

Despite Them

by Clark DesSoye

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Characters

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| <i>Daniel</i> | <i>35-ish, business man, senior speech/copy writer</i> |
| <i>Kent</i> | <i>35-ish, business man, junior speech/copy writer</i> |
| <i>Walter</i> | <i>55-ish, direct supervisor to Daniel and Kent, despite his conservative dress, his hair changes color daily from salt-and-pepper, to dark brown or gray or blonde.</i> |
| <i>Laura</i> | <i>45-ish, Walter's direct supervisor, head of the company's public/media relations department</i> |
| <i>Liz</i> | <i>40-ish, the company's lead graphic designer</i> |
| <i>Mildred</i> | <i>60-ish, the media relations department office manager</i> |
| <i>Helen</i> | <i>60-ish, Laura's executive assistant</i> |
| <i>Shelly</i> | <i>40-ish, Mildred's executive assistant</i> |
| <i>Rita</i> | <i>25-ish, secretary</i> |
| <i>Messenger</i> | <i>20s</i> |
| <i>Sam</i> | <i>45-ish, company's main liaison with its advertising agency</i> |
| <i>Peter</i> | <i>55-ish, account manager with Kleiner, the company's PR agency</i> |
| <i>Karen</i> | <i>25-ish, account rep, Peter's assistant</i> |
| <i>Ruth</i> | <i>35-ish, Daniel's wife, an attorney</i> |
| <i>Joan</i> | <i>40-ish, Kent's wife, executive administrator to a name partner of a major law firm</i> |
| <i>Joe Howard</i> | <i>70-ish, company president and chairman, a voice off stage</i> |
| <i>Setting:</i> | <i>New York City 1991, a pseudo-gothic office building with a cavernous lobby, sterile marble floors, pillars and archways. The working floors above the lobby are typical 1980s offices with a mixture of cubicles, open areas and private offices. All staff members are sporting blue pins on their lapels with "JMTG" in large white letters.</i> |

Act 1, Scene 1

Setting: Morning. Worn and dated office cubicles.

At Rise: Daniel sits at his computer retrieving PROFS (internal pre-email system) notes while the message light on his desk phone flashes. Kent, still dressed in overcoat, sticks his head into Daniel's cubicle opening.

DANIEL

Greetings.

KENT

Morning, Daniel. So... the idiocy begins again....

[Daniel shrugs and gestures broadly with his arms and shakes his head.]

DANIEL

That's for sure. Ma-dame's already started. Notes on PROFS. Messages on voicemail.

How was the movie last night?

KENT

Great. You'd 'ave hated it. Kinda like a cross between Monty Python and Mission Impossible.

Is Henry feeling better?

DANIEL

Yeah, thanks. I'm gonna make a pit stop and get some coffee. You want?

KENT

Sure. I'll just take my coat off. Meet you by the stairs.

[Kent turns to walk toward his cubicle three cubes down. Daniel gets up leaving his cubicle walking in the opposite direction to the “Media Relations” door at the end of the cubicle row, shouting over his shoulder.]

DANIEL

Monty Python and Mission Impossible?

[Kent removes his coat, shouting to Daniel’s back.]

KENT

You know. Like *here...* “wink, wink, nod, nod, say no more” eh? “we disavow *any* knowledge.”

[Daniel exits through the door, laughing. Before Kent can leave his cubicle, Walter appears at the opening knocking ineffectually on the metal pole that supports the movable wall, gesturing with some typed papers in his hand that show many editing marks.]

WALTER

Ah.

KENT

Good morning, Walter.

WALTER

Yeah. G’ morning. Do you have the disk with Nelson’s Managers’ Meeting presentation on it?

KENT

Not the latest version. Betty has it.

[Looking confused, Walter steps further into the cubicle.]

WALTER

Ah.

KENT

She made the last round of changes on it the other day when I was at Sydney's.

[Walter stops and begins to back out of the cubicle.]

WALTER

Oh. O K. I'll give these changes to her and she can put them in. Thanks.

[Walter scurries with quick short steps out the same door Daniel just left by. Curtain.]

Act 1, Scene 2

Setting: Five minutes later, Daniel's cubicle.

At Rise: Daniel is sitting behind his desk, coffee and a bagel now on the desk. Kent sits opposite, his coffee and a muffin on the edge of the desk. They eat and drink throughout the scene.

[Kent leans into desk, speaking in a gravelly, but whispered, voice.]

KENT

“Ah. Do, ah, you have that disk with Nelson's talk on it?”

[Kent switches to an overly patronizing tone.]

KENT (CONTINUES)

“Gee, no, Walter. Don't you remember? I told you the other day I was giving it to Betty because I wasn't going to be here.”

[Kent resumes his regular voice, ending the on a very sarcastic note.]

KENT (CONTINUES)

I swear, I have to explain the same god-damned thing to that fuckin' asshole every time he bothers to get involved with a project he “supervises.”

DANIEL

I know. They futz around with god-knows-what for weeks on end, totally oblivious to the other things they're “responsible” for. And then, there's suddenly some deadline or crisis and they don't know what's going on. Yesterday, “she” buzzes me on the intercom, *[in Laura's raspy voice]* “Da – ni – i – el, get in here. What's this person for “Ad Age” calling me about?”

[Daniel returns to his normal voice]

DANIEL (CONTINUES)

It was typical. This reporter left her a message, last Thursday and, rather than just calling him back, she shuffles it to me, *[as Laura in a conspiratorial whisper]* “Call this guy and see what he wants.”

[returning to his normal voice] I mean, figure it out yourself, lady. A reporter from “Advertising Age” is calling the head of Media Relations. What do *you* think he wants to ask about?

KENT

Ah. Let me guess. Advertising? And maybe what we’re running on the Super Bowl this Sunday?

DANIEL

You’d think Laura could figure it out. But, no. So, I went ahead and called, Mikel, you’ve seen him around here, right?

KENT

Yeah, sure, Sam goes out to lunch with him all the time.

DANIEL

Yeah, he usually works with Sam, who’s off on another one of his vacations. Mikel knows how things “work” around here. Ma-dame is the only one who could tell him, since she doesn’t bother to tell the rest of us anything.

He wasn’t thrilled to have been shuffled off onto a lackey, but asks, “Have you decided which ad you’re running on the Super Bowl?”

KENT

Surprise!

DANIEL

Exactly. So, while I have him on the phone, I call her and tell her what he wants to know. “Should I connect him to you?” *[in Laura’s conspiratorial whisper]* “No. No. Um. Tell him that we haven’t decided yet.” *[in his own voice]* “It IS this Sunday.” *[as Laura]* “Yes. Yes. But...” *[patronizingly in his own voice]* “Well. OK, Laura. But I think he just wants to know if we’ll be using one of the new ads or...” *[back to Laura’s voice]* “We haven’t decided yet. Just tell him that. We... We’re still editing the new ads and they haven’t been approved yet. But, just tell him we... Tell him we’re *hoping* to have one of the new ads ready in time.”

KENT

Well, it *is* only Thursday...

DANIEL

Yeah, I asked her, “Aren’t you afraid that this ‘not knowing’ at this point in time will project an image in the media that maybe we don’t know what we’re doing?”

KENT

You really asked her that?

DANIEL

Yeah. I’m so sick of their bullshit...

KENT

Wha’d she say?

DANIEL

Nothing. She just blurted out what she’d said before, “just tell him that! I have to see Karl about...” blah blah blah, she growled and hung up on me.

KENT

No wonder she didn't want to talk to him herself.

DANIEL

She never talks to *anyone*. Doesn't care how it looks to Mikel... having some peon give him a garbage answer that makes no sense and tells him nothing.

KENT

Oh. But you're assuming that "Media Relations" means, you know, relating to the media, when around here it just means "keeping THEM off our backs!"

DANIEL

I forget that sometimes.

[Daniel and Kent finish their coffees and wrap up the papers from their pastries.]

DANIEL (CONTINUES)

Well, I better see what *she* wants now.

*[As Daniel picks up his phone, Kent deposits all their trash in the basket by the cubicle opening on his way out.
Curtain.]*

Act 1, Scene 3

Setting: Five minutes later. Kent's cubicle.

At Rise: Kent is sitting in front of his computer monitor looking through PROF's notes. Walter pops his head around the cubicle opening.

WALTER

Um, Kent... Betty won't be in today so Helen has to... and um, Mildred gave me her disk and asked if you could put in these changes — all of *her* people are busy...

[Walter places the edited pages and the computer disk on top of the pile of papers in the "in" box at the corner of Kent's desk.]

KENT

Sure. So, you want me to do that instead of the "Annual Report" copy that's due tomorrow? Or maybe I should do it instead of the "Chairman's Comments" that were due three days ago?

[Kent begins leafing through the edited pages.]

WALTER

Oh. I guess I forgot to tell you. Steve and I did the "Comments." I just took them up to 13 for "El Capitan's" approval. I thought you had a good start with the "Report" copy already.

[Kent shakes his head as he reads all the editing marks and copy changes.]

KENT

Yeah. I've made a good start, in fact, I could actually finish it up by tomorrow... But not if I have to spend all morning doing this!

WALTER

Well... do the best you can. And don't be afraid to come to me if you need any help.

[Kent gestures with the edited pages.]

KENT

I mean, this is over twenty pages and... And why were there so many changes. I thought, last week, they were pretty much happy with it?

[Walter had started backing out of the cubicle, but now moves over to sit in the chair opposite Kent's desk. As he starts to talk, Walter leans into the desk patronizingly.]

WALTER

Yeah, but I met with Nelson and Phil after you left and we decided that it wasn't necessary to do the entire demonstration, since they'll be doing a workshop on it later in the day.

In this, they want to concentrate on how to use the system to recruit.

KENT

How nice of them to tell us — after we've written it.

WALTER

I think it was a case where no *one* person knows exactly what all was going to happen at the meetings... Oh, and Sue was wondering if you could put this in the usual "Visual — Audio" format for her?

KENT

Oh. So *that's* the reason Mildred's "people" couldn't do it?

Sure. Sure. I'll see what I can do.

[Kent turns toward his computer on, types in some codes and then slides the computer disk from the "in" box into the disk drive. Walter gets up and backs toward the cubicle opening, feeling behind him for the wall as he talks.]

WALTER

And Phil's here — in the Home Office — for the next day and a half, if you want to talk to him some more about *his* part. You can reach him through Nelson's office.

*[Kent nods his head distractedly as he works at the computer. Walter nods as he spins out of the cubicle. As Walter scurries past the cubicles, the sounds of Kents keyboard and Daniel's muffled voice on the phone can be heard.
Curtain.]*

Act 1, Scene 4

Setting: Two minutes later. A large, open work area without cubicles. Two desks face a closed office door with two desks behind them facing the opposite direction. Clerks and secretaries work at the desks, some with computer terminals and some with electric typewriters. All the desks have phones. Behind the desks are tables with printers, fax machines and filing cabinets. Next to the closed door is a cabinet with cubby holes for inter-office mail.

At Rise: Walter scurries into the area to Helen's desk. Helen has her head down, reading some pages on her desk.

WALTER

Is she back from her meeting with "Uncle Karl?"

HELEN

I guess... She came in a few minutes ago and two minutes after that Norm went in there and she closed the door. I don't know what *that's* all about.

WALTER

Did she look upset when she came back?

[Helen finally looks up at Walter.]

HELEN

Walter, to tell you the truth, I didn't even notice. I was working at my desk, like this *[demonstrates by looking at the papers on her desk again]* and noticed her grabbing her phone messages. But by the time I looked up, she was in there.

[Walter bounces from foot to foot, picks up an industry magazine from one of Helen's mail piles and starts flipping through it, humming softly.]

WALTER

Um. Uh... "Everything's coming up roses..."

HELEN

Oh. Walter, I think Rita put a phone message in your little box over there.
[gesturing toward the cubby hole cabinet opposite Shelly's desk]. I was going to bring it in to you, but I didn't know you were back...

SHELLY

Hi, Walter. How are you today, doll?

[Walter stops humming as he reads the phone message.]

WALTER

O K... Um. *[to himself]* I wonder what Grieves wants?

[Walter moves back to the area in front of Helen's desk.]

WALTER (CONTINUES)

Rita, did Karl Reeves — it's not Grieves — say...?

[Walter looks behind Helen and notices that Rita is not at her desk.]

WALTER (CONTINUES)

Helen, do you know where Rita is?

HELEN

I think Mildred has her doing something with Al and Angela in the “quiet room.”

WALTER

Do *you* know if Reeves left any kind of message, other than to call him?

HELEN

No. I couldn't say. But it did sound like it was important; he really flustered Rita — though that's not hard to do. I did hear her say that she'd be sure you got the message as soon as you got back here.

[Walter looks again at Laura's closed door then turns to scurry out the main door to the area toward his office. People work quietly at their desks. Shelly whispers to Helen.]

SHELLY

Isn't he just the cutest?

HELEN

Walter? He's a mess. I swear he's going to twist himself into an early grave...

[The door to Laura's office opens quietly and Norm walks out leisurely exiting the area as Walter had. Helen looks up to watch him leave. Laura ducks her head out of her open door.]

LAURA

Anything new, Helen?

HELEN

Nope.

[Laura goes into her office as Helen picks up her phone, touching the intercom buttons. Stage left an isolated desk area lights up with Walter typing on his computer keyboard. His phone buzzes]

WALTER

Walter.

HELEN

Yes. Walter, Norm just left...

[Walter starts nodding his head and spins a pencil around impatiently with his free hand as he listens.]

HELEN (CONTINUES)

Laura asked if she had any more messages. I told her she didn't...

WALTER

O K. O K...

[Helen continues as if he hadn't interrupted her.]

HELEN

She wanted to see Liz, but she's not here yet... So if you want to see her...

[Walter jumps up, dropping the pencil.]

WALTER

Yes. Yes. *[he starts to put the receiver back on the phone]* Thanks, Helen.

[Walter scurries away from his desk and the lights go down on the isolated desk area. In the main office area Liz strolls in carrying a large portfolio. She nods to Helen. Then looks into Laura's office.]

LIZ

Sydney's latest...

LAURA (OS)

Great. Let's see it...

[Liz enters Laura's office, closing the door. Helen smiles broadly to herself then looks up to track Walter scurrying back so stare at the closed door then spin around to look sadly at her.]

HELEN

Sorry, Walter. Liz came in with — what looks like — some kind of layouts and said something about Sydney.

WALTER

Yeah. That is great. We didn't think we'd see the new cover layout till tomorrow.

HELEN

I don't know if it *is* the cover...

[Walter stares at the door, wishing it would open. Then he moves closer to covertly listen. He whispers to Helen.]

WALTER

That *must* be what it is. I hope he got it right this time.

[Walter continues to stare at the closed door dejectedly as Mildred and Rita walk into the area. Rita sits at the desk behind Helen and Mildred leans down to talk quietly to Helen. Helen nods. Mildred nods to Shelley and heads past Rita's desk, as Helen whispers to Walter.]

HELEN

Walter, Rita's back... if you want to ask her about the phone message...

[Walter looks at Helen and then at Rita, with a blank expression on his face, as if he doesn't understand what she's saying. Mildred stops and turns, looking at Helen and then Rita.]

MILDRED

What phone message?

[Rita shrugs, then her face lights up as she remembers. But before she can say anything, Laura's door opens and Laura shouts through her WASPy clenched jaw.]

LAURA

Mildred! Oh, there you are. Could you come in here a minute?

[Mildred nods and walks around Walter to enter the office. Laura turns to lead the way inside. Walter peaks into the office.]

WALTER

Is that the new cover layout?

LAURA

Yeah. You wanna see?

[Walter scurries into the room before the door is closed again. Helen turns to Shelly and shrugs. Shelly shrugs back and the two women return to their typing and sorting. Curtain.]

Act 1, Scene 5

Setting: Moments later. Inside Laura's spacious, well-appointed office. Unlike the other offices here there are two walls of windows (but the blinds are tightly shut day and night). The desk, the coffee table and various end tables each sport overflowing ashtrays as Laura smokes continuously. Laura also bounces between the action at the coffee table and her desk, where she is constantly looking to see her PROFs (email) notes.

At Rise: Laura, Liz, Mildred and Walter are bending over the coffee table looking at a series of cover layout mockups.

LAURA

Which one was the one he showed us last time, again?

LIZ

It's not here. I think it was like this first one, only with the company name in smaller type.

WALTER

Remember, Karl wanted the name bigger?

LAURA

Yeah, yeah. But it doesn't really look all that much bigger to me.

MILDRED

I think it's much bigger...

LIZ

Oh, yes. Remember, last time it was the same size as the words "Annual Report."

LAURA

You sure he didn't just make *that* smaller?

MILDRED

No. It's the same size. I remember it came in about three inches from the right margin. And it's the same size as the numbers in the background pattern. See how the 1990 in "1990 Annual Report" is mirrored in the numbers in the background?

WALTER

Yeah.

LAURA

O K. And now he's got the title in white. What else should we be looking for?

WALTER

I remember Joe thought the title was lost at the bottom of the page.

LIZ

Even in white, it still seems lost.

MILDRED

Yeah, it does.

LAURA

Well, I don't know. You can definitely see it better in white. What do you think, Walter?

WALTER

I'd have to see them side by side. But I think Joe 's right. Let's just dump this version with the title still on the bottom.

LIZ

I agree.

LAURA

Mildred?

MILDRED

If Joe already said he doesn't want the title down there, I think we shouldn't come back with an option with it there.

LAURA

O K. So, take that one out and let's see how these other two differ.

[Liz removes the first layout and leans it against the wall by the door. They all look from one to the other of the remaining layouts. They alternately make motions to speak, but then don't. Laura squints over the top of her glasses. Mildred tilts her head from side to side as she studies the layouts. Liz seems to be reading the words, over and over again. Walter just has a blank expression on his face as if wishing he were somewhere else — fishing.]

LIZ

Well, you and Walter were the ones who showed the old layout to Karl and Joe and company. What other concerns did they have?

LAURA

Walter?

WALTER

I remember Larry was concerned about the size of the company name, too.

LIZ

All of these layouts solve *that* problem. Don't you think?

WALTER

Yeah. I think so. But then, I liked it the way it was.

LAURA

No. Actually. It's funny; I thought it was perfect before, but now that I see it like this, I like it this way better.

MILDRED

Yes. I like these.

LIZ

So, obviously, we should look at the size of the title and the size of the numbers in the background pattern.

Is it easier to read with the title in large print and the pattern in small print? Or... with the title in small print and the numbers in large print?

LAURA

I don't know....

WALTER

I... Ah...

MILDRED

I think, with the numbers bigger, you're less inclined to fix on them; so, your eye just naturally goes up to the top of the page to read the company name first.

LIZ

Yes. And, with the smaller pattern, your eye picks up on the title right away.

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LAURA

So, with version two here, we'll say that it directs the eye to the company name first, while this other version the eye tends to focus on the title first.

LIZ

Yes. So, which do we want to do?

LAURA

I don't know. Let's show them both to Karl, with these explanations, and see what he thinks.

WALTER

That makes sense.

LIZ

Don't you think it would be better to decide here and just show them the one layout?

WALTER (INTERRUPTING)

No, it's better to have them both out there....

LIZ

And if they have some kind of problem about the company name or the title being too prominent, just tell them about the other layout... Maybe hold it in reserve.

LAURA

No.

WALTER

I agree, Laura. We should show both versions and tell them that in the one version the readers are first aware of whose Annual Report it is and then they pick up on the title or theme. Whereas, in the second version, they'll see the title first — get an idea about what the report is about — and, then, look to see whose book it is.

LAURA

That should work.

LIZ

Fine, if that's the way you want to play it...

But, we have to have a decision by tomorrow morning. Sydney says that they're ready to start matching colors at the printer and we have to have this to Winston by eleven thirty.

WALTER

No problem.

LAURA

Yeah. We can do *that*.

MILDRED

Yes. And we don't even want to show them this other layout?

LAURA

I don't know. Let's look at it again.

[Liz retrieves the “discarded” layout from the corner and places it back on the coffee table, shaking her head the whole time. The others just watch her and then stare at the layout as if seeing it for the first time.]

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LAURA

You know, that one's not bad.

LIZ

I don't think so. The title 's just lost...

MILDRED

I agree.

WALTER

Yeah, but think about it: If we're saying that this pattern forces the reader to see the company name first and only then will they see the title, that's accomplished with this one, too, with the title all the way on the bottom of the page.

LAURA

And it's certainly more readable in white.

LIZ

Great, so you show all three of them to Karl, Larry and Charlie and they all pick this one. Then Joe sees it and rejects it 'cause the title 's on the bottom the page. So, we have to go back to Karl et al and sell them the one Joe's picked.

LAURA

Well, that could happen with only two choices. Karl and company could pick one and Joe could pick the other one and we'd have to go back and sell Joe's pick to them.

WALTER

Right. It's all negotiation, especially this year. Maybe we should just go with Larry's pick?

LAURA

No. It's Joe's last Annual Report... and he's told Larry that, too.

WALTER

Just kidding.

LIZ

But the point is, we don't have a lot of time to go around in circles with this...

LAURA

O K. Mildred, you get on the phone with Winston and see what our absolute, drop-dead deadline for this is. And how much it'll cost us if we don't get it to him by, say, the day after tomorrow. I think Charlie is away 'till then.

MILDRED

We went through this last year — and it cost us a *bundle*. I don't think we'll want to go past their deadline. But, I'll call and find out what's the latest time we can get it there tomorrow morning....

[Mildred leaves the office and, before she can shut the door behind her, Helen manages to shout into Laura, gesturing with the phone receiver.]

HELEN

Karl called you — twice, Laura, and he's on the line again...

LAURA

Oh great. Did he say what he wants?

HELEN

No. He just says it's important.

[Mildred exits, closing the door behind her. Laura goes to her phone and punches in the blinking button then holds her finger up to Liz and Walter, to indicate that they should stay.]

LAURA

Yes, Karl.

[While on the phone, Laura lights up a cigarette and talks with it dangling from the corner of her mouth. Liz half listens, as she writes some notes to herself on a yellow legal pad. Walter continues to study the layouts, picking them up one at a time.]

LAURA (CONTINUES, ON THE PHONE)

Yes, we've got them now. ... Uh huh.

No, not those pages yet, we're still waiting to hear from the Controller's office.

No. I haven't heard anything about that yet.

Yes. I will, just as soon as I know.

Right.

[Laura hangs up the phone and puts out her cigarette simultaneously.]

LAURA (CONTINUES)

That... man... is driving me up the wall. I've told him five times that the financials aren't due until next week... but every time, he asks again.

WALTER

The man has no mind. He's like a cat. He retains information for only 15 to 30 seconds — max. And can only plan for the next minute or two. Everything's immediate.

LAURA

Yeah. He must be great in bed.

LIZ

Oh please. I don't want to even think about *that*.

WALTER

Can you imagine? "Sorry, dear, what was it we were doing?"

LIZ

Ew. Stop!

LAURA

Or, "What do you mean we just did it fifteen minutes ago? I wanna..."

[Laura moves from behind her desk to stand over the layouts again.]

LAURA (CONTINUES)

So. What else do we need to decide here?

LIZ

Do we want to show Karl — and company — one, two or three of these layouts? And. Do we have enough time to play around by giving them a whole bunch of choices?

WALTER

I think we should take all three layouts up there. We'll tell them that in this first version, the readers are drawn to whose Annual Report it is and then they pick up on the title or theme. Whereas in the second version, readers first see the title and then look to see whose book it is.

[Liz shakes her head, frustrated and then answers dismissively.]

LIZ

Yeah. Yeah...

WALTER

And in the third version, the readers are first aware of whose Annual Report it is and then they pick up on the title ... a little later than in the first version.

LAURA

O K. That works for me.

LIZ

But, if the first and third versions do the same thing, why bother with both?

LAURA

Because you *know* one of them is going to ask what the previous version looked like. And we can point to this one and say it was like this but with black type, but Joe thought the title got lost at the bottom of the page.

WALTER

Yeah, and *that* will be their signal *not* to choose that one.

LIZ

So, if we're going to "tell" them not to pick it anyhow, why show it?

WALTER

No. No. It'll be O K. It's all in how we present 'em.

LAURA

But she has a point, Walter. And Joe did, kinda, say that he didn't want the title on the bottom of the page.

LIZ

Yeah. So, we can't show *him* a new version *with* the title on the bottom.

WALTER

That's a good point. We can't show him something he's definitely said he doesn't want.

LIZ

So, you're only going to take the two versions up there?

WALTER

Yeah. Is that O K with you, Laura?

LAURA

Let's do it this way. Let's take these two up. And we'll bring along the third one and just leave it in the portfolio.

WALTER

If one of them wants to see what the last version looked like we can bring this one out.

LAURA

Right. And we repeat that bit about Joe not liking the title on the bottom...

[Curtain.]

Act 2, Scene 1

Setting: Moments later. Outside Laura's office the door still closed.

At Rise: Helen and Rita (now sitting at Shirley's desk) are busy working on their computers. Kent walks by Helen's desk with a computer floppy disk. A few minutes later a printer can be heard printing out pages. Kent emerges with a newly printed document in his hand. He stops in front of Helen's desk.

KENT

How are you today, Helen?

HELEN

All right, I guess... Too many phone calls.

KENT

Well. You *know* how important Laura is... how vital she is to the functioning of this "billion-dollar corporation..."

HELEN

Oh, you...

[One of Laura's phone lines buzzes and Helen answers it. Kent moves in front of Rita while thumbing through the pages he has just printed out.]

KENT

Good morning, Rita, starting to settle in?

RITA

Ah. Sorta. Not what I was expecting. How are *you*, Kent?

KENT

Oh. You *really* don't want to know, believe me.

[A messenger walks by carrying an inter-office envelope, a heavy bag over his shoulder with many more such envelopes sticking out of it.]

MESSENGER

Walter DiMiddi?

RITA

Here, I'll take that... he's in *there*.

[Rita takes the routing envelope and the messenger turns and leaves. Rita places the envelope on the corner of her desk and Kent looks at the crossed-out names above Walter's.]

KENT

Looks like this came from the Chairman's office. George just called me to ask if the "Comments" had been approved yet. Think it'd be O K if I just take a look?

[Rita looks toward Helen who nods and she nods, too. Kent opens the envelope and removes several pages of copy. There are a number of handwritten comments in the margins. Kent starts skimming the pages as Daniel walks by. A moment later Daniel reappears and whispers into Kent's ear.]

DANIEL

You're *not* gonna believe what today's "crisis" is.

[Kent smiles distractedly, showing the pages to Daniel.]

KENT

Do you believe this? Mr. Smucko, who knows "The Chairman's every waking thought," does one "Chairman's Comments" the whole, fuckin' year, and look how they come back from Joe...

Despite Them

[Daniel glances at the pages, smiling. The door opens and Liz starts walking out.]

LIZ

Kent. Have you seen the latest cover layouts?

*[Kent looks to Daniel, who nods as Kent walks into Laura's office.
Curtain.]*

Act 2, Scene 2

Setting: Moments later. Inside Laura's office, same as before.

At Rise: Laura and Walter are still standing over the cover layouts on the coffee table. Liz and Kent enter and join them, as Walter moves over slightly to give him a better view.

LAURA

What do *you* think of these?

[Kent studies the layouts for a few moments as Laura, Liz and Walter look smugly at each other in mocked anticipation of Kent's judgment. Kent eventually points to the version with large title type, in the middle of the page and the background numbers pattern in a smaller font.]

KENT

Let's see. I think this one here is certainly the easiest to read. And I like it with the smaller numbers. It makes a more interesting pattern.

[Liz points to the alternate version.]

LIZ

Yes. But we were saying that with this version, the company sort of stands out more — up here above the background pattern.

KENT

I don't think so. I think the name stands out just as much in this version. But you can glance down and see the title faster. Let's ask the Annual Report veteran.

[Kent shouts out the door]

KENT (CONTINUES)

Daniel, what do you think of these layouts?

[Daniel enters and joins them at the table. Liz moves aside so that he can see the versions displayed on the coffee table.]

LAURA

You know, now that you mention it, with the bigger numbers the pattern does kind of lose something.

[Kent leans toward Walter handing him the marked up “Comments.”]

KENT

By the way, Walter, these just came back down from Joe’s office *and* George has been calling about them.

WALTER

Oh. Great...

[Walter steps away poring over the pages adding notations of his own. Kent turns to Liz.]

KENT

Just the fact that the title is superimposed on some sort of pattern makes the name stand out more. But in this one the pattern almost buries the title with the smaller type. It’s like the title isn’t important at all — while it’s actually the theme of the entire book.

DANIEL

Yeah. That’s what I think, too. I mean either one of these two will work, but here it’s like you’re whispering the book’s theme. And look at what we’re whispering: “A Brave New Beginning!”

LIZ

Oh. That's a really good point. I wasn't actually looking at what the words were saying. But it is kinda stupid to dwarf that title in the pattern.

LAURA

But don't you think it competes more with the company name?

KENT

No.

DANIEL

Not really.

LIZ

No. That's a good catch. I didn't look at it that way.

LAURA

Walter, what do you think?

[Walter looks up from his reading. It's obvious that he doesn't know what she's talking about.]

WALTER

Yes. I think that's certainly a consideration. Ah, could you excuse me for a moment? I have to give these changes to Helen...

[As he turns to leave the room, Mildred returns carrying a slip of paper with some scribbled notes on it.]

MILDRED

What are you giving to Helen? She's very busy...

WALTER

These. I just got them back from the Chairman... He wants us to make a few changes.

[Mildred observes all the edits on the pages he's waving at her and winces.]

MILDRED

Didn't Rita do them for you the other day?

WALTER

Oh, yeah, you're right. It was Rita. I'll give these changes to her. I'll be right back.

[Walter scurries out of the room. Mildred refers to her notes.]

MILDRED

I just got off the phone with Winston and he's having some problems with another job, so the earliest he can get to this is tomorrow afternoon.

LAURA

Good. That gives us plenty of time to have everyone look at all three versions. So that's settled. Thank you, everyone.

[Mildred walks with Laura toward her desk talking quietly. Liz stacks the three layouts together and Kent and Daniel help her slide them back into the portfolio. They are shaking their heads, but not talking. When they're done, they start to walk out of the office, as Walter runs back in.]

WALTER

That's underway... Oh, we're done?

LIZ

Yep.

Despite Them

WALTER

Great. Oh, Laura...

LAURA

Not now, Walter. I'll call you in a few minutes...

*[Walter follows the other three out of the
office.
Curtain.]*

Act 2, Scene 3

Setting: Moments later. Outside Helen's office.

At Rise: Liz, Walter, Kent and Daniel are leaving Laura's office. Daniel leans in to pull the door closed behind him. Walter looks confused then scurries off toward his office. The other three move down past Helen and Rita's cubicles by the printers.

LIZ

I could just kill them. Do you realize that Laura had totally made her mind up on each of them five times during that meeting? And I knew she'd never just take the one she'd picked upstairs...

DANIEL

Yes. And calling all of us in there to *help* her decide. As if she might actually *decide* anything. And Walter. He was even toady than usual today.

LIZ

You weren't there for the best part. Every time Laura leaned toward one version, Walter was right there, "Yes, Laura, you're right, Laura..." I wanted to scream.

KENT

Which one had she "decided" on before we came in?

LIZ

They'd just about convinced each other that it wasn't necessary to show all three, though "Let's take along the extra one — just in case."

DANIEL

They're unbelievable. Oh. What am I saying? They're in perfect form. "No. No. Make a decision, yeah, I can do that, can't I, Karl?"

LIZ

Thanks for your help, *wise* guys.

[Liz walks away, toward her office and Kent pulls Daniel over to the printer where the extra copies of his document are piled up.]

KENT

So, what were all the frantic notes and messages about this morning?

DANIEL

You'll love this. Larry called Laura and told her to make sure the announcement of his election as the chairman gets into the "Fleetwood Weekly News," circulation 2,500.

KENT

You're kidding.

DANIEL

I kid you not. And the best part is, I called about it yesterday (it's like a one-man operation out of this guy's basement). He told me that the paper isn't distributed where Larry lives in White Plains.

[As Daniel is talking Kent starts to remove the perforated edges and separating the pages he has printed.]

DANIEL (CONTINUES)

So, I asked Laura what Larry's connection was to Fleetwood. She told me his parents live there.

[Kent chuckles as he moves over to an empty table where he begins separating his pages into different piles.]

DANIEL (CONTINUES)

I called the “Fleetwood Weekly News” this morning, there’s a message on their machine saying they’re out until Monday — seems he only works a few hours a week.

KENT

Must be lots of Fleetwood news.

DANIEL

Yes. A *very* important publication that our new chairman *has* to get his announcement in.

[Kent paper clips his copies and gathers them up. Daniel steers them to another printer where he retrieves several pages and his computer disk.]

DANIEL (CONTINUES)

I figured, “I’ve got some time now, why don’t I call Larry’s secretary, get to know her and her me?” I thought she might be able to give me his parent’s address or something...

Come to find out, they’re dead. His parents have been dead for years.

KENT

But Laura *told* you they live in Fleetwood?

DANIEL

Exactly. (Imagine if I’d have casually asked Larry about them?) In fact, I realized that I was in her office yesterday when she was talking to Janice, Larry’s secretary. While she’s on the phone, she’s mouthing to me, “His parents’ live there.” Like she couldn’t be bothered to listen to the rest of what this woman had to say about the subject.

KENT

And... she couldn't...

DANIEL

And, as soon as she hung up, it was just, "his parents live there" and I was dismissed.

[He gestures a shooing motion with his hands.]

KENT

But Janice didn't say anything like that?

DANIEL

No. And when I talked directly to her this morning, she must've thought I was an idiot or something. But she was very nice about it. She should be a lot easier to work with than Joe's secretary. She told me that Larry and his wife grew up in Fleetwood. They were sweethearts in high school and lived there 'till Larry made it big in the insurance biz.

[They walk together past Mildred's desk, she's on the phone but looks up to accept a copy of Kent's pages, nodding. Kent then gives a copy to Helen, she's also on the phone, but looks up with a big grin to accept the pages. Kent and Daniel move to exit, stopping to talk near the open door.]

KENT

So, everything Laura told you was wrong?

DANIEL

Everything. I can't figure out what she must have been thinking while she was talking to Janice and me. I mean, she's on the phone being told one thing and turns around and tells me something entirely different.

KENT

Unbelievable...

DANIEL

I know we all spend a lot of time around here just going through the motions. But this is ridiculous; even by her “standards.”

KENT

It’s like she thought that Larry’s parents lived there and, maybe Janice gave her some kind of indication that that was the case, so she just stopped listening.

DANIEL

Exactly. Nine out of ten times I know exactly what someone’s going to say before I ask a question, but I still *listen* to the answer. And if it’s not what I expected, I say something, like, “Oh, I thought Larry’s mom and dad lived there?” which is exactly what I ended up doing this morning.

KENT

Well, sure. But *you* want things to make sense... and be accurate. These people just want things to be *done*. Preferably by someone else.

DANIEL

Exactly. And in the meantime, I’m talking to a newspaper editor — telling him about how our guy’s parents live in his town.

KENT

Then, when *that* story ‘s printed, Laura gets the call from Larry and two seconds later she’s screaming “Da – a – a – ni – i – el, where did this story about Larry’s parents come from?”

DANIEL

And I'll have to tell her that she told me that Larry's secretary told her and she won't remember any of it.

KENT

So, once again, Daniel ends up looking like an idiot.

DANIEL

God. I swear. This place is unbelievable.

[Kent and Daniel turn to leave but Walter can be seen scurrying toward them, so they step aside. Kent reaches out to stop Walter, gesturing with the pages he holds. Kent turns back to Daniel.]

KENT

Well, you averted one crisis anyway. See you later, I need to distribute these new versions.

[Daniel nods and exits. Walter stops next to Kent.]

WALTER

What's up?

KENT

Yeah. I made those changes and printed it up. I left a copy with Mildred to get it proofed. Laura 's got a copy too. But if you want to look it over in the meantime...

[Kent hands him one of the copies. Walter takes it and immediately starts reading it, humming to himself as Kent turns to leave.]

WALTER

Great. Great.

[Kent leaves as Walter looks up and shouts.]

WALTER (CONTINUES)

Uh. Any idea when you'll have the Annual Report copy ready?

[Kent turns in the doorway and slouches against the frame. As he starts talking, Walter returns to his reading, taking a pencil out of his inside jacket pocket.]

KENT

Not really. I've been working on *that* thing all day... and I'll still have to make corrections from the proofing and — whatever changes you still want to make *[gesturing to Walters raised pencil over the pages]*. Then maybe I can get back to the Report.

WALTER

Oh. Don't worry about *this*. It looks like it's in pretty good shape now. Why don't you give the disk to Helen. I'm sure we can get her to make any other changes. You can get to work on that Report. In fact, why don't you make it your number one priority.

[Kent heads towards Helen's desk with the computer disk as Walter scurries off, smiling sheepishly. Kent just grins sardonically. Curtain.]

Act 3, Scene 1

Setting: A week later. An elevator that eventually opens onto an expansive marble lobby.

At Rise: Daniel and Kent, dressed in their heavy overcoats, stand in the back of an elevator, the door juggles and buzzes, trying to close.

DANIEL

Sure, we'll be stuck on this stupid elevator right through lunch. And I can just get off and go to my two thirty meeting with Karen and Peter.

KENT

Oh? Big meeting with the Kleiner people?

DANIEL

Yeah. Walter wants them to go over their PR proposal for next year, though he's got no intention of doing most of it.

[The elevator door finally closes — very slowly.]

KENT

Too expensive?

DANIEL

Not for a company that takes PR seriously. I think it's a great plan, but Smucko hasn't said a thing to me about it.

KENT

So, you're going to a meeting with Kleiner about a plan you haven't even discussed with each other yet?

[The elevator stops after descending just two floors. Three middle-aged men in bulging grey suits enter the elevator and turn to face the doors. They all have toothpicks sticking out of their mouths and “JMTG” pins in their lapels. Daniel and Kent look at each other and roll their eyes. Again, the whining noise is heard and the elevator doors take several moments to close. Daniel leans toward Kent, speaking very softly.]

DANIEL

Yeah. I have to learn what the company’s reaction to the plan is at the same time as our outside agency.

KENT

You think he actually discussed it with Ma-dame?

DANIEL

Not really. I mean the proposal’s been on his desk for two weeks but I’m sure he hasn’t read it. All he’ll know about it is what Karen and Peter say today. And he’ll just wing a response.

KENT

Sounds like a great way to handle our PR planning for the year.

DANIEL

Certainly. Why have a plan?

[Finally, the elevator doors open onto the lobby. The three executives file out first. Kent and Daniel follow them at a distance. Kent gestures toward the three grey suits.]

KENT

There they go. The Insurance Company of Manhattan's finest, slinking back into their holes after another exciting meal in the executive dining room.

[Daniel picks up the theme in a marching cadence.]

DANIEL

With stale mint on their breath and mighty toothpicks at the ready.

[There are many people milling about in the lobby. They stand in groups talking or simply staring off into space. Most have "JMTG" pins on their lapels. Daniel and Kent walk towards the revolving doors, pausing there briefly.]

DANIEL (CONTINUES)

Let's face it. PR 's not important here. And it's certainly not as important as "JMTG" — whatever the fuck *it* is.

KENT

Look at all these idiots. "They told us to wear these pins, so we're wearing these pins." Won't they feel stupid when they find out that "JMTG" is Russian for "Kick Me?"

DANIEL

I will say this for 'em, they've certainly gotten people curious as to what "JMTG" means. And the fact that it hasn't leaked out is even more amazing...

KENT

But I have a feeling that whatever it is, it ain't gonna live up to this gigantic build-up.

DANIEL

No, of course not. And it really bugs me that they can spend money on this kind of half-assed propagandizing, but they can't...

Oh, I don't know why I let these things get to me. Nothing 's ever going to change around here.

KENT

You never know. It could be "Joe Makes The Grade" and he's going to give out the first ever annual bonus to the entire staff.

DANIEL

Yeah. Dream on, buddy. More likely, it's "Just Making Time Grind" to announce nothing new, no increases, no promotions, nothing.

KENT

And, speaking of non-events, I forgot to tell you about the big media relations decision Walter made last week when you were out sick.

DANIEL

Yes. You'll need to tell me that. But first, where are we going?

KENT

As far away from *here* as possible, in the time allotted.

I don't know. How 'bout Ottominelli's? We haven't been there in a while.

DANIEL

Sure. So, what was this big "decision" from the void?

KENT

I didn't get all the details, but he told me that Paramount Studios called to ask about shooting "Record Close" in the lobby and vacant floor of our building. Seems they've been scouting for locations up and down Wall Street, but none of the real Wall Street buildings looked right. So, they called to ask if they could use *this*.

[Kent gestures to the lobby around them.]

KENT (CONTINUES)

Somehow, Smucko got the message. He read it to me and said, "I'm just gonna call them back and tell them 'no.'" It's just too much of a hassle."

DANIEL

God. And the little shit didn't even tell me about it. I'd 'ave at least talked to them. It's not like they wanted to film "Debbie Does New York" or something. I mean, it's probably a giant, spare-no-expense production.

KENT

Yeah. And it's based on the top selling book of last year. I'm not a Tom Wolfe fan myself, but I still see lots of people reading it on the trains.

DANIEL

Oh. It's a great book. You'll have to read it... very interesting, insightful. I think you'd like it.

*[Daniel and Kent exit the building.
Curtain.]*

Act 3, Scene 2

Setting: Two hours later. Daniel's office. Around the table across from his desk are Peter, Karen and Daniel. Walter (his hair is yellowish blonde today and the sunlight coming in the window behind him makes it glow), leans atop the desk with his arms crossed.

At Rise: Peter, standing, is talking while displaying pages from the detailed proposal he is holding.

PETER

So, you see, we will be positioning The Insurance Company of Manhattan as one of the most innovative, technically advanced, financial services corporations in the country... and the world.

[Peter sits down and Walter leans forward.]

WALTER

Great. Great. That all sounds very good... And we definitely want to try to do some of these things. But, how much will it cost?

[Peter looks toward Karen, winking discretely to Daniel. Karen looks quickly at Daniel also and then stands up and flips the proposal to the last page.]

KAREN

Based on last year's actual spend, instead of the estimated budget, you can see here that we could do everything we've proposed with an increase of only five percent....

WALTER (INTERRUPTING)

Well. Ah. We were actually, ah, thinking that, ah, we'll have to cut back on our PR spending this year...

[Karen resumes her seat, turning to Daniel, who shrugs. Peter also looks at Daniel. Walter leans back and looks from Peter to Karen to Daniel.]

DANIEL

So, why don't we talk about how much of a cut you were considering and let Peter and Karen put something together for us within that framework...

KAREN

Yes. If you can give us some idea of where we stand....

[Walter stands up and the others automatically follow suit, looking at each other confusedly.]

WALTER

With all the budget cuts — throughout the company this year (it was the worst sales year since '84) every department has had to make some tough decisions. Laura and I discussed your proposal — at length — and we think that you can find some ways to make the most of this work with a little less fat — so to speak.

[Walter reaches across the table to shake hands with Peter and Karen and turns to leave.]

DANIEL

Yes. But, Walter, what figure did you “decide” on?

KAREN

How much should we cut?

WALTER

You know, we know you can bring us something we can work with...

DANIEL

But...

WALTER

So why don't you give Daniel a call when you've got something together and we'll look it over...

[Walter leaves Daniel's cubicle and scurries away toward his office. Peter and Karen sit back down and begin collecting their presentation materials. Daniel mockingly continues Walter's response.]

DANIEL

And then we'll tell you, once again, that we can't afford it. And since all "we" really "look over" is the cost, "we'll" never really know what it is you're proposing for us, unless Daniel summarizes it for "us."

KAREN

What are we supposed to do? He didn't say what he liked, what he could live without... just "make it cheaper."

PETER

Don't worry, Daniel. We'll look it over again and see where we can make some cuts.

DANIEL

I wish I could give you some direction, but I don't think Walter ever read it — and I know he never discussed it with Laura — and you could see he wasn't really paying any attention here today.

PETER

We'll work something out.

KAREN

Yes. I'll call you in a couple days.

Despite Them

[Peter and Karen stand and make their way out of the cubicle. Daniel follows them.]

PETER

I don't think it'll be necessary for us to come back in here to go over it again...

DANIEL

I understand. We'll talk...

[All three head toward the elevator. Curtain.]

Act 3. Scene 3

Setting: *That evening. The main lobby of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. At one side is a buffet with vegetables, cheeses and crackers. At the other side is a full bar. Dozens of people stroll about eating, drinking and talking quietly. Several tables are set up with guests doing the same.*

At Rise: *Kent and Joan are sitting at one of the tables, small plates with vegetables and cheese cubes and drinks before them.*

JOAN

I thought there'd be more people here.

KENT

Me too. There were certainly enough articles about the Velázquez in the last few weeks... the "Sunday Times", "New York Magazine," "Seven Days," "Newsweek"

JOAN

Yes. I know. I'd never heard of him, but I really enjoyed the exhibit, especially being able to see it without all the crowds.

KENT

Yeah. This is great: see a wonderful exhibit, have cocktails, sit and chat with friends. It's really great that your boss pays for your membership here for you.

JOAN

He used to give me all the invitations that came for him, once he was incapacitated. But it always felt funny responding and showing up instead of him.

KENT

That would be weird.

[As they talk, Daniel and Ruth join them.]

DANIEL

Great exhibit... and what a party. Thanks again, Joan, for inviting us.

RUTH

Yes. Thanks. This is all so nicely done.

JOAN

Oh, it's all right. I'm glad to do it. I'm always getting extra tickets. I like to give them to people who appreciate all this.

[Joan gestures to include the building as Daniel and Ruth sit down.]

DANIEL

I love it. And you get to go to parties like this all the time? Go to museums whenever you want?

KENT

Yeah. It's great. We were up in the Patron's Lounge last week. There were maybe thirty people there. One of the curators gave a talk on the latest excavations in Egypt.

RUTH

That must have been fascinating.

KENT

It was.

JOAN

Yeah. They passed around this three-thousand-year-old stone foot from a statue. We had to put on white cotton gloves before we could hold it. It was wonderful.

KENT

And, of course, there was a reception before and after it — with an open bar and hors d'oeuvres.

DANIEL

Of course. So, what did you think of the Velázquez? Ruth and I loved it.

KENT

I like the everyday and mythological scenes better than the portraits. Let's face it, Philip's family was pret-ty homely. But they were all interesting.

RUTH

I don't know. I think it's wonderful that he managed to capture them... blemishes an' all.

DANIEL

That dwarf, that was the children's toy or something... kinda gave me the creeps.

[As they talk, one by one each person notices an eccentrically dressed couple fill up a cocktail glass with vegetables and another with dip, which dribbles down the side of the glass.]

DANIEL (CONTINUES)

They must work at Insurance of Manhattan... all class.

KENT (LAUGHING)

That's exactly what I was thinking. They're certainly dressed for it.

JOAN

I don't know. You two are the only people I know who work there, and you always dress nicely... you certainly have better manners.

Despite Them

KENT

Speaking of manners, would you like another drink, dear?

[Joan nods as Kent stands up. Daniel stands as well.]

DANIEL

I'll go with you.

[Kent and Daniel make their way to the bar.]

RUTH

They're always putting *that* place down — and the people there — at least Daniel is.

JOAN

Oh, Kent does, too. But it's just because they're treated so poorly there. They deserve better.

RUTH

Daniel is just so frustrated...

JOAN

But all you can do is try to find another job — and they're doing that. Kent's very conscientious about it.

RUTH

Oh, so is Daniel. It's part of our Sunday ritual: get the "Times", look through the ads, type cover letters, send out résumés...

JOAN

I feel so badly for them...

[Kent and Daniel return with fresh drinks.]

Despite Them

JOAN

Thank you.

KENT

You're welcome.

[Ruth salutes Daniel with her glass.]

RUTH

And thank *you*, m' dear.

DANIEL

A pleasure.

KENT

I'd 've brought some veggies over, but I don't think I could have done it as gracefully as Mr. and Mrs. Polyester over there.

But enough of *that*. Here's to a great evening...

[They all raise their glasses and drink.]

RUTH

Yes. This is all so nice. Thank you, Joan.

DANIEL

Yeah. I'm glad we can enjoy the time we're not at work.

[Kent raises his glass again.]

KENT

Here, here. But the real tragedy of it is that I actually enjoy the work itself. And I like some of the people we work with. But the rest of them are just so...

DANIEL (INTERRUPTING)

Stupid? Idiotic? Incompetent?

JOAN

Excuse me, but I think I better use the lady's room before we go.

RUTH

I'll go with you...

[Joan and Ruth get up. Daniel gets halfway up, looking at Kent as if to ask "Do you want to go, too?" Kent shakes his head, but get up to. Daniel shakes his head and they sit down as Joan and Ruth exit.]

KENT

You know. You're exactly right. They take away all the possible pleasure we might otherwise get from writing reports or brochures or speeches...

DANIEL (INTERRUPTING)

I can't get any pleasure out of writing that drivel any more. I'm just *sick* of it and sick of them.

[Daniel leans back in his chair, sipping his drink. Kent leans forward and continues, more intensely.]

KENT

I'm certainly sick of them, but I still like doing the research, discussing projects with different people. And I love the writing process itself.

And that speech I did — in one day — last week when Smucko Walter was home taking his dog to the vet, was a lot of fun. It's exactly the kind of thing that Walter would have loved to do. If he'd 'ave been there he'd 'ave really fucked it up with all his usual rhetoric.

DANIEL

Yeah. A speech to a Congressional committee is something he'd really sink his teeth into.

KENT

But he'd 'ave had Joe talking for half an hour and not really say anything. I had that speech so packed with facts that Walter would have had to make it twice as long to fit in all his bullshit. But it was a talk on taxing the cash build up on life policies. The committee wanted the figures, the data, not the plight of our poor, million-dollar policyholders.

DANIEL

Ah. But you forget, "emotion sells."

KENT

Ah. But you forget, Joe couldn't work up an emotion if he were watching his cat get run over...

DANIEL (INTERRUPTING)

Just wait. Next week you'll see an emotional Joe, when he tells us what "JMTG" means...

KENT

Sure, sure, I know. Walter only mentions it twenty times every day: "That's Joe's baby and he's real excited about it... won't even tell us what it's all about."

DANIEL

Oh, Walter's just upset because his "Papa Joe" didn't include him in this whole thing.

KENT

Yeah. I wonder who's writing the big presentation for next week?

DANIEL

Oh, he'll probably call his puppy dog, Walter down to his office Thursday morning and give him till two to write it for him...

[Kent leans in.]

KENT

In the strictest confidence, of course.

DANIEL

Of course... or, in other words, just like he does everything.

KENT

Exactly. Like writing Annual Report proposals...

DANIEL

Or memos to "Uncle Karl" about reorganizing the unit.

KENT

Or turning down million-dollar movie deals.

DANIEL

Oh, yeah. Speaking of *that*, I've been dying to tell you...

[Daniel notices that Ruth and Joan have returned. He looks up at them.]

DANIEL (CONTINUES)

Hello.

[Ruth and Joan sit.]

RUTH

It's so fun to walk around here with no crowds...

DANIEL

Yeah, it seems kinda strange though. I was just telling Kent about that phone call I got this afternoon.

RUTH

Oh, yes. That sounds exciting....

DANIEL

We'll see.

[Daniel turns to Kent.]

DANIEL (CONTINUES)

Have you told Joan about any of this?

KENT

I don't *know* any of this. You haven't told me anything yet.

DANIEL

You didn't tell her about Smucko getting the phone call from a movie studio?

KENT

Oh yeah. She knows about that.

[Kent turns to Joan.]

KENT (CONTINUES)

Remember, I told you about how Walter told Paramount to "get lost?"

JOAN

Yes. That was just a couple weeks ago. I thought that would be the end of it.

KENT

I thought it would be. But apparently I was wrong....

[Kent turns back to Daniel.]

DANIEL

Anyway, the locations director for “Record Close,” a guy named Geoff Courtney, called again this morning and Rita, like she always does with calls she doesn’t know where else to send, put him through to me.

KENT

So, they didn’t just give up?

DANIEL

No. Geoff told me that some moron named “Midildo” — I swear, he said “my dildo — left a message that we weren’t interested.

He was incredulous. “How could you not want to get some free publicity? Big stars around, the press, video news coverage, stories galore...”

I started to give him the party line. But then I figured, “what the hell” and told him we should get together to discuss it, “see if we can come up with a way to do it.”

KENT

Good for you. Are you gonna tell Ma-dame about all this?

DANIEL

Not right now. I’m having lunch with Geoff tomorrow, I asked Peter to join us, to kinda endorse whatever plan we come up with. If it comes to that.

RUTH

But you are going to tell her, eventually?

DANIEL

Naturally. I'll do what I have to do to cover my own ass... I've learned that much from them.

Mainly, I'm just curious. I want to see how things operate behind the scenes in this whole filming process. And I figured it'd be a good chance to maybe make some contacts of my own.

JOAN

Do you want to get into the movie business?

DANIEL

Are you kidding? I'd love to. Unfortunately, I don't think this one little project will be my entrée...

JOAN

You never know...

RUTH

Yes. Remember, dear, what a fluke it was when you got that job with... what was the name of that PR firm?

DANIEL

Coyle and Associates. And that whole job was a fluke: I couldn't wait to get out of *there*.

KENT

It must 'ave been bad, if you were willing to come to Insurance of Manhattan.

DANIEL

Believe me. I should 'ave known. I mean I met Ricky Coyle at my uncle's funeral. We were stuck together in this endless receiving line and he ends up telling me to send him a résumé... and then he actually reads it and hires me.

JOAN

That's great. I mean how that all worked out. Haven't I been telling you that, Kent? You never know when you'll meet someone who'll really appreciate you.

KENT

I believe you; it's certainly worked out for you. But, since nothing like that 's ever happened to me, I can hardly pin all my hopes on it.

JOAN

Well, no. I don't think you should. But isn't it nice to hear that it can happen?

KENT

Yeah. Even though the job itself didn't pan out.

RUTH

It wasn't bad at first. Right, Daniel?

DANIEL

Let's just say, the day I got the job I was thrilled to death. But it didn't take more than a few hours to figure out that old Coyle was getting every penny he could out of the agency before he retired. The place was going downhill fast.

Hopefully, if I do make some useful contacts, it'll be with the studio people. I doubt if Paramount will be folding soon.

JOAN

I doubt it. It sounds like a good opportunity.

KENT

But the bottom line is, you still don't think anything will come of using the building as a location?

DANIEL

Well, I can hardly go ahead and make a deal with them now, after my "supervisor's" turned them down.

KENT

I don't know. Has Walter actually deigned to tell you they called before?

DANIEL

Well, no...

KENT

So, you just tell them that Geoff talked to a "moron my dildo" and you didn't *know* it was really Walter D'Mittonni...

DANIEL

That's right. I wouldn't be, knowingly, contradicting him.

RUTH

Daniel, you can't afford to step on anyone's toes.

KENT

Believe me, Ruth. Walter's already forgotten that Paramount called.

DANIEL

Yeah. What the hell. I'll hear what they have to say first. Then I'll decide if I should go ahead. And, if so, how I should go about telling *them*.

[Curtain.]

Act 3, Scene 4

Setting: Early the next day. A large conference room with a built-in audio/visual center at the front, a large table with seats all around it and chairs along the wall in the back.

At Rise: Daniel, Kent, Helen, Shelly and Sam sit along the back wall. Linda is at the front talking with Mildred, Walter stands off to the side. There's a general hum of noise as people standing and sitting around the table are chatting in small groups.

LAURA

Ah. People. Can we get started here?

[Slowly, the people standing find their way to seats. Laura looks at Helen.]

Are the studio people coming?

HELEN

They should be on their way...

LAURA

Well, let's get started.

Yesterday, Sam and I presented our advertising proposal to the EMC, which — for those of you who don't know — is the Executive Management Committee, and they approved our 30-million-dollar ad budget for the year.

[These is some sporadic applause, just as Liz and two other studio people enter the room and stand quietly near the door.]

LAURA (CONTINUES)

I'm glad you could make it...

LIZ

Sorry, we were in the editing room and lost track of the time...

LAURA

What this approval means is that, for one, we got everything we asked for — which is a first... at least for me.

DANIEL

That's great. How nice of them to give us approval to do our jobs.

[There's general laughter and rumbling. Laura continues as though nothing was said.]

LAURA

And two. It means that we can tell the ad agency to go ahead and produce the second set of proposed commercials and start scheduling our media buys for the year.

KENT

Are we ever going to get to see the first set of commercials?

DANIEL

Or are we going to have to wait to see them on our TVs at home?

LAURA

Funny you should ask, because I just happen to have a tape of the first three commercials right here.

[Laura looks around the room, then turns to Liz.]

LAURA (CONTINUES)

Ah. Liz, did you bring the tape?

[Liz gets up and moves to the tape machine.]

LIZ

It's in the machine and ready to go.

LAURA

Helen, can you dim the lights?

[Helen stands up to adjust the lights from the switches on the wall behind her. Liz pushes a button the VCR to start the tape, but all that shows up on the TV screen is a colorful static. She fiddles with a few knobs and buttons, but no picture appears. The other two people from the studio get up to help her and Liz motions to Helen to turn the light back up.]

LAURA (CONTINUES)

While they're doing that, is there anything happening in the other areas? Mildred? Walter?

[Mildred looks up as if thinking, but Walter steps forward.]

WALTER

Actually, we've been hearing some very good response to the speech Chairman Howard made to a Congressional Committee last week. All the industry publications have quoted from it in columns and the wire services sent out stories on it...

*[Finally, giant numbers, counting down to zero, appear on the TV screen and Liz dims the lights again.
Curtain.]*

Act 4, Scene 1

Setting: *That afternoon. Daniel's cubicle.*

At Rise: *Daniel is working on his computer as Kent walks by. Daniel motions for him to come in.*

DANIEL

Wait 'till you hear this. I think I'm going to go ahead and recommend that we let them shoot the movie here...

KENT

That's quite a switch. I take it the lunch went well?

DANIEL

You could say that.

[Daniel switches to a more sincere tone and almost whispers.]

DANIEL (CONTINUES)

I'm really impressed with Geoff, he knows exactly what buttons to push. And Peter said I'd be a fool not to pursue this — even if I have to go around Smucko and Madame.

KENT

But then, Peter doesn't work here — with the brainless duo...

DANIEL

I think I've come up with a way to do it. They won't even know I bypassed them.

KENT

That sounds promising.

DANIEL

It can't miss. I'll pretend I don't know Walter turned them down; he certainly never discussed it with me and probably never discussed it with Laura.

So, first I've already contacted the building services and security people to get figures on what potential overtime might cost. Paramount will pay us double the payroll cost and the company's entire utility bill for the weeks they're here. We'll actually make money, without interrupting any work... They'll only be here nights and weekends.

Next, once I have the costs, I'll send memos to the chairman's office trio with Walter and Laura cced, outlining the plan and asking if they have any objections. While, at the same time, I'll send Walter and Laura FYI PROFS notes, saying "since it won't cost us anything and our paid expert, Peter, approves it, I've gone ahead and started contacting the various people who'd be affected, including the big three."

KENT

I see. Tweedle-De-Dumb and Tweedle-De-Dumber won't possibly turn down the plan until you hear back from Joe, Larry and Charlie....

DANIEL

Right. And though one of them may come back and ask for Laura's opinion, the other two are bound to just say, "go ahead." What else could Laura say at that point?

KENT

But how can you be so sure two of the three will O K it?

DANIEL

The numbers, buddy boy, the numbers. That's all those guys look at. And Geoff gave me a great number. But I didn't tell you the best part of the deal yet.

Apparently there's a scene in the movie, I don't remember it from the book, but it's in the screenplay, where some broker at the firm has to produce a big new client or get laid off.

The character is poring through the phonebook, making cold calls, when he gets a call from one of his current clients. A woman just out college with nothing but a little IRA. He's trying to put her off while she's trying to tell him that her father died and she's the million-dollar beneficiary on his life insurance policy...

KENT

Ah, ha. The plot thickens. It wouldn't happen to be an Insurance Company of Manhattan policy, would it?

DANIEL

It could be, if we accept the deal.

KENT

That'd be fantastic.

DANIEL

There's more. It seems this broker always sings when things are going well, changing the words to popular songs to fit the occasion. Geoff said, the scene would end with the guy literally singing our praises...

KENT

So, you're thinking you'll sell the "holy trinity" with a song?

DANIEL

No. They won't give a shit about that. But they will listen when I compare the value of that song, to say, a few million-dollar commercials during the Super Bowl. Paramount estimates that more people will see this movie over the next two years — at theaters, on cable and through video rentals — than have seen the last three Super Bowls combined.

KENT

Even Smucko and Ma-dame will be able to understand that. They might not even realize you stepped on their toes.

DANIEL

Oh, I hope they do. They certainly step on ours enough...

Do you believe that fuckin' asshole "MiDildo" this morning, standing there like a little school boy giving a report on the debating team's victory?

[Daniel straightens far enough out of his chair to see over the cubicle wall and looks around quickly, then sits back down. Continuing in an exaggeratedly prissy voice.]

DANIEL (CONTINUES)

"We are pleased to announce that the speech we wrote for Chairman Howard has been well received throughout the industry..."

KENT

The implication being that "we" means Walter, to everyone in that room.

DANIEL

And "we" made absolutely no attempt to discredit any such assumption and give the proper credit...

KENT

It's par for the course around here.

DANIEL

Well, it shouldn't be. When are these... people... gonna start to show a little class?

KENT

They have no class to show. They aren't managers. They aren't professionals. They're just scared little rabbits.

DANIEL

They don't have a clue when it comes to dealing with people.

KENT

No. All they know is how to "yes" their bosses to death. That's how they got to where they are. But when it comes to actually producing something, giving an opinion, making a recommendation... they haven't got a clue. That's why they're so paranoid: they don't know what they're doing and they're scared they'll be found out at any minute. So, they constantly have to cover their asses.

DANIEL

And *we're* what they cover them with. We do the actual work. We provide them with the scape goat to point a finger at if something goes wrong. But, when things go right, like the speech you wrote, there they are taking the credit.

KENT

Luckily, in this case, I made a special point of letting Laura and Karl and Joe know that I filled in for Walter to write the thing.

DANIEL

Clever. So, if it had bombed, you could say, “Sorry, but Walter wasn’t here to help me with it.” But, since it worked, they’ll know you can do it without “la puppy dog” Walter. That sounds like one of *their* maneuvers.

KENT

Heh. I’ve learned something from them. Maybe they’ll start to see that I can play their stupid games, too.

DANIEL

They don’t think it’s a game. To them it’s just survival. By this time next week, “we” will have convinced “ourself” — and anyone else who’ll listen — that “we” actually did write Joe’s famous address to congress.

[Kent leans back, affecting a dull, monotone voice.]

KENT

We are all on the same team. A victory for one is a victory for all. We all work to the best of our capacity and receive compensation equal to our — perceived — contribution.

DANIEL

And, unfortunately, we’ve got deaf, dumb and blind rabbits doing the perceiving.

KENT

That’s why we’ve gotta get out of here. When ‘s this Geoff guy going to offer us jobs?

DANIEL

As soon as we put together his deal for him. Let’s get to work and start calling the people we need to get on board. I’ve put together a list of who we need to contact and drafted the memos, if you’re serious about working with me on this?

Despite Them

KENT

Certainly...

DANIEL

Great, let's divide up this list and, hopefully, get it done by tomorrow. Geoff would like an answer by early next week.

*[Kent walks around Daniel's desk to look at the lists he's compiled.
Curtain.]*

Act 4, Scene 2

Setting: A week later. Laura's office.

At Rise: Laura is quietly talking on the phone, cigarette dangling from the corner of her mouth. As the scene begins, Laura hangs up the phone and a lone desk with a low partition wall is lite up stage left, Sam sits talking on the phone.

LAURA (SHOUTING)

Sam, get in here...

[Sam stands up to peek over the partition searching around for someone to see that he's on the phone. Laura can't see him from inside her office and shouts again.]

LAURA

Sam?

[Sam covers the mouthpiece on the phone, and replies to her in a loud, but controlled voice.]

SAM

I'll be right there, Laura...

LAURA

Now!

[Sam squats down, talking quietly into the phone and hangs up. Lights out on Sam's desk as he rushes out. He pauses at the door to Laura's office.]

LAURA (CONTINUES)

Shut the door.

[Sam sits across the desk from Laura, looking like a juvenile delinquent in the principal's office. Laura snubs out her cigarette and changes to a more conversational tone, trying to sound ironic.]

LAURA (CONTINUES)

The latest word from Karl is that, since the EMC wants every department to cut ten percent more from their — austerity — budgets, and we could only come up with two percent in additional cuts, he wants us to slash 15 million from our ad budget.

[Sam jumps out of his seat and leans into Laura's desk.]

SAM

What? We can't cut the budget in half. We've already committed half of it to creative production. We'll need the other half for placements. They work hand in hand. The whole campaign depends on frequency. We can't have commercials made and then not show them....

[Laura leans back in her chair, lights a cigarette, scans her computer screen, checks the lights on her phone and then looks directly at Sam.]

LAURA

If you're through, I'll go on. I don't like this any better than you. I never fought so hard for anything in my life as I did for that ad budget. But the fact is, it's got to be cut. Period.

So, what I want you to do is call the ad agency and figure out with them where they can make some cuts. And tell them to get me a new placement proposal, within the new budget, by Monday morning. I've got to show Karl something that afternoon and I'll need time to go over it with you first.

[Sam shakes his head and walks slowly out of the office. As he nears the door, Laura's phone buzzes. As she answers she shouts to Sam.]

LAURA (CONTINUES)

Oh. And Sam, don't forget about the big "JMTG" unveiling this afternoon on the 13th Floor Auditorium...

[Sam exits, leaving the door open. Laura speaks into the phone.]

LAURA (CONTINUES)

Yeah, Helen. Who? No. I don't know anybody named Wasserman...

HELEN (OFF STAGE VOICE)

He says he's from "Advertising Age"

LAURA

Send it to Daniel.

[Laura hangs up her phone and leans back. Lights out on Laura's office. Lights back up on Sam's desk as he sits back down and his phone buzzes.]

HELEN (OFF STAGE VOICE)

Ah, Sam, Daniel's talking to a reporter from "Advertising Age," wants to know about the new ad campaign. Can you take it?

SAM

Yeah, sure. Have him transfer the call to me...

[Curtain.]

Act 4, Scene 3

Setting: That afternoon. A large theater-style auditorium.

At Rise: We just see the back wall of the auditorium where Daniel, Kent, Walter and Sam stand talking quietly to each other and many other muttered conversations are heard. Throughout the scene we watch their reactions to the talk. Walter mouths the words spoken by Joe that he helped craft. Laura and Joe speak off stage, addressing the group which instantly goes silent.

LAURA (OS)

If everyone could take your seats. *[pause]* I would like to introduce our President and Chairman of the Board, Joseph Howard.

[Brief applause.]

JOE (OS)

Thank you, Laura. As you know, this will be my last address to you, as I will be retiring at the end of the month.

[Daniel whispers to Kent.]

DANIEL

It's also the *first* time.

JOE (OS)

It has been an honor steering The Insurance Company of Manhattan during the last six years, through the deregulation of the insurance and finance industries that marked significant changes to every organization in those industries. It hasn't been easy, adding new products and services...

[Kent whispers to Daniel.]

KENT

And getting buy-in for them from our sales teams...

JOE (OS)

...but we're heading in the right direction.

[Sam whispers to Kent and Daniel.]

SAM

Are you fucking kidding me?

JOE (OS)

I'm sure you are all anxious to learn what "JMTG" stands for. As we anticipated, we got some very far-ranging guesses. I'd like to share a few of them with you:

It does *not* mean: Justice Makes TICOM Grow nor Join My TICOM Group.

We *never* refer to The Insurance Company of Manhattan by the acronym TICOM.

[Daniel whispers to Kent.]

DANIEL

Except for in every single staff meeting and in 500 PROF's messages daily....

JOE (OS)

"JMTG" also does not mean: Jobs Move To Georgia, in reference to our new claims office, no doubt. All the positions in that new office are newly created jobs...

[Some chuckles are heard and some mumbling. Sam whispers.]

SAM

Yeah, right, and none of us noticed that the 16th floor is now completely empty.

JOE (OS)

There were a number of guesses I would hesitate to repeat in polite company. They were all as erroneous as they were imaginative...

[Subdued laughter as Joe drones on. Lights dim briefly and then come back up as the audience applauds. Kent and Daniel continue standing at the back of the auditorium as people file out.]

DANIEL

Oy. I thought we might get a press release, at least, about this “JMTG” shit. But what could I possibly say about *that* that anyone outside of here would give two shits about?

[Curtain. End of play.]