

SECRET ORDER

by Bob Clyman

Represented by:
Bruce Ostler
Brett Adams, Ltd.
448 West 44th Street
New York, NY 10036
(212) 765-5630
(212) 265-2212 (Fax)
bostler@bretadamsltd.net

76 Grandview Avenue
North Caldwell, NJ 07006
(973) 509-0769
roclyman@yahoo.com

bobclyman-playwright.com

CHARACTERS

WILLIAM SHUMWAY	Early Thirties. Immunologist. A passionately curious scientist in cancer research and rising star at the Hill-Matheson Institute. By nature, gentle and isolated.
ROBERT BROCK	Fifties. Immunologist and Director of Hill-Matheson. Shumway's mentor, a charismatic man of great intelligence and ambition. More awkward in his personal life but capable of a gruff kind of affection.
ALICE CURITON	21. A student in Shumway's lab. A bright, 'mouthy' spitfire, indifferent to etiquette
SAUL ROTH	67. Chief of Toxicology at Hill-Matheson. Plays at being the amiable philosopher but is in fact a very political animal. Brock's rival for power.

Two acts. Running time: 2 hours with intermission

Note: The use of back slash (/) marks towards the end of a line signifies where the next character speaking should interrupt.

If a back slash precedes an ellipsis (/...) at the end of a line, the interruption should come in as quickly as possible after the last word but not interrupt it.

If a line ends with an ellipsis but no back slash, the lack of a full stop suggests that the character is implicitly pointing toward some completion of his thought. In many of those instances in the character might have asked something to the effect of, 'Do you know what I mean,' if he had completed the sentence.

If an ellipsis takes place within a speech rather than at the end of it, it means the character has interrupted himself to pursue a different thought.

ACT I

(LIGHTS UP ON WILLIAM SHUMWAY, A CELL BIOLOGIST IN HIS EARLY THIRTIES FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, AS HE WALKS ON STAGE.)

SHUMWAY

(TAPPING THE MICROPHONE, LOOKING INTO THE WING)

Is this on?

(TURNING TO THE AUDIENCE)

Hello. My name is Dr. William Shumway. On behalf of the program committee, welcome to the university's Monday lecture series. Afterwards, there'll be something to eat. For those of you who came to today's symposium expecting to hear Dr. Vregel in Flemish Studies read from his new collection of poems, he was suddenly called out of town, and the program committee has asked me to fill in. I'm a cell biologist here at Illinois, my area's cancer research, so, if there's any logic to the process, I have to assume I wasn't their first choice. Ordinarily, I would've tried like the dickens to get out of it. I don't really like talking in front of groups or being in groups or talking, but this morning, the most amazing thing ... then suddenly, complete coincidence, I was being asked to speak.

(BEAT)

So, imagine your body's a community, and your cells are the people who live there. The dream of every cell is to be immortal ... to make endless copies of itself, but the community can only use so many liver cells and no more than two eyes, so your cells need to cooperate ... send signals to each other ... 'yes, it's your turn to divide' or 'no, please wait in line.' Actually, it's a lot like this town meeting I went to, where everyone had an opinion, they're all talking at once, but what makes this really confusing is you've got 10 billion cells, so the meeting feels more like China with no one in charge. But it all works out in the end ... everyone gives a little, gets a little, because that's what a community is.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Except every now and then, you get a bad apple ... the kind of cell that just won't listen to 'no.' He never used to be a problem, but then he mutated into a cancer cell... pumping out copies, who also keep pumping out copies ... a virtual riot of malignant, unstoppable vanity, until the day comes you notice they've driven out all of the decent folk and taken over the town. Everything we've tried... surgery, chemo... comes at a terrible cost. So it occurred to me, what if instead of attacking the cancer directly, I could turn it against itself. This was three years ago, and you can't imagine how difficult technically, but I just finished running a set of experiments, and... now remember, everything I've done so far has been just in a Petri dish, nothing on actual mice, let alone... and again it's only one set of experiments, so this is completely premature, but I think I may have figured out how to cure cancer.

(BEAT)

How am I doing on time?

(SHUMWAY'S PHONE RINGS. LIGHTS UP ON DR. ROBERT BROCK, PHONE IN HAND, DIRECTOR OF CANCER RESEARCH AT THE HILL-MATHESON INSTITUTE. SHUMWAY ANSWERS HIS CELL PHONE)

SHUMWAY

Hello?

BROCK

Listen, I just read your paper, grab a pen. In your letter... 'Do I think you should try to publish in CELL?' Four days in a Petri dish? Don't waste the stamps. Maybe in IMMUNOLOGY or TRENDS, I don't know where you got the idea it's ready for CELL.

SHUMWAY

I'm sorry, and this is who?

BROCK

Bob Brock, Hill-Matheson.

SHUMWAY

You mean, Dr. Brock? I can't believe you even read / it.

BROCK

CELL won't look at it till you've got something with animals. You can teach tumors to dance the mambo, CELL won't care if it's still in the dish. Then there's your writing. It's awkward...tentative...no point mincing words, it stinks. Read Whitehead and Russell for style. By the way, who are you? I've never heard of you. I only started reading your paper, because I thought it was something else.

(AS SHUMWAY STARTS TO SPEAK)

What I get is you're stitching together DNA snippets from a few genes and slipping them into a cancer cell, where they reprogram it and turn it into this R-cell of yours, is that not correct?

SHUMWAY

I guess you could / say...

BROCK

So now instead of always telling itself, 'yes, it's time to divide,' like a cancer cell does, your R-cell says, 'no it's time to stop,' is that close enough?

SHUMWAY

Are you / asking...?

BROCK

Well, it's been done.

SHUMWAY

I know.

BROCK

The snippets are smaller, you're jamming in more, but more doesn't make it new. Look, I'm off in five minutes to do a site visit in London. Some important new work on fever. I really can't talk with you now. Hello?

SHUMWAY

Yes?

BROCK

Go on, you were saying?

SHUMWAY

(BEAT)

I'm sorry, what was the question?

BROCK

I see you're at Illinois. Lot of bright people there, I'm sure. Then there's New York. We're six months away from the best immunology department in the world, that's why they call it New York. I'm only going for brilliant here. I can't be bothered with bright. Hello?

SHUMWAY

Hi.

BROCK

Your R-cell doesn't just tell itself no...it goes after any cancer cells around it and wipes them out by telling them no...this is new. It's not the money, is it?

SHUMWAY

No.

BROCK

Good, that's out of the way. So, what then? No, of course, you like it there. The Midwest, why not? I'm told the wind comes sweeping down the plain. Plus, you work for Ed Paxon. I've known Ed for years, he's exceedingly 'bright.' There isn't a better program if you're looking for somewhere to die. Let me guess, he wants to make you repeat what you've done in 10 different nutrient cultures.

SHUMWAY

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Well, he feels in order to / demonstrate...

BROCK

And I'm sure that's a perfectly valid point, but it's also complete bullshit. Ed's the best juicer I know. He can squeeze 10 different papers from one piece of work. Life's pretty short, William. Do you want to spend two more years of it still in the dish?

SHUMWAY

I'm sorry...did you just offer me a job?

BROCK

Hill-Matheson, best cancer research institute in the world. New York, best city in the world. Starting in a month.

SHUMWAY

God, that would...any way this could wait / until...?

BROCK

I want you here tomorrow. I'm giving you a month.

SHUMWAY

It's just I'm kind of in / the middle...

BROCK

(SHOUTING OFFSTAGE)

Connie, change my flight and put me through Chicago. I need to stop in Champagne-Urbana.

(BROCK WALKS TOWARDS SHUMWAY, CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION BUT NOW IN PERSON)

BROCK

Do you understand the magnitude of what you've already done? People have spent the last 20 years trying to figure out how tumor cells trick us into thinking they're one of us. You're tricking tumor cells into thinking we're one of them. This is one of those moments, when people better cover their heads, because there's a low rumble, old plates are starting to slide apart, and the crust is going to fly. You're taking us down the rabbit hole, and journals like CELL don't like getting papers from Illinois that scare the shit out of them.

SHUMWAY

Even if I started shutting things / down tomorrow...

BROCK

(PULLING A LETTER FROM HIS POCKET TO SHOW SHUMWAY)

This is a requisition for your new animal lab. Do you want me to sign it or not?

SHUMWAY

You mean...back up a second...you're saying I would have my own lab? My own animal lab?

BROCK

I need you, William. This is what I've been chasing for years. And you need me. Say the word, and I'll have you in CELL by the spring. I know how to make things happen. I won't let those R-cells just sit there rotting at the bottom of a dish.

SHUMWAY

(BEAT)

I'll need at least 200 mice, 20 groups of 10...that's to start. And I can be there...what about...all right, make it five weeks...Yes.

(HE SHAKES BROCK'S HAND AND BROCK TURNS TO GO.)

And make that 25 groups of 10!

BROCK

(TURNING BACK TO SHUMWAY)

One month!

(HE EXITS)

(LIGHTS UP ON THE LAB, WHERE SHUMWAY IS WORKING. BROCK ENTERS)

BROCK

Put down whatever you're doing. Peter Whitcomb's coming up.

SHUMWAY

Now?

BROCK

Exactly what are you doing?

SHUMWAY

Waiting.

BROCK

New set of slides?

SHUMWAY

I'm almost ready / to...

BROCK

I think what bothers me most about Peter is his complete self-absorption. He comes to a party, youngest director at Oxford of cell bi...nobody asked to hear his credentials...Nobel at 42...fine, say it once.

(ALREADY SITTING, AS HE ASKS)

Do you mind if I sit? I have a feeling the wine was Almaden. I had to drink quite a lot to kill the taste. Foundation people from Carnegie, Ford...perfect chance to mention the

new wing? Not with Peter around. He acts like the only reason people came is to listen to him.

SHUMWAY

I thought the party is for him.

BROCK

Well, of course it is, technically. We can't throw a party to get all those people and then say the guest of honor is us. Don't give him any specifics. He just wants to snoop around and see if your cell is farther along than his. Hasn't it been five minutes? He said five minutes.

(AFTER SEVERAL BEATS)

So...how are you liking New York?

SHUMWAY

Fine.

BROCK

You grew up in Minnesota, I seem to remember. Beautiful country...I'm not interrupting?

SHUMWAY

No. Well, / actually...

BROCK

Good. How about your apartment...plenty of room to prowl around in?

SHUMWAY

Uh-huh.

BROCK

All the appliances work?

SHUMWAY

I guess.

BROCK

That smell of urine...have they gotten it out of the lobby yet? I was appalled to hear.

SHUMWAY

I think so.

BROCK

Any pals yet? Someone to go see a film?

SHUMWAY

Kind of.

BROCK

(BEAT)

William, were you severely beaten as a small boy for talking too much?

SHUMWAY

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Oh. Sometimes when I'm working on a new set of slides, I forget to talk. I just try to make myself quiet inside and wait. Sorry.

BROCK

And that somehow...no, I'm interested...how does it help?

SHUMWAY

I guess I've always thought about science as...I don't know, revelation. If I care too much about whether I'm right, it becomes more about pride.

BROCK

Don't tell me you're religious?

SHUMWAY

Well...kind of.

BROCK

No...that's fine...you mean, God, that sort of thing. Have you met the Saudis? Extremely devout people...rearranged their lab so they could do their work facing east. One of my sons, in fact.

SHUMWAY

One of your sons is a Saudi?

BROCK

No, believes in God. Or used to. For years, and I never knew.

SHUMWAY

To me, it's like a jigsaw puzzle. We shuffle pieces around, trying to find which ones look like they go together, when suddenly the entire design / becomes...

BROCK

You know, it's probably just as wise not to talk like this in front of Peter.

SHUMWAY

Think about it. If I hadn't read your paper in June of '93 on mapping peptides...

BROCK

June of '93, I think you're right.

SHUMWAY

...because if I hadn't, I would never have gone to the meetings in Tucson that year in order to hear you speak.

BROCK

I nearly won the Nobel twice for that work, did you know that?

SHUMWAY

'95 and '99.'

BROCK

I got robbed in '99.

SHUMWAY

Your talk completely changed my life...I thought my brain was on fire ...

BROCK

Wait a second. You went to Tucson in '93? How old were you then?

SHUMWAY

Fifteen. I thought I'd have to hitchhike, but my mother finally broke down and paid for a bus.

BROCK

(BEAT)

You're very...different, aren't you?

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Maybe on Sunday, you'll come to the apartment...meet Annie, my wife...second wife, technically. Good, I'll expect you at 10. Why do you keep looking at your watch? It's just time for the regular check, right?

SHUMWAY

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Uh-huh.

BROCK

Nothing particular needs saying?

SHUMWAY

No...not necessarily.

BROCK

Is there something you'd like to say?

SHUMWAY

Not yet.

BROCK

William...

SHUMWAY

All right.

(BEAT)

Okay, here's what I was thinking. Normal cells read each other's signals, which can be 'yes' or 'no.' Cancer cells read only their own signals, which are always 'yes, keep dividing'...that's why they're so hard to stop. An R-cell used to be a cancer cell and still looks like one...at least that's what real cancer cells think, so they let its 'no' signals in. The result...'no,' from the outside, 'yes' from within...the signals start to scramble... then shutdown...meltdown...death. Only it's not that simple, why?

(SLIGHT BEAT)

One more minute...play.

BROCK

The R-cell always goes after the nearest cancer cell it can find...the R-cell looks and acts just like a cancer cell, so it winds up attacking itself.

SHUMWAY

Exactly. After three or four days, the R-cells wipe themselves out, and the tumors start to grow back. If I could add another gene to the R-cells...one that'll keep them alive long enough...

BROCK

You're not considering bc12, I hope?

SHUMWAY

Actually...I was. If I can isolate the sequence / then...

BROCK

Talk to Peter. He was sure about bc12...then after wasting six months...remind me, I'll dig up his paper.

SHUMWAY

April of '99. He used the wrong sequence.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

When I read his paper, it made perfect sense. It's just, you know...wrong.

BROCK

So find the right one.

SHUMWAY

I did.

BROCK

That's why the new set of slides?

(SLIGHT BEAT)

How long before the tumor started to shrink?

SHUMWAY

14 hours...down from 20.

BROCK

(UNIMPRESSED)

14...20...what else?

SHUMWAY

I injected the mice nine days ago. Well, eight.

BROCK

How long before they began to relapse?

SHUMWAY

They haven't.

BROCK

(BEAT)

Let me understand. You haven't had a single tumor start to grow back?

SHUMWAY

They're still shrinking...in fact.

BROCK

For eight days?

SHUMWAY

In two more minutes, it could be nine.

BROCK

You do know, it's still much too soon to be sure.

SHUMWAY

I know.

BROCK

(UNABLE TO RESTRAIN HIS EXCITEMENT)

Jesus, William, what the hell's wrong with you? You don't think at some point it might've been nice to mention this?

SHUMWAY

I figured you'd say it's much too soon to be sure.

BROCK

Well, it is. So, don't start getting excited, it's premature!

(LIGHTS UP ON OFFICE. ALICE CURITON, A 21-YEAR-OLD STUDENT IS SEATED AND TALKING TO BROCK. HE IS PREOCCUPIED, LOOKING FOR SOMETHING. HIS COMMENTS ARE IN THE SPIRIT OF DISTRACTED GRUNTS)

CURITON

So, while technically I'm only a junior, I topped out of the undergrad track with my scores.

BROCK

Uh-huh.

CURITON

And now, with the Pauling Fellowship, that pays for space and enough computer time, I can do my own projects...up at Harvard...?

BROCK

Right...near Boston...

CURITON

...so it's not terribly far-fetched to think you could use me this summer / in your...

BROCK

You know, I'm looking, but I don't see a folder...

CURITON

Actually, I'm sort of pissed. I thought Harvard would have immunology worth doing...with a 'C'...that's Curiton with a 'C'...

BROCK

Um.

CURITON

...or at least down the block at MIT.

BROCK

Down the block, / yes.

CURITON

I guess when 80% of the full professors are over 50, the gears have to slow down / a little...

BROCK

And you sent a cover letter?

CURITON

...although truthfully, the whole field seems to be getting a little weak in the knees...

BROCK

With a transcript to my attention?

CURITON

...Yes, B,R,O,C, K, 'BROCK.' To me, the excitement is elsewhere. Cal Tech...a little crackle and pop at Duke, and, of course, here. Dr. Shumway...his article in CELL this month...I thought, 'no way he could've shrunk a tumor for two weeks like that'...but after the second read, I had to grab my head to make sure it didn't explode. Then I threw open the window and started shouting how everyone else in tumor research should pack up their things and go home.

(BROCK STEALS A GLANCE AT HIS WATCH)

If I was talking too much, you'd let me know, because I'm a little nervous. You wouldn't just look at your watch, you'd let me know.

BROCK

(SLIGHT BEAT, LOOKING UP FROM HIS WATCH)

Uh, yes, of / course...

CURITON

Please...all I want is a broken chair in his lab this summer. Say yes, I really need the challenge.

BROCK

I'm sorry, but I've looked everywhere, and I have nothing here from you. Now my secretary said I would see you today?

CURITON

Naturally, I was grateful. Here, I brought another.

BROCK

And you're sure it was / her?

CURITON

The important thing is I'm here, and we're meeting.

BROCK

(BEAT)

Miss Curiton, do I look like someone who can't think of ways to fill his time? You have no appointment...there was never a transcript...I'm guessing you called and my secretary...no, please don't defend yourself. In fact, try not to speak at all. You're like a thousand poodles barking at once. We don't take summer students here. We found they were often in love with themselves for no apparent reason. They made snide remarks about people over 50, as though being young and irritating were somehow an end in itself. Now I am looking at my watch, and I see it's noon.

CURITON

Then if it's okay, I'd like to take you to lunch.

BROCK

(BEAT)

No need...we understand each other.

CURITON

I have to do this, it's destiny. The science is perfect and what an incredible story. On one side, you've got cancer...smart...tough...enthusiastic...never slows down. On the other, there's a normal, say a liver cell, divides maybe five times in its entire life. Which would you bet on? Now take that same cancer, put it in a room with the R-cells and watch them go...reading each other...playing off each other...making the perfect moves. Good and evil mean nothing...it's the best against the best, every moment electric...and tragic, because this is war, there's only one winner, and it's winner takes all. By the end, they know each other so well, there's a kind of love, and they know they'll have to destroy the thing they love. It's epic. That's the kind of science I want to do.

BROCK

(BEAT, THEN INDICATING THAT SHE SHOULD GIVE HIM HER TRANSCRIPT. A QUICK GLANCE, HE IS CLEARLY IMPRESSED)

Good, now we do have a folder on you.

(AS HE STANDS, SHE DOES SO AS WELL)

As it happens I'm on my way to Dr. Shumway's lab. If you want to just say hello...

(HE PICKS UP HIS BRIEFCASE AND UMBRELLA. THEY WALK)

So tell me...Alice? Did you have a relative who died of cancer? A close friend?

CURITON

Excuse me?

BROCK

Something got you interested in cancer research, that's all I meant.

CURITON

That's what I thought you meant. I'm a woman, so it's got to be personal. I can't just love science like you.

BROCK

Miss Curiton, you want something very badly from me. So if you find me a little patronizing, my suggestion is...live with it.

(THEY ENTER THE LAB WHERE SHUMWAY IS WORKING)

SHUMWAY

Remember what you were saying about the sequence?

BROCK

Dr. Shumway...Miss, uh...

(CURITON STARTS TO EXTEND HER HAND)

SHUMWAY

(PLEASANT BUT INDIFFERENT)

Hi.

(TO BROCK)

Isn't today Washington?

BROCK

I thought you might want to hear a little news.

SHUMWAY

Let me show you my idea first. Maybe the tumors start coming back at two / weeks...

BROCK

Did you try cutting that chain out of the sequence?

SHUMWAY

Didn't help.

BROCK

How about increasing / the...?

SHUMWAY

What if instead of increasing the 'no signals,' I focus on ramping the signal / strength up...?

BROCK

Except you're close to optimal/ strength already.

CURITON

What if you spliced in a gene sequence that varies the signals to 5% 'yes?'
(SLIGHT BEAT)

Sorry.

SHUMWAY

Go on.

CURITON

I think the tumors could be breaking your code.

SHUMWAY

Adding those five will drop the actual 'no' signal impact by closer to 10.

CURITON

I know. But if you randomize the five, you could get enough extra scramble to more than wipe out the loss.

SHUMWAY

(BEAT)

Interesting.

CURITON

Really?

SHUMWAY

When we tried it, it didn't work...

CURITON

Oh.

SHUMWAY

...but it's still an interesting thought.

BROCK

(BEAT)

There now...we've met. Unfortunately, Miss Curiton has a train to catch?

CURITON

Right.

(TO SHUMWAY)

Thank you.

(SHAKING HIS HAND. THEN, SHAKING DR. BROCK'S HAND)

'Never overstay your welcome,' that's my motto.

(SHE EXITS)

BROCK

'If you don't like the way I drive, stay off the sidewalk.' That's her motto.

SHUMWAY

Then how come you brought her here?

BROCK

I don't know...I was curious?

SHUMWAY

Me too. Why don't I call downstairs and / ask them to...

BROCK

No...let her get back to Boston first. I'll have Connie phone and ask her to come back tomorrow...for an appointment. Tuck in your shirt, William. How can you work with your shirt hanging / out?

SHUMWAY

Sorry.

BROCK

The conference planners in Tucson just called.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Looks like we're in. They even gave us a Friday slot.

SHUMWAY

Unbelievable.

BROCK

Congratulations on an excellent start.

SHUMWAY

Start?

BROCK

A Saturday slot would be unbelievable. Friday at 10 is an excellent start.

SHUMWAY

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Aren't you excited?

BROCK

Of course.

SHUMWAY

I mean, how many papers get chosen for Tucson?

BROCK

Very few.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

But even fewer get picked for a Saturday slot. All I'm saying is don't forget the difference. Friday at 10 is promising. And promise...

(REFERRING TO CURITON)

...is all you need when you're her age. But for you, it should never be enough.

SHUMWAY

No...you're right.

BROCK

(SUDDENLY AWARE HE MAY HAVE HURT SHUMWAY'S FEELINGS. AN AWKWARD BEAT)

You need an umbrella?

SHUMWAY

Why?

BROCK

There's a storm on its way up from Florida. Take it, I never catch colds.

SHUMWAY

Then why did you bring it?

BROCK

In fact, keep it. I'll just wind up leaving it on the plane.

SHUMWAY

I'm not upset.

BROCK

It's just an umbrella.

SHUMWAY

I mean, I see your point. Friday isn't Saturday...you're right.

BROCK

Well, then...enough said.

SHUMWAY

(BEAT, THEN INDICATING THE UMBRELLA)

I guess I can always use...

BROCK

I got that in London, you know.

SHUMWAY

Thanks.

BROCK

So, don't lose it. It's a nice umbrella. Well...

(BROCK LEAVES. SHUMWAY ADMIRES THE UMBRELLA. THEN,

LOOKING UP, HE OPENS IT, AS THOUGH IT HAS STARTED TO RAIN.
HE IS UNAWARE THAT CURITON HAS ENTERED THE LAB, HOLDING A
PIZZA BOX. HE SUDDENLY SEES HER)

CURITON

I decided to take a later train.

SHUMWAY

Miss...

CURITON

Curiton. That's Curiton with a 'C'. I figured, hey, 12:15, time for lunch...

(INDICATING THE UMBRELLA)

You in the middle of something?

SHUMWAY

No...they're expecting rain.

CURITON

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Yeah, well, I grabbed a few slices down the block. I hope you like pepperoni.

(SHE SETS DOWN THE PIZZA AND STARTS TO EAT A SLICE
RAVENOUSLY)

SHUMWAY

How is it?

CURITON

Delicious. All the pizza in Boston is made by Greeks. Slice?

(HE GESTURES NO, AS SHE CONTINUES EATING)

SHUMWAY

You might want to think about eating more slowly.

CURITON

Why?

SHUMWAY

You'll burn the roof of your mouth.

CURITON

It's such a waste of time eating slowly. Honest opinion, what do you think of me?

SHUMWAY

I barely know you, Ms. Curiton. I was just watching you eat.

CURITON

I wish you'd call me Alice. I've got a boyfriend, it's just awkward the other way.
(AS SHE CONTINUES EATING)

I didn't actually just get back with the pizza, I was waiting for Dr. Brock to leave.

SHUMWAY

I kind of...

CURITON

Plus, I faked my appointment, he could tell. I really don't believe in lying, so I never get to practice, that's why I'm so inept ... which should tell you how desperate I am.

(AS SHE HANDS HIM A TRANSCRIPT)

In case you want to look while we're talking.

SHUMWAY

Thanks.

CURITON

(INDICATING THE TRANSCRIPT)

Anything about it unclear?

SHUMWAY

You're very intense, aren't you?

CURITON

Say I can work with you, and I'll shut up.

SHUMWAY

Part of the problem is you're an undergraduate.

CURITON

Why, because that's what it says on my transcript?

SHUMWAY

Well...yes. It says 21...undergraduate right here.

CURITON

Okay, but that's where the similarity ends. What if I move to New York for the fall...do my senior project with you, while I finish whatever classes...?

SHUMWAY

That's the other problem, I don't have time to teach you.

CURITON

I'm not asking you to teach me.

SHUMWAY

You'd be my student, so wouldn't I kind of have to? I like working alone.

CURITON

All I want is a chance to be around you and watch.

SHUMWAY

Then I wouldn't be working alone.

CURITON

Look, my fellowship travels with me, so you'll be getting me for free...I'll do any job your technicians hate doing, and you just have to go like this when you don't want to talk. It's really not that bad a deal.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

You're considering it, I can tell.

SHUMWAY

How?

CURITON

You haven't thrown me out.

SHUMWAY

I didn't think you would leave.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Your idea before about 5% 'yes' signals...how'd you come up with it?

CURITON

It just seemed logical.

SHUMWAY

Adding 'yes' to get 'no' isn't logical.

CURITON

I did the math.

SHUMWAY

Right, but before the math, you had the idea. Where did that come from?

CURITON

I don't know if I can ... okay, a couple of days ago I was thinking...then on the train this morning, something else, but that didn't work, so I thought about chicken lo mein for lunch...picked up the idea again...got stuck...thought the smell, we're probably passing through Bridgeport...had another idea...liked the idea...got pissed off...decided on pizza instead...then something different about the feel of the tracks... noticed somebody's hat...thought about 'hat' as a metaphor...and suddenly this popped out.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Is that okay?

SHUMWAY

(BEAT)

Look, it's only one more year...there are worse things than a degree from Harvard.

CURITON

Nobody there believes in a cure. They treat the word like a relic from some grainy old film about Louis Pasteur. You get tenure by tacking another 20 seconds onto someone's remission. 'Being cured' is how children think...like 'abracadabra, it's gone.'

SHUMWAY

It's only Harvard, so I'm sure you correct them.

CURITON

I used to. Now I just tell them to read your paper.

SHUMWAY

You're 21, Alice, you'll read plenty of other papers.

CURITON

It's too late, yours got inside my brain and rearranged the circuits. Forget trying to kill tumors. You've created a cell that gets them to fall on their swords and die. You've got cells talking other cells into taking a moral position. The whole idea is completely insane and exactly right. Other people might be older and have more experience, but they won't get it like me.

SHUMWAY

(AFTER A COUPLE OF BEATS)

Do you want to see my favorite toy?

(INDICATING A PIECE OF LAB EQUIPMENT)

It's the highest resolution cell counter made. Only places you'll find them are Oxford, Cal Tech and here.

CURITON

How much did it cost?

SHUMWAY

Precisely? A lot. Here's what a level four mouse carcinoma looks like on it.

(HE CLICKS A CONTROLLER, AND A LUMINESCENT DISPLAY APPEARS ON AN OVERHEAD SCREEN. THERE IS A DENSE CLUSTER OF SHIMMERING, YELLOW DISCS, WITH A MUCH SMALLER NUMBER OF MORE DIFFUSELY DISTRIBUTED, SHIMMERING BLUE DISCS)

Every cell gets a radioactive tag...blue for normal, yellow for tumor and...this is two days after injecting the mouse...

(HE CLICKS THE CONTROLLER, AND A MODIFIED SCREEN APPEARS, IN WHICH SOME OF THE YELLOW DISCS HAVE BEEN REPLACED BY LUMINOUS GREEN ONES)

...green for R-cells.

CURITON

Far out.

SHUMWAY

Now at eight days...

(CLICK, AND A NEW SCREEN, THIS ONE WITH MORE GREEN AND FEWER YELLOW DISCS)

...12...

(CLICK, STILL MORE GREEN AND FEWER YELLOW)

...14...

(CLICK, THE DIRECTION HAS REVERSED, WITH YELLOWS REPLACING BLUES)

...and the tumor comes roaring back.

CURITON

Any way to break it down by location?

(CLICK. A GRID OF VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL LINES ARE SUPERIMPOSED OVER THE LAST DISPLAY)

Nice.

SHUMWAY

Just not specific enough.

(CLICK. A GRID OF MUCH FINER, CLOSER LINES IS SUPERIMPOSED OVER THE FIRST)

Say I want a closer look at this one.

(HE MOVES A CURSOR, UNTIL IT IDENTIFIES A PARTICULAR SQUARE IN THE GRID. CLICK. THE SQUARE IS INSTANTLY ENLARGED, SO THAT IT COMPLETELY FILLS THE SCREEN)

CURITON

Excellent.

SHUMWAY

Now I drop another grid ...

(CLICK. A GRID OF LINES, IDENTICAL TO THE FIRST ONE WE SAW, IS NOW SUPERIMPOSED ON THE SCREEN)

...20 more times, and I've got data I can actually use. Too much, even for three post-docs and eight technicians. To start, you'll just be learning my procedures from Tom ... he's my chief technician. The procedures are really tedious, as is Tom. I don't do things like Harvard, so if you really want to work here, you'll have to start all over with me.

CURITON

Wow.

SHUMWAY

As far as transferring, Columbia's got the best cell biology program in New York.

CURITON

Done.

SHUMWAY

Actually, they like it when people apply. How much time after exams will you need?

CURITON

Figure 15, 20 minutes to pack.

SHUMWAY

Then I'll expect you here in June.

CURITON

Dr. Brock said no way till the fall.

SHUMWAY

It's not like there's an actual rule about summer students. He just didn't ... you know ... want to take you. And now...

CURITON

Right, you need to get back to work.

SHUMWAY

Call if you have any questions.

CURITON

(BEAT)

Don't you wish June wasn't so far away?

SHUMWAY

See you then.

(BEAT, SHUMWAY STARTS WORKING. CURITON DOESN'T LEAVE)

Yes?

CURITON

I'm just...I feel like someone said, "Here's a dollar. Go buy a perfect day."

(LIGHTS UP ON SAUL ROTH, MID-SIXTIES, CHIEF OF TOXICOLOGY,
AND SHUMWAY IN THE WAITING ROOM OF BROCK'S OFFICE)

ROTH

Some people eat to live, I live to eat. Even with the ulcer. A glass of tea, maybe an egg in the morning. A light lunch...something dairy...then a sensible dinner.

(BEAT)

This is what I'm supposed to eat. But am I a good boy? And what's more, I love to nosh. Did you know that man is the only animal who snacks? We've turned eating into a hobby. Sweets, I can live without. You like chocolate, it's yours. But a fresh warm loaf of bread...I believe this is the closest we'll ever get to seeing the face of God.

(BEAT)

We haven't been introduced. Saul Roth, Chairman of Toxicology.

SHUMWAY

Of course. William Shumway.

ROTH

Don't be offended, your shirt tail is out.

(AS SHUMWAY TUCKS IT IN)

I find when I tuck it into the underpants, the elastic keeps it in place. This is just a suggestion.

(BEAT)

My appointment was for 10. Then again, what's an hour? My people waited 40 years in the desert. How? We learned to live off our humps.

(BEAT)

Here's something no one knows why. Our taste buds are lined up in neat little rows.. and yet the nature of human appetite's a mystery. You're from Minnesota.

(BEAT)

I'm asking.

SHUMWAY

Yes, outside Duluth.

ROTH

Do you know the Epsteins...Abe and Betty?

SHUMWAY

I don't think so.

ROTH

Actually, they live in Wisconsin, but they're probably the nearest Jews to Duluth.

(BROCK HAS COME OUT. BOTH ROTH AND SHUMWAY STAND)

BROCK

Saul...forgive me.

ROTH

No, I've been getting acquainted with William. Still waters run deep.

BROCK

The strangest phone call. A woman from Newsweek. Anything new on the horizon, that sort of thing, when all of a sudden she asks if I was aware some of our people...a Dr. Lazlow for one...use only female sheep, and might there be a political agenda that her readers should know. I said that was a fair question and, yes, Dr. Lazlow's sheep are all female, but as Dr. Lazlow is studying cervical cancer, I wasn't sure how it could be helped. It turns out I'd heard her wrong. She wasn't from Newsweek but Ewe's Week. They're some radical, feminist, animal rights group. The thing is, Saul, she's thrown off my whole morning. You know, instead of trying to find another time that works for us both... tomorrow's the Friday talk — why don't you grab me while people are getting coffee. I can't imagine whatever you need will take more than a couple...

SHUMWAY

I can come by / later...

BROCK

Don't be silly, Saul's flexible.

SHUMWAY

All I need is / a minute...

BROCK

I'm sure it isn't a problem for Saul.

ROTH

(BEAT)

So, tomorrow. What's a day?

(ROTH EXITS. SHUMWAY HANDS PAGES TO BROCK, AS THEY ENTER THE OFFICE)

BROCK

I hope these revisions are final, they need to go out today.

SHUMWAY

The schedule for Tucson's been set for a month.

BROCK

When they gave you Friday, your tumors were only shrinking for two weeks...now you're getting five. Peter Whitcomb just applied for a patent...brand new vaccine. I want that Saturday slot.

SHUMWAY

How can Peter...?

BROCK

He says it's in the pipeline.

SHUMWAY

What does that mean?

BROCK

When you've got something, you publish. When you've got nothing, you say it's in the pipeline. The press thinks, 'Peter Whitcomb, won the Prize at 42...maybe it's something.' Drug companies like Pfizer and Merck think it's got to be something, or why all the press? And even nothing, when you water it with 50 million dollars, sometimes a vaccine will grow.

(INDICATING THE REVISIONS)

Better.

(HANDING THEM BACK TO SHUMWAY)

Get these out today. What did Saul say to you?

SHUMWAY

I have no idea.

BROCK

All those years in the desert? His uncle Milt, who probably doesn't exist?

SHUMWAY

He waited an hour. How come you didn't put off that woman's call?

BROCK

There was no woman. He knows that.

SHUMWAY

He does?

BROCK

Of course. Why bother lying to him, if he doesn't know it's a lie?

SHUMWAY

What if he believed you?

BROCK

EWE'S WEEK?

SHUMWAY

I thought there was a woman. I was even thinking, 'What an original name for a magazine.'

BROCK

Saul's afraid I may be planning to cut a few of his projects, but he's mistaken, I plan on cutting them all. My problem is, Saul has a lot of friends on the Board, so until my position is stronger...I'm on a leash here like everyone else. If I go to war with Saul, I better be sure I can win.

SHUMWAY

Why does somebody have to win?

BROCK

People are dying from cancer. William. We need fresh ideas, not someone who has to cut short a meeting, when it's time for his nap. You think your lab is big? Well, you need twice as big. That's what Peter has, and the money it takes is embarrassing.

SHUMWAY

Just because Dr. Roth can't still work at the same / level...

BROCK

There are only so many dollars. Do I need to go to the blackboard and draw you a pie? We're in a dogfight, William...This is my job, which I do, so you can afford to be nice. (SLIGHT BEAT)
Terrific, now you're upset.

SHUMWAY

No, I...what do you want me to say?

BROCK

How about 'thank you?' And be careful ... Saul doesn't need to be gunning for you ... once the shooting starts, you might still catch a stray bullet standing next to me. So any time he starts in about Uncle Milt, that's when you duck.

(BROCK TURNS TO ADDRESS THE BOARD, HOLDING UP HIS HAND TO QUIET DISCUSSION)

BROCK

If I might? I'm beginning to think the Board doesn't quite understand. As of an hour ago, the conference planners in Tucson gave Dr. Shumway a Saturday slot. You're all business people, this is a simple business decision. William Shumway is beachfront property. MIT wants him, Duke wants him...after Tucson, he'll have Europe after him, too. Don't insult him. Give him the money he needs...so the post-docs come here instead of Duke...so he can have the space and equipment he could get in a second at MIT.

(TURNING TO SOMEONE)

Excuse me, I'm still talking! I know you're all busy, this wasn't on the agenda, and there are places you need to be. I don't have time for this either. I've got people waiting to hear your decision from Pfizer and Merck. So until I get an open and binding vote on my budget, nobody leaves this room. I left Yale and came here for one purpose only ... to

get something done. I still call it the ‘War Against Cancer.’ I think of myself as a soldier. I can’t compromise on this. If you won’t support me...

(TAKING AN ENVELOPE OUT OF HIS SUIT POCKET)

...I’ll have to submit this as of today.

(BROCK AND SHUMWAY IN A CORRIDOR)

SHUMWAY

So, there was nothing actually in the envelope?

BROCK

Of course, there was something, it had to look full.

SHUMWAY

What if they opened it and saw you were lying?

BROCK

They already knew I was lying. If the Board thought I was serious, they would have seen me as a hothead.

SHUMWAY

But this way, when they realized you were lying to them...they saw they could trust you? Huh.

(LIGHTS UP ON BROCK’S OFFICE, AS BROCK USHERS ROTH IN)

BROCK

Saul...come in. Sit. Coffee?

ROTH

Please.

BROCK

With a little milk. You see? I remember.

ROTH

Will you let me say something? Right here, right now, I insist.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Bravo. To a successful first year at the helm. Some directors, when they get here, they do a little this, a little that...but not you.

BROCK

There isn’t time.

ROTH

You said 'the hell with Toxicology. Chemo can go fly a kite. Fuck anyone but me and mine.' Which is how it should be...to a point. And the point is this. I heard a rumor about your Dr. Shumway...according to which, you asked the Board to put certain monies at his disposal.

BROCK

I'm not sure why you call it a rumor.

ROTH

My Uncle Milt...a very wealthy man...used to say, 'Never get too close to one idea.' He was Sephardic...came over in the Diaspora on a camel...

BROCK

Saul...please. This is a copy of my new budget.

ROTH

(AS HE READS)

You don't imagine the Board'll approve this / arrogant...?

BROCK

I can assure you they agonized before doing just that 10 minutes ago.

(BEAT)

I understand your disappointment, Saul. Really, I do. So I wouldn't think of you as disloyal, if you were to consider other offers that might come along.

ROTH

(GENUINELY STUNNED)

I'm 67 years old. My wife and I are very ... comfortable here.

BROCK

I seem to remember you've got a daughter living in Dallas, husband works for Raytheon? Maybe you could find something closer...get to see more of your grandchildren.

ROTH

You know, now that I'm looking more closely, did I say I couldn't live with these? A man can't get to be 67, he doesn't see flexible as a virtue.

BROCK

The thing is, Saul, it isn't just money for your projects. I'm cutting salaries, too.

ROTH

Well, then...I don't see the problem. My wife, she likes to shop. 32 years, I've told her what can you buy at Bloomingdale's that Macy's hasn't got? So, exactly how much were you thinking?

BROCK

I really don't want to insult you.

ROTH

Please...insult me.

BROCK

The fact is, I could get three post-docs with the money I'm paying you.

ROTH

Three more years, Bob, I'm 70. That's when a man is supposed to be old. I'll lie on the beach in Miami...go hear Edie Gorme...in the meantime, all I need is an office with my name on the door. A place to go each morning, I can put on a suit.

BROCK

Saul, I'm really not the bastard you think I am. If you would still like to stay / on...

ROTH

Ask anyone, Bob, I never used the word 'bastard.'

BROCK

...But about your own office, I don't see how. You know the problems with space here.

ROTH

I guess I didn't make myself clear. The money, I already told you...make me an offer, the answer is yes. But at 67, without my own office...I shouldn't have to explain / this to...

BROCK

Saul, it isn't just you. I talked with Howard this morning. I'm merging him and Chemo as of / the eighth.

ROTH

All due respect, Bob, Howard's a kid.

(HOLDING UP THE LIST OF PROJECTS)

These I can swallow. The office, though, I have to insist.

BROCK

No, Saul, you don't get to insist. Not anymore.

(BEAT)

So, what do you think?

ROTH

What do I think? Fuck you, is what I think. I've had an office for 33 years...since the day I got here from Hopkins.

BROCK

It's in the order of things, Saul...I'm sorry.

ROTH

I've been here through four different directors. At some point, every one of them needed my support ... when that day comes for you ...

BROCK

You wanted to meet, so we're meeting. I could've just sent you a memo.

ROTH

R-cells come and go. I'll be here to watch the sun burn out.

BROCK

There now...we've met.

(AN EXCLUSIVE MEN'S CLOTHING STORE. SHUMWAY IS TALKING FROM AN OFFSTAGE DRESSING ROOM)

BROCK

How do you like it?

SHUMWAY

It doesn't even look like me.

BROCK

That's the idea. Do you like it?

SHUMWAY

I look great. You don't think it's too expensive?

BROCK

For a Friday, you can pick something off the rack. For a Saturday slot, this is your suit. Hill-Matheson considers it a wise investment.

SHUMWAY

Are they aware it costs over a thousand dollars?

BROCK

Don't worry, the budget provides very clearly for that.

SHUMWAY

Under what?

BROCK

'Miscellaneous.' If this isn't 'miscellaneous,' I don't understand the word.

(SHUMWAY COMES ONSTAGE WEARING A SUIT WITH A WHITE HANDKERCHIEF, WHICH ARE IDENTICAL TO BROCK'S)
 Stand over here.
 (SHUMWAY STANDS FACING DOWNSTAGE WITH BROCK BEHIND HIM, AS THOUGH THEY ARE FACING A MIRROR)
 Your right shoulder's a little higher than the left.

SHUMWAY

Sorry.

BROCK

One of my sons had the same problem. It's an easy fix.

SHUMWAY

How many...sons?

BROCK

Two. Might've been the other shoulder, I forget.

SHUMWAY

What about a little color for the handkerchief?

BROCK

I don't see it.

SHUMWAY

Are they scientists?

BROCK

No, they're in real estate. Good kids, though...went into business together...their wives are close. We're on good terms. A little distant, that's only natural. With boys, I mean. Bright kids. Not brilliant...bright.

SHUMWAY

(SLIGHT BEAT, THEN SHIFTING HIS WEIGHT)
 I had no idea I was asymmetrical.

BROCK

Didn't your father ever buy you a suit?

SHUMWAY

I haven't seen him, since I was five.

BROCK

Ah.

SHUMWAY

Water under the bridge.

BROCK

Understood.

(SHUMWAY IS MOUTHING WORDS, AS HE STARES AT THE MIRROR)

What are you doing?

SHUMWAY

Practicing my talk along with the suit.

BROCK

Why don't you wear it to work? Get used to being the guy in the great looking suit.

(SHUMWAY SENSES BROCK APPROACH HIM FROM BEHIND)

Just a couple of hairs in back.

(BRUSHING THEM OFF WITH A TENDER AWKWARDNESS)

There now. Perfect.

(SHUMWAY ENTERS A LAB WHERE CURITON IS WORKING)

CURITON

Great suit.

SHUMWAY

Is it obvious my right shoulder's higher than my left?

CURITON

It's all anyone talks about here.

SHUMWAY

You have the list of which cultures I need you to make, while I'm gone?

CURITON

Yes.

SHUMWAY

The instructions on running the gels?

CURITON

They're on the list.

SHUMWAY

What'll you do if you run out of gel boxes?

CURITON

Look for more behind the fixatives where they always are, which is specified on the list.

SHUMWAY

Where's the list?

CURITON

Right here.

(POINTING TO HER HEAD)

SHUMWAY

Alice...

CURITON

And where you posted it on the liquid nitrogen tank and on the tissue culture hood where you also posted it just in case.

SHUMWAY

(GETTING A KEY OUT OF HIS POCKET)

Dr. Brock thought I should leave the key with one of the post-docs or Tom.

CURITON

How come you didn't?

SHUMWAY

If something went wrong here, they'd all be upset. You're the only one who'd be as upset as me.

CURITON

(BEAT, AS HE HANDS HER THE KEY)

Listen, a few of the toxicology post-docs were talking...and one of them said he heard you believe in God.

SHUMWAY

(SLIGHT BEAT)

And?

CURITON

I defended you.

(BEAT)

You're kidding.

SHUMWAY

I never talk about it here.

CURITON

You don't mean literally?

SHUMWAY

This is why.

CURITON

You're a scientist.

SHUMWAY

I don't want to discuss it.

CURITON

Why would you want to believe in something you can't even discuss? This is the same thing I used to get at St. Agnes.

SHUMWAY

You went to Catholic School?

CURITON

Until they kicked me out.

SHUMWAY

Really? It sounds like a match made in heaven.

CURITON

If they would've just said, 'It's okay to be confused. Explaining why babies have to suffer gives us a headache, too.' But instead of admitting they don't have the answers, they blamed me for asking the questions. It meant I didn't have faith.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

I would've made a terrible Sister Alice ... faith always seemed like just rolling over to me. Although the funny thing is, I wanted them to be right. I always wanted to give myself over completely to one huge, spectacular idea, and now I have...it just isn't God.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

I used to envy the girls who had faith. Their brains may have been assembled from a kit, but they had pleasant dispositions...they weren't always angry and disappointed like me.

SHUMWAY

Why were you disappointed?

CURITON

I don't know...that there were so many beautiful, terrifying questions, and nobody else seemed to care. When I was little, I couldn't fall sleep at night, so I asked my parents to explain the dark. They said, 'Here's a nightlight, you'll be fine,' but I knew the dark was still there.

SHUMWAY

My mother takes cream in her coffee. I used to ask her to drizzle it slowly, because I loved watching the swirls. One morning I noticed the swirls in her second cup were completely different from the first...but after she stirred, the color looked exactly the same. I was terrified, so I asked her if the world was like that color...an illusion of order hiding a true condition of chaos.

CURITON

What did she say?

SHUMWAY

'God works in mysterious ways...but don't worry...you'll understand everything as soon as you're dead.'

(SLIGHT BEAT)

I think God...whatever we call God...never reveals itself to us directly...only in the traces it leaves behind. We have to listen for it in a trail of echoes. I think God is the order of things...but the world is so full, it's hard to find that order. It gets buried in the sheer amount...the chaos and riddles...the coffee swirls. Look at the R-cell. 'The enemy of my enemy is my friend.' The logic of a possible cure, and it's buried in a paradox.

CURITON

It sounds kind of Buddhist. I guess Buddhist is okay.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Do you ever worry you'll get all the way to the bottom of those coffee swirls, and there won't be an order, just more swirls?

SHUMWAY

No...that's what makes it faith.

CURITON

So where is the bottom...how do you get there? I don't even know where to look.

SHUMWAY

You can't find it by looking. You have to listen. If you're quiet and alert enough, maybe you'll hear.

CURITON

I'm too impatient. Teach me to listen like that.

SHUMWAY

There's no way to teach it. I picked you, because you already can.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Your idea on the train from Boston that time...that wasn't something you figured out...you started listening, and then you heard.

CURITON

(BEAT)

Do you want to have sex?

SHUMWAY

I thought you have a boyfriend.

CURITON

I've decided I like you better.

(AFTER SEVERAL BEATS)

This is embarrassing.

SHUMWAY

No, it's a nice...thought.

CURITON

(SLIGHT BEAT)

You're not gay...on top of being religious?

SHUMWAY

You're my student, it wouldn't be right.

CURITON

I know two post-docs who are practically engaged to their lab chiefs.

SHUMWAY

Post-docs aren't students.

CURITON

So you can't have sex with me, but you can with someone you don't even trust with your key?

(SHE WALKS OVER AND SEEMS ABOUT TO KISS HIM)

That makes sense.

(SHE ADJUSTS THE KNOT ON HIS TIE)

Knock 'em dead in Tucson.

SHUMWAY

(AS SHE IS ABOUT TO LEAVE)

Alice...you won't be a student forever. Rain check?

(LIGHTS UP ON BROCK, TALKING INTO HIS CELL PHONE)

BROCK

No, I want Dr. Shumway in the penthouse suite, right where you booked him over a month...excuse me, am I still talking? You screwed up, and that's okay, now live with it. As a scientist, I pride myself on being dispassionate. But as director of this institution, I'll have our attorneys sue your hotel till it bleeds.

(BEAT)

Good, then. And make sure the quiche and those little meatballs are hot.

(LIGHTS UP IN THE LAB. BROCK ENTERS)

BROCK

Tell me again, slowly this time.

SHUMWAY

I was checking weights on the new group of mice when I noticed several...their glands are starting to swell.

BROCK

You finish checking all your other mice?

SHUMWAY

Three times.

BROCK

Any swelling with them?

SHUMWAY

All the other groups seem fine. It's just the new one.

BROCK

This is why I had to "stop whatever I'm doing?" Last month, when the glands in that other group started to swell...

SHUMWAY

I know.

BROCK

Were those animals beginning to relapse, or was it a simple infection like I said?

SHUMWAY

And I'm sure it's a simple infection again. 99% sure.

BROCK

Good. Can I go now? I've still got a million things to do before tomorrow.

SHUMWAY

That's the problem, Tucson's tomorrow. There's no time to section the tissue.

BROCK

So, you'll section it when you get back. Now go home and get some sleep.

SHUMWAY

Is that what you think I should say?

BROCK

About what?

SHUMWAY

In Tucson. When I mention the group, say there wasn't time, I'll section it when I get back.

BROCK

Why even mention it?

SHUMWAY

(SLIGHT BEAT)

You mean...I guess I'm not sure what you / mean.

BROCK

One group means nothing.

SHUMWAY

Right, so why not / mention it?

BROCK

Why do you think final drafts had to be in a month ago? Something always comes up at the last minute, everyone knows that.

SHUMWAY

Uh-huh. So, if everyone knows that...I guess I'm still not / clear...

BROCK

Why, do you think there's something to worry about?

SHUMWAY

No. I'm sure as soon as I section / the tissue...

BROCK

You'll be addressing reporters...idiots with an MBA. It would take a week to explain the magnitude of what you've been doing. You'll have 45 minutes, tops. Out of which, you'll have their undivided attention for 10. By the time they've had a couple of cocktails, they'll remember maybe two things you said, and trust me, this will be one.

SHUMWAY

I'm sure if I can be matter-of- / fact...

BROCK

Do you want to listen, or did you wake up today knowing more than me?!

(BEAT)

You can't expect people like that to understand science. If an animal dies, all they know is it's dead. People are bringing their checkbooks tomorrow. And you want to stand up and give them what people with money love the most...a perfect excuse not to spend it.

SHUMWAY

(BEAT)

So then...you're saying as long as I deal with it right after Tucson...

BROCK

Obviously, if it turns out there really was a problem, you email people and let them know right away.

SHUMWAY

I guess bringing it up before I've had any chance to investigate ... it's not like we're trying to publish.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

The funny thing is I already had one foot out the door. If I hadn't decided to check one more time...

BROCK

Listen, I told the driver to pick me up first. That way you'll get a little more sleep.

SHUMWAY

Thanks. You're not angry?

BROCK

About what?

SHUMWAY

It just seemed the tone of your voice...

BROCK

'The tone of my voice'...honestly, William.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

I can't believe we're still up. Excited?

SHUMWAY

You bet.

(A SPOTLIGHT ON SHUMWAY, WHO TURNS TO ADDRESS THE AUDIENCE IN TUCSON)

SHUMWAY

... And in conclusion...I truly believe that some day we'll look back on cancer the way we look at cholera today ... as the curious suffering of a primitive people.

(APPLAUSE. LIGHTS ON SHUMWAY AND ROTH, AS THE SOUND FADES, ROTH STILL CLAPPING AND POINTING HIS FINGER PLAYFULLY AT SHUMWAY)

ROTH

I knew him when, I knew him when... Very nice, very professional. In case your ears have been burning, a couple of rows behind me, I overheard someone, "This young man, if there wasn't already the Prize, they would have to call Sweden and make one." You probably don't know, I brought down a little something myself they want me to read. Should you happen to find yourself with a few extra minutes...

SHUMWAY

If there's any way I can / come...

ROTH

...The last I heard, they moved me to Monday, right after something very important on pus. You try the Jacuzzi?

SHUMWAY

Actually, there's...one in my room.

ROTH

I'll probably skip it. Looking across at a bunch of naked scientists...the idea alone, I want to throw up. It would be quite an honor...winning the Prize at your age. Younger than Watson...almost as young as Heisenberg.

SHUMWAY

Younger than Heisenberg...actually. Listen, I should probably...there's a little reception upstairs...of course, you're welcome, / if you'd like to come...

ROTH

You're very thoughtful, but I mostly came over...I was waiting at the front desk before...? You don't want to hear the toilet they gave me...and the man saw me wearing Hill-Matheson ...

(INDICATING HIS ID TAG, WITH NAME AND AFFILIATION)

...said a woman from New York sent a fax, did I know where Dr. Shumway... ?

(HOLDING UP AN OPEN ENVELOPE, WITH A FOLDED FAX INSIDE, HE HANDS IT TO SHUMWAY, WHO STARTS TO READ)

Everything okay?

SHUMWAY

Yes.

ROTH

Good. You know, for such a young man, I admire your poise.

SHUMWAY

Thanks. I was a lot more nervous than I looked.

ROTH

I mean right now. If it were me, I'd be on the phone...

(INDICATING THE FAX)

...asking what she means by 'something the matter with two of your groups.'

SHUMWAY

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Anyway, I really need to...

ROTH

Please, go mingle. Maybe when we're back in New York, you'll come see my office, meet my new roommate ... we'll sit down and talk.

(SHUMWAY IN THE LAB. THE PHONE RINGS. AS SHUMWAY ANSWERS, LIGHTS COME UP ON BROCK, WHO IS CALLING FROM A PAY PHONE IN THE MILAN AIRPORT)

SHUMWAY

Hello?

BROCK

Listen, my cell phone died, can you hear me all right?

SHUMWAY

Where are you?

BROCK

The airport in Milan.

SHUMWAY

I've been trying to reach you.

BROCK

Arnie Pollock just tracked me down. You remember meeting him in Tucson last week... had that God awful toupee?

SHUMWAY

THE NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL...sure.

BROCK

Apparently, they're going to print in a week, and an article just kicked out. Do you have a clean draft of your paper from Tucson?

SHUMWAY

Yes.

BROCK

Get it out to him today...someone is faxing you details.

SHUMWAY

THE JOURNAL wants to run it?

BROCK

What do you think we've been talking about? There's no time to put it through regular peer review, but if he gets it today, he can fast track it and have it in galleys by Friday.

SHUMWAY

Friday?

BROCK

William, Pollock's calling it the most exciting work he's seen on tumor research in more than 10 years.

SHUMWAY

I thought we said Tucson was different from trying to publish.

BROCK

Right, if there turned out to be a problem.

(BEAT)

William, you have to talk louder. This airport seems to be filled with infants that haven't been fed.

SHUMWAY

Another group is involved.

BROCK

I know...you showed me the girl's fax.

SHUMWAY

I mean, another one since then.

BROCK

Why's that surprising? If the infection from the first group spread to / the second... ?

SHUMWAY

It wasn't an infection. The mice were starting to relapse.

BROCK

(A COUPLES OF BEATS)

Anything else different about those groups?

SHUMWAY

No. They're all from the latest batch that got shipped / but...

BROCK

You're sure?

SHUMWAY

I don't know why that would / matter.

BROCK

How many times do mice get infected, before they're even / shipped?

SHUMWAY

It wasn't / an infection.

BROCK

I'm just saying as an example. Anyway, this has nothing to do with THE JOURNAL.

SHUMWAY

Nothing / to...?

BROCK

You'll only be publishing the groups before Tucson.

SHUMWAY

Right but wouldn't we still want to...? We'll only be losing a couple of months.

BROCK

It doesn't work like that. THE JOURNAL's locked up for more than a year. Get him the draft today, will you? This sort of break never happens. Look, my plane is boarding...

(HE SEEMS ABOUT TO HANG UP)

SHUMWAY

I really think we should talk / about this...

BROCK

Fine. What if I try to reach you sometime / tomorrow?

SHUMWAY

I need more time!

(AFTER SEVERAL BEATS)

I'm sure it's / just...

BROCK

Okay, William...maybe you'd better tell me right now. Is the pressure getting too much for you?

SHUMWAY

What do you / mean?

BROCK

All the attention...everything moving so fast...

SHUMWAY

That's got nothing to do / with...

BROCK

Your project's the only thing on my calendar. I've never given anything this kind of focus, but I can't keep making the R-cells my life, if you're not completely sure.

SHUMWAY

I just told you I'm sure.

BROCK

And I heard that, but are you sure? Because the people on top of money mountain want better than kind of pretty sure. Tucson got you off the farm, made you credible, but these people have spent the last 30 years and billions of dollars on a cure that was always around the corner, but the cows never came home, so when they listen to a paper in Tucson, they're hearing every paper that nearly cost them their jobs...this time they want to be sure.

SHUMWAY

How?

BROCK

A letter in writing from God, but he said no...THE JOURNAL's the closest thing.

SHUMWAY

(BEAT)

And Dr. Pollock is clear, he'll only be getting results before Tucson?

BROCK

Just the groups you presented there.

SHUMWAY

So, all I'll be saying is 10 groups of mice were injected with the human equivalent of a level 4 carcinoma...

BROCK

Right. Can I tell him yes?

SHUMWAY

...the tumors continued to shrink for five weeks before stabilizing...I don't see how I'd be overstating...

BROCK

It's practically word for word from your talk.

SHUMWAY

He needs it by the end of the day?

BROCK

Don't worry about typos, his editors need the work.

SHUMWAY

I just want to make sure it's clear when I sectioned the latest group.

BROCK

As long as he gets it by the end of the day.

SHUMWAY

So he really liked my talk?

BROCK

'The most exciting work in over 10 years'...Arnie Pollock.

SHUMWAY

Hurry, you'll miss your plane.

BROCK

Are you near a cup?

SHUMWAY

A cup?

BROCK

Coffee cup...or just grab a beaker. You got it?

SHUMWAY

Yes.

BROCK

Now raise it.

SHUMWAY

Okay.

BROCK

Because I'm about to propose a toast. Is it in the air?

SHUMWAY

Yes.

BROCK

(HOLDING THE PHONE IN ONE HAND, BROCK RAISES THE OTHER)
To Sweden.

(END OF ACT I)