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by

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FADE IN

INT. MEDICAL LAB - DAY

A MALE CORPSE (32) lies on a gurney, a sheet pulled over his chest... but not high enough to cover a cruel autopsy scar.

MOVE CLOSER to his slack face... closer... and PUSH IN to the darkness of his nostril.

Travel on to the sinus area and PUSH THROUGH inside skull and FLY OVER the wrinkled surface of the brain. DIVE INTO the central fissure, PUSH THROUGH the spongy cerebrum and continue towards the center of the brain.

AT THE BRAIN STEM

CIRCLE the major structures of the brain stem: the Corpus callosum, the thalamus, the hypothalamus, the cerebellum, and stop at the very center of the brain, the knob-like pons.

HOLD and wonder at the delicate complexity and then...

The surrounding cerebrum begins to tremble and then violently shake: a fleshy earthquake in the brain.

The sharp teeth of a core drill bit tear through the pink mass, impossibly big in contrast to the scale of the brain as it whirls and chews with horrible efficiency.

With a tug and a twist, the tube of brain begins to slide away from the brain stem. It pops free and bright light spills down the man-made tunnel.

DR. BERNARD EAST (45) peers in. He pushes his surgical mask aside and grins like a kid on Christmas morning.

EXT. COLLEGE CAMPUS - DAY

The campus bustles with college life. A sign outside the Admin Building reads 'H. West College for the Simply Gifted.'

INT. ACADEMIC BUILDING - HALL - DAY

The hall is crowded as STUDENTS make their way to class.

INT. ACADEMIC BUILDING - BIO CLASS - BY THE DOOR - MOMENTS LATER

STUDENTS shuffle in, NANCY LANGENKAMP (18) among them. She looks as if she might have just stepped off the set of a commercial for the latest super-absorbent maxi... pretty, confident, bold, yet young and fresh-faced.

She looks around the big room and spots MARLA BECKHAM (18).

Marla's dark straight hair and slight almond shape to her eyes hint at the exotic Asian in her pedigree. Marla sits in a perfect square of light that streams in from a nearby window.

She waves back to Nancy from raised auditorium seating.

MOMENTS LATER

Nancy drops into the seat by Marla and readies her books. Marla yawns big and loud.

NANCY  
Late night?

MARLA  
Yep.

NANCY  
Studying?

MARLA  
Sure, mom. I was studying.

NANCY  
So, what? You with Earl again?

MARLA  
It wasn't Earl.

NANCY  
Was it --

MARLA  
Hey, Ms. Nosy? I was in the lab, OK?

Dr. East walks in, a tall man with a confident stride and horn-rimmed glasses used more for affect than effect. He walks with prim self-assurance, the sort of assurance of one who has played God. He wears a white lab coat over slacks, dress shirt, and tie.

As he walks to the board, he yawns.

East pulls down a chart with a side view of the human brain.

EAST  
Where were we? The pons? Did we talk about the pons?

He looks up at the class. They're baffled.

He begins to furiously scribble a drawing of the human brain stem on the board. He labels the structures as he speaks.

EAST (CONT'D)  
Right. The pons. Sixteen cases with ischemic rarefaction of the pons were  
(MORE)

EAST (CONT'D)  
 reported in 1995 in a series of 85  
 patients examined with an MRI...

The class writes frantically, barely able to keep up. JOHN CROUCH (19), African American, fresh faced and well built, listens and writes with a confused look on his face.

EAST (CONT'D)  
 They examined two cases  
 histopathologically--

CROUCH  
 Histo-what?

EAST  
 (not missing a beat)  
 Do try to keep up, Mr. Crouch. The  
 pontine areas were hyperintense on T2W  
 MRI...

Crouch raises his hand. East notices, but keeps on.

EAST (CONT'D)  
 ... showed white matter pallor with  
 reactive astrocytosis, primarily in the  
 central parts of the pons, with  
 arteriosclerotic changes in the small  
 arteries.

Crouch begins to wave.

EAST (CONT'D)  
 They also saw lacunar infarcts in and  
 around these areas.  
 (irritated)  
What is it, Mr. Crouch?

CROUCH  
 This is Bio One, isn't it?

East's brow creases, his eyes squint. He looks out at the class. A few students nod in agreement with Crouch.

EAST  
 It is? You're certain?

Crouch nods. East glances at his watch and runs his hand through his hair.

EAST (CONT'D)  
 Right. So it is. Apologies.

He takes a deep breath, turns to the board and erases the technical jargon but leaves the picture of the brain stem.

MARLA

Would you like me to lead, Dr. East?

East turns to the class and sees Marla. His eyes light up.

EAST

Oh. Marla. How nice. Long time, no see. Please, if you would. Just an intro on the pons, identifying the major structures et cetera.

MARLA

Absolutely no problem, Dr. East.

Nancy's brow creases in confusion as Marla stands, walks down the steps and crosses to the chalk board.

She smiles at East, who has returned to his desk, and then turns to face the class.

MARLA (CONT'D)

The pons is the structure near the top of the brain stem that's responsible for the nervous system. It relays sensory information from the cerebrum to the cerebellum --

East can't help himself. It's his favorite subject.

EAST

It's long been speculated that the pons is the very center of our consciousness, our very being. It's the traffic cop for all of the other systems, controls both metabolism and dreams.

A cell phone in East's pocket RINGS high and shrill. He pulls it out, looks at the caller ID, and then to the class.

EAST (CONT'D)

Marla, continue please.

East walks out of the class. Marla watches the door close behind him. Concern crosses her face. She turns back to the class.

MARLA

OK. Right. The pons...

INT. ACADEMIC BUILDING - HALL - MOMENTS LATER

East meanders down the empty hall, cell phone pressed to his ear.

EAST

Eunice, listen, I've done everything. Seen the doctors. Switched to boxers.  
(MORE)

EAST (CONT'D)  
 Stopped riding the bike, taken all the vitamins.

He pronounces it *vit-a-mins*. East is flustered.

EAST (CONT'D)  
 What!? Please. Low sperm count has absolutely nothing to do with I.Q.! It's--

East listens to his wife's interruption. He shakes his head 'no.'

EAST (CONT'D)  
 Did you ever think maybe you should be tested? I mean maybe there's something with you --

East's mouth opens and closes as he tries to get a word in.

EAST (CONT'D)  
 No! No of course not. That's not what I meant! Still... maybe just ask a doctor?

East holds the phone away from his head and looks at the display.

EAST (CONT'D)  
 Hello?

East contemplates the dead phone for a moment. Marla emerges from the class behind him.

MARLA  
 Everything OK, Dr. East?

He smiles at Marla with pursed lips and nods his head.

EXT. WINDING ROAD - NIGHT

A BMW 650i moves aggressively through the curves. Mist rises from the tires as they HISS over the wet road.

INT. BMW - CONTINUOUS

East is at the helm of the beemer. His wife, EUNICE (38) sits in the passenger seat. Everything about Eunice is folded in, closed uncaring, cold. She swipes her finger over the dash, grimaces as she finds a fleck of dust.

EUNICE  
 Bernard, tell me, why are we schlepping around in a six series? Why did we not get the seven series? Are we that poor?

EAST  
 I told you. The seven series is about prestige not performance.

EUNICE  
And enlighten me, why do I care about how  
fast we can go?

EAST  
I didn't say 'how fast we can go.' I said  
'performance.'

East turns up the radio to tune Eunice out.

INT. MANSION - DINING ROOM - LATER

East and Eunice sit at an elaborate formal dining table. In front  
of them are main dishes, some sort of pâté or roast duck along  
with glasses of red wine. Very fancy.

At opposite ends of the table are MR. JOHN SMYTHE (75) and MRS.  
VIRGINIA SMYTHE (65), Eunice's parents.

The butler, MAURICE (40), tends to their needs. Mr. Smythe takes a  
long swallow of his red wine and looks at it with appreciation.

MRS. SMYTHE  
Wine's quite good tonight.

MR. SMYTHE  
What was I saying?

EUNICE  
The new drugs?

The elder Smythe is tough. Gruff. A ball-breaker.

MR. SMYTHE  
Right. Twelve new products. This year.  
That's if the FDA can get off their lazy  
asses and approve them.

MRS. SMYTHE  
You're so ruthless, dear.

MR. SMYTHE  
When I started this company 40 years  
ago...

East sighs: *here we go again.*

MR. SMYTHE (CONT'D)  
... I did it on nothing but sweat and two  
enormous hairy balls --

Mr. Smythe gestures how enormous his balls are. Huge, apparently.

EAST  
(sotto voce)  
And we're off.

MR. SMYTHE  
I started with nothing. Nothing. And look  
at me now.

EAST  
(sotto voce)  
Just look at you.

Eunice kicks her husband under the table. Mr. Smythe fixes his  
steely gaze on East.

MR. SMYTHE  
And someday, when I die, all of it will  
go to my grandson, God willing.

Mr. Smythe pauses for a gulp of wine. He stares at East over the  
top of his glass. East chews slowly and stares back.

Mrs. Smythe catches the sudden shift in tone.

MRS. SMYTHE  
Let's not start, boys. OK? Not tonight.  
(to Eunice)  
How's the wine, hon?

Eunice doesn't have time to answer. The elder Smythe berates his  
son-in-law with a wine-tinged slur.

MR. SMYTHE  
When I was your age I was a captain of  
industry! A maven! A trailblazer! You're  
nothing but a washed up schoolteacher --

EAST  
Professor.

MR. SMYTHE  
Can't even father me a grandson. I always  
knew you were a Nancy-boy.

MRS. SMYTHE  
John!

EUNICE  
Actually, I have some good news.

Nobody hears her. The 'Nancy boy' comment was the last straw. East  
pushes back from the table, stands, and throws his napkin down.

EAST  
I'll have you know, sir, that I am a  
highly respected professor with tenure!  
Tenure!

Mr. Smythe pumps his fist up in down in a jerking off motion.

EAST (CONT'D)

Oh. That's nice. Really professional.  
You're quite the role model.

MR. SMYTHE

You're a washed up failure! You can't  
even perform the relatively simple yet  
somewhat distasteful task of impregnating  
my daughter!

EUNICE

Daddy!

Eunice quickly regains her composure.

EUNICE (CONT'D)

I said 'I have some good news.'

But Smythe's on a roll...

MR. SMYTHE

And you know what? You'll never get it.  
No grandson, no company. Never.

EAST

I don't want your God damn company  
anyway! I make my own way!

MR. SMYTHE

Never ever never ever never!

Eunice raises her voice.

EUNICE

I said 'I have some good news!'

All eyes on Eunice.

EUNICE (CONT'D)

I'm pregnant.

MR. SMYTHE

Is it a boy?

MRS. SMYTHE

Oh my goodness! Me, a  
grandmother!

East looks down at his wife, mouth open, eyes wide.

EXT. MANSION BY THE FRONT DOOR - LATER

The Smythe's see East and Eunice off. The tension from earlier has  
been replaced with drunken jubilation.

East extends his hand to Mr. Smythe. Smythe knocks it aside and  
hugs him. The embrace places Smythe's mouth by East's ear.

MR. SMYTHE

You know how that wine makes me, Bernie.  
Get me a boy, OK? Get me a boy and  
there's a place for you as well, I  
promise.

East manages a strained smile, releases the awkward hug and takes Eunice by the hand.

EAST

We've got to get going. It's late. Our  
mom-to-be needs her rest.

MR. SMYTHE

Wait wait wait.

Maurice stands in the shadows with a bottle of wine. Mr. Smythe takes the wine from Maurice and hands it to East.

MR. SMYTHE (CONT'D)

Here. Take this. A gift. Toast my  
grandson when he's born.

MRS. SMYTHE

You take care of my baby.

EAST

Oh I will. Count on it.

MRS. SMYTHE

I'll visit!

EAST

(sotto voce, sarcastic)  
We'll really be looking forward to that.

MOMENTS LATER

The Smythe's wave as East's car disappears in the distance. The smile falls from Mr. Smythe's face.

MR. SMYTHE

That poofa better-a made a boy.

EXT. WINDING ROAD - NIGHT

The BMW's headlights illuminate a steady rain.

INT. BMW - CONTINUOUS

Eunice glances over at the speedometer.

EUNICE

Must you drive so fast?

INSERT - THE SPEEDOMETER: THE NEEDLE DROPS FROM 80 TO 70.

EXT. WINDING ROAD - OUTSIDE THE BEEMER LOOKING IN - CONTINUOUS

Through the windshield, East stares out as he drives. Rain beads. Wipers glide over the windshield and we

WIPE TO...

FLASHBACK SEQUENCE: INT. EAST'S OFFICE - NIGHT

East leans back in his chair, feet propped on the corner of his desk as he reads his own book: 'It's All About the Brain, Stupid.' He chuckles as reads the familiar words.

His free hand swishes a glass of scotch. The bottle's on his desk, next to his watch: a distinctive white-gold Rolex.

The door to his office opens and Marla stands in the doorway.

MARLA

Dr. East?

East sits up, sees Marla, puts down his book, opens his desk drawer and puts the bottle and glass into it.

EAST

Yes?

He slips on his Rolex.

MARLA

Marla Beckham? Bio 101?

EAST

Right. 9:30 Monday, Wednesday, Friday.

She smiles, flattered the older, wiser man remembers her.

EAST (CONT'D)

You always sit in the patch of light.

MARLA

At least for the first half of the class, right? Pretty watch.

EAST

A gift from my wife. What can I do for you, Ms. Beckham?

She approaches the desk, sits, and leans forward.

MARLA

Is that your book?

EAST

It is.