MAKE BELIEVE

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1. INT. OFFICE - NIGHT

PETER types at his desk, bleary-eyed, knees bouncing. Four Red Bulls guard his to-do list.

A KNOCK sounds at his cubicle.

DEX (O.S)
You coming with us?

PETER
(eyes glued to LAPTOP)
Can't.

Dex flicks the Red Bull cans in the trash.

DEX
(beat)
I respect the grind, but you're still young—- have some fun once in a while, alright? G'night, Peter.

PETER
Night, Dex.

Dex exits with the TEAM, laughter echoing.

MONTAGE - The janitor's vacuum HUMS. Lights buzz off in sequence. Peter, alone in his LAPTOP'S glow, shuts the lid.

FADE TO BLACK

2. INT. ELEVATOR - DAY

A rapid-fire MONTAGE of Peter's morning routine. He emerges into the sleek, modern lobby of "SECOND STAR".

CUT TO:

Peter's already in an elevator. The doors begin to close, but a CHILD slips through the gap: decked out in a three-piece suit, polished oxfords, and gripping a leather briefcase. Peter instinctively adjusts his own tie. Both reach for the same floor button--the CHILD's small finger strikes it first.

PETER
Uh...hi?

The child offers a curt nod.

CHILD
Morning.

The elevator climbs. Numbers tick by. The CHILD keeps checking his watch.

PETER
I didn't realize it was bring your kid to work day.

CHILD
I'm here for the proposal review.

PETER
Okaayy... but the executive floor requires a badge,. I can walk you to reception, maybe your parent--

CHILD
No need.

The child flashes a BADGE: his own stern face beside "Julius Hawkins - VP of Strategy." Peter gawks. The elevator DINGS.

JULIUS
If you'll excuse me, I'm due in a meeting.

The doors part. Children—each impeccably dressed like Julius—stride through the office: sipping coffee, griping about the housing market by the water cooler, and complaining about their (in-laws).

Peter spots Julius organizing papers at what should be Dex's desk. Peter speed-dials Dex--straight to voicemail.

PETER
What the fuck is going on...

MONTAGE -- Peter searches various rooms. Even the bathrooms. Every familiar face has been replaced by a child in business attire.

PETER
(to Julius)
My team--where is everyone?! I've called, I've texted--

JULIUS
You were briefed. Department restructuring. Check your inbox.

CUT TO: FLASHBACK

3. INT. OFFICE - NIGHT

Peter's LAPTOP glows: "URGENT: Organizational Changes Effective Immediately" sits unread in his email.

RETURN TO SCENE:

4. INT. OFFICE - DAY

PETER
Where's Dex? Where's my boss?

Julius glances at a tablet, then reads Peter's badge.

JULIUS
Dex isn't on my list so it's safe to say he's been offboarded--

PETER
Offboarded?!

JULIUS
(cont.)
--As for your boss, you're looking at him.

PETER
(beat)
This is ridiculous. I'm leaving.

JULIUS
Peter. I understand this change may be startling, but you're on the clock. I need you in the conference room. Now.

5. INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

CUT TO: FLASHBACK

A table of shouting ADULTS. A stapler flies. Coffee spills. Chaos.

RETURN TO SCENE:

Now, CHILDREN sit neatly at the table, legs dangling, tapping notes on tablets. Calm. Peter strains a smile while standing before a "Questions?" slide. The CHILDREN golf-clap politely.

/* Director's note: I dislike this. The children are not distinct.

(maybe they should be different parts of Peter's psyche) The dialogue itself serves no purpose other than to make them look smart.

Peter's own reactions seem unrealistic.*/

SARAH
Really clean visuals, Peter. One question--your data's mostly from C-Suite. How come there's nothing from the production floor?

PETER
(tired)
We didn't have time. That would've delayed us by a month.

MICHAEL
Your benchmarks use annual averages. Our client runs seasonally. Shouldn't they match?

PETER
Annual's the standard. That's what our competitors use.

JANICE
I liked your outcome range in the cost-benefit analysis. But shouldn't we factor in the new tariff rates?

PETER
(voice cracking)
The new tariff rates haven't even been announced. They're not part of the scope.

SARAH
But client impact is always in scope. That's literally the whole job.

MICHAEL
I could reformat the benchmarks. It's just an Excel swap.

JANICE
I can restructure the tariff data so it's an API pull.

PETER
It's fine. The client will be fine. We're overcomplicating this.

SARAH
Are you sure? Cause if I'm being honest this presentation felt more like a first draft.

Peter stares at the table. The woodgrain swims.

MICHAEL
Didn't they replace the last team for this? Just...making slides?

The CHILDREN murmur in agreement.

JULIUS
That's enough for today. Peter, come see me in my office.

6. INT. JULIUS'S OFFICE - DAY

TO BE CONTINUED...