

NPC

by Madeleine Dougherty

CAST OF CHARACTERS

PETER.....late 20's, male, dresses in khakis and striped button-up shirts, always pushes the arms up.
KAREN.....20's, female, dresses in skirts and blouses, very swirly and flowery, happy type person.
MR. ROBERT HILDEBRANT.....the boss, 40's male, dresses expensively in suits, but always takes off his jacket, is thin, tall, gray hair.

TIME: Wednesday, 9am, an overcast April 12th

SETTING: corporate office building, cubicles, boring, typical, with dull pictures of landscapes on the walls, the only thing surprising about the room is a very nice, expensive gun in a case on the back wall next to a large picture of MR. HILDEBRANT. At the front of the room is a long table with snacks and a coffee pot. There is a door on the right that leads to MR. HILDEBRANT's office.

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

PETER and KAREN walk on from house left. It is KAREN's first day, so PETER has been asked to show her around. There are white neon lights that surround the gun case that flicker on and off periodically.

PETER

And this is the place you will spend the rest of your life. Your cubicle's right here and mine's actually right across from yours. Your cubicle is usually reserved for Mr. Hildebrant's pseudo-secretary, so be prepared for lots of coffee runs.

KAREN

What do you mean?

PETER

He's too cheap to hire a full-time secretary, and the department's too cheap to force him to. His job's a little too easy to do to need a secretary, so he makes the gerbil in the cubicle closest to him spin its wheel getting him coffee and lunch and his dry-cleaning. That gerbil is now you.

KAREN

Gerbil?

PETER

Yep. Don't worry. The rest of us are lemmings. We're likely to all throw ourselves off a bridge is only one of us gets it in their head to do so.

KAREN

How sad.

PETER

Oh, it's fine. We're easily replaceable. Now over here is our break room.

KAREN

It's just a table.

PETER

Yeah, budget cuts. The former break room is now Anna and Bill's office. They got raises and we got a table. Mr. Hildebrant also

doesn't like the coffee here, so you'll be going across the street a lot.

KAREN

This is quickly sounding like the worst job ever.

PETER

Oh, it is. Don't be fooled. The way this company works is that it feeds on the happiness and positive energy of the employees as a sacrifice to the capitalist gods. We are the food that the executives get fat on. Just in the meantime, before we die, we get to file paperwork, input data, and ignore memos. At least we'll never be fired.

KAREN

So, what happened to the person who had my job before me?

PETER

Janice? She was hit by a car a week ago. Robert really wanted his caramel macchiato.

(MR. HILDEBRANT steps out of his office.)

MR. HILDEBRANT

Hey, get back to work.

PETER

You told me to show her around. I'm showing her around.

(Long pause. MR. HILDEBRANT stares at KAREN.)

MR. HILDEBRANT

My new secretary, get to work.

(He returns to his office.)

PETER

So, that's our boss.

KAREN

He seems nice.

(KAREN snorts. PETER looks at her sadly.)

What? Sorry, did I do something wrong?

PETER

I was just thinking about how that'll be gone in a couple weeks.

KAREN

What will?

PETER

Your laughter.

(KAREN becomes scared. She looks around and sees the gun.)

KAREN

What's with that?

PETER

Our boss has a thing for guns. He has a lot more in his office. This one just spilled over, I guess. They're supposed to instill fear, but I just feel annoyed with it. It sits there in that box, never used, never touched. Trapped. Like us.

KAREN

I think I'm going to go.

(KAREN starts to walk away.)

PETER

You can't. You signed the paperwork. They won't let you leave.

KAREN

Come on. We can both go. All we have to do is walk out the door.

(KAREN takes PETER's hands.)

PETER

No, I mean, we literally can't go. There's a compulsion set on us. After a while, we don't even want to go. If we ever tried, there are guards.

KAREN

And what about the end of the day? They have to let us go then, right?

PETER

No, they don't. Most of us would happily sleep in our chairs or curled up under our desks. Some brought pillows. Those who leave always feel the compulsion to come back.

KAREN

Where do they get this power?

PETER

From our positive energy. It's a vicious cycle.

KAREN

Well, I haven't been here that long. I can still get out and you can hold onto me.

PETER

What do you mean "haven't been here that long"?

KAREN

It's only my first day.

PETER

Karen, you've been here for two weeks.

KAREN

What? No!

(MR. HILDEBRANT steps out of his office.)

MR. HILDEBRANT

Get back to work.

PETER

Yes, sir.

(PETER sits at his desk.)

KAREN

No, this can't be happening. Nooo!

(KAREN runs off stage.)

MR. HILDEBRANT

Karen!

(pause)

Where's my latte?

(KAREN walks back on stage carrying a coffee cup. She's dressed in conservative business attire.)

KAREN

Right here, sir.

(KAREN hands MR. HILDEBRANT the coffee.)

Dougherty, 6
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MR. HILDEBRANT

Now, get back to work.

KAREN

Yes, sir.

(KAREN sits at her desk. MR. HILDEBRANT goes back into his office.)

(fade to black.)