SCENE 2.1 TEAMWORK

INT. BILLIARDS LOUNGE - DAY

A rack of balls. SMACK. They scatter.

The World Cup is on the TV.

Heideberg makes a tricky shot, sinking a striped ball. Darren and STEFAN (27), another LAB MEMBER, nod their heads in approval.

STEFAN
Nice shot, Dr. H.

Heideberg nods, content with his shot. He shoots again but just misses.

HEIDEBERG
Damn.

Harold fills out the quartet. He stands off to the side as Stefan chalks up his cue.

HEIDEBERG
Remember to take your time and line up your shot this time.

Harold walks over to Darren as Heideberg corrects Stefan.

HEIDEBERG
No. The three is a much better shot.

HAROLD
Hey, Darren?

DARREN (distracted)
What’s up?

HAROLD
I wanted to talk to you about me being taken off the Sorenson collaboration.

DARREN
What do you want me to say, man?

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

HAROLD
I’d like another chance to figure it out. I think I might know what I was doing wrong.

DARREN
It’s a done deal, Harold. Just let it go.

HAROLD
I don’t know if I can.

SMACK. Stefan tries for the three ball but misses.

DARREN
Look, it was Heideberg’s decision. There’s nothing I can do.

HAROLD
If I could just talk to you--

HEIDEBERG
Harold, it’s your shot.

HAROLD
Sorry.

Flustered, Harold takes a cue and hurriedly lines up a shot. He rushes his shot and sinks the cue ball. Heideberg shakes his head as Darren and Stefan cringe.

HEIDEBERG
All right. Let’s switch up teams.

INT. SORENSON LAB – DAY

Jayna sits at her desk. She checks her email. One from Darren.

Darren has replied to an email from Jayna.

TEXT FROM JAYNA: Darren, what do you think our next steps are going forward and when can I expect delivery of the next lot of compound? Thanks, Jayna.

TEXT FROM DARREN: Dr. Heideberg wants us to retest the first and second deliveries. Can you return any remaining material you have? As far as the next lot, we hope to have something for you in two weeks. Darren.

Jayna goes to the freezer and retrieves what she has left of the deliveries from the Heideberg lab.
CONTINUED:

She finds Ana Sofia poring over a lab notebook at her bench.

JAYNA
Hey.

ANA SOFIA
Oh, hi. What’s up?

JAYNA
I need help with something.

ANA SOFIA
Yeah, sure. What’s up?

JAYNA
The Heideberg people want me to return anything left over from the first two batches so they can retest it. Do you mind running this package over there for me?

ANA SOFIA
Oh.

(not what she was hoping)
Yeah, sure. I can do that. It’ll be good to get some face time with them since I’ll be working with them at some point.

JAYNA
Thanks. I just can’t take Darren talking down to me today.

Jayna leaves the package and walks away.

INT. HEIDEBERG LAB – DAY

Ana Sofia enters. Not a lot of people around.

ANA SOFIA
Hello?

Meena pokes her head around a corner.

MEENA
Can I help you?

ANA SOFIA
Hi. I’m from the Sorenson lab. I was asked to drop this off.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

MEENA
Oh, right. Thanks.

Meena takes the package and puts it in a freezer.

ANA SOFIA
It’s quiet around here.

MEENA
Yeah. Dr. H took some of lab to watch the World Cup.

ANA SOFIA
You don’t like soccer?

MEENA
No. I do. I love it. He just assumes women don’t follow sports. Which is ironic cause I played soccer at my undergrad.

Ana Sofia laughs.

MEENA
It’s okay. I actually prefer the quiet. I’m Meena, by the way.

ANA SOFIA
Ana Sofia. Nice to meet you.

MEENA
You were with Jayna the other day. I’m going to be working on the collaboration going forward.

ANA SOFIA
Cool. I wish I was.

(Meena is puzzled)
Sorry. I was hoping to build on the work Jayna’s doing with you all but that’s all been thrown off by the delays. So, I’m working on something else in the meantime.

MEENA
Oh. Well, I hope you get to work on it soon.

ANA SOFIA
Thanks. Sorry, I didn’t mean to be a jerk. That’s great you’re working on the collaboration.
CONTINUED: (2)

MEENA
You weren’t being a jerk.

They laugh.

ANA SOFIA
Jayna will be happy to hear you’re on the project I’m guessing.

MEENA
Yeah, she and Darren have had a rocky go of it.

ANA SOFIA
Seems like it. Look, do you want to grab coffee or lunch some time? It’s always good to connect with other women in labs.

MEENA
Oh. Um, I would like to. I’m just super busy. I’m presenting my thesis work at the regional American Chemical Society next week and I still have so much to do.

ANA SOFIA
That’s great.

MEENA
And I’m trying to get up to speed on the compound for Jayna. I’m just kind of swamped right.

ANA SOFIA
It’s cool. I’m kind of crazed myself getting situated.

MEENA
But, we can exchange numbers and maybe do something when we’re less busy?

ANA SOFIA
Sure.

Ana Sofia hands Meena her phone. Meena punches in her number. Ana Sofia takes it back and sends a text.

Ding. Meena gets it.
CONTINUED: (3)

ANA SOFIA
Cool. Nice to meet you.

MEENA
Yeah. You too.

Ana Sofia leaves as Meena gets back to work.

SCENE 2.2 SORENSON SUBGROUP MEETING

INT. SORENSON’S OFFICE – DAY

Sorenson works at her desk. An email from Heideberg.

EMAIL TEXT: Jules, I wanted to make you aware of a new development in our collaboration. Darren Novak, who has been leading the research, will soon be leaving us. Meena Anand, a grad student in my lab, will now be making the compounds for your experiments. The research will carry on as planned, with Meena as point person. She has my full support. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation. (Best wishes, Malcolm).

Sorenson groans, worried at how Jayna will take this news.

SORENSON
Great.

Loretta leans in the doorway.

LORETTA
Meeting in five.

Sorenson checks the time.

SORENSON
Oh crap.

Loretta almost leaves – and then stops.

LORETTA
Have you checked in with Alex lately?

SORENSON
No. He hasn’t said anything so I assume he’s fine. Why?

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

LORETTA
I spoke with him a few days ago
and he seems frustrated. He told
me he would speak to you. I’m not
sure he’s on a clear path.

SORENSON
Okay, I’ll check in with him.

LORETTA
Thanks.

Loretta heads out as Sorenson wraps up.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - SORENSON’S LAB - LATER

Sorenson, Loretta, Jayna and Ana Sofia sit around a
table. Jayna is getting everyone caught up on the status
of her research.

JAYNA
Darren and I were last in touch a
couple of days ago. He requested
that we bring him any extra
material from their first two
deliveries of the compound. Ana
Sofia took what we had back to
their lab and they’re testing the
compounds for any inconsistencies.
Darren also told me they’ll have
the next batch ready in two weeks.
I wish I didn’t have to wait that
long, but at least they’re working
on it.

SORENSON
That’s great. (Pause). I don’t
want to upset you...

Jayna gives her a “what now” look.

SORENSON
I got an email from Malcolm
Heideberg. He’s taking Darren off
the collaboration since he’s
leaving the lab soon. He’s put a
new graduate student on the
project, Meena Anand. You’ll work
with her from now on.
CONTINUED:

JAYNA
Are you serious? Some random grad student is taking over my project?

SORENSON
Dr. Heideberg seems confident in her abilities.

JAYNA
I’ll have to wait for her to get up to speed, which will push them back even more. Perfect. This project’s never getting done.

SORENSON
I know this is not what you wanted to hear. I’d like us to give it a chance before we assume the worst. Let’s try to look at it as a fresh start.

ANA SOFIA
Meena is really nice. I met her when I dropped the compounds off. She seems like she’ll be easier to work with than Darren.

SORENSON
(to Jayna)
Why don’t you reach out to Meena? You can ask her if she needs anything before you get the next delivery.

Jayna is not happy.

JAYNA
All right. I’m willing to see how it goes.

SORENSON
Thank you.

Sorenson turns to Ana Sofia.

SORENSON
How are you doing Ana Sofia? Are you making any progress reproducing Justin’s work? Do you see any avenues to build on there?
CONTINUED: (2)

ANA SOFIA
Well...I’m having a slow start. I have some ideas...hopefully, I’ll finalize a plan soon.

SORENSON
It’s all right to take it slow. No one expects you to instantly get it all.

ANA SOFIA
Thanks. I’ll keep working and I’ll keep you updated on my progress.

SORENSON
Remember to check in with Jayna if you need anything. I’m sure she can help.

JAYNA
I’ll help if I can. I’m just crazy busy right now...

ANA SOFIA
Thanks, Jayna. I understand.
(to Sorenson)
It would be great if we could meet too, when you have the time.

SORENSON
Yes, of course. I haven’t forgotten about our orientation meeting. There’s just a lot going on. As soon as I get caught up, we’ll grab that coffee. Okay?

Sorenson checks the time again.

SORENSON
I have another meeting to get to. Keep up the great work everyone and let me know if you need anything.

Sorenson quickly heads to her next appointment. Loretta, Jayna and Ana Sofia offer quick goodbyes as she rushes off.

SCENE 2.3 POSTER SESSION DEBRIEF
INT. HEIDEBERG LAB - DAY

Dr. Heideberg wraps up a meeting with lab members. Meena, Darren, Harold, and a few others are present.

    DR. HEIDEBERG
    All right, everyone. Let’s get to work.

Everyone gathers their things to leave but--almost as an afterthought--

    DR. HEIDEBERG
    Oh! Meena, how did the poster session go?

Everyone stops. Is this still part of the meeting?

    MEENA
    It was interesting.

    DR. HEIDEBERG
    Meena just presented at the ACS meeting. Give us the highlights, if you will.

    MEENA
    Uh, sure. For the most part it went well. A lot of people stopped to ask questions, and seemed generally enthused about the project. They were impressed with the route we took in the synthesis, that definitely got some attention. Some even wondered whether I actually contributed to the scheme or whether I mostly just followed your lead.

    DR. HEIDEBERG
    Sometimes that’s inevitable, the important thing is, I know the contributions you made. And you know them. You can be proud of the work you’re doing.

    MEENA
    Thank you.

    DR. HEIDEBERG
    Did Jim Brennan stop by? He mentioned he might.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

MEENA
He did, yes, um, he didn’t have much to say about the project actually, but, um, he wanted me to tell you he said hello.

DR. HEIDEBERG
OK. It was good you got to meet him. Ok, that’s it for today.

Everyone files out.

INT. VENDING MACHINE ROOM - DAY

A package of Cheetos falls from the spiral. Meena and Harold are grabbing snacks.

HAROLD
That’s cool you got to meet Jim Brennan. Dr. Heideberg talks about that guy all the time.

MEENA
Yeah, it wasn’t that great actually.

Darren comes in.

DARREN
(dropping coins in the machine)
What wasn’t that great?

MEENA
Nothing.

Darren looks at them both. Now he’s intrigued.

DARREN
What were you guys talking about?

Meena stays mum.

HAROLD
(feeling pressure from Darren’s gaze)
Nothing. Just the poster session and meeting Brennan.

Darren can see Meena doesn’t want to say anything.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

DARREN
Did he do something?

MEENA
No, he didn’t do anything. He was just...a little creepy.

DARREN
Creepy how?

MEENA
Nothing...um, It was almost like he was coming on to me, and his comments made me really uncomfortable

DARREN
Really?

MEENA
Yeah. I was trying to explain my thesis work to him, but he just kept saying things like: you’re probably too young for me but you are one of the cutest chemists I’ve seen in a while. Stuff like that. It just...

Meena shudders a little.

DARREN
Are you serious?

MEENA
Yeah.

DARREN
That is ridiculous. Heideberg has introduced me to Brennan like three times and he never even remembers my name. But he’s going to remember you because you had a skirt on at a poster session. Tell me how that’s fair.

Harold can see Meena is uncomfortable.

HAROLD
That sucks, but I think it’s good you didn’t say anything to Heideberg. Brennan is like his all time favorite student.
CONTINUED: (2)

**DARREN**
Yeah, well, he’s a freakin’ genius. What are you gonna say anyway? You said he didn’t do anything. So, he hit on you. He probably hit on all the girl students at the conference. Just hope he remembers your name.

Darren takes his snacks and leaves. Meena looks to Harold.

**HAROLD**
(shrugging)
It sucks but what are you gonna do? Brennan’s kind of a rockstar.

He leaves as well. Meena is distraught. She takes a moment to compose herself before following them.

**SCENE 2.4 QUESTIONS AND MORE QUESTIONS**

**INT. SORENSON’S OFFICE - DAY**

Sorenson and Alex talk at a small table.

**SORENSON**
So, how are things going?

**ALEX**
Pretty good, I guess. I’ve been reading a lot of articles. There’s some work on mRNA therapeutics that seems interesting.

**SORENSON**
Okay. Yeah, I agree there’s interesting work to be done there.

**ALEX**
So, you think that should be my focus for my first project?

**SORENSON**
Well, I’m not sure. I guess I would have thought you’d moved past the reading stage and been setting things up by now.

(CONTINUED)
ALEX
No, I have. I’ve been messing around—not messing around—um, I’ve been trying some things, uh, experimenting.

SORENSON
Okay. And?

ALEX
I see a lot of potential options, I guess. I just don’t know which one is the most promising.

SORENSON
That’s fine. Uh, is there any that seem more interesting than the others for you?

ALEX
Um, I want to focus on the one that will have the biggest impact on the field. The one that’s kind of most forward-looking.

SORENSON
Of course, that’s a good aspiration. Any of these areas you’re talking about can really make an impact and—and that’s important to think about.

ALEX
Yes. That’s where I was hoping I could get your opinion on things.

SORENSON
Okay. We can definitely talk through the things your looking at. I’m happy to give you my opinion—

ALEX
That’d be great.

SORENSON
I meant I can give you my opinion but you are the one reading the papers and diving into these specific research areas. (MORE)
CONTINUED: (2)

SORENSON (CONT'D)
So, my opinion can inform your choice but your opinion about what’s most interesting should ultimately drive your decision.

Alex looks confused.

SORENSON
It’s great that you want to maximize the impact your research has and you don’t want to exclusively prioritize that. You want to focus on projects that interest you and you feel an affinity for.

ALEX
I agree.

SORENSON
So, which of the topics fits that bill? For you?

ALEX
I don’t know, exactly. They’re all interesting.

SORENSON
Okay. Do any of your project ideas seem to have a longer horizon where one might lead to a series of experiments?

ALEX
Maybe one or two are like that.

SORENSON
Would you prefer that so you have sort of a path laid out or would you prefer to start with something more contained and then re-evaluate after that?

ALEX
I’m not sure. I’m okay with a longer time horizon as long as the focus is something that makes sense.

SORENSON
Of course.

(continues)
A

CONTINUED: (3)

ALEX
It’s, I guess, the focus I’m still working on.

SORENSON
That’s fine. It’s a process. I would say try narrowing it down to the projects that have a time horizon you think works best for you and then just choose the one that fits most what you want to be working on. Does that seem like a reasonable plan going forward?

ALEX
(giving up)
Yeah, sure. I’ll go back and think about it more.

SORENSON
Great. And I’m here. Let me know if I can help.

ALEX
Okay.

Alex leaves.

INT. SORENSON’S LAB - DAY

Alex walks back to his bench. He sighs. Ana Sofia looks over at him.

ANA SOFIA
How did your meeting go?

ALEX
I don’t know. How do you think my meeting went?

ANA SOFIA
What?
(Alex laughs to himself)
I don’t get it.

ALEX
Nothing. It’s just—I don’t feel like Jules ever gives me a straight answer. Every time I ask her a question, she just replies with a question of her own.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

ALEX (CONT'D)
I’m just asking her to tell me what area she thinks I should pursue. I’m not asking her to do the research for me or anything.

ANA SOFIA
I could see how that would be frustrating.

ALEX
Does she not do that with you?

ANA SOFIA
I don’t know. I haven’t really had a one on one with her yet. Just group meetings.

ALEX
Really? I know she’s busy but come on. You’ve been here a while now.

ANA SOFIA
I guess...I’m sure she’ll let me know when she has time.

Both feeling a bit dejected, they go back to work.

SCENE 2.5 A SYMPATHETIC EAR

INT. MEENA’S APARTMENT - EVENING

A comfy, modest apartment. Meena fixes herself dinner in the kitchen. Pours it into a bowl and sits on the couch. Clicks on the TV.

Blows on her food. Too hot to eat.

She is distracted. Looks at her phone. Clicks off the TV and picks up the phone. Scrolls through her contacts to Ana Sofia. Hesitates for a minute, but then texts:

MEENA VIA TEXT
Hey.

A minute passes. Meena blows on her food.

ANA SOFIA VIA TEXT
Hey.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

MEENA VIA TEXT
It’s Meena. We met at Heideberg’s lab.

ANA SOFIA VIA TEXT
Yeah. How r u?

MEENA VIA TEXT
Fine. How are you?

ANA SOFIA VIA TEXT
THUMBS UP EMOJI WITH A HEAD-EXPLODING EMOJI.

MEENA VIA TEXT
Sorry if your busy. Don’t mean to bother you.

INT. ANA SOFIA’S APARTMENT – EVENING

Ana Sofia sits on the couch, watching TV.

ANA SOFIA VIA TEXT
No bother. Everything OK?

MEENA VIA TEXT
Yeah.

(beat)
Kind of.

INT. MEENA’S APARTMENT – EVENING

Meena’s phone rings. It is Ana Sofia.

MEENA
Hi. Sorry. I really don’t want to bother you.

ANA SOFIA
Meena, it’s cool. Just tell me what’s going on.

MEENA
It’s not a big deal. I had a bad experience and I’m probably overreacting...

ANA SOFIA
Maybe, maybe not. If you want to talk about it, I’ll listen.

(CONTINUED)
MEENA
Remember the Poster Session I told you about...

ANA SOFIA
Didn’t go well?

MEENA
It was fine. I mean the usual. People wondering how much I contributed to my own thesis project cause I’m a woman. Stuff like that.

ANA SOFIA
Yeah, love to hear that after you put all that work in.

MEENA
I know. But what happened after is what really bothered me. Dr. H has a former student he always talks about. Jim Brennan. He told Heideberg he’d be at the conference and would stop by. And he did.

ANA SOFIA
Creeper?

MEENA
He didn’t even look at my poster. He just kept hitting on me.

ANA SOFIA
I’m sorry, Meena.

MEENA
It was gross. What’s worse, he had a female student with him, really pretty. He had his hand on her shoulder the whole time he was creeping on me. I don’t want to assume what their relationship is, but she looked as uncomfortable as I felt.

ANA SOFIA
Classy. Did you tell anyone in your lab about it?
MEENA
Sort of. Dr. H asked about him, but I felt weird telling him his
golden boy hit on me. I told a few other guys in the lab about it,
but they didn’t get it.

ANA SOFIA
What did they say?

MEENA
One thought I should be flattered.

ANA SOFIA
(scoffing)
Are you serious?

MEENA
The other felt bad for me, but said I shouldn’t make a big thing
of it.

ANA SOFIA
What do YOU think you should do?

MEENA
What can I do?

ANA SOFIA
You can report Dr. Creeper through the proper channels and you could
tell Dr. H that this guy made you feel uncomfortable. It might not
do any good, but he should at least know it’s happening.

Silence from Meena. Clearly she is hesitant to do those things.

ANA SOFIA
Look, I know that it’s easy for me to say and you don’t have to do
anything. Okay?

MEENA
Yeah.

ANA SOFIA
The question is, what do you want to do about it? It bothered you
enough to call me. If all you need is someone to talk to, that’s
cool. I have no problem with that.

(MORE)
ANA SOFIA (CONT'D)
If it’s going to keep bothering you, then you’ll have to figure something out. Whatever you do, it should make you feel better about it, not worse. Okay?

MEENA
Yeah. Thanks.

ANA SOFIA
Sure. Look, say to me what you want to say to them

MEENA
What do you mean?

ANA SOFIA
You know this is gonna happen again someday, just thinking this through will help you be more prepared next time so you can choose whether to stay in the situation or not. Say it to me. What did you want to say to the creeper at the poster session?

MEENA
I wanted to tell him to... you know!

ANA SOFIA
Right... what would have been constructive to say?

MEENA
I would have told him he was making inappropriate comments and to please only comment on the work, as that is why I was there... to present my work.

ANA SOFIA
Ok, and what do you wish you had said to Dr. H and the other jerks in your lab?
MEENA
I wish I had said, Dr. Brennan hit on me, and made me really uncomfortable and you need to be aware of how he’s treating female students if you’re going to recommend they interact with him and I would tell my lab colleagues I was disappointed when it clearly made me uncomfortable that they were not more understanding or supportive and that they don’t understand what that’s like for a woman to have to deal with that every time we present our work! It’s bad enough that we have to constantly prove ourselves in ways you don’t have to but to be disrespected like that on top of it--it’s too much.

ANA SOFIA
(chuckles)
Feel better?

MEENA
Yeah, actually, a little. Is it weird I called you since we don’t really know each other?

ANA SOFIA
No. I didn’t see many other women in your lab. So, I get it. And I’m here if you ever need someone to talk to about this kind of stuff. I understand, believe me.

MEENA
Thanks. How do you deal with this?

ANA SOFIA
You just deal with it. You don’t let it stop you. I find it does help me to volunteer with the local girls in a STEM program. We have a meeting this Saturday if you wanna stop by.

MEENA
That could be cool.
CONTINUED: (5)

ANA SOFIA
And if you want to look into your
options more the chapter of WISE
here is really good.

MEENA
What is WISE?

ANA SOFIA
Women in science and engineering.
They put on workshops and have
advice for dealing with harassing
behavior. Stuff like that. I think
it could help depending on what
you want to do.

MEENA
Thanks, um, I’ll check them out.

ANA SOFIA
I’m here if you want to talk more,
ok?

MEENA
Oh. Sure, thanks. Bye.

ANA SOFIA
See ya.

They hang up.

SCENE 2.6 ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER INDIGNITY

EXT. BIOLOGY BUILDING - DAY

Jayna crosses the quad enters the building.

INT. LOUNGE AREA - DAY

A few students sit around a TV as Jayna passes.

CNN is on. The Chyron reads: UNARMED BLACK MAN SHOT AND
KILLED BY POLICE.

TV Anchor: Initially the Mayor fired the officer but the
police union challenged this, saying the Mayor
overstepped her authority and the officer cannot be fired
without due process.

Jayna shakes her head and continues on.
INT. MAILROOM/FACULTY LOUNGE - DAY

Jayna stops in the mailroom on the first floor. Two SENIOR FACULTY MEMBERS (ONE FEMALE, ONE MALE) stand by the boxes chatting. Jayna grabs her mail and then pulls the mail from Loretta and Jules' boxes as well.

One of the Senior Faculty notices.

SENIOR FACULTY #1
Is all of that your mail?

JAYNA
I’m sorry?

SENIOR FACULTY #2
Are you faculty in this department?

They move closer, standing between Jayna and the mailboxes.

JAYNA
I’m a postdoc in the Sorenson lab. I’m picking up mail for others in my lab. They asked me to.

SENIOR FACULTY #1
Who’s your PI? I don’t think I’ve seen you before?

SENIOR FACULTY #2
Neither have I. Are you new?

Jayna starts to say something but stops herself. She takes a deep breath.

JAYNA
I’m not new. I’ve been in the Sorenson lab for about two years. My name is Jayna Bell.

She points to the mailbox with her name on it.

SENIOR FACULTY #1
And who is Dr. Sorenson’s Lab Manager?

Jayna looks incredulously at her.

JAYNA
Loretta. Wenstrup.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

SENIOR FACULTY #1
Oh. That makes sense.

SENIOR FACULTY #2
Okay. We were just trying to be safe. We just hadn’t seen you before. Wanted to make sure you were in the right place.

SENIOR FACULTY #1
You’re very youthful. I would not have guessed you were a postdoc. Good for you.

Jayna smiles sarcastically, heads out with her mail.

INT. SORENSON LAB - DAY
Loretta at her bench. Jayna drops her mail off.

LORETTA
Thanks.

JAYNA
Yep.

LORETTA
Everything good?

JAYNA
Good as it’s gonna get, I guess.

Jayna walks away. Loretta looks after her concerned. Jayna goes to her desk. An email from Darren.

TEXT OF EMAIL: Jayna, we checked the compounds you returned and both are the same molecule. Data proves the problem has to be on the bio side. Hope you figure it out. Darren

Jayna shakes her head. Begins typing.

TEXT OF EMAIL: Darren, I just finished another experiment with additional controls in place and got the same results. There is something off in the second compound. I’m sure of it. I would like nothing more than to prove you wrong and shove it in your face. Unfortunately, I can’t because you seem unable to get me more compound to test with. It’s obvious this collaboration is not a priority and you and Dr. Heideberg can--

(CONTINUED)
LORETTA
Hey, uh, you gave me your mail too.

JAYNA
Oh, thanks.

LORETTA
Are you sure you’re ok?

JAYNA
Never better.
(beat)
It’s not worth getting into.

LORETTA
Jayna, come on. What’s going on?

JAYNA
It’s-- well it’s kind of everything, you know?

LORETTA
Tell me about it.

JAYNA
It’s the news, it’s seeing another Black person being shot and my white friends telling me they’re sorry and wishing they could do more.

LORETTA
I get it.

JAYNA
It’s feeling like I have no control over my work. It’s people looking at me like I don’t belong. It’s people thinking I only belong because I’m a diversity hire. It’s people asking me who helped me with the math, or, who did the hard parts of my project. It’s being asked to be on DEI committees when all I want is to do my research. It’s the pressure I get from my family and how much they want me to succeed and how I really don’t want to let them down but they have no idea all the stuff I’m dealing with. It’s everything, you know?
(MORE)
CONTINUED: (2)

JAYNA (CONT'D)

(beat)
But most of all, I’m tired.

LORETTA
You have a right to feel tired. It’s exhausting! It’s not easy
being in a system that needs to be
fixed. I was dealing with the same
types of things 25 years ago when
I was in grad school. Men greatly
outnumbered women then, believe
me. Being Black and a woman in
science was not easy. There were
so many obstacles.

JAYNA
I can’t imagine. How did you even--

LORETTA
It was challenging. But, it was
worth it. I had a network of other
women and we kept each other
going. I also talked, complained
and planned with other Black
professionals in science, and
other disciplines. Both were
critical. It makes a big
difference to know you’re not the
only one--and you’re not.
Remember, there are other groups
on campus that you can go to. Like
the Women in STEM group. And there
are lots of online communities
that can help too.

Jayna nods, feeling better.

Sorenson comes around the corner.

SORENSON
Loretta there you are. Can we go
over some things when you’re free?

LORETTA
Yes, I just need a minute.

SORENSON
Sure. Is everything ok?

LORETTA
It’s fine. I got it.

Sorenson leaves.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: (3)

JAYNA
Sorry. I didn’t mean to go off.

LORETTA
Nothing to apologize for. You have
to let stuff like that out or
it’ll just eat at ya. But don’t
ever think for a second that you
don’t belong here or that you
haven’t earned everything you get.
I’ve been in labs a long time and
you are as smart and capable as
any student I’ve seen and this
community needs you.

JAYNA
Thanks.

LORETTA
Feel free to come and talk to me
or Jules anytime you need to ok?
Jules may not understand first
hand everything you’re
experiencing, but take it from me,
she values the scientific
contributions you make to the lab
and cares about you as a person.

JAYNA
Alright, I will.

Loretta heads towards Sorenson’s office.

Jayna looks over the email she was writing. Deletes
everything she wrote. Begins again.

TEXT OF EMAIL: Darren, Thanks for the update. When can I
expect more compound so I can continue with my
experiments and figure out where the problem is? Jayna.

She hits send.

SCENE 2.7 TYING IT DOWN/HAROLD PUSHED TO THE LIMIT

INT. HEIDEBERG LAB – DAY

Meena hard at work. She checks the spectroscopy results.
Her shoulders collapse and she sighs in frustration.
Something is off; it is not the molecule she was trying
to make.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

Meena looks at Harold’s bench. Empty. She sends him a TEXT: Where are you? Are you okay? A string of texts to Harold, with no response.

Frustrated, Meena finds Darren at his desk. Busy, he doesn’t look up.

    MEENA
    Darren, do you have a minute?

    DARREN
    Not really, but go ahead.

    MEENA
    I’m having trouble making the compound.

    DARREN
    This is getting ridiculous. Everything you need is in the protocol and in my notebook, which I still want back someday.

    MEENA
    It would help if you could watch me go through the procedure to make sure I’m doing everything correctly.

    DARREN
    That would be a huge waste of my time.

    MEENA
    Then can you at least review your notes again to make sure nothing’s wrong?

    DARREN
    If you really belong in a lab like this, you should be able to make the compound.

    MEENA
    I’ve tried. I’ve consulted with Harold on this too and both of us have been unable to reproduce.

Darren rolls his eyes and finally looks at her.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: (2)

DARREN
Harold’s inexperience in a lab at this level is clearly catching up with him. I thought at least you would be able to handle this.
Look, you have to take care of this yourself. You’re in charge of the project now, so it’s your problem.

Meena stares at Darren in disbelief. Darren turns back to his desk.

Meena returns to her bench, disappointed. Heideberg walks through the lab. Sees Harold’s empty bench.

HEIDEBERG
Has Mr. Wendling made an appearance today?

MEENA
He should be in soon. He told me he was just taking care of something and he’d be right in.

Heideberg is unconvinced.

HEIDEBERG
Um-hm.

Meena goes back to work, more flustered than usual. Heideberg sees she is preoccupied.

HEIDEBERG (CONT’D)
How are things going for you?

Before Meena can answer, Harold arrives. He is haggard. The sight of Heideberg catches Harold off guard. He hastily begins to work, but it is too late.

HEIDEBERG (CONT’D)
Care to explain yourself?

HAROLD
I’m sorry. I haven’t been feeling well lately. I’ll get started right away...

HEIDEBERG
It would be nice. If we could do some chemistry today.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: (3)

HAROLD

Of course.

Meena wants to say something, but holds her tongue. Heideberg looks Harold over.

HEIDEBERG
You are aware of the appropriate laboratory footwear?

HAROLD
I was running late. I must have grabbed the wrong shoes--

HEIDEBERG
This is a lab. Not your dorm room.

HAROLD
I know.

HEIDEBERG
I trust we won’t have this conversation again. Is that understood?

HAROLD
Yes.

HEIDEBERG
Good. Get to work.

Heideberg returns to his office and closes the door.

Meena watches Harold. His breathing is short and he is obviously upset. He stops to catch his breath.

Meena places a hand on Harold’s back.

MEENA
Harold, let’s get some fresh air.
Come on.

Meena leads Harold out of the lab.

EXT. CHEMISTRY BUILDING – DAY

Meena guides Harold to the side of the building.

MEENA
Where have you been? I’ve been worried about you.
CONTINUED:

HAROLD
I woke up and came right over.

MEENA
It’s 3 in the afternoon. I’ve been texting you all day. Are you okay?

HAROLD
Not really.

MEENA
Are you sick? Have you eaten today?

HAROLD
I’m just not hungry. I’m not sleeping well. I’m just tired of being tired.

MEENA
Harold, you can’t let this whole thing get to you like this.

HAROLD
What? Being a failure?

MEENA
Stop it. You’re not a failure.

HAROLD
I’m not cutting it and everyone knows it. Undergrad was so easy. I did great in my old lab and then I came here. Everything started fine and then this damn collaboration. I keep messing it up. You know Heideberg. There’s no margin for error here, no room for mistakes. I know he wants me out of his lab.

MEENA
Harold, calm down. You’re a hard worker and this is a very difficult project. Sure, we’re having problems, but the issues will get resolved. I can’t figure it out either. I really don’t think it’s you. This stuff is hard. Sometimes you’re gonna fail. It doesn’t make you a failure.

Harold still looks unconvinced.
MEENA
I think we should both go talk to Heideberg together.

HAROLD
I can’t talk to him right now...

MEENA
Not now. Tomorrow. Together. We’ll tell him something isn’t right with the Sorenson project and tell him Darren needs to work with us to make the compound from scratch. It’s the only way to finally determine what’s wrong.

HAROLD
It won’t do any good. He already thinks I’m useless.

MEENA
Not if we show him there’s something off in the synthesis. Then he’ll know it’s not your fault. We’ll talk to him tomorrow. Together, all right?

Harold is still nervous, but relents.

HAROLD
Okay.

FADE OUT.

SCENE 2.8 TALKING IT OUT

INT. SORENSON’S LAB – DAY

Ana Sofia works at her bench. She pores over an electronic notebook on her computer. The notes are difficult to follow. Ana Sofia shakes her head.

She gets a text from Meena.

MEENA VIA TEXT
Have you talked to her yet?

ANA SOFIA VIA TEXT
No.

(pause)

Do I have to?
CONTINUED:

Ana Sofia’s phone vibrates as she exits the lab.

INT. HALLWAY BIOLOGY BUILDING – DAY

Ana Sofia enters the hall and answers her phone.

ANA SOFIA
Hi. Yes. I know I need to talk with her, but I don’t want her to think I’m totally incompetent.

MEENA
You’ve tried your best and you haven’t done anything wrong. Talking to Dr. Sorenson is the right thing to do. You can practice on me. I’ll be her. What would you like to say? Did you write any personal scripts you can use?

ANA SOFIA
Yeah. Okay...I’m having trouble understanding Justin’s notebook and I’d feel more comfortable if we could go over it together.

MEENA
That’s great.

ANA SOFIA
It’s not too desperate?

MEENA
No. You’re just being honest.

ANA SOFIA
Or I could say...I’m unfamiliar with the systems for tracking data in the lab. Could you please go over it with me so that I can better interpret Justin’s notebook?

MEENA
I like that one too. Maybe go with the second one because it addresses the issue of data management in the lab. You’ll be fine. Trust me.

(CONTINUED)
ANA SOFIA
Thanks, that helps. I’ll go talk to her after this. How are you doing? Were you able to make the compound?

MEENA
No. I haven’t had any luck. It’s so frustrating.

ANA SOFIA
Sorry. I know the feeling.

MEENA
I hope I can figure it out today. If not, Harold and I are going to speak to Dr. H tomorrow. I’m really dreading that conversation, but we don’t know what else to do.

ANA SOFIA
It’ll suck but you can do it. If you want, we can talk through it?

MEENA
I guess I made you do it so... We feel like we’ve done everything we can to reproduce the compound. We’d like Darren to guide us through the procedure. We believe it’s the only way we’re going to be able to do it successfully.

ANA SOFIA
That sounds reasonable to me.

MEENA
He’s going to be so disappointed.

ANA SOFIA
Probably but I’m sure he also wants the project to move forward. If you think that’s the best way to do that, he’s gotta understand. Feel any better?

MEENA
I guess. Thanks.

ANA SOFIA
No problem. I’m going to talk to Jules. Good luck with yours. Let me know how it goes.
CONTINUED: (2)

MEENA
I will. Good luck.

Ana Sofia takes a deep breath and goes back in.

INT. SORENSON’S OFFICE – DAY

Sorenson talks with Loretta at her desk. Ana Sofia knocks and comes right in.

ANA SOFIA
Jules, can I talk to you about something--?
(see their in a meeting)
I’m sorry. You’re busy. I’ll come back later.

Sorenson and Loretta see she is nervous.

SORENSON
It’s all right. We’re just finishing up. Is everything alright?

ANA SOFIA
I’ve been having trouble reproducing Justin’s work. It’s hard to interpret his lab notes on the server. There are multiple files with no clear dates or order. And I can’t figure out the procedure. At first, I thought I was doing something wrong. I’ve tried and I can’t make sense of the experiments as they were performed. Maybe I can figure out the system if you help me get started and I can take it from there.

LORETTA
It’s all right, Ana Sofia. We’re here to help you as best as we can.

SORENSON
That’s right. Let’s look at Justin’s notebook.

Sorenson brings up the files on her computer. Sorenson and Loretta are dismayed.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

SORENSON
I certainly understand why you’re having problems. I don’t want you to spend any more time trying to reproduce Justin’s work right now. Has Jayna been able to help you with this?

ANA SOFIA
I didn’t ask her about it. She seems really busy right now, so I didn’t want to bother her.

SORENSON
All right. I’ll talk to Jayna about it. We’ll set up a meeting with the three of us to figure out next steps.

ANA SOFIA
Thank you. That would be great.

LORETTA
Thanks for coming to us.

Ana Sofia exits. Sorenson and Loretta share a look.

SORENSON
What do you think?

LORETTA
I think those notes are a mess. I wish she had come to us sooner.

SORENSON
I don’t blame her really. She didn’t want to seem incapable starting in a new lab.

LORETTA
Obviously, our electronic notekeeping needs work. With Ana Sofia not being able to reproduce, are you worried the data may be off?

SORENSON
No. His research was replicated by a very reliable collaborator. Luckily.

(MORE)
CONTINUED: (2)

SORENSON (CONT'D)
We do need to come up with a more concrete plan for how we organize our data so we don’t have problems like this going forward.

LORETTA
Absolutely. I actually just read a paper about improving communication in labs.

SORENSON
Great. That sounds like a good place to start.

LORETTA
I’ll send it to you.

SORENSON
All right.

They go back to the prior meeting.

SCENE 2.9 LORETTA WEIGHS IN

INT. SORENSON’S LAB – DAY

Alex sits daydreaming at his bench. Loretta walks by with her laptop. He perks up and moves some things around to look busy.

LORETTA
Hi, Alex. Placing another order. Do you need anything?

Alex looks around. Checks in a cabinet.

ALEX
No, thanks. I’m good.

Loretta starts to walk away and thinks better of it.

LORETTA
What are you working on?

ALEX
I’m setting up some initial tests for my first project.

Loretta looks around, confused. His bench is mostly empty.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

LORETTA
That’s great. Did you book any equipment today?

ALEX
Well, no. I won’t need much.

LORETTA
Do you need help? I can see if any of the undergrads are free?

ALEX
No – it’s all right. I don’t need anything.

Loretta can tell that something is off.

LORETTA
Is everything okay, Alex?

ALEX
I’m fine. I’m still figuring some things out.

LORETTA
Did your meeting with Jules help? She told me it went well.

Alex scoffs but then stifles it.

LORETTA
Alex, your Fellowship review is coming up pretty quickly. They’re going to want to see a clear direction for your first research project.

ALEX
You think I don’t know that? I’m working on it.

Loretta is taken back by his tone. Takes a second to compose herself.

LORETTA
Okay. I’m saying it doesn’t all have to be on you. We’re here to help you if you’re having trouble.

Alex does not reply.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: (2)

LORETTA
I’m not sure why you don’t trust that I’m trying to help you.
(pause)
Alex?

ALEX
I know you’re just going to go
tell Jules any bad things I say.

LORETTA
Okay, first, that’s not true.
Second, the same as Jules, all I want is to help you be successful.
That’s my job. If you can’t come to me for help, than what I am here for? The lab only succeeds if you succeed. So, I would like you to trust me when I tell you that I am here to help you as best I can.

Alex considers this.

ALEX
Really?

LORETTA
Of course.

ALEX
Okay. Well, I didn’t get anything out of my meeting with Jules. I just wanted her to tell me what direction she wants me to take my research but she just kept avoiding my questions. At my lab in Korea, the PI was a lot more direct. It was clear what type of research he wanted and it was easy to figure things out. I don’t understand why it has to be this hard here. She’s just evasive.

LORETTA
Okay. I hear you. You’re not saying anything bad about Jules. What you’re describing is miscommunication. I’ve known her a long time. She’s trying to lead you to a place where you can make your own decisions about what research you pursue.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: (3)

ALEX
But I just need her--

LORETTA
Hang on. That’s not what you need from her. I understand that. But I would say that you haven’t conveyed to Jules what it is you do need from her.

ALEX
I try--

LORETTA
I hear you. The problem is we can’t get past this unless we solve the communication problem. And that means talking it out. I want to set up another meeting.

ALEX
I don’t think it’ll do any good.

LORETTA
I’d like you to give it a chance and I will be happy to be a part of the meeting to help resolve any miscommunication. Are you willing to try that? Cause the other option is not making any progress.

ALEX
Okay. Fine.

LORETTA
Thank you. I’ll talk to Jules and set it up.

Alex turns back to his bench as Loretta leaves.

INT. SORENSON’S OFFICE – LATER

Loretta stops by. Sorenson works at her desk.

LORETTA
Do you have a minute?

SORENSON
Sure.

(CONTINUED)
LORETTA
I just spoke to Alex.

SORENSON
Yes?

LORETTA
He told me he’s still having problems with his research.

SORENSON
Really? I thought our last meeting went well.

LORETTA
I know. I don’t think he left with the same impression. My sense is he needs clearer guidance on what his projects should be.

SORENSON
You know I prefer to guide the students along rather than force things on them. I’ve worked in labs where the PI was a dictator and that’s not the way I want to run things.

LORETTA
Absolutely and most of our students appreciate that and thrive under it. I think Alex may be an exception. It sounds like he was used to the other method in his lab and you may need to adjust a bit to where he’s at.

SORENSON
Okay. So what does that mean?

LORETTA
I’d like to set up another meeting between you two. If it’s okay, I can be there to help with any cross communication issues.

SORENSON
That’s fine. If it will help him figure out what he needs to move his research forward, it’s good with me.
CONTINUED: (2)

LORETTA
Okay. I’ll set up the meeting.

SORENSON
Great. Thanks.

Loretta leaves and Sorenson sits at her desk, lost in thought.

SCENE 2.10 MEENA VISITS HEIDEBERG

EXT. CHEMISTRY BUILDING - EARLY MORNING

Sunshine barely peaks over the buildings as Heideberg enters the Chem building.

INT. HEIDEBERG LAB - EARLY MORNING

On his way to his office, he sees Meena at her bench, working away. She looks tired. It is clear she has been there all night.

He enters his office.

EXT. CHEMISTRY BUILDING - LATER

Meena waits anxiously outside the building. She checks her phone. She texts Harold.

MEENA VIA TEXT
Where are you?

There are a string of unanswered texts in the thread.

Finally, Harold arrives. Meena sighs with relief. Harold does not look good.

MEENA
Where have you been? Are you okay?

HAROLD
Not really.

MEENA
Are you ready?

HAROLD
I can’t do it.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

MEENA
Why not?

HAROLD
I can’t face him. I’m sorry.

MEENA
Harold…?

HAROLD
Sorry.

He rushes off. Meena almost goes after him but stops. She sighs and goes into the building.

INT. HEIDEBERG LAB – DAY

Meena knocks on the door to Heideberg’s office.

HEIDEBERG
Come in.

MEENA
Good morning.

HEIDEBERG
Good morning…Yes??

MEENA
I can’t reproduce the compound for the Sorenson lab.

Heideberg sighs in disappointment.

MEENA
I have Darren’s notebook and I’m following all of the steps but I cannot figure out why the synthesis is not working. I’m getting the same results that Harold did. Is it possible for Darren to walk through it so we can figure out where the disconnect is?

HEIDEBERG
If Darren was able to make the compound twice, you and Harold should be more than capable of replicating it. I can’t believe the amount of time and resources we’ve already put into this.

(MORE)
CONTINUED:  HEIDEBERG (CONT'D)
All right, I see no other choice. I’ll tell Darren to walk you through it to figure out what you and Harold are doing wrong.

MEENA
Thank you.

HEIDEBERG
My students from India have always been exceptional. I really thought you were the one to get this done.

MEENA
I’m sorry you’re disappointed but I really feel I did everything I could.

Heideberg is unconvinced.

HEIDEBERG
Well, you’re in charge of the collaboration. Let the Sorenson people know they won’t be getting the molecule again this week.

MEENA
I will.

Heideberg goes back to what he was doing. Meena leaves.

SCENE 2.11 MORE BAD NEWS

INT. SORENSON LAB - DAY

Jayna sets up an experiment at her bench. Ana Sofia stops by.

ANA SOFIA
Have you gotten the compounds yet?

JAYNA
No but I want to be ready when they do. Darren said two weeks so should be getting them any time.

ANA SOFIA
Good luck.

JAYNA
Thanks. Fingers crossed.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

They both cross their fingers.

Ana Sofia heads off to her desk as Jayna checks her phone. An email from Meena.

TEXT IN EMAIL: Jayna, I am sorry but we are still experiencing delays in making the compound. We are working as hard as we can to deliver what you need but we need additional time. I can’t say at this time how long it will be but I will get back to you with a clearer idea as soon as I can. Again, I am really sorry. Meena.

Jayna is pissed. She heads directly to Sorenson’s office.

Sorenson and Loretta are in a meeting. Jayna barges in.

JAYNA
I just got an email from Meena. No compounds. They’re still having problems. They have no idea when they are going to get me something.

Jayna paces as she waits for Sorenson and Loretta to process.

Sorenson and Loretta exchange a look.

SORENSON
Okay. You have every right to be upset. Do you think we can talk about it constructively or do you need time to collect yourself?

JAYNA
(stunned)
I don’t understand why you’re not more upset about this. Heideberg should be held accountable for the incompetence of the people in his lab.

LORETTA
Jayna, it’s not going to help to take this personally. Let’s try and problem solve.

JAYNA
How can I not? Justin didn’t have any of these problems when he dealt with Darren and Heideberg. So, it’s gotta be me they have a problem with.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: (2)

SORENSON
This is a collaboration. We can’t tell Heideberg how to run his lab anymore than we would want him to tell us how to run ours. We can only control the things within our power.

JAYNA
That’s not good enough. If you step in, they’ll listen and have to take this and me more seriously. They are not providing any explanation for the delays and no timeline on when I can expect the next delivery. How is that okay?

SORENSON
I’m not saying it’s okay. We never established specific deadlines or timetables. The best thing you can do is have a conversation with Meena and try for clarity around the delays. See if you can get a clearer timeline.

JAYNA
So, just putting it back on me again?

Jules and Loretta look to each other.

LORETTA
We’re not trying to put it back on you, Jayna.

SORENSON
No, we’re here to support you. At the end of the day though, it is your project...

JAYNA
I don’t feel like I’m getting the support I need to do my project.

Jayna leaves. Sorenson and Loretta look at each other.

SCENE 2.12 THE WORST NEWS
INT. HEIDEBERG LAB - DAY

Dr. Heideberg is in his office. ELLIOT BARR (45), the Director of Graduate Studies for the Chemistry Dept. knocks on his door.

HEIDEBERG
Elliot, this is a nice surprise. How are you?

ELLIO T
(his tone is grave)
Fine, Malcolm. Thanks.

HEIDEBERG
Is everything okay?

ELLIO T
I’m here to talk to you about one of your grad students.

HEIDEBERG
All right.

ELLIO T
Harold Wendling attempted suicide in his apartment last night.

Heideberg is dumbfounded.

HEIDEBERG
What? What did he do?

ELLIO T
He survived and he’s expected to make a full recovery.

Heideberg nods but still can say nothing.

ELLIO T (CONT’D)
Harold’s family has asked that no one discuss it as a suicide attempt. They want it to be described as a family emergency and Harold had to move closer to his family to help out. I’m helping Harold get into a program closer to home and his family is going to see that he gets the help he needs.

HEIDEBERG
I understand.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

ELLiot
I thought it was important that you knew the truth.

HEIDEBERG
Yes, no. Of course.
(a beat)
He really had not been cutting in the lab lately but I never thought that--

ELLiot
I’m not asking for an explanation. It’s not up to the department if there is an inquiry or not.

Heideberg nods.

HEIDEBERG
Okay. I trust the department will be taking care of all of the details.

ELLiot
We are taking this very seriously. The rate of suicides on campus has increased and I’m sure you’re aware the department has not been immune.
(a beat)
This is something we’re all concerned about.

HEIDEBERG
Of course.

ELLiot
Nothing is decided at this point. It seems likely that in the near future we’re going to bring in a consultant to work with all faculty on promoting healthy labs. Identifying potential mental health issues in lab members. Something like that.

HEIDEBERG
I see.

ELLiot
And we would appreciate if you could be the first faculty member from the department to volunteer.

(continued)
CONTINUED: (2)

HEIDEBERG
Is that necessary?

ELLiot
The college, grad college, and
department are making this a
priority.

HEIDEBERG
Well, if all faculty are meant to
participate...that would be fine.

ELLiot
Ok. I’ll be in touch as things
develop. But wanted to let you
know.

Elliot leaves. Heideberg sits at his desk, processing for
a moment. Gets up. He wanders over to Harold’s bench.
Meena is there.

It is clear from her face she has already heard the news.
They exchange a look, not accusational, just sadness.
Heidgeberg goes back to his office.

END ACT 2.