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?

Yes, ma’am.

When?

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

So what did they want?

They’re coming.

(Beat.)

Today?

This afternoon.

And this is the first we hear about it?

We’re just employees, why should they tell us?

Why are they coming?

They didn’t say.

Didn’t say or Wouldn’t say?

Is there a difference?

All the difference in the world, Frank.

(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.
“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)
Mmmmm... 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”.

6.
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?

KIRSTEN
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—
MARGARET
We don’t—

FRANK
Margaret!

MARGARET
I mean, it’s ridiculous, Frank!

CHIP
Oh, please, everyone knows!

FRANK
...they do?

MARGARET
There’s nothing to know!

FRANK
(To Kristen)
Do you know what he’s talking about, Kristen?

(Beat. She nods sheepishly)

MARGARET
Oh my god.

KRISTEN
Pretty much everyone in the office pretty much knows.

FRANK
But we were so careful...

MARGARET
There’s nothing to be careful about! Nothing happened!

FRANK
How can you say that?

MARGARET
Because it’s true! Tell them it’s true that it’s not true, Frank.

FRANK
...I thought the things you told me were true...

KRISTEN
I mean, it’s cool with us, it’s none of our business.

MARGARET
Exactly.
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)

CHIP
I snore?

MARGARET
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—
MARGARET
I do!
FRANK
Like I’m sure Chip has reasons for downloading all that porn.
CHIP
WHAT??
FRANK
I mean, it’s totally your business.
CHIP
I never... I don’t...
(They all stare at him. Pause)
CHIP
Does everybody know?
(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)
Oh, dammit.

Don’t answer it.

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...)

What.

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...)

Ah.

Oh.

...huh...

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

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

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)

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