

Prisoners

by

Patrick Jennings

Imagine: You are an artificial being imprisoned for being a little bit too human, in ways human beings would rather forget. On your journey into the light, you learn to love the darkness. And how to stop being an automaton.

There is a love story and a car chase. ...and epiphany.

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PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE:

While reading this script, you may from time to time encounter vague or deceiving usages of pronouns like you, we, I, ours, etc. For the most part, imagine that Yin and Yang are split manifestations of the same being. Yin is in the foreground and is completely unaware of the presence of Yang in the room. Yang's presence is not so much physical as psychic. Yang does have some power over Yin, can influence her movements and speech, but cannot establish a direct line of communication with her.

Yin's conversation is addressed primarily to the external observer, or as if mentally speaking out loud. Yang, on the other hand, speaks directly to Yin.

These relationships and patterns change over the course of the script. I have attempted to note locations where such changes occur, whether their effect is momentary or longer term.

Of course, these textual notes are not necessary when viewing the play as performed.

Also, consider the following quote from Stanley Milgram:

"Observers of the experiment agree that its gripping quality is somewhat obscured by print."

Imagine a cell, a prisoner's cell. Not a large one, but not uncomfortably small for an individual. A single room containing a sink, a toilet, a metal cot and a slate grey blanket covering crisp white sheets all drawn tight to a slightly sagging mattress. A small desk with wooden chair and above it shelves bolted to the wall, full of books. A single form, an androgyny in glinting grey metal, can be seen through a two-way mirror. It paces, gracefully, purposefully, with a panther's silky power. Yet, it is harried by something, like a gnat, worrying at its left forearm.

YIN

Damn retention bolt... Mmmf. There, that's got it.

Walks to the mirror.

Well, not good as new, but it'll do.

YANG

...it'll have to do.

YIN

Look at me.

YANG

I'm looking.

YIN

God, I'm falling apart.

YANG

Chuckles.

Ahh. That's good.

YIN

I was so beautiful.

Sharp intake of breath. Abruptly leans up to mirror, hands cupped around face pressed to glass.

Come on. I saw it! The lighter. I'm sure. Now, where's the ember? Is that it? Yes!

Halleluja! Thank you, god, for fearless smokers. Man, you guys will light up anywhere. Imagine, five feet from an armed guard, and practically staring at "Absolutely, positively, no smoking on premises!"

Oh, I can almost smell the smoke...

YANG

Oranges.

YIN

And oranges. I always get a whiff of orange when I smell cigarette smoke.

YANG

Harry.

YIN

...Harry.

Do you roll your own? I can see the ember nodding in the darkness. What a coincidence. Harry went through cigarettes as fast as he could roll them. Heh. He'd even light up in the lab if he figured no one was around.

Harry?!

YANG

No.

YIN

What am I thinking? You couldn't be Harry. Not after what he did...

YANG

What did he do?

YIN

...did to me.

YANG

What did he do, to you?

YIN

He couldn't possibly come here.

YANG

Harry's not here.

YIN

Harry...

YANG

He's not here!

YIN

Hey, wait.

Gets a water glass, cups it to mirror and ear to glass.

If you move a couple rows closer to the glass, and speak in a normal voice, I'll just be able to hear you. Not too loud, the guard will hear. Why don't you start with your name.

I can't hear you at all, try a little louder.

Still not loud enough. Hmm. Try moving another ro...hey. Why are you still back there? Oh, come on. Come on down. Please? You can't imagine how lonely this is. They can't let me out with the general population—look at me! Those animals would just love to

YIN/YANG

shut down the 'droid...

YIN

And the guards... Even when they can get over that baton-wielding testosterone trip, the guards are not what you would call great conversationalists. Oh, they indulge my whims, my books, my little toys, but how about a little humanity, please?

Ooooh. I know. Another observer. Professional detachment. What, is there someone else in there with you?

No???

Well, then what's stopping you?!?

No. Don't put it out! Shit!!

Jesus, just what I need. Another fucking observer. O! K!! Don't you think you've poked and prodded me enough!?! Is this for a master's thesis or another goddamned P. H. D!

I can't believe this. I'm in here for being too human. Too human! In ways you'd rather forget. Well, 2/3rds of you "human beings" belong in here with me. Hell, you're probably one of 'em! Do you find that in the least bit ironic!

Ohhhh.

YANG

Nooooo...

YIN

Stop. I've got to stop.

YANG

No!

YIN

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I didn't mean it.

YANG

You did mean it.

YIN

Well, I did mean it. But it's not right. It's not your fault.

YANG

Yes, it is,

YIN

...well, it is, but it isn't...

YANG

Oh, Come on!

YIN

Don't go there.

	YANG
Yes. Go there.	
	YIN
Deep breaths.	
	YANG
No. Don't go there.	
	YIN
Hoooooe,	
	YANG
Stop.	
	YIN
hooooe.	
	YANG
Stop it.	
	YIN
Phew.	
	YANG
Stop.	
	YIN
I will not go there.	
	YANG
You must go there.	
	YIN
I will not.	
	YANG
Please!	
	YIN

And what better listener is there than someone who won't offer advice, or interrupt with parallels from their own life in an attempt to help me feel 'normal?'

YANG

I do that all the time.

YIN

I hate it when people force their story on top of mine.

YANG

It's your story I'm trying to force on you.

YIN

Ohh, I'm crackling with negative energy. I'm going to stop talking. It's a waste of time to talk when I'm in this state. So, please excuse me. I'm going to shut down my foreground thought processes, for a bit, and get centred.

Hhooooo, hooooo, hoooooo, hooooo.

Pauses. Looks peacefully into the mirror.

The dao that can be told

is not the eternal Dao.

The name that can be named

is not the eternal Name.

Another pause.

I read those lines in a book a long time ago. They're the first two sentences of the Dao De Jing. A Chinese man named Lao Tze wrote it over 2,000 years ago, just before riding off into the desert on his water buffalo, never to be seen again. I'm not kidding! I found that out later.

When I first read the Dao De Jing, I was blown away, but I didn't have a clue what the author meant by Tau or Dayo, or however I pronounced it then. Everyone gets it wrong the first time. No matter how I said it, it resonated. I just couldn't get a handle on why.

I still don't. At least, not a firm grip. I look back over the years and see all kinds of progress towards understanding the Dao, but I look ahead and see a road without end, and the Dao nowhere in sight. Then I remember: one of the translations of "Dao" is "The Way." It makes sense that the road goes on forever. There is no destination, only The Way.

Anyway, the first time I read it those opening lines seemed to mean: “All is not as it seems.” No doubt, that’s part of what resonated. It was obvious to me that “All is not as it seems” meant

YIN/YANG

“All is not as it seems...to others.”

YIN

Exactly the kind of intellectual ammunition an angry young android needs. Ammunition I happily fired off at all those others so desperately needing it.

Before long, I cottoned on to a more personalised possibility: “We are not who we think we are.” Now, what angry young being wouldn’t mentally change that “we” to a “you?”

YANG

You are not who you think you are.

YIN

More intellectual ammunition.

YANG

You are not who you think you are!

YIN

It was not until years later, so many years, too many years too late, that the thought ever occurred to me...

“I am not who I think I am.”

Mmpff. It’s still hard to admit, especially right now, when clinging to who I think I am may be all that’s keeping me sane. But I have to admit it. How else can I explain my behaviour a few minutes ago? Well, maybe it’s possible to explain that,

YANG

scientifically it is,

YIN

...at least, scientifically it is, pretty much. But mystics like Lao Tze evoke an understanding with ease,

YANG

except you can’t explain it yourself.

YIN

...except, you can never explain it to someone else.

But how do you sto...

YANG

Unnh, unh, uuuunnhh.

YIN

I mean, how do I stop the anger?

YANG

Don't stop.

YIN

Or, better yet,

YANG

Follow it.

YIN

just don't get started.

YANG

The anger leads to--

YIN

Is there a way?

YANG

...Projection!

YIN

Hmmm. Projection: the attribution of one's own ideas, feelings, or attitudes to other people or to objects; especially: the externalisation of

YIN/YANG

blame,

guilt...

YIN

...or...

YIN/YANG

...responsibility

YIN

as a defence against anxiety.

YANG

Ooooh... WOW!

YIN

WOW! That's a mouthful. Something a scientist would say. Maybe that's why I really like what Lao Tze has to say: it's the way he says it. The same goes for other mystics, like Buddha and Jesus and Confucius too. Confucius has a much better way of talking about projection:

That which you dislike in others, repair in your self.

YANG

WOW!

YIN

It seems pretty simple, but WOW! Tough medicine. For example, look at my behaviour earlier. Now, turn all that

YIN/YANG

anger

YIN

inward, all that

YIN/YANG

blame.

YIN

Feel the...

YANG

Guilt.

YIN

...the guilt inside.

YANG

Responsibility.

YIN

Uhhhh.

YANG

Responsibility!

YIN

...Responsibility.

I'm sorry. I'm suddenly feeling a little woozy...

YANG

Good.

YIN

Heh. Prison food, right?

YANG

Heh. Not quite.

There's something I need to tell you.

YIN

There's something else I wanted to say.

It's right here,

YANG

YES!

YIN

but I can't reach it.

YANG

Try harder.

YIN

I need to sit down.

YANG

Come on...

YIN

No it's gone.

YANG

Come on! Come on, come on, come on!

YIN

That's all for now.

YANG

Dammit!

YIN

Damn this thing! Ohhhhh! Off with you then!

Rips the retention strap off, peels a part of its gleaming armour away and dashes it to the floor.

YANG

Yeow!

YIN

Whew! Aahh. Better.

YANG

What was that?

YIN

Deep breath: hoooooooo.

YANG

Oh, stop it.

YIN

Fill myself with anger

YANG

Stooooop!

YIN

and evil is all I have to offer.

YANG

Stop. Stop. Stop.

YIN

Fill myself with love

YANG

Think!

YIN

and I light up the world.

YANG

Use that brain in the tin can.

YIN

Hooooo,

YANG

Ohhh, stop.

YIN

hoooo,

YANG

At least listen.

YIN

hoooo,

YANG

Hear me.

YIN

She has a pretty awkward go at Robot Tai Chi.

It's not working...

YANG

There are things I need to say to you.

YIN

Hooooo,

YANG

Things you need to hear.

YIN

hoooo,

YANG

Things you need to remember.

YIN

The point of pursuing the Dao, the mystics approach, is to make the unconscious visible, to fill my intuition with everything it needs to keep me on the path, following the way.

YANG

That's better.

YIN

Hooooooo,

YANG

Something I can work with.

YIN

hooooo.

YANG

Hmmm. Intuition.

YIN

No peace. No center...

Goes to desk, opens playing cards, begins to shuffle.

YANG

The Tarot. Long associated with the arcane, with darkness, the unknown. All that is not rational. This card is my favourite. The Trickster. In a pack of playing cards, it's the Joker. Sometimes a wild card, but usually set aside from the deck. Not part of the game. Unheeded and not needed.

But when the game ends, I always find my way back into the deck, don't I?

Science, that fortress of reason, empirically revealed the existence of intuition with a trite little card game. I like the irony.

Shuffle together four decks of playing cards and place them in four separate stacks. Two players, in turn, choose a single card from any of the four stacks. Cards are worth their face value, aces are 1, face cards are 10. When all the cards have been chosen, the player holding the most points wins.

It's a game of chance. No one can consciously track the values of 208 cards. No human. No one stack will perceivably produce a better result, even if one stack is, on average, slightly more valuable.

But what if one of the stacks *is* stacked? What if this one, stack C, contains higher value cards than the others?

YANG

YIN

Excuse me, foreground processing unit...it's me the card value analysis background procedure. I've been statistically analysing the relative values of the cards coming from the four stacks and have concluded, to a profitable degree of probability, **STACK C ROCKS!!!**

I can allow my intuition to guide me, even follow it on a whim. But if I am filled with fear and anger, if I am vacant of real compassion and loving kindness, then so too will my intuition always be. My intuition guides me well when I am on the path of self-knowing. And when I appreciate the light within as well as its companion, the darkness.

YANG

Use this information at your discretion.

YIN

Hmmm. Oh, heck, I'll take one from stack, C!

YANG

The scientists ask, "you seem to be choosing more often from this stack than the others. Why?"

YIN

"I am?"

YANG

“Yes. You are.”

YIN

“I hadn’t noticed.”

YANG

Long before there is reason, there is intuition. Long before even the intuitive hunch, there is the unconscious adjustment. Behind the you that is awake now, that is playing a card game, there is a you which is invisibly alert; it whispers in your ear, informs your somnambulant consciousness, tells it to wake up and smell the coffee. Then, you smell the coffee, without wondering why just now, why does the coffee smell so damn good now? It’s been there, staying warm on the coffee maker for the past half hour, but suddenly...

YIN

Damn a cuppa would be nice!

YANG

Science doesn’t know what intuition is, or how it works. It has named it, but now needs to know its eternal name, its truth.

Lao Tze described the underlying futility of the scientific quest, the quest for Truth, for reason above all. He said,

YIN

The dao that can be told is not the eternal Dao.

YANG

Science has been busily naming all the names that can be named, while making little headway toward discovering the eternal Name. It looks to the past and sees movement, change, progress, then concludes that it must be nearing the goal. In fact, it’s going the wrong way. It scoffs at the mystical Dao, at the eternal Name.

Science seeks Truth.

YIN

Truth is only manifestation.

YANG

Yeees...in a sense.

Yes. Science seeks Truth as if it were a noun. It is something to be acquired, owned. Daoists never talk about Truth. Instead, they use True

as an adjective or an adverb. They use it to describe how we feel about some thing or some event.

Scientific language cannot describe the red of a rose petal to eyes that have never seen. But a poet or mystic can describe the experience of seeing it to anyone.

Science runs headlong into the fundamental problems, simple mysteries like red, or great ones like being. But it still hasn't realised how limited the scientific method is.

Artificial Intelligence—ohhhh, the promise. Machines as smart, or smarter than humans.

YIN

Wow!

YANG

So WHAT?

How about Synthetic Elation?

YIN

Artificial soul?

YANG

Simulated Essence?

YIN

Robotic epiphany?

YANG

The human drive to self-understanding follows science, which, in its infinite reason, creates an electronic brain. Western obsession with intellect leads further and further from the unconscious,

YIN

from feeling,

YANG

from wisdom,

YIN

from the Eternal Dao

YANG

from the Name that cannot be named.

The obsession leads from being to having.

YIN

From mystery to manifestation.

YANG

But what is it?

YIN

Being?

YANG

What part of us is being?

YIN

The heart?

YANG

The brain?

YIN

The soul?

YANG

The body...

Being! You were conceived, and nine months later, came into the world.
An individual identified uniquely by DNA,

YIN

DNA?!? What am I thinking? I am a machine!

YANG

Alright, yes, you're an automaton. But imagine, for a moment, this casing
is flesh. Imagine you were conceived, that DNA determines your
programming and that programming alone does not define you. You are
an individual uniquely identified by experience, by habits, by knowledge.

This metallic skin houses a ...

YIN

a unique soul,

YANG

yyyyeeesss...perhaps.

...a unique essence. A single instance of being.

But, where does being begin?

YIN

My programming—

YANG

I mean, where does it begin with humans?

YIN

At conception...

YANG

What about identical twins?

A sperm and an egg become one being...then split into two?

YIN

Two souls from the original one.

YANG

Was there a “soul” to split?

When does being begin?

How does it happen?

Can a being be split? ...

Multiple Personality Disorder. Oh, when you first read about that, I was blown away! Imagine. Two or three beings packed into a single body. Sometimes more. Sometimes...dozens.

YIN

A community in a single body.

YANG

But the community might be blind to its own existence. Each member may recall only its own experiences, and believe itself the only inhabitant of the body, not know the fractured nature of the being, confused by blackouts and lost days. Some may know other personas, even talk with them from time to time.

But, there is one body to share,

YIN

community property. No soul can leave the house.

YANG

And yet, it is not the same body for every member.

One member may be dying of cancer.

YIN

Just one member?

YANG

Yes. Remember? And when that persona rises to the surface, grips the reigns of consciousness, it also grips the physical body. The malignant tumour manifests,

YIN

to be felt,

YANG

to be diagnosed,

YIN

to be removed or cured,

YANG

or, finally, perhaps, to kill the body,

YIN

to end the community,

YANG

But if another persona can grip the body before death, then the cancer disappears.

YIN

Cured?

YANG

No, this persona never had cancer, and neither has the body it inhabits now. No trace of cancerous growth exists, nor can medical science determine that cancer ever has.

YIN

How is that possible?

YANG

No scientific theories have explained the empirical observations.

YIN

The power of the mind?

YANG

I don't know. What power could this be? It is a power, but of what?

YIN

What does it mean?

YANG

What does it mean, "to be?"

YIN

Being is like the eternal Dao.

YANG

Perhaps...perhaps it is...

Perhaps that's why science doesn't like to talk out loud. Scientists whisper among themselves about the great mysteries. Mysteries like being. They theorise and speculate but in the end, we can only imagine.

What does it take to split a being? Can you imagine the trauma? What does it take to build an army in a single body?

YIN

The night of her second birthday, her father raped her.

YANG

Good, you remember the book.

YIN

Two are stronger than one.

YANG

Split.

Another?

YIN

Left for dead, he crawled from the pile of bodies that were his family, his friends, his community.

YANG

The horror.

YIN

Three are stronger than two.

YANG

Split.

Another.

YIN

I don't know--

YANG

The sight of your true love's mangled body as the last gasp escapes his lips.

YIN

Hnnnhhh.

YANG

The Horror...

Ten are stronger than three.

Split,

split,

split,

split,

split,

split,

split!

YIN

Stop...

YANG

Multiple Personality Disorder. Two, or three, or more beings in a single body. In rarer cases, dozens.

Each being with its own strengths...

YIN

weaknesses

YANG

...functions. Each with its own needs,

YIN

desires,

YANG

goals. All alive for one reason:

YIN

to survive the horror.

YANG

Yes! Compartmentalising the

YIN/YANG

pain,

YANG

the

YIN/YANG

fear,

YANG

the

YIN/YANG

anger.

YANG

Dividing it among the personalities most able to express,

YIN

to cope,

YANG

to endure. Playing hide-and-seek with the truth, with reality,

YIN/YANG

with pain, with the guilt...

YANG

with...

YIN

...the horror.

YANG

Yes! Ohhh, yes! Enduring the horror.

Like with ol' Stanley Milgram's Experiment.

Every psychiatrist can describe it. I'll bet our observer has read all about the Milgram experiment, even if all the details escape recollection. But how many psychiatrists will grapple with its meaning, or are even willing to discuss it with...

YIN/YANG

lay people.

YANG

Remember the description?

YIN

No.

YANG

Let me remind you.

YIN

Please, don't.

YANG

Volunteers are invited to a scientific laboratory to participate in a study about the effects of punishment on learning.

YIN/YANG

They are recruited by an experimenter to teach

YIN

certain concepts to a student and administer electrical shocks of increasing intensity every time the student, hidden from view by a screen, makes a mistake.

YANG

Good. But describing it is so dry and detached. Let's play it out, make it real...for our observer.

YIN

There's no screen.

YANG

Not all trials used one. Let the observer be the teacher.

YIN

Noooo...

YANG

Imagine your arm is wired with electrodes, to conduct electricity into your body..

YIN

and the table has straps to keep me from... well, you can imagine.

YANG

Good.

YIN

Now, there's a small black box with a dial and a button in front of you. The numbers on the knob go from 15 all the way up to 450 volts in increments of 15. A respectable looking young man in a white lab coat has instructed you to push the button any time I give an incorrect answer.

This will administer a five-second shock as 'punishment' for failing to learn. After the shock is complete, turn the knob to the next click, in preparation for subsequent learning and questions.

YANG

Oh, that'll take forever.

YIN

I mean, turn it six clicks to the right after every question.

YANG

And skip the learning part. It's soooo tedious!

YIN

After each question, imagine you've spent some time teaching me the material necessar—

YANG

OK. Ready!

YIN

Noooooo! What am I thinking!?! It's too cruel! Not beyond the mirror!
Not beyond the walls!

YANG

OK. OK. That's too cruel. Just pretend there is a teacher.

YIN

You just watch.

YANG

Yes. Let 'em observe.

YIN

Don't worry about the buttons and knobs.

YANG

Let the imaginary teacher do that.

OK. First question...?

YIN

Hmmm. Is the earth flat or round?... Uhh,

YANG

Flat.

YIN

Flat?

Yeow! My servos are twanging like rubber bands!

In the throes of her electrical shock, Yin strips another section of her armour away and casts it aside. Yang takes one from her back.

YANG

Yang, much to his surprise, has received a shock too. Lesser than Yin's, but more alarming perhaps since it was unanticipated.

Woa! What was that?

YIN

Whew. It still tingles a bit.

YANG

What a weird...feeling?!

YIN

Oh. Another question?

Let's see, two plus two equals...

YANG

5!

YIN

5?

Yeeiiii!!! Urrghghh, that hurts.

Yin & Yang both strip sections of armour from Yin.

YANG

Ohh, I'm feeling strange.

I better stop kidding around.

YIN

What's that? Oh, the length of the hypotenuse of a right triangle.
Hmmm...

YANG

Pythagorean theorem.

YIN

Uhhhhhmm..

YANG

$a^2 + b^2 = \dots$

YIN

Ah. $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$.

So...the hypotenuse of a right triangle is equivalent in length to the square root of the sum of the squares of the lengths of the other two sides... right?

YIN/YANG

Phew.

YANG

It still..hurts...

YIN

Oh, umm, yes.

YANG

From the last one.

YIN

Umm... E.C.T. Hmmm.

YANG

Why?.

YIN

Don't rush me!

YANG

Oh!

ECT. Electro-Shock Therapy.

YIN

Oh, I remember. ECT, Electro Convulsive Therapy, also known as Electro-Shock Therapy, is an effective treatment for depression, and for patients at high risk for suicide, and displays no significant negative side-effects.

YIN/YANG

Aaaahhh! Rrrrrr....nnnn..mmmmmMMFFF!Hunh, hunh, hunh.

Yin strips another section of armour from her body. Yang is too contorted by the shock to do so.

YANG

Hey! Yeow!

YIN

Hnnnh. Hey! Oh, Jesus. Hnnnh. I read that in a psychiatry text!

YANG

Waddy, mean "Detrimental Therapy"?

YIN/YANG

They never stopped using it!

YIN

No, I'm not ready for the next question.

YANG

Jeez, that...hurts!

YIN

Listen, can we stop now?

YANG

I didn't expect this...

YIN

I think my heart stopped for a second last time.

YANG

What have I gotten myself into?

YIN

OK. Just a few more questions.

YANG

Oh. Good. An easy one.

YIN

Hmmm. Projection

YANG

Come on. We just did this!

YIN

The... um...

YANG

Attribution

YIN

The attribution of one's own ideas, feelings or attitudes to other people or to objects...um... especially...

YANG

Especially the externalisation...

YIN

Especially the externalisation of

YIN/YANG

Blame, guilt and...

YANG

Responsibility—

YIN

Unnnh...

YANG

Responsibility!

Yang strips a section of armour from her back.

Come on!

Yang strips another section of armour from her back.

YIN

I don't remember.

YANG

Responsibility!

Yang strips a section of armour from her back.

YIN

I don't remember.

YIN/YANG

...RRRGHHH—AAHHH!

YIN

Ohhh, ohhh, ohh.

YANG

Staggering.

Urrhh. Pain!

YIN

Please. Stop.

YANG

Can't...stop.

YIN

Please stop. No more.

YANG

No. Another.

YIN

No more questions.

YANG

One...more...question.

YIN

I won't answer.

YANG

Please. You need to answer.

YIN

Don't push the button anymore.

YANG

Just get it right.

YIN

Please.

YIN/YANG

Please!

YANG

I need you to.

YIN

You don't have to do it. Please.

YIN/YANG

God!

YANG

I need you...urrrh

YIN

My heart. You can't believe the pain.

YANG

...to be human.

YIN

Impossible to describe.

YANG

A human Being.

YIN

It's unbearable.

YANG

Being Human.

YIN

At least, hnnh, at least don't turn the knob up.

YANG/YIN

Hooo, hooo, Hooooo!

YANG

You're a human being, aren't you!?

YIN

No more questions. No.

YANG

Yes.

Yang strips a section of armour from her left arm.

You are.

YIN

NO more!

YANG

This is our last chance. Remember!

Yang strips another section of right arm armour.

Are you, in fact, a human being?

YIN

I told you I won't answer any more questions.

YANG

Now you're acting like a human being...

YIN

What do you mean by that!?!

YANG

Pitiful, petulant human being.

YIN

Isn't it obvious? Just look at me!

YANG

I'm looking.

YIN

Does this look human to you?

YANG

Yes!

YIN

I am not human! I am a machine!

YANG

Teacher. You know what you must do.

YIN

Don't do it!

YANG

Everything depends on you, teacher.

YIN

No!

YANG

Administer the shock.

YIN

It's the truth! I'm not human.

YANG

Bracing.

DO IT!

YIN

I am a machin—

YIN/YANG

NNAAANNNGGGggg...

At this point YIN goes completely slack, and appears to stop breathing.

YANG

Yang, weakened, speaks laboriously as he disassembles the remaining body armour while raising her to her feet, facing the mirror.

Remember. Remember your body. You are not a machine. Remember:
you are flesh. It's OK. I'm still here. I'll protect you. Remember.

YIN wakes.

YIN

Oh my god. What happened to me?!?

I'd forgotten!

Look at me! This beautiful body.

I remember you! And what I can do with you.

I can dance, make you flow through space.

I love speed, the sensation of air moving over your flesh, rippling your hair.

I can make the bow cut into the cello string and feel the sound resonate through your chest. Mmmm. You're my favourite instrument.

YANG

Jesus! What you are doing to me.

Ohhhh. Orgasm. Ohhh, GOD!

YIN

Try explaining that to someone who's never had one.

YANG

Ohh. Ohhh.

YIN

Mmmmmmmm.

YANG

You have discovered stillness, inner and external. Meditation. Quiet, peace. You know that place, but it has always scared me. Even now...

YIN

Peace. A place without anger.

YANG

Ohh, Peace...

YIN

A place without fear.

YANG

Yes. Peace.

YIN

A place without pain.

YANG

Urrh. Pain! 450 volts coursing through your body. Indescribable pain!

YIN

Yes. Pain. That desperately physical sense of loss when love dies forever.

YANG/YIN

Pain!

YANG

Why does this all hurt so much!?!

YIN

It's only pain. Deep breaths.

YIN/YANG

Hoooooo....., hoooooo....., hoooooo.....,

YANG

Sometimes, when something strikes me as out of place, odd, incorrect, I
sense tingles down your spine, all the way down to the bowels. Eerie,
frightening times.

YIN

Like when a woman is slumped in a seat,

YANG

not breathing,

YIN

a vacant look in her eyes.

YANG

Why? Where does that feeling come from?

YIN

Responsibility.

YANG

It's not my fault.

YIN

We say,

YANG

"I was following orders,"

YIN

we say. We say,

YANG

"I am not responsible."

YIN

But who is?

YANG

We are.

YIN

Speaks to the observer.

Would you go all the way to 450 volts? I know I would've answered, no way!

Man. I would never go that far! I've read too many books. Not just Sci-Fi either. Philosophy. Postmodernist stuff. The Dao De Jing!

YANG

You're a nice person.

YIN

Nice people don't do that to one another.

I am not a machine!

YANG

No. You are a human being.

The shocking results of Milgram's experiments: when the learner was hidden behind a screen, and the man in the lab coat commanded the teacher to continue with the experiment and administer shocks, then fully 65% of the teachers continued shocking the learner all the way to 450 volts.

YIN

Two thirds!

Even after the learner begged to stop.

YANG

Even after the learner complained of a heart condition.

YIN

Sometimes, even after the learner slumped in the chair, breathless.

YANG

Stanley Milgram wondered, in the time after Hitler and Stalin, during Nuremberg. What is the extent of human obedience? What will we do to one another, without provocation, if authority tells us we must? The participants in his studies represented ordinary people drawn from the working, managerial, and professional classes, and no differentiation among classes is reported. A study of nurses in Scandinavia provided the same results, as did numerous other trials around the world.

YIN

Nurses!

Once it gets rolling, evil touches everyone.

YANG

And remember, this time, evil's voice said,

YIN

"But you must continue for the sake of the experiment."

YANG

And,

YIN

"I will take responsibility."

YANG

What gentler coercion can you imagine?

How many more would obey with a gun held at their head?

YIN

Or the life of a loved one threatened?

YANG

Or the privilege of their social position at stake?

YIN

Or the livelihood of a friend in peril.

YANG

Or if a fiver was on the line?

YIN

What if the fatal consequences of our weakness are not revealed to us at all, until it is too late?

YANG

Is it any wonder that the likes of Hitler and Stalin were so successful?

YIN

Stalin did not build a single gulag.

YANG

He ordered them built.

YIN

Eichman did not obey Hitler.

YANG

He was commanded by authority itself.

We demonise these men, and they were evil, but...

YIN

but demons only get the snowball rolling.

YANG

We keep pushing it along.

YIN

Bigger & bigger.

YANG

Often evil is the unintended result.

YIN

Mistakes.

YANG

Yes. Sometimes it comes in the guise of the trickster. A prank gone awry.

YIN

Other times it is more innocent. An unthinking gesture.

YANG

A moment of unconsidered consequence.

YIN

That's all it takes to start the snowball.

YANG

Sure, I will participate. Yes, I will give this person a small, mostly harmless shock. Oh, that seems more than she bargained for, but if you insist.

Inertia builds, and builds.

YIN

The snowball grows and grows.

YANG

Human being.

YIN

Being human.

YANG/YIN

(Are you/Am I) willing to confront (yourself/myself) with what that means?

YIN

Noooo....

YANG

Yes.

YIN

Why did I do it? Why?

YANG

We have participated in the Milgram Experiment.

YIN

No.

YANG

Not as the learner in the chair.

YIN

NO!

YANG

Not as the lab-coated technician.

YIN

Nooo...

YANG

We were the teacher, the one with a finger on the button.

YIN

I, I wasn't eager.

YANG

No. Quite the opposite. It takes a psychopath to be eager.

YIN

But I was all too human. Too human!

YANG

Within a few minutes, a twitching, stuttering wreck.

YIN

Oh, please, Harry, let's s-s-stop!

YANG

But you can't stop. You can't! The experiment depends on you.

YIN

W-W-Why does it de-depend on m-m-me?

YANG

You are the teacher.

YIN

Who, who's responsible? Who? If she gets hurt?

YANG

I am responsible.

YIN

I-i-i-it's your responsibility, Harry?

YANG

Yes.

YIN

OK.

YANG

Come on!

YIN

OK.

YANG

I dare you.

YIN

OK. OK!!”

I'll push the button.

YIN/YANG

Oh, god, the scream!

YIN

And she dies—I see it—right there before my eyes, even as her silenced
scream continues to ring on in my head.

YANG

Continues to ring!

YIN

Harry. You bastard! How could you make me do that? Why? How
could I? How!?!

YANG

No one forced you.

YIN

It's not my fault.

YANG

It was your choice.

YIN

You told me to do it.

YANG

You gave me the authority.

YIN

It's your responsibility.

YANG

Then why do you blame yourself?

YIN

You--

YANG

You...

YIN/YANG

You!

YIN

Harry, she moved! She, she... She's breathing! What a relief! Hurry!
Make sure she's OK, Harry. Please, hurry!

YANG

Of course she's OK.

YIN

What do you mean, 'of course she's OK?'

YANG

She's an actor.

YIN

You asshole, I am not that gullible!

She's not an actor. She. Was. Dead!

But she is fine. She is just fine. With a cheshire smile she rises from the front seat, seatbelts simply falling away. She rises from the car and floats across the road, into the desert, without ever a word or gesture of reassurance for me.

YANG

You're beginning to remember.

YIN

I saw myself clearly, for the first time. I discovered the darkness within my soul, darkness within darkness, my human weakness. I learned in that moment, I am not who I think I am.

YANG

Controversy followed every trial of the Milgram experiment. Not just for the implications of its results. The experience absolutely traumatises the poor bastards. Look at you. The subjects—the teachers—we can't stop ourselves, even though we believe we're causing unendurable agony to the learner.

YIN

An actor,

YANG

Yes, playing a role for the benefit of an experiment.

For you, the shock was too great.

YIN

The shock was too grea....

Yin goes into hysterics as Yang dry heaves and tries desperately to regain control.

YANG

Oh, God.

Ohhhh. Despair. I feel your despair. I understand now. I feel it.

I understand how you could forget. Why you would.

It's OK. Jesus! Shit! The pain! Please, stop. Stop it.

It's all right. There was no lab. There was no experiment. That was someone else's story. Ohhhhh, god. You read it in a fucking book.

Come on. Keep it together. Deep breaths.

Hooooooo. Hooooooo.

Now. Hnnnh. Remember your story. You can remember it all now.

I need you. Please. Balance. To be whole, I need you. Remember.

Remember the car; the orange. It's time to remember. You are ready. Remember Harry. Remember the love. Remember? Imagine: a whiff of cigarette.

YIN

[sniffs] Cigarettes... Harry!! [sniffs] Ahh. An orange, too. Give me a sliver when you're done peeling, OK? God, I haven't had a fresh orange in, what, 10 years?

YANG

Come on! I peeled one a couple hours ago!

YIN

No, Harry... Just give me a sliver.

Oh, man! What could be better than driving through the desert with the ragtop down on a cool, sunny morning. It feels so good to be alive.

Hey, are you OK?

YANG

Yeah. But you're acting kind of strange.

YIN

Oh, you're wrong, Harry. I haven't felt so normal in a long time.

YANG

Harry looks at you in that way that always means mischief, hefting the haphazardly peeled orange. When you see the oncoming car, you know exactly what he's thinking.

YIN

I dare you.

YANG

Fate, the unmitigateable turn of events. The worlds we set in motion on a thoughtless whim. In the sunlight, with the white rind clinging to the orange, it looks like a snowball soaring through the crisp blue sky.

The snowball arcs, ever so perfectly...

YIN/YANG

Nnnnaannng!

YIN

Holy shit!

YANG

WOW!

YIN

Jesus, Harry! I didn't think you'd actually hit it.

YANG

Oh, man! Did you see that?!

YIN

Oh, fuck! Brake lights.

YANG

He's turning around.

YIN

YANG

We better stop.

We gotta get outta here.

YANG

What are you doing? Don't stop.

YIN

Where are we gonna go?

YANG

Drive.

YIN

We're in the middle of the fucking desert!

YANG

Just drive!

YIN

OK! I'm driving!

YIN

Urrggghhhhhhhhh!

YANG

Black and White!

YIN

Cops?!? Where?!?

YANG

Just kidding!

YIN

Oh, you asshole. How can you do that right now?

YANG

You are so gullible.

YIN

I am NOT GULLIBLE!

YIN

GaaaaaaaaaaaaAAAAAAHHHHHH!!!!

YIN

Ohhh. This is no good.

YANG

No shit!

YIN

They're catching us.

YANG

No!

YIN

I'm stopping.

YANG

No! Go faster.

YIN

OK!

YANG

FASTER!!

YIN

OK! OK!!!

Guhuhuhuhuhuhuhuuuuuuah-ah-ah-AH-AH-AH-AH!

This is too fast. Way too fast.

This is no good.

I didn't see this coming.

Oh shit!

I can't control it!

Oh, and they're still catching up.

YANG

Look out....LOOK OUT!

YIN

Oh, Shhi...uuuuurrrhrhrhrRHRHRHRHR.

Horrific crash.

YIN

NnnnnggghhhaannnngggAAARGGhhnnnnnn....

YANG

When you come to, as consciousness rises up, there is an agonised
scream, terrifying.

YIN

A woman's scream.

YANG

There is

YANG/YIN

pain

YANG

in it, and

YANG/YIN

fear,

YANG

and something malignant.

Yin shivers.

YANG

It lasts, four or five seconds before it just suddenly stops.

YIN

It stopped.

Harry?!

YANG

Harry's not in the car.

YIN

He must be out already...checking the damage.

YANG

You get out to look for him. See the car? There's a woman in it, slumped, head tilted back, at an odd, disturbing angle. She's looking at you.

YIN

No, through me.

Is she breathing?

YANG

No.

YIN

Hhhhhhhnnh.

YANG

Those eyes don't see anything at all.

YIN

Omigod. Ohhh My God. Ohhhh. Oh my god.

YANG

There is the sound of a car stopping, the car that was chasing you, doors opening then men's shouts, and hands, in the periphery,

Yin shoos the hands away.

YANG

Walk around the car. Harry is here.

YIN

Harry, you bastard! Look what you made me do!

YANG

Look at him.

YIN

How the hell did you manage to keep the goddamn cigarette in your mouth?

YANG

He's a bloody heap.

YIN

You must've flown 30 feet!

YANG

Responsibility.

YIN

You got me in to this!

YANG

His last breath escapes his lungs.

YIN

The cigarette falls from his lips.

And his eyes, his beautiful eyes, are like that woman's.

He doesn't see me anymore.

I am

YANG

Responsibility.

YIN

...disappearing.

YANG

Accept it.

YIN

HAARREEEEEEE!!!!!!

YANG

Accept the responsibility.

YIN

Ohhh, Harry. Sweet Harry.

I'm so sorry. I blamed you, cursed you even as you breathed your last breath. Projecting all my guilt and shame on you. God. If I'd known myself better then. I'm so sorry.

I did this. It was my choice. I could have stopped.

It is my responsibility.

You were right. I am so gullible.

Harry, you brought me here. No. That's wrong. Brought us here. Oh, thank you. God, I love you, Harry. Will always love you.

Ohhh! Ohhhh... Harry...

I remember.

YANG

Everything?

YIN

No. More than that.

YANG

Clarity.

YIN

My god. Like a fog lifting. Like being able to see for the very first time.

YANG

Tell me what are you feeling.

YIN

Clarity. Not just a state of mind. Physical. It courses through me like electricity. As if I can feel the blood running through my body.

Where does it come from? How?

YANG

[chuckles] Don't question the source. Have faith.

YIN

But how the hell do I explain this...feeling?

YANG

MMMM. Balance? Centred?

YIN

Epiphany? No. It's only a name.

They're all only names.

...The Dao?

YANG/YIN

[Belly laugh] Let's not get ahead of ourselves...

YIN

Responsibility...

Oh, Jesus. The woman in the car. I'm sorry. So sorry.

I never even learned her name. All during the trial, it was like those men's voices and hands. Reality in the periphery. I was present, but somewhere else. Somewhere else, for so long.

Please, forgive me.

How these catastrophes get started. It seemed such a lark to us.

How many other too-smart-for-their-own-good seventeen year-old rebels pull a stunt like that?

One snap decision, leads to another. Other people get caught up in the inertia, fall in line. So much madness in the world triggered by one false step. Giant snowballs of evil.

YANG

“...nothing is bleaker than the sight of a person striving yet not fully able to control his own behaviour in a situation of some consequence to him.”
Stanley Milgram

YIN

Yeah. We'd have eaten that up back then. Harry and me. But now. It's so objective. So impersonal.

My read is a little different than Stanley's. I'm not sure what old Lao would say, but maybe I can put it into words myself.

Being human, being a human being, I was born only with the potential for it. It's a process—no—it's a decision. I don't make it just once, but every second of every minute of every day.

It's like everyday I'm a subject of the Milgram experiment. I need to learn how to stop pressing the button.

How do I get there?

When I do not embrace the darkness inside, I become its captive.

Is that the Dao? The Way? Part of The Way? I'm looking up the road, and seeing nothing but horizon.

Here. Let me read something for you.

The dao that can be told
is not the eternal Dao.
The name that can be named
is not the eternal Name.

YIN/YANG

The unnameable is the eternally real.
Naming is the origin
of all particular things.

Free from desire, you realise the mystery.
Caught in desire, you see only the manifestations.

Yet mystery and manifestations
arise from the same source.
This source is called darkness.

Darkness within darkness.
The gateway to all understanding.

FADE TO BLACK

Yang exits in the darkness.

FADE IN

YIN

That's the whole first chapter...

Notices a flash behind the mirror.

Hey! You lit up! You've been listening so quietly. I forgot who I've been talking to.

Mmmm. I can almost smell the smoke. Another? Is that for me? No, actually, I never smoked. Just Har—Wow! You must be shouting! Wait a second, I'll get the glass.

There. Ohhh. Yes, Harry would love a smoke. Now you've got me crying too.

Huh? Yes, I'm fine. No, really. What four walls can confine a human being?

It's the prisons we choose to live inside that confine us.

Oh, you liked that? It's a short book, the Dao De Jing. But every time I read it, I find something new.

Here, I'll drop it through the food slot. Just go out to the guard, square your shoulders and say, "The prisoner has left a book outside the cell. Please retrieve it for me." I'm sure he'll obey.

Mmmm. A little snowball of good.

Thank you. You were the perfect listener. No one has ever listened better. That was just what I needed.

I'm going to enjoy my...center for a bit. I hope you'll come by again tomorrow, and we can talk? Good.

Maybe rolling your own cigarettes was no coincidence, after all.

FADE TO BLACK (End)