

Split

by

Guy R. Newsham

2068 Gatineau View Crescent
Gloucester, Ontario, Canada
K1J 7X1
guy.newsham@rogers.com
613-314-9903

Split

An experiment in rational behaviour with lives on the line, is it deal or no deal?

Characters:

Professor 'Mac' Berger, middle-aged tenured professor at a large university, male, any ethnicity

Elise/'Abigail', late-twenties, PhD student of Prof. Berger, female, any ethnicity

Brandon Jellicoe, late-twenties, male, any ethnicity

Note: Anyone producing this play is free to modify the genders of the characters, and to make the necessary small adjustments to the script to reflect these choices appropriately.

Setting: Behavioural laboratory in a university basement, the present day

(SR is the experimental chamber, sparsely furnished with a table and two chairs, and a standing lamp which hides a microphone and a speaker. There's a lockable filing cabinet in the corner. SL is the control room, also sparse, with a desk and two chairs, and a computer. The rooms are separated by a frame that represents a two-way mirror; both rooms are windowless.)

(ELISE removes some papers from the filing cabinet in the experimental chamber, locks the cabinet and arranges the papers on the desk. BERGER is in the control room.)

ELISE

Mac, do you think we should have something more colourful in here?

BERGER

(distracted) Hmm?

ELISE

Something more colourful, you know, some pictures, a rug, maybe?

BERGER

No, I don't think so.

ELISE

It'd be more comfortable, for our ... guests.

BERGER

We can't change things now, El, that's a basic rule.

ELISE

I know, but –

BERGER

I mean that's Design 101.

ELISE

Yes, of course, you're right.

BERGER

Yeah, I know. Have you eaten?

ELISE

No, I'm skipping dinners these days.

BERGER

What, is that some new kind of diet? That's insane.

ELISE

It's called the poverty diet.

BERGER

Come on, we don't pay you that badly.

ELISE

My car's in the shop, and ... it's fine, really, I'm not hungry anyway. And you?

BERGER

What?

ELISE

Have you eaten?

BERGER

(waving cell-phone) There's something waiting for me at home, apparently.

(Elise has moved to the furthest point from the lamp.)

(Berger takes a camera mounted on a tripod from its initial, hidden, position in a corner of the control room, and sets it up aiming at the experimental chamber through the two-way mirror.)

ELISE

Oh, nice.

BERGER

Drying out in the oven as we speak.

ELISE

Still, there's someone looking out for you.

BERGER

Could we just check the levels, El? You went a bit quiet there.

ELISE

Er, sure. Testing, testing, one, two, three. How's that?

BERGER

Fine. And closer?

(Elise moves up to the lamp and speaks into the shade.)

ELISE

Testing, testing, one, two, three.

BERGER

Good. And smile for the camera.

(Elise poses, while Berger takes a picture.)

BERGER (cont.)

Beautiful.

ELISE

Yeah, right.

BERGER

No, really. We should save that one for your passport. You'll love the conference.

ELISE

I hope it's worth the carbon.

BERGER

Carbon?

ELISE

The flight, it's a ton of carbon each.

BERGER

Yeah, but springtime in Paris ... And this conference, it's like the Oscars for our profession, without the nice clothes, of course.

ELISE

You all set in there?

BERGER

Yeah, I'll just test the panic signal.

ELISE

Ah yes, the panic signal.

BERGER

How's this?

(Berger waggles a dial and the lamp goes up and down in brightness.)

ELISE

Yeah, that's working.

BERGER

Just don't make me use it, please.

ELISE

You want some coffee?

BERGER

Yeah, thanks.

ELISE

And turn your speaker off in here.

BERGER

Oh, right.

(Berger flips a switch.)

BERGER (cont.)

Can you hear me now?

ELISE

If you're speaking now, I can't hear you.

(Elise exits the experimental chamber.)

BERGER

Good, good.

(Berger's cell phone buzzes. He looks at call display, groans, and answers.)

Hello ... Yes, I got your text about the casserole ... Well, I don't know, it's unpredictable ... It depends on many factors ... You should just go ahead and eat, you and the kids ... No, I haven't forgotten, I'll be ... Yes ... See you later.

(Elise arrives in the control room carrying two plastic cups of coffee.)

ELISE

Here you go.

BERGER

Oh, thanks.

(He takes the cup, and a takes a sip of coffee.)

BERGER (cont.)

Ugh.

ELISE

What's the matter?

BERGER

No sugar.

ELISE

Oh sorry, Mac. You'd think by now I'd know. I'll go and --

BERGER

No, no, no, I'll survive. Do me good. *(beat)* El, I was thinking ...

ELISE

What?

BERGER

If you're short of money I've got that first-year class next Tuesday, you could teach it for me, if you want. It's basic stuff, I can give you my notes. Just a couple of hours at TA rates, but still ...

ELISE

Oh, sure, if you like.

BERGER

You've done it before.

ELISE

Yeah.

BERGER

And more teaching hours can't hurt. Pedagogical experience is a box the hiring committees always have to tick.

ELISE

Yes. Thanks.

BERGER

You can do it Thursday too, if you want. Fucking undergrads! They're a pain in the neck, not a clue, but they think they're the cat's meow. Is there a self-esteem problem in this country? You betcha! There's way too much of it. You'll understand them better than I do anyway, you're closer to their age. You can probably still remember when you were just like them, whereas I'm not sure I was ever that young. You think when you get tenure you're done with undergrads, but then someone in the Dean's Office ... *(He takes another sip of coffee, scowls)* Maybe there's a packet of Splenda in here somewhere. *(He starts searching)* What time is it?

ELISE

Six twenty-five.

BERGER

And he's late. Punctuality's another thing that's gone by-the-bye.

ELISE

So, it's a 'he' this time?

BERGER

Yeah, here's the application *(searches out a piece of paper and gives it to her)*. Brandon, Brandon Jellicoe.

ELISE

Jellicoe?

BERGER

Yeah, unusual name, huh? Says he's male. *(beat)* OK?

ELISE

Yes, yes.

BERGER

Splenda's the pink one, right?

ELISE

Yellow.

BERGER

Yellow, of course. Oh, and here's Mr. Jellicoe now.

*(BRANDON enters the experimental chamber. His clothes are scruffy, as is his hair, maybe a wool beanie, maybe stubble or an unkempt beard. He has a limp.)
(Brandon goes to the mirror, and checks his appearance.)*

BERGER (cont.)

Yep, looks like a male to me. Not the finest example, but we're only paying ten bucks.

(gestures with wrist to Brandon) Hey! You're late buddy.

ELISE

(chastising) Mac.

BERGER

He can't see me.

ELISE

Still.

BERGER

Or hear me. Can't I have a little fun? *(beat)* Oh, you need the number, right?

ELISE

Yeah.

(Berger reaches into a bag, pulls out a slip of paper, unfolds it, and reads aloud.)

BERGER

And today's number is ... the number one.

ELISE

One? Shoot.

BERGER

I know, luck of the draw. You OK?

ELISE

Oh sure, I've done this a hundred times.

BERGER

Yeah, I bet you could do it in your sleep by now.

ELISE

Maybe. I'm surprised you came here tonight, though.

BERGER

It's not really my job to run these things.

ELISE

Exactly, you design them, and we carry them out.

BERGER

But I should sit in once in a while, after all, my name's first on the paper. Good luck.

(He hands her the slip of paper.)

ELISE

Thanks.

(Elise exits the control room, and immediately re-enters the experimental chamber.)

(Berger presses a few computer keys, starts the camera, then adopts a relaxed observational posture, occasionally checking his phone.)

ELISE (cont.)

You're Brandon?

BRANDON

Yeah, hi.

ELISE

Brandon Jellicoe?

BRANDON

That's me. Nice to meet you.

(He extends a hand. She declines the handshake.)

ELISE

We'll save the handshakes for later.

Oh, all right.

BRANDON

I'm Abigail.

ELISE

Abigail, that's a pretty name.

BRANDON

It's not my real name.

ELISE

Oh. What is your real name?

BRANDON

Abigail. I'm Subject A.

ELISE

... OK, I get it. And I'm Subject B?

BRANDON

That's correct.

ELISE

B for Brandon. What a coincidence.

BRANDON

Yes. Why don't we sit down, and I'll take you through the procedure.

(He sits. She sits.)

BRANDON

It's ten bucks, right?

ELISE

We'll get to that.

BRANDON

Cash?

ELISE

Yes.

BRANDON

Great. Up front?

ELISE

At then end.

BRANDON

After I've proven myself?

ELISE

(beat) So, we have a basic screening questionnaire, and then there's a consent form to sign.

BRANDON

Fire away.

(She takes out some papers and a pencil.)

ELISE

Are you taking any medications?

BRANDON

Nope.

ELISE

Alcohol or recreational drugs in the past twenty-four hours?

BRANDON

I saw the instructions on the recruitment poster, so no. Why do you care?

ELISE

They can affect your behaviour. Caffeine in the past six hours?

BRANDON

That was tougher. I work in a coffee shop, but no.

ELISE

Good.

BRANDON

Does Coke count? I mean, Coke as in Pepsi?

ELISE

Yes, of course.

BRANDON

Then no. You're not taking any blood, are you?

ELISE

We don't do that here.

BRANDON

Phew!

ELISE

You slept well?

BRANDON

Yes, last night, and this afternoon.

ELISE

Good for you. Have you had sex in the past twenty-four hours?

BRANDON

... That wasn't on the poster.

(Berger is suddenly alert.)

ELISE

It's confidential.

BRANDON

Then, no ... sadly.

ELISE

And in the past week?

(Berger flashes the lights.)

BRANDON

Are these lights flickering, or is it just me?

ELISE

It's a wiring problem, it's intermittent, ignore it.

BRANDON

Oh ... OK.

ELISE

So, sex? In the past week?

BRANDON

No, dry spell.

ELISE

OK, you passed the screen.

(Berger stops flickering the lights, but looks concerned.)

ELISE (cont.)

(with reference to lights not flickering anymore) See?

Now I'll tell you what we're going to do in the experiment.

BRANDON

I thought it might have started already.

ELISE

We're going to play a game. It's a very simple game. I have ten dollars to split up between us.

BRANDON

Whoa! I thought I was getting the full ten dollars.

ELISE

You are, this is an extra ten dollars.

BRANDON

Extra? Alright, I'm listening.

ELISE

I will offer you a certain fraction of that extra ten dollars. You have two choices, accept the offer, or reject it. If you accept the offer, you get your fraction, and I keep the rest. If you reject the offer, we both get nothing. Do you understand?

BRANDON

Sure. I was hoping for something more exciting, I guess.

ELISE

It's called The Ultimatum Game. It's a classic in Economics research.

BRANDON

Oh, well, if it's a classic.

ELISE

Any questions?

BRANDON

Do you really keep the rest, or does it just go back into a lab kitty, or something?

ELISE

I really keep it.

BRANDON

Really?

ELISE

Yes.

BRANDON

This is how they pay you here?

ELISE

Partly, yes.

BRANDON

So the more I get, the less you get?

ELISE

And *vice versa*, yes.

BRANDON

This sounds unethical, conflict of interest?

ELISE

It's been cleared by the Review Board.

(She pushes a paper and pen towards him.)

ELISE (cont.)

Here's a consent form. It describes your rights as a lab participant.

BRANDON

A guinea pig, huh?

ELISE

Take all time you need.

(He picks up the pen and signs it immediately.)

ELISE (cont.)

That was quick.

BRANDON

I trust you. You have a nice face.

ELISE

Do I?

BRANDON

Besides, I sign a dozen things like this every day on my phone. You know, apps? Who reads those?

ELISE

Apps, sure. Ready?

BRANDON

As I'll ever be. Make me an offer.

(She moves to lock away the consent form, and returns to the table with ten dollar bills/coins, while ...)

BERGER

(on his phone) This is Professor Berger with a message for Dean Prasad. Sorry I didn't catch you, but it's almost seven on a Friday, and obviously you have a life. Just wanted to touch base about

this new committee you've put me up for. I mean, 'Integrity and Plagiarism', that's serious stuff and I've got a sabbatical coming up. And I'm already teaching first-years. How about you put me on 'Campus Environment' instead, you know, recycling and stuff, that seems more do-able. Let me know. Anyway, have a nice weekend, I should get back to the lab. Bye for now.

(Elise looks at the piece of paper Berger drew earlier, and slides one dollar a little in front of the others.)

ELISE

One dollar.

BRANDON

... One dollar for me and nine dollars for you?

ELISE

Correct.

BRANDON

That's not fair.

ELISE

I started with ten dollars and I'm giving you one, that seems ... generous.

BRANDON

That's ten-percent on the ten bucks I'm already making. You only tip ten-percent in the coffee shop and your biscotti's gonna have hygiene problems.

ELISE

One dollar. Accept or reject?

BRANDON

Reject.

ELISE

But that's not rational. Reject and you get nothing.

BRANDON

I get my dignity.

ELISE

Five dollars you'd accept?

BRANDON

Yeah, that's a fair split.

ELISE

So your dignity's worth four dollars, then?

Fuck you.
BRANDON

Charming.
ELISE

So now you're offering me five dollars?
BRANDON

I'm offering you one dollar.
ELISE

And I'm telling you to shove it, in my charming voice.
BRANDON

What could I do to change your mind?
ELISE

Nothing, it's beneath me.
BRANDON

Alright then, rejection noted.
ELISE

(She notes something down.)

... That's it?
BRANDON

Yes, thank you.
ELISE

Don't we play another round? You make a different offer? We negotiate?
BRANDON

No.
ELISE

Ah. This is one of Berger's experiments, isn't it? His name was on the door back there.
BRANDON

It's one of several experiments in Professor Berger's Lab, yes.
ELISE

It figures. No-one liked Berger.
BRANDON

(Berger becomes more attentive again.)

ELISE

You know Professor Berger?

BRANDON

I took his first-year class, ten years ago, right before I dropped out. He didn't have time for kids like me. What's he like with you?

ELISE

Mac treats me very well.

BRANDON

Oh, it's 'Mac', is it?

ELISE

It's very informal around the lab.

BRANDON

He insisted on Professor Berger with us.

ELISE

You were undergrads, that's just the way it is.

BRANDON

Naturally.

ELISE

And things have changed in ten years.

BRANDON

They sure have.

ELISE

Now I want you to imagine that you're Subject A.

BRANDON

Ah, the experiment does continue, after all.

ELISE

How much would you have offered me?

BRANDON

Eight bucks.

ELISE

Eight? And why would you do that?

BRANDON

To show you I'm a nice guy.

ELISE

And money is how you do that?

BRANDON

It's one way, along with my winning smile. People used to say I was very photogenic.

ELISE

Uh-huh. And suppose I reject your shallow attempt to burnish your character?

BRANDON

Burnish?

ELISE

Polish, improve, repair.

BRANDON

You wouldn't reject it. Something's better than nothing.

ELISE

You rejected my offer.

BRANDON

That's just me.

ELISE

(beat) Why d'you drop out?

(Berger flashes the lights.)

BRANDON

The lights are flickering again.

ELISE

Yes.

BRANDON

Perhaps you should check that wiring, we wouldn't want any fires.

ELISE

It's not a problem.

BRANDON

I can't answer your questions with this going on.

ELISE

... Alright. I'll be right back.

(She exits the experimental chamber, and immediately re-enters the control room.)

(Berger stops the flickering, Brandon looks satisfied.)

BERGER

Where are you going with this, El? There's a script.

ELISE

I'm allowed to improvise.

BERGER

You go too far off script we can't use it.

ELISE

I've done this a hundred times, Mac, you haven't, I know what works.

BERGER

And I've spent a career doing this kind of thing, you haven't, not yet.

ELISE

If you don't like what I'm doing, we can stop and you can go home. Eat your wife's casserole before it's spoiled. Help your kids with their homework.

BERGER

Homework? That's a lost cause.

ELISE

So, should I stop?

BERGER

... No.

ELISE

You trust me?

BERGER

I don't want to go home.

ELISE

OK then.

(She exits the control room, and immediately re-enters the experimental chamber.)

BRANDON

Everything alright now?

ELISE

Yes.

BRANDON
You fixed the wiring?

ELISE
So, why d'you drop out?

BRANDON
I'll tell you for five bucks.

ELISE
You agreed to half-an-hour, and you signed a form. Tell me, I'm a good listener.

BRANDON
How is it relevant?

ELISE
I won't know until you tell me.

BRANDON
... I got injured, blew out my knee. You didn't see my limp? It's worse after a shift at the coffee shop, or on deliveries. And then the stairs to get down here ...

ELISE
Does it hurt now?

BRANDON
A little bit. I need to find a sit-down job.

ELISE
You got injured and ...?

BRANDON
I've told this story a hundred times (*bored with telling it*).

ELISE
The hundred-and-first is the charm.

BRANDON
... I was on the football team, very popular, but not very smart, I guess, not book smart like you. I blew out my knee in practice one day. A couple of months on crutches, an operation, but I was never the same. There's no grade-forgiveness for a former football star. So I left, I was bitter I guess. The offers dry up pretty quick when you can't sprint downfield anymore. Got a series of dead-end jobs, and I share a shit-hole apartment with some guys on the south side of The Commons. So your experiment seemed like an easy way to make a few bucks.

ELISE
Well, there's no shortage of volunteers.

BRANDON

Thought you only recruited undergrads for this kind of thing.

ELISE

No, undergrads are not representative, their behaviour can be ... erratic.

BRANDON

Want to offer me a nine-dollar split now?

ELISE

Why would I do that?

BRANDON

Now you've heard my sob story, now I've softened you up a little?

ELISE

No, there's no new offer.

BRANDON

You have a heart of stone.

(She gets up, goes to the two-way mirror, and adjusts her look a little.)

ELISE

I love dogs, cupcakes, and walking in the rain *(from her dating app profile)*.

BRANDON

What?

ELISE

Nothing?

BRANDON

(beat) So, can I leave now?

ELISE

Leave? We're just getting to know each other.

BRANDON

I think I'm done.

ELISE

You promised me half-an-hour, you signed a form.

BRANDON

Is this how you plan to spend the rest of your life, playing these games?

ELISE

If I'm lucky.

BRANDON

Why does someone like you need luck?

ELISE

Used to be you got a Ph.D. you felt special, assistant professor next, then tenure, and a career revealing the human condition.

BRANDON

With experiments like these?

ELISE

But now Ph.D.s are two-a-penny, there are dozens in this department alone, all chasing the odd tenure-track position that pops up when one of the old guys finally retires. Somehow you have to get noticed.

BRANDON

And how do you get noticed?

ELISE

Build your resumé, enhance your profile. And Mac, Professor Berger, well, his recommendation carries a lot of weight.

BRANDON

And if that doesn't work?

ELISE

You take a string of lowly post-doctoral positions, and try not to give up hope. I've learned to be tough.

BRANDON

Sounds like a shitty way to spend the best years of your life.

ELISE

As opposed to the sterling way you're spending yours?

BRANDON

I give people what they want.

ELISE

Uh-huh?

BRANDON

I make people coffee --

ELISE

We all make people coffee.

BRANDON

I deliver parcels, I deliver pizza in less than half-an-hour, people are happy to see me.

ELISE

You sure about that?

BRANDON

Meanwhile, you're running crazy little experiments, with no relevance to people's real lives, so you can write opaque articles in obscure journals that no-one except other egg-heads reads. And I know what 'burnish' means.

ELISE

... Alright, you want another offer?

BRANDON

Sure.

ELISE

How about a thousand dollars?

(Berger perks up again.)

BRANDON

What?

ELISE

Would that have some relevance to your life, to your real life?

BRANDON

A thousand dollars? You're yanking my chain.

ELISE

No, I'm dead serious.

(She unlocks the filing cabinet, removes a money box containing a pile of cash, this is the entire experimental fund, and returns to the table.)

ELISE (cont.)

Here we are. Ten thousand dollars, you get a thousand.

(Berger flicks lights again.)

BRANDON

Looks like that wiring problem's back.

ELISE

Ignore it.

BRANDON

Kinda hard to ignore.

(She approaches the mirror. Berger approaches from his side, so they are almost nose-to-nose. She bangs her fist on the mirror frame. Berger restores the lights.)

ELISE

There, that's fixed it.

BRANDON

Have you thought about trade school? You're a natural.

ELISE

A thousand dollars, accept or reject?

BRANDON

And you get the other nine?

ELISE

Yes, same deal as before, you get one, I get nine.

BRANDON

What kind of operation is Berger running here, hidden away down below the ground? You must be a very wealthy lady.

ELISE

Only if you accept.

BRANDON

Why wouldn't I?

ELISE

It's the same nine-to-one ratio, the same unfair split. What happened to your dignity?

BRANDON

OK, this is getting weird now. I think I should just go.

ELISE

You're walking away from a thousand bucks? That must be four months rent for a shit-hole on The Commons.

BRANDON

What's going on here?

ELISE

You signed a form, Brandon.

BRANDON

I don't know what I signed up for, but it wasn't this.

(He goes to stand. She stands too.)

ELISE

You think you can just walk away? Sit down.

BRANDON

(wincing) Look, I don't have to --

ELISE

Sit down! Take the weight off that bad knee.

(He pauses, sits.)

ELISE (cont.)

Better?

BRANDON

Sure.

ELISE

You seen me before, Brandon?

BRANDON

Before tonight, you mean? I don't know, I've seen a lot of people.

(She returns to the mirror, and adjusts her look a little more – maybe ruffles her hair, maybe takes off some earrings, maybe buttons/unbuttons fasteners at her collar or sleeves. Berger looks on closely, fascinated. She continues through the next few exchanges.)

ELISE

Cast your mind back.

BRANDON

Do you come to the coffee shop? It's the Starbucks at Church and Second.

ELISE

I'm talking a few years ago.

BRANDON

A few years, well ...

ELISE

I looked different then.

BRANDON

So did I.

ELISE

Yeah, you looked much better, and I looked much worse.

BRANDON

Er ... What?

ELISE

Your profile was very ... burnished.

BRANDON

Profile?

ELISE

And you couldn't see the limp in the photos. But I liked the limp. You know how some girls like scars?

(She turns to face Brandon.)

ELISE (cont.)

Of course, my hair was quite different then, dyed black and shaggy, it's not like I carry a wig around.

BRANDON

What is this?

ELISE

I was going through an 'emo' phase, very short on self-confidence.

BRANDON

Wait a minute, I --

ELISE

I couldn't believe you swiped on me. And you used your real name, which revealed a winning confidence, I thought. I used a fake name ... Abigail. You remember now?

BRANDON

Er ...

ELISE

It was a Saturday night. We met at a bar where you bought us both eight-dollar cocktails, one after another, each one a different colour. It was The Anvil, the bar, it's closed down now. You remember The Anvil?

BRANDON

Sure, The Anvil, it was very popular.

ELISE

The music was loud, the room was packed, someone bumped into me and I spilled my drink on my dress. We laughed, you bought me another. I don't remember much after that, I can't take my drink, I guess.

BRANDON

Look, er ...

ELISE

I woke up on a couch in some shitty apartment. No underwear, monster hangover, of course. It was still dark and you weren't around. Every other door down the hallway was closed. I grabbed my purse and snuck out. Never heard from you again.

BRANDON

You're sure it was me?

ELISE

I'm certain it was you.

BRANDON

OK ... You know, everyone knows what's going on when they hook up like that.

ELISE

Maybe I didn't know.

BRANDON

You swipe, you meet up, you both get hammered, everyone knows what they're doing. Guards come down --

ELISE

Maybe I didn't have a lot of experience. Maybe that's why I was on the app, because I hadn't --

BRANDON

Inhibitions, yeah, inhibitions come down. Sometimes it's just giggles, sometimes you make out, sometimes ... it goes further. People do things they wouldn't normally do, that's why we love alcohol.

ELISE

Was there anything else in those drinks?

BRANDON

Anything else? Wait, you're not suggesting I ... because I would never --

ELISE

Wouldn't you?

BRANDON

No. God no! Look, whatever you think, you must've indicated ... or at least not refused ... You must have agreed, I mean.

ELISE

I don't remember agreeing.

BRANDON

Right, you don't remember, because you were drunk.

ELISE

Because you got me drunk.

BRANDON

I got us both drunk.

ELISE

Us?

BRANDON

If it was me. Hypothetically. I always bought the drinks, I didn't force anyone to drink them.

ELISE

I'm not a big drinker, never have been --

BRANDON

Oh come on. I mean, everyone has regrets, sometimes, the morning after, if they've had too much to drink. The girls I woke up next to sometimes ...

ELISE

You didn't wake up next to me.

BRANDON

Well, exactly.

ELISE

It was you. Jellicoe, it's an unusual name. I think you ... alcohol is not an excuse, not anymore.

BRANDON

Wait a minute --

ELISE

You did something to me I didn't consent to.

BRANDON

How do you know you didn't?

ELISE

It's tantamount to rape. Maybe it was ... I mean, some people --

BRANDON

Ra -- Some people? Which people?

ELISE

I don't know the legal --

BRANDON

Jesus! We went to the bar, we drank the drinks, we went back to my place. Afterwards you thought better of it. It was a bad date, is all.

ELISE

A bad date?

BRANDON

Sure. Everyone has a collection of bad dates, war stories. It's not always a good time, you take the chance.

ELISE

Did you have a good time?

BRANDON

I don't know, I don't remember either. Neither of us knows what happened, I was hammered too.

ELISE

You don't believe me.

BRANDON

It's not that I don't --

ELISE

Why would I lie?

BRANDON

I don't think you're lying. But my picture's different. Look, you experiment when you're young, and not all experiments work out.

ELISE

(beat) You're right, I don't have the data, I don't have objective data. But I know how it made me feel.

BRANDON

I mean, you throw around words like ...

ELISE

Like what? Say it.

BRANDON

(Through gritted teeth) ... Rape. But it wasn't that.

ELISE

Then what would you call it?

BRANDON

(beat) I took advantage, maybe.

ELISE

And maybe I was expecting something better from you.

BRANDON

Then you'd be an outlier.

ELISE

It made me feel used, Brandon, worthless, stupid. *(beat)* And then I was worried I caught something, or that I'd miss a period.

BRANDON

Hey, I always used --

ELISE

Always? Even if you were very drunk?

BRANDON

Yeah, I -- oh, shit.

ELISE

What is it, Brandon?

BRANDON

You're not going to tell me ...

ELISE

Tell you what?

BRANDON

That you ... that I ...

ELISE

Doesn't feel good, does it? Not knowing.

BRANDON

... No.

ELISE

(beat) I was a couple of days late, that's all.

BRANDON

OK, OK.

ELISE

But I was scared to go out at night after that. No more dates, of course, good or bad. And I almost dropped out of school too. But in the end I decided I was stronger than that.

BRANDON

Look, I'm sorry, and if it was me. It was a long time ago, a different time.

ELISE

Yeah.

BRANDON

I mean it. I'm sorry, if that counts for anything.

ELISE

And you don't recognise me, even now?

BRANDON

There was a lot of alcohol and a lot of Saturday nights, OK?

ELISE

How are your Saturday nights these days?

BRANDON

Uneventful. I don't get many swipes any more, and I couldn't afford the drinks.

ELISE

A thousand dollars would help with that.

BRANDON

Jesus! We're still playing that game, are we?

ELISE

Accept or reject?

BRANDON

Have you been trying to find me all this time?

ELISE

Don't flatter yourself. I've been doing my best to forget about you, all this time. But then you stepped in here tonight.

BRANDON

So what happens now? You going to ... report me?

ELISE

Report you? To who? We both know what a waste of time that would be.

BRANDON

So ...?

ELISE

You get to walk away, of course.

BRANDON

We're done here?

ELISE

Yes, I'm finished with you now.

BRANDON

Again, I'm sorry.

ELISE

Of course you are. You don't want the money?

BRANDON

No, thank you.

ELISE

At least take your ten-dollar participation fee. I've had my half-hour.

BRANDON

(beat) Goodbye ... Abigail.

(Brandon exits without taking the fee.)

(Elise collects up the papers, and puts them away, with the money, in the filing cabinet.)

(Berger enters the experimental space.)

BERGER

What the ...?

ELISE

Sorry, Mac, I messed up --

BERGER

No --

ELISE

I know we can't use this, I went too far off script, you told me not to.

BERGER

Whoa, El, slow down.

ELISE

I'm sorry --

BERGER

That was amazing!

ELISE

What?

BERGER

They're going ape-shit for stuff like this right now. They'll love it in Paris!

ELISE

What?

BERGER

This case study, role-play protocol. Deception, it's suddenly in vogue again, more revealing the journals are saying. Open-ended, rich qualitative data, worth way more than a hundred sterile forced-choice experiments. But it's so difficult to do well, realistically, I know I couldn't, but you ...

ELISE

That's not --

BERGER

I've got it all on camera, every word, every gesture. Students will be analyzing the transcript for decades.

ELISE

Shit, Mac --

BERGER

I mean, you were on thin ice ethically, but I think it's OK, more than OK. If he'd taken the time to read the form before he signed it, you were allowed to introduce new ideas that --

ELISE

Mac, please, listen --

BERGER

You were very creative, hats off to you. So natural, so sincere. Do you spin the same story with all the participants, or was it just him? Are there more recordings like this? Oh my God!

ELISE

Wait, you don't think –

BERGER

It would just be with the male participants, I guess, or would it?

ELISE

I didn't make it up.

BERGER

... What?

ELISE

This actually happened to me, with Brandon, eight years ago.

BERGER

Really?

ELISE

Yes, really.

BERGER

Oh, well then.

ELISE

Yes.

BERGER

So it will just be this one recording, hmm. But real for both participants in the scenario ... yeah, this is gold!

ELISE

But I ... But the funders, this isn't what we promised them.

BERGER

The funders get their brownie points for pushing their money out the door on time. It's always a bait and switch, promise one thing, then do what you like, it's expected. It's a game as old as the hills, you'll learn.

ELISE

Mac, we can't use this.

BERGER

And I'm telling you we can. We'll be headliners.

ELISE

What I'm trying to say is, I don't want us to use this.

BERGER

What do you mean?

ELISE

I'm not comfortable --

BERGER

The Ultimatum Game played with genuine emotional stress, meaningful money, meaningful consequences. I mean, this is a breakthrough! Do you know what this'll do for my lab?

ELISE

No, please.

BERGER

Look, we'll pixelate the faces, modify the voices ...

ELISE

It'll still have my name on it.

BERGER

Of course, your name right after mine. You'll have your pick of appointments, and I'll never have to work on a fucking committee again.

ELISE

I mean, people will still know it's me.

BERGER

Yes, that's what I'm saying, you'll get your share of the credit, you'll --

ELISE

They'll know it's my story.

BERGER

Well, sure.

ELISE

I don't want people to see me that way. I was hurt, I was embarrassed, I was naïve. I've never told anyone, you think I want students poring over the details for decades to come?

BERGER

Come on, it's not that bad.

ELISE

You'd like your dirty laundry in every first-year text book?

BERGER

EI, you know how difficult it is to get your foot in the door. I could get you a position right here, tenure-track.

ELISE

And have three-hundred undergrads snigger every time I stand up in front of them? I'm not going to be a zoo animal.

BERGER

I thought you were stronger than this.

ELISE

I'd locked this away. What were the chances ...?

BERGER

This is medal-winning research. And Assistant Professor for you, with an office upstairs with a window, all to yourself. Think about it, EI.

ELISE

I shouldn't stay here anyway.

BERGER

EI.

ELISE

A post-doc abroad somewhere, find a new way to make my mark.

BERGER

Abroad?

ELISE

To get some distance.

BERGER

You'd need a reference from me.

ELISE

What are you saying?

BERGER

Look, EI ...

(She exits the experimental chamber and re-enters the control room. He follows her. She goes to the computer.)

ELISE

I need to destroy the recordings.

BERGER

EI, please.

ELISE

Just let me --

BERGER

They don't belong to you, they belong to the lab, my lab, they belong to me. Read your contract, you signed a contract.

(She finds the files and goes to delete them, he grabs her wrist.)

BERGER (cont.)

Don't do that!

ELISE

Let go, please.

BERGER

Don't do something you'll regret.

ELISE

I already did.

BERGER

EI!

ELISE

You're hurting me! Aagh!

(He releases her. A beat. He goes for the computer again, she stands in his way, he stops short of physical contact this time.)

(A few breaths from both as they regain their composure.)

BERGER

Sorry, sorry. Fuck! Sorry.

ELISE

I could have you dismissed for that.

BERGER

Now EI, I didn't mean --

ELISE

You stopped the recording just after Jellicoe left. Too bad, they would have loved this little epilogue in Paris.

I have no excuses, none.

BERGER

No, you don't.

ELISE

I'm sorry, El.

BERGER

You're sorry?

ELISE

You know I'm not like that, I've been under a lot of stress ...

BERGER

Why did you come here tonight?

ELISE

I ... I don't know. *(beat)* I'll give you an excellent reference, if that's what you want. And not because of what just happened, because you're good, Elise, very good, one of my best students ever, really, I mean it. *(beat)* So ...?

BERGER

... I think you should go home to your wife, Professor Berger, and tell her she makes a lovely casserole.

ELISE

Yes, yes, of course. Thank you.

BERGER

And I'll clean up in here.

ELISE

(Berger nods, then exits. Elise deletes the files - this can be verbalized with 'And delete all' or something similar. She exits the control room, and re-enters the experimental space. She opens the filing cabinet, removes Brandon's consent form, and tears it up. She opens the cash box, counts out nine one-dollar bills - the counting can be verbalized '... seven, eight, nine' etc. - pockets them, and leaves.)

(The End)