

Extract from **The Effect**

By Lucy Prebble

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Bloomsbury Methuen Drama

Characters

Dr James

Toby

DR JAMES

Two very good reasons. You asked to see the scans of the volunteers showing the greatest effect. Are you interested in who they are?

TOBY

Of course.

DR JAMES

K. Two very different clinical histories, backgrounds, genders even. But they have one thing in common. They are both involved in an intense and protracted flirtation, with each other.

TOBY

Really? Right...So you think *that's* what I'm looking at?

DR JAMES

I think their physical symptoms and this neural activity is a result of that....attraction and frankly it's obscuring any sense of what the drug itself is doing.

Beat.

TOBY

Unless it is what the drug itself is doing.

DR JAMES

No, I don't think so.

TOBY (READING RESULTS)

We've got increased electrodermal response

DR JAMES

They're sweating more.

TOBY

Pupil dilation, suppressed appetite, inability to sleep...?

DR JAMES

Exactly.

DR JAMES

I don't understand what you're exactly-ing.

TOBY

If the agent is causing all these symptoms, why on earth *wouldn't* they assume they were infatuated?

DR JAMES

You think because they feel all the things one would associate with infatuation they are just... assuming that's what they are.

TOBY

Assuming, exactly. I'm saying the body responds a certain way to what it's being given, they can't sleep, they can't eat, they're in a constant state of neural excitement ever since they met, what's the brain going to conclude?

DR JAMES

You think it mistakes that for...love?

TOBY

Not even mistakes it, creates it. To make sense of the response. Are the other volunteers showing similar anti-depressant effect?

DR JAMES

Not to the same extent.

TOBY

But they're all straight men, right?

DR JAMES

Judging from their hygiene levels I'd guess, yes.

TOBY

Well maybe they've just got nowhere to go with it, nothing to hang it off. You can instill very strong feelings in a body as long as it's toward something that looks right, you know? You can make ducklings follow a kettle believing it's their mother for years.

DR JAMES

Can you.

TOBY

They did it at Exeter.

DR JAMES

Oh that's very Exeter.

TOBY

I know(!)

Look at it objectively. The agent's designed to avoid the emotional dampening we normally see with anti-depressants. It makes sense emotions would be heightened. And with healthy volunteers we're starting

DR JAMES
'Normal minds.' (!)

TOBY
You know what I mean. Depression's characterized by deadness of emotion, right? Insularity, lack of engagement with the world and those around you –

DR JAMES
Is it.

TOBY
So the other end of the spectrum, where the agent could be taking them, is extreme emotion, excess engagement, overwhelming purpose and feeling. What does that sound like - ?

DR JAMES
Bollocks?

TOBY
What does it sound like?

DR JAMES
I'm pretty sure it's not drug effect, Toby(!)

TOBY
How? Don't forget it was just a blood pressure trial where they discovered viagra. Once * everyone noticed that one prominent side effect.

DR JAMES
So what? You're thinking you've found a Viagra for the heart?

TOBY
Don't be simplistic. It's just not impossible. The brain can be made vulnerable to certain states. Cannabis we know can increase susceptibility to schizophrenia. Likewise I'm sure you can create a chemical vulnerability, to something more positive –

DR JAMES
Sounds a bit rohypnol to me.

TOBY
I mean it rather romantically! Medical science has extended everyone's lives without taking any responsibility for us having to be married longer. We could do with a bit of help!

DR JAMES
What you mean instead of giving up and starting over?

TOBY
It depends. But you'd try anything in the worst of it.

DR JAMES

TOBY
Aren't we?

DR JAMES

I don't think so. It seems to me you're trying to stress the chemical nature of things, for *my* benefit.

TOBY

No. But okay, yes, equally, if you have a chemical imbalance that makes you sleep all the time, feel lethargic, have trouble focusing, of course you're going to eventually feel *depressed*.

DR JAMES

Oh for god' s sake Toby, you ask someone about their history of depression they don't say I felt tired one day. They say, I lost my job, I lost my wife, there are external events they / respond to –

TOBY

/ Everybody loses their job, everybody loses their wife!

DR JAMES

No they don't, Toby! It's about an interaction with the world. It doesn't just appear. I know this depression as disease thing is good for business but –

TOBY

Don't. Don't say that in front of me.

DR JAMES

Don't say that in front of *me!*

I was a clinical psychiatrist at Barts for ten years while you were greasing your way up the ladder, don't tell / me what...

TOBY

/ Why would you grease a ladder?!

DR JAMES

You know what I mean.

TOBY

You weren't there a lot of those ten years.

DR JAMES

You don't know that at all!