

THE GREATEST  
EXPERIMENT  
EVER PERFORMED  
ON WOMEN

*Exploding the Estrogen Myth*

BARBARA SEAMAN

 HYPERION

*New York*

# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION:  
SMART DOCTORS, FOOLISH FORECASTS  
000

## *PART I*

1.  
ON THE PATH TO PREMARIN  
000
2.  
FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH OR GOLDEN FLEECE?  
000
3.  
HOW HAS PREMARIN FARED IN THE UNITED STATES,  
AND WHO WAS ROBERT WILSON?  
000
4.  
A DARING PROGRAM TO KEEP WOMEN YOUNG  
000
5.  
CRAZY PEOPLE IN AMERICA  
000

PART I

THE BEGINNING  
OF A  
WOMAN'S HEALTH

## CHAPTER 14:

# HEALTH IN THE BALANCE: UNDERSTANDING BONES, BONE LOSS, AND NEW METHODS OF OSTEOPOROSIS PREVENTION AND TREATMENT

“The public must realize that of what medical students learn in 4 years only a third will still hold true in 10 years, one third will be completely disproven and one third will be controversial or problematic. Most of the public is being taken care of by physicians who are 10-30 years out of medical school. Who are responsible for their re-education? All physicians must earn 50 hour credits of CME every year to renew their licenses. But nobody cares about the sponsorship of those courses.”

—DR. LILA WALLIS, OCTOBER 14, 2002

*A new adventure within the land of spumoni and cheese artifacts artifacts. Did you know that seven hundred people have been found underneath the land of Hilly Bombara this past month? Before that no one had even ever heard of this mountain. Just to think that when many of us are home in our beds, sleeping, there are people living in a moun-*

tain with such an utterly preposterous name. While many of us sleep and others of us dream, there are people who not only live there but do their best to create the best Spumoni and cheeses of all sorts of variety. We have found many upon many brands and variations, the famous Strawberry Benitowitz.

Certainly, this cheese is not just for the average in dairy consumer, this is some neat-o stuff! But perhaps when served amongst a delightful array of Spumoni does this fine food allow the eater to fully appreciate the lengths that one has gone through to create and manufacture such a product. Now is the part of this document where I can no longer figure out what to type so I resort to typing from previous printed fodder. Actually I don't have to do that, because I can just download text from any website and flow it into this document, sheesh, why did I never think to do that in the first place, sometimes I can be so darn stupid. Alas I digress and move on.

Silent film had three Ur-Flappers: three actresses who epitomized the \*bee-stung lipped, cloche-hatted, opinionated, bohemian, collegiate, garter-belted, gin-stoked, sexy. These women broke free of the image constraints of their earlier sisters in the trade, Mary Pickford and Lillian Gish, in a conscious attempt to capture the image of the post-war modern young woman. In doing so, they shaped our iconography of the Jazz Age.

Clara Bow broke free of her vapid stock ingenue roles by '25 and became the 'It' Girl: the epitome of Brooklyn sass, manic Jazz Age energy and guilt-free sex appeal. Louise Brooks, a cool, beautiful enigma, the American Garbo, broke free of the Hollywood studio system altogether by the late-'20s to make her celebrated 'Lulu' films for G. W. Pabst in Germany. Both Bow and Brooks have been celebrated in theatrical and home entertainment reissues of their work. But there's a third Ur-Flapper who hasn't been reissued at all. She shared with Brooks a distinctive pud-

ding bowl haircut which defined the new generation. She may not have been the first actress to wear the China Doll cut, but she popularized it (Brooks copied her). While she wasn't anywhere near as sexy as Clara Bow, she went head-to-head with her at the height of Bow's popularity. Ella Cinders was an adaptation of a popular comic strip of the period. As the title indicates, it's the Cinderella story in modern dress.

Colleen is the put-upon maid-of-all-sorts for a wicked mother and two wretched stepsisters. The Prince is a rich man's modest son; there's a fancy dress ball in the form of a contest to see which small town girl gets a screen test; and the Kingdom is Hollywood itself. It gets at the heart of what makes Moore so appealing.

First there's the image: dowdy, as skinny as Olive Oyl, plaintive, wistful and shy, more Zasu Pitts than Clara Bow. Moore was "the girl next door" in her best films-gawky, befuddled, disarmingly gentle, pretty in a distinctive way without being a sex threat, pert and cute. You want to cuddle her before you kiss her.

There's a winning sweetness and modest decency to Moore's persona which is not altogether different from the virginal purity of Lillian Gish or the spunky child/woman guilelessness of Mary Pickford. Moore was loveable and sweet, and she exploited her near-good looks in canny ways throughout her work. Then there are the comedic skills. Moore was a great reaction comic-it's not so much what she did as her gentle, befuddled response to things around that keys her comedy.

Most of the female comics, from Mabel Normand to Constance Talmadge to Colleen Moore to Anita Garvin to Bebe Daniels to Marion Davies, didn't play it rough and tumble like Chaplin, Keaton, Lloyd and the rest of the male comedy stars. The women weren't knockabout artists. The comedy came from the play of facial expressions. They caught comedy on the rebound.

Colleen exploited her gawky/beautiful face to perfection. She can mug with the best of them, most famously in *Ella Cinders* in the trick shot where she's practicing eye movements from a book on how to be a movie star. One eye exercise involves a play on Ben Turpin's famous crossed eyes, and a split screen effect allows Moore to roll her eyes wildly in all directions at once. Moore needs to baby sit to earn enough money to pay for a photaining the children by performing a routine straight out of Chaplin's *The Gold Rush* a variant of the classic "dance of the bun rolls" segment. Moore pulls off the routine with such aplomb that you forgive her the theft. Actually, Roscoe Arbuckle performed the bun roll dance before Chaplin, so, technically, it's a theft of a theft.

#### THE CHEMIST, HIS WIFE AND HIS FUHRER SCHERING AND THE GERMAN GENIUS

There's a parody of one of her famous rivals. When Moore poses for the photographer, she decides to drape a veil over her head and hold a white rose: a good-natured send-up of the "plaintive virgin" poses of Lillian Gish. When the photographer nixes the veil and rose pose, Moore sets herself for the photo - only to have a pesky fly land on her nose. She goes cross-eyed and attempts to blow the fly off its perch. Of course, that pose becomes the entry in the photo contest. Moore even shares the stage with another First National star: the great comedian Harry Langdon. While in a Hollywood studio Moore has to evade a studio guard. She finds herself on the set of a Langdon picture. Harry himself, in full character, bumps into her. There's a scene where Moore and Langdon react to each other, each in the befuddled, deliberate manner that made both famous. It's like watching an uncanny brother and sister act.

Colleen Moore was star enough not to be so gracious in sharing the stage with every Hollywood personality. In '24, an up-and-coming Clara Bow was to appear with Moore in a film called *Painted People*. Bow was to play Moore's kid sister. According to Moore, Bow insisted on playing Moore's part, and when Bow couldn't get her way she backed out of the film. According to Bow, as told in David Stenn's bio of Bow, *Runnin' Wild*, Bow and Moore were in a scene together, and director Clarence Badger called for close-ups. "Not for her," said Moore, indicating that the only actress who would be getting close-ups in this scene would be Colleen Moore. Moore knew a born upstager when she saw one. Bow complained that Moore was hogging the spotlight; that Moore was a big star, and that Bow had worked hard and needed the exposure.

#### THE PANDORA'S BOX OF SIR CHARLIE DODDS

*"Charlie trumps "The Devil's Chemists" and has Hell to Pay"*

*"But if we fall, then the whole world will sink into the abyss of a new Badger shot close-ups of Moore alone. Bow lost that argument, but not the war. Bow walked off, got some surgery performed which prevented her from returning to the production where she had worked for three weeks (according to Bow's biographer Stenn; three days, according to Moore). This caused Moore to re-shoot scenes, prolonging the production and going overbudget.*

—WINSTON CHURCHILL

Irene in 1926 another First National hit for Colleen, exploited a stereotype associated with silent Hollywood in general and Moore in par-

ticular. Colleen Moore's real name was Kathleen Morrison, but Colleen Moore fit in nicely with the stock image of the poor but adorable Irish family: lots of scrappy but lovable kids; the drunk but lovable da, the irascible but lovable ma; the tenement and the snooty rich folk; and the tenement. As stereotypes go, it's not as obnoxious as the wheedling Jewish pawnbroker or the superstitious, shiftless black man, but it's a staple of the period.

“Conjugated estrogens developed exclusively by Ayerst, were extracted from mare's urine during the third to the tenth month of the eleven months pregnancy period, and blended across the seasons to produce a uniform mixture of sodium salts from the sulfate esters of the estrogenic substances.”

It helps somewhat when you've got expert comedic talent like old Sennett hands Kate Price as the ma and Charley Murray as the da. They engage in some 'foine' comic turns in Irene. Irene has the kind of grace notes that you find sneaking up on you in Hollywood's "shopgirl" comeaverage young women clerking in department stores or working as waitresses or otherwise punching the clock.

THE BOSTON TEA PARTY OF  
THE WOMEN'S HEALTH MOVEMENT

DAY 1: ROOM 318 OLD SENATE OFFICE BUILDING,  
OPENING AT 9:40 AM

They are playing a vivacious manicurist at a barber shop, but the film then veers into its own strange "cabin in the woods" territory. Colleen, always pure at heart, takes to the road where she meets up with another good girl who's spurned her date for the evening. They're faced with a long, desultory walk home. Fortunately Moore has a pair of roller skates. They each take one skate and, leaning against one another, push each other off down the road. The economy of motion is as pleasing as the cleverness of the gag. There's a close-up of what appears to be Colleen asleep in bed.

1 *“From the inconsistant evidence now available a final over-all appraisal of the precise significance of hormonal factors in libido cannot be offered.”*

2 *“Human behavior involves all sorts of mental processes not subject to experimental control. In women with normal libido, sexual gratification may depend mostly on the proper ‘amatory prelude’ or on the proper mechanics of coitus.”*

3 *“Sufficient evidence has accumulated to show that the administration to women of estrogenic and particularly androgenic substances in sufficient dosage may increase or awaken libido....”*

The pull-back shot: she's in bed in a departmentstore window, demonstrating the comfort of the bedding. Watch her facial expressions in this scene: she goes through a routine of demonstrating the comforts of the product in a style which anticipates Lucille Ball in Ball's classic

Vegameatavitamin routine. Moore has to deliver packages to a mansion. Once there, reveling in the luxury, she engages in a makeshift fashion session, draping a drape over herself and fashioning a hat out of a lampshade. Moore swoons in the make-believe finery, and we get to see her peekaboo sensuousness. Moore's face in swooning repose suggests the purr of a contented kitten. It's sweetly sexy.

The swishy owner of a couture boutique takes Moore and her tene-ment pals on, reluctantly, as fashion models. Moore has a sustained scene on a revolving fashion platform where the owner attempts frantically to costume her as the platform revolves round and round. It may be her finest sustained comic sequence.

Orchids and Ermines in 1928 is another "shopgirl" comedy, but here we see how Moore artfully negotiates a persona which you would think would prove problematic. The flapper as golddigger was not something you'd expect from the determinedly modest Moore.

The golddigger was part of the flapper image as much as the skirt,

---

Footnote 1:

One way of calculating RELATIVE RISKS

breast cancer	26% arrow up
stroke	41% up
blood clots in the veins	107% up
blood clots in the lungs	113% up
heart disease	29% up
hip fractures	34% arrow down
spinal fractures	34% arrow down
colorectal cancer	37% arrow down

One way of calculating ABSOLUTE RISKS

Among 10,000 taking Prempro for one year there will be 7 more coronary heart disease events, 8 more invasive breast cancers, 8 more strokes and 8 more blood clots in the lung, but six fewer colorectal cancers and 5 fewer hip fractures.

the beads, and the stockings: She can't be too good and a golddigger - that doesn't make sense. So Moore's got to fall in love with a Sugar Daddy she mistakes for someone modest-meaning she has to really fall in love with him, not pretend to fall in love with him for his money. She's got to remain Cinderella at heart. At the same time, she has to fall for a Sugar but not too ambitious—more wistful than ambitious. All of this may be why the plot in Orchids crisscrosses in all sorts of directions before settling itself down to the requisite happy ending. It's a Jazz Age.

*Senator Thomas McIntyre:*

Jack Mulhall, wearing pince-nez and looking and acting much like the Harold Lloyd of Girl Shy in 1924 is the Sugar Daddy, an heir to an oil fortune. The scenes between Moore and Mulhall, in their delicate blend of romance and comedy, are reminiscent of the Lloyd and Jobyna Ralston scenes in Lloyd's comedies.

*Dr. Robert Kistner:*

Moore starts off as a receptionist at a cement yard and leaves to become the phone operator at a swank Manhattan hotel, and most of her scenes take place in the hotel. A midget comes by and asks Moore for information.

*Senator McIntyre:*

"That is more than a complication." <sup>2</sup>

It's coming from Mickey Rooney, then six years old. He's strutting around in a tuxedo, smoking a cigar. There's a party thrown on a Long Island

mansion to which Moore tags along with her more overtly golddigging rival, Gwen Lee. As in Moore rebuffs the amorous advances of a couple of old rich buzzards. She's too late to catch the Long Island line back to the City, so she's faced with a long walk home. Fortunately one of the cement yard truck drivers happens by, and Moore hitches a ride.

- "Trust Me, Dear"
- "It's a Good Thing You Came to See Me When You Did"
- "What Medical School Did YOU Go To?"
- "There, There, Dear, Don't You Worry Your Pretty Little Head"
- "Take These and You'll Feel Better"
- "What Do You Need a Uterus for, Anyway?"

Along the way the truck driver mentions that ditched dates on a Saturday behind him. Moore does so. We see a shot of dozens of dumped goldiggers sitting around in the back of the truck.

Colleen Moore doesn't have many champions. That's a shame. She was one of the finest comedic actresses of an era rich in comic talent. Here's hoping one day she'll get the David Shepard/Kevin Brownlow resemminent film historian William K. Everson, in his book on screwball comedy, considered Orchids and Ermine.

"The public must realize that of what medical students learn in 4 years only a third will still hold true in 10 years, one third will be completely disproven and one third will be controversial or problematic. Most of the public is being taken care of by physicians who are 10-30 years out of medical school. Who are responsible for their re-education? All

physicians must earn 50 hour credits of CME every year to renew their licenses. But nobody cares about the sponsorship of those co

In doing so, they shaped our iconography of the Jazz Age. Clara Bow broke free of her vapid stock ingenue roles by '25 and became the 'It' Girl: the epitome of Brooklyn sass, manic Jazz Age energy and guilt-free sex appeal. Louise Brooks.

### Reasons Besides Osteoporosis that Bones Break

- Lack of Lean Muscle Mass (Making us less strong and more likely to fall)
- Use of Long Acting Tranquilizers, Antidepressants and Other Drugs
- Inappropriate Foot Wear That Makes One More Likely To Fall
- Thinness (Giving the bone less natural padding)
- Removal of Ovaries, Especially Before Natural Menopause
- Cigarette Smoke, Alcoholism
- Use of Steroid Drugs
- Lack of Handrails and Proper Lighting in Public Spaces

Both Bow and Brooks have been celebrated in theatrical and home entertainment reissues of their work. But there's a third Ur-Flapper who hasn't been reissued at all. She shared with Brooks a distinctive pudding bowl haircut which defined the new generation. She may not have been the

first actress to wear the China Doll cut, but she popularized it (Brooks copied her. While she wasn't anywhere near as sexy as Clara Bow, she Cinders was an adaptation of a popular comic strip of the period. As the title indicates, it's the Cinderella story in modern dress. Colleen is the put-upon maid-of-all-sorts for a wicked mother and two stepsisters. In the sense of blah blah.

## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT BIRTH CONTROL PILLS

(ORAL CONTRACEPTIVE PRODUCTS)

The Prince is a rich man's modest son; there's a fancy dress ball in the form of a contest to see which small town girl gets a screen test; and the Kingdom is Hollywood itself. It gets at the heart of what makes Moore so appealing.

First there's the image: dowdy, as skinny as Olive Oyl, plaintive, wistful and shy, more Zasu Pitts than Clara Bow. Moore armingly gentle, pretty in a distinctive way without being a sex threat, pert and cute. You want to cuddle her before.

### A Warning About Blood Clots

There's a winning sweetness and modest decency to Moore's persona which is not altogether different from the virginal purity of Lillian Gish or the spunky child/woman guilelessness of Mary Pickford. Moore was loveable and sweet, and she exploited her near-good looks in canny ways throughout her work. Then there are the comedic skills. Moore was a great reaction comic—it's not so much what she did as her gentle, befuddled response to things around that keys her comedy. Most of the female comics, from Mabel Normand to Constance Talmadge to Colleen Moore to Anita Garvin to Bebe Daniels to Marion Davies, didn't play it rough and tumble like Chaplin, Keaton, Lloyd and the rest of the male comedy stars. The women weren't knock-about artists.

## Who Should Not Take Birth Control Pills

The comedy came from the play of facial expressions. They caught comedy on the rebound. Colleen exploited her gawky/beautiful face to perfection. She can mug with the best of them, most famously in Ella Cinders in the trick shot where she's practicing eye movements from a book on how to be a movie star.

One eye exercise involves a play on Ben Turpin's famous crossed eyes, and a split screen effect allows Moore to roll her eyes wildly in all directions at once. Moore needs to baby sit to earn enough money to pay for a photographer's session for her entrance in the photo contest.

There's a parody of one of her famous rivals. When Moore poses for the photographer, she decides to drape a veil over her head and hold a white rose: a good-natured send-up of the "plaintive virgin" poses of Lillian Gish.

When the photographer nixes the veil and rose pose, Moore sets herself for the photo-only to have a pesky fly land on her nose.

### The Pandora's Box of Sir Charlie Dodds

She goes cross-eyed and attempts to blow the fly off its perch. Of course, that pose becomes the entry in the photo contest. Moore even shares the stage with another First National star: the great comedian Harry Langdon. While in a Hollywood studio Moore has to evade a studio guard. She finds herself on the set of a Langdon picture. Harry himself, in full character, bumps into her. There's a scene where Moore and Langdon react to each other, each in the befuddled, deliberate manner that made both famous. It's like watching an uncanny brother and sister

# NOTES

## Note 1.

Page 1, Paragraph 2

*Surprise expressed by a doctor friend...*

I have a doctor friend who so believed in the value of synthetic estrogens that when the National Institutes of Health announced a large clinical trial to compare these pills with sugar pills, she dismissed it as a waste of money. "Obviously, the women on the hormones will be living longer," she said. "It's unethical to leave volunteers on the placebos for the full eight and a half years of the trial. At some point, they'll have to stop the study and offer hormones to everyone."

Her colleagues concurred, but then the opposite came true. On the morning of July 9, 2002, my friend, along with other physicians and the 30 million U.S. patients taking estrogen products woke up to discover that the world, after all, was flat. A safety monitoring board had suddenly halted a part of the study involving 16,608 women because those taking hormones had more breast cancer, heart attacks, strokes, pulmonary embolisms and blood clots than those taking sugar pills. Yes, these volunteers on real Prempro also had fewer bone fractures and less colon cancer. But not enough to balance out the risks.

My friend initially heard the startling results on "Good Morning America," where Dr. Tim Johnson described this "somewhat surprising outcome." He predicted that most women then taking hormone pills would stop "after talking to their physicians today," failing to anticipate that many doctors would take their telephones off the hook. My friend switched the channel to CNN, where Paula Zahn repeatedly exclaimed: "I tell you – women gotta go insane today." Surfing, she caught up with the "usual suspects," certain doctors familiar to TV viewers whose spin skills had been developed by public relations coaches at agencies that handle pharmaceutical accounts. It was then my friend got it. These physicians were appearing on stations where paid ads suggested that if only we took estrogen we could look like

**Note 2.**

Page 4, Paragraph 1

*"How did this Happen?"*

I have a doctor friend who so believed in the value of synthetic estrogens that when the National Institutes of Health announced a large clinical trial to compare these pills with sugar pills, she dismissed it as a waste of money. "Obviously, the women on the hormones will be living longer," she said. "It's unethical to leave volunteers on the placebos for the full eight and a half years of the trial. At some point, they'll have to stop the study and offer hormones to everyone."

That night my friend called me to apologize for having objected to the title I planned for this book. She had called it "over the top and ridiculous," but now she said she could "almost agree." While the Prempro arm of the Women's Health Initiative lasted 5.2 years and included 16,608 women was a major test, it is only a small part of what I encompass under "The Greatest Experiment Ever Performed on Women." The experiment began in England in 1938, and it has continued for 65 years. A British biochemist, desperate to prevent Nazi Germany from cornering the world market on synthetic sex hormones, published his formula for cheap and powerful oral estrogen. Within months, thousands of doctors and scores of drug companies around the world were working with this formula.

That opened the Greatest Experiment. Products made from chemicals that mimicked the feminizing effects of a woman's natural secretions were marketed, fresh out of the lab. They were prescribed and sold for a host of concerns—to slow and prevent aging, stop hot flashes, avoid pregnancy or miscarriage, and as a morning-after contraceptive.

I call the marketing, prescribing and sale of these drugs an experiment because, for all these years, they have been used, in the main, for what doctors and scientists hope or believe they can do, not what they know the products can do. Medical policy on estrogens has been to "shoot first and apologize later" - to prescribe the drugs for a certain health problem, and then see if there is a positive result. Over the years, hundreds of millions, possibly billions of women, from every corner of the world have been lab animals in this unofficial trial. They were not volunteers. They were given no consent forms. And they were put at serious, often devastating risk.

These drugs' risks have been known and documented since the beginning. The British doctor who published his estrogen formula thereafter spent many years warning the world that these drugs, although containing great promise, were serious hazards for endometrial and breast cancer. Despite the ignorance or hypocrisy of many doctors who have said "who knew?" since the halting of the Prempro trial in July, there is nothing surprising in the recent findings. We have known since day one that these drugs posed threats. And since then, science has added to, not subtracted from the list of estrogen's problems. If doctors and scientists have known these dirty secrets for so long, why is the bad press so recent? This is an essential question right now, and this book seeks to present answers. Part of the answer is the vigorous effort by drugs companies to protect an invaluable market.

**Note 3.**

Page 4, Last Paragraph

*"The Coming of Wisdom With Time by William Butler Yeats*

I have a doctor friend who so believed in the value of synthetic estrogens that when

the National Institutes of Health announced a large clinical trial to compare these pills with sugar pills, she dismissed it as a waste of money. "Obviously, the women on the hormones will be living longer," she said. "It's unethical to leave volunteers on the placebos for the full eight and a half years of the trial. At some point, they'll have to stop the study and offer hormones to everyone."

CHAPTER 1 THE PATH TO PREMARIN

**Note 4.**

Page 9, Paragraph 2

*"Nowadays the American Medical Association reports" Mirian*

I have a doctor friend who so believed in the value of synthetic estrogens that when the National Institutes of Health announced a large clinical trial to compare these pills with sugar pills, she dismissed it as a waste of money. "Obviously, the women on the hormones will be living longer," she said. "It's unethical to leave volunteers on the placebos for the full eight and a half years of the trial. At some point, they'll have to stop the study and offer hormones to everyone."

That night my friend called me to apologize for having objected to the title I planned for this book. She had called it "over the top and ridiculous," but now she said she could "almost agree."

That night my friend called me to apologize for having objected to the title I planned for this book. She had called it "over the top and ridiculous," but now she said she could "almost agree."

**THE POLITICS OF RECOGNITION**

These efforts have included underwriting prominent studies and doctors, getting into medical school curriculums, advertising heavily in medical journals and seeing that continuing medical education is directed by the industry's doctors. It has also entailed one of the most elaborate promotion and advertising campaigns in history. Only through learning about how drug companies buy and influence medical opinion can women protect themselves from a new spin, the new claims that will inevitably emerge about these drugs, and about countless others.

**Note 5**

Page 9, Paragraph 2

*It would have been interesting to have been a fly on the wall*

I have a doctor friend who so believed in the value of synthetic estrogens that when the National Institutes of Health announced a large clinical trial to compare these pills with sugar pills, she dismissed it as a waste of money. "Obviously, the women on the hormones will be living longer," she said. "It's unethical to leave volunteers on the placebos for the full eight and a half years of the trial. At some point, they'll have to stop the study and offer hormones to everyone."

That night my friend called me to apologize for having objected to the title I planned for this book. She had called it "over the top and ridiculous," but now she said she could "almost agree." This is not the first time estrogen sales have felt the cold wind of consumer anger. In 1975, the magnitude of estrogen-related endometrial cancer was established; drug sales