

LORENZO'S OIL

An absolutely true story

Screenplay

by

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(c) Kennedy Miller
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IN DARKNESS...

A clear, precise female voice...

MICHAELA'S VOICE

...When you were born, what was the first thing you decided to do? Did you squeal? Did you squawk? Not Lorenzo Michael Murphy Odone. You took a giant pee, a great golden arc clear across the delivery room. "Maschietto!" cried Papa. "Such a man. A true Odone, grandson of a general." "A true Murphy," said I. "Grandson of a scholar." But in truth, you were always utterly yourself, and all the more prized because your parents had waited so long to bring you into being. So it was only fitting that you should grow up in Paradise, in the Comoros, the Islands of the Moon...

HIGH ANGLE

down on a crowd of faces, most of them African, many of them kids, all looking up to camera.

They're calling to someone, but we can't yet hear the name.

FADE UP SOUND...

FRENCH SCHOOLMISTRESS

Lorenzo! Ca, c'est folie!
(This is madness.)

She turns to an African schoolboy.

FRENCH SCHOOLMISTRESS

Va chercher sa mere.
(Go get his mother.)

WHOLE SCENE

A beach in the Comoros Islands.

The schoolboy runs.

Beyond him, at the very top of the tallest tree is the tiny figure of
LORENZO.

2

Below him is the anxious crowd.

TRACKING

the schoolboy running past glamorous European women, basking in the noonday sun.

ANGLE

Under a shade-tree sits MICHAELA in a cotton dress and a large hat. She is teaching English to Comorian teenagers.

SCHOOLBOY

Madame Odone! Lorenzo est coincé dans
un arbre!
(Lorenzo is caught up a tree).

She puts down the book and runs.

As the group follow her, one of them, eighteen-year-old OMOURI, turns to the schoolboy.

OMOURI

Monsieur Odone. Vitel

The schoolboy scurries off towards the town as Omouri chases after Michaela.

RESUME HIGH ANGLE

down on the crowd, which is larger now.

MICHAELA and OMOURI join them.

MICHAELA looks up...and laughs.

MICHAELA

Lorenzo, we are going back to America.

ANGLE

on five-year-old LORENZO, wooden sword in hand, seated calmly at the top of the tree.

LORENZO

Everything I like... I can see from here. The lagoon, the reef, the dolphins, the volcano, the soccer-field...

OMOURI

(to Michaela)

Je le redescendrai.
(I'll fetch him down.)

MICHAELA

No, we'll use sweet reason.

LORENZO

...my school, our house, my Papa's office,
my mother, Omouri...

MICHAELA

But if you stay in the Comoros, and Papa
goes back to the World Bank, I'll be torn.
How does Mommy choose between you?

LORENZO

Papa can stay, and you won't have to
choose.

COMORIAN MARKET, DAY

The Muslim call to prayer is heard...

...as AUGUSTO ODONE, in a suit, runs through the African market-
place. He's followed by the SCHOOLBOY and some WORLD BANK
EMPLOYEES.

This parade amuses the beggars outside the mosque.

RESUME HIGH ANGLE

down on the crowd. AUGUSTO arrives.

AUGUSTO

Lorenzo. Che posso fare per te? (What
can I do for you?)

LORENZO

You can stay here in the Comoros.

AUGUSTO

Mi piacerebbe moltissimo.
(I'd like that very much.)
But, my friend, my work is finished here.
It's time for us to go home.

LORENZO

Can Omouri come with us?

MICHAELA

His home is here, with his family.

LORENZO

But we're his family.

MICHAELA

Well, yes, darling. But here he has his relatives. And you have yours in America.

LORENZO

But I don't remember them. And I won't like them!

He's tearful now. Michaela turns to Omouri.

MICHAELA

I think you should bring him down.

BUNGALOW, NIGHT

The insistent whine of a mosquito.

MICHAELA stalks the invader under her son's mosquito-net.

LORENZO and AUGUSTO'S eyes are fixed on the hunt.

Slap!! Silence.

The Odonas tuck their tired boy into bed.

LATER

LORENZO in pyjamas marches down a hall lined with packing-cases...

...and bursts into his parents' bedroom...

...causing an awkward flurry of activity under their mosquito net. They cover themselves as he clambers onto the bed.

LORENZO

Family...are the people you love?

MICHAELA

Of course, Lorenzo.

LORENZO

Do I love Aunt Deirdre and the others?

MICHAELA

Well, maybe not yet.

Augusto gets out of bed.

LORENZO

Then why are they my family?

Michaela watches as Augusto leads Lorenzo back towards his room.

AUGUSTO

They have the same blood as Mama, and you have part of Mama in you, and part of Papa. A family shares the same blood, the same genes. These are the little...stamps inside us that make us alike.

LORENZO

I'm going to Washington...to be with people that look like me?

Michaela smiles.

AUGUSTO

Washington is where Papa will be working.

LORENZO

Do you love Washington, Papa?

At the other end of the hall Augusto steers the boy into his room.

Michaela is enjoying the discussion...

AUGUSTO'S VOICE

I love Italy, Lorenzaccio. Now, bed.

He emerges from his son's room.

LORENZO'S VOICE

But Italy isn't Mama's home.

AUGUSTO

No, she makes her home with you and me.

He's back with Michaela.

LORENZO'S VOICE

Well, my home is in the Comoros!

Augusto slips back into bed as Michaela gestures down the hall, laughing.

MICHAELA
Your genes or mine?

HIGH ANGLE

The crowded market at noon.

CLOSE

From a cab laden with baggage, MICHAELA and AUGUSTO watch...

...the beggars come down the steps of the mosque to farewell LORENZO. He has parcels for them. They have little mementoes for him. Among the cheerful faces we see...

...a WOMAN who is blind, a YOUTH without a tongue, a MAN without limbs.

INT, CAB

As the taxi bounces along the sea road, LORENZO'S eyes search the landscape. Suddenly...

LORENZO

There he is!

MICHAELA and AUGUSTO look ahead...

to OMOURI perched atop Lorenzo's tree.

OMOURI

Au revoir, mon amil

LORENZO

Au revoir, Omouri!

They speed past the tree.

OMOURI

A bientôt, mon amil

LORENZO

A bientôt, Omouri!

Omouri is receding now.

OMOURI

Sois sage, mon amil
(Be good, my friend!)

LORENZO
Et toi aussi, Omouri!
(You too!)

Omouri's reply is lost in the noise of the car.

FADE TO BLACK

WASHINGTON, EARLY FALL

The homeless are huddled over the steam-grates on Pennsylvania Avenue; beyond them stands the White House.

THE SUBURBS, DUSK

SUPERIMPOSE

CHEVY CHASE, MD.
SEPTEMBER 3, 1983

A street in which nothing bad can happen.

Amid maples and past picket fences are gabled clapboard houses with porches. From the most inviting of all, the ODONE home, drift sounds of family celebration.

LIVING-ROOM

Crates of books, half-unpacked. Bookshelves half-filled.

LORENZO leads his blind-folded mother into the room where the MURPHY women, Michaela's mother and three sisters, are gathered with their families.

KENISE'S HUSBAND and MARIAH'S HUSBAND hold a plank close to the floor.

Lorenzo instructs Michaela to stand on the plank, and place her hands on DEIRDRE'S shoulders.

Watching are AUGUSTO, KENISE'S DAUGHTERS, GRANDMOTHER MURPHY, the pregnant MARIAH and a priest, FATHER KILIAN.

Lorenzo has his uncles lift the plank a few inches off the floor, as Deirdre crouches steadily.

Michaela believes she's being lifted high off the floor.

KENISE lowers a board to touch Michaela's head. It feels like she's reached the ceiling.

Michaela squeals. Lorenzo's beside himself as his mother tries to keep her "balance".

She topples all of two inches to the floor, pulls off the blindfold...

...and cracks up in a giggling heap. Mother and son are rolling on the floor.

KITCHEN

The cook, AUGUSTO, sprinkles basil over a glorious mound of spaghettata.

As MICHAELA collects plates, she nuzzles his neck. DEIRDRE comes in to find them kissing.

DEIRDRE

Hey, lady, don't bother the chef. We're chewing on the napkins in there.

DINING-ROOM

At the centre of the clan around a large dining-table is LORENZO.

He uses his sword for little 'soldier's drill', chanting a bold rhyme.

LORENZO

Ils ne passeront jamais!
Ni lundi, ni mardi,
Mercredi, jeudi, vendredi,
Samedi, dimanche.
That means: "The enemy will never get through. Never. Not Monday, not Tuesday, not Wednesday, not Thursday, not Friday, not Saturday, not Sunday." See, I scare them away with my sword.

Laughter, applause. He flourishes the sword.

LORENZO

I'm taking it to school tomorrow.

KENISE

Why bother with school? Send him straight to West Point.

MARIAH

Michaela would like to pack him off to Harvard.

MICHAELA

Alcatraz.

LORENZO

But I'm not going to college. When I'm thirteen we're going back to Italy.

Augusto brings in more food.

AUGUSTO

Eh, Lorenzino, we're going to grow tomatoes...

LORENZO

Tomatoes that taste like tomatoes. And Papa's going to teach me Greek and Latin.

Augusto sets down a spectacular dessert to general delight.

DEIRDRE

You're really gonna teach him yourself?

AUGUSTO

It's what my father did for me. And these great soulless institutions...

Michaela throws her arm casually over his shoulder.

MICHAELA

Augusto is a true Italian. He never trusts any group larger than can fit round a dinner-table.

Laughter.

EXT, ROSEMARY HILLS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, CHEVY CHASE

School's out.

LORENZO is first out the door, running into MICHAELA'S arms.

He has a painting for her. It's bold, clear and colourful.

MICHAELA

"The Islands of the Moon." This is very skilfull

A YOUNG TEACHER approaches.

YOUNG TEACHER
Mrs Odone, may I have a word?

The TEACHER draws her aside.

YOUNG TEACHER
Is Lorenzo having any problems at home?

MICHAELA
None that I know of.

YOUNG TEACHER
Today he suddenly began throwing paints
around. He went wild, destroying the other
children's pictures.

MICHAELA
Was he provoked?

YOUNG TEACHER
It came out of the blue. And he's normally
such a terrific kid.

CONNECTICUT AVENUE, LATER

LORENZO and MICHAELA are walking home.

MICHAELA
How were they annoying you? Were they
teasing you?

LORENZO
No.

MICHAELA
Were they taking your paints?

LORENZO
No.

MICHAELA
Then how were they annoying you?

LORENZO
They just were.

MICHAELA
By doing what?

LORENZO

Things.

MICHAELA

What things, Lorenzo?

LORENZO

Things that made me feel annoyed.

ODONE HOUSE, NIGHT

MICHAELA and AUGUSTO are in bed.

MICHAELA

...have you ever known him incapable of explaining himself?

AUGUSTO

He's missing the Comoros. Or it's the school. Maybe he's bored.

MICHAELA

That shouldn't make him inarticulate.

EXT, SCHOOL

School's out.

This time LORENZO is not first. He walks slowly towards MICHAELA.

YOUNG TEACHER

Mrs Odone?

Michaela sees her standing with the PRINCIPAL.

MICHAELA

Another incident?

They look to Lorenzo who keeps his distance.

YOUNG TEACHER

...today it got a little scary.

PRINCIPAL

We wondered... is there anything wrong at home?

MICHAELA

Why do you assume that the trouble must be at home?

PRINCIPAL

Because nothing here can explain his behaviour, which, I'm sorry, is... disturbed.

The word assaults Michaela.

PRINCIPAL

We think he's in need of help.

DINING-ROOM, EVENING

LORENZO stares at a plate of food which MICHAELA has set in front of him.

LORENZO

I want my Papa to cook for me.

MICHAELA

Lorenzo...

LORENZO

I want my Papa's food!

LORENZO knocks the plate onto the floor.

MICHAELA

Lorenzo!

INT, AUGUSTO'S CAR

AUGUSTO pulls into his driveway.

As he turns off the engine he hears turmoil inside the house.

DINING-ROOM

AUGUSTO rushes in. The room is a mess.

MICHAELA is trying to subdue the raging LORENZO.

CLASSROOM, ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, DAY

LORENZO plays with the YOUNG TEACHER at one end of the open-plan room.

AUGUSTO and MICHAELA argue with the PRINCIPAL and the SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST.

PSYCHOLOGIST

...Okay, this is not a typical case, but he does present as a "hyperactive".

MICHAELA

"Hyperactives" repeat tasks endlessly, don't they?

PSYCHOLOGIST

They perseverate, yes.

MICHAELA

But all Lorenzo's activities have shape and structure, a beginning, middle and end.

AUGUSTO

My gosh, he's learnt three languages! By the age of four he could reason in syllogisms.

PSYCHOLOGIST

I know it's hard to accept that a gifted child may also be disturbed.

PRINCIPAL

But we're sure he'll be best served by a special ed. class.

MICHAELA

Any "special ed." he needs will be provided at home.

INT, ODONE HOUSE, EARLY EVENING

MICHAELA and LORENZO sit at a table reading from a book.

MICHAELA

"...but this did not frighten Hansel, for..."

She prompts Lorenzo.

LORENZO

"Hansel was a..."

(slurring)

"...a cleveerr laaad,"

MICHAELA

A wnat?

LORENZO

'A cleverr lad,"

MICHAELA

"Who knew how to solve..."

LORENZO

"...diffical prommems."

MICHAELA

"Difficult problems." You're sluring your words, Lorenzo.

LORENZO

"Difficult. Problems."

MICHAELA

Words carry our thoughts. We respect them by speaking clearly.

LORENZO

Sometimes they c-come out goosey.

AN OFFICE, DAY

MICHAELA, AUGUSTO and LORENZO sit in a cheerful room decorated with animal alphabet posters.

SPEECH THERAPIST

...I really shouldn't claim my fee. This young man is simply acquiring an American accent.

They would like to believe this is true.

ODONE LIVING-ROOM, CHRISTMAS DAY

The MURPHYS have gathered for Christmas. It's all the happier because MARIAH holds her new-born...a boy.

Through the window we can see the children playing in the street.

MICHAELA

...We were sitting in this cafe near the Duomo, arguing about some Latin word...

AUGUSTO

About the derivation of the word 'nativity'.

MICHAELA

It was snowing outside. And he started rubbing my hands to warm them.

MARIAH

Uh-oh.

MICHAELA

No. Because then he produces photos of his wife and kids...

DEIRDRE

That old routine.

AUGUSTO

Deirdre! I was attracted to her intellect. Her wit. Her... reticence.

Michaela's sisters howl their derision.

MICHAELA

And if I'd known this was the man I was going to wait ten years for...I would have let him get the check.

KENISE'S daughter SIOBHAN runs up the path and into the house.

SIOBHAN

Lorenzo's fallen off his bike!

PAEDIATRICIAN'S OFFICE

The worried ODONES hold LORENZO as his head-wound is sutured by a jovial PAEDIATRICIAN.

PAEDIATRICIAN

...It's Christmas Day. All over the country little boys are trying out their new bikes.

The Odones are unconvinced.

PAEDIATRICIAN

Hey, champ. Tell your folks to lighten up. How will they be when you're nose-tackle for the Redskins?

LIVING-ROOM, DAY

LORENZO loses balance. Falling, he grabs a branch of the Christmas tree, which crashes with him to the floor.

PAEDIATRICIAN'S OFFICE

The PAEDIATRICIAN holds LORENZO'S test results. On the lightbox behind the ODOONES is a brain scan.

PAEDIATRICIAN

...EEG, normal, skull x-ray, normal, CT scan... This boy's neurologically intact.

AUGUSTO

We were wondering...we spent three years in East Africa.

MICHAELA

Could Lorenzo have brought back some rare parasite?

TROPICAL DISEASES UNIT

Maps, charts of parasitology.

TROPICAL DISEASES SPECIALIST

...we've run cultures on his blood, urine, faeces and cerebro-spinal fluid. Nothing points to an underlying organic pathology.

CHILD PSYCHIATRIC UNIT

In an office the ODOONES watch a video screen showing LORENZO in a room surrounded by toys.

PSYCHIATRIST

...I'm afraid we may be seeing the early presentation of an autistic child.

The Odoones are stunned. The psychiatrist stares at the monitor.

PSYCHIATRIST

He's an exceptionally good-looking boy. I wish that was just a compliment, but it's strange how often good looks accompany childhood psychoses.

CLOSE ON THE MONITOR...

Lorenzo sitting forlornly among the toys.

ODONE HOUSE

CLOSE

on a stack of books about autism and childhood psychiatric disorders. Beyond, MICHAELA prepares a snack for LORENZO. The male duet from Don Carlos fills the house.

Suddenly the music is deafening.

MICHAELA

Lorenzo!

She runs into the living-room to find Lorenzo sitting in front of the speakers as the music blasts his ears.

MICHAELA

Lorenzo!

He doesn't hear her. Only when she touches him does he know she's there.

EAR SPECIALIST'S OFFICE

The ODOBES watch as the SPECIALIST points to a model of the ear and brain.

SPECIALIST

...It's a contradiction. A fifty decibel hearing loss, and yet there's nothing wrong with the ears.

MICHAELA

He's not going deaf?

The specialist indicates the temporal lobe of the brain.

SPECIALIST

Not exactly. This may be an auditory processing difficulty. The ears hear but the brain has trouble listening.

AUGUSTO

This means something organic. What? A tumour, a..?

SPECIALIST

It could be any one of a dozen things...

HOSPITAL CORRIDOR, DAY

DR DONALD FISHMAN looks more like a mortician than a child neurologist, but he speaks to LORENZO without condescension.

FISHMAN

...I want you to come stay in the hospital for three days, and allow us to run some more tests. It's the only way I know to get to the bottom of this.

Lorenzo nods.

WASHINGTON CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL, DAY

ANGLE

on LORENZO as DR FISHMAN takes blood.

ANGLE

Electrodes are attached to Lorenzo's head for an EEG.

REVEAL

DR FISHMAN and THE RESIDENT watching.

ANGLE

the tiny figure of Lorenzo engulfed by the cold immensity of the Magnetic Resonance Imaging Machine.

PULL BACK

to reveal, first Fishman and the Resident, then, through a glass partition, the ODNES. The room is decorated for Easter.

We hear an exquisite Stabat Mater, Mary's lament at the Cross.

CATHOLIC CATHEDRAL, WASHINGTON, NIGHT

Darkness.

The great Easter candle is brought from the back door by the priest.

The faithful wait with unlit candles.

The single flame passes from one worshipper to another. Thus the candlelight fans out, filling the vast interior with light.

CLOSE
on purple drapes being lifted to reveal...

The statue of the Holy Mother.

CRANE DOWN
on the immense congregation, to find...

AUGUSTO with his head bowed in prayer. Next to him...

MICHAELA, her face raised to God in supplication.

CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL CORRIDOR, DAY

SUPERIMPOSE

APRIL 20, 1984

LORENZO is dressed for home, nursing a large Easter egg.

MICHAELA and AUGUSTO wait with him.

They see THE RESIDENT approaching with a NURSE.

RESIDENT

Dr Fishman is ready now.

Michaela links hands with Lorenzo. The Resident looks at her.

NURSE

Hey, Lorenzo. We'll go feed the goldfish.

The Odonos look steadily at the Resident. It is hard for him to meet their gaze.

CONSULTING ROOM

FISHMAN has the test results. The ODONES see that he's suppressing intense emotion.

AUGUSTO

Please, Doctor, without equivocation...

FISHMAN

There's a family of rare diseases called the leuko-dystrophies. Lorenzo has one of them. A.L.D. It's an inborn error of metabolism which causes degeneration of the brain. It affects only males, usually between five and ten...

He takes a deep breath.

FISHMAN

...Its progress is relentless. And the end is inevitable.

The Odone's are perfectly still.

FISHMAN

...Most boys die within two years of diagnosis.

MICHAELA

There are no exceptions?

FISHMAN

(shaking his head)

I'm sorry.

The Odone's absorb the news in silence.

MICHAELA

You're sure of this diagnosis?

FISHMAN

Yes. Lorenzo shows the definitive sign... abnormally high levels of very long chain saturated fats in his blood.

AUGUSTO

And these fats destroy his brain? .

Fishman nods.

AUGUSTO

But how!

FISHMAN

The enzyme that should metabolise long-chain fats is defective. They accumulate in the nerve cells and somehow this rots the brain.

MICHAELA

"Somehow rots the brain." Could you be more specific?

FISHMAN

Do you know what myelin is?

They shake their heads.

FISHMAN

It's the fatty sheath which insulates the nerves, like the plastic round electrical wires. Without it, they can't conduct impulses. ALD strips away the myelin. And as the brain degenerates, the body loses its functions.

The ODONES are silent. Augusto takes Michaela's hand.

AUGUSTO

And there's no treatment?

FISHMAN

Ten years ago the disease hadn't even been identified. We're still trying to understand what it is.

AUGUSTO

There is no treatment.

Fishman shakes his head. Silence.

FISHMAN

Look...we normally try to be constructive at this point... focus on what can be done. But in this case...

He can't finish the sentence.

Augusto is looking around the airless room.

AUGUSTO

Why does this room have no windows?

CORRIDOR

MICHAELA and AUGUSTO emerge from Fishman's office. They approach...

LORENZO, his back to them, staring into the fish-tank...

Their struggle to compose themselves is huge.

Lorenzo turns.

LORENZO

I ha-have a good idea. Can you g-guess what it is?

Michaela manages to speak...

MICHAELA

We can't pack fish in a suitcase, Lorenzo!

LORENZO

Th-there's always a w-way.

AUGUSTO

Yes.

They take Lorenzo by the hand.

The three Odoes leave the hospital.

READING ROOM

The great room is almost deserted. AUGUSTO scans a medical journal.

CLOSE

on the page...

ADRENOLEUKODYSTROPHY

A Clinical and Pathological Study of 17 Cases

CLOSE

on Augusto turning the page.

CLOSE

on stark phrases from case histories...

PERSONALITY CHANGE

SLURRED SPEECH

POOR HEARING

BIZARRE HYPERACTIVE BEHAVIOUR

Then the words...

SEVERE MENTAL DETERIORATION

DEMENTIA

RECURRING SEIZURES

SPASTIC QUADRAPARESIS

CLOSE
on Augusto.

Then the words...

INCONTINENT

DEAF

DECORTICATE

QUADRIPLEGIC, MUTE, BLIND

CLOSE
on Augusto.

CLOSE...

DEATH BY 33 MONTHS

CLOSE...

DEATH BY 19 MONTHS

CLOSE...

DEATH BY 12 MONTHS

ODONE BEDROOM, NIGHT

AUGUSTO and MICHAELA lie together in the moonlight. Both are wide awake.

They hear noise from Lorenzo's room. Michaela goes to get up. Augusto restrains her.

AUGUSTO

I'll go.

LORENZO'S ROOM

AUGUSTO opens the door to find the light on, and LORENZO searching through his toy-box.

LORENZO

I have to find my s-sword.

AUGUSTO

Lorenzino! You should sleep.

LORENZO

I'm not going to sleep. If I c-close my eyes the boo-boo comes.

AUGUSTO

There is no boo-boo, Lorenzo.

LORENZO

There was a boo-boo in the hospital. He-help me find my s-sword.

Augusto watches his son's obsessive search.

He kneels beside the toy-box. They search together.

ODONE BEDROOM, LATER

In the moonlight Augusto and Michaela are wide awake. Between them, Lorenzo clutches his sword, asleep at last.

WORLD BANK OFFICE, WASHINGTON, DAY

AUGUSTO answers the phone.

AUGUSTO

Odone.

FISHMAN'S VOICE

Augusto? Donald Fishman. I've been speaking to Professor Gus Mobley, head of the Roosevelt Institute. If there's a world expert on the leukodystrophies, Mobley's it. I don't want to raise any false hopes, but he's working on an experimental protocol. It's based on diet.

ROOSEVELT INSTITUTE, WASHINGTON, DAY

The handsome atrium is dominated by a great marble statue of Jesus, hands outstretched in mercy.

The ODNES enter with LORENZO. A middle-aged woman is waiting for them.

MOBLEY'S SECRETARY

I'm Mary Ellen Mills. Professor Mobley sent me to guide you through the labyrinth.

She turns to Lorenzo, pointing to a wheel-chair.

MOBLEY'S SECRETARY

Would you like to ride in this, Lorenzo?

LORENZO

N-no th-thank you.

MOBLEY'S OFFICE

PROFESSOR MOBLEY is benign and authoritative.

MOBLEY

...It'll be quite an ordeal for a little boy. For six months, no french fries, .pizza, ice-cream...

MICHAELA and AUGUSTO study the diet.

MICHAELA

No peanut butter, no cheese, no red meat, no unpeeled fruit. Quite a list.

AUGUSTO

All these foods contain very long chain saturated fats?

MOBLEY

Yes. They provide building materials for the body's cells.

MICHAELA

Then why do they have such a catastrophic effect?

MOBLEY

Normally they don't. Normally the excess would be burnt off. But in ALD boys the mechanism to do this is impaired. So the saturated fats build up in nerve cells. Hmm?

AUGUSTO

And this build-up somehow strips away the myelin sheath.

MOBLEY

Yes. But by eliminating the saturated fats from the diet we hope to stop them building up in the brain.

MICHAELA

And if you could?

MOBLEY

Please have no illusions. We can't reverse the neurological damage. But we may slow the cascade of symptoms.

The Odone's are downcast.

MOBLEY

And if it's any consolation... we'll learn something about the biochemistry of this heartless disease. Shall we enrol Lorenzo in the trial?

AUGUSTO

A diet which cuts out the destructive fats...why not?

MICHAELA

I...I suppose so.

MOBLEY

Mrs Odone, if he were my son, I'd do it.

Michaela nods.

MOBLEY

Good. I'll pass you on to our dietician. And while you're here we should arrange some genetic counselling.

MICHAELA

Professor Mobley, we're unlikely to have another child.

MOBLEY

I mean for the Murphy family. Your sisters and their children may be carriers. We'll need to test them.

AUGUSTO

Only Michaela's family?

Professor Mobley hesitates.

MOBLEY

ALD is passed only through the mother. I thought you already understood this.

Michaela shakes her head.

AUGUSTO

We knew it was inborn. We assumed that meant... the combination of our genes.

MOBLEY

That's true of most inherited diseases. But ALD is carried on the female chromosome. It passes from mother to son.

Michaela stares directly at Mobley.

MICHAELA

How does she get it?

MOBLEY

From her mother. A fifty percent chance.

MICHAELA

Then why is the female spared?

MOBLEY

She's only the carrier. But her sons have a fifty percent chance of being afflicted.

Augusto looks at Michaela. For the first time, they seem not to be a couple.

MOBLEY

Each of us is a carrier for at least five deadly diseases. Whether or not they're expressed is a matter of fate. A genetic lottery, if you like. Mrs Odone, you have enough to bear without the extra burden of guilt.

Now her face is an icy mask.

INT, THE MURPHY HOUSE, YONKERS, AFTERNOON

Outside the window KENISE'S daughters KIRA, 5, and SIOBHAN, 9, play exuberantly with their father.

KENISE is on the phone. MARIAH holds her baby boy. Beside her sits MRS TERESA MURPHY, her hand held by FATHER KILIAN.

KENISE

...Mother's got her ticket. She's packed and ready! Of course she should come.

DEIRDRE'S VOICE

I don't think Michaela wants anybody round.

KENISE

What if we sent Father Kilian?

LIVING-ROOM, ODOE HOUSE

DEIRDRE whispers into the phone.

DEIRDRE

...Not a great idea. She's not even going to Mass now.

KENISE'S VOICE

What is happening down there?

DEIRDRE

Man, think about it! Mariah's got little Kevin, but she's not a carrier. You are, but you've got girls. I'm a carrier, but I don't have kids. Only Michaela got the double whammy. She's a carrier and she had a boy. Any wonder she's not too happy with G.O.D.?

Suddenly she raises her tone.

DEIRDRE

...Thanks. Been nice talking to you. Bye.

MICHAELA comes downstairs in her overcoat. Without a glance at anyone she walks out the front door.

In the far room LORENZO looks up in bewilderment. AUGUSTO tries to distract him.

LORENZO'S ROOM, NIGHT

AUGUSTO sits upright by the sleeping LORENZO'S bed. He hears the front door open.

LIVING-ROOM

MICHAELA stands in the darkened room as AUGUSTO comes downstairs.

AUGUSTO

You haven't eaten.

MICHAELA

No.

AUGUSTO

You'll tear yourself apart with this guilt.

MICHAELA

Spare me the psycho-babble.

AUGUSTO

Michaela, this is an accident of nature. In Lorenzo's little body among tens of thousands of genes, there's one with the wrong imprint..

MICHAELA

And I gave it to him.

AUGUSTO

Michaela...

MICHAELA

That's what you're thinking... Lorenzo Michael Murphy Odone. My blood-line, your son.

AUGUSTO

Michaela, don't!

MICHAELA

After two perfect children...

AUGUSTO

Non apri quella porta.
(Don't open that door.)

MICHAELA

...Your second wife gives your son her
family taint.

AUGUSTO

Questa e una follia.
(This is madness.)

MICHAELA

You're Italian. That's what you believe.

AUGUSTO

No!

MICHAELA

Tara. Una moglie tarata.
(Taint. A tainted wife.)

AUGUSTO

Tarata. Sì! And if you'd known that when
you married me I would want to kill you.
But you weren't to know. This is fate,
Michaela. Grotesque and indiscriminate.

MICHAELA

Ah! An unlucky draw in the genetic lottery.

AUGUSTO

All right, if not fate, then the will of God!

MICHAELA

Which God is that? The one who works in
mysterious ways?

AUGUSTO

Yes.

MICHAELA

Who has a purpose in every unfathomable human tragedy?

AUGUSTO

Yes!

MICHAELA

No. No! For me, God was... in the life we gave Lorenzo. In Lorenzo. I was thankful every day. He was so...exuberant. So utterly original. And for me to know that at the moment he was conceived he was undone! To know that God lay in waiting for him, like a schoolyard bully, lay in waiting for a five-year-old child...

She stops, choked with rage.

AUGUSTO

If you discard God who will console you? It's one thing to push me away. But to reject Him...

MICHAELA

You feel fine about Him? The way you feel fine about me?

AUGUSTO

Michaela, I don't blame you.

MICHAELA

How kind. Of course, you're the one with the choices.

AUGUSTO

What are you saying?

MICHAELA

If it gets too much for you, Papa, you can always leave.

AUGUSTO

That's the lowest insult you could offer me. Don't ever presume...

He's overcome by fury. Cursing in Italian, he shoves aside a crate of books and leaves the room.

MICHAELA

It's already too much for you?

AUGUSTO

If I stay one more minute, Michaela...

He's out the front door. Michaela stands there listening to him bellow his rage as he walks off into the night.

LORENZO'S ROOM

LORENZO lies wide awake. He's heard everything. He murmurs his soldier's rhyme in the darkness...

LORENZO

Il s ne passeront jamais. Ni lundi, mardi...

EXT, THE ODONE HOUSE, MAY

HIGH ANGLE

on a backyard birthday party. Balloons. Party food. And a clown.

Kids play on Lorenzo's swings and climbing-frame.

CLOSER

on the guests: all the MURPHY CLAN; some World Bank colleagues; neighbours; and lots of kids.

LORENZO sits at the head of the table. As he lifts his fork his hands show a marked tremor.

MICHAELA and AUGUSTO are keeping things light.

KIRA looks at her plate disdainfully.

KIRA

This cake is yucky...

Lorenzo looks up. The adults stiffen.

KIRA

...Where's the ice-cream? I want ice-cream.

Kira's elder sister reproves her in a whisper.

SIOBHAN

This is Lorenzo's party, and we're eating
Lorenzo's special food.

The doorbell rings. Augusto goes inside to answer.

HALL

AUGUSTO opens the door to reveal...

...a strikingly handsome and stylish pair, his children CRISTINA, 17, and
FRANCESCO, 15. They have luggage and a large gift.

AUGUSTO

Cristina. Francesco.

They embrace their father tenderly.

In the street beyond, a couple in a large car watch. AUGUSTO waves
to his ex-wife, and she drives off.

CRISTINA

How is he, Papa?

AUGUSTO

He's having a fine time today.

It is then that Cristina and Francesco notice the padding: stairs,
furniture, and anything else a child could fall against.

AUGUSTO

Una parola primo di uscire. Michaela ha
molto dolore, e potrebbe essere un po...
fredda.

(A word before we go out. Michaela's in a
lot of pain. She may be a little...cold.)

They nod. Putting their bags down they follow Augusto.

MICHAELA appears.

MICHAELA

You're both more handsome every time I
see you.

FRANCESCO

Ciao, Michaela.

She comes towards them.

MICHAELA

You've come all this way for Lorenzo.
Thank you. You'll make his day.

They smile. She embraces them, and leads them out to the party.

MICHAELA

Lorenzo, look, all the way from London!
Everyone, this is Lorenzo's sister and
brother...

THE PARTY, LATER

The CLOWN distributes helium balloons to the eager children.

CLOWN

...And a big bombastic blue balloon for the
birthday boy.

All eyes are on Lorenzo.

He holds out his hand but no longer has the control to grasp the string.

The balloon soars upward.

KID

Oh! Lorenzo lost his balloon.

LORENZO

It's not I-lost. I'm s-sending it to the
Comoros. To my f-friend Omouri.

SIOBHAN

I'll send mine, too!

She lets go of her balloon.

KIRA

Mine too!

Suddenly all the kids are letting go of their balloons.

HIGH ANGLE

on the party.

The mass of faces look skyward, as they watch the balloons float past
camera on their way to Omouri in the Comoros.

FADE TO BLACK

ODONE HOUSE, MORNING

The mailman has just delivered. AUGUSTO comes through the open door reading a letter.

AUGUSTO

This is a conundrum.

He beckons to MICHAELA who is finger-painting with LORENZO.

AUGUSTO

Lorenzo's saturated fats have risen. We eliminate them from his diet. And in his blood... they increase!

LIVING-ROOM, LATER

AUGUSTO is on the phone. MICHAELA is beside him, listening.

AUGUSTO

...I assure you, Professor Mobley, in six weeks not one of your very long chain saturated fats has passed my kid's lips. My gosh, not even in his birthday cake!

MOBLEY'S VOICE

In a six-month trial, we shouldn't conclude anything from one reading of his blood levels.

AUGUSTO

But if they're increasing, and they destroy his myelin, surely we should take him off the diet?

MOBLEY'S VOICE

What if they were increasing anyway? If he weren't on the diet they might be even higher. Mr Odone, please be patient. Wait till the end of the trial.

AUGUSTO

What about other boys? What results are you seeing in them?

MOBLEY'S VOICE

As with Lorenzo, it's too early to tell. We need the study to run for the full six months if we're to gain insight into this disease.

AUGUSTO

Insight is fine. But it seems to be an end in itself. Is anyone out there chasing a definitive therapy?

MOBLEY'S VOICE

Mr Odone, that's not fair. The French have tried bone marrow transplants. And at Harvard, we're about to try immuno-suppression.

AUGUSTO

Why haven't we heard of these before?

MOBLEY'S VOICE

The transplants were disastrous. And the immuno-suppression is highly experimental, so the protocol has been limited to six boys, all more profoundly afflicted than your son.

AUGUSTO

For God's sake, how afflicted does he need to be!

CAMBRIDGE, MASS., SUMMER

LORENZO sits on AUGUSTO'S shoulders as they make their way with MICHAELA across the hallowed Harvard yard.

HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL

DR BROSAN, who has just examined LORENZO, draws MICHAELA and AUGUSTO aside.

BROSAN

...Cyclophosphines are no picnic. They're like chemotherapy. We'd have him in here for a month. At this stage he's still ambulatory, still communicating. Are you sure you want this?

FADE TO BLACK

MEDICAL SCHOOL, DAY

TRACKING

along a corridor towards double doors.

A wheelchair pushed by an ORDERLY enters frame and advances towards the doors.

We do not see its occupant.

Then follow MICHAELA and AUGUSTO, with DR BROSANAN.

BROSANAN

The Faculty is very grateful to Lorenzo for doing this.

LECTURE THEATRE

The doors open. BROSANAN ushers in the ODONES.

Then, in the wheelchair... the shocking sight of LORENZO, pale, wasted and bald.

LORENZO'S POINT OF VIEW

on tiers crowded with DOCTORS and MEDICAL STUDENTS, politely staring.

PAN

to the podium, where a LECTURER stands below a projected slide of a diseased human brain.

As Lorenzo looks up to this grisly shape, it's hastily replaced.

BROSANAN

Thank you for coming, Lorenzo. Up here so we can all see you.

He lifts Lorenzo up onto a bench, and gives him a small rubber duck.

BROSANAN

You know how to play this game. Look straight into my eyes. And squeeze the duck when you see the light.

Lorenzo looks to his parents. They nod. Lorenzo squeezes the duck, which squeaks.

Brosnan speaks to the audience. His manner is compassionate.

BROSNAN

Ten weeks after diagnosis, we observe an homonymous hemianopia, with a transient horizontal nystagmus. The pupillary light reflexes are still intact, and as yet there's no optic atrophy. However, there is evidence of early occipital lobe involvement.

LORENZO

Wh-whyarethesepeoplehere?

BROSNAN

I beg your pardon, Lorenzo?

LORENZO

Why are th-thesepeoplehere?

MICHAELA

He asks why these people are here.

BROSNAN

Lorenzo, these doctors want to learn how to help other boys in the future.

LORENZO

Otherb-boys with the booboo?

MICHAELA

Yes, darling.

Lorenzo nods his approval.

BROSNAN

Thank you, Lorenzo.

(to the audience)

In the scanning speech we look for both ends of the pathology, centrally the dysphasia, and peripherally the dysarthria.

He lifts Lorenzo down.

BROSNAN

Lorenzo, would you walk to me, please?

Lorenzo looks to his parents for reassurance. The Odonos are in turmoil, but manage to nod.

Lorenzo shambles towards Brosnan. His gait is markedly more uncoordinated now. He has a pronounced tremor in his limbs.

BROSNAN

Note the characteristic gait, mostly due to the hyperreflexia, but exacerbated by the encroaching paresis.

Lorenzo stops.

BROSNAN

You're doing well, Lorenzo. Keep going.

LORENZO

O-only ifyou s-stop t-talking likethah..

His words are slurred, but their intent is clear.

Augusto and Michaela are swamped by remorse.

FADE TO BLACK

ODONE DINING-ROOM, NIGHT

TRACKING

on DEIRDRE at a table without cutlery. She is eating pasta and salad with her hands.

REVEAL

AUGUSTO, then MICHAELA. They too are eating with their hands.

FINALLY

LORENZO. His new growth of hair indicates that some weeks have passed.

With shaking hands he struggles to shovel food into his mouth. He is already having trouble swallowing.

Before him is a baby's spill-proof cup.

There is no conversation.

FADE TO BLACK

EAST OF DAVENPORT, IOWA, THE MAGIC HOUR

A view across cornfields to a river.

A phone is dialled.

PAN

to reveal that the view is from the back porch of a farmhouse where a man is talking on the phone.

MUSCATINE

Mr Odone? Ellard Muscatine.

The accent is comfed Midwest. So is the face.

MUSCATINE

I'm president of the ALD Foundation. We heard about your boy Lorenzo, and we'd like to offer you some help.

AUGUSTO

Are you a doctor?

MUSCATINE

Doctor? Heck, no! I'm a farmer from Davenport, Iowa. But I'm an ALD parent. This is my second time around, and I know exactly what you're going through.

TRACK

to the window to reveal a WOMAN busy at the dining-room table, stuffing newsletters into envelopes.

MUSCATINE

My wife Loretta and I, we run the Foundation. We organise counselling, conduct seminars, and fund research. We have five hundred member families, not only American but from Portugal, Israel, Japan, Australia... And we're growing all the time. We want you and Mrs Odone to know you're not alone.

The camera finally comes to rest on...

...the MUSCATINES' SON, a nine-year-old lying motionless in bed, with a naso-gastric tube in one nostril: decorticate, quadriplegic and comatose.

CONFERENCE CENTRE, DAY

The ALD Foundation banner bears the words:

1984 Family Conference

You Are Never Alone.

The ODONES, wearing name-tags, are welcomed by the Muscatines and ALD parents.

LATER, IN AN ENCOUNTER GROUP

MIDDLE-CLASS FATHER

...It's hard to believe that things can get worse. But they will...

ROUND THE COFFEE-URN

MANHATTAN COUPLE

...Above all, the most important rule. Save the marriage. So many things will be tearing it apart... the stress, the fatigue, guilt...

BY THE DONATIONS BOOTH

HISPANIC COUPLE

...One thing nobody likes to talk about... what happens between the two of you in the bedroom. A whole year we couldn't touch one another...

IN THE KITCHEN, WOMEN DRYING DISHES

They're talking to Michaela.

NEW ENGLAND WOMAN

...my husband has stood by me all the way. But, oh my, does it test the men! And the weak ones up and go.

Beside her, a solid down-to-earth country gal in her mid-thirties,
WENDY GIMBLE.

WENDY

Even the strong ones leave. My guy hung in there when our first boy took sick. But then we had little Jake tested... Arlen wanted a whole bunch of boys, a whole ball team. He's going to have them, too. With some other gal.

AT THE URINAL, BESIDE AUGUSTO

SOUTHWESTERN MAN

...Our first boy was vegetative for two long years. I keep wondering, did we nurse him too well?...

SEMINAR ROOM, HANDING OUT NEWSLETTERS

PROFESSIONAL WOMAN

...If we were all as honest as that, then "placement" wouldn't be such a dirty word. You know? Institutional placement.

DISSOLVE

CLOSE

on a soft-spoken PSYCHOLOGIST, with a blackboard charting the "stages of grieving".

PSYCHOLOGIST

...So. From the storm warnings of denial, through the raging seas of anger, and the dark waters of depression, we come...hopefully...into the safe harbor of Stage Four. Acceptance. It's a long voyage, but with a little help from a loving partner we can make it...

DISSOLVE

CLOSE

on LORETTA MUSCATINE on the podium.

LORETTA

...We'd like to thank the parents who gave so generously to the fund for the Harvard immuno-suppression trial. The doctors have told us this experiment contributed greatly to understanding of ALD.

"Betty and Tom Knowles, two hundred and fifty dollars, in memory of Corey. Dr and Mrs Liebowitz, one thousand dollars in memory of Joel and Peter..."

CLOSE

Now it's a cheerful DIETICIAN.

DIETICIAN

...twenty-six people have sent in recipes for the newsletter. We still need more ideas for snack foods and breakfast treats. Remember, all recipes are low-fat, and should only use the foods allowed on the Roosevelt Institute diet.

ANGLE

on the ODNES among the other parents.

MICHAELA

Excuse me.

DIETICIAN

Yes, ma'am.

MICHAELA

Our son has complied with this diet, and yet his levels of saturated C: 24 and 26 have risen for the second month in a row.

WENDY GIMBLE rises.

WENDY

That's exactly what's happened to Jaybird!

MICHAELA

Before we start publishing cookbooks, shouldn't we ask ourselves whether the diet is working at all?

A silence.

MICHAELA

Well, shouldn't we?

WENDY

Damn right we should!

LORETTA

This is out of order.

AUGUSTO

There are two families here with this paradox. Maybe there are more?

MICHAELA

Shouldn't this be a forum for discussion?

ANOTHER PARENT

My boy's levels are rising.

AUGUSTO

Perhaps we could conduct a straw poll?

There are murmurs of support. ELLARD MUSCATINE is on his feet.

MUSCATINE

This is not the way we do things here. This is a formal pilot study. It has to run the full six months. We're not scientists, we don't take it on ourselves to interpret experiments. That's the responsibility of the doctors at the Roosevelt Institute.

WENDY

C'mon, Ellard. Let's at least have a show of hands!

There's a buzz of support.

LORETTA

No! That would be misleading. Dangerous, even. The medical folks call this kind of evidence anecdotal.

MUSCATINE

Thank you, Madam President.

DIETICIAN

The only way the doctors can get useful results is to follow a strict protocol with a statistical sample, a control group and a proper time frame.

MUSCATINE

How else can medical science get the knowledge it needs?

MICHAELA

So I take it that our children are in the service of medical science?

LORETTA

It's time we got back to our agenda.

MICHAELA

How foolish of me. I always thought that medical science was in the service of the sufferers.

FADE TO BLACK

HIGH ANGLE

on the ODONE house. The sights and sounds of a still summer night in suburban Washington.

LORENZO'S BEDROOM

MICHAELA puts a diaper on LORENZO, who is no longer continent.

AUGUSTO and Michaela ease his bed towards the shuttered window.

Augusto turns off the light and throws open the shutters to reveal the vast night sky.

LORENZO

Y-you forgot the music.

Augusto puts on a cassette. The trio from *Così fan tutte* fills the room with tranquillity.

LORENZO

Hold my hand...

ANGLE

The window frames the three Odone's, expectant faces lifted to the starlight.

LORENZO

Now th-the story.

MICHAELA

Which story, Lorenzo?

LORENZO

San L-lorenzo.

MICHAELA

San Lorenzo. Who is...?

LORENZO

My p-patron saint. And s-saint of m-my fa-fa- father's village.

MICHAELA

And what happened to him?

LORENZO

He w-was in R-roma, and...
...I f-forgot.

AUGUSTO

Many years ago, in pagan times, yes? The bad guys say to him, "Bring us the riches of your church." And Lorenzo brings to them the beggars, the sick people. He says...

LORENZO

"Th-these are our r-riches."

AUGUSTO

Bravo, Lorenzino.

MICHAELA

My darling, that's wonderful.

AUGUSTO

And tonight, August 10, is...

LORENZO

La n-notte di San L-lorenzo.

MICHAELA

The night of the shooting stars.

AUGUSTO

When anything can happen.

Three frail human beings gaze at the vast inscrutable universe.

DISSOLVE

LATER...

The music has stopped.

Michaela sleeps by Lorenzo who is barely awake.

Augusto watches over them.

DISSOLVE

PRE-DAWN...

Lorenzo is finally asleep.

Gently, Augusto nudges Michaela. She wakes abruptly, as if from a nightmare.

They speak in low voices.

AUGUSTO

When we first went to the Comoros, what did we do? We got to know the country... its laws, its language, its resources, its politics. We studied.

MICHAELA

Yes?

AUGUSTO

We should treat Lorenzo's illness like another country.

MICHAELA

I don't quite see the analogy.

AUGUSTO

ALD also has many dimensions. To understand it, we'll need a command of genetics, biochemistry, microbiology, neurology, any number of "ologies".

MICHAELA

Augusto, it's a little too late for medical school.

AUGUSTO

The doctors are groping in the dark. They've got Lorenzo on a turvy-tilt diet. And that bloody immuno-suppression! It was brutal and it was useless. We should never have consigned him blindly into their hands. He shouldn't suffer by our ignorance. So, we read a little. We go out and inform ourselves.

MICHAELA

But is it fair to miss any more time with Lorenzo? While he can still speak to us?

AUGUSTO

If he's to be taken from us, Michaela, and we're to live with ourselves, we'll need to know we've done everything we can.

They look at the sleeping Lorenzo.

AUGUSTO

He expects it of us.

INT, ODONE HOUSE, DAY

The ODONES are at the front door.

DEIRDRE watches as MICHAELA speaks with LORENZO.

LORENZO

...B-bbut it's not f-fair!

MICHAELA

You remember the great library of Alexandria? The one that held all the knowledge in the ancient world?

LORENZO

It b-burnt d-ddown.

MICHAELA

Yes. Well, my darling, over in Bethesda there's another library.

AUGUSTO

It's the biggest medical library in the world.

MICHAELA

And you know something? It's only three blocks from here. So if you want Mommy, Aunt Deirdre can call...And I'll come straight home. I'll run all the way.

He nods...reluctantly.

EXT, NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF HEALTH, DAY

MICHAELA and AUGUSTO enter an immense building.

INT, LIBRARY, DAY**HIGH ANGLE**

of the cavernous atrium. Millions of books and hundreds of people at work.

ANGLE

AUGUSTO surrounded by medical journals.

ANGLE

MICHAELA is at the counter. A plump librarian, BIG BETTY, hands over a stack of books.

BIG BETTY

That's it. You've cleaned me out.

MICHAELA

Surely not.

BIG BETTY

Honey, you know...this has to be a very rare disease.

MICHAELA

What about other languages? Russian, Japanese? How do you index another alphabet?

BIG BETTY

If it's not bilingual, every-thing gets an English subtitle, and at least a summary.

MICHAELA

How can I be sure I'm not missing anything?

BIG BETTY

This is the N.I.H. Library. We've got it all. Everything. From aardvark to zygote.

LIVING-ROOM, NIGHT

The living-room has become a think-tank. Alongside Lorenzo's paintings are graphs and scientific data.

MICHAELA and AUGUSTO are deeply absorbed in the medical journals. She looks up suddenly.

MICHAELA

I want to take Lorenzo off the diet.

AUGUSTO

And feed him what?

MICHAELA

Normal food. Things he likes.

AUGUSTO

Full of the long chain fats that we know destroy his myelin.

MICHAELA

But on the diet his blood fats keep rising anyway!

She points to a wall chart.

MICHAELA

We're damned if we do and damned if we don't. It makes no sense!

AUGUSTO

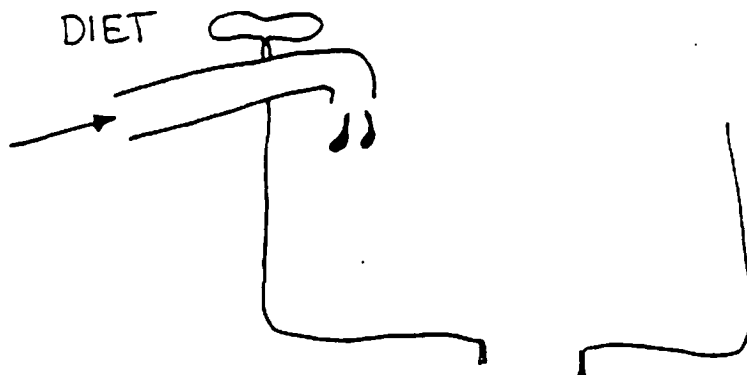
Because we don't know enough. Look! Un piccolo acquaiol
(A little kitchen sink!)

He goes to a white-board and starts to draw a sink.

AUGUSTO

In human metabolism...

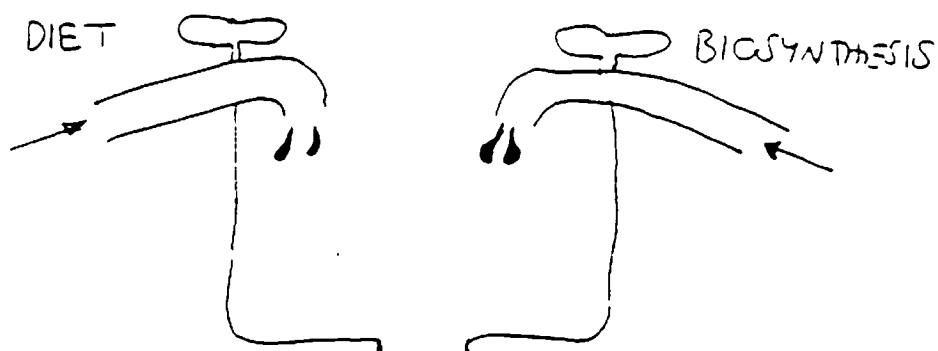
He draws a tap marked "diet" and an inflow.



AUGUSTO

...Very long chain saturated fats are introduced by diet.

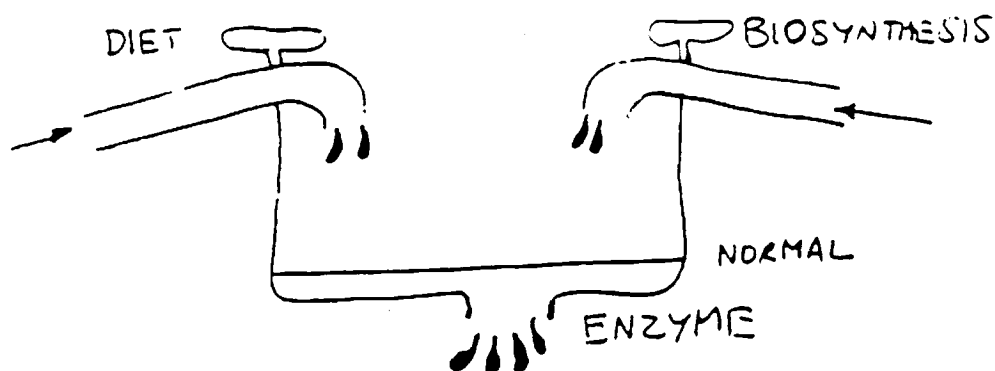
Then a tap marked "biosynthesis" and an inflow.



AUGUSTO

...And also produced by the body...biosynthesis...

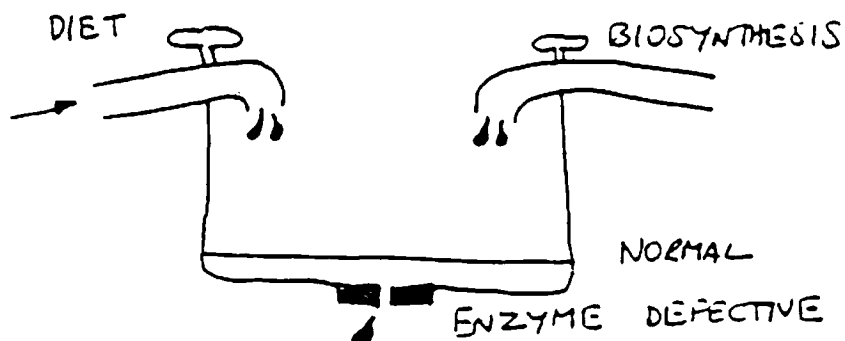
Then he labels the plug-hole: "enzyme".



AUGUSTO

...but normally they're not harmful because this enzyme eliminates the excess.

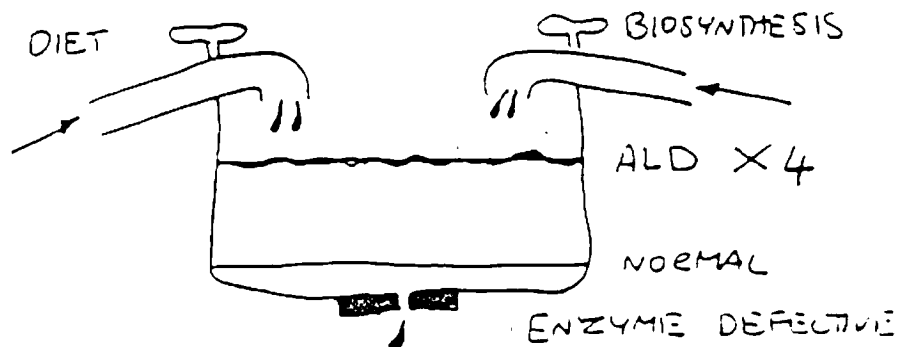
Now he narrows the plug-hole.



AUGUSTO

But Lorenzo's enzyme is defective, his 'plug-hole' is blocked...

He raises the fluid level to four times normal.



AUGUSTO

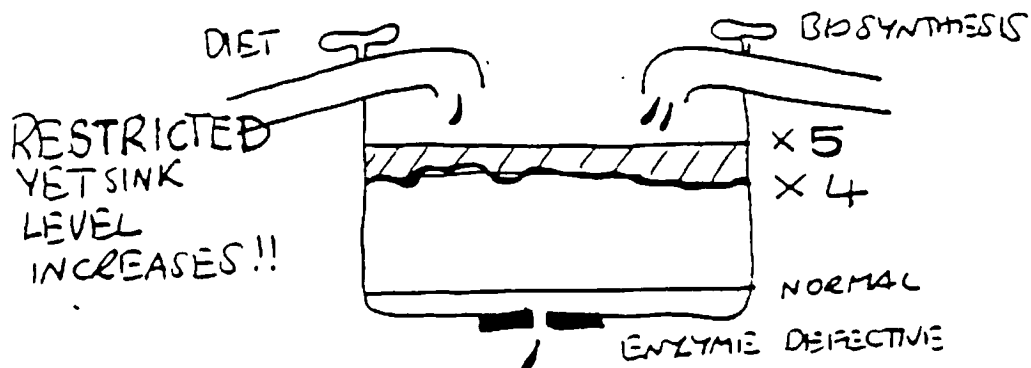
...so his saturated C:24 and 26 rise to four times the normal level. And here we have our intriguing paradox...

He reduces the inflow from the diet tap.

AUGUSTO

We reduce the dietary intake. But the level in the sink...

He raises the fluid level to five times normal.



AUGUSTO

...which we might expect to go down, goes up!

DEIRDRE brings dinner.

DEIRDRE

Brain food.

MICHAELA

So, logically we should take him off the diet!

AUGUSTO

And just as logically we shouldn't. Let's not do what the doctors did. Let's not act without knowing why.

Michaela turns to Deirdre.

MICHAELA

What sort of mind could visualise human metabolism as a kitchen sink!

AUGUSTO

A simple mind, which asks simple questions. Why, when we turn off a tap, does the level in the sink rise?

Michaela pauses between mouthfuls and contemplates the sink-drawing.

LIBRARY, DAY

MICHAELA scans the Index Medicus on microfilm.

CLOSE

on a list rolling up the screen:

"Biochemical and genetic characterization of butyryl CoA dehydrogenase..."

"Compensatory biosynthesis and fatty acid manipulation in rats...Brailowski/Nowotny et al. Polish Jnl. Biol.Sci./1979/Vii/2/41-47 (Polish: abstract in Eng.)

"Quantitative analysis of phospholipids by thin-layer chromatography..."

Michaela halts the roll and scans back. Her eyes fix on:

Compensatory biosynthesis

fatty acid manipulation

LIBRARY COUNTER, LATER

ANGLE

BIG BETTY hands MICHAELA a scientific journal.

Michaela hungrily scans it. As she reads, her excitement grows.

CHEVY CHASE

MICHAELA runs down the street towards the house.

INT, "THINK-TANK"

AUGUSTO, DEIRDRE and LORENZO look up as MICHAELA bursts into the house.

MICHAELA
(breathless)

Polish rats!

They look at her, bemused. She leans over Lorenzo.

MICHAELA
Lorenzo, kiss your clever mother.

He does.

MICHAELA
I think, I think I have an explanation for the
paradox...

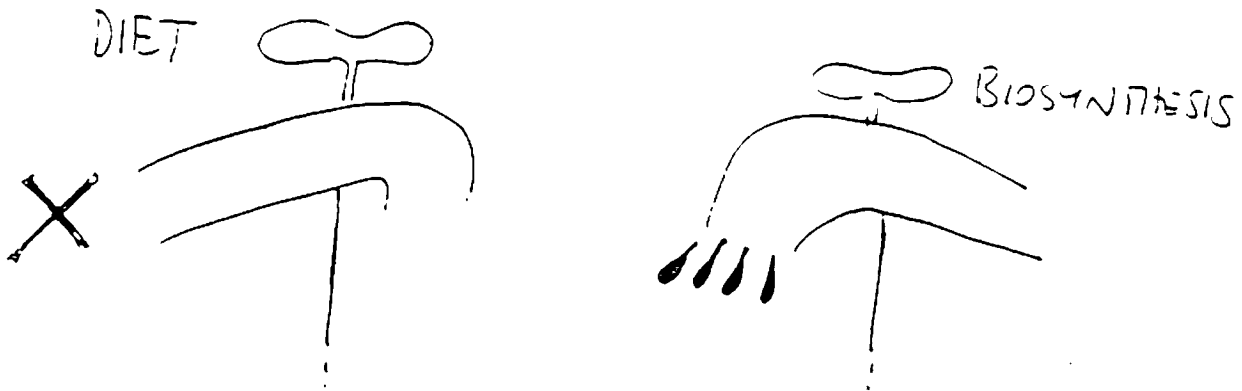
She goes to the last kitchen sink drawing.

MICHAELA
...Polish rats with a fatty acid storage
disease!

She points to the diet tap, "turning it off" by erasing its inflow.

MICHAELA
When they were deprived of a specific fat
in their diet...

She draws a larger inflow from the biosynthesis tap.



MICHAELA

...their body cells compensated by over-producing it. If this holds true for humans...

AUGUSTO

The diet is useless, unless you can also inhibit the bio-synthesis. My gosh!

MICHAELA

There's more. And for this I deserve two kisses, Lorenzo. The summary mentions the concept of fatty acid manipulation.

DEIRDRE

Huh?

MICHAELA

They stopped the rats producing the harmful fat by loading their diet with a fat that was benign.

She erases most of the inflow from the biosynthesis tap.

MICHAELA

It may be that we can lower Lorenzo's biosynthesis of saturated C:24 and 26...

She draws a large inflow from the diet tap...



MICHAELA

...by loading his diet with some fat that's less harmful.

Augusto studies the Polish article. He is very excited.

AUGUSTO

We should have this translated as soon as possible.

LORENZO

I ha.. some n-news too.

He clutches a letter in his shaking hand.

LORENZO

Omouri.

DEIRDRE

He wouldn't open it till you got home.

BACK PORCH, TWILIGHT

Through the window AUGUSTO is seen phoning the World Bank translation service.

REVEAL

MICHAELA on a love-seat, with her arm around LORENZO. She reads the letter, translating from French.

MICHAELA

"...And when you come to visit us, my friend, I have a great joy for you. The best news of all. I have a new baby sister. Moheli. You can see in the photograph that she will be beautiful, not a monkey like her big brother."

She hands Lorenzo a photo of Omouri with Moheli.

Lorenzo brings it abnormally close to his eyes, and tilts his head at bizarre angles.

LORENZO

M-my gosh, she's b-beautiful.

Michaela realises he can scarcely see.

MICHAELA
Lorenzo... is Omouri in the photograph?

He strains to see.

LORENZO
I think so. Is he?

MICHAELA
Yes...yes, he is.

LORENZO
Au revoir, Omouri.

MICHAELA
Au revoir, mon ami.

LORENZO
A bientôt, Omoun.

MICHAELA
A bientôt, mon ami.

CLOSE on Michaela...

LATER

AUGUSTO comes out onto the porch.

MICHAELA'S face is turned away, looking out into the night. LORENZO is asleep in her arms.

AUGUSTO
By tomorrow morning your Polish rats will be speaking to us in English.

Her face is still averted.

MICHAELA
I've been thinking...

She turns to him.

MICHAELA
I found that article by accident. I could easily have missed it. It was by a Polish biochemist who has probably never heard of ALD.

AUGUSTO

But it gives us a new line of enquiry, and...
who knows?

MICHAELA

Yes, but following it could take months.
And there'll be more leads, and they'll take
more time, time we don't have. All these
studies, all these experts working in
isolation on one piece of a jigsaw...

CLOSE on Augusto.

ROOSEVELT INSTITUTE, STAFF CAFETERIA

ANGLE

on PROFESSOR MOBLEY. STUDENTS and STAFF are eating nearby.

MOBLEY

...There's no better way to accelerate the
exchange of information. It's a wonderful
idea, Mr Odone.

AUGUSTO nods.

MOBLEY

But, alas, we barely have money for our
research programs. To bring doctors from
all over the nation...

AUGUSTO

No, from all over the world.

MOBLEY

How many known cases of ALD are there
in the United States?

Augusto shrugs.

MOBLEY

Scarcely three hundred. Hmm? That's too
small a constituency to attract major
research funds. Particularly in this epoch
of Reaganomics, hmm? A symposium is a
luxury we really can't afford.

AUGUSTO

We appreciate that. So we've prepared a preliminary budget, based on forty participants for two days...

He hands it to Mobley.

AUGUSTO

...We think it can be done for thirty-five thousand dollars. And my wife and I will raise the money. Your institute will not be at risk. The Odonos will underwrite any shortfall.

He hands this second document to Mobley, then a third.

AUGUSTO

And we took the liberty of drafting an invitation list...based on our reading.

Mobley scans the list...

MOBLEY

Paoletti, Hashimoto...all these minds in one room! Let me add some names...

(writing)

...We must have Nicole Baumann, from the Salpetriere, Inderjit Singh, a very fine neurochemist...

AUGUSTO

Forgive me, Professor Mobley, but we wish to make two conditions... We'd like the symposium to emphasise therapy.

MOBLEY

And your second condition?

AUGUSTO

That Michaela and I be allowed to participate in discussion.

Mobley glances at him, then beckons his SECRETARY.

MOBLEY

Mary Ellen, I've just added to your workload, but in the best possible cause. We're going to convene our first symposium on ALD.

She smiles at Augusto.

MOBLEY'S SECRETARY

Excellent. We should notify the Muscatines.

MOBLEY

Of course!

(to Augusto)

The Foundation could be very helpful in fund-raising.

MUSCATINE FARM, DAY

On the wall, a large photograph: PROFESSOR MOBLEY receiving a cheque from the MUSCATINES.

Interrupted in the middle of a mail-out, LORETTA is on the phone.

LORETTA

...Now, how can we make this work? What say we hook it to the back of the next Foundation Family Conference?

MICHAELA'S VOICE

Which is when?

LORETTA

Next summer. Fourth of July weekend.

MICHAELA'S VOICE

That's nine months away.

LORETTA

It will take every bit of that time for us to raise the money and invite those busy doctors.

MICHAELA'S VOICE

I don't believe it will.

LORETTA

What's your time-frame, Mrs Odone?

MICHAELA'S VOICE

Six weeks from now. November 10 and 11.

LORETTA

Pardon me, but what's the hurry?

MICHAELA'S VOICE

As ALD parents we both know the answer to that inane question.

LORETTA

If you want to make this symposium happen, you're going about it the wrong way.

ODONE HOUSE, THINK-TANK

MICHAELA

Mrs Muscatine, at least we're going about it.

REVEAL

DEIRDRE with LORENZO who slurs incomprehensibly.

LORENZO

Wamai peeiah awkie t-to. Aie waa negh ohpr.

DEIRDRE

I'm sorry, sweetheart. I don't understand.

MICHAELA

He wants his diaper changed.

(into phone)

Mrs Muscatine?..

She hears the "busy" signal.

She shrugs and hangs up.

HIGH ANGLE

MICHAELA strides into the Washington Post building.

OFFICE

The columnist JUDY MANN at her word processor.

JUDY MANN

...Look. "Nancy and Imelda Go Shopping".
The twelve hundred wittiest words of my
career. And you'd like me to bump this to
help you raise funds.

MICHAELA

Don't you agree it's of more
consequence?

JUDY MANN

In the last few months I've tugged the
heartstrings of Washington on behalf of
muscular dystrophy, sudden infant death
syndrome, cystic fibrosis...

MICHAELA

Then why exclude adreno-leukodystrophy?

JUDY MANN

Because I cover politics, women's issues,
the arts... My readership expects a
balance, you know? I can't run another
medical story right now. Maybe next
month...

MICHAELA

Judy, I think you should meet my son.

ODONE HOUSE, DAY

MICHAELA opens the front door to reveal BIG BETTY.

BIG BETTY

We had no idea. We thought you two
were doctors.

She hands MICHAELA an envelope stuffed with bills.

MICHAELA

This is so very kind.

BIG BETTY

Thank Judy Mann. I showed her column round the staff room, and the dollars came rolling in.

WORLD BANK, AUGUSTO'S OFFICE, DAY

AUGUSTO holds a cheque. He looks up at its donors, his multi-national COLLEAGUES.

AUGUSTO

...My friends, I am very moved.

INDIAN ECONOMIST

My wife is eager to form a committee, perhaps to help with hospitality...

ODONE DINING-ROOM, DAY

The house is decorated for Halloween.

The living-room is taken over by a multi-national committee of World Bank WIVES.

MOBLEY'S SECRETARY

...You can't have these doctors shlepping their own bags. They're used to limousines.

MICHAELA

Then they shall have them, but not at this price.

(waving the budget)

Mrs Svensen, you could put on your sable coat and do a couple of airport runs. And Mrs Gupta? Mrs D'Oliveira, in your black Mercedes?

They nod affably.

The doorbell rings. MICHAELA rises.

ENGLISHWOMAN

We could save on catering. The British contingent can do afternoon tea.

AUSTRIAN WOMAN

And we'll provide the breakfast pastries.

MOBLEY'S SECRETARY

Dinner will be the big cost.

MICHAELA

I know a marvellous Italian cook.

She opens the door to reveal WENDY GIMBLE, her arms loaded with fruit and vegetables. Her six-year-old son JAKE stands shyly behind her. He carries a Halloween pumpkin.

WENDY

I'll lick envelopes, serve coffee, whatever.
And this is for your boy. I grow the best
organic produce in Virginia.

Michaela does not recall her.

MICHAELA

Oh...thank you.

WENDY

You don't remember me? Wendy Gimble.
Foundation Family Conference. I yelled
louder than you.

MICHAELA

Oh, yes. You have two boys.

WENDY

Well, we lost Jaybird. But Jake here is fine.
We think what you're doing is fantastic.

ANGLE

Jake staring beyond Michaela.

JAKE

Is that Lorenzo?

LORENZO is in the hallway, propped unsteadily against a wall, straining to see. DEIRDRE hovers watchfully.

MICHAELA

Lorenzo, this is Jake. He's a young man of
your age.

DEIRDRE

He's brought you a Halloween pumpkin.
Why don't we go touch it?

LORENZO

Nhaharrh gawh nhado.

Deirdre looks to Michaela.

MICHAELA

I beg your pardon, Lorenzo.

LORENZO

Nhaharrhgawh nhadol

MICHAELA

I'm sorry, darling. Let's try again.

LORENZO

Nhaharrh gawhnhado! Nhaharrhgawhnhadol

LIVING-ROOM, NIGHT

AUGUSTO enters to find MICHAELA with LORENZO babbling, half-asleep in her arms. She turns to Augusto. For the first time we see panic in her eyes.

MICHAELA

This morning I could still understand him...

FADE TO BLACK

INT, WORLD BANK OFFICE, MIDDAY

AUGUSTO and his fellow economists are immersed in work.

A phone rings...

LIVING-ROOM, LATER

LORENZO is huddled on the sofa. His incoherent speech has now become an incessant high-pitched wail.

AUGUSTO hurries in to find MICHAELA and DEIRDRE with DR FISHMAN.

Michaela looks desperately towards Augusto. Fishman approaches him.

FISHMAN

You should know this doesn't necessarily indicate physical pain. It's a function of the dementia, a kind of disinhibition. It can be incessant, and may go on for weeks.

HIGH ANGLE

The Odone house in the middle of the night.

The heart-breaking wail continues. There's no way of knowing if it's a cry of rage or profound despair.

HIGHER ANGLE

The street.

The screaming continues...

It's the only sound in the night.

DISSOLVE

ROOSEVELT INSTITUTE CONFERENCE ROOM

SUPERIMPOSE

NOVEMBER 10, 1984

TRACKING

to reveal faces from Italy, Japan, Scandinavia... forty participants in all, listening intently.

DR SINGH

...When we can clone the ALD gene we'll be able to identify the deficient enzyme, mass-produce it, and implant it in ALD sufferers...

REVEAL

at the head of the long table, PROFESSOR MOBLEY...

and at his side, exhausted by their sleepless nights, the ODONES.

DR SINGH

...We know it lies in the Xq 28 region, in the distal end of the long arm of the X chromosome. I think we're very close to it.

Mobley glances at the suddenly hopeful Odone.

MOBLEY

Dr Singh, perhaps you should qualify "very close"...

DR SINGH is now aware of the Odonos.

DR SINGH

Yes, pardon me. It's not like a journey in a car. The last few yards can take longer than the first hundred miles. Science, alas, has its own time.

AUGUSTO

Could you make even a rough estimate?

DR SINGH

If all goes well...what would you say, Dr Baumann?

PROF. BAUMANN

If all goes well...seven to ten years?

Dr Singh nods agreement.

The Odonos are deflated. Augusto looks to his notepad with a drawing of the kitchen sink. He strikes out the "plughole" option.

DISSOLVE

LATER

The room is more relaxed. On the table, coffee and pastries.

MOBLEY is at a whiteboard covered with notes and diagrams.

MOBLEY

...that's merely my own theory. Whatever the case, the pathogenesis of ALD is still unclear.

He glances at the Odonos.

MOBLEY

However, I believe we may be able to arrest the disease, if we can reduce the very long chain saturated fats to normal levels. Hmm?

A general murmur of agreement.

DR STRIBLEY

So, Gus, your diet study? Is it finished yet?

MOBLEY

Yes, as we speak.

DR STRIBLEY

And?

MOBLEY

My friend Stribley is asking for a sneak preview. Now, for six months we've had ALD boys on a diet which excluded saturated C:24 and 26. And...the results are paradoxical. The fats restricted in the diet increase in the blood.

The Odones exchange a glance.

MOBLEY

So, we shine a little light on an obscure biochemical pathway. We conclude that compensatory biosynthesis also applies at the very long end of the fatty acid chains.

DR STRIBLEY

That's excellent news.

There is excitement around the table.

DR WATKINS

Now, Gus, if you could combine the diet with an effective way to inhibit biosynthesis...?

MOBLEY

Yes, we'd have a therapy.

DR HASHIMOTO

If you wish to inhibit bio-synthesis, have you considered fatty acid manipulation?

The Odones' excitement grows.

DR HASHIMOTO

There is some literature. I recall a..rat study, Russian, or Polish...

MICHAELA
Braillofsky, Nowotny and others?

Attention turns to Michaela.

MICHAELA
...Polish Journal of Biological Sciences,
1979, Number 2.

Forty world experts look at her in surprise.

MICHAELA
I read it at the dentist's.

They laugh.

MICHAELA
I have a copy here. They loaded the diet
with one fat and reduced biosynthesis of
another.

DR BRENOT
In Canada they've done the same in
miniature swine.

PROF. LANDAU
And also in Irish wolfhounds.

DR RIZZO
I've seen it in human cells. In ALD cells, as
a matter of fact.

He has everybody's attention.

DR RIZZO
From ALD patients I took fibroblasts...
(to the Odone's)
...skin cells, okay? Each of which carries
the genetic defect. Right? I incubated
them with oleic acid, and reduced the
levels of saturated C:24 and 26 by 50 per
cent.

AUGUSTO
You said...oleic acid?

DR RIZZO
It's the principal component of olive oil.

MICHAELA

But surely this is the basis of a therapy!

DR RIZZO

Whoa! Slow down. This is something I observed in the test-tube, right? Don't assume it will work in the human being.

AUGUSTO

Why not feed the patients olive oil, and see?

MOBLEY

Olive oil contains saturated C:26.

AUGUSTO

Then...use whatever Dr Rizzo fed his fibroblasts.

DR RIZZO

Pure oleic acid would kill a human being. It would need to be in triglyceride form, which is edible, right? And that doesn't exist.

MICHAELA

Can't we take ordinary olive oil and extract the saturated C:26?

DR RIZZO

You could. But it's complex, and very expensive.

MICHAELA

Have you approached any chemical companies?

DR RIZZO

No-one will tool up for it. It's experimental and there's no market.

The Odones look prepared to meet the challenge.

RECEPTION ROOM, LATER

Lunch-break is a vigorous forum. AUGUSTO and the DOCTORS, engrossed in animated debate, are being fed finger-food by WORLD BANK WIVES and WENDY GIMBLE.

CORRIDOR

MICHAELA is on the phone, shouting above the din of the nearby reception.

MICHAELA

...Yes, oleic acid. In edible form. Triglyceride, yes... Then do you know anyone else who does?... Thank you.

She jots down a name and number and dials again.

JAKE GIMBLE, playing in the corridor, bounds up and down a flight of stairs. She smiles.

MICHAELA

Research and Development department, please... Hello? I'm seeking a triglyceride form of oleic acid... No, I'm not a doctor... No, not with any company, I'm the mother of a sick child... Oleic acid, yes... Yes I'll wait.

ODONE DINING-ROOM, DAY

The dining-room is now LORENZO'S bedroom. His bed has been brought downstairs. He lies on it.

AUGUSTO offers him food.

AUGUSTO

...Lorenzaccio, Papa makes you risotto Milanese, seasoned with basilico, the royal herb for our Prince... Baddabib, baddabab, baddaboom.

Lorenzo can scarcely open his mouth to eat.

Beyond them, MICHAELA is on the phone.

MICHAELA

...And it's our only hope now for Lorenzo.

OPERATOR'S VOICE

My Lord, what a story. You'll hear from Mr Kellerman as soon as he gets back from lunch.

MICHAELA

That's 301...

OPERATOR'S VOICE

Don't worry. I have the number.

Michaela hangs up.

Posted beside her are pages from a business directory. Next to Capital City Products, Columbus, Ohio, Michaela ticks "Call Again".

She dials the next number.

RECORDED VOICE

You have reached Duluth Chemicals and all our lines are currently busy...

FADE TO BLACK

THINK-TANK, ANOTHER DAY

MICHAELA is working the phone again.

MICHAELA

...What a pass has this country come to, when the chief executive of a wealthy company can't direct a tiny fraction of the energies of his R&D team to help a stricken child!

She hangs up. Beyond her, the dining-room has become a sick-room.

CLOSER

A senior nurse, RUTH, feeds LORENZO...

...through a naso-gastric tube.

She instructs DEIRDRE and AUGUSTO.

NURSE RUTH

...So, we draw back on the tube first,...See? Stomach juices. That way we know it's in place before feeding.

For Augusto the moment is unbearable.

CLOSE

on Michaela's long list. All but three companies are now scored out.

OPERATOR'S VOICE

...He didn't call you back? Mr Kelleman didn't call you back! I had it all down in shorthand. I told him everything, and he didn't call you back!

CLOSE

on MICHAELA.

OPERATOR'S VOICE

...Don't you fret, Mrs Odone, you'll hear from him within the hour. Be sure of it. One hour!

LATER

The harsh sound of suction, as...

NURSE RUTH instructs MICHAELA, DEIRDRE and AUGUSTO in the use of a suctioning machine.

NURSE RUTH

...And as the swallowing reflex gets weaker, he's less and less able to handle his own saliva. We'll all have to be pretty vigilant. If we let it get down into his respiratory tract...

The phone rings. MICHAELA goes to answer.

AN OFFICE, COLUMBUS, OHIO, DAY

Through a glass partition, we see light industrial machinery at work.

The OPERATOR is gorgeous and determined.

OPERATOR

Capital City Products again. I'll connect you to our Mr Kelleman.

She hands the phone to a chastened executive.

KELLERMAN

I believe you're looking for some oleic acid.

MICHAELA'S VOICE

Yes. In triglyceride form.

KELLERMAN

Well...you're a very lucky lady. We've been testing a glycerol trioleate as an industrial lubricant.

MICHAELA'S VOICE

Oh. Is it fit for human consumption?

KELLERMAN

I don't see why not. It's a purified olive oil.

MICHAELA'S VOICE

Without saturates? Pure, unsaturated C18, in triglycende form?

KELLERMAN

Yes, ma'am. Happens we have one bottle. One litre sitting idle on the shelf.

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTE, NIGHT

Dressed in a tuxedo, PROFESSOR MOBLEY holds a bottle of oil up to the light. It's labelled:

"Oleic Oil"

MOBLEY

It's beautiful...

REVEAL

that he's in a grand vestibule with AUGUSTO who has called him out of a black-tie dinner.

MOBLEY

...So it can't be harmful, hmm?

AUGUSTO

Gus, you're talking to an Italian. It's only olive oil

MOBLEY

And that's harmless? So is sugar. But to a diabetic, sugar can be lethal. You see, we know so little about Lorenzo's ability to metabolise fats.

AUGUSTO

It's been seven months since Lorenzo was diagnosed. He is silent now, and immobile.

MOBLEY

You're suffering very deeply, Augusto, and of course that moves me. But here's my dilemma. I'm a medical scientist. The more I'm affected by human suffering, the more dispassionate I have to be. Hmm? So how to maintain objectivity? We design formal protocols with proper controls, and have them sanctioned by Human Studies review committees. Augusto, all of this takes time.

AUGUSTO

I'm not a scientist. I'm a father. And nobody can tell me what dressing I put on my kid's salad.

The two men survey one another in silence. Then Mobley smiles wryly.

MOBLEY

I'm told your father led the Resistance in Rome?

AUGUSTO

Yes. The Nazis did their best to execute him. But he had other things to do.

He takes out a notebook.

AUGUSTO

In conjunction with your diet, we think forty grams a day?

MOBLEY

That should be the limit. Any more might damage your son's liver...

ODONE HOUSE, DAY

MICHAELA soothes LORENZO as NURSE RUTH takes his blood.

MICHAELA

...We're going to send this blood away to establish a baseline, my darling, because today we begin the fight against the booboo...

Next to Lorenzo's bed is a small table decorated for Thanksgiving.

AUGUSTO

Lorenzino, this year we celebrate
Thanksgiving a little early...

He puts down a handsome fish on a garnished platter. DEIRDRE brings vegetables.

AUGUSTO

...with a fine barracuda like we used to eat
in the Comoros...

He takes up a large feeding-syringe.

AUGUSTO

...and, my scrofoletto, Papa has cooked it
with aromatic dill...

Into the loaded syringe he measures the golden oil.

AUGUSTO

...and adds the special olive oil which
Mama found.

He begins feeding Lorenzo through the naso-gastric tube,
accompanied by the steady gurgle of the suction machine.

FADE TO BLACK

LORENZO'S ROOM, DAY

MICHAELA decorates a Christmas tree as DEIRDRE assists NURSE
RUTH in taking LORENZO'S blood.

NURSE RUTH

...All done.

DEIRDRE

You did good, sweetheart. Real good.

MICHAELA

Your Aunt Deirdre means you did well. In
this house we cherish our adverbs. I'll
expect you to use them correctly, young
man, when you get your voice back.

Deirdre catches the scepticism in Nurse Ruth's eyes.

FADE TO BLACK

THE ODONE HOUSE, CLOSET UNDER THE STAIRS

AUGUSTO stows a box of Christmas decorations on a high shelf.

He glances down at the paraphernalia of an active family life: skis, old toys, tennis racquets. His eye falls on Lorenzo's bike, then...his sword.

The phone rings.

ANGLE

MICHAELA, who has answered.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

...There's been a small drop in the saturated C:24 and 26. About fifteen per cent.

MICHAELA

Fifteen percent.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Professor Mobley said not to get carried away. It could simply be spontaneous variation.

MICHAELA

Am I allowed a tiny squeak of joy?

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

We'll know more next month.

FADE TO BLACK

ODONE HOUSE, NIGHT

The constant sound of suction.

ANGLE

On a graph which charts the November baseline and December 15% drop in Lorenzo's plasma fats.

MICHAELA and AUGUSTO are deep in study.

They hear gasping and coughing.

They run to find...

...Nurse Ruth desperately trying to calm Lorenzo in the throes of some kind of seizure.

LATER

CLOSE

on LORENZO'S trembling hand as the convulsions subside.

ANGLE

DR FISHMAN watching MICHAELA soothing LORENZO.

AUGUSTO

Surely we can't have brought this on with the oil

FISHMAN

Augusto, this event was triggered by saliva in the windpipe. It's a pharyngeal paroxysm.

AUGUSTO

A kind of seizure? Like epilepsy?

FISHMAN

No. Even with suction, some saliva got caught in the trachea. What should be a simple cough sets off a chain of scrambled reflexes. And they amplify into what we've just seen.

AUGUSTO

And if this happens again, what can we do about it?

FISHMAN

Very little, I'm afraid. Help him ride it out. All of us are flying blind here. The best I can offer is sedation.

MICHAELA

If it's not epilepsy, then Lorenzo's aware of what's going on?

FISHMAN

Well...possibly.

MICHAELA

Then we could talk to him during an episode like this?

FISHMAN

Yes. Possibly.

FADE TO BLACK

THINK-TANK, DAY

CLOSE
AUGUSTO slams the phone down.

AUGUSTO
Fantastico!...

URGENT TRACKING
to the graph on the wall.

Augusto marks a cross at January 1985, and joins to it a sharply descending red line from December 84.

LORENZO'S ROOM, LATER

MICHAELA is beaming as she stands by LORENZO'S bed with a glass of wine.

PAN
to find DEIRDRE, WENDY GIMBLE and JAKE sharing the celebration with AUGUSTO.

WENDY
So what did the great doctor say?

AUGUSTO
Gus's still unimpressed.

WENDY
About a fifty per cent drop? The guy ought to be shouting it from the roof-tops.

AUGUSTO
He'll say nothing.

WENDY
That stinks. Here's something that makes the diet work. And the ALD parents don't get to hear about it.

MICHAELA
We should let them know. Then they can judge for themselves.

WENDY
How we going to get to them? The Foundation has the mailing-list.

MICHAELA

So we call the Muscatines.

WENDY

You're kidding.

MICHAELA

I can eat crow. In a good cause.

ODONE DINING-ROOM, NIGHT

A dinner-party for four. The ODO NES and MUSCATINES are at the end of a great Augusto meal.

MUSCATINE

Now that was worth coming twelve hundred miles for.

AUGUSTO

My friends, there will be dessert. But first, a little science.

He hands them a typed paper. They scan it warily.

MUSCATINE

"Dear ALD Parents..."

They look back at the Odone s.

LORETTA

You want us to send this out?

MICHAELA

We're happy to pay for copying and postage.

MUSCATINE

But you're advocating a therapy here.

MICHAELA

We're reporting a hopeful advance on the diet. It would be wrong for us to withhold this information.

LORETTA

Mrs Odone, we have an advisory board of eminent doctors, and we take our guidance from them. After all, they're the ones with the medical degrees.

AUGUSTO

But Gus Mobley knows about this! And he does nothing.

MUSCATINE

Because he's a responsible scientist.

AUGUSTO

And if you do nothing because you follow the doctors, how will there be progress?

MUSCATINE

Our parents suffer enough without being made the victims of false hopes. We can't give credence to every jerk who comes along with a pocket full of apricot seeds.

AUGUSTO

This is an extract of olive oil, an idea that the doctors put forward at our symposium. And it works in an ALD boy to a degree that is significant. Other parents have a right to know this. If they feel as we do, they can put pressure on the doctors. As parents we should be challenging them, pushing them. We shouldn't waste our time on grieving and saving our marriages, and all this and that. We should make a dialectic with the doctors.

MUSCATINE

So you're going to tell us how to run the Foundation. And you're even going to teach the doctors their business. Back where Loretta and me are from, we call that arrogance, Mr Odone.

AUGUSTO

Yes, it is. Arrogance. From the Latin word, arrogare, you know it? "To claim for oneself". I claim the right to fight for my kid's life. And no doctor, no researcher, no bloody foundation can stop me asking questions that might help me save him. That's the right of every parent. And you have no right to stop the sharing of information. Send the bloody letter!

LORETTA

Our job is to be there for the parents, comfort them, not get them all stirred up. If the doctors think you're on to something they'll tell us in their own good time.

Ellard hands back the letter.

AUGUSTO

And because they're powerful, you'll be silent. This acquiescence is disgusting!

They rise and gather their things.

MUSCATINE

You think you know so much. When our first boy got sick we thrashed about looking for anything that might help him. And you know the best thing that happened? He was taken quickly. But our second... he's lasted three years. And for two of them, he's been without his sight, his mind, everything that makes him human. He's a vegetable. And if you'd stop all this denial, you wouldn't do a thing to prolong your boy's suffering and indignity one minute longer.

LORETTA

(quietly)

Has it occurred to you that maybe he doesn't want to be around any more?

Four anguished human beings stare at one another in silence.

THINK-TANK, NIGHT

CLOSE

AUGUSTO puts the phone down.

TRACKING

He moves slowly to the graph. He marks the February reading at a level marginally lower than January's.

ANGLE

DEIRDRE and MICHAELA.

DEIRDRE

It has to be a mistake.

AUGUSTO

Gus says not.

Michaela is downcast.

MICHAELA

Should we risk raising the dose?

AUGUSTO

He's at his upper limit. Gus thinks that more would harm his liver.

From Lorenzo's room, the maddening sound of suction.

FADE TO BLACK

HIGH ANGLE, THE STREET, DUSK

From the Odone house we hear urgent cries.

LORENZO'S ROOM

LORENZO is in the throes of another paroxysm.

MICHAELA shouts instructions to NURSE RUTH. DEIRDRE helps as best she can.

MICHAELA

...Okay. Pull the sheets back. Take care of the tube.

She lifts Lorenzo.

MICHAELA

Lorenzo, darling, you're going to be brave as only you know how. We're going to count together, you and I. Listen to Mommy's voice and the booboo will let go of you. One, two, three, four...

DUSK

Exhausted, MICHAELA and DEIRDRE are beside the bed of LORENZO, who's at rest now.

NURSE RUTH is putting on her coat.

NURSE RUTH

Michaela...I've been a nurse for eighteen years. Normally nothing throws me. But this boy shouldn't be at home...

Michaela stares at her.

NURSE RUTH

He should be in a properly equipped hospital.

MICHAELA

Why don't you say what you mean?

NURSE RUTH

I'm not comfortable with this situation. I'm sorry, I'm...giving notice. I'll stay till you find someone else.

MICHAELA

I think you should finish today.

DEIRDRE

Hey, Michaela. Go easy.

MICHAELA

Your agency will have your cheque in the morning.

DEIRDRE

Look, we're all a little strung out here...

MICHAELA

She means placement, Deirdre. In a hospice. Lorenzo has enough to contend with. I won't have him exposed to doubt and despair.

Michaela returns to Lorenzo's bed. Deirdre sees Ruth to the door.

DEIRDRE

Look, Ruth, she's exhausted, we all are...

NURSE RUTH

Good night. I don't know... Someone had to say it.

She goes.

FADE TO BLACK

LORENZO'S ROOM, DAY, SPRING

LORENZO'S bed is once more against the window.
 DEIRDRE and AUGUSTO watch wearily as MICHAELA opens it. She looks thin and perilously tired.

Above the noise of the suction machine we hear the sounds of spring.

MICHAELA

...There. You can feel the sunlight on your face. You can smell life returning. There's a clear sky, and the cherry tree is just coming into bud. What does Aunt Deirdre see?

DEIRDRE

Well...way up on a branch there's one bud starting to blossom. A little crack of pink.

ANGLE

Lorenzo's unseeing eyes.

MICHAELA

And what day is it, Papa?

AUGUSTO

It's the spring equinox, Lorenzo.

MICHAELA

And what does that mean, Papa?

AUGUSTO

Once again the day is as long as the night.

The phone rings.

THINK-TANK

CLOSE

AUGUSTO puts the phone down.

TRACKING

He moves slowly to the graph. He marks the March reading at exactly the same level as February's.

EXT, ODOE HOUSE, DUSK

MICHAELA is seen through the window tending to LORENZO.

AUGUSTO sits smoking on the back porch steps. He looks pallid and worn. Almost old.

DEIRDRE approaches with coffee. She carries a photo album.

DEIRDRE

Something I want you to see.

She shows a photo of Michaela and Augusto in the Comoros. He is shocked to see how relaxed and vital they look.

DEIRDRE

June '83. Just twenty-one months ago.

Augusto turns the page, and draws in his breath, seeing...

...a vigorous Lorenzo doing a cartwheel.

Augusto puts the album aside.

CAMERA

encroaches throughout the following conversation...

DEIRDRE

It's time you guys went easy on yourselves.

AUGUSTO

If we knew why it only works halfway, then we might know what to do next.

DEIRDRE

Augusto! How many mornings have I found you asleep under a pile of research papers with the light still on? You have no other life beyond this.

AUGUSTO

Deirdre, he's my kid.

DEIRDRE

So are Cristina and Francesco. And it's a year since you've seen them. And Michaela? She's never away from that bedside. Never. She's the mother tiger. But how much longer can she keep on like this?

AUGUSTO

What else would you have her do?

DEIRDRE

Oh man! We both know, even if you get his levels down to normal, his brain can't fix itself. I mean, how much myelin does he have left? You ever ask yourself that question?

Augusto shrugs.

DEIRDRE

She doesn't. I'm afraid for her, Augusto. I'm afraid she's losing it. I mean, really losing it. You've seen how she is with him. She just can't let him go.

MICHAELA'S VOICE

Poor Deirdre. Always the easy option.

Augusto and Deirdre are started to see Michaela behind them. Her face is white with rage.

AUGUSTO

Michaela! Deirdre was speaking out of love.

DEIRDRE

I'm only telling you what I see. For both your sakes, there has to be a life beyond Lorenzo.

MICHAELA

Do you think because he has no voice he can't assert his right to life? He does it through us. If you can't see that, there's no place for you in this house.

AUGUSTO

Michaela! She's your sister, for God's sake.

DEIRDRE

And I'm really worried for you, Michaela.

MICHAELA

Augusto, help her pack her things. I'm going back to our son.

She heads back into the house.

AUGUSTO

Ma tu sei pazzal Assolutamente pazzal
(You're mad! Completely mad!)

MICHAELA

I speak for Lorenzo and you call me mad!

AUGUSTO

Only a crazy woman would keep pushing
people away. Your church, your family,
now the sister who loves you best...

MICHAELA

And you push no-one away. No-one
except your wife. Tell my sister how long
it is since you've touched me.

AUGUSTO

Che diavolo stai facendo? Sei tarata, si,
tarata qui..

(pointing to his forehead)

...nella testa!

(What the hell are you doing? Yes, you're
tainted, here...in the head.)

She screams back at him in Italian...

DEIRDRE is brought to tears by the rage she's released in both of
them.

DEIRDRE

This is the last thing I wanted. I'm sorry,
I'm really sorry...

Their words blur in her ears as she stumbles back into the house.

FADE TO BLACK

LORENZO'S ROOM, LATE AFTERNOON

LORENZO is enduring his wildest paroxysm yet.

MICHAELA shouts instructions to a very young and inexperienced
NURSE NANCY JO, as AUGUSTO helps.

MICHAELA

...Okay. Clear the bed. You have the tube?

NURSE NANCY JO nods.

MICHAELA

Don't nod! Say 'yes'. My attention is on Lorenzo. Okay, Lorenzo. Bring your eyes to the front. Bring them round, baby. And hear Mommy counting. Okay? One, two, three, four...

AUGUSTO

...cinque, sei, sette, otto...

But the convulsions intensify.

CLOSE

on the terrified NURSE NANCY JO, completely out of her depth.

FADE TO BLACK

A siren is heard.

A ROOM, CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL, WASHINGTON, NIGHT

The paroxysm is even worse. Its cruel sounds pervade the room.

CLOSE

LORENZO'S flailing arm.

PAN

to DR FISHMAN turning off an intravenous drip as he speaks to the ODOES.

FISHMAN

...I've sedated him as much as I dare. I don't know what else to do.

AUGUSTO

But how he can endure this... for so many hours.

FISHMAN

Augusto, I don't think he'll have to endure much more.

HOLD

Augusto looking down in anguish at Michaela exhorting their fragile, stricken son.

MICHAELA

Hold on to Mommy's voice, Lorenzo. Let it
keep away the fear, okay?...

DISSOLVE

LATER

Beyond the window we see Washington at pre-dawn.

LORENZO'S convulsions are even worse now. MICHAELA holds him
in her exhausted arms.

AUGUSTO

Let me hold him. You need a rest.

MICHAELA

No. If you could get me some coffee...

When she thinks he's gone, she turns to their son...

MICHAELA

Lorenzo? Lorenzo, listen to Mommy...

In the corridor, Augusto is arrested by the quiet urgency of her tone.

MICHAELA

...If this is too much for you, my darling,
you fly, fly as fast as you know how,
straight to Baby Jesus.

HOLD

Augusto listening, unable to move.

DISSOLVE

VERY HIGH ANGLE, THE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

It's a bright clear morning as the city goes to work.

DISSOLVE

THE ROOM

The sound of the suction machine.

CLOSE

LORENZO'S hand, still now.

PAN
to his chest as he breathes evenly.

ANGLE
on DR FISHMAN drinking coffee with the ODONES. He looks at the sleeping Lorenzo.

FISHMAN
I've rarely seen anything quite like
this...this tenacity.

CLOSE
Augusto, staring at his son.

FISHMAN
They have a bed available upstairs...

The Odone look at Fishman.

AUGUSTO
In the hospice?

FISHMAN
It would be a lot easier... for everybody.

AUGUSTO
But it would not do honour to Lorenzo.

EXT, ODONE HOUSE, TWILIGHT

CRANE
down through the cherry tree, now heavy with pink blossom...

...to find MICHAELA and NANCY JO inside, busily tending LORENZO.

TRACK
to the kitchen window. AUGUSTO prepares dinner.

LORENZO'S ROOM

The suction machine is heard.

AUGUSTO is in the doorway.

AUGUSTO
Michaelina. Come.

He leads his gaunt, mystified wife out of the room.

KITCHEN

A hearty, succulent dinner is prepared.

MICHAELA looks quizzically at AUGUSTO. He sits her down.

AUGUSTO

Tonight we eat, moglie mia. Every last mouthful.

MICHAELA

I'm not hungry.

She rises.

AUGUSTO

You eat. From tomorrow morning, the Odones need all their energies.

He sits her down again.

AUGUSTO

Listen to me. We set out to normalise Lorenzo's blood levels. And with the oleic oil, we got it half right. Why? Why only half? Tomorrow, we go back to the library.

MICHAELA

Whatever energy, whatever time we have left, we should spend with Lorenzo.

AUGUSTO

Cocoletta, if the boy won't quit, neither do we. Not halfway along the road. We review all the literature on fatty acid metabolism. Every word published in the last decade. A big job. So, eat.

Michaela looks at him...

AUGUSTO

Mangial

She picks up a fork...and begins to eat.

FADE TO BLACK

LORENZO'S ROOM, DAY**ANGLE**

on LORENZO'S arm, contorted in seizure.

NURSE NANCY JO stands by as MICHAELA holds and calms him...

MICHAELA

...Seventy-four, seventy-five...That's it, my darling, some deep reassuring breaths, and...

...The paroxysm is subsiding...

MICHAELA

...Seventy-six,seventy-seven,seventy-eight

...

...and passes. The arm relaxes.

NANCY JO

All right! Nice going, Mrs Odone.

Michaela ignores the compliment, turning to Lorenzo.

MICHAELA

You did so well, baby. Sometimes I wonder if people realise how incredible you are.

She settles back to the mountain of research by his bed, as Nancy Jo resumes suctioning.

DISSOLVE**LORENZO'S ROOM, MORNING****ANGLE**

on the stairs.

MICHAELA is heard calling...

MICHAELA'S VOICE

Augustol Quick!

AUGUSTO runs downstairs with shaving-cream on his face...

We follow him to LORENZO'S bedside, where Michaela sits among a great pile of research.

MICHAELA

We should be hung by the eye-lashes. We've only been looking at half the picture. We've been obsessed by what does Lorenzo harm. But utterly ignored what does him good. Oleic acid lowers the saturates, sure. But it also increases the unsaturates! Look...

She splays out the research.

MICHAELA

...Hashimoto's canine studies. An inverse reaction. Saturates down, unsaturates up. Likewise Rizzo's rats, these miniature swine... And I bet it's true for Lorenzo. If we want the whole picture, we need to go after the good guys.

ROOSEVELT INSTITUTE LABORATORY, DAY

CLOSE

a chromatography machine feeds out its reading on a long roll of graph paper.

MOBLEY'S SECRETARY and a TECHNICIAN are with AUGUSTO, who is excited by what he sees. He talks into the phone reading out figures.

AUGUSTO

...And so on. It's consistent. All the way. As his saturates decrease his unsaturates are increasing! So you are right, Cocolletta. The two chains are somehow connected. Like dancers... One goes forward, one goes back.

INT, NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF HEALTH LIBRARY

TRACKING

On the back of a woman carrying a pile of medical journals.

She puts them down on AUGUSTO'S already laden work-table.

CLOSE

on Augusto making chains of paper-clips as he reads. He looks up at the woman and smiles.

AUGUSTO

Thank you.

His helper is DEIRDRE. She surveys the chain.

DEIRDRE

Is this a new hobby? Or a nervous tic?

AUGUSTO

Each paper-clip is two carbon atoms. C:2. C:4. C:6. Okay? I make a chain, very long chain saturated fats...the bad guys.

She points to another pile, paper-clips of a different kind..

DEIRDRE

And what are these, the good guys?

AUGUSTO

Yes. The unsaturates. And somehow the good guys and the bad guys influence each others behaviour. Okay, now I am the enzyme that elongates the bad guys. You be the other enzyme. Make a chain of good guys.

DEIRDRE

Augusto, I had enough trouble with the kitchen sink!

She shows him some medical papers.

DEIRDRE

These the ones you want copied?

AUGUSTO

And make extra.

DEIRDRE

For Michaela?

He nods.

DEIRDRE

Sure. How is she?

AUGUSTO

She's okay.

Deirdre nods and walks away.

LORENZO'S ROOM, NIGHT

CLOSE

on LORENZO'S wasted hand, as MICHAELA counts on his fingers.

MICHAELA

One, two, three, four, five...

She picks up his other hand and eases his fingers from his sword.

MICHAELA

...six, seven...candles!

ANGLE

AUGUSTO bearing a small birthday cake.

AUGUSTO

Mama will blow them out for you.

Mama does.

DARKNESS

LIBRARY, NIGHT

Along a table are paper-trays, boldly marked:

Saturated

C:18,

C:20,

C:22,

C:24,

C:26.

Along a nearby table, trays marked:

Unsaturated

C:18,

C:20,

C:22,

C:24,

C:26.

At the Saturated table, MICHAELA leads an assembly line, elongating chains of outsize black paper-clips.

She calls to the other table.

MICHAELA

I'm keeping up with you.

At the unsaturated table, AUGUSTO leads a team doing the same thing with outsize white paper-clips.

BIG BETTY heaps chains of paper-clips on the unsaturated table.

BIG BETTY

Here's more oleic acid, guys. Now get to it!

AUGUSTO and his team work harder and faster elongating the oleic acid chains.

MICHAELA'S team is slowing down.

AUGUSTO

What's wrong, Michaela?

MICHAELA

I can't keep up! You good guys have all that oleic acid and you're elongating at twice the rate. And my team's slowed right down. For no reason at all. Utterly mysterious.

AUGUSTO

What's the mystery, moglie mia?

MICHAELA

Oleic acid comes along and us bad guys don't feel like working!

Augusto keeps "elongating" furiously.

AUGUSTO

But why, Michaelina, why?

MICHAELA

That's the conundrum. I should be elongating but I feel like dancing. Dance with me, Augusto. Dance with your cocoletta.

They dance together but...he manages to keep elongating unsaturates.

Then...they hear laughter...

Augusto turns to see...

...LORENZO, laughing at his parents' giddy dance.

...LORENZO, carrying his birthday cake, seven candles ablaze.

...LORENZO, whole and well and full of glee.

HIGH ANGLE CRANING
over the whole scene.

Michaela's team are all Michaelas. Augusto's team are all Augustos.

They're all dancing together. It's close, almost erotic.

And then...

...they become one.

LORENZO

Papa! You and Mama! You're the same
enzyme!!

LORENZO'S ROOM

AUGUSTO is dozing by his son's bed. He's covered in research papers.

He wakes from his dream.

AUGUSTO

Michaela!

He runs from the room.

SUPERIMPOSE

MAY 29, 1985

THE ODONES' BEDROOM

MICHAELA stirs as AUGUSTO leans over her.

AUGUSTO

Michaela! They're the same enzyme!

MICHAELA

Augusto?!

AUGUSTO

AUGUSTO

The elongase for the saturated and the unsaturated chains... they're the same enzyme!

MOBLEY'S OFFICE, DAY

The ODONES are with PROFESSOR MOBLEY.

AUGUSTO

...So if we keep it busy elongating unsaturates-

MOBLEY

It's distracted from elongating the saturates.

AUGUSTO

Then we have a way to trick nature.

MOBLEY

It's a principle known as competitive inhibition, hmm?

AUGUSTO

You accept the hypothesis?

MOBLEY

Of course. In Dr Rizzo's fibroblasts, in his rats, and in Lorenzo... It's a single enzyme complex! You've clarified the biochemical pathway.

MICHAELA

We're very encouraged.

AUGUSTO

So this would explain why the oleic acid is only partly successful?

MOBLEY

Yes. It's C:18, in the middle of the chain. It can't completely divert the enzyme.

AUGUSTO

So we add a second barrier! Block the bad guys-

MICHAELA

The saturates.

AUGUSTO

Block the saturates further up the chain! If we divert the enzyme between C:22 and C:24 as well, we should be able to stop the bloody things completely.

MOBLEY

Indeed. But how!

MICHAELA

By adding unsaturated C:22.

MOBLEY

Erucic acid?

MICHAELA

Yes.

MOBLEY

Please, Mrs Odone, I must stop you there.

He presses his intercom.

MOBLEY

Mary Ellen...under animal studies you'll find a file on erucic acid... E.R.U.C.I.C.

He looks at them gravely.

AUGUSTO

You don't believe it will work?

MOBLEY

My dear friends, you've postulated a theory which could be of enormous benefit. But erucic acid causes massive cardiac problems in rats. If it's not safe for rats, how could we contemplate a protocol for the treatment of humans!

MOBLEY'S SECRETARY brings in a file.

MOBLEY

Read any of these studies and you'll see...

He splays them on the desk.

MOBLEY

...Cardiac lipidosis... myocardial lesions...
cholesterol deposits in the adrenal
gland...damage to the reproductive
system...

AUGUSTO

But, Gus, this is incredible. Erucic acid is
the chief component in rapeseed oil.

MICHAELA

China and India must have far lower rates
of heart disease than this overfed country.
And rapeseed oil is their staple fat. How
could it be unsafe!

Mobley puts some more papers on the table.

MOBLEY

Look at these reports. Mass poisoning in
Spain... 1981... 12,000 fell ill...200
deaths...all ascribed to rapeseed oil.

The Odones are winded.

MOBLEY

I'm sorry. The evidence is overwhelming.
Our Human Studies review committee
would dismiss erucic acid out of hand.

The Odones look at one another in consternation.

MICHAELA

But don't you see? The human studies
have already been done, by history! In
China, in India, they've been eating the
stuff for thousands of years...

MOBLEY

How could I base a protocol on an
assertion like that? It could never outweigh
the facts in this file.

AUGUSTO

So, we simply have another conundrum.
This means we should seek more
information, not dismiss erucic acid out of
hand.

MOBLEY

Imagine that I ignored this evidence and implemented an erucic acid therapy, and imagine something went wrong? Hmm? It doesn't matter that I'd be pilloried as a kind of snake-oil salesman. But the work of one of the greatest medical institutions in the world would be discredited forever.

MICHAELA

The risk-reward ratio is unattractive?

MOBLEY

Pardon?

MICHAELA

The life of a child is not enough reward for you to risk the reputation of this institution and the esteem of your peers.

MOBLEY

Mrs Odone, your responsibility is only to your child. Mine is to all the boys who suffer from ALD, now and in the future. Scientists have a duty to the public trust. Antibiotics, food, air safety, we have protocols for everything. You and millions of others have been kept safe and healthy all your lives by the caution you're now condemning. I'm anguished by your child's suffering, I applaud your efforts on his behalf. But I will have nothing to do with this oil.

WORLD BANK, DAY

CLOSE

on a file of clippings in English and Spanish:

MYSTERY OIL POISONING: 200 DEATHS TO DATE

SPANISH OIL DEATHS: GOVT. TO ACT

U.S. BANS RAPESEED OIL SALES

ANGLE

on AUGUSTO studying the grim news.

He closes the file decisively.

TRACKING

Augusto stnding down the comdors of the Bank...

...into an office where the agricultural economists operate.

Three faces, INDIAN, CHINESE, AFRICAN, look up.

AUGUSTO

My friends, I need a name. The
unimpeachable authority on rapeseed oil.
The experts' expert.

THE CANADIAN PRAIRIES, DAY

A stunning vista of wheat-fields rippled by the wind.

KRAMER'S VOICE

...Rapeseed oil has been given a bum rap,
sir.

KRAMER walks into frame, and with him....

PAN

to reveal his laboratory. This man is a zealot, shouting into the phone.

KRAMER

And do me a favour, please. Spare me the
Spanish scandal.

AUGUSTO'S VOICE

Two hundred deaths. That seems fairly
damning.

KRAMER

What should be damned is scientific
laziness. When they bothered to
investigate properly, they found the oil was
contaminated with industrial aniline. That's
what did the killing. But who read past the
headlines?

PAN

with KRAMER past pens of miniature pigs and cages of laboratory rats.

KRAMER

Millions of people in Poland, in China, in India eat the damn stuff everyday, have done for hundreds of years.

AUGUSTO'S VOICE

But what about the little rats and their cardiac lipidosis?

KRAMER

More so-called experts going off half-cocked. The rat heart is simply not a model for the human heart. Not when it comes to erucic acid. No other animal tested, pigs, dogs or monkeys, showed any cardiac lesions.

AUGUSTO'S VOICE

These papers which vindicate the oil, could you send them to me?

KRAMER

I'll even send you the oil.

CAPITAL CITY PRODUCTS, COLUMBUS, OHIO, DAY

CLOSE

on a bottle labelled "High Erucic Acid Rapeseed Oil", sitting on a desk.

REVEAL

AUGUSTO with KELLERMAN and the OPERATOR.

KELLERMAN

...I don't like your chances.

AUGUSTO

They said that about the oleic oil. And that was sitting on your shelf.

KELLERMAN

This is a whole 'nother ball-game. You want to fraction the saturated C:24 and 26 out of this rapeseed oil? That would take my best chemists at least a year. And then you'd never get it past the F.D.A. Erucic acid for human consumption? Whoa! No-one in the country would touch it.

AUGUSTO

And outside this country?

OPERATOR

Mr Kellerman, we're agents for a lot of foreign companies. There must be one that could help.

AUGUSTO

Would you give me your list?

OPERATOR

You and your wife have enough to do. I'm sure Mr Kellerman would call round for you.

She looks pointedly at Kellerman. He sighs deeply.

KELLERMAN

We'd have to be covered legally.

AUGUSTO

Of course, my friends. And it might help if you circulate this.

He tables a paper. The Operator picks it up.

OPERATOR

"The Interplay of Unsaturated and Saturated Fats: Therapeutic Application in ALD..."

(whistles in admiration)

"...Augusto and Michaela Odone."

AUGUSTO

We believe that if we're asking for help, our rationale needs to be clear.

A LABORATORY, DAY

A wild seascape in north-east England.

PULL BACK

from the window to reveal the roly-poly figure of a bluff elderly Yorkshireman. He holds the "Interplay" paper as he speaks on the phone.

MICHAELA'S VOICE

...But when so many others have turned us down...I'm utterly delighted!

DON SUDDABY

Well, it's a beautiful piece of biochemistry.

MICHAELA'S VOICE

Everyone in this country says it's too difficult.

DON SUDDABY

I've been doing difficult fractionations for forty years, Mrs Odone. The oils I produce end up as industrial lubricants or face-creams. I'd be happy to see out my time at Croda working on this oil.

MICHAELA'S VOICE

Do you really think you can do it in six months?

DON SUDDABY

I can but try.

MICHAELA'S VOICE

You'll call us, won't you, if you have any questions?

DON SUDDABY

Oh, I will. Goodbye, Mrs Odone.

MICHAELA'S VOICE

Goodbye, Mr Suddaby. Thank you again.

The old man grasps his walking frame and moves painfully, laboriously...

...to his workbench.

FADE TO BLACK

INT, ODOE HOUSE, DAY

The ever-present sound of the suction-machine.

A tiny Christmas tree sits by the front door.

The doorbell rings.

MICHAELA goes to answer it while in the background NANCY JO is feeding LORENZO.

MICHAELA
Lorenzo, who could this be?...

The door opens to reveal WENDY GIMBLE with winter vegetables and jars of preserves.

MICHAELA
...It's your friend Wendy, with all kinds of good things from the farm.

WENDY
(subdued)
Hi, Michaela. Hi, Lorenzo.

Michaela looks out to see JAKE in Wendy's pick-up.

MICHAELA
Jake's not in school today?

WENDY
He's...not feeling so good.

To an ALD mother this is no casual remark. Michaela calls into the room.

MICHAELA
I'm going to walk with Mrs Gimble for a minute, okay?

NANCY JO
I've given him his two-thirty oxcarbazepine and fifty mils. of water. What would you like me to do now?

MICHAELA
I'm sure Lorenzo would enjoy a story.

OUTSIDE

She joins Wendy. They walk towards the pick-up.

WENDY
He's had a couple tantrums...

Michaela looks at her with sympathy.

WENDY

...It's okay. Mobley's included him in the oleic acid trial. We'll see.

They reach the pick-up. Jake sits staring downward.

MICHAELA

Hello, Jake.

He doesn't look up.

WENDY

Say hi, son.

JAKE

Hi, Mrs O-odone.

Wendy turns away, trying to hold it together.

WENDY

He saw the way Jaybird went. He knows what's in store for him.

Michaela puts an arm round her. Wendy gives way to her grief.

LORENZO'S ROOM

Through the window, we see MICHAELA in the street farewelling WENDY and JAKE.

PAN

to NANCY JO reading to LORENZO as if to a brick wall..bored, toneless.

NANCY JO

..."But Hansel was a clever lad who knew how to solve difficult problems. "See, Gretel...

(stifling a yawn)

...yonder lies the path. Before nightfall we'll find our way home through the forest..."

PAN CONTINUES

to settle on MICHAELA in the doorway, carrying a carton of produce. She frowns.

MICHAELA

Is it beneath you to read that with commitment? Or is it beyond you?

Nancy Jo is affronted.

MICHAELA

This story is precious to Lorenzo. When he was five he could read it better than you do now.

NANCY JO

I'm paid to nurse him, not read stories.

MICHAELA

And you've decided his mind doesn't need as much attention as his body?

NANCY JO

(muttering)

What mind?

MICHAELA

I beg your pardon?

NANCY JO

Nothing.

MICHAELA

Get out.

NANCY JO

Look, Mrs Odone, I've read up on this disease. I know what it's done to his brain.

MICHAELA

Out!

Michaela hustles her to the door.

MICHAELA

Lorenzo doesn't need to hear this from a subliterate with a double-digit I.Q.

NANCY JO

When are you going to face it, lady? The lights are out and there's nobody home.

By now Michaela has handed Nancy Jo her bag and coat and thrust her out the door.

NANCY JO'S VOICE

(enraged)

Merry Christmas! Happy holidays!! And a joyous Yuletide!!!

Michaela turns, walks back to Lorenzo's bed, picks up the book...

...and begins to read calmly and with verve.

MICHAELA

But Hansel was like you, my darling, he was..."a clever lad, who knew how to solve difficult problems..."

LATER

AUGUSTO, still in his overcoat, puts down his briefcase.

AUGUSTO

...Are you going to keep doing this?

MICHAELA

She brought it on herself. She consigned herself to the outer darkness.

AUGUSTO

Michaela, you'd trained her well. She was a good nurse.

MICHAELA

I want someone who can give him more than medications and suction. Someone who'll minister to the mind and the spirit..

She draws him away from the bed. They speak in whispers.

MICHAELA

...And I think I've found him.

AUGUSTO

Him?

MICHAELA

Lorenzo's surrounded by women all day. I don't want our son to grow up hag-ridden. I've written to Omouri. I've asked him to come to us for a while.

AUGUSTO

Omouri? You want to take a man out of his fishing village in Africa and bring him to Chevy Chase to nurse Lorenzo?

MICHAELA

Not to nurse him, to be his friend. To bring the Comoros into this room. For Lorenzo, America means idiot nurses, seizures and unspeakable pain. Why not nourish the part of him that ran along the beach and swam with the dolphins?

AUGUSTO

But you can't uproot a man from ...my gosh, his family, his way of life!

MICHAELA

For a few months! For the sake of a child he loved. And I'll teach him English. We could do a lot for him here.

AUGUSTO

If you're concerned about Omouri, think of the moment when he walks into this room.

MICHAELA

And sees what? What the Muscatines see?

AUGUSTO

You know that's not what he is for me.

MICHAELA

What then? A biochemical conundrum?

AUGUSTO

Michaelina, that's not fair.

MICHAELA

What do you believe? Tell me the truth.

They look at each other in silence.

AUGUSTO

He's my boy and I want him restored to us. But if a person cannot move, cannot see, cannot speak, how can we know what's in the soul?

FADE TO BLACK

SUDDABY'S LABORATORY, HULL, ENGLAND,

It is late into the night. Mozart plays on a small cassette recorder.

The fractionation continues. The bulky figure of DON SUDDABY sits watching the painstaking process...

...as two men in suits watch him through a glass partition.

R&D DIRECTOR

...But he should be at home with his feet up. He was supposed to retire ten weeks ago!

MANAGER

How do I tell a man to give up?

DIRECTOR

Tell him his health won't take it. The hours he's working are daft. And it's kinder to put a full stop to it now.

MANAGER

Tell him yourself. I can't.

Suddaby, oblivious of this conversation, works on.

DIRECTOR

Best leave him, then.

MANAGER

I think so.

They nod, and walk away.

DULLES INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, NIGHT

It's a cool night in early spring.

In the lobby AUGUSTO embraces an incongruous figure...

OMOURI.

INT, ODONE HOUSE, NIGHT

AUGUSTO lets himself in...

...followed by OMOURI, who sees...

...MICHAELA, seated like the Pieta, with LORENZO in her arms.

She smiles in welcome.

MICHAELA

Omouri.

OMOURI

Madame.

He stares a long time at Lorenzo.

Then he takes the wasted hand, tiny and pale, in his powerful African fingers...

...and begins to sing.

VERY HIGH ANGLE, THE ODONE HOUSE, NIGHT

The serene voice of the Comorian wafts over the Washington suburb...

...singing a lullaby from the Islands of the Moon.

CRODA OFFICE, HULL, DAY

The MANAGER sits at his desk.

DON SUDDABY appears at the door.

DON SUDDABY

There's a litre of glycerol trierucate on my bench. Could you see that it's sent to young Mr Odone?

The Manager nods and smiles broadly.

DON SUDDABY

I'll be off home now.

ODONE HOUSE, NIGHT

CLOSE

on two bottles of oil. The first, a lighter colour, is poured into a measuring jar.

AUGUSTO'S VOICE

...Four parts of our old friend oleic...

CLOSE

AUGUSTO adding a smaller quantity of the second, darker and heavier oil.

AUGUSTO

...and one part erucic...

REVEAL

MICHAELA beside him as he blends the oils...

AUGUSTO

...and the journey begins... like all good journeys, with food.

He pours the blended oil into a plate of risotto.

MICHAELA

Where's that wretched nurse? I want my baseline taken. I'm starving.

Augusto goes on preparing the meal.

MICHAELA

I think a month is too long. If my blood levels are taken every week, and I have an ECG every few days, we might know enough to start Lorenzo even sooner.

Augusto tastes the food. The doorbell rings.

MICHAELA

At last!

She strides to the door and opens it...

...to find DEIRDRE.

The sisters stare at each other in silence.

DEIRDRE
Augusto didn't tell you?

Michaela is puzzled.

DEIRDRE
I'm here to be Lorenzo's rat.

MICHAELA
Oh. That's a very kind offer... but no.

DEIRDRE
I'm a carrier same as you. And my blood
levels are just as high as yours...

She rolls up her sleeve to show a circular band-aid on her inner arm.

DEIRDRE
...I've had my baseline taken. And I'm
starving.

She walks past the dumbfounded Michaela into LORENZO'S room...

...where she offers her hand to OMOURI.

DEIRDRE
I've been wanting to meet Lorenzo's main
man.

Omouri shakes her hand. He addresses her in his newly acquired
English.

OMOURI
I am very contented to greet Aunt Deirdre.

Deirdre kisses Lorenzo's forehead.

DEIRDRE
Hi, boots.

Michaela confronts Augusto at the table.

AUGUSTO
Michaela, sit down. You can't test it.
Lorenzo needs you fit and well.

MICHAELA
So you'd put Deirdre at risk?

Deirdre joins them at the table.

DEIRDRE

Hey! I did the hippy trail through India. I ate rapeseed oil up the kazoo. Listen, I've been fasting all day. Let's eat.

Augusto places the special risotto before Deirdre, and waits for her to taste it.

AUGUSTO

So? How is it? Is there an under-taste?

DEIRDRE

No, it's great. What did the man say? The French have the best cooks...but the Italians have the best food.

He also sits and starts to eat.

The wind is out of Michaela's sails. She joins her sister and husband at the table.

DISSOLVE

LORENZO'S ROOM, DAY

Against the gurgle of the suction machine...

CLOSE

on a chart marked "Deirdre."

There are two plasma readings: BASELINE and, somewhat lower, WEEK 1.

AUGUSTO extends the downward line to WEEK 2. The new level is just below normal.

MICHAELA speaks excitedly into the phone.

MICHAELA

...In just eleven days, Mr Suddaby. It's an emphatic result. If we can normalise a carrier's levels so quickly, then who knows! We'll start Lorenzo immediately. We're so grateful to you...

She glances at DEIRDRE.

MICHAELA
... Not to mention the family rat.

Deirdre looks up. Michaela smiles back.

Deirdre grins.

LORENZO'S ROOM, LATER

On the cassette player, the trio from *Cosi Fan Tutte*, as...

OMOURI fills the syringe with puree...

MICHAELA measures the oil and pours it into the syringe...

AUGUSTO holds Lorenzo's hand.

CLOSE

on Omouri easing the food from the syringe into the naso-gastric tube.

FADE TO BLACK

THINK-TANK, DAY

SUPERIMPOSE

DECEMBER 8, 1986

CLOSE

on phone, ringing.

In the background around LORENZO'S bed we see MICHAELA and OMOURI laughing...

...as DEIRDRE sings a comy cowboy song.

DEIRDRE

"I'm an old cow-hand
From the Rio Grande..."

AUGUSTO answers the phone.

AUGUSTO

Odone.

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

It's Dr Rizzo's lab. Look, we have a
problem with this blood-sample you sent
us.

AUGUSTO

What's your problem?

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Could there have been a mistake in the labelling?

AUGUSTO

No. Why?

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Well...we ran the assay twice, and the levels of saturated C:24 and C:26 are normal.

AUGUSTO

What's the name on the sample?

TECHNICIAN'S VOICE

Lorenzo Michael Murphy Odone.

AUGUSTO

There's been no mistake... Thank you.

He hangs up...

...and walks to Michaela.

He puts his arm round her shoulder and gives her the news.

She turns to look at him.

They hug... but out of celebration, not intimacy.

This is the first time we've seen them touch since they've known the disease was genetic.

OMOURI and DEIRDRE share in the excitement.

CLOSE

Lorenzo's unseeing eyes.

FADE TO BLACK

INT, GIMBLE FARM, DAY

The fields of a small Virginian farm in fall.

PULL BACK

to reveal AUGUSTO at the kitchen sink mixing erucic acid with JAKE'S supply of oleic acid.

JAKE

M-mom says th-this is the only b-bottle in the w-world.

AUGUSTO

Now that we've destroyed Lorenzo's boo-boo I'm sure Mr Suddaby will make us some more.

WENDY offers money.

WENDY

Look, I know this is only a fraction of what it cost you...

He gently refuses the money.

AUGUSTO

Wendy, we work by the barter system. Our oil; your produce.

WENDY

There aren't that many tomatoes in the world.

He smiles and seals the bottle of erucic acid.

WENDY

So, when will you tell Mobley?

AUGUSTO

Gus was barely able to swallow the first oil. We'll see how Lorenzo goes on the second.

WENDY

(quietly)

What do you hope for?

AUGUSTO

We've caught it so late. Who can say?

BATHROOM, ODONE HOUSE, EARLY MORNING

Through steam we see MICHAELA, in bathrobe with a towel round her head, brushing her teeth.

She stops, puzzled, with a vague sense of unease.

Shrugging it off, she goes on brushing.

She stops again.

Something is wrong...

The house is completely silent!

Bursting out of the room she runs downstairs to...

LORENZO'S ROOM

OMOURI looks up from LORENZO'S bed to see MICHAELA'S panic.

Michaela sees that Lorenzo is breathing steadily.

MICHAELA

Suction! There's no suction.

OMOURI

But there's no need, Michaela. Not for two hours. I turned the machine off.

FADE TO BLACK

LORENZO'S ROOM, ANOTHER DAY

AUGUSTO watches as MICHAELA speaks with calm authority into LORENZO'S ear.

MICHAELA

...Tell your brain to tell your tongue...

The camera glides in on Lorenzo's profile...

MICHAELA

...to work the saliva to the back of your throat...

...very close now on his mouth and larynx...

MICHAELA

...and tell your throat to swallow.

But we see nothing happen.

MICHAELA

Lorenzo, tell your brain to tell your tongue... to work the saliva to the back of your throat... and tell your throat to swallow.

Still nothing.

As Michaela tries again, Augusto reassures her.

AUGUSTO

Cocoletta, he doesn't have to do it on cue. If he needs less suction, it's likely he's swallowing for himself.

FADE TO BLACK

LORENZO'S ROOM, EVENING

Camera glides slowly towards LORENZO as NURSE ESTHER reads to him with histrionic zeal.

NURSE ESTHER

"...Babar looked around the clearing. Where was Mama? Where was Papa? The little elephant..."

The camera is close again on his mouth and larynx.

Through the babble of Nurse Esther's words, we hear...faintly...

...another voice...

...a fragile wisp of a voice.

THE VOICE

Brain...brain...tang...tongue...tell tongue...

FADE TO BLACK

LORENZO'S ROOM, ANOTHER DAY

SUPERIMPOSE

JUNE 16, 1987

MICHAELA

...Tell your brain to tell your tongue.....to
work the saliva to the back of your throat...

Again the camera glides in on Lorenzo's profile...

...again very close on his mouth and larynx...

MICHAELA

...and tell your throat to swallow.

And there it is, unmistakable...

...a swallow! A SWALLOW!!

AUGUSTO

My gosh!

FISHMAN

He did it!

MICHAELA

Lorenzo, that was utterly wonderful. A
super-hero swallow!

CLOSE

DR FISHMAN and AUGUSTO.

FISHMAN

There's hearing, there's cognition, there's
volition. You must tell Professor Mobley.

MICHAELA

Would it do any good?

FISHMAN

For God's sake, Michaela! A boy's blood
levels have been normalised for the first
time in the history of ALDI! There's
evidence that the disease process has
been arrested!

ATRIUM, ROOSEVELT INSTITUTE, DAY

HIGH ANGLE

directly above the immense statue of Christ watching over the busy
human traffic below.

CRANE DOWN
to find one still figure at the foot of the statue...

PROFESSOR MOBLEY reads a letter from the Odone's.

CLOSE
on the face of a conflicted soul.

FADE TO BLACK

LORENZO'S ROOM, DAY

LORENZO is lying face-down on a map of the world...

...printed on a huge inflatable rubber ball.

He's rocking to and fro.

AUGUSTO and MICHAELA are "exercising" him.

The phone rings.

PHONE-BOOTH

CLOSE
WENDY GIMBLE shouting above the noise of a conference lunch.

WENDY

Michaela! It's Wendy. Can I come visit?
Some folks here want to meet you and
Augusto.

Beyond her the MUSCATINES and DR MOBLEY are in heated
discussion with some parents.

Above them a banner...

ALD Foundation
1987 Conference
You Are Not Alone

ODONE HOUSE

The ODONES open the door...

...to find WENDY approaching with a group of parents of diverse ages
and ethnic backgrounds, among them the Hispanic couple, LUIS and
GLORIA.

WENDY

Sorry, I couldn't help it. Mobley mentioned this "interesting new development of the diet therapy". Just slid it in, like that, and dropped it! So I shot my mouth off. I started in talking about Lorenzo's Oil...

PARENT 1

And they gagged her! They said, "The Odones have no right to behave like doctors."

WENDY

"The evidence is anecdotal."

GLORIA

They called it snake oil.

LUIS

But we can see what it's done for this little guy...

He indicates JAKE, who stands there with a catcher's mitt and baseball.

PARENT 2

How do we get Lorenzo's Oil?

The entreaties build to a clamor.

Augusto raises his hands for silence.

AUGUSTO

Go to the doctors. Force them to act on the information. Demand that they start a formal trial.

GLORIA

Why would they listen to us?

AUGUSTO

Because you speak for the sufferers. You must make a dialectic with the doctors.

PARENT 3

We padded our house yesterday. My kid needs the oil now!

The parents surge forward, each with a similar plea...

HIGH ANGLE

The street is alive with the clamour of desperate people.

There will be no rest for the Odone's.

DISSOLVE

LORENZO'S ROOM, DAY

SUPERIMPOSE

MAY 29, 1988

CLOSE

on a cluster of helium balloons crowding across the ceiling. From them hang ribbons with photos. They show...

...a Japanese boy, glowing with health...

MICHAELA

...Yoshi Sakai from Osaka...

...a Brazilian...

MICHAELA

...Luis da Carvalho from Sao Paolo, who's back on his roller-skates now...

With each new name, applause and cheers...

...an Italian kid...

MICHAELA

...Giancarlo Tirelli from Bologna, who sends greetings to his Onorato Capitano Lorenzo...

...then an American...

MICHAELA

...Jared Hall from Pittsburgh, whose mother says he hates the taste of your oil but loves what it's doing for him...

The names continue...

The house is overflowing with people gathered round LORENZO'S bed...

...GRANDMOTHER MURPHY, DON SUDDABY, CRISTINA and FRANCESCO ODONE, OMOURI and his GIRLFRIEND, and many ALD PARENTS and their BOYS.

Above them a colourful banner:

Happy Birthday, Lorenzo

...and a big brightly painted "10".

He lies motionless, as we hear the roll-call of Lorenzo's Army.

DISSOLVE

OUTSIDE, LATER

The party has spilled out into the backyard.

DEIRDRE, OMOURI and AUGUSTO are serving food to parents and kids.

A few boys chase one another past Lorenzo's old swings and climbing-frame, then round MICHAELA.

A group of parents are watching.

GLORIA

Maybe we ought to get those kids to cool it.

LUIS

They're not in anybody's way.

GLORIA

But think of her.

They look to MICHAELA, blindfolding JAKE for a party game. He giggles as she turns him around. She seems to be enjoying herself.

LUIS

Looks okay to me.

GLORIA

But how would you feel? Watching all of us doing fine because of what you'd done?

LUIS

Proud...I guess.

GLORIA

Come on, don't tell me they're not feeling
anger underneath.

CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

CLOSE

on a Magnetic Resonance Image on a light-box.

The ODONES are with DR FISHMAN and a colleague...

SENIOR NEUROLOGIST

...to the extent that he's still got some
myelin left, he'll reacquire function, but
never enough to communicate. We can
only conjecture about his inner life. He's in
a locked-in state.

CLOSE

on the Odonos, tired and prematurely aged.

AUGUSTO

But...if there was some way...

FISHMAN

Augusto, people have been theorising
about remyelination for years. It's a well-
trodden path. But the truth is, the central
nervous system doesn't regenerate. The
brain can't replace its own myelin.

CLOSE

on the Odonos staring back at him...

LIBRARY, DAY

AUGUSTO opens a text-book...at page one.

CLOSE

on an illustration of a human axon and its myelin sheath...

DISSOLVE

THINK-TANK, LATE NIGHT

AUGUSTO and MICHAELA sit side-by-side engrossed in a map of the human brain.

AUGUSTO

...Far down in some dark cave is our boy.
And because he's lost so much myelin, he
can't find the way out. We know his simple
functions are intact. He breathes, he
swallows, his heart beats, and through the
peripheral nervous system...

He traces a line along Michaela's hand to illustrate the point.

AUGUSTO

...he receives sensation... touch, pain,
cold...

By now he's holding her hand. Michaela's aware of his touch...

AUGUSTO

...and up in the middle brain, he
experiences the primal feelings...hunger,
fear, desire...

...and now he's aware of her. Very aware. And she is still. Very still.

AUGUSTO

...but in the darkness, how to reach what's
trapped up here...

His finger-tips brush her forehead. Their faces are very close.

AUGUSTO

...reason, imagination, memory...the things
that make each of us ourselves...

Now they're kissing. The two are delicate, even awkward with each other...

They embrace...

...hold each other...

...and begin to be lovers again.

EXTREME CLOSE-UP, LORENZO...

...once again face-down on a bigger exercise ball...

CLOSE

on Lorenzo's chin and upper lip. They show the first sproutings of adolescent facial hair.

As the ball rolls forward we hear, faintly, a six-year-old voice...

LORENZO'S INNER VOICE

Aaaah!

The huge ball rolls back and forward again...

LORENZO'S INNER VOICE

...Aaaaah!

Out of Lorenzo comes a contented sigh, which startles his parents.

ADOLESCENT VOICE

AAAAAAHHHI

The sound is surprisingly deep and masculine.

LORENZO'S INNER VOICE

*My gosh, that...out of me! A man's sound.
If I had...if I have an outside voice...is
that...what it is? Whatever it is... it isn't
was...isn't what...was. What is it? What is
my voice?*

SUDDENLY

Lorenzo's world is turned upside-down...

...as he's turned right-side-up...

...and carried across the room...

...to be placed carefully back in his bed.

MICHAELA'S VOICE

Now, what shall we choose? Peter Rabbit?
Or Babar the Elephant?

LORENZO'S INNER VOICE

(a cry of protest)

Aaaaagh!

MICHAELA

I think...Babar.

LORENZO'S INNER VOICE

No! NO! Ils ne passeront jamais. Never!

He clamps his eyes shut.

MICHAELA

Babar. You like Babar.

Lorenzo screams a scream of frustration and rage.

Michaela doesn't hear. She starts to read...and read...

FADE TO BLACK

MADISON, WISCONSIN, DAY

An amazing sight...

...a litter of beagle pups, wobbling, careening in a kind of drunken dance.

ANGLE

on a cocky Scotsman, Professor DUNCAN, with AUGUSTO in a laboratory.

DUNCAN

...How do you propose to raise this money?

AUGUSTO

A powerful idea will always find money. But, my friend, if you participate in the Myelin Project, we have a rule. We don't compete, we collaborate. We don't wait to publish, we learn to use the fax machine.

DUNCAN

That's not how science works.

AUGUSTO

And that's why everything takes so bloody long. On your own, this will take you ten years. With the Myelin Project, maybe we do it in two.

DUNCAN

That's beyond optimism. Nobody works that fast.

AUGUSTO

Not true. Remember the Manhattan Project. Twenty-four months. If scientists can co-operate to build the bomb, surely we can come together to remyelinate some puppy dogs.

DISSOLVE

LORENZO'S ROOM

SKEWED ANGLE

of light patterns on the ceiling.

MICHAELA'S VOICE

"...One morning a little rabbit sat on a bank. He pricked his ears..."

CLOSE

on Lorenzo's face.

MICHAELA'S VOICE

"...and listened to the trit-trot of a pony. A gig was coming along the road. It was driven by Farmer McGregor..."

His eyes close and then open.

MICHAELA'S VOICE

"...And beside him in a brand-new bonnet sat Mrs McGregor."

CLOSE

on MICHAELA, reading.

MICHAELA

"...Benjamin Bunny spied them, and scurried through the field..."

She looks at Lorenzo...

His eyes close again.

She goes on.

MICHAELA

"...and over the stile that led to the
cabbage patch..."

She looks again.

He shuts his eyes...

MICHAELA

Lorenzo?

...firmly.

MICHAELA

What is it? You don't like this story?

Lorenzo opens his eyes again and closes them deliberately.

Michaela is suddenly excited.

MICHAELA

Lorenzo, don't you like this story?

Lorenzo repeats the gesture.

Michaela gasps...

...drawing the attention of an efficient middle-aged NURSE MARIE.

NURSE MARIE

He does that a lot lately.

MICHAELA

When?

NURSE MARIE

Mostly at story-time.

MICHAELA

Lorenzo, listen carefully...is your middle
name Patrick?

Lorenzo closes his eyes firmly.

MICHAELA

"No."

She is trembling.

MICHAELA

Is it Peter?

Lorenzo closes his eyes again.

MICHAELA

"No, Mommy."...Is it Michael? Michael
Murphy?

Lorenzo's eyes remain perfectly still.

MICHAELA

"Yes. Yes." But he doesn't know how to
say it. Lorenzo, show Mommy "no".

Lorenzo closes his eyes firmly.

MICHAELA

When you close your eyes, does that
mean "no"?

Lorenzo keeps them open.

Michaela is thrown. Then...

MICHAELA

Mommy's an idiot! She asked you for the
wrong answer. But you don't want to hear
any more Benjamin Bunny, do you?

LORENZO closes his eyes emphatically! Michaela is barely able to hold
the book...or the tears.

MICHAELA

Now there's a definite reply. Very well,
young man, no more Benjamin Bunny.
How could Mommy be so thoughtless!

She gathers up all the kids' books.

MICHAELA

We'll present these to the Children's
Hospital. Time for the big stuff...

She goes to the bookshelves.

MICHAELA

Something heroic...Ah!

She takes down a book, sits by Lorenzo and reads...

MICHAELA
 "The Once And Future King." By T.H.
 White.

HOLD
 Lorenzo's face as she reads...

FADE TO BLACK

LORENZO'S ROOM, ANOTHER DAY

ANGLE
 on AUGUSTO, OMOURI and DEIRDRE staring intently at LORENZO'S
 right hand as MICHAELA works with him.

MICHAELA
 ...Okay. Is it your thumb?

Lorenzo blinks deliberately.

MICHAELA
 "No." Is it your index finger?

Another blink.

MICHAELA
 Your middle finger?

Blink.

MICHAELA
 Little finger?

Lorenzo's eyes stay open.

MICHAELA
 So it's your little finger. You think you can
 move that.

The eyes stay open.

MICHAELA
 Then go ahead. Tell your brain to tell your
 arm to tell your hand to move your little
 finger...

All eyes on his little finger.

MICHAELA

...Tell your brain...to tell your arm...to tell
your hand...to move your little finger.

Nothing happens.

MICHAELA

...Tell your brain...to tell your arm...to tell
your hand...to move your little finger.

AUGUSTO

Think, Lorenzino, what a wonderful thing,
a "yes".

MICHAELA

And then there's "perhaps" and "could be"
and even "I don't care". But first we get to
"yes". Now, tell your brain...to tell your
arm...

FADE TO BLACK

A CONFERENCE HALL, DAY

CLOSE

on AUGUSTO in full flight.

AUGUSTO

...One American in five hundred is afflicted
with multiple sclerosis. If we could find a
way to replace the myelin they've lost,
think how many of your people could be
saved. Why will you not support the Myelin
Project? When our one goal is the
remyelination of human beings! You
spend your money on theoretical
research. And today's victims have been
abandoned. Medical science should be in
the service of the sufferers. But it seems
like it's the other way round.

He storms out of the great hall, where a thousand delegates are
gathered for the annual congress of the American Multiple Sclerosis
Society...

OUT IN THE CAR-PARK

...AUGUSTO is pursued out of the building by four M.S. SUFFERERS in wheelchairs.

They stop him.

They want to know more.

LORENZO'S ROOM, YET ANOTHER DAY

WIDE

on an efficient NURSE CONNIE at LORENZO'S bedside.

NURSE CONNIE

You're a strange one, Lorenzo!

MICHAELA looks up from the desk where she's working with OMOURI on his studies.

MICHAELA

Oh?

NURSE CONNIE

He's usually wet by this time.

MICHAELA

When did he last urinate?

NURSE CONNIE

Six hours ago.

MICHAELA

He's had all his fluids?

NURSE CONNIE

Yes. And his pulse and temperature are normal. It's as though he's deliberately retaining his urine.

MICHAELA

Perhaps...perhaps he is!

OMOURI

Any young man of Lorenzo's age would prefer not to wet the bed.

NURSE CONNIE

He is very agitated.

MICHAELA

I should be hung by the eye-lashes. He's been trying to tell us. And we never thought to ask the right question... Lorenzo, you don't want to wear the diaper any more, do you?

Lorenzo blinks.

MICHAELA

"No." Good boy, Lorenzo! You've told your brain to tell your bladder to hold on for a bottle.

(to Connie)

Get one, quickly.

NURSE CONNIE

We don't have one.

MICHAELA

Get whatever!

Connie, in a mild panic, starts looking for a container.

MICHAELA

Hold on, Lorenzo. You hold on, okay?

Omouri is staring at Lorenzo's hand.

Ever so slightly, his little finger is twitching. ..

OMOURI

Michaela!

Michaela catches her breath.

MICHAELA

Is your name Lorenzo Michael Murphy Odone?

The little finger twitches.

MICHAELA

Are you eleven years old?

The little finger twitches.

In desperation, Connie grabs a vase of flowers, empties it then puts it in place.

MICHAELA

And, Lorenzo...do you want to pee?

She's rewarded by the glorious sound...

...of a proud stream of urine.

VERY CLOSE

on Lorenzo.

LORENZO'S INNER VOICE

Aaaaah! YEEEEEEESI

To Lorenzo's ears the sound is of a mighty torrent...

a burst fire-hydrant..

an overflowing Boulder Dam.

CUT

CAMERA FLOATS

over a magnificent fountain in an ancient Italian city...

MICHAELA'S VOICE

Sometimes it's hard to understand why we're asked to struggle so. But only the bravest are chosen. You know that now. Behind you there's an army gathered, and it's growing every day. Papa called last night from Italy. He's missing his Lorenzaccio very, very much, but he wants you to be patient...

The screen is filled with tomatoes, peppers, aubergines, melons: the riot of colours and textures that make an Italian produce market...

AUGUSTO is selecting the finest..

MICHAELA'S VOICE

...Because he's making a big dinner tonight...a banquet of brain-food...

AN ORNATE BANQUET-HALL, NIGHT

SUPERIMPOSE

APRIL 12, 1991

Twenty international scientists are gorging on the most luscious feast you ever saw.

But they're not just eating. They're talking, listening, exchanging ideas...

MICHAELA'S VOICE

...for the doctors, the scientists, the experts on multiple sclerosis and, most important, the man with the mutant shaking pups. They shake because they were born without myelin. And if Papa's project finds a way to help them stop shaking...

At the table in wheel-chairs are some of the MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS ACTIVISTS.

MICHAELA'S VOICE

...then one day there might be a way to help all the people who've lost their myelin...

PULL BACK

to reveal the magnificent chamber full of intense talk and good cheer.

AUGUSTO rises to speak.

His thirteen-year-old son hovers as in a dream, gazing down at the fading scene.

MICHAELA'S VOICE

...And if we can do that for you, then think, Lorenzo!

Her resonant voice merges with another, frailer sound...

LORENZO'S INNER VOICE

*...I'll be able... tell... brain...tell my toes...
my fingers, my anything...
to do what I want them to do...
...and then one day...*

MICHAELA

...you'll be able to tell your brain to tell your toes, your fingers, your anything, to do what you want them to do...and then one day...

Now Lorenzo's floating in a void...

....beginning to recede from us...

LORENZO'S INNER VOICE

*...all these words I'm thinking will get
outside my head.*

...till his face is the one tiny point of light in the darkness.