

59 Minutes in the Maxwell Suite

John Bandler

Decades from now, in an era of customized realities, billionaire Luton Maxwell—inventor of the psycho-invasive, mind-augmenting Maxwell Patch—is under Congressional investigation for ethics and human rights violations. Indeed, everyone is after Time Magazine’s most hated man on the planet. The night Luton provokes Naomi Verne, actress and daughter of a presidential candidate, into storming his hotel suite, a suicide squad—supported by a dirty bomb—supposedly takes over the floor below. Fact or illusion, in the frenzied swirl of allegation and revelation, Luton’s plan for her survival unfolds—to begin with, Naomi must forsake her identity.



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59 Minutes in the Maxwell Suite

A stage play in two acts, 46 pages

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59 MINUTES IN THE MAXWELL SUITE - A STAGE PLAY IN TWO ACTS

PLOT SUMMARY

A young billionaire-inventor, under investigation for human rights violations, insults a young actress. When she storms into his hotel suite, a frenzied, life-and-death struggle ensues.

CHARACTERS

LUTON MAXWELL, an entrepreneur-inventor, 30+
NAOMI VERNE, an actress, 30
THE COMMENTATOR (live or recorded voice), 35+

TIME

Just decades from now

SETTING

The Luton Maxwell Tower New York

PLACE

Luton Maxwell's Penthouse Suite

ACT I: LUTON MAXWELL'S PENTHOUSE SUITE - NIGHT

Same set throughout: an office/living area, including both PHYSICAL and VIRTUAL objects, constitutes LUTON'S PERSONAL COGNITIVE ASSISTANT. Chairs, table, sofa, walls, doors - the same neutral color. Two doorways. At LUTON'S whim, 2D interactive IMAGES play on ANY SURFACE: fine art; exotica; live video. Depending on the budget, these images may be INVISIBLE to the AUDIENCE. Similarly for 3D HOLOGRAPHIC sculptures, stationary or moving, visible or invisible at will. Projectors and SOURCES of sound are invisible.

A pair of PAJAMAS on the sofa. A CHAMPAGNE BUCKET with a bottle of champagne. DRINKING glasses.

No: door-handles, lamps, phones, TV sets, clocks, computers, laptop. Update gadgets as necessary. They're all obsolete.

INVISIBLE, seamless, man-machine interfaces, including the table and BLANK WALLS: audio, video, tactile. DARK I-GLASSES and TIME-OUT PILLS augment or alter reality. A TIE and a NECKLACE round out the COGNITIVE/COMMUNICATION PORTALS.

LUTON, thirty+, wears slacks and a shirt. His I-GLASSES sit on the table. His TIE dangles from a chair.

NAOMI, thirty, wears a cocktail dress, a pearl NECKLACE, I-GLASSES. Carries a PURSE.

As the curtain rises, LUTON paces. We hear...

THE COMMENTATOR

...following an unprecedented, international public furor. The world, as surely as we all did today, gaped, astonished, while the very blue ribbon, Congressional Commission, struck to investigate Doctor Maxwell's mounting ethics and human rights violations, shamelessly ate from his hand... The Commission now stands adjourned until 10:00 am Eastern Standard Time, Monday...

LUTON waves the invisible COMMENTATOR to silence, picks up his i-glasses, then speaks to his MOTHER, who is not visible to the AUDIENCE.

LUTON

Hi, Mom. Yes, dear... Spinach. Right. Clean shoes. Hush for a moment, now, will you? Hold on! I'm not shouting. You're the one who's shouting... By morning, yes. He'll regret... Sorry. Really. Yes. No matter how important that douchebag-- Whatever... You know... We've gone over this stuff a thousand times.

(A SOURCE beckons.)
Hey, hold on! Mom! Don't go all teary again... Gotta cut you off now. Mom! Cutting you off. I'm cutting you off. Love you.

He puts down his i-glasses, listens briefly to the interrupting SOURCE, runs his fingers over a BLANK WALL.

LUTON (CONT'D)
(to the unseen SOURCE)
Miss Verne. Yes. On the elevator... Miss Verne... Right. Good work... George? Make sure Allison gets to her suite.

He waves the SOURCE to silence, and reactivates THE COMMENTATOR.

THE COMMENTATOR
President and CEO Maxwell's issue is not that-- Yes...? Just in... The latest threat on Doctor Maxwell's life... Just confirmed by Associated Press... I concur with the spokesman from the opposition, who said today, "Most of Doctor Maxwell's balls are still in the air..."

He waves away THE COMMENTATOR, listens briefly to the previous SOURCE. Then...

LUTON
(to the unseen SOURCE)
Just heard... Yes. Secure my floor.... Allison okay...? Right. Make sure... No one in, no one out.

A bell rings. But LUTON briefly reactivates THE COMMENTATOR.

THE COMMENTATOR
...his only hope of survival.

Another ring of the bell.

THE COMMENTATOR (CONT'D)
...a distinguished panel, ladies and gentlemen. Their take on today's events, and details of chilling new allegations, all coming up, on the other side of the break, in sixty seconds. Don't go away.

He silences THE COMMENTATOR.

LUTON
Yes?

NAOMI (O.S.)
It's me!

LUTON
Hello "me."

NAOMI (O.S.)
It's me, Naomi. Naomi Verne. Open up!

LUTON
Ah, Naomi Verne.
(Crosses to the doorway.)
Naomi?

NAOMI (O.S.)
Open up, damn it!

He raises his hand. She appears.

LUTON
Naomi Verne. Gorgeous... Hi... Hello there...

A purse hangs from her shoulder. I-
glasses cover her eyes.

NAOMI
You don't look too surprised.

LUTON
Never.

NAOMI
I want your apology.

LUTON
At 2:30 in the morning?

NAOMI
Right now.

LUTON
(ushering her in)
Of course. Come in.

NAOMI
Exactly what is it about me you find so distasteful?

LUTON
Well, I don't put on silly faces or make up stories.

NAOMI
Apologize.

LUTON
(squeezing her shoulder)
Are you real? Mmm, yes, I believe you are.

NAOMI
(moving away)
Apologize. Now.

LUTON
Then, Miss Verne, I apologize. Most sincerely.

NAOMI
Faker.

LUTON
About being sincere?

NAOMI
You are so faking, Doctor Maxwell.

LUTON
Fake substance, fake emotions, fake spontaneity. Your stock
in trade.

NAOMI
Like you haven't been expecting me.

LUTON
Perhaps you caved sooner than most.

NAOMI
Bastard!

LUTON
(pointing at the bucket)
Champagne?

NAOMI
You meant to embarrass me.

LUTON
You came for my apology, I'm glad you're here. So let's
toast to it.
(raising an empty hand)
To Naomi Verne.

NAOMI
Stop this crap!

LUTON
I stumbled in. Once inside, I noticed you were performing,
remembered I wanted to meet you.

NAOMI
You told my producer we'd sleep together, in an hour, a day,
a month...

LUTON
Hey, one of your reviews said, "Miss Verne sparkled, a visual
treat..." Something like that.

NAOMI

Marked your calendar yet?

LUTON

Then it kind of veered off-track...

NAOMI

(turning to exit)

Yeah, with "Implausible, overwritten. Miss Verne should stick to song and dance."

LUTON

(blocking her way)

Your script needs work.

NAOMI

Out of my way.

LUTON

Malcolm Gladwell once said, "What inhibits creativity is new words in the service of an old idea."

NAOMI

Let me go.

LUTON

I'm afraid you can't.

NAOMI

Can't? Can't? Of course I can.

(Lifts her NECKLACE.)

Security. I want security... Damn. Security. This is Naomi Verne. Naomi Verne. Open channel 911. Now!

(to LUTON)

Out of my way.

LUTON

(still not budging)

You'll stay.

NAOMI

You have no right.

LUTON

I've ordered a total lock-down. You'll be quite safe...

(pause)

Unless you're part of the conspiracy.

Reluctantly, she takes off her i-glasses, tosses them on the table.

LUTON (CONT'D)

If I can't have the real you, I'll have you cloned.

(off her surprise)

I'll pay well for the cloning license. Real well.

NAOMI

I came for your apology. You apologized. Now kindly let me go.

LUTON

I'll pay anyone, any group. Who'll it be?

NAOMI

You are the most obnoxious...

LUTON

Nevertheless, you're here.

He goes to the bucket, pops open the champagne, pours, holds out a glass. She refuses the glass, looks around, picks up the pajamas from the floor.

NAOMI

Messy place, without i-glasses.

LUTON

I was getting ready for bed.

NAOMI

Apparently while expecting me.

She drops the pajamas on the sofa.

LUTON

So let's kiss and make up.

NAOMI

You were waiting for me.

He grabs her, kisses her before she can protest, then holds up his glass.

LUTON

Cheers!

He gestures at a chair. She doesn't respond. He sits by the table, sips champagne. Wary, she sits down, watches him.

LUTON (CONT'D)

Okay, no secrets now. Tell me. How do you think you got access to my floor?

NAOMI

Likely the same way your wife does.

LUTON

Did.

Right.
NAOMI

LUTON
How did you know I'd be alone?

NAOMI
Aren't you worried?

LUTON
About being alone?

NAOMI
About the new threats to your life.

LUTON
Just another one-day story. A pop, a fizz, and it's gone.

NAOMI
Still, you've locked yourself into your fortress.

LUTON
And you're my hostage. Right?
(pause)

Question: how much freedom are you prepared to sacrifice to gain longevity, convenience, efficiency--

NAOMI
And great sex?

LUTON
Sure.

NAOMI
While holding me hostage?

LUTON
Above all, how far would you go to gain freedom from pain and despair? Absolute freedom.

NAOMI
(sarcastic)
How about kindness, affection...?

LUTON
Diluted love.

NAOMI
You want freedom from love too?

LUTON
Love and hate. Overrated. Interchangeable. Except in games, auto-novels, and movies. Hyper-sex, yes. Love, no.

NAOMI
How about a mother's love?

LUTON

For what?

A silence. NAOMI rises.

NAOMI

To quote Time Magazine, "Luton Maxwell is the most hated man on the planet." It's more than that Patch of yours--

A SOURCE only he can hear interrupts.

LUTON

(to the unseen SOURCE)

It's not necessary, George. Not right now. Don't fret. Sit tight, my friend. Allison...? Good man.

(to NAOMI)

Pity. My Maxwell Patch 2G guarantees the wearer fulfilment, convenience, security.

NAOMI

They say it monitors everything. Absolutely everything. That is, when it isn't killing children in Bangladesh.

LUTON

One child dies so that the multitude can live... Anyway, that was our prototype. I've updated it.

NAOMI

A big step up from your pig-farm sensors.

LUTON

Top priority. Department of Defense. Continental Security. Slap Maxwell 2G Patches on everyone entering the American Union, returning citizens included. Offer volunteers huge reductions on health and wellness insurance premiums... Imagine, medical- and psycho-monitoring, fail-safe data-harvesting, diagnosis and intervention... Band-Aid simple.

NAOMI

And permanent.

LUTON

After an incubation period... Unlike those clunker vests and bras, my 2G's are tamper-proof, even against bra-burners like you.

NAOMI

That's a relief.

Pause.

LUTON

Plagues and pestilence. What comes to mind?

NAOMI

Beg your pardon?

LUTON

Plagues and pestilence...? The Bible...?

NAOMI

...Exodus. What's Exodus got to do with your Patch?

LUTON

God's own chemical and biological agents failed to free His Chosen, so He wiped out Egypt's firstborn.

NAOMI

You're creeping me out.

LUTON

Right. Moses should have shelved the Ten Commandments and indicted Jehovah as a war criminal.

She now picks up her glass, drinks absentmindedly. They drink in silence.

NAOMI

(unsure of herself)

I... I waited, a couple of minutes, in case one of your famous mistresses waltzed out of here.

LUTON

You came straight up.

Pause.

NAOMI

(gesturing)

Okay. Clean now. You've got one stashed away.

(as if in a trance)

Luton, Lute. Is that what they call you? "Lute." What did your mom call you?

A SOURCE only he can hear interrupts.

LUTON

(holding up his hand)

Just a moment.

(to the SOURCE)

I'll fry the bugger's ass!

NAOMI

What is it?

LUTON

Wait.

He listens: only he can hear this SOURCE. Leaps to his feet.

LUTON (CONT'D)

What? Right below...? Why the hell didn't you--? When?

(Listens at length.)

Unspecified. Right. Keep me informed.

(to NAOMI, calmly)

One floor down.

NAOMI

What?

LUTON

The Coalition.

NAOMI

(leaping to her feet)

God's Coalition? Right underneath us? You're joking. Tell me you're joking.

LUTON

Sorry, Naomi. A suicide squad. Supposedly.

NAOMI

(grabs and puts on her i-glasses as if to hide)

Oh God, oh God. Oh my God. We've got to get out.

(fumbles with her i-glasses)

My stupid thing's gone blank. Totally. Does yours work? I'll call Dad. He'll get us out of this.

Arms around her, he restrains her.

LUTON

A truck. In the garage. Loaded. If you so much as breathe on the elevator, they'll blow up the entire hotel.

NAOMI

(struggling)

Oh sweet Jesus!

LUTON

We can sit down. Quieten down. And think, think, and think.

NAOMI

Like Winnie the Pooh? Oh, God. Do something.

(beat; raising her voice)

Do something, for God's sake. Do something. Ask them what they want. Money. Give them money.

LUTON

Quiet. We'll sit down and be real quiet. Pretend they can hear us.

NAOMI

Can they?

LUTON
Absolutely not. But I need to think.

They sit down on the chairs.

NAOMI
Oh shit. I don't like that look on your face.

LUTON
There's...more.

NAOMI
What? For God's sake, what?

LUTON
They're gonna blow us up anyway. Time unspecified.

NAOMI
Oh God.

LUTON
Listen. A small suggestion. Don't get too upset. Wait until I've finished--

NAOMI
Upset? You think there's any fucking way you could upset me more than I am already?

LUTON
Wait. I have a Maxwell Patch, right here with me. The very latest.

A silence as this sinks in.

NAOMI
You... No. This is a set-up. Right? There's no one down there. Oh God, it's just us. It's just you and me.

She leaps to her feet. He intercepts her bid for the door. They fall to the floor. As they roll, she kicks and screams, and sobs like a child.

NAOMI (CONT'D)
You psycho-monster! Oh, God, I'm stuck-- Let me go! Let me go!

LUTON
Calm down. Keep still and listen.
(to his PORTAL)
Voice cut-off, sound-receive mode only: permit Naomi Verne.
(to NAOMI)
When you're ready, stand up.

He helps her to her feet, then waves back THE COMMENTATOR.

THE COMMENTATOR

...heiress to the O'Dwyer estate. A reliable report places her at 2:00 am on the 99th floor of The Maxwell Tower. There, she was seen with Maxwell's estranged wife, Allison. Doctor Maxwell, if you can, call in right now and confirm whether or not you know of Miss Verne's whereabouts--

NAOMI

I'm right here with him, Daddy! He won't let me go!--

LUTON

Save it! It shuts off every time you interrupt.

NAOMI

Why are you doing this?

(beat)

I'm here. God damn it, tell them I'm here.

He puts a finger to his lips.

THE COMMENTATOR

Slaughtered, it seems, by his very own bodyguards: the prince, his entire entourage, three of his children. Imagine, if you can: horrifyingly dismembered corpses turning up at the 10th floor lobby, by elevator. This despicable, trojan-horse atrocity speaks volumes for Maxwell's new 2G Patch--

NAOMI

What prince? What prince and children?

LUTON

Right below your feet, on the floor below us.

NAOMI

Dead? God, it must have happened right after I came up.

LUTON

Different elevator. Mind you, if this shit had happened any earlier, you'd have been trapped at the bar with Allison. Listen on...

Again, he puts a finger to his lips.

THE COMMENTATOR

Thinly disguised, Maxwell takes one of his rare ground-level strolls. A media frenzy. Pursued by paparazzi and mothers against slavery, he ducks into the Eugene O'Neill Complex. To the astonishment of her opening-night audience, he stumbles onto Naomi Verne's stage--

NAOMI

And plunges a packed auditorium into chaos.

LUTON

Don't forget that stunned silence. Priceless! Compelling theater! And you recovered admirably. What buzz!

NAOMI

(ruefully)

Naomi Verne's debut as actor/writer/director. The curtain rises and some megalomaniac-asshole showcases himself. Now, that very same asshole's condemned her to death.

LUTON

At least, up here, we're safe from the paparazzi.

NAOMI

Oh God!

A silence.

THE COMMENTATOR

...as hedge-fund managers recalibrate Doctor Maxwell's life expectancy. Credit default swaps... Excuse me... Just in. The Asian markets: shut down. Hong Kong reports a run on food and water. Next, when our program continues, Miss Verne's father, Senator Walter O'Dwyer--

As Luton silences THE COMMENTATOR...

NAOMI

Daddy! Daddy! Daddy's looking for me. Just you wait. He'll sort this out.

LUTON

How?

NAOMI

And you!

LUTON

Better decide who inherits your fortune.

NAOMI

Creep!

(beat)

Tell me it's a covert op. Please. The CIA needs a pretext to take out some hyper-corrupt "prince." Right? You're in on it. They'll call it off now, right? Say they'll call it off.

He puts on his i-glasses, crosses to a blank wall, runs his hands over it.

LUTON

I'll share some probabilities with you.

She puts on her i-glasses. Peers.

NAOMI

I don't see a thing. Not a thing.

LUTON

(taps his fingers on the wall)

The probability that I'll survive till morning is point zero-five. Hey, that's better odds than this being a covert op!

She puts down her i-glasses, goes over and fingers the blank wall.

NAOMI

(peering from different angles)

Damn it! What the hell did you just do?

LUTON

I've arranged for your rescue. Ah, point nine five. Good news. The conditional probability is point nine five.

NAOMI

I don't get it.

LUTON

Obviously. You're not wearing your bra.

NAOMI

Fuck you! This is just a fucking game to you!

LUTON

You'll be picked up in 45 minutes. Just under. Whisked away. Whoosh! The clock ticks as we speak.

NAOMI

You're serious?

LUTON

(consulting the blank wall)

The conditional probability of you storming up to my suite tonight peaked at just about 1:00 am. You actually showed up during a trough in the estimate. A wide but shallow trough.

NAOMI

Shut up!

LUTON

(fingering the wall)

My estimate would have peaked again at--

NAOMI

Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!

He returns to his chair, puts down his i-glasses, sits.

LUTON

You're right. There's nothing to do but wait.

NAOMI
They'll resolve this. They must. They will.

LUTON
"Must" and "will" are invalid measures, I'm afraid. Now, the mathematical probability--

NAOMI
(putting a hand over his mouth)
Can we change the subject?

LUTON
Why not?

NAOMI
Anything, please. Anything.

A silence.

LUTON
So, did you read my essay in The New Yorker?

NAOMI
What? Something about hegemonic ambitions? Uniting Zionists with Christian and Muslim hard-liners?

She sits down.

LUTON
Whatever propels our DNA furthest into the future is the only thing that matters.

NAOMI
I wish you made sense-- No! Don't say it! I'm not wearing my damn bra.

(She rises, paces the room.)
Luton? Are we in some kind of war game? Right now, I mean?

She stares at him. A small silence.

LUTON
Yes.

NAOMI
Right. This place being a fortress. It did seem a bit odd you leaving yourself vulnerable to the floor below.

(beat)
Can I go now?

LUTON
Not until the game's officially over, in...
(looks up at the blank wall)
40 minutes. So relax. I'll get you more champagne.

He fetches the bottle, pours. They drink.

NAOMI

Jesus Christ, you sure fooled me. But the reports. The reports. They sounded authentic.

LUTON

Part of the exercise. To test my security. See where the soft spots are.

NAOMI

So that's what this is all about. It's obvious. This is a stunt to promote your brand, to bias the Commission. Like that time when you made hand-guns invisible.

LUTON

Not quite.

NAOMI

Not quite what, for God's sake?

LUTON

(lost in thought)

I built a wideband, auto-tunable, metamaterial cloak that made its contents look like a tube of Crest toothpaste wrapped in Hanes cotton underwear.

NAOMI

You're worse than a child!

LUTON

Love that magic.

NAOMI

Aha! Love. You used the word "love."

LUTON

Disappearing tricks. Programmable illusions.

NAOMI

Like love?

Pause.

LUTON

Rendering small objects invisible, with hardly a tell-tale shadow, no problem...

NAOMI

But?

LUTON

But I'm dammed if I can figure out how to compensate for the inevitable, measurable anomalies in mass.

She sits down.

NAOMI

If you had one of your secret meta-cloaks handy, man-size, we could slip away unnoticed.

LUTON

Man-size, huh? I like it. You're ambitious.

NAOMI

Well?

LUTON

Trouble is, our mass won't disappear.

NAOMI

We'd still be tracked?

LUTON

Fortunately not. The Coalition of God ain't up to it. You know, got to keep those shits on their toes.

A pause.

NAOMI

You're... You're managing their progress?

LUTON

According to rumors.

NAOMI

God's Coalition?

LUTON

It's essential.

A silence.

NAOMI

Can't imagine you as a kid. A real kid. Did you play tricks? I mean, then?

LUTON

Of course.

NAOMI

On friends?

LUTON

On my mother's friends.

NAOMI

Her friends?

LUTON

Her boyfriends.

NAOMI
Tell me about her.

LUTON
She's a woman.

A long silence.

NAOMI
Your biographers claim you hijacked every course you were ever enrolled in. You ran them, even set the exams.

LUTON
I had lousy teachers.

NAOMI
Every one of them?

LUTON
Incompetent. The lot. No sense of humor.

NAOMI
I want to write about you. Let me. For some crazy reason...

LUTON
Not a play.

NAOMI
Biography.

LUTON
It's been done.

NAOMI
Not from the inside out. Not everyone gets to see you in your bedroom. Sluts and lapdogs, maybe, but not official biographers.

LUTON
Write my bedroom into your job description, commit yourself to an opera...and I might give you permission.

NAOMI
An opera? God!

LUTON
Why not...? An original opera. And write yourself in.

(beat)
You were awesome in The Terminator: The Opera. Awesome. Naomi Verne as Sarah Connor sings "The Chosen Shall Arise."

NAOMI
Sarah Connor. "The Chosen Shall Arise."

LUTON

I can still taste you, no i-glasses needed.

(beat)

As I recall, someone wrote an opera on Nixon in China.

NAOMI

Nixon in China. That might work. People hated Richard Nixon too. I'll include how you enslave kids in Bangladesh.

LUTON

Exactly. Just like the post-communist Chinese model. For the greater good.

NAOMI

Working title: "Death in Bangladesh."

LUTON

Nothing too personal. Consider it written into our contract.

NAOMI

Just your problems with sluts, middlemen, and politicians?

LUTON

Just my...

NAOMI

Public persona?

He swings her around.

LUTON

I do believe, with you in my life, Miss Naomi Verne, the world will seem a lot less hostile.

NAOMI

Less hostile. Man, you sure know how to wow a lady.

LUTON

What if I were dead?

NAOMI

That might actually make things a lot easier for me.

LUTON

Excellent. There's favorable enough data. Hospitals, orphanages, schools. Scholarships. Let's shake on it.

They shake hands. He swings her close, kisses her. She doesn't resist.

LUTON (CONT'D)

It's a simple enough project.

NAOMI

Unlike Beethoven's 10th?

LUTON

Beethoven. Right. I fed my neural net with the repertoires of Hayden and Bach, as well as Beethoven's and a heap of other crap. One full year, then...

NAOMI

A 10th. And, concurrently, your Ph.D. You credited a machine, though. All marketing hype, right?

LUTON

Concoct a Spielberg-Wagnerian saga for me. On a quantum machine, a day's work.

NAOMI

So, throw it together yourself.

LUTON

I want your stamp on it.

NAOMI

Don't force me.

LUTON

There are many ways I can force you. This isn't one of them.

NAOMI

Well, you ruined--

LUTON

You did.

NAOMI

Did what? You don't even know what I was about to say.

LUTON

Think "drama."

NAOMI

Think "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

LUTON

Think "plagiarized."

Silence. Alarmed, she pours herself the last drops of champagne.

LUTON (CONT'D)

Suppose I **trained** a machine to imitate Beethoven. I don't consider that plagiarism.

NAOMI

What do you mean?

LUTON

Beethoven's portfolio, ripped off, note by note, bar by bar, line by line, like your quote from a quaint constitution.

(pause)
The Gladwell robot could've re-orthogonalized it.

NAOMI
The Gladwell what?

Pause.

LUTON
Your script. It was about your sister.

A silence.

LUTON (CONT'D)
Okay, not a dead give-away. A lucky guess, the probability of which--

NAOMI
This conversation is going nowhere.

LUTON
Incorrect. You're part of my story now. Our opera. Think research. Think--

NAOMI
I really must call Dad.
(She rushes to the wall.)
Show me how, damn it!

LUTON
I'll do more. I'll retrain you and you'll lift your opera into a blockbuster. All on your own.

NAOMI
Let me out!

She makes a run for the doorway. He intercepts her and restrains her.

LUTON
It's painless.

NAOMI
Let me go!

LUTON
I'll rewire you.

NAOMI
I'm not a pedophile!

LUTON
No. But the guy you abandoned your sister to, was.

She slaps him hard.

NAOMI

Let me call out, damn you. Let me call out.

A long pause.

LUTON

I'm hungry. Want something?

NAOMI

(in tears)

I was twelve. Twelve, damn you!

He eases her onto a chair. She slumps onto the table.

LUTON

You're okay, you know. Really.

NAOMI

I was twelve.

LUTON

You saved yourself. Nothing wrong with that.

NAOMI

My play was supposed to be about me and my sister. The original script, that is. God, how I worked on it. Then something happened. All my notes, my files, all the bits and pieces of my script vanished. Couldn't go through with a rewrite, though. I just couldn't.

LUTON

Have your memories purged.

NAOMI

No.

LUTON

Your dad begged you to.

NAOMI

(sitting upright)

How would you know?

A long silence as she dabs her tears.

LUTON

Let's eat.

NAOMI

(leaning on the table)

Tell me what's going on. Please. Luton?

LUTON

You must be starving.

NAOMI

Stop it!

LUTON

Hey, you'll be okay. Truly. My sniffer continues to detect a steady climb in what you would call "love."

NAOMI

Love? For what? For you? What sniffer?

LUTON

My electronic sniffer. You're leaning on it.

She leaps to her feet in horror.

NAOMI

Why oh why are we on this shit?

LUTON

So let's eat, then.

NAOMI

I want to die.

LUTON

There's an acceptable probability you don't. And won't.

NAOMI

I'm not getting myself reprogrammed, not for you, not for anyone.

LUTON

The probability?

NAOMI

I want certainties!

LUTON

Right. It's a certainty I'll offer you caviar, momentarily, but if and only if it's a certainty you won't move. Deal? You gonna move?

She shakes her head, no. He exits, returns with a jar, spoons and offers her caviar. She shakes her head, no, finds a hankie in her purse, uses it. He eats a spoonful of caviar.

NAOMI

Cut the crap and tell me what's going on.

LUTON

Suppose it's your dad.

NAOMI

Suppose what?

LUTON
Politicians and truth rarely mix.

NAOMI
(looking around)
Turn on the window. I want see what's on, outside.

LUTON
He's aiming to be President of the American Union.

NAOMI
He's my dad--

LUTON
Is he...?

She grabs a BOTTLE from her purse,
opens it, readies to pour the contents
down her throat. He wrests it from
her. PILLS roll everywhere.

LUTON (CONT'D)
What if they've blown up my Guatemalan facility?

NAOMI
I'm going to throw up.

LUTON
Let's keep sane, and focused. Suppose they've put a dirty
bomb on their truck. Is that something you want to know?

NAOMI
Time out.

LUTON
Suppose, right now, New York is being evacuated.

NAOMI
Time out!

LUTON
Are you sure?

NAOMI
Yes! Yes! I'm sure!

LUTON
I'll give you 10 minutes.

He finds one of her pills, a 10-minute
TIME-OUT PILL, and hands it to her.
She swallows it, calms down.

NAOMI

Beautiful. Talented. Carolyn used to be so devastatingly beautiful and talented. We were both in this musical. Our dance coach... Didn't tell my father. I couldn't, 'cause I couldn't bear to have my show scrapped.

LUTON

Now you take drugs...

NAOMI

(reaching out)

Give me another pill.

LUTON

(ignoring her request)

Taking drugs is only a step away...

The pill takes full effect. He spoons caviar, offers it. She accepts the spoon in her mouth, peers around, as if for the first time.

NAOMI

I have to go to the bathroom.

LUTON

Of course. You'll find clean underwear in the closet above the sink.

NAOMI

What?

LUTON

Assorted sizes. Silk. You know, for those famous mistresses of mine. Something should fit you.

(off her look)

Don't worry. Unequipped, I can only read your superficial thoughts. De-fuzzified, correlated, post-processed...

(pointing at a wall)

Results projected onto yonder wall... Right now, top priority, you need something pretty basic. Dry underwear.

NAOMI

Shit.

LUTON

(pointing to a doorway)

So, go. Change. It's okay, but don't be long.

She gets up, exits. Head down, he leans on the table. After a moment, he rises, puts on his i-glasses...

LUTON

Give me the will, Mom... Sorry... Now's not the time. Not right now. Right now I need your strength... I need you to be real strong for me... For you too... Forgive me. Forgive me, please. God forgive me.

He removes his i-glasses, slumps at the table like a lost child.

Dark.

ACT II: LUTON MAXWELL'S PENTHOUSE SUITE - MOMENTS LATER

LUTON hears NAOMI, snaps into his upbeat mood.

LUTON
Found what you needed?

NAOMI enters.

NAOMI
Why?

LUTON
Why what?

NAOMI
Why am I here?

LUTON
Because you're vulnerable, and I like you.

NAOMI
After what I told you?

LUTON
Yes. That's why you're here. Still.

NAOMI
Your 2G Patch...?

LUTON
Actually, Master-Patch. Mil-spec, customized. It renders you invisible to all neuro-scanners, all drones, all known viruses.

NAOMI
Are you wearing one?

LUTON
You know the question. You know the answer.

NAOMI
Frustrating to the edge of madness. Like a bad dream. Heaven knows, but I had this crush on you once. I was mad about you. Imagine. Me going to one of those live, solo talks you used to give. Talk over, shaking like a leaf, I clawed my way through your screeching groupies, lined up, begged for your autograph. You looked right through me, asked what I did. "Song and dance," I must have stuttered. Know what you said, probably to the bitch behind me? You said, "It's written." "Where?" I asked. Still looking right through me, you said, "All over you."

LUTON
Well, perhaps it was.

NAOMI
I so wanted to die.

LUTON
But look how you turned out. "The Chosen Shall Arise."

NAOMI
Answer my question.

LUTON
Which one?

NAOMI
There you go again...

Absentmindedly, she opens her purse and rummages inside. Suddenly thoughtful.

NAOMI
You're trying to scare the shit out of me again, aren't you?

LUTON
Impossible.

NAOMI
No. Definitely. I know. I don't-- I can't-- But I should be scared.

LUTON
Forget "should."

NAOMI
Oh?

LUTON
You don't seem high. That's good. The pill. Your body's adapted itself well.

NAOMI
Still, there's something... Downstairs, at the bar, Allison... She whispered to me, "Ask him about his mother."

LUTON
So, ask.

NAOMI
I am.

LUTON
Okay. My ex had problems with my mother.

NAOMI
But she's dead, isn't she?

LUTON
Oh yes. Allison's been dead for a long time.

She stops fidgeting with her purse.

NAOMI

Your mother, damn it!

LUTON

Don't talk about my mother like that.

NAOMI

Like what?

LUTON

So...subjectively.

NAOMI

I don't get it.

LUTON

Take note: once upon a time, just about when you were born, a lowly janitor finds a baby in a dumpster.

NAOMI

Whose?

LUTON

And raises it in his custodial apartment.

NAOMI

You...? This janitor. Was he married?

LUTON

The most challenging riddle Karl Maxwell ever figured out was how to change my diaper.

NAOMI

Karl Maxwell. So, okay. What about documentation? Your ID?

LUTON

Karl's buddy George hacked the Union's data bases. I fixed the data later. Dates, names... Full biometrics.

NAOMI

What happened to your mom?

LUTON

Dear George hooked me into the media before I could crawl. By the time I was four, I'd optimized Karl's janitorial route. Two years later, Karl ran a thriving enterprise. Spiffy in his first suit and tie.

(beat)

It happened while I was at school.

NAOMI

Your mom?

LUTON

No...

NAOMI

God, oh God, I just know this is going to end real bad.

She slips her arms around him.

LUTON

Some prick tried to talk Karl into "protection." He got flustered... You finish the story. Any way you want.

NAOMI

I'm so sorry. How...?

LUTON

I was eight.

NAOMI

It's real late and you're dog tired. Go to bed.

(He shakes his head.)

Come, let's go. Please.

LUTON

We've no time for sex.

NAOMI

Luton. Let's go. I'll tuck you in.

LUTON

A mother, I already have.

NAOMI

But you lived with this George dude and his wife, right? They looked after you.

LUTON

I tracked down Karl's killer.

NAOMI

Oh please, no...

LUTON

Don't fret.

NAOMI

No?

LUTON

Not his whole family.

NAOMI

Thank God!

LUTON

Could have.

NAOMI
Were you into gangs?

Pause.

LUTON
He killed himself.

Pause.

NAOMI
What about your mother? Adoptive mother. Step-mother.
Whatever.

LUTON
I invented her.

NAOMI
Someone must have had to show up, you know, at your school
and places.

LUTON
Necessary apologies, signatures, and permissions were all
appropriately obtained and supplied.

NAOMI
Obtained and supplied?

LUTON
Okay. Forged.

NAOMI
Who was she?

LUTON
Is.

NAOMI
Is?

LUTON
Her name is...? Is...?

NAOMI
Charity Fay Maxwell?

LUTON
Someone tossed me into Karl's apartment dumpster. Question
1: why? Question 2: who?

NAOMI
Could have been anyone.

LUTON

Work all possibilities into your libretto. It would be kind of apropos to hang my postpartum disposal on some high-flyer boyfriend of sorts.

NAOMI

This is getting quite complicated.

LUTON

No shit.

NAOMI

Let's recap. Your mom. Your bio-mom. She'd be proud of you, of what you've accomplished. I know it. Have you tracked her down?

LUTON

How about my bio-dad?

NAOMI

That depends...

LUTON

(lost in his thoughts)

They've too many bastards of their own. Those bloody lawmakers.

NAOMI

What lawmakers?

LUTON

For years, I lobbied Congress for open DNA databases.

NAOMI

Not just-- All the Civil Liberties groups are anti DNA-banks too.

LUTON

Fold my neuro-singularity into your libretto...

NAOMI

Neuro-what?

LUTON

Imagine the Zeitgeist sucked out of existence as humanity evaporates... Probability finite and growing...

(turns to look at a wall)

peaking in--

NAOMI

You are so lunatic!

LUTON

A real possibility.

NAOMI

Nut-cases have been predicting the end of the world ever since recorded time.

LUTON

Regrettably, without much precision.

NAOMI

Now you're pulling my leg.

LUTON

How about the collective suicide of the human species? For aeons, man's ultimate dread.

NAOMI

I'm not sure I want to hear any more.

LUTON

All my models, every one, predict kinks, gaps, and singularities. A kink? Economies collapse. A gap? Civilizations collapse. A singularity? Ah...

NAOMI

If we're all about to evaporate, what's the point of this stupid opera of yours, of all your so-called security, of anything?

LUTON

Last bugger standing faces absolute, unrelenting loneliness. Now that's operatic!

NAOMI

It's you, right? Last person left standing's gonna be you. God, you have such an ego! But you did say "probability."

LUTON

Right. I could be wrong.

NAOMI

Wrong? Wrong? You don't say! You could actually be wrong?

LUTON

In The Terminator, self-aware machines aim to eliminate mankind. In fact, self-deluding mankind is dead on track to eliminate itself.

NAOMI

Have you discussed your "terminator" theories with my dad yet? You should, you know. He has security clearance.

(a hideous thought...)

Oh God, this stuff, your models of doom, must be military, classified. There's only one possible reason you're telling me...

LUTON

Prepare yourself then.

NAOMI

This pill's wearing off.

He reaches out, touches her face.

LUTON

You're quite stunning. Nose, eyes. Kudos to your DNA.
You'll star in our opera, of course.

NAOMI

Give me another pill!

LUTON

Our brains must be fused. Real soon.

NAOMI

I can't handle this any more.

LUTON

You must.

NAOMI

I need a pill, damn you!

The drug wears off, she panics, and
rushes to the bathroom exit.

He puts on his i-glasses. Sits.

LUTON

What am I going to do with her, Mom? What am I going to do?
She's in love. I know... I know... I must.

When NAOMI returns, he returns his i-
glasses back to the table, stands up.

NAOMI

One word to that Congressional Commission about black holes
in the Zeitgeist and they'll lock you up.

LUTON

Exactly. But what if I'm right?

NAOMI

Daddy would laugh at you.

LUTON

Not Walter O'Dwyer.

NAOMI

Call him. I dare you. Now.

Pause.

LUTON

Has your "dad" ever seen you perform?

NAOMI

Daddy sends me the prettiest roses and carnations, by the dozens. Always.

LUTON

The last time he actually saw you perform...?

NAOMI

He's always wanted me to get a "real" job. That's all. "When will you get yourself a real job," he always says.

LUTON

You're trapped.

NAOMI

I'm not.

LUTON

You're in a time-warp, recycling what Carolyn once did.

NAOMI

She was so graceful.

Pause.

LUTON

There's no delicate way of putting this... I'm afraid Senator O'Dwyer doesn't much care about you.

NAOMI

I was a tomboy, kind of pimply.

LUTON

I have unpleasant news.

NAOMI

Things are so different now.

LUTON

Brace yourself.

NAOMI

So they've cancelled my show. So my alternate script sucks. Big deal.

LUTON

I'm afraid O'Dwyer wants you dead.

NAOMI

Not too surprising, under the circumstances.

LUTON

Did you hear what I said?

NAOMI
He sends me flowers. Fabulous, exotic--

LUTON
I'll rephrase it for you. O'Dwyer requires your demise.

Pause.

NAOMI
My dad?

LUTON
It's his presidential campaign.

NAOMI
And you're going to save me?

LUTON
He launched the cyber-drone that purged every trace of your play-in-progress.

NAOMI
He'd never do that. He loves me.

LUTON
You're not cooperating with him.

NAOMI
Go on! Say it! Daddy paid God's Coalition to crash this place and kill us all. Right? Right?

She starts to show hysteria.

NAOMI (CONT'D)
Inventing a mother.

LUTON
Your sister OD'd. Heroin.

NAOMI
You're pathetic.

LUTON
Carolyn, found in an alley, frozen to death.

NAOMI
Mugged. That's what she was. Obviously.

(beat)
Inventing a mother! That's so pathetic.

(pause)
You make me laugh!

(off his look)
I was his favorite. I was. I was. I was.

She's hysterical. He holds her,
comforts her.

NAOMI (CONT'D)

I was. I was.

LUTON

I've been authorized to purge your memories of Carolyn. That would kill your memories of your dance coach too.

NAOMI

(hysterical)

You don't know him. Daddy. He's busy. Always busy doing things for the community. I forgive him. He cares. People. Not you, though. Everybody knows. You do profit. For you, it's all a setup for profit. You're so pathetic. Inventing a mother! How tragic. How pathetic. You make me laugh!

LUTON

Naomi.

NAOMI

Have your own crap purged. Leave me alone. Let me go!

He lets her go.

LUTON

He ordered your coach's death.

NAOMI

Dad went to Africa, to organize famine relief.

LUTON

Your mother died of a broken heart.

NAOMI

She had a stroke.

LUTON

She was in love with him, first.

NAOMI

'Course she was.

LUTON

With your dad.

NAOMI

Of course. My dad. Mommy loved Dad.

LUTON

I mean, with Berge Ivanoff, your dance coach, your bio-dad.

A silence.

NAOMI

Everyone loves Daddy. Always did. He's got friends. He cares. And I love him. When The Enquirer spread rumors about me and those narco drug-lords, he sued and won.

LUTON

O'Dwyer was Carolyn's bio-dad, not yours.

NAOMI

Berge Ivanoff. Carolyn...

LUTON

Listen! O'Dwyer wants me to purge your recollections of Carolyn--

NAOMI

Unlike you, Daddy stands for freedom, for liberty, for the constitution.

LUTON

--which automatically erases Ivanoff too.

NAOMI

All you stand for is yourself.

LUTON

In exchange for which he supports my monopoly on the Patch.

NAOMI

See! This is all about you!

LUTON

Berge Ivanoff and your mom first met at college. She hired him. Then he took a fancy to Carolyn as well as her.

NAOMI

You're jealous. You'll never match Daddy's principles. You haven't even got a father... Your own mom dumped you.

(beat)

I enjoyed tennis, sailing, and incredible champagne brunches. Endlessly. Did you?

LUTON

I worked on a cognitive synthetic tutor for children.

NAOMI

Blackmail! To gain my dad's leverage for your hideous Patch.

LUTON

Naomi!

NAOMI

Dad's a presidential candidate. You're a gutter-snipe!

LUTON

You're not his daughter. And you're the only hostile witness left.

(pause)

Problem is, Walter O'Dwyer doesn't quite know who I am.

NAOMI
Really? Go on. Tell me we're related.

LUTON
I thought we might be.

NAOMI
Baloney.

LUTON
Right.

NAOMI
Absolutely. My DNA will prove it.

LUTON
I already checked.

NAOMI
My DNA?

LUTON
Yeah. Personally.

NAOMI
(pointing at the table)
Through this electronic sniffer-thing?

LUTON
I brushed against you on your stage, remember?

A RED LIGHT flashes.

THE COMMENTATOR
Time-zero, 5 minutes.

NAOMI
Time-zero's the end of the war game, right?

LUTON
Shh. Listen.

THE COMMENTATOR
Doctor Luton Maxwell. Sir, your time is running out. Kindly confirm, is Naomi Verne with you or not?

NAOMI
Who is that?

THE COMMENTATOR
Manhattan continues its orderly evacuation. Just in. A trusted source informs us that the Justice Department is preparing to indict Luton Maxwell on charges of high treason. Maxwell to head the American Union's official list of "Most Wanted Criminals?" A doubtful distinction, ladies and gentlemen--

NAOMI

Stop right now. Stop. Don't let's do this childish war game any more. Start over. Please. I love you. Your sniffer thing's right. God knows why... And, thank God, we're not related.

(yelling)

Why is that stupid light still flashing? Turn it off. Turn the damn thing off!

(He waves it off and silences

THE COMMENTATOR.)

Why are you so bent on poisoning my memories?

LUTON

O'Dwyer needs them purged.

NAOMI

(in tears)

An hour ago he was my dad.

(sinking to her knees)

Carolyn! Carolyn! Oh, Carolyn!

LUTON

Have you noticed? You don't need a pill any more.

NAOMI

I don't feel anything any more. Not anything.

LUTON

Sure you do.

NAOMI

There's something... Your mom. Your bio-mom-- If she showed up, right now, here, in front of us, what's the first thing you'd say to her?

LUTON

I'd ask her, "What did Mister O'Dwyer do with you?"

A silence as NAOMI takes this in.

NAOMI

You? With you?

(rising to her feet)

Who are you? His son?

LUTON

Correct.

NAOMI

His only son?

LUTON

Correct.

NAOMI

My God... You know, I'd ask her, your bio-mom, if I had any brothers or sisters--

(sudden realization)

Oh, God, no!

LUTON

Yes. Carolyn, my sister. Carolyn, the beautiful and talented.

NAOMI

Dad knows I'm here? For sure?

LUTON

He has access to sensors.

NAOMI

Sensors. Black holes. Moses and friggin' cyber-drones. And Carolyn!

LUTON

By now, he should be frantic.

NAOMI

I'm the one who should be frantic!

LUTON

Three point five minutes to go.

NAOMI

Wait a sec, he knows you're his son. He must.

LUTON

Are you in?

NAOMI

If you've figured me out, he's figured you out!

He pulls a BOX from his pocket, takes out a PILL and the Band-Aid-like MASTER-PATCH. Puts both on the table.

LUTON

Listen carefully. You can take this pill and flat-line your heart in milliseconds. Or, alternatively, you can wear my Patch, the only Master-Patch in existence, and fuse key parts of my brain to yours. Its nanofabric will weld itself to your skin like a parasite. Choose. Now.

NAOMI

So, I can turn up my nose to you and take the pill and die, or I fuse with you and live a bit longer?

LUTON

Not quite. You can: A, turn up your nose on Daddy O'Dwyer and humanity and die peacefully, or, B, you can live and destroy our dear Daddy O'Dwyer, and serve humanity.

Pause.

NAOMI

Oh God, I asked for this. I really did.

LUTON

Right.

NAOMI

I guess you've checked my probabilities?

LUTON

Yep. Wavering. Unstable. Still, it's your choice.

NAOMI

Tough draw.

LUTON

A hard act. Hardest of your life.

NAOMI

Are you and God's Coalition in this together?

LUTON

Haven't figured out any other way.

NAOMI

Daddy too?

(with sarcasm)

"Daddy," huh...

LUTON

Humans need terrorism and holocausts as a crank. Always have. All else is illusion and entertainment, like the Olympic Games, like the Roman arena.

NAOMI

God, I wish I could feel something. Anything.

LUTON

The audition's over, Naomi. You want this part or not?

NAOMI

Your money's on the Master-Patch, right?

LUTON

No more "takes." Let's move on. You can fix it "post."

NAOMI

It?

LUTON

Your life story. The rest of it.

NAOMI

I always choose wrong.

LUTON

My money's on you.

She lays her hand alternately over pill and Master-Patch, then approaches him.

NAOMI

(putting her arms around him)

There's a another choice... Kiss me.

(He kisses her.)

When our brains fuse, will I suddenly become aware of all your memories as well as my own? Will we tear each other apart? Or will it feel like there's the two of us listening to each other, chatting, telling each other stories, rather like we are now? Will I know everything about you right away, about your mom, about your favorite toys, your favorite books, your favorite music? Will I compose like you? Write our opera? Will I feel close to you, like I do now? How will we make love? How will we kiss? How will I feel your skin?

She takes off his shirt, lets it fall, runs her hands over his body. They kiss again.

LUTON

(pointing to the bedroom exit)

There's your escape route: an instant clip-on harness for one person to be yanked up into the helicopter. Go.

(off her look)

I'm staying.

NAOMI

Why?

LUTON

Hurry.

Pause.

NAOMI

Why treason?

LUTON

Because freewill and freedom are illusions. Because "normal" behavior is limited to the governing elite. Mainly because they've discovered that I'm holding out on the Master-Patch. I saved it for you. Its blueprints are safe in an extraterrestrial vault.

NAOMI
Blueprints...?

LUTON
Address all questions, Naomi. Face the truth.

NAOMI
I don't want you to die.

LUTON
I've become the problem.

NAOMI
Please God, don't leave me.

LUTON
We'll be together, Naomi. Forever.

NAOMI
Say 'bye to your mom, will you? Kiss her. Kiss her from me too.

(kisses him)
We'll find her. I promise.

A RED LIGHT flashes.

THE COMMENTATOR
Thirty seconds--

She takes the Master-Patch. He points to a spot above her left breast.

LUTON
Here.

She pulls away her dress, peels away the back of the Master-Patch like a Band-Aid and sticks it to her chest.

NAOMI
You haven't consulted your wall for a while. What's my probability forecast?

He's about to speak, but she shuts him up. They kiss.

At last, she pulls away, readies to exit.

NAOMI
By the way, once when Carolyn and I were fooling around on our lake, we capsized our toy boat. We screamed and shouted and Daddy rushed out. He saved Carolyn first, then he turned to me. I was still screaming my head off. His look. That look in his eye. It's never left me.

(beat)

Know what? Carolyn could swim. I couldn't.

(beat)

After your brain is fused with mine, will we be a man or a woman?

While LUTON watches her, and the red light continues to flash, NAOMI exits to the bedroom.

Curtain.

END