

SCREEN SAVIOR

By

Jim Benner
(August 2026)

from
“Ode to Joy”
by Friedrich Schiller:

“Freudig, wie ein Held zum Siegen.”

(“Joyfully, like a hero on the way to victory.”)

Jim Benner
256 Pine Ave.
Manasquan, NJ 08736
732-223-1819
jibenner@verizon.net

Synopsis:

Willan, our hero, must convince the powers-that-be to release him today, from the Hospital for the Digitally Challenged, or face permanent cognitive harm. Dossie, his estranged wife, and Mack, his BFF, are helping!

Characters:

DOSSIE: 30ish woman; friend to Mack; estranged wife to Willan.

MACK: 30ish man; friend to Dossie and Willan.

WILLAN: 30ish man; estranged husband to Dossie; friend to Mack.

SETTING: Visiting room in the Hospital for the Digitally Challenged.

TIME: The not-too-distant future.

NOTE on Music: Short clips of three popular songs are suggested in the script. These can be shortened, or cut, to avoid fair use/copyright issues, if need be. The recommended clip of the tenor solo in Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" Symphony #9 is by Brenden Gunnell, on August 21, 2024, at the Royal Albert Hall, with the Aurora Symphony, conducted by Nicolas Collon, on YouTube, running 1:25 minutes.

SCREEN SAVIOR

Stage has large picture window on upstage/center wall; two vinyl institutional chairs are on either end of a low white plastic table, downstage/center. About 30 seconds at the end of the song "It's the End of the World As We Know It", by R.E.M, is heard as lights come up.

DOSSIE stands at the large picture window. She is wearing a light colored tunic top and darker tights, flats on her feet. Window looks out on bucolic scene of green leaves at tops of tall trees in foreground; yellow gorse and red poppy fields at mid-range; evergreen wooded hills at longer range; blue sky horizon above hills. Seated in one of the two chairs is MACK. He wears a very dark colored tunic as his top, and dark loose pants. Black sneakers. He has a "Chevron" style mustache, ala Tom Sellek.

DOSSIE

Why don't they have bars on these windows, so high up?

MACK

No one expects these patients to commit suicide.

DOSSIE

But, Willan seemed so out of it, last time I saw him.

MACK

These people have self-committed.

DOSSIE

But, they're still guilty, aren't they?

MACK

Nothing so terrible.

DOSSIE

You read the letters, didn't you?

MACK

Of course. I got a few. Right around when he started his spree.

DOSSIE

First of all, letters? Hard-copy and typed, then crazier and crazier.

MACK

In the beginning, it was only a few Cell Phone Units.

DOSSIE

But, it didn't take him long to start on tablets, laptops, even flip-phones.

MACK

Yeah, things got out of hand pretty quickly.

DOSSIE

It's so pretty out there. To be cooped up in here.

(Mack stands up just as Dossie reaches to touch the window. He reaches for her hand and pulls it back.)

MACK

Sorry, sorry. Didn't mean to touch you.

DOSSIE

What's the matter?

MACK

Nothing, nothing. Window could be alarmed, electrified.

DOSSIE

Mack, you take such good care of me.

(Then Mack takes what looks like a cellphone out of a pocket on his tunic, and places it on the windowsill.)

DOSSIE *(cont.)*

What are you doing with that?

MACK

I want to see if he's made any progress, if he can still be tempted.

DOSSIE

Isn't that a T-R-U?

MACK

Oh, shit. Yes. They all look alike. I'm impressed that you even recognize a Taser-Remote Unit.

(Mack adjusts a setting on the TRU, then puts it back in his pocket. Then he removes a cellphone from his other pocket, and puts that on the windowsill.)

MACK *(cont.)*

I can't tell them apart. These damned devices. I have put off my PTI implant long enough. These days, they're safe, if you volunteer.

DOSSIE

Really? That's pretty radical, Mack. PTI isn't pronounced "Pity" for nothing.

MACK

I'm a man of the future, Doss. You know that about me. I'm your protector.

DOSSIE

But, "Plant the Implants"? I like the gap between wetware and hardware.

MACK

Oh, Doss. You're so sweet and old-fashioned.

(Dossie moves to the other chair and sits. She looks around, and is obviously getting impatient. She takes her own cellphone out of a pocket on her tunic and speaks into it.)

DOSSIE

Dossie, what time will Willan come to see us?

(A voice, like Dossie's, speaks from her phone.)

VOICE

Not to worry. He's on his way by all calculations I can make. Relax and enjoy the view.

DOSSIE

(To Mack) He is allowed to come here to see us, isn't he? By himself?

VOICE

All patients at the Hospital for the Digitally Challenged are free to move around within the walls and halls of the institution.

DOSSIE

No, Dossie, I wasn't asking you.

VOICE

My apologies.

DOSSIE

Never mind. It's okay.

MACK

Your Agent has it right. Though I expect some doctor to come first and give us a heads-up. Maybe take us to see Willan, instead.

DOSSIE

But you just heard that patients can move around at will.

MACK

But you see, that's Willan's whole problem. His manner of self-motivation, his acts of volition. That's what got him in trouble in the first place.

DOSSIE

I don't know what I'm going to say to him. It's been so long.

MACK

Tell him you still love him, of course. And all that.

DOSSIE

We have to get him released today. They'll implant him if we don't.

MACK

I know, I know. I hope he's made his case.

ANNOUNCEMENT

"Entering Solaria 1 is Case # 2468"

(Willan, wearing a light colored tunic and loose pants, and white sneakers, walks into the room, carrying a large, upright typewriter, with one sheet of paper in it. He puts it down on the plastic table, and goes to greet Dossie and Mack. He's

very upbeat. He approaches with arms wide, as if to hug them both at once.)

ANNOUNCEMENT

“Who do we appreciate?”

WILLAN

Let’s hug.

DOSSIE

May we hug?

MACK

Should we hug?

WILLAN

Can we hug? Of course we can. And, must.

(Willan gathers the other two in his embrace, and they form a small circle, and spin around for a short time, to the music & vocal of the tenor solo in Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy” movement, for possibly 30 seconds, as if in the atmosphere. It fades out. They stop spinning.)

DOSSIE

Case # 2468?

WILLAN

All case numbers end in 8, so they rhyme with “Who do we appreciate?”

DOSSIE

That’s crazy.

WILLAN

Wait for it.

ANNOUNCEMENT

“8: the symbol for Infinity Stands Upright!. Our goal, together.”

DOSSIE

What?

WILLAN

The infinity symbol standing up; it's all about our glorious, digital futures.

MACK

You've absorbed lots of the tone, Willan.

WILLAN

Dossie, you look so good. You make me want to come home.

DOSSIE

That's the effect I was going for.

MACK

And, what about me, buddy?

WILLAN

I hardly knew you, Mack, what with that mustache.

DOSSIE

I had exactly the same reaction. It's like he grew it overnight.

MACK

Must protect my identity. You're still toxic, my dear friend.

WILLAN

You're the man!

MACK

Don't joke, Willan.

DOSSIE

I liked him better without a caterpillar on his upper lip.

WILLAN

A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do. Right, Mack?

MACK

Always, my friend.

DOSSIE

How are you, Willan? That's what we want to know.

MACK

Yes, we've gotten conflicting reports.

WILLAN

Conflict is good. I relish it now, more than ever. I was so sure that I saw the doctor walk past my door at the appointed hour, for my injection, but he told me he'd already walked past an hour earlier. I tried to nail down the time, but he insisted I was wrong. I just wanted to believe myself again, but he told me that was my problem. Being right isn't all it's cracked up to be. Better to be calm. To rest. Wrap my arms around things that feel just right, as if they are. As if they are. As if they are.

MACK

You can't say things like that and expect to get out of here.

DOSSIE

Are you feeling okay, Willan?

MACK

They did recover all the hardware, computers, phones—

WILLAN

–I don't know. Not my concern, once I got here.

DOSSIE

Mack, why do you even bring that up?

MACK

Just want Willan to know the lay of the land.

WILLAN

Hardware? Who cares anymore? PTI obliterates all devices, for good.

(Pause)

DOSSIE

Let's try another tangent. How are they feeding you?

WILLAN

Three squares a day. Just like the army, I hear.

DOSSIE

Well, that's nice. Still using food.

WILLAN

No, no. Three literal green squares. Meant to be edible. On special occasions, they give us cubes, multi-colored, red, yellow, and green.

MACK

That's an option, for you. Now, that your job is gone. The military–.

WILLAN

–Not with my record for self-incrimination.

MACK

Yes, sadly, you're right about that. Though they need bodies for the war.

DOSSIE

You should just come home for a while, and we'll work it out.

MACK

Do they leave you alone enough? "Me time"?

WILLAN

Not so much. That was the trouble. Thinking and hearing only my thoughts.

DOSSIE

(Suddenly, standing.) I have got to pee. Where's the—

MACK

—Those water pills work like a charm.

WILLAN

So, everybody has to take them, now?

MACK

Oh, they're calling it the "Edema Epidemic". Catchy, no?

WILLAN

Pretty routine around here. We do nothing but sit.

DOSSIE

Thanks, guys. I'll find my way. *(She exits.)*

(After Dossie leaves, a silence falls between the men. They stare at each other. They stare at the window. Willan starts whistling/humming the Tenor tune we've just heard. Then, the scene outside starts to darken.)

WILLAN

She seems good. How's she been?

MACK

Better. You caused her some distraction. Understandable as it was.

WILLAN

Only a distraction?

MACK

Well, you know how hard she works on keeping her focus.

WILLAN

She is, as we know, so old-fashioned.

(Pause)

MACK

How are you, really? What's the doctor say? You seem good.

WILLAN

I seem to be functioning normally. Not obsessively, most of the time.

MACK

Well, that's good. Will they let you out?

WILLAN

Oh, I can leave any time I want. I can throw that chair through the window right now, and get out.

MACK

Why, in the name of all that's digital, would you do that?

WILLAN

To show my own agency, I think they call it. Making my own choices, again, without interference, even if making bad choices. They're not sure that's all to the good, but my brain activity shows volition. Not obsession.

MACK

That sounds less than optimal.

WILLAN

It's a step.

MACK

But, what keeps you from going right back to what got you in here?

WILLAN

My volition, rather than my fear.

MACK

Fear? Fear of—

WILLAN

—Oh, Mack, don't let's go back over all that. I'm trying to put it behind me.

MACK

Of course. Where it should be. I was just concerned.

WILLAN

Of course. As you have always been.

MACK

Why do you say it like that?

(The scene outside has become a rather violent storm, rain, lightning, trees thrashing, no sound.)

WILLAN

I know you have always wanted to take Dossie away from me.

MACK

Willan, what? Why would you say that? I'm your friend.

WILLAN

Of course, I know that. What's that got to do with it?

MACK

You sure are more aggressive than before.

WILLAN

Assertive, perhaps. Forthright? Less secretive, perhaps.

MACK

Are you suggesting that I'm secretive?

WILLAN

Let's be honest with each other.

(Willan goes to the cellphone on the window sill; he picks it up and hands it to Mack. Who, sheepishly, takes it and puts it back in his tunic pocket.)

WILLAN *(cont.)*

Let's not fight, Mack. Let's just enjoy our time here.

MACK

I have nothing but hope for your recovery, Willan.

WILLAN

You know, I stopped using my own CP Unit. I got tired of hearing my own voice. They let me have my typewriter and some precious paper. Therapy.

MACK

Why did you type all your letters to us?

WILLAN

To kill off any cookie trails. By the way, can you type?

MACK

Only with my thumbs.

WILLAN

Opposable thumbs. What makes us human. Though, of course, opossums, pandas, and tree frogs have them, too.

MACK

It's so refreshing to hear you speak of other things, things you've learned while here in the facility.

WILLAN

Facility, indeed. By the way, I have to finish my "Release Application Essay," today. Care to check the rough draft, so far? Offer any advice?

MACK

If you don't mind.

WILLAN

Go ahead, go ahead. Make revisions, if you like.

(Mack goes to the typewriter. Inspects what he can read on the sheet of paper. Then sits and tries to type, but with only his thumbs. Frustrated quickly.)

MACK

How the hell did we ever use these contraptions?

WILLAN

How do you like it?

MACK

Sounds reasonable.

WILLAN

My Agent wrote it. It sounds like me, but it's not a word of me.

MACK

But, what does that matter, if it'll get you out?

WILLAN

Thing is, in the beginning, I wrote prompts just asking for information. But, I then wanted advice, too. Suggestions, choices. My agent, named, of course, "Willan", would help with things like: "What's the most sexually appealing mustache to the female?" But, then, I started asking about Dossie, and should I have married her, should I have stayed with her. Or, why I didn't think the "Bay of Pigs II" was a good idea. Not telling the locals or thinking through the consequences. Then, "Willan" got really fried when I asked about unions in our department. "He" would say things like: "Willan, these may be questions better left unasked and unanswered." He couldn't handle any questions about my mother. That's when I went off, myself. The only solution. Phones, Tablets, Laptops, whatever I could get my hands on. Interestingly, "Willan" helped me plan some of the early thefts.

MACK

I know all this. Remember, you sent me letters, too. I had to turn them over to the authorities.

WILLAN

Did you now? You were always a good friend. Dossie is so attractive.

MACK

Of course she is. You're lucky to have her. Her loyalty is unquestioned.

WILLAN

Don't I know it.

MACK

I hope you do.

(Dossie returns, paying no attention to the ongoing storm outside. She notices the cellphone is gone from the windowsill. Willan sees this.)

WILLAN

Not to worry, dear. I gave it to Mack.

DOSSIE

Oh, honey. I'm so sorry, so stupid of me. My social skills are gone.

WILLAN

Of course they are.

MACK

Would you like to discuss any other topics, or will they kick us out?

WILLAN

I have no idea. I think I might have another few days, take a few more cognitive tests, and all that. Elephant, rhino, jackass.

DOSSIE

So, they think you're able to function like the rest of us, now?

WILLAN

With any luck. More or less.

MACK

Hopefully more than less.

(They all chuckle.)

WILLAN

Can't resist a bad joke, can you?

DOSSIE

He's impossible.

WILLAN

Yes, but we love him, don't we?

DOSSIE

Of course, we do. He's our Mack!

MACK

Okay. That's enough, guys.

(The scene in the window changes again, fully now, back to the opening bucolic stillness. Nobody but Willan notices.)

DOSSIE

I thought you were getting out today.

WILLAN

Not so sure right now.

DOSSIE

Why, I have everything ready at home.

WILLAN

That's sweet of you, Dossie. You always were the sweetest part of my life.

DOSSIE

I wish you'd stop talking like a robot.

WILLAN

Some of my best friends are robots. Present company excepted!

DOSSIE

I've missed you so—

WILLAN

—I'm eminently miss-able. Quick delete. PTI the Thief!

MACK

Do you need to sit down, buddy?

WILLAN

No, I prefer not to sit down. But, thanks ever so much for your concern.

DOSSIE

Willan, you seem so edgy all of a sudden.

WILLAN

It's nothing. I just can't stand the view.

DOSSIE

Why ever not? It's so lovely looking out there.

WILLAN

Lovely looking, yes, you're so right.

MACK

Listen, maybe we've overstayed our visit. You're sounding unhappy.

WILLAN

Oh, I'm happy, my friends. Happy as I ever was.

(The scene in the window changes suddenly, to a stormy mess.)

DOSSIE

What do you mean?

WILLAN

What do you mean, "What do you mean?"

DOSSIE

I don't see what's happening. I just want to love you, make love with you again.

WILLAN

Make love, not war. How quaint. In front of Mack?

MACK

Maybe he is getting agitated.

WILLAN

Damn right I am. You go on home, the two of you. And, make some love, for me, for all of us. It's the wave of the future, now that we can't and don't do any work. Fuck til the cows come home, til the sea rises like a giant tsunami, and washes us clean off our ipads.

MACK

He does seem to have lost his grip.

DOSSIE

Honey, Willan, honey, what's happening to you?

WILLAN

I know why you're both here. To calm me down. And, that just riles me more. It's what you were always doing. Making patterns for me to feel safe inside, to feel so powerful and right. But, I knew you were lying. I knew it was a huge con. And, you don't even...well, Mack, I think you know what you're doing. Dossie, you're just so, well, docile. I should call you "Doss-isle". You just want it to be love, and it can't be just love, my love.

DOSSIE

Willan, I wish you'd stop talking crazy. I wish you'd just come home with me, and we'd start over.

WILLAN

And, where would I sleep? With Mack there?

DOSSIE

What are you saying?

MACK

Stop it, now, Willan. You're overloading, hyperventilating.

WILLAN

Am I? That's fine. Maybe you'll leave me alone, and stop trying to calm me down, tell me how smart I am, how I don't have to be worried about anything anymore, because you've got it all figured out, if we just do it all a little faster and smarter, with the right data dump. Failure is not an option.

DOSSIE

Mack, I think we need to get the doctor. I think he needs a sedative.

MACK

(Reaching into his tunic.) A sedative? We don't need those anymore.

WILLAN

I was powerful then. I was alone, and no one knew what I was or what I was doing. I didn't care. They lived in their stupid little lives, and I had my own world, full of the gadgets they all took so seriously. I loved watching them fritter away their time, anxious that they couldn't do anything anymore, couldn't think or act without their stuff. I really wanted them to see for themselves, but they couldn't think it through. I just couldn't do it any more. There was no hope; they were so far down the rabbit hole of their rabbit holes. When they found out, they thought I was stealing to make money, but I never sold a single unit. Dossie couldn't deal with my long nights out; she was sure I was with someone else. And, I was, in a way. I was with myself. I had to move out; I rented my own cubicle, and it became my warren. I strode through the metal caverns and cluttered alleyways of all the hardware, like a colossus, sure that this was the way. I'd show them the way. I was the way.

MACK

Of course, Willan. You had to do something, under the circumstances.

WILLAN

My nightmare...my whole space, all the devices, with their lids up, their mouths open, as it were. Their screens shining. The place is bright and shadows are bouncing off the walls. And they're all laughing at me. And, then, they all go dark at once. And, I'm shivering in the black.

(There's a pause. The scene outside grows calmer, the sunlight seems to return.)

MACK

Really, Will, you should sit down.

WILLAN

When's the last time you called me that?

DOSSIE

Will, honey, please listen to Mack.

WILLAN

Like when we were children. I like "Will"....but my CP Unit started acting up.

MACK

It was only trying to help.

WILLAN

It didn't like that I wanted to talk about my name, my new name. It felt abandoned or something. I knew my mother was dying, but could not do anything about that, had no prompts to fix that. When I asked if I was being too self-centered, it actually laughed, and said, "Willan, you can't ask such questions." Then, it repeated lies I had told it about Dossie. And, I knew.

DOSSIE

I don't know what else to say. What to say next.

MACK

I have got to pee. Don't do anything rash. I'll be right back.

(Mack exits in a hurry, holding his crotch. Some silence between Willan and Dossie.)

WILLAN

Does he take long?

DOSSIE

He's a man. We better hurry.

WILLAN

I know, I know.

DOSSIE

He has a T R U in his other pocket.

WILLAN

I thought as much. I have to get it.

DOSSIE

What lies did you tell, Will?

WILLAN

That you were part of Mack's team that talked my mother into her PTI.

DOSSIE

Let me lead the way.

WILLAN

My love.

*(Mack returns, adjusting settings
on his Taser Remote Unit. Then
shoves it into his tunic pocket.)*

MACK

You know, Will, when your spree set off a nationwide movement, hardware disappeared all over the place. "Heist the Hardware", "Steal the Hardstuff".

WILLAN

It was wrong of me.

MACK

You were a fool. Your whole movement just accelerated PTI research, development, and deployment. Human trials. Before they were safe.

WILLAN

Did you convince my mother to have her implant?

MACK

I told her about the benefits.

WILLAN

I scared my Agent when I asked about why I was cruel to Dossie, or why I let my mother die alone. At first, it just told me to listen to my feelings, and not beat myself up. But, when I asked about seeing myself in everything, always, its warnings became more high-pitched.

MACK

Your mother did the right thing in the end. She was dying already.

WILLAN

Of course, she stopped seeing her doctor, listening only to her Agent's voice, her own voice, telling herself that she knew better. Then, she started listening to you.

DOSSIE

But Mack, she had second thoughts. She got confused. Afraid of me. Afraid of Will.

MACK

You can't have "second thoughts". It overloads the implant.

WILLAN

Dossie, you knew but never told me.

DOSSIE

She wanted the implant removed. But soon as she had those thoughts, she started having migraines, and then the stroke that killed her.

WILLAN

So, changing her mind killed her?

MACK

The early models did malfunction, sometimes. She overloaded the implant.

WILLAN

She was your guinea pig. But so was everybody. You only tested on humans.

MACK

But, she volunteered for her PTI implant to show you. Show you the futility of your quest. The devices you stole were not the problem. You couldn't steal the future, the inevitable. She gave herself to the program. The future of "Wet Hardware!"

WILLAN

Why do you say "Plant the Implant implant"?

MACK

I don't know. That's not the point.

WILLAN

Oh, I got the point. When I kissed her stony forehead, in the funeral home. Saw the tiny scar above her hairline.

DOSSIE

Guys, let's put a stop to this. Let's stop all the fighting.

WILLAN

Dear Dossie. Never could stand the chaos. Honey, look outside. See how peaceful it is.

MACK

Leave her alone.

DOSSIE

Come on, guys. A goodbye hug!. Like when we were children.

WILLAN

Again?

MACK

Any chance to hug Dossie.

(The three of them approach downstage center. They form another ring together, and start to spin. Willan reaches into Mack's tunic pocket and withdraws the T R U. Mack tries to stop him, but Willan pushes a button, and Mack is stunned. Falls to the floor.)

WILLAN

Come on, we don't have long. He'll start to come out of it—

DOSSIE

—How did you know how?

WILLAN

Part of my therapy. When I got rambunctious.

(Mack begins to recover.)

MACK

Will, you need to relax. Love your mother, she was a hero, like you—

WILLAN

—Don't move, my dear friend.

DOSSIE

Switch the tunics. And here. Try on one of these.

(Dossie removes a handful of fake mustaches from her tunic pocket. She places them on the table.)

DOSSIE *(cont.)*

“Dossie”, which mustache is most appropriate for a villain? The Chevron, the Walrus, the Dali, or the Pencil?

VOICE

Most opinion suggests that the Pencil is the best indicator of villainy.

(Mack tries to get up, and Willan stuns him again. Willan points the TRU at the window, and “draws” so we see bars coming down from its top and across from its right. Until there’s a cross-hatch pattern on the view. As this happens, we hear the opening of the Talking Heads song “Once in a Lifetime”, but at a very low volume.)

DOSSIE

It’s not a window; it’s a fucking screen.

WILLAN

He just switches the function, from the Taser, for me, to the Remote for the screen. With the implant, he won’t need his TRU. Just think it or speak it.

DOSSIE

Here, switch tunics and ‘staches.

(They switch tunics between Mack and Willan, and remove the fake mustache from Mack’s face.

Willan puts on that one and then applies the pencil thin one to Mack's face. They seat Mack at the typewriter, put his head on it, and spread his fingers across the keyboard.)

WILLAN

He won't even know which end is up, which thumb to use.

(Dossie and Willan prepare to leave. Willan now looks a bit like Mack did at the play's opening. Willan starts to place the TRU on the back of Mack's neck.)

WILLAN (cont.)

They won't catch on, for quite some time. They can't tell the difference.

DOSSIE

No, no, Will. Don't. Don't touch him with it. That'll kill him. He's in a complete cramp now, won't know what to do when he wakes up.

WILLAN

He killed my mother with his fucking future of "wet hardware". He knew we were made of the same stuff. She once said, "If it's my time, it's my time."

DOSSIE

Let's just go. Let's get out. We'll be long gone. Like dolphins.

(Slowly, closing music comes up, on the lines, "Same as it ever was, same as it ever was." from the official video of The Talking

Heads: "Once in a Lifetime".)

(Willan and Dossie exit, in the pose of Adam and Eve, as if ashamed of their nakedness, leaving Eden.)

(As lights go down and stage goes dark, David Bowie's "Heroes" comes up and plays the allowed time, enough to hear the lyric: "We could be heroes, just for one day." Stops abruptly in darkness.)

END OF PLAY.