

Light. Fantastic.

Michael Bettencourt

347-564-9998 • michaelbettencourt@outlook.com
http://www.m-bettencourt.com
http://blockandtackleproductions.com

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION

After an attempt to take his own life, Prof. Cluny Martin, prompted by his wife Ana, convinces Dr. Hugh Solomon to bring him into his experiments on manipulating brain synapses in depressed and addicted people. *Light. Fantastic.* touches on the weighty matters of addiction and depression, brain neurons and their synapses, two forbidden kisses, single-malt scotch, and the wonderful green dance of blue and yellow laser lights.

CHARACTERS

- Dr. Hugh Solomon
- Prof. Cluny Martin
- Ana Martin

Scene 1

Lights bump from black to bright on the office of a very busy bioengineering researcher at the top of his game at a prestigious university: littered but orderly.

PROF. CLUNY MARTIN stands, dressed for autumn, hunched in his coat.

Seated is DR. HUGH SOLOMON. Waiting.

MARTIN

Why are you doing my wife this favor, giving me this appointment?

SOLOMON

Because Ana gets me the grants that let me research what I love.

MARTIN

Admit you are at least "in like" with her.

SOLOMON

It's only about the grants. Let's move this forward. Show me your neck.

MARTIN shucks off his coat, takes off his suit coat, unknots his tie, takes off his shirt. A bruise and a burn ring his neck.

SOLOMON examines MARTIN.

SOLOMON

A sheet, or something not hard-edged --

MARTIN

Sheet.

MARTIN puts his clothes on.

MARTIN

I stepped off a stool -- in my garage -- and she cut me down.

SOLOMON

You knew she'd be there in time.

MARTIN

I didn't.

SOLOMON

Is that true.

MARTIN

I didn't plan -- no plan.

SOLOMON

The knife --

MARTIN

Workbench.

SOLOMON

Within reach.

MARTIN

Yes.

SOLOMON

So, knife and stool and wife within reach.

An active silence.

MARTIN

Your clinic --

SOLOMON

I told Ana I'd offer you a seat.

MARTIN

With depressives and addicts --

SOLOMON

It's connected to my optogenetics research --

MARTIN

I'm not depressed. A drunk, yes -- in AA.
Regular meetings.

SOLOMON

Good.

MARTIN

And in love with being addicted -- but not
depressed. I want something different. The
optogenetics. Not the clinic.

SOLOMON

A seat at the table is what's on the table.

MARTIN

What interests me more, Dr. Solomon, is in your
lab.

SOLOMON

The rat studies.

MARTIN

What the rat studies are leading to -- your
trials of humans for the optogenetics device.

SOLOMON

You're not who we're looking at.

MARTIN

Not a subject either. You need this addict for
your experiments in optogenetics -- my ode to
you, Dr. Hugh Solomon, to your optogenetics --
"opto" -- light -- how you stuff light-sensitive
genes -- "genetics" -- from two bacteria into the
brain neurons you want to study, one for an on-
switch, one for an off, then slip in fiber optic
threads -- blue for on -- yellow for off --
neuron on, neuron off -- and see how the
electrified brain feeds us our understandings and
meanings. Ode done. Do you have any addictions?

SOLOMON

No.

MARTIN

In your clinic, yes, but in none yourself --

SOLOMON

I don't need them to solve them --

MARTIN

Their appetites are the easy stuff --

SOLOMON

So I'm missing what?

MARTIN

A metric for ecstasy. Ecstasy. From the letting go -- the liberation of shame -- the beautiful pain of a confessed soul --

SOLOMON

That's not my science --

MARTIN

It's the science of the people at your table, though.

SOLOMON

They don't have a science.

MARTIN

You think they don't have a science, but they do. The science of synapses neither on nor off but hungry.

SOLOMON

This is not how we usually do things.

MARTIN

Your royal "we" is obligated -- wife, don't forget -- and I want what I want.

SOLOMON

Project adviser.

MARTIN

Ana has carried enough Cluny Martin on her lovely back. Philosophy gets some neuroscience, and you get data from the wild. What say you, oh obligated one?

They appraise each other. MARTIN gets his coat.

MARTIN

I will have you know that the time here today has not been wasted, at least for me -- I will let Ana, on whose behalf I have been pitching all my fascinating rhetoric, know how the rest of her days will now pass.

SOLOMON laughs.

SOLOMON

Lame.

MARTIN

I know.

SOLOMON

Obligate me harder.

MARTIN

Tell me how.

SOLOMON

Earlier -- the "letting go" -- "ecstasy" -- shame
-- I don't see the pleasure in such pain --

MARTIN

You don't have any addictions.

SOLOMON

What beauty in watching yourself hang?

MARTIN

You're already using my services.

SOLOMON

You haven't serviced anything yet. So?

MARTIN

Let me think about this.

SOLOMON

No ode ready-made for singing?

MARTIN

Not for how you've asked it.

SOLOMON

So when?

MARTIN

A couple of days. Check the events calendar on
the department website. We will suss it out.

SOLOMON

Last call for the clinic.

MARTIN

Not the last call I'd usually answer. Goodbye.

MARTIN leaves. SOLOMON sits, take out a small journal, and begins
writing in it. The stage fills with points of blue and yellow pulsing
lights.

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Scene 2

The pulsing lights become the lights of an early evening sky.

MARTIN seated on a bench in the university quad. He drinks from a bottle of water. Next to him sits a small oblong black box.

ANA enters.

ANA
Texted: "The bench. At 6."

MARTIN
And you came.

ANA
You knew I would.

MARTIN
Not sure.

ANA
Don't be a diva.

MARTIN
Mostly sure.

ANA
You knew. You know.

MARTIN
Good to be confirmed. Just water.

ANA sits, takes the bottle, smells it.

MARTIN
I know what I need to know.

ANA
Sometimes yes.

ANA sips.

ANA
Sometimes no. The bench. At 6. Here. So.

MARTIN
He's much in like with you.

ANA
Clu. Clu.

MARTIN
I am just saying.

ANA
Not saying what I came to hear.

MARTIN

I'm just saying he's got good taste.

ANA

It's just about the grants with him and not
gettin' in the pants. Helps he's a rock star in
what he does --

MARTIN

And you have asked a rock star this very intimate
favor.

ANA

Don't be a jerk.

MARTIN

I'm just seeing how things lay out.

ANA

Don't be a jerk! I know him just enough to
embarrass myself asking him about you. He made
that okay, though -- manners. I'm sailing home,
Clu, unless you say what I'm asking you to say.

MARTIN

We're negotiating.

ANA

He has an opening you need -- day and time is not
a negotiation. Clu? Clu.

MARTIN

I can't do the clinic.

ANA

Won't.

MARTIN

Right.

ANA

Christ. Christ.

MARTIN

I want to work with him --

ANA

Christ.

MARTIN

-- on his optogenetics device --

ANA

Shut up.

MARTIN

I didn't just walk out.

ANA

They're not looking at you.

MARTIN

Not a subject. A guide --

ANA

Tours have guides, Clu -- tours! Mountain climbing! Shit!

MARTIN

He studies depression and addiction but doesn't have either, so how's he know what he's missing? I am schooled in such [things] --

ANA

Stop it, Clu -- just stop. You've hurt my head hard enough.

MARTIN

He did do his best --

ANA

I said stop.

MARTIN

He tried to --

ANA turns on him in a flash and gives him a hard shove.

ANA

You don't listen! I said shut up. I cut you down -- what you don't know? I chose -- shut up! -- I took that knife -- I forced my hand to grab it -- I decided to cut you down, it didn't come -
- from --

ANA stops herself but not for long.

ANA

Shit! -- shitshitshitshit -- for a split-second I'm thinking -- you selfish son-of-a-bitch -- you -- one sin just rolling up after another as I'm watching you hang.

MARTIN

Damned by one whose "thighs are like jewels" --

ANA

Could you just --

MARTIN

Sorry --

ANA

-- not be --

MARTIN

Sorry --

ANA

-- the cozy bastard that you are --

MARTIN

Sorry --

ANA

Not automatic, the choice, is what I'm saying --

MARTIN

I know --

ANA

-- the choice wasn't heartfelt! You know me, Clu
-- you know me! -- that sin is eating at my heart
-- sin, you hear me -- sin!

ANA stops. MARTIN reaches out to touch ANA, which she lets him do -- clumsy, indefinite, but allowed.

ANA indicates that she wants the water bottle. She drinks, he drinks.

MARTIN

The cozy bastard --

ANA

More bastard than cozy sometimes -- let's just stop this --

MARTIN

My thinking about the guide -- may I? This thing inside me -- the clinic, maybe, would dig deep enough -- but what he wants to do -- with light - - hook myself to that -- something larger -- something not myself -- something not more cozy for the cozy bastard --

An active silence.

MARTIN

If I help him find a way in, then maybe I can find a way in.

An active silence. MARTIN starts opening and closing the jewelry case. ANA puts a hand on his to keep him from doing that. MARTIN puts down the case.

ANA

The dark cloud this time --

MARTIN

It puzzled me, too -- I mean --

ANA

For you everything in place.

MARTIN

Exactly -- happy, even. Then the storm front -- melancholy -- and I'm feeling you can push back. Or not.

ANA

And you didn't -- on my watch --

MARTIN

This is where I need the good doctor --

ANA

Don't call him that.

MARTIN

What in a brain shifts, Ana -- what was off now on, on now off -- I am with you, you are doing what I have asked --

ANA

Never again.

MARTIN

Yeah.

ANA

You just said, "I'll be back" and you didn't come back.

MARTIN

How does that happen? Why? Solomon says that neurons are just on and off -- but I think in gangs they offer permissions -- it's what I'm at the end of.

ANA

I don't know if this will be enough for me, Clu, even if he lets you do it -- my hesitation --

MARTIN

Don't --

ANA

Can't jolly me out of my Catholic -- heart full of guilt.

MARTIN

Taking on the sins of the cozy bastard.

ANA

What're you smiling about?

MARTIN

I thought I had you one night, you know, about your Catholic.

ANA

When?

MARTIN

You'd just served me the most perfect Rob Roy --

ANA

Vermouth from an eyedropper. But yes to the death of God? Just to take you home with me.

MARTIN

Thought I'd convinced you that the universe was absurd.

ANA

And the next day off I want to Mass -- remember?

MARTIN

Not even tempted.

ANA

Always told you, Clu, nothing "lapsed" about my Catholic -- we're all sinners, rule number one.

MARTIN

Looking for forgiveness.

ANA

Rule number two, referring back to rule number one.

An active silence.

ANA

What's in the box?

MARTIN

A little decompression afterwards, so I walked through the jewelry district -- just seeing how much of the business I remember --

ANA

What is it?

MARTIN

Thai bracelet, with the invisible set for the rubies -- I wanted to get you a cabochon-cut pink tourmaline but nothing popped.

ANA

That's an old voice.

MARTIN

Comes on like a worn shirt.

MARTIN hands ANA the box, but she doesn't open it, just handles it, then puts it down between them.

ANA

It'll make a great find for whoever sits here next.

MARTIN goes to pick it up.

ANA

Don't you dare.

Again, not sure of the way forward.

MARTIN

He's going to give me a call, one way or the other.

ANA

One way or the other I have to get home, Clu.

MARTIN

So do I.

ANA gathers herself, rises.

ANA

Behind me or beside me -- but I'm not following you.

ANA leaves. MARTIN toys with the box, leaves it on the bench, goes to catch up.

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Scene 3

Bench moves as scene shifts to MARTIN's post-lecture. SOLOMON sits on the bench, coffee in hand, another coffee on the bench beside him. He holds a small notebook. MARTIN sees him.

MARTIN

A little chilly to be sitting here.

Mental floss. SOLOMON

For me? MARTIN

Black. SOLOMON

Only way to drink it. MARTIN

Then it's yours. SOLOMON

Thanks. How did you know I'd like -- MARTIN

I took a guess. SOLOMON

Good guess. MARTIN

MARTIN toasts SOLOMON, who toasts back.

Did you hear the -- MARTIN

No. SOLOMON

Good lecture -- MARTIN

SOLOMON
"The crossroads of advertising and ethics." Is
that where you stand? About yourself?

Launch right in. MARTIN

SOLOMON
Who else knows, other than your wife and me?

No one. MARTIN

SOLOMON
So you give this lecture, even while on
sabbatical, even after what you tried --

MARTIN
That offends you.

SOLOMON

It puzzles me. A lot. Why not more distressed?
Why not locked away in a psych ward? Why is it
you seem -- so --

MARTIN

Sounds like.

SOLOMON

Self-assured --

MARTIN

Most assuredly not self-assured.

SOLOMON

Whatever you call it, it doesn't fit with what
you did to yourself.

SOLOMON opens the small notebook, flips a few pages.

MARTIN

Depends on what --

SOLOMON

Stop being coy. You tried to kill yourself.

MARTIN

I tried to find a solution.

SOLOMON

I said stop being coy. Right. I took some time
to read --

MARTIN

The novel.

SOLOMON

Yes.

MARTIN

Trash --

SOLOMON

And the business ethics reader -- a couple of
columns you write -- guest-lecturer -- on
sabbatical --

MARTIN

And my wonderful wife.

SOLOMON leafs through pages.

SOLOMON

And your wonderful wife.

At times he will jot things down as ideas come to him.

SOLOMON

The novel -- how much is true?

MARTIN

That's a slippery [word] --

SOLOMON

You can be coy if you want, but then go home and stay away from my lab.

SOLOMON's directness impresses MARTIN.

MARTIN

Yes, I sold jewelry. I was "in the trade."

SOLOMON

Did "the trade" require so much cheating? You and your brother did a lot of it -- the brother?

MARTIN

Genuine.

SOLOMON

Is "the trade" why some of your first published work is about deception? And that journey from "the trade" to "philosophy professor" -- you can see, I've got a lot to ask, but this is really what I want to know about, the point: the letting go. Tell me about the letting go.

MARTIN

The long way around.

SOLOMON

Whichever road gets you there.

MARTIN

In the prep for your human trials -- how do you factor in deception? Because my evolutionary theory says that human consciousness came into bloom when humans learned how to cheat one another. Two words: "I" and "thou." I. Thou. To mislead you, I first have to split you off from me -- that lets me imagine how your "thou" works -- and then --

SOLOMON

And then get inside that --

MARTIN

To get advantage. My brother and I didn't have to lie so much as just jack into people's invented worlds -- their "thou" -- which made it easy to misdirect 'em in plain view. Let me teach you something about trading in I and Thou. Your watch.

MARTIN indicates for SOLOMON to hand it over.

MARTIN

I promise to give it back!

SOLOMON hands it over. MARTIN mocks it.

MARTIN

Let's pretend this -- item --

SOLOMON

A watch is just for telling time.

MARTIN

Wrong. In any case, for my purpose, this item is your aunt's antique gold bracelet -- she just died or needs chemo -- so you come to me, not just with the bracelet, but with needs -- my home court advantage. On to my scale, and I tell you that your 18-karat gold is 75% gold, 25% crap metal.

SOLOMON

Which is right.

MARTIN

I show you the current gold price -- true figure, right there on the website -- building your trust -- and I convert it to grams -- I show you how, convert this to this --

SOLOMON

Why convert?

MARTIN

Make you a little dizzy -- one ounce of gold equals, exactly, 31.1034807 grams -- I could baffle you in ounces, too, since gold is in troy ounces, not kitchen ounces --

SOLOMON

Multiply either unit by point-seven-five.

MARTIN

But we are by no means done with that figure -- I deduct 15%, smelting cost -- for me it's more like two to five, but how would you know? -- and I might not because it's not bad-looking --

SOLOMON

You might sell it.

MARTIN

But I'm not going to tell you that. Then another 10% -- "my profit, you see, not much, I only get the one-tenth" -- and then to round off, I take away another 25% for the crap alloys.

MARTIN and SOLOMON look at each other.

SOLOMON

You just deducted me twice for the alloy.

MARTIN

And more if I don't smelt it -- but everything in the open --

MARTIN hands the watch back.

MARTIN

Your needs are like static in your ears -- they let me get the number on your "thou" and turn you into what you fear you are -- a rube, a mark, a loser -- manipulation of invented worlds -- I'm doing it, they're doing it, how would you cross-check and account for this in your data?

SOLOMON makes some notes in his notebook, puts it on the bench.

SOLOMON

Let me have your watch.

MARTIN hands his watch to him.

SOLOMON

Is this really --

MARTIN

An 18-carat gold Rolex President? It's a Brazilian knock-off, from the old days -- cost \$4995 -- well, not me, but it would someone --

SOLOMON

But you still wear the fake. From the fake life.

MARTIN

I like to remind myself.

SOLOMON

So why didn't the self-deception stop the
"letting go"? This is where the long way around
has brought us, right? What was your static?
Why were you a loser?

MARTIN takes his time.

MARTIN

Of late. I have been visited. By. This.
Voice. Interrogative. Not pushy. Not bullying.
Not. Despairing. Just. Plain. Brief.

MARTIN takes an inhale, then an exhale.

MARTIN

"What is the point?" it asks. Four single-
syllable words: what is the --

SOLOMON

Do you try to answer it?

MARTIN

Doesn't feel like that kind of question. Like an
answer would miss the point.

SOLOMON

But it doesn't leave you untouched.

MARTIN

Dr. Solomon, I am a drunk working on the puzzle
of my sobriety. I'm not convinced about
sobriety, you know. But its anti-Christ,
Inebriation? Despite its many gifts -- so I have
chosen the slow road to Damascus of the AA
meeting.

SOLOMON

"What is the point?" -- is the question about
being sober?

MARTIN

The question has been visiting me more and more
as the sobriety has taken its "toll" -- such a
toll! -- clearer thinking, a steadier pulse,
sleep not a stupor, an adult perspective --

SOLOMON

How terrible.

MARTIN

But all this -- goodness -- a gift, I recognize all that -- but it's aggravated another -- warp in my temperament, this melancholy that sweeps in -- Ana and I call it the "dark cloud" -- in any case, about ten days or so ago, in it sweeps, with a four-syllable voice --

SOLOMON

And we come to that night.

MARTIN doesn't answer right away. SOLOMON plays with the watch.

SOLOMON

Professor Martin, it's not like there is another time we will interview about this.

MARTIN

The whole day -- the question pocking me like the tip of a nail: "What is the point?" "What is the point?" How do you explain the spark of permission -- the blue light -- that suddenly crackled out of this wetware? The permission to avoid the question altogether.

SOLOMON

This plain question of yours is also about being an adult, you know.

MARTIN

My plain question is also about futility because what answer could ever answer the question.

SOLOMON

Like I said, being an adult.

MARTIN

"Permission to avoid" was how I read it, not "futility makes me a better adult." If this is the adulthood that sober had gifted me --

SOLOMON

Have you ever thought about what the shift from jewelry to philosophy did to you?

MARTIN

To me?

SOLOMON

I'm sure for you, but, yes, to you --

SOLOMON holds up the watch.

SOLOMON

-- shifts in identity, in habits of pretending --
authenticity -- "the point" -- it was all a kind
of sobering up --

MARTIN indicates that he wants the watch back. SOLOMON hands it to
him. MARTIN puts it back on.

MARTIN

All I know is -- and I'll admit what I know is
full of -- holes -- that on that night, sober
brain in a blue buzz and a black cloud with this
nagging voice in my ear, I wanted out.

SOLOMON

Except for the knocked-over stool and nearby
blade. And wife. I can't keep those out of the
account.

MARTIN

Meaning.

SOLOMON

Meaning that what we know is full of holes.

MARTIN

I know why I chose to hang myself -- why "What is
the point" had no more point -- not the best but
not an unreasonable choice. Guess.

SOLOMON

You're the guide.

MARTIN

To find the peace that passeth understanding. A
short road to Damascus.

SOLOMON

Huh.

MARTIN

Did I just hit on something?

SOLOMON

There are times in the clinic when I listen to
such suffering and wonder what it is that keeps
their "thou," I don't know, still in the game.

MARTIN

Same thought when I look at a ravaged beggar: I
want to ask, "Is it really that precious?" But
unlike me, you're committed to keeping them in
the game.

SOLOMON

Of course. Why suggest anything else? It's what pushes me to go for the optogenetics devices.

MARTIN

And your lizard part?

SOLOMON

I don't --

MARTIN

The night terrors? The flop sweats? My four apocalyptic syllables -- "what is [the]"

SOLOMON

Who hasn't had them? But just another reason to build the devices.

MARTIN

I'm not sure if you're blessed or not.

SOLOMON

I go for blessed.

SOLOMON stands, puts his coffee cup on the bench.

SOLOMON

I've made a note here.

MARTIN stands.

SOLOMON

Can you get me into an open AA meeting?

MARTIN

That shouldn't be a problem.

SOLOMON

Let me know when, then. In the meantime, I'll talk you over with my team.

MARTIN

That's only fair.

SOLOMON

So --

MARTIN

Enjoy.

SOLOMON starts off, then turns back.

SOLOMON

The aunt's bracelet -- did you ever just want to stop, cold, and say to the person "I'm sorry, I'm just selling you bullshit"?

MARTIN

Often.

SOLOMON

But you didn't.

MARTIN

In those days I thought they deserved to be cheated -- most of them, at least. They wanted to believe that some uncommon metal or some pressurized carbon would make them something they weren't. I despised that. Then.

SOLOMON

And profited thereby.

MARTIN

Then.

SOLOMON

And your Brazilian knock-off.

MARTIN

Reminds me to apply to myself what I'd thought about them. The fake keeps me honest.

They eye each other, and then SOLOMON laughs. MARTIN laughs.

SOLOMON

Call me tomorrow.

MARTIN

Consider yourself called.

And off SOLOMON goes. MARTIN sits back down on the bench. He takes a sip of his coffee but finds it gone cold. He checks his watch, adjusts it on his wrist. He looks at SOLOMON's empty coffee cup, then places his own cup next to it. He looks at both cups, then gazes outward into the middle distance.

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Scene 4

ANA's office -- ANA is not there. SOLOMON walks in and sits. ANA enters, folders in her arms. SOLOMON stands.

ANA wears a nice bracelet. A green apple sits on her desk.

SOLOMON

Here, let me --

ANA

Nope, got 'em -- please, sit.

SOLOMON

On my way back to the lab --

ANA

You're a lucky man -- caught me between meetings.

SOLOMON

Meetings, bloody meetings, it looks like --

ANA

My curse --

ANA puts the folders on the desk, sits.

ANA

Annual appeal.

SOLOMON

Already.

ANA

Leaves get red, squirrels bag acorns -- and I hit up people for an early Christmas. Your name's in here, in case you were worried --

SOLOMON

Not worried any more --

ANA

Now one less on your to-do list.

SOLOMON

My too-long-to-do list --

ANA

Aw.

ANA makes the small violin gesture -- or a playful equivalent. She waits. SOLOMON fidgets.

ANA

So -- just stopping by --

SOLOMON

I just had coffee with your husband.

ANA

After his lecture.

SOLOMON

Hmm.

An active silence.

SOLOMON

You've read the novel.

ANA

From the first time he wrote down the first page.

SOLOMON

Did you know your husband when he -- I'm sorry, I just --

ANA

My husband and I met as bartender and drinker -- drinker, him --

SOLOMON

Yes --

ANA

At one of the jewelry shows -- extra self-improvement money for the townie trying out college -- a day like no other --

SOLOMON

With his brother --

ANA

They squired me around -- I met some spiky characters -- did a few gold buys for the trust fund. But Clu was already moving on -- and so did I.

SOLOMON

He did a "buy" on me --

ANA

The seventy-five percent. "Slick," Dr. Solomon, slick as baby -- well, slick as lavender oil -- that was Clu -- slick and, what?, fragrant?

ANA laughs, gives SOLOMON a searching look, which SOLOMON returns.

ANA

I shouldn't've asked you, right?

SOLOMON

He's been -- I don't know -- entertaining? -- fragrant? It's not how I usually deal with people -- it's put me in a --

ANA

What I'm trying to get at --

SOLOMON

Not what I'm getting at --

ANA

Then what?

SOLOMON

Let's see. In the past two days I have been out in the wild! -- lab free! -- and reading -- for pleasure --

ANA

Wonder of wonders --

SOLOMON

-- because of what you asked --

ANA

Early Christmas.

SOLOMON

Fun -- yes.

The "but" hangs in the air.

SOLOMON

Also something different. He told me I have an obligation.

ANA

You don't.

SOLOMON

But --

SOLOMON makes a fishing gesture, reeling in. ANA half-smiles.

SOLOMON

You know.

ANA

He's made you go "hmm."

SOLOMON

Hmm.

ANA

You go in, a ready hand --

SOLOMON

The clinic --

ANA

You lean -- but he leans --

SOLOMON

You go "hmm" --

ANA

Hardly feel the hook. He told me about his "guide" offer.

SOLOMON

I'll talk him over with my team. But I think he'll be coming through my door.

An active silence.

SOLOMON

I should go -- you're [busy] --

ANA

Dr. Solomon. What do you think I asked for when I asked you to meet with Clu? Really?

SOLOMON

But I failed --

ANA

Too early to tell.

ANA ponders what to say, then says it.

ANA

I cut him down, I know you know that, but you have to understand one thing about why I did what I did.

SOLOMON picks up the green apple and fidgets with it.

SOLOMON

You don't [have to] --

ANA

After I let him slump to the floor -- I slapped him. I mean hard and I mean twice. And the two bring him back -- but here's what you're going to hear: if the two hadn't've done it, I wasn't sure I'd've gone for a third.

SOLOMON puts the apple back on the desk.

ANA

In other words, I wasn't just asking you for him.

SOLOMON

He knew -- a lot about the optogenetics work -- something in it seemed to -- to set a hook -- does it interest you?

ANA

Yes.

ANA points to the apple.

ANA

My lunch. That apple.

SOLOMON

I'm sorry.

ANA

You didn't bruise it. Go on -- take it.

SOLOMON picks up the apple.

ANA

That's what you're doing in your lab, know it or not, why Clu has glommed onto it: the Garden of Eden before the eaten apple -- that's the device you're working on.

SOLOMON

I don't --

ANA

Sin. And release. What's the point without getting some of that? And why look surprised? Not like sin ever ran out. It's about yearning -
-

SOLOMON

In you?

ANA

Higher, please! All of us. If the soul could not so much be at the mercy of these brain sparks -- a little redemption -- a cleansing -- a release --

SOLOMON

But brain neurons are on or off -- not "redemption"/"sin" --

ANA

But when they gang-up? Look out! If we can handle the on and the off and the ganging up -- I call that a state of grace, a "point," Garden before the apple.

SOLOMON

Forgiveness.

ANA

How's that word taste?

ANA points to her folders.

ANA

Isn't forgiveness the annual appeal of annual appeals, the one we're always running? Annual? Hell, daily!

SOLOMON

I cannot disagree -- especially from such a messenger.

ANA

An angel of annunciation, that's me.

SOLOMON

Well.

ANA

As my mom used to say, "well" is a deep subject. Look, if Clu gets his help, Dr. Solomon, I get my mine. He's a complicated gift that way.

SOLOMON

Well.

ANA

Deep.

SOLOMON

I have to go --

ANA

And so do I --

There is a moment in which they have to decide to hug politely or shake hands. They shake hands.

SOLOMON hands her back the apple.

ANA

Keep it. Angel gift. And your name's in the mail. Now go to your bloody meetings and I'll go to mine --

SOLOMON laughs -- and it surprises him that he laughs. ANA laughs with him, though at a lower temperature.

SOLOMON

I'll reinforce the doorframe -- goodbye.

SOLOMON leaves. ANA pulls another apple and a knife from a desk drawer. ANA slices off a piece of the apple. She eats it. She slices another, eats it. Another. Another. She eats as if she definitely has a third slap in her.

* * * * *

Scene 5

An antiseptic light buzzes on: lab light.

The three enter, coats on, SOLOMON holding a scrum of keys. Perhaps the sound of a door being unlocked, opened, closed.

MARTIN

So this is the vaunted --

SOLOMON

Only the outer -- the actual work -- c'mon.

MARTIN

(to ANA)

What your money buys.

SOLOMON

This is what the money buys.

ANA

It's a seventy-five percent.

MARTIN

No it's [not] --

The lab light goes out, comes up on a second part of the stage. A table, chairs, perhaps a computer -- anything else to indicate "lab."

MARTIN

In here.

SOLOMON

Yes. Let me take your coats --

MARTIN shucks his off, hands it to SOLOMON. ANA keeps hers on.

MARTIN

So.

SOLOMON

I want to show you both something we managed to do a little while ago, just to show -- with brain neurons -- the rats' and then maybe yours --

ANA

(to CLU)

There you go.

MARTIN
Interspecies coöperation.

SOLOMON
Not --

MARTIN
There's hope for us yet.

ANA
You shouldn't get so inclusive about your
species, Clu.

SOLOMON
Not like they really coöperate, Professor --

SOLOMON brings a chair to ANA.

MARTIN
(to ANA)
You're trying to be as quiet as a church mouse
but it's not working --

SOLOMON brings over a chair for MARTIN as well. MARTIN sits. SOLOMON
pops open a laptop -- the video will play in front of them.

SOLOMON
It's not long, but it's great.

MARTIN
Giddy. Popcorn!

ANA
Clu --

MARTIN
No budget, eh?

ANA
Cozy, cozy --

SOLOMON
Just watch.

SOLOMON presses go, then pauses it.

SOLOMON
Now, what do you see?

MARTIN
Rat in a bathtub --

SOLOMON
Storage pen. What else?

MARTIN
In its head.

SOLOMON
Fiber-optic connection.

MARTIN
Like a pencil eraser -- no, a --

SOLOMON
What color is it?

MARTIN
What?

SOLOMON
The connection.

MARTIN
Clear. Plastic.

MARTIN looks over to ANA.

MARTIN
Right?

ANA
Speak for both of us.

SOLOMON
Now, watch.

SOLOMON presses go.

SOLOMON
Rat wanders like a rat does -- the connection?

MARTIN
Still clear.

SOLOMON
And now?

MARTIN
Blue -- hell, look at that!

SOLOMON
Circling continuously to its left --

MARTIN
Round and round --

SOLOMON
And now?

MARTIN

Clear --

SOLOMON

And the rat stops, looks around --

MARTIN

"What the hell just happened to me?"

SOLOMON presses pause.

SOLOMON

More importantly, no damage -- a blue laser through the fiber-optic --

MARTIN

I got that --

SOLOMON

The rat's right-side motor cortex -- right brain, left side. But better? Only affected the on/off switch -- not any other cell, the way a deep-brain electrode --

MARTIN

Targeted.

SOLOMON

Targeted.

ANA

You two are acting like a one-legged man who's found his second leg. Look at the two of you.

SOLOMON hits another key -- the video changes.

SOLOMON

Now this.

MARTIN

What are we watching?

SOLOMON

A depressed mouse.

MARTIN

How do you depress a mouse?

SOLOMON

"Social defeat" experiences -- affects the prefrontal cortex --

MARTIN

And then --

SOLOMON goes to unpause the video, But MARTIN does it instead.

SOLOMON

Blue light goes on and --

MARTIN

It moves -- through the maze -- plays nicely with
the other mice -- drinks some water --

SOLOMON

Sugar water. Just like normal.

SOLOMON stops the video.

MARTIN

And this is what the trials --

SOLOMON

The initial steps to take the initial steps to
take the --

MARTIN

You're going to make them run in circles.

ANA

We all do enough of that already.

SOLOMON pulls up a chair and sits.

ANA

Just throwing in my two cents.

SOLOMON

Not circles, no -- not like meetings, bloody
meetings, eh? --

ANA

Right.

MARTIN

What does that [mean] --

SOLOMON

The initial trials --

MARTIN

Ana?

SOLOMON

-- will be about measuring -- what is and isn't
firing when a depressive talks about "the void"
or a substance abuser --

MARTIN

Addict --

SOLOMON
-- not having the will power --

MARTIN
Weakling. Ana?

SOLOMON
The basal lateral amygdala does not equal a
person's character.

MARTIN
It's all about not-sparking. Or maybe too much
sparking --

ANA
What problem are you having now, Clu?

The air goes cold.

MARTIN
"Meetings, bloody meetings" -- what is that
about? You two -- behind my back?

SOLOMON
No.

ANA
He's making you go "hmm."

MARTIN
What?

ANA
PROFESSOR SOLOMON, YOU INVITED US HERE TONIGHT FOR MORE THAN
MOVIES. SOLOMON

Yes I did.

ANA
And that might be.

MARTIN
You two --

ANA
Shut up and listen.

An active silence.

SOLOMON
I've talked with my team and -- and they were
mostly fine with you coming in.

MARTIN
And you?

SOLOMON

I trust my team.

MARTIN

And you?

This is said more to ANA than MARTIN.

SOLOMON

I hope this will give you some peace of mind.

MARTIN

But what about you?

SOLOMON

I think -- it will be interesting.

MARTIN

Ah.

ANA

Satisfied?

MARTIN

Are you?

ANA

Did you get your annual appeal letter?

SOLOMON

Yesterday.

ANA

Then I pronounce myself satisfied.

MARTIN

I got mine.

ANA

Even better. Because now I know that some things are working the way they're supposed to. I'd like to go home.

SOLOMON rises before MARTIN, gets MARTIN's coat and holds it open for him to put on. MARTIN instead takes the coat and puts it on himself, then turns and helps ANA out of her chair.

MARTIN

When shall we three meet again? Well, at least two?

SOLOMON

I have my staff meeting tomorrow. At ten.

MARTIN

En punto, as they say, then.

MARTIN offers ANA his arm, which she takes, and they start for the door. SOLOMON grabs his own coat.

MARTIN

Wouldn't it be so much easier with clear plastic beacons poking out of our heads firing off/on as the case demanded? Little lighthouses guiding us along.

ANA

And what color would you want your beacon to be?

MARTIN

The color of you.

ANA

Cozy.

ANA pulls MARTIN along.

ANA

Cozy little lighthouses --

SOLOMON follows. Lights out.

INTERMISSION [IF NEEDED]

Scene 6

MARTIN and SOLOMON at a table in a bar, indicated by music and lights. A single glass of amber liquor faces them. MARTIN stares at it.

SOLOMON

The AA meeting?

MARTIN

At the church. Across the street.

SOLOMON

But that's not where we are.

MARTIN

We're across the street from across the street.

SOLOMON

And you had me order this drink. Very specific.

MARTIN

Do you hear anything?

SOLOMON

Other than your not answering me?

MARTIN

Just anything.

SOLOMON

Music, chatter -- a hum, kind of --

MARTIN points at the glass.

MARTIN

And from that.

SOLOMON

Liquor doesn't talk to me the way it talks to you.

MARTIN

So how would you measure what I hear of what it says? Do a regression analysis of the muscle tension that keeps my hand off that glass? Sample it.

SOLOMON ponders the glass.

MARTIN

Go on.

SOLOMON

Why does it suddenly feel like a snake?

MARTIN

It has a bite. "The bite" is the reason to sample it.

SOLOMON

That would be your thought.

SOLOMON takes a good sip.

MARTIN

Tell me.

SOLOMON

Be more specific.

MARTIN

Be less cautious.

SOLOMON

Heat. No. Warmth.

MARTIN

Glow. Where?

SOLOMON

Tongue, throat, sternum -- radiates.

MARTIN

Where else?

SOLOMON

Up to the temples, behind the eyes.

MARTIN

The sunburst.

SOLOMON

Back of the head.

MARTIN

Take another.

SOLOMON takes another good sip. They wait as it radiates.

MARTIN

The "around" around you -- annotate it.

SOLOMON

Lights.

MARTIN

Quality.

SOLOMON

Dim.

MARTIN

Sounds.

SOLOMON

Music. Voices. Clatter.

MARTIN

But your sense -- your sense of it all.

SOLOMON looks surprised.

SOLOMON

Warmth.

SOLOMON points at the glass.

SOLOMON

Like that.

MARTIN

From that.

SOLOMON

Yes.

MARTIN
Where everybody knows your name --

SOLOMON
Even if they don't know who you are.

MARTIN
Always companionate.

SOLOMON
Womb -- ish.

MARTIN
That oceanic feeling. Rock-a-bye baby.

SOLOMON
Snake -- womb --

MARTIN
You're getting the measure --

SOLOMON
The garden of algorithm --

MARTIN flashes SOLOMON a big smile, relaxes for the first time.

MARTIN
Two sips and a poet emerges. Sensing what you
sense, what else do you sense?

SOLOMON looks at the glass for a second, then another, then picks it
up and sips again, puts it down.

SOLOMON
This time, the taste -- not just warmth.

MARTIN
Single malt.

SOLOMON
Defined.

MARTIN
Not "highland" for nothing.

SOLOMON
Cleansing.

MARTIN
Too concrete. Sit inside the warmth.

SOLOMON ponders.

SOLOMON
Protected.

MARTIN

From the vile blows and buffets of the world.

SOLOMON ponders some more.

SOLOMON

I am thinking about choices that people make.

MARTIN

Oh, the moralist has entered the room. We will cover Willpower 101 later. For now, just --

MARTIN points at the glass.

MARTIN

-- this. What does the poet hear, not the moralist?

SOLOMON

All right.

SOLOMON drains the glass. Puts it up to his ear. Waits. Puts it down. Clears his throat.

MARTIN

Go on.

SOLOMON

What was the Garden of Eden before the apple?

MARTIN

From what neural network did that spring?

SOLOMON

Don't you know?

MARTIN

No.

SOLOMON

You should know.

MARTIN

How would I know?

SOLOMON

Then let's just say that I know --

MARTIN

Wait. Wait.

They appraise each other.

MARTIN

Bloody meetings. She --

SOLOMON overrides him.

SOLOMON

Warmth, sunburst, protected -- where everybody knows your name -- womb -- snake -- the liquor as communion, addiction as a faith --

MARTIN

She just pours out of you!

MARTIN dares SOLOMON to say ANA's name. SOLOMON stays mum. MARTIN holds up the glass.

MARTIN

Willpower 101. The abuse is not about the substance, at least not directly. It comes from the grip of desire -- its tenacity -- the way it answers the question with "this is the point" -- and so it is always active voice, not passive -- even the scum on the bottom of the barrel still raises his hand on his own and croaks, "Give me more." And so I would say, say always, that you yourself pour it into yourself. Because why not? What does reality really have in its favor that it should trump the pouring in and all its associated wonders?

SOLOMON

"Barrel-scum" does not seem wonderful.

MARTIN

The problem is not the desire but the lack of well-tuned substances on the menu. Our chemists -- our bio-engineers -- have failed us!

SOLOMON

Desires multiply too quickly.

MARTIN

Need to speed up production!

SOLOMON

Perhaps people need more self-restraint.

MARTIN

Why? Warmth, sunburst, protected -- where everybody knows your name -- what you felt after a single pouring-in -- why hold back? Imagine an optogenetics device that would soften inhibition without softening the muscles -- life-work done in a gentle glow yet with perfect focus and coordination -- no need for the two-by-four of caffeine or money or highland between our tired eyes.

SOLOMON

Now who is it pouring out of?

MARTIN

This is the place for your optogenetics device.

SOLOMON

To aid and abet addiction.

MARTIN

It wouldn't be addiction if it made for less suffering, if it kept the craziness away -- if we had the right balance. We don't call prayer an addiction, or meditation, or yoga, or exercise, yet they all aim at more pleasure with less unearned pain. Less suffering. You wanted my consultation.

SOLOMON

How will this fit in with what I'm going to hear tonight?

MARTIN

Has the poet gone away?

SOLOMON

The poet -- waits.

MARTIN

As long as he hasn't gone away.

SOLOMON

He hasn't

MARTIN

Good. You want to take another drink for me?

SOLOMON

I'm good.

MARTIN pulls out a box of mints, opens it, offers it to SOLOMON.

MARTIN

Not cool to have it on your breath.

SOLOMON takes one. MARTIN takes one, but before he puts the box away, SOLOMON gestures for another one, which he takes from MARTIN.

MARTIN takes a bottle out of his pocket, shakes out a pill, slips it under his tongue, puts the bottle away.

MARTIN

What are you going to hear tonight? It won't be what I just told you -- we cannot talk about addiction and desire as if they are, well, positives. Even I can't really do it for real -- not now. Sweet Ativan.

SOLOMON

Has this been a seventy-five percent?

MARTIN

The better breath mint. No, no bluff.

SOLOMON

All those sayings you've been letting loose on my staff -- "addiction is rebellion" -- bluff?

MARTIN

No -- more like war stories. Sitting here with you, you drinking that -- for me -- it provides a harbor, sort of. So I can spin out my consultations for you -- I have been the scum on the barrel-bottom -- you're right, it's not wonderful. But it is also not false -- it is earned -- there is a weird honor in it --

SOLOMON

A complicated gift.

MARTIN

Like the tales of woe you'll hear tonight.

SOLOMON

Are you nervous about these meetings? The Ativan.

MARTIN

I'm nervous coming to the meetings, I'm nervous if I don't come to the meetings. I don't like them, but I like them when I get to talk about myself, which everyone in there likes to do since it's sometimes a big show -- stuff for the local nightly news.

SOLOMON

When you were hanging there --

MARTIN

Now, there's a shift in subject --

SOLOMON

It's connected --

MARTIN

If you say so --

SOLOMON

As you were hanging -- electro-chemistry going silent -- anything?

MARTIN

Like life flashing?

SOLOMON

I don't know what I mean. I'm consulting my consultant.

MARTIN picks up the empty glass, looks at it, smells it -- any other gesture he wants except for tasting whatever residue is left.

SOLOMON

You don't remember.

MARTIN

Anything. At all.

SOLOMON

Before you were hanging, then -- placing the sheet --

MARTIN

If my electro-chemistry knew anything, it knew only four syllables matching the pointless question: Sheet. Step. Off. Free.

SOLOMON

Deliberate. De-liberate --

MARTIN puts the glass down more heavily than he intended. SOLOMON moves it away from MARTIN's hands.

SOLOMON sees how pensive MARTIN has become.

SOLOMON

But perhaps not tonight. In a dangerous place, after all. We should go.

MARTIN

Just -- just -- wait.

They wait.

MARTIN

You said, remember? warmth, sunburst, protected -
- where everybody knows your name -- imagine losing that -- "what is the point?" hounding you -- and that is just gone. That's one answer. Here's my other. It's the hollow feeling that slides in when it's gone. Just. Empty. Just. Sadness. Whoosh!

SOLOMON

You look frightened --

MARTIN does, indeed, look a little spooked.

MARTIN

Me? Naw.

SOLOMON

Shouldn't lie.

MARTIN

I have every hope that tonight will be different from all other nights. No lie.

A moment of realigning feelings. Then they stand.

SOLOMON

Sent in your annual appeal yet?

MARTIN

Yes.

SOLOMON

Me, too.

MARTIN

We are both so adult.

SOLOMON

C'mon, Professor -- lead me on. Earn your keep.

MARTIN

Look, don't smile so much in the meeting, all right?

SOLOMON

I still have the sunburst --

MARTIN

Just don't --

SOLOMON

Only if you promise to smile a little.

MARTIN

Ask me to do something easy.

SOLOMON

So bluff a little. I have heard that you can do that.

MARTIN

Let us go.

They exit.

* * * * *

Scene 7

The Martin household, dimly lit. ANA sits at a table, accompanied by a bottle of amber highland single-malt. MARTIN enters smiling, maybe even whistling -- certainly light-hearted -- until he sees the bottle. MARTIN rushes over to examine the bottle. The bottle hasn't been opened.

ANA

You know it won't be open.

MARTIN

Why did you take it out?

ANA

Because I want this straight, no chaser.

ANA stands up. For a moment they stand quiet. ANA kisses him hard; she bites his bottom lip -- not hard. Then lets it go. A truce.

ANA

I was left lonely, Clu.

MARTIN

But I'm [back] --

ANA

Mistrust still bubbles up from the lizard brain.

ANA pushes MARTIN away gently, then sits.

ANA

How did your meeting go?

MARTIN takes off his coat, rolls up his sleeves, paces as he does so, wary. At some point he picks up the bottle, then puts it back down.

MARTIN

Old hat. Dr. Solomon -- touching for him, I think. The bottle is not supposed to be out.

ANA

I'm sure he thought you were all touched.

MARTIN

I need to put it away -- the whole moment comes flooding --

ANA

Why do you think I brought it out? You call it "the moment." I call it our house of horrors.

MARTIN is not sure.

ANA

This chase with him isn't mine --

MARTIN

Ana --

ANA

I had my own "open meeting" while you left me alone. I have loved you so hard, Clu -- tight, you know? Just when I felt nothing would pop for the bartender and her dinky associates degree -- you pop up. Took me seriously, from behind -- best of all, away, took me away. But now -- this is your chase, not mine --

MARTIN

What is your chase?

ANA

There must have been some touching stories of the collateral damage. Did those interest him?

MARTIN

I don't know -- he didn't say.

ANA straddles MARTIN, face-to-face, in his chair.

ANA

Maybe those were what opened him up, eh, not your crumpled-up tales of woe. You should poke him on this --

ANA pokes him.

ANA

-- in your role of filling him in.

ANA whispers into his ear.

ANA

Collateral. Damage.

ANA pulls back.

ANA

Co-lateral. Side-by-the-side-of the one who committed no sin except for loving the damager enough.

MARTIN goes to speak but ANA puts a finger on his lips, then leans back, still face-to-face.

ANA

This is where it falls apart for me, Clu.

They hold each other's gaze. MARTIN looks as if he will crumble.

ANA

I know you offered your story tonight -- in front
of him and all of them --

ANA unstraddles him, kneels in front of him, back on her heels.

MARTIN

I did --

ANA snaps her fingers.

ANA

Like an "off" for you! A yellow! Relief! But
you telling that story doesn't do anything for
me.

A sob escapes from MARTIN. ANA speaks to him without rancor.

ANA

Don't. You. Dare. Clu. Seen this before --
shame, then a promise -- yellow, a blue, off, on
--

MARTIN's voice is half-choked.

MARTIN

I can remorse with the best of 'em.

ANA

But not like me, Clu -- the shame I feel for what
I felt then, at your "moment" -- the shame's not
blue/yellow, on/off -- though lordy lordy wish it
could be so easy --

MARTIN

There's no blame --

ANA

You don't get to give or take it away -- my sin,
my stain -- stay in the chair --I betrayed you,
Clu --

MARTIN

Nothing compared to [what]--

ANA

My meeting! Stay in the chair!

An active silence.

ANA

I'd been doing the drinking for you -- like you'd asked -- doing your liquor porn -- but I had a clear head -- and I didn't rush to it, leap from the gut. Your betrayal is finished, Clu -- mine isn't over.

MARTIN

No no no no no, my sweet -- whose thighs are like jewels -- no no no not at all, never -- let me tell you why I was smiling when I walked in, Ana, it'll make all the difference --

ANA

Clu --

MARTIN

It will, it'll make the whole difference --

ANA

I don't [want] --

MARTIN

-- of course I told the story -- him with his ears wide -- showing off -- but as I talked, I forgot about him, Ana, all of them -- and it came -- the Damascus road moment --

ANA

Clu --

MARTIN

It came, Ana -- and it stayed --
just let me --
the telling,
different from all other times --
I just -- drained out --
just the same as if you upended this
and in Damascus I felt
the relief the bottle feels
when it's done spewing its poison --
now clear and blank and empty --

ANA

I can't trust that, Clu -- you know I can't
[trust that --

MARTIN

At the meeting I didn't even know what that
"that" was, except how "new" it felt.

MARTIN laughs as he realizes.

MARTIN

But then it came to me, Ana, that I do know, I know what "that" is. Like the Garden of Eden before the apple. Right? Right? Isn't that what you always want? Isn't it?

ANA gestures for the bottle. MARTIN kneels down and hands it to her.

ANA puts the bottle to one side. She pushes MARTIN until he stretches himself onto his back. ANA stretches on top of him, supporting herself so that they look straight at each other, into each other.

* * * * *

Scene 8

SOLOMON's office, late. SOLOMON at his desk, writing in a journal. ANA appears, wearing a London Fog or Burberry. She holds the bottle of liquor.

ANA

You look really surprised -- genuine -- and --

ANA appraises him.

ANA

A little -- scared, is it? I'm hoping for "terrified."

SOLOMON

I am -- all --

ANA

I enter your cave.

ANA comes in without waiting for an invite, puts the bottle on the desk. She straddles one of the chairs, as a man might sit in it.

ANA

You know, you need to take some responsibility for what you feel.

SOLOMON

What are you doing here?

ANA

Why are you here so late? What are you writing?

SOLOMON

My notes.

ANA

About all the poor broke-ass [souls] --

SOLOMON

That's included --

ANA

On the advice of your guide -- let me see.

ANA reaches out to him, wiggles her fingers to indicate that SOLOMON should hand the journal to her. Which he does. With some reluctance. She reads. He waits.

SOLOMON

Does he [know] --

ANA speaks while reading.

ANA

No. He's asleep. The sleep of the forgiven --
he likes to think he's forgiven --

ANA reads as she speaks.

SOLOMON

You know, the security guard [is] --

ANA

I signed a fake name. These notes aren't
scientific --

SOLOMON

Not technically.

ANA

A lot like a personal journal. I also used a
Russian accent. Completely faked her out.

ANA drops into and out of the Russian accent whenever she wants from here on in.

SOLOMON

I often do -- this -- that -- write --

ANA

What're you finding so hard, Hugh?

ANA closes the journal but does not give it back.

ANA

Why do I get blue and the one at home gets
yellow?

ANA gets out of the chair, tosses the journal back to SOLOMON, starts pacing.

ANA

And what color for yourself?

SOLOMON

You should go back.

ANA

You're in over your head.

SOLOMON

Even more reason you should go --

ANA

Because you're right on the edge of falling into his trap. Go on. Ask me.

SOLOMON

Please go back home.

ANA

Glad you asked me. Here's the trap -- Clu likes to set this one out to save his own fragrance -- getting people to believe that the wounds of the alchies, the druggies, the spineless --

SOLOMON

Ana --

ANA smiles at the sound of her name.

ANA

Try my name again --

SOLOMON doesn't say anything but doesn't take his eyes off her.

ANA

I'll wait. "The wounds" are the thing that makes them human. I'm sure he's dropped his little sayings on you, like "addiction is rebellion", "pleasure trumps the oppressions of civilization" -- I'm sure he's said his crap to you --

SOLOMON

I call them his highlandisms.

ANA

Clever! Thus speaks Clu -- the drunks are saints and rebels -- can't judge them, only pity them -- God forbid that anyone would name them as the trash they are -- how about this one from him: "lust is a form of compliment" -- ah!

SOLOMON

Ah.

They have an understanding.

ANA

Clu's got another he likes: "mortal pain is proof of a soul" --

ANA picks up the bottle and sits facing SOLOMON.

ANA

I am in mortal pain, Hugh. On that night --

ANA displays the bottle.

ANA

Recognize?

SOLOMON

He bought a glass of it before we went in to the meeting, for me --

ANA places the bottle on the desk.

ANA

That night -- I drank from this for him --

SOLOMON

He had me do that -- in the bar -- beforehand --

ANA

Self-destruction and love.

ANA points to the bottle.

ANA

And what good did it do? Halfway between picking it up and putting it down, something -- an electro-brain-moment -- I didn't share it --

SOLOMON

I don't know why his brain chose --

ANA

I am there with him -- catch his falls -- he knows this -- and yet zap! and he walks away to the sheet! On his way he lost his way -- he lost me --

SOLOMON

But you cut him down, and now things have gone to yellow.

ANA

Christ, Hugh, it's not a three-hankie movie!

SOLOMON

I was trying to sidetrack the mortal pain.

ANA

There are ways.

ANA gets up, takes off the coat, flings it down. She takes the bottle, unscrews the top, breaking the seal, and sets cap and bottle on the desk, her gaze direct.

ANA

When neurons gang up and say "yeah," they don't always spell out "despair." If mortal pain is proof of the soul-- are you in mortal pain?

SOLOMON

Yes.

ANA

Me, too. Well, let's test the proof.

SOLOMON

Let's not --

ANA stops him with a kiss, which SOLOMON returns without regret.

Then SOLOMON pulls back, flustered but also calm. He opens his journal, flips a few pages, and hands it to ANA.

SOLOMON

Before your anger pushes everything over the edge.

ANA reads, and what she reads stuns her. She lowers herself into the chair; this time she does not straddle it. The reading can take as long as it takes.

ANA finishes and speaks just above a whisper.

ANA

Took the wind right out of my sails.

SOLOMON

For both of us.

ANA

Damn. Damn.

SOLOMON

Add one in for me.

ANA holds up the journal.

ANA

Really?

SOLOMON

Like it says. Like he said it to me.

ANA hands back the journal. She takes the bottle and cap, then takes a swig from the bottle. She hands the bottle to SOLOMON.

SOLOMON

I seem to be getting better at this.

SOLOMON takes a swig, hands the bottle back. ANA puts the cap on, hands the bottle to SOLOMON.

ANA

Keep it for the office liquor. It's played out in our household.

ANA puts on her coat, then steps up to SOLOMON. A moment -- several - of contemplation before they kiss without hesitation and for as long as it takes. ANA breaks free, leaves.

SOLOMON stares for a moment, uncaps the bottle, takes a swig. Waits while it works its way down. Caps the bottle. SOLOMON smells the neck of the bottle -- a deep inhale.

SOLOMON is not sure that to do next. The journal sits in front of him, waiting. The silence hangs.

SOLOMON

If in over your head feels like this --

SOLOMON uncaps the bottle. He opens the journal, takes up a pencil, dunks it in the liquor, and writes, dunks it again, writes again. He laughs, leans down to smell the page.

SOLOMON

Sunburst --

He writes in earnest.

* * * * *

Scene 9

MARTIN's office. On a whiteboard are blocks of notes under two really large block-letter headings: "WHAT IS GIVEN", and under that "FREE WILL???????" [The "notes" do not need to be legible.] Swooping between the notes, sometimes circling or underlining the notes, are blue and yellow lines. There is also a black marker.

MARTIN stands in front of the board, a journal in his hands, checking from one to the other. Perhaps there is music in the background.

SOLOMON steps into the office, looking a bit disheveled and wearing something of a goofy grin on the downside of being drunk. He's wearing a longish coat. MARTIN doesn't know it's SOLOMON -- he hears him but ignores him.

MARTIN
My office hours are this afternoon.

SOLOMON
Between the hours --

MARTIN turns to him. SOLOMON points at the board.

SOLOMON
The big F. W.

MARTIN
Why do you look like the cat that got the mouse?

SOLOMON
Something like that.

MARTIN
Well.

SOLOMON
Deep subject. I kissed your wife, Clu. Twice.

MARTIN
When?

SOLOMON
This morning. She said you were sleeping the
sleep of the forgiven.

MARTIN
Did she want you to tell me?

SOLOMON
I don't know. Too late now. The cat that got
the mouse is out of the bag.

MARTIN comes up to SOLOMON and smells him.

SOLOMON
The whole bottle. I've been writing. All night.

MARTIN
Kissed twice.

SOLOMON
Yes.

MARTIN
Should I smack you down?

SOLOMON
I don't know. Maybe.

SOLOMON points to the board.

SOLOMON
You have a choice. You've got Free Will. With
six question marks.

SOLOMON goes to the whiteboard and erases the question marks. MARTIN
puts them back.

MARTIN
It's a fact the way I like my facts. Twice.

SOLOMON
Fact.

MARTIN
Why not three times?

SOLOMON
Wanted to avoid the trap. Both, we both wanted
to avoid the trap.

MARTIN
"We."

SOLOMON
Because there was a plural in the room.

MARTIN
The trap.

SOLOMON goes to the white board, picks up the blue and yellow markers.

SOLOMON
Any guess why you're using these colors? Doesn't
matter. Here's my long way around.

SOLOMON takes the blue marker and circles "FREE," then circles "WILL"
with the yellow marker. He takes the black marker and draws some
arrows between the two terms.

SOLOMON
Ode to brain synapses -- see, I have an ode.
Synapses are lightning -- positive ions at one
end of the neuron wanting to bind -- tight tight
tight! -- to the negative ions of the other
neuron -- a carnal embrace -- back and forth --

SOLOMON mimes explosions and makes explosive sounds.

SOLOMON
But another fact -- very important -- the "rest"
-- a breathing space -- a brain can't be doing
this all the time --

SOLOMON again mimes explosions and makes explosive sounds.

SOLOMON

If it does -- seizures! zombie! So, the "rest"
in between firings -- tiny tiny -- but it's
there, like in music --

SOLOMON suddenly looks very tired -- body sags, etc.

SOLOMON

May I sit down?

MARTIN

Take a rest?

SOLOMON

Ha ha --

MARTIN

Just don't seizure on the furniture --

SOLOMON sits.

SOLOMON

I've been up all night. I've been writing.

SOLOMON mimes explosions and makes explosive sounds -- though this
time quietly -- then catches his wind. He takes a water bottle from a
pocket, drinks, offers to MARTIN.

SOLOMON

Just water.

MARTIN

I'm good.

SOLOMON

The "rest" -- the rest allows time to refresh the
machine -- and in that rest -- nestled within
that rest -- lies -- choice -- plasticity --
brain plasticity -- a lot hard-wired, but a lot
soft-wired --

MARTIN

Soft-headed --

SOLOMON

Lot of that going around. I want to -- shift --
the wiring -- the on-rest-off-rest-on-rest --

MARTIN

I get it.

SOLOMON

I am tired.

A momentary silence.

SOLOMON

I think -- upon further reflection -- in addition to tired -- embarrassed. Not regretful -- but --

MARTIN

Why are you here?

SOLOMON

Why are you using those colored markers --

MARTIN

Answer my question, or I will hit you.

SOLOMON

The questions are connected. Have you ever hit anyone? I've never hit anyone, or been hit -- I didn't come to gloat --

MARTIN draws his chair around to go face-to-face with SOLOMON.

MARTIN

Let's get the masculine shit out of the way.

MARTIN perches himself on the chair's edge. SOLOMON slides forward, perches himself on his chair's edge. MARTIN indicates to SOLOMON to hold out his hands. Which he does. MARTIN makes sure they're palm-down. Then MARTIN slides his hands, palm-up, under SOLOMON's hands.

Then MARTIN slaps one of SOLOMON's hands before SOLOMON can pull it away. They re-set. A few more times before MARTIN misses. They reverse hand positions.

But before SOLOMON can take his turn, MARTIN slaps SOLOMON in the face. And before MARTIN can take any delight, SOLOMON slaps him back.

These are not very hard slaps. The equals stare each other down.

SOLOMON

Felt good, in a bad sort of way.

MARTIN

I was hit by a customer -- bought the fake Rolex --

SOLOMON

Right --

MARTIN

Felt the same way -- deserved it, glad it was over --

They hesitate, then slide back into their chairs: mutual retreat.

SOLOMON

The trap and the "rest" --

MARTIN

Two kisses --

SOLOMON

It takes two steps to cross a line, so, yes, twice-kissed. We wanted to avoid the trap. Lord knows desire bloomed when she walked in --

MARTIN

She came to you.

SOLOMON

She made that choice. While you were asleep -- she signed a fake name with the security guard. And she said she used a Russian accent. Why would you ever want to risk losing that?

MARTIN

It's not all cream and peaches.

SOLOMON

Who would eat that all the time? In any case, the trap -- you're very clever, you know, all your "highlandisms" --

SOLOMON mimes tiny explosions and makes tiny explosive sounds.

SOLOMON

Here's what came to me - writing writing writing writing -- the pleasures that come from self-destruction -- they need a better wiring --

MARTIN

That's why I came to you.

SOLOMON

No it's not, but let me finish.

MARTIN

Yes it was --

SOLOMON

I'm not finished. On the first kiss -- I wanted the trap. Oh, did I want the trap. I wanted to fall into sin -- the wickedness! -- the release from making choices -- just fall and fall and fall --

MARTIN

This is fascinating.

SOLOMON

I am indeed -- that ache to fall back into the Garden of Eden.

MARTIN

The framework of the flesh -- I told you --

SOLOMON gets up and walks to the board, peruses it.

SOLOMON

What Professor Clu Martin hath wrought.

SOLOMON grabs the three markers in one hand, in a bunch, and starts drawing triple parallel lines all over the board.

SOLOMON

And then there was the second kiss.

Instead of continuing to talk, he continues to draw until he stops. Then he puts the markers down and faces MARTIN.

SOLOMON

I didn't bring that kiss to her. She didn't bring that kiss to me. We chose.

SOLOMON pulls the journal out of the coat pocket, opens it to a certain page, and hands it to MARTIN.

SOLOMON

Read. Go on.

MARTIN reads for as long as it takes to read, then closes the journal and hands it back.

MARTIN

What Doctor Hugh Solomon hath wrought for himself.

SOLOMON

The second kiss rewired the choice. The choices. Took advantage of the "rest" -- ode to synapses. It re-directed the falling -- fall in, fall out, fall back, fall flat on my face, all that falling --

SOLOMON indicates the board.

SOLOMON

Free will? Important to you guys but mostly crap if you look at the brain-body set-up, most of which is already dialed in. But freed will? Freed will -- yeah -- freed will -- I call that "the second kiss."

SOLOMON grabs a blue marker and makes a solid circle.

SOLOMON

Bbbbbblue --

Then he takes the yellow marker and makes an overlapping circle so that the overlap of the two circles creates green.

SOLOMON

Yyyyyyellow -- fine -- on/off --

More little explosion sounds.

SOLOMON

But not sufficient --

SOLOMON uses the black marker to circle the green section.

SOLOMON

This -- the green -- is about our bodies, always in a state of "green" as on/off mix-ups and splatters and -- life is there --

SOLOMON pulls out his water bottle, sits as he drinks.

SOLOMON

And I am exhausted.

MARTIN pulls his chair close. SOLOMON gives him a wary eye.

MARTIN

What kind of "green" are we at this moment?

SOLOMON

I don't think I've gotten that far.

MARTIN

Really? You kissed my wife twice.

SOLOMON doesn't answer.

MARTIN

You are still unpracticed at this.

SOLOMON

But I know what your problem is -- I do. You are always going for the first kiss. You came to me as a chameleon, figuring a change of color would let you stay the same because you didn't really want to give up the first kiss. Still don't.

MARTIN

And this second kiss is what to you?

SOLOMON

And she knows this about you --

MARTIN

Don't speak for her -- just for you, and not even really for you because I am going to answer for you --

SOLOMON

By all means do because I am [tired] --

MARTIN

You think the second kiss has faithfulness in it, sweetness, an embrace without the carnal, with the incarnate, of a higher order --

SOLOMON

Wait, slow down --

MARTIN

-- "green" in its odor and tint, the pure gesture, the sin avoided -- don't lie to me, you felt virtuous, didn't you, when she left leaving the second kiss's linger still upon your lips?

SOLOMON agrees, a little.

MARTIN

You got the sugar without the sting -- I think your second kiss is nothing but cowardice, and second kissers are cowards.

They stare at each other.

SOLOMON

That was not how I was going to answer you.

MARTIN

I don't care. I'm done. I have work to do.

SOLOMON

So no reconciliation between us -- which is why I think I came, partly --

MARTIN

I am reconciled. With my fallen state, my sinful nature, my un-green imperfections. And, even better, she is still with me.

SOLOMON

For now --

MARTIN grabs SOLOMON's water bottle and pours the rest over him.

MARTIN

Prig. Prig squared. Prig cubed.

SOLOMON rises out of his chair. MARTIN tosses the bottle at him.

MARTIN

Now get the fuck out, bambino.

SOLOMON doesn't move, but he wants to attack.

MARTIN

Are those blue lights sparking behind those broody-looking eyes -- he's thinking, he's fuming, he's straining at the leash, trying to free his will --

SOLOMON still doesn't move, and now it's clear he's not going to.

MARTIN

Hup -- and now I think I see -- yes, indeed it's true, the yellow lights are clicking on. Yes, indeed, folks, that's happening. Nothing green and growing here today, is there?

MARTIN gives SOLOMON a push toward the door.

MARTIN

Just turning yellow.

Another shove.

MARTIN

Yellow, yellow --

Another shove. And then SOLOMON gives MARTIN a push back, hard -- enough to show MARTIN there is more power there than meets the eye.

MARTIN

Someone's been using the university gym --

And SOLOMON advances on MARTIN.

MARTIN

All right, all right --

SOLOMON pulls up short, and the two of them square off.

MARTIN

I've got a proposal for you. You listening? I've been thinking it over.

SOLOMON

For how long?

MARTIN

About thirty seconds, so I wouldn't get my face smashed -- but I think it's been marinating since the open meeting.

SOLOMON

I don't know if I would've hit you.

MARTIN

Let's say you did so we can clear off the testosterone. You interested in my proposal or not?

SOLOMON

I get into trouble when I hear proposals from you.

MARTIN

I think you're finding out you wouldn't have it any other way.

SOLOMON

Not another seventy-five-percent routine, is it?

MARTIN

One hundred percent serious.

SOLOMON

What about Ana?

An active silence.

SOLOMON

Right. I've got about five minutes before I fall asleep in that chair over there.

MARTIN

So get yourself in the chair.

SOLOMON sits.

MARTIN

We can probably bang out a syllabus in less than five minutes, then you can sleep the sleep of babes.

SOLOMON

A course.

MARTIN

We're at a university -- what else would manly academic men like us do?

SOLOMON sighs, closes his eyes.

SOLOMON

Hit me with your best shot -- fire away.

Lights -- blue, yellow, green in cycles. Transition music.

* * * * *

Scene 10

Outdoor table, three chairs, at a coffee shop. Thunder in the background but not yet rain.

SOLOMON and MARTIN at the table, coffees in hand, papers which they are marking and reading. Each has a briefcase.

MARTIN puts his papers on the table, looks off into the distance. SOLOMON notices, puts his papers on the table as well.

SOLOMON
Penny for your thoughts.

MARTIN
Hmm?

SOLOMON
Two pennies.

MARTIN
Hmm.

MARTIN doesn't answer, goes back to staring.

SOLOMON
Anything you want to go over?

MARTIN
Hmm?

SOLOMON
On the syllabus? The course?

MARTIN
I think it's going pretty well.

SOLOMON points to the papers.

SOLOMON
I think this assignment went really well.

MARTIN
With a few tweaks it will one day be great --

A non-stressful silence.

MARTIN
I like those moments when -- what should we call them? When our students feel --

MARTIN searches for the word.

MARTIN

Confoundments --

SOLOMON

Shifts -- wrenches -- errrkkk!! I like those,
too --

MARTIN

The trials of our humans.

SOLOMON

A pleasure to watch them stop being so exact with
themselves --

They know they're speaking about themselves as well.

MARTIN

Yes. Well, of course.

SOLOMON

A light shift --

MARTIN

An enlightenment shift --

SOLOMON

Aren't we clever.

MARTIN

Well, "The Second Kiss" -- "Philosophy in the
Flesh" --

SOLOMON

"Philosophy in the Flesh" --

MARTIN

-- was mine.

SOLOMON

-- was yours, yes -- but I would like "science"
somewhere in the title.

MARTIN

There is "Flesh" --

SOLOMON

Not equivalent.

MARTIN

Note, then: work in "Science" on the next go-
around.

They sip their coffees, gather up their papers.

SOLOMON

Any word from Ana? When she'll be back?

MARTIN

Doctor, you make it sound like she's gone to the Peace Corps.

SOLOMON

She's been gone a week, Professor.

MARTIN

She's just on a retreat. It's just a retreat.

Rumbles of thunder in the distance.

MARTIN

She's been there before -- I even went with her -
- they were nice about having an infidel in the house. I played the part of the infidel, by the way.

SOLOMON

I would never have guessed.

An active silence.

MARTIN

She has indeed been gone a week, Doctor.

Rumbles of thunder, now louder.

SOLOMON

I hadn't known about her "Catholic."

MARTIN

That's how we connected -- one of the ways. I noticed this small cross she wore -- from there it went theological. I want you to change the subject.

SOLOMON

Changed to the trials of humans. Following protocols, logging in data, building baseline measurements, working on the permissions for the second phase --

MARTIN

A little "tedious" in your voice.

SOLOMON

I have been pricked by the outside world, Professor. I have been bluffed by philosophy.

MARTIN puts his papers into his briefcase and stands.

MARTIN

I'm going to do these later.

SOLOMON

Any more visitations recently?

MARTIN

Have you noticed anything?

SOLOMON

Not on my watch.

MARTIN

Not on mine, either. The electro-chemistry has shifted. Who knows why? What can I say?

SOLOMON

Nothing more mysterious than the electro-chemical.

SOLOMON puts his papers away and stands.

MARTIN

Even after you measure and catalogue it. That's what's interesting about our class -- put philosophy in electro-chemical terms and --

ANA enters, a backpack slung over her shoulder, wearing a green tee-shirt.

MARTIN

And Ana appears.

ANA

I got your text. Texts.

MARTIN

I've been texting you every day.

ANA

I've been getting them every day.

MARTIN

You did say I could do that.

SOLOMON

I should go.

ANA

Absolutely not.

MARTIN

How was the retreat?

ANA

How "is" the retreat. I am advancing much during my retreat.

MARTIN

Do you want to sit? Do you want to walk?

Thunder is now louder.

MARTIN

Go singing in the rain?

ANA

I think I'd like to sit. And I think I'd like to say I'm sorry. I can also reverse that order.

MARTIN

The first would be pleasant, the second is unnecessary. Right?

SOLOMON

Right.

MARTIN

See, I speak for "we." What do you want, oh muse?

ANA sits. MARTIN and SOLOMON sit. Thunder says "Soon it's gonna rain."

MARTIN

Maybe we should move inside.

ANA

Wait -- no need. This is perfect.

ANA opens her backpack. She speaks like Natasha from Rocky and Bullwinkle.

ANA

The Girl Scout is prepared.

ANA pulls out a plastic bag.

ANA

Take one.

MARTIN reaches in and pulls out a small object wrapped in colorful sacred wrapping paper.

ANA

Now you.

SOLOMON takes one. ANA takes the last one.

ANA

And mine.

Thunder is really loud now.

ANA

I got lucky in the gift shop.

SOLOMON

They have a gift shop?

MARTIN

Oh yes.

ANA

Sacred jams, sacred jellies, sacred pictures on CD, sacred coffee mugs, tee-shirts, baseball hats, books and bookmarks -- and these.

ANA unwraps her package: a green umbrella.

MARTIN half-unwraps his, sees his color, shows SOLOMON.

SOLOMON half-unwraps his, sees his color, shows MARTIN.

ANA

And are we all good?

A crack of lightning, thunder rumbles. SOLOMON and MARTIN completely unwrap their umbrellas.

SOLOMON

We are at "good."

MARTIN

We are good to go.

ANA gets up.

MARTIN

Let's head on home.

SOLOMON and MARTIN go to get up as well, but ANA gestures for them to stay seated.

ANA

Just -- wait. I'm glad things are good. For the moment, at least.

MARTIN

All right.

ANA

But I'm not going home. Let me finish. I didn't say the retreat was over. My advisor thought it'd be good to take a break. Check in. So I'm taking the break and checking in.

SOLOMON

A retreat from the retreat.

ANA

I am advancing much -- but still a ways to go, so --

ANA gestures that she's going to get going.

ANA

I'll be back.

MARTIN

Can't you at least stay for dinner?

ANA

I could -- but it's not what I want to do.

ANA steps away.

MARTIN

So when?

ANA

I'm throwing in my sick days and personal days, too -- so, a while longer.

MARTIN

So when?

ANA

You'll get my text.

Thunder. Thunder.

ANA

Stay dry, fellahs.

ANA exits. They watch her leave. They speak to each other but don't look at each other -- still watching her leave.

MARTIN

Where are the neurons for waiting, Professor, and how do you turn them off?

Another crack of lightning, thunder rumbles some more.

SOLOMON

How about "The Second Kiss: Brains, Bodies, and Beliefs"? And we should probably get inside.

MARTIN

I thought you wanted "science" in the title.

SOLOMON

I'll got "brains" and "bodies" -- close enough. C'mon.

The rain comes. They pop open their umbrellas.

MARTIN

Close enough, you say?

SOLOMON

Close enough.

MARTIN

I'm glad you're satisfied.

SOLOMON

Work in progress. We've still got the next class to prepare -- we might as well do it now.

SOLOMON half-steps away.

SOLOMON

I'll order. You want anything with your coffee?

MARTIN

I'll take tea.

SOLOMON

Tea?

MARTIN

Tea.

SOLOMON

What kind?

MARTIN

Order on a whim.

SOLOMON

Tea on a whim, then.

SOLOMON exits.

MARTIN

What. Is. The. Point. Ana. Answer: You are. He is. We are.

MARTIN waits, a bit abstracted, the way a radio antenna waits for a signal to come in. A half-smile.

MARTIN

The only dark cloud here is the rain cloud. We have advanced much.

A pop of lightning, bluish-white.

MARTIN

Soon. Tea.

MARTIN exits.

Blackout.