

Making it Personal Play script

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About Making it Personal

Making it Personal was an innovative public and community engagement with research project undertaken at the University of Oxford in 2025. Theatre offers a unique platform to “set the scene” on an emotional and personal level, highlighting how individuals process risk and medical information—often in ways that differ significantly from clinical perspectives. Making it Personal utilised theatre to engage the public with genetics research and spark conversation around how a couple might receive and process a de novo (new) genetic diagnosis in their child and approach the question: *could it happen again?*

Over several months (January – April 2025), Drs. Alison Kay and Minna Jeffery collaborated with a co-production panel of genetics practitioners and people with lived experience of genetic diagnosis to produce a play script for live performance. The resulting staged reading took place on 17 May 2025 at the MOLT Theatre, St Anne’s College, with actors Henry Charnock and Laura Hopwood portraying the roles of *Sam* and *Jess*. An interactive workshop followed, featuring improvisations that explored alternative script scenarios and sparked vibrant discussions about the social implications of genetic information. Audience feedback reflected how powerful and different it felt to learn about research through live performance—many remarked on how emotionally resonant and thought-provoking the experience was. The recording of the staged reading is available to view on the [YouTube channel](#) of the Centre for Personalised Medicine.

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Making it Personal

Jess, mother

Sam, father

Jess and Sam's two-year-old child, Evie, has a genetic condition (we leave this unnamed in the play). They've just had a virtual appointment with their local Genetics service to discuss the outcome of testing – a de novo* (new) genetic variant has been found in Evie's results. We follow Jess and Sam through their day as they try to make sense of Evie's diagnosis and whether it could happen again in a future pregnancy.

* A de novo cause means that it could have spontaneously occurred in Evie but there is a small chance this genetic change first occurred in Jess or Sam and is in some of Jess's eggs or some of Sam's sperm. If this was the case, it could happen again.

SCENE ONE: CAR

Jess and Sam are in the car on the way to the supermarket. They have just had an online appointment with a genetic counsellor to discuss the outcome of testing they undertook to determine the origin of their child's genetic condition. By now they are pretty well-versed in difficult appointments, but it never really gets any easier. It is early afternoon on a Wednesday in May and they both had to take time off work for this. Inevitably, the weather is miserable, and the traffic is inexplicably bad for this time of day. Jess is driving. Evie, their little daughter, is sleeping in the back.

A tense silence.

Jess. Oh god, I forgot the shopping list –

Sam. Don't worry/

Jess. I can just picture it there on the counter – I remember putting it there thinking 'this is a helpful place to put it because I'll see it on the way out so I won't forget it'

Sam. No it's fine, I/

Jess. I think I'll have to turn around – there's no point going without it – I'll get sucked into buying all sorts of things we don't need and nothing helpful – ugh! Just when we'd got Evie to sleep!

Sam. Jess! I've got it! I saw it! It's here!

Jess. You what?

Sam. I saw it on the counter and picked it up (*brandishes shopping list*)

Jess. Oh! Phew. Thanks.

Sam. (*Twisting round to address Evie – who is still asleep – and rolling his eyes.*) What's Mummy like, eh?



Silence again.

Sam. So?

Jess. What?

Sam. Doooo you want to talk about it?

Jess. Mm?

Sam. Do you want to talk about what they said? Just now? The appointment? You were there, if I recall correctly

Jess. Right right yeah no yeah um

Pause

Sam. Yeah you're gonna have to translate that for me

Jess. Sorry I think I need a minute. Gotta concentrate on the road for a sec. Bear with. Sorry.

Sam. Cool. Ok.

Jess. Can you add kitchen roll to the list?

Sam. Do you have a pen?

Jess. Handbag. Backseat.

Sam rummages, finds a pen, adds 'kitchen roll' to the shopping list. They sit in silence again for a bit.

Sam. Well I thought it /

Jess. *(At the same time)* I just feel a bit /

Sam. Oh, sorry love – No go on, you go first – /

Jess. *(At the same time)* Sorry sorry – I was just gonna say: 'I feel a bit flat'. I guess I don't know what I was expecting, but I certainly didn't think I'd come out feeling so *(makes a vague deflating sort of noise)*

Sam. Oh. Right. Yeah.

Jess. Don't you feel the same?

Sam. Erm. I guess so. Sort of...

Silence.

Sam. I thought she was nice though, the doctor?



Jess. Did you think so? I thought she seemed a bit distracted – like she was looking at something else on her screen whilst she was talking to us

Sam. Oh, maybe

Jess. And I didn't feel like she was leaving much room for us to ask questions. She kept saying 'does that make sense?' And 'do you have any questions?' But then moving on before I had time to gather my thoughts

Sam. OK yeah, I sort of know what you mean. Maybe I just warmed to her because she was drinking from a Spurs mug

Jess. Yeah I thought you'd enjoy that

Sam. And she was chill about all the tech stuff going wrong at the beginning

Jess. Well yeah, as she should have been – that wasn't exactly our fault

Sam. OK but also when Evie was screaming and you had to nip out to check on her

Jess. She must be used to that happening. And to be honest I thought she seemed a bit impatient to wrap things up when I came back

Sam. Yeah but she must be super busy

Jess. Mm.

Silence.

Jess. I hate this roundabout.

Sam. What?

Jess. This roundabout. It's so poorly designed. The markings make it look like we should be curving round there and like the exit we want is over there, but actually we need to go here and follow it round to here. It's stupid. They should make it clearer.

Sam. You should write to the council about it

Jess. Yeah, maybe I will!

Silence.

Jess. What?

Sam. What what?

Jess. You evidently have something to say so go ahead

Sam. Well just that I wouldn't have said I felt (*copies the deflating noise Jess made*) exactly. I guess my expectations were pretty low – or I dunno, I really thought they were gonna tell us off, like it was gonna turn out that we'd done something wrong, that there was something fundamentally wrong with us that we should have known about or we'd really messed up in some way and – (*cuts himself off.*) Sorry. I just. I'm relieved. 'No. Faulty. Genes.' I thought that was good news. Clearly I'm wrong.

Jess. Oh. No, no, sorry, you're not wrong, but I dunno...I know it's not *bad* news. I think I just thought 'not-bad-news' would feel more like good news and we'd come out knowing what we should do next, with clear answers. But I kind of feel as confused as I was before

Sam. At least we know now, right?

Jess. What do you feel like you know now?

Sam. More than we did before

Jess. Know all you need to know? No more questions?

Sam. Well obviously I have questions, but...whatever. Maybe you're right. Maybe we shouldn't talk about it now. Let it sink in a bit more. Gather our thoughts.

They're approaching a traffic light, it's flashing amber.

Sam. Go, go, go! Go through!

Jess. No way, it's turning red!

Sam. Ugh, this light's so slow though – you should have just whizzed through

Jess. Wow, sorry, I didn't realise you were such a risk-taker!

Sam. It would have been fine. We'll be stuck here for ages now.

Jess. So what? I'd rather be stuck here for a minute than end up with points on my licence

Ping! (Text notification)

Jess. Who is it?

Sam. Mum. Making sure we haven't forgotten about the christening on Sunday

Jess. Ah. Well I had.

Sam. She's also reminding us that we agreed to sort out a cake for it...

Jess. Oh bloody hell

Sam. It's chill, I'll just add 'cake' to the shopping list

Jess. No, Sam, we can't get your brother's firstborn's christening cake from the supermarket. Your mother's probably expecting me to bake one, but there's absolutely zero chance I'll have time to do that. I'll have to go to that bakery on the high street –

Sam. Don't worry, I'll deal with it

Jess. Well I *am* worried about it! I know I can't trust you to get the right sort of cake – crucially the kind of cake your mother will approve of – and I *know* if we turn up with the wrong sort of cake it will somehow be my fault no matter what – *(Sam is about to protest and she cuts him off, at which point Sam's attention drifts a little and he turns around to look at Evie in the backseat)* – No, even if you insist it was your fault she'll find a way to blame me like she always does, so realistically I'm gonna have to deal with it myself if I want to avoid

that. And it's not like I don't have enough to do as it is. I've got to take the Evie to her appointment on Friday, which means more time off work – not that I resent that, I *don't*, of course I don't – but it still means I'll have to do some catching up at the weekend. And actually, does Evie have anything appropriate to wear to a christening? What are kids even supposed to wear to these things? Like if they're not the ones being doused in holy water? Something smart I'd assume, but how smart are we talking? *(Again, Sam opens his mouth to reply but Jess keeps talking over him)* Well whatever it is I'm sure she doesn't have it. Actually can you text your mother right now to ask her? I don't love asking for her advice but I'd rather that than turn up with Evie dressed in the wrong thing and have her burning holes in me all morning with the fiery force / of her side-eye

Sam. *(Finally managing to interrupt her)* Hey, concentrate on the road, please! We're turning left here, no?

Jess. Can't – roadworks – we have to go the long way round – fuck

Sam. Ok, ok, it's alright! It's absolutely fine, stop panicking –

Jess. I'm not panicking, I'm just ! ! Can you stick a gummy snake in my mouth please?

Sam. Come again?

Jess. Gummy snake. Packet in the glove box. Now now now immediately –

Sam. Right, sorry, yes, gummy snake incoming...

He rummages in the glovebox, pulls out an open packet of gummy snakes and places one in Jess's mouth.

Jess. *(Chewing furiously, mouth still full)* Another one immediately please

Sam pops another one in her mouth. He contemplates the bag for a moment and then pops one in his own mouth.

Jess. Hey! That's my emergency supply! Driver's rights

Sam. *(Mouth full)* Sorry – do you want it back?

Jess. *(Laughing)* You're alright. I suppose I can allow it just this once. Only the one though. I'm starving. I didn't have time for lunch. Or like I technically had time to eat but not enough time to make myself calm down enough to ingest food, if that makes sense? My tummy was all knotty and scrumbly. I went to put it in the microwave and my stomach immediately flipped and I thought 'nope!' Can't be forcing leftover curry on a tummy like that T-minus ten minutes before the call. Way too risky.

Sam. *(Laughs.)* Yeah no I get it. Completely. My stomach was feeling pretty scrumbly too. *(He puts a hand on her knee for a moment. She gives it a quick squeeze.)*

Silent chewing. After a moment, Sam leans forward to click the radio on. 'Bye Bye Baby' by the Bay City Rollers is playing. Of course. Jess and Sam stare ahead in shock and horror for a moment. Sam quickly clicks the radio back off again.

Jess. Are you joking!

Horrificed silence for a moment longer, and then they both laugh.

Jess. Jesus Christ!

Sam. Um remember not to let Mum hear you blaspheming like that on Sunday, not in church at least...

Jess: Yeah, yeah don't you worry, I'll be a model daughter-in-law as always

Silence. Jess clicks the radio back on but quickly scans through some different stations.

Jess. Let's see...

She reaches Classic FM. They've just started playing the Andante from Mozart's Flute and Harp Concerto. Perfect. This is just the sort of thing she was looking for. She breaths a deep sigh. Sam side-eyes her.

Sam. Um since when do you listen to Classic FM?

Jess. I need something soothing, ok?

She turns it down a bit and they listen in silence for a while.

Jess. *(In a small voice)* What are we going to tell them?

Sam. What, about *(gestures vaguely)*?

Jess. Yeah I mean she's bound to ask about it – she always does...

Sam. Hey, come on. She only asks because she cares.

Jess. No sorry, I know, I do know that. I'm sorry. I don't want to always go on about your mother. It's such a cliché. And I do know it comes from love and I know she loves us and I love her too. Obviously. She can just be...

Sam. I know.

Jess. But whatever, I'm not just talking about her

Sam. I dunno – do you think people will ask?

Jess. Hmm, maybe you're right. People love making little comments but it's true that they don't tend to actually just come out and ask questions. In some ways I'd prefer it if they did. I can't tell if it's because they feel awkward about asking, awkward about Evie, or because they actually just don't want to know.

Sam. To be honest I think people are a bit scared to ask

Jess. Well I wish they weren't! It just makes things weirder when they don't!

Sam. Or I think sometimes people assume we don't want to talk about it

Jess. *Of course* I want to talk about it! Of course I want to talk about Evie! She's my baby!

Sam. I know, Jess! I know! You don't need to tell me! But all I'm saying is I don't think you need to worry about what to tell people on Sunday because Sunday's not about us: it's about Gabby and Charlie and baby Oscar and we don't want to pull focus

Jess. We *always* pull focus, Sam. Always. We can't help it. Evie can't help it.

Beat.

Sam. What did the doctor call it again? De nova?

Jess. Novo. O. Masculine.

Sam. Sorry, yes. My Latin's never been as good as yours...

Jess. It's not about Latin, love, it's about listening.

Sam. I *do* listen, it just...It just makes me feel so stupid. Like a twelve-year-old in a biology lesson. I was never good at science. But anyway, whatever, nova novo, tomato tomato, the point is – and this is what I meant when I said I thought it was good news – she definitely said it was 'out of the blue'...That's a relief, right? At least now you know it wasn't something you did – sorry, something *we* did – during the pregnancy. And I thought she seemed relieved, too – the doctor, I mean. I got the impression she thought she was giving us good news. Didn't you? I dunno, maybe I imagined that. Like she was smiling and nodding a *lot*. When she was saying the thing about neither of us having carried it – the gene.

Jess. Uh huh

Sam. Surely, *surely* that's a good thing? At least in terms of having more children? Like I was really struggling to get my head around there being something genetic going on in our child when we didn't know about anything obvious in either of our families, so this de novo thing really made me feel a bit better. Knowing I didn't pass something on. I know obviously logically I shouldn't have felt guilty – like either way I couldn't have known. But I guess, deep down, I did feel some level of guilt. But now we know. We're not carrying it and we didn't pass it on.

Jess. Most likely.

Sam. Unlikely

Jess. But maybe

Sam. Unlikely

Jess. But could have done.

Sam. Are you sure that's what she said? Is that what the mosaic tile stuff was about?

Jess. I think so, yeah – mosaicism

Sam. Let's maybe not tell people that. Let's just stick to 'we did not pass it on'. If they start asking questions there's no way I'll be able to explain it. (*Jess opens her mouth to speak but he cuts her off.*) And I know you like to think you're so much better than me at getting stuff and that explaining things is your whole thing –

Jess. It's literally my job to explain stuff clearly to people

Sam. Not this kind of stuff though – not science stuff –

Jess. It made sense to me though. The mosaicism thing. There was a little change in one of our mosaics. Some of the little tiles weren't the right way.

Sam. Ok so does that mean one of us was carrying it then? One of us had the dodgy tiles?

Jess. Not in our proper mosaics though – not in our proper genes – just in our baby making ones. In your sperm, for example, hypothetically

Sam. Ok so when Mum asks you can say: 'Sorry, Sue, the doctor says there are some dodgy tiles in your son's sperm-mosaic'?

Jess. I am *not* saying 'sperm' to your mother, Sam, are you joking me!

Sam. Yeah so that's why I'm saying we're better off just not getting into it

A car overtakes them dangerously close.

Jess. *(Inhales sharply)*

Sam. Oi! Bloody chancers! Way too close to overtake. *(Pause.)* Anyway, I reckon there's not a single tile out of place in my mosaic, thank you very much

Jess. *(Snapping)* What makes you so sure?

Sam. Just a joke.

Tense silence.

Jess. Do you think Gabby and Charlie will have another one? They seem like the sort who'd have loads of kids. They don't have 'parents-of-an-only-child' energy

Sam. Oh well I think Charlie would definitely want more kids if they could have them. We once had a running joke about having enough between us for a football team. But obviously it took them a little while to get started and I got the impression from him that Gabby was already worried about her age, let alone now...And we, well...Yeah. You know.

Jess. I guess they did have a bit of help with this one...Like the IVF stuff. I know they didn't go on about it much but it must have been stressful – especially since it took a few rounds

Sam. Well yeah, not to mention expensive. I keep forgetting they did that because Charlie doesn't really talk about it. He mentioned going to some clinic, but that's about it. Did you chat to Gabby about it a lot?

Jess. Not loads – I was so caught up in our stuff

Sam. You never really know what's going on with other people, do you...

Jess. Would you do that? IVF?

Sam. Why?

Jess. Oh just if...Maybe I haven't understood it right, but if we found out more about what went wrong for us and it turned out that that was a safer option for us or something

Sam. What, using another man's sperm?

Jess. God I don't think we've ever said that word so many times in a single car journey! No I think it *can* mean that, but not normally. It's more that they select each of your better samples and do the mixing. We'd need to read up more about it

Sam. Yeah. I dunno. I'd have to think about it.

Jess. Mm. Something to ponder.

Silence. Sam turns again to look at Evie.

Jess. She still sleeping?

Sam. Mhmm. *(Pause.)* I can't believe we waited almost two whole years for that appointment and now it's done. Twenty minutes later and it's over. Now we know. Or we sort of know. Something. What now? What do we do next?

Jess. Indeed, love. What next? That's sort of the whole thing, right?

Sam. Sorry. I think I was a bit overexcited when we came out because I just felt relieved and then I was surprised that you *didn't* seem to feel relieved, but I sort of get it now.

Jess. The sinking feeling?

Sam. Yeah.

Jess. Yeah.

Jess tries to put a gentle hand on his cheek without taking her eyes off the road and ends up awkwardly pawing at the air for a second, then almost jabs him in the eye. They laugh and he guides her hand to his cheek and holds it there for a moment. They remain like that for a moment, smiling, in silence.

SCENE TWO: DINNER

Later the same day. Sam is finishing making dinner, Jess has just put their daughter, Evie, down to sleep.

Jess. *(Coming in)* Mmm smells good!

Sam. Nearly ready. Evie asleep?

Jess. Yeh. She was making these unbelievably cute noises – like *(cute noise baby makes when asleep)* – I felt like I could have sat there listening to her going *(noise)* forever – but then you managed to lure me here with the sweet smells of – what are we having again?

Sam. Pad thai

Jess. Oh yeh of course! Yum! I'm starving

Sam. Well I knew we'd want a treat din tonight no matter what happened

Jess. Pad thai always reminds me of when we went travelling

Sam. Yeah. Be nice to do that again wouldn't it?

Jess. Just a week somewhere warm would be a start

Sam. A mini-break

Jess. A weekend

Sam. Well, couldn't we? Why not? Get away for a couple of nights? We both need a break

Jess. I dunno, I can barely find a babysitter to commit to a single evening, let alone a weekend...

Sam. You serious? Jack and Emma are literally always getting one in – could we ask them for their babysitter's number?

Jess. Obviously I have her number, Sam! She's the one we used last time

Sam. Oh fine! So just ask her again!

Jess. That's what I'm telling you: I asked her again because I wanted to plan something for our anniversary (spoiler alert, sorry) and she was super reluctant

Sam. Huh! How come? Did we not pay her enough?

Jess. I think she's just nervous about something going wrong. With Evie.

Beat.

Sam. Oh. Got it.

Jess. Also, that reminds me, last time she was here she was saying something about most nurseries charge more for kids with extra needs because they need a higher ratio of staff – she's a trained nursery nurse. So that's fun...

Sam. Yeah, fantastic! Well. Anyway. Conversation for another night – food's ready now. I was also thinking maybe we deserved... *(pulls a bottle out of the fridge and puts two glasses down on the table)* a cheeky glass of wine? To...celebrate? Commiserate? Which is it?

Jess. Hmmm commiselebrate?

Sam. *(Pouring out two glasses)* Right, to commiselebrate. Cheers! To us, I suppose?

Jess. To us

Sam. To us and our faultless genes!

Jess. Sort of faultless

Sam. To us and our sort-of-faultless-maybe-a-tile-or-two-out-of-place-who-knows-neither-of-us-really-understand-it-so-fuck-it genes!

Jess. Cheers! And to Evie

Sam. Yes, definitely to Evie! *(After a slight pause, a little tentatively)* And to future baby?

Beat.

Sam. Or not. Remains to be seen. Potential-undecided-future-baby. We can still toast him even if he doesn't come into being, no?

Jess. Erm excuse me, who says it would be a him?

Sam. Yeah no of course, him or her – I just thought, you know, a boy would be nice, for balance...

Jess. Who needs brothers? I was perfectly happy with just my sister, thank you very much

Sam. Fine, fine! Either way it would be nice, though, wouldn't it? A little built-in friend for Evie? I just – Like just whenever we go to my sister's and see Poppy running around and Harry crawling about after her I feel so... and remember when we were there at Christmas and she was trying to teach him how to do colouring in and they were holding the crayon together and it was so so cute – every time I can't help thinking 'wouldn't it be nice if Evie had that'? You know? You must be thinking that too, right?

Jess. I am, of course I am, but the thing is it wouldn't be like that – not for Evie. It wouldn't be the same, obviously

Sam. Well not exactly the same, no, but if anything *more* special. Don't you want her to have someone there to love her and look out for her for her whole life like we do?

Jess. I get what you're saying but also to be completely honest the other thing I'm thinking when we go round to your sister's is how bloody knackered she and Jack look. How she's constantly running after one or both of the kids and doesn't have a minute to herself –

Sam. Oh well sure yeah, of course, but she loves it!

Sam goes to re-fill Jess's glass but Jess moves to stop him.

Sam. One more can't hurt?

Jess. Hmm alright, but just a tiny one – one of us needs to stay sharp for Evie

Sam. Always so sensible

Jess. One of us has to be

Sam. Anyway, as I was saying – Emma's always saying she wouldn't want it any other way and how happy she is and stuff. Besides, we're always running around too /

Jess. Exactly! If we're like that now just imagine what it would be like with another baby on top! And the fact is Evie does demand more from us. And that's not to say I resent it, of course I don't – you know that. But I'm genuinely concerned that there wouldn't be enough hours in the day! And that's on the assumption that the baby was fine. That the genes pulled through all clear and unfaulty and it didn't happen again. But what if it did? What then? Seriously, what then? Think about it for a second and tell me, in your heart of hearts, do you actually genuinely believe we'd be capable of caring adequately for two babies who need what Evie needs?

Sam. Yeah but what if it didn't happen again? What if it was fine? Don't you think it's worth a chance? Worth the risk? *(Pause.)* Evie's a bit different and we love her. It doesn't mean we can't have another child. And they did say the chance of it happening again is pretty low.

Jess. I...I don't know. I feel like I haven't really had a chance to take in what they said today. Can we try and talk through it? It's only been a few hours and I feel like I'm barely remembering any of it now – or there are some things that obviously stand out massively, but the rest of it's got all jumbled up and I can't even contemplate making any kind of decision before I've got it all straightened out and feel like I've actually understood the situation and what our options are

Sam. Of course! You were the one who didn't want to talk about it earlier – I was raring to go

Jess. I know, I just felt so weird afterwards, I wasn't ready yet. But I think I can give it ago now

Sam. Ok, yeah, that's fair.

Jess. So she said the risk of it happening again is usually low. About one percent, right?...But the thing is, the risk of it happening the first time was also super low

Sam. Sure

Jess. And she definitely said the risk for some couples is higher because of the mosaicism. That's what I keep getting stuck on

Sam. Honestly I think you might be overthinking it. It's classic you, you *love* overthinking things. The risk is pretty low! With Evie it was clearly just one of those things

Jess. I think we should do those other tests – I feel like I can't make any decisions before we know more information

Sam. The research tests? With all the samples and the extra super close looking? Not just like the regular pregnancy ones?

Jess. Yes – the new ones she was talking about, the one where they can give you actual personalised information about risk and –

Sam. Why though? They've already told us what the likely risk is

Jess. What do you mean why?! So we can have more information and make a properly informed decision about it! So we can try and find out where this thing came from and get a proper sense of the risk involved for next time

Sam. I dunno, Jess...It's all taken so long already, I feel like we've been stuck in limbo for ages, I'm bored of all the waiting around

Jess. You want to take this massive risk because you're bored?

Sam. But it's not a massive risk! That's the whole thing! And no, you're twisting my words. And it's not just the waiting. Those tests sounded pretty unpleasant and invasive

Jess. It's all invasive, Sam! Every single step of this has felt invasive to me – I don't see why this next thing should feel any more so than the rest has – Or is it actually because it would be more invasive for *you* because they'd be having a good look at your sperm?

Sam. But would it change anything? If we knew?

Jess. I don't get why you're being so weird about this, Sam. Can you at least do me the courtesy of being transparent with me? Like to be totally honest I think the reason you're so reluctant to do those tests is in case it turns out that it was you

Sam. Come on, that's not what this is! And anyway, for what it's worth, I reckon it's less likely to be me. Plus /

Jess. What? What do you mean it's less likely to be you? Why? What do you mean by that?

Sam. Well no, sorry, I didn't mean that exactly. Forget it.

Jess. No no, please, go ahead, be my guest

Sam. It's – well it's – no, look, our risks are so so small, we don't need to deep it

Jess. Are you actually seriously saying you think it's more likely to have come from me?!

Sam. I'm not saying that at all!!

Jess. That's *exactly* what you were just saying!!

Sam. Ok well if you really want to know, it's just that... I can't help remembering that thing your mum said about your great aunt, you know, having that thing and like... like I kind of think it would add up, you know?

Jess. Are you serious? Is that what you've been thinking this whole time? That because my great aunt had a genetic condition – one completely and utterly unrelated to Evie's – you think it means I'm more likely to have passed it on to Evie? That's ridiculous. Idiotic, even! It's like you haven't listened to a word the doctors have told us! That's not how it fucking works!!

Sam. Hey, come on, Jessie, don't be like that. I don't – I don't actually think that, I just – and even if it *were* the case it's not like I would blame you or anything, you know?

Jess. I should bloody well hope not!

Sam. But anyway the point is that the chances are really tiny. That's the point. Statistically we have nothing to worry about!

Jess. Yeah but that's exactly what the research test is for! So we can work out how big the risk is for us! Have an actual, personalised assessment, not just an unhelpful average. Why are you being so weird about it? Why can't we just do the test and settle it and work out the actual risk and make an actual informed decision about it? Otherwise it's just wishful thinking, right? And you keep saying that the risk is tiny – based on what medical evidence I do not know – but the risk was supposedly also tiny when we had Evie and look what happened!

Sound of crying from next door. They both fall silent.

Jess. Shit (*moving to go*)

Sam. No no don't worry, I'll go

Sam exits and Jess just sits for a while. She waits to see if he's coming back soon. He's clearly not. She tidies the dinner things away and then sits at the table with her head in her hands.

SCENE THREE: DOOMSCROLLING

After dinner Jess and Sam are on the sofa. Sam is watching the football whilst carrying out some Evie-related domestic tasks (organising pills into a pillbox, folding a massive pile of laundry). Jess is on her phone. There is lingering tension post-dinner. Text on the right-hand side of the page will appear as projections.

Sam. YESSSS!!

Jess. Shhh shh! You'll wake Evie

Sam. She's fine! She's fast asleep

Jess. On your head be it...

Jess is messaging her sister, Liv.

WhatsApp thread with Liv.

Liv. Just seen your missed call, sorry – was in yoga class. All good?

Jess. Oh nice [yoga emoji]

Can't remember the last time I had time for yoga

I could really use a stretch tbh I'm stiff af

Liv. deffo come with next time! The studio I go to is really nice

The teacher's great

very...

flexible, if you know what I mean [eye emoji]

Jess. lol ok ok keep it in your pants

I don't want to come with if I'm just gonna be third-wheeling you and the sexy teacher

Liv. nah you can come and be wing woman

Next tues?

Jess. aah hmm depends if Sam's in to watch Evie

Liv. oh yeh of course! how's my sweet angel niece doing?

Jess. she's good! she had a bit of a flare-up the other day but she's alright now

Liv. awww angel [cry smile emoji]

give her a big kiss on the head from me

I wanna come see her soon!!

oh and I forgot – why were you calling earlier? Just for a chat?

Jess looks up from her phone, annoyed.

Jess. (Aloud, to Sam) Can you turn it down a bit?

Sam. Ugh, fine...

Jess. oh

yeh

no no

(Typing for a while, deleting and re-typing.)

we had that genetics appointment this afternoon

about the genes



to talk to us about why it happened like it did with Evie

Liv. SHIT!!

OMG I'm so so sorry Jessie
I completely forgot that was today!!

What did they say???

Jess. *(Typing for a while again.)*

it's kinda hard to explain tbh
not convinced I've fully understood it and got lots of thinking to do
maybe save it for when I see you

Liv.: ok

(Pause.)

(Typing and deleting.)

did they tell you it was because of the cheese lol

Jess. *(Aloud)* Oh for fuck's sake, not the fucking cheese again!

She closes the chat and opens google.

Google search:

'Can cheese cause de novo mutation'

Jess. *(Scrolling through the results and stopping abruptly.)* Ugh, what am I doing!

Sam. *(Vaguely)* Did you say something love?

Jess. Sorry no, nothing. Just my sister going on about the cheese at Tara's wedding again.
It was one piece! One! Barely a nibble!

Sam. *(Evidently barely listening)* Uh huh, yeah

Jess. Whatever

Sam's phone rings, he looks at his phone and mutes the TV.

Sam. Mum's calling – mind if I take it?

Jess. Knock yourself out

Sam. *(Picking up the phone)* Hi Mum, what's up?

Google search:

'mosaicism'

Sam. Yeah it was today, yeah, this afternoon

It was good

I think (glances at Jess, who is clearly listening to the conversation, and then lowers his voice.) – I was just saying I think Jess wasn't quite so convinced. (He glances at her again, Jess rolls her eyes and sighs and exits.)

No, Mum, that's unfair – she's not a pessimist, she's a realist. Like she's a lot better than me
at thinking realistically about things – I get carried away and she's good at bringing me back
down to earth –

What was that?

Oh, yeah, I mean obviously it's hard – we're not doctors so I think it's hard to know if we've
fully got what they've said, you know? But essentially what they were saying was it wasn't
something we did wrong or could have known about in advance



It just happened
 Yeah, I know, I hadn't really heard of that before either
 Well the thing is, apparently there's this testing we can do which would tell us a bit more, but
 –
 No no we could do it already now
 But yeah there's also stuff you can test during pregnancy to see how things are going and in theory still have time to...you know, make a choice about it
(Long pause whilst his mother evidently monologues, he grimaces.)
 I know. I know, Mum. Mum! I know!
 We've spoken about this plenty of times before and you've made your views on it pretty clear. And it's not like I don't feel complicated about it – obviously I'm not saying I'd – We'd
 –
 Anyway, no offence Mum but to be honest this is a conversation between me and Jess
 Yes but it would be *our* child. I'm not saying I don't respect your views – of course I do! We both do. We're both so grateful to you and massively value your input on things and Evie is so lucky to have you –
 What's that?
 Evie?
 Yeah she's great, yeah
 No, no this particular appointment wasn't about that – like I told you, it was about understanding what actually caused it –
 Yeah we've got another appointment next week about her care –
 No come on, Mum, I'm not talking to you about Lourdes again
 It's just not something we're interested in, I'm sorry
 Ok, ok! Alright. We'll have another think. I'll let you know. Promise.
 Oh actually that reminds me – what time do we need to be at the church on Sunday?
 Cool. Alright well I'd better get going – we'll see you at –
 Sorry?
 I did see that you'd sent me something, yes
 Oh, no, I haven't read it yet – I haven't actually opened it, I just saw that you'd sent me something – I'll look at it later
 Ok, ok fine! Hang on
(Holds phone away from his ear and opens the link.)

Article from a dodgy news site about a new 'miracle cure' supplement.

Right...erm...why are you sending me this?
 Yeah, look Mum, I know you mean well but believe it or not we do have actual doctors we can ask about this stuff, I don't need you to –
 Anyway Mum I really need to go now, the game's about to re-start, and...
 Yeah. We'll see you on Sunday.
 Alright. Love you too. Bye.

He hangs up and goes back to the TV. The wrong team score a goal and he groans loudly. He pulls his phone out and opens WhatsApp and clicks on the conversation with his best mate Joe.

Sam. you watching the game?
Joe. ofc mate!!
Sam. what the hell was that??
Joe. absolute embarrassment
Sam. state of it
Joe. you all good btw?
Sam. yeh grand mate
 you?
Joe. how's the little one?

all good here
Sam. yeah she's doing ok
 glad to hear it
Joe. we were thinking of doing a beach trip next bank hol wknd
 Fancy it?
 Bring the kids and have a splash about
Sam. *(Takes a moment to respond.)*
 aah sounds lush mate but beach might be a bit tricky for us atm
 so not this time
 but have a great time!
Joe. ofc ofc, no stress
Sam. fancy coming round next week to watch the match tho?
 be nice to catch up properly
(No response.)

There's a goal.

Sam. *(Loudly)* Come onnn!!!!

Evie starts crying. Sam waits a moment, listening to see if Jess is going to her. She is not. He sighs and heads out of the room. Jess enters and turns the TV off. She puts on a podcast and starts listening. As she listens, she folds laundry. She nods and 'mmms' to some things said. She pauses and googles 'CVS tests'.

Google search:
'CVS tests'

Ping! (WhatsApp notification.)

A message from 'Mummy' pops up.

Mummy. Hello darling Livvie just said about
 your appt today why didnt you say about it
 ???

J: Yes sorry, I thought I told you about it
Mummy: Hold on, easier to phone

Jess. *(Aloud)* Noooo, not now!

Phone rings. She looks at it for a moment, weighing up whether or not to answer. She sighs and answers. She paces around the room during the conversation, restless.

Jess. Hello Mummy
 Yeah, sorry, I was sure I'd told you about it
 No, no, of course I don't expect you to remember
 Parking? What do you – ?
 No it was a virtual appointment
 You know, like a video call
(Laughs dryly.) No it wouldn't have been my preference either, but we didn't have a choice
 Well we'd been waiting so long to get the appointment that it seemed silly not to take
 whatever they offered us
 We fuffed around for ages at the beginning because we couldn't get our microphone to work,
 and by the time we'd sorted it I was all flustered – or even more flustered than I was already
 She was nice, yeah, but it just went by in a bit of a flash
 Oh my god, don't you start going on about the cheese at Tara's bloody wedding as well,
 Mother, I've had enough about that from Liv!

No
 No so they said it was *genetic*, but not *inherited*
 I know none of us have anything, I know
 Or, well, technically Auntie Jen...
 No no ignore me, nothing – the point is it wasn't something from us
 No, Sam's family don't have anything either
 Yeah his sister has two kids and his brother's just had his first, but no none of them have it –
 So yeah it's this sort of genetic thing that can happen to anyone at all
 So actually it could have happened to Sam's sister or his brother, but it didn't...It happened to us.
 No, I didn't mean that. His siblings aren't carrying anything. And Livvie isn't either – if she chooses to have kids then chances are they'll be fine
 Or I guess her odds are the same as ours were
 No no she'll be fine! Forget I said that! None of us are carrying anything! Apparently it's probably just something that happened in Evie when she was, well, you know, growing into a baby...
 No, it's definitely not connected to Jack's ADHD!
 No, no, you haven't upset me.
 I know. I know you want everything to be fine/
(Pause, listening.)
 Yeah, we won't leave it too long. We just...it's a big decision, you know? Obviously we love Evie just as she is, but can you imagine how hard it would be to have two children with extra needs?
(Pause, listening.)
 Yeees, I *did* say that, but I was simplifying a bit – like it was *probably* just in her, but there's this really small chance that it didn't happen just in her and that it was in me, in some of my eggs, or in Sam's sperm.
 Don't tut at me for saying the word sperm, mother, it's just biology
 I'm not snapping at you, Mum
 No I don't think you're stupid, no no, it's complicated – I barely understand it myself
 So yeah, it's only a small chance, but it's possible, so obviously we need to really really think about that and decide...
 Hang on, am I on speaker? Dad?
 OK fine, well, tell Dad I don't think they can reverse it. Not right now anyway.
(Listening)
 Oh, actually, Mum, whilst I've got you – I don't suppose you could babysit on –
 You've got to go?
 Right.
 No, no that's fine.
 Absolutely.
 No worries at all. We'll chat another time.
 Bye bye bye

Jess sighs and sits back down. She opens a WhatsApp group chat for other mums from her pre-natal classes. There's a long stream of them all sharing their babies walking. One person has shared a new ultrasound scan and the others are all congratulating her. She smiles at first and then starts to cry a bit.

SCENE FOUR: NIGHTTIME

Darkness. Jess and Sam are in bed, in theory asleep.

Sam. ... You awake?

Silence.

Sam. *(In a small voice)* I'm sorry

Silence.

Jess. What for?

Sam. Just for...I dunno...I feel like I haven't quite been dealing with things in the right way today – like I think maybe I just had slightly different expectations and was a bit taken aback by how you responded to the situation and didn't then know quite how to adjust to meet you where you were – and maybe also I just wasn't taking it all in properly and it's only really started to sink in now – and I definitely definitely said some stuff I shouldn't have said and –

Jess. Oh no, me too

Sam. No but I mean it. I'm sorry.

Jess. It's ok. I'm sorry too. I shouldn't have snapped at you and I should have left more space for how you were feeling. I know I can get a bit...wrapped up in my own stuff

Sam. Yeah, but I get it – I get that it's really hard, and I need you to remind me of that

Jess. I know it's hard for you too though, and sometimes I act like it's not. I know it's just that you have a different way – probably a much healthier way – of dealing with things

Sam. There's probably a perfect middle ground between our ways

Jess. Probably. Classic.

Sam. One day we'll reach it and we'll be the best couple in the world at navigating difficult life situations

Jess. Something to aspire to

Sam. I love you

Jess. I love you too

Sam. There are just no easy answers, are there? Evie is still as she is. There's no guarantee that if we have another one, it won't happen again...Or I guess it's even possible that a whole other thing could go wrong

Jess. That's not like you, Sam – you're starting to sound like me

Sam. I'm just processing. The more I think about it the more confused I am

Pause.

Sam. Was that your mum on the phone earlier?

Jess. Mmm

Sam. What did she have to say for herself?

Jess. She was just asking how it went today

Sam. And?

Jess. I dunno – I tried to explain but she didn't really get it. I don't know if it was me not explaining well or her not listening properly, or just it being weird and difficult

Sam. Yeah my mum wasn't really getting it either

Jess. Mm. Sometimes I wonder whether it's not so much about not 'getting it', and more about not *accepting* it

Sam. Yeah. She started going on about taking Evie to Lourdes again –

Jess. Oh come on Sue –

Sam. And she'd sent me yet another miracle cure supplement article

Jess. Ughhh

Sam. I know

Jess. Well my mum brought up my uncle again

Sam. Cath!! We've been over this!

Jess. Believe me I know! To be fair, I get that none of us expected this and our mums are just trying to get their heads round it all, like we are. But the thing that frustrates me is that I also feel like she's never that interested in knowing how I actually am, if that makes sense? She'll ask, but find a way of changing the subject if I start giving a proper answer. I think she's scared that she won't know how to deal with whatever I tell her. I don't really blame her – it's obviously a lot, and I know she just wants things to be fixed and settled and normal – whatever that is... Anyway I think talking to her just made me feel worse, like more alone, you know? They're always telling you to talk to other people in your life and share the burden or whatever, but talking to people somehow just makes me feel even more isolated because they just don't get it?

Sam. Yeah that's exactly it

Jess. I think that's why I felt so !! towards you earlier, because you're the one person who should get it, who's totally in it with me, but it seemed like we were on totally different pages and that just made me feel so –

Sam. That makes sense

Jess. But on the other hand I guess it's good for us to come at it from different places, at least to an extent

Pause.

Sam. I can't lie – I kind of thought when they said the appointment would be with a 'genetic counsellor' that there would be a bit more of an actual 'counselling' element to it...

Jess. Yeah, it's a bit of a misnomer

Pause.

Sam. Do you remember how happy we were when you got pregnant with Evie? I just remember feeling so full and excited and thinking: 'yes! this is it! It's happening!' And when she was born –

Jess. Things didn't quite pan out how you'd imagined

Sam. No, no, obviously it wasn't what we'd imagined, no, but it didn't make me any less happy. Shit scared, sure. But to be honest I'd probably have been terrified no matter what. I think...sometimes you just have to do things, even if you're scared. Just take the risk. See what happens. Shall we just do it? Play a round of genetic lottery?

Jess. I dunno, Sam...

Sam. *(Taking on the persona of a lottery presenter)* 'It's Saturday night, and it's time for Lotto! In three...two...one...whoosh, spin spin spin...In the last week, we've seen big wins, with two lucky people becoming parents of a healthy little baby. Will you be next? Tonight's rollover jackpot is an estimated three healthy babies!

Jess. Three?! I think one would suffice, Sam...

Sam. *(Still in the voice)* One healthy baby! Will you get lucky tonight?

Jess. I wouldn't bet on it...

Sam. Well you certainly won't win if you don't play in the first place

Jess. What *is* winning though? In this scenario? What if I get pregnant and it turns out something is wrong – what would we do? It's a possibility we have to consider

Sam. She said we can still have one of those tests, during the pregnancy – what was that again?

Jess. Yeah, a CVS test. I was googling it earlier – it can tell you if it's likely that your baby has a genetic condition – they do it by taking cells from your placenta

Sam. Eek, ouch

Jess. Indeed...And the thing is, what do we do if they find something? Are you sure you'd seriously consider ending the pregnancy at that point?

Sam. I don't know – I don't think I'd know until it came to it

Jess. I know sometimes it's the right decision, and maybe it would be for us, but when I think about it I get this gut punch of guilt because it makes me think about Evie and what we'd have done if we'd had this test when I was pregnant with her. I picture her little face and think 'how could I ever make that choice about you? How could I choose not to have you'?

Sam. No. I know. I would never ever choose not to have her

Pause.

Jess. I'm not saying no. I promise. I'm not ruling anything out. I just – I just need to keep thinking it over. And can you promise to do the same? Can you please consider that research test? The pre-pregnancy one?

Sam. Of course. I promise. And I understand. I need to remember to be grateful for what we have already. Her. And each other. We'll work through this, Jess. I know we will.





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