

NICOLE, THE SCRIVENER

Based on the short story by Herman Melville

By Daniel Irving Rattner

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SETTING

An office. Late Fall 2022.

CHARACTERS

LORRAINE - Boomer

GREG - Gen X

SASHA - Millennial

NICOLE - Gen Z

The actor playing LORRAINE also plays LINDA and LAURA

The actor playing GREG also plays GORDON, GEORGE, GINA, GERALD, and GARRETT

The actor playing SASHA also plays SETH, SANTIAGO, SEB, STAN, and SAM

NOTES

A " / " indicates when the following line should begin.

A " // " indicates a pause on a phone call while the person on the other side of the call is talking.

SCENE 1: RETURN TO OFFICE

Lights up on an office. Desks, chairs, etc.

Seated at a large communal work table in the middle of the room are GREG (mid-40s), SASHA (early 30s), and NICOLE (22).

Standing, facing them, is LORRAINE (60s, short, and with a profoundly unflattering pageboy haircut). She is beaming.

LORRAINE

I was starting to think this day would never come! But here we are!

GREG

Yeah!

LORRAINE

Isn't this terrific?

SASHA

So great!

LORRAINE

It is so good to see you all again.

SASHA

Good to see you too, Lorraine.

GREG

Glad to be back!

NICOLE

Really glad.

LORRAINE

Smells the same in here, doesn't it?

GREG

Oh, yeah.

SASHA

That's right!

LORRAINE

And it doesn't look too bad.

GREG

No.

SASHA

Not at all.

LORRAINE

Thought there'd be a layer of dust an inch thick! But it looks great. So. I wanted to start our day with a little welcome back meeting. Orientation for our RTO, go over some housekeeping...

An awkward pause.

LORRAINE

I just want to wait for Mona before we start.

SASHA

Mona's coming in?

LORRAINE

She's joining us via Zoom.

SASHA

So she's still in Paraguay?

LORRAINE

Well, she lives there now, Sasha. She's not on vacation--

SASHA

So she's not coming back.

LORRAINE

Eventually but--

GREG

Not today.

LORRAINE

Astute as always, Greg.

Beat.

SASHA

So it feels like maybe we could do this meeting without Mona?

LORRAINE

Without our CEO?

SASHA

If the meeting's about our RTO, it kinda feels like she doesn't have to be in it. Right?

LORRAINE

No one likes being left out, Sasha.

SASHA

Just a thought.

Awkward beat.

LORRAINE

Oh! Should we do some introductions?

GREG

We... know each other.

LORRAINE

You don't know Nicole!

GREG

We've been working together for months. On Zoom.

LORRAINE

That's not the same! Anything to say now that she's in person with us?

SASHA

Lorraine, I totally get waiting for Mona--

LORRAINE

Sasha, I promise, any minute now--

LORRAINE's phone starts ringing.

LORRAINE

Oh! Here she is now.

She answers her phone.

Mona! Hi! Oh.

LORRAINE

She listens. Her face falls. She turns to the others.

She holds up a finger to indicate “one second.”

LORRAINE heads towards her office DSL. At the door, she covers the phone and turns back to the team.

So excited to be back with you all!

LORRAINE

She raises a fist in celebration. They cheer back, all smiles. She exits.

As soon as LORRAINE is gone:

What the *fuck*.

SASHA

I dunno, man.

GREG

What are we *doing* here?

SASHA

You got the same email I did.

GREG

Who gives people three days' notice?

SASHA

GREG throws up his hands in defeat.

This is insane. Right, Nicole?

SASHA

It is a little sudden.

NICOLE

SASHA

So sudden. Exactly. It's like -- suddenly we can't run reports from home? Suddenly, you can't clean our data sets from home?

NICOLE

I'm sure there's a good reason.

SASHA

You don't think we're actually doing this every day, do you?

GREG

There's no way.

SASHA

Right?

GREG

Yeah. No.

SASHA

'Cause I can't be in the office all day. I have stuff to do!

GREG

It's gonna be fine.

GREG starts opening and closing the drawers under their work table.

SASHA

What are you doing?

GREG

I'm trying to find-- Ah!

He pulls out a block of cheese from his desk.

GREG

I thought I left this here.

GREG starts to peel back the wrapping

SASHA

Greg!

GREG

What?

SASHA

That's disgusting.

GREG

I haven't eaten since 7 yesterday. Gina's got me on this intermittent fasting thing cuz I'm "repulsive to her."

He's about to put it in his mouth--

SASHA

Greg!

GREG

What?

SASHA

That is two and a half years old!

GREG

Cheese doesn't go bad.

SASHA

Cheese absolutely goes bad.

GREG turns to NICOLE.

GREG

Does it?

NICOLE

I think it depends on the cheese.

SASHA

Where is Lorraine? I need this meeting to happen.

GREG

(with a mouthful of cheese)

This what you were expecting?

NICOLE

What do you mean?

GREG

You know, first time here. Is it what you imagined?

NICOLE

I hadn't really imagined anything.

GREG

I bet I'm fatter than you thought. The COVID 19.

He grabs his stomach.

GREG

(pointing to SASHA)

I bet he's shorter.

GREG sneezes out a mouthful of cheese. He starts wiping it off the table and back into his mouth.

GREG

So this must be your first time working in an office at all.

NICOLE

Yeah. So if you have any tips... !

SASHA

Don't keep anything sharp by your desk.

SASHA mimes slitting his wrists.

NICOLE

(writing this down)

Nothing... sharp. / What else?

GREG

He was joking.

SASHA

Was I?

GREG

But you will want to invest in a good pair of noise canceling headphones.

SASHA

Ugghh Lorraine...

SASHA's phone is ringing. He answers it and scans the office for somewhere to take this call.

SASHA

Oh, Josh! Hi! I was just texting you-- // Yeah, I'm just at home, but there's something going on with my laptop. The screen is just like totally fritzed out. // They do that on purpose, you know. Apple? They design their products to break after like 16 months, so you have to buy a new one. It's called planned obsolescence. // Planned - obsolescence! // I'm so sorry -- Can y'all start without me? I'll be on as soon as I can. I am so so sorry-- // Ugh. Thank you. You're a lifesaver.

(big fake laugh)

You're the best!

He hangs up.

SASHA

I wish I were dead.

GREG

What the hell, Sasha?

SASHA

So, I'm, like, producing this podcast? I haven't mentioned it?

GREG and NICOLE shake their heads.

SASHA

It's fine. It's whatever. It's kinda cool. It's about how to ethically consume art by, you know, like, sexual predators? It's all part time so they can pay me, like, less than minimum wage, but... I don't know. It feels purposeful and it's money and it's not like Lorraine is ever going to give me a raise. I didn't tell you? About the podcast?

They shake their heads again.

SASHA

Hunh. Well. I've been doing it for the last few months. Actually, I kinda do it every day. We record from like nine to... noon.

GREG

Does Lorraine know?

SASHA

No, but she can't get mad that I didn't have time to--

Quit your second job?
GREG

Not all of us married rich, Greg.
SASHA

Oh please, Gina's salary barely covers Soph's new daycare.
GREG

Well, I have to get on this call.
SASHA

I'm not covering for you.
GREG

What?
SASHA

If Lorraine asks what you're doing, I'm telling her.
GREG

Greg!
SASHA

I'm not getting in trouble cuz of you. I can't lose this job.
GREG

You hate this job!
SASHA

Not as much as Gina's gonna hate me being unemployed.
GREG

SASHA slumps into his chair. For the first time in the play, someone isn't moving, and the lights click off.

SASHA throws an arm up. The lights click on.

LORRAINE enters.

SASHA
There's something wrong with the motion sensor, Lorraine.

LORRAINE
Oh. I'll have Linda look at it.

SASHA

Look, Lorraine, I totally get waiting for Mona but--

LORRAINE

(clearly disappointed)

Mona is not going to be able to join us after all.

SASHA

Oh!

LORRAINE

So. Shall we? Uh, a few housekeeping items. Oh! Wait. Did anyone give you a tour of the office, Nicole?

NICOLE

Uh, no.

LORRAINE

What was that?

NICOLE

No.

LORRAINE

I'm having trouble hearing you, sweetie. Could you--

She gestures for NICOLE to pull down her mask. NICOLE does.

LORRAINE

Now, what did you say?

NICOLE

No.

LORRAINE

Oh!

(gesturing to the table)

Well this is where you all work.

(gesturing to her office SL)

And that's my office.

(gesturing to a door SR)

And that's Mona's! Direct eyeline to mine, you'll notice. Got it?

NICOLE nods.

LORRAINE

Terrific! Now. I know there were some health concerns about RTO from one of you -- I won't say who -- but! The First Aid Kit and the AED defibrillator are in the women's restroom, on top of the feminine hygiene products dispenser. And the dispenser is fully stocked should any of you need supplies.

She looks up to see if anyone will need them.

LORRAINE

And now, hopefully you all got the email about the upgrades to the filtration system... ? Sasha? Greg? Nicole? Anyone not get the email?

They all shake their heads.

LORRAINE

Excellent. So you all got the email about the filtration system. And since we are in Code Yellow, we will be testing once a week, on Wednesday mornings, in the lactation room. Unless of course anyone needs to use it, for its intended purpose... ?

She looks up and waits a beat to see if any of her employees anticipate needing to use the lactation room. It's a no.

LORRAINE

Ok great. Now...

(drumroll)

In addition to all that, as an added precaution -- oh, I am just so excited! -- I got you all a little surprise!

LORRAINE reaches under the desk and pulls up a giant plastic trifold partition.

She puts the partition around NICOLE's laptop.

LORRAINE

This way, in case anyone happens to be, you know, spewing contagious germs everywhere, these partitions will block the particles from coming over and infecting you! And it's clear, so you can still--

She stoops down and peers at NICOLE through the clear partition and waves at her.

LORRAINE

Isn't this great?

They nod. LORRAINE has, after all, just invented the cubicle.

LORRAINE

Ok, so the other partitions are in my office so... Sasha, maybe you can get those set up today? And Greg, maybe you can help? Do you want to sync up with Sasha, Greg? And find a time to do that? Great. And, uh... any questions?

GREG raises a hand.

LORRAINE

Yes, Greg.

GREG

I'm gonna have to leave early today.

LORRAINE

Was that a question?

GREG

Gotta pick Sophonisba up from daycare. So.

LORRAINE

Understood. Let's not make a habit of it though, hmm?

GREG

Yeah, it'd just be good to know with more advance notice what days I'll need a sitter.

LORRAINE

Every day, Greg.

GREG

What do you mean?

LORRAINE

What do *you* mean?

NICOLE

I think Greg is wondering if we're in person every day moving forward?

LORRAINE

Hmm?

NICOLE lowers her mask.

NICOLE

I think Greg is just wondering if we're in person every day now.

LORRAINE

Oh! My translator! Thank you, Nicole! Yes, Greg. Every day.

SASHA

Wait. Until when?

LORRAINE

I don't know, Sasha. One of us dies?

SASHA

What?

LORRAINE

This is our office...

SASHA

But we don't need to be here to just run reports...

LORRAINE

Just run / reports?

SASHA

Or for Nicole to clean the data sets?

LORRAINE

Sasha. Frankly, the idea that we were ever handling such *sensitive* data over home WiFi is absurd. Our clients are some of the most preeminent home furnishings wholesalers in the *world*.

GREG and SASHA share a look.

SASHA

So we're back in person. Full time.

LORRAINE

Yes.

GREG

Every day.

Yes, Greg. Every day.

LORRAINE

Normal hours.

GREG

Yes. Normal hours. I'm not a slave driver!

LORRAINE

Lorraine! You can't say that.

SASHA

Say what?

LORRAINE

That you're not a slave driver.

SASHA

I'm saying I'm not one.

LORRAINE

Still. It's offensive.

SASHA

To who? Slave drivers? Good! I hope they are offended! Obviously, I am very anti-slavery. All right? Now: Welcome back, everyone! And back to work!

LORRAINE

She imitates cracking a whip, laughs, and heads to her office. But then remembers:

LORRAINE

Oh. Also: It's the weirdest thing, but my computer is not letting me send email.

SASHA

It's not letting you... ?

LORRAINE

I click the button. And nothing happens. There's no 'whoosh.'

SASHA

Are you connected to the internet?

LORRAINE

(she's not a fucking moron)

Yes, Sasha. I was just surfing the web.

SASHA

So your computer should be able to send email.

LORRAINE

Then it must be on strike!

SASHA

Have you updated the software? Since March 2020?

LORRAINE

How do I... ?

SASHA sighs and heads to LORRAINE's office.

LORRAINE

You're a lifesaver, Sasha. Oh, and Nicole. I was going to email you a list of sets to clean but since I couldn't, I just wrote them out on Post-its...

LORRAINE takes a series of Post-its off her notebook and hands them to NICOLE, who puts them on her cubicle -- excuse me, partition -- one-by-one.

LORRAINE

Is that gonna be too much?

NICOLE

(lowering her mask)

No. I'm almost through the ones you sent me on Friday.

LORRAINE

You know I rave about you to everyone. I tell everyone what a hard worker you are.

NICOLE

That's really sweet, Lorraine.

LORRAINE

I think even my podiatrist knows what a hard worker you are!

NICOLE isn't quite sure what she's supposed to say to this.

LORRAINE

You know, you look exactly how I imagined you would. I didn't know if you were one of those people who used filters? When they're on Zoom?

NICOLE

I don't.

LORRAINE

And why would you! You know, now that we're back in person, we should have lunch!

NICOLE

That would be nice.

LORRAINE

Maybe today?

NICOLE

(re: the Post-its)

Well if you want these done by EOD...

LORRAINE

Oh you can stay as late as you need to to finish. Let me take you out!

NICOLE

But I brought lunch from home...

LORRAINE

Tomorrow then?

NICOLE

Sure.

SASHA re-enters.

SASHA

Software's updating.

LORRAINE

Wonderful! Not as useless as you look, are you?

She chuckles to herself as she watches SASHA go back to his seat.

LORRAINE

How great is this? All of us here? Let's take a picture -- for Mona! Show her what she's missing.

LORRAINE positions herself to take a selfie with the rest of the officemates in the background. But she's having some trouble.

LORRAINE

Oh -- no. That's not right. How do I... turn... the camera... ?

SASHA starts to get up to help--

LORRAINE

No no! I'm not a total luddite! I got it! There.

She takes the picture and excitedly goes to look at it. Her face falls.

LORRAINE

That will have to do. Let me send to Mona...

Whoosh! LORRAINE's text sends. She looks up and takes in her team again.

LORRAINE

It is so nice to be with you all again! You're like my family. My family who talks to me!

And with one last laugh at her own joke (?), she goes into her office.

Lights shift.

SCENE 2: THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW

The office. SASHA and NICOLE at their computers. NICOLE is not wearing a mask.

SASHA
Thank you, Nicole.

NICOLE
No problem.

SASHA
You're an absolute lifesaver.

NICOLE
Happy to help.

SASHA
Greg is like... worse than useless.

NICOLE
I'm sure he was going to get to it.

SASHA gestures at GREG's empty work station.

NICOLE
Eventually...

SASHA and NICOLE resume working. After a beat of them being still, the lights click off.

NICOLE waves her arm. The lights stay off.

SASHA waves his. They click on.

SASHA
(calling offstage)
Lights are being weird again!

LORRAINE enters from Mona's office.

LORRAINE
I'll have Linda look at it. Almost done decorating in there! Hopefully Mona likes the photos I sent her. Where's Greg?

Bathroom.

SASHA

Still?

LORRAINE

SASHA shrugs. LORRAINE goes into her office.

SASHA
(looking at his computer)

Wow, Nicole. This is *so* great.

Thanks.

NICOLE

SASHA

I mean it. Greg should be cleaning your sets.

NICOLE

I dunno.

SASHA

Seriously. You should be running the reports.

NICOLE

I don't think so.

SASHA

I'd put in a good word for you with Lorraine if you ever want to be an analyst.

NICOLE

I like cleaning the sets; the analysis not so much.

SASHA

But you did all this in like an hour.

NICOLE

I think it helps that I'm a digital native or whatever.

SASHA

No, you're smart.

NICOLE

I dunno...

SASHA

No, like, I know I'm smart but you're like... *smart* smart. What are you even doing here?

NICOLE

I applied and... !

SASHA

But you could be at one of the big firms.

NICOLE

(with a shrug)

I guess it's not a good time to be looking. And... I dunno, this seemed like something I could handle while I figure out what I really want to do.

SASHA

And what is that?

NICOLE

I'm still not sure.

SASHA

But like big picture.

NICOLE

I want to change the world.

SASHA

That is big picture.

NICOLE

I don't know *how* yet exactly... But I think it needs to change.

SASHA

Ohmygod *of course* it does.

NICOLE

But right now, I'm just trying to not feel like I'm drowning.

SASHA

That's kinda what your twenties are for.

SASHA slumps his shoulders.

SASHA

And your thirties, apparently.

He looks over to NICOLE, who just shrugs.

SASHA

I dunno. Seb says I'm too negative. He can be *so* judgmental. And I know I'm not unhousted or anything, but it's like... what am I even doing with my life? Helping Chinese sweatshops more efficiently manufacture cheap furniture they can ship halfway across the world, only contributing to the inevitable heat death of our planet? At least the podcast is like a few hours every day where I don't feel like gouging my eyes out with a melon baller. But. Beyond that... ?

He sighs.

SASHA

We got totally screwed, Nicole. We really did. That's what the Gregs and Lorraines of the world will never understand. Our formative years: COVID. The Great Recession. 9/11.

NICOLE

I was two when 9/11 happened.

SASHA

Nevertheless. The shadow looms... you are as much a victim as I am of the policies of Donald Rumsfeld.

NICOLE

Who?

GREG enters, in his coat, and quickly rushes over to his seat.

SASHA

Finally.

GREG

What?

SASHA

Nicole had to do the GeoHaus report with me.

GREG

Oh. Thanks, Nicole.

SASHA

Yeah, I didn't realize you'd be disappearing all afternoon.

GREG

Well, I didn't realize you were going to be spending all morning in Mona's office recording your podcast.

SASHA

We couldn't reschedule! Noam Chomsky could die at any minute! And why are you wearing your coat?

GREG

It's freezing out there.

SASHA

What?

GREG

What what?

SASHA

Why were you wearing your coat in the bathroom?

GREG

I was picking Soph up from daycare.

SASHA

I thought you were in the bathroom.

GREG

You thought I was in the bathroom for *three* hours?

SASHA

I thought it was your IBS.

GREG

I don't have IBS.

SASHA

Hunh. I guess I just assumed...

LORRAINE enters from her office.

LORRAINE

Ah! Greg! Feeling ok?

GREG

Fine. Thanks.

She hands him a bunch of Post-its.

GREG

Oh.

LORRAINE

Well, they've been building up all afternoon.

GREG

It's a lot.

LORRAINE

The supply chains are easing. Things are moving!

GREG

Really moving.

LORRAINE

And I also asked Mona to pick up a few more clients.

SASHA

You... did?

LORRAINE

I want her to see how much more productive we are in person. Give her a sense of the energy she's missing.

LORRAINE darts back into her office.

GREG holds up the Post-its.

GREG

Weren't you going to fix her email?

SASHA

I did. I think she just likes working this way.

NICOLE puts her headphones back on.

GREG

How am I gonna get all this done--

SASHA

Get Nicole to stay late with you. She's really fast.

GREG

I gotta get home. Relieve the sitter.

SASHA

Wait why did you even come back?

GREG

Well I thought I should be here at the end of the day. In case Lorraine...

SASHA

So you went all the way to Jersey, picked Soph up from daycare, dropped her with the sitter, and came back here?

GREG

We got ice cream first.

He takes out his phone and shows a photo to
NICOLE, who doesn't take her headphones off --
just smiles and nods.

SASHA

Sounds complicated.

GREG

Well, she didn't want a sitter to do pick up, she wanted me to.

SASHA

She's 3. She gets a say?

GREG

It's a big enough adjustment going to daycare, I have to ease her into it.

SASHA

So is this gonna be like an every day thing?

GREG

Pick up?

SASHA

Yeah.

GREG

(snapping)

It's gonna be whenever she needs it, Sasha.

GREG pulls a half-opened bag of gummy bears out of his pocket and begins housing them.

SASHA

And what if Lorraine notices you're gone?

GREG

I'm allowed to take a break...

SASHA

I just mean -- if Lorraine asks.

GREG

Tell her I'm taking a late lunch.

SASHA

(mocking)

But Greg, I can't lose my job over you.

GREG

For Chrissake, Sasha, I'm not running a side hustle, I'm taking care of my kid.

SASHA

And that's exactly what I'll tell Lorraine if she asks--

GREG

Fine fine fine. You don't tell, I don't tell.

SASHA

See? It all works out. You cover for me in the mornings, I'll cover for you in the afternoons--

GREG

And what about--

He nods towards NICOLE.

SASHA

Nicole? She's not gonna say anything.

SASHA looks at GREG, suddenly anxious.

They both watch NICOLE, sitting there with her headphones on, for a moment.

SASHA waves towards NICOLE.

SASHA

Hey, Nicole!

NICOLE

(pulling off her headphones)

What's up?

SASHA

You know if you ever needed to step out during the day, Greg and I would cover for you.

NICOLE

Oh. That's alright.

SASHA

Seriously, any time.

NICOLE

I don't think I'll need to leave during the day.

GREG

Right, but if you ever did.

SASHA

Like, Greg and I both might have stuff we have to do...

NICOLE

Ok...

SASHA

And so like if one of us is gone, the others don't have to tell Lorraine where they are.

NICOLE

Oh. I don't like lying.

SASHA

Ohmygod I *hate* lying.

GREG

Yeah we're not asking you to lie.

SASHA

But Lorraine doesn't have to know what we're doing like every second of the day.

GREG

Exactly.

NICOLE

But we're supposed to be here 9 to 5, right?

SASHA

Yeah, but I feel like we all learned during COVID that we don't have to be in the office all day to get our work done.

NICOLE

But if it's what we're supposed to do...

SASHA

I totally respect that, Nicole. But just know, like, we're here for you.

NICOLE

Thanks.

SASHA

So then... ?

LORRAINE darts in.

LORRAINE

Oh good! I caught you all before you left. Did everyone see that O'Donoghue's survived the pandemic?

GREG and SASHA start packing to go.

NICOLE

... What's O'Donoghue's?

LORRAINE

Oh Nicole! It was our *spot*. How often would you guys say we went? Once a week? Couple times a month? We have to take Nicole tonight.

GREG

I gotta relieve the sitter.

SASHA

I have a dinner thing.

LORRAINE

(to NICOLE)

Just the two of us, then! You still owe for me for our lunch!

NICOLE

It's after 5.

LORRAINE

Oh you're right. It's getting dark out so early now.

SASHA

Night, Lorraine!

GREG

G'night.

SASHA and GREG are gone.

LORRAINE watches NICOLE packing up.

LORRAINE

I can give you a ride home, if you like.

NICOLE

Oh. No, thanks.

LORRAINE

Are you sure?

NICOLE

Yeah.

LORRAINE

I've heard the trains can be a little sketchy.

NICOLE

I feel safe on my line.

LORRAINE

That's good. But really, I'm going right by you on my way home.

NICOLE

I'm ok. But thank you.

LORRAINE

Prefer to zone out on the subway huh?

NICOLE

No but--

LORRAINE

You don't wanna get your ear talked off. I get it.

NICOLE

That's not it at all! I just have to run a few errands on my way home.

LORRAINE

Oh! Somewhere I can drop you off?

NICOLE

No, just around here.

LORRAINE

Ok.

NICOLE is at the door.

LORRAINE

You know, I am loving getting to see you every day, Nicole.

NICOLE

It's nice to be here.

LORRAINE

You should pop into Mona's office and see what I've done with it!

NICOLE

Sure.

LORRAINE

I can't wait for you to meet her. I know you've talked on Zoom some, but it's not the same as in person. She's incredible. And I can't tell you how much she's helped me.

NICOLE

Yeah?

LORRAINE

Oh yeah.

(leaning in conspiratorially)

The world is terrified of us, Nicole. Powerful women. So, we have to look out for each other. Don't we?

NICOLE

I guess so!

LORRAINE

So we'll really have to do that lunch!

NICOLE smiles and nods, she waves to LORRAINE. And leaves.

LORRAINE

See you tomorrow!

Lights shift.

SCENE 3: HUMPDAY

The office. NICOLE sits alone at the table.
LORRAINE stands in front of her.

LORRAINE

So they didn't tell you where they were going?

NICOLE

Not specifically.

LORRAINE

They just left without saying anything?

NICOLE

I didn't ask.

LORRAINE

I don't believe that, Nicole.

NICOLE

Really.

LORRAINE

I simply don't believe that.

NICOLE

I'm sorry. I should've asked--

LORRAINE

No, they should have told you! So rude of them.

NICOLE

Oh.

LORRAINE

I'm sure they went off to lunch together. And didn't invite you.

NICOLE

Maybe.

LORRAINE

So rude. No one likes to be left out. But! We'll show them. This is the perfect time for our lunch. What do you say? Doesn't matter, I'm not taking no for an answer!

Ok.

NICOLE

Beat.

LORRAINE

So. Wanna pick out a spot for us?

NICOLE

Now?

LORRAINE

No time like the present! Let me grab my jacket.

LORRAINE leaves. NICOLE is alone. She swipes through her phone.

LORRAINE re-enters.

LORRAINE

Find something?

NICOLE

I thought this place Buddha's Delight looked good? It's like Asian vegan food.

LORRAINE

Oh you like it?

NICOLE

I've never been but it has like four and a half stars on Yelp. Do you want to look at the menu?

LORRAINE takes NICOLE's phone from her.

LORRAINE

Hmm. Hmm... Hmm..... I'm not... too... sure... What do you like to get when you go here?

NICOLE

I've never been actually.

LORRAINE

I see! How adventurous!

NICOLE

But I thought those Thai peanut wraps looked good?

LORRAINE

That's your go-to order from here?

NICOLE really no longer knows what to say.

LORRAINE

You know what? I trust you. If you like it, I'll like it. Got your coat?

At that moment, SASHA bursts out of Mona's office. When he sees NICOLE and LORRAINE, he freezes.

SASHA

Oh, Lorraine! Such nice work in Mona's office--

LORRAINE

Thank you, Sasha. Nicole and I were just going to lunch, so you'll have to babysit yourself. Ready, Nicole?

NICOLE pulls on her coat and stands.

Just then, LORRAINE's phone pings. She reads the message.

LORRAINE

Oh! Oh my, Nicole -- this is Mona. She's wondering if I can chat. I'm so sorry, Nicole, we will have to reschedule! You understand of course.

LORRAINE practically skips back to her office. SASHA immediately hisses at NICOLE.

SASHA

Where's Greg?

NICOLE

I didn't ask.

SASHA

Did Lorraine say anything? About us being gone?

NICOLE

She thought you were at lunch.

SASHA

You're a lifesaver.

GREG enters.

SASHA

Greg! You can't be gone in the mornings!

GREG

I had a meeting at Soph's daycare.

SASHA

So do it in the afternoon!

GREG

I can't control when my kid gets in trouble for biting someone!

SASHA

Forget it. It doesn't matter. Y'all. I just got off the phone with Santiago.

GREG

Who?

SASHA

Mona's assistant?

NICOLE

I thought that was for your podcast.

SASHA

It was. I hired Santiago to do our graphic design. He's actually, like, this super talented artist. His whole thing is he's queer but like in an actually interesting way? He's a little slow with his edits, but he has a really great eye for--

GREG

Sasha!

SASHA

Sorry. Santiago told me that all that stuff Lorraine said about WiFi and security? Total b.s.

GREG

What... ?

SASHA

The only reason we came back is Mona was going to give up the office if we didn't. Some British company wanted to buy out our lease, so Lorraine insisted on coming back.

GREG

You're joking.

NICOLE
Wow.

SASHA
C'mon, y'all. We have to say something.

GREG
I dunno...

SASHA
This is the problem with your entire generation.

GREG
What does that mean?

SASHA
You're all so conflict-averse. You just *let* Iraq happen.

GREG
Yeah, Sasha. This is just like Iraq.

SASHA
Well, I'm gonna say something.

GREG
I'm not getting involved.

SASHA
So the straight white man is gonna make the two marginalized people in this office handle this alone?

GREG
Don't rope Nicole into this.

SASHA
She agrees with me!

GREG
No. You're on your own.

SASHA
How are you ok with this?

GREG
Cuz this is working. I get to take care of my kid, you get to do your podcast--

SASHA

Shit! I totally forgot I'm supposed to be recording right now!

SASHA runs back into Mona's office.

GREG

What is his problem?

GREG's phone is ringing. He groans.

GREG

Yeah?

(shouting)

Look I just spent half an hour with that Nazi you put in charge of my kid. // Kids bite. It doesn't even hurt!

SASHA runs back in and grabs a mic off his desk and goes back into Mona's office.

GREG

Yeah, I can be there in half an hour if you wanna feel a bite that hurts!

He hangs up the call. And then points at Mona's door and looks at NICOLE in disbelief.

GREG

He is totally nuts. Thank god you're here, Nicole. So I'm not the only sane person.

He starts eating the cheese from his desk.

GREG

I know what that lady thinks. I'm a terrible parent. My kid's a biter. But she's upset. She got dumped with a bunch of strangers. And I know how much I miss her, I can only imagine how much she misses me. I'm like one of three people she knows. You know?

He looks down at the cheese mournfully.

GREG

I gotta go get some real food. Thanks, Nicole. For chatting.

Wearily, GREG leaves.

And NICOLE is alone.

After a few seconds, LORRAINE enters,
smugly chipper.

LORRAINE

Mona and I are really getting into it-- Oh!

She's just realized only NICOLE is there.

LORRAINE

They're still at lunch? Well, look, I was going to have them run these reports -- but, do you think you could do it, Nicole? I know it's a bit of a step up from your work but -- Mona wants them this afternoon so.

NICOLE

Sure.

LORRAINE

Thank you. Hopefully this won't back you up too much--

NICOLE

(a test)

I could always finish stuff at home...

LORRAINE

Oh -- so conscientious, but you know how particular our clients are about not using home WiFi.

With that, LORRAINE disappears back into her office.

And then, her voice from offstage:

LORRAINE (O.S.)

Oh, one last one--

And LORRAINE thrusts her arm -- only her arm -- out of her office, brandishing a Post-it vaguely in NICOLE's direction.

LORRAINE (O.S.)

Yoo hoo! Nicole? Yoo hoo!!

The Post-it waves. NICOLE stares at it. She considers it.

She considers the door.

She considers herself.

She doesn't move.

LORRAINE comes back out into the office and moves towards NICOLE's desk holding out the Post-it.

LORRAINE

Sorry, one last set I forgot. Do you mind? Just some returns metrics--

NICOLE

I'm not capable of doing that right now.

LORRAINE

Terrific! Thanks so much!

LORRAINE sticks the Post-it to NICOLE's partition and sweeps back into her office, without breaking her stride.

A beat.

LORRAINE comes back out, slowly. She stares at NICOLE.

LORRAINE

Nicole, sorry I-- the returns metrics?

NICOLE

I'm not capable of doing that.

LORRAINE

Not capable? You don't have the bandwidth? Or... ?

NICOLE

I'm not capable.

LORRAINE

Is... is everything ok?

NICOLE

Yes.

But are you feeling ok? LORRAINE

I am. NICOLE

NICOLE is working and actually seems totally fine.

And you've got those other reports? LORRAINE

I do. NICOLE

Great. LORRAINE

LORRAINE stands there. And stares at her.

And then LORRAINE goes back into her office.

A beat.

LORRAINE comes back out. She resumes staring at NICOLE, who is working away.

NICOLE does not acknowledge her existence.

Nicole? LORRAINE

Yes? NICOLE

You're doing such terrific work. Keep up the good work! LORRAINE

Lights shift.

SCENE 4: I WOULD ACTUALLY, LIKE, LITERALLY PREFER NOT TO

The office. LORRAINE stands in front of her employees, beaming. They all sit at their computers, staring at her, unenthused.

LORRAINE

Well! What do you think?

SASHA

That's really nice, Lorraine...

GREG

Yeah. Wow...

LORRAINE

Everyone's been working so hard this week, I thought a little celebration was in order. And we can get whatever kind anyone wants! Pepperoni. Mushroom. *Prosciutto*. Sky's the limit! Does that sound good?

SASHA

Mhmm.

GREG

Yeah. Thanks.

LORRAINE

Nicole?

NICOLE

A pizza party.

LORRAINE

Terrific! And I've had Santiago put the date on Mona's calendar.

GREG

Which is... what?

LORRAINE

I thought not next Friday, but the Friday after -- to give Mona plenty of time to get back.

GREG

So, two Fridays from now?

LORRAINE

Sure!

An awkward silence.

LORRAINE

What?

SASHA

It's just... that's Christmas Eve.

LORRAINE

Oh perfect! Then it'll be a holiday party too! A non-denominational holiday party.
(a look to SASHA)

We'll have Hanukkah decorations too.

SASHA

... I'm not Jewish.

LORRAINE

Really? You always seem so tense...

GREG

Uh, Lorraine.

LORRAINE

Yes?

GREG

I was sorta planning on spending Christmas Eve... with my family.

LORRAINE

So bring them!

GREG

At home, I mean.

LORRAINE

Well, what about you, Sasha? You don't have a family, right?

SASHA

They're in Michigan. But they exist.

LORRAINE

Nicole and I are not going to let you boys abandon us at this party! Right, Nicole?

NICOLE

Is this a work event?

SASHA

Can't we just do a different night?

LORRAINE

Santiago's already put it on Mona's calendar.

SASHA

She's coming?

LORRAINE

He said the date was available.

SASHA

Can't you see if she's available another night?

LORRAINE

Fine. But then I expect full attendance. With your families! You know I've never met Gina?

GREG

Oh yeah.

LORRAINE

(to SASHA)

And you have a... special friend, right?

SASHA

Seb?

LORRAINE

Right! Terrific! Oh this will be so fun!

Beaming, LORRAINE starts towards her office.

She stops by NICOLE, who has just put her headphones on. LORRAINE points at them. NICOLE takes them off.

LORRAINE

Doing ok today?

NICOLE

Yeah! Good.

LORRAINE

Good. You look good. You look like you're in good spirits, I mean. That was a good catch on the dates in the pendant lighting sales. I hadn't caught that so... that was... good...

NICOLE

I'm glad.

LORRAINE

And you're excited for the pizza party?

NICOLE smiles.

LORRAINE

Good! So... I just wanted to give you this...

Gingerly, LORRAINE hands NICOLE a Post-it.

NICOLE

Got it.

LORRAINE

You know which set I'm talking about?

NICOLE

I do.

LORRAINE

The Funky Furnishings North American numbers?

NICOLE

Mhmm.

LORRAINE

So you think you can get those cleaned?

NICOLE

I'm not capable of doing that right now.

GREG and SASHA look over, startled.

LORRAINE clocks them looking.

LORRAINE

(with a small laugh)

Oh, it doesn't have to be right now! But how about we say... EOD?

NICOLE

I'm not capable of doing that.

LORRAINE laughs loudly, again noticing GREG and SASHA watching, out of the corner of her eye.

LORRAINE

Oh, Nicole, you are such - a - character! But no, you're right -- take 'til Monday!

LORRAINE walks towards her office.

NICOLE

I'm not capable of doing it at all.

LORRAINE freezes at her office door. And slowly turns around.

LORRAINE

Nicole. Can you come in here for a moment?

NICOLE

I'm not capable of doing that right now.

LORRAINE

I would like to have a private conversation with you, Nicole.

NICOLE

I'm not capable of doing--

LORRAINE

Nicole, I have something to say, and I don't know if you want me to say it in front of Greg and Sasha--

No response from NICOLE.

LORRAINE

Ok. Nicole. I have been thinking and...

(thinking on the fly)

Uh, well, I would like to promote you! Formally! To Data Analyst! You've been doing the work for some / time now and--

GREG

Whoa whoa whoa

SASHA

Lorraine...

LORRAINE

Yes! Nicole, you have been promoted to a full-time Data Analyst, along with Greg and Sasha! Your next paycheck will reflect the updated salary and... congratulations! Keep up the great work!

NICOLE does not respond.

GREG

Wait a second--

SASHA

She's getting a raise?

GREG

Who's gonna clean our sets?

LORRAINE

You both know how to clean sets.

GREG

Yeah, but Nicole does it.

LORRAINE

Well, now you'll split it evenly three ways.

SASHA

And are we also getting raises?

LORRAINE

You're not being promoted.

SASHA

Lorraine, can we speak in your office--

LORRAINE

I think we've established we have an open system of communication here--

SASHA

I've been asking you for a raise for months--

LORRAINE

Then get a promotion. Like Nicole did.

GREG

I'd be fine with just not getting a demotion.

SASHA

She doesn't even want to be an analyst!

LORRAINE

Yes you do, Nicole.

NICOLE

Alright then.

LORRAINE

See? / She accepts!

SASHA

Wait / a second!

GREG

Come on, Lorraine!

LORRAINE

Enough! Nicole accepts, and so now you're all analysts. And I want the three of you to think of yourselves as a team. As a family! Ok? We are a *family*.

Lights shift.

SCENE 5: OK ZOOMER

Downstage, LORRAINE, GREG, and SASHA stand outside, huddled in their jackets and shivering.

Behind them, NICOLE is at her desk working.

GREG

So, what? We can just not work now?

LORRAINE

Of course not.

GREG

She's not.

LORRAINE

She is not not working.

GREG

You gave her a promotion, and she's *barely* working.

LORRAINE

She's cleaning the sets I give her.

GREG

But she's not running any reports because she's not able--

SASHA

Not *capable*.

GREG

At the end of the day: She's not working.

SASHA

Lorraine, I do think you have to address the severity of this situation.

LORRAINE

I am addressing it.

GREG

Well, it isn't working. *She* isn't working.

SASHA

For all you know, Lorraine, something super serious could be going on with Nicole.

LORRAINE

You're being absurd.

SASHA

You don't even know anything about her! This could be about abuse... / or-

LORRAINE

Sasha!

GREG

For Chrissake...

SASHA

Seriously! Sometimes people who were abused, as children, shut down like this. It's a trauma response.

LORRAINE

Nicole wasn't abused.

SASHA

How do you know?

LORRAINE

Because she's a good kid.

SASHA

Good kids are abused all the time, Lorraine.

GREG

She wasn't abused; she's just lazy.

LORRAINE

She's / not lazy.

SASHA

Jesus, Greg! She's *definitely* not lazy.

GREG

I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that. I'm lazy! I just want us all to be able to be equal levels of lazy.

SASHA

She's not lazy. But she might be neurodivergent. Or disassociating. *The Atlantic* just had a piece about high-functioning anticipatory post-traumatic stress disorder...

LORRAINE

What?

SASHA

High-functioning anticipatory post-traumatic stress disorder? People her age are a lot more aware of their traumas. And not just the traumas that have happened to them, but the traumas that are *going* to happen to them. Climate change, fascism, microaggressions...

GREG

?

SASHA

They're stressed about the future!

LORRAINE

And can you blame them? Can you imagine graduating college into this mess?

GREG

Into 4% unemployment?

LORRAINE

Inflation!

SASHA

I think part of the problem is that we're all, like, beholden to this idea that we have to be in at work at 9 every day, which is a construct based on like... factories at the turn of the century where literal children were being exploited. And so I think if maybe Nicole, or any of us really, weren't *bound* to this patriarchal, white supremacist *stricture*, and she were capable of coming / in whenever works for us--

LORRAINE

What did you say?

SASHA

Huh?

LORRAINE

What did you just say, what word did you just use--

SASHA

Patriarchal? It means, like, um, male-dominated--

LORRAINE

No, not that--

GREG

Point is. Maybe we don't need to be here all the time.

SASHA

Right. If we could just modify our hours...

GREG

Even part-time remote...

LORRAINE

We've discussed this. It's not secure.

GREG and SASHA look at each other.

SASHA

Lorraine. We know our clients don't care where we work from.

LORRAINE

Who told you that?

SASHA

Santiago.

LORRAINE

Santiago's an idiot.

SASHA

He has like six degrees.

LORRAINE

We are not going back to working from home.

SASHA

Why not?

LORRAINE

Because I'm not doing it! Ok? There's no camaraderie when we're all at home. No *esprit de corps*. The whole working from home thing -- it was only ever meant to be temporary!

And Mona will remember how vital it was to be in person once she's back and sees how well it's going--

GREG

Is it? Going well?

LORRAINE

Yes, Greg!

GREG

Nicole worked when she was at home and here she's decided not to.

LORRAINE

She hasn't *decided* not to.

GREG

Sure she has. She's got free will, doesn't she?

SASHA

Actually, none of us have free will.

GREG

Sasha, focus--

SASHA

It's true! They did this study where they found that the neurons in our brain that fire when we do a simple action -- like raising our arm -- fire before we make the *decision* to raise our arm.

GREG

So what?

SASHA

So something else -- something in our genes or environment or circumstances -- initiates the action first, and *then* our brain tells us we've made the decision to take that action.

GREG

That makes no goddamn sense.

SASHA

I read it in *The New Yorker*.

GREG

That's the one with the cartoons, right?

SASHA

It's science.

GREG

And scientists used to think the earth was flat.

GREG starts hitting himself on the top of his head.

GREG

I am deciding to do this. Ok? Right now. I am *choosing* to do this.
(hitting himself harder)

I am in complete control!

SASHA

(smugly)

You think you are.

GREG stops hitting himself.

GREG

So, everything you do, you're not actually deciding to do?

SASHA

Technically.

GREG

And everything someone else does, they're not actually deciding to do?

SASHA

Exactly.

GREG

So what's the point of that podcast you spend all morning recording?

SASHA

What?

LORRAINE

What?!

GREG

You go into Mona's office and you record your little show and you tell people what not to read and what not to do and what / not to say--

SASHA

I don't tell people what not to do--

GREG

Yes you do, every morning, for hours--

LORRAINE

Every morning? What?

GREG

And for what? If people don't actually even decide what they do?

SASHA

It's a better use of my time than schlepping off to parent pick-up every afternoon.

LORRAINE

Every / afternoon?

GREG

Caring for my child is a worse use of time than your podcast... ?

SASHA

Yeah Greg, because at least I'm thinking beyond my own genetic material.

GREG

Maybe you should be thinking about how not to get your head so far up your / own ass--

LORRAINE

GREG. SASHA.

They finally stop and notice her.

LORRAINE

The nerve of you two, to accuse *Nicole* of not working. Sasha, you will quit any second -- or third or fourth -- jobs you have. And Greg, you will make whatever necessary childcare arrangements / you need to make--

GREG

Lorraine, I can't abandon my kid / with a bunch of--

LORRAINE

Whatever necessary childcare arrangements you need to make in order to be present at your job, both physically and mentally, for the duration of the workday. Thank you. I mean, this is a full-time job after all, not a come-as-you-wish, hourly motel. And as for Nicole, it's nothing you two need to worry about. I'll work my Lorraine magic.

Lights shift.

SCENE 6: WOMEN LAUGHING ALONE WITH SALAD

The office. Empty, except for NICOLE.
LORRAINE enters with a:

LORRAINE

Knock knock!

No response from NICOLE. LORRAINE goes a
little closer.

LORRAINE
(slightly louder)

Knock knock!!

She goes and stands in NICOLE's eye line.
NICOLE is wearing headphones. LORRAINE
waves. NICOLE pulls the headphones off.

LORRAINE

I said -- knock knock!

NICOLE

Hey, Lorraine.

LORRAINE

Didn't know if you could hear me with those on.

NICOLE

I couldn't.

LORRAINE

Uh oh. Hope you don't walk down the street alone at night wearing those!

NICOLE

No, just at work.

LORRAINE

That's good. Wouldn't want you to get assaulted! Well. I just wanted to see if you'd eaten
yet?

NICOLE

I haven't.

LORRAINE

Oh goody. I got an extra salad--

(LORRAINE is carrying two salads)

LORRAINE

--so we can finally do our lunch! I've got a chicken caesar, and a kale avocado... thing. This one's vegan. Do you want this one?

NICOLE

Ok.

LORRAINE

Ok, good. I had a feeling you didn't eat meat, I don't know why. Did you tell me that?

NICOLE

No...

LORRAINE

Oh. I thought you told me that.

LORRAINE sits. She hands NICOLE a fork wrapped in plastic.

LORRAINE

Now you grew up in Tampa. Is that right, Nicole?

NICOLE

I'm not capable of saying.

LORRAINE

(brushing past this)

I only ask because my brother-in-law's uncle lives in Miami. And he loves it there.

NICOLE takes a bite of her salad, doesn't respond.

LORRAINE waits for a beat.

LORRAINE

I'm from San Jose. Have you ever been?

NICOLE is still eating.

LORRAINE

It's the third biggest city in California, tenth in the country. It used to be the state capital! A lot of people don't know that. And it has the highest number of patents per capita. Floppy disks were invented there, and the Eggo waffle... You're liking your salad? Oh good! You're liking your salad. So am I.

LORRAINE takes a bite. She chews. She covers her mouth.

LORRAINE

We lived there until I was seven -- San Jose that is. Then we moved down to Santa Monica. In fact, that's where I got my first job. I sold promotional products, door to door. Do you know what those are, Nicole? Promotional products? Probably before your time... They're like pens and other things that companies would put their logos on and then give away, as advertisements, for their businesses. Pens. Hats. Mugs. Things of that nature. I started when I was 13! I loved it. I learned so much. It's how I got to be so good with people. It's how I mastered the art of small talk. You pick up skills so much more easily at that age; I think it's so important for kids to work. Did you have a job as a kid, Nicole?

NICOLE

I'm not capable of saying.

LORRAINE

I only ask because you have such a robust work ethic, and so I thought maybe you also worked as a kid. You remind me so much of me, Nicole! And I loved that job. It was more than a job, it was... Well, I don't mind telling you this, Nicole. I feel so close to you. You see, the whole reason we moved to Santa Monica in the first place was my mother. I adored her, but she had this problem. With drinking. Her problem was she was too good at it!

She laughs. NICOLE doesn't.

LORRAINE

No, but she got involved with this group up there, a therapy group. It took a lot of courage for my mother to go -- and the program worked wonders. It was all people in my mother's same situation. They would sit in a circle, and they'd go around, one-by-one, and everyone would stand up and tell you everything they thought was wrong with you, whatever they felt you should change about yourself to get -- better. And people could get angry, according to my mother. But it helped.

That was the genius of the man who started it -- Uncle Chuck. Of course that wasn't his real name. It was Chuck Barnes. But we called him Uncle Chuck. Wonderful man. And he bought this big, beautiful hotel on a lake for us all to live in. Very orderly.

Uncle Chuck lived on the top floor. And the farther along you were in the program, the closer you lived to him.

And to pay for the building's upkeep and all our food, Uncle Chuck started this promotional products business. Now, you weren't meant to start sales until you were at least 16, but I wanted to pull my weight as soon as I could. I was so grateful for everything he had done for us -- for my mother, for my family.

And of course it didn't hurt that whoever had the best sales of the quarter would get to serve Uncle Chuck in his room for a night. And spend the whole evening with him, sitting while he ate. Now of course that was something I wanted very much. And I wasn't going to wait until I was 16 to get to do it!

So I muscled my way in at 13. Naturally I was at a disadvantage. So I had to get creative. I came up with what I thought was a fairly clever idea, if I do say so myself: I'd take some of the products we had sold -- a hat with a bank's logo, or a pen with a lawyer's phone number -- and I would have them on me when I was going door to door. Subliminal messaging. Get it, Nicole? It did the trick. When they announced the results at the end of my first quarter, can you guess who was at the top?

The lights flick off. NICOLE raises an arm, but nothing happens.

LORRAINE

I couldn't sleep the night after they announced the results. Every time I would drift off, my eyes would snap open with visions of Uncle Chuck's apartment. I'd heard about the things he had -- the most beautiful linens, silverware, China -- given to him by people he had helped all over the world. I imagined myself placing the food on his plate. Sitting by his side. Helping him how I could...

Silence, in the darkness.

NICOLE

(trembling)

And what happened? When you went in?

LORRAINE startles, as if out of a trance, and the lights flick on.

LORRAINE

I didn't get to, as it turned out. No, Uncle Chuck picked someone else. Sheila -- a few years older than me, blonde. I never found out why. I suppose I was too young.

NICOLE

Thank god!

LORRAINE

What do you mean?

NICOLE

What do you think would have happened? If you went in?

LORRAINE

I don't know, I never found out! We left -- a couple months later. Uncle Chuck bought a few acres up in Mendocino and wanted all the children to go live there with him until their parents finished the program. I was still 13 at the time so I would have gone. And that was a bridge too far for my father... So we went back to San Jose.

(rest)

I don't think my mother ever forgave me for being the reason we had to leave. I'm fairly certain that's why she had my sister. So she could have a daughter she didn't hate. I'd ask her... if she spoke to me!

LORRAINE notices that NICOLE has finished her entire salad.

LORRAINE

(triumphantly)

Guess you hated that! I'll remember for next time.

LORRAINE winks, but NICOLE is stoic.

LORRAINE

I'm glad we got to talk today, Nicole. Maybe we can make this a regular thing? I want you to be able to tell me anything, Nicole.

NICOLE

I'm not capable of doing that.

LORRAINE

If anything is wrong? If the workload is too much? Or if the raise wasn't enough? Is it too noisy in here? You can work in Mona's office until she's back? Would you like that? An office of your own! That will let you focus on your work, won't it?

NICOLE

I have decided not to do any more work.

What? No more work?
LORRAINE

No more.
NICOLE

LORRAINE draws herself up to her full height,
such as it is.

And for what reason, may I ask?
LORRAINE

NICOLE looks LORRAINE in the eye:

Do you not see the reason for yourself?
NICOLE

Blackout.

INTERMEZZO

A light narrows in on NICOLE, sitting in the same position at her desk.

She looks out at the audience.

She seems to smile.

Was that a wink?

Blackout.

SCENE 7: SHHHH!

In darkness, text projected above the stage:

she's terrified of her

You think?

100%

How do I get her to be terrified of me?

why? you wanna stop working too?

Lights up. The office. GREG and SASHA sit at their computers. NICOLE is there too, but she is not even looking at her computer, she's just sitting and staring off into the distance.

GREG types. Then text appears projected again:

Would be nice.

Now SASHA types. Words appear projected.
(You're getting the idea.)

she is ruining my life

Which one?

take your pick

You figure it out with the podcast?

they don't want to record at night

What does that mean for you?

fired

Sorry. I shouldn't have told Lorraine.

*it's ok
how's soph doing with the sitter?*

She's started biting me and Gina too

omg

I know.

i'm gonna tell her

You are?

we have to

SASHA looks up at GREG, pointedly. GREG sighs.

You're right.

SASHA looks back up, surprised.

really?

Yes.

let's go

Now?

yeah

I need a sec.

we have to rip the bandaid off

Give me five.

now greg!

SASHA gets up and goes into LORRAINE's office.

Wait!

But it's too late. SASHA's gone. From LORRAINE's office we hear:

Lorraine, can we talk?

SASHA (O.S.)

SASHA shuts the door. His voice becomes muffled.

GREG stares at NICOLE, then at the door, then back to NICOLE. Suddenly, he gets up and goes into LORRAINE's office.

He opens the door, and we are dropped in mid-conversation.

-- totally get why you're upset.

SASHA (O.S.)

Greg. The door please.

LORRAINE (O.S.)

The door closes, but the latch doesn't take. Quietly, it swings back open...

Voices, at nearly full volume, can be heard:

Sasha and I were just discussing the Q4 numbers.

LORRAINE (O.S.)

Right, yes--

GREG (O.S.)

I'd like to understand what happened.

LORRAINE (O.S.)

We tried to get them done, but / we didn't--

GREG (O.S.)

LORRAINE (O.S.)

I didn't ask you to try, I asked you to do it. *Never* in the five decades of my career have I had to tell someone I couldn't deliver something I had promised. Do you have any idea what that felt like?

SASHA (O.S.)

Lorraine...

LORRAINE (O.S.)

And now Mona isn't returning my calls.

GREG (O.S.)

You can tell her it's Nicole's fault.

LORRAINE (O.S.)

I do not throw my team members under the bus, Greg.

GREG (O.S.)

Well it is!

SASHA (O.S.)

We have been working for four days straight, Lorraine. But it's hard when two people are doing the work of three.

GREG (O.S.)

Cleaning the reports takes forever--

SASHA (O.S.)

And Nicole used to do it all--

GREG (O.S.)

But now...

At this moment, GORDON, a maintenance man who looks remarkably like GREG, comes into the office carrying a stepladder.

He is followed by SETH, a second maintenance man who looks just like SASHA.

They nod politely at NICOLE as they enter.

GORDON

Just fixing the lights.

SETH

Don't mind us.

NICOLE smiles at them as they set to work. The conversation in the office continues audibly:

LORRAINE (O.S.)

I know Nicole's work has slowed.

GREG (O.S.)

It's *stopped*.

LORRAINE (O.S.)

But we have to be patient with her.

SASHA (O.S.)

It's been a week.

GREG (O.S.)

She has literally done nothing for a *week*.

SASHA (O.S.)

She just sits there, staring off into space.

GORDON and SETH glance over at NICOLE, sitting there, staring off into space.

GREG (O.S.)

It's creepy, Lorraine.

SASHA (O.S.)

And we are completely overwhelmed.

LORRAINE (O.S.)
(snapping)

So what should I do?

SASHA (O.S.)

Something. Anything.

LORRAINE (O.S.)

I gave her a promotion. A raise. Her own office. I have tried everything.

Not everything. SASHA (O.S.)

Sasha, I am not having this conversation with you again-- LORRAINE (O.S.)

What conversation? SASHA (O.S.)

We are not working from home! LORRAINE (O.S.)

I wasn't going to suggest that. SASHA (O.S.)

Then what? LORRAINE (O.S.)

Fire her! GREG (O.S.)

Don't be ridiculous. LORRAINE (O.S.)

And replace her with someone who will do the job. SASHA (O.S.)

I will talk to Nicole. LORRAINE (O.S.)

You have already. SASHA (O.S.)

I'll be firmer. I'll- I'll- I'll... LORRAINE (O.S.)

Fire her! GREG (O.S.)

No! LORRAINE (O.S.)

GORDON and SETH look over at NICOLE,
who stares straight ahead.

LORRAINE (O.S.)

I told you I'm not cap-- I can't do that.

GREG (O.S.)

Then what *can* you do?

LORRAINE (O.S.)

Just give me a second! Let me think...

GORDON and SETH begin packing up and
readying to leave.

SASHA (O.S.)

Lorraine. Something has to change here.

LORRAINE (O.S.)

I know, I know--

GREG (O.S.)

Chrissake, Lorraine...

LORRAINE (O.S.)

I'd like to see you two try. I'd like to see how you two deal with something like this--

SASHA (O.S.)

Frankly, I would have never let it / get this far.

LORRAINE (O.S.)

I'd like to see how you two deal with someone who is *clearly* unwell.

GREG (O.S.)

We do. All day.

GORDON knocks on LORRAINE's door.

GORDON (O.S.)

Sorry to interrupt -- Linda sent us to fix the motion sensor for the lights. Should be ok now.

LORRAINE (O.S.)

Oh. Thank you.

GORDON

No problem.

LORRAINE (O.S.)

Uh, excuse me, was that door open when you... ?

GORDON (O.S.)

Yeah... ?

SASHA (O.S.)

Greg, you moron--

GREG (O.S.)

I'm sorr--

LORRAINE's door slams shut. NICOLE is still sitting there. GORDON and SETH leave, with a little nod to her.

Loud murmurs from LORRAINE's office. Then silence.

LORRAINE's door opens again. She steps out. She is composed.

LORRAINE

Nicole.

NICOLE turns and looks at her. Blankly.

LORRAINE

I think maybe you heard some of what was said in there...

NICOLE stares straight ahead.

LORRAINE

I'd like us to discuss a way forward.

NICOLE

I'm not capable--

LORRAINE

No, I understand that, Nicole, but it is imperative that we discuss this--

NICOLE

I'm not capable of doing that.

GREG and SASHA emerge from LORRAINE's office, looking skeptical.

LORRAINE

Then, I'm sorry Nicole, but I'm going to have to ask you to go home. And return only when you are able to be a productive member of this office.

GREG

Wait.

SASHA

So *Nicole* gets to be remote?

LORRAINE

Nicole is not remote. She is on mandatory, paid leave--

GREG

So she doesn't have to work at all?!

LORRAINE

For two weeks.

GREG

Can I get two / weeks PTO?

LORRAINE

And if at that time, Nicole, / you can't work here properly.

GREG

Like, if you're just handing it out?

LORRAINE

Then that's it. Do you understand? Then we will have to part ways, Nicole. Can you tell me you understand?

NICOLE looks up at LORRAINE but says nothing.

Blackout.

SCENE 8: I WISH I KNEW HOW TO QUIT YOU

The office. It's morning. And it's empty.

The handle to the door to the hallway jiggles.
The door doesn't open.

It jiggles again. Again, the door doesn't open.

The handle jiggles again--

SASHA (O.S.)

Lorraine?

GREG (O.S.)

What's going on?

LORRAINE (O.S.)

We're locked out.

GREG (O.S.)

Door's never locked.

He tries the door. It's locked.

LORRAINE (O.S.)

And yet, miracles do happen...

Inside the office, a figure extracts itself from
under the desk: NICOLE!

SASHA (O.S.)

Do you have the app? To get in?

LORRAINE (O.S.)

I'm trying to download it. You don't know my AppleID password do you... ?

NICOLE begins pulling on pants and on a t-shirt
-- but without rushing.

SASHA (O.S.)

I can--

With a beep, the door unlocks. It opens a crack--

Just a minute!

NICOLE

The door stops opening.

Nicole... ?

LORRAINE (O.S.)

NICOLE

I'm occupied at the moment. Maybe go for a walk around the block?

Oh. Uh... Sure.

LORRAINE (O.S.)

The door shuts.

Lorraine!

SASHA (O.S.)

SASHA pushes the door open, GREG and LORRAINE follow him in.

NICOLE stands in the middle of the room. Calmly, she reaches down and picks up a sleeping bag from under her desk and begins rolling it up.

Ho - ly shit.

SASHA

Whoa.

GREG

Nicole? What are you doing here?

LORRAINE

NICOLE places the sleeping bag under the desk and sits.

Alright--

SASHA

SASHA starts to go--

LORRAINE
Where do you think you're going?

SASHA
Home.

LORRAINE
Absolutely not!

SASHA
She's *sleeping* here.

LORRAINE
Obviously something happened to her apartment--

SASHA
This is a joke, Lorraine.

LORRAINE
Sit down.

SASHA
Or what? You'll fire me?

LORRAINE
Yes!

Beat. SASHA chickens out.

SASHA
Well I'm at least taking the morning off!

SASHA turns on his heel and leaves.

LORRAINE
(calling after him)
You better be back for the party tonight!

SASHA's laughter echoes back into the office.

LORRAINE wheels on GREG.

LORRAINE
What? Do you want to go too?

GREG puts his hands up in surrender.

LORRAINE

Nicole? Talk to me. What's going on?

No response.

LORRAINE

What's wrong with your home? Or no -- of course. There's nothing wrong with it. You couldn't bear the thought of being away from us, could you?

GREG

I actually *am* gonna go...

But LORRAINE grabs his arm.

LORRAINE

Don't you see? Nicole needs us. She is alone, Greg. Completely alone. Like a- like a- like an undelivered email, floating about in cyberspace. We're all she has.

GREG

I think you're in over your head, Lorraine.

LORRAINE

And who do you suggest deal with it?

GREG

Mona? When she comes back?

LORRAINE

Grow up, Greg. Mona's never coming back.

GREG

Bingo.

GREG goes to leave and nearly collides with SASHA, standing in the doorway, now wearing a very trendy outfit. He clears his throat.

LORRAINE

Oh, Sasha, I've / decided--

...but when he speaks, it's with a light Paraguayan accent.

SANTIAGO

It is not Sasha. Sorry, I do not mean to... interrupt?

LORRAINE

You weren't. Um, hi--

SANTIAGO

Hello. I am Santiago. Lorraine, / yes?

LORRAINE

Oh, Santiago!

SANTIAGO

Yes, I work with / Ms. Hammond--

LORRAINE

So good to meet you. In the flesh!

SANTIAGO

You as well.

(turning to the others)

And you are... ?

GREG

Greg. Nice to meet you.

And GREG leaves. SANTIAGO nods farewell
and looks over at NICOLE.

SANTIAGO

And you... ?

An awkward pause.

LORRAINE

Nicole! This is Nicole.

SANTIAGO

A pleasure, Nicole.

LORRAINE

Sorry -- so is Mona -- is she in town then?

Yes!

SANTIAGO

I had no idea.

LORRAINE

We flew back yesterday. On somewhat short notice. Your government and their tax laws... it's all very strange. But. Here we are!

SANTIAGO

How wonderful.

LORRAINE

Isn't it.

SANTIAGO

Did you want to see Mona's office? It's all set up for her.

LORRAINE

No, no. Really, I am here about the party tonight.

SANTIAGO

?

LORRAINE

There is a party tonight, no? / A holiday party?

SANTIAGO

Oh of course! Yes!

LORRAINE

Good. Because Mona is very much looking forward to seeing you all there--

SANTIAGO

She's coming?

LORRAINE

Yes... You wanted her there, no? You had me put it on her calendar...

SANTIAGO

I know.

LORRAINE

SANTIAGO

And you sent me many an email reminder.

LORRAINE

I hadn't gotten an RSVP.

SANTIAGO

Well that is why I am here. Not simply for my health. Ms. Hammond asked me to come by because she has a little delivery she wanted to make sure arrived. Um, George?

SANTIAGO turns and beckons in GEORGE, a delivery guy -- who looks like an even more haggard GREG -- carrying an elaborate edible arrangement.

LORRAINE gasps.

SANTIAGO

It's entirely edible.

LORRAINE

This is so kind of her.

SANTIAGO

Yes.

LORRAINE

She is a generous woman.

SANTIAGO

There are several more downstairs. George here could use a hand, actually.

He turns to NICOLE.

SANTIAGO

Pardon. Your name was... ?

LORRAINE

Nicole!

SANTIAGO

Yes, right. Nicole, could you please help George with the remaining arrangements.

LORRAINE

San- / tiago, um--

I'm not capable of doing that.

NICOLE

...No?

SANTIAGO
(amused)

No.

NICOLE

And... why not?

SANTIAGO

I'm not capable.

NICOLE

I can do it!

LORRAINE

SANTIAGO looks over at LORRAINE with raised eyebrows. She looks down.

Oh my.

SANTIAGO

Santiago--

LORRAINE

Sorry, George.

SANTIAGO

GEORGE
(muttering as he goes)
S'fine. I'm always in the middle of some weird shit...

GEORGE moseys off. SANTIAGO smiles at LORRAINE with forced charm.

SANTIAGO
Well. George will have the rest of the gifts up in a moment. And I shall take my leave...
(with a bow)
Until we meet again this evening... And Nicole, will I have the pleasure of seeing you again tonight as well?

No reply from NICOLE. SANTIAGO raises his eyebrows at LORRAINE again.

A mystery! How enchanting.

SANTIAGO

And he's gone.

LORRAINE

This is wonderful, Nicole!

No response.

LORRAINE

You'll get to meet Mona!

SASHA enters still looking annoyed.

LORRAINE

Sasha! Great news--

SASHA

I'm just getting my notebook.

He crosses to the table when GEORGE enters carrying another edible arrangement.

SASHA

Did someone die?

LORRAINE

They're from Mona.

SASHA

They're enormous.

GEORGE

Yeah. And there's like six more. If anyone wanted to help.

LORRAINE

She's coming.

SASHA

Who?

LORRAINE

Mona?

Where?
SASHA

Guess not...
GEORGE

GEORGE leaves.

Here -- tonight. For the party!
LORRAINE

SASHA starts uncontrollably laughing.

What?
LORRAINE

Maybe I will come tonight after all.
SASHA

Really?
LORRAINE
(brightening)

Yeah. You think I wanna miss *this*?
SASHA

He points at NICOLE, throws his head back, laughs, and exits.

LORRAINE and NICOLE alone together. After a moment, LORRAINE works up the nerve to ask:

Nicole? You understand Mona will be here tonight?
LORRAINE

Yes.
NICOLE

And that I cannot be embarrassed.
LORRAINE

Yes...
NICOLE

LORRAINE

So you promise to behave in an appropriate manner?

NICOLE

I am not capable of doing that.

LORRAINE

Then you will have to miss the party.

NICOLE

I am not capable of doing that.

LORRAINE

Nicole. I am offering to do whatever it takes to help you.

NICOLE

You are a very generous woman.

LORRAINE

All I am asking is for you to be your charming, sociable self / this evening.

NICOLE

I'm not capable of doing that.

LORRAINE

Then, Nicole...

NICOLE

Yes?

LORRAINE

Nicole, please don't make me...

NICOLE

I'm not capable / of--

LORRAINE

Nicole!

Beat.

LORRAINE

Nicole... you have given me no choice. I am sorry that it has come to this. I will give you three months' severance. A sterling recommendation to anyone who asks. But the time has come. You must leave this place.

Blackout.

SCENE 9: DOING BOB BARKER PROUD

Lights up on the office. String lights, faint Christmas music, and even a little menorah next to a stack of pizzas in the middle of the work table. It's a non-denominational holiday party!

NICOLE sits in her chair, unmoved from the last scene.

And on the other end of the table sit GINA (GREG in a wig) and SEB (could be SASHA's twin if not for the bowl cut).

They are deep in conversation.

SEB

No, you have to say something. You do.

GINA

You think?

SEB

Absolutely.

GINA

It's messed up, right?

SEB

Totally.

GINA

Ugh, I know. I just want it to be -- you know.

SEB

Of course.

GINA

I can't risk losing my job right now.

SEB

You won't.

GINA

Maybe if this was two years ago. When people still gave a shit about MeToo.

SEB

There are laws, Gina. I don't have to tell you!

GINA

It's just the *most* fucked up workplace.

Beat.

GINA

Besides...

She gestures at the room around them.

GINA

(mouthing it)

Can you believe it?

SEB silently, but exaggeratedly, shakes his head and says "No."

GINA mimes "Crazy."

SEB mimes "Totally."

SEB mimes "Should we say something?"

GINA mimes "What?"

SEB mimes "To her. Should we say something to her? Like, make sure she's ok?"

GINA mimes "Are you out of your fucking mind? She's psycho."

SEB mimes "I thought it was maybe worth a shot!"

GINA

You're really sweet, you know that?

SEB shrugs modestly. But he knows.

GINA

I really didn't know what to expect. Meeting you tonight.

SEB

Me neither!

GINA

Just the way Greg talks about Sasha, I mean--

SEB

Oh.

GINA

(covering)

It's not bad!

SEB

He can be a little -- intense. It's what I love about him.

GINA

I just didn't expect you to be *so* nice.

SEB

Yeah.

GINA

'Cause Greg makes Sasha sound like--

SEB

(wincing)

Yeah.

GINA

Such an asshole.

SEB

Yeah! Well!

Beat. It's awkward. GINA's a little toasted.

GINA

What does Sasha say about Greg?

SEB

Oh...

GINA

You can say it. I live with the guy.

SEB

It's been a really rough few weeks for Sasha. With all of...

SEB gestures vaguely at the universe.

SEB

So, I think everyone has been putting him on edge. It's not just Greg.

GINA

It's too bad they don't get along better. We could double date!

SEB

That would be so fun!

GINA

Besides, Greg could use some friends.

SEB

Yeah?

GINA

He has no friends. None. And he's, like, *obsessed* with our daughter. Not in a pedophile way. But I'm like: You need other interests. And *friends*. You know?

SEB

Totally. I think it's actually good for Sasha to be back here.

Beat.

SEB

He's really lonely.

GINA

That's a lot. On you.

Then, LORRAINE enters and stands in the doorway.

LORRAINE

Oh good! You're still here. Greg and Sasha should be right back. Mona just wanted a word... Can I get either of you something? Another slice of pizza? A drink?

LORRAINE makes her way over to a table littered with bottles of booze, and we notice a slight stumbling in her steps.

SEB

I'm ok.

GINA

Same.

LORRAINE

(fixing herself a drink)

Are you sure? I can make you a Lorraine Stinger! Invented it myself. It's a vodka stinger, but without the crème de menthe.

SEB

No. Thanks, though! We're having a really nice time.

LORRAINE gives a sharp laugh.

LORRAINE

Wasn't exactly the evening I imagined. I'm sure Greg and Sasha have told you about our little... dysfunction.

LORRAINE, drink in hand now, glares at NICOLE. GINA and SEB refuse to look at either woman.

LORRAINE

But they'll be back in a moment. And then we can salvage this party. Mona just wanted to speak to them briefly, that's all. I don't think she's nearly as upset as she seemed, I think she's fine but --

LORRAINE tosses back her drink.

LORRAINE

I mean, have you ever seen anything like that? Someone just refusing to answer a question. At their *workplace*? Have you ever seen anything like that? I guarantee you Mona hadn't. And what did she call me? Do you remember?

NICOLE doesn't respond. LORRAINE turns to GINA and SEB.

LORRAINE

You were there? Do you remember what Mona called me?

SEB

Oh, um...

GINA

A middle-aged, middle management nobody.

LORRAINE

That's right.

LORRAINE glares at NICOLE. And then her eyes close. She begins to sway a little.

LORRAINE

I love this song.

LORRAINE's eyes open back up.

LORRAINE

Sure I can't get either of you anything?

SEB checks his phone.

SEB

Oh.

LORRAINE

(gesturing at the bottles)

I brought all this from my collection at home!

SEB shows GINA his phone. She nods.

GINA

We're actually gonna head out.

LORRAINE

No no no no no!

SEB

Sasha and Greg are waiting for us in the lobby.

LORRAINE

You two don't have to leave just 'cause the boys are leaving! Come on!

SEB

That's really sweet of you Lorraine, / but...

LORRAINE

We can have a gals' night!

GINA

Lorraine. It was good to meet you. We're leaving.

LORRAINE

You two are just like them. Always rush rush rushing out of here. Everyone does. I didn't know Mona could move that quickly! And now Greg and Sasha have told her everything I'm sure...

SEB

Thanks again for having us, Lorraine.

LORRAINE

What do they say about me? Greg and Sasha? What do they say about me when they're at home?

A pause. Slowly, GINA makes her way over to LORRAINE.

GINA

Lorraine. I've been a lawyer for a long time. And one thing I've learned is: Never ask a question you don't wanna know the answer to.

LORRAINE

It's her, isn't it?

NICOLE stares straight ahead.

SEB's phone is ringing now.

SEB

Sorry, Lorraine, I should--

GINA snatches the phone and answers it.

GINA

Yeah. We're coming.

She hangs up and hands the phone back to SEB.

GINA

(to LORRAINE)

Thanks for the party. We're going now.

SEB

(on his way out)

Merry Christmas!

And they're gone. And now it's just NICOLE
and LORRAINE again.

She glares at NICOLE, barely containing her
fury.

LORRAINE

Some party.

No response. LORRAINE stalks towards
NICOLE.

LORRAINE

Can I get you anything? A drink? A slice of pizza? C'mon, eat something--

NICOLE

I'm not capable of doing that right now.

LORRAINE

I'm not capable of doing that right now.

LORRAINE

(triumphant)

How did I know? How did I know you were going to say that? Hmm?

LORRAINE slams the pizza box shut.

LORRAINE

You know, it's the funniest thing, Nicole. Or maybe you won't find it funny. Maybe you won't find it anything at all! But did you know I find myself saying that all the time now? "Capable"? I can't even remember saying it before. But now, suddenly: 'I'm not capable of finding my keys.' 'I'm not capable of fitting into that spot.' 'I'm not capable of deciding on an appetizer.' Because now--

(mocking, grotesque)

You're. Not. Capable. Will you work, Nicole? Will you clean any sets? Run any reports? Will you pop down to the post office? And pick up some stamps? Will you do... anything? No? Why not? Because...

(increasingly grotesque)

Waa! Waa! You're not capable! Waa! Waa!

LORRAINE does a protracted, vivid impression of a baby throwing a tantrum that goes on far too long. Finally, she gathers herself.

LORRAINE

Well, fine, Nicole. We're going home.

She stoops to NICOLE's level.

LORRAINE

And we'll leave you here. If that's what you want.

She goes to the door and stops.

LORRAINE

Goodbye, forever. And I hope, somehow, you get the help you so clearly need.

Blackout.

SCENE 10: ZOOM BALLET

*Around the stage, three screens are projected.
LORRAINE, SASHA, and GREG's faces appear
from the shoulders up.*

LORRAINE

Hi Sasha, Hi Greg. Thank you both for -- oh. Greg. Can you see me?

GREG

I can see you.

LORRAINE

I can't see you suddenly...

GREG

You can't see me? I can see me.

LORRAINE

You can see you? Can you see Greg, Sasha?

SASHA

I can see Greg, but I can't see you.

LORRAINE

You can't see me?

GREG

I can see you.

SASHA

You can see who?

GREG

Lorraine.

LORRAINE

What?

GREG

I can see you.

LORRAINE

Let me -- Oh now I can't see anyone.

I can see me. And that's it. SASHA

I can see everyone. GREG

I can't see anyone-- LORRAINE

No, I can see you. SASHA

Sasha, did our Zoom account expire? LORRAINE

What? SASHA

Ugggghhh GREG

Is that why we can't see each other? LORRAINE

No... SASHA

Well something's not working... LORRAINE

This happens every time-- GREG

They must have a support line -- right? LORRAINE

I'll call. SASHA

SASHA takes out his phone.

Greg, I'm going to mute while Sasha... LORRAINE

GREG

K.

They both mute.

At that moment, on the stage below, lights up on the office. NICOLE still sits there.

The building manager, LINDA, and a doorman, STAN, come into the office with an uptight British businessman, GERALD.

STAN

Damn. You weren't joking.

GERALD

Why would I have been joking?

STAN

I dunno. It sounded strange: "There's a lady on the 5th floor who won't leave."

GERALD

So... could you do something about it?

STAN

What do you want me to do?

GERALD

Obviously she can't be here. My crew's coming in first thing tomorrow.

STAN

So tell her she has to leave.

GERALD

I did. She won't.

STAN

What do you mean she won't?

GERALD

I mean she won't.

STAN

Excuse me, ma'am. You gotta leave.

NICOLE

I'm not capable of doing that right now.

GERALD

See?

LINDA

This is ridiculous...

(to NICOLE)

Do you have someone we can call? Or somewhere we can take you?

NICOLE shakes her head.

LINDA

But do you understand we need you to leave?

NICOLE nods.

LINDA

And will you leave?

NICOLE

I'm not capable of doing that right now.

LINDA

All right then--

LINDA marches towards NICOLE, goes behind her chair and is about to push it, when--

GERALD

Wait wait wait

STAN

Linda! Don't--

LINDA

I'm taking her to the station on Pearl--

GERALD

Don't touch her!

LINDA

How else do you wanna get her out of here?

STAN

He's right. It's a lawsuit waiting to happen.

They all turn and stare at NICOLE. Above them,
SASHA unmutes:

SASHA

Ok, I'm on with Jesse at Zoom.

LORRAINE

Thanks, Sasha.

In the office, LINDA is taking out her phone.

GERALD

What are you doing?

LINDA

Trying to find the number for... there was a lady who was here before... Aha!

She's found the number. She starts calling it on
one of the office landlines.

SASHA

Lorraine, he said to open your video settings.

LORRAINE

Ok.

SASHA

And see if you've got--

LORRAINE's phone starts ringing.

SASHA

Do you need to take that?

LORRAINE

It's probably spam.

LINDA

(to GERALD and STAN)

She's not picking up.

*LORRAINE is fiddling with her phone, still
ringing.*

LORRAINE

I just need to figure out how to... How do you put it on vibrate? Sasha?

What? SASHA

Let me just... Oh! / Voicemail. LORRAINE

Voicemail. C'mon, lady. LINDA

LINDA sighs and redials.

LORRAINE's phone starts ringing.

Oh Jesus. LORRAINE

Just take it. GREG

It's spam, I'm sure. LORRAINE

You guys start construction next month? STAN

If we can. GERALD

Fast! STAN

Lorraine... GREG
(re: the ringing)

I just have to let them get to my mailbox... LORRAINE

What are you turning this into? STAN

A casino. GERALD

For real? STAN

GERALD

Haven't you heard? FiDi is the new Atlantic City.

STAN

Shit. I thought FiDi was the old Atlantic City.

GREG

Maybe just take it?

LORRAINE

All right, all right.

She answers the phone.

LORRAINE

Hello?

LINDA

Yeah. Lorraine?

LORRAINE

This is she.

LINDA

It's Linda. From / 53 Wall Street--

LORRAINE

Oh! Linda!

LINDA

Yeah. And there's a woman here who's refusing--

LORRAINE

Is it Nicole?

LINDA

Are you Nicole?

NICOLE nods.

LINDA

Yeah, it's Nicole.

LORRAINE

What is she doing there?

LINDA

Sitting.

LORRAINE

No, I mean, what does she say she's still doing there?

LINDA

What are you still doing here?

NICOLE

Sitting.

LINDA

She says she's sitting.

LORRAINE

Oh, for goodness sake. Tell her she has to go.

LINDA

We told her--

LORRAINE

And what did she say?

LINDA

That / she's not cap--

LORRAINE

No no! It's fine. Tell her that / she cannot--

LINDA

Lady, I am not a messenger service. You wanna tell her something, you come down here and you tell her yourself.

LORRAINE

I can't! I have Zooms! All afternoon! I can't just take the day off to--

LINDA

Well then we're gonna have to put her out.

LORRAINE

What, like Monday night's garbage? Put me on speaker! Hold on, let me mute--

LINDA puts the phone on speaker.

LORRAINE mutes herself, so now her voice comes crackling through the phone onstage. But above, we see LORRAINE on the Zoom call speaking the lines that come through on speakerphone:

LORRAINE (V.O.)

Nicole, this is Lorraine speaking. Nicole, can you hear me?

NICOLE

Yes.

LORRAINE (V.O.)

Nicole, I'm sorry. For everything. But, you can't stay there. You have to leave.

NICOLE

I'm not capable of doing that right now.

LORRAINE (V.O.)

You have to move on with your life, Nicole. I am sorry it didn't work out with us, but you need to find some other work and--

NICOLE

I'm not capable of finding some other work.

LORRAINE (V.O.)

Of course you are!

NICOLE

I don't want to be inside all the time.

LORRAINE (V.O.)

Then do something outside! Work in a park!

NICOLE

I'm not capable of working at all.

LORRAINE (V.O.)

Then go back to school or--

NICOLE

No, I couldn't.

LORRAINE (V.O.)

Oh, this is ridiculous. Just come here, Nicole. Stay with me. In my home. Until you decide what you want to do--

NICOLE

I'm not capable of doing that.

On Zoom, we see LORRAINE suddenly hang up.

LINDA

She hung up.

SASHA

Everything ok?

LORRAINE

Yes.

SASHA

What happened?

GERALD

What do we do?

LORRAINE

Nicole. She's still at the office.

GREG

Jesus.

LINDA

We've got no choice. Call the elevator...

LORRAINE

I offered to help her-- I told her she could-- I've done all I can do.

STAN

We can't move her.

LINDA

We can't do nothing.

And she wheels NICOLE out of the office...

LORRAINE

I really have done all I can do -- Oh!

LORRAINE suddenly pulls out her phone and--

Onstage, the office phone begins ringing.

SASHA

Lorraine, what are you-- ?

LORRAINE

Shh!

But it's too late.

The phone onstage stops ringing, unanswered.

LORRAINE

I have to-- I have to go! You don't understand--

She hangs up the Zoom and her video disappears.

GREG

What the fuck?

SASHA

I have no idea...

GREG

I guess we're... done?

SASHA

I guess so.

GREG

Well. Bye?

SASHA

Bye.

Beat. They linger.

GREG

Nicole?

SASHA

Crazy.

GREG

You don't think she's been sitting there for two weeks, do you?

SASHA

Feels like a lifetime ago.

GREG

I can't believe we used to see each other every day.

SASHA

I know, right?

GREG

We should get lunch sometime.

SASHA

Yeah. I'd like that.

They hang up.

The stage below is empty.

Then, the roar of the subway:

SCENE 11: THE PROPHET HOPPED THE 'A' TRAIN

A mostly empty subway car. GARRETT, a homeless man, sits in one corner. There are a couple other human-shaped lumps under blankets.

LORRAINE gets on the train. She carries plastic shopping bags. She scans the train and lifts the blanket off one of the lumps and reveals SAM, who hisses at her. She covers him back up.

LORRAINE goes to another lump and lifts the blanket to reveal a girl with matted hair and a dirty face: NICOLE.

Nicole!
LORRAINE

NICOLE lifts her head slowly. She squints her eyes. And then it clicks:

Lorraine... ?
NICOLE

Nicole. Oh thank god. Oh thank god! Hello!
LORRAINE

What are you doing here?
NICOLE

Looking for you.
LORRAINE

For me?
NICOLE

I went down to the office, right after that phone call. But you were gone by the time I got there. I called Linda. She told me they left you at a police station? You told them you had nowhere to go?
LORRAINE

NICOLE nods again. That's correct.

LORRAINE

I told you you could stay with me! I was worried sick, thinking about what might have happened to you. I've had nightmares. I had Sasha make me one of those alerts -- a Google alert -- for your name. Because I thought if there was any news -- if you were arrested. Or if you...

NICOLE

Died?

LORRAINE

Yes. Then I would know. But week after week there was nothing. So I started calling hospitals and shelters and no one had heard of you. And then I remembered I had a friend who works with, um, unhomed youth. And she said that the kids she works with, they often ride the A train all night. So, I've been riding the train every night. Looking.

NICOLE

Every night?

LORRAINE

Well, most nights.

NICOLE

For how long?

LORRAINE

Oh, not long. Not long. A few days. Or -- well, I guess... I guess it's been -- weeks, now.

NICOLE

When do you sleep?

LORRAINE blushes. She lowers her voice and whispers, almost conspiratorially:

LORRAINE

I sleep during the day. I do my work at night, on the train. Well, what work I have. It turns out I can accomplish everything I need to with a few well-timed emails... No more calls with Mona. No more Zooms. Oh, Greg and Sasha -- they're probably happy not to have to see me. I'm sure they were getting sick of the sight of my face. I know I was. Sick of seeing myself in that little box. Much better in the subway windows. Distorted.

NICOLE nods slowly.

LORRAINE

Oh thank god. Oh thank god, Nicole. It's so good to see you!

She shows NICOLE her bags.

LORRAINE

I brought you food! Lots of different things. Some bagels. Nuts. Chips. Dried fruit. That salad you liked.

LORRAINE holds out the bag, but NICOLE shrinks back.

LORRAINE

Please. I brought it for you. To eat.

Suddenly, from the other side of the car:

GARRETT

That bitch don't eat.

LORRAINE

What?

GARRETT

That bitch? She don't eat.

LORRAINE

But you have to eat.

NICOLE

I'm not capable of doing that right now.

LORRAINE

Oh for goodness sake, Nicole.

GARRETT

I told you!

LORRAINE

Told me what?

GARRETT

She. Don't. Eat.

LORRAINE turns back to NICOLE.

You don't eat? LORRAINE

I'm not capable-- NICOLE

Nicole. You *have* to eat. LORRAINE

I'm not-- NICOLE

Nicole! What? You want to starve to death? LORRAINE

I would prefer not to. NICOLE

Then eat! LORRAINE

I'm not capable of doing that right now. NICOLE

This is ridiculous. LORRAINE

Beat.

I eat. GARRETT

What? LORRAINE

I -- eat. GARRETT

LORRAINE stands. She is in tears.

SAM throws his blanket off.

I am the prophet! SAM

LORRAINE sits back down. She presses the food into NICOLE's hands.

LORRAINE

Please. I'm so worried about you, Nicole. I'm so worried!

NICOLE

It's not your job to worry about me.

LORRAINE

I can't help it!

SAM

I see the new world beginning!

GARRETT

Shut up!

LORRAINE

Please, Nicole. Tell me -- what happened.

NICOLE

I have nothing to say to you.

LORRAINE

Nicole! Why do you hate me?

NICOLE

I don't hate you.

LORRAINE

You don't?

NICOLE

No. Not at all. In fact: I love you, Lorraine.

LORRAINE

What?

NICOLE

You're a good person. A really good person.

LORRAINE

Then -- please, come home with me.

NICOLE

I'm not capable of doing that.

LORRAINE

(thrusting the food towards NICOLE)

Fine. But at least eat.

NICOLE turns away from LORRAINE.

LORRAINE

Nicole, please...

GARRETT

She don't want your food.

LORRAINE

Nicole--

GARRETT

So leave her alone.

LORRAINE

(whipping around)

She needs help! Can't you see that? She needs -- help.

SAM

I see the new world coming! And it is a beautiful world!

GARRETT

SHUT - UP!

LORRAINE

Nicole, I'm not going anywhere until you eat. I can be just as stubborn as you. Do you hear me, Nicole? I'm not leaving you again. You'll eat. You'll come stay with me, for as long as you need. And you'll get better. You will.

NICOLE's arm suddenly swings down towards the ground. LORRAINE gasps. NICOLE doesn't react. After all, she's dead.

SCENE 12: WHAT DO WE OWE?

Spotlight on GREG and SASHA, outside,
dressed in black. The rest of the set is dark.

SASHA
I thought it was a nice service.

GREG
Really nice.

Beat.

SASHA
I can't believe Lorraine didn't come.

GREG
I know...

SASHA
When's the last time you even spoke to her.

GREG shrugs.

SASHA
Santiago thinks Mona's gonna replace her.

GREG
Who would notice at this point?

Beat.

SASHA
Who was that guy you were talking to in there... ? With the beard... ?

GREG
Why? You interested?

SASHA
No. Just wondering how you knew someone at Nicole's funeral.

GREG
I didn't. We just got to talking. Nicole worked for him right before she started with us...

SASHA
I didn't know she worked somewhere before us.

Yeah.

GREG

Hunh.

SASHA

GREG

Some remote customer service job. I had totally forgotten, but she told me about it once...

And then behind them, NICOLE materializes, sitting at a desk, a phone pressed to her ear. It rings.

A woman, LAURA, enters and answers the phone in her home. She stands turned away from the audience, so we can never quite see her face during the conversation, but she has a similar build to LORRAINE.

Their voices are distorted, they sound distant:

NICOLE

Hi, is this Laura Jones?

LAURA

This is she.

NICOLE

Hi, Laura. This is Nicole from BAME.

LAURA

Oh for / good--

NICOLE

No please / please please--

LAURA

I've asked you / all to stop calling--

NICOLE

Please just stay on the line. Listen to me. It's important that you hear this. Please.

LAURA relents.

NICOLE

You have an outstanding balance of fifty-three thousand, four hundred and fifty-five--

LAURA

No I don't.

NICOLE

Ma'am, you do. I'm looking at our records, and it says you have an outstanding balance of fifty-three thousand, four hundred and fifty-five dollars on your loan and--

LAURA

That account was closed.

NICOLE

Ma'am, unfortunately it is still open.

LAURA

He's not paying it back.

NICOLE

I understand that ma'am--

LAURA

So you can close it.

NICOLE

Unfortunately, that loan is still outstanding.

LAURA

He's *dead*. He died.

NICOLE

Am I speaking with Laura Jones?

LAURA

Yes?

NICOLE

The mother of the deceased?

LAURA

Yes.

NICOLE

And you joined his policy as / a co-signer--

LAURA

Of course but--

NICOLE

Then under the terms of the policy you signed, the balance of the loan is now due to you.

LAURA

Like hell it is.

NICOLE

Under the terms--

LAURA

You want me to pay for a college degree that my son is never going to finish?

NICOLE

We've waived the cost of tuition for the incompleting semester--

LAURA laughs.

NICOLE

--but he did attend and complete a full year before--

LAURA

Before he died.

NICOLE

Now all we require to settle the matter at this time is a payment of two thousand four hundred and fifty-seven dollars and fifty-seven cents to cover missed monthly payments from the loan. Three months plus interest. And unfortunately, ma'am, if you don't pay it in the next sixty days BAME is authorized by the state of New Jersey to garnish your wages.

LAURA

What?

NICOLE

That's what I'm trying to tell you. BAME will garnish--

LAURA

You. You are BAME.

NICOLE

Yes, if you don't resume payments, we will garnish your wages. We will take the money away from you by force if we have to--

LAURA

Then do it.

NICOLE

Mrs. Jones. Please. I need you to listen to what I'm saying.

LAURA

I am listening. That's the problem.

NICOLE

If you can just make the payment.

LAURA

Two thousand dollars?

NICOLE

Two thousand five hundred dollars. That's all.

LAURA

(with a high-pitched laugh)

That's all.

NICOLE

If I can at least mark you down as having made the payment. Just the most outstanding--

LAURA

Oh god.

NICOLE

(urgently)

They will garnish your wages. They will destroy your credit score. Your insurance premiums will go up. Please. If you can just make a payment, any payment--

LAURA

You are a vulture. Do you know that? A *vulture*. You are feeding off the carcass of my DEAD. SON.

NICOLE

I understand that.

LAURA

Oh, you understand that?

LAURA is quietly crying on the other end of the line now. So is NICOLE.

NICOLE

If you can just make a payment. Please.

LAURA

I-- I--

NICOLE

Please. I'm trying to help you.

LAURA sobs on the other end of the line.

NICOLE

Please.

LAURA

I'm not capable of doing that right now.

END OF PLAY