

THE NATURE OF THINGS

Written By

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BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: "Our truest life is when we are in dreams awake... In dreams we never deceive ourselves, nor are deceived."

FADE IN:

1 INT. THE BOX TROT DANCE CLUB - NIGHT (PORTLAND, 2009) 1

On a crowded dance floor, infused with purple light and the sweaty haze of warm bodies, are AVA JENSEN and RAINA TAN, both late 20s, dancing joyfully to THUMPING HOUSE MUSIC. Fair haired and lovely, Ava smiles at her dance partner, an overly EAGER MAN.

Raina, dark haired and lithe, dances behind Ava, their backs nearly touching. Raina's partner is an overly CONFIDENT MAN. As he steps forward, she steps back, further leaning into Ava. The women are clearly enjoying the attention and sexual energy of the dance.

Ava pivots and presses herself into Raina's back, wrapping her arms around her waste and dancing more sensuously. She buries her nose in Raina's long dark hair, as Raina closes her eyes and responds to the touch. The men gape at the swaying sirens, not believing their luck. Finally, Raina opens her eyes and the women share a long steamy look - before BURSTING OUT LAUGHING.

AVA

GOTCHA!

The men exhale their disappointment as the women point and laugh at them, all in good fun. Ava takes Raina's hand and they begin heading out, pleased with themselves and having a ball UNTIL -

2 EXT. STREET OUTSIDE THE BOX TROT - CONTINUOUS 2

The CRUNCH OF FIST ON FACE and the SCATTER OF A TOOTH ACROSS PAVEMENT, just as Ava and Raina are exiting the club. A YOUNG MAN, early 20s, dressed in black pants and a tight purple shirt has been struck in the face and is hitting the ground hard. Towering above him is a large BEARDED MAN, mid 30s, holding his shoulders in a proud stance. Around him are several supportive friends.

BEARDED GUY

(to Purple Shirt)

FAG!

The women freeze. Ava quickly releases Raina's hand.

BEARDED GUY (CONT'D)
 Why don't you take your fairy ass
 somewhere it's wanted!

Purple Shirt guy wipes the blood from his chin and smirks,
 feigning bravery.

PURPLE SHIRT GUY
 Are you pissed that I'm gay, or
 that I wouldn't blow you?

This is answered with a hard KICK TO THE STOMACH.

AVA
 Stop it! Leave him alone!

Bearded Guy turns. His eyes are pure evil.

BEARDED GUY
 Who the fuck are you?

Ava falters. Raina moves quickly to Purple Shirt and kneels,
 checking his injuries. Bearded Guy glares at Ava until she
 finally drops her eyes.

BEARDED GUY (CONT'D)
 (to his friends)
 Whatever. Let's go.

Ava watches as the men return to the club, moving past the
 bouncer with ease.

RAINA
 Ava! Help me get him up.

Raina's voice seems far off. Ava looks at the people standing
 around, some of the same people they were just dancing with.
 All avert their eyes and feign ignorance. She looks back at
 Raina, cradling the injured man's head in her lap. His face
 is very bloody. Ava's head swims. She is angry at the world
 for being this way. But something else clicks inside her.
 Self preservation. And dread.

DISSOLVE TO:

SUPER: 15 YEARS LATER

3

INT. STEWARTS' MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT (PORTLAND, 2024)

3

Ava, now Ava Stewart mid-40s, is making out with her husband
 on their large four poster bed. He is MICHAEL STEWART, a
 handsome athletic man, also mid-40s.

She is wearing a black cocktail dress which he is working up her thighs, tugging at her thigh-high stockings. She pushes his hand away playfully.

AVA
Stop! The guests will be here any minute!

MICHAEL
They can wait on the porch.

AVA
Michael!

MICHAEL
Come on baby! It's my birthday!
It's supposed to be a freebee.

AVA
The roast is going to burn!

Michael gives her a pleading look. She rolls her eyes and GROANS, trying to be a good sport.

AVA (CONT'D)
Five minutes.

MICHAEL
Yes!

Michael gets to business. We pull back to reveal a large master suite, expensive bedding, nice furniture. Photos of the couple adorn the walls.

Back on Ava and Michael. Michael is working hard, making love, enjoying himself. Ava makes encouraging noises but her mind is elsewhere. She looks at the clock: 5:43 p.m.

4

INT. STEWARTS' KITCHEN - A SHORT TIME LATER

4

Ava straightens her dress while checking on the pot roast. Her kitchen is large and well appointed. As she is bent over returning the roast to the oven, Michael approaches from behind and grabs her hips, playfully moving into her.

MICHAEL
And they go for round two!

AVA
(laughing)
Stop it! I'm trying to cook.

MICHAEL
You're cookin' all right.

He smacks her butt and bites his lip, giving her an exaggerated hip thrust. Ava disentangles herself and moves to the fridge, pulling out a large salad.

AVA
Seriously! I haven't done the vegetables and I need you to -

MICHAEL
Toss your salad?

She glares at him.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Okay, okay! Jeez, why so stressed?

AVA
I'm sorry.

MICHAEL
I see those wheels spinning. What's up? You're not all here.

AVA
It's nothing. Work stuff. Let's just focus on dinner.

MICHAEL
Yeah? Okay.

He lets it go and Ava returns to cooking. Out of habit, he opens the fridge for something to eat. He crouches low. On the bottom shelf he sees a bulky yellow envelope. He reads the label:

**DR. AVA STEWART, CMO
GEN-CAT LABS
PROJECT: PANDORA**

Curious, he picks it up.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
What's this?

AVA
Don't touch that!

Michael drops the envelope on the counter, hot-potato style.

MICHAEL
WHAT? Why? What is it?

Ava gently picks up the envelope, eyeing it carefully. Michael, wide-eyed, waits for an explanation.

AVA
This is the thing that's been on my mind all day.
(deep breath)
Michael, we've done it. We're ready to start human trials, Phase 1. All they need is my go ahead.

MICHAEL
Really? That's what's in there?

Ava forces a smile.

AVA
Yes.

MICHAEL
That's great! Right? This is the one that launches you into the stratosphere!

Michael sweeps her up in a hug.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Awards. Interviews. Promotions!

AVA
That's the idea.

MICHAEL
Hell yeah it is! Your timing's perfect because the market is taking a dump. We need this.

She smiles weakly. He reaches for the envelope again.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
So this is the sample?

AVA
Yes. Be careful.

Michael slides a long clear box from the package. Nestled inside is a large syringe filled with colorless liquid. He holds it up.

MICHAEL
Looks harmless enough.

Ava quickly takes it back, returns it to the envelope, and puts it back in the fridge on the top shelf. He looks at her quizzically.

AVA

Sorry. I just don't want anyone handling it until we know for sure that it's safe.

MICHAEL

Honey, you've taken every necessary precaution. It's safe. It's going to work.

Ava rubs her forehead, feeling a headache coming on.

AVA

Can't we just forget about it for tonight? It's your birthday!

(beat)

And remember, mums the word until we're ready to go public. There's still a lot to consider.

Michael smiles and takes her in his arms again, allowing her to change the subject.

MICHAEL

Did you make me a cake?

AVA

You know I did.

MICHAEL

Cherry Chip?

AVA

Yes.

MICHAEL

Yes!

She pushes him away, smiling and returning to her vegetables. He watches her with pride and pops a carrot in his mouth.

The DOORBELL RINGS.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I'll get it.

5 INT. STEWARTS' HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS 5

Michael walks through the hall to the foyer. He passes a wall covered with pictures of him and Ava in Hawaii, skiing, on a fancy date. There are no children in the photos. The last frame holds an award that reads "FIVE STAR PROFESSIONAL REAL ESTATE AWARD MICHAEL STEWART."

6 INT. STEWARTS' FOYER - MOMENTS LATER 6

Michael opens the door to reveal CHRIS and TARA FOLESON, mid-40s, very clean-cut. Chris has the thick build of muscles turning to fat. Tara is rocking her curves, carrying a bottle of wine. Behind them is Raina, now mid-40s, carrying white wine.

CHRIS
Happy Birthday brother!

MICHAEL
(deadpan)
Who invited you? Damn it Ava I told you not to invite the riff raff!

CHRIS
Piss off and get me a drink.

The men LAUGH and embrace. They are fraternity brothers and best friends. They start talking football. Tara rolls her eyes good-naturedly and steps inside, removing her coat.

TARA
Okay, let the adults pass.

Raina heads directly to the kitchen.

7 INT. STEWARTS' KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS 7

Raina enters the kitchen and places her wine in the fridge next to the lab envelope, which she doesn't notice. Ava is mashing potatoes.

RAINA
And we're already talking about football.

AVA
Well it's his night. If he wants to talk football we'll talk football.

Ava has a slight sweat on her brow. Raina can see her friend is covering something.

RAINA
 Hey love, you all right?

 AVA
 I think I have another headache
 coming on. And I just can't! It's
 Michael's birthday. I have to push
 through.

Raina goes to the cupboard where she knows Ava keeps her
 migraine medication. She fills a cup with water and brings
 the items to Ava.

 RAINA
 Drink.

Ava complies. She gives Raina a worried look.

 RAINA (CONT'D)
 Is there something else?

Ava wants to confide in Raina. She opens her mouth to speak,
 but Tara walks in. Tara is round and lovely. She wears a wrap
 dress and a gold cross around her neck. She sets down a
 bottle of wine.

 TARA
 Hey ladies! Where's the wine
 opener?

 AVA
 (to Raina)
 We'll talk later.

Ava brings Tara the wine opener and gives her a quick hug.

 AVA (CONT'D)
 You look beautiful tonight.

 TARA
 Thanks! I lost 7 pounds. The
 alphabet diet. I only eat foods
 that start with O, S and C.

Ava looks at her meal.

 AVA
 Oh! Well I guess that means no
 potatoes for you?

 TARA
 No Ps.
 (points at pot roast)
 (MORE)

TARA (CONT'D)

But we'll call that Steak and I can
have the Carrots.

RAINA

What about the wine?

Tara raises her glass in a toast.

TARA

Not a food!

8

INT. STEWARTS' FOYER - CONTINUOUS

8

As Chris and Michael stand chatting, the DOORBELL RINGS a second time. Michael opens it to reveal ANDRE and DEBBIE TRAINER, mid-60s, a friendly interracial couple. Andre is tall and dark, and wears slacks and a button up work shirt. Debbie wears a long flowing flower-print dress and she has her hair in natural beach waves.

MICHAEL

Andre! Debbie! Welcome!

They exchange greetings and hugs. Debbie hands Michael an odd-shaped homemade pink candle.

DEBBIE

This color promotes love and closer friendships. I tried to make it red but too much white got in there, so this is what we got.

MICHAEL

What does the red do?

DEBBIE

Promotes passion and sex. I thought you might like that on your birthday.

MICHAEL

(winks)

Already taken care of.

Debbie blushes and laughs.

DEBBIE

Well then!

CHRIS

(to Debbie)

I'd take one of them red candles.

Andre hands Michael a bottle of expensive bourbon.

ANDRE
Happy Birthday.

MICHAEL
Nice! You see that, Chris? Some
people actually bring presents.

Chris turns back to Michael and grabs his own balls.

CHRIS
Oh, I got you a present. Did you
want to open it now or later?

MICHAEL
Maybe later. If you can find it.
Come on Andre, let's you and me go
try this stuff.

Michael throws his arm around Andre and leads him into the dining room. Chris is visibly bummed to see Michael so chummy with Andre. He, Tara and Debbie follow.

9

INT. STEWARTS' DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

9

They enter a beautifully decorated dining room. The table is set with crystal glasses and other finery. Streamers with the words "Happy Birthday" hang around the room.

MICHAEL
Have a seat anywhere, I'll grab
some whiskey glasses.

Michael retrieves three glasses from the bar and fills them with whiskey. The men CLINK and shoot the whiskey down. Chris and Michael love it. Andre is more of a sipper but tosses it back when he sees the other guys do it.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Hoo ya! That burns!

He pours more whiskey. While the men drink, Debbie removes a bottle of unknown origin from her bag and squirts a few shots around the room as if blessing it with positive vibes.

10

INT. STEWARTS' DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

10

As the guests begin to find their seats, Ava enters from the kitchen carrying the pot roast, followed by Raina and Tara who carry the rest of the food.

MICHAEL
Soup's on!

AVA
(to Michael)
Where's Pete?

MICHAEL
Late as usual.

AVA
We can't start without him.

Frustrated, Ava pulls out her cellphone and dials Pete.

11 INT. DIRTY SUBARU OUTSIDE STEWARTS' HOME - CONTINUOUS 11

Ava's older brother PETE JENSEN, late 40s, a scruffy-but-handsome guy who carries a look of permanent boredom, sits in his beat-up old car smoking pot. He is despondent. Worried.

His CELL PHONE RINGS. He considers not answering but then sees it's Ava calling. He glances toward Ava's house. There are shadows of people moving about inside. He answers.

PETE
Hey sis.

INTERCUT AS NECESSARY BETWEEN

AVA
Pete! Where are you? Everyone's here and I'm ready to serve!

PETE
I'm almost there. What'd you make?

AVA
Pot roast.

PETE
Like stew? Bleh. I hate stew.

AVA
Peter Jensen we are not doing this. Get your ass over here NOW or -

PETE
What? You gonna tell Mom?

Peter CHUCKLES, amused at the thought. Ava is suspicious.

AVA
Are you high?

PETE
What do you think?

AVA
Whatever. Just get over here.

PETE
M'kay.

They hang up. Pete glances at a stack of documents on his passenger seat. On the cover are the words BUSINESS PROPOSAL. He grabs the papers and goes inside.

12

INT. STEWARTS' DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

12

Ava walks around the table serving a portion of pot roast to each guest. There is a mixture of HAPPY CHATTER and CUTLERY CLINKING PLATES as they serve themselves side dishes.

Pete enters, having let himself in without knocking. He is very high. He sits down next to Raina.

PETE
(to Raina, familiar)
Hey.

RAINA
Hey.

MICHAEL
(to Pete)
Nice of you to join us.

Pete just gives him a casual look and begins dishing up.

Seated around the table clockwise are Michael, Ava, Debbie, Andre, Tara, Chris, Pete and Raina. There is an unexplained place setting between Raina and Michael.

AVA
Pete I don't think you've met everyone, have you? You know Raina, of course. And Chris and Tara.

Pete smirks at Chris and Michael.

PETE
The Sigma Alpha Epsilon brothers.

Chris glares at Pete then looks at Michael.

CHRIS
Phi Alpha, brother.

PETE
(mock saluting no one)
Phi Alpha.

Ava continues the introductions.

AVA
And these are our new neighbors
Andre and Debbie.

MICHAEL
Neighbors! These are friends!
Anyone who lets me take that much
money off him in poker is instantly
one of my *best* friends!

Andre and Michael share a LAUGH.

ANDRE
I'll redeem myself next month!

MICHAEL
Oh, I hope you try!

Chris laughs uncomfortably, feeling displaced. Raina looks at the empty plate.

RAINA
Are we missing someone?

The SOUND OF A MOTORCYCLE approaching draws her attention to the window.

PETE
I may have invited a friend.

RAINA
Oh? Are you seeing someone?

PETE
Nope. She plays for the other team.

He smiles at Raina. The DOORBELL RINGS and Ava hops up to answer.

RAINA
Oh my God, is this a set up?

Before Pete can answer, Ava comes back into the room and introduces PAISLEY PRESTON, early 30s.

She is tall and thin, dressed in tight black pants and a stylish black leather jacket. Her hair is died black and her black eye liner is thick and dangerous.

AVA

Everyone this is Paisley, an acting friend of Pete's. She's joining us for dinner.

Paisley struts into the room with confidence, making her way to the empty seat. When she speaks, she has a THICK COCKNEY BRITISH ACCENT.

PAISLEY

Sorry I'm late. The roads 'ere was chock a block all the way, even on my motorbike. But chin up, I'm 'ere!

She kisses Pete's cheek as she passes him, and kisses Raina's cheek as she sits, surprising the heck out of Raina.

PAISLEY (CONT'D)

You must be the dish Pete's been talkin' about. I'm Paisley.

Paisley extends her hand. Raina reluctantly shakes it. Paisley's appearance is surprising, but she's quite beautiful as well. Raina is dumbstruck.

RAINA

Raina.

PAISLEY

Nice name, that.

Paisley reaches for the food and dishes herself up. Raina glares at Pete who is delighted at the touch of chaos he's added to the party. Ava watches with interest.

13

INT. STEWARTS' DINING ROOM - A SHORT TIME LATER

13

The food has been enthusiastically consumed and the guests have settled into CASUAL CONVERSATION around the table, enhanced by plenty of wine and whiskey. Ava is in the kitchen. Everyone else is still at the table, talking.

Moving around the table, we catch snippets of multiple conversations mid-stream.

Tara is eyeing the bread trying to find an excuse to eat it on her alphabet diet. She is also trying to convince Debbie to buy her skin care.

TARA

Would you say that is *Sour Dough* bread? I think it is.

Tara tears off a piece and starts chewing. She continues where she left off in her sales pitch to Debbie.

TARA (CONT'D)

It's not really a make-up line, it's skin care. We have a terrific product for women your age! Gets rid of all that crepe skin and fine lines.

(pointing)

Like you have here. And here.

DEBBIE

Oh, but I've fought for those lines! Those lines are my children being born, fits of laughter with my husband, and all the sunny days I've seen.

TARA

Oh! You're a poet!

DEBBIE

Not that we have many sunny days in Portland, but you get my point. I'm keeping the lines!

Andre and Chris talk shop, getting to know each other's business.

ANDRE

It's work I enjoy. I'm the GM of Analytics for AI Solutions, so we're always pushing new boundaries, challenging the old ways of doing things. Learning.

CHRIS

Well La-Dee-Dah. That's a fancy title. But I guarantee you all of your products come through *our* packaging facility.

ANDRE

I'm sure they do.

CHRIS

No. They DO. Companies like yours wouldn't exist without companies like mine. That's the thing.

ANDRE

What thing?

CHRIS

The thing about companies like yours!

ANDRE

(not getting it)

Ah ha.

Pete, Raina, Paisley and Michael are also chatting. Pete explains how he met Paisley.

PETE

She can cry on cue! Not everyone can do that. The first day I met her she did a scene about climate change and she just WEPT.

PAISLEY

Well, you're a bit of a mug, actually. What you don't know is my cat died that day. I was righ' out gutted, nearly honked before class. Then I did the scene.

PETE

And you let me believe all this time you were that talented?

PAISLEY

Kristina is always tellin' us to "USE IT" so I just used it! It worked then, didn't it?

PETE

It certainly peaked my attention.

PAISLEY

Ah, too bad for you, you ol' prat. Not the kind of attention I'm lookin' for.

Paisley gazes at Raina, unguarded and entirely herself. Raina smiles shyly. Michael observes, a little turned on.

14

INT. STEWARTS' DINING ROOM - A SHORT TIME LATER

14

The conversation winds down as people run out of things to say. They begin shifting in their seats, waiting for dessert. Chris drums his fingers, clearly bored. Michael is desperate to liven things up.

MICHAEL
 Cake should be out soon! You love
 Ava's cherry chip, right Chris?

CHRIS
 It's good cake.

DEBBIE
 (thrilling quietly)
 Starts with a C!

Paisley can't believe these boring wankers.

PAISLEY
 Do you 'ave more wine? I'm a bit
 squiffy, but I think we could use a
 bit more.

RAINA
 I brought a bottle. It's in the
 fridge.

Michael jumps up to get it.

MICHAEL
 I'll get it! Hang tight!

PAISLEY
 Brilliant. I'll just pop off to the
 khazi and be back in a split.

She gets up to use the restroom and touches Raina's shoulder
 as she passes. Raina turns to Pete.

RAINA
 Oh my God.

PETE
 You like?

RAINA
 I don't know if it's fuck, marry or
 kill, but it's something.

15 INT. STEWARTS' KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

15

Ava is placing candles on the cake. Michael slips into the
 kitchen, frustrated and drunk.

MICHAEL
 What's taking you so long? People
 are getting bored!

AVA

I'm sorry! I couldn't find the candles.

MICHAEL

Well hurry up! We're dying out there. We've run out of small talk.

He opens the fridge. As he reaches for Raina's wine, his eyes fall on the lab envelope. He smiles, suddenly inspired. While Ava's back is turned, he picks up the envelope and hides it under his shirt.

16

INT. STEWARTS' DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

16

Michael proudly enters with the wine and pulls the package from under his shirt. He glances over his shoulder and sits, mock whispering his big secret to the group.

MICHAEL

Okay you guys, time to liven things up! What I have in this envelope is TOP SECRET. I'm NOT supposed to tell you about it. But if I do, you take this information at your own risk.

DEBBIE

How mysterious!

MICHAEL

You have no idea. This is something HUGE.

CHRIS

Well I know it's not my dick. So what is it?

Michael loves that he has their attention again. He very carefully slides the box from the envelope. The long syringe glimmers in the candlelight beneath the clear cover.

MICHAEL

It's something Ava's company is just about to launch. Check. This. Out. They figured out how to TAKE THE GAY AWAY!

He holds it up like a trophy. Stunned silence follows as Paisley saunters back in.

PAISLEY

Did he say wha' I think he just
said? Someone's tellin' porkies.

This unleashes responses in rapid succession.

CHRIS

That's friggin' cool!

DEBBIE

Is that legal?

RAINA

She did WHAT?

Ava enters from the kitchen with the birthday cake, candles lit. Oblivious, she begins singing.

AVA

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU, HAPPY
BIRTHDAY TO -

The heat of Raina's glare makes her stop. She looks around to see what the trouble is and sees Michael holding the boxed syringe.

AVA (CONT'D)

WHAT ARE YOU DOING WITH THAT? I
told you not to discuss it! My
company has strict protocols!

MICHAEL

Oh, come on! These are our friends!
We can trust them. And this is BIG!
(to the crowd)
It's incredible right?
(pleading to Ava)
Tell us how it works, baby!

PAISLEY

Yes, by all means. Do tell us 'ow
it works.

Raina is hurt and confused.

RAINA

Is he serious?

MICHAEL

Hey! Now that's an idea! Let's try
it on Raina!

He leans playfully toward Raina with the syringe but she jumps up out of his reach, standing.

RAINA
 DON'T YOU DARE FUCKING TOUCH ME
 WITH THAT THING!

Raina's tone surprises everyone.

MICHAEL
 Calm down, I wasn't gonna poke you!

AVA
 Raina, please. Sit down. He's
 drunk. I can explain.

Ava sets down the cake and snatches the syringe from Michael,
 putting it back in its packaging.

AVA (CONT'D)
 (to Michael)
 What is wrong with you?

She places the package on the bar, rubbing her head again.
 Michael is not chastened.

MICHAEL
 Come on. This is next level stuff!
 Let's talk about it!
 (to Raina and Paisley)
 I mean, this could really help
 people like you, right?

Raina glares defiantly at Michael.

RAINA
 Who says we need "help?"

She storms out. Ava follows, her head throbbing, her eyes on
 Raina's quickly departing back.

FLASHBACK

17 INT. BEDROOM (PORTLAND, 1997) - DAY

17

The sound of happy, young, female voices, LAUGHING.

A teenage girl sits on the floor turned away from the viewer,
 her long dark hair flowing down her back.

A pale white female hand reaches out and strokes the hair,
 twirling a lock in her fingers.

A soft female voice speaks.

FIRST VOICE

We'll always be friends. And we'll look out for each other, no matter what.

DARK HAired GIRL

Promise?

FIRST VOICE

Promise.

BACK TO PRESENT

18

INT. STEWARTS' KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

18

Raina turns to face Ava, arms crossed, eyes blazing.

RAINA

What is he talking about?

AVA

I'm sorry. Damn it! I'm going to KILL him for this!

RAINA

What was in that thing? Tell me.

Ava shakes her head, caught. She's got to come clean.

AVA

It's... our new gene therapy. To modify human DNA.

RAINA

Modify it HOW?

Ava's helpless look tells Raina everything.

RAINA (CONT'D)

He was *serious*? Oh my God! How could you make something like that?

AVA

Raina -

RAINA

How is it even POSSIBLE? Are you telling me they found the "gay gene?" That's BULLSHIT!

AVA

(very carefully)
Except it's kind of not.
(MORE)

AVA (CONT'D)

We found four positions in the human genome, actually, that correlate with a subject's interest in gay sex. We zeroed in on those. And we found a way to - edit them.

RAINA

"Edit" them! Are you hearing yourself? You're talking about altering human beings like some twisted science experiment! Like Hitler or, or, or Frankenstein!

Ava rubs her forehead, her headache becoming unbearable.

AVA

It's not like that. Let me explain.

19

INT. STEWARTS' DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

19

The dinner guests are hanging on Michael's every word. It's clear he has just re-hashed the science behind the gene therapy to the best of his understanding.

MICHAEL

(wrapping up)

So yeah, that's how it works. A splice here, an edit there - boom! New and improved DNA. The possibilities are endless!

PETE

That is seriously messed up.

MICHAEL

No! It's a break through!

PETE

Break through for who?

PAISLEY

For terrified American wankers, that's who.

Tara dips her toe in.

TARA

Well, I think Michael may have a point. This *could* actually help people. If it helps people, what's the harm in that?

PETE

Holy shit! I'm surrounded by fascists!

CHRIS

Hey, don't call my wife a fascist. Let her talk.

PAISLEY

Can't wait to hear what the lady with the giant cross has to say.

Tara considers how to proceed. Paisley is a dark unknown presence in the room, and she doesn't want to hurt Raina.

TARA

I mean, let's just start by agreeing that gay people are fine. They're great. Raina and Pete's friend here are lovely.

PETE

BUT -

TARA

But, if there truly was science available to help a person *not* have gay feelings -

She looks to Michael for help.

MICHAEL

It inhibits the homosexual impulse.

Pete SCOFFS.

TARA

- well then, maybe that would be a good thing.

PAISLEY

Yeah, sounds righ' hunky dory.

There is a pause as people consider their next words.

CHRIS

I mean, we all know what the Bible says about homosexuality.

PETE

(sarcastically)

Oh do we? What does the Bible say?

PAISLEY

Do tell.

TARA

"Men should not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination." Leviticus.

CHRIS

Yeah, that's right. An abomination.

TARA

Of course we ALL sin. All they have to do is pray about it and ask for forgiveness and they can be fine.

CHRIS

(skeptical)

Well -

TARA

They can be FINE. But wouldn't it be another step if we could offer them a scientific way to not have these feelings at all?

Pete is aghast. He looks apologetically at Paisley, who remains surprisingly calm. She reclines in her chair and starts picking at her nails.

Pete looks at Andre and Debbie for help.

PETE

Are you guys hearing this? You've been awfully quiet.

Debbie and Andre exchange a glance. Andre looks at his plate, not wanting to get into it. Debbie decides to add her thoughts.

DEBBIE

Well, I was the art teacher at our high school for 25 years. I saw lots of students who were LGTBQ. Early on, they mostly seemed quiet. You know, not wanting to draw too much attention to themselves. But as time went on, they actually seemed proud of their identities. Our daughter tells us kids don't even care these days.

She looks at Andre who refuses to meet her eye.

CHRIS

(self righteous)

I guess that depends on who you hang out with. And where you grow up. Values.

DEBBIE

Well, I understand there are other sides. But Leviticus is Old Testament. It's my understanding the Christian community lives by the New Testament. And Jesus says nothing about homosexuality.

TARA

Are you a Christian?

DEBBIE

I've read the Bible. But no. The earth is my church.

Pete is fed up.

PETE

Who cares what the Bible says! I work with creatives every day. Do you know what media, movies and television would look like without these people? Not good.

CHRIS

Speaking of that, why does every show these days have to have a gay person in it? Whose reality is that? Raina's the only gay person I know.

PAISLEY

Ha! You'd be surprised.

CHRIS

Of you? Pfft. I called your sexual preference the minute you walked in here.

Paisley levels a glare, the first of the evening.

PETE

Look, I'm telling you self-righteous shits, whether or not "God" approves, the gay people I know are the most colorful, authentic and truly FUCKING FANTASTIC people on the planet!

Paisley is calm again, Pete having spoken for both of them.

PAISLEY

There now, luv, keep your pecker up. Nancy boy 'ere just sharin' his limited opinion on what he don't know about. That's all.

CHRIS

Are you insulting me?

PAISLEY

(picking at her teeth)
Perhaps. Wha' of it?

MICHAEL

Now, come on guys. We're just having a friendly conversation here.

PAISLEY

Per'haps we should set'le our disagreement the old fashioned way, ay?

CHRIS

How's that?

Paisley leans forward.

PAISLEY

Arm wrestlin'.

20

INT. STEWARTS' KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

20

Raina and Ava continue their stand off.

AVA

It's not a science experiment. It targets only these specific genes and deletes them. It's the same science we're using to target genetically inherited disease.

Long pause. Raina approaches Ava slowly, until they are very close. The air between them is kinetic.

RAINA

Do you think I'm diseased? Do you think, for a moment, that there is any part of me that needs to be deleted?

Ava would never dream of changing anything about Raina.

AVA

No. Of course not.

(gently)

But other people might feel differently. About themselves. Don't you want them to have that choice?

RAINA

You are not hearing me.

21

INT. STEWARTS' DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

21

The conversation continues in the dining room. Michale tries to cool the tempers that have flared.

MICHAEL

I don't think anyone needs to be arm wrestling you guys! I think the problem here is that we're getting too hung up on religion.

Paisley leans back, relaxing again.

PAISLEY

We are wafflin' on a bit, yeah.

MICHAEL

So let's take religion out of it. Let's pretend for a moment that God doesn't exist. Or he doesn't care.

PAISLEY

Or SHE doesn't.

Tara and Chris give them disapproving looks.

MICHAEL

Just for a moment! Let's just put that aside, and look at the bigger social issues. Let's look at the SCIENCE! I mean, it's incredible this can even be done!

PETE

Just because it can be done, doesn't mean it should. We've got nukes that can destroy the world with the push of a button, but I don't think we should use those either.

MICHAEL

That's a bit alarmist. I'd hardly compare this to nuclear war.

PETE

I disagree! We haven't begun to talk about the full impact of this. Eliminating the gays? Do you even know WHO you're talking about? Michelangelo, Alexander the Great, Oscar Wilde, ELTON JOHN!

DEBBIE

I love Elton John.

MICHAEL

You're suggesting they couldn't have made their contributions to the world if they were straight?

PETE

I'm saying their contributions would have been VERY different.

PAISLEY

Exactly.

Raina enters the room, interrupting the conversation. She stands there a moment, as if she's forgotten why she came in.

RAINA

Does anybody have a cigarette?

TARA

I have one sweetie. Let's step outside.

Tara grabs her coat, puts her arm around Raina, and leads her out of the room.

Ava enters from the kitchen and watches them leave. She sits and tries to regain her composure.

AVA

I want to apologize. Our party got a little off track.

PAISLEY

A bit pear shaped, I'd say.

AVA

Yeah, well, I wasn't expecting...

She trails off, looking at Michael.

MICHAEL

I was just making conversation! I didn't realize everyone would get so offended. It's science!

(pouting)

It's cool.

DEBBIE

Well, don't feel too bad, Ava. We've had a lively debate so far!

AVA

You've been debating?

DEBBIE

Yes. There are lots of different views from all sides.

CHRIS

Some more right than others.

PAISLEY

More *self righteous* you mean.

DEBBIE

(more to herself)

Mmmm. We need a focus candle.

She fishes in her bag and pulls out a yellow candle. She lights it and places it in the center of the table.

Ava wants to turn the tide to more productive talk.

AVA

Again, I'm sorry. I'm sure none of you thought we'd be talking about SEX and RELIGION when you agreed to come over tonight!

(laughs softly)

But - maybe this presents an opportunity. To hear opposing views? It would help me gauge the public's response before actually going public.

She looks around to see who is willing.

AVA (CONT'D)

Can someone tell me what's been said so far?

Andre sits up, finally ready to talk. He is respectful, very organized and direct.

ANDRE

I can sum up. Chris over here feels like God disapproves of homosexuals, and that this kind of therapy would save them from "sinning." Is that about right?

Chris nods.

CHRIS

It's in the Bible, plain as day.

ANDRE

Tara also thinks God disapproves, but she leans toward thinking the gays are "fine" so long as they pray and ask God's forgiveness. She thinks this therapy would be a nice option to all that praying.

Andre points to Michael.

ANDRE (CONT'D)

Michael thinks the science is cool and he's excited about the bigger possibilities.

Andre looks at Debbie with love.

ANDRE (CONT'D)

My wife was a teacher. She was great at it. She says her LGBTQ students got prouder as the years went by. And she wonders if this kind of therapy is even necessary in today's world.

He looks at Paisley.

ANDRE (CONT'D)

Paisley wants to arm wrestle. And Pete... Well, Pete thinks this is really fucked up. And gays rule.

Pete grins. He couldn't have said it better himself.

22

EXT. STEWARTS' FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

22

Tara pulls a pack of cigarettes from her purse and hands one to Raina before placing one in her own mouth. She lights them both. Raina inhales deeply.

TARA
I thought you quit.

Raina gives her a look.

TARA (CONT'D)
No judgment at all. Honestly it's a relief. No one smokes anymore.

RAINA
I'm surprised you still do.

TARA
(joyful)
Not a food!

They LAUGH.

TARA (CONT'D)
I've tried to quit. God knows I've tried. But these things are *persuasive*.

RAINA
(dryly)
Maybe they could alter your genes so you don't crave cigarettes.

TARA
Well now THAT would be something, wouldn't it? I'd sign up for that treatment any day!

Raina glances at Tara's cross. Tara touches it gently with her fingertips.

TARA (CONT'D)
You know, I've never thought you were a bad person Raina. You're my friend, and I love you.

RAINA
Love the sinner, hate the sin?

TARA
(beat)
I love YOU. You know that.

The guests are still breaking things down.

AVA

I can see you all have valid concerns about this.

PETE

Can you?

AVA

Yes. And I expected this. I've tried looking at this from every angle, but there's always more. What gives us the right? Would this help or hurt people? Who really benefits? Is it safe? And the bigger implications. Does anyone really want to change who they are? And what determines that, what we "truly" are?

The guests chew on responses. Andre is reflective.

ANDRE

That's really it, isn't it? What makes us who we are? Good, bad, smart, cruel, kind - is it nature or nurture?

He looks at Debbie questioningly. She shakes her head "no," but he makes his own a decision.

ANDRE (CONT'D)

(quietly, a confession)

We had a son. Daniel. Very smart kid. He was so smart, wasn't he Deb?

Debbie's eyes well with tears. She nods.

MICHAEL

I didn't know you had a son. What -
(realizes the past tense)
What happened to Daniel?

ANDRE

(with pride)

Daniel graduated at the top of his class. Went on to be a finance intern on Wall Street. He was crushing it, I mean just crushing it - everyone knew he was going to be the next big thing. But then -

Debbie SOBS SOFTLY and covers her mouth.

ANDRE (CONT'D)

He killed himself. 24 years old. On a Saturday. In summer.

AVA

Oh! I'm so sorry.

ANDRE

There one minute and gone the next. Just. Gone.

CHRIS

That sucks, man. I'm sorry. If you don't mind my asking, was it the stress of the job? I hear Wall Street's a killer.

ANDRE

Stress, yes. But not from work. It was the stress of being gay. A successful, gay, black man who wanted a big career on Wall Street. He fought like hell to hide who he really was. He thought no one would accept him as a gay man. Especially not a gay man of color. It's different for us. It's not as accepted.

(resentful beat)

And he wanted to run for office one day. So he hid it, from everyone except us. When he dated, he dated women. If he had a crush on a guy, he buried it. He thought he could live like that. But he couldn't.

Michael and Chris exchange barely veiled looks of discomfort. Somehow talking about a guy who is gay is more uncomfortable for them than talking about lesbians.

MICHAEL

I'm sorry, man. That's awful.

DEBBIE

It's not something we like to talk about. When we moved here, we thought "This is a fresh start. No one needs to know."

ANDRE

NOT because we were ashamed of him.

DEBBIE

No! We were never ashamed of him.
Just to make it... easier.

Ava is processing the meaning this story has on the decision she must make to pull the trigger on the gene therapy trials. She is still so conflicted.

Andre reaches across and takes Ava's hand.

ANDRE

If that gene therapy had been available for Daniel, he would have taken it. And he'd still be alive today.

Debbie isn't so sure. But this statement impacts Ava profoundly. This is precisely why she was behind this gene therapy in the first place.

AVA

Thank you.

Ava gets up and moves into the kitchen with her cell phone.

24

INT. STEWARTS' KITCHEN - A FEW MOMENTS LATER

24

Ava is breathless as she gives the order to proceed with the human trials. She feels like she has reached the end of her moral dilemma. This is the right thing to do.

AVA

Yes. Yes, I'm certain. The press release goes out Monday as planned and we'll proceed with Phase One of the human trials.

(beat)

We're doing this.

Ava listens for a moment to the person on the other line.

AVA (CONT'D)

OK. Send it over for my approval.

She hangs up and takes a cleansing breath, her decision made.

25

EXT. STEWARTS' FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

25

Raina and Tara continue their talk. Raina takes a seat on the front porch and Tara sits beside her.

RAINA

You know my parents are religious.
Growing up in Singapore we were
Buddhists. Still are.

TARA

What does Buddha have to say about
all this?

RAINA

Buddha says one should always have
a mind filled with compassion and
loving kindness for all beings.
Buddha himself never talked about
homosexuality. But one of our
precepts is "awareness of suffering
caused by sexual misconduct."

TARA

And some people say being gay is
"sexual misconduct," right?

RAINA

Some people do.

TARA

See! That's just like us! Jesus
never mentions homosexuality, but
some people interpret scripture to
say things about it. It's all in
how you read it.

RAINA

What do you believe?

TARA

Oh, I don't know Raina! But why not
pray about it and ask for
forgiveness, just in case? Then
you're fine! I'm sorry if that
hurts your feelings.

RAINA

It doesn't matter. People believe
what they want to believe.

Tara hates not being able to say something more supportive.

TARA

What do your folks think? Have they
been supportive?

RAINA

They're progressive people, they're cool. But my Godmother, my mother's best friend Raina is Muslim, and she doesn't approve.

TARA

You're named after your Godmother?

Raina smiles.

RAINA

Yes I am. It means "peaceful queen."

TARA

I like that, "peaceful queen." I don't feel like much of a queen these days.

RAINA

Why not?

TARA

It's these kids! They're all grown up and don't need me anymore! And selling skin care at wine parties isn't exactly the height of professional achievement. I want to feel important again.

RAINA

What do you want to do?

Tara is too embarrassed to say it. It's too big.

RAINA (CONT'D)

What? Come on, say it.

TARA

(her big dream)
I want to be a Realtor.

RAINA

So be a Realtor! What's stopping you?

TARA

Bah! Well, there's this BIG test you have to take, and I'm TERRIBLE at tests. Then there's the time - away from Chris and the kids.

(smiles dreamily again)

(MORE)

TARA (CONT'D)

But I think I'd be really good at it. Dressing up, talking with people - actual adults!

(waving it all away)

But it's too much. Probably never happen.

RAINA

If you think like that, it won't. Go for it.

TARA

You think so?

RAINA

Absolutely.

26

INT. STEWARTS' KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

26

Pete enters the kitchen just as Ava is hanging up the phone.

AVA

Hey. What do you need?

PETE

Can't a guy just check in on his little sister? I'm worried about you, kid. This whole thing seems to be getting to you. You OK?

Ava nods. Pete steps forward and awkwardly rubs her shoulder to comfort her. She looks at him suspiciously.

AVA

What are you doing?

PETE

I'm comforting you.

AVA

What do you want?

Pete considers pushing the concerned brother act, but decides to get on with it instead.

PETE

Well, as it turns out - as long as you're OK - I do have a business opportunity I want to discuss.

He pulls the BUSINESS PROPOSAL from an inside pocket of his bulky jacket.

AVA

You want money. Is that it? How much.

PETE

No Ava! I don't *just* want money. This is an actual *business opportunity*. I want to be your partner.

Ava stares him down.

PETE (CONT'D)

WHAT? Can't you just look at it?

Ava takes the papers and quickly scans through them.

AVA

Your timing is excellent, as always. What am I looking at?

Pete sidles up beside her and points to the paperwork, suddenly proud and excited.

PETE

It's a grow farm. For pot. I found some property not too far from here that's perfect. And since it became legal, people are making tons of money! I've got a friend who started a farm near here and he can't keep the stuff in stock.

Ava puts the papers down.

AVA

Pete! I don't smoke! You know that.

PETE

I'm not asking you to smoke it. I'm asking you to sell it.

AVA

Why would I do this?

PETE

That's what I'm trying to tell you! You've invested your whole life in developing drug therapies to help people! Right? Well I'm telling you, pot is the NUMBER ONE drug that can help people with tons of different conditions.

(MORE)

PETE (CONT'D)

There's science to prove it! It's all in the proposal. Just read it!

Ava looks at her brother. She loves him. She wishes he could find his way. Could this be it?

AVA

What about your movie career? Your writing?

PETE

(dryly)

I think I can put that on hold for awhile.

(beat)

I'm not a dummy, Ava. I can do this. I just need a chance to prove myself.

AVA

I know you're not dumb.

PETE

I've been studying this plant. I go to conferences, I read, I know a million different ways it can help people. You'd be amazed. Let's bring it to a broader audience. Together.

AVA

OK, I'll read it. I'm not promising anything. But I'll read it.

Pete resists the urge to hug her. Ava looks reluctantly back toward the dining room.

AVA (CONT'D)

Let's just... go back to the party.

PETE

You really wanna do that?

AVA

It's a shit show, isn't it?

PETE

Total fuckin' wreck.

AVA

Yeah.

Ava picks up the cake but doesn't bother relighting it. She leaves and Pete follows.

27

INT. STEWARTS' DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

27

Ava and Pete re-enter the dining room at the same moment that Raina and Tara are coming in. Ava and Raina look at each other to assess how they are doing. Tense, but still loving. Everyone sits. Ava begins passing out cake.

RAINA

I'm afraid I can't stay much longer.

AVA

Just stay for some cake, OK? Then maybe you and I can go for a walk.

Raina purses her lips doubtfully, but stays. Tara tries to lighten the mood.

TARA

Raina was just telling me about Buddhism. There's these peaceful precepts like this thing called "sila" which is a gift given to others to promote trust and respect. Isn't that nice?

CHRIS

Hey! That reminds me of a joke. A Buddhist, a lawyer and a lesbian walk into a bar -

Raina drops her fork with a LOUD CLANK on her plate.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

What? It's a joke! You can't get mad at me for a joke!

RAINA

I can, actually.

CHRIS

I SAID "lesbian" not dyke! Jesus!

Raina looks to the ceiling for strength. Paisley leans forward, coming to her defense.

PAISLEY

It's lookin' like we migh' have that wrestle after all, ay mate?

CHRIS

Oh, I'd be happy to take you down.

AVA

Can we *please* just have some pleasant conversation. Michael?

MICHAEL

He's joking. Everyone's just on edge because we're afraid to talk about the ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM.

He points and all eyes turn to the lab envelope on the bar.

RAINA

So let's talk about it.

MICHAEL

Yeah?

CHRIS

Yeah! Let's air the dirty laundry. How's this stuff work?

TARA

Yes, I'm confused. Why a shot? And is it a therapy or a drug?

AVA

It's difficult to explain in laymen's terms.

RAINA

Try.

Ava is on the spot.

AVA

OK. Well. Let's start with CRISPR. CRISPR is a technology that allows researchers to easily alter DNA sequences and modify gene function, by making precision edits to the DNA.

(encouraged by their interest)

We actually discovered it by studying a bacteria's immune system. When bacteria is attacked by a virus it's been infected with before, it uses an enzyme to find and cut the virus' DNA.

CHRIS

Like a little fighter pilot. Cool.

AVA

We've adapted this self-defense mechanism to edit genes in any organism. It's remarkable.

Raina won't let her off that easy.

RAINA

How?

AVA

How. Well, CRISPR produces the enzyme we call Cas9. It's a modified protein that acts like a pair of scissors that snips out the targeted parts of the DNA. It has the effect of shutting the targeted genes "off."

CHRIS

(fighter pilot sounds)
Pew! Pew!

RAINA

What happens to the organism?

AVA

The disease - or targeted behavior - ceases to exist in that organism.

RAINA

Ceases to exist.

PETE

Holy shit.

AVA

We've successfully used it to turn off genes that cause hereditary diseases in mice. We're hoping to use it to turn off hereditary diseases in humans, like cystic fibrosis, sickle cell... Huntington's disease.

RAINA

So it's intended for diseases.

AVA

Genetically inherited diseases, yes.

RAINA

Homosexuality is not a disease.

AVA

No. It's not. It's a behavior. And scientists believe that genes are related to behavior. Like I said in the kitchen, studies have narrowed in on four positions in the human genome believed to be related to homosexual behavior. We target those genes and, using CRISPR, we turn them off.

RAINA

What studies?

AVA

We're relying on a study conducted at the Broad Institute in Cambridge.

RAINA

How large was the study?

AVA

2.3 million people.

This surprises Raina.

AVA (CONT'D)

They used the DNA gathered from 23andMe and the UK Biobank. The results were scientifically significant, and obviously, very sensitive.

RAINA

But so far no one has thought to combine CRISPR with turning off these supposed "gay genes?" No one that is, except you.

AVA

I'm sure we're not the only ones to think of it. We're just the first to be ready for human trials.

Chris is more interested in what else gene therapy might do.

CHRIS

Can we use that thing to make people stronger? Or taller?

AVA

That's genetic engineering, but yes. Conceivably anything that can be inherited can be modified.

CHRIS

Outstanding.

MICHAEL

What if our government secretly manufactured entire armies of genetically enhanced people? Hell, what if other governments did that?

AVA

That won't happen. It's voluntary therapy. It can't be forced on you.

PETER

Who knows? I'm pretty sure Russia didn't ask permission when it doped its athletes for the Olympics. They thought they were taking vitamins.

MICHAEL

Master armies. A master race.

AVA

No, no. You guys! We've got very tight holds on this. It's being developed only to help people.

PETE

So what if a parent wanted to use it to "fix" one of his kids? Is that still voluntary? What if Andre here had the chance to "fix" Daniel?

Andre isn't going to take that. He leans in hard.

ANDRE

Don't you bring my child into this. You didn't know him.

PETE

Sorry, but you DID say you wish he'd had the choice. Didn't you? Maybe you'd have given him "special vitamins" as a kid to make sure his more complicated behaviors went away.

Andre clenches his jaw but sits back in his seat. He's conflicted. Maybe he would have. At least then he'd be alive.

RAINA
Your child is gay?

ANDRE
Was. He died.

RAINA
I'm so sorry.

DEBBIE
We wouldn't have done that to Daniel. The earth knows exactly who we are. Daniel was already perfect.

ANDRE
I don't know. I just don't know.

AVA
This is crazy. The United States would never allow this to be used on people without consent!

PETE
Don't be so sure. Public schools force vaccinations. And it wasn't too long ago we allowed institutions to sterilize inmates.

CHRIS
What about the states? Some are REALLY conservative. They'd love to get their hands on this. No more gays in their community? Shit, they'd go nuts.

Raina looks at Chris closely. This is too far, even for him. But Chris is tired of all the PC talk.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
I'm not saying it would be right, *necessarily*. But it could happen.

Paisley smiles, certain now that she will kick his ass.

PAISLEY
You've got a lot of ideas.

Ava gives up on any hope of friendly conversation.

AVA

Well, I appreciate everyone's input but it's getting late. Michael, would you mind clearing the table? Raina and I are going for a walk.

DEBBIE

We'll help clean up.

Debbie, Andre, Tara, and Michael begin clearing the table. Paisley sees her time with Raina is about up.

PAISLEY

Can I walk you out?

RAINA

Sure.

28

INT. STEWARTS' FOYER - MOMENTS LATER

28

Paisley and Raina linger in the foyer saying their good-byes. Ava waits by the door.

PAISLEY

Well, it's been real nice. I mean, it hasn't. It's been bloody awful, really. But, it's a shame we didn't have more time to talk. I think I'd like that.

RAINA

I think I would too.

PAISLEY

(flirting)

Yeah? Never dated a *lawyer* before. That's pretty serious.

RAINA

You're never serious?

PAISLEY

Can be. When the mood strikes. Are you ever not?

RAINA

(laughs)

Can be.

They are enjoying this, the attraction clear.

PAISLEY

Good. Can I call you?

RAINA

Yeah. Pete has my number.

Paisley brushes Raina's hair off her shoulder, leans in, and gives her a sweet kiss on the cheek.

PAISLEY

You're lovely.

Paisley smiles and walks back into the dining room, as Raina watches her go.

29

INT. STEWARTS' DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

29

While the others work to clear the table, Chris finishes his drink. Pete stands and takes his jacket off, removing a joint from an inside pocket. Paisley approaches.

PAISLEY

I'll 'ave one of those.

Chris gives them hard side eye, trying to appear uninterested.

PETE

(amused)

You want some too?

Chris looks toward the kitchen, super incognito.

CHRIS

Not here.

PETE

(to Paisley)

Mind if he joins us?

PAISLEY

Not a bit.

Pete leaves his jacket on the chair and leads the way to the backyard. Paisley grabs the yellow candle off the table and follows. A moment later, Chris does too.

30

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS - NIGHT

30

Ava and Raina walk side by side, a bit uncomfortable.

AVA

I thought you quit smoking.

RAINA

I did. I was having a bad day.

They exchange mildly amused looks. Ava takes the open door.

AVA

Let me just come out and say, *that* was awful in there. I'm sorry. That's not how I planned to tell you.

RAINA

How did you plan to tell me?

AVA

I don't know! Things changed so fast when we discovered the Cambridge study. We were working on sickle cell, and we were nearly ready for human trials, but then the board got excited about this. It's a numbers game. Sickle cell only strikes 200,000 people in the US each year. But when you look at the LGBTQ, that's *9 million* people in the US. 25 million if you add people who admit to some level of same sex attraction. That's a whole lot of potential patients.

RAINA

So it's about money.

AVA

With companies like mine it's always about money. But for me it's personal, you know that.

Raina tries to understand.

RAINA

I know your parents were hard on you -

AVA

- It wasn't just my parents.

RAINA

We grew up in a shitty town! I get it! But that doesn't make this right.

AVA

Science doesn't care what's right.

They stop and stare at each other, at an impasse.

RAINA

Why didn't you talk to me? I'm your best friend. And I'm gay.

AVA

Honestly, you're the last person I wanted to know.

RAINA

Because you knew I'd try to stop you!

AVA

Because I knew you wouldn't listen.

RAINA

Ava! You're just WRONG! Don't you see that? Did you hear what they were saying in there?

AVA

Yes! But the potential *good* this work can do, it's - it's too much to ignore just because people are afraid to talk about being gay! Or what makes people gay, or how we can choose or choose not to be gay!
(visibly upset)
I *need* to do this.

There are tears in Ava's eyes.

RAINA

(with love)

Ava.

Ava lets the tears fall. Raina pulls her into an embrace, soothing her. Ava's hands reflexively stroke Raina's hair.

FLASHBACK

31

EXT. THE BEACH (OREGON COAST, SUMMER, 2009) - DAY

31

A warm breeze blows through long dark hair, bursts of sunlight breaking through the strands.

The SOUND OF SEAGULLS, THE WIND, and FEMALE LAUGHTER.

A glimpse of Ava and Raina running, racing, side by side, on a sunny day at the beach.

BACK TO PRESENT

32

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS - NIGHT

32

Raina gently pulls back from their embrace and looks at Ava. Lost in her reverie, Ava takes a moment to open her eyes.

RAINA

Do you think we choose to be gay?

AVA

No. I don't think we choose.

(beat)

But what if we could choose NOT TO BE?

RAINA

I would never choose that.

AVA

Well maybe I would! Maybe I would jump at the chance to not feel the way I do about you! To not feel like I'm forcing myself to have sex with my husband! To not feel like I'm living a false existence just so I can pass as "NORMAL."

RAINA

"Normal." That's your parents talking. What's so terrible about just being you?

Ava is getting worked up.

AVA

Because this world does not want people like us, Raina. They don't! Some people *pretend* that they do, they *tolerate* us - but they don't! They just want us to be like them.

Raina is beginning to understand the core of Ava's passion about this therapy.

RAINA

You're afraid.

AVA

YES I'M AFRAID! I'VE ALWAYS BEEN AFRAID!

Ava is shaking.

AVA (CONT'D)

Do you remember that poor man in
the street?

RAINA

Of course I do.

AVA

Do you remember the sound of his
teeth hitting the pavement? The
sound of those boots crushing his
chest?

RAINA

I do.

AVA

Do you remember how NO ONE HELPED
HIM? People just stood there, not
losing their place in line, not
even LOOKING at him. Leaving him
there, bleeding. Alone.

Ava is sobbing now. Raina takes her in her arms again and
lets her cry.

AVA (CONT'D)

No one helped him.

RAINA

We helped him. Do you remember,
Ava? We helped him.

33

INT. STEWARTS' KITCHEN - SAME TIME OF NIGHT

33

SOUND OF WATER FILLING SINK, DISHES CLINKING. Michael stands
at the sink, filling it with soapy water. Andre, Debbie and
Tara stand by, ready to help. All are a little shell shocked
after the dinner conversation.

Michael senses a need to lighten the mood. He pulls out his
phone and plays a FAMILIAR ROCK SONG that FILLS THE ROOM WITH
MUSIC through his blue tooth speaker. All begin to move to
the music, relaxing, increasing their dance moves as the song
plays on.

Andre, Debbie, and Tara form a line with Andre dumping food
into the garbage, Debbie handing dishes to Michael who dunks
them in the soapy water. Tara takes the dishes from Michael
and placing them in the dishwasher.

But really, it's a DANCE PARTY. They SING LYRICS ALOUD, waive
their hands in the air, shake their hips, and dance.

Andre gives Debbie a twirl. They are all smiling and LAUGHING, relaxed and happy for the first time all evening.

34

EXT. STEWARTS' BACK PATIO - SAME TIME OF NIGHT

34

Pete, Chris and Paisley walk out to the patio table. Chris pulls out a chair for himself and Paisley swiftly takes it, placing the candle on the table for light.

PAISLEY

Thanks, mate.

Chris is surly but allows it. He walks around to the opposite side and takes a seat. Pete sits next to Paisley and hands her the joint. He lights it and she inhales.

PAISLEY (CONT'D)

(liking it)

That's the dog's bollocks, that is.

She hands the joint to Chris, a challenge. He takes it.

CHRIS

Do not tell my wife about this. We haven't smoked weed since college.

PETE

You think she'd care?

CHRIS

She'd care. It's not a very "Christian" thing to do.

Paisley SNORTS.

PAISLEY

That's a load of codswallop. God made the stuff, didn' 'e?

CHRIS

I suppose he did.

PETE

You care a lot about what people think about you, don't you?

Chris shrugs. He does, but doesn't want to admit it.

CHRIS

Who doesn't?

Pete takes a toke.

PETE
Damn, that IS good shit.

CHRIS
Where'd you get it?

PETE
A friend with a pot farm nearby.

CHRIS
Cool.

PETE
I'm actually thinking about getting
into the business myself.

CHRIS
Really?

PETE
Yup.

Chris hands him a business card. Pete takes it, surprised
people still carry these.

PETE (CONT'D)
Wow. A business card.

CHRIS
Let me know if I can help. I'm Head
of Sales at Martin's Packing. I'll
give you the friends and family
rate.

PETE
Thanks, but with this kind of
product the packaging is... kinda
informal.

Paisley and Pete share a CHORTLE over that. They sit amiably
for a bit.

Until Paisley decides it's time to kick the hornets' nest.

PAISLEY
So this whole anti-gay therapy
gives ya a real hard on, don' it?
Why is that, I wonder?

Chris gives her an even look.

CHRIS

I'm just saying, we've all got enough shit to fight about. This would just be one less thing.

PETE

Why does it have to be fight?

PAISLEY

Ya, you lookin' for a figh'?

CHRIS

I'm saying that from the dawn of time people have been more comfortable with their own tribe. You two turds are refusing to see the facts. If we're ALL in the same tribe, we're going to get along a lot better. Simple as that.

PETE

So why can't we be an all-gay tribe?

CHRIS

Don't be a dick.

Pete CHUCKLES.

PETE

Are you a homophobe, Chris?

CHRIS

No! I am not a homophobe.

PAISLEY

Are you sure? 'Cuz you seem a bit squidgy 'bout the subject.

CHRIS

I'm not!

PETE

Me thinks you protesteth too much.

Pete thinks a moment. He enjoys riling Chris up. And he's pretty high now.

PETE (CONT'D)

OK, how about this. What if - what if we screw around with a gay person's sexy genes -

PAISLEY

- Bollocks -

PETE

- And that person marries a chick. Then they have a baby. What if the messed up sexy genes are inherited?

CHRIS

Are they?

PETE

I don't know! I think so! Anyway, what if in screwing around with the sexy genes, the therapy has *unintended consequences* and our kids inherit *that*?

CHRIS

Like what?

Pete leans in, whispering now, a scary campfire story.

PETE

What if it turns off our *heterosexual impulses* too? So over time we become a race of asexual humans uninterested in sex? Just stumbling around trying to figure out what to do with all that free time?

PAISLEY

At'd serve you righ'!

CHRIS

That would never happen.

PETE

But what if it did? What if somehow this cuts out our sex drive altogether? No sex, no babies, the human population goes extinct. POOF.

Chris LAUGHS.

CHRIS

You're nuts.

PETE

I don't know, maybe. But Chris, what if it resulted in YOU having zero interest in sex?

CHRIS
Not happening.

Paisley takes up the taunt.

PAISLEY
Jus' think abou' it. You wake up
ready to flog the dong and -
nothin'. No mornin' wood, no tickle
in your shorts when a pre'tty lady
walks by, just a sad, empty pair of
trousers.

Chris glares at her.

CHRIS
I'd kill the fucker that messed
with my sexy genes.

PETE
Exactly!

Paisley and Chris do not break eye contact.

PAISLEY
Les' 'ave it then.

CHRIS
You're on.

PAISLEY
Finally!

Paisley clears a path on the table between them, eager to finally take this asshole on in her favorite sport. She removes her jacket, revealing ripped arms of steel. She places her elbow on the table, hand extended for her challenger.

Chris is taken aback by the apparent strength of Paisley. Pete smiles.

PETE
Thirsty Turtle arm wrestling
champion three years running.

CHRIS
Shit.

Chris assumes the position and takes her hand.

35

INT. STEWARTS' DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

35

Michael comes into the dining room to check for any last dishes. He sees a napkin that Pete left on his chair and bends to pick it up. His eye catches on the business proposal hanging out of Pete's jacket. Curious, he pulls it out.

He reads the title "BUSINESS PROPOSAL." He looks at the second page and sees a handwritten note scrawled across the top:

"SIS - PLEASE KEEP AN OPEN MIND AND READ THIS. WE COULD MAKE A LOT OF MONEY - PETE"

Michael's eyes scan to the bottom of the page which contains a summary of the costs to start up the pot farm. He sees:

"TOTAL START UP COSTS: \$500,000"

Michael curls the business proposal into a roll, clutching it tightly.

MICHAEL

Not on my watch.

36

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS - SAME TIME OF NIGHT

36

Ava and Raina have begun walking again, only now they are arm in arm, feeling bonded. They have rounded the corner and are heading back to the house. They speak calmly, each feeling rational.

RAINA

I understand it can be scary. I've lived it. But the world is moving forward with understanding sexuality and how complex it all is. What you're suggesting moves us backward, not forward.

AVA

How does giving people options move us backward?

RAINA

Offering to change the way a person is born isn't an "option." It's playing God.

AVA

Is it "playing God" to use this kind of therapy to cure blindness?

RAINA

No.

AVA

So then why is this? You're refusing to see both sides. The LGBTQ community is all about *choice*. Why can't this just be another choice?

RAINA

What kind of choice is it to erase who you truly are?

AVA

What's so wrong with choosing who you *want* to be? If that gives us a chance at a better life?

They stop walking again. Ava is digging her heels in so much, Raina strains to see what she's really trying to say. An idea sparks.

RAINA

This isn't just about you and me, is it? You're thinking of someone else.

(beat)

You didn't drink tonight. All that stress and not one drop. You're pregnant.

Ava looks up sharply, giving herself away.

RAINA (CONT'D)

Oh my God! Are you PREGNANT?

AVA

Michael doesn't know.

Raina is stunned. She paces a few steps away from Ava.

RAINA

I thought you didn't want children. Michael kept pushing for them, but you always said no.

AVA

I wasn't ready. But I've always wanted children.

RAINA

You never told me that.

AVA
For a long time, I thought I
couldn't have them.

RAINA
Why? There's nothing wrong with
you, physically.

AVA
No.

Raina is trying to understand.

RAINA
All this time I thought it was
because of your career. Dedicating
yourself to science. But that
wasn't it, was it?

Raina is getting close to something Ava doesn't want to
admit.

AVA
Raina, please -

RAINA
I think I get it.

AVA
Stop.

RAINA
(an accusation)
You didn't want children because
you didn't want your child to be
like you.

Ava cringes.

RAINA (CONT'D)
You didn't want her to be like *me*.

AVA
It's such an ugly world out there
Raina! I didn't want to bring a
child into it. Not until I knew she
had a chance.

RAINA
A chance?

Raina understands.

RAINA (CONT'D)
You mean the gene therapy.

AVA
Yes.

Raina is suddenly protective of this unborn child.

RAINA
Oh Ava. You're not thinking of
experimenting on your own child,
are you?

AVA
Of course not! The ethics alone
wouldn't allow that.

RAINA
But if your clinical trials are
successful, are you - are you going
to give it to her?

Ava doesn't answer. This disturbs Raina even more.

RAINA (CONT'D)
Will you give it to her before
she's even old enough to know what
it means? *Without her consent?*

Ava doesn't want to believe she would do that. But she also
desperately wants to protect her child from harm.

AVA
(weakly)
Of course not.

Raina sees the lie.

RAINA
This has to stop. Don't you see?
THAT'S what's going to happen.
Parents will be changing their
children before they even have a
chance to find out who they are.
Don't you see how cruel that is?

AVA
(repeating)
Cruel...

Raina takes Ava by the shoulders and shakes her gently.

RAINA

Stop these trials. Don't announce it to the public. Bury it. Please.

AVA

I can't. I've already given the green light for the press release on Monday. Recruitment for human trials starts next week.

37 EXT. STEWARTS' FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS 37

Michael opens the front door and looks out into the night, searching for Ava. He spots her with Raina across the street. He waves the Business Proposal in the air.

MICHAEL

(angry)

Ava! You and I need to talk about this! This is bullshit!

38 EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS - CONTINUOUS 38

Ava looks across the street at Michael. She sees he is angrily waving a large stack of papers that can only be her brother's business proposal at her.

AVA

Great. I have to deal with this.

Ava begins walking back to her house, but turns to see if Raina is coming.

AVA (CONT'D)

You coming?

RAINA

In a minute. I need to think.

39 EXT. STEWARTS' BACK PATIO - NIGHT 39

Paisley and Chris are locked in a fierce arm wrestling battle. Paisley's muscles are bulging, Chris is sweating and fighting back. Pete watches with joyful amusement.

PETE

You OK there Chris? You're looking a little peaked.

Debbie emerges from the house, looking for them. The arm wrestlers don't seem to faze her. She sees Pete and the pot.

DEBBIE

I thought I smelled herbs! May I?

A surprised Pete hands the joint over to Debbie. She inhales.

DEBBIE (CONT'D)

Mother Earth is good.

PETE

She is.

PAISLEY

Come on ya wank-ah! You're looking
righ' off color! Time to give in.

DEBBIE

GET HIM GIRL! KICK HIS FEEBLE ASS!
RIP HIS ARM OUT OF HIS SOCKET!

Even in the midst of their battle, Paisley and Chris look up
in surprise at this. Debbie shrugs.

DEBBIE (CONT'D)

Daniel was a wrestler in high
school. He was good.

(back to the challengers)

NOW TEAR HIM APART!

With a PAINFUL GROAN, Chris finally goes down, slowly at
first and then with a BAM as Paisley finishes him hard on the
table. She stands, hands in the air, an internal victory lap.
Chris remains collapsed on the table.

PAISLEY

Yeah! Now put a sock in it, ya
prat. We've all 'ad enough of your
yackin'.

Paisley joins Debbie and Pete, taking the spliff.

DEBBIE

Nice work! Way to pound him!

PAISLEY

(laughing)

Better head inside then, yeah? It's
gettin' a bit parky.

Paisley puts her jacket on and heads inside. Debbie walks
over to Chris and, suddenly very maternal, helps him stand.

DEBBIE

There, there now. Let's get you a
nice warm cup of coffee.

Pete stays behind, finishing his smoke.

40

EXT. STEWARTS' FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

40

As Ava approaches, Michael shuts the front door to keep the guests from overhearing. He glances toward Raina.

MICHAEL

Where is she going?

AVA

For a walk. She's upset.

(with intent)

Understandably.

Michael, only moments before ready to pounce, sits back on his heels at this. They look at each other accusingly.

AVA (CONT'D)

WHY did you do this, Michael? Even if my company didn't have a confidentiality provision - which they DO - why would you bring this up as dinner conversation?

Michael doesn't have a good answer. So he goes on the attack. He holds up the business proposal.

MICHAEL

We'll get to that later! What the hell is THIS? Huh? Is your drop out loser brother seriously asking you for money? For a POT FARM?

AVA

He's not a loser, and he didn't drop out. He's very smart, actually.

MICHAEL

So you're CONSIDERING this? Come on!

Ava hadn't really been considering it, but she's mad at Michael so she takes up her brother's cause.

AVA

Maybe it's not such a bad idea. Lots of people smoke pot. It could be quite lucrative.

41 EXT. STEWARTS' BACK PATIO - SAME TIME OF NIGHT 41

Pete has finished his joint and is heading back into the house when he overhears the LOUD ARGUMENT Ava and Michael are having out front. He follows a side path around the house and walks toward the sound of their voices.

He reaches a viewing point at the side of the house, out of sight but able to observe.

42 EXT. STEWARTS' FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS 42

Michael and Ava continue their argument.

MICHAEL

(heated)

Let's pretend for a minute that you're right. Let's pretend the whole world LOVES pot and the federal government gets on board and we all become one giant pot smoking country.

AVA

Sounds fun.

MICHAEL

Great! Yes! Super fun! So we're all just laying around smoking pot and all the pot farmers are making big bucks, but here's the real question - here's where things get murky for me - do you actually think your idiot brother could run a company?

43 EXT. SIDE OF THE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS 43

Pete reacts to this insult.

44 EXT. STEWARTS' FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS 44

Michael continues his tirade.

MICHAEL

Yours would be the ONE pot farm, even in that perfect world, that would fail miserably. Because Pete has never succeeded at ANYTHING in his life. And that's the truth.

Ava hates how condescending he's being.

AVA
You are such a pompous asshole.

MICHAEL
ME? What did I do?

AVA
YOU, with your framed awards and
that ridiculous car you drive -

MICHAEL
- I earned that car!

AVA
You're a coward. You're threatened
by someone who thinks differently
than you do. Someone creative. You
can't understand that, so all you
can do is insult him.

MICHAEL
He's an ACTOR, Ava! We aren't
partnering with an ACTOR!

Ava's had enough.

AVA
You'd better be careful. You're
heading right into mid-life crisis
territory, and it's not a good
look.

Michael is unable to keep up with sober Ava. He reverts to
child-like hurt.

MICHAEL
Why are you being so mean?

AVA
Don't ever talk about my brother
like that again.

She goes inside, leaving him stunned and alone.

45

EXT. SIDE OF THE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

45

Watching from the shadows, Pete is moved by his sister's
defense. He wants to be the man she sees.

46

INT. STEWARTS' LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

46

Ava and Michael come into the living room, where Chris, Tara, Andre and Debbie are sitting around, drinking coffee. Tara is rubbing Chris' wounded arm. She looks up as they enter.

TARA

We made coffee!

DEBBIE

And the kitchen is clean so you guys can sit down and relax.

AVA

Coffee sounds amazing.

An ugly homemade purple candle sits on the table near a warm pot of coffee. Ava pours herself a cup. She gestures toward the candle.

AVA (CONT'D)

What's... this?

DEBBIE

A healing candle. It dispels negativity and charges the room with positive energy.

AVA

We could certainly use that.

Michael enters and sees the coffee.

MICHAEL

I'll get the Bailey's and Kahlua.

Michael leaves to retrieve the alcohol and passes Pete as he's coming in.

PETE

Coffee hour?

AVA

Hey. You want a cup?

PETE

Sure. Two sugars.

Pete sits down at the piano and begins to PLAY A FEW NOTES. Ava sets his coffee nearby and sits down next to Tara and Debbie.

A TOILET FLUSHES off screen and Paisley enters, fresh from the bathroom. She sees Raina is not in the room.

PAISLEY

Well, I'm off.

(to Ava)

Thanks so much for the nosh.
Scrummy.

AVA

You bet. Glad you liked it.

Paisley glances over at Chris.

PAISLEY

You all righ'?

Tara answers for him, oblivious to their arm wrestling.

TARA

He walked into a door.

PAISLEY

Clumsy sod. A bit sloshed then,
were ya?

CHRIS

(tightly)

I suppose so.

PAISLEY

'Night then.

(to Pete)

See you in class.

(to the rest)

Toodle pip!

Paisley leaves cheerfully.

Michael returns with the Bailey's and Kahlua and adds some to his mug. He offers it to Chris and Andre, who both accept.

Pete's twinkling on the keys takes on a JAZZY TONE. It's good and the guests enjoy it.

PETE

I'd like to take this opportunity
to sing a little song to my brother
in law. The man of the hour. I
wrote this little diddy just a
moment ago... while hanging
outside... listening to the sounds
of the night.

Michael and Ava exchange uncertain looks.

PETE (CONT'D)

You can hear some crazy things in
the night, if you just listen.
Anyway, I was inspired. So here
goes.

He begins to play a JAZZY HAPPY BIRTHDAY SONG. He sings.

PETE (CONT'D)

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU, HAPPY
BIRTHDAY TO YOU. HAPPY - BIRTHDAY -
MY

(jazz chord)

FASCIST

(jazz chord)

ASSHOLE

(jazz chord)

PSYCHO

(jazz chord)

STUCK UP FUCKING BRRUUUUUUUUU - THA

(winks at Michael)

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU!

The guests aren't sure how to react. Was that a joke? Michael
bows his head.

Raina enters the room.

RAINA

Wow. That was really something.

Pete smiles up at her and begins again with SOFT JAZZ NOTES
on the piano.

PETE

Why thank you. You just missed
Paisley.

RAINA

I saw her outside. You gave her my
number?

PETE

Yeah.

RAINA

Text me her contact info.

AVA

You want some coffee?

RAINA

Sure.

Raina accepts the mug and perches on the arm of the couch, facing the group. As Pete continues softly playing, she clears her throat, drawing the room's attention.

RAINA (CONT'D)

So, I'd like to say something now. I've been thinking hard about all that's happened here tonight. Thinking a lot about Ava. And the future ramifications of what she's proposing.

Pete stops playing. Ava grows concerned with where this is going.

RAINA (CONT'D)

I love Ava. I really do. I've always wanted nothing more than her happiness. Her success. No matter what the cost to myself.

Pete looks at her. He knows exactly how much she loves Ava. Raina continues, making eye contact with each guest.

RAINA (CONT'D)

Until now. You see, I can't just stand by and do nothing when I see a terrible mistake is about to be made. This is too important. I can't. So I'm going to bring something to light. Something none of you know about. Something that will change things, forever.

Raina looks at Ava with genuine regret. It is clear she is about to reveal something huge. Something Ava doesn't want them to know. Ava has to stop it somehow.

AVA

Yes! Raina, you're right. We should include our friends in this. After all, it's a very exciting announcement.

Raina is surprised to hear Ava speak up. Ava stands and faces the group, her back now to Raina.

AVA (CONT'D)

This is something that I wanted to keep private, for obvious reasons. But I think it's time to tell you all now. Time to come clean.

(beat)

(MORE)

AVA (CONT'D)

You see, Pete and Michael and I,
we're about to start a new company
together! A pot farm! Just outside
of town! Isn't that wild?

TARA

A pot farm!

Pete is genuinely surprised. Michael nearly drops his coffee.
He tries keeping his cool, but he needs to stop to this.

MICHAEL

Now, honey, I don't think we were
ready to make that announcement
just yet. We were still talking
details, remember?

CHRIS

Well, I think it's a great idea,
buddy! It's legal! It's the wave of
the future!

Tara narrows her eyes at Chris and leans in with a SNIFF.

TARA

Have you been smoking pot?

Chris stands quickly and walks over to Pete.

CHRIS

Congratulations man!

DEBBIE

(to Ava)

Yes, congratulations! How nice to
have a family operation like that.
I would have loved to work with my
brother. Of course he's in prison,
so that wouldn't work.

TARA

(disapproving)

I'm not so sure a *marijuana* farm is
the right move here.

Andre stands and slaps Pete and Michael on the back, offering
his congratulations. The men start chatting, Debbie and Tara
debate the pros and cons of pot.

Ava is relieved. Her diversion is successful. The room is now
abuzz with talk of the "new business." Michael struggles to
hide his fury amid the congratulations.

Ava turns to Raina, who sits quietly, waiting. They engage in a WHISPERED EXCHANGE.

AVA
What are you doing?

RAINA
What I have to do to make you stop.

AVA
And what's that?

RAINA
Tell them the truth. Tell them everything.

AVA
Are you *threatening* me?

Raina says nothing but does not look away. She is dead serious.

AVA (CONT'D)
Why?

RAINA
Because you won't listen to reason.

AVA
What are you going to tell them?

Raina says nothing.

AVA (CONT'D)
That I'm pregnant?

Nothing.

AVA (CONT'D)
That I'm GAY?

Raina raises one eyebrow. Michael approaches and grabs Ava's elbow, startling her. But he hasn't heard her last statement. He's still focused on the pot farm.

MICHAEL
(angry whisper)
Dammit, Ava! What the hell? I thought we were going to talk about this!

Ava rubs her head, a full migraine coming on quickly. She looks at Pete who is delighted and talking happily about his pot farm, bullshitting a little.

PETE

(to Chris and Andre)

The initial buy in is \$500,000, but we *should* make that back in 12 months... it's a pretty solid investment.

Ava GROANS and looks back at Michael who is still holding her elbow, shaking her gently.

MICHAEL

Ava! Ava, answer me damnit! I'm your husband! I have a say in this!

Ava looks at Raina. Raina looks back with cool, calm eyes that have had enough.

RAINA

The truth will set you free.

The room spins. The world grows blurry, the voices grow dim. Ava's eyes roll closed.

She faints.

FLASHBACK/DREAM

47

INT. JUNIOR HIGH HALLWAY - DAY (PORTLAND, 1999)

47

13-year-old Ava stands in the hallway of her junior high, her forehead pressed against her locker, cheeks burning. Nearby a group of teenage girls are mocking her, talking loudly.

GIRL 1

It was SO DISGUSTING, she actually tried to kiss me!

GIRL 2

I thought you guys were friends.

GIRL 1

Well we WERE, but not like that! I mean what gave her the idea I would ever want to KISS her? So gross!

GIRL 3

I always knew she was gay.

GIRL 2

Me too. You could sense it. The way she looks at you in gym class.

GIRL 3
I KNOW! IT'S PERVERTED!

GIRL 2
She's nasty.

GIRL 1
She is.

BACK TO PRESENT

48

INT. STEWARTS' MASTER BEDROOM - A SHORT TIME LATER

48

Ava hears WORRIED VOICES. Eyes closed, she senses she's laying in bed. She opens her eyes to a fuzzy world.

RAINA
She's coming around.

MICHAEL
Give her the water.

RAINA
Let her breathe.

Slowly the figures in the room come into focus. Raina is there, sitting on the bed. Michael stands behind her. Pete leans against the wall, a worried look on his face.

PETE
Pretty dramatic, sis, even for you.

Ava GROANS. Her head is splitting.

AVA
Dim the light!

Pete adjusts the dimmer, bringing the lights down.

RAINA
Another migraine?

AVA
(agreeing)
Mmmhmmmm.

MICHAEL
You've never fainted before. We should call a doctor.

AVA
No. I don't need a doctor. Just rest. Did everyone else go home?

MICHAEL

Yeah. Debbie wanted to light another candle for you, but Raina talked her out of it. They're gone.

AVA

Thank God. No offense, Michael, but this has been the WORST. DAY. EVER.

MICHAEL

None taken.

(with love)

I'm sorry I yelled at you like that. I just, I want to be heard.

She is hopeful the worst is now behind them.

AVA

I know. Me too.

Ava reaches for the bottle of headache medication on her night stand. Raina sees, and quickly stops Ava's hand, speaking without thinking.

RAINA

Ava, the baby!

Raina and Ava both freeze. Those words can't be taken back.

MICHAEL

I'm sorry, what? Did she just say... baby?

RAINA

Oh God! I'm sorry!

Ava remains calm. She empties a single pill into her palm.

AVA

I'm off the hard stuff. All my meds are just anti-nausea. It's safe.

Ava tosses the pill back and drinks it with the water. Michael comes to Ava's side.

MICHAEL

Honey? Are you pregnant? Is that why you fainted?

Ava smiles weakly and nods.

AVA

I was going to tell you tonight.
After the guests went home.
Surprise!

MICHAEL

Oh my God! Finally! A baby! Did you
hear that?

He looks at Raina who fails to give him any enthusiasm, then
at Pete but they have bad blood. He looks back at Ava. He
wants all the answers.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

How far along are you?

AVA

Six weeks.

MICHAEL

Six weeks! Why didn't you tell me?

AVA

I wanted to make sure it stuck.

Michael places his hand on Ava's stomach.

MICHAEL

Do we know what it is?

AVA

It's too soon to tell, but I think
it's a girl.

MICHAEL

How do you know?

AVA

I just feel it.

Raina takes a step back from this family scene, feeling like
an outsider. She takes a place by the wall next to Pete. They
exchange knowing looks.

Michael continues his inquisition.

MICHAEL

But I thought you couldn't have
kids!

AVA

(a lie)
Apparently they were wrong.

Michael embraces her again. Over his shoulder Ava looks at Pete and Raina who are staring back at her, knowing the truth of her deceptions. They need to talk.

AVA (CONT'D)

(to Michael)

Can you get me the Tylenol? It's in the kitchen.

MICHAEL

Sure thing. Anything else? Pickles? Ice cream?

He LAUGHS at his own stupid pregnancy joke. Ava smiles indulgently.

AVA

No, just the Tylenol.

Michael leaves. Raina and Pete remain where they are. Ava sits up to face them.

PETE

You're really pregnant?

AVA

Yes.

PETE

(genuine surprise)

Wow. I get to be an uncle.

Raina paces toward the bureau at the end of the bed. She gently touches a crystal perfume bottle. Her voice is casual.

RAINA

So now you're having a baby. The perfect life. The house, the job, the husband. And yet these headaches keep increasing in frequency.

AVA

Yes, they seem to be.

RAINA

Do you ever think that maybe you get these headaches because you're working so hard to keep your secret from Michael?

AVA

That's not it.

RAINA

Are you sure? You never had these headaches when you were with me.

Pete is nonplussed. He has known about Ava's sexual preferences most of his life.

AVA

It's perfectly normal to develop migraines later in life.

Raina moves to a chair where Ava's silk bathrobe is draped over the arm. She strokes the smooth fabric.

RAINA

Migraines are also stress-induced. It must be very stressful pretending all the time.

AVA

Raina, please tell me we're done with the dramatics for tonight. I can't take it.

RAINA

That depends.

AVA

On what?

Raina comes close to the bed again.

RAINA

On whether you're moving forward with this gene therapy.

Ava has had it. She lays it out there, the full truth of it.

AVA

Of course I'm moving forward with it! What choice do I have? We're too far along. It can't be stopped.

RAINA

It can be. You can stop it.

AVA

I can't!

RAINA

You can. And you will. Or I'm going to tell Michael everything.

Pete is surprised at this. Ava is hurt.

AVA
How could you, Raina? You're
messing with my life.

RAINA
And you're messing with mine.

They are at a stand off.

PETE
(to Raina)
You're threatening to out my sister
if she doesn't stop the gene
therapy?

RAINA
Yes.

PETE
That's pretty cold.

RAINA
And what she's suggesting isn't?

What Ava's suggesting is pretty cold.

PETE
Still. Not cool.

RAINA
She's not giving me any choice! She
has the power to stop her company
from doing this. She's the CMO! But
once it's out there, everyone will
have it! I can't allow that!

Even as Raina is threatening her, Ava can see Raina's pain
and it kills her.

AVA
Raina, please. I get that this
scares you. It would be very bad if
this got into the wrong hands. But
I won't let that happen. I promise.

RAINA
You can't promise that! Why can't
you just go back to the sickle cell
research? Let this one go!

Ava can't answer. She is Chief Medical Officer and Head of
R&D, but she still has a board to answer to. Pete comes to
her rescue.

PETE

(to Raina)

I get why you're doing this. It's the only play you have left. But this isn't you. You wouldn't ruin someone else's life, especially not Ava's. You love her too much.

Raina looks at Ava. They are both so angry, so defiant. But they also love each other so very much. Raina relents, coming fully to Ava's side, begging her.

RAINA

Ava, please. I'm begging you. Do this for me!

Ava and Raina press their foreheads together, so much love, so much history. Ava touches Raina's hair. Their emotions overtake them. They kiss.

FLASHBACK

49 INT. BEDROOM (PORTLAND, 2009) - DAY

49

A sunlit bed in the late morning.

A flash of dark hair and dark naked skin against stark white sheets.

Feminine hands clasping, one dark, one light-skinned.

Sweet, soft, joyful, female voices LAUGHING.

BACK TO PRESENT

50 INT. STEWARTS' MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

50

MICHAEL

Ava?

Michael's voice slams them back to the present. He stands in the doorway with the Tylenol, utterly confused.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

What is this?

AVA

Oh God. Michael.

Raina holds tight to Ava's hand.

MICHAEL
I don't understand. What's
happening here?

Pete realizes this is a private moment and leaves.

PETE
'Night sis.

Raina looks at Ava, one last plea. But she says nothing.
Raina won't be the one to tell him after all.

Michael looks at Raina's hand, still holding Ava's.

MICHAEL
Are you two... are you... together?

AVA
(too quickly)
No!

Raina cringes.

AVA (CONT'D)
I mean, no, we're not together. We
were just... it's been an emotional
day and we were...

She searches for the right words. Michael supplies an excuse.

MICHAEL
- confused?

AVA
Yes! Confused.

Disappointed, Raina lets go of Ava's hand and takes a few
steps toward the door. She turns.

RAINA
This is your moment, Ava.

That's all she will say. She leaves.

Ava and Michael are finally alone. Ava doesn't know where to
start. The longer she takes, the more upset Michael becomes.

MICHAEL
Come on Ava. Give me something. You
were overwhelmed? Bumped your head?
Your hormones are raging and she
took advantage of you - something!

AVA
She didn't take advantage of me.

MICHAEL
(stunned)
Has this happened before?

Ava's answer is in her downcast eyes.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Shit, Ava! How many times? Are you
two - are you having an AFFAIR?

AVA
No.

Finally, a denial. He exhales and sits on the edge of the bed.

MICHAEL
Then what? You gotta explain this,
because I'm not getting it.

AVA
Michael, I'm... I used to be...
gay.

MICHAEL
Used to be?

AVA
And probably still am.

Michael stands, paces a few steps, turns back to her.

MICHAEL
What are you saying to me? That
you're GAY? That you've always BEEN
GAY?

AVA
(quietly)
Yes.

A long beat.

MICHAEL
Why didn't you tell me?

AVA
Because I wanted to marry you.

MICHAEL
Why would you want that?

AVA
 Because I wanted a normal life! And
 I knew I could have that with you.

MICHAEL
 So you LIED TO ME?

AVA
 Yes. I'm sorry.

Michael is truly hurt now, the vastness of this lie laid out
 before him.

MICHAEL
 Did you ever love me?

AVA
 Yes! Michael, I DO love you.

MICHAEL
 How can you say that? When you've
 lied to me all this time? When you -
 (an idea hits)
 Is that why you never want to have
 sex with me?

Ava is crushed by this question, by the truth of what it
 reveals. Michael covers his face.

When he looks at her again, there are tears.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
 What about the baby?

AVA
 What about it?

MICHAEL
 Are you really pregnant?

AVA
 Yes.

Michael chokes back a sob.

MICHAEL
 Are you going to keep it?

AVA
 Yes!

MICHAEL
 (remembering)
 There was a time...
 (MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

about 3 years ago... we thought you were pregnant but then you got your period.

Ava remembers.

AVA

Yes.

MICHAEL

(accusing)

Did you terminate that pregnancy?

AVA

Oh my God, no! I had a miscarriage.

MICHAEL

How do I know you're telling me the truth!

AVA

Michael, I'm telling you the truth.

MICHAEL

The truth is you've always been able to get pregnant. You just didn't want to. With me.

AVA

No. I wasn't ready. But I want this child. And I want to have her with you.

Michael looks at her in confused pain.

MICHAEL

WHY?

AVA

Because I love you.

MICHAEL

No! That doesn't make sense. You lied to me. All of this is a lie!

He goes to the door.

AVA

Nothing has changed! I'm still me.

MICHAEL

EVERYTHING HAS CHANGED!

He leaves, SLAMMING THE DOOR behind him.

51

EXT. STEWARTS' HALLWAY - SIMULTANEOUS

51

Raina stands staring at the many photos of Ava and Michael through the years. Pete approaches, putting on his jacket to leave. He sees what she's looking at.

PETE

Cute couple.

Raina SCOFFS.

RAINA

Cute is overrated.

PETE

Maybe. But they work. She loves him, Raina.

Raina gives him a hard look. Pete doesn't back down.

PETE (CONT'D)

She loves you too, but in a different way. I think maybe it's time you let her go.

RAINA

Never. She needs me.

PETE

I'm not saying stop being friends. She does need you. But not in the way you want her to. It's confusing. Let her go. If you really love her, you'll do that.

RAINA

She's GAY.

PETE

So what? Sexuality is only part of the equation. And it's all a spectrum anyway.

Raina is confused. Pete is usually her ally.

RAINA

Are you being serious?

PETE

I've been pretty fluid in my time.

This surprises Raina. He doesn't expand.

PETE (CONT'D)
 She chose him. That has to mean something.

RAINA
 He hates you.

Pete glances up at the pictures of Michael.

PETE
 Yeah. But he makes her happy.
 That's good enough for me.

He turns and walks out of the house, leaving Raina to think.

52 INT. MICHAEL'S HOME OFFICE - NIGHT 52

Michael sits at his desk, swiveling back and forth in angst. He's trying to figure out what to do next.

He opens a desk drawer, pulls out a fifth of whiskey, and unscrews the lid, a force of habit. He pauses before drinking.

FLASHBACK

53 INT. STEWARTS' DINING ROOM (EARLIER THAT NIGHT) - NIGHT 53

Michael is drunk and stupidly sharing Ava's research without her permission. The flashback has an enhanced, dreamlike quality. Michael is almost clown-like.

MICHAEL
 You guys! You aren't going to believe this! Ava's company found a way to TAKE THE GAY AWAY!

GROUP LAUGHTER.

GROUP VOICES
 That's great! Take them all away!

CHRIS
 That reminds me of a joke. A Buddhist, a lawyer and a lesbian walk into a bar - what? I said "lesbian!" It's not like I said DYKE or anything!

GROUP LAUGHTER, Michael and Chris both collapse in UPROARIOUS LAUGHTER, far too comical for the circumstances.

BACK TO PRESENT

54 INT. MICHAEL'S HOME OFFICE - NIGHT 54

Michael sits at his desk, whiskey bottle in hand. These memories take on a sinister quality with the new revelations about his wife. He throws the whiskey bottle away and hand wipes his face, closing his eyes.

When he opens his eyes again he is looking at multiple real estate awards framed on his wall. His eyes move to the framed photos of Ava and Michael around the room. In every photo they are happy, smiling, enjoying life.

He picks up a framed photo of himself with Ava and Raina in Hawaii. Ava is in the middle, her arms around them both, smiling joyfully. Michael strokes her face.

He holds the frame to his heart, looking up at the ceiling and thinking.

55 INT. STEWARTS' LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME OF NIGHT 55

Raina lays down on the sofa, pulling up a blanket to cover herself and placing a pillow under her head. She stares up at the ceiling.

FLASHBACK

56 INT. AVA'S TEENAGE CAR (2009) - DAY 56

The SOUND OF CARS PASSING.

A bright summer day. Ava is driving and Raina is the passenger seat, her feet up on the dash.

They are SINGING OUT LOUD TO THE RADIO. Smiling, joyful.

They take each others hands as the song ends.

RAINA

I love you, Ava.

AVA

I love you too. You'll always be my best friend.

BACK TO PRESENT

57 INT. STEWARTS' LIVING ROOM - NIGHT 57

Raina closes her eyes and smiles at this happy memory, drifting off to sleep.

58 INT. STEWARTS' MASTER BEDROOM - SAME TIME OF NIGHT 58

Ava lays in bed in the dark, a cloth over her eyes. Gently, she reaches up and strokes her own hair, twirling a strand in her fingers.

She releases the hair and slowly reaches for her left hand, turning the familiar wedding band on her finger.

She relaxes her hands at her sides.

After a moment, her right hand comes up and rests protectively on her stomach.

She smiles softly and drifts off to sleep.

59 EXT. DIRTY SUBARU OUTSIDE STEWART'S HOME - MORNING 59

A TAP TAP TAP on the window startles a sleeping Pete awake in his car. He has fallen asleep in the driver's seat and appears to have been there all night. He looks up to see Ava smiling down at him. She's wearing her silk robe and holding his business proposal. He rolls down the window.

PETE

Good morning.

AVA

Good morning. You sleep here all night?

PETE

Yup. Couldn't leave until I knew you were OK. Didn't want to hear about you on Dateline.

Ava is touched. She holds up the business proposal.

AVA

I spent some time reading this over this morning.

PETE

Oh yeah? And?

AVA
It's not bad. If your numbers can
be believed.

Pete smiles hopefully.

PETE
Really?

AVA
Really. Of course I'll have to talk
it over with Michael. And my lawyer
will need to read through it. But
it's not a no.

This is great news.

PETE
"Not a no" is good.

AVA
I just need your firm commitment,
your promise, that if we do this
you'll give it your everything. And
you won't quit, even when it gets
hard. Can you promise me that?

PETE
I promise.

Ava holds up a made-up family handshake.

AVA
Jensen Family Promise?

PETE
Jensen Family Promise.

They exchange the family handshake.

PETE (CONT'D)
(serious now)
I can do this.

AVA
I know. Now why don't you go home
and take a shower. Do you ever
clean that car?

PETE
And lose this lived in quality?
Never.

Ava smiles. He starts the engine.

PETE (CONT'D)
You gonna be OK?

AVA
I'll be OK. But if I'm not, I'm
more of a Forensic Files kind of
girl.

PETE
Do they even still make that show?

AVA
(mock ominously)
WE'LL FIND OUT.

PETE
(laughs)
Bye kid.

He drives off.

Ava looks at Raina's car still parked in the driveway.

60 INT. STEWARTS' LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER 60

Ava comes into the house and peeks in the living room. She sees Raina curled up on the couch sleeping. She decides to let her sleep.

61 INT. MICHAEL'S HOME OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER 61

Michael is fast asleep in his office chair, the framed photo of Ava, Raina and himself still on his chest.

Ava props herself on his desk across from him. She smiles at her sleeping husband. She gently takes the frame he is holding and looks at it. She loves this photo, these people.

MICHAEL
There's something about a picture.

Michael is awake and looking at her.

AVA
Yeah, what's that?

MICHAEL
It tells a thousand words.

AVA
At least. Good morning.

MICHAEL

Morning.

AVA

(back to the picture)

This was a fun day.

MICHAEL

It was.

They exchange friendly, loving looks.

AVA

I'm sorry I didn't tell you the truth sooner.

Long beat. Michael points to the photo she's holding.

MICHAEL

I was thinking, you know, it's always been like that. Brilliant and beautiful you, and Raina and me on either side of you.

Ava agrees.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

But I mean, It's *always* been like that. Always. And I'm thinking, maybe I should have known.

AVA

You think so?

MICHAEL

Yeah. And if I'm being completely honest, I think maybe a part of me *has* always known.

AVA

Really?

MICHAEL

A part of me, yeah. 14 years of marriage.

(mind blown)

14 years! Can you believe that?

AVA

(playfully)

How did that happen?

MICHAEL

After all that time, I'd like to think there isn't any part of you I don't know. On some level at least.

He reaches out and they take each others' hands. They sit quietly, sharing this moment. Michael approaches this next bit carefully, not wanting to fight.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

This gene therapy thing, it kind of takes on new meaning when you think about... you.

Ava nods, agreeing.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Is there any chance that you went in this direction because of who you are?

Ava thinks hard on this.

AVA

No. Certainly not initially. You have to understand scientists are people like anyone else. There are going to be times when the work we're doing has personal implications on our lives. But we focus on the science, and we try not to let our personal lives impact the work. That's our ethical duty.

Michael believes her.

MICHAEL

But at some point you must have realized, if this works, it could be something you might consider using.

AVA

Yes. I've thought of that.

MICHAEL

And?

AVA

Ethically, it won't be an issue for several more years. These are early days.

This is a non-answer.

MICHAEL

Come on Ava. You know what I mean.
When it is available, will you use
it?

He wants her to say yes. He wants her to have desire for no one but him.

AVA

(truthfully)

I don't know. I know that I love
you. I know that I want to have
this baby with you. I know that I
love my work and I want to help
people. That's what I know. The
rest will have to wait. Can you do
that? Can you wait with me?

MICHAEL

With you? Or with you and Raina?

AVA

Raina will always be there. She's
my best friend. But she's not my
lover. This stirred up some old
emotions between us, that's all.

Michael has to ask, to be clear.

MICHAEL

But you two *were* together once?

AVA

Yes.

MICHAEL

Like fully. Girl on girl,
scissoring.

AVA

That's not a thing.

MICHAEL

It's not?

AVA

No. But anyway, it was a very long
time ago. And I chose you.

Michael will have to accept this as good enough. He pulls her toward him and they embrace.

MICHAEL

How about I run get some bacon and
I make us some fried egg
sandwiches?

AVA

Oh my God that sounds AMAZING.

62 INT. STEWARTS' FOYER - MOMENTS LATER

62

Michael and Ava come down the stairs. He's wearing the clothes that he slept in and she is still wearing her pajamas and silk robe. The living room is visible from the foyer.

Michael sees Raina sleeping on the couch. He looks at Ava. She raises her eyebrows as if to say, "this is the life we've chosen." He nods, trusting her. He kisses her and leaves.

The sound of the front door closing awakens Raina.

AVA

(to Raina)

Coffee?

Ava doesn't wait for an answer. She heads to the kitchen.

63 INT. STEWARTS' KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

63

Ava is getting the coffee started. Raina enters carrying the envelope from the lab in one hand, the boxed syringe in the other.

She sits on a stool and places both items on the island between them. Ava glances at them but keeps preparing the coffee.

AVA

God, you're relentless.

Raina drops her head on her folded arms on the counter, exhausted. She talks without looking up.

RAINA

(muffled)

I know! I can't stand myself. But I
still need answers.

Ava ruffles the hair on her Raina's head.

AVA

That kind of determination got you
through three years of law school.

RAINA
 (still not looking up)
Did you tell him?

 AVA
Yes.

Raina finally looks up.

 RAINA
How did he take it?

 AVA
As well as one might expect.

 RAINA
Did he... *leave*? Just now?

Ava sees the worry and also the quiet hope in Raina's eyes. She wants to put this to bed, once and for all.

 AVA
No. He went to get bacon for his famous egg sandwiches.
 (beat)
We're going to be fine. We talked it out. He knows everything. And now we're making sandwiches.

 RAINA
So that's it? You're just going to go back to living a false life?

 AVA
You know what I've realized? It's not a false life. It's just a life. Everyone has their issues, and these are mine. This is *my* life with Michael.

 RAINA
I see.

 AVA
And with you too! You're still my best friend. And Michael still loves you. There are lots of group vacations in our future.

 RAINA
You don't think that will be awkward? Now that he knows?

AVA
(realistic)
Not any more awkward than it has
been. Life is messy.

The coffee BEEPS and Ava pours them both a cup. Raina sits up
and returns her attention to the lab envelope and syringe.

RAINA
So what are we going to do about
this?

AVA
"This?"

RAINA
Ava. You heard the arguments last
night. Imagine that times a
million. That's what you'll be
releasing into the world.
(beat)
Can you live with that?

AVA
What if I had to?

RAINA
What do you mean?

AVA
I mean what if I have no choice?
The last drug we released, the diet
pill, it had some bad side effects.
We were sued. We settled out of
court.

RAINA
I know but -

AVA
- and we nearly went under. We
nearly lost the company.

Raina did not know this.

AVA (CONT'D)
(more hopeful)
But then we latched onto this. The
board got excited, our investors
came back, and now, finally, we're
ready to launch. FDA-approved human
drug trials. Do you have any idea
how hard it is to get to that
level? How much money it takes?

RAINA

OK, so you're struggling. That sucks, I get it!
 (digging in)
 But you're talking about *money*, Ava. I'm talking about *human lives* that will be FOREVER CHANGED if this gets out there. That isn't something you can control.

Ava hears the passion in Raina's voice. She listens.

RAINA (CONT'D)

In too many countries you can be put in prison for being gay. In some countries it's the *death penalty*. What if they round everyone up and put them in prison? What if they give them the choice between gene therapy or *death*? Can you imagine? Because I can. I've been up all night thinking about it.

Ava has not thought of such far reaching implications.

AVA

That's pretty dark.
 (beat)
 But even if I choose to pump the breaks on this, somebody else is going to do it. It's just a matter of time.

RAINA

Maybe. But it doesn't have to be you and it doesn't have to be now. You can stop this. You're head of R&D. Your company will listen to you. Don't profit from this.

AVA

(weakening)
 Raina -

RAINA

You want to help that man they beat in the street? Don't put this in the hands of his enemies.

Raina's arguments are finally having an affect on Ava.

AVA

So what do I do? You want me to convince them to go back to the sickle cell research?

RAINA

Yes.

AVA

And what do I do with this?

RAINA

Bury it. Buy us some time to evolve so that ethically this kind of thing won't ever be an option. Please.

Ava picks up the boxed syringe, thinking.

AVA

We were pretty far along with sickle cell... just about ready for human trials. It's practically the same science.

RAINA

But for a much better cause.

AVA

A course correction, with our existing research.

RAINA

Yes.

AVA

I'd have to find a reason to abandon this... but maybe... Maybe something about missed safety signals and unintended consequences.

RAINA

You could do it. The power is in your hands. This is the biggest decision you will ever make.

Ava is nearly convinced, but then -

FLASHBACK

64 EXT. CITY PARK (2009) - DAY

64

Teenage Raina and Ava are walking down a sunlit path, their pinkies entwined, arms swinging back and forth, joyful.

The sweet memory suddenly takes on a dreamlike quality. Ava HEARS FOOTSTEPS. She turns to see the cruel BEARDED MAN from all those years ago. He's glaring at them, filled with hate. He wants to hurt them.

Ava becomes a mother bear. An overwhelming urge to protect her friend sweeps over her. She knows what she has to do.

BACK TO PRESENT

65 INT. STEWARTS' KITCHEN - MORNING

65

AVA

Okay.

She slides the syringe back inside the lab envelope. She slowly walks over to her garbage can and steps on the foot pedal, opening the lid. She holds the envelope over the edge.

She looks at Raina, who stands watching, breathless.

RAINA

Do it.

Ava drops the envelope into the garbage and allows the lid to close with a THUD. Raina's jaw drops.

RAINA (CONT'D)

Was that for real? 'Cuz you can just dig that back out again.

AVA

It's real. I'll talk to the board on Monday. We'll figure it out.

RAINA

Holy shit! Really? Are you kidding? Tell me you're not kidding.

AVA

Right is right.

Raina wipes exhausted tears from her eyes. She is so grateful.

RAINA
 Yes it is! Oh my God, thank you!
 (beat)
 I'll never forget this.

 AVA
 I know.

 RAINA
 Never. This is the biggest thing
 you've ever done for me.

Ava doesn't respond. Raina can't believe it's over.

 RAINA (CONT'D)
 Really?

 AVA
 Really. Now get out of here.

 RAINA
 Right. I guess I should get out of
 here. Let you and Michael make
 breakfast.

She walks toward the door with uncertainty.

 RAINA (CONT'D)
 Dinner Wednesday at Tucci's?

 AVA
 Sounds good.

Raina turns suddenly hugs her friend again, tight.

 RAINA
 Thank you.

66

EXT. STEWARTS' DRIVEWAY - MOMENTS LATER

66

Raina is walking toward her car when Michael pulls up with the groceries. He gets out of the car and they come face to face. Awkward, but familiar. She wipes her face and smiles bravely.

 RAINA
 Sorry I kissed your girl.

Michael gives her a long look. He decides to let it go.

 MICHAEL
 Just don't do it again, all right?

RAINA

'K.

The SOUND OF A MOTORCYCLE interrupts them. Paisley pulls up on her bike and removes her helmet.

PAISLEY

Got your text. Waffles then?

Paisley holds out an extra helmet. Raina smiles, everything in her world feeling right again. She walks out to meet Paisley, donning the helmet and getting on the bike. A fresh idea strikes.

RAINA

(to Michael)

You know, you should talk to Tara about real estate. She wants to become a Realtor. Could be a good resource one day.

MICHAEL

Tara wants to be a Realtor?

RAINA

Yeah.

Paisley REVS the motorcycle and they peel off.

MICHAEL

Huh.

67

INT. STEWARTS' KITCHEN - SAME TIME OF MORNING

67

Ava is leaning on the counter staring hard at the garbage can. She sips her coffee. Michael enters with the groceries.

MICHAEL

Did you know Tara wants to be a Realtor?

AVA

Hmmm. No idea.

Michael begins unpacking the groceries and goes to work making breakfast.

MICHAEL

Yeah. And I was thinking, you know I could really use an assistant. Assuming business picks back up to where it used to be. Maybe I could train her?

Ava's cellphone CHIMES a new text message. It's from the lab. It reads:

PRESS RELEASE NEEDS YOUR SIGNATURE.

She opens the attachment, a DocuSign. It's the press release for the gene therapy. She need only hit "sign here."

Michael is cooking away, oblivious.

Ava walks over to the garbage can, suddenly all business. The endless possibilities are flying through her mind: the fame, the money, the risks, Raina.

Her thumb hovers over the "sign here" button.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

You think that's a good idea?

She steps on the foot pedal and the lid flies open. The lab envelope stares up at her, calling to her. She stares back.

AVA

The world is full of good ideas.

END