

XQ-28

The Story of a Gene

Chapter 19

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Adrian Challis



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To all the friends and family who encouraged it, to all the great minds that inspired it. But mostly, to Adrian & Anthony, who lived it.

I kept having the same dream.

It's a bright sunny day and I wake to see the sky outside my window full of strange, slow-moving metallic craft. They are making no noise, and although their somnambulant movements give me a queasy feeling of unease, in every other respect I seem to view them with benign familiarity. I feel calm and cool-headed, the bed comfortable and, except for me, empty.

I rise and look out of the window. Skyscrapers tower over grass, huge video screens flash silicon smiles, corporation names, viddyphone numbers. People are walking hand in hand on the grass, this way and that. I turn, still calm, 'what a great world' written on my face, approach the white door of my room which slides open revealing what looks like the inside of a lift. I look down at myself and see I am wearing a night shirt, and feel fine about getting into the lift.

As the door slides shut, the walls of the lift become clear, their white surfaces dissolving to reveal that this side of the building is much higher than the side with my window in it. As I descend, the landscape changes beautifully, the sides of the building giving way to a jungle scene. I see birds of paradise sitting in tree-tops, the sun filtering through humidity and huge leaves, vines dangling invitingly - I want to jump and catch onto one every time, swinging off into the rainforest, but I know that the lift, although transparent, is still solid.

After many floors of jungle I feel the lift slowing. I wait for it to stop and the door to open and I get out. On the wall opposite me there are hundreds of boxes with ornate numbers on them. I know which one to open - number twenty-three. Inside is an envelope, through the cellophane window of which I can see my name. I go back through the lift doors and rise again - I may push a button, I always forget. I am aware however that I am going to the same floor.

I look down at the letter and realise that the floor of the lift is also clear. I open the envelope and take out a folded piece of paper. The letter is dated ten years from today - in my dream, I know this. I start reading. It's from the hospital. It says that whilst recently updating their computer system, they have discovered that a system error, of type-41, caused many of the

wrong diagnoses to be sent to the wrong patients.

I peer at the letter more closely. The next line is made up of different type faces. The words 'That is, you' are in a modular sans-serif face, my name, which came next, in a clumsy serif, 'were told that you were HIV' again, sans-serif, 'negative' in the awkward serif, 'when in actual fact we have discovered that you are HIV' sans-serif, 'positive' serif.

The letter continues if I am not already experiencing an appreciable loss of health, 'or otherwise', I should contact a doctor immediately. It is signed Health Authority Communications PLC.

I am aware of an itch on my arm and raise my right arm to scratch it. As I do so, my nightshirt falls down my forearm to reveal huge red blotches of bubos covering the surface. I raise my other sleeve. Hard nodules of erectile tissue cover my arm, exuding a clear mucilaginous slime through which I can see distorted refractions of the jungle's topography beyond the lift's transparent walls. I raise my hand to my face. Hollow skin stretched over razor cheek bones.

The lift stops, the door swishes open and there stands Martin. I look deep into his rheumy eyes, milky white pin pricks surrounded by bloodshot ping-pong balls and shrink-wrap skin, his black hair a lifeless and straggly frame for his skeletal face to disappear into.

-Good morning Ian, Martin says, his voice weak, pathetic, contemptible.

-I'm not called Ian! I cry, and burst into waking bathed in sweat...

I can't pretend I'm not relieved. After all the worry that he was perhaps not what we thought he was, this is something approaching vindication. Benway will be delighted! There has been pressure to produce results, to cut back our programmes in the absence of quantifiable data. Despite his earlier revelations, I never quite bought the 'invert' tag. He is simply too paradigmatic.

In an attempt to cover my excitement, I ask him about his pathophobia. The perpetual disease scenarios - classic neurosis as guilt placation. I ask him where *he* thinks they originate. Of course, he becomes instantly aggressive, again answering my question with one of his own.

-Where the fuck do you think they originate?

He stares me out, accuses me of being in league with the Dept of Information.

-You're just the business end of entertainment - it's where they get all their ideas.

He seems to think that, as well as his own paranoia, I am somehow responsible for the mental health of the whole country, says that 'my sort' practically invented phobia, begins ranting about how advertising and public health hysteria are the same thing, how they both thrive on feelings of inadequacy, sickness and fear.

-Psychologists seeding impossible desires, creating balls of seething guilt impossible to satiate...

I wrote it down.

I point out that his nightmare implies that he *is* paranoid, that, despite having a clear test, he is still consumed with a morbid obsession that he is about to die. He just stares at me with that piercing gaze, his vivid blue eyes shining through me. As always, they chill me, and in an attempt to avert them, I add, somewhat unprofessionally, that I am surprised that one so relatively young has any sense of their own mortality, that I had always thought that a feeling of invincibility was practically a *definition* of youth.

He explodes.

-We have never known relief, we've never been allowed it, you've made sure of that! You sow guilt like Hydra's teeth - how dare you criticise the harvest?

Then, as if aware of his own hysteria, he softens, again becomes seductively compliant, tells me that, at one time, he was so guilty he worried he may have caught something fatal from peering through a hole in a toilet wall. He asks me if I can 'even imagine' what that feels like.

-To walk around with fear dissolving your skin until everything you see and hear is an omen of putrefaction.

And for the first time in all of our sessions, he suddenly looks lost, and clutches himself, his eyes projecting something close to vulnerability. It is my turn then to soften. I want to tell him that this is the point, that as soon as he realises that we are trying to help him, he will thank us for it, but stop myself just in time. It's still too early.

I fear he may retreat completely before he has told us everything.

Chapter 19 Resonance

I couldn't stand it any longer. Despite my better judgment I was shaking all the time, finding it hard to think of anything but death and disease. My vision was beginning to blur, a humming in my ears making conversation difficult, my step uncertain, like walking on a boat tossed upon vindictive waves. The dream was just too vivid and insistent; regardless that I knew I had done nothing to warrant it, fear inhabited my every move. Every act of love became a torture, a gift whose provenance I could not guarantee. It was almost a week later when the fear broke, and silence could hold no more.

-Martin, there's something I have to tell you.

He was lying beside me, our bodies entwined, his head on my arm, my dormant cock tickling his back. An intake of breath and a high moan signaled his return to consciousness.

-I keep having a nightmare. It's the worst dream I've ever had. I know it can't be true, but it's so real and it just won't go away.

He turned over to look up at me, his eyes blinking wide and slowly focussing on my face.

-What's wrong, mate? His hand on my shoulder, softly stroking me.

I erupted in a wail of tears. I told him everything verbatim, leaving out the ending, still not ready to tell him my true name after so long... aliased.

-I know it's stupid, I believe with all my heart that there is no need to worry, but every night it returns, your face more terrifying every time. Sometimes as I'm looking at you I blink and that face is there, just for an instant, and it takes all my effort not to vomit.

-I have that effect on a lot of people...

I kissed him, the tears falling on his face, my mouth open gaumlessly, and shook my head and moaned.

-You are so beautiful, the most beautiful man I have ever met, and the image in that dream makes me want to die - I don't ever want to see it for real.

-And you won't... Ian, listen. I'm glad you've told me this. Maybe you've been picking up on something I've been thinking, and I'm sorry if I'm responsible...

I was suddenly silent. Something I hadn't even considered rushed in and almost drowned me, a typhoon of betrayal washing away my tears. My face must have shown it, because Martin grabbed me and pulled me close and shhdd my doubts.

-No no no, don't be silly not that! Shhh come on it's fine.

I was limp in his arms, incapable of strength, a deflated bag of sorrow. What the fuck had I become?

-Listen, it's fine. It's to do with Saul's machine. I've been thinking long and hard about what it means, and what we could do with it. If I'm right, no-one will ever have to fear again...

He told me then, lay me down and explained his plan, a plan so elegant and astounding that it left me speechless.

-Like Kurt's research said, Rife's microscope is so powerful it is capable of seeing live viruses. All living matter resonates at a particular frequency - the microscope is designed in such a way that the mere act of seeing a specimen reveals that frequency. If we then expose the virus - ie the 'patient' - to that frequency at a sufficiently high amplitude, the virus is literally shattered in their body.

Silence fell away, replaced by a question.

-But won't that damage the patient?

-No, because all other matter in their body will be unaffected. Nothing else resonates at the same frequency.

-So how do we do this? You thinking of setting up a clinic?

-Better than that. We organise a party! We know enough of

the right people to set this up - Ian, I know it *has* to work. Call me mad but I've always known there was a reason why I was put on this earth, a purpose to my entire existence. This is it - it's nothing less than my destiny!

We talked about all the possibilities. We'd need someone to take blood, a method of isolating the virus. Martin thought Saul would know someone who could help with the former, Kurt being the natural choice for the latter. Tom's kitchen would be the ideal place to advertise - the number of people going through there should ensure a decent turn out. The same crew who organised the solstice party would take care of the technicalities.

-And you can make the visuals! The images you've been making are fantastic, and we've got the projector too!

A squirt of adrenaline lit up my belly.

-Oh my God, it could be amazing!

-It *will* be, we'll make sure it is.

-When're you thinking for this?

-Well, it's the equinox in two weeks time - seems the natural choice! The future hanging in the balance...

-Can we get everything organised in that time?

-Don't see why not. It's the end of the summer, no doubt everyone'll be ready for a party. I can make some phone calls and see who's up for it, make sure everyone's available. Seems to me all we need now is a title!

It was a few hours later, and we were stood looking out over the river, Martin's strong arms wrapped around my shoulders, my belly bulging from the perfect dinner I had helped him cook.

-What do you reckon we should call it, then?

-Don't know. Something that expresses the fact that we're stamping out disease. I was thinking 'Curave' but it doesn't have much of a ring to it.

There was something hanging in the air, a latent concept just beyond my grasp. Then it hit me, with such a ferocity that I shook and stuttered to get it out. I turned to face him, delight and surprise written all over me, and waved my hands excitedly.

-I've got it!

He smiled, the same delight mixed with expectation on his

face.

-Go on...

-Equinoculation!

I was working nonstop. Kurt's viral images began dancing, morphing into demons, invading fractal landscapes before being shattered by every kind of shockwave I could think of. A new idea would tantalise me, the prospect of Martin's approval sustaining me through the hours of manipulation each would take to complete. The software was pretty easy to master, the headaches I suffered from the unfamiliarity of thinking in three dimensions soon abating, until my dreams began to resemble gridforms in x, y and z axes.

-Saul reckons he knows someone to take blood, announced Martin, walking to the kitchen and flicking on the kettle.

-Cool. Hey check this out, I said, hitting the play button on the newly rendered file.

An ugly looking viral monster bounced across the screen before being sliced into a million pieces by the blades of a friendly-faced helicopter, 'Equinoculation' written along its wide belly.

-Nice one! How many you got now?

I looked at the folder containing all the animations arranged in a neat grid.

-Eighteen and a bit so far, not including the title loops. They can stand being repeated anyway.

-How many more you gonna do?

-Only about five I reckon, I'm going a bit mental! I can't think of any more ideas.

-Oh, that's loads. We can project the live footage too.

-Wow, I hadn't thought of that!

-Kurt reckons he can smuggle a centrifuge out of work. It's a Friday and no-one should miss it 'til the Monday. He's confident he can get it back before it's missed.

-Martin, I asked as he placed a cup of tea on the table beside the laptop, do you really think this'll work?

-There's no way of telling 'til we try it. And besides, even if it doesn't it's gonna be a top party! Your visuals'll guarantee that!

He kissed me, and I let my face hang in the air, my eyes closed, smiling, knowing that if they were halfway decent it was his encouragement that had made them such, and waited for another kiss.

The light bouncing off the slate valley was so much flatter than the last time I had seen it. Early dusk was golden, pulling reddish hues out of the trees that surrounded the lip above us, and as I hammered in a nail to which I would attach the rope from which to hang the projection screen, leaves cascaded around me, making my position up the ladder feel more precarious than I liked. I looked below me; Jamie's dancefloor was still there, a few slates had been dislodged and lay broken around the edges, but it still commanded respect. Behind me the sound desk was back in place, Kif again stationed at its helm, visible through the gaps of a scaffolding tower atop which sat the projector; only the light confirmed that time had passed, and I smiled to myself as I thought how readily the valley had welcomed us back, as if it too knew it was the perfect host for a party.

The rope secured in place, I stepped uncertainly down the ladder, and reached out as Martin passed up a corner of the white tarp that would function as a screen for the evening.

-Can you manage mate?

I flashed him an uncertain look, but nodded.

-I fucking hate ladders! Pass me the gaffer?

He handed me a thick roll of white tape, which I fitted over my left wrist, then stepped back up the ladder pulling the tarp with me. Once at the top, I hung the corner over the rope, and peevishly held it in place as I moved the roll of gaffer to my right hand and pulled off a strip, adhering it to the tarp, tugging it to make sure it was secure.

-I'll do the other side if you like, said Martin as I stepped off the bottom of the ladder.

-Thanks, I said exhaling loudly, and noted with some embarrassment that I was shaking. A flash of childhood - standing on the back of the sofa, my palms warm and clammy, little electric shocks pulsing down my arms.

-I'm no good with heights. Sorry...

-No worries mate, why don't you go and check how Saul's getting on, I can manage on my own.

I helped him carry the ladder to the other side of the slate wall, then walked over the valley and up the pathway to the flint cabin. To one side of the decks, their covers still in place, Saul was sitting on a tall stool, peering into the twin eyepieces of the insanely complex microscope, turning little thumb wheels to calibrate the optics.

-How's it going?

-It's fine thanks Ian. The journey doesn't seem to have affected it much. It'll be better once it's dark, we should get a clearer image.

-Any sign of your bloodman?

-Lee? Not yet. He's coming with your friend isn't he?

-Tom, yeah. There's no telling when he'll get here, he's a law unto himself! I hope he's not too long, he's bringing Kurt too, and... I stopped myself before I mentioned the drugs, still unsure whether Saul would approve. He noticed, and looked up from the microscope.

-And...? The emollients?

Saul had a way with words. I smiled and laughed with relief.

-Nicely put. Yes. The party emollients.

He raised an eyebrow before returning his gaze to the microscope.

-You young people... I have to say I *am* impressed with your industriousness. How many people have been working on this?

-You've seen most of them. How many do you think? Thirty, forty tops. The Stress posse know how to organise a party. Especially one with such an important purpose.

-What will you be doing?

-Well I'm in charge of the visuals mostly. I'll be running them from up here. We can set up the camera and film through the microscope too. It all gets beamed down to the projector from up here.

Saul looked up and out of the cabin in the direction of the projector.

-Will that work?

-Wireless technology Saul. Both the laptop and the camera

have a range of about 100 metres. There doesn't even need to be clear sight lines. The waves will even pass through walls!

-Amazing. But not as amazing as this. To think my father had a hand in developing this machine. It makes me proud of him, you know.

-And I'm sure he'd be very proud of you if he knew how you're using it, Saul.

He looked back at me, a thought it seemed hadn't yet occurred to him registering on his face.

-I think you're right. Thank you for saying so.

The sound of wheels on gravel made us both turn. A shopping trolley containing a huge white plastic barrel full of water was being pushed by two men. One of them saluted as he passed, and I recognised him as DJ Swain, his face cracking open in his familiar grin before the gradient accelerated the trolley and wiped the smile from his face, his hand shooting back to the trolley's handle.

-That's Jonny, you'll meet him later no doubt. He'll be spinning the tracks tonight.

-An important job. That's something I've been meaning to ask. How will we know the frequencies to use?

-Martin's been talking with Kurt about that. They've got a plan they haven't told me about yet. I'm quite enjoying the suspense to be honest!

I heard my name being called, and looked out of the cabin in the direction of the screen. Martin was looking over at me, holding his hand out in a gesture of 'How's that?' I put my thumb up, and fished in my pocket for the remote control, pointing it at the projector and pressing a button. Even in the early evening light I could see a flicker on the screen, and watched as the bulb came up to temperature, casting a huge Sony logo onto the canvas. I altered the focus and zoom until a crisp image filled the rectangle, and felt a squirt of excitement illuminate my belly.

It was gonna be a beautiful night.

A volley of percussion ricocheted off the valley. Kif twiddled some knobs on the desk and a deep bass throb resolved into heavy harmony. I looked around and DJ Swain punched the air, himself

twisting knobs on the mixer to pump up the lower end. Happy with the sound, he flicked through a box of records, already planning his next mix, and I looked out of the cabin and saw people applauding and moving around in time to the beat. The sun was setting, a deep red light bathing the slate in a scarlet glow, and I hit play on the first of the animations. Bold three-dimensional letters entered the screen from the right, the camera pulling back until the title filled the screen, walking itself forward and dancing back, a loop that again elicited applause from the few party-goers who were watching.

-Still no sign of Tom? asked Martin, kissing my forehead as I concentrated on the laptop, queuing up the animations in a long timeline so they could run themselves.

-Not yet, you know what he's like.

-Well he better get here soon otherwise there'll be some pretty pissed off people.

Saul was standing beside us, and he noticed someone and waved towards the top of the ridge.

-That's Lee. It would appear that your friends have made it.

I followed his gaze, and saw Tom and Kurt walking beside a stocky man with short cropped hair and stubble who was waving excitedly. Behind them I recognised Tony, who I had last seen at Tom's the night we met Kurt.

-You didn't tell me Tony was coming, I said to Martin.

-Of course he is. He's our first guinea pig. He's the one person we know who's definitely positive.

The first three were at the door of the cabin, and I watched as Martin greeted them, hugging Tom and shaking Kurt's and Lee's hands. Lee looked over in our direction, his lips pursing as he looked at me.

-It's okay everybody, he announced in a loud, deep and somewhat camp voice, the party can start now - the Queen has arrived!

I looked at Saul, who smiled with a little shake of his head, and moved to greet Lee. They kissed, then Lee stopped and stepped back, holding his hand out ostentatiously until Saul took that too.

-My ring dear, kiss the ring! And who pray tell is this

gorgeous creature...?

Guess who he meant.

-Lee, this is Ian. It is because of him and Martin that we're here tonight.

-Ooh, talented *and* handsome!

-Really, you flatter me. And besides, if it wasn't for Saul's father we wouldn't have thought of it in the first place.

-Oh, said Lee, ridiculously campily, don't get me started on his family. Our relations were in the war together you know, although his lot went to a lower camp than mine. Where was it darling? Bergen Belsen? Mine were all at the top ones, Auschwitz, Buchenwald, so much more class in my family.

-You'll burn in hell Lee, said Saul without emotion.

He put his hand over his mouth.

-I know! God I shocked myself then, what a first impression to make. Come 'ere love and give us a kiss.

He grabbed me and held his lips pursed for me to kiss, which I did, quickly.

-Ohh, I'm in love, he said, swooning dramatically. So why you want me to take blood then? Saul was very cagey, he knows I'm such a vampire he didn't need to tell me much.

I was suddenly embarrassed, aware of how unlikely the whole thing sounded.

-Well...

-We're gonna cure AIDS Lee, once and forever. Martin was stoic, standing with his hands on his hips, defiantly staring everybody down.

I knew I would love him until the end of time.

-Ooh, isn't he butch! Well you should've said, I could've brought me brother. He caught it whilst he was viling his way around Africa. And before you ask, he's straight, there's only room for one Queen in our dynasty.

-To vile, I said, laughing. A verb, I take it?

-Practically an artform the way he does it. Anyway best get in drag, point me towards my boudoir someone...

I let Martin walk Lee over to the corner of the cabin, where a makeshift cubicle had been set up made from drapes. They moved inside together, and as the curtains closed behind them I noticed

Lee's hand remained outside, waving regally before disappearing.

-He's fucking funny Saul, where'dya find him?

-It's a long story. He's an exceptional nurse. I wish I could've used him at my clinic, but as you can tell, he's just a bit too obvious for my clientele.

I noticed Kurt standing on his own, looking a little out of place, and quickly moved towards him.

-God, Kurt I'm so ignorant! Sorry mate how you doing?

-I'm fine thanks Ian, it's okay. Lee seems to command attention. My sides have only just stopped hurting from the journey. He's a proper nutter isn't he.

I got the impression Kurt hadn't really met anyone like Lee before, and noted that I wasn't sure that I had for that matter. Suddenly I remembered Ray from Mr Calyx's apartment, and realised we could have done with him here, to keep numbers down in the cabin.

-Martin said you were bringing a centrifuge.

Kurt patted a bag that was hanging from his shoulder, and I moved him over to the cubicle. Inside I could see Lee pulling on a nurse's smock, an intricate Japanese dragon tattoo on his left shoulder, his back smooth and surprisingly attractive.

-Kurt'll be safe in here with you won't he, Lee?

Kurt looked uncertain, but Martin waved him in.

-It's okay mate, I'll keep an eye on him! We need to sort out the other stuff too.

I felt a hand on my shoulder, and turned round to see Tom's smiley face. We hugged, and I was pleased to note some of the darkness had disappeared from his features.

-You're looking a bit better than the last time I saw you.

-Yeah, I know, his familiar giggle lighting up his eyes. Calmed down a bit haven't I. I've got something for you, he said, holding out his hand.

I let him drop something into my palm, and looked to see two capsules with sandy brown powder in them.

-Is that what I think it is?

-I reckon! Again the little giggle. I swapped some of Martin's merchandise for this. That's why we were late. Have you any idea how long it takes to fill a thousand of these?

-Tom, you haven't been filling these by hand have you?

-Someone's got to. We want this to be a party to remember don't we?

I gave him another hug.

-You fucking hero! How much dya want for 'em?

-My treat. I'm gonna need somewhere to stash some money though, they're not free for everyone! Here, have another couple, for Martin. Come and see me if you need some more.

With that, he was gone, moving out of the cabin and down the track, talking to a crew of people hanging out on the ridge, reaching into his pocket as money began changing hands.

It was pitch black by the time everything was sorted. The valley moved en masse, cavorting bodies fueled by Tom's carefully measured transcendence, electrified by the reflected light from the projection screen, augmented by golden flames that leapt from oil drums surrounding the dancefloor. My head was swimming; I could feel my pupils huge and dilated, rendering the inside of the cabin a dull bronze on the few occasions I could pull my obsessed gaze away from the laptop. Tony had disappeared into the cubicle half an hour before, reemerging with the comment that it was weird to have liquids removed from him after a lifetime of pumping stuff in, and a short time after Kurt had brought over the first test tube of lymph for Saul to peruse I was already beyond expressing quite how drug-fucked I was...

I let the laptop be turned away from me, looking on dumbstruck as Kurt's fingers moved expertly over the keyboard. Looking back at the screen in the valley below, it took all my intelligence to understand how the images were still running, and stood transfixed as it occurred to me that perhaps I was hallucinating the whole spectacle, until the animations took on a smeary translucency and fractured into huge and meaningless pixel storms, and I looked back at Kurt and asked him what he was doing.

-I'm gonna boot up Coochi-Coo and run a search for music files with sufficient sections of the appropriate harmonic ranges. We'll be downloading the tracks directly to this and playing them back...

My eyes wide and trusting.

-You can do that? How come the video's still running?

-I've split the processors. One'll run your visuals, the other can be assigned to search for tracks. The phone's running on geo-positional software, it'll find the most appropriate signal to the Coochi router and assign new protocol addresses to the metabolic flange coordinates...

-Kurt, you do realise that you're making no sense at all to me right now?

-Sorry, I'm making most of it up as I go along - it'd be a waste to bother telling you the truth. *You* do realise that you're fucked off your head, right?

I was suddenly embarrassed, but he flashed me a smile and a wink that seemed to hang in the air forever, and I looked over at Saul to see him peering into his microscope, the light emanating from the sample a cool prismatic rainbow, and let my head swing round to DJ Swain who was intently spinning a disc with one finger as he tuned in to one headphone before flicking his hand round in a smooth and artistic flip, the music suddenly echoing off in a spiral scratch, and as my eyes closed and my mind failed to find a word to describe the sheer unequaled peak of a new... m'dmatic elation warm arms passed under mine and hot lips sank into my neck and Martin's perfect smell enveloped me in a cloud of love I could only melt back into and gasp like his embrace had been away for fourteen months and had returned to make this one breath special...

-How's it going, superstar?

...and I turn to look into his face and it's smiling, the most beautiful smile in the world, and I press my lips against it and stare into his wide black eyes and push myself against him and feel him wrap himself around me and laugh and feel tears of joy cascade down my face and tell him it's working everything's working and feel and say I've never been so happy and he giggles and says it's not all working yet, and I look back at Saul and he's looking at Kurt and calling out numbers and Kurt's tapping out numbers and I look at the laptop at the back of the laptop at the space between it and the mobile and close my eyes and see a tunnel of speeding conductive tissue that suddenly shoots up and

into heaven and bounces back down to a thousand locations that light up in a blur of sparks that bounce and coalesce and shoot back up to heaven and shatter into my eyes a million rays of information that blind me and my eyes flick open and Kurt turns to the DJ and says

-We've got it.

-Where's Tony? says Martin and kisses my head and moves from the cabin and I'm left spinning for a second and feeling abandoned until Kurt spots me and beckons me over and turns the laptop to show a small progress bar inching its way along the screen which he points out to DJ Swain who notes the track and nods and grabs another record from his box and I look out of the cabin and see Martin walking Tony to the dancefloor shouting something in his ear and a new track starts with a crash of percussion and a sound like a siren echoes through the valley and I watch as four people with black faces and orange jumpsuits walk over from various positions and stand at the corners of the dancefloor, and I hear DJ Swain laughing explosively behind me and look round to see him smiling wide mouthed and holding his hands out in an expansive gesture...

-It's the national health service!

and punches the air in a two-fist salute and can only laugh gaumless and enchanted as my eyes look back at the dancefloor as another siren echoes and the four jumpsuited figures step up and throw what looks like chalk or flour or salt all over Tony and rub it into his forehead and push him to the ground, and as they each take a leg or a wing Martin walks forward tapping people on the shoulder until there is a clear space at the centre of the dancefloor and the figures carry Tony to its centre lifting him high into the air before setting him down and rub chalk or flour or salt into him and I look back at the movement beside me, and Kurt is passing a long lead to Jonny, who plugs it into his mixer, and nodding Kurt hits the pad on the laptop, and the tune begins.

A hypnotic oscillation, low and intense, begins to ring around the valley, a chirruping flicker highlighting the end of each bar, and I feel a shiver up my neck as the valley seems to resonate to the same note and watch as Tony stands with his arms outstretched, his eyes closed tight as the single bass note seems to

fracture into an ancient vibration like the sound of an Australian didgeridoo but less familiar, more intense, flickering with a violent insistence, and my eyes shoot over to the mixing desk where Kif is twiddling knobs and pushing up faders, the sound becoming solid and suffocating, until the valley disappears and I can see only Tony as if lit in a spotlight as his body begins to shake as the single oscillating note begins to bounce around harmonics and my head begins to flutter with the volume, and just at that moment the beat kicks in and Tony starts shaking and as the beat suddenly intensifies he isn't dancing, he's being danced, by a volume and frequency so intense the slate is rattling - I hear a few screams as slates fall from the pathway above but can't see anybody who's been hit and return my gaze to Tony who is convulsing at the centre of the dancefloor as the rhythm doubles up into a nosebleed cacophony his head thrown back as a higher harmonic intensifies the beat before falling away leaving only the bass note pumping itself into the valley - he slumps forward but remains standing - the jumpsuited what I can now see are women rush forward and throw water over him they have scooped from the huge plastic barrels that surround the dancefloor and it revives him, his face blank and wretched, his wet lank hair straggling his face which he holds back as the higher frequency begins to build, a chorus of baby vultures singing out their unique frequency, and his body begins to shake again - the dancefloor is empty save for Tony, no-one knows what to do but stare from the sidelines as he pulls off his clothes and scrapes at his skin as if being naked is not enough - and the crushing beat crushes back in and Kif pumps up the volume and Tony stands naked and shaking, his arms outstretched his head lolling backwards as the beat pounds into him - rubber bullet machine gun fire pummels his body before the beat suddenly stops, and deposits him on his knees on the slate.

The bass note continues - nobody knows what to do, unsure if whatever they have just seen is over. The women rush forward again and pour water onto Tony's upturned face - it is then we notice he is drinking the water, the muscles in his scrawny throat bobbing up and down like he can't pull enough into his body, and the bass note throbs with a brooding malevolence, a rattle snake

sound alerting all to the fact that it is not yet over, and as the beat arrives back in again the women pull Tony to his feet and leave him to be danced by the music as each element of the sound returns, twisting a different part of his body, before all of the separate sounds fall away, leaving the bass throb animating his slowing form until this too echoes away, and he slumps onto his front, exhausted.

There is silence in the valley. Everyone is in total shock. It is only when he moves his hand, pulls it back from its outstretched position to rub the back of his head that anyone dare move, and then it is to applaud, and scream, and whistle in astonishment. I look at Kurt - he seems lost in thought - and look over at Saul's open mouth as he stares down into the valley.

-Incredible, is all he can say.

But Jonny behind me is laughing, his eyes outshining the darkness. He holds out an upturned palm, his lips held tight in a righteous grimace, and I slap his hand with a whoop.

-Fucking... genius! he says.

There's a queue outside the cabin. People are lining up to be part of the action. A buzz of explanation has rippled through the throng - everybody knows what this means, and are offering themselves up as guinea pigs in the process of healing we've inadvertently pioneered. I find myself wondering if they can all be that worried, but realise that this technology has applications for all kinds of illness - anything viral in origin should yield to the same treatment. Tony is sitting in the corner, a blanket wrapped around him. He looks strangely dishevelled and yet energised at the same time, and greets each calming hand on his shoulder with another little open-faced nod. A crew of very attractive women are gathered around him, and I notice with a smile that he is enjoying their kisses, feigning modesty whilst at the same time lapping up the attention. I move over to stand by him, and he turns to greet me and smiles.

-Well, you *are* the entertainment! How do you feel?

-Amazing! I can tell it's gone just as certainly as I knew when I'd caught it in the first place. I felt it... shatter in my body, felt it losing its grip. I thought for a moment it was gonna be me that

shattered, then suddenly I could... distinguish the sickness from myself. It felt like all these evil little particles were... giving up!

-You look fucked! But happy!

-I am... both! That was better than the biggest hit I've ever had!

-You gonna lay off the smack now too?

-We'll see. Right now I say yes - I feel... purified! If you've reversed twenty-odd years of... stupidity in one night I'm prepared to say you *are* fuckin miracle workers!

Martin was standing by my side then, and I turned to hold him, and we jumped up and down on the spot shouting 'We did it we did it!' and kissed a long passionate kiss until the girls went back to their stroking of Tony.

-And the visuals looked astounding!

-Did they? I didn't even notice them! I was too busy looking at the main attraction!

-You're kidding? Ian, they synched perfectly - just as he slumped on the slate, the animation with the huge shockwave exploding all the little viral monsters detonated, and faded, right on cue!

-You lie? Well it was nothing to do with me! Hey, I said with a huge intake of breath, we can set up the camera for the next lot, show it happening live!

We ran over to the microscope and Saul, who was already peering at the next sample. The camera was stashed beneath the DJ table, and I retrieved it and began setting up a tripod before something occurred to me.

-Shall we do another capsule? I asked cheekily.

Martin looked at his watch.

-Two hours... yeahsss! he said after a tiny intake of breath, and we fished in our pockets until we both found one, placing one in each other's mouths and kissing before swigging on a water bottle.

-Right, best get this set up before they kick in I suppose...

Saul had read out the frequency from the panel in the side of the microscope, then stepped back to allow us to point the camera down one of the eyepieces, and as Kurt found the location for the

next track I switched the lens to macro and focused on the specimen. On the LCD display, a huge cell reflected back magenta light - it was difficult to tell if it was the cell itself or the MDMA that made it shimmer with an opalescent intensity. I pointed the remote at the space I presumed held the projector and switched the channels; a huge version of the same image appeared above the dancefloor, casting a warm magenta light over the slate. I could hear excited noises from the audience, and as DJ Swain again spun the track to assemble the national health service, a round of applause welcomed the young woman being led onto the stage.

-This could be a new kind of spectacle y'know, said Martin, noticeably excited. We may even have invented a new artform!

I kissed him - I couldn't help it. It always seemed the most appropriate reaction to almost everything he said.

-When you want to start, I'll turn up the amplitude on the light source, said Saul, standing by the microscope.

I tried to think if the settings on the camera were correct, and checked the display to make sure the aperture was set to Manual. Kurt turned to Jonny and gave him the thumbs up. The NHS had already libated the patient; her long curly hair was white from what I was now almost certain was flour, and her face looked even more nervous from the paleness it bestowed. As the women led her into the centre, Kurt hit play on the file.

A glissando'd harp announced the start of the track. A deep bass undertone created a throbbing rhythm, augmented by an almost military snare, a series of weird and complex swirls of sound sitting above it. Then it hit, a solid wall of bass, a single trenchant note breaking itself into a commanding pulse - I could see Kif again working the desk, pulling subaudial harmonics out of the track as the woman began to convulse, the end of each bar allowing her a tiny respite before another wall of bass hit her. On the display I could see the virus pulsing, and Martin put his head close to mine to get a better look, then asked Saul if he minded if he had a go. Taking up position by the microscope where Saul showed him what to do, Martin began tweaking the lightsource in time to the peaks and troughs of the music - to mine and the audience's delight, Martin was *playing* the virus, making it dance,

punishing it with vibration before allowing it relief, only to torment it further as another bass wave detonated.

Then the beat fell away, the woman stumbling before the NHS ran in and doused her, supporting her swaying body as she regained her breath, her head and hands still shaking. The softness of a flute seemed to soothe her, a huge bass note from something that sounded like an African djembé drum rocking her back to consciousness, allowing the women to take their leave, before again the snare kicked in, beating the life into her, the death out of her, as the snare ended and a complex series of patterns played out on the djembé vibrated her body across the floor. It was as though she herself knew there was a climax coming, and as Martin turned up the light until the virus shone white-hot at its core, a piercing trumpet, that sounded for all the world like the one that opened Jericho, echoed out across the valley. The woman's head shot back, her arms outstretched in a pose of ecstatic supplication as, behind her, the video image of the virus shattered, and died.

This time shouts and screams accompanied the patient's fall to the floor - we knew by now she would be fine as the NHS rushed in to give her water, and I ran over to the laptop to throw up some animations, switching the projector's source and hitting play on the helicopter movie. I turned to Martin to hug him, the drugs hitting hard as relief set in, our job being done for a while again, and kissed his smiling face.

-Well done, partner! That looked fantastic!

-Your animation looks great too, he said, I didn't realise they had audio as well, as the sound of helicopters echoed around us.

-They haven't, I said, turning to look out of the cabin.

Searchlights sliced open the valley, scattering screaming people this way and that. Ropes hung in the air, black-fatigued commando figures falling from the sky. Everyone in the cabin began moving towards the exit, before being beaten back in by truncheon-waving riot cops, the light glinting off their shields momentarily blinding me. As my vision cleared I saw Jonny fall below the blow of a club and fly backwards knocking a startled Lee into the turntables. Saul tried to grab the microscope before a billy-club smashed it to pieces, glancing off the table and into

his face. Martin tried to pull me out of the way but my vision exploded into stars and white light as a heavy thud dropped me to the floor, from where I saw him fall beside me, his face covered in blood. I tried to stand but another blow returned me to the floor, where I lay, watching a slow-motion movie of brutality as heads were broken and bodies flew. The laptop hit the floor and died, its screen ripped from its casing. Everywhere the sound of pandemonium. I saw Kurt being dragged out of the cabin, a black-suited arm wrapped around his neck as his legs kicked aimlessly in front of him. The table with the decks was suddenly upturned, shooting records in all directions - a helmeted cop, his face twisted into a mask of hatred, smashing vinyl in a frenzy of truncheon blows as another picked up the tripod and swung the camera into the wall, its body shattering, its lens hanging from it like a disembodied eye before being deposited unceremoniously in a corner. I moved over to Martin, to see if he was still breathing, and kissed his unconscious face in a vain attempt to revive him. Then I was being lifted by my shoulders, a rough hand covering my mouth - I heard a voice say

-Careful - that cunt'd bite yer just to gi'ya AIDS...

and wanted to say

-You fucking idiots we just cured that

but knew that, even before the gaffer tape was wrapped around my mouth, it would have made no difference - this lot weren't here to listen. My hands bound behind my back, my shoes suddenly pulled off and thrown somewhere. I saw Tom being carried by two running coppers, his attempts at shaking them off futile. I was sat against the wall of the cabin by having my knees knocked from under me, and looked out, over what had been a party, until another truncheon blow slammed my head into the flint.

And still I didn't lose consciousness, so could merely sit and watch the oil drums overturned and rolling, pouring flame out in wide arcs over the dancefloor. Watch the terrified party-goers cowering under blows from military-style riot police, the term taking on an ironic connotation as they merrily rioted before me. Watch as anyone not cowering was beaten to the floor, their shoes removed, their hands bound with tape behind their backs. Watch

Kif standing in the glare of a searchlight, facing off two shielded cops, his outstretched arms protecting his mixing desk, and could only murmur a muted warning as another came up behind that desk and koshed him to submission, all three taking turns between kicking him and smashing his equipment. Watch the scaffolding tower being pushed over by two laughing cops, the projector smashing against the slate wall. Watch a dog have its head beaten to a bloody pulp and dumped into a barrel of water. Watch every manner of obscene and unnecessary punishment, until I could watch no more, and hung my head between my legs, and sobbed uncontrollably.

Somebody grabbed my hair and pulled my head back, then lifted me to my feet and roughly pulled me back into the cabin. The table had been set back upright; I was pushed down into a chair and the tape ripped from my face, taking a good amount of my lips with it.

-Thanks, I said.

Someone slapped me. I looked up into an average face of authority, toughened, with little to distinguish it but the breadth of its sneer.

-Name.

An interesting question. I thought for a second, my eyes shooting around the cabin. At the table that had last held the centrifuge, a cop sat with a laptop in front of him. I noted with some satisfaction that it was far inferior to ours, until another glance around revealed ours in pieces on the floor. Another slap.

-What's your name?

I weighed up the odds and told him my real one. The cop began typing.

-Address?

I told him the only one they were likely to know, and hoped that my ex-landlord was still too lazy to notify anyone of my absence. The cop in front of me looked over at the laptop cop, who looked up from the screen and nodded. My head was suddenly grabbed and my mouth forced open, a wooden splint placed between my teeth. Another cop in rubber gloves pushed a swab into my mouth, and roughly rubbed it against the inside of my cheek, then another, leaving a sore patch that I ran my tongue

over once the splint was removed. One swab was placed in an odd looking machine with a glass lid, the other in a reseal bag onto which was written my details.

-Am I allowed to ask what you're doing? I asked, and involuntarily braced myself for another slap.

-DNA profile, said the cop behind the desk. It was impossible to tell his rank. Even if he had been wearing any insignia I probably wouldn't have known what it meant.

The machine whirred away in the corner. The light reflecting on the face of the laptop cop shimmied - information was being exchanged. I tried not to think of all the crimes we'd committed, attempted to allow my face to remain blank by dismissing any of them as crimes in the first place.

-Got anything to worry about? said the cop in charge, looking at me suspiciously. It seemed that with some cops, suspicion was their only qualification for duty.

-What, apart from coming to a party you mean?

-You one of the organisers?

-Hardly, I snorted, covering my dishonesty quite effectively I thought.

He held my gaze disturbingly, and I tried hard not to allow anything to show on my face and stared him out.

-You do realise we'll be checking your profile against a database of thousands of crimes, don't you? If you've done one thing wrong, we'll get you. There's no fooling this system.

I was trying hard to keep my brain a blank, to not think of anything whilst his eyes scrutinised my face. He looked down at the papers in front of him, as if bored, and in an instant an image of the cop from the toilet the first night I met Martin scorched itself into my brain. My bowels suddenly loosened and my legs shook. I tried to sit up in my seat to make sure I hadn't actually shat myself, but a hand on my shoulder pushed me back down, giving me a grievance to focus on instead of that face...

-That machine can't possibly store a database of that size, I said, working through the wobble the first few words betrayed.

-It doesn't need to. It sends the information back to a central computer in Swansea. Car crime, robbery, murder, you name it, it can search for it. That machine doesn't need to do much more

than send biographical information. If it finds one thing against you it sends a message so we know to arrest you. If nothing comes up tonight, we know where you live, and we know your genetic fingerprint now too.

-And if nothing *does* show, which it won't by the way, do I get my genetic fingerprints back again?

Another slap. I was grateful for it to be honest. It made lying easier.

-Why don't you just arrest us all and sort it out at the cells?

-I ask the questions, he said, noticeably riled.

His dialogue was poor even by cop show standards. I knew the answer anyway. They didn't have the numbers. Certainly didn't have the budget. Which got me wondering how they'd afforded the helicopters...

-Hang on, you're the local cops, aren't you. So who were the others?

-He's clean, said the laptop cop, sensing I was making uncomfortable connections.

I was lifted to my feet.

-Right you can fuck off now then. Remember, we've got your number. Best keep your nose clean.

God almighty. Do they teach them this shit?

They led me to the door, pulling off the tape around my wrists.

-Can I have my shoes back now?

In answer I got a boot in the back, propelling me out of the cabin, my bare feet catching on rocks. Mind over matter, mind over matter. If your mind don't mind, then your feet don't matter...

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