



Rx

by Kate Fodor

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Val Day
WME Entertainment
vfd@wmeentertainment.com

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CHARACTERS

3M, 3F (doubling)

MEENA PIEROTTI, 37 - Managing Editor, Piggeries, *American Cattle & Swine Magazine*

PHIL GRAY, 37 - Schmidt Pharma researcher

ALLISON HARDY, 45 - Phil's boss

SIMON, 45 - MEENA's boss

FRANCES GODWARD, 78 - A widow in need of new underwear

RICHARD - Marketing executive

ED, 65 - Schmidt Pharma researcher (same actor as Richard)

PLACE

A Midwestern city.

TIME

The present.

Pronunciation Guide

Thriveon: with a long I and a long E

SP-925: like "nine to five"

SP-214: two-fourteen, like Valentine's Day

Scene 1

MEENA's office at American Cattle & Swine magazine, represented mainly by an ugly industrial metal and plastic desk with some papers on it. There's an extra chair across from the desk, and maybe there's a wastepaper basket, but there's not much else. The area will be taken over by other characters to represent other offices throughout the play. MEENA enters with Phil close behind her. He is wearing a visitor's badge and holding a clipboard.

MEENA

Where would you like to -- Should I sit behind my desk?

PHIL

Anywhere you're comfortable.

MEENA

I could sit behind my desk, and you could sit in that chair right there.

PHIL

Good.

(He sits.)

MEENA

I'm going to close the door because --

PHIL

That's a good idea.

(She closes it.)

MEENA

There.

PHIL

Should we get started?

MEENA

Yes.

(She sits.)

PHIL

Great. *(He takes out his pen and looks at his clipboard.)* Name is Meena Pierotti. Age is.

MEENA

37.

(He writes it down.)

PHIL

Job title is.

MEENA

Managing editor, Piggeries, *American Cattle and Swine Magazine.*

PHIL

Number of years in this position is.

MEENA

Four.

PHIL

Number of years with this employer is.

MEENA

Ten.

PHIL

Question One.

MEENA

Yes.

PHIL

Do you like your job?

MEENA

No.

PHIL

On a scale of one to 10, with one being the least unhappy and 10 being the most unhappy, how unhappy are you during the average workday?

MEENA

I can't answer that question.

PHIL

Just do your best.

MEENA

No, I mean -- it's badly worded.

PHIL

How so?

MEENA

Is 10 as unhappy as a person could be in any circumstance, like homeless under a bridge, in which case it would be hard for me to claim more than a two --

PHIL

I think if you just, you know --

MEENA

Or is 10 as unhappy as a basically healthy, employed person could be, in which case I guess I would put myself at about a nine?

PHIL

How about five and a half?

MEENA

No.

PHIL

I took the average of two, from the first answer you gave --

MEENA

But they meant one thing or the other by the question --

PHIL

And nine, from the second answer --

MEENA

So the answer is either two or it's nine. It's not five and a half.

(Phil and Meena look at each other from behind their respective eyeglasses.)

PHIL

Let's put down nine for you.

MEENA

Whatever you think is best.

PHIL

(Recording the number)

Should we go on?

MEENA

Yes.

PHIL

Great. Question Two. Do you cry during the workday?

MEENA

Yes.

PHIL

How often?

PHIL
(overlapping)
Never, rarely, sometimes,
or frequently.

MEENA
(overlapping)
Twice.

(They stare at each other.)

MEENA

Twice a day is --

PHIL

Frequently?

MEENA

Frequently. OK.

PHIL

Are you concerned that crying during the workday affects your colleagues' or superiors' opinion of you?

MEENA

No.

PHIL

Why or why not?

MEENA

I go to the department store. I don't cry here.

PHIL

I'm just writing that in the "explanatory notes" section.

MEENA

I go all the way in the back where they sell the old ladies' underwear. It's the Bon-Ton on the corner. They sell a lot of old ladies' underwear in the back, the great big white ones that look like sails. No one in this office would wear underwear like that, so I know no one will see me there.

(Phil holds up a finger to say he's still writing. She nods.)

MEENA

(CONT'D)

Also, there's just something comforting about all those big underpants. It's like you're surrounded by an army of grandmas. Like they're standing guard for you while you cry. *(One tear leaks from the corner of her eye, and she swats it away.)* I don't cry here.

PHIL

Are you popular among your coworkers?

MEENA

I don't know.

PHIL

Just do your best.

MEENA

I really don't know.

PHIL

Do you experience boredom or over-stimulation during the workday?

MEENA

Yes.

PHIL

Which?

MEENA

Both.

PHIL

Do you experience confusion during the workday?

MEENA

Yes.

PHIL

How many times would you say that you become confused during the average workday?

MEENA

Several?

PHIL

Do you remember your last episode of confusion?

MEENA

Yes.

PHIL

How confused were you, on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most confused and 1 being the least confused?

MEENA

S -- Si -- Seven? Six.

PHIL

Are you crying, Miss Pierotti?

MEENA

No.

PHIL

But you're upset.

MEENA

I guess I just was hoping --

PHIL

Have I offended you in some way?

MEENA

I guess I just was hoping that you were going to help me.

PHIL

This is a preliminary screening. A standardized questionnaire. Your answers will determine your eligibility for the physical exam, which in turn will help determine your eligibility for --

MEENA

Right. No, I know. I don't know why I --

PHIL

Shall we go on?

MEENA

Yes, please.

Scene 2

Allison stands in a spotlight at a podium, addressing the crowd at the annual Schmidt Pharma shareholders meeting. Maybe she has slides. If so, the first one could identify her as "Allison B. Hardy, MBA, Team Leader, Neurology."

ALLISON

One of the things we in the Neurology Business Unit are especially excited about is a development-stage drug we've code-named SP-925, which targets workplace depression, a newly identified -- and we believe eminently *treatable* -- disease caused by a startling drop in norepinephrine levels during the working day. Plummeting norepinephrine levels leave some sufferers listless and unproductive, while others become agitated and difficult to work with. Anyone have a colleague they'd like to volunteer for our clinical trial? I'm kidding! We're in the process of pre-screening subjects for the first major efficacy trial of SP-925, and we'll have that data to present to you at the next annual Schmidt Pharma shareholders meeting, assuming all goes well. And while I am required by the SEC to caution you that my presentation today has contained forward-looking statements that are not guarantees of future performance and involve certain risks and uncertainties, I assure you that I intend to personally see to it that all goes well. Now ask me some questions so I can stay up here a little longer. I love it up here.

Scene 3

An examining room at Schmidt Pharma. Phil wears a white labcoat. Meena wears a paper gown and sits on a paper-covered table.

PHIL

I'm going to begin by just looking into your eyes with a penlight, if you'll allow me.

MEENA

I'm sorry for the way I behaved the other day during the questionnaire.

PHIL

No apologies necessary.

MEENA

I'm such a baby about my job.

PHIL

You may be suffering from workplace depression, which isn't a personal failing, it's a disease. We hope.

(He switches eyes.)

MEENA

But you must talk to so many people whose jobs are so much worse. Oh, god, like the girl who does my nails at the \$10 place. She wears a tee-shirt tied around her face because the fumes give her coughing fits. Also, you know -- I don't know. Rat catchers. Lunch ladies.

PHIL

We're developing this drug for patients with a household income of at least \$65,000.

MEENA

Really?

PHIL

I don't get sent to screen the working poor. They're not our target patient population.

MEENA

I didn't know it worked like that.

PHIL

They don't have health insurance. It costs two billion dollars to develop a drug. You have to be able to sell it to someone. *(He looks in her ears with the penlight.)* OK. Great. Now if you would open up the gown and lie back flat.

(MEENA hesitates.)

MEENA

Are you actually a doctor doctor?

PHIL

Yes.

MEENA

OK. Great. Sorry. (*She opens up the gown and lies back flat. He prods her abdomen, and she watches his hands.*) You wear cufflinks.

PHIL

Yes.

MEENA

That's nice. (*He taps around, feeling the size of her liver. She looks at the ceiling.*) I could never be a doctor. I get sick to my stomach when I see other people's blood. I do have an MFA, though.

PHIL

Oh. Great. What is that?

MEENA

It's a master of fine arts. In poetry. I can dissect a text.

PHIL

Just a little pressure here. (*He pushes down on her belly with his palm.*) I haven't read much poetry. I like it when I hear it, but -- Busy, I guess.

MEENA

William Carlos Williams was a doctor. You know William Carlos Williams? "So much depends/ upon a red wheel barrow/glazed with rainwater...." Oh, god!

PHIL

Is something wrong?

MEENA

No. Sorry. Whatever you did just now made me feel a little --

PHIL

I'm sorry.

MEENA

-- jumpy, that's all!

PHIL

I apologize. May I push down firmly right here?

MEENA

Yes.

PHIL

And a deep breath, if you would.

(MEENA takes a deep breath. Phil pushes down sharply on her belly with his palm. She has a little spasm of anxiety and discomfort and smacks his hand away.)

MEENA

I'm sorry.

PHIL

No apologies are necessary, Miss Pierotti.

MEENA

Are you going to put me in the study?

PHIL

My colleagues and I will review your files, and we'll make a determination based on --

MEENA

I'd really like to be in the study.

PHIL

I understand. There's a committee and we'll --

(He pushes down sharply again, and MEENA smacks his hand.)

MEENA

Sorry.

PHIL

It's quite all right, Miss Pierotti.

(Phil steps back.)

MEENA

You can -- I won't --

PHIL

That's actually fine for now. You can get dressed.

MEENA

That's it?

PHIL

That's it for now.

MEENA sits up and ties the gown.

MEENA

I meant to tell you. I have a deviated septum. I don't know if you saw it. It didn't come up in any of the -- You can look if you want.

PHIL

That's the whole thing for right now.

MEENA

I don't know why I hate my job so much. I just feel like I was meant for better things. Isn't that sort of disgusting?

PHIL

No, I think it's -- You can just check out with Joan after you change. She'll explain what happens from here.

MEENA

OK. Great. Thanks.

(Meena gets down from the table and leaves the room. Phil writes busily in her file. After a moment, Allison sticks her head through the door.)

ALLISON

Hey! Phil!

PHIL

Hey, Allison.

ALLISON

Do you have a minute?

PHIL

Sure. Is everything OK?

ALLISON

Well, basically, yes. However.

(Phil closes the file.)

PHIL

What is it?

ALLISON

I got a memo about you.

PHIL

You did?

ALLISON

A notice of violation of Schmidt Pharma policy. (*She holds it up.*) I have to check this little box here and sign it to say we discussed it.

PHIL

I didn't use my own data descriptors in the IRB report this time, if that's what this is about. I used the registered metadata.

ALLISON

Yeah, I saw that. Thanks. That's not what this is about. You gotta stop taking the document hutch off your work module.

PHIL

What's a document hutch?

ALLISON

The shelfy thing on top. You can't take it off and put it on the floor. It's a fire hazard.

PHIL

Not having a shelf is a -- ?

ALLISON

Leaving it on the floor is a fire hazard, Phil.

PHIL

Can they take it away for me?

ALLISON

If you want your work module to go away with it!

PHIL

What is my -- ?

ALLISON

Your desk, Phil. Says here the shelving unit has the same serial number as the desk, which means they can't be separated per Schmidt Pharma policy on freestanding furniture.

PHIL

I hit my head on that shelfy thing every time I stand up.

ALLISON

Can I check the box, Phil?

PHIL

I've been screening a lot of unhappy workers, and it's exactly this kind of corporate crap that makes them hate their jobs.

ALLISON

No, it's not. People don't hate their jobs because of corporate crap. People hate their jobs because of a treatable norepinephrine deficiency that manifests during the workday.

PHIL

Well, yeah, I know, but --

ALLISON

You know how I know that people don't hate their jobs because of corporate crap? Because I have been through every piece of corporate crap there is. You could pull a mile of red tape out of my ass and use it to tie a bow around all the forms I have to fill out today, but I LOVE my job, Phil. And that's just in my blood --

PHIL

It just seems silly --

ALLISON

That's just because working makes my norepinephrine flow.

PHIL

-- that I have to crack my skull five times a day because of some half-baked serial number system.

ALLISON

Why don't you try just remembering not to bump your head when you stand up? (Phil shrugs.) What did a year of med school cost, Phil? Because it cost 350 bucks to get my cocker spaniel Maggie trained and she doesn't have a problem with stuff like this.

PHIL

What do you love about your job?

ALLISON

All the little triumphs that can be achieved in the course of a day! The problem solved, the budget trimmed, the enemy conquered!

PHIL

Do you have a document hutch on your desk?

ALLISON

Nope.

PHIL

How come?

ALLISON

I took it off. (She shrugs.) I'm management. My life isn't easy, Phil, but it really has its satisfactions.

Scene 4

Meena's office. Meena is working at the ugly desk. Simon enters.

SIMON

Hey, Meena.

MEENA

Hey, Simon.

SIMON

So, this PETA quote in Amy's story.

MEENA

Yeah.

SIMON

We're gonna go with it?

MEENA

I mean, I don't care that much. But I told her to go ahead and use it in the middle, as long as she gives Greenfield Meats the last word, because it's awful when their press guy calls and yells.

SIMON

Because Greenfield's an advertiser.

MEENA

Yeah. OK. It's fine. Either way.

SIMON

And that PETA stuff is very inflammatory. They're saying the Greenfield employees were actually --

MEENA

Oh, god. I know. Don't say it.

SIMON

As a form of protest against their working conditions. They took it out on the pigs.

MEENA

No, please! I'm nauseated as it is today.

(Simon looks at Meena.)

SIMON

Are you going to throw up?

MEENA

Not unless you say the thing about the Greenfield pigs. You want this half of my bagel?

SIMON

No thanks.

MEENA

I didn't touch it.

SIMON

I had a croissant.

MEENA

It's this medication I started taking, I think.

SIMON

Medication for what?

MEENA

For improvement of my condition.

SIMON

What condition?

MEENA

I'm not supposed to talk about it. I'm part of a clinical study. They're testing a new drug on us.

SIMON

You think that's safe?

MEENA

I'm finding it kind of exciting.

SIMON

Because you don't look all that good.

MEENA

They said my body would adjust. I'm not as nauseated today as I was yesterday.

SIMON

If you feel like you're going to throw up at any point --

MEENA

I won't as long as we don't have to talk about the Greenfield pigs.

SIMON

No, no, we don't have to talk about it. But if we're going to run something from PETA claiming that management actually turned a blind eye while those Greenfield employees were --

MEENA

Not! No! We're not! I don't care. I'll tell her to take it out.

SIMON

OK. The other thing I wanted to tell you is Amy's quitting. She gave me her two-week notice.

MEENA

No.

SIMON

Yeah, yesterday. So let's touch base with HR later about all that.

MEENA

Did she get another job?

SIMON

She says she's going to write a book.

MEENA

What kind of book?

SIMON

Some historical kind of thing.

MEENA

What kind of historical kind of thing?

SIMON

A novel, I guess. It's called The Dairy Wife. It takes place in Wisconsin in the 1800s. She said she got the idea when we sent her to that Women in Dairy conference last month.

MEENA

Did she sell a proposal?

SIMON

Not that she said.

MEENA

She's just going to write a book and see what happens?

SIMON

I guess.

MEENA

What's she going to do for money?

SIMON

Tend bar nights at The Barrister. Which is funny, because I go there.

MEENA

What's she going to do for health insurance?

SIMON

Skip it, I guess.

MEENA

What if she gets cancer or fibromyalgia?

SIMON

I didn't ask.

MEENA

Isn't she scared?

SIMON

I actually didn't --

MEENA

I don't think she's thought this whole thing through very carefully.

SIMON

Well, you know, she's young, she's good-looking, she'll land on her feet. (*Meena looks unwell.*) Hey, Meena, are you gonna--

MEENA

No.

SIMON

You want to run to the ladies' room?

MEENA

I have to go to the department store. Shit, I can't find my shoe! *(She digs around under the desk.)* No, wait! There it is! I'll be back in half an hour.

Scene 5

MEENA sits on a small stepladder, crying, surrounded by racks and racks of large, white cotton underwear. Suddenly, there's movement behind one of the racks. MEENA looks up, surprised: no one shops in this department. FRANCES is holding a pair of giant white panties.

FRANCES

My eyeglasses are out of date. Would you mind reading this pricetag for me? You're not busy, are you?

MEENA

No. *(MEENA looks at the pricetag.)* These are two for eleven dollars.

FRANCES

Oh. But I don't need two new pairs of underwear. Well, maybe I need two. *(She looks carefully at the undies.)* They're good, aren't they?

MEENA

Yes.

FRANCES

Nothing fancy.

MEENA

No.

FRANCES

But nice and sturdy.

MEENA

Yes.

(MEENA weeps.)

FRANCES

I'm going to take two. Why not? Live a little. (*She suddenly notices the weeping.*) Oh, dear. What's the matter?

MEENA

It's nothing, really. It's just -- I hate my job. There's nothing really wrong with it, but I hate it.

FRANCES

Well, now. I never had a job to speak of, so I'm no expert on the subject, but you look pretty sharp. Can't you think of a way to make things better?

MEENA

I don't know. Maybe. I'm trying a medication. It might start helping soon.

FRANCES

Well, there you are! (*Frances digs around in her pocketbook and hands Meena a tissue.*) It's not quite true that I never had a job. I had a wonderful job for several months before I got married. I worked in a factory that made hook-and-eye fasteners. Little metal ones. But my husband preferred that I give it up.

MEENA

You enjoyed making little metal hook-and-eye fasteners?

FRANCES

I did, yes. The other girls and I had lunch at Bensons every day. I was terribly lonely after I fell in love and got married. (*MEENA wipes her nose. Frances gives her a little smile of encouragement.*) Better now?

MEENA

Yes.

FRANCES

There's a sale on, you know. You should buy yourself something nice on your way out. That's something else I did when I had that job. I shopped! Just bought myself little things and then had them. (*She looks down at the underwear in her hands.*) I haven't had new underpants in 12 or 15 years.

MEENA

I like those ones with the little flowers on the waistband.

FRANCES

Do you? A little decoration can be nice, don't you think?
(*She shakes her head.*) I don't know when I stopped taking care
of myself. I cut my own hair with my nail scissors. Why do
I do that? It looks awful.

MEENA

You look fine.

FRANCES

I look awful.

MEENA

No, you don't.

FRANCES

And my apartment! All the furniture is lumpy and
avocado-colored, like guacamole! My husband's cousin sold us
a whole living room set made out of guacamole at a discount.

MEENA

Would your husband let you change it?

FRANCES

My husband's dead.

MEENA

I'm sorry.

FRANCES

He died a lifetime ago. (*Beat.*) But I don't know how you would
throw away something as cumbersome as a sofa, do you? My
neighbor's son took hers to the dump for her, but I don't have
any children. My blood was negative-something-or-other, so
the pregnancies always ended badly. I read that nowadays the
doctors can fix the problem with hardly any fuss, just a little
shot of something. I would think it would be wonderful to be
young in this day and age. So many obstacles cleared from the
path. Like driving right behind the snowplow.

Scene 6

*The Schmidt Pharma examining room. Meena in her paper gown;
Phil in his white coat. He is looking at a pair of cufflinks
in a little cardboard box.*

PHIL

Did these cost five dollars or more?

MEENA

They weren't expensive. There was a sale at the Bon-Ton. They looked like little pills to me. That's what made me think of you.

PHIL

I can't accept gifts worth five dollars or more.

MEENA

I'm not sure where you'd find a pair of cufflinks that didn't cost--

PHIL

There are certain regulations governing clinical trials.
(He hands the box back to her.)

MEENA

I'll use them for Secret Santa at the office.

PHIL

I think that would probably be best.

MEENA

I didn't mean to violate the regulations.

PHIL

Of course not.

MEENA

I really just wanted to thank you for putting me in the trial. It's making a big difference to me.

PHIL

You're feeling the effects of SP-925 already, then?

MEENA

Well, no. But I feel like I might start feeling them any minute and I guess that's making me feel -- not quite so hopeless.

PHIL

That's the kind of thing we like to hear. *(He shuffles some papers on the counter, reads one of them, and turns to her holding it in his hand.)* Miss Pierotti, I'm looking at your study journal. You told me just now you were feeling better.

MEENA

No.

PHIL

Yes, you did. Just now.

MEENA

Not yet really, no. What I actually said was that I feel like I might start feeling better any minute now and that is making me feel not quite so bad.

PHIL

Why didn't you record in the study journal that you were feeling better?

MEENA

I'm not yet.

PHIL

Miss Pierotti --

MEENA

Please don't take me out of the study!

PHIL

I'm not going to take you out of the study. But the study journal is a key part of our data collection, so I just want to be sure that you're using it in a manner that accurately --

MEENA

I'll change my study journal if you want. Here, give it to me. I'll change it. Do you have a pen?

PHIL

Miss Pierotti.

MEENA

Yes?

PHIL

I'm not asking you to change your study journal. That would be against the regulations.

MEENA

No, of course not. I'm sorry. It's a very hard time for me right now.

PHIL

Harder than when we did our initial screening?

MEENA

Yes.

(Phil uncaps his pen and reaches for her file.)

PHIL

Why is that, would you say?

MEENA

Someone at work is quitting. She's going to write a book, which I don't think is smart at all in this economy.

PHIL

Anything else?

MEENA

Not really.

PHIL

I see.

MEENA

It's very upsetting.

PHIL

Are you feeling envious because you would like to write a book?

MEENA

I did write a book.

PHIL

You did?

MEENA

Yes. After grad school.

PHIL

Was it published?

MEENA

Yes.

PHIL

Well, that's impressive! Really. What kind of book was it?

MEENA

Poetry. It was a collection of 27 prose poems.

PHIL

Is it available -- you know, could I buy it in a store?

MEENA

You can get it on Amazon.

PHIL

That's great! You're an actual published poet.

MEENA

I'm the managing editor of piggeries at American Cattle & Swine Magazine. I spent three hours this morning line-editing an article about controlling parasitic worms in pigs.

PHIL

If you'll forgive me that actually sounds like--

MEENA

Nodular worms, roundworms and whipworms.

PHIL

That sounds like it could be interesting.

MEENA

The pigs get them from wallowing around in their own shit. Sorry. Waste.

PHIL

Roundworms are often transmitted to humans through under-cooked pork. It's a public health issue of a certain degree of importance.

MEENA

Please don't take me out of the study.

PHIL

I'm not going to take you out of the study.

MEENA

Maybe today my norepinephrine levels will stabilize and I'll start feeling grateful for all the things I should be grateful for.

PHIL

(smiling just a little)

If that happens, will you note it in your study journal for me, Miss Pierotti?

MEENA

Yeah.

PHIL

Thank you.

He hands her back the study journal.

MEENA

I'll see you in two weeks.

PHIL

See you in two weeks.

Meena exits with the study journal. The little cardboard box of cufflinks is left behind on the examining table. Phil picks it up and takes the lid off. Allison enters.

ALLISON

Hey, Phil!

PHIL

Hey, Allison.

He puts the box of cufflinks in the pocket of his labcoat.

ALLISON

You ready to go?

PHIL

I don't know if it makes sense for me to be in this meeting. I don't know if marketing is really my thing.

ALLISON

Marketing is everybody's thing.

PHIL

I'm just not sure I have a lot to contribute to a discussion of --

ALLISON

If you work for Schmidt Pharma -- if you make the omelettes in the cafeteria! -- then marketing's your thing. If we didn't sell any drugs, there wouldn't be any eggs.

PHIL

I do see how it's all connected, but I --

ALLISON

Richard from the ad agency likes to have you in the room.

PHIL

Why does he care about me?

ALLISON

Because your little white coat and your doctor talk make Richard feel like he is part of something *important*, like he *helps* people. That little white coat of yours is the only thing standing between Richard and his midlife crisis. So unless you want him driving to Mexico with a high-priced callgirl and breaking his three children's hearts, you're gonna come to my goddamn meeting and play doctor with the guy.

PHIL

You're in rare form today.

ALLISON

Marketing meetings turn me on like almost nothing else.
(*She takes his hand.*) Come on!

Scene 7

Richard, a vice president from an advertising agency, is standing at the front of a conference room. Allison and Phil enter.

ALLISON

Richard! Got everything you need?

RICHARD

Yes, I do. Thanks so much.

ALLISON

You remember Dr. Gray?

RICHARD

Thanks for coming, Dr. Gray!

PHIL

OK.

ALLISON

We'll take our seats. The room is yours!

Phil and Allison sit. Richard addresses the room.

RICHARD

Good morning, all. As you may know, I'm Richard, co-founder and principal of Health Is Wealth Inc., and we are here today to transform the drug currently code-named SP-925 into... Thriveon. The brandname Thriveon is meant of course to suggest the word "thrive," which is echoed in the tagline: "You Can Thrive from Nine to Five!" That tagline will be used in print, television, radio, online, billboard, brochure and direct-mail advertising. And in the TV and radio spots, it will be powerfully reinforced by our very own version of Dolly Parton's 1981 chart-topper "9 to 5" --

ALLISON

I love that song!

RICHARD

Ready to go to Dollywood?

ALLISON

I'm coming with you!

(Richard pushes a button and the JINGLE plays, to the tune of Dolly Parton's "9 to 5":)

ENERGETIC SINGING VOICES

*I've got peace of mind
And I give Thriveon the credit!
Work can make you
Happy if you let it!*

(Instrumental music continues under an ANNOUNCER'S VOICE: "Thriveon. You Can THRIVE from Nine to Five!" Richard turns off the recording.)

RICHARD

Hope I'm making you happy so far.

ALLISON

No one from any ad agency has ever made me happier. No man has ever made me -- Richard. You make me. God, Richard. You make me -- god. You make me -- god! You're really good at what you do.

RICHARD

Dr. Gray?

PHIL

Yes?

RICHARD

You're the one out in the field interacting with the people who suffer from this debilitating but treatable condition.

PHIL

Yup.

RICHARD

How do you think they'll respond to our message?

PHIL

Oh. Well.

RICHARD

We know you'll agree that everyone wants to thrive in the workplace --

PHIL

I don't know. I think most of the people I've been seeing just want to stop feeling so awful for a minute.

RICHARD

But if they knew that thriving was within their reach!

PHIL

I think it's more about just, you know. Survival. Maybe Surviveon? Maybe "You Can Survive From 9 to 5?" Because these people are really feeling kind of hopeless.

(Richard beams.)

RICHARD

It's great to have Dr. Gray with us, isn't it? Because he reminds us what we're doing in the first place: we're helping people. Real, hopeless people who have nowhere else to turn! That's why I love to have a doctor in the room. Because doctors -- doctors *help*. You gotta admire -- You gotta sort of wish you could -- I mean, looking at your own choices in life. Anyway. I admire you, Dr. Gray.

PHIL

Thanks.

ALLISON

Good. Everybody happy?

RICHARD

Sure, I'm happy.

ALLISON

Happy, Phil?

PHIL

OK.

ALLISON

Great! Let's see the focus group data.

Scene 8

The Schmidt Pharma examining room, near the end of one of MEENA's check-ins. MEENA in her paper gown; Phil in his white coat. Phil looks up from writing something on MEENA's chart.

PHIL

I bought your book.

MEENA

Oh. OK.

PHIL

I liked it.

MEENA

Good.

PHIL

I liked the poem about the day everyone in the world was barefoot.

MEENA

Oh, well --

PHIL

I liked the line about the old man's toes, where you compared his skin to the rough white rind of a --

MEENA

Oh, my god, stop! Please.

PHIL

I'm only quoting it because I liked it.

MEENA

I know, but it's just so incredibly--

PHIL

I don't know a lot about prose poems, but I thought it was--

MEENA

It's incredibly--

PHIL

And the little girl's feet, how they were soft and pink like the interior of a--

(MEENA claps her hands over her ears.)

MEENA

No, no!

PHIL

But --

MEENA

It's so embarrassing!

PHIL

-- you wrote it.

MEENA

That doesn't mean that I don't hate it.

PHIL

Well, I'll stop.

MEENA

Thanks. Sorry.

PHIL

But I thought it was very evocative, the one about the feet.

MEENA

Well. Thanks.

PHIL

Actually, I had a dream after I read it. I was back in Chicago, in the emergency room at Hartnett Hospital, which is where I

did my internship. And I walked out into the waiting area and I looked at all the people. And you know, there's always a guy with a blood-alcohol level of point-four who's using an oily rag for a tourniquet because he tried to open a beer with his chainsaw, and there's always an old lady puking and praying the rosary because she didn't throw away the chicken that was 29 days past its sell-by date, and there's always a five-year-old with an ugly rash and a high fever whose mother waited too long to bring him in because she wanted to beat her best score at Tetris. And I thought I wanted to do emergency medicine when I was in school, I really did. But after a while, I deeply hated my patients. I mean, I'm not entirely sure that you deserve our help here, people. Because we're really tired and we have \$300,000 worth of student loans to repay, and you know, honestly, it's time to take a little responsibility for yourselves! But in this dream, I was back there and the waiting room was really crowded, and everyone in there was barefoot. Like in your prose poem. And somehow seeing their feet, it made me feel some compassion again. It made me want to be of service to them.

MEENA

Feet are -- you know, Jesus washed the apostles' feet.

PHIL

Do you have any other prose poems I could read?

MEENA

No. They're all in the book.

(They look at each other.)

PHIL

OK. See you in two weeks, then.

(MEENA nods. She leaves. She comes back and stands in the doorway.)

MEENA

The book got very bad reviews.

PHIL

There were reviews?

MEENA

There was one review.

PHIL

In a newspaper?

MEENA

The New York Times.

PHIL

That's really impressive.

MEENA

It was a bad review.

(She leaves. Phil looks after her for a second.)

SCENE 9

The old ladies' underwear section at the Bon-Ton. MEENA is sitting on a stepladder crying. Frances enters.

MEENA

Oh! Hello.

FRANCES

I came back for second helpings! I can't tell you how much I've been enjoying my new underwear. It's brought a sort of freshness to everything.

MEENA

I'm glad.

FRANCES

Suddenly I want to fall in love and take a jazz dance class and go to the Galapagos Islands.

MEENA

I think you should.

(Frances hands MEENA the stack of underwear she was holding and pulls a glossy pamphlet out of her purse.)

FRANCES

I inquired with a travel agent this morning about the Galapagos and I got this brochure. It turns out that it costs \$7,000 for a two-week stay. So. *(She shrugs.)* We'll see. But! It's exciting to have the brochure.

(MEENA looks over Frances' shoulder.)

MEENA

That's a big turtle.

FRANCES

It's a 400-pound, 113-year-old Indefatigable Island Tortoise! I'm going to make a list of the things I want to do, because otherwise I'll forget. *(She puts the brochure back in her purse and digs around for something else to write on.)* Look, here's the receipt from my underwear! And here's a pen. Now, what did I say? Learn jazz dance, which can be done at the YMCA; fall in love, which I'm told can be done on the computer; and go to the Galapagos. Does that all sound do-able if I have another five or 10 good years in me?

MEENA

Completely do-able.

FRANCES

I'll make a list for you, too. You have more time. What do you want to do?

MEENA

I can't answer that question.

FRANCES

Just do your best.

MEENA

I want to make something undeniably beautiful.

FRANCES

Can you be more specific?

MEENA

No.

FRANCES

Like a painting, maybe.

MEENA

No, I don't know how to paint.

FRANCES

Well, there you are! For you, I'm putting down: painting lessons. *(She writes.)* That's number one. What's number two?

Scene 10

The Schmidt Pharma examining room. Another check-in. Meena is sitting on the paper-covered table in her paper gown. Phil faces away from her, writing in her chart.

MEENA

You know, that was really weird, what you did.

(Phil turns and looks at her. Then he looks at the floor.)

PHIL

I know. I hope you won't feel compelled to --

MEENA

I just need to know, should I be scared of you?

(He looks up, surprised.)

PHIL

Scared of me?

MEENA

Yes.

PHIL

No.

MEENA

OK.

PHIL

I meant for it to be art. I had a new camera, and you and I had been talking about feet, so --

MEENA

It's just, the subject line of the e-mail said, "A photograph of my feet," which was weird, and then there was no note or anything, just the attachment with the picture of --

PHIL

My feet.

MEENA

So it was a little --

PHIL

I thought I might do a series with my new camera -- about feet. But I've never tried anything like that before, so I wanted to get your opinion, as a creative person.

MEENA

Well, no, I mean -- It was a good picture. If you're interested in photography, then I think you should --

(Phil clears his throat.)

PHIL

Also, Miss Pierotti, I did want to show you my feet.

MEENA

Oh.

PHIL

Because of your prose poem. Because when you described the feet of the people in your prose poem, you seemed to feel so much affection for them. And after I read your poems, I felt so much affection for you, and I was hoping that maybe you would feel some affection for me. If you saw my feet. I'm a scientist. I'm not good at this kind of thing.

MEENA

No. I understand. I mean, there are a lot of things I'm not very good at. Really a lot of things.

(A pause. They look at each other.)

PHIL

I looked up that review of your book.

MEENA

Oh.

PHIL

I think he started out biased against prose poems as a genre. Which I guess I can understand because I didn't even know there was such a thing as a prose poem, and you have to admit, they're a little -- But I think he just wanted to make a point about prose poems. He didn't bother to read your book carefully enough to see what beautiful use you were able to make of the form.

MEENA

That's nice of you.

PHIL

I think you made really beautiful use of the form.

MEENA

Thanks.

PHIL

I'm sorry about the photograph. Leave the art to the artists, that's what my mother used to say.

MEENA

I think what you do is really important.

PHIL

No, I mean, I was going to do something important, but then I couldn't really cut it in the emergency room. I was so tired and angry all the time, I wasn't helping anyone. At least here they give me a lot of money for not helping anyone.

MEENA

You're helping me. If it weren't for you, I wouldn't have this drug and I wouldn't be feeling like any second I might start feeling better.

PHIL

(gently)

I want you to feel better.

MEENA

Thank you so much.

(Phil and Meena kiss. It rains white cotton underwear. The underwear buries them. Beneath it, they roll and thrust and grunt and moan. The lights go out on them. There is music suggesting a celestial unveiling, a choir of angels - - and not far from the writhing pile of underwear, lights rise on Frances with a fabulous new haircut. She's resplendent. Meena stands in the dark to look at her, steps into her light.)

MEENA

Wow!

FRANCES

Do you like it?

MEENA

It's fabulous.

FRANCES

It's not ridiculous?

MEENA

No, not at all.

FRANCES

She layered it and gave me bangs.

MEENA

I can see.

FRANCES

Also, she did a color wash to make it silver instead of just gray.

MEENA

It's glorious.

FRANCES

You can tell it's silver now?

MEENA

I can really tell.

FRANCES

The hairdresser was surprised to see me. So was the doctor. They're next door to each other, so I did them both for the first time in years. A haircut and a checkup! What's interesting is that the doctor found a little lump in my left breast. He says I should have been checking my breasts all these years in the shower, but I don't like to poke at myself.

MEENA

No. Me either.

FRANCES

They're going to do a biopsy, and of course these things always turn out to be nothing at all, don't they? When a doctor thinks you should have some tests, you know there's money due on his yachting slip, that's what my husband used to say.

FRANCES

What happened to your husband?

MEENA

He died of liver cancer.

Scene 11

Phil's bed. Night. Meena and Phil are looking through a stack of photographs he took.

MEENA

I like this one, because of the way the light hits your ankle. This one's good, too. I mean, the composition is, but it's kind of out of focus. Right up here in the area by your pinky toe.

PHIL

Yeah.

MEENA

Did you mean to do that?

PHIL

It was before I read the whole manual.

MEENA

What's this one?

PHIL

It's yours. Your left one. I took it while you were sleeping. Last week. It was the first night you stayed over, and I couldn't believe how beautiful -- Like the Queen of Belgium's feet in your prose poem about the day everyone in the world was barefoot.

MEENA

No, no! Not good!

PHIL

It's beautiful and I am going to say it out loud. I am.

MEENA

No.

PHIL

"And the Queen of Belgium's feet were finely wrought, but strong..."

MEENA

I don't want you to. I'll leave.

PHIL

I'll stop. I will. Lie back down. I promise. But your feet are just like the Queen of Belgium's.

MEENA

My feet are just like a managing editor's. Oh, no, Phil, it's 12:42! I don't want to go to work tomorrow!

PHIL

Did you take your pill today?

MEENA

Yes. It's not helping.

PHIL

The effects are cumulative. Give it time.

MEENA

What if I'm in the placebo group? Didn't you warn me that could happen, at our first interview? What if I'm one of the suckers who's swallowing a lump of chalk every morning?

PHIL

The placebo is made out of sugar, usually. Milk sugar; lactose.

MEENA

What if I'm pinning my hopes on a lump of lactose and there's no help coming at all?

(Phil takes his glasses from the night-stand and puts them on. He looks at Meena.)

PHIL

You're not in the placebo group.

MEENA

How do you know? *(She sits up and puts on her glasses, too.)* You said you weren't allowed to know, because it could influence your perceptions of my reaction to--

PHIL

I'm not allowed to know. But I do.

MEENA

You do?

PHIL

Somebody owed me a favor. So I asked him, and he told me.

MEENA

Really?

PHIL

Yes.

MEENA

Couldn't you get in trouble for that?

PHIL

I needed to know I was really helping you. I didn't want to be giving you a lump of lactose.

MEENA

Wow. Thank you.

PHIL

SP-925 shows a lot of promise, MEENA. Give it time.

MEENA

OK. (She looks at him.) Are you OK? Do you have a headache?

PHIL

No, I just -- It was a long day. And I smacked my head really hard on this shelfy thing above my desk.

MEENA

Do you ever think about leaving Schmidt Pharma?

(Phil takes his wallet from the nightstand, takes a small folded square of paper out of it, and hands the paper to Meena.)

PHIL

I saw this in the back of New Physician magazine.

MEENA

"Put your ideals into action! Flying Physicians, a nonprofit corps of doctors who travel the world providing medical assistance where it is needed most, seeks field staff. Join us for a presentation, film, and question-and-answer session to learn more about how you can become a Flying Physician working in India, Australia and/or Africa." *(She looks at Phil.)* Are you going to the presentation?

PHIL

It was last month.

MEENA

Why didn't you go?

PHIL

Because once in the emergency room at Hartnett, I told a nine-year-old with a broken arm that he was a little fucker.

MEENA

You did?

PHIL

He was a little fucker.

MEENA

Oh.

PHIL

He bit my hand.

MEENA

OK.

PHIL

So. I don't have a good enough heart to do that kind of work.

MEENA

I think your heart is the eighth wonder of the world. I think your heart is like that record-breaking tower they're building in Dubai that's going to be 2,000 feet tall and have the world's fastest elevator and look like a shining silver spiral reaching up into the sky.

PHIL

Was that a prose poem?

MEENA

Yes. I think that was a little prose poem about your heart.

PHIL

Wow. Thank you.

MEENA

No problem.

PHIL

The thing is, I think maybe my heart is only like that when I'm around you.

MEENA

Well, that's OK, because I'd come with you.

PHIL

You would?

MEENA

Yes. I'm going to come with you to Africa.

PHIL

And write poems?

MEENA

Sure. Can you imagine anywhere better than Africa to write poems? The grasslands and the children with those big beautiful brown eyes. My god, those eyes are poems already, aren't they?

PHIL

A lot of them have river blindness.

MEENA

I don't want to know what that is.

PHIL

It's a parasitic disease carried by flies that breed in rivers. It can inflame the eyes to the point of blindness.

MEENA

Is it treatable?

PHIL

There's a drug, yes. Mectizan. It works.

MEENA

So, go treat them, Phil. *(She hands him back the little scrap of paper.)* I'll come with you.

Scene 12

Simons's office. Meena enters.

MEENA

Hey, Simon.

SIMON

Hey, Meena.

MEENA

I got ahold of those USDA graphs.

SIMON

Spot market sales?

MEENA

Versus meat-market sales. They're exquisite, Simon. They really make our point for us.

SIMON

Yeah?

MEENA

It's like I drew them myself.

SIMON

They go by carcass weight?

MEENA

They go by carcass weight.

SIMON

Awesome.

MEENA

Awesome, right?

Scene 13

Phil's bed. Night. Meena strokes Phil's cheek.

PHIL

I did my best. I tried to be very honest and forthright.

MEENA

Well, that's good. That was the right thing to do.

PHIL

I hope so. I told them there were a lot of problems at Hartnett. Chicago is a big city. But I called the problems challenges. Challenges to be met.

MEENA

That's good!

PHIL

And I said I thought those challenges were excellent preparation for working in the countries Flying Physicians aims to help!

MEENA

You told the truth, but you found a way to make it positive.

PHIL

I also told them that I called that nine-year-old with the broken arm a little fucker.

MEENA

Oh. You did?

PHIL

I wanted to be forthright about my past experiences. Even though I don't think it really bothered the kid that much when I called him a little fucker, so maybe I don't need to dwell on it quite so much. Actually, maybe I didn't even need to bring it up in the --

MEENA

No, I'm not really sure you did.

PHIL

But, you know, that was really the worst part about the whole thing, that the kid didn't seem bothered by it! Like he was totally used to being called a little fucker! This *child*. (*He shakes his head.*) I told the Flying Physicians about you.

MEENA

Why?

PHIL

I told them that you said my heart was the eighth wonder of the world. And that while that was of course an exaggeration, I do feel different since I met you. (*MEENA's Blackberry rings.*) I wanted them to know that my heart has changed since Hartnett.

MEENA

Well, it sounds like you -- (*Blackberry rings.*) I guess we'll have to just wait and see, huh?

PHIL

Yup.

MEENA

Phil, I have to take this for just one second. (Talks into the phone) Hey! No. (She laughs.) Yes. Wow. Will you leave them for me on my desk? Great. Hey, it's late. Go home. OK. Yeah, I'll be in early. 'Night." (She turns to Phil) Did they say when you would have to leave?

PHIL

Well, if they accept me.

MEENA

If they accept you.

PHIL

August.

MEENA

Wow. That's soon.

PHIL

You look a little --

MEENA

The timing might be -- Simon and I were throwing around ideas today about this cover story for September.

PHIL

What kind of a story?

MEENA

Actually, this sort of interesting thing about the pork pricing crisis in China. Lessons learned for the US market.

PHIL

You don't care about that, do you?

MEENA

Well, yes, Phil, I do. I mean, it's not saving the world, it's not heroic, but if I've started a project, I'd like to see it through.

PHIL

You haven't even started it, though.

MEENA

We've had the inspiration.

PHIL

What about writing? You said you were going to start writing again in Africa.

MEENA

I write at work every day.

PHIL

What about prose poems?

MEENA

Let me tell you something about prose poems.

PHIL

What?

MEENA

I hate them.

PHIL

You don't mean that.

MEENA

Maybe I don't mean that I hate them. But I mean, what's the point? You struggle and struggle to write them. You tear your hair out, you wring your heart for blood with your hands. And for what? My book sold 114 copies, Phil. Nobody wants to read somebody else's prose poems.

PHIL

I love your prose poems.

MEENA

Well, thanks, Phil. Really. But I think it's time for me to grow up a little now.

PHIL

If they offer me this post, will you come with me in August or not? (*MEENA is silent.*) You're scared.

MEENA

You're not a little scared to go to deepest, darkest Africa, Phil?

PHIL

You're scared to write.

MEENA

I write every day at --

PHIL

You're scared to write another book because Douglas Bates wrote in The New York Times that your poems were fat.

MEENA

He didn't call them fat!

PHIL

He called them corpulent creations that lumber where poetry should leap!

MEENA

You memorized that?

PHIL

Well, it kind of sticks in your head, doesn't it? (*A beat. Meena's BlackBerry rings, but she doesn't answer it. Phil reaches for her hand.*) I don't want to go to Africa without you.

MEENA

Then maybe you don't really want to go.

PHIL

Yes, I do.

MEENA

You didn't like Hartnett so much, remember?

PHIL

But I'm different since I met you, Meena! I've been reading poetry. Hey! I wanted to tell you something funny -- the metrical patterns in poems are called feet!

MEENA

I know, Phil.

PHIL

There's a chapter in *American Poets and Poetry* called "Poetic Feet." Which I think is really nice, because I'm starting to think that all feet, human feet, are sort of -- God's poetry.

(The BlackBerry rings again. Meena looks down, takes note of who it is, but doesn't answer it.)

MEENA

I think I'm going to go home, OK?

PHIL

No, please.

MEENA

It's hard to sleep here sometimes. You roll around.

PHIL

Please stay.

MEENA

I have a big day at work tomorrow. I'm introducing new editorial guidelines for my staff and I want to really sell them. I don't want to be tired for this. It's a big deal. *(She finds her clothes.)* Hey Phil. Have you been listening to me tonight?

PHIL

Yes.

MEENA

I think it's working. The SP-925 is finally working on me!

PHIL

It might be.

MEENA

Well, isn't that sort of exciting? I mean, Phil! Your drug works!

PHIL

I knew it worked already.

MEENA

You did?

PHIL

The loss mitigation specialist from Citibank called to tell me she had fun at her foreclosure meetings this morning.

MEENA

Phil. This could be big. For you. For me. God, I don't know how to thank you.

PHIL

Stay here with me tonight.

MEENA

OK. Yes. Of course.

PHIL

And come to Africa with me.

MEENA

Well, that's kind of a bigger -- I mean. I might, Phil.

PHIL

Will you?

MEENA

Let's see what happens.

(She strokes his cheek again.)

PHIL

If you don't come with me, my heart won't be the eighth wonder of the world while I'm there. My heart will almost certainly be insufficient to meet the task at hand.

MEENA

If I don't scrap my pork pricing story and come with you, you're going to call some kid with river blindness a little fucker? Is that what you're saying?

PHIL

I don't want to, but I might.

MEENA

That really isn't fair.

PHIL

I don't think the changes in my heart are necessarily permanent. I don't know that I can maintain them without you.

MEENA

I'm going to go home, OK? I have a big day tomorrow.

PHIL

You said you were going to stay.

MEENA

I'm sorry, Phil. I have a big day at work.

Scene 15

Meena's office. Meena looks up when Simon comes in.

SIMON

Did you do your new guidelines meeting?

MEENA

Yup.

SIMON

How'd they take it?

MEENA

Oh, you know, fine. People don't like change. They'll get over it.

SIMON

"Whoever desires constant success must change his conduct with the times." Tell them that. That's Machiavelli.

MEENA

I'll tell them.

SIMON

I took a whole management seminar on change. I'll find you the list of quotes they gave us. Machiavelli has a lot of 'em.

MEENA

"We would rather be ruined than changed."

SIMON

Who said that?

MEENA

"We would rather die in our dread/Than climb the cross of the moment/And let our illusions die." That's Auden. The poet.

SIMON

Didn't you write a book about poetry?

MEENA

I wrote a collection of 27 prose poems.

SIMON

But it was published, right?

MEENA

Yes.

SIMON

I always thought that was really cool.

MEENA

Thanks.

SIMON

I'm glad you didn't get rich and famous and miss your calling as a managing editor, though.

MEENA

Do you think I have a calling as a managing editor?

SIMON

Well, you're pretty damn good at it, MEENA. Sorry if I don't say that enough.

MEENA

You think I'm good at my job?

SIMON

Honestly? I think you kick ass as a managing editor.

MEENA

Thanks. I think you kick ass as an editorial director. (A beat.) I'm really excited about our cover story, Simon.

SIMON

Me, too.

(They stare at each other. Meena swallows.)

MEENA

Hey, Simon?

SIMON

Yeah?

MEENA

Could you maybe come over here?

SIMON

Yeah, sure.

(Meena and Simon have fabulous sex on the ugly desk. Meena gets Post-It Notes

stuck in her hair. Simon cums loudly with a fax cover sheet stuck to his bare, sweaty buttocks. He pulls up his pants, she straightens her skirt, he buckles his belt, she smoothes her hair.)

MEENA

Let's get back to work.

SIMON

Yeah. Let's work.

Scene 16

The Schmidt Pharma examining room. Phil is making notes on a chart when Meena comes in.

MEENA

Hi.

PHIL

Hello.

MEENA

How are you?

PHIL

I've been trying to call you all day.

MEENA

I know. I'm sorry. Things have been crazy. At the office.

(He takes a step toward her.)

PHIL

Are we still, you know -- ? *(She doesn't answer.)* Meena!

MEENA

What?

PHIL

Answer me!

MEENA

I don't know what the question is.

PHIL

(frantic)

The question is -- are we still, you know -- ?

MEENA

I don't --

PHIL

Meena!

MEENA

Yes! Yes, I think we are. But, Phil, this thing between us is only going to work if you can find it in your heart to have a little respect for my job.

PHIL

You hate your job.

MEENA

I love my job! I mean, I don't love my job. I'm an educated, cultured person. I don't love working for a magazine about factory farming. But I'm finding ways to make the best of things, and I would have thought you would support that. I thought you wanted to help me, Phil.

PHIL

I love you.

MEENA

Doesn't that mean you want me to be happy?

PHIL

It doesn't seem to be turning out that way, no.

(A silence.)

MEENA

Are you going to examine me?

PHIL

I don't know. How do you feel?

MEENA

I feel pretty good, Phil.

PHIL

Then I don't think I'll bother. *(He takes a syringe out of a drawer.)* I have to take blood today, though.

MEENA

OK. Is that my refill on the counter?

PHIL

Yes.

MEENA

Can I have it?

(He hands her the bottle of SP-925.)

PHIL

I need your arm.

(He attaches the syringe to a collection vial. She offers up her arm. The vial begins to fill. She looks at the bottle of pills in her hand.)

MEENA

Phil, you wouldn't ever...?

PHIL

Wouldn't ever what?

MEENA

You wouldn't ever switch my drug to some kind of placebo, would you?

PHIL

Why would I do that?

MEENA

So that I'd go back to feeling the way I felt about my job, and we could go back to being the way we were.

PHIL

I wouldn't do that. I have ethical standards as a scientist.

(Meena smiles.)

PHIL (CONT'D)

Do you think that's a joke?

MEENA

No, it's just -- you're fucking one of your study subjects, Phil.

PHIL

Get out of here.

MEENA

I'm sorry, it just struck me as funny.

PHIL

Take your SP-925 and get out.

MEENA

I have this thing in my --

(Phil yanks the needle out.)

MEENA

Ouch. *(She rubs her arm.)* OK.

(Meena leaves. Phil stands holding the vial of her blood. Then he goes to the counter and puts a drop of the blood on a little glass slide. He puts the slide under his microscope and looks into the eyepiece. The room darkens. We see, as projections in the darkness, what Phil sees on the slide: Meena's erythrocytes bumping around, carrying her oxygen. Phil's heart hurts. There is music to accompany the erythrocytes' dance: loud, sad, disorienting. Suddenly, it stops. The lights snap back on. Phil has his head in his arms on the counter. Allison is there, peering at him.)

ALLISON

Are you feeling OK?

PHIL

My head hurts a little, I guess.

ALLISON

Did you smack it again in your office?

PHIL

I don't remember.

ALLISON

I'll get you some Releevium.

PHIL

No, it's OK. I'm just a little down, that's all.

ALLISON

Do you want to talk about it?

PHIL

It's secret. I mean private.

ALLISON

Spill it, Phil.

PHIL

I need to ask you a favor. There's a trial I need to enroll in.

ALLISON

You mean a Schmidt Pharma trial?

PHIL

Yes.

ALLISON

You want to enroll as a patient?

PHIL

Yes.

ALLISON

You can't.

PHIL

I wouldn't be asking you if I weren't totally desperate.

ALLISON

Jesus. You're sick.

PHIL

Yes, I am. I'm sick.

ALLISON

What is it? Cancer? You want in on that pancreatic cancer trial they're running out of Philadelphia, don't you? Fuck, Phil. I don't know what to --

PHIL

No, it's not that. (*A beat.*) I heard Ed Morgan and his team are running a trial of a single-isomer version of thienobenzodiazapine to treat -- heartbreak.

ALLISON

You want to enroll as a patient in Ed Morgan's heartbreak trial?
(*She laughs.*)

PHIL

It's not funny. My heart hurts so much I almost went to the emergency room last night.

ALLISON

Even aside from the fact that we can't enroll a Schmidt Pharma employee in a Schmidt Pharma trial, as your friend, I wouldn't let you near that project in a Hazmat suit. Ed Morgan may think he's exactly like Einstein because he can't spell, but really he's just a moron.

PHIL

On a scale of one to 10, I would put this pain at a 9.5.

ALLISON

Anyway, they're going to pull the plug on that study and I'll tell you why: because there's no long-term revenue stream. Ed Morgan has no foresight. Those heartbreak patients are going to take that goddamn drug for two weeks until they meet some cute blonde in a bar and forget all about old what's-her-face who they loved so much, and that's the end of the revenue stream. Whereas, you look at a condition like workplace depression -- those patients are going to be on Thriveon every day of their lives, with their employers begging to pay for it no less, until they get old and retire and we start them on Intimex for their erectile dysfunction, and in fact I am already, Phil, already working with urology to think about how to make sure that the Thriveon-Intimex transition happens for our patients. My point being that Ed Morgan is no Einstein and I am no Ed Morgan. Are you absolutely sure you don't want some Releevium? Oh, my god, Phil, are you crying? Stop. Who broke your heart? I'll wring her neck. Aw, Phil. C'mere. Buck up.

(Allison gives Phil a hug with a few good slaps on the back. She notices the vial in his hand.)

What's that?

(Phil looks at it, a little disoriented.)

PHIL

Oh, it's just a --

ALLISON

Is that a blood sample?

PHIL

Well, yes.

ALLISON

How long have you had that in your hot, moist little hand, Phil? That should have an ID code on it and it should be in the fridge.

PHIL

No, I know. I was just about to -- You know I'm normally very -- I just am feeling really --

ALLISON

Phil, Phil, Phil. I know you feel like shit. I really do, but listen to me. Now is not the time to get sloppy about your work. Work is steadfast and loyal and fair, and it pays back what it owes you. Don't turn your back on work, Phil. Not now when you need its comforts the most. Where's the barcode sticker for this sample?

(Phil takes a little ID sticker from a sheet that's part of Meena's file.)

Put it on.

(Phil puts it on the vial.)

Now put the vial in the fridge.

(Phil puts the vial in a mini-fridge under the counter.)

Now note it in the file.

(Phil notes in the file that he has labeled and stored the blood sample.)

Don't you feel better already?

Scene 17

Ed Morgan's office, represented by the ugly desk. Phil sits in the chair across from the desk, waiting for Ed. Ed enters.

ED

I'm late.

PHIL

Yes.

ED

Significantly late?

PHIL

Well, yes.

ED

The damndest thing happened. I plugged in the coffee pot this morning and the whole thing burst into flames. No idea why. Oh, well. Einstein said the most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. Sorry to hold you up, though.

PHIL

It's all right.

ED

You don't look well, Phil. What can I do for you?

PHIL

I need to enroll in the heartbreak trial. I know it's slightly irregular, and I wouldn't dream of asking you except that --

ED

I can't enroll you in my trial. You're a Schmidt Pharma employee. It's against the regulations, it would compromise my data, invalidate the whole damn study.

PHIL

I think I may be dying, Ed.

ED

Someone really roughed you up, huh?

PHIL

Pretty badly, yes.

(Ed nods.)

ED

OK. Listen. I can't put you in the study. But if you want to try the drug, I'll just give you some.

PHIL

You will?

ED

Why not? Who's to know? I'm pretty sure I've got some right here in the drawer. *(He opens the jam-packed desk drawer and digs around.)* Ha! This is that adrenaline derivative we tried for psoriasis. Remember that? Gave everybody explosive diarrhea. Oh, well. If we knew what we were doing, it wouldn't be called research, would it? Aha! I thought I had some! I put it in a baggie to bring it home for the dog because the German Shepherd down the street screwed her and dumped her, but she shook it off without the drug. Animals are resilient. *(He*

hands Phil the baggie.) SP-214. Take one every morning with a big glass of water. Hell, take two if you want. We're still playing around with the dosage.

PHIL

Do you mind if I take them right now?

ED

Be my guest. (*Phil swallows two of the pills. Ed sits back down in the desk chair and grunts as he pulls off his boots, revealing his bare, hairy feet.*) Einstein didn't wear socks, either.

PHIL

I've never felt this bad before. This is the first time I've ever been in love.

(*Ed puts his feet up on the desk.*)

ED

First time's the worst. Einstein's first wife was a Serbian woman with tuberculosis and a limp. She thought it was his fault she never had a great scientific career. Said she had to spend all her time calculating his equations. (*He shrugs.*) At least she didn't have to wash his socks. Anyway, it didn't work out with her. She was a very unhappy person.

PHIL

Hey, Ed?

ED

Yes?

PHIL

I might need some assistance. I'm feeling a little -- Holy cow. Do you mind if I just ---? I think what I probably need to do is just lie down here on the rug.

(*He lies on the rug. Ed stands over him.*)

ED

Are you all right, Phil?

PHIL

My heart feels perfectly blank, like a white winter sky.

ED

So is that better?

PHIL

It's much better.

ED

Well, great. That's the kind of thing we like to hear.

PHIL

Thanks for helping me, Ed.

ED

Glad to do it, Phil.

PHIL

You're loyal and kind. I can see it in the way your toes splay, like a dog's.

ED

Hey. Actually, now that I'm thinking about it. What color were those pills I gave you, Phil?

PHIL

Orange.

ED

Not red?

PHIL

No. Orange like blood.

ED

You mean red like blood?

PHIL

No, I meant. Holy cow. I'm really kind of. I think I was thinking of a blood orange.

ED

OK. Well, my question is --

PHIL

The pills were bright orange. Like a -- Wow. Like an orange.

ED

Do you mean a blood orange, which is red inside, or a navel orange, which is orange?

PHIL

They're in my pocket.

(Ed leans down and takes the baggie out of Phil's pocket. He examines the pills through the plastic.)

ED

Hmmm. Now that I'm thinking about it. I may have gotten a little bit confused.

PHIL

That's OK, Ed.

(Ed goes back to the big desk drawer.)

ED

There's a lot of stuff in here. I think what I gave you was this thing we were trying out for blood pressure in the late 90s.

PHIL

Don't worry.

ED

It killed a chimp in a lab.

PHIL

That's OK.

ED

I'm afraid it could be fatal if we don't do something very quickly.

PHIL

Just let me hold onto your toes.

ED

I'm going to call an ambulance. I think that's the right thing to do.

Scene 18

The Schmidt Pharma examining room. MEENA sits waiting on the paper-covered table in her paper gown. Allison enters and extends her hand.

ALLISON

Allison B. Hardy, MBA.

MEENA

Meena Pierotti. Um. I have an MFA.

ALLISON

I'm told you have a question for me.

MEENA

I was just wondering what happened to Dr. Gray. The doctor who's filling in for him said she didn't know.

ALLISON

Dr. Gray is taking a little time off.

MEENA

Is he OK?

ALLISON

My understanding is that he's going to be just fine.

MEENA

He's sick?

ALLISON

He's taking some well-deserved time off.

MEENA

But you just said --

ALLISON

I've said almost nothing about anything.

MEENA

You said that you think he's going to be fine.

ALLISON

I think he's going to have a fine time during his well-deserved time off.

MEENA

Is he going to Africa?

ALLISON

I'm not at liberty to talk about --. *Africa?*

MEENA

Is he going away?

ALLISON

Why do you care?

MEENA

Just, um, I don't know. I -- like him.

ALLISON

Do you have some sort of personal friendship with Dr. Gray outside of the scope of this research project?

MEENA

Is that question part of the clinical trial?

ALLISON

Just answer it, Miss Pierotti.

MEENA

Do I have to answer it to get my SP-925 is what I'm asking?

ALLISON

Any sort of social bond between a clinical trial investigator and a clinical trial subject is a bending of protocol if not a total violation. There are very strict regulations governing clinical trials, Miss Pierotti. We pay four people just to read the FDA's rules and try to figure out what they mean. I don't know what line of work you're in, but --

MEENA

I'm in journalism. I'm an editor.

ALLISON

Well, this isn't journalism. This is profitable business. Multi-billion-dollar business. And I would ask you, if you are a friend or family member of Dr. Gray's, to disclose that information to me so that I can note it in your file at the very very least.

Meena stands.

MEENA

I think I need to go. If you see Dr. Gray, will you just tell him I -- Tell him I -- No, no message.

ALLISON

Oh, my god. You like him. You have a crush on Dr. Gray? Oh, Miss Pierotti -- Listen. Girl to girl. I'm sure Phil is cute if you like the big ears, glasses thing, but he is no one you want to get mixed up with.

MEENA

Why not?

ALLISON

Because he's head over heels in love with some hard-boiled bitch who just smashed his heart to little pieces.

MEENA

Is he suffering very badly?

ALLISON

I think it's going to be a long, long time before he's any kind of man again.

MEENA

Oh.

ALLISON

My friend Stephen in accounting has glasses and he's single. I would be more than willing to set you up with him if you would just absolutely promise --

MEENA

I won't bother Dr. Gray. I promise.

Meena leaves. Allison looks after her for a moment, then picks up her file and begins to turn the pages.

Scene 19

A hospital room. FRANCES, no longer looking resplendent, is lying in the bed hooked up to an IV. MEENA enters and sits in a chair beside her.

MEENA

Hi, Frances. How are you?

FRANCES

I have breast cancer all the way down to my uterus. Did you know that that could happen?

MEENA

No.

FRANCES

It's very interesting, dying. You learn all kinds of things about the world.

MEENA

Are you in a lot of pain?

FRANCES

Not really, no. It's amazing what they can do with drugs. The nurses here wear buttons on their blouses that say, "IF YOU'RE IN PAIN, I NEED TO KNOW." I told them I was hurting and they gave me this little button to push so that I can give myself morphine whenever I need it.

MEENA

That's good.

(Frances pushes the button.)

FRANCES

It does make me sweat, though.

(Meena takes a tissue from a box on the bedside table.)

MEENA

Can I?

(Frances nods, and Meena leans in and wipes her face for her.)

Is that a little better?

FRANCES

Yes. (A beat.) If I had bought that underwear sooner, I would have gotten that nice haircut earlier, and gone to the doctor next door, maybe while I still only had breast cancer in my breast, where it belongs. How much did those underpants cost again?

MEENA

They were two for eleven dollars.

FRANCES

They weren't cheap. But still. They were good. *(She puts her hand on top of Meena's.)* If I had a daughter, I would tell her this --

MEENA

Yes?

FRANCES

Buy things.

*(Frances closes her eyes.
Meena looks at her carefully for
a long time, then pulls the
bedsheet up to cover the body.
The room is silent. White cotton
underwear rains softly from the
sky.)*

Scene 20

Allison's office, represented by the ugly desk. Allison pours herself a drink -- it's her third or fourth -- from a bottle of Four Roses. She looks up when Phil comes in.

ALLISON

You didn't die.

PHIL

Well, I haven't died yet. My heart is still -- *(He notes the bottle and shotglass.)* What's going on with you?

ALLISON

My heart, too, Phil.

PHIL

Really? Why?

ALLISON

They're pulling the plug on Thriveon.

PHIL

But the topline data was looking --

ALLISON

There was a setback.

PHIL

What kind of setback?

ALLISON

While you were in the hospital.

PHIL

I know this study better than anyone. If there's a problem, they should let me try to solve it now that I'm back.

ALLISON

You can't solve the problem, Phil.

PHIL

Why not?

ALLISON

Because you are the problem.

PHIL

I am?

ALLISON

They know about Meena Pierotti.

PHIL

They do?

ALLISON

I almost didn't tell them, but I knew I would never forgive myself for violating the protocol.

PHIL

But how did you --

ALLISON

I read her file while you were in your coma, Phil. You drew little hearts all over her glucose chart! You wrote a poem in the explanatory notes section! I had to tell them, and now they're shutting the whole thing down.

PHIL

Isn't that sort of an extreme reaction?

ALLISON

It's mandated in section 14A of volume 7 of the 1996 addendum to the FDA's guidelines on human trials of psychotropic and neurologic drugs. Apparently. Either that, or we have to have all your study data reviewed by an independent panel, everything you touched, all the way back to the beginning. That's a 17-million-dollar expense and a year-long delay even if they don't find anything wrong. We fall behind, Merck launches their workplace depression drug first, and we're a me-too product with mediocre sales.

PHIL

I'm sorry.

ALLISON

Sorry doesn't feed the bulldog. (*She takes a slug of Four Roses.*) As a drug, alcohol is not really very effective. It

makes you feel worse and worse. I don't understand why it's such a money-maker.

PHIL

You should probably go home, don't you think?

ALLISON

This is my home, Phil. That house is a little yellow box where I take off my shoes and wait for it to be time to come back here. *(She drinks)* I'm not supposed to talk about this, but what's the difference now? Dolly was going to do the song. She was 90 percent on board. I talked to her agent myself.

PHIL

Dolly?

ALLISON

Parton. *(She sings)* "Work can make you/Happy if you let it!"

PHIL

Oh. Right.

ALLISON

Phil.

PHIL

What?

ALLISON

My heart hurts so much.

PHIL

God, Allison. I don't know --

ALLISON

I love that drug.

PHIL

I love Meena Pierotti. So I know.

ALLISON

I feel like there should be a funeral.

PHIL

I know.

ALLISON

People should come and pay their respects and acknowledge our grief.

PHIL

"Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come." That's Auden. I've been reading poetry since I fell in love.

ALLISON

Oh, *fuck* you, Phil.

PHIL

I just mean to be saying, I acknowledge your grief. (*A beat.*)

ALLISON

Nobody wants you seeing study subjects anymore. I told them I would transfer you down to patents and trademarks.

PHIL

OK.

ALLISON

But I don't want to do that.

PHIL

Thanks.

ALLISON

I want to fire you.

PHIL

Oh.

ALLISON

Then I want to sue you for the 49 million dollars Schmidt Pharma wasted on Thriveon, and the 450 dollars I wasted on the shoes I was going to wear to meet Dolly Parton. I want to break you. I want to humiliate you. I want security to come and Taser you right now and drag you out of here naked and screaming. (*She breathes.*) You broke my heart.

PHIL

I'm sorry.

ALLISON

You're fired.

PHIL

OK.

Scene 21

The Schmidt Pharma examining room, the next day. Meena in her paper gown sitting on the paper-covered table. Allison enters.

MEENA

Oh, it's you.

ALLISON

Yup.

MEENA

Do you know if anyone is coming in to examine me? I've been sitting here for like 40 minutes.

ALLISON

Sorry to waste your time.

MEENA

No, it's OK, just do you know how much longer, because --

ALLISON

You can put your clothes on, Miss Pierotti. The study's all over.

MEENA

Excuse me?

ALLISON

Schmidt Pharma is no longer in a position to offer you access to the experimental therapy SP-925. *(She hands Meena a Xeroxed sheet of paper.)* If you notice any of the symptoms on this list during the withdrawal period, please go to the nearest emergency room.

MEENA

What if I pay for the drug myself?

ALLISON

It's a study drug, Miss Pierotti. It's not approved for sale by the FDA. No study, no study drug.

MEENA

I don't understand how you can just --

ALLISON

If you find yourself in severe psychological distress, there's a suicide prevention hotline number on the bottom of that sheet.

MEENA

I want my SP-925.

ALLISON

Can't have it. Sorry.

MEENA

The people in this study suffer from a serious medical condition!

ALLISON

None of this is up to me, believe me.

MEENA

I'm going to do something!

ALLISON

I'm sorry, are you threatening a lawsuit, Miss Pierotti?

MEENA

No! Yes! I'm threatening a lawsuit! Can anybody hear me? A great big lawsuit!

ALLISON

Miss Pierotti!

MEENA

Hello? Hello out there? (*She leans out the doorway.*) I am threatening a lawsuit! With lawyers! I see you over there, and I am going to sue you and you and you, and especially you -- yes, you! -- unless you give me back my drug RIGHT NOW!

Scene 22

Phil's office, represented by the ugly desk. Phil is packing his belongings into a cardboard box. Ed comes up behind him.

ED

Phil?

PHIL

Hi, Ed.

ED

How are you?

PHIL

I'm OK, I guess.

ED

I wanted to say that I'm so sorry about --

PHIL

I didn't die.

ED

Yes. I see that. I'm glad.

PHIL

I did get fired, though.

ED

I see that. Yes. I'm sorry.

PHIL

For falling in love.

ED

Einstein said, "You cannot love a car the way you love a horse." You see, the horse brings out human feelings, whereas a car is mere machinery --

PHIL

I'm not sure what that actually has to do with --

ED

No. Sorry. Nothing probably. I'm nervous. You must be furious with me.

PHIL

Not really.

ED

Listen, by way of apology, Phil, I brought you some SP-214.

(Ed holds out a little bottle of bright red pills. Phil just looks at them.)

ED (CONT'D)

These are not from my big drawer. These are from a labeled container in the climate-controlled storeroom in the lab. *(He puts the bottle on Phil's desk.)* In case your heart still hurts.

PHIL

Thanks.

ED

You're welcome.

(Phil picks up the bottle.)

PHIL

It's been working for people?

ED

It has. It has been working.

PHIL

That's great. Congratulations.

ED

It has been working in certain patient populations to some extent.

PHIL

Right, well. Just because it's not a silver bullet doesn't mean --

ED

It does seem to cause some inflammation of the gums, some loosening of the teeth. But I wanted you to have the option. (*Pulling some crumpled papers from his briefcase.*) Here's the data. You can make up your own mind.

Scene 23

MEENA on the stepladder in the underwear section with her head in her hands. A rustling. She looks up.

MEENA

Oh, my god! What are you doing here?

SIMON

It's a store, Meena. I was --

MEENA

Nobody shops in this section!

SIMON

I was buying some socks over there, and my mother called on my cell, and when I told her where I was --

MEENA

Did you follow me here?

SIMON

No. I had to buy some socks, and my mother said while I was here, would I pick her up some --

MEENA

This is my private fucking space! What lengths does a person need to go to to get a little private fucking space?

SIMON

My mom is a size 3x, Meena. This is one of the only places --

MEENA

Get the hell out of my underwear!

SIMON

What exactly is the matter with you? Is this because I took Annabelle out to lunch?

MEENA

No.

SIMON

It was her performance review.

MEENA

You can fuck Anabelle in the supply closet for her performance review for all I care. I just need you to get out of here. Please, please, please.

SIMON

I knew this inter-office stuff was a bad idea. I can't have you acting like this in the workplace.

MEENA

We're not in the workplace! You're in my underwear!

SIMON

I don't want trouble from you, Meena. I've worked really hard to get where I am.

MEENA

Well, that's a crying shame, because where you are is really lousy.

SIMON

Don't malign my position at the magazine just because you're upset. I have a very good position. I'm VP, Editorial Director!

MEENA

I know. It breaks my heart.

SIMON

Are you crying? Don't cry on my behalf.

MEENA

I just can't pretend anymore that it's a normal, acceptable thing that people should be penned up in little cubicles their whole lives and tortured --

SIMON

I'm not being tortured. I just got a raise.

MEENA

I mean pigs -- that pigs should be penned up and tortured -- and I'm not going to eat pork anymore, Simon! Not unless it was raised organically and allowed to roam free. You know what those Greenfield employees were doing to those pigs.

(She dries her eyes. Simon takes two pairs of underwear from a nearby rack and checks the tags to make sure they're the right size for his mother.)

MEENA

You should get her ones with a little decoration. A little decoration on the waistband can be nice.

(Simon glances down at the underwear, then looks back up at Meena.)

SIMON

I think you should see a doctor. Seriously. I'm going to make a recommendation to HR that you get some kind of medical help.

(He leaves.)

MEENA

Help me, help me, help me.

(She pulls a pair of underwear off a rack and covers her face with it. She pulls off another and hugs it to her chest. She breathes.)

MEENA (Cont'd)

That's much better. Thank you.

Scene 24

A waiting area in the legal department at Schmidt Pharma: two chairs against a wall. Phil sits in one of them, with a folder in his lap. Meena comes out from an office behind him.

PHIL

Meena.

MEENA

Phil. Hi.

PHIL

What are you doing in the Schmidt Pharma legal department?

MEENA

I had a meeting with Tom Lonner.

PHIL

Is Schmidt Pharma suing you?

MEENA

No.

PHIL

Tom Lonner is ruthless, MEENA. Don't say anything, don't sign anything. You should have your own lawyer with you. Why don't you have a lawyer with you?

MEENA

It's really OK, Phil, I promise.

PHIL

Because none of this is your fault! *(He stands.)* I'll go tell them that right now.

MEENA

I don't think they think it's my fault. It's OK. Sit down.

(He sits.)

PHIL

I just want to help you however I can.

MEENA

You want to help me?

PHIL

Yeah.

MEENA

You do? Still?

PHIL

Yes.

MEENA

Can I ask you something?

(Phil leans forward.)

PHIL

Of course.

MEENA

Do you think you could get me some SP-925? There must be some left somewhere, right? Lying around the lab?

(Phil pulls back.)

PHIL

I don't work in the lab anymore.

MEENA

You don't?

PHIL

No.

MEENA

Why not?

PHIL

I got fired.

MEENA

You did?

PHIL

Because of you.

MEENA

I didn't know that.

PHIL

That's why I'm up here. Paperwork.

MEENA

But would they still let you into the lab? Like if you said you had left some files or something and then you went in and

-- (A beat.) I'm sorry. It's just, life was really good when I liked my job.

PHIL

Not for me it wasn't.

MEENA

You resented seeing me happy.

PHIL

I didn't think it was really you. You're a prose poet.

MEENA

It's not up to you to decide who I am! I liked being happy. I liked liking being a managing editor at *American Cattle and Swine* and having meetings and writing e-mails and getting things done! I really liked liking that.

PHIL

But you need to write prose poems.

MEENA

I don't want to need to write prose poems! Stop, Phil. Leave me alone. The only thing I want from you is some SP-925.

PHIL

I don't have any.

MEENA

OK. Then I'll call you sometime. When things settle down.

PHIL

You could just take an aspirin, though.

MEENA

Excuse me?

PHIL

Or, you know, a Tic-Tac. I have some Tic-Tacs right here in my pocket. Would you like a Tic-Tac, Meena? Would a Tic-Tac help, do you think?

MEENA

What are you talking about?

PHIL

You were never taking SP-925. You were in the placebo group.

MEENA

You told me I wasn't in the placebo group.

PHIL

I lied.

MEENA

You specifically -- You said somebody owed you a favor --

PHIL

Yeah, I let Frank Durand sleep on my couch when he was going through his divorce.

MEENA

And that he told you --

PHIL

He looked it up and he told me you were in the placebo group.

MEENA

Why did you lie to me?

PHIL

I wanted to help you. I wanted to be the one who could help you. And I did, Meena. In a way that's perfectly medically sound. A placebo is a legitimate medical treatment in cases where --

MEENA

I felt so much better. Why did I feel so much better about my job?

PHIL

The placebo effect is well documented.

MEENA

Maybe it was being with you.

PHIL

Did it feel like it was being with me?

MEENA

No, it felt like it was the drug.

PHIL

Right.

MEENA

But now I don't know for sure.

PHIL

The way to find out would probably be to conduct an informal experiment where you didn't have the drug anymore, but you and I were still together. Just scientifically speaking, that would be the way to tell.

(MEENA sinks into the chair next to Phil's.)

MEENA

Tom Lonner gave me \$500,000.

PHIL

Tom Lonner -- ?

MEENA

I guess I said I was going to sue Schmidt Pharma. I don't remember saying that. I remember yelling a lot, but I don't really remember what I said.

PHIL

They gave you half a million dollars?

MEENA

Yeah. I had to sign a piece of paper saying I wouldn't sue anyone. Or yell anymore. And then they gave me half a million dollars. So what do I do now?

PHIL

Holy cow, Meena. Anything!

MEENA

Are you going to Africa?

PHIL

No.

MEENA

You should.

PHIL

They didn't let me in. They said they had some reservations about my bedside manner. So. I told you. I'm not a good enough person for that kind of thing.

MEENA

I'm sorry.

PHIL

Thanks.

MEENA

Remember how you said that Douglas Bates didn't read my prose poems carefully enough to see what beautiful use I'd made of the form?

PHIL

Yes.

MEENA

I don't think they read you carefully enough.

PHIL

That's nice of you to say.

MEENA

I got fired.

PHIL

You did?

MEENA

Yeah, everything went to hell after I lost the SP-925. Or what I thought was the -- Also, Phil. I had sex with Simon, which turned out not to be a very good idea.

PHIL

When did you have sex with Simon?

MEENA

When I was taking the SP-925. Or the, you know, what I thought was the -- Near the end.

PHIL

Oh. (*He stands.*) Tom Lonner always keeps me waiting and it's rude and I think I should leave.

MEENA

It wasn't really about Simon. It was like fucking my work when I loved work. I was feeling all racy because of these pork-pricing charts we'd been working on together. The SP-925 really sexualized that kind of thing for me.

PHIL

You were on a placebo.

MEENA

But the placebo effect is well documented.

PHIL

I'm going to tell Lonner's secretary she can call me to reschedule.

MEENA

It was always in the office, the sex with Simon. I never would have done it with him in a bed.

PHIL

Meena --

MEENA

You know it's different. You remember what it was like lying in bed together. (*A beat.*) I'm sorry, Phil. (*A silence.*) I think I'm going to go to Kansas with the money. My grandparents had a house on Lake Lovewell. It's been falling apart since they died. I'm going to go and fix it up.

PHIL

And write prose poems?

MEENA

I don't know. Maybe. Yes, I guess so. Fuck! I hate my prose poems.

PHIL

I love your prose poems.

MEENA

Do you want to come with me? To Kansas? Until you can apply again for Africa?

PHIL

I can't apply again for Africa. They asked me not to.

MEENA

So will you come with me, then?

PHIL

Maybe. I don't know.

MEENA

They have an emergency room at Lake Lovewell Hospital. I took my grandmother there once. It seemed kind of run down.

PHIL

Maybe.

MEENA

You'd have to try really hard not to tell any kids they were--

PHIL

No, I know. I would try not to.

MEENA

I could remind you.

PHIL

Meena, I have this heartbreak drug--

MEENA

What?

PHIL

This heartbreak drug. I've been carrying it around, but I'm scared to take it because last time I took a drug, I almost died, and anyway I looked at Ed Morgan's data in the cohort of healthy men born after 1960 and it's garbage. There's no way it's even worth the risk of losing my teeth. So if I came to Kansas and you and I lay in bed together at night, you would really have to promise not to break my heart again.

MEENA

I would promise to try very hard.

PHIL

That's not good enough!

MEENA

But Phil --

PHIL

There's no effective treatment! I have no remedy if my heart gets broken!

MEENA

Neither do I.

PHIL

Right. Although actually there's some evidence in Ed's data that this drug might work in women. The side-effect profile for SP-214 is significantly better in women, too. So you may have options where I have none.

MEENA

But do you want to come to Kansas? Anyway?

PHIL

OK, yes. I do.

MEENA

You do?

PHIL

Yes. *(He takes the bright red pills out of his pocket.)* I would feel a lot better about it if SP-214 had shown any kind of -- but I want my heart to be the eighth wonder of the world, like that tower with the very fast elevator, and I seem to be dependent on you for that. So I think I'd better come with you. *(He hands the pills to Meena, and she looks at them.)* You should keep those. The data in women is really sort of promising.

(Meena curls her fingers around the pills.)

MEENA

Thank you, Phil.

(She kisses him. It's a long kiss. Then a blackout.)

END OF PLAY