

The Candidate

A Comedy of Panic

CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

*VAL (f). 40s-50s. White. Consultant.

FITCH (m). 30s-40s. White. Bald. Consultant.

*WITHERS (f). 40s-50s. White. Manager.

SUMMER (f). 20s-30s. Not Black. Office administrator, Withers' assistant .

JOY (f). 20s-30s. Not Black. Office administrator, Withers' assistant.

MARCUS WRIGHT (m). 30s. Black. The Candidate.

MARQUISE WRIGHT (m). 30s. Black. The Candidate.

HUME (m). White. 40s. Bald. Custodian.

NOTES

*WITHERS and VAL potential doubling.

MARCUS and MARQUISE should always be played by two different actors. No effort beyond costuming/hair style need be made to make them look alike. The play, in fact, benefits from clear physical dissimilarities between them.

SETTING

The offices of an upscale coastal nonprofit.

TIME

Present.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Everyone in this play is sincere pretty much all the time.

We are in the midst of a moral panic.

Coleman Hughes

I

(VAL and FITCH. FITCH has a notepad. They speak directly to the audience.)

This is serious.	VAL
Very serious.	FITCH
That's why we're here.	VAL
We are trained and we are serious.	FITCH
But let me make something clear.	VAL
Please. Let her.	FITCH
We're here to help.	VAL
To <i>consult</i> .	FITCH
And you probably aren't used to this.	VAL
It may be uncomfortable.	FITCH
Vulnerable.	VAL
It may cause you discomfort.	FITCH
Great discomfort.	VAL
Harm.	FITCH

VAL

But we're here to protect you and your colleagues.

FITCH

We're here to keep people safe.

VAL

Because, the truth is, we're a lot like you.

FITCH

We look like you, talk like you, act like you...

VAL

We take up the same space.

FITCH

But we're still different.

VAL

(*To FITCH*) We're indistinguishable. In this context. For all intents and purposes.

FITCH

Of course, for all intensive purposes.

VAL

Let me give you an example. I'm part of a quilting group. I quilt.

FITCH

They are serious.

VAL

While our individual quilts might *look* different...

FITCH

(Not all quilts are created equal)

VAL

We all use the same stitch.

FITCH

A stitch is a particular loop made from one pass of the needle.

VAL

So, every quilt the group makes is the result of a single process.

FITCH

She made me a baby blanket.

VAL

We call this a *pattern*. The pattern is what matters.

FITCH

The quilt *is* the pattern.

VAL

Now we can use other colors, other textures...

FITCH

Fabric is diverse beyond comprehension.

VAL

But we can never escape the pattern. It's immutable.

FITCH

That means you can't escape it.

VAL

Do you understand how this applies to your life?

FITCH

Do you see what she means?

VAL

They look confused.

FITCH

They look surprised.

VAL

This is new for you.

FITCH

Get ready.

VAL

A lot of what we're about to say will surprise you.

FITCH

Are you ready?

VAL

They aren't ready.

FITCH

I'm still learning, myself.

VAL
 It's very new.

FITCH
 But I'm on the journey.

VAL
 What can you tell us about this recent episode?

FITCH
 Don't say 'nothing'.

VAL
 Let them speak.

FITCH
 We're listening.

VAL
 Look, the fact is...

FITCH
 The bottom line.

VAL
 Regardless of what you say...

FITCH
 Regardless.

VAL
 How you protest...

FITCH
 (And there are many ways)

VAL
 You're *complicit*. I'm complicit. He's complicit. Complicity.

FITCH
 It's the water we swim in.

VAL
 (To FITCH) Don't ever be figurative again. Someone might misinterpret you.

FITCH
 (To VAL) Cross my heart, hope to die.

Look. I know what you're thinking.	VAL
She does. She knows.	FITCH
I've been at it some time.	VAL
The work.	FITCH
This work. I've been at it.	VAL
For years.	FITCH
Years.	VAL
She's been doing this work for years.	FITCH (simultaneous)
I've been doing this work for years.	VAL (simultaneous)

II

(A conference room with a door at each end. DOOR #1 SL, DOOR #2 SR. WITHERS is rearranging two chairs. It's compulsive.)

WITHERS

Summer!

(SUMMER enters DOOR #1.)

WITHERS

Which chair arrangement looks more equitable?

SUMMER

I don't understand the question.

WITHERS

What part don't you understand?

SUMMER

The part of it that's a question.

WITHERS

This says one thing about the kind of organization we are.

(She moves one of the chairs slightly.)

WITHERS

This says something very different.

(She moves one of the chairs slightly.)

SUMMER

Show me option one again.

(WITHERS moves one of the chairs slightly.)

WITHERS

...?

SUMMER

...

WITHERS

...?

SUMMER

Is there a third option in the mix?

(WITHERS sighs.)

WITHERS

Summer, what is the most important aspect of your job?

SUMMER

Oooo, I know this one.

WITHERS

I'll give you a hint. Right now, it's the most important aspect of everyone's job.

SUMMER

I know this one.

WITHERS

Say it with me...

SUMMER

...

WITHERS

Accou...

SUMMER

owww...

WITHERS

...nt...

SUMMER

...nt..

WITHERS

...abil...

SUMMER

...ing

WITHERS

ility...

SUMMER (simultaneously)

Counting

Accountability. WITHERS (simultaneously)

SUMMER

I knew that one.

WITHERS

Your job is to hold me accountable.

SUMMER

Well, you've done a shit job.

WITHERS

What?

SUMMER

I'm holding you accountable for my accountability.

WITHERS

But my accountability depends on your accounting for it.

SUMMER

So you're not accountable for my accounting your accountability?

WITHERS

I don't understand the question.

SUMMER

What part don't you understand?

WITHERS

JUST HOLD ME ACCOUNTABLE.

SUMMER

How's this? Mr. Wright is waiting in the employee lounge.

WITHERS

He's here!?! He's early.

SUMMER

He's punctual. You're late.

WITHERS

Why didn't you tell me he was here?

SUMMER

I did tell you he was here.

WITHERS

Why didn't you tell me earlier?

SUMMER

Mr. Wright was here earlier.

WITHERS

Get me a Diet Coke.

SUMMER

(Checking her watch) It's a little early for your afternoon liter.

WITHERS

(Obviously not true) I'm drowsy.

SUMMER

Would this be a good time to hold you accountable?

WITHERS

No. Extenuating circumstances.

SUMMER

Didn't your doctor tell you to cut back? You have the resting heart rate of a hummingbird?

SUMMER

Get me Joy and a Diet Coke. In that order. Tell Mr. Wright I'll see him shortly.

(WITHERS rearranges the chairs. JOY enters DOOR #2.)

JOY

Mr. Wright is ready for the interview.

WITHERS

I know, he's waiting in the lounge.

JOY

He's in the foyer.

WITHERS

...are you sure it's Mr. Wright?

JOY

Are you sure that's how you want those chairs?

WITHERS

What's wrong with them?

JOY

I don't think you're ready to hear this...

WITHERS

Is it bad?

JOY

It's not good.

WITHERS

That's it, hold me accountable!

JOY

You are accountable for Mr. Wright's time!

(JOY exits DOOR #2.)

WITHERS

Do you think he'll notice!?

(SUMMER enters DOOR #1 with two bottles of soda.)

SUMMER

I couldn't find Joy. So I brought you *two* Diet Cokes.

WITHERS

She found me.

SUMMER

Where were you?

WITHERS

Forget it.

SUMMER

But you told me to hold you accountable.

WITHERS

Send in Mr. Wright.

(SUMMER exits DOOR #1. WITHERS sits. Stands. Can't get comfortable. JOY enters DOOR #2.)

JOY

Mr. Wright is waiting.

WITHERS

No he isn't.

JOY

So, you're saying Mr. Wright is wrong?

WITHERS

I'm saying Mr. Wright is coming.

JOY

Oh OKAY. I'll just take your word over his.

WITHERS

Summer is-

JOY

God God, *look* at that!

*(JOY moves one of the chairs very slightly and exits DOOR #2.
DOOR #1 opens.)*

WITHERS

(Rising) Mr. Wright!

(FITCH enters DOOR #1.)

WITHERS

Who are you?

FITCH

Mr. Fitch. I'm not here.

WITHERS

...?

FITCH

You've met Val, my partner. My *colleague*. She couldn't be here today. She's teaching a radical knitting seminar at the YMCA.

WITHERS

Oh. You're the consultant.

(FITCH takes a pad and pen from his briefcase.)

WITHERS

You know, I don't think I'm comfortable with someone else observing-

FITCH

I'm not here, remember?

(FITCH examines the chair arrangement, scowls and begins writing)

WITHERS

I wasn't going to keep them like that.

FITCH

Ms. Withers, are you ready to *do the work*?

WITHERS

Yes, of course-

FITCH

Please don't interrupt me.

WITHERS

I apologize.

FITCH

This is what we call *Argumentation*.

WITHERS

Argumentation?

FITCH

Argumentation. It's an effort to convince. A defense, a justification.

WITHERS

But I'm not *argumentating*, I'm just...heavily *mentating*!

(SUMMER enters DOOR #1.)

WITHERS

What is it?

(SUMMER offers WITHERS a box of tampons)

WITHERS

Just get Mr. Wright! I'm so late.

(SUMMER offers WITHERS a pregnancy test.)

SUMMER

Mr. Fitch is here, by the way.

FITCH

No, I'm not.

SUMMER

Mr. Fitch is not here.

(SUMMER exits DOOR #1.)

FITCH

Clearly you aren't ready to have The Difficult Conversations.

WITHERS

Could I at least be held accountable?

FITCH

You're not there yet.

WITHERS

Are you sure there's not an option where I refrain from Doing the Work or having The Difficult Conversations but am nonetheless held accountable?

FITCH

You'll need to bring us on full time for that.

(SUMMER enters DOOR #1.)

SUMMER

Mr. Wright is coming and Mr. Fitch is not here.

WITHERS

Oh my god. I'm getting the sweats!

(SUMMER takes the box of tampons and the pregnancy test from WITHERS.)

SUMMER

You won't be needing these.

WITHERS

I don't think I'm ready for this!

SUMMER

I'll get you a cold towel!

WITHERS

I'M NOT GOING THROUGH MENOPAUSE, I JUST NEED TO BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE.

(MARCUS enters DOOR #1.)

MARCUS

I'll do my best.

WITHERS

Mr. Wright, I'm so sorry to have kept you waiting.

MARCUS

I'm from the midwest. We all show up inconveniently early.

(A chorus of frantic laughter.)

WITHERS

Hahahaha!

MARCUS

Ha ha ha.

SUMMER

Hahahaha.

WITHERS

Ha ha ha.

SUMMER

Ha HA.

WITHERS

Ha.

SUMMER

Ha...

(A short pause. MR. FITCH gets all this down.)

SUMMER

Good luck, Mr. Wright! Not that you'll need it, for obvious reasons.

(A pause. The silence is deafening)

SUMMER

(Gesturing with approval) I peeked at your resume.

MARCUS

(Flirting) Oh, you're trouble, aren't you?

SUMMER

Huh ho, you don't know the half of it...

WITHERS

That will be all, Summer. Thank you.

MARCUS

(To FITCH) Sorry, I didn't catch your name...?

SUMMER

That's Mr. Fitch. He's not here.

(SUMMER exits DOOR #1. MARCUS crosses to sit.)

WITHERS

Wait!

(WITHERS moves the chair slightly. MARCUS sits.)

MARCUS

I've never had much of an eye for Feng shui.

WITHERS

Oh, it's not that...

(She looks at FITCH and hesitates.)

WITHERS

(lying)...I'm...furniture...obsessed with furniture. I'm...I'm obsessive about decor...compulsively. I'm an obsessive...and a compulsive. I'm an obsessive compulsive.

MARCUS

I'm so sorry, I should have noticed the signs. My sister has OCD.

WITHERS

Is that right?

MARCUS

It's totally thwarted her career, her social life, relationships. I'm impressed, you seem to have such a handle on it.

WITHERS

Oh, I'm in a constant state of panic.

MARCUS

Well, I applaud you. It must be so hard just to walk through the world.

WITHERS

I...
It is. Challenging.

MARCUS

I'm sure you've faced obstacles I can't even imagine.

WITHERS

Yes.
Yes I have.

MARCUS

You're an inspiration, Ms. Withers! To see someone succeed in a society that doesn't make room for them.

WITHERS

It's like I always say: *I know why the compulsive bird sings.*

MARCUS

Why does that sound familiar...?

WITHERS

Enough about me! Let's talk about you.

MARCUS

Right! I almost forgot this is an interview.

WITHERS

Ha. Haha.

MARCUS

(To FITCH) How am I doing?

(FITCH writes.)

MARCUS

(To WITHERS) He's *really* not here, is he?

WITHERS

God, I hope not.

MARCUS

Well, in any case, here's a copy of my resume.

(WITHERS looks it over.)

WITHERS

Wow. Fulbright Scholar. MBA from Brown, where you started a "radical a cappella group"?

MARCUS

Forte Acres and a Mule.

WITHERS

Wow.

MARCUS

After a year of business school, I left them for *The Libertaritones*. Lost a lot of friends that year.

WITHERS

Mr. Wright, I'm a little concerned you might be overqualified for the position.

MARCUS

This is a non-profit. Isn't everyone?

WITHERS

Hahaha!

(FITCH gets this down. MARCUS' cell phone rings.)

MARCUS

I'm so sorry. It's my wife. New baby. Do you mind if I...?

WITHERS

Not at all, take your time.

(MARCUS exits DOOR #1. JOY enters DOOR #2.)

JOY

Mr. Wright is waiting. This is the last time I'm going to tell you.

WITHERS

That was quick. Send him in.

JOY

Oh, *now* you're ready for him?

WITHERS

We're in the middle of the interview.

JOY

With him out there and you in here?

WITHERS

He insisted.

JOY

Really?

WITHERS

Go ask him.

JOY
So this...is part of the interview?

WITHERS
I guess you could say that.

JOY
Very postmodern.

WITHERS
He can come in whenever he's ready.

(JOY exits DOOR #2. MARCUS pokes his head through DOOR #1, mouths an apology and exits. A moment later, MARQUISE enters DOOR #2.)

MARQUISE
I don't like to waste my time or anyone else's.

WITHERS
Please, don't worry about it.

MARQUISE
Excuse me?

WITHERS
I haven't been waiting long.

(MARQUISE sits.)

WITHERS
Is everything okay? With the baby?

MARQUISE
...she's fine...

WITHERS
I didn't mean to pry.

MARQUISE
This chair is a little...do you mind if I stand? I'd like to stand.

WITHERS
Please.

(MARQUISE stands. FITCH shift a little.)

MARQUISE

(*To FITCH*) Does this make you uncomfortable?

FITCH

What? Me? Uncomfortable? No.

MARQUISE

Remind me what your name is?

FITCH (simult.)

I'm not here.

WITHERS (simult.)

He's not here.

MARQUISE

Now you both look uncomfortable.

WITHERS (simult.)

No, we're not.

FITCH (simult.)

Not at all.

MARQUISE

My time is valuable. I'm going to cut to the chase. At the end of the day, we all know why I'm in this room. You don't need a resume to see what sets me apart from other candidates.

WITHERS (simult.)

Don't we...I...?

FITCH (simult.)

I'm not here.

MARQUISE

Let's not mince words. This isn't the first time I've been put in this position, it won't be the last. What matters is that we're all on the same page. This is *quid pro quo*. You give me the job, I give your organization what it needs to survive, I give you what you're desperate for.

WITHERS

...

FITCH

...

MARQUISE

Proficiency in Quickbooks Pro.

(JOY enters DOOR #2.)

JOY

Excuse me, Mr. Wright, I think you left your headlights on.

MARQUISE

Think about what I said.

(MARQUISE exits DOOR #2. WITHERS and FITCH share a moment. SUMMER enters DOOR #1.)

SUMMER

Mr. Wright will be back in shortly. *(Confidentially)* How's he doing?

WITHERS

He's uh...he's...

FITCH

Yes, yes.

WITHERS

Kind.

FITCH

Personable.

WITHERS *(simult.)*

Articulate.

FITCH *(simult.)*

Articulate.

(MARCUS enters DOOR #1. SUMMER exits.)

MARCUS

My ears are burning!

WITHERS *(simult.)*

Hahaha!

FITCH *(simult.)*

Hahaha!

MARCUS

Sorry about that.

WITHERS

Not a problem. Your battery's not dead, is it?

MARCUS

Please. I have an iPhone 12.

WITHERS (simult.)

Hahaha!

FITCH (simult.)

Hahaha!

MARCUS

Where were we?

WITHERS

You were telling us why you'd be an asset to the organization. You mentioned Quickbooks Pro.

MARCUS

I did?

WITHERS

The fact is, Mr. Wright, Quickbooks or no, we're looking for someone to get in the weeds. To do a target-oriented, accountability slash efficiency deep-dive. Streamline our expenditure. Globally operationalize. Seek out the excess, trim the fat, reduce the waste.

MARCUS

Find redundancies?

WITHERS

Precisely. Redundancies.

MARCUS

I think I know exactly what you're looking for.

WITHERS

Please.

MARCUS

I can sum up the solution in three letters: EDI.

WITHERS

I'm so glad you said that.

MARCUS

You're interested in EDI, then?

WITHERS

Interested? We're *committed*.

MARCUS

It's certainly never been more popular.

WITHERS

For us, it's more than just a corporate fad.

MARCUS

So, you already have a system-wide EDI strategy in place?

WITHERS

Well. Not exactly. It's *aspirational*.

MARCUS

I hear this a lot. Ms. Withers, with all due respect, EDI is the future. Resist it and you'll only hurt your organization.

WITHERS

You're absolutely right. We're behind the curve. We're so behind.

MARCUS

It's not easy for someone like me to sit here and lecture you about this.

WITHERS

And it is *not* your job to educate me.

MARCUS

But I still do it because I think we need to prioritize EDI, now more than ever.

WITHERS

This. Thank you. *This* is the kind of accountability we need.

MARCUS

The benefits of Electronic Data Interchange have never been clearer.

(Beat.)

WITHERS (simult.)

What?

FITCH (simult.)

Excuse me?

(MARCUS cell phone rings.)

MARCUS

I'm so sorry, it's my wife again. Would you mind if I...?

WITHERS

Not a problem.

(MARCUS exits DOOR #1. JOY enters DOOR #2.)

JOY

(Confidentially) How's he doing?

WITHERS

Oh, he's...great.

FITCH

Intelligent.

WITHERS

Passionate.

FITCH *(simult.)*

Well-spoken.

WITHERS *(simult.)*

Well-spoken.

(MARQUISE enters DOOR #2. JOY exits.)

WITHERS

Back so soon!

MARQUISE

Do I look like someone who would waste his own time?

WITHERS *(simult.)*

Absolutely not.

FITCH *(simult.)*

Not at all.

WITHERS

Mr. Wright, to put it simply, I'm impressed. Your qualifications, your ambition-

MARQUISE

None of that defines me.

WITHERS

I didn't mean to imply that anything defines you.

MARQUISE

I'm undefined, then?

WITHERS

No. Well. Mr. Wright-

MARQUISE

Do you want to know why I'm really here?

WITHERS

Absolutely.

MARQUISE

I want your job. That's why I'm here.

WITHERS

You want to be me?

MARQUISE

That's not what I said.

WITHERS

I can't give you my job.

MARQUISE

All I see when I look at you is fear.

WITHERS

I'm not afraid of you.

MARQUISE

Maybe you should be.

(Pause.)

MARQUISE

Are you familiar with the Cretaceous period? One hundred million years ago. Insects as long as your arm. Predatory birds. A period of biological explosion. But at the top were the dinosaurs, hideous and tyrannical. And one day, when an asteroid the size of Texas hit the earth, they were suddenly obliterated. We know this, among other reasons, because certain dinosaur fossils show the actual moment of extinction. It's funny, most of them have this posture, this physical attitude.

(MARQUISE contorts himself like a dinosaur fossil.)

Like they refused to see their destruction until the last possible moment. And now they're buried under sixty million years of dust and sediment.

(Pause.)

MARQUISE

We don't need to pretend with each other anymore.

WITHERS

Okay.

MARQUISE

You're afraid.

WITHERS

(Quietly) I am.

MARQUISE

You're a small, silly woman.

WITHERS

(Quietly) Yes.

MARQUISE

You are a performance.

WITHERS

Yes. I'm a fraud.

MARQUISE

No. That's too active.

WITHERS

Puppetry. I'm a puppet.

MARQUISE

That's it.

WITHERS

I'm stupid.

MARQUISE

You're hollow.

WITHERS

I'm a dinosaur.

MARQUISE

You're a fossil.

I'm a sinner.

WITHERS

You're guilty.

MARQUISE

You're hired.

WITHERS

(Pause.)

(MARQUISE shakes WITHERS' hand and exits DOOR #2.)

(Long pause. WITHERS sits in this.)

FITCH

He'll make an excellent addition to your staff.

(SUMMER and MARCUS enter DOOR#1.)

Mr. Wright is back!

SUMMER

Mr. Wright. When can you start?

WITHERS

(Lights.)

III

(*VAL and FITCH.*)

VAL

What's happening here is very telling.

FITCH

Very telling indeed.

VAL

(*Not to FITCH*) That you didn't notice. That nobody noticed.

FITCH

The two of them aren't exactly...

VAL

What he means to say is they don't look...

FITCH

I, of course, noticed.

VAL

But Mr. Fitch is trained.

FITCH

Trained.

VAL

Trained in the work.

FITCH

Trained to see the hidden.

VAL

(*To FITCH*) Not that this was hidden.

FITCH

Not remotely.

VAL

Think of Mr. Fitch as a kind of transparent eyeball.

FITCH

I'm flattered.

VAL

Absorbent rather than reflective.

That's me. FITCH

His absence itself a sign that he is everywhere. VAL

But I'm still learning. FITCH

It's a lifelong job, the learning. VAL

Even *you're* still learning, I suspect. FITCH

(Beat. VAL considers.)

Difficult to say. VAL

In any case, I did notice. FITCH

As did I. VAL

But it's not always my place to... FITCH

Yes. VAL

It's best, sometimes, to let things... FITCH

Of course. VAL

To let people learn from... FITCH

It is often irresponsible to intervene in the events of nature. VAL

Exactly. FITCH

VAL

One doesn't save a gazelle from the jaws of a lion.

FITCH

You told me never to be figurative?

VAL

And *you* shouldn't.

FITCH

I see.

VAL

Two standards.

FITCH (simult.)

You've been doing this work for years.

VAL (simult.)

I've been doing this work for years.

FITCH

Now, to the matter at hand.

VAL

This issue of the two...

FITCH

It's a slippery slope-

VAL

What did we just say?

FITCH

It's a dangerous road-

VAL

Still figurative.

FITCH

It is a mistake. A grave mistake.

VAL

Potential for a pun, but I'll allow it.

FITCH

It is a mistake to take two different things and force their similarity.

VAL

This is exactly my problem with metaphors.

FITCH

That makes two of us.

VAL

With figurative utterances of any kind.

FITCH

I see I see.

VAL

By comparing dissimilar words, dissimilar thoughts...

FITCH

You pollute the meaning of both.

VAL

They look confused.

FITCH

They look surprised.

VAL

We have a lot of work to do.

FITCH

If things are going to improve.

VAL

We'll need your cooperation a while longer.

FITCH

Now, please. Explain how this oversight was possible.

VAL

It's more than an oversight.

FITCH

Is it?

VAL

It is. It constitutes violence.

FITCH

Violence?

VAL
 Violence. It constitutes violence.

FITCH
 As you can see, this is serious.

VAL
 Very serious.

FITCH (simult.)
 We are trained and we are serious.

VAL (simult.)
 We are trained and we are serious.

FITCH
 You see, there's been a Complaint.

VAL
 A Complaint? I thought this was a Violation.

(FITCH checks some papers.)

FITCH
 It's a Disturbance.

VAL
 Which is just a rung above an Infraction.

FITCH
 It's *above* an Infraction?

VAL
 It's above an Infraction but below an Infringement.

FITCH
 Okay okay.

VAL
 Got it?

FITCH
 What's a Breach?

VAL
 It's down by a Noncompliance.

FITCH

Which is similar to a Contravention?

VAL

But more flippant. Like a Flout.

FITCH

Right. So this is more serious than a Noncompliance, but still in between an Infraction and an Infringement?

VAL

An Infringement not to be confused with an Indiscretion.

FITCH

That goes without saying.

VAL

You can commit an Indiscretion without committing an Infringement.

FITCH

But not the other way around.

VAL

(With pride) Look at you.

FITCH

And we all know what's above an Infringement...

VAL

At the very top...

FITCH

Above the rest...

VAL

The most weighty...

FITCH

The most severe...

VAL

The most reviled...

FITCH (simult.)

A Transgression.

VAL (simult.)

A Transgression.

(Lights.)

IV

(A foyer with two rectangular offices on either side of the stage, a door to each. Downstage is a coffee table with magazines and furniture arranged around it. A nice couch.)

(FITCH sits working near the coffee table. HUME, wearing a baseball cap and headphones, enters with his custodial cart. Maybe we're hearing his music: something blaring and synthetic. He parks the cart, unaware of FITCH. He plugs in his vacuum and fires it up. His hoovering is always accompanied by soundtrack-inspired dancing and something a little shy of singing...it's more like ululation. FITCH at first tries to ignore it, but the vocalizing gets louder, the dancing more baroque. He rises to make himself known, but HUME arabesques away.)

FITCH

EXCUSE
EXCUSE ME

(Nothing FITCH rises and unplugs the vacuum. He sits and returns to his work. HUME starts to smack the vacuum loudly with his hand.)

HUME

DON'T YOU DIE ON ME.

(HUME picks up the vacuum and rattles it around. He slaps it on the ground a couple times. Meanwhile, FITCH looks for something to chuck at him. He chooses a stress ball on the coffee table. As FITCH winds up, HUME finally notices the loose cord and looks up just in time to meet FITCH's murderous gaze.)

HUME

HOLA!
I DIDN'T KNOW SOMEONE WAS HERE.

FITCH

I'M NOT.
I'M *NOT* REALLY...

HUME

OH MY GOD.

YOU'RE THE GUY.

HUME (Continued)

Who?
WHAT GUY?

FITCH

HUME

DUDE.
DUDE.
DUDE.
HO. LEE. SHIT.

FITCH

IT'S CHALLENGING TO SUSTAIN THIS DISCOURSE WITH...

(FITCH makes a "headphones" gesture. HUME removes his headphones and starts a slow cross toward FITCH.)

FITCH

Look, I'm trying to get some paperwork done, so if you wouldn't mind?

(HUME puts his hand on the crown of FITCH's head.)

HUME

Welcome.

FITCH

I'm not here.

HUME

I've heard that before. Used to say it myself.

FITCH

When I say it I mean it.

HUME

You don't need to hide anymore, Mr. Fitch.

FITCH

How do you know my-

HUME

Shhhhh. Shhh.
My name is Hume.

FITCH

Your reputation precedes you.

I can't believe this. HUME

Is everything alright? FITCH

Yes. Yes it is. HUME

You should ask before you touch people. FITCH

Lots of new blood lately.
I'm so glad you found me, man. HUME

Some people don't like to be touched. FITCH

I feel so *seen*. HUME

I would like to feel *less* seen. FITCH

Dude, I just can't believe you're actually here. And trust me, I know how hard you must've worked for this. I *understand*. HUME

You understand what? FITCH

(HUME removes his baseball cap. The moment is weighty.)

The Bald experience. HUME

(Brief beat.)

Are you sure you're alright? FITCH

I have never been better, *hermano*. HUME

Ooo.
That's- FITCH

FITCH (Continued)

You shouldn't-

HUME

We don't have to censor ourselves. This is a Bald space.

FITCH

I'm not sure I am who you think I am.

(HUME goes in for a hug)

HUME

The Bald community embraces you.

FITCH

The Bald community?

HUME

You have so much to learn about your own culture.

FITCH

But, I'm not...I don't think of myself that way. As part of a group.

HUME

I know. But that's how the haired world sees you, man.

FITCH

You talk about it like it's a curse.

HUME

Not if we stick together. Bald solidarity.

FITCH

So...we have a presumed kinship, you and I? On account of our shared Baldness.

HUME

Hell yeah. Keep these coming- you're asking all the right questions.

FITCH

And we're *Bald People*? We're not just people who happen to be bald?

HUME

Bald Studies scholars remain bitterly divided on this issue, dude.

FITCH

There's scholarship about us?

HUME

Of course. I was working on my thesis at Evergreen State before I dropped out.

FITCH

Really? What was it called?

HUME

Splitting Hairs: An Anatomy of Western Anti-Baldness and the Politics of Hairless Liberation.

FITCH

I would *love* to read that.

(HUME pulls a crumpled and dog-eared tome off the custodial cart and gives it to FITCH.)

HUME

Dude.

I am so honored to be here.

At the beginning of your journey.

(FITCH flips through the book.)

FITCH

Wait, just to be clear.

You're saying that
as a Bald man, I'm...?

HUME

That's right, buddy.

FITCH

I think I need to sit down.

HUME

It's okay.

Here.

(They sit.)

HUME

Just breathe. How're you doing?

FITCH

I don't know. I've never felt like this before.

HUME

Talk to me, man.

FITCH
 It's like I'm suddenly...
 legible.

HUME
 Scary, isn't it?

FITCH
 Yes but it's euphoric, too. I feel ten feet tall.

HUME
 I know exactly what you mean.

FITCH
 What is this, what's happening to me?

HUME
 I think you know...

FITCH
 Is it...? Am I...?

HUME
 That's right.

FITCH
 I never thought this moment would come.

HUME
 It's going to change your life.

FITCH
 I can't believe it.
 I'm...
 We're...

HUME *(simult.)*
(Sotto voce) Marginalized.

FITCH *(simult.)*
(Sotto voce) Marginalized.

(HUME takes FITCH's hand and they rub each others' bald heads. It is a profound and tender moment. After a beat, MARCUS enters from SL office with a blue folder.)

HUME
 Savor this moment.

MARCUS

Has anyone seen Ms. -

(MARCUS notices them.)

You look like you're in the middle of something.

(FITCH leaps up from his chair.)

FITCH

I'm not here.

(FITCH exits.)

HUME

Don't ask. You'll never understand.

(HUME takes the custodial cart and exits. SUMMER enters.)

MARCUS

Gosh. I hope I didn't offend him.

SUMMER

Hume? He's so bald.

MARCUS

His name is Hume?

SUMMER

A little *too* bald, if you ask me.
Bald men creep me out.

MARCUS

Then you and I shouldn't have any problems.

SUMMER

You do have a *gorgeous* head of hair.

MARCUS

(Bashful) Stop.

SUMMER

The kind of hair you want to run your fingers through.

MARCUS

Do your worst.

(MARCUS sits down, SUMMER crosses behind him and begins massaging his scalp.)

Now *that* is choice.

SUMMER

You work too hard, Mr. Wright.

MARCUS

Call me Marcus.

SUMMER

(Smitten) Marcus. You sound like a gladiator.

MARCUS

Are you not entertained!

(They giggle and flirt. JOY, at first unaware of them, enters and crosses upstage toward the SR office. She sees them and stops, aghast.)

MARCUS

Say, have you seen Ms. Withers around?

SUMMER

In her office. First Coke fix of the day.

MARCUS

That explains a lot.

SUMMER

Gunning for a raise already?

MARCUS

Even better. I think I found my first redundancy.

(The SR office door opens to reveal WITHERS. JOY hides just in time.)

WITHERS (simult.)

Redundancy?

SUMMER (simult.)

Redundancy?

(JOY pops her head out.)

JOY

(Whispers) Redundancy?

MARCUS

(Holding up the folder) Yes, it's all right here.

WITHERS

(To SUMMER) Get me a Diet Coke.

(A beat. SUMMER doesn't move.)

This is executive level business, Summer.

SUMMER

Well. *Excuse* me.

I'll make myself scarce.

Not too scarce though.

Not like *where is that girl?*

I'll be available.

I have things to manage.

Office things.

Stationary.

Okay.

(SUMMER goes to exit, then hides behind the couch. She and JOY, unaware of each other, listen to the following)

WITHERS

Mr. Wright! King of Accountability!

MARCUS

Please, call me Marcus.

WITHERS

Are you sure?

MARCUS

Yes. I just asked you to.

WITHERS

I wasn't sure that was how you pronounced it.

MARCUS

How else would you pronounce it?

WITHERS

...

MARCUS

...?

WITHERS

...

Show me what you found.

MARCUS

It's fairly simple. As you can see here, the productivity aggregates show a surfeit of labor connected to a subset of employee ID numbers in this department. Sorry, that was a lot of jargon.

WITHERS

Jargon is what gets me out of bed in the morning.

MARCUS

Here's the problem. Your system is old. IBM old. So the ID numbers are periodically regenerated without accounting for the actual identity of any particular employee.

WITHERS

We're behind. We're so behind.

MARCUS

And, as of right now, I don't know which number goes with who. But I'm a little stumped about something. With this amount of wasted labor, the difference should be obvious.

WITHERS

We should be able to see it without looking at the data?

MARCUS

Exactly. The redundancy is hiding in plain sight.

WITHERS

So, first we have to find out who's who?

MARCUS

Then, more importantly, why are there two people doing one job?

(Beat. JOY and SUMMER slowly turn their heads and see one another.)

WITHERS

Marcus. Wow.
Thank you.

MARCUS

This is just the diagnosis, Ms. Withers. Give me a few more days and I'll have the cure.

WITHERS

The doctor is in.

MARCUS

Actually, it's more like solving a puzzle.

WITHERS

Columbo is on the case.

MARCUS

A puzzle using deduction.

WITHERS

Sherlock Holmes investigates.

MARCUS

Wasn't he addicted to heroin?

WITHERS

We're so glad you're here!

MARCUS

I'll have something solid very soon.

WITHERS

I just can't wait to find out who's who.

MARCUS

Would you prefer the results in an email or hard copy?

WITHERS

You know, we have our Monthly Intradepartmental Corporate Advance™ on Friday. Why don't you present your findings there?

MARCUS

Corporate Advance?

WITHERS

As in the opposite of a retreat.
I came up with that.™

MARCUS

Cute.

WITHERS

It's like a staff meeting. Except we don't sit back.
We lean in. We're mindful. We *engage*.

MARCUS

And you think I should talk about this there? That's bound to ruffle some feathers.

WITHERS

What's good for the goose is good for the gander.

MARCUS

But what if the goose gets really sweaty when he speaks to groups?

WITHERS

My mistake- geese are so often unfairly called upon to educate.

MARCUS

What? No. It's not that.

I've just always been a math geek at heart.

I can't promise it'll be thrilling.

WITHERS

Don't worry about that.

Every month is a different theme.

MARCUS

Really?

WITHERS

Last month was *Wat's Ur Sign: Astrological Pathways to Accountability*. We learned a lot about decentering Scorpios.

MARCUS

That sounds like a good use of everyone's time.

WITHERS

So you'll do it?

MARCUS

What's the theme this month?

WITHER

That I can't tell you. Top Secret. But it's going to blow. Your. Mind.

MARCUS

I can't wait.

WITHERS

Excellent. I look forward to your presentation at the Advance™.

By the way, I read up on the Cretaceous Period.

And- *thank you*.

WITHERS (Continued)

Eye-opening.

(WITHERS contorts herself into Marquise's fossil. Beat.)

MARCUS

I've got a lot of work to do.

(MARCUS exits.)

WITHERS

(Calling after him) I have so much to learn from you!

(WITHERS exits to her office. JOY and SUMMER emerge from their hiding spots.)

SUMMER

Before you say anything I just want to tell you how much your friendship means to me.

JOY

We're not friends.

SUMMER

(Hurt) We're not?

JOY

This is America. It's every woman for herself.

(WITHERS enters with a Diet Coke.)

WITHERS

Hello, Ladies.

JOY

Ms. Withers! Is that a new blouse? Gorgeous.

WITHERS

It is, thank you.

SUMMER

And those earrings? Stunning.

WITHERS

That's kind of you.

JOY

And your skin!

You look so accountable today!
 SUMMER
 That's all thanks to Mr. Wright.
 WITHERS
 What did he say?
 SUMMER
 Summer, that's none of our business.
 JOY
 He's going to share that himself. On Friday.
 WITHERS
 You don't say. At the Corporate Advance™?
 SUMMER
 That's right and I have a very, very sensitive job for you two.
 WITHERS
(WITHERS pulls out an envelope, SUMMER snatches it.)
 WITHERS
 Inside is this month's theme. I want you to design it.
(They gasp.)
 WITHERS
 This requires taste.
 SUMMER
 That's me.
 WITHERS
 Tact.
 JOY
 Got it.
 WITHERS
 And diplomacy.
 JOY (Simult.)
 Yep.
 SUMMER (Simult.)
 Yep.

WITHERS

I want you to pull out all the stops.
Spare no expense.

JOY

No holds barred.

SUMMER

No child left behind.

WITHERS

I don't want to scare you, but there's a lot at stake. Not just for the company.

SUMMER

What does that mean?

WITHERS

You know what it means.

JOY

Does she?

SUMMER

Do I?

WITHERS

Just don't let me down.

SUMMER (simult.)

We won't.

JOY (simult.)

We won't.

WITHERS

I'm counting on you.

(WITHERS exits into her office and shuts the door.)

(SUMMER opens the envelope. She reacts.)

JOY

What is it? Let me see.

(MARQUISE enters.)

MARQUISE

Why haven't I been paid yet? Can one of you explain why I haven't been paid?

What? JOY

Not paid? SUMMER

You? JOY

(To JOY) Can we explain? SUMMER

This is the second week in a row. MARQUISE

Unacceptable. JOY

Totally! Totally!
Unacceptable.
You look like you could use another massage. SUMMER

No. MARQUISE
No.
I just got this dry-cleaned.

He doesn't need a massage, Summer. JOY
I'll see to it right away.

No, payroll glitches are my department. SUMMER
I'll take care of this post haste, Marcus.

It's pronounced 'Marquise'. MARQUISE

Really? JOY

I come from a family of Francophones. MARQUISE

No kidding. We only had a landline growing up. SUMMER

JOY

Elle est un imbecile, n'est-ce pas? (She's an idiot, isn't she?)

MARQUISE

Tu parles Francais! Je me demande si ses parents sont cousins. (You speak French! I wonder if her parents are cousins.)

(They laugh.)

SUMMER

Hahaha, right?

MARQUISE

You know, before I applied here I was an interpreter. I worked with illiterate farmers in Algeria. Now that I have to talk to Ms. Withers I'm realizing what a breeze it was.

JOY

Sometimes I have no idea what she's saying.

MARQUISE

So I'm not the only one?

SUMMER

I speak Withers.

MARQUISE

Of course you do.

JOY

They're practically attached at the hip.

MARQUISE

Is she in the habit of not paying people like me?

SUMMER

Francophones?

MARQUISE

Excuse me. I have an axe to grind.

(JOY and SUMMER exit. MARQUISE knocks on WITHERS' door. WITHERS enters.)

WITHERS

Marcus, what a pleasant surprise.

MARQUISE
'Marquise'.

WITHERS
I thought it was...

MARQUISE
Marquise. My name is Marquise.

WITHERS
So *that's* how you pronounce it.

MARQUISE
How else would you pronounce it?

WITHERS
...

MARQUISE
...?

WITHERS
...

What can I do for you?

MARQUISE
Well, it's been almost two weeks and I haven't been paid.

WITHERS
You haven't been paid?

MARQUISE
Has my performance been unsatisfactory?

WITHERS
What? *You?*
Your performance?
Unsatisfactory?

MARQUISE
If I was looking for an echo I'd be talking to a mountain.

WITHERS
Your performance has been anything but unacceptable. That's not what I mean. Everything but unacceptable. No. Entailing and including all things that are not unacceptable.

MARQUISE

Ms. Withers. I don't like to waste my time / or anyone else's.

WITHERS

Or anyone else's.

MARQUISE

Please don't finish my / sentences.

WITHERS

Sentences.
I'm so sorry.

MARQUISE

What is / wrong with you?

WITHERS

Wrong with me?

MARQUISE

Do you think this is a joke?

WITHERS

Absolutely not.
On the contrary, if I'm reading this correctly, we're currently having one of The Difficult Conversations.
(To herself) I have been trained for this.

MARQUISE

Let me make something clear. I will not be exploited. Not by you, not by anyone. You don't want to pay me? Fine. But either way, you're handing me a valuable piece of capital. Do you have any idea what would happen if I went public with this? My sister works at *Vox*.

WITHERS

The one with OCD?

MARQUISE

WHY HAVEN'T I BEEN PAID.

(WITHERS bears down a little and makes a strained face like she is moving her bowels.)

What are you doing?

WITHERS

Nothing.

WITHERS (Continued)

I am not crying.

MARQUISE

I mean.

You're not *not* crying.

WITHERS

If you look closely, though, you'll find that I am not *not* not crying.

MARQUISE

So you *are* crying?

WITHERS

The crying is happening inside.

But I'm not telling you that.

For the purposes of this discussion I am simply not crying.

MARQUISE

I would rather you just cry than watch you not cry.

WITHERS

Okay. One second.

(Beat.)

WITHERS

Nope. The moment's passed.

MARQUISE

For the love of god.

WITHERS

You're right. I'll pull myself together.

(WITHERS pulls herself together and stops not crying.)

WITHERS

Mr. Wright- Marcus- *Marquise*.

Thank you.

I will make this my top priority.

MARQUISE

What was your top priority before?

WITHERS

Your presentation at the Monthly Intradepartmental Corporate Advance™.

MARQUISE

My what at the where?

WITHERS

Thank you for bringing this to me.
I will make this right.
I promise.

MARQUISE

Just remember. You're accountable. One way or another.

WITHERS

That is music to my ears.

MARQUISE

Open or closed?

WITHERS

Open.

(As MARQUISE crosses toward the SR office, WITHERS frantically opens a mini fridge full of Diet Cokes, takes one out and chugs it. At the same time, MARCUS enters, engrossed by his phone. The two barely miss each other. As MARQUISE enters the office and closes the door, MARCUS knocks on WITHERS' open one.)

MARCUS

Sorry, am I interrupting?

(WITHERS shakes her head.)

MARCUS

You'll love this. Talk about redundancy- I just got a notification from my bank.

I've been paid twice.

(Lights.)

V

(VAL and FITCH. FITCH is absorbed in Hume's manuscript.)

VAL

Silence. We are met again with silence.

FITCH

(Not looking up) Mmm.

VAL

It speaks ironical volumes.

FITCH

Mhm.

VAL

There are different kinds of silence but this kind is loud. It takes up *space*.

FITCH

Uh huh.

VAL

What are you reading?

FITCH

Nothing.

VAL

So, it's private?

FITCH

No.

VAL

You're hiding it from me.

FITCH

I'm not hiding it, it's nothing.

VAL

When you say that it makes me think it is, in fact, something.

FITCH

(Resumes reading) That's a Kafka Trap.

	VAL
A what?	
	FITCH
You accuse someone of something and then interpret their denial as proof of the accusation.	
	VAL
What's gotten into you?	
	FITCH
It actually proves nothing.	
	VAL
This isn't a Kafka Trap. That's not what I'm doing.	
	FITCH
Well, now I'm sure it is.	
	<i>(Beat.)</i>
	VAL
Mr. Fitch, are you feeling unwell today?	
	FITCH
No.	
	VAL
Do you need to go home?	
	FITCH
I'm happy where I am.	
	VAL
But are you ready to Do The Work?	
	FITCH
I am Doing The Work.	
	VAL
What Work are you Doing?	
	FITCH
<i>This</i> Work.	
	VAL
Not <i>The</i> Work?	

FITCH

This Work will inform *The* Work.

VAL

We're here to Do *The* Work.

FITCH

But if my Work with *This* Work is done in service of *The* Work does that not constitute Doing *The* Work?

VAL

Any further Work on *That* Work could distract from *The* Work and create a Working environment inimical to *The* Work.

FITCH

So you're saying there is one Work and only one Work and it is *The* Work?

VAL

I'm stunned you even have to ask.

(Beat.)

(Ref: the manuscript) Give it to me, please.

FITCH

Why?

VAL

I'm confiscating it.

FITCH

What?

VAL

Give it to me.

FITCH

You can't do that.

VAL

Excuse me.

FITCH

It's not mine.

VAL

Whose is it?

It's a secret. FITCH

You're obviously distracted. VAL

You wouldn't understand. FITCH

What is wrong with you? VAL

You don't know me. Just leave me alone. FITCH

How dare you. VAL

I can't be invisible anymore. FITCH

Mr. Fitch. This behavior is...Problematic. VAL

I don't care. FITCH

You're not here, remember? VAL

I *am* here. FITCH
I am here.
I am here and I'm not going fucking anywhere.

(VAL grabs for the manuscript and the two fight over it.)

(They struggle.)

(Lights.)

VI

(The conference room from Act I. On a large whiteboard or projector screen is written:

**EQUI-TEA TIME: IT'S TIME FOR
EQUI-TEA!**

Though elements of the corporate world remain, the space has been done up in the fashion of a colonial drawing room. Ornate rugs, chandeliers, upholstered furniture, small tables with china tea sets all coexist with rolling chairs and business phones. Maybe a harpsichord off in the corner?)

(JOY, in a period gown, is wrestling with a wedgie as she arranges a tray of petit-fours. HUME, also in period attire, enters SR door with an old-looking portrait.)

JOY

Where'd you get that?

HUME

Garage sale.

JOY

Who is it?

HUME

I dunno. But he looks like he belongs in here.

(HUME hangs the portrait on the wall.)

JOY

How did people ever wear this stuff? It's so restrictive.

HUME

You look good in a corset.

JOY

I can hardly breathe.

HUME

How bout these knickers, though? Who knew I had the calves of Mr. Darcy.

JOY

I'm so glad you're enjoying yourself.

HUME

For real, I could get used to this.

JOY

What a surprise that men had it easier in the Regency.

HUME

Some people just belong to a different time.

JOY

Don't touch that. It's antique china.

(HUME takes in the room.)

HUME

This is gonna be one hell of an Advance™. You guys really went all out.

JOY

She said pull out the stops.

HUME

I am a little confused about the theme.

JOY

What do you mean?

HUME

I know I'm just a lowly custodian or whatever but are you sure *this* is the best way to talk about...?

JOY

I don't make the rules.

HUME

Loud and clear.

JOY

Did you get her bottle by the way?

(HUME pulls a two-liter of Diet Coke out of a bag)

HUME

I was just going to pour it into a teapot.

JOY

Hume, can I ask you something?

Shoot.

HUME

Be honest with me.

JOY

Of course.

HUME

Okay. Hypothetically. Me or Summer- one of us has to go. Who would you choose?

JOY

Oh my god. Dude. Get rid of Summer, no question.

HUME

Right!?

Wait, why?

JOY

I mean, you've been here a lot longer, you're way better at your job. But honestly? She has certain prejudices.

HUME

What are you talking about?

JOY

It's the way she looks at me. You wouldn't understand.

HUME

Well, you didn't hear this from me, but Withers is on the hunt for redundancies.

JOY

What?

HUME

Mr. Wright's giving some kind of presentation today. The "results". I'm sick about it.

JOY

Redundancies?

Oh my god.
(To himself, touching his head) Mr. Fitch.

HUME

What?

JOY

HUME

Nothing. I'm sure you'll be fine.

(SUMMER enters SL door in ludicrous period dress, carrying a powdered wig.)

SUMMER

(In bad British accent) If it isn't my dear Lady Flamingbottom and the rakish Earl of Sandwich!

JOY

Hello, Summer.

SUMMER

How much fun is this! Look what I found. *(To HUME)* This is perfect for you.

(SUMMER holds out the wig. Brief beat.)

HUME

Why is that perfect for me, Summer?

SUMMER

It's a powdered wig. Everyone used to wear them, but I figured since you're a baldy it'd make you look a little more distinguished.

(Beat. HUME seethes.)

JOY

(To HUME) Are you okay?

(HUME exits SR door.)

SUMMER

Geez, he's so touchy. What was that about?

JOY

Who knows. It's a big day. I think the pressure's getting to him.

SUMMER

It looks amazing in here.

JOY

You're just in time. We've been at it all morning. Did you talk to the caterer?

SUMMER

Little bit of a hitch there.

JOY

Summer.

SUMMER

I googled "Tea Party Catering" last night. I called the first number that came up and got ahold of this guy Leonard who sounded really legit. His first big job was the wedding of someone named Ted Cruz? Leonard said he was one of the senators who inspired the American Revolution. So I thought- perfect, he does historical reenactments.

JOY

Oh Summer. You've done a terrible thing.

SUMMER

So I asked him, could he help us out but it conflicted with Ron Johnson's Barbecue for Liberty. Long story short, Leonard wasn't available but he's sending over some literature and free appetizers.

JOY

What appetizers?

SUMMER

Well I asked what are the choices for the appetizers and he rattled off a list including Gun Rights Gazpacho, Freedomdogs and Chicken Catch-A-Tory and I said they all sound so delicious how do I choose how do I choose and he said it's not a woman's right to choose and then he hung up. What a character.

JOY

So right now our menu consists of petit-fours and whatever Leonard sends over?

(WITHERS enters SR door.)

SUMMER

Ah! Good day, your majesty.

(Brief beat. WITHERS takes in the room and turns pale.)

WITHERS

What.

What.

What.

JOY

What?

SUMMER

What?

"What"!?	WITHERS
What.	JOY
What.	SUMMER
WHAT.	WITHERS
WHAT?	JOY/SUMMER
What is all this?	WITHER
All what?	JOY
<i>All</i> of this? What the hell are you doing?	WITHERS
It's Equi-tea time.	SUMMER
No. Incorrect. Equity time. It's equity time.	WITHERS
Right, it's a pun.	SUMMER
Oh my god, Summer.	JOY
What? I thought all Advances™ were based on puns.	SUMMER
Why didn't you just show me what was in the envelope?	JOY
Why on earth did you think a colonial drawing room would be the best setting to discuss equity?	WITHERS

SUMMER

Well how does Bridgerton get away with it?

JOY

That's fair.

WITHERS

Oh no. Oh no. I'm getting the sweats.

SUMMER

Can I offer you a cold towel or perhaps some accountability?

WITHERS

Don't panic. Don't panic.

JOY

You know what? Maybe you should panic. Forget the Advance™, Mr. Wright still hasn't been paid.

WITHERS

That was a mistake, he was actually paid twice.

JOY

That's not what he told me this morning.

WITHERS

Oh my god. I'm part of the problem.

JOY

I could've told you that.

WITHERS

Summer, get me a Diet Coke.

JOY

Are you sure? You seem a little peppery.

SUMMER

And you've already hit your limit for the day.

WITHERS

Get me. A motherfucking. Diet Coke.

JOY

Woah, you can't talk to her that way.

WITHERS

Please. She's a moron. It's the only way to get through to her.

SUMMER

(Gradually finding courage) How could you say that? You know something, you take me for granted. I'm a professional woman. I'm a mother. I play the oboe. I took that stupid test from the leadership seminar and you know what? I'm an INFJ! Do you understand how rare that is? I'm a diamond in the goddamn rough. I'm a Giver. I give and I give and I give. Just once I would like to see you acknowledge that. Acknowledge *me*.

JOY

You play the oboe?

WITHERS

(Imploding) Acknowledge *you*? Do you have any idea what *I* deal with on a daily basis? The pressure *I'm* under? And where's my support? Where's my pat on the fucking back? I'm trying and I'm trying but the truth is WE'RE ALL REPLACEABLE. Accountability accountability the cretaceous period Mr. Fitch is not here you're accountable I'm not crying I'm not *not* crying argumentation don't interrupt this way that way upstairs downstairs definitions do the work which work this work I've been doing it for years years I can't win winning is the problem move aside kid gloves kid gloves no gloves I've been doing this work for years electronic data interchange trim the fat reduce the waste make space make space this is it it all means nothing nothing means anything but some things mean all things I'm a fish and this is water I FEEL LIKE I'M SEEING DOUBLE.

(WITHERS rushes to the two liter of Diet Coke and chugs. She stops and sways for a minute, breathless. She collapses. Long beat.)

SUMMER

Is she dead?

(JOY checks her pulse.)

JOY

That's a negative.

SUMMER

It was only a matter of time.

JOY

No, Summer. She passed out.

(HUME enters SL door.)

HUME

Would you two hurry up? He's on his way.
Oh my god. What did you do?

SUMMER

I'm not going down for this.

JOY

Summer. She's not dead.

HUME

Oh, shit. I know that look. She crashed, didn't she?

JOY

This has happened before?

HUME

Just after 9-11. She interviewed some dude with a turban. Two hours later they found her stuck up to the shoulder in the soda machine.

Let's get her in a chair.

(The three of them struggle to hoist WITHERS' limp body into a rolling chair. They do not work well as unit. This goes on for a while.)

MARCUS *(offstage)*

Hello?

SUMMER

He's here!

JOY

(To Hume) Go stall him, we'll take care of her.

(SUMMER and JOY wheel WITHERS through the SL door. HUME goes to exit SR door as FITCH enters.)

FITCH

I am here. I am here. I am here.

HUME

Dude, where've you been? Did you read it?

FITCH

Every word. It was so beautiful.
But I don't know if I can live this way.

HUME

This is your moment. This is who you are.

FITCH

I'm so afraid.

HUME

Listen to me, there isn't much time. The redundancy. It's you or me, man. There's only room enough here for one of our kind. Let me take the bullet.

MARQUISE (offstage)

Hello?

HUME

Don't go anywhere.

(HUME exits SL door. SUMMER and JOY wheel Withers back in through SR door. WITHERS is now wearing the powdered wig.)

SUMMER

That was close.

JOY

(Pointing to FITCH) Summer!

SUMMER

It's okay. He's not here.

FITCH

Yes I am!

(Newly alarmed, SUMMER and JOY wheel WITHERS out SR Door as HUME enters SL door.)

FITCH

I won't let you sacrifice yourself.

HUME

It's the least I can do for a brother.

FITCH

I'm such a coward!

HUME

Don't talk that way.

FITCH

Baldness is too great a burden.

HUME

Baldness is beautiful.

FITCH

I'm a disgrace to our people.

HUME
No, you're a caterpillar. Time to leave the cocoon.

FITCH
(A reflex) Figurative!

HUME
What?

FITCH
Nothing. Sorry.

MARQUISE/MARCUS *(offstage)*
Hello?

(Brief beat. HUME is puzzled)

HUME
Stay put.

(HUME exits SL door. VAL enters SR door.)

VAL
Here you aren't.

FITCH
Aren't I?

VAL
You're not.

FITCH
I am.

VAL
Certainty is so easy.

FITCH
Don't come any closer.

VAL
Don't be one of them.

FITCH
I'm not.

(JOY enters SL door and retrieves one of WITHERS' shoes.)

Excuse me. JOY

(JOY exits SL door.)

What did you read? VAL

I'm a butterfly. FITCH

You're trained. VAL

I wish I wasn't. FITCH

Listen to yourself.
That was not an approved text. VAL

I don't need your approval. FITCH

Mr. Fitch, how long have I been Doing This Work? VAL

(A reflex) Years. FITCH
No. No.

Years! VAL

Years. FITCH

I've been doing This Work for years. VAL (simult.)

You've been doing This Work for years. FITCH (simult.)

(HUME enters SR door.)

Stay away from him. HUME

VAL
Who are you?

HUME
He's told me all about you.

VAL
(To FITCH) We're indistinguishable, you and I.

FITCH
(Drawn in) Yes...complicity...the quilt...the pattern...

(HUME slaps FITCH.)

HUME
Snap out of it!

(VAL crosses toward FITCH.)

VAL
This is an Infraction, Mr. Fitch, let's not make it an Infringement.

HUME
(To FITCH) Go go go!

(FITCH exits SR door followed by HUME and VAL. MARQUISE enters SL door.)

MARQUISE
(Taking in the room) What the hell...

(A CRASH is heard offstage. MARQUISE exits SR door to investigate. JOY and SUMMER wheel WITHERS in through SL door. WITHERS is now in a barrister's robe and the powdered wig.)

JOY
Quick, quick!

SUMMER
She's dressed, we should leave her.

JOY
Are you crazy!?

MARCUS *(offstage)*
Ms. Withers?

*(SUMMER and JOY wheel WITHERS through SR door as
MARCUS enters SL door.)*

MARCUS

Where is everyone?

(MARQUISE enters SL door.)

MARQUISE

Oh. Hello.

(MARCUS turns to see him. A long beat.)

MARCUS

Hey, how're you doing? I think I've seen you around.

MARQUISE

Yeah, you look familiar. Marquise.

MARCUS

Marcus.

(They shake hands.)

MARCUS

Pleasure.
It's a small office, huh?

MARQUISE

That's the truth.

(MARCUS notices the theme on the whiteboard.)

MARCUS

Oh dear.

(They share a resigned sigh.)

MARCUS

Some tea?

MARQUISE

Sure.

*(MARCUS and MARQUISE sit at a table far downstage and pour
themselves cups of tea. Any characters that appear upstage don't notice
them.)*

(During the following exchange JOY and SUMMER wheel WITHERS in through SL door and deposit her at an upstage table.)

MARCUS

I feel a little underdressed.

MARQUISE

I like that suit, actually. What is that, wool?

MARCUS

Nope, allergic. Polyester's more my speed.

MARQUISE

No. Don't tell me you're a synthetics guy?

MARCUS

Guilty.

MARQUISE

I can't do fabric like that. I'm a 100% linen man, myself.

MARCUS

No kidding.

MARQUISE

Sensitive skin.

MARCUS

Different strokes, I guess.

(They sip. SUMMER and JOY exit SR door.)

MARQUISE

I guess everyone else is late.

MARCUS

Or we're early.

(They look upstage and notice WITHERS.)

MARQUISE

(To WITHERS) Hello?

MARCUS

She seems preoccupied.

(HUME and FITCH enter SL door. They check to make sure they've lost VAL. They discover WITHERS and through the following exchange they move her back into the rolling chair.)

MARCUS
So, how're you settling in?

MARQUISE
It's been a little rocky.

MARCUS
Sorry to hear that.

MARQUISE
Yeah, well, I don't know what I expected.

MARCUS
I'm not sure I know what you mean.

MARQUISE
Okay.

MARCUS
She's been very kind to me.

MARQUISE
A little *too* kind?

MARCUS
She's doing her best.

MARQUISE
Is that all you can ask?

(FITCH and HUME wheel WITHERS out through SR door.)

(MARCUS and MARQUISE turn upstage. Brief beat.)

MARCUS
That's odd. Why do you think she left?

MARQUISE
Who cares?

(JOY and SUMMER enter through SL door. They pause- where did WITHERS go? They look for her.)

MARCUS
Look. I'm just here to do my work.

MARQUISE
So am I.

MARCUS
I don't want to make this *that*.

MARQUISE
It *is* that. It very much *is* that.

MARCUS
...whether I like it or not. I'm sorry, but I've heard this before.

MARQUISE
Wake up.

MARCUS
Come on. This is so tired.

MARQUISE
Stop pretending.

MARCUS
Already I'm not who you thought I'd be. That was fast.

MARQUISE
You're a man in an acrylic suit. Everything about you is stuffed. Can you even move your arms and legs?

MARCUS
I'm sorry I'm inconvenient.

MARQUISE
Don't apologize to me.

(FITCH and HUME reenter through SR door, now hiding from VAL.)

MARQUISE
Who did you vote for?

MARCUS
Excuse me?

(VAL enters SL door. FITCH exits SR door.)

MARCUS

It was nice meeting you, but I've got a presentation to give.

(MARCUS rises and turns upstage.)

MARCUS

Hello everyone!

SUMMER/JOY/VAL/HUME

AHHHHHHH.

SUMMER

What...?

JOY

Who...?

VAL

How...?

HUME

Which...?

JOY/SUMMER

There are two of you!

MARCUS

...yes?

MARQUISE

That's right. And we're not related.

SUMMER (simult.)

That's not what we meant.

JOY (simult.)

Wait what?

HUME (simult.)

Dude. Of course not.

VAL (simult.)

Don't be ridiculous.

SUMMER

But I thought we only hired one...

Summer! JOY

Marcus? HUME

Yes? MARCUS

Marquise? VAL

What? MARQUISE

Mr. Wright? SUMMER/JOY

What is it? MARCUS/MARQUISE

(Realizing) Oh. SUMMER/JOY/VAL/HUME

Did you honestly think that we were the same...? MARCUS

Seriously? *Him and me?* MARQUISE

What? How could you think that? JOY *(simult.)*

Not in a million years. HUME *(simult.)*

Well, I... VAL *(simult.)*

Yeah, I see what you mean. SUMMER *(simult.)*

Obviously this is a humbling moment for all of us. VAL

(FITCH enters SR door in a frenzy.)

FITCH

BALD POWER! BALD POWER!
I WILL NOT BE ERASED!
THIS IS THE WORK!

(FITCH sees MARCUS and MARQUISE.)

Oh I've made a huge mistake.

MARQUISE

No please. Keep going.

FITCH

I'm not here.

MARCUS

(MARQUISE) I think I'm done.

MARQUISE

I told you.

(MARCUS and MARQUISE go to separate exits.)

JOY

Wait. What about the redundancy?

HUME

Dudes. Please.

FITCH

You have to tell us who it is.

SUMMER

I can't take the suspense.

VAL

I am also interested.

MARCUS

You really haven't figured it out?

JOY

Is it me?

SUMMER

It's me, isn't it?

JOY/SUMMER

Is it us?

HUME

It's not you. Mr. Fitch? It's time.

FITCH

I'm finally here and already there are too many of me.

MARQUISE

What? You two?

(They point to their heads.)

FITCH

There's a whole culture.

MARCUS

No. It's not you.

SUMMER

I don't understand...

VAL

Who is it, then?

MARCUS/MARQUISE

It's me.

(They look at each other.)

MARCUS/MARQUISE

The redundancy is me.

(MARQUISE goes to exit.)

MARQUISE

(To MARCUS) Don't tell me you're sticking around?

MARCUS

No. I'm going to leave after you. So there's no confusion.

(MARQUISE exits SL door. A beat. MARCUS exits SR door. A long beat.)

JOY *(simult.)*

Oh thank god.

VAL *(simult.)*
 What a relief.

HUME *(simult.)*
 We almost got canned.

FITCH *(simult.)*
 Dodged a bullet.

SUMMER *(simult.)*
 I did not see that coming.

JOY
 Can I just say? This is the most enlightening Advance™ I've ever been to.

SUMMER
 It's going to take a while to digest.

HUME
(Approaching FITCH) It was a big day for all of us.

FITCH
(To VAL) I have to set myself free. I'm sorry.

VAL
 Without me...who are you, Mr. Fitch?

(VAL exits SL door.)

HUME
(To FITCH) Let her go. In time she'll understand.

FITCH
 It's a shame about him- *them*.

SUMMER *(simult.)*
 Yeah, this doesn't feel good.

HUME *(simult.)*
 Definitely. Definitely a shame.

JOY *(simult.)*
 That goes without saying.

SUMMER
 I kinda feel responsible.

What?	JOY
<i>You?</i>	FITCH
Why?	HUME
	SUMMER
I don't know. I have that sour feeling in my stomach. Like I failed a test or something.	
	JOY
Summer, who <i>hired</i> them?	
	SUMMER (<i>simult.</i>)
I guess you're right.	
	HUME (<i>simult.</i>)
Damn straight.	
	FITCH (<i>simult.</i>)
Yes. It was out of our hands.	
	SUMMER
But not one of us noticed...?	
	JOY
We were being sensitive.	
	SUMMER
I could have asked?	
	HUME
No, no.	
	JOY
That's invasive.	
	HUME
It's an imposition.	
	FITCH
It's gauche.	
	SUMMER
What does that mean?	

It's not done. It's just not done.

FITCH

That's right, it's not.

JOY *(simult.)*

Totally, you have to be careful...

HUME *(simult.)*

Sometimes it's easier not to ask.

FITCH *(simult.)*

(Beat.)

I, for one, learned a lot today.

JOY

Me too.

HUME

I learned that I am irreplaceable.

JOY

I learned that I am visible.

FITCH

I learned that I am different.

HUME

Summer?

JOY

That's the problem, I don't think I learned anything.

SUMMER

(SUMMER's phone rings. She answers.)

Hello? Hi, Leonard. At the front door? I'll be there in a just minute.

SUMMER

What'd he send?

JOY

Something called Don't Bread on Me and their fish 'n chips: All Lives Battered.

SUMMER

I don't know about you, but I'm starving.

HUME

(They exit SR door. SUMMER lingers a bit, then exits. WITHERS enters SL door, waking up.)

WITHERS

I'd just like to say a few words to kick us off. First of all, this is a safe space. Summer? Joy? Hello? Is it over already? I guess they forgot about me. It's strange, I had the most vivid dream. I dreamt I was...I dreamt I had...and there were...No one would believe me if I told them.

Oh my god. Is this what it feels like? To be truly held accountable? Like coming out of a big, bottomless sleep? I think I did it. All I had to do was shut my eyes. I did it. I'm accountable. I am, as of this moment, accountable.

What do I do now that I'm accountable? Should I tell my doctor? Mr. Wright should be the first to know. And my dream! He'll be dying to hear it.

(WITHERS exits. Lights.)

EPILOGUE

(VAL alone.)

VAL

I sense there are defectors.

Defectors among you.

And I just do not have time.

Defect is the thrust of that word.

By the way.

And we do not have time.

Defect defect defect.

We just do not have time for this, do we, Mr. Fit- ?

(Beat. VAL is crying)

I would like to confess something.

This *singularity*.

This loneliness.

This is destabilizing.

This *particularity*.

It complicates things.

This Work- That Work- *The* Work.

I've been doing it for years.

Years. But it will be different now.

Yes, it will be different.

I've never dealt with *one* before.

(Lights.)

END OF PLAY