

A MILLION MORE TO GO

By

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A MILLION MORE TO GO

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A MILLION MORE TO GO

A Million More to Go was originally produced at Trinity Theatre in Austin, TX, by Jarrott Productions and Cinnamon Path Productions.

CAST: 4 People and 1 Man

R	A person, possibly younger than S
S	A person, possibly older than R
T	A person, possibly entangled in complexities with S & R
V	A person who is new to the group
Chuck	Chuck and Buck and #2 and Man (same actor in all 4 roles)

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ACT 1
SCENE 1

Inside a cabin deep in the woods. It has the feel of an early horror movie scene: quaint and charmingly inviting, even as you know something terrible is likely to happen later.

On the back wall is a bulletin board with a couple of small pieces of paper tacked to it. At the top it says “Wall of Suspicion” in block letters. There is a small table in the middle of the stage where R and S sit sorting through a stack of papers. Near them is an oddly crafted box with a crank on it. The box is labeled “The Bloodhound.”

There are two transparent bins in front of the table. One has a smiley face stuck to it, the other has a frowny face stuck to it. The smiley face box is filled to overflowing with pieces of paper. The frowny face one has a handful or two of paper pieces in it.

There is an old push-button phone in one corner. It blends in with the walls and floor.

Toward the back, in what may be a small hallway leading to another room, is the silhouette of someone holding a rifle over his shoulder. He’s still and menacing, even in shadow.

Soon a door opens at the side and T and V enter. T is dressed for the woods, maybe wearing camo. But T looks like they could fit into an office environment too. T would be at home in a button-down if their hair were better-brushed.

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V is wearing a blindfold and being led, with a light touch, by T. V looks a little bit loose in style, not quite sure what they're all about. Pants and shirt don't fit perfectly, hair a little out of place, clothes have a few mud and grass stains. But V is attractive and appealing under all that.

T. Not much to look at, I guess.

V. Can I take the blindfold off?

T. Oh yeah, sorry.

V. *(Removes the blindfold and looks around. R and S continue what they're doing, concentrating on the papers, tabulating in mismatched notebooks.)* No windows?

T. What do you think.

V. Smells like...

T. Freedom.

V. Sorry?

T. That's the smell of freedom.

V. I was going to say eucalyptus.

T. *(Gesturing.)* This is our afternoon crew, R and S. *(Realizes a mistake.)* Sorry, S and R. Need to order more nametags.

V. Are those their real names?

T. What do you think. *(V approaches the table.)* Don't make eye contact with them. This is a very delicate and precise operation. We don't want to interrupt the flow. You can always talk to 'em on break. *(V steps back.)* We need an alias for you too.

V. Can I pick my own letter? I'd love to be U. Get over here, U. Hey U. That would be fun.

T. No vowels.

V. Why not?

T. They're soft, squishy, can't trust 'em. No vowels.

V. I see.

T. You're V.

V. Not bad. V for Vendetta.

T. What's that now?

V. *(Noticing the shadowed figure.)* Who's the dude with the gun?

T. That's Chuck.

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V. No letter of the alphabet for him?

T. Chuck is Chuck. You don't mess with Chuck. He comes between you and death. Your life is in Chuck's hands. You need Chuck. We all need Chuck.

V. That rifle is loaded?

T. What do you think.

V. (*Gives T a look, then walks to the bulletin board.*) What's going on here?

T. That's the Wall of Suspicion.

V. I got that. What's it for?

T. You see something suspicious, you put it up there. You can't figure something out, you put it up there. You want something reviewed because it seems sketchy, you put it up there.

V. So if something doesn't feel right...

T. Is it suspicious? You put it up there. That's how it works. Then it gets reviewed.

V. Who reviews it?

T. The team.

V. R and S here?

T. Whoever. Got a lot of teams throughout the day and night.

V. Cool.

T. Ready to start?

V. Can I get a tour of the place first?

T. Done with the tour. You've seen it all.

V. (*About the box with the crank.*) What about this thing.

T. That's the bloodhound.

V. Right.

T. You know what a bloodhound is known for?

V. Sense of smell?

T. Great sense of smell. Exquisite. The bloodhound sniffs out the truth.

V. Well...

T. Good to keep the bloodhound hungry. The hungrier he is, the better the sense of smell.

V. Okay, but... this is a just a box, right?

T. You want the truth, you go to the bloodhound. Enough said.

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V. But then what?

T. You're getting ahead of yourself. You're asking a lot of questions. You want this job or not?

V. Definitely. I definitely do.

T. You didn't ask so many questions before.

V. Before we were in a park. It was a nice, normal day.

T. Not normal. No normal days anymore.

V. Sorry, you're right. But I knew where I was. Just a neighborhood park. Been to it a thousand times. Then you blindfolded me and drove me out to who knows where.

T. You put that blindfold on yourself.

V. But you double-knotted it and checked to make sure I couldn't see anything.

T. Don't want anyone knowing where we are.

V. Obviously.

T. You don't want this job, I can put you back in that truck and we can bring you back to that not-so-normal park. You can go about your not-so-normal business. You can live your not-so-normal-anymore life. You forget you were ever here. You remain a sheep, capiche?

V. Uh, yeah, yeah. It's just...

T. Are you on the side of freedom?

V. Absolutely I am.

T. Then zip it. We got a training video to watch. (*V nods, and T leads them offstage past Chuck who moves ever so slightly out of the way.*)

R. (*After a moment, turning to S.*) Pass the magnifying glass?

S. (*Focusing on a task.*) Just a sec.

R. Sorry.

S. (*Finishing the task and handing it over.*) Find something?

R. Not sure yet.

S. You gotta check the whole surface. Both sides. If there's some kind of fold or crimp...

R. I know about crimps.

S. If you need the UV light...

R. Just checking something here real quick. (*Beat.*)

S. Plans for lunch?

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R. Packed a sandwich.

S. Gotcha. I had a granola bar earlier. Thought it'd tide me over. Not many options out this way. They really make you scrounge. Wish the vending machine still worked.

R. *(Hands ballot to S.)* Take a look at that.

S. Where?

R. Top right corner. *(Hands magnifying glass to S.)*

S. *(Examining.)* Huh.

R. I know, right?

S. More than a smudge.

R. It's got a real shape to it.

S. Rounded corners.

R. Symmetrical.

S. Why would there be...

R. Exactly what I was wondering.

S. Haven't seen anything quite like this before.

R. What do we do?

S. Put it on the wall, I guess.

R. Right. *(Gets up, tacks it to the Wall of Suspicion. Comes back. Gets another ballot from the pile.)*

S. I want to apologize for Sunday. *(R looks at the ballot, turns it around, examining every square inch.)* I wasn't myself. I don't know what to say.

Two glasses of wine. On an empty stomach. Plus a Benadryl that was way past its expiration date.

R. It's okay.

S. It's not.

R. It's all right.

S. I just...

R. Don't sweat it, S.

S. You're a peach, R. Shouldn't have been mixing business with pleasure anyway. It's so intense, though. Around here.

R. Important work we're doing.

S. The most important. Don't want to distract.

R. Don't need distractions.

S. Sometimes the pressure, though. What we're doing...

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R. The pressure is real.

S. Eyes of the world upon us. So to speak. They're watching.

R. What do you mean?

S. The press. Social media. We are the hub of the future of power, strength, leadership, and all that is Just.

R. Only one pair of eyes that concerns me.

S. T's?

R. What? No, G's.

S. G? I don't remember who that is. Is he on one of the weekend shifts?

R. I'm talking about God.

S. Oh *that* G.

R. We do right by the Lord, we do right by the universe.

S. Amen.

T. (*Entering from offstage; then, awkwardly to no one in particular.*) We are not affiliated with religion or religious groups of any kind!

S. That's right.

T. Thank you. (*Exits.*)

R. I didn't say anything about religion.

S. You mentioned God.

R. But not any specific God. Just... God.

S. Well...

R. Everyone knows He's up there, no matter which faith you practice.

S. I mean that's not technically incorrect.

R. This place is clamped tight.

S. We gotta be. Stay away from trouble. Don't stir the pot.

R. It's like if I said I wanted pasta for lunch. I didn't say spaghetti or linguini or angel hair. Just pasta. Everyone knows pasta exists, whether you're a meatballs person, a penne person, if you're into risotto or butter and ketchup or whatever. (*S nods.*) You know what I'm saying?

S. Yep.

R. People can be so sensitive.

S. A lot at stake.

R. I suppose.

S. I wish I had some pasta for lunch. (*Chuck clears his throat and shifts a bit.*) Let's keep working.

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R. I'm working, I'm working.

S. We're a little behind schedule.

R. You and me?

S. All of us. The whole operation.

R. I didn't know.

S. Supposed to finish two weeks back.

R. I wasn't even working then. We got a lot left?

S. Almost half.

R. You're kidding.

S. A million, they say.

R. A million. That can't be right. Not that many people voted.

S. Twice that many.

R. Can't be.

S. That's what we're here to find out.

T. (*Enters.*) Permission to speak?

S. You don't gotta ask permission, T. You're the boss.

T. Setting an example. For the noobs.

R. How's V doing?

T. A little rough around the edges.

R. Is it gonna work out?

T. Time will tell. (*notices the bulletin board*) Something new on the wall?

S. Some kind of smudge.

R. Symmetrical, though. Rounded corners.

T. Interesting. Man-made?

S. Hard to know.

T. Makes you wonder how deep this thing goes.

R. What do you mean?

T. Well, I don't want to get ahead of myself, but there's some talk to alien influence.

R. Alien?

S. You're talking south of the border aliens?

T. Like I said, I don't want to get ahead of myself.

S. Crew's a little light today.

T. K called in sick, plus I think there was some kind of unsanctioned event over the weekend.

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S. Unsanctioned?

T. Went off the rails, I hear. Took down L, M, N, O, P.

R. O? I thought there were no vowels.

T. She was grandfathered in. The founder's niece.

R. Must be nice.

S. Were they let go?

T. L M N O P? No, recovering, I think. Possibly an investigation.

R. I hear we're behind schedule.

T. Nothing for you to worry about. What's the tally so far?

R. For our shift? I've got 174 confirmed for candidate Alpha, 27 confirmed for candidate Beta, and 4 questionable.

T. Very good. And S?

S. I'm not feeling 100% today.

T. That's okay, no problem.

S. I've logged 84 confirmed for candidate Alpha and 87 confirmed for candidate Beta with 2 deemed questionable.

T. Wow, you sure about that?

S. Sure as I can be.

T. Might be good to start double-confirming.

S. What do you mean?

T. You each review the ballots, then hand off to the other to check.

S. Won't that slow us down?

T. We're doing this right. That's why we're here. To fix what others broke. Quality, not quantity.

S. Isn't there a budget?

T. You can't put a price on freedom.

R. We still gotta get paid.

T. Of course, of course. Just something to think about. Keep up the good work. *(Exits to the other room. R & S begin working on ballots again. The phone in the corner of the room rings. R & S look confused and uncertain.)*

R. What do we do?

S. I don't know.

R. Has it rung before?

S. I don't think so. I didn't even know it worked.

R. Should we...

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S. I'm in the middle of...

T. *(Enters, looks at the ringing phone, looks up at R & S.)* Someone gonna answer that?

S. We were just about to... *(T, frustrated, runs over and picks up the receiver, listens for a second, hangs up.)* Maybe it was a wrong number? *(T exits without making eye contact. R & S resume their work.)*

R. I can't get service out here.

S. No.

R. You'd think they could put a cell tower somewhere without too much trouble. On the side of a mountain maybe. *(S continues to work. R pulls a cell phone out of their pocket.)* Thought about climbing a tree or something, seeing if I could pull in a signal somehow.

S. *(Flustered.)* You're not supposed to have a phone in here.

R. It's okay, it's turned off. *(S pulls out a whistle from a string hanging around their neck. S blows it. It's a loud, single chirp.)* What are you... *(Chuck fidgets, adjusts rifle.)*

T. *(Walking in.)* What's going on?

S. R has a phone.

T. What? *(T sees R holding it.)*

R. I forgot.

T. How long have you been working here?

R. I don't know. A week or so, I guess.

S. Nine days. *(R shoots S a look.)*

T. And you FORGOT?

R. I just...

T. Give it to me.

R. I can put it away. I can put it in my...

T. Hand it over. *(R hands T the phone. T exits without making additional eye contact.)*

S. Trust me. That was the right thing to do. *(Glances at Chuck for a second.)* If I knew you had that phone and *didn't* blow my whistle, we'd both be in bad shape. Real bad shape. Capiche?

R. *(Glares at S, shakes head.)* By the way, the answer you wanted is still no.

S. What are you...

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R. (*Glares at S again. S doesn't get it.*) On Sunday. The question you asked me? Right before you passed out? It's still no.

S. I didn't... Oh, did I?... And it's still...

R. It's a no.

S. You're talking about...

R. Yes.

S. Wow. Okay.

R. You'd think that after what you did over the weekend, what you put me through, you would...

S. I already apologized.

R. And now you blow your whistle?

S. It's for our own good.

R. There's no "our own good" here. There's *your* own good and there's *my* own good. That was not for my own good.

S. Trust me, it was.

R. Trust you? You don't make decisions for me.

S. We're in this together, R.

R. Wait, wait, what did you say?

S. We're in this... (*Chuck shifts. S notices. Then whispers.*) ... together... (*R pulls out whistle from around neck, blows it. Chuck straightens up.*)

T. (*Running out.*) What's the meaning of this? Someone have another phone?

R. S is a communist.

S. What?!

R. S believes in the greater good. S believes in togetherness. S believes in looking out for the group and not for the individual.

S. That's not what I...

T. (*Going to S.*) What's this about?

S. R misunderstands.

T. Are you a communist?

S. Of course not.

T. Are you a socialist?

S. (*Gags.*) I'm going to be sick.

T. Universal healthcare. (*S gags again.*) Basic living wage. (*S gags again.*) Public restrooms. (*S gags, gets up, runs to the front door, opens it and runs*

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outside. Chuck takes a step toward them, cocks his rifle. T waves him off. Chuck relaxes. T turns to R.) What's going on?

R. Just what I said.

T. Is this retribution for the phone?

R. What? No.

T. I've known S a long time, R.

R. Tell me about it.

T. Excuse me? *(R examines ballots on the table.)* You've done a lot of good work here.

R. Thank you.

T. But don't screw it up.

R. Is that a threat?

T. It's a warning.

R. You gonna fire me?

T. We can work this out.

R. Riiiiight.

T. We can talk later if we need to. Come to some kind of understanding.

R. Sure thing, boss.

T. I'm talking later later.

R. I know what later means.

T. I hope so, R. I know that S sometimes... *(R looks at T.)* ... flies off the handle.

R. Where's my phone?

T. In a safe place.

R. When do I get it back?

T. Later.

R. Later later?

T. Let's see how we're getting along in a few hours. *(Exits back to the training room. Chuck edges out of the way. S enters from outside, coughs a bit.)*

R. You all right?

S. It burns.

R. Serves you right.

S. Do I need to talk to T about this?

R. I took care of it.

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S. I guess I can catch ‘em up later. (*R glares at S. S sits down again.*)

Gonna need the next stack of ballots soon. (*They continue to work.*)

V. (*Enters with a large stack of ballots.*) Heard you guys might be looking for these?

S. Put ‘em on the table here.

V. That’s not...

S. What.

V. That’s not how it works. According to the training.

R. What are you talking about?

V. There’s a process. According to the training.

R. (*R and S look at each other.*) What’s the process?

V. (*Thinking.*) Let’s see. Organize the ballots into clean piles of no more than 50 each. I’ve done that part already. Five piles of 50.

S. Great. Put ‘em down.

V. Hang on. Each team member will be assigned one pile each, using gloved hands. (*Looks at them.*) You two have gloves?

R. No.

S. Yeah. Somewhere. I had them. Not sure where I put them.

R. (*To S.*) You got gloves?

S. We all got gloves.

R. I didn’t.

S. Yeah you did. You just don’t know what you did with them.

R. That’s not true.

S. Standard issue here.

R. Where did you...

S. You must have misplaced them.

V. You guys need more gloves? There are more gloves.

R. Definitely.

S. I’m fine.

V. A bunch in there. (*Gestures to the next room.*)

R. Cool. (*Gets up and moves toward the room.*)

V. A charge, though.

R. (*Stops.*) Wait, what?

V. A charge for replacement gloves. They don’t grow on trees. That’s what the training video says.

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R. But I never got a pair in the first place.

S. Yes you did.

R. *(To S.)* What's your problem?

S. We all got gloves. That's how it works here.

R. I'm not paying for a pair of required rubber gloves.

V. Latex.

R. Whatever.

V. They don't grow on trees.

R. Too bad cuz there's nothing but trees any way you look for miles.

V. You been looking at trees?

R. What?

V. No windows.

S. Let's get to work. Ballots, please.

V. You're supposed to have gloves.

S. That's just to start.

V. I don't think so.

R. *(Sitting down.)* If S isn't using gloves, I won't either.

V. *(Looks at them, then at the training room, then back at them again.)*

Did you guys even do the training?

S. Of course we did.

R. I didn't.

S. Dammit, R.

R. What?

S. Yes you did.

R. I was told it was optional.

S. Recommended. It was recommended.

R. I was told optional.

S. Same thing.

V. Okay, I am *not* supposed to hand out ballots if the regulations aren't being followed.

S. No regulations here. Just recommendations.

V. Rules, actually.

R. Why didn't anyone tell me to do the training?

V. I'm not going to be able to...

S. Just hand over the ballots, Sasquatch!

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V. *(Taken back. R is taken back too.)* You know what? I'm just going to go talk to T for a second. *(Starts to walk off.)*

R. *(To S.)* Sasquatch?

S. Don't ask. *(Gets up, runs to V.)* Hey, hey, there's no reason to talk to T about this.

V. Yeah, I think there is.

S. It's just a misunderstanding.

V. Who misunderstands who?

S. *(Stares at V for a beat.)* Whom.

V. That's it. I'm going.

S. We'll both talk to T. *(V and S walk off. R starts looking at ballots again. After R puts the current one into the happy face bin, R picks up another ballot. R notices something small stuck on it. Squints at it. Then scratches at it. Then holds it up and sniffs it. R looks alarmed. Then R looks off toward the other room, then over at Chuck. R gets up and walks to the edge of the other room, then toward Chuck. Chuck straightens and shifts the rifle in an unfriendly way. R thinks better of it, looks around a bit more, and R's eyes land on The Bloodhound. R goes to the quirky machine and it's obvious R doesn't know how to use it. R touches it, tests the crank, examines the front of it that we can't see. R takes the ballot in question and inserts it into the box. Then begins moving the crank. We hear an effortful whirring of grinding gears. The crank is obviously difficult to move. After several cranks we hear a DING and R looks down at something that's come back out. R picks up a slip of paper, along with the ballot in question, and R's eyebrows raise. R then looks around animatedly and goes to the Wall of Suspicion, tacking the ballot up right in the middle of it. T and V and S enter from the other room in the middle of a discussion.)*

T. Of course we need to follow the rules.

V. That's what I thought.

T. Though there is some flexibility in how they're enforced.

S. And that's what I'm talking about.

T. The key is how to *respect* the rules while *honoring* the flexibility and the *intent* of the rules.

V. I have to say I find this whole situation kind of confusing.

S. I'm not surprised.

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T. (*Notices R standing near the Wall of Suspicion.*) What's going on here?

R. I found something.

T. What kind of thing?

R. A substance.

T. What kind of substance?

R. Come see for yourself. (*Pulls the ballot off the wall and hands it to T.*)

T. (*Looks at it. R gestures at a spot. S and V crowd in to see. T scratches at it. Sniffs it.*) Is that...

R. Firm. Solid. White. Insidiously small. Any guesses?

S. Is it alive? (*V steps back.*)

R. No, no. It's half a kernel of rice.

T. Are you sure?

S. R is making that up.

R. I used The Bloodhound.

S. Did you really?

T. You gotta keep the bloodhound hungry.

R. This seemed important. (*Holds up results from The Bloodhound.*) It's from China, see?

T. (*Examines the piece of paper. S is stunned.*) Where did you get this ballot from? Which pile? (*R points. T sweeps up all the ballots in the general area and starts to rip them all to shreds, throwing the remains into the trash can.*)

S. Are you sure you're supposed to do that?

T. Am I supposed to.... This is why we're here. There are thousands upon thousands of ballots which have been infiltrated by foreign entities. I've been waiting for something like this to happen. I knew it would. It was only a matter of time. Rampant alien contamination.

V. How do you know how many there are?

T. You cannot have infected ballots. That's why we're here.

V. Wow.

T. Good work, R.

R. (*Pleased.*) Thank you.

T. That was a close one. Who knows how many more there are like this. We've got to continue doing this work.

R. The Lord's work.

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T. No, that's not... We're not affiliated with...

S. It's the country's work.

T. That's it, what S said.

S. For the sake of freedom. And justice.

T. Bingo.

V. Aren't you supposed to fill out some kind of report?

T. What do you mean?

V. Discarded ballots. For accountability.

S. But they're from a foreign entity.

R. Didn't you see? There was a kernel of *rice* on there.

V. I know, I know. I'm not questioning anyone's judgement.

R. The Bloodhound's judgement.

V. Definitely not questioning the bloodhound.

T. You don't question the bloodhound.

S. The bloodhound sniffs out the truth.

V. I remember all that. It's just... It's just...

S. (*Mocking.*) "It's just... it's just..." Spill it, V. Cat got your tongue?

R. Maybe the cat wants to meet the dog. The bloodhound. Take a guess how that'll end up.

S. Woof!

V. I'm only trying to suggest that the training says we need to keep a record of discarded ballots, along with a reason for the discardment.

R. Is discardment even a word?

S. I sincerely doubt it.

V. Whatever the word is.

R. Who's the one shaky on the training now?

V. Am I crazy, T? It was in the video. You're supposed to fill out a report.

T. Me? I'm supposed to?

V. I mean the manager. You are the manager, aren't you?

S. Of course T is the...

R. Of course T is!

T. I am. Yes.

V. That's all I'm trying to... a report. A discarded ballot report. It seems like that's something we're supposed to...

T. Okay. I mean yes. It does make some sense.

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S. It does.

R. When you really think about it.

S. You can't have unaccounted-for discarded...

R. Discardment.

S. Whatever that is!

R. I know, right?

T. I'm going to go take care of that report now. Just how I always write reports under situations exactly like this.

S. Always.

R. Dem's da rules. (*T exits.*)

V. I didn't mean to cause a fuss.

S. Oh, you're all right, V. Don't worry about it.

R. No big deal.

S. Just trying to do what's right.

V. I mean isn't that why we're all here?

S. It's why *I'm* here.

R. Me too.

S. To fix things. To make them whole.

R. Right as rain.

V. I haven't eaten all day. Is there any food around here or...? (*The phone in the corner rings. R & S look at each other.*) You mind if I answer that?

R & S. Uhhhh....

V. It was in the training, what to do, so it's top of mind.

S. Go right ahead.

R. Sure thing.

V. You're supposed to answer it in a very specific way.

S. Of course you are.

R. That's how it's done.

V. (*Picks up phone, a bit stilted as if trying to remember the words exactly.*) Happy New Year to you and all your loved ones. (*S & R look at each other.*) Yes. V. As in vendetta. As in voyeurism. As in viscerally vindictive. No, I just made that up. Thank you. One day. First day, I mean. Yes. Okay. Yes, sure, I'll tell them. (*Hangs up, looks at the others, smiles.*)

R. What was that all about?

S. What did they say?

A MILLION MORE TO GO

V. I'm not supposed to tell you.

S. Why not?

V. I'm specifically supposed to limit the information to just the manager.

R. You mean T?

V. That's the manager, isn't it?

R. Of course it is.

S. No doubt about it. I'll go get 'em. *(Exits to the other room.)*

R. You're really good, by the way.

V. I am?

R. Yeah. At learning things, I mean.

V. Oh, thank you. I did pretty well in school. Without even trying, really. Just picked things up as we went along.

R. That's awesome.

V. You really didn't get gloves when you started here? *(R shakes head.)* Or get told to do the training at any point? *(R shakes head.)* How did you... What exactly brought you here, R? *(R swallows. S & T enter. T carries a yellow piece of paper and a pen.)*

T. Did I hear there was a phone call?

V. That's right. I answered it just like they taught us in the training video.

T. Congratulations.

V. *(About paper T is holding.)* Is that for the report?

T. What? Yes. I'm filling out a discarded ballot report. Just as we talked about. Just like I always do.

V. But aren't you supposed to use the red forms for those?

T. The red...?

V. The training said the yellow forms are for office transgressions, the blue forms are for suggestions to the board, the red forms are for discarded ballots, and the purple forms are for raise requests.

R. Raise requests?

S. Is that a thing?

T. There are no purple forms here.

S. Did you do something with them?

R. Or use them all up for yourself?

V. Sorry, sorry. I was kidding. I thought it would be funny. *(R forces a quick laugh.)*

A MILLION MORE TO GO

T. You were kidding about everything?

V. No, just the part about the purple forms.

T. Right, that's what I figured. I'll go get the red form in a minute. For the discarded ballots. Just like they tell you in the training.

R. What exactly is a work transgression?

V. *(To R.)* I can give you some examples from the video if you want.

T. Wait, wait, the phone call! What did they say to you?

V. You want me to tell you here? In front of everyone?

T. Yes, just spill it. We're all friends here.

R. Ha! *(T glares at R. R demurs.)*

V. They said "Santa Claus is coming to town." *(Beat.)*

T. This is another joke?

V. No, no, not at all.

T. Santa Claus?

V. Is coming to town. That's right.

T. And what... what are we supposed to do with...

V. You don't know?

T. I don't... Am I supposed to know?

V. They made it sound like the manager would know. If you're the manager -- and you've said you are several times now -- you're supposed to know.

T. Okay. Okay.

S. *(To T.)* So do you know?

T. Well, I certainly know where to go to find out.

R. And when exactly is he supposed to be coming?

V. Santa, you mean? I'm not really...

R. I mean it's May.

V. Right.

R. Late spring.

V. Mm hmm.

R. Is he bringing presents?

S. Or food? Cookies even?

R. That's not how Santa works.

V. I really couldn't...

A MILLION MORE TO GO

T. I'm just going to check the manual real quick here. I'll get to the bottom of this. (*Exits.*)

S. (*To V.*) You're really enjoying this, aren't you.

V. What do you mean?

S. All of it. Everything. The training. Answering phones. Acting like you know everything about everything even though it's your very first day.

V. I'm just doing my job. I'm just doing what I've been trained to do.

R. So you're incapable of thinking for yourself?

V. What? Of course not. I've been hired to do a job and I'm going to do it.

R. This is an important job.

V. Very important.

S. Extraordinarily important.

V. I think we all agree on that.

R. We do.

S. (*to V*) As long as you're telling the truth.

V. I wouldn't even be here if it weren't for the truth.

S. Good.

R. Wait, what?

T. (*Runs in with a relatively thick manual.*) Okay, I found it. If I'm reading this right – and I think I am – Santa Claus is the codename for Number Two.

S. Number Two?

R. Who's Number One? The Easter Bunny?

T. How did you know that?

R. I didn't!

T. You been reading the manual?

R. I haven't even gone to training!

S. Yes you have.

R. Oh my God.

T. Cut the God talk.

V. So Number Two is coming?

T. I believe that's right.

R. To town. Number Two is coming to *town*.

S. Where's the town?

T. We're the town. This is the town. We're in it.

A MILLION MORE TO GO

S. This is a shack.

R. In the middle of nowhere. I can't even get cell service!

T. It's code. It's all in code. A secret code. We are the town. Ergo, Number Two is coming here. To see us.

V. Ergo?

R. Is he bringing presents?

S. Or food?

T. I sincerely doubt it.

S. Why would Number Two be coming here?

T. I don't know.

V. What does it say in the manual about it?

T. It doesn't say anything about Why. Just Who.

V. Well, okay. Who is Number Two then?

S. I can't believe you asked that.

R. I wonder that too, honestly.

T. Number Two is someone very important.

V. What does the manual say?

T. The manual doesn't name names. But Number Two can only be one of a very small group of people.

S. Well, we know this. Number Two is definitely not Number One.

R. Number One is the Easter Bunny.

T. Number Two is very close to the top, though.

V. The second in command?

T. Oh, I don't think so.

V. Why not?

T. I'm pretty sure we all know the answer to that question.

R. Even I know that.

V. Then why call him Number Two?

T. There's a difference between who *appears* to be in control superficially and who *truly* is in control under the surface.

V. But Number One is in control?

T. Totally.

S. Absolutely.

T. Both superficially *and* under the surface.

A MILLION MORE TO GO

R. I mean we *are* talking about Number One here. (*During all this, Chuck has exited the stage without anyone noticing.*)

V. Do we know *when* Number Two is coming?

T. That's the most difficult part to figure out here. We don't have that intel.

S. Could be any second.

R. Could be in a month.

T. It won't be in a month.

V. Could it be on Christmas Eve when he visits all the other good girls and boys?

T. Are you mocking us, V?

V. I'm just asking questions is all.

S. Interesting that you're the one asking questions even though you were the person who took the phone call in the first place!

T. That is interesting.

R. Very interesting.

V. I don't know any more than I've told you.

S. Oh yeah? Then what about the intonation?

V. What do you mean?

S. Was there any hint *in the voice* of the caller to give you a sense of urgency? What was the caller like?

V. Very nice, actually.

T. That doesn't sound urgent.

V. They sounded quite relieved in a way. Almost like they were happy that someone finally answered the phone in the correct manner.

T. Correct manner?

V. Per the training.

S. That sounds dubious.

R. And suspicious.

V. They were very congenial. And yet there was a heightened sense of alert in what they said at the same time. I don't know how to explain it.

R. (*To T.*) What does the manual say about tone of voice or intonation or whatever?

T. (*Scans the manual on the page that's open.*) Nothing.

S. It's a very large manual.

A MILLION MORE TO GO

R. Sizable.

S. Dense.

T. I don't see anything in here about tone of voice or intonation.

V. It seems to me that this is something we should be taking *very* seriously.

T. We're taking this seriously!

R. Number Two is coming and could be here any second!

S. Should we prepare in some way?

T. Of course we should, of course. We want everything in tip-top shape before he arrives. *(They look around, and don't know what to do. Nothing happens.)* We need to be ready to answer any and all questions he may have.

R. Like what?

T. Like anything!

R. Should we maybe do the training real quick? Those of us who never had the chance, I mean?

T. There's no time.

V. Well, there might be time. We have no idea.

T. We need to be ready. We need to be ready now. A coiled spring wound tight. *(R & S try to turn their bodies into tense springs. They struggle at it.)*

V. We don't want to scare him, though. *(R & S relax back to how they were.)*

T. Number Two is not easily cowed.

V. Whoever he is.

T. Everyone I can think of who *might* be Number Two – which includes pretty much everyone from Number One through Number Ten in my own personal rankings – has a spine made of steel. *(There is a loud knock on the door.)*

R. Oh my gosh he's here.

S. That was so fast.

V. What are we supposed to do?

R. I don't think we're supposed to see him. Santa, I mean. I know it's not really Santa, but since that's his codename, should we follow the Christmas etiquette anyway? Should we hide?

T. Nobody needs to hide.

A MILLION MORE TO GO

S. You're sure?

V. T is the manager. T knows.

T. That's right. Everybody just relax. This is no big deal.

S. No big deal? Why would Number Two come way out here – under a codename even – if it was no big deal. I think you're vastly underestimating the significance of this.

T. (*Flustered.*) Just. Everyone. Look busy.

S. Busy with ballots?

T. No, busy with your shoelaces. Of course busy with ballots. The ballots are everything! (*S & R rush back to the table where they were, picking up a ballot and freezing with it, ready to look busy. V isn't sure what to do so goes to the Wall of Suspicion and looks thoughtfully at the ballots there. T walks to the door. Hesitates. Turns back to the others.*) I wonder if I shouldn't answer it.

S. Why not?

T. Does a manager ever answer the door? Shouldn't the manager have an assistant who answers the door?

R. Like a greeter?

S. Or a hostess?

T. Right. Something like that.

S. Do you want one of us to do it?

T. I think so. What do you think?

S. It sounds right to me.

R. Though then we won't be looking busy. We'll be looking like we're answering the door.

T. That's okay. And I can be in the back. And you can call me.

R. Call you? Like on the phone?

T. No, just yell to me.

R. Yell? That sounds unprofessional.

T. Shout. Beckon. Whatever.

S. We can beckon.

T. Perfect. (*Starts walking to the back room.*)

S. Do you care which one of us answers?

T. No, you figure it out. (*Exits.*)

S. I'm nervous.

A MILLION MORE TO GO

R. I haven't been trained.

S. My palms are sweaty.

R. What if he asks what happened to my gloves which I never got?

S. Does my hair look all right?

R. Do I have anything in my teeth? *(There's a sudden pounding on the front door. S & R jump a little.)*

T. *(Off.)* What's the holdup, people?

V. *(Walks to the door.)* I got it.

S. What?

R. That doesn't seem... *(V opens the door. A MAN stands there, dressed more casually than we expect. He holds a small paper or plastic bag in front of him.)*

V. Yes?

MAN. *(Looks at bag, then up again.)* T?

V. T? You want T? *(Man nods. Calls off.)* T?

T. *(Off, trying to sound managerial.)* Just wrapping up the daily reports!

V. *(Calls off.)* A man has asked for you!

T. *(Off.)* A man, you say? That sounds important!

V. *(Calls off.)* He sure smells good anyway! *(Man blushes a bit. S & R sniff deeply and get a whiff of something pleasant. They're intrigued.)*

T. *(Enters. Then, to V.)* I'm sure you don't mean that. It's a very unprofessional thing to say. *(V steps out of the way. T makes eye contact with Man. Stops in his tracks.)* Oh.

MAN. Hello again.

T. Well. You're not exactly who I...

MAN. *(Holds up the bag.)* Kung Pao Chicken?

T. Yes, that's right. *(Takes bag.)* Thank you. *(T fishes in his pocket, pulls out a couple of quarters and hands them to Man. Man accepts them with a slightly disappointed nod.)*

MAN. Guess I'll see you next time. *(Exits.)*

R. Santa *did* bring food.

V. I don't think that was Santa.

R. But he came to town just like we talked about.

S. *(To T.)* You ordered takeout?

T. That's right.

A MILLION MORE TO GO

S. But I thought we had a policy.

T. More of a practice.

S. A protocol?

T. They had a special going which was about to expire.

R. What kind of special?

T. *(Reaches into the bag, pulls out two small plastic packages.)* Extra fortune cookies. *(He tosses them to R & S who excitedly open them and start eating.)*

V. You ordered Chinese food?

T. What? No. It's Kung Pao Chicken.

V. That's Chinese.

T. What's Chinese about it?

V. The Kung and the Pao.

T. You have to admit it's delicious. *(R & S continue to eat the cookies, aware that each contains a small fortune.)*

V. It's full of rice.

T. Food is not politics.

V. What does that mean?

T. There's a famous expression about this.

V. Oh?

T. Something about the stomach versus the head versus the mind.

R. I know what you're talking about.

T. Help me out here, R.

R. You can appeal to the stomach...

S. Without impacting the mind...

T. While circumventing the heart.

V. I don't understand.

T. It means the kitchen is a place removed from the voting booth. It's a separation of stove and castle. The pan is not the polls. The potholder is not politics. Do you want a bite?

V. *(Mouth watering.)* Really? *(T opens up the container and holds it out. V takes a fork and scoops up a bite, chews. R & S watch in jealousy.)* That is really exceptional. Where is there takeout around here? *(Suddenly there is a loud pounding at the door. T is startled and drops the food which spills messily across the floor.)*

A MILLION MORE TO GO

R. Oh no.

VOICE. (*Off.*) Ho, ho, ho!

R. Santa!

T. We gotta clean this up. Quick. Everyone. (*T & V & R & S crowd around the rice and chicken, plucking pieces and putting them back in the container. It will obviously take a while to pick it all up. The front door slowly creaks open. NUMBER TWO appears without the others noticing. He resembles Man and Chuck in size and shape, but Number Two wears a leather jacket, tie, and dark sunglasses. He sees what's going on and approaches the crew. Gets right behind them without anyone noticing.*)

#2. Whatcha got over here? (*All others jolt in surprise.*)

S. Oh my God.

R. No God talk.

S. Sorry.

T. Sir! (*Stands up and at attention. All others stand as well. T squints at #2, trying to see behind the sunglasses*) Karl? Is that you?

#2. (*Doesn't respond to T.*) Someone gonna answer my question?

V. It's Kung Pao Chicken, sir.

#2. Chinese dish, ain't it?

T. Not necessarily.

V. It is, yeah.

#2. Curious.

S. We were cleaning it up.

#2. (*Glares at S.*) Who's in charge here?

R. T is.

S. T's in charge.

#2. (*To T.*) You T?

T. Yes, sir.

#2. What happened to B? (*R & S look at each other and shrug.*)

T. B is on administrative leave.

#2. (*Stares at T for a moment.*) And where's double-Z?

T. Double...? (*Beat.*)

V. Double-Z is in Washington, sir.

#2. (*Turns.*) Who are you?

V. V, sir.

A MILLION MORE TO GO

#2. *(Breaks into a partial smile.)* V. I heard about you.

V. Good things, I hope.

T. Inappropriate, V.

#2. Pretty good, yeah. *(To T.)* V's all right in my book.

T. Yes, sir.

S. I'm S. And this is R. *(#2 glances at them for a second. Then turns back to T.)*

#2. You're the manager?

T. Yes, sir.

#2. Let's see your credentials.

T. Uh, credentials?

V. *(To T.)* In the pocket on the back of your badge. Right side of your desk. Next to the pencil sharpener.

T. *(Looks at V, then at #2.)* Right, right, of course. Just a sec. *(#2 walks to the Wall of Suspicion, then to The Bloodhound. Then goes to the nearby garbage can, leans down and pulls out a few of the ripped ballots.)*

S. T is in the process of filling out forms for those.

R. Red forms, she means.

#2. *(Examining one ballot in particular.)* This rice on here?

R. Half a kernel, sir. Yes sir.

#2. *(About takeout food.)* And who ordered the Chinese food? *(R & S look at each other, shrug. #2 to V.)* Do you know? *(Before V can answer, T comes in with a badge and credentials. Hands it to #2.)* Take it out.

T. Out?

#2. Of the pocket.

T. Right. *(Struggles with it, pulls a folded piece of paper out from behind the badge, hands it to #2.)*

#2. *(Examines it, looks at T, then hands it back.)* You may be wondering why I'm here.

R. I do wonder that.

S. Me too.

T. It's an honor to have you here with us, sir.

#2. I wouldn't be here if it weren't of the utmost importance.

T. Absolutely, sir.

S. Makes perfect sense.

A MILLION MORE TO GO

#2. This is not a social call.

T. No, sir.

R. Wouldn't expect it, not at a time like this.

#2. Though don't worry. I'm very interested in your well-being.

T. Thank you, sir.

#2. *(To V.)* How're you holding up, V? Doing all right?

V. Me? Yes. Fine, sir.

#2. They treating you okay?

V. Yes, sir. Thank you.

#2. You're welcome.

S. I'm fine too, sir.

R. As am I. *(#2 glances quickly at them, then away.)*

#2. Here's the deal. You've been compromised. *(R & S gasp.)*

V. What does that mean?

T. Leave the questions to me, V.

V. Sorry.

#2. A small army of rogue soldiers is on their way here right now to capture this space and everything it contains.

S. The ballots?

#2. Everything.

S. How big is the army?

#2. Small.

R. How small?

#2. There are more of them than there are of you.

T. Terrible news, sir.

#2. You're going to need to enact Contingency Plan Number 17.

T. We have 17 contingency plans?

#2. *(To V.)* Is T for real?

V. *(To T.)* There are 36 contingency plans, T.

T. Jesus.

R. Careful.

V. They're all listed in the back of the manual.

T. Oh yes, right, of course.

V. *(To #2.)* How much time do we have?

#2. *(Looks at wrist where a watch would be if he had one.)* Three minutes.

A MILLION MORE TO GO

S. Three? That's it?!

#2. You better get moving. *(To V.)* Help T with the planning.

V. Right. *(T & V exit to the other room.)*

S. What about us? What can we do?

#2. Whatever V and T tell you to do.

R. V is not our boss.

#2. V knows what's up. Listen to V.

R. V did do the training.

S. Recently. R means recently.

R. I never even got gloves.

S. That's not true.

R. It is true.

#2. *(Calls to the others.)* How's it going in there?

T. *(Off.)* Good, sir! Just securing the ballots!

#2. *(To R & S.)* You're probably gonna want bug spray where you're going.

S. Wait, where are we going?

#2. *(Calling off.)* Two minutes, team!

T. *(Off.)* Roger that!

#2. *(To R & S.)* Buck up. Be strong. Don't take any guff. Our freedom depends on it. *(R & S nod. #2 walks out through the front door.)*

S. I wish I knew what was happening right now.

R. I wish I'd gone to the training.

S. Can I ask you something?

R. Sure.

S. What does your fortune say? From the cookie?

R. Oh yeah. I was going to talk to you about that. There's something weird about it. *(Digs around in pockets.)* Oh, now I can't find it.

S. You don't remember what it said?

R. No, just that it was weird.

S. Strange. *(V & T enter, each with a backpack on and an extra in their hands.)*

T. Put these on. *(Tosses the extras to R & S. R & S put them on.)*

V. What happened to the guy?

S. You mean Number Two?

A MILLION MORE TO GO

R. Santa?

T. Karl. Pretty sure his name is Karl.

R. He left.

S. Said we'd need to bring bug spray where we're going.

T. It's in the packs already. *(We hear the SOUND of a couple of large trucks pulling up on the gravel outside along with an agitated group of voices.)*

T. Quick. Quick. Let's go. No time to waste.

R. How do we know where we're going?

T. Chuck knows. *(Chuck enters from the front door and beckons at them to follow. He exits. The rest start to follow. Before R & S walk out the door, R turns to S.)*

R. Oh, and what about yours? Your fortune, I mean.

S. Oh right. *(Pulls out paper.)* "Never trust a man in dark glasses." *(R looks at S, concerned. They walk out the door to join the others. S reaches back into the room and flips off the light switch. The stage goes dark.)*

END OF ACT 1

THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS –

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