

ANOTHER DAY AT THE OFFICE

A Short Play

by

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CHARACTERS

DADE                                      Adult male. Any ethnicity.

PECK                                      Adult male. Any ethnicity.

SETTING

A blown-out window ledge. Floor Ninety-Something.  
North Tower, World Trade Center, New York City.

TIME

Morning. September 11, 2001.

## SCENE 1

(DADE and PECK sit on the edge of the stage representing a building ledge. Dressed in business attire, they're a wreck: Soot-smearred faces, a missing shoe, a torn sleeve.)

DADE

If you'd given me a million guesses this morning what I'd be doing right about now ...

PECK

Right?

DADE

Not a chance.

PECK

No sir.

DADE

Two million guesses even.

PECK

No, sir. No, sir.

DADE

Absolutely not. Right outta left field.

PECK

Absolutely not. Unbelievable.

DADE

Waiting on the Ross audit? Yes. Jackson-Holden analysis? Sure. Fighting Claire over the exec summary

--

PECK

Jesus Christ. Claire and that fucking ...

DADE

Executive summary!

PECK

Executive summary!

DADE

Holy shit! What's she thinking?

PECK

Right?

DADE

What's it been? Six drafts? Deadline last Tuesday?

PECK

Seven, you count the first.

DADE

Last Tuesday!

DADE

I didn't see that one.

PECK

What?

DADE

The first one. I missed it. Danny Boy brought me in somewhere around version three.

PECK

Well, it was version zero-point-five, you know? Half there.

DADE

Right, right.

PECK

Not even.

DADE

No loss.

PECK

Pick your battles. You know? No one cares whether the subheads --

PECK

Match the body content!

DADE

Match the body content!

PECK

Right?

DADE

Right. Like someone in H-R -- fucking H-R! -- is gonna read the summary and then flick back and forth to make sure --

PECK

Someone oughta smacked her upside the head before she ever got to draft three.

DADE

H-R couldn't find its collective butt if it had a bell on it. You think they're gonna give that 98-page turd-ball the fine tooth?

DADE

Hell, no.

PECK

No way.

DADE

Well, doesn't matter now, I guess.

PECK

Right? Right.

DADE

Right. You see her?

PECK

Who?

DADE

Claire.

PECK

No. When?

DADE

She was first to go. Up and over.

(HE whistles like a bomb dropping.)

No hesitation.

PECK

No kidding.

DADE

Straight out and gone. Not even a good-bye-nice-working-with-you. Just, Geronimo.

PECK

Always first in line. Little go-getter.

DADE

I'll give her that. Always had hustle. Can't deny it.

PECK

Not a bad thing, I guess.

DADE

Well, considering. Yes and no, right?

(Pause.)

Damn. This is a frigging mess.

PECK

Right? And the smell.

DADE

That smell's never coming out of this suit. Lemme tell you.

PECK

Right? It's like ... Christ, I don't have words.

DADE

It's nuts.

PECK

On the bright side, they put off installing that new carpet until next week.

DADE

(Laughs.)

Right? Saved a few bucks there.

PECK

Small victories, right? Look on the bright side.

(Pause.)

DADE

That shit off-gases for months. New carpet, I mean. I've heard.

PECK

(Laughs.)

Doesn't seem so bad where I'm sitting.

DADE

(Laughs.)

Right? I hear you. Shit. Hey, you hear about Povich?

PECK

Who, Sam? Sam Povich?

DADE

Yeah, accounting. You hear?

PECK

What do you mean?

DADE

H-R did a number on him. Screwed him slow like a top-shelf whore. For a decade.

PECK

How so?

DADE

Never explained the pre-tax deduction plan to him. Found out just last week.

PECK

What do you mean "never explained?"

DADE

They never explained it! On his first day ten years ago. 1990. Eleven years, whatever. You know, you get the walk-around the office -- the "This is Sam who's joining us in accounting" thing; and here's the break room, be sure to clean up your mess; and watch out for Maryanne from R-and-D, she's nuts -- and the H-R sit-down with all the ... the stuff.

PECK

And they didn't cover the pre-tax stuff.

DADE

Not a word. According to him. Never mentioned it.

PECK

That's hard to believe.

DADE

No shit it's hard to believe. They got one job. So do it already!

PECK

Right?

DADE

I mean, the man's thirty years in the business, been working some place or another since he was outta under-grad.

PECK

He knows the score.

DADE

Right, that's what I'm saying. He's no spring chicken. Fast-tracked for partner at his last shop not two years in. But still --

PECK

But he's executive staff. He oughta know.

DADE

Of course, he oughta know. That's what I'm saying.

PECK

Wait a minute. If he made partner at his last shop, what's he doing here?

DADE

Well, he didn't make partner the last place. Long story.

PECK

Any other day, I'd say, We got the time.

DADE

Right? Anyway, he walks from the last place, gets hired here. 1990. No, I had it right before: '91. Ten years ago. Anyway, he's Brandeis's pick of the litter. No way he wasn't getting the offer with Pickle Head running the show.

PECK

Frigging Pickle Head.

DADE

The whole thing, they never bring it up. Pre-tax deductions. Money taken out of gross before taxes ...

PECK

Yeah, I know. I know.

DADE

... to lower taxable income. Less FICA, Social Security, Medicare.



PECK

Right, right. Shit.

DADE

They dropped the ball. And it's not even like Povich was the only loser. The firm --

PECK

Right, the firm --

DADE

The firm took it on the nose, too. All the employer-paid taxes suffered, too, right? FUTA, FICA, SUI ...

PECK

Shit.

DADE

You gotta figure over ten years, the loss from that --

PECK

Substantial.

DADE

You bet it's substantial! It's more than substantial. Especially at his pay-grade.

PECK

Seven figures?

DADE

What?

PECK

Seven figures, don't you think?

DADE

Tax savings?

PECK

No, not the taxes. The salary.

DADE

Oh, right. No, I'd guess six.

PECK

You don't think?

DADE  
Unlikely. Upper sixes, my guess.

PECK  
Poor Povich.

DADE  
Right?

PECK  
Never liked him anyway.

DADE  
What do you mean?

PECK  
Something about him. Bad taste in ties. And he had that ... that thing.

DADE  
It's a tick.

PECK  
Whatever it is.

DADE  
It's a nervous tick. You can't blame the guy for something like that. Not like he's got any control --

PECK  
Whatever. Never spent so much time looking at my shoes then talking with that guy. And, boy, could he talk.

DADE  
Hey. C'mon.

PECK  
Forget I mentioned it. He's fine. A prince among men in suits. Even if he never heard of pre-tax deductions.

DADE  
I'm not saying he never heard of it.

PECK  
Never mind.

DADE

I'm saying the dickheads in H-R dropped the ball.

PECK

Fine.

DADE

And it cost him.

PECK

Right.

DADE

That's all. Cost him and the firm.

PECK

Can we talk about something else?

DADE

Love to. How about the weather?

PECK

Nice day to get outside for a little fresh air.

DADE

Right? 64-degrees. Practically balmy.

PECK

Did you say, "Bomby?"

DADE

Balmy.

PECK

Bomby?

DADE

Balmy. Bomby? What is that? A joke?

PECK

No, I thought that's what you said. I thought you were making a joke.

DADE

Balmy. As in "pleasantly warm." Well, except for all this.

PECK

Wait a minute. Why didn't he bring it up himself?

DADE

Who?

PECK

Povich. Why didn't he just bring it up himself?

DADE

Bring up what?

PECK

The pre-tax stuff. If he knew all about it. Thirty years under his belt, and all.

DADE

He did. He had to. Know about it, I mean.

PECK

Then why didn't he just bring it up himself? What's he waiting on H-R for? Sits on his ass for 10 years? And then points the finger at H-R?

DADE

Sits on his ass? Look, I didn't say I understood it. And don't put the blame on him. Not his place to bring it up.

PECK

No, I'm just saying.

DADE

Look, we gonna do this or not?

PECK

I've been waiting for you.

DADE

Well, I've been waiting for you to stop yakking about Povich.

PECK

Christ, gimme a break. You brought it up.

DADE

(Standing.)

Well, I'm sorry I brought it up now.

(HE looks down.)

So. What do you think?

PECK

(Standing, and looking down.)

I don't know.

DADE

What do you say? On three?

PECK

Three?

DADE

One, two, three ... jump.

PECK

I guess.

DADE

Or one, two. And we jump on three.

PECK

Yeah, that. One, two, and we jump on three.

DADE

OK.

(Pause.)

Well.

(Pause.)

You ready?

(PECK shrugs.)

One ...

DADE

Two. Three.

PECK

Two. Three.

(Neither jump.)

DADE

What the hell is that?

PECK

What?

DADE

Just what the hell's your problem, Peck?

PECK

What? I didn't ... You know. It's ... I don't know. I don't know!

DADE

You think I'm some kind of rube? You clearing a path to V-P? Nice little corner office with your own girl? Cancel out all your competition?

PECK

Hey, don't give me that. Come on! What? You're still here, too!

DADE

Yeah, keeping an eye on you. You always struck me that way, you know? I'll say it now. Here and now, I'll say you always came off a little ... I don't know.

PECK

What the hell, Dave?

DADE

Squirrely. That's the word. Squirrely.

PECK

Aw, come on --

DADE

No, that's the perfect word. Like when Klein brought up --

PECK

Christ, not this again --

DADE

Like when Klein brought up the discrepancy in Jackson-Holden, the whole team agreed --

PECK

Not again --

DADE

The whole team and their collective mothers all agreed to just let it rest. Let. It. Rest.

PECK

It wasn't right, Dade. I'm no saint. Believe me. But it doesn't take a saint to know that just wasn't right.

DADE

Let it rest. Not hurting nobody. A rounding error would've made bigger ripples. Because the pond -- the pond, Peck -- was immense. Not a pond at all. An ocean! But you --

PECK

Look, you wanna do this?

DADE

No, I wanna talk about Jackson-Holden and the holier than thou prick who wanted to jeopardize 18 months' work and the reputation of an entire team of senior level executives all for a halo 'round his head and a peaceful night's sleep happily ever after.

PECK

You know what? I don't need this. I'm outta here.

DADE

What? Where you headed? You're gonna jump? Now you're gonna jump? Now you're ready?

PECK

Yeah! Maybe I am. I'm gonna jump. You wanna hang out here? I thought we were doing this thing. You know? Together.

DADE

Look, I'm the team player here. Don't make this out to be me striking out on his own. I'm not the backstabber --

PECK

Backstabber? Backstabber?! You for real?

DADE

Whole team agreed. Klein, Morrissette, Atkinson, Pickle Head ... You don't think we talked about it? You think you held a half dozen pairs of feet to the fire and we weren't gonna talk about it?

(PECK stifles a laugh.)

DADE (Continued)

What? What's so funny?

PECK

Nothing. It's just. I dunno. "Feet to the fire." It's just. You know. Context and all.

DADE

(Chuckling.)

Yeah. Yeah, I see your point. Christ. Look, I'm sorry. Woke up in a great mood, you know?

PECK

Right?

DADE

Yeah. Yeah.

(Pause.)

PECK

So. We gonna do this?

DADE

Seriously. I don't know what got into me --

PECK

Never mind. I already forgot it.

DADE

Yeah. OK.

PECK

On three?

PECK

On three. One ...

DADE

Two. Three.

PECK

Two. Three.

(Neither jump. Pause.)

DADE

You. Fucking.



DADE  
Prick. I swear, if this  
wasn't very likely my last  
day on earth, I'd vow to  
spend whatever number of  
decades I mighta had left to  
making your life a living  
hell.

PECK  
Fuck you, Dade. Right in the  
ear hole. Left ear hole,  
right ear hole -- doesn't  
matter to me. Backstabber?  
Back at ya, buddy. Right  
back at ya.

(Pause.)

PECK  
Living hell. Right.

(Pause.)

DADE  
Hey, I think I can see my house from up here.

PECK  
Trenton? No way you see to Trenton.

DADE  
Weehawken.

PECK  
Weehawken? Since when?

DADE  
Last summer.

PECK  
No shit.

DADE  
Donna finally convinced me the shorter commute made up  
for the furnished basement we finally got around to  
furnishing.

PECK  
Right?

DADE  
Only took us 12 years. She was right. I'd never go  
back.

PECK

I got a guest bathroom been two-thirds done for better part of a decade.

DADE

Yeah?

PECK

Someday.

DADE

Right, right.

PECK

Right?

(Pause.)

DADE

Look, I --

PECK

Look, I --

(Pause.)

DADE

Sorry, you --

PECK

Sorry, you --

PECK

Go ahead.

DADE

(Extends his hand to PECK.)

Give me your hand.

(PECK takes his hand.)

Together. OK? Together on three.

PECK

Together.

DADE

One ...

DADE

Two --

PECK

Two --

(QUICK BLACKOUT.)

(END OF PLAY.)

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES

No aspect of 9/11 was more disturbing to me than people choosing to jump from the Twin Towers rather than perish in smoke and fire.

I'm afraid of heights. While I wish it was just a reflection of some Darwinian life-preserving instinct, I'm almost sure it goes beyond that. I always feel a queer tingling sensation in my extremities as I approach a window inside any tall building before daring myself to look down.

I'm also afraid of flying. Or, as I diplomatically choose to frame it among less-familiar acquaintances, "I don't like to fly."

So it's impossible for me to imagine what it would have been like to stand at the edge of a devastated World Trade Center amid the immediate chaos of the jetliners' impact. It's a scenario that blends two of my greatest fears, and is, therefore, entirely unfathomable to me.

As a result, the only way I can imagine that scene playing out is in some manner in which it could certainly never play out. For me, the dire inconceivability of the circumstance requires it be defused and neutralized by shifting into something even more inconceivable: an absurd parody, as I've presented here.

I suspect some will be offended by this. That's not my intention. And while I'm somewhat uneasy with casting myself as a pariah, I stand by what I've written.