

SCENE 1

SETTING: Alex's new office at Scratchopolis, a backscratcher company. There is an office chair and a desk with a phone on it. On the wall there is a poster depicting a backscratcher with the slogan "Scratchopolis: Ditch Your Itch!"

AT RISE: We hear a phone ring, and lights come up on ALEX, sitting in the office chair. He answers the phone.

ALEX

Thank you for calling Scratchopolis, home of all your backscratcher related needs. How may I assist you?

(Pause.)

I'm sorry you're not satisfied with the Itch Irradiator. It's our top of the line model. May I ask what difficulties you've encountered, sir?

(Pause.)

It burst into flames?

(Pause.)

Look, how about I just send you a new one?

(Pause.)

I'm glad we were able to work this out. Thank you for calling.

(ALEX hangs up and looks around nervously before quickly picking up the phone again and dialing a number. He waits a bit and then begins nervously leaving a message.)

Hi, Katie? Hi. I guess you're not home now. I know we aren't supposed to, you know, talk. But just 'cause we broke up, there's nothing wrong with checking in, right?

(He gets a call on the other line.)

Oh, gotta go—

(He switches to the other line.)

Thank you for calling Scratchopolis. How may I assist you?

(Pause.)

I'm sorry to hear you lost your backscratcher, ma'am.

(Pause.)

No, I don't know where it is.

(Pause.)

Ma'am, please, calm down. Watch your language—oh, you found it. Ok. You're welcome. Bye.

(He hangs up, then quickly redials Katie's number.)  
Hi Katie. I forgot to say...this is Alex. So, uh, anyway, call me back, if you want.

(He hangs up, but immediately redials Katie's number.)  
It's me again. You're probably wondering how I'm doing. I'm doing great. I bought an ottoman.

(Pause. ALEX picks up a little object shaped like a hand from his desk and begins to manipulate it.)  
Anyway, I'll see you soon. Wait, I guess I won't. But I'll talk to you, maybe. You know, probably. So...bye. I guess. I mean...it's Alex.

(ALEX hangs up. HONORIA enters.)

ALEX

Hello?

HONORIA

You're new here.

ALEX

Yes.

HONORIA

I don't care for change, Alex.

ALEX

Oh, you know my name.

HONORIA

Your deductive skills are commendable. Now let us proceed to the topic at hand. I wish to present you with a proposal.

ALEX

(Uncomfortable, lamely:)  
A proposal? You'll have to buy me dinner first...  
(He laughs nervously. HONORIA stares at him, expressionless.)  
You were saying?

HONORIA

Every workday at precisely 10:14 I depart from my office for a brief 3.75 minute break where I consume five-eighths of a banana and some nonfat ice milk. The shortest route to the kitchen from my workspace is through this office. I

feel you must know this lest you become startled by my daily commute.

ALEX

So, you're going to come through my office every day?

HONORIA

I'm afraid you have no choice, Alex. Cutting through your office shaves roughly ten steps off my commute both ways. Assuming one step takes approximately 0.5 seconds, that's five seconds saved per day, translating to 1300 seconds, or 21.7 minutes, saved per year. Now, to the second topic at hand.

ALEX

There's a second topic?

HONORIA

Mr. Delafontaine has requested I improve my relations with my coworkers. He feels I am unable to connect to others on a personal level and am inept at understanding various social cues.

ALEX

Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. You know, I had a cousin who-

HONORIA

(Abruptly cutting him off:)

During every morning trip to my break I shall say, "Good morning, Alex," and you shall respond, "Good morning, Honoria." Upon my return trip through your office, I shall bring up a common topic of conversation. We shall discuss it briefly, and then I shall exit. Is this clear to you?

ALEX

Sort of.

HONORIA

My break is starting. Good morning, Alex.

ALEX

Enjoy your break.

(HONORIA stares at him.)

Is something wrong?

HONORIA

I must insist you stick to the prearranged agreement. Say "Good morning, Honoria."

ALEX

Oh, right. "Good morning, Honoria."

(HONORIA stares at him for a bit, then exits. ALEX continues to look at the hand-shaped object, when suddenly LOUIE enters stage right.)

LOUIE

Hey, Alex! Welcome to Scratchopolis, buddy!

ALEX

Oh! Hey Louie.

LOUIE

What's wrong?

ALEX

I just met someone named Honoria.

LOUIE

We like to play a little game around the office called "If Honoria Sees You, Run Like Hell." I don't know if you'd like it, though. It requires a lot of strategic nuance.

ALEX

Oh.

LOUIE

Anyway, tell me, how's your first day as Executive in Charge of Quality Control?

ALEX

I'm still settling in. I can't believe I already have an executive position.

LOUIE

Yeah, we use the term "executive" pretty loosely here. Steve the unpaid intern is Executive in Charge of Fabricating Course Credits.

ALEX

Well, thanks, Louie, for recommending me for the job.

LOUIE

No problem, pal. You needed a fresh start. And nothing can give you a fresh start like the nation's third most

successful backscratcher company. Hey, I almost forgot your office-warming present!

(LOUIE exits to retrieve the present.)

ALEX

Present? Louie, you didn't have to-

(LOUIE returns with a sad-looking cactus.)

ALEX (CONT'D)

Oh. You got me a cactus.

LOUIE

Last night it hit me that I hadn't gotten you anything for your new office! So I wrote "buy Alex gift" on my hand so I wouldn't forget. But it must have used a cheap marker, because in the morning, the only letters I could make out spelled "Blift." "What the hell does Blift mean!?" I thought. It was the scribblings of a madman! But then, when I was cutting through the alley on the way to work, I remembered! Blift! Buy Alex gift! And—just my luck—I saw this beauty, sitting all alone in the alley, like that guy who sometimes sells me magic beans. It was fate.

(LOUIE plops the cactus down on ALEX's desk.)

ALEX

Uh...thanks.

LOUIE

It's just that you both could use a little love.

ALEX

It looks like it could use a little sun, too.

(ALEX takes the cactus and places it on the window sill.)

LOUIE

(Catching sight of the hand-shaped object:)  
Oh, no. Alex, don't tell me you still have this!

ALEX

Louie, please don't touch that.

LOUIE

I thought you were trying to get over Katie. Keeping her gifts won't help that!

ALEX

It's the only thing I have left of her.

LOUIE

Fine. But tonight I want you to come out with me and some people from the office.

ALEX

I don't know. I mean, I have to go home and, you know, throw out some expired yogurts—

LOUIE

Come on. It's been forever since you've felt any kind of *joie de vivre*.

ALEX

Sorry, Louie. I can't go out tonight.

LOUIE

At least promise me the one tiny request that you'll forget all about Katie.

ALEX

I can't promise that.

(ALEX clutches the hand-shaped object.)

LOUIE

Oh God, you didn't leave her another message, did you?

(Suddenly, HONORIA bursts in stage left.)

HONORIA

Chinchillas are the softest rodents and have been hunted nearly to extinction. What are your thoughts on this matter?

LOUIE

(Not pleased to see her:)

Hello, Honoria.

HONORIA

(To LOUIE, not looking at him:)

Don't try to engage me. I haven't the time for multiple discourses.

LOUIE

Looks like it's my lucky day.

(LOUIE exits stage right.)

HONORIA

Your thoughts, please.

ALEX

What?

HONORIA

Your thoughts. On the chinchilla matter. I'm trying to have a conversation, Alex. Remember our agreement.

ALEX

Well, I guess that's pretty sad, that they're hunted and all.

HONORIA

Goodbye.

(HONORIA exits.)

END OF EXERPT