

The Side Effect Pill

Book & original story by Don DiVecchio

Music & Lyrics by Terry Crystal

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Dramatis Personae

Liz - Undercover Journalist (Alto/Mezzo)

Justin - Research Scientist (Tenor)

Susan - Head of Research & Development (Soprano)

Max - President of Pillco Corp. (Baritone)

Aldo - Head of Marketing (Tenor)

Place:

Pillco Pharmaceutical Company,
Northeast Massachusetts

Time:

Present

Lights dim.

Scene 1

Stage is dark. Trumpet solo (Side Effects). Light rises on Justin, sitting in desk chair stage-left. Second light rises on Liz, also sitting in desk chair stage right. Both are reading paperwork and underlining important facts. Justin pretends not to notice Liz. As they continue to read their material, he begins to glance at her and she at him. This continues for a few minutes until tune ends. Liz drags her desk over and sits.

Liz

I haven't seen you here before.

Justin

Th-they sent me up from level three.

Liz

How long you been with the company?

JUSTIN

About six months.

LIZ

Ahhh...Fresh meat.

JUSTIN

Wh-What does that mean?

LIZ

Just kidding.

(moves closer)

Usually it means they want you for something special—something weird and kinky...Kidding.

JUSTIN

How do you know this?

LIZ

I'm what you call a three year Pharma-Veteran—short for pharmaceutical...Liz is my name. I'm a second level researcher. Got my PhD in Neuro-Biology...What about you?

JUSTIN

What about me?

LIZ

Yeah...What's your game...and your name?

JUSTIN

I'm J-Justin...Micro-Bi-Biology research scientist.

LIZ

Well Justin Micro-Biology research scientist, something weird is going on here...It's strange that their calling you up after six months...I've seen them come and go...And sweetie, you're one of the quickest climbers of the bunch.

JUSTIN

I-I was a little surprised they gave me the advancement...I'm expected to pa-participate in some new research study.

LIZ

Hmmm...In house...Using one of their own...That's really odd.

JUSTIN

Odd? They strike me as being considerate and ge-generous.

LIZ

Are we talking about the same company?

JUSTIN

Why are you so suspicious?

LIZ

The question is...Why aren't you?

SINGS

(SIDE EFFECTS)

RIGHT IN FRONT OF YOUR FACE
DON'T THINGS SEEM OUT OF PLACE?
SOMETHING IS WRONG HERE
CAN'T YOU SEE?
RIGHT IN FRONT OF YOUR FACE

JUSTIN

What?

LIZ

TAKE YOUR HEAD OUT OF THE SAND
LOOK AROUND, IF YOU CAN
SOMETHING IS WRONG HERE
CAN'T YOU SEE?
TAKE YOUR HEAD OUT OF THE SAND

WE ARE WORKING FOR ONE OF THE BIGGEST
DRUG COMPANIES IN THE LAND
AND THEIR PILLS, THEIR PRODUCT,
WHAT THEY CALL THEIR MEDICATION
HAVE EFFECTS

JUSTIN

What are you talking about?

LIZ

SIDE EFFECTS
SIDE EFFECTS
LOTS OF NASTY SIDE EFFECTS

JUSTIN

STANDARD OPERATING PROTOCOL
FOR DRUGS THAT GET RESULTS
YOU'VE GOT TO EXPECT
A FEW LITTLE PROBLEMS DOWN THE LINE

LIZ

A few little problems? This company may be under investigation
for the side effects of their drugs.

JUSTIN

IF YOU DON'T LIKE WHAT YOU SEE
IF YOU CAN'T LET THINGS BE
WHY DO YOU STAY HERE?
WHY NOT LEAVE?
IF YOU DON'T LIKE WHAT YOU SEE

LIZ

I've been thinking about it until you came along.

JUSTIN

What does that mean?

LIZ

Do you ever have that feeling? Like when you meet someone and there's something in them that brings something out in you... Like you're in some kind of danger and need my help.

JUSTIN

Danger!? M-maybe the danger is you!

JUSTIN

ALL THE DRUGS THAT WE MAKE
ALL THE PILLS THAT WE TAKE
THAT IS THE NATURE
OF THE BUSINESS WE'RE IN
ALL THE DRUGS THAT WE MAKE

WITH EVERY UPSIDE
THERE'S A DOWNSIDE
LIFE IS MESSY
DON'T YOU AGREE

LIZ

You don't understand.

JUSTIN

Look...I need this job...I feel per-perfectly fine here. So don't worry. I can take care of myself.

LIZ

Fine! But I'm not giving up!

JUSTIN

I have work to do.

LIZ

TAKE YOUR HEAD OUT OF THE SAND
LOOK AROUND, IF YOU CAN
SOMETHING IS WRONG HERE
CAN'T YOU SEE?
TAKE YOUR HEAD OUT OF THE SAND

LIZ & JUSTIN

WE ARE WORKING FOR ONE OF THE BIGGEST
DRUG COMPANIES IN THE LAND
AND THEIR PILLS, THEIR PRODUCT,
ALL THEIR MEDICATION HAVE EFFECTS

SIDE EFFECTS
SIDE EFFECTS

TAKE A STAND YOU GET SIDE EFFECTS
 IF YOU TAKE AN ACTION
 YOU GET A REACTION
 AND YOU GET

*They stare at each other for a few
 seconds.*

SIDE EFFECTS!

*Lights go out. Music begins. The desk-
 chairs are removed*

Scene 2

On second word of song, Spotlight opens
 to reveal three executives sitting
 center stage at boardroom table
 (wearing bowler hats?).

ALDO, MAX, SUSAN
 Sing

A SITUATION

All

WE HAVE A SITUATION HERE
 THE SOLUTION FOR IT IS NOT CLEAR
 OUR SALES, THEY ARE FALLING
 OUR LAWYER'S ARE CALLING
 WE'VE GOT TO DO SOMETHING
 THAT IS CLEAR

WE HAVE A SITUATION HERE
 OUR STOCKS ARE DOWN AND IT'S A BEAR
 MARKET FOR OUR DRUGS
 STARING AT OUR MUGS
 WONDERING IF THE END IS NEAR

Susan (soprano)
 OUR ADVERTISING IS NOT WORKING

Aldo (tenor)
 OUR MERCHANDISE, IT IS NOT MOVING

Susan and Aldo
 OFF THE SHELVES

Max (baritone)

TELL ME
AFTER ALL THESE YEARS
COULD IT BE AS BAD AS YOU SAY?

Susan – BAD AND GETTING WORSE

TELL ME
AFTER ALL OUR CARE
HOW COULD THINGS WORK OUT THIS WAY?

Aldo and Susan – IT IS GRIM, IT IS GRIM, IT IS
VERY, VERY GRIM

All

THE LAST THREE QUARTER WERE A BUST
OUR CUSTOMERS HAVE LOST THEIR TRUST
FOR WHAT IT IS THAT WE ARE SELLING
THE INTEREST IS FLAT
CAN WE MAINTAIN A BUSINESS
LIKE THAT?

Aldo

OUR MARKET SHARE, IT IS RECEDING

Susan

OUR STOCKHOLDERS WILL BE STEAMING

All

WHEN THEY FIND OUT

WE HAVE A SITUATION HERE
THE SOLUTION FOR IT IS NOT CLEAR
OUR SALES, THEY ARE FALLING
OUR LAWYER'S ARE CALLING
WE'VE GOT TO DO SOMETHING
THAT IS CLEAR

WE HAVE A SITUATION HERE
OUR STOCKS ARE DOWN AND IT'S A BEAR
MARKET FOR OUR DRUGS
STARING AT OUR MUGS
WONDERING IF THE END IS NEAR

Max

FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION

Susan – NOT AN OPTION

BANKRUPTCY A LAST RESORT

Aldo and Susan – A LAST RESORT

All
WE NEED
SOMETHING BIG
SOMETHING NEW
TO REPORT!

(beat) Light rises. Susan stands and points to a paper chart. (Their dialogue is quick and lively.)

SUSAN

As you can see, the sales on all our prescription drugs are falling...Some drastically...If you look at the sales of our most popular selling drugs "Senbril" and "Toloft", you'll see that they have fallen 20% from last year, "Fuesta" is off 15%, "Pestor" 10%, "Cimera" 20%. Our current line of anti-depressants are down 30% including "Kozac". If our sales follow this current trend, we are looking at roughly four billion in revenue losses.

ALDO

In short...Adults are feeling more anxious and out of control, more fearful, but they're not buying our drugs.

SUSAN

Our campaign to convince parents to put their children on anti-depressants at age five was successful for a while, but that has tapered off. The teen market has also fallen...And we're still recovering from our disastrous line of hormone replacement drugs.

Aldo walks around the table.

ALDO

On the upside, the only drug that's doing well is our testosterone enhancing pill and "Reagra"...Our research is showing that people are finding their lifestyles more distressful and joyless. They want more passion and lust in their lives.

MAX

Well done.

(coughs)

Excuse me.

Max walks over to side table, pours some water in a glass, stares blankly at the wall, takes pill out of bottle

and swallows. He then walks back to his seat at boardroom table.

MAX (cont'd)

Where were we?

ALDO

We were talking about our sales profile, and-

MAX

Let Susan speak.

SUSAN

Essentially the side effects from our drugs are causing major problems. The data is pouring in, and we're beginning to see the long term harmful effects of our top selling pharmaceuticals.

ALDO

The pattern is consistent sir...Thousands of people are suffering serious if not deadly side effects from our drugs.

MAX

We always factored that in...The number of deaths and permanent injuries—all the potential lawsuits matched against our profits...And we always come out sixty billion dollars ahead.

SUSAN

True...But none of these drugs have endured twenty or thirty years of sustained usage—and the results are devastating.

MAX

What devastating! What...The F.D.A. approved all our pharmaceuticals—God bless 'em.

ALDO

(paces)

What Susan is saying is: More people are experiencing ill effects from our drugs than any good they are doing.

MAX

(coughs)

That's not possible!

ALDO

The data is irrefutable.

SUSAN
(sings rapidly)
LIVER DAMAGE, HEART ATTACK,
SEIZURES AND STROKE,
SUICIDE, DEPRESSION AND DEATH.

ALDO
(sings rapidly)
BRAIN DAMAGE, BONE LOSS,
KIDNEY FAILURE, STROKE
PULMONARY THROMBOSIS, DEATH.

SUSAN
Some drugs we created to decrease suicide have actually increased it...Especially in teens.

ALDO
What we are paying out in lawsuits, which is roughly one billion, has increased by 30%.

SUSAN
The cost of maintaining these drugs is seriously cutting into our profitability margins.

MAX
So what's the bottom line?

ALDO
The bottom line is-

MAX
Let Susan talk!

SUSAN
Well sir...Since more people are becoming sick from our pharmaceuticals—they're beginning to look at more natural, more homeopathic solutions.

MAX
This is the worst news!

SUSAN
Not necessarily.

ALDO
R&D has come up with a few possible solutions.

SUSAN

If we create one pill that would counter the side effects of all our drugs, we'd be reversing the downward spiral.

ALDO

And, if we inject into that pill a compound that will increase the libido for both sexes, we'll have a winning combination and make a fortune.

MAX

What were you saying?

ALDO

One pill that would do it all!

MAX

Right! Can it be done?

SUSAN

We're developing it as we speak sir.

SINGS (**ONE PILL**)

ONE PILL
 ONE PILL
 ONE PILL TO SATISFY YOUR COMPLAINTS
 ONE PILL
 ONE PILL
 AND NOW THE PAIN IS GONE
 THE PAIN YOU DIDN'T HAVE BEFORE
 YOU TOOK OUR OTHER MEDICATION

Aldo & Susan

WE TRIED AND CREATED A PILL THAT WORKS
 TO HEAL THE ACHE THAT'S BOTHERING YOU

Aldo

ONE PILL
 ONE PILL
 ONE PILL, A ROSY PICTURE WE'LL PAINT

ONE PILL
 ONE PILL
 AND NOW THE WORRY'S GONE
 WE RID YOU OF THE SIDE EFFECTS

Aldo & Susan
NO FEAR OR WORRY WHEN TAKING OUR DRUGS THAT WORK
TO HEAL THE ACHE THAT'S BOTHERING YOU

Aldo
GOT A HEADACHE?

Susan
RELIEF!

Aldo
GOT A HEART-ACHE?

Susan
RELIEF!

Aldo
DO YOU FEEL ALONE
GOT A KIDNEY-STONE?

Aldo & Susan
WE'VE GOT A PILL THAT WILL KILL

Aldo
WHATEVER YOU'VE GOT
WHENEVER YOU'RE NOT

Aldo & Susan
FEELING LIKE YOU SHOULD YOU CAN TAKE A PILL
JUST POP ONE OF THESE AND RELIEVE

Susan
OH WHY
DOES MY BODY HURT ALL OVER?

Aldo
DO MY FEET SWELL, MY BREATH SMELL,
AND OVER ALL FEEL UNDER THE WEATHER?

Susan
OH WHY
DO I FEEL SO BAD ALL OVER?

Aldo
TAKE A BLUE ONE, A PINK ONE,
A YELLOW ONE, A GREEN ONE AND FEEL BETTER.

MAX

I'm feeling better already.
 (looks at Susan)
 How far along are we in R & D?

SUSAN

We'll have something ready in a few months. It's already going through some preliminary testing with positive results.

MAX

What does legal say?

SUSAN

Legal always worried about the long term scenario, especially twenty years from now...But nothing's perfect...Nothing lasts forever...We think it's our best bet.

MAX

It might just work.

Aldo, Susan & Max

ONE PILL
 ONE PILL
 ONE PILL, A ROSY PICTURE WE'LL PAINT
 ONE PILL
 ONE PILL
 AND NOW THE WORRY'S GONE
 WE RID YOU OF THE SIDE EFFECTS

NO FEAR OR WORRY WHEN TAKING OUR DRUGS THAT WORK
 TO HEAL THE ACHE THAT'S BOTHERING YOU

UPHILL
 UNTIL
 WE SHILL
 THAT PILL
 THAT WILL KILL THOSE SIDE EFFECTS.

MAX

I guess there's hope for us yet!..Anymore business?

ALDO

There's a little more sir...Advertising has said that the new pill should have a more personal, more down to earth touch...Which is why they suggest we test it on one of our own research scientists...The implied idea is: We are one of you folks...We've tried it and it works!

MAX

Very inventive!

ALDO

(paces)

One commercial could have our scientist coolly saying how healthy, horny and side effect free he or she feels.

MAX

(hits table)

If you weren't my nephew, I'd say you were after my job!

ALDO

(laughs)

No sir...I'm happy where I am.

MAX

Do you have a scientist in mind? Is it a woman?

ALDO

We're starting with a man and his name is Justin Hobart, a third level researcher. He's been with us for about six months.

MAX

Have you talked with him?

SUSAN

Only briefly sir.

ALDO

We plan to start our major trials in a few days...He'll be fully briefed...And of course he'll be expected to participate.

SUSAN

We selected him because he's boyishly handsome, intelligent looking, and falls within the twenty-to-thirty age group...And he's using one of our heart murmur pills.

ALDO

Of course we want our side effect pill to appeal to all ages, but everyone identifies with the young.

MAX

Fabulous!..Is that it!

ALDO

We need a name for it.

MAX

(looks at his watch)

Of course.

SUSAN

People seem to like a drug with a name ending in "era" or "esta" like "umera" or "unesta" or "il" like "axil" or "fenbril".

ALDO

How about something celestial like "Venutia" or "Saturna"?

MAX

No...These are planets for God's sakes—too Astronomical.

SUSAN

What about "Raptura"?

MAX

Nope...Too close to the religious "Rapture" folks and "Ecstasy" drug users.

ALDO

How's "Collabria"?

MAX

Too Mafia.

SUSAN

"Remora"!

MAX

That's a monster Godzilla fought.

ALDO

I got it..."Centera" or "Pentera". The worry free pill that restores confidence and passion.

MAX

Not bad...Pass it on to advertising and see what they say.

ALDO

Sir...If I may—

MAX

What now!

ALDO

The projected profits from the side effect pill are off the charts. We could virtually destroy the competition.

MAX

Let's not get too greedy...After all we're not ruthless scoundrels...We have families like everyone else...And we don't want to attract too much attention...Is that it?

ALDO

Nothing else sir.

Max

(looks at his watch)

I have another meeting in five minutes, keep me in the loop.

Max exits.

SUSAN

That was weird.

ALDO

The way he snubbed me and deferred to you?

SUSAN

No!..This is the second week running...he seems a little off...Not all there...

ALDO

You know...If Max retires, I'm next in line.

SUSAN

I wouldn't count on it.

There is a knock on the door.

ALDO

Come in.

Enter Liz.

LIZ

You paged me sir?