

Scene 1

SETTING: A liberal arts college. A lab desk with chemistry equipment is located center stage, along with a whiteboard with markers. A bed is located stage right. This is the dorm room ERIN and JESSICA share.

AT RISE: Dim lights come up on ERIN, working at the lab bench.

ERIN

Organic Substitution Reaction.

(ERIN writes "Substitution" on the whiteboard.)

Step 1: Mix tert-butyl chloride with methanol.

(ERIN draws the structures of the two chemicals on the whiteboard. She mixes the chemicals in a flask as

YOUNG ERIN and OLIVER enter.)

At first, no reaction is observed.

YOUNG ERIN

Oliver, please—

OLIVER

Enough.

ERIN

Step 2: Heat the reaction mixture.

(ERIN draws fire underneath the chemical structures, then swirls the flask.)

OLIVER

She needs me. I have to take her somewhere safe!

YOUNG ERIN

Everything's going to change without you!

(YOUNG ERIN grabs hold of OLIVER's hand.)

ERIN

Step 3: The tert-butyl chloride molecule dissociates from its chlorine substituent.

(ERIN erases the bond connecting the chlorine to the rest of the molecule. OLIVER pulls away from YOUNG ERIN.)

OLIVER

Goodbye, Erin.

(OLIVER gets into his car.)

YOUNG ERIN

Oliver!

ERIN

Step 4: Methanol attacks.

(OLIVER lurches forward in his seat and we hear a crash. The lights immediately come down.)

(Lights come back up on ERIN and JESSICA in their room. ERIN is holding a towel. JESSICA enters, wearing a bathrobe.)

ERIN

You left your wet towel on my bed.

JESSICA

That towel isn't on your bed, Erin. It's in your hand.

ERIN

Of course it's not on my bed. I moved it because it was wet.

JESSICA

Oh, don't be such a wet blanket.

(Beat, as JESSICA realizes the irony of what she just said.)

ERIN

Just promise me you'll stop leaving your wet towels everywhere.

(ERIN tosses the towel to JESSICA.)

JESSICA

Please. When else have I done that?

ERIN

The morning of September 5th, September 28th at 10 p.m., October 15th, November 6th, 3 a.m. on December 8th—

JESSICA

Okay, okay.

ERIN

Oh, and February 11th, when I found not only this same wet towel on my bed, but also another, wetter towel wrapped inside it.

JESSICA

I was trying to dry that other towel. How else do you think people are supposed to dry towels if not with other, dryer towels?

ERIN

Can we just stop saying the word "towel"?

JESSICA

Fine. If you agree to stop using your Hyperthymia just to win arguments with me. I mean, at least give me a chance before you fire off all the incriminating dates.

ERIN

They're not just dates. Not to me. They're episodes. It's like I'm flipping through a scrapbook of my own life.

JESSICA

You weren't always like this. Remember back when we were fourteen, when we used to go to that island in the middle of the lake?

ERIN

We were thirteen.

JESSICA

Whatever. The point is, we'd pretend that there were no other people in the world but us. And that was enough for us.

(She plops down on ERIN's bed.)

At least, back then it was.

ERIN

(Seeing it in her mind:)

It was seven years ago on June 10th, and we were lying down on the island. The sun was sinking below the horizon and stars were just faintly beginning to appear. I told you that I didn't want anything to change from this moment. You said, "Then why let it?" I said, "Let it what?" Then you replied, "Change." Then I responded, "Change what?" And you

said, "No, let this moment change." So I said, "No, I don't want it to change--"

JESSICA

Get to the point.

ERIN

Anyway, we proclaimed that island to be the Land of Erica, a combination of "Erin" and "Jessica." The place where nothing would ever change.

JESSICA

I take back what I said about your memory, Erin. It's really incredible you can remember that so clearly.

ERIN

I don't just remember it. I relive it. Thanks for reminding me, Jess. It's a good memory to have.

(KYLE enters.)

JESSICA

Oh, hey, Kyle.

KYLE

Hey, Jessica. Do you, uh, do you mind if I speak to Erin privately?

JESSICA

Go ahead. I have lots of important things to do, anyway.

(JESSICA takes off her bathrobe to reveal her normal clothes underneath it.)

ERIN

Were you just wearing your clothes under there?

JESSICA

Actually, they're your clothes, but that's a story for a different day.

(JESSICA exits.)

ERIN

Hi, Kyle.

KYLE

Hi.

(They kiss, somewhat awkwardly.)

ERIN

What's wrong? You seem distracted.

KYLE

I'm sorry, Erin. It's just...I have to tell you something. You know my startup?

ERIN

Which one?

KYLE

U-Score. The app that scores your life by playing music that best fits whatever you're currently doing.

ERIN

Oh, yeah. That's the tagline.

KYLE

An investor just signed on to the project. A big one.

ERIN

Your mom?

KYLE

No. Thanks to this new investor they were finally able to promote me. Now I'm U-Score's Chief Systems Analyst.

ERIN

Kyle, that's great—

KYLE

Look, I get it if you think this whole thing is stupid. You're a Chemistry major. You're going to contribute to medicine and everything while I'm just helping people enjoy some free jazz before jumping out of an airplane.

ERIN

You know I support you.

(KYLE thinks for a second, then speaks.)

KYLE

Chief Systems Analyst is a full time job. Now that the startup is back on its feet, who knows how long they're going to need me there. I already signed a twelve-month contract.

ERIN

Twelve months? But what about—

KYLE

I'm not coming back to school next year.

(Beat.)

ERIN

...What?

KYLE

This could be a real future for me. But I'll never know until I take the risk.

ERIN

But...Kyle...

KYLE

We can do long distance. Because that always, you know, works—

ERIN

Please—

KYLE

I'll always be with you up here, right?

(He touches Erin's head. Lights dim and KYLE exits. ERIN walks back up to her lab bench.)

ERIN

Organic Substitution Reaction.

(ERIN writes "Substitution" on the whiteboard.)

Step 1: Add ethyl bromide to ethanol in a basic solution.

(ERIN draws the structures of the two chemicals on the whiteboard, then mixes them with her lab equipment.)

(YOUNG ERIN and OLIVER enter and lie down head to head.)

YOUNG ERIN

They're so much brighter this time.

OLIVER

We've never been out this late before.

YOUNG ERIN
I guess more people are asleep, huh?

OLIVER
Guess so.

(Beat.)

YOUNG ERIN
I wonder which ones aren't really there.

OLIVER
What?

YOUNG ERIN
You know, the stars that have died already but are so far away that it looks like they're still there.

OLIVER
I think if you're far enough away from something it doesn't matter if it's real anymore.

YOUNG ERIN
Well, they're real to me, at least.

ERIN
Step 2: The ethanol, possessing a stronger nucleophilic character, will exert a stronger attraction on the molecule than its bromide substituent.

(OLIVER's phone buzzes; he checks it.)

OLIVER
I'm sorry, Erin, I have to go.

YOUNG ERIN
What?

OLIVER
Claire wants me to come over. You know the way back, right?

(He stands up.)

YOUNG ERIN
We've only been here a few minutes—

ERIN

This isn't Erica. We're miles away from that island. This is real life.

JESSICA

I understand. But a micronation isn't confined to its territory like a real nation. Its spirit stretches far beyond that. Sure, we called the island "Erica." But ultimately, Erica was always just...us. Erin and Jessica. And as long as we're together, nothing bad can happen to either of us. Even I remember making that promise to you seven years ago.

ERIN

You said, "When we're together, we'll just block out the things that make us sad. Now let's trade Silly Bandz."

JESSICA

Past me is right. Well, except for that Silly Bandz part.
(JESSICA slaps a sticker reading "Erica" on ERIN's shirt.)

I also ordered stickers.

(Beat.)

ERIN

Block it out...

(Lights dim and JESSICA exits. ISAAC enters and sits down at the lab bench. The next scene takes place in ISAAC's office. Lights come up on ISAAC and ERIN, who has just entered the office.)

ISAAC

I thought I locked that door.

ERIN

Oh. You didn't.

ISAAC

Who are you?

ERIN

(Confused:)

Erin.

(ISAAC is silent.)

Isaac, I'm in Sophomore Organic Chem. You're my TA.

ISAAC

That doesn't sound right.

ERIN

I sit in the sixth row, third seat from the left.

(No reaction from ISAAC.)

On February 5th I wore a shirt that showed a molecule of adrenaline and said "the element of surprise."

ISAAC

That's stupid. Adrenaline isn't an element, Erica.

ERIN

It's "Erin."

ISAAC

(re: the Erica sticker)

That's not what your shirt says.

ERIN

(Unable to fathom this:)

You don't know who I am?

ISAAC

It's a three hundred-person class. I have better things to do than memorize the names of you and your Scantron-bubbling ilk.

ERIN

Sorry.

ISAAC

In Romanian culture, apologies are typically followed by solutions, justifications, and remedies to correct the wrongdoing.

(Then:)

Conversely, in Roman culture, apologies were typically followed by a dagger through the abdomen, as one's political enemies saw them as a sign of weakness. What do you want?

ERIN

To work in your lab.

(ISAAC laughs.)

All grad student TAs manage a lab, right?

ISAAC

It's April, Erica. The semester ends in a month. Why do you want to start now?

ERIN

There's no way to welcome in the summer like confining yourself in a relatively well-ventilated room for hours every day.

ISAAC

Okay. Well, what do you want to help with? Storage? Cleanup? I hear the squeegee team is making some pretty big leaps.

ERIN

I want to do independent research.

ISAAC

You're a sophomore. I can't just leave anyone alone in a room full of unlabeled poisons and glassware specifically designed to shatter in the most unsafe way possible so as to punish whoever broke it.

ERIN

I've worked in a lab before.

ISAAC

What's the number one rule of lab safety?

ERIN

Hot glass looks like cold glass.

ISAAC

If you aren't sure what chemical you just spilled, what should you do?

ERIN

Assume it's a fast-acting, highly potent neurotoxin, so by comparison whatever chemical burns you receive cleaning it up don't seem that bad.

ISAAC

Let me tell you a story, Erica.

(He stands up.)

Believe it or not, I was once like you. Ambitious. Headstrong. Bursting at the seams.

(ERIN stands very much contained by her seams.)

But one thing in particular separated me from others of the kind: I had a vision. Of course, they all said I was crazy. Such is the constant struggle of the genius. They said, "Isaac, you'll never be able to regioselectively synthesize

aryloxyquinolines under metal-free conditions. Who do you think you are, Superman?" But I proved them wrong. My whole thesis was dedicated to producing a single molecule, but its applications could be countless.

ERIN

Oh.

ISAAC

What's your vision, Erica?

ERIN

Well...memories, after all, are just chemical signals in the brain. So there must be a way to manipulate them. It has already been shown that painful memories can be eliminated through the depolymerization of actin filaments. Scientists have even removed specific memories from the brains of snails by blocking certain protein kinases. If I can find a way to make a drug that could perform this same function and accurately target and eliminate a memory, then—

ISAAC

Look, I know this might sound surprising to you, but people aren't snails.

ERIN

I know, but still—

ISAAC

You want to fundamentally change how people think.

ERIN

They would still be the same person, just without the memory—

ISAAC

There are 37 thousand billion billion chemical reactions per second in the human body. No one ever stays the same.

(ERIN is silent.)

Tell you what.

(ISAAC pulls a piece of paper out of his desk and gives it to ERIN.)

If you can solve this synthesis problem using the given molecule in, I don't know, five minutes, I'll let you conduct your research in my lab. But I should warn you, it's well beyond the scope of your Sophomore O-Chem class—

ERIN

Done.

(She puts down her pencil.)

ISAAC

(Stopped dead in his tracks:)

How did you—

ERIN

(Seeing it in her head:)

On Tuesday, October 20th when you were handing out our exams, you accidentally gave me a sheet of paper that had this problem on it. Only, it also said, "the answer is on the back." You quickly took it from me once you realized your mistake, and in that instant I saw the back of the paper. But there was nothing written there. All I could see was the given molecule that was on the front, only flipped around, since I was looking at it through the opposite side of the paper. I figured that's what "the answer is on the back" meant, so I just put that. The same molecule, except flipped around.

ISAAC

Wow, for a sophomore to already understand chirality shifts...

ERIN

What? But I don't—

(Catching herself:)

I mean, yep, I understand them alright!

(ISAAC tosses her the keys to the lab.)

ISAAC

The silver one is for the main entrance, the gold one is for the supply room. I want a ten-page outline of your research proposal by next weekend.

(He starts to exit, then turns back.)

I hope you realize what you're getting yourself into.

(Beat, then ISAAC exits. ERIN walks over to her room. JESSICA enters, wearing a hat that says "Erica" on it. Several made up flags are drawn on pieces of paper attached to the wall.)

JESSICA

Hmm...no.

You want to wave your magic wand and suddenly make everything better. Well, life doesn't work that way. There are rules. Laws. Necessary steps we have to go through. You of all people should know that.

ERIN

(Looking at OLIVER:)
What I would give to reach out and touch him.

(Beat. ISAAC turns away from her.)

ISAAC

I never want to see you in this lab again.

OLIVER

(To YOUNG ERIN:)
Goodbye, Erin.

(ISAAC and OLIVER exit in opposite directions. ERIN watches YOUNG ERIN exit, following OLIVER.)

BLACKOUT

END OF SCENE 1

SCENE 2

SETTING: ERIN's liberal arts college. The semester is over and KYLE has left.

AT RISE: Lights come up on JESSICA and ARTIE, who is standing just outside JESSICA's room. He knocks on the "door" to the room.

ARTIE

This is the ambassador of Micronation Codename Q7013Z. Open up, or I'll be forced to raise my voice incrementally until you do.

(Beat. Then, slightly louder:)
This is the ambassador of Micronation Codename Q7013Z. Open up, or I'll be forced to raise my voice incrementally—

(JESSICA opens the door.)

JESSICA

Artie!

ARTIE

Surprised to see me?

JESSICA

You're the ambassador?

ARTIE

Indeed. Now, shall we commence with the heretofore arranged diplomatic meeting?

JESSICA

Don't you want to catch up first? It's been a while.

ARTIE

Very well. How have you been?

JESSICA

Well-

ARTIE

Splendid. Now, according to Article 5, Section H of the International Micronation Law, no other micronation shall occupy the same territory as another. Any nation that fails to comply will be conquered and considered territory of the original one.

JESSICA

Look, Artie. Erica is our-I mean, Erica is my micronation. I'm not just going to hand it over to you.

ARTIE

Then you leave me no choice. I'm afraid you must fight me, or surrender your beloved nation.

(He dramatically pulls out an extremely tiny sword.)

JESSICA

First of all, what is that? Second of all, I thought we were friends!

ARTIE

(Obviously:)

First of all, it's a micro-sword.

(Then, angry:)

Second of all, we haven't been friends since the day you cleft my heart in twain!

JESSICA

What are you talking about?

ARTIE

Perhaps your mind, so absorbed in its own vile convolution, allows no room for such a torturous memory as when you turned me down to the winter gala!

JESSICA

This is all because I turned you down to the dance?

ARTIE

You took way my dignity. Now I'm going to take way something *you* care about!

(JESSICA grabs her wet towel.)

JESSICA

Not if I have anything to say about it!

(JESSICA and ARTIE fence using the wet towel and the tiny sword, respectively. JESSICA hits and sword out of ARTIE's hand and starts whapping him with the wet towel. ARTIE falls to the ground.)

ARTIE

Ow! Détente! Détente!

(JESSICA stops hitting him.)

JESSICA

Let me get this straight. You contacted the other micronation on campus, asked them if you could join, applied to become the ambassador, and got permission to hold an official diplomatic meeting in this room, just so you could get revenge on me for not going to the dance with you?

ARTIE

A little bit.

JESSICA

Could you be any more petty?

ARTIE

Petty? You were ready to fight me just so you wouldn't have to give up your stupid safe space you made up when you were a kid!

(Beat.)

Oh, I'm sorry, that was rather harsh, wasn't it-

JESSICA

From day one Erica was supposed help Erin escape from the pain of her past. But Erica will never be able to help Erin because Erica *is* the past.

(JESSICA drops her "Erica" hat on the floor.)

ARTIE

We found micronations not because we're trying to delude ourselves into some false reality. We do it because it offers a circumstance where, however small it may be, we can be in control. We can decide what is just, what must occur. But ultimately all a micronation is is refuge from the unpredictability of life. I guess I took it a little too far, huh?

(Beat. ARTIE slumps a little, feeling sorry for himself. JESSICA smiles.)

JESSICA

What the hell. Do you want to get coffee with me sometime, Artie?

ARTIE

Make it in neutral territory, and you've got yourself a deal.

(ARTIE exits. JESSICA exits and reenters with a coffee cup. ISAAC enters.)

ISAAC

I'm looking for Erica.

JESSICA

You're too late. There is no more Erica.

ISAAC

You killed her?

JESSICA

What? Who are you talking about?