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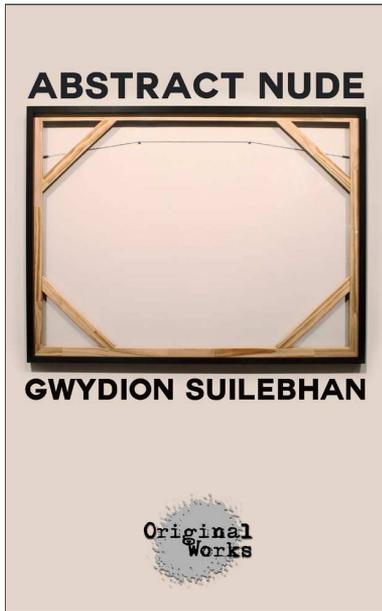
False Solution

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ABSTRACT NUDE
By Gwydion Suilebhan

Synopsis: "Abstract Nude" is an enigmatic, erotically-charged portrait that seems to reveal more about the people who view it than it reveals about itself. As the painting moves backward in time, it passes from owner to owner, exploding the lives of everyone who encounters

it. In one home, the portrait tips the balance in a barely-suppressed power struggle among the members of a well-to-do family. In another, it awakens a great deal of confusion – and passion – between two former fraternity brothers. In the home of the portrait's subject, it inspires nothing but unrequited love and alienation between two dear friends. And finally, back in the moment of its creation, where the story both ends and begins, the painting incites a terrible violence... the tragedy that haunts it wherever it travels, and that cannot be escaped.

Cast Size: 4 Males, 3 Females

FALSE SOLUTION

**A play by
Oren Safdie**

FALSE SOLUTION was first produced at La MaMa in New York, opening June 13, 2013. It was directed by Oren Safdie; the set design was by Blanca Añón García; the costume design was by Tristan Raines; the lighting design was by Emily McGillicuddy; the stage manger was Jessica Gouker; the dramaturg was Fritz Michel; casting was by Pat McCorkle, CSA; graphic design was by R.D. MacPherson; and publicity was Sam Rudy Media Relations. The cast was as follows:

Anton Seligman: Sean Haberle

Linda Johansson: Christy McIntosh

FALSE SOLUTION had its West Coast Premiere at the Santa Monica Playhouse in association with La MaMa and Jacqueline Bridgeman, opening on April 24, 2014. It was directed by Oren Safdie; the set design was by Evelyn Ellias; the costume design was by Kate Fry; the lighting design was by Rusty Gaidzik; the stage manger was Cheryl Valice; the dramaturg and assistant director was Shelagh McFadden; graphic design was by R.D. MacPherson; and publicity was Philip Sokoloff. The cast was as follows:

Anton Seligman: Daniel J. Travanti

Linda Johansson: Amanda Saunders

CHARACTERS

ANTON SELIGMAN: An accomplished world famous architect of European descent in his late 50s, 60s, early 70s, who has lived in America for many years. He is charming, stylish and exudes a kind of confidence that feels effortless -- although like many successful architects, his insecurities are never far from the surface.

LINDA JOHANSSON: A smart, intellectual, beautiful, blond graduate architecture student in her mid-20s to mid-30s, who has come to work at as an intern for a famous architect. Keenly aware of the power of her looks, and more importantly, her brains, she is willing to do whatever it takes to get what she wants.

Place: The model shop of Anton Seligman's architecture firm.

Time: A summer evening in the mid to late 1990s.

For Sapta Pola

FALSE SOLUTION

(Lights up. Linda stands downstage left. She is dressed in a short skirt, tights, and a blouse. Behind her, on a table, is a study model of a Holocaust museum in the initial stages of design. Sketches of the Deconstructivist building are pinned up on the walls - stylistically, a cross between Libeskind and Gehry ... She addresses the audience directly, formally.)

LINDA: The thing about architects is that their buildings live on long after they're dead; forming individuals, influencing communities ... sometimes even defining - or reflecting - the collective conscience of an entire nation. And whereas doctors are often cited as the agents of God, in pursuit of extending human life; it is the architect that exemplifies the idea that man has been created in God's image, in control of his own destiny ... for better or worse.

(Anton enters the room, jacket slung over his shoulder, briefcase in hand. He stops to study the model Linda's been working on. She turns to acknowledge him and then back toward the audience.)

LINDA: He was not the type that allowed his eye to wander indiscriminately, or if he did, he was tactful, economical - limiting his indulgence to essential causes. Totally in control ...

(Anton accidentally knocks a piece off the model.)

ANTON: Oops.

LINDA: Until he wasn't.

(Anton tries to attach the piece back on.)

LINDA: I was getting a tour from one of his low-level project managers; he was showing potential clients around the office. As we passed in the hallway, I felt his glance stay on me an extra second -- a familiar sensation that never loses its potency ... or power. After that, it was only a matter of time before an opportunity presented itself. It usually does ... if the desire is there. *(Turning to Anton.)* It's not finished.

ANTON: *(Startled.)* Don't mind me. I'm rather fascinated by people's creative process, how different people approach a similar problem ... I see you've chosen to cut all the shapes out before assemblage.

LINDA: I thought it would be more efficient.

ANTON: Perhaps when dealing with pre-fabricated building construction, or if you were working the assembly line of an auto manufacturer ... but for a small-scale study model like this, you might find it poses unnecessary risks. Any miscalculation - a slip of the ruler - even an unevenness of the table surface, can set back the whole process to the beginning.

LINDA: Would you like me to start over?

ANTON: Of course not - you've obviously put in a tremendous amount of effort - just something to keep in mind as you proceed ... forward ... in life. Because as Camus would say, man is the only creature that refuses to be what he is.

LINDA: Sounds as if he was exempting women.

ANTON: On the contrary: he was a rabid sexist. Females were nothing more than objects of his desire ... especially the pretty ones.

LINDA: (*Trying to show some intellectual muscle.*) Still a step ahead of Sartre who compared our anatomy to a vessel of gapes and orifices in need of being filled ... or is that fulfilled?

ANTON: Maybe the Existentialists weren't as existential as they were said to be.

LINDA: I don't take it personally.

ANTON: As you shouldn't. Where would it end?

LINDA: Or begin?

ANTON: (*With importance.*) Anton ... Seligman.

LINDA: (*Echoing him.*) Linda ... Johansson.

(*They shake hands.*)

ANTON: You've done a wonderful job weaving these little wire mesh strips across the openings.

LINDA: Long nails are a girl's best friend.

ANTON: I just felt to put conventional windows when you're about to enter 1941 would be nothing less than criminal.

LINDA: It definitely makes it feel oppressive.

ANTON: As it must've been - a massacre in Kiev, Jews being ordered to wear yellow stars, the first experimental use of gas chambers introduced at Auschwitz. Although, if I may be candid, the inspiration came from my experiences as a young student in Zurich where they housed us in depressing cinder block dormitories overlooking the Platzspitz, otherwise known as Needle Park ... We were so fed-up with all the drug addicts breaking into our rooms and stealing the few francs we had, that we wrapped the entire building in razor wire and gauze and painted it purple.

LINDA: A precursor to Christo?

ANTON: Where do you think he got his ideas? ... But it's what follows that's been the most challenging aspect of the project: how to convey what the imagination cannot grasp. Have you seen the revised floor plans for the sub-terrain levels?

LINDA: Only the renderings put out by the press.

ANTON: Ah. (*Opening his sketchbook.*) This is the real crux of the experience ... As the visitor descends the ramp towards 1942, 1943 and beyond, the walls begin to slant inward, never surpassing 52 degrees - the year Germany signed the reparations agreement with Israel - a reference more for myself than for public consumption.

LINDA: My lips are sealed.

(*He glances up at her lips with lust before continuing.*)

ANTON: Then, just as it starts to become unbearable, the floor and ceiling start torquing in opposite directions, almost as if you're in the middle of a wet rag and someone's trying to ring you out. Off to the side, you catch glimpses through small portals of empty rooms - no photographs or artifacts - just light, color, suggestive imagery, each conveying a distinct mood such as surprise, humiliation, reckoning ... despair. The effect on the visitor is that he starts to feel disoriented, interspersed with feelings of panic, nausea. The ramp slopes down even harder as you come upon 20,000 primitive faces carved out of shtetl brick - the number of Jews that lived in the town's enclave - intended to be walked on, creating a horrid industrial sound echoing throughout the void, all leading to a simple wood door with brass hinges, offering escape, yet upon entry, the visitor finds himself in a claustrophobic sixty-foot cavernous shaft; no heat, no displays, just a single ray of light emanating from a razor thin slit in the roof.

LINDA: Hope?

ANTON: Its antithesis: the promise of freedom was always presented - an effective way of quashing uprising. But work did not set them free. Collaboration only postponed the inevitable, and the promise of food and shelter was a ploy to lure the desperate ... (*Aside; more casually.*) Access will be limited to small groups, and they may remain as long as desired to reflect on the emptiness of death.

LINDA: How do they exit?

ANTON: Good question. I'm still working on that ... Any ideas?

LINDA: (*Sheepishly.*) You want my opinion?

ANTON: Why not? I'd like to think everyone in this office plays a role in contributing to the design process. Ideas can come from the oddest places if you're confident enough with yourself to be open to them.

LINDA: Can I have the weekend to think about it?

ANTON: Absolutely not - I'm a strict believer in first instinct.

LINDA: I really haven't had any time to prepare for this -

ANTON: Give it a shot - what do you have to lose?

LINDA: Well ...

ANTON: Go on ...

LINDA: Maybe you might try to discourage people from leaving the way they came in -- for circulatory reasons.

ANTON: Very astute ...

LINDA: Not to mention it might give a false impression that there's somehow a way of returning to what once was, when there really isn't.

ANTON: Therefor ...

LINDA: You'd probably benefit from some kind of transitional space, or maybe an entirely new experience that highlights the shaft, by contrasting it.

ANTON: Such as?

LINDA: (*Losing confidence.*) I'm really not very good at working like this -

ANTON: You're doing marvelous -

LINDA: I'm drawing complete blanks -

ANTON: (*Pressing her.*) First thing that pops into your head.

LINDA: (*Feeling pressured.*) I don't know ...

ANTON: Out with it!

LINDA: (*Desperate attempt.*) A trap door opens and people drop six feet into a smoldering ditch.

ANTON: Really? I was thinking the opposite: blinding light, dense vegetation, maybe some source of rushing water or misty fog ... foggy mist.

LINDA: Rebirth?

ANTON: Other worldliness. A Garden of Exile - void of any biblical references, of course, as to introduce God at this point would be nothing less than sacrilege.

LINDA: More like one of those planets from an early episode of Star Trek.

ANTON: (*Amused.*) ... Harvard?

LINDA: Columbia - on a full scholarship.

ANTON: I'm usually spot-on with these things -- especially with the GSD students - they tend to sprinkle their intellect with pop culture innuendos, making them seem more in touch with mainstream culture than they really are.

LINDA: What about Princeton or Yale?

ANTON: Earnestly overeager to impress, and you're obviously quite comfortable in your own skin -- even if your syntax appears to have been mildly corrupted. (*Surmising.*) You must be Second Year.

LINDA: First.

ANTON: Now you've defied my expectations twice.

LINDA: (*Darker than humorous.*) Maybe they need readjusting.

ANTON: Ah, yes, I'm definitely starting to pick up that Upper West Side vibe.

LINDA: Sorry, it's just that people have often made false assumptions about me - I have a tendency to overreact.

ANTON: Because you're blond?

LINDA: And female. And young. And what a narrow-minded market-driven segment of society might consider "attractive". I used to model.

ANTON: I can empathize ... For years I toiled in obscurity as an experimentalist, people writing me off solely as an educator and theorist, reducing my work to "poly-sophomoric indulgence, rooted in conceit, steeped in Rejectionism" ... Fortunately, I never heeded their rhetoric or I'd probably never have risen much further than their expectations.

LINDA: (*About herself.*) Easier said than done.

ANTON: But crucial if you want to make it in this profession where the odds are stacked so overwhelmingly against you.

LINDA: (*A little sarcastic.*) I appreciate the words of wisdom.

ANTON: I'm sorry, did I just sound like every pretentious authoritative figure I grew up despising?

LINDA: A little.

ANTON: Please shoot me next time if I say anything like that again. It's bad enough they're giving me a solo show at MoMA -- I've always been much more comfortable in the underdog role.

(*Linda looks down again and smirks.*)

ANTON: I've done it again, haven't I?

LINDA: I'm beginning to think it's a prerequisite for the profession.

ANTON: No, no, I don't want you to think that I'm usually this pontifical. It must be that you've unleashed all my insecurities.

LINDA: Why would I do that?

ANTON: (*Flirting.*) Oh, I don't know ... Maybe it has something to do with your obstinate directness; it's quite intimidating.

LINDA: People sometimes mistake it for passive aggression.

ANTON: Good to know I'm not the only one ... So what is it?

LINDA: I don't know ... Maybe my own insecurities.

ANTON: (*Trying to be humorous.*) Well, now that we've established how insecure we both feel around each other, maybe we can explore some of the more burning questions in life.

LINDA: (*Taking him literally.*) Such as?

ANTON: Like, for instance ... Well ... I don't know -- How do you enjoy working here?

LINDA: You're playing it safe.

ANTON: My instincts tell me to. Has it been a good experience so far?

LINDA: Well, everyone's been really nice and supportive, and I'm certainly gaining a level of practical knowledge that they just don't teach in architecture school.

ANTON: Glad we're meeting your expectations.

LINDA: Oh, I didn't have any.

ANTON: You sure have a way of sticking it to your superiors, don't you?

LINDA: What I mean to say is I make it a point of never anticipating what something will be like before I do it.

ANTON: Diminishing the risk of disappointment?

LINDA: Being open to the element of surprise.

ANTON: That's quite disciplined of you.

LINDA: I have an irrational side to me too.

(Anton looks at her; his intrigue growing.)

ANTON: Still, you must've had some reason for wanting to intern here -- as opposed to any number of firms who'd no doubt be lucky to have you.

LINDA: Actually ... I wrote a paper on you this past semester.

ANTON: Really?

LINDA: Yes, we were required to choose any living architect and write about the evolution of his or her work in relation to outside influences such as popular movements, new technologies, even personal history if we found it relevant.

ANTON: That's quite encompassing, even if it makes me feel a bit like some minute bacteria floating around in a Petri dish.

LINDA: I'm sorry. It's a little awkward for me to be discussing my subject matter with my subject matter. Obviously, I'm also intrigued by your work.

ANTON: Completely understandable. When I graduated from university, I knew I had to work for Eisenman. I became so obsessed that I bought a white suit for my job interview because I had heard that was how he dressed his children.

LINDA: I can't say I went to such extremes ... But it was after I read your essay "Thoughts on a Photograph of a Demolished Building" that I first wanted to become an architect.

ANTON: I'm deeply humbled. There's no higher compliment a serviceman can be paid.

LINDA: (*Asserting herself as someone to be taken seriously.*) That's not to say my paper isn't a rigorous, objective evaluation, which, at times, I may find myself disagreeing with certain aspects of your work.

ANTON: Naturally. A measured amount of skepticism should be encouraged. It's even healthy.

LINDA: Personally, I've always been attracted to what eludes me rather than what I find myself easily obtaining.

ANTON: (*Flirtatiously.*) A bit of the masochist in all of us, I suppose.

LINDA: Does one benefit more by surrounding oneself with people who always agree with us, or by those who challenge our beliefs?

ANTON: Theoretically, provocative - but maybe a touch naïve. As Caesar quickly discovered, the perils of such a strategy can be disastrous.

LINDA: On the contrary: he might've saved himself a lot of grief had he been more open to evaluation. After all, Brutus can hardly be considered a malicious character.

ANTON: I suppose that depends on which side of the knife you were on.

LINDA: If you're willing to call a mule a donkey.

(*Anton sizes her up.*)

ANTON: So, if you don't mind me asking, exactly which aspects of my work did you have problems discerning?

LINDA: I shouldn't have said anything.

ANTON: On the contrary: I thrive on dissension. It forces me to clarify my positions.

LINDA: I can print out a copy of my paper if you'd like.

ANTON: That would be grand ... (*Needing feedback right away.*) But just a few of the highlights ... if you don't mind.

LINDA: This feels awkward.

ANTON: Nonsense. We're all beginners when you get down to it.

LINDA: It's just a silly term paper.

ANTON: I could use a laugh.

LINDA: Very well ... To begin with, I find your early theoretical forms, despite being cerebral, nevertheless convey an elegant aesthetic sensibility. They're original, definitive, instructive - at once nostalgic yet characterized by unusually sharp foresight and imagination. And as these ideas became buildable, such as your experimental housing units for the homeless in Paris -

ANTON: If only the city built the damn thing -

LINDA: - or the alternative school in the Netherlands -

ANTON: Apparently, test scores have doubled -

LINDA: - you were able to retain - if not the complexity - the essence of the experiences, sensitively adapting to program and site. Even as your popularity grew, there was still a retention of the mystery that continued to lay out your narrative without pandering to any popular movement.

ANTON: God knows, I try.

LINDA: But in your most recent buildings - whether this has to do with a growing body of work that invites greater comparison, or because of some kind of shift in your value system - I feel the spontaneity is ... less consistent.

ANTON: Ah, you've been reading Rybczynski-

LINDA: Not that I'm naïve to the fact that larger scaled projects are bound to leave you with less time to devote to every last detail, but what's been disappointing - because obviously you have one of the more intelligent minds in the profession -

ANTON: You're too kind.

LINDA: - is to what extent you've copied yourself to the point that some of the forms are in danger of becoming caricatures of themselves.

ANTON: (*Stung, but trying to remain even keel.*) You have a hard time deciphering -

LINDA: (*Passion growing.*) Quite the opposite: there's little room for interpretation. You give us everything. Like in this museum: I get the skewered train tracks, the toppling triangles, thrusting beams with the tortured souls rising up to heaven through the chimney; that sense of dread and anxiety. But what does the building offer in terms of allowing one to discover? Where's the poetry? ... Rather than create a space where these elements can be contemplated, you hit us over the head with the message, taking away any possibility of achieving a genuine personal epiphany. Like what you look for in a great book; the story unfolding in stages, peeling away the layers, like the skin of an onion ... (*Intensely; at him.*) Or like when you first fall for someone you're attracted to, and slowly start to uncover all the wonderful traits that make you realize that it's more than just some fleeting infatuation ...

(*Anton is stunned.*)

LINDA: (*Off his look.*) I'm sorry, I think I've overstepped my boundaries.

ANTON: (*Trying to recover.*) No, no, I'm flattered that you've put so much time and thought into my work. It's overwhelming -

LINDA: Because it doesn't take away anything from how I feel about your work in the larger context of architectural history.

ANTON: Of course not ... But let me get this straight - because I don't want to put words into your mouth or misrepresent your ideas - you'd prefer I don't try to interpret the Holocaust at all. No articulation whatsoever; maybe a few posts and beams here and there - a couple of slabs to protect from the elements ... Or maybe a series of floating exhibits, held up with magic string -

LINDA: That's not what I -

ANTON: (*With decisive charm.*) No, not directly, but it's imperative for you to understand that whatever's built on this site will be an expression of something. Even a lack of expression can be incredibly expressionistic - look at the Modernists!

LINDA: I understand that, but-

ANTON: So although you might find it easy to dismiss my attempts to give any type of architectural interpretation of the Holocaust, equally offensive is the notion that you can treat this building like any other, with sky-lit galleries, beautiful courtyards, maybe a little rose garden out back to have some tea. Because as far as I'm concerned, my responsibility as an architect is to make people think and feel in ways that no other medium is capable of doing ... As for relationships, you can just as easily discover all the things about a person that drives you mad, making you wonder what you saw in them in the first place.

(Realizing he's revealed his displeasure a little too much, Anton goes over to a cupboard, pulls out a bottle and two glasses, and calmly turns to Linda.)

ANTON: Vodka?

LINDA: *(Almost accusatory, but jokingly.)* Your personal stash for late night rendezvous?

ANTON: My model maker's - although, mysteriously, someone's topped it off so many times, it hardly has any potency.

(Anton pours, they clink glasses, and shoot back. The Vodka is strong.)

LINDA: Evidently, it's been given an infusion.

ANTON: *(Mock paranoia.)* The plot thickens ...

LINDA: *(Unable to leave it alone.)* So how do you justify the symbolism of the deconstruction of the Star of David in the floor plan covering Hitler's election to Kristalnacht?

ANTON: *(Wanting to move on already.)* Oh, you're not going to try and string me up for that too! Has symbolism suddenly become a dirty word? Look at the Aztecs with their cardinal points and four corners; or for that matter, the great cathedrals of Europe: their entire essence stems from a floor plan lifted from the shape of a cross.

LINDA: That's different: without it Catholicism would cease to exist. But Judaism's supposed to be different. It's not so much about the actual places Jews gather to pray as it is about the act of gathering itself. The most important holy site is a simple stone wall with a few shrubs poking through the grout. It's anti-idolatry.

ANTON: Not judging by the fashion show parading through the aisles of my synagogue last Yom Kippur.

LINDA: A reflection on consumerism, rather than anything Judaism - as a religion - strives to be.

ANTON: Symbolic in itself ... (*Rather impressed.*) As is your surprisingly in-depth analysis of Jewish theology.

LINDA: No more than any other Jew forced to suffer through 5 years of Hebrew school.

ANTON: (*Surprised.*) Johansson is Jewish?

LINDA: My mother.

ANTON: Amazing. You have absolutely none of the features.

LINDA: My father used to say that her Eastern European mutt roots were no match for his 2000 years of Norse lineage.

ANTON: (*A compliment to her looks.*) There's something to be said for consistency.

LINDA: Actually, it's been more of a burden: my father's family never fully accepted me - especially once my parents divorced; and some of my Jewish friends kept a polite distance, particularly the boys who were all too eager on dating me, but less enthusiastic about bringing me home to meet their mothers.

ANTON: (*As a compliment.*) I find that hard to believe.

LINDA: (*Taking it the wrong way.*) You think I'm making it up?

ANTON: Oh, no, nothing like that; it's just that my own experiences have been quite the opposite -- and it's my father who's Jewish. But I suppose because I have his name, his nose, nor does it hurt that I've achieved a certain level of world renown, the Jewish community has embraced me like I'm the coming of the Messiah - and I'm not even circumcised!

(*Linda looks down as if this makes her uncomfortable.*)

ANTON: I'm sorry, that was a little more information than required.

LINDA: ... But sad.

ANTON: (*Concerned.*) Why?

LINDA: Well, obviously you're expressing some sense of guilt over an imagined or justified thought that you were hired under false pretenses, as your exposure to

the Holocaust was minimal at best. Either way, I personally don't think it should have any bearing as to whether you're qualified to do the job.

ANTON: I appreciate the vote of confidence, but your analysis isn't quite accurate. As you may or may not know, my wife - my first wife, Miriam - lost her entire family during the war, and spent 3 months at Auschwitz before her freedom was bartered for a shipment of arms. And although our cohabitation is hardly akin to actually suffering through such horrific events, I would submit that living with a survivor on a daily basis for sixteen years, witnessing the repercussions up close, is powerful and meaningful in itself. Battles with guilt, the hoarding of money under our mattress, a fixation on maintaining order, or even watching her run for the exit if we were in a restaurant and she overheard a couple speaking German, were impossible to escape. But equally impressive - and I don't think most people are aware of this - was her heightened sense of joy for the small things in life, the way she laughed whole-heartedly, or her voracious appetite for knowledge - let alone an unmatched - if uneducated - understanding of architecture that constantly challenged me.

LINDA: Sounds ideal; why'd it end?

ANTON: We were much too young when we met, not to mention all the usual suspects of this ever-encroaching world: finances, power struggles ... parenting styles. The question these days should be why does it last?

But I suppose if one were to break it down from a psychological standpoint, things really started to deteriorate when I finally began to have success. An underlying fatalism bubbled to the surface, usurping her optimism; almost as if she were afraid of enjoying the fruits of our hard work, coupled with an innate fear of losing me - which nevertheless became a self-fulfilling prophesy ... not that I can claim complete innocence, or that I didn't come with a whole host of complications myself.

LINDA: The affair.

ANTON: You've done your research.

LINDA: I didn't have to look far.

ANTON: Why my daughter insists on airing the family's grievances in front of the whole world is beyond my comprehension - the least she could do is put it into fiction. (*Trying to boost his fatherly image.*) Quite the opposite from my other daughter, I might add, who regularly seeks my advice on just about everything ... but why am I going on to you about this?

LINDA: Guilt?

ANTON: Oh no, I dealt with it years ago.

LINDA: I'm referring to the present.

ANTON: (*Laughing it off.*) No, I'm afraid, at this stage of my life, I take great comfort in being boring.

LINDA: Boring?

ANTON: Well, not me personally, just the life I lead: an agreeable - if somewhat greyish - marriage, attending my son's soccer practices, weekends in the yard pruning rose bushes. All those things you said you'd never become, but then you do, and realize it's actually a very sane way of leading your day-to-day life.

LINDA: When I was a little girl, my grandfather used to tell me a story about a man who lived inland and, after many years, decided to take a vacation by the Baltic sea. On his first day, he walks down from his hotel to the beach and encounters the most beautiful seashells he's ever seen; each different in shape and texture, each color brighter than the one next to it. But just as he's bending down to pick them up, he looks left, then right, and sees miles of endless shoreline. So he decides to hold off for the time being and ventures down the beach in search of even more spectacular shells ... only, as he gets farther away, the pickings get slimmer.

ANTON: (*About life.*) How true.

LINDA: So he quickly turns around and rushes back, but by the time he gets to the hotel, the sun has started to set, the tide has risen, and all those beautiful seashells are nowhere to be seen. The next morning he comes

down to the beach, but there's nothing. He returns every day for his entire vacation, even extending his visit by a few days ... But it's hopeless.

(He pours himself another glass of vodka and drinks.)

ANTON: And why am I being made privy to this bleak Bergmanesque tale?

LINDA: At first, I remember thinking it was a tragic story about lost opportunities, but my grandfather insisted that its essence had nothing to do with shells. They were just objects that could never really be possessed anyway. Instead, he tried to get me to focus on the man's spirit, and his willingness to take risks, even if he ended up coming away with nothing.

ANTON: Funny, I see it as a cautionary tale about man's inability to appreciate what he has ... Of course, if it were me, I'd have picked up the shells and held onto them until I scoured the entire beach, exhausting all other possibilities.

LINDA: You seem quite sure of yourself.

ANTON: That's just the kind of person I am.

(Solid beat.)

LINDA: *(Slyly connecting the issues.)* So did you ever consider exploring other philosophical approaches before setting out to design this museum?

ANTON: If you're asking me whether my basic philosophy ever changes, the answer is no. That's not to say it doesn't evolve.

LINDA: But doesn't an event like the Holocaust, which defies logic, demand a different approach in order to inspire creativity that will truly signify illogical meaning? Kind of the way a great actor immerses himself so deeply in each role that it becomes nearly impossible to distinguish who he is from film to film.

ANTON: I have only respect for actors - even if by definition they're always pretending to be something that they're not. But I prefer to think of the architect as a director, who establishes a vocabulary by which the actors - or in this case, the various parts of the structure - are able to function within a given set of parameters, forcing them to flex their creativity in ways that unconditional freedom would only discourage.

LINDA: Isn't it contradictory for creativity to flourish under restrictive conditions?

ANTON: Think of it like this ... A young gentleman looking to lose his virginity enters a bar, and immediately draws the attention of a gorgeous woman who, after several drinks, invites him back to her apartment. The man is beside himself with his luck. Within minutes, she's completely disrobed, revealing a body that is more sumptuous than anything he could have imagined. She then takes him by the hand and guides him to her bedroom, adorned with plush walls, a mirrored

ceiling ... But just before they're about to lie down on the bed, she says to him: (*Directing his gaze at Linda.*) "I want you to do anything you want to me." Well, at this point, he thinks he's died and gone to heaven ... But after the initial shot of euphoria wears off and he begins to contemplate all the possibilities, he freezes, overwhelmed by the enormity of the options. Needless to say, he ends up having boring, conventional sex, almost putting the woman to sleep, and - worse - his self-esteem is shattered for years to come ... Now, contrast that with the same man, but now it's twenty years later. He's married at this point. In fact, he's experiencing somewhat of a lull in his relationship. Somehow, he finds himself back at that same bar where he encounters another woman who shows interest in him, only this time, she's quite unattractive, overweight, middle-aged, but for some reason something about her grabs his attention.

LINDA: What?

ANTON: I don't know - her intelligence - it's not important. Turns out she's also in the bar because she's having marital problems of her own, and following several drinks, they find themselves in some deserted back alley. They kiss, grope at each other, but just before they're about to give in to their impulses and have intercourse, an unrelenting guilt grips them both. In a moment of desperate compromise, they agree that if they keep their clothes on, and don't actually touch skin to skin, the severity of their betrayal will be less-

ened. In fact, what happens, is that these self-imposed constraints only forces them to come up with incredibly creative ways of giving each other pleasure. The experience is actually augmented so much so that when they return home to their spouses, they are unable to ever make love to them again without it being a reminder of what it isn't.

(Beat.)

LINDA: Your wife doesn't stimulate you intellectually anymore.

ANTON: This has nothing to do with my wife; I'm describing how a methodology -

LINDA: So you'd be as inclined to discuss your work in such depth or share erotic stories over a vodka with, say, Carl?

ANTON: Who's Carl?

LINDA: The other intern.

ANTON: If he's intelligent and as intellectually savvy as yourself -

LINDA: - Really?

ANTON: I don't see why not.

(She stares at him, provocatively. Anton is drawn to her and just as it seems he might move in to kiss her, she withdraws.)

LINDA: Then I apologize ... I've obviously misread the situation.

ANTON: *(Unsure of what he wants.)* Yes, you ... have -

LINDA: Your state of denial goes much deeper than I thought. The inability to challenge yourself is fundamentally tied to an overly enthusiastic self-assessment, heightened by a chorus of congratulatory associates who speak your name in the third person even when you're standing next to them in the same room, and a wife who showers you with endless praise, and by whom you can do no wrong.

ANTON: Now, hold on-

LINDA: *(Getting a little heated up.)* And you see all this, knowingly are aware of it, yet you refuse to act in fear of unsettling some conflict-free status quo you've so comfortably settled into. But it's obvious - to this admirer of yours, anyway - that you're having doubts.

ANTON: Of course I have doubts. Everyone has doubts; it's a sign of humility.

LINDA: Big doubts ... Like when you were in your last semester of architecture school and Mies van Der Rohe came by your desk and suggested you might be better off working as a graphic designer.

(This hits a nerve with Anton and he becomes defensive.)

ANTON: Let me tell you something, since the selection of my proposal for this museum was unveiled to the public, letters of praise have poured into our office from around the world. The Board of Trustees from the Simon Wiesenthal Center issued an open letter expounding the building's virtues; members of the lower Polish Parliament lined up to shake my hand; the President of Israel, for Christ's sake, called me at home to tell me he looked forward to cutting the ribbon at the opening ceremony.

LINDA: And the survivors? What have they had to say about it? Have you asked Miriam what she thinks?

ANTON: You're obviously not as up to date with your research as I thought, or you'd know that she had a breakdown several years ago and has been institutionalized.

LINDA: *(Pulling back.)* I'm sorry.

ANTON: Won't utter a word to anyone.

LINDA: I wasn't aware.

ANTON: Not that we were on speaking terms to begin with ... *(Trying to convince himself.)* But I assure you that if we were, she'd tell me how proud of me she is, as have hundreds of other survivors who have come forward with their unsolicited gratitude.

LINDA: No doubt.

ANTON: (*Showing his vulnerability.*) ... Besides, even if I wanted to contemplate a change at this point - which I'm not - but if I did, it wouldn't be possible. The selection committee chose me over dozens of the world's top architects because of what my work is.

LINDA: (*Becoming his confidant.*) I'm sure.

ANTON: I mean what would you have me do? Go back to them and say, guess what: I've had an epiphany! Everything that you thought was wonderful about my scheme is totally misguided! Here's something else I've been playing around with in the back of my mind.

LINDA: I don't underestimate the enormous pressures you're facing -

ANTON: Do you have any idea what it's like to be responsible for trying to express the deaths of six million people in a single building?

LINDA: It's hard to imagine.

ANTON: I've stopped sleeping. It's more like a series of winks and nods that I have to shake myself out of in order to stop my body from self-asphyxiating.

LINDA: Maybe it's trying to tell you something ... Like maybe you need to take a step back.

ANTON: It's not that simple.

LINDA: (*Coming closer; consoling him.*) You can always pick up from where you left off.

ANTON: One doesn't open a door this big, and if you don't like what you see, come back in and cuddle by the fire. The mere act of opening it in the first place has implications of its own.

LINDA: (*Soothing him.*) If you let yourself be motivated for the right reasons, you will be set free.

ANTON: (*Noticing her proximity and stepping away; almost paranoid.*) And what exactly are your motivations? Why's my work so important to you?

LINDA: I told you: I believe in you.

ANTON: So you're some sort of design missionary out to save self-satisfied architects from destruction?

LINDA: All right, perhaps I have some vested interest in it myself.

ANTON: Now we're getting somewhere.

LINDA: You see, we're at a pivotal point in history where advances in technology are allowing architects to design just about anything their minds can imagine, with real potential to finally do away with those boxy towers, bland strip malls, and cookie-cutter housing

units. But there's also the potential for abuse, where architects will do whatever it takes to compete for attention, no matter the cost to society ... Surely you can appreciate that people will be watching what you'll do - my classmates are looking for a sign. And how you respond can have a huge impact on which direction this profession takes.

ANTON: The conclusion of your paper?

LINDA: An argument I had with my ex-boyfriend.

ANTON: I pity him.

LINDA: You shouldn't ... He shamelessly tries to copy you.

ANTON: Why were you with him?

LINDA: He has other qualities.

ANTON: Such as ...?

LINDA: (*Challenging him.*) He knows what he is ... and isn't.

(*Anton contemplates her ... She has his attention, but he feels it out with an air of skepticism.*)

ANTON: All right, let's for argument's sake, or maybe as some hypothetical exercise -

LINDA: Of course -

ANTON: - try and approach this from a different perspective. Where to begin? Do I work parts of the initial concept into something else? Adapt some of the stronger elements into a another paradigm?

LINDA: (*Upbeat, almost as if having waited to share.*)
Well, on my first day of studio, my professor gave us an exercise where we had 72 hours to come up with a design for a library of the illiterate. We were given the square footage and site specifications and, as you might imagine, everyone jumped right in, sparing no time for analysis - or sleep for that matter. After three days, as we were putting the finishing touches on our models and pinning up our drawings for the crit, our professor walked into the room, and instructed all of us to destroy everything we had been working on and start from the scratch.

(*Anton takes the intricate model Linda's been working on and (either) smashes it with his fist, or tosses it into the garbage.*)

ANTON: Fine. What next?

(*Linda is stunned to see all her hours of work destroyed.*)

LINDA: (*Not so sure of herself now.*) Ah ... well ... since your initial concept had little relation to the climate, landscape, surrounding buildings or vernacular ... maybe that's a good place to start.