

X

C. Scott Ananian

February 9, 1998

[A black stage. Nothing can be seen except a MAN, suspended in space. Ropes stretch away from his arms and legs; he forms a tense X against the black.]

[An spotlight is tightly focused upon him; his binding ropes trail into darkness. The light comes from diagonals: his shadow is not seen on stage. We cannot see the floor.]

[The man is dressed in grey. A one-piece uniform. His hands and feet are bare. Perhaps there are shackles on his wrists and ankles. We cannot tell.]

[The man speaks to the unseen AUDITOR, not to us. He is curiously at ease.]

MAN: I can't tell you how excited I am about this. I've been looking forward to it, really.

[Long pause.]

[Starting again.] I love doing this. It makes my time here meaningful, somehow. To create—nothing quite matches the feeling. I've got lots of ideas.

I'm thinking of trying to make a living out of it, you know. It's not easy, but—hey, it's a challenge. I've seen the design group, the ones I'll be working with? I'm excited. I said that before. I really am. Great people.

Do you think I'm making a mistake? I worry at times—I really enjoy this stuff, I do—but can I do it for real? I mean, out there. Where they pay you for this. It's not easy. I... well, it's exciting to prove myself, you know? Each time is completely new, start from scratch. Each time—it could be a masterpiece or utter failure. I never know. That's what makes it...

Seeing it in the end. That's what makes it worthwhile.

[Another long pause.]

Are you still there?

[Silence.]

It's terrifying, really. A step into my future, you know? I've got to give up everything to pursue this. It makes a lot of my past meaningless. Void. Wipes it out in one stroke. Have to start again.

At least I have support.

[The rope holding the MAN's right hand is suddenly broken. We see the rope spring, and the MAN's hand swings across his body and goes limp from the shoulder. The man is suspended by one wrist, now. His X is contorted and painful. His useless arm hangs out of the light. His earlier ease vanishes and his left bicep tenses, holding himself upright. He wobbles slightly on the ropes.]

Wh—

I don't understand.

I've been working hard. Two weeks, already. Why did no one tell me? What wasn't I told? Who...

[Deep breath.]

It's harder this way. It won't be easy. I mean...

I understand. You have to do ... [A sudden grimace of pain.]

[Struggling to say it.] This.

Is.

Okay.

[The rope suddenly tenses on his left wrist, and he is stretched between his wrist and ankles. Pain.]

[His breathing is ragged.]

[With effort.] I am confident. Still. Confident.

It is not the end.

I know... myself. My work. I can...

Other. Opportunities.

My work is... good.

[His left wrist is cut loose. He falls arcing out of light.]

[The spotlight finds him again hanging from the ropes on his ankles. Perhaps the ropes shift upwards to break his fall more quickly? Perhaps he falls the entire distance.]

[The man hangs head down, his back to the audience. He has been flogged; his uniform hangs in tatters where he has been whipped. Long red scars form an X on his back.]

It is. I know it is.

Good.

[He twists his torso to face forward, seeking the auditor. Savagely:]

You can not...

[The ropes are drawn apart. A pause filled with pain. Slowly:]

Can.

[He returns to rest, back to the audience, head gazing downwards.]

You can do what you please.

[A pause.]

[His arms reach for the floor, straining. His hands clench. He tenses and brings his fists and arms in towards his body, gathering strength.]

You can do. But I will not.

I will forever strive. I will not be beaten.

I do not renounce dreams. I chase my ambitions. Opportunities denied *will* be refound. Opinions *will* be changed. My work will grow, my self improve. I will walk outside. I will make the cut. I can be battered, but will not give in.

[He jerks his body, straining against the ropes. He bobs wildly in and out of the light. His struggle is futile, but he fights against his bonds.]

[The rope on his right ankle is cut. He swings to the side, out of the light.]

[The lights finds him again, suspended from one ankle. His arms are strong and tense, held out to his sides; his free foot is held straight beside the bound ankle. An inverted iron cross pendulums in and out of the lit space.]

[With all his strength, the MAN voices his resolve.]

I...

[The last rope is cut. The man falls.]

[We do not hear him hit the ground.]