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**What if your sins could be  
more than forgiven? What if  
they could be... removed?**

# **THE SIN GENE**

CABLE NEWS CLIP

A beautiful ANCHORWOMAN shakes her head as if even she can't believe the latest news.

ANCHORWOMAN

Scientists at Vector Pharmaceuticals claim to have discovered the genetic component responsible for all our anti-social behavior. They're calling it the Sin Gene and, hold on to your DNA, it can be surgically removed --

INT. BOXING GYM - DAY

Small neighborhood gym. Two men circle each other in the ring.

PETER (early 40s) moves forward, jabbing. There's a gentle smile on his face, even when throwing punches.

TOM (mid 20s) shuffles back. His worried mind is clearly on something else. He looks like a boy next to Peter.

TOM

So, what do you think?

Peter jabs, connects -- Tom's head snaps back.

PETER

Think you should keep your guard up.

TOM

About the Sin Gene.

They exchange rapid throws.

TOM

A world without sin. Without lust, greed, anger, violence --

On "violence," Peter connects twice to the chin, knocking Tom off his feet.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Peter and Tom stand by open lockers, dressing.

TOM

I'm worried.

PETER

I'm worried, too.

They button up black, short sleeved shirts.

TOM  
You don't look worried.

They slip on white collars -- both men are pastors.

TOM  
I think it's a game changer.

PETER  
We'll see.

CABLE NEWS CLIP

An elderly man (the EXPERT) sits next to the Anchorwoman. He wears a lab coat with the Vector Pharmaceuticals logo.

EXPERT  
-- not a surgical procedure in the traditional sense. Most of the work happens on a nano level. Genetic replacement takes nine days. Then you wake up, follow regimented DNA therapies for two months, and say hello to the new, improved you.

ANCHORWOMAN  
Can I get a little body work done at the same time?

EXT. CHURCH - NIGHT

A small parish on a residential street. LOUD BANGING carries over the scene.

INT. CHURCH FELLOWSHIP HALL

A dozen people (CHURCH BOARD MEMBERS) sit around a large table, shouting at each other.

MATTHEW, a middle aged man in a business suit, BANGS a thick bible on the table.

The two pastors, Peter and Tom, sit on opposite ends of the table. Tom shoots a worried glance to Peter, who shakes his head, smiling.

MATTHEW  
One at a time! One at a time!

The commotion dies down. Matthew nods to a SHORT MAN.

MATTHEW

Let's hear from the Finance  
Commission.

The Short Man studies an open laptop.

SHORT MAN

Offerings have dropped seven percent  
since the Sin Gene was announced.  
People without sin don't need God.  
This can put us out of business.

Arguments erupt again, louder than before. Matthew grabs the  
big bible with both hands and BANGS the table.

They settle into uneasy silence.

MATTHEW

Membership Commission.

A THIN WOMAN spreads out some papers.

THIN WOMAN

Only three percent of our members have  
signed up for the procedure. However,  
ninety-five percent want to know if  
the church approves, or even endorses,  
removal of the Sin Gene.

MATTHEW

Well, Peter? We're looking to you.  
Where do you come out on all this?

PETER

I'm still thinking.

MATTHEW

We need an answer. Would you consider  
the procedure yourself?

Everyone waits on Peter. He smiles.

PETER

I might. If I really believed it would  
bring me closer to God. But truth is,  
most of us don't turn to God out of  
guilt or fear. We seek God to find a  
deeper purpose. A journey that  
satisfies an unfulfilled longing. In a  
way, it doesn't even matter if God is  
really there. The journey that God  
inspires, that's our salvation.

Tom smiles, moved by Peter's words. Matthew rolls his eyes.

MATTHEW

Then why not undergo the procedure?  
Why not lead your flock through this  
technological Red Sea?

PETER

Because I'm not convinced the Promised  
Land waits on the other side. But...

Peter leans forward, lost in thought.

PETER

I've always been fascinated by the  
role of the sacrificial lamb. The bold  
individual who takes on an experience  
for the hesitant community. Maybe it's  
my turn to drink from that cup.

MATTHEW

So you'll do it?

Peter leans back and smiles.

PETER

I'll certainly pray about it.

CABLE NEWS CLIP

The Anchorwoman flashes her cynical grin.

ANCHORWOMAN

The entire world, up in arms!  
Political scandal? Environmental  
crisis? Nuclear disarmament? No! It's  
the Sin Gene!

CUT TO video of crowds from every culture: marching,  
protesting, celebrating. The world in chaos.

ANCHORWOMAN (V.O.)

Hundreds of millions gather to panic  
or party! Is this a sign of the "end  
times," a tweak on our evolutionary  
branch, or a societal sea change that  
could lead to world peace and, dare I  
dream, dinner with my in-laws -- ?

INT. CHURCH SANCTUARY - MORNING

A small sanctuary packed with a wide diversity of people. Tom sits in front, anxious, looking around at all the faces.

Peter, in simple pastoral robes, steps into the pulpit.

PETER

I haven't seen this many faces since  
our last All You Can Eat potluck.

The congregation laughs nervously. They look up with hope and trust. They clearly love this man.

PETER

"You shall know the truth, and the  
truth shall set you free." As I have  
said many times from this very spot,  
science is one of our greatest tools  
in finding, testing and knowing truth.  
I believe we have the capacity, the  
God nature, to understand everything,  
to unravel every unknown, including  
the mystery behind Matthew's 17-year-  
long bad mood.

More nervous laughter. Matthew, again in a business suit,  
folds his arms and rolls his eyes.

PETER

You're all wondering about the Sin  
Gene. What does it mean for us as a  
faith community? What does it mean for  
you as a parent or spouse, a teenager  
or child?

He scans their faces. They gaze up at him, waiting.

PETER

After much prayer, I've decided to  
walk on ahead and find out. I will  
undergo the procedure next week.

The congregation reacts in startled whispers.

PETER

In exchange I ask only this: none of  
you have the Sin Gene removed. Wait  
until you hear back from me. Then make  
your decision. Agreed?

People glance to one another, talking, gesturing. Tom,  
worried, looks up at Peter, who smiles reassurance.

Finally the congregation settles. Peter watches as, one by one, the faces below tilt up to him and nod agreement.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Peter sits propped up in a hospital bed. Tom sits beside him, wringing his hands.

TOM  
I'm scared.

PETER  
I'm scared, too.

TOM  
You always say that. You always say, "I'm scared, too" or "I'm worried, too" or "I'm angry, too" but you never look scared or worried or angry. Are you sure this is the right thing?

PETER  
No.

TOM  
Then why do it? Why not wait until you're absolutely sure?

PETER  
If I waited that long, I'd never do anything. Every decision is an act of faith, Tom. Think, pray, step, learn, repeat.

TOM  
I'm going to stay right here and pray until the procedure's done.

PETER  
The procedure takes nine days.

Tom buries his face in his hands, overwhelmed.

PETER  
You know what I'm really afraid of?

Tom looks up, hopeful. Peter smiles sadly.

PETER  
I'm afraid I'll miss my sins.

Tom stares at Peter, even more baffled, then drops his face back into his hands.

INT. HOSPITAL OPERATING ROOM - DAY

Peter lies on an operating table, prepped for surgery.

The ANESTHESIOLOGIST places an oxygen mask over Peter's face.

ANESTHESIOLOGIST  
Count backwards from 10.

Peter nods to himself, summoning his courage.

PETER  
10... 9... 8... 7... 6... 5...

His eyes flutter. His view grows blurry. Everything begins to turn white. His eyes close.

PETER  
6... 7... 8... 9...

INT. DREAM GYM

On the "10" beat, a BELL RINGS and Peter opens his eyes.

He wears a light gray shirt, light gray shorts, light gray boxing gloves, and stands in an all-white boxing ring.

Suddenly, someone punches him in the face. He reels back and looks up.

A SEXY YOUNG WOMAN stands in the ring. Her short, tight boxing gear reveals every curve, shows a lot of skin.

Peter can't help but stare. She gazes back, licks her lips.

SEXY WOMAN  
Come on. Let's see what you got.

Confused, Peter looks around but there's nothing else. Just the white boxing ring in white space --

BAM! Another right to the chin. Peter staggers back.

When he looks up, he sees a FAT MAN in shorts and no shirt, belly flab bouncing as he bobs and weaves, fists ready.

PETER  
Who are you?

The fat man lumbers in, throwing punches. Peter backs up.

FAT MAN  
That's right. Run, skinny boy!

The fat man lands three fast punches. Peter's head snaps back and forth like a punching bag.

He shakes it off and looks -- to find himself facing a HANDSOME MAN in elegant boxing gear, wearing a gold chain.

HANDSOME MAN

Look at you. What have you got to show for yourself?

He throws several punches to the head. Peter blocks, dodges -- leaving himself open for a blow to the gut. He doubles over.

When he straightens up, he finds himself facing a TEENAGE BOY, 17 years old. The boy charges, throwing punches, screaming in rage. Peter peddles back.

TEENAGE BOY

Coward! Hypocrite! Liar --

The teen backs Peter into a corner, throwing body blows.

Finally, Peter's face lightens, eyes widening in epiphany. He smiles and pushes the teen away.

When Peter steps out of the corner, he finds himself facing a MIDDLE AGED MAN. About his age, his height.

MIDDLE AGED MAN

You can't win, you know.

Peter laughs and advances, fists up. He and the Middle Aged Man go at it, punching, testing each other, both working hard.

Peter smiles, transcendent, happy, sweat streaming down his face, gloves up, loving the fight.

CABLE NEWS CLIP

The Anchorwoman leans forward, smiling.

ANCHORWOMAN

One of the first religious leaders to complete the Sin Gene procedure returns to his parish today. I'm not a church-goer myself, but I'd love to be a locust on the wall, if you know what I mean --

EXT. CHURCH - MORNING

News vans pack the street. REPORTERS and camera crews overrun the lawn, elbow each other at the door.

INT. CHURCH

The choir stands on one side. The last chords of a HYMN reverberate in the small sanctuary. The choir sits.

Members pack the pews. Reporters squeeze into every open space. A dozen microphones have been taped to the pulpit.

Tom sits in the front row, waiting, anxious.

Peter, in his simple robes, steps into the pulpit. He smiles, gazing down at the faces.

PETER

It's good to be back. Thank you for all the cards and letters, phone calls and visits. I feel truly loved.

The faces below shine up at him.

PETER

For my sermon today, I've chosen Paul's passage on the armor of God.

The faces fall, confused. Peter smiles.

PETER

Just kidding.

Everyone laughs.

PETER

Apparently, humor isn't a sin.

More laughter.

PETER

Since my Sin Gene was removed, I haven't had one sinful thought.

Excited and worried whispers pass through the congregation. Reporters scribble notes. Cameras flash.

PETER

I want you to understand what's at stake. So let me be more specific. I haven't had one lustful thought about Mary, our beloved organist.

He nods to the ORGANIST. An attractive, middle aged, shy woman. She looks like a sexy librarian. She blushes.

The congregation stares at Peter. Matthew crosses his arms over his chest, indignant. Tom's mouth hangs open.

PETER

Not one moment of rage over Matthew's holier-than-thou arrogance.

This time, several people smile. Matthew rolls his eyes.

PETER

Not one instance of pride that my faith is so much stronger than Tom's.

He smiles tenderly down at Tom, who stares back, shocked.

PETER

I still feel love and joy and hope. But I don't feel lust or anger or fear. I don't feel any anti-social compulsion. I'm not pulled back and forth by self-destructive yearnings. I don't crave anything. I don't envy anyone. All of those daily battles have gone away.

The faces gaze up in wonder. Even the cynical reporters have stopped writing. Everyone waits.

PETER

So how do I feel? I feel...

Congregation, choir, reporters -- everyone leans forward, eager to catch Peter's next word.

PETER

Bored.

Every face reacts with confused surprise: What?

INT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Tom follows a POLICE OFFICER past a row of cells.

Dozens of men sit inside. They look like they've had a rough night. Drinking, fighting, waiting for bail or trial.

Peter stands inside a cell, arms looped through the bars. He smiles as Tom approaches.

The officer leaves. Tom stares at Peter.

TOM  
You're... you're in jail.

PETER  
First time.

TOM  
But you're without sin.

PETER  
I was walking home from the market and passed a group of protestors. Before I knew it, I was holding a sign and shouting. The police came. We refused to disperse. Here I am.

TOM  
What were you protesting?

PETER  
I've had an epiphany, Tom. God doesn't save us from our sins.

Tom looks around, desperate.

TOM  
That's blasphemy.

PETER  
God saves us from our trivialities. From our widescreen TVs and computers and shopping malls. From our couches and our cars and our headphones. God saves us from the sidelines. Sin is our sparring partner, Tom. We fight in here --  
(taps chest)  
to prepare for the fight out there.

Peter points away, as if aiming at the whole world.

PETER  
Remember Luther's command, "Let us sin boldly that grace may abound"?

TOM  
That's blasphemy, too.

PETER  
He meant, don't hide from your sins. Face sin boldly -- in yourself and in the world. Get in a good fight.

Tom stares at Peter, completely baffled.

The officer returns and unlocks the door.

OFFICER  
Bail's been posted.

TOM  
Matthew's upstairs with the church  
checkbook. If it's a fight you want,  
you're about to get it.

Peter laughs and steps out of the cell. The two men walk  
toward the door.

LONG DISSOLVE:

CABLE NEWS INSERT

The Anchorwoman lights a single candle on a birthday cake.

ANCHORWOMAN  
Happy birthday to the Sin Gene! In  
just one year, eleven percent of the  
world's population have completed the  
procedure. Murder, assault, theft,  
substance abuse, all "sin" related  
statistics continue to drop, making  
your world a much better place and my  
job much less interesting. On an  
unrelated note, consumer spending is  
at an all-time high --

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - DAY

Run-down houses line the street. Signs shouting "FORECLOSURE  
NOTICE" stand on several lawns.

Noisy crowds gather in the yard of one small house.

Tom pushes his way into the crowd. Breaking through, he sees  
Peter standing on the porch with a dozen people. They look  
like they're guarding the house.

Peter raises his hands for quiet.

PETER  
You all know Mary.

He nods to a MIDDLE AGED WOMAN by his side. The crowd murmurs.

PETER  
When she lost her job, the bank  
threatened to foreclose.  
(MORE)

PETER (cont'd)

Now she's working three part-time jobs to make ends meet. She offered to pay sixty percent of her mortgage until she can get back on her feet. The bank refused. That's why we're here today.

The crowd stirs, angry. Tom quickly steps up to Peter.

TOM

Can I talk to you?

Peter hesitates, then follows Tom away from the porch.

TOM

The board has threatened to replace you as senior pastor. Matthew drafted a letter. If you get arrested one more time, he mails it!

PETER

I need a good fight, Tom. I miss it. I miss fighting my way to God.

Several POLICE SIRENS approach. Tom looks up, nervous, then turns back to Peter.

TOM

But when enough people have the Sin Gene removed, crimes like this will go away. We'll see the end of greed and poverty and all of it. The fight will be over. Then what'll you do?

PETER

I don't know. Become a farmer, and struggle with the earth.

Peter smiles. Tom stares at him, at a loss for words.

Suddenly, a DOZEN POLICE OFFICERS break through the crowd.

Peter walks back to the porch and links arms with the others.

An OLDER OFFICER lifts a megaphone.

OLDER OFFICER

This is a foreclosed property! You have received written, legal notice! You are all trespassers! If you do not vacate, you will be arrested!

The people on the porch look scared. Peter smiles at them, nodding courage.

PETER  
Remember Ghandi! Remember King! Love  
thy enemy, and stand!

The officers rush forward and pry the protesters apart.

The crowd on the lawn shouts angrily, on the verge of becoming a violent mob.

Tom watches, scared, as police pull Peter roughly from the others, forcing him to the ground.

In the scuffle, Peter's white pastoral collar gets knocked loose and rolls in the dirt.

Officers handcuff people and drag them away.

Two cops haul Peter to his feet. They twist his arms behind his back. He looks right at Tom.

PETER  
This is my prayer for you, Tom.

The words hit Tom hard. He stares, speechless, as his friend and mentor gets cuffed like a criminal.

The cops try to lead Peter away, but he won't walk. They have to drag him backwards through the crowd. He smiles at Tom.

PETER  
Get your hands dirty! Make a mess!  
Start a fight! Fight all the time!  
Fight! Fight and let grace abound!

He crows the last word like a victory cheer -- and is gone, dragged into the mass of protesters who turn to follow, signs and voices raised high.

Tom watches, stunned. He lowers his gaze -- and notices Peter's white collar, trampled in the dirt.

As he sits on the ground and picks up the collar, the CAMERA pulls away, moving off with the protestors.

Tom grows smaller and smaller as we FADE OUT.

- THE END -