

Hidden Potential,  
or  
The Straight Gene

by

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CHARACTERS:

Charlie - Emma's brother and Matt's husband  
Emma - Charlie's younger sister (by 1-4 years)  
Bette - Gene Report Worker  
Matt - Charlie's husband

The characters are similar in age from late twenties to late thirties.

SETTING:

The near future.

Genomic Profiling Services Center waiting and reporting rooms.  
Charlie and Matt's apartment. Restaurant. Bette's apartment.

Each location should somehow incorporate a small box of growing pea plants, both tall and short ones like in Gregor Mendel's research contributing to our understanding of dominant and recessive traits.

**ACT 1:**

SCENE 1-1: ATCG

MATT

Alvin Touches Calvin's Groin. Alvin Touches Calvin's Groin. That's the key to life itself. What drives us. Who and even what we are. Alvin Touches Calvin's Groin. Adenine, Thymine, Cytosine, Guanine. They sound like the ingredients to an energy drink, but they are, in fact, our ingredients. Well, the ingredients of everything alive. Lanky capital A and T hooking up, with the more rotund C and G's spooning with each other.

(holding up his hand)

And here they are folks: The Nucleotides!

(mock fanfare)

Three billion base pairs of these nucleotide sweethearts are arranged in groups ranging in size from village to city and each of those is a gene. Organized into forty-six chromosomes, twenty-three from mom, twenty-three from dad, deoxyribonucleic acid, aka DNA.

SCENE 1-2: THE WAITING

At Rise: Charlie and Emma in a waiting room. Charlie fusses. Emma, eyes closed, focuses her energy.

CHARLIE

I can't believe you talked me into this.

EMMA

This is a good thing. Stop fretting.

CHARLIE

I fret, okay, I'm a fretter.

EMMA

You don't know that. This is about finding out who you really are. Now please, I'm trying to prepare.

CHARLIE

Prepare, why do you need to prepare? This isn't an audition. We don't have to audition, do we? Is there an interview or something? I thought the hard part was over.

EMMA

Yes, yes, and it wasn't so bad, was it? I'm trying to get myself into a receptive place to best hear what they have to tell me.

Charlie sighs loudly.

EMMA (cont'd)

We're already here. They've already run their tests. Now we just have to hear the results. No sense in leaving our results unheard, right?

CHARLIE

I don't know, what if I don't like what I hear?

EMMA

You have to hear it. If you don't you will always wonder. You'll stay up nights thinking about the unread file in this office. Tossing and turning in bed, wondering what it says. I know you too well. I know that's what you'll do.

CHARLIE

Well, true. But I can't believe you got me here in the first place.

EMMA

Neither can I, actually.

CHARLIE

Moment of weakness, okay? Moment of weakness. And you had that coupon. I can't believe I'm doing this on a coupon. What is wrong with me? Who does this with a coupon?

EMMA

It was a two-for-one. That's a great deal.

CHARLIE

I'm free. I can't believe I'm doing this for free. How good a job can they do for free? And it's so important. It shouldn't be free. I can't believe you paid for this.

EMMA

It's going to be worth it. Vicki at work did it and she said it changed her whole life. Besides everyone's getting it done now. Especially now that it's so affordable. And I had a coupon.

CHARLIE

Changed her whole life?

EMMA

That's what she said.

CHARLIE

Does she still work with you?

EMMA

Yeah.

CHARLIE

So, it didn't change her whole life. I mean if she's still in the same job.

EMMA

It's not about that. I mean for some people it is, but not always.

CHARLIE

Then what's it about?

EMMA

It's about -

CHARLIE

No, I know. It's about "uncovering your potential." What does that even mean?

EMMA

It means they are going to help you uncover your potential. Help you find out about hidden talents you might have.

CHARLIE

If I have hidden talents, maybe they're supposed to stay hidden for a reason, have you thought about that?

EMMA

Stop fretting, it's going to be fine. They've run your genetic profile and they are going to tell you what you can be good at.

CHARLIE

I just don't understand the point of doing this. I think I know who I am. What if I don't know who I am?

EMMA

Yes, but maybe you have a musical aptitude you aren't using. We didn't have a very well funded music program at our school. Maybe this whole time you've been missing out. You could take up cello. Cello is so hot right now. I think it's because they hold it,  
(gesturing)  
You know? Charlie, calm down.

CHARLIE

What if I don't have time to study cello? So they're going to tell me there is one more thing I'm supposed to be doing? My talent is going to be unhidden and then it's just going to be lying there. I mean if I know I'm wasting my potential I'm just going to feel worse about it. Do you think I need that kind of pressure?

EMMA

This is supposed to be a good thing.

CHARLIE

I'm going to have to learn cello. Mom couldn't even get me to take piano. She even said it would look good on my college applications, which is a lie. People lie about how useful things will be on college applications.

EMMA

You didn't take piano.

CHARLIE

What if I should have? What if they say I should have? I've ruined my life by not listening to Mom. Oh, worse, they are going to tell me I should have taken piano and I'll have to admit to Mom that she was right. You know I can't keep something like that from her. I'm going to have to tell Mom she was right all along about piano, and it's going to be your fault. You are the worst sister ever.

EMMA

I'm a great sister.

CHARLIE

How accurate is it?

EMMA

You read the brochure. They've come a long way in this area of research. It's accurate, okay. Maybe they'll tell me I should try out cooking. I've been wanting to try out cooking.

CHARLIE

How do you eat?

EMMA

Take out, microwave, "add water and stir," simple things that I make. But I want to try complicated recipes. Involving rosemary or a flour sifter. And maybe they'll tell me that I should. And I'll take a cooking class and it'll be amazing. I'll hold dinner parties and invite over lots of friends.

CHARLIE

You'll have to clean your apartment first.

EMMA

But I'll do that. And everyone will gather around my dinner table, and we'll have brilliant conversations about politics, but without fighting, and talk about art exhibits, but it won't be boring. It'll be just like the movies or tv.

CHARLIE

No, it won't.

EMMA

Yes, it will. And I'll fix friends up with each other.

CHARLIE

And they'll break up and blame you.

EMMA

No.

CHARLIE

The only thing they'll agree on is neither of them wants to talk to you again.

EMMA

No. That's not going to happen.

CHARLIE

So take a cooking class. Maybe I'll find a two-for-one coupon and go with you. Get over my fear of eggs. Don't give me that look. Eggs kill. Bacteria and what not. You have to sterilize the whole kitchen.

EMMA

But you'll eat things that other people have cooked with eggs. Are their kitchens sterile?

CHARLIE

I try not to think about it.

EMMA

I can't take a cooking class unless they tell me I have the potential for it. If I do, we could take a vegan cooking class together.

CHARLIE

Why here?

EMMA

They had the coupon.

CHARLIE

No, but it's so sciencey. Why not a psychic? People used to go to palm readers for this kind of thing.

EMMA

I never would have gotten you to a palm reader.

CHARLIE

I don't like the idea that they can know what I'm thinking. What if I think something I don't want them to know?

EMMA

See, so here we are.

CHARLIE

But a palm reader, there would be more wiggle room.

EMMA

So are you worried about them being too accurate or not enough?

CHARLIE

Both.

EMMA

Of course.

Bette enters wearing a lab coat and a knitted scarf.

BETTE

Charlie, Emma, we're ready for you. If you want to follow me on back.

EMMA

Here we go.

CHARLIE

Oh hell. Well, I guess it's better than staying up wondering.

SCENE 1-3: THE NEWS

Genomic Profiling Services Center Report Conference room. Bette and Charlie enter. Bette carries a report and a file.

BETTE

We're right in here, Charlie.

CHARLIE

I can't do this with my sister?

BETTE

No, someone else is meeting with her.

CHARLIE

Okay.

BETTE

First of all, thank you for choosing the Genomic Profiling Services Center for your life navigation needs.

(handing him papers)

Here is another copy of GPSC's confidentiality policy and your rights under GINA ("gina") - the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008. Also information on our counseling services should any issues arise for you.



CHARLIE

Issues?

BETTE

They're standard handouts. We're required by law to offer you basic counselling and consultation, but we also have more psychological, psychiatric - in case you find out you need medication, and life coaching services available.

She grabs the last one back and reorients the booklet/brochure before handing it back to him.

BETTE (cont'd)

Actually, this brochure talks about all the services we offer. You did the Basic Profile with Major Personality and Aptitude package. We also offer: Personality, Interest, and Aptitude Compatibility for Couples; Complete Medical Profiling; Family Planning; and our newest Job-Seekers Package which helps you identify your interests and aptitudes, strengths and weaknesses as an employee but also how well you might perform in interviews.

CHARLIE

All that is in my genes?

BETTE

The introvert extrovert thing plays a part, aggression, sense of well-being. There are a bunch of traits. Are you currently looking for work or a promotion?

CHARLIE

No.

BETTE

Oh, well ...

(handing him a device)

So, if I could get you to sign with your finger to double verify that I have informed you of your rights and of post-profiling counseling resources available to you. You have to sign about three times.

CHARLIE

Oh.

Charlie begins reading through the papers.

Slight pause.

BETTE

Most people just sign without ...  
(glancing at his file)  
(MORE)

BETTE (cont'd)

Oh, I guess you are the type the reads everything before, okay ...

CHARLIE

So, just sign with ...

BETTE

With your finger. It's a combo fingerprinting and signature gizmo thingy.

Charlie signs twice and hands it back to Bette. She looks at it.

BETTE (cont'd)

(giving it back)

Opps, there's just one more. I know it's some fine print thing we actually need all three signatures to prove you read all three.

CHARLIE

Sorry.

BETTE

It's okay.

He signs again and hands it back to her.

CHARLIE

But you said most people don't.

BETTE

Sign? They do.

CHARLIE

Read through the papers.

BETTE

No, they don't. They just sign anyway. It's like when you go to the doctor and they have that form about giving them permission to do whatever, most people don't read those.

CHARLIE

I do. I've even amended and initialed before.

Bette glances at his file again.

BETTE

Yeah, you would. So, here is the full report. Right now we'll go over the highlights and answer any questions or address any concerns you might have. Our number is on there if you think of something else later, but it's really pretty self-explanatory. There aren't usually that many questions.

CHARLIE

Oh, I'll probably think of some.

BETTE

Okay. Well, that's okay too. So, here you go.

(handing him the report)

The highlight summary is on the first page. As you can see, the whole thing's pretty easy to read. We found that that was important for our clients. So, let me go over the highlights with you, okay? Whenever you are ready.

Charlie puts the report down and takes a deep breath.

CHARLIE

All right, all right. Lay it on me. I should have taken piano, right?

BETTE

Actually, no, I'm sorry, you are not musically inclined.

CHARLIE

Yes! Told. You. Mom. Sorry, I ... anyway, what else?

BETTE

Well, I'm sorry, but you are lacking an ear for languages. That's usually another popular one.

CHARLIE

No, no, that's fine. C- in high school Spanish, not my fault. This is great news. I think I'm almost enjoying this. Okay, what else have you got?

BETTE

Well, so that's foreign languages. And English, sorry, I hope you weren't trying to be a writer. I know, I was when I first started here and figured I'd do this short term for money until ... and anyway, well, I guess all those rejection letters were right.

CHARLIE

I'm sorry.

BETTE

No, no. I mean it was a disappointment, but I'm glad I found out, you know, it's been a real time-saver.

CHARLIE

So you don't write anymore?

BETTE

No, of course not. What would be the point if I'm not inclined?

CHARLIE

Well, I'm sorry anyway. I never really tried it. I mean I wrote a poem once for Mother's Day. I was nine. It was a class assignment.

BETTE

Did she like it?

CHARLIE

Well, she had to, she's my mom. It's probably in a box somewhere with a decaying pile of spray-painted macaroni.

BETTE

Ah, macaroni. Well, it says here, art, not so much.

CHARLIE

Oh.

BETTE

Not at all.

CHARLIE

Right.

BETTE

But, cooking, yeah.

CHARLIE

Yeah?

BETTE

Oh yeah.

CHARLIE

Huh. How about that?

BETTE

I know. I bet your wife will be glad to hear it.

CHARLIE

What? My wife?

BETTE

Oh, I just figured your wife would be happy to hear you're going to be cooking more often. And really well in fact.

CHARLIE

No, it was just the wife part, I never said.

BETTE

Well, you're wearing a ring.

CHARLIE

Oh, right.

BETTE

Yeah, right. You're profile didn't come back with the cheater gene.

CHARLIE

I'm not, a cheater.

BETTE

Why do I always meet men who seem to forget that they're wearing a ring? Or do they think I won't notice? Or do you think I'm so desperate? Do I look desperate? I don't think I do, or am, or ...

CHARLIE

No, you don't, aren't, I ... I don't know. I, well, it's just actually, a husband.

BETTE

I'm sorry?

CHARLIE

I have a husband.

BETTE

What? You have a wife, don't you?

CHARLIE

No, a husband.

BETTE

A husband?

CHARLIE

Yeah.

BETTE

Are you sure?

CHARLIE

Pretty sure.

BETTE

No, no. Your results. You're straight.

CHARLIE

I don't think so. I'm gay.

BETTE

No, genetically, you're straight, a heterosexual.

CHARLIE

No, is this? Is this like those fake pregnancy centers where they try to scare you away from abortion? Is this whole genetic profile potential thing a gay-baiting sham?

BETTE

No, no, we're not. There are, in layperson's terms, gay genes, and some people have them. Some people who come here have them, but you don't.

CHARLIE

Okay, bisexual then.

BETTE

No, not even.

CHARLIE

But some people?

BETTE

Yes, some people are homosexual and some people are bisexual and then some people are, like you, heterosexual - straight.

CHARLIE

But I'm not.

BETTE

Genetically, the tests say that you are.

CHARLIE

Well, they're wrong.

BETTE

Look, there has been a lot of research on the gay genes, okay? A lot. On that part of the test, we know. Okay, frankly between you and me, maybe you could have tried a little harder in Spanish class. But on this, no, there's no question. It's one of the most accurate parts of the test.

CHARLIE

Well, it's just I think I would know.

BETTE

Well, apparently not.

CHARLIE

But, okay, I can see if I thought I was straight and you were telling me, you know, then it's a maybe it never occurred to me kind of thing. But, I didn't choose this. I mean I didn't even want this. When I was younger, I really, really didn't want this. The kids at school who suspected and teased me for it before I was even out, and what, those jerks are smarter than your test?

BETTE

I don't know what to tell you. This doesn't usually happen.

(MORE)

BETTE (cont'd)

Especially not this, like you said, we get some the other way, you know, straight-to-gay kind. And a bunch of hidden bisexuals, but ...

CHARLIE

I tried to do the straight thing. Okay, I tried a hell of a lot harder than high school Spanish to not be the way that I am, which is gay.

BETTE

I'm sorry, but you're not.

CHARLIE

Well, your test is wrong.

BETTE

No, it isn't.

CHARLIE

Well, run it again.

BETTE

We run through these tests more than once.

CHARLIE

Well, you mislabeled my sample then. Mom was right I should have taken piano and somewhere out there is some straight, cooking guy. Okay.

(mispronouncing)

¿Esta bien?

BETTE

We'll take a new sample and try again. If you want to wait here, I'll go get a kit, right now. If you want we can rush, we can do just the sexual orientation part of the test right now, if you don't mind waiting here a little longer.

CHARLIE

Yeah, sure, thank you.

SCENE 1-4: GRAY GOO

MATT

If Friedrich Miescher hadn't become hard of hearing from a typhoid infection in his childhood, he most likely would have grown up to practice medicine like his father. Instead his father suggested research. He joined Felix Hoppe-Seyler's lab and studied white blood cells, which he got from a local hospital in the form of yellowed puss-filled bandages. Miescher was fascinated by the cells' nuclei, even though no one else cared much about them back then. He used washes of alcohol and an acid extracted from pigs' stomachs to dissolve away the cell membranes.

(MORE)

MATT (cont'd)

Finally, he was left with a gray paste. He conducted further tests on the gray goo trying to identify it until he decided it must be something special. He called it "nuclein." His boss, Hoppe-Seyler was less than impressed, with Miescher or anything coming from a nucleus at the time. But in 1871 Miescher was credited with discovering DNA. It wasn't until the mid-nineteen hundreds that Miescher's gray stuff got it's fifteen minutes and then some. And then in 1953 Francis Crick and James Watson gave us the infamous double helix.

SCENE 1-5: COOKING A CELLO

The waiting room. Emma, much less Zen, more impatient, irritated. Charlie enters.

EMMA

Gee jumping jack rabbits, what took you so long?

CHARLIE

Nothing, they just had to double check something.

EMMA

What?

CHARLIE

Nothing, it's not important.

EMMA

Are you okay?

CHARLIE

Yeah. It's just they are so thorough and while they were double checking I was reading accuracy rate statistics, they are really accurate.

EMMA

Oh course you would.

CHARLIE

What?

EMMA

Double-check the statistics. You worry too much. Did your report say that, that you worry too much?

CHARLIE

I don't know, I didn't read all of it, yet. It's just a silly report.

EMMA

A very accurate report.



CHARLIE

They double-checked.

EMMA

Yeah, whatever. So, what did you find out?

CHARLIE

Cooking. I guess I'll be taking cooking classes with you.

EMMA

No, I guess you'll be taking those classes on your own.

CHARLIE

Oh, really?

EMMA

Yeah. I guess I'm stuck with frozen boxes and my microwave.

CHARLIE

I'm sorry.

EMMA

You can't do dinner parties with frozen boxes.

CHARLIE

Potluck.

EMMA

People don't dress up for potlucks on tv, not really. For dinner parties they fuss in the kitchen and use a cutting board. And I was going to get a boyfriend who would smile and joke with me while I peeked into a pot of boiling something while wearing an adorable apron and cute oven mitts without stains on them. And then the door would ring just as I was finishing up. And my guests would bring a bottle of wine and we would all smile, and greet each other loudly and kiss kiss near each other's cheeks.

CHARLIE

You watch too many movies.

EMMA

And tv.

CHARLIE

And tv. Well, hey, maybe tv is right, and all you need to do is invite everyone out to Olive Orchard.

EMMA

Shut-up. I'll just go over to yours and Matt's place. I guess the two of you will be having the fabulous dinner parties now.

CHARLIE

You know, let's get out of here. Okay with you?

EMMA

More than. Don't worry, you'll be a good cook. If they said you'll be good at cooking you'll be good and everyone will love your dinner parties and I'll even come over and help you clean up beforehand, and after too if you want.

CHARLIE

Thanks. I'm sorry you didn't get cooking.

EMMA

Yeah, thanks. Oh, and to top it all off, now I have to buy a fucking cello.

SCENE 1-6: THE HUSBAND

Charlie in the apartment he shares with Matt. Charlie is, of course, fretting. Matt enters with a shopping bag and a pizza box.

MATT

Sorry, sorry, I'm late.

CHARLIE

No. How could I be mad at you?

MATT

You get mad all the time. This morning I left the sponge in the sink.

CHARLIE

Sponges are such little things.

MATT

Yeah, but you are right, they get smelly and I really should try harder to remember to squeeze it out and put in the drying holder.

CHARLIE

But I forgive you. When people-, I forgive you and we move on from there.

MATT

Did you cheat on me?

CHARLIE

What? No.

MATT

You've never let the sponge thing go so quickly. What's with the forgiveness talk? Did you start a fire in the kitchen?

CHARLIE

No. Why would I start a fire in the kitchen?

MATT

Well, I'm not saying on purpose.

CHARLIE

No, I didn't think you were. And how do you get from an affair to burning up our kitchen? It's fine. The kitchen is fine. Our kitchen is fine. Our matrimonial kitchen ...

Matt pulls a package of sponges from the shopping bag.

MATT

Look! I bought new sponges!

Matt tosses the sponges to Charlie who doesn't catch them.

MATT (cont'd)

They are perfect for sterilizing. Okay, don't be mad at her. I know you probably wanted to tell me yourself, but I guess she could resist. And look what I bought you.

(pulling a book from the bag,  
showing it off)

It's an egg cookbook. You wouldn't believe how many egg cookbooks there are. And I found the most adorable egg timer, I think it's at the bottom of the bag.

CHARLIE

You bought me an egg cookbook?

MATT

You don't have to do eggs right away. You can work up to it. Your sister told me, about the results. Actually, she just left a message on my voicemail about you being the next great cook and dinner parties and then she screeched something about getting a cello and hung up.

CHARLIE

We had a full day at the gene clinic.

MATT

I'm so jealous. I want to uncover my hidden potential. I wonder if we should have gone together. I know your sister had that coupon, but I'm sure she could have found someone else. Jose and Ben just went. They do couple compatibility reports too.

CHARLIE

I don't know if that would have been a good idea.

MATT

Jose and Ben said it was great. They were even able to identify areas where the two of them might disagree. Ben said the two of them argue less now because of what they learned.

CHARLIE

I don't know if that would work for us.

MATT

But how else would we know what we might disagree on?

CHARLIE

That's what I'm afraid of them telling you. Us. You know, what if they tell us we are going to disagree about something and then we start to. And then it's like if we had never gone in we wouldn't know, we could just be happy.

MATT

You know, they are pretty accurate nowadays. The research has come a long way. I was reading about it online, when I was supposed to be working. Maybe they'll tell me I'm not a very hard worker. Or maybe they'll tell me that I am supposed to be a hard worker and I'll try harder. I want to go in now and have my genes read.

CHARLIE

No, it's stupid.

MATT

But you got to do it.

CHARLIE

And so I know it was stupid.

MATT

Why? What did they tell you? All I got from your sister was the cooking thing.

CHARLIE

Nothing. Nothing.

MATT

Well, there has to be something. They did a full report, didn't they? Let me read it.

CHARLIE

No.

MATT

Honey, why not?

CHARLIE  
It said ...

MATT  
What?

CHARLIE  
Cooking. And no piano.

MATT  
That's it?

CHARLIE  
It's been an exhausting day.

MATT  
Awww, are you worried about the eggs? Hey, is your ovophobia genetic?

CHARLIE  
I don't know.

MATT  
Don't worry about the cooking. You don't have to dive in right away. Just take it slow.

CHARLIE  
Slow?

MATT  
Some people like to start with pasta and sauces, your reds, pestos, alfredos. It's like combination outfits. A few key pieces with greater possibilities. So many possibilities. But I know you don't like your noodles swimming in sauce. Personally, I-

CHARLIE  
No, no sauce.

MATT  
No, I know. We can start you out easy.

CHARLIE  
I just, can we not talk about what my genes want me to - cook?

MATT  
Okay. I picked up dinner. In case you weren't ready to start cooking yet.

CHARLIE  
See, you and I belong together.

MATT

Of course, we do.

CHARLIE

I know. We're in sync.

MATT

I got the pizza we like from the Italian place by the bank.

Matt begins dishing up the pizza.

CHARLIE

The pizza I like?

MATT

Yeah. Well, the one we both like. The one with all the special toppings we picked out and now we get the exact same thing every time, but it's okay, because it's a choice. Basil, olives, eggplant and artichoke hearts. Maybe I'll go up and down the stairs at work an extra time tomorrow.

CHARLIE

I love you.

MATT

I love you too.

SCENE 1-7: LATER ON ...

Charlie and Matt's apartment. The groceries and pizza have been cleared. Matt sits on the couch grading papers. Charlie enters and watches him. Matt notices.

MATT

I'm going over those response papers I made my students write and some of them ... I can't help but start to wonder is it just that this isn't their thing? Maybe I shouldn't expect more from them. It isn't fair. Or are there some students who could be applying themselves that aren't? Like Patrick here, what would his genetic profile say about his aptitude for my class?

CHARLIE

I don't know. Is that all there is? You like teaching.

MATT

I like being called professor. Most kids from my high school weren't expected to go to a university, and here I am tenure-track. Maybe just to prove something?

CHARLIE

But you like teaching?

MATT

Yeah, I like it. I guess I like the way they, some of the students, start out at the beginning of the semester and then watching them interact with the material and their classmates and me. Then by the end of the semester I can see this journey that they've taken in their work. And I was a part of that. And yeah, some of them are just fulfilling a requirement with my class, but then a few, I think I've opened up their interests more.

CHARLIE

You had that one student that changed majors because she'd taken your class.

MATT

Bonus points.

CHARLIE

You're a good teacher and you love it. But what if you were to find out that your genetic profile says you should be doing something else?

MATT

I guess it depends on what it tells me.

CHARLIE

But you love teaching. I've seen you, you're a good teacher. You'd leave it?

MATT

What if I could be better at something else? What if I'd love that even more? I mean I'd have to consider it, wouldn't I?

CHARLIE

Why? People used to make these decisions on their own. We made these types of decisions on our own last year and now ...

MATT

You never like the new tech.

CHARLIE

It's just, do we need it?

MATT

If it were up to you we would send correspondence through carrier pigeon.

CHARLIE

I'm not that bad.

MATT

At the very least, you and I would still have that old vacuum cleaner.

CHARLIE

It worked, didn't it?

MATT

The new one works better.

CHARLIE

Okay, in that case it does, but ... I don't know. Can't we know who we are and what to do on our own?

MATT

People have never figured that stuff out on their own. Guidance counselors, friends, family, experimentation ... Genetic profile prediction reporting simplifies things. It removes a lot of the uncertainty, the anxiety. Come on, can't you appreciate that?

Pause.

MATT (cont'd)

What's wrong?

CHARLIE

Nothing. I finished the dishes and put the groceries away.

MATT

The dishes?

CHARLIE

What there was of them.

MATT

Uh-huh. Take-out does streamline the dish-washing portion of our evening. It's okay, I'll love you even when I have to clean your pots.

CHARLIE

My pots?

MATT

Our deal, one of us cooks, the other cleans up. Are you sure your gene report really said you should be cooking? This isn't just a ploy so that with cooking more I have more turns doing the dishes?

CHARLIE

No.

MATT

Oh, what about the pears I bought?



CHARLIE

On the counter, except for the two I put in the fridge as per our treaty on differing beliefs regarding fruit storage.

MATT

Thank you.

Pause.

MATT (cont'd)

You seem different tonight. What's going on?

CHARLIE

Different?

MATT

Yeah.

CHARLIE

I'm just tired. It was a long day.

MATT

Are you sure that's all?

CHARLIE

Yeah.

MATT

Nothing's wrong?

CHARLIE

No. Just tired. Tomorrow morning I'll be all fresh and sparkling, complete with a new and improved sticker on my ass. Okay? Don't worry about me.

MATT

Because ... The gene people didn't tell you that you're going to get sick or something. Get cancer or some other condition in five to ten years?

CHARLIE

No, no. I'm just thinking about all of it. The gene reports and I don't know.

MATT

You would tell me if there were something I should be worried about, right? You can tell me, anything.

CHARLIE

It's just my sister was so invested in her dinner party idea and then she finds out that she's not going to be a dinner party person, well, a dinner party cooking person, you know what I mean.

(MORE)

CHARLIE (cont'd)

It's just you have this idea of what your life should be, of maybe even what your life is and then this test, this report says something else. I mean can she really not cook for her dinner parties now?

MATT

I didn't realize she was that into the dinner party thing.

CHARLIE

It's not that.

MATT

Doesn't she usually go from one idea to another. She flits. She flits, you fret. Look, hey, look, you cooking more would save us some money, and it's an area to explore creativity, but that's it. We eat fine now. We can stick to our usual recipes. I know you don't like change.

CHARLIE

No, I don't. I don't.

MATT

Well, nothing has to change. If you don't want to cook, then don't cook. Screw your hidden potential.

CHARLIE

Yeah, screw it. What does it know? Stupid genes.

MATT

Did the report, did it say you weren't that smart? Stupid genes?

CHARLIE

No. No. I'm just saying, they're genes and it's a report and this is my life and I'm not going to cook.

MATT

Okay. You always worry so much. I love you anyway.

Matt begins to rub Charlie's shoulders.

CHARLIE

What are you doing?

MATT

I'm, you're being tense. You are often tense.

CHARLIE

No, that's okay.

MATT

Charlie?

CHARLIE  
No, I'm, I'm not in the mood, okay?

MATT  
Okay, I was just ... okay.

CHARLIE  
I'm sorry.

MATT  
Charlie, what's going on?

CHARLIE  
Nothing.

MATT  
What's wrong?

CHARLIE  
Just, look, I'm just not in the mood tonight, okay?

MATT  
I don't care about that, but you seem ...

CHARLIE  
What?

MATT  
I don't know, more neurotic than usual.

CHARLIE  
I'm fine. We're fine. I just have a lot on my mind. My sister and her dinner parties. I mean, should I cook so she can have dinner parties?

MATT  
Fuck her dinner parties. Has she never heard of catering? Half those fast food places she lives off of do catering and aside from that you show up a restaurant, order a bunch of food and then dump it onto your own serving plates, hide the evidence, done. Seriously, it's not that complicated. Your sister will be fine. Charlie?

CHARLIE  
You're a good egg. I'm gonna go to bed. Thank you for the new sponges.

SCENE 1-8: LUNCH

Olive Orchard restaurant. Charlie and Bette are seated at a table. Bette is wearing a different knitted scarf. Charlie wears a knitted scarf as well. An opened gift bag is on the floor.