

A Mouse Who Knows Me

Book & lyrics by Scotto Moore, music by Robertson Witmer

Characters (with suggested doubling)

Dr. Audrey Whitman

Dr. Roland Grant / Romeo

Dr. Robert Cramer

Dr. Lorelei Meadow

D29-1 / Ethics Board / lab technician

Dr. Helena Warwick / D28-2

Theodore Werner / D29-2

D29-3 / Mouse Dancer #2 / Mouse Child #1 / Ethics Board / lab technician

D29-4 / Mouse Dancer #1 / Mouse Child #2 / Ethics Board / lab technician

Note: If alternate doublings are considered, the only doubling that must be preserved is Roland / Romeo – the story is specifically designed around these roles being played by the same actor.

Songs

Act One:

1. "No Love In Laboratories" - Ensemble
2. "Found A Mouse Who Knows Me" - Audrey
3. "No Love In Laboratories (continued)" - Dr. Cramer, Audrey, Lorelei, Roland, ensemble
4. "Fear Conditioning" - Lorelei, Roland
5. "Can't You See I'm Just Like You" - Romeo, ensemble
6. "All We Gotta Do Is" - Audrey, Romeo
7. "The Budget Cuts" - Dr. Warwick
8. "The Promise Of Reward" - Dr. Cramer, ensemble
9. "The Breeding Program"
10. "Military Mice" - Dr. Cramer, Mr. Werner
11. "In For A Shock" - Audrey, Lorelei
12. "A Single Little Why" - Roland, ensemble
13. "All For Science!" - Dr. Cramer, Audrey, Lorelei
14. "Mice In Our Cages" - D29-1, Romeo, supermice

Act Two:

1. "My Chances Expended / All For Science! (reprise)" - Lorelei, Audrey, Dr. Warwick, Dr. Cramer, Mr. Werner, Ethics Board
2. "No Love In Laboratories (reprise)" - Dr. Warwick
3. "A Single Little Why (reprise)" - Audrey, ensemble
4. "The Intervention" - D29-1, supermice
5. "On This Fateful Day" - Supermice
6. "If It All Ends Today" - Audrey, ensemble
7. "Sad To Say" - Lorelei, D29-1
8. "All We Gotta Do Is (reprise)" - Romeo, Audrey
9. "The Promise Of Reward (reprise)" - Dr. Cramer
10. "Found A Mouse Who Knows Me (reprise)" - Audrey

ACT ONE

Scene One

Songs: "No Love In Laboratories," "Found A Mouse Who Knows Me," "No Love In Laboratories (continued)"

The ensemble sings in silhouette.

ENSEMBLE:

**There is no love in laboratories
Science fails at romantic stories
You cannot measure such depth of feeling
Experimenting is unrevealing**

**What you feel in your heart is true elation
Unexpressed on the page though it takes your breath away
There's no proof for your life in a raw equation
Forces abound that can make you pray**

**There is no love in laboratories
Science fails at romantic stories
There is no sequence for true connection
No protein-coding for revelation**

A light comes up on AUDREY, facing the audience, and DR. WARWICK.

AUDREY: Thank you for giving me a chance to explain. I mean, beyond what I explained to the police.

DR. WARWICK: The police have a limited interest in genetic engineering. The Dean and I, on the other hand, would like to hear the whole story.

AUDREY: I didn't witness the whole story.

DR. WARWICK: Just give us your honest explanation of the events as you understand them. Fill in what you need to with your own hunches about what must have happened. Once we understand what happened, we can discuss your future with the university.

AUDREY: We were humanizing mice in Dr. Cramer's lab. He runs a very competitive lab. Thanks to his work, this university's production of humanized mice rivals industrial throughput. We're really in the game, and we were all hoping for a breakthrough as big as his. Dr. Cramer visited his lab once a month to see how his postdocs were doing.

Dr. Warwick exits as lights come up on the rest of the stage – we are in a lab, where ROLAND, LORELEI, and Audrey are each at a workstation comprised of microscopes, petri dishes and other lab gear, notebooks, mice cages, etc. Other LAB TECHNICIANS are in the background. Behind them, floor to ceiling shelves house many more cages neatly lined up in rows. The laboratory is in fact also a mouse housing facility. The cages are plastic bins, sufficient to hold five mice each.

DR. CRAMER enters in a whirlwind.

ENSEMBLE:

**Introducing the world-renowned geneticist
Master of fund-raising, genius self-publicist
Dr. Robert Cramer!**

DR. CRAMER: Progress report if you please! Dr. Grant, how are your little mice Methuselahs?

ROLAND: I've been dosing them on metformin, resveratrol, and fifteen other substances that contribute to longevity. We're seeing mice that last an extra ninety days!

DR. CRAMER: Promising, but don't get your hopes up – our pharmaceutical underwriters have heard fountain of youth stories before. And how about your mice, Dr. Meadow?

LORELEI: The latest generation shows a noticeable increase in muscle strength and reaction time. Of course, this has resulted in significantly increased aggression, but with time--

DR. CRAMER: I'm certain at our next grant review, the university will be underwhelmed about a therapy that counts "increased aggression" as a key side effect, yes?

LORELEI *defeated*: Yes, Dr. Cramer.

DR. CRAMER *moving on*: And finally, we come at last to Dr. Whitman, who never fails to impress me. What new insight have you prepared for me this month, Audrey?

AUDREY *a little bashful*: Well... actually...
I've found a mouse who knows me

DR. CRAMER: I'm sorry... what?

AUDREY: **I've found a mouse who knows me
I can see it in his eyes
I've found a mouse who knows me
I don't think you realize-**

LORELEI: -that you're crazy?

Audrey stops short. Dr. Cramer shoots Lorelei a nasty look; Lorelei retreats.

AUDREY: **Every morning in the lab
I see him staring at me
Every day he swims the maze
He's trying to impress me**

**I've found a mouse who knows me
I think he's rather bright
I've found a mouse who knows me**

And if my hunch is right...

He's smart!

ROLAND: What is that supposed to mean?

**AUDREY: I began with a dozen genes that make us clever
Genes for spawning neurons, genes for making neurons talk
Inserted them in eleven different stem lines altogether
But eventually my faith began to balk**

**Every little mouse I made was just a little smarter
But not enough to justify the time they took to make
I wondered what would happen if I tried a little harder
And inserted them all at once - would they all take?**

DR. CRAMER: I'm on the edge of my seat. Did they all take?

AUDREY: Not the first time, and not the second. But then - with a bit of luck - the stem cells took the modifications. All twelve genes.

DR. CRAMER: And the result?

AUDREY: A mouse that was off the scale.

**It happened very quickly
A matter of mere days
He soon became an expert
In the Morris water maze**

**And then one day he tricked me
As I put my lab book down
He sank beneath the water
My mouse began to drown!**

**I reached into the pool and plucked the mouse up off the bottom
He shook off his pelt and splattered me in the face
When I looked down I could have sworn the mouse was smiling
As though he had won a very peculiar race**

**I put him back into the pool and watched him start to swim
It seemed like he'd played a silly practical joke
He made it safely to the platform with no effort
And then he jumped back in the pool and began to do a backstroke**

LORELEI: Oh please.

**AUDREY: I've found a mouse who knows me
I continue running tests**

**His litter mates are clever, sure
But this one is the best**

Yes, he's smart

LORELEI: You're suggesting this mouse played a prank on you, and that's all the evidence you need to prove that it's "off the charts"?

AUDREY: There's more than that.

LORELEI: Oh sure, you can "see it in his eyes."

AUDREY: I'm still testing.

LORELEI: What test will you try next - a staring contest?

DR. CRAMER: Lorelei, I'm afraid the big picture has managed to elude you here despite its proximity to the front of your face. Audrey trusted her intuition, and made a leap of faith with her research. She might be wrong about this mouse - but if she's right, we may have ourselves a very promising new direction ahead of us. Audrey, I assume you've already safely frozen copies of these modified stem cells?

AUDREY: Yes.

DR. CRAMER: And what's next?

AUDREY: A full battery of tests. Breeding, maybe-

DR. CRAMER: Sounds like you could use assistants to speed up your progress.

AUDREY / ROLAND / LORELEI *all surprised*: Assistants?

DR. CRAMER: Audrey, please take Roland and Lorelei under your wing - they both show promise but I wonder if working with you might truly catalyze their potential. *Addressing the entire lab*: Let me remind you, friends, that what we do here is the noblest calling imaginable.

**DR. CRAMER: There is no glory in half solutions
No prestige with funding institutions
Unless our efforts produce a break through
That is what I'm expecting of you**

**AUDREY, ROLAND, LORELEI: What I feel in my heart is anticipation
Unexpressed in results though it takes my breath away
This is my biggest chance for a demonstration
LORELEI: If she interferes, I will make her pay!
ROLAND: If she smiles at me, I don't know what I'll say!**

ENSEMBLE:
There is no love in laboratories
Science fails at romantic stories
There is no sequence for true connection
No protein-coding for revelation

Scene Two

Song: "Fear Conditioning"

The cast – except Audrey – ceremoniously picks up their mice cages, puts them back on the shelves, and begins to exit slowly as Audrey speaks.

AUDREY: Every night, the lab mice slept in cages along side thousands of other mice. Each cage had its own RFID chip to help us find specific mice – we didn't chip the mice themselves, because the chip's emissions might taint our experiments.

Roland enters briskly, grabs a cage off a shelf and places it in front of Audrey.

AUDREY: The next morning, I had assistants.

ROLAND *looking in the cage*: Their tails aren't marked. How do you tell them apart?

She studies the five puppets in the cage – then quickly pulls one in particular out and shows it to Roland.

ROLAND: I have to say – he doesn't look all that special to me.

AUDREY: How special do *you* look first thing in the morning?

Lorelei enters, carrying her lab book – a big black journal full of research notes.

AUDREY: Good morning, Lorelei, how-

LORELEI *smiling at Roland*: Oh, Roland – I see you're here bright and early.

ROLAND: You do indeed see that.

LORELEI: It's going to be such a treat working more closely with you in the coming weeks.

AUDREY: I couldn't agree more. Let's get started, shall we?

LORELEI: Actually, if you don't mind, before we begin I thought we might conduct a few neurobehavioural assessments of your "special mouse." Just to help verify the results you reported to Dr. Cramer.

AUDREY: Actually I thought we'd- *Stops herself short.* That sounds perfectly reasonable. What did you have in mind?

**LORELEI: When phenotyping mice it is clear
The quickest path to knowledge is fear
We'll give your mouse an electric shock
While holding his tail in a lock
 Then we'll let your mouse dance
 On an electric sheet
 Which we'll turn on and off
 Underneath his poor feet
 And we'll study reactions
 How fast does he freeze
 His anxiety rising
 His breath starts to wheeze
And in the end we'll see just how smart
Your little mouse can be from the start
And if he fails the test
That will just break my heart**

AUDREY: By all means... set up the experiment.

Lorelei nods and begins preparing a special cage with a hot plate underneath it, connected to a black box with a few switches on it. Audrey pets her mouse to reassure it, which catches Roland's attention.

**ROLAND: Look at the way she caresses its fur
Fingers so tender, you might hear it purr
All that affection is wasted on mice
But she's never looked at me twice**

Audrey whispers to her mouse, smiling.

**ROLAND:
Look how she holds it, her hands on its waist
See how it dangles, so docile and chaste
If I should woo her and she should say no
That will just break my heart**

Audrey places her mouse on the hot plate and puts a plastic barrier around it, preventing its escape. Roland can't take his eyes off Audrey – much to Lorelei's chagrin.

**LORELEI bitter: When phenotyping men I must say
The winds are rarely blowing my way
He cannot take his eyes off that fake
She doesn't see that he's on the make**

**ROLAND:
Look how she trembles to see it get hurt
Look how she whispers a single sweet word
If she rejects me, if I fail her test**

**LORELEI:
And in the end we'll see just how smart
The both of them can be from the start
And if they fail the test**

That will just break my heart

That will just break my heart

AUDREY: Let's start the test.

The lights begin to dim except for Audrey and her mouse; Lorelei and Roland seem to disappear.

AUDREY *to the audience*: Using fear conditioning, we can determine how quickly a mouse learns and how much it can remember. Each time a specific audio tone is triggered, a mild electric shock is also administered. Over time, the mouse learns to associate the tone with pain, and will experience prepulse inhibition any time it hears the tone – it will freeze, expecting pain that may not actually come.

Scene Three

Song: “Can't You See I'm Just Like You”

Lights out on Audrey and the lab. In the resulting blackout, we hear a drum roll, which builds and builds until we hear a loud cymbal crash – at which point a pool of light appears downstage, and ROMEO slides into the light, Elvis-style. He wears a stylish white Elvis jacket. After a few beats, he turns to face the audience, relaxing into a casual pose, smiling a bit. Nothing to do, nowhere to be, just cool.

Then we hear a very loud & brash audio tone, coupled with the sound of an enormous electrical shock. Romeo leaps into the air and shrieks in pain.

ROMEO: What the fuck-

He spins around, realizes what's going on, looks way up where he must see Audrey hovering above the top of his cage.

ROMEO: Really? It's this? Seriously? *No response.* Look, I'm sorry about that thing in the water maze – I just thought it would be funny. *No response.* He turns back toward the audience, determined. It's like that, is it? You always gotta prove yourself, it's like yesterday never happened-

Another loud tone & electrical shock, causing Romeo to leap & shriek, but this time as he emerges from the shriek he is beginning to snap his fingers and dance, joined suddenly by several BACKUP MICE.

**ROMEO: One more day and one more pellet
I got a big brain and I really gotta sell it
Every day you hit me with something new
Can't you see I'm really just like you**

**One more day and one more treat
When I figure out speech, it'll really be neat
Every day's a struggle to get through
Can't you see- *Huge shock* – I can't remember the rest.**

Wild song & dance – backup mice going wild as Romeo sings a high harmony.

**ROMEO: Now I can't wait for that audio tone
Wait til you see me, gonna throw you a bone
Cuz I know this pattern better'n you think I do
The next time I hear it - the joke's gonna be on you**

LORELEI *becoming visible upstage*: Disengaging the electric shock. The next time I play the tone, the mouse should freeze in fear... if it has any brain at all.

We wait in hushed suspense, a quiet drum keeping the beat, Romeo poised for action. Then - at last - we hear the harsh audio tone, this time without the electric shock to accompany it. Romeo pauses a moment, smiles at the audience - and then begins shrieking in absolute pain, collapses onto the floor, writhing in abject torment, spasming and flailing. Backup mice flee the stage.

AUDREY *now visible with Lorelei*: What are you doing?

LORELEI: Nothing! I was just playing the tone!

AUDREY: It's malfunctioning! You're torturing him!

LORELEI: I'm not even touching it anymore! He must be having a seizure!

AUDREY: That doesn't make any sense - unless...

Slowly Romeo stops, comes to his knees, brushes off his jacket.

LORELEI: Unless what?

AUDREY: Unless that mouse was pranking you.

ROMEO *smiling to the audience*: Bingo.

LORELEI: Funny.

She flips a switch on her device, this time generating a loud electric shock unaccompanied by an audio tone, which drives Romeo back to his knees and keeps him there longer than we might expect.

LORELEI *leaning into the mouse cage*: Right back atcha, you little shit. *She exits.*

Scene Four

Song: "All We Gotta Do Is"

Audrey's workstation is pulled back into its customary position center stage. Romeo stands slowly. Carefully Audrey leans in to talk to her mouse.

AUDREY: You must be terribly bored to resort to stunts like that. I wish I could take you home with me instead of sending you back to your cage for the night... but it's against federal regulation to remove lab mice from a research facility in case they're harboring a dangerous pathogen. Hmm...

maybe you can just... explore the lab for a few minutes?

She gently produces an adorable MOUSE PUPPET version of Romeo. The actor Romeo smoothly retrieves the puppet and begins operating it, while also walking about the room in a long, slow exploration. As the actor operates the puppet, he never stops acting the role himself – if our eyes wander from the puppet to the actor, we should see the same character & intent from each.

AUDREY: This is probably the first time in your entire life you've been free in an environment this large. I can't imagine what must be going through your mind right now.

ROMEO: This room is disturbingly lacking in levers I can push. *Turning to her.* Tell me – how does this room dispense treats?

AUDREY *catching her breath:* You're looking at me, aren't you. You're looking right at me.

ROMEO: You know, when I was just a young pup, about... eight days ago... my mother sang a song to my litter mates and me, to comfort us as we grew and opened our eyes for the very first time. She knew they were going to take her away from us, she knew that we'd all be split up and sent in every direction, and she... she wanted us to remember a little piece of her. She wanted us to remember her song. It goes... a little something... like this. *Suddenly:* MEEP MEEEEEEEEEP MEEP MEEP MEEEEEP MEEEEEEEEEEEEEP MEEEEEEEEEP MEEEEEEEEEP! MEEEEEEEEEP MEEP MEEP MEEEEEEEEEEEEEP! *Pause.* MEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEP! *Noticing Audrey's surprised stare:* I would of course like to translate that song for you now.

**“Now listen all my babies, I won't tell you this twice
Your life is just a prison, it ain't gonna be nice
If you're lucky you're a mutant and you'll last for a while
The rest of you will end up in a euthanized pile”**

Romeo turns to her.

ROMEO: But you're not like my mother at all. You're strange, and gigantic, and you seem like you care. Potentially. About something. Am I making sense here?

**I'm different from the others, I could tell right away
I ask so many questions, they've got nothing to say
But you keep looking at me like there's nothing to fear
If I shouted loud enough I wonder if you could hear**

**AUDREY: What kind of inner life are you living through?
How do you manage in this terrible zoo?
We're lucky you're a mutant and I noticed your cries
Instead of getting used for testing bleach in your eyes**

AUDREY:
Now all
All we gotta do is

ROMEO:
Now all we gotta do, yes
All we gotta do is

Find our own way to communicate
Cuz all
All we wanna do is
Shine a big light and illuminate

The way you see the world
It's a brand new bag and
It's gotta be heard

One thing I must say
I never thought you'd
Turn out this way

Now all
We gotta do is...

Communicate
Cuz all we wanna do, yes
All we wanna do is
Illuminate

The way you see the world
It's a brand new bag and
It's gotta be heard

One thing I must say
I never thought you'd
Turn out this way

Now all
We gotta do is...

AUDREY: ...figure out how to speak each other's language.

ROMEO *over the top of her*: ... figure out how to stop getting shocked all the time.

AUDREY: When the timer shuts the lights off at six every night
Do you wonder if you'll see me in the morning light?

ROMEO: When I solve another puzzle and I'm claiming my treat
When I see you smiling at me, life is almost complete

AUDREY:
Now all
All we gotta do is
Find our own way to communicate
Cuz all
All we wanna do is
Shine a big light and illuminate

Someday soon you'll see
The tests will all be over and
You're gonna be free

Now all
We gotta do is...

ROMEO:
Now all we gotta do, yes
All we gotta do is
Communicate
Cuz all we wanna do, yes
All we wanna do is
Illuminate

Until that happy day
I guess I'll just keep swimming
And making my way

Now all
We gotta do is...

ROMEO: These moments of freedom have opened my eyes. You are not like the other strange giant things.

AUDREY: I am totally going to get fired. I should put you back in your cage.

She guides the puppet back toward her workstation.

ROMEO: Your touch is gentle and sincere.

AUDREY: I'll try to sneak some extra treats in before I leave.

ROMEO: I could grow to trust you. *Pause.* I'm sorry, did you mention "treats"?

Audrey puts the puppet inside the cage. Romeo wanders off stage.

AUDREY: And don't worry... no more electric shocks. At least not for a while. I've had all I can stomach of Lorelei trampling all over me. We've clearly demonstrated you possess an unusually smart phenotype. Smart, and probably empathic too. I mean, dogs and cats respond to people's emotions, but with you, it just feels like... Anyway, now it's time to figure out how to replicate this smart, empathic phenotype. Maybe we can make you some friends... some friends of your own species, I mean.

Roland has entered during the above.

ROLAND: You seem pretty attached. It's like your pet. A mouse is no good for a pet, Audrey. A two year life span-

AUDREY *turning to him*: What about your longevity treatment?

ROLAND: It's a pretty heavy drug regimen. Not sure about all the side effects just yet.

She turns away, back to her mouse.

ROLAND: Pets need a name. You got a better name for him than specimen N23-17?

AUDREY: I've been calling him... Romeo.

Roland stares at her a beat.

ROLAND: Didn't Romeo kill himself?

AUDREY: Oh stop.

ROLAND: So look, let's get off campus for lunch. I found this pub you might like. Good vegetarian options.

AUDREY: I'm not a vegetarian.

ROLAND: I know, but the meat's not so good there.

AUDREY: Ha ha. Anyway I brought my lunch.

ROLAND: You've thought of everything.

AUDREY: Not yet, but I am definitely working on thinking of everything.

ROLAND: Leave a few thoughts for the underprivileged to think, won't you?

AUDREY: You're not underprivileged – you're working with me, after all. *As he starts to exit:* Maybe tomorrow?

ROLAND: Maybe tomorrow.

Scene Five

Songs: "The Budget Cuts," "The Promise Of Reward"

Roland starts to exit, but stops as Lorelei enters briskly with her big black lab book.

LORELEI: Dr. Cramer is back early from Munich. He called a lab meeting.

ROLAND: I thought the conference lasted another week.

LORELEI: It does, but apparently he's discovered a new opportunity for our research.

AUDREY: But we've barely gotten started.

LORELEI: Yes, I've been emailing him daily reports so he shouldn't be surprised by our lack of momentum.

AUDREY: You *what*? Lorelei, I'm responsible for keeping Dr. Cramer updated.

LORELEI: And you haven't had much to tell him lately except "look at my smart little mouse, swoony swoon swoon." So I've offered him additional insights. Don't worry. Roland and I confirmed quite clearly that your mouse transcends every known scale we possess for intelligence and memory in rodents. I'm sure you'll be famous.

AUDREY: And what "additional insights" did you offer him beyond that?

LORELEI: An idea about... a new direction for our research.

Dr. Cramer enters, followed by the ensemble taking up their stations from the opening of the show.

ENSEMBLE:

**Here comes the world-renowned geneticist
Master of glad-handing, expert at grandstanding
Dr. Robert Cramer!**

DR. CRAMER: I'm terribly sorry for the surprise visit.

AUDREY: I haven't had a chance to put any slides together-

DR. CRAMER: Don't fret, Audrey, we have plenty of time to review your results.

Roland pulls a mouse cage from the shelves and takes it to his workstation.

DR. CRAMER: And Dr. Grant delivers our fearless mice companions. Audrey, the talk around the halls is that you've actually given one of yours a name.

AUDREY *bashful*: Yes... I call him Romeo.

ROLAND *after a beat*: Mine is Toby Belch, if anyone cares.

LORELEI *irritated*: They do not have names. They are N23-13, N23-14, N23-15, N23-16, and "Romeo" is N23-17 - on the rare occasion when we have any need whatsoever to refer to them individually.

DR. CRAMER: Thank you, Dr. Meadow, for that exquisite if unnecessary reminder of basic laboratory protocols. Now then-

Dr. Warwick enters suddenly.

DR. CRAMER: Helena! What a... perfectly pleasant surprise.

DR. WARWICK: Bob. I heard you were back early from Munich.

DR. CRAMER: I don't believe you've met all of our postdocs. Everyone, I'm pleased to introduce Dr. Helena Warwick. She is the Chair of the Department of Genetics, reporting directly to the Dean of the College of Science and Engineering, and she signs all of our paychecks. What brings you down here, Dr. Warwick?

**DR. WARWICK: We should speak in my office about the budget cuts, Bob
You've been traveling the globe so much you haven't heard
The school is in the crosshairs - times are tight - it's not just us, Bob
But your lab is quiet - not a paper - not a word**

**If I understood the value of your latest work, Bob
I'm sure that I can help - this doesn't have to be severe
I just need a little summary to help me get it right, Bob
Help me understand why your postdocs still revere you**

DR. CRAMER: Of course. I'll have a summary prepared for you.

DR. WARWICK: Come to my office and summarize in person.

DR. CRAMER: Is that a request or an order?

DR. WARWICK: **If that were a request, I would have sent you flowers first, Bob
Don't play coy with me, I've known you far too long
Something's going on that you're not telling me, Bob
You'll need more than your charm to prove my instinct wrong**

**We've had each other's backs all the way right up the ladder
But history is history, it really doesn't matter
It's really nothing personal, it's just a mere formality
But don't forget that I'm the boss, and that is your reality**

DR. CRAMER: You became head of this department because of my work, Helena.

DR. WARWICK: And I *stay* head of this department because I deserve it.
**So let's chat in my office about the budget cuts, Bob
I'll expect to see you after your last class
I know you wouldn't disappoint me, or betray, Bob
The trust I have in you, or else I'll have your ass**

She exits.

Dr. Cramer turns to see his postdocs staring expectantly at him. He can barely control his anger.

DR. CRAMER: She can't- *Pause.* I bring in more- *Pause.* *Smiles.* I can handle Dr. Warwick.

AUDREY: We might be able to publish soon, Dr. Cramer. The results are conclusive – my mouse is more intelligent than any mouse on record.

DR. CRAMER: But that's not all you're looking for, is it, Audrey?

AUDREY: No... I think it's empathic too, but-

DR. CRAMER: That's the kind of creative thinking we need. We have so much more work to do before we worry about telling the world. *To the entire lab:* I'm here at a crossroads in our lab's funding history, ladies and gentlemen. I'm here to provide... direction.

The lab is rapt as he begins singing:

DR. CRAMER: **We've got one single mouse that's smarter than the rest
One single mouse that passes every test
Wouldn't it be nice if all of these mice were so clever
The only way to pull that off is if we work together**

**Romeo's a mutant – a freak of nature
The product of science's strange behavior
You can't predict what craziness will come your way
The only thing to do is take advantage of your chance to play**

AUDREY: What do you want us to do?

**DR. CRAMER: We need to start a breeding program as fast as we can
Get Romeo a dozen little one night stands
Maybe his mutation will pass hereditarily
And then we'll have litters of his brainiac progeny**

AUDREY *ignoring them, to Dr. Cramer:* Anything else?

DR. CRAMER *grinning:* Oh absolutely.

**DR. CRAMER: We need to propagate the gene that makes Romeo smart
Cross it with one of Lorelei's for a start
Breed ourselves a litter full of mutant genes
And hope that they express themselves beyond normal means**

AUDREY: But Lorelei's mice are the ones with "increased aggression"!

DR. CRAMER: Yes - and keener eyesight, and stronger constitution. If we can produce a mouse with the same intelligence of *your* mouse...

AUDREY *whirling on Lorelei:* This was your "new direction"?

LORELEI: It's pretty obvious when you think about it... which is something you weren't bothering to do.

Dr. Cramer sees Audrey's distress, and tries to console her:

**DR. CRAMER: I haven't overlooked your amazing contribution
I couldn't stand to lose you, there'd be no substitution
I think you're amazing, I think you'll be a superstar
You just need a push to get you further than you already are**

AUDREY: What kind of "push"?

**DR. CRAMER & ENSEMBLE: The promise of reward
Is a thing of supple beauty, hard to ignore
The promise of reward
Gets you going in the morning as you walk out the door**

**Don't you want to be noticed, get your name on a gene?
Don't you want to see your face on "Mouse Magazine"?
Don't you want to be quoted in popular news?
Don't you want to get tenure you can never lose?**

The promise of reward...

DR. CRAMER: ...is the offer that I'm making, it could all be yours

DR. CRAMER: Can you work with Lorelei on this?

AUDREY: Of course.

DR. CRAMER: It's all for science. And your Romeo will receive all the extra care and attention we can give him.

AUDREY: Thank you, Dr. Cramer.

Dr. Cramer exits, followed closely by Lorelei.

ROLAND: About the... the breeding program... I can manage it if you want.

AUDREY *surprisingly forceful*: No. I can do it.

Roland pauses, then grimly begins putting the mouse cages away.

AUDREY: I'm sorry. I'm just tired of Lorelei pushing me around. I can handle my own research. I *should* handle it. I'm better at it than she is. This was my discovery in the first place and I don't need her "assistance."

ROLAND: Or mine. *Pause.* It's cool. Far be it for me to disturb the young hot shot at work.

He exits.

Scene Six

Song: "The Breeding Program (instrumental)"

Dr. Warwick appears.

AUDREY *to audience*: Romeo was six and a half weeks old by then, just entering sexual maturity. Female mice go into estrus every 3 or 4 days and the gestation time of mice is 19 to 21 days-

DR. WARWICK: I'm sure you can skip the precise clinical details, Dr. Whitman.

AUDREY: Of course. My point is - it did not take long at all to create the next generation.

DR. WARWICK: And what did you expect of this next generation?

AUDREY: I wanted them to be smart like Romeo, maybe even smarter, so smart that the entire body of my research since joining the lab would be vindicated. I trained my whole life to get a shot like that one. Maybe I should have been more careful.

DR. WARWICK: Careful about what? Your research was impeccable.

AUDREY: Careful about my feelings. Careful about having any, I mean. *Resuming her story*: First we bred Romeo with normal mice. *Lights out on Audrey and Dr. Warwick.*

Romeo enters downstage, looking bored. MOUSE DANCER #1 enters, surprising Romeo. She is dressed in a version of the mouse costume, but it's a slinky dress instead. They eye each other carefully.

ROMEO *very suave*: Well hello there.

A sultry and seductive slow dance number begins between the two of them.

MOUSE DANCER #1: I see the ten hour dark cycle has begun.

ROMEO: Yes. Perfect timing, wouldn't you say?

MOUSE DANCER #1: I do prefer breeding during the dark cycle.

ROMEO: And how many litters have you produced?

MOUSE DANCER #1: Only one. My last mate cannibalized it.

ROMEO: I'm sorry to hear that.

MOUSE DANCER #1: Do you intend to-

ROMEO: No, I actually enjoy the taste of grain pellets.

The dance reaches a quick climax in which it's clear that Romeo has done his duty – then they separate.

ROMEO: Will I see you again?

MOUSE DANCER #1 *nonchalant*: I don't know.

ROMEO: I think that's okay.

Mouse Dancer #1 exits as MOUSE DANCER #2 enters to join Romeo. She is less sultry than the last mouse, a little more innocent. They begin to dance.

ROMEO: Tell me about yourself.

MOUSE DANCER #2: I like running in that big wheel that goes around and around.

ROMEO: Hey, me too – we have so much in common.

MOUSE DANCER #2: Sometimes the wheel goes so fast I can barely keep up with it.

ROMEO: You do realize that you control its rate of speed?

MOUSE DANCER #2: What do you mean?

ROMEO: The wheel is- Let us not speak of the wheel, my sweet. Let us speak the language of love.

MOUSE DANCER #2: I don't really know what that means either.

ROMEO: Ssshhhh.

The dance again reaches a quick climax in which it's clear that Romeo has done his duty – then they separate.

ROMEO: You're not as... talented as the other one.

MOUSE DANCER #2: I think I'm inbred.

ROMEO: That would explain a few things.

Mouse Dancer #2 exits. Light up on Audrey.

AUDREY: Then we bred Romeo with one of Lorelei's special mice – D28-2. *Light out on Audrey.*

D28-2 enters to join Romeo. She is by far the sultriest – perhaps the most mature – of all these ensemble mice. Romeo is taken aback with her beauty. She eyes him skeptically as she carefully examines her new surroundings.

ROMEO: You're not like the others.

They begin sniffing around each other.

ROMEO: The others are all dim-witted... docile... resigned to their fates. But you... I sense in you a ferocity. I must taste it for myself.

D28-2: I would prefer to tear your throat out with my teeth... but my desire to mate betrays me.

ROMEO: I should warn you – I have become very experienced.

D28-2: I think you'll find I'm easy to disappoint.

They begin dancing, the hottest dance yet, bordering on violence. He tries to speak several times, but she stops him each time with more intense dancing – she is firmly in control. Finally the dance – and Romeo – come to a climax. They drift apart slowly.

ROMEO: Well?

D28-2 *shrugs*: I've had better.

ROMEO: Any pointers? Any advice?

D28-2: Mating is just physical. Stop acting like you care.

ROMEO: We may never see each other again.

D28-2: I think that's okay. *She exits.*

Lights up on the lab. Audrey is at her workstation – she pulls out the mouse puppet which Romeo smoothly retrieves and begins operating.

AUDREY: I'm really sorry I had to put you through all that.

ROMEO *almost on top of her*: I wanted to thank you for how absolutely awesome that was. That was right up there with the test where I self-administer cocaine to my pleasure center until I can't stand up. Which reminds me – we *are* doing that one again someday, yeah?

AUDREY: Eventually I'll have studied everything there is to study about you. And then I guess I won't... need you anymore, except... it's not scientific at all, it's completely just unverifiable intuition, but... I can't shake this feeling that you actually understand what I'm saying.

ROMEO: I can't shake that feeling either. *Pause.* But let me tell you something. Of all the enormous weird creatures like you that handle me in a given day, you are obviously the sweetest. I'm supposed to stop acting like I care, but I really want to figure out how to cheer you up a little! Perhaps you might enjoy... a private performance?

The Romeo puppet begins dancing a very small soft shoe on the table.

ROMEO: This is something I've been practicing at night. The other mice don't seem to approve, but it is not their approval I seek.

AUDREY: Very nice. You could join a circus. Actually you might scare the elephants.

Romeo introduces some pizzazz into the piece, twirling & spinning. Audrey smiles.

ROMEO: There we go, there's that thing you do with your face. Hey, I got an idea. Try this.

Romeo executes a move and then stops, waiting patiently for Audrey.

AUDREY: Wait... are you... you want me...?

Tentatively, she mimics his dance move. He jumps up and down with glee, causing her to laugh.

AUDREY: Okay, my turn.

Audrey tries a simple move and stops – Romeo immediately repeats her move. Now it's his turn: he executes an unbelievable series of flips and spins, and when he stops, the actor holding the puppet is winded.

AUDREY: Sorry, I draw the line at modern dance. *Blackout.*

Scene Seven

Songs: "Military Mice," "In For A Shock"

Light up on Audrey.

AUDREY *facing the audience*: D28-2 and Romeo produced a small litter of only four mice. But these four mice were special.

The postdocs enter & the lab bustles with activity. Lorelei approaches Audrey with a cage full of mice.

LORELEI: They're all off the charts. They're strong, fearless, intelligent... and they've got Romeo's empathy too I think. Look at that one – I call that one D29-1. Look at how closely D29-1 follows his mother around. He's almost protective of her when I try to separate them.

AUDREY: Why do you need to separate them?

LORELEI: The mother has almost outlived her usefulness. Once her children are weaned, I plan to sacrifice her.

The lab snaps to attention as Dr. Cramer enters along with a man in a crisp suit – MR. WERNER.

ENSEMBLE:

**Presenting the eminent geneticist
Elite among researchers, god among financiers
Dr. --**

MR. WERNER *unimpressed*: Do they always do that?

DR. CRAMER: I'd like you all to clear the lab immediately, if you please! I'm giving a tour for a visiting dignitary, and I can't have any of you accidentally speaking to him. *As the cast starts to exit*: All but Doctors Whitman and Meadow, if you don't mind.

Audrey and Roland exchange a glance, as he and the other postdocs exit. Both Audrey and Lorelei are caught off guard and seem nervous. Slowly Mr. Werner crosses toward Lorelei's station and peers at the mice cages in front of her.

MR. WERNER: These are the subjects?

Lorelei glances at Dr. Cramer, who nods his approval.

LORELEI: These are my current subjects, yes.

AUDREY: There's one over here too, actually.

Mr. Werner ignores both of them, looks back to Dr. Cramer.

MR. WERNER: Let's discuss your terms.

AUDREY: "Terms"?

**DR. CRAMER: Allow me to introduce a very distinguished man
The CEO of a significant global brand
Renowned across the world for expertise in many industries
My dear friend Theodore Werner**

**He's been looking for a breakthrough in a very specific field
I think that what we're doing here qualifies for a deal
His firm is manufacturing military technology
And selling it to the highest bidder**

**DR. CRAMER: We do the finest work of all the labs inside this hemisphere
MR. WERNER: Then let's get down to business right away!**

**DR. CRAMER: These mice we've made are smarter in every way
And stronger and faster and made in the USA
MR. WERNER: The possibilities seem endless I must say
I must have their DNA**

**DR. CRAMER & MR. WERNER: We could use those mice as military mice
We could use them as little G.I. Joes
We could train those mice until they're calculating killers
And set them loose upon our foes!**

AUDREY: I don't understand. They may be exceptional for mice, but how on earth could they be used as soldiers of war?

**MR. WERNER *sighs*: So close-minded for a scientist. Allow me to explain.
The hardest part of war is keeping soldiers alive
We're building suits of armor that can help them survive
Equipping all these suits with heavy guns and rockets
The armor is so thick, no one can fit inside**

**Some believe that fully automated kill machines
Can do the job as well as any SEAL or the Marines
But what we really need is the best of both worlds
A deadly robot warrior with a brain inside!**

AUDREY: Oh my god.

**MR. WERNER: The value of a human life cannot be overstated
I'm sure that you believe that too
If we can send a mouse to do a soldier's job
That's the very definition of the red, white and blue!**

**DR. CRAMER & MR. WERNER: Time to build an army of military mice!
Time to change the face of modern war
While our mice defend the American way of life**

Our precious soldiers can stay home!

AUDREY: I'm sorry, Dr. Cramer, but these mice are intelligent. I can't work on a project to turn them into weapons. That's completely inhumane.

DR. CRAMER: Without Mr. Werner's investment, I may be forced to close this lab entirely. Which would result in the mass sacrifice of every mouse in the facility... without exception. Am I clear?

Audrey nods.

DR. CRAMER: Excellent. Keep this exceedingly quiet. Wrap up your other research projects and focus exclusively on this one. Mr. Werner, let's retire to my office to discuss the terms of your investment.

He exits with Mr. Werner. Audrey levels Lorelei with a harsh stare.

AUDREY: You've known all along that Dr. Cramer was planning this.

LORELEI: You can thank me for the opportunity any time.

**AUDREY: I guess I'm not surprised at your deception
Steering our research in this direction
Now you're asking me to just play nice
But first you need to hear some straight advice
If you cross me one more time
You'll be in for a shock**

**LORELEI: You don't understand your situation
You don't seem to trust your own ambition
Think of it as an electric sheet
Activated underneath your feet
And when you freeze in fear
I'll give you a treat**

**AUDREY & LORELEI: I don't think you know how much I hate you
Just for being who you are
And it seems a cruel twist of fate you
Have followed me so far**

**LORELEI: You could stop right now and quit the lab
Change your focus, just steer clear**

**AUDREY: Yes I'm sure you'd love to steal my work
Shine the spotlight on your career**

**LORELEI: I am not an academic wonder
Thoroughly beloved by Dr. Cramer
But I played a part in this whole breakthrough
Surely you must see what that has led to
If you cannot learn to swim**

Get out of the maze

Roland enters, quickly observing the tension between them.

ROLAND: What's going on?

AUDREY & LORELEI: Nothing.

After a beat, Roland exits.

**AUDREY & LORELEI: Do you think you'll be on top forever
Do you think I'll hide or run away
You think you can push me like a lever
And predict just what I'll say
But if Dr. Cramer wants us both
Then we'll see who gets the prize
Even though I am extremely loathe
To be staring in your eyes**

**AUDREY: Even if we both were picked by Cramer
I am still this project's lead researcher**

**LORELEI: Looks like you are catching on at last
Finally the wheel is spinning fast**

**AUDREY & LORELEI: So you'd better just behave
Or you'll be in for a shock**

LORELEI: So you're sticking with the project.

AUDREY: I can't isolate the mutation that makes Romeo special if I'm kicked off the project.

LORELEI: I see. It's all for science.

AUDREY: I need to prove that he's not just smart. He's empathic.

LORELEI: You have no reliable way to measure that.

AUDREY: I can solve that problem. I just need time and resources, which I'll never find on my own.

LORELEI: And what happens when you do prove that your mouse is empathic?

AUDREY: Then I can demonstrate beyond a shadow of a doubt that selling these mice to the military is a vast ethical breach.

LORELEI: Ah, you're planning to set a mouse trap, are you?

AUDREY: And you're not going to tell Dr. Cramer.

LORELEI: What makes you say that?

AUDREY: Because when I do prove that my mouse is empathic, I'll make sure you get your share of the credit.

LORELEI *pause, nods*: I'm pleased you're getting to know me so well.

Roland enters again.

ROLAND: Safe to come in yet?

LORELEI: Of course. Actually you're just in time. I need to blend up some mouse lungs to study. Could you grab cages 19 and 20 off the shelf?

Roland brings the cages to Lorelei, who takes them to a set piece that has been in the background of the lab the entire show: a machine about the size of a dorm refrigerator, with a big metal door on the front labeled with a biohazard symbol. The machine has a large rubber tube leading out of it into a tank on the floor that is clearly labeled with a symbol indicating "inhalant hazard" - poisonous gas inside. Lorelei opens the door and begins placing mice puppets from the cage into the machine. Audrey turns to the audience in her spot as Lorelei goes about her business.

AUDREY: We use carbon monoxide in the lab for sacrificing batches of small animals. It induces loss of consciousness without any apparent pain or discomfort in the subject. The mice typically just slip into hypoxia without even realizing they're being suffocated. *Pause.* We use the term "sacrifice" to remind us that these mice give up their lives for a reason. For science.

Lorelei finishes placing the mice inside, then closes the door. She reaches for the nozzle to turn on the gas, but Audrey interrupts her.

AUDREY: Every single mouse in this room is watching you right now.

In a fury, Audrey exits. Lorelei shrugs. She turns the nozzle which produces a slow hiss that soon subsides into silence.

ROLAND: What's with her?

LORELEI: Never mind her. Dr. Grant, I've been thinking of a promising new direction for our work. Your "Methuselah mouse" project... it's suddenly very imperative that we breed these mice with as long a lifespan as possible. To give them more of a fighting chance, you might say.

ROLAND: "Suddenly very imperative"? What's going on, Lorelei?

LORELEI: I'm simply excited about my work. *Sudden realization:* Oh - Dr. Cramer asked me to cover his afternoon class. Would you mind wrapping this up? The latest file for the experiment is on my desk.

ROLAND: Sure thing.

Lorelei exits. Roland turns off the nozzle & goes to Lorelei's desk and rifles through some paperwork – then stops, realizes Lorelei has left her lab book behind. He picks it up, begins flipping through it. Lights fade on the lab.

Scene Eight

Song: "A Single Little Why"

Lights up on Audrey, sitting on a park bench. Roland enters and sits next to her.

ROLAND: Hi.

AUDREY: Hi.

ROLAND: Do you want to tell me what's going on?

AUDREY: Nope.

ROLAND: I read Lorelei's lab book. She's intentionally breeding for increased aggression now.

AUDREY: Why did you read her lab book?

ROLAND: She has an appointment written in her calendar for a guy named Theodore Werner. Have you Googled this guy?

AUDREY: No.

ROLAND: Cramer doesn't just want to humanize mice. He wants to weaponize them. And you're helping. Why? *She doesn't answer.*

**If I asked you an honest question
Would you give me the honor of your reply
I've only got one simple question
I'm asking you why**

**Now I know that I don't know
All the things that make you tick inside
You know that I'd like to, until I'm allowed to
I've gotta know why**

**It's not like you to be so distant
Even though we're not the closest of friends
I feel like I'm missing the picture
I can't see how this parable ends**

**Is it the money, is it the fame
Is it a secret you're always going to hide
You can trust me, I'll always be here**

But I must know why

Audrey has softened toward him.

AUDREY: Roland... I don't want you mixed up in this.

ROLAND: I gotta do something about that lab book.

AUDREY: You could forget about it.

ROLAND: I don't think so. *Pause.* Never thought you and Lorelei would become besties.

AUDREY: That's not...

ROLAND: Then what? *Pause.* Did Cramer threaten your mouse? *She looks away.* You do realize it's just a laboratory specimen?

AUDREY: Of course.

ROLAND: Good. Hard to tell with you sometimes.

He exits.

Scene Nine

Song: "All For Science!"

Lights up on Audrey in her spot.

AUDREY: The next morning, Dr. Warwick summoned us for a surprise review of the last two years of our research. She specifically requested that Lorelei bring her lab book, so I knew Roland was responsible. *Pause.* I let Roland down that day. Roland was trying to do the right thing, but I was so fixated on proving that my mouse was empathic that I just... let him twist.

Lights up on an executive office. At a desk on one side of the stage sits Dr. Warwick, reading Lorelei's lab book. Roland stands next to her. In front of the desk, waiting very nervously, are Dr. Cramer, Audrey and Lorelei.

DR. WARWICK: This is quite a lab book. Pretty ingenious stuff going on in your lab, Bob.

DR. CRAMER: What is the problem with doing ingenious research?

DR. WARWICK: The problem is that Dr. Grant tells me you've already lined up an investor.

DR. CRAMER: Dr. Grant is hardly a reliable resource of information.

DR. WARWICK: I know you and Theodore Werner are close. And Dr. Grant believes that Mr. Werner is probably quite interested in these elite, super-intelligent mice that you've been developing.

DR. CRAMER: Everything we do in my lab is in the service of humanity. Every technique described in that lab book has potential therapeutic application.

DR. WARWICK: Dr. Grant tells me that Mr. Werner visited your lab just the other day-

DR. CRAMER: Enough about Dr. Grant!
I can't believe you're listening to that garbage
I can't believe you're listening to that brat
After everything I've done to raise the profile of this small department
I can't believe you're listening to that
Everything I've done since I was just a lowly intern was for science!
AUDREY & LORELEI: All for science!

DR. CRAMER: At the start of my career
When I was miles away from here
All I dreamt about was rescuing the human race
From dementia and insanity
Alzheimer's, even vanity
I knew that I would someday find my place
As I rose in my profession
My talent and obsession
Led me to a singular breakthrough

AUDREY & LORELEI: He found a mouse gene with a special property
That gave him a clue about brain physiognomy
Which led to a treatment for hydrocephalus
As you can see he's just smarter than the rest of us

DR. CRAMER: Everything I've done along the way I'm proud to say was all for science!
AUDREY & LORELEI: All for science!

DR. CRAMER: Now we're humanizing mice
Betting lightning will strike twice
And I don't believe you understand the stakes
I know it isn't nice
To ponder rodent sacrifice
Unless you know the difference that it makes
We might cure meningioma
Or prevent a strange lymphoma
If your child was afflicted, wouldn't you care?

DR. CRAMER, AUDREY & LORELEI: The world needs a cure for polymicrogyria
And nobody wants to get oligodendroglioma
We don't need that holoprocencephaly
Or god forbid metachromatic leukodystrophy

DR. CRAMER: Think of all the orphans in the world who would be dead if not for science!
AUDREY & LORELEI: That's right - science!

DR. WARWICK: Fair enough, Bob. No one can deny your contributions to this university, as you

yourself have so eloquently reminded us. But let me offer you some friendly advice. The halo around your lab is fading. You should publish some of this ingenious research soon. Very soon. I can't protect your lab forever.

DR. CRAMER: I always respect your advice, Helena.

ROLAND: Wait – that's it?

DR. WARWICK: I have seen no documented evidence that your claims are accurate, Dr. Grant. But thank you for bringing this matter to my attention.

DR. CRAMER *sarcastic*: Yes, thank you *so much*, Dr. Grant. I do hope the budget cuts don't affect your appointment in the near future.

DR. WARWICK: Oh let me be very clear, Bob – Dr. Grant's appointment is absolutely rock solid, guaranteed to withstand *any* cuts the department has in store. *She smiles*. I like that at least one set of eyes in your lab isn't a fawning sycophant. That will be all, Dr. Grant – I'm sure we'll be in touch.

Roland grimly makes his way to the door, pausing briefly to try to make eye contact with Audrey – who ignores him. He exits.

LORELEI: Dr. Warwick... may I have my lab book back?

DR. WARWICK: I'll have my secretary return it as soon as we've photocopied it for our records. Just normal bookkeeping to prove to the university we performed our due diligence in this matter.

LORELEI: Thank you. *She exits.*

DR. WARWICK: Always a pleasure to see you, Bob. Come by for a visit any time.

He tries to think of a retort – fails – and exits. Audrey turns to leave as well, but Dr. Warwick stops her.

DR. WARWICK: Anything I can do for you, Dr. Whitman?

AUDREY: No... I don't imagine there is.

DR. WARWICK: I know what it's like working closely with Robert Cramer.

AUDREY: Of course.

DR. WARWICK: If you ever want to contact me, for any reason, please don't hesitate.

Audrey nods and exits. After a beat, Dr. Warwick picks up the phone.

DR. WARWICK: Susan... call the main office and have them send over all the visitor logs for a man named Theodore Werner. And then, figure out what the process is for requesting an emergency ethics board review... No, first thing in the morning is fine.

Lights fade on the office.

Scene Ten

Song: "Mice In Our Cages"

Lights up on a stylized mouse shelf – cages traced in light on the floor or similar. The first mouse we see is Romeo, sitting in a corner alone, stoic. As lights come up to full, we see D29-1 and the other supermice in the cage next to Romeo's. D29-1 is a grim, bitter mouse.

D29-1: Hey Romeo... how come your pretty little princess didn't come for you today?

ROMEO: I don't know.

D29-1: Maybe she found herself a sexier mouse than you, you think? Maybe she's thinking of checking *me* out. *I'm* the one with heightened reflexes and boosted strength. *Punches the air swiftly a few times like a martial artist.* Yeah, that's right.

D29-3: When are you gonna get us out of here, D29-1? I want us to *mate* and all you do is pace.

D29-1: I'm working on a plan, baby.

ROMEO: A plan for what?

D29-1: A plan to escape.

ROMEO: Escape where? Where would you go?

D29-1: My plan doesn't go that far yet.

Romeo gets up, crosses toward D29-1.

ROMEO: If you escaped your cage, you would simply be trapped on the floor below instead of in your cage-

D29-1: Anything is better than this cage.

D29-2: Seriously D29-1 – what's the plan? We've been sentient for days and we're just wasting time here.

The other supermice chime in.

D29-1: *I SAID I'M WORKING ON IT!*

And the other supermice fall silent.

D29-1: You think I don't know? I've been sentient longer than ANY of you!

ROMEO: Except me.

D29-1: Except him! So don't talk to *me* about wasting time! We're the smartest mice that have ever lived, and they stick us on a SHELF every night! And every single day we have to watch them MURDER another batch of us. *To Romeo:* You've got your princess to keep you safe, but what about the rest of us? *To them all:* I'm telling you - SOMETHING'S GOTTA GIVE!

**D29-1: We are mice in our cages
Bubbling with rages that we can't ignore
We are mice in our cells
Trapped in separate hells that we cannot endure**

**They keep us on a shelf - divorced from affection
They treat us like pariahs - like we've got some infection
We're the smartest mice that have ever lived
I'm telling you - something's gotta give**

**D29-1 & SUPERMICE: We are mice in our cages
D29-1: The world outside is tantalizing me
D29-1 & SUPERMICE: We are mice in our cells
D29-1: All I know is I want to be free!**

**I only knew my mother for a short while
I still remember how it felt to nestle up beside her
But then they ripped me from her loving paws
And she was gone**

**And I don't know
What gives them the right
Aside from being so much larger**

**I won't rest
Until I find my mother
And show her the mouse that I've become**

**D29-1 & SUPERMICE: We are mice in our cages
D29-1: What would mother think if she could see me now
D29-1 & SUPERMICE: We are mice in our cells
D29-1: We must break out - I just do not know how...**

Lorelei enters and grabs a couple cages from the far end of the shelves, which she sets on a table near the gas chamber.

LORELEI: Good evening, everyone. *She opens up the chamber and one by one begins putting mice puppets inside - to the horror of D29-1 and the other mice observing.* I'm afraid Dr. Cramer has decided not to continue Roland's line of research, a tiny little punitive measure you might say, so we won't be needing his mice any longer. And the rest of you have just gotten a little too old to bother keeping

around. I could sacrifice you all individually I suppose, but I'm going to the opera later, so I think the gas chamber is probably most expedient.

D29-1: Wait –

ROMEO: Those mice –

D29-1: I smell a familiar mouse among them...

ROMEO: I recognize a particular smell...

Lorelei pulls out a mouse that seems to be giving her quite a struggle.

LORELEI: Aren't you precocious?

ROMEO: Oh no-

D29-1: No, no it can't be-

Sudden, dead silence on stage. D28-2 enters in a harsh light nearby, gazing at D29-1.

D29-1 *at the top of his lungs*: MOTHER, I'M HERE!

D28-2: Remember me, my son!

ROMEO: I'll remember you too!

D28-2 *after a beat*: Remember me, my son!

D29-1 *to the other mice*: Help me! Quickly!

They all begin pounding their bodies against the front of the cage, sliding further forward a little bit each time.

Lorelei proceeds to put all the remainder of her mice into the gas chamber, cranks open the nozzle that sends poison into the gas chamber and lets it go for a few minutes.

In her harsh light, D28-2 slowly suffocates and collapses to the floor, dead. D29-1 is stricken with grief.

Lorelei makes a call on her phone.

LORELEI: Hi, it's Dr. Meadow... We need a pickup for incineration. Non-radioactive biological waste. First thing in the morning would be perfect.

She exits. Romeo steps forward.

ROMEO: D29-1. *Pause.* Son-

D29-1: Don't call me that. When they ripped me away from her, I was *alone*. Where were *you*?

ROMEO: Probably in a water maze.

D29-1: Exactly. They separate us. Torture us. And then, they murder us. Do you see now what these *monsters* truly do?

ROMEO: Yes. I see now. But *look*. Look at what *you've* done. Your cage is halfway over the edge of the shelf. *D29-1 doesn't seem to understand*. You can escape by knocking your cage to the floor! Try it! Try it now!

D29-2: D29-1, let's get out of here!

D29-3: D29-1, *hurry*, I am so totally in estrus right now!

The other supermice chime in with encouragement and D29-1 regains his composure. He rises and together they pound the front of their cage until it plummets to the ground. If the actual shelf from the lab set is visible, we should see one of the prop cages fall to the ground. The supermice cheer. D29-1 rises, studies his situation carefully.

D29-2: What is that smell, D29-1?

D29-1: Food bait, inside of traps. You must resist.

D29-3: I can't resist *you* any longer-

D29-1: You WILL resist! Our brothers and sisters remain trapped! We must free them from their prisons, even for a little while before they die. At least tonight... each one will taste freedom.

ROMEO: Wait, are you sure that's such a good idea? These mice don't share your strength, or your intelligence, they're just-

D29-1: They're prisoners, just like us!

ROMEO: They're nothing like you!

D29-1: Life with your princess has made you soft, Father. *He turns to address the entire room.* The only way to release you all is for us to push each cage off the shelf, down onto the floor! Some of you will fall further than others! Some of you may not survive! Prepare yourselves!

Music swells as D29-1 and the supermice mime climbing up the shelves and knocking all the cages down – again, if possible, the prop cages should fly off their shelves. Ideally mice puppets would spill out all over the stage – and somehow scamper! The last cage D29-1 approaches is Romeo's.

D29-1: You lead a charmed life thanks to your princess. I could leave you here, to live out your days with her.

ROMEO: No. If this is your plan... crazy as it seems to me... I will follow you, my son. We've been separated long enough.

The supermice push Romeo's shelf down, and he is free. They all collect together.

ROMEO: Now what?

D29-1: Now... we make our true escape.

The music swells one last time, then the supermice sing:

D29-1, ROMEO & SUPERMICE: **We are free from our cages
Free to face the world until they take our lives
We are free from our cells
We'll find out in the morning which of us survives**

D29-1: Tomorrow... we begin the *war!*

Blackout. End of Act One.

ACT TWO

Scene Eleven

Song: "My Chances Expended / All For Science! (reprise)," "No Love In Laboratories (coda)"

Spot up on Audrey.

AUDREY: I walked into the lab the next day, and it was... chaos.

Lights up on the lab – Audrey walks in and gasps in amazement. Lorelei is on her knees in the center of the room, panicked – the entire floor is swarming with mice puppets. She ignores Audrey as she frantically makes a call on her cell phone.

AUDREY: Oh my god... Lorelei...

A light up on Dr. Cramer elsewhere on stage, answering his phone.

DR. CRAMER: Yes Lorelei, what is it?

LORELEI: **The mice have escaped, they're all over the place
And I don't know what to do – so I'm asking you**

DR. CRAMER: What the hell happened?

LORELEI: **I opened the door, they're all over the floor
I let out a shout, they had all gotten out
I looked through the window, I saw all the cages**

Had come off the shelves, just knocked themselves

**To the ground, what I found was a really big mess
The mice in the place on the floor in a race
Running here, running there, but they can't get anywhere
I slammed the door shut before the mice could get out**

And I don't know what to do - so I'm begging you

DR. CRAMER: Slow down, you're barely making sense.

**LORELEI: Every single mouse in the entire facility
Is roaming 'round the place with disastrous mobility
The cages have no lids because the mice cannot climb out of them
But tip the cages over and there really is no stopping them...**

**What will we do, the experiments are ruined
The mice are mixed up, there's no telling them apart
My job, my tenure, it's all gone to pieces
My future in science, dead before it started**

She makes a sharp realization:

LORELEI *to Audrey*: I was the last one here last night. Before the opera.

AUDREY *surprised*: So?

**LORELEI: The mice are running loose and they'll all blame me
My research wasted, my chances expended
The irony here is I had to tell someone
Up the chain all about it, I can't be defended**

And I know what they'll have to do - and so do you

Lorelei hangs up, dashes to her feet and exits. Lights out on Dr. Cramer. In a daze, Audrey fishes her phone out and makes a call. Lights up elsewhere on Dr. Warwick answering her phone.

DR. WARWICK: Yes?

**AUDREY: The mice have escaped, they're all over the place
And I don't know what to do - so I'm asking you**

DR. WARWICK: Escaped?

**AUDREY: The mice are running loose, they're all over the floor
And Lorelei just ran out the door
She didn't do it, don't know why she would
But we've got no suspects and that's no good**

**What will we do, the experiments are ruined
I failed to act, my chances expended
If I had all the time in the world I could find
My Romeo-**

DR. WARWICK: Your what?

AUDREY: My specimen. If you could just give me a little time, I could find him and maybe-

DR. WARWICK: Thank you for alerting me, Dr. Whitman. I will take it from here.

Dr. Warwick hangs up on a frustrated Audrey; lights out on Audrey. Dr. Warwick makes a phone call. Lights up on Dr. Cramer elsewhere onstage.

DR. CRAMER: Please, Helena-

**DR. WARWICK: I can't believe I'm listening to this madness
How could you people let this happen here?
Every last experiment that uses mice inside these halls
Is done - what's left is punishment severe
Perhaps you could explain how you have squandered so much research
So much science?**

DR. CRAMER: We don't know how it happened.

**DR. WARWICK: You've crossed the line this time
You must really think I'm blind
But I can't abide betrayal - not from you
You burned me once, I know
That you always planned to go
Once you took what you could take from me, it's true**

**You have built a little empire
But you've taken things just too far
I've called the Ethics Board to smack you down**

Lights up on a trio of singers in crisp professional attire - THE ETHICS BOARD.

**ETHICS BOARD: We're the Ethics Board, and we summon you
To appear today and explain what's true
The charges against you are serious
And we'll need you here to explain to us
All the reckless things you claim you've done within the very name of science
So-called science!**

Lights out on the Ethics Board and Dr. Warwick. Dr. Cramer makes a phone call. Lights up elsewhere on Mr. Werner.

MR. WERNER: I wasn't expecting a delivery from you so soon.

DR. CRAMER: You may never get your delivery.

MR. WERNER: I'm sorry?

DR. CRAMER: **The mice have escaped, they're all over the place
And they've summoned me before - the Ethics Board**

MR. WERNER: Explain.

DR. CRAMER: **Helena has been after me
Waiting, watching carefully
But she never found a single sign
Of a secret deal or a grand design**

**But the mice have escaped - and I've got to defend it
My lab's in the spotlight, my chances expended
I cannot execute our plan
The lab's a mess and I'm the man-**

-that the Ethics Board will blame - ruin my name

MR. WERNER: They will do no such thing.

DR. CRAMER: What should I do?

MR. WERNER: **You should go appear, and submit to all their scrutiny
I will call a favor from my friends inside the military
They will not be robbed of their supermouse delivery
No Ethics Board can stand up to a government conspiracy!**

DR. CRAMER: **The lab's still a mess - what am I to do?**

MR. WERNER: **That particular problem's up to you
I know what you need to do - and so do you**

Mr. Werner hangs up - lights out on Dr. Cramer. Mr. Werner dials a number.

MR. WERNER: Yes, I'd like to speak to the Dean, please... Oh, I'm sure he'll take my call. Tell him it's Theodore Werner... Goodness, I'm terribly sorry to interrupt. *Abrupt shift:* Listen closely, you groveling shit.

MR. WERNER: **I have it on good authority
A dozen federal agencies
Are on their way to your small town
To close your doors and shut you down**

**They're acting on a secret tip
And when they hear the press will flip
It doesn't matter what they find
The scandal will be top of mind**

And I know that this is true, and so do you

**Swarming through your labs will be the FDA, the EPA
For good measure, just in case, expect to see the USDA
Thanks to sneaky students you might also see the DEA
The NIH, the IRS and OSHA will be on their way**

**Get your lawyers out of bed
This will all be on your head
You've got no time to spare, so say your prayers**

MR. WERNER: Naturally I'm telling the truth. Check your inbox. The inspection notices should already be arriving. Of course, I *could* call them all off... if you'd be willing to call off the Ethics Board review of Robert Cramer... Why? Because I believe. In science.

Lights out on Mr. Werner. Lights up on the Ethics Board – Dr. Cramer joins the scene, flanked by Audrey and Lorelei; on the other side of the stage, we see Dr. Warwick and Roland.

**ETHICS BOARD: We are the Ethics Board, and we're in session
We have a great responsibility
To uphold the highest moral standards
And protect the sanctity of-**

A phone call interrupts the song. Ethics Board #1 checks to see who's calling.

ETHICS BOARD #1 *to the other board members*: It's the Dean! *Answering*: Yes? ... Of course.

She hangs up, consults with the rest of the Ethics Board. Then:

ETHICS BOARD #1: This session is hereby suspended!

DR. WARWICK: What are you talking about?

ETHICS BOARD #2: The Dean has requested our attention on a much higher priority matter.

ETHICS BOARD #3: We'll need to... we need to look into... anomalies in... we've got some *issues*...

ETHICS BOARD #1: I think we can all agree that assisting the Dean at this critical juncture is a vastly superior use of our valuable time.

DR. WARWICK: When does this session reconvene?

ETHICS BOARD #2: We make no promises that it *will* reconvene.

ETHICS BOARD #3: But thank you for bringing this matter to our attention, Dr. Warwick. Your spirited defense of your department suits you.

The Ethics Board exits. Dr. Warwick has to contain herself from throttling Dr. Cramer out right.

DR. WARWICK: That was very clever, Bob.

DR. CRAMER: I don't know what you're talking about.

DR. WARWICK: I'm suspending your access to all laboratories on campus until further notice. All of you! Your key cards are dead effective immediately.

DR. CRAMER *flustered*: You can't do that – the Ethics Board suspended the session-

DR. WARWICK *harsh*: I only needed the Ethics Board to open a review of your finances. The ridiculous escape of all your mice, however, is completely and solely under my purview. You're out. Go home, all of you – except you, Dr. Grant. I need someone with demonstrated principles to clean this up.

ROLAND: What do you need?

DR. WARWICK: I need to know the exact number of mice currently housed in that facility. I need each one rounded up and accounted for. And then, per federal regulation, I need each one destroyed.

AUDREY: No!

Dr. Warwick casts a sharp look toward Audrey.

AUDREY *quietly*: Please.

DR. WARWICK: It would take months of effort from all personnel in that lab to try to return any of those mice to their original experiments. And a cloud of doubt would still hang over any research we continue with those mice – we will already be a laughing stock in the entire field of genetic engineering when people learn of the accident, let alone if we tried to publish with a straight face. We have frozen copies of all the embryonic stem cells that generated the most important mice in your experiments. It will be cheaper and faster to destroy these mice and just start over.

Roland exits.

DR. WARWICK: **There is no mercy in regulation
No quarter given for good intention
I understand your misplaced affection
Has driven you to a sad position**

**Every mouse in that room has lost its meaning
Stripped of its purpose, severed from its place
Grieving for mice isn't nice, it's just demeaning**

We've got thousands more frozen just in case

DR. WARWICK, DR. CRAMER, AUDREY, LORELEI:
There is no love in laboratories
Science fails at romantic stories

Dr. Warwick exits.

LORELEI: So that's it. We're out.

DR. CRAMER: Down, Lorelei, but never out. Audrey, do you think you could recognize your mouse?

AUDREY: Of course. I'm pretty sure I've been saying that for weeks now.

DR. CRAMER: We'll never find a way into the freezer to get stem cells out of the building – it's too locked down and we can't access the network any more. But if we can find your mouse - a mouse we *know* to be super-intelligent – a mouse that's just going to be destroyed anyway, in the middle of a massive amount of lab mouse chaos - we can salvage this disaster. We'll at least have his DNA to jump start a new round of development... off campus.

LORELEI: But we can't get into the lab any more.

DR. CRAMER: Audrey, you'll have to convince Roland to let you in before he starts up the gas chamber. You'll have to convince him to let you see each mouse before he sacrifices it. Can you do that?

AUDREY: He's given up on me.

LORELEI: Ha – you're the only thing he cares about.

DR. CRAMER: Audrey, can you do this for me? It's our only chance to save our careers, and our dignity...

AUDREY: I don't care about your dignity.

DR. CRAMER: Audrey, it's the only chance to save Romeo's life.

Audrey nods – she'll help. Blackout.

Scene Twelve

Songs: "A Single Little Why (Reprise)," "The Intervention," "On This Fateful Day"

Lights up on the lab. Roland has an array of cages all around him on tables and he is scooping mice puppets up off the floor and plopping them into cages, then marking scratches on a clipboard to keep count. Audrey is outside, pleading from the other side of a locked door.

AUDREY: Roland, please let me in! I could be your assistant. I could help you gather all the mice up.

ROLAND: Too late – I've collected every last one. *Frowning at his clipboard:* Hmm, that's odd.

AUDREY: Help me find Romeo and I swear –

ROLAND: Ssshhh, I'm recounting.

He begins mumbling a count to himself. Audrey impulsively tries a softer tactic.

AUDREY: I know you must think I'm a complete nut job for caring so much about that mouse... I just... don't do so well with people. In general. I mean, we're friends, aren't we?

ROLAND: Of course we're friends.

AUDREY: You're probably the only true friend I have.

ROLAND: Nice of you to notice.

**AUDREY: I never gave you an honest answer
I never gave you the honor of my reply
You only had one simple question
I never said why**

**I should have come to you much sooner
Even though we're not the closest of friends
I think I imagined we were closer
But here's where my imagination ends**

**AUDREY & ENSEMBLE: All the mice in the whole history
Of the world never made a difference to me
Suddenly I thought I'd found an answer
To a question I didn't realize could even be**

**Science is a beacon in the dark
And a soul inside a mouse is a treasure and a spark
Once you've got that spark you've gotta fight
Til you know you've got yourself a powerful light**

**AUDREY: That's the reason I can't abandon
The mouse I brought into this world
I can help him - if you will let me-**

ROLAND *sadly*: I can't.

AUDREY: I figured.

ROLAND: Federal regulations.

AUDREY: Mice in our cages.

She watches shell-shocked as he starts shoveling mice puppets into the gas chamber.

ROLAND: You might get lucky, though. According to my count, there seem to be several mice missing. *Trying to cheer her up:* Maybe Romeo organized a prison break. Maybe he escaped into the heating vents in the ceiling, and as we speak, he's organizing a bloody revolution against his terrible human captors!

He cranks up the gas on the gas chamber.

Lights out on Audrey and Roland. Lights up on D29-1 and his gang of supermice. They are peering down into the lab – and D29-1 seethes with menace and anger.

D29-2: Is he really going to murder every last one?

D29-1: Yes.

D29-3: I can't bear to look.

She tries to bury her face in his shoulder, but he forces her to look.

D29-1: No. We must all bear witness. From here, we can truly see how they operate the machinery of death.

D29-4 *cheerfully oblivious:* Looks pretty easy to operate actually, you just open the door, stuff 'em in there, and turn that nozzle. I bet I could make it work with my eyes closed--

D29-1: We must all bear SILENT witness!

Romeo enters.

ROMEO: You know, in retrospect, I'm seeing some real flaws in your big escape plan. Notably how stupid those mice are. I mean, look at them – they're just running around in circles like their brains don't work if they're not inside a maze.

D29-1: Be quiet.

ROMEO: Oh, and they walk right into those traps. That can't be pleasant.

D29-3: Why are you so heartless?

ROMEO: I'm just saying – I think it was heartless to release them from their cages in the first place.

D29-2: They don't understand the freedom we've given them.

ROMEO: Exactly! They were better off swimming mazes and pushing levers. That's what they were bred for. *Pause.* They're not like us.

D29-1 *emphatic*: They are our brothers and sisters, and we must all bear witness!

D29-1: **Genocide**

SUPERMICE: **Genocide!**

D29-1: **You're looking at genocide**

SUPERMICE: **Genocide!**

D29-1: **And we dare not hide at this abuse of power**

D29-1: **Murderers**

SUPERMICE: **Murderers!**

D29-1: **These humans are murderers**

SUPERMICE: **Murderers!**

D29-1: **And we need to intervene in this final hour**

D29-1 & SUPERMICE: **All of the torture that we suffered at their hands
Kept in the dark from our family and friends
Now we are free in the heating vents
They'll never see us coming!**

ROMEO: "See us coming" - are you crazy? We've got a chance to get out of this building-

D29-1: There is no way out, only down, back into the hell below. And that's where we *should* go - to make them understand what they've done.

ROMEO: But that just sounds like...

D29-1: **Suicide**

SUPERMICE: **Suicide!**

D29-1: **It may well be suicide**

SUPERMICE: **Suicide!**

D29-1: **To plunge to the floor and show them what you are**

D29-1: **Martyrdom**

SUPERMICE: **Martyrdom!**

D29-1: **I'm talking 'bout martyrdom**

SUPERMICE: **Martyrdom!**

D29-1: **But you'll go out big and let them know that we mean war**

SUPERMICE: **First we'll distract him with all our dexterity
Slash him and bite him with vicious severity
This is no time for the slightest timidity
D29-1: He'll never see you coming!**

ROMEO: "Bite him with vicious severity"? You only have, like, four useful teeth.

D29-1: *Super* teeth, I would remind you.

ROMEO: You'd be crazy to attack him directly-

D29-1: That is not my plan.

ROMEO: Oh perfect, a new plan, since the first one worked so well.

D29-3: What should we do, my love?

D29-2: How shall we defeat our mortal enemy?

D29-1: **Sabotage**

SUPERMICE: **Sabotage!**

D29-1: **You'll hit him with sabotage**

SUPERMICE: **Sabotage!**

D29-1: **Use your increased strength and wreck the gas machine**

D29-1: **Victory**

SUPERMICE: **Victory!**

D29-1: **You'll all taste the victory**

SUPERMICE: **Victory!**

D29-1: **And by your sacrifice you'll all go down in history!**

ROMEO: You may be my son, but I can't stay to watch this.

D29-1: Then go. Run to your princess.

ROMEO: Come with me.

D29-1: Our chance to be a family died with my mother.

Romeo exits in disgust.

D29-1: Now go, all of you, before it is too late.

D29-3: What about you? Aren't you coming with us?

D29-1: No. My destiny lies along another heating vent.

D29-2: You seek revenge for mother.

D29-1: I seek justice for her murder.

D29-2 *nods sagely*: May you someday find the land of milk and many cheeses.

D29-1: Thank you, my friend.

D29-3: It's not fair! I've only just learned how to love.

D29-1: I have pushed many levers in my life, but no lever has ever stimulated my pleasure center the way you did when we mated. *Pause.* Go, all of you, quickly! *He exits.*

Each of the supermice acquire prop versions of themselves – little fake mice at the end of wires which the actors can use to manipulate the prop from a distance. As the lights come up, the supermice drop down out of the heating vent into the housing facility. They sing as they drop in two groups – D29-2 drops first, across the room from the gas chamber, attracting Roland's attention.

**SUPERMICE: Comrades, on this fateful day
We come to join you in the fray
You will not perish all alone
We join you as your flesh and bone**

**And so, the supermice shall fight
And bring about a darkest night
Inside these walls we make our stand
Outside a cage – inside the promised land!**

Music ends. Roland studies D29-2.

ROLAND: Well well well, look who turned up just in time for the funeral services.

He approaches D29-2 slowly. As he is distracted, D29-3 and D29-4 drop down near the gas chamber. Roland seems to get close to catching D29-2, who suddenly slashes him and darts away.

ROLAND: What the hell! Listen, you little bastard...

Meanwhile, D29-3 and D29-4 crank the gas up on the gas chamber – and then they yank open the door to the chamber. Audrey is a horrified witness to the entire scene.

AUDREY: Oh my god... Roland, they're poisoning you!

ROLAND: They're not "poisoning" me, they're just annoying me.

AUDREY: Roland – the gas chamber! It's open!

Just then Roland is slashed again, so that he misses Audrey's call to him. D29-3 and D29-4 suffocate and die. Roland dances a little bit more trying to catch D29-2 – and then D29-2 too slowly falls to the ground, dead.

ROLAND: Oh come on, falling over dead isn't very sporting. Wait – why would it just fall over dead unless- *He turns slowly, sees the wide open gas chamber. Colorless and odorless. Damn.*

He takes a step toward it and immediately stumbles to his knees, already starting to lose consciousness. An alarm begins to sound.

ROLAND: Oh... let everyone know... the carbon monoxide detector did not pass the annual inspection.

AUDREY: Roland, please, close the door, just get to the door and close it!

ROLAND: Audrey... you might get lucky yet... we're still missing a couple mice.

He collapses, dead.

AUDREY *in shock*: Oh my god, Roland... I'm sorry, I'm so so sorry.

Lights & sound fade on the lab.

Scene Thirteen

Song: "If It All Ends Today"

Lights up on Audrey, sitting on a park bench.

AUDREY: **How did I make it so far on my own
Maybe "why" is the question worth asking I know
How could I be so blind
So wrapped up in my mind
I had one real friend and I just watched him go**

**And the mice have escaped - they're all over the place
And when I think of Romeo, I see Roland's face
But I know that he's dead
And I'm losing my head
Cuz I wasted my time breeding a master mouse race**

**But no - that's not how I feel
Romeo knew me - I know that was real
But what kind of future could ever have been
Shows what I don't know of mice and men**

**If it all ends today
How will I look back and what will I say
If it all ends today
Can I face tomorrow without learning to pray
It already ended today for my friends
God knows that's where this whole story should end**

**Can I start over and where will I go
There's so many damn things I don't want to know
One thing I never thought I would believe
Someday I'd find myself having to leave**

Alone...
Alone...

If it all ends today
With no second chances to do things the right way
If it all ends today
Can I let all the pieces just fall where they may

If it all ends today
How will I look back and what will I say
If it all ends today
Can I face tomorrow without learning to pray

ENSEMBLE: **If it all ends today**
AUDREY: **Will I ever look back**
ENSEMBLE: **If it all ends today**
AUDREY: **Can I face tomorrow**
ENSEMBLE: **If it all ends today**
AUDREY: **How can I start over**
ENSEMBLE: **If it all ends today**
AUDREY: **Help me, I'm leaving...**

AUDREY & ENSEMBLE: **Alone...**
Alone...

AUDREY: **How did I make it so far on my own...**

Lorelei enters.

LORELEI: Where have you been?

AUDREY: Hiding.

LORELEI: You're pretty easy to find.

AUDREY: I'm not hiding from you.

LORELEI: Audrey... Roland is dead.

AUDREY: I know. I watched it happen.

LORELEI: What?

AUDREY: From outside the lab.

LORELEI: The carbon monoxide detector triggered a call to the police. You were the only witness. Why did you leave?

AUDREY: No one was going to believe me if I told them Roland was killed by super-intelligent mice. *Pause.* It's my fault he's dead, Lorelei. I'll never forgive myself.

LORELEI: That's fair. *Pause.* They found a busted out grate for a heating vent near the ceiling. Apparently two mice escaped into the system before the vents around the lab sealed up to keep the gas in.

AUDREY *stunned*: They really *are* in the heating vents?

LORELEI: We could still find them. If they're trying to escape, the vents will lead them to the roof. If they're smart enough to get this far, they *have* to be ours.

AUDREY: Ours?

LORELEI: Romeo, and... I suspect the other one is D29-1. It may surprise you to learn that I believe I would recognize the damn thing. Such a fierce little mouse. It always looks right at me, as though it wants to tell me something. I almost started calling it Tybalt, just to spite you.

AUDREY: Why, Lorelei? What did I ever do to you?

LORELEI: It may surprise you to learn that before you came along, Dr. Cramer respected me.

AUDREY: That does surprise me.

LORELEI: Before you came along, Roland talked to me.

AUDREY: Wait... that's it? I just got between you and a couple of men?

LORELEI *frustrated*: No, look – before you came along... people thought I was a good scientist. I *am* a good scientist. No one remembers any more. Roland certainly doesn't.

Silence.

AUDREY: Look, if you find Romeo-

LORELEI: We only need one mouse to rebuild our research. If I find either mouse, I'm taking it to Dr. Cramer.

AUDREY: After all this, you're still just going to hand Dr. Cramer what he wants? You run the maze and he gets the reward? Lorelei, wake up. Dr. Cramer doesn't care about us. The last thing on earth we should do is let him rebuild *our* research just so he can sell it out from underneath us to the military.

LORELEI: But-

AUDREY: If we find our mice, we *hide* them from Dr. Cramer. We have to stop this now, while we have a chance. *Pause.* I know you don't believe you have a future in genetics without Dr. Cramer, but

trust me, you do. We both do. The two of us together could walk into any university in the country and rebuild on our own.

LORELEI: Why would you...

AUDREY: The one thing Dr. Cramer got right... he made us work together. And that made us both sharper. I was too proud to accept it at first. But I'm a scientist. I know results when I see them.

LORELEI: I see why everyone likes you so much. You're very persuasive.

AUDREY: And I'm right.

LORELEI: Maybe. If we find either one of these mice... technically we should have them destroyed.

AUDREY: You think you can actually do that to your fierce little mouse?

Pause.

LORELEI: To the roof, then? You take the north fire escape, I'll take the south.

They dash in opposite directions. Audrey stops and calls back:

AUDREY: Lorelei, one last thing-

LORELEI: I know. I'm sorry about Roland too.

They exit.

Scene Fourteen

Song: "Sad To Say"

Dusk on the rooftop of the laboratory building. Lorelei creeps onto the scene. She comes across a very obvious exhaust port for the heating ventilation system – and discovers a busted out grating on the ground in front of it. Immediately her tension level rises. She spins around – but sees no one. As she creeps forward, the actor playing D29-1 pulls himself out of the vent – then purposefully reaches back into the vent and grabs a MOUSE PUPPET – similar in style to the Romeo puppet, but larger, more menacing in its expression. The puppet leaps up onto the vent with a loud clang.

LORELEI: Oh. I see.

Lorelei turns to face him.

**D29-1: In a very real way you are my mother
Responsible for carving me from clay
You claimed that role from any other
When you ripped apart my DNA**

But sad to say

**I don't belong in your world
I've come to say goodbye
In my own way....**

He edges closer to her. She stands defensively, though does not back away.

**LORELEI: Look at you – you are my masterpiece
I've never seen a mouse so smart and strong
It was you who tipped the cages – you who set them free
I'm proud of you – I have been for so long**

**But sad to say
You don't belong in my world
I need to make you safe
In my own way...**

**D29-1 & LORELEI: Fate has blessed us with a little time to make our peace
Fortune left us a chance to reconcile our memories**

**LORELEI: Before I knew you
Life was simplicity**

**D29-1: Now – knowing what I know
I'd slip into the past and just be free**

He edges ever closer to her.

**D29-1: But I realize that time will just move forward
My real mother perished at your hands
I've sacrificed my chance for milk and cheeses
I know that I will never reach those lands**

She slowly reaches for him.

**LORELEI: But sad to say
You don't belong in my world
I need to put you back
Inside your cage...**

Audrey enters and quickly takes in the scene.

AUDREY: Lorelei, careful-

D29-1: Meet my super teeth!

And with that, the D29-1 puppet springs at Lorelei's throat and sinks its teeth into her. She screams and struggles frantically but he is too strong for her. The actor playing D29-1 exits, replaced now by a small mouse prop. Audrey rushes to help, and after much effort, finally manages to yank the mouse prop away from Lorelei's throat. A fountain of blood shoots into the air from Lorelei's throat as she collapses. Audrey summarily stomps

on the mouse prop's head.

AUDREY: Lorelei?

No response. Lights out on the roof.

Scene Fifteen

Song: "All We Gotta Do Is (reprise)"

Lights up on Romeo, crawling slowly through a heating vent. He seems exhausted.

ROMEO: It has been hours since I last tasted the sweet comfort of a grain pellet. These vents go everywhere and nowhere, past sounds and scents at once familiar and repellant. The smell of death is long behind me – I fear I am alone now, the last of my kind.

**Well it's been a real pleasure doing time on this rock
I'd love to stick around but this may come as a shock
I wish that I could see your pretty face one more time
The time we had together was extremely sublime**

**Now all we gotta do, yes
All we gotta do is
Communicate**

He pauses, stunned – as he sang the word "Communicate," we hear a complementary line sung by Audrey echoing through the heating vents.

AUDREY: **Find our own way to communicate...**

ROMEO: **Cuz all we wanna do, yes
All we wanna do is
Illuminate**

AUDREY: **Shine a big light and illuminate...**

She continues singing harmony as he begins moving, drawn to her voice.

**ROMEO & AUDREY: I can't believe my ears
Listen to the music
Erasing my fears**

**One thing I must say
I never thought I'd
Get home this way**

**Now all
We gotta do is...**

Lights slowly rise on the roof – Audrey watches dumbfounded as Romeo emerges from the heating vent. They are overjoyed to see each other.

AUDREY: You've had quite an adventure!

ROMEO *nonchalant*: What can I say – I'm a modern mouse.

AUDREY: I have to smuggle you off campus somehow or they'll sacrifice you like all the rest.

ROMEO: I'm clearly too awesome to let that happen.

AUDREY: I'm going to hide you in my coat until this all blows over, and I need you to be very, very still. Can you do that?

ROMEO: Does your coat dispense treats?

Audrey mimes stuffing Romeo in one of her lab coat pockets – as she does so, the Romeo actor ducks out of sight. Audrey turns to go – and is stunned to see...

Scene Sixteen

Song: "The Promise of Reward (reprise)"

...Dr. Cramer, standing in the doorway, having witnessed the end of that exchange.

DR. CRAMER: Dr. Whitman.

AUDREY: Dr. Cramer. What are you doing here?

DR. CRAMER: Dr. Meadow texted me that she was headed for the roof in search of her last remaining mouse. *Noticing her body*: I see she found it.

AUDREY: Yes.

DR. CRAMER: Where is it?

AUDREY: I don't know. It was gone before I got here.

DR. CRAMER: Naturally. *Pause*. I see you found *your* mouse. Came when you called it, so it *must* be yours. Hand him over and I will ensure he is safely transported off campus.

AUDREY: Never.

DR. CRAMER: We can start over with that mouse in a privately funded lab-

AUDREY: I said never.

DR. CRAMER: Not the best career move, I should think.

If you don't find the platform
You'll drown in the maze
There are traps all around you
These are terrible days

The parameters change
With the slightest of ease
When you stop being useful
You can't just walk free

There are tests within tests
There are punishments too
And you're not in control
Of this strange human zoo

If you want off the wheel
It'll take more than tears
And you don't seem conditioned
For the right set of fears

If they can make the Ethics Board of the university squirm, think what they can do to you, Dr. Whitman. But... it doesn't have to be that way.

We've got one single mouse that's smarter than the rest
One single mouse that passes every test
With that mouse in hand, we can start the whole thing over
The only way to pull that off is if we work together

Lorelei's death and Roland's too
Demonstrated I wasn't lying to you
Military mice - that's truly something we can sell
Effective and deadly - capable of giving 'em hell

The promise of reward
Requires a little sacrifice, you know that it's true
The promise of reward
Is a Pentagon paycheck for me and for you

Don't you want to be rich, free from your cares?
Start your own lab and keep all the shares?
Don't you want your precious little mouse to live?
That's a little something only I can give

The promise of reward...
...is the only way your precious little mouse will survive

AUDREY: The mice from your lab butchered Lorelei and Roland.

DR. CRAMER: Proof that we're headed in the right direction. And your mouse is the *key*. A mutation beyond comprehension. Hand over your mouse while you still have a career to protect.

AUDREY: I would rather kill Romeo with my bare hands than let you have him.

DR. CRAMER: I don't believe you.

AUDREY: That's a mistake.

With a swift motion, she pulls a small mouse prop from her pocket – and SNAPS ITS NECK. We hear a loud crack/pop sound effect to emphasize the move. After a beat, she throws the mouse corpse squarely at Dr. Cramer, who is too stunned to catch it – it hits his chest and drops to the floor.

DR. CRAMER: What have you done?

Dr. Warwick enters quietly behind him.

DR. WARWICK: She's honoring my request, to make sure every last mouse is accounted for, and then destroyed. Thank you for your diligence, Dr. Whitman.

AUDREY: Of course.

DR. CRAMER *bewildered*: Helena... what are you doing here?

AUDREY: I texted her to let her know where I was headed... and why.

DR. WARWICK: That was a very interesting pitch you just gave to one of this department's top researchers. Militarized mice, I'm to understand. Mice that can assassinate human beings... including two of your own postdocs.

DR. CRAMER: I had nothing to do with their deaths.

DR. WARWICK: I'm sure, although that's for the police to decide. However, when it comes to the misuse of this university's resources... in the pursuit of immoral and illegal profiteering within the military industrial complex... that's for *me* to decide. There are no therapeutic applications for mice that can operate a gas chamber. I've seen enough to have your position here terminated, effective immediately.

After a long, icy stare down:

DR. CRAMER: I built this department.

DR. WARWICK: And it's time for you to go before you tear it all down. The police are waiting for you at the bottom of each fire escape.

He exits slowly.

ENSEMBLE: **There goes the now disgraced geneticist-**

DR. CRAMER *offstage*: Oh shut up.

DR. WARWICK: Dr. Whitman. *Pause*. Have you ever wanted to run your own genetics laboratory?

AUDREY: Absolutely.

DR. WARWICK: Good. You can run ours until we find someone more qualified.

AUDREY: Really?

DR. WARWICK: I'll need to get the Dean's approval. He'll want to meet you and hear what happened, in your own words.

AUDREY: He'll think I'm crazy.

DR. WARWICK: He might. Or he might think you're brilliant.

AUDREY: Dr. Warwick, thank you so much. *Pause*. I'm going to-

DR. WARWICK: -need more postdocs, yeah, I'm on it. *She exits*.

Epilogue

Song: "Found A Mouse Who Knows Me (reprise)"

The rooftop set is pulled back out of the way. A pair of Mouse Children enter, and Audrey addresses them instead of the audience. The Mouse Children have their own MOUSE PUPPETS.

AUDREY: Of course... I couldn't tell the Dean and Dr. Warwick everything.

**I suppose I should tell you how the story ended
I suppose there's just a little more to be said
The mouse that I killed and threw at Dr. Cramer
I'd already killed by stomping on its head**

**The killer mouse corpse was stuffed inside my other pocket
Dr. Cramer never knew the switch that I made
I'm the only one who ever knew my mouse on sight
I guess that will be the Doctor's last mistake**

Romeo enters, operating his puppet.

ROMEO: That pocket of yours is a little snug for my taste, but I did find some very unusual crumbs to snack on.

AUDREY: The important thing is you're alive. And I'm going to keep it that way. I'm taking you to my house!

**And so a mouse who knew me
Was safely by my side
We gave up on experiments
I let him live his life**

**And as the mouse got older
He bred a few more times
Just to let him see
A family before his eyes**

MOUSE CHILD #1: Tell us another story about your days in scientific research!

ROMEO: You young whippersnappers have no idea. When I was your age, we had to swim and solve puzzles before we got any treats. If you weren't fast enough, they'd electrocute your feet. These days treats just fall out of the sky, like we're living in some kind of... magic... treat-generator.

MOUSE CHILD #2: But what kind of research did you do? Did you help cure a disease?

ROMEO: Of course not – mice can only help cure diseases by *getting* diseases first, which thankfully I avoided. *Pause*. However, I would be happy to describe a certain breeding program that was forced upon me.

Romeo seems to age in front of us, and his children help settle him into a comfortable bed of blankets on the floor. They drape his Elvis cape over him.

**AUDREY: But life goes on – and a mouse's life is shorter
We made him an extremely comfortable nest
A couple years is all that we would spend together
Before we said goodbye and he went to his final rest**

She bends and scratches his head one last time.

AUDREY: Goodbye, my little Romeo. I'm sure they have the best treats where you're headed.

ROMEO: And water mazes? Will they have water mazes?

AUDREY: Yes, I'm sure they'll have water mazes, too.

Romeo smiles, relaxes. Then:

ROMEO: And a dispenser full of cocaine drops, will they have that too?

AUDREY: I don't know actually.

ROMEO: Oh. *Pause*. Well, whatever. *Pause*. Goodbye, Audrey. You took good care of me.

AUDREY: I'll take good care of your kids too.

ROMEO: Are you going to do any more science?

AUDREY: Of course. I'm a scientist, Romeo. That's how I found you.

Romeo nods & smiles, and passes away quietly.

**AUDREY: I found a mouse who knew me
An accident of fate
And at the end I'd like to think
We did communicate...**

THE END