

DESTINY

Pitch Transcript

© Christopher & Kathleen Riley 1997, 2004
All Rights Reserved

(C) denotes Christopher

(K) denotes Kathleen

(C) DESTINY is a scientific thriller wrapped around a human drama about a very smart female psychologist who's made it to the age of 40 without forming a single loving human relationship. It's the story of the love she finds for a damaged child, the transformation that love works in her -- and the fierce battle she wages to save the child who first saved her.

(C) How did psychologist Alexis Patton make it so far in life without stumbling upon love?

(C) She'll tell you it's because her work consumes her -- the search for the genetic causes of mental illness in hopes, one day, of finding a cure.

(K) What she won't tell you is how her interest in mental illness began. Her mother fought frequent bouts of depression and schizophrenia. Her father had hoped that having a child would somehow lift his wife back to health. It didn't work. And Alex still carries the burden of that failure.

(K) She's grown into a driven researcher who buries herself in her work so deeply that she doesn't have time to think about the needs of her own heart.

(K) All of this brings Alex to an unforgettable meeting where our film begins:

Act One

(C) Alex is with Christopher Towne, the most incredibly gifted human being she's ever met. The genius of Stephen Hawking. The athleticism of Deon Sanders. The charm and good looks of Mel Gibson. You'd like him. But don't get too close because he's got one little flaw: he's a brutal, jam-a-screwdriver-in-your-ear serial killer. That's why he's on Death Row, scheduled to die at midnight tonight.

(K) Alex questions Towne about his childhood.

(K) Towne isn't interested in answering Alex's questions. He wants her to talk about her theory. It's a theory that has stirred up incredible controversy. Alex believes that the aggression of serial killers is caused by a particular combination of 13 genes. People who have these genes kill. Those who don't don't.

(K) Towne loves her theory because if she's right, the killing isn't his fault. And his execution tonight is unjust. Alex tells him his execution is an absolute necessity. It's the only way he can be stopped. He smiles and tells her he's not dead yet.

(C) This guy's scary -- even chained to his chair with guards on either side -- but he doesn't scare Alex. She moves in to draw a vial of blood. But as she withdraws the needle, Towne jerks violently and topples his chair over on top of Alex, taking her to the floor. The guards tear him away. All Alex cares about, though, is the vial of Towne's blood that has fallen to the cell floor. She reaches out and slips it in her pocket.

(C) Alex rushes back to her lab to meet with her research partner. Dr. William McKenzie. He knows more than anyone alive about human genetics. And like many of the world's top geneticists, he's been itching for a good reason to attempt a human cloning. He wants a Nobel Prize more than anything in this world and he'll do whatever it takes to get it.

(C) Alex is counting on McKenzie's reckless ambition. Because she needs his help on an incredible experiment. She's going to clone Christopher Towne.

(C) Outrageous? It's a simple equation. Christopher Towne minus Alex's combination of thirteen genes equals everybody's ideal man. Smart. Athletic. Gorgeous.

(K) Starting with the DNA of a monster, Alex is going to create just the opposite, a perfect little boy. And open the door to a world of cures for genetic disease.

(C) For McKenzie, if it works, it's his Nobel Prize, guaranteed. And if it doesn't, he's not too proud to bury his mistakes.

(C) Working in absolute secrecy, McKenzie prepares the embryo, clipping out the genes responsible for Towne's aggression and cloning all the genius, athleticism and charm that remain.

(K) But Alex needs a woman to carry the baby. Someone she can trust to keep her secret. Someone she can control.

(K) There is only one choice. Alex must carry the baby herself.

(K) Her colleagues are shocked when Alex announces her pregnancy. They don't know anything about the experiment. They can't imagine this cold, aloof researcher as a mother.

(K) As the pregnancy progresses, Alex prepares a room for the baby. Just the necessities. It looks more like a neonatal hospital room than a baby's bedroom.

(K) Then the baby's born. A perfect, flawless boy. But something happens to Alex she didn't expect. She takes the slimy newborn in her arms and is overwhelmed by the beauty and innocence of this tiny human being. And she cries. And her tears infuriate her. She doesn't want to feel what she's feeling.

(K) Over the first weeks of her baby's life, this cold woman fights her increasing attachment

to this child as she finds herself sitting and staring at his miniature fingernails. Smelling his sweet breath. Climbing out of bed in the middle of the night to make sure he's still breathing. Anyone but Alex would recognize what's happening here: she's falling in love.

(C) Then disaster. A competing research team publishes a study that suggests Alex and McKenzie have identified the wrong set of genes. Their research shows that another cluster of genes gives rise to murderous aggression. And those genes are still in the baby. Alex and McKenzie may have bred a killer.

(C) They argue violently. McKenzie tells Alex what will happen if news of the botched experiment ever gets out. Their beloved science of genetic engineering will go in the toilet. Not to mention their careers. They have no choice but to terminate the experiment.

(K) Terminate the experiment? Kill the baby? Alex knows the data says the baby is doomed. But there's a new voice talking now. Her heart. She vows to redeem this tiny son she's named Patrick.

Act Two

(C) Terrified of what McKenzie might do, Alex refuses to let the baby out of her sight. Until the day she leaves him for just a moment in the care of a lab receptionist and returns to find him gone. She races to McKenzie's office only to find him comforting the crying baby. Patrick calms in his arms and McKenzie hands him back to Alex, apparently unharmed. The whole encounter profoundly unsettles Alex.

(K) Alex works to learn everything she can about the childhood of Christopher Towne. She's gotten ahold of old home movies of Towne as a child. She watches nine-year-old Towne's extreme devotion to his mother. But also hears him ask unsettling questions. Like why is it wrong to kill? Who says so? And why should we believe them?

(C) Baby Patrick develops a high fever. An infection that responds to no antibiotic. Blood tests indicate his liver is being attacked by something that looks a whole lot like the hepatitis virus. But stronger.

(K) Alex fights like a mother bear, calling every colleague she knows. Her passion to save her dying son is contagious. They pull out all the stops, they use experimental drugs, and slowly Patrick gets better.

(C) But doctors from the CDC in Atlanta want to talk to Alex. It appears to them that Patrick's virus is a mutation, as if tailor-made to resist the body's immune system. They know Alex works in genetic research. Is it possible the baby was infected by something created in her lab? Any chance there was an accidental needle stick?

(K) Alex pulls Patrick's medical file and is surprised to find an unsigned consent form for a vaccination she knows nothing about. The receptionist says she put it there the day McKenzie took Patrick back to his office to give him his first set of shots. Alex knew nothing about any shots. She flashes back on McKenzie holding her crying baby and in that instant she knows. He

really did it. McKenzie tried to kill her baby.

(K) Alex races to Patrick's bedside. What can she do? Go to the police and tell her story? Patrick will end up on the front page of the Enquirer. She's got to get him out of this hospital.

(C) She makes it as far as the parking garage. Then McKenzie shows up. And as he approaches, so reasonable, so concerned, Alex panics, bangs down the door locks, gets the minivan in gear and rockets forward. A clean getaway. Then she hears the back hatch pop open. Sees McKenzie climbing in. Toward her baby. Alex checks Patrick's seat belt. Grabs the wheel. And swerves into a parked car. On impact, McKenzie's thrown forward through the windshield, dazed but alive, and Alex is on her feet with Patrick in her arms, running into the night.

(K) And now Alex lives with her baby in hiding. Reading every book written about the art of parenting. It's not an art that comes naturally to her. She has to study and mimic the mothers she sees in the park just to learn to talk baby talk to her child.

(C) And just as she's settling into her new life as a small-town mother, her picture appears with Patrick's in the junk mail on one of those missing children flyers. She's described as an emotionally unstable mother on the run with a sick baby in need of medical care. And suddenly the local sheriff's knocking on her front door and she has to grab Patrick and run again.

(K) Alex continues to pore over Towne's home movies. Searching for any clue that might help her. And she finds that when he was nine years old, Towne was befriended by a teacher. Alex tries to track that teacher down. And learns that he was killed many years ago in a suspicious hunting accident. An accident that may have involved young Christopher Towne. Alex comes to believe that Towne first killed at nine years of age.

(K) And now the race is really on. Because Patrick has grown into a nine-year-old boy. The perfect twin of the boy in the old home movies. A prodigy. The smartest kid any of his schools has ever seen. The apple of his mother's eye.

(C) Meanwhile, McKenzie's career has skyrocketed. He's started a genetic research firm that's made him a millionaire. But he knows that somewhere out there a time bomb is ticking that will one day bring him down. And so he searches relentlessly.

(C) Alex and Patrick stay on the move. And even as a nine-year-old Patrick asks questions Alex has heard before. Questions like why is it wrong to kill? Who says so? And why should we believe them? An eerie echo from Towne's home movies.

(C) And when he bloodies another boy's nose and Alex gets called to the principal's office, she doesn't know what to think. Was this just a normal playground fight... or has the violence begun?

(K) When Patrick is with Alex, he's affectionate and loves to draw her pictures and tell her she's his pretend girl friend. There could be no more devoted son.

(C) But Alex has to wonder if this is a parallel of Towne's devotion to his mother. And she notices that his favorite part of the newspaper is the obituaries, which he reads religiously.

(C) And when they happen upon a terrible car accident, Patrick watches placidly as Alex works to help the injured. And she turns around just in time to see him dip his finger in the victim's blood... and raise it to his lips.

(K) Patrick's fascination with death terrifies Alex. And he hates that. Because the last thing he wants is to displease his mother. But no matter how hard he tries this fascination is something he can't understand or control.

(C) Then Patrick develops a high fever that won't respond to medication. All the symptoms he had as a baby. Like other viruses that lie dormant for years before showing themselves, Patrick's virus has come back -- with a vengeance. His liver is being destroyed. Without a real cure -- soon -- he's going to die.

(C) Alex's tactics have to change.

Act Three

(C) Over the years, McKenzie's aggressive experimentation has paid off. He's about to realize the dream of his lifetime. He's this year's front runner for the Nobel Prize in medicine.

(C) Then a bizarre fax arrives in his office. It's an article clipped from today's Boston Globe describing the experiment that led to the birth of Patrick. It tells about McKenzie's attempts to kill the boy. And it reports that in Stockholm, his Nobel nomination has been withdrawn.

(C) Panicked, McKenzie pages through his newspaper only to discover that no such article appears. The fax is some kind of hoax.

(K) Then his phone rings. It's Alex with an ultimatum. He'll tell her how to beat the virus -- or she'll tell the world about their little secret. McKenzie admits a cure exists. But Alex and the boy will have to meet with him to get it.

(K) Alex knows better than to bring Patrick to McKenzie. She'll hide Patrick and meet McKenzie alone. But Patrick refuses to cooperate. He won't hide again until she tells him the truth about his past. Who is his father and why do they have to live on the run?

(K) Up till now, Alex has tried to save Patrick by controlling everything around him. Now she has to do something new and terrifying. Trust him with the truth. She reluctantly tells him how he was born -- as the result of a failed experiment, the clone of a killer.

(K) The news devastates Patrick. Who is he then? Her son? A lab specimen? Or a monster? No wonder this ferocious battle has raged inside him all of his life. It's more than he can comprehend. Patrick disappears.

(K) Alex can't find him anywhere and her time is up. To have any hope of saving Patrick,

she has to leave and meet with McKenzie.

(C) McKenzie is furious when he sees that Alex has come alone. He refuses to talk to her unless she produces Patrick. Alex refuses to do that -- and bluffs that if she doesn't return tonight with a cure,, Patrick will fax their story to the Boston Globe. And to Stockholm.

(C) McKenzie counters with news that there is no cure. Pushes her out of his car. She stands in the road, devastated, not knowing what to do next. McKenzie knows. He puts his car in gear and runs her down.

(C) Doesn't kill her. Just hurts her. And then throws her in the back seat and drives her to the hospital. In the emergency room, Alex has had enough. She starts talking. Telling the story of the secret experiment and of McKenzie's attempts on the life of her son. Doctors gather and listen with great interest. And having heard her story pull McKenzie aside and confide that his former colleague is even sicker than he'd prepared them to believe. Lost in paranoid delusions. Poor woman. They commit her for observation in the psych ward. Exactly as McKenzie planned.

(C) He makes sure the media gets wind of this sensational story, trusting that Patrick will hear. And come.

(K) Patrick does hear. And he does come. Weak and sick. And when he sneaks into the hospital and learns that Alex is in psychiatric lock-up, he starts a fire that forces the evacuation of the psych ward. It give Alex and Patrick the chance they need to slip away.

(K) Alex has one final desperate plan. It's late and she leads Patrick to McKenzie's office, just off his dark and deserted lab. She draws on her long history with McKenzie to dig through his files and ultimately uncovers a single critical notation: like many viruses that can't survive in sunlight or apart from moisture, this virus is designed to die in the presence of high doses of the simplest thing: plain old Vitamin C. They have their cure.

(K) But they still have to get across and out of the lab. Before they can make it, McKenzie arrives and locks the lab doors. And finally they are face to face: creature and creator.

(C) McKenzie intends to terminate the experiment right here where it began. And he's through playing around with viruses. This time he has a gun.

(C) Because of her injuries, Alex can only watch as Patrick and McKenzie stalk one another through the dark lab.

(C) McKenzie cranks open the natural gas valves located at each lab table as he goes, filling the air with deadly fumes. He's a good hunter. Patrick's better. He was bred for it. He gets the gun. Turns it on McKenzie. And has the chance to end the hunt and save himself.

(K) Alex sees what's happening and begs Patrick not to shoot. Not to become the killer she's fought so hard to prevent. She reminds him who he is. Not a specimen. Not a monster. Her son. A human being with the power to choose. It's a desperate cry from a mother's heart.

(C) But the raging killer in Patrick has been awakened and wars against everything Alex has invested in him. And as he holds the gun on McKenzie, it comes down to this: a trembling, confused nine-year-old boy has to choose. What will he do? Who will he become?

(C) Patrick backs McKenzie into his office. Slides the glass door closed. Leans close and puts the gun against McKenzie's head.

(C) Alex's world hangs in the balance as Patrick makes his choice --

(C) -- and grabs the doctor's keys. Backs out of the office. And throws the gun from himself with all his might. It skitters across the floor to the farthest corner of the lab.

(C) And now Alex and Patrick race to the far lab door and struggle to unlock it. The gas is so thick it's almost overwhelming.

(C) McKenzie won't accept defeat. He breaks through the glass and heads for the gun. He gets there just as Alex and Patrick get the door open. And in a last, reckless attempt to stop their escape he fires a wild shot -- igniting the gas in a fireball that consumes the lab.

(K) Sometime later, somewhere far away, Alex and Patrick are mending. While in Stockholm the late Dr. William McKenzie's research team is awarded the Nobel Prize in medicine. And for the first time ever, Alex has something new for herself and her son: hope.

Get help writing a script that grabs Hollywood's attention – from writers who've done it.

Arrange for a professional script consultation from Christopher and Kathleen Riley, the screenwriters behind *Destiny* and the multiple-award-winning film *After the Truth*, at www.scriptHollywood.com.

“The Rileys constantly made me dig deeper into the characters and go for the emotional truth. Thanks to their input I now have a fellowship at Disney and a script that gets managers and agents to call me.”

*Amy Snow
Winner
2004 Disney Screenwriting Fellowship*

Find out more about how a consultation with the Rileys can help you by visiting www.scriptHollywood.com.

www.scriptHollywood.com