, pulling files from a cabinet.

"Come on, Alan. *Tell* me…" she said, antsy to hear what he believed caused AIDS.

"All right, then. AIDS in adults is caused by chronically destructive behavior from years of abusive and excessive conduct. With children, the situation is different, of course. The CDC's own statistics show that 95 percent of the babies with AIDS are born to mothers who are confirmed drug addicts or

prostitutes. The immune systems of children are not fully developed until they reach their teens, which makes them especially susceptible to the immune suppressive effects of their environment. A drug polluted womb can wreak havoc on a fetus. Malnutrition is a very powerful source of immune suppression in children, and is unfortunately quite prevalent, even in this country. There is no single thing such as an infectious agent that causes the disease and it is not contagious. That's all I'll say for now. Prove me wrong."

"My work's cut out for me. I just hope there's enough time. I'll take this stuff over to the library and get started," she said, getting up to leave.

"I suggest you start with syphilis." He handed her Harris Coulter's book *Aids and Syphilis: The Hidden Link*, and added, "Let me give you Joan McKenna's phone number and address, and while you're in Berkeley, why don't you give Peter Duesberg a call. You really should talk to Joan, she was the first person to systematically study the connection between syphilis and AIDS.

"Oh…let's find an office you can use," he said, walking out with her.

Twenty One

Core immediately called Joan McKenna of the Institute for Thermobaric Studies in Berkeley. She was more than happy to talk with Core. She learned enough in a few minutes on the phone to convince her that they had to meet. Joan was free that afternoon so Core took BART under the bay to Berkeley.

Joan briefed Core on the history of syphilis and its appalling statistics. She explained that syphilis, "the great masquerader," which had laid waste to parts of Europe centuries ago was still endemic throughout the world. Syphilis is a condition of many manifestations, phases, and lifelong "carrier states," capable of being passed from mother to child as effectively as from lover to lover. It's transmitted essentially, but by no means uniquely, through sexual intercourse. Syphilis, particularly in its secondary and tertiary stages, can mimic hundreds of other conditions, ranging from simple flu-like symptoms and swollen glands to general wasting, dermatological problems, serious complications of internal organs, general weakness and malaise, dementia and severe immune depression.

However, it now appears that tertiary syphilis is not caused by the spirochete but is almost certainly due to the treatments of the past, which included a variety of highly toxic heavy metals and other poisons. With the advent of penicillin and antibiotics tertiary syphilis has virtually disappeared because these therapies replaced their toxic predecessors.

Joan pointed out that in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a clinician interviewing a young, sexually active person with a combination of these symptoms would have most likely diagnosed the patient as being syphilitic. Now, of course, the diagnosis would be AIDS. Centuries before, many physicians thought that The Great Pox was a skin disease, and that treatment to make pustules vanish was the equivalent of "curing syphilis." It took many years to recognize that syphilis was a generalized, constitutional disease with many phases and manifestations of which skin eruptions were only one aspect. By 1900 the

"masquerader" was thought to lurk behind virtually every conceivable pathological sign of a patient, particularly if he was thought to be part of a "high-risk group" as socially defined—which meant any sexually active and usually unmarried young person.

Joan went on to characterize the situation following World War II. After the war, a simple blood test for syphilis was developed and it, along with mass produced benzathine penicillin, provided physicians with the weapons they believed would finally bring syphilis under their control. After a time, a "new" disease—infectious mononucleosis or "the kissing disease"—appeared with symptoms surprisingly similar to syphilis, but since that disease had been "wiped-out," a new cause had to be found—enter the viral connection. Eventually, Epstein-Barr virus was labeled the culprit in infectious mononucleosis.

However, Joan continued, infectious mononucleosis could easily be diagnosed as syphilis if it were not for the strong belief that the Great Pox had been eradicated, or was at least largely under control. The resultant new syndrome, ranging from mild bouts of flu-like symptoms, general fatigue, and so on, now became itself, on a smaller scale, a "great masquerader" which could be mistaken for many other conditions.

Joan then went on to underscore the sad fact that nowadays if a physician is confronted with a young, sexually active patient who is wasting away, flu-stricken, chronically fatigued with swollen glands, frequent opportunistic infections and any of the other symptoms of syphilis, he or she is almost certainly going to make a diagnosis of AIDS.

Joan claimed that the unintelligent use of penicillin during the 1950s and sixties forced syphilis into a dormant state, just waiting for an opportunity to reemerge—and it did. During the 1970s syphilis reappeared in epidemic proportions in the great metropolitan cities of the US. In the nineties, syphilis and another old nemesis—tuberculosis—are reemerging yet again, especially among poor Blacks and children of drug addicts—and for the same reasons. The erroneous belief held by many physicians that antibiotics had largely eradicated both diseases led to decades of complacency and the massive spread of syphilis and the antibiotic resistance of tuberculosis. Joan estimated there are 30 million adult Americans with undiagnosed active syphilis. What was even more shocking: she said that twenty percent of Americans are born with congenital syphilis. The rate is forty to fifty percent for poor children.

Following the discouraging history of syphilis, Joan was curious about Core's experiences in covering AIDS and asked how she could be of more specific help. Core explained that she was going to write a series of articles on the alternative theories of AIDS—especially those not dependent on HIV. Joan was only too happy to share what she had learned from years of working with AIDS and syphilis patients. With that, Core began the interview.

"On the way here I read your 1986 paper in *Medical Hypotheses* connecting AIDS with syphilis. It reminded me of Peter Duesberg's assault on the HIV theory of AIDS that appeared in *Cancer Research*. The response it received was anything but encouraging. What kind of reaction did your article get?" "The best reaction," Joan said, "was an editorial in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* by Mary Guinan of the CDC. She acknowledged that blood tests are not very good at measuring how well penicillin cures syphilis. The CDC even agreed with us that penicillin could be ineffective against syphilis when treating an individual immune-suppressed by AIDS, or drugs, or anything else.

"Following the publication of our paper, we began spreading the information around. In the summer of 1986 I went to Europe and talked to specialists in London, at the Institute for Tropical Diseases, and at the World Health Organization in Geneva. I talked to Klaus-Uwe Dierig and Urban Waldthaler in Augsburg, Germany. They had earlier published an article in a West German medical journal describing a history of syphilis in one AIDS patient and gonorrhea in another AIDS patient. They suspected that AIDS was a deep-seated venereal disease. So they gave both patients a whopping dose of penicillin each day for twenty days. Not the one or two injections typical in the US. After twelve to fifteen months they were free of symptoms."

"Let me see if I've got it right. You and the West Germans were working independently on the AIDS-syphilis connection at about the same time," Core said. "The Germans made the link between syphilis and AIDS by successfully treating their AIDS patients' venereal diseases with large doses of penicillin. But I don't understand what made you first suspect syphilis was involved in AIDS?"

"As early as 1981 I had reached the point where I couldn't believe what I was reading about AIDS in the newspapers. It wasn't consistent with what I knew was going on in the gay community. We've known for a long time that a certain population of gay men were subject to many chronic inflammatory conditions. And that many of these men used a lot of drugs that are immuno-suppressive. Physicians have known for a long time that the chronic infections and massive

drug abuse prevalent among these men predisposed them to many secondary infections. Sounds suspiciously familiar, doesn't it.

"In England or Europe, when you have one of these secondary infections, the physician will say, Tell me every drug you've taken in the last six months, and don't lie about it! And then he will ask you if you've had any of the following diseases. He will give you a whole list of chronic inflammatory diseases to select from. Then he will ask about environmental exposure to radiation, various toxic chemicals, etc. From this he can usually figure out what is causing the syndrome. You can't catch syndromes—they're not infectious. It's quite specific to the individual patient and to the microorganisms one carries.

"The CDC was aware of all this, too, but for some reason they changed the rules during the eighties. They began saying the AIDS epidemic just arose out of nowhere, with no grounds for it. They chose to ignore the factors that cause the syndrome. Specifically, with the gay community, prostitutes, intravenous drug abusers, and the like, the CDC totally discounted the presence of chronic inflammatory diseases and drug use among these groups when discussing AIDS. The CDC was denying that drugs were a major problem in these communities. They also denied that physicians had anything to do with prescribed drugs being abused substances in these communities."

"It's hard to believe the CDC would ignore the deleterious effects of drug abuse," Core interjected. Then recalling her experience at McPherson, she added, "They could have been pressured by the drug companies to de-emphasize the darker side of their business."

"Maybe so, but to say that these individuals didn't have chronic inflammatory conditions is really beyond me."

"I found the same fuzzy thinking prevalent throughout the Welter Institute," Core said. "So, faced with all those contradictions what did you do?"

"I started a literature search on acquired immunodeficiency syndromes. Guess what: *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia—PCP for short—has been killing heroine addicts for many decades. Junkies, you see, have been dying of AIDS well before you were born, but since nobody gives a damn about them, AIDS had to await recognition until it affected people with political clout.

"I found an account of a European epidemic of PCP in orphan asylums after World War II. It turned out that the children were getting antibiotics like penicillin and terramycin prophylactically—all the time, for Christ sake. The PCP sprang up because their immune systems had been chemically altered by the

antibiotics. That's one reason why even today doctors are nervous about treating anyone with anti-inflammatory drugs for chronic diseases like arthritis, or giving chemical immuno-suppressives to prevent organ rejection. These patients all experience a kind of pre-AIDS syndrome caused by the drugs.

"Anyway, to get back to my part of the story, it struck me that from what I knew about the gay community, they had a history of chronic inflammatory disease and massive drug abuse. The first thing to do was to stop all that. So in 1981 I started a program to help these gay men—a program of life-style changes that would enable them to live without drugs and would remove some of the burden of their chronic inflammations. By 1983 my first AIDS patient had gone three years without complications. His physician was referring people to me. Other people had heard about my program and wanted to get in. I couldn't handle so many clients on a one-to-one basis, so I set up a training module. We ended up working with about a hundred people: thirty-two with AIDS; the rest with ARC (AIDS-related complex) and the 'worried well.' What we were trying to do was to help them get their non functioning immune systems back into shape. Once we managed to restore some life to their immune systems, however, we found a funny thing happening. All of a sudden they started developing fevers. This meant they were reacting to something. It was part of a curative process. But what were they reacting to? Furthermore, these fevers seemed to have no other accompanying phenomena, no other symptoms, no distinctive biochemical findings. There were just these cyclical spiking fevers, apparently isolated from any pathological basis.

"I said this is crazy. I have to look into the literature and see if I can find out what is happening. In 1984 I was reading in the UCSF library and I came upon an article that said point-blank, 'Be careful not to confuse PCP with syphilis; both of them have a white-lung condition.' This really made me stop and think: Could AIDS be a form of syphilis? And syphilis kept coming up again and again. I found a lot of articles from the 1950s and sixties stating that you had to be very careful with subcurative penicillin treatment of syphilis, since the disease could skip the primary and secondary stages and go right into latency, and when it emerges later, it does so in very bizarre ways.

"I found more recent articles by Raymond Smego and Stephen McPhee stating that AIDS could easily be confused with secondary syphilis. I found articles, beginning in the early 1950s, describing the successful treatment of Kaposi's sarcoma with penicillin—the drug used to treat syphilis. In 1984 I

realized that immuno-suppression produced by medical drugs was one of the causes of AIDS and I started saying so. I'm an optimist. I think it's wonderful to understand the causes of things. *Real* knowledge makes it possible for you to go to work on solving problems. I didn't realize what was going on out there in the medical world that made it very hard for them to hear me. In short, all hell broke loose, and I realized I had made a big mistake confronting the medical community with the obvious. The medical profession is pretty much locked in to the viral theory of AIDS. There's an awful lot of politics involved." Joan stopped talking and swiveled her chair around to look out the window toward the Golden Gate Bridge.

"I've experienced that recently myself," Core said, recalling the domagic fog shrouding the Welter Institute.

"You have to understand," Joan said, "that the only new money—not already-spoken-for money—put into biological research in recent years has been for Legionnaire's Disease and AIDS. As a result, laboratories are being built and careers are being made on that money. When you think of all the money earmarked for research on that innocent virus that could better be spent on the investigation of syphilis and chemical immune suppression, it just makes you sick. And doctors who do not accept the official line on AIDS can find themselves in a lot of trouble."

Her words reminded Core of Alan's similar remarks on research funding when they first met.

Joan turned back around, facing Core again. "Can I get you a cup of coffee or something?"

"No thank you. I'm fine," Core said, then added: "Naturally, working with syphilis brings you in contact with the CDC in spite of your views on AIDS. Tell me what it's been like."

"Several years ago I contacted the CDC on the problem of identifying syphilis and syphilis antibodies in drug users and diseased people. Ninety-five percent of our AIDS clients had a history of syphilis, which meant they should have had antibodies to syphilis. Seventy-five percent of them didn't. If you can't find the syphilis spirochete, or any changes in antibody levels, no one will treat the patient for syphilis. At one point, the CDC became mildly interested in our work and wanted me to show how syphilis was evolving into AIDS, but that required setting up a clinic and would have taken years and money I didn't have, so I declined. However, they missed the boat with their 'one cause, one effect'

mentality that has prevailed since the appearance of HIV. We're studying the multiple assaults by the combination of diseases and drugs that cause AIDS. 'The one cause, one effect' legacy of Pasteur does not apply here. Of course, many scientists consider cofactors, but the AIDS virus is all people hear talked about on television.

"The main problem with the CDC and others is that they are following an old fashioned model which is no longer applicable. They assume that blood tests are always going to tell whether syphilis is or is not present, regardless of the present health and drug use status of the patient. They assume these tests are going to yield uniform and accurate readings—and they aren't.

"We have anomalies all over the place. We have men with known multiple histories of secondary syphilis yet have no antibodies. The doctors respond by saying they must have been infected a long time ago. We knew differently: they were infected eight months to two years before joining our study. The doctors say they must be very young. Wrong again: our patients ranged from 21 to 50 years of age. I can't explain the reasons for these anomalies, but they exist.

"About seventeen years ago when I first started looking at AIDS, I called the CDC and said, 'If an individual is chemically immune suppressed and contracts syphilis, would he necessarily produce antibodies to syphilis?' They said, 'No.' Then I asked, 'If a person has AIDS and contracts syphilis, would he show antibodies to syphilis?' They said, 'No, not necessarily.' I said, 'Let me ask it another way: If a person is chemically immune suppressed, and gets immune suppressed from syphilis as well, he could have very bizarre symptoms but still have negative blood tests?' They said, 'That's correct.' So I asked, 'Why aren't you surprised by these questions? When I called the California Department of Health, they started to get hysterical because they had never thought of it before.' The CDC's response was, 'Well, this isn't new. We've been getting calls for years now from physicians who are treating men with AIDS whose symptoms are consistent with secondary syphilis but their blood tests are negative.' So I asked, 'Well, what are you doing about it?' They said, 'Nothing.' Then I asked, 'What are you *going* to do about it?' Amazingly, they said, 'Nothing.'

"We have examined a battery of syphilis tests—six in all. We see anomalies in all of them even though the biopsies have been consistent with syphilis and treponemes were even found in one patient. But if you can't accurately test for syphilis with blood tests, if the standard treatments are part of the cause, if, as a society, we have so overused chemicals that the very chemical makeup of our

bodies is altered, then we are facing the failure of the biochemical approach to the treatment of disease."

"That's a pretty sweeping statement," Core gasped. "Do you see the downfall of modern medicine?"

"Possibly. The rules of the game are changing. The old medical model is now turned against itself. But the medical establishment keeps relying on its belief system. For example, they keep counting on syphilis to always show positive on blood tests, but this is no longer valid.

"Drugs are another thing. I have histories of gay men who have been on tetracycline for 18 years because they're scared of a pimple! I guarantee you their body chemistries aren't normal. I have guys with almost unlimited prescriptions for erythromycin because every two or three weeks they will get a sore throat—and they'll take erythromycin for a few days to get rid of it. This is an abuse of an antibiotic. I have individuals who, when they fill out their drug histories, give me pages that are coded to show which combinations of drugs they were on in any given period. Often they were taking two or three prescribed drugs—valium, librium, erythromycin—plus designer drugs—amyl nitrite, butyl nitrite, uppers, downers, you name it. We are talking about a community where drugs are rampant. We don't have any idea what their body chemistries are anymore. And we don't know how much of the general population is in the same kind of chemical distortion. We're an overly drugged nation."

"Where does all this leave us, Joan—where are we heading?" Core asked, her face stiff with concern.

"It means that with AIDS we are in a new ball game, and the medical profession had better realize it. But there is an element in the AMA—and the mass media, I might add—which wants to go after every doctor or health worker who is against a chemotherapeutic cure for AIDS. They polarize society against everyone who is offering any other kind of insight into the nature of the disease or the nature of the community being treated. There has to be a truce between the medical profession, the media, and everyone else for the sake of the AIDS patients themselves.

"For instance, over at San Francisco General Hospital there is a group of AIDS patients regarded as long-term survivors. The doctors themselves admit that these patients are the ones who at some point decided to make behavioral, lifestyle, and emotional changes. They don't rely on physicians telling them what to do. They refuse to lie down and die just because HIV theory demands it of

them. Everyone knows this, but a physician at the hospital has stated publicly that if he tried to go around and advise AIDS patients that they had to take command of their lives to survive, he would be accused of quackery.

Joan leaned back in her chair, realizing that she had been talking a long time.

"Well, Core—My voice is about to go and I've talked your ear off enough anyway. Why don't we call it quits for today? I hope I was able to help you."

"Thank you very much, you've been extremely helpful. But I admit to feeling saturated a bit by all you've told me. I apologize for taking up so much of your time."

"Heavens, No. It's for a worthy cause. I look forward to your articles"

Core still had some time before meeting Alan for supper. She followed Alan's suggestion and took a bus to the UC Berkeley campus not far from Joan McKenna's facility. She headed for the Department of Molecular and Cell Biology to say hello to Professor Peter Duesberg. The door was open and he was sitting at the computer, just clicking away. Core knocked.

"Professor Duesberg..." she waited for him to recognize her.

"Core Fletcher. My goodness, it's good to see you. Please come in," he said, leaving what he was doing.

"If I'm disturbing you, I can come back," she said.

"No, No. I've been sitting here long enough. Let me just save what I've done so far before I lose it." He glided back to the computer and pressed a few keys. "There now...please sit down." He directed her to a comfortable chair. He sat on the couch adjacent to her.

"It's been awhile...let's see, about two years since we've talked, I guess. What brings you to Berkeley?" he said, giving her his full attention.

"I was down the road talking with Joan McKenna and I thought that since I was so close I'd stick my nose in and say hi."

"This is a little off you usual beat, isn't it?" he said.

"I'm on a one month sabbatical at UCSF. I just finished one at the Welter Institute."

"You're still at *Science Week* aren't you?"

"Oh yes."

"What a novel idea: a journalist on sabbatical. I suppose it has to do with AIDS."

"That's all I've written about for six years. But I've seen some things the last several weeks that have really opened my eyes. I just wish I had paid more attention to you years ago. It was all there from the beginning, but I had to find it out for myself. The only crime HIV is guilty of is impersonating a dangerous virus."

"Welcome to the other side of the fence. You'll find it much less crowded over here, but the company is very agreeable," he said. "How did Stephen Julio take your loss of faith in his virus…he can't have been too pleased?"

"Well, that's what's interesting about the whole story—he doesn't know yet," she said. "In fact, it was my stay at the Welter Institute that purged any lingering belief I had in the importance of HIV. Before I shock the public with the precipitous reversal of my position on HIV, I feel obligated to them and myself to understand this thing called AIDS. That's what I was doing at Joan McKenna's.

"Well, I'm not going to take up any more of your time; I just came by to say hi. I've got a bad habit of droping in unannounced. Hey, I've got an idea. If you're free tonight, why don't you join Alan Haan and me for supper. We're going to a Thai restaurant, if that helps you make up your mind."

"Marvelous suggestion. My wife's out of town, so it'll just be me. Did you take BART over?"

"Sure did."

"Then I'll drive us to the city. Let's say around six."

"Sounds good. I'll meet you here at six," she said.

Core had two hours to kill before they left for San Francisco. She decided to spend the time in the biology library and looked up Kaposi's sarcoma, one of the identifying diseases specific to gay AIDS. The Hungarian dermatologist Moriz Kaposi could never have guessed how famous he would become more than a century after he first described the condition that bears his name. In 1872 he was looking for external signs of syphilis. The skin lesions he documented were eventually called Kaposi's sarcoma.

Classical Kaposi's sarcoma is incorrectly named and is not really a cancer at all. In the United States the disease was previously seen only in elderly men of Ashkenazi Jewish or Mediterranean Italian background. AIDS changed that. Core had seen the now familiar purplish lesions covering the bodies of a number of gay men suffering with AIDS.

An unusually aggressive form of Kaposi's sarcoma—and prevalent even before AIDS appeared—was commonly seen in kidney transplant patients whose

immune systems had been intentionally suppressed with drugs to prevent rejection. If the drugs were withdrawn, the disease diminished. About one third of the patients who received kidney transplants died from chemically induced complications rather than kidney failure or infection. Of course, today, these patients are classified as dying of AIDS instead of the procedure itself if they are HIV positive.

The extraordinary 98% preference for Kaposi's sarcoma in gay men was a complete mystery before Duesberg pointed out that those with KS all had used poppers extensively. Poppers are a gay drug, used to facilitate anal intercourse, and are some of the most potent mutagens and carcinogens known. The overwhelming prevalence of KS in gay men, Duesberg explains, is a reflection of the preferential use of poppers by these men. KS is a very specific drug disease, that's why it's never seen in hemophiliacs and other recipients of blood products unless they also happen to use poppers.

Core was really getting into untangling the extraordinary web of confusion, half-truths, and down-right lies surrounding AIDS. After satisfying her curiosity about the connection between Kaposi's sarcoma and AIDS, she decided to see what she could find on the other most prevalent indicator of AIDS.

Pneumocystis carinii is normally a harmless parasite which many if not all healthy people carry about with them. The organism is so feeble that it is almost impossible to grow it outside of a living host. Tragically, AIDS patients provide the ideal environment for *Pneumocystis carinii* and it is a major immediate cause of death. Until AIDS appeared, almost all cases of *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia in the US had been severely ill cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy, or recipients of organ transplants—both causes, again, of immune depression. Around the world, the majority of *Pneumocystis* deaths were in children in the Third World who were immune deficient because of malnutrition.

Core found that the same story repeated itself with the menagerie of other organisms that plagued AIDS patients: *Cryptosporidium, Toxoplasma gondii, Giardia lamblia, Entamoeba histolytica, Candida albicans, Coccidiodes*...the list was endless.

"My God!...these poor people are living cesspools," she gasped.

Core was glad it was time to leave—she had depressed herself enough for one day.

Twenty Two

The traffic on the Bay Bridge was unusually light for the time of day. It could have easily been bumper-to-bumper. Although Peter was driving, Core took credit for their good fortune, saying Lady Luck had been following her lately. They even found a parking space on Geary Street right in front of Khan Toke. Alan was waiting inside when they arrived.

"Peter…what a nice surprise," Alan said, pleased that Core had asked his old friend to join them.

They took off their shoes and checked them before entering the dining area. The walls were a warm, royal red; traditional art and sculpture were everywhere. The restaurant was divided into cozy spaces about the size of a large family dining room at home. The tables were close to the floor so Alan asked for one with a sunken well for his feet. Nimbler guests chose the more authentic custom of sitting on cushions strewn about the floor. Alan tried it the first time he went to Khan Toke but had found it impossible to get comfortable. He volunteered to order the appetizers and said the pork balls were a must. Since all three admitted being very hungry, he added the traditional skewered beef strips with peanut sauce and pickled cucumbers on the side.

"How about a beer, Peter?" Alan said.

"I'll have a Sing ha," was his response.

"Me too," Core chimed in. She had been anxious about talking shop with Duesberg during the drive over from Berkeley but resisted the impulse. She didn't like the idea of interrogating someone she had invited to supper. But that was precisely what she wanted—to talk to him about AIDS. It was important to make the most of every minute in San Francisco; she couldn't afford to miss the opportunity to discuss AIDS with one of the world's leading critics of HIV.

They had all made their selections of entrées and settled back to enjoy the beer and appetizers. Alan showed Core how to fold the rice paper into a cone. He

took a wedge of spiced ground pork and placed it in the cone. Then he added peanuts, diced ginger, chopped garlic, bell pepper, lettuce, and covered it all with a tangy sauce. He popped the whole thing into Core's mouth. She had never tasted anything like it; she savored the satisfying explosion of flavors, impossible to describe. The beer and genial atmosphere were having an effect. Peter was good company; his informality and sense of humor made it easy for Core to plunge ahead without preamble into what she really wanted to discuss.

"Peter, how would you fix AIDS research if it was left up to you?"

"Core, if anyone was foolish enough to offer me the job I wouldn't take it. But suppose as punishment for my sins I found myself in that depressing situation. I would have people spend more time in the clinic and less in the lab, for starters. We need to get people looking much more closely at the patients themselves and less at the hardware. We rely way too much on instrumentation. The extreme sensitivity of our machines tends to remove us from real life."

The second wave of food arrived.

"Oh, Alan…it's wonderful," she said, then took another thin piece of rice paper and made another cone—it was just too delicious. Core was in really good spirits now .

"Even though I don't believe in the importance of HIV anymore," Core said between bites, "isn't it fair to say that the virus is associated with AIDS to some extent?"

"What is associated with AIDS is *antibodies* to HIV," Peter said, going for the peanut sauce. "Antibodies are a sign that you've successfully dealt with a virus, not a prognosis of disease. To this day, no paper on AIDS has reported a detectable concentration of active HIV in a patient. Julio, Gallo, Levy, and Montagnier all admit they can't isolate HIV itself in more than fifty percent of the cases. When they do find the virus, it is in a dormant state, requiring special laboratory conditions to activate it. They made up their minds too early that AIDS is a single disease. It is a combination of symptoms which are highly heterogeneous and have little to do with each other."

The waiter appeared with the entrees and began serving.

"Umm…the curries are delicious," Peter remarked, savoring the mingling aromas.

"To get back to the point you made earlier," Alan said, "doesn't the extreme sensitivity of current instruments cause a lot of scientists prematurely to

conclude that they have discovered a pathogenic virus simply because nowadays they can find these wee beasties wherever they look?"

"That's got a lot to do with it," Duesberg answered. "The sensitivity of biochemical methods is approaching that of physics. There is no mouse in this world that doesn't have at least fifty retroviruses in him as latent as the HIV virus. No chicken, no cow, no cat. In fact, some fifty to a hundred latent retroviruses have been found to reside in the DNA of all humans, passed along to each successive generation for as long as human beings have existed. We can find these viruses, but that doesn't mean they're doing anything.

"When Koch and Pasteur were considering under what conditions germs caused disease, they had nothing near our level of magnification available to them. They would never have been able to see HIV. Koch was looking at somebody who was *loaded* with tuberculosis. Pasteur was looking at somebody who was *loaded* with rabies virus. Researchers today do great detective work in finding retroviruses. However, what they're doing is clinically irrelevant—even absurd in the case of AIDS. But that's what they can do—that's their skill. To justify what they're doing, they have to believe they are finding the cause of disease."

"It's not sufficient then to just show that a virus is present, it also has to be doing something," Core added.

"Yes, but I don't see why that's such a difficult concept for some people to understand. A virus must infect and kill more cells than the patient can spare. Every month, half of your T-cells are replaced with new ones. So the HIV virus would have to infect a couple percent of them every day. It doesn't. You don't become demented from losing 0.1 percent of your brain cells. You don't become an AIDS patient from losing 0.01 percent of your T-cells…hell, that's a pin prick."

"Peter, when you were on sabbatical at the NIH a few years ago how'd you get along with Robert Gallo…were the sparks flying?" Alan inquired, amusing himself.

"That was the summer of 1987. I've known Gallo for a long time. He doesn't want to talk about my paper in *Cancer Research* that came out that same year. He says, 'With friends like you, who needs enemies.'"

"It sure is strange how he avoids your criticism of HIV," Core said. "Don't other people ask Gallo about your arguments?"

"Sure they do. It annoys the hell out of him. He doesn't want to get into a debate about HIV. The same goes for your friend Stephen Julio.

"I tell you, things are just getting crazier and crazier. Anything short of pregnancy, and I don't know—breast cancer, maybe—is being diagnosed as AIDS. I mean, tell me what's not AIDS! Antibody positive, and you forget the keys to your car… I'm not making it up. In Florida, there was this young Cuban boy. He forgot the keys to his car several times. He couldn't remember where they were, and went to the hospital with some other problems. The doctor learned that the boy was walking the streets because he couldn't find his keys and decided to perform some tests. The boy was antibody positive for HIV so the doctor diagnosed him as having AIDS dementia. This case goes to the CDC as an AIDS statistic."

"The obsession with retroviral diseases didn't start with AIDS." said Alan. "Peter, you, Gallo, Julio, and a bunch of others spent a lot of time studying those viruses during Nixon's big war on cancer. Why is it you seem to be the only one who's lost the faith, so to speak?"

"I was pretty naive in those days," Peter said. "But Nature has a way of bringing one back to reality with an occasional slap on the face. Viruses just turned out not to be as important to cancer as I thought when I began, as many still think they are. I'm not as important as I thought I was. Or my work isn't. That goes for a number of leading scientists right now: the Baltimores, the Weinbergs, the Varmuses, and of course, the Julios and Gallos of this world. All their reputations are based on the view that retroviruses are significant pathogens in cancer…and now AIDS. The expectation that viruses were important causes of cancer just didn't pan out. This explains why there is generally so little criticism of the view that HIV causes AIDS. HIV pleases all the old veterans of the virus-cancer program. Just when the retroviral-cancer link was fading, all of a sudden, there appeared a new windmill for them again—AIDS. They're all marching again to the only tune they know. They crank-up their retroviruses once more and go to work."

"Julio's got a big AIDS vaccine program going." Core said, "It can't possibly help people but could it potentially be dangerous?"

"I think the vaccine research is more silly than dangerous," Peter said, smiling effusively. "Maybe the people doing the research could be dangerous, I don't know. On the one hand they say, look how wonderful we are, we're going to give you protection against HIV by producing antibodies in you. On the other hand, when people develop antibodies to HIV on their own and this is detected in a blood test, other people burn down their houses and people commit suicide."

“What bothers you the most about AIDS research these days?” Core asked, finishing her beer.

“I think AZT is the most sinister aspect of this whole business,” Peter responded. “It’s poison—that’s all. They’re killing growing, normal cells with that stuff—that’s what they’re doing. That’s very serious business. That fellow at Harvard—what’s his name, Haseltine—proposed treating babies that are antibody positive to HIV one week with AZT, the second week with interferon—highly irresponsible.”

Duesberg was about to make another point but changed his mind when the waiter appeared and began clearing the table.

“Well, it looks like we’ve cleaned every plate,” Alan said, examining his empty beer bottle.

“I’m stuffed,” Core said, “but I’ll have a cup of Thai tea for dessert.”

“I guess I will too,” Alan said, “how about you, Peter?”

“No. I’ve had more than enough of everything. I better be getting back to Berkeley before it gets too late. I’ve got class tomorrow. Thanks for dinner; it was superb. Core, I’m really glad you stopped by. Come by again before you leave.”

“Thanks, Peter. I will,” she said, then he left.

“Core, I bet you didn’t realize it’s Halloween. Would you like to see how San Francisco celebrates it?” Alan asked.

“I’m in no mood to go trick-or-treating.”

“That’s not quite what I had in mind,” he said.

They took a cab to the intersection of Market and Castro. The gay strip of Castro was now a gay (the old meaning of the word) party. The Castro festival attracted straight people too, eager to experience the sheer fun of it. A swarm of creatures outfitted in the most creative and outlandish costumes circulated between the police barricades. People were dancing on the balconies and in the street. Even though it was an annual event, the celebration was always a spontaneous, joyful occasion.

“The police are more prominent this year,” Alan observed. “For some reason gay bashing is on the rise again. The Castro symbolizes the heart of the gay experience. It is the scene of their greatest triumphs and tragedies. Heterosexuals don’t fear these people…they know nothing about them. Straight folks have learned to fear the myths parents, preachers, peers, and politicians perpetuate about the dangers and horrors of homosexuality. While the so-called general population viciously condemns homosexuals, it ravenously consumes the

art, dance, theater, music, and general good taste for which these outcasts are largely responsible. If the bigots could expunge homosexuals from society, they would find many of the finer things of life had gone with them."

"Alan, you're a passionate cuss when you get wound up, aren't you," Core said, taking his arm. "Calm down awhile; let's just have some fun." Then she whispered in his ear, "I'm glad you're the way you are."

Twenty Three

Bright and early next morning Core was in the UCSF library looking up the references Joan McKenna and Peter Duesberg had given her the day before. It was now clear that the major contributor to the AIDS epidemic in both gays and straights was the massive consumption of prescription and recreational drugs.

The AIDS outbreak in San Francisco was preceded in 1970s by an epidemic of generalized lymphadenopathy (enlargement of the lymph glands) which is one of the most characteristic symptoms of syphilis. In fact, Core could not find one symptom or property of AIDS that had not been seen in syphilis patients over the centuries—including *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia. However, it was becoming clear to her that drugs were the real culprit.

Core found that other organisms besides the one that causes syphilis have powerful immuno-suppressive capacities: Cytomegalovirus, Hepatitis B, and Epstein-Barr virus to name a few are common in the gay community. For that matter, human semen itself is immuno-suppressive when it passes into the bloodstream, as may happen during anal intercourse—which could be significant given the number of sexual partners of gay men—upwards of 5,000 in a decade in some cases. Nevertheless, these diseases took a back seat to immune suppressive effects of drugs. Core was outraged that the medical and governmental institutions were virtually ignoring the role of drugs in the development of AIDS.

Deciding she had had enough of infectious agents, Core switched her attention to the single greatest cause of immune suppression in the world: malnutrition. Malnutrition was the common condition linking drug addicts, poverty, and children—indeed, malnutrition had its most devastating effect on children. Both AIDS patients and protein-calorie malnourished youngsters suffered from a host of opportunistic infections, and *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia. In fact, like syphilis, malnutrition alone could produce all the

symptoms of AIDS. Other than by using the HIV blood tests, it was impossible to distinguish between people suffering from hunger from those with AIDS.

Infant death had been on the rise even before AIDS, with the US currently ranked nineteenth in infant mortality in the industrialized world. And since one in five American children went hungry everyday, the so-called pediatric AIDS epidemic had become a convenient way of excusing the intolerable level of poverty and malnutrition in the United States by shifting the blame to a virus.

Alan found Core on the third floor of the library sitting at one of the large tables, partially hidden behind a mountain of books.

"Hi beautiful," he whispered.

"Ooh!" she screeched. "You nearly scared me to death."

"Sorry…you must have really been concentrating," he said. "It's lunch time. How about a break?"

"Okay…I need to stretch my legs, anyway."

Hanna's Restaurant was just three blocks from the library. Core had the donburi, Alan the udon. She was unable to clear her mind of the library work and wasn't good company during lunch. Alan wasn't offended at all; he completely understood.

In an hour she was back at it, pouring over the literature on immune suppression. Core felt that she had sufficient material on the immune suppressive effects of infectious diseases and malnutrition. She turned her attention to what was fast emerging as the most insidious cause of immune suppression yet: the "cure" itself.

Medicinal drugs themselves substantially disabled the immune system. Because of the obvious sensitivity of the billion-dollar pharmaceutical industry to this issue, the immuno-suppressive side effects of drug treatment were rarely discussed. Penicillin—the drug used to treat syphilis—had a variety of deleterious effects on the immune system as well as any the disease itself may add. The antibiotic was known to lower the levels of some of the most important types of cells involved in immune protection. The same was true for the families of tetracyclines and erythromycin. Core found that every one of the common drugs typically administered to gay patients to treat their chronic infections and maladies had serious effects on some aspect of the immune system. The famous AZT was pure poison, as Peter Duesberg said. AZT damaged bone marrow, the very place where the raw material of immune cells was produced, and caused severe anemia, requiring transfusions.

Core looked-up a 1992 issue of the *New York Native* where John Lauritsen reviewed the FDA clinical trial of AZT which resulted in its early "compassionate" release to seriously ill AIDS patients. Lauritsen received five hundred pages of material on those trials from Project Inform in San Francisco. The documents had been released by the FDA on a Freedom of Information Act request. After reviewing these records, Project Inform's Martin Delaney had made the following assessment: "The multi-center clinical trials of AZT are perhaps the sloppiest and most poorly controlled trials ever to serve as the basis for an FDA drug licensing approval. Despite this and a frightening record of toxicity, the FDA approved AZT in record time, granting a treatment recommendation in less that five days and full pharmaceutical licensing in less than six months."

Lauritsen had found examples of "doctored" data in the report. One FDA inspector found such glaring improprieties at one AZT test center that she recommended the center, out of the twelve used, be excluded from the analysis of the multicenter trial. At that point, three months after the study had been closed down, some attempt was made to re-evaluate what had been going on at all twelve of the AZT test centers, but it was too late. Harvey Chernov, an FDA analyst, had looked over the pharmacological data of AZT and recommended that the drug not be approved for release—but, unfortunately, he was unsuccessful.

Notwithstanding the scandalous misrepresentation of AZT in the past, the most boastful claim to date for this drug was that it increased the lives of AIDS patients by only five months. One couldn't help wondering, Core thought, how much longer those patients would have lived had they refused to take AZT, as was a growing number of AIDS survivors.

Core had been working so intently she didn't notice that it was dark outside until she got up to go to the rest room.

"Jesus! What time is it?" she blurted out.

When she found a clock and saw that it was ten, all of a sudden it felt like midnight. The day had been very productive, but it was time to gather everything up and go home to Alan. But before leaving, she examined once again the list Joan McKenna had given her of the typical medical histories of a large group of homosexual men in the Bay area:

Gonorrhea: multiple incidents with treatment by antibiotic therapies; twenty incidents per year for two or more years

Hepatitis: high incidence of known hepatitis or positive blood tests; ten percent had chronic hepatitis for five years or longer.

Urethritis: multiple presentations, sometimes chronic in that an individual will report six or seven episodes per year for up to eight years; higher doses and longer duration of antibiotics as condition became resistant to chemical intervention.

Skin eruptions: specific, palliative, and prophylactic use of antibiotics, tetracycline, and corticosteroids; reports of prescribed tetracycline for five to eighteen years continuously.

Sedatives, tranquilizers, and mood drugs: prescribed or used without prescriptions.

Chronic sore throat: more than fifty percent report frequent episodes requiring antibiotic.

Herpes simplex: twenty-five percent report chronic herpes; ninety percent had herpes within the past ten years.

Allergies: high incidence of history of chronic and sever allergies, allergy medications, and symptomatic suppressants.

Lymphadenopathy: frequent to constant swelling of lymph glands in forty percent of sample for up to twenty-five years preceding survey.

Diarrhea: high incidence of known and unknown etiologies; frequent parasites suspected, and parasitic treatments with and without confirmation of actual organisms in nearly thirty percent of the study.

Recreational drugs: nearly universal use of marijuana; a multiple and complex use of LSD, MDA, PCP, heroin, cocaine, amyl and butyl nitrites, amphetamines, barbiturates, ethyl chloride, opium, mushrooms, and what are referred to as “designer drugs.”

One fourth of the sample had shared nine or more of these conditions or patterns, and all of those who had been diagnosed with AIDS or ARC were concentrated in that one fourth. Joan’s list showed how preposterous it really was to believe that these gay men’s immune systems had been fine and dandy until HIV showed up.

Core spent a week compiling and editing the mass of technical evidence supporting the alternative but perniciously squelched explanation of the genesis of AIDS. She was now satisfied that she possessed what was needed to write the

last chapter, "The Causes of AIDS," for her issue of *Science Week*. She found herself in complete agreement with Harris Coulter's summing-up:

> AIDS is not just a disease like other diseases. It is to some extent a man-made catastrophe and must be classified with the other destructive environmental effects of human activities.
>
> This time, however, it is our internal environment which is being assaulted and destroyed.
>
> AIDS is the long-term price paid for a short-term benefit and is thus the medical equivalent of our depletion of the ozone layer, the destruction of tropical rain forests, the burdening of the atmosphere and poisoning of the rivers and oceans with pollution and pesticides.
>
> The short-term benefit has been the quick cure of illness with antibiotics. The long-term price is impairment of the immune system.
>
> This is no secret, no great discovery. These things are well documented. The drugs synthesized since World War II have achieved their end—the antibiotic sterilization, more or less, of patients' bodies—at the expense of the immune system, and AIDS is the last stop on the line. The immune system cannot be suppressed and undermined indefinitely without a price being paid. The chickens have come home to roost.

Twenty Four

The month Core spent in San Francisco she was a women possessed—by her growing attachment to Alan and the exposé on AIDS. She returned to Washington suffering the withdrawal of not being with Alan, and she tried to blunt the pain by submerging herself completely in work. She had decided on a title for the cover page of her solo issue—*Veiled Tyranny: The Lie Called AIDS.*

Gabe was ecstatic with what Core had written. He didn't care a milligram about science, but exposing corruption, that was what buttered his bread—and the larger the scandal the better. While Core was in San Francisco, Gabe had confronted Stephen Julio about his practice of expropriating other peoples' grant moneys while they were in transit. He gave Julio a chance to explain or at least respond to Core's article before it was published. At first he pretended ignorance until Gabe asked an assistant who was waiting outside Julio's office to bring in a box containing a selection of the NIH documents that had been sorted and arranged to clearly demonstrate that they had the goods on him. Julio then retreated into a cocoon of silence and mumbled something about seeing his attorneys. When Core's tour de force issue of *Science Week* appeared the last week of November, Stephen Julio was taking an impromptu vacation in Greece. Don Sakanari said the NIH's legal representatives were awaiting his return with unrestrained enthusiasm.

By the time Alan Haan arrived in Washington in mid-December to give his seminar at the NIH, he found *Veiled Tyranny* had become a sensation. A squad of reporters had begun following Core wherever she went. She met Alan at the airport and on seeing Core's predicament, he immediately spirited her away from her colleagues in the press who were pestering her for an interview for the folks back home.

"Lady, you've become the woman of the hour," Alan said, as they raced for the exit. "How long's this been going on?"

"Oh…those guys don't bother me. In a week they'll get bored and go chasing after somebody else—this is Washington, remember.

"*I'm* done with journalism, though," she said with resignation. "I'm finished as a science reporter…there are too many big-shots with skeletons to hide. My dramatic about-face has made all of them scared of me."

"I'm not one of 'em," he said, then with a sly look continued: "If you're interested in a new job, I hear there's a desperate fellow at UCSF in need of a microbiologist with a mind of her own."

For a moment Core looked at him puzzled, then realized what he was saying and gave him a tremendous kiss.

"I'll have my resume ready in the morning," she said.

"How do you like being a celebrity?" he asked, after they got into the car.

"It beats being ignored," she admitted. "The *New York Times* got permission to run the story on Stephen Julio. But it irritates the hell out of me they won't consider using the even more important disclosures on HIV and AIDS. Well, I suppose I should be grateful the *Washington Post* is running the AIDS articles.

"Yesterday, I got a call from the *Today Show* asking if I'd be willing to go to New York to discuss *Veiled Tyranny* on one of their programs. I told them I wasn't sure I had enough material to fill an entire two-to-three minute interview so, regrettably, I must decline."

"What if MacNeil-Lehrer called—would you go?"

"Huh! Their office called last week," she said.

"You're kidding."

"No—they really did. I turned 'em down, too. I report news—I don't make it. I told them I have no desire to sensationalize Julio's problems, and if they wanted to discuss the AIDS stuff, they should invite a real authority like Peter Duesberg. I have already put in print what I have to say."

"Shouldn't you accept some of the TV offers? They're bound to get somebody to talk about the hornet's nest you've disturbed. You ought to be there to defend yourself?" Alan said.

"I don't need defending. I'm a member of the press, remember. If what I've written can't stand scrutiny it shouldn't prevail. The charges and accusations I have made should stimulate a debate between the principal people and authorities involved in the controversy over AIDS. If that doesn't happen, my

comments become irrelevant. Besides, I have no intention of them turning me into a story so they can ignore AIDS."

"You've got a point," Alan agreed. "AIDS has been discussed to death by surrogates. It's time to put the main players on the spot and let them thrash it out in public, for a change."

"It could get ugly," Core said. "Gabe Lublin thinks Congress will get involved before it's over. Good grief Alan, we can talk about this tomorrow. What would you like to do tonight?"

"Oh…let's just go home," he said.

"Fletcher, when you get off the phone I need to see you in my office," Lublin said.

"Right away, Gabe." Core was talking to Alan. He was in the midst of going over the seminar he would deliver at the NIH on Thursday.

"You should see the mess I've made," he said. "I've got slides scattered all over your kitchen table."

"You're just like me…you wait till the last minute to get organized. Alan, I've got to go. Gabe wants to see me about something. Give your little wiger-wager a squeeze for me. See you tonight. Bye."

"What's up, Gabe?" Core said, still smiling from the conversation with Alan.

"I just got off the phone with Senator Collins. He called to let me know, as an old friend, that he is going to have the General Accounting Office open an investigation into how the government is handling this AIDS thing. He also said he was going to hold an in-depth hearing on a whole spectrum of AIDS issues and the administration's policy on AIDS. He credited *Veiled Tyranny* with initiating all the activity."

"Wow!…when is he going to begin the hearings?"

"Right after the Christmas recess. Fletcher, experience tells me you should be prepared to testify. After all, you're the spark that ignited this fire."

"Why me?" she said, shaken by the thought of going before of a congressional committee. "I'm no expert…just a puny journalist. Isn't there such a thing as best evidence. They should go after all the big-shots involved."

"They'll probably subpoena the whole lot," he said. "Come on Fletcher, you can't be that naive. You started all this. Collins is a good man—he's as fair as they come. And because of that, he will include on the committee strong supporters of the NIH and the Welter Institute—Ted Spender for one."

"Jesus! Gabe. Not Spender. That's taking fairness to an extreme," she said, jumping out of her seat and getting redder by the minute.

"Sit down, Fletcher," Gabe said as gently as he knew how. "You have the truth as you know it on your side. Just be professional and answer their questions the best you can. They will try to take advantage of the fact that you're not an expert. Expect an attempt by Spender or somebody else early in the hearing to discredit you. Their position will be that you have no right to pass judgement on so highly a technical issue as the government's administration of AIDS research. That's an old ploy used frequently against whistle blowers. Collins will protect you against those kinds of attacks. Really, the only way to counter personal attacks is to be who and what you are and nothing more. Leave the technical arguments to the experts. I know you Fletcher, and I've learned to trust your judgement. You should do the same."

Core left Gabe regretting she'd ever written *Veiled Tyranny*. She went back to her office and tried to call Alan but he wasn't there. She brought up *Veiled Tyranny* on her computer and studied it as if it wasn't her creation to see if others might find it persuasive—or full of holes. When she started reading she felt pangs of nauseating doubt. But when she got further along her fears began to evaporate. She hadn't invented all those arguments condemning HIV or the alternative explanations of the cause of AIDS, which the public health institutions almost totally suppressed. In twenty minutes she was feeling more confident and was able to smile when she remembered Alan would be waiting for her when she got home.

Twenty Five

"Hi gorgeous," Alan said when Core entered the kitchen.

"Now aren't those a lot better," she said, observing that he was wearing the shorts she bought hoping to wean him from those outlandish things he preferred.

"Oh…the shorts. Yeah, they're nice, but they make me feel a little too…too ordinary.

"Got my seminar organized…ready to dazzle 'em with my brilliance tomorrow," he said. "Any new, exciting things happen today?"

"Oh, not much. The GAO is going to investigate the government's mismanaging of AIDS research and I'll most likely have to appear before senator Collins' committee hearing on AIDS—that's all."

"Wow!…it's about to hit the fan," he said, "and it's all because of *Veiled Tyranny*. The word processor is truly equal to the sword."

"Alan, you better start getting dressed. The play starts at eight," she said, "but I'm getting a shower next…you had all day to get ready."

"Not to worry. I'll be dressed before you are," he said, chasing her up the stairs.

"Uhh!…what a play," Alan gasped, as they left the Kennedy Center. "Lovelard comes at you unmercifully. Core, you reckon he's gay…the dialog was so authentic?"

"Not a chance," she responded, a trifle too quickly.

"That was pretty definite. How can you be so sure?"

"I just am," she said, then tugged on his arm: "Let's go get a drink."

"I thought Lovelard used an interesting twist having none of the characters die of AIDS," Core said. "They just periodically referred to dead friends—which made it even scarier to me."

"Maybe that was the effect he wanted since most people have never seen anyone with AIDS," he said. "Unless you're gay, poor, or certain physicians, it's extremely unlikely that you'll come across anybody with AIDS. Most everything everybody knows about the disease is second hand. We're pretty good at handling real physical threats, but when you look at history, we're terrible at dealing with the never-never land of gossip and rumor. It's no wonder we have such a hard time countering all the institutional AIDS babble."

"The main character Willie was fascinating, I thought," she said. "I liked what he said about truth being nothing more than what people choose to believe. It wasn't just another simple pronouncement on the relativity of truth. No...what he was getting at was much subtler than that."

"To a large extent, we create our truths—each of us," Alan said swirling his cognac. "And all are valid, in a way. That may explain why reasoned discourse fails so miserably at changing people's minds."

"People can change. I know...I've certainly changed over the years," she said. "But I have no idea what causes me to change my mind. It has nothing to do with what people tell me, that's for sure. For instance: Peter Duesberg is saying the same things today about HIV that he was going on about when I first became a science writer. Why am I in total agreement with him now and not six years ago?"

"I don't think anybody knows what causes people to alter their convictions," he said. "I know that whenever I change my beliefs it just sort of happens, and I become aware of it later. It makes you question the notion of objectivity. Look at history. The scientific explanations we now take as obvious were anything but that when they were first being put forth. And what we accept today as carved in granite will be ridiculed in the future when our precious beliefs are supplanted by the next crop of explanations.

"For argument's sake, let's say there really is objective truth. If we accept that, then who possesses this truth and how would you recognize it or them? When you're a child, your parents are the wielders of absolute truth—for a while, at least. The Catholic Church has staked a totalitarian claim to truth—so have liberals and conservatives. The most notorious citadels of truth are the mega-institutions of government and society.

"At some point each of us decides what constitutes truth and which ones we'll accept. We smugly believe that *our* choices represent 'objective' truth; but curiously, since every individual must do his own choosing, doesn't that make the whole process subjective?"

"Okay, Alan. Let's forget about absolute truth. When most people make *objective* pronouncements they're really talking about consensus, though few are willing to acknowledge it. And we've already agreed that it's futile to try to persuade people to change their beliefs. So what the hell am I doing writing anything or testifying before Congress?"

"You know, years ago it occurred to me," he said, "that weddings are really for the guests—not the guests of honor—and funerals are held for the benefit of the living—not the dead. When you write and speak, you leave a record that you've been there. You're not converting anyone; you're providing a foundation for others to grab onto when the magical moment strikes and they move from where they were to where you are. You're not shoving them over the edge; you're giving them a place to land."

"Well…I have to admit that's a nice way of looking at it," she said and set her Coke aside.

"Hey, I'm tired of this place—let's go home and get sinful," she said.

"Hi Alan…How'd your seminar go today?" Core said, carrying in the groceries she'd picked up on the way home from work.

"Oh…it was so-so. I wasn't able to compete with the fire storm you touched off at the NIH. They can't get any work done over there for all the uproar over *Veiled Tyranny*—that's all they talk about. It did my heart good to see all those people discussing and arguing things they should have been talking about years ago."

He took the bags from her and placed them on the floor.

"I'm so proud of you, Core," he said, taking her in his arms. "You accomplished more in that one issue of *Science Week* than a decade of scientific polemics. You snatched right out of the hands of the prima donnas control of the AIDS debate by providing the public access to the whole controversy."

"Thanks, Alan. I need all the support I can get. I'm getting really nervous about those hearings next month. I sure wish you were going to be here."

"This is important stuff. I can probably find some reason for spending a few days in Washington around the middle of January," he said.

"Whoopee…" Core responded jubilantly and began putting the groceries away.

Twenty Six

Core spent Christmas in Atlanta with her parents. Being around normal folks again highlighted the insanity of life inside the Beltway. She made up her mind to leave Washington as soon as she had satisfied her obligation to *Science Week* concerning the repercussions of *Veiled Tyranny*.

Alan was as good as his word. He arrived back in Washington the weekend before the Senate hearings began.

"Brrr!…it's cold outside," he said. "I hope it's not an omen of the kind of reception awaiting you at the hearing this morning."

"Oh, thanks a lot, Alan. That's just what I needed to hear going out the door," Core said while putting on her coat to leave.

"I'm sorry, Core. I know you're nervous about this," he said, suitably mortified.

Arriving early, Core and Alan took their seats at the back of the walnut paneled hearing room. C-SPAN had its cameras positioned in the choicest spots. Interlopers from the various other networks were relegated to inferior locations on a first-come-first-serve basis.

Core counted seven microphones and name plates on the long rectangular table at the front of the room. There were two smaller tables facing forward for the witnesses with two microphones on each—no doubt the redundancy was for the convenience of accompanying lawyers. Core thought it very poor taste hiding all that fine oak furniture beneath such garish green covering, but immediately realized that the putrid facade satisfied the exigencies of television.

Senator Collins and his staff entered from a side door leading directly to the big table. In a few minutes the rest of the committee members and their staffs filed in and took their seats. Chairman Collins pounded the gavel three times and called the hearing to order in his familiar Southern drawl.

“Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to this hearing,” he began. “The purpose of this hearing—I want to emphasize from the start—is to provide this committee and the American people with a better understanding of the nature, cause, and remedies of the national tragedy called AIDS. This malady has afflicted our citizens for two decades. It is my personal intention to find out where we stand on this matter and where we’re heading.

“As a result of the recent revelations that have appeared in the press, this committee is going to look critically into the government’s handling of the AIDS epidemic. The committee comprises members with strongly opposing views on the administration’s AIDS policy and its oversight of the various institutions charged with implementing that policy. I will now exercise the prerogative of the chairman and call the first witness. I asked Dr. Raymond Brown if he would give us an overview of the medical establishment and what we’re dealing with.”

Following a brief swearing-in ceremony, Dr. Brown began.

“The medical establishment is a loose web of academia (schools, hospitals, and research institutes), professional associations, government health and regulatory agencies, health foundations and, of course, the pharmaceutical industry. Scientific medicine has achieved prominence, prestige, and power from the medical advances of this century, but is becoming increasingly bureaucratic, conservative, and intolerant of approaches and practices that challenge its authority.

“Members of the medical profession, by their possession of medical degrees, are considered uniquely qualified for positions of authority and counsel. They staff academia, serve in the government, disburse funds, control professional publications, instruct the news media, and advise legislatures and industry. They are the thread that unites all factions of the Establishment and, like adversary lawyers in court, they move easily and interchangeably through competing, and at times opposing, areas of activity. Their sameness of outlook and training provides liaison and leadership in maintaining institutional and establishment protection from their critics.

“A familiar scenario, reminiscent of the defense industry, is the musical chairs interchange of personnel among academia, government, industries, and foundations. Within the medical establishment, orthodoxy is maintained by control of medical education, research funding, and professional publications. What is not popular is seldom funded or published. The credo ‘Don’t rock the

boat' attempts to preserve the mutually rewarding and protective system of balances created among the institutions of the medical establishment.

"Changes, however, are occurring as previously comfortable alliances among the institutions are loosening. There is a growing unease that the old approaches and rules may not apply and that previous guides and maps may not be pertinent to the altered landscape of today. It is likely that the stresses and strains imposed by AIDS across all medical institutions will profoundly affect the structure of the medical establishment—in particular: the National Institutes of Health and the Food and Drug Administration and private foundations such as the Welter Institute for Retroviral Studies.

"Let us first consider the research arms of the Establishment—the NIH and the Welter Institute—in more detail. The NIH is the major funding agency for medical research throughout the country and provides billions of dollars to the citadels of orthodoxy and scientific fashion epitomized by the Welter Institute. Its guidelines, like military rules and regulations, protect the conventional while discouraging originality or independence. By controlling research funding, it effectively stifles dissent.

"The scientists and clinicians are just too eager when it comes to inflicting the latest laboratory curiosity or hypothesis on an innocent patient. An uncritical public bears its share of the blame for this situation by expecting too much of technology and not enough of the physician.

"The inadequacies of institutions like the NIH and the Welter Institute are best illustrated by the history of cancer research. When the NIH was founded in the 1940s the role of nutrition in cancer was a major interest. But the importance of nutrition was totally discarded as chemotherapy and virology permeated and ultimately dominated research thinking. Incredible amounts of money, talent, and time were expended over three decades in a search for cancer's viral cause and a chemical cure. However, the major advancements in cancer therapy that we enjoy today resulted from refinements in pre-existing methods of diagnosis, surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy and owed precious little to the research laboratories.

"The viral cause of cancer culminated in Robert Gallo's work with the Human T-Cell Leukemia Virus (HTLV), but even the significance of this discovery has been challenged by Peter Duesberg and others. In an attempt to find relevance for a decade of labor, Robert Gallo promoted strain three of his HTLV as

the cause of AIDS. And then we come to find out that it wasn't even his virus but one he obtained under mysterious circumstances from Luc Montagnier.

"Pertinent to the current stalemate in AIDS research are some past comments by prominent medical researchers:

"Nobel prize winner Dr. Albert Szent Gyorgi said, 'The molecular level is but one of many levels of organization, and what we call life is an integration of all functions and reactions. The whole is the most complex and difficult field of research. It is the whole person that has all the charm and whimsicalness of life. To approach him we must be in direct personal contact and not merely observe the readings of our instruments and hardware. We must use all our senses including two outdated instruments: eyes and brains.'

"The late Dr. Colin Macleod frequently stated that, 'We are all aware of fads and fashions in research, which constitute one of the banes of scientific life. An investigator announces a significant discovery, whereupon squads of research workers abandon what they were doing and move in to mop up. This common tactic stems from psychological insecurity, fear of being alone in the ocean of scientific ignorance, with all the self-doubts this engenders. Much better to be hunting with the pack, or, as it is put—to be in the forefront of scientific advances.'

"Finally, there is the comment of the great Australian immunologist Sir F. MacFarlane Burnet. 'The intellectual attraction of microbiology and immunology today is at the level of molecular biology and biochemical genetics…It is a magnificent continuing achievement and it has no bearing whatever on human needs. There is a desperately urgent need for people of first rate capacity to move away from the laboratories back to the direct and practical needs of medicine.'

"Now, let us switch gears and turn our attention to the Food and Drug Administration. The FDA, probably the most powerful and essential institution of the medical establishment, is the most demoralized, inept, and excoriated of any regulatory agency within the government. Under the jurisdiction of eight separate congressional subcommittees, it had in a three year period the unenviable record of one hundred unfavorable investigations by Congress. The distinguished chairman has served on a number of them."

"More than I care to remember, Dr Brown," interrupted Senator Collins. "Please continue, sir."

"Thank you Mr. Chairman. Founded for the purpose of achieving purity and safety in our food and medicines, the FDA has never reached its goals.

American medicine lacks many good products and therapies available in other countries, as the majority of FDA decisions concerning drugs are made by bureaucrats who have never practiced medicine. By generally refusing to acknowledge or accept foreign research, to allow drug combinations, or many biologic products, the FDA protects itself from the intrusion of ideas and products it cannot understand or control. By present FDA standards, it would be difficult—likely impossible—to introduce aspirin, penicillin, insulin, or electrocardiographic equipment into production.

"The agency's close ties to industry, from which FDA officials are frequently drawn, and to which they return following government service, have produced FDA leniency toward safety standards for many industry products—of which the most recent and scandalous example is AZT.

"The FDA sprawls across the center of government, and by its Byzantine internal politics, has threatened and harassed employees who have directed attention to its inadequacies. It has worn out those within and from outside who have attempted to reform it, and has expended its energies in bureaucratic expansion of power at the expense of common sense and service. For these and many other reasons, the FDA resolutely opposes a wide spectrum of therapies for the treatment of chronic and degenerative diseases, most especially AIDS and cancer. The processes and powers by which the FDA has functioned as policeman, prosecuting attorney, and judge of medical practice must be amended, and only legislative action can accomplish this.

"In the final analysis, only a concerned citizenry, exerting power through their elected representatives in Congress, can achieve the needed reform of the FDA. Only then can American medicine achieve its full potential. I think it's no secret to anyone that the reason we're all here today is because of the deep concern and professional efforts of a woman whom I've never had the pleasure of meeting but sincerely look forward to the opportunity—I'm speaking of course of Core Fletcher of *Science Week.*

"Thank you Mr. Chairman. That concludes my opening statement. I'll be more than happy to answer the Committee's questions."

"Thank you Dr Brown. I think now would be a good time to take a forty-five minute recess to allow the members, who haven't already done so, an opportunity to vote on the Civil Rights bill. Without objection we'll reconvene at eleven."

“Senator Collins is a crafty buzzard,” Alan said. “That was clever using Dr. Brown to preempt any strategy that tried to paint the institutions that regulate medical research as being sacrosanct and above criticism. It makes it harder for Spender to sweep everything under the rug by discrediting you.”

“I feel a little less like the Lone Ranger,” Core remarked, unconvincingly. “Even though Spender subpoenaed me, maybe he won’t call me now.”

“Maybe not. But I wouldn’t count on it,” he said. “Well, we’ve got forty-five minutes to kill, why don’t we go outside and breath some of that crisp air?”

Twenty Seven

An hour and fifteen minutes later the hearing reconvened. Senator Collins led the questioning.

"Dr. Brown, you've portrayed an unflattering picture of the institutions that make up what you've described as the medical establishment of this country. And from what you've said, there are massive, chronic problems in the government's handling of health care in our nation. As you pointed out, I have participated on a number of previous hearings on the FDA and I'm getting tired of it. The FDA, the NIH, the CDC and so on are among a growing menagerie of beasts Congress is increasingly unable to tame. Therefore Doctor, I want to ask you: From your experience, what are the chances that this hearing will be any more effective than its predecessors at leading to improvements in the medical-industrial complex?"

"Your point's well taken, Senator Collins. The history I presented earlier this morning clearly demonstrates that government is impotent when it comes to controlling and managing the institutions of health care. The only hope I see is if this hearing somehow ignites the American people enough to commit their voices and energies to correcting the serious flaws that are pervasive in these institutions that so intimately affect all our lives."

"Senator Spender, you had a question for Dr. Brown," Chairman Collins said, looking to his right. "If you would sir, please proceed."

"Thank you Mr. Chairman," Spender began.

"Dr. Brown, we all know the problems plaguing the NIH and the FDA. And like our distinguished chairman, I too have participated in a lot of the hearings on those institutions. We've had Nobel laureates before our committees. We've had many of the world's leading scientists and physicians testifying—people who are eminently qualified to advise and pass judgement on these matters. Therefore, wouldn't you agree that it is grossly irresponsible to let any Tom, Dick, or Jane

presume to take these serious matters to the street where who knows what harm public involvement may do to the distinguished medical institutions of our great country? I mean, don't you agree that these matters should be left in the hands of the experts?"

"I take the premise that we live in a democracy very seriously, Senator. In a democracy, the experts are the servants of the people—not our masters. It is my firm belief that a more open and vigorous debate at the grass roots is essential to moving us in the right direction. We've all witnessed how a recent issue of *Science Week* entitled *Veiled Tyranny* has engaged the public's interest in the specific area of AIDS research. The calamitous misrepresentation of AIDS and the consequent scandalous behavior at the NIH and the Welter Institute just represent the latest symptoms of deeper systemic problems permeating the entire health care industry."

"Are there any other questions for this witness?" Senator Collins said, examining both sides of the table. "Well then, Dr Brown, thank you very much. You're excused. Would our next witness, Ms. Core Fletcher, please come up front so we can get you sworn in."

"Oh well…wish me luck." Core said to Alan.

"At least you'll get it over with early," he said, giving her hand a squeeze as she got up to go.

"Thank you for appearing today, Ms. Fletcher," Senator Collins said, employing an effusive smile as a palliative against Core's evident anxiety. "Ms. Fletcher, am I right saying this is your first time participating in one of these shindigs?"

"As a witness, yes sir."

"Would you care to make an opening statement?"

"I don't know if you'd call it an opening statement, but I'd just like to say that I will do everything I can to be of help to the Committee."

"Thank you very much, Ms. Fletcher. I have no questions for you but my distinguished colleague from Maryland would like to ask you a few."

"Thank you Mr. Chairman—Ms. Fletcher," Spender said, nodding first at Collins, then at Core.

"Now then, Ms. Fletcher, you're a journalist for *Science Week*. How long have you been writing for that publication?"

"I'm just starting my seventh year."

"And what topics have you written on during that time?"

"In 1986 *Science Week* created a new beat to cover AIDS and they needed a full time reporter so they hired me. I've written almost exclusively on AIDS while there."

Spender turned to an aide who handed him a folder of previous issues of *Science Week.*

"Ms. Fletcher, I have here examples of the articles you've written on AIDS over the years," he said, alternately holding up various issues. "Here are two you wrote in 1986, thirteen in '87, twenty-three—no twenty-four—in '88, and so on, where you describe with marvelous clarity the scientific investigations of Stephen Julio, Robert Gallo, Luc Montagnier, Anthony Fauci and a virtual Who's Who of research authorities on AIDS. Let's see, you've written…" he said, turning to confer with a young assistant, "you've written eighty-six articles or thereabouts, if I've counted correctly, with great skill and conviction on the involvement of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus in the tragic disease of AIDS."

"I haven't sat down and counted them, but I'll take your word on that," she said, recognizing belatedly how prolific she'd been.

"You have indeed produced a handsome collection of articles over the years, demonstrating an impressive access to our most prestigious medical institutions. My staff has discovered that you have earned the respect and admiration of not only the publishing industry, but also the scientific community for your work. One must assume, then, from all this, that you have translated and reported to the public faithfully the work and views of our country's and the world's greatest scientists and physicians. Is this a fair assessment of what you've accomplished over the years, Ms. Fletcher?"

"You're being more than kind. I certainly don't deserve all that praise," she said, realizing he was just setting her up for the attack.

"Modesty has its place, Ms. Fletcher, but what you've done speaks for itself," Spender said, smiling for the first time. "Wouldn't you agree your reputation—which you justly deserve—is rooted in your steadfast reporting of the work of the acknowledged experts in the field of AIDS, Ms. Fletcher?"

Here it comes, she thought.

"I've always tried to seek out the best scientists and report their work as fairly and clearly as I know how," she responded.

"Then, my dear Ms. Fletcher," he began softly, "I'm totally at a loss to understand your treacherous behavior in writing this scandalous trash slandering Stephen Julio, a fine American and the greatest scientist of them all, and

undermining the work of the research and medical institutions of our country," he shouted, waving a crumpled copy of *Veiled Tyranny.*

Core was prepared and didn't even flinch, though she felt like running from the room.

"Senator, I..." she tried to respond, but Spender interrupted.

"As a lawyer, I can only conclude that the dramatic reversal of the position you've held on AIDS for six years and the attack on Stephen Julio can only be the result of the tragic relinquishing of the high professional standards and personal integrity you so admirably displayed for so long."

"Senator Spender," Collins interrupted, "I think you ought to let the witness respond at this point before you continue."

"Senator Spender, I'm sorry you feel that way about me," Core began. "All I can say is that when I wrote *Veiled Tyranny* I used the same standards and skills I've always used. However, I must plead guilty to taking six years before waking up to what is really going on in AIDS research, and I confess to letting the experts snow me with their almighty authority for so long. It's just not possible that Gallo's virus is capable of destroying the entire immune system, and cause bizarre cancers, pneumonias, parasitic infections and neurological disorders. As for exposing the corruption at the Welter Institute, I didn't invent Stephen Julio's misdeeds. The NIH's own records prove that."

"Ms. Fletcher, aren't you aware of the damage you've done to our efforts to solve the problem of AIDS? Don't you think it is grossly pretentious of you to presume to challenge the prevailing positions on AIDS put forth by the best scientists and institutions of our country?"

"If, as your question suggests, Senator, the medical solution to AIDS is already in the best possible hands, and the reigning theory that the disease is infectious and is caused by HIV is sound and indeed true, then the people and institutions you're so staunchly defending should easily weather the scribbling of a mere journalist.

"Many people think," she went on, "that medical science is pure, and is best left to the exclusive domain of the experts. I've never presented myself as anything other than a science writer—I'm just a journalist. But you don't have to be an expert to recognize that for a long time a small group of self-proclaimed disciples of HIV, as well as their sycophants in the media, have dominated the discourse on AIDS. Virtually all other voices have been ruthlessly excised from the public debate on this social catastrophe.

"The study of medicine is saturated with politics, and what passes for 'medical science' is often a reflection of medical politics. This is especially true for AIDS. The science surrounding this disease is so polluted by social, cultural, economic, and religious judgements, that AIDS has become a metaphor for an unloving and uncaring society.

"I spent a month at the Welter Institute and during that time I got no impression that the activities going on there had in any way anything to do with improving the quality of people's lives. To scientists like Stephen Julio, AIDS isn't a horrible disease that people suffer and die from so much as it is a terrific opportunity for them to demonstrate to their colleagues how clever they are, and parade before the public as well as peers the unquestioned authority of the Holy Inquisition."

Core had worked herself up into quite a state, and for the first time realized she shared and understood Alan's passionate feelings about AIDS. She looked at the members of the committee and decided she'd said enough.

"That's all I have to say on that, I suppose."

Alan felt like applauding; instead he cheered her just loud enough for the people around him to hear.

"Those are fine words, Ms. Fletcher," Spender said. "But what gives *you* the right to say as you do on page twelve, 'The Administration's proposed policy to protect the general population from AIDS by the use of massive testing for HIV-infected Americans is dangerous and unbelievably irresponsible?'"

"The Constitution does, Senator, regardless of whether I'm right or wrong," she said, prompting a few chuckles from the members of the Committee as well as the audience. "But to address your question more specifically, the generally held but erroneous belief that HIV infection is the same as AIDS has dire consequences for our society. The stigmatization of persons with AIDS in America is overwhelming. By in large, our society judges people with AIDS as promiscuous, immoral, perverted, and drug-oriented. Most people who are now dying of AIDS are members of the most detested minority groups in America. As a result, AIDS patients are often shunned like the lepers of yore.

"It hurts me to say this, but not everyone in our society is displeased with the mass deaths from AIDS. Already the epidemic has been welcomed by racists, homophobes, and those *religious persons* who believe that the punishment for sin is death."

"Now…Ms.…Fletcher…" Spender interrupted.

"I'm not finished, Senator," she said, heating up again. "Many of those who are pushing for mandatory testing have proposed quarantining those people who are positive for HIV. On the surface, their argument for isolating those positive for HIV as being the only way to stem the tide of AIDS, appears reasonable to some people. The sinister nature of this plan becomes obvious, however, once the bigoted motivations behind it are exposed.

"Still, after more than seventeen years, the groups at highest risk for AIDS are gay men, prostitutes, drug abusers, hemophiliacs, Blacks, and Hispanics. Half of the children with AIDS are black; twenty-five percent are Hispanic. These statistics make it easy to understand why certain of our more comfortable leaders in government and society do not find it especially distasteful to quarantine segments of our population.

"In 1987 I was saddened by the results of a poll taken by the *Los Angeles Times*. It indicated that just under half of all Americans would limit civil rights in order to control AIDS. I don't believe the number would be that high if we had been attacked by the Soviets. Three out of ten were in favor of tattooing HIV carriers. We are in the process of scarring ourselves to death.

"If none of this has convinced you, Senator, there is one final argument against the wholesale screening of the population. There are more than 60 known causes for a false positive HIV antibody test in people who are actually free of the virus. If we were to test all 270 million Americans, we would accuse hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of our citizens of having AIDS who are not even infected with the virus. How would you like being one of those unfortunates, Senator?"

"It sounds to me, Ms. Fletcher," Spender said, in a low voice, "you have little confidence in your government and its institutions."

"That's right, Senator," she said, staring him straight in the eye. "That's one reason why I'm leaving Washington and *Science Week*. Over the years I have interviewed countless officials and scientists of the CDC about their work on AIDS. I tried to ignore the CDC's infamous past while doing my job. That mistake led me to be duped many times by the same organization that supervised the notorious Tuskegee Experiment.

"You remember that, don't you Senator? It wasn't that long ago. Over a period of forty years in Macon County, Alabama, our government studied a group of about 400 illiterate black men suffering from syphilis. The purpose of the grand study was to record the destructive effects of untreated syphilis, and follow

closely, as good scientists will, the medical progress of the group until each man died.

"Ring a bell, yet, Senator—if not I'll continue," Core said without giving Spender a chance to respond. "The Black men were never told they had syphilis, nor were they told their disease could endanger their families. When penicillin became available during the 1940s, the men in the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment were not allowed to receive the antibiotic which could have cured them—if used properly. By decree, other doctors in Macon County were forbidden to treat any of the men in the study. Only special government doctors—let's not call them healers—could treat the men, and quickly autopsied the men when they died.

"Over the years, many medical studies involving these untreated syphilitic men were reported in the scientific journals. Remember, our government and the American scientific community sanctioned this tribute to scientific advancement for nearly five decades. During the Civil Rights Movement of the sixties, pressure was put on the CDC to stop this inhuman experiment, but despite such criticism, the government study continued until sufficient political pressure was finally mustered to end it in 1972. In case you didn't catch that, Senator, I'll repeat it. The Tuskegee Experiment lasted until 1972 and was supervised by the CDC, the same government agency that now oversees the AIDS epidemic.

"The scientists and physicians justified their experiment by insisting that the racial inferiority of the Blacks made them a 'notoriously syphilis-soaked race.' Their smaller brains lacked mechanisms for controlling sexual desire, causing them to be highly promiscuous. The Black man matured early and consequently was more sexually active; and his enormous penis with its long foreskin was prone to venereal infections. These physiological differences were sufficient in the minds of the government's scientists and physicians to justify their barbarous conduct toward their fellow citizens.

"Tell me, Senator Spender, does this history of the CDC, which is by no means unique, fill you with boundless pride and confidence in government institutions?"

Spender wanted to continue having a go at Core, though she was more than a match for him. Personally, Senator Collins would have enjoyed watching Core Fletcher continue to whittle away at Spender's precarious positions and exposing to the world his pompous ignorance, but the Chairman concluded that the moment was opportune to interrupt their jousting and declared a ten-minute recess. Senator Collins pulled Spender aside and convinced him with a little

political arm twisting that his personal attacks on Core were not in his best interest. Whatever satisfaction Spender took from subjecting Core Fletcher to a day of abuse was nothing compared to the pleasure the press would take in relentlessly barbecuing him if sufficiently provoked.

Before calling the Committee back to order, Senator Collins canvassed the rest of his colleagues to see if any wished to question Core Fletcher—none did.

"This hearing will come to order," the chairman announced. "Senator Spender, you had the floor at the break. Sir, do you have any further questions for the witness?"

"Mr. Chairman, I have no further questions for Ms. Fletcher at this time."

Core was excused and sat down next to Alan, exhilarated and satisfied. Alan was overwhelmed by her performance. He took her hand and said:

"Come on, let's get out of here."

"Core, I know you were nervous as hell…but babe—you were magnificent," Alan said, admiring her at arm's length.

"Oooff…I'm glad that's over—I only hope they don't recall me," she gasped, conscious now of every taut muscle.

"It's a pity Collins cut short the mauling you gave Spender."

"No, it's not. It would have been just fine with me if he'd intervened sooner—you think I get a kick out of this?" she said.

Alan just peered at her without saying a word, forcing Core to change her plea.

"Well…I am a *little* proud of myself," she confessed, smiling.

Alan gave her a big bear hug.

"I guess I did handle myself pretty well," she said.

"Silly bee—you know you did," he said. "Come on, let's go back in. I want to hear what Sonnabend has to say."

Twenty Eight

Core and Alan returned quietly to their seats just as Senator Weiss was finishing a question to Joseph Sonnabend of Mount Sinai Medical School in New York.

"…So, I guess what I'm asking then, Dr. Sonnabend, is how do you account for the popularity of the HIV theory of AIDS?"

"The short answer is that HIV provides a neat and tidy approach to AIDS. The HIV theory was given a push toward stardom by the government's egregiously premature sanctioning in 1984 of Gallo's virus as the official cause of AIDS. That single act by the government did more damage to the whole scientific endeavor to understand AIDS than anything else.

"There are social factors as well in the presumption that every disease has a single agent that causes it. It is convenient for some people to believe that nothing we do in our lives, in our environment, is really unhealthy. That poverty is really not a bad thing, just a choice people make, and it doesn't make people sick. That all sexual behavior and lifestyles are also harmless.

"The HIV theory, when believed across the board, at the expense of environmental factors, absolves people whose economic policies create ghettos and keep people poor. It's so easy to say that a virus came along and made people sick, not their living conditions. A similar shifting of the blame is seen in people who live a highly promiscuous lifestyle and prefer to believe that the lethal effects of their behavior is really caused by a virus that happens to come along. Or in Africa, it's much easier to say that illness from the collapse of malaria-eradication programs or from hunger are really due to HIV.

"Senator, we've also gotten hung up on high-tech solutions. HIV makes a very attractive research project. All the funding certainly went that way. HIV is also appealing because it implies a possible quick fix or quick cure by means of a vaccine. The single agent theory of AIDS has tremendous appeal for those political

people who are promoting agendas based on what they call 'family values,' or no sex outside of marriage—that sort of thing."

"It's obvious to me from talking with a number of scientists," Senator Weiss said, "that some of them have serious questions about HIV but won't open their mouths publicly because they're afraid of losing grant money or their jobs."

"They're probably justified in feeling that way, Senator."

"Is this something new, the pervasiveness of this fear?"

"No. But the degree to which the HIV hypothesis has closed all debate is monumental," Sonnabend said.

"I've had people say to me, Dr. Sonnabend, if HIV doesn't cause AIDS, why do so many scientists around the world say it does?"

"I and many of my colleagues have found out the hard way that AIDS reporting goes through a selection process. The ones who agree HIV causes AIDS get their articles printed. I was editor of the journal *AIDS Research* during the eighties when it was the only truly independent voice in AIDS research. I was fired from that position when the owners changed the direction of the journal to focus exclusively on HIV. My views on HIV conflicted with theirs so I was let go."

"But then people also like to maintain that if HIV were a mistake, some famous scientists would have spoken out publicly by now," Weiss said.

"They do," Sonnabend said flatly. "Peter Duesberg has spoken out against HIV for years and he continues to do so. But since he's not a government scientist, he lacks the clout that Anthony Fauci or Robert Gallo and Stephen Julio have to get interviewed by the networks for example."

"Well, Dr. Sonnabend, I have no more questions. Unless there is anything else you'd like to add at this point you're excused, sir."

"Thank you, Senator. I have no further remarks."

Stephen Julio was scheduled to testify next. Core didn't feel like enduring it so she and Alan went home.

"Alan, you just don't know how much I appreciate you coming all the way out here again just to be with me and support me. You really mean a lot to me—thanks, babe," Core said, as they snuggled on the couch.

"I wouldn't have missed your performance for anything," he said. "I only wish I could stay longer, Core, but I don't want to pull a Julio and be away from my people in the lab all the time."

"So you're definitely leaving *Science Week*," he said changing the subject. "Will it be soon?"

Core squeezed his hand and then let go of it.

"Yep," she said, resting the back of her head on his arm. "As soon as Gabe says I'm free to go. I told him I'd stay as long as he needed my help covering the hearing—maybe two months."

"What do you think you'll do?" he said stroking her hair.

"Oh…I don't know. Maybe I'll write a book. Lord, I have enough material. There's one thing I have to do, though: get divorced. It's crazy…Joseph gets back in May and I can hardly visualize his face. Isn't that terrible?"

"I wish you'd write your book in San Francisco," he said. "It's not such a bad place to do that sort of thing. You've seen my house—there's enough room upstairs to write a busload of books. I'll put a desk in front of the bay window for you so you can look out onto Golden Gate Park while you work."

"Are you serious about that Alan?" she said, her hungry eyes more alluring than ever. "Because I'm warning you, Dr. Haan, if you are, you've got a roommate."

Twenty Nine

Core dropped Alan off at the airport on the way in to work. When she went in to brief Gabe Lublin on the AIDS hearing he was swearing to high heaven.

"That son-of-a-bitch Collins is straining our friendship with this," Gabe shouted. "I wish I could get back that expensive scotch I gave him Christmas. That son-of-a-bitch. How could he do it to me just as I'm fixing to retire."

"Good lord, Gabe. What happened?" Core said.

"Look at this, Fletcher," he said, handing her his subpoena to appear before Senator Collins' hearing on AIDS. "Damn, woman. What do I know about AIDS?"

Core was laughing so hard it hurt.

"Gabe, this is wonderful," she said, trying to catch her breath. "There is a just God after all."

He grabbed the subpoena from an hysterical Core and retreated to his big leather chair.

"Damn it, Fletcher, what's so goddamn funny? Couldn't you handle their goddamn questions?"

"I guess not, Gabe," she said, still finding it hard to compose herself. "I guess they require someone with your political savvy." Calming down a bit she continued.

"Didn't Senator Collins give a clue as to why they want you?" she asked.

Gabe lit a cigar and had taken a few puffs and was beginning to relax somewhat.

"Yeah…they figure that since I've been your boss all these years, I must know something about AIDS coverage in the media. Collins asked me to give a critical analysis of how well the press has done in covering AIDS."

"I think that's a great idea, Gabe," she said. "You've seen all that's been going on over the years without personally getting involved. You've got your

faults like the rest of us, Gabe, but nobody can accuse you of bias when it comes to AIDS. It used to make me mad that you took no interest in AIDS—had no opinions on it—it just bored you. You don't have the baggage of all the various theories hanging around your neck to obstruct your vision as to how we've all done covering this nightmare.

"Yes, Gabe…I'm looking forward to your report card on the media."

. . . . .

On Thursday of the following week, Gabe Lublin appeared before the Collins' hearing on AIDS. Core was sitting this time in a front row seat. Senator Collins introduced Lublin.

"The Committee is very fortunate to have the distinguished and accomplished editor of *Science Week*, Mr. Gabe Lublin, appear before us and give his evaluation of how well the media has done in covering the AIDS holocaust. If you would, Mr. Lublin, please proceed with your opening statement."

"Thank you Mr. Chairman. I cut my teeth as a political reporter in this city close to thirty years ago. Most of my professional life was spent as a reporter and editor at the *Washington Post*. For medical reasons, I left the *Post* and became managing editor of *Science Week*—a position I've held now for ten years.

"I have never had any interest in science or medicine—they both bore me. My wife says that's because I'm not smart enough. That's probably true. So I'm not going to get into any arguments about AIDS technicalities. Senator Collins asked me to analyze how well we in the press and the media in general have done our jobs at presenting to the American public an honest and complete picture of AIDS. I'm prepared to do just that. I wouldn't begin to know how to tell a good scientist from a bad one, but I can certainly judge if my colleagues in the press are doing their jobs right or not.

"I was at the *Post* during the Nixon years. Fearing that Ted Kennedy would run against him in the 1972 election, Nixon's aides advised him to support public health. He did so in a big way by declaring war on cancer. The NIH spearheaded this epic struggle of the seventies. I remember two factions developing at the time. One, which was rather secretive for awhile, believed that cancer was caused by substances generated by industrial society. The other faction, eventually led by Robert Gallo, believed viruses caused cancer.

"We don't hear much about that war on cancer anymore, do we senators? I don't recall any declaration of victory, do you Mr. Chairman? So prior to coming here to testify before this committee I decided to find out how the war on cancer

turned out. Gentlemen of the Committee, I'm ashamed to report that it ended like Viet Nam. We cut our loses, which amounted to billions of dollars, and pulled out of the war on cancer and rapidly redeployed our scientific forces against a more glamorous and more tractable enemy—some thought—the Iraq of AIDS. The reason the virus-wielding scientists dropped their old love like a hot potato and enthusiastically embraced AIDS was because the research battle against cancer had reverted to trench warfare. AIDS provided Gallo's arrogant and boastful warriors with a convenient and most welcomed escape from the myopic and dead-end research they pursued as a result of his viral theory of cancer.

"During this period, the environmentalists were no more successful than Gallo's bunch at the NIH. The environmentalists swamped their ship before it put to sea with an ocean of paper work, listing a mountain of environmental pollutants which might cause cancer.

"Members of the Committee, you won't find this information in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *LA Times* or most of the other major papers and broadcast reports of the past twenty years. I had to really dig to find out what came of the war on cancer—it just followed Nixon into obscurity, somehow.

"With AIDS, the media coverage is even worse—disgraceful, in fact. There are so many problems with the media's coverage of AIDS it's hard to know where to begin. The media get their information from press people who work at universities and public health agencies, where they are fed HIV-dogma like popcorn. If you are a reporter and call a research institution looking for information, you are shunted to the PR folks who, though earnest enough, are paid not to think on their own. They relay what department heads of the various labs want people to know. The really good PR people have learned to screen out a reporter's embarrassing questions. A number of people, for example, have called the National Cancer Institute, wanting to speak with Robert Gallo about his rock-solid conviction that HIV causes AIDS. He has become notorious for refusing to discuss this question, especially if the name of his chief nemesis, Peter Duesberg, is mentioned.

"Duesberg, by the way, is finally getting some of the press he deserves. For example I refer you to Core Fletcher's solo issue in our publication that Senator Spender is so fond of. However, even now no scientist who puts forth a non-viral cause of AIDS is given prime space. Today of course, the media is deaf to you unless you're an HIV fanatic. Why? Because the official line printed by the daily newspapers comes down from the NIH, the CDC, or the Welter Institute for

Retroviral Studies. As is always the case, thankfully, there are exceptions: Nick Regush at the *Montreal Gazette*, John Crewdson at the *Chicago Tribune*, and Terry Krieger and Dr. Cesar Caceres, who both contribute to the *Wall Street Journal*. These journalists are among the few who have avoided prostituting themselves as unquestioning reporters of the party line.

"Writers for dailies don't get paid to do research in biomedical libraries, to put together pieces of information they actually dig up on their own from the medical literature or human sources. Therefore, federal health agencies are always going to sound right and authoritative to reporters. Editors provide negative incentives for reporters who might otherwise venture to challenge the institutions and individuals of authority. How dare a reporter find things out for him or herself? Or, lacking the proper technical credentials, how could a reporter presume to criticize official authority? The medical degree draws the line in the sand beyond which none of the uninitiated may hope to pass.

"The paranoia in Washington, especially, encourages everyone to think and operate under the illusion that Things Are Generally All Right. Adhering to this principle that Things Are Generally All Right makes it impolite and bad form to even whisper that the emperor may be less than modestly attired. You can see the obstacles an environment like this places in the way of reporters covering provocative issues, grand institutions, and government agencies.

"Editors, besides bowing to the basic rule that Things Are Generally All Right, know they can't justify spending money on a story that takes a great deal of time, as would any proper investigation of AIDS. Oh, they'll do a few of them on rare occasions when seeking fresh stock for the trophy case, but they take great care that the ripples they produce would hardly disturb a waterlily.

"Science is almost never scuffed by abrasive writing or commentary. Medical issues in particular are just too well concealed behind the fog of elitism generated by arrogant experts. The men in the white coats are kings. They scurry about their polished labs and issue proclamations now and then, and the public listens to them through the media and pays obligatory homage.

"If a person shoots herself in the head with her father's pistol because she tested positive for HIV, you know something is going on. Something called cultural hypnotism because, admit it, that pitiful woman hadn't the slightest idea whether her disease, if any, was going to be fatal or not. She was operating on pure faith.

"Owing to the technical nature of medical expertise and the arrogant elitism of medical scientists and physicians, it was easy for the public to miss the

cumulative effect of building up the AIDS empire. The juggernaut thus created will be very difficult to turn around. First, there is the fact that epidemics are perfect events for media work. We have the invisible killer. It moves silently, unpredictably, without tipping its hand. We meet victims. We get a constant barrage of new scientific information, breakthroughs. This gives readers and viewers the impression they're peering over the shoulders of the best minds of our time, delving into the mysteries of the gene, viruses, the core-essence of human life. Senators, it makes you want to stand up and cheer.

"Oh…and there is terror, too, gentlemen. You might be the next person to be sneezed on by a junkie. Even though you've been told you can't get the virus from sneezes, you wonder. The lab worker stuck her hand on a needle—that's all it took. Some AIDS person bled all over a cop—now the cop's suing him. You and your girlfriend have been living together for several years…but then you think, she could have picked up the virus when she was in Baltimore. Who was that scuzzball she used to go with? It's called whipsawing, from pillar to post.

"With AIDS, the media report a great deal of what comes out of the mouths of a few select experts, which gives the public the impression that they are doing their job, but in fact these disclosures forestall public debate and action. On the other side of the coin, the media does precious little questioning to find out what's really going on. They give us nothing about university researchers who are rankling under the collar because they can't get a dime to do viral research unless they write *I Believe In HIV* at the top of their application forms. They don't question the statistics fed them by the NIH and the CDC. The list of what the media should be doing in covering AIDS is many times longer than the one detailing what they are currently doing.

"At this point, Mr. Chairman, I think I'll end my remarks and give you and the members of the Committee an opportunity to question me on your specific areas of concern."

"Thank you, Mr. Lublin," Senator Collins said. "I have one question at this point. You mentioned several times that it's probably not a good idea for the press to rigorously honor the barrier of credentials and expertise that bars the public's access to the inner sanctums of medical research. What role do you think the public should play once it dons a white coat and peers behind the hallowed doors of science?"

"At first glance," Gabe said, "the restrictions limiting who participates in decisions about technical social issues to credentialed experts seems reasonable.

After all, who am I to know the value of a project or its feasibility? However, my point is that civilians have a right to be interested in the direction science is taking, what priorities are being emphasized, what risks are being ignored. These issues are mostly buried in the minds of scientists themselves. I understand Core Fletcher reminded the Committee of the tragedy of the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment. All I can say is that the shameful mistreatment of those poor black men who trusted their government is a prime example of what can happen without public participation in what the CDC is doing.

"Obviously, the Tuskegee Study required the cooperation of many scientific bureaucrats. Also obviously, untrained citizens, had they been sitting on the review boards as requests for continued funding came up—which there were no doubt many during the forty years of that monstrous experiment—these citizens would have raised questions. They would have asked about messy matters like murder. The hypnotic spell created by the wand of Science would have been shattered."

"Thank you, Mr. Lublin. Senator Spender has indicated he'd like to ask you some questions," the Chairman said.

"Thank you, Mr Chairman," Spender said. "Mr Lublin, your reputation for integrity and hard-nose investigative journalism is well known in this town. Then you, sir, should know better than most that the gentlemen and ladies of the press like nothing better than digging up trash on big wigs, or making holier-than-thou pronouncements about some corruption or other. So I find it very hard to believe that you're telling this committee that the media has been pussy-footing when it comes to reporting on AIDS. How do you expect any of us who've experienced the sting of your pen over the years to believe that that could possibly be the case?"

"Senator," Gabe responded, "I grant everything you say with one exception. When the subject is science, my colleagues in the press are about as effective as kittens treeing a grizzly bear. About the only thing they've got stomach for are squabbles over inadequate funding for AIDS research. The cry *We Need More Funds* is the only controversial issue given any media analysis. All others are taboo. However, the wisdom of throwing more money down the same rat-hole that produced HIV and AZT goes unquestioned. To say that more than just the lack of money 'is rotten in Denmark' violates the cardinal rule that Things Are Basically All Right. It remains impolite and bad taste to suggest that structural supports are rotten, that problems are endemic, that AIDS research is a swimming mess and will stay that way."

Senator Weiss asked the next question.

"Mr. Lublin, from your experience, do you see any possibility that the institutions of the media are likely to respond adequately to your charge of their complicity in and unfaithful coverage of the AIDS issue?"

"Regrettably, Senator, in the present environment I have to say no. Let's say some major media outlet built up enough courage to do the right thing and pursue AIDS contradictions and scandals with a vigorous, mean day-after-day approach, exposing every aspect, not relenting, giving front-page coverage and headlines often enough to keep the public in a mild frenzy. You know what would happen? Quicker than a heartbeat, upper management would step in—maybe even the media-ownership would get involved—and quash what was going on because the issue is too sensitive to the wielders of power."

"Sir, you paint a very bleak picture," Collins said to Gabe. "Mr. Lublin, the Committee has no further questions. Is there anything you'd like to add before you're excused, sir?"

"A warning, Senator," Gabe said. "Be wary of the experts. In two or three years, maybe even sooner, the AIDS statistics, I've been told, will be so overwhelmingly against the HIV theory of AIDS that some government scientists could panic from the looming disclosure that the emperor has no clothes.

"AIDS is really a disease of definitions. Since the definition of AIDS is now so inflated as to encompass virtually every disease and condition, watch for these pillars of government science attempt to extricate themselves from their predicament by, for example, shrinking the definition of AIDS, thereby reducing—by means of this accounting trick—the number of reported new cases in the future. They will boastfully and with great fanfare attribute the decline in AIDS patients to a recent campaign of nation-wide immunization with a newly available HIV vaccine. The result would be remarkably hilarious if it weren't so heinous. An entire nation positive to the HIV blood test, but dwindling AIDS.

"The short-term effect of this scheme will be a much welcomed reduction in the public's anxiety. The relief will be so great that people will do and accept just about anything to put AIDS behind them. Therefore, gentlemen, the government scientists who perpetrate this egregious fraud stand a very good chance of pulling it off. For those who say *who cares as long as we're done with AIDS*, I just have to ask them: Would they want to be a patient in those guys' care?"

Core and Gabe left the hearing room together. He told her on the way to the car that there wasn't much else left for either of them to do. Core was free to leave *Science Week* anytime she liked.

Core decided to give notice and use the month of accumulated vacation time to take care of some nagging little details, such as filing for a divorce. In April, Alan joined her and they drove her car cross-country to San Francisco. By June, public interest in renewing the AIDS debate created by *Veiled Tyranny* and Senator Collins' hearing had been displaced by the political hoopla surrounding the arms sales to Iraq. Quietly, Stephen Julio had voluntarily stepped down as director of the Welter Institute to see to his legal defense in US Court against charges of misappropriating Federal funds. Core's book *Tyranny of AIDS* appeared a year later and was met by an eager public and good reviews. Shortly thereafter, the government reported for the first time a decline in the number of new cases of AIDS.

The End.

Epilogue

Many American institutions disgracefully and systematically exclude the public from access to the great controversy surrounding AIDS. I have written this novel to bring the vibrant—but hidden—and almost totally unreported AIDS debate to a broader audience.

All of the statements, facts, and statistics of AIDS that I have included were taken from the scientific literature, published books, conversations with experts, and my own experience as a practicing scientist. I have quoted liberally from the books and scientific papers listed in the sources at the back, and in many other instances reworded the ideas of others to suit the flow of the novel without (I trust) warping the authors' meanings.

I want to stress that I have nothing against the millions who believe in HIV, or any other theory for that matter. However, the cult of HIV has transported AIDS beyond the domain of science and medicine into the realm of mythology. There are powerful individuals and institutions with a professional or financial stake in HIV that take it upon themselves to be the sole purveyors of "truth." In that spirit, don't take my comments as gospel. I encourage a healthy and lively skepticism. The sources I have listed should provide a good start for those seriously interested in evaluating the HIV theory of AIDS. Don't be cowed by the experts; you are capable of finding out for yourself the truth about AIDS. Jurors are all the time weighing the technical hodgepodge presented by experts during trials and find it possible to make judgements. AIDS is just too important to be left in the exclusive hands of the "experts."

All scientists have expectations of what they will find before ever performing an experiment. If they didn't, there would be little motivation for going to all the trouble of doing the experiment. However, problems arise when government scientists use their privileged status to parade their theories as facts, instead of acknowledging them as merely informed guesses. Government institutions have compounded the difficulty of arriving at a true understanding of AIDS by doing everything in their power to suppress the views of individual scientists that differ with the established dogma. Scientists with dissenting opinions should be cherished as bastions against complacency. The history of science is replete with the ultimate triumph of the views of obstinate individuals. I believe eventually the same will be

true of AIDS. In the end, it's not so much what we believe but rather what we do with our beliefs that leads to human misery and tragedies like AIDS.

Sources

AIDS: the good news is HIV doesn't cause it. The bad news is "recreational drugs" and medical treatments do. by Peter Duesberg & John Yiamouyiannis (1995) 194 pages, $15, ISBN 0-913571-05-9, Health Action Press, 6439 Taggard Rd., Delaware, OH 43015, phone 1-800-721-4124.

Infectious AIDS: have we been misled? [A collection of 13 articles published in scientific journals between 1987-96] with foreword by Professor R. Strohman, UC Berkeley, by Peter Duesberg (1995) 582 pages, $18.95, ISBN 1-55643-195-3, , North Atlantic Books, 1456 4th Street, Berkeley, CA, phone 510-559-8277.

Inventing the AIDS virus, with foreword by Nobel Prize winner Kary Mullis, by Peter Duesberg, over 500 pages, near $30, to appear March 1996, Regnery Publishing Inc., 422 First Street, SE, Suite 300, Washington, DC, phone 202-546-5005.

AIDS: virus- or drug induced?, A collection of 27 articles by scientists (including Duesberg), independent scholars and investigative journalists from Europe, Australia, and the US. Edited by Peter Duesberg, foreword by Peter Duesberg (1996) 358 pages, paper back $49.50, ISBN 0-7923-3961-4, hard cover $227.50, ISBN 0-7923-3961-4, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 50 Spuiboulvard, P. O. Box 17, Dordrecht, Netherlands, phone 31-78-639-2392, FAX 31-78-639-2254.

Why We Will Never Win the War on AIDS, by Bryan Ellison and Peter H. Duesberg (1994) Inside Communications, 190 El Cerrito Plaza, Suite 201, El Cerrito, CA 94530.

Rethinking AIDS: The Tragic Cost of Premature Consensus, by Robert Root-Bernstein (1993), The Free Press, New York.

AIDS and Syphilis: The Hidden Link, by Harris L. Coulter (1987), North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, California.

AIDS: The HIV Myth, by Jad Adams (1989), Saint Martin's Press, New York, New York.

Poison by Prescription: The AZT Story by John Lauritsen (1990), Asklepios, New York.

The AIDS War: Propaganda, profiteering and genocide from the Medical-Industrial Complex, by John Lauritsen (1993), Asklepios, New York.

Deadly Deception: The proof that sex and HIV absolutely do not cause AIDS, by Robert Willner (1994), Peltec Publishing Co., Inc., 4400 North Federal Highway, Suite 210, Boca Raton, FL 33431, 1-800-214-3645.

Good Intentions: How Big Business, Politics, and Medicine Are Corrupting the Fight Against AIDS by Robert Nussbaum (1990), Atlantic Monthly Press, New York.

Syphilis As AIDS, by Robert B. Mitchell (1990), Banned Books, Austin, Texas.

AIDS INC.: Scandal of the Century, by Jon Rappoport (1988), Human Energy Press, San Bruno, California.

AIDS: Hope, Hoax, and Hoopla, by Michael L. Culbert (1989), The Robert W. Bradford Foundation, A Trust, Chula Vista, California.

AIDS and the Doctors of Death, by Alan Cantwell Jr. (1988), Aries Rising Press, Los Angeles, California.

AIDS, Cancer & the Medical Establishment, by Raymond Keith Brown (1986), Robert Speller Publishers, New York, New York.

AIDS: The Mystery & the Solution, by Alan Cantwell Jr. (1986), Aries Rising Press, Los Angeles, California.

Dangerous Diagnostics: The Social Power of Biological Information, by Dorothy Nelkin and Laurence Tancredi (1989), Basic Books, Inc.,Publishers, New York, New York.

Fire In the Walls: Syphilis in America, by Joan McKenna (need to get date of publication and publisher)

Articles from Professional Journals

AIDS Acquired by Noncontagious Risk Factors, Peter H. Duesberg (1992) *Pharmacology and Therapeutics* Vol. 55, pp 201-277.

The Role of Drugs in the Origin of AIDS, Peter H. Duesberg (1992) *Biomedicine and Pharmacotherapy*, Vol. 46, pp. 3-15.

AIDS Epidemiology: Inconsistencies with Human Immunodeficiency Virus and with Infectious Disease, Peter H. Duesberg (1991) *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA*, Vol. 88, pp. 1575-1579.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome: Correlation but Not Causation, Peter H. Duesberg (1989) *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA*, Vol. 86, pp. 755-764.

Retroviruses as Carcinogens and Pathogens: Expectations and Reality, Peter H. Duesberg (1987) *Cancer Research*, Vol. 47, pp. 1199-1220.

Is the AIDS Virus a Science Fiction?: Immunosuppressive Behavior, Not HIV, May Be the Cause of AIDS, Peter H. Duesberg and Bryan J. Ellison (1990) *Policy Review* Vol. 53, pp. 40-51.

Is HIV the Cause of AIDS?: Peter H. Duesberg and Bryan J. Ellison Respond to Their Critics, Peter H. Duesberg and Bryan J. Ellison (1990) *Policy Review* Vol. 53, pp. 70-83.

Unmasking AIDS: Chemical Immunosuppression and Seronegative Syphilis, J. J. McKenna, R. Miles, D. Lemen, S. A. Dunford, and R. Renirie (1986) *Medical Hypotheses*, Vol. 21, pp. 421-430.

Farr's Law Applied to AIDS Projections, Dennis J. Bregman, Alexander D. Langmuir (1990) *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Vol. 16, pp. 1522-1525.

The Tuskegee Syphilis Study, 1932 to 1972: Implications for HIV Education and AIDS Risk Education Programs in the Black Community, S. C. Thomas and S. B. Quinn (1991) *The American Journal of Public Health,* Vol. 81, pp. 1498-1505.

Relevant Books and Papers

Bad Blood: The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment by James H. Jones (1993), The Free Press, New York, New York.

Disease-Mongers: How Doctors, Drug Companies, and Insurers Are Making You Feel Sick by Lynn Payer (1992), John Wiley & Sons, Inc., New York, New York.

A Conspiracy of Cells, by Michael Gold (1986), State University of New York Press, Albany, New York.

No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease In the United States Since 1880, by Allan M. Brandt (1985), Oxford University Press, Inc., New York, New York.

Disease and History: The Influence of Disease In Shaping the Great Events of History, by Frederick F. Cartwright with Michael D. Biddiss (1972), Thomas Y. Crowell Company, New York, New York.

Medicine on Trial: The Appalling Story of Ineptitude, Malfeasance, neglect, and Arrogance, by Charles B. Inlander, Lowell S. Levin, and Ed Weiner (1988), Prentice Hall Press, New York, New York.

Case Studies in Pathological Science, D. L. Rousseau (1992) *American Scientist,* Vol. 80, pp. 54-63.

Freedom of the Mind, by William O. Douglas (1964), Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York.

Microbes and Morals: The Strange Story of Venereal Disease, by Theodor Rosebury (1971), The Viking Press, New York, New York.

Glossary

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome: AIDS is just as its name says. It is the undermining and destruction of a person's normally functioning immune system by outside causes. The person suffering with AIDS is susceptible to an incredible number of **opportunistic infections**, cancers, and so on. AIDS itself does not kill, but ravages the immune system of its victim to the extent that other diseases windup killing the patient. The outside causes are numerous, ranging from malnutrition and infection to drug use and many other environmental influences. Some scientists believe that **AIDS** is infectious and that **HIV** (see **HIV** entry below) is the sole cause of this disease. However, many other scientists dispute this—so do I in this book.

AIDS: Same as **Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.**

AIDS blood tests: The **HIV antibody** blood tests are commonly but incorrectly known as AIDS tests. These tests check to see if a person's blood contains **antibodies** to the **Human Immuno-deficiency Virus**.

AIDS virus: Most people and many scientists call **HIV** the AIDS virus since they think it causes AIDS. However, there are many other other people who dispute this claim.

AIDS-Related Complex: ARC is a less severe depression in a person's immune capacity than is seen in a person with "full-blown AIDS." Immune depression similar to **ARC** is intentionally chemically induced in organ transplant recipients to keep the patients' **immune systems** from rejecting the transplant.

anti-inflammatory drugs: are used to treat diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis where the patient's **immune system** is believed to play a role in the progression of the disease. The inflammed tissues are the sites of destruction and considerable pain.

antibiotics: are either natural or synthetic substances use to treat bacterial, fungal, and parasitic infections. Antibiotics are not known to have any activity against **viruses**.

antibodies: are proteins produced by functioning **immune systems** to specifically recognize and destroy invading **microorganisms**, and cancer tissue. The antibodies produced by a person infected by **HIV** are measured by the HIV antibody tests the so-called **AIDS tests**.

ARC: Same as **AIDS-Related Complex** (see above).

AZT: stands for azidothymidine (Retrovir, zidovudine) made by Burroughs-Welcome Company and is the only drug specifically licensed for **AIDS**. AZT is very toxic, but since it is active against HIV in the test tube it is thought to be useful against AIDS. However, this claim is hotly disputed.

benzathine penicillin: is a synthetic penicillin which has been much used and abused for four decades. It is used to treat a variety of bacterial infections, including **syphilis** and **gonorrhea**.

biopsies: are tiny specimens of organs obtained surgically and examined in detail in the laboratory for the presence of disease. Biopsies are commonly done on suspected tumors.

CDC: Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia, is the government agency responsible for monitoring **infectious diseases** world wide. The CDC compiles and reports the **AIDS** statistics that are quoted frequently in the media and by the government. The CDC also administered the infamous **Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment**.

DDC: DiDeoxyCytidine is the latest drug approved by the **FDA** for the treatment of **AIDS**. Its principle action is similar to that of **AZT**.

DDI: DiDeoxyInosine is a recent drug approved by the **FDA** for the treatment of **AIDS**. Its principle action is similar to that of **AZT**.

DNA: DeoxyriboNucleic Acid is the double stranded genetic material in each cell of higher organisms and humans. **RNA**, however, is different from DNA and has many essential biological functions. RNA is the genetic material of **HIV** and other **retroviruses**.

DNA polymerase: is the **enzyme** which replicates the **DNA** genetic material. A heat stable variety of this enzyme is used in **PCR**.

enzyme: Enzymes are proteins that are produced by every living thing. Enzymes do all the work of life. **Reverse transcriptase** is a unique enzyme produced by **retroviruses** and if it is found in people this is taken as proof that they are infected by a retrovirus, e.g., **HIV**.

etiological: means the study of the origin of disease.

FDA: Food and Drug Administration.

gonorrhea: is a sexually transmitted bacterial disease that is treatable with antibiotics. It is a widespread disease in many gay and heterosexual communities.

helper T-cells: are immune cells which mature in the thymus gland, hence the “T” in T-cell. The helper variety of T-cells are considered to be the generals

orchestrating the cellular immune response. The number of T-cells progressively declines in a person with **AIDS**.

hemophiliacs: are people suffering from a genetic disorder which keeps their blood from clotting properly. These people require regular injections of specific blood factors to control their clotting disorder. Eighty-five percent of hemophiliacs are positive to the **HIV antibody** test.

histological: means the examination of tissues under the microscope. It is a very powerful technique to identify disease in particular organs and possible causes.

HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus is a **retrovirus** discovered by Luc Montagnier in Paris. **HIV** is considered by many scientists as the sole cause of **AIDS**, but again, many people strongly disagree. As HIV goes, it is a very feeble virus that cannot be shown to have much effect on humans. HIV is said to cause AIDS simply because it can be found in very low levels in some AIDS patients' **helper T-cells**. Nobody has even come close to demonstrating or even explaining how HIV goes about destroying the **immune system**.

HIV protease: is an **enzyme** produced by **HIV** which appears essential to its activity. Many drug companies are furiously trying to develop drugs effective at neutralizing this enzyme as a possible therapy for **AIDS**.

HTLV III: Human T-Cell Leukemia Virus III (now called **HIV**) was the name given by Robert Gallo of the National Cancer Institute (which is part of the **NIH**) to the virus that he obtained under mysterious circumstances from Luc Montagnier who originally discovered the virus.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus: same as **HIV** (see above).

immune system: comprises the entire complex defense system of the body against invasion by infectious agents and cancer tissue. The immune system is responsible for organ rejection following organ transplantation. Immune suppressive drugs are given to organ recipients to keep the immune system from rejecting the organs, causing in the patients a pre-**AIDS** condition which reverses when the drugs are removed.

immunology: is the science of the body's natural defense against disease. It is a relatively new discipline that dominates much of medical research. Immunology has been said to equal in complexity the study of the human brain. Since **AIDS** results in the wholesale collapse of the **immune system**, immunology has become a prominent among the fields of study employed in understanding the disease.

immunosuppressives: anything that reduces the ability of the **immune system** to function properly. Generally, the word is applied to things that are

taken intentionally like food or drugs. Other sources of immune suppression are diseases like **syphilis** and malnutrition.

in vitro: is fancy for test-tube experiment.

inflammatory disease: is one in which the **immune system** is involved. Some scientists believe that an out-of-whack immune system is the actual cause of the disease. Rheumatoid arthritis is an example. Inflammatory diseases are often treated with immune suppressive drugs because of this belief. Many people with **AIDS** took these drugs over great periods of time to treat their chronic inflammatory ailments.

interferon: is a natural protein that the body produces to fight viral infections. The bio-tech industry has produced large quantities of this protein in the belief that it might prove useful in the treatment of viral diseases. However, the drug has turned out to be quite disappointing due to its toxicity and lack of effectiveness.

IV: IntraVenous. Injection into a vein, hence: IV drug users.

Kaposi's sarcoma: is a skin lesion first described by Moriz Kaposi in 1872. To call it a **sarcoma** is incorrect since it is not a cancer. Kaposi was looking for signs of **syphilis** in the skin of patients when he described this malady. Kaposi's sarcoma is one of the distinguishing diseases characteristic of gay **AIDS**. However, a very similar Kaposi's is seen in kidney transplant recipients due to the **immune suppressive** drugs they receive to ward off rejection.

macrophages: are large white blood cells that wander about the body attacking unwanted or foreign material, cells, and infectious agents. Macrophages are now believed to be the major hiding place for **HIV** instead of the **helper T-cells**, however, the **virus** does not seem to harm these cells at all.

microbiology: is the science of microscopic life: bacteria, fungi, viruses, etc. One of the main aspects of microbiology is the study of these organisms as a source of both health and disease.

microorganisms: are microscopic living things: bacteria, fungi, viruses, etc.

molecular biology: is generally taken to mean the study of life at the molecular level of the gene: study of **DNA**, **RNA** and the biochemical manipulations of these very-very large molecules in genetic engineering.

mycoplasmas: are disease causing agents which are smaller than bacteria but larger that **viruses**. One of these organisms has recently been shown to be present in the diseased tissues and organs of **AIDS** patients.

NIH: National Institutes of Health located in Bethesda, Maryland. The NIH is the government's principal funding and research organization of Medical science.

opportunistic infections: are generally meant to describe those diseases that show up because of the depressed **immune system** of an already sick or unhealthy person. The implication is that these so-called opportunistic diseases will not be able to attack a healthy individual.

PCP: Pneumocystis Carinii Pneumonia is a so-called **opportunistic infection** seen in **AIDS** patients. PCP is normally quite harmless since virtually everyone carries it around with them, but only becomes dangerous when the **immune system** is seriously depressed by malnutrition, chemotherapy, and AIDS.

PCR: Polymerase Chain Reaction is an exquisitely sensitive technique of **molecular biology** that allows one to detect one gene in a million and amplify it a billion or more times. Even using this technique it is impossible to find **HIV** in all **AIDS** patients, which is difficult to reconcile with the belief of some scientists that HIV is the sole cause AIDS.

Pentamidine: is the drug used principally to treat **Pneumocystis carinii pneumonia**; a previously rare disease before **AIDS**.

pheromone: is a chemical substance produced by various animals (it's not certain this is true for humans) and used to communicate with other members of the species; especially sexual receptiveness.

Pneumocystis carinii pneumonia: same as **PCP** (see above).

polymerase chain reaction: same as **PCR** (see above).

pre-AIDS syndrome: same as **ARC** (see above).

Retrovirus: is a virus that has its genetic material in the form of **RNA** instead of DNA like humans. A retrovirus has an **enzyme** called **reverse transcriptase** which copies its RNA into **DNA** which allows the viral genetic material to become part of a person's genes. Retroviruses will be used by **molecular biologists** in the future to insert foreign genes into people with genetic defects in the hope of replacing bad genes with good ones. **HIV** (the so-called **AIDS** virus) is a retrovirus.

reverse transcriptase: is the **enzyme** used by retroviruses (like **HIV**) to copy their **RNA** into **DNA** for incorporation into a person's genes. Reverse transcriptase is used as an indicator that a person is infected by a **retrovirus**.

RNA: RiboNucleic Acid is the genetic material of retroviruses. However, humans use RNA also to transmit the messages from the genes DNA to where proteins are made in the cell.

sarcoma: is a malignant tumor (cancer) of connective tissue.

spirochete: is the spiral form that the **syphilis** bacteria take during certain stages of their life cycle.

syndrome: is a combination of characteristics and symptoms of a specific disease or condition. The particular manifestations of a syndrome are highly dependent upon the history of the patient's health leading to the condition or disease. The "S" in **AIDS** stands for syndrome.

syphilis: is the disease caused by the bacterium **Treponema pallidum**. It is principally transmitted sexually, but is easily passed from mother to child at birth, and during blood transfusions. It is estimated that 30 million adult Americans have active syphilis and don't know it. Twenty percent of new born babies in this country have syphilis while the number is one in two for poor children. Every symptom that has been seen in **AIDS** patients has been described in syphilitics. Syphilis is one of the most powerful **immune suppressive** diseases known. Indeed, many of the symptoms seen in AIDS are due to an underlying syphilis.

T-cells: are the white blood cells that mature in the thymus gland, hence the "T" in T-cell. They come in three main varieties: the helper (which are depleted in **AIDS** patients), suppressor, and the killer. Since the **helper T-cells** are severely depleted in AIDS patients, scientists looked for a **virus** that infected these cells and found the one now called HIV. It is believed by many scientists that because **HIV** can be found in the helper T-cells it must be the cause of AIDS. However, this has never been proven and is greatly disputed by many scientists, but mostly in private.

thymocytes: is just another name for **T-cells**.

Treponema pallidum: is the bacterium that causes **syphilis**.

UCSF: stands for the University of California at San Francisco.

virus: is a parasitic form of bio-material with either **RNA** or **DNA** surrounded by a protein coat. Viruses are much-much smaller that bacteria and lack much of the machinery necessary to replicate themselves outside of a living host. Many viruses cause a variety of diseases ranging from no symptoms to lethal in severity.