

H. R.

A play

by

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H. R.

CHARACTERS:

KRISTEN: An Department Chief, 30's.
FRANK: An Office Administrator, 50's.
CHIP: A Sales Rep, 30's.
MARGARET: A Vice-President, 50's.

TIME:
Now.

PLACE:
An Office.

SETTING: A Receptionist's desk in an office. Now.

AT RISE: FRANK, 50's, in shirt and tie, sits behind the desk, on the phone.

FRANK

(Into phone)

...thank you.

(He hangs up, concerned, as KRISTEN (30's), also in business attire, walks in with a file, she glances behind the desk)

KRISTEN

Hey, Frank. Is the fax machine broken?

FRANK

No, ma'am.

KRISTEN

'Cause the Peterson people were supposed to fax me an invoice.

FRANK

Yes, ma'am.

KRISTEN

You're sure it's plugged in and everything?

FRANK

Yes, ma'am.

KRISTEN

They said by 10 o'clock.

FRANK

We got nothin'.

KRISTEN

Well, screw them.

(She grabs a candy from the little bowl on Frank's desk)

FRANK

Yes, ma'am.

(Kristen starts out)

FRANK

You should know, H.R. called.

(Kristen stops)

From Corporate? KRISTEN

Yes, ma'am. FRANK

When? KRISTEN

Just now, I just hung up the phone, I was about to tell Margaret. FRANK

So what did they want? KRISTEN

They're coming. FRANK

(Beat.)

Today? KRISTEN

This afternoon. FRANK

And this is the first we hear about it? KRISTEN

We're just employees, why should they tell us? FRANK

Why are they coming? KRISTEN

They didn't say. FRANK

Didn't say or Wouldn't say? KRISTEN

Is there a difference? FRANK

All the difference in the world, Frank. KRISTEN

(CHIP enters, a good looking guy in his 30's in collar T-Shirt, jeans, and flip-flops)

CHIP
 Hey, Kristen-McGisten.
 (Kisses her cheek)
 Morning, Franker.
 (Shakes his hand, glances
 behind the desk)
 Is the fax machine broken?

FRANK
 No, sir.

CHIP
 I should have gotten a fax from the Brownsteins.

FRANK
 Yes, sir.

CHIP
 (Taking a candy from Frank's
 bowl)
 But no faxy-taxy, huh?

KRISTEN
 Chip. H.R. called.

CHIP
 Who's H.R.?

KRISTEN
 Human Resources, Chip.

CHIP
 Right! Absolutely! Yeah, no, I was thinking like H.R.,
 like H.R. Puffnstuff.

FRANK
 No, this would be Human Resources.

KRISTEN
 From Corporate. They're coming.

CHIP
 Where.

KRISTEN
 Here, Chip, they're coming here to our office.

CHIP
 Why?

KRISTEN
 We don't know.

CHIP

Well, why don't we know?

KRISTEN

Because they won't tell us.

FRANK

"Didn't" tell us.

(MARGARET (50's) enters in a business outfit with papers)

MARGARET

Frank, is the fax machine broken, because-

(Sees the others)

Oh. Did I call a meeting and forget to CC myself?

KRISTEN, FRANK, CHIP

H.R. is coming.

MARGARET

What?

FRANK

I was going to tell you, I just got off the phone with them, I tried to tell you, but these, these, these-

(gestures to Kristen and Chip)

-hindrances hindered me.

MARGARET

When are they coming?

FRANK AND KRISTEN

Today.

MARGARET AND CHIP

What??

CHIP

They can't come today! Today is casual day!

KRISTEN

For you anyway.

CHIP

I wasn't seeing anyone today -- Margaret, you said on days when there was no face-to-face I'd be Mr. Phoner Man, I could dress down, you said they wouldn't know how I looked over the phone, you said so!

MARGARET

Well, I didn't know H.R. was coming, did I?

CHIP

Oh, Christ, I gotta, they're gonna see me, I'm not, they're gonna totally-

KRISTEN

Didn't you used to keep a shirt and tie in your office just in case?

CHIP

(Slaps his forehead)

Duh! Yes! Emergencies! If this isn't an emergency I don't know what is, right? Thank you!

(He grabs another candy and charges off)

MARGARET

It's not an emergency, it's just H.R.

KRISTEN

But they didn't call you?

MARGARET

No. Which is sort of... Frank, why are they coming?

FRANK

They didn't say.

MARGARET

Didn't say or Wouldn't say?

KRISTEN

(To Frank)

You see?

FRANK

I was as surprised as anyone, but I played it cool, like you always told me to do, I asked, "Oh, really?", very calm, very like, "Hmm." "What's the occasion?" and they said they just needed to meet with the staff and they'd be here this afternoon.

KRISTEN

"Meet with the staff"...

MARGARET

Was that exactly what they said?

FRANK

"We just need to meet with the staff". That's what they said.

MARGARET

"Meet with the staff."

KRISTEN

"We need to meet with the staff."

MARGARET

(Checking her PDA)

We're not due for another Town Hall Meeting until next month.

KRISTEN

(Checking her PDA)

Self-Evaluations are due in May...

MARGARET

And the Confessional Retreat is in June...

KRISTEN

"Dreaming Outside the Box" is in July...

MARGARET

(To Frank)

Do you have anything on your calendar?

FRANK

(Looks at his desk calendar)

Mmmm... Tomorrow is Tina's birthday.

MARGARET

They aren't coming for Tina's birthday.

KRISTEN

Them and me both.

MARGARET

You're not still mad about the refrigerator thing?

KRISTEN

I'm not mad. I'm just disappointed.

MARGARET

It was two months ago, Kristen.

KRISTEN

And the Oreo pie was clearly labeled as mine, it was from my party, it was on the left side of the second shelf which is my side of the second shelf-

FRANK

(Reading calendar)

This is "National Blood Pressure Awareness Week".

KRISTEN

Oh, I'm aware.

MARGARET

They wouldn't-

FRANK

(Reading)

My cat has a vet appointment on Thursday. I think they're gonna give her one of those big white collar things-

MARGARET

You're sure they said "Meet with the staff".

KRISTEN

Maybe they just need to meet with Sales again.

MARGARET

Then Chip damn well better have a tie in his office.

(And Chip trots on buttoning the most wrinkled dress shirt you've ever seen, over incredibly wrinkled dress pants, a tie in his hands, but still wearing flip-flops)

CHIP

Okay, no worries, the Chip machine is powered up, people.

(He makes a "clicking on" motion)

KRISTEN

Jesus, Chip, where do you keep that suit, in your desk drawer?

CHIP

...yeah.

(He takes another candy from the bowl)

MARGARET

Okay, look, people, H.R. could be coming for any number of reasons. To discuss new benefits packages, or go over new evaluation forms, talk about the needs of each department-

KRISTEN

Or they could be coming to ax someone.

(Beat. They look at each other)

MARGARET

We have no reason to believe that.

KRISTEN

Then why are they coming? Why no notice? Any of that other stuff, they could do in e-mails-

CHIP

But it's Monday. They don't fire people on Monday.

KRISTEN

Tell that to Howard and Laneesha.

MARGARET

And Gregory. Don't forget Gregory.

CHIP

Oh, god. Gregory.

FRANK

I don't care what they do, I'm not going down like Gregory.

KRISTEN

My point is the day makes no difference.

MARGARET

But it does matter who's coming.

(Dials her cell phone)

Hang on.

CHIP

But we know who's coming.

FRANK

We don't know names. If it's Mr. Hickenlooper, we're all probably all right.

CHIP

As in Mr. C.E.O?

KRISTEN

You know another Hickenlooper?

FRANK

The big boss won't be anywhere near a firing. Wherever he goes there's this protective bubble. Like you're fine until he walks out of the room.

CHIP

I want to be in that bubble. I need to be in that bubble.

MARGARET

(Into phone)

Uh, hi, Francie, this is Margaret in Cleveland, just got word about the impending visit and wanted to check on who exactly we should expect. Call me back, okay? Thanks. Bye.

(She hangs up, looks at the rest of them. They look at her)

MARGARET

I left a message.

KRISTEN

They didn't take your call?

MARGARET

Well, no... but...

(They all take a step back from her)

MARGARET

Oh, come on! I'm sure she was just on the other line.

CHIP

Not taking your calls. That's like the first sign.

KRISTEN

(Nodding)

They're sending H.R. From Corporate. They don't do that for little people. They only do that for higher-ups.

FRANK

No, little people they fire over the phone. Remember Henry?

CHIP

They got him over the phone?

FRANK

Whenever he hears a ring-tone now? He wets himself.

KRISTEN

They're sending someone in person...

CHIP

Margaret...

MARGARET

This is ridiculous. They're not- I haven't even- If they were going to terminate anyone, they'd be scheduling a Survivor's Guilt Workshop for next week. We're all fine.

FRANK

Unless they were sending H.R. because they want us to think it's for someone higher-up, and it's really for one of us.

CHIP

...or multiple ones of us.

KRISTEN

Unless they think we think they think we'll think they're thinking of a manager, so they can actually think about one of us, but they're really thinking about a manager.

MARGARET

...They're not that smart.

KRISTEN

Or they want you to think they're not that smart.

MARGARET

These are the people who made Frank count out spoonfuls of Creamer to see if we were actually getting what the container said we were getting.

CHIP

And were we?

FRANK

The jar said there were 150 servings, I counted 137.

CHIP

Maybe you counted wrong. Maybe that's why they're coming.

KRISTEN

No. You know what. I bet it's Tina.

FRANK

Won't be Tina.

KRISTEN

Why?

FRANK

She filed a complaint against Leon last year, remember? For inappropriate behavior. There'd be lawyers all over them if she got fired.

KRISTEN

Then maybe it's Leon?

FRANK

Won't be Leon. He's African-American. There'd be lawyers all over them if he got fired.

KRISTEN

Dammit! I wish I'd filed a complaint.

CHIP

I wish I was African-American!

MARGARET

We've got to let the rest of the office know they're coming.
Frank, send out a memo-

KRISTEN

No!

MARGARET AND FRANK

What?

KRISTEN

What about Desmond?

MARGARET

In I.T.?

KRISTEN

He's dug in in his little spider hole back there. He's an ex-marine.

CHIP

He collects guns.

KRISTEN

If he gets advance word H.R. is coming? It's gonna make Waco look like a freakin' doll party.

MARGARET

Oh, for God's sake.

CHIP

But the rest of the crew should probably know. They might need to change their clothes too.

FRANK

Who knows? They rest of 'em might even have shoes.

(Chip looks down at his flip-flops)

CHIP

Shit!

(He charges off)

KRISTEN

It's me, isn't it, Margaret?

MARGARET

What?

KRISTEN

Frank's right. They're coming for the little people. I'm the last one standing in my department, they're just gonna shut down my whole operation, aren't they?

MARGARET

Kristen, I haven't heard any such-

KRISTEN

At that luncheon two years ago! I sat next to what's-his-name -- that V.P. For Development. I told him about my grandmother's Alzheimer's. Dammit, dammit, dammit!!

MARGARET

But you don't have Alzheimer's-

KRISTEN

Yet! They're cutting me now before their coverage has to cover me-

(Chip runs back on, still in his suit, but now barefoot)

CHIP

I don't have any shoes!! I wore'em home last time I had to change! Frank! Do you have an extra pair of dress shoes with you?

FRANK

I don't know, Chip, let me look. No. No, I don't seem to have brought an extra pair of dress shoes with me today.

CHIP

(To Margaret and Kristen)

Did either of you guys?

KRISTEN

Not that'd fit you.

CHIP

Crap. Crap crap crap. I'll just...

(He crowds in to stand beside Frank behind the desk)

FRANK

What are you doing??

CHIP

I'm hiding my feet. When they come in I'll just stand back here and smile.

(He gives a little wink and cocky
"finger gun" click)

FRANK

Not beside me you won't.

CHIP

Oh, come on!

FRANK

You've got your own desk, go smile behind it.

CHIP

(Not leaving the desk, reaching
for another candy)

You're such a jerk, you know that?

(Frank slaps his hand and Chip drops
the candy)

CHIP

Hey!

FRANK

I'd rather be a jerk than a mooch! You always got your
goddam paws in my candy bowl-

CHIP

I thought it was for everybody!

FRANK

It is! But have you ever, EVER brought in any food for the
office?

CHIP

I don't know, probably not-

FRANK

No, the answer is definitely not, because you're a mooch! A
big old Moocher Mooch!

CHIP

Yeah, well, at least I'm not... screwing the boss!

(Beat. They all stare at him)

CHIP

I'm bettin' there's some kind of rules against that one, Mr.
Smarty Man.

FRANK

I don't-

KRISTEN

But I think it's kind of against company policy.

FRANK

(Head in hands)

Oh god oh god oh god...

KRISTEN

But I mean, so are your naps, Margaret, and we're not reporting those!

MARGARET

My what?

KRISTEN

Every day at 2:13 when you close your office door.

MARGARET

I'm not sleeping!

CHIP

(Sheepishly)

You do kind of snore pretty loud.

(Beat)

MARGARET

I snore?

CHIP

If the air conditioner is off, you can pretty much hear it through the whole office.

FRANK

All those walls and cubicles. It bounces. Like a canyon.

(Margaret sits on the desk, dazed)

MARGARET

...I'm dead.

FRANK

Maybe they don't know.

MARGARET

They know. They always know. I just... I haven't been sleeping well, the 2nd and 3rd quarters were lousy...

FRANK

I know.

CHIP

Of course you've got your reasons-

I do!

MARGARET

Like I'm sure Chip has reasons for downloading all that porn.

FRANK

WHAT??

CHIP

I mean, it's totally your business.

FRANK

I never... I don't...

CHIP

(They all stare at him. Pause)

CHIP

Does everybody know?

CHIP

(They all nod)

CHIP

Even Desmond?

KRISTEN

Desmond's the one pointed it out.

FRANK

And please, you're in Sales. Sales Departments are what keep internet porn alive.

CHIP

...I'm dead.

KRISTEN

The nuns with the Saint Bernard was a little off-putting...

CHIP

That site was an accident! It just popped up! It was a, a cookie-

KRISTEN

I never saw it, I just heard about it.

MARGARET

(To Kristen)

Exactly. Like we just heard about you in the storage closet.

KRISTEN

...what?

MARGARET

Oh, come on, Kristen.

KRISTEN

I don't know what you're talking about.

FRANK

The storage closet, Kristen. You've been huffing the toner cartridges in the closet.

KRISTEN

I never...!

CHIP

Pretty much everyone in the office knows about it, Kristen.

KRISTEN

I don't... I mean, accidentally, it's a small room, I might have inhaled once or twice-

MARGARET

I'm pretty sure there's a company policy on that one.

KRISTEN

Do you think they know?

FRANK

They know. They always know.

KRISTEN

I'm so dead.

(To Margaret)

You're dead.

(To Frank)

You're dead.

(To Chip)

You...

CHIP

I wore my fucking flip-flops on the wrong fucking day!!

KRISTEN

Excuse me.

(She walks out)

FRANK

(To Margaret)

I just need to know that we had something, Margaret.

MARGARET

What do you think I was losing sleep over?

FRANK

It wasn't just 3rd Quarter losses?

MARGARET

The 3rd Quarter can go to hell. Every quarter can all go to hell, as long as I have you.

FRANK

Do you mean it?

MARGARET

If I'm going down I'm going down like a grown woman. On my terms.

(They're now behind the desk, crowding Chip who is increasingly uncomfortable, but unable to leave...)

FRANK

And I'm going down as the best damn Office Administrator this crap shack has ever known.

(And they kiss passionately inches from Chip)

CHIP

Um. Excuse me...

(And in stumbles Kristen, black ink smudges over her nose and mouth, clutching her files and a toner cartridge)

KRISTEN

THERE IS NOTHING HUMANE... OR RESOURCEFUL... ABOUT HUMAN RESOURCES!!

(Frank and Margaret continue kissing)

CHIP

Kristen!

(Kristen staggers back toward the door)

CHIP

Where are you going?

KRISTEN

I am taking the Vanguard supple-leather-arm-rest, quadri-rolling, ergonomic chair from Margaret's corner office 26 stories up and I am chucking that sucker straight through her floor-to-ceiling sun-tint window and I am then chucking myself down all 26 stories onto the goddam smokers bitterly huddling around the front door! I am making my own final parking place all over the freakin' curb and sidewalk!!

(She staggers out)

CHIP

Kristen! Somebody! Somebody should stop her, she needs to be stopped-

FRANK

(In mid-kiss, now on the desk,
writhing with Margaret)

You stop her.

CHIP

I can't! I'm barefoot! If H.R. walks in that door right now and I'm running around barefoot...

(Calling out)

Someone? Kristen's going off the reservation!

MARGARET

(To Frank)

I love you so much.

FRANK

I love you so much.

CHIP

Anyone?? We're about to have a serious P.R. challenge!

(Frank's phone rings)

FRANK

(To Margaret)

I have never, never loved any of my superiors like I love you.

MARGARET

No one is your superior, Frank Dilford.

CHIP

(Calling out)

Leon? Tina??

(Phone rings)

FRANK

Oh, dammit.

MARGARET

Don't answer it.

FRANK

Habit.

(He grabs the phone)

Good morning, Wilkeson Midwest...

(They stare at him)

Yes. Yes. Of course not. No. Thank you.

(He hangs up as Kristen staggers back on in a stupor, dragging a rolling chair behind her...)

MARGARET

What.

FRANK

That was H.R. From Corporate. They aren't coming today after all. They said they'd call back when they're coming to town. Maybe tomorrow.

(They all look at each other... total wrecks...)

MARGARET

Ah.

CHIP

Oh.

KRISTEN

...huh...

MARGARET

I'll just... take my chair back, Kristen. Thank you.

(She pries the chair from Kristen's grip and wheels it off)

CHIP

I should go call the Brownsteins and see where that fax is.

(He grabs a candy and hurries off. Kristen and Frank look blankly at one another)

KRISTEN

I'm gonna take a little break.

(She turns and stumbles off. An offstage THUD as she collapses)

(Frank stands alone. Sits at his desk. Straightens his tie. Pause. His phone rings. He jumps. It rings again. He stares at it...)

(Blackout)

END OF PLAY