H.R.

(working title)

BY
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From Rule Maker to Rule Breaker

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EXT. NICHOLS & QUAFF - AFTERNOON

A three-story office building in South San Francisco fronted by a parking lot. Cars pull out - it's the end of the work day for most Nichols and Quaff employees.

We glide toward the building, move under the shiny black and stately **N&Q** above the double glass doors. The ampersand between N and Q is a tastefully rendered martini glass.

INT. HUMAN RESOURCES - ELLEN BELL'S OFFICE - SAME

ELLEN BELL (Late 30's) sits at her desk - control in a skirt suit, corporate and precise, Tracy Flick twenty years later.

At least until BILL does his damage. Bill (43) being the guy sitting across from her staring in shock

BILL
Fired? Why am I fired?

ELLEN
Terminated, Bill, not fired, and the reasons are as follows: you sent an admin links to pornography and told one of our Market Managers you'd like to dine on her fish taco, both of which are violations of 8B and C of the anti-harassment policy clearly spelled out in the Nichols & Quaff employee handbook.

Bill's eyes burn with hate. He starts to hyperventilate.

BILL
You can't fire me!

PUSH IN ON ELLEN. We'll soon understand Ellen's snappy reply and VO happens in her head, but presently it seems she's simply responding.

ELLEN
Oh yes I can. I'm Ellen Bell, Director of Human Resources here at Nichols & Quaff, a global alcoholic beverages company that produces, distributes, and markets beers, wines and spirits. My job is jobs, to give them, and to take them away. I'm the eyes and ears of this company, and when I see or hear of anything in violation of our employee handbook, it's my job to take action.

Ellen speaks rapid-fire in VO through QUICK SHOTS-

INT. HALLWAY - WATER COOLER - DAY

A MAN (30's) glances around furtively, spits on his fingers and rubs them over the water cooler spout.

ELLEN (V.O.)
In Human Resources, we're reminded every day that you never really know who you're hiring.

INT. NICHOLS AND QUAFF - EMPLOYEE KITCHEN - DAY

A WOMAN in skirt and blouse leans into the fridge. TWO MALE EMPLOYEES (20's) walk in. One simulates lifting her skirt and fucking her from behind while the other makes lewd faces.

ELLEN (V.O.)
I like to say it's like getting married without dating first. Which you'd never do.

INT. SUPPLY ROOM - DAY

A mousy looking WOMAN (20's) nervously glances around as she rapidly stuffs office supplies into her handbag.

ELLEN (V.O.)
And once you're married, it's hard to get a divorce.

INT. BATHROOM STALL - DAY

Outside looking in. Pants around ankles. Two sets of hands on the top of the stall, heavy breathing and hard pounding.

ELLEN (V.O.)
Because there are laws to protect workers.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

A WIRED UP WOMAN in a suit fumbles a vial of coke, falls to her knees, frantically snorts it off the carpet.

ELLEN (V.O.)
The bottom line is, we deal with jobs, and when people fail at their job...

INT. COPY ROOM - DAY

A FRUSTRATED EMPLOYEE punches a malfunctioning copier again and again, lifts it and SMASHES it on the floor.

ELLEN (V.O.)
It's our job to tell them.

SLAM BACK TO-

INT. ELLEN'S OFFICE

Bill. Still hyperventilating. We realize Ellen's riff happened in her head as she waited for him to chill the fuck out. He hasn't.

ELLEN
Thank you for your contribution to Nichols & Quaff. We'll be sending your possessions to the home address we have on file.

BILL
(spits this out)
Someone's gonna pay for this. This doesn't...just...happen.

Ellen picks up the phone as Bill glares at her.

ELLEN
May I have security?

EXT. PARKING LOT - LATER - DUSK

Ellen exits Nichols & Quaff. Walks through the parking lot in front of the building, chirps her KIA unlocked with her keys and slides behind the wheel.

INT. KIA - DUSK

Ellen carefully navigates her KIA out of the parking lot.

EXT. STREET - DUSK

The KIA motors into the street. A Buick Regal tucked by the side of the road pulls out and follows. Enough light from the dash to see Bill behind the wheel, looking unhinged

EXT. BOULEVARD - FIVE MINUTES LATER

Light traffic. Ellen's KIA cruises at a law abiding 35 MPH. Fifty yards behind it, Bill's Buick stalks.

Suddenly Bill's car accelerates toward the KIA. Fast. Faster. FASTER. Ellen's car slows for the red lights ahead...rolls to a stop and Bill's car rockets at it and-

SMASH! **METAL AND GLASS EXPLODE** as the Buick BLASTS INTO the KIA, sends it sailing into the intersection where a pick-up truck SLAMS into it and it FLIES INTO THE AIR IN SLOW MOTION, somersaults twice, and SMACKS upside down against the pavement with a dull scraping thud.

Silence. Stunned aftermath. Then, movement. The KIA door creaks open.

After a long beat, Ellen crawls out onto the pavement on all fours.

She gingerly climbs to her feet. Stands. Unsteady. She raises her eyes and stares vacantly.

She begins walking. People stare in shock. At this woman in shock.

A MAN races up to her, moves in front of her like he's guarding her, in case she falls, tries to talk to her-

MAN
Miss? Miss? Maybe you shouldn't try to...

Ellen stops. Smiles a serene smile. Then falls into his arms and the screen goes-

BLACK

END TEASER

ACT 1

BLACK SCREEN + TITLE: ***EARLIER THAT DAY...***

EXT. THE GRIND HOUSE - SAN FRANCISCO - EARLY MORNING

An indie coffee joint. Patrons reading novels and iPads and working on laptops.

INT. THE GRIND HOUSE

Ellen in line, battling impatience due to the undecided SLACKER in front of her preoccupying the BARISTA. Ellen sighs with relief when he finally finishes, brandishes her thermal coffee mug, addresses the Barista. He mouths some of her words because he's heard this so many times.

ELLEN
Medium Grind House decaf, half-whole milk, one quarter 1%, one quarter non-fat with a shot of Grind House decaf espresso with 3/4 inch space for regular milk at the service bar.

BARISTA
And a bran muffin.

ELLEN
And a bran muffin.

Barista squats down to grab a muffin from the case. The wicker basket is empty.

BARISTA
Huhm, looks like we're all out of bran muffins today.

Ellen's eyes flood with distress.

ELLEN
I get a bran muffin here every day.

BEARDED CO-WORKER
Delivery didn't come yet. You wanna hang, dude might be here in like twenty or so.

ELLEN
Twenty minutes?

BEARDED CO-WORKER
You know, just chill here.

ELLEN
Can you call to see if they're nearby?

BEARDED CO-WORKER
Yo he's like some immigrant, he's not gonna be droppin' ETA's or anything uber organized.

God, Ellen hates the way this guy talks. A HANDSOME GUY (28) behind ELLEN tries to help-

HANDSOME GUY
Pardon me.

Ellen turns. Handsome indeed. If Orlando Bloom and Jude Law had a baby sort of thing.

HANDSOME GUY (CONT'D)
The blueberry bran muffins are really nice.

ELLEN
And so are the plain bran muffins.
(back to Barista)
Just my coffee.

Ellen slides her *"GRIND KINDNESS"* rewards card out of her marked holder ("REWARDS/DISCOUNT CARDS"), lays it on the counter directly in front of her so Barista has to reach across to get it - passive aggressive payback for the missing muffin.

INT. NICHOLS & QUAFF - MORNING

Elevator doors open, Ellen steps out with her thermal coffee mug, ready for the day. The N&Q office is a sea of cubicles with private offices around the perimeter.

Large colorful cardboard in-store displays of liquor brand mascots - BAR WENCHES, MONKS, PIRATES, LEOPARDS and ENGLISH DANDIES - are scattered about in cubicles and tell us N&Q is in the alcoholic beverages business.

THE COMPANY MOTTO is painted across the entirety of one wall:

"QUALITY SPIRITS LIVE FOREVER" - Jonathan Quaff

Ellen passes workers knocking back coffee getting jacked for the day as she heads into one of the smaller private offices.

INT. MARKUS TEAL'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

MARKUS TEAL (41) CEO of N&Q. Piercing eyes, yoga posture. With TIM RIMMING (37). Brilliant. Gay. A radical beneath the designer suit, general Council for N&Q. DANA ARTY, (33) Director of Brand Management, presently confused.

DANA
Isn't my job to spearhead ad campaigns that get people's attention?

MARKUS
We don't want attention.

TIM
When it comes to booze, bland is good. The ads only have to create awareness.

MARKUS
Or we're headed for the constraints impairing our comrades in the tobacco industry.

TIM
Scenario: a *Zapata Tequila* campaign gets a bunch of press. A week later a *Zapata* bottle is found in a pick-up truck that plowed into mr. and mrs. mini-van and their four fat offspring, killing them instantly in a fiery explosion.

MARKUS
A PR nightmare waiting to happen.

TIM
A watchdog group could use it as evidence.

MARKUS
Though I like the imagery.

TIM
We have bad marriages, lousy jobs and a feeble economy to sell booze.

MARKUS
Life sells alcohol, Dana. Don't run ads, run the front fucking page.

A *tap-tap* on Markus' door.

MARKUS (CONT'D)
Yes?

Door opens - Ellen.

ELLEN
Markus, you wanted to see me?

MARKUS
We have news. Come in. We've almost landed Piers Moore. The sales phenomenon, the legend.

TIM
I'm sending you a PDF of his contract.

MARKUS
If we can get this guy our stockholder's pants will be moist.

TIM
Moist. Great word.

MARKUS
I'd like you and Dana to meet Piers for lunch at the Lamb and Frog Pub. He's flying in from Chicago.

ELLEN
Why a pub? Why not here?

TIM
He's British.

MARKUS
We go wherever he wants. More importantly, we need his contract signed.

ELLEN
As CEO shouldn't you meet with him? Or join us?

MARKUS
We had a thing in a bar in London last Spring. Not sure he remembers but I don't want to take a chance.

TIM
Remarks were made, punches thrown.

MARKUS
(gloating)
One punch was thrown.

ELLEN
How can he not remember?

TIM
He parties. Hard.

Ellen doesn't track. Tim mimics drinking.

ELLEN
He must know you're the CEO.

MARKUS
If he's signed a contract it will hardly matter.
(re: Tim)
Says Tim.

ELLEN
Moss Lieber and I are preparing for a staff reduction.

MARKUS
I know this, fourteen people, so?

ELLEN
We'll want to keep the Piers Moore hire low profile.

TIM
Good point.

DANA
We're firing fourteen people? But N&Q had a great year last year.

ELLEN
(ignores Dana, to Markus)
Will that be all?

Markus nods. Ellen leaves, closes the door behind her.

MARKUS
(under his breath)
Fucking robot.

DANA
Why do I have to go with her?

MARKUS
I don't want her to scare him away.

Dana sighs as we-

INT. ELLEN'S OFFICE - NOON

Ellen fills in a employee complaint form on her computer screen as she talks to TAMI CRESSBERG (23), a charming fusion of jappy and hippie. Ellen types in Tami's answers.

TAMI
Farshid prays everyday at four.

ELLEN
What does it sound like?

TAMI
Sound like?

ELLEN
Can you describe the sound for me?

TAMI
I can DO the sound for you.

Tami does - she's a great mimic.

ELLEN
(cringes)
Okay that's enough.

TAMI
Does this go on a report?

ELLEN
Without reports HR would be a whiner's repository.

TAMI
Does it make me look anti-Arab?

ELLEN
Have you not read the employee handbook section on discrimination?

TAMI
I'm sorry I-

ELLEN
(cuts her off, rapid fire)
-Article 16D: racial discrimination is the act of treating an employee unjustly because of nationality, race or religious background. Have you treated Farshid unjustly?

TAMI
What? No, I was-

ELLEN
-Article 16E: racial harassment is any form of behavior denigrating or humiliating an employee on the grounds of race, color, nationality or religious background. Have you denigrated Farshid?

TAMI
Denigrated, I would never-

ELLEN
-the last four people who sat there complained.

TAMI
So you can move him?

ELLEN
Religion is the HR professional's kryptonite. But we can move you. The movers will arrive by six.

TAMI
(shocked)
Wait, I'll just deal, it's not that bad. I really like my office.

ELLEN
(conversation's over)
I'll send you an email regarding the location of your new office.

Tami sighs, completely bummed, rises to leave. Opens the door. Dana is there, about to knock. She and Tami say hi in passing and Dana taps on Ellen's open door.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
Yes?

DANA
I'm sorry but I can't do lunch.

ELLEN
Fine. It probably makes more sense if I meet this candidate alone, due to my training.
(Dana about to speak but-)
Anything else? I'm rather busy.

DANA
Nope.

Dana departs and Ellen refocuses on the screen as we go-

EXT. LAMB AND FROG PUB - DOWNTOWN SAN FRANCISCO - DAY

Ellen stares with muted distaste at the carved wood sign of a lamb and a frog kissing each other.

INT. LAMB AND FROG PUB - DAY

Ellen enters. A downtown business crowd and soccer fans. Bar on one side and a semi-elegant dining room on the other. Ellen walks to the HOST, who sizes her up.

HOST
Table for one?

ELLEN
I'm meeting a man named Piers Moore.

That instant an English accent erupts at a TABLE OF EIGHT in the dining room. Ellen snap-zooms in on its owner: thick unruly hair, Paul Smith suit, indelibly rebellious *'I don't give a shit'* sophistication. Ladies and gentlemen, meet-

PIERS MOORE
...and then I said, this twit is so absolutely full of shite, if you surgically removed his colon, he'd be a human whoopie cushion!

Table ROARS with laughter. Piers downs his pint of beer.

PIERS
Alright then, got to run.

As he stands they shower him with *"awww, don't go"* etc.

He turns away, bumps into a table of THREE WOMEN, tips over a glass of wine, miraculously catches it and places it in its owner's hand with a majestic bow. The enchanted Woman coyly smiles as Piers glides to the podium and-

PIERS (CONT'D)
Ellen. Bell.

ELLEN
How did you know I was here?

PIERS
I could feel you.

INT. DINING ROOM - FIVE MINUTES LATER

Ellen and Piers. Table for two. Piers sips from his pint glass. Ellen is stiff, holds a note pad and pen.

ELLEN
Before our food arrives, I'd like to ask you a few questions.

PIERS
Absolutely.

ELLEN
They're just some HR questions.

PIERS
HR? What's that?

ELLEN
Human Resources, of course.

PIERS
You're the lot who sacks people.

ELLEN
HR does more than "sack" people.

PIERS
No need to get defensive.

ELLEN
(defensive)
I'm not defensive.

PIERS
You most definitely are.

ELLEN
No I'm not.

PIERS
What are the questions?

ELLEN
Questions that will help me better understand you.

PIERS
Are they designed specifically for me?

ELLEN
They're from an HR management book.

PIERS
They can't help you understand me.

ELLEN
How do you know?

PIERS
Are human beings your specialty?

ELLEN
I'm in human resources.

PIERS
Precisely.

ELLEN
So?

PIERS
Why aren't you acting humane?
Let's see some humanity.

ELLEN
I don't know why I'm having this
conversation.

PIERS
Versus asking stock "HR" questions?

ELLEN
We're not getting anywhere.

PIERS
Sex.

A non-sequitur. Which throws Ellen. Which is what Piers wanted. He examines her face.

PIERS (CONT'D)
Just as I thought.

ELLEN
What?

PIERS
I can read you.

ELLEN
Excuse me?

PIERS
You think I drink too much and I'm arrogant because I won't answer your absurd questions and you're angry that a boozer is great at the job.

ELLEN
That's close.

PIERS
You're sober and not good at yours.

ELLEN
I am very good at my job.

PIERS
Why haven't I signed a contract?

ELLEN
I'm not through here.

PIERS
You can't force me to sign, dearie.

ELLEN
Please address me as Ms. Bell.

PIERS
Yes dearie.

ELLEN
Maybe I am through here.

PIERS
Want to know what I think of you?

ELLEN
I don't care what you think of me.

PIERS
Yes you do.

He's right. She does. And it pisses her off.

PIERS (CONT'D)
You were the tattle tale in kindergarten, the middle school hall monitor, and the rat bitch informant in high school. You've spent your entire life pent up and shut down and consumed by fear which you hide with a tough but fraudulent exterior. And you're still the tattle tale.
(MORE)

PIERS (CONT'D)
You don't like word games, sport, or travel, and out of control laughter makes you uncomfortable, *and...*
(catches his breath)
...you don't like sex. In fact, it's been...
(mumbles math under his breath)
Seven years, three months, one week and one day since Vagistan has been occupied. Why?

Ellen snaps her handbag shut, slaps her napkin on the table.

PIERS (CONT'D)
I'd have it off with you in a heart beat.

ELLEN
You're in violation of article 12C and D of the employee handbook.

PIERS
(to Waiter re: his pint glass)
One more please.

ELLEN
(glaring at his empties)
And article 8G.

PIERS
(to waiter)
Make it two.

ELLEN
I'm leaving.

PIERS
You'll be back.

ELLEN
Don't hold your breath.

Ellen stands, marches out, suddenly stops and glares at Piers. She says this so loud the restaurant stops cold.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
I do too like word games!

And as Ellen blows out of there...

END ACT 1

ACT 11

INT. NICHOLS & QUAFF - ELLEN'S OFFICE - HALF HOUR LATER

Ellen walks in. Still fuming from lunch. Her phone is ringing. She takes it.

ELLEN
Yes?

AN ASSISTANT
(speakerphone)
Markus Teal would like to see you.

ELLEN
Fine.

Ellen hangs up and marches out.

INT. OFFICE - CORRIDOR - THIRTY SECONDS LATER - AFTERNOON

Ellen reaches Markus' door, knocks, walks in-

INT. MARKUS' OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Markus stands, rubs his hands together with anticipation.

MARKUS
How was Piers? You bring his contract?

ELLEN
No.

MARKUS
Where is it?

ELLEN
He didn't sign it.

MARKUS
Why not?

ELLEN
He was inebriated.

MARKUS
(confused)
That's not an advantage?

ELLEN
When someone is trying to solidify a new job they don't show up intoxicated.

MARKUS
He's not trying to solidify anything, we are!

ELLEN
He was drunk.

MARKUS
Drink with him.
(bitterly)
Oh I forgot, you don't drink.

ELLEN
Should I sleep with him, too?

MARKUS
YES!

ELLEN
Excuse me?

MARKUS
I made it clear how important it was to get his contract signed! I gave you an order!

ELLEN
This isn't the military!

MARKUS
YOU act like it is!

ELLEN
He was drunk.

MARKUS
(low and vicious)
I wouldn't bank on my cleverly managed proximity to senior management if I were you. I can have your ass.

ELLEN
Is that a sexual overture?

MARKUS
Are you insane!?

ELLEN
He was in violation of two articles in the N&Q employee handbook. At a contract signing! That's MY defence!

Ellen spins toward the door. And Markus explodes.

MARKUS
Where are you going!?

ELLEN
I have things to do.

Stay with Ellen as she walks out and-

MARKUS (O.C.)
Yes! Get Piers Moore's signature on that contract!

INT. CORRIDOR / ELEVATORS - LATER - AFTERNOON

Ellen and JUDITH JASPERS (33) walk to the elevator bank. Judith works with Ellen in HR. She's African American, sexy and tough. Ellen is tweaked from her shit day. Judith listens to her vent and we can tell it's not the first time.

ELLEN
It's always been a pet peeve that employees are paid for the 15-to-30 minute tasks of logging on their computers at the start of the day and logging out at the end.

JUDITH
(a beat, then)
You okay, Ellen?

ELLEN
(an edge)
Thanks for asking, Judith, but no I'm not. That drunken salesperson ruined my day.

They round a corner, almost run into a voluptuous cleavage wielding woman named TRICIA JAMES (29) who's walking while texting.

TRICIA JAMES
Hello people.

JUDITH
Hi, Tricia.

As they continue...

ELLEN
I feel like she flagrantly disrespects the N&Q dress code.

Ellen's Blackberry beeps: text from Moss Lieber: *swing by asap.*

ELLEN (CONT'D)
Moss. I better go. He doesn't like to wait.

INT. MOSS LIEBER'S OFFICE - MINUTES LATER - AFTERNOON

MOSS LIEBER (52). Ellen's boss. Curly hair. Going gray. Plays all angles. Pictures of Moss with his WIFE and TWO DAUGHTERS on holidays through the years dot his office.

MOSS
This is where the job of HR is harder than anyone can imagine. Fourteen people-
(finger across his neck)
-lives changed, like that.

ELLEN
I believe we're making sacrifices for the greater good, Moss.

MOSS
Well put. Now, I don't want to circle the wagons on this, I want strategy and lock down.

ELLEN
Friday terminations are best, shall we aim for end of this week?

MOSS
Great.

ELLEN
I actually have a one-off right after this - sexual harassment.

MOSS
You told me. Nice warm up for Friday.

ELLEN
Yes.

MOSS
Oh, I sat next to a CEO on the way back from Augusta who said they're moving to sexual segregation because the last sex harassment lawsuit cost them five million plus.

ELLEN
Interesting. What about same-sex harassment?

MOSS
Next big thing. Legal firms are setting up specialty wings. There's a white paper if you want it.

ELLEN
Please.

MOSS
You up for this? Fourteen people is a lot for a company that's had three incredible years in a row.

ELLEN
How shall we do it?

MOSS
Here's the angle: a foreign office, we're not sure which one, is losing market share, and since we're global, everyone's affected. Gives them someone to blame besides us.

ELLEN
Smart. But I meant how do you want to organize Friday?

MOSS
I want you to handle this one.

The curve ball. Ellen didn't see it coming. Beat. Moss slides a document across his desk to her. Ellen studies it like a gold miner who struck a vein. He sneaks a peek to see if she's taking the carrot. She's practically drooling.

MOSS (CONT'D)
The promotion.

ELLEN
(eyes widening)
I can have it now?

MOSS
Instead of in sixteen months.
Happy to announce it at the board
meeting here in two weeks.

Moss shifts uncomfortably in his seat. His stomach rumbles and growls. Something bleak percolates in there.

MOSS (CONT'D)
IF you've handled the reduction.
(then)
How was lunch with Piers Moore?

ELLEN
Have you met him?

MOSS
Pours more, they call him. Likes
the booze, great salesman. I
haven't, no.

ELLEN
It was not pleasant.

Moss' face pinches, he stands delicately, somewhat hunched, like excess movement is potentially hazardous.

MOSS
Sorry, Ellen, men's room, be right
back.

ELLEN
I've got to run as well.

Moss hurries out. Ellen stands the instant Moss' Blackberry vibrates. She looks at the door. The blackberry. The door. Quickly leans over his desk: **A TEXT:** *"if you had balls you'd bang my brains out on the conference room table."* Sender name is *"Majestic Air."* Ellen's face puckers.

She feels eyes on her. Slowly turns. Moss's wife stares out from a framed photograph.

As Ellen gazes at her, HYPER RAPID LABORED BREATHING GROWS LOUDER AND LOUDER AND TAKES US BACK TO-

INT. ELLEN'S OFFICE - (THE BEGINNING) - AFTERNOON

It's Bill. Hyperventilating. We're back at the beginning. She's just fired him.

BILL
(spits this out)
Someone's gonna pay for this. This doesn't...just...happen.

Ellen picks up the phone as Bill glares at her.

ELLEN
May I have security?

EXT. PARKING LOT - LATER - DUSK

Ellen exits Nichols & Quaff. Walks through the parking lot in front of the building, chirps her KIA unlocked with her keys and slides behind the wheel.

INT. KIA - DUSK

Ellen carefully navigates her KIA out of the parking lot.

EXT. STREET - DUSK

The KIA motors into the street. A Buick Regal tucked by the side of the road pulls out and follows. Bill is behind the wheel, looking unhinged.

PRE-LAP BLARING AMBULANCE SIREN WHICH DISSOLVES us to-

INT. AMBULANCE - MOVING - NIGHT - MINUTES AFTER THE CRASH

Ambulance races through the streets. Ellen, out cold, attended by TWO PARAMEDICS.

Paramedic # 1 glances at a monitor with Ellen's vitals.

PARAMEDIC # 1
Twenty-two angio...we'll need an ultrasound to check for internal bleeding.

PARAMEDIC # 2
(amazed)
She doesn't have a scratch on her body.

Paramedic # 2 gestures to the HUGE red-purple lump jutting out of her hair on the side of her head.

PARAMEDIC # 1
It's all there.

PARAMEDIC # 2
Temporal lobe took it for the team.

EXT. AMBULANCE - MOVING - NIGHT

And as the ambulance races away into the night...

END OF ACT 11

ACT III

EXT. HOSPITAL - LATE NIGHT

A twenty story structure where death and healing duke it out.

INT. HOSPITAL - ELLEN'S ROOM - SAME

Low hum and intermittent beep of hospital machinery. Ellen in deep sleep. A MALE NURSE enters, examines the bandage on her head, walks out.

INT. HOSPITAL - ELLEN'S ROOM - NEXT DAY - NOON

Ellen sits up in her hospital bed. She's with DR. ROBERT FALEN, brain trauma specialist. He holds her Cat Scan. The swelling on her head has decreased, and they've been talking.

DR. FALEN
I've neglected to ask an important question. How do you feel?

ELLEN
Kind of...great, actually. I'm stiff, but I don't feel bad at all. Am I on something?

DR. FALEN
No, but you slept for fourteen hours. Ellen, if you don't want to talk about it now, we can wait. But do you remember anything about the accident?

A sense of wonder fills Ellen's eyes.

ELLEN
I was thinking about that when you walked in. I remember being aware that something had shifted...

FLASHBACK

Ellen crawls out of the KIA, gets to her feet, in a daze...

ELLEN (V.O.)
I had this sensation that before that instant, I didn't even exist. I suddenly felt invincible...

Ellen stares wide-eyed at millions of shards of glass from the car's shattered windows sparkling like diamonds on the pavement. They create a glittering path. She slowly raises her eyes to follow it and discovers: herself, beckoning with a finger, beaming a devilishly mischievous grin.

ELLEN (V.O.)
...and I was setting off on a journey in search of.....life.

END FLASHBACK

INT. HOSPITAL - ELLEN'S ROOM - AS BEFORE

Dr. Falen's response is more restrained than he actually feels.

DR. FALEN
That's a very interesting description.

Ellen's eye is caught by one of the small instruments protruding from his pocket.

ELLEN
What is that?

DR. FALEN
(looking down)
Which one?

ELLEN
The one in the middle.

DR. FALEN
It's called an ophthalmoscope.

ELLEN
May I?

DR. FALEN
(passes it to her)
It's used to determine the health of the retina and vitreous humor.

ELLEN
Do you have vitreous humor, Doctor, or are you more of an irony man?

DR. FALEN
Pardon?

ELLEN
When can I go home?

DR. FALEN
I want to observe you another night.

ELLEN
(disappointed)
Really?

DR. FALEN
I want to make sure there's no bleeding below the dura mater, but your Cat Scan looks good.

Dr. Falen doesn't see Ellen absentmindedly unscrewing the top of the ophthalmoscope.

ELLEN
May I have a glass of water?

DR. FALEN
Of course.

He turns and moves to the sink, and as he walks-

DR. FALEN (CONT'D)
I'll have them bring you water.

He returns with the glass. She takes it, washes something down with it. Then she lays back on the bed.

ELLEN
Hospitals are absurd.

DR. FALEN
Excuse me?

ELLEN
They signify illness and project loss of hope, and the odor brings to mind public bathrooms. If they had bars and music and good food and a library and a game room, people would visit more and patients would be reminded how great life is. They'd be motivated to stay alive and get healthy.

DR. FALEN
That actually makes a heck of a lot of sense.
(then, gently)
May I have my ophthalmoscope back?

She passes it to him. The headpiece is missing. He looks between the ophthalmoscope and Ellen's lap.

DR. FALEN (CONT'D)
The top must have come off.

Ellen shrugs. Dr. Falen searches another beat. Then he stops. His eyes dart between Ellen. The glass of water. And his ophthalmoscope. A long beat.

DR. FALEN (CONT'D)
I'll uh, see you this afternoon.

And off Ellen smiling goodbye to Dr. Falen we-

INT. HOSPITAL - ELLEN'S ROOM - HOUR LATER - AFTERNOON

MALE NURSE from Ellen's first night walks in, startled to see Ellen checking herself out in the bathroom mirror. She turns around. She's transformed the horrible swath of polyester hospital gown into a stylish dress.

MALE NURSE
Get me Anna Wintour on the phone.

ELLEN
You like it?

MALE NURSE
You'll be the best dressed girl in the MRI room.

ELLEN
MRI? Dr. Falen said my Cat Scan looked okay.

MALE NURSE
He wants to do an MRI. More comprehensive than a Cat Scan.

Off Ellen's bummed reaction we go-

INT. DR. FALEN'S OFFICE - TWO HOURS LATER - DUSK

Ellen sits across from Dr. Falen, making small talk. She's still wearing her revamped hospital gown.

DR. FALEN
That was my residency, and after that it was Harvard.
(he looks up)
Dr. Suresh.

Dr. Suresh Rao (40) walks in holding her MRI.

DR. FALEN (CONT'D)
Ellen, Dr. Suresh. Doctor, this is Ellen Bell.

DR. SURESH
Pleased to make your acquaintance, Ms. Bell.

Ellen smiles. Dr. Suresh doesn't take his eyes off Ellen as he sits down. It's bizarre.

DR. FALEN
Dr. Suresh is Chair of Neurosurgery at University of San Francisco and the head of the Neurovascular Surgery and blood flow laboratory.

ELLEN
And why is he staring at me?

DR. SURESH
I am so sorry, it is just that you are fully conscious. It is beyond my comprehension. Your case is very rare. And dangerous I might add.

ELLEN
I feel fine. Great, in fact.

DR. SURESH
Euphoric, almost immortal in a sense?

ELLEN
(hesitant)
Yeah.

DR. SURESH
One patient said he felt as though he was blind, and now he could see.

ELLEN
Yep.

DR. SURESH
(nodding vigorously)
It is telltale, and masks something far more unsettling. Ellen, there is a rare syndrome called Klüver-Bucy, which occurs when there is damage to the medial temporal lobes, precisely where we have located cerebral contusions on your MRI.

(MORE)

DR. SURESH (CONT'D)
There is also bruising to your orbitofrontal cortex. The symptoms of the damage are low impulse control, an impulsive hunger for sex, and Hyperphagia, which is a compulsion to eat odd objects.

Ellen's eyes dart to the new ophthalmoscope in Dr. Falen's pocket, then-

ELLEN
I feel better now than ever before.

DR. FALEN
As I said, this is the mask, beneath which lies the problem.

ELLEN
Will I still feel like this?

DR. SURESH
You'll be healthy and you will feel good. There's a new procedure that-

ELLEN
-you didn't answer my question.
(she waits)
Answer the question.

DR. SURESH
No. You won't have this feeling.

DR. FALEN
Naturally, we cannot do anything without your consent, but I assure you, this is the correct choice.
(then)
Is there someone you can call who can care for you during your recovery?

This innocent question. Fucks Ellen right up. Because she doesn't. Her emotions swell. She keeps them in check.

ELLEN
No.

DR. FALEN
Well, we can arrange for-

ELLEN
-No.

DR. FALEN
The hospital support staff is highly qualified.

ELLEN
I don't want the surgery.

Ellen stands. Turns to the door. Walks out. Dr. Falen and Dr. Suresh stare in dismay.

DR. FALEN
Ellen? Ms. Bell?

Dr. Falen stands, moves to the door, looks down the corridor.

DR. FALEN (CONT'D)
Ellen?

But she's gone.

BLACK SCREEN + TITLE: **TWO WEEKS LATER**

INT. ELLEN'S OFFICE - LATE MORNING

Ellen sits on the edge of her desk, being briefed by Judith. It's *Extreme Makeover, Ellen Edition*. Hairstyle upgrade, J Brand jeans, Tucker blouse and K. Jacques sandals. And oozing confidence.

ELLEN
Anything else I need to know?

JUDITH
Farshid's at it again.

ELLEN
Praying?

JUDITH
Praying slash chanting. The guy who took over Tami's office complained. And we have the global meeting tomorrow.

ELLEN
Oh. That's right.

JUDITH
Moss told me to remind you there's fourteen people you need to deal with.

ELLEN
He didn't do it while I was gone?

JUDITH
Nope. And he wants it done asap.

ELLEN
You ever notice that "Moss" and "pussy" both have double s's?

Judith. Never heard this kind of thing from Ellen. Shocked.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
However, in this case, I'm glad he's a gutless swine. Firing hard working people to give bonuses to a few high ranking executives is greed-based short-sighted idiocy.

JUDITH
Who's gonna tell Moss that?

ELLEN
The pleasure will be mine.

Judith stares at Ellen. Her clothes. Her whole...gestalt.

JUDITH
Are you on Vicodin, Ellen?

ELLEN
No, got any?

Ellen laughs. So does Judith, but delayed and uncomfortable.

INT. SMALL CONFERENCE ROOM - NOON

Ellen peruses a folder as FARSHID (27), an Arab with intense unblinking brown eyes, steps in. Corkboard on the wall has booze ads pinned to it from a brainstorming session.

ELLEN
Hello, Farshid.

FARSHID
Hi.

ELLEN
Please sit.

FARSHID
Why am I here?

ELLEN
Same reason as always. We have a problem, Farshid.

FARSHID
The new guy has complained.

ELLEN
Like everyone else who has ever sat across from you. So we want to move you.

FARSHID
But I like my office.

ELLEN
Unfortunately your praying distracts people from their work, which is the first order of business at Nichols and Quaff.

FARSHID
That is religious bias. I stay in my office.

ELLEN
I call bullshit Farshid.

FARSHID
You have used profanity against me. This is grounds for lawsuit!

ELLEN
Do you still live with your family?

FARSHID
What? Why?

ELLEN
Are they aware you work for the largest purveyor of alcoholic beverages in the world? More importantly, are the members of your Mosque aware that the sole purpose of this company is to sell booze?

FARSHID
I am calling lawyer!

ELLEN
The legal team employed by this company would have you up for treason faster than you can say jihad.

(MORE)

ELLEN (CONT'D)
I'll lie and say you used your job in I.T. to spy on the company and you threatened to bomb the place because you believed alcohol was evil.
(big smile)
I'm in Human Resources, sweetie, I'm the last word in credibility.

She's got him now. Farshid wilts before our eyes, defeated.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
But I don't want you to stop praying, Farshid. I just want you to move to a place where your praying won't bother people. Come here.

He hesitates, unsure, finally moves to her. Ellen brandishes a copy of the office floor plan, indicates one of the rooms.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
See this office? The window faces out to Mecca, that's in the East, right?

He's surprised she knows this, his eyes come to life.

FARSHID
(with wonder)
Yes. An office with a window?

ELLEN
An office with a window.
Are we good?

FARSHID
(his first smile)
We are good. We are real good.

INT. ELLEN'S OFFICE - LATER - AFTERNOON

Ellen reads about the history of alcohol on Wikipedia. Her eyes dart to a shelf in her office lined with N&Q products. She moves to them, runs her finger over *Papa's Rum, Valkyrie Vodka, Gunga Gin, Zapata Tequila*.

Her finger goes back to the bottle of Vodka. She lifts it, opens it. Sniffs. Takes a pull. The instant liquid touches her tongue her eyes light up like an actress in a soda ad.

She looks at the bottle with wonder, then takes another sip.

INT. ELLEN'S OFFICE - LATER - END OF DAY

Ellen is removing some framed motivational posters - "endurance" (a turtle) "diplomacy" (kittens eyeing each other) from her wall. Judith walks in.

ELLEN
Hey, Judith.

JUDITH
I'm gonna get out of here. Just wanted to say bye and welcome back.

ELLEN
I'm finished too. Drink?

JUDITH
(stunned beat)
You're asking me if I want to go have a drink? After four years working together? I didn't even know you drank.

ELLEN
Well?

JUDITH
Hell yes I want to go out for a drink.

INT. BAR - EARLY EVENING

Judith and Ellen at a table - they've had a few. Bar teams with post-work BUSINESS CROWD. Ellen sips a Martini and Judith nurses a Daiquiri.

JUDITH
Just *hoooold* on, girl. You can't get in a car accident and say you liked it. That's just weird.

ELLEN
I didn't say I liked it.

JUDITH
But you're talking about it like it was a good thing. You're supposed to be upset and nervous and scared to get behind the wheel of a car.

ELLEN
Judith, I actually think being in the accident saved my life.

JUDITH
Ellen, this thing, I get it, some of it's good, but you gotta see someone. This is some serious Post Traumatic Stress shit.

Ellen removes two speared olives from her spent Martini, locks eyes with A MAN (30's) at the bar, slowly and salaciously slides the olives over her tongue, swallows them.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
What the *hell?*

A WAITRESS arrives, sets down a fresh Martini for Ellen. Judith about to speak when the Man Ellen flirted with swaggers over. Ellen looks up, their eyes lock.

ELLEN
I've been watching you. I sense we would have heinous sex. I know I would take pleasure in exploring your darkest desires, and I would open up to you and expose the sordid soul of my need. However, I haven't seen my friend in awhile, and I want to be with her.

Ellen reaches out, rests her hand on his cock. He's frozen by her grip and audacity.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
I look forward to meeting him.

Judith spits up a mouthful of Daiquiri. Ellen releases the Guy's unit. He stares dumbly, stumbles away in an aroused stupor. Judith looks at Ellen like she's her new God.

JUDITH
Do not go see anyone. Do not get fixed. Do not change ONE THING! You are the *shit*, girl!!

Judith jumps out of her seat, throws her arms around Ellen, and Ellen's chair tips back and knocks over a table. Glasses shatter as they fall on the floor laughing.

END ACT 111

ACT IV

INT. HALLWAY - NEXT DAY - LATE MORNING

Ellen walks toward Moss' office in a tank dress and flip-flops, studying the contract he gave her.

She hears an explosive cackle of female laughter and looks up. A beat later Tricia James emerges from Moss' office, sashays off in the opposite direction.

Ellen pauses outside his door, thinking as she watches Tricia walk away. After a beat, she knocks on his door.

MOSS (O.S.)
Yes?

INT. MOSS'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Ellen walks in. Moss looks up from his laptop.

MOSS
Ellen.

ELLEN
Thanks for the flowers.

MOSS
After what happened, I'm just glad you're in one piece.
(re: her attire)
Nice get up. Casual Friday on a Thursday morning. Get properly dressed, the bigwigs are prowling the halls. And the old man is here.

ELLEN
Jonathan Quaff?

MOSS
I'm stunned he's still breathing. I'm planning a vacation to Scotland and I'm trying to decide if St. Andrews or Turnberry has the better course - meaning I'm under a lot of pressure here. What's up?

She lays her contract in front of him.

ELLEN
I was hoping you might sign this.

MOSS
When you do what I asked you to do.

ELLEN
I figured out that if we reduce executive bonuses by just nine percent we could keep everyone.

He turns back to his laptop, talks as he surfs the net.

MOSS
Don't grow a conscience because you bumped your head. We opened the kimono and paid for the drill down. I'm not ignoring the recommend.

ELLEN
I was hoping we could put a little human in human resources.

MOSS
I'm sure the soup kitchen downtown needs volunteers, Ellen. Trust me, they'll all live. FYI, Markus is far from pleased about the Piers Moore debacle.

ELLEN
(a beat re: that, then-)
What's the meeting agenda?

MOSS
If you send those fourteen employees packing I'll add your promotion to VP to it.
(eye contact)
Execute and we'll talk. And lose the clothes.

She takes the contract, nods, and walks out.

INT. ELLEN'S OFFICE - HALF HOUR LATER - LATE MORNING

Ellen stares at her computer screen with concern.

THE MONITOR: Beverageworld.com - THE trade mag for the booze business. Headlines scroll - then we see what Ellen sees:
SUPERSTAR SALESMAN PIERS MOORE COURTED BY PERNOD-RICARD.
Ellen turns to her window and we see her mind going to work.

INT. NICHOLS AND QUAFF - HALLWAY - NOON

Ellen walks with focus toward a cubicle carrying an envelope.

INT. JUDITH'S CUBICLE - CONTINUOUS

Ellen enters Judith's space, sits. They speak quietly.

JUDITH
Hey. How's your head?

ELLEN
I feel great.

Ellen brandishes the envelope - Judith digests she's in business mode.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
I need you to go to Chicago. There's a thousand dollars petty cash in here if you need it. I've already booked you a flight.

JUDITH
What? When?

ELLEN
Plane leaves in two hours.

JUDITH
Why?

ELLEN
(sincere)
Judith, do you remember last night when I said I wanted to change things?

JUDITH
Yes.

Ellen says this from the heart.

ELLEN
I can't do it alone.

This is the moment. Where partnerships are made. Or not.

Judith bolts up, sticks her phone in her bag, shuts down her computer. Ellen grabs Judith's coat from the rack, holds it ready so Judith can slide into it.

JUDITH
What am I doing in Chicago?

They hurry out of Judith's cubicle, Ellen drops instructions as they move down the hall to the elevator bank. She slides out a picture of Piers Moore.

ELLEN
Find this guy, Piers Moore. Have him sign his new contract - it's in the envelope. Tell him I've doubled what they originally offered him.

JUDITH
Did you get approval for that?

ELLEN
Asking approval is just ass kissing without lips.

JUDITH
Can't you just fax and have him sign and scan the contract?

ELLEN
I've left him messages. You're my insurance. He's meeting with Pernod-Ricard and if they sign him the conversation's over. His home address, work address, cell number - everything you need is in the envelope.

They reach the elevators as the doors open. Judith steps in.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
One more thing: tell Piers that Ellen requires his services in Vagistan as soon as possible.

JUDITH
Vagistan?

ELLEN
(as the doors close)
He'll know what you mean.

Ellen turns from the elevator toward the offices, her eyes already focused on the next bit of business...

INT. LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM - AFTERNOON

TWENTY MEN AND WOMEN IN SUITS around a long sleek table. Pre-meeting chit-chat and smart phone love. Moss picks his teeth with a paper clip. Markus confers with Tim Rimming. JONATHAN QUAFF (80), one of the founders of N&Q, sits between TWO BOOTLICKING ASSISTANTS (20's).

Moss sees Ellen walk in - still wearing a tank dress and flip-flops and holding her contract. Moss' way of covering his ass for his underling's attire is-

MOSS
As you may know, Ellen was in a *terrible* accident. She's back today. For a little while.

Now the clothes are okay. There's some polite *oh my gosh welcome back glad you're okay* greetings.

ELLEN
Thanks.

Markus stands. Moss eyes Ellen. She takes a seat at the table. This does not please him. At all.

MARKUS
Thanks for flying in from our offices around the U.S., and welcome to the leadership meeting. We're going to announce new titles, discuss sales data and get updates from each office. I'm sure you all noticed that the founder of this great company, Jonathan Quaff, has joined us today. An honor, sir.

Quaff somberly scans the room, taking in the polite applause.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - HALF HOUR LATER

A PASTY MALE (30) drones at the podium about a build-out at the White Plains office. Human Ambien. Ellen finishes writing on a post-it, adheres it to her contract, stands, walks past Moss, lays it in front of him, exits the room.

INT. WOMEN'S BATHROOM - MINUTE LATER

As Ellen walks in, humming to herself, and heads to a stall. She begins to pee - <u>the sound continues over our next beat</u>...

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - SAME TIME

THE SOUND OF PEE as Moss stares in shock at Ellen's note: *"sign this by the time I walk back in, hand it to me, make the announcement when you speak. Or I tell your wife you're banging Tricia James."*

<u>FLUSH</u>

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - TWO MINUTES LATER

Ellen walks in. Passes by Moss. He holds up the signed contract. She snatches it without looking or missing a step.

Human Ambien concludes his monotone torture, intro's Moss. Moss stands. Brave face. Push through. Moves to podium.

MOSS
Hello everyone. Before I share my HR overview, I'm pleased to be making a surprise announcement. None other than our survivor here, Ellen Bell, has been promoted to Director of Human Resources.

Polite clapping. Moss shoots Ellen an ugly smile. BITCH.

Ellen stands. She's moving to the podium. Moss' face flashes *Whatthefuckyoudoing?* Takes everything to conceal his rage. As she nudges him out of the way...

ELLEN
(under her breath)
I was totally guessing. But now I know.

His eyes bulge with dumbfounded rage as he goes back to his chair. Ellen doesn't speak for a beat. Then another.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
Over the last week, I had time to think. Time to think about my life. About this world we live in.

Audible sighs. And facial expressions which say *oh no, not another windbag in a conference room. Oh God, please make it fast.* They pretend to listen as their eyes furtively flick between Ellen and the Blackberries in their laps.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
I also had time to think about this company. Really think about it. Ladies and gentlemen, we sell booze. *Do it* fluid. Giggle juice. Firewater.
(eyes raise from Blackberries)
We're the reason thousands of deals get made around the world, the reason people laugh and sing and dance and get laid on the nights they otherwise wouldn't.

Suits lean forward, attitude and posture shift - *wait, what?* Ellen gathers steam with each new line...

ELLEN (CONT'D)
I used to come here and want to control the employees, make them toe the line, and keep them *down*. Now, I want to celebrate them. I want to build a well-lubricated army of workers who live and breathe Nichols & Quaff and spread the consumption of our products all across the globe.

LEGAL TEXT FADES UP BOTTOM SCREEN - the kind we see on every TV Alcohol Ad:

ALWAYS DRINK RESPONSIBLY

This text appears in the series whenever the content / comedy calls for it.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
Do not get me wrong, I'm aware there are people with alcohol issues, who need help, and I respect that. We need to make an extra effort to help them. In fact, we will help them. But, is there hatred for donuts when some gluttonous scale-breaker goes morbidly obese on Bavarian creams and chocolate Eclairs? No. And let us not forget that people who abuse alcohol and draw attention to themselves are in the minority. The rest of us, the *majority* of drinkers, we don't get press. I don't see any headlines saying 'Jane Smith got home safe after having wine with dinner' or 'Bob felt better after an ice cold beer' or 'Carol and her husband fucked like bunnies after a couple of dry martinis' or 'Steve came out of the closet after two shots of Tequila.'

Somebody claps. Someone else does. A few more. It's almost involuntary. Ellen raises her hand - doesn't want applause. Moss stares at Ellen like a stupefied mannequin. Jonathan Quaff watches her like he's on the verge of a stroke.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
I ask you this: when we look outside, is it not painfully clear that we need a drink now more than ever? It sucks out there!
(MORE)

ELLEN (CONT'D)
Have you read the news lately? And who in the hell killed the three martini lunch!? We want our booze back!

LOUD APPLAUSE. Ellen has to raise her voice to be heard.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
Let me close with this: the way to a higher stock price and fat bonuses is not through firing hard working people, it's taking the people we employ and empowering them to get the finest booze available to mankind into the hands of each and every human being old enough to belly up to a bar!

The room erupts in applause. A MALE EXEC's hand shoots up.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
Yes?

MALE EXEC
(over applause)
I know you've been promoted to Director of HR, but are you open to advising other departments?

ELLEN
Absolutely.

Quick cut to Markus on that, eyeballing her. A FEMALE EXEC's hand shoots up.

FEMALE EXEC
What about the watch dog groups and all the limitations they put on us?

Murmurs of assent and *"good question"* etc.

ELLEN
Find out who they are and hire them for more money.

Jonathan Quaff looks like he wants to speak. He raises a finger - it's all he needs to silence the room.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
Yes, Mr. Quaff?

He narrows his eyes at Ellen. Hold this.

JONATHAN QUAFF
What did you say your name was?

ELLEN
Ellen Bell.

JONATHAN QUAFF
Ellen. I've been waiting since 1987 for someone to come along with enough balls to say what you just said.

Applause. Quaff vanquishes it with another raised finger.

JONATHAN QUAFF (CONT'D)
I'd like to buy everyone a drink tonight.
(to Ellen, he's joking)
And I'd like your phone number.

Laughter. And after the laughter dies down a bit...

ELLEN
Shall we rendezvous at the elevators in an hour or so?

Murmurs of agreement. Ellen moves from the podium, realizes Moss has her locked in his gaze. She passes him on her way out - he holds up a folded piece of paper and she takes it.

INT. NICHOLS AND QUAFF - HALLWAY - MINUTE LATER - AFTERNOON

Ellen stops, unfolds the piece of paper, reads:

I AM GOING TO BURY YOU

Ellen thinks. Looks both ways down the hall.

As something comes to life in her eyes we PRE-LAP AN EXOTIC SINGING MALE VOICE which takes us to-

INT. N&Q - I.T. DEPARTMENT - MINUTE LATER - AFTERNOON

Ellen walks toward an office door, hears Farshid's voice inside chanting the Call To Prayer. A NERDY I.T. GUY (25) walks toward her and-

NERDY I.T. GUY
I wouldn't go in, he's doing his Adhan.

Ellen's face tightens, she just can't wait any longer. She quietly turns the door handle and opens it slowly and-

INT. FARSHID'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Ellen steps in. Armed with heartfelt apologies for such a rude interruption. However.....

The chanting VOICE. Emanates from speakers. Not Farshid. He's far too busy blazing through World Nine of *ANGRY BIRDS*. House music pumps through his Dr. Dre Monster Beats headphones. His socks and shoes are strewn over the floor. She sees his backpack hanging on a hook with the top of a wine bottle sticking out.

Ellen smiles. Walks behind him. Stands utterly still. Beat. IN A BLUR Farshid spins and jumps up and rips off his headphones and he's face to face with Ellen. Shocked.

At first. Then, degree by beautiful degree a dazzling shit-eating grin appears on his face. His accent is gone.

FARSHID
Times are tough, this economy is a nightmare. I was protecting my job with a shield of religion. It was either that or a medical malady.

Edward Norton in *Primal Fear* ain't got nothing on Farshid. Ellen is stunned. But recovering.

FARSHID (CONT'D)
Can I pack up some of my stuff and then leave, or is this one of those call security you're fired get out now situations?

Beat. She stares at him in wonder. She shakes her head.

ELLEN
Completely and utterly brilliant.

FARSHID
What?

ELLEN
YOU.

He doesn't comprehend she's totally fucking impressed.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
Want to save your job, Farshid?

FARSHID
Yes.

ELLEN
It must be between us.

FARSHID
Everything is from now on.

ELLEN
Are you able to look at text messages of an employee?

FARSHID
If the employee uses a company phone. Who?

ELLEN
Moss Lieber.

FARSHID
Have a seat.

Ellen does. Farshid moves to his desk, works the keyboard.

FARSHID (CONT'D)
Are we good?

ELLEN
We are good. We are real good.

INT. NICHOLS AND QUAFF - HALLWAY - TEN MINUTES LATER

Ellen holds a sheath of printouts as she walks down the hall.

She pauses outside the glass enclosed office of Tim Rimming, who looks up, sees her and waves her in.

INT. TIM'S OFFICE

He smiles.

TIM
That was so great in there. You just cut through all the fear.
(re: her distressed look)
What's wrong?

She sighs, shakes her head. Hands the print-outs to him.

ELLEN
I.T. just sent them to me. They were doing a random communication review. These came up for Tricia James. And Moss.

Tim reads. Eyebrows raise.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
I feel awful. He just promoted me.

Tim reads on. Quotes something...

TIM
'If you aren't in my office by 12:45 with your clothes off you're fired.'

ELLEN
Clearly it's part of some game they play, not a real workplace threat.

Tim and Ellen lock eyes. Something here is communicated way beyond words. But a few words are required...

TIM
Often in workplace legal cases there's a double meaning that must be resolved by judgement. There are many methods of interpretation but at the core of any analysis, there must be purpose and desired outcome. Do you understand what I'm saying, Ellen?

ELLEN
Resources are limited in the workplace, so employees have an incentive to achieve their goals at the expense of their colleagues?

TIM
Ding!

ELLEN
Why the anti-Moss sentiment?

TIM
I liked what you said in there. And I've never liked him. He's lazy and arrogant.

ELLEN
I lied to you, Tim. About feeling awful.

TIM
I know.

ELLEN
Sorry.

TIM
It's all good.

And off Ellen we go-

INT. NICHOLS AND QUAFF - ELLEN'S OFFICE - LATER

Ellen at her desk reading the employee handbook. And drawing X's over entire pages. A bottle of Zepata Tequila with a styrofoam cup over the cap sits on her desk.

A beat of silence. Then a MAN'S BLOODCURDLING SCREAM echoes through the office. Ellen smiles. Ceremoniously pours a shot of tequila, raises the cup in salute, knocks it back. She unfolds a piece of paper on her desk - it's Moss's note: **I AM GOING TO BURY YOU.** She looks at it, then tears it in half and drops it in the garbage.

INT. NICHOLS AND QUAFF - ELEVATOR BANK - TEN MINUTES LATER

Markus, Tim, Dana, Jonathan Quaff, his Assistants and a few suits talk as they wait by the elevators for Ellen.

TIM
There she is...

Ellen. Smiling. Glowing with confidence. Trailed by Judith, Tami, Farshid, and...*a JANITOR* (JUAN, 37).

ELLEN
I thought I'd bring some humanity to the proceedings.

The suits turn in unison to see Jonathan Quaff's response to the Janitor idea. But his eyes are locked on Ellen and they're glowing with pride.

DANA
What was that screaming?

Everyone piles in the elevator. Ellen and Farshid end up going in last and facing the doors.

TIM
Moss Lieber was being escorted out.

DANA
Oh.

Ellen and Farshid's eyes don't meet, but the subtle secret smile on their faces is nearly identical. The doors close on them and we go-

INT. ELEVATOR

Everybody packed in like sardines. PRELAP THUMPING MUSIC. STROBE LIGHTS WASH OVER THEM. ELEVATOR DOORS OPEN AND-

INT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

The N&Q posse flows out of an elevator onto a packed dance floor illuminated by strobe lights.

A SERIES OF CUTS- (to loud music)

-Tim grinding shirtless with a hot guy

-Farshid holds Tami by the hips as they mimic the Standing Wheelbarrow sex position

-Juan dancing - the guy is insanely great - bad ass breaking, popping and locking-

-Markus up on the SECOND LEVEL staring suspiciously down at-

-Ellen and Jonathan Quaff. In an intense conversation. Until Tim grabs her and pulls her on the dance floor-

-Ellen lost in the music as a great song comes on and we move into her beaming beautiful face flickering in the strobe and we are-

EXT. THE GRIND HOUSE - PARKING LOT - MORNING

Ellen pulls in behind the wheel of her crappy insurance replacement car, opens the door and gets out. Her cell rings, she takes it as she walks to the entrance.

ELLEN
Hello?

A MAN'S VOICE
(on cell throughout)
I have Mr. Quaff for you.

ELLEN
Oh. Good.

JONATHAN QUAFF
Ellen?

ELLEN
Hi.

Airline announcements in the B.G. - *turn off mobile phones, seats in upright position, tray tables* etc.

JONATHAN QUAFF
That was a helleva night, my dear.

ELLEN
Yes. Amazing.

JONATHAN QUAFF
I thought I was going to leave a pile of bureaucratic caca when I died, but you...you give me hope. Sonofabitch, a flight attendant's telling me to hang up. But I wanted to answer your question.

Ellen stops moving toward The Grind House. Thinks. *Question? What question?* She's totally lost. But plays it so cool.

ELLEN
Oh, great.

JONATHAN QUAFF
The answer is, do it. So long, Ellen. I'm sure we'll be talking.

He clicks off. She's blanking. *Do it?* She searches her mind. For a long beat. Then, as her eyes widen-

WE REVERSE

-from this moment ALL THE WAY BACK TO THE CLUB, to the conversation Ellen was having with Jonathan Quaff when Markus was watching them with suspicion from the balcony.

Ellen has had a drink or two, she's possessed by the loud music and the moment. She looks in Jonathan's eyes and asks-

ELLEN
(rips through fast)
What would you say if I told you I wanted to turn Nichols & Quaff inside out? I'm talking a coup d'état and tonic with a splash of end the idiocy, I'm talking subverting the system, corrupting the corruption and pissing on policies that make people hate going to work in the morning. I want to make new booze, rethink business, and administer a company-wide enema that kicks the place in it's big, fat, corporate ass.

Before he can answer, Tim grabs Ellen by the hand and pulls her on the dance floor and we are back in the-

PRESENT

Ellen looks up from her cell phone. Stares straight ahead. She slowly breaks out in a beautifully mischievous grin.

A feeling Ellen has never experienced before flows through her like a wave of light:

It's fucking great to be alive.

INT. THE GRIND HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ellen walks in, heads to the counter. Barista checks her out an extra beat, sees there's something different going on.

BARISTA
The usual?

ELLEN
No. I'd like a black coffee and a blueberry muffin.

BARISTA
Sure thing.

Ellen smells the aroma of coffee and pastries. Looks around. People with Laptops. Readers. Papers.

She zeroes in on someone: HANDSOME GUY. Who suggested the blueberry bran muffin. Remember him? Barista returns with coffee and muffin.

ELLEN
May I have another muffin?

BARISTA
Of course.

INT. THE GRIND HOUSE - MINUTE LATER

Ellen balances plates, coffee, and cell phone, walks to Handsome Guy's table, sits across from him, passes him a muffin. He looks up, startled.

ELLEN
What are you up to?

HANDSOME GUY
I'm...actually job hunting. You're the bran muffin woman.

ELLEN
What kind of job are you hunting?

HANDSOME GUY
I have a literature degree from Princeton but-

ELLEN
(her cell rings)
Sorry.
(into phone)
Hello?

JUDITH
(on cell throughout)
We're on our way.

ELLEN
"We're?"

JUDITH
(slurred)
I made him come with us...

Ellen is already rising out of her chair. Rifles her handbag, finds a business card, gives it to Handsome Guy.

ELLEN
You sound drunk.

JUDITH
The man is crazy, Ellen. We've been out all night.

ELLEN
(to Handsome Guy)
Call me. I may have a job for you.

She turns away, talking to Judith as she exits...

ELLEN (CONT'D)
Text me when you're on the elevator and I'll meet you...

Off Handsome Guy watching her go, intrigued. He realizes she left her muffin and coffee, jumps up and grabs them to bring it to her, but she's already gone. We'll see this guy again.

INT. N&Q - HALLWAY - HALF HOUR LATER - MORNING

Ellen walks to the elevator. Waits. Piers and Judith emerge, sleep deprived and slightly hammered.

ELLEN
Follow me.

She looks at Judith as they walk.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
You have his contract?

PIERS
Not even a hello?

Ellen stops. Kisses Piers. Five seconds of the most desire inducing loin tingling French kissing we've ever seen.

ELLEN
Hello handsome.

Then she continues walking. Piers tries to recover. Judith passes Ellen his signed contract.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
You rule.

JUDITH
Can I go home and sleep?

ELLEN
Of course. Call me later.

She stops, looks in Judith's eyes.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
Thank you, Judith.

JUDITH
Stay crazy.

Judith smiles and heads off.

PIERS
Where we rushing to?

ELLEN
Markus. But he's leaving in about ten minutes for New York.

PIERS
Markus?

EXT. MARKUS' OFFICE - SECONDS LATER

Ellen stops by Markus' office door, has Piers wait.

ELLEN
Just one sec.

Ellen knocks, walks right in.

INT. MARKUS OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Markus is on the phone, near a window. His coat and briefcase are on a chair by the door.

He turns and sees Ellen.

MARKUS
(in headset)
Doug, let's close the circle later. Upload Hanks's notes to Eva and we'll Botox the numbers Monday.
(hangs up, to Ellen)
Just because you're the new Head of Human Resources, doesn't mean you can walk right in.

ELLEN
What are you talking about?

MARKUS
Jonathan Quaff sent a company wide email ten minutes ago. With Moss gone it's all you.

Ellen processes it. It's hard to pretend she didn't plan it this way, but the reality of it is sweeter than she expected.

ELLEN
I have news for you, too.

She crosses to him, gives him Pier's contract.

He examines it, looks up at her, surprised and impressed.

MARKUS
You did it.

ELLEN
Yes.

MARKUS
What's going on with you, anyway?
(doubletakes the contract)
Whoa, that base salary is high.

ELLEN
Moss Lieber's salary covers it.

MARKUS
Oh. Right. Good. Smart. When can he start?

ELLEN
Why don't you ask him.
(off his surprise as she turns to the door)
Piers?

MARKUS
He's here?

Piers walks in. Markus is astonished and overjoyed.

MARKUS (CONT'D)
Piers Moore?!

ELLEN
Piers, this is Markus Teal, CEO of N&Q, and your biggest fan.

MARKUS
I am so happy you're here.

PIERS
Hiya.

Markus walks to Piers, reaches out his hand to shake. Piers steps toward Markus and the NEXT MOMENT HAPPENS SO FAST IT TAKES US A BEAT TO PROCESS-

Piers punches Markus in the face and Markus trips back and flips over his desk and crashes to the floor.

LONG beat. Holy shit.

Then, Ellen remembers something. She turns to Piers.

ELLEN
Let me guess - payback for London.

He nods.

PIERS
And this could be the all time record for shortest length of employment at a company.

Markus's head slowly rises up from behind his desk. Blood streams from his lip as he stands up.

He wipes it with his sleeve and-

MARKUS
Want to call it even?

PIERS
I'd love to.

MARKUS
(bloody smile)
In that case, welcome aboard.

Piers touches his knuckles and grimaces - he's no brawler.

PIERS
Thank you, Markus.

ELLEN
C'mon Piers, let's go to your new office.

PIERS
I'd rather go to Vagistan.

Ellen looks at him with a coy smile.

ELLEN
You know what they say, it's wise to discover a few things about a new country before you actually go there.

And as they walk out of the office we are-

END OF PILOT