

Downsize

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

Beginning of the workday, drones streaming into corporate buildings. Faster and faster the lines blur and weave and people become faceless and bodiless until...

INT. OFFICE - DAY

The face of HANNAH (20s)—stunned, tight, emotionless.

BOSS (O.C.)

You're a moron!

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - CUBICLE AREA - DAY

GERARD (20s), VERA (20s), and KHALID (20s, Indian)—the Boss' personal staff—peek over their cubicles into the BOSS' windowed office as he yells at Hannah—their faces worried and ghostly under the BUZZING fluorescent lights.

THROUGH OFFICE WINDOWS

The Boss has his back to them, and they can see it shake in anger. They see Hannah's contorted face. She holds two large cups of water.

BOSS

(muffled)

It was a goddamn simple fucking data analysis, but you come up with figures we can't use!

CUBICLE AREA

Gerard, Vera, and Khalid pop up and down, share worried glances. They resemble nothing less than the moles popping up and down in the Whack-A-Mole arcade game.

BOSS (O.S.)

And you're saying that it's because my initial fucking assumptions were wrong? Wrong?

THROUGH OFFICE WINDOWS

Hannah rigid, dumbstruck, a deer in the headlights.

OFFICE

Hannah's blank face stares ahead.

HANNAH'S HEAD

Two hands come in to view holding a stiff old-fashioned dunce cap with "MORON" on the front. They jam the cap on Hannah's head.

OFFICE

As the Boss' VOICE lifts, Hannah begins to vibrate.

ON HANNAH'S HANDS

The water in the cups vibrates.

BOSS (O.C.)

Only a moron would say that. And I want fucking bottled water, not that crap from the fucking staff cooler!

ON HANNAH'S HANDS

The water tremors.

Then, without warning, she tosses the water from one of the glasses.

ON BOSS

The silver ribbon of water flies into his face and over his suit. He stumbles backwards and sits in his chair.

THROUGH OFFICE WINDOWS TO CUBICLES

The faces of Gerard, Vera, and Khalid pop wide with disbelief as they watch Hannah pitch the water onto the Boss.

THROUGH OFFICE WINDOWS FROM CUBICLES

Then, the strangest, strangest thing: smoke rises in thick billows, like water hitting dry ice. And the Boss melts away.

OFFICE

Smoke from the vaporizing Boss ribbons across Hannah's impassive face and the "MORON" dunce cap on her head.

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

BOSS (O.C.)

What the fuck have you done? Don't you realize 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.

The Boss' LAMENTATION trails away to SILENCE.

CUBICLE AREA

Gerard, Vera, and Khalid exchange scared, astonished, joyous looks.

THROUGH OFFICE WINDOWS

The three of them see Hannah standing stock still, wreathed in smoke, still holding one empty and one full vibrating glass of water.

ON HANNAH'S HANDS

The water in the remaining glass quivers. Then stops. Completely.

OFFICE

HANNAH puts both cups on the Boss' desk. She walks to the chair and swivels it around. It is empty and wet. She jerks her hands away from the chair as if she'd touched something hot. She continues circling the desk, eyes fixed on the chair, amazement blooming on her face.

OFFICE - DOOR

Gerard on the threshold, looks at Hannah, looks at the chair. Vera and Khalid bob behind Gerard.

GERARD

What the hell was that? Where is he?

HANNAH

(half-smiling)

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?

OFFICE

Gerard, Vera, and Khalid edge in as if they were entering the lion's den. The three stare at the wet office chair as if it were a viper.

HANNAH

Khalid—

Hannah gestures to close the door. Khalid closes the office door.

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. Isn't that unnatural?

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

HANNAH

We are all free.

CUBICLE AREA

Without warning, the overhead fluorescent lights sputter and snap off.

HANNAH (V.O.)

We are all free.

OFFICE

GERARD

Naw. There's always a boss. Somewhere.

VERA

But not here.

GERARD

But his boss—

HANNAH

Gerard, shut up: we're free.

VERA

We're free.

CUBICLE AREA

One by one, the computers blink off.

GERARD (V.O.)

But what does that mean?

OFFICE

VERA

We can leave.

GERARD

No we can't.

KHALID

It's possible.

GERARD

No it's not.

HANNAH

Yes it is.

GERARD

(angrily)

Why did you do it? Now we don't have a boss!

CUBICLE AREA

The fax machine cuts out. The copier snaps off.

KHALID (V.O.)

(very quietly)

Gerard seems to need a boss.

OFFICE

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

HANNAH

Don't. Don't touch it.

Gerard gives Hannah a hard look.

GERARD

Why the fuck not?

Hannah points to the chair.

HANNAH

Because I never even saw him.

GERARD

You saw him enough to whack him. Fuck you.

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?

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, goes to the window.

VERA

Hannah?

(to Gerard)

What've you done to her?

(to Hannah)

Come back.

THROUGH EXTERIOR WINDOW - FROM HANNAH'S POV

The plaza below filled with blurred hurrying people.

Across from her, an office building filled with blurred drones.

As Hannah SPEAKS, flames replace her reflection in the window.

HANNAH

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

OFFICE

Hannah at the window. Khalid stares at Hannah's back. His body begins to vibrate slightly.

GERARD

(swiveling chair)

Nut case.

VERA

Ssh!

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 against the window-wall. 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.

KHALID

I can finally hear it—the old voice.

Khalid tosses the pen back onto the desk, moves behind Hannah, stares out the same window.

THROUGH EXTERIOR WINDOW - FROM HANNAH'S POV

Hannah stares at the flames in the window. Khalid's reflection is among the flames.

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!"

OFFICE

Gerard finally sits in the chair. He takes a pen from the pen set and starts writing on a pad of paper, SPEAKS 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.

EXTERIOR WINDOW

Hannah whips around. The flames disappear. The office building with its drones reappears. Khalid is so close that he has to jump back.

FROM HANNAH'S POV

Khalid glows, as if in flames, especially the dot on his forehead. Then he is just Khalid with a red dot between his eyebrows.

OFFICE

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

"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 legs.

VERA

(to Khalid)

What are you saying?

KHALID

Old lessons.

Khalid LAUGHS sheepishly.

KHALID

“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 (O.C.)

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 (O.C.)

(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.

DESK

Gerard is scribbling on the pad.

GERARD

“Then orgasm.”

Hannah jams the dunce cap into Gerard’s chest, driving him back.

ON THE CAP

The word “MORON” disappears against Gerard’s chest.

DESK

Hannah tosses the crushed hat on the desk, “MORON” facing upward.

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

Shut up.

KHALID

“—from the sun comes rain—”

VERA

And then—poof!

KHALID

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

Even you. Hannah has fed us.

Hannah turns away from them. Khalid turns to watch her.

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.

BOOKCASE

Hannah wanders to the bookcase.

GERARD (O.C.)

It won't happen!

One shelf holds a metronome. She unhooks the arm, which begins to CLICK back and forth.

DESK

The TICKING of the metronome in the background.

GERARD

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.

BOOKCASE

Hannah stares at the metronome.

VERA (O.C.)

So you like it up your ass?

GERARD (O.C.)

Ooh, Vera's getting a little mouthy—

DESK

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?

BOOKCASE

Hannah holds up the metronome, starts walking to the desk.

HANNAH

I don't know.

DESK

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 points the letter opener at Hannah.

GERARD

What are you doing?

Hannah continues to bear the TICKING metronome to the desk.

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, which bangs against the glass wall.

GERARD

All twisted, all of you. Voices, chants—Christ, it makes no sense!

Hannah gets to the desk, cradles the metronome. It TICKS.

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.

Hannah puts down the metronome. It TICKS.

HANNAH

No. 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. His sudden action bangs the chair against the wall again.

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 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. I think we can—

Gerard moves to the door, holds up his hand to stop Vera from talking.

GERARD

Save it.

VERA

So—are we agreed on our 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.

CUBICLE AREA

Gerard notices that everything is shut down.

GERARD

What the—

Then, as if on cue, all the lights and machines bump on, and the office HUMS.

GERARD

That's better.

Gerard stalks off towards the bathroom.

OFFICE

SILENCE as the three of them look at the closed door, the re-lighting of the office space. Then at each other. 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. The metronome TICKS.

FROM HANNAH'S POV

The metronome flicks back and forth, back and forth, TICKING.

DESK

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.

FROM HANNAH'S POV

The metronome TICKS. The SLAM of a closing door.

OFFICE

Hannah scans the empty room. She looks at the empty chair. Her face looks peaceful, calm. She stops the metronome.

THROUGH OFFICE WINDOWS

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

OFFICE

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

Her turning reflection bounces back from the office's interior windows, from the glass on the cabinet housing the Boss' golfing trophies, the glass top of the Boss' desk, from the exterior windows—clip after clip after clip of the exultant spinning Hannah.

A healthy toss of her hair, and the shower of water catches the light as it flies around the room and lands everywhere.

She picks up the metronome, rears back, and lets it fly at the interior office windows.

WINDOW

Freeze just as the metronome slices through the glass.

FADE OUT