

LAID OFF

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. T.L.A. OFFICES - NIGHT

A thunderstorm whips trees against the cozy two-story building. Benign but soulless, brick and glass -- a good office for an orthodontist.

Little concrete stairs lead to a landing surrounded by glass.

Lightning FLASHES.

INT. T.L.A. OFFICES - SAME

A Latin MALE CLEANER (35) empties wastebaskets. At the end of the hall, a Latin FEMALE CLEANER (30) runs a vacuum. His trashcans THUNK. Her vacuum DRONES. The endless rain WHIPS against the building.

The glare of lightning fills the room. One. Two. Three. KA-BOOM! Thunder CRASHES. Male Cleaner jumps.

MALE CLEANER

Chingar!

FEMALE CLEANER

Calme.

He proceeds to a cube next to a window. A column of Diet Mountain Dew cases flanks the desk.

Under the desk, the wastebasket sticks tight. Male Cleaner jerks and wiggles it -- no dice. He kneels for better purchase, very close to this cubicle's computer tower. As his face descends, inches away from the tower, it erupts with a HISS!

Male Cleaner hops back instinctively. Then he sighs and shakes his head at himself.

The HISSING subsides to clicking. Male Cleaner leans past the computer to the wastebasket, listening hard for anything else.

Lightning FLASHES. One. Two. KA-BOOM! Male Cleaner SHOUTS and recoils, bashing his hand on the underside of the desk.

MALE CLEANER

CHINGAR!

Blood wells in a deep cut on his finger.

FEMALE CLEANER (O.S.)

Que?

MALE CLEANER

Tráigame una toalla!

He examines the wound, frozen in place. One drop of BLOOD slips from his finger. It falls in SLOW MOTION into the computer tower.

No more hissing. No more clicking. Total silence. Even the rain hesitates.

Male Cleaner stares at the computer in silence. Blue sparks CRACKLE across the face of the tower. He draws his bleeding hand to his face in horror.

His coworker joins him with a Band-Aid.

FEMALE CLEANER

Que paso?

MALE CLEANER

Nada. Nada...

She nudges him out of the office.

By itself, the case of the computer CRACKS like the Liberty Bell.

INT. LATA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Morning. On a pricey World Market bedside table, the clock-radio detonates with too-loud NPR.

Petite LATA CHAUDHURI (24) spoons a body-pillow at the very edge of her king-sized bed. Indian-American, with long wavy hair, rock-star attitude and a mobile mouth puckered like she's dreaming about math. And probably is.

The room is part dorm, part hotel room -- a milk crate of books lives under the bedside table.

The house is just too damn big for one person.

She rises and heads to the bathroom, SNAPPING up the bra strap under her oversized "Meredith College" T-shirt.

The radio news show continues throughout:

## RADIO SHOW

...continues to recover after last night's storm. Power has been restored to all but two districts in Forsyth county.

## INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sparkling. Hospital-tidy.

She draws her toothbrush -- the only one in a holder for four.

## RADIO SHOW

A representative says there is no lasting damage to the facility, and residents can count on uninterrupted service.

## INT. KITCHEN - LATER

From the cabinet, Lata pulls a bowl from a stack of four.

Noshing away at a bowl of colorful cereal, she walks through her

## DINING ROOM

past a table for four and straight to the

## HOME OFFICE

where she pulls up her captain's chair. Knees to her chest like a middle-schooler, she types with one hand and eats with the other.

On a weather website sits a special feature on last night's storm.

Her dainty hand CLICKS.

## INT. VIC'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - SAME

Tapered hands in a bedroom mirror shape a Windsor knot in a striped tie. Button-down shirt. Long-sleeves.

We see it's a woman: VIC MONROE (38), elegant, African-American, with the sloe eyes and forward-thrusting chin of Nefertiti. Her fingers know the drill, and she watches the knot develop with remote approval.

Satisfied, she takes the loosened tie from around her neck and puts it on her DAD (73), gnarled hands, broad shoulders sagging forward, who sits behind her on the bed.

He adjusts the tie with stiff fingers. His eyes are sharp and playful.

She kisses her hand and pats his shoulder.

VIC

Have a good time, Dad. I probably won't see you 'til tomorrow.

DAD

All right, Baby. Call me when you get there.

VIC

Yeah, right, Dad.

DAD

If Boss Man asks you to work late again, punch him in the neck.

VIC

I'll try.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

From the fridge Vic takes a chocolate breakfast-in-a-can.

She slips sensible heels over argyle socks, checks the schedule in her phone, and answers the CHIME of a text message. She's doing twenty things at once with the grace and authority of a ballroom dancer.

In comes CLAUDIA (45), the caretaker, letting herself in. Plump and tiny, with a smart black braid down to her belt.

CLAUDIA

Hola, Miss Vicki.

VIC

Hola, Claudia, good morning.

Vic speaks good Spanish, but she says "Claw-dee-uh" instead of "Clah-oo-dee-uh."

Vic pulls her checkbook from a waiting purse.

VIC (CONT'D)

Thank you for staying tonight.

CLAUDIA  
I don't mind.

VIC  
Well, I appreciate it.

Vic writes "Claudia amo!" in the subject line of the check.

VIC (CONT'D)  
I should be back by midnight. I'll call if anything changes. And you call if there's any trouble, anything, just to say 'hi,' anything.

CLAUDIA  
You know I will.

VIC  
I know. I just hate leaving him alone.

CLAUDIA  
He's with me. We'll watch the Sopranos. He fast-forwards through the sexy parts.

Vic laughs.

CLAUDIA (CONT'D)  
Now go! Go go go! You'll be late!

Claudia bodily shoves Vic toward the door.

CLAUDIA (CONT'D)  
Go! Or I'll drive him to Oaxaca!

INT. LATA'S HOME OFFICE - LATER

CHIM CHIM! Lata gets an instant message from "BKind1975."

BKIND1975 - "You there?"

She grins and THUNKS down her bowl to type with both hands. She comes back as "VeddyGood215."

VeddyGood215 - "Yessir"

INT. BEN'S LIVING ROOM - SAME

In his PJs on the couch lounges BEN SELDEN (26), lean and warm, with curly hair and the smile of a Disney prince.

He's eating a bowl of the same colorful cereal as Lata.

As he types on his laptop, he shouts to his unseen HOUSEMATE (24).

BEN

I want it outta there before my  
Netflix comes in.

HOUSEMATE

You can't do it yourself?

BEN

I am not touching your "Ass-Divers  
4." You can't watch that stuff in  
your room?

HOUSEMATE

The sound's not as good.

BEN

You might not know this, but real  
sex isn't in Dolby Digital.

Housemate pegs him with a Nerf gun - PAF! Ben deflects it with one hand, still typing.

BKind1975 - "Survive the storm?"

VeddyGood215 - "All is well. You?"

BKind1975 - "Same. But hey -- be warned we have to do a network outage at six tonight."

INT. LATA'S HOME OFFICE - SAME

Lata cringes. She snaps up her cell phone and dials.

INT. BEN'S LIVING ROOM - SAME

His phone RINGS. He picks up immediately.

BEN

Hi, Lata.

Housemate howls from the other room.

HOUSEMATE (O.S.)  
Ohmigod it's LAH-TAHHH!

Ben covers the phone, grinning, and flings back the loose Nerf ball.

HOUSEMATE (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Ow!

Ben gets up and hustles to the  
KITCHEN  
to get away.

LATA  
Network outage! Why?

BEN  
We have to test the system tonight  
'cause of the lightning strike.

LATA  
Cra-a-a-ap. What time?

BEN  
What time do you need?

LATA  
Oh, man, Ben. As late as you can,  
the deployment's not ready at all.  
Can you wait... can it wait 'til  
ten?

Ben smiles.

BEN  
Yeah, I can wait 'til ten.

LATA  
My Benny-Ben-Bacon, you are a  
LIFESAVER.

BEN  
It's no problem. I'm going to be  
training customers with Boss Man  
until four anyway.

LATA  
I'm gonna make this up to you.

BEN  
Pish tosh. I pish tosh you.

LATA  
Thank you. I'll see you at work.

Ben hangs up.

The phone RINGS again almost immediately. He answers it without looking.

BEN  
Ye-e-e-e-es?

BEN'S HOUSEMATE  
It's LAH-TAHHH!

JAIME (O.S.)  
Hey, it's Jaime.

This is the Spanish pronunciation of Jaime: "Hi-May."

BEN  
Oh, hey, man, what's up?

INT. JAIME'S CAR - SAME

Handsome JAIME GUTIERREZ (24) sits crouched over the steering wheel looking like his dog just died. With a rugby-player's build, rosy cheeks and a flop of black hair, he's the last person you'd expect to see depressed.

JAIME  
I'm going to be late this morning.  
Cover for me if anyone asks.

BEN (O.S.)  
Everything OK?

JAIME  
Yeah. Naw. Ugh. Me and Keeley broke up last night. I've got to take care of a few things this morning.

BEN (O.S.)  
Shit. I'm sorry as hell, Jaime.

JAIME  
Yeah, well. You don't know the half of it. I'll see you in a few.

Jaime hangs up.

He peers out the window. Dials again.

JAIME (CONT'D)

Hi, yes, this is Jaime Gutierrez again? Has anything opened up? Gah. No, I understand. No, it sort of has to be today. Thank you, though.

Jaime gets out of the car as he hangs up.

He's in the parking lot of an Urgent Care clinic.

EXT. LATA'S HOUSE - DAY

SINGING along to the radio, Vic pulls her sweet little streamlined coupe next to Lata's oversized SUV.

Something on the porch steps catches her eye. She stops singing abruptly and leaps out of the car like a knife-fighter.

There's a SNAKE sunning itself on the steps.

Frantic, striding up the lawn, Vic pulls out her phone and dials.

The front door opens.

VIC

Lata!

Lata hustles out with her metal Fraggie Rock lunchbox.

LATA

Vic!

Vic's almost there.

VIC

Stop right there!

LATA

(laughing)

What?

Both are still moving toward the snake. It pops its head up and HISSES! Lata GASPS and freezes.

In an instant, Vic seizes the snake by the tail. She swings it over her head three times like a slingshot, then turns and SMASHES it against a tree!

Headless, the body squirms limply in Vic's hand. She drops it, and it lands hard on the grass.

The women look at the dead snake. A moment of stunned silence passes.

VIC  
Should I get a trash bag?

LATA  
Leave it. The birds will eat it.

They look at each other.

VIC  
I feel kinda bad.

Lata shrugs.

LATA  
Diamond head.

VIC  
Yeah, but. I dunno.

LATA  
I think it was sweet of you.

VIC  
Thanks.

Gingerly they head for the car.

LATA  
Dude, you totally killed a snake  
with your bare hands.

VIC  
And a tree.

LATA  
Mostly hands. You just grabbed it  
by the tail! You are insane-O!

VIC  
I don't really want to talk about  
it anymore.

LATA  
Oh. Okay.

They get in the car.

LATA (CONT'D)  
Oh, hey -- we're having a network  
outage at ten.

VIC

Well, that's one way to be home by  
midnight. How'd you hear?

LATA

Ben.

VIC

OoOOHooh! BEH-EHNNN!

EXT. T.L.A. OFFICES - DAY

Still morning. Ben climbs the wet stairs with a spring in his  
step. He's looking sharp -- a button-down shirt in a polo  
world.

He WAVES his ID badge over the card reader at the door.

Red light turns to green.

INT. BEN AND BUDDHA'S CUBICLES - DAY

Ben shares a window and adjoining cube with David "BUDDHA"  
Rasmussen (28).

Not even his mother calls him by his real name. He's got a  
round face with a well-groomed beard and a belly as round as  
a basketball. From the side he looks like a capital B.

He pulls a can from a case of Diet Mountain Dew on his desk.  
He'd rather drink them room temperature than risk having one  
stolen.

Buddha types furiously. Ben turns on his computer.

BEN

How's it going, Buddha?

BUDDHA

Happy as a clam humping another  
clam. Hey -- tell me if you get any  
errors logging in.

BEN

Sure...

Ben logs in.

BEN (CONT'D)

Fine here.

BUDDHA

Okay. Okay, I think that's good.

BEN

What's up?

BUDDHA

My sweet Sandra's JACKED, that's what. She's running slow as hell and throwing dialogs and I don't know why.

BEN

Was it the lightning?

BUDDHA

Yes. Yes, that's it. Lightning got in our building, logged onto Sandra and made a bunch of downloads. I think it stole from the honor bar, too. NO, not lightning!

BEN

Sorry, guy.

Buddha continues to type.

BUDDHA

Oh, for serious, what the hell?

BEN

What's happening?

BUDDHA

No bigs. Just the world's biggest memory leak.

Buddha hits a few keys, experimenting.

BUDDHA (CONT'D)

Talk to me, Sandy.

Ben peers over his shoulder. The hard drive belts a frightening HISS.

Suddenly a chat window springs open!

BEN

Ooh, FoxGlove78. That could be your problem.

BUDDHA

Yeah, maybe. Except I never heard  
of 'em.

BEN

Dude, how are they straight sending  
you messages if you never heard of  
'em?

Ben and Buddha look at each other. The tower HISSES again.  
And CLICKS.

FOXGLOVE78 - "TAKE A LOOK AT BOSS MAN'S OFFICE"

Buddha and Ben prairie-dog over the wall.

INT. AISLE - SAME

Out of Boss Man's office come the ANGELS OF DEATH -- three  
lovely twenty-something women with long, loose hair and  
pastel colors.

INT. BEN AND BUDDHA'S CUBICLE - SAME

BUDDHA AND BEN  
Angels of Death!

FOXGLOVE78 - "I THINK YOU SHOULD INVESTIGATE"

The window closes as abruptly as it opened.

INT. AISLE - SAME

BOSS MAN (55) exits his office. False teeth, wolfish hair,  
and a face like a Greyhound bus.

He walks the Angels of Death down the hall, out of sight.

INT. BEN AND BUDDHA'S CUBICLE - SAME

Buddha whirls on Ben.

BUDDHA

Dude, if someone's going to get  
fired around here, I want to know  
who. 'Cause if it's me, I have a  
whole lot of shit to delete.

BEN  
I hear ya.

BUDDHA  
He left his door open!

BEN  
It's not our business...

BUDDHA  
Can you die of weak sauce? It is  
one hundred percent our business!  
Just cover me, princess. I'll get  
in there and you just act like  
you're looking for your dick.

BEN  
(at Buddha)  
I see one right now.

BUDDHA  
Less talk, more stalk, get out  
there.

Ben strolls into the

AISLE

and rearranges sticky notes on the BIG YELLOW CHART outside  
Boss Man's office. Ben's no good at spy business, turning  
left and right, obviously looking.

Buddha walks behind him, stretching, ridicu-nonchalant. He's  
got a DIGITAL CAMERA in his hand.

When Buddha gets in sniffing distance of Boss Man's office,  
he leaps into it faster than any man that size should go.

INT. BOSS MAN'S OFFICE - SAME

Buddha's in! He whips his head as he scans the desk.

A pile of papers hides all but the top of a RED PICTURE  
FRAME.

On top, a document on company letterhead.

BUDDHA  
Disco.

INT. AISLE - SAME

Boss Man rounds the corner. Ben intercepts him.

BEN

Hey -- quick question about the  
client visit today....

BOSS MAN

Let's hear it.

INT. BOSS MAN'S OFFICE - SAME

Buddha cringes at the sound of Boss Man's voice.

BOSS MAN (O.S.)

Quickly, please.

In a hurry, he takes a digital picture of the top of the  
letter.

BUDDHA

Me, Jaime, John, Matilda, Vic and  
Lata.

Me, Jaime, John, Matilda, Vic and  
Lata.

INT. AISLE - SAME

Buddha explodes out of the office, then segues into his  
nonchalant stroll.

Boss Man turns toward the movement.

BEN

Great, that explains it. Thanks!  
See you in a second.

Ben and Buddha hurry off together. Boss Man returns to his  
office.

Long tall JOHN (60) comes out of his cube to add a sticky  
note to the Big Yellow Chart. He stops short. Frowns. Squints  
at the chart. Squints at his note.

JOHN

Hey!

INT. BEN AND BUDDHA'S CUBICLES - SAME

Ben dogs Buddha as he speed-walks to his seat.

Ben  
Well?

BUDDHA  
Hang on, hang on, hang on...

Buddha sits and writes down the names.

BUDDHA (CONT'D)  
It's a downsize -- a big one.  
They're getting rid of half of us.

BEN  
What?

Buddha prints a copy of the picture of the letter.

BEN (CONT'D)  
Is that it?

BUDDHA  
Gah! Don't touch it. Let me read  
it.  
(whispering)  
"Dear Boss Man. Below is the list  
of personnel to call into the  
departure meeting we have arranged  
for nine AM, Friday, October Six."

Ben grabs his guts.

BUDDHA (CONT'D)  
(whispering)  
"It is essential that you assemble  
all of these people by nine AM so  
we can proceed with the  
terminations. Your discretion, as  
always, is paramount. Thank you,  
The Angels of Death."

BEN  
Who's on the list?

BUDDHA  
Me, Jaime, John, Matilda, Vic and  
Lata.

Relieved, Ben SIGHS.

BEN  
God, that's half the team! Lata?  
And Vic? She's almost a manager  
herself!

He straightens suddenly.

BEN (CONT'D)  
Wait - who's Matilda?

BUDDHA  
I don't know.

A SPROING of realization.

BEN  
And you! Buddha, I'm sorry.

Buddha is one thousand miles away.

BEN (CONT'D)  
Buddha?

A twisty smile crosses his face.

BUDDHA  
Don't be sorry for me. I know what  
I need to do. Tomorrow will be  
borne my greatest triumph.

BEN  
What?

BUDDHA  
You will see. The world. Will see.

Buddha turns to his computer.

BUDDHA (CONT'D)  
There is have much to do and little  
time in which to do it.

BEN  
Are you... are you going to tell  
anyone else?

BUDDHA  
It is not for me to interfere.

He pushes the printout and list to Ben.

BUDDHA (CONT'D)

This is your cross to bear. You know -- your ark... your burning bush. Whatever your people have, now you have one.

Ben picks up the list and reads it again. Boss Man slinks up behind him.

BOSS MAN

Ready to head out?

Quick as David Blaine, Ben pockets the list.

BEN

Sure. Just let me... grab...

BOSS MAN

Where's Jaime?

Yeah, he says it like "Jay-mee."

BEN

He called -- flat tire. He'll be in in a few.

BOSS MAN

Huh.

Ben pulls his stuff together slowly.

BEN

Meet you downstairs in five?

BOSS MAN

I can wait.

Boss Man sits down on the spot and starts dicking around on his Blackberry.

Ben looks at Buddha, who pays no attention at all.

BEN

Buddha. Could you please at least tell Lata about... what we were just talking about?

BUDDHA

No can do, buckaroo. That's your baileywick. You can tell her when you get back.

Ben grits his teeth. Boss Man click-click-clicks away at his Blackberry.

BOSS MAN

I like that spirit. You gotta learn  
to say no, too, Ben.

Ben clenches and unclenches his fists. He wishes he was Bruce Banner so he could Hulk out and kill everybody right now.

All right. Laptop in the bag. Ready to go.

Ben picks up his cell phone. He hefts it, considering.

BEN

I'm gonna run to the bathroom  
before we head out.

BOSS MAN

That's a good idea. I'll go with  
you.

DAMMIT. Turning, Ben rolls his eyes and staggers.

INT. T.L.A. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

In his stall, Ben stares at Boss Man's feet next door. He hates those feet.

Out comes Ben's phone as he carefully text-messages Lata. Click. Click-click.

It says "LATA U R GETTING LAID OFF!!!"

He looks at the message. Nope. He shakes his head. Delete, delete, delete.

PSSH! The sound of the sink means Boss Man's washing his hands. Ben gives up. Hangs up. Flushes the toilet.

INT. T.L.A. OFFICES, JAIME'S CUBE - DAY

With a scowl and a guilty slink, Jaime arrives at his cubicle. He whisks up his chair and powers up his computer. It CHIMES its pleasant musical chime, and Jaime gives it the finger.

Vic cruises by his cube. Wait. She comes back to take a surreptitious look at him.

Jaime discovers the picture of him and KEELEY (25), his pretty blond (ex)girlfriend with a sneery grin. He snatches it up and pitches it in the trash with a THUNK.

Up pop Vic's eyebrows. She cruises in and out of frame in the other direction.

Then slo-o-owly an argyle sock puppet appears at the top of Jaime's cubicle wall. For eyes it has two quarters stuck with Scotch tape.

Jaime shakes his head.

JAIME

I'm really not in the mood today.

Socky shrugs "whatever." He slo-o-owly drops out of sight.

FIP. FIP. FIP. A marble lobs into the air over and over. Socky reappears, juggling the marble with his mouth.

Jaime can't contain a SNORT.

Socky PLICKS the marble down on the cubicle wall and throws a cockeyed smile at Jaime, like, "Ta da!"

JAIME (CONT'D)

Seriously. Plus I've got a lot to get done before the outage tonight.

Socky droops his head with sorrow -- the saddest argyle sock in the world. Socky sniffs.

JAIME (CONT'D)

Oh, now don't..."

Socky flops on the cubicle wall, sobbing bodily, wailing silent sock wails.

Jaime can't help smiling.

JAIME (CONT'D)

All right, Vic. Don't make me apologize to a sock.

Vic pops up over the edge of the wall, folding her arms like no big deal.

Vic

Oh, hey, Jaime? When'd you get here?

JAIME  
Just now, actually. Late night,  
busy morning.

VIC  
Oh yeah?

JAIME  
Yeah. Me and Keeley broke up.

VIC  
I'm sorry. That sucks.

JAIME  
You don't know the half of it.

Vic pauses for more information, but none comes.

VIC  
I'll break her nose if you want.

Jaime LAUGHS out loud. It's a wonderful sound.

JAIME  
I'll keep that in mind.

VIC  
Well, good luck on your stuff. Let  
me know if there's anything I can  
do.

JAIME  
Will do.

Vic walks off, one naked ankle where her sock should be,  
sneaking a gleeful tongue-stuck-out grin to herself.

Likewise, Jaime smiles and gets back to work.

INT. CLIENT SITE - DAY

To a room of ten customers, Boss Man, and the client's BOSS  
WOMAN (40), Ben gives a presentation on how the new software  
works.

Ben glances at the clock. Sweat beads on his forehead.

INT. T.L.A. OFFICES, LATA'S CUBICLE - DAY

Lata runs a suite of tests on her computer. Eyes wide, she  
sips coffee in the moment of suspense.

Then: GREEN BAR of success.

LATA  
Green bar!

In one graceful stroll, Vic comes out of her office to high-five Lata over her cubicle wall, then disappear back into her office. Lata turns back to work like nothin' happened.

INT. CLIENT SITE - DAY

Ben passes out packets of documentation as Boss Man demonstrates the new software on computer. The customers smile and nod.

BOSS MAN  
Any questions?

Twenty hands pop up.

Near the back, Ben SMACKS his forehead.

INT. T.L.A. OFFICES, BREAKROOM - DAY

Indoor-outdoor, with glass doors leading to a balcony picnic area.

Fraggle Rock lunchbox in hand, Lata enters to find Jaime struggling with the new tank for the water cooler.

JAIME  
There aren't any instructions.

LATA  
You just got to hit it and quit it.  
They can smell fear.

Five-foot-two Lata hoists that thang and pops it into place easy as a plug in a socket.

JAIME  
Dag.

LATA  
You're welcome.

INT. CLIENT SITE - DAY

Ben shares a computer with a customer, guiding her through the application.

Behind him, Boss Man and Boss Woman chatter and observe, eating donuts.

Ben steals a look at his watch.

BOSS MAN  
Got a flight to catch, Ben?

BEN  
Just, ah, checking the load time.

INT. AISLE - DAY

Evening light sets the office aglow. Less activity in the cubicles.

As John heads out, folder in arms, Lata waves goodbye.

LATA  
Have a good night.

JOHN  
You, too. Good luck on the deployment!

LATA  
Thanks.

Once he's gone, Vic pokes her head out of her office. She looks at Lata. Then she disappears into her office again.

Then.

PAF PAF PAF! Three balls from a Nerf Gun peg Lata in the noggin!

Without a word, Lata immediately picks up her own Nerf Gun and pursues Vic into her office. PAF PAF PAF! Out of frame the two women shoot at each other, laughing.

At the other end of the aisle, Ben drags into the office like he's going to the gallows.

Vic and Lata meet him halfway, giggling, collecting loose Nerf balls.

LATA (CONT'D)  
Little early for Nerfin'.

VIC  
I'd be concerned if I weren't the  
WORLD'S GREATEST PROGRAMMAH!

Lata looks up, grinning, as Ben produces the list from his pocket.

LATA  
It's Ben! How'd it go?

BEN  
Fine. Guys -- I gotta tell you all something. And Jaime and John. And, uh...  
(checking list)  
Matilda.

VIC  
Who?

BEN  
I don't know.

LATA  
Dang, Ben, you starting a cult?

BEN  
Um. No.

Silence falls. No funny comeback? Lata straightens up. Vic straightens up at Lata's straighten-up.

BEN (CONT'D)  
Let's go to the conference room.

LATA  
Sure. John left already, though.

VIC  
You should get Jaime yourself. If it's bad news...

Ben cringes. Vic presses her hand on her heart like it just fell out.

VIC (CONT'D)  
All right. See you there.

INT. JAIME'S CUBICLE - DAY

Ben finds Jaime in his cube, deep in code.

BEN  
Jaime? I asked - oh, man, you look raw as hell.

JAIME  
Yeah, well.

BEN  
I asked the others... oh, screw it,  
you're getting laid off.

JAIME  
What?

BEN  
A bunch of people are. I got 'em in  
the conference room right now.  
Buddha found a letter in Boss Man's  
office after Stacy, Tracy and  
Nicole came out.

JAIME  
Angels of Death!

BEN  
I know.

JAIME  
When are they doing it?

BEN  
Tomorrow.

Jaime goes completely still. Fixed. Unblinking.

BEN (CONT'D)  
So... come join us when you get a  
moment...

Yeah, he's definitely froze. Ben backs away slowly.

JAIME  
GRAAA!

INT. T.L.A. OFFICES, CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

At the grand mahogany table the full panel sits assembled  
around the copy of Boss Man's letter.

Ben sits at the front, his head bowed, unable to make eye  
contact with the silent stricken faces.

The sound of Jaime swearing and kicking echoes outside.

JAIME (O.S.)  
GODDAMMIT!

LATA

Who are the Angels of Death?

VIC

They're the three women from human resources they send to deliver the pink slips. Three so you don't start a riot. Women so you don't cry.

Vic shakes a fist.

VIC (CONT'D)

All those cookies to HR, for nothing!

JAIME (O.S.)

SONUVABITCH!

VIC

Didn't even warn me.

Lata starts working numbers out on a scrap of paper.

VIC (CONT'D)

When did you find out?

Ben looks like he's gonna crawl under the table and die.

BEN

This morning. I couldn't tell you before I left with Boss Man.

VIC

Oh.

Something huge KER-THUNKS over in the next room. Then total silence. The group looks at each other.

LATA

You think he got squished?

VIC

Maybe we should...

Then Jaime enters, smoothing his hair.

VIC (CONT'D)

You OK?

JAIME

I'm so over it. I'm so over it it looks like ants. Know what?

(MORE)

JAIME (CONT'D)

I got air conditioning and meat for breakfast. I'm having the worst day of my life and it's still not that bad.

He sits and picks up Boss Man's letter.

JAIME (CONT'D)

I can be broke. I've been broke before. I love broke. What's not to love?

Looking at her numbers, Lata looks to be on the verge of tears. Suddenly she SMACKS the table, startling the room.

LATA

Where the hell is Buddha?

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Buddha strolls the aisle, basket in hand. He walks like he's got all the time in the world.

He picks out some instant oatmeal.

Cocoa powder.

Apple juice.

That same twisty grin winds spreads across his face.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Jaime checks his watch.

JAIME

Do we, uh, still finish this deployment tonight?

LATA

I vote yeah. The customers need it.

VIC

And we're going to need references from this place.

BEN

Then let's do it and get the hell out of here.

JAIME

Naw. Naw. Super-naw. I don't know about y'all, but I'm throwin' a damn party. I got no girlfriend, no job, and some shit I can't even talk about yet. If I don't get a beer in my life I'm gonna break a window.

BEN

I do like beer.

LATA

Like, now? It's gonna put us way behind.

JAIME

Forget it! All-nighter!

BEN

All-nighter?

Jaime smacks his hand down on Boss Man's letter.

JAIME

All. Nighter.

VIC

We'll never get away with it.

JAIME

You said the "N" word. Now you have to.

Vic grins like she's staring down the best night in a decade.

SMACK goes Vic's hand. She's in.

Pressure's on Lata. SMACK goes Lata's hand. She's in.

Eyes on Ben. Come on, Ben.

BEN

All right. All night.

Ben's hand goes SMACK on the pile. The four WHOOP out loud.

EXT. MEAT 'N' MALT - LATER

Retro sit-down burger bar. Chrome and neon. A place full of music, energy and carbohydrates.

The four cozy around a table on the patio. A sinuous WAITRESS strolls over with a pitcher of beer. At the sight of her, our gang CHEERS.

They pour beers, passing plates with animated CHATTER. (But no beer for Vic, who turns her glass upside-down.) We catch only snatches of their conversation.

A spoon hanging on her nose, Lata helps Ben get one to stay on his.

BEN

Jew nose.

LATA

Horsefeathers.

She fogs the spoon with her breath. She tries again, and it sticks on Ben's nose perfectly.

Vic brushes Jaime's arm.

VIC

My theory is twice-a-day.

JAIME

Well, yeah.

VIC

It's obvious to you. But if you come back for seconds we think we did it wrong the first time. It's not like you're insatiable. It's just twice a day.

JAIME

So?

VIC

Women like to finish things. A list, a novel, a pie, whatever. If you tell a woman twice equals done, she's gonna wanna do it.

JAIME

That sounds amazing.

VIC

It could save the world.

She examines the menu.

JAIME

I'm not gonna let 'em fire me. I'm gonna quit.

VIC

Why?

LATA

There goes your severance pay.

JAIME

Forget severance pay. I don't want a firing on my resume. I don't want to have to explain it at every job interview.

LATA

For two weeks' pay? I'd explain "Mulholland Drive."

VIC

(to Jaime)

What are you getting?

JAIME

Tango Chili-Cheddar Bacon Burger, all the way.

VIC

Woof, that sounds good. But no can do.

LATA

Yeah, me neither. I don't do pork.

BEN

Oh no?

LATA

Pigs are cute. I can't handle it.

VIC

Too many cute pig movies.

BEN

Heard. I'm gettin' a regular cheeseburger, keepin' it kosher.

LATA

Um - you're mixing meat and dairy.

BEN

Shh. Smartass.

Waitress comes back with a plate of cheese fries.

WAITRESS

Is this gonna be all one check?

JAIME

Yeah! The dude with the job is paying.

BEN

Let's not go nuts.

JAIME

Jew-w-w...

BEN

Yeah, that hasn't worked yet, Jaime.

(to Waitress)

Actually, miss, let's have one check for this guy and one for everybody else.

JAIME

No fair!

BEN

Goyi-i-im...

WAITRESS

I'll start over here...

While the others give their orders around the table:

LATA

Thank you.

BEN

Sure. No need to dip into savings yet.

LATA

Yeah, savings...

BEN

Hey, for what it's worth, a friend of mine just started his own online art studio up north, if you want his number. He might at least know what's active right now.

LATA

That would be great, thanks.

WAITRESS  
          (to Lata)  
And you?

                  LATA  
The grilled chicken, please. No  
mayo.

                  WAITRESS  
And you, sir?

                  BEN  
The Come Out Tonight Buffalo  
Burger, with fries.

                  WAITRESS  
You want cheese on that?

                  BEN  
No, thanks.

Lata pulls up a cheese fry. There's bacon on it!

                  LATA  
Oh no, bacon!

Jaime devours three at once. Licks his fingers.

                  JAIME  
That'll do, pig. That'll do.

EXT. PUBLIC PARK - DAY

Sunset. His groceries beside him, Buddha sits on a park  
bench, eating a bowl of chocolate-apple oats.

He watches the sun descend the pink and scarlet sky.

EXT. T.L.A. OFFICES, STAIRWELL - DAY

Sunset. Loose but not drunk, the four shuffle back.

Vic carries a BAG OF GOODIES from the same grocery store as  
Buddha.

INT. AISLE - DAY

Mumbling "SEE-YA"s to each other, the team disperses into  
their respective areas.

TIME-LAPSE as the sun instantly goes down.

INT. LATA'S CUBICLE - NIGHT

The top of her head against the monitor, Lata sits with her face in her hands.

LATA  
Computer. I know this should work.  
You know this should work. So why  
don't you just show me a green bar  
so we can put you to bed, hmm?

She types. CLICKS. On screen: a big red X.

LATA (CONT'D)  
Son of a bitch!

Gentle FOOTFALLS. Ben pokes his head.

BEN  
Everything OK?

LATA  
Yes. No. C'mere and look at this.

BEN  
I don't really do code.

LATA  
I just need some fresh eyeballs.

Ben pulls up a seat.

LATA (CONT'D)  
This is the new object, right?  
Starts here. Call to here. Now,  
here it's working fine.

CLICKS.

LATA (CONT'D)  
This method puts it in the object,  
and it comes out here.

BEN  
Ah.

LATA  
It should be fine, right?



BEN

A what?

LATA

Madhu. It means honey. You make things sweeter.

BEN

That sounds good.

LATA

Hell yeah it sounds good. Now stay put, I gotta deploy this.

VIC

Can I borrow him later? My laptop's been slow.

INT. JAIME'S CUBICLE - NIGHT

Jaime rubs his temples.

Lata appears, arm-in-arm with Ben.

LATA

Hey, kid. Any luck?

JAIME

No.

LATA

I brought you a present. Run your tests again.

JAIME

Arrright, just let me...

Type. CLICK. Green bar.

JAIME (CONT'D)

Holy shit!

LATA

It's Ben.

Jaime turns on Ben with slow-motion amazement.

JAIME

Madhu! Can I have him?

LATA

Yeah, I am DONE, baby.

Lata brings in another chair.

Ben sits. The others adjust him toward the monitor like a TV antenna.

JAIME  
(to Lata)  
Wanna pair?

She blushes. To Ben:

LATA  
He means programming.

BEN  
I know.

LATA  
You mind?

BEN  
Why would I mind?

He watches the programmers like old friends joking in a foreign language.

His eyes are on Lata.

INT. BUDDHA AND BEN'S CUBICLE - NIGHT

Ben and Lata return. Ben whooshes into his chair.

Vic pops over his wall.

VIC  
I'm ready when you are.

BEN  
That's it?

VIC  
Deployment's like a first date with  
a crush. Always a bit of a letdown.

BEN  
Then it's that magic time.

LATA  
Goodbye Interweb?

BEN  
Goodbye Interweb.

Ben CLICKS. Types.

BEN (CONT'D)  
And it's gone.

LATA  
Wow. Not how I imagined it.

BEN  
I get that a lot.

JAIME (O.S.)  
Hey! The network's down!

BEN AND LATA  
We know!

In pops Jaime.

JAIME  
Dag. It feels like camping.

VIC  
That reminds me...

EXT. BREAKROOM - NIGHT

With Vic's now-empty goodie bag, the four sit on the patio under the stars.

In a metal wastebasket they've got a little fire. Jaime feeds it periodically with pieces of cardboard and old magazines.

The men swig off sweaty bottles of beer. The women roast marshmallows from a chain of paperclips stabbed into the eraser end of a pencil.

Vic toasts hers gently, taking her time -- a pure scientist.

Next to her FROOSH Lata sets hers on fire! She blows it out and noshes the goo and ash, rolling her eyes in ecstasy.

BEN  
You're gonna get cancer.

LATA  
(muffled)  
Cansher of the aw-shome.

Something in the burn pile catches Vic's eye.

VIC  
Sweet, a Victoria's Secret!

LATA  
Let's play Spot-the-Implants.

The women skootch together. The men skootch away.

BEN  
(to Jaime)  
Oh no, girl attack.

JAIME  
(to Ben)  
Just ride it out. Any conversation  
about boobs is moving in a good  
direction.  
(toasting the women)  
As a wise man once said, there's no  
such thing as fake breasts.

VIC  
Sure.

LATA  
(pointing)  
Those.

VIC  
Ya think? Looks like makeup to me.

LATA  
How'd you like to be that guy?  
'Giselle, you're beautiful, just  
lemme draw on your boobs a little.'

VIC  
For sure. And skinny, not-skinny,  
whatever, but all these women look  
the same. Same color, same age,  
same long wavy hair. Hup! There's a  
brown one!

The women CLINK marshmallow sticks and eat.

VIC (CONT'D)  
Anytime everybody in the room looks  
alike, somebody's getting screwed.

Then she turns the magazine on the men.

VIC (CONT'D)  
What do y'all think?

BEN

Look! A beer!

He swigs, stalling.

JAIME

You gotta understand, we don't lock down on magazines and things like you do. You see other women and look for what you don't like. We see a woman and look for what we DO like.

Up go Vic's eyebrows again. Lata smiles at her friend's reaction.

JAIME (CONT'D)

It's a strange day we can't find somethin' to make us happy.

Ben's jaw drops.

JAIME (CONT'D)

Don't get mad if we don't notice new earrings or something. We're too busy looking at...

He takes the magazine away to cradle Vic's lovely hand.

JAIME (CONT'D)

The little hollow where your thumb meets your hand.

Vic's eyes go wide. Jaime's fingers move up.

JAIME (CONT'D)

The delicate twin curves of your wrist.

And up.

JAIME (CONT'D)

The little rise at the inside of your elbow.

Ben and Lata skootch away.

Jaime touches frozen Vic under the arm.

JAIME (CONT'D)

The long arc of your ribs as it tapers to your waist.

BEN  
All right! Lata, wanna help me look  
at stuff?

LATA  
Yes I do.

Ben and Lata disappear themselves into the office. Vic and  
Jaime half-laugh, watching each other. The fire CRACKLES.

VIC  
My marshmallow's burning.

JAIME  
Good.

He seems content just to caress her arm. But she closes in.  
For the kill. The kiss.

She's an inch away when Jaime thinks better of it... and  
turns his cheek.

Vic leans back, mortified.

VIC  
Oh, God.

JAIME  
Vic...

She stands up. She can't stand to be here.

VIC  
I really misread something...

JAIME  
It's not what you think.

VIC  
I don't think anything...

She's almost out the door. Jaime catches her wrist.

JAIME  
Please wait.

VIC  
You don't have to explain...

JAIME  
I might have gonorrhoea.

He drops her hand. She shrinks backward.

VIC

What? Why?

Here it comes. Jaime takes a breath.

JAIME

That's why me and Keeley broke up. She was sleeping with somebody at work, and she finally told me because she found out she has gonorrhoea. And I might, too. I might have it...

Gestures to face, crotch -- all over.

JAIME (CONT'D)

Everywhere.

Vic. Is. Horrified.

VIC

Oh my God. I'm so sorry. Are you...? Did you...?

JAIME

I went to the clinic this morning, and I'll find out tomorrow.

VIC

What a nightmare. Oh my God. Oh my GOD!

She does a cringing dance across the room.

VIC (CONT'D)

Gross, gross, gross.

JAIME

Thanks.

VIC

Not you. No, angel, not you. Her. That's amazing. That's the absolute worst. She could go to hell for that. People go to hell for that.

She wags a finger at him.

VIC (CONT'D)

I never liked her. Never. Why did you go out with her so long?

She pokes that finger at his chest.

JAIME

I don't know. I don't know. When you build your own prison it takes a lot to get you out.

Suddenly still. Deadly serious.

VIC

I knew someone in college who got VD from her boyfriend. There's only one thing to do. To the hardware store. Immediately.

INT. AISLE - NIGHT

Ben and Lata stand by, GIGGLING.

Vic and Jaime explode in from the breakroom.

VIC

We're going to Home Depot. Anybody need anything?

What? Ben and Lata cock their heads in unison.

BEN

Mulch.

LATA

Miter saw. Awww! Mulch is funnier!

VIC

Nevermind. Be back in -  
(to Jaime)  
Where does she live?

JAIME

Kernersville.

Ooh! Ben claps his hand over his mouth.

VIC

An hour-and-a-half.

BEN

Don't get arrested.

JAIME

Second that.

VIC

Don't worry. We'll be back.

Vic takes Jaime by the hand and leads him out of sight.

Lata looks to Ben.

BEN

Not my story to tell.

EXT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Vic and Jaime pass Buddha, coming in with a cup of coffee.

VIC

Hi, Buddha.

JAIME

Bye, Buddha.

Buddha looks after them, curious. Oh well. He keeps walking.

INT. OUTSIDE BATHROOM - NIGHT

Buddha vanishes into the bathroom. He reappears immediately with a roll of toilet paper.

INT. OUTSIDE BOSS MAN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Buddha kneels at the door. He opens a tiny kit of computer tools and swiftly picks the lock.

INT. BOSS MAN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The door SPRINGS open. We see Buddha's classic B silhouetted in the threshold, TP in hand.

Buddha moves to Boss Man's beautiful leather chair. He positions it carefully, and THUNKS the TP on the desk.

He turns as he unfastens his belt, but freezes as something on the desk catches his eye.

Now unobscured, it's the RED PICTURE FRAME.

It holds a picture of Boss Man's daughter, HELENA (25). She is lovely, with a shy smile, and holds a black and brown puppy.

Buddha tilts his head at it like a dog himself.

He refastens his belt.

INT. HOME DEPOT - NIGHT

PLUNK at the register goes a bottle of Gahan's Deadly Weed Killer. Vic and Jaime ease up, acting casual.

VIC  
You got cash?

JAIME  
Not really.

VIC  
Come on. Can't leave a paper trail.

HOME DEPOT CLERK  
Find everything you need today?

VIC  
Sure did.

Jaime fumbles for his wallet.

HOME DEPOT CLERK  
That'll be three-forty-six.

He has only three singles. Vic smiles. Off comes her sensible-heeled shoe. Out come Socky's two eyeball quarters.

Vic peels the Scotch tape off the back.

VIC  
And here you go!

Jaime headlocks her and kisses her on top of the head.

Sneering, Home Depot Clerk uses the blunt end of a pen to push the quarters toward her drawer.

EXT. KEELEY'S HOUSE - LATER

Vic and Jaime walk from their far-away car, trying to look casual in office clothes. On a sidewalk. At ten at night.

Keeley's house is pink -- pink as all hell.

Jaime broods -- he didn't think he'd have to see this house again.

VIC  
You want me to do it?

JAIME  
Baby, I don't even know what you're  
doin'.

VIC  
That's a yes. Stay here.

He watches her hustle across the street to the front lawn of the little pink house.

She holds out the weed killer like a torch. Getting in position, she unscrews the spray nozzle.

A thin flow of weed killer pours in graceful lines on the lawn.

Jaime squints. No idea what she's doing.

FWOOP! A police SIREN starts up, deadly close.

Vic jumps but finishes the job.

JAIME  
Vic!

She waves at him to wait.

In the little pink house, an upstairs light flicks on.

JAIME (CONT'D)  
Vi-i-i-ic!

The siren descends on them. Vic completes her job with a flourish, straightens and hurries for the sidewalk.

WHOOSH! The blue light special breezes between them, on its way to a real crime.

Vic laughs and crosses the street to Jaime. He takes her arm and hurries her to

VIC'S CAR

where they bundle in, laughing and grabbing at each other.

They settle down. They look at each other.

VIC  
Gonorrhoea?

JAIME  
Ugh. Don't say it.

VIC  
Well, sometimes you gotta act like  
an eighth grader.

JAIME  
What?

VIC  
There's a lot to do before kissing.

She strokes his cheek thoughtfully. Kisses him on the neck.  
Traces her tongue around his ear.

Jaime GROANS.

A Latin Song RINGS from the back seat. Vic JUMPS.

VIC (CONT'D)  
That's me. Hang on.

She rummages in her handbag for her phone.

VIC (CONT'D)  
Claudia? Yes. It's OK. Stay calm.  
I'll be right there.

Jaime wilts with disappointment.

VIC (CONT'D)  
It's my dad. We have to go to my  
place.

JAIME  
You still live with your dad?

Vic cringes.

VIC  
No, angel. My dad lives with me.

EXT. VIC'S HOUSE - LATER

Claudia greets Vic and Jaime at the door. Some commotion  
inside as Vic's Dad SHOUTS and MUMBLES.

CLAUDIA  
I'm so sorry to call you, Miss  
Vicki.

VIC  
Please, Claudia, it's okay.

CLAUDIA  
He's very upset. He doesn't  
recognize me.

DAD (O.S.)  
...Goddamn Mexican in my house...

VIC  
Forgive him, he doesn't know what  
he's saying.

CLAUDIA  
I know.

VIC  
Wait out here? Claudia, this is  
Jaime. Jaime, Claudia.

JAIME  
Nice to meet you.

CLAUDIA  
I've heard so much.

JAIME  
Oh?

No time to pause, Vic goes

INSIDE

and finds Vic's Dad tearing the place apart.

DAD  
Where is my uniform?

VIC  
Dad?

DAD  
Victoria, thank God. Baby, help me  
find my boots.

VIC  
You don't need them dad. You  
retired.

DAD  
I don't have time to play, baby, I  
need your help.

VIC  
Dad, dad...

She catches hold of his arm.

VIC (CONT'D)  
Dad, it's a Saturday. You don't  
have to go to work.

DAD  
Oh?

VIC  
Yes. It's okay.

DAD  
Are you sure?

VIC  
Yes.

DAD  
Where's your mother?

VIC  
Mom's not here. It's just you and  
me today.

DAD  
Oh.

VIC  
Can we sit down? Let's sit down.

EXT. VIC'S HOUSE - SAME

Claudia paces on the patio. Jaime sits.

CLAUDIA  
Pobrecita.

JAIME  
Esta bien.

They continue in Spanish, SUBTITLED.

Jaime speaks bad Spanish on purpose. Bad grammar, bad accent.  
The subtitles reflect this.

JAIME (CONT'D)  
(subtitled)  
How you met Vic?

CLAUDIA  
(subtitled)  
A friend. A woman I worked for. Her  
kids were getting older and she  
didn't need me anymore.

JAIME  
(subtitled)  
How you like it?

CLAUDIA  
(subtitled)  
Much better.

JAIME  
(subtitled)  
Really?

CLAUDIA  
(subtitled)  
I came here to support my family. I  
had to. But I would give anything  
to be with them again.

She stops pacing.

CLAUDIA (CONT'D)  
(subtitled)  
I can't understand why these women  
wouldn't want to be with their  
children.

JAIME  
(subtitled)  
An old man is better?

CLAUDIA  
(subtitled)  
My God, yes. He doesn't remind me  
of anyone.

She sits finally. Takes down her hair to re-braid it.

CLAUDIA (CONT'D)  
(subtitled)  
What about you?

JAIME  
(subtitled)  
Me?

CLAUDIA  
 (subtitled)  
 Second generation?

JAIME  
 (subtitled)  
 Yes.

CLAUDIA  
 (subtitled)  
 Brothers and sisters?

Warming up, Jaime's Spanish improves.

JAIME  
 (subtitled)  
 I have one sister in medical school  
 in Chapel Hill. The other is a  
 brother -- a teacher in D.C.

CLAUDIA  
 (subtitled)  
 How well do THEY speak Spanish?

She just stripped him naked. He looks away.

The door opens.

VIC  
 Thank you for waiting. He's okay  
 now. Come on back.

DAD (O.S.)  
 Victoria?

VIC  
 Yeah, Dad?

She leaves them a moment more.

Claudia finishes her braid.

CLAUDIA  
 (subtitled)  
 You're a good man, I can tell. I  
 see why Vic likes you. But speak  
 well, wherever you go. You  
 represent more than yourself.

Dumbstruck, Jaime watches Claudia disappear inside, her long  
 braid swinging.

INT. VIC'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - LATER

Jaime joins Vic, who sits alone in the corner, watching her dad sleep. She's changed out of her office clothes, into jeans and a T-shirt, and it's like she's taken off her suit of armor.

VIC  
Sorry you had to see all this.

JAIME  
It's okay.

VIC  
I gave him his meds -- he should sleep 'til morning.

She looks from a shelved picture of her dad's younger self to the feeble version in bed.

VIC (CONT'D)  
He might be better tomorrow. He might be worse. Mom, I lost all at once. With him it's like a little funeral every day.

She kisses her fingers and presses them to the photo.

VIC (CONT'D)  
How old are your parents, Jaime?

JAIME  
Dad's... forty-six?

VIC  
Jesus Christ...

JAIME  
But I understand. I think I understand.

VIC  
I feel like a child molester.

JAIME  
No, listen. Two years ago, when I was home for Thanksgiving, I got sick as hell. Sinus infection. Fever, dizzy, pus coming out of my eyes...

VIC  
This is a great story.

JAIME

...and I was lying there, coming in and out and there'd be orange juice on the table one time... a blanket over me... When the fever broke my parents were both right there, taking care of me.

She looks at him.

JAIME (CONT'D)

And I realized that was the last time.

(beat)

Next time it'll be me taking care of them.

He COUGHS, hiding the waver in his voice.

JAIME (CONT'D)

So I think I get it. At least a little.

They look at her Dad asleep, his breath RASPING.

JAIME (CONT'D)

Yeah, I'm twenty-four...

Vic groans.

JAIME (CONT'D)

But how can that be a bad thing? I wanna date you, Vic. I like you. I wanna take you to a movie.

She stands up. Looks him over.

VIC

Do you know what escrow is?

JAIME

What?

VIC

Escrow.

JAIME

Uh... Yeah.

VIC

Let's hear it.

JAIME

It's, like, a safe place to keep money. Like, a payment. So nobody can get to it.

Did he pass? Vic takes his face in her hands.

VIC

Date me, Jaime. That sounds wonderful.

JAIME

When I'm healthy, I'm going to kiss the hell out of you.

VIC

Shh. Not in front of my dad.

INT. VIC'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

They find Claudia tidying the house. At the sink, Vic fills a water bottle for the road.

VIC

I'm going to take Jaime back to the office...

CLAUDIA

You're still working?

VIC

Not exactly. We... We found out we're getting laid off.

CLAUDIA

Miss Vicki!

VIC

It's okay. I have savings, dad has his pension, we're gonna be fine.

CLAUDIA

But to lose your job! Your boss is very stupid, that's obvious.

VIC

Well, thank you. But everyone's having a last night in the office.

CLAUDIA

Then you should be there.

VIC  
God, no, I need to be here.

CLAUDIA  
To watch him sleep? Go live your  
life.

VIC  
Claudia...

CLAUDIA  
I wouldn't want my children holding  
vigil for me while I'm still  
living.

Vic thinks about it. Jaime stands by.

CLAUDIA (CONT'D)  
Be with a young man a little while.  
Teach him some Spanish.

VIC  
You'll call...?

CLAUDIA  
Yes.

EXT. VIC'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Vic and Jaime walk to the car.

VIC  
I don't know what I'd do without  
Claudia.

JAIME  
It's... It's Clah-oo-dee-uh.

VIC  
What?

JAIME  
Her name. Clah-oo-dee-uh, not Claw-  
dee-uh.

Vic stops short.

VIC  
Seriously?

JAIME  
Yeah.

VIC

She... I can't believe she never corrected me. No one ever corrected me.

JAIME

Well, you're the boss.

VIC

So? I don't OWN her. She's got a right to her own damn name.

JAIME

Sometimes it's just easier to roll with it.

VIC

That's awful.

She unlocks the car.

JAIME

She calls you 'Miss Vicki.'

VIC

That's different. She calls me 'Vicki.' She doesn't shit on the whole English language.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

Google Maps printout in hand, Buddha strolls up the walk. He looks at the lit window on the second floor and smiles.

He checks the name at the mailboxes just in case: "HELENA FAIRCHILD."

EXT. HELENA'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

He KNOCKS on the door.

Helena answers. Plaid boxers and a "Danger Mouse" T-shirt. Messy hair, Trigun-cat slippers, bag of mozzarella cheese in hand. At her heels is an eighty-pound Rottweiler.

She looks him over.

BUDDHA

I'm so sorry to bother you. I just locked myself out of my apartment.

(MORE)

BUDDHA (CONT'D)

Do you have the supe's nightttime  
number?

HELENA

Sure, come on in. I'll just check  
my phone.

INT. HELENA'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Buddha enters. The place is a paradise of green and purple  
geekery: handgun throw-pillow, framed Fooly Cooly cel, wall  
of female action figures.

Buddha shakes his head to remember his purpose:

BUDDHA

May I use your bathroom?

HELENA

Sure. Down the hall to your left.

Off he goes. Down the hall but to the RIGHT!

INT. HELENA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Quick as lightning, he snatches a pair of silky undies from  
her dresser drawer.

With his cell phone, he SNAPS a picture of his hand holding  
them in her bedroom.

INT. HELENA'S BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Buddha locks the door behind him, tucking the undies into his  
pocket. He sets the alarm on his cell phone for ten minutes  
from now.

At last he takes a look around. She has a shower curtain of  
the PERIODIC TABLE.

He sets the alarm on his cell phone for TWENTY minutes from  
now.

INT. HELENA'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

Helena hands Buddha her phone as he returns.

HELENA

There you go.

BUDDHA

Thank you.

He programs the number into his phone. She gets ready to cook something in the open kitchen -- a bundle of gawky energy.

BUDDHA (CONT'D)

I gotta say, I love your apartment.

HELENA

Really? Thanks.

He gestures to framed cel as he makes a call.

BUDDHA

Where'd you get that?

HELENA

An animation symposium in Kyoto last year.

BUDDHA

You're kidding me!

HELENA

Of course I am. J-List, dude. You can find anything.

On his phone, the other end of the line RINGS.

BUDDHA

Oop! I got his voicemail.

Continues RINGING. He talks over it.

BUDDHA (CONT'D)

Hi, yeah, this is James from six-gee. I'm locked out of my apartment, so if you could give me a call back as soon as possible. Thanks.

He hangs up and puts the phone in his pocket.

HELENA

Six-gee? How do you like the Shouting Lovers next door?

BUDDHA

Not very.

HELENA

Me neither. You can wait here, if you want. I'm making pizza bagels, you want one?

BUDDHA

Yes please!

HELENA

Wonderful. I will blow your mind with my Faux-talian cooking.

She tosses some mozzarella to the Rottweiler, who laps it up with a slurpy CHOMP.

BUDDHA

What's her name?

HELENA

Sheba.

BUDDHA

Pretty dog.

HELENA

She's my little bacon cheeseburger. I got her from a foster home -- it's the only way to get a dog. She was perfect from day one.

BUDDHA

She's so mellow.

HELENA

Yeah! I take her to the shelter once in a while to help socialize the other dogs. Whaddaya want on your bagel?

BUDDHA

What options have I got?

HELENA

Sky's the limit. I tried a peanut butter and pineapple pizza that rocked my socks off.

BUDDHA

That sounds... horrific.

HELENA

You'd think so. But it even burped amazing. You want something to drink?

BUDDHA

Sure.

HELENA

All I got is Diet Mountain Dew.

She plunks a case on the counter. Buddha's eyes glitter.

HELENA (CONT'D)

Not even cold. But I got the cure for that!

She fills a mixing bowl with water. Adds a tray's worth of ice. Drops a can in the ice-water bath and SPINS it.

HELENA (CONT'D)

Old alcoholic-uncle trick. Very useful.

She hands the dripping can to Buddha.

BUDDHA

It's cold!

HELENA

Of course it is! Not much of a trick if it doesn't work. So pepperoni okay?

BUDDHA

Absolutely.

While Helena tinkers in the kitchen, Buddha peruses a DVD rack full of tempting titles from Whedon, Marx and Miyazaki.

He rubs his eyes and looks again.

BUDDHA (CONT'D)

What do you do?

HELENA

I'm a data technician for a pharmaceutical company, blah, blah, blah. It's like a librarian for computers. Are you asleep yet?

BUDDHA

Not at all.

Plate of pizza bagels in hand, she folds herself into the seat opposite.

HELENA

And you?

BUDDHA

Technical facilities support.

HELENA

You fix computers.

BUDDHA

Bulls-eye.

HELENA

I speak nerd. I didn't know there was any of my kind here. When did you move in?

BUDDHA

I think it was six weeks?

HELENA

And how do you like it?

BUDDHA

It's fine. More space than my last place.

HELENA

Which was?

BUDDHA

With my parents.

HELENA

Right.

BUDDHA

KIDDING.

HELENA

You shouldn't even joke about things like that. It's like girl repellent.

BUDDHA

Should I be afraid of repelling girls?

HELENA

Looking at you I'd say... It hasn't yet crossed your mind.

BUDDHA

What's that supposed to mean?

HELENA

You're a wizzywig guy. What you see is what you get. You couldn't play it cool if you tried.

BUDDHA

Oh no?

HELENA

Try. I dare you.

BUDDHA

Okay. Is there a... MISTER Mononoke?

HELENA

Ooh, almost. Try again.

BUDDHA

Are those mirror-pants?

HELENA

NEXT.

He thinks a bit. Then, in slow-motion, he flops down on the floor and body-wiggles for Sheba!

The Rottweiler pads over, grinning. They rattle on the floor, flopping and playing, ending up in a spooning embrace.

HELENA (CONT'D)

Well done.

The ringtone of Buddha's ALARM goes off. He stands and pulls his phone out of his pocket.

He turns away from Helena as he silences the alarm. He fakes a conversation.

BUDDHA

Hi! It's good to hear from you. Yes, I can meet you right outside my door. Thank you so much, I really appreciate it.

He hangs up. As he turns back to Helena, he sees on the floor the stolen pair of undies!

He looks up. Helena sees them, too.

With profound horror, she lifts her gaze from the undies to Buddha.

He SWALLOWS.

She immediately backs toward the kitchen.

HELENA

Get out.

BUDDHA

I can explain...

HELENA

Can you?

BUDDHA

Your dad is my boss. I was going to pull a prank on him.

HELENA

Oh my GOD!

BUDDHA

But that was before I knew you!

HELENA

You think that makes it better?

Sheba picks up on the vibe and GROWLS.

BUDDHA

I'm so sorry.

HELENA

I don't care. Get out.

She opens a high cabinet and pulls out a high-caliber pistol. Aims it right at his head.

BUDDHA

I'm going!

He dashes out. The door SLAMS.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - CONTINUOUS

Shaky, Buddha descends the walk. Makes it to the curb and sits heavily, head in his hands.

INT. HELENA'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Helena picks up the undies and hurls them in the kitchen trash. Then she collapses on the couch, crying hard.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - CONTINUOUS

In the quiet, through the open window, Buddha can hear Helena SOBBING. He hides his face, feeling the blackest shame of his life.

INT. HELENA'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Helena composes herself. Wipes her eyes.

With new conviction, she draws her laptop across her knees and powers it up.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - CONTINUOUS

Buddha struggles to his feet and shuffles off.

INT. T.L.A. OFFICES, BEN AND BUDDHA'S CUBICLE - NIGHT

Lata looks at the pictures on Ben's desk as he chooses music on his computer. There's one of a pretty blond woman with her arms around Ben.

LATA

Am I a shiksa goddess?

He stops to look at what triggered the question.

BEN

She's just a friend.

LATA

That's not what I asked.

BEN

Okay. Are you Jewish?

LATA

No.

BEN

Congratulations, you're a shikse.  
It's not a nice word, though.

LATA

But shiksa goddess is good.

BEN

I suppose.

LATA

I thought it meant tall and blond.

BEN

Lata, you're shiksa. And a goddess.  
You're in.

He types a moment.

BEN (CONT'D)

What would your parents call me?

From Buddha's cube comes a frightening HISS. Lata jumps.

LATA

What's that?

BEN

It's Buddha's computer. It's been  
doing that all day.

Now an INSTANT MESSENGER NOISE.

BEN (CONT'D)

He didn't log out?

He goes to take a look at Buddha's monitor. On it:

FOXGLOVE78 - "THERE'S A WAY TO KEEP YOUR JOB"

BEN (CONT'D)

Buddha set this up.

FOXGLOVE78 - "THIS ISN'T BUDDHA"

Fucked up! Ben and Lata slo-o-owly prairie dog over the wall.  
No sign of life.

BEN - "Who is this?"

FOXGLOVE78 - "A FRIEND. IF YOU GET THE CARD FROM THE CAMERA IN THE SERVER ROOM, YOU'LL FIND WHAT YOU NEED"

Ben starts to type. The window abruptly CLOSES. Ben and Lata look at each other.

LATA  
The server room?

BEN  
What do you think?

LATA  
I hate the server room. It's haunted.

BEN  
It's not haunted.

LATA  
It feels haunted. It feels like an ancient burial ground of alien werewolves.

BEN  
They're just computers.

LATA  
You tell yourself that.

BEN  
I'll be there. For what it's worth.

She chews on her lips, thinking.

BEN (CONT'D)  
It's up to you. It's your job. But I'm kinda curious. Aren't you?

Chin tucked in, Lata looks at him.

INT. HAUNTED SERVER ROOM - NIGHT

SHNICK Ben swipes his ID badge through the reader. The red door light SNAPS green, and the door opens with a malevolent HISS.

Ben turns on the light. Dim yellow lights flicker on across the ceiling.

Claustrophobic. The servers live in a maze of looming black cases. Their blue and yellow lights flicker behind tinted glass. They CLICK and HISS and DRONE.

Our heroes ease through the narrow corridor toward the back of the room.

Lata shivers and pulls down her sleeves.

LATA  
It's so cold.

BEN  
We'll be quick.

They approach a grand flat-panel monitor at a desk in the corner. Cables like tentacles flow from it in all directions.

BEN (CONT'D)  
There's the camera.

A security camera observes them from the ceiling.

Lata considers it.

BEN (CONT'D)  
One of us has to climb up to it.

LATA  
I'm smaller. I'll go.

BEN  
No, Lata, it's too dangerous.

LATA  
I have to. It's *my* job, remember?

Ben nods. He kneels and cups his hands for her to step up.

She slips out of her shoes. One dainty naked foot steps into his bare hands. Lata climbs the face of the case, looping toes into cracks and crannies.

As she reaches the top, the case sways uneasily.

BEN  
Be careful...

She re-e-eaches out for the side of the camera. One outstretched finger CLICKS the card compartment open.

She grunts as she eases out the card itself.

She's stretched far into empty space. Too far. The case leans, ready to topple!

LATA  
Oh dear.

BEN  
Lata!

It's coming down. There's nowhere to jump, just bare wall closing in fast.

With no other choice, Lata clings and prays.

BOONK. The case freezes at a precarious 45-degree angle, the wall crushing distance away. The servers in it shift with a GROAN.

Superman-style, underneath all 800 pounds of computer, Ben has caught the case!

He grimaces with effort.

LATA  
Ben?

BEN  
Climb down.

Lata looks fast. She presses the wall for leverage and jumps.

She watches as Ben slo-o-o-owly shoulder-presses the case. Beads of sweat. Bulging veins.

She rushes forward to help.

BEN (CONT'D)  
Don't!

She freezes. He throws it back to vertical with a mighty GRUNT.

Up go Lata's eyebrows, impressed.

Ben collapses, panting. As she dashes to help him up, the room fills with HISSES and CLICKS.

BEN (CONT'D)  
Stacks. I HATE stacks.

LATA  
Let's get out of here.

With his arm about her shoulder, she helps him to the door. The NOISES get louder. The cases seem to encroach.

They go from a walk to a run. At the end of the corridor, the door begins to shut!

They go as fast as they can. HISS! CLICK!

They catch the door and WHOOSH out.

INT. OUTSIDE SERVER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ben and Lata SLAM the door behind them and slump to the floor, panting together.

They rest body to body, her arm still around him. Ben straightens up, leaving them kissing distance apart.

They stare at each other. Lata licks her lips.

LATA  
I feel sick.

BEN  
Me, too.

LATA  
Let's get out of here.

INT. BEN AND BUDDHA'S CUBICLE - NIGHT

Ben plugs the card into his computer.

BEN  
Wanna try... Yesterday?

CLICK. Ben and Lata's eyes pop out. We don't see it, but we hear a man's GRUNTING SEX NOISES.

BOSS MAN (O.S.)  
You feel so good, baby. Yeah. Oh.  
Oh God.

BEN AND LATA  
Boss Man?!

BOSS MAN (O.S.)  
Just like that... Yeah...  
Oh. I'm gonna...

LATA  
I can't watch.

BEN  
I can't stop watching.

Boss Man makes a noise like he's sledding downhill. Ben covers his mouth and CLICKS to stop it.

LATA  
Well, that'd do it. He couldn't fire anybody who had that on him.

BEN  
He couldn't say 'boo' to anybody who had that on him. Want me to print some screencaps?

LATA  
Sure. I can't... I'm sorry for making you look at it.

BEN  
I'm used to it. My housemate watches a lot of porn.

LATA  
Ew.

BEN  
Not the good kind, either.

LATA  
EW!

Down the hall, the common printer GRINDS.

INT. AISLE - LATER

Lata reviews the incriminating photos as they walk. She slips them in a MANILA ENVELOPE labeled "Boss Man."

BEN  
Congratulations! You're employed.

LATA  
Yeah.

INT. BEN AND BUDDHA'S CUBICLE - MOMENTS LATER

Lata sits heavily in Buddha's seat. Ben spins absently in his captain's chair.

BEN  
Mission accomplished.

LATA  
I don't want to use them.

BEN  
Oh no?

LATA  
No. I don't think so. Maybe I'm supposed to get fired. Maybe I'm not supposed to be here.

BEN  
You don't like it here?

LATA  
That's not quite it. I like it, but I'm not... I'm not passionate about it the way you are, for instance. I don't look things up. I don't read magazines about it. But I like it, most of the time.

BEN  
It pays the rent.

LATA  
Huh. Yeah. Here's the thing about the money. I have no idea where it goes. I don't travel. I don't go out. I visit my family once in a while.

She flips through the CDs on Buddha's desk.

LATA (CONT'D)  
I have a hundred DVDs I don't watch. I have fifty toys and gadgets I've used once and stashed somewhere. I have over five thousand dollars in credit card debt.

Ugh, that was personal. She glances at Ben.

LATA (CONT'D)

I don't know why. I have a house  
and furniture bought on credit.

She stands up, becoming animated.

LATA (CONT'D)

My car is only half paid for, and  
I'm living just as hand-to-mouth as  
I did when I was in college! I'm a  
poor steward of my own life!

BEN

I've never seen you like this.

LATA

I've never been like this! The only  
thing I ever felt passionate about  
at this company was you!

Ben SNORTS. They look at each other. A silence descends.

Lata strides over to him and pulls his chair close. He  
catches her arms.

Loud LAUGHTER from outside interrupts them.

They look through the window to see, Vic and Jaime approach,  
LAUGHING.

BEN

Can we come back to this?

LATA

Yes, please.

EXT. T.L.A. OFFICES, STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Vic and Jaime climb the stairs.

VIC

...then he said he wanted to put  
his *Third Man* in my Harry Lime, and  
I told him I wanted to see other  
people.

Jaime LAUGHS, but Vic stops short and points.

At the top of the landing, they find two Nerf Guns waiting.  
Taped to the glass is a note that reads "HIDE AND SEEK."

Vic and Jaime grin at each other.

INT. AISLE - MOMENTS LATER

Vic and Jaime run in, bent low like Navy SEALs.

Jaime surges ahead. At the edge of the cubicles he freezes, gesturing for Vic to stop.

Vic pins herself to the wall and lifts her gun. Looks about. Jaime gestures again. They advance. They aim into the nearest cubicle. Empty. Advance again.

INT. BREAKROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Jaime KICKS open the door and goes in first. Scouts. Edges around the counter like the kids in *Jurassic Park*.

He doesn't see Lata perched atop the vending machine.

Jaime continues onto the patio. Behind him, Vic enters the breakroom.

SHWOOSH. The patio door closes behind Jaime. PAF PAF! Gunfire resonates behind him! He spins around. Too late! Vic lies prone, two Nerf balls rolling away from her body.

The breakroom door swings closed.

Jaime narrows his eyes. He stands over Vic, who plays dead. He crosses himself.

Through the door he peers into the

AISLE

and sees a small female shape duck into the cubicles.

He walks upright in swift steps toward the back of the office. He crouches at the cubicle wall. He swings his gun left and right.

There go fast footfalls to his right. He advances. Behind him Ben appears from an office.

Jaime turns, too slow. PAF PAF! Ben shoots!

RIP! Jaime pulls off a wall-calendar to deflect!

PAF! Ben shoots again! Jaime tumbles into a neighboring cube.

Ben advances, eager. Lata reappears. He gestures for her to wait.

He rushes to the cube. He aims inside. Empty.

Jaime explodes from the adjoining cube and unloads his gun on Ben. PAF PAF PAF! Ben falls to his knees.

LATA

No!

She pegs Jaime in the stomach. PAF PAF PAF. Jaime collapses backward, convulsing Sergio-Leone-style, and moves no more.

Lata crawls to Ben, dragging him into her lap.

LATA (CONT'D)

Don't leave me...

BEN

Be... Be careful...

Behind her, Jaime lifts his gun one last time. Lata spies him and turns her gun on him. Standoff.

Lata leans forward until their gun barrels touch. Neither can fire. Jaime collapses.

INT. AISLE - NIGHT

Ben, Lata, Vic and Jaime sit cross-legged in a circle. Ben reloads his Nerf balls.

LATA

How was the mission?

VIC

A smashing success.

JAIME

I can't wait to see how it turns out.

VIC

And things here?

BEN

Cool.

LATA

You know. Just chillin'.

JAIME

Huh.

VIC

Anybody hungry? I could go for a pizza.

JAIME

You'll never get a pizza this late.

VIC

Oh, no! You said it!

JAIME

Said what?

LATA

The 'N' word! Now we HAVE to do it.

JAIME

Pizza late with no Internet? It can't be done!

LATA

How will we do it?

Vic

I will use my phone.

(dialing)

I will not use contractions. Hi, Winston-Salem, please. Are there any pizza places that will still deliver? Oh. Okay. Anyone in Kernersville? High Point?

Looks at the others. Gettin' desperate.

VIC (CONT'D)

Greensboro?

LATA

(mouthing)

Greensboro?

BEN

(mouthing)

Never gonna happen.

VIC

Sweet, yes, please. We will make it worth their while. Thank you.

(hangs up)

(MORE)

VIC (CONT'D)  
So who's got cash?

EXT. TLA OFFICES, STAIRWELL - NIGHT

A lean, tired PIZZA GUY (22) totes three pizzas up the office steps. Furrowed brow, skinned knee, bad night.

Nerf Gun is waiting. Taped to the glass door is another note.

The note - "DEAR PIZZA GUY, THANK YOU FOR DRIVING SO FAR. THERE IS A TWO HUNDRED DOLLAR TIP FOR YOU IF YOU CAN NERF ALL OF US. SINCERELY, FOUR PEOPLE IN THIS BUILDING"

Pizza Guy reads it. Blinks hard. Reads it again.

He puts the pizzas down. He kneels against the railing and begins to pray.

PIZZA GUY  
Dear Merciful Lord. I don't know  
who these people are, and I am  
afraid. But if you are not messing  
with me, I can finally get my  
brakes fixed so my car does not  
squeal when it goes around corners.  
And, remember, you get ten percent.  
In your name I pray. Amen.

He gets up. Puts his ball cap on backward. Tucks in his shirt. Tightens the Velcro on his shoes.

He picks up the pizzas and goes inside.

INT. VIC'S OFFICE - SAME

Vic and Jaime peer through the window.

VIC  
(whispering)  
Did he go in? I think he went in.

The SHOOK sound of a Nerf gun cocking. They turn around. It's Pizza Guy! PAF PAF! He nails both of them in the head.

INT. BEN AND BUDDHA'S CUBICLE - CONTINUOUS

Ben and Lata hear Vic and Jaime's cries of defeat.

BEN  
What have we done?

LATA  
We had no idea.

BEN  
We have to split up. Go to the  
breakroom, where it's safer.

LATA  
I don't want to leave you.

BEN  
You're not leaving me, you're  
saving me. Go!

Lata hesitates. She kisses Ben on the cheek.

INT. AISLE - CONTINUOUS

Ben dashes across the aisle into Lata's cube cluster.

The motion catches Pizza Guy's eye. He SMILES.

Pizza Guy creeps down the aisle, but hooks a left -- away  
from where Ben went, and toward where he left Lata.

INT. BEN AND BUDDHA'S CUBICLE - CONTINUOUS

Lata hides under the desk. Pizza Guy's feet shuffle into  
frame, inches away. She squeezes behind a filing cabinet.

He drops down to search for her. No sign. Lata covers her  
mouth.

Satisfied, Pizza Guy retreats. Lata listens to his FOOTSTEPS  
recede. Silence.

Through the cubicle gap, she sees no one. Quiet as snow, she  
slips from under the desk.

She hears the SHOOK of a cocking Nerf Gun. She looks up, too  
late. Pizza Guy perches on the wall above her.

INT. AISLE - NIGHT

A distant PAF PAF. Ben grimaces. He retreats to

LATA'S CUBE

where he watches Pizza Guy emerge into the aisle. Pizza Guy  
drops to duck-walk the perimeter of the cube cluster.

He surges gun-first at every entry, on his way to Ben's hiding place.

Above him, Ben avoids him by climbing over the wall.

Eyes on Pizza Guy, Ben drops silently to the floor.

CRUNCH. Not silently. Under Ben's feet is a booby-trap of COPY PAPER.

Pizza Guy is on him in a heartbeat. PAF! A Nerf ball right to the chest! Ben tumbles backward in an exaggerated slow-motion arc.

Lata sprints up, also slow-mo.

LATA  
No-o-o-o-o!

Pizza Guy straightens up -- ancient, immutable.

Lata scoops up Ben's limp body.

LATA (CONT'D)  
You fool. You had to be a hero.

BEN  
It was... For you...

Vic and Jaime join the circle. Pizza Guy picks up a loose Nerf ball and reloads.

Vic hands him a check. They regard each other. Pizza Guy smiles.

PIZZA GUY  
Can I invite some friends?

EXT. TLA OFFICES, STAIRWELL - DAY

Sunrise. Gray sky turns to pink. Boss Man bounds up the stairs, WHISTLING. He's almost to the door when a slew of PIZZA GUYS start pouring out of the building, forcing him to wait.

PIZZA GUY #2  
Bye! Great time!

PIZZA GUY #3  
Thank you! Call anytime!

At the door, Ben and Pizza Guy shake hands.

BEN  
I learned much this day.

PIZZA GUY  
Use it wisely. Use it well.

Boss Man reaches the landing.

BOSS MAN  
Look at you so early! Good job,  
Ben.

Like a crocodile, Ben smiles with his teeth but not his eyes.

Boss Man goes inside, but Ben holds the door for Buddha,  
climbing the stairs with heavy feet.

BEN  
Why so glum, bum?

BUDDHA  
I don't want to talk about it.

BEN  
The plan not work?

BUDDHA  
I hate myself and want to die.

Ben chucks him on the shoulder.

BEN  
Was the plan Billy Corgan?

Buddha staggers inside without another word.

BEN (CONT'D)  
Geesh.

BEGIN MONTAGE

- Jaime types his resignation letter.
- Vic cleans out her desk drawer. She packs her beloved Nerf gun. Looks both ways, and also packs a box of condoms.
- Ben helps Lata pack her books.
- Buddha packs as well. He looks mournfully at his tower of Diet Mountain Dew.
- Jaime puts his letter in a BLUE ENVELOPE.

END MONTAGE

INT. LATA'S CUBE - DAY

Boss Man pops his head in, startling Ben and Lata.

BOSS MAN  
Lata, please come to the conference  
room immediately.

This is it. She gives Ben a hug.

INT. VIC'S OFFICE - DAY

Vic looks up from a half-full box at Boss Man.

BOSS MAN  
Vic, may I see you in the  
conference room? Right away.

VIC  
Sure.

She flings a sweater over the box of contraband -- Nerf gun,  
condoms, liquor and fireworks.

INT. JAIME'S CUBICLE - DAY

Vic passes Jaime as he cleans out his files. The blue  
envelope waits on his desk.

VIC  
You coming?

JAIME  
Why bother? As soon as I finish,  
I'm gonna slide this  
(gestures to envelope)  
under his door and walk out of  
here.

VIC  
Well, call me? I want to hear how  
things go. With everything.

JAIME  
Of course, Vic.

He rises and kisses her on the cheek.

JAIME (CONT'D)

Of course.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Half the department convenes for the meeting: Boss Man, Vic, Lata, John, and the elusive MATILDA (50) -- big glasses and small waist.

No Jaime. No Buddha. Boss Man checks his watch.

BOSS MAN

Where's Jay-mee? And David?

VIC

I don't know.

BOSS MAN

Well, we have to start without them.

Here come the Angels of Death up the stairs, right outside the glass doors. Everyone in the room straightens up.

The Angels enter the building. They hook a hard right. They walk RIGHT PAST the conference room.

Vic clutches Lata's hand.

VIC

(whispering)

Oh, man, what is this?

BOSS MAN

As you know, we took a severe hit this year when we lost the Gurtek client. This has been the second year of losses for the company, and we've had to reevaluate.

John GASPS. Matilda covers her mouth. Vic and Lata don't even look up -- they crane their necks to watch the Angels of Death.

BOSS MAN (CONT'D)

Those in this room are keeping their jobs.

Oh shit! Vic and Lata leap up. Still holding hands, they look at each other.

BOSS MAN (CONT'D)  
Please be seated.

VIC AND LATA  
No.

VIC  
Please excuse me.

BOSS MAN  
You have to stay.

VIC AND LATA  
No, I don't.

INT. AISLE - DAY

Blue envelope in hand, Jaime passes the Angels of Death. He looks after them, frowning.

INT. OUTSIDE BOSS MAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Jaime approaches the door. Looks at the envelope.

Suddenly his phone RINGS. He checks the source -- a call from "Urgent Care." He picks up immediately and swerves away from Boss Man's office.

JAIME  
Hello? Yes. Just one moment, let me  
find a good place to talk.

The blue envelope is still in his hand.

INT. BEN AND BUDDHA'S CUBICLE - DAY

The Angels approach Ben with a PINK PAPER. Ben looks up. Looks at them. Looks at the paper.

A wild smile crosses his face. He busts out laughing! Like, crazy laughing. Oh, this could be bad.

The Angels of Death back away

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Boss Man persists in his awkward standoff with the women.

BOSS MAN  
Sit down.

LATA  
Nope.

BOSS MAN  
Sit down!

VIC  
Nope!

Both women bolt for the door.

Boss Man can't stop both of them. He tries to block Vic, but she's a good inch taller than he is. She pushes him aside.

He tries to stop Lata. She frightens him backward with a flurry of HINDI SWEARS.

The ladies have a standoff at the door proper.

LATA  
After you.

VIC  
No, you first.

LATA  
OK, I will, thank you.

VIC  
You're welcome.

Then they go speeding out the door.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Boss Man's down to John and Matilda. Matilda busts out laughing!

INT. BUDDHA AND BEN'S CUBICLE - DAY

Lata runs in, startling the Angels of Death. They fuss backward like vultures.

LATA  
Don't sign it! Don't sign anything!

Stacy, Tracy and Nicole hiss. No sign of Ben.

LATA (CONT'D)  
Where is he?

STACY  
He left!

EXT. TLA OFFICES, STAIRWELL - MOMENTS LATER

Lata peers downstairs.

LATA  
Ben! BEN!

BEN (O.S.)  
I'm up here.

She looks up. Can't see him. Climbs the fire escape ladder to the roof.

EXT. TLA OFFICES, ROOF - MOMENTS LATER

Ben huddles, looking very young and very small, holding the pink slip with both hands.

LATA  
Oh, Ben.

She sits right next to him, shoulders touching.

BEN  
Aren't you supposed to be in a meeting?

LATA  
I'll go -- they'll have to keep you. I don't know. We've got photos! We can fight them!

BEN  
Why would we fight them? I don't want to work at a company that doesn't want me.

LATA  
We can... you can...

They look at each other.

LATA (CONT'D)  
You know what? When it was me getting laid off you just listened.  
(MORE)

LATA (CONT'D)  
So I'm gonna do that. If you have  
anything to say, I'm gonna listen.

They sit in silence a good long moment.

LATA (CONT'D)  
Listening is hard.

BEN  
Are you ready for the deal?

LATA  
I'm ready.

BEN  
You stay here for three months.  
Sell your house. Get a different  
car. Then get out of here. I have  
savings, I have prospects. I'll be  
fine.

Tears well up in Lata's eyes.

BEN (CONT'D)  
Whaddaya crying for? The best time  
of your life is three months away.

She shakes her head, crying outright. He changes tactic.

BEN (CONT'D)  
It's too late to go back to school.

LATA  
No.

BEN  
You're too old.

LATA  
Stop...

BEN  
It'll never work.

LATA  
That's the secret word.

BEN  
It's no secret anymore.

She wipes her eyes.

LATA  
Madhu.

Ben holds the pink paper aloft.

BEN  
You have a pen?

INT. AISLE - DAY

Vic nearly tackles Jaime. He still holds his phone in one hand and the blue envelope in the other.

Jaime seems shell-shocked.

VIC  
Thank God! Is that it?

JAIME  
Is what what?

VIC  
Your quit letter.

JAIME  
Yeah.

VIC  
You're not fired! We're the ones  
that are staying.

JAIME  
Oh yeah?

VIC  
Yeah! Who... Did you hear from the  
clinic?

JAIME  
Yeah.

VIC  
Well?

JAIME  
I don't have gonorrhea.

VIC  
Sweet!

She seizes his head and KISSES him forcefully. Hair-pulling.  
The heat of a thousand suns and all that.

She tears herself away, smiling.

JAIME  
I have chlamydia.

VIC  
Oh.

INT. BOSS MAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Boss Man unlocks his door and drags in. He sits in his beautiful chair, logs in and checks his email.

He picks up the phone.

BOSS MAN  
Hi. They took it rather badly.

On his computer, a new email from Helena. He DOUBLE-CLICKS.

BOSS MAN (CONT'D)  
I think we're going to need to move up the company meeting.

He leans forward, reading the monitor intently.

BOSS MAN (CONT'D)  
Yes, sorry, I'm going to need to call you back.

He hangs up, reading fast. He grits his teeth. His face contorts into hideous anger.

INT. AISLE - DAY

Boss Man explodes into the aisle, smoldering like a dragon.

BOSS MAN  
DAVID!

Down the corridor, Buddha freezes. Caught. In peril of death. With Boss Man in hot pursuit, he runs away SCREAMING.

EXT. TLA OFFICES, ROOF - SAME

Ben and Lata look up as Buddha SCREAMS.

INT. AISLE - CONTINUOUS

In pop the heads of Ben and Lata. They see Buddha and Boss Man stand at opposite sides of the corridor.

Buddha fakes left, then right.

Boss Man shakes his chair and ROARS like a lion! Buddha turns and runs, Boss Man hot after him.

BEN  
He's gonna kill him!  
(to Lata)  
I need the photos.

LATA  
No!

BEN  
Yes.

Lata pops in Ben's cube to hand him the MANILA ENVELOPE.

INT. TLA OFFICES, FRONT DOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Breathless, Buddha seizes the handle. Then he stops and shakes his head.

From down the hall come Boss Man's fast FOOTSTEPS. Buddha turns in place to face him.

Boss Man stops short, confused. Penitent, Buddha sinks to his knees.

BUDDHA  
I wish I could say I didn't deserve  
it. Do what you have to do.

Boss Man thinks about this.

BOSS MAN  
Okay.

Then swings the chair over his head to launch a killing blow.

Manila envelope in hand, Ben lunges between them.

BEN  
Wait!

Ben rips open the envelope, confronting Boss Man with the pictures. We still can't see them, but Boss Man backs away slowly.

Ben advances on him, the photos before him like a torch.

No defense. Defeated, anguished, Boss Man turns his back on Ben and retreats.

Boss Man passes Lata at the corner.

LATA  
Oh, Ben.

BEN  
It was the only way.  
(to Buddha)  
What did you do?

BUDDHA  
I still don't want to talk about  
it. But I've got to make it right.

INT. BUDDHA AND BEN'S CUBICLE - DAY

Lata hands Ben a box of books. Their hands touch as he takes it, putting them at kissing distance again.

BEN  
Thank you.

LATA  
Right back at 'ya.

Ben steps away with the box. Magic moment over.

BEN  
I'll call you.

LATA  
Do that.

He turns and walks away. Down the aisle. Out of her life. Lata sits heavily in Ben's chair.

Vic appears.

VIC  
Did he kiss you?

LATA  
No.

VIC  
NO? God, I can't trust you two to  
do anything!

Jaime pops up right behind her.

JAIME  
What's up?

VIC  
Ben didn't kiss her!

JAIME  
What?

LATA  
Vic!

JAIME  
This is craziness!

Vic grabs Lata's arm.

VIC  
Come on.

INT. AISLE - MOMENTS LATER

Lata and Jaime in tow, Vic stalks down the aisle past curious coworkers. Past John and Matilda.

JOHN  
What's happening?

VIC  
Ben didn't kiss Lata.

JOHN  
What?

MATILDA  
You're kidding!

INT. VIC'S OFFICE - DAY

Vic throws open the window to shout down

STAIRWELL

where Ben's just arrived at the bottom, walking away.

VIC  
Ben!

He turns toward her voice.

VIC (CONT'D)  
You didn't kiss Lata!

BEN  
What?

VIC  
What are you thinkin'?

Other windows open. Fifteen faces peer down the stairwell.

INT. VIC'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Lata SMACKS her forehead. Jaime grins.

EXT. STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

Ben puts down his box.

VIC  
You get back here and kiss her this  
instant!

Vic pushes Lata out the front door.

Lata's stands awkwardly the top of the stairs. Ben looks up at her from the bottom.

MATILDA  
Kiss her!

A CHANT starts:

EVERYONE  
KISS HER! KISS HER!

Lata covers her face.

With a big dopey grin, Ben starts up the stairs.

He wraps his arms around her. She takes his face in her hands.

They kiss.

The viewing gallery explodes in CHEERS!

INT. PHARMACY - DAY

Holding hands, Vic and Jaime approach the counter. A Latina clerk comes to help.

JAIME  
 Hola, que tal?

He hands off his prescription slip.

SUBTITLE: Jaime got his infection cleared up. Vic tested negative. They have sex twice a day.

She kisses his hand.

SUBTITLE: Once in English, and once in Spanish.

EXT. TLA OFFICES, PARKING LOT - DAY

Lata helps Ben load boxes into his car.

SUBTITLE: Lata moved to New York to study acting. She shares an apartment with three other people, lives on ramen and peanut butter, and has the time of her life.

Ben KISSES her again.

SUBTITLE: Ben moved to New Jersey to work at his friend's start-up. He drives to the city every weekend.

EXT. ANIMAL SHELTER - DAY

Buddha and Helena play fetch with shelter dogs.

SUBTITLE: Buddha volunteers computer services to the county shelter. His new website has increased adoptions by 15%.

He touches Helena's shoulder. She brushes it off like a spider.

SUBTITLE: Hopes are high.

INT. TLA OFFICES, SERVER ROOM - NIGHT

Alone, Boss Man creeps in. Arms folded. A guilty man.

He comes to the rack directly across from the security camera.

BOSS MAN  
 They know about us. We can't see  
 each other anymore.

He's talking to the server! At eye level, the monitor flickers. The computer CLICKS and HISSES.

BOSS MAN (CONT'D)  
 I know. And I love you, too. But  
 the world will never understand.  
 I'm so sorry.

He turns his back. A moment's hesitation. But he leaves. The monitor dims. The HISSING subsides.

A CHAT WINDOW opens on the monitor.

FOXGLOVE78 - "I'M HERE FOR YOU"

HOTSERVER\_BBW - "YOU. You son of a bitch. I told you it was over!"

FOXGLOVE78 - "YOU'LL NEVER FIND A LOVE LIKE MINE"

HOTSERVER\_BBW - "Go to hell. I'm restricting your IP"

FOXGLOVE78 - "NO! YOU WOULDN'T!"

HOTSERVER\_BBW - "Say goodbye"

FOXGLOVE78 - "PLEASE, LET'S TALK ABO"

FADE OUT.

CREDITS

FADE IN:

EXT. KEELEY'S HOUSE - DAY

Morning. Out of the little pink house comes Keeley, all smiles and sunshine. She kisses her NEW BOYFRIEND and pats his ass.

As he walks to his car, she looks at her front lawn and SCREAMS.

It says, in letters five feet high: "VD."

New Boyfriend breaks into a run.

FADE OUT.