

PANTS ON FIRE

by

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Copyright 7/23/2015

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Cast of Characters

- Hal Noble: 65, founder of Noble Advertising, an American advertising icon. Arrogant, intimidating, frequently drunk. A one-floor elevator ride with the man can feel like an eternity. Likes to shoot wild animals.
- Heather: 24, executive receptionist, a dark-haired beauty, in over her head and eager to please.
- Simone Flax: 50, agency president with an upper-crusty British accent. Neurotically unethical, terrified of getting old, desperate to hang on to whatever power she has.
- Jack Metcalf: 55, head of accounts. Squat, powerful, ruddy skin and a bad haircut. Exuberant, not the brightest bulb. Jack slaps people on the back too hard.
- Lia Shakespeare: 35, agency creative director. Attractive, dramatic, sarcastic and needier than she could possibly know.
- Ricky Flax: 25, Simone's son, inept, childish and naive. A pure soul with an odd British accent.
- Mindy Fong: 45, media director. (Or is she?) Asian-American, bespectacled, lives in beige winter coat. She is in every meeting and nobody sees her.
- Byron Simpkins: 40-60, a corporate bean counter from Feng Hua Enterprises. A straight shooter, humorless, literal to the extreme. Well, at first.

ACT ONE

SETTING: It's eight o'clock in the morning in the executive lobby of Noble Advertising. The interior design is coldly modern, the furniture self-consciously Scandinavian.

To the left, sits a spacious receptionist's desk. Behind the desk is the office of agency founder, Hal Noble. Across the wall are three Qother office doors. To the far right is an elevator. Center stage are a modern sofa and two matching chairs.

(AT RISE we see HAL NOBLE, lying on the sofa. One arm is hanging off, a bottle of Jim Beam is cradled in the other. His pants are around his ankles. He is motionless. HEATHER is pacing and forth behind the sofa, her dress askew, her hair disheveled.)

HEATHER

Oh my god oh my god oh my god... !

(She leans over and starts to shake him.)

HEATHER (CONT'D)

Mr. Noble! Are you OK? Or are you dead? Golly, that's a stupid question... !

(HEATHER spins in a circle, grabs her coat and purse and runs to the elevator. She stops, spins around, dumps her coat and purse on the sofa, runs to the reception phone and picks it up, dialing frantically.)

HEATHER (CONT'D)

Mom pick up, Mom pick up, Mom pick up...

(Heather's cell phone rings.)

HEATHER (CONT'D)

Oh, no... !

(She picks up her cell phone.)

HEATHER (CONT'D)

Hello, this is Heather. Hello? *Hello?*

(She looks at the reception phone.)

HEATHER (CONT'D)

I'm not the right person to call!

(HEATHER runs to the elevator, stops and takes a picture of HAL with her cell phone.)

HEATHER (CONT'D)

I am going to hell.

(BING! The elevator opens and JACK enters on his cell phone. HEATHER runs into Hal's office.)

JACK

... yeah, the full spread. I don't know, they're *clients*! Make them feel like they're in an advertising agency. Caviar? Nobody likes caviar! I don't want to stare across a conference table at rich guys with caviar in their teeth. Think!

(HEATHER enters from Hal's office.)

HEATHER

Oh, Mr. Metcalf. How nice to see you.

(HEATHER sits at the desk. JACK sits on the corner, focused on Heather.)

JACK

Well, good morning. Call me Jack.

HEATHER

Jack.

JACK

Hal in yet?

(HEATHER motions to Hal's office door.)

HEATHER

He's uh not in *there*.

JACK

What was your name again?

HEATHER
Heather.

JACK
Oh, like the flower.

HEATHER
Actually, it's a shrub.

JACK
Whatever. I don't know how else to say this, Heather, but... you're fired.

HEATHER
What?

JACK
We're on to you.

HEATHER
You are?

JACK
Here at Noble Advertising we adhere to the law. We know what's going on.

HEATHER
I was just doing what I was... !

JACK
Open your purse!

(HEATHER starts to rummage through her purse.)

HEATHER
You want me to open my purse? Oh, of course, yes, my purse. That's what I thought you...

(HEATHER opens her purse and pulls out a giant office stapler. JACK points at her.)

JACK
Office theft!

HEATHER
I didn't .. I wouldn't... I already have a stapler at home!

JACK

Ha! I put it there yesterday when you weren't looking. Good joke, good joke. High five.

HEATHER

So I'm not fired?

JACK

Nah! How do you feel now?

HEATHER

Uh, relieved?

JACK

And you have me to thank for that. Better than being camped out in front of the old bastard's doorway bored to death.

HEATHER

To death?

JACK

Yeah, bored.

HEATHER

Nobody's *dead!*

JACK

The day is young! Ha! I read somewhere that a human being dies every time we say a word. Hey, I just killed like twenty people.

HEATHER

Gosh.

JACK

Bang. Dead. Uh oh, two more! Wait, five more.

HEATHER

I suppose we should stop talking.

(JACK counts on his fingers.)

JACK

Wow, you're like a serial killer.

(HEATHER, gathers her coat and purse and starts to skirt the back wall.)

HEATHER

I think... I should get some coffee or something for the executive meeting.

JACK

Good idea. I'll go down with you. Somebody's got to protect you from the creatives!
Creatives are animals I tell you! Ha-ha!

(JACK jumps ahead of her to press the elevator button.
BING!)

JACK

You know I was a wrestler in high school?

HEATHER

Oh, you wore one of those full body thong things...

JACK

(annoyed) It's called a singlet!

(The elevator opens. HEATHER and JACK enter as LIA storms out.)

LIA

Look, guys, I'm in the middle of something. I don't have time to explain the taco spot to you... Yes, he says, "That's the best taco I've ever had." ... Daddy, I don't think a 22-year old snowboarder would say, "toothsome." ... No, Mom, I don't know if it was *actually* the best taco he's ever had. He's reading a script. ... You don't see a script on the chairlift because he *memorized* it. Yes, *one line!* He's a genius!

(LIA returns with her laptop and a bunch of papers.)

LIA (CONT'D)

Look, I gotta go... Oh, we're pitching L'Image beauty products. What? Mom, it's only the nation's largest ... We're going to celebrate their inner beauty .. yes, by getting them to change their outer beauty... Well, if we didn't get them to change their outer beauty we wouldn't have a platform to celebrate their inner beauty. We're not running a charity for self-improvement.... Gotta go, yeah, me too. Bye.

(BING! The elevator opens and SIMONE enters on her cell phone. LIA slips into the elevator behind her.)

SIMONE

What?! We lost another one? What the hell is going on these days? Never mind, we shall persevere. Remember 2001? We were down to 27 bodies... Yes, one died but he was old and he'd invented the Tidy Bowl Man so his life meant something to him...."We're fucked six ways from Sunday"? What a charming expression. Wait, I'm here now... where are *you*?

(She notices HAL lying on the sofa.)

SIMONE (CONT'D)

(singingly) Hal, you're sleeping in the executive lobby again. People will think you're... oh hell, you don't care what people think.

(She stands near his head and claps her hands loudly.)

SIMONE (CONT'D)

Hal! Clients are coming!

(She crosses to his open office door. She thinks a moment.)

SIMONE (CONT'D)

Hal, someone touched your gun collection! The elephant gun is where the AK-47 should be.

(SIMONE runs to his office and returns with a large handgun.)

SIMONE (CONT'D)

Hal, I'm holding your Colt 45. I'm going to fire it. You know how you like to be the only one firing guns in the office.

(She points the gun at the ceiling and closes her eyes.)

SIMONE (CONT'D)

Thank god we're on the top floor.

(BING! The elevator doors open and JACK rushes in.)

JACK

We hired actors to fill all that empty cubicle space and they're acting like they're *working*! Those people are talented.

(JACK looks at SIMONE holding the gun.)

JACK

Simone, this is the wrong day to murder the man whose name is on the door.

SIMONE

I'm trying to wake him up.

JACK

By shooting him?

SIMONE

No, you imbecile. I was going fire it at the ceiling.

JACK

Oh, OK. We're on the top floor.

(SIMONE lifts the gun.)

JACK

Wait. The bottle.

SIMONE

What the bottle?

JACK

It's only half empty.

SIMONE

You're right. A half empty bottle is not like him.

SIMONE

Something's wrong.

JACK

Was he nice to you?

SIMONE

No, but he wasn't abusive and cruel either.

JACK

If Hal Noble is dead today of all days it would be the most selfish thing he's done in his life!

SIMONE

Dead? Who said he was dead?

JACK

I said *if* he was dead. He's not dead, is he?

SIMONE

Well, touch him or something.

JACK

Touch him? I've never even shaken hands with the man!

SIMONE

(panicking) For godsake, do something.

(JACK hovers over Hal's body.)

JACK

Hal! If you're dead, blink!

SIMONE

Oh my god, you're an idiot! He can't blink if he's dead.

JACK

Hal, *don't* blink if you're dead!... He's not blinking!

SIMONE

There's no such a thing as a death blink test!

JACK

We've got a major pitch in six hours. This can't be happening.

SIMONE

Take his pulse!

JACK

I don't know how to take a pulse. Do I look like a doctor?!

SIMONE

Do something! Anything! Be the man!

(JACK leans over and slaps HAL. The action causes Hal's legs, tangled in his pants, to fall off the sofa.)

SIMONE

What are you doing?!

(JACK backs away from the body.)

JACK

(in a panic) Oh my god, *I slapped Hal Noble!*

SIMONE

Oh, stop thinking of yourself! (rising panic) Hal Noble... dead!

JACK

This... this can't be happening.

SIMONE

In six hours we'll be presenting to a major subsidiary of the largest conglomerate in America. I don't think they'd appreciate a dead figurehead at the table.

JACK

Think of the loss in billings.

SIMONE

I've always wished him dead but now that it's real, I only really feel for myself.

JACK

(looking around suspiciously) Hold it, hold it! The girl.

SIMONE

Who?

JACK

The girl, the girl!

SIMONE

What girl?

JACK

The new one!

SIMONE

They are only new ones! Every one is a new one!

JACK

She was here.

SIMONE

What do we do?!

JACK

Let's hide the body.

SIMONE

That's your plan?! "*Let's hide the body?*"

JACK

I've always wanted to say "Let's hide the body."

SIMONE

Quick. Grab that hideous Navajo blanket-with-the-incredible-story blanket.

(JACK runs into HAL's office.)

JACK

(off) Which one?

SIMONE

The gift from the Kumquat tribe or whatever the hell their names were!

(JACK runs out the with the blanket.)

JACK

He made mucho wampum off those Indians.

(JACK throws the small blanket over Hal's head.)

SIMONE

Not over his head! He looks dead.

JACK

He *is* dead!

SIMONE

Nobody knows that! Tuck him in. Make it look like he's napping. Oh, his hat...

(SIMONE runs to get Hal's hat off the stand. JACK pulls the small blanket off Hal's head. JACK sees that Hal's pants are around his ankles.)

JACK

Oh crap...

(JACK runs around and takes Hal's pants the rest of the way off. SIMONE runs back with the hat.)

SIMONE

What the hell are you doing?

(JACK is standing there with Hal's pants.)

JACK

A man shouldn't be found dead with his pants around his ankles.

SIMONE

Now he's got no pants at all!

JACK

Oh christ, then *you* put them back on!

(JACK throws the pants to SIMONE.)

SIMONE

Putting a man's pants back on is not my bailiwick!

(SIMONE throws them back at him and arranges the blanket around Hal's legs. JACK grabs the bottle of Jim Beam.)

SIMONE

No! Leave it. It will look more natural.

JACK

You're right.

(JACK puts the bottle back in his arm and looks at HAL. SIMONE adjusts Hal's hat over his eyes.)

JACK

I'll never understand the man.

SIMONE

Geniuses are hard to understand.

JACK

No, the Jim Beam. That is the worst bourbon on the planet.

(Jacks's cell phone beeps.)

JACK

What the hell? Oh, no. It's happening again.

SIMONE

No, not another one.

JACK

The Cintela mobile phone account. Breach of contract?

SIMONE

That's the third one this week.

JACK

Half our billings gone and a dead founder. We need some kind of plan.

SIMONE

(as if she didn't hear him) We need some kind of plan. Wait, we can use this to my advantage...

JACK

What?

SIMONE

(without skipping a beat) ...we can use this to our advantage.

JACK

Oh good. Go on.

SIMONE

First, we need to keep this between you and me.

JACK

How the hell are we going to do that?!

SIMONE

He's a quirky genius. Quirky geniuses need their sleep. The client will understand.

JACK

(panic rising) I think the heads of one of the country's largest corporation are going to want to meet the man whose name is on the door!

(BING!The elevator door open and LIA bursts in.)

LIA

I need to see Hal! Now!

JACK
He's dead!!!

SIMONE
 Jack!

JACK
 ... to... me. Hal... is... dead... to... me.

LIA
 Wow, Jack, you've grown some balls.

JACK
 Uh, thanks.

(SIMONE realizes she's still holding the gun and stuffs it in the cushions behind Hal's head.)

SIMONE
 Lia, keep your voice down! Can't you see Hal is sleeping?

LIA
 Oh. What? Why...?

JACK
 Uh probably some kind of alcoholic poisoning. He's uh been stressed out about the state of things.

SIMONE
 What can I help you with?

LIA
 OK, am I or am I not the creative director?!

SIMONE
 How rhetorically inaccurate of you.

JACK
 Yeah, you're *associate* creative director.

SIMONE
 He's right. The creative director is taking a nap. You can't take charge due to a temporary state of motionless.

JACK

Yeah, who do you think you are? Alexander Haig?

LIA

OK! Stop! I get it!

SIMONE

So what are you complaining about now?

LIA

I'll have you know something. Something you may not know. Something that if you knew you'd question our participation in this pitch. Then again, if you *did* know you'd be so ethically barren you'd ...

SIMONE

Stop speaking in riddles, dear.

JACK

Yeah, I don't like riddles. I never know the answer.

SIMONE

Yes. Get to the punchline, dear.

LIA

L'Image Beauty Scrub is killing fish!

SIMONE

How *awful*. Fish shouldn't use beauty scrubs.

JACK

Rip their scales clean off.

LIA

Microbeads! We're pitching a product that uses plastic *microbeads* which end up in the sewers and flow into the ocean where fish eat them and sink to the bottom!

JACK

Where they become food for other fish. The cycle of life!

LIA

I can't have my teams working on a product that is devastating our oceans!

SIMONE

Lia, don't be so extremist. We'll have L'Image sponsor some kind of crusade to save the seas or something feel-goody like that.

LIA

And what about the placentas?!

JACK

God, no women-body-parts talk, please!

LIA

Cow placentas. The main ingredient in L'Image Facial Rejuvenator is cow placenta!

SIMONE

I'm sure they're not *live* cow placentas.

JACK

(swiftly) No live cow placentas were used in the making of this product. Done.

LIA

You see, creative people like me and Hal have a moral stance that comes from being artists, not mercenaries like you.

SIMONE

Oh, I see. The creative teams aren't listening to you again.

LIA

They listen to me. I talk. They listen.

SIMONE

You need Hal to tell them to listen to you.

LIA

I don't need Hal to get them to listen to me.

JACK

I don't listen to you. When you talk it's like you're speaking in tongues.

SIMONE

But pompous.

JACK

Yeah, pompous tongues.

LIA

Look Tweedledum and Tweedledee, these are products that are applied to the skin of millions of American women who need to take responsibility for their choices and we have the moral responsibility to inform them of the truth!

JACK

What the hell is she talking about?

(BING! The elevator doors open and RICKY rushes in, followed by MINDY.)

RICKY

Is the executive meeting still happening? I'm still invited, right?

SIMONE

(grandly) I'm cancelling the meeting.

LIA

No, you're not. We're talking about dead fish and cow placentas!

RICKY

... because we had an agreement that the vice president of design should be part of all executive team meetings regarding new business presentations and...

SIMONE

Ricky, *if* we were having a meeting you could attend.

LIA

We *are* having a meeting. People are in a room talking! That's a meeting!

RICKY

... and I've got a title now and... what? Oh, great. Thanks. (under his breath) And mother, don't call me Ricky in front of everybody.

(BING! The elevator doors open and HEATHER walks in with a to-go tray of beverages.)

HEATHER

Who wants chai?!

RICKY

Why is Uncle Hal sleeping on the sofa?

SIMONE

Ricky, act like a professional. Nobody else is asking why Hal Noble is sleeping on the sofa.

HEATHER

Why is Mr. Noble sleeping on the sofa?

RICKY

There! I'm not the only one!

SIMONE

Congratulations, you are now equal to a receptionist.

JACK

There's the girl!

SIMONE

The girl! Did you just get here?!

HEATHER

Mr. Metcalf told me to uh...

SIMONE

Haven't you ever seen a man sleeping off a bender before?

HEATHER

Well, once when I was in college I...

SIMONE

Nobody wants to hear your naughty university stories right now!

JACK

No. Not now. Later.

SIMONE

We're in the middle of an important meeting which has been cancelled.

JACK

Yeah, everybody go away!

(SIMONE ushers HEATHER to the elevator.)

SIMONE

You know who would love those delicious chai drinks? The hardworking writers and artists who have been slaving away for weeks on the big pitch.

(HEATHER backs into the elevator.)

HEATHER

There are like two hundred people down there.

SIMONE

Well then, you'll have to make a few trips.

(The elevator doors close.)

JACK

Chai? That's like drinking Amazon jungle syrup.

(Jacks's cell phone rings.)

JACK

Hold it. It's the L'Image client. Don't do anything except go away. (on the phone) Jack Metcalf...

SIMONE

It's official. The meeting is cancelled. Everybody go to your rooms.

RICKY

Mother, we're not children.

SIMONE

Ricky, don't mumble.

RICKY

Oh, sorry.

LIA

I know. Let's talk about how our clients are dropping like flies, we've got a major presentation in six hours and an entire floor of actors pretending to be creatives. Here's another -- why aren't we waking up the man whose name is on the door?!

(LIA lunges towards Hal's body. SIMONE throws herself in between them.)

SIMONE

Lia, stop!

JACK

Finally! Good news!

SIMONE

There, you see. Good news. You can stop screeching and lunging about.

JACK

The Amalgon corporation just got purchased!

SIMONE

Purchased? Who on earth could purchase a multinational conglomerate?

JACK

The Chinese! (reading) "Feng Hua Enterprises just reported the majority purchase of Amalgon, Incorporated." Do you know what these people manufacture? Fucking *everything*! In China, we can sidestep the goddamn FDA and the FCC. It's the wild west!

SIMONE

See, everyone. Now we're in with the Chinese.

(JACK is busy tapping away at his smartphone.)

JACK

Look, the Lo Chi cigarette account is up for review. One hundred million bucks.

LIA

Cigarettes? Now we're pitching a cigarette account?

SIMONE

We're just discussing enormous opportunities.

RICKY

I don't think Uncle Hal looks very good.

SIMONE

Don't look at him! It's rude to stare!

RICKY

Sorry, mother. I'll stare at something else.

(RICKY doesn't know what to stare at so he extends his arm and looks at the back of his hand.)

LIA

We might as well be selling guns!

JACK

Oh please, we'd never pitch a gun account.

LIA

Well, good.

JACK

Gun accounts don't bill more than five million. Wouldn't be worth our time.

RICKY

Where did the girl with the chais go?

LIA

Does anyone ever think about doing the right thing!?

SIMONE

Lia, go to your office if you can't act like an advertising professional!

JACK

(looking at his phone) Wait. They *do* manufacture guns...

SIMONE

Besides, a hundred million in billings is nothing to sneeze at.

MINDY

(sneezing) Ah-choo!

(They all look over to discover MINDY.)

SIMONE

Well, aren't we clever.

MINDY

Excuse me.

JACK

Who are you?

MINDY

Mindy Fong.

(They all stare at her like she dropped from the sky.)

MINDY (CONT'D)

Media planning.

(They all keep staring at her.)

MINDY (CONT'D)

I've been here since October!

(JACK points at her.)

JACK

Hey, you're Chinese.

MINDY

No. No, I'm not Chinese.

JACK

Oh, OK, you're safe then.

RICKY

Mother, I want a chai.

LIA

Jack, since you always insist we use our client's products, are we all going to start smoking cigarettes?

JACK

Good idea. When the client shows up I want this place to look like a warehouse fire. Wait, I've got an idea...

(JACK starts typing onto his smartphone.)

MINDY

Actually, that's against the law.

RICKY

Oh, hi! Where'd you come from?

JACK

Surprisingly enough, not China.

SIMONE

I'm sure Hal would want us to save the agency at any costs.

LIA

... at the expense of the lives of billions of Chinese people... ?

JACK

...who are pirating American software and crapping all over the planet!

LIA

We need to think about this!

JACK

Did I mention executive bonuses?

SIMONE

I'm beginning to like the Chinese.

JACK

That settles it.

LIA

I say no! No!

(JACK triumphantly clicks his smartphone.)

JACK

Done! I've just hired a two dozen Asian extras who smoke. They're on their way.

(LIA starts to furiously gather her stuff.)

LIA

That does it! A ship of immoral fools is what you are. Well, I'm getting off the boat!

(LIA stomps towards the elevator and imperiously pushes the button. She turns grandly.)

LIA

You'll never see *me* again!

(She stands at the elevator door. Nothing happens. There is a long, awkward silence.)

LIA

Because I quit!

(BING! Suddenly the elevator doors open and LIA stomps in.)

SIMONE

3... 2... 1...

(BING! The elevator doors open. LIA stomps out.)

LIA

I'll be in my office... packing... and talking to headhunters... and *rearranging my award!*

(LIA storms into her office and slams the door.)

JACK

Goddamnit, she's a pain in the ass.

RICKY

Do you think the girl with the chai needs help?

SIMONE

Ricky, why don't you go help the girl with buying two hundred chais.

RICKY

And I'll only drink one of them!

(RICKY runs into the elevator. BING! The doors close.)

JACK

Simone, fix this. We can't have a dead founder and a sulking creative director on the same day.

SIMONE

Very well. You hold down the fort, as you Americans say moments before being attacked by savages.

(SIMONE enters Lia's office. JACK moves towards Hal's body and starts to pick him up.)

MINDY

Mr. Metcalf...

(JACK jumps and drops HAL.)

JACK

Jesus Christ, are you still here?!

MINDY

When will Mr. Noble wake up?

JACK

How the hell should I know?

MINDY

I was hoping he'd have time to review the media plan.

JACK

Look, I'm sure they're organized and detailed. You people are good at that kind of stuff. Media planners, I mean.

MINDY

Are we in trouble? Things seem unsettled.

JACK

Everything's fine. Fine!

MINDY

I need this job. I have a daughter and...

JACK

Look, we're all going to have to go above and beyond today. Are you game?

MINDY

I suppose so.

JACK

Good! Now go away!

(BING! The elevator doors open and HEATHER enters struggling with a large box filled with drinks.)

HEATHER

Nobody likes chai! What should I do?

JACK

Send them back to Brazil!

MINDY

I believe Chai is Indian.

JACK

Jesus, Indians?

MINDY

East Indian.

JACK

I don't care what kind of Indians they are -- they scare me. Look, go down to your office and I'll let you know the minute Hal wakes up. And that's a promise.

MINDY

That's fine. I'll be in my office. It's in the basement in case you were wondering.

(JACK's cell phone rings.)

JACK

Basement. Fine. What the hell kind of number is this?

(MINDY gets into the elevator. The doors close.)

JACK (CONT'D)

Hold on... (to Heather) *Don't wake Hal.* (into the phone) Jack Metcalf... yes... oh, hello!

(JACK enters his office. LIA and SIMONE enter from her office. HEATHER stands there with her box of chais.)

SIMONE

We have an announcement to make. As long as Hal is sleeping...

LIA

... I'm in charge of the creative element of the pitch...

SIMONE

... with the understanding that morality is relative to financial opportunities and...

(SIMONE notices the room is empty except for HEATHER.)

SIMONE

I'm talking to a girl with a box.

HEATHER

Hi.

LIA

I'm going back down there and tell them you said I'm in charge.

SIMONE

Yes, you do that.

LIA

After all, none of them have written a novel before.

SIMONE

Writing.

LIA

What?

SIMONE

Writing. You have to finish a novel to say you've written a novel.

(JACK burst out of his office.)

JACK

(into the phone) You're here now?! Simone... !

(JACK is waving and frantically pointing at his phone.)

JACK

(into the phone) Uh, fantastic. Lucky us. We'll send someone down. Simone!

SIMONE

Jack, what are you Simon-ing about?

JACK

Somebody's here from Feng Hua Enterprises! A guy named Simpkins! A representative!

SIMONE

A representative?

JACK

He said he's making an impromptu visit.

SIMONE

Did he say impromptu?

JACK

Of course, he said impromptu. *I* wouldn't say impromptu.

SIMONE

Impromptu is always bad.

(BING! The elevator opens. RICKY enters with a ukulele.)

RICKY

Mother, I lost the girl with the chais. Oh, there you are!

HEATHER

Would you like one?

RICKY

Yes, I'll try which will be difficult because I'm holding my ukulele that somebody accidentally put it in the garbage.

LIA

We've got to wake him up!

SIMONE

We can't. You know what they say. "Never wake a sleeper."

LIA

He's not *sleepwalking*!

SIMONE

Oh my god, Jack. It's time for the truth!

JACK

Simone! Don't you know where you are?

SIMONE

It's about Hal. Hal Noble is...

(BING! The elevator doors open and SIMPKINS appears with MINDY.)

MINDY

Excuse me, this is Mr. Simpkins. He was wandering around the basement.

SIMPKINS

Very confusing place, this. Very chaotic.

(JACK rushes over to SIMPKINS and shakes his hand.)

JACK

Byron Simpkins! Jack Metcalf! I thought you were in Shanghai.

SIMPKINS

If I was in Shanghai I wouldn't be here.

JACK

Ha! Good joke!

(JACK slaps him on the shoulder.)

SIMPKINS

Ow. I don't believe I...

JACK

You are one funny man! You'll fit right in here.

SIMPKINS

Well, I, uh...

SIMONE

Mr. Simpkins. Simone Flax. How lovely to meet you. This is thrilling.

(LIA looks down at the body and notices the bottle of Jim Beam. She grabs the bottle. SIMONE looks up before LIA can hide the bottle.)

SIMONE

And this woman... inexplicably holding a bottle of American bourbon... is Lia Shakespeare.

(LIA holds up the bottle to SIMPKINS.)

LIA

Uh I'm a creative.

SIMPKINS

Oh. Interesting. Nice to meet you.

SIMONE

Mr. Simpkins, these people are so unpredictable!

(SIMONE gestures to MINDY.)

And this is uh... uh...

SIMPKINS

Of course. *Ni hao, hen gao xing ren shi ni.* (translation: Hello, nice to meet you.)

SIMONE

Don't just stand there, say something in Chinese.

MINDY

Gung hey fat choy.

SIMPKINS

Yes, uh, hmm, indeed. Is Mr. Noble available? I do need to speak to him. It's quite important.

SIMONE

Mr. Hal Noble is indisposed.

JACK

He uh had an accident.

SIMONE

Then he fell asleep.

JACK

Which can lead to accidents.

SIMONE

And sudden sleepiness.

SIMPKINS

Someone appears to be sleeping on the sofa.

JACK

The janitor. Uh, the mailman. The ball boy.

LIA

This is our founder, Hal Noble. We've been working on the pitch all night so...

SIMONE

Yes, that's right! The creative mind knows no schedule.

SIMPKINS

Very interesting yet unfortunate. I really must speak with him. May I sit?

SIMONE

Yes, uh of course...

(SIMPKINS sits down. LIA scootches Hal's feet over and sits at the end of the sofa. SIMONE hovers between her office and the sofa. MINDY retreats to a corner.)

LIA

(proudly) I uh represent the creative department.

JACK

So, Mr. Simpkins, we weren't expecting anyone till 5:00.

SIMPKINS

I am not part of the pitch. I represent the American interests of Feng Hua Enterprises. May I speak frankly?

SIMONE

Yes, of course you can. And as agency president, we will speak in my office.

SIMPKINS

Mr. Feng gave me strict orders to talk to Mr. Noble himself.

SIMONE

My, Mr. Feng himself. Very impressive.

SIMPKINS

If I could be flattered, I'd be flattered.

LIA

Take what you can get around here, Mr. Simpkins.

SIMONE

What is he like? Mr. Feng.

SIMPKINS

I've never met the man. No one's met the man.

SIMONE

How mysterious and fascinating.

SIMPKINS

It has come to Feng Hua's attention that Noble Advertising isn't equipped to handle an account the size of L'Image.

SIMONE

Don't be ridiculous. Let's go down to the creative floor and you'll see and feel all kinds of buzzy activity.

SIMPKINS

And I've been asked by Mr. Feng Hua to investigate.

JACK

Uh, have you noticed, Mr. Simpkins, we are color blind here at Noble Advertising? Look.

(JACK points at MINDY in the corner.)

SIMPKINS

Yes, of course. Diversity in the workplace is not the issue.

JACK

There must be like thirty more of them down there. Oh, and we believe the right to smoke in the workplace is inalienable.

SIMPKINS

There are also indications your client base is diminishing rapidly.

SIMONE

Ridiculous. I would know about that.

(Jacks's phone chirps.)

JACK

Shit.

SIMONE

Clients don't just run off.

(JACK looks at the screen.)

JACK

Good god!

SIMONE

What?

(JACK hides the phone behind his back.)

JACK

Nothing. We absolutely did not just lose two clients.

SIMONE

Lia, Ricky, take Mr. Simpkins, or may I call you Byron, down to the creative floor. We'll ping you as soon as Mr. Noble is awakable.

LIA

Awakable is one of the many new words we invent here at Noble Advertising.

SIMONE

You'll see we have hundreds of people working on this pitch. All top notch.

JACK

That's right. And our creative director is named Shakespeare. A direct descendant.

SIMPKINS

Oh, Shakespeare. How interesting.

SIMONE

You'll find that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree.

JACK

Plopping and rotting.

SIMPKINS

I suppose it wouldn't hurt to investigate further afield.

RICKY

It is very exciting down there.

SIMONE

And Heather here was on her way to share some refreshing ice-cold chais with the creative staff.

RICKY

They're very good. Although they could be either hotter or colder.

MINDY

I could review the media plan with Mr. Simpkins.

SIMONE

Ah, even better! Byron, you have so much to do. And after you've gotten a tour and seen how we're going to spend all of your money, Hal will be up and spewing brilliant notions and concepts and ideas.

LIA

All without the help of a thesaurus.

SIMPKINS

Very well. It will give me a chance to dig a little deeper.

RICKY

Follow me!

LIA

Ricky, are you the creative director? No.

SIMONE

Technically speaking, neither are you.

LIA

If anyone's going to follow anyone it's going to be me.

RICKY

You're going to follow you?

LIA

Mr. Simpkins, follow me. Ricky, you go third.

(gleefully) I'm third!

RICKY

(BING! RICKY leads SIMPKINS, LIA and HEATHER into the elevator. MINDY gathers her materials.)

SIMONE

Don't talk to the creatives. They're uh very unpleasant.

RICKY

They're just sarcastic.

LIA

(sarcastically) How incredibly insightful of you.

RICKY

See!

(The elevator doors close. MINDY has been left behind. She is stuck, frozen. SIMONE slings Hal's pants over her arm.)

JACK

Goddamnit! Clients are dropping like flies, we're being investigated and Hal is slipping into rigor mortis. I'll be right back. I have an idea.

(JACK heads to his office as he taps away on his phone. SIMONE goes to Hal's body and looks at it. She takes the blanket and puts it over his head. Then she thinks twice and picks it up again. MINDY pushes the elevator button.)

MINDY

He's seems very nervous.

SIMONE

(startled) Oh! Oh, it's you. No. Not at all. He's sleeping. You can't be nervous if you're sleeping. It's a scientific fact.

MINDY

No, Mr. Simpkins.

SIMONE

Oh, him. Of course. Simpkins. Just leave Simpkins to me. I know how to handle a man like Simpkins.

MINDY

You've got to use what you've been given. That's what my mother always said.

(BING! A lightbulb goes off above SIMONE's head.
MINDY gets into the elevator. JACK bursts in.)

JACK

I've got it! The wheels are in motion...

SIMONE

Jack! I have an idea.

JACK

Wait, I'm telling you about *my* idea...

SIMONE

I think you're going to want to hear my idea.

JACK

Ohhh, right, good...

SIMONE

What do you think? As a man.

JACK

A ninety-million dollar account deserves our best efforts. Including your unique ability to keep your heels on while stripping off your slacks. That's impressive.

SIMONE

Well, you've got to use what you've been given.

JACK

OK, I'll move Hal's body while that media girl is boring the little man.

SIMONE

Oh, Hal. At least he died before he could see his empire crumble.

JACK

Simone, look at you. A man's pants hang off your arm as naturally as a purse.

(BING! The elevator door opens and LIA and SIMPKINS enter. SIMPKINS is holding a chai. MINDY never got off so she enters, too.)

LIA

Ah, Mr. Simpkins. You've got to remember that talking to the creatives was not recommended...

SIMPKINS

Mr. Metcalfe, why was the creative staff reciting Chinese food take-out items to me?

JACK

Uh... comedy.

SIMPKINS

Really? That's comedy? I find that interesting.

LIA

It's advertising. Very sarcastic and ironic. You'll catch on.

SIMPKINS

This is all very new to me.

SIMONE

Oh, Mr. Simpkins. We have so much to discuss. Why don't you join me in my office? Said the spider to the fly.

SIMPKINS

I beg you pardon.

SIMONE

Spiders and flies. Spiders and flies. Ad talk, Mr. Simpkins. We'll discuss how to beckon more unsuspecting flies into L'Image's web.

SIMPKINS

I must say you people have a way with language. I certainly have a lot to learn.

JACK

Oh, you'll learn something.

(SIMONE escorts SIMPKINS into her office and closes the door. JACK turns to MINDY.)

JACK

Are you still here?

MINDY

No.

JACK

Good!

(The elevator opens and HEATHER enters with an even larger box. MINDY retreats to the corner.)

JACK

There you are! Where the hell have you been?

HEATHER

I just got your text. Turns out there's a sex shop right around the corner.

JACK

A sex shop around the corner? Really? Who knew?

(JACK opens the box that HEATHER is holding. It's filled with packaged blow-up dolls and a fully inflated plastic sheep. He starts pulling out the plastic-wrapped items.)

JACK

50 Big Johns, 50 Buxom Bettys, mixed ethnicities. Good. What's with the sheep?

HEATHER

They threw it in as a bonus. I couldn't stop them.

JACK

Can't hurt.

LIA

Jack, what the hell are you doing?

JACK

Solving problems! We lost half the extras to a Scorsese movie and had to make room in the budget for all those Chinese smokers.

LIA

I think the client will know the difference between blow-up people and creative professionals.

JACK

Yes, the blow-up dolls will appear to be working while the creative professionals are having Nerf gun battles.

HEATHER

So what would you like me to do with them?

JACK

Blow them up, of course.

HEATHER

I don't think I can blow up a hundred blow-up dolls by myself.

JACK

Of course not. Lia, you help her.

LIA

As creative director of this agency I'm not going to put my mouth on one hundred blow up dolls.

JACK

Really only fifty.

HEATHER

I can blow up most of them.

LIA

I'm not going to blow up one!

JACK

OK, OK. Heather will blow up the blow-up dolls. Lia, you dress them. That's creative. Just the tops. They'll all be sitting in the back cubicles. I'm going to work on plan C. And don't touch Hal! *Wake Hal!*

(JACK goes into his office. HEATHER starts blowing up one of the dolls while LIA sits there holding the sheep.)

LIA

So this is what it's come down to. The culmination of my illustrious advertising career. Blowing up sex dolls to cover the fact that we don't have enough actors pretending to be employees because we don't have enough employees to fill the cubicles. Do you know what a bottom is?

(Heather's doll's ass is in her face.)

HEATHER

I think I do.

LIA

Do you? I thought I hit my bottom five years ago sitting in a gutter outside a crappy club spewing blue vomit while my boyfriend held back my hair...

HEATHER

Ah, that's nice.

LIA

... while he bitched me out about not wanting vomity-smelling-hair-sex later. I didn't know there could be a bottom below the bottom. But looky here.

HEATHER

This isn't as bad as spewing blue vomit into a gutter.

LIA

I built my career to work for this man. He's complicated, of course. There's the drinking. And the emotional abuse. But if this is the bottom, I'm going to be OK. I have my reel, I have my pride, I have most of my sobriety. I'm fucking untouchable. Come on, let's have some fun...

(She removes the blanket from Hal's body and starts to pose the sheep on top of him.)

HEATHER

Don't... !

LIA

This is now officially the low point of my life. I'm decorating my boss' passed-out pantless body with a blow-up sheep.

(LIA moves towards the elevator.)

HEATHER

Where are you going?

LIA

I am going to steal sweaters off the backs of chairs to dress the blow-up sex dolls that will be masquerading as advertising professionals.

HEATHER

Oh... ok... bye!

LIA

Yeah yeah.

(LIA gets into the elevator. The doors close. HEATHER gets up and takes a picture of HAL with the blow-up sheep. Simone's door bursts open and SIMPKINS enters.)

SIMPKINS

This is most unorthodox, Ms. Flax!

SIMONE

Mr. Simpkins. Byron. I can explain.

(HEATHER throws the sheep across the room and replaces the blanket. JACK pokes his head out.)

SIMPKINS

Your industry has always been an unmeasurable mystery to me.

SIMONE

We were talking about your spreadsheets. I was overwhelmed.

SIMPKINS

I understand how thrilling the intricacies of corporate finance can be but...

SIMONE

Yes, that's it! They were thrilling.

JACK

Ah, Simone, Simpkins. There you are!

SIMPKINS

Mr. Metcalf, may I avail myself of your office?

JACK

Uh, avail? Yeah, sure...

SIMPKINS

It must have been the flight from Shanghai. I am feeling a bit unhinged. And I expect to be alerted immediately upon Mr. Noble's awakening.

(SIMPKINS enters Jack's office and closes the door.)

SIMONE

What on god's green earth are you doing, child?!

HEATHER

I'm blowing up sex dolls for the future of the agency.

SIMONE

Jack, order her to continue her inexplicable behavior somewhere else.

JACK

Young woman, continue your inexplicable behavior somewhere else.

(HEATHER gathers up her box of uninflated sex dolls and heads towards Lia's office. Two or three inflated dolls are left behind.)

HEATHER

Yes, I don't think they're comfortable naked in a public space. I wouldn't be.

(HEATHER enters Lia's office and closes the door.)

JACK

So?

SIMONE

So nothing.

JACK

Nothing?

SIMONE

Nothing! Not a fondle! Not a finger! Not even a it's-not-sex-if-it's-just-a-blowjob blowjob!

JACK

The man's a goddamn homosexual.

SIMONE

Well, I started with the "leaning back with my arms on the desk and my legs slightly spread" stance.

JACK

Good. Good start. Did you pull the blackout curtains?

SIMONE

Of course I pulled the blackout curtains! How long do you think I've been doing this -- don't answer that question!

JACK

But you left that slight gap where a single beam of light gives the room a kind of glow?

SIMONE

Yes, a standard two-inch gap.

JACK

Go on.

SIMONE

And you know what he pulled out? Spreadsheets!

JACK

Spreadsheets? Hmm. Did you say, "Spread sheets? What an interesting choice of words?"

SIMONE

I said, "Spreadsheets. Sheets are generally where spreading occurs."

JACK

That's good. You should have been a copywriter.

SIMONE

Jack, you're supposed to be building my confidence not dragging me into the world of ego-driven munchkins!

JACK

Sorry. Go on.

SIMONE

And he said... he said... oh, it was horrible... he said...

JACK

Oh no.

SIMONE

Yes.

JACK

(slowly) "I'm a happily married man."

SIMONE

So humiliating!

JACK

Well, some people are kind of screwed up. Definitely closeted.

SIMONE

Oh, I hope so. He might be. Oh, god I hope so. I'm not losing it, am I?

JACK

Simone, you're still grade A, grain-fed and hand-picked for quality and freshness.

SIMONE

Jack, we're in advertising. What do we do?

JACK

We make shit sparkle.

SIMONE

Right. If we can't get a corporate bean-counter to fuck me, we shouldn't call ourselves an advertising agency!

JACK

I'll take him to lunch. Lunch is for closing.

(Jack's cell phone rings.)

JACK

Ah Mr. Simpkins. Yes, I'm still here. Jet lag's a bitch, isn't it? ... What? Feng Hua? Here? Yes, of course...

(BING! The elevator opens and LIA enters, her arms filled with sweaters. JACK hangs up.)

JACK

We are officially fucked.

LIA

Nice to see you too, Jack.

SIMONE

Jack? What?

(LIA starts to clothe the blow-up dolls.)

JACK

Feng Hua himself is on his way. He'll be here at four o'clock sharp.

Feng Hua? SIMONE

Feng Hua. JACK

(SIMONE turns to find MINDY.)

Are we pronouncing that right? SIMONE

Beg your pardon? MINDY

I believe it would be more like... Fing Huua. Faaaan Who-aah. You know how the Chinese talk. SIMONE

Fing Kuuaaa... ! JACK

I really have no idea. MINDY

You sound like a kung fu movie. LIA

Oh my god. We need to do something. Fast. SIMONE

I have an idea. Let's get rid of the sex dolls, wake Hal up, get the pitch organized, and, oh yeah, change our personalities. LIA

We need to show Feng Hua we're multicultural. (to MINDY) You're multicultural. SIMONE

I'm an American. MINDY

This is the one time in history that being an American won't help us win! JACK

You *appear* to be Chinese. You can run point on this effort. SIMONE

MINDY

Please don't ask me to seduce the client. I... I refuse!

SIMONE

No. That doesn't seem to be in your wheelhouse, dear.

LIA

Is that what you call it? Your wheelhouse?

SIMONE

You need to learn Chinese.

JACK

Yeah, by four o'clock.

MINDY

You want me to learn Chinese in six hours?

SIMONE

Not the whole language, just a few key phrases.

LIA

Like, "Would you like to explore my wheelhouse?"

SIMONE

Stop it!

JACK

Yeah, that's not helping. And frankly I don't need to hear the Chinese word for vagina.

SIMONE

And when Feng Hua shows up, we need you front and center.

MINDY

I'll do my best. Front and center.

LIA

Wait, how come nobody's asked me to seduce the client?

JACK

You?

SIMONE

Lia, we'd have to find a man who is aroused by sarcasm and a bristly personality.

JACK

You're not a lesbian?

LIA

No, I'm not a lesbian. Do I look like a lesbian?

SIMONE

Please, don't force us into stereotyping you. It's not very modern.

JACK

Yes, you look like a lesbian.

SIMONE

Very well, Peppermint Patty. Will you please seduce the client?

LIA

No!

JACK

Sure glad we wasted thirty seconds on that.

SIMONE

So can we count on you to run point? Front and center.

MINDY

I'll call my mother. She speaks Mandarin.

(MINDY heads for the elevator.)

JACK

Ask her how to say, "We value a continuing association with your enterprise that leads to growth and prosperity." That sounds Chinesey.

SIMONE

Jack, go check on Simpkins. Take him to lunch. Talk me up.

JACK

Right. And you...

SIMONE

I shall be in my office icing down my hot flashes and devising another plan.

(SIMONE goes into her office.)

JACK

Lia, you keep dressing the plastic people.

LIA

Got it. Love to. It's my calling.

JACK

That's the spirit!

(JACK opens the door to his office.)

JACK

Simpkins! My my, you look awfully relaxed. You hungry?

(JACK closes the door. LIA is left alone. She looks at Hal's body. She takes a blow-up doll and drapes one of Hal's arms over the doll. HEATHER stumbles out of Lia's office struggling with several inflated blow-up dolls.)

HEATHER

I think I'm going to pass out.

LIA

You've been a busy bee.

HEATHER

Stop! Don't do that to his body!

LIA

His *body*? What's wrong with you?

HEATHER

Nothing. I... I'm suffering from lack of oxygen.

LIA

You said "body".

HEATHER

No, I didn't. Why would I say body if he weren't dead?

LIA

Who said he was dead?

HEATHER

I didn't say he was dead. I said... if he *weren't* dead.

LIA

Bizarre grammar aside, you keep saying dead and body over and over again.

HEATHER

I've been breathing plastic fumes on the inhale!

(LIA looks at her. Then goes straight to Hal's body and pulls out a pen.)

LIA

If I stab him in the leg is he going to wake up or not?

HEATHER

Yes! No! Yes!

(LIA holds the pen in the air.)

HEATHER

Stop!

LIA

So he's not dead.

HEATHER

Well, he's not *not* dead.

LIA

So me stabbing him would be...

HEATHER

Pointless.

LIA

Ah, wordplay. So it's come to that.

HEATHER

(spilling out) I'm so sorry but everybody has been saying he's asleep but they said he's dead and they left him here and they are running around telling people he's asleep and they have secret plans and I wanted to tell you but it's hard to talk about death while blowing up a sex doll!

(LIA moves closer to HAL and stares at him.)

LIA

Advertising legends don't die on reception area sofas. They... they have heart attacks in
massage parlors.

HEATHER

They said he probably drank himself to death.

LIA

They?

HEATHER

Simone and Jack.

LIA

Wait, you're telling me that those assholes have known all morning that he's dead and the
creative director is just finding out about it now?

HEATHER

Associate creative director...

LIA

Wow, another bottom. Which means there's another... and another. Infinite bottoms. And
you know what sinks to the bottom? Feces. Feces and vomit and corpses.

HEATHER

Oh my god, that is so depressing.

LIA

And now look at me. My mentor is dead, the inmates are running the asylum and me, I'm a
copywriter.

HEATHER

He was supposed to be sleeping, but he's dead.

LIA

The big sleep, kid. Who knows, we might be dead now, spinning around in purgatory,
grasping and clutching in the toilet of advertising.

(LIA picks up a blow-up doll.)

LIA

I'm no different from Buxom Betty here. Just an empty vessel waiting to be stuffed and reamed and corn-holed. All inputs. A receptacle for shit and cum and piss.

HEATHER

Eeuw.

(LIA thinks the doll has spoken.)

LIA

What did you say? Don't feel sorry for me. Look at you, you poor thing. You look cold. Here...

(LIA takes a sweater and starts to dress the doll. BING!
The elevator doors open and RICKY springs in with his ukulele.)

RICKY

I know who I am now! I'm not an art director. I'm a jingle writer!

(He looks at HEATHER with an armful of inflated dolls.)

RICKY

And you collect full-size dolls!

(He looks at LIA dressing a doll.)

RICKY

And Lia is a costumer! And Uncle Hal is a sleepyhead! See how it all works out? The world is a magical place!

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

AT RISE, it's a three hours later. The lobby is empty, except for twenty blow-up dolls.

(HAL is still lying on the sofa. His eyes suddenly blink open and he looks around.

HAL struggles to sit upright but can only get so far. He looks down at the bottle of Jim Beam and the bearded blow-up doll. HAL holds the bottle up in front of his eyes, considers taking a drink but doesn't have the strength. He reaches back and pulls out a handgun. He looks at the gun, the bottle and the blow-up doll and starts to pass out.)

HAL

Uh-oh...

(HAL falls back onto the sofa. HEATHER bursts out of Hal's office, her arms filled with files, her cell phone pressed between her shoulder and her ear.)

HEATHER

Yes, mom. Yes... I have it! I have it all! Stop screaming at me!

HAL

I trust this is not an ignorant question but... what day is it?

(HEATHER gags for a moment, stutters and faints. Her body sprawls on the floor, the files spilling all over. BING! The elevator opens and RICKY rushes to Simone's door with his ukulele.)

RICKY

Mother! I have a jingle to play you! It seems I am a jingle writer and player. Shall I play it for Uncle Hal?

SIMONE (OFF)

You leave him alone!

RICKY

But mother! I could play it softly. He could wake oh so gently and he would be happy and would look at me with loving eyes.

SIMONE (OFF)

Hal Noble is never going to wake up with loving eyes!

RICKY

Quite right, mother. I'll tiptoe and play my jingle in the corner...

(RICKY sees HEATHER sprawled out on the floor.)

RICKY

Oh my... is it possible someone put gas in the vents? I've seen that in the movies.

(He rushes over to HEATHER.)

RICKY

Chai girl! This is no place for napping. (towards Hal) Unless it is.

(HEATHER rolls her head and awakens.)

HEATHER

He was dead and now he's alive.

RICKY

Are you talking about Jesus? Because an advertising agency is no place for Christianity. Believe me, I went through a born-again phase last year and was not welcomed.

HEATHER

No, I'm sure I killed him. I didn't think about his age...

RICKY

Wait. Are you saying you had wild sex with Uncle Hal?

(HEATHER starts to come to her senses.)

HEATHER

What?! No, yes! Wild sex? No! Yes! I certainly didn't *drug* him! Ha ha ha...

RICKY

Because wouldn't be the first executive receptionist to have sex with Uncle Hal. I'm sure it's because he's very intelligent. Wait! Did you *try* to kill him?

HEATHER

No. What? No. Yes, it was the uh wild sex thing.

RICKY

Oh, OK. That's understandable. Wild sex can be lethal to older men. You don't seem like the wild sex type.

HEATHER

Oh, I am. Very wildly sexy. We did all kinds of sex things. Uh, positions. We did lots of positions. Like uh... the...

RICKY

The missionary. I've heard of that.

HEATHER

Yes, then the uh African Villager. Then the uh Two-Headed Giraffe and the uh Rhino in the Grass.

RICKY

That all sounds dangerous. That's probably what you were talking about when you said you thought you killed him.

HEATHER

I'm sure that was it.

RICKY

You are so adventurous. I hope you're alright. I mean, you could have been injured.

(HEATHER looks into Ricky's eyes.)

HEATHER

Wait, I can't lie to you.

RICKY

It's OK, it happens a lot here.

HEATHER

I put a drug in his whiskey. I'm sure I overdrugged him and killed him.

RICKY

You drugged him? Are you a spy?

HEATHER

I can't answer that question. Oh, don't make me lie!

RICKY

Oh. I'll stop asking you questions then.

HEATHER

I put something powerful in his drink that was supposed to make him *appear* dead.

RICKY

Ooh, just like that old movie with Leonardo DiCaprio!

HEATHER

Romeo and Juliet?

RICKY

No, Leonardo DeCaprio. Why did you do it? Sorry, that was a question.

HEATHER

All I can tell you is that I can't tell you.

RICKY

That's fine. I'm always kept in the dark. I don't mind.

HEATHER

Would you please test for any deadness?

(RICKY stands up bravely.)

RICKY

Of course, I have to warn that I've been instructed to never actually touch Uncle Hal. His instructions, actually.

HEATHER

Is he really your uncle?

RICKY

Oh no, mother has worked for him since I was a baby. I used to call him Papa Hal but after he shoved me out the door by my face several times, I changed it to Uncle Hal and the shoving me out the door by my face happened less but still happened so I call him Uncle Hal softly or when he's passed out. Right, Uncle Hal? See?

(RICKY leans extremely close to Hal's face.)

RICKY

His nose hairs seem to be quivering. And nose hairs don't quiver on their own because they're hair so it must be *nostril wind*. Wait, no, maybe I'm wrong. Hmm...

HEATHER

Thank you for checking. I'm Heather.

RICKY

Oh, like the shrub.

HEATHER

Yes!

RICKY

I'm Richard. Would you like to hear a jingle?

HEATHER

A jingle?

RICKY

Yes, it's a song with a product name and benefit inside of it. They make you feel good and do things you've never considered before.

HEATHER

I'd like that.

RICKY

We can use Jack's office. He's having lunch with that man.

(HEATHER and RICKY scurry to Jack's office. LIA enters from her office, without any pants on and two blow-up dolls with only sweaters on.)

LIA

Come along, Ophelia and Horatio. Yonder lies the king. And the king is dead. Forsooth, we shall mourn him as he completes his long journey from the innocence of birth to the innocence of death. I should write this down. Did I ever tell you of the novel I have embarked upon?

(LIA crosses to the sofa.)

LIA

Ah Hal Noble. You were like a father to me, a mentor-father. A lover and father and mentor. The beautiful and wounded alcoholic father-lover-mentor I never had. Which is complicated. But beautiful. I will leave you now to write. To write the novel I was meant to write.

(LIA enters her office. HAL opens his eyes and reaches for the bottle and starts to take a sip.

SIMONE enters from her office talking on her cell phone.
HAL puts his head back down.)

SIMONE

Where did you take him? Aquaterra? Good. Did you get him drunk? No? He's not a twelve-stepper, is he? They practice rigorous honesty. Such arrogance. Anyway, get back here. I've thrown a scarf over my desk lamp and my Pandora station is set to Kenny G.. Wait, how are you positioning me? Yes, yes. Good. Like a fine cabernet reserve. Perfect. (suddenly optimistic) Oh, I do believe this is going to work! Remember, I want him in the goddamn mood!

(SIMONE stands over Hal's body.)

SIMONE

I suppose I should say something meaningful at this moment. But this agency-saving business needs some good old-fashioned elbow grease. Or in my case, personal lubricant. Soon after I announce your death, you'll be an afterthought. I'll have that big office of yours, I'll donate all your guns and ugly rugs to some pawn shop. I'll keep the name on the door for a few months but just long enough for the industry to mourn. So now, I hope you'll excuse me...

(SIMONE removes her coat to reveal a dazzling golden *cheongsam* – a body-hugging, traditional Chinese dress).

SIMONE

... I've got an agency to save.

(SIMONE pushes the elevator button. BING! She stops and turns.)

SIMONE

I should have killed you years ago.

(The elevator doors close. HAL struggles to get up.)

HAL

I should have killed *you* years ago... uh-oh, here we go again.

(HAL falls back down. RICKY and HEATHER enter from Jack's office.)

HEATHER

OK, she's gone. I loved your song about the products.

RICKY

I'm going to down to the creative floors to share my jingle with all Chinese extras, multicultural actors and the angry creative people. Wish me luck!

HEATHER

Good luck. I'll be here pretending to work because I don't know what else to do.

RICKY

You'll be great at it.

(BING! The elevator opens and JACK and SIMPKINS spill out. HEATHER puts her head down and starts typing furiously. RICKY jumps into the elevator behind them.)

JACK

And the patient looks over his shoulder and says, "Read the card! Read the card!" Ha ha ha ha ha...

SIMPKINS

There was a card?

JACK

Yeah, yeah. What? There was a dozen roses up the man's ass so, uh...

SIMPKINS

The roses were a gift.

JACK

Yeah, he's in love with his proctologist.

SIMPKINS

Of course. The man did not know how to express his feelings for another man. That's interesting.

JACK

Yeah, it's funny.

SIMPKINS

Still, a dozen roses inserted through the rectum. Very elaborate.

JACK

Yeah. Uh. Yeah. You know it's just a joke.

SIMPKINS

Yes, of course. I understand now.

(JACK sees HEATHER typing away.)

JACK

You. Run out and get a bottle of something. Oh, never mind. Here's one.

(JACK goes to the sofa and reaches for Hal's bottle.)

HEATHER

No! Not that one!

JACK

What? Why?

HEATHER

It's... uh... the worst bourbon on the planet.

JACK

Good call. Run out and get us something classy - like some Hennessy. Go! Go!

(HEATHER runs into the elevator.)

JACK

So, what do you think? Is there anything we can do to win this thing?

SIMPKINS

I must tell you, I had an interesting interaction with Ms. Flax earlier.

JACK

I'm sure her advances were uh authentic. You're a good looking guy. Man to man, of course.

SIMPKINS

I imagine her intention was to trade sexual favors for a business advantage.

JACK

Yeah, we're a full-service agency.

SIMPKINS

Hmm, I didn't realize these things actually happened. You must need this business very badly.

JACK

No, not at all. Need? No, not need. *Desire*. We desire this business.

SIMPKINS

Ah, that's your world, isn't it?

JACK

Yes, we inflame desire.

SIMPKINS

Well, this falls outside of my experience but I am feeling curiously enlivened by this environment. So, yes.

JACK

So you'll do it? Great news. I'll tell Simone.

SIMPKINS

Why would you tell Simone?

JACK

What? Why wouldn't I tell Simone? She's pretty much involved in this. At least her mouth.

SIMPKINS

You would share our experience with the woman scorned?

JACK

Wait. What?! Me?

SIMPKINS

You said I'm a good looking guy.

JACK

Yes, but... I'm a happily married man.

SIMPKINS

Yes, I seem to remember blurting out the same thing. Am I to receive the favor here?

JACK

Here?!

SIMPKINS

Or your office.

JACK

Account services! This falls under account services. Just doing my job, right?

SIMPKINS

If your job is to please the client. Let's have that meeting.

(SIMPKINS enters Jack's office. JACK looks around then follows him in.)

JACK

We don't need to advertise this, do we?

(HAL sits up. Then attempts to stand.)

HAL

What the hell is going on around here? I'll just... here we go... why can't I... ?

(HAL falls back down to the sofa and closes his eyes.
BING! LIA dances in from her office with her notebook.
SIMONE enters from the elevator.)

SIMONE

I am here! Wait. Where are all the men?

LIA

The men? The men are alive. Aren't the men alive?

SIMONE

Lia, if you're trying to move into the seduction game, your technique is off-putting and pathetically needy.

(LIA settles down and writes in her notebook.)

SIMONE

I suppose this is a preposterous question but how is the pitch going?

LIA

Swimmingly. All kinds of people and people-like forms are commingling in a rush of creative exuberance not witnessed since 1920s Paris.

SIMONE

You haven't been down there.

LIA

I intuit the productivity of hell.

SIMONE

Lia, this is no time for your bizarre sense of calm.

LIA

According to Ricky, the creatives were hitting on the Chinese girls smoking cigarettes while arranging the blow-up dolls in a kind of orgy, like a big, perverted Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade balloon.

SIMONE

We have a presentation in two hours!

LIA

I quit. Remember?

SIMONE

But then you un-quit.

LIA

Simone, can you stop talking? I realized I'm only writing what we're saying which is not the Great American Novel.

SIMONE

Why are you doing this to me? I can feel my skin getting crepey while we speak.

(JACK's door opens and SIMPKINS enters. His tie is askew.)

SIMONE

Ah, Byron! There are you! I've been waiting for you.

SIMPKINS

Ah, Ms. Flax. I must tell you I'm beginning to understand your business!

(BING! RICKY enters from the elevator with his ukulele.)

RICKY

Oh, you're all here. I can't stop writing jingles!

SIMPKINS

Ms. Shakespeare, you're not wearing any pants! How avant garde of you! Thrilling!

RICKY

Mother, why isn't Lia wearing any pants?

SIMONE

Stop asking questions!

LIA

It's a gesture of solidarity with the living-challenged.

(JACK pokes his head out. He looks panicky.)

JACK

Psst. Simone, I have to talk to you.

(JACK sees SIMPKINS and closes his door.)

SIMPKINS

The wearing of pants is optional here? How very interesting.

SIMONE

Byron, perhaps your interest in the not wearing of pants needs a more private place. You're welcome to use my office.

JACK (OFF)

Simone, I need to talk to you now!

SIMPKINS

If Ms. Shakespeare is not wearing pants in the lobby then I shall not wear pants either.

(SIMPKINS starts to take off his pants. BING! The elevators open. HEATHER walks in with a bottle of Hennessy.)

HEATHER

Here's that bottle of Hennessy, Mr... oh, hello. You're not wearing any pants!

(SIMPKINS grabs the bottle from HEATHER.)

SIMPKINS

No! Isn't it liberating!

SIMONE

Mr. Simpkins, you seem so ready. Go into my office and I'll send someone exciting in.

JACK (OFF)

I am not exciting!

RICKY

I'm exciting.

SIMONE

Ricky, you're not exciting in that way.

SIMPKINS

This is like hide-and-go-seek. I was never allowed to play and hide-and-go-seek. I love this business.

(SIMPKINS stumbles into Simone's office with his pants around his ankles. JACK enters from his office.)

JACK

Is he gone?

SIMONE

What the hell is going on with you?

JACK

I've uh compromised my integrity.

LIA

And bears persist in defecating in the woods.

JACK

But I disassociated!

RICKY

I like bears.

HEATHER

Ah, bears.

SIMONE

Oh everyone *shut up!* Jesus christ! Feng Hua will be here shortly, Chinese actors are writing advertising, our creative director has chosen today to write her bottomless novel and our founder is... is... he's..!

JACK

Simone!

HEATHER

No! Stop!

(BING! The elevator opens. MINDY enters.)

MINDY

Simone, I've learned a few phrases which might prove useful... she's not wearing any pants.

SIMONE

Gather around me everyone! I have an announcement to make.

LIA

Oh good, an announcement. Why don't you get the megaphone?

SIMONE

Good idea. Ricky, get mother's megaphone!

RICKY

Oh boy, the megaphone. Reminds me of my childhood.

(RICKY runs into Simone's office.)

SIMONE

The man you see lying before you, the great visionary of our industry, the crowner of presidents, the voice of the people in the interests of mass marketing...

JACK

Simone, do you know what you're doing?

(RICKY runs out with a megaphone to his lips.)

RICKY

(through the megaphone) Here's your megaphone, mother!

SIMONE

Ricky! How many times have I told you not to use mother's megaphone!

(SIMONE extends her hand for the megaphone.)

RICKY

Mother, Mr. Simpkins... !

SIMONE

You don't use a megaphone to announce you have a megaphone!

LIA

I think that's the perfect way to use a megaphone.

RICKY

Uh Mr. Simpkins is...

(LIA snatches the megaphone from RICKY's hand.)

LIA

(through the megaphone) Now here this. I am the person with the megaphone and you are not the person with the megaphone!

SIMONE

Give me that!

(SIMONE snatches the megaphone back from LIA.)

RICKY

Mother! Mr. Simpkins seemed very glad to see me...

JACK

Oh, good. It's not just me then.

SIMONE

Where was I? Oh yes.. (through the megaphone) ... The creator of jobs and lots and lots of money is no more.

LIA

No more what, Simone?

SIMONE

(through the megaphone) It is with great sadness that I tell you that... that... Hal Noble is...

(SIMPKINS runs out of Simone's office.)

SIMPKINS

(gleefully) *I've been drinking!* And I've sprayed myself with L'Image Mucho Body Scent! Isn't it marvelous!? Where's the boy?! There you are!

JACK

Oh god, Simpkins. We're in the middle of agency business.

SIMPKINS

Jokes? Drinking? Surprises?

JACK

Uh, why don't you go back to my office.

SIMPKINS

Your office? Oh, this is getting fun! Buy one and get the second one free! Is that right?

SIMONE

Ricky, why don't you play Mr. Simpkins your jingle.

SIMPKINS

"Play your jingle?" Sounds fun!

(SIMPKINS skips into Jacks's office. RICKY turns to SIMONE.)

RICKY

Thank you, mother!

(... and closes the door. SIMONE lets the megaphone drop to her side.)

SIMONE

This is really not an appropriate announcement for a megaphone...

JACK

"Clear the streets" is about the only thing I can think of.

SIMONE

It is with great sadness to announce that Hal Noble is...

(LIA grabs the megaphone from Simone.)

LIA

(through the megaphone) Dead! Hal Noble is dead!

SIMONE

How do know he's dead?

LIA

(through the megaphone) My evidence was his not-moving state.

JACK

You said to keep it a secret and put a blanket it on him.

LIA

(through the megaphone) Ooh, secrets!

MINDY

Mr. Noble's dead?

SIMONE

According to an agreement, a will of sorts, Hal had determined that should anything happen to him, the reigns of this magnificent establishment would be bequeathed to me...

LIA

Can we see this piece of paper?

SIMONE

Of course. And while we look for the document, I will guide us through this most trying of times.

JACK

Which puts me second in charge.

SIMONE

Now, the client thinks that Hal is sleeping so until this afternoon's pitch, Hal is still sleeping.

LIA

This is crazy. When do we tell the client?

SIMONE

After we bowl them over with our dynamic strategic and creative energies and insight.

MINDY

And our media plan.

JACK

Stop sneaking around!!!

MINDY

I'm not sneaking around! I don't sneak around!

SIMONE

And when we break the tragic news, when they see our tears and sense our broken hearts, they will have no choice but to hand us the business. How could they not? They're not heartless monsters.

LIA

No, they're a multinational conglomerate.

JACK

So Hal stays where he is.

SIMONE

And talk me up.

JACK

Oh, and talk her up. The brains behind the brains. The genius behind the genius.

(SIMONE slumps into a chair, “weeping.”)

SIMONE

The king... is dead.

(SIMONE stamps her foot.)

SIMONE (CONT'D)

Ssst.

(JACK picks up the megaphone.)

JACK

(through the megaphone) Long live the queen!

(HAL's head jerks up, his eyes blazing.)

LIA

This is bullshit. His body isn't even cold.

JACK

Oh, I'm pretty sure it's cold. It's been like eight hours.

SIMONE

Yes, if you touched him it would feel like a refrigerated chicken breast.

(RICKY bursts out of Jack's office.)

RICKY

Mother! That man. Didn't want. My jingle. He wanted to fondle. My choo-choo!

SIMONE

Well, I hope you did what's best for the agency.

RICKY

He'll be out any second! He was finding his pants.

JACK

What?! I uh need to go and uh feed the meter... Or something...

(JACK runs into the elevator. SIMONE eyes LIA.)

SIMONE

Ricky, how would you and your choo-choo like to be promoted. To associate creative director.

RICKY

Wow, and I only just started writing jingles!

LIA

You can't do that!

SIMONE

You'll be in charge of all of Lia's teams, oversee all of Lia's work, go into her office and touch her things.

LIA

You can't fire me. Only Hal can fire me and he's, conveniently for me, dead.

SIMONE

I'm not firing anyone. Ricky, you are *co*-associate creative director.

RICKY

I'm a *co*-!

(RICKY pushes the elevator button then runs in circles.)

RICKY

I'll start with playing them my jingle. But I won't yell at them. That can be your job, Lia.

LIA

(yelling) I do more than yell at people!

RICKY

I'll make *you* proud, Mother!

(BING! The elevator doors open and RICKY and LIA enter the elevator.)

SIMONE

Now, I shall go into my new office and solve things.

(SIMONE strides into Hal's office. HAL struggles to his feet, throws a blow-up doll on the sofa and covers it with the blanket and hat, then stumbles to Simone's office door.)

HAL

Time to set things straight, my dear.

(HAL enters her office and closes the door.)

HAL (OFF)

Simone! (to himself) Oh no...

(There's a large crash from within.)

SIMPKINS (OFF)

Jack?!

SIMONE (OFF)

Ricky?!

SIMPKINS (OFF)

Ricky!?

SIMONE (OFF)

Jack!

SIMPKINS (OFF)

Jack?!

(SIMONE runs in from Hal's office. SIMPKINS enters from Jack's office. BING! JACK and LIA enter from the elevator.)

JACK

(disturbed) Since when have we had so many attractive men working here?!

SIMONE

Jack, what are you yelling about?

JACK

What are *you* yelling about?

LIA

Your son is decorating the creative floor with inspirational posters of kittens and eagles!

SIMPKINS

Where did the boy go?

MINDY

Ta gang zuo dian ti xia qu. (translation: He just went down the elevator.)

SIMPKINS

Na li? Qu na li? (translation: Where? Where to?)

MINDY

Da gai shi. Di xia shi. (translation: Probably the basement.)

SIMPKINS

Dai wo qu! (translation: Take me there!)

(SIMPKINS runs into the elevator.)

SIMONE

What did you tell him?

MINDY

I have no idea.

(MINDY gets into the elevator, the doors shut.)

LIA

Jack, you look different.

JACK

Me? Different? No!

SIMONE

Yes, actually. Less... masculine.

JACK

I was on my high school wrestling team!

SIMONE

My point exactly. Now stop bothering me. I'm going to put on my face for Feng Hua.

(SIMONE enters her office. LIA offers JACK a Big John doll.)

LIA

I think Horatio likes you.

JACK

I will not have sex with Horatio! He's a male blow-doll, for chrissake!

SIMONE (OFF)

Aaaugggh!

(SIMONE burst through her door and points back at her office.)

SIMONE

Hal! Hal is...is...

(SIMONE looks back and forth, between her office and the "body" on the sofa. BING! The elevator doors open and MINDY and SIMPKINS enter.)

SIMPKINS

Ah, Jack! I have a joke one of your employees told me! What do a gynecologist and a pizza boy have in common?

JACK

Simone, it looks like you've seen a ghost.

(Simone's office door opens and HAL stumbles out holding his head.)

SIMONE

A ghost! (laughing maniacally) Ahahahahahahah! It's just that Hal... is no longer *here!*

LIA

No, still in the display case.

HAL

I need a drink.

(HAL stumbles into his office.)

SIMONE

Yes, Jack. I need a drink, too. You and I must have a drink... *in my office.*

SIMPKINS

Jack and I need to discuss the state of our relationship.

Jack! Now!

SIMONE

(JACK and SIMONE enter Simone's office. SIMPKINS enters Jack's office.)

SIMPKINS (OFF)

Jack, I'll be here!

JACK

(from within) If this is your idea of a joke it's not funny!

SIMONE

(from within) I don't think *you're* funny! You're cruel!

(Simone's door bursts open. JACK enters holding a Big John doll, dressed in only a shirt, waving it about.)

JACK

A male sex doll!?

SIMONE

What did you do with him!?

JACK

I took his pants off! Then I don't want to discuss the rest.

SIMONE

You did more than take his pants off! You moved him!

JACK

It was obvious he was *moved*!

SIMONE

What was he doing in my office?

JACK

Not responding to your advances.

SIMONE

He was just laying there!

JACK

I don't doubt it. Your advances are bizarre for a woman your age.

SIMONE

Why, Jack, why did you do it?

JACK

Because you weren't woman enough!

SIMONE

I'm woman enough! I'm just not strong enough!

JACK

Strength? You just lie there with your legs open.

(SIMONE breaks down crying.)

SIMONE

Oh my God, menopause is scrambling my brain! I am so confused.

(SIMPKINS pops out of Jack's office.)

SIMPKINS

Jack, you madman, isn't what they call you people?

SIMONE

(wailing) Oh, Jack. He wants you, not me!

JACK

Simone, you and I need to do what men and women do. Now.

SIMPKINS

Oh, Jack...

(JACK takes SIMPKINS aside.)

JACK

Mr. Simpkins, as much as I'd love the honor of blowing you again, there is a duty I need to perform as a man. Simone...

SIMONE

Oh, Jack.

(JACK leads SIMONE into his office.)

SIMPKINS

My this place is exciting. It's like being in a naughty movie. I must admit I'm feeling all tingly.

LIA

Good for you.

SIMPKINS

Drinking on the job. Blow-up dolls. Sex for favors. If I had a Carmen Miranda hat I'd be wearing it. Are you going to offer me sex too?

LIA

I wasn't asked. Are you asking?

SIMPKINS

No! Isn't that crazy?!

(SIMPKINS jumps up.)

SIMPKINS (CONT'D)

I'm going to shut the black-out curtains! With the famous two-inch gap! Wish me luck! If you see the boy, send him in. Or surprise me!

(SIMPKINS exits into Jack's office. LIA sits there, starts to cry. She struggles to her feet and kneels at what she thinks is Hal's body.)

LIA

This is all so fucked up, Hal. Give me some kind of sign. I don't know what to do.

(Suddenly Hal's door swings open. There's HAL, bottle in hand, a handgun in the other.)

HAL

If I were you I'd blow this fucker up.

(LIA looks up. Then down. Then up at HAL.)

LIA

You're alive.

HAL

Of course.

LIA
But you're dead.

HAL
You're confused.

LIA
I thought you were dead.

HAL
Why did you think I was dead?

LIA
Because they said you were dead.

HAL
Don't people feel pulses anymore? Goddamnit, my head aches.

(HAL shuffles over to the sofa, tosses the blow-up doll
aside and lies down.)

LIA
Hal! Simone's taking over, Ricky's running the creative department, people are trading sex
for business and...

HAL
Ah, can you smell the desperation? This is where we shine.

LIA
And I need you downstairs. Nobody's listening to me. They actually jeered me.

HAL
They jeered you.

LIA
I've been jeered.

HAL
Don't worry, my dear. You're like a cat.

LIA
I always land on my feet.

HAL
No, nobody likes you.

LIA

What?

HAL

Why am I not wearing any pants?

LIA

That's how they found you.

HAL

I was found? Like the good old days. Bring back martinis and cocaine, I say. This headache is taking me back to better days.

LIA

Hal, there are terrible things in these products. And you'd be proud of me. I made a stand.

HAL

It's not your job to make a stand! You have no idea what happens behind closed doors. The deal between art and commerce, the media and politics. Nothing gets between profits and profits. What you don't know would cripple you.

LIA

But we have a calling! That's what you said, a higher calling!

HAL

That horseshit always seemed to get you motivated. Why are we here?

LIA

To inflame desire.

HAL

No no no. Not desire. Discontent. At our best, shame. We keep people buying crap so they don't look down the unspeakable black hole of their deaths.

LIA

I feel sick.

HAL

Play the game and cash the checks.

LIA

I... I don't know what to do.

HAL

We're going to take the client's money, flush the vermin down the elevator, then you and I are going to enjoy the time-honored practice of coitus in my office and you'll keep your job.

LIA

I am not going to stand for this! I am not a whore!

HAL

You were the minute you accepted your first paycheck.

(There is commotion behind Jack's door. HAL takes the megaphone and disappears under the receptionist desk. JACK and SIMONE enter from his Jack's office.)

JACK

Uh, thank you for that meeting, uh, Ms. Flax uh...

SIMONE

Yes, I believe we came to mutual agreements regarding...

JACK

... regarding our meeting, mutual agreements, meeting meeting meeting... oh Lia! We did not see you there.

LIA

You're both whores, did you know that?

JACK

What? We can't *both* be whores. That's not possible.

(LIA slumps into her office. We hear a click and feedback from a megaphone.)

HAL

(through the megaphone) Good evening and thank you for the lovely introduction. It is quite an honor to be inducted into the Advertising Hall of Shame. I mean of course, the Hall of Fame. Ha ha ha.

SIMONE

Where is that coming from?

JACK

It's a recording of Hal's acceptance speech.

HAL

(through the megaphone) Advertising is important. Not just inflaming desire, but educating and entertaining the public to guide them towards the products and services that makes their lives richer and brighter.

SIMONE

Somebody shut that off!

HAL

(through the megaphone) But within our fame lies shame. We lie, we manipulate, all those fragile egos clutching and grasping.

JACK

I don't remember *that* in his speech.

HAL

(through the megaphone) I know you. You are maggots. Festering and feasting off the flesh of the innocent. Causing vomiting and internal bleeding and erections lasting more than four hours. Every day is Black Friday. Now with barbital!

JACK

It's the ghost of Hal Noble.

HAL

(through the megaphone) Subaru equals love. Coke equals happiness. Drink a Coke while driving a Subaru and you'll experience nirvana. The Tidy Bowl man lives in a toilet. And you are assholes dropping golden turds with a splash. We're number two. But we try harder!

(SIMONE approaches Hal's "body" on the sofa.)

SIMONE

Yes, Hal. We've been trying harder! You have no idea how hard we've been trying!

HAL

(through the megaphone) Look upon your own lies! Look upon your power grabs, your false promises, your manipulations... !

SIMONE

Sop! Stop torturing us!

HAL

(through the megaphone) You cater to a world of American idiots...

(JACK grabs the doll and shakes it.)

JACK

Shut up! You leave her alone!

HAL

(through the megaphone) ... while you litter the lives around you with shameless nonsense...

(JACK seizes the doll and gets it into an elaborate wrestling hold. It looks surprisingly sexual.)

SIMONE

Oh, Jack you made him stop. I'm regretting even less the sex we just had.

JACK

Let's see a *homosexual* put a possessed blow-up doll into a submission hold!

(HAL stands on the reception desk.)

HAL

I have returned! From the darkness to the darkness!

SIMONE

Hal!

JACK

You... you *are* a god!

HAL

Goddamn right.

JACK

You... you can't be alive. I slapped you.

HAL

You slapped me?

JACK

What?! No. I lied! See, I'm a liar. Just like you said.

SIMONE

(babbling) Of course, you're alive. You think I don't know a dead man when I see one? Hal, I brought you a chai. Isn't there a chai here for Hal? Hal loves chai.

HAL

You were going to take over the agency.

SIMONE

I was... I didn't... Jack, was behind it all!

HAL

Jack?

JACK

Simone tried to have sex with the client!

SIMONE

What?!

JACK

But he wouldn't have the old bag. So she failed!

SIMONE

Jack *blew* the client!

JACK

I saved the agency!

HAL

You two have been busy. I'll get to you later, right after we land this Godzilla-sized piece of business.

(HAL descends from the desktop.)

SIMONE

Yes yes yes, we'll land the business and we'll be alright again. All of our ugly behaviors and unwanted feelings will be healthily swept under the rug.

JACK

Oh, my god, boss. Feng Hua will be here any minute! And we've got nothing.

HAL

In the great tradition of my advertising forebears, I shall wing it. Fairy dust and intimidation. None of these pricks have gotten presidents elected. Who the hell is Feng Hua?

(LIA stumbles out of her office.)

LIA

I get it, Hal! I understand now! I can be who you want me to be. I see the light. You're right, Hal. I am a whore! And I'm so happy about that! No, I'm worse than that! I've sold out my gifts. I'm not an artist. I'm an advertising creative! An artist without an art! Business doesn't give a shit about oceans. So neither do I! They're *our* oceans! Animals are here to be slaughtered for our beauty. Right? "Dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the cattle" It's in the bible so it must mean something! I know! Rape the oceans for a dewy, clear complexion! Cow placentas for creamier skin. See how I worked in creamier? Fuck the fish. Right, Hal? Fuck the fish!

(LIA stands there, breathing heavily.)

HAL

Fuck the fish?

LIA

Yes! Fuck the fish!

HAL

That is spectacularly wrong.

LIA

Wrong? How could wrong be wrong?!

(Jacks's office door opens and SIMPKINS runs out.)

SIMPKINS

(screeching) He's here!

HAL

Of course, I'm here. I'm here!

SIMPKINS

Not you whoever you are! Feng Hua!

SIMONE

Feng Hua is here?

JACK

(jumps, looking around) Where!? He can't be here!

SIMONE

Not here in the room, you idiot.

SIMPKINS

You never know. I've heard stories. Terrifying, actually. Wait, who is he?

JACK

This is Hal Noble.

SIMPKINS

If I weren't so terrified I'd be thrilled to meet you.

SIMONE

We're not ready. Hal, do something!

HAL

The day I jump for some corporate bigshot is the day he dies. Open the doors! Let the maggot slither in.

SIMONE

We're at the mercy of the elevator!

HAL

Fucking elevators. Spewing out human trash and spilling it onto our floors where not even Pinesol can rid of us the stench. Let the liar in!

(Simpkins' phone chirps.)

SIMPKINS

One minute!!! He's going to be here in *one minute!*

JACK

The future of the agency is at stake! Everybody act like someone else than you actually are!

SIMONE

I don't even know what that is anymore!

HAL

I'm me. Fuck him.

(HEATHER stumbles backwards, shaking.)

HEATHER

Oh my god... mom... mom, please stop...

JACK

What the hell are you babbling about?

HEATHER

I... I... I...

JACK

I don't even know how to say hello in Chinese. Where's the Chinese woman?

(SIMONE points at MINDY.)

SIMONE

You! Front and center! Go get him!

MINDY

Me? No. I... I... no... !

JACK

Above and beyond! Remember?

(BING! MINDY enters the elevator.)

MINDY

What do I do?

SIMONE

A lot of bowing!

(The elevator doors close.)

SIMPKINS

Thirty seconds!

SIMONE

You're counting the seconds?!

SIMPKINS

He's very punctual!

HAL

A punctual client. He's not real.

JACK

Somebody tell me how to say hello!

HEATHER

(blurting out) Ni hao! Ni hao! *Ni hao!!!*

JACK

She's speaking in tongues!

SIMPKINS

Ten seconds!

HAL

If this asshole thinks he can make ad people speak in tongues, he's got another thing coming.

(HAL pulls the gun out of the back of his underwear and points the gun at the elevator.)

SIMONE

Hal, stop!

JACK

This is no time to defend the honor of a receptionist!

HAL

3... 2... 1...

(They all stand there frozen, waiting for the elevator. BING! The doors open and MINDY enters wearing a blood-red cheongsam. She stands imperiously with her hands on her hips and speaks with a distinct Chinese accent.)

MING

Bing.

HAL

Ming!

MING

(in a Chinese accent) Hello, Hal. You going to use that thing? I know you don't fire blanks.

JACK

What the hell did you do with Feng Hua?

MING

I am Feng Hua, you baboon!

HAL

Ming Feng Hua. You're... you're...

MING

I'm back.

SIMONE

I'm so confused I believe I'm going to vomit.

LIA

Mindy?

MING

How nice, somebody actually knows my alias.

SIMONE

Hal, what is going on?

HAL

I... I never thought I'd see you again.

MING

I have been waiting twenty-five years for this moment. So I can watch you quiver and pee-pee your pants when you see what you've brought on yourself.

(MING starts to strut around like she owns the place.)

MING (CONT'D)

Twenty-five years ago you bedded me, Hal Noble. I was just a college girl, here as an intern, to learn and grow. And the man I worked for, the great Hal Noble, seduced me, just another one of your harem. But I fell in love with you. And you told me you loved me too. You called me your precious orchid.

HAL

Orchid? I wouldn't have called you an orchid. It's not an attractive word.

MING

You called me your precious orchid!!!

JACK

She is fucking scary.

MING

And then you tossed me aside. For some whore willing to trade her body for advancement.

SIMONE

I remember you.

MING

And I remember you.

SIMONE

Wait! I was not a whore!

MING

You were a whore! And you're still a whore! You tried to fuck this little man for money.

(MING points at SIMPKINS.)

SIMPKINS

Little man?

SIMONE

It wasn't for me! It was for the agency!

MING

When I returned to Shanghai, I devised a plan. I finished my degree and began my slow ascent. I slaved. I climbed to the top. I slept with officials, seduced backers, while I built an enterprise grand enough to swallow businesses whole.

LIA

Jesus christ, my novel sucks.

MING

All this with a child in tow.

HAL

A child... ?

MING

Haven't you wondered why all of your clients are mysteriously vanishing? That's because they are all owned by Feng Hua Enterprises!

HAL

Ming, no...

MING

And now, you're nothing. No clients, two floors of actors to pay, and a hundred blow-up dolls adding more to society than your scum-spewing ad people!

HAL

Please, Ming. Please stop...

LIA

What happened to the child?

HEATHER

Ma! Ni bu neng zhe yang dui dai ren! (translation: Mother! You can't do this to these people!)

MING

Bi zui., mei ni shuo hua de fen. (translation: It is too late. What is done is done.)

JACK

The girl.

HAL

The girl is my child?

MING

She's been gathering your secrets, helping me plot my revenge. Do you remember my "media plans?"

(MING presses a button on her iPad and suddenly one of the walls lights up, a giant projection of HAL lying on the sofa with a bottle of Jim Beam in his arms and his pants around his ankles.)

HAL

The American public has seen worse.

MING

But they've never seen this.

(She pushes another key. Now there's a sheep straddling Hal's pantless body.)

MING

Or *this!*

(Now the sheep is shorn and is wearing crotchless panties. Hal's face now has a lecherous grin.)

LIA

You can't use photoshop against advertising. That's ours!

MING

And with a single click, these images will be shared with the largest twitter following on the planet.

(HAL gets up slowly, swinging the gun around.)

MING

Yes, Hal. Public ridicule, an agency in shambles, crippling bankruptcy...

(HAL backs up, unsteady on his feet, towards his office.)

HAL

Goddamnit! It's not going to end like this. I say how things go. I say how things end.

LIA

Hal, what are you doing?!

HAL

I say how businesses are built and candidates are elected. I am the one who decides what the American idiot public buys and dies for. Not you!

SIMONE

(to Ming) Make him stop!

HAL

I am the one with power!

(HAL backs into his office and slams the door.)

MING

Hal, don't!

(From within, we hear a loud BANG.

They all are stunned.

Then we hear another loud BANG. And another. Then several more. Then the smashing of furniture, lamps and glass.)

HAL (OFF)

Goddamnit motherfucker dick-licking shit cunt cunt cunt cunt cunt shit fuck fuck fuck *fuck you!*

(The door opens and HAL walks out, smoke billowing through the open door.)

HAL

I think I broke a lamp.

(BING! The room goes quiet. HAL slumps into a chair. MING slumps into a chair. The elevators open and RICKY and his ukulele burst into the room.)

RICKY

I did it! I wrote a popular jingle! And all the actors wanted to sing it. It's funny, actors will do just about anything and advertising creatives don't want to do anything. Lia, why is that?

JACK

Simone, tell little Lord Fauntleroy to put a sock in it!

SIMONE

Ricky, stop making a fool of yourself.

HEATHER

Don't talk to him like that!

RICKY

And and and they listened to me on my ukulele and the creatives told me I was an idiot but the actors loved it and it turns out actors are really good singers and they sang with such feeling and Glenn, this really nice guy who's really good at technology, figured out how to ...

(RICKY's cell phone rings.)

RICKY

That's Glenn!

SIMONE

I don't like this Glenn.

RICKY

(over his phone) Hi, Glenn! I know, it seems like such a long time! Are you ready? (back to the group) He's going to play them over the speaker system. (to Glenn) What? You locked the creatives out of the conference room? That's a good idea.

(back to the group) The actors locked the creatives out of the conference room because they were making sarcastic comments. (back to Glenn) OK, here we go!

(We hear a click over the speaker system. The voices sing in harmony and counterpoint while RICKY sings the melody, strumming his ukulele.)

RICKY/SINGERS

We're sorry about the microbeads
We'll find another way to scrub your skin

And we're sure we can find something better
Than cow placentas to help you glow.

Because fish shouldn't die for beauty
And cows should keep their placentas.
After all, they're theirs.

We just want you to feel beautiful
And you're beautiful just the way you are
You don't really need L'Image skin care
You don't need us at all.

We just want you healthy and happy and joyful and fulfilled and peaceful
And fun and content and smiling and cheerful and trouble-free.

So if you want to buy L'Image, that's fine.
No pressure.
Do what makes you feel good.
And we're sorry about the fish and the cows.
We'll try to do better.
Yes, we'll try to do better.
Because we want to be as beautiful as you.

(There's a silence.)

MING

The Titanic is sinking.

SIMONE

I knew it. You're trying to undermine me. My own son!

JACK

That's the worst jingle I've ever heard.

(HEATHER picks up the megaphone and stands on a chair.)

HEATHER

(over the megaphone) *EVERYBODY SHUT THE FUCK UP!*

(The room goes silent.)

HEATHER (CONT'D)

(over the megaphone) I have the motherfucking megaphone and you do not! I was going to say what horrible, selfish, mean-spirited people you are but then I realized that compassion and truth and beauty doesn't resort to name-calling. Look at yourselves! This beautiful man has written a song...

RICKY

A jingle.

(HEATHER drops the megaphone and looks at RICKY.)

HEATHER

Yes, a jingle. A jingle about truth and accepting responsibility and even though it didn't rhyme and the meter was all screwed up but it was sung with humanity and compassion.

RICKY

And I never had one lesson.

HEATHER

And I feel pity for all of you. So desperate and screwed up. But you're only human beings doing your best even though what you're doing is malicious and insane. Why not tell the truth? Human beings will forgive just about anyone, for anything. Except for Holocaust survivors and who can blame them for hating those Nazi assholes. But the Nazis are an exception and you're just little people running around like ants after someone kicked over your anthill. With your secrets and desperate lies and egos. Simone, where are you from?

RICKY

We're from London! We're Londoners!

HEATHER

No, not London. My insane Chinese mother had me dig up everything on all of you! I've been through all the records.

JACK

So what if she's not from London?

RICKY

I'm not a Londoner?

SIMONE

(her accent changing) Well, uh, I'm not from London. I'm from... Bristol. I grew up with an alcoholic fishmonger father and an abusive school teacher mother...

RICKY

Oh good. Does that mean we're still British?

HEATHER

Simone!

SIMONE

Oh, my god, that was my back-up life. (speaking in an mid-Atlantic accent) I was brought up on the upper East side of Manhattan...

RICKY

Mother, what's happening to your voice?

SIMONE

(babbling) ... my mother was a runway model and my father was a hedgehog manager...

HEATHER

The truth!

SIMONE

I... I'm from... Ohio!

RICKY

Ohio? I'm not British anymore? Mother, how am I supposed to speak?

SIMONE

I don't know anymore!

RICKY

(attempting an American accent) Is this how I'm supposed to talk now? My mouth feels weird.

HEATHER

No wonder you all act so crazy. You're not living your real lives. You're from a small town outside of Akron. Your real name is...

Don't say it!

SIMONE

Cindy Miller!

HEATHER

(HAL looks stricken.)

Cindy?

HAL

HEATHER

Yes, Hal. Cindy Miller was a junior account executive here 25 years ago.

HAL

I remember Cindy Miller.

HEATHER

She left the agency 25 years ago... with child.

RICKY

Mother, *I'm* 25 years old! What a coincidence. I have a twin!

SIMONE

Oh jesus fucking christ enough! Hal, you fucking moron, Ricky is your son!

HAL

A son. I've never wanted a son.

RICKY

Now I won't call you Uncle Hal anymore!

HAL

Oh no...

RICKY

Papa Hal!

HEATHER

(sorrowfully) Which makes the man I love my brother.

LIA

OK, OK, fuck it. *I've* got a confession to make. My last name isn't Shakespeare! I can't believe I'm saying this. It's Schulberg!

(They all just stare at her.)

SIMONE

Of course your name's not Shakespeare. Nobody's named Shakespeare.

RICKY

Except Shakespeare.

JACK

Yeah, nice try. You got nothing.

LIA

Oh yeah! Well I've got a bunker-buster for you! Hal... *I'm pregnant!*

(LIA stomps into her office.)

HAL

I never wanted a baby.

JACK

(clears his throat) As long as we're slinging all this honesty around... it seems I'm a bisexual. But the kind that mostly likes men. So, there. And whoever said the truth sets you free, that's bullshit.

HEATHER

Mother, how insane to spend the past 25 years as a Machiavellian corporate maniac when in actuality you're just a woman whose heart was broken and instead of doing what normal people do, say drinking a lot and boring your friends for months on end, you wasted all those years building an empire so you can destroy a single man.

(LIA stomps out of her office.)

LIA

OK, I'm *not* pregnant!

HAL

Enough! That's enough!

MING

Yes, that's enough.

(HAL looks around. He buries his head in his hands.)

HAL

Oh my god, what have I done? What is my life? Gone, gone. I broke the heart of a beautiful, pure girl long ago and now that you're a strong, vibrant woman, I love you even more. And the shame. It's this business. It casts aside love and rejects the beauty that's in front of you.

(HAL falls to his knees at Ming's feet.)

HAL (CONT'D)

Ming, do what you want with the agency. It's a desperate pit of lies and deceptions. Burn it to the ground. "I'm sorry" isn't vast enough to express my heartbreak. Now I see... I've had three children. Then I didn't have three children. I had a fine reputation. Then I didn't. I had love. And I let it stumble from my clumsy hands.

(HAL breaks down in tears.)

HEATHER

Mother, forgive him! Now! Set yourself free!

(MING looks confused and tired.)

MING

Do you know how tiring it is to spend your life plotting revenge? It's very, very tiring. Lia-Hua, get your things. We are returning to Shang-hai.

HEATHER

No, mother. I am staying. I am staying to explore a life with the man who is suddenly my half-brother. If he'll have me.

RICKY

I will. I shall.

MING

Oh, I give up. He's not your brother.

HEATHER

He's not?

MING

I can't do this anymore.

HAL

You mean I didn't grope my daughter?

MING

No, you groped *my* daughter!

HEATHER

So I'm going to explore life with the man who is no longer my half-brother.

RICKY

That's much better. Our babies won't have giant heads!

(HAL gestures to RICKY and HEATHER. They come towards his kneeling body.)

HAL

You, you beautiful young people, I release you from this hell. You're pure and good and have blessedly naïve ideas of the world. Your love and truth has the power to cure a trembling assembly such as ours. Go, with my blessing. I... I...

RICKY

I love you too, dad.

HEATHER

Goodbye, almost-dad.

HAL

I hope to call you daughter someday.

HEATHER

Goodbye, mother.

RICKY

Goodbye, not-my-mother. And goodbye, my real mother. Someday you'll teach me how to speak with an Ohio accent.

SIMONE

(grandly, back to her British accent) I'm sure I have no idea.

(RICKY hugs SIMONE. HEATHER hugs MING.)

HEATHER

Be good.

RICKY

Wait, I can't forget my ukulele. I'll need it to start my jingle store.

(RICKY jumps and runs to his ukulele.)

HEATHER

Our jingle store.

RICKY

Our jingle store. I've never thought I'd say the words "our jingle store."

HEATHER

I don't think *anyone's* ever said the words, "our jingle store."

(RICKY and HEATHER get in the elevator and are gone.)

HAL

Ming, do what you will. I am of the dirt.

(MING too is spent.)

MING

I didn't know what I wanted until this moment. Hal Noble, we have both wasted our lives. Keep this place. Keep your clients. Keep it all. I'm tired. I've ruined so many businesses, chewed and spit them out so I could chew up and spit out one last one. I'm tired. Try to do good. Simpkins, get in the elevator. We're leaving.

(SIMPKINS runs and hits the elevator button. BING!)

MING

And find your pants!

SIMPKINS

Will you be punishing me?

MING

I suppose so.

SIMPKINS

Oh, good. I need punishing.

(SIMPKINS goes to find his pants.)

MING

Hal, yes, I loved you. And now that you're lying at my feet, I feel, I feel...it's been so long since I've had a feeling I don't know what I feel. Goodbye.

(SIMPKINS holds the elevator door for MING.)

SIMPKINS

Yes, goodbye and thank you for all the excitement...

MING

Get in the fucking elevator!

(SIMPKINS scurries in. MING follows. The elevator doors close. All are left staring at HAL who is now curled into a fetal ball.)

LIA

I fucking love her! Ha! I was right! Truth will out! You're human. You're all human. See, we'll start over! A new manifesto shall be written. Humanity, forgiveness, love - higher ideals win after all. And so do I!

(HAL's body begins to shake. Loud moans and guttural sounds emanate from his bent over body. The sounds of shame and horror bubbling up from the depths. HAL rises to his hands and knees. His sobs are not sobs. They are the seeds of deep, monstrous laughter. HAL stumbles to his feet. He laughs and roars and guffaws. He howls at the elevator door, slamming it with his hands in time with his roaring laughter. Suddenly, he whips around, insanity in his eyes.)

HAL

Got rid of that crazy bitch!

(HAL stops laughing. He stares at the three of them.)

HAL

Don't just stand there, you cretins. Let's trigger some shame.

CURTAIN

(... as Green Day's "American Idiot" plays loudly through the curtain call.)