

**THE SHADY LADY:  
A Robust Blend of Privilege,  
Influence, and White-Collar Crime**

*By*

*Kara Poe Atnip and Lisa Dellagiarino Feriend*

# THE SHADY LADY: A ROBUST BLEND OF PRIVILEGE, INFLUENCE, AND WHITE-COLLAR CRIME

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*The Shady Lady: A Robust Blend of Privilege, Influence, and White-Collar Crime* was originally produced by The Saint Sebastian Players in Chicago, IL, featuring the following cast:

Preston Taylor.....Jon Yelton  
Madison.....Claire Rutkowski  
Deborah.....Laura MacGregor  
Nicole.....Valerie Gerlock  
Melinda.....MJ Deamon  
Leah.....Amy Hunt  
Big Preston.....Joshua Paul Wright  
Ronin Farrow.....Eamon McInerney  
Elizabeth Taylor.....Jill Chukerman Test

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CAST: 3 Men, 6 Women

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| PRESTON TAYLOR   | 50s/60s, white, short, unfamiliar with consequences                |
| MADISON          | 22, idealistic, hardworking  |
| DEBORAH          | 60s, sweet, a gossip   |
| NICOLE           | 40s, perfectionist, fixer  |
| MELINDA          | 50s, curt, sarcastic   |
| LEAH             | 40s, naïve, ditsy  |
| BIG PRESTON      | 20s, white, tall, good natured but dumb                            |
| RONIN FARROW     | 30s, a puff piece reporter   |
| ELIZABETH TAYLOR | 50s/60s, white, politician ( <i>can be a video or live actor</i> ) |

TIME: Present day.

PLACE: The conference room of the nonprofit formerly known as Garbage Patch Kids in Portland, Oregon.

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## ACT 1

*In the darkness, a political tv commercial plays. It shows a montage of a woman, ELIZABETH TAYLOR, addressing the viewer, signing papers, taking phone calls, shaking hands with voters, etc.*

**ELIZABETH.** Hi, I'm Elizabeth Taylor - no, not that Elizabeth Taylor - and I'm running for Governor of Oregon. In my long political career, I have worked hard to forge connections and make meaningful changes to people's lives at the local level, and now I'm hoping to take those skills into statewide service. I pledge to work hard to improve our already exceptional schools, keep our air and water clean, rebuild our crumbling infrastructure, and reform our criminal justice system. Let's show the rest of the country how amazing our Pacific Wonderland can be. In Oregon, we love dreamers. On November third, vote Elizabeth Taylor, and let's dream big together.

**VOICEOVER.** Paid for by Elizabeth Taylor for Governor. *(The commercial ends. In the darkness, a voice yells out.)*

**PRESTON.** Madison! *(Lights up on an office conference room containing a long table surrounded by chairs. A phone sits on the table and a large, framed photo of a yacht hangs on the wall. PRESTON TAYLOR,*

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*possessing all the confidence of a mediocre white man, holds down a button on the phone in the middle of the conference room table and screams at the phone. He wears an Elizabeth Taylor for Governor button.)*  
Madison! Madi – (*MADISON enters. She also wears an Elizabeth Taylor for Governor button.*)

**MADISON.** Mister Taylor, my desk is right outside the conference room. You don't need to use the intercom.

**PRESTON.** I wanted to make sure you heard me.

**MADISON.** It's impossible not to.

**PRESTON.** Madison. We have a big, big problem. Tell everyone to come to the conference room right away. (*Madison reaches across Preston and presses the intercom button on the phone.*)

**MADISON.** Everyone is needed for a meeting in the conference room as soon as possible. (*She gives Preston a look that is almost 'Why couldn't you do that?' but not quite, because this is, after all, her boss.*)

**PRESTON.** Thank you.

**MADISON.** What's going on?

**PRESTON.** A terrible crisis. It's all my wife's fault.

**MADISON.** Did something happen with her campaign?

**PRESTON.** No, her campaign is going great. That's the problem.

**MADISON.** How is that a problem?

**PRESTON.** Because now that she's won the Democratic nomination for governor, the press is doing deep dives into my life and work. Nobody cared what I was up to before my wife became the Governor-Elect.

**MADISON.** Well, she's not technically the Governor-Elect yet, Mister Taylor.

**PRESTON.** You think Oregon is going to elect a Republican governor, Madison?

**MADISON.** Sure, it could happen. I mean, it probably won't happen this fall, after that viral video of him running over that kid's dog.

**PRESTON.** That was an accident!

**MADISON.** Yeah, but it still doesn't look great.

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**PRESTON.** How did we get here? How did this happen? She's only ever held local office. Nobody outside of the greater Portland area even knows who she is. What could people possibly find appealing about her?

**MADISON.** About the woman you chose to spend your life with?

**PRESTON.** She beat out so many other politicians.

**MADISON.** Well, it's all about name recognition.

**PRESTON.** But she's not the Elizabeth Taylor they recognize!

**MADISON.** I'm still a little confused as to how you getting more attention is a bad thing. More exposure for the nonprofit is great! Every little bit helps us reach our goal of getting rid of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch.

**PRESTON.** That's impossible to do. It's the whole ocean at this point. And besides, more exposure is not great. Extra scrutiny on Garbage Patch Kids is the last thing I want.

**MADISON.** We're not allowed to call it that anymore. Remember the cease and desist letter?

**PRESTON.** You see, this is what I'm talking about! You run a nonprofit for ten years and nobody cares what you call it, and then your wife wins the Democratic nomination for governor, and all of a sudden you're being ordered to change the name.

**MADISON.** I mean, the logo was Cabbage Patch Kids' faces popping out of seaweed-covered trash.

**PRESTON.** Whose side are you on, Madison?

**MADISON.** Yours of course, Mister Taylor, but that doesn't change the fact that you've got to come up with a new name and logo. Nicole submitted some possible designs to you weeks ago. *(DEBORAH enters. She also wears an Elizabeth Taylor for Governor button.)*

**DEBORAH.** Mister Taylor, I came as quickly as I could. This meeting wasn't on your schedule. Is something wrong?

**PRESTON.** Terribly, Deborah. Irreparably. Madison, please grab your computer so you can take down the minutes.

**DEBORAH.** Oh dear. *(Madison exits.)*

**PRESTON.** Can you please get me a coffee, Deborah? In one of the disposable cups. You know how the real mugs hurt my wrist.

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**DEBORAH.** I certainly do.

**PRESTON.** It's not that I don't care about the environment.

**DEBORAH.** Well that's obvious. You started this wonderful nonprofit.

**PRESTON.** It's just that a string of childhood illnesses have left me with weak wrists.

**DEBORAH.** What a cross you bear.

**PRESTON.** You don't know the half of it. Just wait until you hear what I have to say.

**DEBORAH.** Oh, Mister Taylor, I'm so on edge! I'll get that coffee right away for you. *(Deborah leaves as Madison reenters. They share a glance conveying that neither knows what the crisis is. Madison sits at the end of the table farthest from the door and turns on her computer. Preston stares at her, thinking.)*

**PRESTON.** Madison, can I tell you a secret that I'm about to tell everyone else?

**MADISON.** Does that count as a secret?

**PRESTON.** I received a call from the Portland Gazette. Ronan Farrow is coming here at noon.

**MADISON.** Ronan Farrow?

**PRESTON.** Yes.

**MADISON.** Is coming here at noon?

**PRESTON.** He's doing a piece on Garbage Patch Kids.

**MADISON.** Can't call it that anymore.

**PRESTON.** He's doing a piece on us, Madison. On our work.

**MADISON.** And that's not great news?

**PRESTON.** Again, more attention focused on me and my endeavors is not great news. He's won a Pulitzer Prize, Madison. A Pulitzer Prize.

**MADISON.** ... And that's bad?

**PRESTON.** That's terrible.

**MADISON.** Gotcha.

**PRESTON.** He's a good journalist. He researches people and then he destroys them.



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**MADISON.** Well, only people who deserve it. *(Preston stares at Madison for a long beat, glances at the door, and then back at Madison.)*

**PRESTON.** *(In a slightly lowered voice.)* Madison. Hypothetically, if someone has engaged in a series of affairs - consensual affairs - can Ronan Farrow metoo them?

**MADISON.** Wha-

**PRESTON.** A string of torrid, passionate encounters between two consenting adults which ended in their mutual satisfaction. Can a man be metoo'd for that?

**MADISON.** Um... I think you're fine.

**PRESTON.** It wasn't me.

**MADISON.** Of course not.

**PRESTON.** It's hypothetical.

**MADISON.** Sure. But this conversation is a little strange and outside of my job description.

**PRESTON.** No, administrative assistant is a catchall.

**MADISON.** Oh. Great.

**PRESTON.** So, what is the best way to keep Ronan Farrow from learning that someone enjoys affairs, do you think?

**MADISON.** He's coming to do a piece on the nonprofit, not an exposé on your personal life.

**PRESTON.** Okay, you're right. It's me. I've cheated on Elizabeth. A lot.

**MADISON.** Yeah.

**PRESTON.** Now it's just one more thing to worry about, and you know multitasking gives me hives. That's why I have Deborah. Where is Deborah? Where is everyone?

**MADISON.** I'm sure they're just wrapping up whatever they were working on and they'll be right here. *(Slight beat.)* You know, this sounds like a job for Nicole. She's really good at stuff like this. *(Enter Deborah with a disposable coffee cup, blowing on the coffee to cool it for Preston, and NICOLE with a notebook and pen. Nicole also wears an Elizabeth Taylor button.)*

**PRESTON.** Hello, Nicole.

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**NICOLE.** Good morning, Mister Taylor. (*LEAH runs in, breathless. She also wears an Elizabeth Taylor button.*)

**PRESTON.** (*As he takes the coffee from Deborah.*) Leah, where's Preston Junior? (*Leah stops in her tracks and rushes back to the door.*)

**LEAH.** (*Yelling out the conference room door.*) Hey! Is Preston here?

**MELINDA.** (*Offstage.*) He's in the conference room!

**LEAH.** I mean Big Pre...er...Preston Junior!

**MELINDA.** (*Offstage.*) Oh, he's running late. He's with his life coach.

**LEAH.** (*To Preston.*) He's with his li—

**PRESTON.** I heard. Please have a seat. (*MELINDA enters. She also wears an Elizabeth Taylor button.*)

**MELINDA.** We always seem to have impromptu meetings on the days when I have a thousand balls in the air.

**NICOLE.** Melinda, if the boss calls a meeting, you have to come.

**MELINDA.** Oh, stay in your lane, Nicole.

**PRESTON.** Sh! I've called this meeting to discuss a very serious matter. As you all know, my wife is running for governor - (*Deborah starts an earnest clap and everyone joins in awkwardly.*) Hold your applause. My wife's candidacy has created a bit of a PR issue for us. Today we have Ronan Farrow (*Melinda's head snaps up.*) coming here to have a sit-down interview with me to talk about the business and, I can only assume, snoop around and attempt to destroy us all so he can win a second Pulitzer.

**NICOLE.** Ronan Farrow is coming here?! That's amazing - What great press! If you had told me this interview was happening, I could have prepared a PowerPoint for him.

**PRESTON.** I only just received a call from the Portland Gazette telling me to expect him at noon.

**NICOLE.** What does the Portland Gazette have to do with it? Ronan Farrow writes for The New Yorker.

**PRESTON.** Well perhaps he switched publications, or is working in tandem with both of them to make us look ridiculous on both coasts. I don't know. All I know is he's coming here at noon, and we have a lot of shredding to do.

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**MELINDA.** I don't think it's actually that much shredding.

**PRESTON.** You don't?

**MELINDA.** No. It's really just the last few months that we need to clean up.

**NICOLE.** I'm sorry, what is this conversation? Why are we shredding things? *(To Preston, wide eyed.)* Have you made us accomplices to something illegal?

**PRESTON.** No.

**MELINDA.** A little bit.

**NICOLE.** Which is it? No, or a little bit?

**PRESTON.** No.

**MELINDA.** *(Nodding her head.)* A little bit.

**NICOLE.** I don't understand the confusion. Either you're doing something illegal or you're not.

**MELINDA.** Over the last few months, the cash flow statements have been too complex for earnings management, due to a recent purchase.

**NICOLE.** *(Horried.)* What kind of purchase?

**PRESTON.** You know I have a love of yachts which borders on fanatical.

**NICOLE.** I do?

**PRESTON.** You've seen all the pictures of them in my office. *(Gesturing to the picture of a yacht on the wall.)* And in here.

**NICOLE.** But I didn't know they were all yours!

**PRESTON.** Well, they're mine.

**LEAH.** I thought all those pictures of boats -

**PRESTON.** Yachts.

**LEAH.** I thought all those pictures of yachts were on the walls because we use them to clean the garbage patch.

**PRESTON.** Oh, Leah. Why would we need a luxury cabin cruiser with a sky lounge and cockpit bar to clean the ocean?

**LEAH.** Because that would be nice for our volunteers?

**PRESTON.** *(With a chuckle.)* Volunteers don't deserve nice things. Only idiots work for free. Know your worth, Leah. That's an invaluable pearl of wisdom. Put that in the minutes, Madison: 'Know your worth.'

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**NICOLE.** Stop taking minutes, Madison.

**PRESTON.** Anyway, I haven't been able to afford any new yachts lately, because my wife is running an expensive political campaign. But then I saw her: *(He gestures to the picture of the yacht on the wall.)* The Shady Lady. She was perfect. So I did the only logical thing.

**NICOLE.** Said 'Oh well,' and moved on?

**PRESTON.** I borrowed some money from Garbage Patch Kids -

**DEBORAH.** *(Overlapping him.)* Can't call it that anymore.

**PRESTON.** -and bought her. I'll pay it back. The election is next month. After that, I'll have money again.

**NICOLE.** You've misused our funds. That's a financial crime.

**PRESTON.** *(Confident.)* I'm not sure about that.

**NICOLE.** I am.

**PRESTON.** My personal accountant said I'd be a fool not to invest my money this way.

**LEAH.** Melinda?

**PRESTON.** No, my personal accountant.

**MELINDA.** *(To Leah.)* You think I'd encourage my boss to commit a felony?

**LEAH.** I don't know what to think!

**MELINDA.** Do you know how hard I work every day to keep him from accidentally doing something illegal?

**MADISON.** It sounds like it's not hard enough.

**PRESTON.** I can do whatever I want with this organization, it's mine.

**MELINDA.** *(Pointing to Preston.)* You see what I'm up against?

**NICOLE.** *(To Preston.)* They're not your funds. They're the nonprofit's funds.

**PRESTON.** Yes, originally. But my wife is spending a lot of our money on her gubernatorial campaign, and I have a certain lifestyle to which I am accustomed, so I have to pull the money from somewhere else. Just for a limited time, just until after the election. *(Silence.)* I'm going to put it back!

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**NICOLE.** It is illegal to run a nonprofit which accepts money for one thing and then uses it for something else. That is a crime, it is called embezzlement, and you cannot explain it away.

**PRESTON.** Allow me to try.

**LEAH.** This is definitely not what I thought this meeting was going to be about.

**MADISON.** Me neither, I thought it was going to be about his affairs.

**NICOLE.** Affairs?!

**PRESTON.** Madison, I told you that in confidence!

**DEBORAH.** Well, the affairs are part of it. In addition to purchasing The Shady Lady, he's been using the nonprofit's money to book hotels and to pay for lavish dinners with his female companions.

**NICOLE.** Wait, Deborah knew? (*To Deborah.*) How did you keep this a secret? You've never kept a secret in your life!

**DEBORAH.** I guess I didn't really think about it. My job as Mister Taylor's assistant is to help him, so I just give the receipts to Melinda and don't worry about it. I figure if it's not aboveboard, he wouldn't be doing it.

**PRESTON.** Exactly.

**NICOLE.** (*To Deborah and Melinda.*) Why didn't either of you tell me about this? I could have fixed it before Ronan Farrow was about to show up.

**MELINDA.** He promised he would start putting the money back after the election. I didn't want to have to deal with you and the way you get.

**NICOLE.** (*Shouting.*) What way do I get, Melinda?! (*Melinda calmly gesticulates to "all this."*) How many of you knew this was a criminal enterprise?

**MELINDA.** This is not a criminal enterprise. A few crimes have been committed of late, but that's all.

**NICOLE.** How many of you knew?

**MELINDA.** It's only been happening for a few months. Calm down. Stay in your lane.

**NICOLE.** How many?

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**DEBORAH.** Just Melinda and me. (*Nicole sits and massages her temples.*)

**NICOLE.** Oh my God.

**PRESTON.** It's not that bad. Other than the Shady Lady and the women, all of our money goes toward our mission. Or, at least, it did. And it still would, if we had enough money left in the Garbage Patch Kids' -

**NICOLE.** (*Overlapping him.*) Can't call it that anymore.

**PRESTON.** -bank account to do any work.

**MADISON.** Wait. We don't have any money left?

**PRESTON.** We have enough left to pay all your salaries for the remainder of the year, but not enough to do any actual work.

**NICOLE.** What the hell were you thinking?!

**PRESTON.** I was in love, Nicole. The Shady Lady was far outside my price range, but - much like most of the women I see - I had to have her.

**MADISON.** Inappropriate.

**NICOLE.** (*To herself.*) Goddamn it.

**LEAH.** So... we can't do any work for the rest of the year?

**PRESTON.** Well, I mean, I can take The Shady Lady out to the Great Pacific Garbage Patch one day this fall and, you know, pick some stuff up. At worst we're dishonest. We're not criminals-

**MELINDA.** You are a criminal.

**PRESTON.** -but I worry that Ronan Farrow might not see it that way.

**NICOLE.** I can't believe this is happening.

**LEAH.** I had nothing to do with any of this. I didn't even know it was going on.

**MADISON.** Me either!

**MELINDA.** You didn't realize that for the past three months we didn't have any funds and weren't running any programs?

**MADISON.** I'm just an administrative assistant!

**LEAH.** And I was planning programs! I assembled a team of interns. We ordered tee shirts.

**MELINDA.** That order was never placed. (*Leah gasps in horror.*)

**LEAH.** I thought the shipping was just taking longer than usual.

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**MELINDA.** This is a very small nonprofit. This kind of scandal will take us all down. Even if a jury acquits you, your career will be destroyed.

**PRESTON.** Now hang on, none of us are criminals.

**MELINDA.** You are a criminal.

**PRESTON.** You can't be a criminal when you wear a suit to work.

**NICOLE.** *(To Preston.)* This is unbelievable. I will be damned if I go to prison because of you. I will be damned.

**PRESTON.** None of us will go to prison. Ronan Farrow thinks he can waltz in here with his pretty face and his Pulitzer Prize and drag us all off to the Multnomah County Jail?

**MELINDA.** No.

**PRESTON.** That's the spirit!

**MELINDA.** We will be going to federal prison.

**PRESTON.** That's not the spirit!

**LEAH.** *(Starting to cry.)* I don't want to go to federal prison.

**PRESTON.** But you won't, Leah. All of us working together are smarter than Ronan Farrow. We can keep him from finding out. All we need to do is turn this back into a legitimate business by noon.

**NICOLE.** That only gives us forty-five minutes.

**PRESTON.** Which is nearly an hour. Entirely doable. Find some money, put it in our bank account, and do it all without bothering my wife, because she will be upset if she finds out about this. Can we do it? *(Silence, except for Leah's quiet weeping.)* Yes we can! Nicole, make it happen. I'll be in my office. Let me know when it's done.

**NICOLE.** Wait, Mister Taylor. You have to sell The Shady Lady. Right now.

**PRESTON.** Stop talking nonsense. I love The Shady Lady more than I have ever loved anything - don't tell Preston Junior. I can't part with her.

**NICOLE.** But you have to.

**PRESTON.** Surely there's another way.

**NICOLE.** We need that money back.

**DEBORAH.** You can always buy it again with your own money later.

**PRESTON.** The new owner would never sell. She's a special one.

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**NICOLE.** Sir, this has to happen. Your wife is probably going to be elected governor next month. You can't skate by under the radar anymore.

**PRESTON.** I'm going to need a second opinion.

**MADISON.** I agree with Nicole.

**PRESTON.** Not your opinion. I want my personal accountant's opinion, but he's out of the country this week, climbing Kilimanjaro.

**DEBORAH.** Go sell that yacht.

**PRESTON.** (*Wounded.*) Deborah, you're supposed to be on my side.

**DEBORAH.** I'm supposed to be your assistant. I'm assisting you in making the right choice.

**PRESTON.** But I love The Shady Lady.

**DEBORAH.** She's a fine vessel. But you know what they say about letting go of things you love: If it comes back to you, it's yours. If it doesn't, it was never meant to be.

**PRESTON.** Only poor people say that.

**DEBORAH.** You need to do this, honey.

**PRESTON.** I'll figure something out.

**NICOLE.** It's figured out. You need to sell it.

**PRESTON.** (*Heading to the door.*) When Preston Junior shows up, don't tell him about the affairs. It's not something he needs to know.

**NICOLE.** Did you hear me? You need to sell it.

**DEBORAH.** (*To Preston.*) Of course we won't say anything to Preston Junior.

**NICOLE.** You're going to sell it, right?

**PRESTON.** I'll do something.

**NICOLE.** What does that mean?

**PRESTON.** (*Over his shoulder as he exits.*) Clean this up before Ronan Farrow gets here.

**NICOLE.** (*Calling after him.*) The biggest part of the cleanup is you selling the boat!

**PRESTON.** (*Offstage.*) It's a yacht!

**NICOLE.** (*To the other women.*) Does that mean he's going to sell it?

**MADISON.** I hope so.



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**MELINDA.** Let's give him ten minutes to come to terms with it and then check in.

**NICOLE.** Okay.

**LEAH.** What else should we do to fix this, Nicole? *(Everyone looks at Nicole expectantly. Madison's fingers are poised for typing. A beat.)*

**NICOLE.** Um... *(BIG PRESTON, aka Preston Jr, enters.)*

**BIG PRESTON.** Hey guys!

**LEAH.** *(Very guilty.)* Big Preston, we don't know anything about what your dad's doing behind your back!

**BIG PRESTON.** What?

**DEBORAH.** *(Hissing.)* Leah!

**LEAH.** I'm sorry! I'm not good with secrets!

**BIG PRESTON.** It's okay, Leah. My dad already told me about the Shady Lady. I'm going to get us out of this one.

**MELINDA.** You are?

**BIG PRESTON.** Absolutely!

**MELINDA.** I don't know. You're not really built for thinking.

**BIG PRESTON.** *(Thinks it's a compliment.)* Thanks, Melinda. You're right, I'm built for experiencing life as it happens. It's all that tai chi and yoga. They really do wonders for the human body. I'm even using yoga to lower my cholesterol.

**MELINDA.** *(Muttering to herself.)* We're all going to prison.

**BIG PRESTON.** If you send that energy out into the universe, then sure, maybe we will. So let's instead project with confidence the belief that nothing incriminating will be found. The human mind is the most powerful tool in our arsenal.

**MADISON.** Okay. But, just out of curiosity, what else do we have in our arsenal?

**BIG PRESTON.** Everything, Madison. We have everything. My dad called a little bit ago, explained the situation to me, and told me that Ronan Farrow won't be here until noon. Let's burn some sage to dispel this negative energy, put out some glossy pamphlets touting our achievements, take a couple deep, cleansing breaths, and delete any incriminating emails.

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Let's remember that we are made of stardust and our future lies stretched out before us as a string of infinite possibilities. Who is Ronan Farrow to determine our fate? Seize hold of your destiny, face it unflinchingly, tame it, and ride it off into the night. Take this quasi-shell company and transform it into something beautiful, something noble, something admirable. *(An excited gasp.)* After all, in one shell you can hear the entire ocean. Make the world take notice of you and what you've created. Make people say, 'If, in all the years I have left, I am able to accomplish one-tenth of what the employees of Garbage Patch Kids -

**LEAH.** *(Overlapping him.)* Can't call it that anymore.

**BIG PRESTON.** - have accomplished, I will have lived a worthwhile life.' So rise up, my comrades! Let's not only clean up this mess, but transform it, like a phoenix rising from the ashes. As Winston Churchill said in a similar situation, if this organization lasts for a thousand years, let's make it so men will still say that this was our finest hour. Okay, I'll be real with you, I had a coffee enema this morning, and I am wired. But nobody worry. That's the main take away I want to leave you with. I'm going to begin by going to my office and raising the blinds up as far as they go, because sunlight is the best disinfectant. You do what feels right for you, and let's get this place fixed by noon! *(Big Preston leaves. Leah starts to cry.)*

**LEAH.** We're going to get caught.

**NICOLE.** No, Leah. We can fix this if we work together. We can fool Ronan Farrow.

**LEAH.** *(Wailing.)* No one can fool Ronan Farrow!

**NICOLE.** Sure we can. You, Madison, and I never caught on to what was happening. Why should Ronan Farrow be any different?

**MELINDA.** Because he has a Pulitzer Prize.

**NICOLE.** Shut up, Melinda. I can't believe you've been helping Little Preston embezzle for three months.

**MELINDA.** It's not like I was enthusiastic about it. But I've worked here for eight years, and he's never tried to do something like this before. He just went crazy over that boat.

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**NICOLE.** Not a good excuse.

**MELINDA.** It was going to be a temporary problem. I didn't want to quit my job over it. I'm fifty-three. Who's going to hire a fifty-three year old?

**NICOLE.** Not a good excuse!

**LEAH.** I mean, I can kind of understand that. It's tough out there.

**NICOLE.** *(To Leah.)* No you can't. *(To Melinda.)* If you're being asked to commit crimes, maybe that's not a job worth keeping.

**MELINDA.** I'm five months from being able to open my own dance studio. Either I help Little Preston and keep my job, or I lose my job and never move on from teaching dance at the Y.

**NICOLE.** So you never open your dance studio. You know what else you'd never do? Go to prison. *(To Deborah.)* And you, Deborah. You chose this moment in time to stop sharing everybody's business with everybody else?

**DEBORAH.** I don't do that. *(Nicole, Leah, Melinda, and Madison all reply at the same time.)*

**NICOLE.** You absolutely do.

**LEAH.** It's your thing.

**MELINDA.** I beg to differ.

**MADISON.** Can't tell you anything.

**DEBORAH.** I can be discrete.

**NICOLE.** Apparently all it took was crimes.

**MADISON.** Maybe instead of everybody yelling at each other, we should figure out how to fix this before Ronan Farrow gets here?

**NICOLE.** I'm not done yelling yet!

**DEBORAH.** It'll be okay, Nicole.

**MELINDA.** Yeah, Little Preston will sell the Shady Lady, we'll transfer the money back into the bank account, and we'll be fine. We'll be fine by noon. *(Big Preston enters.)*

**BIG PRESTON.** I've purified my workspace. What's next on the cleanup agenda?

**NICOLE.** Big Preston, have you talked to your dad? We sent him to his office to sell The Shady Lady.

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**BIG PRESTON.** And I'm happy to report that he has done it!

**NICOLE.** Oh, perfect!

**MELINDA.** See? We're going to be fine.

**BIG PRESTON.** Yeah, he signed it over to me, and as soon as Ronan Farrow leaves, I'll sign it back over to him.

**MELINDA.** Goddamn it.

**NICOLE.** What? No. No, Big Preston. We need him to sell it. For money. So we can put that money back in our bank account.

**BIG PRESTON.** Oh... He doesn't want to do that.

**NICOLE.** I know. I need you to make him.

**LEAH.** Well, if he signed it over to Big Preston, then can't Big Preston sell it?

**NICOLE.** Yes!

**BIG PRESTON.** No. I can't sell the Shady Lady. He'll kill me.

**NICOLE.** A father's wrath or twenty years in prison - which do you want?

**BIG PRESTON.** I want a third choice.

**NICOLE.** Go sell that boat.

**BIG PRESTON.** Please don't make me.

**NICOLE.** The Shady Lady needs to be out of the Taylor family by noon. We have *(She looks at her watch.)* thirty minutes. Jesus. Okay.

**BIG PRESTON.** How do you even sell a yacht?

**NICOLE.** I don't know, use the internet.

**DEBORAH.** Call Bernard.

**BIG PRESTON/NICOLE.** Who's Bernard?

**DEBORAH.** Little Preston's yacht guy.

**MADISON.** He has a yacht guy?

**DEBORAH.** The man loves buying yachts.

**BIG PRESTON.** *(Uneasy.)* Calling my dad's yacht guy sounds like it might end up getting back to my dad.

**NICOLE.** Fine, don't sell it. Lose your job and your family. Get convicted and serve your time. When you get out, the only job you'll be able to find is working as a secretary in your ex-girlfriend's dentist office.

**BIG PRESTON.** That is very specific.

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**MELINDA.** You'll lose followers.

**BIG PRESTON.** Not with this face.

**LEAH.** Sell the Shady Lady, Big Preston. Please

**BIG PRESTON.** Don't worry, Leah. All you have to do is act like everything is fine until not only Ronan Farrow believes it, but you believe it, too. Truth is like a diamond. There's many sides to it.

**MADISON.** What?

**BIG PRESTON.** *(Ignoring her.)* What you need to do is create the truth in your heart, and believe it until it becomes real.

**MADISON.** That's not how truth works.

**BIG PRESTON.** Yes it is.

**MADISON.** No.

**BIG PRESTON.** Leah, do you believe that you work for a man who would do something illegal?

**LEAH.** No?

**BIG PRESTON.** Then you don't.

**LEAH.** Yeah?

**BIG PRESTON.** Yeah.

**MADISON.** No.

**BIG PRESTON.** Hold onto that truth, and it will get you through this day.

**LEAH.** Thank you.

**BIG PRESTON.** Don't thank me. That's my job.

**NICOLE.** No, your job is to oversee me.

**BIG PRESTON.** You don't get oversight. You're the Marketing and Fundraising Director.

**NICOLE.** Yeah, and you're the Chief Marketing and Fundraising Director.

**BIG PRESTON.** I am?

**NICOLE.** Yes. That is your job title. Have you ever looked at your business cards?

**BIG PRESTON.** Why would I? I know my name and number.

**NICOLE.** *(With a sigh.)* Okay.

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**BIG PRESTON.** I thought you were the boss. You're the smartest person here.

**NICOLE.** *(Trying not to appear resentful.)* I know.

**BIG PRESTON.** Well, why don't we just continue playing the roles we've been playing. You continue handling fundraising and marketing, and I'll continue handling interpersonal staff issues, like this sort of thing with Leah.

**MELINDA.** *(Nodding.)* Stay in your lanes.

**BIG PRESTON.** Exactly.

**MADISON.** So Nicole will keep doing all the hard work, and you'll get paid a third more than her to convince people that no crimes have taken place? *(Big Preston looks quizzically at Nicole for a beat.)*

**NICOLE.** *(To Big Preston.)* Please go call Bernard and sell The Shady Lady.

**BIG PRESTON.** I make a third more than you? Is that true? I spend the majority of each workday at the gym.

**NICOLE.** I don't want to talk about that right now. Just sell the boat.

**BIG PRESTON.** I'll try, but I might get too scared.

**NICOLE.** Big Preston, this is the one thing - this is the only thing - that no one can do but you. Can we count on you? *(A beat. Big Preston gathers his courage.)*

**BIG PRESTON.** Of course. *(Big Preston leaves.)*

**MELINDA.** Everyone knows we can't count on him, right? *(Everyone murmurs agreement.)* We're going to need a backup plan.

**NICOLE.** I know. Just let me think.

**MADISON.** We don't have a lot of time for thinking. This is more of a 'First viable solution off the top of your head' situation.

**NICOLE.** Let's brainstorm ideas.

**DEBORAH.** *(Rising.)* I'll get the white board.

**MADISON.** We don't have time for the white board! Ronan Farrow will be here in thirty minutes!

**NICOLE.** *(Handing Deborah her notebook and pen.)* Here. *(Deborah opens the notebook to the first page.)*

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**DEBORAH.** (*Saying the words aloud as she writes them.*) Ideas to Fix the Embezzlement.

**NICOLE.** Okay, who's got an idea?

**LEAH.** We can ask Big Preston to loan us the money?

**MELINDA.** Won't work. Big Preston's entire yearly salary isn't enough to cover it.

**NICOLE.** Are you serious? How expensive can a boat be?

**MELINDA.** Extraordinarily expensive.

**LEAH.** Maybe he can pull from his savings?

**MELINDA.** Yeah, the guy who spends thousands each month on coffee enemas has money saved.

**NICOLE.** Okay, there are no bad ideas. Thank you, Leah. Who's got another idea?

**MADISON.** What if we go to Mrs. Taylor and ask her for help?

**DEBORAH.** We can't tell Mrs. Taylor.

**MELINDA.** Yeah, we can't be her October surprise. That's a bad idea.

**NICOLE.** There are no bad ideas! But I agree, telling the candidate that her husband has been embezzling money and asking her to help us cover it up might not look great in the press.

**MADISON.** We're not asking her to help cover it up, we're asking her to help correct it.

**MELINDA.** It'll make her look just slimy enough to throw undecided voters to the Republican.

**LEAH.** I don't want that man to win! He ran over a kid's dog!

**DEBORAH.** Plus, remember, it's not just the money. Or the yacht. It's also all of the lady friends.

**MADISON.** Yeah, but if the affairs come out, that throws sympathy to Mrs. Taylor.

**MELINDA.** Or it makes men wonder why she's unlovable.

**NICOLE.** (*To Madison.*) We don't want Mrs. Taylor associated with embezzlement at all.

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**MADISON.** Well, she's associated with embezzlement whether she knows it or not, so she might as well know it. At least that way she can be prepared.

**MELINDA.** I disagree.

**NICOLE.** Okay, this is good. We have two ideas. Who's got another idea?  
*(A beat.)*

**MELINDA.** If Big Preston doesn't sell the Shady Lady - and we all agree that he lacks the follow-through to do anything - I don't see how we get out of this.

**NICOLE.** There's a way out. There's got to be.

**DEBORAH.** Maybe we just level with Ronan Farrow? Explain that this happened, and that we didn't know it was happening.

**MELINDA.** But you and I did know.

**DEBORAH.** Well, I was just following your lead.

**MELINDA.** Why?

**DEBORAH.** *(Caught off guard.)* Why? Well... I... *(Melinda lets Deborah flounder for a beat before turning to Nicole.)*

**MELINDA.** It was just until November. He said he would start putting the money back in November. And I figured, fine. We're a small nonprofit, no one will notice, he'll fix it after the election. I didn't know Ronan Farrow was going to come snooping around.

**LEAH.** Why not? That's what he does.

**MELINDA.** So I gambled wrong. I'm sorry.

**LEAH.** Well, at least the rest of us haven't committed any crimes. We'll be okay.

**MADISON.** Will we? This has been happening right under our noses.

**NICOLE.** But we didn't know about it.

**MADISON.** Ah, so when Ronan Farrow says, 'Excuse me, Nicole. I can't help but notice that your organization has been embezzling money for three months. Please respond,' you'll say, 'Yes, it has been, but I didn't know.'

**NICOLE.** It's the truth!



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**MELINDA.** The truth doesn't matter! He will destroy you. He will destroy you and your reputation.

**MADISON.** And then he'll write a book about it.

**MELINDA.** 'Local Valetorian Implicated in Nonprofit Embezzlement Scheme.'

**NICOLE.** Stop! That's not going to happen.

**MELINDA.** It very much could.

**NICOLE.** Well, maybe Big Preston will sell the Shady Lady. Did we add that to the list?

**MELINDA.** We're making the list because we know he won't.

**NICOLE.** Deborah, will you read back the ideas we've come up with?

**DEBORAH.** (*Reading off the paper.*) Ask Big Preston for the money, tattle to Mrs. Taylor, and level with Ronan Farrow. (*A beat.*)

**NICOLE.** I have another idea.

**LEAH.** What is it?

**NICOLE.** It's just to get us through today.

**LEAH.** What is it?

**NICOLE.** What if we hide the embezzlement?

**DEBORAH.** Hide it?

**NICOLE.** (*Quickly, defensive.*) Just for today, just until after this interview, and then tomorrow we start working to put the money back?

**MELINDA.** How would we do that?

**NICOLE.** (*To Melinda.*) Well, first you would go take a look at the books, and see how much money Little Preston siphoned off for The Shady Lady and women. And Leah too - you were helping Melinda when she was out with that foot thing. After you find out how much money he embezzled, you make new books - just for today, just in case Ronan Farrow wants to see them - showing all the money exactly where it's supposed to be.

**MADISON.** Isn't that called 'cooking the books'?

**NICOLE.** Yes, technically, but it's just for today. Tomorrow we'll destroy the fake books.

**MELINDA.** What about Little Preston's paper trail?

**NICOLE.** He left a paper trail?!

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**MELINDA.** Of course he did.

**NICOLE.** Okay, well, Deborah would look at Little Preston's calendar and inbox. *(To Deborah.)* You'd clean it up as best you could. Get rid of any traces of company money being used on romantic escapades and a big dumb boat. Make it so everything looks above board at first glance, and keep a tally of how much money he needs to reimburse the company, so we can cross check it with Melinda and Leah's number. Then Madison and I create new fundraising data which matches the new accounting numbers from Melinda and Leah.

**MADISON.** So... your idea is that we fix his financial crime by committing more financial crimes?

**LEAH.** There are no bad ideas.

**NICOLE.** A short term solution for a short term problem. After Ronan Farrow leaves, we'll toss the fake books, get Little Preston to reimburse the company, and be back on the right side of the law. *(A beat.)*

**MELINDA.** That actually might work.

**DEBORAH.** It buys us some time.

**LEAH.** And everything turns out legal in the end.

**NICOLE.** Madison?

**MADISON.** I mean, I think he's just coming to do a puff piece on the candidate's husband. I doubt he'll even want to look at the books. This would just be like insurance.

**NICOLE.** Exactly. Insurance. So. All in favor of becoming white-collar criminals until Ronan Farrow leaves the building? *(Everyone raises their hand.)* Okay. Great.

**LEAH.** Now what?

**NICOLE.** Now we go do all the things I mentioned. Leah and Melinda, you cook the books, Deborah alters Little Preston's calendar and inbox, and Madison and I update the fundraising data as soon as we have the fake accounting numbers. God, it sounds really bad when you say it fast like that. Ready team? *(Everyone murmurs their assent.)* Okay, we have twenty minutes. Let's go! *(Melinda, Leah, and Deborah exit. Deborah leaves the*

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*notebook on the table. To Madison.)* I'll be right back with our fundraising data.

**MADISON.** You think we can pull this off?

**NICOLE.** I know we can. I was voted Most Likely to Succeed from Barberry High School's class of ninety-seven<sup>1</sup>, and I will be damned if I let an idiot and his wife take that away from me, just because she's decided to run for governor. It's like the Churchill quote Big Preston used: I will fight on the beaches, I will fight on the landing grounds, I will never surrender -

**MADISON.** *(Consulting her computer.)* That's not the quote he used. He used the finest hour speech.

**NICOLE.** Are you still taking minutes? Stop taking minutes! We're committing crimes! I'm going to grab the fundraising stuff. Don't move. *(Nicole exits. Madison, alone, stops typing and looks around, lost. Deborah enters with a loaf of banana bread.)*

**DEBORAH.** Oh good. I was hoping you'd still be here.

**MADISON.** Still? You just left the room.

**DEBORAH.** Can you believe Little Preston is sitting in his office playing Solitaire while his employees furiously work to save his nonprofit from Ronan Farrow's meticulous truth-uncovering?

**MADISON.** I sure can. Are you nervous about the fact that we're covering up crimes with more crimes?

**DEBORAH.** No. It's just to fool Ronan Farrow.

**MADISON.** What if it doesn't fool him?

**DEBORAH.** It will.

**MADISON.** How can you be sure?

**DEBORAH.** *(Cheerfully.)* Because if it doesn't, we'll be in a great deal of trouble. So it has to! Anyway, I had brought some banana bread in to share with everyone today, before we heard the news... I figured you could probably use a slice.

**MADISON.** Thanks. I'm allergic to bananas, but thanks for the gesture.

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<sup>1</sup> Change year as needed so Nicole is in her early 40s

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**DEBORAH.** *(As she sits by Madison.)* Allergic to bananas? Wow, this is really not your day.

**MADISON.** Guess not.

**DEBORAH.** You'll probably be okay. You didn't know he was misappropriating funds until today.

**MADISON.** Will a jury make that distinction?

**DEBORAH.** Well, hopefully it won't come to that. Hopefully we'll trick Ronan Farrow, and then this will all be a fun story to tell!

**MADISON.** I'm not telling anyone this story.

**DEBORAH.** It'll be fine. Today's adventure is just like this banana bread here. There's zucchini in it, which is disgusting, but when you mix zucchini with bananas and sugar, you can't even taste it. We are the bananas and sugar. Ronan Farrow will never discover the zucchini hidden within.

**MADISON.** I don't know. He's won awards for discovering the zucchini. *(Deborah cuts herself a slice of banana bread.)*

**DEBORAH.** Would you like just a little slice?

**MADISON.** No thank you. I'm allergic to bananas.

**DEBORAH.** Okay. Suit yourself. *(She starts to eat her slice, thinking.)* I think I might retire when this place goes under. Maybe it's time. I've always had this fantasy about buying an RV and seeing the whole country. I've been saving up for one. The only problem with an RV is there's no one to talk to but my husband. And I really like to talk to people. You know I used to bartend in a restaurant? A fancy restaurant that called itself a saloon. Talk about a great opportunity to chat with people. Portland's biggest movers and shakers came in and told me their troubles, and I gave them advice, and sometimes they'd take it, and changes would take place in the city, and I knew that I had had a hand in that. I loved it. And now, if we manage to keep this under wraps and Mrs. Taylor becomes the governor, I'll have state-wide influence. Can you imagine? What a dream. You can't influence the influencers from inside an RV, can you? But I'd really like to see New England in the fall, so who knows? Maybe I'll do it. Problem is, I don't like my husband all that much. An RV, that's a lot of

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togetherness. I'm not sure we'd survive. You really can't eat bananas? That's terrible. I can't even imagine. *(Nicole reenters with a binder and her computer.)*

**NICOLE.** Okay, I think I've got all the - oh hi, Deborah. How's it coming with Little Preston's stuff?

**DEBORAH.** Great. I'm finished.

**NICOLE.** You're finished?

**DEBORAH.** Yep! I deleted his email account and burned his calendar in the bathroom trash can. Problem solved!

**NICOLE.** *(Clearly not pleased.)* Okay...

**DEBORAH.** What's wrong with that? You said to get rid of anything incriminating.

**NICOLE.** Yes, but you got rid of everything.

**DEBORAH.** It was all very incriminating. He gets lunch with either a lady friend or Bernard almost every day. It's all in his calendar.

**NICOLE.** Sure. But don't you think it's a little suspicious for the Executive Director of a nonprofit to not have an email account or a schedule?

**DEBORAH.** Well, when you phrase it like that, then maybe.

**NICOLE.** You're going to need to recreate a calendar for him - full of only legal activities - and get his email back open. Make sure his inbox contains only legal, do-gooder stuff.

**DEBORAH.** That's an awful lot.

**NICOLE.** Oh, and also you're going to need to get rid of the charred remains of Little Preston's calendar in the bathroom trash can.

**DEBORAH.** Already flushed it.

**NICOLE.** Oh, okay.

**DEBORAH.** I wasn't born yesterday.

**NICOLE.** Great... You know, we do have a paper shredder. You don't need to burn documents.

**DEBORAH.** Yes I do. Ronan Farrow is absolutely the kind of person who would go through shredded paper and piece it back together.

**MADISON.** That's award-winning work.

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**DEBORAH.** *(To Nicole.)* Madison gets it. You want some banana bread?

**NICOLE.** No, I want you to go do all the things I just mentioned.

*(Deborah lets out a sigh.)*

**DEBORAH.** Okay. Well I might need some overtime.

**NICOLE.** You only have until noon. You know this. We've all mentioned it many, many times.

**DEBORAH.** Then I guess I'd better get started.

**NICOLE.** Yes. Thank you.

**DEBORAH.** Did you know that Madison is allergic to bananas?

**NICOLE.** Now, Deborah.

**DEBORAH.** *(As she slowly gets up.)* Okay, okay. *(She reaches to take the picture of the Shady Lady off the wall.)* You want me to throw this in the dumpster out back?

**NICOLE.** I don't think that's necessary.

**DEBORAH.** Oooh rolling the dice, are you? I like it. *(Deborah exits. Nicole lets out a frustrated sigh.)*

**NICOLE.** Okay. Fundraising. Here's everything for our current and previous fiscal years. He's probably not going to ask to look at more than that, right?

**MADISON.** I don't see why he would ask to look at any of it. He's not approving us for a government grant, he's writing a puff piece on a gubernatorial candidate's husband.

**NICOLE.** That's what he wants you to think. He lulls you into a false sense of security. How do you think he won that Pulitzer Prize?

**MADISON.** By thoroughly investigating and meticulously reporting on Harvey Weinstein's sexual misconduct allegations.

**NICOLE.** Yes, but how do you think he's going to win his second?

**MADISON.** You seem to be spiraling out right now.

**NICOLE.** Well, how do other people deal with this?

**MADISON.** I think, normally, people who commit crimes lack the moral code that's getting in our way.

**NICOLE.** That's probably what it is. We're too honest for a life of crime.

**MADISON.** We're not embarking on a life of crime.

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**NICOLE.** That's true. We're model citizens.

**MADISON.** In college, I won an award for activism and community service.

**NICOLE.** I volunteer at a soup kitchen every other Saturday.

**MADISON.** We're good people.

**NICOLE.** We're great people.

**MADISON.** Damn right we are.

**NICOLE.** Let's get to work falsifying these records. *(Nicole hands Madison the binder and pulls up the fundraising form on her computer. Madison opens the binder. Nicole pushes her computer toward Madison.)* Here's the template. Go ahead and enter all the numbers that we know will stay the same, and we'll put the rest of the stuff in when we get the fake accounting information from Melinda and Leah.

**MADISON.** *(As she reaches for the computer.)* Okay.

**NICOLE.** This is definitely a crime.

**MADISON.** Yep, we are crime-ing now.

**NICOLE.** But it's for Ronan Farrow's eyes only.

**MADISON.** It's a one-person crime.

**NICOLE.** Then we'll destroy it all.

**MADISON.** Exactly... Can I ask you a question without you getting angry?

**NICOLE.** I don't know. Maybe.

**MADISON.** How did you not notice any of this? You're the fundraising director.

**NICOLE.** Yeah, but I'm also the marketing director.

**MADISON.** Okay.

**NICOLE.** Most of my focus is on marketing.

**MADISON.** Don't you want to market our fundraising numbers?

**NICOLE.** Sure, in theory, yeah, but I'm ... *(Very guilty.)* I haven't been paying attention.

**MADISON.** You haven't been paying attention?

**NICOLE.** I mean, Melinda's always telling me to stay in my own lane.

**MADISON.** But you never listen to her.

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**NICOLE.** Not usually, but my husband's unhappy -

**MADISON.** Because he can't live up to your standards of perfection?

**NICOLE.** What? No. Ouch, no. He's feeling unfulfilled at his job. He wants to quit and open a cupcake store.

**MADISON.** ...What?

**NICOLE.** He wants to bake cupcakes. He wants to open a cupcake store. He'd be good at it, too. He's a great baker. And we figured maybe now is the time to try, while our kids are still in school, before we're paying three college tuitions. So I've been helping him get it started: Find a location, get insurance, buy supplies, all that. It's been very time consuming, so I haven't been paying much attention to what's going on here. I figured this organization has been around for over a decade, so it would be okay if I took my eye off the ball for a minute. Everybody skates by at work doing the bare minimum. Everybody at every job everywhere. And I always give a hundred and ten percent. So I figured nothing bad would happen if I also did the bare minimum - for just a little bit - in order to help my husband's cupcake store get off the ground. But of course it's just my luck that as soon as I start doing the bare minimum, everyone around me begins committing crimes.

**MADISON.** So if Ronan Farrow catches us, I'm going to go to jail because you wanted a side hustle?

**NICOLE.** Aren't I allowed to have a side hustle? I'm leaning in, Madison.

**MADISON.** No, you're not allowed when it enables the people around you to lapse into criminality.

**NICOLE.** How was I supposed to know they would do that?

**MADISON.** How were you supposed to know? Little Preston's face screams 'I am a man who will commit as many crimes as I can get away with.'

**NICOLE.** That's true. You're a wise baby. I've just been overworked.

**MADISON.** Maybe prison will be like a vacation for you.

**NICOLE.** I can't go to prison. My twenty-five-year high school reunion is coming up. You think I want all those losers to hear I'm in jail? I want them to be jealous of me.



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**MADISON.** But it doesn't sound like you're very happy.

**NICOLE.** I'm miserable, but as long as I project success and happiness, that's all that matters.

**MADISON.** Is it?

**NICOLE.** Of course. Cry alone in the shower, and never break a smile in public.

**MADISON.** That doesn't sound very healthy.

**NICOLE.** *(Ignoring her.)* You know, Mrs. Taylor told me that if she wins, she wants my husband to cater the desserts at her inaugural ball.

**MADISON.** Wow, that's great publicity.

**NICOLE.** Plus a lot of money. If she wins, our cupcake business will be off to the best possible start.

**MADISON.** If she wins.

**NICOLE.** We won't let the embezzlement get out. She'll win. *(Leah enters.)*

**LEAH.** *(In an excited, sing-song voice.)* Deborah said there was banana bread. *(She walks over and cuts off a piece.)* Why does the bathroom smell so weird?

**NICOLE.** Deborah burned Little Preston's calendar in there.

**LEAH.** That's a strange choice.

**NICOLE.** Yeah.

**LEAH.** I'm not sure that the smell of burnt paper is the smell of innocence.

**NICOLE.** No, I'm not sure that it is. How are the numbers coming?

**LEAH.** Melinda's got it under control. I'm not sure why I was the one picked to help her when she was out with that foot thing. I've never been good at math.

**NICOLE.** That's true. But it was the off season for programming, so you had more time than everyone else.

**LEAH.** I guess, but someone better at math would have been able to tell that Little Preston was embezzling money.

**NICOLE.** Only if they were paying attention.

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**LEAH.** Look at us. The top of Barberry High's class of ninety-seven and the bottom of Barberry High's class of ninety-seven are working at the same place, facing possible jail time for the same crime... There's a psychology study in there somewhere.

**NICOLE.** White-collar crime is the great equalizer. *(A beat.)*

**LEAH.** Can I say something without you getting mad?

**NICOLE.** Why is everyone prefacing with that today?

**LEAH.** I think we should tell Mrs. Taylor.

**NICOLE.** What? No. We agreed that wasn't a good idea.

**LEAH.** I know. But I just got off the phone with her-

**NICOLE/MADISON.** *(Horried.)* Did you tell her?!

**LEAH.** No. *(Nicole and Madison visibly relax.)* She offered me a job. *(Nicole and Madison respond at the same time.)*

**NICOLE.** A job?

**MADISON.** Congratulations!

**LEAH.** I mean, it's contingent on whether or not she wins next month.

**NICOLE.** She's going to win.

**LEAH.** Unless we mess up today.

**NICOLE.** *(As if saying it will make it so.)* She's going to win.

**MADISON.** What job is it?

**LEAH.** She wants me to chair the Environmental Justice Task Force. *(Nicole and Madison respond at the same time.)*

**MADISON.** What?!

**NICOLE.** Oh, Leah!

**LEAH.** She likes the programs I've been creating here, she likes the ideas I have for things we can do state-wide, and she says if I'm able to work in an environment with her husband and son, then I can definitely handle this.

**NICOLE.** That's great! You absolutely can't tell her that you're covering up her husband's crimes.

**LEAH.** But she said that one of her favorite things about me is my unshakeable honesty.

**NICOLE.** That's one of my favorite things about you, too.

**LEAH.** But I'm not being honest.

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**NICOLE.** You're not being dishonest. You're being discreet.

**LEAH.** It's dishonest not to tell her what Little Preston has done.

**NICOLE.** She's not going to win if it comes out that her husband was committing white-collar crime and she knew.

**LEAH.** Well, I think the timeline makes a difference -

**NICOLE.** The timeline doesn't matter. No one reads the article. They only read the headline. And the headline will be that Preston Taylor was committing white-collar crime and Elizabeth Taylor knew.

**MADISON.** You can't call her.

**NICOLE.** She doesn't want you to tell her this. She wants limits on your honesty.

**LEAH.** Are you sure? *(Nicole and Madison answer at the same time.)*

**NICOLE.** Yes.

**MADISON.** Definitely.

**LEAH.** *(Muttering to herself with a sigh.)* I hate secrets. Okay... Well, anyway, Deborah told me I had to try the banana bread.

**NICOLE.** *(Exasperated.)* Deborah! *(She presses the intercom button on the phone.)* Deborah, please return to your desk and finish your assignment. It needs to be completed by noon. Just a reminder to everyone: Your assignments **MUST** be completed by noon. *(She releases the button.)*

**DEBORAH.** *(On the intercom.)* Hi everyone, Deborah here. Just wanted to let you know that there's banana bread in the conference room. Go team! *(Melinda enters with binders.)*

**MELINDA.** *(Dropping the binders on the table.)* Here you go: The real books and the fake books.

**NICOLE.** *(Passing the fake book to Madison.)* Great. Here, Madison. Use these numbers.

**MELINDA.** I'll be right back, I'm just going to hit up the Keurig in the break room.

**MADISON.** That's something else that should have been a red flag. What kind of environmental group would buy a Keurig? They're so wasteful.

**MELINDA.** But those little pods are so convenient.

**MADISON.** They contribute to the waste that we say we're fighting.

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**MELINDA.** Yeah, but they make it so easy to make one cup of coffee.  
*(Madison stares at Melinda for a beat.)*

**MADISON.** Why did you want to work here?

**MELINDA.** Preston Taylor, Senior, is a big name.

**MADISON.** It had nothing to do with a love of the environment?

**MELINDA.** God no. But I've developed an appreciation for the environment.

**MADISON.** Have you?

**MELINDA.** Little bit.

**MADISON.** Not enough to stop using a Keurig.

**MELINDA.** Oh no. One cup. Always fresh. Always hot.

**MADISON.** Right.

**MELINDA.** Oh please. Like you only applied here because you wanted to help the environment.

**MADISON.** I do want to help the environment.

**MELINDA.** Yeah, but you also want to go to grad school. All Millennials want to go to grad school.

**MADISON.** I'm Gen Z.

**MELINDA.** *(Waving her comment away.)* Whatever. A recommendation letter from Governor Elizabeth Taylor would certainly help you out.

**MADISON.** She's not the governor yet.

**MELINDA.** But she will be, if we survive today. People have started turning images of that kid cradling her dead dog into memes.

**MADISON.** That's awful.

**MELINDA.** Yeah, politics are brutal. Anyway. Be right back. *(Melinda exits. Madison uses the fake accounting book to update the fundraising numbers on Nicole's computer. Leah eats banana bread.)*

**NICOLE.** *(Getting up.)* I think I need some coffee, too. Becoming a felon requires caffeine.

**MADISON.** *(As Nicole walks toward the door.)* We're only felons until Ronan Farrow leaves.

**NICOLE.** *(To calm herself.)* That's right. Not even a full day. A half day.

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**MADISON.** A half day. Then we'll fix it. *(Nicole exits. Leah and Madison sit in silence for a moment. Madison types while Leah eats. Finally, Leah breaks the silence.)*

**LEAH.** The banana bread is good.

**MADISON.** Oh.

**LEAH.** You want a piece?

**MADISON.** No thank you, I'm allergic.

**LEAH.** To what?

**MADISON.** Bananas.

**LEAH.** Oh. *(They sit in silence for another moment while Madison types.)*  
What about plantains?

**MADISON.** What?

**LEAH.** Are you allergic to plantains?

**MADISON.** Yeah.

**LEAH.** Really?

**MADISON.** Same family.

**LEAH.** Huh. That's interesting.

**MADISON.** Not really. *(They sit in silence for another beat. Leah eats banana bread. Finally, Madison looks up from Nicole's computer.)* Is there something you should be doing right now?

**LEAH.** Right now I'm trying not to panic.

**MADISON.** That's fair. *(Big Preston enters.)*

**BIG PRESTON.** Yes, banana bread! Is there anything more delicious?

**LEAH.** *(To Big Preston, nodding toward Madison.)* She's allergic to bananas.

**BIG PRESTON.** *(As he slices himself a piece.)* No way! You know, you can train your body to overcome that.

**MADISON.** I don't think that's true.

**BIG PRESTON.** Mind over matter. You want to start now?

**MADISON.** No, thank you. *(Nicole reenters with a coffee mug.)*

**NICOLE.** Big Preston! Is it done? Did you sell the Shady Lady? *(A beat. He hasn't. He looks like a deer caught in headlights. Nicole tries to control her rage.)* Call Bernard and sell the Shady Lady.

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**BIG PRESTON.** I'm trying to work up to it.

**NICOLE.** Call Bernard and sell the Shady Lady!

**BIG PRESTON.** But my dad will be so mad.

**NICOLE.** *(Pointing at the door.)* Call Bernard! *(Big Preston shuffles toward the door. He turns around to say something in his defense. Nicole cuts him off before he can speak.)* Bernard! *(Big Preston exits, chastised.)* Do you think they allow alcohol in prison?

**MADISON.** Definitely not.

**NICOLE.** But what about for fancy white-collar criminals like us?

**MADISON.** Toilet wine? *(Melinda enters with a coffee mug and begins slicing herself banana bread.)* You were right about Big Preston.

**MELINDA.** Of course I was.

**LEAH.** I really thought he might sell it. I thought he might realize the importance of selling it.

**MELINDA.** *(Eating the banana bread.)* You thought that idiot might realize something? Oh, that is rich. Rich as a fresh, non-sustainable cup of joe.

**NICOLE.** *(To Leah.)* You've never been a good judge of character.

**LEAH.** Well, I've been friends with you since ninth grade, so what does that say about you?

**NICOLE.** I'm the exception that proves the rule. *(Madison closes Nicole's computer.)*

**MADISON.** The new fundraising figures are ready.

**NICOLE.** Great. Leah, can you take the real accounting numbers and real fundraising data and hide them somewhere Ronan Farrow won't find them?

**LEAH.** How about the trunk of my car?

**NICOLE.** Perfect. *(Leah takes the real accounting book and the fundraising binder off the table and heads toward the door.)*

**MELINDA.** Wait, Leah. *(Leah stops and turns.)*

**NICOLE.** No, don't wait. There's no time. Go. Go go go. *(Leah starts to walk out.)*

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**MELINDA.** Stop. (*Leah stops, exasperated.*) We all agree this is what we want to do?

**NICOLE.** We don't have time for more brainstorming.

**MADISON.** This is the best option we came up with. And it's just for today.

**LEAH.** Yeah, our crime isn't as bad as Little Preston's crime.

**MELINDA.** I agree, it's just ...now everyone's a criminal.

**NICOLE.** Just for today!

**MELINDA.** I was bending the rules. This is breaking them.

**NICOLE.** No, you broke the rules. We're mending them.

**MELINDA.** By breaking them again.

**NICOLE.** By bending them at a slightly more severe angle.

**MELINDA.** It will break.

**NICOLE.** It won't.

**MELINDA.** It will break in front of Ronan Farrow.

**NICOLE.** It won't.

**MADISON.** He's probably not going to ask to look at any of these numbers.

**MELINDA.** I guess we'll find out. (*A beat.*)

**NICOLE.** (*To Leah.*) Go hide that in your trunk. (*Leah begins to exit with the accounting and fundraising figures as Preston and Big Preston enter.*)

**BIG PRESTON.** Okay, everyone's here. Where are you going, Leah?

**LEAH.** I just have to put this in my car and scream at the sky for a second.

**BIG PRESTON.** That sounds super therapeutic. (*Leah exits.*)

**MADISON.** Where's Deborah?

**BIG PRESTON.** She's manning the front desk, waiting for you-know-who to arrive.

**PRESTON.** Is everything fixed?

**NICOLE.** (*Trying to shake off what Melinda said.*) We're trying, sir. But there's one thing you should probably do before Ronan Farrow shows up and starts asking questions.

**PRESTON.** Practice my innocent face? (*He attempts a look of wide-eyed innocence.*)

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**NICOLE.** No. Stop making that face. You should definitely not make that face. You need to explain to Preston Junior where the misplaced money that didn't go to the Shady Lady went.

**BIG PRESTON.** You spent Garbage Patch Kids' -

**MELINDA.** *(Overlapping him.)* Can't call it that anymore.

**BIG PRESTON.** - money on more than just the Shady Lady? *(A beat. Preston won't meet Big Preston's gaze.)*

**NICOLE.** Do you want Ronan Farrow to bring this up, or do you want to? *(Another beat.)*

**BIG PRESTON.** What did you spend the money on, Dad? *(Another beat.)*

**PRESTON.** Um... Son, I... a long time ago... and also some time ago... and, with much regret, more recently, had a dalliance...s outside of my marriage with your mother. *(Big Preston is shocked.)*

**NICOLE.** Great. So that's out there, and now no one will be blindsided if it's brought up.

**BIG PRESTON.** *(To Preston.)* Wait, did you tell everyone but me?

**PRESTON.** No, I told Madison in confidence, and then Madison told everyone but you.

**MADISON.** *(To Preston.)* You told us not to tell him.

**NICOLE.** Okay, we don't need to do all this right now, I just wanted the information out there so we can present a united front to Ronan Farrow.

**BIG PRESTON.** I can't believe you told everyone but me!

**PRESTON.** I didn't! It was Madison! You want a long explanation? You want all the details?

**BIG PRESTON.** No.

**NICOLE.** I agree, now's not the best time for that.

**PRESTON.** Let me explain myself more thoroughly to my son, Nicole -

**BIG PRESTON.** No, I think I will be just fine not knowing specifics -

**PRESTON.** *(To Big Preston.)* Your mother and I have been together for many years, and you'll find out as you get older that sometimes love can be complicated.

**NICOLE.** Please stop.

**BIG PRESTON.** Dad, not in front of all our friends.



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**MELINDA.** It's okay. We're not friends.

**PRESTON.** *(To Big Preston.)* Being a parent puts you in the orbit of certain people that -

**BIG PRESTON.** Who?

**NICOLE.** I feel like we're losing focus on the crisis at hand – *(The Prestons' exchange is rapid-fire.)*

**BIG PRESTON.** *(Interrupting.)* Miss Phillips?

**PRESTON.** Yes.

**BIG PRESTON.** *(Getting angrier with each name.)* Ms. Gonzalez?

**PRESTON.** Yes.

**BIG PRESTON.** Ms. Randolph?

**PRESTON.** Definitely.

**BIG PRESTON.** Mrs. Ortiz?

**PRESTON.** Almost.

**BIG PRESTON.** Ms. Lee?

**PRESTON.** Yes.

**NICOLE.** Stop shouting women's names!

**BIG PRESTON.** Ms. Patel?

**PRESTON.** Of course.

**BIG PRESTON.** Ms. Brown?

**PRESTON.** Absolutely.

**BIG PRESTON.** Miss Waterson?

**PRESTON.** Oh yes.

**BIG PRESTON.** My piano teacher?! How could you? You knew I loved her!

**NICOLE.** Prestons, please. I beg you.

**MELINDA.** This is not helpful. Ronan Farrow will be here any minute.

*(Big Preston takes his shirt off as Leah reenters.)*

**BIG PRESTON.** *(To Preston.)* You're a monster!

**PRESTON.** What exactly are you doing?

**BIG PRESTON.** I don't want to get blood on this when I break your nose.

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**PRESTON.** *(With a chuckle.)* Okay, no need to be so dramat- *(Big Preston punches him. Preston yelps in pain and covers his nose.)* You broke my nose!

**LEAH.** *(Rushing toward the door.)* Oh my God! I'll grab some ice! *(Leah exits. A bit of chaos ensues as Preston and Big Preston try to continue the fight, despite the conference table being in the way. Nicole, Melinda, and Madison try to stop them.)*

**PRESTON.** Come on, boy! Is that the best you can do?!

**BIG PRESTON.** I think breaking your nose is pretty good!

**PRESTON.** Well, I broke your heart by sleeping with your piano teacher!

**BIG PRESTON.** You think I can't break your heart too?

**PRESTON.** I know you can't!

**BIG PRESTON.** Oh no?

**PRESTON.** No!

**BIG PRESTON.** Well how about this: I just sold the Shady Lady! *(Preston gasps and staggers back, clutching his chest. Melinda and Madison grab Big Preston and pull him back.)*

**MELINDA.** *(Surprised.)* What do you know.

**PRESTON.** No. You wouldn't.

**BIG PRESTON.** I did. I called Bernard. *(Another gasp from Preston.)* He's going to text me when it's done.

**PRESTON.** *(Pulling out his phone.)* Well then I'll call him and cancel the sale- *(Nicole knocks Preston's phone out of his hand, stomps on it repeatedly, and kicks it under the table. Preston shrieks.)*

**NICOLE.** *(As she stomps.)* No! That boat needs to be sold so we can put the money back!

**PRESTON.** It's not a boat, it's a yacht! And it's the only thing I've ever loved!

**BIG PRESTON.** Screw you!

**PRESTON.** Screw you! *(Leah reenters and gives Preston ice. Both Prestons are breathing heavily and glaring at each other. Suddenly, Nicole laughs a long, hard, mildly deranged laugh. Awkward beat.)*

**MELINDA.** *(Icy, slow.)* What is so funny?

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**NICOLE.** We're all going to go to prison because of these idiots.

**BIG PRESTON.** This isn't my fault.

**NICOLE.** Shut up, Big Preston. Put your clothes back on.

**PRESTON.** Big Preston?

**NICOLE.** Preston Junior. I meant Preston Junior.

**BIG PRESTON.** *(As he puts on his shirt.)* They all call me Big Preston behind your back. Because I'm a bigger man who would never cheat on his wife, if he chose to be tied down by one. Also because I'm much taller than you.

**MELINDA.** *(Trying to talk Preston down.)* That's actually the only reason.

**BIG PRESTON.** They call you Little Preston.

**PRESTON.** *(Aghast.)* Little Preston?

**BIG PRESTON.** Because you're short. A tiny turd of a man.

**MELINDA.** *(To Preston, desperate to calm him.)* It's just because you're shorter than him. It has nothing to do with being a turd.

**PRESTON.** I am appalled by the lack of respect -

**BIG PRESTON.** Well, you know, if you had given me my own name, they wouldn't have had to figure out how to distinguish between us, but your hubris -

**PRESTON.** Mister Taylor and Preston Junior! That's how you distinguish between us!

**NICOLE.** Oh, shut up, Little Preston! *(Preston gasps.)* The most important meeting of our lives is about to happen! What we call you is not important!

**PRESTON.** It's very important!

**NICOLE.** *(Punching the banana bread on 'No.')* No, staying out of jail is very important!

**MADISON.** You got banana bread on me!

**NICOLE.** *(Ignoring Madison, to Preston.)* Somehow, you have turned me into a person who needs to worry about being thrown into federal prison! Me!

**MADISON.** It's everywhere!

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**NICOLE.** (*Ignoring Madison, to Preston.*) And now one small pebble of criminality has snowballed into a whole situation which I assumed I could fix in time. And then I assumed I could hide it in time.

**MADISON.** (*Beginning to scratch.*) Oh, it's starting.

**NICOLE.** (*Ignoring Madison, to Preston.*) But now you idiots are fighting over nicknames at the eleventh hour, and I'm beginning to realize that I'm not going to be able to hide anything because you're both morons!

**MADISON.** Does anybody have any Benadryl?

**NICOLE.** (*Ignoring Madison, to Preston.*) You will have plenty of time to argue when we all spend the next twenty years rotting in a federal prison for embezzlement!

**MADISON.** My throat.

**PRESTON.** (*To Nicole, ignoring Madison.*) Nicole, stop this. If you would just have a seat we can talk about it like adu-

**NICOLE.** (*Grabbing Preston and shaking him.*) Oh spare me! You can't explain away the fact that we are a bunch of criminals! (*The intercom on the phone switches on. Everyone freezes.*)

**DEBORAH.** (*Through intercom.*) Mister Taylor, Ronan Farrow is here to see you. (*Nicole releases Preston. Slowly, Preston reaches out and presses the intercom button on the phone.*)

**PRESTON.** (*Overly calm.*) Excellent. Thank you, Deborah. I'll be right there. (*He looks at everyone, who are all still frozen in place. Then, still holding the ice to his face, he slowly walks out of the conference room. Blackout with the sound of the door closing behind him.*)

**END OF ACT 1**

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