

RESORTS

phi2634377@yahoo.ca

© 2007

FADE IN:

AN INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX. A HALLWAY. DAY.

FERN and RAY are standing outside BEN's office.

FERN pounds on the door three times.

FERN
[Loudly] Ben, open up.

There is no response.

FERN tries to open the door but it's locked, so she takes a hairpin out of her hair and starts picking the lock.

RAY
Are you sure that's a good
idea?

FERN
[Without looking up] You
know, sometimes I forget
you're new around here.

The lock clicks.

RAY
[Backing away] I'll just wait
over there.

FERN
Right.

FERN enters the office.

BEN is sleeping on a couch. There is a stack of files on the desk and a couple of DVD's.

FERN walks to the desk and starts flipping through the files.

She picks out a few files and takes one of the discs.

As FERN is leaving, the alarm clock on the side table near the couch where BEN is sleeping goes off.

FERN is startled but quickly recovers.

She calmly exits the office, and closes the door behind her.
The alarm is still sounding.

FERN hands RAY the files and the DVD.

FERN
[Without stopping][Casually]
There you go.

RAY
[Following FERN] Thanks. Um,
Ben's okay with you doing
stuff like this right?

FERN
More or less.

RAY
Okay, now I'm worried.

FERN
Relax; just do your job and
you'll be fine.

RAY
Right.

[Glances at a file] Wow.

FERN
Nice huh?

RAY
Yeah. It looks like you
guys've been working on this
for months.

FERN
Well we're good. And Ben
already had most of it
figured out.

RAY
Then why was he here all
night?

FERN

Because he's a details guy
and he likes this project.

RAY

It is pretty cool.

FERN

Got that right.

RAY continues toward a flight of stairs while FERN enters their office.

She sits down at her desk, takes out her cellphone, and makes a call.

FERN waits a few moments and then leaves a message.

FERN

Hey it's me; you were right.
I'll keep an eye on things
and give you a call if
anything else happens.

FERN ends the call and starts working at her computer.

A few moments later there is a knock at the door and she looks up.

BEN is standing in the doorway.

FERN

[Grins] Hey, you're in early.

BEN

[Smiles] You broke into my
office again didn't you?

FERN

Ray needed the files and they
were on your desk which is in
your office so yeah.

BEN

Okay, thanks.

FERN

No problem. You look awful.

BEN

I'll be all right. I'm going out for coffee now so can I get you anything?

FERN

No, I'm good. But if they have any fresh bagels feel free to buy me one.

BEN

Right. I'll be back in ten.

[Walks away]

FERN

Thanks.

[Loudly] And if they have any raspberry Danishes that'd be good too.

BEN

[Comes back to the door] And how would you like your coffee?

FERN

One cream, two sugars.

BEN

Got it.

[Takes a step and then stops]

By the way, do you have any plans tonight?

FERN

You're not my type and I'm not covering for you again.

BEN

[Sighs] Right.

FERN grins as BEN walks away.

A HOTEL BALLROOM. NIGHT.

A large group of people is milling around.

BEN is standing by a table of refreshments drinking a glass of punch. He looks bored.

CECIL walks over to him.

CECIL

Couldn't get Fern to come?

BEN

What're you talking about I love these parties.

CECIL

[Chuckles] Don't we all.

BEN

Have you looked at the blueprints I sent over?

CECIL

Actually I just got back this afternoon so I'm not really sure what's going on around here.

BEN

You've been out of town?

CECIL

No one told you?

BEN

No one said anything.

CECIL

I told my secretary to let everyone know where I was.

BEN

I never got the message.

CECIL

Figures; new secretary.

BEN

Oh. I guess you'll be on the phone all day tomorrow apologizing to everyone.

CECIL

Yeah. Anyway I've been in Asia for the past month checking out project proposals and that sort of thing. Actually there are a couple I'd like you to take a look at if you've got the time.

BEN

When's the deadline?

CECIL

A couple of months from now but I'd like to get all the details worked out as soon as possible; I really hate leaving things till the last minute.

BEN

Yeah. I think we can handle it.

CECIL

That's great. I'll send you the specs and everything else tomorrow.

BEN

You've already got sketches?

CECIL

Yeah, I got our architects started on them while I was over there.

BEN

Are you sure you're not in a hurry?

CECIL

I'm sure. I just thought I'd try to get ahead of the competition. Not that I'm worried or anything; I'm just being prudent.

BEN

With the architects you've got I think we'll be all right.

CECIL

Then how do explain that resort?

BEN

That's what the blueprints are about. I think Howard looked through the sketches again so we're going with the original proposal.

CECIL

Wait. So you finished the blueprints for that shoebox design and then you had to go back and draw up the blueprints for the good one?

BEN

Yeah. That's why I asked about it.

CECIL

No wonder you looked tired.

BEN

Thanks.

CECIL

Don't mention it.

BEN

So I guess you were out of town when the merger was finalized.

CECIL

Sort of. Howard started working on the deal six months ago so everything was pretty much done before I left.

Actually most of the issues were resolved in a few weeks and everything since then's just been paperwork. That's why I was spending so much time on the West Coast.

BEN

I was wondering what that was all about.

CECIL

And that was the easy part. We picked up a bunch of executives in the merger and they're all accountants.

BEN

All of them?

CECIL

Yup. Howard thinks we need to improve our "financial discipline" and he's the boss.

BEN

So you didn't bother adding any architects or engineers to the board?

CECIL

Nope.

BEN

Great. But at least Bob's got some company now.

CECIL

I hadn't thought of that. This is really bad.

BEN

Yeah, right now I wouldn't even mind a couple of corporate lawyers.

CECIL

Thanks.

BEN

Don't mention it.

CECIL

Yeah. But seriously, things are going to change around here. These new guys really know how to take apart financial documents, and when they find anomalies they take apart whoever's responsible for them. That's what Howard was looking for when he started all this, so I'd be careful.

BEN

My books are in order but thanks for the warning.

CECIL

I hope it helps.

HOWARD and KATE walk over to BEN and CECIL.

HOWARD

Hey Ben! I just had a look at the new plans and they look fantastic; great work.

BEN

Thank you sir, I'm glad you like them.

HOWARD

[To KATE] See, I told you he was easy to get along with.

KATE

Thanks Howard.

HOWARD

[Chuckles][To BEN] Ben, allow me to introduce our new CFO, Kate Mitchells.

BEN

Pleased to meet you.

[Shakes hands with KATE]

KATE

Likewise.

HOWARD

She came over in the merger a few weeks ago so she'll be checking in with you sometime just to make sure you know what's going on.

Anyway, you three chat. And try the shrimp.

HOWARD walks away.

KATE

[To BEN] So Howard tells me you've been working with this company for a few years now.

BEN

Yeah, one office complex and a couple of skyscrapers so far.

KATE

That's impressive. And now
you've got a luxury resort on
the drawing board.

BEN

Right. It's a little
different but change is good.

CECIL's cellphone starts ringing.

He takes it out of his pocket and checks the display.

CECIL

Um, I'm really sorry but I
have to take this. Excuse
me.

CECIL walks away and starts talking on the phone.

There is a pause in the conversation.

BEN

We already had a finalized
blueprint.

KATE

It wasn't what we needed.

BEN

You're an accountant, not an
engineer. Stop messing
around with things you don't
understand.

KATE

This is a business venture,
not a design study. That
makes me the expert here.

BEN

If you want to settle a score
with me be an adult and do it
on your own time.

KATE

If that's what this was about
you'd already be fired.

BEN

So you're trying to throw me
off schedule just for the fun
of it?

KATE

I don't have to explain
myself to you.

BEN

If you pull another stunt
like that I'll drop this
project.

KATE

That's not much of a threat.

BEN

Because it's not a threat;
it's a statement.

KATE

Are you trying to issue some
sort of ultimatum?

BEN

Just stay out of my way.

KATE

I'll be at your office
tomorrow morning, 9 AM.

KATE walks away.

AN INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX. A HALLWAY. DAY.

KATE walks up a flight of stairs and heads down the hall towards
BEN's office.

FERN sees KATE and greets her.

FERN

Good morning Ms. Mitchells.
Ben told me you were coming
this morning but he had

another meeting to attend so
I'll be filling in.

KATE

That's fine.

FERN

Great. We can talk in his
office.

FERN opens the door, KATE enters, and FERN follows and closes
the door behind them.

KATE

Did Ben tell you why I wanted
to meet with him?

FERN

Yes, he said that you've been
reviewing your company's
accounting operations and
wanted to make sure that
everything was in order on
our end.

KATE

[Taking a seat on the couch]
That's right. I've gone
through our records and I have
to say that I'm really
impressed with the work your
company's done in the past
and I hope you keep up the
good work.

FERN

[Taking a chair opposite the
couch] I'm pleased to hear
you say that. We've always
enjoyed working with your
company.

KATE

We try to be accommodating.
The only issue I need to
discuss with you right now is

the estimate associated with
the new design.

FERN

Right. We did our best to
stay close to the original
estimate and all things
considered I believe we were
fairly successful.

KATE

Actually, a lot of my people
are worried about the cost
overrun and after I looked at
the numbers myself I had some
concerns too.

FERN

We know the main building
will be somewhat more
expensive than we
anticipated, but the façade
in the revised design is made
up of over two thousand
individual components which
have to be assembled on-site,
as we outlined in the notes
we sent along with the new
models.

KATE

I read those notes, and none
of the components you plan to
manufacture is exactly cheap.

FERN

We're aware of that, but this
structure is extremely
complicated from an
engineering standpoint. We
actually had to produce a few
panels just to confirm that
it was feasible.

KATE

I appreciate that, but the
profit margin on this project

was fairly slim to begin with and I'm not sure I can make the numbers work with these additional costs.

FERN

We appreciate that and we knew that cost would be an issue, so we studied several alternatives and concluded that this design is the most cost effective way to execute this building. In fact it's the only way.

KATE

Accountants hear that sort of thing from engineers all the time, but we've found that if we insist that they meet cost projections they almost always find a solution.

FERN

And I'd love to be able to find a solution, but our original estimate was based on the original design. With the entirely new drawings your company sent over last week we had to change a lot of things and unfortunately that changed the price tag.

KATE

So you really don't think you can cut costs any further?

FERN

I'm afraid not.

KATE

I've spoken with some engineers and they told me that the paint-on fireproofing material you intend to use is considerably

more expensive than the conventional spray-on type used in most buildings of this sort.

FERN

Then you also know that the paint-on type offers superior performance and that's why we decided to use it.

KATE

But it isn't required to satisfy government building regulations and given the budget constraints it's the best place to cut costs.

FERN

That's probably true, but safety isn't a luxury.

KATE

The width of the emergency stairwells is already well in excess of minimum requirements and the secondary support structure's rock solid. This building is safe enough as it is.

FERN

And the paint-on fireproofing will make it even safer.

KATE

[Pauses] I don't want to seem blunt, but if you can't get back to the original estimate we'll find another firm to work with.

FERN

Of course. I appreciate your candor.

KATE

Not at all. Well, I have some other appointments to keep. It's been a pleasure speaking with you.

FERN

Likewise.

FERN and KATE shake hands.

FERN and KATE get up and start walking to the door.

FERN

If there's anything else please don't hesitate to call.

KATE

I'll keep that in mind.

KATE exits the office.

FERN watches KATE for a moment and then walks to BEN's desk, picks up the telephone, and makes a call.

FERN

Yeah, it was pretty bad.

[Laughs] Yeah.

[Concerned] Yeah, how'd you know?

Right.

Whoa, are you sure about that?

BEN walks into the office talking on his cellphone.

BEN

It's legal and it'll get us close to the estimate. She's right.

FERN hangs up the phone and BEN closes his cellphone.

FERN

But for a building like this
I'd feel more comfortable
with the stuff we're using
now.

BEN

I know, but if this is how it
has to be then we don't have
a choice.

FERN

We could always quit.

BEN

Not this time.

FERN

So you'd rather do
substandard work?

BEN

It'll be fine.

FERN

Then why did you want to go
with the paint-on
fireproofing in the first
place?

BEN

That's irrelevant. The
spray-on stuff can get the
job done so that's what we'll
go with.

FERN

It's a compromise and you
know it.

BEN

It's a design tradeoff.
There's a difference.

FERN

I don't want to work that way
and neither do you.

BEN

And what if we lose this contract?

FERN

We've got other projects in the pipeline; we'll survive.

BEN

I don't want to walk away from this one.

FERN

And she knows that. Don't let her get to you Ben.

BEN

[Pauses] This is non-negotiable for you isn't it?

FERN

Yeah, and it is for you too.

BEN

[Takes a breath] Okay, we're out.

FERN

I'll call her this afternoon and tell her the good news.

BEN

Thanks.

FERN

That's what I'm here for.

FERN slaps BEN on the shoulder and walks out of the office.

AN UPSCALE CAFÉ. NIGHT.

BEN is sitting at a table drinking a cup of black coffee.

KATE sits down at the table and signals to a WAITRESS.

The WAITRESS walks to the table.

KATE
I'll have an espresso.

WAITRESS
Coming right up.

The WAITRESS walks away.

BEN
What're you doing here?

KATE
Some people try to deal with
adversity; then there are
people like you.

BEN
Fern left a message with your
office. We don't have
anything to discuss.

KATE
It's possible that there's a
good reason for this need to
avoid problems instead of
dealing with them, but I
doubt it.

BEN
And if you're thinking about
interfering with any future
projects I'll drop those too.

KATE
It's more likely that people
like that are just lazy or
scared, and either way
they're cowards.

BEN
Frankly I'd like to see you
explain that to Howard and
everyone else at your
company.

KATE

And that's why I think
they're absolutely pathetic.

BEN

I'd tell you to leave Lenny
and Val alone too, but I'm
pretty sure even you can
figure that out.

The WAITRESS returns with KATE's espresso.

KATE

Thanks a lot.

WAITRESS

You're welcome.

The WAITRESS walks away.

There is a brief pause in the conversation.

BEN

What're you still doing here?

KATE

I want to make sure we're
clear about the protocols
before construction starts
but I've got a bunch of
meetings this week so this is
the only time we have to
talk.

BEN

I've already quit.

KATE

You stated your intention to
quit but I haven't agreed to
anything.

BEN

I don't need your permission.

KATE

And I don't need to waste time getting someone else up to speed.

BEN

That's your fault and your problem.

KATE

We both know you can't turn your back on this job.

BEN

I have other things to work on.

KATE

You didn't want this one for the money so stop acting like you did.

BEN

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

KATE

I can tell when you're lying.

BEN

You don't know me as well as you think. And you have no idea how things get built so stop acting like you do.

KATE

If it wasn't for me this project would be a manufactured waste of time. The design change was absolutely necessary and you know it.

BEN

Of course I do; it was completely obvious from the start.

KATE

Then what's your problem?

BEN

What do you think?

KATE

Two years and it's still like
yesterday to you?

BEN

That's not what I meant -

KATE

Then why does it sound like
it?

BEN

Because you never listen.
You just do whatever you want
and leave the people around
you to deal with the
consequences.

KATE

And you're better than that?

BEN

People change.

KATE

Yeah, we do.

BEN

Are you admitting something?

KATE

I have nothing to apologize
for.

BEN

That's not what it sounds
like.

KATE

So this is about what
happened.

BEN

[Pauses briefly] I've already quit. You can leave now.

KATE

You tried to quit. According to the records you're still the lead contractor.

BEN

Then your files are out of date.

KATE

The accounting system's fairly automated so all I need you to do is make sure the numbers you send over are accurate. And if you can back them up with some documentation that'd be good too.

BEN

You aren't listening.

KATE

And you've got some work to catch up on; we'll need at least a preliminary construction schedule in a few days. Unless you really are afraid of something.

BEN

Your accounting department's set up so you can track and verify every single expenditure from start to finish?

KATE

Yeah. That's how things are supposed to be.

BEN

It's insane. Do you have any idea how complicated these projects get?

KATE

I was vice-president of logistics at that automaker...which one was it again?

BEN

This is different.

KATE

You mean simpler. Show some respect.

BEN

Respect is earned.

KATE

[Sarcastically] Wow, you must be in a really bad mood.

[Normal tone] But if I was on your diet I'd be pretty temperamental too.

BEN

There's nothing wrong with the way I eat.

KATE

Looked in a mirror lately?

BEN

[Sarcastically] You know, I've really missed you.

KATE

I know. And now that we're clear about everything you proceed as planned.

BEN

You're approving the revised budget?

KATE

I signed off on it this
afternoon.

BEN

[Pauses briefly] Now all you
need's an engineer.

BEN gets out of his chair, takes some bills out of his wallet,
drops them on the table, and walks out of the café.

KATE watches him leave.

AN INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX. BEN'S OFFICE. DAY.

BEN is at his desk typing at the computer.

RAY knocks on the door.

BEN looks up.

BEN

C'mon in. What can I do for
you?

RAY

[Enters] I just wanted to let
you know that I can get these
panels made on time. If
that's what you're worried
about then there's no reason
to drop this project.

BEN

That doesn't have anything to
do with it. And if I didn't
think you could do the job I
wouldn't have hired you.

RAY

Thanks boss. So should I
keep the panels we've already
made?

BEN

How many are there?

RAY

About a dozen, but we might need the space once we get going on some of our other contracts.

BEN

Then keep them there for now but if they start getting in the way you can toss 'em.

RAY

Okay.

RAY leaves.

A few moments later FERN storms into BEN's office, slams the door behind her, and walks up to BEN's desk.

FERN

[Annoyed] Kate just called to ask for a progress report. What's going on?

BEN

What'd you tell her?

FERN

I said I'd have to call her back but she could tell I had no idea what she was talking about.

BEN

Same here.

FERN

She also said that she authorized the revised budget and discussed their accounting procedures with you last night.

BEN

We spoke but I told her we were walking away from this.

FERN

And that's it?

BEN

Pretty much.

FERN

Whatever. If you don't want to tell me what's going on that's fine but I thought we were better friends than that.

BEN

She's been setting me up since she found out about the merger.

FERN

What?

BEN

[Pauses briefly] She knew that I'd want to work on this thing no matter what, and that I'd figure out the optimal design even if it wasn't going to be built that way. That's why she sent us the revisions at the last minute.

FERN

So she gave us just enough time to get everything done but kept a deadline that would maximize the amount of stress it would put on you.

BEN

Yeah. And then she said all that stuff about the budget yesterday to see if she could make me compromise it.

FERN
That's actually kind of
clever.

BEN
Kate's good.

FERN
Yeah. Um, sorry about all
that.

BEN
No problem.

FERN starts walking out of the office but then stops.

FERN
[Turning around] But if you
wanted to keep working on
this she'd go along with
everything right?

BEN
That's not the point.

FERN
I know, but she did approve
the budget so we'd be good to
go.

BEN
That's what she said but I
don't trust her.

FERN
Yeah, I guess you're right.
It's too bad though; this was
a really cool project.

BEN
Yeah.

THE STREET OUTSIDE AN APARTMENT BUILDING. NIGHT.

KATE gets out of a taxi holding a briefcase, slams the door, and pays the driver.

She walks to the entrance as the taxi drives away.

KATE sees BEN by the entrance.

BEN sees KATE and walks up to her.

KATE
So you're stalking me now?

BEN
You want to talk or not?

KATE
You could use some fresh air.

KATE starts walking down the street and BEN walks beside her.

BEN
If you want to get this thing done you need me to stay on board.

KATE
I can manage with or without you.

BEN
So you've got someone else lined up?

KATE
I knew you'd come to your senses so I didn't bother.

BEN
If you hadn't started all of this everything would've been okay.

KATE
So this is all my fault.

BEN

You made this a lot more complicated than it had to be.

KATE

I didn't have a choice.

BEN

What's that supposed to mean?

KATE

I needed to know if I could trust you and I didn't have a lot of time to find out.

BEN

You actually thought -

KATE

I didn't know; and I couldn't take the risk.

BEN

Then why didn't you just find someone else to work with?

KATE

Because I knew you had what we needed. This wasn't personal.

BEN

Doesn't seem that way.

KATE

Whatever. Do you want to work on this or not?

BEN

Are you going to keep getting in the way?

KATE

We won't have any problems as long as everything stays on spec, on time, and on budget.

BEN

I don't want you looking over
my shoulder.

KATE

Did you hear what I just
said?

BEN

Yeah, and it was pretty
evasive.

KATE

So you don't trust me but you
think I'll keep the promises
I make?

BEN

I just wanted clarification.

KATE

Fine. I'll avoid you and
everything associated with
you wherever and whenever
possible. That clear enough?

BEN

Yeah.

There is a short pause in the conversation.

KATE stops walking and BEN stops beside her.

KATE

How did you find out where I
live?

BEN

Same way you found out where
I drink.

KATE

My secretary isn't that
gullible.

BEN

Neither's mine, but you're an excellent liar.

KATE

What about you?

BEN

Dishonesty's contagious.

KATE

Apology accepted. Stay away from my people and I'll stay away from yours.

BEN

Fine.

KATE

Then I think we're good.

BEN

Yeah. I'll call your office tomorrow to let you know where we are with everything.

KATE

Okay. Good night.

BEN

Good night.

KATE turns and starts walking back to the apartment building while BEN continues walking down the street.

He looks at his wristwatch and flags down a taxi.

A taxi pulls up next to him and BEN gets in.

A SPORTS BAR.

A hockey game is being shown on the TV's in the bar.

BEN enters and walks over to the table where LENNY is sitting.

LENNY

It's about time.

BEN
Glad to see you too.

BEN pours himself a glass of beer from the pitcher on the table.

He drinks about half the glass right away.

LENNY looks at him.

BEN notices.

BEN
Just thirsty.

LENNY
So how's work?

BEN
Good. You?

LENNY
Same.

Mom call you yet?

BEN
Yup. Left a bunch of
messages on my voicemail.

LENNY
Told you it was important.

BEN
I was working.

LENNY
Sure. Have you called her
back yet?

BEN
No, I've been busy. She
called you about it didn't
she?

LENNY

No, dad did. She's been talking to him about it nonstop.

BEN

She's that upset over one dinner?

LENNY

She wouldn't be if you showed up once in a while.

BEN

It's only food.

LENNY

Tell that to mom.

BEN

I will.

LENNY

No you won't.

BEN

You think I'm scared?

LENNY

I think you know you're in trouble. That's why you haven't called.

BEN

I've been busy.

LENNY

Sure.

BEN

I have.

LENNY

All right I believe you.

BEN

Good.

LENNY

[Pauses] So when are you
gonna call?

BEN

Later.

LENNY

Right. I'll cover for you.

BEN

You're the best.

LENNY

Yeah.

There is a pause in the conversation as they continue watching
the game.

BEN

Kate's back.

LENNY

[Pauses briefly] Don't let
her get to you.

BEN

That's what Fern said.

LENNY

It's good advice.

There is a pause in the conversation.

BEN

I think everything's going to
be all right.

LENNY

Be careful.

BEN

I know. But it wasn't all
bad.

LENNY

So some of it was.

BEN

You don't have to remind me.

LENNY

Just checking.

BEN

I'll be all right.

LENNY

A lot of my students think that before they have to evacuate the lab.

BEN

Thank you professor.

LENNY

Don't mention it.

BEN

So everything's good with Val and the kids?

LENNY

Well Pete came down with the flu a couple of weeks ago and passed it on to Jake, but they got better after a few days and hardly missed any school.

BEN

Glad to hear it.

LENNY

But then Val caught it and she took almost twice as long to recover.

BEN

Really?

LENNY

Yeah, she hardly ever gets sick but when she does it's

like everything goes wrong.
I've never seen so much vomit
in my entire life.

BEN

You wouldn't think someone
her size would have much to
throw up.

LENNY

I know, and she doesn't even
eat that much. The human
stomach's an amazing thing.

BEN

But everyone's okay now?

LENNY

Yeah, they're good, but I've
been feeling kinda sluggish
the past few days.

BEN

Maybe you should go home and
get some rest.

LENNY

Okay mom.

A COFFEE SHOP. DAY.

FERN and RAY are sitting at a table having lunch.

FERN

I guess you could try telling
him that losing a day threw
off the entire schedule. He
won't buy it, but you could
try.

RAY

I'm glad you think this is
funny.

FERN

Well I told you not talk to him. If you just did your job like I said you could blame everything on the usual production bugs and everything would be okay, but instead you went in and shot your mouth off.

RAY

Okay, I'll never question your wisdom again but that doesn't help me now.

FERN

You're beyond help.

RAY

[Pauses] If I hire some extra personnel I can get back on schedule. I might even be able to pull ahead.

FERN

Great idea, but most people don't work for free.

RAY

But at least that's something.

FERN

Yeah. But still.

RAY

Yeah.

FERN

You want me to break the news to Ben don't you?

RAY

Well now that you mention it

-

FERN

I'll cover for you this time,
but you'll owe me.

RAY

Anything you want. Just name
it.

FERN

Well now that you mention it,
I remember you said your
sister works at a car
dealership.

RAY

Yeah, she's a mechanic. Just
bring your car in anytime.

FERN

That's not exactly what I had
in mind.

RAY

Oh. I'll get you the
brochures tomorrow.

FERN

Actually I've already got my
eye on something.

RAY

Okay, then I'll set
everything up with Gail so
that when you meet with the
salespeople they'll know
what's going on. Depending
on the model the employee
discount's around a thousand
off the sticker.

FERN

Thanks. I'm really glad
we're working together.

RAY

Yeah.

FERN

[Looks at the front door] We should go.

RAY
We just got here.

FERN
Don't turn around, but Kate just came in.

RAY
Who?

FERN
Oh, right, you don't know her. Long story short, we've gotta get outta here.

RAY
But I like it here.

FERN
Do you mind eating alone?

RAY
No.

FERN
Then I'll see you later.

FERN wraps up her sandwich, picks up her cup of coffee, and walks toward the door with her head turned away from KATE, who is ordering at the counter.

Just as she is almost out the door, KATE has her order in a take-out package and walks up to her.

KATE
Fern?

FERN
[Turns around] Oh, hi Kate!
It's really good to see you.

KATE
You too. Are you heading back to the office already?

FERN

Yeah, I've got some work to catch up on.

KATE

Great. I'm on my way there so we can talk on the way.

FERN

Great.

FERN and KATE walk out of the coffee shop.

KATE

So I guess Ben told you we sorted things out.

FERN

Actually he didn't say anything about that but I sort of suspected. And I'm sorry about the way things went at the office the other day.

KATE

That was my fault; I had some doubts about Ben and I took it out on you. It was just business, but still.

FERN

That's all right. So everything's all right with you two?

KATE

Yeah, I think so. We talked some things over and we agreed on how things are going to work from now on.

FERN

That's good.

KATE

Yeah. [Pauses] You're probably wondering why I'm dropping by.

FERN

Well, we don't get a lot of visits from CFOs.

KATE

It's not like that. One of the guys at my company just said that your assembly line was one of the best in the business so if I wanted to see how things work that was the place to go.

FERN

Wow, we usually don't get that kind of respect from developers.

KATE

This guy's kind of old fashioned. Actually I think you know him. Do you remember Cecil York?

FERN

Big guy, glasses, gray hair?

KATE

Yeah, that's him. He's kind of condescending but he knows what he's talking about so I thought I'd take his advice.

FERN

You don't like him?

KATE

No one does.

AN INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX. THE SHOP FLOOR.

About a dozen assembly line workers are at their stations turning out finished panels of glass.

FERN and KATE enter and put on hard hats and safety glasses.

KATE

So this is where it all comes from.

FERN

Yup. We're pretty good at this stuff but that design change was somethin' else. Our new guy wasn't even sure we could make the panels because we'd have to bend the glass so much during manufacturing, but Ben took that into account when he worked out the basic design so we just got by. But it had me kinda scared for a while.

KATE

Sorry.

FERN

Actually I kind of liked that.

KATE

Do you still go skydiving?

FERN

Only on weekends.

[Points to the right] Those are the computer controlled milling units. Once we get the schematics done we just feed in the data and they take care of the rest.

KATE

Cool. It must save a lot of labor.

FERN

That's what I've been told
but I've never actually seen
it done manually.

KATE

Really?

FERN

Yeah, everything was
computerized before I ever
got into this field. Back in
college we used to crack
jokes about the old guys that
did things without computer
models, but it must've been
pretty cool to watch a bunch
of craftsmen take some raw
materials and turn them into
finished components.

KATE

This is where Ben used to
start lecturing me about the
art and science of
engineering.

FERN

[Smiles] I guess engineers
can get a little sentimental
about this stuff.

KATE

Just a little.

FERN

[Points back to the milling
unit] Watch this.

KATE looks over and watches as the technicians monitor a piece
of metal being machined inside it.

The component is completed moments later and the technicians
take it out and examine it.

KATE

Wow.

FERN

Yeah, we think it's pretty impressive.

KATE's cellphone starts ringing. She checks the display.

KATE

[Muttering] Great.

[To FERN] I'm really sorry but I've gotta get going.

FERN

That's all right; this about concludes the tour anyway.

KATE

Thanks, I really appreciate everything.

FERN

No problem.

FERN and KATE put the safety equipment back and exit the shop.

FERN walks KATE to the exit.

KATE

Um, I know this is none of my business, but how's Ben doing these days?

FERN

He's good. I mean he still puts in more hours than he should sometimes but he's okay.

KATE

That's good. I'll see you around.

FERN

Yeah, drop by any time.

KATE exits the building.

FERN walks up the stairs to her office.

She enters and finds a large courier envelope on her desk.

FERN opens the envelope and quickly skims the contents.

She puts all the materials back in the envelope and walks to BEN's office.

FERN enters the office and sees BEN sitting at his desk.

FERN

[Slightly startled] Oh, hi, I
thought you went out for
lunch.

BEN

I was going to but I wanted
to finish some paperwork.
What's that?

FERN

[Hands BEN the envelope] Just
a communications package from
the concrete guys. I think
I'll go over there to take a
look around.

BEN

[Looking through the
envelope] It looks like a
pretty routine plant upgrade.

FERN

I know, but they said it's
okay if we want to drop by
and I'd feel a lot better
knowing that everything's in
order. Concrete's pretty
important.

BEN

Yeah. As long as you're
going there can you double-

check that they got our order right?

FERN

Sure. By the way, Kate came by just now.

BEN

Really?

FERN

Yeah, she wanted to have a look around the shop so I gave her a tour.

BEN

Oh. She probably got the idea from Cecil.

FERN

I guess. And Ray wanted me to tell you he needs to hire a few people to make sure we can deliver all the panels on time.

BEN

Okay.

FERN

[Looks at her watch] I'll probably leave in a few minutes so after I'm done at the plant I'll call it a day.

BEN

All right. I'll see you tomorrow.

FERN

Really?

BEN

You've always set your own hours.

FERN

I know, but I thought you'd be a little less lenient with this project.

BEN

We're ahead of schedule and everything's under control. And I'm going to leave early too.

FERN

Got plans?

BEN

Yeah.

BEN'S APARTMENT. THE DEN. NIGHT.

BEN is sitting in a recliner watching television. His cellphone is on the coffee table.

After a while he picks up the cellphone and starts dialing a number but then pauses and closes the cellphone.

BEN'S APARTMENT. THE KITCHEN.

A large steak lands in a frying pan and starts sizzling.

BEN takes a spatula and centers it in the frying pan. He then goes back to making a salad.

A SKYSCRAPER. A CONFERENCE ROOM. DAY.

BEN is giving a presentation to HOWARD, CECIL, KATE, BOB, and several other executives.

BEN

As a result, all of the buildings are going to be equipped with a geothermal heat pump to augment the usual HVAC systems. According to the computer models this should reduce

heating and air conditioning costs by about a third.

For hot water, the conventional boiler system will work in conjunction with a solar thermal installation. The system we've selected uses roof-mounted panels to drive a heat exchanger connected to the water tanks in the basement, and based on projected water usage the breakeven point should be somewhere in the seven to ten year range.

Finally, we plan to reduce construction time by installing the interior a little differently.

Instead of laying down flooring and putting up drywall, we'll be using prefabricated panels that can be attached directly to the frame of the building.

These panels are manufactured with insulation built-in, and come with modules for electrical wiring, ventilation ducts, plumbing, and computer networking where applicable. Based on our past experience with this system we believe we'll be able to finish the interior faster and with fewer personnel than would otherwise be possible.

And that about sums everything up, so if you have any questions I'd be happy to answer them.

BOB

Yeah, I like the geothermal idea but I was wondering about how the solar panels are going to affect the appearance of the buildings.

BEN

That actually had us worried too, but with our roof design everything looks completely seamless, just like in the architect's rendering.

HOWARD

And you're sure about the interior panels you want to use?

BEN

We've used them on our last five projects so we know what we're dealing with, and our clients are really happy with them too.

BOB

So you're sure about cost and quality control?

BEN

Definitely.

From a cost standpoint we benefit from economies of scale because they're produced on an assembly line, and the manufacturing precision is what you'd see in a luxury car so the finished result will be exactly what the architects specified.

BOB

And supply isn't an issue.

BEN

I've lined up four different suppliers and I've worked with all of them before, and so far they've always delivered.

But in the event that any of them do fall behind schedule I have options in all of their contracts for additional units at a discount, so we'll have the supplies we need no matter what.

CECIL

[To HOWARD] That's why I love this guy: when he plays it safe he still adds a margin of safety.

HOWARD

[Grins] Yeah.

[To BEN] And I guess if we want to remodel the interior later on this design'll make it a lot easier.

BEN

Right. All you'll have to do is rearrange the panels and modules.

HOWARD

That sounds good. What do you think Kate?

KATE

From an accounting standpoint this plan looks workable, but any time you modify your assembly process you have to expect some problems to occur.

HOWARD

So you think it's a bad idea.

KATE

I think it's a risk but it's still worth taking. We just have to exercise some caution.

HOWARD

[To BEN] That means she'll be looking over your shoulder.

There are some laughs around the table.

HOWARD

[Looking around the table]
All right, any other questions?

Okay, then I guess that's it. Ben, whenever you're ready, start putting this thing together. And thanks again for coming out here.

BEN

Always a pleasure.

BEN gathers up his notes and CECIL remains seated while the rest of the executives leave.

When they have all left, CECIL turns to BEN.

CECIL

Good ole Bob huh?

BEN

Great guy.

CECIL

Well, at least you don't have to see him every day.

BEN

Yeah. But thanks for leaving me with Kate the other night and then sending her over to the shop.

CECIL

Yeah, sorry about that.

BEN

No problem, but if you're going to tell her to visit again I'd appreciate some warning.

CECIL

I told my secretary to call ahead.

BEN

I never got the message.

CECIL

[Sighs] I've been hearing that a lot lately.

BEN

It might be time to hire a new secretary. Again.

CECIL

I did.

BEN

Oh. I guess good help really is hard to find.

CECIL

I'm starting to think so. I don't suppose you got the info on the project proposals yet?

BEN

Actually we got the package a couple of days ago. Fern's working on the models now so you should get the first

preliminary blueprint next week.

CECIL

That's great. Um, I don't suppose you could meet with Kate some time?

BEN

[Looks at his watch] I've got to get back to the office but I've got a few minutes.

CECIL

I don't mean right now. Just sometime. At your office.

BEN

Why would I want to do that?

CECIL

[Pauses briefly] I'm not afraid of her, but if you could keep her out of the way I'd appreciate it.

BEN

You think she's angling for your job.

CECIL

Let's just say that I'm not sure that she's not.

BEN

You're overreacting.

CECIL

You don't know that.

BEN

She just got here and Howard trusts you so you don't have anything to worry about. If she's going to replace anyone it's Bob.

CECIL

[Looks at BEN] You're afraid
of her.

BEN

That's not gonna to work.

A SMALL COFFEE SHOP.

BEN is standing on the street outside the coffee shop.

He looks around and sees KATE getting out of a taxi.

KATE pays the driver and then walks over to BEN.

KATE

What's going on?

BEN

Cecil thinks you're trying to
take his job.

KATE

Okay. Is that it?

BEN

Yeah, but let's go inside so
I can tell him we talked
about the project.

KATE

You can lie.

BEN

I'd rather be honest.

KATE

You mean somewhat honest.

BEN

Yeah.

KATE

[Looks into the coffee shop]
All right.

BEN enters the coffee shop and KATE follows. There is no lineup.

KATE looks at her watch.

BEN orders first.

CASHIER

Hi, how may I help you?

BEN

Hi, I'll have a medium coffee and a plain bagel.

KATE

[Over BEN's shoulder] And I'll have the same.

CASHIER

[Confused] So is this one order?

BEN

No.

KATE

Yes.

BEN

[To KATE] Wait your turn.

KATE

You invited me here.

BEN

[To the CASHIER] It's one order.

CASHIER

That'll be \$5.99.

BEN takes out his wallet as the CASHIER gets the order.

The CASHIER returns, takes the money, and gives BEN the coffees and bagels.

CASHIER

There you go, have a nice
day.

BEN

Thanks.

KATE immediately takes her coffee and takes a sip.

KATE

Stay on schedule and we won't
have a problem. Keep the
bagel.

KATE walks out of the coffee shop.

A SKYSCRAPER. KATE'S OFFICE.

KATE is typing at her computer. The sunset is visible through
the office windows.

She finishes and turns off the computer.

KATE sits back in her chair for a while.

She gets out of her chair and walks to the window.

KATE stares out at the view.

AN INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX. FERN'S OFFICE. NIGHT.

FERN is standing by the window talking on her cellphone. The
office door is closed.

FERN

So yeah, it was pretty bad.
But then a couple of days ago
he walks in and says we're
back on the project, and then
I saw her at the deli after
that and she acted like
everything was all right too.

A SUBURBAN HOUSE. THE MASTER BEDROOM.

VAL is lying in bed talking on the telephone. Her face is noticeably flushed. She is using the speakerphone function.

VAL

[Slightly weakly] I knew those two would sort things out as soon as Lenny told me he mentioned her.

FERN

[Over the telephone] He told Lenny?

VAL

Yeah, they went to a bar a few nights ago to watch the game. I meant to call you but I was still recovering. Or at least I thought I was.

FERN

Right. Do you need anything? I can run some errands and stuff.

VAL

Thanks, but Lenny already asked Ben to come over tomorrow.

FERN

Oh.

VAL

Yeah, I don't know how a guy who designs buildings can be so useless around the house. But if I pass out at least there's someone to get me to a hospital. Actually, right now I'm more worried about him.

FERN

You sound like Lenny.

VAL

Well there's a lot of history here and I'm not sure what it all means. And I'm not sure they do either.

FERN

You can renovate a building all you want, but at the end of the day its basic framework is what it is.

VAL

You think it's that simple?

FERN

With those two, yeah, but we should still keep an eye on things just to be on the safe side.

VAL

So you're worried too.

FERN

I just don't want to take any chances.

VAL

Now you sound like Lenny. But you have to admit that Kate had her reasons so it's not like she's evil or anything. You have to give her that much.

FERN

Yeah. You should've seen the look on Ben's face when I told him she came by. It was like college all over again.

VAL

Those were the days. Has he worked overnight since the last time you called?

FERN

I don't think so, but he seems more distracted than usual. But then again his complexion's clearing up so at least he looks better.

VAL

If it was anyone else I'd say he was paying more attention to his diet, but with Ben this is just confusing.

[Hears the front door][Quickly, quietly] I think Lenny's back from the pharmacy. I'll call you if I hear anything.

AN INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX. FERN'S OFFICE.

FERN

Right. I'll talk to you later.

FERN presses a button on the cellphone to end the call.

AN INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX. A CONFERENCE ROOM.

BEN and RAY are sitting at the conference table. There are computers and papers all over the table.

BEN

So how much longer will it take to finish the production run?

RAY

Two more weeks. We might even get ahead of schedule at this rate.

BEN

Okay. Jerry said he's cleared up the backlog on his assembly line but give him a

call tomorrow just to make
sure.

RAY

Okay.

FERN enters the room.

FERN

Did I miss anything?

BEN

No, we're pretty much done
here. Oh, I won't be in
tomorrow so if Howard calls
can you take care of it?

FERN

Sure. Taking a personal day?

BEN

No, Val's got the flu so
Lenny asked me to keep an eye
on her.

FERN

Oh, I guess it's flu season
again. Good luck.

BEN

You know, I build skyscrapers
for a living.

A SUBURBAN HOUSE. THE KITCHEN. DAY.

A pot overflows and some soup spills onto the stove top.

BEN quickly runs over to it, lifts up the top to let out the
steam, and wipes up the spilled soup with a towel.

LENNY and VAL are in the den, sitting on the sofa under a
blanket, watching television.

LENNY looks over to the kitchen.

LENNY

Everything all right in there?

BEN

[Calling from the kitchen]
Yeah.

LENNY

[To VAL] I told you this was a good idea.

VAL rolls her eyes.

She gets up and shuffles to the kitchen. She slumps down into a chair.

VAL

Listen Ben, I'm really sorry about this.

BEN

It's okay, I'm always happy to help.

VAL

Need a hand with anything?

BEN

[Pouring two bowls of soup]
I've got everything under control. Just promise you'll never get sick again.

VAL

So the boys gave you some trouble this morning?

BEN

[Setting down a bowl of soup]
They're just kids.

VAL

What'd they do?

BEN

It's like they don't even hear their alarm clocks and

then they waltz down here at 8:15 and act like it's Sunday brunch. I don't know how you get them to school on time.

VAL

[Drinking the soup] Welcome to my nightmare.

BEN

[Walking to the den with the other bowl of soup] How's the soup?

VAL

It's actually really good.

BEN

You sound surprised.

VAL

[Pauses briefly] I sound like that when I'm sick.

LENNY

[Takes the bowl from BEN and has a spoonful] Wow. Did you find a recipe or something?

BEN

I called mom last night.

LENNY

Just for the recipe?

BEN

I was apologizing about dinner but I figured as long as she was lecturing me I might as well take care of this too.

LENNY

You have great family values.

VAL

[Running past BEN and LENNY to the bathroom] I'm going to be sick.

BEN

[Notices LENNY looking at him] It's mom's recipe.

LENNY

Mom can cook.

BEN

I can cook.

LENNY

And I can fly.

BEN

You just said it was good.

LENNY

That was before it sent her running to the bathroom.

BEN

She was already throwing up before she drank the soup so it's not the soup.

LENNY

You don't know that.

BEN

But the odds are on my side.

LENNY

You're using a probability argument?

BEN

It's a valid approach.

LENNY

But it doesn't inspire a lot of confidence.

BEN

You really don't trust me do you?

LENNY

Not now.

BEN

I eat my own cooking all the time -

LENNY

No you don't.

BEN

Well I have been lately and I'm all right, so I think you can relax a little.

LENNY

I'll relax if I survive.

BEN

I forgot how argumentative you get when you're sick.

LENNY

Val hasn't thrown up in over two hours, but a few tablespoons of your concoction and she's back in business. Still think I'm overreacting?

BEN

My argument makes more sense.

LENNY

No it doesn't, and even if it does that doesn't mean it's right.

BEN

Then why aren't you throwing up?

LENNY

Give it time.

BEN

There's nothing wrong with
the soup.

LENNY

I really hope so.

BEN

And anyway you said only Val
was sick. What's your
excuse?

LENNY

I live with her.

VAL

[Shuffling back] I heard
that.

LENNY

I'm not blaming you dear, I'm
just stating a fact.

VAL

[Collapses onto the couch]
Something you'll live to
regret.

LENNY

I hope so. Do you feel
better now?

VAL

I didn't throw up; it was
just a false alarm.

BEN

[To LENNY] See, I can cook.

LENNY

It's mom's recipe.

A JAZZ CLUB. NIGHT.

KATE is sitting at the bar drinking a martini.

The group on stage is a trio consisting of a piano, bass, and drums. There is no vocalist.

The group finishes a song and then starts playing an arrangement of Gershwin's "Love Is Here To Stay".

KATE listens for about forty seconds and then puts the glass on the bar, drops a bill next to it, and quickly walks out of the club.

AN INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX. DAY.

KATE walks up a flight of stairs and down a hallway.

She stops at FERN's office and knocks on the door.

FERN

[Looking up] Hey, come on in.
Is something wrong?

KATE

[Entering] No, I just thought
I'd drop by and see how
things were going. So how's
everything going?

FERN

Great. I just checked in
with some of the contractors
and two days in they're still
on schedule, so, so far so
good.

KATE

That's good. Um, is Ben in
his office?

FERN

No, he came down with the flu
so he won't be around for a
few days. But if you want to
give him a call I'm sure he
wouldn't mind.

KATE

No, I was just curious. If anything happens you'll let me know?

FERN
Yeah, no problem.

KATE
Okay great. I'll talk with you later.

FERN
Okay.

KATE leaves the office and walks back down the stairs.

She pauses for a moment by the exit.

KATE then exits the building.

A PATH BY THE HARBOR FRONT.

KATE parks her silver Audi TT by the curb, gets out, and walks along the path for a while.

A few moments later she spots BEN and walks up beside him.

KATE
Hey.

BEN
[Slightly surprised] Hey.

There is a pause in the conversation.

KATE
[Puts her hand on his forehead] You should be at work.

BEN
It's a nice day.

KATE
You told Fern you had the flu.

BEN

And I was taking care of Lenny and Val yesterday so I didn't want to risk infecting anyone.

KATE

But you aren't experiencing any symptoms so as far as you know you're lying.

BEN

I don't know that I'm not.

KATE

So you only prefer to be honest some of the time.

BEN

Sometimes.

KATE

That's good to know.

BEN

I would've explained it to Fern but I didn't want to give her a chance to start lecturing me.

KATE

She doesn't lecture; she tells amusing anecdotes.

BEN

After the tenth time it's a lecture.

KATE

Repetition doesn't change anything.

BEN

Yes it does.

KATE

No it doesn't.

BEN

So you can listen to a song a dozen times and it's still the same to you?

KATE

No, but that doesn't mean that the song's changed.

BEN

But your perception of it's different.

KATE

That's not the point.

BEN

Yes it is.

KATE

No it isn't.

BEN

What're you doing here anyway?

KATE

You're trying to change the subject 'cause you know I'm right.

BEN

No I'm not.

KATE

Yes you are.

BEN

Fine. So what are you doing here?

KATE

What do you care?

BEN

I just want to know.

KATE
Does it matter?

BEN
Wait, how did you even know I
was here?

KATE
Does that matter?

BEN
It's kind of disturbing.

KATE
Have you had lunch yet?

BEN
No, I'm not hungry.

KATE
It's almost one o'clock. Did
you have a late breakfast?

BEN
No, I'm just not hungry.

KATE
Maybe you are sick.

BEN
I'm fine.

KATE
What did you have for dinner
last night?

BEN
Why're you so concerned about
my eating habits?

KATE
Because you're the lead
contractor on my company's
most expensive project. And
because you look awful.

BEN
It's just fatigue.

KATE
Well at least you look better
than you did a few days ago.

BEN
Thank you.

KATE
That wasn't a compliment.

BEN
It sounded like one.

KATE
But it wasn't. Anything
would've been an improvement
over the way you looked.

BEN
No one working twenty hour
days looks good.

KATE
But most don't look that bad.

BEN
You just can't leave a
compliment alone can you?

KATE
It wasn't a compliment.

BEN
Sure.

KATE
Whatever.

BEN
[Pauses] Do you want to get
lunch?

KATE

It's about time you asked.
But I already had something
on the way over.

BEN

Oh.

There is a brief pause in the conversation.

KATE

I stopped by your office the
other day to look at the
shop.

BEN

Fern told me.

KATE

Oh. It was Cecil's idea but
it wasn't entirely consistent
with the arrangement we
agreed on -

BEN

You mean you knowingly and
willfully violated a verbal
agreement negotiated in good
faith.

KATE

So you're a lawyer now?

BEN

You started it.

KATE

I was trying to be precise.

BEN

It sounded like you were
trying to mitigate your
responsibility.

KATE

Is that what you think?

BEN

No. Cecil said he told you to visit to get you out of the office, and since he's scared of you he probably made it sound like really good professional advice from a fellow co-worker. You were just doing your job.

KATE

[Pauses briefly] He told you all that?

BEN

He only admitted that the visit was his idea, but his facial expression said a lot more.

KATE

So he's actually afraid of me.

BEN

You're surprised?

KATE

I was going out of my way to be non-threatening.

BEN

Really?

KATE

We talked about that the other day.

BEN

I know, but it didn't look like you took it that seriously.

KATE

I was in a hurry.

BEN

Oh.

KATE

[Taking a wrapped sandwich out of her purse] Anyway, I got you this to make up for the intrusion.

[Hands BEN the sandwich]

BEN

[Takes the sandwich] Thanks.

KATE

You're welcome. But now we're even.

BEN

[Unwraps the sandwich] Tuna salad on rye.

KATE

Yeah.

[Looks at her watch] I've gotta get going. I'll see you around - you know what I mean.

BEN

[Grins] Yeah, take care.

KATE turns and starts walking back to her car.

BEN starts eating the sandwich.

He looks over his shoulder at KATE for a second before turning away again.

BEN'S APARTMENT. THE DEN. NIGHT.

BEN is sitting in a recliner, lost in thought. The television is on but he isn't paying attention.

His cellphone is on the coffee table.

BEN turns off the television, picks up the phone, and makes a call.

A few moments pass.

BEN

Hey, it's me.

[Annoyed] It's just past ten.

[Looks at his watch] Wow, it is pretty late.

I was just wondering if you'd like to go out for dinner tomorrow night.

[Long pause]

Okay. I'll meet you there around seven. And sorry about calling so late.

Yeah, good -

BEN takes the cellphone away from his ear and looks at the display.

He presses a button to end the call.

A BUILDING ON THE NYU CAMPUS. A LAB. DAY.

There is a small explosion and a puff of white smoke.

LENNY coughs as he covers his mouth with his left hand and waves his right around to clear the air. He is standing at the front of the lab lecturing to a class of students.

LENNY

And that's why you have to be careful with volatile substances.

[Coughs] Anyway, your lab is next Tuesday and the report is due the following Friday,

so go over the notes with
your lab partners beforehand
so you know what you're doing
when you show up.

And as far as the midterm
goes, I finished writing it
while I was away and it
covers everything up till
today. I've also spoken with
Professor Harris about the
scheduling conflict with his
physics quiz, so if any of
you are in his class, talk to
him this week and he'll set
everything up so you can
write both evaluations.

I think that's it, so I'll
see you all next week.

The students start filing out of the lab.

LENNY coughs a couple of times as he packs up his notes in a
binder.

When he is finished he walks out of the lab and down the hall to
his office.

LENNY drops the binder on the desk, collapses into the chair
behind his desk, and takes a deep breath.

The sunset is visible through the office window.

There is a knock at the door and LENNY looks up.

BEN is at the door.

BEN

[Entering the office] You
don't look so good.

LENNY

No kidding.

[Looks at his wristwatch] You
left work early?

BEN

[Sitting down in a chair
across the desk from LENNY] I
thought I'd give it a try.

LENNY

Where'd you go?

BEN

Nowhere; I came here straight
from work.

LENNY

Right.

BEN

I did.

LENNY

Fine, I believe you. I
forgot how argumentative you
get when I'm sick.

BEN

Did you drive here?

LENNY

No, I was feeling drowsy this
morning so I took the subway.

BEN

Good thinking.

LENNY

Yeah.

BEN

But you probably should've
taken the day off.

LENNY

I thought about it but exam
season's right around the
corner so I wanted to make
sure I got through all the
lecture material.

BEN

I'm guessing Val stayed home.

LENNY

It's Physics Department policy to let students fend for themselves. And she's in no shape to lecture anyone anyway.

BEN

[Smiles] Remember when we were all at college together?

LENNY

Okay, now I feel old.

BEN

We had some good times, me, you, Val, Fern and Kate.

LENNY

I wouldn't include Kate.

BEN

You never liked her did you?

LENNY

She was all right, but you were already halfway through your senior year when you met her and then the two of you graduated. Then Fern graduated a year later and it was just me and Val finishing our Ph.D's, so for historical accuracy it was really just me, Val, you, and Fern.

BEN

Yeah, I guess so. Do you have anything else to do here?

LENNY

No, I'm done for the day.

BEN

Then I'll give you a lift home.

LENNY

Thanks.

LENNY and BEN get out of their chairs.

LENNY

Are you busy tomorrow night?

BEN

No, why?

LENNY

Val and I have concert tickets but we're not exactly a hundred percent so if you want 'em they're yours.

BEN

Thanks. That's what Val said when she called.

AN INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX. FERN'S OFFICE. NIGHT.

FERN and RAY are working at their computers.

RAY stops and turns off his computer.

FERN

[Without turning] Calling it a day?

RAY

Yeah, I'm all caught up. What about you?

FERN

[Still typing] Ray, after you've been in this business for a while you realize that schedules are nothing more than artificial constructs

put in place to provide a basic structure for time management. As such they should be treated as minimum requirements, not exalted standards of perfection. You know this reminds of this time in high school -

RAY
You're worse than my sister.

FERN pauses and then starts shutting down her computer.

RAY
[Grins] You forgot you were picking up your car tonight.

FERN
No I didn't.

RAY
Then why're you rushing?

FERN
I'm not rushing.

RAY
It looks like you're rushing.

FERN
[Rushing out of the office]
Women just move more quickly than men.

A DOWNTOWN STREET.

KATE is walking along at a casual pace. The other people along the street are walking at a noticeably faster tempo.

She stops in front of a flower shop and looks at the display in the front window for a few moments.

KATE then continues walking along.

She turns down another street and glances in the window of a small bistro.

KATE sees BEN sitting at a table looking at his watch.

She enters and takes the seat opposite BEN.

BEN

Late as usual.

KATE

There was traffic. Have you ordered yet?

BEN

No, I was waiting.

KATE looks over at a WAITER and he walks to the table.

WAITER

[With a light French accent]
Are you ready to order?

KATE

Yes, we'll both have the garden salad, and we'll go with the appetizer that the chef recommends.

For the main course we'll both have the lasagna, but for dessert I'll have the chocolate éclair and the gentleman will have the pie à la mode.

WAITER

Excellent. And would you care to select a wine?

KATE

I think we'll have the house white.

WAITER

An excellent choice.

The WAITER takes the menus and walks to the kitchen.

BEN

In some countries it's customary to let other people make their own selections.

KATE

What were you going to order?

BEN

That isn't the point.

KATE

You're welcome.

BEN

So you'd let me order for you as long as I chose what you would?

KATE

That's different.

BEN

That's what I thought.

KATE

No, it really is different. I can get everything completely wrong and you'll still be obligated to eat whatever I order because of chivalry. But if you don't order exactly what I want I'm allowed to make a gigantic scene and completely humiliate you, and somehow I don't think you'll take that chance.

BEN

I think you're a little confused.

KATE

You're just saying that
'cause you know I'm right.

BEN

No, I'm pretty sure you're
wrong. And even if you're
not, chivalry wasn't invented
to protect women like you.

KATE

Hey, just 'cause I don't need
it doesn't mean you can
ignore it.

BEN

I can always adopt a more
relaxed code of conduct.

KATE

Do you really want to take
that risk?

BEN

Now that's a threat.

KATE

No, it's a question. Would
you like to provide an
answer?

BEN

Since I'm a gentleman there
isn't any point.

KATE

That's what I thought.

BEN

Who asked you?

The WAITER returns with two salads, cutlery, a bottle of wine,
and two glasses on a tray.

WAITER

[Setting the table] Here we
are. And our chef has been
working on a light, grilled

salmon dish that comes with his signature sauce if you would care to try it.

BEN

[Looking at KATE] That sounds wonderful.

WAITER

[Pouring the wine] He will be delighted to hear that. There you go; bon appetite.

KATE

[Looking at BEN] Thank you.

The WAITER walks away.

BEN and KATE start eating.

KATE

Do you think he remembers us?

BEN

I doubt it.

KATE

Yeah.

There is a pause in the conversation.

BEN

But he should; I was pretty generous with the tips.

KATE

Right.

BEN

I tipped ten percent.

KATE

That's the rate for an average level of service. The way he treated us you should've gone to fifteen.

BEN

After what happened he was
lucky we came back.

KATE

That was an accident.

BEN

There were empty tables all
around us but he dropped the
tray on ours.

KATE

They were having problems
with the new cook. Everyone
was a little distracted.

BEN

Right.

KATE

You think they were lying?

BEN

No, I remember the food.

KATE

You never complained about
it.

BEN

I know, I'm just saying that
a ten percent tip was
perfectly justified.

KATE

Because you didn't like the
food or the service.

BEN

And other than that it was
great.

KATE

This is a restaurant. What
else is there?

BEN
Furniture, dishes, cutlery.
Location.

KATE
And that's why you never said
anything.

BEN
I guess so.

KATE
You should've said something.

BEN
I don't have any regrets.
And the food started getting
better after a couple of
weeks.

KATE
But you kept tipping ten
percent.

BEN
I didn't want them to think I
was being rude at the
beginning.

KATE
[Sarcastically] Good
thinking.

BEN
Thank you.

[Pauses briefly] You never
said anything about this back
then.

KATE
Why would I? I was getting
free dinners at the
restaurant of my choice.

BEN
Good thinking.

KATE

I know.

[Pauses] And when he dropped the tray he spilled some wine on my dress.

BEN

Oh yeah, the blue one.

KATE

[Glances at BEN] Yeah. But the drycleaner managed to get it out so it wasn't that bad.

BEN

Otherwise we wouldn't have come back.

KATE

Pretty much.

There is a pause in the conversation.

BEN

I'll be back at work tomorrow if you need to find me.

KATE

Okay. I'll probably be out of the office checking on some other projects so if anything happens you can leave a message with my secretary.

BEN

Okay. Have you had a lot of meetings lately?

KATE

Yeah, how'd you know?

BEN

Howard likes to get his executives together when

things are busy to make sure everyone knows what's going on with everyone else.

KATE

Oh. You know those guys pretty well.

BEN

And I know you don't like meetings.

KATE

It's not that bad; if I get bored I just walk out.

BEN

Really?

KATE

No, but you believed me didn't you?

BEN

Either way I answer you'll be upset.

KATE

Yeah. So which is it?

BEN

Now you're just looking for a fight.

KATE

Stressing people out gets the best out of them.

BEN

Stress and productivity usually don't go together.

KATE

Tell that to Beethoven.

BEN

I said usually.

KATE
Bach, Handel, Mozart, Mahler,
Brahms, Tchaikovsky,
Armstrong.

BEN
You know I have concert
tickets.

KATE
I figured it couldn't hurt to
check.

BEN
Lenny and Val were going out
tomorrow night but they're
still recovering so they gave
them to me.

KATE
Anything good?

BEN
Wynton Marsalis.

KATE
Impressive.

BEN
Pick you up at six?

KATE
No thanks.

There is a brief pause in the conversation.

KATE
Six fifteen.

AN INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX. THE PARKING LOT. DAY.

FERN pulls into the parking lot in a new, black Pontiac Solstice
GXP.

She parks it, gets out, closes the door, and then stops to admire it. She spots a smudge on the hood and wipes it off with the sleeve of her jacket.

FERN walks to the complex. She opens the front door and turns to take one more look at the car before she enters.

She walks into the building and hears someone in the shop yelling.

TECHNICIAN

It was just a mix-up! We sorted it out and everything's fine so why're we even talking about this!

RAY

Because it shouldn't have happened in the first place! You look at the part, you look at the screen, and if they match then you don't have a problem! All you have to do is look! It's that simple! Why didn't you just look! Do you know how much trouble you could've saved me! I thought I was going to have a heart attack!

TECHNICIAN

It was just a mix-up!

RAY

Involving a multimillion dollar piece of equipment! You don't call me up and tell it's malfunctioning unless it's actually malfunctioning! I have real problems to deal with! I don't need these imaginary breakdowns to help pass the time!

TECHNICIAN

Yeah we did it on purpose just to annoy you because we

don't have anything better to do!

RAY

I'm hoping that's what it is because no normal person could make -

FERN enters.

FERN

Whoa, hold on there Ray. Just come with me.

RAY

[To the TECHNICIAN] We'll finish this later.

FERN and the TECHNICIAN exchange nods as FERN and RAY turn to leave.

FERN and RAY walk out of the shop and head to their office.

FERN

How's everything going?

RAY

Not bad. It's just these careless mistakes; they really get to me.

FERN

Okay. But try not to take it out on the guys; this job's pretty tough on them so we need to exercise a little more patience than usual.

RAY

Yeah, okay.

FERN

[Takes a package of mints out of her pocket and hands it to RAY] But if you really need to yell at them you should at

least make sure your breath
is fresh.

RAY

[Grins] Thanks.

FERN

[Smiles] Anytime.

There is a brief pause in the conversation as they continue walking.

FERN

Aren't you going to have a
mint?

RAY

Why, is my breath really that
bad?

FERN

Not exactly, but at close
ranges even the best of us
need to be careful.

RAY

Oh.

[Takes out a mint and puts it
in his mouth]

FERN

And the guys in the shop like
to leave about five minutes
early to beat the traffic so
make up some excuse to shut
things down early today.

RAY stops walking and FERN stops beside him.

RAY

You think I need to apologize
for holding them responsible
for their mistakes?

FERN

The part about your breath is really for all of us, but yeah, you need to let them know you're reasonable.

RAY

Everything I said was justified.

FERN

Probably, but there's more to being right than having the facts on your side; you've also got to treat people with respect.

But don't actually admit you were wrong; that makes things way too complicated.

RAY

So I should come up with an excuse to give them what they want because I said some things that were justified by the mistakes they made?

FERN

Yeah.

[Continues waling]

RAY

[Following FERN] Wouldn't it be better to just forget the whole thing?

FERN

[Entering the office] You'd think so but no. People need reassurance sometimes, but you have to be careful not to give them too much. Or too little.

RAY

It's like I'm dealing with a
bunch of kids.

LINCOLN CENTER. THE PENTHOUSE. NIGHT.

Wynton Marsalis and his ensemble are playing "Linus and Lucy".

BEN and KATE are seated beside each other in the third row.
Every seat in the room is filled.

KATE looks over at BEN.

BEN is watching the performance, smiling.

A STREET OUTSIDE LINCOLN CENTER.

BEN and KATE are walking down the street.

BEN
It's still jazz.

KATE
It's Charlie Brown.

BEN
So what?

KATE
So it's a joke.

BEN
No it's not.

KATE
Do you take it seriously?

BEN
Yeah.

KATE
Then why were you grinning
the whole time?

BEN

Because it's a fun piece of music and it brings back a lot of good memories.

KATE

So your taste in jazz is based on recollections of a children's cartoon.

BEN

Just because it was composed for a cartoon doesn't mean it's an inferior piece of work.

KATE

Doesn't mean it's beyond criticism either. It's not the kind of thing that should be performed at a place like this.

BEN

These concerts are supposed to be informal.

KATE

When Bell was there he played Kreisler.

BEN

He's a violinist. What else was he going to play?

KATE

You think violins are only good for classical?

BEN

Violinists are only good for classical. They're too uptight to play anything else.

KATE

How many violinists do you know?

BEN

About a dozen.

KATE

I meant personally.

BEN

That's irrelevant.

KATE

No it's not.

BEN

Fine. But the concert was great.

KATE

No, the acoustics were great, the seats were great, the musicians were really great, and the program sucked.

BEN

You just don't appreciate jazz.

KATE

I introduced you to jazz.

BEN

But now you're a musical snob.

KATE

I am not. I just expected some sophistication.

BEN

Yeah that's not aristocratic.

KATE

Shut up.

BEN

Typical upper class temper tantrum.

KATE

What do you know about the upper class?

BEN

They've got great cars, great houses, really great country clubs, and their taste in music sucks.

KATE

People like me bankrolled Beethoven.

BEN

And what've you done lately?

KATE

I tried to enlighten a slob.

BEN

There's nothing wrong with the music I like.

KATE

I wouldn't be so sure about that.

BEN

Snob.

KATE

I've just got good taste. And I'm probably not the only one disappointed by the program. A few more concerts like this and Lincoln Center's history.

BEN

Just like Gibraltar.

There is a short pause in the conversation.

BEN

If there's anything to report
I'll give you a call.

KATE

Okay.

BEN spots a small dessert place about half a block ahead.

BEN

Dessert?

KATE

Sure.

BEN

So I guess you're getting
along with everyone at your
office?

KATE

Sort of. They're pretty good
at their jobs but I don't
like the culture.

BEN

Too passive?

KATE

Yeah.

BEN

Have you tried the cafeteria
food?

KATE

No, I saw it and then I
ordered out. I guess you
weren't so lucky.

BEN

The first time I went to see
Howard he invited me to lunch
so I couldn't refuse.

KATE

He eats that stuff?

BEN

I don't think he'd ever eaten
there before and we've never
been there since.

KATE

That bad?

BEN

Worse.

KATE

I don't know why but I feel a
lot better now.

A BUILDING ON THE NYU CAMPUS. VAL'S OFFICE. DAY.

A popcorn machine is popping some popcorn.

VAL is sitting at her desk watching the kernels bounce around
inside the machine.

She hears a knock at the door. The door is ajar.

VAL looks over and sees KATE standing there.

VAL

Hey, come on in!

KATE

Thanks.

VAL turns off the popcorn machine as KATE enters the office.

KATE closes the door behind her and takes a seat.

VAL

[Taking a seat opposite KATE]
It's really good to see you;
it's been way too long.

KATE

Yeah, it's good to be back.
So I guess you know what's
going on?

VAL

Fern's a reliable informant
and Lenny tells me
everything. Eventually.

KATE

So it's business as usual.

VAL

Pretty much. Popcorn?

KATE

No thanks, I've just had
lunch. But don't let me stop
you.

VAL

Actually I was just popping
it to watch the kernels
bounce around.

KATE

Physicists have way too much
fun.

VAL

Probably, but we deserve it.
So how's everything going?

KATE

Good; it's a lot of fun
seeing how the city's changed
and all that. I'm really
glad I took this job.

VAL

You had doubts about it?

KATE

Yeah. I actually planned to
leave when I heard about the
merger but I'd never been
part of a management
transition and I wanted to
see what it was like. And
the compensation package
wasn't bad either.

VAL

[Grins] Right.

KATE

And it helped pass the time;
I've been talking with people
at a few other companies
since I got here and I needed
something to do in between
meetings.

I'm leaving tonight.

VAL

Oh.

KATE

I know I shouldn't have come
back -

VAL

Actually, I'm glad you did.
You and Ben needed to talk.

KATE

I wasn't expecting that.

VAL

Well I'm not Lenny.

KATE

So he's still upset?

VAL

He didn't like you to begin
with so his opinion doesn't
count.

KATE

But he's right about this.
That's why I have to leave.

I was hoping you could call
Ben tomorrow and tell him I
said good-bye.

VAL

Don't do this.

KATE

It's the right thing to do.

VAL

If this is about Lenny you don't have to worry about it. He's just overprotective when it comes to his kid brother so when he finally figures out that you and Ben belong together he'll be okay, just like everyone else.

KATE

It's not that.

VAL

Then you don't have any reason to leave.

KATE

So if Ben was your brother you'd want me to stay?

VAL

I'd be objective and keep an open mind.

KATE

But eventually you'd come to the same conclusion for the same reason.

VAL

Ben's different now, and you wouldn't be here if you hadn't done some thinking too. That changes everything.

KATE

I can't risk -

VAL

That wasn't your fault. He had a lot of problems to deal with and he needed a lot of time to sort things out.

KATE

And all of you were there to help him but I wasn't.

VAL

It would've been more difficult for you than the rest of us combined.

KATE

That doesn't make it right.

VAL

So you honestly believe you were obligated to stay no matter what?

KATE

He was my responsibility and nothing that happened changed that.

VAL

That's a really complicated way of looking at it.

KATE

It's the only perspective that counts.

VAL

Maybe, but even then you did everything you could.

KATE

We both know that's not true.

VAL

If humans were capable of perfection we wouldn't need forgiveness. You've stopped

blaming Ben and now you need to stop blaming yourself.

KATE

So it was all right to just walk out and leave everyone else to deal with the situation?

VAL

He didn't give you any reason to stay.

KATE

He shouldn't have had to.

VAL

You had every right to leave and everyone knows that.

KATE

Then why do I still feel guilty about it?

VAL

Why did you really come back?

KATE

[Pauses] From what I've seen he's better off without me.

VAL

I don't think that's true and you know he doesn't feel that way either.

KATE

But if you knew it was true then you'd agree with me.

VAL

[Pauses briefly] You didn't do anything wrong and you know that he's okay with what happened. But if you let your guilt affect your

judgment now whatever happens
will be your fault.

KATE

So you don't think I was
being selfish back then?

VAL

No, and you shouldn't either.
You did the best you could.

KATE

[Sarcastically] Yeah, and
everything worked out great.

VAL

You're here aren't you?

KATE

[Pauses briefly] I don't
trust myself.

VAL

Talk to Ben.

KATE

No matter what I say it'll
amount to the same thing and
I can't -

I want to leave on good terms
this time. Then at least
we'll have that.

VAL

And then everything'll be
okay?

KATE

I shouldn't have come back.
The best I can do now is try
not to make things worse.

VAL

Things've been gotten better
because you came back.

KATE

Val, if this was just about me I'd stay, but it isn't.

VAL

Are you sure about this?

KATE

Yeah.

VAL

[Pauses] I don't know.

KATE

This is the right thing to do.

VAL

[Sighs] I'll ask Lenny -

KATE

I want you to talk to Ben.

VAL

Fern's known him longer than I have.

KATE

But you're better with this sort of thing.

VAL

I'm not so sure about that.

KATE

Lenny and Fern would tell him that he's better off without me, but you won't. You'll say that I'm better off without him, because you know that that's what he needs to hear.

VAL

He won't believe me.

KATE

But it's better than the alternatives.

VAL
You've given this a lot of thought.

KATE
Yeah.

VAL
[Pauses briefly] I can't do this again.

KATE
Please.

There is a pause in the conversation.

VAL
I'll call him tomorrow.

KATE
Thank you.

VAL watches KATE leave the office.

VAL sits there for a moment.

AN INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX. BEN'S OFFICE.

BEN is putting some files away in his filing cabinet.

The sunset is visible from the office window.

His cellphone starts ringing and he answers it.

BEN
Hey Cecil; what can I do for you?

[Casually] What do you mean?

[Long pause]

Oh, okay.

Yeah.

[Chuckles] Right.

Yeah, thanks for calling.

Take it easy.

BEN ends the call.

He pauses for a few moments and then walks over to the chair behind his desk and sits down.

BEN makes a call.

BEN

Val, it's me. Did Kate say anything to you before she left?

[Short pause]

[Takes a deep breath] I just got a call from a guy at her company so I know she resigned a few days ago. And since she didn't bother to tell me it's pretty obvious.

[Long pause]

Okay.

No, I'm all right.

[Casually] Well I am.

Yeah. Tell Lenny I said "hi".

Okay.

BEN ends the call.

He looks out the window for a few moments.

There is a knock at the door.

BEN turns and sees KATE in the doorway.

BEN
[Pauses briefly] Hey.

KATE
Hey.

They look at each other for several moments.

BEN
[Smiles] Are you new around here?

KATE
[Smiles] What the heck kind of a pick-up line's that?

BEN
[Walking towards KATE] Who said I was trying to pick you up?

KATE
[Walking towards BEN] [Struggling to maintain composure] So you're not?

BEN
That's not the point.

BEN and KATE hug.

KATE
Do you want to buy me dinner or not?

BEN
All right fine.

KATE
Great; there's this Italian place I want to try.

There is a pause in the conversation. They remain in the middle of the office, holding each other.

BEN

Three and a half years at college and that was the best line I could come up with.

KATE

Yeah, but it worked.

[Pauses][Composes herself]
But seriously are you gonna to buy me dinner or what?

[Play Jack Jones' recording of Gershwin's "Love Is Here To Stay" during FADE OUT and the credits.]