

Downsize

by

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DESCRIPTION

When HANNAH inadvertently pours water on the boss and melts him away, she and her three co-workers find themselves momentarily released into their own freedom, which terrifies and excites them: what to do when you don't have a boss?

CHARACTERS

- HANNAH, young woman working for a corporation
- GERARD, young man working the same corporation
- VERA, young woman working for the same corporation
- KHALID, young man working for the same corporation; from India

Note: Except for KHALID, race/ethnicity of the characters does not matter.

SETTING

- Corporate executive office

Note: The set consists of a single executive-style desk and executive-style chair, preferably high-backed. The desk can have some executive paraphernalia on it: pen set, name plate, desk calendar/blotter, file stand, legal pad of paper, etc. The BOSS can be either recorded or live.

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Lights up stage left: HANNAH in tight shot holding two large glasses of water. Stage right: an executive desk and chair. Upstage center, in tight shot: VERA, KHALID, and GERARD at the office door, anxious. GERARD holds a dunce cap in his hand. The audience hears the following.

NOTE: It would be fine if a stagehand could somehow, unseen, manipulate the chair as if someone sat and moved in it. But this is not necessary to the action.

BOSS

You're a moron. It was a goddamn simple fucking data analysis and a report, but you come up with figures we can't use!

HANNAH begins to vibrate. The water in the glasses also vibrates.

BOSS

And you're saying that it's because my initial assumptions were wrong? Only a moron would say that to her boss. Gerard?

GERARD steps forward slightly, dunce cap in hand.

BOSS

Now!

GERARD goes to HANNAH and puts the dunce cap on her. The word "MORON" is printed across the front. GERARD scuttles back to his place next to VERA and KHALID.

BOSS

And I want my bottled water, not the crap from the fucking staff cooler!

HANNAH vibrates for a moment more, then, without warning, she spins and moves to the executive desk. She dashes one of the glasses of water into the chair. Smoke billows up from the chair.

The Boss' voice changes into the agonized voice of Margaret Hamilton in The Wizard of Oz.

BOSS

What the fuck have you done? Don't you realize that I'm the boss? You don't do this to bosses! I'm melting! Christ, I'm melting! Oh, this is a wicked, wicked world.

HANNAH places the cups of water on the desk. She walks to the chair and swivels it around. She jerks her hands away from the chair as if she'd touched something hot. She continues circling the desk, fear and amazement on her face.

GERARD, followed by VERA and KHALID, edge into the BOSS' space.

GERARD

What the hell was that?

HANNAH

He. Is. Gone.

VERA

He was yelling at you—like he always does—

KHALID

Using his boss voice.

VERA

He gave you the dunce cap—again.

GERARD

Sssh!

GERARD speaks over his shoulder to VERA and KHALID.

GERARD

Do you hear it?

They wait, ponder.

GERARD

Do you realize how quiet it is?

GERARD, VERA, and KHALID edge in a little more as if they were entering the lion's den. The three stare at the wet office chair as if it were a viper.

VERA

Do you realize how quiet it is?

KHALID

We don't have a boss.

VERA

We don't have a boss.

GERARD

No boss.

KHALID

It's 8 o'clock in the morning, and—no boss.

VERA

No boss.

KHALID

Isn't that unnatural?

They all look at each other. KHALID reaches to take the dunce cap off HANNAH, but HANNAH stops him.

HANNAH
We are all free.

GERARD
Naw—naw. There's always a boss.

VERA
In the abstract.

GERARD
Somewhere.

VERA
In theory. But not at this moment, not here. Isn't this what we
always wanted?

GERARD
But his boss—

HANNAH
Gerard—sssh.

VERA
Don't we always wish he'd never come back when he's gone?
We've had our wish granted.
(amazed)
We're free.

They ponder this.

GERARD
But what does that mean?

VERA
We can leave.

GERARD
No, we can't.

It's possible. KHALID

No it's not. GERARD

Yes it is. HANNAH

GERARD
(angrily)
Why did you do it? Now we don't have a boss!

KHALID
(very quietly)
Gerard seems to need a boss.

GERARD moves behind the chair, goes to put his hands on it.

Don't. Don't touch it. HANNAH

GERARD gives HANNAH a hard look.

GERARD
Why the fuck not, dunce-girl?

HANNAH points to the chair.

HANNAH
Because I never even saw him.

GERARD
You saw him enough to whack him. Fuck you.

KHALID
Why don't you be polite?

GERARD
Because I am the boss you fucking need.

GERARD puts his hands on the chair, and immediately a vibration shoots through him. Just as quickly, his body stops vibrating. Something about him has changed: now a deeper voice, harder face.

GERARD

This is a nice chair, everyone. This is a very nice chair.

VERA

Gerard?

KHALID

You're too late.

HANNAH

I didn't see him.

GERARD

(with a sneer)

So what did Wonder Woman see?

HANNAH points directly at GERARD.

HANNAH

I saw—flames. I tasted fire.

HANNAH pivots, comes downstage to the office "window."

VERA

Hannah?

(to GERARD)

What've you done to her?

(to HANNAH)

Come back.

HANNAH reaches to touch the glass of the window. KHALID moves closer to HANNAH, seemingly drawn to her. Lights change to flame on HANNAH.

HANNAH

My brother set the back field on fire one summer, burning grasshoppers with a magnifying glass. I was caught in the middle.

GERARD
(swiveling chair)

Nut case.

VERA

Sssh!

With an abrupt turn, KHALID moves to the desk, starts poking around.

GERARD

What're you—

But KHALID pushes the chair back against GERARD, which bumps GERARD. KHALID shakes out his hands—as if in touching the chair, he had touched something very hot. GERARD pushes the chair back but misses KHALID.

KHALID finds what he wants: a red felt-tipped marker or dry erase pen. He presses the tip against his forehead, right between his eyebrows, leaving a red dot. He smiles.

KHALID

Go ahead, Hannah. I can finally hear it—
(to them all)

I can finally hear it—the old voice.

KHALID tosses the pen back onto the desk, moves behind HANNAH, stares out the same window.

HANNAH

In the sunlight the flames were almost clear. The smoke roped around me. I couldn't move. My brother kept yelling to run, kept calling me "you moron!" "Run, you moron!"

GERARD finally sits in the chair, just as HANNAH finishes her last line. He reacts to the water but doesn't get up.

GERARD

I'm carrying the boss' water!

GERARD takes a pen from the pen set and starts writing on the pad of paper. In a fake Viennese accent.

GERARD

Und how long have you had zese zexual tensions?

VERA flashes him an annoyed look, turns back to HANNAH and KHALID at the window.

VERA

Stuff it!

GERARD

Stuff yourself.

HANNAH whips around. The flames disappear. KHALID is so close that he has to jump back.

HANNAH

You're from India. You know these things.

GERARD

(sneeringly)

"Note: Khalid is an Indian from India."

VERA moves closer to HANNAH and KHALID. KHALID looks at HANNAH with an open bemused face.

KHALID

You mean like "The insatiable fire of desire is the constant foe of the wise"?

KHALID shakes himself, as if to wake himself up.

GERARD

Where did that come from?

HANNAH

I could feel the heat on my legs.

GERARD

(writing, laughing)

Hot flashes.

VERA

(to KHALID)

What are you saying?

KHALID

Old lessons, old voice.

(laughs sheepishly)

“The insatiable fire of desire is the constant foe of the wise.”

VERA

(overlapping)

“—is the constant foe of the wise.”

KHALID

The Bhagavad Gita. Don't usually quote it on company time.

GERARD

(chiding)

Now, now, none of that on company time.

KHALID

(to HANNAH)

But the boss is gone—gone!—and for some reason it now comes back to me.

GERARD

(writing)

“Unbridled lust.”

HANNAH

And then, out of the sky, water. The fire fighters had gotten there, and they arced a hose to cover me while they put out the fire. Safety.

GERARD

(writing)

“She gets hosed.”

As HANNAH strides toward the desk, she takes off the dunce cap. GERARD is scribbling on the pad.

GERARD

“Then orgasm.”

HANNAH jams the dunce cap into GERARD's chest, driving him back. She tosses the crushed hat on the desk. GERARD leans forward slowly, his eyes narrowed to pin-points. He twirls the pen in his fingers.

HANNAH
(pointing at GERARD)
All I saw were flames. “Moron!”

VERA joins HANNAH at the desk.

VERA
(miming throwing)
That’s why you—

HANNAH
Yes.

KHALID joins them. The three face GERARD, who faces them back from the depths of the chair, looking very “boss-like” all of a sudden.

KHALID
“The offering thrown into the fire reaches the sun—

GERARD
Out of order.

KHALID
“—from the sun comes rain—”

VERA
And then—poof!

GERARD
Fuck “poof.”

KHALID
“—from rain, food; and from food, all creatures.” Us.
(to GERARD)

Even you—
(grinning)
—fuck-wad. Hannah has fed us.

HANNAH wanders away.

GERARD
Bullshit fucking poetry!

GERARD knife-throws the pen at HANNAH. But KHALID catches it mid-flight and drops it to the floor. Their eyes lock.

GERARD

It won't happen. They're just going to jam another boss up our asses.

VERA

Is that what you want?

GERARD

Some boss, some get bossed.

GERARD leans back into the depths of the chair.

GERARD

I have no problem with that.

VERA

So you like it up your ass?

GERARD

Ooh, Vera's getting a little mouthy—

KHALID stares at HANNAH.

GERARD

Fit yourself in, or you'll never get ahead.

VERA

And you—foom! up the corporate ladder, Mr. Junior Account Executive!

GERARD

At least I didn't ice a boss to get there.

VERA

Yet.

GERARD

Yet.

KHALID
(to HANNAH)

What should we do, Hannah?

HANNAH

I don't know.

GERARD toys with a letter opener.

GERARD

Sooner rather than later someone is going to notice. They're going to be curious. Then what?

He aims the letter opener at HANNAH.

HANNAH

I only saw flames. With a voice. He was never real.

GERARD tosses the letter opener onto the desk as he shoots up from the chair.

GERARD

"He wasn't a person, officer, he was really a burning bush—" All twisted, all of you. Voices, chants—Christ, it makes no sense!

VERA

Just take a deep breath.

GERARD

I am already breathing!

VERA

The Grand Fucker is gone. We don't exactly know the physics—okay—but somebody's going to want to know, and— My suggestion: no one knows a thing. We were at our desks, and whatever—happened—happened— I think we should all go back to our desks.

KHALID

Finish out the day?

VERA

I think that's best.

KHALID

No you don't.

GERARD

Like some ordinary Tuesday?

VERA

Exactly.

(to KHALID)

Yes I do.

HANNAH

No you don't. We're free.

GERARD

No we're not.

KHALID

Not you because you want the chair.

GERARD

And why not?

KHALID

At some point you too will just be a fire waiting to be put out. You'll want too much.

GERARD moves up close to KHALID.

GERARD

That's the fucking way I'm built. That's the fucking American way, in case you don't know that, Indian.

VERA holds up her hand, as if for permission.

GERARD

What? What?

VERA
(to KHALID)

I lied.

(to GERARD)

I do want to leave—

HANNAH

Then why don't you?

VERA

Do you really think—

HANNAH dips her fingers into remaining glass and flicks water at VERA. VERA does not flinch.

VERA

Maybe a matinee—something small—I've never done that.

GERARD

Not me. I've got work to do.

VERA

Saturdays. The Grand Fucker had us work on Saturdays, Gerard.
I think we can—

GERARD moves to the door, holds up his hand to stop VERA from talking.

GERARD

Save it for the priest.

VERA

So—are we agreed on the story?

GERARD

Yeah.

(hands over his ears)

Me one of the monkeys.

He gestures to the door.

GERARD

Anyone else?

No one moves.

GERARD

Losers.

GERARD leaves. Silence. Then VERA, with a burst of false bravado.

VERA

Okay, I'm gonna do it!

She strides toward the door, but at the door she stops, turns, and puts her hands over her mouth.

VERA

(sing-song)

Me one of the monkeys!

She laughs as she turns to leave. But she doesn't quite make it through the door.

VERA

Monday.

She turns and faces HANNAH and KHALID.

VERA

I'll do it on—Monday—that cash-flow report—you know— Monday
for sure!

VERA gives them a cramped little wave and leaves. Silence.

KHALID puts his hands over his eyes, then pops them open.

KHALID

Me one of the monkeys. Me have been asleep.

He dips two fingers into the water and runs them from his forehead over the bridge of his nose to his chin. He gives HANNAH a "V for Victory" sign.

KHALID

Goodbye.

KHALID leaves.

HANNAH scans the empty room. She looks at the empty chair. Her face looks peaceful, calm.

HANNAH picks up the glass of water and holds it over her head.

As HANNAH pivots in a slow circle, she pours the water over her head, as if it were a rainshower.

A healthy toss of her hair, and the shower of water catches the light as lights come down.