

Focus Testing

By

Robert Cummins

Copyright 2016 Robert Cummins

CHARACTER LIST

Deborah, Manager

Aaron, Employee

Sarah, Employee

Marshall, Employee

Charles, CEO

John, Respondent

Barry, Respondent

Todd, Respondent

Respondent 1

Respondent 2

Man

Policeman 1

Policeman 2

ACT 1Scene 1.1

There is a desk holding a computer and a headset. Next to this, an office chair. There is a sofa and an armchair. Next to these, a small table holding a phone. There is a one-way mirror at the fourth wall. The whole environment is gray. Every room is like this.

Three respondents, one named Todd, sit on the sofa and the armchair. Enter Barry.

BARRY

Is everyone here? Yeah. Okay. Hi. I'm Barry. I'll be your interviewer. I'd like to begin by asking you some questions. I'd like to end that way too. In fact, I'll be asking you some questions this entire goddamn time. First. You all took the screener, right? You qualify? There isn't anyone here who isn't supposed to be here? Right. Okay. Beautiful. So this whole thing is on coffee. Yes, I have tasted the coffee. No, I can't tell you what I think of it. First off, why do you drink coffee? You, we'll start with you.

RESPONDENT 1

Well, for me, it helps with my.

BARRY

For you? What do you mean for you? Of course it's for you, you're the one talking. Go ahead.

RESPONDENT 1

Well, it helps with my concentration. I'm a bit scatterbrained.

BARRY

I'll bet you are.

RESPONDENT 1

Excuse me?

BARRY

How about you? Why do you drink coffee?

RESPONDENT 2

I like it.

BARRY

Is that the only reason?

RESPONDENT 2

Isn't that enough?

BARRY

You'll just do anything you like, will you? Plenty of things in this world people like doing. Doesn't mean they should. That's temptation, isn't it?

RESPONDENT 2

Well, it's my fuel for the day. It gets me up in the morning.

BARRY

So you can do what?

RESPONDENT 2

So I can what? What are you asking me?

BARRY

Why do you get up in the morning?

RESPONDENT 2

Well, I've got a job. Things to do. Life is a great gift.

BARRY

Oh great gift, uh huh, alright, that's enough. Finally, you, why do you drink coffee?

TODD

I wish I was dead.

BARRY

Good answer. Now before we take a drink I'd like to ask you what you think of Ariadne coffee. No, I can't tell you if this is Ariadne coffee because the sponsor prefers to remain anonymous. So. What do you think of Ariadne coffee? Are you strongly favorable, somewhat favorable, neither favorable nor unfavorable, somewhat unfavorable, or strongly unfavorable?

RESPONDENT 1

I like their logo.

RESPONDENT 2

Oh, I love it. Whoever made is brilliant.

RESPONDENT 1

Of the maze.

RESPONDENT 2

A millionaire. It's not a maze.

BARRY

I'm asking.

RESPONDENT 1

It's not?

RESPONDENT 2

No, it's only got one path.

BARRY

I'm asking. What about the coffee? I'm asking about the goddamn coffee.

RESPONDENT 1

The coffee? It's good. I like it.

BARRY

It's good. Alright. So, are you strongly favorable, somewhat favorable?

RESPONDENT 1

Somewhat favorable.

BARRY

And you?

RESPONDENT 2

About the coffee?

BARRY

About the coffee. The flavors, the so on.

RESPONDENT 2

What are the choices again?

BARRY

Strongly favorable, somewhat favorable, neither favorable nor unfavorable, somewhat unfavorable, or strongly unfavorable.

RESPONDENT 2

Oh. Okay. Neither favorable nor unfavorable.

BARRY

And finally?

TODD

Strongly unfavorable. It tastes like pure shit.

BARRY

Great. Good. Stimulating. Now drink from cup A and tell me what you think.

RESPONDENT 1

It's kind of bitter.

BARRY

Bitter. Fascinating.

RESPONDENT 2

I strongly agree. I don't think Ariadne should release this.

BARRY

Who told you it was Ariadne?

RESPONDENT 2

You just asked us about Ariadne.

BARRY

Doesn't mean they're going to release it.

RESPONDENT 2

Well, whoever.

BARRY

And what difference does it make? You're going to buy it anyway. You know you are, you fucking dumbass.

TODD

Hey, should you be telling us what to think like this?

BARRY

Uh, I'm just probing. What, you can't handle my probing?

TODD

You're not probing. You're just, you've had a fucking attitude this entire time, bro.

BARRY

Listen, asshole, every week I have two hundred different people coming in talking about a dozen different things. You think I care about you or your opinions personally? No way in fucking hell. People like you are pathetic.

TODD

Oh, the people you work for?

BARRY

I don't work for you.

TODD

Your customers.

BARRY

Who's giving who money?

TODD

Who make you your fucking paycheck.

BARRY

You know, you come in here and you think your perspective on the world is so important it deserves compensation. Well, I personally don't give a shit what you think about this fucking coffee. Or anything, for that matter.

TODD

Well, try fucking faking it then.

BARRY

You don't tell me.

TODD

Fucking fake it. Don't take it out on us when we're just here to make some money and drink some coffee.

BARRY

You don't tell me how to conduct this interview.

TODD

You're not conducting shit. You're just acting like an asshole.

BARRY

Fuck you.

Todd throws his coffee at Barry. Barry punches Todd in the face. A fight erupts. Enter Deborah.

DEBORAH

(to respondents) Call security.

Exit Respondent 1, 2. Deborah grabs Barry's shoulder. Barry relents and struts around in circles.

BARRY

I'm tired of this shit.

DEBORAH

I'm so sorry, Todd. Please step out, I'll deal with him.

BARRY

I'm tired of it.

TODD

I'm not going to leave you in here with this maniac.

DEBORAH

Please. Trust me. I can deal with him.

TODD

Go fuck yourself, you bitter piece shit.

Exit Todd.

BARRY

I'm tired of begging to the fucking mob for their fucking opinions. I'm tired of hearing fucking voices. I've had enough.

DEBORAH

Barry. Don't come any closer. The police are coming.

BARRY

Let them come. Let us all come.

DEBORAH

I just feel more at ease at a distance. Can you respect that?

BARRY

I'm used to it by now.

DEBORAH

Barry.

Barry stops.

BARRY

Whatever you say, Boss.

DEBORAH

Are you drunk?

BARRY

Yeah, I irished up the coffee. It's a great way to piss people off and still feel great about myself.

DEBORAH

What's wrong? You're tired of it? Okay. You've been working a lot. It's getting monotonous.

BARRY

It's more than monotonous. I know their opinions already. I know what they're going to say before they even say it. I can't even call it predictable at this point. Would you call me a sage if I told you the sun was going to rise in the morning?

DEBORAH

Is that just it?

BARRY

It's pointless, pointless, pointless. All of it. All us interviewers, we come in and become the same fucking nonperson.

DEBORAH

What's pointless about this?

BARRY

You know, big data knows more about you than even you know. It gets the same information we're gathering here, and its getting more than us, and its getting more accurate than us. And we're using this method? These tea parties, these fucking book clubs? This fossil of the last century? This is bullshit, Deborah, this is distracting bullshit.

DEBORAH

It isn't the most reliable method, but it has its use. The people need to tell us what they want.

BARRY

The people tell us what they want? The people don't know what they want. They get told what they want. They need guidance from above and there's nothing to guide them.

DEBORAH

Well. You should have told me you had such impressive opinions, Barry. I don't agree with you, but have you ever thought of starting a podcast or something?

BARRY

With you?

DEBORAH

No, I'm employ. I'm busy. I'm just thinking for you. Or like, there's other things, like, construction work.

BARRY

Are you even listening to me?

DEBORAH

Yeah, I'm just trying to assess your strengths. Clearly you're are unsatisfied with this job. So, I don't know, what else are you good at?

BARRY

I get it, Deborah. You don't want me around. Not with me punching people in the face. I get that. Go ahead.

BARRY

Fire me. I'm finished with what I can do here. But do you think your position here is final? That this is the end of a long march? Your time is up soon, just like mine.

DEBORAH

I think I'm going to be just fine.

BARRY

No, no, you're not. It's an issue of industry. And it's happening everywhere. The truth is that the best of us are working behind everyone, while the worst have everyone's attention. The best will rise on their own accord, without any force or outside help or notice from anyone else. There is something Big Data can't ever learn, that no amount of statistical analysis or market research can ever uncover. If there is anything useful about this, it will not be with how we're using it now. Do you know the question that no one has ever asked?

Enter Policemen.

POLICEMAN 1

Is this the man?

DEBORAH

Yes, this is him.

BARRY

Yeah, it's me.

POLICEMAN 2

Come with us, sir. We'll be back here for your testimony momentarily, miss.

DEBORAH

Of course, officer. I guess this is goodbye then, Barry.

BARRY

I love you, Deborah.

DEBORAH

Good luck on your future endeavors, Barry.

BARRY

Thanks, Deborah.

Exit Barry, Policeman 1, Policeman 2.

DEBORAH

Where do I find these whiny bitches?

Scene 1.2

Sarah is organizing papers. Enter Aaron.

SARAH

Are you watching me?

AARON

I don't know. Would you be flattered or creeped out?

SARAH

Whichever, you still would or wouldn't be doing it. Are you?

AARON

Okay. You're right. I am. So?

SARAH

So, I hope your eyes were that baggy and red before looking at me.

AARON

Before looking at you, they usually are. Creepy or flattering?

SARAH

You know, the two are pretty interchangeable.

AARON

Are they that bad?

SARAH

Like usual. Did you hear what happened to Barry? Oh, and can you get this.

AARON

Yeah. Yeah, I did.

Sarah hands Aaron paperwork, who helps organizing.

SARAH

He punched a respondent in the face.

AARON

Yeah, I heard. What do you think gets a man to become like that? He was so soft spoken and professional and then, what? What was going on in his mind?

SARAH

What difference does it make, what was going through his mind, though? He did it, is what matters.

AARON

I don't know, a bunch of different factors I think. He was single, getting older. There was always an intensity lurking in him. I think he just sort of broke.

SARAH

Probably. He's fired, so the supervisor position is open now.

AARON

I don't even know if I want it.

SARAH

I didn't ask if you did. Here take this.

AARON

Alright.

SARAH

No, tell me, what were you going to say?

AARON

So you could respond to me like that. You know, you raise a red flag for your welcome sign. You drape yourself in its silk.

Aaron is now doing the paperwork by himself.

SARAH

Oh, come on. You don't want the position, why?

As he speaks, Sarah goes on her phone.

AARON

The thing is, these firms are just the country's sensory nerves. I don't want to take it for the rest of my life. I want to make it. I don't want my finger on its pulse. I want to be the pulse. I want to be so ubiquitous that no one even knows my name. I wonder, though, you think it's better to quit or be fired? I've always thought it'd be better just to quit. Retain your self-respect. Not to hold out, be some clogged artery on the place. And you never know when you might get sacked. So, it's helpful to know and to prepare. Then again, there's unemployment benefits. So, you can see, it's a dilemma.

SARAH
Definitely.

Enter Deborah.

AARON
Definitely a dilemma. We'll talk about this later.

SARAH
Sure.

DEBORAH
So, let's try to make this briefing as fast as possible, concentrate on the survey itself, and not on any debacles that may have occurred earlier this week. This is a very long survey. It will be a very long briefing.

AARON
How long is it?

DEBORAH
We'll get to that in a second. So, here are the basics. This is called the Induction Survey. The sponsor wants to remain anonymous. They're anonymous even for us, so don't bother asking me who it is, because I don't know. The survey will be going on indefinitely, so get used to this one. There are no quotas for qualification. All participants are compensated \$300 for each session here. Recite everything ad verbatim. Seriously, guys. Every single session is going to be monitored by the client, so don't screw around on this one. The length of the survey can stretch anywhere from five minutes to three hours, and might.

SARAH
Three hours?

DEBORAH
Yeah. And it might require further sessions on different dates.

AARON
How are we going to keep their attention for that long?

DEBORAH
With the incentive of three hundred dollars, Aaron. Are you new here?

SARAH
What if we go overtime?

DEBORAH

Then you'll get overtime.

SARAH

What if goes on so long we can't take our lunch break?

DEBORAH

We'll have someone else take your place, and you'll both receive a complete.

SARAH

Well, what's the survey about? Is there a product?

DEBORAH

No, there's no. I was actually just about to get to that so if you would listen first and ask questions later we might all learn more quickly. You're not the manager, Sarah.

SARAH

Don't want to be the manager, Deborah.

DEBORAH

So, before I was interrupted I was going to inform you that the survey appears to be concept testing, or, uh, recruiting. Or, uh, maybe a really elaborate screener? I don't know. To be honest, I haven't actually read the whole thing.

SARAH

Oh lord, and I'm so rude. How are you supposed to brief us on something you haven't read?

DEBORAH

Listen, you rebellious brat, you have no reason.

SARAH

What did the client say it was studying?

DEBORAH

Are you listening? We're not in communication with the client.

SARAH

Then why haven't?

DEBORAH

Don't doubt me because I don't have all the information. It was never given to me.

SARAH

You have the survey, at least.

DEBORAH

I will not allow another uprising after Barry. It'll be the respondents who suffer, not us. Now. Listen. This is a very peculiar survey. A very big file. From what I can tell there could be thousands, maybe even tens of thousands of questions.

AARON

We have to read tens of thousands of questions?

DEBORAH

No. Shut up. Listen. I have gone through a few test runs, entering different answers and each time it's taken me in a different direction. It's a fucking Choose Your Own Adventure book. And it came to us complete with the strict guideline not to change a single word.

SARAH

What are the questions asking?

DEBORAH

All sorts of shit. Different. The word is different. That means not the same each time. Besides, it doesn't matter what the survey is about as long as you cooperate with it. Follow the instructions and you'll be fine. You won't even need to know its purpose. Look. I'll show you. We're going to go through this just once. I don't know what good it'll do, but we might as well. Aaron, get the lights.

Scene 1.3

Deborah is seated at the desk. Enter John.

JOHN

Alrighty. The last pack of eyeliner is in the closet. You know it was hard to find this place. Damn phone map kept glitching, telling me to go to the mall. Say, what sort of work is this anyway?

DEBORAH

Marketing research. We do surveys, focus groups. Respondents always get paid. How do you like the shipping business?

JOHN

Love it. Love to drive. It's a different sort of work you have, huh? Planted, stable. There's no chances here. I take it it's morning to night in this place. Your work is your social life. Sitting around, going nowhere.

DEBORAH

Hey. You may get around but you're still sitting all day like me.

JOHN

Maybe, but you don't get out at all. The job attracts the person, I suppose.

DEBORAH

So, what does your job say about you? Can't be held down, always on the move. You must drive women crazy.

JOHN

I've been known for it.

DEBORAH

But I'll go around in my car sometimes without a destination. You know, to relieve stress.

JOHN

Does it work?

DEBORAH

No, no not really. I can have bad road rage. I always need to find other ways to relax.

JOHN

Who'd have thought there'd be a fury hiding underneath that suit of yours. I'm afraid of what I might find.

DEBORAH

I'm afraid you might find it. But I'm in a bit of a transitional period of my life, so I don't know what might be there.

JOHN

Why's that?

DEBORAH

I had a separation recently. I have no kids, if you're worried about. If you're wondering about that. It's hard these days for a woman like me, you know? I've been in a relationship for so long I've kind of forgotten who I am. I guess I'm just trying to find myself.

Enter Marshall, who sits in a chair.

JOHN

That's all I need to know. What are you doing tonight? I can swing on by after your shift, pick you up.

DEBORAH

Come back here? You have no business in this place except delivering packages. Unless you might want to perhaps take a survey maybe.

JOHN

Ooh, is that how it's going to be? Well. There may be a fury, but the suit doesn't lie. How long and how much?

DEBORAH

They're not long on like a cosmic scale. We've got a new one for three hundred dollars. It can go for a few hours, or for a few minutes.

JOHN

Well, seeing as you were my last shipment, these three hours I'd be doing nothing anyway. A hundred an hour is not so bad a contract, not even accounting the provisions.

DEBORAH

Aaron, come in here. I'll just need you to sign this paperwork for me first.

Deborah hands John paperwork. Enter Aaron.

AARON

What is it?

DEBORAH

Are you free right now? We've got a respondent for the Induction survey.

AARON

Yeah. Come on in, sir.

John hands Deborah paperwork.

JOHN

See you soon, Deborah.

DEBORAH

Nice to meet you, John.

Exit John, Aaron. Deborah turns and notices Marshall.

DEBORAH

Are you waiting for a interview?

MARSHALL

I am waiting for a job interview.

DEBORAH

Oh right. My god, you're Marshall. Well, we can have it right here. That's fine. I was very impressed by your resume. You went to Stanford.

MARSHALL

That's correct, miss.

DEBORAH

How did you like it there?

MARSHALL

I believe if it enables me to land this job, it was nearly worth the money, I think.

DEBORAH

You flatter well, young man.

MARSHALL

Well, I can see myself working here.

DEBORAH

Well, great. I did some research on you. I noticed you don't have a very strong social media presence.

MARSHALL

Well, I can have one if you would like.

DEBORAH

Well. It might be good if you're inconspicuous about certain things. You won't tell anyone about the things we do here, will you?

MARSHALL

No, not at all.

DEBORAH

Great. Well. Well, great. I'll show you around.

ACT IIScene 2.1

Aaron sits at the desk, typing on and reading from the computer. John sits on the armchair.

AARON

Are you going to avert your eyes?

JOHN

What?

AARON

The survey says, Are you going to avert your eyes?

JOHN

How much more of this, by the way?

AARON

I'm not sure. If there's anything you need, coffee, a snack, a bathroom break, just let me know. It'll be provided for you.

JOHN

No, no, I'm enjoying this. I'm learning a lot about myself.

AARON

Okay. To return, are you going to avert your eyes?

JOHN

What the hell does that mean? Why are you asking me a question like that?

AARON

I didn't write the survey, sir.

JOHN

Well, no. No, I'm not going to avert my eyes.

AARON

Concerning your work as a shipper, do you ever find that you forget extended periods of time while driving?

JOHN

Oh sure, all the time. Happened to me even before I started shipping. I believe it's a commoner thing than is often said.

AARON

What do you think is the cause of this forgetfulness?

JOHN

Oh, you know. I can get lost in thought. Suddenly hours pass by and I can't remember anything. And the whole situation does it for me.

AARON

What about the situation causes this forgetfulness?

JOHN

Sitting down does it. Puts you in a relaxed state of mind. The yellow lines too. They have a kinda beat when your driving. Like a rhythm for the eyes. And for the outside, the world turning around me, in some places I can see the whole horizon stretch out. Feels like your protected from it, being in your car, but still a witness to it all.

AARON

Given your occupation, how often do you use your rear view mirror: always, frequently, occasionally, sometimes or never?

JOHN

Always? I'm not using it now. So frequently.

AARON

Do you ever notice yourself using your rear-view mirror involuntarily?

JOHN

Sure, I guess I do it involuntarily. You know how that is. You find yourself doing things you made no conscious decision to do, automatic, like you were guided by habit or some other.

AARON

Do you ever feel uncomfortable in rooms with one-way mirrors?

JOHN

Are you asking me, or is this part of the survey?

AARON

Both, sir.

JOHN

Well, no. I don't.

AARON

Who do you think is behind the one-way mirror?

JOHN
Your supervisor, maybe.

AARON
What do you see in the one-way mirror?

JOHN
I see myself.

AARON
Switching gears, do you feel that your family relationships are headed in the right direction or off on the wrong track?

JOHN
Huh. Wrong track, I guess.

AARON
Why are your family relationships off on the wrong track?

JOHN
Well, I'm divorced. That's no good for anyone, in spite of how popular it is.

AARON
Do you have children?

JOHN
Yeah. The ex-wife has full custody of that daughter.

AARON
When is the last time you saw your daughter?

JOHN
Must've been about a year ago.

AARON
Why did you divorce?

JOHN
Honestly, I had problems with drugs.

AARON
What was your drug of choice?

JOHN
Heroin. And it was no choice of mine. It was an addiction. Don't believe anyone who tells you you can just stop. It really takes possession of you. It makes the decisions for you. You're its slave. And you get a, what's it called, a sort of, a stockholm syndrome to it. It's not healthy to have human attachments to something that ain't human. Not healthy at all.

AARON

Are you clean now?

JOHN

Had to be clean, son. Had to start over. Got myself the job I have now to get that feeling of getting away, to clear the mind.

AARON

Did you ever feel that heroin relaxed you to the point of a waking sleep?

JOHN

Yeah, that's the purpose of it.

AARON

Did you ever feel that heroin led you to open up and embrace new thoughts?

JOHN

When I was conscious enough to entertain them, yeah, sure.

AARON

Did you ever overdose?

JOHN

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Many times. I had this dream once after one of them. Man. I lived a whole life during that overdose. A life within my mind, birth to death. 100 years in a single night. I dreamt I had a family, a suburban home, a good job, paid vacations. I closed my eyes on my death bed on the last day of that life, surrounded by my family, and woke up on a hospital bed in a rehab, back to this shithole life I was in before. I lost everything. I was mourning a dream. I still do mourn that life. To this day I feel closer to my children in that dream than I do with my actual child.

AARON

Why did you use heroin?

JOHN

To escape. Escape was the main thing. I chose heroin, but it could have been just about anything. On the worst days it practically was just about anything.

AARON

From what were you trying to escape?

JOHN

From the pain.

AARON

The pain of what?

JOHN

The pain of my addiction.

AARON

Put your left thumb and forefinger onto your eyes. Push hard and then tell me when you see it.

JOHN

See what?

AARON

I can't interpret the survey for you.

JOHN

I see something. I see a circle. It's a green circle. Green and gray.

AARON

Continue holding your eyes. You are driving through a suburb lined with trees in the latest model Ford Focus, relaxing to your favorite radio station. The urban design of the suburb is a grid and every intersection looks the same. You have forgotten how long you have been driving, but it seems to you that you have stayed in the exact same place. You begin to notice that the street is slanting in a decline, though it is so slight that you can barely feel it at first. And the radio starts switching channels on its own, static, then news, then music, then static, and changing volumes, high, low, medium, low, high. There is a deep rumbling sound outside, and as you gather speed, the street slants more and more, growing steeper, and your crawling faster downward, creeping, and the street is gone, and the car has gone, and now you feel you fall, you are free falling slowly downward, flowing, dropping softly deeper, falling faster into sleep.

He taps a bell and it makes a high-pitched "Ding!"
Open your eyes. Stand up. In a moment I am going to ask you to do something for me. Will you do it?

JOHN

Yes. I will.

Scene 2.2

The phone rings. Enter Sarah, who answers it.

SARAH

Leary Research.

CHARLES

Sarah, Charles Leary. I have been trying to reach you. I have called for you multiple times, and I am frankly too busy for these long-distance phone tags.

SARAH

I have been busy too, Mr. Leary. But you know I wouldn't mean to do that to you, Mr. Leary. You understand how much respect I have for you.

CHARLES

I understand that. I don't think you understand something. This firm you are in, it is mine, it bears my name. You may never see me, you may never even meet me, but when I call for you you must answer and when I tell you to do something, you must do it.

SARAH

I'm sorry, Mr. Leary. Really, I am. I hope this doesn't come into conflict with the senior manager position.

CHARLES

That position is no longer open. It has been filled. I'm giving it to Deborah. She doesn't know it yet, but the paperwork is being processed. But with her gone, the supervisor will become the manager. Aspire to fill that gaping wound.

SARAH

Deborah hates me. She'll never give me a promotion.

CHARLES

Tough luck. So long, Sarah.

Dialtone. Sarah begins to organize papers. Enter Aaron.

SARAH

Are you okay?

AARON

Why do you ask? Is something wrong?

SARAH

Nothing's wrong. Why do you ask?

AARON

Wait. Why do I ask, why do you ask?

SARAH

What?

AARON

Are you asking me why I asked you why you asked?

SARAH

No, I'm asking, why did you ask if something's wrong?

AARON

Well, you asked me. No, I'm okay. Doing just fine. But, uh, have you done the, uh, Induction Survey?

SARAH

I've only gone like five minutes into it. They keep terminating. Hey, can you take this?

AARON

You can do it yourself, can't you? It's within your capacities.

SARAH

You're not going to help me?

AARON

Okay. I will. I think I've discovered the secret to the Induction Survey. Why it didn't seem so interesting during the briefing.

SARAH

Oh, yeah?

AARON

Yeah, it's not like other surveys where you just sit there like some.

SARAH

Psychiatrist.

AARON

Yeah, some psychiatrist. Like some impartial observer. No, the secret's in reading it aloud one-on-one with the respondent. If there were any others watching the atmosphere would just evaporate.

SARAH

Well, aside from.

AARON

Yeah, aside from that. But no, there's a kind of magnet between the two of you. When it's just the two of you and you're reading it aloud. You see that? You're connected to him, but outside of him, like a ghost, like some spirit, you know that? Like your invisible, untouchable but possessing him and his body. Or, like some voice in his head, nagging out orders, telling him what to do.

SARAH

Oh, come on.

AARON

Total cerebrophilia. I've never been in that position. Guess I've always been on the receiving end.

SARAH

Oh, I don't think it's like that.

AARON

You don't get what I'm saying?

SARAH

I get the feeling you're trying to tell me something you're afraid to say.

AARON

No, no, no. It's just I'm not sure I can say it. Accurately. But you don't even think about the control when you're doing it, do you? These are just surveys, after all. It's kind of funny. The survey's going on across the country. Respondents having psychotic break-downs, their souls up for auction. Meanwhile, the interviewers are just counting down the minutes 'til their lunch break.

SARAH

It's not that bad.

AARON

No, not that bad, not really. But it makes me wonder, though. Are the respondent really, truly in the kind of trance you think they are?

SARAH

I don't think even they know that.

AARON

And it makes me wonder, who is it that's sponsoring this? What could they possibly be gaining from this whole thing? Are they trying to research opinions or manufacture them?

Enter Marshall, unnoticed.

SARAH

Don't even worry about that stuff. But that is fascinating. Really fascinating. Did you like it when you were nagging out orders? Or, when you were controlling them?

AARON

Did I? Did like it? I don't know if I liked it. It was different. It was strange. To be honest, I feel kind of a little crippled. I feel. I don't know. Should I feel guilty?

SARAH

Guilty for what?

AARON

For manipulating someone's mind like that. I mean, is it right for the sponsors to turn me into that guy, into a mind slavemaster, where he has to take my every direction?

SARAH

Well, the survey's every direction.

AARON

Well, sure.

SARAH

You feel crippled?

AARON

Not. I mean, not crippled, I felt.

SARAH

That's a real shame.

AARON

I'm selling a story right now.

SARAH

Sure, alright, okay. Well, the queasiness will pass with time. It always does. Anyway, I have a respondent in a couple minutes. We'll talk about this later.

AARON

Wait, Sarah.

Exit Sarah. Aaron turns, and while speaking, sees Marshall.

AARON

Welp. I fucked that up again. Holy shit. Have you been standing there the whole time?

MARSHALL

When is the whole time?

AARON

When is the what?

MARSHALL

From when til now is the whole time?

AARON

Are you waiting for a focus group or something?

MARSHALL

No, I was just hired.

AARON

Well, welcome aboard.

MARSHALL

Have you worked here the whole time?

AARON

Funny, funny. Nice hipster glasses. Do you even need those?

MARSHALL

I can't remove them without being reminded of how fortunate we are to see.

AARON

Very profound. What's your name?

MARSHALL

Marshall. You're Aaron. That survey seems to have really gotten to your head. Are you certain this is the right field of work for you?

AARON

I'm just here for the steady income. I've got other dreams. How about you? You're the new hire. You want to work in marketing research? It's your dream job?

MARSHALL

Being here renders any dreams unnecessary.

AARON

What?

MARSHALL

I don't need to want to when I am.

AARON

What? Look. I have another respondent coming. If this is another three hour survey I will be here till ten. We'll talk again soon.

MARSHALL

Good luck, Aaron.

AARON

Yeah, thanks, Marshall.

Scene 2.3

Night. Deborah is wearing a black, silk dress, checking herself out in the one-way mirror. Enter John.

JOHN

Knock, knock. Hey, I realized on the way back here I didn't get my check.

DEBORAH

Aaron didn't tell you? Ugh. Incompetent little shitstain. You'll get it once the full survey is completed. You're scheduled for another session next week, right?

JOHN

Right. Okay. Hell. Hope I don't end up coming here religiously. So. I was thinking of taking you to Casey's pub.

DEBORAH

Let's stay here. It might be fun to mix work and play.

JOHN

I knew you wouldn't want to get out.

DEBORAH

I'm pouring myself a drink. I hope you don't mind.

JOHN

I live in a glass house. Pour me one.

DEBORAH

You might think this is weird, but I would love to live in a glass house. You know at night, when the curtains are open and the light inside is on, and you're in your underwear and you know that anyone walking by can look in and see you, but you can't see them?

JOHN

Yeah. Not the underwear part, but yeah.

DEBORAH

That turns me on. Does it turn you on?

JOHN

Not even a bit.

Deborah grabs John's crotch.

DEBORAH

I'm usually not like this.

JOHN

I can have that effect on people. Women mostly. But who knows.

DEBORAH

I want to get to know you first, though. How about a little survey?

JOHN

I'm not used to role play.

DEBORAH

Sure you are. It's easy. All you have to do is believe.

JOHN

Do I get compensated?

DEBORAH

Maybe. But I can't guarantee the compensation will be money.

JOHN

Whatever you've got is good with me. I'm busy guy though. Will there be further sessions next week?

DEBORAH

Let's see if you qualify first. What's your name?

JOHN

John Logan.

DEBORAH

Do you or does anyone in your household work in marketing research, the media, advertising, pornography, BDSM, or prostitution?

JOHN

I sure hope not.

DEBORAH

Do you think I'm sexy?

JOHN

A bit.

DEBORAH

Do you like being dominated?

JOHN

You really are something else.

DEBORAH

Come on. Do you like being dominated?

JOHN

Just as long as I'm in control of it.

DEBORAH

Get on your knees. I want you to get on your knees.

JOHN

I thought this was a survey. You should be asking me.

DEBORAH

Will you get on your knees?

JOHN

I see no harm in that.

John does so.

DEBORAH

Will you hold your hands behind your back?

JOHN

Sure thing, darling.

John does so.

DEBORAH

Will you let me slap you?

JOHN

I'll let you slap me.

Deborah does so.

DEBORAH

Will you let me spank you?

JOHN

I will.

John turns around. Deborah spansks him.

DEBORAH

Will you face me again?

JOHN

I will.

John does so.

DEBORAH

Will you kiss my feet?

JOHN

No. I'm not going to kiss your feet.

DEBORAH

Okay. Take your pants off. Will you take your. Will you let me take your pants off?

JOHN

I will.

Deborah unbuttons John's pants. Physical intimacy ensues. Enter Aaron.

AARON

Hey Deborah, I just finished with that fucking respondent, holy shit.

DEBORAH

Aaron, what are you doing here?

AARON

I just finished on that respondent. Holy shit.

DEBORAH

Get the fuck out of here, Aaron. No overtime.

AARON

Sure thing.

He starts to walk out, then stops.

AARON

It's just you have my paycheck.

DEBORAH

They don't come til next week, idiot. Leave.

AARON

Each hour we flee further from divinity.

DEBORAH

Get the fuck out of here.

AARON

Yeah, yeah, alright.

Exit Aaron.

DEBORAH

That is so embarrassing. I don't know how I'm going to face him on Monday.

JOHN

I thought you said you liked being watched.

DEBORAH

It's nice to know they're there. It's not nice to see them. I'd rather see other men. Where were we?

Scene 2.4

Sarah is on the computer. Enter Marshall.

SARAH

Hi, Marshall, right?

MARSHALL

Yes. Nice to meet you. Sarah?

SARAH

Yeah. Want to know what I'm doing? Faking surveys. Best part of the job. You get the compensation, which is like tips, job benefits, and you don't have to talk to single soul.

MARSHALL

Hm.

SARAH

But forget work. We should get to know each other.

MARSHALL

I don't believe we should.

SARAH

Sure we should. Why wouldn't we?

MARSHALL

You don't know?

SARAH

No, I don't.

MARSHALL

Hm. This company must operate in ways that aren't strictly job-oriented.

SARAH

Ah, you saw me with Aaron. You don't want to get on his bad side. I understand.

MARSHALL

As long as coworkers are professional they don't need to have that fear.

SARAH

Interesting. You must have some other fear then. Are you scared to talk to women?

MARSHALL

The job here to talk to everybody. If I had such phobias I would not have applied.

SARAH

Everybody, I see. You must be testing me. See if I fit into your harem. Is that it?

MARSHALL

Men with many women have many distractions. Everyone's on his periphery. He's confused. He can't see any one of them clearly.

SARAH

Monogamy. That's refreshing to see. So, what, are you sworn to chastity? Are you some Christian?

MARSHALL

God forbid. There's no religious requirement for celibacy, by the way. There's no active duties at all. It can be likened to sobriety. To have it you only need to do nothing.

SARAH

Maybe there's nothing for me to do. Did someone castrate you? Or did you cut them off yourself?

MARSHALL

My balls are my business. And don't disrespect the eunuch. He's an ascetic. He rids himself of the things he is not using. It's the minimalist approach to life.

SARAH

Are you actually like this?

MARSHALL

Like what?

SARAH

You're just refusing to be straight with me. Maybe that's it. Maybe you're just not straight.

MARSHALL

If I were to tell you I was gay, you would just try to talk to me some more. I would be your sassy psychiatrist. Why would I want that?

SARAH

That wasn't a no. So what, then? What's the problem? Why are you being so cold?

MARSHALL

I'm not being cold. I'm in the preparatory period. My job here is to ask questions, not answer them.

SARAH

Make money and not friends, huh?

MARSHALL

That too.

SARAH

Well. If you don't want to be asked anything, then stop answering.

Enter Aaron

AARON

You two hitting it off well?

SARAH

Excuse me?

AARON

No, you're free to do what you like. The women in this company don't take long, do they?

SARAH

Have the guys here gone crazy?

AARON

No, you can do what you like. But Deborah is coming in for a meeting with me and newguy here so you should probably go.

Enter Deborah.

SARAH

No, I'm not going to leave.

DEBORAH

Meeting time, meeting time. Sarah, get the fuck out of here.

Exit Sarah.

So, we're gathered here today because we have a tipsy turvy type situation. I have come up with a custom solution for this problem I'm having. We're having, I mean. So, then. Aaron, I'm going to need you to do an offsite in San Jose. Marshall will take over any respondents you have for the Induction Survey.

AARON

What's that? Offsite. Right. Any respondents. I see. So John, then?

DEBORAH

If you happen to have a respondent named John who is currently participating in the Induction Survey, then yes, he will be under the guidance of Marshall.

AARON

You want him to take my respondents. He'll get my completes.

DEBORAH

Your quota completion is fine.

AARON

He's new. He might not be able to handle this one.

DEBORAH

I think he can handle it. Look at him. Firm and grounded. Just take a look at him. I think Marshall won't do well, he'll excel. Won't you, Marshal?

MARSHALL

Yes, miss.

DEBORAH

Look at him. Bark, bark, bark.

AARON

You want me to leave. So this isn't about anything else?

DEBORAH

What else could it be about? This isn't punishment. This is a great opportunity to show corporate you're capable of that supervisor position. Remember that?

AARON

I'm not even sure I want the supervisor position.

DEBORAH

But don't you want to show them that you're capable of it? It's good to know that people know you're good. Marshall, are you pleased with these arrangements?

MARSHALL

I will work as competently as I can with them.

DEBORAH

Excellent. Look at him. Firm and grounded. Bark, bark.

Exit Deborah.

AARON

I'm losing confidence in her management. She's punishing me with the starts of a job promotion. It makes no sense. Is she punishing me or herself, I wonder.

MARSHALL

It's not worth wondering. You're set to go whatever her intentions.

AARON

You know, it gets embarrassing watching you grovel at her feet the way you do. I know you're new, want to make a good impression and everything, but, uh, it's sickening to see.

MARSHALL

You become the person whose council you seek.

AARON

I don't know if I should be angry at you.

MARSHALL

Why wouldn't you be?

AARON

Why would I be? It's there, though, cloaked with uncertainty.

MARSHALL

Perhaps it is the uncertainty that makes you so angry.

AARON

I don't think you're entirely aware of what I'm uncertain about.

MARSHALL

You don't have to worry about me. I will not do anything that I am not instructed to do. If that is a problem, complain to whoever instructs me.

Exit Marshall.

AARON

What the fuck is wrong with that guy?

ACT IIIScene 3.1

Marshall sits at the desk, typing on and reading from the computer. John lies on the sofa.

JOHN

I've been trying to get visits with my daughter. I've talked to the courts. I've gone into some counseling. But that's not just it, my son. I'm talking to my mother again. I've started dating a real nice, successful girl. Things are looking up for my life in a way it hasn't for some time.

MARSHALL

How is your relationship with the nice, successful girl?

JOHN

Great. Been with her for a month now. I like her. I've dropped all my other girls, in fact, just a couple days ago. I think after my divorce, after all the mistakes I made, I'm starting to learn just what it takes to keep a two-person relationship going.

MARSHALL

What mistakes did you make?

JOHN

All sorts of things. Root of it was jealousy. Found myself imagining things about her with no proof but my own mind. Who knows, maybe she was and I was intuiting right. Or maybe she did but after my accusations. Who knows whose faith left first. Anyhow, it was unfair of me to have more trust in doubt than in her, because maybe it was just untrue. These are the sorts of lessons I learned.

MARSHALL

What compelled you to reunite with your daughter?

JOHN

Now, that's a ridiculous question. She's my daughter. I can't see her. I miss her. And fact is, I was never really even there for her when I was with her. That's the sad fact of it.

MARSHALL

Why were you not there for her?

JOHN

Honestly, I wanted to give her space, give her the freedoms I never had. If it meant not being there for something, not punishing her for some bad choices, well, that's price to pay. It was for her own good, her own learning. Her own independence. It's tough to know how to balance between the two.

MARSHALL

Why did you never have the freedoms she had?

JOHN

My father was a very strange man. I don't like to get into it. But, uh, he may have been a little, what do guys like you say, psychotic. The things that would come out his mouth, I still can't formulate how he came up with them. Apocalyptic things. Paranoid things. Judgmental things. And still, I can't quite decide if he was ever wrong.

MARSHALL

Close your eyes.

Marshall taps the bell.

You are a child. You are playing with a small toy car. Your father is in the room. He has been bedridden for days. His skin seeps into the bed sheets as one fabric. He exhales dust, coughs clods of wet sand onto his breast. He lifts his head to you, ripping an open sore on the back of his neck. I bought you that toy car, he says, not so that you may play with it, but so that you may drive it to the place you need to go. You take the toy outside, crush yourself into it and find that the world has reduced itself with you. Where do you go?

JOHN

Please. Please, not again, not again, I don't want you here.

MARSHALL

Do not worry about the shadow people. They only come to you because they know you are brave enough to handle them. To return, where do you go?

JOHN

I drive around. To relieve stress.

MARSHALL

The street floods, the car has become a boat and you are sailing on a stream flowing into an estuary. The open sea is obscured by a thick mist that is enlightened only by faraway lightening strikes. You have been drinking rum. How do you feel about your girlfriend?

JOHN

(sings) Well she needs perfume and a plastic surgeon but her heart's only for me. At ten years old she was not a virgin, but her heart's only for me. If I beat her face like she beats my dick no difference you would see, 'cause cunt old bitch is a whore bitch and her heart's only for me.

MARSHALL

How does she feel about you?

JOHN

(sings) Well more tears than cum after sex are dripped, but his heart's only for me. His wallet is open while his pants are zipped, but his heart's only for me. If I laid in bed with his best man, he'd still wed me faithfully, 'cause cucky old bitch is a bore bitch and his heart's only for me.

MARSHALL

And how are you together?

JOHN

(sings) Well, the whole damn world finds our love surreal, but our hearts are one the same. They can't figure out who got the worst deal, but our heart's are one the same. Do you wonder what sustains us? Resignation is to blame. Yeah, tired old fucks don't give no fucks, and their hearts are one the same.

MARSHALL

Close your eyes. The water parts and you are in the Ford Focus again, speeding on a highway through the rain storm. Up ahead there is a car overturned on the side of the road. You are concerned, but you know that in these areas there are foul, feral individuals who will con unsuspecting drivers to pull over so they can rob them. As you deliberate whether to pull over, a woman in a white dress materializes right in front of your car. You swerve and the car flips over. All at once you can hear it: shattering windows, ripping rubber, flaming diesel and bending metals. And now you are standing outside, though the rain and the air cannot be felt and you can see your corpse through the broken windshield of your totaled car. You turn your head and see the woman in the white dress facing your direction. She nods. She can see you too. What do you say to her?

JOHN

I'm not going with you. Not yet. I still have things to do. I have things here that I want. Things that I need. I need to stay so I can finally get them back. I need to stay so I can finally keep them.

MARSHALL

In a moment I am going to ask you to repeat something for me. Will you repeat it?

JOHN

Yes. I will.

Scene 3.2

*Sarah sits on the sofa. She is on her cellphone.
Enter Marshall.*

SARAH

Did you see the line today? This place is becoming a welfare office.

MARSHALL

Hm. Does the government fund any of these studies?

SARAH

Some of them. Why?

MARSHALL

There's material there for a conspiracy theory.

SARAH

So, how is the Induction Survey going?

MARSHALL

It's going alright.

SARAH

No existential crisis?

MARSHALL

No, not really. Should I have had one?

SARAH

It's best you don't.

MARSHALL

Okay, good. I'm still getting used to this job.

SARAH

If Aaron were here he'd say, Was that a slight against me?

MARSHALL

Well, it was, wasn't it? Aren't you two an item?

SARAH

I thought we were going to keep things business.

MARSHALL

I am. This is small-talk.

SARAH

Oh, lord. I need a cigarette. Days like these. I used to be a chain smoker. First it's fun. Then it's frequent. Then it owns you.

MARSHALL

I'd appreciate it if you'd turn the phone off.

SARAH

Are you about to give a lecture? Or, are you jealous of the attention it's getting?

MARSHALL

I get the sense you're recording me.

SARAH

Because you're so beautiful and entertaining, huh?

MARSHALL

If you think so it would explain why you are so fixated on it.

SARAH

On it, not on you.

MARSHALL

On both, if you are.

SARAH

So, what, then? Are your senses sound? Are you intuitive or just paranoid?

MARSHALL

Either way, you are still being rude.

SARAH

Either way, you're still being neurotic. But don't worry about this, it's for your own benefit, for quality assurance. Worry about doing a good job for the camera. Worry about your performance for the superiors. Don't worry about being watched when it's for your own good. And, aha, I do think you already are performing. Look at how stiff you're becoming, modeling for the camera. Good boy. Look at you now. Staring at your feet. Oh, come on, I'm just playing with you.

MARSHALL

You're playing at me.

SARAH

It's down. But honestly, you are being monitored. Just not by me.

MARSHALL

Why is that?

SARAH

The cameras behind the one-way mirrors never stop recording.

Enter Deborah.

DEBORAH

Meeting time, meeting time. So. I'm in a very good mood today. Things are looking up. Let's try to have as much fun together as possible. I brought smoothies. But first, we have to get down to business. First things first. Marshall.

SARAH

Wait, Deborah. I wanted to.

DEBORAH

I'm speaking to Marshall.

SARAH

No, listen, I.

DEBORAH

You remember, I will not allow another uprising.

SARAH

I wanted to apologize.

DEBORAH

Oh. And?

SARAH

And I wanted to say sorry for speaking out of turn to you. How I've been doing that. You're my boss, I should have more respect for you.

DEBORAH

Well, thank you, I accept your apology. So second then. Marshall, I noticed you disqualified Samantha Morton for the mascara study. She didn't wear mascara everyday. Yeah. Listen. The study can accommodate her. She's a friend of mine. Understand?

MARSHALL

I understand.

DEBORAH

Skew the data, is what I'm implying.

MARSHALL

I understand, miss.

DEBORAH

Okay, now. Sarah, my love, you had a question about the Induction survey.

SARAH

I do. Have the questions been altered over the last couple days?

DEBORAH

No. Why do you ask?

SARAH

I had two respondents answer the first ten or so questions in the exact same way and it still changed. It didn't go in a linear path. It still went in different directions.

DEBORAH

That can't be right. It's a single file, Sarah.

SARAH

It did. It also incorporates people's answers into the questions, but not in any way that I've ever seen before. It's weird. The clients are monitoring us live. You think there might be someone on the other end sending questions?

DEBORAH

I doubt it. Have either of you deduced what it's about?

MARSHALL

Nothing. It's not a study. It's a direction. One of our respondents, John, has come every week for the last month. At the beginning, he was distracted, wanton, dissatisfied with his achievements. But now he is more attentive at his job, closer to his family, sensible in his relationships, more receptive to yet detached from new ideas. I believe the survey may be a force for good.

DEBORAH

We're talking about these people like they're our patients.

MARSHALL

I'm sorry. Would you prefer I speak about him differently?

DEBORAH

No, but I'm interested. About the survey. What else has happened with this respondent, what's his name?

MARSHALL

John. Well, he is in a new relationship that he has high hopes for. He even, to quote him, dropped his other women just a few days ago.

DEBORAH

You mean to tell me John was with multiple women up until only a few days ago?

MARSHALL

Yes, that's right. Is that. Should that be a concern of this company?

DEBORAH

No, no, no. It's just I'm disappointed that I've let a pig like him into my office.

SARAH

This is a virtuous side of you I've never seen before.

DEBORAH

Are you sure about this? About the survey and the respondents?

MARSHALL

I don't doubt the survey, miss. It's smarter than me. But as to the respondents, they have no choice but to tell the truth when they are taking the Induction.

DEBORAH

Okay. Okay. Well, the two of you can leave now.

SARAH

Thank you.

MARSHALL

Thank you, miss.

Exit Marshall and Sarah.

DEBORAH

That lying asshole. What else has this fucker been hiding from me?

Deborah sits at the computer table, puts on a headset, and types.

AARON

(voice) So. To begin, may I have your first and last name?

JOHN

(voice) My name is John Logan.

AARON

Do you or does anyone in your immediate family work in advertising, the media or marketing research?

JOHN

Nope. Not a soul.

Scene 3.3

Sarah sits at the desk, with a headset.

SARAH

Candidate A says that the NSA should not be infringing on people's rights of privacy. Do you strongly agree, mostly agree, moderately agree, or agree very little?

VOICE

Are those the only options? Because I've read a lot about this and it's a simplification. I disagree strongly.

SARAH

So, what should I put down: moderately agree or agree very little?

VOICE

Very little, I guess.

SARAH

Okay. Candidate B says that the NSA files are necessary for public safety and that the public needs to calm down, even going so far as to suggest that the people are paranoid narcissists. Do you strongly disagree, mostly disagree, moderately disagree, or disagree very little?

VOICE

Did he really say that?

SARAH

According to this.

VOICE

Politicians are such scum. Strongly disagree.

SARAH

Well, that concludes our survey. We appreciate your feedback and hope you have a good evening. Thank you.

Sarah takes off headset.

SARAH

Deborah?

Enter Deborah.

DEBORAH

What is it?

SARAH

I just finished the last landline. I'm going to go.

DEBORAH

You were doing the political poll, right? You know they're pretending. For the money and attention. They don't actually know what they believe. They don't know anything about themselves. Can I ask you something?

SARAH

Sure.

DEBORAH

Have you ever been in a relationship where someone was keeping facts from you?

SARAH

Yeah, during a long-distance relationship, actually. You never can know what a person is doing when they're that far away.

DEBORAH

What was it like?

SARAH

We'd video chat, talk on the phone. It was tough. We wouldn't touch, couldn't make eye contact, unless we'd stare into that creepy black circle, in the camera. It's a tease, like I was dating a ghost. What's this guy not telling you?

DEBORAH

He's been fucking other women while I'm not around.

SARAH

It was the same with my guy actually. He was very cruel. He still hasn't forgiven me for it. What's he told you about those other women?

DEBORAH

I don't know. It wasn't in the recording.

SARAH

Recording?

DEBORAH

Yeah, I didn't want to mention it but he's, well, he's one of our respondents.

SARAH

Wait a minute, you mean the guy we were talking about in the meeting today? This isn't metaphorical? You're actually fucking a respondent?

DEBORAH

He's not that bad, Sarah. I mean, except that he's a sloppy drug addict.

SARAH

Oh my god, this is the complete inverse of what I thought. This is realer, this is a lot lower than I thought. Is there not going to be an end that spinning? Am I going to grow up, used up, asking people half my age for relationship advice?

DEBORAH

What?

SARAH

There's a sweeter option for me, a more trusting option.

DEBORAH

Are you listening me?

SARAH

I'm talking to myself. Maybe you're right, Deborah. But I've got to go home.

DEBORAH

Yes, I was about to relieve you. I'm expecting someone. Guess who? Him. The slob.

SARAH

Okay. But before I do.

DEBORAH

Hold on, I think I hear him coming. Go out the back exit.

SARAH

Okay, but I want to tell you I think Marshall would be a good choice for the supervisor position.

DEBORAH

I'll keep your recommendation in mind. Leave, leave.

SARAH

Thanks. See you tomorrow.

Exit Sarah.

DEBORAH

Okay, Deborah. Be cool. Don't play your hand too early.

Enter John.

JOHN

Well, hey there.

DEBORAH

Well, hi. So, how is your daughter?

JOHN

My daughter? How do you know about that?

DEBORAH

You'd like to know, wouldn't you? You heroin addict, you fucking lied to me. You fucked me then you lied to me. Or lied to me then fucked. Or, who knows, both at the same time. Did you really think I was going to let you use me up like that?

JOHN

Lied to you? Lied to. I never told you I wasn't a heroin addict.

DEBORAH

Lies by omission.

JOHN

How in the hell do you know all this? Have you been tracking me? Stalking me? Hiring some private investigator?

DEBORAH

There is always someone watching, John, especially when you think there isn't. Maybe you should have taken meth. It'd give you the paranoia to figure that out.

JOHN

I have taken meth. Listen, Deborah, you mean nothing to me. My life is none of your business.

DEBORAH

I don't know about that. You've been here every week unloading your mind on my employees. That is my business. That is by definition my business.

JOHN

You're creeping the living shit out of me. The living shit. I barely know you.

DEBORAH

And I know everything about you. I know things about you that you don't even know. I know what that survey is doing to you. I've seen what a fool you are. I've seen how you've submitted to my employees, how they've made you hallucinate, how they've made you dance and strip in front of the one-way mirror. And I know how to make you do it myself.

Deborah taps the bell. John stiffens.

DEBORAH

Get on your knees.

JOHN

Yes, miss.

John gets on his knees. She slaps him.

DEBORAH

Tell me you like it.

JOHN

I like it.

DEBORAH

Turn around. Bend over.

JOHN

Yes, miss.

John does so. Deborah spansks him.

DEBORAH

Tell me you like it.

JOHN

I like it.

DEBORAH

Turn around. Kiss my feet.

JOHN

Yes, miss.

John does so.

DEBORAH

Ugh. Eww.

Deborah kicks him in the face and he falls backward.

DEBORAH

You pathetic piece of shit. You child, you spineless little boy. Doing what momma tells you. No wonder you're a heroin addict. Too weak to handle life for yourself. You need help, choir boy, huh, you fraud, you fucking faggot?

JOHN

Yes, miss.

DEBORAH

You're what's wrong with men these days. You're not even a man. You're a bitch. A limp dick bitch, taking commands. I can't believe it. The arrogance you have, that you think you can be with a woman like me, a manager of a marketing research firm. And what are you? A junkie who can't even see his own kids. Ugh, it makes me want to puke.

JOHN

Yes, miss.

DEBORAH

Here. Take this mop. Swab the fucking center. It's just the kind of work for a goofy, inbred thug like you. Do you like being called that? A goofy, inbred thug?

JOHN

Yes, miss.

DEBORAH

Then do it.

John mops. Deborah sits down, takes out her cell phone.

Oh, and when you wake up you're going to think we had sex. Understand?

JOHN

Yes, miss.

DEBORAH
Disgusting.

ACT IVScene 4.1

The phone rings. Enter Marshall, who answers it.

MARSHALL

Leary Research.

CHARLES

Hello.

MARSHALL

Hello. Who is this?

CHARLES

Charles Leary.

MARSHALL

Hello, Mr. Leary. What can I do for you?

CHARLES

I need not mince words with you. Sarah knows only pithy, bitchy lowblows. Deborah knows only sex talk and corporate speak. But you. You step boldly into the bloodbath, you know who the general is. I respect that. I respect you. A true soldier of a foregone era. You did well in school? No shit. The teachers could see right through you, they know you're fucked in the head. They know you're predisposed to be a goddamn school shooter. But you weren't shooting up schools, were you, my boy? No, you weren't. Highest honors. I love that. I love you. You're the best of the bunch, boy. But what are we to do? Continue our operations, I suppose. Expand our research empire. You know the drill. I need not drill it into you. But look. I need a man of your caliber. Have you considered the supervisor position?

MARSHALL

It's a lot more work for a only few more dollars.

CHARLES

Oof, my boy. The light does shine from out your eyes. Well, sort this out. You know what to do. Will you do that for me?

MARSHALL

I will.

CHARLES

Goody, goody. Now, I know you know I see that mangy bard is on his way. So, we'll leave it here for now. Toodaloo.

Dialtone. Enter Aaron.

MARSHALL

Welcome back. How was San Jose?

AARON

Who were you just talking to?

MARSHALL

Charles Leary.

AARON

Yeah? He seems to call everyone but me. I guess I don't need the help. Yeah, San Jose was alright. It was weird wondering what you all were up to here, though. How are you liking my respondent?

MARSHALL

He's not your respondent anymore.

AARON

Yeah, I know that. You two having fun?

MARSHALL

This isn't fun. This is work.

AARON

No, but then again you're a stoic. I'm not so much a stoic. Life's motions are like lights upon your face. They wrap and furl over it but leave no trace of themselves. It's not so with me. On me, they're like blows. They break skin, they change my figure.

MARSHALL

You're not going to learn about me by telling me who I am. Which by the way is good, because I don't want you to know.

AARON

Well you should get to know me. I may be your superior soon, and you should know I'm not going to be pushed around.

Enter Deborah.

DEBORAH

Aaron, you cocksucking little bastard, get over here. Marshall, get out of here. Aaron, we're going to talk. I'll be coordinating this conversation.

Exit Marshall.

You dumb little loser. You were under quota. At 38%. I sent you off on the offsite because I knew that you

DEBORAH

wouldn't be around to. Because I knew you could do it. So, what were you doing out there?

AARON

I've had some things on my mind.

DEBORAH

Well, take them off. You're developing a real cavalier attitude towards quota completion. I know that you have been working here for a long time and that you want the supervisor position.

AARON

I don't want the.

DEBORAH

But you're not going to get it by acting like an infant. Marshall is starting to look like a very promising candidate compared to you. 100% quota completion, immaculate attention to detail, perfect according to quality assurance. Do you want that?

AARON

If you're going to fire me, then I'm quitting right now. I don't care about the unemployment benefits. I care about my dignity.

DEBORAH

I'm not firing you. But I can't rely on you to do anything too responsible right now. Your job for the next week is going to be faking surveys, and that's it. Regret that phone number app.

AARON

Regret it. I already have it.

DEBORAH

Alright. Good. Come up with some names and numbers and start faking it, fucker.

AARON

Christ, the globe of life. I am the last pioneer, progressed so far in one direction only to end up where I've started.

DEBORAH

You didn't progress, Aaron. 38% is not progressing. Keep the poetry at home, where no one but you can hear it.

AARON

Do I get the compensation? Or is the money going into your bank account?

DEBORAH

I can reduce you to the janitor of this place, and you're looking for perks.

AARON

The clients want their money to go to the person answering their questions. That's me.

DEBORAH

And you're giving it to a charity of your choice, asshole. A fundraiser for my summer trip to Vegas. How kind of you.

AARON

You have been nothing to me but.

DEBORAH

What?

AARON

I have nothing to say.

DEBORAH

Don't say you have nothing to say. If you have nothing to say, don't say anything.

AARON

I don't have anything to say. I have nothing.

DEBORAH

Be quiet, is what I'm saying.

AARON

I can't be all quiet until my heart stops ticking.

DEBORAH

I await the day.

AARON

I have nothing to say to that.

DEBORAH

Shut up.

Exit Deborah. Aaron stares above. Enter Sarah.

SARAH

What are you looking at?

AARON

Those bright bulbs above us. No heat comes from them. No, only light. No wild scent in the cool breeze. No, only air fresheners in air conditioners. No nature here at all, no, only its stale replacements, and our hands to turn their dials.

SARAH

What are you even saying, Aaron?

AARON

This time I'm talking to myself more than to you.

SARAH

I can see that. So, I think Marshall might have some sort of brain dysfunction. Might have been a drug baby.

AARON

Marshall, huh? Well. I agree with you. He's got ahold of something really psychotic.

SARAH

Listen. I want to talk about things. Have you thought about trying to make this work?

AARON

I don't know if this job's ever going to. It's getting to me. When I was at San Jose I just lost all motivation, lost all sharpness. Everything exhausted me. It's not physical. I'm not unhealthy. As a matter of fact, not a single person in my family has any disorders whatsoever.

SARAH

Are you trying to sell me on your genetics?

AARON

Just take it into consideration. But what do you care? You've saved no bonds for me. You'll save that for the sociopaths. They won't have to wait long.

SARAH

When you look at me, do you like what you see? Or do you just like how I make you look?

AARON

Where the hell did that come from? You must be talking to yourself now.

SARAH

I've got work to do in here. Can you leave?

AARON

Gladly. Besides, I've got to relax my mind for tonight. I have a big threesome planned with a screen and my mind. I'll be masturbating to porn videos while fantasizing about other porn videos.

Exit Aaron.

SARAH

Fuck this.

She takes out her phone and calls.

Hello, is Charles Leary there? Hi, this is Sarah Williams. Let Mr. Leary know that I am still interested in the senior manager position. I realize that he is giving it up to Deborah, but let him know that I have some information for him that I believe will change his mind.

Scene 4.2

Marshall sits at the desk, typing on and reading from the computer. John sits on the sofa.

MARSHALL

Five oil lamps spin around your head. How is your daughter?

JOHN

She's. She's in jail. She was found whoring herself out. They caught her with drug possession. She faces two felony charges.

MARSHALL

The flames flicker from the brewing wind. On the table before you there is a vase with a poppy seed in it. The vase expands. It is sucking you in. You are now in it.

JOHN

Bring it back. Bring it back.

MARSHALL

What do you see?

JOHN

It's gone, damn it. It's not there anymore. It's disappeared.

MARSHALL

What do you see?

JOHN

Nothing, damn it.

MARSHALL

You must see something, sir.

JOHN

The mirror. I see the one-way mirror.

MARSHALL

What do you see in the one-way mirror?

JOHN

I see myself.

MARSHALL

The mirror revolves on its midheight axis until the transparent side faces you. On the other side of the glass there is nothing. There is no room. There is no supervisor. It is a void of neither darkness nor light. Now, what do you see?

JOHN

I don't see anything.

MARSHALL

The question concerns what you do see. Not what you don't.

JOHN

Okay. Then, I see nothing.

MARSHALL

If you know that nothing is there, then why are you looking?

JOHN

You asked me to.

MARSHALL

Focus on the mirror, please. This is not an open-ended question and that's not one of the available answers.

JOHN

What are the available answers?

MARSHALL

I am not allowed to tell you.

JOHN

Why isn't it one of the answers?

MARSHALL

I don't write the surveys, sir. But, I suspect because the survey didn't ask you to look in the mirror. It asked you what you saw in the mirror. As you know, these are very deliberately worded.

JOHN

Well, how am I supposed to see if I don't look?

MARSHALL

I don't mean to be rude, sir, but we've been together a long time, and it won't go any faster with you asking the questions.

JOHN

I'm sorry. I don't know why I looked.

MARSHALL

I don't know. Okay. Good answer. What did you expect?

JOHN

Anything. It could have been anything else and I would have been happier.

MARSHALL

What did you want?

JOHN

More people. My family. My families.

MARSHALL

Take a deep breath. The mirror revolves again so the reflective glass is now facing you. Your reflection, the man who faces you now, shakes free from his connection to you and waves his hand, beckoning you to come. You step into the glass, through yourself, and now you are on its side. You leave this room and there is no one in the building. There is no one anywhere. You drive to your house, the lamps are lit, the traffic lights blink, but there is no one. A car passes by you but the driver's seat is empty. A sign on a supermarket flashes with the word, Open, but there is no one inside. You are driving through a ghost city, a living death. There is no one but you. And you enter your home, but you are alone. And you wash in the shower, but you are alone. You think sad thoughts and sing sad songs, and all this time you are alone. But now when you open your closet door, you see a hallway into an opium den. And in there your daughter hangs by her heels upside-down from the ceiling as shadow people, demons of silk and smoke, stick needles into her skin and dildos into her orifices. And you try to run over to her but prison bars appear preventing you from

MARSHALL
moving any closer, and she smiles at you and she says to you, "This is what you wanted for me, Daddy. Are you proud of me, Daddy?"

JOHN
Oh, good God in heaven, help me.

MARSHALL
Is this what you wanted for her, Daddy?

JOHN
No.

MARSHALL
Are you proud of her, Daddy?

JOHN
No.

MARSHALL
What do you say to her?

JOHN
I would be there for you, baby. I would. If I could, I would be there. My little girl. The world does not want me with you.

MARSHALL
Is it really the world's fault?

JOHN
I don't know whose fault it is.

MARSHALL
You return once again to the mirror, step through, and now you are back. I am going to place a product on the table. Inspect it without touching it, then tell me when you are finished.

He stands up, pretends to place something on the table and sits back down.

JOHN
Oh my god. Oh my god, oh my god. I'm so sorry.

MARSHALL
Are you finished in your inspection?

JOHN
Yes, yes, I'm finished.

MARSHALL

What are your first impressions of the product?

JOHN

It's beautiful.

MARSHALL

What do you see?

JOHN

Everything. It's everything.

MARSHALL

Why do you want it?

JOHN

To fill the void.

MARSHALL

Are you ready to fill the void?

JOHN

Yes, Daddy. I'm ready.

MARSHALL

Deborah wants a lay tonight. Will you give it to her?

JOHN

Yes, Daddy. I will.

Marshall hits the wall three times. John loosens.

MARSHALL

The survey is complete, sir.

JOHN

Really? That was fast. Only a total of some, what, thirty hours?

MARSHALL

You qualified, sir.

JOHN

Qualified for what? Another survey? You guys really crave me, don't you?

MARSHALL

Deborah, the survey is over. He qualified.

Enter Deborah.

DEBORAH
Qualified? Qualified for what?

MARSHALL
It will contact him within one to three days.

DEBORAH
Hold on, let me see it. You can leave now, Marshall.

Exit Marshall.

JOHN
So, how about another round tonight? Celebrate the end of this survey.

DEBORAH
Sounds good.

JOHN
I'll play manager this time.

Scene 4.3

Aaron is on the computer. Enter Marshall.

AARON
I know you're there, Marshall.

He turns around to face Marshall.
Are you on break or something?

MARSHALL
My shift ended a half an hour ago, but I've been interviewing John.

AARON
My old respondent. Fragile-minded man. But he has to be if he's lying with Deborah.

MARSHALL
What does she have you doing?

AARON
I'm faking surveys. Right now I'm answering as Julia Merton, a married woman with three children who works in finance and doesn't exist. How do you think Mrs. Julia Merton feels about cologne number 476?

MARSHALL
You'll have to ask her.

AARON

This is pretty schizophrenic. Does that bother you?

MARSHALL

I'm still here, aren't I?

AARON

Are you? Are you the same person out there as you are in here?

MARSHALL

It's my duty not to be a person here at all, Mrs. Merton.

AARON

You want to give it a try, then?

MARSHALL

Deborah knows I'm uncomfortable faking surveys.

AARON

But you conduct them, don't you? So what difference does it make? What's the difference if you're asking questions you never wrote, or answering them as someone else? It's still not you. You said so yourself. Not to be a person here at all.

MARSHALL

That's an interesting point.

AARON

So, help me out. I'm wasting away sitting here.

MARSHALL

You were assigned to do this work, though. Not me.

AARON

You don't want me languishing, do you?

MARSHALL

It wouldn't really affect me.

AARON

You see the comfort here. Chairs and cubicles and gray carpet floors. Silver interior of my soul now. Is that what you wanted when you applied? What brought you here to this firm?

MARSHALL

What brought you.

AARON

I know what you're doing. I've read the Art of War.

MARSHALL

You seem to know what I'm doing better than I do.

AARON

I asked you, Why are you here? You know what I'm asking. You know what I'm trying to talk about.

MARSHALL

For some people their focal point is their blind spot. If they tried speaking around it, they might make their point.

AARON

Isn't it best to be blunt? Or do blunt knives break no skin? I don't know. Let's address it with whatever rhetoric the situation demands from us.

MARSHALL

Are you sure you want to talk about this during work?

AARON

I'm not working. Julia is.

MARSHALL

Are you sure you want to talk about this with me?

AARON

Without you, there would be nothing to talk about.

MARSHALL

Are you sure you even want to talk about this?

AARON

Yes, I do. And settle this before it turns into something else.

MARSHALL

I don't know if you've noticed, but we should be careful what we say in here.

AARON

I've got nothing to lose. I don't know if you've noticed, but it didn't take you too long to threaten taking my. Future position.

MARSHALL

No, Aaron, it didn't take me long. But have I taken it? She knows I'm not interested. I've been honest in all accounts. In spite of.

Marshall gestures to the computer.

AARON

Yeah, in spite of that.

MARSHALL

So you do have something to lose.

AARON

I can't lose something I don't have yet.

MARSHALL

You haven't been given the offer?

AARON

No.

MARSHALL

You've invested a lot into this sheer speculation. All this time you've said you don't want it, while I thought you've had it. I thought it was official.

AARON

It's not even unofficial. It's not anything. You're a near sighted sage.

MARSHALL

So I guess this means we're in the same position.

AARON

Maybe. But whenever she speaks to me, she brings you up. Why is that, Marshall? What could she possibly be hiding?

MARSHALL

I can speculate all year and still not find the reason.

AARON

You may be right that I speak too much. I try to tell her and she hears nothing. Meanwhile, your silence is more convincing than my words.

MARSHALL

My numbers speak for themselves. But still we're in the same position. There is no need for jealousy and suspicion. We are still in the same place. However, if you were to want to make something else, I might help you out. You understand? I'm not trying to be your sassy psychiatrist. It is just, suppose you were on a river that is progressing downstream. How do you make it upstream?

AARON

How?

MARSHALL

You leave the water and walk up the river bank.

AARON

Exit is your answer? Start some other. Do something else.

MARSHALL

Sure. I'm not the most masculine person but I do have balls. So do you. God gave them to you so that you can use them.

AARON

Didn't you hear the good news? God died a hundred and fifty years ago.

MARSHALL

He's been known to resurrect.

AARON

That horny old cuckhold's been known to erect, whenever his most faithful fuck each other up he watches gleefully, impotently whenever we have our little deaths. Believe me, he'd rise at my suicide. Are you on his side?

MARSHALL

I'm here. Which side is that?

AARON

I don't know.

MARSHALL

I don't know either. Maybe it's not for us to decide. Maybe it's for us to do, and let something else decide for us.

Marshall begins to walk out.

AARON

Where are you going?

MARSHALL

Home.

AARON

So you're not going to help me out, then?

MARSHALL

No. I won't do your work, Mrs. Merton. But, Aaron, I can do our work.

AARON

Nothing's been settled. Our fists are clenched.

MARSHALL

As long as we are still here, they'll stay that way. And as long as they stay that way, we'll still be here. Please reflect on what I proposing you.

Exit Marshall. Aaron stares into the one-way mirror.

AARON

Well, hello. I know you are monitoring me. You voyeur, you watch and you never call. Well then, I'll start. You probably think I'm a nut talking to you. I would. I'd say, look at this guy, he thinks I'm looking at him. Or maybe there's nothing recording behind this pane of glass. Who knows. I'm wailing at the modern condition, gazing into it, trying to find the entity that is judging and scrutinizing me, but only seeing myself. Like everyone else. They'll say we look like the entity. They'll say we are the entity. Well. I say it's only a reflection. There actually is an entity behind it, and it looks nothing like me. Okay. Whatever. Listen. I'll hide nothing from you. You see my situation, faking surveys, killing myself with masturbation. Aye. I stare into the mirror and see Mrs. Merton. Now not even my reflection looks like me. Or, maybe I never recognized I always had her face. Okay, whatever, but I'm at a dead end on a one-street. There's a line of cars behind me honking for me to go forward. Should I stay here, be an chump, be a fool for placing my loyalties onto you, when you hold no loyalties for me, while I have nothing else to be loyal to, when maybe to leave will be to live well? No. No, there's is only stepping out and walking back. So, let's leave this last little piece of me in the trunk and then I'm out. It's my duty now to work as some other person. I'll talk to myself, I'll surrender. I'll fake these surveys. I'll surrender myself and I'll fake them.

Scene 4.4

John sits at the desk, doing paperwork. Enter Deborah, Todd.

DEBORAH

You're on a roll tonight.

TODD

It's easy when I'm with a sexy little. Oh, uh excuse me, sir, I uh.

DEBORAH

Oh, don't. Don't worry about him. He won't see us.

TODD

He won't, he won't see us? He's right there.

DEBORAH

No, I've got this thing going. He's doing my paperwork. He's been promoted.

TODD

He's what? Wait, are you using a retard for slave labor?

DEBORAH

He's not. He doesn't have a mental disorder. He's not like that because of his own brain. He's like that. Forget about him. Forget why he's like that. Let's drink. I mean, I hope you don't mind I've been drinking. Or that I will be drinking. I mean, do you want to drink, is what I'm saying?

TODD

Yeah, for the love of god, give me a drink.

Deborah pours.

DEBORAH

Did you know I would have loved to live in a glass house?

TODD

No. I, uh, had no idea.

The two drink.

DEBORAH

Ignore him. But don't. Because when I said that I meant that I like being watched. Like public exposure, that sort of thing. It helps me cope. You want to know what else helps me?

TODD

I've got an idea.

Todd grabs her breast.

DEBORAH

Ugh. Men like you. I meant drinking. And I need it. Unsympathetic asshole like you can't even let me finish before assuming what I'm going to say. Can you even understand the grief I have being childless at my age? My child is dead.

TODD

I'm sorry to hear that.

DEBORAH

Well, he never really lived. I've never been pregnant. But the grief, but still the despair to see one friend after the other having two kids, three kids, four. Their breeding a fucking community. And where am I? I'm more successful than some of them. I can't even be upset about it. I'm not allowed to. Take your pants off.

Todd takes his pants off. As Deborah removes her dress.

It's not my fault. Yeah I cheated with my husband. So what? He never loved me. If he loved me I wouldn't have. I promise. But I couldn't be there for him. Not in that way. He had to be there for me in that way.

TODD

Look, let's just get this over with.

DEBORAH

I know. I like that you're so demanding. No, it's good. Really. It's a sweet relief not to ride my toys tonight. But you wouldn't talk to me like that if you knew. You have no idea what a hot bitch I used to be. I had stalkers. I miss that. I treated them like shit. They were shit. I miss them. You have no idea. You talk to me like that now, and I like it, I do. But you don't know. You can never know.

Physical intimacy. John stops doing the paperwork and watches. He approaches them and begins to incorporate himself.

DEBORAH

Pig. You fucking pig. Trying to incorporate yourself into this.

John becomes more aggressive. Deborah freaks out.

TODD

This place is a fucking asylum. I'm out.

Exit Todd.

DEBORAH

Todd, you fucking coward, I helped you. Save me.

Deborah and John wrestle on the floor until Deborah releases herself. She runs to the wall and smacks it three times. John loosens.

JOHN

Woah, what the hell.

DEBORAH

You rapist. You ruined my date with your rape.

JOHN

What the hell is going on?

DEBORAH

Get out of here, you're scum. Creepy, serial killer, rapist, misogynist scum. Leave.

JOHN

I don't even know what the fuck just happened.

DEBORAH

You need to learn how to function as a proper employee.

JOHN

Hey, listen, bitch. I ain't going to allow any woman talk to me like that. Telling me what's wrong with me and shit. I ain't asking for your advice.

DEBORAH

If I ever see you again.

JOHN

In your fucking dreams.

DEBORAH

I'll fucking put you behind bars. Get the flying fuck out of here.

JOHN

I will. I'll go home right now and I'll let the CEOs in Leary Buttfuck Research know what in the hell you've been doing with me after you close this place up. Good luck finding a new job, you fucking whore. Shit.

Exit John. Deborah screams.

ACT VScene 5.1

Sarah is packing her things. Enter Deborah.

DEBORAH

Ugh. I had the worst nightmare last night.

SARAH

About what?

DEBORAH

The slob. What are you doing?

SARAH

Packing my stuff. I got the senior manager position.

DEBORAH

I didn't know that position was open.

SARAH

Yeah, I realize that.

As Sarah exits:

DEBORAH

You know that advice you gave me was shit.

Phone rings. Deborah answer it.

DEBORAH

Leary Research.

CHARLES

Deborah. I need to talk to you about a couple things.

DEBORAH

I know already what you want to talk to me about.

CHARLES

You know? Alright, well good. Then you know to fire him.

DEBORAH

Fire him? He didn't actually work here, Charles.

CHARLES

Aaron's been working there for a year now.

DEBORAH

What's Aaron got to do with this?

CHARLES

He faked the surveys, didn't he? Are we talking about the same. Oh wait. I know what you're talking about. Yeah, we'll get to that in a second. Yeah, so, QA called one of the respondent's numbers for verification and the voicemail was for a free number app. We looked it up and saw that the interviewer was Aaron. You're using fake identities, Deborah.

DEBORAH

He used them.

CHARLES

Yeah right, well, he won't anymore. He's fired. I'm sending you the papers right now.

DEBORAH

You know, every firm in the world fakes these surveys.

CHARLES

That may be so. But, Deborah, you can't make it so obvious. Now, onto that other thing. Eh, how I shall I put this? Uh, we have been receiving complaints from respondents about your behavior. That you have been too invasive, too unprofessional, that sort of thing. Is this true?

DEBORAH

No.

CHARLES

I don't even know why I'm asking. It doesn't matter if it's true. It matters that someone said it. Now, Deborah, you know me. I'm a relaxed guy. I can drink a glass of scotch while the whole world shatters around me. Bombs don't faze me, I'm unflappable. The water pipes of our nation can be poisoned, fruit fields can be lit up by naïve radicals, fanned into a fiery inferno, scarecrows smoking away into the wind, I don't care, skyscrapers can fall, husbands and wives can be drugged out on meth in the broken streets paved by our forefathers, they can be chainsawed by militiamen right near the teary eyes of their bastard children, their grandmamas, wrinkly old conservative women preaching of the end times while fucking in muddy waters, and their bappas, beating priests with the crosses of their faith, mobs of starved pale scavengers feasting on bird shit, smirking perverts in elementary schools using leather whips to punish prepubescent asses, blood pouring - pouring into sidewalk sewers, racial wars, death, decay, the end of all that is holy and civilized, all of this, all of this I can sit through and I can drink my scotch, and I would say, Man, this

CHARLES

is some fine scotch. But uh, Deborah, uh, what was I talking about?

DEBORAH

You're a relaxed guy...

CHARLES

Right. So, right, you're free to do whatever you like so long as it abides by the rules and conduct of this company, whether explicit or implied.

DEBORAH

Charles, what the hell are you talking about?

CHARLES

Okay, allow me to be less opaque. As you know, your after hour videos have been a dependable source of satisfaction for me. We've had a good thing going, and I have compensated you well. But you don't blather to your inferiors about what you've been doing and you don't then call the guy, Creepy, serial killer, rapist, misogynist scum, because that makes problems for me.

DEBORAH

So I'm being fired.

CHARLES

No, I'm not going to lay you off. But with the faked surveys and this, count yourself blessed. You almost got the senior manager position, Deborah. I told everyone you were great, and now I look like a fool. You should be thanking me. You should be on your knees, kissing my feet.

DEBORAH

I'm very thankful, Charles.

CHARLES

Yeah, yeah, yeah, well, truthfully, there's no reason to be. You were never really under any threat.

DEBORAH

I wasn't?

CHARLES

No, not a soul in this office believes it'd be wise to fire you. Isn't that strange?

DEBORAH

I suppose.

CHARLES

In fact, your presence is so pleasing for our face, no one wants to demote you either. Stranger still, isn't it?

DEBORAH

I suppose.

CHARLES

And yet, all of us here at corporate agree we can't rely on you for any responsibility. What a predicament.

DEBORAH

I suppose.

CHARLES

You suppose. I suppose we've sailed into some mysterious seas, haven't we?

DEBORAH

I suppose from your tone and innuendo that this call is more than a mere warning, so get out with it.

CHARLES

Deborah. We've come up with a new arrangement that we believe will make you feel more comfortable. You know Marshall?

DEBORAH

I should. I hired him.

CHARLES

Marshall will be taking your salary and your responsibilities as manager, and you will take the salary and responsibilities of the supervisor. You will still be manager, though, in title, if not in duties or in pay. Same with Marshall. He's just the supervisor, you see. So, if someone goes up to Marshall and asks, for instance, may I speak to your manager, he'll direct that someone to you. But when it comes to, uh, you know, actually managing. Do you understand?

DEBORAH

Yeah, I get it. Do I get any choice in this arrangement?

CHARLES

No.

DEBORAH

So I'm a fraud. You're asking me to be a fraud.

CHARLES

Yes, I and all those who watch you through the ceiling of your glass house.

DEBORAH

Do you know how much stress I have gone through for this company? The wrinkles I've grown, the sweat, the tears, the blood, all my bodily fluids. Do you even care about that?

CHARLES

No. No, crippling anxiety is not among your job requirements. Nor, among the services we provide. At most it's collateral damage. I am pleased you can see through this, though. There may be hope for you yet.

DEBORAH

There's no hope in lies.

CHARLES

No, that's true. And that worries me. I'm sure you've noticed we've been clearing all the old ways out. We've discovered new uses for these firms that transcend research. New old stuff. It's been beneficial to us to regain some of the old world wisdom. You've seen it. You wrecked up that respondent John, unfortunately. He got his wits back. But that's not a problem. We've got the induction survey going on in every one of our locations across the country. That we need lies for support though is a problem that concerns me. But don't worry about yourself. You'll be fine. You'll have a good time. After all, you can mix work and play.

Dialtone.

DEBORAH

Aaron, Marshall, come in here.

Enter Aaron.

Jesus, you look tired.

AARON

Aye. And yet I drank so much coffee this morning.

DEBORAH

Where is Marshall?

AARON

Unpacking the last of the lipstick.

DEBORAH

We'll wait for him. Meantime, have you seen my eyeliner?

AARON

Try calling it, Boss.

DEBORAH

That won't work, idiot. It's eyeliner.

AARON

Swoosh. You can borrow my bags.

DEBORAH

I want to look sexy, not drunk.

AARON

Fuck me, Boss. I am drunk and you've never looked sexier.

Enter Marshall.

DEBORAH

I should send you to HR.

AARON

What HR? You are HR.

DEBORAH

I mean corporate HR.

AARON

Go ahead. They know I'm a buffoon.

DEBORAH

Marshall, thank god. (to Aaron) If I weren't already firing you, I'd fire you for that.

AARON

Oh, strange fortunes. What was the grace that banished me?

DEBORAH

What?

AARON

Why am I being fired?

DEBORAH

Because. Corporate validated a respondent's phone number and heard a voicemail for the CallMeNow app. You didn't cover yourself, Aaron.

AARON

Ah. Faked, found, fired. The truth creeps through. Well. I dismissed my name to this place, and it dismisses me. What little life left leaves. Good stuff.

AARON

There is poetry in sacking me for that, but of every way I've fucked up here, where is the logic? That fault is in the employer, not in the employee, is it not? Is it really my mistake to take your orders?

DEBORAH

I ordered you to break the rules, not get caught. That was your mistake.

AARON

Then they've busted the right nut. I worked at an upstart firm, and one man was dropped because they said he was responsible for every spelling and grammar mistake in the surveys. Of course he was. He was the only one there who wrote the surveys. They see the blemish on the face of Helen, you know.

DEBORAH

Are you not well?

AARON

I'm doing just great. You've fired me up. I won't miss this. All that recruiting over the telephone, calling up someone's house at ten at night asking some guy if I can speak to his wife. That can tear a bit of doubt in a man's soul. My voice is the voice of a home wrecker.

DEBORAH

Good news time, now. Marshall, you've been promoted.

MARSHALL

Oh, for god's sake. Why me? Why not Sarah?

DEBORAH

Sarah, unbeknownst to me, has applied for a senior manager position and has gotten it.

MARSHALL

I wasn't aware that position was open.

DEBORAH

Neither was I.

MARSHALL

So, I'm supervisor.

DEBORAH

Yes, but not exactly. It's going to come with certain conditions. Essentially, you will be managing this location, you will get a manager's salary, but you will still be supervisor and I will still be manager. Have you got any questions about this?

MARSHALL

I am not entirely sure what I am being asked to do.

AARON

Yeah, those are uncertain conditions.

DEBORAH

You're not being asked to do anything. We have to ask you. That's what being, or not being manager means.

MARSHALL

Right, but am I to answer to you, or you to me?

DEBORAH

We answer to each other.

MARSHALL

If we answer each other, then who is asking?

DEBORAH

The employees.

MARSHALL

Aside from the employees, when a final decision must be made, who is in the position, you or I, to give the orders?

DEBORAH

We make it together. Your orders are for me to agree to.

MARSHALL

Are you to tell me that when a decision is to be made, I must come to you with the orders, you must agree to them, and then the orders can be made?

DEBORAH

That appears to be the situation.

MARSHALL

But I can't just make the orders.

DEBORAH

No, because you're not manager.

MARSHALL

So they're my orders that you are implementing.

DEBORAH

No, you're implementing the orders.

MARSHALL

So it's your job to assent to or dissent from the orders?

DEBORAH

Yes.

MARSHALL

And if you dissent, the orders will not be made?

DEBORAH

No.

MARSHALL

How exactly is this to be played out in the physical world?

AARON

Inefficiently.

DEBORAH

Be quiet.

AARON

Mendaciously.

DEBORAH

Shut. What? Shut up.

AARON

This is how it'll go. You'll say, This needs be done. She'll say, That's bullshit. You'll say, Yes miss. Then you'll go ahead and do it anyway.

DEBORAH

Stop right.

AARON

All will be impotent. All will be frustrated.

DEBORAH

Stop right now.

AARON

'Twill be a great charade that wastes the time of all.

DEBORAH

Will you shut up? That's not how it will be.

AARON

The bull is the shit.

DEBORAH

We will operate under these conditions and then we will see. Do you have any other complaints?

MARSHALL

Well, also, if Sarah, with her modest numbers, is going to be a senior partner, it seems to me I've worked hard only for middle management.

DEBORAH

I'm still the manager. Is that your main complaint?

MARSHALL

It's more of an observation, miss.

DEBORAH

Good, because I can't do anything about that.

MARSHALL

Can I?

DEBORAH

No. Any more comments or questions from either of you?

AARON

I'd like to make a comment. You can all fucking bury each other.

DEBORAH

Thank you for your comment. This meeting is now adjourned.

AARON

Thanks, your honor.

MARSHALL

Thank you, miss.

Exit Aaron and Marshall. Deborah sits. She picks up her phone and dials.

MAN

Hello?

DEBORAH

Hi, this is Deborah. Is John there?

MAN

This is his brother. I hate to be the one to tell you this, but John died last night.

DEBORAH

Oh my god. I'm sorry. Was it a heroin overdose, or a car accident, or?

MAN

No. He, he fell down a flight of stairs. He was looking to get a vase and candles at the mall for some reason.

DEBORAH

Oh.

MAN

Did you know him well?

DEBORAH

Yeah. I knew him. He was a cocksucker. I called him now to tell him. He's a dick for brains. What the Brits call a bell end. A complete idiot moron dude bro. I hate to be the one to tell you this, but it's better that he's dead.

She hangs up the phone and stares into the mirror.
You want a nice video, Leary?

She sits on top of the desk and starts masturbating, sobbing.

Fuck me, fuck me, fuck me. Rub me all over with oil, Leary. Fuck me, fuck me. Rub it all over my breasts. I want to be saved. Fuck me. Rub me with oil. I want to be saved.

Scene 5.2

Sarah is continuing to pack. Enter Marshall.

SARAH

Hey. How are you?

MARSHALL

Hey, I can't really talk, I've got a respondent in a few minutes. Barry. Didn't he used to work here?

SARAH

Yeah. I'm going to be leaving soon.

MARSHALL

I know. Congratulations. It's a legitimate position. Aaron's been fired. I'm. Well, I'm supervisor, I guess.

SARAH

Aaron's been fired?

MARSHALL
Yes.

SARAH
You know, even though I'm leaving, we can still talk over the phone, if you'd like.

MARSHALL
That might be nice.

She steps back.

SARAH
I really should stop doing this.

MARSHALL
Aaron is on your mind.

SARAH
It isn't that.

MARSHALL
I didn't ask.

SARAH
Okay. You're right. He is.

MARSHALL
That's nothing to be ashamed of.

Enter Aaron.

SARAH
Marshall, he's not a screw up. At all. But he's screwing up. What should I do?

MARSHALL
Ask him.

Exit Marshall.

AARON
Well? Aren't you going to ask me? Aren't you going to ask me what you should do?

SARAH
I can't be sure you'd give me the right answer.

AARON
If you trust me, you can. But why should I trust you? Wouldn't you prefer Marshall? You find him attractive, don't you?

SARAH

Marshall reminds me of a reanimated corpse. Don't be ridiculous. Sit down. Relax.

AARON

Sit down? This is a conversation, not an interview. Or shall we play couples therapy?

SARAH

Aaron.

AARON

You've told me about your life. I've told you about mine. We've both been hurt.

SARAH

Oh god.

AARON

We're afraid it'll happen again. But it's that fear that will hurt us.

SARAH

You're scaring me. Marshall.

AARON

He is not a knight, Mrs. Senior Manager.

SARAH

Stay back. Marshall.

AARON

He has a respondent waiting for him, Mrs. Senior Manager.

SARAH

Stay back. You've gone completely crazy. Stay back.

AARON

Stay back, stay back. Oh shut up. I don't want to come any closer. And it's a bit vain of you to think I do.

SARAH

I'm vain? Me? I'm the one with the hubris, not you, the great American bard? Your ego is very big and very fragile and there's a little demon inside of it that wants to ruin everything good in your life.

AARON

Oh! Horn of the unicorn. Oh, how it hurts. The gods do love your use of it, the jealous gods, the penis envying gods. Oh how they love your imaginary horn.

SARAH

You've lost your mind.

AARON

Aye. It was very fragile. So. I have had the ghost of Barry possess me. It has led me to his fate. I'm confident you've heard. If in nothing else, I am confident in that.

SARAH

It wasn't the ghost of Barry that got you fired. It was you and your dumb mistakes.

AARON

Aye, yai, yai. Corrida de unicorn. And I, aye yai yai, thrown so unwittingly into the ring.

SARAH

You're drunk. You think I'm going to put up with you if you're drunk all the time?

AARON

Put up with me? Girl. Oh, girl. You have not grasped the coming reality. You have no enemy left to run to. I am the disappearing matador. The sun whitens the red dye off my flag. The wind levels my footprints in the sand. I leave you at last without war, and you're stranded here without peace. Aye, yai, yai.

SARAH

So this is it, then. Did you ever really love me?

AARON

You drove me crazy. I think that qualifies.

SARAH

If you would have just focused on our relationship.

AARON

How can I focus on something that isn't there? Lie to my trusting eyes? Or, trust my lying eyes? No, I'll look away. I'll find it elsewhere. There are better prospects for me out there than in here. So this is it. So long, Sarah.

Aaron begins to exit.

SARAH

Aaron.

AARON

What?

SARAH

Wait.

AARON

Why?

SARAH

Just wait.

AARON

Just what is the goddamn issue?

SARAH

I don't want it to end like this.

AARON

So?

SARAH

So, before you leave, I want you to do something for me.

AARON

Really? You? So unusual. Well, alright, name it. For old time's sake. This will be the last time I ever do anything for you.

SARAH

I'm fine with that. I want you to ask me, what is your name?

AARON

Why do you want me to do that?

SARAH

It's just a little survey. Can you do that for me?

AARON

Alright. What is your name?

SARAH

Sarah Williams. Now, ask me, Do you wish you had been more respectful towards me?

AARON

Sarah.

SARAH

Please.

AARON

Do you wish you had been more respectful towards me?

SARAH

Yes, I do. Now ask, do you wish I was more respectable?

AARON

Oh, fucking Christ. Do you wish I was more respectable?

SARAH

Yes, I really do. Ask me, do you want to see me?

AARON

Do you want to see me?

SARAH

Yes, I do. Ask me, when I leave here, will you follow me?

AARON

When I leave here, will you follow me?

SARAH

Yes, Aaron. Yes, I will.

AARON

Will you kiss my feet?

Scene 5.3

Barry sits on the armchair. Enter Marshall.

MARSHALL

Are you here for the Induction?

BARRY

That's me. Are you the young man who took my job?

MARSHALL

In a manner of speaking, yes. These things are given, though, aren't they?

BARRY

Yes, and they can be given up too.

MARSHALL

What brings you back here, sir?

BARRY

I need some quick cash. \$300 is too good to pass up. You hear that a lot don't you: quick cash?

MARSHALL

It is a very popular phrase.

BARRY

You'll tire of it someday.

MARSHALL

It's possible, sir.

BARRY

Well, the lanky hordes have arrived.

MARSHALL

It appears that way, sir.

BARRY

So, what's this survey about?

MARSHALL

I can't say, sir.

BARRY

I see, I see. Well, I'm shaking with excitement.

MARSHALL

Before we begin I would like to ask you some preliminary questions. Would you like my job?

BARRY

What's the question?

MARSHALL

Would you like my job, sir?

BARRY

Are you asking me, or is this part of the survey?

MARSHALL

What difference does it make?

BARRY

I need to know if you're serious.

MARSHALL

I am serious. I believe it's a fortuitous thing for you to come here today, sir. For the both of us. Would you like my job, sir?

BARRY

I've had your job. I was fired.

MARSHALL

That means prior experience. Besides, it's not like the job you had. Not anymore.

BARRY

Why are you offering it to me? Why don't you want it?

MARSHALL

I have a friend I want to start something with.

BARRY

So, what are you suggesting?

MARSHALL

I hire you as an employee. I cede my position to you.
Then, I resign. And you get to run this place.

BARRY

You're speaking to me like you're the manager. You're
not the manager.

MARSHALL

No, I'm not. Would you like my job?

Curtain.