

# MORPHOGENESIS

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## **CHARACTERS**

DOCTOR HANNAH WAVERLY, a Jamaican born gynecologist

DOCTOR LILLIAN SHERBORN, a pregnant marine biologist

ADAM SHERBORN, Lillian's son from a fetal stage to age twelve

EVE SHERBORN, Lillian's daughter from a fetal stage to age twelve

NOTE: Adam and Eve are intended to be played by young adult actors

## **TIME**

The present and twelve years earlier

## **PLACE**

New York City and Montego Bay, Jamaica.

A stylized set represents a conference room, a parlor, and a pool.

(New York City. In a conference room, DOCTOR HANNAH WAVERLY stands to address the audience, speaking with a Caribbean accent.)

HANNAH

Ladies and gentlemen of the New Genesis Foundation: First, I must remind you that this is *not* a courtroom and I am *not* on trial. I am told your foundation is composed entirely of scientists, many willing to live in exile and defy restrictions on research of any kind. By now we realize that no one can suppress the human quest for knowledge -- not credulous clerics, not ignorant politicians, not even the president of the United States -- so I appreciate your willingness to hear my side of the case. My name is Doctor Hannah Waverly. I was educated at Columbia University, and am a practicing gynecologist in Jamaica. Twelve years ago, Doctor Lillian Sherborn called me to her home in Montego Bay. A mutual friend assured her that I could be discreet because...

(As HANNAH speaks, she approaches DOCTOR LILLIAN SHERBORN standing in her parlor.)

HANNAH

...something strange happened.

LILLIAN

Something strange happened.

(LILLIAN lifts her sleeves, revealing a glittery sheen on her arms which HANNAH examines.)

LILLIAN

I woke up with these splotches. I hope I'm not contagious.

HANNAH

It appears to be an iridescent rash suffused with flecks of mica, like a good dusting by fairies. Does it itch?

LILLIAN

No.

HANNAH

How far along is your pregnancy?

LILLIAN

Nearly five months.

HANNAH

Have you had an amniocentesis?

LILLIAN

Yes, everything's fine. I know they're twins: a boy and a girl. I'm naming them Adam and Eve.

HANNAH

Ah. You'll need to write down everything you've had to eat or drink in the past two weeks, and every place you've been.

LILLIAN

I'm either here or my pool or the lab where I work.

HANNAH

So Doctor, I understand you're employed by the Atlantic Waters Institute.

LILLIAN

That's right, and please, call me Lillian. I'm working with a team of marine biologists. We're researching the major mass extinctions.

HANNAH

What about your husband? Has he had any illnesses?

LILLIAN

I'm single; I was inseminated by an anonymous donor.

HANNAH

Ah. Well, Miss Lillian, I am afraid you are going to need blood tests, an immediate biopsy, and an ultrasound. I will also need a list of the chemical contents of your laboratory and pool. *(pause)* Aside from the obvious, your blood pressure's low, your temperature's subnormal, and your pupils are dilated. Are you taking drugs?

LILLIAN

No.

HANNAH

Anything you haven't told me?

LILLIAN

I have trouble sleeping.

HANNAH

Anything else?

LILLIAN  
Well, I...I eat fish.

HANNAH  
Ah. Which fish?

LILLIAN  
Oysters and clams, and...

HANNAH  
Yes...?

LILLIAN  
Shrimp, shark marlin, mackerel, and anything that swims!

HANNAH  
My god, woman! That has to cease immediately! Surely you know fish can harbor parasites that cause toxoplasmosis -- not to mention fetal deformities.

LILLIAN  
Yes, yes, but when Adam and Eve start kicking, I get cravings so intense, I...I can't seem to control myself. I know it sounds crazy, but *they're* the fish lovers. I always preferred poultry.

HANNAH  
Do you have swollen glands or muscle aches?

LILLIAN  
No.

HANNAH  
Any nausea?

LILLIAN  
No.

HANNAH  
You realize you are at risk.

LILLIAN  
What can I do?

HANNAH

Nourish your babies, their bodies and minds. I'll prescribe vitamins and an antibiotic; then avoid the lab and pool, eat sumptuous meals, but make certain the meat's well cooked! Now before I leave, there is something I must say: your breath, Miss Lillian, it is *not* pleasant.

(As HANNAH continues her testimony, LILLIAN fetches a hidden fishbowl, snatches a fish, and swallows.)

HANNAH

Her breath wasn't just foul, it was infectious -- not just a nasty case of halitosis, but permeating my clothes, the carpets, and rum colas I drank to calm my nerves. When I sobered up, I analyzed her skin sample. The epidermis was infused with mineral residue, ichthylepidin, and magnesium carbonate, in other words: fish scales! Two days later, Miss Lillian's rash was spreading, and since she refused to leave her house, I returned with my portable ultrasound.

(HANNAH wheels a portable sonogram towards LILLIAN who is lying supine.)

HANNAH

*(to Lillian)* Now then, shall we see how the Adam and Eve are progressing?

( As HANNAH places the probe on Lillian's stomach, lights reveal ADAM and EVE enwrapped in the transparent sheath of Lillian's amniotic sac. THEY appear to be swimming slowly, their limbs intertwined, intoning deep melodious, oceanic sounds.)

ADAM and EVE

Uuuuuuuuloooooolaaaaaaa...

HANNAH

There they are.

LILLIAN

*(sighs, relieved)* Ohhhh, they're fine, perfectly normal. One of them seems to be waving.

HANNAH

My god...

LILLIAN

What...?

HANNAH

Look closely: there appear to be membranes between the fingers -- the toes as well!

LILLIAN

Oh...

HANNAH

Now focus on their necks, beneath the ears...

LILLIAN

You mean those small, narrow slits...?

HANNAH

My god, they have gills! Membranes can be surgically removed, but gills...

LILLIAN

But what if...?

HANNAH

What?

LILLIAN

Well, if they're swimmers, they'll be useful, and we all have an inner fish. Our own jaws and ear bones correspond exactly to the gill structures of fish, and it's not so noticeable, is it?

HANNAH

Sorry, but I am *not* optimistic. Your test results indicate toxic levels of mercury and tetrodotoxin; you're also full of worms -- mostly flukes and nematodes. Frankly, I am amazed you're still breathing, much less functioning. Have you given any thought to terminating?

LILLIAN

No, absolutely not!

ADAM and EVE

*(squirming)* Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh...

LILLIAN

After five attempts, I'm seeing this through. You're a mother, surely you understand.

HANNAH

Ah, but my children were not on their way to being a new species!

LILLIAN

A species that will live in water as well as on land! They'll know the sea in a way we'll never know it.

HANNAH

Ah. You mean they won't need cumbersome scuba gear?

LILLIAN

Not just that. Glaciers are melting which means oceans are rising, causing storms, floods -- whole countries are shrinking! But no matter what happens, Adam and Eve will thrive. They'll thrive because they'll have two worlds to live in!

HANNAH

Good, because if they smell like you, no one will want to go near them!

ADAM and EVE

Whhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhaahhh...

LILLIAN

Can't you see?! Adam and Eve could expand our definition of humanity. We'll start thinking of ourselves as an evolving species; people will glimpse their future!

HANNAH

Or their past. If they're amphibious, they're regressive.

LILLIAN

You're wrong; they'll make the whole of history swim faster!

HANNAH

Well, I won't be bobbing in their wake. Sorry, but they are malformed, undernourished, and likely to be retarded, which means they'll need constant lifelong care. *(pause)* Oh, dear, now that they've turned, I see a projection from Eve's spine. Are my eyes playing tricks or does it seem to be extending? What is it? A cyst? A tumor...?

LILLIAN

No, it's a...a fin! *(delighted)* A fin!

HANNAH

My god...

ADAM and EVE

Whhhhhhheeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee...

LILLIAN

A fin that evolved from ancestral bones that made our knees, our femurs, fibulas and tibias. Even the bones of our hands can be traced to the skeletons of fish! The primordial waters are still flowing! We have whole oceans inside us!

*(HANNAH gapes, appalled, then turns to continue her testimony.)*



HANNAH

I never thought they'd last to term, and confess I watched with morbid fascination. Four months passed, then clever Miss Lillian timed their births so we were trapped in her house where her inner ocean spewed forth Adam and Eve -- straight into her pool!

(Shimmering lights reveal a pool where ADAM and EVE emit watery wails while breaking through their amniotic sac, then separate, and collapse.)

HANNAH

Everything is tested when you deliver a child who's malformed: your prejudices and preconceptions, your emotional and physical stamina, your very notion of what constitutes human nature.

(HANNAH draws forth a large syringe.)

HANNAH

They have to be euthanized.

LILLIAN

No! Out of the question!

HANNAH

No one has to know.

LILLIAN

Stop it! Stop right now!

HANNAH

My god, woman, put them out of their misery!

LILLIAN

I told you, no! Not now, not ever! All I want is for you to examine them.

HANNAH

They're too damn slippery! We can both observe the obvious: they're blue, hairless, and warm blooded.

LILLIAN

Like the higher marine mammals. I wonder if they're transgender -- like blue headed wrasses who start out female then become male. Do you think they're sentient?

HANNAH

Let's hope not. Otherwise, they'll realize the age of mammals is in full swing, and they're not invited to the party. They will hate you!

(Suddenly ADAM and EVE sing a haunting melody.)

ADAM and EVE

Whhaaa, la, la, loo, loo, loo...

HANNAH

My god!

LILLIAN

Incredible! They both sound so lovely...

HANNAH

Like bottom feeding divas! So what happens when they're hungry? Will you be feeding them fish bait?

LILLIAN

Minced vegetables, minnows, and sea water.

HANNAH

I need a drink.

LILLIAN

As soon as they learn to speak, stand upright, and are properly socialized, I'll present them to the world!

HANNAH

You'll what!?

LILLIAN

There'll be a huge demand for their genes.

HANNAH

Are you saying you actually *planned* this?!

LILLIAN

I've been working on the genomes for several piscine species. All I did was isolate the appropriate nucleotides and inject them into their embryos.

HANNAH

My god, woman! What you've done is reckless and reprehensible!

LILLIAN

In a few years there'll be an even greater gender imbalance. Due to prenatal sex selection in China and India, there's already one hundred and twenty males born for every hundred females. Too many males means unstable countries with unstable armies dropping bombs which means more pollution, more warming, more flooding, so where will all the peace lovers of the world escape? To the lakes, the rivers, and oceans! Of course we can't expose them until they've matured.

HANNAH

Ah! Then you'll expose them to ridicule, condemnation, and a media circus! Frankly, I think you've cracked your coconut!

LILLIAN

Have I? You have to admit we humans have trashed the planet, and since we lack the will to modify our behavior, I've modified the species instead. We may perish with the rest of the predators, but Adam and Eve will carry our genes. They'll be swimming in their aquatic Eden, leading us out of darkness and back to the sea!

(ADAM and EVE cease singing as HANNAH steps towards the podium, followed by LILLIAN.)

HANNAH

That was twelve years ago, and I'm still dead set against reproductive gene therapy of any kind! The media keep referring to Doctor Sherborn as the female Frankenstein, only instead of stitching cadavers, she incubates the creatures in her womb. I confess I agree, and recommend you stop people like Doctor Sherborn from wreaking havoc with our species!

(HANNAH leaves the podium as LILLIAN approaches.)

LILLIAN

Now it's my turn: I'm here with the understanding that there were no enforceable laws in effect when I began my gestation, followed by years of nurturing my children who are *not* "creatures" but a new extraordinary species. I've agreed to emerge from seclusion and share my results with the New Genesis Foundation, so ladies and gentlemen: may I present the world's first homo-piscines: Adam and Eve.

(ADAM and EVE enter dancing, showing off their glittery, blue bodies, twirling their hands.)

## LILLIAN

Being part male, but mostly female, Adam and Eve produce both ova and sperm, spawning hundreds of eggs. Their eggs have hatched, been dispersed, and are swimming in the Caribbean Sea, then west in the Gulf of Mexico, the Pacific Ocean, then east in the Atlantic, and now New York Harbor and the Hudson River. They're intelligent, creative, and comprehend their unique nature. Before we leave, they want to sing for you.

(ADAM and EVE sing with a beautiful watery voices.)

## ADAM and EVE

*Somewhere in the water  
Are my daughters swimming free;  
Somewhere in the water  
You can hear their melody.  
They've gone to find a home among the fishes;  
They've gone to find their lovers in the sea,  
Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh,  
In the sea,  
Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh,  
In the sea...*

(Lights fade to black.)

*End of Play*

