

# **THE SURGEON**

"Trials & Tribulations"

[PILOT]

Written by

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**TEASER**

**INT. MERCER HOME - OFFICE - DAWN**

CLOSE ON, a wall-framed FLORIDA MEDICAL LICENSE.

Below the frame, lying on a deflating AIR MATTRESS, we find --  
**SOLOMON MERCER** (39) slighting his prized accomplishment.

Our disheveled salt-and-peppered giant sleeps through his  
GOOGLE NEWS ALERTS, but wakes to A DOUBLE KNOCK instead.

GIRL (O.S.)

Dad...

BOY (O.S.)

Open up.

As the knob turns, Solomon barely glimpses at the door. He's  
stuck mumble reading the notifications on his SMARTPHONE.

SOLOMON

Shouldn't you both be at school?

BOY (O.S.)

We made something for you.

Solomon's MESS OF A SPACE is christened with MEDICAL BOOKS,  
LEGAL DOCUMENTS, and SURGICAL TOOLS scattered around.

He swivels across the air mattress to stand up, just as A  
FAMILY DRAWING slides underneath the door. He picks it up.

WE READ: "THE MERCERS" hand-crafted to perfection.

GIRL (O.S.)

C'mon, let's leave him alone.

SOLOMON

My lil' calligraphers... Thank you.

WE HEAR, footsteps down the hallway, gaining closer.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)

Did you guys do your homework?

WOMAN (O.S.)

Go wait by the car.

(beat)

Solomon, we're about to leave.

SOLOMON

Hold up--

Solomon rests both hands on the door, as if he's shutting her out. Then again, maybe he's shutting himself inside.

WOMAN (O.S.)  
I have to get to work.

SOLOMON  
You're not treating this situation like the opportunity it is...

WOMAN (O.S.)  
Opportunity for whom? This isn't an overnight surgical procedure. You can't just cut out little bad bits and expect everything to heal up.

SOLOMON  
You wanted me home more.

WOMAN (O.S.)  
Yeah, but not like this.

SOLOMON  
This? This'll all be over soon.

WOMAN (O.S.)  
I'll believe it, when I see it.

SOLOMON  
For Pete's sake, right here in black and white...

Solomon plucks A MANUAL and reads the HIGHLIGHTED PASSAGE.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)  
The hospital's S-O-P states "Brain Death" is determined by a certified physician, not by any member of the transplant team.

WOMAN (O.S.)  
You don't have to convince me, remember? I'm not the one that brought this on our family.

SOLOMON  
Tsk. Don't put that on me.

A contemptuous Solomon holds back, as her footsteps fade. He takes a lap around the office, then grabs his robe.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)  
Avery? Wait--

**INT. MERCER HOME - GARAGE - DAY**

WE MEET, **AVERY MERCER** (36) hailing to NEIGHBORS as she nudges her school-uniformed **LYDIA** (9) and **PORTER** (7) toward the car.

The strange and shiftless neighbors don't wave back.

PORTER

Are you two getting a divorce?

AVERY

In the car. Let's go.

**INT. AVERY'S CAR - DAY**

Avery slowly pulls out. Then taps her GARAGE CONTROLLER.

Solomon runs down the FRONT WALKWAY, but Avery's insulated in her own world -- until she hits the CAR BRAKES.

Eyes bulged, Avery slants to the backseat:

The kids are preoccupied on their TABLETS.

She faces forward to take another gander, when --

**EXT. MERCER HOME - DRIVEWAY - DAY**

Flat-footed Solomon finally catches Avery's attention.

SOLOMON

I was doing my job--

Avery POINTS, as the kids JAWS DROP.

AVERY

There's a job.

Then Solomon blinks over his shoulder, and WE REVEAL --

"K-I-L-L-E-R" graffitied across their GARAGE DOOR PANEL.

Stone-faced, Solomon blindly defers to Avery.

**EXT. DADE COUNTY HOSPITAL - MAIN ENTRANCE - DAY**

LOCAL NEWS REPORTERS emerge onto the scene of a vast and popular hospital. Then --

WE MEET, **NATHAN SHUGER** (45) from the BOOTS up. Nathan's mum, yet holding back a mouthful:

NEWS REPORTER

It's been over two months since the passing of Vanessa Shuger... A Dade County Hospital patient whose family claims the hospital's top surgeon and P-A both hurried to declare her brain dead-- in order to harvest organs from her body.

(beat)

The widower himself, Nathan Shuger is here with us now after filing a massive malpractice lawsuit -- set to challenge "exploitation" on the highest level.

Nathan tenses up.

NEWS REPORTER (CONT'D)

Nathan, if you win... What would you do with four million dollars?

**INT. DADE COUNTY HOSPITAL - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY**

ON THE MONITOR, A MASKED SOLOMON steps back from his SURGICAL PROCEDURE when A RAGING NATHAN enters the operation room.

SOLOMON (V.O.)

Mr. Shuger?

NATHAN (V.O.)

Stop what you're doing.

SOLOMON (V.O.)

Get him out of here!

BOARD MEMBER #1 (O.S.)

Sorry, when is the trial hearing?

JULIE (O.S.)

A year... Maybe months.

A brassy **DR. JULIE NGUYEN** (40s) abruptly PAUSES the LCD VIDEO PROJECTOR. She sits at head of the 20' conference table smack dab in the middle between two strained groups:

LEFT SIDE -- Health Care Physicians and Surgeons.

RIGHT SIDE -- Hospital Board Members and Lawyers.

JULIE (CONT'D)

Reality check: We all messed up. The husband should've never been able to enter in the first place.

BOARD MEMBER #1

If not for that surgeon... You might've been able to spin this.

JULIE

Fact remains, that surgeon is one of our top generals and my right-hand man, having performed a dozen successful organ procurements at this very hospital.

BOARD MEMBER #1

Julie, do you know what solidarity could cost? Four mill plus damages.

JULIE

His return helps dispel negligence.

BOARD MEMBER #2

A test run? Negative.

BOARD MEMBER #1

Our brand needs recovering.

JULIE

As Chief of Surgery, I feel that my guy's reputation is on the line--

BOARD MEMBER #1

So is this hospital's. Answer's no.  
(beat)

Solomon Mercer and whoever his P-A is, will not be welcomed back until the board unanimously agrees.

BOARD MEMBER #2

Just stay on top of the press.

**INT. DADE COUNTY HOSPITAL - JULIE'S OFFICE - DAY**

Julie staggers into her office and shuts the door. She takes a beat to decompress. Then heads over to the BULLETIN BOARD.

CLOSE ON, magazine and online news CUT OUTS of a working-class husband, father, and friend...

WE READ: "Surgeon Accused of Fast-tracking Death in order to Harvest Organs." Then another headline --

"Shuger Family Names Hospital for Death Victim in Civil Malpractice Lawsuit." Then another --

"Dade County Hospital Suspends Transplant Surgeon After Possible Breach of Ethics." Then --

Julie recoils from disappointment.

**INT. MERCER HOME - GARAGE - DAY**

Solomon rummages through his garage shelves. He stops to wave to A DOG WALKER, who responds by SPITTING on his driveway.

A surprised Solomon grins and bears it. Then heads out with A PAINT TIN and BRUSHES.

**INT. MIAMI ASYLUM OFFICE - INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY**

Avery grabs a tissue to pass to today's ASYLUM SEEKER, accompanied by her SPANISH TRANSLATOR.

ASYLUM SEEKER

They're animals... I can't go back.

SPANISH TRANSLATOR

Are breaks allowed?

AVERY

Not during interviews. We should be done soon.

(beat)

Let's go back to the day of her husband's gang initiation.

SPANISH TRANSLATOR

What do you want to know?

AVERY

What made you support your husband's drug business?

SPANISH TRANSLATOR

She asks... Why did you help Fernando with the drugs?

ASYLUM SEEKER

I love him. Not the money.

Avery eagle-eyes the Asylum Seeker with curiosity.

**EXT. MERCER HOME - DRIVEWAY - DAY**

Solomon meticulously wipes over the disparaging moniker that has plagued his family for months. He takes a short break...

Then catches a glimpse of his wilted VEGETABLE GARDEN.

**INT. MIAMI ASYLUM OFFICE - LOCKER ROOM - DAY**

Avery checks her cell phone to find "4 MISSED CALLS" from Solomon. Then dials him back.

SOLOMON (V.O.)  
Can we start today over?

AVERY  
Only if you're making dinner?

SOLOMON (V.O.)  
Done. What else?

AVERY  
Let's not fight anymore or at least until this mess gets resolved.

SOLOMON (V.O.)  
I love you.

AVERY  
(beat)  
I'll see you later.

**EXT. MERCER HOME - VEGETABLE GARDEN - DAY**

Solomon side-steps through the garden with a full tray of VEGETABLE SEEDLINGS in each hand.

He crouches down to remove the DYING PLANTS. Then begins to transplant the FRESH SEEDS one-by-one.

**EXT. MIAMI ASYLUM OFFICE - PARKING GARAGE - NIGHT**

In the heart of DOWNTOWN, we find Avery exiting from her 5-story office building with a deep sigh of relief.

She side-eyes the overhanging AMERICAN FLAG, as she hustles to the parking garage...

Once underneath, Avery stops abruptly! She's forgotten something, but --

WE HEAR, CLUNKY FOOTSTEPS nearby.

Avery swiftly makes A CALL. It's RINGING...

She scans the area: Half startled, half curious.

Avery hangs up, switching her hips free and clear, until --



A MASKED MAN mauls her to the floor, between two parked SUVs.

Avery's adrenaline kicks in, as she aggressively fights back. She elbows his LOWER RIB CAGE repeatedly, then shoots up off the floor. Avery grabs her stuff and strides toward safety.

It looks like she's won the battle, but unexpectedly gets KNIFED IN THE BACK...

Avery tumbles, sliding across the HOOD of a car.

She takes a deep breath from her injury. He's banged up too and can barely kick her belongings aside. Then --

A CAR drives downward on the opposite ramp, distracting our masked assailant from finishing his kill.

The beaming HEADLIGHTS loop the parking garage corner, finding a godawful scene: SCREECH!

A beat of cold stares, as SOMEONE pops out the car, signaling the DOOR AJAR WARNING. This scares off her wounded attacker.

Thank, **WILLIE** (30s), Avery's handsomely flamboyant colleague.

He freezes at the sight of BLOOD trickling off the BUMPER.

WILLIE

Av-Avery?

**INT. MERCER HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT**

Solomon washes his hands. Then stops to fancy his SILVER WEDDING BAND. Meanwhile, Lydia sets the dinner table.

Solomon visits the kitchen island and starts dicing tomatoes, when the PHONE RINGS --

SOLOMON

Hello?

(beat)

Yes, this is...

**END OF TEASER**



SOLOMON  
She's going to need surgery--

**INT. DADE COUNTY HOSPITAL - SURGERY WAITING AREA - DAY**

Paralyzed with dread, Solomon blocks the double swing doors.  
He peeps inside every time someone enters the OPERATION ROOM.  
Meanwhile, A POLICE DETECTIVE creeps up behind him.

POLICE DETECTIVE  
Good morning... Are you Mr. Mercer?

SOLOMON  
Doctor Mercer.  
(glimpses over)  
Not now.

POLICE DETECTIVE  
I'm here about your wife's assault.

SOLOMON  
I said, not now.

Julie exits the operation room, as our Police Detective respects Solomon's wishes.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)  
You gotta let me in.

JULIE  
You know why I can't do that.

SOLOMON  
Julie?

Julie firmly shakes her head "No".

JULIE  
Once she's out of surgery, I will  
come and get you.

SOLOMON  
You better have your best on this--

JULIE  
Solomon, I should tell you now...  
The attacker grazed her kidney.  
(beat)  
Avery's only kidney.

All of sudden, Solomon can't take it anymore -- and bails.

**EXT./INT. MERCER HOME - KITCHEN - DAY**

Solomon enters. He drudges through the foyer. Then finds comfort in the kitchen.

PORTER (O.S.)

Mom?

Solomon opens the refrigerator covered with DAILY MEAL PLANS. However, he can't stomach anything.

SOLOMON

Porter... Lydia?

(beat)

I'm down here.

Then behind the fridge door, we find his precocious children.

LYDIA

Are you taking us to school?

SOLOMON

No school today for you two.

PORTER

Where's Mommy?

SOLOMON

Well, she was with me.

(beat)

Your mother's at...

Solomon tries to abandon the kitchen for a less tense space.

LYDIA

Dad, you're scaring me.

PORTER

What's wrong?

He grabs a stool...

Then PUSH IN on A FAMILY PHOTO CLOCK.

**INT. DADE COUNTY HOSPITAL - ROOM 304 - NIGHT**

**DAMIEN** (20s), an iffy but well-financed coordinator from the regional organ procurement organization talks at HALF SPEED.

SOLOMON'S POV:

Everything is muddled, except for the TICKING of Damien's flashy HERMÈS WATCH, matching BELT, and SHOES.

We don't even hear a syllable -- just the BEATING WATCH combined with Avery's VITAL SIGNS, as she lays up in the hospital bed, betwixt two lifesavers.

Meanwhile, Solomon's gaze says: *'How can he afford all this?'*

Solomon watches Damien's WAXED EYEBROWS move up and down, as he reads from -- A WAITING LIST on an iPad.

INSERT: NAMES UPON NAMES hidden by ASTERISK SYMBOLS.

He visibly sees Avery's likelihood of transplantation with a deceased-donor organ will take weeks, months, years.

Then finally Damien's words pop into our eardrums:

DAMIEN

It's a very random yet unfettered algorithm. It only selects the next desired patient, based on the need for an organ.

SOLOMON

Fuck your waiting list!

DAMIEN

Excuse me, Sir--

SOLOMON

Damien, you're new right? You think I'm gonna' have my wife sit around while you guys play bingo with organs-- so you can raffle 'em off and make yourselves look good...

Solomon comes from behind his wife's bed, and slowly approaches Damien, face to face.

DAMIEN

It's not like I can just punch her name up on the list.

SOLOMON

What can you do?

DAMIEN

UNOS-- determines the standard for selection, which depends on medical urgency or geographic disparity.

(beat)

At any rate, a live donor is better than an organ from a cadaver.

SOLOMON

I know, I do this for a living.

DAMIEN

Then you should know there's over a  
100,000 distressed patients all  
waiting for organs themselves.

SOLOMON

That's why I don't want her to be  
one of the four to five thousand  
that die each year, waiting in bed  
strapped to a stupid dialysis mach--

(beat)

Do you know the cardiac risks?

Damien steps back.

DAMIEN

Why not an organ donation from a  
family member or friend... All the  
gifts, must mean there's somebody.

SOLOMON

I'm making calls, but it won't  
matter without a blood match.

(beat)

A-B negatives are rare to find.

WE HEAR, a snarky sigh behind Solomon, when --

SOLOMON (CONT'D)

What was that for?

An ominous beat fills the hospital room, as Solomon holds  
onto Damien's words. Then --

DAMIEN

Nothing... You're right. That's why  
folks are traveling overseas -- to  
buy organs on the Black Market.

Solomon gives Damien the nod of the head, as if to say  
*'That'll be just my luck.'*

**EXT. STREET MARKET - DAY**

**SUPERIMPOSE:** HAVANA, CUBA

A SEA OF NATIVES flood the marketplace for one-stop-shopping,  
as A JET PLANE SHADOW trails over their bodies.

**EXT. PRIVATE AIRPORT - TARMAC - DAY**

A SURGICAL TEAM of SIX descend from A LEARJET 45 XR, handing their bags to the most congenial SHUTTLE DRIVER in Havana.

SHUTTLE DRIVER  
Guess, I'll come back for the boss.

**INT. LEARJET - AIRCRAFT CABIN - DAY**

Still inside, we meet A PAPER-PUSHING, **GILL TAHARA** (30s) bound to his work. He's crunching one last set of numbers into his calculator, as his WIRELESS BLUETOOTH flashes --

MAN (OVER PHONE)  
Where are we now?

GILL  
I'm a little shy of eight hundred.

MAN (OVER PHONE)  
How?

GILL  
Still waiting on wire transfers.

MAN (OVER PHONE)  
That's it?

GILL  
We-- also lost two prospects before they could make payment.

MAN (OVER PHONE)  
You're fucking... This expansion isn't working. If you can't manage to make goal in retirement states, then you're useless to me.  
(beat)  
Where are you?

GILL  
Just landed in Havana.

MAN (OVER PHONE)  
Finish this last transplantation, and call it quits.

GILL  
(thinking)  
Let me fix this... I can drop off the surgical team and be stateside in an hour. Two tops.

MAN (OVER PHONE)  
No, why should I let you?

GILL  
I have other client-prospects to  
vet... donors too.  
(beat)  
Dad, we're just getting started.

MAN (OVER PHONE)  
(sucks teeth)  
You have one week to prove  
yourself.

Gill hangs up the phone. Then sends A TEXT MESSAGE.

GILL  
Pilot...

PILOT (O.S.)  
Yes, Mr. Tahara?

A MILITANT PILOT exits from the cockpit.

GILL  
Call me, Gill-- I'm not my father.  
(beat)  
Change of plans. Take me back.

PILOT  
We should probably wait for your  
team, and check maintenance first.

GILL  
Not if you want to get paid.  
(beat)  
They'll be done with surgery in a  
few days. I'll send you back.

PILOT  
(concerned)  
Yes, Mr. Tah-- Gill.

Off Gill, prepping A LINE OF COCAINE.

**INT. DADE COUNTY HOSPITAL - CAFÉ - DAY**

Solomon and his kids hold onto their LUNCH TRAYS for dear  
life, as MEDICAL STAFFERS size them up:

The Mercers try to ignore all this GOSSIPY ATTENTION.



SOLOMON  
You guys sit and wait right here.

LYDIA  
Dad, where are you going?

SOLOMON  
To do some homework... Eat up.

**INT. DADE COUNTY HOSPITAL - JULIE'S OFFICE - DAY**

Solomon sneaks inside. He bumps straight into Julie's BULLETIN BOARD. Then --

He GAGS at the HEADLINES that have memorialized his current work situation. Then --

Solomon starts ripping down each NEWS CLIPPING one-by-one, and trashes them with wounded pride.

He sits behind Julie's desk. Powers on the computer.

Then signs into DCH's PATIENT PORTAL.

INSERT: BILLING CHARGES on "AVERY MERCER."

Solomon leans back and ponders for a beat.

SOLOMON  
C'mon Solomon... Think!

Next, he stumbles back onto her PROFILE PAGE -- and stares at the computer screen.

Solomon clenches his fists.

After a long beat of silence, he opens A PRIVATE BROWSER and creates A GOOGLE SEARCH:

"HOW TO BUY AN ORGAN ON THE BLACK MARKET?"

Solomon takes another beat, then hits DELETE until the search field box is empty.

**INT. DADE COUNTY HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - DAY**

Solomon rejoins his kids outside of Avery's room, when --

PORTER  
Miss Julie.

LYDIA  
Miss Julie.

JULIE  
(forehead kisses)  
Hi guys... Doctor?

SOLOMON  
You two go sit over there. I have  
to talk to, Miss Julie.

**INT. DADE COUNTY HOSPITAL - ROOM 304 - DAY**

Solomon stands by Avery's bed, as Julie passes him her CHART.

JULIE  
I was thinking, Solomon.  
(beat)  
What if you obtained residency in  
another state?

SOLOMON  
No, this is my home.

JULIE  
It's a sure way to expedite the  
organ donation process.  
(beat)  
It worked for Steve Jobs.

SOLOMON  
No, my wife will wait to be treated  
right here -- at this hospital.

JULIE  
With one dire kidney... You know  
how this ends.  
(beat)  
You do want Avery higher up on that  
waiting list... Right?

SOLOMON  
Of course.

JULIE  
Then there's less populated states  
like Delaware, Tennessee... What  
about Virginia?  
(beat)  
I know you can afford it. Pick one.

SOLOMON  
The thing that sucks the most...  
I've helped build up the patient  
care at this hospital, and now that  
my family is in need...

(MORE)

SOLOMON (CONT'D)  
 no one can do anything... Not  
 relatives, friends, or my defense  
 attorney.

(beat)  
 So much for the board, huh?

Julie drops her head, then brings it right back up.

JULIE  
 Solomon, don't make this personal.  
 Not when you have this civil case  
 pending. It'll just make this whole  
 thing worse.

(beat)  
 Take my advice. Register Avery in  
 another state. It's likely your  
 best course of action.

SOLOMON  
 Thanks Julie, but you don't have to  
 talk to me like I'm not a surgeon.

JULIE  
 I didn't mean--

SOLOMON  
 You can go now.

Julie heads out, but turns right back around:

JULIE  
 Solomon... A move would do you and  
 your the family some good. Aren't  
 you're tired of arguing with Avery  
 about all the harassment or random  
 graffiti artists tagging your home,  
 and branding you-- a killer.

(beat)  
 Yeah, she told me.

SOLOMON  
 Get, out... Get out.

Julie takes heed. He's ready to RAGE. Swallowing expletives.

Unable to hem his life together, Solomon shoves the spare  
 HOSPITAL BED into the door... Blocking any entry!

He buries his face in his hands for a moment. Then --

Off Solomon, revealing a mixture of anger and trepidation:

He preys on the X-RAY FILM VIEWER docked with her CT SCAN.

Then flips the switch.

SOLOMON (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
(tearful)  
Don't worry, Vee.

CLOSE ON, targeting image of Avery's INFLAMED KIDNEY.

**END OF ACT ONE**