

wiped out before it even had a chance to work. Anytime it was given to someone who had caught an STD or the flu and went to the doctor and was given a round of medicine, it would have killed a more vulnerable strain. Besides, it was supposed to be weak, so the host's body would naturally defeat it, but not until after the amphetamine and dopamine precursor were delivered. It was incurable because it was *supposed* to be harmless."

"So what happened?" Mr. Courtlen hissed.

Dr. Pazzo shifted nervously in his seat. "Watch and see," he said and indicated that the guard should start the video again. The screen again showed the window into the room with animal cages. Two figures in light blue biohazard suits came into view. One of them pressed a button near the window and spoke into the intercom.

"We are administering the first dose via injection. After today, this room's air will be filtered in a closed system where the streptococcus bacteria that the animals breathe out will be refreshed with more amphetamine and dopamine precursors. The goal is to monitor both short and long term effects of exposure." The speaker was Dr. Pazzo. The other figure was busy opening one cage door after another and administering the bacteria.

"For this series of tests we are using Macaque monkeys."

A young woman stepped in front of the camera smiling. "For all my animal rights friends, I just want you to know for the record, we've done our research, this should be completely harmless to the monkeys. They should feel happier and more alert. Also, they are only in the cages for the administration of the injections. You'll be happy to know that the room behind me opens into a communal living area for the Macaques once they have received their injection."

"Thank you Ann," said Dr. Pazzo.

Nella could actually hear the eye roll in his voice. She felt a pang of sadness as the pretty young woman walked out of frame. So that was Ann as she had once been. The video reeled on, silent now as the two doctors administered the injections.

"Was Ann your student?" she asked.

"No, she was Gerta's intern. She was in all ways the responsible party when it came to Ann's fate." Dr. Pazzo's mouth twisted, as if he'd tasted something rotten.

"Ann's fate?"

"Just watch," Dr. Pazzo spat.

Someone focused the camera more closely on the cages but the animals seemed calm and Nella was unsurprised when the screen went black a few moments later.

“I’m going to save you hundreds of hours of recording. Results were normal across the board. No aberrations, no warning signs for four weeks. In fact, I think the test was going exactly as planned until the video I’m about to show you.” Dr. Pazzo paused and leaned toward them over the table. His expression was solemn. “I *think* this day was when the Plague actually began.”

Nella felt a painful tide of tight goosebumps cascade down her arm and over her wounded hand.

The screen blinked and a haggard Dr. Pazzo appeared. His eyes had great dark pouches beneath them and his jaw was shadowed with a patchy brown beard. He scrubbed his face with one hand. Nella thought he looked overly stressed for someone with a flawless experiment and she began to grow suspicious.

“Um . . . Okay. This is video diary number . . . 69. There is nothing new to report, all quiet on the monkey front. Seriously Gerta, I don’t know why we need to be doing round the clock observation when we’re filming all this. And when are you going to show up for your shift? Ann and I are ragged.” Young Dr. Pazzo shrugged. “You won’t even look at this tape anyway. But I’ll make the morning report regardless.” Dr. Pazzo’s face split into a bitter grin. He held up a clipboard. “Okay, the animals are consistent in their activity, logging three more hours on average of play movement. Their natural sleep cycles are still reduced to three point five hours . . .” Dr. Pazzo kept talking but Nella completely forgot to listen. Behind the haggard figure of the scientist was the window into the animal room. The cages had been moved and Nella could see a climbing habitat with several monkeys actively interacting. In the center of the habitat, sitting on the floor, was Ann. She was asleep in the contaminated room in her street clothes. As Nella watched, Ann stirred and yawned.

“Oh my god.”

“What is it?” asked Mr. Courtlen. He had obviously been listening to Dr. Pazzo’s report. Nella got up and walked to the television. She skipped the video back a few seconds and pointed with a shaking finger to Ann. Nella stood mesmerized as the video reeled on. Ann got up and exited the animal room. Dr. Pazzo was continuing his report, completely oblivious to the fact that his intern was now carrying the special strep strain on her clothes, her breath, her sweat. Mr. Courtlen began to stand as he watched the figure of Ann walk up behind Dr. Pazzo, as if he could somehow physically stop what had happened. Ann reached an arm around the shoulder of Dr. Pazzo and she kissed his ear suggestively. Nella winced thinking of the thousands of bacterium that had just been introduced directly into Dr. Pazzo’s system.

Dr. Pazzo turned toward Ann. “Hey,” he hissed, “Not on camera.”

“Oh relax,” she said, smiling broadly, “No one is ever going to watch this disc and you know it.”

Dr. Pazzo relented and turned toward Ann and kissed her on the mouth. Nella felt nauseous. She walked slowly back toward the table and sank unsteadily into her seat. Dr. Pazzo was looking down at his hands, not raising his eyes to see either their reaction or his younger self in love upon the screen.

“How did you get so much energy?” asked Dr. Pazzo, still oblivious. “I’m completely wiped out.”

“I have my ways,” Ann grinned mischievously, “No sign of Dr. Schneider?”

“No. I don’t think she’s showing up today. Listen, do you mind taking a turn for a while at the computers? I’m so tired of staring at screens. If I could just get an hour’s nap I’ll be okay.”

“Sure,” said Ann brightly, still hanging on his hip. The two walked out of frame and the camera was left watching monkeys swing and climb through the glass window.

Nella turned to look at the prisoner. “You think this was the first time Ann went into the animal room without a suit?”

Dr. Pazzo shook his head but didn’t look up from his hands. “No, but it is the first evidence I can find of it. From her incubation period and the alteration of the monkeys’ behavior, she must have been infected for two weeks before this video.”

“How can that be?” asked Mr. Courtlen, “You said that you taped everything.”

Now Dr. Pazzo looked up and Nella saw his thin face drawn even tighter with anger. “When Dr. Schneider was on shift, she took the camera into the lab so she could talk continuously to it and document her work. Any of those shifts Ann could have gone into the animal room. I know Dr. Schneider was the one that persuaded her to do it in the first place.”

“Why? Why would Dr. Schneider risk Ann or even her experimental results by infecting a human?” Nella asked.

“Dr. Schneider was convinced the bacteria was rendered harmless, and all the results *seemed* to be showing that. But she was impatient. The tests would have had to continue for months, years maybe before human trials could begin. She wanted her results now, not later. So Dr. Schneider left us alone to do round the clock observations for longer and longer periods. And then, when we would go home for some sleep there would inevitably be some trivial ‘emergency’ just a few hours later and we’d be called back in. She was *hoping* one of us would crack from the exhaustion. We were both bordering on irrational at that point. If

Ann hadn't been persuaded to take advantage of the 'free boost' of dopamine in the animal room, then I eventually would have made a mistake. With my suit or the door or a sample. Infection was pretty much inevitable. And Dr. Schneider made sure of that."

Mr. Courtlen shook his head. "I don't understand. You said the experiment was going smoothly. How did we go from happy, besotted, alert interns to- well, to enraged cannibal?"

Dr. Pazzo scratched his cheek as he thought about his answer. Nella wondered if he were getting ready to lie.

"Of course, I can't be sure because by the time I realized what was going on, I didn't have time to conduct a real laboratory examination, not the kind I would want to do. But my *guess* is that either one of the monkeys or Ann herself were carriers of a competing strain of strep bacteria. Either that, or the strain we had infected the monkeys with just mutated as it passed into a human. It caused swelling in the brain. That's why the first symptoms were shambling or uncoordinated movement. It was followed by aggression and eventually uncontrollable pica- cannibalism in this case."

"And it couldn't be cured because you used an antibiotic resistant strain," sighed Nella.

Dr. Pazzo raised his hands and held his head, pulling at the thin strands of hair that were left on his scarred skull. "That's not the worst of it," he mumbled. Nella was startled to find herself empathizing with the man's distress, even after his nastiness.

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Courtlen.

"Normally when people get a strep infection they manifest symptoms within three days, like sore throats, colds, earaches, rashes. Things that would send people to their doctors. With a normal strep infection the medical community would have been alerted very quickly. With this strain, nothing happened for four to six *weeks*. Even I didn't see it until week five or six in Ann and I was trained to look for it." Dr. Pazzo stopped talking and took great shuddering breaths. Nella thought he must be crying.

"Jesus. Five weeks. How many international flights could have delivered the Plague in that amount of time?" Mr. Courtlen sat stunned.

Not just planes and boats and cars, Nella thought, How many crowded movie theaters and shopping centers is that? How many hospital waiting rooms when symptoms did start being recognized?

"The world had already died by the time I found out. It just didn't know it yet," Dr. Pazzo sobbed, and Nella felt a pang of sympathy for him, "What was I supposed to do? What good would warning people do? It was already too late."

“Maybe we should take a break,” suggested Nella in a gentle voice. Dr. Pazzo was still audibly weeping and Mr. Courtlen looked shell shocked and was completely still. Nella stood up. She gently squeezed Frank’s shoulder as she passed behind him. He shook himself.

“Yes I think that’s a good idea. Robert, perhaps we should call it a day. I’m sure Dr. Rider can ask the nurse to give you something to help you sleep.”

Dr. Pazzo laughed bitterly. “Why should I get to sleep peacefully Frank? When everyone else is troubled. I know how rare sedatives are these days. Since I am the author of all this,” he raised his hands and spread his arms around him, “why should I be the one that sleeps? Besides, we can’t stop now. There is no time.”

And for the first time Nella felt a cool stone of nervous doubt at the base of her throat. Maybe he wasn’t bluffing.

“At least let’s take a break then. We’ll come back in an hour okay?”

Dr. Pazzo nodded looking defeated. “Yes, that’s acceptable,” he said, “but we need to finish the diaries today. We can talk about what happens next tomorrow.”

The stone in Nella’s throat grew heavier and icy. “I thought you said we had enough time,” said Nella.

“We do. All the time that’s left in the world.” Dr. Pazzo stood up from the table and shuffled down the hall toward his cell. Frank stared after him and then shook his head. He looked around and saw Nella still standing behind him. He smiled to break the tension.

“Come on,” he said, “I’ll buy you the worst lunch you’ve ever eaten.”

Nella laughed and immediately felt better. “I don’t know,” she said, “I’ve seen some pretty rough times in the past eight years. It can’t be as bad as the medical camp food.”

“Want to bet?” he said and walked with her toward the cafeteria.

"We Never Even had a Chance."

It really was one of the worst meals Nella had eaten in a long while. She didn’t care. The cafeteria was bright and open after the windowless cell block. A few administrative personnel and infirmary staff were scattered over the area, but for the most part she and Mr. Courtlen were isolated from the quiet conversations of the others.

Nella looked at the shriveled pile of canned fruit on her plate. She sighed and then laughed.

“What is it?” asked Frank

“I was just thinking how much I miss bananas. A peanut butter and banana sandwich. I think I miss bananas more than I missed hot showers.”

“Hmm, I don’t know if I would go that far, but a banana would be pretty wonderful. I never would have imagined that I would go almost a decade without fresh tropical fruit. I wonder what parents feed their infants now?”

Nella poked the shrunken pear with her fork. “Not this I hope. Maybe after the trial I’ll buy a boat and sail to New Guinea and start a banana farm.”

“I can think of worse places to retire.”

Nella was trying to keep both of their minds off of the disturbing task still before them. “What do you want to do after this is over?”

He leaned back in the plastic chair. “I hadn’t really thought about it. Everything’s moved so fast, I’m still not entirely sure how I got this far,” he perked up, “Maybe I’ll come with you. I’ll start a pineapple plantation next door. It’ll be our cover, we’ll really be partners in a rum running operation. I’ll cook the books, you cook the rum.”

Nella laughed. “Deal. You take the east half of the island, I’ll take the west side.”

“Wow,” he said, “that was easy.” He raised his coffee to his lips and suddenly stopped. “Wait, why the west side?”

Nella shrugged. “I like to sleep on the left side of the bed.”

Frank coughed on his coffee. He laughed deeply and it was like a warm wind rolled across the world. Nella could count on one hand the times she’d heard anyone laugh so freely in the past several years. For a moment she was bewildered by it. A guard walked up to their table and Nella felt a pang of real regret knowing their break was over. Even the guard looked hesitant to interrupt.

“Mr. Courtlen, Dr. Rider, the prisoner’s ready to begin again.”

Frank straightened up and began tidying up his tray. “Thank you, we’ll be right there,” he said.

The guard walked back toward the cell block. Frank looked at Nella. “Are you ready? Are you still in pain? We can stop at the infirmary if you like.”

“No thank you, I’ll be okay. Besides, the aspirin makes it hard to concentrate.”

They both stood up from the table. “Listen,” Nella touched his wrist to stall him, “Did you know all of this before you saw it on the video?”

Mr. Courtlen’s brow tightened and he looked troubled. “The version he told me was- well, it was highly edited. I’m not a medical professional, so I still don’t know if I quite grasp all of it. But I knew it was Ann who was first infected and I knew Dr. Schneider had coerced her into tampering with the experiment. But I didn’t know they started with a resistant strain. And I didn’t know that it had

been kept secret for so long.” He rubbed the scar on his cheek with two fingers. “Six weeks. We never even had a chance did we?”

Nella shook her head. “Maybe a few rural populations wouldn’t have been reached by then, but the cities would have been heavily infected. And then as the outbreak began, infected people would have fled to those rural areas without even knowing they were carriers. But you’re his lawyer. Why didn’t he tell you all of this?”

“I don’t know. He hasn’t told anyone this much. The other doctors- he wasn’t lying when he said you were the fifth one. He’d string them along with the same version I got until they started asking him personal questions and he’d try to get them to answer personal questions of their own. And when they wouldn’t answer, he’d refuse to see them again.”

“What kind of personal questions?”

“Well, he usually asked them what they did to survive the Plague or what they did to help the Cure.”

“So why hasn’t he asked me?”

Mr. Courtlen shrugged and picked up his tray. “I can only assume it’s because your history with the Cure is already well known. It was clear to me that the judges were tired of trying to placate Dr. Pazzo and decided to hire you to work some kind of miracle on Miss Connelly rather than do much with Dr. Pazzo. They are expecting her to tell the whole story. But it looks like Dr. Pazzo decided to start telling it anyway.”

“Mr. Courtlen,” she said, and the icy boulder that had lodged in her throat reappeared, “I’m starting to think you were right about Dr. Pazzo.”

“What do you mean?”

“I think he really has something important to tell us. I don’t think it’s a bluff anymore. And I don’t think it is anything good.”

Mr. Courtlen stared at her. “What do you think he’s trying to tell us?”

She felt sweat spring out on her forehead and tears prickled in the corners of her eyes. She whispered so the scattered occupants of the cafeteria wouldn’t overhear. “I don’t think we’ve seen the last of the Plague.”

How it Spread

Dr. Pazzo had recovered his usual reserve, but Nella’s chest was tight with anxiety. She’d seen no indication of madness in Dr. Pazzo yet, nor did she expect to. Beyond a fairly normal case of narcissism and an understandably high level of depression, he was remarkably healthy. His hints of withholding vital

information were all the more frightening to Nella because of this. She could see, however, that Mr. Courtlen was becoming more suspicious of his client. Nella was increasingly convinced that Dr. Pazzo was telling the truth.

They resumed their seats. Nella heaved an inward sigh at the contrast between the bright and airy cafeteria and the grim, hunched narrowness of the cell block. She was glad she would get to walk out at the end of the day.

“Dr. Pazzo,” she began, “You said it took you several weeks to notice Ann’s symptoms. How did you finally find out that she was infected?”

“It was the day I took her to the hospital. She had accidentally cut herself on some broken glassware. If I had known what we were dealing with at that point, the cut would have been enough for me to suspect something.”

“What do you mean?”

“Ann was never klutzy, but over a few days preceding this incident she was stumbling pretty often. I thought it was the exhaustion. She would slur her speech every so often as well and we had some really nasty fights in those last couple of days. What else should I have thought? It was a normal reaction to lack of sleep. But- well let me show you.”

The video began again. The camera was still focused on the window into the animal room. The monkeys seemed sluggish, but Nella thought, perhaps it was the beginning or end of their sleep cycle. Somewhere off the screen came a loud, splintering crash as glassware was dropped.

“Oh Jesus, Ann! Oh God. Are you all right?” Dr. Pazzo’s voice moved away and Nella heard Ann mumbling but couldn’t hear what she said.

“Okay, just stay there. Don’t. Move.” Nella heard footsteps run past the camera which tilted as Dr. Pazzo ran past. Now it pointed partly into the lab. Nella could see computer screens and equipment as well as the animal room in the corner of the screen. She still couldn’t see Ann but could hear her whimpering. Something black thudded across the screen. It was Dr. Pazzo.

“Here, we have to keep pressure on it. Look at me Ann, I need to call for help. Can you keep pressure on it?”

Nella didn’t hear any response from Ann. She heard the quick skid of Dr. Pazzo’s shoes as he ran back toward the camera followed by a stumbling, irregular trot that was Ann. They came on screen, Dr. Pazzo dragging Ann and pressing a towel onto her upper arm. He fumbled with a phone for a minute, trying to dial with one hand and hold Ann’s arm with the other. “Hello?” his voice was shaky and loud, “I need an ambulance at-”

Nella tuned the rest out. She was watching Ann intently. Ann was not looking at anything in particular, her eyes wandering in the pattern Nella now recognized. She was rocking gently back and forth and seemed utterly calm.

Nella could see the towel darkening on her arm. She watched the two run past the screen and heard a door open and slam and then everything was quiet. The video cut out and returned, refocused on the animal room.

Nella heard the door open and the heavy tread of Dr. Pazzo. "Robert, is that you?" Dr. Schneider's voice sounded distant but Nella heard the sharp clicks of high heels head steadily toward the camera. "Where have you been? I come in and the lab is abandoned with broken glassware everywhere-"

"Ann cut herself. She had to be rushed to the hospital." Dr. Pazzo stooped into the frame fiddling with the camera.

"What? Where is she now? What kind of tests did they run at the hospital?" Dr. Schneider's voice was shrill and panicked.

Dr. Pazzo looked up from the camera, his tired face drawing into a scowl as he turned away towards Dr. Schneider. "She's at home sleeping. Jesus, do you even care that she was injured?" Dr. Pazzo shook his head in disgust and turned back to the camera. "Christ, this thing is a mess," he mumbled and picked up the camera, carrying it with him to a desk. A cloth swiped over the lens and the camera was lifted to shoulder level as Dr. Pazzo looked through the eyepiece. Nella felt slightly dizzy, but at last the view settled onto Dr. Schneider's angry face. "She needed stitches and the emergency tech said she seemed exhausted, which I agreed with. So they stitched her up and sent her home to sleep. Why would they need to run tests?"

Dr. Schneider hesitated, frowning at Dr. Pazzo. "Nothing. Never mind," she said. The camera was abruptly set on the desktop. "No, what did you mean? What tests?"

Dr. Schneider was silent. Dr. Pazzo came into view, rapidly crossing the space between himself and Dr. Schneider.

"Gerta, what tests? What did you do?"

"She was exposed to the Recharge bacteria."

"She's infected? How did she become exposed?" Dr. Pazzo threw up his hands.

"No, you know what, I don't even want to know. When was she exposed?"

"Calm down Robert. It's a harmless strain, you checked it yourself. Don't you see? This is good. This will push the trials forward-"

"Shut up. Where did you get your doctorate anyway? Mail order? It was a harmless strain. Every time it crosses species- every time it infects someone new, in fact, it has a chance to mutate. This whole experiment was supposed to be about control. The dopamine and amphetamine levels, yes, but also keeping a pure strain. We have no idea what mutations may have occurred at this point."

Dr. Pazzo clutched his head. "Jesus, Gerta, she could be exposing others right now. How long ago was she exposed? Are we infected?"

“Relax! My guess is that it's been about four weeks. She's fine. We're fine. There's nothing to worry about.”

It startled Nella to see Dr. Pazzo run out of view. A few seconds later, she heard a violent retching. “Really Robert, there's no need for all this melodrama. If it will make you feel better, I'll run some cultures when she comes in tomorrow and show you it's the same strain.”

“No. I'm going to go get her now.” He came back into view, clutching one of the pale blue biohazard suits. He walked up to Dr. Schneider and pointed a shaking finger at her. “And you're going to stay right here until I get back.”

Dr. Schneider laughed. I don't think so. I have a fundraising dinner tonight.”

“I don't give a damn about your fundraiser Gerta. We have to figure this out. You're going to take a sample of the bacteria in the animal room. Then, you're going to sit your ass down and do some actual lab work. You need to compare it to our original strain. I'm going to get Ann before she infects anyone else. Maybe it's not too late.”

Dr. Pazzo began stepping into the biohazard suit. “Hey, I'm the lead scientist on this project,” Dr. Shneider said shrilly, “I don't take orders from you.”

Dr. Pazzo stopped with one arm in the suit. “I don't care about seniority Gerta. Don't you understand? We fucked up. We have to find a way to fix this.”

“There is nothing to fix! Everything is fine.” Dr. Shneider rolled her eyes. “This is ridiculous. I'm going home.”

“Gerta, if you take one more step toward that door, I'll have to do something we'll both regret. We have to maintain quarantine.”

“Quarantine?” she hissed, “Do you even hear yourself?” She shook her head and then started walking past Dr. Pazzo toward the door. Looking grim, he punched her in the jaw and then caught her as she fell.

Nella felt Mr. Courtlen tense in surprise. She watched in shock as the young Dr. Pazzo dragged the unconscious woman back to the desk chair near the camera.

He slumped her onto the chair and then reached for a roll of medical tape sitting nearby. Nella could hear the loud squeal of ripping tape as he bound Dr.

Schneider to the chair. He paused to rub a hand over his eyes and Nella could see he was crying. He rocked back and forth on his knees and held his head in his arms. He was so close to the camera that Nella could hear the crackling rustle of the suit. “Please let it be okay,” he whispered, “Please let it be okay.”

Dr. Shneider groaned and began to stir. Dr. Pazzo stood up, his eyes still streaming. “I'm sorry Gerta, but you've got to stay until I figure this out.”

“Idiot,” she spat.

“I'm going to get Ann now. I'll be back soon.”

“If she is infected then you're already infected too,” Gerta sneered, “I know all

about your little trysts. That suit isn't going to protect you.”

Dr. Pazzo shook his head. “It's not to protect me from Ann,” he said, “It's to protect everyone else from us.” He pulled the plastic helmet over his face and walked away.

Turning

The video cut out and Nella turned to Dr. Pazzo. He was shaking and held up one hand as if to forestall her questions. “I think,” he said in a low voice, “I’m going to leave you both to watch the next pieces alone. I will answer any questions you have tomorrow, but I don’t think I can live through the next part again. If you’ll excuse me,” he rose from his seat, “Mr. Courtlen, Dr. Rider goodnight. And thank you for the books.” Dr. Pazzo shuffled down the hall followed by his guards.

Mr. Courtlen took a deep breath and puffed his cheeks blowing it slowly out again. “Do you know what is on the next tape?” asked Nella.

“I haven’t watched it, but I can guess that it is at this point that Dr. Pazzo secluded himself and the others in the lab. Dr. Pazzo’s notes say this is a key piece of evidence, but I’m not so sure- I think we’ve pretty much seen all the evidence that matters. Let’s get to it though.”

“I’m not really concerned with evidence. Did he tell you about his relationship with Ann? Or Dr. Schneider?”

Mr. Courtlen shook his head. “No, I didn’t know he and Ann were sleeping together. I guess it’s not really that important for the trial.”

“It might explain some of his actions. Why didn’t he contact the authorities?”

“I have a feeling Dr. Schneider was at least partially responsible for that part. And you saw how panicked he was. He probably thought he could get ahead of it. If anyone found out- about *any* of it; sloppy laboratory practices or sleeping with interns, he could lose his job and his reputation would be permanently scarred.”

Nella picked up the remote and started the video again. The camera still showed Dr. Schneider taped to the chair on the side of the screen. She appeared to have fallen asleep. Two blue suited figures walked in, one supporting the other. Dr. Pazzo removed his helmet and guided Ann into a nearby chair, where he removed her helmet as well. She was awake, but to Nella appeared exhausted or drugged. Her eyes stared toward the camera but didn’t seem to register anything around her. She seemed to have been chewing on her lip, there was a thin line of dark, crusted blood just below it and there were minor scratches on

her face.

“Stay here Ann,” said Dr. Pazzo and Nella saw Dr. Schneider start from her sleep.

“You’re back then,” said Dr. Schneider.

“Yes, we’re here.”

“Are you going to let me go?”

“Are you going to help me figure this out?”

“She looks fine Robert, just tired. Why don’t we all go home and get some sleep and in the morning-”

Dr. Pazzo crossed the room with surprising speed. He shoved Dr. Schneider’s chair and she rolled rapidly toward Ann. The two women were about a foot from each other, but Ann didn’t even blink. Dr. Pazzo grabbed the back of Dr. Schneider’s head and forced her to look at Ann.

“Look at her,” he said, and his voice was low and threatening, “She can’t walk straight. She’s been scratching at her face.” He pulled the glove off of one of Ann’s hand. The tips of her fingers were pulsing with blood. “She’s been eating her hands Gerta. Does that seem fucking fine to you?”

“Let me go,” said Gerta, “Okay, I get it, let me go. We’ll do the samples now.”

“You aren’t going to try to run?”

Gerta sighed. “No, if there is really something wrong it’s too late for me to go anywhere now.”

Dr. Pazzo began removing the tape. Dr. Schneider silently moved off screen and returned with a first aid kit. “Get the lab ready,” she said, “I’ll work on her hands.”

The camera cut out for a second. Dr. Pazzo appeared on screen talking into the camera.

“I’m not sure who I’m leaving this for, but I hope that someone will find it. I would send it out over the internet, but Ann- well, Ann had an episode. The modem is in pieces and Gerta has confiscated my cell. Some nonsense about damage control. As if there could be any control after this.” He scrubbed his face with his hand. “I’ve put Ann in the animal holding area for now and locked the door, so that she can’t destroy anything else. Gerta is going over and over the tests, but I’m afraid there is no doubt. The strain of strep has mutated.” Nella saw tears starting up in Dr. Pazzo’s eyes as he backed a few feet from the camera and sat heavily down into a desk chair.

“I guess that answers the question,” said Mr. Courtlen. Nella nodded and turned back toward the screen.

“Ann’s antibody levels are abnormally high, even in the presence of strep.

The closest thing I can compare her behavior to is Autoimmune Neuropsychiatric Disorder, but I've never seen it in an adult before. She is unable to walk without lurching and stumbling. She won't stop chewing on her bottom lip and her hands. In fact, she seems not to even notice that she is doing it." Dr. Pazzo stopped and Nella watched a tear slide down his face. He cleared his throat. "She has become erratic and aggressive which are not normal traits for her at all. She smashed a good deal of equipment before I could sedate her and contain her in the animal room. I didn't want to do it, but there is only one other room with a lock on it, and that is the closet for cleaning supplies. I can't tell if Gerta and I are infected or not. So far our blood tests aren't showing anything, but it could just be a matter of time. Whether or not we will experience the same symptoms as Ann, I don't know. There is really no way to conclusively test for inflammation of nerves in the brain. I hope Ann is the exception. But to be safe we are going to have to quarantine the lab. Gerta doesn't accept this and I'm afraid I may have to force the issue if she doesn't come around. Until we have proof that this strain is not as dangerous as it has become for Ann or we are past the incubation period for ourselves, we can't risk exposing anyone else. Eight weeks should be sufficient to evaluate our symptoms and to see if our bodies will be capable of fighting the infection off naturally. If Ann *does* have a form of ANDAS, her body's defenses are unfortunately fighting her brain and not the bacteria. In our quest to develop a bacterial mule that would succeed in the greatest number of subjects, Gerta and I—" Dr. Pazzo shook his head, "No, not Gerta, *I* chose a bacteria that was resistant to all known antibiotics. There is no known cure. I cannot realistically hope that the infection has been isolated to the lab, but still I have to take precautions. All I can hope for is that the bacteria remains harmless to the rest of the population. If not, I hope this record and our data will help someone develop an effective antibiotic quickly. I am going to close up the lab now. I will leave a disinfected copy of this video in the—"

A banging sound came from behind Dr. Pazzo. He turned swiftly in his chair. "Jesus," he said. He stood and walked toward the animal room behind him. Standing at the window was Ann. She was slapping the glass with her hand. Nella couldn't see much of her face, she was too far from the camera. "I'm hungry Robert," she yelled. She smacked the glass.

"You just ate, Ann," said Dr. Pazzo trying to maintain a reasonable tone.

"I'm hungry," she smacked the glass a little harder, leaving a pink streak where the bandage on her hand had slipped. "I'm hungry, Robert, I'm HUNGRY!" She was yelling louder now. Dr. Pazzo ran a hand through his hair, distressed. "I'M HUNGRY, I'M HUNGRY! I'M HUNGRY," Ann was screaming louder and faster now, flinging her whole shoulder against the glass

with deep, nauseating thuds. Suddenly she stumbled deeper into the room away from the glass. Nella heard the shrieking of dozens of monkeys, along with Ann continually screaming, “HUNGRY,” over and over. This went on for several seconds and Dr. Pazzo began slapping the glass window. “Ann, Ann,” he called. Something smacked the window with a wet crunch, as if several carrots were snapped at once. Nella jumped. Whatever it was smacked the window again, leaving a smear of blood and silver fur. Ann came up to the glass holding a limp monkey just in front of Dr. Pazzo. He backed up slowly from the window. “Hungry,” Ann said and buried her face in the carcass. Dr. Pazzo sank down into a crouch, his head swallowed in his arms. “No, no, no,” he cried and rocked back and forth. The video cut out.

Quarantine

When the screen shifted from blank black, it showed a small closet and Nella's ears were filled with the incessant buzz of an old florescent bulb and the muffled sobs of a woman somewhere outside the closet. Occasionally there was a sharp, rhythmic banging.

“Don't do this Robert!” Dr. Schneider's voice was pleading and raw even through the wall. “I'm not sick. You can see that I'm not sick.”

“I'm sorry Gerta. I have to do this. I can't trust you to maintain quarantine voluntarily. Ann is locked in as well and I'll be locking myself in next.”

“Someone's going to come looking for us,” sobbed Dr. Schneider, “You won't get away with this.”

“Someone might come along, but they'll have to ignore some pretty massive signs warning them. Then they'll have to break through several palettes I nailed across the door.”

Nella paused the video. “Mr. Courtlen, I don't know if I should see this. Dr. Pazzo isn't charged with kidnapping but he could be.”

He ran a hand over his head for a second. “I know you don't have to keep anything confidential, and I'm not asking you to. I don't think a kidnapping charge is anything Dr. Pazzo has to worry about. Not just because I don't expect him to win his case in this trial. Holding Ann and Schneider was necessary to protect the public. I don't think he will be charged even if it gets that far.”

Nella was worried by his bleak outlook. She started the video without further comment.

The banging resumed for a few moments. “What's your brilliant plan for getting us out of here once our quarantine is done?”

There was a lengthy silence. The electric hum of the lightbulb seemed

overwhelming.

“Or are we just supposed to slowly starve to death in here?” Her voice wavered like a candle in a breeze. Nella winced, sensing Dr. Schneider had been on the verge of hysterics.

“We're not going to starve. There was an emergency supply of food and medicine in the basement for just this sort of incident. I've supplied each of us with enough for almost a year. If I'm overreacting, then someone will break the quarantine before then. If I'm not- well, I guess if you are still not sick by then, you'll have the strength to break through these few boards. If you are really prepared to live alone in a dead world.”

“You're mad! We're fine, we're not sick.”

“Speak for yourself Gerta.”

“It was just a bad reaction that Ann had. We'll fix it together. But I can't do it in an office kitchen.” There was only silence. “Robert? Robert!”

There was a squeal of hinges as the closet's metal door opened. Dr. Pazzo stumbled through and grabbed the camera, his face filling the screen.

“I can't remember what video number this is. I'm sorry. I'm having trouble with the details now. I'm making this particular entry in case I've been wrong about this whole thing and I need to defend my actions.” The camera spun around to show the closet's interior. “Of course, if I'm right about the extent of damage this disease can cause, our collection of video diaries may help survivors figure out how this happened and maybe, someday, a way to cure what we have done.”

The closet had been cleared and all that remained was a low cot, a pile of books, and a mop sink. It still looked cramped.

“As you can see,” Dr. Pazzo began, “I have provided us with the basics. For water and toilet necessities, we all have a drainable sink- actually Ann has a basin that is automatically filled regularly as part of animal care. But both Dr. Schneider and I have sinks. I've loosened the spigot in both, so that there is a constant small stream of water. For when we can't remember to turn it on by ourselves.”

The camera shook and Nella realized Dr. Pazzo was crying silently. She heard Mr. Courtlen utter a strangled sigh beside her.

“Anyway,” continued Dr. Pazzo in an exhausted voice, “We don't have to worry about water or light, since the lab was converted to solar power during the university's green initiative last year. The gas generator should kick on if the snow covers the panels and we have enough for a long while.” The camera spun around to show a small shelf cut into the wall. “This is a food dispensary of sorts. I've programmed the timer for the animal room to release ration packets once a day to all of us. With the reluctant help of Dr. Schneider and some spare

vent hoses from the maintenance room we should be well supplied for about a year. You may be wondering why I felt this system was necessary.” Dr. Pazzo walked out of the closet. Nella saw with some shock that the desks and lab tables were gone, nailed in large panels over the visible doors and windows. The lab was left a gray wasteland ruled by a silver web of exhaust hose draped from the ceiling. Even the loose cords and computers had been carefully bundled to the far side. For a moment she wondered why such care had been taken in what had surely been a very hasty preparation. Dr. Pazzo lurched forward and stumbled, almost dropping the camera. Nella guessed that he must already have been very ill at the time of the video.

“It has been almost two weeks since we discovered Ann was infected and her symptoms have become dramatically worse.” The camera swept over toward the glass window of the animal room. Nella wanted to cover her eyes. She heard Mr. Courtlen draw in a sharp, shocked breath. The window was smeared, edge to edge, with blood and fur and greasy matter. It was almost opaque with gore, except where the light shone through the yellow fats like a greasy paper bag.

“I have been into the animal room twice since she killed the first monkey. Once to move a cot in for her and once to attempt to clean that. But Ann attacked me so violently that I would have had to harm her to stop her. So I left and have not tried again. Instead I have relied on the internal video feed to observe Ann's symptoms.” Dr. Pazzo paused and when he continued, his voice cracked.

“Ann can no longer speak articulately. She will sometimes shriek or grunt, but no one has heard a word from her in a week. She also no longer seems to recognize us by sight or voice. Even the animals- Ann used to lobby for us to treat our lab animals with all the kindness we could. Without fail she would bring them toys or interact with them even through the plastic suit we had to wear . . . She killed them all. All the monkeys, one after another. Within two days, fifteen in all. She gorged herself on them. The only thing I can think is that she is suffering from a strange compulsion. She is certainly not hungry. I don't know, however, how much is just the constant aggression and hostility she is displaying and how much is the need to eat. Anyhow, this is why I put the food distribution system in place. So each of us would get the calories we needed every day without killing ourselves by eating too much, too quickly.”

Dr. Pazzo walked over to a bank of light switches. “It became clear that we would have to separate ourselves not only from the outside world, but also from each other after Ann's numerous episodes of violence. And since we do not know when or if we will all suffer from the same symptoms, we had to act as quickly as possible. This is why we are in isolated, secure cells. Ann's is locked from the outside. Gerta- Dr. Schneider's kitchen has no lock, so I boarded the