

FAUSTUS monologue

Just another night in the lab, reading papers, doing experiments that come to nothing, checking Facebook, and wondering what the hell I'm going to talk about at group meeting on Thursday. To think what I could have done instead.

He looks at his computer, and begins perusing Facebook.

I could have become a philosopher, and asked myself the deep questions. (acidly) Like whether dogs have thoughts. What a field! 2500 years of effort and, Socrates still has the best answer: none of us knows anything! And the philosopher especially doesn't know how to make money. Now, had I wanted to make money, I could have gone to med school, and been a real doctor.

He looks at his computer.

Hah! Jane Doyle, M.D. (acidly) Well, if she can do it, I could have. I could have piled up gold, or a Beemer...or maybe just debt. I could have been out there curing people. But I would like to be immortal, and medicine only extends mortality.

Then literature perhaps. Homer speaks yet, as does Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Twain. But their lasting fame only came from a clever retelling of shopworn ideas like the hero's journey, or the sympathetic villain who leads him to destruction. I want to make something new, to be the first to see and do things hidden right in front of our faces. To have those discoveries known long after I am gone. And so, science and science alone must be my calling. Its mysteries and possibilities are endless: curing cancers yet undescribed, rebuilding an entire organ in a day, yea, the ability to create and manipulate life itself. And he who controls the science controls wealth and power. (discouraged) At least in the movies. Three years I've been at it, and the most important discovery I've made is that ramen with lemon yogurt is disgusting.

Bad Angel, Good Angel, Faustus

Enter GOOD ANGEL and BAD ANGEL.

GOOD ANGEL

Why are you doing this? You're taking the easy way out at the cost of you know not what.

BAD ANGEL

Loss of a soul? Condemnation to Hell? The Devil? You are a rational, evolved person. You've moved beyond the superstitions of the past. The glory is great, the cost is nothing.

GOOD ANGEL

Damnation doesn't require a heaven or hell. All it requires is me, a conscience, an inability to live with doing wrong. You watch out, I don't trust the devil, no matter how sweet his song.

BAD ANGEL

Why do you have to trust him?

GOOD ANGEL

(to Bad Angel)

What's more, I don't trust you either.

BAD ANGEL

Oh shut up, goodie-twoshoes. Jack, all you have to do is trust yourself, and pull out before it's too late.

FAUSTUS

"Pull out before it's too late." I tried that line with Jane, remember?

BAD ANGEL

And it worked, remember?

GOOD ANGEL

And you felt awful about it.

BAD ANGEL

Afterwards.

(beat)

And only for, like, a week or two.

BAD ANGEL

Consider our advice, Faustus

Exit Bad Angel.

GOOD ANGEL

And wipe your feet before you come into the lab next time, make sure to eat enough fiber, don't talk with your mouth

full, make sure you read something before you sign it, look both ways before you cross the street, don't take any wooden nickels and oh yes, DON'T TRUST SATAN!

Exit Good Angel.

President of WIT

PRESIDENT

(Bombastically)

Friends, laymen, countrymen, uh, countrywomen, uh, foreigners, neighbors, students, faculty, staff, spouses, roommates, colleagues et al., lend me your ears. I stand before you today on this momentous occasion as we celebrate excellence, for after all, in the words of a celebrated orator, no eminent page in history was ever drafted by the standards of mediocrity. And as I look out upon you today I say without fear of contradiction, the eminence of your pages is self-evident. Truly, the halls of fame resound thy name. As we are gathered to celebrate the scholarship of today and how it will build a better tomorrow, we reflect upon the dedication of the scholars who make it all possible, without whom our knowledge would be unable to advance. Such scholars bring the illusivity of theory into the imperative actuality. In our exploration of the world around us, we find new insights, seek new horizons, find new things to seek and seek new findings that are today hidden, in our ongoing quest for truth, justice, the American way, apple pie, plum pudding, peach cobbler.. . .

the President's voice gradually fades to an inaudible mumble, as he continues gesturing as though addressing a large audience.

Faustus, Helen, and Mephistopheles (comic scene)

HELEN

Dr. Faustus? Remember me? We took thermodynamics together.

MEPHISTOPHELES

(to Faustus)

And you sure felt the heat.

FAUSTUS

Oh, uh, yeah. You were, um, you were really something. I mean, not that you aren't really something now.

MEPHISTOPHELES

(aside, sarcastically)

Smooth!

FAUSTUS

What I mean to say is you are something. I mean, really something.

HELEN

And what matter of something might this thing I am be?

FAUSTUS

Oh, thou art fairer than the evening air
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars;
Brighter art thou than flaming Jupiter
When he appear'd to hapless Semele:
More lovely than the monarch of the sky
In wanton Arethusa's azured arms:
And none but thou shalt be my paramour.

(to Mephistopheles)

How's that?

MEPHISTOPHELES

(to Faustus)

Overwrought, but I can work with it.

HELEN

Wait. Am I Jupiter or "Hapless Semele?" Does that mean I'm a dude or....

Mephistopheles places an enchantment
on Helen.

HELEN (cont'd)

(enchanted)

Well, who cares about details like that when you're such a gallant little charmer! Tell me, did you come up with that yourself?

FAUSTUS

Why, uh, yes. A long, long time ago.

MEPHISTOPHELES

About 420 years ago, in fact.

FAUSTUS

Can you give me a break?

HELEN

(enchanted)

It's is amazing we haven't talked much until now. What do you say we make up for lost time?

FAUSTUS

I'd be very happy to make out for- um - make up for lost time. So, uh, how about the Rams moving back to LA?

Mephistopheles stops her enchantment
and looks exasperated.

HELEN

(Coming out of the
enchantment)

Pardon?

FAUSTUS

You know, NFL franchise realignment is all over the news now.

MEPHISTOPHELES

Oh God.

FAUSTUS

Will you shut up?

HELEN

(crossly)

I haven't said anything.

FAUSTUS

Not you, it's, ah...

(searching for an
excuse, and finds one

my cellphone is on vibrate and I keep getting these
irritating calls.

HELEN

Oh.

FAUSTUS

Anyway, where were we? Oh yes, football. Or maybe you prefer
basketball? Or whatever the national sport of Greece is? Like
tiropitas tossing?

MEPHISTOPHELES

You know how the Greeks used to wrestle, right?

FAUSTUS

Naked, I know.

HELEN

(outraged)

Naked tiropitas tossing?

FAUSTUS

No, I mean, unless you're into that kind of thing.

HELEN

You have got to have the weirdest pick-up routine I've ever seen. And as I'm a woman in engineering, that says a lot.

FAUSTUS

I'm sorry, I can't help it.

(to Mephistopheles)

Gimme a hand, please!

Charlie and Trish

CHARLIE

He's changed a lot in a year and a half. I distinctly remember him doubting himself when nobody else did, and now he can't believe anyone would ever have been so foolish as to doubt him.

TRISH

He seems to believe in his star, or his stars, or something. Right before he defended he said, wait till you hear this, I wrote it down:

Imitating Faustus

"Behold, my rise is like a comet,
which long sat dormant in its hyperbolic sphere
and now breaks forth at perihelion."

CHARLIE

"Hyperbolic" says it all.

TRISH

Yeah. Every time he talked to himself in the office, it was in verse, it was really freaky.

CHARLIE

Well, he did get one thing right. His rise is like a comet: wherever he goes, he is marveled at.

TRISH

Perhaps he's afraid his comet will be considered a harbinger of doom.

CHARLIE

Or worried that it will return to the cold obscurity of the Kuiper Belt from which he came.

TRISH

Unless it impacts Jupiter with a bang like Comet Shoemaker-Levy. Or leaves behind a dust cloud through which the earth passes. Faustus may become the Perseids of Science yet.

CHARLIE

How much further are we going to drive this analogy?

TRISH

Hey, you started it. The thing is, sometimes the only thing worse than failure is success. Jack thinks he has to keep up this pace forever, or he's going to disappoint not only himself, but the entire world.

CHARLIE

Yeah, I heard him saying that he only wants his papers published in Science or Nature, so as not to disturb his

perfect record.

TRISH

He's setting himself up for unhappiness, even when he succeeds.

CHARLIE

If that's the price of success, I hope I'm a failure. Anyway, how about you, Trish? When are you getting out of here and on to bigger and better things?

TRISH

Eventually, I guess. I've started writing, and will probably defend before the end of the year. Then post-doc, then academia.

CHARLIE

(without sarcasm)

You haven't soured on academia!? Wow!

TRISH

I still want to do the fundamental work of science upon which everything else is built. I know my work determining the structure of channel proteins is never going to make the front page of the New York Times. The press would rather talk about the person who makes a new drug that targets that channel protein. Nobody will ask how this guy knew the drug would nestle into the right spot, or how the protein's structure was known in the first place. But I'll know. And for me, that's enough.

Faustus and Mephistopheles

FAUSTUS

You lied to me about the experiments!

MEPHISTOPHELES

And you went through with them! Even though your institution, your colleagues, and your wife all spoke one word, with one voice, no. And I think the scientist in you agreed with all of them.

FAUSTUS

Why didn't you stop me?

MEPHISTOPHELES

By what right would you have expected me to? The contract was up. And even if I had said no, would you have listened?

FAUSTUS

I might have.

MEPHISTOPHELES

Yes, you might have. And when I'm the only being on Earth you trust, well...

FAUSTUS

Mephistopheles, can I ask a final question?

MEPHISTOPHELES

Time's a wasting, but yes.

FAUSTUS

All that stuff I accomplished with your help. The marriage. The discoveries. The achievements of a lifetime. Would I have ever gotten that far had I not sold my soul?

MEPHISTOPHELES

You'll never know.

FAUSTUS

(after a beat,
resigned)

Well, summon your demons or whatever and drag me away to hell

MEPHISTOPHELES

Oh No no no, nothing so primitive. There will be no dragging off with demons: the worst demons are those that you cannot see. You might not even face death within a natural lifetime: Lucifer and I might keep you on this earth for a long, long time.

FAUSTUS

So my damnation is...eternal life?

MEPHISTOPHELES

Something like that.

FAUSTUS

I hardly see how that's damnation. At least I still have a wife who loves me-

MEPHISTOPHELES

Oh, Jack, did you think she was kidding when she threatened to leave you?

This is finally what shakes Faustus
to his core.

FAUSTUS

Helen was the only woman I ever loved.

MEPHISTOPHELES

She was the only person you ever loved. You never even loved yourself, not really.

FAUSTUS

(grasping at straws)

At least I still have my love of knowledge.

MEPHISTOPHELES

If you have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, but do not have love, what are you?

FAUSTUS

Nothing.

Faustus and Mephistopheles

FAUSTUS)

(Surprised)

You changed.

(Appreciating her
appearance)

You changed, but, you, are...

MEPHISTOPHELES

What?

FAUSTUS

Aren't you supposed to be a, you know, a dude?

MEPHISTOPHELES

Will you knock it off? You act like you've never seen a woman before.

FAUSTUS

But you are supposed to be a guy, right?

MEPHISTOPHELES

Hell is an equal-opportunity employer, jackass. So whadda ya want already, huh?

FAUSTUS

Uh, gimme a second here....

(A moment. He
consults the paper
and reads)

"I charge thee wait upon me whilst I live,
To do whatever Faustus shall command,
Be it to make the moon drop from her sphere,
Or the ocean to overwhelm the world."

MEPHISTOPHELES

Hold it. For one thing, I answer to Lucifer, who's my PI, for what seems like forever now, but still. Second of all, I don't want to hear any of that shit about how you "command" me either.

FAUSTUS

Then did your boss send you?

MEPHISTOPHELES

No, I came here myself. I can self-actualize, I have empowerment, the freedom to disintermediate, and all that other modern management crap.

FAUSTUS

So I must have conjured you. I repeated the result of the paper!

MEPHISTOPHELES

No, goofus, you stumbled into it. Like Fleming into penicillin, Pauling into the alpha helix and Watson and Crick into an empty mine shaft for screwing Rosalind Franklin out of a Nobel.

FAUSTUS

Watson and Crick stumbled into a mineshaft?

MEPHISTOPHELES

(matter-of-factly)

They will.

FAUSTUS

I see. So all that mumbo-jumbo did nothing at all?

MEPHISTOPHELES

Nope. I showed up because as soon as somebody looks up that paper, it means his soul is ripe for the taking.

FAUSTUS

As Faustus was doing. And as his soul is ready. You see, I'm not into the whole "God" or "heaven" or "hell" thing. It's all made up. Faustus doesn't fear what he knows doesn't exist

MEPHISTOPHELES

And yet Faustus believed in the Devil enough to summon him.

FAUSTUS

Look around the world. The Devil's work is everywhere. You don't have to believe in God to believe in the Devil, and to realize that in the struggle between good and evil, if there is one, the devil seems to be winning.

MEPHISTOPHELES

Cynical, but probably accurate.

FAUSTUS

So, how would you describe Lucifer?

MEPHISTOPHELES

He's Distinguished Chair, Chancellor and Senior Provost of Hell. And he bears a striking resemblance to L. Ron Hubbard.

FAUSTUS

Didn't he used to work for God?

MEPHISTOPHELES

L. Ron Hubbard?

FAUSTUS

No, Lucifer! Didn't Lucifer used to work for L. Ron Hubbard? I mean, didn't Lucifer used to work for God?

MEPHISTOPHELES

Yes, and God took him under her wing. She was even going to let Lucifer run the place after she retired to Florida.

FAUSTUS

(surprised that God
is a woman)

What happened?

MEPHISTOPHELES

Oh, Hell lured him with a nicer benefit package: fancier title, named professorship, better pay, a parking spot with his name on it, that kind of stuff.

FAUSTUS

And what about Lucifer's, uh, underlings like you? If I can say that? If it isn't too offensive?

MEPHISTOPHELES

We are all miserable, damned to work with him for ever.

FAUSTUS

Why did you follow him then?

MEPHISTOPHELES

Oh, I guess it was the impulsiveness of youth, the need for a good letter of reference, and the desire to live someplace where it doesn't snow.

FAUSTUS

And, where is it that you live?

MEPHISTOPHELES

In Hell. Duh. Or Fresno. Take your pick.

Lucifer and Mephistopheles

LUCIFER

That's why I gave you this job. Special job. Don't usually give out these kinds of jobs. 23 years following this guy around is really VIP treatment. Oh yes. Don't think I don't know how much fun it is to help somebody accomplish something, and in the meantime avoid doing real work. But now play-time is over and you've got to close. Go out there and grab 'em by the---you know whats.

MEPHISTOPHELES

What if I don't do it? What if I let Faustus get out of the contract? Remember what that means.

LUCIFER

Yes, if you refuse a direct order from me, I'll have no choice but to fire you, and you're free to be a mortal. But, where else do you have to go, if not working with me? You have acquired a very peculiar, overspecialized, and hard-to-market skill-set.

MEPHISTOPHELES

What else is a post-doc for?

LUCIFER

Not for making lots of money. But it is about innovation.

MEPHISTOPHELES

Innovation?

LUCIFER

Exactly. You've found some exciting new ways of making people suffer. Your draft proposal for how to torment Faustus was very original. Opens with a standard Reverse Cassandra gambit, but develops into a very unusual Flagellant Variation, transposing into something that looks a lot like the Caro-Kann. It's a solid line.

MEPHISTOPHELES

I now half-wish I had never come up with it.

LUCIFER

Oh come on, who are you kidding? You're suddenly being wracked with doubts, but look inside yourself. You know you love seeing foolish mortals be destroyed by their own pettiness, self-importance, and self-regard. Comedy is when the arrogant fool who gets his comeuppance is somebody else. When you see Faustus as that fool, "This horror will grow mild, this darkness light."

MEPHISTOPHELES

I've never known you to be a fan of comedy.

LUCIFER

Dark comedy. Macbeth is hilarious.

MEPHISTOPHELES

And Dante's comedy is simply Divine.

LUCIFER

(angry)

Don't test me! I've put up with about as much as I'm going to take from you. You screw up again, and your career is toast. No, worse than toast, it's charcoal briquettes. No, wait, it's the carcinogenic residue of charcoal briquettes on the grilled lamb chop of eternity. No, it's the carcinogenic residue on the bones of the grilled lamb chop--

MEPHISTOPHELES

(interrupting)

I get it.

LUCIFER

Are you sure? Let me spell it out for you. Either you condemn Faustus to Hell as I ordered, or you're sharpening pencils 24 7 by hand with a dull razor blade for the next 400 years. After which, I'll pull your wings, and you're free. Free to wander the Earth without employment or purpose. Free to find that being a mortal with morals is not easy. And when you are free to die, as die you will, you will find that God, the love that moves the sun and other stars, is not so interested in adding you to her orbit. So then, after you become another one of those hicks to cross the Styx, you can join the general population of slothful tormented souls in Hell. And those other souls will pay back, with interest, all the torments you inflicted on them. So, what's it going to be? Your eternal torment, or his?

Joan and Faustus

Enter JOAN.

FAUSTUS

Hello? Do I know you?

JOAN

You know me all too well, Dr. Faustus. I've only been your student for many years now. I've wasted your time, wasted your money, and burdened you immeasurably.

FAUSTUS

That's not how I think of you. I think of you as an intense, resolute young woman with a future. I was just trying to make an....

(trailing off)

Increasingly unfortunate-sounding joke about seeing so little of you that I've forgotten your face.

Joan gives a mirthless chuckle.

JOAN

Everybody forgets my face. It is a forgettable face, and I'm a forgettable person. And if they remember me, it will be as one who was brilliant, but long about her second year just became a burden on everybody. And after I'm gone, everyone will sigh with relief.

FAUSTUS

Gone? Gone where?

JOAN

Just gone. Everywhere.

There is a long pause. Faustus suddenly understands.

FAUSTUS

(to Mephistopheles,
sotto voce)

Get security here, now.

Mephistopheles takes a long pause, thinks about it for a minute, then exits.

(to Joan)

I, for one, am not feeling relieved right now. It sounds like you are here to say goodbye.

JOAN

I am.

FAUSTUS

Well, I'm not going to let you. Not like this.

JOAN

Why?

FAUSTUS

Because I've felt the same way you do now. And somebody talked me out of it. I never got the chance to repay Trish--

JOAN

You were suicidal?

FAUSTUS

Yes. Just like you. Not something I've wanted to admit, but the time never felt quite right, you know what I mean?

JOAN

Yeah.

FAUSTUS

And why does the time never seem right to say you have thoughts of suicide?

JOAN

I dunno. I guess saying it out loud might freak people out.

FAUSTUS

Exactly. People like your friends, your family, even, and it might surprise you to hear this, your boss.

JOAN

You really think so?

FAUSTUS

I know so. And if they're freaked out by hearing you talk about it, how much more freaked out are they going to be if you actually go through with it?

(a pause, and Faustus continues)

You know, you are in charge of maintaining the most demanding instruments. Have you ever wondered why that is?

JOAN

Why?

FAUSTUS

Because you are a problem-solver. You know every problem has a solution, if you can just find it.

JOAN

Yeah, I guess I am great at solving problems. Except one.

FAUSTUS

Which is?

JOAN

I took those damn pills.

FAUSTUS

Oh, I think there's a solution for that, too.

Enter Mephistopheles with a
paramedic.

Take as much time as you need. And realize, sometimes the
world understands you more than you will ever know.

JOAN

Thank you.

Exit Joan and paramedic.

Patrick and Faustus

PATRICK

Sir? Sir! Where the hell is he now? Right when you need him, he's nowhere to be found.

Enter Faustus.

FAUSTUS

Ah, Patrick, I was just about to head down to the hospital to see how the patients are doing after the first little batch of genome editing.

PATRICK

THAT'S what those experiments were about?!

FAUSTUS

Yes. Why?

PATRICK

The patients we were injecting, the women, they...their children are stillborn.

FAUSTUS

My God. All 80 of them?

PATRICK

No, only the first four who were closest to term. The surgeons saved one of them, but...the doctors say they've never seen heads that small.

FAUSTUS

No, this is impossible. You must have injected the wrong delivery vehicles, or Jackie ordered the wrong blocks of DNA. You fools! You were to follow my instructions to the letter. Did you have any idea what was riding on these experiments?

PATRICK

I do now.

FAUSTUS

So who screwed up! I want their heads, dammit!

PATRICK

Not us. We double-checked your instructions, and Jackie sent you the DNA sequences like you told her to. It's all in your e-mails.

FAUSTUS

Well, we'd better fix this damned quick, before the other 76 mothers in the study get to term.

PATRICK

You mean, we aren't stopping the study right now?

FAUSTUS

NO! We can't. We've gone too far for that! We have to see it through, we owe it to those four kids to not let their lives go to waste.

PATRICK

But we have no idea what's wrong! We have to stop. Sir? We have to stop!

Faustus freezes, entirely unsure of what to do next. We hear sounds of a great commotion outside.

PATRICK (cont'd)

The press is here. What the hell do we do? We have to say something! Well?

FAUSTUS

What am I supposed to do? I'll think of something....go out there and tell them I'm coming.

PATRICK

Not on your life. If they find out I was the one overseeing the treatments, and that we're still continuing the experiments...

FAUSTUS

They won't. The experiment is over. Now, I suggest you make tracks for Quito, and do so by the back exit.

Patrick nods, and exits. Faustus is alone on stage.