

THE MERGER

A Play in Two Acts

By

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

CHAD/WILLIAM/BEAU: Late 40s. CEO. Same character/same actor.

WILLIAM: Late 40s. CEO.

A hybrid of self-help narcissism and bare-knuckle businessman, William would like people to think he's an enlightened visionary, but he probably should have stuck to buying and selling restaurant chains instead of investing in media, which he doesn't know or care about at all. One size does not fit all, but William believes his own track record and thinks he's smart enough to do—and succeed—at whatever he likes.

ROSIE: 50s. Head of human resources.

Rosie has been with the company since Chad's parents started it decades ago, and it's the only place she's ever worked. Rosie is loyal and dutiful, but she sees the writing on the wall when William and Cornerstone, the private equity firm, take over. Rosie tries to do right by her fellow "native employees," but feels her power and influence slipping away. In the end, she just wants to hang on long enough to put her son through college, but she senses that's not going to happen.

MARC: 35. Magazine publisher.

Marc has been with the company many years and, post-merger, he is trying to keep his team and position intact. He misses feeling a sense of ownership over his client, New Jet, as well as being given carte blanche to act in an entrepreneurial fashion. His position has changed enormously since the merger, and for someone who used to be viewed as a profitable golden boy, it's hard now being seen as a burdensome cost center. Marc has a hard time working for Doug, too, who he sees as an impediment and ruinous to his relationship with Jon—his client and friend. Adding to the work distractions, Marc's mother is currently undergoing chemo and his father has to move into assisted living.

LAUREN: Late 30s. Magazine editor.

Like many people in the magazine business, Lauren has bounced around editing jobs for years, but she doesn't want to do that any more. She has found a good place at New Jet, and she loves working with Marc and Justin. Now that she's finally pregnant, after a year of trying, she just wants her work life to stay on track—her husband is currently unemployed, so the timing of her long-in-the-works IVF pregnancy and the ramifications of the merger couldn't be worse.

JUSTIN: Late 20s. Magazine art director.

Justin, a hipster in skinny jeans, is just starting out in his career as an art director. He is dedicated to his work, as well as living with integrity and creativity. He is friendly with Brittany, the only person at the company younger than him, and Justin wants to be able to do good work with good people and not get caught up in the *sturm und drang*. He doesn't suffer fools, though, which can get him into trouble.

BRITTANY: 24. CEO's personal assistant.

The newbie started out working for Chad, but now she assists William. She feels the changes acutely; working for Chad's family-owned business was very different from working for the figurehead of a private equity firm. Brittany wishes she could make her living in fashion but, for now—and like most people her age, recently out of college—she has to pay some dues while she works to get herself to where she wants to be.

ELLEN: Late 40s. Chief Creative Officer.

Ellen's primary goal is to do right by her team. She fosters the illusion that she can be true to herself and her staff while navigating the changing landscape brought on by the merger. But when several staffers are laid off without her knowledge or consent, Ellen stops being a team player and starts shooting her mouth off. She is the primary breadwinner for her artist husband and their daughter. Like her fellow natives, Ellen finds herself between a rock and a hard place—how to make a good living and support her family while remaining true to her ethics and her conscience?

NANCY: Early 50s. Chief Client Officer.

A single mother with two kids, Nancy will do whatever it takes to survive any change in the force. She will espouse the same edicts as the boss, and even drink the same kale juice without apology. She plays all sides, but tells herself that's what one needs to do to stay relevant—and employed. Nancy has worked nonstop since her teens, and she knows the grave importance of having a job; she believes that life is about making as much money as you can to succeed, which, to her, means being able to earn a living and support her family.

DOUG: Early 40s. Chief Marketing Officer.

Doug is a married father of small children who has been along for the ride with William for several years—and most of his professional life. He is a foot soldier who has to do William's bidding to succeed in William's universe. Doug plays by the rules, which at Expansion means success by any means necessary, but as his failure becomes apparent to everyone around him, he flails and becomes the dying gunfighter, trying to fire off another round before losing his own life.

GARTH: Early 30s. Chief Financial Officer.

Garth is the hatchet man, with no ties to anyone at Expansion. He is there merely as a numbers guy to protect Cornerstone's investment. Garth avoids any personal involvement with the staff, and appears around the office as a dark force that only communicates with William, but he'll care about William only as long as Cornerstone does. It's just business.

CHRISSY: Early 30s. Human resources.

Unbeknownst to anyone at Expansion, Chrissy worked with Garth before and the two are close. Even William doesn't realize that her loyalty is solely to Garth.

SETTING

A non-descript office in New York City.

TIME

Today.

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

(CHAD, a CEO casually dressed in a polo and khakis, stands at center stage and prepares to address the audience. A SPOTLIGHT shines on him, the sole person illuminated onstage. Looming behind him is a large video screen, depicting his family-owned company's cheesy logo. CHAD holds the clicker that controls the screen.)

(ROSIE, the head of human resources, stands a few steps away from CHAD in shadow. Here, and always, she holds a clipboard to her chest.)

(At the back of the stage is the CEO's large office, on top of which are four, second-story offices/cubicles in which EMPLOYEES sit in the dark. The occupants are unknown at the moment, but their offices—from stage left to right—belong to DOUG, MARC, LAUREN and ELLEN. There is a walkway in front of all the cubes, leading to staircases that head down to stage left/the kitchenette and stage right/the conference room.)

(The private conference room at stage right is furnished with a table and chairs. A glass wall is behind it, but the front is open to the audience. The kitchenette is at stage left. Coffee urns and snack jars rest on the counter, and that great symbol of the American workplace—the water cooler—stands in the corner.)

(Suspended high above the stage is an LED screen on which we can read the private Instant Message (IM) conversations that occasionally transpire between employees. **These conversations are denoted in yellow.**)

(In the meantime, EMPLOYEES, waiting for CHAD to begin, speak to each other in a LOW HUM of conversation.)

CHAD

Quiet! Quiet, Everyone. Shhh ... Ok, that's enough. Welcome ... Good morning. Shhh.

(The HUM finally dims.)

CHAD – CON'T.

Good morning. So I know there's been a lot of speculation these last few weeks ... or months, OK? And I want to address your concerns and put everyone's mind at ease. Now, I've made no secret about the fact that we've been looking to merge with another company to help fast track our position in the marketplace. And now, I am happy to announce we've found the perfect fit, well beyond what my parents could have imagined when they started our quaint little family business all those years ago. So many of you have been with us for some—if not all—of that time, and you know that we need to grow

CHAD – CON'T.

and evolve into a truly modern organization, OK? Especially if we hope to compete in this ever-changing industry. And now, we've finally met our match, and we're merging with Expansion Digital ... and taking their name. It's an awesome name, right?

Expansion.

(CHAD clicks a button on the remote and the video screen behind him changes to reflect the name/logo for Expansion Digital. The logo looks like a cheesy symbol on a 1970s-era superhero uniform on Saturday morning television.)

(The HUM of VOICES starts again and CHAD raises his hands to silence the chatter. ROSIE steps forward to try to assist him, but he waves her off and she steps back into place.)

(The LED screen broadcasts messages between MARC and LAUREN, who are seated in the dark in their cubicles upstairs. Every time an IM message flashes across the screen, it is preceded by the messenger's first name.)

LAUREN/IM

LAUREN: What fresh hell is this?

MARC/IM

MARC: Buckle up, Sister.

LAUREN/IM

LAUREN: Ugh. If I were a user of emoticons, I would insert a sad one here.

CHAD

Now, I can assure you this decision has been made carefully, OK? The planning has been going on a long time. And the most important part, the reason why this is even happening, is you. We have awesome employees. The best. But the world is changing and, within five years, consumers will manage 85 percent of their relationship with a brand without interacting with a human being. Can you imagine? Now, we can no longer ignore that fact and, fortunately for us, Expansion brings a lot of that *experiential experience* to the table.

(Hands rise and, again, ROSIE steps forward as a means of assistance, but he waves her back into place and out of the spotlight.)

CHAD – CON'T.

We do not have all the answers yet, and there is still a lot of work to do. Soon, we will begin answering your questions. But rest assured: Expansion's CEO and I have known each other for nearly nine months and I have developed the utmost respect for him. He is a visionary and, perhaps most importantly, he's tall. He's taller than me!

(No one laughs at CHAD's lame attempt at levity.)

JUSTIN/IM

JUSTIN: LMAO. Did you know about this?

BRITTANY/IM

BRITTANY: No! I would of told u!

JUSTIN/IM

JUSTIN: J/K. But, dude ...

CHAD

But seriously, he's a real entrepreneur, OK? He has run several businesses—in hospitality ... restaurants ... and, most recently, Expansion.

(A lot of MURMURING among the EMPLOYEES.)

CHAD – CON'T.

But that's not all. William will be the second largest investor behind a private equity firm, which specializes in acquiring ... *supporting* ... family-owned businesses like ours. For all these reasons and the fact that it's hard for two CEOs to live together under the same roof, I will help William transition to be your new CEO, and then I will move on.

(Now CHAD expects/waits for some kind of reaction, but there isn't one. He seems disappointed. Still, he soldiers on.)

CHAD – CON'T.

But don't worry; I'm an investor, too. I still have skin in the game. And Rosie, who has been with us since day one ... come here, Rosie ... she'll be here to help with the transition and everything that comes after, OK? Any HR questions should still be directed at her. Rosie?

(Now, CHAD reaches for ROSIE's hand and she steps forward to meet him. He raises their held hands together in the air like she's the new First Lady on Election Day. Then, he releases her and she steps back and, again, out of the light.)

ELLEN/IM

ELLEN: Poor Rosie.

NANCY/IM

NANCY: Please. He pays her a lot of money. No sympathy.

CHAD

I can't wait for you to meet William. You'll love him. Honest. Please know I would never leave you in anything less than capable hands, OK? And I couldn't be more excited about this. More details will be available soon but, for the foreseeable future, William and his deputy, Doug, who's a great guy, too, by the way, will work out of our office while they search for a larger space so we can really bring our companies together. In the meantime, best wishes for your ... for *our* continued success, and don't forget our values as we move forward: Be creative. Be awesome. And, my personal favorite: Be profitable. OK?

(BLACKOUT.)

(The HUM of the EMPLOYEES rises and rapidly increases into full-throated conversations of worried voices, wondering what the hell just happened?)

SCENE TWO

(It's several weeks later and a typical office scene, which it will be throughout the play. EMPLOYEES sit in their cubicles while others walk about or congregate in the kitchenette for coffee, snacks or a chat around the water cooler. But the atmosphere isn't warm or convivial. It's low-key, secretive and hushed.)

(JUSTIN, a hipster art director in a t-shirt and skinny jeans, and BRITTANY, a sweet, fresh-out-of-college assistant, mill about the kitchenette, having a private conversation—or as private as a conversation can be in a public space. They speak in whispers.)

JUSTIN

Fifty-three negative reviews. Fifty-freaking-three! They can't all be disgruntled employees.

BRITTANY

I never look at that website.

JUSTIN

Well, you should. His approval rating is below 25 percent. That sucks!

BRITTANY

Working for Chad ... the family ... that was one thing ... but these guys ...

(DOUG, a constant gum-chewer, enters the kitchenette to get a cup of water. JUSTIN and BRITTANY see him coming and make eyes at each other to disperse.)

BRITTANY – CON'T.

So, Chipotle?

JUSTIN

You know me? Always up for *carnitas*! Later, Britt.

BRITTANY

See you, Justin.

(DOUG doesn't notice—or care—that JUSTIN and BRITTANY are leaving because of his arrival. He takes his water and races to the CEO's office, where he's late for a meeting.)

(Inside WILLIAM's office, which looks like it doubles as a yoga studio—Tibetan artwork and design motifs, candles and a standing desk. His

seating consists solely of meditation cushions. WILLIAM sits on his, which is higher than the rest, and ELLEN and NANCY sit on two other cushions arranged around him. This ain't easy—to sit or stand—especially in heels and dresses.)

(WILLIAM, who takes off his shoes when he's in his office, is the same person/actor as Chad, a fact that should immediately dawn on the audience. They are interchangeable, although WILLIAM's casual dress is more in a cashmere style than khaki dad.)

ELLEN

(to William)

So the total is about \$20,000, which I know is a little over-budget ...

DOUG

(ducking inside and clumsily taking a seat on the remaining free cushion)

Sorry, Guys.

ELLEN

... I think it's worth it, but it's totally up to you, of course. I just know how important the theme is. And the whole launch thing.

DOUG

You're talking about the party? Is it really necessary to create a brand for a party? It's only two hours, right? Tops?

ELLEN

We're a content marketing agency. And *we do branding*. Isn't the point to announce ourselves? To make a splash in the marketplace?

DOUG

I didn't realize we were spending so much. Whose budget is it coming out of?

ELLEN

I think it's a good idea if we really want to make our mark, you know? It has to be awesome if we want *The Times* to write about it.

NANCY

The Times is coming?

ELLEN

Hypothetically ... I mean, *maybe*. We haven't sent the invites yet, but *The Times* is definitely on the list. And we're going to set up booths to showcase some of our best work, like New Jet ...

(a reminder to Doug)

ELLEN – CON'T.

That's our inflight magazine.

NANCY

And biggest client.

DOUG

How many people again?

ELLEN

We're sending 300 invites. Digitally. No paper, of course. Too expensive. And the event planner, Carol—who William recommended, thank you very much—says we should expect a ten-percent ROI, which means thirty total.

DOUG

What's her fee?

(ELLEN shrugs and looks to WILLIAM, but he deflects the question with a waved hand—don't worry about it.)

DOUG – CON'T.

You're inviting all copy people?

ELLEN

Industry columnists and pundits ... you know, writers who cover the media ... bloggers, Tweeters.

DOUG

There are 300 people who do that?

ELLEN

Oh, yeah! More. So many creatives out there. And if they all write about us, that would be so awesome.

NANCY

Who's attending on our end?

(The trio looks to WILLIAM, who finally contributes to the conversation.)

WILLIAM

The four of us, of course. And then I'll choose some more boots on the ground ... Nancy, I'd like you and Ellen to send recommendations for our most *personable* employees. But I want to be clear that they should be limited to one drink. This isn't for them.

NANCY

Understood.

The Merger

ELLEN

It won't start till six so we'll make sure everyone goes home by then. But we should definitely have the New Jet staff. Lauren and Marc ...

DOUG

What's that drink again?

ELLEN

We'll have beer and wine, *natch*, but we'll be pushing our signature drink, which is gin or vodka ...

(to William)

Bottom shelf, of course, with a splash of cranberry so it matches our new logo. It's called *The Expansini* because our name is Expansion.

(WILLIAM nods, and NANCY notices.)

NANCY

Fun!

ELLEN

And we *expand* profits for our clients, right? We have such a creative party-planning team; they've worked really, really hard on this. So young and bright. Edgy.

(BRITTANY gingerly walks inside the office, carrying WILLIAM's mid-morning juice/smoothie concoction. She enters and hands him the very green juice—he smiles warmly at her. WILLIAM sips from this cup throughout the scene.)

WILLIAM

(softly to Brittany)

Extra kale, right?

(BRITTANY nods and exits as quickly and quietly as she entered.)

WILLIAM – CON'T.

(raises his cup)

To youth, the ultimate heartbreaker.

ELLEN

OK ... um, also, the new business cards will be ready next week, so we'll have them in time for the party ...

(to William)

So. About the budget?

WILLIAM

Lock and load.

(ELLEN celebrates in her seat.)

WILLIAM – CON’T.

You know, Elon Musk once said, ‘Brand is just a perception,’ and I believe he’s right. The way we appear to the media, and are perceived in the industry, it’s as important—if not more so—than the work we do for our clients. How *cool* is our logo? Is our office *hip* and *colorful*? It may seem superficial or a waste of time but, in my experience, it’s vital.

NANCY

(taking notes and nodding profusely)

I totally agree.

(Meanwhile, the screen broadcasts an IM chat between BRITTANY and JUSTIN.)

BRITTANY/IM

BRITTANY: You should hear them in there. OMG!

JUSTIN/IM

JUSTIN: Hit me.

BRITTANY/IM

BRITTANY: They’re actually doing the *The Expansini*.

JUSTIN/IM

JUSTIN: NOOO! It’s so lame! She didn’t know we were kidding?

BRITTANY/IM

BRITTANY: LOL!

JUSTIN/IM

JUSTIN: Saving grace? Free booze. I’ll be all like, give me a beer, Beyaches! But keep your stupid cocktail.

BRITTANY/IM

BRITTANY:



WILLIAM

Ellen? Tell me: What’s your brand?

ELLEN

Excuse me?

The Merger

WILLIAM

Everyone has a personal brand. What's yours?

ELLEN

Um, that's a good question. I guess I never thought about it.

WILLIAM

You work in a creative field. You're a writer, editor ...

ELLEN

Well, it's been a long time since I did any of that.

WILLIAM

You manage a team of creatives, yet you say you don't have your own brand? Of course you do. I assume you're on social media?

ELLEN

Of course.

WILLIAM

Facebook? Instagram?

ELLEN

And Twitter ...

NANCY

I'm on Pinterest!

DOUG

(raising his hand)

LinkedIn.

WILLIAM

Who are you on those sites? What perception are you sending? What is your voice? That's your brand and, frankly, these days, everyone has to have one. In fact, I don't trust anyone without a serious digital footprint as well as a vision for that footprint. Which reminds me; I want everyone here to create their own personal brand. And project it.

(NANCY scribbles away then thinks of something and stops.)

NANCY

What's yours, William? If I may ask?

WILLIAM

Yes, you may, and thank you for asking, Nancy. I'm a leader with an eye on innovation. What does that mean? It means I read all the best subject matter on the topic that I can find.

NANCY

What are some examples? Please.

WILLIAM

I recently read Walter Isaacson's book about famous innovators ... and I subscribe to *Wired* and *Fast Company*. I suggest you do the same.

NANCY

I need to do that. I've been meaning to for ages.

WILLIAM

I follow people on Twitter. Thought leaders like ...

ELLEN

Elon Musk!

WILLIAM

Exactly.

DOUG

He's always reading.

WILLIAM

And you should, too. I want each of you to step up your game. We're no longer in the minors, OK? We are now officially in the majors, and that's where all the big stuff happens. For big boys and girls. Which brings me to one of the biggest changes I have in mind—and Doug, this is going to affect you the most.

DOUG

Bring it on, Boss.

WILLIAM

Whales.

DOUG

You mean, like, bigger contracts?

WILLIAM

Exactly. Have any of you read *Moby-Dick*?

(ELLEN and DOUG reluctantly shake their heads no.)

NANCY

I think I did ... in college.

(No she didn't.)

WILLIAM

I couldn't get through it, but I've always identified with Captain Ahab. And I see us getting our very own whales, to the tune of ten million-dollar contracts a year. How does that sound?

NANCY

Sounds great!

DOUG

Sign me up.

WILLIAM

Chad spent too much time cultivating clients like him: low-rent mom and pops bringing in small numbers. Bush league. Let me tell you something: his thinking was small. His prospects were small. He was, and I'm sorry if you still like the guy, but *he* was small. We, however, are going to be big. As the late, great Steve Jobs once said, 'I want to put a ding in the universe.' Well, I do, too.

NANCY

Ding, ding, ding!

(DOUG and WILLIAM chuckle ...)

ELLEN

That's great, but it's a real departure. I mean, from how Chad built the place.

WILLIAM

Yes, well, I disagree with his approach. He was vision-less.

DOUG

So, what can you share about the *whales*? Like, how are we going to land them?

(WILLIAM begins walking around his office as he talks, fixing the crafts on the walls.)

WILLIAM

Look, I'm not in sales, OK? That's your domain, Doug. And I don't want to micromanage you. I just want each of you to do what you do best—your jobs. I deliver the vision and you execute.

DOUG

OK, but, Boss ... million-dollar contracts? Their average is three-hundred thousand. Three-fifty max.

WILLIAM

Well, this isn't *theirs* anymore ...

(WILLIAM walks over to his desk and types on his computer.)

WILLIAM – CON'T.

Is that number right?

WILLIAM: What's the average contract price under Chad?

Watch this ...

(WILLIAM waits a beat and there Rosie is ..)

ROSIE/IM

ROSIE: \$236, 252.

WILLIAM/IM

WILLIAM: Thanks.

(to the group)

236,252. That woman has got to be a robot.

(ELLEN shyly raises her hand.)

WILLIAM – CON'T.

You don't have to raise your hand. Just give a 'Yo, Bill,' and I'll be happy to answer any questions. You and Nancy are the brain trust, OK? I know that. You were with Chad, what? Three, four years?

ELLEN

A year and a half.

NANCY

Nine months.

WILLIAM

Right. You're no Rosie, but you know enough about how the engine runs. I respect that. But what I do when I acquire a business—and it doesn't matter what that business is—I identify the weaknesses and turn them around as quickly and cost-effectively as possible. That's my job.

ELLEN

I guess that's the part I don't totally understand. Do you turn them around by growing them? Or selling them?

WILLIAM

(slurping what's left of his drink)

It depends on the business.

ELLEN

So ... what about this business?

WILLIAM

I see a lot of potential here, Ellen. You've all done an OK job with what you were given to work with. But I want to plant our flag in the industry and let the world know we're here. We're thought leaders now, OK? With this merger we're the new big dog in town, and I want to disrupt how everyone views what we do, turn around the perception and come out on top.

ELLEN

How do you do that?

(WILLIAM sighs and DOUG and NANCY follow suit with their disappointment—even though they likely don't really know why.)

ELLEN – CON'T.

I'm sorry! I want to understand. I want to be successful.

WILLIAM

It's very simple. These are our new goals for the combined company, which are the same ones I used when I was buying up restaurant chains: One, we are going to be the top-of-mind provider of best-in-class, innovative approaches to visualizing and executing high-impact, effective client service. That's your lead, Nancy.

(ELLEN looks to DOUG and NANCY: What does that even mean? But NANCY keeps scribbling and DOUG nods along.)

WILLIAM — CON'T.

Two, whales. That's where you come in, Doug. No more wasting time selling or maintaining piddly little low-rent contracts—those days are gone. Three, by doing the first two, we'll achieve sustainable industry-leading profit margins that will see us expanding to three continents within two years.

NANCY

(scribbling away and smiling)

So awesome.

WILLIAM

And then, within three-to-five years, we'll be acquired by a larger firm. That's the plan.

DOUG

(educating Nancy and Ellen)

That's the average timeframe for a flip ...

WILLIAM

Look, this is no longer Chad's company. And, if the truth be told, he left us a bag a shit, let me tell you. I'm just being honest. But he did a number on his numbers and left us, and Cornerstone, holding the bag. I don't know how he did it, but now, if we work tirelessly and focus like lasers, we'll be successful.

NANCY

Yo, Bill?

WILLIAM

(chuckles at this)

Yes, Nancy?

NANCY

Everything you say makes so much sense. Chad was a nice guy and all ... but, to be honest, I never really agreed with his approach.

WILLIAM

No?

NANCY

I always thought we could be innovating more; curating better experiences for our clients; and disrupting the marketplace. I guess what I'm trying to say is, I'm glad you're here. And I like what you say about the whales.

WILLIAM

I appreciate your vote of confidence. I know I have Doug's. This is ... what is it, Doug? Our third company together?

DOUG

That's right. We always be closing, Boss.

WILLIAM

Yes. We always be closing.

(NANCY laughs and ELLEN half-smiles, too, thinking that she should.)

WILLIAM – CON'T.

Look, I've been down this road before, OK? This isn't my first time at the acquisition rodeo. Let me tell you what's going to happen out there. The natives are going to get very restless and, honestly, they can be really ... sometimes they can get a little crazy. They

WILLIAM – CON'T.

worry about their jobs, their co-workers and, before long, it turns into an us-versus-them mentality. It never fails, and I already see it happening here.

(ELLEN shakes her head no; NANCY nods yes.)

WILLIAM – CON'T.

I'm not going to lie. So I'm really going to need each of you to help put a pin in it out there. We—the four of us in this room—are the leadership of this company. And I need to know I can count on you. You have your numbers and know what you need to hit to get your bonuses. If you hit them, you can do very well. And if you continue to hit them, like Doug does, then you can come with me for as long and as far as my personal journey goes. Flip, flip, flip ... But the first step is making your numbers. By any means necessary. And anyone who stands in your way, or isn't onboard with what we need to do, well, let's just say there are plenty of people out there, desperate people, who would be very happy to have their jobs. Understand?

NANCY

Absolutely.

WILLIAM

Ellen?

(ELLEN nods.)

WILLIAM – CON'T.

Good, good. And I know Doug does, too.

DOUG

You know it, Boss.

WILLIAM

OK. Look, this is our team. We are in this together. Everyone ... they're either in or they're out. So, who's with me?

(WILLIAM holds out his hand in an invitation for them to put theirs on top of his, which they do, one by one—like a high school football team—starting with NANCY and DOUG and ending with ELLEN.)

NANCY/DOUG

I'm in/I'm in.

WILLIAM

Great. That's it for now. Thank you.

(WILLIAM removes his hand and walks over to his desk while DOUG, NANCY and ELLEN rise and prepare to leave his office. It takes a while to get up off those cushions! WILLIAM sips his last sip of juice and looks at his computer, but not at them.)

WILLIAM – CON’T.

Oh, and we’re going to welcome a new member to the team in a few weeks.

(DOUG, NANCY and ELLEN stop cold, just short of the door.)

WILLIAM – CON’T.

We have a new CFO so, Doug, you can focus exclusively on sales. Garth is great; you’re going to love him. Super bright guy.

(DOUG is stunned but doesn’t say anything. He also stops chewing his gum for the first time the entire scene.)

ELLEN

What about Walter?

WILLIAM

Rosie’s going to take care of it ... Garth is young and energetic, and costs a lot less than Walter, which is critical at this stage.

(ELLEN gives NANCY a look but NANCY just shrugs. ELLEN and DOUG exit the office.)

(WILLIAM finally looks at them and smiles at NANCY, who’s the last of the three out the door—she wishes she could stay with him all day.)

NANCY

(confidentially)

Walt’s a nice guy and all, but he’s been checked out a long time. I’m just being honest. Lock and load, right, Bill?

BILL

That’s right, Nancy. Lock and load.

(She gives him thumbs up then slowly closes the door behind her.)

SCENE THREE

(It's several weeks later. MARC and LAUREN sit alone in the conference room. WILLIAM is at work in his office and other EMPLOYEES walk about, doing their things, or work in their cubes.)

(Although they are alone in a private meeting, MARC and LAUREN modulate their voices throughout their conversation, based on the delicate nature of what they're saying and just in case someone is standing or listening outside.)

LAUREN

Are you fucking kidding me? Please tell me you're fucking kidding me.

MARC

Shhh. Calm down ...

LAUREN

What is he basing this on? The numbers are wrong and he knows it. When are they going to admit it?

MARC

They're not going to. And I can't keep pointing that out.

LAUREN

Phony, magic numbers. Never mind how much they spent on that ridiculous party. I am never going to get over that. Where's our *Times* story? That's all I want to know. Twenty grand for a *Times* story I could have told you from the word go was never going to happen.

MARC

You have to remember you're not supposed to know how much that cost.

LAUREN

I'm not going to say anything.

MARC

Don't make me regret telling you.

LAUREN

I won't! But did you taste that drink? God! I felt like I was back in high school, drinking Sex on the Beach at the bowling alley.

MARC

It wasn't that bad. And shouldn't you not be drinking?

LAUREN

I just had a sip. But think about it. They spent twenty-thousand dollars so five interns could try to choke down that hideous excuse for a cocktail.

MARC

I can't believe only five people showed up.

LAUREN

Interns live for free booze, and they didn't even last twenty minutes! And now? Insult to injury, Marc. Insult to injury.

MARC

Yeah, well, we've both been down this road before.

LAUREN

And you know what? I don't want to go down it again. How many times do we have to go down? It's a very bad road.

MARC

Well, these are the numbers they're using. It's their formula.

LAUREN

But they know it's crap, right? As long as they know that ...

MARC

Look, they want a 24 percent profit margin; they've been very clear about that since day one.

LAUREN

They're nuts.

MARC

It's Cornerstone. It's how they operate.

LAUREN

Do they even know what business they're in? Do they understand what they bought?

MARC

They see us at four percent and they want 24. It's a huge difference.

LAUREN

Yes, I believe the difference in that equation is 20.

MARC

You're hilarious.

LAUREN

I'm an editor, but I can count.

MARC

Lauren ...

LAUREN

... and chew gum at the same time, which is more than I can say for our *geniuses* over there ... and what are they going to want next year? It's not only unachievable; it's unsustainable, too.

MARC

Can I continue?

LAUREN

I don't know, *can* you?

MARC

You're really on fire today. I have to hand it to you. Is this your version of morning sickness?

(LAUREN holds a finger to her lips: Shh! Don't say that.)

LAUREN

Only four percent ... that's profit!

MARC

Look, can't you just fudge your numbers?

LAUREN

Of course I can fudge my numbers.

MARC

Then just do it, OK?

LAUREN

That's not the point.

MARC

Can we not have a point for once?

LAUREN

I like my points.

MARC

I know you do, but you have to give me something here. I can't protect you anymore. I can't even protect myself.

LAUREN

I hate giving them the satisfaction. They don't deserve anything from us. How much leaner can we get? As it is we have no assistance ...

MARC

Look, we'll trim art and edit and ...

LAUREN

No fact checkers, copy editors ...

MARC

Look into paper stock ...

LAUREN

We do everything ourselves ...

MARC

And that should get us to 150.

LAUREN

It's ransom; a hostage negotiation with no actual negotiation because we have no leverage.

MARC

I've gone round and round with Doug ...

LAUREN

No power. Nothing.

(NANCY walks by the conference room, carrying a green juice like William drank in the previous scene—she's drinking these now, too. MARC and LAUREN stop speaking until she passes, and when they start talking again, their voices are hushed.)

MARC

They need these numbers for Cornerstone. That's all there is to it.

LAUREN

And what about New Jet? What is Jon going to say when all of a sudden his magazine looks like shit?

MARC

You know what Confucius, excuse me, *Doug*, says: It's easier to ask forgiveness than permission.

LAUREN

I really, really hate that.

MARC

Well, that's what he says and he's the boss.

LAUREN

You know, my first job out of school was in book publishing ...

MARC

Here we go ...

LAUREN

When it was a *gentlemen's business*. You earned a reasonable profit and lived to see another day.

MARC

Lauren ...

LAUREN

And, if you were lucky—really lucky—you might have even gotten a chance to produce some quality here and there. *Maybe*.

MARC

The world is digital now. We're lucky they're even keeping print.

LAUREN

They don't even know what *quality* means. Let alone care. All they know is their silly spreadsheets and magic numbers.

MARC

Well, if we don't like it, we can leave, OK? They've made that very clear, too.

(They're both quiet for a moment. Meanwhile, the screen lights up with an IM conversation between NANCY and DOUG.)

NANCY/IM

NANCY: Your boy is looking a little intense in the conference room.

DOUG/IM

DOUG: With who?

NANCY/IM

NANCY: Who else?

(DOUG rises and makes his way out of his office and downstage left toward the kitchenette. He pretends he needs some water but he's really there to steal glances inside the conference room.)

LAUREN

Please tell me you won't leave.

MARC

I'm not leaving, but I'd love to get out of here. I'm not gonna lie.

LAUREN

And I'd be very happy for you if you did. At least I'd try to be. OK, I'd *pretend* to be. But I really don't want you to.

MARC

You could go, too, you know?

(LAUREN puts her hands on her belly. She isn't showing yet, but she's pregnant.)

LAUREN

To try my luck someplace else? No, thanks. I'd rather stick with the devil I know. I am so tired of bouncing around this business. What I should do is go work in a library somewhere. Or a bookstore.

MARC

Yeah, because they're not being threatened with extinction. Look, you have to be real ... You want to go back to making what you did ten years ago? You want to start over? And with Joe out of work and now a baby? Let's just do what they want—for now—and get them off our back for a while, OK? Let's try that and see how it goes.

(JUSTIN walks inside the conference room. He has ear buds in his ears and carries a couple of pieces of paper. He's excited about the papers, which he sticks in front of LAUREN's and MARC's faces.)

JUSTIN

Hey guys, sorry to bother you, but I wanted to show you the new cover mock. Isn't it great? Look, it's got these gorgeous contours. And see what I did with the blue over here? I can make it lighter or darker, depending on what you like.

(MARC and LAUREN glance at the mock but they couldn't care less—they both answer a bit deadpan.)

LAUREN

Looks great, Justin.

MARC

Nice work.

(JUSTIN just stands there, waiting to receive more or better praise—or to be included in their conversation.)

JUSTIN

What are you guys up to?

LAUREN

Just talking.

JUSTIN

About what?

(They offer no reply.)

JUSTIN – CON'T.

But the cover's good, right?

LAUREN

Justin, when I'm done I'll come by and give you a cookie, OK? Now, do you mind?

MARC

We're almost done, Buddy.

JUSTIN

OK, sorry. Jeez.

(JUSTIN, dejected, leaves them alone. MARC waits until he's gone to continue.)

LAUREN

What can I say? He loves what he does.

MARC

Poor bastard.

LAUREN

Remember what that's like? To love what you do? And not have to be part of all *this*?

(They half-smile at each other and wait a beat.)

MARC

When are you gonna tell him?

LAUREN

I don't know. I don't know how.

MARC

Can't you do his numbers, too?

LAUREN

Of course I can. But that's not the point.

MARC

No more points. Just do what you gotta do and we'll see how things go. For now.

(They just look at each other—they both know how it's going to go.)

(DOUG can't take it anymore and makes his way toward the conference room. He walks by and raps his knuckles on the glass as a hello—or a warning?)

DOUG

I'm gonna need the room in a few.

(MARC nods, and he and LAUREN feign smiles until DOUG passes, heading back upstairs to his cube.)

MARC

(imitating Doug)

Sell anything today? You know he asks me that first thing every day. Like I'm an infant. *Sell anything today?* Who does he think was selling this thing years before he got here?

LAUREN

(imitating Doug imitating Alec Baldwin)

My favorite's the *always be closing*.

MARC

Painful ...

LAUREN

He can't even come up with his own clichés. He's gotta steal Mamet's? Sheer laziness, if you ask me. You know, it kinda kills me to work for these people.

MARC

Yeah ... at least Chad let us be autonomous ... entrepreneurial ...

LAUREN

Now it's all jargon, clichés and magic numbers. And if I hear the word *awesome* one more time I swear I'm going to spontaneously combust.

MARC

That would be awesome to watch.

(MARC's cell phone rings, startling them both. MARC looks at it and debates whether to answer.)

LAUREN

Dad or DiFi?

(MARC reluctantly answers the phone.)

MARC

Hi, Diane.

(The woman's voice coming through is loud and frantic, although we only really hear MARC's side of the conversation as he tries to appease her.)

MARC – CON'T.

No, it's not a done deal yet. I'm doing my best. Promise.

(ELLEN walks by, smiling broadly and waving through the glass. LAUREN semi-smiles back. ELLEN makes a "come talk to me later" motion that MARC sees, too. LAUREN nods and ELLEN walks on.)

(MARC covers his phone with his hand and whispers to LAUREN.)

MARC – CON'T.

What does Stepford want?

LAUREN

She better not hear you call her that.

MARC

(into phone)

You'll be the first to know. Promise. Yes, from ten to seven-and-a-half. I know, it is highway robbery.

(Now ROSIE appears in the doorway of the conference room and motions to LAUREN that she'd like to come in. LAUREN waves her inside.)

JUSTIN/IM

JUSTIN: Lauren can be such a beyach sometimes. Britt, u there? Uh oh.

ROSIE

Am I interrupting?

LAUREN

Not at all. Come on in. How're you holding up?

(ROSIE joins them and takes a seat.)

ROSIE

Oh, just ducky. How are you?

LAUREN

Peaches and cream.

MARC

(whispering to Rosie)

I'll be with you in a sec.

(wrapping up his call with Diane)

OK, go sell then. That's right; always be closing. Yup, I'm a huge jerk. A huge jerk who's trying to save your commissions. Yeah, I know. OK, bye.

(MARC hangs up the phone.)

LAUREN

She OK?

MARC

When is she ever OK?

ROSIE

Diane?

MARC

Salespeople are supposed to make *more money* the longer they're at a place. Not less.

ROSIE

More importantly, how's your mom?

MARC

Two more rounds of chemo, so, we'll see. Thanks for asking.

ROSIE

Would you please sign up for FLMA already? You won't have to worry about time off, and I can protect you. You can't leave this stuff up to chance.

MARC

I know ...

ROSIE

Please, Marc. That's what it's there for. They can't hold it against you.

MARC

Thanks, Rosie. We'll see ...

ROSIE

So ... in other news ... I don't want to scare you guys, but William is definitely up to something.

(ROSIE nervously looks outside the conference room to see who passes by and, by extension, who sees the three of them talking together.)

ROSIE – CON'T.

Sometimes I think it would have been better if they just fired all of us. Start over with whoever they want.

LAUREN

Too late for that.

ROSIE

I only have two years before Tommy finishes college. Two years. After that, I don't care what happens to me.

(to Lauren)

How's Joe doing?

LAUREN

Still looking. Nothing so far.

ROSIE

Shit.

MARC

What do you think William's up to?

ROSIE

I don't know. I'm basically just payroll these days—they got everything they needed out of me. But there's a new guy starting Monday. Have you heard about that? Garth something. In finance.

(MARC looks up something on his phone.)

ROSIE – CON'T.

For Walter, I guess. William didn't even have me interview him. It's been very hush hush. Like everything else around here.

(nervously looks around at who might be within earshot outside the conference room)

Walter didn't *resign*. You know that, right?

(they nod)

He was so upset. I didn't know what to say to him ... after all these years. Then William *informed* me it would be best to let everyone think it was Walter's decision. How could someone with a life coach be so *duplicitous*?

LAUREN

Life coach?

ROSIE

You didn't know? That woman, Carol, who helped with the party? Life coach.

LAUREN

No way!

ROSIE

Way.

MARC

(re: what he found on his phone)

Here he is: Garth McKinnon. Eleven-year industry veteran, blah, blah, blah financial institutions. Specializes in newly merged or acquisitioned companies.

(reading to himself)

Jesus, he's younger than me.

ROSIE

Oh, and the new office is on hold. It'll cost too much to move everybody.

LAUREN

They just figured that out *now*?

ROSIE

Total spending freeze. And now you know everything I know. How pathetic is that?

BRITTANY/IM

BRITTANY: I'm here. You got lucky this time.

JUSTIN/IM

JUSTIN: Sorry!

BRITTANY/IM

BRITTANY: Be careful! William hovers over my desk all the time. NSFW!

(WILLIAM walks by the conference room and looks inside as he passes. He half-smiles and waves, friendly enough, but his presence worries ROSIE, who immediately rises and heads for the door.)

ROSIE

I should go. I'll see you guys.

LAUREN

Hang in there, Ro.

MARC

Let us know if you hear anything.

ROSIE

You, too. And take the time if you need it, Marc. It's important. It's more important than anything going on around here, that's for sure.

(ROSIE races out the door.)

MARC

When are you going to tell her?

LAUREN

I'm not three months yet.

MARC

It will keep you safe.

LAUREN

Or get me fired.

MARC

They can't ...

LAUREN

No? Then why won't you sign up for that family leave thing?

(MARC shrugs a shrug form of touché.)

MARC

You didn't spend the last year and how-many-thousands of dollars trying to get pregnant just so you could be *unfireable*. It's OK to be pregnant.

(MARC's phone rings. He looks at it.)

Shit.
MARC — CON'T.

Dad?
LAUREN

MARC
We have to have the assisted-living conversation. He is not going to like it.

(They sit quietly for a moment as the phone rings and then MARC finally silences the ringer.)

MARC – CON'T.
Chad sure did us a solid, huh?

LAUREN
You said it.

MARC
I heard he made 20-mil on this deal. Can you believe that?

LAUREN
What a world.

MARC
Twenty-million dollars. What kind of tools paid that kind of money for this place? You ever think of that?

LAUREN
Every morning I walk through the door. Good for Chad, though, right? Aren't we supposed to be happy for him? American dream and all that?

MARC
At least you knew where you stood with him, though, you know? You may not agree, but at least you knew where you stood.

LAUREN
Well, now we work for *private equity* ...

MARC
Yeah, well, say what you want about Chad, but *as a leader*, in retrospect? He looks like Abraham fucking Lincoln next to these clowns.

SCENE FOUR

(It's a few weeks later. JUSTIN stands at the kitchenette counter, drinking coffee and flipping through a magazine while waiting for his potato to cook in the microwave. WILLIAM heads toward him—he slows down a bit when he sees JUSTIN, but it's too late to turn back now.)

WILLIAM

Good morning ... Jackson, right?

JUSTIN

Justin.

WILLIAM

Justin, yes. That's right. Hello, Justin.

JUSTIN

Hey.

(WILLIAM aims to get himself a cup of coffee but it's immediately clear he has no idea how to work the coffee maker.)

WILLIAM

And you work on ..?

JUSTIN

New Jet. With Marc and Lauren. Art director.

WILLIAM

Right, right. That's right.

(WILLIAM is really clueless about the coffee maker. JUSTIN enjoys watching him struggle for a moment or two.)

JUSTIN

Would you like some help?

WILLIAM

Brittany's at a seminar ... about eCommerce.

(JUSTIN takes over the coffee maker and starts to show WILLIAM how to make a cup. But WILLIAM doesn't care how it works—he just wants a coffee.)

JUSTIN

So, you put the pod here and place your mug and hit brew. Voila!

(GARTH approaches to get a snack.)

WILLIAM

Hi Garth, how's it going? Everyone making you feel welcome?

GARTH

Absolutely, Bill. It's a great team you've put together.

WILLIAM

Yes, thank you. It's a nice group.

(GARTH looks at JUSTIN but doesn't say anything.)

JUSTIN

Hey. Justin.

(GARTH nods, grabs an energy bar and walks away.)

GARTH

Well, back to it. See you.

WILLIAM

Bye, Garth.

JUSTIN

(re: the coffee)

Now, if you want it a little bitter, hit this button—you see this? That's how I like it.

(WILLIAM pretends to look—and give a shit.)

JUSTIN – CON'T.

Or, this is just for regular brew. It takes a while to get going.

(JUSTIN points to the setting but WILLIAM is tired of pretending to care. Then JUSTIN looks in a cabinet or two.)

JUSTIN – CON'T.

Or, we have a French press somewhere if you prefer that. I like ...

WILLIAM

(interrupting)

Yeah, that's OK. If you can just ...

JUSTIN

Sure. Which setting?

WILLIAM

I don't care. Regular's fine ... thanks.

(They wait an interminable moment or two ...)

WILLIAM – CON'T.

So, have you decided on your brand?

JUSTIN

Not really.

WILLIAM

Aren't millennials supposed to like that kind of thing? With all your technology?

JUSTIN

Maybe.

WILLIAM

Well, everyone needs to have theirs by the 15th. They'll be part of your email signature. I look forward to seeing what you choose.

JUSTIN

OK.

WILLIAM

Think of it this way: 'Branding is what people say about you when you are not in the room.' Jeff Bezos.

(Finally, WILLIAM's mug is full. JUSTIN grabs it and hands it to him.)

JUSTIN

I will.

(re: the coffee)

Here you go. What's yours?

(The microwave DINGS and JUSTIN's potato is ready. He removes it from the oven but it's too hot so he bounces it on his hands a couple of times and then tosses it onto the counter.)

WILLIAM

My brand? I am a leader with an eye on innovation.

(JUSTIN tries not to laugh.)

JUSTIN

Cool. So how are you innovating around here?

WILLIAM

For now, it's a work-in-progress. Thanks for the coffee.

(WILLIAM takes his coffee and heads back to his office. JUSTIN shakes his head, blows on his potato and goes back to reading his magazine.)

SCENE FIVE

(It's several weeks later. LAUREN, who still isn't showing, heads toward ELLEN's cubicle. She peeks her head inside the door.)

LAUREN

Knock, knock.

ELLEN

There she is! Come in, Ms. Editrix. Have a seat. How are you today? I missed you guys!

LAUREN

Yeah, you've been gone a lot. How'd it go?

ELLEN

It's so good getting face time with clients. I can't even tell you. And letting them know about all the fabulous changes going on around here. They're really excited. Jon says hello, by the way. He really loves you guys.

LAUREN

Well, we love him.

ELLEN

Thanks for holding down the fort. Everything OK? How's Justin?

LAUREN

He's Justin. Justin's always good.

ELLEN

Awesome. Oh my god! We haven't even had a chance to talk about the party! Wasn't that great? I had so much fun.

LAUREN

Oh, yeah.

ELLEN

I would have had a zillion more of those drinks if I didn't have to drive home!

LAUREN

Right. *The Expansini*. That was something.

ELLEN

What'd you think of it, really? I mean ... I know the turnout wasn't the best. We were expecting more people, but it was OK, right?

LAUREN

Sure.

ELLEN

I just hope someone writes about us. I'd hate to think we spent so much time and creative energy for nothing.

LAUREN

And money ...

(The LED screen lights up.)

JUSTIN/IM

JUSTIN: Dude! We got Alan Price for the cover.

BRITTANY/IM

BRITTANY: That's amazing!!! Congratulations!!!!

JUSTIN/IM

JUSTIN: We're shooting him, too.

BRITTANY/IM

BRITTANY: OMG! You have the coolest job eva. Can I come?

JUSTIN/IM

JUSTIN: Ha. Yeah, I'm pretty lucky. Drink after work? To celebrate?

BRITTANY/IM

BRITTANY: Mos def. You are soooo good at your job.

JUSTIN/IM

JUSTIN: Tx.

LAUREN

So, are we getting any press?

ELLEN

Not yet, but I've been following up with everyone who attended so, hopefully, soon. Lots of good leads and energy. There's a lot of excitement out there.

LAUREN

Good. That would be good. You know, *considering* ...

ELLEN

Yeah, totally. So, what can I do for you?

LAUREN

Nothing much. ... status quo ...

ELLEN

You must need something? How's the hubby? Job search going OK?

LAUREN

He's got some leads. We'll see.

ELLEN

Good, good. So, what's the word out there?

LAUREN

Have you seen the new issue?

ELLEN

Yes! It looks gorgeous! I meant to tell you.

LAUREN

Really? It just came out.

ELLEN

Yeah, with what's-her-name on the cover?

LAUREN

No, that was last month. This month is ...

ELLEN

Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, with what's-his-name? Gorgeous!

LAUREN

Thanks.

ELLEN

I thought it looked great. So, what's going on out there? Are the natives feeling restless?

(LAUREN shrugs.)

ELLEN – CON'T.

How's Marc doing working with Doug?

LAUREN

Fine ...

ELLEN

So? Anything?

(LAUREN really wants to tell her that she's pregnant, but can she trust her? For now, she chickens out.)

LAUREN

I did want to ask you about vendors.

ELLEN

Shoot.

LAUREN

You know we cut our budget, right? I mean, our budget was cut.

ELLEN

I know. I was so sorry about that. I fought as hard as I could. We just ... we need to make some changes and then everything will right itself. It shouldn't take too long.

LAUREN

Right ...

ELLEN

I want you to have everything you need to keep creating that gorgeous, beautiful magazine.

LAUREN

Well, thanks, but our writers aren't getting paid. On time, anyway. It's taking longer for finance to cut checks.

ELLEN

Yeah, I heard there was a glitch in the new system ... I'm sure Garth is taking care of it.

LAUREN

I heard that, too, but this is the second issue it's happened. It's taking up to six weeks to pay people.

ELLEN

Is it? Business days or ...

LAUREN

We've always paid in thirty. When you change things like this ...

ELLEN

Oh, I totally understand.

LAUREN

People get nervous. They don't know if they should continue ...

(ELLEN picks up a pen off her desk and writes a note on a post-it.)

ELLEN

I'll ask William about it at our next meeting.

LAUREN

These are long-term relationships. As in, *my* relationships, Ellen. The writers I've worked with at all the magazines I've edited. My reputation.

ELLEN

I am with you. Completely. I hear you loud and clear. I'll take care of it. Anything else?

(LAUREN just looks at her, as though realizing for the first time that ELLEN has absolutely no power—or semblance of a clue. She's losing faith in her boss, and ELLEN knows it.)

LAUREN

That's it. Thanks.

ELLEN

Any time. You know, I'm here for anything you need. I'll always do my best to help.

LAUREN

I appreciate that.

ELLEN

Sorry I haven't been around. But now that I'm back, we should make sure to have our weekly meetings. Maybe we can even go to lunch or out for drinks sometime?

LAUREN

Sure. Sounds fun.

(LAUREN rises to leave and ELLEN rises, too. She walks around her desk and escorts LAUREN to the door. But, instead of showing her out, ELLEN closes the door shut to give them some privacy.)

ELLEN

Look, I know things aren't going quite the way we thought they would after the merger. But I think we're still in a settling-in phase. A getting-to-know-you kind of thing. But I think William is smart and innovative and omni-channel and all that. Did you know he meditates? Like, all the time. ... but he's not soft. Not at all. I still think a lot of good things are in store for us.

(LAUREN looks at ELLEN, wanting to believe her but not sure that she can.)

ELLEN – CON'T.

I wouldn't be here if I didn't believe it. You know that, right?

LAUREN

I guess.

ELLEN

I'm fighting for you and Justin and all the creatives every day. I got your back, OK? This is just taking longer than we thought. Chad really screwed us with the numbers, you can't even imagine. ...

LAUREN

You honestly believe that?

ELLEN

I do. You know, I thought of leaving right after it happened. This is between you and me, right?

LAUREN

Of course.

ELLEN

(whispering)

I even got a job offer, but I turned it down.

LAUREN

You did? Why?

ELLEN

I didn't want to leave you guys. I wanted to stay and give this a real chance. I believe in Expansion but, more important, I believe in us. Our team. I know a lot of what's gone on has been *inartful*.

LAUREN

That's a kind word for it.

ELLEN

These are business guys, Lauren. They're all about numbers. Numbers, numbers, numbers. You think Doug has a clue what we do? You think William knows about anything creative? Let alone cares? *Not!* But at some point they're going to realize that if they want to keep our clients happy, then they need talented, creative, awesome people like you and Justin to stay on the job. And Marc.

LAUREN

You really think so?

ELLEN

Of course they do. They have to.

(whispering again)

Without us, they have nothing. We're going to be fine! I promise. So stop worrying, OK?

(ELLEN opens the door for her, satisfied and happy with herself for "getting through" to LAUREN.)

ELLEN – CON'T.

OK, Ms. Editrix. Back to it. I can't wait to see your next beautiful, stunning, gorgeous, awesome issue! Who's the next cover?

LAUREN

Alan Price. As of this morning.

ELLEN

Oh my god! I love him. That's so awesome. You are so good at your job. So good.

(ELLEN bounces back to her desk, happy with the way that went.)

(LAUREN starts back toward her cubicle, not sure how she thinks of that conversation. En route, she sees MARC on the walkway outside his office, getting ready for his own weekly meeting with DOUG.)

MARC

What did Stepford have to say?

LAUREN

Shhh ... she's OK. She's trying.

MARC

Did you tell her?

(off Lauren's head-shake no)

Lauren, you have to tell people. Do yourself a favor.

LAUREN

I know. I will.

MARC

OK, wish me luck.

(LAUREN holds up her hand and MARC high fives her, then she ducks inside her office while MARC braces himself for his time with DOUG.)

SCENE SIX

(Continuing. LAUREN re-enters her office and soon JUSTIN comes in to work with her. They study the wall in her cube, where they have magazine pages tacked up and they consider, discuss and move things around. It's an intense, creative and happy interaction.)

(ELLEN sits at her desk, working on her computer. Soon, NANCY joins her for a meeting.)

(Meanwhile, down the landing, MARC waits outside DOUG's office for a moment longer, psyching himself up before entering. He knocks and walks inside, finding DOUG seated at his desk.)

(DOUG, chewing gum, speaks to MARC without moving his eyes away from his computer. MARC has a bunch of papers and a copy of his magazine's latest issue in his hands.)

MARC

You ready for me?

DOUG

Hey, Buddy. Just a sec.

MARC

I can come back.

DOUG

No, no. Have a seat.

(MARC does as he's told, waiting while DOUG continues working. It's a few beats before DOUG speaks. MARC drums his legs with his hands.)

DOUG – CON'T.
(still typing)

You sell anything today?

MARC

It's ten-thirty.

DOUG

So?

MARC

I've got a lot in the pipeline.

(DOUG takes a few more seconds to bang something out on his keyboard. He makes no eye contact with MARC.)

DOUG

Can't wait to hear alllllll about it.

(MARC fidgets another moment then makes a move to rise from his chair.)

MARC

I can come back later if you're busy.

DOUG

No, it's cool. I just have to send this to Ellen ... got a cover yet?

MARC

Yeah, Alan Price.

DOUG

Who?

MARC

Sir Alan Price. Won an Oscar a couple years ago? Big new movie coming out.

DOUG

I'm more of an action guy. The Rock. *Mission Impossible*. Stuff like that.

(LED screen IM conversation between ROSIE and ELLEN.)

ROSIE/IM

ROSIE: Hi, Ellen. You have a sec?

ELLEN/IM

ELLEN: Hi, Ro. Shoot.

ROSIE/IM

ROSIE: Do you have the staff numbers on New Jet?

ELLEN/IM

ELLEN: Who's asking?

ROSIE/IM

ROSIE: Garth.

ELLEN/IM

ELLEN: Why?

NANCY/IM

ROSIE: I don't know. For William, I guess.

ELLEN/IM

ELLEN: I can get them. EOD, OK?

ROSIE/IM

ROSIE: Sure.

ELLEN/IM

ELLEN: Should I be worried?

ROSIE/IM

ROSIE: I don't know. But they're asking for a lot of numbers.

ELLEN/IM

ELLEN: OK. Thanks, Ro.

(ELLEN turns her chair to face away from her computer and looks off into space for a moment—this doesn't bode well. After a few moments, she turns back to NANCY and looks like she's sharing this news. NANCY shrugs and doesn't seem to mind.)

(Finally, DOUG presses send and turns his attention to MARC.)

DOUG

She's such a pain in the ass. Doesn't know thing one about numbers. I have to walk her through every little thing. So, what have you got for me? How's your forecast?

MARC

OK.

DOUG

Just OK?

MARC

I have some ideas.

DOUG

Good. Ideas are good. You know, when I was selling the *Inquirer*, the lowest we'd come down off rate card was maybe ten percent. *Maybe*.

MARC

Uh huh.

DOUG

If you pretend you're more valuable than you are, people will believe you.

MARC

This is different. That was twenty years ago and it was a newspaper—when everybody had to be in the newspaper.

DOUG

I don't follow.

MARC

We're an inflight magazine in a very crowded field. And now, the airline's got Wi-Fi, so fewer people care about the magazine.

DOUG

Well, whatever the case, I don't know why you're selling full pages for half price.

MARC

Well, about that. I have an idea, but it's an investment.

DOUG

(shaking his head no)

It's happening more and more. Look, I know it's tough out there, but it's always tough out there and you've got to be creative. Generate new ideas. Innovate. The airline industry is doing great; that should be reflected in your margins.

MARC

Yeah, well, now we have a new problem.

DOUG

Marc, there's no excuse for bad news, OK? You have everything you need to be successful. You have an editor, you have an art director, you have a production manager and two salespeople. You have everything you need to publish your book.

MARC

I'm talking about advertisers.

DOUG

What about 'em?

MARC

They're unhappy with the new stock.

DOUG
What do you mean?

MARC
The new paper. Remember? This was the first issue and it doesn't look good.

DOUG
What's the problem?

MARC
Did you see it?

DOUG
Yeah, yeah, I saw it.

(No he didn't. MARC lifts the magazine off his lap and hands it to DOUG across the desk. DOUG flips through it but doesn't look at anything.)

MARC
Look at the bleed. The ink goes right through the page. See?

DOUG
Where am I looking?

MARC
Anywhere. It doesn't look good.

DOUG
Lemme see.

(DOUG's quiet for a moment as he takes this in.)

MARC
I don't know what to do about it.

DOUG
Uh huh, uh huh ... yeah, this doesn't look too good. Why'd we do this again?

MARC
You wanted me to cut the budget, remember? Art, edit, paper ...

DOUG
Right, right ...

MARC
This is the result.

The Merger

DOUG

Then who did?

MARC

I have no idea, but I'll tell you—everyone out there's worried about it. That's not coming from me.

DOUG

Why would they be worried?

MARC

Our name has the word *digital* in it. Expansion Digital. And you cut all the print budgets.

DOUG

What'd you tell Lauren about this?

MARC

About what?

DOUG

I don't want you talking to Lauren.

MARC

She's my editor. I talk to her every day.

DOUG

She doesn't need to know the decisions we make in this room, you read? It only complicates things. You think I tell Ellen anything? Creatives don't need to know what we do. It's none of their business.

MARC

Doug, Lauren and I have worked together a long time. We built New Jet, and we've been profitable every year ...

DOUG

Whoa, whoa, whoa. Chad used bullshit numbers and you know it. You were never profitable.

MARC

What?!?

DOUG

OK, maybe a tiny bit, but nowhere near where you need to be. And don't think for a minute Chad used real numbers.

(They just look at each other—how far can MARC push?)

MARC

If the numbers were so bad, then why did William invest?

DOUG

What do you mean?

MARC

And Cornerstone? Where was the due diligence? Isn't it their job to comb through everything? Run all the numbers? They had months to do that.

DOUG

Chad fucked us over. Plain and simple.

MARC

With what? His mathematical genius?

DOUG

No, no, no ...

MARC

His beautiful mind?

DOUG

Forget it. You wouldn't understand.

MARC

What wouldn't I understand? I know how to look at numbers.

DOUG

You know what? Here's what I need you to do. I need you cut a salesperson. Before you close the next issue.

MARC

I thought we squared this ...

DOUG

Did Diane hit her number?

MARC

She had a tough issue.

DOUG

Cut her loose. If you keep fighting me on commissions ... my hands are tied, you read?

MARC

Doug, she's hit her number every issue since she started. That's more than two years.

DOUG

That's not my question. Did she hit her number *this issue*?

MARC

She has a lot going on ...

(DOUG rises, walks across the floor and closes his door.)

DOUG

Excuse after excuse after excuse ... you think I don't have a lot going on? You think no one else is carrying a sack of rocks? Let me tell you, my wife yells at me every day to quit this place. Seriously. She thinks I'm going to have a heart attack with all this stress. I haven't seen my kids in like a month and I'm not gonna hit my numbers, OK? You think I like this? You think I'm happy, getting up at zero dark thirty every day to come in here and, and ... deal with all this shit? I'm here for that bonus ... if I don't get it ...

(They just look at each other.)

DOUG – CON'T.

Now, I'm asking you one question. Did Diane hit her number this issue? Yes or no? That's all I want from you right now.

MARC

No, Diane did not hit her number.

DOUG

Well, there it is. You know, you're supposed to be on our side. You are a manager and part of the management team.

(DOUG takes a moment to collect himself.)

DOUG — CON'T.

You gotta cut her loose. That'll free up, what, 60k? Is that her base?

MARC

She brings in at least 60k an issue. It's not worth it to replace her and have to train someone who will need to ramp up and ...

DOUG

Hire an independent rep. Twenty percent commission, no base. No fifteen. Fifteen percent.

MARC

Are you serious?

DOUG

She's not selling? You cut her loose. Always be closing, Marc. Always be closing.

(DOUG returns to his seat and turns back to his computer.)

DOUG – CON'T.

Anything else, Buddy?

(MARC rises, trying to conceal his disgust.)

DOUG – CON'T.

Hold on, hold on. Let me ask you something.

MARC

What?

DOUG

Never mind.

MARC

What?

DOUG

Do you have to have an editor?

MARC

What?!?

DOUG

Or an art director. I mean, on staff? Can't you use freelancers?

MARC

Where's this coming from? Is it Garth?

DOUG

There are a million freelancers out there, right? They all need work and they're a lot less expensive than staffers. No health insurance, benefits ... just work for hire. Easy, breezy. Right?

MARC

We can't do that.

DOUG

I gotta stop hearing can't, Marc ...

MARC

But ... that's ... you can't have fly-by-night people doing this. We have relationships ... the client. New Jet ... Jon doesn't want freelancers doing his magazine. It's customer service. He's with us for quality and consistency and—

DOUG

Alright, alright, alright. Never mind. It was just a thought.

MARC

Is this for real?

DOUG

No, no, no. Forget I said anything. And don't say anything to Lauren or Jared, OK?

MARC

Justin.

DOUG

Justin, Justin. Whatever. It's just something we're looking at. By the way, let me ask you something ... between you and me. Is Lauren gonna have kids?

MARC

What?!?

DOUG

What is she, late 30s? If she gets pregnant she's never coming back. I've seen it a thousand times. Something to think about. You don't want to get caught with your pants down.

MARC

First of all, her husband is unemployed at the moment, and second ... Look, Doug, if this goes anywhere, you have to talk to me first. Seriously. I'll need you to talk to me before you say anything to Garth. I'm the publisher, OK? I'm still the publisher of this magazine.

DOUG

Fine, fine ...

MARC

That's a total game-changer, and not in a good way. You hear me? You can't just lay that on me. Outta nowhere.

DOUG

Go, go. Sell something. It's OK. Not gonna happen.

(MARC heads for the door.)

MARC

And I want you to reconsider Diane. I think it's the wrong move going with a rep. She just had one bad issue. Everyone has a bad issue now and then.

DOUG

Not on my watch. You read?

(DOUG's back on his computer—he doesn't look at MARC.)

DOUG – CON'T.

Sixty-k, Marc. That's what I'm saying. She's your responsibility.

(MARC leaves and heads downstairs to gather himself at the water cooler. He takes a moment and pours a drink and sucks it down. He moves to toss his cup in the garbage and practically bumps into GARTH, who arrived out of nowhere and helps himself to a snack.)

MARC

Oh, sorry, Man. How's it going?

(GARTH doesn't say anything but kind of grunts in MARC's general direction.)

MARC – CON'T.

Hey, I heard you live in my neighborhood.

(GARTH doesn't respond.)

MARC – CON'T.

I'm on Liberty. You?

(WILLIAM joins them in the kitchenette and the demeanors switch—GARTH beams and MARC goes dark.)

WILLIAM

Gentlemen? How are you today?

GARTH

Great, Bill. How are you?

WILLIAM

Great. Glad to hear it. Marc? How's the ad world treating you? Or treating us, I should say.

MARC

OK. We're working hard.

WILLIAM

Good, good. That's what I like to hear. Hey, would you hand me a cup?

MARC

Yes, Sir.

(MARC retrieves a paper cup from the water cooler's cup dispenser and WILLIAM frowns.)

WILLIAM

Don't call me that.

MARC

Excuse me?

(WILLIAM just shakes his head.)

MARC – CON'T.

I didn't mean anything by it ...

(WILLIAM slaps GARTH on the shoulder.)

WILLIAM

We're on for eleven, right? To discuss the you-know-what?

GARTH

You bet, Bill. Be right over.

(GARTH leaves them be. WILLIAM fills his cup with water from the water cooler.)

MARC

I didn't mean any disrespect.

WILLIAM

You have a decision to make, Marc. You're either onboard or you're not. What's it going to be?

MARC

I'm onboard. What makes you think I'm not onboard?

WILLIAM

Only you can answer that question. And tell me: What's your brand again?

MARC

I help individuals, small businesses and corporations promote their high-quality, authentic and sustainable brands.

WILLIAM

Well, it sounds good. I'll give you that.

(WILLIAM drinks his water, tosses his cup in the garbage and walks off, leaving MARC feeling a bit bewildered. What was that about?)

SCENE SEVEN

(It's a couple of weeks later. JUSTIN loafs with BRITTANY, doing a little bullshitting by the water cooler. JUSTIN is in the middle of a story.)

JUSTIN

... he knew this poor girl had to return everything, and I'm like, 'Dude, you're an Oscar-winning actor and you gotta pull this kind of shit? We're not *GQ*, you know?' I mean, this guy is making a huge studio movie. He's living at the freaking Plaza *for months*—and not picking up any of the tab—and we're just this little inflight, you know? So if you want to take advantage of us ... if we're only on earth to give you six-to-eight pages of free publicity for your next blockbuster, then, you know what? I can't look at you the same way anymore.

BRITTANY

This is such a bummer.

JUSTIN

He says ...

(in a faux British accent)

Wow, I rather love this jacket. It fits me really well.

(back to American English and so on and so forth)

And everyone knows what's coming next, you know? We've all been in this position before with some asshole movie star who expects everything for free even though they have more money than god. And he says, *I have a premiere tonight, and I'd sure like to wear this on the red carpet.* And this poor stylist, she's like 23—maybe—coz that's what we can afford these days, right? No offense.

BRITTANY

None taken.

JUSTIN

And she's been running around all over the place grabbing clothes for days, putting this together and you know she's gotta haul all that shit back to Queens after the shoot, because she can't return it till the next day and she lives in freaking Astoria. And she says, because what else is she gonna say? She says, *Of course, Sir Alan, please take the jacket.* And he gives her some b.s. like, *Oh, I'd be happy to return it to you after the premiere,* and she says, *No, that's OK. I want you to have it.*

BRITTANY

Oh, no! She has to pay for that.

JUSTIN

Yeah, if she doesn't return everything with tags ... it's all borrowed, you know? So Lauren's there, and she's *so angry*, and she tells the girl to bill us, because that's bullshit and that's not coming out of her pocket. Not that we can afford it, either, but she's a

JUSTIN- CON'T.

freelancer, for Chrissake, and that's just not right. And she's so excited because this is a big job for her—her first cover—and he's a freaking Sir. And a major, A-list dude, so she tells Lauren, *If he wears it tonight, I can put it in my portfolio so it'll be worth it.*

BRITTANY

How do you take advantage of someone like that?

JUSTIN

And then, get this. He says to his publicists—he's got two of them with him the whole time; like he can't be left alone for two hours in the Plaza—and he says, *What shall I wear under it? I really adore this t-shirt*, and one of them says, *That's perfect, Sir Alan. I love the color.* And so, that poor stylist, you know? Everyone's looking at her and she says, *It's yours, Sir Alan. No problem.* And now she's out like eight-hundred bucks.

BRITTANY

That's so sad.

JUSTIN

I know, right? I'm dying for this girl. Well, I thought Lauren was really going to kill someone. I mean, this guy is worth millions of dollars and he can't write this girl a check? The price tag is right there on the shirt!

BRITTANY

What a dick.

JUSTIN

Total dick. Now, I know it's all symbiotic and all that, but, come on, Man! This girl is now out all this money and, thankfully, Lauren's good people because she said we'd cover it but ... I can't look at that guy the same way again. And I love him as an actor. He played the Dalai Lama, for Chrissake.

BRITTANY

He was a great Dalai Lama.

JUSTIN

I know, right? And it's like, Man, don't you remember when you were starting out? And young? I know it's been a long time, but he didn't set out to be some rich douche his whole life. He got lucky doing what he loved. That's the mother lode right there.

BRITTANY

It doesn't get much better than that. I would kill to make my living in fashion.

JUSTIN

Right? Like I don't want to be a freaking painter? Please. And Sir Alan of Douchebaggery didn't have to become some hedge fund asshole to make a lot of money. And how much can you even make? Seriously. It hacks me off so much.

BRITTANY

Yeah. So ... did he wear it?

JUSTIN

Yeah, he wore it, that ass clown. And she had it on her website the next day: Sir Alan Price, styled by whatever her name was. So I guess it all worked out.

BRITTANY

Sounds like what happened to my friend with that jerk real estate guy she worked for.

(NANCY approaches to get a cup of water. JUSTIN and BRITTANY give each other a look, as in, 'Let's stop talking and get the hell out of here.')

NANCY

Hi, Guys.

JUSTIN

Hey.

NANCY

I heard you shot Alan Price. I love him. Was he awesome?

JUSTIN

So awesome.

NANCY

You're lucky. Your job is so cool.

(JUSTIN puts his coffee mug in the sink and leaves it there.)

JUSTIN

Awright. I'm gonna get back to it. Later, Britt.

BRITTANY

See you, Justin.

NANCY

Bye, Guys!

(JUSTIN heads back to his desk and so does BRITTANY. NANCY fills her cup with water and then heads back to her office, too.)

SCENE EIGHT

(Later that day. ROSIE follows GARTH into the conference room, where GARTH holds the door open for A BUNCH of EMPLOYEES, including JUSTIN, to join them inside. ROSIE holds a large pile of manila envelopes in her hands, on top of her clipboard.)

(From her second-story perch, LAUREN notices what's going on in the conference room and IM's MARC.)

LAUREN/IM

LAUREN: Conference room.

(When everyone is inside the conference room, a SECURITY GUARD appears from out of nowhere and stands outside the door. MARC and LAUREN meet on the landing outside their cubes for a closer look.)

(WILLIAM is in his office, standing up and eating sushi. He's on the phone, having an animated conversation—laughing, enjoying his lunch and having a good time.)

(DOUG realizes what's about to happen and makes his way down the stairs and toward WILLIAM's office.)

LAUREN – CON'T.

Jesus. They brought in a security guard?

(Inside the conference room, ROSIE and GARTH sit beside each other on one side of the table while the EMPLOYEES sit on the other. ROSIE hands each person a packet across the table.)

(ROSIE reads mournfully from a piece of paper and makes an effort to make eye contact with the EMPLOYEES, but she is unable to sustain any connection.)

ROSIE

(reading)

These packets are not to be opened until you get home. Each one contains your individual severance package, if you agree to stay and finish out the next two weeks. I am pleased to tell you these are very generous, which was important to William to help make this as painless as possible.

(EMPLOYEE ONE breaks down and JUSTIN tries to comfort him by putting an arm around his shoulder.)

(DOUG approaches WILLIAM's office, enters and gestures to him what's going on in the conference room. WILLIAM gets off the phone and motions to DOUG to close the door. Then DOUG closes the shades in WILLIAM's office, too.)

(LAUREN starts to panic and tries to get a better angle to see inside the conference room.)

LAUREN

Justin's not in there, is he?

MARC

I can't see.

LAUREN

Please tell me Justin's not in there!

MARC

I don't see him. But is that Diane? Shit! That's Diane.

(LAUREN leaves and MARC follows her downstairs to the kitchenette for a better view. Meanwhile, inside the conference room ...)

ROSIE

(still reading)

Please note we will do everything we can to help you land on your feet. And now, we would like you to take the rest of the day off. There is no need to go back to work. Please take your packets and we'll see you Monday. If you have any issues or concerns, please see me ... I mean Garth ... after the weekend. Thank you.

(ROSIE sits, dejected, while, very slowly, each EMPLOYEE rises and heads toward the door. The SECURITY GUARD takes it from here and escorts them offstage.)

(Before departing, though, JUSTIN looks at ROSIE and GARTH, still inside the conference room.)

JUSTIN

(to Rosie)

You know what, Rosie? Fuck you. This is bullshit and you know it.

(to Garth)

And most definitely fuck you!

(to the office at large)

Good luck, Assholes! I'm out of here! Have fun with your vulture capitalist, private equity pigs! You asked for everything you get! Occupy! Occupy! Occupy!

(JUSTIN looks toward the kitchenette and sees LAUREN and MARC. He salutes them.)

JUSTIN – CON'T.

Lauren? Marc? It's been real.

(JUSTIN continues on his way out, his yells fading as he departs the office.)

JUSTIN – CON'T.

Occupy! Occupy! Occupy!

(LAUREN is frozen, and powerless to do anything to help.)

(JUSTIN disappears offstage while A NEW GROUP of EMPLOYEES makes its way inside the conference room to receive their termination packets, too.)

(Inside WILLIAM's office, DOUG moves the shades so he can try to sneak a look at what's happening in the conference room. He sees MARC and MARC sees him. They look at each other for an uncomfortable moment and then DOUG turns and hides once again behind the shades.)

LAUREN

You think we're gonna be spared?

MARC

Spared. Look at who's going to *spare us*.

(NANCY and ELLEN appear in the kitchenette, having just returned from lunch—they still wear their coats and are on the hunt for some coffee. They are giggly and unaware of what's happening nearby.)

ELLEN

That is so awesome! You're lucky your sons are so talented and artistic.

NANCY

We should switch kids!

ELLEN

Right? My daughter has no interest in anything but Hello Kitty and dance videos on YouTube.

NANCY

That's how I spend all my free time!

(ELLEN and NANCY notice LAUREN and MARC and stop laughing when they see the looks on their faces.)

ELLEN

Hey guys. What's up?

NANCY

Yeah, did somebody die or something?

(LAUREN just looks at ELLEN—disgusted—and runs off, back up the stairs to her office. MARC motions to the conference room.)

MARC

Kind of.

(ELLEN and NANCY turn to the conference room and see they walked in at a really bad time.)

ELLEN

What's happening?

NANCY

I forgot that was today.

(grabbing Ellen's arm)

Come on.

(NANCY leads ELLEN away.)

ELLEN

What's going on?

(Meanwhile, upstairs in her office, LAUREN grabs her bag and races back down the stairs to stage right.)

BRITTANY/IM

BRITTANY: Justin? Are you there? Justin!!!

(Inside the conference room, ROSIE reads the next round of laid-off EMPLOYEES the same script.)

ROSIE

These packets are not to be opened until you get home. Each one contains your individual severance package, if you agree to stay and finish out the next two weeks ...

(LAUREN races past the conference room and the SECURITY GUARD, who is back at his post.)

(ROSIE is distracted by LAUREN rushing by and stops reading for a moment. She pauses a beat and, when LAUREN is gone offstage, she resumes reading. Her voice cracks as she reads.)

ROSIE – CON’T.

There is no need to go back to work. Please take your packets and we’ll see you Monday. If you have any issues or concerns, please see *Garth* after the weekend. Thank you.

(Again, the SECURITY GUARD escorts the TERMINATED EMPLOYEES out of the conference room and out of the office. ROSIE starts to leave, too, but then GARTH holds onto her arm and motions to her to take a seat. What she thought might happen finally dawns on ROSIE—it’s happening—and she closes her eyes and takes a seat.)

(GARTH places ROSIE’s severance package on the table in front of her. Her thanks for firing all those people is getting fired, now, too. Once this fact finally, officially, irrevocably, dawns on ROSIE, she crumples in a heap of tears.)

(MARC continues watching the proceedings, stunned by what he’s seeing. After a moment, BRITTANY joins him by the water cooler. She has her coat on and carries her purse.)

BRITTANY

Where did Justin go? Did you see him?

MARC

He left.

BRITTANY

I’m out of here. If William wants me, tell him he’ll have to come find me. And drag me back!

(BRITTANY leaves and MARC stands still, watching ROSIE cry. But there’s nothing he can do. After a moment, he limps back up the stairs to his office.)

SCENE NINE

(It's later that day but it looks like the same scene as Scene One. The few remaining "spared" EMPLOYEES sit in their cubicles waiting for WILLIAM, at center stage, to begin speaking. This time, however, there is no hum or murmuring. There is complete silence and no Rosie standing behind the CEO. The sole onstage light shines on WILLIAM as he prepares to address the company.)

WILLIAM

Good afternoon. By now, you're all aware of what happened earlier today. Should you have specific questions, please speak with your manager. Our new head of HR will be starting on Monday. It's Carol. Remember Carol? She helped with our launch party when we first started ... Anyway, we made some difficult decisions today and a significant number of staff was affected. The good news is the re-org is complete—you can rest assured your jobs are safe. And we will do everything we can to help our former colleagues land on their feet. I know what you're all thinking and, yes, there will be a time and place to celebrate and focus on what's ahead—we have a very bright future here at Expansion. But for now, and when the time comes for your colleagues to depart, please help them walk out of here with their heads held high. Be empathetic. And keep in mind one of our most important company values, as it pertains to what we had to do today: We are all in this together. Thank you.

LAUREN/IM

LAUREN: Is he out of his mind?

MARC/IM

MARC: You said it, Sister.

LAUREN/IM

LAUREN: We have got to get out of here.

MARC/IM

MARC: A.S.A.P.!

(BLACKOUT.)

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO**SCENE ONE**

(It's several months later. GARTH sits with CHRISSY in the conference room. They are very familiar with one another. In fact, this is the most human we've ever seen GARTH.)

GARTH

Again, sorry it took so long. I had to wait for Carol to screw up badly enough ... it took longer than I thought.

CHRISSY

Stop apologizing. I'm happy to be here now.

GARTH

Thanks. You know I would have done it first thing if I could. But William was adamant about bringing her in and, at the time, the situation wasn't like it is now ...

CHRISSY

It's fine. I understand.

GARTH

OK, so, starting fresh. The best advice I can give is to keep your head down and don't get personally involved. With anyone. Blah, blah, blah. You know the drill.

CHRISSY

Am I going to be able to get away with that here?

GARTH

Epoch was different; they all got used to being sold every few years. But, here? We had to clean house. They were here forever. Entrenched. You can't succeed in that kind of environment.

CHRISSY

You still get all the credit for Epoch. You know that, right?

GARTH

Not all ...

CHRISSY

Yes, *all*. Everyone hated you, of course. But no one can deny you got us through.

GARTH

Yeah, well. Maybe. But now the thanks I get is to try to figure out this mess. William knows nothing about this business.

CHRISSY

Oh, and you do?

(They share a small laugh.)

CHRISSY – CON'T.

Hey, it shows Cornerstone's confidence in you. And I can't thank you enough for bringing me in. It's so good getting the band back together again. Even if it's just the two of us.

GARTH

The pleasure is all mine. Now remember, you report to me. Let William think blah, blah, blah. You know the drill. As far as he's concerned, he's your boss, but you're my direct report. I do all the hiring and firing; I put together all the numbers for Cornerstone and all that. With your help, of course.

(GARTH raises his hand and CHRISSY, knowing the drill all too well, high fives him.)

CHRISSY

You know it! It was a rough go without you. I have to say.

GARTH

I told you I'd come back for you. It was just a matter of time.

SCENE TWO

(DOUG, NANCY and MARC are in Doug's office on a phone call with JON, their New Jet client, who is on speakerphone and can be heard but isn't seen.)

DOUG
Hi, Jon. Are you there?

JON
I'm here.

DOUG
Good. Thanks for taking our call today. I've got Nancy here, and Marc.

NANCY
Hi, Jon!

JON
Marc's there?

MARC
I'm here. Hi, Jon.

JON
Oh, good. How are you doing, Marc?

MARC
Good. Thanks for asking.

JON
Again, so sorry about your mother.

(DOUG and NANCY look at each other then at MARC—what about his mother?)

MARC
Thanks.

DOUG
So, Jon, the reason we wanted to get you on the phone is because we realize the contract is coming up for renewal pretty soon ... and we'd like to talk to you about amending the current agreement so we can continue working for you, uninterrupted, and so you don't have to bother going out for RFP or anything like that.

(It's quiet on the other end.)

DOUG — CON'T.

I know with Chad you would lock in for a few years and then add extensions, right? Rather than renegotiate the entire contract?

JON

That's correct.

DOUG

Well, we'd like to continue along those lines. Don't want to fix what ain't broke, you read? I know Lauren and Marc put together a great book for New Jet, and we'd like them to keep doing that for a long time. Without any interruptions or distractions.

(Silence.)

NANCY

Hi, Jon. It's Nancy. How are you today?

JON

Fine.

NANCY

Good, glad to hear it. Yes, when it's convenient, I'd like to come up to Providence and sit down with you to go over all kinds of awesome products we'd like to incorporate into your media program. We should discuss social, mobile, billboards and things of that nature. There's a lot more Expansion can do for you than just your magazine, and we'd like to be your premier content agency.

JON

Yeah, haven't we ...? Marc, are you still there?

MARC

I'm here, Jon.

JON

Haven't you explained this? We've talked about this ...

(This really puts MARC in a pickle. He knows all this and has shared it with DOUG and NANCY, but they're making him pursue it anyway.)

MARC

(listless)

Well, now with Expansion, we have a range of capabilities you might not be aware of.

(NANCY doesn't like how he's "selling" this and intervenes.)

NANCY

Maybe there's a way to change how we work together? If you want to let me know a good time in the next week or two to come up to Providence ...

JON

We have other vendors we use for that. Marc, do you mind?

MARC

Of course ...

NANCY

(interrupting)

Yes, but doesn't it make sense to consolidate ... put it all in one place? And we can have Marc and Lauren manage everything for you. Just like the magazine.

JON

I don't have time to go into all this. Marc ... would you please reiterate our position on this?

MARC

Sure thing, Jon.

JON

Thanks.

(MARC goes to speak, but DOUG holds up his hand to silence him.)

DOUG

Jon. Doug again. Nancy and I have some ideas to get around those regulations.

NANCY

Yes, we'd like to meet and discuss our ideas—get in the room and hash everything out. When is a good time for you, Jon?

(Long silence on JON's end.)

DOUG

Are you there? Jon?

JON

Look, I know you all have a job to do, but I'm going to level with you. We're happy with the magazine, OK? We're very happy with Marc and Lauren, and we really liked Justin's work, too. Now, it's your business what decisions you need to make over there, but between letting Justin go without telling us and going down in paper stock and a host of other issues, I have to tell you, we're not thrilled with ... with *Expansion*. Frankly, the

JON – CON'T.

reason we're not taking steps to get out of our contract is because what Marc and Lauren have done for us all these years. Now, please don't contact me again about new business. When our contract comes up for renewal, we can talk about whether we'll continue working with you. Thank you for your time.

(JON hangs up the phone and DOUG and NANCY are pissed.)

NANCY

(to Marc)

What in the world have you been saying to him?

MARC

What? Nothing!

NANCY

(to Doug)

He shouldn't talk to him anymore.

DOUG

I don't want you talking to him anymore. I'll deal with him directly.

MARC

Wait. I didn't ... did you hear what he said? I've been telling you all along.

(NANCY packs up her stuff and prepares to leave the room.)

NANCY

Well, that's going nowhere.

MARC

I have told you repeatedly that they cannot give over a certain amount of revenue to any one vendor. I have told you that again and again, yet you keep pushing for more business.

DOUG

That's bullshit. It's an excuse. He's giving us an excuse.

MARC

It's not! They have FAA rules and regulations they need to follow. It's in the contract.

NANCY

I don't buy it. I don't know who said what to whom, but he just doesn't want to work with us. End of story. We've got to figure out a way around him.

(NANCY exits the office and DOUG and MARC are alone and silent for a while after she's gone. NANCY heads down to the kitchenette, where she retrieves her kale juice from the fridge.)

(MARC's cell phone rings and he looks at it.)

MARC

I have to get this.

(answering the call)

Hi, Dad. I'm going to have to call you back. Yes, the check is in the mail. This morning. Yes, we're moving you on Thursday.

DOUG

How much time is left on the contract?

(DOUG motions to him to hang up.)

MARC

(covering the phone)

About nine months.

(into phone)

Yeah, I'll call you back. Thursday, Dad. OK, bye.

(MARC hangs up.)

DOUG

You should go see him. Take him to Ruth's Chris, buy him a scotch and a rib-eye and see what he's thinking.

MARC

That's a waste of time. You heard him. He's telling the truth.

DOUG

No, he'll listen to you. We have to get something out of them.

MARC

If he could give us more work, he would. I know that. He's not bullshitting. His hands are tied. You have to back off.

DOUG

You know what? Don't. I'll go to his boss. Send me some dates that you can head up there and we'll go wine and dine him. That'll do it.

MARC

I gotta go. I have a lunch.

DOUG

Send me dates by EOD. You hear me?

(MARC bolts his way out of there and heads back to his cube. When he arrives, he puts on his coat then very brusquely exits the office.)

SCENE THREE

(Continuing. ELLEN sits in the conference room with her lunch, and writes on a legal pad. NANCY soon appears at the door, sipping her juice and snacking on baby carrots.)

NANCY

Knock, knock. Mind if I join you?

(ELLEN doesn't say anything so NANCY helps herself to a seat inside the conference room. ELLEN is not happy to see her.)

NANCY

Well, New Jet isn't going to pony up any new business. Looks like Marc's talking shit about us to the client.

ELLEN

No he's not ...

NANCY

Doug thinks so, too.

ELLEN

Well then it must be true.

NANCY

What's gotten into you?

(ELLEN doesn't answer.)

NANCY – CON'T.

What are you doing?

ELLEN

The invite list for Andy's show.

NANCY

Oh, right. The exhibition. Does he actually sell anything?

ELLEN

Here and there. But don't get excited. It's not a living. Just a little extra.

NANCY

But he takes care of Chloe, too, right? Not needing childcare is a huge help.

ELLEN

Yes. It is.

NANCY

You're so lucky. It kills me to send the boys to daycare after school ... so he actually does sell some?

ELLEN

Occasionally.

NANCY

And he has an agent?

ELLEN

A dealer ... in a tiny gallery ... it's microscopic it's so small.

NANCY

Still, it's impressive.

ELLEN

It's just for some extras ...

NANCY

Even so. I've always had to work. Since I'm fifteen. But a job was always about making money, you know? As much as you could. Whether you liked it or not was beside the point, especially now ... single mother? Please. Andy's lucky he gets to do what he likes. You, too.

(DOUG approaches and pops his head inside the conference room.)

DOUG

Hey.

NANCY

Hi, Doug.

DOUG

So we're good on the Destiny stuff, right?

NANCY

All set.

DOUG

Ellen?

ELLEN
Uh huh.

DOUG
Great. Once you get me the proposal I'll run it by William ...

ELLEN
Wait, what?

DOUG
The proposal.

ELLEN
(to Nancy)
I thought you said it was a one-sheet.

DOUG
Nancy?

NANCY
No, *the proposal*. We need the whole thing.

DOUG
Yeah, we need the whole thing.

ELLEN
You did not say that. You never said that.

DOUG
I thought you knew the schedule ...
(to Nancy)
I thought she knew the schedule.

ELLEN
I do now.

DOUG
You can handle it, right?

ELLEN
Do I have a choice?

DOUG
No.

ELLEN

Then I guess you'll have it Friday.

DOUG

That's all I need to hear.

(DOUG blows a bubble, leaves them and heads to WILLIAM's office.
ELLEN seethes. NANCY tries to think of something to say ...)

ELLEN

Don't, alright? I don't want to hear you defend him anymore. Or tell me to suck it up.

NANCY

I wasn't going to ...

ELLEN

He dumps everything on me. Everything! As if I don't have enough to do. And now?
With half my team gone ...

NANCY

It's the same for all of us, Ellen. Deal with it.

ELLEN

Deal with it ... remember the days when all you had to do was your job? Here's your job;
here's your job; and here's your job. Now, everyone has to do everything all the time.

NANCY

Yeah, well ...

ELLEN

What?

NANCY

Honestly? I welcome the opportunity for personal growth.

(CHRISSEY peeks her perky head inside the conference room.)

CHRISSEY

Hi. Just a reminder that lunch-break allotments are thirty minutes max and, Ellen, you've
been here thirty-two. I can give you three more minutes, but then you'll have to vacate.

(CHRISSEY ducks back out and ELLEN looks at NANCY in astonishment
at what this place has become.)

ELLEN

You wanted to discuss personal growth?

NANCY
New skills are important. That's all I'm saying.
(whispers)
And you never know when you'll have to get back out there.

ELLEN
What do you mean?

NANCY
Just that it's good to learn new skills.

ELLEN
Wait. Do you know something?

NANCY
About what?

ELLEN
Nancy ...

NANCY
What?

ELLEN
If you know anything ...

NANCY
I'm just being realistic. Women of a certain age ... this is the time to make that push for the final stage, you know?

ELLEN
I wish you'd tell me if you knew something.

NANCY
I don't know anything.

ELLEN
I think you do.

NANCY
You're paranoid.

ELLEN
I am not paranoid.

NANCY

All I'm saying is we're going to age out pretty soon, so we better make as much money as we can now. Women in their fifties—*or sixties?* In this business? Please. My kids are still years away from college. It's a race against time to stay employed, and you would be wise to suck it up and deal with it.

ELLEN

You would tell me, right?

NANCY

Tell you what?

ELLEN

If you knew something?

NANCY

Why would I know something that you don't?

ELLEN

I don't know.

NANCY

That's because there's nothing to know ... unless ... do you know something?

ELLEN

No!

NANCY

But you'd tell me?

ELLEN

Of course I would.

NANCY

And I'd tell you.

ELLEN

You would?

NANCY

Ellen!

ELLEN

Sorry, there's just so few of us left ... we should stick together.

NANCY

We do. Don't we?

ELLEN

I do.

NANCY

Well I do, too. Don't I? You think I don't?

(WILLIAM walks by and raps his knuckles on the glass. He scares them with this and they both jump a bit in their seats. He points to his watch in a, 'It's time,' gesture," and NANCY and ELLEN wrap up what's left of their lunches, throw it in the garbage and follow WILLIAM into his office. When WILLIAM arrives, he kicks off his shoes.)

SCENE FOUR

(Continuing inside WILLIAM's office, DOUG is already seated on his cushion while WILLIAM wanders around. We catch him in the midst of berating DOUG.)

(Meanwhile, MARC returns to the office. He enters his cubicle, takes off his coat and and sits at his computer. He is not happy.)

WILLIAM

Are you fucking kidding me? Please tell me you're fucking kidding me. After all this time? How is this possible?

(ELLEN and NANCY join them inside and take their seats. They keep their heads down, clearly wanting to stay out of the line of fire.)

WILLIAM – CON'T.

I'm not talking to myself over here.

DOUG

They don't want to pay our ask.

WILLIAM

You tell me this now? Now?!?

DOUG

I don't know how much more I can push.

WILLIAM

You know how bad this is? We have to present on Monday. Monday! I need this contract signed for that meeting.

DOUG

I thought it was going to happen ...

WILLIAM

I can't walk in there with nothing.

DOUG

I tried everything ...

WILLIAM

These numbers are never going to fly. You hear me? This is the second straight quarter we're down—way down. You promised this would turn around yet here we are, having the same conversation we've been having for months.

DOUG
It's flat out there.

WILLIAM
You said they were at 90 percent.

DOUG
I can't get anyone to move.

WILLIAM
That's bullshit. There's always business out there.

DOUG
If creative turned things around faster, I could get out more.

ELLEN
You have got to be kidding.

DOUG
See more prospects ...

ELLEN
Don't you dare try to put this on me.

DOUG
I have to ask 10 times just to get a sell sheet out of her.

ELLEN
That is such ... my team, or what's left of it, has given you everything!

DOUG
Not true.
(to William)
Not true!

ELLEN
And we're not your personal marketing team. We have our own jobs, which we can't do because we're always doing yours.

DOUG
You are supposed to be there for whatever I need to sell. I don't have anybody else.

WILLIAM
Alright, that's enough ...

DOUG

Whatever I need. That's the deal.

(to William)

That was supposed to be the deal.

ELLEN

How many rounds of presentations can you make? Rounds and rounds and rounds ...

WILLIAM

OK, that's enough! We have larger problems to contend with at Cornerstone.

ELLEN

It's not my fault he can't close a deal.

DOUG

Oh, fuck you, Ellen. Fuck you, fuck you, fuck you.

WILLIAM

Shut up! Both of you.

(There's a long beat as the tension settles in the room. Meanwhile, MARC IMs LAUREN, who is seated next door to him in her cubicle. She is now very pregnant and showing.)

MARC/IM

MARC: You there?

LAUREN/IM

LAUREN: How'd it go???

MARC/IM

MARC: No go.

LAUREN/IM

LAUREN: Crap. Sorry. Money?

MARC/IM

MARC: Yeah, job's too junior. God I hate being here.

LAUREN/IM

LAUREN: Why is this taking so long?

MARC/IM

MARC: I don't know, but I can't take a pay cut and afford my dad's new place. Anything on your end?

LAUREN/IM

LAUREN: Nada. Joe didn't get that offer ...

MARC/IM

MARC: Shit.

LAUREN/IM

LAUREN: Yeah. You want a coffee? Let's get a coffee.

MARC/IM

MARC: Take the head start.

LAUREN/IM

LAUREN: K. Don't forget to delete.

(Their messages disappear—MARC deleted the conversation.)

(LAUREN rises and waddles down to the kitchenette, where MARC will soon meet up with her. They try to make it look coincidental—no one wants to appear too chummy with anyone else these days. They huddle close and whisper to each other, separating only when another EMPLOYEE happens by from time to time.)

(Meanwhile, back in WILLIAM's office ...)

WILLIAM

Nancy, what would you do? You talk to clients every day. What can we do to make Insight do business with us?

NANCY

But they're just a prospect ...

WILLIAM

Think outside the box.

NANCY

That's not my vertical.

WILLIAM

Solution this, would you? If you were the *prospective* client, what would we have to do to get you to lock and load?

NANCY

Well, clients always want to pay less, of course, so there's that. Coming down in price is always a sure thing.

DOUG

I can't come down any lower and hit my number.

WILLIAM

And Cornerstone isn't going to accept another quarter of failure. So, what do you suggest? You've had nine months to bring in new business—*nine months*—and you haven't signed a single contract.

DOUG

It's flat out there. And our ask is too high.

WILLIAM

Your cost to this company is too high, Doug, and with no revenue to show for it. None. What am I supposed to do about that?

(ELLEN snickers, as if by accident, and WILLIAM stares at her.)

WILLIAM – CON'T.

What the hell is so funny?

(Something's crossed over in ELLEN; it's as if she doesn't care anymore.)

WILLIAM – CON'T.

Go on.

ELLEN

Don't you mean what is Garth supposed to do about that?

WILLIAM

Garth? What does Garth have to do with this?

ELLEN

Why isn't he in here? Why is he never in any meetings? And why doesn't he talk to anyone but you?

(to Nancy)

Has Garth ever said a word to you?

(NANCY looks to WILLIAM and doesn't answer.)

ELLEN — CON'T.

(to William)

Has he been *instructed* to only speak to you? Because he has never said a word to me— not one word!

(to Doug)

Does he talk to you?

(DOUG ignores her.)

ELLEN – CON'T.

Why is that? We're C-suite, right? We all meet and talk to each other; we're meant to be in this together. But Garth is *other*.

WILLIAM

I don't know what you're saying. *Other*.

ELLEN

Does he work for Expansion or Cornerstone? I ask myself every time I see him, why he just grunts. Like a feral little animal. Nothing but grunts. And then it dawned on me. You did it on purpose. Or Cornerstone did. One or the other.

WILLIAM

You've got a lot of nerve, you know that?

ELLEN

You set it up this way. So when all the terminations and cost-cutting and everything goes down, Garth can do it with a clear conscience. He isn't emotionally invested or involved in anyone or anything. He's Mister Spreadsheet. Automaton. He's here so four or five fabulously wealthy people at Cornerstone can protect their investment and you get to feel clean.

WILLIAM

Feel clean ... who the hell ...? This is my company and we do things my way, OK? I'm the one who sunk millions into this, Ellen. *Millions*. I'm the one whose investment is at risk—whose ass is on the line. What do you have to do? You people ... you just show up and collect your paychecks, your health insurance, *benefits* ... and if you don't like what you do, or if you don't like me, then all you have to do is find another job. No harm, no foul. Meanwhile, I'm out millions.

(ELLEN stays seated, fuming, and looks at the floor. WILLIAM takes a deep breath and tries to find his Zen.)

WILLIAM – CON'T.

Now, Doug. Let's solution this, alright? I can only help if I know what the problem is.

DOUG

Insight doesn't want to pay what we want ... what we *need* them to pay. We don't want to risk any money upfront. But they won't pay a fee.

WILLIAM

Uh huh.

DOUG

So we'd have to take on the hard costs to hopefully get the business, to hopefully be a success and to hopefully generate revenue.

WILLIAM

OK, OK ...

DOUG

And our competition is more than happy to do whatever Insight wants them to do to get the business. We can't compete and hit our numbers at the same time.

WILLIAM

How long have you been on them?

DOUG

Since day one! They were supposed to be our first whale!

ELLEN

And not one has come through. Not one! He keeps taking and taking from my team and he hasn't brought in a single piece of business.

(imitating him)

What'd you sell today? What'd you sell today? What did you sell today, Doug?

DOUG

That's not fair. You have none of my stress. You get to sit around making shit all day. Looking at your freaking navel.

(imitating her now)

How gorgeous! How creative! How awesome! I could throw up with all that bullshit!

WILLIAM

That's enough!!!

ELLEN

(to William)

Why should my team and my numbers suffer for his failure? That's what I'd like to know. We do all the work and he sucks up all our resources.

WILLIAM

(goodbye Zen!)

All of you! Shut the fuck up! NOW!

(The EMPLOYEES going about their business outside WILLIAM's office hear the yelling and stop whatever it is they're doing—some to listen more closely and others to high tail it out of there.)

(MARC and LAUREN, still in the kitchenette, try looking natural at the water cooler while listening to what's happening in WILLIAM's office.)

WILLIAM – CON'T.

Ellen, leave the room.

ELLEN

You should hear how it really is out there, William. You have no idea what's going on right under your nose.

WILLIAM

GET OUT OF MY OFFICE. NOW!

(ELLEN can't get on her feet fast enough. She rises and exits, angrily charging up the stairs to her cube. LAUREN and MARC watch her abrupt departure and wonder what in the world is going on.)

(EMPLOYEES look away from ELLEN and pretend they have no clue about the mayhem that's taking place inside WILLIAM's office.)

(LAUREN makes a motion to follow ELLEN but MARC holds her arm and keeps her with him. Meanwhile, back inside WILLIAM's office ...)

WILLIAM – CON'T.

(to Doug)

She's right, you know. Not one contract in all this time.

DOUG

It's on me. I know. I live with it every day.

WILLIAM

(to Nancy)

We're shedding clients all over the place and not upselling a thing. How are you going to get those numbers up?

NANCY

I'm working on it. Focused like a laser.

WILLIAM

How is it that each of you is incapable of doing your job? Doug isn't selling; Nancy, you're losing clients; and Ellen is angry and insubordinate. I gave each of you a golden opportunity with a single mandate: sell, create and retain. And none of you has been a success. Not even close. We are hemorrhaging money. *My money*. And Cornerstone isn't going to wait forever for us to turn this around. What do we have to do to turn this around?

(Silence.)

WILLIAM – CON'T.

That is not a rhetorical question. I'm paying you both a lot of money—where is my ROI on the *two of you*?

DOUG

It's been a steep climb going after bigger business. It's a different world.

WILLIAM

Bullshit. A deal is a deal is a deal. What's the difference if you're selling a rocket ship or a stick of gum? There are buyers and sellers, supply and demand.

DOUG

In my experience ...

WILLIAM

Maybe that's it? Maybe you're too inexperienced? Maybe you're in over your head? Maybe I put too much faith in you and you weren't up for it, OK?

(DOUG's starting to melt down.)

DOUG

I don't know why it's not working. I've done everything I've always done. I have never not been a success!

NANCY

(to William)

What do you need from me? I'm prepared to give you whatever you need.

WILLIAM

Honestly, I don't know anymore. And I don't know what we're going to say to Cornerstone. I am not one for making excuses.

NANCY

It's only been a few months ... and Chad ...

WILLIAM

We can't blame this on Chad anymore. Jesus. We've had two full quarters to show something for ourselves and that hasn't happened. And, frankly, I don't know that it will.

DOUG

The margins, Bill ... they're impossible.

NANCY

I'm happy to talk about more layoffs ...

(WILLIAM just looks at her, and NANCY decides it's probably a good idea if she returned her gaze to the floor.)

WILLIAM

I need to think. Get out. Get out of my sight.

(DOUG and NANCY can't get out of there fast enough. They exit WILLIAM's office with their heads hung low. DOUG races back to his office while NANCY walks up the stairs toward ELLEN's cube.)

(MARC and LAUREN stare at the coffee pot to avoid eye contact as DOUG and NANCY exit.)

(WILLIAM takes a seat on his meditation cushion and closes his eyes.)

SCENE FIVE

(Continuing. NANCY ascends the stairs to ELLEN's office. She enters without knocking and helps herself to a seat. Inside, she finds ELLEN holding her head in her hands. She's a mess.)

NANCY

That was intense, huh? You OK?

ELLEN

I'm great, Nancy. Just great. I didn't just sabotage my entire life or anything.

NANCY

Well, if it's any consolation, he gave it to Doug pretty good after you left.

ELLEN

Well, he should, I mean ... Jesus.

NANCY

Yeah ... it was rough. You were ...

ELLEN

What?

NANCY

I just mean ... Wow. You really lost it.

ELLEN

Sometimes I don't shut up when I should, OK? It happens.

NANCY

I don't think he's going to fire you. Do you?

ELLEN

You think he's going to fire Doug? Please. At this point he's got to fire someone.

NANCY

Well, it's not going to be me. I'll tell you that much.

ELLEN

Maybe, but our heads are going to roll long before he flies away in his golden parachute. All those people ... you think of that? Jesus, Nancy. We let that happen.

NANCY

Yeah, well, there's nothing we can do about that now.

ELLEN

No. Not now ... I wonder how our fearless leader is going to innovate his way out of this one ...

NANCY

I should go.

ELLEN

Yes.

NANCY

I'm sorry.

ELLEN

For what? What are you sorry about, Nancy?

(NANCY rises, shrugs and leaves ELLEN's office. She walks down the walkway and heads over to DOUG's cube and walks inside, closing the door behind her.)

(LAUREN, still in the kitchenette, sees NANCY leave ELLEN's office and makes her way to head up there. But CHRISSY approaches.)

CHRISSY

Just the person I'm looking for!

LAUREN

(distracted)

Oh, hi, Chrissy. What's up?

CHRISSY

I know you probably already told me—my apologies if I'm repeating myself—but what is your return date from maternity leave? William needs to know.

LAUREN

I don't know. I haven't given birth yet.

CHRISSY

Oh, right. But I need you to sign a document before you go, confirming you'll come back. Otherwise, you'll have to reimburse us for time lost. New policy.

(LAUREN glares at CHRISSY.)

CHRISSY – CON'T.

I'm just the messenger! Don't shoot!

(LAUREN sidesteps CHRISSY and her lame joke and heads upstairs to ELLEN's office.)

LAUREN

I can't right now.

CHRISSY

(calling after her)

I'll send you a meeting invite so you can sign it. You have to sign it, Lauren. It's a new rule.

LAUREN

It's not gonna happen, Chrissy. Sorry.

CHRISSY

I'm sending that invite.

(CHRISSY walks away and LAUREN, arriving upstairs, knocks on ELLEN's door. ELLEN doesn't respond but LAUREN enters and takes a seat. LAUREN closes the door behind her.)

LAUREN

Are you OK? What the hell happened in there?

ELLEN

I have a kid. My husband is a *painter*, OK? Water colors! I have to make a living.

LAUREN

I know.

ELLEN

I thought that if I stayed and played along, I could protect ... keep everyone OK. I should have taken that offer. William's gonna fire me.

LAUREN

Really?

ELLEN

I would if I were him. What I did in there was definitely not *Stepford* material.

(LAUREN had no idea ELLEN knew that's what MARC calls her.)

LAUREN

Sorry about that ...

ELLEN

No, *I'm* sorry. I went along with everything and stood for nothing.

LAUREN

You couldn't have done anything. No one could.

ELLEN

Yes, I could.

LAUREN

Like what?

(ELLEN thinks for a moment but comes up with nothing.)

LAUREN – CON'T.

Actually, you could have spared us *The Expansini*.

(They share a small laugh.)

ELLEN

Sorry about that, too. You should go.

LAUREN

It's OK ...

ELLEN

Seriously, I don't want anyone to see you in here.

LAUREN

Come on ...

ELLEN

I don't want you to get in trouble. I'm serious. Now. Go.

LAUREN

OK.

ELLEN

I'll be fine. We'll talk later. Go.

(LAUREN leaves ELLEN's office and returns to her own cube next door. She looks around herself before entering to see if anyone's seen her. The coast is, thankfully, clear.)

SCENE SIX

(The next day. BRITTANY tiptoes into WILLIAM's office with his morning juice. WILLIAM sits on his meditation cushion, meditating, but he opens his eyes when he senses BRITTANY in his office.)

BRITTANY

Sorry ...

WILLIAM

Leave it on the desk.

BRITTANY

Actually, can I talk to you? I realize this may not be a good time ...

(WILLIAM rises and grabs his juice off his desk.)

WILLIAM

Shoot.

BRITTANY

This isn't easy ... I've never done it before ...

WILLIAM

But ...

BRITTANY

But I got another job. I am hereby giving my two weeks' notice.

WILLIAM

Hereby?

BRITTANY

Sorry. I don't know how to do this.

WILLIAM

Don't apologize. If this is what you have to do, for you or your career ...

BRITTANY

(turning to go)

Thank you for understanding.

WILLIAM

Hold on, hold on. Have a seat.

(BRITTANY clearly doesn't want to, but she has no choice. She takes a seat on a cushion.)

WILLIAM – CON'T.

I know I'm not allowed to ask, but now that you're leaving ... what are you? Twenty-five? Twenty-six?

BRITTANY

Twenty-four.

WILLIAM

Ah, twenty-four! There isn't a more beautiful word in the English language. 'Youth is the ultimate unlimited resource.' William Shatner. You know what I wanted to be when I was twenty-four? A chef. I'm actually a pretty good cook. I don't have a lot of time to do that anymore ... but that was my passion. I was going to travel the world, become Anthony Bourdain before there even was an Anthony Bourdain. Without the drugs, of course.

BRITTANY

Why didn't you?

WILLIAM

Things didn't turn out that way. One thing led to another ... I started running restaurants instead of cooking in them. And then, once you start making money ... We never had any when I was growing up, so ... when you have it ... it's important. So, did you accept an offer?

BRITTANY

Yes.

WILLIAM

Good for you. Are you getting a bump?

BRITTANY

A bump?

WILLIAM

A raise? More money than you make here. You should never go anywhere without a bump.

BRITTANY

That's not why I ...

WILLIAM

Of course it is. How much?

I don't think I should ...

BRITTANY

How much?

WILLIAM

Two-thousand.

BRITTANY

Two-thousand? Not bad. Should I counter?

WILLIAM

No.

BRITTANY

No, I didn't think so.

WILLIAM

Sorry ...

BRITTANY

Nothing to be sorry for.

WILLIAM

Sorry. I didn't mean to say sorry.

BRITTANY

WILLIAM

Then why did you? Look, this is how the world works. Everyone looks out for *numero uno*, right? Nothing wrong with it. It's business. The real world. The sooner you accept that the better off we'll all be. No hard feelings when it's just business.

(BRITTANY softly shakes her head no.)

WILLIAM – CON'T.

They didn't teach you that in school? No? Well, it's true. So, where are you going to work? Let me guess: a nice non-profit somewhere? Or some do-gooder service for the disadvantaged? Inner city?

A finance company.

BRITTANY

Finance? Really? Where?

WILLIAM

BRITTANY

It's a startup. I doubt you've heard of it ...

WILLIAM

Try me.

BRITTANY

It's called Wish Management. It's a new kind of ...

WILLIAM

I know it. Pay the fee you want, donate a portion to charity ...

BRITTANY

Yes, but it's more than that. It's a sensibility.

WILLIAM

Oh, I don't doubt it. I'm sure it's a very nice place. And I trust you'll do very well there.

BRITTANY

Thank you.

WILLIAM

And you're giving me two weeks?

BRITTANY

They wanted me to start right away, but I said I couldn't.

WILLIAM

You can start whenever you want. Or take some time off. Go ahead. Travel. See the world. Backpack. Do kids still backpack these days?

BRITTANY

I don't want to leave you in a lurch.

WILLIAM

I can get my own juice from now on. Don't worry about that.

(WILLIAM extends his hand and BRITTANY rises and shakes it.)

WILLIAM – CON'T.

Thank you for your service, Brittany. I wish you the best of luck. Sincerely.

BRITTANY

Thank you.

WILLIAM

I hope you'll remember your time here fondly. Or ... at least ... maybe you'll decide you learned something.

(BRITTANY tries to smile, then heads for the door. But before she departs.)

BRITTANY

You should know ... Justin is OK. Do you remember Justin?

(If WILLIAM doesn't, he does a good job of pretending.)

WILLIAM

Of course. I'm glad to hear it.

BRITTANY

It took a while, and he had to move in with his parents, but now he has a good job. Where he's happy. And creative. I thought you should know. And I'm pretty sure he'd be glad I told you.

(BRITTANY leaves and WILLIAM watches after her.)

SCENE SEVEN

(Later that day. NANCY sits in DOUG's office. DOUG stands over his desk, and dials the phone for a conference call. The phone RINGS a few times and then JON from New Jet picks up on the other end.)

JON

Hello?

DOUG

Jon, Doug here from Expansion. How are you?

NANCY

And Nancy! Hi, Jon.

(Jon doesn't respond.)

DOUG

So, Jon, we've been thinking a lot about the contract and, we've decided, maybe it's about time we changed how we do things. The way we're structured now, we make your magazine at no cost to you. We assume all the risk and ...

JON

(interrupts)

And keep all the profits.

DOUG

Yes, well, if there are any ...

NANCY

Which there aren't.

DOUG

Yes, the way the deal is structured, you see, it doesn't work for us anymore. And we're not the ones responsible for it.

JON

We have a contract.

DOUG

Yes, but we're going to need you to start paying a fee for us to make the magazine. We can't keep assuming all the risk ... overhead ...

JON

That's not what our contract says.

NANCY

Yes, but as you know, we recently underwent a merger and so we've had to change how we do business.

DOUG

We want New Jet to be profitable, Jon. Healthy. For a long time.

JON

So, you're trying to tell me that all those years with Chad, you weren't turning a profit?

DOUG

That's right.

JON

Yeah, that's not how I see it, or what's been told to me. Look, I don't know what you're doing over there, but ... a word of advice, if you want to keep the good people you have, which as far as I can tell isn't very many at this point, then you need to stop playing fast and loose like this.

DOUG

Jon ... Jon, hold on ...

JON

How does your profitability have anything to do with New Jet? You're a vendor, that's all. Your success, or failure, is not my responsibility. And, as you well know, there are plenty of hungry, highly competent companies out there who would be more than happy to take over our business.

NANCY

But, Jon ... if I may ...

JON

You have a contract with us, which expires at the end of the year. I expect you to adhere to it. If not, I will sue. And, with this phone call you have forced me to go out to RFP. Unfortunately, Expansion will not be invited to submit a proposal.

DOUG

Jon. Jon! Hold on!

(The line goes dead. DOUG and NANCY look at each other.)

NANCY

Marc is a cancer. I can only imagine what he's been saying about us.

(Meanwhile, next door, MARC and LAUREN are instant messaging.)

MARC/IM

MARC: She's been in there all morning.

LAUREN/IM

LAUREN: Relax. It's not about you.

MARC/IM

MARC: How do you know?

LAUREN/IM

LAUREN: Please. Get over yourself. It could be a million things.

MARC/IM

MARC: Maybe you're right.

(MARC's phone rings.)

MARC/IM – CON'T.

MARC: Be right back.

(MARC answers the phone.)

MARC – CON'T.

Hello, Marc speaking. Oh, hi, Jon. Yes, what can I ...? What? No ... I had no idea ... oh, shit. Yeah, of course I understand ... I'm sorry.

(An angry DOUG throws open his door, stomps down the landing and listens outside MARC's office. He soon flies inside and paces for a moment. He alternately—and nervously—sucks on and fidgets with a Sharpie marker.)

(NANCY slinks out of DOUG's office, closes the door behind her then descends the steps at stage left toward the kitchenette.)

DOUG

Hang up. I said hang the fuck up! Is that Jon?

(DOUG reaches for the phone in MARC's hand, struggles with him for it, wins the battle and hangs up.)

MARC

What the hell, Man?

DOUG

You know something? You're toxic.

MARC

What are you talking about?

DOUG

A cancer.

(DOUG paces like a caged animal.)

DOUG – CON'T.

Like I don't have enough to deal with without hearing about your shit all day? You and your big, fat mouth. You've been trying to undermine me since day one!

MARC

I have no idea what you're talking about. Where is this coming from?

DOUG

Where the hell do you get off talking to clients?

MARC

Doug, seriously ... I don't know what you're talking about ... calm down.

DOUG

Don't you fucking tell me to calm down!

(DOUG slams his hand against a wall and a picture frame crashes down, taking the framed magazine cover with it.)

(LAUREN, seated next door in her cubicle, hears DOUG yelling and inches her way outside on the walkway. She stands outside MARC's cubicle and tries to find out what's going on.)

DOUG – CON'T.

I warned you. I told you you talk too much. You brought this on yourself.

MARC

What are you talking about? Doug!

(DOUG FLINGS the Sharpie at MARC, who ducks just in time so it misses him, then he exits MARC's cube as angrily as he entered it.)

(DOUG nearly bangs into LAUREN, who is still standing outside.)

DOUG

And you ... both of you just suck.

(DOUG storms back to his office and slams his door shut.)

(Meanwhile, EMPLOYEES congregate in the kitchenette and outside the conference room to see what the ruckus is about. WILLIAM steps out of his office and looks to the cubes upstairs. So do NANCY, GARTH and CHRISSY.)

(LAUREN peeks inside MARC's office but he waves her away.)

MARC

Not now! Go! GO!

(MARC rises and shuts his door in LAUREN's face. LAUREN goes back toward her office, notices everyone looking at her and moves more quickly to her cube. She takes a seat and immediately instant messages MARC.)

LAUREN/IM

LAUREN: What the hell just happened? Marc! Tell me!

(But MARC doesn't respond. LAUREN's IM just sits on the screen with a blinking ellipses ...)

SCENE EIGHT

(A short time later. MARC is virtually paralyzed and locked in his office—as are ELLEN and LAUREN.)

(GARTH, meanwhile, has assembled WILLIAM, NANCY, DOUG and CHRISSY in the conference room. DOUG has his head in his hands.)

CHRISSY

I understand you're upset, but you can't throw Sharpies at employees. The last thing we need right now is a lawsuit.

WILLIAM

He knows that. He just ... lost himself.

NANCY

You can understand the frustration, can't you? He's being undermined. We are all being undermined.

WILLIAM

Everyone just calm down. I suggest we ...

GARTH

(interrupting)

I suggest you leave it up to Chrissy and me. We'll take it from here. Doug, please ...

(NANCY and WILLIAM look at each other, but DOUG doesn't look at anyone. He just rises and races the hell out of there. His face is beet red—from embarrassment or anger or both. He takes two steps at a time, eventually locking himself in his office.)

GARTH – CON'T.

Nancy.

(WILLIAM nods at NANCY and she rises to leave, as well. After she's gone, GARTH looks at WILLIAM, suggesting he leave, too.)

WILLIAM

I can't let Doug go. It's not his fault.

GARTH

Chrissy and I will sort it out.

WILLIAM

But ... how will I ...

GARTH

Thanks, William. I'll take it from here. We're all set.

(WILLIAM has nowhere to go but out. He slowly rises from his chair and exits the conference room.)

(CHRISSEY untucks a bunch of papers from her folder and hands a manila envelope to GARTH. She keeps one for herself.)

CHRISSEY

You ready, Boss?

(Meanwhile, up in MARC's office, he finally contacts LAUREN via IM.)

MARC/IM

MARC: WTF?!?!?

LAUREN/IM

LAUREN: I know. I mean, I don't know.

MARC/IM

MARC: Who the fuck told him anything? What did you say?

LAUREN/IM

LAUREN: Nothing. No one. I swear.

MARC/IM

MARC: You're the only one I talk to. It had to come from you.

LAUREN/IM

LAUREN: You never told me anything everyone didn't know already. Don't blame this on me. Please!

ELLEN/IM

ELLEN: Lauren, you there?

LAUREN/IM

LAUREN: Hey. How are you holding up?

ELLEN/IM

ELLEN: I gotta pick up Chloe. Can you do me a favor?

LAUREN/IM

LAUREN: Of course!

ELLEN/IM

ELLEN: Take a look and see if anyone's out there?

LAUREN/IM

LAUREN: Give me a sec.

ELLEN/IM

ELLEN. Tx.

(LAUREN rises from her seat, opens her door and surveys the first floor. The kitchenette is clear, but GARTH and CHRISSY still occupy the conference room. She returns to her cube and her computer.)

LAUREN/IM

LAUREN: Avoid the conference room.

ELLEN/IM

ELLEN: Tx.

LAUREN/IM

LAUREN: Ellen's leaving. What are you going to do?

(ELLEN shuts down her computer and gathers her things. At the same moment, CHRISSY rises from her seat and finalizes what's in her manila envelope. GARTH does the same with his.)

MARC/IM

MARC: I figured I'd shoot myself and leave a beautiful corpse. Right splat here under my desk.

LAUREN/IM

LAUREN: Stop that.

MARC/IM

MARC: We should have gotten the hell out here the second they shit-canned everyone. Why did we stay?

LAUREN/IM

LAUREN: We need paychecks.

MARC/IM

MARC: Yeah, well. When they come for my body, make sure I look good, OK? I'll try not to bleed too much. Here's my suicide note: 'Friends are nothing but a known enemy.' Kurt Cobain.

LAUREN/IM

LAUREN: Would you stop that, please? It's not funny. And I didn't fuck you over.

MARC/IM

MARC: Go home. We'll do this again tomorrow. And then the next day, and then the day after that. If we're lucky, right? I gotta go see my dad anyway.

(CHRISSEY passes through the kitchenette and takes a cookie from the cookie jar. She puts it in her mouth then climbs the stairs stage left toward the cubicles while GARTH picks up the phone in the conference room and dials. The RING on the other end can be heard throughout the office, but it's unclear in which cubicle it's actually ringing. It could be for ELLEN, LAUREN, MARC or DOUG, each of whom is, at the moment, hiding in his office with the door closed.)

(CHRISSEY slowly walks past all the cubes—past DOUG's, MARC's and LAUREN's, then she stops in front of ELLEN's and walks inside. ELLEN sees that it's CHRISSEY carrying a manila envelope in her hands. ELLEN immediately realizes she's being fired. She calmly puts on her coat and prepares to leave. CHRISSEY doesn't say a word—neither does ELLEN—she just places the manila envelope on ELLEN's desk.)

(The phone RINGS a few more times, seemingly louder with each ring, and, finally, MARC answers.)

MARC

Marc here.

(GARTH speaks into the phone but we can't hear what he says. MARC rises from his desk and looks outside his office, peeking down into the conference room.)

(MARC is in shock, but not really—he knows he's about to be fired and he might even be a bit relieved that it's finally happening. He thinks fast, retakes his seat at his desk and types one last IM on his computer.)

MARC/IM

MARC: Conference room ...

(Next door in LAUREN's cubicle, she reads what MARC just sent her. LAUREN rises to look down into the conference room.)

(ELLEN takes the envelope off her desk and, without looking at its contents, walks onto the walkway, followed by CHRISSEY. LAUREN, now on the walkway in front of her own office, understands that ELLEN

is being fired. CHRISSY stands beside LAUREN on the walkway, watching after ELLEN.)

LAUREN

Ellen?

(ELLEN turns to see LAUREN and then, without a word but with a small smile, she turns back around and heads toward the exit. She takes her time.)

CHRISSY

(to Lauren)

We'll have you take over for Ellen. When the time is right.

(CHRISSY heads downstairs to join GARTH in the conference room.)

(Next door, MARC shuts down his laptop and puts it under his arm, then grabs his coat and heads downstairs toward the conference room. He passes LAUREN on the walkway but doesn't say anything. Neither does she.)

(A SECURITY GUARD appears at the door of the conference room.)

(ELLEN arrives at the bottom of the stairs and lets the SECURITY GUARD escort her out of the office.)

(When MARC reaches the conference room, he keeps walking and heads offstage. GARTH rises to summon him but MARC ignores him and, in a moment, he is gone.)

(LAUREN, standing on the walkway, stands still and watches after MARC and ELLEN—even after they're gone. Then, DOUG appears on the walkway and looks at LAUREN. They take in the scene together.)

(NANCY, who saw ELLEN and MARC vacate, appears near the conference room and looks up at LAUREN and DOUG, wondering what's going on.)

(LAUREN looks at NANCY, bites her lip and disappears inside her office, closing the door shut behind her.)

(NANCY salutes DOUG—the last one standing on the walkway—and then DOUG goes back to work inside his cube.)

(NANCY ascends the steps at stage right and, when she arrives at ELLEN's office, she enters the vacated cube. She takes a seat and puts her hands on the desk.)

(BLACKOUT.)

SCENE NINE

(It's several weeks later, but it's the same scene as Scene One. WILLIAM is illuminated onstage, and we see the shadow of NANCY sitting in ELLEN's old cube. But no Marc, Lauren or Doug—their offices are no longer inhabited.)

(The video screen behind WILLIAM shows the company logo and WILLIAM takes a moment to clear his throat before speaking. CHRISSY stands in the wings behind him, as does GARTH, on the other side of WILLIAM and in shadow. They flank him.)

(The LED screen shows an ellipses, as though it's waiting for someone to type a message, but there's no one to type it.)

(In the kitchenette, a silhouetted GUY resembling Justin stands at the microwave, cooking a potato.)

WILLIAM

Quiet! Quiet, Everyone. Shhh ... Ok, that's enough. Quiet. Welcome ... welcome. Good morning. Shhhh ...

(The HUM finally dims and WILLIAM begins his speech.)

WILLIAM – CON'T.

So, I know there's been a lot of rumor and speculation these last few weeks, and I want to address your concerns and put everyone's mind at ease. As you know, I've made no secret of the fact that we've been looking to merge with another company to ... to help our position in the marketplace. And now, I am pleased to announce we've found a good fit. We are being acquired ... *merging* with Capital Media ... and taking their name.

(The video screen behind WILLIAM changes to reflect the name/logo for Capital Media. It looks like yet another generic, cheesy symbol.)

(The HUM of voices starts again—GROANS this time—and WILLIAM raises his hands to silence the chatter. CHRISSY steps forward to try to assist him, but he waves her off and she steps back into place.)

WILLIAM – CON'T.

Now, I assure you this decision has been made carefully, OK? Many of you will have questions and we will begin answering those questions. But Capital's CEO and I have known each other for nearly a month now and I have developed the utmost respect for him. He is a visionary and well known within industry circles ... He's not even 50, but he has already bought and sold several businesses.

(A lot of MURMURING among the EMPLOYEES.)

WILLIAM – CON'T.

But that's not all. Beau will be the second-largest investor behind Cornerstone, which still believes in us—they stand behind the investment they made in us last year. For these reasons and the fact that two CEOs can't live together under one roof, we have made the decision that Garth will help Beau transition to be your new CEO, and I will move on.

(Now WILLIAM expects/waits for some kind of reaction, but there isn't one. No one cares. Still, he soldiers on.)

WILLIAM – CON'T.

I can't wait for you to meet Beau. He's awesome. Unfortunately, he couldn't be with us today—he's a very busy guy—but you'll meet him in the flesh soon enough. In the meantime, we have a feed of him coming through so you can see you'll be in very competent, capable hands. But first, don't forget our company values as we enter this exciting new time, OK? Be resourceful. Be responsible. And, of course, be profitable.

(The VIDEO SCREEN comes to life with an image of BEAU, who is the same actor/person as Chad and William, a fact that is not lost on the audience. BEAU is a bit pixilated and the sound quality isn't great, but there he is.)

WILLIAM

Lock and load. Hi Beau, can you hear me?

BEAU

Hello, can you hear me? Garth? Are you there?

GARTH

(disembodied voice; he's barely seen)

Yes, we hear you. How are you today, Beau?

BEAU

Great! Nothing but blue sky.

(BEAU tries to say something else but the sound has gone out and we can't hear him after all. As his face becomes increasingly pixilated ...)

WILLIAM

OK, we're ready. All yours, Beau!

(The microwave DINGS and the GUY waiting for it removes the potato and bounces it on his hands once or twice then tosses it on the counter—it's too damn hot.)

GUY

Ow! Ow! Ow!

(The SPOTLIGHT goes out.)

(BLACKOUT.)

END OF PLAY