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Product Code A0320-F

IRRATIONAL EXUBERANCE

a play for our financial times

by Jonathan Graham

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Irrational Exuberance

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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.

Irrational Exuberance

by Jonathan Graham

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.

RICH

She wants to know if I'm dead.

PATRICIA

And no apology, by the way.

RICH

Yeah, well I'm here now so... *(Listening and motioning toward the dining room)*

PATRICIA

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?

PATRICIA

(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.

RICH

What else have you got for me?

PATRICIA

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?

RICH

What else?

PATRICIA

You and I both know things don't happen over night.

RICH

What else?

PATRICIA

How is that possible?

RICH

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?

RICH

Is that all?

PATRICIA

Honey.

RICH

(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?

NOLAN

They'll assume it's housekeeping.

RICH

Right. But what if housekeeping actually shows up?

NOLAN

You fired housekeeping, remember?

RICH

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

NOLAN

Me?

RICH

I want this place spotless.

NOLAN

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

(NOLAN finishes ironing the shirt and hands it to RICH.)

NOLAN, *Continued*

Put this on.

RICH

I want to be comfortable in the car.

NOLAN

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

RICH

O.K., you're right.

(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.)

RICH

When's your flight?

NOLAN

Eight-thirty.

RICH

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.

RICH

You have a fire pit?

NOLAN

Christmas present. Consumer Air became air pollution.

RICH

And the dossier, too?

NOLAN

What dossier?

RICH

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

NOLAN

Forget about it.

RICH

Shredded?

NOLAN

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

RICH

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

Your 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.

NOLAN

I don't think—

RICH

Try.

NOLAN

I don't know what to say.

RICH

That's good, but a little huskier.

NOLAN

I don't know what to say.

RICH

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.

RICH

Yes, but remember, husky!

NOLAN

O.K., I'll call her from the airport.

RICH

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.

NOLAN

Got it. You're leaving now?

RICH

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.

NOLAN

Are you sure you don't want to fly?

RICH

The drive will clear my head.

NOLAN

And the staff there knows we're coming?

RICH

You are the staff.

NOLAN

You mean ... nobody?

RICH

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.

NOLAN

And we'll get there about midnight?

RICH

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.)

RICH, *Continued*

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)* Mmmmmmm. 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 hmmm. 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-hmmmmmmmm. 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 — PATRICIA
 I'm Debbie Mullins! DEBBIE
 Oh my God! PATRICIA
 You remember? DEBBIE
 Of course I do. PATRICIA
(THEY hug.)
 You were my sitter — DEBBIE
 That whole summer — PATRICIA
 When I was eight. DEBBIE
 And now ... God, I am old. PATRICIA
 You look spectacular. DEBBIE
 And you — PATRICIA
 I don't usually look so — DEBBIE
 You look great. *(Beat)* Do **not** tell your mother that you heard me having phone sex! PATRICIA
 I never told her about you and that lifeguard. DEBBIE
 I had no business being trusted with anyone's child! PATRICIA

DEBBIE

I thought you were magical.

PATRICIA

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

DEBBIE

You taught me how to do my make-up.

PATRICIA

What every second grader so desperately needs.

DEBBIE

I worshipped you.

PATRICIA

Really?

DEBBIE

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

PATRICIA

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

DEBBIE

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

PATRICIA

That's sweet.

DEBBIE

I always thought you must have been an awesome mom.

PATRICIA

My husband and I never had children.

DEBBIE

Oh. I didn't mean to —

PATRICIA

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

DEBBIE

She's okay. She had to close her shop a few years ago.

PATRICIA
That must've been hard.

DEBBIE
So now she works at the Comfort Inn.

PATRICIA
And you?

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

PATRICIA
You couldn't find anything else in the city?

DEBBIE
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.

PATRICIA
Oh, no. What did you do?

DEBBIE
I managed a call center.

PATRICIA
It wasn't Davenport Innovations by any chance?

DEBBIE
How'd you know?

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

DEBBIE
That's what I get for working for crazy people.

PATRICIA
Right.

DEBBIE
So I'm back home, living with mom.

PATRICIA
That's good, right?

DEBBIE
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.

PATRICIA

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.

So what brings you back?

DEBBIE

My husband and I have a cabin by the lake.

PATRICIA

Oh.

DEBBIE

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

PATRICIA

I thought you said you never come back here?

DEBBIE

Um ... I meant when I was younger.

PATRICIA

When your parents were still alive.

DEBBIE

Exactly.

PATRICIA

But now that the cabin's yours —

DEBBIE

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

PATRICIA

I noticed.

DEBBIE

It must be a little scary here at night.

PATRICIA

It's okay.

DEBBIE

Your mom must worry.

PATRICIA

She'd worry no matter what.

DEBBIE

But working to midnight? Out in the boonies?

PATRICIA

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.

RICH

Call me when you get this.

NOLAN

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?

RICH

Who's this?

(*NOLAN and RICK listen to their messages.*)

RICH and NOLAN, *Together*

Oh for God's sake.

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

RICH

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

NOLAN

Hi, Rich, it's Nolan again.

RICH

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

NOLAN

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

RICH

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

NOLAN

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.*)

RICH

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

Yes, I got your new Sudoku book, O.K.? Bye.

(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.

RICH

I guess this is not my day.

DEBBIE

You want a cup of coffee to warm up?

RICH

That'd be nice. Thank you.

(DEBBIE pours RICH a cup of coffee.)

DEBBIE

I'm Debbie by the way.

RICH

Rich.

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

RICH, *Continued*

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

DEBBIE

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

RICH

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

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

RICH, *Continued*

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

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

RICH, *Continued*

Is there something I can —?

DEBBIE

What?

RICH

You're staring at me.

DEBBIE

I was thinking maybe I recognized you from CNN.

RICH

I guess I was talking too loud.

DEBBIE

Couldn't help but overhear.

RICH

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

DEBBIE

Oh really?

RICH

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

DEBBIE

So what brings you here?

RICH

I've got a place by the lake.

DEBBIE

Nice.

RICH

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

DEBBIE

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

RICH

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.

DEBBIE

What kind of business?

RICH

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

DEBBIE

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

RICH

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.

(RICH removes his jacket, tie, shirt and undershirt. HE puts on the shirt. It's a ladies t-shirt, tight on him, with a ballet neck and three quarter sleeves. It was made for a softball team and says "Davenport's Devils.")

DEBBIE

How's that?

RICH

(Looks down at it and sees the writing for the first time) Look at that. Perfect.

DEBBIE

You telling me you're a devil?

RICH

I've been known to be. I'm also a Davenport.

DEBBIE

I know who you are.

RICH

You do?

DEBBIE

I used to work for you.

RICH

Oh. I'm sorry.

DEBBIE

You ruined my life, so "I'm sorry" doesn't quite cut it.

RICH

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

DEBBIE

I know about risk.

RICH

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

DEBBIE

Oh, you did?

RICH

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?

DEBBIE

The company's bankrupt.

RICH

The correct wording, actually, is: "under bankruptcy protection."

DEBBIE

Well, pardon me.

RICH

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.

DEBBIE
You can't sell air.

RICH
Air futures.

DEBBIE
Whatever.

RICH
That is the essential word.

DEBBIE
No one owns air.

RICH
Futures.

DEBBIE
It doesn't exist.

RICH
Surely you understand —

DEBBIE
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.

DEBBIE

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 is going to 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 shithead 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 pleased 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?

NOLAN

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.

NOLAN

Why would I do that?

PATRICIA

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 Keynes, 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?

NOLAN

No.

PATRICIA

Is he giving you protection of any kind?

NOLAN

No.

PATRICIA

He thinks you're weak.

NOLAN

He trusts me.

PATRICIA

Richard doesn't trust anyone.

NOLAN

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.

NOLAN

Oh.

PATRICIA

And you want to, don't you?

NOLAN

I want to have sex with a lot of people.

PATRICIA

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

NOLAN

I hadn't thought about it like that.

PATRICIA

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.

DEBBIE

There were gatekeepers.

RICH

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

DEBBIE

It was a high fence.

RICH

Well, boo-hoo.

DEBBIE

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.

RICH

I never got the letter.

DEBBIE

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.

RICH

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

DEBBIE

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

RICH

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

DEBBIE

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

RICH

But the letter never reached me.

DEBBIE

Then a week later, that reporter showed up.

RICH

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.)

DEBBIE

Nice underpants.

RICH

Underneath.

(DEBBIE looks again and sees the money.)

DEBBIE

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?

RICH

And she turned it down.

NOLAN

Of course she turned down your first offer.

RICH

My first offer was a hundred grand.

NOLAN

Anyone would turn down a hundred.

RICH

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

NOLAN

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

RICH

Then I'm definitely leaving.

NOLAN

So you want me to—

RICH

Make it go away.

NOLAN

Rich, no prosecutor is going to —

RICH

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.

NOLAN

When was this?

RICH

I was in Madrid.

NOLAN

You mean when I fired her?

RICH

I was in Madrid. You were in charge. So make it go away.

NOLAN

Is there something you have in mind?

RICH

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.

NOLAN

I am not weak!

RICH

Then show me.

NOLAN

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

RICH

Good.

NOLAN

So you'll come back for me?

RICH

You can ride with Patricia.

NOLAN

And we'll see you at the cabin?

RICH

I can't deal with my wife tonight.

NOLAN

Where are you going?

RICH

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

NOLAN

So you're trusting me with your wife?

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

RICH

Of course I do.

(RICH exits. NOLAN enters the convenient store. DEBBIE recognizes him at once.)

DEBBIE

What are you doing here?

NOLAN

I hear you have my dossier.

DEBBIE

You left it on my desk.

NOLAN

While you were an employee of Davenport Innovations.

DEBBIE

You forgot it there after you fired me.

NOLAN

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.

DEBBIE

O.K.

NOLAN

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.

DEBBIE

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

NOLAN

Given the circumstances, we would explore criminal avenues first.

DEBBIE

Criminal?

NOLAN

Those are very valuable items, as you have acknowledged.

DEBBIE

When did I do that?

NOLAN

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

DEBBIE

You mean the gym bag?

NOLAN
You wanted more.

DEBBIE
No!

NOLAN
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.

DEBBIE
You left it on my desk.

NOLAN
I had a lot on my mind that day.

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

NOLAN
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.

DEBBIE
How far what goes?

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

DEBBIE
I work in a gas station.

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

DEBBIE
That owns gas stations.

NOLAN
I know.

DEBBIE
The dossier is about Consumer Air. Which sold air —

NOLAN
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.

NOLAN

So you got greedy? Is that all it was?

DEBBIE

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 —

NOLAN

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

DEBBIE

Would you look at that? It's closing time!

NOLAN

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

DEBBIE

I'm not afraid of you.

NOLAN

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.

DEBBIE

What's that supposed to mean?

NOLAN

If you testify, your career's over.

DEBBIE

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.

DEBBIE

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?

NOLAN

Yes, well that's the other option.

DEBBIE

But if I sign the affidavit —

NOLAN

I would do my best to help you.

DEBBIE

What makes you think I want your help?

NOLAN

Because you don't have anybody else, Debbie.

DEBBIE

How would you know?

NOLAN

I can see the desperation in your eyes.

DEBBIE

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.)

NOLAN

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.

DEBBIE

Give me the phone.

NOLAN

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

(DEBBIE tries to grab the phone from him.)

DEBBIE

Give it!

NOLAN

(To DEBBIE) Trade you for the dossier.

DEBBIE

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