The Viral Lowdown: Can You Believe What She Says?

It’s rag time, and our gossip maven takes to her bed -- and therein, loves, lies the dirt.

December 1, 2000

It’s been illsville for me, sweeties. Nothing AIDSy -- just a touch of the flu from the touch of a certain who-knew-who at the bathhouse two HIVers just opened in my neighborhood. The dears were at death’s door in ’96, and now they’re Lazari on disability spreading the, er, luv. I went straight home from the doc’s and started mainlining telly and Vicks. And, kids, the viral loads on the tube are anything but undetectable.

Whoever NBC is paying for lighting on Must-Not-See-Lipo TV deserves an Emmy. I mean, honey, the “my private life is my business” schtick works for the gays, but HIVers demand a little more credit for spotting their own. To all you in-the-closet disease types I say: Come in, darlings, the water’s fine and crypto-free. POZ, shmoz -- you’ll get the *Advocate* cover, plus a return on the investment in your pearly-whites. Sorry about that other gay mag -- when it comes to HIV, you can be out but not *Out*.

Look, if Katie Couric can show us her colon, we’re all free to be you and me. And speaking of a crock of shit, have you seen the prime-time coverage of AIDS this year? Really, what’s a girl to do when she’s just downed a dose of nauseating meds and CNN gives her another: “Next up -- new hope for an AIDS vaccine.” Get over it -- vaccines were the ugly stepsister for years, and now they’re the toast of the town. So what if that makes us HIVers toast?

Well, hype leads to hope leads to cushy press (remember the brave names ready to roll up their sleeves and test a vaccine -- or at least get snapped for a *Newsweek* cover?) and big bucks from Bill Gates. Meanwhile those testosterone-testy smoking smarties of TAG issued a report card this year warning HIVers not to mistake promise for progress.

And the bandwagon plays on. When the September *Nature* blared that “HAART early, HAART fast” kept the virus in check in five newbie HIVers after they dropped the drugs, an August news hole turned it into the AIDS treatment story of the year. But faster than you can “billion-dollar initiative,” IAVI boosters hopped on the horn with their “It’s the vaccine, silly” spin. What a long way from yesteryear’s “It’s the virus, stupid.” But my advanced studies in bitchiness tell me this may be a case of sour grapes. Mea gulpa. But then why did the brainy activist I ran into at the bathhouse mutter, “Whenever I hear IAVI’s ’A vaccine by 2007’ ralling cry, I think, ’Even if they

have to walk over the corpse of every PWA to get it.'" Call him Deep Dish -- petri, that is.

All this science gossip has me reaching for the concealer on the nightstand. But which "face of AIDS" to wear in my weakened state? Sweetie, if the mirror has two faces, then HIV must be on its 99th. That "changing face of AIDS" slug raised its hydra-headlines more times than the CDC revised -- backward -- its deadline to reduce national infection rates (2005). For Goddess' sake, what is the face of AIDS changing to? Dark & Lovely, henna rinse or I'm-worth-it blonde? (Only the CDC's Helene Gayle, MD, knows for sure.) Even she got in on the act, as the feds' October PR proved, trumpeting "Minorities Outnumber Whites in AIDS" with all stats but one -- us "outnumbered" gays. Black or white, we were unread all over. Call me paranoid, but I know how God (Government Office of Disinformation) works.

Will all this ch-ch-ch-changing get resources to underserved groups or just deepen our divides? Either way, noisy neighbor Larry Kramer said HIVers should spend less time squabbling across fences and more warring as one. "Yeah, AIDS' face sure is changing," he said. "Now it's everywhere and who knows how long before it's everyone's? Hell, 'they' are not going to rest until every person 'they' hate is dead." Just don't ask him to borrow a cup of apple juice to chase the ddI.

And don't ask him if HIV causes AIDS. He's steering clear of Peter Duesberg's hit list. In 1959, the world got "50,000,000 Elvis Presley Fans Can't Be Wrong." In 2000, we got the less regal Durban Declaration -- the HIV-causes-AIDS equivalent of 5,000 Scientists Can't Be Wrong. The petition's target was rogue doc Irma le Duesberg and his Svengali sway on South Africa prez Thabo Mbeki, who would frankly chat up Julia Child if she had a recipe that would get him out of paying for HIV care.

But the defensive strike will just bite AIDS Inc. in the ass. One unlikely rebel, Anthony Fauci, MD, refused to sign, telling *The Washington Post*, "It's like a bunch of people saying the Earth is flat, and then you have to get everyone in the aerospace world to say that the Earth is round. That's crazy." Preach! What a lot of ink spilled for a bunch of bullies with a fax machine. Never underestimate the power of a fax machine for self-promotion. Just ask Brett Beasley.

Well, once I start on my old flames, I figure it's time to let go and let Xanax. But just as I was switching off the telly to cover my eyes with cucumbers, a certain couturier got in the way with the wool. There he was on Leno looking oh so lean-o. Lift the veil, honey, we all know. Only in HIVland, kids. Only in HIVland.

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