Decoding Annie Parker

By Adam Bernstein
- Excuse me, Dr. King?
- I'm sorry.
I don't have any more time.
I'm already late for my plane.
My name's Annie Parker.
Oh.
I read your letters.
I heard you were in town.
I tried to catch
your lecture, but...
the traffic was horrible.
- I'm sorry.
- It's okay.
It was a bit dry.
My jokes didn't play very well.
- That's a pretty necklace.
- Thank you.
It was my mom's.
I had it restrung recently.
- You know, she...
- Hey, I'm sorry.
I really do have to go.
I hope we can speak again.
All the best.
Oh, you might
feel some discomfort.
Just relax.
There are great
mysteries out there.
Strange and magical,
hidden in codes.
Did you ever wonder...
if you knew those codes,
could you change your future?
- Slap.
- Snap.
That's my big sister Joan and I.
She knew things.
That's where Death hides
when he comes to the house.
He sleeps most of the time.
But you should be very quiet
when you're up here
so you don't wake him up.
Did Mommy wake him up?
Yes, she did.
She blew it, and now
we don't have a mommy anymore.
And he'll get us too
if we're not careful,
like he did Grandma
and Aunt Lil.
- Snap.
- Snap.
And this is my story.
Some girls
love to run around
Like to handle
everything they see
But my girl
has more fun around
And you know
she'd rather be with me
Me-oh my
Lucky guy is what I am
Tell you why
you'll understand
She don't fly
although she can
Some boys
like to run around
They don't think about
the things they do
But this boy
wants to settle down
And you know
he'd rather be with you
Me-oh my, lucky guy...
That's me, not as confident
as I should be,
so I would make up for it
by making bad choices.
That's my sister Joan
all grown up.
And that's Joan's
best friend Louise,
who my dad said was trouble
with a capital T,
which made Joan, who was always good, like her even more.
That's Paul, who was sweet and funny.
We fell in love and got engaged when I was only 18...
always a good idea...
and later got married because he was sweet but also because he had a great ass which was like a piece of pneumatic machinery.
Thumpity thumpity thump.
He was going to be a musician, which is hard, so until then, he was working as a pool cleaner... in Toronto.
My dad died suddenly in 1972. I guess that's where we should start.
Give heed, O Lord, to my prayer, the sound of my voice.
- You ready to go?
- I need another minute.
- I'm gonna stay here.
- Okay.
People behave oddly around the bereaved.
Hey.
They can't help themselves.
- I'm sorry.
- That's okay.
You're, like, one of the main mourners?
Excuse me? I don't mean in a bad way.
So...
what are you doing after this? After this is the wake.
Right.
But after that?
So you think your mother suffered? My wife went through 18 months of agony. To lose your mother and your father. I can't imagine how lonely that must be. Every day it was worse. That's suffering. Just to be by yourself. It must be so painful, so lonely.

She was wrong, of course. My parents were gone, but I had my sister, Joan. And we didn't know what trouble we were in. So I have to ask, Dr. King. What's the story with the clock there? The clock is marked at every 12 minutes. That's how often a woman will die of breast cancer in this country. - Well, that's...
- One in nine. Two million over the next 20 years. - Potentially, but... - Maybe your wife. Your daughter. I think what Dr. King means is that the disease, along with a potential cure, is of interest to a vast number of people... a cross section... I'm sorry, Allen. I wanna be clear about this, Dr. King. You believe that there may be a genetic link
to some breast cancers?
I do.
Even though virtually no one else believes this to be true?
That's correct.
And to prove your theory, you're going to have to examine the...
- The human genome.
- The human genome, which has...
- 100,000 genes.
- Or so, give or take a few.
And how many women are in your study?
- We began with several thousand.
- Not so many.
And you'd have to interview them all, yes?
Most. Yes.
100,000 genes, several thousand women, and no certain outcome?
Of course, we're already well into our research.
Oh, well, how far along are you?
Um...
So, 74...
No, no. Um... six more.
Uh-huh.
So, 80...
Um...
Right. Well, thank you.
Thank you so much for your time and your hospitality.
We'll be in touch. And we're obviously very interested in helping you with something so important, so...
I can't see it, Allen.
I'm sorry.
Can't see it?
We're looking at something like 20 years here.
- Yeah, but Dr. King thinks...
- Dr. King thinks.
She thinks.
Nobody else thinks.
What is it about people
like Mary-Claire King
that think the world
owes them a living, huh?
She's like that grasshopper
with his little violin.
- Pardon?
- Grasshopper.
You know, he plays
his little violin.
He says, "The world
owes me a living."
Give him a PhD, there's your
doctor friend right there.
You're comparing one of
our most brilliant geneticists
to a cartoon grasshopper?
The answer's no, Allen.
So let's leave it alone, huh?
Sorry.
He didn't like me, did he?
He... No.
- I'm sure that...
- What did he say?
He compared you
to an animated grasshopper.
Did he? Goodness.
Well, that's sort of
charming in a way.
- Did you tell him about the...
- No, I...
- He wasn't having any of it.
- We could...
Okay. I see.
So thank you...
for coming out.
- What will you do?
- What will I do?
My work.
I'll do my work.
I do
day and night
It's only right
to think about
the girl you love
And hold her tight
So happy
together
I can't see me
loving nobody but you
For all my life
When you're with me,
da-da-da
Blue, da-da
You for all my life
Imagine me and you
I do
Wow. Sweet.
Yeah, yeah. I know.
But we were young, and we had
lots of time on our hands.
That is playing with your food,
which is bad.
These are your sister
Joanie's tomatoes,
so, technically,
I'm playing with Joanie's food.
I'm playing with
Joanie's tomatoes.
- I think he has a point.
- I don't like tomatoes.
- I don't like tomatoes.
- I do have a point.
- I like tomatoes.
- No, you don't.
- You do? I didn't know that.
- Then you can have my tomatoes.
Paul, give Louise my tomatoes.
No, I don't need
any tomatoes. I just...
You guys are so cute together.
And I hear
the thumpity thump is...
- Joan!
- Louise!
The what?
The thumpity what?
- I think they probably...
- I can't believe you told her.
- I didn't know it was a secret.
- Nothing.
I told them you were good at
vegetable animals. Really good.
I like to think that
my work speaks for itself.
- So lifelike.
- I can't believe you told her.
This is gonna go down in history
as the greatest vegetable animal
- ...of all time, ever.
- I didn't tell her much.
Of all time.
Do you see this dinosaur
that I've created
in this restaurant?
- Excuse me. Look at this.
- No.
It's not a real dinosaur.
It's a triceratops
made of fruit and vegetables.
Don't be afraid.
It's gentle.
- See?
- We call him Larry.
You smell like fruit, Larry.
- You smell like cantaloupe.
- I'm sorry you're a prude.
Let's conclude.
We have a proposition,
a thesis of sorts,
that certain breast cancers
are inherited.
No one else believes this.
We do.
To prove it, we have to do
four things. Sarah?
First? Find a group of women
who have breast cancer, and from within that group, women who have relatives who have breast cancer.

Second? We then need to find a way to track the inheritance of our breast cancer gene from generation to generation.

Third? Even if we manage to map the gene to a specific chromosome, we then need to isolate and sequence it to find the mutation, which will take years. And then, uh... then we find out if it repeats in the relatives. And if it does, then that is our link.

Fourth? Fourth and, realistically, maybe the most difficult. We then need to figure out why a mutation in a single gene could lead to breast cancer in so many women.

Wonderful.

See you first thing.

- Hey.
- Why are you playing in the van? The acoustics in here are incredible.
- Slow day, then?
- Strange as it may seem, no one wants their pool service this time of year. And look at me. I'm a Canadian pool man. I'm like one of those oxy... oxy...

- Morons.
- Morons.
Yes.
I'm gonna go inside.
Oh.
Okay. Well...
I was kind of thinking
maybe you should
hang out here for a bit.
Sha-la-la-la-la
Live for today
Sha-la-la-la-la
Live for today...
Yeah, yeah. I know.
But we were young,
and we had lots of time
on our hands.
Thumpity thumpity thump.
Gee.
Paul?
Paul?
What are you doing?
Nothing. Just,
you know, practicing.
- You okay?
- Yeah.
Paul!
- Paul!
- What?
- Joanie!
- Oh!
- Joanie!
- What's going on?
- She's pregnant.
- Paul.
- No, I mean, you know...
- Oh, my God! Honey!
- Okay.
- Shit!
He's... He's good-looking.
For a baby, you know.
In an ugly kind of way.
He's got bass player hands.
I mean, I'm not saying that,
you know, babies are ugly.
They just got that kind of ugly baby thing going.
You need to borrow
Like the platforms
For no one can fill
All of those needs
That you won't let show
- You just call on me, sister
- Hey.
- When you need a hand
- Joanie. Hey.
After you had your baby,
did you, like,
do it less?
Honey, have you and Paul been...
It's really bad.
We're down to, like...
four times a week now.
Are you serious?
- That's actually quite a lot, Annie.
- It is?
Yeah.
Sorry.
Don't you dare!
No. No.
- Joanie, what's wrong?
- Are you okay?
- You all right?
- I'm sorry. It's just I...
Excuse me.
Joan?
I'm sorry.
Did I hurt you?
Oh, come on, Annie.
I make you cry, remember?
What is it?
Um...
Well, it might not be as bad as it sounds.
Joan?
I found a lump
in my breast.
But you're gonna
be all right. Okay? Yeah?
You're gonna be just fine.
- Snap.
- Snap.
- I'm gonna be fine.
- Yeah. Yeah.
I love you.
I love you, honey.
- My big sister.
- That's right.
Four times a week.
Really?
Do you remember the man
in the room upstairs?
It wasn't a man, it was death.
Shh!
What, you think
if we don't say it,
it'll go away?
Okay, I'll whisper.
Did you ever go in there?
Just once.
Right before...
No. I never did.
Joanie! It's not funny.
It's so not funny.
- I can't stop thinking about it.
- Death?
Shh!
Yeah.
And...
Cancer?
Yeah.
It's stalking us.
Oh, you mean like that guy
you met at the Leafs game
who kept calling you and
sending you chocolate hearts,
and then he parked
outside our house,
and Dad caught him
jerking off into Hockey News?
Yeah.
Like him.
Because I'm scared.
I'm really, really scared that it's inside of us, it's in our family.
Sweetie... that's not true.
I'm sorry.
Don't be.
I like it when you're worried.
I like it when you have lots of problems.
It's gonna be really hard without Joanie.
I know.
- I know.
- Come here.
Come here. Come here.
Well, at least she went quick.
Not like my wife.
Boy, she took her time, didn't she?
I mean, it was endless suffering.
Endless.
My God.
First your mother, then your father.
Now... poor Joan.
You again? Cool.
You know, a lot of women can't be hot and in mourning at the same time, but you... you pull it off.
I don't mean any disrespect, but when you think about it, isn't sex our way of saying "fuck you" to death?
How are you still working here?
The thing was, I started thinking about it all the time... my family and death.
Watching me, waiting, hiding in a closet or parked outside the house,
the Hockey News.
Oh, you might feel
some discomfort.
Beautiful day today.
Though I'm stuck in here,
it looked lovely
through the window.
And I spoke to your husband.
He explained
you were very worried.
He said I was
feeling myself up, right?
Checking, yes.
Perfectly understandable
once in a while.
He said once in a while?
Yeah.
Oh, yeah. Keep talking.
Oh, keep talking.
You know, there is a simple check
you can do for testicular cancer.
I heard about this.
Baby, do you want me
to check you now
while I'm down there?
- Come on.
- Annie. Annie.
What? Oh, what?
He mentioned that perhaps
you were overly concerned.
I know your family history.
It's very sad.
But that doesn't mean
that you're going to get cancer.
Look, Anne.
White coat, stethoscope.
You can trust me.
No more worrying, okay?
- Okay.
- Good.
That's my girl.
I don't know about genetics.
I know about computers.
You see, I make these cards,
and then I load them into the front of the computer, along with everyone else's, and then, usually the next day sometime, depending on how many other people are using the computer, maybe a few days later, I get this printout. And there you go. And for the amount of data we're going to have, how fast? The university's mainframe computer weighs two and a half tons. It's capable of storing 700 kilobytes of data. I'm sorry. How long? Once we get the data, make a program and then load it... Ten years? Will? - Yeah? - Honey. Come on. Get up. I'm up. No, no, no. If you're not out of bed, you're not up. Hey. - You're not gonna have breakfast? - Uh, I can't. Work. Got a new client. They called this morning. - Kiss? - I'm already late, Annie. What? Hey, I'm a musician, okay? It's a look. Okay. When I grow up, I'm gonna be a pool man, like Dad. Do you, sweetie? Oh, that's so nice.
Well, maybe when you're a little older, we'll talk about it, okay? Mommy's gonna go take a shower. Mommy loves you, okay? Have a great day.
All right.
Anne...
your biopsy shows that you have carcinoma of the left breast.
Phew.
And I thought it was gonna be really bad news. Well, it's quite advanced, I'm afraid.
But what I recommend would be surgery. - Surgery?
- Mm-hmm.
What's known as a modified radical mastectomy.
Oh, God.
I'm sorry, Anne.
The surgery would require, I'm afraid, the removal of the entire breast, as well as most of your underarm lymph nodes.
Oh, God.
Oh, God. William. I'm scared.
I don't wanna be scared. I don't want to suffer. - I know. I know.
- I don't want to suffer. I don't want to die.
Oh, God.
Hey.
How you doing? Hey, you want an ice chip?
Oh.
Can I have one?
This is really good ice.
Oh, my God.
Oh, my God. Wow.
It's really good.
Ow. It hurts.
Don't make me laugh.
What? Oh, don't... Oh.
It really hurts.
- And how are we feeling today?
- Not too good.
- Oh?
- I had a breast removed.
Of course.
What I meant...
I'm feeling all right, considering.
Good.
But, you know, I just knew
this was gonna happen.
It happened to my mom,
happened to my sister,
and it happened to my grandma...
Many women feel that way and,
yes, your family did have
a bit of bad luck, but there
are many complex factors...
- It's not bad luck.
- There's some evidence
that certain people
have a predisposition
based on diet
or environmental factors...
Excuse me a minute.
What are you doing?
Well, there's just some interesting
current research that suggests...
Look, rejection of orthodoxy
always seems within the purview
of the young doctor.
I don't know what my age
has to do with that.
However, to mislead
is irresponsible.
There have always been articles.
There always will be articles.
But because some theory is new
doesn't make it right.
Proof makes it right.
And I've seen no recent evidence
concerning alternative
treatment for cancer
which would lead me to alter
the views I've acquired
over 40 years
of practicing medicine.
- I understand.
- Good.
Good.
Hey, if you wanna
talk some more,
you can just give me a call.
- Oh, thanks a lot, Dr...
- Doctor!
Sean is fine.
- Anne, right?
- Annie.
Annie.
Thanks.
Let me tell you,
I'm gonna be the best nurse
you have ever had.
And I think I already am,
because you can't make out
with your other nurses.
Mommy was in the hospital
because Mommy has cancer.
- Didn't Aunt Joan have cancer?
- Yeah, she did, sweetie.
But she died.
Yeah, she did.
- Are you gonna die?
- Hey, no.
I promise you.
You are not gonna lose
your mommy to cancer.
But how do you know?
Because I just know.
I'm not gonna die.
Wait.
I wanna come with you.
- I'm not going anywhere.
- You're going to work.
That's not anywhere.
Aren't you cleaning Louise and Steve's pool today?
I wanna come with you.
Come on. It'll be fun.
Please?
Come on, then.
- Let's get in.
- Yeah, right.
I'm serious.
Uh, we're not getting in.
Why not?
Because I don't want to,
and because I'm a pool man,
and pool men don't get
into people's pools.
Is that, like, the pool man's code of ethics or something?
Why is the water green?
Because Louise's dumbfuck husband
only has me come once a month.
No. No, I mean, really,
why is it green?
Oh, that's algae.
It's there because the pH
balance of the pool is off.
It can't be too acid or too base.
It needs to be around 7.5,
the same pH as human tears.
Aw.
See, if you, uh...
If you don't put chlorine in,
you get phosphates,
and algae feeds on phosphate.
But if you put chlorine in,
the algae will die.
But you can't be a dumbfuck
and only have your pool man
come once a month.
Are you gonna keep wearing eye makeup?
Yeah, I am.
I'm gonna get something to drink.
- You want something?
- Nah.
I'll stay here.
I didn't know if the pool was green because Paul was a bad pool man or because Louise's husband was a dumbfuck.
But it made me think.
"Breast cancer. See cancer."
Okay.
"Cancer. Any malignant growth or tumor caused by abnormal uncontrolled cell divisions."
William?
Willy, Mommy needs the bathroom. Number one or number two?
Mommy's gonna buy you a new backpack.
Okay?
Hi. Sorry. I'm, uh...
- Where are you off to?
- Detroit.
Gotta run.
Hope you're well.
I am fine.
What about our coffee?
You're late.
- What's going on?
- Allen, you got here too late.
- You're late.
- I know, I know. I'm late, I'm late.
We have news.
We've identified a dozen high-risk families... 50-some cancer cases
between them.
- Good. And so?
- So?
So now we can begin to look
for correlations in earnest.
We need to interview them,
get blood samples,
extract the DNA, and then
begin to look for markers.
- Okay. "Markers"?
- Genetic markers.
We can track them
through the families,
like a signpost on a highway.
Say you have two stretches
of road in the desert...
And they look exactly the same.
But if you pass signposts,
you can measure the intervals...
And you can identify
the different stretches of road.
Even if they look...
And if those markers
are next to something
like the breast cancer gene,
it can be identified.
What is it with
the magazine selection
in doctors' offices?
Hello.
Field & Stream?
Do a lot of your patients
show up wearing camouflage bibs,
a bag full of decoys,
and making duck calls?
I don't know, ma'am.
I would think that you would
notice something like that.
Like I said, I don't know.
Quack.
Quack.
Quack quack.
Quack.
Nice office.
It's not mine.
Dr. Benton takes long lunches.
I figure it's not
hurting anybody.
It was either here
or the cafeteria,
and the floors are
much stickier there.
Are you sure you won't
get into any trouble?
I'm a doctor.
I can't get in trouble.
What can I tell you?
I'm mostly lab-based,
but I can tell you
what I know.
Why do I have cancer?
That's a big question.
There's no one answer.
So many factors involved.
I had a feeling
that you might say that.
You know, I had a teacher
once who told me
what the ideal breast cancer
patient would be.
He said the person
with the highest risk
would be a nun
living in a cold climate,
who was overweight, who ate red meat,
who was breast fed,
whose mother and sister
had premenopausal breast cancer,
and who was Ashkenazi Jewish.
Not a great start,
but he gave me a pile of books,
and I promised to read them.
Doesn't make any sense.
Oh, shit!
Good, good! Ohh!
...the puck has
cleared it behind...
You know, it's been hard
for him, too, with everything.
It's not like he gets
any attention.
You're right, you know?
I'm being selfish.
No. That's not
what I meant.
You're right.
Maybe I am.
You know, I feel sorry for Paul.
I do, and I...
I feel sorry for me, too, but...
You know what I feel
most of all?
What?
I just wanna be touched.
Come here.
Come on.
Come here. Come here.
Okay.
So this is something
we need to look at.
Don't mind me.
So does that mean I have to eat
nothing but grapefruit
or something?
No, no.
It's nothing that severe.
Although studies have shown that
foods high in fat,
fried foods...
- Japanese women.
- Pardon me?
They eat very little red meat,
and they have a much lower rate
of breast cancer
than North American women.
Is that so?
Yeah.
- So did your family go out...
- Three different tests.
One was over ten years.
It's fairly conclusive.
Anyway, I'm gonna get going.
— So...
— We can't know anything.
There's so many
possible factors.
It could be diet.
It could be toxins in the home.
One of a thousand viruses
known or unknown.
They know the groups that
have the highest incidents.
They don't know the elements
common to those groups.
We don't know
what happened to your family.
We may never know.
My mom used to wrap
hot dogs in bacon,
and they deep-fried them.
— What's this?
— It's dinner.
Where's the rest of it?
That's it.
It's a salad.
It's got tomatoes in it.
I hate tomatoes.
You can pick them out.
Is everything okay?
Yeah. Yeah.
You know what?
Um, I'm gonna go
come us some burgers.
— You want one?
— Yeah!
But no tomatoes
and no oniony things.
No tomatoes
and no oniony things.
Okay. You want one?
Why are we looking
at Mormons and Jews?
Mormons tend to have
very large families,
which makes them
excellent genetic resources.
Plus the Church of Latter Day Saints believes everyone related to the Mormons has to be baptized to be saved later. So, what, there's carcinogens in the baptismal water they're using?

No. But they keep incredibly detailed records of their familial ties. A researcher before us found 30 cases of breast cancer in one family. Called the Kindred 107. Ashkenazi Jews are important, Tom, because they have an extraordinarily high rate of breast cancer. In New York, it's an epidemic. Okay. But... why couldn't it be the water or the air? If that was true, it would be true of all women in the area. Breathing the same air, drinking the same water.
- But it's not.
- So it's something in them. In their genes.
You're early. Dr. Gold's not here. So how did you know all that stuff the other day? What stuff? The medical stuff. I used to be a nurse.
- You used to be a nurse?
- Yep.
- What happened?
- What do you mean, "what happened"?
You don't think I enjoy this? Yes?
Okay.
Mr. Elson, you can
take your wife through
to the back with the nurse.
Seriously, what happened?
Uh...
I used to work
in the oncology ward.
But it was too much,
so I quit.
You're right. Cancer patients
are a pain in the ass.
- Sorry.
- Hello.
Yes, Doctor, the tests
will be ready this afternoon.
No, Doctor.
I would've told you.
Okay. Bye-bye.
- You're right.
- About what?
You're all a pain in the ass.
That's true.
- He likes you, you know.
- Who?
Dr. Gold?
Yeah, him.
- No.
- Yes, he does.
I'm married.
Of course.
What was I thinking?
Annie.
Hey. Hi.
Oh. Oh.
I could've gotten cancer
from my mom?
Like passed down?
Uh, there's no evidence
that you can get it passed down.
All cancer is
genetic in the end,
just not necessarily
in the beginning.
I don't understand.
When you get cancer,
your DNA gets messed up,
and certain genes
can cause your cells
to replicate wildly.
But something
has to mess the DNA up
in the first place, right?
Right.
Well, then, what messes it up?
We don't know, really.
I really didn't mean
to upset you again.
It's not you. It's me.
It's the chemo, I think.
You know, I even cried
at the Leafs game
with Paul last night.
- You did?
- Yeah.
It was a tie,
but the players all looked so sad.
Hey, An...
Hey, hon.
Hon.
Annie...
Why?
Why? We've got doctors.
The chemo...
is going well...
you know?
I've gotta
do something. I...
Annie...
Hey, why can't you
just leave it alone?
I really didn't know.
I think that part
more than anything
drove him crazy.
Guys want reasons.
I should've made one up.
I don't know, Annie.
Maybe you need to give him time. I've given him time. Maybe it has something to do with the...
- You know. The...
- What?
I don't know.
All the research. It's a tiny, tiny bit obsessive. Obsessive? How?
You know, like...
wacko obsessive.
Wacko obsessive. It's not the bad kind, then. It's not too late to reach out to him and to let him know how you feel.
What, like a blow job? Yeah, that's exactly what I mean.
Have you guys heard of Mary-Claire King?
She used dental genetics to identify children of parents murdered by the junta in Argentina. But she is also doing some very interesting work on the genetics of breast cancer.
So I wrote to Dr. King, and I wrote to her again, and I wrote a third and a fourth time. I told her my story, my family's story. Books were hard for me, so I started making models so I could understand. Cells, genes, chromosomes, and a helix. I'm going to the bar! What?
I'm going to the effing bar because this is an effing building site! I can't hear you! I don't fucking believe this. I'm going out! Hey, watch the rest of the game. Remember the score. Paul, would you put William to bed? We didn't discover much in that first year, but, oddly, that mattered less and less. Something mysterious was taking hold of me. I didn't know what it was then. That would come later. And then, some news. Keep having you in to do screenings every six months or so just as a precautionary measure, but I would say that cancer is out of your life. You have reason to celebrate. Done? I'm done with chemo? You're done with chemo. Hey. Hey. What is this? Uh, Louise is watching William. Okay. Um, I... I wish you had told me. - Why? - 'Cause I have plans. - You have plans? - Yeah. - What plans? - Just... You know, just plans. I... Can you just stay and eat a little bit
before you go at least?
Yeah. Yeah.
Great.
Okay.
Can you change them?
- What?
- Your plans.
I kind of, uh...
I made this dinner
special for us, you know?
Thank you.
I know you went to...
a lot of trouble,
and it looks great.
- I just...
- No, no.
There's no trouble,
Paul, you know?
I'm married.
Married people do nice things
for each other.
I know.
They do things together...
like make love.
Annie, please, just...
We can have sex.
Don't do this.
Don't you love me anymore?
Annie, I do.
Hey, I want to.
You want to?
No, I... I do.
Well, then, I don't understand
what the problem is.
Why can't you make love
to me anymore?
Look, I just... I just...
I just can't.
- You can't?
- Okay? I can't.
Oh, is it because
I only have one breast?
- Is that what it is?
- Oh, my God, Annie.
Why don't you just, like, only put it up halfway?
Maybe you could get half-erect.
- Maybe you could close one eye.
- Annie, stop it!
- No, I will not stop it!
- Stop it! Stop!
I can't touch you!
Okay? I can't touch you!
Annie...
I can't even look at you, at your body.
I mean, I hate that...
that hole, that scar.
I'm sorry. I just...
Paul...
Knudson's two-hit theory?
Normal cells have two undamaged chromosomes...
- ...one from the mom...
- And one from the dad.
Right. Now, let's say there is some sort of hereditary predisposition to cancer.
All that means is that one of the genes is damaged.
I still haven't heard from Dr. King.
I don't think you're the only person to write to her, Annie.
In the last five years, the Broad Institute, the Genome Institute at Washington University, and the Baylor College of Medicine...
And I would go through life with this one bad gene, and everything's still okay, because the other gene
is fine, right?
And then one of these
factors comes along, like those...
All that would mean is that they
would have to damage the other gene?
Right. And then the cell is
damaged enough that it can mutate.
Which could be cancer.
Could be. Can be.
It's, uh...
It's all too much.
Is this a doctorly hug?
I should leave.
He was a lovely man
and a friend.
See you later.
But love is like DNA.
We can't know
its predispositions.
It wasn't to be.
For me, anyway.
- Where's Dad?
- I don't know, sweetie.
Maybe he went to work early.
- Where's Dad?
- Come on. Eat your oatmeal.
Not this. Please. Come on.
I'm not gonna eat till
you tell me where Dad is.
- Eat your oatmeal.
- Where's Dad?
- Eat your oatmeal.
- I don't want to.
I said eat your
goddamn oatmeal now!
Oh, God. William!
Honey, I'm sorry.
William!
William, no.
These are Mommy's things.
William, no. Please don't.
Oh, sweetie, I'm sorry.
Come here. Come here.
Sweetie, come on. Come on.
Come on.
Hey, come on. I'm sorry.
Hey, sweetie, come on.
Come here.
God, I'm sorry.
I will never, ever
talk to you like that again.
- Okay? I'm so sorry.
- I'm sorry.
Hey, you don't need to be sorry.
They're Mommy's silly things.
Louise? Louise!
Sweetie?
Louise?
Stop!
Oh shit.
- Divorced?
- Yes, sweetie.
Mommy and Daddy are gonna
live in different houses,
but that doesn't mean we don't
love you very, very much.
This way,
you'll have two houses.
I don't want two houses.
I want us all together in one house.
- So does Dad.
- Please, Paul, don't do that.
What? I'm telling the truth.
- I knew this was your fault.
- No, it's not my fault, honey.
Paul?
Maybe if you didn't
spend all your time
on this DNA shit.
At least there's
a reason for that.
Reason? Really? What reason?
Tell me the reason.
- Because I have to know.
- Are you fucking joking?
- Language.
- You have a high school education, Annie.
You don't know anything.
You're not gonna find out anything.
- Is that why you won't touch me?
- Oh, here we go.
Oh, so you can say...
you can say that.
but I fucking
can't say "fucking"?
Do you wanna tell him
the real truth?
- Tell him about Louise?
- Oh, my God.
- What about Aunt Louise?
- Nothing, William.
It's nothing.
Tell you what, Annie.
I am sorry.
I tried. I tried.
- I just couldn't.
- Get out.
- What?
- Get out.
I'll tell you what, Annie.
At least she was there for me.
I'm so sorry.
What's going on?
- Come on.
- Just listen.
These four women
have breast cancer.
What they've found are certain,
let's call them odd proteins,
that have unique configurations
in the parent gene.
Let's say these are them.
We can identify them
by their unique,
say, shape.
Now, each parent donates
a gene to the child,
and the genes get
all mixed up, right?
But look. It's not
completely arbitrary.
- We have news.
- Genetic markers.
- We can track them through their families.
- And what we can call linkage.
Do you see it?
We now know that even though our genes get all mixed up when we're conceived, certain markers remain.
- Markers?
- Genetic markers.
We can track them through the families.
It's like a signpost on a highway.
Say you have two stretches of road in the desert.
- And they look exactly the same.
- Right.
But if you pass signposts, you can measure the intervals. And you can identify the different stretches of road. Even if they look exactly the same.
And if those markers are next to something, like the breast cancer gene, it can be identified.
We now know that even though our genes get all mixed up when we're conceived, certain markers remain.
If we can find these markers, we're in striking distance of finding our gene.
Yes!
Kim kept encouraging me to go out.
I think she wanted me to meet someone.
Is your wife gonna join you this evening?
I, um...
I am no longer married.
Mm-hmm.
- So is your girlfriend coming later?
- Really?
That's really none of your business.
Mm-hmm.
Hey, is your daddy's girlfriend coming tonight?
Dad doesn't have a girlfriend.
At a peewee hockey game,
- ...I met Marshall.
- I'm sorry about my friend.
I'm Marshall.
- I'm Annie.
- Hi.
Only a Canadian girl meets a man at a peewee hockey game.
Christmastime is almost here again
People come from far and near again
Isn't Christmastime a wonderful thing?
Deck the halls and hang the mistletoe
Kiss the ones you love and let 'em know
Isn't Christmastime a wonderful thing?
- Dad!
- Hiya, sport!
Hi, Paul.
Hi.
Yeah.
- How are you?
- Hi.
You look great.
Really, really happy.
- You okay?
- Yeah.
Doing all right.
Been a little sick.
So, um, Marshall.
He's a good man.
- Yeah, he is.
- Yeah.
- You okay?
- Okay.
Um, I'm gonna go
get some... some food.
Come on, sport.
Tom, you open up the betting.
All right. Okay.
Another bad hand,
but what the heck?
Fold. Fold.
Fold. Fold. Fold.
Annie. Annie.
- Hey!
- I wanted to...
I'm smiling at you,
but you can fuck off.
This is fun.
Ah.
- Good to see you guys.
- You too, man.
- I'd love to hear that conversation.
- Oh, no.
You invited them.
Yeah, but I didn't think
they'd interact.
- Merry Christmas.
- Merry Christmas.
Well, I'll be back.
- Great.
- Okay. Yeah. We're...
Is it weird?
Did it get weird?
- Merry Christmas, Marshall.
- Merry Christmas.
Here's to her.
To Annie.
Marshall?
I'm up here, hon.
Marshall?
I'm in here.
I, uh...
I found the key.
I thought I'd...
clean out this room.
We could use it
as a guest room or, uh...
- No, you didn't.
- ...a study.
Keep your helixes in here.
- Did Mommy wake him up?
- Yes, she did.
No. You let him out.
You let him out.
- Who?
- You...
There's no one here.
- It's just a room.
- You can't go in that room.
- You let him out.
- Honey, no.
It's just a...
Seriously, I wouldn't
believe this either,
except it happened.
Louise called me
and told me that Paul was ill.
Hey, um...
Doctor says colorectal cancer.
Hey, um...
I was looking through these,
and, uh...
thought you might
wanna see them.
You gonna be okay with William?
By yourself, I mean?
Paul...
Imagine me and you
I do
Think about you
day and night
Day and night
It's only right
to think about
the girl you love
and hold her tight
So happy together
What did you ever see in me?
I loved the careless,
boundless, wildness of you.
Then what happened?
You were boundless and careless.
Paul.
Hey, listen.
I want you
to do something for me.
What is that?
I want you to believe.
Believe in what?
Believe in anything.
Come on, Annie.
Come on.
It worked for me.
Uh, no offense, but...
believing that there's some
miracle cure out there
that no one knows about...
You gotta believe in something.
I do.
I do believe
in something, Annie.
I believe in cancer.
And you know what else
I believe in, Annie?
I believe that
I am going to die.
Okay.
I'm gonna go now, okay, sweetie?
Just like he said he would,
Paul died.
I realized then
that was the difference,
and that was the answer
to the question
everyone was always asking me.
Paul didn't believe
in anything in the end.
I did.
I believed in my genes
and chromosomes.
I believed in my helix,
and I believed in
predispositions.
Faith.
It may not seem like faith,
not as you might think it,
but it is.
And maybe those who say
faith sustains us
are right.
And maybe it doesn't matter
what we have faith in
as long as
it's faith in something,
like the future.
My brother died of lung cancer,
uh, and colon cancer.
I had never seen cancer
until I saw colon cancer, okay?
Blood coming out of everywhere,
and it was just...
I don't know how you can go on.
I don't think I could.
It's agony.
It's the shit I deal with.
I know what it's like.
Yeah. I'm telling you,
it was the same guy.
Either one or both
of the parents were...
Or they both
had the receptive...
One of the parents had some...
Yeah. It seemed random.
You okay, Annie?
Oh...
I'm afraid I don't
have good news for you.
We found malignant tumors
on both your ovaries,
with involvement
of the fallopian tubes
and elsewhere in your abdomen.
Do you understand
what I just said?
Now, while you do
have an advanced form
of ovarian cancer,
we removed everything
that we found.
Anything left
is potentially curable
with chemotherapy.
Advanced?
Stage three.
You have a long,
hard fight ahead of you.
I'm 37.
Oh, that's very young.
You rest, and we'll talk later,
all right?
All right. I've reviewed
your pathology reports,
and it's good
you had the surgery.
Please, Doctor.
You know I prefer bad news.
Cheers me up.
With what we're seeing
on your path reports,
I have to tell you,
this type of cancer
responds best
to a combination
of chemotherapy drugs.
We'd like you
to receive cisplatin
and cyclophosphamide.
Maybe ten or twelve treatments.
How long?
Altogether, a year or so.
I've been here before.
I know you have.
So what do you say?
Damn, you're hot.
I need some water.
One breast,
no hair.
They all want you, but they can't have you.
Just hold on a minute.
Sorry.
I'm gonna be sick.
I'm gonna be sick.
I'm gonna be sick.
Oh!
You are so hot, baby.
One breast, no hair.
What's weird is that you want your mom.
I just want my mommy.
- You need the nurse?
- I'm in too much pain.
- You need the nurse?
- I want... I'm in too much pain.
Okay. Are you comfortable?
No. I'm hot. Let me take...
I'll take 'em off.
They all want you, but they can't have you.
- It hurts me.
- I know, sweetie.
It really hurts.
No.
No, they can't.
Dr. King, are you all right?
- Dr. King, are you...
- Maybe there's something acting on these genes.
Maybe it's not happening independently or spontaneously.
Controlling genes.
Squeeze one more time for me.
Okay. Okay.
Well, let's try the other arm, hmm?
Sorry, Annie.
This happens when you've had too much chemo.
The veins get scarred
and are hard to use.
Like a junkie.
Well, next time,
I'll put in a portacath.
That'll last several sessions.
Okay.
Yeah? I think
we've found one.
- Yay.
- Right there.
- Hey.
- Wow.
Cancer haute couture.
Ta-da!
Not a good look, then?
It's... a look.
Thanks, Brian.
Thank you.
- They're beautiful.
- You are.
- What's going on?
- Excellent question.
Let me show you what's going on.
Maybe you can
figure it out for us.
Look around you.
What do you see?
A lot of paper.
Each paper represents
parts of chromosomes
that we suspect may be active
in the cancer
of our test patients.
In other words,
these areas are variants...
mutations in the DNA.
- Our 350... all cancer sufferers.
- Why are there so many?
Because it represents
many generations.
- See these red dots?
- Yeah.
Wherever they appear is
an indication of a mutation.
Black lines... morbidity, death. So there's a lot of mutation? Yeah. Everyone's DNA has a certain amount of variation. What we're looking for is a mutation the same place on the same chromosome. Mary-Claire, if we're looking for patients who have - ...a predisposition to breast cancer... - Yes. That would suggest that they were born with a mutated gene. - Yes. - But most cancers occur later in life, when the telomeres are reduced in size. Right. So if we concentrate on women who have early-onset cancer, we'd be much more likely to find women who have a predisposition. We were presuming that all breast cancers were caused by the same thing. Yes, but if they have similar tumors but different causes... And we just look at women with early-onset cancer... Do it. Average age, 28. - 40. - 35. Where is it? It's here. And here. We found our gene. That's Mary-Claire King. There's a link. There's a link.
You understand what I'm saying?
There's a genetic link
between mothers and daughters
and sisters
who have had breast cancer.
See, there's a predisposition.
A kind of mutation.
There's a link.
You were right.
Excuse me.
Hello. Hi.
Hey, I heard the good news.
Allen, she's in Cincinnati.
Cincinnati?
They could hardly believe it.
Yeah, well,
they believe her now, huh?
They do. Anybody who
ever doubted us.
Well, her. She did it.
- A single gene.
- Pretty much.
Incredible. So, what now?
Oh, there's still
lots to be done.
We have to pinpoint the
precise gene and sequence it.
Yeah, well, that's
where the money is.
- The money?
- Yeah. Lots and lots and lots of money.
You sequence the gene,
and then you patent it.
It's yours.
Do me a favor, will you?
Say good-bye
to Dr. King for me...
and, uh...
you know, congrats and all that.
She is something.
- Excuse me, Dr. King?
- I'm sorry.
I don't have any more time.
I'm already late for my plane.
My name's Annie Parker.
Thanks.
Oh.
I read your letters.
I heard you were in town.
I tried to catch your lecture,
but the traffic was horrible.
- I'm sorry.
- It's okay.
It was a bit dry.
My jokes didn't play very well.
- So I...
- I've wanted to meet you.
I wanted to meet you, too.
So I heard they patented
our gene... your gene.
That's right. They have.
So does that mean
we get a discount on it
in the future if we need it,
like a Sears card?
It's not a cure, of course.
No. Yeah. I heard,
but it's a start.
That's right. It's a start.
- That's a pretty necklace.
- Thank you.
It was my mom's.
I had it restrung recently.
- You know, she...
- Hey, I'm sorry.
I really do have to go.
I hope we can speak again.
All the best.
You are a remarkable woman,
Anne Parker.
I'm sorry... so sorry
I couldn't do more.
You did so much.
So very much.
Oh, the gentlemen
are talking
And the midnight moon
is on the riverside
They're drinking up
and walking
And it is time
for me to slide
I live
in another world
where life and death
are memorized
Where the earth is strung
with lover's pearls
and all I see
are dark eyes
I can't control
What life is now
What will roll
over me
It's not freedom
But it set you free
So see yourself
as free
As I'm falling
from your reach
Don't forget
Don't regret
Don't dwell
on the past
Nothing left
Nothing sacred
Nothing pure
is ever gonna last
You should turn away from me
As I drift away from you
If time has spent
and time
has come
to let me go
and you
to run
Then let me leave
and let me go
So see yourself
as free
As I'm falling
from your reach
Don't forget
Don't regret
Don't dwell
On the past
Nothing left
Nothing sacred
Nothing pure
is ever gonna last
You should turn away from me
as I drift away from you
Ooh...
Ooh...
Don't forget
Don't regret
Don't you dwell
on the past
Nothing left
Nothing sacred
Nothing pure
is ever gonna last
You should turn away from me
as I drift away from you