

P71

Chapter Eight: 11am (pps71-81)

Press conference

AZ: All the speeches are excellent, as is the scene with Osborne. What's still needed is more inner tension in Toni (and perceived by Toni in Stanley) about the potential disaster from the US. They must struggle to project calm and reassurance while internally they are on tenterhooks.

Even if the press conference is a success and the press buys what they say, the US could still withdraw. KF: No. After they see the news coverage, they must feel that they have weathered the storm—provided there is no further scare (which of course there will be when the theft is discovered).

Do more to warm up Toni's feelings for Stanley and her excitement about being invited.

GK: AIDS should be all capitals since it is an acronym. Might want to say "" three million people died of AIDS, which is caused by a human immunodeficiency virus

11 a.m.

“Viruses kill thousands of people every day,” Stanley Oxenford said. “About every ten years, an influenza epidemic kills around twenty-five thousand people in the United Kingdom. In 1918, flu caused more deaths than the whole of World War One. In the year 2002, three million people died of Aids, which is caused by Human Immunodeficiency Virus. And viruses are involved in ten per cent of cancers.”

Toni listened intently, sitting beside him in the Great Hall, under the varnished timbers of the mock-medieval roof, watching the faces of the assembled reporters. Would they hear what he was saying, and understand the importance of his work? *And is she thrilled to be part of this?*

She knew journalists. Some were intelligent, many stupid; a few believed in telling the truth, the majority just wrote the most sensational story they could get away with. It was outrageous that they could hold in their hands the fate of a man such as Stanley. Yet it was true: if enough of them portrayed him as a mad scientist in a Frankenstein castle, the Americans would *might well* get embarrassed and pull the finance, and Oxenford Medical would be finished. And that would be a tragedy, not just for Stanley, but for the world. Toni wanted to slap their dumb faces and say: “Wake up—this is about your future!”

“Viruses are a fact of life, but we ~~don't have to accept~~ that fact passively,” Stanley went on. Toni admired the way he spoke. His voice was measured, but relaxed. This was the

Let's feel more of her turmoil, hope, anger, as she has these thoughts

P72

SE: Change "germs" to "bacteria".

GK:

- Again, AIDS needs capitalization. May want to say ""before AIDS and influenza, the great virus-caused killer was smallpox"". Also, the Chinese used a form of vaccination, called variolation, actually using smallpox virus, well before Jenner's discovery. Jenner identified that a different virus, cowpox, could be used to prevent smallpox.

Would be better to say "A virus cannot reproduce itself - instead, it hijacks the biochemical machinery of a living cell..." The difference being that virus do not specifically use host DNA, but use host proteins (along with their own) and the host's basic molecular building blocks inside the cell (like the nucleotides that make up DNA and RNA) to replicate.

tone of voice he used when explaining things to younger colleagues. His speech sounded more like a conversation. “Scientists can defeat viruses. Before Aids, the great killer was smallpox, the most lethal human infection—until a scientist called Edward Jenner invented vaccination in 1796. Now smallpox has disappeared from human society. Similarly, polio has been eliminated in large areas of our world. In time, we will defeat influenza, and Aids, and even cancer—and it will be done by scientists like us working in laboratories such as this.”

A journalist put up a hand and called out a question without waiting to be asked. “What are you working on here—exactly?”

The questioner was a woman Toni did not recognise. Toni said: “Would you mind identifying yourself?”

“Edie McAllan, science correspondent, *Scotland on Sunday*.”

Cynthia Creighton, sitting on the other side of Stanley, made a note.

Stanley said: “We have developed an antiviral drug. That’s rare. There are plenty of antibiotic drugs, which kill germs, but few that destroy viruses.”

A man said: “What’s the difference?” He added: “Clive Brown, *Daily Record*.”

The *Record* was a tabloid. Toni was pleased with the direction the questions were taking. She wanted the press to concentrate on real science. The more they understood, the less likely they were to print damaging rubbish.

Stanley said: “Germs, or bacteria, are tiny creatures that can be seen with a normal microscope. Each of us is host to billions of them. Many are useful, helping us digest food, for example, and disposing of dead skin cells. A few cause illness, and some of those can be treated with antibiotics. Viruses are smaller and simpler than germs. You need an electron microscope to see them. A virus cannot reproduce itself—instead, it hijacks the DNA of a

living cell and forces the cell to produce copies of the virus. No known virus is useful to humans. And we have few medicines to combat them. That's why a new antiviral drug is such good news for the human race."

Edie McAllan asked: "What particular viruses is your drug effective against?"

It was another scientific question—but, Toni remembered, a journalist could ask serious and intelligent questions at the press conference then go back to the office and write garbage. Even if the writer turned in a sensible piece, it might be rewritten by someone ignorant and irresponsible.

incendiary

hostile

"That's the question we're trying to answer. We're testing the drug against a variety of viruses to determine its range."

Clive Brown said: "Does that include dangerous viruses?"

Stanley said: "Yes. No one is interested in drugs for safe viruses."

The journalists laughed. It was a witty answer to a stupid question. But Brown looked annoyed, and Toni's heart sank. A humiliated journalist would stop at nothing to get revenge.

She intervened quickly. "Thank you for that question, Clive," she said, speaking warmly in an attempt to mollify him. "Here at Oxenford Medical we impose the highest possible standards of security in laboratories where special materials are used. In BSL4, which stands for BioSafety Level Four, the alarm system is directly connected with regional police headquarters at Harbourmouth. There are security guards on duty twenty-four hours a day, and this morning I have doubled the number of guards. As a further precaution, security guards cannot enter BSL4, but monitor the laboratory via closed-circuit television cameras."

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Toni was ready for this. "Let me make three points. One, it was not a hamster. You've got that information from the police, and it's wrong." She was able to say this with confidence because she was the person who gave Frank Hackett the dud information. She had done it so that she would know if he leaked the story—and he had. "Please rely on us for the facts about what goes on here. It was a rabbit, and it was not called Fluffy."

They laughed at that, and even Brown smiled.

"Two, the rabbit was smuggled out of the laboratory in a bag, and we have today instituted a compulsory bag search at the entrance to BSL4, to make sure this cannot happen again. Three, I didn't say we had perfect security. I said we set the highest possible standards. That's all human beings can do."

"So you're admitting your laboratory is a danger to innocent members of the Scottish public."

"No. You're safer here than you would be driving on the M8 or taking a flight from Glasgow airport. Viruses kill many people every day, as Professor Oxenford has explained, but only one person has ever died of a virus from our lab, and he was not an innocent member of the Scottish public: he was an employee who deliberately broke the rules and knowingly put himself at risk."

The press conference was going well, Toni thought as she looked around for the next question. The television cameras were rolling, the flashguns were popping, and Stanley was coming across as what he was, a brilliant scientist with a strong sense of social responsibility. But she was afraid the TV news would throw away the undramatic footage of the press conference in favour of the crowd of youngsters at the gate chanting slogans about animal rights. She wished she could think of something more interesting for the cameramen to point

What were they?

P74

IT Top of page: 'She was able to say this with confidence because she was the person who gave Frank Hackett the dud information' – can we delete this line, because the reader already knows about it, cf p19

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P. 75

NN: Stanley's answer that "one person can infect another very quickly" seems to me *would* be the quote that would come out of the news conference. Even if the lab was convinced that Ross had seen no one else -- which they aren't -- the fact that this is rapidly contagious among humans is the sure-fire news scare line (it certainly would be here!), and nothing Toni says afterward could possibly minimize it. Is there any way for Stanley not to give out such alarming information, or to obscure it in such a way that it doesn't sound so alarming?

GK: Good coverage for the host range of the fictional virus, although it might be better to switch chimpanzees to rhesus macaques. Also, good to see that there is a mention that this is in a specific "type" of rabbit. That would work well with earlier comment #18 if the lab identified a new rabbit model for the Madoba virus.

their lenses at.

Frankie buddy,
Carl Osborne spoke up for the first time. He was a good-looking man of about forty with movie-star features. His hair was a shade too yellow to be natural. "Exactly what danger did this rabbit pose to the general public?"

Stanley answered: "The virus is not very infectious across species. In order to infect Michael, we think the rabbit must have bitten him."

"What if the rabbit had got loose?"

Stanley glanced at the window. A light snow was falling. "It would have frozen to death," he said.

"Suppose it had been eaten by another animal. Could a fox have become infected?"

"No. Viruses are adapted to a small number of species, usually one, sometimes two or three. This one does not infect foxes, or any other form of Scottish wildlife, as far as we know. Just humans, some chimpanzees, and certain types of rabbit."

"But Michael could have given the virus to other people."

"Yes. Although the virus does not spread easily from rabbits to humans, one person can infect another very quickly. Anyone who was in the same room as Michael Ross after he fell ill should contact us or their doctor immediately. But, as far as we can tell, no one saw him during the critical period."

"We aren't trying to minimise this," Toni put in hastily. "We are deeply concerned about the incident and, as I've explained, we have already put in stronger security measures. But at the same time we must be careful not to exaggerate, and the truth is that the public have not been endangered."

Osborne was not finished. "Suppose Michael Ross had given it to a friend, who had

P76

SE: Nice reference to CDC and USAMRIID. Work is also done at Battelle Laboratories.



given it to someone else...how many people might have died?"

Toni said quickly: "We can't enter into that kind of wild speculation. The virus did not spread. Only one person died. That's one too many, but it's no reason to start talking about the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse." She bit her tongue. That was a stupid phrase to use: someone would probably quote it, out of context, and make it seem as if she had been forecasting doomsday.

Osborne said: "I understand your work is financed by the American government."

"The Department of Defense," Stanley said. "They are naturally interested in ways of combating biological warfare."

"Isn't it true that the Americans have this work done in Scotland because they think it's too dangerous to be done in the United States?"

"On the contrary. A great deal of work of this type goes on in the United States, at the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia, and at the US Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases at Fort Detrick, Maryland."

"So why was Scotland chosen?"

"The drug is being tested here at Oxenford Medical because it was invented here."

Toni thought it was about time to close the press conference. "I don't want to cut the questioning short, but I know some of you have midday deadlines," she said. "You should all have an information pack, and Cynthia here has extra copies."

"One more question," said Clive Brown of the *Record*. "What's your reaction to the demonstration outside?"

She still had not thought of something more interesting for the cameras, she realised.

Stanley said: "They offer a simple answer to a complex ethical question. Like most

simple answers, theirs is wrong.”

It was the right answer, but sounded a little hard-hearted, so Toni added: “And we hope they don’t catch cold.”

The journalists laughed, and she stood up to indicate the conference was over. Then she was struck by inspiration. She beckoned to Cynthia Creighton. Turning her back on the audience in the hall, she spoke in a low, urgent voice. “Go down to the canteen, quickly,” she said. “Get two or three canteen staff to load up trays with cups of hot coffee and tea, and hand them out to the demonstrators outside the gate.”

“What a kind thought,” said Cynthia.

Toni was not being kind—in fact she was being cynical—but there was no time to explain that. “It must be done in the next couple of minutes,” she said. “Go, go!”

“Okay!” Cynthia hurried away.

She turned to Stanley. “Well done—you handled that perfectly,” she said.

He smiled. “I think it was a team effort.”

“Now you should slip away, otherwise they’ll all be trying to get you in a corner for an exclusive interview.” He was under pressure, and she wanted to protect him.

“Good thinking. I need to get home, anyway, to welcome the family.”

That disappointed her. She had been looking forward to reviewing the press conference with him. “Okay,” she said. “I’ll monitor the lunchtime news.”

“Why don’t you drop in at the house in a couple of hours? We could watch it together, and see what mistakes we made.”

She brightened: there was nothing she would have like better. His home was only five miles away. “Fine.” She felt privileged, to be invited to Steepfall on Christmas Eve, when his

p78

AZ: Carl may not need to affect Toni so severely. She could think he's silly, pompous, self important, and she has no interest in having a personal relationship with him, but there could be something about him that she likes nonetheless. She might find him amusing, but she of course hides this.

family were visiting. "Look out, here comes Osborne. I'll head him off at the pass. See you at one."

She moved to intercept the reporter, and Stanley left by a side door. "Hello, Carl. I hope you got everything you needed?"

"I think so."

"May we rely on you to do a judicious piece that reflects the facts, and doesn't exaggerate the danger?"

"You mean will I be talking about the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse?"

She winced. She had been afraid he would pick that up. "Foolish of me to give an example of the kind of hyperbole I was trying to discourage."

"We're all human. How long is it now since you split up with Frank?"

"He left me at Christmas two years ago. Why?"

"Just wondering if it's not too soon."

"Too soon for what? You're not making sense."

"Would you like to have dinner?"

"Dinner? As in, go out on a date? With you?"

"Yes to all three questions."

It was the last thing she had expected. "No!" she said. Then she remembered how dangerous this man could be to her and her boss, and she tried to soften her rejection. "I'm sorry, Carl, you took me by surprise. I've known you so long that I just don't think of you that way."

"I might change your thinking." He looked boyishly vulnerable. "Give me a chance."

The answer was still No, but she hesitated for a moment, asking herself why. Carl was

handsome, charming, affluent a local celebrity. Most single women of forty would jump at the chance. But she was not even mildly attracted to him. Why not? It took her only a second to find the answer. He had no integrity. A man who would distort the truth for the sake of a sensational story would be equally dishonest in other areas of life. He was not a monster; there were plenty of men like him—and a few women, too. But Toni could not contemplate becoming intimate with someone so shallow. How could you kiss, and confess secrets, and lose your inhibitions, and open your body, with someone who could not be trusted? The thought was revolting.

“I’m flattered,” she lied. “But no.”

He was not ready to give up. “The truth is, I always fancied you, even when you were with Frank. You must have sensed that.”

“You used to flirt with me, but you did that with a lot of women.”

“It wasn’t the same.”

“Aren’t you seeing that weather girl? I seem to remember a photo in the newspaper.”

“Marnie? That was never serious—we did it for publicity.”

He seemed irritated by the reminder, and Toni guessed the weather girl had thrown him over. “I’m sorry to hear that,” she said.

“Show your compassion in actions, not words. Have dinner with me tonight. I even have a reservation at La Chaumiere.”

It was a swanky restaurant. He must have made the reservation some time ago. Probably for Marnie, Toni thought. “I’m busy tonight.”

“You’re not still carrying a torch for Frank, are you?”

Toni laughed. “I was upset when he left me, but I’m over him now.”

a reporter?

“Someone else, then?”

“I’m not seeing anyone.”

“But you’re interested in someone. It’s not the old professor, is it?”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Toni said.

“You’re not blushing, are you?”

“Certainly not, though any woman subjected to this kind of interrogation would be entitled to blush.”

“My god, you fancy Stanley Oxenford.” Carl was not good at taking rejection, and his face became ugly with resentment and malice. “Of course, Stanley’s a widower, isn’t he? Children grown up. All that money, and just the two of you to spend it.”

“This is really offensive.”

“The truth so often is. You really like high-flyers, don’t you? First Frank, the fastest-rising detective in the history of the Scottish police—and now a millionaire scientific entrepreneur. You’re a starfucker, Toni!”

She had to end this before she lost her temper. “Thank you for coming to the press conference,” she said. She held out her hand, and he shook it automatically. “Goodbye.” She turned and walked away.

She was shaking with anger. She tried to make herself calm. She went to the reception desk near the door and spoke to the supervisor of the security guards, Steve Tremlett. “I have to go. Stay here until they’ve all left, and make sure none of them tries to take an unofficial tour.” No guest could get into BSL4, but a determined snoop might enter medium-security areas by “tailgating”—waiting for someone with a pass then going through the door close behind them.

"Leave it to me," he said.

She hurried to her office. She closed the door and stood still, grateful to be alone for a minute. She tried to set aside Osborne's unpleasant remarks and think about the press conference. Right now, she was pleased with the way things had gone, although she told herself not to pass judgement until she had seen the actual coverage.

She felt calmer. She put her coat on and went outside. The snow was falling more heavily, but she could see the demonstration. She walked to the guard booth at the gate. Three canteen staff were handing out hot drinks. The protesters had temporarily stopped chanting and waving their banners, and were smiling and chatting instead.

And all the cameras were shooting them.

All the speeches are excellent as is the scene with Osborne.
 What's still needed is more inner tension in Toni and which she perceives in Stanley about the potential disaster from the U.S. They must struggle to project calm and reassurance while internally they are on tenterhooks. Because even if the press conference is a success and the press buys what they have to say, the U.S. could still withdraw.
 Suggest too you do more to warm up Toni's feelings for Stanley and her excitement about being invited.