

WONDER DRUG

BY

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WONDER DRUG

BLACK SCREEN

The SOUND of a key slipping into a lock.

A CLICK.

Angle from inside -- a small mailbox door opens.

Framed inside the vertical opening is the face of FRANCES OLDHAM, a sweet looking, wide-eyed 21-year-old.

She spies the letter resting inside and thrusts a gloved hand in to retrieve it. She slams the door closed.

BLACK SCREEN

INSERT TITLE -- WONDER DRUG

BASED ON A TRUE STORY

MONTREAL - 1936

INT. REDPATH BOARDING HOUSE FOR GIRLS - DAY

Leaning against the wall of mailboxes in the foyer of the tidy boarding house, Frances inspects the letter.

She's bundled against the cold, wearing a worn wool skirt and vest. The small pretty girl keeps her hair short, parted on the side, like a boy.

She studies the envelope--U.S. Postage--the return address: EMK Geiling, Pharmacology Department, The University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, USA.

The typewritten address--MR. FRANCES OLDHAM.

Frances tears open the envelope and scans the letter. On her forehead, a crease of worry.

EXT. MONTREAL STREET - RUE UNIVERSITY - DAY

Frances pedals a rusty old bike along the main street. She passes shuddered shops, dusted-up MEN huddling around a trash-can fire, and boarded up bank windows.

She surveys the long line of MEN, WOMEN, and CHILDREN waiting for a handout of soup and bread.

EXT. MCGILL UNIVERSITY SCIENCE BUILDING - DAY

Frances cuts across the lawn and drops her ride in front of the massive stone structure.

INT. MCGILL UNIVERSITY SCIENCE BUILDING - DAY

Navigating the familiar labyrinth of halls and doors in the science building, she quickly arrives at the pharmacology lab, knocks, then lets herself in.

INT. PHARMACOLOGY LAB - CONTINUOUS

She isn't coming to celebrate.

FRANCES
(breathless)
Dr. Stehle. It came.

Her mentor, DR. STEHLE(50s), tries to keep a frog on a scale.

Stehle wears khaki shorts and hiking boots even now, in the dead of winter. He's bald, bearded, and good humored.

She holds out the letter.

He plops the frog back in a tank and takes the envelope.

DR. STEHLE
(reading the note)
Congratulations.
(to Frances proudly)
Nice opening.

FRANCES
(points to the letter)
But look. Who it's addressed to. I should cable Dr. Geiling. Tell him that I'm a SHE.

DR. STEHLE
Don't be ridiculous. Now isn't the time to jeopardize an offer like this. Tell him you're coming.

He offers her a pen but she won't take it.

FRANCES
I'll bet you that when he finds out I'm a girl, he won't want me in his grad program. I'll disinfect this whole lab if I'm wrong.

She extends her hand to seal the bet. She's called his bluff and they both know it. Now it's his turn not to take what's being offered.

DR. STEHLE

Ok, so maybe he won't. But by accepting you he's already admitted that you can do the work. So sign your name, pack your things, and go.

FRANCES

All right. But before I'm through I'll make him admit he was wrong about me. That's a promise.

Dr. Stehle considers her shrewdly.

DR. STEHLE

It must be hard lugging around that boulder-sized chip on your shoulder.

Frances doesn't know what he means.

DR. STEHLE (CONT'D)

You know I believe in you, Oldham. You're skilled in the lab. You ask interesting questions. And you've got passion and commitment in spades-- maybe more than anyone who's come through my lab. But sometimes you forget what's important about doing science. It's not about you being right and proving that everyone else is wrong. It's about working together to find out the truth.

FRANCES

(protesting)

But I'm the best team player in this lab...

Dr. Stehle's raises his eyebrows in disbelief.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

(catches herself)

The boulder. I get it.

DR. STEHLE

And don't you forget it. Aside from kids and a husband, that's the only obstacle that might keep you from being a good scientist.

(in a lighter tone)

Now will you sign that damn paper already?

Smiling, she grabs the pen; clearly she's thrilled.

Dr. Stehle stands behind her, watching, as she signs her name with a flourish--Frances Oldham (Miss).

EXT. ROAD - DAY

A Greyhound Bus crosses the rolling hills of eastern Canada.

INT. BUS - DAY

Frances watches the landscape whirl by.

EXT. PORT OF ENTRY - DAY

The bus hisses to a stop at the U.S. border crossing station. Its door swings open.

The weary PASSENGERS shiver as they climb down from the warm bus into the cold winter afternoon.

Frances breathes deeply, glad for the fresh air. She glances across the imaginary line that separates the two countries.

Her future.

The others have moved on. She hurries toward the U.S. immigration station. Before she enters, one last look back.

INT. BORDER CONTROL - DAY

Frances stands in line with the other passengers. The AGENT beckons her forward.

She presents her papers.

AGENT
Purpose of your visit?

FRANCES
To attend university. I have a student visa.

He examines her visa.

AGENT
M-R-S degree?

FRANCES
(did she hear him right?)
What's that?

AGENT
Coming to catch an American husband?

FRANCES
I'd rather catch a ride on the
Hindenburg.

He's stumped.

FRANCES (CONT'D)
Here's where you say, go ahead.
Welcome to the U.S.

AGENT
Whatever you say, miss.

She passes through the station and out the door to the waiting bus.

EXT. CHICAGO - DAY

The early morning sun casts a line of light across the steel gray waters of Lake Michigan. Waves, immobilized by the cold, line the shore.

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO - DAY

Piles of snow dot the wide midway that bisects the University of Chicago campus.

Frances trudges across the frigid ground and into the life-science building.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LAB - DAY

The lab is all empty tables and boxes.

Trying to impress her new professor, Frances wears a Deco-inspired dress and heels, but she comes off as both clumsy and inexperienced.

DR. EUGENE GEILING (45) instructs Frances in the lab's set up. He is graceful but abrupt. Conservative. Old-school.

His English betrays his South African roots.

DR. GEILING
Come daily at 8.

FRANCES
Yes, Doctor.

DR. GEILING
If I find your work satisfactory you can commence classes in the spring quarter, which starts in April.

FRANCES
I'll do my best.

DR. GEILING
Animal room here. Rats, rabbits,
those go in these small cages.

Frances, unstable on heels, staggers. Geiling mistakes her movement.

DR. GEILING (CONT'D)
You've worked with animals?

FRANCES
Yes, Doctor.

Geiling doesn't fully trust her response.

FRANCES (CONT'D)
I'd like to work on the armadillo.

DR. GEILING
I'll tell you what to work on, hey?

FRANCES
Yes, of course.

DR. GEILING
Start with an inventory. Who knows
what's come in.

FRANCES
But, Dr. Geiling, since you showed
that the posterior and anterior
pituitary lobes are separate in the
armadillo....

DR. GEILING
Specimens to be prepared here.

He points to where he wants equipment set up.

DR. GEILING (CONT'D)
Glass homogenizer. Centrifuge.
Charcoal chromatograph.

FRANCES
...my research could prove that the
posterior hormones don't simply
diffuse from the anterior lobe.

DR. GEILING
(Cold)
Come April you could be gone.

His comment quells her enthusiasm. Geiling strides towards the door.

DR. GEILING (CONT'D)
 When you have the inventory fixed up, order supplies through the purchasing department. They have the forms.

And he's gone. Frances kicks off her heels and surveys the lab. There's a lot of work to do.

INT. SUPPLY AREA - DAY

Frances balances several boxes of supplies on a small flat trolley and checks the order against her paperwork.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

She steers the trolley up the hall, stopping in front of Geiling's lab.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LAB - CONTINUOUS

Dr. Geiling tours COON (25), a new graduate student, through the well-organized and highly functional lab.

Coon, short, doughy, and filled with self-regard, inspects the lab as if he were a captain taking command of a ship.

With some effort, Frances throws open the door and wrangles the trolley inside.

Neither Dr. Geiling nor Coon come to assist her.

DR. GEILING
 Here's Oldham with supplies. She's the one I told you about. The other graduate student. Frances, this is Mr. Coon.

Frances smiles and calls across the lab.

FRANCES
 Nice to meet you.

Coon takes in every inch of her with his eyes.

COON
 (to Geiling)
 You were right about her hair.

Frances's smile drops. Coon and Geiling chuckle together.

She burns with resentment. Neither man notices or cares.

She turns back to her work unloading the trolley.

DR. GEILING

(to Frances)

Mr. Coon will be working on the posterior pituitary of the whale. He aims to prove that the posterior hormones don't simply diffuse from the anterior lobe.

Frances stuffs down her anger.

COON

(to Frances)

We have a collecting trip this coming summer off the coast of California. Maybe you'd like to come? (suggestively)
Bring your bathing suit.

FRANCES

I prefer working with my clothes on.

DR. GEILING

(to Frances)

Order an additional freezer for the whale specimens.

Geiling hands Frances a small stack of papers.

DR. GEILING (CONT'D)

And fix up whatever's here on Coon's list.

COON

Thank you, Dr. Geiling.

The two men amble toward the door.

DR. GEILING

(to Coon)

Come around the house tonight for a sherry.

Geiling and Coon leave Frances in the lab.

She crumples Coon's list into a tight ball and hurls it after them.

Her anger relieved, she retrieves and smooths out the pages, and with resignation, pushes the empty trolley slowly out the door.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LAB - NIGHT

The lab is quiet and dimly lit.

Rats and rabbits fill the cages in the animal room. A hand reaches in and pulls out a white rat. It's Frances's hand.

She gently places the rat in a guillotine, kills it, and then, with a look of absolute absorption, resects the pituitary gland from its brain.

Examining the segment through a microscope, she sketches what she sees.

Gone are all traces of the nervous, gawky newcomer; her movements are swift, sure, and economical, the drawing careful and accurate.

With the drawing finished, Frances mashes the pituitary in a mortar and pestle, then scoops it into a test tube filled with clear liquid.

She shakes the test tube and pours the solution onto white filter paper. She watches, rapt, as bands of color emerge.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LAB - DAY

Frances reaches into a cage and pulls out a lab rat as Geiling and Coon come into the lab together.

She strokes the creature and whispers to it as she carries it to the lab table.

Dr. Geiling calls to her mockingly as he dons his lab coat.

DR. GEILING

It isn't your pet, Oldham.

FRANCES

McClosky & Miller found that excitement previous to decapitation leads to greater secretion of vasopressor substances.

COON

So what?

FRANCES

We'll get better data if she's calm before I sacrifice her.

DR. GEILING

There's no room in my lab for your sentimentality, Oldham, Miss.

FRANCES
It's science, not sentiment.

DR. GEILING
Coon!

Coon hastens over, expecting Frances to hand him the rat.

COON
I'll take it.

FRANCES
Callous handling increases her ADH levels.

COON
Give me the rat.

Now Geiling joins Coon.

FRANCES
It will skew the results.

DR. GEILING
If you're unwilling to do what's required, I can find a man who will. Now, give me the animal.

Frances reluctantly hands Geiling the rat. In one swift move he places it in a guillotine and chops off its head.

DR. GEILING (CONT'D)
Coon, finish the chemistry on this specimen. Oldham is taking the rest of the day off to get her emotions under control.

It's an order she doesn't want to follow but dares not disobey.

Frances backs slowly to the door. Her eyes brim with tears of anger. She hangs up her lab coat, then turns and runs out of the lab.

EXT. GEILING'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Rain-soaked Chicago. A car pulls up in front of a neat Hyde Park bungalow.

A large man hastens to the door. He bangs on it urgently.

INT. GEILING'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Dr. Geiling puffs on his pipe while listening to a RADIO REPORT on the war in Spain.

The thundering KNOCKS jolt him out of his chair. Hastening to open the door, he recognizes the figure in front of him.

DR. MORRIS FISHBEIN (40), a bear of a man, steps inside.

DR. GEILING
Morris! What brings the AMA out on
a night like tonight?

Fishbein holds out a bottle of Elixir Sulfanilamide.

DR. FISHBEIN
Nine people are dead in Tulsa after
drinking this. Five of them kids.
We need you to figure out what's
killing them.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LAB - NIGHT

The DRONE of a spinning centrifuge conceals Dr. Geiling's entrance into the lab.

DR. GEILING
You're solo here, Oldham?

FRANCES
Just me and the other condemned
animals.

Geiling sets a large box on the table and pulls off his wet overcoat.

DR. GEILING
Where's Coon, hey?

FRANCES
Exploring human anatomy.

DR. GEILING
What about Schoeffel?

FRANCES
Neither one's been in the lab tonight.

DR. GEILING
Well, why the hell not?

FRANCES
It's Friday night.

DR. GEILING
That makes it blimmin' playtime?

Clearly not for Frances.

DR. GEILING (CONT'D)
I suppose those boys should have
their fun while they can. What are
you doing?

FRANCES
Having my fun finishing the
cytoplasmic reduction on subject 37.

He's changed into his lab coat.

DR. GEILING
Freeze it. It's your lucky night.

He pitches a bottle to her. She snatches it out of the air.

FRANCES
Elixir Sulfanilamide.

DR. GEILING
Heard of it?

FRANCES
I've heard about Sulfa, it's in
Prontosil. It saved Roosevelt's
son. The paper calls it a "wonder
drug."

DR. GEILING
This one's not so wonderful. Nine
known deaths.

FRANCES
Allergic reaction?

DR. GEILING
Not likely. Renal failure.

He unloads a dozen large bottles of Elixir from his box.

DR. GEILING (CONT'D)
But the truth is we don't know much
about the action of these drugs. My
hunch is the sulfanilamide didn't
knock out their kidneys.

FRANCES
The solvent? What is it?

DR. GEILING
Diethylene Glycol. I don't know
much about it. You?

FRANCES
No, Doctor.

DR. GEILING

Well then, there's a lot to learn.
I'll design a simple animal toxicology
trial.

ANGLE ON

THE ANIMAL ROOM--neat shelves filled with small tidy cages
not unlike a pet shop.

Frances and Geiling stand in front of a row of rabbit cages.

DR. GEILING (CONT'D)

Set up a funnel under each cage to
catch the urine. Send it to a
graduated cylinder.

FRANCES

I'll spin out the components of the
Elixir. We should get Sulfanilamide,
Diethylene Glycol, and flavorings
and color additives. I can calculate
a dose and find a control agent too.

DR. GEILING

Once I administer the chemicals you'll
have to check output and color every
half hour. That will tell us
something.

EXT. CHICAGO - NIGHT

The city sleeps...

INT. UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LAB - NIGHT

...but Frances and Dr. Geiling keep working.

The cages are arranged.

Frances slips tubes of Elixir into the centrifuge and sets
it spinning.

Geiling administers the chemicals to the rabbits.

DR. GEILING

Call Coon and Schoeffel in the
morning. I'll need them to chart
the data.

EXT. CHICAGO - DAWN

The sun rises over the lake. A cool fall morning.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LAB - DAWN

Geiling sleeps on top of one of the lab tables.

Frances dials the phone.

INT. COON'S BEDROOM - DAWN

The phone RINGS in this well-appointed apartment, waking up the naked YOUNG WOMAN in bed.

She turns and shakes Coon into consciousness. The phone RINGS again.

INT. SCHOEFFEL'S BEDROOM - DAWN

The phone RINGS.

SCHOEFFEL (23), a thin pale man with stringy hair, sleeps on a single mattress on the floor of his run-down boarding house room. The phone RINGS again.

He heaves himself out of bed, leaves his room, and staggers to the hallway.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Schoeffel stands in the hallway in his boxers and t-shirt.

SCHOEFFEL
Hello...Oldham?

INT. UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LAB - DAY

The lab is now buzzing with people. Geiling, Frances, Coon, Schoeffel.

Clipboards. Observations. Chemical analysis.

ANGLE ON

THE ANIMAL ROOM.

Frances is charting results when Geiling steps in. Coon is at his elbow.

FRANCES
Dr. Geiling, I think we have results.
Here...

Coon, rested and alert, upstages Frances.

COON
Here is the control group.

Healthy rabbits.

COON (CONT'D)
Nice pale urine and lots of it.

The next set of cages.

COON (CONT'D)
Sulfanilamide alone.

More healthy rabbits.

COON (CONT'D)
No adverse reaction.

The rabbits in the next few cages are dying or dead.

Even though she's exhausted, Frances asserts herself, cutting off Coon.

FRANCES
These ones got the Diethylene Glycol.

The small amount of urine is red with blood.

COON
(back in front)
And these the Elixir Sulfanilamide.

More bloody urine.

FRANCES
It's clear that Diethylene Glycol is
the toxic agent.

DR. GEILING
We have our results, then.

Geiling reaches out and strokes one of the rabbits.

DR. GEILING (CONT'D)
Renal failure is a nasty way to go.
Let's track the remaining rabbits
for another eight hours. Measurements
on the half hour.

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO SCIENCE BUILDING - NIGHT

Two attractive, well-dressed YOUNG WOMEN walk into the Science building.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO HALLWAY - NIGHT

The women saunter down the hall and turn into Geiling's lab.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LAB - NIGHT

Coon and Schoeffel hang up their lab coats. Their Saturday-night dates wait impatiently.

COON
If you don't need us.

Frances inspects the women--their silken hair, lovely dresses, high heels, and make-up.

They check her out as well--her short hair, white lab coat, flat shoes, and unpainted but pretty face.

Neither wants to trade places with the other, but a hint of understanding passes between them.

Geiling shoos them all out.

DR. GEILING
Thanks to you, we've completed the critical work. You've done a good job. I'll finish the postmortems. Now go, be young.

Coon, Schoeffel, and their dates leave.

Frances removes her lab coat, and tries to fix her hair.

DR. GEILING (CONT'D)
Where're you going?

FRANCES
I'm young.

DR. GEILING
Look around.

She does. Disorder everywhere.

DR. GEILING (CONT'D)
Your job is to clean the lab so we can get back to our normal work.

FRANCES
Just what a girl wants to do on a Saturday night.

DR. GEILING
Finish what you start, hey?

FRANCES
What about them? They come in late and finish early.

DR. GEILING
Your bad luck that you were here
first.

FRANCES
I'm always here first. And I always
leave last.

DR. GEILING
Quit your whining. Go if you want
to.

Frances stands rooted to the spot.

DR. GEILING (CONT'D)
Go on. Get out. Get out of my lab.

She shuffles to the door.

Frances knows that if she leaves it will all be over.

She lifts her lab coat off the hook.

FRANCES
I can help with the postmortems.
Write up the results.

France holds her lab coat.

FRANCES (CONT'D)
You tell me, Dr. Geiling. Should I
put it on, or should I hang it up?

DR. GEILING
Put it on, Miss Oldham.

Frances slips into her lab coat and takes her place at the
table.

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LAB - MORNING

Morris Fishbein rushes to the door of the science building.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LAB - CONTINUOUS

Fishbein lets himself in. Geiling sleeps on the lab table.

DR. FISHBEIN
Eugene.

Geiling wakes.

DR. FISHBEIN (CONT'D)
What's the news?

DR. GEILING
I've got your results.

Frances loads glassware into the autoclave.

DR. FISHBEIN
(to Frances)
Be a good girl and put on some coffee.

Geiling calls from across the lab.

DR. GEILING
Oldham, this is Dr. Morris Fishbein
of the AMA.

Frances pours Fishbein a cup of coffee from a percolator
that's been sitting over a low flame.

FRANCES
Nice to meet you, Doctor.

DR. GEILING
The postmortems confirm the laboratory
observation. Cause of death: renal
failure caused by toxic levels of
diethylene glycol.

DR. FISHBEIN
Thank you, Eugene.

Frances hands Fishbein the coffee.

FRANCES
Dr. Fishbein, do you think they knew,
at the company?

He's surprised by the "coffee girl's" question.

DR. FISHBEIN
No. They were in a hurry. It's a
competitive business. They didn't
test it, but they don't have to.

FRANCES
But wouldn't you want to know how it
works? What it does?

Fishbein looks to Geiling for an explanation.

DR. GEILING
She's my graduate student. She
helped.

DR. FISHBEIN
These companies put all kinds of pap
out there and call it a cure. No
law says it has to be safe.

He finishes his coffee and sets the empty on the lab table.

DR. FISHBEIN (CONT'D)
(to Geiling)
Let's go.

Fishbein strides to the door.

Geiling follows. He hangs up his coat and moves swiftly out
the door.

The lab is a mess. Frances realizes she's got hours of work
yet.

She's stunned by his ingratitude.

FRANCES
(in an accent like
Geiling and to herself)
Good work, Miss Oldham. You really
proved yourself tonight.
(as herself)
Thank you, Dr. Geiling.

Geiling calls from the doorway.

DR. GEILING
Hey.

Frances turns, red-faced, but Geiling doesn't care about
what he just overheard.

DR. GEILING (CONT'D)
There's a ranch outside of Perdenalis
Falls, Texas that can supply you
with armadillos.

He's already out the door as his voice drifts back.

DR. GEILING (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Purchasing has the forms.

She's glad that at least she'll have a chance to work.

She replaces the percolator with an Erlenmeyer flask filled
with water and turns up the flame.

Opening her notebook to a new page, she prints the heading:
Toxicity Study of Diethylene Glycol.

The water boils. She fixes a mug of tea.

Frances sits in the morning sun sipping her tea and writing up the report.

EXT. AMA BUILDING - DAY

REPORTERS hurry up the steps of the American Medical Association building in downtown Chicago. They jockey for position as Dr. Morris Fishbein makes his statement, with Geiling at his side:

DR. FISHBEIN

The lab report concludes that diethylene glycol is toxic to humans and that taking Elixir Sulfanilamide is life-threatening.

Under the current law the Food and Drug Administration cannot recall a drug simply because it poses a lethal threat. But this drug, because it contains no alcohol, is technically mislabeled. FDA Chief Inspector George Larrick has directed the FDA's 200 field agents to search out, remove, and destroy all bottles of this toxic drug as quickly as possible.

INT. GEILING'S HOUSE - DAY

Dr. Geiling, Morris Fishbein, Coon, Schoeffel, and a few other MEN gather around the radio in Geiling's bungalow.

It is a party atmosphere.

Frances sits off to the side, apart from the easy camaraderie.

Geiling adjusts the TUNING.

DR. GEILING

Here it is.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

The President of the United States,
Franklin Roosevelt.

President Roosevelt's familiar voice fills the room.

Frances leans forward, listening intently.

ROOSEVELT (O.S.)
 Today, June 25th, 1938, I have signed
 into law the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic
 Act. This law requires scientific
 proof from any manufacturer that its
 new drug is safe before it can be
 distributed to the American people.

Frances sits back with a smile of satisfaction.

In the background, relief and celebration.

DR. FISHBEIN
 (to Geiling)
 We've been waiting for those words
 for a long time.

DR. GEILING
 Damn shame it took a hundred people
 to die.

COON
 (to Schoeffel)
 There was no doubt it was the solvent.
 We proved it...

Frances smiles to herself and shakes her head.

COON (CONT'D)
 We set up the trial.

Schoeffel nods.

Frances quietly moves toward the front door and takes one
 last look at this group.

COON (CONT'D)
 And monitored the results.

She walks out, framed by the picture window, stepping down
 the walkway with her back to the assembly of men.

DR. GEILING
 With this new law you'll be the ones
 who'll be testing for safety from
 now on. So let's drink. To good
 science and the health and healing it
 promises for all of us.

EVERYONE
 To good science.

CUT TO:

CHICAGO - 1943

EXT. THE CHICAGO MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT

The marquee reads--MADAME CURIE

Frances (30) strikes a more mature figure in her page-boy cut, pleated skirt, and sleek suit jacket. She wears a military-inspired hat cocked on her head.

She and KEL wait, arm in arm, in a line with other couples. KEL (31), tall and good-looking, radiates confidence. Even waiting in line for the movies, he's clearly a ball of fire.

They're comfortable and close.

They check out the movie's publicity poster.

FRANCES

She and her husband worked in the lab together.

KEL

We're not bad ourselves. We'll get a paper out of that quinine research.

FRANCES

(teasing)

Who says I'm putting your name on it?

KEL

I don't care if you do. As long as you let me put my name on you.

Frances smiles at Kel's hint but she's not ready to say "yes."

KEL (CONT'D)

(at the box office)

Two please.

He hands her a dollar and they amble into the theater.

INT. CHICAGO MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT

Frances and Kel settle into seats.

A United Newsreel of Women's Army Corp workers fixing a B-17 fills the screen.

NARRATOR

From motor to tail assembly, the girls make ready the giant battleships of the air.

The newsreel continues as Kel whispers to Frances.

KEL
I wish they'd let me "up." I'd go.

FRANCES
They don't want their scientists
getting killed. Neither do I. It'd
be a waste.

Images of WACs during the war.

FRANCES (CONT'D)
That's what Geiling thinks about us
getting married. That I'd be throwing
away all these years of work.

KEL
The old bachelor said that to you?

FRANCES
That's why he doesn't want women
students. He thinks they're a bad
investment.

The movie starts. Kel puts his arm around Frances and she
snuggles in.

EXT. CHICAGO MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT

Kel and Frances emerge from the theater into the mild summer
night. They stroll along Lake Street.

FRANCES
That was so tragic, the way he died.

They dash across Michigan Ave.

KEL
Run down by a car, I can understand.
But by a horse and buggy? And then
Marie Curie takes over his
professorship. Not bad.

FRANCES
If the Curies can teach together in
the same department, why can't we?

KEL
They didn't have a nepotism law.

FRANCES
There's no way around it?

The climb the steps in front of the Art Institute.

KEL

If we get married one of us is going to have to resign.

FRANCES

You mean me.

That's exactly what Kel means but he can't bring himself to say it.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

Then we'll have to live in sin.

She plants a kiss on his lips.

A couple of passing GI's give a whistle.

KEL

You'd love the scandal.

FRANCES

I wouldn't. But what choice is there?

Kel realizes that she might be serious.

KEL

And how'd that be for starting a family?

It'd be bad and she knows it.

KEL (CONT'D)

So you take some time off. You'll get back to work, I promise. When the kids get big enough.

FRANCES

Geiling's right. I am a waste.

KEL

(comforting her)

No. No. We're doing this to add to our lives. It'd be a waste not to get married. Not to have a family.

As they step down the stairs, passing the lions in front of the Art Institute, Frances slips her hand in his. They walk off into the night.

FADE OUT:

CINCINNATI, OHIO - 1960

EXT. CINCINNATI - DAY

The modern City of Cincinnati on the banks of the Ohio River.

EXT. MERRELL PHARMACEUTICALS - DAY

Manufacturing headquarters of Merrell Pharmaceuticals.

INT. MERRELL PHARMACEUTICALS - DAY

The Merrell pharmaceutical manufacturing plant is the latest in automated biomedical production.

Stainless steel vats feed chemicals through pipes and chambers, producing an unending stream of colorful capsules.

The pills dance along a belt, collect in a revolving tray, and drop into waiting bottles.

The mechanism pops a cotton ball into each pill bottle and screws on a lid.

The bottles of Kevadon march down the line. A sticker reads, "Investigational Use Only."

WASHINGTON, D.C. - 1960**EXT. WASHINGTON, D.C. - NIGHT**

Frances (47) rides in the front seat of the family's Impala as Kel navigates the streets of Washington.

Though middle-aged, Frances retains her youthful good looks and her bright and curious visage.

Kel carries a bit more weight--that, the dark rimmed glasses, and the gray hair at his temples impart an air of gravitas.

Serious and thoughtful, their daughter, CHRISTINE (12), peers out the back window.

They're all dressed up for an evening event.

CHRISTINE

Are we almost there, Dad?

KEL

Through the bank, around the grocery store, under the White House and just over the line into Maryland and we'll be there.

CHRISTINE

I'm a little nervous.

KEL
Throwing up is your best option.

FRANCES
Pay no attention to him. The trick
is to imagine everyone in their
underwear.

Christine wrinkles her nose.

CHRISTINE
Ewww. Gross.

FRANCES
It works. Chrissy, who is the
scariest person in the room?

KEL
Besides your mother.

Christine finally cracks a small smile.

CHRISTINE
My teacher.

FRANCES
Mrs. Sandoval?

Christine nods.

FRANCES (CONT'D)
So what if you were giving your
report, and all the kids and the
parents were there. And there's
Mrs. Sandoval in nothing but what?

CHRISTINE
(laughing)
Panties?

FRANCES
What color?

CHRISTINE
Mom!

FRANCES
Well?

CHRISTINE
Pink.

FRANCES
With polka-dots? And what about...?

She points at her breasts.

CHRISTINE

Mother!

FRANCES

Not so scary in her wonder bra and pink panties, is she?

Christine is laughing in the back seat.

Kel pulls into a parking place in front of the school.

KEL

Third floor: gizmos, gadgets, and ladies unmentionables.

INT. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM - NIGHT

Children and parents applaud as a boy wearing a toy space helmet finishes his report.

JILL SANDOVAL (25) steps to the front of the classroom. She's thin and almost deathly pale with deep dark circles under her foggy blue eyes.

SANDOVAL

Thank you, James, I'm sure you'll help us pass the Soviets in the space race. Next we have Christine Kelsey with her report on life-saving drugs.

Frances and Kel look on proudly as Christine makes her way to the front.

Frances nods encouragement and mouths the word...

FRANCES

Underwear.

Christine bites back a smile.

She sets her chart on the easel. It lists all kinds of drugs, when they were invented, and what they are used for.

Her slightly unfocused gaze lingers too long on Mrs. Sandoval, who responds with a quizzical...

SANDOVAL

Ok?

Christine shakes off the image and starts her talk.

CHRISTINE

It's hard to imagine, but just 20 years ago there was no penicillin. Now we have all kinds of antibiotics.

She points to the chart.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

Neomycin is a cream that kills germs on cuts. Strong antibiotics like Isoniazid can fight serious infections like tuberculosis. But antibiotics aren't the only new medicines that are helping people.

Frances and Kel beam.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

Radioiodine is helping doctors diagnose and treat all kinds of diseases. Blood thinners from tropical plants are helping to lower high-blood pressure. And new drugs called antimetabolites are keeping cancer cells from growing into tumors without harming healthy cells.

Mrs. Sandoval leans against the wall, rubbing her tired eyes.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

Since World War 2, hundreds of new drugs are helping Americans stay healthy and live longer. The 1960s will be full of new medicines that will continue to help all of us.

Frances leads the applause as Mrs. Sandoval nudges Christine toward her seat.

SANDOVAL

Next...

She interrupts herself with a huge yawn.

INT. DOCTOR'S EXAMINATION ROOM - DAY

Two shadows move behind the privacy curtain of the exam room.

SANDOVAL (O.S.)

It's like a jet fighter.

Behind the curtain, in this modern facility, kindly DR. FRANK AYD (60s) skillfully examines the exhausted Jill Sandoval.

She wears a medical gown.

He feels the lymph nodes around her neck.

SANDOVAL (CONT'D)
Most of the time, nothing.

He checks under her arms.

DR. AYD
Lie back, please.

SANDOVAL
But then, here it comes and BOOM it shakes the whole room. That's what I get for being an old-fashioned girl.

DR. AYD
There are always a few newlywed surprises. If snoring is the worst of it, you'll be fine.

SANDOVAL
Not if I don't get some sleep. My seventh graders are calling me Mrs. Dracula. Last week one of them gave a report on new medicines and I thought, "it's worth a try."

DR. AYD
You can get changed. I'll be right back.

Dr. Ayd slips out.

Sandoval steps out of the gown and pulls her dress over her head.

While she waits she examines the medical diagrams that decorate the walls. One shows the developing fetus.

A KNOCK. Dr. Ayd steps back in. He holds two bottles of pills.

DR. AYD (CONT'D)
This is called Kevadon. It's brand new. Take one before bed. You'll sleep right through Raul's snoring.

SANDOVAL
Thanks, Dr. Ayd.

DR. AYD
From what my other patients tell me, you won't feel groggy in the morning.

SANDOVAL

Maybe it will change me back into a human.

INT. MURRAY'S OFFICE, MERRELL PHARMACEUTICALS - NIGHT

Charming and charismatic, DR. JOSEPH MURRAY (50s) occupies a modern corner office with expansive views of Cincinnati.

Well-dressed and well-spoken, with salt-and-pepper hair and penetrating eyes, he's the perfect public face of Merrell Pharmaceuticals.

He pours two bourbons.

MURRAY

Something to take the edge off?

He hands a drink to DR. JONES, Merrell's Medical Director. Jones (50), blond and trim, smiles with casual boyish enthusiasm.

MURRAY (CONT'D)

So where are we on MER/29?

JONES

30 participating doctors with reports on 2260 patients. The worse side effect was thinning hair.

MURRAY

(maybe not joking)

Then I'm not taking it. What about the pharmacology reports?

JONES

MER/29 lowers blood cholesterol, we know that. But there may be something.

MURRAY

Spill it.

JONES

The LD 50 dose was unusually low. And we lost some animals during the long-term toxicity study.

MURRAY

Recalculate the data without them. You heard Marschalk, we deliver the New Drug Application for MER/29 to the FDA on Monday.

JONES

Another weekend watching the world
go by on the other side of this glass.

Jones gazes out the window onto the city below.

INT. SENATE HEARING ROOM -- DAY

From the dais SENATOR ESTES KEFAUVER (57) BANGS the gavel opening the session.

A tall, hulking man, he's egg-headed with thick black glasses. Kefauver, from Tennessee, is a slow talking southerner, polite and proper, who speaks in almost a whisper. It's clear he's the smartest guy in the room.

KEFAUVER

The Senate Sub-committee on Anti-trust and Monopoly will come to order.

Bulldog-faced ROMAN HRUSKA (56) is the only other senator at the hearing. Several REPORTERS and ONLOOKERS fill the gallery.

KEFAUVER (CONT'D)

Our first witness this morning is
Dr. Barbara Moulton.

Frances slips into the hearing room. She settles in the back row.

DR. BARBARA MOULTON (44) sits at the witness table.

She's tall and solidly built, upper-class, quick tempered, used to saying exactly what's on her mind and used to having other listen.

DR. MOULTON

Thank you, Senator. For five years I was a member of the staff of the Bureau of Medicine of the Food and Drug Administration. I hoped for a long career there but I resigned in February of this year.

Cameras flash as reporters take photos.

KEFAUVER

Why did you resign, Dr. Moulton?

DR. MOULTON

Because, Senator, the power of the pharmaceutical companies has corrupted the agency.

Reporters scribble in their note pads.

HRUSKA

Mr. Chairman, this is a very serious accusation.

Kefauver nods for her to continue.

DR. MOULTON

I witnessed the deliberate neglect of the interests of the consumer as senior staff ignored scientific facts when making policy decisions.

Frances looks on, riveted.

DR. MOULTON (CONT'D)

Senator, I believe that hundreds of people suffer daily, and many die, because the Food and Drug Administration has failed utterly in enforcing the law dealing with the safety of prescription drugs.

Hruska interrupts, feigning shock and outrage.

HRUSKA

Mr. Chairman! I've read the statement very carefully and I could not find any documentation of this charge.

Moulton remains steadfast, unintimidated by Hruska's outburst.

DR. MOULTON

I'll continue.

EXT. SENATE OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

Frances emerges through the revolving door out into the warm spring sunshine.

She recognizes Barbara Moulton, standing at the top of the white marble stairs, smoking a cigarette.

She starts down the steps, intending to say nothing, but she can't let the opportunity go.

FRANCES

(turning back)

Dr. Moulton.

DR. MOULTON

Yes?

FRANCES
I was inside. I just saw your
testimony.

DR. MOULTON
(amused)
Really?
(smoke pours from her
mouth and nose)
So what'dya think?

FRANCES
It was...

DR. MOULTON
(interrupting)
Are you a reporter?

She sucks one last drag then drops her cigarette butt and
grinds it out.

FRANCES
No. I'm...

DR. MOULTON
(impatient)
Too bad.

Moulton takes off down the stairs, leaving Frances in mid-
sentence.

Frances deliberates as she watches her go. Then she dashes
after her.

FRANCES
Dr. Moulton! Please.
(within ear shot)
You really were stunning.

Barbara Moulton stops and turns. Frances's momentum takes
her a few steps past her. She turns, looking up at Moulton.

FRANCES (CONT'D)
And I was horrified by what you said.

DR. MOULTON
What's it to you?

FRANCES
I'm the new Medical Officer at the
FDA. I start in August.

DR. MOULTON
So you've got my old job.

FRANCES

Looks that way.

DR. MOULTON

My condolences. I can't believe the old boys went and hired another woman after all the trouble this one caused.

Moulton looks Frances up and down. She's amused by her seersucker suit and pillbox hat and suspicious of her good looks.

DR. MOULTON (CONT'D)

But, then again, maybe they made a better choice with you.

FRANCES

You say! You have no idea.

DR. MOULTON

If you're looking for a hand to hold, sister, you've got the wrong girl.

She starts down the steps. Frances tugs her arm and Moulton swings around, looking up at her from the step below.

FRANCES

I know it was rough in there but I'm not the enemy. My parents told me that I could do anything that my brothers did, anything a man could do, and I believed them when they said it was my job to make the world a better place. Dr. Moulton, I've got a PhD and an MD and nobody handed me either one of them. I kept myself off the dole during the depression without a check from home or some sugar daddy taking care of me. I've put my arm down rattle-snake infested holes in Texas to gather armadillos for pituitary research. I've helped the government's war effort, published in a dozen journals, and wrote the textbook on pharmacology with a man who thinks women students are a waste of time. I've had men threaten me, come on to me, ignore me, and sabotage me, and I'm still here, "sister." I stood my ground when I had to and sometimes, when I couldn't figure out anything else to do, I let things slide, but not anymore.

(MORE)

FRANCES (CONT'D)

My husband gave up his job and I dragged him and my daughter across the country so that I could do more than be a small-town family doctor in South Dakota and neither one has really forgiven me. I plan to do a good job at the FDA because this is my chance to do a job that's important. So if you care enough to come and testify to Congress, maybe you'd care enough to come to dinner and tell me what's really going on.

DR. MOULTON

Was that your best shot, angel?

FRANCES

You're working hard to protect that stony facade but I'm not letting up on you until you say "yes."

DR. MOULTON

There's no way you're more stubborn than me.

INSERT -- ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE

JOHN KENNEDY addresses the July 1960 Democratic National Convention.

KENNEDY

That is the choice our nation must make...

INT. FRANCES'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Books, journals, and newspapers crowd every horizontal surface in the Kelsey's comfortable home.

KENNEDY (O.S.)

...a choice that lies not merely between two men or two parties...

Frances, Kel, and Moulton watch Kennedy's speech while sipping after-dinner drinks. Christine sits in front of the console TV eating ice-cream.

KENNEDY (CONT'D)

...but between the public interest and private comfort--between national greatness and national decline.

The convention erupts into applause.

FRANCES

Alright, Christine, take your dish in and then go on upstairs and get ready for bed.

Christine heads off to the kitchen.

Frances moves to the TV set. She admires Kennedy's image for a moment before she clicks off the TV.

DR. MOULTON

That'll be the day, when public interest trumps private comfort. All I got for having high standards and asking questions was getting moved into an office without a phone.

Moulton starts picking up dishes.

Kel stands and hands his dirty plate to Moulton. Frances grabs it first.

KEL

(excusing himself)
You gals must have a lot to cluck about. Nice to meet you, Barbara.

DR. MOULTON

Thanks for having me over, Kel.

INT. FRANCES'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Frances and Moulton lug the dirty dishes into the kitchen. Moulton scrapes the scraps into the trash while Frances fills the sink with soapy water.

FRANCES

You really don't think things are going to change?

Frances slips an apron over her dress, then pulls on yellow rubber gloves.

DR. MOULTON

I wish they would, but here's how it works. I was reviewing a new drug application for Promazine. There were all kinds of problems.

Frances starts on the dishes. Moulton picks up a dish towel and dries.

FRANCES

(pointing to a cabinet)
Plates up there.

Moulton stows the dishes.

DR. MOULTON

The company sent four of their men over for a "conference," which is just a euphemism for arm-twisting.

She grabs two pots and a skillet from the stove.

DR. MOULTON (CONT'D)

You ready for these?

Frances nods "yes." Moulton brings them over.

DR. MOULTON (CONT'D)

I'm going down the list: no long-term animal toxicity studies, weak clinical trials, serious side-effects dismissed as insignificant. Your new boss...

FRANCES

Ralph Smith?

DR. MOULTON

That's the one. He walks into the meeting and tells the company men that we're approving the drug. Just like that.

Frances waves the frying pan as she talks.

FRANCES

He can't do that. I've read the handbook; only the assigned Medical Officer can approve the application.

DR. MOULTON

He did. And it was done. There's your public interest. What's going to change that?

INTERCUT TELEPHONE CONVERSATION -- MURRAY'S AND AYD'S OFFICE - DAY

The phone rings in Murray's office.

MURRAY

This is Dr. Murray. Frank, great to hear from you.

DR. AYD

Joe, I wanted to let you know that I'm almost at the 200 patient mark for Kevadon.

MURRAY

Coming through as always, Frank.

DR. AYD

I'm having a lot of success with it and I'd be happy to write a paper on Kevadon for publication.

MURRAY

We'd be happy for that, too. We'd include it when we go for FDA approval.

Of course we can issue a \$ 1000 check to your grant account to help with your research.

DR. AYD

Next time you're out here we should hit the links.

MURRAY

Thanks, Frank, I'll try to take you up on that.

INT. MURRAY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

He hangs up the phone, pleased with Dr. Ayd's report.

His intercom buzzes to life.

SECRETARY (O.S.)

Your appointment with Mr. Marschalk.

MURRAY

Of course...

INT. MARSCHALK'S OFFICE

Lean, quick, and dangerous, ROBERT MARSCHALK (40), the president of the company, is a bottom-line man.

He leans back on his black leather sofa, arms crossed, considering Murray's report.

MURRAY (O.S.)

...we're gathering data.

Marschalk's office is modern and spare. Light pours through the windows.

Murray stands. The sun shines directly in his eyes.

MURRAY (CONT'D)

I expect we can submit Kevadon by the end of the year.

MARSCHALK

Incorporate the data from England and Germany.

MURRAY

Sure, but the FDA requires our own studies.

MARSCHALK

So we're back to our studies?

MURRAY

It takes time, Bob.

MARSCHALK

The boys in marketing have done some studies of their own.

MURRAY

Have they?

MARSCHALK

They found that the demand for sleeping pills goes way up around the holidays.

MURRAY

(sarcastic)

That took a study?

Marschalk stands. He circles Murray

MARSCHALK

Stress. Traveling, the pressure to buy presents, the family that you have to be with but you don't really like. Everyone wants a little something to help them through.

MURRAY

We're not ready to submit this summer.

MARSCHALK

(to his face)

August.

MURRAY

September, maybe.

MARSCHALK

Chemie Grunenthal and Distillers are making millions on Thalidomide. Grunenthal has a liquid for kids. They call it West Germany's baby sitter.

MURRAY

Research is tapped out. We put everyone on MER/29.

Marschalk takes him by the shoulder and leads him to the door.

MARSCHALK

A successful strategy. Well done.

MURRAY

Thanks, Bob.

MARSCHALK

MER/29 and Kevadon are our tickets to the big time. If it's on the market there, it should be no problem getting it on the market here.

He guides him across the threshold.

MARSCHALK (CONT'D)

(with a smile)

Right, Joe?

Murray reluctantly agrees.

MURRAY

Right.

The door closes in Murray's face.

EXT. FDA BUILDING - DAY

Frances climbs down the steps into "Temp-S," the post-war prefab building that houses the medical bureau.

INT. FRANCES'S OFFICE - DAY

Moving boxes spill into the hallway. There's barely room for the desk, chair, and bookcase in Frances's tiny office.

This had to be a bathroom converted into office space. Sounds ECHO off the tiled walls and floor. A frosted window filters the summer sunlight.

She unpacks books.

RALPH SMITH (40s), the high-strung Chief of the Medical Bureau, a little man with a puppy-dog face, pays a visit. He's more of a talker than a listener.

SMITH
Settling in?

FRANCES
Maybe I'll bring a rug...

SMITH
(proudly)
We got you a window.

FRANCES
...and a plant, too.

Smith climbs over and around the boxes to the window.

SMITH
Nestor's office is mostly a file room.

He tugs at the window but it just won't open.

SMITH (CONT'D)
Nothing but file cabinets to look at.

He's banging on it now, but still no luck.

SMITH (CONT'D)
No surprise.

He turns his back on the window.

SMITH (CONT'D)
Still no phone? We've ordered one, but you know the phone company, they'll put it in when they're good and ready.

Frances props a framed photo of Kel and Christine onto the desk-top.

SMITH (CONT'D)
(off the photo)
The whole family moves across the country so you can land in this glorious place.

FRANCES
It was my turn. And there was a position for my husband with the NIH.

SMITH
He's working?

FRANCES
Imagine.

SMITH
I just figured...

FRANCES
Someone's got to cook?

SMITH
And clean, and drive the kids to school.

FRANCES
The things your wife does for you?

SMITH
I think of myself as a "modern man," but I wouldn't pack up and follow her across the country. But people have to change with the times. As long as the work gets done, I guess it doesn't matter if the person is wearing pants or a skirt.

FRANCES
I'll take that as permission to wear whatever I want.

He hands her four large binders.

SMITH
Usually we assign new drug applications on a rotation, but I thought we'd get you started with an easy case. Give you a sense of how we do it.

Frances thumbs through the application.

FRANCES
Kevadon.

SMITH
Selling as Contergan in Germany and Divistal in England. The chemical is Thalidomide. There shouldn't be any issues--it's in widespread use as a hypnotic.

FRANCES
I can consult with other staff?

SMITH

Sure. Get a chemistry and pharmacology consult. But first, send a letter to Merrell Pharmaceuticals--who is it--

He flips through the pages.

SMITH (CONT'D)

F. Joseph Murray, saying we got it. That starts the clock. We act, up or down, within 60 days or it's automatically approved. So take a look. The clock's ticking.

INT. AUDITORIUM - DAY

Fifty clean-cut WHITE MEN in blue suits, all in their early 30s, fill the small but ornate auditorium.

Murray and Marschalk supervise from the stage.

Dr. Jones, in a much nicer blue suit, stands in front of the assembly. He's the chief salesman in this room filled with salesmen.

JONES

First, you've done a great job getting Kevadon to doctors in private practice.

A slide projected behind him reads, "Great Job!" Slides of key words and facts punctuate his talk.

JONES (CONT'D)

Now it's time to hit the hospitals and to land the big fish, the chief of O-B-G-Y-N, the chief of surgery, and the director of medicine, and to sell them on Kevadon. Tell them that they've been singled out as important enough to be one of the first to hear about Kevadon.

Emphasize that this is not basic research. We've already established that it's safe, we know the dosage, we know how useful it is. These studies are solely to confirm the safety and effectiveness of the drug.

This drug is going on the market in early 1961. This is their chance...

Marschalk stands and interrupts.

MARSCHALK

Our goal is December 1960.

JONES

...Ok, end of the year. You heard it from the top. So, let's get to work. Our goal is 750 studies with an average of 20 patients per study.

INT. SMITH'S OFFICE - DAY

Smith brown-bags lunch while watching the Orioles and Yankees on a portable black & white TV.

His office is government issue.

SMITH

Jesus, Joseph and Mary! Bring in Barber for cryin' out loud!

The phone interrupts his rant.

SMITH (CONT'D)

Smith here.

INTERCUT TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

MURRAY

Dr. Smith. This is Joseph Murray over at Merrell Pharmaceuticals.

SMITH

What can we do for you, Dr. Murray?

MURRAY

You have our application for Kevadon. We'd like to meet with your medical officer. Answer any questions.

Smith reacts to the game as he talks to Murray.

SMITH

Kevadon is in the capable hands of our newest officer, Dr. Kelsey. If you'd like me to have Dr. Kelsey return your call...

MURRAY

(interrupting)

Thank you, Dr. Smith, just patch me through. I'll talk with Dr. Kelsey directly.

SMITH

I wish I could. We've ordered one, but there's no phone in Dr. Kelsey's office. I'll pass along your message.

INT. FRANCES'S OFFICE - DAY

Working a hammer and small pry-bar with the skill of a construction worker, Frances forces her window open.

The open window brings some relief from the heat.

She opens the Kevadon binder. She's dog-eared pages, underlined passages, and written questions in the margins.

She tucks the binder under her arm and heads out.

INT. DOCTOR AYD'S OFFICE - DAY

Sandoval lies on the exam table draped in a medical gown. Doctor Ayd checks her abdomen.

DR. AYD

We'll take some blood and that will help us calculate the due date. You can sit up.

I'm going to prescribe some prenatal vitamins for you. Certainly stay active. Are you getting enough rest?

SANDOVAL

I've been sleeping just fine.

DR. AYD

You're using the Kevadon.

SANDOVAL

I've gotten more used to Raul's snoring. But every now and then, if he's woken me up for a few nights in a row, I'll take one.

DR. AYD

Ok. Congratulations. I'll see you next month.

EXT. MOULTON'S DAIRY FARM - DAY

Moulton and Frances stroll in the warm autumn air. The trees blaze orange and red. Moulton's black-and-white Holsteins dot the hillside and LOW contentedly.

DR. MOULTON

Don't turn it down.

FRANCES

I can't approve it.

DR. MOULTON

To turn it down you need everyone's signature, right up to Commissioner Larrick.

FRANCES

He'd be able to tell that these aren't real studies. They're all just testimonials.

DR. MOULTON

I'm telling you, it'll be one nasty fight after the other.

FRANCES

The facts speak for themselves. Don't they?

DR. MOULTON

You want to believe the best in people but you can't win that way. They won't let you. I learned that the hard way. And there are lots of drugs you'll review after this one. Don't ruin your reputation on this first one.

FRANCES

So I should play ball?

DR. MOULTON

No. But remember, they don't want you to make waves.

FRANCES

So I'll make ripples. I'll say they never submitted a complete application.

DR. MOULTON

That could work.

FRANCES

I'll tell them to provide more complete absorption data, better long-term toxicity studies, and a more detailed chemical analysis.

DR. MOULTON

You know, the drugs that we use on our cows require more scientific

(MORE)

DR. MOULTON (CONT'D)
 testing than the ones we approve for
 people.

She looks out on the pastoral setting.

MOULTON
 Of course, these girls deserve to be
 well taken care of.

FRANCES
 Amen, sister.

INT. FRANCES'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Frances and Christine are eating dinner in front of the TV.

CHRISTINE
 Can't we watch the Flintstones?

FRANCES
 This is a little more important than
 Fred and Barney.

KENNEDY
 (on TV)
 ...I don't believe there's any burden,
 or any responsibility, that any
 American would not assume to protect
 his country...

Kel comes in with a plate and joins them in watching the
 Presidential debate.

KEL
 Frankie, the drug gets approved in
 six months instead of now. What's
 the point?

FRANCES
 You heard Barbara. People suffer
 and die because Medical Officers
 aren't doing their jobs.

KEL
 Sounds like you're being stubborn
 for the sake of it.

FRANCES
 I showed you their studies. This
 company thinks they can submit awful
 data and that we'll just roll over
 and say, "sure thing."

KEL

You want to make an example of them?

FRANCES

I want to do my job. The one that I got hired for and that I'm qualified to do.

CHRISTINE

If you're gonna fight can I change the channel?

Frances and Kel respond simultaneously.

FRANCES

Of course.

KEL

No.

They're stunned by the lack of agreement. Christine stares at them for a moment and then changes the channel to the Flintstones.

KEL (CONT'D)

This doesn't affect just you.

FRANCES

You're right. People who don't even know me are counting on me.

INT. FDA BUILDING - DAY

Frances drops a dime into a coffee vending machine and presses the button for tea.

As a decorative paper cup drops and fills, she checks her reflection in the machine's shiny surface.

She's all business in her dark suit and pulled-back hair.

She retrieves the tea, then straightens her shoulders, takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly: it's show time.

With the tea in one hand and a bunch of binders under her arm, she sets off to the contentious meeting.

INT. FDA CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOS

Smith and three members of the Medical Bureau staff already sit in the conference room.

Frances slips in and takes a seat.

SMITH

Alright, gentlemen, let's get to it. We'll start with updates, reports, and decisions. Then we'll distribute the new applications. Spears, you're first.

Cherubic DR. SPEARS(27) seems hardly old enough to be in long pants. He's insecure and overdressed.

SPEARS

I'm reviewing Ortho Novum, it's a low-dose progesterone from Syntex. The hormone formulation isn't that different from Enovid, but I never really studied gynecology.

Spears looks to Frances and all eyes follow.

FRANCES

Just 'cause I drive a car doesn't mean I know how it works.

SMITH

So that's an "Ok" to approve.

Spears nods.

SMITH (CONT'D)

Thank you, Dr. Spears. And now we have two Medical Officers who've joined the Bureau since our last meeting. You both know Dr. Nestor and Dr. Kelsey.

DR. BEACHWOOD(60s), an old-timer with the agency, pipes up.

BEACHWOOD

I, for one, am glad to have a pretty young thing in the Bureau. Nice to have you, Dr. Kelsey.

Frances responds with a curt nod.

BEACHWOOD (CONT'D)

That Moulton always reminded me of Eleanor Roosevelt.

SPEARS

She was scary.

SMITH

Dr. Nestor, you first.

Casual, brash, and outspoken, NESTOR(40s), rolls up his sleeves and launches into his first meeting.

NESTOR

Hi. Ok, I'm still waiting on the chemistry report on Carisoprodol. It's only a slight change from Equanil, so I don't expect trouble.

I also have Ismelin, chemical is Guanethidine. Indicated for hypertension. Animal studies seem thorough but the clinical studies are kind of a joke.

SMITH

Adequate or inadequate?

NESTOR

Can't we get something a bit better than "I tried it on my brother and he's ok?"

Frances smiles while the others sit stone-faced.

NESTOR (CONT'D)

(backing down)

All right, all right, let's approve it.

Smith pushes on.

SMITH

Thank you, Dr. Nestor. Dr. Kelsey.

Frances opens a binder.

FRANCES

The brand name is Quaalude, the chemical name Methaqualone. Indicated as a sedative.

SMITH

(to Beachwood)

Wasn't that your case?

BEACHWOOD

There's been a lot of turnover. I've been carrying more than my share.

SMITH

I assign the cases, Dick. Go ahead, Dr. Kelsey.

FRANCES

The data suggests the risk for addiction. I've asked for a chemistry consult.

SMITH

What about Kevadon?

FRANCES

Short-term studies seem fine but the long-term toxicity studies didn't test enough subjects over a long enough period. We just don't know what would happen if someone used it for more than a few days. And rats can take enormous doses with no effect, doses that would put you or me to sleep. I don't think they're absorbing any of it, which means we can't rely on their animal studies. I'd like them to clear things up so I want to designate it as incomplete.

SMITH

Incomplete?

FRANCES

I'd like to see more data.

SMITH

It's 60 days, up or down. Today is...

FRANCES

Day 56.

Frances takes out her manual.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

(reading)

Section 503 says 60 days from the submission of a complete new drug application.

She closes the book.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

Theirs was never complete.

(softer)

Dr. Smith, I'm new here, but I have to agree with Dr. Nestor: I'm shocked by the dismal caliber of the clinical trials.

She looks for his support. Nestor gauges the prevailing sentiment and begins doodling in his notebook.

NESTOR

Sure, there's room for improvement but I never called anything "dismal."

SMITH

You're new and you're the only woman here. Clearly, you want to show everyone that you can do the job. So we're all very impressed. Aren't we.

He eyeballs everyone at the table. Who can say no?

SMITH (CONT'D)

We get about 250 new drug applications a year. If you hold off on approval, in a few months time, you're going to be juggling 7 or 8 applications, maybe as many as 10. That's when something seriously dangerous will slip through. So unless there is clear evidence that a drug is unsafe, you'll approve it. Questions?

No one dares.

INT. FDA CAFETERIA - DAY

GOVERNMENT WORKERS fill the FDA building's austere basement cafeteria.

Frances carries a tray with a sandwich and a glass of iced-tea. She scans the tables and settles on a suitably isolated spot.

Kel spies her across the lunch-room. He weaves his way over, unseen.

KEL

Someone sitting here?

She's surprised and grateful he's there.

FRANCES

You'd be the only one brave enough.

He takes the chair across from her.

KEL

Communicable disease?

FRANCES
The trouble-maker virus.

KEL
That one again. Dangerous bug.

Frances catches sight of Dr. Smith approaching. She warns Kel with a glance.

FRANCES
Dr. Smith. This is my husband, Ellis Kelsey.

Kel stands and greets Smith.

KEL
Dr. Smith.

SMITH
Frances tells me you're at the NIH.

KEL
Special Assistant to the Surgeon General.

SMITH
Welcome to Washington. Do you mind?

FRANCES
Please.

SMITH
(to Frances)
Dr. Kelsey, I've looked over the Kevadon application. It isn't out of the ordinary.

Frances opens her mouth to respond when Kel cuts in.

KEL
I've seen it. That can't be what you usually get?

SMITH
This isn't the academy.

Frances's glance warns Kel to back off.

KEL
Clearly. Someone needs to do a better job teaching them how to conduct a study.

SMITH

You think we're a bunch of bozos?
(to Frances)

Like you're the only one who wants
to raise the standards? I hired
Nestor. I hired you.

FRANCES

What did you expect?

SMITH

Small steps. So, word to the wise:
write up whatever concerns you have;
ask for the specific data you want;
point out where studies should be
stronger; send your letter to Murray
and when he answers, you approve the
drug. That's how it works here.
Our job--approve drugs.

FRANCES

Approve safe drugs.

SMITH

Drugs that take the sting out of
real people's very real pain and
suffering.

It's clear the conversation is over. Smith gets up to leave.

SMITH (CONT'D)

(to Kel)

Enjoy your lunch. Nice to have met
you, Dr. Kelsey.

Kel nods his goodbye. He and Frances watch Smith go.

KEL

That's one dangerous virus.

INT. FRANCES'S OFFICE - DAY

Frances pulls the completed letter from the typewriter.

Decorating the top of the stationary is the seal of the Food
and Drug Administration.

She scans the letter one last time, then signs her name:
"F.O. Kelsey, PhD, MD."

INT. MURRAY'S OFFICE, MERRELL PHARMACEUTICALS - DAY

Murray gazes out over Cincinnati. He holds the opened letter
in his hand. Three pages.

A KNOCK. Jones lets himself in.

JONES

Let's see it.

He hands Jones the letter.

MURRAY

Unbelievable. Already being used in 30 countries and it's turned back. They've got a boatload of information on Kevadon, probably more than anything they've ever seen.

He checks the name on the letter over Jones's shoulder.

MURRAY (CONT'D)

How can this F.O. Kelsey call it "incomplete?"

JONES

These are minor requests.

MURRAY

There shouldn't be any requests. And it won't matter to Marschalk. He's angling for a place on the board and wanted to announce this at the shareholder's meeting. He's going to breathe fire.

Jones opens a folder and reads.

JONES

We have studies now at University Hospital in Ann Arbor, Brigham's in Boston, Florida State Hospital, Cincinnati General, Johns Hopkins...

MURRAY

So...

JONES

...You get it? We have hundreds of studies going on. Almost 20,000 people are taking Kevadon. I'll get the data: age, sex, the condition treated, dosage, outcome. This is no problem.

MURRAY

If you were counting on a Christmas bonus, this is a problem.

JONES

We can send something in a few weeks.

MURRAY

I'm not waiting a couple of weeks.
I'm going to meet with this Kelsey
and straighten him out. He sounds
like a real pain in the ass.

INT. FDA OFFICES - DAY

Frances stops in the main office to retrieve her mail.

FRANCES

(to the secretary)

Have the overseas journals come in?

SECRETARY

I haven't seen anything.

Frances inspects the stack of envelopes on the way to her office.

INT. FRANCES'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

She steps inside and discovers a lovely bouquet of fall flowers sitting on her desk.

Smelling the fragrant flowers brings a smile to her face.

She picks up the envelope and slits it open with a pocket knife.

This isn't a love letter.

INT. SMITH'S OFFICE - DAY

Frances stations herself in Smith's office doorway.

FRANCES

We asked for answers. They sent
flowers.

SMITH

Nice gesture.

She hands him the card.

FRANCES

And this.

Smith scans it.

SMITH

So meet with him.

FRANCES
I'm supposed to let him take me to
lunch at Rive Gauche?

SMITH
Why not? They have excellent steak.

FRANCES
Maybe have a glass of sherry?

SMITH
Nothing says you can't.

FRANCES
On the down low?

SMITH
On the up and up.

FRANCES
We'll meet here.

SMITH
Too bad, I was planning on joining
you.

EXT. WASHINGTON NATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY

Dr. Murray hails a cab outside the Washington National Airport
on this gray November day.

EXT. TEMP-S - DAY

Murray hops the steps down into the building.

INT. FDA CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Frances and Murray face off on opposite sides of the table.

Frances flips through the new documents.

FRANCES
Dr. Murray, should I take this
personally?

MURRAY
I'm not sure what you mean.

FRANCES
You must think I'm incompetent. Why
else would you bring data that's so
deeply flawed.

MURRAY
There's nothing wrong with this data.

FRANCES

You didn't think I'd catch it? You figured you could sneak something by the new girl.

MURRAY

That's an unfair characterization.

FRANCES

I can understand that. I've run into it before.

MURRAY

(frustrated)

There is nothing personal.

FRANCES

Then the only other conclusion is that you don't even know that you're submitting inconclusive and substandard studies. Nothing here proves that Kevadon is safe for long-term use.

MURRAY

All right. Fine. We'll label it for short-term use only?

FRANCES

I'd have to see the label.

MURRAY

But you'd agree that a label would be an adequate response.

FRANCES

I'm not agreeing to anything. You and I both know that once the drug's on the market, people will use it however they want.

MURRAY

But a label will satisfy your concerns.

FRANCES

Better studies will satisfy my concerns.

MURRAY

Since we're obviously not going to get it on the market before Christmas, we're planning our launch in March.

(MORE)

MURRAY (CONT'D)

We need to get the wording approved and have the packet insert printed before then. So, Dr. Kelsey, what about a label that advises against long-term use?

FRANCES

What about waiting a year and proving that the drug is safe?

Murray bangs on the table and jumps to his feet.

MURRAY

Will you answer!

Frances recoils a bit but keeps her cool.

Murray waits, red-faced. Frances stands.

FRANCES

Here's your answer. I'll approve a label that advises against use of any kind. If you want something different you'll need to do better.

She folds up the binder and slaps it into Murray's chest.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

Enjoy your lunch.

INT. SENATE OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

Dr. Murray's footsteps ECHO as he strides down the corridor. He turns into Senator Hruska's office.

INT. SENATOR HRUSKA'S OFFICE - DAY

Hruska's office is a shrine to things "Nebraskan," from the autographed Cornhusker footballs to the giant smiley "kool-aid" pitcher.

An old ally, Senator Hruska listens to Murray's complaints.

MURRAY

They keep pushing the bar higher. They sent back MER/29 twice before we got approval in June. They've turned down Kevadon by questioning our clinical trials and our animal studies. They won't agree to labeling without a fight.

HRUSKA

All so unnecessary.

MURRAY

Yes, sir. It delays us getting good new medicines to people who need them.

HRUSKA

There's been a shift since that Barbara Moulton testified, no question about it. Larrick almost lost his job. He's trying to be more cautious. I'll see what I can do.

MURRAY

Thank you, Senator. It's good to know who your friends are.

They stand to part company. They walk to the door.

HRUSKA

Maybe you'll have more friends in the senate if we can pull out this election.

MURRAY

We're always ready to help our friends.

EXT. WASHINGTON, D.C. SUBURB - DAY

A '58 Imperial cruises the street, a loudspeaker strapped to the top BLARES the Kennedy theme song...

SONG

He's got HIGH HOPES. He's got HIGH HOPES. He's got HIGH as the SKY apple PIE hopes....

EXT. JEFFERSON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Frances and Kel amble around the corner as the Kennedy car continues up Connecticut Ave.

Campaign workers wave Kennedy/Johnson signs and Nixon/Lodge posters hoping to rally their supporters.

Frances and Kel step inside.

INT. JEFFERSON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

They step up to the poll worker who they recognize as a pregnant Mrs. Sandoval.

FRANCES

Mrs. Sandoval!

SANDOVAL
If it isn't Dr. and Dr. Kelsey.

KEL
Nice to see you.

FRANCES
You look great! How are you?

She looks them up on the register.

SANDOVAL
Super, thank you. How's Christine liking school? I never see her.

FRANCES
She's adjusting.

SANDOVAL
That's one neat kid. I'd be happy if mine is anything like her.

KEL
Congratulations.

SANDOVAL
Thanks, we're really excited.

FRANCES
And you're feeling OK? Eating, sleeping?

SANDOVAL
So far, so good. When I need a babysitter, I'll give Christine a call.

FRANCES
She'd love that. Congratulations.

SANDOVAL
You're all set. Take any open machine.

INT. HYANNIS, MA - ARMORY - DAY

In front of red, white, and blue bunting, a humble John Kennedy, flanked by his very pregnant wife, declares victory.

KENNEDY
And Mr. Nixon goes on to say that he pledges his united support over the next four years.

So now my wife and I prepare for a new administration and a new baby.

INT. FRANCES'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Kel and Christine playfully decorate the Christmas tree. Kel wears a Santa hat, red velvet with white fur trim. Ridiculous.

A vocalist croons Christmas songs on the hi-fi.

Moulton sips egg-nog and lounges comfortably on the couch with her new boy-friend, WAYLES BROWNE (45).

Frances sits at a TV tray piled high with documents.

BROWNE

Kefauver said it wouldn't look so good if Barbara was spotted with a committee staff member. At first we had to sneak around when we wanted to meet.

DR. MOULTON

It was like high school.

Christine seems unusually interested.

CHRISTINE

What kind of sneaking around did you do in high school?

FRANCES

(affectionately)

The kind that you shouldn't be doing, missy.

Christine glares at her mother.

CHRISTINE

Mother.

Frances sighs, returning to her work. Browne concludes.

BROWNE

Anyway, that's how it all started.

FRANCES

We're happy for both of you.

CHRISTINE

It doesn't seem like Christmas without snow. There'd be lots of snow in Vermilion by now.

BROWNE

There's plenty'a snow in this town.

CHRISTINE

Really?

Kel throws tinsel on Christine's head.

KEL

That's what they call it when someone says a lot but it doesn't really mean anything.

CHRISTINE

Like how snow covers things up?

BROWNE

You got it.

FRANCES

It's been snowing in my office since August but this last set of data is a blizzard.

KEL

(to Moulton)

It really is a collection of meaningless pseudoscientific jargon intended to impress unsophisticated readers.

DR. MOULTON

(to Frances)

You can't say that. Smith will think you've lost your objectivity.

KEL

I'm going to. I'm adjunct to the pharmacology branch.

FRANCES

But how does that look, having my husband weigh in on this?

DR. MOULTON

That squad from Merrell descends in a month. Something better fall from the trees--otherwise Smith is just going to approve it.

KEL

That's why I want to submit a report.

FRANCES

But this is my fight.

KEL

We've always been in it together.

FRANCES
This is different.

KEL
Because it's your job?

FRANCES
Because I have to prove I'm right or
else no one's going to trust my
judgment again.

KEL
And you have one month to do it.

FRANCES
So what am I doing here?

CHRISTINE
You two! All we ever hear about is
your stupid drugs.

FRANCES
Just another month and then things
will get back to normal, I promise.

CHRISTINE
It's our first Christmas here and
you're ruining it.

Christine runs upstairs. Frances leaps to her feet, upending
the TV tray and spilling papers everywhere.

FRANCES
Chrissy!
(to her guests)
I'm sorry,
(under her breath,
covering up)
Her time of the month.

She runs after her daughter.

FRANCES (CONT'D)
Christine.

The tree sparkles with light, angels, and a "Peace on Earth"
ornament.

EXT. NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MEDICINE - DAY

Frances climbs the steps into the Greek Revival structure.

INT. NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MEDICINE - DAY

Frances scans the rack of recent medical journals. She picks up a Canadian volume, glances at the table of contents, and replaces it.

She approaches the reference desk. A REFERENCE LIBRARIAN smiles.

LIBRARIAN

Can I help you?

FRANCES

I'm looking for more recent British and Australian journals. Everything's three or four months old.

LIBRARIAN

There's an overseas shipping strike.

FRANCES

What? Well, when might you get them?

LIBRARIAN

I couldn't say. If the strike ends soon, maybe next month.

The color drains from Frances's face.

FRANCES

I don't have a month.

EXT. THE CAPITOL - COLOR ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE - DAY

John Kennedy is sworn in as the 35th President.

INT. FRANCES'S HOUSE - DAY

The Kelsey family clusters around the B&W TV to view the inaugural address.

KENNEDY

...that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans.

Frances looks on, buoyed by Kennedy's words. She reaches out and takes Kel's hand.

EXT. THE CAPITOL - COLOR ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE - DAY

KENNEDY

Let both sides seek to invoke the wonders of science instead of its terrors.

(MORE)

KENNEDY (CONT'D)
 Together let us explore the stars,
 conquer the deserts, eradicate
 disease, tap the ocean depths...

INT. FRANCES'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The speech stirs Frances's passion. She shares her excitement with Christine.

FRANCES
 Can you imagine, exploring the stars!?

KENNEDY (O.S.)
 All this will not be finished in the
 first 100 days....

FRANCES
 When I was about your age we all
 just worried about our next meal.
 We couldn't think about the stars.
 Maybe you'll be a rocket pilot and
 fly up to the moon one day.

CHRISTINE
 The sooner the better.

FRANCES
 If I were young I'd figure out how
 to get there.

KENNEDY (O.S.)
 ...nor even perhaps in our lifetime
 on this planet.

KEL
 But we need you here on earth.

Frances turns her attention back to the TV.

KENNEDY
 But let us begin.

INT. FRANCES'S OFFICE - DAY

Frances wears her outdoor winter coat as she talks on the phone.

FRANCES
 (polite)
 Good morning. This is...I know you
 said you'd call when they came in...
 Did you check in the cataloging
 room?...But there's no harm checking,
 is there?...Thank you, I'll wait.

She checks the radiator. Stone cold.

FRANCES (CONT'D)
 (cursing to herself)
 Damn dilapidated...

She pinches the receiver between her shoulder and ear reaching both hands down to torque open the radiator valve.

The radiator CLANGS and HISSES to life.

FRANCES (CONT'D)
 Yes, I'm here.

Frances listens, raising her fists in the gesture of triumph.

INT. STAIRS/TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

Frances hurries down the stairs of Temp-S to the basement and bursts through the door to the D.C. connector tunnel.

Several people hike the underground pedestrian way. Workmen outline a decorative mural along one wall.

Frances sprints toward the library.

INT. NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MEDICINE - JOURNAL ROOM - DAY

The librarian leads Frances into a room filled with unopened cardboard boxes.

Against the wall on a table, towering, all-but-teetering stacks of medical journals.

LIBRARIAN
 They're not processed and they're
 all mixed together.

FRANCES
 But they're here. Thank you.

LIBRARIAN
 We close at 5.

And with that, she leaves Frances in the cluttered room.

Frances takes a long, hard look at the intimidating number of backed-up journals. This is no easy job.

She cracks her knuckles, rolls her shoulders and then her neck, preparing for the Sisyphean task.

FRANCES
 You might be tough, but I'm tougher.

She slaps a note pad and pencil on the table, reaches up on her toes to grab the first journal off the top of the pile, and opens it.

INT. FRANCES'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Kel and Christine use chopsticks to eat Chinese take-out right out of the little white boxes.

EXT. NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MEDICINE - MORNING

Frances, bundled in her winter clothes, waits by the front door, stamping her feet to stay warm. From inside the librarian unlocks the door and lets her in.

INT. NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MEDICINE - JOURNAL ROOM - DAY

Several neat stacks of journals rest on the table's left hand side. On the right, a small stack.

Frances sits in the middle. She takes a journal from the left, examines it, and moves it to the right.

EXT. JEFFERSON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

Kel leans against the hood of his car as Christine emerges at the end of the school day. He waves and she comes running over.

INT. NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MEDICINE - JOURNAL ROOM - DAY

Frances is back at it. She has dark circles under her eyes but the pile on the right now equals the pile on the left.

INT. FRANCES'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Kel sleeps. Frances, propped up on pillows, scans more medical journals.

EXT. NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MEDICINE - JOURNAL ROOM - DAY

Frances looks beat--unbrushed hair, rumpled clothing, droopy eyes, but she stays with it, checking the journals one by one.

A sizable stack of journals still remains on the left side of the table.

The door opens and the Librarian steps inside.

LIBRARIAN

Dr. Kelsey. We're closing in ten minutes.

Frances sighs.

LIBRARIAN (CONT'D)

Any luck?

Frances cradles her head in her hands.

FRANCES

Nothing yet. Can I take this last stack?

LIBRARIAN

Of course.

FRANCES

I'll have them back tomorrow.

EXT. TEMP-S - EVENING

Frances carries her briefcase, overflowing with journals, in one hand and a shopping bag filled with journals in the other. She shuffles into the FDA building.

INT. FRANCES'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Frances pushes the piles of unopened mail off her desk and onto the floor.

She strips off her coat; her office is unbearably hot. Nestor stops in.

NESTOR

It's a sauna in here.

FRANCES

This or frostbite.

NESTOR

How's it going?

FRANCES

I'm just back from the library.

She drops the remaining journals on her desk, falls into her chair and gets back to work.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

Have to find something by tomorrow.

NESTOR

Let me help.

Frances eyes him suspiciously.

FRANCES

No. It's OK.

NESTOR

I'm not trying to mess with you.

Frances decides to trust him. She hands him a small pile of journals. He squats in the doorway.

NESTOR (CONT'D)

What are you looking for?

FRANCES

Anything on Contergan, Divistal, or Thalidomide. Like...

Frances reads from the journal in her hand.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

"Is Thalidomide to Blame?"

NESTOR

Ok, got it, I'll start looking.

FRANCES

No, I just found it!

Nestor jumps to his feet. She flips to the article and reads out loud as he looks over her shoulder.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

Listen to this...Marked paraesthesia affecting first the feet and subsequently the hands.

INT. SMITH'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Frances reads the article to Smith like she's arguing in court.

FRANCES

Coldness of the extremities. Occasional slight Ataxia. Nocturnal cramps in the leg muscles.

SMITH

That's the big breakthrough? Four cases of leg cramps?

FRANCES

Peripheral neuritis can be really serious.

SMITH

So their hands and feet tingle.

FRANCES

It's painful.

SMITH
It's pins and needles.

FRANCES
That never go away.

Frances almost pleads with Smith.

FRANCES (CONT'D)
It's not nothing.

SMITH
It's not much.

FRANCES
It's the canary in the coal mine.
Inflammation of the nerves should
not be a side-effect of a sleeping
pill.

SMITH
The boys from Merrell are here for
the conference tomorrow. Ask them
about it.

FRANCES
Oh, I will. Someone at Grunenthal
or Distillers must have known about
this. And I'll bet you they did
too.

EXT. FRANCES'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A large black sedan pulls up in front of Frances's house.

Two men emerge. From their build and dark suits we know they must be government.

Lights shine from the trim row-houses that make up this urban neighborhood.

A kid practices VIOLIN, providing a scratchy sound track to the night.

The two AGENTS survey the environment as they step toward the door.

INT. FRANCES'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The dining room table is piled with medical textbooks.

Frances sits at the table taking notes from a neurology book. The SOUND of a TV sitcom drifts in from the living room.

There's a KNOCK on the door.

Kel calls from the other room.

KEL (O.S.)
You expecting someone?

FRANCES
No. Can you get it?

Kel, in loungewear, walks through the dining room on his way to answer the door.

INT. FRANCES'S HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - CONTINUOUS

He calls through the unopened door.

KEL
Hello.

AGENT CRAIG
Dr. Frances Kelsey?

Kel cracks the door open.

KEL
That's my wife. She's flat out preparing for an important meeting tomorrow. Can I help you instead?

AGENT CRAIG
I'm sorry, sir, I need to talk to your wife.

He shows Kel his badge.

AGENT CRAIG (CONT'D)
Right now.

Kel opens the door.

KEL
What could be so important now?

Frances comes up behind Kel.

FRANCES
What's going on?

AGENT CRAIG
Dr. Kelsey, my name is Agent Craig and this is Agent Powell. We're from the Office of Immigration and Naturalization. We have credible information that you are in violation of immigration law.

FRANCES
Impossible! I'm an American citizen!

AGENT CRAIG
I'm sorry, Dr. Kelsey. We have a warrant for your immediate detention pending a removal hearing.

He hands her the warrant.

AGENT CRAIG (CONT'D)
You'll have to come with us.

FRANCES
You can't do this! I work for the federal government.

AGENT CRAIG
Then you understand that we're just doing our jobs.

Agent Powell steps between Frances and Kel. They mean business.

CHRISTINE
Mom?

Christine emerges from upstairs, wondering what's happening.

KEL
It's alright, Chrissy.

The Agents lead a stunned Frances out the front door to their car. Christine runs down the stairs.

CHRISTINE
Mom!
(to Kel)
Dad! Don't just let them go.

FRANCES
(calling back)
Bring my notes! And call Barbara, she'll know a lawyer.

Kel hangs on to Christine.

They stand in the front doorway watching as the car disappears into the night.

INT. INS OFFICE - DAY

Agents flow in and out of this government office while secretaries type up reports.

Bathed in harsh florescent light, Frances paces in the cage-like holding area.

She looks on as Kel, Moulton, and the LAWYER negotiate with an OFFICIAL.

The Lawyer gets up and shakes hands with the Official. He walks to the cage with Kel and Moulton trailing.

Frances grips the chain link cage, eager to hear the news.

LAWYER

It's all good.

She breathes a sigh of relief.

LAWYER (CONT'D)

There'll be a hearing in about two months. Somehow all they have is your student visa. Your other records aren't in their depository and they just happened to discover it now.

Moulton registers her skepticism.

DR. MOULTON

What a coincidence.

KEL

I'm going to post your bond right now.

FRANCES

Get me the hell out of here. It's 9 o'clock!

LAWYER

(responding to the urgency)

I'll show you where to pay.

KEL

Come on!

Kel and the Lawyer race down the hall.

Frances and Moulton watch them go.

EXT. WASHINGTON, D.C. MALL - DAY

Snow is already falling as Dr. Murray, Dr. Jones, and Dr. Ayd descend the steps into the FDA's Temp-S building.

Jones's just-scrubbed good looks, Murray's smoldering intensity, and Ayd's kindly face make them a formidable looking trio.

INT. FDA BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Smith hurries to the Secretary's desk.

SMITH
Did Kelsey call in?

SECRETARY
Her husband called. He said it's a long story but she'll be here.

SMITH
What is she trying to pull?

INT. FDA CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Nestor sits on one side of the conference table and the men from Merrell on the other.

There's a tense silence as each man reviews his notes, waiting for the conference to begin.

Smith pops his head in the room; he's looking for a way to stall.

SMITH
(to Murray, Ayd, Jones)
Can I get you some coffee?

MURRAY
Not for me, thanks.

JONES
No. We're ready to go.

SMITH
Men's room is down the hall to the left.

The men nod their thanks.

SMITH (CONT'D)
Is there anything else?

The men exchange looks.

MURRAY
Thank you, Dr. Smith. We're all set. We'd like to get started.

Smith slides into the room.

SMITH

The thing is, Dr. Kelsey has been delayed.

INT. BORDER CONTROL - DAY

Frances stews in the holding cell. Moulton sits smoking.

INT. FDA CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

MURRAY

Thank you for agreeing to meet with us. I regret that Dr. Kelsey wasn't able to be here. Merrell Pharmaceuticals is planning to release Kevadon in March. We believe that our data meets widely shared standards of proof. But in order to demonstrate our cooperation, my associates, Dr. Jones, Dr. Ayd, and I are here to answer questions and present additional data that will lead to favorable action.

INT. CAR - DAY

Kel weaves through traffic toward Jefferson Street as Frances struggles to change into office clothes.

INT. FDA CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

JONES

Barbiturate overdose, accidental and deliberate, causes more than 10,000 deaths per year. There's a real need for a non-toxic drug. As we've demonstrated, it is virtually impossible to overdose on Thalidomide.

INT. CAR - DAY

Kel guns it, heading for the walkway of the Temp-S building.

FRANCES

Watch it!

EXT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

The car pops the curb and blasts toward the front doors.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Frances braces herself as the car SCREECHES to a stop. Instantly she's out the door, briefcase in hand, dashing down the steps.

FRANCES
 (calling back)
 Thanks, Kel.

KEL
 (calling after her)
 Give 'em hell...

INT. FDA CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Nestor stands at the chalk board. He's drawn the molecular diagram of Thalidomide, Doriden, and Megimide on the board.

NESTOR
 It's this asymmetrical carbon atom
 that's at the root of the mystery.

INT. FRANCES'S OFFICE - DAY

Frances grabs a pile of documents and races to the conference room.

INT. FDA CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

NESTOR
 We know that they're really effective
 drugs, but they're also extremely
 addictive.

Frances bursts into the conference room. As much as she tried to fix herself up, she's still a crumpled mess.

SMITH
 Dr. Kelsey!

FRANCES
 Forgive me. Dr. Murray. Dr. Jones.

They rise to shake her hand.

DR. AYD
 Frank Ayd.

FRANCES
 Dr. Ayd.

MURRAY
 Rough night?

FRANCES
 (sharply suspicious)
 Why do you ask?

MURRAY
 You look like you didn't sleep well.

She can't resist.

FRANCES
And you have just what I need. Is that it?

MURRAY
No, I...

FRANCES
Still looking for more patients to add to your clinical trial?

Murray, Jones, and Ayd are unsure how to respond. Frances proceeds with a charming smile.

FRANCES (CONT'D)
Thank you, gentlemen, but if I need something I prefer a proven remedy.

Nestor hides his smile.

SMITH
Let's get back to it.

FRANCES
I hope I haven't missed too much.

SMITH
We're ready for the pharmacology report.

Frances pulls files from her briefcase.

FRANCES
The pharmacology issues are old news-- there is no evidence of short-term toxicity. But the chronic toxicity studies don't use enough animals over a long enough period to prove long-term safety.

MURRAY
Dr. Smith, we can advise against long-term use on the label. Dr. Kelsey already agreed to this.

FRANCES
I agreed to nothing. I pointed out that once it's approved you can't guarantee there won't be long-term use.

MURRAY

We'll do everything we can to instruct doctors and pharmacists on proper use.

DR. AYD

As a practicing physician, I can assure you that doctors don't go off label.

NESTOR

What about the patients?

MURRAY

The Germans and English have been using thalidomide for years and there are no reports of long-term toxicity.

FRANCES

Really?

MURRAY

Yes.

FRANCES

So you're not aware of the report of peripheral neuritis in the latest British Medical Journal?

MURRAY

You mean the letter from Dr. Florence?

FRANCES

That's the one.

MURRAY

I read it just this week.

FRANCES

And no one in Germany or England ever mentioned this side effect to you before?

MURRAY

This is the first time we've heard of it.

FRANCES

But you didn't think to mention it here?

MURRAY

I thought it insufficiently
(MORE)

MURRAY (CONT'D)

(in air quotes)

"Scientific" to meet your standards,
Dr. Kelsey.

FRANCES

It's every bit as scientific as the
(she air quotes back)
"Testimonials" you've provided.

MURRAY

So you want it to work both ways.

FRANCES

It raises doubts about the drug's
safety.

MURRAY

You can't be serious?

FRANCES

I think there're a lot of unanswered
questions.

JONES

Maybe she has to run our research by
her husband?

Then they go on the attack.

MURRAY

(to Frances)

You probably do. You haven't been
in a lab in ten years.

JONES

While you've been out playing with
your daughter...

MURRAY

...our scientists have been working.

JONES

New techniques, new methods, new
drugs. Maybe you're just out of
step.

MURRAY

Face facts, Dr. Kelsey, you don't
have the expertise.

JONES

Go back to being a housewife.

MURRAY

Things have changed since the 40's.

FRANCES

What clearly hasn't changed is the industry's greed. The rush for profits. The willingness to put untested drugs on the market. Don't pretend you care about people's health when all you want is to boost your stock prices.

SMITH

Time for everyone to take a deep breath.

JONES

Thalidomide is distributed all over the world: Germany, England, Australia, Japan, and we've just been approved to sell it up north in Canada, your country of origin.

FRANCES

So you know where I was born.

JONES

(threatening)

We know a lot more than that.

MURRAY

We know that the safety evidence for Thalidomide is overwhelming. But frankly, Dr. Kelsey, what we don't know is why you're sitting here, smugly, and telling us that every other doctor, researcher, and clinician in the world is wrong and you're right.

FRANCES

Dr. Murray, if the safety evidence really was overwhelming we wouldn't be here and everyone in this room knows it. Anyone who's saying this drug is safe is doing it to line their own pockets. If you want this drug approved you don't have to send me flowers or put me to jail. Just send me the proof.

INT. MURRAY'S OFFICE, MERRELL PHARMACEUTICALS - DAY

Murray reads the letter out loud to Marschalk, who paces and jabs the air in a cold fury.

MURRAY

"Histologic studies of the central and peripheral nervous systems after animals have received the drug for one year."

MARSCHALK

So that pushes us back a year?

Murray flinches.

MURRAY

I can provide something now.

MARSCHALK

But not exactly what they asked for.

MURRAY

Not exactly.

MARSCHALK

Make it look good.

Murray nods.

MARSCHALK (CONT'D)

Seven months for what should have been a two-month process! We have thousands of doctors, hundreds of thousands of patients, and millions of Kevadon tablets all waiting on one woman. Go to England and find out what's going on. See Grunenthal in Germany. I want this application approved! Do what you have to.

INT. PAN-AM 707 AIRPLANE - DAY

Dr. Murray and Mr. Jones review their notes.

MURRAY

It's like those Negros. First they want to sit at the lunch counter, now they're taking over the bus lines. We both know that nothing's going to satisfy her.

JONES

(holds his beer bottle
over his crotch and
whispers)

I've got something right here that can satisfy her. Set her straight.

They both laugh.

MURRAY

I gotta tell you, Phil, every time I'm in a room with her I involuntarily cross my legs. She's every bit as nasty as that bitch Moulton. Just a nicer package.

JONES

Bet she pussy-whipped her husband into writing that report.

MURRAY

So from now on, we only talk to Smith.

JONES

He's not going to step in. Not after Moulton tattled on him to Kefauver.

MURRAY

You think he's protecting her?

JONES

That's not it. He's got to keep his hands off. He's just going to refer us back to her.

MURRAY

So we'll go higher up. Right to the top. I'll line up a meeting between Marschalk and Larrick.

INT. SMITH'S OFFICE - DAY

Baseball season again. Smith is riveted to his B&W TV. President Kennedy throws out the first pitch.

Frances appears at his door. She waits until the historic moment passes.

FRANCES

I thought it was always football up on Cape Cod.

SMITH

He's got a good arm. Better than the dregs they scrapped up to make this team.

FRANCES

I've never followed. But I'm going to start so Immigration doesn't haul me off to jail again.

SMITH

You're joking, but there's a lot to the game. Not just the stats. The heart. Hope. That's what the beginning of every season is about.

FRANCES

And the end?

SMITH

Despair, usually. Triumph, rarely.

Frances isn't buying Smith's prophecy.

FRANCES

So you're always ready for disappointment?

SMITH

Being a baseball fan teaches you to have low expectations.

He hands her a new Kevadon binder.

SMITH (CONT'D)

Speaking of which.

She flips through it.

FRANCES

The undead.

SMITH

They're not going away. Make peace on this.

FRANCES

They've never been wholly frank with us about their studies, about known side-effects, or about how they intend to market this drug. I think they knew about peripheral neuritis and just didn't tell us. I expected some pressure, but this company, calling everyday, saying I've agreed to things that I haven't, threatening my citizenship, it's over the line.

SMITH

You know what they say, if you can't stand the heat, best to get out of the kitchen.

FRANCES

Are you telling me to quit or give in?

SMITH

Take your pick. You stand between them and tens of millions of dollars. It's only going to get hotter. If you want to win this, you're going to have to stop waiting to see what's next and find something to nail this shut. Otherwise, do us all a favor...

John Nestor pokes his head into Smith's office.

NESTOR

Hey, boss. Oh, didn't see you, Doc.

Frances nods a hello.

SMITH

Dr. Nestor.

NESTOR

I caught a call from the Adverse Reactions Reporting Bureau. They've got some wild stories of some strange and serious side-effects from a newly approved drug.

SMITH

Which one?

NESTOR

MER/29.

EXT. CAFE - DAY

Barbara Moulton sits at a quiet outdoor cafe on a glorious spring day.

Frances pulls up next to her with a cup of iced tea.

Barbara shows off her engagement ring.

FRANCES

Nice.

DR. MOULTON

He says he wants to meet my father. So Dad tells him to come out and he'll take him to visit the Holsteins. You've met him, he's not dumb, but he's from the city.

(MORE)

DR. MOULTON (CONT'D)

He's thinking he's going to meet a famous economist. Someone from Dad's Brooking's days. He gets there and Dad starts introducing him to the cows. You should've seen his face.

FRANCES

Bet you never expected you'd meet your husband at those hearings.

DR. MOULTON

I expected to meet men everywhere, but they were all such little boys.

FRANCES

Who are still afraid of girls. Most of the guys aren't bad, they're just cowards.

DR. MOULTON

Did you hear that Kennedy hired Janet Travell as the President's personal physician?

FRANCES

Good for her. There's a first for everything.

Barbara slides a magazine over to Frances.

CLOSE ON -- an ad for Vick's Cold Tablets.

DR. MOULTON

So take a look at this.

FRANCES

More from our friends at Merrell Pharmaceuticals. What are they up to now? Oh, they've cured the common cold. Wonderful news.

DR. MOULTON

I filed a complaint for deceptive advertising.

FRANCES

Too bad it isn't true. It'd be more useful than this sleeping pill they're trying to push through.

DR. MOULTON

You know Isoniazid?

FRANCES

Sure, the antibiotic.

DR. MOULTON

For TB. We used it when I was director of the contagious diseases hospital in Chicago. One of its side effects was neuritis. That was documented, even then. There were some deaf babies born to mothers who were on Isoniazid. Maybe there's something there. Maybe not.

FRANCES

Nestor's been saying we should start asking about safety during pregnancy.

DR. MOULTON

You're going to get the same answer. It's on the market in Germany and England. No problems there.

FRANCES

Or so they say, I wonder if anyone's really checked?

EXT. HEW BUILDING - DAY

Mr. Marschalk and Dr. Murray step from a black Lincoln town-car and stride into the Health Education and Welfare headquarters building like they own it.

INT. HEW - CONTINUOUS

The two men march to the elevator and step inside.

INT. HEW ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

MARSCHALK

(to the elevator
operator)

Secretary Ribicoff's office.

The operator presses the button for the top floor.

INT. RIBICOFF'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The elevator doors open.

Mr. Marschalk and Dr. Murray step into the well-appointed office of HEW Secretary ABRAHAM RIBICOFF.

Ribicoff (50) and Marschalk embrace like old friends.

MARSCHALK
Secretary Ribicoff.

RIBICOFF
How are you, Bob?

MARSCHALK
Abe, we could use some of that
"integrity of compromise" you're
always talking about.

RIBICOFF
Well, let's hear it.

INT. FRANCES'S OFFICE - DAY

Frances unwraps a large package. It contains the new edition of Essentials of Pharmacology, by Kelsey, Kelsey, and Geiling.

She picks up the phone and dials.

FRANCES
Dr. Geiling, please. Yes, tell him
it's Dr. Kelsey calling from the
FDA.

She waits.

FRANCES (CONT'D)
Hi, Eugene. How've you been? Good...
All very well, thank you. The 4th
edition arrived today...I am. Very
proud. I have a question. What do
you know about Isoniazid and
pregnancy?

INT. COMMISSIONER LARRICK'S OFFICE - DAY

CLOSE -- On the detailed model of a modern office building --
so realistic that it looks like an exterior.

REVEAL -- on a table in the middle of this expansive office
sits a model of the proposed new FDA headquarters building.

This is FDA Commissioner GEORGE LARRICK's (60) dream. He's
a career government man--street smart and politically savvy.

Tall and big-boned, he speaks with practiced indifference.

His secretary shows Dr. Murray and Mr. Marschalk into the
office.

LARRICK
Gentlemen.

MURRAY
Dr. Larrick, I'm Dr. Murray.

They shake hands.

LARRICK
It's Mr. Larrick. Nice to meet you,
Dr. Murray.

MURRAY
This is...

LARRICK
Of course. Nice to see you, Bob.

MARSCHALK
Commissioner. Impressive building.

MURRAY
A step up from what you've got now.

LARRICK
It's a modern headquarters for an
essential agency.

They sit. Larrick lights up.

LARRICK (CONT'D)
I know about your case and I'd like
to help.

Larrick offers Murray a smoke.

MURRAY
No, thank you.

MARSCHALK
George, our company submitted the
initial new drug application for
Kevadon in September. Three times
it has been deemed incomplete and
inadequate.

LARRICK
Yes. I've heard.

MURRAY
The medical officer, Dr. Kelsey, has
been a complete obstructionist.
She's nit-picky, overly cautious,
argumentative, and she simply
dismisses the credibility of our
investigators.

(MORE)

MURRAY (CONT'D)

She's even changed the rules; we're supposed to get a ruling in 60 days. She's out of control.

LARRICK

You gave her what she asked for?

MURRAY

She asked for absorption data, we supplied it, and her husband called it meaningless. She asked for labeling changes and we made them. She asked for chronic toxicity studies, we gave them to her, and she said, "not enough." She's never satisfied.

MARSCHALK

When reports of peripheral neuritis were published, Dr. Kelsey asked us to investigate.

MURRAY

So our medical director, Dr. Jones, and I went to Germany and England. There were a few reports but nothing significant. We canvassed our medical investigators in the U.S. and we've only found three cases.

MARSCHALK

All of this was sent to Dr. Kelsey. Here's what she wrote to us.

He takes out his reading glasses.

MARSCHALK (CONT'D)

"We are deeply concerned that evidence of the occurrence of peripheral neuritis in patients in England was known to you but not forthrightly disclosed in the application."

MURRAY

She's charging that we concealed known side effects. I'd consider that somewhat libelous, wouldn't you?

Larrick winces, clearly displeased by the news.

MARSCHALK

We've sent it to our legal department and we plan to initiate action against both Dr. Kelsey and the Medical Bureau.

LARRICK

(rallying)

Dr. Murray, you've called Dr. Kelsey 36 times, by my report, had a dozen meetings with her, and a number with Dr. Smith, all to push through an approval for Kevadon. You're here meeting with me. Maybe you'll admit to giving her the wrong impression.

MURRAY

And what's that?

LARRICK

That you'll stop at nothing.

MARSCHALK

Come on, George. Dr. Kelsey's saying that we fudged our data. She's got no objectivity about this and you ought to replace her.

MURRAY

She keeps moving the target.

LARRICK

Dr. Kelsey is discharging her duty to protect Americans from unsafe medications.

MARSCHALK

But there's nothing to suggest that Kevadon is unsafe.

LARRICK

As I'm sure you know the application must prove that it is safe.

MARSCHALK

What's the standard, George? It isn't absolute.

LARRICK

Of course not.

MARSCHALK

We know that driving a car isn't absolutely safe but we tolerate some
(MORE)

MARSCHALK (CONT'D)

risk because we want the convenience of travel. Our chemotherapy medications are poison but we accept the risk because the ends justify it. Your cigarette carries some risk but you enjoy the sensation and in our country you are allowed to make that choice.

Thalidomide is already being used in most of the world. You can't kill yourself by taking it--intentionally or by accident. Thousands of people die from barbiturate overdose. If those people had Kevadon in their medicine cabinets they'd all be alive.

Larrick lights up again.

LARRICK

Thank you, Bob. I really do enjoy these philosophical discussions. When I light up, or get behind the wheel of my car I know that there's a risk. Most people understand that. You're right, it's a choice. But most people have no idea what the risks are when they take a pill. They're not choosing those risks. You, in the industry, have to figure out what those risks are, and we, in the government, have to decide if they're tolerable. So let's each do our job. I'll have my secretary set you up for tomorrow with Dr. Smith and Dr. Kelsey.

MARSCHALK

We have appointments with Senator Humphrey and Senator Dirksen tomorrow.

LARRICK

Those are big names to drop.

MURRAY

H-E-W Secretary Ribicoff suggested we talk with them.

MARSCHALK

I hear he's planning a run for senate next year?

LARRICK

Bob, you can go and talk with any senator you like. You can take 'em to dinner or fly them to Mexico on your corporate plane. You can even write a little speech for them that denounces the FDA as inefficient and that calls for new leadership. But none of that will make a speck of difference in this case. There's one person you have to convince.

INT. FDA OFFICE - DAY

Frances hands a small stack of papers to the secretary.

FRANCES

This one to Chemie Grunenthal in Germany. This one to Distillers in London. One each to the public health services in Germany and England. Let's see if they know anything.

The phone rings.

SECRETARY

Medical Bureau...She's right here.

Handing her the phone.

SECRETARY (CONT'D)

Commissioner Larrick's office.

INT. COMMISSIONER LARRICK'S OFFICE - DAY

Larrick paces as he vents. Frances sits, taking the heat.

LARRICK

It was poor judgment and it exposes the agency to exactly the kind of criticism that we're trying to avoid. A law suit is the last thing we need.

FRANCES

Mr. Commissioner, they included studies from Germany and England, they had to know.

He stands behind the model of the new headquarters.

LARRICK

There's nothing to suggest they did.

(MORE)

LARRICK (CONT'D)

So when you meet with them tomorrow you will tell Dr. Murray that you have no reason to believe that he knew about the peripheral neuritis before it was reported in print. Do you understand?

She nods her affirmation.

LARRICK (CONT'D)

And you never make this charge in public again. Do you understand?

FRANCES

I understand.

LARRICK

You will tell Dr. Murray exactly, in excruciating detail, what you want from them. If you have to walk them through how you want the study set up, conducted and reported, you do that. Put it in writing. And then, when the data comes in, you approve the drug.

FRANCES

They don't have the data and they don't want to get it.

LARRICK

Then they can't claim they misunderstood. Don't meet with them alone, have a colleague with you. Or better yet, Smith.

FRANCES

I'll do that.

Larrick moves to the model. He softens his tone.

LARRICK

Look at this. This is the future.

FRANCES

It's very impressive.

LARRICK

Modern labs and offices for the scores of new medical officers and scientists this country needs. I'd like to get this built, Dr. Kelsey, before I'm done here. Don't you want that, too?

FRANCES
 (confused)
 Certainly, Mr. Larrick.

LARRICK
 There are a lot of people who think I've made a mess of this job. Powerful people who'd like to see me go. And they might succeed in getting rid of me. So we--that's you and me and the rest of this agency--can't afford any high profile mistakes. Now go prepare for that meeting.

INT. NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MEDICINE - NIGHT

Frances, Kel, Nestor, and Moulton assemble at a library table to plot strategy for the meeting.

DR. MOULTON
 You don't have to present evidence. Just ask them for data showing that Thalidomide is safe during pregnancy.

NESTOR
 The American Association of Pediatricians is coming out with a position on this next month. Larrick's in on it. The report says you can't trust tests on adults when it comes to the fetus.

KEL
 I'll make a few calls. We'll get the exact wording.

FRANCES
 So that covers it. We still need data on absorption in humans. Long-term toxicity reports in animals...

INT. FDA CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Frances states her requests to Murray and Marschalk.

FRANCES
 ...Data on peripheral neuritis from patients who've taken 100 milligrams of Kevadon nightly for three months or longer.

MURRAY
 Do you want just the number of reported incidents or do you want a report on the severity as well?

FRANCES
Incidents is sufficient.

MURRAY
We'll report both.

FRANCES
Finally, based on the incidence of peripheral neuritis in adults, we need evidence that the drug is safe during pregnancy.

MURRAY
Here she goes again, always trying to squeeze more out of us.

They appeal to Smith, trying to make it "us" against "them."

MARSCHALK
(undertone to Smith)
Women. Reminds me of my divorce settlement. Every time we were about to agree, there was a new bar, always set a little higher.

FRANCES
(loudly)
Maybe your wife would have been more agreeable during the divorce if you'd been able to give her what she wanted while you were married.

As Marschalk struggles to find a retort, she hands each of them a pamphlet.

FRANCES (CONT'D)
This is a new report from the Academy of Pediatrics about clinical investigations. It says that tests on mature animals and adult humans can't prove if a drug is safe for an infant or a fetus.

MARSCHALK
This is exactly what we told Commissioner Larrick would happen.

FRANCES
I'm sorry I'm so predictable.

Isoniazid and Thalidomide both cause peripheral neuritis. Isoniazid causes still births and embryonic anomalies in chick embryos. Thalidomide could, too.

Smith tries to appease the company men.

SMITH

Have pregnant women been part of your trials?

MURRAY

Yes.

SMITH

Then it shouldn't be too much trouble to break out data from that group.

MARSCHALK

Dr. Murray?

MURRAY

We can do that.

FRANCES

I want in-vitro studies.

MARSCHALK

Dr. Kelsey, you're going too far.

FRANCES

I didn't want to be too predictable.

(she presses her
advantage)

Mr. Marschalk, Thalidomide isn't a cure for cancer. If it were, we'd tolerate more risk. It's a sleeping pill. It should be completely safe and you have to prove that it is.

MARSCHALK

Is this something you ask about every drug?

FRANCES

No, but perhaps we should. My husband...

MURRAY

There she goes...

FRANCES

...and I worked on synthetic quinine research during the war. We worked with rabbits. Adult rabbits metabolized quinine with no problem. But we found out that quinine passed through the placenta and killed the fetus.

MARSCHALK

My regrets to the rabbits. Dr. Smith, we expect our application to be held to the same standards that are applied to every other drug. The FDA approved a birth-control pill, for god's sake. Did you insist on in-vitro studies?

SMITH

No.

MARSCHALK

No.

He's made his point. He stands.

MARSCHALK (CONT'D)

We have other appointments. You'll certainly be hearing from us.

Murray and Marschalk leave.

SMITH

Could you have made it worse?

FRANCES

Larrick said to ask for what I wanted.

SMITH

Within reason.

FRANCES

He did not ask me to be reasonable.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - DAY

Jill Sandoval rides waves of pain as a medical crew rushes her gurney down the long hallway to the delivery room.

A rosy middle-aged NURSE who's seen it all before offers reassurance.

NURSE

You're fine, love. Nothing to worry about.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

Expectant fathers pace and smoke. Among them, RAUL SANDOVAL (late 20s), a thick Spaniard with a black mustache.

INT. HOSPITAL DELIVERY ROOM - NIGHT

The culmination of a long evening. Sandoval rests, breathing heavily. An ASSISTANT mops her forehead with a wet cloth.

NURSE

Almost there. Alright love, the head is out. One big push and you have a baby. Ready, and PUSH!

Sandoval pushes. The nurse lifts the baby and the room collapses into a deafening silence.

Sandoval falls back, exhausted.

The baby's CRIES break the silence.

SANDOVAL

My baby?

NURSE

(in a whisper)
It's a boy.

SANDOVAL

Tell my husband. Tell him he has a son.

NURSE

(whispering to the
Assistant)
Call the doctor.

INT. HOSPITAL NURSERY - NIGHT

Rows of newborns in bassinets, pink and blue bundles, sleep or cry.

The nurse wheels Jill Sandoval to the nursery window. Raul is at her side.

They are joined by Dr. Ayd.

The nurse brings out the bundled little baby. He rests serene and angelic in her arms.

NURSE

He's got a sweet face.

RAUL SANDOVAL

Beautiful. Looks like his mother.

Raul and Jill share adoring smiles.

NURSE

But he's...There's...

Their expressions change as the nurse unwraps their seriously malformed baby.

There's a flipper-like stub where the right arm should be. On the left side, fingers extending directly from the baby's shoulder.

Jill recoils. She's too repulsed and too afraid to reach out.

Raul holds her, searching for an answer in Dr. Ayd's face.

RAUL SANDOVAL
This is our son?

DR. AYD
From what we can tell, your son...

RAUL SANDOVAL
Simon. We've named him Simon.

DR. AYD
...Simon is fine in most ways.

RAUL SANDOVAL
What happened?

DR. AYD
We don't know.

Raul falls to his knees and caresses his wife.

They weep silently, huddled together in the dim light of the lonely hallway.

EXT. HEW - DAY

Frances waits in the shade outside the HEW Building. She fans herself with a medical journal. It is one HOT day.

Kel shuffles out the door, hands in his pockets. He holds his wife in a heavy embrace that lasts just a bit too long.

FRANCES
Hi there, good-lookin'. I'm glad to see you, too.

KEL
Rough day.

She takes it as a question but it's not.

FRANCES
Quiet, actually. I had a chance to prepare for the Altafur hearing. What a mess that is.

She takes his arm and they begin to stroll across the Mall.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

Where to?

KEL

Let's walk over to Christo's. I told them I was taking a long lunch.

Frances picks up on Kel's downcast demeanor.

FRANCES

That's not like you.

KEL

I don't have much to rush back for.

FRANCES

Best to just spill it, Kel.

KEL

Seems like Surgeon General Terry isn't needing me at the Public Health Service anymore.

FRANCES

Oh Kel! What happened?

KEL

Departmental reorganization.

FRANCES

They gave you that tired old line.

KEL

Washington is a small town, darling.

FRANCES

You aren't serious? It's not because of me?

KEL

Your adversaries have powerful friends.

FRANCES

I'll tell Larrick. He'll help you get your position back.

KEL

He's not going to stick his neck out for me.

FRANCES

They can't do this.

KEL

It's done.

The stop in front of the reflecting pool. The Capitol Building looms behind them.

FRANCES

That's not how it supposed to work anymore. These are supposed to be new times.

KEL

Not yet. With these Kefauver hearings the FDA is under a microscope. They'd love to get rid of you but the only way to do it is pressure from the outside. What's next, Frankie? Christine doesn't come home from school? You have an "accident?"

FRANCES

Don't be so melodramatic.

KEL

These are powerful people and clearly you're not the only target. You're going to put your family at risk because you're so intent on proving you're right.

FRANCES

It's not about being right.

KEL

No? Then tell me. What cause did I give up my career for? What vital principle is worth wrecking our family for?

FRANCES

Kel, you saw it with your own eyes. How many times was I asked to get coffee, or order supplies, or change bedpans because of some man's limited imagination? If they can't imagine a women doing the job of a scientist then I have to be there doing it to prove it can be done. I'm not going to be dismissed this time, when I'm right, because I'm wearing a dress. You wouldn't want that for your daughter, so why is it OK for your wife?

Kel quietly appeals to Frances.

KEL

Damn it, Frankie, you and Christine are more important to me than the limitations of any man's imagination. But please, get off that high horse. I lost my job today. It'd be nice if you'd come down here and join me.

Frances blinks, stunned by her own thoughtlessness. She links her arm through his and they turn and walk on in silence.

INT. FRANCES'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - EVENING

As pots simmer on the stove, Frances finishes preparing a salad.

FRANCES

Christine.

INT. FRANCES'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Frances grabs a stack of dishes, puts them on the dining room table, then calls upstairs.

FRANCES

Christine! Time to set the table.

She waits but Christine doesn't emerge.

EXT. FRANCES'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Frances calls to Christine from the front steps.

FRANCES

Chrissy! Christine Kelsey!

She scans the street, there's no one in sight.

INT. FRANCES'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Dinner remains unserved and uneaten. Frances sits on the kitchen counter as Kel talks on the phone.

KEL

Thank you, Officer.

He hangs up.

KEL (CONT'D)

They're going out looking. I'm going to join them.

FRANCES

I'm coming, too.

KEL
She'll be back. You should be here.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

Christine sways slowly back and forth on the playground's swing set. Flashlights make their way toward her.

KEL
That's her bike!

Kel and a POLICE OFFICER come dashing up.

KEL (CONT'D)
Chrissy! Chrissy...honey!

CHRISTINE
Hi, Dad.

KEL
Are you OK? Are you hurt?

He looks her over.

CHRISTINE
I'm fine. What's the fuss.

KEL
(to the Officer)
She's alright. I'll take her home.

The Officer extinguishes his light and leaves them alone.

Kel hops on the next swing over. They converse in hushed tones.

KEL (CONT'D)
What are you doing, baby?

CHRISTINE
Nothing. Remember when Mom would push me up so high?

KEL
I remember.

CHRISTINE
Taking a trip to the moon. That's what we called it.

KEL
You're too old for the playground now, huh?

CHRISTINE
 Yea, but this is a nice place.
 There's some open sky. I've been
 missing the sky. And it's quiet.

She takes in the hush of the night.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)
 I've been missing the quiet.

KEL
 It's been a little loud at home?

She nods.

INT./EXT. FRANCES'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Frances peeks out the window, holding her breath as their car pulls into the driveway.

The headlights turn off. The driver door opens and Kel emerges.

Frances fills with dread.

Kel opens the trunk and takes out Christine's bicycle.

Tears stream down her face.

Then the passenger door opens and Christine steps out.

A wave of relief sweeps Frances out the door.

EXT. FRANCES'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

She dashes outside and scoops her daughter into a loving embrace. Kel observes from nearby.

FRANCES
 I'm glad you're home.

Christine returns the embrace halfheartedly.

CHRISTINE
 I just went to the park. You didn't
 need to call out the national guard.

FRANCES
 We didn't know where you were; we
 were worried.

CHRISTINE
 I wanted to be by myself.

FRANCES
So just tell me that.

CHRISTINE
Mom, you haven't exactly been
listening.

Christine breaks free. She crosses the lawn to the front door and pushes past Kel, who's been waiting in the doorway.

Frances looks to Kel for reassurance. He's on Christine's side. He steps inside. Frances stands alone.

INT. FRANCES'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Kel sleeps peacefully.

Frances props herself up on one elbow and gazes down on her husband.

Restless, she climbs out of bed.

She looks in on Christine--the girl fading, the young woman emerging--both now visible.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Sandoval slumbers in the hospital's single bed while Raul snores gently in an arm chair close by. Simon sleeps beside them in his bassinet.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

Frances, Kel, and Christine file into the courthouse.

INT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

Frances, accompanied by her Lawyer, passes documents to the Immigration Judge.

The Lawyer directs the Judge's attention to the Kelsey family, sitting on a courtroom bench.

Frances studies the faces of her husband and daughter.

She's made up her mind. It's not worth it.

INT. FDA CAFETERIA - DAY

Frances sips a cup of tea. Smith leans back like he saw it coming.

SMITH
You're quitting.

FRANCES

I'll work out a compromise with Merrell on Thalidomide.

SMITH

They've already agreed to label it for short-term use. And they'll be overjoyed to say there's no proof that it's safe for pregnant women. You pushed them hard. It's a victory.

FRANCES

I have six other cases, you'll have to reassign them.

SMITH

And then what?

FRANCES

Kel and I still have a place in South Dakota.

SMITH

Going back to being a country doctor?

FRANCES

I'll help people one at a time.

SMITH

Don't take it so hard. It's as much as you can expect. That's just how it's done here. It isn't ever all or nothing. There's some middle ground.

FRANCES

I've got some journals to return, some filing to do.

SMITH

Cleaning out your office?

She nods.

SMITH (CONT'D)

Go home and relax. On Monday, we'll write up the letter to Merrell. This whole thing will be behind you. You'll see it all in a new light.

INT. FRANCES'S OFFICE - DAY

Frances straightens her office. She collects a stack of journals due back at the library.

INT. FDA BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

She carries the journals down the stairs toward the tunnel.

INT. TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

The long fluorescent lit tunnel is deserted. Her flats emit the faintest scuffing sound as she shuffles along.

The scaffolding still stands along the wall.

Behind it, the mural is taking shape.

Frances pauses to take a look.

It's a time-line.

Points on the time-line recount one tragedy after another caused by tainted food, poisonous cosmetics, and unsafe drugs.

After each tragedy, new safety laws.

She stops at 1937 - Elixir Sulfanilamide - Over 100 deaths.

The painters have just started on 1938. The date's there, but nothing more.

She puts her finger on the date leaving

HER FINGERPRINT

in the slightly wet paint.

She looks at it and at her finger. Frances turns and walks back toward her office.

INT. FDA CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The Medical Officers assemble in the room. Nestor, Smith, Beachwood, Spears and Frances.

SMITH

Good morning, everyone.

Grumbles of "good morning."

SMITH (CONT'D)

We all know that Dr. Kelsey has been working tirelessly on the Kevadon application for the last year.

BEACHWOOD

And making our lives worse because of it.

NESTOR

Relax, Beachwood. Dr. Smith, before we get the long goodbye I've got something I want to say. I've been collecting drug reaction data on triparanol, MER/29. There's no doubt that it causes severe cataracts, weird skin reactions, and total baldness--which, while popularized by Yul Brenner, is a look many women object to. But here's the deal, not one of these side-effects was mentioned in the new drug application for MER/29. I pulled the application and reviewed the studies. They seem doctored to me.

SMITH

Hold on now.

NESTOR

I'm telling you how I see it. Some of this data is fabricated.

SMITH

You're saying they lied?

NESTOR

They lied.

FRANCES

That doesn't surprise me.

NESTOR

I think we should take the drug off the market.

SMITH

Once it's approved that's it. There's nothing we can do.

The secretary interrupts the meeting.

SECRETARY

Dr. Smith. Dr. Murray is here to see you.

Smith rises heavily to his feet. There's too much out of his control. He glances at Frances.

FRANCES

Tell him I'm still on the case.

INT. SMITH'S OFFICE - DAY

Dr. Murray is handing more pages of documents to Smith and summarizes the work to date.

MURRAY

Our labeling information has been approved by Dr. Kelsey. We've submitted more data on neurological reactions. We submitted information about administration during pregnancy. We've submitted samples for analysis, and authorization for manufacturing plant inspection. Can there possibly be anything else?

SMITH

It seems in order but Dr. Kelsey will need to review the resubmission.

MURRAY

And when do you think that will be?

SMITH

I can't say.

MURRAY

No idea?

SMITH

She's handling a number of other applications.

MURRAY

We want a "yes" or "no" answer. No more stalling. We've filed for a hearing.

He gets up to go.

SMITH

Before you take off, Dr. Murray, I think you should know we're getting some strange reports about MER/29.

No reaction registers on Murray's face.

INT. FDA CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Frances and Nestor are reviewing new data.

NESTOR

Your Dr. Murray called me. He wanted me to suggest names of investigators so they can study Kevadon for kids.

Smith joins them.

SMITH
The two of you together makes me nervous.

NESTOR
It should.

SMITH
(to Frances)
Murray just left my office. They want a "yes" or "no."

FRANCES
Dr. Smith, it has to be "no."

SMITH
On what grounds?

NESTOR
That they pay doctors to write their studies. How's that?

Smith dares him to continue.

NESTOR (CONT'D)
Not good enough? How about that they cover up side effects.

SMITH
That's enough. Even if it were true for MER/29, Kevadon is a different deal.

FRANCES
It's all part of the same culture. They say they can cure the common cold, they fudge their studies, and they deliberately omit serious side effects. We all know it.

SMITH
On December 1st I'm removing you from this case and approving Kevadon unless you show me some reason not to. They've had enough. I've had enough. Things are getting out of hand.

INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

Thanksgiving decorations adorn the market.

Frances pushes her cart hastily toward a holiday turkey display, rushing past Jill Sandoval, who she doesn't see.

Sandoval maneuvers both a pram and her shopping cart up the aisle.

Both women inspect the frozen turkeys. Frances hefts a turkey into her basket. Sandoval spots her.

SANDOVAL

Hi, Dr. Kelsey.

KEL

Mrs. Sandoval. I'm sorry, I didn't see you. I'm in my own little world.

SANDOVAL

Holidays are a busy time.

FRANCES

There's so much to do. How are you?

Sandoval can't say.

Frances shifts her attention to the baby.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

And who's this?

She takes her keys out of her purse.

SANDOVAL

That's Simon.

FRANCES

Hi, Simon. How you doing, big boy?

She shakes the keys in front of the baby. Simon is awake and alert.

SANDOVAL

No. Dr. Kelsey.

Frances is perplexed. Why isn't the baby reaching for the keys? Then she notices.

Sandoval tries to push the pram away but Frances is leaning on the side.

FRANCES

(tenderly)

What...

SANDOVAL

Please. Let me go.

FRANCES

May I?

Sandoval nods her permission.

Frances lifts Simon out of the pram. He smiles and coos.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

Look at all the bright lights.

She holds him tenderly, feeling his shoulders where his arms should be. She strokes his cheek and chin.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

So alert. So happy. What a smart, sweet boy you have.

She lays Simon back in the pram.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

Thanks for letting me hold him.
It's been a long time since I could pick up my girl.

Sandoval swallows hard.

SANDOVAL

Say hello to Christine for me.

FRANCES

I will. Call when you need a baby-sitter.

Sandoval nods.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

Happy Thanksgiving.

EXT. TEMP-S - DAY

Frances hurries out of the cold and into the FDA building.

INT. FDA OFFICE - DAY

Frances grabs her mail, which includes a large padded envelope.

INT. FRANCES'S OFFICE - DAY

Frances drops her mail on the desk and falls into her chair. She's tired.

Picking up the package, she notices the German postage and Dr. Widukind Lenz's return address in Hamburg.

She slits open the overstuffed envelope and the contents spill out. Letters, graphs, x-rays, and photos.

Frances examines the photos. One deformed baby after another.

FRANCES
Contergan. Thalidomide.

She breaks down in tears.

A MONTAGE OF NEWSPAPER HEADLINES:

HEROINE OF FDA KEEPS BAD DRUG OFF MARKET

DOCTOR'S ACTION BARS BIRTH DEFECTS

DRUG MARKET GUARDIAN FRANCES OLDHAM KELSEY

INT. SANDOVAL'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - DAY

Jill Sandoval and Simon catch their reflection in the medicine cabinet's mirror as Jill opens the cabinet, reaches in, and takes out a bottle of Kevadon.

She unscrews the top, pours the pills into the toilet, and flushes them down.

INT. DOCTOR AYD'S OFFICE - DAY

Dr. Ayd sweeps hundreds of bottles of Kevadon off his shelf and into a waiting trash can.

EXT. MERRELL PHARMACEUTICALS - DAY

FDA AGENTS pull up in front of Richardson-Merrell's headquarters.

INT. MERRELL PHARMACEUTICALS - DAY

A Merrell manufacturing employee leads the agents through the plant.

They arrive at an enormous bin filled with Kevadon tablets.

Two men shovel Kevadon tablets into the raging fire of the plant's incinerator.

EXT. MERRELL PHARMACEUTICALS - DAY

Smoke pours from the smokestack.

INSERT ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE - KENNEDY NEWS CONFERENCE

Kennedy stands at a small podium in a room filled with reporters.

KENNEDY

Recent events in this country and abroad concerning the effects of a new sedative called thalidomide emphasize again the urgency of providing additional protection to American consumers from harmful or worthless drug products.

INT. SMITH'S OFFICE - DAY

Smith and Nestor sit, eyes glued to Kennedy on the TV. Frances stands behind them.

KENNEDY

The alert work of our Food and Drug Administration, and particularly Dr. Frances Kelsey prevented this particular drug from being distributed commercially in this country.

Frances squeezes both men's shoulders and gives them each a warm pat on the back. Smith turns and Frances points to Nestor, sharing the credit.

INT. MARSCHALK'S OFFICE - DAY

Marschalk, Murray, and Jones watch Kennedy's news conference with grim recognition of the difficulties ahead.

KENNEDY

Nevertheless, the drug was given to many patients on an investigational basis.

INT. COMMISSIONER LARRICK'S OFFICE - DAY

Larrick follows the conference as well.

KENNEDY

The Food and Drug Administration have had nearly 200 people working on this and every doctor, and every hospital, and every nurse has been notified.

INSERT ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE - KENNEDY NEWS CONFERENCE

KENNEDY (CONT'D)

Every woman in this country, I think, must be aware that it is most important that they check their medicine cabinet, that they do not take this drug, that they turn it

(MORE)

KENNEDY (CONT'D)
 in. Every citizen, of course, should
 be aware of the hazards, and I am
 sure they are.

EXT. FRANCES'S HOUSE - DAY

A limousine pulls up in front of Frances's house.

INT. FRANCES'S HOUSE - DAY

Frances uses the mirror by the front door to finish pinning on her pillbox hat. She wears a new stylish suit.

She turns to Kel for a final review.

KEL
 You look great.

Kel wears a suit and bow-tie.

FRANCES
 Thanks, darling. So do you.

She pulls the door open but Kel stops her. He takes her by the shoulder.

KEL
 You are great.

She takes the compliment. He waits...then imitates her.

KEL (CONT'D)
 Thanks, darling. So are you.

She pushes him playfully.

FRANCES
 (laughing)
 You get a lot of credit for putting
 up with this stubborn old broad.

She opens the door.

FRANCES (CONT'D)
 After you.

INT. LIMO/EXT. WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY

Frances, Kel, and Christine take in the city as they make the trip from their house to the White House.

Frances gazes on the imposing Supreme Court building, the inspiring Capitol, the business-like Department of Agriculture

building, the stately Smithsonian, and the very humble FDA Temp-S quarters before driving through the White House gates.

EXT. THE WHITE HOUSE - DAY

A yellow VW beetle follows the limo through the security gate and parks in the White House lot.

Moulton emerges from the VW and catches up with Frances, Kel, and Christine who wait by the front door.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - DAY

A GUIDE escorts the group through the White House. Frances seems unbalanced as they walk.

DR. MOULTON
 (in a hushed voice,
 motioning to Frances's
 shoes)
 What are those?

FRANCES
 I couldn't wear flats to meet the
 President.

CHRISTINE
 (to Moulton)
 I'm not sure what's the bigger deal,
 meeting the President or Mom wearing
 heels.

FRANCES
 I'll admit, I'm a little nervous.

INT. THE OVAL OFFICE - DAY

A gaggle of newspaper reporters call out her name and snap photos as Frances enters the Oval Office.

The President stands in back of his desk with the new drug bill in front of him. Congressmen and senators form an arc behind him.

Frances finds a place next to George Larrick and Senator Kefauver.

Kel, Christine, and Moulton look on from across the room.

KENNEDY
 Before we get to signing this
 legislation I'd like to take a moment
 to recognize Dr. Frances Kelsey,
 Medical Officer, at the Food and
 Drug Administration.

All eyes shift to Frances. She takes a wobbly step forward. Frances makes eye-contact with Kel and then with Christine. Christine mouths the word...

CHRISTINE

Underwear.

Frances glances at Kennedy and breaks into a huge smile.

KENNEDY

By using her exceptional judgment in evaluating a new drug for safety for human use, Dr. Kelsey prevented a major tragedy of birth deformities in the United States. Through high ability and steadfast confidence in her professional decision, she made an outstanding contribution to the protection of the health of the American people. And for that, it is my pleasure to award you the President's Medal for Distinguished Civil Service.

Kennedy drapes the medal around her neck. The room erupts into applause. Kefauver, Larrick, and Hruska all clap.

Kel, Moulton, and Christine applaud and beam with pride.

Kennedy and Frances shake hands as reporters snap photos.

KENNEDY (CONT'D)

And now.

The President sits at his desk with the bill in front of him.

KENNEDY (CONT'D)

Ladies and gentlemen, the Kefauver-Harris Amendments to the Food and Drug Act of 1938 that I am signing today bring a new standard of science to the American drug industry. No drug will reach the American people until the manufacturer proves that it is safe and effective through rigorous scientific studies. The FDA will have new powers to supervise the distribution of all drugs for investigational purposes.

Flash bulbs pop as President Kennedy puts pen to paper and signs the legislation. The room breaks into applause.

Kennedy stands and shakes hands with Senator Kefauver.

Frances makes her way over to Kel, Christine, and Moulton, who admire her medal.

Kennedy slips up behind her.

KENNEDY (CONT'D)
Dr. Kelsey. A word.

He takes her aside. It's a private moment.

KENNEDY (CONT'D)
Dr. Kelsey, I have a son who is less than a year old. And please don't repeat this, but we're fairly sure that Jackie is pregnant now. If Thalidomide had been approved, she might have taken it. She wanted me to tell you that the whole family is deeply and personally grateful for what you've done. And it would honor me and them if you took this pen and signed this photo for us.

It's the pen that Kennedy used to sign the new drug bill.

She takes the photo.

CLOSE ON THE PHOTO

It's a Polaroid of Kennedy giving Frances the medal for Distinguished Civilian Service at the ceremony only minutes ago.

She thinks for a moment. Then writes.

Kel and Christine join her. She hands Kennedy the photo and reads the dedication.

FRANCES
Let us seek to invoke the wonders of science instead of its terrors.

It's the line from his inaugural address.

Kennedy smiles and examines the snapshot.

It's signed.

"Sincerely, Frances Oldham Kelsey, Ph.D., M.D."

FADE OUT:

END TITLES

Over 10,000 "Thalidomide Babies" were born worldwide.

If Thalidomide had been approved for use in the U.S. in November 1960 there would have been thousands more.

In 1964 Merrell Pharmaceuticals was convicted of withholding information about MER/29's side effects from the FDA and fined \$ 80,000.

Dr. Frances Kelsey was named Director of the newly formed Division of New Drugs in 1963. She instituted procedures and standards for clinical trials that continue to be used today.

She retired from the FDA in 1994 at the age of 80.

THE END