

STORY LIBRARY

FINAL SHOOTING SCRIPT

MY OWN COUNTRY

**Based On The Book
By
Dr. Abraham Verghese**

**Screenplay
By
Soonni Taraporevala**

**WHITE - (Complete Script) - 07/25/97
BLUE - (Complete Script) - 08/13/97
PINK - (Selected Pages) - 08/14/97
YELLOW - (Selected Pages) - 08/21/97
GREEN - (Selected Pages) - 08/25/97
GOLD - (Selected Pages) - 08/27/97
SALMON - (Selected Pages) - 09/05/97
BUFF - (Selected Pages) - 09/10/97
GREY - (Selected Pages) - 09/15/97
TAN - (Selected Pages) - 09/17/97**

1 INT. MAKE-SHIFT BAR - ETHIOPIA - 1975 - NIGHT

A title reads: Ethiopia 1975

A booted foot hits the leg of a chair, rhythmically. A red bulb sways on the ceiling. We are in a makeshift bar. A group of men sit on benches, drinking and listening to the news on BBC radio about the unrest in Ethiopia.

BBC

Emperor Haile Selassie has been overthrown by DURG, a coalition of military generals who wish to remain nameless.

From outside, sounds of grenades and explosions. Amongst all the black men, is a handsome 20 year old Indian man, ABRAHAM VERGHESE. His long, curly hair hangs limply around him. It's hot. He wipes his forehead and looks at his watch.

MAN 1

Only six more hours before the end of curfew. Want to buy us a drink, Indian boy?

ABRAHAM

Sorry, I don't have any money.

The man glares at him. Abraham, scared, looks away. Suddenly a military type in a blazer and brown combat boots stands up angrily and begins yelling at the man who's been hitting his foot on the leg of the table.

MILITARY TYPE

Stop that man! Stop that!

The man gives him a defiant look and continues banging his foot. The military type, takes out his gun. Everybody freezes. He points at the man's foot and pulls the trigger. Abraham dives under the table. Freeze the image of Abraham crouched under the table, his hands covering his ears as sounds of gunshots fill the air.

FADE TO WHITE

1A INT. OPENING SEQUENCE - DAY

1A

A collage of an identity document: Abraham Verghese as a young schoolboy in Ethiopia dissolves to Abraham's picture three years later in his Indian passport. A hand stamps his departure from Ethiopia; superimposed over this image is Abraham's hand writing in a diary.

(CONTINUED)

1A CONTINUED:

1A

ABRAHAM

(v.o.)

I was born in Ethiopia to Indian parents who had come here to be teachers. When you're forced to leave a country you once called home, it changes everything. You can't appreciate the simple pleasures of life; you envy people around you who can.

CUT TO:

2 INT. MED SCHOOL - MADRAS, INDIA - 1979 - DAY

2 X

A title reads: Madras Medical College, India 1979.

Abraham, 25, who now has hair down to his shirt collar, wearing bell bottom trousers under his lab coat, is huddled around a bed with other medical students.

ABRAHAM

(v.o.)

I had chosen medicine because of Somerset Maugham's "Of Human Bondage", a book that made medicine seem the most romantic of professions.

The patient on the bed, A LONG-HAIRED INDIAN MAN in his 20's, is emaciated. PROFESSOR S.B.T. instructs the students. It's obvious the patient can't speak or understand English. He looks at them blankly.

PROFESSOR S.B.T.

X

You must learn to use all your senses. You sir, what does diabetic coma smell like ?

MOHAN

X

Acetone sir!

PROFESSOR S.B.T.

Typhoid fever? Verghese?

ABRAHAM

Freshly baked bread sir.

PROFESSOR S.B.T.

Scrofula. Vadivel?

VADIVEL

Uh, ammonia sir?

(CONTINUED)

2

CONTINUED:

2

PROFESSOR S.B.T.

Wrong. Stale beer.

(Meaningfully)

I thought you of all people would know that.

X
X
X
X

A reaction from Vadivel.

X

The students start sniffing. The patient looks at them alarmed.

ABRAHAM

Hepatic coma sir?

PROFESSOR S.B.T.

Very good Verghese.

The professor begins to examine the patient. Brings his head close to examine his skin, steps to the foot of the bed, squats to "sight" down his body, to see if both sides of his chest rise and fall equally. Only then he begins to probe using his fingers. He percusses smoothly, rhythmically and rapidly: quick strokes - before moving on, each triplet melodic and crisp, mapping out the borders of the lung, the edges of viscera, a silhouette of the heart. Finally, almost as an afterthought, he puts his stethoscope in his ears.

PROFESSOR S.B.T. (CONT'D)

Never forget, inspection, then palpation, then percussion, finally auscultation. Which is our least important instrument?

STUDENTS

(bark out)

The stethoscope, sir!

PROFESSOR S.B.T.

And why is that?

STUDENTS

(chant)

Because sir, by the time you have looked, felt and percussed, you should know what you will hear!

3

INT. MEDICAL SCHOOL HOSTEL - NIGHT

3

A smoky room in the men's hostel. A card game is in progress and from the looks of it has been going on for many hours. A group of medical students, Abraham included, are around the table, dressed in lungis (sarongs) and vests. Abraham absentmindedly percusses the table. All of them puff on cigarettes and sip their drinks - bottles of empty booze lie piled up on the floor, dirty plates with chicken bones rest on the two beds. Even though a fan whirrs, all of them are sweating and hot. Sitting on a bed, one of them MO, a perpetual student who is older than the rest of them, rolls a joint. MOHAN, another student, enters the room.

X

ABRAHAM

Eh Mohan - listen to the lecture
Vadivel gave the U.S. consul.

Mohan draws up a chair.

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

What a visionary! What passion! Tell
him Vadivel.

VADIVEL

(In an American accent)

"Spare me the crap" he said "about
coming back to serve your country.
Why do you really want to go?"

X
X
X
X

ABRAHAM

So what did you say?

VADIVEL

I said "Sir, craving your indulgence,
I want to train in a decent, ten-story
hospital where the lifts are actually
working. I want to become a wonderful
doctor, practice real medicine, pay
taxes, drive a big car on decent roads
and never come back to this wretched
town, where doctors are as numerous
as fleas and the air is not fit to
breathe".

X
X

Everybody roars with laughter.

VADIVEL (CONT'D)

Bugger rejected my visa.

More laughter. Mo takes a deep drag off his very large joint
which is not his first. He speaks slowly, stoned -

(CONTINUED)

3

CONTINUED:

3

MO

If at all I go, I'll marry a green-card holder, live in Las Vegas, screw some deadly blondes on the side. But on second thoughts, I think I'll stay here. Desh -motherland - that's important to me.

ABE

At least you have a motherland -

MOHAN

I'd rather have a greencard than a motherland. Bloody escape artist - your parents escaped to Ethiopia, when it blew up they ran to America - now off you go following your mommy-daddy with your greencard in your pocket...

X

ABRAHAM

There's a price to pay you know...

VADIVEL

You want us to feel sorry for you or what? Think of us driving your cadillac in Boston, sipping your champagne.

MO

You buggers think it's that easy? The cowpath to America doesn't lead to good hospitals for foreigners like us - unless you're willing to take a job as bathroom sweepers.

ABRAHAM

Yeah yeah Mo - we know you know everything there is to know about America.

MO

My cousin told me. He said we foreign medical graduates are an embarrassment, a problem. We are like the Mexican-migrant-worker problem, or the Columbian cocaine problem. We are like transplanted organs -life-saving but rejected, because we're foreign tissue.

(CONTINUED)

3

CONTINUED: (2)

3

VADIVEL

As they say in America, "tough shit!"

CUT TO:

3A

INT. CREDIT ROLL - DAY

3A

CREDITS ROLL over a series of documents chronicling Abraham's journeys from 1980 to 1985: his student identity card from Madras Christian College dissolves into his Indian passport, dissolves into his "Resident Alien" U.S. Green Card, dissolves into a picture of him as a hospital orderly in a seedy Boston hospital, until finally the frame rests on an identity document from the V.A. hospital in Johnson City, Tennessee: Abraham Verghese, Associate Professor, Infectious Diseases.

END MAIN CREDITS.

CUT TO:

3B

INT. ABRAHAM'S STUDY - NIGHT

3B

A manual typewriter's keys type across the screen:
Summer, 1985.

From fingers motionless on the keyboard, go to Abraham, now 30, staring at the keys, thinking. Now his hair is cropped short.

X

ABRAHAM

X

(V.O.)

X

I returned to Johnson City Tennessee
in 1985, the same year a young man
from New York came home.

X

X

X

3C

EXT. RURAL SUBURBAN HOUSE - DAY

3CX

A tire hangs from a tree.

X

4

INT. RURAL SUBURBAN HOUSE - DAY

4 X

The sounds of a local Tennessee radio station playing classical music. We are in a upper middle class house in rural suburbia. A middle-aged lady with blue hair cooks up a storm in her kitchen, her husband paces up and down in the living room, looking out of the window, anxiously waiting.

ABRAHAM

(V.O.)

I can hear the radio playing, I can
picture his parents waiting for him,
his mother cooking his favorite food...

(CONTINUED)

4

CONTINUED:

The living room is full of golfing mementos. From a framed photograph of their son on his high school graduation day -a well-scrubbed, clean-cut young man.

CUT TO:

5 EXT. YOUNG MAN'S CAR TRAVELLING - DAY

5

The same young man in a car on a highway. Now he has dirty blonde hair and a earring. He looks very unwell - his hands shake on the steering wheel. A highway sign reads "WELCOME TO TENNESSEE - THE VOLUNTEER STATE" His car has New York plates. From the I love NY sticker on his car's back window, pan to stacks of hay rolled into tidy bundles, lined up on the edges of fields. See tobacco plants and sagging sheds with their rusted, corrugated-tin roofs and shutterless side-openings.

Chills shake his body. He rolls up the car windows, turns the heater on full blast. It's hard for him to keep his foot on the accelerator or his hands on the wheel.

ABRAHAM

(v.o.)

The dread of finding himself sick and alone must have kept him going. That and the desire for home.

His breath is heavy and laboured. His vision blurs.

X

CUT TO:

X

6 INT. JOHNSON CITY MEDICAL CENTRE EMERGENCY ROOM - DAY

6

A finger punches a "Code Blue" button on a cubicle wall. An operator's voice booms "Code Blue, emergency room! Code Blue, emergency room!" The code blue team; an intern, a senior resident, two intensive care unit nurses, a respiratory therapist, a pharmacist - thunder down the hallway.

Patients in their rooms watching TV sit up in their beds. Visitors freeze in place in the corridors. Doctors run in from the parking lot in their street clothes. Others come in scrub suits.

Track down the corridor to the emergency room; the young man is slumped down on the stretcher, he's stopped breathing. The muscles in his neck stand out like cables. His blonde hair is wet and sticks to his forehead. His skin is grey, his lips and nails blue. They stick an IV into his arm. RAY, a pulmonary physician calls out:

RAY

Bicarbonate - Epinephrine! I want a second IV line...

(CONTINUED)

6 CONTINUED:

Ray calls out a rhythmic cadence out loud as a beefy intern climbs onto a step stool and with locked elbows, one palm over the back of the other, squishes the young man's heart.

The ER physician unbuttons the young man's pants and cuts away his underwear.

A "crash cart" stocked with ampules of every variety stands at the foot of the stretcher, as the pharmacist records each medication given and the time.

Ray bags the patient with a mask and hand-held squeeze bag. At a signal from Ray the players freeze in midair. Ray bends the young man's head over the edge of the stretcher, slides the laryngoscope in, feeds the endotracheal tube down the back of the throat, connects the squeeze bag and pumps air into the lungs.

A code-nurse calls out the elapsed time in 30 second intervals.

Slowly the blue in the young man's skin begins to wash out and a faint pink appears in his cheeks. The ECG machine which had spewed paper into a curly mound on the floor, now shows the original rapid heart rhythm restored. The young man's chest rises and falls. He's breathing again.

DISSOLVE TO:

7 INT. JCMC ICU - DAY

The silence of a cubicle in the ICU. The young man comes awake suffocating and gagging. The respirator tries to pump oxygen but he bucks and resists it, tries to cough out the tube in his throat, tries to tear it away but his hands are tied - he's helpless. A blazing light shines down on him, there are tubes up his nose, mouth, penis, probes stuck in his arm. Close-up of his terrified eyes.

Outside the cubicle his parents stand, in utter disbelief, trying to see their son through the forest of intravenous poles and the thicket of tubing and wires that cover him. Ray comes and gently leads them away into the corridor.

RAY

I'm sorry to tell you, your son has
AIDS.

Over the parents' shocked faces hear Abraham's voice.

(CONTINUED)

7

CONTINUED:

7

ABRAHAM

(v.o.)

Word spread like wildfire through the hospital. All those involved in his case agonized over their exposure.

CUT TO:

7A

INT. JCMC ER - DAY

7A

The intern remembers his palms pressed against the young man's clammy breast as he performs his massage.

Claire remembers the intravenous line as blood trickles out and touches her ungloved skin.

The respiratory therapist recalls the fine spray that landed on his face.

CUT TO:

7B

INT. JCMC - ICU - DAY

7B

Go back to his parents' faces frozen in time. We continue the scene where we left off with Ray in the corridor.

FATHER

But how? How could he have gotten this?

RAY

Has your son been healthy in the past year?

MOTHER

Lord, yes!

RAY

Did he ever use intravenous drugs?

MOTHER

Lord, no!

RAY

Is he married?

MOTHER

No.

RAY

Does he live alone?

(CONTINUED)

7B CONTINUED:

7B

FATHER

No, he has a friend in New York.

RAY

A male friend?

FATHER

Yes...we've never met him.

Ray remains silent. The penny drops.

FATHER (CONT'D)

Oh Lord! Is that how he got it? Are you saying my son's a queer?

Ray just stands there, unable to respond. The father turns to his wife.

FATHER (CONT'D)

Mother, do you hear this? Do you hear this?

She gazes at the floor, nodding slowly, confirming finally what she has always known.

DISSOLVE TO:

8 INT. JCMC - ICU - DAY

8

Doctors and nurses peek through the glass as if they're at a freak show. See the parents on the other side of the glass wall, at their son's bedside - holding his hand, talking to his inert body.

CUT TO:

9 EXT. PLANE WINDOW - DAY

9

Clear blue sky and the sight of the Smoky Mountains from an airplane window.

ABRAHAM

(v.o.)

Two months after the young man from New York died, I returned to Johnson City from Boston where I had specialized in Infectious Diseases.

10 OMITTED

10 X

11	<u>OMITTED</u>	11 X
12	<u>INT. ALLEN'S CAR AND EXT. JOHNSON CITY - DAY</u>	12 X
	Allen and Abraham are seated in the front with Rajani in the middle. The baby's in the back in a car seat. Allen's truck has a painted sign "Allen's Repair & Towing".	X X X
	ABRAHAM	X
	Nobody could understand why the hell anybody'd leave Boston for Tennessee	X X
	ALLEN	X
	So what'd you say?	X
	RAJANI	X
	Abraham would say I'm going back because of the people of Tennessee. "They'll give you the shirt off their backs if you're their friend."	X X X X
	ALLEN	X
	Abe's a good ole boy. So you're a full fledged specialist now Doc?	X
	ABRAHAM	X
	You could say that.	X
	ALLEN	X
	Sure as hell hope they're offering you a decent wage.	X X
	ABRAHAM	X
	Could be better, but it's not bad. I'll be at the VA mostly but also at the Miracle Center, do a spot of teaching, some research.	X X X X
	ALLEN	X
	Now that you're a big shot I don't suppose you'd be interested in riding a vintage Triumph bike..?	X X X
	Abraham stares at Allen. Allen laughs.	X
	ALLEN (CONT'D)	X
	A feeling in my bones told me you'd be back, so I didn't sell her. Kept her oiled and greased for you - still runs real good.	X X X X

(CONTINUED)

12

CONTINUED:

12

Overjoyed, Abraham hugs Allen. They swerve dangerously.

ABRAHAM

Thank you.

Rajani reprimands Allen half seriously.

RAJANI

You shouldn't have. What will everybody think? He's not an intern anymore. He's a father now, an assistant professor, a doctor.

ALLEN & ABRAHAM

So what?

ABRAHAM

Is there a rule that says fathers, doctors and professors can't ride motorbike?

CUT TO:

X

X

X

X

X

X

X

X

X

X

X

X

X

X

X

X

12A OMITTED

12AX

13

INT/EXT VERGHESE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM/PORCH -DAY

13 X

Rajani, surrounded by boxes, unpacks alone. She glances at Abe and Allen who are on the porch drinking beers. Abe comes in to the house to get another beer.

Abraham enters, singing, trying to charm her.

ABRAHAM

(sings to her)

Honey I'm home, Get your sweet thing
over here, Bring me my slippers and a
cold, cold beer.

Abraham walks toward Rajani flirtatiously and gives her a boozy smooch.

14 OMITTED

14 X

THRU

THRU

16

16

17 INT. VERGHESE HOUSE - NIGHT

17

The moon shines into their empty bedroom. Steven is fast asleep between Rajani and Abraham on a mattress on the floor.

RAJANI

So how long do you think we'll stay here before you'll want to move again?

ABRAHAM

I don't want to go anywhere. I've been roaming too long - now all I want is to settle down in one place, be a good doctor, put down roots. I feel like I'm at the end of a long journey.

Rajani, pleased, smiles and pulls him towards her, kisses him. He looks at his son sleeping the sleep of the innocent. Bends and kisses him gently.

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

You know Rajani, I've always envied people like you. You can go back home to India -it's always there for you. I want Steven to have what I never did - a permanent home. I feel at peace here, don't you?

Rajani smiles and nods.

RAJANI

I envy you sometimes. My world is so small, all I have here in America is you and the little one. But you - anywhere you go, you're at home. Your friends are your family.

(softly)

It scares me sometimes.

18 INT. MOUNTAIN HOME VA WARD 2 - DAY

18

An old-fashioned open (Pulmonary) ward of World War II veterans, mostly in their fifties and sixties. At the emergency exit, a cluster of men in brown-striped dressing gowns, their oxygen turned off, their green tubing draped around them like necklaces, puff on cigarettes, wheeze and cough.

(CONTINUED)

18 CONTINUED:

At another end of the ward, a chronic ventilator unit, with six ventilators does the breathing for six patients.

19 EXT. MOUNTAIN HOME VA - DAY

Abraham roars in on his motorbike, parks under a tree, dismounts, stows his helmet, puts on his coat and hangs his stethoscope around his neck.

20 INT. MOUNTAIN HOME VA - DAY

A group of interns are waiting for him in a room. Only two interns are Americans. The others are from Nigeria, India, Haiti, Pakistan, the Philippines and Palestine. Abraham rushes in. They look at him curiously, he doesn't seem much older than them.

ABRAHAM

Sorry to be late. I'm Dr. Abraham Vergheze - the new head of Infectious Diseases. Could you please introduce yourselves and tell me where you are from?

X
X
X

They take turns calling out their names.

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

Good. Is there anything you want to know about me?

X
X

VIKRAM NAYAR

What made you choose Infectious Diseases as a speciality? That's very unusual -

X

ABRAHAM

(smiles)

I love bedside medicine, it's like being Sherlock Holmes - mining the body for clues. In America it's a lost art. I don't suppose any of you intend to do anything as old-fashioned?

They all shake their heads "no".

JOHN OKRI

What about AIDS? Aren't you scared?

ABRAHAM

(mischievously).

It's my only chance to play hero.

They look at him like he's crazy.

(CONTINUED)

20 CONTINUED:

20

JOHN OKRI

Have you treated lots of AIDS patients?

ABRAHAM

Yes, several in Boston. But enough about AIDS - let's go see some patients!

They troop out after him. Preceded by Vet in corridor on breathing machine; interns swoop down like penguins entering corridor.

21 INT. MOUNTAIN HOME VA WARD 2 - DAY

21

The interns crowd around the bed of a veteran. Abraham's percussing his chest.

ABRAHAM

If you don't stop smoking you're going to be in trouble.

VETERAN

Here I am, fought for my country. You foreigners just come here telling us what to do, making money off us. I'm going to write to my Congressman.

ABRAHAM

(pats him)

You do just that.

VET

(Winking)

Hey Doc, get me some American doctors!

The group of foreigners move on. By another bed a nurse is drawing blood without gloves. Abraham stops by the bed, she looks up at him.

Abraham draws the nurse out of hearing distance of the patient.

ABRAHAM

You should be using gloves. You know the new rules - don't you?

SADIE

I know, but I keep forgetting. Besides I can't draw blood with gloves - I can't feel anything -

X

ABRAHAM

You're playing with fire Karen.

(CONTINUED)

21 CONTINUED:

SADIE

There's no AIDS around these parts! I mean, look at that old blowhard. Does he look like a drug addict or a homosexual to you?
(laughs)

Abraham shakes his head and walks away.

22 EXT. MOUNTAIN HOME VA - DAY

22

Abraham is by his bike. A voice calls out, "Abe!". He turns. We see OLIVIA SELLS, a tiny, energetic woman in her fifties, with a thin, brown cigarette dangling from her lips, half-moon glasses dangling from a chain, a huge leather bag hanging from her shoulder, run up to him.

OLIVIA

I'm so excited you're back. At last we have an AIDS expert in town! There's so much ignorance - and we've been feeling the pinch - fewer people been donating blood 'coz they think they're going to catch something. So the Red Cross made this videotape "Beyond Fear" that I've already shown to some church groups. Will you come and talk when I show it again?

ABRAHAM

Okay, Olivia, but what about the gay population here? Is it a sizable number? How informed are they?

OLIVIA

We ought to show the tape at the Connection. Thank you for reminding me! Why didn't I think of that?

(looks at his puzzled face)

It's a gay bar. Never heard of it? I'm not surprised. They don't exactly advertise. I'm going to call there right now.

She immediately wears her glasses, goes through her fat daybook.

ABRAHAM

Maybe we should write a letter - maybe it'll be seen as an intrusion.

(CONTINUED)

22 CONTINUED:

22

OLIVIA

Why, Abraham, I knew the man who runs
it when he was a little tyke! We don't
need no letter.

Abraham wonders what he's got himself into as she picks up
the public phone next to them and dials, speaks into the
phone.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

Honey, it's Olivia. What are you doing
about AIDS?

23 INT. VERGHESE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EARLY EVENING

23 X

Two kids looking through the window, seeing Rajani practising
Odissi dance steps with bells on her ankles to taped Indian
music emerging from a Boom Box. Abraham enters the room
holding two shirts on hangers and the kids run away. He
watches Rajani silently for a few beats; she looks the
embodiment of Indianness. She notices him and stops dancing.

ABRAHAM

I can't decide which shirt to wear.

RAJANI

(Walking towards him)

This is a small town.

What if anyone sees you go in there?

ABRAHAM

But you know why I'm going.

RAJANI

I'm not talking about myself! I'm
talking about other people! You know
how they talk. And as an Indian you're
not exactly invisible.

ABRAHAM

It's too late. I can't let Olivia
down. Help me.

RAJANI

Why bother? Go naked...

She resumes dancing.

24 EXT. CONNECTION - EVENING

24 X

Abraham, on his bike, waits in the gravel parking lot outside
the Connection. There's only one other car there. It's a
warehouse like building, painted sky blue.

(CONTINUED)

24 CONTINUED:

The entrance is through an inconspicuous door at one corner. He looks at his watch nervously.

A car drives by slowly. The occupants of the car seem to be scrutinizing him. His palms are sweaty. He stares straight ahead. A police car approaches from the other direction and studies him carefully. He's relieved to see Olivia getting down from her station wagon. He pulls up next to her.

25 INT. CONNECTION - NIGHT

Abraham, still nervous, enters the bar with Olivia. There are only three men at the bar. The bartender, Olivia's contact, dressed as a cowboy, greets her with a kiss.

OLIVIA

This is Dr. Abraham Verghese. He's a specialist in AIDS.

ABRAHAM

Well, not exactly - my speciality is Infectious Diseases and AIDS happens to fall within that -

OLIVIA

Whatever. You're still more of an expert than anybody else in this town.

BARTENDER

What can I get you to drink?

ABRAHAM

Just some water please.

BARTENDER

Bubbles?

ABRAHAM

Uh, tap is fine, thank you.

OLIVIA

Let's plug in.

They are led to a small back room where there's a TV and chairs set up; it's separated from the rest of the bar by a flimsy veil. They try to plug in the video player Olivia's brought to the TV. Abraham looks through the veil into the bar.

(CONTINUED)

25

CONTINUED:

25

ABRAHAM

(whispers to Olivia as
he walks into the
club)

X

X

That man used to work at the 7-11
near my old apartment.

The man in question, has curly blond hair and chubby cheeks. He's wearing short shorts, sandals and a tank top. And he's applied eye shadow and lipstick. It's an incongruous, almost pathetic image. Abraham's angst seems to pale in comparison to the tension in his face. A cigarette goes back and forth from his lips to the ashtray with scarcely a pause, and his foot nervously hammers out a measure on the bar rail. It's obvious that he's either drunk or quickly getting there.

OLIVIA

Help me Abe. This isn't working.

(CONTINUED)

25 CONTINUED: (2)

25

Abraham concentrates on the task at hand as several men drift into the bar and into the back room. Finally he gets it to work. Olivia looks at her watch.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

Shall we begin?

A short black man with a baby face, TREVOR, effeminate and flippant, cries:

TREVOR

Oh, let's start. These Tennessee queens don't even wake up till midnight. And it takes them another hour to get dressed. If we wait for them we'll be waiting all night!

DISSOLVE TO:

25A INT. CONNECTION - NIGHT

25A

The lights are dim. Hear the soundtrack of the videotape. Abraham's eyes sweep the room. See images of the men who are watching the tape. Trevor is snuggled up to Raleigh, a white wisp of a boy who looks no older than 13. His hair is gelled up into a cross between a mohawk and a pompadour. Together they giggle and whisper as if they're sharing a desk in school. Another man, D.A., has a serious, intellectual look - there's nothing outrageous about him, nothing to suggest he's gay. He's watching, intently and seriously. The 7-11 man is still nervously smoking and drinking and eyeing a man who hasn't even noticed his presence.

The videotape over, the lights come on. Through the veil catch glimpses of the action in the bar.

OLIVIA

Gentlemen - and ladies.

She gets a laugh.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

I give you Dr. Abraham Verghese.

Abraham clears his throat and stands up.

ABRAHAM

I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

A thin young man with blond hair, a low brow and green eyes, wearing a batik shirt and jeans, sitting on the floor, hugging his knees, clears his throat and speaks softly.

(CONTINUED)

25A CONTINUED:

25A

THIN MAN

What are our chances of getting AIDS here in Johnson City?

ABRAHAM

If you use a condom, it should be extremely low.

THIN MAN

Well, what if you don't - or you haven't.

Trevor giggles and nudges Raleigh, who gives a little yelp. This is good for a few laughs. The thin young man flashes them a look of exasperation.

ABRAHAM

If you don't, then it depends on how many of your partners happen to be carrying the virus. It's a bit like Russian roulette. In a place like New York or San Francisco, most of the chambers will have bullets in them. In Johnson City...I don't know.

THIN MAN

I mean...let's say that you have been careful. You trusted someone. But come to find out he was carrying on with everyone...And the only person you were with was him.

ABRAHAM

Is he HIV positive?

THIN MAN

Well, I don't know, see. He's left to Atlanta and all I know...I heard he was sick. In fact, I think he's dead.

Trevor and Raleigh look as if someone's poured a bucket of cold water on their heads.

ABRAHAM

(v.o.)

All of a sudden the virus was right in our midst.

ABRAHAM. (CONT'D)

It depends on your partner and whether he had the virus.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

25A CONTINUED: (2)

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

And how long you were together, what
you did together, and so on...the
blood test is the only way to tell.

Abraham looks around. There's an eerie silence in the room.
Olivia asks over cheerfully.

OLIVIA

How many of you here have taken the
test?

Not one hand is raised. Abraham tries not to show his
surprise.

ABRAHAM

(v.o.,)

What was common in San Francisco and
New York was unknown here. It was
like we were in a different time zone.

OLIVIA

The test is free and completely
confidential.

ABRAHAM

Please call the Red Cross or come by
my office anytime.

They step out through the veil into the other room, where
people are oblivious. The music is turned up loud.

X

X

(CONTINUED)

25A CONTINUED: (3)

25A

OLIVIA

I've got to run, but you go ahead and stay for a while. You may only get one chance to see this.

She gives him a hug of encouragement and leaves. Abraham finds a corner table, sits down and observes everything.

25B INT. CONNECTION - NIGHT

25B

The 7-11 clerk is now piss-drunk. It's obvious that this is hardly a relaxed atmosphere - it all seems a bit desperate - people coursing around the room as if at a county fair, peering over each other's heads, searching, scanning... Suddenly the music blasts forth - the building rocks to the tune of "Fame: I'm going to live forever". The lighting has changed to black lights; a psychedelic globe reflects squares onto the floor - There's an exodus to the dance floor - a strobe comes on - all we can see are the truncated movements of limbs, seventy-odd incandescent faces in ecstasy, dancing not in couples, but en masse. The 7-11 clerk makes his way to the dance floor, unsteadily. The group make room for him, let him into the circle, he begins to dance. For the first time we see his face wear a smile. Every face on the dance floor is relaxed, happy, devoid of artifice; the primitive beat of the music unites them, making them as one.

26 INT. ABRAHAM'S OFFICE - STRIP MALL - DAY

26

Inside his office, Abraham and CAROL, the nurse are going over the test results. Carol is a perpetually cheerful, optimistic sort. She's wearing "Smile", "Have A Nice Day" and "This Is The First Day Of The Rest Of Your Life" buttons.

X

CAROL

(triumphantly)

Negative. Negative. Negative. Negative.

Sabra, the Tennessee Queen, opens the door of Abraham's office. Carol hands her test results. She looks at it, kisses the paper and Carol, triumphantly sashays through the waiting room which is full of the gay men we saw in the Connection.

27 EXT. ABRAHAM'S OFFICE - STRIP MALL - DAY

27

Establishing shot of Abraham's office, located in a strip-mall. Sabra sashays past the lock-smith, the dentist, the xerox shop. Everybody stares.

X

28 INT. ABRAHAM'S OFFICE - STRIP MALL - DAY

28 X

ABRAHAM

That's amazing.

X

X

(CONTINUED)

28 CONTINUED:

CAROL

Why should you be surprised? This is rural Tennessee, not Sodom and Gomorrah.

ABRAHAM

(excited)

This means we can contain it. AIDS hasn't yet reached our gay population, and they're the only "high-risk" group around.

29 INT. CHURCH - DAY

Abraham addresses a church group and REVEREND K.

ABRAHAM

(v.o.)

I felt a sense of urgency that I had lacked before.

An painfully shy spinster stands up and speaks softly and hesitantly.

SHY SPINSTER

But hasn't reverend Jerry Falwell said that "Homosexuals will one day be utterly annihilated and there will be a celebration in heaven"?

ABRAHAM

Ma'am, would you rather believe Mr. Falwell or the Bible? The good book says "Judge not, lest ye be judged". The Bible also says "Love thy brother as thyself".

Two churchgoers whisper together amongst themselves.

2ND CHURCHGOER

That's a laugh. A foreigner lecturing us about the Bible?

SHY SPINSTER

Those perverts may be his brothers, but they sure as hell ain't no brothers of mine!

CUT "

28

29

X

30 INT. LOCAL TV STUDIO - DAY

30

The studio of a community based TV show. The furniture's dusty and of a tasteless mustard colour. The camera operator is new to the job. He's having a hard time keeping Abraham's head in the frame.

ABRAHAM

The fact is that our high risk population simply hasn't been exposed to this virus yet, so we must seize this window of opportunity. Safe sex education can and will keep AIDS out of our town.

X
X
X

DIRECTOR

Cut! Thanks doc. That was good.

ABRAHAM

When's it going to air?

DIRECTOR

Sunday morning - 5am.

ABRAHAM

5AM?

31 INT. VERGHESE HOME - KITCHEN - EARLY MORNING

31 X

In their kitchen Rajani waves the local Johnson City Herald in Abraham's face.

RAJANI

This is getting to be too much Abraham!

X
X

ABRAHAM

Let me see that.

(scans his article)

At least they quoted me correct.

RAJANI

Can't you stop now? This isn't Boston. It's so embarrassing.

He holds her hand to stop her from continuing her chores, and looks into her eyes.

X

ABRAHAM

What would you do if a child of ours were to grow up gay?

(CONTINUED)

31 CONTINUED:

31

RAJANI
Don't say that!

(CONTINUED)

31 CONTINUED: (2)

31

ABRAHAM

Rajani, those gay men at the Connection, they're all somebody's children. I hope they're listening, hope that while they're changing channels or flipping through the paper they'll see the message. Because that's the only way they'll stay alive. There's no drugs for this, I can't offer any cure. Can you understand that?

Rajani, a bit shamefaced, remains silent.

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

(softly)

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to lecture you.

She snuggles up close to him.

RAJANI

(softly)

You're forgiven.

Abraham looks into her eyes and begins seducing her by softly singing "Malaika"; they lean across the kitchen table, reaching for each other, their arms and hair are intertwined.

X

X

DISSOLVE TO:

32 EXT. MOTEL PARKING LOT - DAY

32

The same song, "Malaika" continues on the soundtrack. It's now one year later. Rajani, 8 months pregnant, and Steven who is now a 2 year old toddler, get down from their car. The parking lot of the Midtown Inn looks like an Indian convention. Women in saris, their children in tow, mill around, chatting and laughing and loading their cars with huge bags of shopping.

A Ford Van is the center of attraction. On the outside is painted "Patel's Portable Indian Foods and Spices: Servicing the Tristate Area". A map shows the tristate area of Tennessee, Virginia and North Carolina with the towns of Boone, Johnson City, Bristol, and Wise marked with red arrows.

X

The inside of the van has been rigged up with shelves. On the shelves are every conceivable Indian food product. Bags of rice, flour, lentils, bottles of pickles, spices, sweetmeats etc.

(CONTINUED)

32 CONTINUED:

A formidable Gujarati lady with a diamond in her nose, thick gold bangles on her wrists, sits on the lips of the cargo space, weighing out rice and flour on the weighing machine. From time to time she calls out orders to her thin husband, who meekly hands his wife the necessary goods.

Steven joins his friends who are playing hide and seek around the cars. Rajani greets her friends, the women, who chatter away in a variety of Indian languages. She stands in line, her shopping list in her hand.

SARYU DOSHI

So Rajani. How's your husband and his AIDS?

Rajani is saved further embarrassment by being next in line.

WOMAN SHOPKEEPER

Rajaniji - how are you? You are eating almonds like I told you?

RAJANI

Yes Mrs. Patel - I'm eating 7 almonds every morning just like you said.

WOMAN SHOPKEEPER

Good. What I can get you today?

RAJANI

Three packets chilli papads, two kilos basmathi rice -

WOMAN SHOPKEEPER

I give you discount on five kilos -

Abraham creeps up behind her, pecks her neck.

ABRAHAM

Hi gorgeous!

She jumps.

33 INT. VERGHESE HOUSE - KITCHEN

A photographic still-life wide shot of the kitchen with the answering machine clicking on.

ANSWERING MACHINE

(MATTIE V.O.)

Dr. Vergheese. This is Mattie Vines from Virginia. I'm all to pieces about my brother Gordon.

(CONTINUED)

33

CONTINUED:

33

ANSWERING MACHINE

(MATTIE V.O.)

He's just come home after living in
Florida for many years.

(takes a deep breath)

I'll be honest with you.

Abraham and Rajani enter their home laden with groceries,
Steven following. They hear the tail end of the message on
the answering machine.

ANSWERING MACHINE (CONT'D)

(MATTIE V.O.)

I won't beat around the bush. Gordon
has the HIV factor. Could you call me
at 555-8009? It's urgent. Thank you
very much.Abraham pauses in the hallway, looking towards Rajani, a
faint note of excitement in his voice.

ABRAHAM

Rajani, my first AIDS patient in
Tennessee is on its way! Mattie's
brother.

Rajani's face looks like she's hearing something ominous.

33A OMITTED

33AX

33B INT. JCMC - GORDON'S ROOM CORRIDOR - NIGHT

33BX

Mattie, 30 pert with brown bobbed hair and huge eyes, and
Abraham walk down the corridor towards Gordon's room.

X
X

MATTIE

Abraham, I'm so glad you could see us
so quickly. I heard you were back in
Johnson City, then I saw you on TV
the other day, that's how come I
called. Gordo's been sick a long time -
I mean a long time - but he's very
sick tonight.

X
X
X
X
X
X
X
X
X

GORDON

(V.O.)

I feel like a young man in an old
body.

X
X
X
X

34 INT. JCMC - GORDON'S ROOM - NIGHT

34 X

In Gordon's room, Abraham, assisted by a nurse MARY, examines GORDON. He's frail and wispy - has an odd smile on his face, unrelated to his real emotional state. It's a smile that flickers on and off, his first response when he's spoken to, as if signaling his return to the real world from an all-consuming private reality. Though he's emaciated, pale, his breathing laboured, he's calm and resigned.

X

ABRAHAM

When do you think you contracted the virus?

GORDON

What do you mean?

ABRAHAM

Well, your test says October 1985. But do you think it may have been before that? Did you have any lovers who died of AIDS?

X

GORDON

I've had one - no two - lovers. Who died of AIDS. I guess I must have got the virus in '80 or '81.

Abraham examines him - starts with his pupils, goes to his mouth, his neck & then works his way down with speed & smoothness. This is his craft and he clearly has a rhythm and comfort with it.

(CONTINUED)

34 CONTINUED:

ABRAHAM

How long have you been feeling poorly?

Gordon laughs a short, sharp laugh.

GORDON

Months - no, years. I was tired for so long. And losing weight. Even before I came home.

ABRAHAM

And what have you been feeling since you got home?

GORDON

(smiles)

Tired and feverish. And I stay cold all the time. I can barely shower. Or wet my head 'coz I freeze to death. And then I'll suddenly break a sweat. Otherwise -

He stops speaking. He's short of breath. Abraham waits patiently.

GORDON (CONT'D)

- otherwise I'm doing pretty well.

CUT TO:

34A INT. JCMC - GORDON'S ROOM CORRIDOR - NIGHT

34AX

MATTIE, paces up and down outside Gordon's room, nervously nibbling at her nails. Abraham comes out. Takes her aside.

X

ABRAHAM

We're going to have to admit him. He's anaemic, needs a transfusion. He has yeast in his mouth, and I hear rales in both lungs.

X

X

X

CUT TO:

X

34B INT. JCMC - GORDON'S ROOM - NIGHT

34BX

Inside, Mary pats Gordon's hands.

X

MARY

Honey, don't you worry about a thing.

Abraham and Mattie enter the room.

(CONTINUED)

34B CONTINUED:

34B

ABRAHAM

Gordon, I think you need to be in the hospital.

GORDON

I don't want to be in the hospital.
Can't you give me some medicine and send me home?

ABRAHAM

It's not that simple. You need blood.
You need antibiotics by vein.

Gordon smiles and shakes his head. Mattie steps in. Her tone is gentle but it brooks no argument.

MATTIE

Now, Gordo, you are going to do what the doctor says and there ain't two ways about it.

Abraham fills out the hospital admission forms.

ABRAHAM

Don't you worry about Gordo. We'll take good care of him. I'll come by and see you tomorrow. Try and get some sleep.

She looks at him gratefully.

35 INT. VERGHESE HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

35

Rajani's asleep. Abraham bends over Steven who is in his crib and has a pacifier fallen out of his mouth. Abraham puts it back in his mouth.

X

X

RAJANI

Have you washed your hands?

ABRAHAM

Yes Rajani - I washed my hands.

(patiently, as if
explaining to a child)

You know it's not passed through touch -

He holds her shoulder, trying to turn her to face him. She moves away from him. Abraham lies down. Over his face, looking at the ceiling:

(CONTINUED)

35 CONTINUED:

3

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

(v.o.)

I didn't recognise this person next to me. I didn't realize that Rajani was merely frightened, as any wife or mother would be, in those days when we understood so little about AIDS. I never saw how much fear filled her days while I was off playing hero.

Close-up of Rajani's face - her eyes are open - tears trickle silently down her cheeks.

CUT TO:

36 OMITTED

36 X

36A EXT. ESTABLISHING SHOT OF MATTIE'S HOUSE - DAY

36A

Mattie's house: her kids play outside with a watering hose, a dog barks, clothes hang to dry.

37 INT. MATTIE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

37

A peal of laughter. When Mattie laughs, her face lights up and the world can't help but laugh with her; her laugh is distinctive, infectious.

MATTIE

That was me, believe it or not. Gordy did up my hair. Made me feel like a homecoming queen.

Abraham's looking at a photograph of Mattie as a young girl with moon eyes, a large mouth, huge dimples, and a huge beehive hairdo.

MATTIE (CONT'D)

That picture was taken just before I found out about my breast cancer.

ABRAHAM

(surprised)

You had -

(CONTINUED)

37

CONTINUED: (2)

37

We see Mattie amidst choreographed domestic activity-kids getting cookies, somebody in her lap sometimes she's cooking in the kitchen. We are in Mattie's living room, paneled in dark wood. Above the babble of the TV, hear the staccato eruptions of a police scanner from Mattie's bedroom. On the living room wall, Elvis, wreathed in a golden halo, smiles from a knobby walnut frame.

X

X

X

X

MATTIE

Years ago. I beat it thanks to good luck and the good Lord. I tell you - bad luck has a way of just striking out of the blue. When Gordon came home it was like another test God was giving us.

A chubby Gordon, barely recognizable, smiles out at us from another photograph.

MATTIE (CONT'D)

'Here' He said, 'let's see what you all do now'. And there wasn't two ways about it -I knew what I was going to do.

ABRAHAM

Is Gordon your only brother?

MATTIE

No. There's three of us - Herman was the head of the household when Pa was away, then there's me, then Gordo. We were tough kids, Herman and me. Between us we survived nearly about everything,

(smiles)

broken bones, scarlet fever, even typhoid. Only Gordo was the sickly one. Poor kid was in and out of hospital from the time he was four; croup, bronchitis, fits.

CUT TO:

MATTIE (CONT'D)

So he became a Loony Tunes addict.

(laughs)

He'd mimic the voices of Bugs Bunny or Elmer Fudd. Sometimes he'd pretend he was Bugs or Donald Duck for weeks at a time.

(MORE)

X

(CONTINUED)

37 CONTINUED: (3)

MATTIE (CONT'D)

I think it was when he was 18 or 19
that the fits went away. Suddenly he
put on inches, developed a style,
turned into this dazzling creature -
(softly)
It was nothing short of a miracle.

CUT TO:

38 INT. MATTIE'S BACKYARD - FLASHBACK 1979 - DAY

38 X

Mattie, her brother, their mother rolling with laughter while
Gordon performs. He's acting out a skit, performing both
parts; a prim and proper high-class southern lady, and her
doctor.

Gordon has on his mother's glasses on the tip of his nose
when he plays the doctor. His voice changes when he plays
Mrs.T.

GORDON

(peers)

Those are lice ma'am, crab lice. Do
you itch?

GORDON (CONT'D)

Oh it's so embarrassing, oh Lordy,
yes I do itch, son, I itch something
awful.

GORDON (CONT'D)

Is the Reverend itching too?

GORDON (CONT'D)

(proudly)

My husband has nothing to do with it.
I am responsible for my own crab lice.

GORDON (CONT'D)

Do you, uh, wear, you know what, when
you're with your, uh partner?

GORDON (CONT'D)

(blushes and examines
her hands)

Yes, but it didn't help me did it?
What could I have done to prevent
this? Worn a raincoat?

Mattie's laughing so hard she's lying on the ground, holding
her stomach and rocking.

39 INT. MATTIE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

39 X

MATTIE

(smiles wistfully)

It was like he came from a different planet - he could've done anything. We both left home after that, shared a house in Kingsport.

X

ABRAHAM

You met Gordon's friends?

MATTIE

Sure. They'd come home - and to be quite frank - I didn't like some of them. I told him so. I said, Gordon, you be careful now. You watch out.

ABRAHAM

You mean they were gay men?

MATTIE

Yes. But I didn't think too much about it, you know? Gay may have been what he did, but it wasn't who he was. He was our Gordo before he was anything else.

ABRAHAM

How long did you two live together?

MATTIE

About a year. Then I returned to Blackwood and got married and Gordo moved to Atlanta. My mother and I, we visited him there once.

CUT TO:

40 INT. ATLANTA CLUB - FLASHBACK 1980 - NIGHT

40 X

Gordon, in a cape and white suit, belts out "Yes, I'm the great pretender, pretendin' that I'm doing well". We are in a small, smoky nightclub. Mattie and her mother, tears in their eyes, proudly watch him perform. Still singing, he comes over to their table. The song finished he announces -

GORDON

Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like you to meet the two people in this world who have made my life worth living. Mattie my sister, and my ma - visiting us from Preacher's Creek, Tennessee.

(CONTINUED)

40 CONTINUED:

They get a loud round of applause. He kisses his mother; pulls a reluctant Mattie up onto the stage with him.

Together they sing a duet of their favorite song; "All my Ex-es are in Texas but my heart's in Tennessee". He makes her feel like a queen. She looks at him adoringly. The love that runs between them is as palpable as an electric current.

Gordon sweeps up Mattie in his arms and ballroom dances with her across the nightclub floor.

MATTIE

(v.o.)

One year, Gordo didn't call on Mother's Day. Then Mama's birthday came and went with no call. He had just disappeared off the face of the earth. For five years we didn't know whether he was dead or alive.

CUT TO:

41 INT. MATTIE'S PARENT'S KITCHEN - FLASHBACK 1986 - DAY

41 X

Gordon stands in the doorway of his mother's house.

GORDON

Hey, Mattie. What you doing?

MATTIE

(screams)

Ma!

His face looks deflated, the flesh of his cheeks seems to have collapsed onto the bone, his thick bush hair is falling out and streaked with grey. Her mother comes rushing over. He hugs her tight.

GORDON

What you doing, Mama?

Her mother starts sobbing, the oil on the stove splutters, Mattie shouts -

MATTIE

WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN? WHY HAVE YOU NOT CALLED ALL THESE YEARS?

Her mother hushes her. Gordon's father stands watching, tears streaming down his cheeks. He grins from ear to ear. Mattie and her mother start whooping and hollering and praising the Lord.

(CONTINUED)

41

CONTINUED:

41

GORDON

Mama, I've come home.

MRS.VINES

Lordy, I'm going to have to fatten
you up.

Gordon goes to his father - they hug awkwardly.

GORDON

Mattie, look what I got you.

From his suitcase he takes out the white suit he had worn in Atlanta. He swoops her up - twirls around with her singing "All my ex-es are in Texas but my heart's in Tennessee" -one line into the song and he collapses out of breath. His breathing is laboured. He starts shivering. Mattie covers him with a blanket.

MATTIE

(alarmed)

Gordo, are you all right? Should I
call a doctor or something?

He wanly shakes his head "no".

MR.VINES

Of course he's all right. He's just
tired with all the travelling.

MRS.VINES

We just gonna have to put some flesh
on him.

MR.VINES

I know I ain't been much of a father,
ain't been around that much, but now
that you're home things are going to
be different. What say you when you
rest up we go into business together?
I was thinking of roofing and tiling.
Would you like that?

X
X
X
X
X
X
X
X

Gordon looks at his father wanly, slowly shakes his head
"yes".

X
X

Mattie looks at her brother. Mattie unpacks Gordon's bag at
one end of the room glancing up at her father every now and
then. Over close-up details of Gordon's sundry possessions -
post cards from exotic places, a picture with his lover - an
airline steward, bowties and the white suit, we hear Mattie's
VO.

X
X
X
X
X
X

(CONTINUED)

41 CONTINUED: (2)

MATTIE

(v.o.)

All my parents could think of was
that God had returned their prodigal
son to them. I was the only one who
knew something was wrong.

41

X
X
X
X
X
X

CUT TO:

42 OMITTED

42 X

42 CONTINUED: 42
X

43 INT. MATTIE'S LIVING ROOM - FLASHBACK - NIGHT 43
Mattie's knitting a vest for Gordon. He enters the room -
backlit - looks like a Christ-like figure. X
GORDON X
Mattie, I'm sick. Can you help me?

44 INT. MATTIE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY 44 X
For the first time tears come to her eyes and roll down her
cheeks.
MATTIE
I tell you, it was almost a relief.

45 EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - EVENING 45 X
Abraham on his bike, speeds down a country road, his face is X
wet. We don't know whether he's crying or whether it's the
cold wind in his eyes that has made them water.

45A INT. JCMC - GORDON'S ROOM - NIGHT 45AX
Gordon is asleep in his hospital bed. Abraham enters the X
room with Mary, the nurse in charge. Abraham gazes at X
Gordon's face. X
ABRAHAM X
Any change in his fever? X
MARY X
No. X
Abraham gently covers Gordon with another blanket. On the X
table he notices a carton of take-away Chinese food. X
ABRAHAM X
What's that? X
Mary answers hesitantly, expecting to be reprimanded. X
MARY X
He said he loved chop suey so I got X
him some.... X
Abraham touched beyond words, just nods and leaves the room. X

46 INT/EXT. JCMC - ER RAMP AREA - DAY

46

VICKIE TALLEY, 35, a woman in jeans, oversized man's shirt, a red polka-dotted bandanna over her chin-length hair, lifts all 180 pounds of her husband CLYDE out of the back of their car and into a wheelchair. Vickie is a veritable "force of nature". Clyde, 35, has hollow cheeks, and sunken eyes. His hair, once plentiful is now wispy and scarce.

X

(CONTINUED)

46

CONTINUED:

46

Vickie is pissed. She harangues a few NURSES AIDES, who half-heartedly try to assist.

VICKIE

Now look, you all - just look at him!
Would depression or nerves do this to
a grown man?

Two kids, DANIELLE, 12, and CLYDE JUNIOR, 4, climb out of the beat-to-shit, bile-green Ford Torino. They leave the car doors wide open. We see tools, spare parts, cigarette butts, etc. strewn on the floor and the back seat.

The kids trail after their parents. Vickie continues her harangue to the group of INTERNS we saw before and NURSES without missing a beat. They're all gathered around Clyde, who sits passively in the wheelchair, looking on with little understanding.

X
X
X
X
X

VICKIE (CONT'D)

Would nerves make him lose weight?
Would they make him stop talking and
become like a baby? Would nerves make
him hiccup for weeks?

X
X
X
X
X

A hiccup breaks the surface and ripples across Clyde's face.
He winks at the assembled medical staff.

X
X

47

OMITTED

47 X

48

INT. JCMC - PHYSIO ROOM (CLYDE'S ROOM)

48 X

Clyde sits passively in bed as Abraham informs Vickie of his test results. Their children wait in the hall.

ABRAHAM

Your husband's CAT scan indicates a
global deterioration of all cognitive
functions.

VICKIE

Can you speak in plain English?

ABRAHAM

It means that his brain has shriveled.
It's the sort of thing we find in
seventy-year old patients with
Alzheimer's.

X

(CONTINUED)

48

CONTINUED:

48

VICKIE

Honey I hate to burst your bubble,
but Clyde's a 35 year old truck driver.
It ain't like somebody put his brains
in the dryer and just left it running.

ABRAHAM

He's a trucker?

VICKIE

Don't believe them commercials. It
don't pay worth a shit. But Clyde
likes to travel so...

ABRAHAM

Has he ever used intravenous drugs?

VICKIE

No. He just drinks.

ABRAHAM

Has he ever had sex with another man?

VICKIE

Hell, no!

CLYDE

Hell, yes!

Vickie spins around.

VICKIE

What??

ABRAHAM

You've had sex with men?

CLYDE

Yep.

VICKIE

He don't know what he's saying. They've
got him all pumped up with -

CLYDE

I like sex Vickie, you know I do.

VICKIE

With men, Clyde? You like sex with
men?

CLYDE

Yep.

(CONTINUED)

48 CONTINUED: (2)

48

Clyde starts to play with the remote control, clicking through the channels. Vickie grabs it and throws it at him.

VICKIE

You two-timing pervert!

ABRAHAM

Mrs. Talley.

X

Clyde pulls the sheet over his head and lays still like a mummy - causing Vickie to get even more furious.

VICKIE

You slept with my sister too, didn't you? Answer me, Clyde! Don't think I don't know it, you son of a bitch!

Vickie's ready to wallop her husband, but Abraham takes her arm.

ABRAHAM

Mrs. TALLEY. Please. Your husband shows signs of AIDS related dementia. Though I need to test him to be certain of that.

(beat)

I suggest we test you as well.

(beat)

And your sister. And anyone else you think would be appropriate...

49 OMITTED

49

50 INT. JCMC ER RAMP AREA - DAY

50

Vickie is with her kids.

DANIELLE

What's the matter with Daddy?

VICKIE

I don't want to talk about it, baby. Not here. Not now.

Elevators shut. Abraham, watches from down the hall, concerned.

51 OMITTED

51

51A OMITTED

51AX

52 INT. CLINIC - ABRAHAM'S OFFICE - DAY

52

Garrulous REVEREND K is seated in Abraham's office.

ABRAHAM

So what seems to be the problem,
Reverend?

REVEREND K

Well, it's kind of embarrassing son,
but I got this fire at the end of my
pecker and this honey-coloured milk a-
dripping out.

Abraham keeps a straight face though he's dying to laugh.

ABRAHAM

I'll have to step outside and get a
special agar plate to culture for
gonorrhea.

REVEREND K

(clears his throat)

While you're at it, Doc, you might
get one for my throat too.

ABRAHAM

All right.

Abraham's at the door. The reverend makes to stop him once
again. But this time Abraham's caught on.

(CONTINUED)

52

CONTINUED:

52

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

I know. One for your backside, right?

REVEREND K

There you go! Safe in the arms of
JesusX
XAbraham leaves the room. Stay on the randy Reverend as he
taps his foot and waits.

ABRAHAM

(v.o.)

I also tested him for "bad blood"
which by now, 1986, meant both syphilis
and HIV. He was negative.

CUT TO;

53

INT. JCMC - FAMILY ROOM - EVENING

53

Mattie, her mother, brother, and one daughter are sitting on
a sofa beneath the picture windows overlooking the adjacent
VA campus. Gordon's father, a cap glued to his head, stands
to the side of the sofa, leaning against the window, his
hands in his pockets. Other cousins are seated on chairs.
Abraham is in a chair in front of the sofa. Christian icons
on the wall.X

X
X

ABRAHAM

Think of the immune system like an
orchestra, and the CD4 cell like the
orchestra conductor. When the conductor
collapses there is total confusion.
This is what happens with AIDS. The
AIDS virus attacks the CD4 cells and
the body becomes vulnerable to even
the simplest infection.

MRS.VINES

But how in the world did our Gordo
get it?

MATTIE

(irritated)

You know how he got it, Mama, don't
you?

MRS.VINES

Lord, lord, how do they get that way?

Like a pillar of salt, Mr.Vines stands there, his arms folded,
studying the carpet.

(CONTINUED)

53 CONTINUED:

53

Then he lifts his head up, heads for the door, turns and addresses his family, ignoring Abraham completely.

(CONTINUED)

53 CONTINUED: (2)

53

MR. VINES

All I know is that the good Lord did not bring him back just to take him away. I don't believe he has this AIDS or nothing like it. He's going to get better. I just know it.

He exits the room and disappears down the hallway.

54 INT. ABRAHAM'S OFFICE - STRIP MALL - DAY

54

Abraham seated at his office, staring into the frosted glass. A few patients are waiting in the waiting room. Carol comes in with two charts. She hands him first one chart, then the other.

X

X

CAROL

Chester Mews. And Langdon Arwood.

X

He looks at Carol puzzled.

CAROL (CONT'D)

They wanted to be seen together. I figured you wouldn't mind. They want to be examined and they want an AIDS test. They're waiting in the examination room.

She leaves the room. Abraham stares at the charts.

55 INT. ABRAHAM'S OFFICE ROOM - STRIP MALL - DAY

55 X

Abraham has his hand on the handle of the examination room door.

ABRAHAM

(v.o.)

This moment, this waiting on the threshold, I would come to know well.

He knocks and enters. The two seated men come to their feet. The butcher-block like examining table occupies one side of the room. On the other side are three chairs. Abraham extends his hand -

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

I'm Dr. Abraham Verghese.

CHESTER

Chester Mews, this is Langdon Arwood.

X

It's obvious Chester is the leader, Langdon his follower. Chester is extremely unwell.

X

(CONTINUED)

55 CONTINUED:

He's pale and thin, his face has sores, his hair's falling out, he's emaciated.

(CONTINUED)

55

CONTINUED: (2)

55

It's obvious from looking at him that he has AIDS.

They are an odd couple. Despite Chester's illness he looks cosmopolitan, like he could be at home in NY or San Francisco, Langdon is very much a local boy. Chester's wearing wire-rim glasses, and a red T-shirt under his bomber jacket. Langdon is a roly-poly man with bulging, sad, moon eyes from which tears seem on the verge of spilling. He's bald with a high-peaked crown. When Abraham looks at Langdon he seems to want to shrink back into the surroundings. X X X

CHESTER (CONT'D)

We're from Abingdon. We're here for the AIDS test. I would've done it there but Langdon refused. He didn't want to be the talk of the town. Not that we aren't already. We are gay, you know. X

Langdon blushes. Abraham tries to put him at ease. X

ABRAHAM

(to LANGDON)

Does Abingdon have a meeting place like the Connection? X

CHESTER

Lord, no!

LANGDON

I wish! X

Abraham pulls some surgical gloves on - ties a tourniquet on Langdon's arm. X

ABRAHAM

Make a fist for me, please.

LANGDON

(looks away)

Oh, Lordy, I'm queasy with blood. X

Abraham draws blood.

ABRAHAM

Langdon, have you always been gay? X

LANGDON

Yes, though I tried to be straight. I was having sex with Chester when I was seven. But I kept telling myself it was wrong. X

(CONTINUED)

55 CONTINUED: (3)

55

CHESTER

So he got married and had three kids.

LANGDON

You left town so what was I to do?

CHESTER

You got married first - that's when I decided to leave.

Abraham draws out the needle - Langdon presses his wound.

ABRAHAM

So you were childhood sweethearts?

They both smile and look at each other fondly.

CHESTER

You could say that, yes.

Abraham ties the tourniquet on Chester's arm.

ABRAHAM

Are you still married?

LANGDON

Lord, no! I finally had to admit it, I'm about as straight as a three dollar bill! Chester came back from New York, cos I was so alluring, I got divorced, we set up housekeeping together going on twelve years now.

ABRAHAM

How often do you have anal receptive intercourse?

CHESTER

(grins)

Not often enough.

LANGDON

Chester!

ABRAHAM

Have you had other partners in the recent past?

CHESTER

Sure.

(CONTINUED)

55

CONTINUED: (4)

55

LANGDON

(embarrassed)

Chester!

X

Chester, who is not at all ashamed and in fact takes pride in being in-your-face, continues.

CHESTER

On weekends we like to have what we call "recreational sex" - we drive up the Interstate to truck stops - they come from all over - we call 'em pickle packers.

LANGDON

Or pecker picklers.

X

ABRAHAM

Are they gay?

LANGDON

Oh, Lord, no! They just want relief.

X

ABRAHAM

Aren't there women turning tricks at these places?

Langdon and Chester both nod.

X

CHESTER

Oh, yeah.

LANGDON

You bet.

X

ABRAHAM

Well why wouldn't a trucker go with a woman, if that's what he wants?

CHESTER

For one thing, he'd have to pay for it.

LANGDON

And Lord knows he wouldn't like it half as much!

X

They burst into laughter. Abraham smiles.

ABRAHAM.

Chester, I'd like to examine you now, if I may.

X

X

(CONTINUED)

55 CONTINUED: (5)

Chester undresses and lies down on the examination table. He's all bones. His body is full of Kaposi's sarcomas and enlarged lymph nodes. Langdon starts to cry. Abraham looks at him alarmed.

LANGDON

You don't understand, Doc. I'm not worried about myself. I'm worried about him. He's been real tired and at night he sometimes breaks into a cold sweat and cries in his sleep. Take care of him Doc. I've loved him since we were seven years old. He's my life. Without him I wouldn't want to live.

Langdon puts his head on Chester's chest and begins to wail so loudly that Carol rushes in. She gently extricates Langdon, murmuring comforting noises.

ABRAHAM

I promise you I'll do my best. When your results come in we'll plot out a strategy - okay? In the meantime, please don't worry.

Carol and Abe leave his office to go to reception area. As they shut the door behind them. Carol says to Abe:

CAROL

Lord, I'd die for a man to love me like that!

56 INT. VERGHESE HOUSE - NIGHT

Abraham rushes into his house - Rajani is sitting on the sofa, flipping through a magazine, dressed in a silk sari, with all her jewellery on, looking gorgeous.

ABRAHAM

I'm so sorry - got caught up at the clinic, I'll run and take a shower - won't be a minute.

She glances up at him. She doesn't say a word, nor does she meet his eyes.

57

INT. SCHOOL GYM - NIGHT

57

Rajani and Abraham walk into the gym of a local school. They pause at the door and Abraham mutters under his breath. With them is Vikram Nayar, Abraham's intern, whom we had seen in an earlier scene.

X

X

ABRAHAM

X

Same gym, same people, different host,
no bloody booze -

X

X

Rajani gives him a sharp look.

X

VIKRAM

X

Hello sir!

ABRAHAM

Vikram! Hi! Meet my wife. Rajani,
this is Vikram Nayar, one of my
interns.

X

X

Rajani gives him a smile, walks over to where the women are sitting on their own, having animated discussions.

X

SARYU DOSHI

X

So you've given up dancing?

X

Rajani smiles and points to her grown belly.

X

SARYU DOSHI (CONT'D)

X

Yes, yes, that's just for now. We
were hoping you would kick off our
cultural programme for Indian
Independence Day celebrations.

X

X

X

X

RAJANI

X

Saryuji, I've stopped performing. I
feel too out of touch in this country -
no musicians, no colleagues - now I
dance only for myself.

X

X

X

X

SARYU DOSHI

X

Tsk, tsk.

X

Very selfish of you. Depriving us -

X

The men stand around in clusters, talking on their own. The children weave between the two genders, raucously playing.

X

ABRAHAM

Is this your first time here?

(CONTINUED)

57 CONTINUED:

VIKRAM

Yes sir.

ABRAHAM

Welcome to the pecking order. Doctors rule over engineers who lord it over everybody else. Let me introduce you. Ophthalmology Patel's God is Ano-Rectal Patel whose God is Thoracic Patel - he's the ultimate -everyone has to rise when he enters the room. You see, even though Ano-Rectal Patel makes more money than Thoracic Patel what he does has shades of untouchability, working with shit and all that.

VIKRAM

(grins)

And infectious diseases?

ABRAHAM

We're the bathroom sweepers my dear. Now go and mingle!

57A INT. SCHOOL GYM - NIGHT

Vikram wanders off to a group of youngsters his age. Abraham is surrounded by a group of men.

DR.PATEL 1

How's AIDS Verghese?

(CONTINUED)

57B CONTINUED:

57B

An intense looking girl - PRIYA fixes her intense eyes on Abraham. She speaks with a perfect Appalachian twang.

PRIYA

But like when you're seeing your patients, don't they like see you as a foreigner? I mean, like, isn't it hard overcoming that?

ABRAHAM

Actually no. Most often it works the other way around. They tell me things they wouldn't tell a white doctor. They feel I won't judge them. Maybe they feel I have no right to judge them!

CUT TO:

57C INT. SCHOOL GYM - NIGHT

57C

Time to leave. People are saying their goodbyes. Abraham is approached by MR.SHAH.

MR.SHAH

(half-serious, half-joking)

Verghese, what magic have you worked on my daughter? She just told me that when she finishes medical school she's going to become an AIDS specialist!

ABRAHAM

My congratulations.

Ahead of him he can see Rajani, laughing, at the center of a circle of women. She seems perfectly at home and happy.

CUT TO:

58 INT. ABRAHAM'S OFFICE - STRIP MALL - DAY

58

A close-up of Vickie's nervous face. Abraham is behind his desk in the clinic, she's sitting opposite him.

VICKIE

My test came back positive, didn't it?

ABRAHAM.

Yes.

(CONTINUED)

58 CONTINUED:

Vickie's face falls. She starts to speak, but can't. Abraham tries to think of something positive.

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)
You're what's called an a-symptomatic carrier, Vickie.

She gives him her "speak English" look.

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)
You have the virus, but your CD4 counts are quite high. Almost normal, in fact.

Vickie opens her purse, pulls her cigarettes out. looks for an ashtray. There isn't one.

VICKIE
How long will I live?

ABRAHAM
If you quit smoking, you should be around for some time.

VICKIE
What, a year? Two years?
(no answer)
Ten years?

ABRAHAM
This is a relatively new disease.
We're still studying the -

VICKIE
Don't bullshit me. If you don't know, just say so.

Vickie's hands are shaking so badly that her cigarette breaks.

ABRAHAM
There's a lot of research being done.
I'm sure they'll find a cure.

VICKIE
When? When???

ABRAHAM
(softly)
I don't know.

Her face crumbles. She tries not to cry. She begins to cry.

(CONTINUED)

58 CONTINUED: (2)

58

VICKIE

What about my sister?

ABRAHAM

She's positive as well.

VICKIE

Oh God....I knew it....I knew it...

ABRAHAM

I'm sorry.

She pulls herself together.

VICKIE

Yeah. Well, me too.

She walks out of his office, bravely, her head held high.

59 INT. VICKIE'S TRAILER - DAY

59

In her trailer Vickie fumbles with a gun; she's stuffing bullets into it. The box of bullets falls off the bed, scattering bullets all over the floor. She gets down on her knees picking up the bullets - looks up and sees her children standing by the bedrail.

DANIELLE

Mom?

Vickie drops the gun, falls onto the bed weeping.

60 INT. JCMC HALL - DAY

60

Abraham and Mattie walk down the corridor towards Gordon's room.

ABRAHAM

How do you all feel about it?

MATTIE

I'm happy for Gordon because it's obviously made a difference. Go in and take a look-see. I think you'll be surprised.

CUT TO:

60A INT. JCMC - GORDON'S ROOM - DAY

60A

They enter Gordon's room. Gordon's sitting up in bed, looking alert and bright-eyed. One gets the sense of his old charisma. With him are his beaming mother and nurse Mary.

(CONTINUED)

60A CONTINUED:

GORDON
(to Mattie in his Bugs
Bunny voice)
Hello Dolling! What say you and I go
rashmagooling, just you and me?

Mattie laughs till she cries.

GORDON (CONT'D)
(still in his Bugs
Bunny voice)
Say doc - what say you send me home?

ABRAHAM
(smiles)
And to what do we owe this sudden
transformation?

GORDON
Last night I saw Jesus - I woke up
and saw this cloud around my bed. I
wasn't dreaming mind you. My eyes
were open and I could see Mama laying
there. Just then a voice spoke out
from the cloud 'Everything will be
all right Gordon' and a hand reached
out to me and I knew it was Him and
He held my hand.

Mary wipes a tear from her eyes. Mattie and her mother look
at Abraham. He looks at the chart - examines him, takes his
temperature.

ABRAHAM
(smiles)
Well Gordon, your fever's broken,
whether by divine intervention or
antibiotics, I don't know. But it
seems like the right time to send you
home. Mattie, I'll arrange for some
home oxygen and maybe Mary would agree
to come by the house to administer
his medications?

Mary nods "yes" most willingly. Gordon's mother, so happy
and pleased, impulsively throws her arms around Abraham and
gives him a big hug.

MRS. VINES
You've been wonderful. Thank you.

Abraham, pleased as well as embarrassed, extricates himself
as best he can.

61 INT. ABRAHAM'S OFFICE - STRIP MALL - DAY

61

Chester is seated in Abraham's clinic.

ABRAHAM

Where's Langdon?

X

CHESTER

Left him at home. Didn't want him to break down in public. I'll tell him when I get back.

ABRAHAM

Has Carol already told you the test results?

CHESTER

No. But it wouldn't take a genius to figure it out. I've known for a long time. The test is purely academic. So what's our CD4 count doc?

ABRAHAM

Langdon's 500, yours I'm afraid is only 30.

X

Chester's face falls.

CHESTER

(bravely)

Hey, what the hell -

Abraham remains silent. Chester struggles to keep the tears from his eyes. Abraham, not wanting to embarrass him, looks away.

CHESTER (CONT'D)

Say, Doc, will you have a coffee with me?

ABRAHAM

Now?

CHESTER

Forget it, I'm sorry I asked.

ABRAHAM

No, no - of course I will. Where shall we go?

61A EXT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

61AX

Establishing shot.

X

62 INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

62 X

In a quiet coffee shop, Chester toys with the sugar cubes as he talks.

CHESTER

See Doc, I got no regrets in life. I have no one to blame but myself. I've had more sex than ten heterosexuals would have had in a lifetime! I was in NY in the heyday of being gay - bathhouses, Fire Island and all that - I mean, we fucked like crazy!

CUT TO:

62A STOCK FOOTAGE

62AX

A Halloween gay parade down the streets of the Village in New York. Outrageous costumes - everybody's having a ball.

CUT TO:

62B INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

62BX

CHESTER

And now here we are. I don't believe it's a punishment from God or any of that crap. If I was to be reborn, I'd want to come back gay. I mean, when you think about it, most gay men have experienced more of this world than any heterosexual. They've traveled to several countries, have seen the best shows, movies, plays, have taken an interest in art, in the way their house is decorated....No insult to you doc, but most straight men are beer-guzzling slobs, at least around these parts. But by God, the one thing they know is how they feel about queers! When they see a queer they can look down on him, feel contempt, beat up a queer because it's justified. What's it like where you come from?

(CONTINUED)

62B CONTINUED:

62B

ABRAHAM

When I was in college in India,
homosexuality was regarded as kind of
a joke - it was only when I came to

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

62B CONTINUED: (2)

62

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

America, that I became aware of a gay culture. What was it like for you when you were growing up?

CHESTER

Oh the usual - had to hide, pretend to be straight, pretend to laugh when somebody told a faggot joke. That's why when I got to NY, I was gay with a vengeance. We started a group called the Gay Liberation Front - all of us were young - we had tremendous revolutionary spirit - we were out there - in your face - all the time.

(smiles at the memory)

ABRAHAM

So what made you come back to Tennessee?

CHESTER

I'd been an activist since after Stonewall - a full-time thing. Every gay pride march, every gay this-or-that, I had to go.

CUT TO:

63 EXT. STOCK FOOTAGE - DAY

63

Silence=Death marches, men kissing each other as they march, posters etc.

CUT TO:

64 INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

64 X

CHESTER

I was worn out, ready to live a calmer life, and besides

(softly)

I missed Langdon something awful.

(after a beat)

Which is what I wanted to talk to you about. See, he's never really been good about taking care of himself. When I do go, will you keep an eye out for him?

X

65

EXT. VERGHESE HOUSE PORCH - NIGHT

65

Abraham and a very pregnant Rajani sit side by side on the swing in the porch. Rajani's brushing her long hair. Sound of crickets and other nocturnal creatures. Abraham's feeling, looking at five index cards - of his AIDS patients. Rajani puts down her brush, turns to him with a sweet smile.

RAJANI

Abraham, are you sexually attracted to gay men?

X

ABRAHAM

WHAT??

RAJANI

You heard what I said.

ABRAHAM

I can't believe you're asking me this.

RAJANI

I'm just curious. All of a sudden you seem very comfortable around them.

ABRAHAM

You're right. In a strange way, I've come to learn more about being a man from gay men than from straight men.

RAJANI

Meaning?

ABRAHAM

Meaning - I've learnt that there are other sides of being a man - the ability to appreciate the arts, to really listen to women and befriend them -

Rajani puts down her brush and playfully strokes Abraham's cheek.

RAJANI

You're not turning sweet on me, are you?

ABRAHAM

(irritated)

Stop it! That's not the point.

X

Rajani snuggles up to him.

X

(CONTINUED)

65 CONTINUED:

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

Listen, with gay men, you're looking
at men without the influence of women.
Men not conditioned by what women
find acceptable, what women allow.

She looks at him warily. It's his turn to tease.

RAJANI

Meaning what?

ABRAHAM

Meaning the sexual life of gay men is
what all men would perhaps like if
left to themselves - a variety of
partners, anonymous sex -

(smiles)

except they can't get women to agree.

RAJANI

(hurt - tears in her
eyes)

Is that what you'd really like?

She gets up, goes into the house. He calls after her.

ABRAHAM

By the way, the answer to your question
is no. I'm attracted to you.

The netted door bangs shut behind her.

CUT TO:

66 EXT. WOODS - DAY

66

Dappled sunlight. Abraham & Mattie walk through a path in
the woods.

MATTIE

Oh, I think everybody knows what
Gordo's got.

ABRAHAM

How?

MATTIE

I told them. We got nothing to hide.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

66

CONTINUED:

66

MATTIE (CONT'D)

I got no time to waste on what the neighbours think.

ABRAHAM

Have you had any negative reactions from anyone?

MATTIE

If they got anything negative to say, they sure better not come and say it to me. Over the days some women from our church have been coming by, bringing food - not that Gordo eats anything.

(softly)

All he's got on his mind is wanting to get baptized....

X

67

EXT. LAKE - DAY

67

Abraham watches as Gordon, supported by his father on one side and Mattie holding his oxygen mask on the other, slowly walks into a lake. It's a magnificent setting. Around them the Smoky mountains rise majestically. Sound of birdsong. God's presence seems palpable here.

Gordon, extremely out of breath, stands in the water. Mattie holds the mask to his mouth. The priest's words ring through the air.

PRIEST

I baptize you in the name of the Father -

Mattie removes the mask. The priest dunks him into the water.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

- the Son -

Dunks him into the water. He comes up sputtering.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

- and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dunks him. He comes up gasping and sputtering.

The baptism over, Mattie and her father help Gordo back to land. He sits on the shore to recover his breath. He looks calm and utterly at peace.

(CONTINUED)

67

CONTINUED:

GORDON

(softly)

I'm ready to die Mattie. I know He's
waiting for me on the other side.

(CONTINUED)

67

CONTINUED: (2)

67

Close-up of Mattie's face as she looks at her darling baby brother. She would exchange places with him if she could. She reaches out and touches his face, committing it to memory.

CUT TO:

68

AND

69

OMITTED

68 X

AND

69

70 OMITTED

70 X

70A INT. ABRAHAM'S OFFICE - STRIP MALL - DAY

70A

Abraham walks into his office. Carol walks out of the examination room.

CAROL

I'm going to get a suture set: you might have to do a little sewing next.

Abraham enters the examination room where Vickie's on the table - an ugly V-shaped cut on the knuckle of her hand. The skin hangs down in a flap. She looks at Abraham with an apologetic smile.

VICKIE

That's my cousin Grace's tooth what done that.

Carol enters with the suture set. Both Abraham and Carol put on gloves. As Abraham begins work, cleaning up the cut, stitching it up, she talks.

VICKIE (CONT'D)

(sighs)

You all are going to think I'm awful. But what the hell. See, there's Grace who works here at the hospital who done told everyone in Tester Hollow that Clyde and I have AIDS. You know people around here are so damn inquisitive they wouldn't hesitate to stop a funeral to ask what deceased the corpse! Grace and her husband Andrew, go to this Holiness church? I never go no more -can't take all that babbling in tongues and holy spirit stuff; scares the shit out of me. But Clyde, now that he's sick, has been wanting to go to church.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

70A CONTINUED:

70A

VICKIE (CONT'D)

Well my dear cousin Grace, stands up in church and tells the whole goddamn church that Clyde has AIDS and would the church be willing for him to come there, cause he very much wants to.

ABRAHAM

Did you or Clyde ask her to do that?

VICKIE

Hell, no! And by the way, the church congregation said No! And then they come to my house to tell me this - I just said to her "You little dumb ass. How would you feel if the shoe was on the other foot? Don't you ever step in my house again or I'll jack slap your ass till kingdom come." Well," Andrew says, " We'll come and see our cousin Clyde anytime we please". That's when I picked up a poker and went after him. Buddy, he just lit out like his pants were on fire. Grace was just standing there. I got so mad. That I let her have it with my fists. I dropped her with one shot, bust a few teeth I reckon, whopped her real good.

X

X

X

X

Both Abraham and Carol have stopped what they're doing - they're staring at Vickie with their mouths open. She looks at their expression and begins to laugh - they begin to laugh too. Abraham finishes bandaging her wound.

ABRAHAM

(smiles)

Remind me not to mess with you.

VICKIE

Aw doc, I'd never do that to someone who didn't deserve it.

ABRAHAM

Can you remove your bandana please?
We need to do a full examination.

Vickie's lower lip begins to tremble, tears form in her eyes.

(CONTINUED)

70A CONTINUED: (2)

VICKIE

I'm real ashamed about this.

Very reluctantly she begins to unknot the bandanna, pausing once, as if she's changed her mind. She takes it off. She's completely bald. Carol looks puzzled.

VICKIE (CONT'D)

I did it. I didn't mean to - I just set in the trailer and yanked it out, a hair at a time...

She looks away crying. She can't bear to meet their eyes.

ABRAHAM

It's nothing to be ashamed of. You're under incredible stress. It happens. There's even a name for it. It's called -

VICKIE

Crazy.

ABRAHAM

No, it's called "trichotillomania"

Vickie loses it completely.

VICKIE

It's not fair! It's not fair!

ABRAHAM

(whispers)

I know it's not.

Abraham rubs her shoulder. She holds her head, weeping. Carol offers her a tissue, but Vickie wipes her nose with her sleeve.

CUT TO:

71
AND
72

OMITTED

71 X
AND
72

X

72 OMITTED

73 INT. VERGHESE HOUSE HALLWAY - NIGHT

73

The shrill insistent ring of the phone. Abraham stumbles out of bed and into the hallway - gropes for the phone half asleep.

LANGDON

(v.o. shrill and alarmed)

Doc? Chester is very sick! He's very, very short of breath and running a fever. A hundred and four. Dr. Vergheese, he's turning blue on me.

ABRAHAM

Langdon, calm down. Call the emergency ambulance service - tell them to bring you to the Medical center - come to the emergency room - I'll meet you there.

74 INT. JCMC - ER RAMP AREA - DAWN

74

The ambulance comes roaring IN, its lights flashing. The back door opens - Abraham, who's been waiting, peeks in. Chester's eyes are rolled back in his head, he's covered with a fine sheen of sweat. Despite the oxygen mask, his skin is the colour of lead. His chest is making vigorous but ineffective excursions.

Langdon, who's been riding in the front seat, is scarcely able to stand up. His face is tremulous; he's on the verge of fainting.

LANGDON

(Begs, pleads)

Don't put him on no machines, whatever you do. Please, no machines.

ABRAHAM

Why?

(CONTINUED)

74 CONTINUED:

LANGDON

Because that's what he told me. He doesn't want it.

ABRAHAM

When did he tell you? Just now?

LANGDON

No. A long time ago.

ABRAHAM

Did he put it in writing? Does he have a living will?

LANGDON

No...

75 INT. JCMC ER - DAWN

75

While Abraham examines Chester, nurse Sadie has already begun an IV and brought the crash cart. The respiratory therapist administers oxygen. X

ABRAHAM

Get a gown, goggles and mask ready for me.

RESPIRATORY THERAPIST

You going to do it yourself? Shouldn't we call an anesthetist?

ABRAHAM

We have no time to find one who'll work on an AIDS patient.

Chester is moaning and muttering incomprehensibly, but his presence is largely unnoticed in the bustle of the ER.

76 INT. JCMC - ER - HALLWAY- DAY

76

Abraham rushes around looking for Langdon.

76A INT. JCMC - ER RAMP AREA - DAY

76A

Abraham finds him at the ambulance entrance smoking a cigarette with three other men. The smoke rises quietly around their weathered faces. They look like a Norman Rockwell portrait - small-town America's citizens in their work-clothes in a hospital parking lot, facing a family crisis.

LANGDON

Dr.Vergheese - these are Chester's brothers.

(CONTINUED)

76A CONTINUED:

76A

ABRAHAM

Langdon, can I tell them what's going on?

X

Tears pour down Langdon's cheeks uncontrollably. His body shakes with sobs.

X

LANGDON

Tell them everything.

X

ABRAHAM

(talks fast)

Chester is very sick. He has AIDS. Now he has a bad pneumonia - I need to put him on a breathing machine in the next few minutes or he will die. But Langdon tells me Chester has expressed a desire not to be put on the machine.

X

The assembled brothers turn to Langdon who nods vigorously

X

LANGDON

He did. Said he never wanted to be on no machines.

X

ELDEST BROTHER

We need to discuss this.

ABRAHAM

We have no time, I need to go right back in.

ELDEST BROTHER

Then put him on the breathing machine, if you have to. Do everything you can.

A little wail comes out of Langdon that degenerates into sobs. Abraham puts his hand on Langdon's shoulder. He shakes his head back and forth, back and forth. The oldest brother speaks again, matter-of-fact and determined.

X

X

ELDEST BROTHER (CONT'D)

We are his family. We are legally responsible for him.

Langdon's face crumbles as he suddenly becomes a mere observer with no legal right to determine the fate of the man he had loved since he was seven years old.

X

ABRAHAM

Langdon, I have to go in.

X

77 INT. JCMC - ER - DAY

77

Abraham goes through the ritual of gowning and masking.

ABRAHAM

(v.o.)

I had, when it came down to the final moment, given Chester's brothers the power of family. Not Langdon. But there was not time to look back now.

Chester is expending tremendous amounts of energy to breathe. Abraham extends his head over the edge of the stretcher. The respiratory therapist gives him a few brisk breaths of oxygen from the squeeze bag and steps away. Abraham inserts the laryngoscope blade into Chester's mouth and heaves up on the tongue. He pushes the tube in. It goes in too easily. He knows he's missed. He pulls the tube out. While they bag him with the squeeze bag again, Abraham mutters to himself.

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

Come on Abe, you can do it...

Chester is a deeper shade of blue now. Abraham's pager that he has in his pocket, rings. He ignores it. He holds his breath - mutters "please God" and pushes the tube in again.

CUT TO:

78 INT. VERGHESE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

78

Rajani, doubled over with pain, curses Abraham beneath her breath. Steven is staring at his mother, crying. She just about manages to pick up the phone and dial a number. Her contractions are coming fast and furious. She gasps into the phone.

RAJANI

Allen...I need some help..

CUT TO:

79 INT. JCMC - ER - DAY

79

Nurse Sadie pats Abraham on his back. He looks very pleased with himself. The procedure's a success. Chester's breathing and being wheeled out of the ER.

ABRAHAM

Did you know that intubation was invented by a physician named O'Dwyer as a lifesaving measure in diphtheria?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

79 CONTINUED:

79

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

It's therefore an infectious diseases procedure!

SADIE

X

(smiles)

Yeah right. I'll keep that in mind.

Abraham remembers the pager - takes it out of his pocket, looks at it. Goes to the phone, dials. There's no answer.

79A INT. VERGHESE HOUSE - HALL/STAIRWAY - DAY

79A

Cut to an image of a phone ringing in an empty hallway in the Vergheese home. A beachball gently falls down the stairs, silently. The phone keeps ringing.

79B INT. JCMC ER - DAY

79B

Another nurse comes running up.

NURSE 2

Dr.Vergheese, your friend Allen called.
Your wife's been admitted - you're
needed immediately.

Abraham sheds his gown, gloves, goggles - races down the corridor.

ABRAHAM

(v.o.)

I was totally at the mercy of God or nature. Given all that I had seen recently, all the suffering, all the sadness, an easy uncomplicated birth seemed almost too much to hope for.

80 INT. JCMC - MATERNITY HALL - DAY

80

A nurse rushes past him in full gear, making him worried. Abraham races into the maternity ward. Allen's in the corridor. He extends his hand - a big grin on his face.

ALLEN

I had no time to buy you a cigar.
Congratulations! Another fine son!

Abraham, relieved, tearful, ecstatic, jubilant, hugs Allen, whoops, clicks his heels - the nurses all look at him and laugh.

(CONTINUED)

80 CONTINUED:

80

ALLEN (CONT'D)

Look at it this way Abe. With a boy
you only gotta worry about one dick
in town. With a girl you'd have to
worry about all the dicks in town!

81 INT. JCMC - MATERNITY ROOM - DAY

81 X

Rajani's sitting up in bed looking exhausted and tearful.
Steven's by her side. Abraham enters, sits down next to
her, kisses her, can't stop kissing her. Scoops up Steven,
kisses him too.

(CONTINUED)

81 CONTINUED:

81

RAJANI

Where were you?

ABRAHAM

I'm sorry, so sorry, I was at an emergency, I rushed right over, oh sweetheart, I'm so sorry you had to go through this alone. Things are going to change now, I promise. Let's make this a new beginning. I'll work hard to make things better for us, for the kids.

RAJANI

(softening)

Don't you want to see Jacob?

ABRAHAM

Where is he?

RAJANI

Right behind you.

Abraham jumps up and goes to the crib, looks in - as he's catching his first sight of his second son - his pager begins to ring. He looks at it. The pager says: "Code blue! Code blue!"

X
X

Abraham looks towards Rajani apologetically. She closes her eyes.

X
X

RAJANI (CONT'D)

Go. Take Steven with you.

X
X

She's drifting off to sleep. Abraham grabs Steven and rushes out of the room.

X
X82 INT. JCMC ICU CORRIDOR - DAY

82 X

Abraham rushes down a corridor, carrying Steven who is rattled; the new baby, his mother seemingly sick, his father running. His soft sobs turn hysterical. Abraham deposits Steven at the nurse's station

X

82A INT. JCMC ICU - DAY

82AX

Abraham rushes into the ICU, where a furious Code Blue is in progress on Chester. All the bustle and activity around Chester is in contrast to the activity in Chester's body; there's no heartbeat. Chester is dead. Abraham shocked, stands very still, his head bowed. Gradually the activity ceases. Slowly, he pulls out the tube from Chester's trachea. Waves everyone off.

X

(CONTINUED)

82A CONTINUED:

87

ABRAHAM
Thank you everybody.

They leave. Chester finally looks peacefully asleep. There's no one in the room but Abraham and an ICU nurse. She's picking up the debris from the code.

(CONTINUED)

82A CONTINUED: (2)

82A

She's dressed as if for a shuttle mission - gloves, gown, mask, goggles.

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

(almost to himself)

I didn't think his heart would quit so quickly. I really thought I could give him a few more months -

ICU NURSE

(nonchalantly)

Well, they're all going to die, aren't they? There's not much point to this.

ABRAHAM

(furious)

Can you tell me what's the "point" of keeping 90 year old patients who are brain dead alive? And if you were in the same boat, would you like an extra year of life or would you think there's no "point" to that? Or do you think your job is only to take care of immortals?

He can hear the nurses huddled together, whispering and talking about him behind his back.

X
X83 INT. JCMC - ICU CORRIDOR - DAY

83 X

Abraham, still fuming, picks up sleepy Steven from the nurse's station. Walks down the corridor.

ABRAHAM

(mutters to himself)

Pick your battles, Abe, pick your battles.

84 INT. VERGHESE HOUSE - PORCH - NIGHT

84 X

Steven, in his pyjamas, on the singing bench, looks at his father sitting next to him, softly strumming his guitar and singing him his favorite lullaby "Malaika" Steven's eyes close, he drifts off into peaceful, innocent sleep. Abraham, troubled, lost to the world, continues the song.

X
X
X

DISSOLVE TO:

85 EXT. VERGHESE HOUSE PORCH - EVENING - ONE YEAR LATER

85

The song continues as Abraham strolls up and down the front porch with baby Jacob in his arms.

(CONTINUED)

85 CONTINUED:

85

Jacob is now one year old. He's wearing only a diaper. Abraham holds him facing him, his feet curled up against his chest, his body resting on his forearms, his head in his cupped hands. Jacob's eyes are focused on Abraham's mouth as he sings. He shows no signs of sleep.

Steven, who is now three years old, runs around the garden with a Mason jar, chasing fireflies, shouting "ping, ping" as their lights flash on and off. The phone rings.

ABRAHAM

Steven! Get the phone please.

Steven runs into the house - brings the phone out - hands it to Abraham, who picks up the receiver.

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

Yes?

86 INT. DR.PRESNELL'S KITCHEN - EVENING

86

Go to DR.SARAH PRESNELL - cut between them as needed.

SARAH

Abraham, it's Sarah Presnell from Kentucky. I'm sorry to bother you at home but I have a sad sad situation here.

Abraham, still holding the baby, watches Steven run around as she talks.

SARAH (CONT'D)

A wonderful man I know, Lloyd FLANDERS, is infected with HIV. Nobody but me - and now you - knows that he's infected. Even his son and daughter don't know.

X
X

Rajani, flushed and sweating, comes in through the gate in her jogging suit. She takes the baby from Abraham - enters the house.

SARAH (CONT'D)

I can't treat him. I'm quite willing to, but everybody knows him here. He is a pillar of our community. He even makes me keep his medical records at my house under lock and key.

X
X

(CONTINUED)

86

CONTINUED:

86

ABRAHAM

How did he get it?

SARAH

He had a heart attack, they did open heart surgery, gave him a transfusion, this was just weeks before they had started screening blood - such bad luck.

Steven signals excitedly that he's caught a firefly in his jar. Abraham gives him the thumbs-up sign.

ABRAHAM

So you want to send him over?

SARAH

Tonight if it's OK with you. He and his wife have their bags packed and the car tanked up. He's waiting for me to call and tell him.

X

ABRAHAM

(sighs, slightly
irritated)

Send him on to the old section of the Miracle Center.

SARAH

Where?

ABRAHAM

I'm sorry: the MOUNTAIN HOME MEDICAL Center. It's an inside joke.

87

OMITTED

87

87 OMITTED

88 INT. JCMC - FOYER - LATE EVENING

88

A well-dressed man, gaunt under his fedora, approaches the admission counter. LLOYD is in his early fifties, wearing a light overcoat, which he takes off with the help of his wife. Beneath it he's wearing a jacket and tie. He takes off his hat. He has a buzz cut, his sideburns shaved almost above his ears. He's slightly stooped over, with fatigue more than age. His wife HOPE is the same age; she's wearing a tweed suit with leather pumps. She drapes his jacket over her arm, steps closer to her husband, as if they're physically connected. Abraham watches them though they are unaware of him. She clutches a small overnight bag. Lloyd braces one hand against the counter, the other reaching for his wallet.

Wide shot of the husband and wife, dwarfed by the high ceiling and the imposing foyer, looking forlorn and forsaken. It's a heart-wrenching sight. Abraham steps forward quickly.

ABRAHAM

Mr. FLANDERS?

Lloyd turns. He seems to know instantly who Abraham is. He grasps his hand in both his.

LLOYD

Dr. Verghese. I'm delighted to see you.

It's obvious his words are not just a figure of speech. His face breaks into a warm smile. Crinkles form all around his eyes and the strain and worry dissipates. A gap between his teeth gives him a Huckleberry Finn impishness.

(CONTINUED)

88

CONTINUED:

88

LLOYD (CONT'D)

Hope, this is Dr. Verghese.

She shakes Abraham's hand, the natural smile on her lips deepening.

ABRAHAM

(to the admissions
clerk)

Admit them to a room on the 5th floor
please. You can come up later and
fill out the forms you need.

(to Hope)

Allow me.

He takes the bag from her hand and leads them to the staff
elevator. Lloyd holds the back of Abraham's arm, walking
slowly, leaning on him from time to time, while Hope walks
on his other side.

LLOYD

Son, how come if you're from India,
you have a name like Abraham?

ABRAHAM

I'm a Christian.

LLOYD

You got Christians in India?

ABRAHAM

Sure. Ancient ones. After Christ's
death, Thomas the apostle traveled
east and arrived on the Malabar Coast.
He converted the local Hindus to
Christianity -

LLOYD

My word, I had no idea -

HOPE

Look how God works!

89

INT. JCMC - LLOYD'S ROOM - NIGHT

89

Lloyd is settled into bed. Abraham sits beside the bed in a
chair.

LLOYD

(chuckles)

It's easier for the queen to slip out
of Buckingham Palace than it is for

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

89

CONTINUED:

89

LLOYD (CONT'D)

us to be gone from home. Sarah told you about our situation didn't she?

ABRAHAM

Yes she did Mr. FLANDERS -

X

LLOYD

Call me Lloyd, son.

ABRAHAM

All right Lloyd. As your doctor I have to tell you that we're not dealing with one virus here, but two.

HOPE

(alarmed)

Two?

ABRAHAM

What I mean is, one is the actual AIDS virus, the other virus is the accompanying shame. You've got your plate full with one, you don't need the other.

LLOYD

(smiles but speaks firmly)

Nobody needs to know we have AIDS.

ABRAHAM

We?

LLOYD

I gave Hope the virus.

HOPE

We thought you knew.

Abraham had no idea.

90

INT. VERGHESE HOUSE KITCHEN - NIGHT

90

Abraham and Rajani at their kitchen table. She's in her nightclothes, sleepy-eyed - she's fixed him something to eat.

RAJANI

(bleary-eyed)

The baby kept me awake till now. You think it could be colic?

(CONTINUED)

90

CONTINUED:

90

Abraham ignores her because he hasn't heard her. He's preoccupied with his own experiences.

ABRAHAM

As we walked down that corridor, I felt as if they were my parents, or a favorite uncle and aunt who were sick and needed my help.

Rajani remains silent.

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

And then I felt guilty. I mean, I never escort patients up to their rooms, never carry their luggage. Why was I doing all this? Maybe because I too thought they were innocent victims? Maybe I also have a blind spot?

RAJANI

Eat Abraham.

He picks at his food.

ABRAHAM

I wonder what lies they had to invent to tell their children.

X

(CONTINUED)

90 CONTINUED: (2)

90

RAJANI

(softly)

I wish this disease was gone, that
you were not so close to it. It's
kind of become who you are. Steven,
Jacob and I are losing you to it.

ABRAHAM

(holds her hand)

I wish it was gone too.

RAJANI

But it's not going to, is it?

91 OMITTED

91

92 INT. ABRAHAM'S OFFICE - STRIP MALL - DAY

92

The waiting room of Abraham's clinic now looks like a gay convention. There are a group of gay men waiting, all talking at once, having separate conversations. Amongst them is an older, aristocratic queen, SIMONELLE. Mrs Paez waits in a corner.

X
X

SIMONELLE

I told myself, bitch, did you think you could escape it? But then I thought - it's a virus. That's what we have to constantly remind ourselves. It's not sexuality that's the problem -

BILL

I was just so ashamed when I found out -

ETHAN

I didn't want to die in the closet. I know people who come out on their deathbeds.

SIMONELLE

Shame. I say shame. So I told myself and I'm telling you - go and have as much sex as possible. Go on and make love as much as possible. Just make it safe. There's more to sex than this

(makes a gesture of
one finger going
through an encircled
finger)

Go ahead. Worship each other's bodies.
Love them.

Abraham walks in and into his office. Carol follows him in with a bunch of charts.

93 OMITTED

93 X

NOTE: PAGE 80A HAS BEEN OMITTED

94 OMITTED

94 X

95 INT. ABRAHAM'S EXAM ROOM - STRIP MALL - DAY

95 X

MRS. PAEZ

(fingering her pearls)

Let me be frank. My son has AIDS. He
is dying slowly but he is still
working. He lives in San Diego.
Eventually, I hope to bring him back
here. I love him dearly. But both he
and I don't want anybody to know about
AIDS. Cancer or lymphoma is what we
will tell people. When my son dies, I
want people to remember his life, his
kindness, his personality. If they
know he has AIDS, to them it will be
just another faggot dying - someone
less than human.

(tears in her eyes)

X
X
X
X
X
X
X
X
X
X
X
X
X
X
X

95

CONTINUED:

95

Abraham finds a rush of hot tears in his own eyes.

X

ABRAHAM

X

There have been people who have not
hidden what they have and -

X

X

MRS. PAEZ

X

I sit at dinners where they talk about
faggots. I want to say to them: Do
you know you are talking about my
son? Do you know this could be your
son and you just don't know it? His
own father has no idea he's gay. I
imagine when the time comes he will
have to know. To him it will be another
reason why I failed him. He's always
accused me of babying my son. This
will be his ammunition.

X

X

X

X

X

X

X

X

X

X

X

(pause)

X

I've come to ask if you'll help me
when he comes home? I would like him
to die at home, not in any hospital.

X

X

X

CUT TO:

X

95A

INT. ABRAHAM'S WAITING ROOM - STRIP MALL - DAY

95A

Close-up of hands putting up a flyer on Abraham's bulletin
board. In the background see Abraham escort Mrs. Paez out.
We see the hands belong to Langdon Arwood. Abraham returns.
The clinic is empty except for Langdon and Carol at her desk.

X

X

ABRAHAM

Langdon! Good to see you.

LANGDON

I started a support group in Chester's
memory. TAP - Tristate Area Aids
project. Will you tell your patients
to attend our meetings?

ABRAHAM

Of course. but why don't you come in?

LANGDON

Don't want to take up any of your
time.

ABRAHAM

How've you been?

(CONTINUED)

95A CONTINUED:

95

LANGDON

(tearful)

Lonely...miss Chester something awful.
It was when I was in one of my funky
blue spells that I thought of this -
it's what Chester would have liked. I
was never the activist kind you know.
I always hid, didn't want people to
know - now look at me -

(smiles)

- shouting it from the rooftops! I
hope he's watching...

ABRAHAM

I'm sure he is.

LANGDON

You think so?

ABRAHAM

I know so.

Carol appears, all dressed up to leave. She rubs Langdon's
back in an affectionate gesture of departure.

CAROL

Y'all come back now, y'hear?

96 OMITTED96A EXT. ST. JOHN'S HOSPITAL GARDENS - DAY

Mary, the nurse crosses Abraham in the garden.

MARY

Have you seen how they look into each
other's eyes?

Abraham approaches Lloyd and Hope sitting on a garden bench
by an icon of Christ. A few vets on their wheelchairs are
seen in the background. Hope is holding his hand and reading
to him from Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass". Lloyd is
very pleased to see Abraham. He pats a spot on the bench.
Abraham sits by his side on the bench. Lloyd holds his hand.

LLOYD

How was your day?

ABRAHAM

(smiles)

The same. But what about you? You
know, I'm worried about you.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

96A CONTINUED:

96A

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

It's such a lonely business to carry
this burden alone. Surely your
children will understand, your church
members -

LLOYD

If anyone in our community knows,
then the next time Hope and I go to
church it will be an empty church.

(CONTINUED)

96A CONTINUED: (2)

ABRAHAM

I think you're wrong! I had a patient here who had the support of just about everyone in his church, who -

LLOYD

I worry about Hope. After I die I don't want her to face the stigma of AIDS. We have no idea how our children will react to this. How will our son-in-law feel about us being with his children?

Tears stream down Hope's cheeks as her husband talks about his death.

LLOYD (CONT'D)

See, Abraham, I also have to worry about my business, the possible ramifications of this on my partners, the irrational responses of people who hear about our plight.

ABRAHAM

It seems such a shame for you to be spending so much energy just in keeping up this secret. You're so alone, the two of you, so far from all your loved ones -

LLOYD

Abraham, I don't think you understand. We are not alone. The one unshakeable presence in our life is Christ. I personally think that this thing, this virus, is from hell, from the devil himself. It is not from God. And I'm determined to fight it with all I have.

(chuckles)

Oh it will get me eventually, but only after a fight. I'll never give in or quit. Never, never, never.

CUT TO:

97 INT. MATTIE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

97 X

Mattie and her mother are at Gordon's bedside. Her father stands in the darkened doorway, his cap on his head, his hands deep in his overalls. Mattie places her head on Gordon's chest - she lays there for a beat, her eyes wet with tears.

(CONTINUED)

97 CONTINUED:

97

Then she stands up, crosses his hands over his chest, quietly pulls the sheets up, but doesn't cover Gordon's head. Her mother collapses, crying.

98 INT. MATTIE'S FRONT ROOM - NIGHT

98 X

Mattie is on the phone, talking to the local mortician. Her father is smoking. His hands quiver.

MATTIE

Doochie? This is Mattie Vines. My brother Gordon done passed away. Now, I'm going to tell you the honest truth: Gordon had the HIV factor. That's what killed him. Now you just tell me yes or no. Can you take care of him?

INTERCUT:

99 INT. DOOCHIE'S FUNERAL HOME - NIGHT

99 X

DOOCHIE is a bald man, who drags the little hair he has from one ear to another.

DOOCHIE

Lord ha' mercy, Mattie. I'm real sorry to hear it.

Mattie can feel the fear in his voice, she feels her own anger rising.

MATTIE

Just yes or no Doochie?

DOOCHIE

Now, Mattie, I got to tell you, I never studied how to prepare that kind of body...

MATTIE

You buried everyone else in the family that ever died. Yes or no?

DOOCHIE

I want for us to do the service, Mattie. And all the other arrangements. It's just that I got these cuts on my hands from where that formalin dries me up? And I worry, you understand?

(CONTINUED)

99 CONTINUED:

MATTIE

I understand where ignorance could
lead you to believe that.

Mattie hangs up on him. He stares at the phone.

100 INT. MATTIE'S HOUSE - DAY

100 X

Mattie dials another number.

MATTIE

George? It's Mattie. My brother
Gordon's gone. He had the HIV factor.
AIDS.

Her parents wince as she says the unspoken "A" word.

MATTIE (CONT'D)

Doochie says he'll do the service but
he's scared to prepare the body. I
was wondering if you could help him?

X
X

Her parents wait with bated breath as Mattie listens. Mattie
breaths a sigh of relief.

MATTIE (CONT'D)

Thanks George. And I want Gordo to
be brought back home.

X
X

She puts down the phone.

MATTIE (CONT'D)

That was George WESTON from Norton.
He's going to help Doochie. I told
him they gotta prepare Gordo and bring
him home. I don't want him laying
anywhere he's not wanted.

X
X
X
X

Her mother goes over to a chair and picks up Gordos white
suit, silk tie, shirt and handkerchief.

X
X

MRS. VINE

(her voice quivers)

He had it all picked out. Told me
where it all would be.

X
X
X
X

She collapses crying again. Mattie goes over and holds her
tight. Mother and daughter rock together, crying, comforting
each other.

X
X
X

(CONTINUED)

100 CONTINUED:

100

Behind them, hear the awful sound her father makes, a sound
like the splintering of an old tree, and then a high wailing
as big buckets of tears come gushing out of him.

X
X
X

CUT TO:

100A OMITTED

100AX

X

X

100B EXT. MATTIE'S HOUSE - DAY

100BX

Doochie's black Cadillac outside the house. Mattie dressed up for the funeral, walks past holding a bunch of freshly plucked hearts-a-bustin' flowers. She enters the house.

X
X
X100C OMITTED

100C

100D OMITTED

100D

101 INT. MATTIE'S HOUSE - DAY

101 X

The closed casket lies in the center of the living room.
Doochie, his hands folded stands next to it with his face
set in his professional expression - respectful, heartfelt
sorrow.

X
X
X

MATTIE

X

Doochie Jones, I want you to open
that casket!

DOOCHIE

Why Mattie, you said your brother
wanted a closed casket!

MATTIE

I wanted it closed for everybody else.
But I want to see that he looks all
right. You open it right this minute.

Doochie opens the casket with a huge, old key. Mattie's
expression changes as she sees Gordon lying there in his
white suit, looking beautiful.

MATTIE (CONT'D)

(softly)

He loved this white suit. Saturday
Night Fever was his favorite movie.

Then she notices his bare feet.

MATTIE (CONT'D)

Doochie, how come Gordon don't have
no socks on?

DOOCHIE

Mattie, we don't usually put no socks
on.

MATTIE

I don't want my brother going to heaven
without socks. You get some socks for
him, right now.

(CONTINUED)

101 CONTINUED:

101

Doochie disappears, reappears with a pair of socks - but he's got calving gloves on.

MATTIE (CONT'D)

(very angry)

Doochie Jones! What in the world do you think you're going to catch from him now? You done pickled his body; there ain't a bug that's going to survive that.

DOOCHIE

Mattie -

MATTIE

Okay, Just put his socks on -

Mattie stands with her hands on her hips, her eyes flashing.

MATTIE (CONT'D)

You take off those gloves and put his socks on right now. Do you think for one moment this is the last time you're going to be called to do this? Go on. I want to see you do it. Git!

Doochie looks like he's about to cry - he very reluctantly takes off his calving gloves and very gingerly puts the socks on Gordon's feet.

102 EXT. CEMETERY - POWELL VALLEY - DAY

102

Mattie and Abraham stand by Gordon's grave, whose epitaph reads "Safe in the arms of Jesus". Abraham slowly turns 360 degrees, taking in the vista from Gordon's POV. The valley is so green, that it's almost too much for the eye.

MATTIE

It's where he wanted to be buried.

ABRAHAM

(softly)

This is where I'd want to be buried too.

MATTIE

That's my plot.

She points to the ground to the left of her brother's grave.

CUT TO:

103 EXT. VICKIE'S TRAILER - DAY

103

Abraham and Vickie sit on the porch of her trailer drinking coffee; Vickie's smoking a cigarette. It's perfect weather.

(CONTINUED)

103 CONTINUED:

10

On the other side of the trailer a path winds up the slope between the trees. Abraham glances at Vickie. The wound on her hand has healed. He smiles. Vickie sees his expression.

VICKIE

What?

ABRAHAM

Nothing.

VICKIE

Like hell, nothing.

They both laugh. The trailer shakes beneath them. He looks at Vickie inquiringly.

VICKIE (CONT'D)

Hell, that's just Clyde turning in bed. You can feel a tick burp in here. It don't take much to shake the trailer.

ABRAHAM

How are things with you and him, Vickie? Are you still angry with Clyde?

Vickie's smile vanishes. She stares into the distance. She takes a long pull on her cigarette.

VICKIE

I just can't get angry no more. See, I love the man, can't help it, always have.

X

She stubs out her cigarette and immediately lights another.

VICKIE (CONT'D)

A couple of weeks ago, I lost it with him though. He pipes up: 'Why, hell, I think I might just go around and give this to as many people as I can. Seeing that someone done gave it to me'. I was so shocked! Well, I just lit into him.

X

X

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

103 CONTINUED: (2)

103

VICKIE (CONT'D)

I said: 'You've already done put the death sentence on two people. Don't you dare think about it, or I'll kill you myself, you son-of-a-bitch'.

She looks at Abraham for a beat, then cracks up laughing. The camera goes slightly slow motion, imperceptibly. She stops laughing to wipe her hand across her nose roughly, her eyes becoming serious, sadder.

X

ABRAHAM

(v.o.)

I tried to put myself in Vickie's shoes. How does one react to a spouse whose sexual betrayal has involved both sexes? A spouse who brings home a deadly virus?

CLYDE

(o.s.)

Change channels! Change channels!

We come back to reality and real motion.

VICKIE

(gets up)

Speak of the devil. I bet he's messed his pants too.

Abraham follows her through the cramped kitchen area, down the shotgun hallway and into:

104 INT. MASTER BEDROOM - VICKIE'S TRAILER - DAY

104

CLYDE

Change channels!

VICKIE

OK Clyde, ok! I'm changing, I'm changing! Calm down.

The small room is dominated by a huge double bed and a TV. Clyde in bed wears a Tennessee State football jersey for pajamas. He's lost weight, but he's still a huge man.

Vickie changes the channel to cartoons.

VICKIE (CONT'D)

There you go, honey. There's Bugs bunny, see? There he is...

INSERT TV SCREEN

(CONTINUED)

104 CONTINUED:

10

Bugs Bunny and Tasmanian Devil. The Tasmanian Devil is in a cage, and he doesn't look happy about it.

Clyde stares at the tube with an idiotic grin.

ABRAHAM

How are you today?

CLYDE

(pointing at the TV)

Zoo.

ABRAHAM

Yes, they're in the zoo.

VICKIE

He stares at that tube, day and night.
If I turn it off, even when he's
dozing, he wakes up madder'n a wet
nest of hornets.

CLYDE

I want to go to the zoo.

Vickie reaches for the disposable diapers.

VICKIE

(soft, sad)

We're already there, baby. Take a
look around you...

105 EXT. VICKIE'S TRAILER - DAY

105

Abraham hands Vickie a TAP flyer.

X

ABRAHAM

One of my patient's started this
support group for people with AIDS. I
thought you and Clyde could try one
of their meetings? I don't know how
much Clyde will get out of it, but it
might help you.

VICKIE

You want me to sit and talk with a
bunch of queers?

ABRAHAM

Try it. This disease is too much to
carry alone.

(CONTINUED)

105 CONTINUED:

105

VICKIE

Hell, I ain't carrying it alone.
Everyone in this hollow knows. I wish
they didn't, but they do.

She walks Abraham to his parked bike.

VICKIE (CONT'D)

Hey, doc, know what that is?

She points to a shrub with red flowers on it. Vickie snaps off a flower and puts it in his hand. It's more like a pod than a flower. The pod has burst open to reveal a brilliant cluster of bright red seeds within, shining like polished pebbles.

VICKIE (CONT'D)

It's called hearts-a-bustin. It's
also called 'swamp dogwood', but I
don't care for that much. 'Hearts-a-
bustin': that's pretty much how I
feel sometimes about what's happening
to me.

CUT TO:

106 EXT. DREAMSCAPE - DAY

106

Rajani, in a Sari walks through a field of mustard flowers carrying a bunch of red hearts-a-bustin' flowers. She lifts her veil. She's crying. Abraham, the groom, reaches for her hand but she pulls away. A chant begins "He's got it now", "He's got it now".

X
X

A sun bleached street in India. The camera tracks down a street. Faces come up close to the camera grinning - "He's got it now".

Steven reaches out towards the camera in the Madras hospital we have seen his hands outstretched - he's pulled away - he cries - the chorus reaches a crescendo "He's got it now".

X
X

CUT TO:

107 INT. VERGHESE HOUSE BEDROOM - DAY

107

Abraham wakes up in a cold sweat and a black depression. It takes him several seconds of looking around the room, of seeing and touching Steven next to him, before he realizes he's been dreaming. He places his index finger in Steven's hand. Steven, still in deep sleep, encircles Abraham's finger tightly.

X
X

108 INT. JCMC LLOYD'S ROOM - DAY

108

Abraham's seated on Lloyd's bed, by his side. Hope is not in the room. After so many years of listening to other people's sorrows, Abraham's finally found somebody to listen to his own. The words pour out of him in a rush of feelings that have remained unspoken and suppressed, until now.

ABRAHAM

I'm a doctor, a scientist, trained in professional detachment, but all the usual postures seem like a joke in the face of AIDS.

Lloyd pats his hand.

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

Sometimes I find myself thinking - what if I was a cardiac surgeon? What if my income was one million a year? What if I was a radiologist with music piped into my office, and a game of golf waiting for me every afternoon at the country club?

LLOYD

Abraham, you know what I believe? I believe that it's part of Christ's intervention that when we came to Johnson City for treatment, we should run into you; to us you are like a messenger from another world.

Abraham is touched, but not comforted.

ABRAHAM

My life is slipping downhill faster than I can handle. I can't juggle it all anymore - my case load, my wife, my sanity. Rajani treats AIDS like a mistress that's taking me away from home, that I can't talk about when I am at home. I feel as tainted by this disease as my patients are. When we came here two years ago I thought I had finally found my own country but nowadays I'm filled with a longing for a home, so intense, it burns me up. Death surrounds me, all joy has disappeared...

They sit in silence for a beat.

(CONTINUED)

108 CONTINUED:

108

LLOYD

(softly)

I know what you are saying. I myself, have lost all libido. What was once an act of love, of joy, an act of life, has become an act of death for me. It holds nothing other than horror...

CUT TO:

108A INT. JCMC - HALL/STAIRS - DAY

108A

Abraham stumbles out of Lloyd's room, hoping no one will see his red eyes. He takes the back stairwell down to the parking lot.

108B INT/EXT. JCMC LLOYD'S ROOM/PARKING LOT - DAY

108B

Lloyd watches him walk off from his bedroom window.

109 INT. VERGHESE HOUSE LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

109

Rajani dances in a melancholic mood. In the middle of the dance she stops, just stands and listens to the music, her face troubled.

110 INT. ABRAHAM'S CLINIC - DAY

110

In an examination room Hope Flanders gets dressed after an examination. She's wearing a plaid skirt, puts on a light blue cardigan over her blouse. A tiny gold crucifix is visible at her neck. She opens the door. Abraham, who's been waiting outside for her to finish dressing, enters cheerfully.

ABRAHAM

There's nothing immediate to worry about, Mrs Flanders. But the nature of this virus is such that you have to be careful. Look after yourself, not just Lloyd

X
X
X
X
X

HOPE

I want you to be candid about Lloyd's chances. Is it fair to ask... how long... he has?

X
X
X
X

ABRAHAM

I really don't know. He isn't getting worse and that's reassuring. Everyone here is full of admiration for you both and how you cope.

X
X
X

(CONTINUED)

110 CONTINUED:

Hope sags noticeably, then makes to go.

HOPE
I'm sorry. I know how busy you are.

ABRAHAM
I've got no one else to see, and all
the time in the world.

She folds her tissue into a square, and then a tinier square,
hesitates and then opens up, as if she needs to tell her
side of the story.

HOPE
I only wish you'd know him before
this terrible thing happened. He was
so vital. I'll never forget what he
looked like when they wheeled him out
of intensive care - There was blood
everywhere - blood was pouring like
there was a faucet open... At about 3
in the morning a black intern come
out of Lloyd's room - my daughter and
I ran after him. He said, looks like
he's okay now. The bleeding is finally
quitting. I felt like I had been
holding my breath and I could finally
let is out.

But then he said, "We had to give him
a lot of blood, lots and lots of blood.
If he doesn't recover fully, or
afterward if strange things happen,
please remember what I just told
you". I didn't understand what that
young man was trying to tell me - it
didn't register until Sarah called us
into her office and told us that Lloyd
was infected.

(begins to weep)

(CONTINUED)

110 CONTINUED: (2)

110

HOPE (CONT'D)

I punish myself every time I think of this, punish myself for not paying attention. I will never forgive myself for being so passive.

(speaks between sobs)

If Lloyd had been in my position he would have pushed the intern to explain what he meant. I failed him...

Abraham holds her tight. She weeps into his shoulder.

X

(CONTINUED)

110 CONTINUED: (3)

ABRAHAM

You did not fail him. -you musn't
blame yourself - it's not your fault...

But she's inconsolable.

HOPE

I'm grateful that I was infected. I
can't imagine living without Lloyd.

CUT TO:

111 INT. VERGHESE HOUSE STAIRCASE - EVENING

111

Abraham, his shoulders slumped, walks slowly into his house.
He pecks Rajani on her cheek. She's still in her dance
clothes.

RAJANI

Your patient Vickie called an hour
ago. Her husband Clyde just died.

Abraham sits down, his head in his arms.

ABRAHAM

(v.o.)

I could think only of all the
inevitable calls to come and I wanted
to run.

Rajani hovers around, undecided whether she should comfort
him. She takes a step towards him, changes her mind, leaves
the room.

CUT TO:

112 EXT. VICKIE'S TRAILER - DAY

112

Abraham walks by her side - she is sorrowful but composed.

VICKIE

He opened his big eyes once and saw
us and just for a moment it seemed
like it was the old Clyde behind those
eyes. He wanted to say something to
us but he couldn't. I knew he was
scared - I'd been married to the man
for so long I could read his mind.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

112 CONTINUED:

112

VICKIE (CONT'D)

I said to him, 'It's all right, sweetheart. Go on. It's all right. God loves you. He will take care of you. Go on.' He opened his eyes a few minutes later, as if he'd seen or heard something else right above him, and that was it.

(beat)

I want to thank you Doc - you've always been there for me.

Abraham takes her hand.

ABRAHAM

(softly)

You know Vickie, you've never been someone I thought of as a patient I'm paid to help. You've always felt more like a sister to me...a very brave sister...

Vickie's eyes fill with tears. She brushes them away roughly, wipes her nose on her sleeve, sniffs, lights a cigarette - puts on a brave smile.

VICKIE

Hell, we all gotta die sometime, right?

113 INT. JCMC - HALL ELEVATORS - DAY

113

Abraham rides up in the hospital elevator with a 12 year old girl carrying a wrapped Christmas present. They both get off on the fifth floor.

They both walk down the hallway together - it's decorated with Christmas cheer.

Hope is outside their room. The little girl kisses her. Abraham looks quizzical.

HOPE

(smiles)

Doctor Verghese, I'd like you to meet my granddaughter Wilhemina.

WILHEMINA smiles & shyly shakes Abraham's hand.

WILHEMINA

Can I go in and see grand-dad?

HOPE

He's waiting for you.

(CONTINUED)

113 CONTINUED:

She goes in - Hope turns to Abraham.

HOPE (CONT'D)

I told them. I told them the truth.

ABRAHAM

Your son and daughter?

HOPE

Yes. I didn't want Lloyd to die alone, with only me by his side. So I made the decision, didn't tell him, went to the phone and called. Won't you come in and meet them?

114 INT. JCMC LLOYDS ROOM - DAY

114

Abraham enters Lloyd's room to find him lying in bed, dressed in the suit he arrived in. With him are his family; his son and daughter and two grandchildren. They are all smiles.

LLOYD

Abraham, I'd like you to meet my family. My son Jake, my daughter Emily, my grandson Lloyd Jr. and my granddaughter Wilhemina.

Abraham shakes their hands.

LLOYD (CONT'D)

This is Dr. Abe Verghese. He has been our Godsend.

Abraham blushes. Lloyd pats the bed, Abraham sits.

HOPE

He's been waiting for you. Lloyd has something to tell you.

LLOYD

Last night I had a vision of Christ. I saw the devil emerging from the television set. I called out to Jesus. I was scared. And I saw the devil driven away, and the next thing I know, I feel Jesus come out of this cloud near the foot of my bed and take me by the hand. He told me He would be fighting for me.

(smiles)

I think I'm ready to go home, Abraham.

Abraham shakes his head in disbelief, then smiles.

(CONTINUED)

114 CONTINUED:

114

ABRAHAM

Do you know you're my second patient
to have had a vision of Christ in
this hospital?

LLOYD

Well son, you are in the Bible belt.

115 EXT. JCMC - DAY

115

Lloyd and Hope leave the same way they came, except this
time with their family; Lloyd leaning on Abraham, Abraham
carrying their bag. They emerge from the staff elevator and
into the foyer.

At their car, Abraham puts their suitcase in; they say their
silent goodbyes. Abraham waves to them until their car is
out of sight.

ABRAHAM

(v.o.)

With that, one of the most remarkable
couples I have ever met left for home
after a two-week hospital stay that
was unremarkable but for a weight
gain of seven pounds and a vision of
Christ.

MARY

Dr.Vergheese! Mr.Dean wants to see you
in his office right away.

X

116 INT. JCMC - MR.DEAN'S OFFICE - DAY

116

Abraham walks through the executive suites of the hospital
to a door which says "MR.DEAN - ASSISTANT MEDICAL
ADMINISTRATOR". He knocks and enters.

Mr.Dean is in his forties, the epitome of the MBA health
management type. On his office walls are planning charts; a
computer monitor on his desk has a clock ticking in the bottom
right hand corner and Abraham's name in a bar. On his desk
is a photo of his wife and children.

MR.DEAN

We appreciate what you do here. It's
just that AIDS patients are such a
big drain on our funds. This Chester
Mews, for example, cost us 85,000
dollars, 110,000 for Gordon Vines.
The list does go on.

Abraham, fuming, remains silent.

(CONTINUED)

116 CONTINUED:

MR.DEAN (CONT'D)

Is it fair to say that part of the reason we have so many AIDS patients is because of your reputation?

ABRAHAM

Are you suggesting we turn them down? As a community hospital that takes public funds, aren't you obliged to -

MR.DEAN

I'm not saying we should turn them down. I just don't know that we should go out of our way to attract them either. Dr.Vergheese, you've drawn patients from three different states to this hospital.

Abraham stands up to leave. At the door he turns.

ABRAHAM

Right now I have eighty-two cases. In a small town. In the middle of nowhere. In five years we'll be looking at six hundred cases. And they won't all be gay. When this starts killing straight people you better be ready, because it will decimate the next generation.

117 INT. ALLEN'S SERVICE STATION - NIGHT

117

Abraham paces up and down in Allen's service station, furious.

ABRAHAM

I want to walk out - let's see if AIDS just goes away like they hope it will! They think I'm bringing AIDS to their hospital, disrupting their precious bottom line, their birthing suites, their one-day surgery center, their high-tech money making operations? Just because I'm not a profit center my patients simply don't matter? Hell, in other hospitals they got a whole team of doctors - here I am alone - treating 82 patients on my own!

ALLEN

Relax Doc, have a beer.

(CONTINUED)

117 CONTINUED:

117

ABRAHAM

Got anything stronger? I want to get drunk.

Allen pours him a stiff scotch.

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

I simply didn't understand how devastating it would be to watch my patients dying.

(takes a deep swig)

I've been thinking about this more and more - maybe it's time to leave, take a break, start fresh somewhere else. Perhaps in a new place I could begin from a wiser, more careful perspective...?

ALLEN

I don't blame you. I don't see how you do it day after day. Hell, my heart breaks when I blow an engine - but it's just an engine, not a life. I don't see as I blame you, though you know I wouldn't want you to leave.

Allen holds out his cigarette pack - Abraham lights up and takes such a deep drag, he has to sit down to keep from passing out.

ALLEN (CONT'D)

You know what, Doc? One day, about ten years from now, I'd say this town is going to be just like San Francisco. People won't pay no mind to gay or AIDS or nothing, people just won't think too much about it. It'll be like diabetes or cancer.

ABRAHAM

You reckon?

ALLEN

Yeah.

118 EXT. VERGHESE HOUSE PORCH - NIGHT

118

Abraham, drunk and bleary-eyed, sprawled out on the porch, thumps out tunes on his guitar, singing like a college kid. In the shadows, behind the mosquito net door, see Rajani watching him, a puzzled look on her face. Abraham sees her, stops singing, tries to get up, stumbles towards her.

(CONTINUED)

118 CONTINUED:

11

ABRAHAM
Merry Christmas! Ho! Ho! Ho!

119 INT. VERGHESE HOUSE LIVING ROOM - DAY

119

Steven and Jacob tear open their Christmas presents. Abraham, bleary-eyed and hung-over, tries to maintain some semblance of Christmas cheer, quite unsuccessfully.

120 EXT. VERGHESE HOUSE - DAY

120

Rajani and the kids get ready to leave on a car trip. Rajani straps the baby into the car seat - Abraham kisses Steven.

ABRAHAM
Be a good boy - give your Meena aunty my love and wish her Merry Christmas from me.

STEVEN
See you on Monday dada.

Abraham and Rajani give each other a strained peck on the cheek.

ABRAHAM
Drive carefully. Call me when you arrive.

Rajani gets in the car, they drive off, Abraham watches until the car's out of sight, then goes back into the house feeling abandoned and bereft.

121 EXT. VERGHESE HOUSE - GARAGE - DAY

121

Abraham tries kick starting his bike. It won't start. He gives up and walks slowly to work.

121A EXT. STRIP MALL - DAY

121AX

Meets SADIE, the pretty secretary.

SADIE
Hi Abe.

ABRAHAM
Hi Sadie - what's new?

X

SADIE
Well, last night I went and bought myself a little black dress. A crepe number.

(CONTINUED)

121A CONTINUED:

121A

ABRAHAM
That's what's new?

X
X

SADIE
I have this mirror on my ceiling. I
looked at myself and, damn, it made
me hot.

Suddenly, Abraham looks at her and kisses her roughly, then
abruptly walks away.

X
X

Sadie in response reaches for the skin under his nipple and
pinches him.

X
X

SADIE (CONT'D)
I'm in the phone book.

X

She strolls away, looks over her shoulder and winks.

122 INT. ABRAHAM'S OFFICE STRIP MALL - DAY

122 X

Abraham, alone in his office, has the phone book open in
front of him.

ABRAHAM
(v.o.)
I felt like a death camp inmate: in
this setting what did a friendly fling,
a flying fuck, a quickie, matter?

He picks up the phone, puts it down again, his attention
distracted by the rolodex file in front of him, which lists
all his patients on index cards. He begins to flip through
the rolodex, thoughtfully, looking through the cards. He
gets up and goes to Carol's desk.

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)
Do you have your car today?

CAROL
Sure, why?

ABRAHAM
Would you drive me? I want to take
all the patient records home.

CAROL
Why?

(CONTINUED)

122 CONTINUED:

ABRAHAM

Carol, have you ever wondered where
our 80 odd patients have come from?

CAROL

Un-un can't say I have.

ABRAHAM

Think about it. Two years ago there
was no AIDS around these parts. The
entire gay population tested negative.

CAROL

So?

ABRAHAM

So I don't know but I'm going to find
out.

123 INT. VERGHESE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

123

Sprawled out on the living room floor Abraham compiles a
list of every person with HIV that he's seen in his office,
and then traces with red pencil on the map the route their
lives have taken.

ABRAHAM

(v.o.)

All thoughts of the Little Black Dress
had faded.

X

X
X
X
X

DISSOLVE TO:

123A INT. VERGHESE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

123AX

Rajani and the kids come home to find Abraham unshaven, red-
eyed, frantically typing. All around him are cards, charts,
maps, files, empty coke cans, a half-eaten stale pizza still
in it's box.

RAJANI

Abraham? What's all this?

He jumps up excitedly - shows her the map which has an
assortment of arrows, dots, crisscross routes drawn in red
and blue.

ABRAHAM

Look, see this? I've just discovered
a paradigm that might be true for
other rural areas as well.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

123A CONTINUED:

123A

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

HIV in Tennessee is largely an imported disease. Imported to the country from the city. Imported by native sons who left long ago and then returned home to die.

She's not impressed. She bends to start clearing up the mess.

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

I've just hammered out a paper that I'm going to send to the Journal of Infectious Diseases.

She's fed up and at the end of her tether.

RAJANI

(firmly)

Abraham, I want us to go in for counselling.

ABRAHAM

(softly)

Rajani, I want us to leave Tennessee.

From a close-up of Rajani's shocked face:

CUT TO:

124 INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

124

The 'new' Vickie. It's a TV movie sort of transformation. Her hair's grown back fully, she's wearing a dress and make-up. She looks pretty.

VICKIE

I'm beginning to believe that I was given this disease for a reason. I was just this everyday, typical housewife, and now, wow! I'm on the board of TAP - can you believe it? An old country hick like me? After I lost Clyde, I'm not scared of death one bit. When it comes, I'll deal with it. I've made arrangements for my kids. Meanwhile, Doc, guess what?

X

ABRAHAM

(smiles and shrugs)

What?

(CONTINUED)

124 CONTINUED:

12

VICKIE

I just enrolled in nursing school!

Abraham just looks at her silently, like a proud parent.

VICKIE (CONT'D)

Aren't you going to say anything?

ABRAHAM

(choked)

I'll come from the ends of the earth
for your graduation.

VICKIE

Why? Won't you be here?

ABRAHAM

No Vickie. I'm leaving.

125 OMITTED
AND
125A

125 X
AND
125A

126 INT. MOUNTAIN HOME - VA WARD 2 - DAY

126 X

Abraham walks down the VA ward shaking hands and saying goodbye to the veterans on their breathing machines.

VETERAN

What's the shortest verse in the bible,
doc?

ABRAHAM

Jesus wept, Bill - Jesus wept.

127 INT. ABRAHAM'S OFFICE - JCMC - DAY

127

Abraham arrives at his clinic. He opens the door - a hundred voices call out "SURPRISE!" He sits down both in shock and to recover his breath.

It's a farewell party for him that Carol's organized. Everybody's there - Rajani, his children, Allen, Mattie, his patients, his nurses, his staff, his interns, Simonelle, Langdon, Paez.

Rajani watches as Abraham is feted and hugged - for the first time she really gets a feel of how much her husband has touched so many people's lives.

(CONTINUED)

127 CONTINUED:

Vicky starts them singing "For he's a jolly good fellow"
Abraham, thoroughly embarrassed, holds his hand up for
silence.

ABRAHAM

I want to thank all of you...

Overcome with emotion, he can't speak for a beat.

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

Before I embarrass myself by bursting
into tears - I'd like to introduce
you to my successor - Dr. Mitchel
Edwards. Mitchel take a bow.

X
X

Mitchel takes a bow amidst cheers.

X

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

Dr. Edward's going to be assisted by
four interns - interns take a bow -

X

Four interns, John Okri, Vikram Nayar, Shaheen Khan and
Mahmood Mandela take a bow.

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

I'm very pleased, happy, proud, that
they intend to take up Infectious
Diseases as their speciality.

More cheers. Abraham steps down from his makeshift podium,
makes his way to Rajani who is in the back of the room,
leaning against a wall. He bends and kisses her. She throws
her arms around him and sobs.

128 EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

128

Abraham, Rajani and the kids guzzle cokes and sing in the
car.

ABRAHAM

(v.o.)

We worked hard so that the kids
wouldn't feel our sorrow.

DISSOLVE TO:

128A EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

128A

Night. The backseat is folded down. The rear cargo area of
the station wagon is a cozy nest of sleeping bags and pillows;
the two boys are curled up around their mother, all three
fast asleep.

(CONTINUED)

128A CONTINUED:

128A

ABRAHAM

(v.o.)

I had left my own country, my beloved
Tennessee. Perhaps my constant moving
was a way to avoid loss?

They pass a sign that says "Welcome to Iowa". The radio DJ
begins the countdown to the New Year.

RADIO DJ

8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1 - HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!

Abraham pulls over at a rest stop - gets down from the car.
The sky is rich and huge, the wind is biting cold. He walks
to the stone border of a field; the black horizon seems
limitless. He peers onto puddles of cracked ice, looking up
at the stars.

X
X

The first rays of the sun begin to illuminate the prairie.
Abraham turns and goes back to the car. Presses his nose
against the rear window and peeks in. Sees his two sons
snuggled up against their mother, each with a leg thrown
over her.

He climbs back into the car and starts the engine, begins to
drive. Over his voice-over see the passing landscape.

ABRAHAM

(v.o.)

I think of the young man from New
York, driving home. I think if his
voyage were to happen today, he might
find a community in Johnson City better
equipped to accept him. I have faith
in the town and its people. I remember
the acts of human kindness that
illumine our world.

Long shot of the car disappearing down an empty stretch of
highway in the light of dawn.

FADE TO BLACK:

Postscript:

Dr. Abraham Verghese now lives in El
Paso, Texas where he is Professor of
Medicine and Chief of Infectious
Diseases at Texas Health Sciences
Center. He is still treating patients
with AIDS.

This was based on his true story.

X

(CONTINUED)

128A CONTINUED: (2)

END CREDITS ROLL