# Tick, Tick, Bloom

written by

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**OVER BLACK.**

A soft ELEVATOR CHIME.

FADE IN:

**INT. OFFICE BUILDING - LOBBY - CLOSE ON ELEVATOR - MORNING**

The closed elevator doors open to reveal JANET (mid-50s, professional attire).

JANET
Good morning, Mark! How's the flower business?

REVERSE ANGLE

Ready to enter the elevator car is MARK LARKIN (55, gray at the temples, awkward but passionate). He is decked out in a store-bought vampire costume, including plastic fangs.

MARK
(a bit muffled)
Bloody good, Janet!

Mark steps into the elevator. He and Janet share a friendly smile before the doors close.

**INT. OFFICE BUILDING - FIFTH FLOOR - ELEVATOR LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER**

A second ELEVATOR CHIME, then one set (of several) elevator doors open, revealing Mark, alone. Mark steps out, into the lobby, and walks to the glass front doors of the business that occupies the entire floor. These doors display a logo in purple and green reading BEST BUDS. Mark goes in.

SUPER: OCTOBER 31

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CONTINUOUS**

Mark greets the receptionist at the front desk, then peels off, headed to his office. We move in the opposite direction, taking a quick tour of the headquarters of Best Buds, today decorated for Halloween.

Offices along the outside of the floor, cubicles filling the interior. As the workday begins, about 250 employees -- most in costumes -- take their seats at their desks, don headsets, and fire up their laptops, launching a virtual companywide meeting. We can see on their screens more and more of them joining.

Eventually, we reach the office of the president.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - PRESIDENT'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS**

The office of Craig Moran (60s, wavy white hair) is medium-sized but comfortable and filled with photos of family, friends, corporate events. A nameplate on the desk reads CRAIG "THE MAN" MORAN. Craig himself is seated at his desk, facing a laptop.

CRAIG
Good morning, everyone. I'll keep it brief: Halloween sales were spooktacular.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CONTINUOUS**

The laughter of people who like having health insurance.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - MARK'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS**

Mark's office is small and cluttered with stacks of papers. On the walls are full-color printouts of the Halloween campaign assets, one reading TREATS FOR ALL THE BOOS & GHOULS, another reading LOOK WHO'S STALKING. The everyday furnishings of Mark's office include photos of only landscapes and an old dog. Also, business-type awards. And flowers.

CRAIG (V.O.)
And of course I must thank, as always, Mark Larkin and his team for their creative work.

MARK
Well, as always, Craig, it's our pleasure--

CRAIG (V.O.)
Mark, I think you're on mute there. But you look bloody good!

We hear another hit of laughter from the floor. Mark smiles -- then quickly puts in his fake fangs, a bit late.

CRAIG (V.O.)(CONT'D)
Now, turning our attention to the holidays...

**EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - 6 PM**

The exterior of the five-story building could use a power wash, but the large BEST BUDS sign on one side is vibrant. The building is in one of the hundreds of office parks on Long Island, New York. Surrounding the building is a large parking lot with occasional, intentional plots of mown grass.

Mark comes out of the building, still in costume, carrying a Halloween-themed flower arrangement. As he walks to his car, he hears someone calling his name.

JANET (O.S.)
Good night, Mark!

Mark waves but does not yell back.

FADE TO BLACK.

**OVER BLACK.**

A soft ELEVATOR CHIME.

FADE IN:

**INT. OFFICE BUILDING - LOBBY - CLOSE ON ELEVATOR - MORNING**

A man in a suit is already in the car.

EARL
Good morning, Mark! How’s the flower business?

REVERSE ANGLE

Mark is decked out in an elf outfit.

MARK
The holly is jolly!

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - MARK’S OFFICE**

The campaign collateral on the walls now read DECK THE HALLS, WALLS & DOORS and GROW, HO, HO! Mark is at his desk, laptop open in front of him.

SUPER: DECEMBER 24

CRAIG (V.O.)
And of course, many thanks to Mark Larkin and team for their creative work. There's something special for you this year in Santa's sack!

Mark smiles and nods.

QUICK CUT TO:

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CREATIVE BULLPEN - CONTINUOUS**

Mark's closed office door is in the background. In focus are the neighboring cubicles of the copywriters, LINCOLN SILVER (late 30s) and MARISSA WOLPER (early 30s, very pregnant). They share a horrified look, then remove their headsets to converse conspiratorially.

LINCOLN
"Santa's Sack"?!

MARISSA
It's where he keeps his sleigh balls.

LINCOLN
Wow. You're disgusting.

MARISSA
You love me, and you're going to miss me.

**EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - EVENING**

Mark comes out of the building, still in costume, carrying a poinsettia.

EARL (O.S.)
Merry Christmas, Mark!

Mark waves.

FADE TO BLACK.

**OVER BLACK.**

A soft ELEVATOR CHIME.

FADE IN:

**INT. OFFICE BUILDING - LOBBY - CLOSE ON ELEVATOR - MORNING**

The doors open to reveal KATE BLUME, a young woman, mid-twenties, in business casual dress in the elevator. Mark enters, wearing khakis, a shirt, and a sweater vest.

KATE
Hi.

MARK
Hi.

A moment of quiet, then:

KATE
Mark?

MARK
Yes.

KATE
I'm Katherine Blume. Kate. We met a couple of weeks back. I'm going to be filling in for the woman on your team out on maternity?

MARK
(warmly)
Of course! Good to see you again, Kate. I'm sure you'll have forms to fill out and other stuff to square away first thing. But when you're settled in, grab a cup of coffee and come see me.

KATE
Absolutely. How do you take your coffee?

MARK
(momentarily bemused)
Oh, no, the coffee's for <u>you</u>.

KATE
Ah. I actually don't drink coffee.

MARK
(sincerely)
Really? How?

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CREATIVE BULLPEN**

Mark walks through where the designers and writers sit, passing Lincoln's and Marissa's cubicle last. Marissa's cubicle is empty, but Lincoln is in his.

SUPER: JANUARY 3

MARK
Good morning, Lincoln.

LINCOLN
Hey, Mark. Happy New Year. Craig was looking for you.

MARK
Yeah?

LINCOLN
(in good fun)
Yeah. He said to give me a raise.

MARK
Uh huh.

LINCOLN
He's in the boardroom.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - BOARDROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

The boardroom is the largest and nicest room in the office, with a long, shellacked wooden table and a better class of rolling chairs. Craig sits at the head of the table, looking over some hardcopy reports. Mark enters.

MARK
Craig. Happy new year.

CRAIG
Mark! The same to you and yours. How's Aaron?

MARK
Aaron is doing well. Should I sit?

CRAIG
Please.

Mark takes a seat near but not right next to Craig.

CRAIG
The numbers are close to where we want them to be, but they aren't quite there. Usually we can coast through January on the strength of the holidays and sympathy gifts, but this year is a little soft.

MARK
(anticipating)
We need a campaign?

CRAIG
We need a campaign.

MARK
There's not much going on--

CRAIG
There is not much going on. There is also not a lot of time.

Mark gets the message and gets up.

MARK
I'm on it.

CRAIG
I bet you think of something before you get to your desk!

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - MARK'S OFFICE**

The door is closed. Mark is in his chair. Lincoln is in one of the two visitor chairs. There is a soft knock on the door, then Kate comes in.

KATE
Oh. Should I come back?

MARK
No. Come in. We need you.

Kate sits next to Lincoln.

MARK (CONT'D)
I was just telling Lincoln about you. Kate, Lincoln Silver. Lincoln, Kate Blume.

They shake hands.

LINCOLN
Blume? Really? Well, this is the perfect place for you.

KATE
For now.
(beat)
Oh, I just mean... because it's a temp job--

MARK
In any event, you're going to hit the ground running, Kate. We've been asked to come up with a mini-campaign for January. Sales are soft.

LINCOLN
How soft?

MARK
Not very, but enough that Craig wants to sell a few more flowers before Valentine's Day. Kate, the long and short of it is that about eighty-five percent of our annual revenue comes from just six weeks: the two before Christmas, then Valentine's, then Mother's Day. If we meet our projections for those three occasions, we're pretty much set for the fiscal year.

KATE
But--?

MARK
Exactly. The projections look good for Valentine's, but the Powers That Be would still like the numbers to be a bit stronger going into February.

LINCOLN
Except January's pretty empty. At least as far as special reasons for sending flowers.

MARK
Right. So go brainstorm for a bit. Work together. Let's reconvene after lunch.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CREATIVE BULLPEN - MOMENTS LATER**

Lincoln and Kate exit Mark's office.

KATE
Mark mentioned the "Powers That Be." Not the "Flowers That Be?"

LINCOLN
Nice.

KATE
Yeah, I spent some time on the website. You guys have fun.

LINCOLN
Sometimes. Mark keeps us from going too far.

KATE
What's too far?

LINCOLN
I'm glad you asked. We sell a giant teddy bear for Valentine's. I wrote up some romance copy that began "He's big, brown, and ready to get down." That didn't fly.

KATE
I'm surprised.

LINCOLN
Right? But try anything. You never know what might work.
(beat)
Except "Roses Are Red." Don't bother with that setup. Ever.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - BOARDROOM - AFTERNOON**

Craig and Mark in the seats they occupied earlier, Kate next to Mark, Lincoln across from Mark. Mark has some tabloid-size printouts.

MARK
Craig, before we begin, I want to introduce Kate Blume, who's sitting in for Marissa, who's out on maternity. Kate, Craig Moran is the company president.

CRAIG
Blume? Well, that's perfect. And I do like to say that we only pick the best.

Kate smiles. Mark nods.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
Mark, what have you got?

MARK
Well, we took a long, hard look at the calendar. We went deep, too.

Kate catches Lincoln's eye. Lincoln smiles tightly back.

MARK (CONT'D)
January's not especially fertile ground, but we have a couple of solid options.

Mark slides one mockup to Craig.

MARK
January eleventh is National Thank-You Day.

LINCOLN
International.

MARK
Excuse me. International Thank-You Day.

CRAIG
(reading)
"Thank You. Don't Just Say It, Spray It."

LINCOLN
You know, like a spray of flowers.

CRAIG
Why not "...Bouquet It"?

MARK
We thought it read better this way.

CRAIG
Okay. I trust you. What else?

Mark slides a second printout to Craig.

MARK
January twenty-first...

CRAIG
(reading)
National Hugging Day. Lincoln? Is that correct?

LINCOLN
Yes, sir. Domestic hugs only.

CRAIG
(reading)
“Clasp them to your...”

He looks up.

CRAIG (CONT’D)
“...blossom.”

The others watch Craig and wait. Finally:

CRAIG (CONT’D)
I’m fine with these. Legal will have to review them, but I don’t foresee a problem.

Craig collects the printouts.

CRAIG (CONT’D)
Good work, guys. Thank you.

**INT. OFFICE BUILDING - OUTSIDE BOARDROOM**

MARK
(to Kate)
Not a bad first day, huh? Got your feet wet.

KATE
My stems?

MARK
Hmm. Maybe stay away from Lincoln.

LINCOLN (O.S.)
Harsh. But fair.

KATE
Speaking of, I’m supposed to go down to the store at three.

MARK
That's right. So you'll get your hands dirty, too.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CREATIVE BULLPEN - LATER**

Lincoln sits in his chair; his desk is a playground of pop culture toys, mostly action figures. Mark sits in Kate's chair; Kate's cubicle still has all of Marissa's things. The men face each other across the aisle.

MARK
We're going to need additional headlines, subheads, email subject lines... all the usual copy.

LINCOLN
Yup. Do you want me to take one and let Kate have the other? I could take Thank You and give her Hugs.
(beat)
You know what I mean.

MARK
Up to you. But expose her to a little of everything.
(beat)
You know what I mean.

LINCOLN
Hey, that reminds me: <u>Was</u> there something special for you in Santa's Sack this year?

MARK
Mostly the usual.

LINCOLN
Coal?

MARK
Booze.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - RETAIL STORE - WORKSHOP - AFTERNOON**

There is a retail Best Buds storefront on the first floor of the building, and part of the store is where the bouquets are assembled. There is a large worktable, and already at that table is MORGAN (late 20s, scruffy), working with roses.

Kate enters and approaches the table.

KATE
Hi. I’m Kate. From... upstairs.

MORGAN
Morgan. Grab a pair of gloves, one of those funky tools, and a rose... and start stripping.
(beat)
Actually, you only have to wear gloves if you think you’ll need your fingers for something later.

Kate gloves up and gets to work, doing what Morgan’s doing.

MORGAN (CONT’D)
Yup. Just like that. Clean stems go in that bucket. Repeat until you go insane or we run out of roses.

KATE
(amused)
How long have you been doing this?

Morgan looks over her head to a clock on the wall.

MORGAN
About twenty minutes? But it feels much longer.

KATE
(confused)
Twenty...? This isn’t--?

MORGAN
My job? No. I am also from upstairs. Do I... look like I strip for a living?

KATE
Can I refuse to answer that?

MORGAN
I work in Operations. I’ve been with the company for a week, but it was a busy week.

KATE
In Operations.

MORGAN
In Operations.
(beat)
Switches and levers.

KATE
I'm sorry?

MORGAN
Don't be sorry. It's what I'm good at. Switches and levers. Sometimes a knob.

KATE
(playing along)
Pulleys?

MORGAN
Pulleys? Please. This isn't the Dark Ages.

KATE
Okay, so what are the switches and levers, really?

MORGAN
Really? They're all the behind-the-scenes sales mechanisms that keep the company on target.

KATE
Like?

MORGAN
All right, so the company sells flowers two ways: In stores like this one, and by shipping fresh flowers directly from the farms where they're grown.

KATE
Where are those?

MORGAN
South America, mainly. But we don't own those farms. We buy flowers from them. Like any other retail business, we try to buy no more and no less than we need. Unlike most other businesses, we can't sell our product after just a few days.

KATE
Because flowers die.

MORGAN
Because flowers die.
(MORE)

MORGAN (CONT'D)
So when sales of flowers that we've bought are slow, we have to speed things up or else we eat the unsold flowers. Not literally. But we lose that money. Literally.

KATE
Okay. So, how--?

MORGAN
Switches. And levers.
(beat)
Sales. Deals. Bundles. Daisies are normally, like, forty-nine ninety-nine for a dozen? So we mark them down ten bucks until we clear out the inventory. Also, did you know there's a woman named Daisy who works here?

KATE
My last name's Blume.

MORGAN
My last name is Kaczmarek. Not floral at all. It means "innkeeper."
(beat)
And, what do you do upstairs?

KATE
I'm a copywriter. But I'm just filling in for someone having a baby.

MORGAN
Copywriter. So you come up with the words for the emails when we have to sell more flowers in a hurry. Like "Roses are red"--

KATE
Actually, we never do that, I've been told. Roses are never red.

MORGAN
I guess that makes sense. Violets aren't usually--OW!

Morgan drops his rose and tool and removes his glove to inspect a small puncture wound.

KATE
You okay?

MORGAN
Pointy little bastards finally got me. If I wind up in the hospital with thorn poisoning, Kate, promise you will not send me flowers. Chocolate only.
(beat)
Or that really big teddy bear we sell.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CREATIVE BULLPEN - LATER**

Kate returns. When she reaches her desk, she notices that the light in Mark's office is out. She turns to Lincoln, at his own desk.

KATE
Mark's gone?

LINCOLN
One of the perks of being a vice president.

KATE
Ah. When do you usually leave?

LINCOLN
About five minutes after Mark.
(beat)
Grab your stuff. I'll walk you out.

**EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - EVENING**

Lincoln and Kate exit the building. Plenty of others are leaving for the day, too.

LINCOLN
So, Kate, got a boyfriend? Or a girlfriend? One of each? Two of each? Do they all know each other? Do they all get along?

KATE
That's a second-day question, I think.

LINCOLN
Are you coming back tomorrow?

KATE
Sure.
(MORE)

KATE (CONT'D)
Unless something terrible happens to me.

LINCOLN
Funny. I've been coming back for seven years because nothing terrific has happened to me.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - MORNING**

The rank and file are logging on, donning their headsets, launching the virtual morning meeting.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CREATIVE BULLPEN - CONTINUOUS**

Lincoln, Kate, and the five others in Mark's department are watching their screens.

SUPER: JANUARY 12

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - MARK'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS**

Mark is at his desk, watching and listening.

CRAIG (V.O.)
...and on this National Thank-You Day, I know we're all grateful to Mark Larkin and his team for the boost in sales we saw yesterday.

Through the glass front of Mark's office, we see Lincoln shake his head dramatically. <u>International!</u>

Mark closes his laptop.

SMASH CUT TO:

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - MORNING**

Everyone logging on, donning headsets, launching their meeting.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CREATIVE BULLPEN - CONTINUOUS**

Lincoln, Kate, and the rest watch their screens.

SUPER: JANUARY 22

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - MARK'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS**

Mark at his desk, laptop open.

CRAIG (V.O.)
...and if it wouldn't get me in trouble with Human Resources and the government, I'd hug every one of you. Instead, maybe I'll just hug Mark Larkin.

Mark closes his laptop, stands up from his desk, heads to the door of his office.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CREATIVE BULLPEN - CONTINUOUS**

Mark exits his office and walks toward the midst of his subordinates. Before he gets far, though:

KATE
Question, Mark.

EVERYONE ELSE
QUESTION, MARK!

Kate shrinks a bit.

MARK
What's up, Kate?

KATE
Where can I find the Valentine's battlecry?

MARK
Ah. Craig is supposed to bless that today, but Lincoln can show you the almost-final assets.

LINCOLN
Yes, I can. In fifteen minutes.

MARK
I'm headed into the huddle. Kate, you're in charge.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - BOARDROOM**

Craig and all of the VPs (a dozen) around the table, including JESSICA (late 40s), VP of PARTNERSHIPS.

CRAIG
While we have a bit of quiet before the storm, so to speak, I thought we could hear from Jessica about a potential partnership opportunity on her radar. Jess?

JESSICA
Thank you, Craig. Good morning, everyone. I've been talking with a rep for Stacy's Sea Steaks about a cross-promotion.

VP OF COMMUNICATIONS
Stacy's Sea Steaks? The mail-order fish company?

JESSICA
Yes.

VP OF PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT
(dubious)
We're going to bundle flowers and fish? What's the connection?

VP OF LEGAL
That fish smell bad, but flowers smell good?

JESSICA
Exactly!

VP OF BRAND STRATEGY
What? That's a terrible premise for a partnership.

VP OF COMMUNICATIONS
And it's not even accurate. Fresh fish <u>doesn't</u> have an odor.

VP OF PROCUREMENT
Plus, most of our flowers have had the scent bred out of them.

VP OF STRATEGY
So neither one actually smells.

JESSICA
But--

CRAIG
Sorry, Jess, but the group's not going for your fishy flower package.

HARD CUT TO:

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - MARK'S OFFICE**

Kate is poring over a hardcopy deck on Mark's desk. Lincoln stands behind her, to one side, waiting...

KATE
No. This... this is a joke, right? This can't be the battlecry.

Lincoln smirks. That's the reaction he was hoping for.

LINCOLN
That is the battlecry. At least unofficially. Until Craig greenlights it, at which point it will be official.

KATE
But... he won't. He's not a thirteen-year-old-boy.
(beat)
Who came up with this? Mark?

LINCOLN
Guess again.

KATE
You? But Mark approved it? Does he... get it?

LINCOLN
Honestly, I don't know. I'd like to think he does, but also, Mark is...

KATE
Mark is...?

LINCOLN
That's the thing. I don't know what Mark is. No one's really sure.

KATE
You're going to get fired.

LINCOLN
Maybe. But it'll be worth it.

KATE
Craig’s not going to approve this campaign. He just has to say it out loud, just once.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - BOARDROOM**

As the vice presidents file out of the room, Craig stops Mark.

CRAIG
Mark. Valentine’s is approved.

Craig passes a hand through the air as if he’s imagining a marquee.

CRAIG (CONT’D)
“GET YOUR HEART ON!” Love it.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - OUTSIDE BOARDROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

As Mark exits the boardroom, he is approached by ALLISON.

ALLISON
(quietly)
Mark, could I have a word?

Mark follows Allison to her office, nearby. The door closes and we remain outside, long enough to read the nameplate on the door: ALLISON HALLER, VP OF HUMAN RESOURCES.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CREATIVE BULLPEN - LATER**

Mark returns to his department. Lincoln and Kate are working at their desks.

LINCOLN
What’s the word, Mark? Is Valentine’s a go?

MARK
(preoccupied)
What? Oh, yes. Craig’s happy with it.

KATE
Are you okay, Mark?

MARK
Lincoln, can I talk to you for a minute?

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - MARK'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER**

Mark steps behind his desk but doesn't sit. Lincoln also stands after he closes the door.

LINCOLN
What's up, Mark?

MARK
Have you been in touch with Marissa?

LINCOLN
I don't like the way that question sounds.

MARK
I was just told that there's a complication with her pregnancy.

LINCOLN
Shit. What?

MARK
I don't have the details, but Marissa may need to be induced early.

LINCOLN
Like, too early?

MARK
Earlier than... otherwise. In any event, this isn't for everyone to know. But I thought you should.

LINCOLN
Thank you.
(beat)
So, Craig really did like the Valentine's campaign?

MARK
Were you worried he wouldn't?

LINCOLN
Not for a minute. Anyway, my head's already in May. I have the Mother's Day turnover this afternoon.

MARK
Better you than me. Take Kate.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CREATIVE BULLPEN - MOMENTS LATER**

Lincoln returns. Kate looks up, concerned.

KATE
Everything okay?

LINCOLN
Mark’s got a special Mother’s Day project for me.

KATE
Yeah?

LINCOLN
Yeah. He wants me to seduce his mother.

KATE
There’s something wrong with you.

LINCOLN
She’s ninety-three.

KATE
Seriously wrong.

LINCOLN
But spry. Flexible.

KATE
Please stop.

LINCOLN
I might need your help.

KATE
You might need therapy.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CONFERENCE ROOM - AFTERNOON**

Lincoln and Kate sit next to each other, with others, at the table in the room. Each person has a large packet of paper in front of them. On the table are a variety of vases and other “hardgoods,” but no flowers. This is the end of a meeting that has been going on for nearly two hours at this point.

Lincoln looks bored. Kate looks shellshocked. The woman running the meeting, MARY, is still speaking enthusiastically, somehow.

MARY
Okay, these are the last two: Our turquoise birdhouse planter, new for Q4, has a balsa-wood roof and painted-on blooms. This will be the preferred container for several seasonal SKUs, including “Mom’s Best Nest” and “Royal Tweetment for Mom.”

As Mary speaks, a sample of the planter goes around the table. Lincoln gives it a cursory look, while Kate in turn marvels at how flimsy it is.

MARY (CONT’D)
And finally we have a white picket fence planter adorned with a floral-print grosgrain bow. This ships with “Garden of Planty” and “Picket Fancy.”

When the fence planter reaches Kate, she turns it over in her hands and manages to break off one of the pickets with an audible SNAP. She looks up guiltily. Lincoln hides his amusement, but barely.

**EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - EVENING**

Mark exits the building, carrying a bouquet of flowers to his car. We follow as he walks.

COLLEAGUE (O.S.)
’Night, Mark!

Mark waves. When he has gotten into his car, we return to the building. Lincoln and Kate exit together.

KATE
(indignantly)
If my eventual hypothetical children ever give me a “Garden of Planty,” I will, hypothetically, disown them.

LINCOLN
Fair.
(beat)
And just <u>how</u> hypothetical is that scenario?

KATE
Well, tonight I will be working on a very non-hypothetical bottle of wine. Alone.

LINCOLN
Salut.

KATE
Merci. À bientôt.

They part ways.

**INT. MARK'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER**

Mark starts his engine and pulls out of his parking spot.

**INT. KATE'S CAR**

Kate does the same.

**INT. LINCOLN'S CAR**

Lincoln does not start his car. He sits in the driver's seat, takes out his phone and turns it on. He opens his contacts and scrolls to BABY MAMA. He almost calls... but then doesn't. He puts his phone down. Then he puts his head down on his steering wheel.

FADE TO BLACK.

**OVER BLACK.**

A PHONE RINGS. Someone fumbles in the dark to find and answer the phone.

MARK
(sleepily)
Craig?
(beat)
Oh, shit.

FADE IN:

**EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - PARKING LOT - BEFORE DAWN**

A dozen cars are either already parked or arriving, drivers getting out and rushing to the building.

**INT. MARK'S CAR - MOVING**

Mark pulls into the lot and finds a spot. As he does:

RADIO NEWSPERSON (V.O.)
...officials say Ping Wu was overjoyed to be reunited with her cubs. In international news, after brewing for days, Tropical Storm Jessica made landfall in Colombia shortly after midnight...

SUPER: FEBRUARY 11

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - BOARDROOM**

Craig is already at the head of the table, head down, massaging his temples, as his vice presidents -- the heads of all the various company departments, including Mark Larkin -- arrive and take seats. Everyone has coffee.

When all are seated and the room is silent, Craig takes a moment, takes a breath, then another, then:

CRAIG
Our rose farm in South America was wiped out by a hurricane this morning. There's nothing left.

MARK
Is everyone--?

CRAIG
The people are all fine, fortunately. And I'm not minimizing how important that is.
(beat)
But the product -- our product -- was completely destroyed. There are no roses to be shipped.

Stunned silence. Until finally:

CRAIG (CONT'D)
We're totally and utterly fucked.

VP OF COMMUNICATIONS
Hang on. Our stores can still deliver--

VP OF PROCUREMENT
Only what they have in stock. Which is <u>something</u>.
(MORE)

VP OF PROCUREMENT (CONT'D)
But most of our Valentine's sales are direct ship roses. "From Our Farms to Their Arms" and all that.

VP OF STRATEGY
Can we re-source?

VP OF PROCUREMENT
Three days before the holiday? No. We're now the idiot that our marketing makes fun of, the guy who waits until the last minute.

VP OF STRATEGY
We didn't wait--

CRAIG
No, but we're just as screwed. Worse, actually. Because there's no chance we're going to get lucky and find fifteen million red roses at a gas station mini-mart.
(beat)
This could bankrupt us.

VP OF LEGAL
We have time to figure something out, Craig.

CRAIG
We have about three hours until everyone else shows up for the day. I have exactly that long to figure out what I'm going to say to our own employees. The rest of you have three hours and ten minutes to think about what we're going to tell our customers.
(beat)
Or find fifteen million roses. Under the circumstances, any color will do.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CREATIVE BULLPEN - MORNING**

It's about 9:15. The first of the rank and file are beginning to arrive, Lincoln among them. As he drops some things off at his desk, he half-literally cocks his ear and sniffs the air. Something's up.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - MARK'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS**

Lincoln enters to find Mark at his desk, multiple cups of coffee around. Mark looks terrible. Worried. Tired.

LINCOLN
Mark?

Mark looks up and smiles, but weakly.

LINCOLN (CONT'D)
I came in early to talk before things got busy... but it looks like you might have something on your mind already. Everything okay?

Mark gets out of his chair, walks to the wall where the Valentine's campaign collateral is hanging, and takes down the hero GET YOUR HEART ON! poster. He crumples it and stuffs it into a wastebasket.

Lincoln suddenly looks concerned.

MARK
Everything is not okay.

LINCOLN
Mark, that campaign--

MARK
That campaign is out. And we all might be out of work soon. There are no roses to deliver.

LINCOLN
No roses...?
(realizing)
The hurricane? Did we--?

MARK
Lost all of our stock. Craig called leadership in at five this morning to tell us in person.

After a moment:

MARK (CONT'D)
What did you want to tell me?

LINCOLN
I spoke to Marissa last night. She's fine. The baby's out of the NICU.
(MORE)

LINCOLN (CONT'D)
I know that's not such a big deal right now, but--

MARK
Lincoln, it's a huge deal. That's wonderful news. Thank you for letting me know. I'm glad you're in touch with her, since the rest of us aren't really allowed to be.

LINCOLN
All right. Well, I should probably get ready to hear the catastrophic news firsthand. And then we'll regroup?

MARK
And then we'll regroup. With Kate and the designers.

LINCOLN
Today might be the day she starts drinking coffee.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - 9:30 AM**

We take a lap around the near-silent office. The unsuspecting employees are all ready to hear their fearless leader wish them a good morning. We come around to:

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - OUTSIDE CRAIG'S OFFICE**

The door is closed. We watch through a window as Craig brings everyone up to speed. Then we hear a loud, collective gasp, followed by the sounds of concern and uncertainty.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CONTINUOUS**

We move around the office again, now seeing people physically manifesting their discomfort, though still plugged in to the virtual meeting. They put their hands to their heads. They cover their mouths in shock. Some cry.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CREATIVE BULLPEN**

Kate, at her desk, looks over to Lincoln, at his. Kate is wide-eyed in disbelief. Lincoln nods slowly. He's as concerned as anyone, though he had some warning.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - MARK'S OFFICE**

Mark is watching the end of the meeting.

CRAIG (V.O.)
We're going to get through this crisis the same way we do everything here: together... as Best Buds.

Mark closes his laptop, stands, walks to his office door and opens it. His entire department -- seven people -- are already immediately outside, waiting to speak to him.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CREATIVE CONFERENCE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

Around a table are Mark, Lincoln, Kate, four graphic designers (MIKE, RYAN, KELLY & TINA), and a project coordinator (VICTORIA).

MARK
All right. I think the first thing I'm supposed to tell you, as your immediate supervisor, is not to panic. But you're going to panic anyway. In fact, panic seems to be the order of the day.

TINA
Question, Mark.

LINCOLN
Question, M--
(off Kate's reaction)
No, no. You're right. Not the time.

TINA
Are we going out of business?

MARK
Tina, I don't know what's going to happen any more than you do. What I do know is that companies bounce back from the brink all the time. We could still pull through this.

LINCOLN
Smelling like a rose, though?

VICTORIA
Lincoln, shut up.

LINCOLN
I'm sorry. Nerves.

KELLY
But how? What's the plan? If we can't deliver roses... on Valentine's Day...?

RYAN
Aren't Valentine's roses, like, ninety-nine percent of our business?

MARK
It's more like thirty-five percent of our annual revenue, but, yes, it's a big chunk. Which is why no one is pretending this isn't calamitous. As for the plan... well, the plan is to... come up with a plan.

Mark rubs his eyes.

MARK (CONT'D)
I'm sorry. On top of being worried, I'm very tired. Leadership is working on a plan. Until such time as Craig announces that we're packing it in and calling it quits, we should consider things business as usual. There are still birthdays, anniversaries, and funerals happening, so let's focus on selling flowers for those.

Mark nods, indicating that the meeting is over. Everyone gets up to go.

MARK (CONT'D)
Lincoln, Kate, Michael, stick around for a minute?

Kelly, Tina, Ryan, and Victoria leave the room.

LINCOLN
(sotto voce, to Michael)
I saw the tears in your eyes.

MICHAEL
(sotto voce)
Stop looking at my eyes. Look at your own eyes.

MARK
People, be quiet and listen for a minute. Whatever the plan turns out to be, Craig is going to ask us to sell it. You're going to be my crisis response team. We can't get started yet, but you can clear the decks. Get absolutely everything off your plates so we can focus on saving the day.
(beat)
Later today or tomorrow.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - PANTRY - LATE MORNING**

During the busiest times of the year, the company fills a small side room with snacks. Kate pops in and finds Morgan there.

KATE
Hey, you. Oh--

MORGAN
"Oh"...?

KATE
You look...

MORGAN
Stressed? Yeah. We're all going to put on weight this week. Which is good, because we all might be on the street next week.

KATE
So... I don't imagine this is a job for switches and levers.

MORGAN
Not even knobs. There are no tricks up anyone's sleeve that will make enough roses appear.

KATE chuckles.

MORGAN (CONT'D)
(off her laugh)
What?

KATE
Well... that's a classic trick, isn't it? The magician pulling a flower from his sleeve?

MORGAN
Is it? Doesn't he pull colored handkerchiefs from his sleeve?

KATE
Oh. Yeah. So where does the flower come from?

MORGAN
His wand, right? The wand becomes a rose.

KATE
Yes! And the rabbit--

MORGAN
Comes out of his ass. Which is where someone here is going to have to pull a solution from.

KATE
Or we're all going to be on the street.

MORGAN
Exactly.

**INT. BEST BUDS - BOARDROOM - AFTERNOON**

Craig and all of his vice presidents are present, seated. Every one of them looks tired and worried.

At the opposite end of the room from Craig stands an easel. On it is a large presentation board, but whatever is to be revealed is turned around. BRAD, VP of MARKETING, stands by the easel.

There is plenty of murmuring, until:

CRAIG
Okay, let's settle down. We're all tired and worried, so I'm going to throw it right to Brad, who thinks he might have something.

BRAD
Thank you, Craig.
(beat)
In nineteen eighty-three, a blockbuster movie was released. You might have heard of it: "Nova Conflict." It was, in a word, huge.

Brad turns the oversized poster board around, revealing a reproduction movie poster for a decades-old groundbreaking epic space opera. The room fills with murmurs of recognition... and confusion.

BRAD (CONT'D)
I had this poster in my office already, if you're wondering.
(beat)
The movie studio had a licensing deal with a small-time toy company called Fungible to sell action figures and vehicles. Problem was, Fungible didn't have time to produce the toys before the film was released and blew up. So they did something so bold, so... <u>ridiculous</u> that it's still talked about today.

Brad walks around to the other side of the easel.

BRAD (CONT'D)
What Fungible did was sell, in stores, what amounted to an IOU. It was a mostly-empty box with publicity photos from the film and a form inside that kids filled out with their names and addresses and mailed back to Fungible. When the first action figures were finally ready, they shipped first to the certificate kids.

We look around the table at the various expressions of bewilderment and, on a couple of faces, nostalgia.

BRAD (CONT'D)
This <u>never</u> should have worked. But it worked so well that today that slick box and form are themselves collector's items. That essentially empty box fetches <u>thousands</u>.

Brad takes a seat, though it seems like he should have said more.

CRAIG
You're suggesting that we sell... empty boxes, then?

BRAD
Sort of. Not exactly.
(MORE)

BRAD (CONT'D)
I mean, we've already sold the roses. We just can't deliver them. So what we need to do now is keep our customers from demanding their money back.

VP OF LEGAL
How is an empty box going to do that? People will lose their minds. They'll crucify us.

BRAD
Not if we prepare them. We don't surprise them with empty boxes. We tell them, in the next twenty-four hours, that an empty box is coming.

VP OF PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT
And...?

BRAD
And we promise to deliver gorgeous roses next year.

CRAIG
But then... then we don't sell any new roses next year.

BRAD
Sure we do. Because keep in mind: We sold roses to men, mostly. But it's women, mostly, who are going to be disappointed. And those women will remember.

VP OF BRAND STRATEGY
(getting it)
So the men will buy enough to give the women twice as many roses next year.

BRAD
Exactly. Maybe. We hope. But if so, we might even convince them to purchase that second bouquet, next year's bouquet, <u>now</u>.

CRAIG
(incredulous)
So we're going to charge them <u>double</u> for an empty box?

BRAD
We won't position it that way. But even if they don't buy more roses, now or later, if they just let us deliver this year's roses next year, we get to keep their money.

VP OF FINANCE
That-- that's actually brilliant. If it works. We're talking about millions of dollars in our pocket, earning interest, for a year.

VP OF PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT
But we've spent that money. Or some of it. On the roses that were destroyed.

VP OF FINANCE
Not all of it. Not even most of it, given our markup.

VP OF LEGAL
Plus, we're insured for the loss.

The room is very quiet for a moment. Then:

CRAIG
Holy shit, Brad.
(beat)
Mark.

Mark snaps to attention.

MARK
I'm sorry. I... I don't have a presentation.

CRAIG
Can you work up something soon, though?

MARK
For this? The empty box idea?

CRAIG
Yes.

MARK
I'll... do my best.

CRAIG
Good. Because if we ever needed your best, we need it now.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CREATIVE CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER**

The Creative Crisis Team is back together: Mark, Lincoln, Kate, Michael. Coffee.

No one speaks. Mark looks from member of his team to member of his team. Lincoln, Kate, and Michael each look mostly at Mark. Finally:

LINCOLN
(flabbergasted)
What?!

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - PANTRY - LATER**

Kate returns for candy. She finds Morgan there again.

KATE
Cue trite witticism about running into each other like this.

MORGAN
Execute polite laughter subroutine.

KATE
I assume you've heard the plan?

MORGAN
I have. Have you?

KATE
(bemused)
What? Yes. That's how I know there's a plan!

MORGAN
You could just be trying to get it out of me. Pretty sneaky.

KATE
It's not a secret. At least, I don't think it is. Actually, maybe it is. But my team is working up some concepts to soften the blow.

MORGAN
But you're here. Getting... Twizzlers.

KATE
Twizzlers help me think.

MORGAN
If you get back to your team and they've cracked the concept while you were gone, will you feel bad?

KATE
I'll feel great. I'll get to leave.

Morgan laughs.

MORGAN
Nobody's leaving, Kate. The VPs are getting a block of hotel rooms nearby so that they don't have to go all the way home to sleep. Craig's not even going that far away.

KATE
Seriously?

MORGAN
Seriously. This is serious. This is Valentine's Day. And this is a flower company. With no flowers.

KATE
Well, no roses.

MORGAN
Yeah, hydrangeas are not the answer. Carnations are not going to save the day.

KATE
Ranunculus? Ridiculous!
(beat)
I should probably go back.

**EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - EARLY EVENING**

It's dark already, and cold. But at least two dozen Best Buds employees -- including a VP or three -- are outside, smoking. There's not a lot of chatter, other than from some teeth.

Lincoln and Michael stand together.

LINCOLN
What are you going to do with your bonus?

Michael laughs.

MICHAEL
You must be taking this the hardest. And I do mean hardest. Your Valentine's campaign got scrapped. That's the real tragedy.

LINCOLN
It's still in my portfolio.

MICHAEL
Mine, too. We might need to update those soon.

LINCOLN
You don't keep yours up to date?

MICHAEL
I refresh it every few months.

LINCOLN
I refresh mine every morning.

Kate appears.

KATE
Dad says to come inside.

Lincoln and Michael take final drags and then toss their butts.

**INT. OFFICE BUILDING - ELEVATOR - MOMENTS LATER**

Lincoln, Kate, and Michael ride up together.

LINCOLN
(riffing)
Think outside the box. Think <u>inside</u> the box.

KATE
Don't look in the box.

MICHAEL
(Brad Pitt in SE7EN-ing)
"What's in the box?"

KATE
(Keanu in The Matrix-ing)
"There is no box."

LINCOLN
Ah, but that's <u>all</u> there is.
(beat)
See the box. Be the box.

MICHAEL
(Chevy Chase in Caddyshack-ing)
“You’re not being the box, Danny.”

LINCOLN
Show off your box--

KATE
Careful...

MICHAEL
Have you met this guy? Mister “Big, brown--“

KATE
“...and ready to get down.” Yeah, I heard about that on my first day.

LINCOLN
I made that bear a legend.

No one speaks for a moment, until:

MICHAEL
Roses are--

The ELEVATOR DINGS.

CUT TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

**EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAWN**

The sun rises on Best Buds HQ.

SUPER: FEBRUARY 12

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - BOARDROOM - MORNING**

Craig and the VPs are back for their morning huddle. Like last time, Craig sits at the head of the table, nearly everyone else around. The easel again stands at the other end of the room. This morning, Mark stands by the easel. There is a poster board on the easel, turned around.

When everyone is settled:

CRAIG
Good morning.
(MORE)

CRAIG (CONT'D)
I hope you got at least some sleep last night. I got... very little. Because I'm worried about the company, of course, but also because this place is kind of spooky when it's empty. There might be mice in the ceilings. Mark?

All heads turn.

CLOSE ON MARK

MARK
Okay. We all know where we are: behind the eight ball. We know where we want to be: in the clover. And we've already decided that the best way to get from behind the eight ball into the clover is to be honest with our customers. So...

Mark leans out of frame to turn around the poster board. Then Mark looks to Craig, across the room.

The room is silent. No one wants to react before Craig does. We don't yet see the board.

REVERSE ANGLE

CRAIG
Mark....

REVERSE ANGLE - CLOSE ON MARK

Mark looks at the easel, off screen, realizes his presentation is upside down, flips it 180 degrees.

MARK
Oops.

REVERSE ANGLE

Now we see and hear murmuring. The other vice presidents can't help themselves.

CRAIG
(concerned)
Mark...?

REVERSE ANGLE

Finally we see what has everyone concerned and confused. On the easel is a large poster with a simple photo of an open, empty Best Buds-branded flower delivery box. The headline reads “ROSES ARE DEAD”. The subhead at bottom reads “...but it will all be bouquet!”

The murmurs return.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - OUTSIDE BOARDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

The blinds in the large glass windows around the board room are all closed, so no one can see in. Nevertheless, dozens of employees are gathered around and near the boardroom, trying to hear... anything. But it is silent.

After a moment, the door to the boardroom opens, prompting the crowd to disperse. Then the VPs file out, followed by Craig. Mark does not come out.

**INT. BEST BUDS - BOARDROOM**

Mark alone remains in the room, sitting in a chair, facing and staring at the poster on the easel. Lincoln comes in and sits across from Mark. Mark turns in his chair.

LINCOLN
They went for it.

MARK
They went for it.

LINCOLN
We’re going out with it.

MARK
We’re going out with it.

LINCOLN
You can have the rest of the month off, Lincoln.

MARK
You can have an hour for lunch, Lincoln, and then you need to draft a letter from Craig to our customers. Keep it simple, Cupid.

Lincoln exits. Mark remains, turns back to the easel. We pull back and

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

**EXT. MARK'S HOUSE - DAY**

Mark's home is a picturesque rustic cottage-type house in the suburbs, at the end of a quiet, closed road. It's the kind of house that doesn't make it obvious where you're supposed to enter.

**INT. MARK'S HOUSE - ENTRANCE**

Inside the front door there are coats, hats, and scarves hanging on hooks. On a console table are magazines, keys, Mark's wallet, and a prop Valentine's bow-and-arrow set.

We hear JAZZ playing from a SPEAKER in another room. We also hear the sounds of cooking.

**INT. MARK'S HOUSE - KITCHEN**

Mark is making himself breakfast. He is alone, but the more time we spend in his house, the more we get the impression that he hasn't always lived here alone.

Just as Mark cracks an egg into a glass, his PHONE RINGS. He wipes his hands and answers his phone, putting the caller on speaker.

MARK
Hello, Mom.

MARK'S MOTHER
Happy Valentine's Day. Shouldn't you be at work?

MARK
How do you know I'm <u>not</u> at work?

MARK'S MOTHER
A mother knows. So why <u>aren't</u> you at the office?

MARK
We've done all we can do.

MARK'S MOTHER
So you've got the rest of the day to find a date for this evening?

MARK
Mom....

MARK'S MOTHER
Don't "Mom" me, Mark.
(MORE)

MARK'S MOTHER (CONT'D)
You're not too old to try again. You're not too old to find a woman to marry. And if you find a woman who's young enough, you could even still give me grandchildren.

MARK
I wasn't going to mention my age. But I really can't believe I need to remind you--

MARK'S MOTHER
You don't need to remind me. I remember. Have you spoken to Aaron lately?

MARK
No.

MARK'S MOTHER
Need I remind you that it's Valentine's Day?

Mark allows himself to laugh.

MARK
I <u>have</u> been trying to forget.

MARK'S MOTHER
Well, since you have nothing else to do today -- and since you obviously don't want your lonely mother to be your Valentine, or you would have called me... call Aaron.

MARK
I'll think about it.

MARK'S MOTHER
Don't "think about it," Mark. Just call him.
(beat)
Maybe he knows of a nice, single woman for you.

**INT. MARK'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM**

We leave Mark in the kitchen to finish cooking breakfast. As the jazz plays, we make our way to the fire in the fireplace... and the mantle, where there are framed photos. Mostly of a dog, from puppy to old girl. But there's one of Mark and Aaron.

They look happy.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - MORNING**

Back at the office, back to the grind, back to normal. We take our lap, seeing everyone in the virtual morning meeting. When we reach Craig's office, we find the door wide open. We PUSH IN.

SUPER: FEBRUARY 15

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - PRESIDENT'S OFFICE**

Craig is finishing his pep talk. He looks much better than the last time we saw him.

CRAIG
And I simply can't thank you all enough. What we managed was nothing short of a miracle. Have a great day, everyone. I know I will.

Craig pushes a button on his laptop to end the meeting. There is a KNOCK on the door to his office. Craig looks up.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
(surprised)
Mark. Come in. What's on your mind?

Mark enters, sits.

MARK
I'm stepping aside, Craig.

CRAIG
(flabbergasted)
Tell me you're kidding. You just helped us pull off the impossible.

MARK
I did. And it made me feel... bad.

CRAIG
Bad? But we did <u>good</u>. We did <u>great</u>, Mark!

MARK
We kept talking about saving the day. We didn't save the day, Craig. We saved our own bacon.

CRAIG
Mark, we did what we had to do to survive. To stay in business.

MARK
And I'm glad it worked. Honestly. Best Buds lives to deliver flowers another day. Another year. But...

A pause, then:

CRAIG
(resigned)
We sold empty boxes.

MARK
(almost over Craig)
We sold empty boxes.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - MARK'S OFFICE - LATER**

Lincoln sits opposite Mark.

MARK
Well, Lincoln, it's time for us to part ways.

LINCOLN
(blindsided)
You're firing me?

MARK
What? No. I'm leaving.

LINCOLN
You are? Wait... for the day, or for good?

MARK
Maybe I should start over.
(beat)
Lincoln, I've decided to leave the company. I gave Craig my resignation.

LINCOLN
(deflated)
Oh. Wow. Why?

MARK
It's... more than one thing.
(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)
Ultimately, I think Valentine's Day took something out of me that can't be put back.

LINCOLN
What are you gonna do? Next, I mean.

MARK
I might travel. Take photos. Start a small business... selling photos that I take while traveling. Maybe I'll just sit around for a bit and not think about the next holiday and the next holiday. Most of the time, I'm not even sure what month it is.

LINCOLN
It's June.

MARK
It's still February.

LINCOLN
That doesn't seem possible.
(beat)
How long?

MARK
End of the month.

LINCOLN
That's not enough time to find someone new.

MARK
No. But you'll be fine. Craig will put out feelers. You'll probably be involved in that, too.

LINCOLN
Getting feelered by Craig?

MARK
Interviewing candidates.
(beat)
Unless you want the job?

LINCOLN
No, thank you. Too much stress. The last guy aged horribly.

**EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - AFTERNOON**

Lincoln is pacing, smoking a cigarette, on his phone.

LINCOLN
Yeah. Leaving. Says there's a piece of him that he can't regrow or something. A hole he can't fill.
(beat)
Not Phillip. Fill.
(beat)
Okay, maybe a Philip would do.
(beat)
I don't know. He hasn't mentioned Aaron in a while.
(beat)
How's <u>your</u> new guy?

Lincoln listens to a lengthy answer. Pacing, smoking... until he stops short. He stands more or less motionless for a moment, trying to make sense of what he's just heard.

**INT. OFFICE BUILDING - ELEVATOR - MOMENTS LATER**

Lincoln stands in the ascending elevator, alone, just... staring forward. He barely blinks.

DING. And the doors open.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CREATIVE BULLPEN**

Lincoln is at his desk, but not working. Really just staring into the middle distance.

KATE (O.S.)
Lincoln?
(beat)
<u>Lincoln</u>?

Lincoln snaps out of it.

LINCOLN
Oh. Hi. Sorry. Hi.

KATE
Hi. So, I just got some unexpectedly good news. Want to hear it, or should I go tell someone else first?

LINCOLN
No, no. Of course tell me.

KATE
They want me to come aboard full-time.

LINCOLN
Oh. Yeah.

KATE
You knew? Or... you knew that Marissa's not coming back.

LINCOLN
She just told me. Five minutes ago. First Mark, then Marissa.

KATE
First Mark what?

Oops. Lincoln opens his mouth but doesn't speak immediately. He sighs. Then:

LINCOLN
Mark resigned. He's going to tell us all soon, so just pretend like you don't already know.

KATE
Who's going to run the department? Not you, right?

LINCOLN
(mildly hurt)
You don't think I could?

KATE
I don't think you <u>should</u>. And I don't think you'd want to.
(beat)
I'm sorry you're losing all of your friends. Why isn't Marissa coming back?

LINCOLN
After the difficulties with her pregnancy, she doesn't want to--

KATE
She had her baby?

LINCOLN
Yes. Abraham.

KATE
Abraham. Cute. Old school.
(MORE)

KATE (CONT'D)
(chuckling, realizing)
"Lincoln, this is Abraham. Abraham, Lincoln."

LINCOLN
You're taking the job, yes?

KATE
What? Oh, yeah. I need health insurance.

**EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - MORNING**

It is snowing.

SUPER: FEBRUARY 28

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - MARK'S OFFICE**

Mark, in his chair, laptop on his desk, speaks to the virtually assembled company.

MARK
...and please know that wherever life takes me, whether it's to the forests of Madagascar or just the beaches of Fire Island, I will always consider you all some of my best buds.

Office-wide applause rings out. Mark closes his laptop with something like finality.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CREATIVE BULLPEN - EVENING**

Mark turns off the light and exits his office for the last time. He is bundled up, with a bag on his shoulder. He carries an orchid in a pot.

Best Buds HQ is empty. Mark is the last to leave.

**EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER**

Mark steps out into the dark and cold evening. He walks to his car, one of the few remaining in the lot. It is the end of an era for Mark Larkin. It snows on his orchid.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CREATIVE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY**

SUPER: MARCH

INTERCUT: Three different interviews, three different women (each early 50s). CLOSE ON each, answering unheard questions.

JENNY
(with a slight twang)
Jenny Pearson.

HANNAH
(polished but casual)
Hannah Ames.

MINDY
(chewing gum)
Mindy Fludger.

JENNY
University of the Deep South.

HANNAH
Rochester Academy of Art. With Honors.

MINDY
The College of Words and Pictures.

JENNY
Like a reddish-blue. Or a bluish-red.

HANNAH
Pantone three sixty-one. It’s an emerald green. It was the color of my high school prom dress, which I made myself.

MINDY
Oooh, that’s a hard one. I’m actually colorblind.

JENNY
I usually complete tasks on time.

HANNAH
I led the comprehensive rebranding of a Fortune 500 company that soon after moved into the Fortune 300.

MINDY
I learned to tie my shoes when I was just three.
(MORE)

MINDY (CONT'D)
But then I forgot how for five years, until I was nine.

JENNY
When will you be making a decision?

HANNAH
What's the most important thing for us to accomplish in the first ninety days?

MINDY
Yes: Do I have to bring my own lunch?

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - OUTSIDE PRESIDENT'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON**

Lincoln, looking the worse for wear, comes down the hallway, peeks into Craig's office, doesn't see Craig. As Lincoln turns away to leave, Craig materializes.

CRAIG
I was just looking for you.

LINCOLN
I was just looking for you.
Hannah. No contest. Hire Hannah.

CRAIG
So, about that....

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER**

The creative department is assembled: Lincoln, Kate, Tina, Kelly, Michael, Ryan, and Victoria.

LINCOLN
(perturbed)
Well, I made my recommendation to Craig just in time for him to tell me he didn't need it. They're bringing in a woman I haven't met. She's someone's friend. Or the friend of someone's friend.

TINA
What's her name?

LINCOLN
I don't know.

KELLY
What's her experience?

LINCOLN
I don't know.

RYAN
Why are we even having this meeting, then?

LINCOLN
(defeated)
I don't know.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - MORNING**

SUPER: MONDAY

The troops are on the morning meeting. We make our way from desk to desk.

CRAIG (V.O.)
...and, finally, I want to introduce our new Creative Director, Sunny Shepard. I hope you'll all get a chance to meet her this week, but for now, Sunny, you can just say hello to everyone at once.

CLOSE ON LINCOLN

We watch Lincoln try to keep a straight face as he looks at his laptop. Over his shoulder, out of focus, we see a woman in Mark's old office, at his old desk.

SUNNY (V.O.)
Good morning. Thank you, Craig. And just to answer the questions I get all the time right up front: Yes, my name is really Sunny. Yes, I am actually six feet tall. Yes, my hair is naturally red.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CREATIVE CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER**

The department is again assembled, but now at the head of table is the new boss, SUNNY SHEPARD (six foot tall, red hair).

SUNNY
(threateningly enthusiastic)
So, this is exciting.
(MORE)

SUNNY (CONT'D)
I'm looking forward to working with all of you. I'm going to set up one-on-one meetings so I can find out your individual strengths and hear what's on your plates. But first, I've got to know: Whose idea was "Get Your Heart On!"?

**EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - AFTERNOON**

The entire creative department is on a smoke break, though not everyone actually smokes.

KATE
I'm scared.

VICTORIA
I don't think she's really a redhead.

RYAN
Yo, she sucks.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CREATIVE CONFERENCE ROOM - MORNING**

SUPER: TUESDAY

Same crew, minus Tina. Kelly is fighting back tears.

SUNNY
Before anything else: Tina is no longer with the company. Vickie, can you remind me--

RYAN
Wait. Tina quit?

SUNNY
Tina's employment with the company came to an end.

RYAN
She got fired?

SUNNY
She was let go.

RYAN
She's already gone?

SUNNY
Yesterday was her last day.

RYAN
Who’s gonna do her work?

SUNNY
Well, we still have three designers.

When no one says more:

SUNNY (CONT’D)
So, April is coming, and I think we have a unique opportunity to earn back some goodwill with a playful campaign.

RYAN
Who’s April?

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - PRESIDENT’S OFFICE - LATER**

Lincoln sits across the desk from Craig. Lincoln looks semi-panicked, almost in a trance. He doesn’t make eye contact.

LINCOLN
She wants us to work up an April Fools’ email asking people to return their Valentine’s Day boxes. You know, the empty ones. The empty boxes that almost sank the company. She wants us to joke that we need those back now.

CRAIG
(not horrified)
That could actually be--

Lincoln goggles at Craig.

CRAIG (CONT’D)
I’ll... I’ll talk to her.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CREATIVE BULLPEN - LATER**

Lincoln returns to his desk. Kate watches him.

KATE
You okay?

LINCOLN
I guess. Why do I care if we lose all of our customers? It’s not my company. I just work here.

KATE
You seem okay.

Lincoln laughs.

LINCOLN
I'm fine. I'll be fine. How are you? What does the Sun Queen have you working on?

KATE
Mother's Day battlecries.

LINCOLN
All right. So she's got some confidence in you.

KATE
(deadpan)
She told me to try really hard to use the word "wow." Because it looks like "mom" upside down.

Lincoln nods.

LINCOLN
I guess the good news is we won't have to stress about Father's Day at all.

Lincoln's desk PHONE RINGS. He pushes the speaker button.

SUNNY (O.S.)
Michael's working on a contest page. Brag about your mother and win her a prize or whatever. He needs a call to action.

LINCOLN
(thinking aloud)
Uh... Show Mom--

SUNNY (O.S.)
Just tell him. Thanks.

CLICK. Lincoln looks askance at the phone. Looks at Kate. Picks up his phone handset.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CREATIVE BULLPEN - MICHAEL'S DESK**

Michael answers his phone.

MICHAEL
Hey.
(beat)
No. Come on.
(beat)
Okay. You're the word guy.

**INT. MARK'S HOUSE - MORNING**

SERIES OF SHOTS

Mark strolls into the kitchen, makes coffee.

Mark takes his coffee to the living room, sits in a chair, reads a magazine.

Mark goes back to bed.

**EXT. MARK'S TOWN - AFTERNOON**

The "business district" of Mark's town is just a few blocks of a main street, with stores on either side of the road.

**EXT. GROCERY STORE**

Mark comes out with a bag of groceries (no baguette).

**EXT. BOOKSHOP**

Mark comes out with an armful of books.

**EXT. FLOWER SHOP**

Mark comes out with a bouquet.

**INT. MARK'S HOUSE - EVENING**

There's a fire in the fireplace and a glass of wine on the coffee table, next to the new bouquet of flowers, next to the new books. Mark comes in, sits, picks up the wine, relaxes, sighs with contentment. Or boredom?

After a moment, Mark opens his laptop, heads to the BEST BUDS homepage. At the top is a banner reading:

MOTHER'S DAY SWEEPSTAKES...
ENTER YOUR MOM!

Mark immediately closes his laptop and picks up his wineglass again. Not his problem.

**INT. MARK'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - LATE MORNING**

Mark's PHONE RINGS, waking him. He answers. As he talks, he becomes more alert and more agitated.

MARK
Hello?
(beat)
This is.
(beat)
What? When?
(beat)
Oh my god. I'll be there as soon as I can.

Mark throws the covers and gets out of bed, steps out of frame.

SUPER: APRIL 1

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CREATIVE BULLPEN - MORNING**

Kate is working at her desk. Lincoln drops a 200-page manuscript next to her laptop with a THUD. Kate looks up at Lincoln, then down at the manuscript.

KATE
(reading)
"VIOLET CRIME: A Jack LaFleur Mystery. By Lincoln Silver."
(beat)
You wrote a book?!

LINCOLN
I wrote a book.

KATE
Can I read it?

LINCOLN
That's why it's on your desk.

KATE
I can't wait. I might not wait. What kind of feedback do you want?

LINCOLN
Praise, mostly. Let me know if you guess who the murderer is.

KATE
I just hope the victim is six feet tall with red hair.

Kate's PHONE RINGS. Lincoln steps away. Kate answers her phone, listens... then:

KATE
(fed up)
It's short for "chrysanthemum."
(beat)
We could certainly try that.

As she talks, Kate flips over the first page of Lincoln's manuscript. PUSH IN on manuscript to see the dedication on the second page: FOR ABRAHAM

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - PRESIDENT'S OFFICE - MORNING**

SUPER: APRIL 2

Craig, at his desk, speaking to the company via laptop.

CRAIG
One final thing this morning. I'm sorry to announce that Mark Larkin's mother passed away yesterday. Mark and his sister will be sitting shiva at Mark's house for the rest of this week. Renée in HR has the address.

Craig pronounces "shiva" like the Hindu god.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CREATIVE BULLPEN - LINCOLN'S DESK**

Lincoln calls Craig.

LINCOLN
It's <u>shiva</u>. Like you're cold and from Boston. <u>Shiva.</u>
(beat)
Perfect.
(beat)
Food. Jews don't really do flowers.
(beat)
Mark is... Mark.

**INT. LINCOLN'S CAR - MOVING - AFTERNOON**

Lincoln drives. Kate sits in the passenger seat.

LINCOLN
Ever paid a shiva call?

KATE
No.

LINCOLN
Don't say hello or goodbye. Just walk in and walk out. It's custom.

KATE
Seems rude.

LINCOLN
That's not very Christian of you, Kate.

KATE
Speaking of which, I have a question for you. About your book. I couldn't help noticing the dedication. Are you Abraham's godfather? I assume that Marissa and her baby are also Jewish. Do Jews have godparents?

LINCOLN
Sometimes. But Jewish godfather is a purely honorary title.

KATE
No decapitated horses?

LINCOLN
Horse isn't kosher, Kate.

**INT. MARK'S HOUSE - LATER**

The first floor -- entrance, hallway, living room, kitchen -- is lousy with sympathy floral arrangements. Possibly everyone that Mark ever worked with at Best Buds sent one.

Lincoln and Kate arrive, letting themselves in through the front door. In the living room, they join Mark, Kelly, Victoria, Michael, and Ryan. Everyone is chatting. Lincoln holds a large cellophane-wrapped platter of cookies.

LINCOLN
(to Mark)
Kitchen, Mark?

EVERYONE ELSE
KITCHEN MARK!

They all chuckle. Mark needed that. He points Lincoln toward the kitchen.

**INT. MARK'S HOUSE - KITCHEN**

Lincoln steps in and finds RACHEL (late 50s), Mark's sister, pouring herself a cup of coffee. Lincoln puts the cookies down among the flowers.

LINCOLN
You must be Mark's sister.

RACHEL
That's what he tells me. Rachel.

LINCOLN
Lincoln. I'm very sorry about your mother.

RACHEL
Thank you. Coffee?

LINCOLN
Ah... yes. Thank you.

RACHEL
Are you part of Mark's old flower crew?

LINCOLN
I am. Mark and I worked very closely for several years. It's... not at all the same without him. But if he's happy--

Rachel hands Lincoln a mug of coffee.

RACHEL
He's not happy.

LINCOLN
(embarrassed)
I didn't mean... of course not.

RACHEL
No, even before this. He loved his job. I think he'd take it back if he could have it.

The DOORBELL RINGS.

LINCOLN
I'll get that. To be continued.

**INT. MARK'S HOUSE - ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS**

Lincoln opens the door to Craig, holding both flowers and food. Rather than let Craig in, though, Lincoln steps outside.

LINCOLN
Talk to me for a second?

**INT. MARK'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

Rachel joins the group just as Mark finishes telling a story.

MARK
So she takes my hat, puts it on the watermelon, and marches me right out of the supermarket.

RACHEL
That wasn't you. That was me. And it wasn't Mom, it was Dad!

MARK
Really? Well, it's still a good story.

LINCOLN (O.S.)
Guys, no more dirty jokes. There's a baby listening.

ANGLE ON Lincoln, Craig, and Marissa (holding ABRAHAM), coming into the room. The others stand. Marissa hands Abraham off to Lincoln so she can hug her former coworkers. Lincoln takes Abraham to an armchair and sits with him. Kate walks over. She and Lincoln converse quietly.

KATE
Are you his <u>father</u>?

LINCOLN
Yes.

KATE
What? No, seriously. You are?

LINCOLN
Seriously. I am. Marissa wanted a child. She didn't have a partner. She didn't want to wait for one. She asked me to... contribute. I did.

KATE
How... how does this work? You're his father, but you don't... you're not--

LINCOLN
Don't break your brain trying to figure it out, Kate. Just enjoy the baby. Do you want to hold him?

KATE
No. No, thank you.

LINCOLN
You're missing out. Babies are awesome. They've got that new baby smell.

**INT. MARK'S HOUSE - KITCHEN**

Kate steps into the kitchen. She finds and opens the cookies she and Lincoln brought. As she stuffs a cookie in her mouth:

MARISSA (O.S.)
How do you like my desk?

Marissa enters and joins Kate at the cookie platter. Kate is still chewing.

MARISSA (CONT'D)
If you found something that looks like a flower-shaped sex toy in the bottom drawer, that was from a partnership I worked on.

Marissa makes air quotes.

MARISSA
"Best Buds in Bed."
(beat)
I'm Marissa.

KATE
I'm Kate. And I will be asking for a new desk on Monday.

Marissa laughs.

MARISSA
How's working with Lincoln?

KATE
Full of surprises.
(MORE)

KATE (CONT'D)
(beat)
Have you read his novel?

MARISSA
No, but I think he gave a minor character my name. Maybe a waitress or a hooker with a heart of goldenrod.

LINCOLN (O.S.)
Who is?

Marissa walks over, takes Abraham, and stage whispers to Lincoln:

MARISSA
Your mom.

**INT. MARK'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING**

MARISSA
Okay, well, this beautiful baby needs to go to bed. Also Abraham.

CRAIG
I should head out, too.

Goodbyes are said and Marissa takes her leave. Lincoln walks her out. Craig departs as well. We remain.

RACHEL
I'm going to head upstairs myself. It was nice to meet you all.

As Rachel exits, the group AD LIBS their goodnights.

MARK
Can I get anyone anything?

RYAN
Can you get me a new job?

Awkward quiet for a moment. Lincoln returns.

LINCOLN
Did Ryan say something?

All chuckle. Lincoln sits.

MARK
So, how <u>are</u> things at work?

No one wants to answer at first, but then the dam breaks:

VICTORIA
Our new boss is... very tall.

MICHAEL
She has red hair.

KATE
Her name is actually “Sunny.”

KELLY
She fired Tina.

RYAN
She fucking sucks.

No one disagrees.

LINCOLN
Can I get anybody anything?

**INT. MARK’S HOUSE - ENTRANCE**

The visitors are bundling up, getting ready to leave. Kelly, Victoria, Michael, Ryan, and Kate in turn each hug Mark or shake his hand. Lincoln is last. Lincoln squeezes Mark’s arm.

Mark closes the front door and locks it. No one else is coming tonight.

**INT. MARK’S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER**

Mark pours himself a glass of wine and takes a cookie.

**INT. MARK’S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM**

Mark sits down.

There’s a KNOCK on the FRONT DOOR.

**INT. MARK’S HOUSE - ENTRANCE**

Mark unlocks and opens the door to Craig. Craig steps in.

MARK
What’d you forget?

CRAIG
I forgot to ask you to come back to the company.
(MORE)

CRAIG (CONT'D)
But, really, I just didn't want to do it with other people around.

Mark leads Craig to the kitchen. He pours a second glass of wine, offers it to his guest.

MARK
Were you just waiting in your car for everyone else to leave?

CRAIG
I found a coffee shop in town. Next to the flower shop. Not one of ours.

Craig drinks his wine. All of it.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
Mark, Mother's Day is around the corner.

MARK
Craig, my mother is in the ground. I'm still dealing with that.

CRAIG
I know. I know. The timing could not be worse.

MARK
Would there have been a better time for my mother to die?

CRAIG
That's not what I meant.

MARK
I know. But it is a little strange that you're asking me to help out with Mother's Day... right now.

CRAIG
I'm not just asking you to help out with Mother's Day, though, Mark. I'm asking you to do what you love again, do what you believe in. Look at all of these flowers. People sent you flowers because flowers work. You know that better than anyone. You send more flowers than anyone.
(MORE)

CRAIG (CONT'D)
(beat)
And Sunny has no idea what she's doing. I'm ready to cut her loose, but I need to know that--

Craig stops. He realizes that he's being selfish.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
I'm sorry. You're right. This isn't the time.

Craig places his wine glass on a table.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
Take care of yourself, Mark. Call if you need anything at all.

Craig exits the kitchen. Mark remains. We hear the FRONT DOOR OPEN then SHUT.

Mark busies himself in the kitchen. After a minute. we hear a tentative KNOCK on the FRONT DOOR.

Mark leaves the kitchen. We remain.

We hear, off-screen, Mark open the door again.

MARK (O.S.)
(softly, surprised)
Oh. Hi.

AARON (O.S.)
Rachel texted me.
(beat)
I'm so sorry.
(beat)
I brought you these.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - LOBBY - MORNING**

Among others, Kate and Morgan enter the building and head to the elevators. They find each other.

MORGAN
Hey.

KATE
Hey.

MORGAN
You have a new boss?

Kate looks around, over the tops of everyone's heads.

KATE
Yes. She’s... tall.

MORGAN
That’s... high praise.

KATE
That’s the best I can do.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - ELEVATOR - MOMENTS LATER**

Kate and Morgan get in an empty car. Morgan notices the manuscript under Kate’s arm.

MORGAN
Did you write a book?

KATE
Lincoln did. It’s a mystery. Do you know Lincoln?

MORGAN
We’ve been in meetings together. Funny guy. Smart. Good cologne.
(beat)
What’s it about?

KATE
(dramatically)
Murder. And magnolias.

MORGAN
Ah. Homicide and hydrangea.

KATE
Law...

**INT. OFFICE BUILDING - FIFTH FLOOR LOBBY - CONTINUOUS**

The elevator doors open.

BOTH
...and orchids.

They exit the elevator, enter the BEST BUDS main entrance, then split.

KATE
Later.

MORGAN
Later.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CONTINUOUS**

The office is full of posters and banners with Sunny's Mother's Day battlecry: WOW MOM. Neither subtlety nor humility are anywhere to be seen. We follow Kate to her desk. She shakes her head as she walks.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ -BEST BUDS HQ - CREATIVE BULLPEN - CONTINUOUS**

Lincoln is at his desk already when Kate arrives.

KATE
(mock solemnly)
Hail fellow, Wow Mom.

LINCOLN
And a very Wow Mom to you, Katherine. May the road rise up to Wow Mom.

KATE
You had me at "Wow Mom."

LINCOLN
How's my book?

KATE
I'm enjoying it very much. You have an ear for dialogue.

LINCOLN
And a wow for your mom.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CREATIVE CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER**

Sunny addresses the department (Lincoln, Kate, Victoria, Kelly, Michael, Ryan).

SUNNY
I don't know how my predecessor used to deliver news like this, but Mother's Day orders aren't where leadership would like them to be.

KELLY
(subtly salty)
I don't remember Mark ever telling us that.

SUNNY
(subtly icily)
Be that as it may, that's where we are now. So Craig has asked that we prepare some additional emails to deploy over the weekend.

MICHAEL
(sincerely)
Same messaging, or something new?

SUNNY
Same messaging. Have fun with it.

The group winces, though they try to hide the pain.

RYAN
Same amount of "WOW," or...?

SUNNY
Okay, thanks, guys. I've got to run down to the photo studio. I'll check in with you later or tomorrow.

Sunny leaves the room. The creatives look at one another for a moment.

MICHAEL
What if we all just quit?

VICTORIA
That would not be very WOW, Michael.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CREATIVE BULLPEN - LATER**

Everyone works at their desk. Lincoln's desk PHONE RINGS. He answers.

LINCOLN
Lincoln.
(beat)
Be right in.

He stands and taps Kate on the shoulder.

LINCOLN (CONT'D)
We've been summoned.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - SUNNY'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER**

Lincoln and Kate sit across from Sunny.

SUNNY
Hi, guys.

Lincoln and Kate smile and nod.

SUNNY (CONT'D)
Sunflowers. There's going to be a big sunflower push starting soon after Mother's Day, so I'd like you to get started on some assets. I was thinking we could do a "fun facts" infographic or something.

LINCOLN
Sure.

SUNNY
Great. Remember to mention that they turn to face the sun. I always liked that.

KATE
They don't, though.

SUNNY
Sorry?

KATE
That's a myth, it turns out. I did some research into sunflowers already, and unfortunately, it's a fun myth, but not a fact.

SUNNY
Well, we can say it anyway.

KATE
I'd... rather not.

SUNNY
You'd rather not?

KATE
I mean... it isn't true, so I'd really rather not include misinformation in our material.

SUNNY
Lincoln? What do you think?

LINCOLN
I’m no botanist, but if Kate says she’s looked into it....

SUNNY
So, you would both rather not.
(beat)
Okay. Thank you. We can revisit this another time.

KATE
I’m happy to write up other fun facts--

SUNNY
You know what? Maybe I’ll just take this one, myself.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CREATIVE BULLPEN - MOMENTS LATER**

Lincoln and Kate exit Sunny’s office, closing the door behind them.

KATE
Thank you for having my back.

LINCOLN
Of course.
(beat)
Sunflowers don’t follow the sun?

KATE
Don’t you work at a flower company?

LINCOLN
For now.

**EXT. BEST BUDS HQ - OUTSIDE BOARDROOM - LATER**

In the hallway, Craig and Sunny walk in opposite directions, toward each other. When they pass, they smile politely. Then we see Sunny go into Human Resources and close the door. Craig goes into the boardroom and closes the door.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - BOARDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Craig sits at the head of the table, alone, with a stack of papers. He reads, making notes. Then he punches in a number on the phone on the table. Someone picks up:

BRAD (V.O.)
Craig?

CRAIG
Brad, join me in the boardroom?
Bring a calculator. And coffee.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - OUTSIDE BOARDROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

Brad comes down the hall, enters the boardroom. As the boardroom door closes again, the door to HR opens and Sunny comes out, then walks out of frame.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CREATIVE BULLPEN**

Lincoln's desk PHONE RINGS; he answers.

LINCOLN
This is Lincoln.
(beat)
Yes.
(beat)
Yes.
(beat)
I understand.
(long beat)
Hannah.

ANGLE ON Kate for her reaction: a reserved smirk.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

ON A LAPTOP SCREEN

We join the morning virtual meeting, already in progress. Many of the Best Buds employees we've already met appear in boxes, with a long roster of names of others to the side.

CRAIG
...and, finally, we're excited for the dawn of sunflower season. I've asked Sunny to head up the initiative.

SUNNY
(unasked)
Appropriately enough. I've always felt a personal connection to sunflowers, especially because they follow...

She points at herself.

SUNNY (CONT'D)
...the sun.

An awkward silence falls over the meeting.

VP OF PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT
Actually, Sunny that's a myth.

SUNNY
(flustered)
No, it's a fact. Everybody knows that sunflowers follow the sun.

VP OF PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT
Well, I might only have a Master's Degree in Horticulture, but your parents named you "Sunny," so I won't bother arguing the point.

More than a few in the meeting chuckle at the remark. Sunny scowls.

CRAIG
Okay, well, have a wonderful day, everyone.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CREATIVE BULLPEN - LATER**

Sunny comes out of her office and walks to the midst of the creative department to make an announcement.

SUNNY
(haughtily)
Guys, I need you to wrap up whatever's in your queues. May will be here before we know it.

RYAN
Who's May?

Sunny loses it.

SUNNY
The <u>month</u>, Ryan. <u>May the month</u> will be here. Are you <u>actually</u> retarded or do you just desperately need attention?

Dead silence. Then:

RYAN
(calmly)
Sunny, you fucking suck.

Silence again, but different.

Sunny storms out of the room, slams the door.

Lincoln, Kate, Victoria, Kelly, Michael, and Ryan crack up. Some of them actually clap.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - BOARDROOM - EVENING**

Craig in his seat, the creative department around the table. Not Sunny. The other shoe is about to drop.

After a long moment during which all eyes are on Craig and no one dares speak...

CRAIG
Well, she's gone.

Eyebrows raise around the table. Mouths open. Is this... good news?

CRAIG (CONT'D)
Sunny. She's out. Already took her stuff and left.
(beat)
Good riddance.

Sighs.

RYAN
She--

CRAIG
I know. I heard.
(beat)
What I didn't do is listen to Lincoln. Now, unfortunately, the candidate we should have hired is no longer available.
(beat)
I owe you guys an apology. I'm sorry. You've been dealing with... a lot lately.

No one knows what to say, until finally:

LINCOLN
Let me make a call.

**INT. MINDY FLUDGER'S APARTMENT - LATER**

Mindy's living room is a mess. Not hoarder mess, but scatterbrain mess. We hear her PHONE RING, then she comes into frame, searching for her phone. It rings and rings as she looks under magazines, under clothes, under her couch... until she realizes that her phone is in her pocket. She answers.

MINDY
Hello?
(beat)
Yes.
(beat)
Oh, I would love to!
(beat)
So, do I, like, mail my blood to you?

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - BOARDROOM - DAY**

Craig and the VPs are once again assembled and seated around the table. The easel stands at the end of the room opposite Craig, and Mark stands near the easel. On the easel is a poster board, turned around.

SUPER: APRIL 25, NATIONAL ZUCCHINI BREAD DAY

MARK
Good morning. Some of you might remember me...

Laughter. And relief.

MARK (CONT'D)
...but allow me to tell you a bit about myself all the same. My name is Mark Larkin. I am fifty-five years old. My partner moved out of our home six months ago, and I lost my mother recently.

Quiet, sympathetic murmurs from the room.

MARK (CONT'D)
My partner and my mother were not close. In fact, my mother and I were not especially close, in part because of my choice of partner. His name is Aaron.

Fewer murmurs. Some people knew, some didn't.

MARK (CONT'D)
All the same, when she died I was heartbroken. For the second time in six months. The death of a parent puts things in perspective very quickly. It also helps bygones be bygones.

**FLASHBACK - INT. MARK'S HOUSE - ENTRANCE - EVENING**

Mark opens the door to Aaron, who holds flowers. They embrace. Mark invites Aaron in.

MARK (V.O.)
Although we hadn't spoken in weeks, when he heard about my loss, Aaron visited. And although he knew that everyone I know would send some, he still brought flowers.

Soft laughs from the boardroom off-screen.

**INT. BEST BUDS - BOARDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

MARK (CONT'D)
We don't sell flowers. We help people communicate their feelings. Some feelings are easier to communicate than others. Usually, it's easy to tell a parent, or a child, that you love them, Sometimes it isn't. And sometimes, the time just doesn't feel right. Unfortunately, sometimes time runs out.

Mark flips the poster board, revealing the lockup of the Mother's Day slogan championed by Sunny:

WOW
MOM

Mark produces a large red marker from his pocket, uncaps it, and moves to write on the board.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - OUTSIDE BOARDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Thunderous applause from inside the boardroom, followed immediately by applause from the rest of the office.

We see on their screens that the meeting is being broadcast to everyone in the company.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CREATIVE BULLPEN - LATER**

Mark returns to his department, carrying the poster board. We don't see what he wrote yet. He passes Kate, who smiles at him. Mark smiles back. He passes Lincoln.

LINCOLN
Welcome back, boss.

Mark hands the poster board to Lincoln, then continues on into his office.

Lincoln hangs the poster on a display board in the bullpen, then steps away so we can finally see it. Mark has written, in red marker, one word, three simple letters, below the designed lockup. We see:

WOW
MOM
NOW

**INT. MARISSA'S APARTMENT - DAY**

Marissa, holding Abraham, walks past a gorgeous bouquet of flowers in a vase and a card on a table in the living room. We see the front of the card only. It reads: "HAPPY FIRST MOTHER'S DAY!" In the background, sitting on an armchair, is the enormous stuffed brown bear sold by Best Buds.

FADE TO BLACK.

**OVER BLACK.**

A soft ELEVATOR CHIME.

FADE IN:

**INT. OFFICE BUILDING - LOBBY - MORNING**

Lincoln, alone, gets into an elevator.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER**

Lincoln exits the elevator, walks into the office. Still no one around.

**INT. BEST BUDS HQ - CREATIVE BULLPEN - MOMENTS LATER**

Lincoln deposits his bag, looks around. Nobody to be seen.

SUPER: JUNE

Lincoln's desk PHONE RINGS. He answers.

LINCOLN
Lincoln.
(beat)
Of course.

Lincoln walks away from his desk.

**INT. BEST BUDS - BOARDROOM**

It is mostly dark in the boardroom, with only one set of lights on overhead, at the head of the table. Craig's usual seat is empty. The easel is near the empty chair, with a poster board turned around on it.

Lincoln comes into the room. He finds Mark just inside the door... then makes out a dozen colleagues around the table and many others standing in the room. Kate, Ryan, and the rest of the creative department. Craig, Brad, Morgan... everyone we've met is present.

MARK
(solemnly)
Sit.

Lincoln sits.

LINCOLN
My birthday's in September, you know.

Mark turns the poster on the easel. It is a mockup of a book cover for Lincoln's novel, with a banner reading "TODAY: A DRAMATIC READING BY THE AUTHOR".

LINCOLN (CONT'D)
(chuckling)
Oh, no, no. You don't want that. It'll spoil the ending.

CRAIG
You're not going to read the whole thing! Some of us still have work to do today.

All laugh.

LINCOLN
Okay, okay. But I don't have my manuscr--

Mark produces Lincoln's MANUSCRIPT and drops it onto the table with a THUD. More laughs from the room.

LINCOLN (CONT'D)
Fine. But I'm going to need help. Kate?

Kate gets up from her chair and steps over to Lincoln's side, looking over his shoulder. Mark takes Kate's seat.

LINCOLN
(to Kate)
Ready? You start.

KATE
(reading)
"VIOLET CRIME: A Jack LaFleur Mystery. By Lincoln Silver."

Lincoln turns two pages.

KATE (CONT'D)
"Chapter One: Seeds of Doubt"

**INT. JACK LAFLEUR'S APARTMENT - MORNING**

We're in the black-and-white gumshoe-era world of "VIOLET CRIME" now, watching Lincoln's characters as Lincoln and Kate provide the narration and dialogue.

PUSH IN ON dead man's body and flower on couch.

LINCOLN (V.O.)
(dramatically)
It was a stark and thorny nightshade lying next to the body--

FREEZE FRAME. The Best Buds audience groans off-screen.

LINCOLN (O.S)
(in his own voice)
You guys asked for this! <u>Hush</u>.

We resume PUSHING IN.

LINCOLN (V.O.)
(dramatically again)
It was a stark and thorny nightshade lying next to the body. I knew not to touch either one with my bare hands. I didn't want my fingerprints on the corpse, and I didn't want my fingers on the poisonous flower. Even if it wasn't the murder weapon, it was still evidence. And even though I didn't think I'd committed murder, I still couldn't say why there was a dead man in my living room.

ANGLE ON JACK LaFLEUR, a hungover private detective in his pajamas, taking in the scene from the threshold of his bedroom.

**INT. JACK LAFLEUR'S APARTMENT - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS**

LaFleur steps to a console table, picks up a rotary phone handset, and dials.

LINCOLN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I picked up the phone in the hall and dialed my office. I knew my secretary would be there already because I should have been there already. I was late that morning, but not as late as the stranger on my couch.

**INT. LAFLEUR INVESTIGATIONS - CONTINUOUS**

Jack's SECRETARY (early 20s) sits behind a reception desk. She has her own phone handset to her ear.

KATE (V.O.)
(over-the-top ingénue)
LaFleur Investigations.

**INT. BEST BUDS - BOARDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Laughter. Kate smiles broadly. Lincoln shakes his head, but he is amused.

LINCOLN
(reading)
My secretary was a peach if ever there was one. If there were two of her, she'd have been a pear.
(MORE)

LINCOLN (CONT'D)
She kept my business running smoothly when I was too well-oiled to work properly. That was more and more often these days, since I lost my wife to a terminal case of the Spanish flu. As in, she flew from the Pan Am terminal to Barcelona with another man.

More laughs and groans.

**INT. JACK LAFLEUR'S APARTMENT - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS**

LaFleur rubs his temples with the fingers of the hand that isn't holding the phone. LaFleur mouths the line:

LINCOLN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Kitten, where was I last night?

**INT. BEST BUDS - BOARDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

LINCOLN (CONT'D)
(reading)
I call my secretary "Kitten" because her last name is Katz but she's still very young.

**INT. LAFLEUR INVESTIGATIONS - CONTINUOUS**

Kitten on the phone, flipping through a scheduling book.

KATE (V.O.)
You said you were going to the library.

**INT. BEST BUDS - BOARDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

LINCOLN (CONT'D)
(reading)
That's right. The Library is a speakeasy on the corner of Reade and Wright. The bartender's a real card. I'd popped in to check out two volumes. One was a pint of gin, the other a quart of tonic water. My bookmark was a slice of lime....

As Lincoln reads, we scan the room. Everyone present is impressed, clearly enjoying the performance and the writing. But none as much as Mark. We stop and stay on Mark, who is clearly very proud of Lincoln, and very happy to be back at Best Buds.

FADE TO BLACK.

**OVER BLACK.**

A soft ELEVATOR CHIME.

FADE IN:

**INT. OFFICE BUILDING - ELEVATOR - EVENING**

We're inside the elevator, facing the closed doors. When the doors open, we see Janet waiting. Her appearance tells us it's the end of a long day.

JANET
(brightening some)
Mark! I haven't seen you in a while. How's the flower business?

REVERSE ANGLE

Already in the elevator is Mark.

CLOSE ON Mark's face, he smiles at Janet.

We PULL OUT a bit to see that Mark is holding a bouquet of red, white, and blue blooms.

SUPER: JUNE 14

We PULL OUT further, backing into the lobby, as Janet joins Mark in the elevator. As the doors close, we see Mark handing a flower to Janet.

FADE OUT.

RUN CREDITS

FADE IN:

**EXT. SUNFLOWER FIELD - AFTERNOON**

The sun blazes high in a clear blue sky, beaming down upon a magnificent field of stately sunflowers... all of them facing us, their backs to the sun.

REVERSE ANGLE

We see a bedraggled Sunny standing across a dirt road from the field, where she has a good view of the flowers. Tears of frustration and disillusionment well up in her eyes. She falls to her knees and raises her fists to the heavens. Just as she is about to cry out in anguish, we

QUICK CUT TO BLACK.

THE END