

DEATH & TAXES

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Property of ABC

TEASER

FADE IN:

INT. CUBICLE JUNGLE - DAY

EARL (30's) barges down the corridor with a headlong stride. A sheet of paper gripped tightly in his fist. Nothing will get in his way.

INT. PHOTOCOPY ROOM - DAY

Earl storms inside and comes to a sudden stop. Fear grows in his eyes. He ekes out a bit of phony bravado.

EARL  
So we meet again.

His nemesis stands against the wall. A complicated and convoluted array of buttons, gears and illuminated panels -- the office photocopier.

B&W SECURITY CAM POV: Earl approaches the photocopier machine. His head on a swivel. Making sure the coffee maker or fax machine doesn't bushwhack him along the way.

Posted above the photocopier is a list of Do's and Don'ts.

- #1. Keep hands away from all moving parts.
- #2. Swearing is not permitted in this area.
- #3. This is not a medium for self-expression.
- #4. Do not look into the light. Earl looks at the photocopier warily.

EARL  
Remember what happened to the last machine? Capitulate or suffer the consequences.

Earl lays his page face-down and presses COPY. The photocopier HUMS, SHUDDERS and MOANS. Finally, it JAMS. The machine WHEEZES into idle. Earl barely maintains his thin veneer of self-control.

He spies the final rule.

- #5. Do not unjam the copier. If a jam occurs, fill out the L220 Repair Form and submit it to your supervisor.

Earl reaches for an L220 Repair Form. There are none. A memo reads: If out, please make more copies. Earl's anger builds. He reaches for his original and discovers the machine ate it.

EARL

You just don't get it, do you? All I want is a little respect and you treat me like some punk bitch.

B&W SECURITY CAM POV: Earl grabs a fire extinguisher and begins to murder the inanimate object.

EARL

(yelling)

Why do you make me do this? Mocking me with your meaningless icons!

Just as quickly as it started, it's over. Covered in sweat, Earl HYPERVENTILATES. The photocopier lies in ruins.

INT. FLOYD'S OFFICE - DAY

A dishevelled Earl slouches before his boss, FLOYD (50's), in the only office on the floor with a window. Tightly shuttered blinds squander the prestige in the dimly lit room.

FLOYD (O.S.)

Earl, do you think photocopiers grow on trees?

Earl picks up a framed photo of his boss. Wearing a polyester leisure suit and feathered haircut, YOUNG FLOYD (20's) poses arm-in-arm with a uniformed Augusto Pinochet. It's signed: Floyd, I really like your style. General A. Pinochet.

FLOYD (O.S.)

That we can chop one down any time we want from a vast Xerox forest that stands just outside The Beltway?

EARL

(arrogantly)

You can't fire me, Floyd. Civil servants are the herpes of the working class. We're here to stay.

Earl lowers the picture to reveal our 21st century Floyd -- complete with graying comb-over. Surrounded by B&W monitors that vigilantly invade the privacy of his employees.

FLOYD

You're not going anywhere. I need you for the Common Ground audit.

EARL

(surprised)

Isn't that Kirstin's assignment?

FLOYD

She bowed out for medical reasons. Claims she needs another hysterectomy.

EARL

Women. There's always something wrong with 'em.

Floyd nods his head agreement.

FLOYD

Listen to me carefully, Earl. If you know what's good for you, you'll do a half-assed job and finish this audit as quickly as possible.

Earl tries to speak but Floyd cuts him off.

FLOYD

I don't wanna hear about your code of honor or code of ethics. Morse code or even one coda. The only code I care about is the tax code. Got it?

Earl leans aggressively on Floyd's desk. One of those drinking birds repetitively dips his beak in a glass of water.

EARL

Then give me an assistant. It's been six months. Six months of dealing with piddley crap that could be handled by a well-trained monkey.

(sternly)

I want my monkey, Floyd.

Floyd's not one to back down from a fight.

FLOYD

I can't go around hiring people.

Earl sits down and crosses his arms defiantly.

EARL

And why not?

FLOYD

Because it just doesn't work that way. First, I hafta make a need assessment to verify the vacated job is still essential and not duplicated elsewhere.

Earl listens contemptuously. The dipping bird monotonously plods on.

FLOYD

After that, I'm required by law to internally post the opening for existing government employees.

The corners slowly chip away from Earl's defiance. The dipping bird continues getting nowhere.

FLOYD

Only then can I advertise the position externally.

EARL

(slightly beaten)

But it's been six months. Surely, we've reached that point by now.

FLOYD

(exasperated)

You can be so naive.

Floyd motions to the stacks of bound rules and regulations that fill the shelves behind his desk.

FLOYD

Do you have any idea of the legal risk that exposes us to? Let's say we interview a middle-aged black woman and some guy with a visible physical handicap.

EARL

Okay.

FLOYD

What if they're equally qualified? We can only hire one. The other could sue us for discriminatory hiring practices. It could cost millions.

Floyd tabulates a figure on his huge mechanical calculator.

FLOYD

It turns out to be more cost-effective to let you destroy three photocopiers a month than hire an assistant.

Earl's overwhelmed with irony. The dipping bird plods on with unthinking glee.

FLOYD

Now, get back to work.

EARL

This isn't over, Floyd. I'm gonna get that assistant. Floyd's phone RINGS.

FLOYD

(angrily)

What?

(cowed)

Yes, sir. What can I do for you?  
Floyd masks the phone receiver.

FLOYD

Get outta here.

Earl exits. Leaving Floyd alone.

FLOYD

I just assigned it to him.

(beat)

Don't worry. He'll sleepwalk right through it.

(beat)

Oh, he'll tow the company line. And if he can't, he's completely expendable.

FADE TO BLACK.

END TEASER

## ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. WASHINGTON ICONS - DAY

Montage of stereotypical monuments but with a fresh twist. The Lincoln monument smokes a cigarette. A toilet paper roll is attached to the Washington monument. A massive Calder mobile next to the Smithsonian knocks a photo-happy tourist on his ass.

INT. TENEAYLLE'S CUBICLE - DAY

The office has the decaying charm of a 40's federal building (including a pneumatic tube message system). However, it suffers from a mid-70's renovation when "privacy" cubicles were installed and utilizes MS-DOS computers from the 80's.

Earl approaches the veal-fattening pen of TENEAYLLE (20's), a gay, black, male co-worker. He finds Teneaylle inundated with paperwork.

EARL

Come on, Teneaylle. You look like you could use a smoke. Teneaylle SIGHS mournfully.

TENEAYLLE

Tobacco. A fickle temptress who teases with nicotine-baited breath. Just before crushing you with her black, tar-filled heart.

EARL

What's with you?

TENEAYLLE

Robert left me. I'm going to die alone in the world.

EARL

Maybe a cigarette will ease your pain.

TENEAYLLE

And my building's getting fumigated this week. I need a place to crash. I just wish there was someone I could turn to.

EARL  
 (insincerely)  
 Look, I really wish I cared.  
 (desperately)  
 But we should be smoking right now.

TENEAYLLE  
 I'd like nothing better.  
 (off his desk)  
 But just look at all this work.

Earl SIGHS and grabs a rubber stamp off Teneaylle's desk. He SLAMS a red AUDIT on every folder.

TENEAYLLE  
 (astonished)  
 That was easy.

Earl tugs on Teneaylle's arm.

EARL  
 Come on. I'm dying for you to have  
 a cigarette.

EXT. SMOKING STEPS - DAY

Earl deeply inhales the second-hand smoke from the sexy mystery of Teneaylle's cigarillo.

EARL  
 That's good stuff.

Teneaylle shoots him a judgemental look.

EARL  
 What?

TENEAYLLE  
 I admire that you want to quit. I  
 even commend it. But why do you  
 insist on doing it in such a half-  
 assed manner?

Earl looks at his friend's rear.

EARL  
 You're retaining water again,  
 aren't you?

Teneaylle checks out his rump.

TENEAYLLE  
 It shows, doesn't it?

TENEAYLLE (CONT'D)

And I feel a pimple coming on. I'll never find a man this way.

EARL

Are you kidding? You gay guys got it made. All you hafta do to get laid is wash your hands in a public restroom.

TENEAYLLE

(cynically)

You make it sound so glamorous.

EARL

(wistfully)

I wish I was queer. I'd have somebody to watch the game with. I could belch whenever I wanted. And fall asleep after sex without getting my ear talked off.

TENEAYLLE

(sarcastically)

It's our loss really.

(sagely)

But you can only bounce from bed to bed for so long. I want a commitment. Someone who doesn't want my body but the complete package called -- Teneaylle Porchet.

EARL

(enviously)

You're on a completely higher plane of unhappiness than me.

Teneaylle takes another deep drag and makes smoke rings.

TENEAYLLE

I thought you were going to ask your neighbor out.

EARL

I'm playing it cool. Don't wanna seem too desperate.

(sniffing)

And she's almost ripe for the picking.

TENEAYLLE

You'd have better luck with women if you just talked to them.

TENEAYLLE (CONT'D)  
Tried to be their friend first.

EARL  
(aghast)  
That is so gay.

WENDELL (40's), a weasly weakling, steps outside. He blinks heavily and has a photographic memory. Teneaylle lights Wendell's cigarette. Earl watches enviously. Unconsciously inhaling with him.

EARL  
I can't take anymore.  
(off Wendell's smokes)  
Hand one over, Wendell.

Earl takes a cigarette but Teneaylle grabs his arm.

TENEAYLLE  
Mind over matter, Earl. Steel yourself.

EARL  
But the side-effects are killin' me. I can't sleep. I can't focus. And I'm filled with tons of unvented rage.

WENDELL  
That's not caused by nicotine cessation. Your frontal lobe is shrinking.

EARL  
What?

WENDELL  
It's true. The frontal lobe in the male brain begins to shrink after puberty. Causing men to become irritable and extremely cantankerous.

EARL  
Whatever it is, if I don't get an assistant soon, I'm gonna go revenue on someone's ass.

TENEAYLLE  
Floyd still afraid to hire someone?

EARL

It's too litigiously hazardous. And he just pawned off the entire Common Ground audit on me.

(ruefully)

If there's anything I hate, it's a bunch of tree huggers trying to make the world a better place.

(shuddering)

It goes against human nature. Wendell looks around nervously.

WENDELL

You be careful. I hear they're controlled by the Russian mob... and the Vatican.

Earl rolls his eyes. He's heard this all before.

TENEAYLLE

Maybe they have a homeless shelter I can use?

EARL

Just stay with Wendell. Teneaylle's eyes brighten.

WENDELL

(nervously)

I'm not allowed house guests. Doctor's orders.

Teneaylle's shoulders slump.

WENDELL

What about your place, Earl?

Earl responds with enthusiastic cynicism.

EARL

Gee, it'd be just like Three's Company. Only he's really gay and I'm not two hot chicks.

TENEAYLLE

Don't worry about me. I'll just squander my savings at some flea bag hotel. Or better yet, find a sturdy cardboard box to lay my weary head.

Teneaylle hangs his head with melodramatic flair.

EARL

I don't have time for any of this.

TENEAYLLE

Just get a temp and get over it.  
Earl's face lights up.

EARL

I can do that?

TENEAYLLE

I don't see why not.

WENDELL

Temporary hires give employers the  
power to deny benefits and to  
terminate at will.

EARL

That's great. I'll use this audit  
to finally make Floyd gimme an  
assistant.

(beat)

I could kiss you, Teneaylle. That  
is...if you weren't a homo and all.

TENEAYLLE

I'm torn as well.

(mournfully)

It's my bane to solve everyone's  
problems but my own.

It's too much for Earl. He finally relents.

EARL

Okay, you can stay with me for a  
couple days. But don't make me  
regret it.

INT. RECEPTIONIST AREA - NEXT DAY

MEGAN (20's), a very cute klutz, stumbles from the elevator.  
She approaches the sorely indifferent RECEPTIONIST (50's).

MEGAN

Excuse me.

The Receptionist is on the phone and motions for Megan to  
wait.

RECEPTIONIST

You've reached the Internal Revenue  
Service.

(MORE)

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)

If you don't know your party's extension, press one for the staff directory. If this is regarding an audit, press two. If this is about seizure of your business or personal property, press three. Otherwise, please hold for an operator to assist you.

The Receptionist puts the caller on hold.

RECEPTIONIST

(to Megan)

Can I help you?

MEGAN

I always assumed a machine did that.

The Receptionist stares at her with silent indifference.

MEGAN

I'm Megan McCardell. I'm here to see Earl Hasslich.

The Receptionist points around the corner.

RECEPTIONIST

Just follow your nose. He had chili for lunch again.

Megan warily heads towards her destiny.

INT. EARL'S CUBICLE - DAY

Megan leans her head into Earl's cube.

MEGAN

Is it appropriate to knock? Since you don't have a door and all. Earl doesn't look up from his work.

EARL

They do that to minimize on-the-job suicides.

MEGAN

Right.

(beat)

I'm here about the temporary position.

Earl finally looks at her. A wry smile grows on his face.

EARL  
I bet you are.

MEGAN  
Excuse me?

EARL  
Nothing. Did you bring a resume?

She pulls one from her purse and hands it over. Earl reads it over -- more impressed with each line.

EARL  
Good. Very good. Excellent. She smiles proudly.

EARL  
You were both a Fulbright and Rhodes scholar?

Earl does the math in his head and CRUMPLES the resume.

EARL  
But unless you're Doogie Howser, you'd have to be fifty to have this much education.

Busted. Megan furiously rubs her temples.

MEGAN  
I swear I'm my own worst enemy. The tumor in my head feels like it's gonna burst any minute.

EARL  
You have a tumor?

MEGAN  
The doctors got most of it. It's the scar tissue that causes most of the trouble now.

She starts to cry. Rendering Earl completely powerless.

EARL  
Don't do that.

MEGAN  
I'm having the worst day. And my head feels like it's gonna explode.

EARL  
Please don't. This is my only good shirt.

MEGAN

I just need this job so badly.

EARL

But I can't hire anyone I don't completely trust.

KIRSTIN (40's), an over-worked supermom and reigning queen of the cubicles, sticks her head over the partition.

KIRSTIN

What do you think you're doing?

Earl fears and despises her all at the same time.

EARL

Your work. I get a temp to speed up the Common Ground exam.

KIRSTIN

Floyd didn't say anything about a temp to me. My workload's double what you do. Someone in this office keeps issuing audits on perfectly acceptable returns.

EARL

Guess you should keep that in mind next time you duck an assignment.

Kirstin reaches for the audit folders.

KIRSTIN

Just give me the paperwork. And the girl. I'll do this job right the first time.

Earl snatches them from her grasp.

EARL

No way. The girl's mine.

KIRSTIN

Just because you're motivationally-challenged, doesn't mean you get an assistant.

EARL

But I finally have someone to do my bidding, perform my menial tasks and play my little reindeer games.

MEGAN

So I got the job?

Earl realizes the corner he's backed himself into.

EARL

Yeah, sure. I guess.

Megan smiles brightly. Kirstin sets her jaw firmly.

KIRSTIN

You're going to screw this up royally. And then Floyd will finally get rid of you.

EARL

And you're just one vibrating dildo away from a bright and shiny new attitude.

She looks aghast.

KIRSTIN

That's it. You're getting written up for that one.

She marches towards Floyd's office.

EARL

She doesn't scare me. The only thing I like better than a good lap dance is sensitivity-training.

MEGAN

(dryly)

I'll keep that in mind.

Earl shares an uncomfortable look with Megan.

EARL

You know there won't be any health benefits. For your tumor and all.

MEGAN

(smiling)

Oh, was lying about that. I tend to do that when I'm under pressure.  
Earl realizes the agony of victory.

INT. AUDIT ROOM - DAY

The sound-proofed audit room resembles an interrogation chamber. Earl and Megan administer their daily inquisition. If Napoleon wanted to save the world instead of rule it, he'd be DR. BRAD TRUMAN (40's).

A little guy with a big motor that never stops turning. Next to him sits his statuesque Jewish accountant, CHRISTIAN HIMMELFARB (50's).

DR. BRAD TRUMAN

How many times must we go through this? Have we done anything illegal?

EARL

That's what we're here to find out. A reliable tipster claims you employ questionable accounting practices.

DR. BRAD TRUMAN

This must be some ludicrous political vendetta. I demand to know my accuser.

EARL

The Bill of Rights doesn't apply at the IRS. We view all TP's... that means "taxpayers" as guilty until proven innocent.

DR. BRAD TRUMAN

Is it absolutely necessary I be here? As comptroller, Christian's quite capable of handling this.

EARL

You both signed the return so you're both required to be here.

DR. BRAD TRUMAN

But my time is better spent with people who desperately need my help. Not with some petty bureaucrat dedicated to a life of meaningless paperwork and brown-nosing.

Megan flinches. This really burns Earl up.

EARL

You have no idea how much my boss wishes I was like that.

DR. BRAD TRUMAN

I hope you're unhappy with your job. Because you'll be looking for a new one -- very shortly.

EARL

Look, Dr. Truman.

(aside)

That is...if you really are a doctor.

(beat)

The beauty of a crappy job like mine is no one else wants it.

Dr. Truman shares an exasperated look with his handsome accountant.

DR. BRAD TRUMAN

You are a deeply troubled person.

EARL

Don't forget callous, caustic and vindictive.

DR. BRAD TRUMAN

I'm not without connections. You don't want me as an enemy. Earl seethes.

EARL

From the get go, I was told to do a lousy job on this audit. Now, I don't mind doing less for the team. I am American. But I've learned in my short, unhappy life that hypocrisy walks hand in hand with piety. Which means I gotta give you the audit that I call, The Anal Probe.

DR. BRAD TRUMAN

You have the self-preservation instincts of a lemming. Earl smiles wryly.

EARL

And my turn-ons include satin sheets, Chinese food and self-immolation.

INT. FLOYD'S OFFICE - DAY

Earl and Megan stand before Floyd with mock subservience.

FLOYD

(angrily)

Why don't you ever listen? Were you shaken as a baby?

EARL  
(agreeably)  
That would explain a lotta things.

FLOYD  
I explicitly told you to skim over  
the Common Ground exam.

Floyd presses play on his cassette recorder.

FLOYD (V.O.)  
If you know what's good for you,  
you'll do a half-assed job and  
finish it as quickly as possible.  
Floyd turns it off.

EARL  
You record our conversations?

FLOYD  
Why are you busting this guy's  
balls?

EARL  
I wanted to do a lousy job. I  
really did. But arrogance must be  
punished.

FLOYD  
Not your code again. There's no  
room for chivalry at the IRS.

EARL  
Actually, chivalry promotes a  
stratified class system that I'm  
really not comfortable with.

FLOYD  
You can't eat honor in the real  
world.

EARL  
But it sure helps you sleep at  
night.

In exasperation, Floyd holds his face with his hands.

EARL  
Truman's hiding something behind  
all his righteous indignation. I  
just know it.

Floyd leans back in his chair. Smiling wickedly.

FLOYD

I warned you. If you can't play by our rules, you'll be looking for a new job.

EARL

You can't fire me.

FLOYD

Dr. Truman has very powerful friends. Men who control this department's budget. They can eliminate your position with a flick of the wrist.

(to Megan)

And your little dog too.

Earl shares a lost puppy dog look with Megan.

MEGAN

Good thing I don't like it here.  
Floyd sneers at her.

FLOYD

I like your attitude.

EARL

Tell me this is all a big joke.

Earl LAUGHS half-heartedly. Floyd stares him into silence.

FLOYD

Truman takes a walk. Get that through your thick skull and we can go back to business as usual.

INT. CUBICLE JUNGLE - DAY

Earl and Megan step out of Floyd's office -- shell-shocked.

EARL

The only reason why I even took this lousy job was because I thought I could never lose it.

(beat)

I don't wanna get fired. But I also can't let that pompous ass get off scot free.

MEGAN

Is this a code thing again?

EARL

If I think he's dirty and let him  
off the hook, then I'm just as  
guilty.

Megan smiles in admiration.

MEGAN

There's something hidden behind the  
good doctor's pious posturing. If  
we really nail this guy, they can't  
lay a glove on you. Earl's glad  
she's taken his side.

EARL

Well, if anyone can spot a liar,  
I'm sure it's you.

They march down the corridor with renewed purpose.

EARL

You like chili?

INT. EARL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Earl stands next to his front door. Wearing his Washington  
Capitals hockey jersey. He holds a bag of garbage and looks  
through the peephole. Teneaylle uses the phone next to Earl's  
couch. Earl's basset hound, MOOCHER, plops his slobbery face  
on Teneaylle's pant leg. Refusing to budge.

TENEAYLLE

(on the phone)

Why won't you even see me?

TENEAYLLE (CONT'D)

I deserve that much consideration.  
No, I'm not being a bitch.

Earl's odd behavior finally gets the better of Teneaylle.

TENEAYLLE

What are you doing?

EARL

I'm waiting for Debbie to get home  
so I can take out the trash. It  
gets chicks hot to see guys doing  
guy things.

TENEAYLLE

You must stop reading the Penthouse letters. Teneaylle returns to his phone call.

TENEAYLLE

If it's a sin to love someone unconditionally, then I'm going straight to hell.

Teneaylle's really getting on Earl's nerves. Earl covers his ears. GROANING in frustration.

TENEAYLLE

And don't make that face. You know how that gets on my nerves.

(beat)

I just know -- that's all!

Earl turns on the RADIO -- Dancing Queen. Trying to drown out his roommate. Teneaylle shoves a finger in his open ear.

TENEAYLLE

Why must you treat me like an emotional scratching post?

Earl bangs his head against the wall in frustration. DEBBIE (22), Earl's sexy neighbor, KNOCKS on his door. Through the peephole, Earl spies her in a trashy outfit.

EARL

Oh, God!

Earl wedges himself in the doorway so she can't see Teneaylle.

EARL

Hi, Debbie. How's it goin'?

DEBBIE

Can you please keep it down?

TENEAYLLE (O.S.)

(loudly)

Don't treat me this way. I'm only made of flesh and bone.

EARL

(nervously)

Believe me, I'd like nothin' better. But I'm caught up in a little situation, right now.

TENEAYLLE (O.S.)  
Just stab me in the heart! It'd be  
so much quicker.

DEBBIE  
Don't make me report this to the  
building super!

Teneaylle swings the door wide open.

TENEAYLLE  
Would you please! I'm trying to  
have a fight with my boyfriend.

Teneaylle SLAMS the door in her face. Debbie's stunned by  
this unexpected revelation. Earl's completely embarrassed.

EARL  
What did you do that for?

Teneaylle shakes the phone in the air.

TENEAYLLE  
Excuse me for wanting a life.

Earl forcibly hangs up the phone. This tweaks Teneaylle.

EARL  
Now, she thinks I'm queer.

TENEAYLLE  
(incredulous)  
Please. In that outfit.

EARL  
I have a hard enough time getting  
chicks without suffering your homo-  
tage.

TENEAYLLE  
I did you a favor. That girl was  
stanky.

EARL  
(uneasy)  
Maybe I like 'em...stanky.  
Teneaylle re-dials.

TENEAYLLE  
(rudely)  
Excuse me, I've got a legitimate  
relationship to save.

That does it. Earl storms out of his own apartment.

FADE TO BLACK.

END ACT ONE

## ACT TWO

FADE IN:

INT. CONFSSIONAL - NIGHT

Light splashes on Earl's face as the confessional window slides open. He spills his guts to an UNSEEN CONFESSOR.

EARL

Please forgive me for my sins. It's been three weeks since I've been here.

Earl steals a glance at his confessor. He CLEARS HIS THROAT and closes his eyes to help his concentration.

EARL

I've given up smoking like we talked about. I knew I'd put on weight. I just didn't think it'd all be in my neck.

Earl adjusts his rear on the hard bench.

EARL

Add to that my shrinking frontal lobe. I figgered my inner rage stemmed from my daily trudge through bureaucratic magma that renders all effort futile. Earl looks down in disgust.

EARL

And unless I pull a rabbit outta my hat, I'm gonna lose my lousy job. You know it's bad when you've got all your self-esteem wrapped up in a dead-end career that only causes others pain. Earl blows his nose with a tissue.

EARL

And I shoulda never let Teneaylle stay at my place.

(aside)

That's my homo friend I was telling you about.

(frustrated)

I've been trying to get with this neighbor chick for months. And in seconds, he makes her think I'm a fruit boot.

Earl discards the used tissue with a basketball arc.

EARL

Maybe Teneaylle's right. He says I should treat women as friends. Instead of just sexual objects. He looks at his Confessor.

EARL

I dunno anymore. What d'ya think?

Reveal that Earl is talking to a NAKED PEEPSHOW GIRL who sits behind a safety window. Her crossed arms cover all the naughty bits. The window slowly closes.

NAKED PEEPSHOW GIRL

I'd love to tell you what I think, Sweetie. But you'll hafta put in another buck.

The window closes. Earl digs into his pocket and desperately feeds four more quarters into the peepshow slot.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. SCHULZ'S CAFETERIA - NEXT DAY

Earl, Megan, Wendell and Teneaylle slowly work down the line of the aging cafeteria. The prices are cheap here because you're paying for the ambience. Earl and Teneaylle are still mad at each other. Maintaining a safe distance. Earl slides up to the hair-netted CAFETERIA WOMAN (50's). She holds up a slab of meat from a watery grave.

CAFETERIA WOMAN

Roast beef for you.

EARL

You have any southern-fried dodo or maybe some fresh coelacanth.

CAFETERIA WOMAN

Excuse me?

EARL

Never mind. You wouldn't understand.

EARL(CONT'ÖD)

I gotta figger outta way to prove Dr. Truman's ripping off money from his foundation.

WENDELL

But he runs orphanages, food pantries, free clinics. He's practically Mother Teresa.

EARL

I never trusted her either. Anyone who takes a vow of poverty is just looking for a free ride.

WENDELL

If anyone can nail him, it's you.  
(to Megan)  
Earl's even better than Quincy.

EARL

And hopefully not as one note.

Teneaylle HUFFS. Earl ignores him as they sit down to eat.

EARL

This job is the only thing I've ever been good at. Besides, masturbation, of course.  
(philosophically)  
I figger anyone will lie, cheat or steal if they think they can get away with it. I'm all that stands between modern civilization and total social anarchy.

Teneaylle silently mocks Earl. Earl tries to ignore him.

MEGAN

But why stick your neck out if no one else does? Why can't you just let it slide...even one time?

TENEAYLLE

Because he's his own worst enemy.

EARL

Really? I thought you were doing a pretty good job of that.

Wendell and Megan try to ignore the growing animosity.

WENDELL

Earl's a bit obsessive/compulsive when it comes to the truth?

EARL

Rule #4. The truth cannot be hidden forever.

MEGAN

I used to have a personal code.  
Until it killed a man. Wendell  
leans towards Earl.

WENDELL

She's joking, right?

EARL

I have no idea.

Megan eats like a pig. Elbows on the table. Ravenously shoveling food into her face. The men stare at her crude behavior in disbelief. She stops in mid-chew.

MEGAN

What?

EARL

Do you always eat like that?

MEGAN

I learned it in prison, okay?

TENEAYLLE

Why do I believe her?

Earl GRUNTS and turns away from Teneaylle.

TENEAYLLE

Don't even go there.

EARL

You can't even fathom the damage  
you've done to me, can you?

TENEAYLLE

It's called a favor.

EARL

Debbie is the perfect woman for me.

TENEAYLLE

Yeah. Perfectly stanky.

EARL

I refuse to take advice from a guy  
who couldn't keep a boyfriend if he  
tied raw meat to his wiener.  
Teneaylle fumes.

TENEAYLLE

At least, you can't get Vegas odds on my next sexual encounter. Earl burns. He holds out his hand.

EARL

That's it. Gimme back my house key? Right now.

Teneaylle fishes out the lone key and holds it just out of reach.

TENEAYLLE

If you want it...

Teneaylle swallows the key whole.

TENEAYLLE

...you can fish it out of the bowl in about 24 hours.

Teneaylle picks up his tray and walks off. Earl heads the other way. Wendell and Megan are frozen in fear.

MEGAN

What's up with that? I thought they were friends.

WENDELL

You mean it doesn't show? She stares at him blankly.

WENDELL

Earl's not the most gregarious guy in the world. In fact, misanthrope pretty much hits the nail right on the head.

(beat)

He takes friendship very seriously. Too almost dangerous limits. With expectations like that, it's hard not to be disappointed.

Megan nods knowingly.

INT. PHOTOCOPY ROOM - DAY

Earl shows Megan how to run the photocopier. Piles of unkempt paperwork surround them.

EARL

We're gonna get this guy. If this business has taught me anything, it's never trust a Jewish accountant named Christian. He presses COPY and nothing happens.

EARL

You just gotta jiggle it a bit.

He rattles the photocopier. Harder and harder.

MEGAN

Careful. You'll tilt it.

His anger gets the better of him. He pushes the photocopier onto the floor -- CRASH.

MEGAN

Remind me to never ask you to fix my car.

Kirstin pops her head through the door.

KIRSTIN

Word is your job's in jeopardy for trying too hard. I just love the bitter taste of irony, don't you? Earl painfully bears her insult.

KIRSTIN

Slowly but surely we're going to dismantle your little mafia of rejects and reprobates.

EARL

Truman's dirty. I just know it.

KIRSTIN

He's practically a one man United Way. And the great grandson of our President.

Earl shakes a handful of papers at her threateningly.

EARL

When I blow the lid off this case, they'll be dialing 800-IMA-HERO.

KIRSTIN

You just don't get it, do you? Dr. Truman walks in a state of political grace. He's untouchable.

MEGAN

That's until now. Earl's like a shark. Always on the hunt for tax fraud chum floating just below the surface.

Earl glances at the papers in his hand.

EARL

And I just found it. A list of all of Dr. Truman's charitable donations. To himself!

He grabs Megan by the arm and they run out.

EARL

Come on. We gotta show this to Floyd.

Kirstin stands there and nods sadly.

KIRSTIN

He'll never learn.

INT. FLOYD'S OFFICE - DAY

Earl and Megan beam proudly as Floyd glowers at the evidence before him.

FLOYD

What does this have to do with anything?

Their faces immediately drop.

EARL

Whatta ya mean? He's been siphoning funds from needy people for years. We can hang this guy out to dry.

Floyd slowly takes the paperwork to the shredder.

FLOYD

Let me tell you about what it means to be a company man, Earl. A company man does what he's told, when he's told, without asking why. Floyd destroys the evidence.

EARL

But...

FLOYD

You'll never be a company man. You got too much of...whatta they call it? Integrity.

EARL

I won't let you cover this up. I'll go to the press.

FLOYD

Except for Section 6103 that forbids all IRS employees from divulging any tax-related information. You'll end up in the slammer for that.

Floyd returns to his massive desk.

FLOYD

It was nice knowing ya. Now, clear out your desk before I call security.

INT. CUBICLE JUNGLE - DAY

Earl and Megan step out of Floyd's office -- stunned.

MEGAN

I didn't see that coming.

EARL

I can't lose this job. It's the only place where I can punish the rich and greedy with extreme prejudice and not damage my own karma.

MEGAN

This job's a real roller coaster. I dunno how many times I can go through this?

This strikes a chord with Earl.

EARL

That's it.

MEGAN

That's what?

EARL

Just a little something Dr. Truman slipped out at his interview.

Earl hurries off. Megan watches him go in dazed confusion.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. EARL'S CUBICLE - NEXT DAY

Megan finds Earl asleep at his desk with a severe case of bedhead. She holds a hot cuppa joe in her hands.

MEGAN

Tell me you weren't here all night.

EARL

Do you ever get that not so fresh feeling?

MEGAN

You look like you could use some hot coffee.

Earl smiles warmly at her cup.

MEGAN

This one's mine.

Earl holds up a folder.

EARL

I finally figured out what this is all about.

Megan sits down. Eager with anticipation.

EARL

Dr. Truman was audited two years ago. And given a clean bill of health despite all of his obvious misdealing.

MEGAN

Yahtzee!

(beat)

Who ran the audit?

EARL

Floyd's boss. And just before his big promotion too.

Kirstin pops her head over the partition. Filled with righteous indignation.

KIRSTIN

Why are you still here? Your getting fired is the best news I've heard since my mother died.

Earl shakes the folder of incriminating evidence.

EARL

Gimme a break. Anyone coulda walked into this trap.

KIRSTIN

Please. Why do you think I ducked out?

Kirstin smiles wickedly. Earl can't believe it.

KIRSTIN

Floyd says I can keep your temp once you're gone.

Megan looks at Earl fearfully. He's completely defeated.

EARL

I won't stand in her way.

MEGAN

(to Earl)

What did I ever do to you?

Kirstin burns from this insult. She drops behind her partition. Wendell approaches the cubicle.

WENDELL

Tough luck, Earl. Things won't be the same without you. Earl shakes Wendell's hand.

EARL

I'm really gonna miss you, Wendell. Compared to you, I've always felt good about myself.

WENDELL

Thanks.

EARL

There's gotta be some way to reveal this cover-up.

WENDELL

Better be careful. They'll jail you for violating Section 6103. It's their code of silence.

MEGAN

Does anyone not have a code around here?

EARL

Don't worry. I'll do a lot of stupid things to keep this job. But it all stops when the threat of anal rape rears its ugly head.

WENDELL

It's the perfect Catch 22. Only employees have access to evidence of corruption and the law says they can't do anything about it. Earl's eyes light up.

EARL

That's it!

Earl gives Wendell a big bear hug.

EARL

Wendell, you're the best.

WENDELL

(weakly)

I don't like being touched.

INT. FLOYD'S OFFICE - DAY

Floyd squares off against Earl and Megan.

FLOYD

Do I have to set you aflame to make you understand you're not welcome here?

EARL

You've got plenty of your own fires to stomp out, Smokey. Floyd picks up his phone.

FLOYD

That's a threat. And I've got it on tape. I'm calling security. Earl sits down confidently.

EARL

Go right ahead. The more the merrier.

Floyd stops in mid-dial.

FLOYD

What's going on? You should be afraid of me right now.

EARL

We both know I can't tell anyone about your little cover-up. But there's nothing to stop Megan. She's just a temp.

MEGAN

Just?

Floyd hangs up the phone. He attempts damage control.

FLOYD

You had me worried, Earl. Thought I was gonna lose my best auditor. But I knew you'd figger a way outta this one.

Floyd shakes Earl's hand vigorously.

FLOYD

Welcome back to the family. I just love happy endings, don't you? Now, if you'll excuse me...

EARL

Hold on. We still have Dr. Truman to deal with.

Floyd's face twists painfully.

FLOYD

What?

EARL

You heard me. I won't let this get swept under the rug.

FLOYD

Don't push this, Earl. Earl leans on his desk.

EARL

I gotta look myself in the mirror every morning. Preferably with my clothes on.

(beat)

And if I can't do that -- then I've got absolutely nothing going for me.

FLOYD

Come on. We've learned our lesson.  
Can't you just let it go.

EARL

You put me through hell. Now, it's  
your turn.

Floyd SIGHS. He might as well be talking to the wall.

FLOYD

Whatta I care? I was just following  
orders. I'll just sit back and  
watch the heads roll off the guys  
upstairs.

INT. CUBICLE JUNGLE - DAY

Earl and Megan exit Floyd's office. They execute a sloppy  
high-five.

MEGAN

We make a pretty good team.

EARL

It's like I looked deep into my  
bleak and pathetic existence and  
found a soulmate.

MEGAN

I've never met anyone like you.  
Someone willing to stick his neck  
out...no matter what. From now on,  
I'm gonna be just like you. Damn  
the consequences.

EARL

You're lying again, aren't you?  
Megan silently nods.

EARL

Now that I got my job back. All I  
gotta do is get laid. Megan looks  
around uncomfortably.

MEGAN

You're not coming onto me, are you?

EARL

(emphatically)

No!

(aside)

Not yet.

(MORE)

EARL (CONT'D)

(tersely)

At least, Teneaylle can't hurt me anymore.

MEGAN

Don't take this the wrong way. But you seem like the kinda guy who needs all the friends he can get.

EARL

I'm a lot pettier than I let on.

(beat)

Most people wouldn't think I'd have a homo for a friend. But we share a heritage of ridicule. The merciless teasing at school. Getting beaten up just for being different.

(repentantly)

I was a real jerk to those gay kids.

(beat)

But over time. Almost imperceptibly, I've become a fag stag.

MEGAN

Your secret's safe with me. But don't you miss him? Even a little?

EARL

Well, yeah. I can count my friends on one hand. Even after sticking it in a garbage disposal.

EXT. EARL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Teneaylle KNOCKS on Earl's door. No answer. He starts to slide the key under the door when Debbie shows up.

DEBBIE

So how are the love birds?

TENEAYLLE

Excuse me?

DEBBIE

In hindsight, it makes perfect sense. I've never seen Earl bring a woman into that apartment. Ever.

TENEAYLLE

What are you getting at?

DEBBIE

I'm just glad he found someone who can put up with him. You must be a real saint.

TENEAYLLE

(tersely)

Oh, I'm really something.

DEBBIE

Don't take it the wrong way. To each his own. That's my motto.

The elevator door opens and Earl steps out.

TENEAYLLE

So you don't think a woman could ever be interested in Earl?

Earl ducks back into the elevator to eavesdrop.

DEBBIE

Well, I'm sure there'd have to be somebody for him. Statistically-speaking. Maybe in a women's prison somewhere.

TENEAYLLE

I'll have you know that Earl's one of the sweetest men I've ever met.

DEBBIE

It's great that you sisters stick up for each other. No one else will do it. That's for sure.

The elevator alarm BUZZES. Earl can't believe his misfortune. He steps into the hall and reveals his presence.

DEBBIE

Hi, Earl. We were just talking about you.

Without Debbie seeing, Teneaylle pinches his nose and waves off her stankiness.

EARL

Really. What about?

DEBBIE

Oh, just girl talk. You know.

TENEAYLLE

Debbie's glad you're finally in a healthy relationship.

DEBBIE

Oh, yeah. I was sure you'd never find anybody. But honestly, you seem too crude to be gay.

EARL

I find it helps when I'm confronted with ignorance.

DEBBIE

I know just what you mean. Some people can be real dopes.

EARL

And stanky.

DEBBIE

Excuse me?

Earl puts his arm around Teneaylle and kisses his cheek.

EARL

It's a guy thing. You wouldn't understand.

Dazed and confused, Debbie enters her apartment.

EARL

What brings you back? Teneaylle holds up the key.

TENEAYLLE

I'm returning this. Don't worry, I washed it thoroughly.

Earl gingerly takes the key. Teneaylle hands him a folded newspaper.

TENEAYLLE

I also circled some Want Ads for you. A couple jobs don't even seem that humiliating.

EARL

Don't need it. I bullied Floyd into giving my old job back.

Teneaylle's eyes light up. He gives Earl a big hug.

TENEAYLLE

That's amazing! Good for you. Earl squirms uncomfortably.

EARL

Yeah, well.

TENEAYLLE

I can move back into my place. Thanks for letting me stay here. You never know who your friends are till you've seen 'em in their underwear.

Teneaylle won't let go. Earl doesn't know what to do.

EARL

Um, Teneaylle. I'm glad we're buds again and everything. I don't even mind the hugging part. But do you hafta squeeze my buns like that?

FADE TO BLACK.