

**NEURON DOWN**

A play in one act

By

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## SCENE 1

*(DUSTIN enters the stage wearing a Santa hat and holding a mug of eggnog in one hand, and a small bottle of whiskey in the other.)*

DUSTIN

Merry Christmas! Hooray, it's Christmas! I'm happy. I know I'm happy. You know how I know? I'm wearing a crazy hat.

*(Begins to pour whiskey into his eggnog.)*

This is eggnog. I love eggnog. I love eggnog even more when there's booze in it.

*(Takes a sip.)*

That hits the spot. Christmas is a wonderful time, is it not? It's almost like for a brief moment, on Christmas Eve, God himself comes down from heaven and touches every one of us. Like for one evening everyone is just a little nicer to each other. You know on Christmas Day if you go out of the house you're just a bit kinder to everyone you see. At least I try to be. It's a warm, comforting feeling.

*(Beat.)*

Sometimes I wish I were dead. I know that's a bad thing to say, but I do, I wish I were dead. I think if I had my choice I would prefer someone to slip poison in my morning coffee. Then I wouldn't know when it was coming and I couldn't feel guilty about it. I scare myself sometimes. My brain is broken, is the thing.

**(MORE)**

DUSTIN (cont'd)

I know what the right thing to do is most of the time, and it's very clear in my mind when I'm in the position to do the right thing, then for some retarded reason I go ahead and do the wrong thing, and I go right back to being a miserable, insufferable prick. If only I had the courage to kill myself. This is good eggnog. Me and Christine used to get drunk off of eggnog every Christmas Day and watch old World War II movies. It was like a tradition. We loved those old movies.

*(Beat.)*

She left me exactly one year ago today, on Christmas. It was shitty. But it's been a whole year now, and I've been busy. You should always stay busy after a break-up. It keeps your mind off things. And boy, I had plenty of things to keep me busy, like moving out of the old apartment, finding a new apartment, and returning to the old apartment occasionally, hammered off my ass, to pee on the side of it. Call me a romantic. But this Christmas I'm ready to feel better. Ready to move on with my life. That's why I rented The Dirty Dozen and The Guns of Navarone. I'm going to sit here in my new apartment, watch them by myself, and drink eggnog. And I'll try to not replay our break-up over and over again in my head and cry like a little girl until I pass out.

*(Drinks the rest of his eggnog.)*

But that's usually what happens.

*(DUSTIN sits on a chair. A SPECIAL emulates the flickering of a television screen on his face. Lights out.)*

## SCENE 2.

*(Inside Dustin's head, one year earlier. A small briefing room. A folding chair faces a small white projector screen next to a podium. CAP is in the chair, his back to us. A Neuron GENERAL enters and sets up to the podium.)*

CAP

Ten Hut! Officer on Deck!

*(CAP snap to attention.)*

GENERAL

Siddown, siddown.

*(He does)*

Can we get the thing over here working? Can we turn on the screen thing?

*(The screen projects a slide that reads "OPERATION 43598.13")*

Thank you. I would wish you a Merry Christmas but I don't cotton to insincerity. When I say it is every neuron for himself out there I mean it. I shoot you straight. So we'll begin the briefing for Operation what is that, 4-3-5-niner - that print is too small. Can we zoom the thing in? Can someone get on the zoom? No zoom? Skip it. It's in the report. Next slide please.

*(The slide changes, but flips. The numbers are backwards)*

What's going on? Can we fix this? They say use the equipment, it's there for your benefit... is it fixed? Okay, next slide please.

*(The slide changes to a picture of a PENGUIN.)*

That can't be right. I swear, nothing ever works right in this place! Forget it. I'll tell you what We know.

*(The projector turns off)*

At Oh-100 hours today our Conscious Projection - code name "Dustin" -- broke up with Christine. Or she broke up with Us. Or it was a mutual thing. It's complicated. Look, Intelligence has been suspicious of an affair lately, but nothing conclusive, I'll leave it at that. I really can't say any more. Wish I could. Well okay, I guess it wouldn't hurt. Let's go to the film. Access Optics Node 4. Keep in mind what you are about to see and hear is highly sensitive top-secret information direct from the optic nerve. So don't get fresh. Okay, roll 'em!

*(Lights rise on DUSTIN and CHRISTINE next to the briefing room in a separate area. They act the scene out with the neurons "viewing" them.)*

DUSTIN

I'll go to the Olive Garden! Let's just go to the Olive Garden!

CHRISTINE

Sure, now you want to go!

DUSTIN

I'm just saying, if you're breaking up with me because of the Olive Garden thing, then right now, let's go to the Olive Garden!

CHRISTINE

I'm not breaking up with you because you don't like the Olive Garden! There are a lot of reasons, you know that!

DUSTIN

Yeah, I know the real reason. It's your, your actor friend --

CHRISTINE

Forget it, Dustin. Forget it, forget it, forget it.

DUSTIN

Why can't you just admit it? Can't stand that I'm right?

CHRISTINE

You're a, a, selfish boob.

DUSTIN

Real mature.

CHRISTINE

Oh, shut up!

DUSTIN

Why don't you shut up!

CHRISTINE

Make me!

DUSTIN

Yeah? I hope his bed is cold, leaden with guilt, and covered in glitter from that awful dinner theater he's in!

CHRISTINE  
That's pathetic, Dustin. You're pathetic.

*(DUSTIN loads his response.)*

GENERAL  
Hold right there please!

*(DUSTIN and CHRISTINE freeze. The lights go down on them.)*

That brings us to the current nanocycle. Drop your linen and start your grinnin'. Your messenger chain will be in charge of delivering the next sentence, and boy is it a doozy.

*(The GENERAL hands him a folder. CAP opens it.)*

CAP  
That's what We're saying next?

GENERAL  
Yes, in fact it is. Is there a problem, neuron?

CAP  
No, sir.

GENERAL  
What's your mission?

CAP  
To deliver the message, Sir.

GENERAL  
I can't hear you!

CAP  
To deliver the message, Sir!

GENERAL  
Good.

*(Beat. Strolls down to CAP.)*  
**(MORE)**

**GENERAL (cont'd)**  
Cap, sometimes... we have to do the wrong thing 'cause it's the right thing that is actually wrong

CAP  
Sir?

GENERAL  
I may have messed that up. What I'm saying is, we do the wrong thing, but... it turns out, eventually... that it's...

CAP  
*(Unsure.)*

Are you trying to say that sometimes we have to do the wrong thing because it's what's right at the moment, even though we know it's the wrong thing to do?

GENERAL  
Possibly. Forget it. Look, what I'm trying to say is, it ain't roses out there. This break-up thing is quite the cluster-fudge. There's gonna be risk. Alcohol may enter the system. You may encounter emotions. What does the Cortex Code say about emotions, neuron?

CAP  
Never trust Our emotions! Sir!

GENERAL  
*(Smiles and winks.)*  
I like you, Cap. You remind me of me, back when I was like you.

CAP  
Yes, sir!

GENERAL  
Now go out there and give 'em hell. Dismissed!

*(Lights out.)*

SCENE 3.

*(PAT, KAL, and STU, three neurons. They are forming up at a motor pool.)*

PAT  
Y-y-you hear that? All those neurons, firing randomly ... I don't even want to think about what's out there right now. I hope it's not anything b-b-bad...

STU  
This whole thing is FUBAR.

PAT  
Don't s-s-say that, Stu.

STU  
It's a suicide mission.

PAT  
Oh dear...

STU  
We'll be lucky to make it back alive.

PAT  
S-s-stop! You're scaring m-m-me!

STU  
Does that scare you?

PAT  
Yes!

STU  
Ooga-booga!

PAT  
Knock it off!

*(CAP enters.)*

KAL  
Attention on deck!

*(They all stand and salute. CAP returns the salute.)*

CAP  
As you were.

STU  
What's the story, Cap? Do we know what we're saying?

CAP  
I'm afraid it's classified.

STU  
What a bunch of malarkey.

CAP  
Stu —

STU  
No, what is this, the Cortex does the flying, we do the dying?

PAT  
S-s-stop saying we're gonna die!

CAP  
You're scaring Pat. Form up. I want a nice, tight grouping.

*(The neurons line up.)*

CAP *(CONTINUED)*  
Kal, get the Cortex on the horn. Tell them the chickens are ready to fly the coop, repeat, the chickens are ready to fly the coop.

*(KAL powers up his radio and relays the message.)*

KAL  
Messenger chain Alpha-Romeo-1 to Home Nest. The chickens are ready to fly, over.

STU  
Can't you give us a hint?

CAP  
No.

Let's play twenty questions. STU

Let's not. CAP

Is it a statement? STU

I'm not answering. CAP

Is it an interrogative? STU

Equipment check? CAP

*(Everyone turns and checks each other's packs. STU continues to badger CAP.)*

STU  
They don't just mark a message priority and scramble messenger chans like this for a run-of-the-mill thing, that's all I'm saying.

CAP  
That's enough, Stu.

STU  
Come on, I can't be the only one wondering what We're saying. What about you, Pat? Don't you want to know?

PAT  
It would make this whole thing less s-s-stressful.

STU  
Kal, what about you?

*(KAL just shrugs.)*  
Good talk, Kal. Mr Personality over here...

CAP  
Stu, I think you talk too much. Any word from the Cortex?

KAL  
Static, Cap.

CAP  
Static?

KAL  
Their communications must be down. Either that, or they just don't want to answer.

CAP  
Keep trying to make contact.

PAT  
They won't answer? Wh-what does that mean? Is that bad? Are we gonna die? Cap? Are we gonna die? Be honest with me here!

CAP  
Get a hold of yourself. I'm sure it's just a hiccup in the system.

STU  
Hiccup my receptor. We're cut off. It's a suicide mission, just like I said.

CAP  
You want to try and be constructive?

STU  
Maybe if you'd be willing to share some information!

CAP  
It's classified!

STU  
Classified, Schmassified!

PAT  
W-w-we have a right to know! It's our butts on the line!

CAP

You guys are the biggest bunch of babies I ever saw.

KAL

Everyone hold on, I've got something! They're sounding the warning beacon... execute final orders... return to the Cortex... radio silence.

PAT

I'm-I'm-I'm hyperventilating.. Oh jeez...

STU

What the hell is going on out there, Cap? No more of this Cortex Talk.

CAP

*(Beat.)*

At Oh-100 hours... We broke up with Christine.

*(PAT tries to speak, but only lets out panicky sounds.)*

STU

Holy Mackerel!

PAT

We broke up with her?

CAP

She could have broken up with Us. It's complicated.

PAT

We were so good together!

STU

Then what's the message?

CAP

I've said too much already.

STU

Come on, Cap! Give us an idea what we're up against!

PAT

P-please!

KAL

No one's listening, Cap. It's just static.

*(CAP sighs and hands them the folder. They all look at it, go slack-jawed, and pass it along.)*

STU

Wow.

PAT

Aw, what are We thinking!

CAP

Give me that back.

*(Snatches the folder back.)*

This is what we're gonna do, squad. We're gonna make tracks to the Vocabulary Center and deliver this message, and we're gonna do it by the numbers.

STU

Cap?

CAP

What is it, neuron?

STU

How do I transfer out of this chicken-shit outfit?

CAP

Everyone huddle up. I understand your concerns with this mission. But, sometimes the wrong thing to do is the right thing to do right now. Right?

PAT

Huh?

STU

Wha?

You lost me. KAL

Forget it. Move out! Let's go, let's go, let's go! CAP

*(CAP exits. STU, KAL, and PAT all follow.)*

Yes Sir, your high commander Sir! STU

Moving out! KAL

So. This is how I die. PAT

*(Lights out.)*

SCENE 4

*(The Vocabulary Center. The Neurons enter and take their gear off to rest after a long journey. CAL RINGS a desk bell. A small old husk named VOCAB shuffles out from the back.)*

The bell! Always when I'm dozing off, that bastarding bell rings! Hold on, hold on... VOCAB

*(Puts his bifocals on.)*

Now. What can I help you with, sonny?

Messenger chain Alpha-Romeo-One? We're in charge of the next sentence? CAP

Could you speak up, please? VOCAB

We're in charge of the next sentence. CAP

Oh, you're the boys from Central. VOCAB

Chain Alpha... Romeo... er... *(Pulls out a clipboard and refers to it.)*

One. CAP

What's that, sonny? VOCAB

One. Alpha-Romeo-One. CAP

Yes. Sign here, please. VOCAB

*(CAP scribbles his signature on the clipboard. CAP hands him the folder. VOCAB takes a look at it.)*

Holy Horse Nuts! That is ripe! I, er... I should call this one up to Rationality. This can't be right. No, no...

*(VOCAB begins to shuffle away.)*

It won't do you any good. They just sounded the warning beacon. CAP

VOCAB

*(Stops.)*

Due respect, sonny. I'm the one they call Vocab. I been here since the first word. "Banana." That was the first word. "Banana." I'll decide which messages get the call up to Rationality. So sit back and get comfortable. 'Cause if I learnt anything in this place, as long as I been here, it's you should always be careful what you say, 'cause if you say the wrong thing, you sure will regret it.

*(Small pause.)*  
(MORE)

"Banana."

VOCAB (cont'd)

*(VOCAB shuffles offstage.)*

STU  
Where do you cut the string on that old codger?

CAP  
That's enough, Stu.

STU  
Seriously? We survived the whole way here only to suffocate in Cortex red tape?

*(PAT pulls out his canteen and takes a refreshing sip.)*

PAT  
Better s-s-safe than s-s-sorry.

STU  
Hey, if We want to tell her that, I say go for it. I was against this whole relationship from the start, and as always, I was proven right. Nobody listens to me around here.

CAP  
For a reason, Stu.

STU  
*(Dismissive.)*

Ahh...

PAT  
I th-th-thought We were great together.

STU  
You putz.

PAT  
Oh, if I have an opinion, I'm a putz, but if you have an opinion please everyone stop what they're doing —

STU  
But I ain't acting like a putz.

PAT  
I'm a putz? I'm a putz because I believe in things like-like-romance? Er, passion? T-T-True Love? Is that so-so-wrong?

STU  
*(Laughs.)*  
Take a break, kid. I think you're late for your tea party!

PAT  
Aw, what do you know?

STU  
I call 'em like I see 'em. Kal? What do you think?

*(KAL just shrugs.)*  
Mr. Personality. Hey, Cap!

CAP  
Shut up, Stu.

STU  
Let's get the lead out, huh?

*(STU rings the bell repeatedly.)*  
Hello! Anyone home?

*(CAP wrests STU away from the bell.)*

CAP  
Knock it off! Sidddown!

*(STU sits wuh PAT and KAL. VOCAB shuffles out.)*

VOCAB  
That bell is going out! I swear it!



CAP

You'll have to excuse my grunt. No one ever taught him manners.

VOCAB

I was just on the phone with Rationality ...

CAP

Yes?

VOCAB

I was put on hold for a long while...

CAP

And?

VOCAB

And then I forgot what the message was.

STU

For the luvva --

VOCAB

Could you remind me again, sonny?

CAP

*(Holds the folder to VOCAB's face sternly.)*

Priority One! Transmit Immediately! Direct order from The Cortex!

VOCAB

Priority One? Why didn't you say so? That's a horse of a different color. Here we go. Preparing to transmit. On my mark.

KAL

Brace yourselves, boys. It's about to get real ugly in here...

VOCAB

Mark!

*(Lights out.)*

SCENE 5.

*(DUSTIN and CHRISTINE, at the exact moment we left them. DUSTIN is loading his response.)*

DUSTIN

You're a whore.

*(A beat.)*

CHRISTINE

I'm going to stay at my mom's tonight. Then, this weekend... I'm going to move all of my things out.

DUSTIN

You're not even going to admit it.

CHRISTINE

Are you trying to get a reaction out of me? Is that it?

DUSTIN

How about the truth?

CHRISTINE

I'm leaving, Dustin. I'm exhausted, I've been crying for three hours. Okay?

DUSTIN

Oh, forgive me. I'm probably keeping you from your "hot date" you got planned tonight.

CHRISTINE

Fuck you.

DUSTIN

You gonna run away like a coward?

CHRISTINE

What does it matter!

DUSTIN

You don't hide it, I know it, all our friends know you're screwing Mr. Cool-Actor-Dude, but you just won't say it! And it's not like the guy is some Johnny Depp, he's playing Danny McGuire in a dinner theater adaptation of Xanadu, for Chrissake! Do you know how humiliating that is?

*(Small pause.)*

Say it! You owe me that much after three years!

CHRISTINE

*(Grabs her purse and coat and heads for the door.)*

I'm so tired of keeping track of what we owe each other. Goodbye, Dustin.

DUSTIN

Wait —!

CHRISTINE

Please don't follow me, okay?

DUSTIN

Don't go! Christine! We can work it out!

CHRISTINE

No!

DUSTIN

*(Quickly; before she's gone.)*

Yes! I didn't — I didn't know you felt that way! Now that I know how you really feel we can talk about how we really feel I really feel deeply, I can't-I can't live without you, I-

CHRISTINE

You just called me a whore!

DUSTIN

*(Collapses to his knees.)*

I know, I know... but you've gotta believe me...

**(MORE)**

DUSTIN (cont'd)

if I knew it was the wrong thing to say I wouldn't have said it... let's just watch the movie, okay? Let's watch the movie, and we can just act like it never happened — can we, can we just talk — come on it's Christmas...

CHRISTINE

*(With finality.)*

Leave me alone. Don't call me, don't come over, don't bother my mom, don't call my friends... just don't do it, Dustin.

DUSTIN

*(Small pause.)*

I love you...

CHRISTINE

*(Sincere.)*

I have to leave.

*(CHRISTINE waits for a beat, then exits. Dustin anguishes on the floor for a moment.)*

DUSTIN

...bitch!

*(In the distance, we hear bombing and mortar blasts coming closer.)**(He begins to weep uncontrollably. He cleans himself up, gets his wus about him and pours some eggnog into a glass. He stumbles around the kitchen and grabs a bottle of whiskey. He spikes the eggnog and holds the glass up, toasting himself.)*

Merry Christmas to me.

*(He takes a large swallow from the glass. He sits on a chair and the SPECIAL flickers the television on his face. The lights go dark and the explosions and mortar blasts engulf the stage.)*

## SCENE 6.

*(Back inside DUSTIN's head. The mayhem carries over as the lights rise on a war zone. Flashes of explosions, smoke filling the room, etc. PAT is hard at work patching up STU, who lays prone, injured. They are dirty and haggard.)*

STU

Aggh! That's too tight!

PAT

Well stop s-s-squirming! I'm doing the best I can!

STU

I dunno what's worse, getting hit by alcohol or having you patch me up! Ouch!

PAT

J-j-just relax, you've lost about half your charge! This is nuts -- it's like a meat grinder out there! Oh dear, oh dear...

*(CAP hurries in, as if escaping a major tangle.)*

CAP

Is everyone okay?

STU

Having a blast, Cap! Breakfast and Tennis tomorrow?

CAP

We have to fall back.

STU

Fall back? I'm just getting started! Let me at 'em!

PAT

I'm all for falling back! That's the b-b-best idea anyone's had in a while! Where's Kal?

CAP

I thought he was with you when we got separated!

STU

He wasn't with us. We ended up in Sector 19, then we got ambushed!

PAT

We th-th-thought he was with you!

STU

Stinkin' Whiskey --!

*(A MORTAR SHELL goes off close to them. They all duck for cover.)*

CAP

Wherever he is, he'll have to wait! We're sitting ducks out here! Can you move him!

STU

I'm fine! Just help me up!

*(PAT and CAP help STU offstage.)*

PAT

So this is how I die!

*(Lights out. The explosions and gunshots subside.)*

## SCENE 7.

*(Lights change. The bombing and sounds of war fade further off in the distance, not close enough to be a threat. Their intensity wanes and the attacks are more sporadic.)*

*(CAP enters, followed by PAT, who is helping STU along with his injured leg.)*

PAT

He n-n-needs to rest, Cap.

CAP

Everyone take five.

Where are we anyway?  
STU

CAP

*(Scans the horizon with his binoculars.)*

I don't know. I lost my field map when Alcohol pinned us down. If I had to take a guess I'd say we're somewhere close to Sector 7. The hippocampus.

STU

The hippocampus? That's no-man's-land.

PAT

Wh-wh-what do you mean, no-man's-land?

STU

There's a million different circuits connecting to millions of other places in the brain, and we don't have a Field Map. I mean we're lost.

PAT

Oh dear --

CAP

We're not lost.

STU

Then what would you call it?

CAP

Not lost.

PAT

C-C-Cap, maybe we should try and get in contact with The Cortex.

CAP

If I still had my comm specialist, I would.

PAT

There's got to be s-s-something around here. Stu's not doing so hot. I need to get him somewhere I can work on him or-or-or he'll be in constant pain.

CAP

Is that a bad thing?

STU

I heard that!

CAP

We still have to find Kal.

PAT

Find Kal? Cap, he c-c-could be anywhere. If he even survived.

CAP

This squad does not leave a neuron down.

STU

We sure don't have a problem leaving a neuron in pain.

CAP

I'm sorry, Stu. Did I interrupt your bubble bath?

STU

Perhaps. But, continue.

CAP

It's Cortex Code.

PAT

B-b-but Cap --

CAP

We're going to find Kal. End of discussion.

STU

How?

CAP

End of discussion.

STU  
Yeah, but how? That's the problem with you Cortex Types --

CAP  
I said end of discussion.

PAT  
P-permission to speak, Sir?

CAP  
What is it, neuron?

PAT  
You just said you don't have the m-m-map. All the bad stuff is behind us, and y-you want to march right back in? And I-I-I'm just a reservist, Sir... they just grabbed me out of nowhere... my former existence was p-p-pretty boring, and well, to be honest, I prefer boring over a lot of things...

STU  
Yeah, I don't know if you've been keeping up on current events, but we just got our axons kicked, pal --

CAP  
Do you two need a refresher course on the chain of command?

STU  
Ohh, ahh, ohh forgive me.

PAT  
Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear...

CAP  
*(Stops scanning.)*  
I can see a nerve cluster about two clicks that way. There might be someone there who can help us.

STU  
Do you even know what's down that way?

CAP  
Put a sock in it, neuron.

STU  
Lower brain functions! You really think we'll get help from lower brain functions -- ?

CAP  
You got any better ideas?

PAT  
Is surrender an option?

CAP  
Move out! Let's go, let's go!

*(PAT hoists STU up to his feet as CAP exits, leading the way.)*

STU  
What did I tell you? FUBAR.

PAT  
FUBAR.

*(Lights out.)*

SCENE 8.

*(The Emotion Bar, A nightclub inside DUSTIN's lower brain functions. It's a depressing dive. A gloomy BARTENDER leans back with his arms folded. A few patrons slump at their tables, motionless. There is a small stage with an old microphone standing vacant surrounded by tables with candles. STU, PAT, and CAP enter and sidle up to the bar.)*

STU  
Now this isn't half bad! Maybe I was wrong, Cap. I could use a little pick-me-up! I wonder who the headliner is...

CAP  
We're not here for entertainment.

PAT  
D-d-do you think anyone here knows what's going on out there?

STU  
I think everyone here might as well be furniture.

*(To the BARTENDER.)*  
'Cept for this fella. He looks like a regular Spring Chicken. How are ya, fella? Can I get a dopamine straight up -- ?

CAP  
No. Take a break.

PAT  
Come on, Stu. You n-need to rest.

STU  
Aye aye! Yes sir. All right, good talk fella. I guess I'm driving tonight. I'm gonna grab a table with my friend here.

*(STU and PAT grab a table.)*

CAP  
Excuse me, we're a messenger chain on a Priority One mission from The Cortex. We got separated from our Sector, and we've lost our comm specialist. I need to get into contact with The Cortex for further instructions. You wouldn't happen to have a Burst Axon Transmitter in this place, would you?

*(No response.)*  
"No" on the burst transmitter?

*(No response.)*  
Radio of some kind? Hard link?

*(No response.)*  
Anything?

**(MORE)**

CAP (cont'd)

*(Beat.)*  
Say something

BARTENDER  
Due to circumstances beyond our control, we're outta dopamine. Can I get youse guys a refreshing Sugar Water Molecule?

CAP  
*(Small pause; sighs.)*  
No, that won't be necessary.

BARTENDER  
Enjoy the show, Mac.

*(The BARTENDER begins polishing a glass. CAP goes over to the table and takes a knee beside PAT and STU.)*

CAP  
So here's the situation:

STU  
Half-priced drinks?

CAP  
Knock it off! We can't make contact. We're gonna have to wait here, get you patched up, and keep moving --

PAT  
Can do.

STU  
I have a wholly different idea. I say we patch me up, then we stay here and reward our hard work so far with refreshing spirits, then catch a stimulating dance/variety act, then move on --

*(The lights begin to dim and the stage lights up. The show is about to start.)*

CAP

Nobody cares what you think, Stu --

STU

You know what that is? That's reverse insubordination --

CAP

You're lucky you've lived this long --

*(Swanky music begins. A relentless DJ pipes in offstage.)*

DJ

Neurons from the lower brain functions, welcome to the one and only Emotion Bar! There's a bad break-up happening up there and you've had a long day of keeping muscles moving and oxygen flowing... it's time for you to kick back, relax and enjoy some of the hottest song stylings of the music playing inside Our head, because coming up to the stage is the most jaw-dropping-axon-melting-super-certified-to-have-you-drooling-on-the-floor-and-begging-for-mercy-piecc-of-heavenly-ham-sandwich-miss-thang-emotion, Love!

*(LOVE enters, and she is stunning. She should be played by the same actor who plays CHRISTINE. Some scattered applause. STU begins WHOOPING and CAT-CALLING. She's wearing a glittering 40's-Matinee-Idol Dress. She slinks up to the microphone and begins singing a sultry rendition of "L.O.V.E." by Nat King Cole.)*

LOVE

L... is for the way you Look at me / O... is for the Only one I see / V... is Very, very extraordinary / E... is Even more than any one that you adore can / Love is all that I can give to you / Love is more than just a game for two / Two in love can make it / Take my heart and please don't break it / Love was made for me and you...

*(Music slowly fades. She stops singing. Works the crowd.)*

I'd like to thank everyone for coming out. My dressing room gets so stuffy this time of year.

STU

Take it off!

LOVE

Well, I see we have some of our fighting boys shown up tonight. How are things on the front lines, fellas?

CAP

Don't mind us, we were just leaving..

LOVE

Don't be silly, stick around and jaw at me for a spell. I hardly get any new visitors these days... especially ones in uniform...

STU

Honey, I'm abandoning my post!

LOVE

*(Fans herself, feigning a swoon)*

And they say males lack integrity. What do y'all think of this surly hot-head over here?

*(The PATRONS grumble with malcontent.)*

So much of me in this room. Who's that cute little soldier boy sitting behind you, hot-head?

PAT

P-p-p... Pp-p... homina, homina, homina..

STU

Letme peek at those gams, doll!

CAP

Stand down, neuron! We're moving out!

LOVE

And just who do you think you are, Mr. Crew-Cut?

CAP

Due respect, Miss... we are in the middle of an important mission --

LOVE  
More important than my singing? This I have to know. What's your important, top secret mission, little neuron?

CAP  
I'm not at liberty to say.

LOVE  
Sure you don't want to convince your men to stick around? I promise I'll make it worth your while...

STU  
Cap, I'll never forgive you for this.

CAP  
Due respect, Miss...

LOVE  
Didn't you hear the song, Sugar? The name's Love. L-O-V-E.

CAP  
We can't.

STU  
Son-of-a...

LOVE  
What's the matter, don't your little receptors find me... stimulating?

CAP  
No, you're quite... quite...

LOVE  
Ever been this close to a real live emotion before?

CAP  
*(Having a hard time concentrating.)*  
I can't say that I have.

LOVE  
Should I switch perfumes?

CAP  
No, it's fine. It's... we have to go... thank you for the lovely performance... I apologize... goodbye.

*(CAP shuffles everyone out.)*  
Let's go, neurons!

STU  
Baby, when I come back to this place, I'm taking you home to my private zoo!

*(STU CAT-CALLS all the way out the door.)*

LOVE  
Y'all come back now, hear?

*(Lights out.)*

SCENE 9

*(STU, PAT, and CAP are walking single file, with CAP in the lead.)*

STU  
We could have stayed and had a great time, that's all I'm saying.

CAP  
Duly noted.

STU  
You're not listening --

*(They hear a rustling offstage. CAP holds his hand up.)*

CAP  
Wait one.



*(They all freeze. The rustling gets louder. CAP makes a fist with his raised hand. They all scatter and take defensive positions.)*

PAT  
Is it alcohol?

CAP  
Shh!

*(LOVE emerges. She is dressed in a long black cloak with a hood. She clutches a bundle close to her chest.)*

LOVE  
Please! I am unarmed.

STU  
Wowie! Our luck is starting to turn!

PAT  
Homina, homina, homina...

CAP  
Everyone stay back!

STU  
If you insist.

PAT  
Sir.

LOVE  
I mean you no harm.

CAP  
Those sound like famous last words.

LOVE  
You must believe me. I've taken a great risk. If Alcohol knew where I was --

CAP  
Save it. We are on a very important mission --

LOVE  
I know you're looking for your friend. I can help you.

*(A pause.)*

CAP  
Stu, Pat... go scout ahead.

STU  
What?

PAT  
B-b-but --

CAP  
*(Firmly.)*

Go scout ahead for alcohol.

STU  
Oh, I see. Come on, Pat. Cap wants some "alone time on the company dime."

CAP  
Knock it off, Stu!

STU  
Yes Sir! Knocking it off, Sir!

PAT  
T-tell us all the details, Cap --

CAP  
Would you get moving!



Maybe I shouldn't be -- CAP

Exchange enzymes? LOVE

Um... I uh, CAP

Shucks, you think I don't know about a peptide chain? LOVE

Okay, I'm definitely feeling a lot warmer than I was before. That's one thing that's different. CAP

Relax. You're so much more handsome when you're strong. LOVE

Something's not right here. Something's not right here. I feel all warm. CAP

*(Breaks away from her.)*

It's normal. LOVE

Then how come it's the weirdest thing I ever felt? CAP

'Cause you never felt it before, Sugar. LOVE

*(Moves closer to him.)*

Why did you follow us? CAP

*(Beat.)*

Supplies, you big galoot. LOVE

Why did you follow me? CAP

Why does anyone bump into anyone? Aren't we all just bouncing around in this big ol' brain anyway? LOVE

That makes no logical sense, but for some reason I am compelled to believe you. CAP

Don't worry, neuron. Sometimes the wrong thing is the right thing. LOVE

*(She kisses CAP softly.)*

I must go. CAP

But -- LOVE

Don't tell anyone where I am. CAP

Wait -- LOVE

And good luck on your mission. LOVE

*(She pulls her cloak tight and quickly exits. Lights out.)*

SCENE 10.

*(Lights up on DUSTIN. He is standing to us, dressed only in his underwear. He dangles a broken-into six-pack of shitty Ice Beer in one hand and drinks one from the other. He hasn't slept for days.)*

## DUSTIN

So things are going well. It's been six months since Christine left me for Danny McGuire of Xanadu-Dinner-Theater fame, and I cleaned my apartment for the first time today. Because I'm better than that. I don't need to live like a slob and hate myself on account of her. She wasn't a good person. She didn't appreciate me. I'm special, you know? A guy like me is very special. I deserve much better. After I cleaned up I figured I'd run some errands. Then I looked at myself in the mirror and I froze. All of the sudden I was clean-shaven, well-dressed, and the rings around my eyes had started to disappear. I felt something, what do you call it? Oh, yeah. Confidence. And it freaked me out. I literally freaked out. I untucked my shirt and ran down to the corner store for booze. I didn't get any errands done. And I messed my apartment right back up. I went out and rented The Longest Day and Saving Private Ryan. Great movies. And now, I'm just watching them. I didn't like what I saw in the mirror. I saw someone who was moving on, but I didn't want to move on. I just wasn't ready. I wanted to feel that pain again. I wanted to imagine my life with her. Imagine my happiness. I must be deranged. I must be a crazy person. But I don't want to find someone else. It's too hard. Half the girls you meet are crazy anyway. It's so improbable that you'll find anyone who wants to be with you, let alone love you as much as you love them. So what's the point? Might as well get drunk and watch some movies. My mother has pretty much given up on the idea of me ever owning a home at this point.

*(The flickering returns to his face. Lights out.)*

## SCENE 11.

*(Over the darkness we hear the sounds of war. An epic battle is taking place. We hear a RADIO crackle to life and tune in to an official-sounding VOICE.)*

## VOICE

Messenger chain Alpha-Romeo-One, The Cortex has resumed broadcasting, repeat, The Cortex has resumed broadcasting. Roger your request to locate Neuron Designation Kilo-Alpha-Lima to complete your chain, over. Chemical signature indicates Neuron Kilo-Alpha-Lima is in the long-term memory center, over. Be advised, alcohol has taken foothold of the memory center. Expect heavy resistance upon arrival, over. Be advised Fast-movers are inbound for ground support, ETA 5.49 nanoseconds.

*(Lights up on the battle scene. A Neuron named PEP is hiding from the fire fight behind a ridge. CAP, PAT, and STU enter in a hurry and bury themselves next to him.)*

## PEP

Nice of you to join us, Sir! The name's Pep!

## STU

Hiya Pep!

## PAT

Oh dear, oh dear –

## PEP

Seeing how you're here, could I ask you if you happened to bring those fast-movers with you, Sir? They were supposed to be here 2 nanoseconds ago!

## CAP

I'm afraid not! Where's the rest of your squad, Neuron? Who's in command here?

## PEP

You are, sir! We took an artillery blast! Lost my whole squad! They got blown into a million pieces! All over the place! It was quite something!

## CAP

Any chance of getting into the memory center from here?

## PEP

Not a chance, sir! Alcohol has it buttoned up pretty good! I'm staying back here so I don't get blown up! Talk about a bad day, huh?

## PAT

I wanna go home! I don't belong here! I'm just a reservist!

## STU

Take it easy, kid!

*(An EXPLOSION rocks ground close to them.)*

STU  
One thing's for sure, Cap! We're all dead if we hang around here any longer!

CAP  
You're right! Pep!

PEP  
Yes, sir!

CAP  
We've got to change our position! See if you can make it to that impact crater! We'll cover you!

PEP  
If you say so, Sir!

CAP  
Let's go! Covering fire!

*(Everyone fires over the ridge. PEP runs offstage. There is an EXPLOSION, and his body parts fly back on stage.)*

CAP  
Oh boy.

STU  
You got a Plan B?

PAT  
AAAAAA!

CAP  
Pat! Get a hold of yourself!

PAT  
It d-don't make sense, Cap! Where's the sense in all of it!

CAP  
Keep it down!

*(PAT stands and begins to remove his equipment.)*

STU  
What are you doin' kid? Get down!

CAP  
Pat!

PAT  
If they w-want me they can t-take me! It d-don't make sense anymore!

STU  
Oh boy, he's lost his marbles Cap!

CAP  
Pat! We got fast-movers coming in to bomb this whole area to hell at any nanosecond --

PAT  
THIS IS HOW I DIE! AAAAA!

*(PAT runs into the battlefield in a blaze of glory. CAP tries to stop him, but STU holds him back. The slow HUM of an armada of prop engines slowly grows louder in the sky.)*

CAP  
Pat!

*(An EXPLOSION. We hear PAT SCREAM in agony.)*

STU  
It's too late, he's gone!

CAP  
No --!

STU  
You hear that? The calvary is coming! Get your axon to the ground!

*(STU drops down on CAP, covering him. The lights go dark and the background lights up into a vivid sunset. The hum grows to a deafening crescendo as the planes' silhouettes move along the background. They drop an Apocalypse Now-sized payload and the stage goes red with fire and destruction.)*

*(Lights out.)*

## SCENE 12.

*(The long-term memory center. KAL sits on his knees staring at a picture of CHRISTINE that is projected on the wall. He is catatonic. CAP and STU enter, haggard and weary. STU drops his helmet and plops to the ground. CAP runs to KAL.)*

Mr. Personality.                   STU

Kal! Are you okay? Kal?           CAP

Isn't she beautiful?               KAL

She- what? Kal, it's Cap. And Stu. We've come to rescue you.           CAP

Cap? I don't know a Cap. Christine. There's a girl I know. She's everywhere. And she's so smart, and funny, and so beautiful...           KAL

How long have you been trapped here?           CAP

You want to hear about the first time We met?           KAL

  CAP  
Kal, snap out of it! We have to get back to The Cortex. We're just Neurons. We don't belong here. Do you understand? We need to go home.

  KAL  
I am home.

  STU  
What's the major malfunction here? This bozo even care if we saved him? Hey, Mac! We lost Pat coming to get you! You remember Pat -- !

  CAP  
Stand down!

  KAL  
We met on a sunny day!

*(STU has had enough. He gets up and brings KAL to his feet by the collar.)*

  STU  
Listen up, shitbird! We've been traveling halfway across this stinkin' brain to find your measly hide. And I'll tell ya, all I really want to do is find a nice peep show and a quiet bar. Now you either drop the Helen Keller routine, get your shit and get moving or I'm gonna kill you myself --

  CAP  
*(Grabs STU)*  
He's plugged into long-term! His transmitters are fried! Stand down!

*(An ALCOHOL molecule enters. He should be wearing an SS-style stormtrooper helmet. He brandishes a weapon at them.)*

  ALCOHOL  
Frost! Jeder frieren ein! Schnell! Schnell!

*(CAP and STU freeze. KAL still has a dopey grin on his face.)*

ALCOHOL

Vell, vell, vell... Pesky little Neurons. Hands up!

KAL

Who's that?

CAP

Alcohol, Kal. Get your hands up like us.

*(KAL stands with them.)*

Well, you have us dead to rights.

ALCOHOL

Yes, indeed.

KAL

How are you, friend?

ALCOHOL

*(Quickly, into his radio.)*

Oberster Kommandant, habe ich die Drohung, vorbei neutralisiert.

*(To the NEURONS.)*

Pesky little Neurons... doing whatever zee Cortex tells you. Zee Cortex says give it pain, you give it pain, it says, ruin zis younk man's life, you ruin his life. It says, depression, suicide... Vell, you know zee rest.

STU

I don't think you're so tough.

CAP

Stu...

STU

How about you drop that pea-shooter we'll settle this the old-fashioned way, you monkey scum?

CAP

Stu!

STU

Save your breath, Cap! I'm gonna die on my feet, not at the knees of this Jerry.

ALCOHOL

You should watch how you talk to me. I am unpredictable. I may do something crazy like shoot all three of you in zee face.

CAP

Please don't listen to him.

STU

I think you're a lot of talk and a badge! If you're gonna do something, do it. Otherwise, get off my receptors.

CAP

Why are you such an idiot all the time?

ALCOHOL

Halt die Schnauze! Lucky for you zee Commandant only wants two prisoners.

*(Raises his weapon and cocks it.)*

Goot bye, pesky Neuron.

*(ALCOHOL squeezes the trigger. BANG!)**(But STU is unharmed. LOVE stands, dressed in her cloak; the bang came from her small concealed weapon. ALCOHOL looks down in shock and falls to the floor.)*

ALCOHOL

Scheizer!

*(ALCOHOL dies. CAP goes over to LOVE.)*

STU

Well, looks like our luck is starting to turn!

CAP

Stu! Go outside... take Kal. Tell The Cortex the memory center is secure, radio for immediate evac.

STU  
Why do you have to pull rank all the time?

CAP  
Just give me a minute, will you?

STU  
*(Pause.)*  
Alright, Cap. Come on, Bambi. Let's get you some help.

KAL  
There she is... so beautiful.

STU  
Yeah, she's great. Get moving, bucko.

*(STU exits, with KAL in tow.)*

CAP  
Thank you.

LOVE  
It was nothing.

CAP  
How did you --

LOVE  
Come on now. Aren't we all just bouncing around in this big ol' brain anyway?

CAP  
You should get back to the Emotion Bar. It's not safe here.

LOVE  
There's not much use for me anywhere else.

CAP  
This place is a graveyard. It's not a good place for someone of your... stature.

LOVE  
You're gonna make me blush.

CAP  
I just want to make sure you're safe.

LOVE  
Be careful, I might start thinking you have a crush on me.

CAP  
What? A cr-- That's ridiculous. It would never work, for one.

LOVE  
So you've thought about it?

CAP  
I don't know what you're talking about. I don't even -- understand it. You could need some medical attention, so you should come with us.

LOVE  
I'm fine.

CAP  
But --

LOVE  
Nothing lasts forever, sweetie. I think I'll stay a while and just fade away. A distant memory.

CAP  
I don't want you to fade away. You're the only thing in this whole rotten war that has made sense to me.

LOVE  
You'll get used to me being gone. All it takes is time. And things will change. One day the sun will rise, and everything will be better. You will find me again, and you won't even recognize me. I'll have a new face by then. But I'll always be here, in this place. I'll always be a part of Us. And we'll always have this.

*(She kisses him. Lights out.)*



## SCENE 13.

*(DUSTIN is passed out in his Santa Hat from SCENE 1. His phone is ringing. The machine picks up.)*

MACHINE

*(CHRISTINE's voice.)*

Dustin, are you there? It's me, Christine. I was just watching Tora! Tora! Tora! and drinking some eggnog and was thinking about you. Are you doing okay? I haven't heard from you in... gosh, I don't know, a year? I really hope you're not passed out right now because I really need to talk to you tonight...

*(DUSTIN jumps awake, takes a moment to see where he's at and runs to the machine. He listens.)*

You were right about Danny McGuire, okay Dustin? You were right. I thought you might be happy to know that. I feel like a fool, you know? Can I just meet you somewhere? Can we talk? It's been so long... we should go to IHOP or something. Like we used to --

DUSTIN

*(Picks up the phone.)*

Christine?

*(Lights out.)*

## SCENE 14.

*(A booth at the International House Of Pancakes. CHRISTINE sits across from DUSTIN. He's still wearing his Santa Hat. They both have mugs of eggnog.)*

CHRISTINE

You'll never get this one: What was the name of the song at the end of Kelly's Heroes?

DUSTIN

Kelly's Heroes. 1970. Clint Eastwood. Telly Savalis. Don Rickles. Song was... Burning Bridges by Mike Curb Congregation.

CHRISTINE

You win again.

DUSTIN

What can I say? I waste a lot of my time.

CHRISTINE

I miss hanging out with you.

DUSTIN

Well...

CHRISTINE

*(Beat.)*

I really don't know what to do anymore with relationships, you know?

DUSTIN

I can understand that.

CHRISTINE

With you it was so simple, you know? How did we let it get so complicated?

DUSTIN

Well... you cheated on me.

CHRISTINE

I'm so sorry, Dustin.

DUSTIN

You know what? It was a long time ago.

CHRISTINE

I want to make it better.

DUSTIN

You kind of can't. Ever. But it's okay.

CHRISTINE

Well... I was thinking... I want to try and be friends again.

I don't know --  
DUSTIN

Believe me, I've been paying for what I did to you. I never should have done that.  
CHRISTINE

Yeah, but --  
DUSTIN

I'm just so lonely these days. I could use a friendly face...  
CHRISTINE

Well, I...  
DUSTIN

*(A beat. STU and CAP enter and sit down in front of the action, viewing them. They are quietly followed by other neurons in uniform. They all sit and watch, like a captive audience.)*

I guess I wanted to be on the way here. But right now, this is gonna sound weird... right now I kind of feel like I'm in a World War II movie. And this is the part in the story where the hero must weigh the value of womanly love against compromising the mission to defeat Hitler.

And...?  
CHRISTINE

The thing about those movies is they always defeated Hitler. They never chose the woman.  
DUSTIN

So...?  
CHRISTINE

So... I'm gonna go defeat Hitler.  
DUSTIN

What is that, some smarmy way of telling me no?  
CHRISTINE

I don't know how else to explain it!  
DUSTIN

The answer is no? You would leave me like this? At an International House Of Pancakes?  
CHRISTINE

Sometimes the wrong thing is the right thing.  
DUSTIN

That doesn't make any sense.  
CHRISTINE

It does in my head.  
DUSTIN

*(A young waitress enters with two mugs. For some reason her name is FLO. She is also wearing a Santa Hat.)*

Merry Christmas! Can I get you guys a couple of refills on those eggnogs?  
FLO  
*(Buses the table.)*

I'm tired of trying to figure you out, Dustin. I'm done with it. I'm done. And I'm done with you. You're like a ship out to sea. You never look around and see what's actually going on, or who you hurt, you just wallow in your own head.  
CHRISTINE

I guess I'm a real jerk sometimes. Don't worry about the check, I'll get it.  
DUSTIN

Rrrgh!  
CHRISTINE

*(CHRISTINE leaves.)*

Wow... someone's a real Scrooge McDuck.  
FLO

DUSTIN

You have no idea.

FLO

What a way to act on Christmas Day. That's like the one day of the year you're supposed to be nice.

DUSTIN

Yeah...

FLO

Sorry, I'm really tired. I have worked all through the holidays and I'm just starting a double right now. I feel like I've just been bouncing around all day. More eggnog?

DUSTIN

No, I think I'll actually have a Coke... hey... nice hat.

FLO

*(Smiles. A bit shy.)*

Oh... thank you...

DUSTIN

*(Extends his hand.)*

Hi, I'm Dustin.

*(Mike Curb Congregation's "Burning Bridges" begins to play. The Neurons begin APPLAUDING DUSTIN. Lights go down around him. STU stands up, grabs another NEURON, and kisses her, dipping her as red, white, and blue CONFETTI drops from the ceiling. The applause gives way to cheering and whistling. PLANES fly by in the distant background.)*

NEURONS

Hip hip! Hooray! Hip hip! Hooray!

*(Lights out. End of play.)*

