



∞ A Boardroom Farce ∞

by Ross Carter

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

<i>Vienna Sylvester</i>	Executive secretary
<i>Higginbottom</i>	CEO of Conglomerated Enterprises
<i>Fred Noyes</i>	Chief Financial Officer
<i>Lanny Slezak</i>	VP of Sales & Marketing
<i>Manny Escobar</i>	VP of Human Resources
<i>Christina Marlowe</i>	Plain clothes detective, Newark Police Department
<i>Lily LeBlanc</i>	Attractive author of <i>Managing By Threes</i>
<i>Sidney</i>	A young applicant for Vienna's job

PLACE

The executive offices of Conglomerated Enterprises.

TIME

The recent past.

ACT 1**SCENE 1**

Setting: The common area of a suite of executive offices in an upper floor of a large office building. A wall extends across the upstage. The wall contains four doors. The UR door opens upstage and leads to FRED's office. The URC door opens downstage and is the doorway to the rest of the building. We will call this the main door. The ULC door opens upstage and leads to MANNY's office. The UL door opens upstage and leads to LANNY's office. Positioned LC, between MANNY's and LANNY's doors, is a desk with a chair and a wastepaper basket. On the desk is a telephone and papers but no computer. There are exits to the wings L and R; they have no door, but rather represent corridors. To accomplish setting changes from the common area to the interior of an office, actors exit through an office door and enter, usually immediately, through the main door. The desk, which is VIENNA's desk in the office common area, becomes the office occupant's desk. To return from an office to the common area, actors exit through the main door and re-enter through the office door. These changes happen swiftly, without blackouts or breaks in the action.

The audience does not need to see into the set upstage of the doors.

Actors must be able to cross backstage between all the exits, including the far left and far right exits, with reasonable alacrity.

Lights Up: Doors are closed. It is a weekday morning and employees are arriving for work.

VIENNA SYLVESTER enters through the main door. She sits at her desk, tidies her desk which is already tidy, and generally seems in no hurry to begin doing anything productive. One senses that she has worked her way up to the position of executive secretary, and now finds that there is nothing of interest for her to do. At length she picks up the phone and dials a few numbers.

VIENNA

Hello, and thank you for calling Conglomerated Enterprises. You have reached Vienna Sylvester, executive secretary. Today is Tuesday the twenty-second. Due

to an exceptionally high call volume, I cannot take your call now, but if you will leave your name and number, I will forward your message to the appropriate person. Thank you.

VIENNA replaces the phone and sighs as if she has just done a day's work. LANNY SLEZAK enters through the main door and crosses to VIENNA to pick up his messages. LANNY fancies himself a ladies' man.

LANNY

Morning, Vienna.

VIENNA

Morning, Lanny.

LANNY flips through his messages as he exits into his office. MANNY ESCOBAR enters through the main door. MANNY is not the sharpest knife in the drawer.

MANNY

Morning, Vienna.

VIENNA

Morning, Lanny. May I please be promoted to office manager?

MANNY

No.

MANNY takes his messages from VIENNA and flips through them as he crosses to his office door. He stops and turns toward VIENNA.

MANNY

What did you call me?

VIENNA

I said Good Morning, Manny.

MANNY

No you didn't, you called me Lanny.

VIENNA

No, I said Manny.

MANNY

You called me Lanny.

VIENNA

Your hearing aid is acting up again. Did you get a new battery for it?

MANNY

I distinctly heard you say Lanny. You know how much I hate to be called Lanny. It's Manny. And I asked you to pick up a hearing aid battery for me.

VIENNA

Look, I know your name is Manny. Who could forget the irony? And I didn't get your hearing aid battery because I'm an executive secretary, not your personal secretary.

MANNY

Lanny is a no good scum wart and I don't want anybody confusing us. So just don't call me by his name. What do you mean 'who could forget the irony?'

VIENNA

Manny, man, you, man. It's ironic, that's all.

MANNY

OK, let's just start over. Thank you for my messages, Vienna.

VIENNA

You're welcome, Manly.

MANNY exits into his office.

VIENNA

Not.

FRED NOYES enters through the main door. He is dressed in a very business-like dark suit. He is the most senior of the three vice-presidents, humorless and focused.

FRED

Morning, Vienna.

VIENNA

Morning, Fred.

FRED

What did you call me?

VIENNA

I said Good morning, Mr. Noyes.

FRED

That's better. Any messages?

VIENNA

Here you are.

FRED takes his messages from VIENNA.

FRED

And my appointments?

VIENNA

They're with your messages.

FRED

Vienna, how many times have I told you, I want my appointments separated from my messages!

VIENNA

What difference does it make? Everyone else wants their appointments and messages all at once.

FRED

I don't care what those two tree frogs want. We do things my way, is that clear?

VIENNA

Yes, Mr Noyes.

FRED crosses to his office.

VIENNA

Mr. Noyes, may I—

FRED

No!

FRED exits into his office. LANNY enters from his office.

LANNY

Vienna, have those other two air-brains showed up yet?

VIENNA

I haven't seen them.

LANNY exits into office. VIENNA dials a phone number and waits for an answer. A few beats of silence pass. MANNY, LANNY, and FRED burst from their offices, irritated and speaking at the same time.

MANNY

Vienna, do you realize these aren't my messages? Will you please give me my messages and give these to Doctor No? Why do you think I want his messages? Etc.

LANNY

Not again, Vienna, can't you get anything right? I don't know any of these people. These are for Minny here. You do this every day. How are we supposed to get anything done? Etc.

FRED

These are his messages, not mine. I can feel the sleaze dripping off these things. I wish you could get this one simple thing right. That's not too much to ask, is it? One simple thing? Etc.

VIENNA

Hi, Charlene. What are you doing? Oh, nothing. Yeah, me too. Just passing the time.

As the men fume, VIENNA places her hand over the telephone.

VIENNA

Would you please keep it down? Can't you see I'm on the phone?

MANNY, LANNY, and FRED continue to fume as they sort out their messages among themselves and exit to their offices.

VIENNA

All right, Charlene, I'd better go now. I'll call you again in a few minutes.

VIENNA hangs up the phone. After a few beats, the men explode from their offices.

MANNY

These still aren't my messages. Why did you give these to me? Etc.

LANNY

You know these aren't mine. You're as confused as she is. Etc.

FRED

Those are mine, can't you see that? Why is this so difficult for you? Etc.

Again they sort out their messages. LANNY and MANNY exit into their offices.

FRED

Vienna, it's time we—

VIENNA

Coffee break.

VIENNA exits into the corridor L. FRED looks angrily after her, then exits into his office. The scene shifts to the interior of Fred's office as FRED enters through the main door. He crosses DC looking at his messages.

FRED

Oh my God!

FRED exits through the main door. The scene changes back to the suite. FRED, LANNY, and MANNY enter from their respective office doors. They are each looking at a message.

LANNY

Boys, we've got a problem.

MANNY

I hate to tell you guys this, but trouble is brewing.

FRED

You think you've got trouble? I'll tell you what trouble looks like. This is what trouble looks like.

FRED shows his message to the others.

LANNY

You have a ten o'clock meeting with Lily LeBlanc. That's trouble?

MANNY

Who's Lily LeBlanc?

LANNY

Yeah, who's Lily LeBlanc? I think my trouble is bigger than your trouble. Look here: ten o'clock, FBI. I think that's more important than little Lily Langtree.

FRED

Oh for heaven sakes, don't you two polyps know anything? Lily LeBlanc is a vicious, heartless, conniving, death-dealing, shameless, two-faced—

LILY LEBLANC enters through the main door. FRED sees her and breaks off his tirade.

FRED

We'll continue this discussion in my office.

MANNY

In your office? You never let anyone in your office.

FRED

Just move!

FRED, LANNY, and MANNY exit through Fred's door. VIENNA enters L.

VIENNA

Good morning, may I help you?

LILY

Yes, I have a ten o'clock meeting viss— (*a strong French accent*)

VIENNA

Oh, yes, right, you're the ten o'clock. Won't you have a seat? All three executive vice-presidents are in a meeting just now, but they never talk to each other very long. Would you like a cup of coffee?

LILY

Oui merci, thank you.

VIENNA

It's right down this hallway. Oh, what the heck, I'll show you. Would you like to come this way?

VIENNA and LILY exit L. MARLOWE enters through the main door.

MARLOWE

Hello? Is anyone here? Hello?

Frustrated, MARLOWE exits through the main door. FRED, MANNY, and LANNY enter through the main door (by which we understand that they are entering Fred's office).

FRED

OK, we've got to think fast. It's almost ten o'clock.

LANNY

She's here early. That's a bad sign.

FRED

What do you know?

LANNY

I know women.

FRED

Not as many as you pretend to know.

MANNY

Why is your office nicer than mine?

FRED

Never mind that! Try to focus here! I've got a meeting scheduled with Lily LeBlanc!

MANNY

Who is she anyway?

FRED

I can't believe you two don't know about Lily LeBlanc. She's only written the most important book on management in a decade. Have you ever heard of Managing By Threes?

MANNY

I didn't realize that corner offices had such nice big windows.

LANNY

That sounds familiar. A book, isn't it? I don't read many books.

MANNY

You could hide behind those curtains and no one would ever find you.

FRED

Every midget-minded CEO in the country that's read her book has started getting rid of upper management. That's her schtick. She says most executive management is incompetent and companies are better off to cut it to the bone.

LANNY

And she's been successful at it?

FRED

She sent so many heads rolling they started calling her Madame La Guillotine. And get this: she hates men!

LANNY

She's never met me.

MANNY

I can barely open my window wide enough to get some fresh air.

FRED

Will you shut up about the office? We've got a crisis here! Now I want to know the truth and I want it now: did either of you have anything to do with this?

MANNY

With what?

FRED AND LANNY

With Lily LeBlanc!

MANNY

Oh, right. No, not me. I'm just the vice president for human resources. I don't hire management consultants. I don't hire anybody, if I can avoid it.

LANNY

Nor me either. Why would Sales and Marketing want to make the company more efficient?

FRED

Right. That's what I thought. I think we all know who's responsible for this crisis.

MANNY

Who?

FRED

Who is the biggest moron, the most ignorant, muddle-headed bag of bad ideas in this entire organization?

MANNY

Vienna?

FRED

No.

MANNY

You?

FRED

No, you idiot. Higginbottom!

MANNY

The CEO?

FRED

Don't you see? Lily LeBlanc has an appointment with me. You two are bound to be next. Obviously, she is looking for upper management personnel she can clear out. Higginbottom must have hired her on the sly. It's just like him!

LANNY

We all know that Higginbottom has been whipping our backs lately to come up with ways to cut costs. All he had to do was read Lily LeBlanc's book and the answer is staring him in the face. Bring her in as a consultant and let her chop out the deadwood.

MANNY

I hope by "deadwood" you're not referring to our bonuses. We're about due for one, aren't we Fred? Isn't it time for our National Cucumber Week bonus?

LANNY

That was last week. This week it's our Saint Swithin's Day bonus. Next week is our Talk Like a Pirate Day bonus.

FRED

We'll never make it to Talk Like A Pirate Day if we don't get past Walk The Plank Day.

MANNY

We get two bonuses this week? That's a lot, even for us. Say, do you think this Lily woman is going to find out about our bonuses? What if she looks through your books?

FRED

She won't find anything. Our bonuses are totally off the books. The official books, anyway. I keep our bonuses hidden where no one will find them.

MANNY

Where?

FRED

Where nobody will find them, lamebrain!

LANNY

Listen, if Lily LeBlanc is as dangerous as you say she is, we've got to work together to get through this.

MANNY

We can't work together. We hate each other.

FRED

Lanny's right, for once.

LANNY

What do you mean, "for once"!

MANNY

I think he means you've never been right.

LANNY

I know what he means!

MANNY

Then why did you ask?

FRED

Look, you two go out there and distract Lily LeBlanc. Buy us some time while I think.

LANNY

What should we tell her?

FRED

Tell her anything. Tell her I'm dealing with an existential crisis that could bring the entire industry to its knees.

LANNY

Which industry? We're a conglomerate.

FRED

The conglomeration industry, I don't care, just cover for me.

MANNY

Then what are we supposed to do? Just wait around for the axe to fall?

FRED

Your job is to stall for time while I come up with a brilliant course of action.

MANNY

I think there's a slight flaw in that plan.

FRED

You've got a better one?

LANNY

Just let me do the talking. I'm a salesman, remember? I'll just throw a little Sales and Marketing at her. She won't know what hit her. Poor devil.

FRED

Fine, whatever, just do it!

*FRED shoves MANNY and LANNY out through the main door.
FRED continues to think for a moment.*

FRED

I've got it!

FRED exits through the main door. VIENNA and LILY enter L.

VIENNA

Now that you know where the coffee is, feel free to help yourself. Sooner or later somebody is bound to come along who knows how to make it.

MANNY and LANNY enter through Fred's door.

MANNY

Good morning. You must be Madame La Guillotine.

LANNY

Shhhh! Miss Le Blanc, I take it? Excuse my friend. He isn't wearing his hearing aid. It affects his brain.

LILY

Good morning. Are you Monsieur Nwah?

LANNY

Huh? Oh, it's pronounced Noyes. N-O-Y-E-S. Noyes. Like a loud bang. You know. But you can call him Fred.

LILY

Him?

LANNY

Heem? Oh, him! No, I am not Fred Noyes. My name is Lanny Slezak.

LILY

Lanny?

LANNY

It's a nickname for Lance.

VIENNA

Because he uses his lance a lot.

FRED enters through his door, unseen by LILY, LANNY, and MANNY. FRED crosses to VIENNA and attempts, quite

unsuccessfully, to mime to her that she should pretend to be an executive.

LANNY

I do S and M.

LILY

S and M?

MANNY

That's Sales and Marketing.

LILY

Oh. How disappointing.

LANNY

I'm the vice-president of S and M.

LILY

Vice. Promising.

MANNY

Manny Escobar. Vice-president of human resources.

LILY

So much vice.

LANNY

Fred—Mr. Noyes—is tied up at the moment.

LILY

Tied up?

MANNY

He's crying on his knees.

LILY

What??

FRED breaks off his mime and crosses to LILY.

FRED

Miss LeBlanc! How do you do? Fred Noyes, Vice-president and Chief Financial Officer of Conglomerated Enterprises.

LILY

More vice. I see. How do you do? And are all your vice-presidents men? No women?

FRED

Au contraire! May I introduce our Super Senior Executive Vice-President, Vienna...

VIENNA

Sylvester.

FRED

Vienna Sylvester.

LANNY

He's lost his mind.

MANNY

You know what it sounded like he said? It sounded like he said Vienna is a vice-president instead of a lowly secretary.

LILY

Did you say Super Senior Executive? How impressive! And she is so humble! She even took me to get coffee! You boys could learn something from this lady's work ethic.

MANNY

Vienna has a work ethic?

LILY

So tell me Miss Sylvester. Why did you choose to place your office out here in ze common area? Would you not prefer to have a private office? A corner office, perhaps?

VIENNA

Oh, this is just temporary. From time to time I like to sit out here where I can see everything that goes on. Plus, it reminds me of the time when I was just an *office manager*. My real office is that one. (*Points to Fred's door.*) The corner office.

LILY

Zat one? But I thought zat was ze office of Monsieur Noyes.