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IRRATIONAL EXUBERANCE

a play for our financial times

by Jonathan Graham
Irrational Exuberance
by Jonathan Graham

CHARACTERS:

RICH; the middle-aged C.E.O. of a multi-million dollar financial group

PATRICIA; his wife, in her mid-30’s-40

NOLAN; Rich’s trusted right hand man, in his 30’s

DEBBIE; a gas station/convenient store manager in her early 30’s

SETTING:

The Present; various locations in outside Chicago including a restaurant, an office, along the roadside, an airport and a gas station carry-out.

ETC:

Time is fluid. Settings are suggestive. Transitions are quick.

PRODUCTION HISTORY:

Irrational Exuberance was developed through readings at Bloomington Playwrights Project (BPP) in Bloomington, IN during the 2008-2009 season. The play was first produced at BPP as part of the BloomingPlays Festival, May 14-30, 2009 and was later performed at the Great Plains Theatre Conference (Omaha, NE) in May 2010 under the direction of Gail Bray.
ACT I; Scene 1

(AT RISE: A restaurant located in the lower level of an office building. PATRICIA, a fabulously dressed, middle-aged woman, is sipping an Arnold Palmer and talking on a hands-free cell phone.)

PATRICIA
But he’s forty-five minutes late, and the restaurant is in the same building as his office. (Listening) Exactly. If he’s dead, they should have called me. (Laughing) I should be the one to identify the body. After all these years of marriage, I can’t miss that! (Listening) Just call Nolan, and ask him if my husband’s dying words had anything to do with our lunch date. I’ll hold.

(In a moment, RICH – a corporate titan in a tailored suit – enters.)

RICH
Hello, beautiful.

(RICH tries to give PATRICIA a kiss, but SHE dodges it.)

PATRICIA
Do you have any idea how annoying it is to be married to you?

(RICH’s cell phone rings.)

RICH
Hold that thought. (Answering) Hello?

PATRICIA
(Into phone) He just walked in. (Listening) Yeah, and took a call.

She wants to know if I’m dead.

RICH
And no apology, by the way.

PATRICIA
Yeah, well I’m here now so… (Listening and motioning toward the dining room)

RICH
They don’t have any tables. (Into phone) He looks surprised I’ve been waiting.
RICH

(Into phone) We’re having lunch.

PATRICIA

(Into phone) According him, we’re still going to eat. (To RICH) I’m starving!

RICH

(Into phone) Listen can you do something about the echo in there? I hate how it sounds like an empty office. (To PATRICIA, covering the receiver) Where’s Angelo?

PATRICIA

He got fired.

RICH

(Into phone) Why didn’t you tell me Angelo got fired? (Beat) Patricia said he did.

PATRICIA

(Into phone) They didn’t know about Angelo, so when Nolan gets back on the line, you should tell him the whole story.

RICH

Patricia knows. Patricia’s assistant knows. It seems like everybody knows but me. So why don’t you find out?

PATRICIA

Yes, I’ll hold.

RICH

You could’ve started on an appetizer, honey.

PATRICIA

They told me I was welcome to wait in the bar.

RICH

Did you give them my name?

PATRICIA

Isn’t it enough that I’m being seen in public with you?

RICH

So now I’m the bad guy for wanting to take my wife to lunch?

PATRICIA

You’re forty-five minutes late, Richard. And all you had to do was ride down the elevator.

RICH

I had a busy morning.
PATRICIA
Doing what?

RICH
Running my company, thank you very much. (Into phone) Yeah, what’s up?

(Into phone) Yes, I’m here.

RICH
That’s a shame.

PATRICIA
He said, “I had a busy morning.”

RICH
Send Angelo a bottle of good scotch for me. (To PATRICIA) You still want to eat, right?

PATRICIA
Meanwhile, still no tables, and no apology.

RICH
(Into phone) And tell Dingle we’re over-leveraged right now.

PATRICIA
Do you know why he was so late?

RICH
(Moving away a little) And send some flowers to Patricia. She’s a little pissed at me.

PATRICIA
Are you kidding me?

RICH
(Listening) Well, I don’t think it was really forty-five minutes.

PATRICIA
(To RICH) Why did you fire everybody? (Into phone) He’s ignoring me.

RICH
And no statements to anyone about this morning.

PATRICIA
You mean moved the furniture out? (To RICH) What the hell is this?

RICH
Just because I’m having lunch with her doesn’t mean we’re going to have a conversation.
PATRICIA
You watch, he’ll try to ship me off to the Caymans for the week.

RICH
She said something about the Caymans, so find out where she’s going to be before you call the florist.

PATRICIA
Like I have no stake in this. (Listening) If he’s wearing the orange jumpsuit, I’m right there beside him.

What else have you got for me?

RICH
So what you’re saying is he went in this morning, fired another fifty people, had a moving company come and start clearing out the office, and he didn’t have presence of mind to tell me he might be a little late for lunch?

What else?

PATRICIA
You and I both know things don’t happen overnight.

What else?

RICH
How is that possible?

What else?

PATRICIA
Since last month this happened? (Listening) O.K. (Listening) I’m going to talk to him. (Hangs up, and stares at RICH, unbelieving) Richard?

Is that all?

RICH
Honey.

(To PATRICIA) Two seconds. (Into phone) I think we have a table now, so —
PATRICIA
No.

RICH
So they take care of the junk. Pick up and dispose?

*(PATRICIA tries to take RICH by the hand.)*

PATRICIA
Can you call him back later?

RICH
*(To PATRICIA)* Shhh. *(Into phone)* Are there tax advantages?

PATRICIA
HOW THE FUCK DID YOU LOSE FIFTY MILLION DOLLARS IN A MONTH?

RICH
*(Into phone)* Um, I’ve gotta go. *(Hanging up)* Maybe a little quieter, Patricia.

PATRICIA
Is that number right?

RICH
It’s close.

PATRICIA
And this morning, you were “busy” because your company went out of business.

RICH
Essentially.

PATRICIA
And you didn’t bother to tell me?

RICH
I suppose I should have asked your permission?

PATRICIA
Don’t patronize me.

RICH
It just kills you that you have no role in this.

PATRICIA
Oh, I have a role.
RICH
Oh, yes: the capable enlightened woman of the twenty-first century.

PATRICIA
We used to talk about things.

RICH
And that always went so well.

PATRICIA
You might need me again, you know. I mean, who do you think is going to be there beside you when you’re doing the leg shackle shuffle over to the courthouse?

RICH
Could we maybe not talk about this in a public place?

PATRICIA
You don’t tell me what to do.

RICH
An equal partner. She who must be consulted.

PATRICIA
I think I deserve to know about the future of our money—

RICH
(Cutting her off) Our money? ... I mean, who made that money, darling? And while we’re at it, who bought that diamond necklace and those ridiculously expensive shoes? The fact of the matter is, I can afford to lose fifty million. I’m sorry if it’s no fun to watch from the sidelines, but it’s not my fault that you decided somewhere along the line that your sole accomplishment in life would be to spend my money.

(PATRICIA throws her drink in his face.)

RICH, Continued
That was uncalled for.

PATRICIA
This is not over.

(PATRICIA exits. BLACKOUT.)
ACT I: Scene 2

(AT RISE: A dimly lit and nearly empty office. After a moment NOLAN, a younger man dressed in a good suit and conservative tie, enters and flips on the light. HE carries an iron and ironing board, which HE sets up. From a closet HE retrieves a shirt and irons it. Shortly, RICH enters, now dressed in a sweat suit, carrying a gym bag.)

RICH
Are you crazy?

(RICH turns out the light.)

NOLAN
I can’t see.

(NOLAN turns on the light. RICH turns it out.)

RICH
Someone could be watching.

NOLAN
How am I supposed to iron if I can’t see?

RICH
I didn’t ask you to iron.

NOLAN
You asked me to get your clothes together. You asked me to pack your bag. I can’t do it properly in the dark.

(NOLAN turns the light back on. RICH reaches for the switch. NOLAN stops him.)

NOLAN, Continued
You want to draw attention to yourself? Keep flipping the lights on and off. It’ll look like Morse code.

RICH
Could you please just throw everything in the bag?

NOLAN
Would you stop freaking out? The lawyers are almost positive: no indictment until next week. Supposedly there’s some star witness coming in next Monday. Who knows how long that will take?

RICH
But after this morning, we’re going to be on the news, right? What if somebody drives past and sees the light on?
They’ll assume it’s housekeeping.

Right. But what if housekeeping actually shows up?

You fired housekeeping, remember?

Oh, yeah. Speaking of which, clean the bathroom before you go, O.K.?

Me?

I want this place spotless.

So when they break down the door for the benefit of Eyewitness News, they’ll be like Geraldo Rivera in Al Capone’s vault.

\textit{(NOLAN finishes ironing the shirt and hands it to RICH.)}

Put this on.

I want to be comfortable in the car.

Do you really want to risk doing the perp walk in a pair of sweatpants?

O.K., you’re right.

\textit{(RICH undresses and then puts on the shirt, a tie, dress socks, a tailored suit, and shoes. HE stands, facing the audience as if looking in the mirror. NOLAN pulls up a chair behind and stands on it and combs RICH’s hair. RICH is transformed into a corporate titan.)}

When’s your flight?

Eight-thirty.

And when do you get to Indy?
NOLAN.
Ten o’clock their time.

*(NOLAN puts away the iron and ironing board. RICH goes to the next room and returns with a trash bag full of shredded paper.)*

RICH
I shredded the rest. You took care of your files, right?

NOLAN
I wiped the hard drives and burned the paper last night in my fire pit.

You have a fire pit?

NOLAN
Christmas present. Consumer Air became air pollution.

And the dossier, too?

NOLAN
What dossier?

RICH
The Consumer Air dossier. My secretary never did find it.

Forget about it.

NOLAN
Shredded?

RICH
The less you know about my division the better, right?

Right. And everything else is clean?

NOLAN
Everything else was in the red. They’ll follow the money.

RICH
Right. *(Going to the desk and emptying a bunch of money into the gym bag)* But they won’t find anything...

NOLAN
They need a person who knows enough about Consumer Air to hurt us. Who understands —
RICH
Oh, yeah, none of these people understand.

NOLAN
Consumer Air was isolated. It was beautiful. No one but us knew the first thing about it, so those assholes who’ve agreed to testify can say what they want. Talk about accounting irregularities or that nonsense about insider trading —

RICH
But they don’t know anything about Consumer Air.

NOLAN
Pure speculation. The only people who knew anything worked at the call center.

RICH
Nothing to worry about.

NOLAN
Even if they got somebody to testify, those girls didn’t grasp the complexities.

RICH
(Giving NOLAN the trash bag) Find a dumpster, O.K.?

(NOLAN takes the bag and checks that the desk drawers are empty.)

RICH
So, let’s see. Take out the trash. Clean the bathroom. Take my other suit to the cleaners. Cancel my subscription to the Sun-Times … I hate that fucking rag … And get the phones and internet turned off for this place. You got time before your flight. (Beat; Nolan is making a list) But first, I need you to talk to my wife.

NOLAN
You’re wife doesn’t want to talk to me.

RICH
We’ve got to convince her to take some of my money and leave the country.

NOLAN
Don’t you think that she would rather talk to you?

RICH
You mean scream at me? Ruin another suit?

NOLAN
Indictment or no indictment, you’re eventually going to have to talk to your wife.
RICH
I don’t accept that. You need to look into other options. Patricia and I discovered long ago that we communicate best through our subordinates.

NOLAN
She needs to hear from you. An apology, maybe. Assurance. A little tender loving care.

(NOLAN’s suggestion is met with silence.)

RICH
You know, Nolan. If you tried, you could sound just like me.

I don’t think—

NOLAN

Try.

RICH

I don’t know what to say.

NOLAN

That’s good, but a little huskier.

RICH

I don’t know what to say.

NOLAN

See? She won’t know the difference. When was the last time she listened to what I had to say?

NOLAN

What am I supposed to say about the company?

RICH

Just say something about the restructuring has hit a few speed bumps. Keep talking, and she’ll lose interest. She’ll change the subject.

NOLAN

What about the grand jury?

RICH

Tell her, “I swear to God, these people have no imagination.”

NOLAN

I swear to God, these people have no imagination.
Yes, but remember, husky!

O.K., I’ll call her from the airport.

No. She’s obsessed with caller I.D. Call her from here. Call her “Honey Bear.” She loves that. And whatever you do, don’t let on that we’re going to the cabin.

Got it. You’re leaving now?

Yeah. The drive’s five hours. Your flight lands three hours from now, so we should get to the cabin at about the same time.

Are you sure you don’t want to fly?

The drive will clear my head.

And the staff there knows we’re coming?

You are the staff.

You mean ... nobody?

It’s just a little cabin where Patricia’s dad used to fish. If the T.V. guys show up, they’ll be disappointed. Which is the point, of course.

And we’ll get there about midnight?

We’ll see what they say about me on the late news.

(RICH retrieves a rolling suitcase from the closet. From the gym bag, HE takes a couple bundles of cash and gives them to NOLAN.)

Did you get dinner? You should grab a sandwich at the airport.
NOLAN

Thanks.

RICH

And tell my wife I put a million in her account, but that’s going to have to last a while.

NOLAN

You mean like five to seven years?

RICH

My wife doesn’t have much of a sense of humor.

NOLAN

Sorry.

RICH

Tell her I love her. As me, I mean. And if she says anything thing about this mess—

NOLAN

I swear to God these people have no imagination.

RICH

That’s really very good. Keep your phone on. Bye.

(RICH exits. Beat. NOLAN checks out the window, and then, a bit nervously, dials the phone.)

NOLAN

Hi, Honey Bear, it’s Rich. Listen, I am so sorry about lunch today. (Listening) I deserved every bit of it. You were right, and I was wrong. (Listening) This whole restructuring thing has hit a few speed bumps. I don’t know, I just wish you were here.... (Listening) No, absolutely not. Patricia, I swear to God those people have no imagination. Don’t believe everything you hear, Honey Bear. (Listening) I don’t care what Nolan told your assistant. This is Rich talking. I didn’t call to talk to you about that nonsense. (Listening) I called because I miss you. Because I think we spend too much time letting our subordinates do the talking. (Listening) What am I wearing? (Describes what RICH was wearing) A navy suit, a white shirt and a light green tie— (Listening) Oh ... boxers, actually. (Settles into RICH’s chair) What are you wearing?

(LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.)
ACT I: Scene 3

(AT RISE: PATRICIA inside the carry-out at a gas station. SHE is talking on a hands-free cell phone while balancing a few groceries. SHE crosses back to her cart as SHE speaks, placing the groceries in the cart. NOLAN remains in half-light on the other end of the phone; a frozen silhouette.)

PATRICIA
I’m naked, actually. In the hot tub. Yeaaaaaaah... Steamy hot. I’m so sorry about earlier, darling. I wish you were here with me, so we could, you know, make up. I’d love to go bobbing for Richard. (Listening) Uh huh. You’re in the office, right? And everyone else is gone? Well, you better go hands-free darling, you’ve got work to do. That’s right. I can picture you in that big leather chair. Thinking up some big ideas. Oh, yeah. (Listening) Put on the headset, pumpkin. (Beat) Yes, I can hold.

(PATRICIA takes her groceries to the counter where DEBBIE, the manager, stands. DEBBIE, 30s, has great hair and is dressed in jeans and a company logo polo shirt.)

DEBBIE
Did you find everything all right?

PATRICIA
Yes, thanks. (Back to phone) Hmmmmmm. I’m still here. No, you talk to me. (Listening) That’s right.

DEBBIE
Paper or plastic?

PATRICIA
(Motioning to a cloth bag in her basket) Put it all in here. (Into phone) That’s what I said. Umm hmm. I’ll put it in the trunk where it belongs.

(DEBBIE finishes ringing up the groceries and putting them in the bag.)

DEBBIE
Eighteen thirty-seven, ma’am.

(PATRICIA gives DEBBIE a hundred dollar bill; DEBBIE makes change.)

DEBBIE, Continued
You want the receipt in the bag?

PATRICIA
Give it to me. (Motioning “just a minute” to DEBBIE; turning her back and speaking into phone) Ummmmmm-hmmmmmmmmmm. Yes! Yes! Oh, yeah. (Beat) You feel better now? That’s all right. You can make it up to me later. But I have to ask, is this Nolan?
(LIGHTS UP on NOLAN.)

NOLAN
What? What do you mean, Honey Bear? (Beat) I called you Mrs. Davenport? Um, yes, it’s Nolan. (Listening) Meet me at the airport? Who said I was flying to Indianapolis?

(Though in separate locations, focus is on both NOLAN and PATRICIA as THEY continue their phone conversation.)

PATRICIA
At the first sign of trouble Rich always heads for the cabin. I’m there now. Putting sheets on the beds. Rich always sleeps on the sun porch, so I’ll be all by myself in the master suite.

NOLAN
Oh, I couldn’t possibly — (Listening) Well, of course, Mrs. Davenport. (Listening) Wouldn’t it be better if you went to the Caymans?

PATRICIA
The company is crashing down around us, Nolan, and I’m not going anywhere. And you know what’s good for you, you’ll do exactly what I say. Now tell me your flight information. (Listening) United 1432. 10:05. Oh, I’ll be there, Nolan. The only question is, will I be wearing underwear?

(LIGHTS OUT on NOLAN. DEBBIE studies PATRICIA’s face as SHE gives PATRICIA her change.)

PATRICIA
Men really can be more trouble than they’re worth.

DEBBIE
I know what you mean.

PATRICIA
We grow up thinking that it’s so important to develop the skills to attract men, and then eventually we realize that attracting them is the easy part … but getting them to behave sensibly, now that’s a skill. (Beat) Is something wrong?

DEBBIE
No, you just look so familiar to me…

PATRICIA
Oh, well I did grow up around here. Went to Martinsville High. Long before your time, though.

DEBBIE
Are you Patty Wilson?
Yeah! Patricia, now, but —

I’m Debbie Mullins!

Oh my God!

You remember?

Of course I do.

(THEY hug.)

You were my sitter —

That whole summer —

When I was eight.

And now … God, I am old.

You look spectacular.

And you —

I don’t usually look so —

You look great. (Beat) Do not tell your mother that you heard me having phone sex!

I never told her about you and that lifeguard.

I had no business being trusted with anyone’s child!
I thought you were magical.

DEBBIE

You were a terrific kid. You did more for me than I did for you.

PATRICIA

You taught me how to do my make-up.

DEBBIE

What every second grader so desperately needs.

PATRICIA

I worshipped you.

DEBBIE

Really?

PATRICIA

You seemed so glamorous and smart. The stories you’d tell me about Northwestern University and little trinkets you’d give me.

DEBBIE

One was a shot glass, as I recall. Bet your mom loved that.

PATRICIA

She thought you were great. We’ve talked about you. Wondered how things turned out for you.

DEBBIE

That’s sweet.

PATRICIA

I always thought you must have been an awesome mom.

DEBBIE

My husband and I never had children.

PATRICIA

Oh. I didn’t mean to —

DEBBIE

(Cutting her off) It’s O.K.… if you knew my husband, you’d know it’s no tragedy. (Beat) How is your mother?

PATRICIA

She’s okay. She had to close her shop a few years ago.
That must’ve been hard.

So now she works at the Comfort Inn.

And you?

I went to I.U. and worked outside Chicago for a while, but I got downsized.

You couldn’t find anything else in the city?

It was kind of a sudden thing, and I had a bunch of money in the company’s stock, so I didn’t really have a choice.

Oh, no. What did you do?

I managed a call center.

It wasn’t Davenport Innovations by any chance?

How’d you know?

Just a guess... I’ve been reading the papers. I’m really sorry for what you went through.

That’s what I get for working for crazy people.

Right.

So I’m back home, living with mom.

That’s good, right?

You mean as opposed to a homeless shelter?
PATRICIA
No, I mean to spend time with your mom. *(Beat)* After that summer I took care of you, I hardly ever came back here. I really wish I’d spent more time with my folks before they died.

DEBBIE
It’s not that I mind being with my Mom. It’s that I don’t have any other place to go.

I see.

*(Silence.)*

DEBBIE
Is everything all right?

PATRICIA
Yes, I’m just —

DEBBIE
Because all of a sudden you look like —

PATRICIA
It's just seeing you after all these years. You were always such a pretty girl.

DEBBIE
Yeah, well, I don’t look my best in this uniform.

PATRICIA
I didn’t mean that!

DEBBIE
It’s mortifying to stand here and smile at all these people I went to high school with.

PATRICIA
You don’t look bad.

DEBBIE
And of course last time I was back, I was bragging about my awesome job in Chicago. Oh, how the mighty have fallen.

PATRICIA
I just feel so terrible for you, honey.

DEBBIE
It’s not like it’s your fault.

PATRICIA
No.
DEBBIE
So what brings you back?

PATRICIA
My husband and I have a cabin by the lake.

DEBBIE
Oh.

PATRICIA
Nothing fancy. Actually, my dad used to go there and fish. We go there quite a bit.

DEBBIE
I thought you said you never come back here?

PATRICIA
Um … I meant when I was younger.

DEBBIE
When your parents were still alive.

PATRICIA
Exactly.

DEBBIE
But now that the cabin’s yours —

PATRICIA
It’s nice to come for the weekend. It’s so quiet here.

DEBBIE
I noticed.

PATRICIA
It must be a little scary here at night.

DEBBIE
It’s okay.

PATRICIA
Your mom must worry.

DEBBIE
She’d worry no matter what.

PATRICIA
But working to midnight? Out in the boonies?
DEBBIE
We have a security camera… and there’s the trooper station just down the highway.

PATRICIA
Great. So when they discover your cold, dead body, they’ll be wearing those nice hats. *(Digging through her purse)* I want to give you something.

DEBBIE
You don’t have to —

PATRICIA
*(Offering something to DEBBIE)* Here. Have a taser.

DEBBIE
You carry a taser in your purse?

PATRICIA
Go on and take it. I’ve got six or seven more in the back of my car. I like to hand them out.

DEBBIE
No thanks.

PATRICIA
Your mother would want you to take it.

DEBBIE
Isn’t that what you said about the shot glass?

PATRICIA
Come on, honey. Take it from your favorite baby sitter. Every woman should be well armed.

DEBBIE
I appreciate the thought and all, but I took some self-defense classes, and they said that nothing’s more dangerous than a weapon in the hands of a novice.

PATRICIA
That just means you need to practice. *(Brandishes the taser)* You should come out to the cabin tomorrow. I’ll let you shoot my husband if you want.

DEBBIE
Would you mind not pointing that thing at me?

PATRICIA
Suit yourself.

*(PATRICIA puts the weapon back in her purse, then takes out a slip of paper and writes a phone number on it.)*
PATRICIA, Continued
But seriously, here’s my number. You and your mom should come see us.

DEBBIE
You don’t have to do that.

PATRICIA
I want you meet my husband. I think it would do him good.

(BLACKOUT.)

ACT I: Scene 4

(AT RISE: Specials find NOLAN and RICH; NOLAN with a suitcase and airplane ticket, cell phone to HIS ear – and RICH – soaking wet, even though HE is holding an umbrella, and talking on a cell phone. The TWO are leaving messages on one another’s voice mail.)

NOLAN
Rich, it’s Nolan. There’s a slight change in plans.

RICH
Nolan, it’s me. Would you believe my car is out of gas?

NOLAN
I spoke to your wife and it turns out she’s at the cabin.

RICH
Unbelievable! I’m just off the interstate, maybe five miles from the cabin. Soaking wet.

NOLAN
I just landed.

RICH
There’s a Jiffy Gas just down the road.

NOLAN
Patricia wanted to pick me up here.

RICH
Unless I call again, meet me there.

NOLAN
I guess we’ll see you soon.
Call me when you get this.

My battery’s about dead, so I’m going to turn my phone off. See you at the house. Bye. (Beat; looks at his phone) Message?

Who’s this?

(NOLAN and RICK listen to their messages.)

Oh for God’s sake.

(RICH and NOLAN frantically call one another again only to get each other’s voice mail.)

Nolan, under no circumstances may you accept a ride with my wife.

Hi, Rich, it’s Nolan again.

Call her back, and tell her she simply cannot be at the cabin.

I will get to the gas station just as soon as I can.

As you know, I need to be calm and confident and devil may care with the reporters in the morning—

As I said in my last message, my battery’s about dead, so I’m turning this thing off.

(NOLAN closes his phone and exits.)

Patricia needs to be far, far away. I thought she was supposed to be in the Caymans? I don’t care what you do, Nolan. Give Patricia some cash and send her to the moon if you have to, but keep her away from me. She will ruin everything, Nolan. Call me.

(RICH closes his cell phone. BLACKOUT.)
ACT I: Scene 5

(AT RISE: The gas station. DEBBIE is on the phone.)

DEBBIE
Mom, of course I’m not watching American Idol. There’s no T.V. here.

(RICH enters, soaking wet, talking on his cell phone.)

RICH
Honey Bear! It’s Richard. I don’t know if you’ve talked to Nolan, but I’m afraid there’s a change of plans.

DEBBIE
Besides I’ve got to study up for the Grand Jury.

RICH
I’m not going to make it to the cabin tonight. I have to deal with this “fraud” nonsense in the morning.

(DEBBIE sees RICH and recognizes him right away.)

DEBBIE
Mom, I have to go. No, it’s important. Somebody I know just walked in. No, you don’t know him. If you don’t hear from me, call me right before midnight.

RICH
I think the Caymans are a marvelous idea, because up here it’s going to be nothing but reporters and other bores.

DEBBIE
No, I’m not going to call in and vote for him. I have to go.

RICH
All right, sweetie?

DEBBIE

(DEBBIE hangs up.)

RICH
Oh, and don’t believe anything you see on CNN tomorrow. Everything’s fine. Love you. (Closes cell phone) Good evening. Do you sell gas cans?

DEBBIE
I’m sorry, we’re out. Sold two today, if you can believe it.
I guess this is not my day.

You want a cup of coffee to warm up?

That’d be nice. Thank you.

(DEBBIE pours RICH a cup of coffee.)

I’m Debbie by the way.

Rich.

(DEBBIE and RICH shake hands. HE fails to recognize her.)

Did you guys remodel or something? This place used to be kind of a pit.

I started as manager a few months back and cleaned up the joint.

(Making a toast) Here’s to the new regime.

(DEBBIE stares at RICH. At first HE thinks she’s checking him out.)

The new boss looks better in the uniform, for one thing.

(DEBBIE continues to stare at RICH. HE starts to feel weird.)

Is there something I can —?

What?

You’re staring at me.

I was thinking maybe I recognized you from CNN.
I guess I was talking too loud.

RICH

Couldn’t help but overhear.

DEBBIE

I was just exaggerating... So everybody’ll leave me alone while I do all this paperwork. I just closed down my company in Chicago.

RICH

Oh really?

DEBBIE

That’s yesterday. I’ve got to move on. Figure out what’s next.

RICH

So what brings you here?

DEBBIE

I’ve got a place by the lake.

RICH

Nice.

DEBBIE

Trouble is, whenever I’m there, I don’t want to go back to work.

RICH

Well, maybe you should stick around for a while this time.

DEBBIE

Now that I know where to find good coffee, maybe I will. I’ve been thinking I might start a new business out at the cabin. I’ve got a view of the lake. Wildlife. And if I need a break in the afternoon, I can go out back and fish.

RICH

What kind of business?

DEBBIE

Management consulting. You can do that from anywhere. All I’d need is laptop and telephone.

RICH

And a spiffy power point to tell people what they already know.

DEBBIE

Right. So I’m guessing you haven’t always been the manager of a gas station.
DEBBIE
I got downsized six months ago.

RICH
That’s rough.

DEBBIE
That’s yesterday. I’ve got to move on. Figure out what’s next.

RICH
You’ve picked yourself up and you’re moving forward.

DEBBIE
Very slowly.

RICH
But a go-getter like you could probably write her own ticket. Maybe you could even be a management consultant.

DEBBIE
You think?

RICH
What were you doing before?

DEBBIE
I was a customer service manager.

RICH
And you still are.

DEBBIE
For half the salary.

RICH
You’re out in the world. You’re making positive first impressions every day. Somebody might come in here and offer you the job of your dreams.

DEBBIE
Just like that, you’re offering me a job?

RICH
Well, I have some things to work out. The cabin’s not outfitted. I need to winterize the sun porch.

DEBBIE
Uh huh.
RICH
And there are loose ends to tie up with my company.

DEBBIE
I bet there are.

RICH
But now that I’m here, and I know that you’re here, we should talk about it. Over dinner, maybe.

DEBBIE
(Handing RICH a business card) Here’s my card. Call me some time. Can I have a card?

RICH
I don’t have new ones printed.

DEBBIE
What about your old ones?

RICH
A sad vestige of the past. But I’ll call you.

DEBBIE
You should get out of those wet clothes.

RICH
I’ll be all right.

DEBBIE
I have a t-shirt you can borrow. Might be a little tight, but at least it’s dry.

RICH
That’s nice of you.

(Handing RICH a business card) Here’s my card. Call me some time. Can I have a card?

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DEBBIE
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RICH
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DEBBIE
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DEBBIE
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(Handing RICH a business card) Here’s my card. Call me some time. Can I have a card?

RICH
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DEBBIE
What about your old ones?

RICH
A sad vestige of the past. But I’ll call you.

DEBBIE
You should get out of those wet clothes.

RICH
I’ll be all right.

DEBBIE
I have a t-shirt you can borrow. Might be a little tight, but at least it’s dry.

RICH
That’s nice of you.

(Handing RICH a business card) Here’s my card. Call me some time. Can I have a card?

RICH
I don’t have new ones printed.

DEBBIE
What about your old ones?

RICH
A sad vestige of the past. But I’ll call you.

DEBBIE
You should get out of those wet clothes.

RICH
I’ll be all right.

DEBBIE
I have a t-shirt you can borrow. Might be a little tight, but at least it’s dry.

RICH
That’s nice of you.
I’ve been known to be. I’m also a Davenport.

I know who you are.

You do?

I used to work for you.

Oh. I’m sorry.

You ruined my life, so “I’m sorry” doesn’t quite cut it.

Well, keep in mind, life is not without risk.

I know about risk.

And I’ve always felt that I never simply offered people jobs ... I invited them on an adventure.

Oh, you did?

Remember those early ads: Davenport Innovations, one step ahead of the future. I mean, who else can say that? That they are actually ahead of the future?

The company’s bankrupt.

The correct wording, actually, is: “under bankruptcy protection.”

Well, pardon me.

And besides, what an experience! That was the magic carpet ride. The yellow brick road, Debbie. You were following the stairway to heaven, and yes, I know, at the very top of the stairs there was a door, which turned out to be locked... But hell, how many people even
RICH, Continued
make it up to the first landing, you know? We were all a part of remarkable adventure. We
weren’t just selling a product. We were the company that dared to ask, “What is a product?”
We can never forget how radical a notion that was. So, yes, the critics will always have their
negative spin. The company closed. A thousand people lost their jobs. Projected profits were
not achieved. Fair enough. But we know those critics have no imagination. The suggestion
that our company failed? I don’t accept that.

DEBBIE
Do you have any idea what I did for your company?

RICH
No.

DEBBIE
I managed a call center. I sat in a cubicle in some ugly ass aluminum building and listened to
other people answer the telephone.

RICH
You were providing the next generation of customer service.

DEBBIE
Oh, yeah. (Putting on a telephone voice) “Good evening, Davenport Innovations. What’s on
your mind?”

RICH
That’s exactly how I hoped it would sound.

DEBBIE
Too bad you fired me, huh?

RICH
Another opportunity could present itself.

DEBBIE
If I didn’t want you dead.

RICH
The opportunity to get in on the ground floor of something great.

DEBBIE
You mean great like the last one? (Beat) All you did was play on people’s fears. Their greed.
Their hunger for some sense of security.

RICH
And to think nobody had ever tried it before.
You can’t sell air.

DEBBIE

Air futures.

RICH

Whatever.

DEBBIE

That is the essential word.

RICH

No one owns air.

DEBBIE

Futures.

RICH

It doesn’t exist.

DEBBIE

Surely you understand —

RICH

Oh, I know how it worked. You got a bunch of idiots excited about pumping “pure fresh air” down from Canada. You spent a billion dollars of other people’s money on a pipeline that was supposed to run from the Yukon Territory straight down the middle of the United States.

RICH

Not “supposed to” — it does!

DEBBIE

It abruptly stops 20 miles south of Duluth, Minnesota.

RICH

That’s the middle of the country. The northern middle. (Beat) Look, Debbie, you are a smart, tough, hardworking, beautiful woman, and you do not deserve the pain that you have felt. I remember the glowing reports about your call center, Debbie. Lord knows you gave your all to the company, and I thank you for that from the bottom of my heart. I am sorry for all that you have lost. Believe me, I don’t sleep well at night. So could we please sit together for a minute? Please.

(RICH sits. Reluctantly, DEBBIE sits, too.)
RICH, *Continued*

Thank you. See here’s the thing: there was a whole web of companies involved in this thing. The banks, the engineers, the pipeline guys, distribution people... You had the guy with the great idea, me, right in the center, and the implementers arrayed out around me. And I figured, if someone had the capability to do something, they would do it. Sometimes I was right, like with you... You came to me with an education, right?

DEBBIE

I have a bachelor’s degree in finance and communications.

RICH

And experience?

DEBBIE

Ten years in retail management.

RICH

And I have no doubt that you were worthy of my trust.

I was.

RICH

But some of these jokers? See, I made the mistake of assuming that any jarhead in a hardhat could put together damn pipeline and any nitwit with a calculator could plan some rudimentary logistics. Wrong. I mean, first there was that whole rigmarole with wolf habitats. And who knew it was so hard to *store* air? But none of that means that it was a bad idea.

DEBBIE

But you were the C.E.O., being paid millions of dollars —

RICH

Most of which is gone, by the way. I’ve probably lost at least a couple million since lunch, Debbie. This is difficult for all of us.

DEBBIE

You are just too much. People like you are the —

RICH

I’m stopping you right there. People like me are why there is such a thing as the American upper middle class. O.K? People like me give Harvard Business School and Stanford Law somewhere to send their graduates. And I say to them, “Harvard: go make me a ton of money” and “Stanford: keep me out of the courtroom.” They salute, and then they go hire people like you do the actual work. Out of that simple arrangement comes a nation where millions of people are living a life that is cushy almost beyond imagining. Because people deal with me, and suddenly they say to themselves, “there is a better way of life and I want it. I want it so bad that I’m going to max out my pathetic little credit cards and spend money that I don’t have on a house that isn’t all that nice anyway.”
DEBBIE
But you lied.

RICH
What is a lie exactly? When accountants sign off, lawyers sign off, analysts buy into a new approach — Is that a lie?

DEBBIE
A lie is when you make shit up.

RICH
Didn’t you like it better when we were talking about you? I know I did. You know how long it’s been since I had a chance to connect with a stranger?

DEBBIE
But we’re not strangers anymore.

RICH
Oh, but we are. I don’t know how you are at long-range planning, and you don’t know what it would be like to help me develop my next great idea.

DEBBIE
You’re nuts.

RICH
You’re no fun.

DEBBIE
Wait till you try prison.

RICH
They’ve been at this for months, Debbie. They’ve interviewed people and seized documents and searched offices but somehow, there’s been no indictment.

DEBBIE
Be patient. I haven’t testified, yet.

(Beat.)

RICH
Debbie, honey, you know you’re wasting your time. No court in the world in going hold the C.E.O. of a multi-billion dollar company responsible for the day-to-day practices of—

DEBBIE
(Pulling out her cell phone) But let me show you a picture.

(DEBBIE shows him a photo on her cell phone.)
RICH
Where did you get that?

DEBBIE
Your dossier? The day he came to fire us, that shithole assistant of yours, Nolan isn’t it?—He left the dossier on my desk. I’ve got it in my safe deposit box. It has handwritten notes from when you dreamed up Consumer Air. An action plan you apparently wrote yourself. And my favorite: a one-item to-do list dated the day I lost my job. “Fire the bitches.” Well, guess what? Monday morning, this bitch is testifying at your grand jury.

(Dead silence. RICH looks at the photo of the dossier.)

RICH
Fuck.

(BLACKOUT.)

ACT II: Scene 1

(AT RISE: “In the meantime;” NOLAN in the airport, with his phone to his ear. After a moment, PATRICIA enters and comes up behind him.)

PATRICIA
Nolan, you certainly look relaxed.

NOLAN
Mrs. Davenport.

PATRICIA
Call me Honey Bear.

NOLAN
I really don’t think this is such a good idea.

PATRICIA
It’s a little late for that.

NOLAN
I think you should go to the Caymans after all.

PATRICIA
Are you asking me to run away with you, Nolan?

NOLAN
You realize we’re in the middle of the airport.
PATRICIA
C’mon, Nolan. You’re a man of the world. You mean to tell me that this is the first time you’ve pleasured yourself while talking to your boss’ wife on the phone?

NOLAN
About that ... I just want to reiterate —

PATRICIA
We don’t have to say a word.

NOLAN
I must say that demonstrates excellent judgment on your part.

PATRICIA
And all I require in return is that you tell me exactly what’s going on with my husband’s company.

NOLAN
I can’t do that.

PATRICIA
Of course you can. (Beat) So what are we looking at? Subpeonas? Indictments?

NOLAN
Your husband and I are confident that we can rebound from this. We are looking for various ways to re-capitalize. The economic stimulus package, for instance—

PATRICIA
Ha!

NOLAN
Look, your husband gave me very specific instructions not talk to you about this.

PATRICIA
Did he give any instructions about beating off in his desk chair? (Beat) The point is, my husband needs me, Nolan.

NOLAN
Have you discussed it?

PATRICIA
Richard and I need to be in the cabin together.

NOLAN
I just got a message from him, and he was very clear about not wanting your involvement.
PATRICIA

(Pulling close to him) What about you? Do you want my involvement?

NOLAN

It’s not about what I want.

PATRICIA

(Putting arms around him) It could be. If Richard went away —

NOLAN

(Pulling away) This bullshit with the Grand Jury is just the price of success. The more successful you are, the more of a pain in the ass the government is... And that’s why your husband doesn’t want you involved.

PATRICIA

I’m involved, Nolan. He doesn’t have a choice.

NOLAN

I’ll remind you that your husband doesn’t like surprises, and he doesn’t like extra people in the room.

PATRICIA

Since when am I “extra people” in my own house?

NOLAN

He doesn’t want you to worry about the company.

PATRICIA

What should I worry about, Nolan? The people whose lives he messed up? What about all those people you fired? Their families? Some little second grader whose daddy —

NOLAN

It doesn’t do us any good to get emotionally involved.

PATRICIA

But you already are, Nolan. For one thing, you seem convinced that my husband walks on water. (Again, pulling him close) Is that what holds you back? Are you afraid you might not measure up?

NOLAN

(Pulling away) Let’s not get carried away.

PATRICIA

But I think you want to get carried away. I could tell you wanted to at the company Christmas party last year. And at the executive retreat in Martinique.

NOLAN

Given the current state of the company—
PATRICIA
The company is toast, Nolan. The only question is, are you going to stand around making croutons, or go ahead and squeeze yourself a little honey?

NOLAN
What are you talking about?

PATRICIA
You know what I’m talking about.

NOLAN
Well, yes, but I think we should change the subject.

PATRICIA
Don’t you tell me that you’ve gone and found your scruples? You knew what you were doing a few hours ago, Nolan. You knew who you were talking to... I was the one who was in the dark.

NOLAN
You started it.

PATRICIA
Did it ever occur to you to pretend?

Oh. No.

PATRICIA
Yet once an actual opportunity presents itself, suddenly you have no problem keeping your pants on.

NOLAN
What is it that you want?

PATRICIA
I want you to help me put my husband in jail.

NOLAN
What?

PATRICIA
Nolan, dear, these are actual people who lost their jobs, their money —

NOLAN
This is your husband we’re talking about.
PATRICIA
And if I don’t stop him, who will?

NOLAN
Why would I want to stop him?

PATRICIA
What are you trying to do, Nolan? Get named employee-of-the-month? Well, you got it, sweetheart. Because this morning, he fired everybody else.

NOLAN
We actually prefer the term, “furlough.”

PATRICIA
How do you feel about the term, “medium security?”

NOLAN
They’ve got nothing.

PATRICIA
But you could give them exactly what they need.

Why would I do that?

NOLAN
It’s time to stop protecting him. If you would stand up on your hind legs for once, maybe at the end of it all you might …wind up on top…if you know what I mean.

NOLAN
Mrs. Davenport, your husband and I have a plan. And my role is to make sure he has some quiet time to think.

PATRICIA
Oh, yes, we mustn’t get in the way of the great mind of Richard Davenport. Such great big ideas that he can’t come to lunch on time, can’t pick out his own clothes. Can’t spell worth a damn.

NOLAN
I don’t think it’s appropriate to —

PATRICIA
Do you know when he was writing his dissertation, he couldn’t spell “Maynard” to save his life? Richard spent two years researching and writing about John Maynard Keyes, and couldn’t spell the name. But I could. I caught it every single time. Along with his comma splices and his goddamn passive construction. Do you think he ever really appreciated me? All he required was good social skills, a great ass and impeccable proofreading. And don’t think for second it’s different for you.
PATRICIA, Continued

(Beat) Tell me the truth, Nolan... Do you honestly think Rich would go down without dragging you with him?

NOLAN
Your husband has been nothing but kind and generous towards me.

PATRICIA
Has he offered you some special, secret deal?

No.

PATRICIA
Is he giving you protection of any kind?

No.

PATRICIA
He thinks you’re weak.

He trusts me.

PATRICIA
Richard doesn’t trust anyone.

No, actually, he allowed me to —

PATRICIA
He’s about to allow you to take the fall for him. You know he would if he had the chance. That’s why we need to get him to confess. So tomorrow at the cabin, we’ll have an intervention... Just like they do with junkies and cult members. You, me, and a couple of surprise guests I have in mind. We’ll convince him that he should just go to the grand jury and admit everything.

NOLAN
I can’t help you.

PATRICIA
Of course you can.

NOLAN
But he has kept me by his side to the very end.
PATRICIA
That’s because he’s decided you’re absolutely no threat. He even trusted you with his wife.
But now that we’re having an affair —

NOLAN
That’s not technically true.

PATRICIA
If you don’t help me, Nolan, I’m going to tell him how we made sweet love in the back of
my Cadillac Escalade.

NOLAN
But we didn’t.

PATRICIA
Not yet. But it’s right out in the parking lot.

Oh.

NOLAN
And you want to, don’t you?

PATRICIA
I want to have sex with a lot of people.

NOLAN
But how many of them want to have sex with you?

PATRICIA
I hadn’t thought about it like that.

NOLAN
You muse away for a minute.

(PATRICIA kisses NOLAN. HE kisses her back. THEY enjoy this for a moment; then SHE pulls away.)

PATRICIA, Continued
I’m going to freshen up.

NOLAN
Hurry back now.

PATRICIA
See you soon.
(PATRICIA exits. NOLAN looks after her, torn, trying to decide what to do. NOLAN turns and heads in the opposite direction and heads outside.)

NOLAN

Taxi!

(BLACKOUT.)

ACT II: Scene 2

(AT RISE: Back at the gas station. At first DEBBIE is alone but soon RICH enters.)

RICH

There’s a guy at pump number three who has a gas can. He’s going to help me out and give me a ride to my car.

DEBBIE

Good.

RICH

So I want to pay for his gas.

(RICH hands her a $100 bill.)

DEBBIE

With a one hundred dollar bill?

RICH

Smallest thing I’ve got.

DEBBIE

Of course. (Looks out the window) He’s still pumping.

RICH

Yeah. (Pause) Look, Debbie, we’re a couple of reasonable people. We have the gift of time. The happenstance of encountering one another like this. I think that means something. We should honor this moment.

DEBBIE

You’re trying to wiggle out of this.

RICH

I have to say, I’m a little hurt by that.
DEBBIE
Do you realize the harm you’ve caused? The people who lost their jobs, all their savings … I mean, these girls who worked for me are not going to dust themselves off and start management consulting firms.

RICH
Of course not.

DEBBIE
You took girls who thought they were going to spend their whole lives running the register at CVS or Wal-Mart and you gave them a decent job with good pay and benefits… a job where they could sit in a comfortable chair their whole shift and talk on the telephone… it was heaven for them. For a year or two. And now they’re back at Wal-Mart.

RICH
So I’m a scoundrel because I only rescued them temporarily?

DEBBIE
You think you’re so clever because we all believed you.

RICH
My whole life is based on one simple truism, Debbie. “There is something better than this.” Better than Wal-Mart. Better than this gas station. Better than Davenport Innovations, even. And I know you believe it. I started talking to you about coming to work for me and you were there, Debbie. You could see yourself in the cabin, couldn’t you? You could see yourself traveling and consulting with managers at major multinationals. Putting fancy dinners on my tab. I didn’t even have a business card to give you, but you could picture it all in your head, couldn’t you?

DEBBIE
(Pause) Yeah.

RICH
Yeah. Because it’s not about the damn business plan, Debbie. It’s about vision.

DEBBIE
You wanted us to drink the Kool-Aid.

RICH
Because it was really good Kool-Aid. I made the Kool-Aid. I reinvented the concept of Kool-Aid. And you drank it, too.

DEBBIE
So you think this is my fault?

RICH
My experience is that in my company, when smart, talented people made the right kind of noise, they got heard.
There were gatekeepers.

If there’s a gatekeeper, then you go around back and jump the damn fence.

It was a high fence.

Well, boo-hoo.

On April 19 of last year, I sent you a letter by FED-EX. It was about customer complaints. A train derailed in southern Illinois. There were toxic fumes in the air, a bunch of people were evacuated, and when these ladies tried to order their fresh air, the telephone number didn’t work.

I never got the letter.

So they started calling me, and I was going by the book. Filling out a complaint form, sending the report on to corporate, but I was getting nothing. They kept calling, and I had nothing to say to these women.

Don’t tell me you gave up after sending the e-mail report.

I called every name I had, Rich. I called your office a few times, but you were very busy.

Believe me, if I had been made aware of the seriousness —

Your secretary signed for the letter at your office. Your personal chef signed for it at home.

But the letter never reached me.

Then a week later, that reporter showed up.

That I heard about.
DEBBIE
And pretty soon, you fired us. (Beat) You were afraid the whole house of cards was falling down.

RICH
The company was built on our ability to respond to market forces quickly and effectively manage risk.

DEBBIE
So basically, it was a fly-by-night operation.

RICH
I don’t even know why I bother talking to you.

DEBBIE
You just can’t help yourself. (Referring to the person filling his gas tank outside) Looks like he’s done.

(Debbie rings up the charges and gives Rich his change.)

RICH
How much money did you lose?

DEBBIE
None of your business.

RICH
I’d really like to make it up to you in some way.

DEBBIE
Then turn yourself in.

(Silence. Rich considers something. He takes a notepad and pen from his damp suit jacket and writes a note. Rich hands the note to Debbie.)

DEBBIE
(Loosing at note) You’re bribing me?

RICH
That’s a vulgar term. (Whispering) And probably not something a star witness should be talking about in front of a security camera.

(Debbie crumples the paper and throws it away. Rich revises his offer and hands her another slip of paper. Again, Debbie crumples the note and throws it away. This action is repeated several more time. Finally, Rich slings the gym bag on the counter.)

RICH
Look inside.
(SHE does.)

Nice underpants.

RICH

Underneath.

(DEBBIE looks again and sees the money.)

Holy shit.

RICH

It’s yours.

DEBBIE

Are you serious?

RICH

But you can never speak of Consumer Air again.

(There is a considerable pause. DEBBIE zips up the bag and hands it back to RICH.)

DEBBIE

(Referring to the man at the gas pump) Better not keep your ride waiting.

RICH

Oh, right.

(DEBBIE turns her back on RICH.)

RICH, Continued

Debbie, can we talk about this again before Monday? (Pause) After we both have a chance to think things through. (An idea) Have you ever been to the Cayman Islands?

DEBBIE

Forget it.

(RICH takes the gym bag and exits. As HE does, NOLAN enters, running up to RICH.)

NOLAN

Sorry, Rich, I got here as soon as I could.

RICH

This is all fucked up.
NOLAN: We’re fine. We’ve just got to get out of here.

RICH: Where’s your car?

NOLAN: I have a taxi waiting.

RICH: You mean the one that’s driving away.

NOLAN: Hey! Hey! I gave him a hundred bucks to wait.

RICH: You don’t give them a hundred to wait. You give it to them *after* they wait.

NOLAN: Why can’t we go in your car?

RICH: I ran out of gas, remember.

NOLAN: Oh, I thought somebody would have taken care of that by now.

RICH: That somebody was supposed to be you.

NOLAN: Oh.

RICH: The guy in the red pick up is giving me a ride.

NOLAN: Oh, good, then I can—

RICH: No. There’s something you need to take care of here.

NOLAN: What is it?

RICH: The girl in the station used to work for us.
NOLAN
Is that why you’re wearing that t-shirt?

RICH
I got rained on.

NOLAN
It’s not a great look for you.

RICH
This is not the time to mess around. This girl knows all about Consumer Air.

NOLAN
When you say, “All about”—

RICH
All.

NOLAN
How?

RICH
Because you fired her, and then you left the dossier on her desk.

NOLAN
Rich, you need to relax.

RICH
Look, Nolan, she knows things. She ran the call center. She’s going to testify on Monday.

NOLAN
Let her say her piece and—

RICH
She has the dossier, Nolan. You filed everything in there. She answered the complaint calls. She documented things. She Fed-Exed me a letter before everything fell apart. If she testifies, we’re fucked.

NOLAN
Did you talk to her?

RICH
I offered her two hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

NOLAN
Why would you do that?
And she turned it down.

Of course she turned down your first offer.

My first offer was a hundred grand.

Anyone would turn down a hundred.

My ride’s leaving, but you’ve got do something about this.

Maybe if we both talked to her… And Patricia should be here any minute.

Then I’m definitely leaving.

So you want me to—

Make it go away.

Rich, no prosecutor is going to —

Don’t talk to me about prosecutors, Nolan. Don’t talk to me about lawyers or evidence or jail. That is not my concern. Consumer Air was your division, Nolan. And if something illegal went down there, you can bet your fucking boots I was at a conference in Madrid.

When was this?

I was in Madrid.

You mean when I fired her?

I was in Madrid. You were in charge. So make it go away.
Is there something you have in mind?

You’re still on the payroll, Nolan. You’re the only one. I don’t pay you to ask me questions. I pay you to take care of things. This is not the time to go weak on me.

I am not weak!

Then show me.

She’s a fucking speed bump on the road to restructuring.

Good.

So you’ll come back for me?

You can ride with Patricia.

And we’ll see you at the cabin?

I can’t deal with my wife tonight.

Where are you going?

(Walking away) Call me tomorrow, and tell me how you fixed this.

So you’re trusting me with your wife?

(RICH stops and looks at NOLAN for a long moment.)

Of course I do.

(RICH exits. NOLAN enters the convenient store. DEBBIE recognizes him at once.)
What are you doing here?

I hear you have my dossier.

You left it on my desk.

While you were an employee of Davenport Innovations.

You forgot it there after you fired me.

No, actually, that’s not true. What I did that day was share the unhappy news that your division was closing, and to ask you to leave by the end of the day. So, therefore, you were an employee of the company until the end of the day.

O.K.

So it is not yours to be carrying around, sharing with others and so on. I would strongly suggest that you should destroy it along with any other confidential materials pertaining to your work at Davenport Innovations.

And if not, what? You’re going to sue me?

Given the circumstances, we would explore criminal avenues first.

Criminal?

Those are very valuable items, as you have acknowledged.

When did I do that?

By attempting to blackmail Mr. Davenport for more than a quarter of a million dollars.

You mean the gym bag?
You wanted more.

No!

He panicked, offered a substantial sum, and you turned him down. Clearly, you had done your research. It appears you had been putting this together for some time. Ever since you gained access to the dossier.

You left it on my desk.

I had a lot on my mind that day.

You were afraid one of my girls was going to kick your ass.

Can you imagine how disconcerting it is to discover that a confidential dossier is in the hands of an ex-employee? It really makes one wonder how far this goes.

How far what goes?

It raises questions about what involvement your new employer might have in all this.

I work in a gas station.

You work for a fast-growing, publicly traded company.

That owns gas stations.

I know.

The dossier is about Consumer Air. Which sold air —

Air futures.
DEBBIE
The point is, there is no conflict of interest here because, thank God, nobody else in the world is selling what Consumer Air was selling.

NOLAN
Then what’s that thing over there? You’ve got a tank, a gauge, two hoses, and a sign that says — gasp! — air, fifty cents.

DEBBIE
That’s for tires.

NOLAN
For now, yes. But we’re talking about the future.

DEBBIE
O.K., we’re done. Unless you have some actual business here, I’m going to have to ask you to leave.

NOLAN
Listen, we don’t want this to be ugly for anyone. All you have to do is sign an affidavit acknowledging your wrongdoing in this matter.

DEBBIE
My wrongdoing?

NOLAN
It’s a simple form, and then we’re done.

DEBBIE
Do think I’m a moron?

NOLAN
I think maybe you got a little too zealous in your climbing of the career ladder, and when you hopped from one company to another, you thought you’d bring along a little inside information.

DEBBIE
I didn’t “hop” here. You fired me.

NOLAN
Why were you fired?

DEBBIE
You eliminated the whole division.

NOLAN
But you said fired.
DEBBIE
What’s the difference?

NOLAN
I think most people would think there is a big difference. Consumer Air was the most profitable division in the company. Seems strange to fire a manager of such a successful sector.

DEBBIE
That’s what I thought.

NOLAN
So perhaps you’re a disgruntled employee who felt under appreciated?

DEBBIE
Don’t forget underpaid.

So you got greedy? Is that all it was?

EXCUSE ME?

NOLAN
I think you’ll agree that the question is going to come up: how did Consumer Air make so much money.

DEBBIE
I’m sure it will.

NOLAN
And I’d say that if you already have a manager who is known to have misused proprietary information —

DEBBIE
Wait a second —

And tried to shake down the C.E.O.

NOLAN
Would you look at that? It’s closing time!

DEBBIE
I’m just asking the questions the U.S. Attorney is going to ask.

DEBBIE
I’m not afraid of you.
Maybe you should be.

DEBBIE
I got my stellar performance reviews from your company. I’ve e-mails from you praising me to the skies. And, for the record, I turned down the money because I know where it came from… I know lots of people who have been hurt by this, and they will stand by me. So maybe you ought to be afraid of me? (Beat) I’m going testify for that grand jury on Monday, and there’s not a thing you can do to stop me. I’m going to tell them about Consumer Air and going to tell them about tonight. So which one us do you think has more to fear?

(Pause.)

NOLAN
Hm. I guess that depends on whether your life’s ambition is to work in this shit hole.

What’s that supposed to mean?

If you testify, your career’s over.

Oh really?

NOLAN
You went from a decent job to a crappy one, and now you’re going to testify against your former employer? You’re nuclear waste. Nobody’s going to touch you. But if you were to take this in a different direction, then perhaps I could help you.

You?

NOLAN
I am not without connections. Business school. People I know socially. Two of my old roommates have their own companies. I could make some calls.

DEBBIE
I thought you were going to have me arrested?

Yes, well that’s the other option.

NOLAN
But if I sign the affidavit —
I would do my best to help you.

What makes you think I want your help?

Because you don’t have anybody else, Debbie.

How would you know?

I can see the desperation in your eyes.

I’m not desperate enough to need you. (PHONE RINGS) Now, if you’ll excuse me. (Answers phone) Jiffy Gas, this is Debbie, may I — (Listening) Oh, hi, mom! So glad you called. I’m just getting ready to close. (Listening) No, I didn’t call. I told you. (Listening) Because I had work to do. Because there were people in the store. (Listening) Mom! I know he’s from Indiana. What difference does that make? Listen, I’ll be home in half an hour and we can—

(NOLAN grabs the phone and speaks into it, pretending to be RICH.)

Good evening, ma’am. You don’t know me, but I must tell you that your daughter is involved in some very dangerous business that could imperil you as well as her.

Give me the phone.

My name is Richard Davenport, and your daughter used to work for me.

(DEBBIE tries to grab the phone from him.)

Give it!

(To DEBBIE) Trade you for the dossier.

No way.

(THEY struggle. HE pushes her away and climbs up on the counter.)
NOLAN
Now, ma’am, many of the things that you’ve heard on television are simply not true. A lot of people are saying extremely unkind things about my company. Libelous things. Things that simply cannot be proven in court, and I fear that your daughter has gotten involved in that.

DEBBIE
Give me the goddamn phone.

NOLAN
She may go to jail.

(DEBBIE bites HIS leg.)

NOLAN, Continued
Ow! She just bit me, by the way. I think she’s mentally unstable. (Climbs down; listening)
Well, you should know that if we were to win our lawsuit against her, we could take your house.

(DEBBIE yanks the phone cord out of the wall.)

NOLAN, Continued
You didn’t have to do that. I was pretty much done, anyway.

DEBBIE
Get out!

NOLAN
Not without the dossier.

DEBBIE
It’s in a safety deposit box.

NOLAN
We’ll see about that.

(NOLAN goes behind the counter and starts looking through things roughly. DEBBIE’s cell phone rings. SHE answers it.)

DEBBIE
Hi, Mom. (To NOLAN who is throwing stuff on the floor) Stop it! (Into phone) I can’t talk right now. (Hangs up; then to NOLAN) Get out of here!

NOLAN
Not without my dossier.

DEBBIE
It’s not here.
(DEBBIE’s phone rings again. SHE doesn’t answer it.)

NOLAN
This is my life you’re fucking around with. I don’t need this shit. (Beat) Look, I’m really not bad guy. After college I almost joined the Peace Corps, and lived in a hut in Ecuador. (DEBBIE turns away) If I had joined Peace Corps, you and I wouldn’t have wound up in stuck at a gas station in Buttscratch, Indiana. (Pause) But I went to a recruiting session, and I saw the pictures and I thought to myself, I don’t want to spend my life dressed like that. So I got a real job and some grown-up clothes. And then I went to a party at somebody’s lake front condo and I thought, I want a place like this, but with a nicer kitchen. I mean, what’s so bad about that? (Beat) So just give me the thing, and I’ll go back to Chicago and you can go back to trailer park.

(DEBBIE slaps NOLAN across the face.)

NOLAN
Ow.

DEBBIE
Apologize.

NOLAN
I’m sorry. Now go get me my dossier, you stupid cunt.

(DEBBIE slaps him again. NOLAN, outraged, grabs her by the throat but SHE breaks free. THEY continue to fight then break apart, winded.)

DEBBIE
Get out.

NOLAN
I’ll do whatever you want. I’ll meet you at your bank tomorrow. But I need my dossier back.

DEBBIE
You just tried to choke me in front of a security camera so I don’t think I need to do you any favors.

(NOLAN looks up, sees the security camera and then heads for the back room.)

DEBBIE, Continued
Hey! (NOLAN is rustling through shelves offstage) Come back here!

NOLAN
Where’s the videotape?

DEBBIE
It’s 2012, (Or current year), moron. It’s a live video feed.
(Pause. NOLAN rushes at DEBBIE and grabs bag for her car keys. SHE struggles to take it away from him. PATRICIA enters and witnesses this. SHE digs through her purse.)

DEBBIE

(Seeing PATRICIA) Help!

PATRICIA

Just a second.

NOLAN

(Seeing PATRICIA) Oh, Patricia, thank God. Help me lock her in the closet.

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes