

PROPER PROTOCOL

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By

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CHARACTERS

Aaron Seplow.....early 40s, wiry build of a marathon runner
Whitney.....late 30s, a smart, sophisticated woman, Aaron's wife
Marvin.....early 30s, a research fellow in Aaron's lab
Harriet Gates.....late 40s, MD in Aaron's lab
Lincoln Masterman.....50s, dignified, businesslike, dean of medical school
Donna Fairchild30s, Good-looking TV reporter
Bruce Sutherland.....early 40s, professor and associate of Aaron
Ethan Hancock*.....20s, federal investigator
Todd Buster*.....20s, AIDS clinic worker
Clayton Manning*.....20s, drug trial volunteer

* Ethan, Todd and Clayton can be played by the same actor

SET

Abstract set with areas suggesting (in order of frequency of use) laboratory
conference room, living room, office of the dean, hospital room with bed, three
large TV screens in limbo in different places on the stage.

TIME AND PLACE

New York City -- October through December, present day

ACT I

SCENE 1

SET: The living room of a research scientist and professor at a prestigious university.

AT RISE: It's late at night. Aaron, thin, fit, early 40s, enters, wearing blue jeans, a cowboy shirt and a black Stetson. Exhausted from a long, hard day at work, he carries a beat-up briefcase crammed with papers. The house is half lit, suggesting that everyone else has gone to bed. Aaron throws his hat onto a chair, pours a glass of wine and plops down with his briefcase. Sipping the wine, he pulls out papers from the briefcase and starts studying them. Whitney, late 30s, sexually attractive, appears in the doorway, dressed for bed.

WHITNEY

Another hard day in the lab?

AARON

You're still up?

WHITNEY

None of the patients responding?

AARON

One guy is. A little bit. Probably artifact.

WHITNEY

Want me to heat you up something?

AARON

No, thanks anyway. I'm just going to go through some figures. See if I can figure out why this isn't working.

He continues searching through the papers.

WHITNEY

Chelsea was waiting up for you, but the poor dear couldn't keep her eyes open. She had exciting news to tell you.

AARON

Exciting news?

WHITNEY

She qualified. She'll be playing in the recital.

AARON

A star is born. But we always knew she would be a star, didn't we?

WHITNEY

Played Chopin's Minute Waltz.

AARON

That's what I did for my first recital.

WHITNEY

I don't think it's a coincidence she picked that piece.

AARON

Were you there to hear her play?

WHITNEY

Of course. The auditorium was filled with proud parents clapping after each piece, even though we were told not to.

He hums a few notes from The Minute Waltz.

AARON

It didn't take me long to get the notes down and play them in the right sequence. But it took a year to master the piece. And then one day it happened. I was playing Chopin, not just the notes. After winning the competition, my parents took me to a very fancy restaurant and my father, very ceremoniously, let me drink my first glass of champagne. Mom was very disapproving. I was only 11.

WHITNEY

I took Chelsea to McDonald's.

AARON

(Disapproving)
McDonald's?

WHITNEY

It was what she wanted.

AARON

I was going to be an internationally famous pianist.

WHITNEY

Do you ever regret giving up music as a career?

AARON

(Shrugs)

I used to play with my mother. They were very special times. I'm going to call Chelsea tomorrow on her cell and congratulate her.

WHITNEY

No, Aaron. In person. Can't you come home early tomorrow?

AARON

I'd really like to, but I'm up to my neck in...

(Seeing her look of disappointment)

Sure I can. And I'll bring flowers.

WHITNEY

She'd like that.

Aaron returns to his work and sees something interesting.

WHITNEY (CONT'D)

(Disappointed by his preoccupation with work)

I guess I'll go back to bed.

She waits for a response that never comes.

WHITNEY (CONT'D)

Don't stay up too late.

She exits

AARON

(Preoccupied, without looking up)

Good night, dear.

Lights fade to black

END OF SCENE 1

SCENE 2

The next day, Aaron's office, which consists of elements suggesting a research scientist's office with a conference table. It has two white phones and one red phone. There's also a statue of a female goddess with wings and serpents adorning her shoulders.

Marvin, early 30s, is sitting at the conference table, going through a computer print-out. Harriet, late 40s, looking harried and exhausted, enters. They both wear the long white lab coats of academic researchers. She looks around the room surprised.

HARRIET

Where is he?

MARVIN

Still jogging. Doing an extra 10 miles to get ready for the marathon. You look awful.

Harriet's not pleased with the comment.

MARVIN (CONT'D)

I mean, you look awful in a good way, like you've been doing exciting and productive work.

HARRIET

Tyrone is not doing well. He's dying. Can't control the pneumonia.

MARVIN

Does he know he's dying?

HARRIET

I think he realizes now, after a terrible night. He wants to see Aaron. To say thanks. We're the ones who should be thanking him. He wants to give Aaron a great big kiss. That I would like to see.

MARVIN

(Fondly)

Tyrone thought he was going to be the first cure. He told me he had picked out what he was going to wear on Good Morning America. Crazy guy. This trial hasn't been going well, has it?

HARRIET

Aaron's been listening to a lot of Beethoven, if that's what you mean.

(Indicating the statue)

And talking to Nina.

MARVIN

They never told me about her.

HARRIET

The Sumerian goddess of water, wisdom and technical skill? Whenever the science isn't working, he talks to Nina and plays Beethoven's Ninth.

Aaron enters, wearing his Stetson. He slings his hat at the hat rack, doing a silent cheer when he successfully catches the hook and ignoring it when he doesn't.

AARON

(Seeing the glum expressions)

Well, look at these happy faces greeting me this bright, cheerful morning.

(Indicating the print-out)

What's all this?

MARVIN

Today's stats?

AARON

Great jog. Beautiful sunrise. Started me thinking about infinity and infinite possibilities. Do you think a lot about infinity?

HARRIET

It's not at the top of my list.

AARON

If the universe is infinite, it must contain an infinite number of configurations. And if there is an infinite number of configurations, some of them must be very similar to each other. You're following me so far?

HARRIET

Trying to keep up with you.

AARON

So somewhere out there must be a world very similar to this one with scientists very similar to us solving problems very similar to the ones we're trying to solve. What excites me is that some of them must be years ahead of us.

HARRIET

This is what you're thinking about when you're jogging?

AARON

What do you think about?

HARRIET

How much longer I've got to run.

AARON

(Giving Harriet a disapproving look)

What about you, Marvin?

MARVIN

How good it feels?

AARON

Why is it whenever I ask you a question, you answer with a sentence that has a question mark at the end?

MARVIN

Because I'm not sure of the answer?

AARON

How long have you been here?

MARVIN

Six months?

AARON

(To Harriet)

Is he playing with me?

HARRIET

Marvin doesn't play like that.

AARON

(Thinks about this, decides not to pursue it)

So if the scientists on Planet X are years ahead of us, we should contact them and get all their answers. Save us one hell of a lot of time.

MARVIN

But you can't do that. Can you?

AARON

(Not sure if Marvin is serious)
Why do you ask me that question?

MARVIN

It just came out.

AARON

Do you think I am seriously considering contacting Planet X?

MARVIN

No, of course not.

AARON

It's an exercise, Marvin. In thinking outside the box. You do think outside the box, don't you?

MARVIN

(Emphasizing the period at the end of the sentence)

I do.

AARON

Good.

(To Harriet)

So what are we looking so glum about this morning?

HARRIET

We're about to lose Tyrone. The pneumonia.

AARON

Oh, shit.

HARRIET

He's not going to make it through the night. He wants to see you.

AARON

What's he want to see me for?

HARRIET

To thank you.

AARON

He doesn't have to thank me.

HARRIET

He thinks he does.

AARON

It's better that you take care of that.

HARRIET

I'll tell him you're too busy in the lab.

AARON

I was going over the stats last night. I think I know why the MIG isn't working. It's being neutralized by all the other drugs our patients are taking.

HARRIET

They are taking a lot of drugs.

AARON

Everyone but Billy Benson, the guy who couldn't tolerate the drugs so you stopped them. He's the only one who responded to MIG.

HARRIET

A slight response.

AARON

But a response, nevertheless. Let's discontinue the other drugs the test subjects are taking.

HARRIET

That's a change in protocol. We'd have to get approval.

AARON

Of course.

HARRIET

I.R.B. Bruce Sutherland.

AARON

I'll be tactful.

Aaron turns to Nina and enters what appears to be a mild trance. Harriet and Marvin wait.

HARRIET

(Finally)

I take it this meeting is over.

Aaron looks at them, surprised that they are still there.

AARON

Yes.

Harriet exits. Marvin remains as Aaron turns back to Nina. Marvin coughs.

AARON (CONT'D)

Is there something more?

MARVIN

It would mean a lot to Tyrone if you just stopped by for a minute. He's been wanting to meet you since he got here.

Aaron looks at him with a how-do-you-know-that expression.

MARVIN (CONT'D)

(By way of explanation)

We've been talking.

(Defensively)

It's hard not to talk to Tyrone.

AARON

You shouldn't be talking to test subjects. You're not his physician. You're a fellow. A research scientist.

MARVIN

(Spitting it out before Aaron can stop him)

No one's come to visit him since he was admitted. Tyrone's a playwright. He said the best and worst news in his life came the same day. In the morning, he got word they were going to produce his play. And that afternoon he's told he has AIDS. His play opens next month. He's not going to be here to see it.

AARON

Marvin, reaching out to someone like this makes you a nice human being, but a lousy scientist.

MARVIN

Yes, Aaron.

AARON

It's bad for you. And it's bad for them. But most important it is bad for the science. You can't afford to lose your objectivity. Leave the patients to clinical coordinators like Harriet.

MARVIN

It's hard not to get involved.

AARON

I know.

Marvin exits.

AARON (CONT'D)

(Calling out)

Harriet.

Harriet enters.

HARRIET

Yes, Aaron.

AARON

Is he still conscious?

HARRIET

Yes.

AARON

Lucid? He knows who you are?

HARRIET

He drifts in and out, but he knows what's happening.

AARON

It would be good if you spent the night with him. In his room. Just in case.

HARRIET

Just in case what?

AARON

(Hiding his concern)

Just in case he needs a doctor, for God's sake. You're a clinician. Isn't that what you clinicians do? Stay with him.

HARRIET

I guess it's the least we can do.

Harriet exits.

Aaron goes to a stack of CDs near his CD player, picks out a disk and inserts it into the recorder, which he turns on. He sits down and looks at Nina.

AARON

Well, old girl, what are we going to do when they find out that one of them died? Care to share a bit of your Sumerian wisdom with your old friend?

He closes his eyes in deep thought as the first strains of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony come up.

Lights fade to black

END OF SCENE 2

A little while later, the office of Bruce Sutherland. Bruce is a clean-shaven man in his early 40s, wearing a long, white lab coat. He is sitting behind a desk, talking to Aaron.

BRUCE

George must have gained 50 pounds, but he looks distinguished with his premature gray hair.

AARON

(Impatient, not interested)

Is that so?

BRUCE

Dr. Sumner still heads infectious diseases.

AARON

I wanted to talk to you about making some changes in the protocol.

BRUCE

You should have been there.

AARON

I have no interest in that stuff.

BRUCE

You want to change the protocol? You just started this trial.

AARON

We started it almost a year ago. And still we're getting no significant responses. I expected to see more by now.

BRUCE

In science, you don't always get the results you expect. Until now, you have been very fortunate.

AARON

Our drug is being neutralized.

BRUCE

What's that got to do with changing the protocol?

AARON

I want to stop all the other drugs the test subjects are taking.

BRUCE

Those drugs are keeping the patients alive. You can't discontinue them.

AARON

Only for a few months.

BRUCE

To test a highly experimental treatment with -- what do you call it?

(With contempt)

The master immune gene.

AARON

The MIG.

BRUCE

The MIG.

AARON

All drug trials entail some risk.

BRUCE

All life is precious.

AARON

We're talking about taking a very small risk to learn a lot.

BRUCE

What makes you think the MIG is being neutralized?

AARON

The only response we've gotten has been in the one patient not taking other drugs.

BRUCE

You need more data than that to justify changing the protocol. You're planning animal studies I assume.

AARON

They'd take months to do. It's a waste of time.

BRUCE

Science moves ahead slowly, one little step at a time.

AARON

(Hint of sarcasm)

You always were a very careful scientist, even in school. No one could focus on details like you could.

BRUCE

Science does not advance with wild leaps of faith.

AARON

How's your experiment with the hamsters going, or are you still working with the fruit flies? You know the experiment I'm talking about? The one you started in grad school?

BRUCE

Actually we've started working with cats. You did see my paper in this week's Lancet, didn't you?

AARON

I must have missed it.

BRUCE

Your friend Donna Fairchild didn't miss it. She's due here any minute to interview me.

AARON

She's hardly my friend.

BRUCE

Oh, I thought she must be, considering all the stories she keeps doing on you.

AARON

She's a talented medical reporter who can tell good science from all the crap. With or without your support, I'm asking the I.R.B. for a change in protocol.

BRUCE

I wouldn't hold out too much hope.

AARON

Thank you for your time, Bruce.

BRUCE

My pleasure.

Aaron heads out the door just as Donna Fairchild is entering. She's a TV-attractive woman in her 30s or 40s.

DONNA

(surprised)
Dr. Seplow.

AARON

Hello, Donna.

DONNA

(Seeing the awkward expressions)
Am I interrupting something?

AARON

No, I was just leaving. Dr. Sutherland and I were discussing the scientific method.

He exits.

DONNA

I've been spending a lot of time in his lab.

BRUCE

Have you?

DONNA

You haven't been following our series on the MIG? He's doing impressive work.

Bruce smiles, obviously avoiding making any comment.

DONNA (CONT'D)

At least a lot of people think so. The press office says you're doing a lot of impressive work yourself.

BRUCE

They were very kind in their description of our work.

DONNA

The press release said you've developed a test for detecting leukemia.

BRUCE

Our test picks it up three months before any symptoms or signs appeared.

DONNA

In children or adults?

BRUCE
In cats.

DONNA
Cats?

BRUCE
We did 90 cats. Over a two-year period. Double blind.

DONNA
But only in cats?

BRUCE
Only cats get feline leukemia. But if we can duplicate this with human leukemia, it's potentially a significant diagnostic aid.

DONNA
When will the human trials begin?

BRUCE
That's hard to say. A lot more work needs to be done.

DONNA
The press release said initial studies were very encouraging and widespread trials were just around the corner.

BRUCE
I imagine that depends on how you define "just around the corner."

DONNA
How do you define it?

AARON
A couple of years, at least. Do you have your camera people with you? It's quite all right if you want to film the lab.

DONNA
I think we'll wait for the human trials. We don't want to give our viewers false hopes.

BRUCE
(Disappointed)
Oh. Of course, we wouldn't want to do that.

DONNA
(Preparing to leave)
Please let me know when you're ready to start the human trials.

BRUCE

I told the people in public relations that this wasn't a good idea. Putting out the press release. We still have a lot of work to do.

Lights fade to black

END OF SCENE 3

Later that night, back at the lab. Harriet is working at the computer. Aaron enters. She can see that he is very angry.

HARRIET
The meeting didn't go well?

AARON
The meeting didn't go well.

HARRIET
Not tactful enough?

AARON
He wants animal data. I'm not going to wait. Is Marvin still here?

HARRIET
In the store room.

AARON
(Calling out)
Marvin.

(To Harriet)
Let's start getting the data he wants. But maybe we can persuade the dean to expedite matters.

(Calling out)
Marvin. God-damnit, where the hell...

Marvin enters

MARVIN
Did you want me?

AARON
Need you to stay late tonight. I'm going to the Animal Safety Committee tomorrow. We've got to draw up a protocol.

MARVIN
Sure, Aaron.

The red phone rings.

AARON

(Checking the phone ID and then his watch)

Oh, shit.

(Answering the phone)

Hello... I'm so sorry, Witty. I should have called. Things have been crazy around here...I can't leave right now...

(Whitney explains how much Chelsea was counting on seeing him)

Put her on...Hello, dear. I'm still in the lab. I'm sorry I couldn't get home early tonight, but a lot of important things are happening here.

(Chelsea tells him she knows his work is important.)

But you're important, too. Very important. Your mother gave me the good news last night. I'm so proud of you, dear...She said you played Chopin, The Minute Waltz...I can't wait to hear it...Maybe on the weekend... I'd love that, but you'll be in bed by the time I get home tonight. I bought you some flowers. I'll leave them on your bed when I come in to kiss you good night. You'll find them there when you wake up. Good night, precious. Love you.

He hangs up.

AARON (CONT'D)

(to Marvin)

I want three cohorts. Need 18 animals. Macaques.

Lights fade to black

END OF SCENE 4

SCENE 5

Later that night in Aaron's living room. Whitney is furious at Aaron for coming home late.

AARON

I bought her a mix of flowers. I didn't know what was her favorite.

WHITNEY

That doesn't surprise me.

AARON

(Seeing her anger)

I tried to be here.

WHITNEY

You did?

AARON

I guess she was disappointed.

WHITNEY

(Sarcastic)

Do you really think so?

AARON

I'll make it up to her. This weekend. We'll do something special.

WHITNEY

Roses.

AARON

What?

WHITNEY

Those are Chelsea's favorite flowers.

AARON

I'm sure there are some roses in the mix of flowers I got.

WHITNEY

You didn't buy them, did you?

AARON

Gloria did.

WHITNEY

Somehow that doesn't surprise me.

AARON

Hey, give me a break. I got Chelsea flowers to celebrate. Does it matter who actually bought the flowers?

WHITNEY

(relenting)

No.

AARON

It's been a hell of a week.

WHITNEY

All the weeks are difficult.

AARON

One of our patients is dying. Harriet doesn't think he will make it through the night.

WHITNEY

Was he...Is he young?

AARON

They're all young. The kid wanted to see me. To say thanks. They just don't realize that they're not going to benefit from these experiments. We explain it to them, but it doesn't register.

WHITNEY

Did you?

AARON

Did I what?

WHITNEY

See him.

AARON

I told Harriet to take care of it.

WHITNEY

But he wanted to see you.

AARON

You know how I feel about that sort of stuff.

WHITNEY

He's dying. Couldn't you break your rule, this one time?

AARON

We really shouldn't be talking about this. Do we have any leftovers? Anything you can heat up?

WHITNEY

There are leftovers in the microwave you can heat up.

AARON

(Heading out the door)

I'm in a big fight with Bruce. He can be so pig-headed. Especially when his ego is at stake.

He exits

AARON (CONT'D)

(Off stage, yelling)

How much time to heat this stuff?

WHITNEY

(Calling out)

Three minutes.

Aaron enters.

AARON

I've got to convince the dean to intercede in the fight.

(Seeing that Whitney is angry and not interested)

You're still thinking about Tyrone?

WHITNEY

He's not asking for that much.

AARON

I told Harriet to stay with him tonight. What more could I do?

(This doesn't satisfy her)

I've never met him. Talking to a complete stranger for a few minutes isn't going to make it any easier for him.

WHITNEY

It'll make it easier for you years from now when you think about what happened.

AARON

I don't think about those kinds of things.

WHITNEY

You're not as tough as you think you are.

AARON

I'm not his doctor.

WHITNEY

And he's not one of your lab animals.

The microwave beeps. Aaron gets up.

AARON

My dinner is ready.

WHITNEY

(Sarcastic)

Enjoy.

AARON

All right, I'll see him.

WHITNEY

When?

AARON

When I finish eating.

He storms out, gets his dinner and returns.

AARON (CONT'D)

I've got to get the dean's support on changing the protocol. But he doesn't like going against Bruce and the I.R.B. What I've got to do...

The phone rings. Whitney answers it.

WHITNEY

(On the phone)

Hello... Yes, he's right here.

(To Aaron)

It's Harriet.

She hands him the phone.

AARON

(On the phone)

Yes, Harriet... Was he alone?... Good.

He hangs up.

AARON (CONT'D)

Tyrone just died. Harriet was with him.

Lights fade to black.

END OF SCENE 5

SCENE 6

The next afternoon, the dean's office. The dean, a dignified man in his 50s and wearing a perfectly ironed and starched, white lab coat, is seated at his desk, elaborately preparing a pot of tea. Aaron sits opposite him.

LINCOLN

You're just in time for afternoon tea.

AARON

For four years I have been coming into this office. Every time you offer me tea. And every time I refuse. I can see why you're the dean. You are very persistent.

LINCOLN

One of these days you will say yes and discover what you have been missing all these years. So how's the new house? Settling in?

AARON

I've been so tied up in the lab I've hardly been in it.

LINCOLN

Martha wants to have you and Whitney over for a welcome-to-the-neighborhood party. But I think she has ulterior motives. Whitney is the only person who's ever beaten Martha at Scrabble. She wants a rematch.

AARON

Whitney would love that.

LINCOLN

Some very important people have been taking note of all the things you've been accomplishing.

He pours some tea and savors it.

AARON

The work has not been going as well as I expected. I need to change the protocol.

LINCOLN

So you said.

AARON

What we're finding with our study...

LINCOLN

I've asked Bruce to join us. Any changes in protocol must involve the I.R.B.

AARON

I thought we could discuss some of the details before talking to Bruce.

LINCOLN

It's better that we wait. I saw you on TV the other night. Very impressive. Except for that hat. Do you think it might be possible for you not to wear cowboy hats when you're on television, representing the university? We don't want people thinking our scientists are a bunch of cowboys.

AARON

What should I wear?

LINCOLN

A long, white lab coat minus the hat would be nice.

AARON

Why should I wear a lab coat? I never do bench work. You don't either. Why do you wear a lab coat?

LINCOLN

Despite your attire, the documentary was very good.

AARON

The reporter didn't get it right.

LINCOLN

She called the institute the "world's leading AIDS research center." She got it right.

AARON

We're not an AIDS research center.

LINCOLN

You're treating AIDS patients.

AARON

We're using them to study the immune system. They're guinea pigs.

LINCOLN

I do hope you never use that description with reporters.

AARON

(With growing excitement)

What we're doing is much more important than finding another AIDS drug.

LINCOLN

I don't think so.

AARON

(With increasing passion)

The MIG is critical in the early stages of T-cell differentiation.

LINCOLN

Very impressive.

AARON

It reinforces the effect of IL-2 and promotes the differentiation of CD4 cells into T-helper cells.

LINCOLN

Remarkable.

AARON

It controls the growth and proliferation of early progenitor cells in the thymus and bone marrow. It's important in both T-cell and Natural Killer cell activation. I can't sleep at night thinking of what we might accomplish here.

LINCOLN

I rejoice in your excitement, misguided though it might be. A new AIDS drug. That's what's exciting, not natural killer cells and T-helper cells. That's what impresses people who serve on boards that approve building projects like the one we want. AIDS. It's the magic word. It's why you got that NIH grant.

AARON

Of course, everything I've been saying is theoretical. The human trials are critical.

LINCOLN

It's because of AIDS stories on TV that the Burston Foundation is going to give us the grant.

AARON

Our 120-page application doesn't impress them, but TV documentaries do?

LINCOLN

Twenty million is the figure being tossed around. We should get their decision by the end of the year. It will be a very nice Christmas present.

AARON

I'm surprised that philanthropists are so interested in basic science.

LINCOLN

They don't give a damn about basic science. You're a winner. Everyone wants to help you when you're winning.

AARON

And when winners fail?

LINCOLN

We run like hell. You have used that reporter very effectively. But be careful. Reporters are very helpful, but they can turn on you.

The intercom sounds. Lincoln answers it.

LINCOLN (CONT'D)

(Addressing intercom)

Yes, Josie.

JOSIE'S VOICE

(On intercom)

Dr. Sutherland is here.

LINCOLN

(Addressing intercom)

Send him in.

(To Aaron)

Now be nice, Aaron. Don't get all roiled up like you usually do. Bruce is only doing his job.

Bruce enters.

BRUCE

Hello, Lincoln. Aaron.

LINCOLN

Care for some tea?

BRUCE

Yes, I'd love some.

Lincoln pours the tea.

LINCOLN

Aaron wants to change the protocol.

BRUCE

Yes, I know.

(To Aaron)

I understand that one of your test subjects has just died. Is this true?

AARON

We couldn't control the opportunistic infection.

BRUCE

Why didn't you notify us?

AARON

I'm notifying you now.

BRUCE

Notification is required within 24 hours.

AARON

It happened last night.

BRUCE

This death must be investigated.

LINCOLN

Let's hear Aaron out.

AARON

The MIG is being disabled by the other drugs the test subjects are taking. We want to discontinue their AIDS drugs.

LINCOLN

This is the change in protocol you want?

AARON

Yes.

LINCOLN

Is there any reason not to support this, Bruce?

BRUCE

It would put the test subjects at unnecessary risk.

AARON

There's precedent. The San Francisco trials? Patients were taken off the drugs for several months.

LINCOLN

So we wouldn't be breaking new ground, Bruce.

BRUCE

Theoretically the test subjects could have benefitted from the trial in San Francisco. The goal was to minimize side effects.

AARON

Four months off drugs. That's all we need.

BRUCE

You can't deny patients life-saving drugs to test something that's not going to help them.

LINCOLN

Would stopping the drugs for only four months be that dangerous to the patients?

BRUCE

We don't know how dangerous it would be, Lincoln. That's why we can't take the chance.

LINCOLN

(To Aaron)

Just how certain are you that the MIG is being neutralized?

BRUCE

He's basing this all on only one patient.

LINCOLN

Is that true, Aaron?

AARON

Yes.

LINCOLN

No animal studies?

AARON

We've just started them.

LINCOLN

(To Bruce)

Would you feel differently about this, Bruce, if animal studies confirmed that the MIG was being neutralized by these other drugs?

BRUCE

I might.

LINCOLN

(To Aaron)

Then we should wait for the results from your animal trials.

AARON

It's a waste of time.

LINCOLN

Bruce is right. We'd be taking an unacceptable risk with comparatively little justification. We'll all be more comfortable with additional data.

AARON

(Standing)

Then you're insisting on waiting?

LINCOLN

We need more data, Aaron.

AARON

Other labs are working on this.

LINCOLN

Buy you're far ahead of them, aren't you?

AARON

One of the labs is Belmont.

LINCOLN

Belmont?

AARON

Harvard.

LINCOLN

Oh.

AARON

The grapevine says he's on the verge of human trials. Thank you for your time.

Aaron exits.

BRUCE

I'm concerned about this death, Lincoln.

LINCOLN

As well you should be. You're chairman of the I.R.B.

BRUCE

The board will stop the trials until it confirms that MIG was not involved.

LINCOLN

I'm sure you could convince the board that stopping the trials isn't necessary.

BRUCE

It would be the most prudent thing to do.

LINCOLN

More prudent if your only concern is guaranteeing the safety of test subjects. Other things must also be considered, Bruce. Because of the remarkable work Aaron is doing, the government and other funding agencies are eager to support what we're doing.

BRUCE

The death must be investigated.

LINCOLN

And, of course, I want you to investigate it. But there is no reason to stop the trials while you're doing it. Aaron said the patient was killed by the underlying disease, which isn't a surprise. All the test subjects are in the terminal phase of disease.

BRUCE

Aaron is a loose cannon, Lincoln. His luck is going to run out and you'll be burned, if you're not careful.

LINCOLN

In less than four years he's turned the institute into the most respected in the country. It takes more than luck to do something like that.

BRUCE

We were doing very well before you recruited him.

LINCOLN

You did a good job in getting the institute started. I've told you that.

BRUCE

He's always been like this, even when we were in graduate school, always jumping ahead, never taking the time to master details.

LINCOLN

You don't like him, do you?

BRUCE

I wanted to be his friend.

LINCOLN

He's a good scientist, Bruce.

Bruce doesn't respond.

LINCOLN (CONT'D)

You don't think so?

BRUCE

He's the most brilliant scientist I have ever known.

LINCOLN

So let's give him his head. We sure as hell don't want Harvard to beat us on this.

Lights fade to black

END OF SCENE 6

SCENE 7

A few days later, Aaron's lab. Aaron is working at his computer. Harriet enters.

HARRIET

Donna Fairchild is outside, talking to Gloria. What she doing here?

AARON

Update on the MIG work.

HARRIET

I wouldn't mention the problems we're having with the I.R.B.

AARON

If she asks, I'm not going to hide it.

HARRIET

Bruce'll think you're using the media to put pressure on him. Is that what you're doing, Aaron?

AARON

Donna is doing a series on science and how it works.

Aaron's phone rings.

AARON (CONT'D)

(On the phone)

Yes, Gloria... OK, send her in.

(Hangs up)

HARRIET

This could backfire.

Donna enters.

AARON

Ah, it's the very creative journalist, Donna Fairchild.

DONNA

Hello, Aaron. Harriet.

HARRIET

Donna.

(To Aaron)

Remember what I said.

(To Donna)

Nice seeing you again.

Harriet exits.

AARON

I saw your documentary. You have a very imaginative mind.

DONNA

I thought you looked very good, not like a stuffy academic.

AARON

That does seem to be the consensus.

DONNA

Did you like the piece?

AARON

The dean liked it.

DONNA

What about you?

AARON

I didn't realize we were so close to finding a cure for AIDS, especially since we aren't looking for one.

DONNA

Have to show our audience what all this mumbo jumbo science is leading to.

AARON

It does get your attention, saying we're about to cure AIDS.

DONNA

(Taking out note pad and tape recorder)

So, what's happened since our last meeting?

AARON

We think we know why we haven't been getting any responses to MIG. It's being disabled by all the AIDS drugs our patients are taking.

DONNA
So why don't you stop the drugs?

AARON
We'd like to.

DONNA
And?

AARON
The I.R.B. won't let us.

Lights fade to black

END OF SCENE 7

SCENE 8

Later that night, Aaron's living room. He is studying something on his laptop. Whitney is watching him, disappointed that he is more interested in his laptop than her.

WHITNEY

Did you happen to read that report in this week's New England Journal? A shocking finding.

(Waits for a response but doesn't get one)

It was about sex.

(Wits, still no response)

They found an inverse relationship between work and libido. The more men worked, the less libido they had. Men who consistently worked more than 60 hours a week lost it completely. After a while they couldn't get it back. It was gone. Forever. Zip. Even Viagra didn't work.

AARON

Donna Fairchild interviewed me again today. I told her that we think we know why the MIG isn't work. But couldn't check it out. Because of the I.R.B.

WHITNEY

Bruce isn't going to like that.

AARON

Bruce is an asshole.

WHITNEY

Aaron, he used to be our friend.

AARON

In school, when we shared the same vision. We were going to do so much. Now all he sees are limits.

WHITNEY

Bruce is doing a difficult and thankless job.

AARON

Bringing important research to a halt?

WHITNEY

That's what you told Donna Fairchild?

AARON

There's no reason to keep secrets unless you're doing something you don't want people to know about.

(Chuckling)

I'm sure Donna won't sensationalize this. So how was your day today?

WHITNEY

I had coffee with Martha. We played Scrabble. I beat her again.

Aaron is lost in his computer.

WHITNEY (CONT'D)

The recital is Oct. 7. I found out when Chelsea is scheduled to play so you don't have to be there all afternoon. Four PM.

(Realizing he's not hearing her)

I'll send you an e-mail. Don't you think you've done enough work for tonight?

He doesn't respond. Giving up, Whitney gets up, pours a glass of wine and prepares to leave.

WHITNEY (CONT'D)

I have poured myself a glass of wine. I am taking it upstairs where I will soak for a long time in a very hot bath. When I'm finished, I will go to bed and lie between satin sheets, wearing nothing more than perfume dabbed here and there. If I've fallen asleep by the time you get there, don't bother to wake me up.

She starts to leave.

AARON

Wait.

WHITNEY

Yes.

AARON

I'll come with you and scrub your back.

WHITNEY

That would be a good start.

AARON

Just let me finish this.

Good night.

WHITNEY

She exits in a huff.

For a few seconds Aaron stares intently at the laptop screen. Suddenly he realizes what he's done.

AARON

(Calling out)
Wait. Wait. I'm coming.

He rushes out.

Lights fade to black

END OF SCENE 8

SCENE 9

The next day. A large television screen with the image of Donna's face.

DONNA (ON TV SCREEN)

The cure for AIDS may be in sight. Channel 4 has exclusively learned that scientists at the Institute for Immunologic Studies, the world's leading AIDS research center, have developed a revolutionary drug that has produced encouraging results in preliminary trials. Institute director Dr. Aaron Seplow says they're now ready to test this remarkable drug in widespread human trials. That's the good news. The bad news is that the university won't let them.

Screen flickers off and the lights go to black.

END OF SCENE 9

SCENE 10

The next day, Aaron's office/conference room. Harriet is on one of the white phones while the other white phone is ringing.

HARRIET

(On telephone)

The TV was wrong. We don't have a cure for AIDS.

She hangs up and answers the second phone.

HARRIET (CONT'D)

(On telephone)

Institute for Immunologic Studies... We're not expanding the trial at this time... I know. A lot of people don't have much time.

She hangs up. Marvin enters.

HARRIET (CONT'D)

Thank God you're here. The phones won't stop ringing. And Gloria is out running an errand.

She picks up a phone.

HARRIET (CONT'D)

(On telephone)

Institute for Immunologic Studies.

(To Marvin)

Take some of these calls, will you?

(On telephone)

I'm sorry, we're not accepting new patients.

MARVIN

It's amazing how many people watch television.

HARRIET

The phone.

Marvin picks up the other phone.

MARVIN

(On phone)
Institute for Immunologic Studies.

HARRIET

(On phone)
When we do, I'm sure we'll announce it. Thank you for calling.

Harriet hangs up as Marvin mimes talking to a patient on the phone. Aaron enters, flinging his Stetson at the hat stand.

HARRIET (CONT'D)

The phones haven't stopped ringing.

Marvin hangs up. The phones keep ringing.

HARRIET (CONT'D)

That reporter was irresponsible.

AARON

(Pleased)
Donna does have a way with words.

HARRIET

Marvin, will you go look for Gloria. And take the phones off the hook. This ringing is too much.

He exits and shortly afterwards the ringing stops.

HARRIET (CONT'D)

The retraction isn't going to stop the calls, not after what she said.

AARON

What retraction?

HARRIET

Public relations is going to demand one.

AARON

I didn't authorize that.

HARRIET

That reporter practically said we've cured AIDS.

AARON

We do not need a retraction.

Bruce charges in.

BRUCE

That was totally irresponsible of you. Bringing in the reporter like that.

AARON

I didn't bring her in. It was a routine interview as part of the series she's been doing.

BRUCE

Why did you tell her we wouldn't let you test the drug?

AARON

Why shouldn't I have told her. Is it something we're ashamed of?

BRUCE

You could have said no comment.

AARON

She's been interviewing me all year. I couldn't suddenly start saying no comment.

BRUCE

The dean is not going to like this.

AARON

The dean is doing fine.

BRUCE

You've spoken to him today?

AARON

Yes.

BRUCE

What did he say?

AARON

He said he was going to talk to you.

BRUCE

This is outrageous.

Bruce charges out of the office.

HARRIET

Did you orchestrate this, Aaron?

AARON

Public funds support this research. The people have a right to know how we're spending their money.

Clayton appears in the doorway.

CLAYTON

Hello. I'm looking for Dr. Seplow. Is this the right place?

AARON

You shouldn't be in here. Speak to the secretary outside.

CLAYTON

There is no secretary outside.

AARON

(To Harriet)

Where the hell is Gloria?

HARRIET

Running an errand.

CLAYTON

Are you the scientist they were talking about on TV?

AARON

Just what is it that you want?

CLAYTON

I want to volunteer for the trial. My name is Clayton. Clayton Manning.

HARRIET

We're not taking any new patients.

CLAYTON

They said you had this drug that might...

HARRIET

The work is very preliminary. You really shouldn't be in here.

CLAYTON

I have AIDS and I haven't been taking the drugs. That's what they said you were looking for, isn't it? People like that.

HARRIET

Would you please leave?

AARON

When were you diagnosed?

CLAYTON

A while ago. It's pretty far along.

(Lifting T-shirt to show Kaposi marks)

I've got a lot of other symptoms. My doctor says my immunity is shot.

Clayton hands Aaron his medical report. He looks at it and hands the paper to Harriet.

AARON

(Referring to the report)

Your doctor is right.

CLAYTON

My viral load is pretty high.

(Referring to Aaron's look of surprise)

I know all the jargon.

HARRIET

You should be taking the drugs. Why aren't you?

CLAYTON

Made me sick as a dog.

HARRIET

And now you want to take an experimental drug, one that could have even worse side effects?

CLAYTON

Maybe it will work.

AARON

This isn't an AIDS drug.

CLAYTON
The television said...

AARON
We're doing basic research.

CLAYTON
That could lead to an AIDS drug.

AARON
Extremely unlikely.

CLAYTON
But it's possible?

AARON
Theoretically.

CLAYTON
You're afraid I'd sue you.

AARON
What?

CLAYTON
If you say it will help me and it doesn't.

AARON
I don't give a damn about that.

CLAYTON
I want to make a contribution. To science.

HARRIET
Maybe if your doctor tried a different combination of drugs, he might find one you didn't react to.

CLAYTON
None of those drugs are a cure. You live knowing the disease is going to get you in the end and you'll die an awful death.

HARRIET
That's not necessarily true. Not now, with the latest treatments.

CLAYTON
If there's the slightest chance this drug will work, I want to take it.

AARON

Many things must be done before we can expand the trial.

CLAYTON

What you're saying is that you'll be ready when I'm too sick to benefit.

AARON

Leave your name and phone number with the secretary outside.

CLAYTON

There is no secretary outside.

AARON

All right, give it to me. If the situation changes, we might contact you.

CLAYTON

(Writing out the information)

I don't have much time. Before things begin to happen.

AARON

We know that, better than you do.

CLAYTON

I'm very knowledgeable about AIDS. And willing to do whatever is necessary.

He hands Aaron the paper. He shakes their hands and exits.

HARRIET

Why did you take his name? It's giving him false hope.

AARON

One day we might need someone like that.

Lights fade to black

END OF SCENE 10

SCENE 11

That afternoon, the dean's office. Lincoln and Bruce are sipping tea.

BRUCE

This is exceptional tea.

LINCOLN

Formosa Oolong Supreme.

BRUCE

(Smelling the tea)

It has an orange fragrance.

LINCOLN

They call it the champagne of teas. It's hand-picked on small estates in northern Formosa.

BRUCE

Well worth whatever you spent.

They simultaneously sip the tea, lost in the pleasure of the moment.

BRUCE (CONT'D)

(Finally)

So he wants to revisit this issue. I can't see why. We told him we're not changing the protocol.

LINCOLN

He said he has new data.

BRUCE

What new data?

LINCOLN

He didn't say. More tea?

BRUCE

Yes, please.

Lincoln fills Bruce's cup.

LINCOLN

They pick this tea only once a year, when flavor is at its peak.

BRUCE

That explains why it is so good.

They savor some more tea. Aaron appears in the doorway.

AARON

(Seeing Bruce)

Surprise. Surprise.

BRUCE

And it's always good to see you, too, Aaron.

AARON

Hello, Bruce.

LINCOLN

Would you care for some tea, Aaron? Formosa Oolong Supreme.

AARON

Thank you, but no thank you.

(To Bruce)

I just heard that you'll be running in the marathon this year.

BRUCE

I thought I would give it a try.

AARON

You've run the marathon before?

BRUCE

No.

AARON

I hope you finish.

BRUCE

I will. What is this new data you have?

AARON

I have something more important than data. A perfect candidate to test the MIG. He has advanced disease but can't tolerate AIDS drugs. That should take care of your ethical concerns.

BRUCE

He just happened to walk into your laboratory?

AARON

He saw the TV report.

BRUCE

About the drug that can cure AIDS?

AARON

About the university that won't let us test it.

BRUCE

He's volunteering because of that rubbish on TV.

AARON

We told him there was little chance that he would personally benefit.

BRUCE

Even so, he probably...

LINCOLN

I assume that it's been made clear to him that he will not benefit from the experimental drug, that this is merely a way to study the immune system?

AARON

Perfectly clear.

LINCOLN

And he still wants to volunteer?

AARON

He said he wants to make a contribution to science.

BRUCE

It's very unusual to press ahead like this, with a single patient.

AARON

We have an unusual opportunity.

LINCOLN

A significant response even in one patient would be persuasive. Positive results would attract national attention.

BRUCE

But if something goes wrong and we haven't done it by the book, there will be serious negative consequences. It would be far safer to complete the current trial, see how the test subjects tolerate the maximum dose and then decide where to go from there.

LINCOLN

Other labs may be working on this.

BRUCE

(Becoming aware of Lincoln's motives)

Oh.

LINCOLN

Being second doesn't mean a thing.

AARON

You're right, Lincoln. We're so far ahead of Harvard. It would be a shame to lose our lead. Don't you agree, Bruce?

LINCOLN

What do you want to do with the volunteer?

AARON

We'll give him the maximum dose of MIG with a booster shot one week later. If it's working, we should see an improvement in immunologic parameters within a couple of weeks. A significant response should persuade the I.R.B. to approve discontinuing anti-retrovirals in all our other patients. If there is no response, we'll wait to see what happens with our animal studies.

LINCOLN

That seems like a reasonable plan, don't you think, Bruce?

BRUCE

If you think so, Lincoln.

LINCOLN

More tea?

BRUCE

Yes, please.

Lights fade to black

END OF SCENE 11

SCENE 12

A little while later. Aaron's home. Aaron and Whitney are having before-dinner drinks.

WHITNEY

We got a call from Elio today.

AARON

Is he in town?

WHITNEY

Called from Modena. To congratulate you.

AARON

For what?

WHITNEY

Curing AIDS. It's all over the TV in Italy.

AARON

(laughing)

I better give him a call.

WHITNEY

He was inviting you to finish the MIG work in his lab so he could share the Nobel with you.

AARON

I do love that guy.

Aaron exits and comes back with two glasses and a bottle of champagne.

WHITNEY

What's that for?

AARON

Today we got the OK to admit Patient Zero Zero One.

WHITNEY

I hope this goes well, Aaron.
(Holding her glass high)
To Zero Zero One.

They toast and drink.

AARON

(Indicating his glass)
If everything goes the way it's supposed to, we'll have to start stocking up on champagne.

WHITNEY

Why don't we take Elio up on his offer?

AARON

To work in his lab?

WHITNEY

No, silly. To visit him in Italy. It would be a shot in the arm, for the whole family.

AARON

This isn't a good time for that.

WHITNEY

I don't mean today or tomorrow. After this trial.

AARON

Let's see how it goes and then we'll talk about it.

WHITNEY

No, Aaron.

AARON

What do you mean no?

WHITNEY

It's not something we will talk about. It's something we have to do. I'm worried. I'm worried about what's happening to us, what's happening to Chelsea.

AARON

Everything is fine.

WHITNEY

All we ever do is work. It's the only think in our lives. I want to sit in the patio of some Italian villa with you and sip lemoncello and decide what's really important in our lives.

AARON

We know what's important.

WHITNEY

When was the last time you saw Chelsea?

AARON

I see her every day.

WHITNEY

Oh, come on.

AARON

I kiss her every night.

WHITNEY

When was the last time you saw her awake?

AARON

I don't know. Just the other day.

WHITNEY

Two days before she won the competition. That was the last time. Almost a month ago, Aaron. That's not right. You're her father and she needs you.

AARON

Important things are happening in the lab.

WHITNEY

Important things are happening with your daughter.

AARON

Like what?

WHITNEY

She's growing up. And you're not there to even witness it let alone share the wonder. Always what's happening in the lab gets your attention first. You have to decide what's more important, your work or your daughter.

AARON

Don't ask me to make a Sophie's choice.

WHITNEY

You've made a Sophie's choice. I'm asking you -- I'm begging you -- to reconsider the choice you have made.

AARON

There is so much to accomplish. I know you are making a sacrifice. And God knows poor Chelsea is. But the potential good from what we are working on is enormous. It would be wrong if I didn't give it everything I could.

WHITNEY

Chelsea is your daughter.

AARON

We might be on the verge of finding ways to manipulate the immune system. This could lead to cures for all sorts of diseases, save untold numbers of lives. Would it be right to put our needs -- even Chelsea's -- ahead of that?

WHITNEY

But, Aaron...

AARON

It would be wrong.

Lights fade to black

END OF SCENE 12

SCENE 13

Early that evening, a public health office with posters referring to AIDS, safe sex and related public health matters. Aaron is sitting angrily on a straight-back chair with his white Stetson on his lap. He looks at his watch, anxiously debating whether he should leave or wait. He decides to leave, gets up and heads for the door. Todd, 25, enters. He is dressed in blue jeans and a sweat shirt that says "AIDS NOT LOVE KILLS." He carries papers.

TODD

Hey, where do you think you're going?

AARON

I can't wait here all day. I'm late, for a recital.

TODD

This is a hell of a lot more important than a recital.

AARON

Give me the damn test results. I've got to go, Mr...
(bending forward to read his name tag)
...Buster

TODD

Call me Todd.

AARON

Mr. Buster.

TODD

You sound like you are angry with me, Marvin. Are you angry with me, Marvin?

AARON

Pissed off is what I am. They wouldn't give me the results over the phone. I think I know why.

TODD

You do?

AARON

I tested positive, didn't I?

Yes, I'm afraid you did.

TODD

You've done a western blot?

AARON

Todd is surprised by Aaron's obvious medical sophistication.

AARON (CONT'D)

(Impatient)

You've confirmed the results?

TODD

Yes, of course. We're not in the business of scaring the hell out of people for no reason. You're HIV positive. There's no question about it.

(Seeing Aaron's concern)

It's natural to be scared. But we might have caught it in an early stage.

Aaron shakes his head.

You're having symptoms?

TODD (CONT'D)

Thrush.

AARON

We have drugs. Do you know when you were infected?

TODD

Yes.

Todd waits for an elaboration but Aaron is preoccupied with the grim news.

You are sexually active?

TODD

I'm married.

AARON

Your wife must be tested.

TODD

AARON

I know that, for Christ sake.

TODD

Do you have access to a doctor? A doctor who is familiar with this disease.

AARON

I have access to several doctors, who are familiar with this disease.

TODD

Then you should see one of them as soon as possible. This isn't something you should ignore.

AARON

(Getting up)

I'm late for my daughter's recital.

TODD

We offer anxiety counseling. Perhaps you would...

AARON

I don't need counseling.

Aaron heads for the door.

TODD

Marvin.

Aaron turns and Todd goes to him and offers him a card.

TODD (CONT'D)

This is a very good support group. They have meetings. People dealing with the same things you'll be dealing with. And they have a 24-hour hot line.

AARON

Why a hot line?

TODD

In case you have trouble sleeping.

He takes the card and heads for the door, but stops and turns back to Todd.

AARON

Thank you, Todd. You have been very kind.

CURTAIN ACT I

END OF ACT I

ACT II

SCENE 1

Later that evening. Aaron's home. Aaron and Whitney enter, having just returned from the recital.

WHITNEY

(Very angry)

You missed half of her recital, Aaron. Half of it. There's no excuse for that.

Aaron goes to the bar table and pours himself a stiff drink.

WHITNEY (CONT'D)

She could see me there, sitting next to an empty seat. What was so much more important in that laboratory of yours that you missed your daughter's first recital?

He drinks without responding.

WHITNEY (CONT'D)

Don't we matter at all to you?

AARON

We have to talk.

WHITNEY

You're damn right we have to talk.

AARON

There was an accident in the laboratory. Eight years ago.

WHITNEY

Again it's all about you and your work. Can't you for a moment think about...

AARON

It involved me.

WHITNEY

(Stopped in her tracks)

What kind of accident?

AARON

A needle scratch. With infected material.

WHITNEY

You never said anything.

AARON

I didn't want to worry you needlessly.

WHITNEY

You're worrying me now, Aaron.

AARON

I just had myself tested. That's why I was late for the recital. I was in a clinic, getting the results.

WHITNEY

Oh, shit.

AARON

My people are working with infected material all the time without any problems. I walk into the lab and make a mistake.

WHITNEY

The test results were...

(Waits for him to finish the sentence)

AARON

Positive. I should have done something. But I didn't think the scratch was anything.

WHITNEY

You're working with infected material and you don't think a needle puncture is anything important?

AARON

It wasn't a needle puncture. I scratched myself. It didn't even draw blood. At least I didn't think it did.

WHITNEY

Goddamn, what the hell were you doing working with that stuff? You don't do bench work any more. Isn't that why you have all those people working for you? I never wanted you to work with that fucking virus. I was afraid of something like this happening. But I kept telling myself, not Aaron. He's too smart to do something stupid.

AARON

The needle slipped, Whitney. The needle slipped. You're going to have to get tested.

WHITNEY

Oh, Jesus.

AARON

You're not having symptoms. That's a good sign. You aren't having symptoms, are you?

WHITNEY

What kind of symptoms would I be having?

AARON

Headaches. Night sweats. Swollen lymph nodes. Sore throat.

WHITNEY

I've had colds. At least I thought they were colds.

AARON

I'm sure those were just colds.

WHITNEY

Why are you so sure?

AARON

The only way to be completely sure is to be tested.

WHITNEY

Tested at the Institute?

AARON

Better to go to an anonymous testing center.

WHITNEY

You're having symptoms? Is that why you got tested after all this time?

AARON

Thrush. It's all over my mouth.

WHITNEY

Oh, my God.

AARON

The drugs today are very good. Look.

He brings out a large pill bottle from his pocket, takes out a single pill and shows it to Whitney

AARON (CONT'D)

The AIDS drug cocktail, packed into a single pill. People aren't dying like they used to.

WHITNEY

They're not being cured either.

(Sudden realization)

What about Chelsea? If I am infected, if we should both... Who'll take care of her?

AARON

No, Witty. We'll go crazy dreaming up worst case scenarios. After you're tested we'll know what to do.

WHITNEY

Yes, yes. You're right. I can't let myself think about what could happen.

AARON

It's been a long day and I'm exhausted. Let's go to bed.

He goes to the door.

WHITNEY

It's only 9 o'clock.

AARON

I want to hold you.

WHITNEY

One little scratch and everything might be ending.

She goes to the bar table, fills her glass with scotch and sits down to drink it.

AARON

Witty?

WHITNEY

I'll be up in a little while.

AARON

I'm so sorry.

He exits. Whitney stays in her chair, looking sadly ahead, drinking the scotch.

Lights fade to black

END OF SCENE 1

SCENE 2

One week later, Aaron's office/conference room. Clayton, looking very happy, is sitting at the conference table. Harriet comes rushing in with legal papers.

HARRIET

I'm sorry, I was printing out some material for our meeting, but as usual there was a computer glitch.

CLAYTON

You wouldn't have forced me to make this long trip just to give me more bad news, would you?

HARRIET

We're moving ahead with the next phase of our research much faster than I thought. We can offer you a spot in our next trial.

CLAYTON

(Looking heavenward)

Thank you, God.

HARRIET

We'd like you to come in next Monday for a bunch of tests. It'll mean an overnight stay in the hospital. If everything checks out, we'll bring you back a week later and give you the MIG. You still haven't taken any AIDS drugs, have you?

CLAYTON

I told you I can't.

HARRIET

Are you still certain that you want to volunteer for this trial?

CLAYTON

Absolutely.

HARRIET

(Handing Clayton the papers)

This is a full description of what the trial will involve and the possible risks.

CLAYTON

The infamous informed consent.

HARRIET

Yes.

CLAYTON

(Taking out a pen and indicating the bottom of the last page)

This is where I sign?

HARRIET

You haven't read what it says.

CLAYTON

I don't have to.

Aaron appears in the doorway and watches.

HARRIET

You should know all the possible risks before volunteering for a trial like this.

CLAYTON

There's nothing written in here that would stop me from going ahead.

He starts to sign, but Harriet stops him with her hand.

HARRIET

We cannot accept you if you don't read the informed consent and understand what it means.

AARON

(Entering the room)

Dr. Gates. Mr. Manning.

HARRIET

I was just telling Mr. Manning...

CLAYTON

Call me Clayton.

HARRIET

...that he must read the informed consent form before signing it.

AARON

I empathize with you, Clayton. It's all a lot of legal gobbledegook. I don't even understand half of it myself. I will tell you what you must know. This is a totally new type of drug. You will be putting yourself at risk.

You will certainly experience side effects like nausea, fever and chills. And you could face more serious side effects. The drug could kill you. So far no human and no animal has had a negative reaction to this drug but we have never given this high a dose before. You will not personally benefit from this drug, but your participation may help us to better understand the immune system.

CLAYTON

What are the odds that something bad will happen?

AARON

We can't put a figure on it. We think the odds are low.

CLAYTON

You don't have to convince me.

AARON

I am not trying to convince you, Clayton. I am merely presenting the facts so that you can make an informed decision.

CLAYTON

All right.

He signs the papers.

CLAYTON (CONT'D)

Is that it?

HARRIET

(Not happy)

We'll see you Monday.

CLAYTON

I feel great, wonderful. And the treatment hasn't even started.

He eagerly shakes Aaron's and Harriet's hands and exits.

HARRIET

He should have read the consent form.

AARON

I told him everything he needs to know.

HARRIET

You didn't tell him about everything that could go wrong.

AARON

Listing every possible risk isn't helpful. If we did that with aspirins no one would ever take them. Trust. That's the important thing. And we should earn it, not pass the buck with informed consent forms.

Marvin enters.

MARVIN

The pizza's arrived.

AARON

I'm starving.

Aaron exits.

MARVIN

Was that the guy we're going to do?

HARRIET

Who?

MARVIN

The man who almost kissed me in the hallway.

HARRIET

Yeah, that sounds like him. Clayton. Clayton Manning.

MARVIN

Kind of young.

HARRIET

Twenty-five.

MARVIN

He looks a lot younger. It's going to be hard not talking to him.

HARRIET

Aaron's been bugging you again?

MARVIN

They all want to talk. And they all have questions. How can Aaron not care about these people?

HARRIET

Not care? He cares too much.

The red phone rings and Marvin answers it.

MARVIN

(On phone)

Vector Lab...I'm sorry, I can't understand what you're saying...Is this Mrs. Seplow?...I'll get him right away.

He puts the phone down and heads for the door.

MARVIN (CONT'D)

(To Harriet)

It's Mrs. Seplow. She's crying so hard I could hardly understand her.

(Calling out from the doorway)

Aaron, you're wife's on the phone. It sounds important.

Lights fade to black

END OF SCENE 2

SCENE 3

A little while later, the Seplow living room. Whitney is sitting in front of the phone, near tears, staring at it. Aaron comes rushing in.

AARON

Witty.

She goes to him sobbing. He hugs her.

WHITNEY

All they did was leave a message on the machine. Told me to call them.

AARON

Where's Chelsea?

WHITNEY

I left her at mom's. I didn't want her to be here if...

She breaks down crying.

AARON

Let's take this one step at a time. Call them now.

WHITNEY

It's not right that they just leave a message on your answering machine like that. Don't they realize they're scaring the hell out of people?

AARON

Did they indicate anything in the message?

WHITNEY

Nothing. They didn't even say who they were. "Your results are in. Please call." That's all they said.

AARON

They would have told you to come in if the test results were positive

WHITNEY

That's what they're going to tell me when I call back.

AARON

Call them, Witty.

WHITNEY

What'll we do if it is positive? Who'll take care of Chelsea when... My mom is too old and I can't ask...

AARON

One step at a time.

WHITNEY

She's only 11.

AARON

We'll be here for her whatever happens. We'll be here for her graduation. And her wedding. And the grandchildren.

WHITNEY

I know I'm infected. That virus has been growing inside you for eight years. Every time we made love you were exposing me to that god-damn virus. Why didn't you get tested after you scratched yourself? You know how dangerous...

AARON

I'll never forgive myself for putting you at risk like this.

The phone rings. They tense but don't answer it. They wait for the ringing to stop. Finally it does.

AARON (CONT'D)

Make the call.

Whitney picks up the phone, finds the number on a scrap of paper and dials.

WHITNEY

(On the phone, responding to recorded instructions)

One...Two...One.

(To Aaron)

I can't believe this. I'm calling about something like this and taking orders from a recorded voice.

(On the phone)

What?...Is this a real person?...I'm calling to get test results...Yes, someone called and left a message on my answering machine...Three, seven, two, one, eight.

(To Aaron)

It's awful the way they do this.

(On phone)

Three, seven, two, one, eight. Yes, that's the number they gave me. What?

She hangs up sobbing. Aaron takes her in his arms.

WHITNEY (CONT'D)

It was negative.

Lights fade to black

END OF SCENE 3

SCENE 4

One week later in the clinical research center. Clayton is in bed and Marvin has just finished drawing blood and is preparing to leave.

CLAYTON

You don't talk much.

MARVIN

Nothing much to say.

CLAYTON

There's always chit chat. Isn't there?

Marvin doesn't reply.

CLAYTON (CONT'D)

Are you a real doctor or a techie?

MARVIN

Real doctor.

CLAYTON

I studied medicine. Nurse practitioner. Didn't want to be a doctor. Doctors don't spend much time with patients any more. They don't even talk to them.

MARVIN

You're a nurse practitioner?

CLAYTON

Dropped out of nursing school. Got a B.A. in fine arts.

MARVIN

Why did you drop out?

CLAYTON

I preferred to sit in my sailboat and sketch sunsets.

MARVIN

What kind of sailboat do you have?

CLAYTON

Twenty-seven-foot O'Day.

MARVIN

I have an old 29-foot Conyplex. A Contest.

CLAYTON

Where do you sail?

MARVIN

Chesapeake Bay. And you?

CLAYTON

Long Island Sound. Do you have a picture of your boat?

MARVIN

Lots of them.

CLAYTON

Would you bring one in?

At first Marvin is reluctant to get involved, but relents.

MARVIN

(Finally)

Sure, why not?

Harriet enters, carrying a tray with a syringe and a styrofoam container filled with ice and a small vial. On the container is written MIG. Clayton sees Harriet and the container with apprehension.

CLAYTON

The moment of truth.

HARRIET

The moment of truth.

MARVIN

I'll bring the picture in tomorrow.

Marvin exits

CLAYTON

(Calling after him)
Don't forget.
(To Harriet)
So this is it.

HARRIET

Yep.

CLAYTON

Just like getting a flu shot.

HARRIET

It's quite a bit more than that.

CLAYTON

Feels like an anti-climax after all the things I had to do to get this stuff.
(Indicating the styrofoam container)
It would be more dramatic if you used dry ice. Lots of smoke pouring from the little box that contains the magic brew.

HARRIET

You're in a very good mood.

CLAYTON

She whistled a happy tune in the King and I when she was scared. I use wit.

HARRIET

Are you scared?

CLAYTON

Truth be known, I'm terrified. I know your buddy...

HARRIET

My buddy?

CLAYTON

Dr. Seplow. I know he thinks this stuff is safe, but, hell, we all know that there's a risk with any new drug.

HARRIET

Especially with a totally new type of drug.

CLAYTON

It worries me the way you guys keep saying "totally new type."

HARRIET

The drug doesn't kill the virus, like antibiotics kill bacteria. It forces your immune system to kill the HIV. This was all explained in the informed consent. You should have read it.

CLAYTON

My bad.

HARRIET

If you're having second thoughts about this.

CLAYTON

I'm not having second thoughts.

HARRIET

All right, then.

Harriet starts to position the needle. Clayton stops her with another question.

CLAYTON

So what could go wrong?

HARRIET

A lot of things.

CLAYTON

Your list of concerns, what's at the top?

HARRIET

We'll be forcing your immune system to work over time. It's theoretically possible that it will attack your liver or kidneys. Worst case scenario, it could destroy the organs and kill you.

CLAYTON

You're a lot more serious than Dr. Seplow.

HARRIET

What we're doing is very serious.

CLAYTON

You know what my fantasy is, Harriet? You don't mind if I call you Harriet, do you?

HARRIET

Harriet is fine.

CLAYTON

My fantasy is that this drug does make me very sick. I see myself sweating with an awful fever. I'm delirious. And you guys are gathered around my bed, afraid I'm about to die. But during the night, the fever breaks and when I wake up in the morning the HIV is gone. I'm cured.

HARRIET

You should expect a high fever.

CLAYTON

As bad as I imagine?

HARRIET

You're going to feel like you've been hit with a very bad case of the flu. Fever. Chills. Maybe nausea. You have to be prepared for this, Clayton. It's going to be a little rough.

CLAYTON

You're not very big on reassurance, are you?

HARRIET

I want you to know what you might be getting yourself into.

CLAYTON

I don't want to die a hero's death. But this thing inside of me is going to kill me if I don't do something. Maybe your drug is the miracle I'm hoping for.

HARRIET

It's a long shot, Clayton, a very, very long shot.

CLAYTON

Without the miracle drug, my living to an old age is a long shot. Dr. Seplow's bedside manner isn't worth a damn. I don't get the sense that he liked me much.

HARRIET

He's like that with everyone. He's always inside his head, working out ideas.

CLAYTON

What do you think of him?

HARRIET

He's good.

CLAYTON

How good?

HARRIET

Very.

CLAYTON

You can't ask for more than that. Let's get on with this.

Harriet takes the vial from the ice, fills the syringe and goes to Clayton.

HARRIET

A little pinch.

She injects the vector into his midriff.

CLAYTON

That wasn't so bad. So now I get a real big fever and wake up cured.

Lights fade to black

Lights come up on the room in the CRC the next day. Clayton is covered with blankets, which he throws off. He is moaning and breathing heavily.

CLAYTON (CONT'D)

Oh, God.

He moans. Harriet enters

CLAYTON (CONT'D)

Never felt this bad in my life. Got a splitting headache.

HARRIET

I'll have the nurse give you something.

CLAYTON

I'm burning up.

HARRIET

You have a very high fever. Hundred and three.

CLAYTON

Has something gone wrong? I shouldn't be feeling this bad, should I?

HARRIET

You're doing fine.

CLAYTON

You've got to be kidding. Oh God, my head.

Lights fade to black.

Lights come up on the CRC the next day. Marvin is drawing blood.

CLAYTON (CONT'D)

You here again?

MARVIN

I'm almost finished. There.

He starts packing up his equipment.

CLAYTON

What day is this?

MARVIN

Day three.

CLAYTON

I'm so cold.

MARVIN

The chills shouldn't last much longer. I'll see you tomorrow.

CLAYTON

Yeah, sure.

Marvin exits

CLAYTON (CONT'D)

(Calling out)

Nurse. I'm freezing. Can I get another blanket?

He shivers some more as the lights fade to black.

Lights come up on the CRC, which is dark. Clayton is bent over a bedpan, throwing up.

Lights fade to black.

Lights come on a brightly lit CRC. Clayton is sitting up in bed while Marvin gets a blood sample from him.

CLAYTON (CONT'D)

Are you going to leave any for me?

MARVIN

You're looking pretty good today.

CLAYTON

You guys didn't tell me it would be six days of feeling like shit.

MARVIN

I'm glad you're feeling better.

CLAYTON

Even better than before I got the injection. You think maybe that stuff has started working already?

Marvin says nothing.

CLAYTON (CONT'D)

Placebo effect. That's what you're thinking, isn't it?

MARVIN

Placebo effect.

CLAYTON

How old are you?

MARVIN

Thirty-one.

CLAYTON

You've been in school and studying most of your life?

MARVIN

Pretty much.

CLAYTON

How many of those 31 years.

MARVIN

Including pre-school?

CLAYTON

Yeah.

MARVIN

Twenty-seven years.

CLAYTON

You whipped that figure out pretty fast.

MARVIN

I think about it a lot.

Finishes sticking Clayton and starts to pack up his stuff.

CLAYTON

Why do you think about it a lot?

MARVIN

Sometimes I wonder if it was worth it.

CLAYTON

What are you thinking now?

MARVIN

It's worth it.

CLAYTON

When did you know you wanted to be a doctor?

MARVIN

When I was a kid, playing with a toy medical kit. I liked listening to my heart with the stethoscope.

CLAYTON

I never knew what I wanted to be. I kept saying to myself, I'll figure that out tomorrow. AIDS made me realize that I didn't have that many tomorrows to screw around. Why'd you become a doctor?

MARVIN

The intellectual challenges, I guess. To help people.

(Clayton gives him a you've-got-to-be-kidding look)

No, really.

CLAYTON

I've bummed around most of my life. Did a lot of drugs. A lot of rough sex.

(Indicating being in a hospital bed)

Obviously a little too much rough sex. If this drug of yours works, I'm going to get on the ball. Make a career choice. Yes, that's what I'm going to do. If I beat this thing.

MARVIN

What career are you thinking of?

CLAYTON

I'll become a doctor. Just kidding. You never brought me a picture of your sailboat.

MARVIN

I'll bring it tomorrow.

CLAYTON

Tomorrow I get the booster shot.

MARVIN

At 8 AM.

CLAYTON

Is it going to make me sick again?

MARVIN

Nothing like before. Some people have no bad reactions at all.

CLAYTON

Do you think it's going to work? I mean, do you think there's a chance it'll knock out the HIV?

MARVIN

This isn't an AIDS drug. The purpose of this study is to...

CLAYTON

You people keep telling me that. But if MIG can restore my immune system, shouldn't it knock out the AIDS? I mean, isn't that what AIDS is -- a screwed-up immune system?

MARVIN

It might help, a little, theoretically.

CLAYTON

Then it might save my life, theoretically. I hope you're right about the booster shot. I never want to get sick like that again.

MARVIN

You're going to do just fine, Clayton.

(With a hint of concern)

You're going to do just fine.

Lights fade to black

END OF SCENE 4

SCENE 5

The next morning, Aaron's office. Marvin is seated at the table with a framed photograph of a sailboat and going through papers. Harriet enters, dishevelled and exhausted, almost in a state of shock. She plops down in a seat next to Marvin. He studies her, but she says nothing.

MARVIN

(finally)
You've been here all night?

HARRIET

(dazed)
No.

MARVIN

Are you OK? Harriet?

HARRIET

He's dead. I can't get hold of Aaron. He's not answering his cell.

MARVIN

Clayton's dead? What happened?

HARRIET

Where the hell is Aaron?

MARVIN

Running in the marathon.

HARRIET

There was no warning.

Aaron bursts through the door.

AARON

Three hours, 46 minutes and 12 seconds. What do you think of that time? Bruce dropped out after two hours.

(Seeing the concerned looks)
Something is wrong.

HARRIET

Clayton's dead. I'd just given him the booster shot and was halfway down the hall when the monitors went off. I ran back to his room and he was struggling to breathe. He was blue. Couldn't talk. His blood pressure plummeted and his heart stopped.

AARON

God-damnit.

HARRIET

I called a code. Intubated him.

AARON

Anaphylaxis.

HARRIET

He didn't respond to epinephrine.

AARON

If not anaphylaxis, what?

HARRIET

He got a lot of MIG.

AARON

It's not an overdose.

HARRIET

We can't rule it out.

AARON

Then why didn't this happen last week when you first injected him? No, this is a classic case of anaphylaxis. Did you get post-mortem blood?

HARRIET

Yes, of course.

AARON

How many people already know about this?

HARRIET

Everyone in the CRC, of course. And I guess everyone they talked to, which means just about everyone.

AARON

Damn.

(To Marvin)

Review all the animal data again. Look for anything suggesting allergic reactions.

MARVIN

There weren't any reactions.

AARON

We might have missed something because we weren't looking for it. Contamination or drug mix-up could be another explanation. Confirm that the vector Harriet injected is from the same production lot and seed stock as the one given to all our other patients. And inject some animals. Also contact pathology for an autopsy. Tell them I want a pathologist who knows anaphylaxis. Harold Brownstein. See if we can get Brownstein.

(To Harriet)

It can't be dose related. Drugs don't cross thresholds and instantly become lethal after appearing totally benign at all other dose levels.

HARRIET

The dose he got was three times more than we've ever given before.

AARON

(exploding)

I know that.

HARRIET

Of course you do. I didn't mean to suggest that...

AARON

(Conciliatory)

You're right. We have to include overdose as one possible explanation. Double check patient charts for dose-related reactions. I don't care how minor.

HARRIET

His parents will be here this afternoon.

AARON

You called them?

HARRIET

Yes, of course.

AARON

And they're coming here?

HARRIET
Yes.

AARON
Why?

HARRIET
Their only son just died.

AARON
There's no reason to come here.

HARRIET
They're hurting and they're confused. They said they don't know why God would do something like this. They want to know why their son was in the trial. They think we were experimenting on him.

AARON
Of course we were experimenting on him.

HARRIET
You've got to see them.

AARON
You see them.

HARRIET
(Firmly)
No, Aaron.

AARON
(Recoiling from her tone)
What?

HARRIET
They want to see you. Not your proxy. It's not unreasonable. Their son died in our experiment.

AARON
(Stunned by the rebuke, finally)
OK, I'll see them.

HARRIET
I'll send them up here when they arrive.

AARON

No, not here. I'll come down there.

HARRIET

Where will you talk to them?

AARON

In the chapel.

The phone rings.

MARVIN

(Answering the phone)

Yes, Gloria... What does she want?... Oh...Just a minute.

(To Aaron)

There's a reporter on the phone.

AARON

I can't talk to Donna now.

MARVIN

It's not Donna. It's the Associated Press.

AARON

What the hell do they want?

MARVIN

They know about the death.

AARON

Already?

MARVIN

The reporter wants to talk to you about it.

AARON

I have no comment.

MARVIN

(On phone)

Aaron has no comment. .

Marvin hangs up. Aaron thinks for a moment and then, with considerable resignation, calls out.

AARON

(Calling out)

Hey, Gloria, get me the dean.

(To Marvin)

What the hell are those reporters doing, living in the CRC? We can't do a god-damn thing without some reporter writing a story that exaggerates everything.

The phone rings. Aaron picks it up.

AARON (CONT'D)

(On phone)

Yes, Gloria...Hello, Lincoln, something's come up.

Lights fade to black

END OF SCENE 5

SCENE 6

That night, the Seplow living room. Aaron and Whitney are talking.

AARON

They didn't know he had AIDS. I don't think they even realized their son was gay.

WHITNEY

You told them he was gay?

AARON

No, of course not. I kept talking about how he wanted to make a contribution.

WHITNEY

I know it was difficult, talking to them like that.

AARON

They didn't want him to come to the city. They said they told him bad things happened in cities. They were hoping he'd find a nice woman to marry and move back home to make a family. Imagine being so out of touch with your kid that you'd think he'd want to do that.

WHITNEY

You spent a lot of time with them.

AARON

I didn't want to know all those things. This was Harriet's job, not mine. Where's Chelsea?

WHITNEY

At Brian's.

AARON

I'll go pick her up.

WHITNEY

She was going to stay overnight.

AARON

I want her to be home tonight.

WHITNEY

I wouldn't have let her stay if I knew you'd be home so early.

AARON

Why don't we all go to that Italian restaurant we used to love? Chelsea would like that.

WHITNEY

She really prefers McDonald's.

AARON

McDonald's?

WHITNEY

I told you that.

AARON

All right, we'll go to McDonald's and celebrate.

WHITNEY

Celebrate what?

AARON

I don't know. We'll all talk about it, pick something to celebrate.

WHITNEY

I'll go get her.

AARON

No, I'll do it. Give us a chance to talk about music and things like that.

WHITNEY

That would be nice.

AARON

I guess McDonald's isn't BYOB.

WHITNEY

I don't think it's ever been tried.

AARON

Shall we wine?

WHITNEY

I think we better stick with the French fries.

Oh, well.

AARON

He exits

Lights fade to black

END OF SCENE 6

SCENE 7

The next day, Aaron's office. Donna and Aaron are seated at the table.

DONNA

Why the hell didn't you call me?

AARON

We were busy trying to find out what killed him.

DONNA

Not too busy to talk to the AP.

AARON

They called me.

DONNA

How did they know about it?

AARON

I don't know. I really don't have time to talk to you about this right now.

DONNA

You have time to talk to me when you've got something that makes you look good.

AARON

I've got work to do.

He stands and prepares to leave.

DONNA

I still have questions.

AARON

Well, I don't have any answers for you.

He exits

DONNA

(Calling after him)

They say there was no informed consent. Is that true?

Lights fade to black

END OF SCENE 7

SCENE 8

That night, TV screen with the image of Donna's face comes up.

DONNA

(On television)

Clayton Manning, the brave young man who died two days ago, one week after a deadly, untried, experimental drug was injected into his system, didn't know the risks he was taking when he volunteered to test the unproven drug. A Channel 4 investigation reveals that Manning had not read the informed consent form detailing the dangers he was about to confront.

TV screen goes black. TV screen in a different place on the stage comes up with Donna's image.

DONNA (CONT'D)

(On television)

It is now two weeks since the tragic death of Clayton Manning and the Institute for Immunologic Studies still cannot explain why the courageous volunteer died. Channel 4's continuing investigation of the death reveals that many researchers in the Institute thought that more safety testing should have been done before undertaking this trial.

Screen fades to black. Other screen comes up, with Donna's image.

DONNA (CONT'D)

(On television)

The people in Elkton, Maryland, a small fishing village on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay, mourn the loss of Clayton Manning, who died last month in an ill-conceived experiment with a highly experimental, lethal drug. Elkton is where Clayton was born 25 years ago. Art was the subject he most liked in high school and art is what took him to New York City and his fateful encounter with Dr. Aaron Seplow.

Screen fades to black.

Lights come up on dean's office. Lincoln, who looks very concerned, is watching Donna on TV.

DONNA (CONT'D)

(On television)

The Senate Special Committee on Medical Research, headed by Senator William Hastings of New York, announced today that it would be conducting an investigation of the Institute for Immunologic Studies and the Food and Drug Administration to determine why they haven't responded more vigorously to the death of Clayton Manning. Senator Hastings ordered the investigation four days after a Channel 4 investigation revealed that...

The dean shuts off the television. He sits back and thinks about what must be done. Sadly he realizes he must distance himself from Aaron. The intercom sounds.

LINCOLN

(Pressing intercom button)

Yes, Josie.

JOSIE'S VOICE

(On intercom)

Dr. Seplow is on one. He wants to set up a meeting.

Lincoln doesn't reply, not sure what to do.

JOSIE'S VOICE (CONT'D)

Dr. Masterman?

LINCOLN

(To intercom)

Tell Dr. Seplow I'm busy.

JOSIE'S VOICE

(On intercom)

He said any time today.

LINCOLN

Tell him I'm not available.

He hangs up sadly.

Lights fade to black

END OF SCENE 8

SCENE 9

One week later, Aaron's office. Aaron is seated at the table with an investigator from the Office of Human Research Protection.

HANCOCK

I'll need a list of all the people who worked on the MIG.

AARON

This is a waste of taxpayers' money.

HANCOCK

I also want their contact information -- phone extensions, e-mail addresses and where I can find them. And I want the protocols on all the trials leading up to and including this trial. Both animal and human.

AARON

You should be investigating the damn drug companies.

HANCOCK

I'll need this by the end of the day.

AARON

How long is this witch hunt going to take?

HANCOCK

Depends on what we find.

AARON

I don't want my people being tied up with this nonsense. We have work to do.

HANCOCK

Thank you for your time, Dr. Seplow.

Harriet appears in the doorway. Hancock exits, pushing by Harriet.

HARRIET

The man from the FDA?

AARON

Actually he is from the Office of Human Research Protection.

HARRIET

There really is such an agency?

AARON

Apparently there is.

HARRIET

Doesn't seem very pleasant.

AARON

He's going to interview you, you know? He'll want to know who decided to do what when. You should make it clear that I was the one who made all the final decisions.

HARRIET

But that's not true.

AARON

We've got to minimize the collateral damage.

Cross fade to limbo area elsewhere on the stage. Hancock is talking to Marvin, taking notes and recording what he is saying.

HANCOCK

Why did he decide to start this trial before the first one was completed?

MARVIN

Dr. Seplow didn't think continuing the trial would provide any useful information. It had become obvious that the AIDS drugs were stopping the MIG.

HANCOCK

The maximum dose of the MIG was given to only six monkeys. Is that correct?

MARVIN

Yes, and there were no side effects.

HANCOCK

Why only six?

MARVIN

Dr. Gates wanted to test more monkeys before beginning the second set of trials. But Dr. Seplow said it would be a waste of time because we'd already come close to reaching the maximum dose without the slightest hint of an adverse reaction.

HANCOCK

Dr. Seplow seems to think that a lot of procedural things are a waste of time.

MARVIN

Dr. Seplow leaps ahead with ideas. It frustrates him that we're not as quick as he is.

Cross fade to Aaron's lab. He's sitting with Harriet at the conference table with photographs of organs from the autopsy. He looks at the pictures one after another, happy by what he sees.

AARON

(Examining the post-mortem image)

Everything else checks out. No evidence of toxicity, organ damage or other abnormalities except for those associated with anaphylaxis.

(Pointing to one of the papers)

This is what proves it beyond a doubt. Tryptase. Huge elevation. It's a classic marker.

HARRIET

You were right. Anaphylaxis.

AARON

One-in-a-million chance. We're off the hook.

Marvin enters. He's excited.

MARVIN

Something's happened with the macaques. The ones getting the 120 units. The virus is gone.

AARON

What are you talking about?

MARVIN

The virus has totally disappeared in the monkeys. And all the immunologic factors are within normal ranges.

AARON

The virus must be below detectable limits.

MARVIN

I did a PCR.

(responding to Aaron's surprised look)

I wanted to be sure.

Marvin hands him the print-out and he checks it eagerly.

AARON

The virus must be in the tissue where we can't pick it up with blood tests. But even so.

Cross fade to limbo in a different part of the stage, where Hancock is interviewing Bruce.

BRUCE

I didn't think the trial should be approved. But Dr. Seplow convinced the dean that the potential benefits of MIG outweighed the risks to test subjects.

Bruce smiles with satisfaction as Hancock makes note of what he has just said.

HANCOCK

Mr. Manning wasn't the only patient to die in trials conducted by Dr. Seplow.

(Consulting his notebook)

I understand that a Tyrone Williams also died. You didn't think that justified stopping the trials?

BRUCE

I thought we should but Dr. Seplow insisted that the death was caused by an opportunistic infection that couldn't be stopped.

HANCOCK

And you accepted Dr. Seplow's assessment without looking into yourself?

BRUCE

The I.R.B. looked into it.

HANCOCK

But didn't stop the trials when it was conducting its investigation.

BRUCE

No.

Cross fade to Aaron's office, where Aaron and Marvin are waiting for the phone to ring.

AARON

The son of a bitch has stopped calling me back.

(Calling out)

Gloria, try the dean again. Harriet tells me you've been having problems. Dealing with the deaths. She said you almost lost it when Williams died.

MARVIN

I just wasn't prepared for it.

AARON

And Clayton Manning too.

MARVIN

He was a couple of years younger than me. Why can't we lick this thing? Billions of dollars have been spent. The best laboratories. The brightest minds.

AARON

We haven't done very well against any viral diseases.

MARVIN

The patients look at us with such trust. I feel like a fraud.

AARON

You should stop going over to the hospital. Harriet can do that. She's over there all the time, anyhow.

MARVIN

That's all right. I can...

AARON

Harriet will do it.

MARVIN

She's not going to like that.

AARON

It was her idea. And I agree with her.

MARVIN

If there is no virus in the tissue, if it's completely gone, do you think maybe MIG is curing AIDS?

AARON

HIV is a very wily virus.

MARVIN

But it is possible, isn't it?

AARON

It's unlikely.

But possible.
MARVIN

Yes.
AARON

The red phone rings. Aaron answers it.

AARON (CONT'D)
(On the phone)
What do you mean, he's too busy to take the call.

Cross fade to another part of the stage, where Hancock is interviewing Harriet.

HANCOCK
Was Mr. Manning aware of all the risks involved with the MIG?

HARRIET
He was.

HANCOCK
He read the informed consent form?

HARRIET
He knew the risks.

HANCOCK
But did he read the form?

HARRIET
Yes.

HANCOCK
How much time did he spend reading it?

HARRIET
I don't know.

HANCOCK
Five minutes? Ten minutes? Twenty minutes?

HARRIET

He didn't want to read the form. Dr. Seplow explained all the risks. He said the form was hard to understand because of the legal gobbledegook.

HANCOCK

Legal gobbledegook?

HARRIET

(Afraid she has revealed too much)

Yes.

HANCOCK

(Writing down the comment)

Thank you very much for your time, Dr. Gates.

Hancock exits. Harriet thinks about what has just transpired and becomes concerned.

HARRIET

Oh. shit.

Lights fade to black. Lights come up on a different part of the stage.

HANCOCK

Dr. Sutherland said that just before the I. R. B. decision you, he and Dr. Seplow met to discuss the MIG protocol.

LINCOLN

That's true.

HANCOCK

Why?

LINCOLN

Dr. Seplow was very eager to proceed with the trial and I wanted to be sure that he wasn't putting undue pressure on Dr. Sutherland.

HANCOCK

I understand you also were eager to proceed with the trials.

LINCOLN

The importance of this work and getting drugs to the bedside quickly cannot be overestimated. But I insisted that this be done without putting test subjects at risk.

HANCOCK

Did Dr. Seplow agree?

LINCOLN

Dr. Seplow is a brilliant scientist. But he does march to a different drummer.

HANCOCK

And that is all right with the university? You approve of this?

LINCOLN

Not if patients are put at risk.

HANCOCK

Are you taking steps to make sure that this is not happening?

LINCOLN

I am doing and will do everything necessary to assure that no one is put at risk.

Hancock writes this down while Lincoln waits.

HANCOCK

Well, I think that's all I need for now. Thank you for your time.

LINCOLN

I want to do whatever you think is necessary.

They shake hands and Hancock exits. Lincoln pushes the button on his speaker phone.

LINCOLN (CONT'D)

(To phone)

Josie, get me Dr. Sutherland.

JOSIE'S VOICE

(On speaker phone)

Yes, Dr. Masterman.

Lincoln busies himself with papers.

JOSIE'S VOICE (CONT'D)

(On speaker phone)

Dr. Sutherland is on the line.

LINCOLN

(To phone)

Hello, Bruce. It's time to start reigning him in.

JOSIE'S VOICE (O.S.)

Dr. Seplow, please wait. I'll check...

Aaron appears in the doorway.

LINCOLN

(To phone)

I'll call you back.

AARON

You don't look so busy.

LINCOLN

I don't have time for you right now.

AARON

Will you listen to me?

LINCOLN

Make an appointment with Josie.

AARON

The virus totally disappeared.

LINCOLN

Will you please leave?

AARON

We gave six infected macaques a MIG dose three times more powerful than anything we'd given before. And the virus is gone.

LINCOLN

Isn't that convenient?

AARON

What?

LINCOLN

This happens just as the government is about to shut everything down?

AARON

We've got to check this out.

LINCOLN

I'm really too busy to talk about this now.

(Calling out)

Josie. Dr. Seplow wants to make an appointment.

Lights fade to black

END OF SCENE 9

SCENE 10

A little while later, Aaron's living room. Beethoven's Ninth is playing. Whitney is arranging flowers in a vase.

AARON

The son of a bitch is distancing himself. I've seen him do this before, with a lot of people who are no longer here.

WHITNEY

Maybe you should take one of those offers you've been getting.

AARON

He has no interest in basic research. He's a god-damn obstetrician with an MBA.

WHITNEY

I wouldn't mind living in Boston. We could learn how to ski. That's something you could get into, isn't it? And San Diego and Houston want you.

AARON

Those offers are dead. No one wants a researcher who can't get funding any more. Especially one who's been in the news like I have.

WHITNEY

That television reporter is interviewing all our neighbors. Three different people said they spoke to her.

AARON

They don't know about my infection, do they? You haven't told anyone?

WHITNEY

I told Sam.

AARON

Good Lord, why? You hardly know the man.

WHITNEY

He won't tell anyone. It would be unethical.

AARON

You're seeing him professionally?

WHITNEY

He's been helping me with some issues.

AARON

And you're talking to him about my infection?

WHITNEY

Your infection is the issue I've been dealing with.

AARON

I told you not to tell anyone.

WHITNEY

Damn-it, Aaron, I needed help. You won't talk about it. You can tuck something like this away in the back of your mind. You go about your business as if nothing's wrong. All I can do is think about what it's going to be like not having you here.

AARON

AIDS is not a death sentence any more.

WHITNEY

I'm thinking about your death when I wake up in the morning. I'm thinking about it when I go to sleep at night.

AARON

That's not rational.

WHITNEY

Why the hell do you think I need help?

Lights fade to black

END OF SCENE 10

SCENE 11

A few weeks later, the dean's office. The dean is seated at his desk. Bruce and Aaron are sitting in front of it. The dean is sipping tea as Aaron pours over a thick document.

AARON

(Finally, indicating the document)

They found nothing wrong.

LINCOLN

That's not how I read it.

AARON

None of these things had anything to do with Clayton Manning's death. Petty discrepancies. That's all these are.

LINCOLN

Discrepancies in procedures are never petty.

AARON

Oh, Lincoln, come on.

(Referring to the paper)

What's this crap? "Unduly optimistic in describing trial."

LINCOLN

Convincing test subjects to enter trials is frowned upon by the FDA. The publicity is hurting the institute and the university.

AARON

The hell with the publicity.

LINCOLN

A human being died in this trial of yours.

AARON

Because of him, we're getting answers to fundamental questions. The few who may die will...

LINCOLN

The few who may die? You were preparing to add more young people to your list of sacrificial lambs? The university can't afford to have any more deaths.

AARON

Your primary concern is protecting the image of the university. Is that what you're saying?

LINCOLN

Yes. And your primary concern is the safety of the test subjects.

AARON

My primary concern is doing good research.

LINCOLN

That's not what you're telling the reporters at tomorrow's press conference.

AARON

If there's going to be a press conference, then it should be to announce that Manning was killed by an allergic reaction.

LINCOLN

How are we going to prevent another tragedy like this one? That's what they want to know. We've got to take the lead on this. We can't put the university in the position of being told what to do by a federal agency.

AARON

The government will pull back with this new proof.

LINCOLN

With an impending Congressional investigation? I don't think so.

BRUCE

What I want from you is all of the data you've collected on Manning, before admitting him to the study. Our investigation...

AARON

Your what?

BRUCE

Our investigation.

AARON

(To Lincoln)

What's this all about?

LINCOLN

Protocol violations automatically trigger an I. R. B. investigation.

AARON

What the hell is this, one witch hunt after another?

LINCOLN

Protecting the reputation of the university is hardly a witch hunt. We've stopped gambling on your leaps of faith. I want a guarantee that no more test subjects will be put at risk.

AARON

It is impossible to make such a guarantee.

BRUCE

Such a guarantee is not impossible.

AARON

The only way you make such a guarantee is stop all human trials.

BRUCE

(To Lincoln)

I don't think he understands.

LINCOLN

No, I don't think he does.

AARON

If we don't move ahead with this, other centers will pass us and get credit for all the work this university has done.

LINCOLN

Let me try, one last time. What are you going to do to guarantee that no more test subjects will get killed?

AARON

And let me try, one last time, to tell you what I have already told you. There is no way to guarantee that.

LINCOLN

If you can't, we will.

Lights fade to black

END OF SCENE 11

SCENE 12

A little while later, Aaron's office. An off-stage radio is playing Christmas carols. Marvin and Harriet are sitting at the conference table, waiting for Aaron to arrive. They're both wearing Stetsons.

HARRIET

I overheard technicians in the cafeteria joking about how they put Aaron down when the investigator interviewed them.

MARVIN

I was with Aaron when the Burston Foundation called. He listened without saying much, hung up and looked at the phone for the longest time. Then he said, more to himself than me, they're all running away.

HARRIET

Aaron showed sadness?

MARVIN

For a minute. Then he became Aaron again. There's talk they might remove him as director.

HARRIET

He's probably working on a plan right now to beat them. That's the way he is. An experiment doesn't work. He broods for a while. Talks to Nina. And then comes back at the problem from a totally different direction and solves it.

MARVIN

(With hope)

That's why he called this meeting. To tell us where we go from here.

HARRIET

He has been asking me a lot of questions about the test subjects. How they react after being injected. How long the fevers and chills last.

MARVIN

He wants me to draw more blood. He called me about it this morning. Do you think he's found another test subject for the trial?

HARRIET

He wouldn't dare do another patient, not at this dose level. It's too dangerous.

Aaron bounds into the room, smiling and cheerful. He is surprised to see the hats.

AARON

What the hell is this?

MARVIN

Solidarity.

He sits down.

HARRIET

It's been a while since we've seen you smile.

AARON

We should all be smiling. We live in the best of all possible worlds. I wanted to bring you up to date on where everything stands.

He hesitates, trying to figure out what to say. The Christmas music intrudes.

AARON (CONT'D)

(Yelling)

Gloria, turn off that damn radio.

He waits. The sound of the radio stops.

AARON (CONT'D)

The university is...

He breaks up laughing.

AARON (CONT'D)

I wish you guys would take off those hats. You don't have to prove it to me. I know you both think outside the box.

They take off their hats.

AARON (CONT'D)

The university is stopping human trials. They're announcing it at a press conference this afternoon.

HARRIET
Which trial?

AARON
Both of them.

HARRIET
But there were no problems with the first one.

AARON
It doesn't matter. They're stopping it.

HARRIET
For how long?

AARON
Indefinitely.
(Looking around the table with disappointment)
You didn't bring the kit?

MARVIN
You want it now? Here?

AARON
That's what I said, isn't it?

MARVIN
Yes, Aaron.

Marvin exits.

HARRIET
So, what's our next step?

AARON
I'm sure as hell not going back to square one. Not when we're this close.

HARRIET
You have a plan?

AARON
I always have a plan.

HARRIET
What is it?

I will tell you tomorrow.

AARON

Why tomorrow?

HARRIET

It's better that I tell you tomorrow. You must have a lot of things to do to get ready for Christmas. No need to stick around.

AARON

The stores are open late tonight.

HARRIET

Go.

AARON

All right, I will.

HARRIET

She fills her briefcase with papers and heads for the door. Looking back, she sees Aaron, bent over in thought.

HARRIET (CONT'D)

Are you all right?

AARON

What?

HARRIET

Is there something I can do?

AARON

(Rebounding)
No, no. I'm fine.

HARRIET

You're sure?

AARON

Yes.

She opens the door.

AARON (CONT'D)

Harriet.

HARRIET

Yes.

AARON

I appreciate how hard you've worked on this project. I want you to know that. We have different styles. We've disagreed on some things, but that's good, isn't it?

HARRIET

We've accomplished a lot.

AARON

Yes, we have.

HARRIET

What are you and Whitney doing Christmas Eve? We'd love to have you over for dinner. Sing some Christmas carols. Think about something else.

AARON

That's very nice of you, but I don't think I'll be up for that.

HARRIET

Sure. If you and Whitney change your mind, just come on over. No need to call.

She starts to leave again, but stops.

HARRIET (CONT'D)

Can I give you a ride home?

AARON

I'll be working late tonight. I might even sleep over, in one of the on-call beds in the CRC.

HARRIET

You're pulling an all-nighter?

AARON

I just very well might. Good night, Harriet.

HARRIET

Good night, Aaron.

Harriet starts to leave again.

AARON

You forgot your Stetson.

She gets the hat with a smile and exits. Aaron roles up a sleeve and loosens his shirt.

AARON (CONT'D)

(To himself)

Oh, what the hell.

(Yelling)

The meeting's over, Gloria. Play the damn carols if you want.

The music comes up. Marvin enters with equipment for drawing blood.

MARVIN

What do you want me to do with this?

AARON

What do you usually do with a blood-drawing kit?

MARVIN

Where's the patient?

AARON

I want you to draw my blood for a standard baseline battery.

MARVIN

I don't think I understand.

AARON

You don't understand what a baseline battery is?

MARVIN

Why should I do that with your blood?

AARON

Will you draw the blood please?

Marvin swabs Aaron's arm and draws out a couple of vials of blood.

MARVIN

The full battery?

AARON

Yes.

MARVIN

What do you want me to do with the results?

AARON

Enter them in the MIG data base.

Marvin is stunned by the implication of what Aaron is saying.

MARVIN

(Finally)

You have AIDS. And you're going to...

AARON

Enter the results.

MARVIN

You can't do this, Aaron. It's too dangerous.

AARON

Would I experiment on myself?

MARVIN

Is that what you're doing?

AARON

We'll talk about it tomorrow.

MARVIN

The anaphylaxis. We don't know how common it is.

AARON

I am not planning to test the vector on myself. Good night.

MARVIN

Then why are you...

AARON

Good night, Marvin.

MARVIN

(Looking at him with much suspicion)

I'll be home all night, if you need anything.

AARON

Thank you.

Marvin exits. Aaron goes to a small refrigerator and takes out the distinctive styrofoam container with MIG written on it. He takes out the vial from the container and fills a syringe. Pulling up his shirt, he prepares to inject himself when Whitney appears in the doorway with a small bag. She takes two champagne glasses and a bottle of champagne from the bag.

WHITNEY

You forgot the champagne.

Aaron is too stunned to speak at first.

WHITNEY (CONT'D)

I began to suspect you were thinking of this when you stopped taking your drugs.

(Responding to Aaron's surprised look)

I was counting your pills. And when you kissed me goodbye this morning, I could tell. Today was the day. I also knew you'd be alone. What you're doing is probably breaking some law and you didn't want to implicate anyone else.

AARON

I would have told you, but I was afraid you'd try to talk me out of it.

WHITNEY

Me, talk you out of something?

He pops open the champagne and fills the glasses.

AARON

(Toasting)

To you, my love.

They drink.

WHITNEY

I'm scared.

AARON

The worst that could happen is nothing happens.

WHITNEY

Maybe everyone gets an allergic reaction.

AARON

If I thought it was too risky for me, how could I justify injecting all these other people?

WHITNEY

This isn't going to prove anything. It won't convince anyone.

AARON

It will convince me.

Lights fade to black

END OF SCENE 12

SCENE 13

Television screen with the image of Donna.

DONNA

(On TV screen)

Dr. Aaron Seplow, the researcher who killed a 25-year-old boy with an experimental drug, has injected the same deadly drug into himself to prove that it can cure AIDS. Neither the university nor Dr. Seplow would comment, but sources have told Channel 4 that Dr. Seplow is doing well, six days after getting the lethal drug.

Screen fades to a blank as the screen of another TV elsewhere on the stage lights up with Donna's image.

DONNA (CONT'D)

(On TV screen)

It's now two months since Dr. Aaron Seplow injected himself with a deadly experimental AIDS drug, and he is still doing fine. Channel 4 has learned that the daring scientist is undergoing a battery of tests today to see if the drug has stopped the spread of the virus in his body.

Screen fades to black

END OF SCENE 13

SCENE 14

A little while later, the Seplov's living room. Whitney is nervously going about the room, straightening things up. Aaron appears in the doorway. She looks at him expectantly.

WHITNEY

(Finally)
Tell me, Aaron.

AARON

We couldn't find anything.

WHITNEY

The tests were negative?

AARON

Yes.

WHITNEY

All of them?

AARON

Every one.

WHITNEY

Oh, Aaron.

She hugs him. They are both close to tears.

WHITNEY (CONT'D)

I kept mourning all the little things you never think about but are so important. You sitting there working on your papers, climbing into bed late at night putting your body next to mine, going to the park with Chelsea.

AARON

That didn't happen very often, did it?

WHITNEY

It takes some horrible thing like this to make you realize how much you have, how much you can lose.

AARON

I should have been spending more time with you and Chelsea.

WHITNEY

I hoped we would at least have a few more years. I didn't dare hope for a cure.

(Seeing that this makes Aaron uncomfortable)

You are cured. Aren't you, Aaron?

AARON

I hope I am.

WHITNEY

What do you mean you hope you are? You said the virus is gone.

AARON

I said we couldn't find it.

WHITNEY

Then it's not there. And you're cured.

AARON

It could be hiding somewhere beyond the reach of our tests.

WHITNEY

You said they were sensitive tests. That if the virus was there, the tests would find it.

AARON

It's possible I'm cured.

WHITNEY

No, Aaron. Not possible. You are cured. The virus isn't there.

AARON

Even if I'm not cured, what has...

WHITNEY

You're cured.

AARON

It's premature to...

WHITNEY

Isn't it possible that the reason no virus was found was because no virus was there?

AARON

It's possible.

WHITNEY

Then you're cured.

AARON

(With warmth, abandoning his scientific detachment)

Yes, it's possible.

WHITNEY

This is what I choose to believe.

AARON

Then that's what we'll believe.

They hug long and hard.

AARON (CONT'D)

We'll have no trouble getting volunteers, once the media gets this. These results are dramatic. Still we'll still need to double blind. Twenty patients in each arm should be enough for Phase One.

WHITNEY

You think the university will go along with this?

AARON

Lincoln will be falling all over himself to get some credit for this. And I'm betting the building committee will reconsider and approve construction of our new laboratories.

WHITNEY

Everyone loves a winner.

AARON

I'm meeting with Aaron tomorrow.

WHITNEY

He already knows about this? Doesn't he?

AARON

He will after the evening news tonight.

WHITNEY

Damn, Aaron. That isn't the way he should find out about this.

Serves him right.

AARON

That doesn't make any sense.

WHITNEY

Lincoln abandoned me.

AARON

This will infuriate him. You need that man.

WHITNEY

He's needs me. Those bastards can go to hell.

AARON

They're not bastards, Aaron.

WHITNEY

Are you on their side?

AARON

There are no sides here.

WHITNEY

They're mediocre minds.

AARON

They might not have this wonderful gift you've been given. But they're not mediocre.

WHITNEY

The hell with them.

AARON

Don't destroy yourself with this damn arrogance of yours. It almost already has. Tell Lincoln and let him announce the results.

WHITNEY

After all he has done to me?

AARON

Now you can afford to be generous. Tell Lincoln you realize he was just doing his job -- protecting the university.

AARON

Are you crazy?

WHITNEY

It's the wise thing to do.

AARON

That isn't my way.

WHITNEY

It's time to change your ways. Getting everyone to root for your demise is a bad strategy. Be nice to these people. It's a small compromise.

AARON

All right. I'll call Lincoln tonight and tell him. But being nice to people? I don't know about that.

They laugh and hug.

WHITNEY

It's been a long time since we laughed.

Lights fade to black

END OF SCENE 14

SCENE 15

The next day, the dean's office. Lincoln and Aaron are facing each other over the dean's desk. Bruce sits nearby, self-confident and superior.

AARON

You're not going to offer me tea?

LINCOLN

No.

AARON

And here I was finally going to try a cup.

LINCOLN

You must be feeling good, about everything.

AARON

I know this has been a difficult time for you.

LINCOLN

Do you?

AARON

Everyone was attacking us. The media. Government agencies. Politicians. I realize you had no choice. You had to protect the university.

LINCOLN

A lot of damage was done.

AARON

But now we're the ones on top.

LINCOLN

Do you think so?

AARON

What's happened here is far more important than a treatment for AIDS.

LINCOLN

Nothing has been proved.

AARON

I'm submitting something to the New England Journal, of course. But this is too big to wait. It's all right with me if you want to announce the results now.

LINCOLN

Because of your grandstanding, the NIH is withdrawing funding of all institute projects. It's also reviewing all of the human trials that have been conducted here.

AARON

They'll pull back on all that now.

LINCOLN

You were told to stop the trials. This was a clear, unambiguous directive from the university, ordered by the FDA. You exceeded your authority. You might very well have broken the law.

AARON

Damn it, Lincoln. I proved the MIG works.

LINCOLN

One patient proves nothing.

AARON

It proves that we need a bigger trial.

LINCOLN

All it proves is that you should leave this university.

AARON

I don't think I understand.

LINCOLN

I want your resignation.

AARON

Why should I resign?

LINCOLN

Because I can't fire you.

AARON

I have no intention of resigning.

LINCOLN

It would make everything a lot easier. A lot cleaner. You don't want to be fired.

AARON

Only the board of trustees can fire a tenured professor.

LINCOLN

And that's just what the board will do. I will make sure of that. You're a loose cannon. You risked the good name of this university with this crazy escapade of yours. I want your resignation on my desk by the end of the day.

Lights fade to black

END OF SCENE 15

SCENE 16

A week later, Aaron's house. Aaron and Whitney are having drinks.

WHITNEY

You'll be vindicated when they finally do the human trials.

AARON

That will be years from now. Bruce is taking over the research.

Aaron laughs.

WHITNEY

You're finding all of this funny?

AARON

I should be angry. I am angry. I'm pissed off. But I'm also amused.

WHITNEY

I don't think this is very funny.

AARON

People like Bruce are cockroaches. They survive no matter what happens. Bruce goes on to bigger and better things and my career is finished, in this country at least.

WHITNEY

Let's get away. These last months have been a roller coaster for both of us.

AARON

Yes. Let's take that trip to Europe you've been wanting.

WHITNEY

You want to go to Europe?

AARON

A trans-Atlantic crossing.

WHITNEY

On a ship?

AARON

It's too far to swim. A long cruise will give me a chance to spend some time with Chelsea.

WHITNEY

We can go to Italy. Ravello. We had such wonderful times in Ravello.

AARON

Not Ravello. Modena.

WHITNEY

Modena?

(Slowly realizing)

Elio lives in Modena.

AARON

So he does.

WHITNEY

You think spending time with Elio would be a vacation?

AARON

I was thinking Elio and I might do some work together. Maybe put together a human trial.

WHITNEY

To prove MIG is effective against AIDS?

AARON

That's yesterday's news. Let the Bruces of the world pick up the pieces. Elio and I will be looking for the gene that tells cells to grow and stop growing. We have some exciting leads.

WHITNEY

No one cares about basic research.

AARON

(With growing excitement)

What tells cells to start multiplying? And what tells them to stop. They are the most important question in biology. I can't tell you how exciting this will be. I have trouble falling asleep when I think about the next step we should take.

WHITNEY

Cancer is uncontrolled cell growth.

AARON

Yes, of course.

WHITNEY

You're talking about a cure for cancer. Aren't you?

AARON

(Belittling the thought)

No, Witty. I'm talking about understanding the most basic process in biology. A toast.

(Holding up his glass)

To us.

They toast and drink.

AARON (CONT'D)

I can't wait to get on that ship and run around the deck with Chelsea. Strong wind. Fair skies. A gentle rocking. You and me standing at the rail, my arm around you, looking at the sun setting behind the horizon.

WHITNEY

It sounds wonderful.

AARON

Just think, Whitney. Cell multiplication. No other biological process is more basic.

Whitney smiles with amusement and then pride. Once again Aaron is turning defeat into victory.

CURTAIN

END OF PLAY

AARON SEPLOW (THE SCIENTIST)
WHITNEY or WIT (Aaron's wife)

MARVIN WHEELING (Assistant professor in
Institute)

HARRIET GATES (Aaron's ally, Associate Professor in
Institute)

DONNA FAIRCHILD (TV Reporter)

BRUCE SUTHERLAND (Chairman of IRB)

LINCOLN MASTERMAN (THE
DEAN)
CLAYTON MANNING, 25, (Doomed Patient) *

ETHAN HANCOCK (NIH Investigator) *

TODD BUSTER (AIDS Worker) *

*Todd, Ethan and Clayton can be played by the same
actor

(OFF-STAGE)
CHELSEA --Daughter of Aaron and Whitney

TYRONE WILLIAMS (First Patient in Trial Who Dies)

GLORIA, Aaron's secretary

JOSIE, Dean's secretary

PAUL, scientist who brought back tea for the Dean

Martha is Lincoln's wife

Institute for Immunologic Studies

Sen. William Hastings

Jim is Harriet's husband

Sam is the psychiatrist Harriet is seeing.

Harold Brownstein is the pathologist who did autopsy

Recital is Oct. 7