

NUMBERS ARE DOWN

A Comedy in Three Acts

by

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Cast of Characters

<u>Andrew (Andy):</u>	A man in his early 30s; works at Abacus.
<u>Maxine (Max):</u>	A woman in her mid 20s; Andy's coworker.
<u>Cassie:</u>	A woman in her early 30s; Andy's girlfriend; works in legal at Abacus.
<u>Frank:</u>	A man in his 40s; Andy and Max's boss.
<u>Lucy:</u>	A woman in her 50s; Frank's boss.

Additional Character Notes

Outside of Andy, no character is stereotyped to a given race or ethnicity. Andy, meanwhile, should be portrayed as someone who identifies as white.

Gender dynamics plays into the story. It's important that Max, Cassie, and Lucy are portrayed as women (or feminine-leaning non-binary). Andy and Frank should be portrayed as men who identify as men.

No conflict or jokes rely on physical appearance (height, weight, disability, etc.). Characters can be played by actors of any size and shape.

Scene

An open-seating office in the basement of Abacus headquarters.

Time

The present

Act IScene 1

SETTING:

An open-seating-style office, located in the basement of Abacus headquarters. The office is both empty of life and full of clutter. The mise-en-scene indicates the office has seen better days. Important set props: a coffee machine, a small gold trophy next to the sink, and the packaging box of a printer sitting on side table.

There should be two exits: one to FRANK's office and one to the hallway.

AT RISE:

Both MAX and ANDY are sitting at their desks, in front of laptops. ANDY's computer is closed.

MAX is wearing a muted but professional pantsuit. ANDY is wearing jeans and a polo shirt. He is neither a slob nor a start-up bro; he's just turned casual Friday into casual 21st Century.

MAX's area is clean and organized, while ANDY's is messy. Important desk props for ANDY: a picture frame of a young boy, a water bottle, and a mug behind his computer.

MAX is working; ANDY is leaning back and playing on his phone. MAX looks up and shakes her head. ANDY mimes "okay, okay," opens his computer, types

ostentatiously with one finger, looks at Max to ensure she's not watching, and goes back to his phone. He decides he wants coffee and starts looking for his mug.

ANDY

Hey, Max, do you know where my mug is?

MAX

It's *Frank's* mug. You stole it.

ANDY

It's only stealing if he notices it's missing. He left it in the sink for three weeks. It's fair use now.

(ANDY sees it behind his computer. He grabs it and heads toward the coffee pot.)

ANDY

I'm still mad they cut the cup budget. Mugs require too much memory.

MAX

Eh, we're saving the earth and \$5 a month. Seems like a win-win.

(ANDY pours himself a big cup.)

MAX

Hey, we get one pot a day now. Don't pour so much.

ANDY

You don't have to remind me. I've gone into caffeine withdrawal. It's why I left early yesterday.

MAX

You leave early every day. Always with a new excuse. Will it be Billy again next week?

(She gestures toward the frame on his desk.)

ANDY

Billy is in daycare, and it's not my fault it closes at 3.

MAX

You don't have a child!

ANDY

Don't say that to Billy. He gets sensitive when his existence is questioned.

MAX

You know, eventually Frank will find out, and he'll fire you.

ANDY

Fire me? If he was going to do that, I would have been in the layoffs. Besides, we're both in too deep. I had him sign Godfather paperwork.

MAX

You're ridiculous.

(Pause)

It's all temporary anyway. If our numbers get better, budgets will come back.

ANDY

Ha, come back. When I started, my signing bonus was an expired Groupon. There's nothing to go back to.

MAX

You know, it wouldn't hurt if you, like, actually did some work.

ANDY

Let's not get ahead of ourselves; not everyone cares about being a VP.

MAX

But some of us do. It's not a bad thing.

ANDY

I'm not saying it is. I respect that you have dreams of making budget cuts one day. I just prefer complaining about them.

MAX

You know I would make a difference if I was in charge, right? With Frank, it's all execution, no strategy.

ANDY

Let me guess, strategy is what you learned at Wharton?

MAX

That's literally the whole point of the degree.

ANDY

MBA programs are fascinating to me. I mean, everything one needs to know about business can be found right here.

(Andy gestures around.)

MAX

Enlighten me.

ANDY

Like, how to write emails with the right number of exclamation marks. Too many and you seem fake; too few and you seem rude. Did they teach you that?

MAX

We focused more on semicolons.

(ANDY laughs.)

Look, I spent two years learning about operations, financing, and supply chain management. That's knowledge you don't get grinding away in here.

ANDY

And has the degree helped you so far?

MAX

I'll admit, not much. My last strategic idea was recommending we nix the free snacks.

ANDY

That was you? If I die of hunger, I'm suing you.

(FRANK enters, coming from his office. His suit is big and boring. He is not your cliché rude or idiot boss - just distracted and overworked. He's trying but

failing. FRANK speaks in that constructed boss tone, one that tries to sound in charge, but which comes off unnatural and jargon-heavy. He keeps his back unnecessarily erect, as though posture begets authority, and he uses his hands a lot, whether that's putting his fingertips together as if deep in thought or pointing with his entire hand. It's like he watched a five-minute video of "how to act like a boss," but had it on mute.

FRANK is carrying a red manilla folder. He goes to get coffee but can't find his mug.)

FRANK

Where did the coffee cups go?

MAX

You got rid of the budget.

FRANK

I thought we had some left, though. I can't find my mug.

(ANDY's eyes widen, and he hides the mug from FRANK's view.)

ANDY

What's up, Frank? You're more frazzled than usual.

FRANK

(Gesturing with the red folder)

We have a problem. Our numbers are bad. Real bad. We have to figure out why.

ANDY

I'm not the MBA grad, but laying off 80% of our department probably didn't help.

FRANK

Andy, this is no time for jokes.

(FRANK takes a deep breath.
MAX and ANDY continue to
watch him, uncertain of
what's happening.)

FRANK

Team, I need to call an impromptu meeting. Can everyone please gather around?

(MAX and ANDY look at each
other, unsure if they need to
move. They both slightly
angle their chairs, somewhat
ostentatiously, toward FRANK.
FRANK seems happy with it.)

ANDY

So, have you prepared an agenda? Should I take minutes?

(FRANK ignores him. His voice
is peak boss-tone: slightly
condescending, slightly too
confident, wholly empty of
substance.)

FRANK

Look, no matter how you slice it, we're in trouble. If we don't stop the bleeding, we could shut down. We have to work as a team to fix this. There's no silver bullet, but there has to be a way to leverage our assets to drive organic growth.

MAX

Frank, I understand. But we need help. I have no bandwidth, and who's even doing accounting with Claire laid off? You know, bad things happen when you don't have an accounting team.

FRANK

I wish hiring was an option, but it's not.

MAX

What about freelancers?

FRANK

We can't afford cups. What do you think?

MAX

Then let's restructure our targets. We need more realistic goals.

FRANK

Can't. Lucy wants to double them next quarter.

ANDY

What if we had, like, two coffee pots a day?

FRANK

Nobody works at Abacus for the amenities.

ANDY

True, true. We work here for the job security. Claire was just saying that the other week.

FRANK

Andy, our department is in danger of being shut down. We can figure this out. There's a reason I kept both of you.

ANDY

Actually, I've been meaning to ask, why is that? Max, of course, but me?

FRANK

You're creative. Your safety inspection idea saved us half a million in refunds.

MAX

That was Claire's idea.

FRANK

Really?

(MAX nods. FRANK looks at
ANDY. FRANK shrugs.)

Then maybe your salary was the lowest.

ANDY

And who said you weren't a motivator?

FRANK

Can we get back to the point?
(FRANK waves the red folder.)

MAX

I actually have some ideas.

(Max pulls out a large binder
and slams it down. She flips
through it until she finds
something she likes.)

MAX

Okay, here we go. Our internal software is from 1992 and is
extremely buggy.

ANDY

It's true. It crashes when you type a vowel.

MAX

We could modernize it so data integrates with our SaaS
tools automatically. I'd save an hour a day. Applied across
the company, that could be millions in time savings.

FRANK

Love it. Think we could have it done this month?

MAX

Sorry if I was unclear. We're talking about a, I don't
know, six-month project that I can't code. We'd need buy-in
from the top.

FRANK

Oh, okay. What else?

MAX

Well, let's see. Our execs still use private jets. If even
one were to fly commercial, we could fund six people in
this department.

FRANK

I don't know - we need to keep our execs happy. Where would
we be without our leadership?

MAX

(Not joking, it's true)
In fewer sexual harassment lawsuits, at the very least.

FRANK

I like your initiative. I really do. But any ideas specific to our department?

(MAX pulls out another folder and opens it, exposing a single piece of paper.)

MAX

Umm, let's see. We could require employees to bring their own pens. Between the three of us, that's \$27 in savings a year.

FRANK

Well, it's not nothing. Let's start there.

(LUCY appears at the doorway, looking like an executive. She is confident, polished, and serious, but she is not icy or mean, just blunt and to-the-point. She is holding a blue manilla folder.)

LUCY

Frank, we need to chat.

FRANK

Lucy! How are you doing?

LUCY

I'm concerned. We lost the Sysco account. We need to talk.

FRANK

Understood. Let's go to my office.

(Turns to ANDY and MAX.)

Hey team, let's circle back this afternoon.

(FRANK and LUCY enter his office.)

ANDY

Do you think she ever smiles? I've wondered if her lips are just painted on.

MAX

First of all, that's sexist. Secondly, it's Lucy. You know she was the youngest woman to become a VP here?

ANDY

She still makes my skin crawl.

MAX

How do you expect to ever move up if you don't show your bosses some respect?

ANDY

I don't expect to! I'm happy where I am. I don't have to bring my work home with me. It's nice.

MAX

You don't bring your work *into* work with you.

ANDY

Eh, mediocrity suits me.

MAX

I don't think I'll ever understand that. Mediocrity seems so...boring.

ANDY

Hey, not *all* of us have fancy degrees and an ability to collate.

(Picks up the notebook.)

I mean, did you do this in your free time? Where did you even print it?

MAX

I'd much prefer to work than watch TV at home. I watched the Bachelorette once, and I'm pretty sure I lost brain cells.

ANDY

I hear you, but overachieving gets you only so far here. I mean, did the four rounds of layoffs scream, "Hard work is rewarded"?

MAX

Well, I survived them, didn't I?

ANDY

And, *well*, I'm still around too. Which means it's all random. You're one coin flip away from panhandling.

(Pause)

All I'm saying is, don't work so hard.

MAX

Andy, if you don't want to try, that's fine. But please don't work shame me.

ANDY

Sorry. I didn't mean anything by it, honestly. It's just foreign to me. Besides, you'll be my boss soon enough, and you can slack shame me all you want.

(He smiles, she laughs. She pauses, looks at the office and back at ANDY.)

MAX

Hey, what do you think was in the folder she wanted to talk about? Maybe it's about us. Maybe it's bad.

ANDY

Or maybe it's good. Or maybe it's accidentally glued to her hand. It doesn't matter, not for us to know.

MAX

It's just weird, her coming down here unannounced.

(MAX goes back to working, and ANDY, not knowing what else to do, does the same. After a few seconds, MAX is reminded of something.)

MAX

Oh - Cassie started today, right?

ANDY

Yup!

MAX

Do you think it's gonna be weird working at the same company as your girlfriend?

ANDY

A little, but it'll be more convenient. Her old firm was across the city. By the time I met her for happy hour, the bars were closing.

MAX

I'm still surprised she got a job, given all the layoffs.

ANDY

(Shrugs, not a joke)

She does bankruptcy law. It's our only growing department.

LUCY

(Off)

Frank, this is unacceptable. I've been lenient with you, but I can't protect you any longer.

(LUCY leaves the office and heads out. ANDY and MAX look at each other and make an awkward cringe. FRANK slowly comes out.)

FRANK

It's never a good thing when your boss randomly drops in, is it?

ANDY

Everything okay, Frank?

FRANK

It's been better.

ANDY

What's the problem?

FRANK

What isn't the problem?

MAX

Did you bring up my ideas?

FRANK

No, I can't risk looking like I don't know what I'm doing.

(MAX gets offended, looks away in a huff.)

ANDY

To be fair, Lucy didn't seem to think you knew what you were doing.

FRANK

Funny. I have a meeting, but let's regroup this afternoon. Andy, will you still be here at four?

ANDY

Maybe. Billy is coming down with a fever.

FRANK

Sorry to hear that.

(FRANK exits into the hallway.)

MAX

You know what we have to do?

ANDY

Forge a doctor's note.

MAX

No, convince Lucy to get rid of Frank.

ANDY

Frank? Not Frank. He's incompetent and pays me. He's the perfect boss.

MAX

That's *exactly* why he should go. And he's obviously on the ropes anyway.

ANDY

Max, it's bad karma to get someone fired.

MAX

He doesn't have to get *fired*. Demoted - moved to another department - I don't know. But this isn't working.

ANDY

It *would* be nice to have coffee cups again.

MAX

Exactly! Hello Styrofoam, goodbye porcelain.

ANDY

(Snaps out of it)

Wait, no. And let me guess, if he goes, you'd replace him?

MAX

Yes - no - I mean, I don't know.

ANDY

Why are you so sure you'd magically fix things?

MAX

Have you seen my ideas?

ANDY

They're good, but impossible to implement. Abacus isn't a forward-thinking company. We haven't even launched a website.

(Not a joke.)

MAX

It doesn't have to be that way.

ANDY

Max, I can't humor you. Plus, I worry you'll require me to come in at 9.

MAX

Frank already requires that.

ANDY

Yeah...but from him, it's more of a recommendation.

(Pause)

Look, I know how important your career is to you. But we can't get involved. If Lucy lets him go, she lets him go. Until then, just be patient.

MAX

Be patient? Do you know how many times a man has told me to wait my turn? What if Frank stays for five more years and then Abacus promotes some random white guy who quotes *The Office* all day? This is *our* chance.

ANDY

Your chance. Leave me out of it.

MAX

Andy, it's hard for me to stay silent and watch us fail.

ANDY

And what's your plan? Plant drugs in his desk and call the cops?

MAX

I would talk with Lucy and just be honest.

ANDY

Nobody likes a tattletale.

MAX

I would be subtle with my criticism.

ANDY

(Imitating her)

"Lucy, Frank is great. I only wish he embezzled less."

MAX

Is embezzlement on the table?

ANDY

Have you seen his suits? If he's embezzling, he's doing it backwards.

(CASSIE enters. She's wearing a pant suit. CASSIE is a diplomat, always wanting to mitigate tension in the room.)

CASSIE

Knock knock.

ANDY

Cassie!

(ANDY walks over to CASSIE, and they go to kiss. They both pause before they lock lips and look at MAX, who is staring at them. They realize maybe it's not professional to show affection in the office. They step back, and ANDY awkwardly pats CASSIE on the shoulder.)

CASSIE

Good to see you again, Max.

MAX

Same! How's your first day going?

CASSIE

It's nice, different. My first day at the firm, they had me in client meetings. Today my boss told me my only task for the week was learning where the bathrooms were. I laughed, but I'm not sure he was joking.

(To Andy)

How's your day going?

ANDY

Well, Max wants to commit bossicide.

MAX

It's not like that. I just...want to make sure Lucy has all the information.

CASSIE

Who's Lucy?

MAX

She's our SVP.

CASSIE

What's an SVP?

MAX

Senior Vice President, Frank's boss.

CASSIE

Thank you. I have a lot of corporate jargon to learn. I've been saying "productize" all morning and still don't know what it means.

(CASSIE starts walking
around.)

CASSIE

Andy, you never told me your office was so...

ANDY

Charming?

CASSIE

Small. No decorations?

MAX

We sold them for cash.

(CASSIE lifts up the printer
box. There's nothing
underneath it.)

CASSIE

Is your printer just the box it came in?

ANDY

Everything is digital, and Frank got \$120 for it on eBay.

CASSIE

Why...the box?

ANDY

The room felt empty without something there.

MAX

To be fair, we've had fewer paper jams since the switch.

(MAX turns to her computer.)

It's great to see you again, Cassie, but I should get back
to work. Numbers aren't looking good.

ANDY

Work? How can you work when the prettiest girl on this
floor is here?

MAX

Rude.

CASSIE

Also, you're in the basement. I'm competing with the sewer
system.

(To ANDY)

See you tonight? I could definitely productize some wine
tonight.

ANDY

Of course.

(CASSIE leaves.)

MAX

I like her, you know.

ANDY

How could you not? She's funny, she's pretty, she's salaried.

(Pause)

Hey, just promise me you won't do anything stupid. I don't want to see you get in trouble.

MAX

Fine, I promise. But our definition of stupid may be different.

ANDY

Good enough for me.

(ANDY sits down at his desk. He starts to work, but quickly gets bored of it.)

I'm thirsty. I'll be right back.

(He stands up and grabs his water bottle.)

MAX

"Right back", sure. When does it ever take you less than ten minutes to get water?

ANDY

Hey, the watercooler is slow, my bottle is big, and I have an iPhone with games. It's not my fault.

(Andy smiles and exits. MAX watches him go, and then her eyes are drawn to FRANK's office. An idea comes to her. Does she have time to see what was in the blue folder? She debates and then slowly gets up. She creeps toward FRANK's office, looks around, stops, retreats, pauses, advances, pauses, retreats, pauses, and then runs toward the room. Before entering, she turns around, gets cold feet, and sits back down.

She starts to work again, but her eyes dart to the room. She can't let the thought go. This time she just stands up and runs into FRANK's office.

After 3 seconds of silence, FRANK enters. He looks dazed, defeated, like a man who took a DNA test for fun, only to discover he married his sister. He pauses and thinks about going to his office, but instead heads into the main room. He grabs the coffee pot, but it's empty. He sighs and just stares at the pot, contemplating more than just the volume of liquid left.

ANDY returns with a filled water bottle, still playing a game on his phone. It's quiet, so ANDY is startled when he looks up and sees FRANK standing there.)

ANDY

What did I say, can we get that coffee budget back?

FRANK

(Starting to sound less boss-like)

You think I'm a bad leader, don't you?

(ANDY is taken aback. He puts his phone away.)

ANDY

I don't. I just think that...Abacus leadership is an oxymoron. You're a symptom, not the disease.

FRANK

Maybe. But this has not been a banner year. That's on me.

ANDY

We're all in this together.

(MAX quietly exits FRANK's office and freezes when she sees ANDY and FRANK talking. FRANK and ANDY are situated so that ANDY can see her, but FRANK can't.)

FRANK

With all the layoffs and the yelling, it's just been hard to get into a groove.

(FRANK returns the coffee pot to the machine. While distracted, ANDY waves at MAX to move away from FRANK's door. MAX has been slow to move, afraid of making noise. FRANK starts to turn toward his office, but ANDY leaps forward and grabs FRANK's shoulder.)

ANDY

Don't be so hard on yourself. It's not all your fault.

(FRANK looks up at ANDY, a little comforted. Meanwhile, MAX has silently crossed the room to the hallway entrance.)

FRANK

Sometimes you surprise me.

ANDY

It was an accident. I take it back.

(MAX enters, pretending she was coming in from the hallway.)

ANDY

And where were you?

MAX

I had to...get something from outside.

ANDY

Nothing vague and suspicious about that at all.

MAX

So, should we have that regroup now?

FRANK

I don't think that will be needed. Please, carry on.

(FRANK walks to his office
without any energy.)

MAX

Is he okay?

ANDY

I don't think so.

(Checks to see that FRANK is
in his office.)

What were you thinking?

MAX

No one was here. I thought I had time.

ANDY

What were you even looking for in there?

MAX

Lucy's folder.

ANDY

Why?

MAX

I don't know! Maybe it was about us. Or him. I wanted to know.

ANDY

And was it?

(MAX shakes her head.)

MAX

It was just numbers, numbers, and more numbers.

ANDY

What's gotten into you?

MAX

You break the rules all the time.

ANDY

I ignore office hours. I don't commit breaking and entering.

MAX

The door was open.

ANDY

And, what, that makes it okay? Max, what's going on? You're suddenly sneaking around our boss's office. What happened to the rule-following Max? The one that times her bathroom breaks so they aren't longer than four minutes.

MAX

Are you *not* worried that you'll be let go because of someone else's bad decisions? I just can't...sit on the sidelines anymore.

ANDY

Frank isn't perfect. But there's no reason to think anyone - yourself included - could fix this. And I know how much you want to be a "VP by 30," but you have like 5 years. It doesn't have to be now.

MAX

Andy, whether or not you believe it, I actually do care for this company. And, selfishly, yes, I would love Frank's job.

ANDY

And his title.

MAX

And the title. But not *because* of the title. I want his job because I know I can make a difference. And I worry if we do nothing, we'll stay in this freefall forever, just waiting for the day he comes out of his office saying, "So, today's my last day."

(FRANK walks out of his office, dazed.)

FRANK

So, today's my last day.

MAX

Wait, what?!

FRANK

(His boss-personality further softened)

I'm not surprised, but...I was holding out hope.

(ANDY goes over and is about to pat FRANK's back, but it suddenly feels too personal. ANDY pulls back.)

ANDY

I'm sorry. I really am. None of us wanted this.

MAX

Yes, this is...quite a shock.

FRANK

No, it's not. We've been sinking for years, and I couldn't save us. As they say, the fish rots from the head.

ANDY

Don't be so down on yourself. How about...the dog smiles from the mouth?

FRANK

What?

ANDY

(Confused as well)

It made sense in my head.

MAX

Did she say who would replace you?

FRANK

No. And that's not really *my* top concern right now.

(MAX feels seen, looks away. There is a palpable, awkward pause.)

ANDY

So, I'll, umm, miss you, Frank.

FRANK

(In his own world)

You know, I've been here fifteen years. Fifteen!

ANDY

That shows commitment! And employers love loyalty. You'll find something in no time.

FRANK

Maybe. Hopefully.

(Pause)

Lucy told me to leave by 5. You two are welcome to leave early. I'd like to pack up alone.

(MAX and ANDY look at each other and close their computers.)

FRANK

I'll miss you two, really.

(FRANK picks up the picture of Billy.)

And tell Billy 'hi'. Maybe I could come to his next birthday party. I'm sorry the last one was canceled.

ANDY

Umm, yeah, of course. He has...appreciated all your letters.

FRANK

Well, children are a gift.

(ANDY grimaces. He looks at MAX, who makes a gesture that implies, "You should tell him. He deserves to know that you've been lying about having a child for years. He's not going to be happy, but better to discover it from you than someone else." MAX has an impressive gesturing ability.)

ANDY

Frank, I'm sorry. I...can't do this anymore.

(ANDY takes the frame from
FRANK.)

FRANK

Do what?

ANDY

I...ummm...don't have a, umm, child, so to speak.

FRANK

Wait, what? Who's that? I contributed to his college fund!

ANDY

It's whoever came with the Walmart frame. I named him Billy. He has eleven toes and never ceases to amaze me.

FRANK

(Adopting boss tone)

Unbelievable! You and I are going to have a -

(He drops the tone.)

- wait, what am I doing? You're not my problem anymore.

(Snarkily)

Well, I hope Billy has a long and happy life. Maybe in twelve years you can take a whole week off to tour colleges together.

ANDY

Frank, it was all in good fun. Please, don't take it personally.

FRANK

Of course I take it personally. You treated me like a joke for years.

ANDY

I never wanted you gone though.

FRANK

I do believe that. I know not everyone felt that way.

(FRANK doesn't look at MAX,
but MAX sheepishly looks
away.)

I don't envy you two. But at least you have each other.

(FRANK turns and enters his office. ANDY feels guilty.)

ANDY

I'm going to go.

MAX

(Humorously, in a good mood)

Let me guess, time to pick up Billy?

ANDY

No, I think he'll be living with his mother for a while.

(ANDY heads to the exit with the frame. He turns around at the entrance.)

ANDY

Oh, and congrats.

MAX

About what?

ANDY

Getting what you wanted.

(ANDY leaves)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF ACT)

Act II

Scene 1

SETTING: Same office, a few days later.
It's 9pm on a weekday.

AT RISE: MAX is pacing the room, talking
to herself, practicing
interview questions.

MAX

"What makes you unique?" Great question! Let's see. Well, I
can type over 150 words a minute. I wrote my entire college
thesis over Thanksgiving break. No, no. Sounds pretentious.
Maybe something about my pivot table skills?

(There is laughter outside.
MAX, embarrassed of being
there so late, turns off the
lights and hides under a
desk.)

CASSIE and ANDY enter. ANDY
leans against a wall, and
CASSIE cozies up to him. All
this happens in the dark.)

CASSIE

Do you think anyone else is here?

ANDY

It's only us and the rats. We're fine.

(CASSIE leans in and gives
him a long kiss.)

MAX

Please stop!

(MAX stands up.)

CASSIE

Why are the rats talking?

ANDY

I knew our water was radioactive.

(CASSIE flips on the lights.)

CASSIE

Max! When did you get here?

MAX

I was already here. I hid when you came in. I...don't really want to ask why you're here.

ANDY

Oh, nothing scandalous. We were at O'Hares, and I realized I left my wallet here. It felt terrible asking Cassie to pay.

(ANDY heads to his desk and indeed finds his wallet.)

CASSIE

I *always* pay.

ANDY

But normally I do the gallant thing and at least *offer*.
(Pause, to MAX)
Why are you still here?

MAX

I was working late.

ANDY

You really should relax some time. Being an overachiever will get you nothing but raises and promotions.

MAX

Please don't call me that. My entire life I've been told I work too hard.

CASSIE

You're a woman in the workforce. You either work too hard or not enough.

MAX

Sometimes I just wish I could be content being bad at my job. I don't know how you do it, Andy.

ANDY

That *sounded* like a compliment, but it didn't *feel* like a compliment.

MAX

You're just so good at not trying.

ANDY

I don't *not* try. It...takes effort to look this carefree.

MAX

Your work style...it's the perfect middle ground between not getting fired and not being promoted. No one would think of giving you more responsibility.

ANDY

You should stop with the compliments.

CASSIE

What's got you working so late anyway?

MAX

I'm practicing for my interview with Lucy.

CASSIE

Oh, you have an interview?

MAX

Yes! Well, no. But it's going to happen, right? I don't see Abacus bringing in an outsider. I'm pretty sure Lucy will promote one of us.

ANDY

In that case, I volunteer to be your reference. I'll list a parole officer as mine.

MAX

Don't be so flippant. You've been here longer than me. And as a white male, all you have to do is sneeze and you'll get promoted.

ANDY

I promise, if I get interviewed, I'll bomb. If they offer me the job, I'll turn it down. I don't want it.

MAX

Thank you, Andy. But there's still a chance they bring in an outsider. Hence the practicing. But I should go. Promise me to not, you know.

ANDY

As I said, wallet!

(ANDY waves his wallet. MAX smiles and leaves. CASSIE cozies up to ANDY.)

CASSIE

What do you think? Maybe she had a good idea?

(They kiss, but Andy pulls away.)

ANDY

Do you think Max actually thinks I'm bad at my job?

CASSIE

You *are* bad at your job.

ANDY

No, I choose to be bad at my job. It's different.

CASSIE

She didn't mean anything by it.

ANDY

I know. It just felt harsh.

CASSIE

Forget about it.

(She leans in and kisses him again. FRANK enters, carrying a big box. He's looking more casual, but still in professional attire. His outfit fits slightly better than his Act I garb. His tone is missing the artificial boss intonations.)

FRANK

Andy?

ANDY
Frank?

FRANK
What are you doing here?

ANDY
Me? You don't work here.

FRANK
I'm returning the equipment from when we were remote. My severance required it. I was hoping no one would be here.

ANDY
I'm glad you got a severance.

FRANK
Don't be. It was for two days. Barely covered the gas here.

CASSIE
Well, let us help.

(CASSIE helps him put the box
on the table.)

ANDY
How did you get in?

FRANK
My keycard still works. It probably will for a while. We laid off the building's security team last month.

ANDY
I wondered about that. Our front door has been broken for a week, and no one's found a way to close it yet.

CASSIE
I'm beginning to think Abacus doesn't care about my physical safety.

FRANK
I'm sorry, who are you? Was there an office mixer tonight?

ANDY
No, no. This is Cassie. She's my girlfriend. She works in legal.

FRANK

Ah, okay. So why are you here this late? I also saw Max on my way in.

ANDY

Well, forgetful me left my wallet. And Max was doing some late-night interviewing prep.

FRANK

I wondered how quickly Lucy would start those.

ANDY

Wait, she wants to promote one of us?

FRANK

I should be leaving. I'm sure this is a crime.

ANDY

No security team, remember.

FRANK

That was five days ago. Who knows what changes have happened since.

ANDY

This is Abacus. Tectonic plates move faster than us.

FRANK

Always funny. It was nice to see you. Have a good night.

CASSIE

Wait, sorry, is Max a shoo-in you think?

Frank

I don't know. Lucy grilled me on both of you.

ANDY

Oh, what did you say?

(FRANK pauses, unsure if he should say anything.)

FRANK

I told her Max was brilliant but young, and that you, for all your faults, would be terrible at the job.

ANDY

I'm beginning to think people don't have a high opinion of me.

FRANK

I bet Billy does.

ANDY

Okay, okay, we get it. Andy is a screw up.

FRANK

Regardless, it's not up to me anymore.

(FRANK goes to leave but
stops in the doorway.)

FRANK

Can I ask you one question, Andy?

ANDY

Sure.

FRANK

Why did you show me so little respect for so long? I was never mean to you.

(ANDY is taken aback.)

ANDY

I don't know, Frank. I mean, who likes their boss? Have you *watched* a TV show?

FRANK

Always with the jokes.

ANDY

Let me ask you then - why did you show me too *much* respect? Why not lay me off? Do you know the guilt of watching someone with three kids go home while I stay behind?

FRANK

You think it was easy making those decisions? There was so much happening behind the scenes. People who wanted to go. People on performance plans. Then the internal dynamics. If I kept Claire and not Lindsay, Claire would quit. So let's lay them both off. You have raw talent, you really do, but keeping you was easy because you'd stay forever in the role if you could.

(This leaves ANDY speechless,
having never heard FRANK
speak with such conviction.)

FRANK

I'm sorry I asked. Goodbye.

(FRANK leaves.)

ANDY

That kind of hurt.

CASSIE

So what? He's right. You're happy with the status quo.

(CASSIE leans in. He pulls
back.)

ANDY

I think we should head home.

CASSIE

Sure, babe. My arms are tired from all the moving anyway.

(CASSIE smiles. ANDY
doesn't.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT IIScene 2

SETTING: Same office, a few days later.
It's around 11am on a weekday.

AT RISE: Andy is looking nicer than
normal. Nice pair of jeans and
a dress shirt, which he is
buttoning up. CASSIE is also
there.

ANDY
I feel so restricted.

CASSIE
All you did was put on a dress shirt.

ANDY
Why all the buttons? Magnets are more convenient. They work
for my ties.

CASSIE
You know, I work in a department where suits are considered
casual. You shouldn't complain.

ANDY
I'm not complaining. It's constructive criticism.

(ANDY finishes buttoning.
CASSIE lifts up his pants so
the belt is at his hips.)

CASSIE
Now, what did we talk about?

ANDY
I'm supposed to be professional enough to not get fired,
but bad enough to not get promoted.

CASSIE
And what will you say about Max?

ANDY
(By rote)
Passionate, smart, and impressive.

CASSIE

Great. Hey - it's 10:55. I should go.

ANDY

(In his own world)

Cassie, do you think what Frank said the other night was true?

CASSIE

I think so. I haven't seen a security guard since I started.

ANDY

That I have raw talent.

CASSIE

Oh, don't let that get to you.

ANDY

Get to me? It's a compliment!

CASSIE

But it threatens your, like, general aura of incompetence.

(Pause)

What's going on, babe?

ANDY

I guess it's hard being repeatedly told you're so mediocre.

CASSIE

Only at work. Work isn't everything.

ANDY

Not everything, coming from you? There was a month I didn't see you before 8pm. I thought you'd become a vampire.

CASSIE

And why do you think I *left* the firm to go in-house? It certainly wasn't the money.

ANDY

But you'll no doubt take this job seriously.

CASSIE

Sure I will. But so what? That's me. Look, as much as I love watching fragile male egos collapse, I have to go. I love you.

(CASSIE leaves. ANDY paces and unbuttons the top button, being overdramatic that it's choking him. ANDY continues to unbutton his shirt, hinting at his internal irritation. He tosses the shirt aside, exposing a white t-shirt underneath. He plops down at MAX's seat absentmindedly. LUCY enters. She is carrying a fancy notebook.)

LUCY

Andrew?

(ANDY stands up. He tucks in his white shirt, as though that makes him look more professional.)

ANDY

Hi, Lucy! Would you like to sit down?

(He points to where he was sitting - MAX's desk.)

LUCY

I only have a few minutes, but I just wanted to learn a little more about you. See if we could incorporate your skillsets into our broader workflow.

ANDY

Yes, of course. I love it when my...skillsets get...incorporated into...broad workflows.

(ANDY scrunches his face, uncertain of what he just said.)

LUCY

Andrew, were you sad to hear Frank was let go?

ANDY

For sure. Three years is a long time to work together.

LUCY

Frank did a lot for us, but he wasn't the best fit for a down period. It was time.

(Pause)

Andrew, why do *you* think Abacus is struggling?

ANDY

Good question! My coworker, Max, has some great ideas there. She has Google Alerts set up and reads every article about us.

LUCY

And do you not do the same?

ANDY

Me? No. I haven't even read our onboarding docs.

LUCY

You must have some ideas. You've been here a while.

ANDY

Well, I guess, it feels like we haven't innovated in years. And our customers *hate* us. I'm embarrassed to tell people I work here. When someone asks me what I do, I say I'm unemployed.

LUCY

Yes, we're working on our image. Recalls are down 2% this year.

ANDY

I mean, *I* don't even use our products.

LUCY

Statistically, you'll live longer that way.

(Pause)

And what would you say are your long-term career goals?

ANDY

I'm pretty content with my current role. I'm happy clocking in at 10 and out by 5.

LUCY

Our hours are 9 to 6.

ANDY

(Wasn't a joke, just a slip-up.)

Of course. Just keeping you on your toes.

LUCY

Some of your work has been impressive, but, to be honest, Frank and Max didn't have flattering things to say.

ANDY

Wait, what did they say?

LUCY

The consensus was you were a good person but, well, lacking in ambition.

ANDY

They both said that?

(She nods. He becomes agitated.)

LUCY

I always like to give people the benefit of the doubt. Frank, after all, had plenty of opportunities to lay you off, but he didn't. That says something.

ANDY

I would like to believe I provide *some* value to the company.

LUCY

I'm sure. Now, do you have *any* idea why they would say these things?

(ANDY sighs. This week has upended his internal image, as someone who is talented and smart but just chooses not to try. It's clear his coworkers didn't share that view, though.)

Frustrated at that realization, as well as hurt

by MAX's insulting of him to Lucy, he wants revenge. He starts talking in a voice new to the audience: slow, manipulative, one akin to a con artist trying to convince someone that his concoction can indeed cure lupus.)

ANDY

Well, Frank, as you said, he...never evolved. He thought all he had to do was yell, and we'd do his bidding. He never attempted to motivate us. If it seems like *I'm* not ambitious, that's on him, right?

(LUCY doesn't respond, just watches him)

ANDY

And Max.

(Pause)

Well, Max is passionate, smart, and impressive. But...also young, naive, and stubborn. She considers a 60-hour work week to be the baseline. If someone works only slightly less, like myself, she views them as lazy. She has a lot to learn.

LUCY

It doesn't feel like this department has the healthiest working relationship.

ANDY

It's tough, you know, being the only adult in the room all day.

(LUCY looks at her phone.)

LUCY

I'm sorry to keep this so short, but I have to run. Thank you for your time. I hope to make a decision later today.

ANDY

Thank you too. Always a pleasure, Lucy.

(She leaves, but without her notebook. ANDY stands up and slowly walks to the kitchen.)

His anger has dissipated and he's realizing what he did was wrong. He puts his hands on the counter, lowers his head, and closes his eyes. LUCY returns.)

LUCY

Sorry, I forgot my notebook.

(LUCY grabs her notebook. In the process, she sees MAX's binder on the desk. Her interest piqued, she picks it up and flips through it.)

LUCY

This looks interesting. Is it yours?

ANDY

Probably.

LUCY

Mind if I borrow it?

(ANDY is still staring down, not looking at her.)

ANDY

Be my guest.

(LUCY leaves with the folder. ANDY continues to grapple with his throwing MAX under the bus. MAX walks in, excited and bubbly)

MAX

Is your interview *already* over? How'd it go? Did she talk to your parole officer?

(ANDY turns around.)

ANDY

My guess is I kept my job without getting a promotion.

MAX

Mine went great, thank you for asking. She's much friendlier than I thought. She even made a joke. I haven't laughed that hard in years.

ANDY

What was the joke?

MAX

I don't know. I missed the punchline.

ANDY

But you laughed?

MAX

She laughed, so I laughed. It was enough for me.

ANDY

Well, I'm glad it went well. It's nice to see someone with ambition around here.

MAX

Hey, you okay?

ANDY

I've been better.

MAX

What happened?

(ANDY pauses, uncertain what to say.)

ANDY

Eh, interviews exhaust me. I hate talking about myself. Cassie still doesn't know if I have siblings.

MAX

You know, if I get it, I'm keeping you around, right? I mean, we'll have a conversation about your hours, work ethic, blatant lies, general attitude, total disregard for authorities, and, well, overall performance, but, beyond that, we're a good team.

ANDY

Well, aren't you passionate, smart, and impressive.

MAX

You didn't happen to say that to Lucy, did you?

ANDY

Verbatim.

MAX

No qualifiers?

ANDY

What qualifiers would I add?

MAX

I'm too passionate? I've been kicked out of *multiple* pep rallies.

ANDY

You have just the right amount of passion to both keep your job and get a promotion.

MAX

So, what should my first order of business be? I feel like we should cut down on the number of meetings. Free us up for actual work.

ANDY

We should be careful, though. Abacus already has a bad track record for cross-department communication.

MAX

Is that real feedback? Look at me, I take over and suddenly even Andy is inspired.

ANDY

Come on, I have plenty of ideas. I'd be great at this job if I tried.

MAX

Why don't you try, then?

ANDY

Honestly, it never occurred to me that the point of work was work. I was here for the jokes.

MAX

Was?

ANDY

Am.

MAX

You sure you're okay?

(CASSIE walks in.)

ANDY

Down already? How'd you know I was done?

CASSIE

Max texted me.

ANDY

When?

MAX

I'm half GenZ, half Millennial. I can text in my sleep.

(This invisible texting happens three times in the show. In no instance does the audience see MAX text.)

CASSIE

How'd it go? I was worried you'd admit you come in late.

ANDY

Cassie, I'm not an idiot.

CASSIE

No one said you were.

(CASSIE walks over to the shirt and shakes her head. ANDY shrugs.)

CASSIE

(To MAX)

And how did your interview go?

MAX

It went great. She's such a role model.

CASSIE

Awesome! Now, let's just hope they don't bring in someone new.

MAX

Lucy wouldn't. She likes me. We had a great laugh.

ANDY

Over something you can't even remember.

MAX

(Annoyed)

She laughed. So *I* laughed. It was enough for me.

CASSIE

Well, let's celebrate!

MAX

It's 11am.

CASSIE

IHOP it is.

MAX

What if Lucy comes back?

CASSIE

Do you not get a lunch break? Come on.

(CASSIE and MAX leave. ANDY
slowly follows them.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT II

Scene 3

SETTING: Same office, an hour or so later.

AT RISE: They are returning from lunch. CASSIE and MAX are laughing. ANDY is following, sullen.

CASSIE
Andy, what's the matter? You didn't make one sarcastic joke.

ANDY
I'm exhausted. Raspberry jam wears me out.

CASSIE
There we go!

MAX
So, I have a quick meeting. Think I can take it in there?

(MAX points to FRANK's office.)

CASSIE
Who's gonna stop you? Go for it!

(MAX runs into the office.
ANDY's phone starts buzzing,
and he answers it.)

ANDY
Hello? Oh hi...yes it's me...of course, it was a pleasure too...oh, yes, I understand. It was a tough choice...that makes sense...yes, yes, and you'll tell her now?...have a nice day too.

(ANDY's hand with the phone drops, and he stares at it.)

CASSIE
What's the matter?

I got the job.

ANDY

What job?

CASSIE

Frank's job.

ANDY

What? How?

CASSIE

I don't know.

ANDY

You're joking.

CASSIE

I'm not.

ANDY

There has to be a mistake.

CASSIE

It's real. That was Lucy.

ANDY

But *you*?

CASSIE

Your support never goes unnoticed.

ANDY

What happened to keeping your job without getting a promotion?

CASSIE

I even failed at that.

ANDY

Babe, you're not a failure.

CASSIE

Yes, I am. I got promoted!

ANDY

CASSIE

You're turning it down, right?

ANDY

I...I don't know. What if, like, I can do it? I have the raw talent, right?

CASSIE

Andy, you would hate this job. And it's Max's dream.

ANDY

I know it is. But maybe they want someone with more experience. Someone who knows their way around Abacus.

CASSIE

Andy, what did you tell Lucy about Max?

ANDY

I said what we practiced.

CASSIE

And nothing else?

ANDY

Sure, we talked about other things. I told her all about my long-term career goals.

CASSIE

Anything else about *Max*.

ANDY

I don't know, it was all a blur.

CASSIE

Jesus. Did you throw her under the bus?

ANDY

Of course not. I would never do that. Although, um, maybe a little.

CASSIE

What did you say?

ANDY

I may have added that she acts her age.

CASSIE

Why!?

ANDY

I don't know, it just slipped out! Lucy said Max wasn't so kind to *me* either.

CASSIE

I can't believe you. This is her life.

ANDY

It shouldn't have mattered. She gets one critique, and I have a thousand against me.

CASSIE

What's gotten into you?

ANDY

Maybe it's my fragile male ego.

CASSIE

At this point, what else could it be?

ANDY

Why do you even care so much about Max getting it?

CASSIE

I fight for fairness.

ANDY

Oh yeah, you corporate lawyers and your love for underdogs.

(MAX leaves FRANK's/ANDY's office. Her mood has flipped. She looks dazed, like she saw the ghost of a high-school sweetheart in a Trader Joes. She sits and stares at the ceiling. CASSIE and ANDY watch her in silence.)

MAX

She said I did great, but I wasn't the best candidate.

CASSIE

I'm so sorry, Max.

MAX

And, what now - they're just gonna bring in some mediocre white guy who went to Booth with the CFO?

ANDY

Well, what if it's not just *some* mediocre white man?

CASSIE

Babe, stop.

ANDY

What if it's someone who knows Abacus well? Someone who's great regardless of their gender?

MAX

Why does it matter to you? You won't give a shit regardless.

(ANDY pauses. CASSIE gestures to ANDY to spit it out.)

CASSIE

I...can't be here. Andy, do the right thing. Max, I'm sorry. I really am.

(CASSIE leaves.)

MAX

What did she mean?

ANDY

They gave the job to me.

MAX

What job?

ANDY

Frank's job.

MAX

I'm not in the mood for jokes.

ANDY

I'm serious.

(MAX studies him.)

MAX

You're not joking.

ANDY

Look, I understand you may be upset -

MAX

Upset? I've watched you for a year do nothing but goof off. There has to be a misunderstanding.

ANDY

Lucy just called me.

MAX

No, there *has* to be a misunderstanding. I mean, you don't know what our department does, you skip out on meetings, and you've shown zero interest in doing more than the bare minimum since we met.

ANDY

It's true at times I used to slack off.

MAX

At times? You took whole days off to care for a fictional child.

ANDY

Can we forget Billy? I've already apologized to Frank.

MAX

No! It's part of a long pattern of irresponsibility that follows you like a stench.

ANDY

Ouch.

MAX

What did you do, bribe Lucy? Lie?

ANDY

I honestly don't know why they chose me.

MAX

So, you're turning it down, right?

ANDY

What do you mean?

MAX

You promised you would if you got it. You said you would fight for me.

ANDY

And I will! But...perhaps my opinions would have more weight if I were VP. I can do more for you there than here.

MAX

I don't believe it. I shouldn't have trusted you. I thought we were friends.

ANDY

We are! And maybe we shouldn't just assume they made a mistake. When Lucy laughs, you laugh, remember?

MAX

There is no world where this is the right move. I mean, what do you even bring to the table? Will our weekly reports be written in crayon?

ANDY

I'm not a child.

MAX

No, a child at least listens to authorities. You're something worse.

ANDY

You want to talk about being a child? You've had a real job for barely a year. I have warts with more work experience than you.

MAX

I worked more in that year than you have in eight.

ANDY

Max, you're entitled and young and too quick to judge. The world doesn't revolve around you.

MAX

I'll admit I judged you wrong.

ANDY

You know, you're not the first egotistical young employee I've seen here. Entitlement got them nowhere either.

MAX

You're just like everyone else trying to keep me in line. I have no idea why they chose you, but I can assure you, you will fail. And I will be there to pick up the pieces.

ANDY

Jesus, isn't it possible I was chosen for a reason?

MAX

For a reason? How many times did I have to cover for you because you were late or lazy?

ANDY

I never asked you to.

MAX

Someone had to do it.

ANDY

No. No one did. Why couldn't you just let a man fail in peace?

MAX

Aaaand that's exactly what this is about.

ANDY

Go on.

MAX

In a pick between a man who puts in four hours a day, and a talented, overeducated woman, the company of course goes with the former.

ANDY

Why is it always about gender with you?

MAX

If this isn't an example of patriarchy in action, please explain why not.

ANDY

Well, Frank praised my ideas. He said I saved us millions.

MAX

That was Claire's idea!

ANDY

Max, I can't explain it, but it happened.

MAX

You don't know the first thing about being a boss. I give you a week before you're fired.

ANDY

I'm more capable of leadership than you think.

(ANDY takes a deep breath as he prepares the transformation. Like a light switch, ANDY now speaks in that unnatural boss tone, similar to FRANK's from Act I. He straightens his back and occasionally touches his fingertips together. He's doing this to prove he knows how to sound corporate-y; he hasn't magically transformed into Frank.)

ANDY

Now, I understand your frustration. I really do. But starting on Monday, we have to start working like a team. I'm not sure if you saw this week's numbers, but they are down. Max, you and I are the only ones left to drill down and figure out why.

(MAX eyes him with disgust.)

How about we discuss this further in our first one-on-one next week. And if you could have your weekly report ready by then, that would be great.

(Pause)

We can do this, you know. As a team. And, of course, keep up the good work.

(ANDY enters his office. MAX groans and puts her head into her hands.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF ACT II)

ACT III

Scene 1

SETTING: Same office, three weeks later.

AT RISE: MAX walks in carrying a full water bottle. She's wearing jeans and a t-shirt. There is a picture frame on her desk now. She strolls in, sits down, and leans back. After a second she starts playing games on her phone.

ANDY comes out of his office. He now looks like Act I FRANK. His suit, if not the exact same one that Frank wore, looks similar. He's stressed, his sarcasm gone. He's carrying the same red folder from Act I.

ANDY

Where were you?

(MAX points to her water.)

MAX

Hydrating.

ANDY

For 20 minutes?

MAX

The water cooler was clogged. I had to fix it. I should get a raise for all the extra work I do around here.

ANDY

Okay, whatever, let's move on. It's time for a team meeting.

MAX

Team? It's just me.

ANDY

It's more motivating to view us as a team.

MAX

Okay, fine, team. We're a team. What's the team meeting about?

ANDY

It's about you. You've been coming in late. We start at 9.

MAX

I told you -

(MAX picks up the photo.)

- Penny started daycare. Can you blame a single Mom?

ANDY

Let me guess, Penny has 11 toes?

MAX

We wish! Even her third foot has seven.

ANDY

Look, I get the whole schtick. And it would be funny if we weren't so behind on our numbers. We're already lower this week than last week.

MAX

I didn't realize we *could* go lower.

ANDY

What about your great ideas?

MAX

What's the point? You said it yourself, they're impossible to implement.

ANDY

Let's brainstorm then. Put your degree to use.

MAX

My degree? You're the boss. Why don't we put your English degree to use? We can call up Shakespeare and get his opinion on expense reports.

ANDY

I don't like this new you. We used to have a great working relationship.

MAX

We had a relationship. I wouldn't call what you did working.

ANDY

I'm different now. I'm putting in more hours than you even. And it's pivotal that you adapt too.

MAX

I have adapted! I now go home at four and watch *The Bachelorette* all evening. It's a great life.

ANDY

With all your jokes, it's hard to know what's true and what's a bit.

MAX

I don't need to joke with you. You've turned yourself into one big joke.

ANDY

That's *no way* to speak to your manager.

MAX

Then lay me off. But you know you can't do that, because our numbers are terrible, and I'm the only one smart enough to fix them.

ANDY

What happened to us being a team?

MAX

That was your word!

ANDY

Look, what do you want me to do?

MAX

I just want a purpose. What do I have now?

(Counting on fingers)

No career path, no mentor, no leader, no coworkers, and a failing department. I'm trapped.

(Takes a big chug of water.)

And now, if you excuse me, I'm also thirsty.

(MAX starts to leave. CASSIE enters.)

MAX

(To CASSIE)

You know, your boyfriend's become a terrific leader. Ask him about our team meeting.

(MAX leaves. In this scene, ANDY is not giving CASSIE his full attention. He's instead busy with work.)

CASSIE

How are you doing? You left so early this morning, I assumed you were cheating on me.

ANDY

I had to finish something for Lucy. I...had no idea how much Frank did behind the scenes. Like, what the hell is a balance sheet?

(ANDY holds up the paper in his hand.)

CASSIE

It's a sheet for balancing income. Very confusing.

ANDY

Funny.

CASSIE

Dinner tonight? I get off at 6.

ANDY

Can't. I present to Lucy on Friday.

CASSIE

It's Monday! And you've been avoiding me for three weeks.

ANDY

I'm sorry, it'll get better next week.

CASSIE

No, it won't. You meet with Lucy every Friday.

ANDY

Look, I'll get into a groove, I promise. It may just take a few weeks.

(Pause)

Is there something you need?

CASSIE

Something *I* need?

ANDY

Yeah, you could have texted me about dinner.

CASSIE

Maybe I just wanted to see my boyfriend. This month I've seen my estate lawyer more often than you.

ANDY

(In his distracted state,
sarcasm goes over his head)

Are you redoing your will?

CASSIE

It was a joke. And then when I do see you, all you do is talk about your stupid numbers.

ANDY

But have you seen them recently?

CASSIE

Of course I have! Last night I tried to seduce you, and instead of reciprocating, you just handed me a pie chart. I got so self-conscious, I cried in the bathroom.

ANDY

I'm sorry. It's just temporary, I swear.

CASSIE

Are you happy, Andy? This doesn't seem like you.

ANDY

What does happiness have to do with it? I accepted the job.
(Gestures toward his mess of documents.)

And this comes with it. What options do I have?

CASSIE

You could quit!

ANDY

And look like a failure?

CASSIE

To whom? Max? She's already done with you.

ANDY

I can do this job, Cassie. I know I can.

(CASSIE starts to say something and stops herself. She watches him actively ignoring her.)

CASSIE

Andy, do you know what drew me to you?

ANDY

I do not.

(ANDY is done with the discussion. He needs to work! He moves toward the exit and angles his body toward it. He gestures toward the hallway, implying she should leave.)

But I would love to find out. Maybe after 7?

CASSIE

(Ignoring him)

You were so relaxed. You had a job, but you didn't take it seriously. Being with you was easy. No complaining about work. Just jokes and wine and you know. The guy I dated before you, Daniel -

ANDY

I know Daniel. He played lacrosse at Yale, he owns a yacht, and the first time I met him, he thought I was the valet.

CASSIE

Do you know why I broke up with him?

ANDY

I don't know, Cassie...he hated parking his own car?

CASSIE

Because when two people have demanding jobs, no one is the anchor. No one is there reminding you that what matters isn't the Brennan account, but the now. You grounded me. Daniel did not. All we did was complain about our jobs.

With you, I could go months not thinking about work after seven.

ANDY

So, what, you're saying I should abandon my career, just so you can be a fancy lawyer and relax at night?

CASSIE

I do bankruptcy defense for a company with a negative stock price. I don't think that qualifies as 'fancy'.

ANDY

It just feels like a double standard.

CASSIE

I'm not *saying* you shouldn't have a career. But you're bringing work *home* with you now. If this is the new you, I...can't.

ANDY

Unless I had a yacht?

CASSIE

I broke up with Daniel! Jesus, if you want to be jealous, try my friend Mark. He got fired and now just makes TikToks of him fiddling.

ANDY

You're bluffing.

CASSIE

Not at all. We'd make love on top of his unemployment checks.

ANDY

Funny. Look, can we just talk about this tonight? I really am busy right now.

(MAX returns and sits down.)

CASSIE

Let's take the night off. You can sleep with your numbers tonight.

(CASSIE leaves.)

MAX

So, what next, dear leader? Any more rousing speeches to give me?

(It takes ANDY a second to get reoriented from his fight, but he returns to mediocre white boss mode quickly.)

ANDY

Yes, in fact. I'm glad you're back. We didn't get a chance to finish our earlier discussion.

(Pause)

As you know, we're in a rough patch right now. If our numbers don't turn around, some tough decisions will need to be made. I'm not saying we need to put in 80-hour weeks, but we need to work smarter. Strategize. Leverage our skillsets.

MAX

Why do these speeches all sound the same?

ANDY

It's the truth.

MAX

What did you say - I was a coin flip from panhandling? Why should I care anymore?

ANDY

What about VP by 30?

MAX

It was a stupid dream by a stupid girl who thought she could break the cycle.

(She picks up a paper cup.)

But, hey, at least you brought back the cup budget. Life is good again.

Frank

(Off)

Hello?

(FRANK enters, looking different. He's dressed casually, but sharply. Has he lost weight? Maybe. He seems

more relaxed and confident than before. He has the aura of having just attended a two-week meditation retreat hosted by Ralph Lauren.

ANDY and FRANK lock eyes, both aware there's been a glitch in the Matrix.)

FRANK

I'm sorry to barge in. I swear this is the last time.

MAX

Frank, you look...different.

FRANK

So do you. Both of you.

(This is the first time ANDY has seen FRANK since the promotion. Remembering their last conversation, ANDY feels caught, embarrassed.)

ANDY

Did you hear that I, um, got the role?

FRANK

I heard, yes. I thought maybe bribery was involved, but I know what you make, so no.

(Pause)

To be honest, though, I haven't thought much about it. I haven't thought much about Abacus at all.

MAX

(Awkwardly; doesn't know what else to say)

So, um, how have you been?

FRANK

I feel great! I've lost nine pounds, and my receding hairline is now on the offensive. It's funny what stress will do to you.

(FRANK looks at ANDY. ANDY looks away.)

FRANK

I have to say, the moment I let go of this place, like really let go of it, I felt a sense of relief. I've even picked up pottery. My cups look like bowls and my bowls look like cups, but it's relaxing.

(ANDY recovers from the initial awkwardness of seeing FRANK. Through the next few lines, ANDY tries to get FRANK to leave, verbally and non-verbally. Both MAX and FRANK ignore him.)

ANDY

We appreciate you coming in, Frank. But what do you need?

(FRANK strolls over to the kitchen area.)

FRANK

New cups I see. Good luck with that.

(He picks up the trophy next to the sink.)

I'm not vain, but it just felt weird leaving this here.

(He reads it.)

"Forbes, Best Corporate Leader, East Region. Frank Anderson."

MAX

Wait, is that an actual award? I thought we bought it ironically.

FRANK

Don't sound so surprised.

MAX

It's just, well -

FRANK

I'm terrible?

MAX

I never used those exact words.

(ANDY tries to shoo FRANK out the door.)

ANDY

It's always a pleasure to see you, Frank, but we really have to work.

(FRANK stares at the trophy.)

FRANK

The past few years I was certainly not what I used to be. Fifteen years at a company will do that.

ANDY

Hey - I have an idea. How about we reminisce *after* work hours?

(FRANK slowly sounds more confident, more like a leader. It's not the unnatural tone of a middle management boss, but the passionate, charismatic energy of a true motivator.)

FRANK

(To Max)

You know, I started working here like you, right after my MBA. Got promoted in about three years. After that, our numbers skyrocketed. We went through a hiring boom. We doubled in size every three quarters.

MAX

What happened?

FRANK

Who knows. Market forces, bad strategic bets. Civilizations rise and fall; why shouldn't companies too?

(ANDY is at the door, making ostentatious gestures toward the exit. FRANK looks at ANDY. The look is one of pity and empathy. ANDY stops gesturing, unsure of how to handle the look.)

MAX

What was it like, when things were better?

FRANK

Oh, there was an energy. People tried, not because they were worried about layoffs, but because it was fun to work together. We'd go out for weekly drinks as a team. We did long offsites in Cancun every year. It was...special, exciting. It's cliché, but we really were a family, not just coworkers.

(ANDY gives up. He throws up his hands and slumps down on a chair, looking defeated. FRANK's presence has struck a chord. Maybe it's ANDY's guilt about how he treated FRANK; maybe it's his realization that FRANK had been right all along; or maybe he's just jealous he never got to go to Cancun.)

MAX

Did you like leading back then?

FRANK

I loved it. We were a team. When I would say "jump", you know what they would do?

ANDY

(Without much energy)

Jump?

FRANK

They'd leap! We had to raise the ceilings after all the concussions.

MAX

Why did you never tell us any of this?

FRANK

What's the point? Momentum stalled. The team changed. There was no going back.

(Pause)

I wish those days didn't have to end. But they did. It was inevitable. All that's left now is you two.

ANDY

Frank, I really am trying.

FRANK

I know. If it doesn't come easy, just remember what you told me: Abacus leadership is an oxymoron.

ANDY

(Softly)

I'm not sure how you did this for years.

FRANK

Let me guess, you're having nightmares about presenting naked?

ANDY

Sometimes I get lucky and I'm wearing socks.

FRANK

I wish I could say it gets better.

ANDY

How'd you do it for so long?

FRANK

I had the past to hold onto. With every year, that got harder.

ANDY

I'm...not sure I know what I'm doing.

FRANK

Andy, do you know why I really kept you around?

ANDY

I had the lowest salary?

FRANK

No. Well, yes, but no. And it's not because I thought you wouldn't quit either.

ANDY

I don't think I'm going to like this.

FRANK

You're bright. And I used to be great at turning smart hires into our best employees. I thought I could do the same with you. But, no matter what I did, you stayed you. I failed.

ANDY

(A little touched, a little hurt, a little embarrassed)

Can we just say it was the salary?

FRANK

I think it was a point of pride keeping you around. Maybe, with more time, I could have fixed you.

ANDY

Why are you telling me this?

FRANK

You could do this job if you really wanted. But you need training. You spent too long turning your creativity into ways to goof off. It's not your fault if it's not coming easy.

(Speaking to ANDY but looking at MAX.)

And if you want someone to learn from, I know where to look.

(Pause)

Anyway, it was a pleasure to see both of you. I hope things get better. I really do.

(FRANK starts to leave, turns back around, reaches into his pocket, and hands his keycard to ANDY. FRANK exits.)

ANDY

What just happened?

MAX

I'm not sure, but I have the sudden urge to follow him into battle.

ANDY

(His old self coming back)

No kidding, I'd jump on a stapler to save his life.

MAX

Who knew he was, like, not always terrible.

ANDY

We may have projected our frustrations a little bit.

MAX

Maybe a little. Maybe a lot.

ANDY

I feel so bad. The *lengths* I went to convince him that Billy was real. I brought in baby teeth!

MAX

It's funny, I worked here for a year and never once asked him what the office used to be like. I guess I couldn't envision anything else but this.

ANDY

I screwed up.

MAX

Yes, you did. Well, we both did. You more, though.

ANDY

My whole life, I viewed myself as that guy who could do anything without trying. In high school I was valedictorian, you know. And my friends were so impressed by how little I studied. I made slacking off a point of pride.

MAX

When I think 'peak in high school', I think jock, so that's a new one.

ANDY

I know I half-assed it here, but I still thought I was smart and if I wanted to move up, I could. And I believed everybody else thought that too.

MAX

What changed?

ANDY

After Frank...I realized no one else *actually* thought that. So, I don't know, I guess I wanted to prove I wasn't a screw-up.

MAX

If it matters, I know you're smart. Everyone knows that. It's not dumb to want work/life balance. You're not less of a person just because you don't care about climbing the corporate ladder.

ANDY

Says the person who would be offended without a yearly promotion.

MAX

(Small laugh)

Look, I have my own demons. I'm jealous of people who are just...naturally content. When I was three, I demanded my parents do a 360 review.

ANDY

Were they harsh?

MAX

Low marks on potty training, but otherwise above average for my age bracket.

(Pause)

I'm sorry. I thought all of this was just an act. And you know what bullshit privilege that would have been, to get promoted and treat it like a joke?

ANDY

It was never an act. I was just poorly cast.

(Pause)

I'm sorry too, Max. Frank was right all along. You deserved this role. I should have turned it down. I truly am just another terrible white man in a long line of them.

(Long pause as they non-verbally accept each other's apologies. The tension fades.)

MAX

Hey, you know what?

ANDY

What?

MAX

Jeans are terrible! I have rashes all up and down my legs.

ANDY

That actually sounds like a medical issue...

MAX

Not to mention I feel so guilty about coming in late that I haven't held down solid food for weeks. I'm on a steady diet of Pedialyte and crackers.

ANDY

I know, I can't sleep. I wake up at 4am thinking about my performance review. Which is in six months!

(Pause)

And Cassie! God, I'm so stupid.

MAX

What happened?

ANDY

I think she's leaving me for an unemployed fiddler named Mark.

MAX

Oddly specific.

(CASSIE enters, silently, and stands at the door.)

ANDY

I screwed up. What if I never see her again?

(He turns and sees her.)

Cassie! Have you been standing there since our fight?

CASSIE

What? No. That was like twenty minutes ago. Max texted me that you were melting. I came down to watch.

(ANDY hugs CASSIE. She doesn't reciprocate.)

ANDY

Cassie, I'm an idiot.

CASSIE

Yes.

ANDY

And a jerk.

CASSIE

Yes.

ANDY

I hate working.

CASSIE

I know.

ANDY

And suits! What a terrible invention. I don't even own a suit. I fell asleep at my desk and woke up with this on.

CASSIE

Yeah, I feel like I'm dating a funeral director.

ANDY

So, we're still dating?

CASSIE

Of course, you idiot.

ANDY

I'm quitting. This isn't me. I pushed you away and turned a friendship into a rivalry.

MAX

It's only a rivalry if you had a real chance at succeeding.

(ANDY laughs.)

ANDY

I missed that.

CASSIE

Look...it was unfair to imply my career should have precedent over yours. I've been told that before. It's not fun. But I do need boundaries, or else my job will kill me.

ANDY

Oh, I can set boundaries! I'll never work again! I'll take up pottery and make cups that look like bowls and bowls that look like cups.

CASSIE

Maybe there's a compromise. Like, you have a salary, but no work-talk at night.

ANDY

Deal.

(They shake hands, then embrace.)

ANDY

But there's still one thing.

CASSIE

Yes?

ANDY

What about Mark?

CASSIE

Oh, you don't have to worry about *his* fiddle.

MAX

Okay! I'm still here.

ANDY

(To CASSIE)

Should we leave?

(CASSIE nods.)

MAX

Wait - so you're, like, really quitting?

ANDY

Yes. Three years at Abacus is enough for me. It's up to you to save this department.

MAX

What are you going to tell Lucy?

(Silently, LUCY appears at the doorway. ANDY doesn't see her.)

ANDY

I guess I'll tell her how I really feel.

LUCY

And how do you really feel?

(ANDY turns around quickly.)

ANDY

We really need a door chime.

LUCY

Max sent me an email that you were quitting. I came down immediately.

ANDY

(To MAX, flustered)

How many hands do you have?!

(He turns to Lucy.)

I...appreciate the opportunity you gave me, but I'm laying myself off.

LUCY

That's too bad. You were a rising star. We assumed the jet idea was a joke, but the stock buyback idea was well received.

ANDY

Did I send an email in my sleep?

MAX

Did...*his* other ideas include solar panels and restarting safety inspections?

LUCY

I see you discussed it as a team.

ANDY

No, those are her ideas. My only contribution was a coffee stain.

LUCY

I'm confused - we had a whole discussion about buybacks last Friday.

ANDY

After which I had to Google what a Dow Jones was.

MAX

Andy, did you pretend my ideas were yours to get the job?

ANDY

No - I swear! I may be lazy and incompetent, but I'm not a thief.

LUCY

Maybe it's a good thing you're quitting.

MAX

Lucy, may I ask why you thought they were *his* ideas.

LUCY

After his interview, I saw the binder on his desk, asked if I could borrow it, and he said yes.

ANDY

(To MAX)

The interview stressed me out. I was so distracted I would have said yes to a lobotomy.

MAX

Lucy, that notebook was mine. I've been working on it for months.

(LUCY pauses as she realizes the truth.)

LUCY

Well, that explains a lot.

(To MAX)

You were polished and articulate in your interview. He talked a lot about our onboarding docs.

(LUCY smiles for the first time, finding her comment comical. MAX starts laughing and flops down.)

ANDY

Max - I'm so sorry. I didn't realize what happened.

MAX

I can't believe it. All this trouble - and for what? You forgetting which desk was yours?

LUCY

(Speaking in a tone that's
more casual than before)

Max, I apologize. I don't like marginalizing young bright women. You have a future at Abacus. How about you come by my office tomorrow, and we can discuss this department's future together?

MAX

I would love that.

LUCY

(To Andy)

Andy, I accept your resignation, and I will happily decline being a job reference.

(Turns to CASSIE)

I don't know you. Is there anything you need from me?

CASSIE

More bankruptcies? My workload has dropped.

LUCY

Ha! You must be in legal. I love your department's sense of humor.

(To MAX)

My office, 9am.

(LUCY leaves.)

ANDY

Max, I really didn't know.

MAX

It doesn't matter. She wants to talk tomorrow! Oh, what type of white should I make my business cards? I don't want to come off as too pretentious, but also not too flaky.

ANDY

Whatever you choose will be perfect. And also - congrats.

MAX

About what?

ANDY

VP by 30.

MAX

It seems less impressive staring at an empty room. But, thanks.

ANDY

Maybe we can work together again.

MAX

Only if you'll tell me where I can find baby teeth. I don't want to be on time for *all* of Lucy's meetings.

(They both smile.)

ANDY

I assume I should go.

MAX

If you don't, I'm calling security.

ANDY

Good luck with that.

(Pause)

It's been fun, Max. I have faith in you.

(ANDY turns to CASSIE.)

Should we go home?

CASSIE

Not me. I'm still on the clock.

ANDY

Oh, right. Not going to quit in solidarity?

CASSIE

Of course not. Someone needs provide for both you and Billy.

MAX

Well, goodbye, Cassie. Goodbye, Andy. Hopefully we won't be strangers.

(ANDY smiles, but he also knows that one rarely sees their ex-coworkers again.)

ANDY

Take care, Max.

(CASSIE and ANDY leave. Beat. ANDY comes back in and gives MAX a long hug. MAX ends the hug and steps back, shaking her head.)

MAX

This is stupid.

ANDY

I don't think we'll get in trouble for a hug.

MAX

No, you leaving is what's stupid.

ANDY

I quit. Generally that involves leaving.

MAX

Don't quit, then.

ANDY

I think it's too late for that.

MAX

No, it's not! I can talk to Lucy. I can't hit our numbers alone. I need you here. She'll understand. She has to.

ANDY

I don't know, I was kind of getting into the pottery idea. I feel like I'm a natural sculptor.

MAX

You'd hate being unemployed. If you weren't getting *paid* to slack off, you'd find it boring. Come on, for me. Will you stay if I can make it happen?

ANDY

Hmm, can I come in at 10?

MAX

No.

ANDY

Leave at 3?

MAX

Of course not.

ANDY
Two coffee pots a day?

MAX
Doubtful.

ANDY
What about a raise?

MAX
Highly unlikely.

ANDY
Screw it. I can't leave you to fend for yourself. If you can convince Lucy, I'm in.

MAX
Yes!

(MAX hugs him again.
Afterwards, ANDY picks up the
red folder and hands it to
her.)

ANDY
This is yours now, boss.

(MAX opens it and peers
inside. She looks confused.
She pulls out a sheet and
puts the folder down. She
cocks her head sideways as
she looks at it.)

MAX
Are these the right numbers?

ANDY
Yup, it's official letterhead. You can tell because Abacus
is misspelled.

(ANDY points over her
shoulder to the word.)

MAX

And who compiles these?

ANDY

Some guy named "Steve".

MAX

Steve? The upstairs office manager Steve?

ANDY

I think so. What's up?

MAX

The axis is all wrong. Our...numbers aren't down. Not at all. They've been going up for a month.

ANDY

What?! How could that happen?

(ANDY grabs the sheet and looks at it, though he doesn't know what he's looking for and just rotates it around.)

MAX

Well, Steve is 22, and he once argued with me over whether or not Europe was a country.

ANDY

So, what does this mean?

MAX

It means management was a fool to fire Claire. We're bound to have supply chain issues now. Things are going to go from bad...to a different type of bad.

(Pause)

What did I say, bad things happen when you lay off accounting.

(She tosses the sheet, and it falls to the floor.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF ACT II)

(END OF PLAY)