

LEGACY SYSTEMS

by

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DRAFT ACCURATE AS OF

10:47pm, October 4, 2026.

CHARACTERS

HAROLD "HAL" PRUITT, 67. Systems programmer. Came up on DEC hardware at a state university, arrived at Scioto Mutual in 1991, and has not changed his coffee order or his haircut since. Trained in judo at Ohio State; brown belt. Divorced. Lives with a cat named Kermit, after the file transfer protocol, and will explain this if you let him. Believes a standard is the only kind of promise that reliably gets kept.

MORTIMER "MORTY" KESSLER, 64. COBOL programmer. Joined in 1984 as a temp and never left. Married to Ruth for forty-one years. Wrote roughly a third of CLAIMS-II, the mainframe system that still pays every claim the company processes. Believes that working beats correct, and has four decades of 3 a.m. pages to prove it.

NADIA REYES, 20. Junior in computer science at Ohio State. Her parents came to Columbus from Batangas in 2001. Their English is good; their insurance English is another matter, and she has been the family's translator for landlords, clinics and benefits offices since she was eleven. Applied for the Platform Modernization internship because it paid twenty-two dollars an hour and had "cloud" in the title. Did not expect the basement. Is not bothered by the basement.

RUTH KESSLER, 63. Retired high school chemistry teacher. Married Morty in 1985. Has been quietly managing Morty for four decades and Hal for thirty-five years, and knows it.

CLAIRE PRUITT, 34. Hal's daughter. Software engineer. Heard, not seen.

DEVIN OKAFOR, 31. Director of Platform Modernization. Means well. Uses "sunset" as a verb.

MARCIA DAHL, 54. Senior Vice President, Enterprise Risk. Has a board to answer to, and never lets anyone forget it.

GARY LINDGREN, 30. Chair of the change-control committee, mostly because nobody else wanted it. Reads every page. Born in 1996.

JANET PRUITT, 66. Hal's ex-wife. Quoted, never seen.

TIME AND PLACE

The play takes place between September and December 2026.

Most of the play is set in Room B-014, the basement office of Legacy Operations at Scioto Mutual, a regional insurance company in Columbus, Ohio. Other locations include a break room, a third-floor conference room, an executive office on the sixth floor, and the Kesslers' kitchen in Westerville.

NOTES ON PRODUCTION

The basement should remain onstage throughout. Other locations can be suggested with a single piece and a change of light: a glass partition for the sixth floor, a kitchen table for the Kesslers', a row of empty chairs for the change-control committee.

The basement contains an IBM 3270 terminal, unplugged, which should be visible from the first scene, and three filing cabinets labeled A, B and C. A fourth cabinet, labeled D, appears in the final scene. The terminal needn't be a IBM 3270 specifically. It just needs to read as "old computer".

Dates and times matter in this play. A practical wall clock and a paper day-by-day calendar hang in the basement, visible to the audience, and both should be set to each scene's date and time. The characters' schedules, the Mondays, Thanksgiving and December 18 are all tracked by the audience through them. Scene transitions should be used to convey the passage of time; Nadia, Hal or Morty might tear pages off the calendar. Advancing the clock in real time can be used for dramatic effect.

Everything the audience needs to know from a letter, card, screen or email is spoken aloud by a character. Devin's slideshow at the retirement party is the only exception. It is meant to be a sight gag.

The judo in this play consists of balance-breaking (*kuzushi*) and grips. No throws are required. Morty's falls land in a

rolling office chair. All physical sequences should be staged by a fight director.

ACT ONESCENE ONE

8:55 a.m.

The basement. Three filing cabinets, labeled A, B and C, line one wall. Above HAL's desk hang a clock and a paper calendar, one page per day. HAL is at his terminal. MORTY enters carrying two coffees and sets one beside HAL's keyboard.

HAL

You're late.

MORTY

It's eight fifty-five. I start at nine.

HAL

You're late relative to me.

MORTY

Everyone's late relative to you. The sun is late relative to you.

HAL drinks the coffee. He does not say thank you.

HAL

(holding up a printout)

This came off the printer this morning. Some vendor. *(reading aloud)* "Each record includes eight bytes of padding." Who writes this? A byte isn't eight of anything.

MORTY

A byte is eight bits, Hal. It's been eight bits since before your divorce.

HAL

A byte is the smallest addressable unit of memory. The PDP-10 let you pick any byte size from one to thirty-six bits. I ran seven-bit bytes for a decade, and I was *happy*.

MORTY

You were never happy. And nobody's touched a PDP-10 since the Carter administration.

HAL

Werner Buchholz coined the word at IBM in 1956, and it didn't mean eight. It meant whatever the machine needed. If you mean eight bits, say *octet*. The RFCs do.

MORTY

I'm not an RFC.

HAL

Clearly. They're precise. Unlike this. (*reading*) "Storage: one terabyte."

MORTY

So?

HAL

So the operating system will report it as nine hundred thirty-one gigabytes, which are actually *gibibytes*, and it will be lying to you in a dialect you refuse to learn.

MORTY

I will die before I say "gibibyte" out loud. It sounds like a dog treat.

HAL

The IEC standardized it in 1998.

MORTY

The IEC can standardize my foot. Kibibyte. Mebibyte. It's baby talk. In any room with a raised floor, kilo means ten twenty-four.

HAL

Kilo means a thousand in every room on Earth. It

meant a thousand for the meter, and it means a thousand now. You people borrowed it because two to the tenth was *close enough*.

MORTY

It was close enough. Two point four percent. You've been wrong by more than that on every estimate you ever gave a manager.

HAL

At a terabyte it's nine point oh five percent. That's not rounding. That's embezzlement.

A long pause. The HVAC hums.

MORTY

So what do you want the vendor to say?

HAL

"Eight octets of padding."

MORTY

Fine. And the drive?

HAL

"One terabyte." It's correct.

MORTY

You just spent five minutes telling me--

HAL

I spent five minutes telling you it's correct for the wrong reasons. *(He sets the printout down.)* Now fix the nibble on line forty.

MORTY

Nibble with an *i*.

HAL

Nybble with a *y*.

MORTY

Hal. Anyone who actually knows that a nybble is four bytes--

HAL

Bits.

MORTY

--four *bits*, knows you can also spell it with an *i*!

*HAL opens his mouth. Closes it.
Returns to his terminal. MORTY sits
down at his, enormously pleased with
himself.*

HAL

Found another one of yours. Two-digit year in the reinsurance module.

MORTY

That's windowed. Pivot at forty. Under forty is twenty-something. Forty and up is nineteen-something.

HAL

So a claim filed in 2040 gets dated 1940.

MORTY

In 2040 I'll be seventy-eight and this machine will be a planter.

HAL

You said that in 1998.

MORTY

In 1998 I said it'd be replaced by 2005. I was wrong about the date, not the principle. And don't lecture me about two-digit years, Hal. I fixed every one of them in this building for Y2K.

HAL

Y2K was a moral panic. Three hundred billion dollars to add two digits.

MORTY sets down his coffee, slowly.

MORTY

I was here New Year's Eve, 1999. Ruth brought a

card table and a thermos of soup. Midnight came,
and every claim in eleven states processed clean.
You know why nothing happened, Hal?

HAL

Because it was overblown.

MORTY

Because I spent fourteen months making sure
nothing happened. Nothing happening was the
product.

Pause.

HAL

The soup was good.

MORTY

You didn't have any. You went home at twelve
oh-five.

HAL

She left a bowl for me in the break room fridge.
With my name on masking tape. I found it January
second. Split pea.

MORTY looks at him.

MORTY

She never told me that.

HAL

I never thanked her. After a certain interval it
seemed stranger to bring it up than not to.

SCENE TWO

10:30 a.m.

*DEVIN appears in the doorway holding
a laptop like a shield.*

DEVIN

Guys! Quick sync. So, leadership signed off.
We're sunseting CLAIMS-II. Cloud-native
replacement, eighteen-month runway. We're
standing up a whole Platform Modernization org.
Own budget, own cost center, own everything. And
we'll need knowledge transfer. Everything that's
in your heads.

MORTY

Everything in our heads.

DEVIN

Right, the tribal knowledge.

HAL

"Tribal knowledge" is what people call
documentation they haven't read.

DEVIN

Oh, so there are docs?

HAL

Forty-two hundred pages. Binders. Cabinet C.

DEVIN

Amazing. Are they current?

HAL

They're accurate as of 1996.

MORTY

Which is when he stopped speaking to the
change-control committee.

HAL

They approved a patch with no rollback plan.

MORTY

It fixed a typo. In a comment.

HAL

Comments are code that humans execute.

DEVIN

Okay! So what I'm hearing is we need a fresh pass. Maybe we put it all in a wiki? Confluence?

HAL AND MORTY

(in unison)

No.

DEVIN

Love the energy. I'll send a calendar invite.

DEVIN exits.

MORTY

Eighteen months.

HAL

They said eighteen months in 2009. And 2016.

MORTY

This time they hired a Devin.

HAL

...Yes. The Devins are how you know it's real.

MORTY

I'm not doing the eighteen months, Hal.

HAL

Nobody expects you to do them well.

MORTY

I mean I'm putting in my papers. December.

HAL stops typing.

HAL

You're sixty-four.

MORTY

I can count. I wrote the pension calculation.

HAL

Your full retirement age is sixty-seven. You claim Social Security now, that's thirty-six months early. Twenty percent reduction, permanently.

MORTY

I know what it is.

HAL

Five-ninths of a percent per month, times thirty-six, is--

MORTY

Hal. Leave it.

HAL resumes typing. He is not looking at what he types.

SCENE THREE

12:15 p.m.

The break room. HAL eats turkey on rye, yellow mustard, cut on the diagonal. MORTY unwraps whatever Ruth packed. There's a sticky note on it. He reads it and puts it in his shirt pocket.

HAL is looking at his phone.

MORTY

Why are you reading GitHub? *(leaning over)* Whose repo is-- "cpruitt." That's Claire.

*HAL turns the screen face down.
Then, after a moment, face up again.*

HAL

Her scheduling service stores timestamps in local time. Eastern. Twice a year it'll either skip an hour of jobs or run an hour of them twice.

MORTY

So tell her.

HAL

And her tests assume every day is eighty-six thousand four hundred seconds.

MORTY

Every day *is* eighty-six thousand four hundred seconds.

HAL

Not the ones with leap seconds.

MORTY

Unix time ignores leap seconds. That's the whole genius of it. It pretends they never happened and repeats a second. It's a noble lie.

HAL

It's a lie.

MORTY

They're getting rid of leap seconds anyway. They voted. 2035.

HAL

They voted to stop *adding* them by 2035. The ones already inserted still happened. You don't get to vote away the past.

Pause.

MORTY

How long have you been reading her code?

HAL

Since she made the repository public.

MORTY

And how long's that?

HAL

Four years.

MORTY

And the last time you talked to her--

HAL

Janet's mother's funeral. She said I looked old. I said that was consistent with the passage of time.

MORTY

Christ, Hal.

HAL

It was accurate.

MORTY

Was Janet there?

HAL

Janet was there. We did not speak. The last time

we spoke was March fourteenth, 2011, at four forty p.m., in the driveway. It was raining. She took the Corolla and the good colander.

MORTY

That's not what I asked.

HAL has no answer.

They eat. HAL nods at MORTY's shirt pocket.

HAL

What's the note say?

*MORTY hesitates, then hands it over.
HAL reads it aloud, quietly.*

HAL

"Morty, lunch. Love, R." (beat) "Morty, lunch. Love, R."

He looks up.

HAL

She wrote it twice.

MORTY

Yeah.

HAL

Is that why December.

MORTY

Neurologist says it's early. Says we've got good years yet. I'd like to spend them at home and not down here arguing with you about kibibytes.

A long silence. HAL folds his wax paper into exact quarters, then eighths.

HAL

A single duplicated note isn't a statistically meaningful sample.

MORTY

Hal.

HAL

I know. I know. I'm-- I know.

*He hands the note back. MORTY puts
it in his pocket. Neither of them
says anything else.*

SCENE FOUR

1:30 p.m.

Both men at one terminal.

MORTY

Letter came in through Enterprise Risk. Some SVP named Dahl copied herself on it.

HAL

Enterprise Risk doesn't read letters.

MORTY

This one did. She asked for the system's full change history. Said she'd "keep an eye on it."

HAL

Then we fix it before she finishes looking.
(scrolling) Dental module. Rounding routine.

MORTY

Keep scrolling. It's not mine.

HAL scrolls. Stops.

MORTY

Well, well. "H.P., 1994."

HAL

That's correct code.

MORTY

You're rounding half to even.

HAL

Banker's rounding. It's statistically unbiased. Round-half-up drifts upward over millions of transactions. It's the IEEE 754 default for a reason.

MORTY

Ohio Administrative Code says half up.

HAL

Ohio is wrong.

MORTY

Ohio is the customer.

HAL glowers at the screen for a long moment.

HAL

So I was right for the wrong jurisdiction.

MORTY

Wrong for the right reasons. Somebody told me something like that once.

HAL fixes it. He does not enjoy fixing it. They begin the documentation Devin asked for; MORTY dictates while HAL types.

MORTY

...the high-order nibble holds the region code,
low-order holds the plan tier--

HAL types. MORTY, reading over his shoulder, stops.

MORTY

You spelled it with an i.

HAL

(not looking up)

Continue dictating.

MORTY does, a little slower, and doesn't stop smiling.

SCENE FIVE

3:30 p.m.

MORTY puts on his coat. HAL remains seated.

HAL

It's three thirty.

MORTY

I leave at three thirty now.

HAL looks at him.

MORTY

Don't worry. You've still got twelve minutes.
(beat) See you tomorrow, Hal. Give Kermit my regards.

HAL

He is a cat. He won't reciprocate.

MORTY turns to go.

HAL

Morty.

MORTY stops.

HAL

Ask Ruth to write down the split pea. Exact quantities. By weight. None of this "a couple handfuls" business.

MORTY

You want the recipe.

HAL

I want the specification.

MORTY looks at him for a long moment.

MORTY

Come over Sunday. She'll make it. You can watch and take notes.

HAL

I'll bring a scale.

MORTY

(half smiling)

She would be insulted if you didn't. *(stopping at the door)* And tell Claire about her bug.

HAL

I intend to.

MORTY

Tell her hi while you're at it.

MORTY exits. HAL is alone. He opens his email.

HAL

(typing)

To: Claire. Subject: timezone handling in scheduler-svc. *(He types quickly, reads it back, nods. Then he scrolls to the top.)* Hi. It's Dad. *(He stops.)* The From field already says who it's from. Redundant. *(He deletes it. A long pause. He types again.)* Hi. It's Dad.

His hand rests on the mouse over Send for a long time. Then he deletes the line again.

HAL

Save to Drafts.

He checks the time.

HAL

Three forty-one.

*HAL sits quietly in his chair.
Lights fade.*

SCENE SIX

Monday, 7:12 a.m.

Three weeks later.

*HAL enters the basement at 7:12.
Someone is already there. A young
woman sits at the spare desk, the one
with the unplugged IBM 3270 terminal.
She has a backpack, a lanyard, and a
printed offer letter.*

HAL

That desk is not in use.

NADIA

Sorry! Sorry. It was the only one that wasn't
covered in binders. I didn't touch the binders.

HAL

That's what "not in use" means.

NADIA

I'm Nadia. I'm the... intern?

HAL

We don't have an intern.

NADIA

(holding up the letter)

"Platform Modernization Intern. Report to Room
B-014, eight a.m." I'm early. The bus doesn't
really do seven forty-five. It does six forty or
eight ten, so. Here I am.

HAL

This is B-014.

NADIA

I know. I checked, like, three times.

HAL

This is not Platform Modernization. Platform Modernization is on six. They have a kombucha tap.

NADIA

Oh, nice. I like kombucha.

HAL stares at her.

NADIA

Yeah, my badge doesn't open six. I tried. Twice. The security guy was very nice about it.

HAL

Sit. Don't touch the 3270. It isn't plugged in. It's a matter of principle.

She sits, unzips her backpack, and takes out a granola bar. She holds up a second one toward HAL.

NADIA

Granola bar?

HAL

I eat at twelve fifteen.

She puts it back. HAL returns to his terminal and opens a ticket with the HR service desk, reading aloud as he types.

HAL

"Misrouted personnel. Room B-014." Priority: high.

Time passes. At 8:55, MORTY enters with two coffees and stops dead.

MORTY

Who's that?

HAL

The intern.

MORTY

We don't have an intern.

HAL

That was my position. It has not survived contact with the evidence.

NADIA

Hi. Nadia.

MORTY looks at the two coffees in his hands. Without hesitation, he gives one to NADIA.

MORTY

Cream's in the break room fridge. The good sugar is hidden behind the bad sugar.

NADIA

Oh, no, that's yours--

MORTY

I'll make another. *(beat)* So. Why an insurance company?

NADIA

I've been reading insurance letters since I was eleven. Figured I'd see where they come from. *(beat)* Also, it's twenty-two an hour.

HAL

That one was mine.

MORTY

You've been drinking coffee since seven twelve. You don't need a coffee, you need a cardiologist.

NADIA

How do you know he got here at seven twelve?

MORTY

He's been getting here at seven twelve since the first Bush administration.

HAL

It was the... (*calculating*) ...yes. The first.
1991. He's correct.

MORTY

Write that down. You'll never hear it again.
(*beat*) Leaves at three forty-two, too. Eight
hours and a thirty-minute lunch. You could set a
cesium clock by him.

NADIA

Why seven twelve?

HAL

Inbound traffic on 315 starts building at seven
twenty. Outbound builds after three forty-five.
I have thirty-five years of data.

MORTY

He keeps a spreadsheet.

SCENE SEVEN

9:40 a.m.

DEVIN appears in the doorway, laptop in hand.

DEVIN

Morning, legends! Weird one, has anybody seen an-- oh! Hi!

NADIA

Hi. Nadia Reyes.

DEVIN

Nadia! Yes! You're mine! I mean, you're ours. Platform Mod. We've been pinging you all morning. Orientation was on six.

NADIA

My badge doesn't open six.

DEVIN

Right, so, funny story. Workday has you under cost center 1100.

MORTY

That's us.

DEVIN

That's you. Legacy Operations. And HR says reassignments only happen in the quarterly cycle, so... *(spreads his hands)* it is what it is. But here's the good news: we can make this a win-win. Nadia can support the migration effort from down here! Close to the source. Super authentic.

NADIA

Okay. Um. What would I be doing?

DEVIN

Love that question. So, low-hanging fruit: Cabinet C. If you could scan all forty-two hundred

pages into Confluence--

HAL

No.

DEVIN

--and maybe tag them by module--

MORTY

She's not a scanner.

DEVIN

Totally, totally. She's way more than a scanner. Okay, so, I've got the steering committee Thursday at seven a.m. If Nadia could grab coffees, it's a twelve-person order, I'll Slack her the spreadsheet--

MORTY

No.

DEVIN

--and maybe take notes?

HAL

The meeting software transcribes automatically. Badly. At no cost to her education.

DEVIN

...Okay. What about a fun deck? "Farewell to CLAIMS-II." For the all-hands. Some clip art, a cake emoji--

Silence.

HAL

Devin. What do you think an internship is?

DEVIN

I mean, it's a learning opportunity--

HAL

Correct. What does a person learn from carrying twelve lattes?

DEVIN
...Stakeholder management?

MORTY
(to DEVIN)
She's learning COBOL.

HAL
(to MORTY)
She's learning assembly.

MORTY
(to HAL)
COBOL first. That's where the money is.

HAL
(to MORTY)
Assembly first. That's where the truth is.

DEVIN steps between HAL and MORTY.

DEVIN
Love this. Love the passion. I'll circle back.
(to NADIA) Let's find time for a one-on-one and
get your growth goals documented.

NADIA
Sure.

DEVIN exits.

MORTY
(quietly)
That's three.

HAL
Three.

NADIA
I mean, for the record? I genuinely don't mind
getting coffee.

HAL AND MORTY
(in unison)
No.

NADIA

...Okay.

SCENE EIGHT

Wednesday, 2:00 p.m.

NADIA sits between them at one terminal. It has become her seat.

HAL

Hex dump. Read me that byte.

NADIA

C1. So... that's not a letter. A would be 41.

HAL

41 is ASCII. On this machine ASCII is a rumor.
This is EBCDIC. C1 is A.

NADIA

Why?

HAL

Punch cards. Everything is punch cards if you dig
far enough.

MORTY

My turn. (*pointing*) PIC S9(7)V99 COMP-3. Tell me
what that is.

NADIA

Signed number, seven digits, then two more
after... the V is the decimal point?

MORTY

The V is an *implied* decimal point. It isn't
stored anywhere. The program just believes in it.

NADIA

Huh. That's kind of beautiful.

HAL and MORTY exchange a look.

NADIA

Wait. The dependents field is PIC 99. What

happens if someone has a hundred dependents?

MORTY

Then they've got bigger problems than insurance.

NADIA

No, but seriously. It'd drop the high-order digit and store zero, right? Silently?

MORTY

(slowly, pleased)

Silently. Yes. High-order truncation. No error, no warning.

HAL

Good.

MORTY stares at HAL.

NADIA

So if you're sending packed fields over the network, you'd count them in octets, not--

HAL

You said octets.

NADIA

My networking professor is, like, militant about it.

HAL nods slowly, with deep approval.

MORTY's phone buzzes. He glances at it, types two words, and sets it face down. HAL does not look up.

MORTY goes out to refill his coffee. NADIA waits until his footsteps are gone.

NADIA

(quietly)

Is his wife sick?

HAL

What?

NADIA

Okay, this is going to sound weird. He checks his phone, like, every twenty minutes? And he sends back the same two words every time. I saw them Monday. "Here. Love." (beat) Nobody answers that fast unless they're scared they'll miss something.

HAL stares at the doorway MORTY just walked through.

HAL

Since when?

NADIA

Since at least Monday. That's all I've got data for.

HAL

Her name is Ruth. It's early. He told me in September. (beat) He didn't tell me about the phone.

NADIA

I don't think he'd tell you. I think you kind of just... see it. Or you don't.

MORTY returns with his coffee and sits. His phone buzzes. He glances, types, sets it down. HAL watches the whole thing, closely.

HAL turns back to his terminal, opens a ticket, and types.

NADIA

What are you doing?

HAL

Closing a ticket. (typing) Status: closed.
Working as intended.

A chime from NADIA's computer.

NADIA

(reading)

"Nadia, could you print twelve copies of the Q4 roadmap for Thursday? Color if possible."
Praying-hands emoji.

*HAL pulls the keyboard toward himself
and types, reading aloud.*

HAL

Reply all. "The intern is unavailable. She is learning packed decimal. H. Pruitt."

He sends it. Another chime.

NADIA

(reading)

Devin replied. It's just a thumbs-up.

SCENE NINE

Thursday, 2:15 p.m.

HAL

I closed a ticket this week without a root cause.
I don't do that. I want to know how she got here.

NADIA

I took the 10 bus.

HAL

Structurally.

*HAL pulls up HRINTAKE. He scrolls.
MORTY, reading over his shoulder,
goes very quiet.*

HAL

There. *(reading aloud)* "If cost-center not in
valid-centers, move 1100 to cost-center." *(beat)*
And a comment. "Temporary. Route unknowns to
someone who will notice. Remove before 1988.
M.K."

Silence.

NADIA

Platform Modernization's cost center is new?

HAL

Created in September. Someone added it to Workday
and never told the mainframe. The mainframe did
what it was told in 1987.

NADIA

So I'm here because of a temporary fix from before
I was born.

MORTY

It routes unknowns to somebody who'll notice.

HAL

You're here because it worked.

DEVIN appears in the doorway.

DEVIN

Found it? Amazing. Can we patch it so this doesn't happen to future interns?

HAL and MORTY look at each other.

MORTY

Could be risky. HR intake touches payroll.

HAL

We'd need a rollback plan.

MORTY

And change-control approval.

HAL

I don't speak to change control.

DEVIN

So... backlog?

HAL AND MORTY

Backlog.

DEVIN

Love a backlog.

DEVIN gives a double thumbs-up and exits.

NADIA

What just happened?

MORTY

Nothing happened.

HAL

Something happened. Nothing *will* happen. Those are different.

NADIA

It's three lines. I can literally see it from here.

MORTY

It's three lines in a program that runs payroll intake for four thousand people. The three lines aren't the risk. The risk is the Friday afternoon when somebody decides three lines is easy.

NADIA

And you didn't *want* to fix it.

MORTY

No.

HAL

That was administrative judo.

NADIA

Administrative *what*?

MORTY

My term. He's objected to it since 1992.

HAL

Because Morty got it from a Chuck Norris movie. Chuck Norris practiced Tang Soo Do, which is Korean and has nothing to do with judo. Jigoro Kano founded the Kodokan in 1882. I trained four years. Ohio State judo club, 1977 to 1981. Brown belt.

MORTY

Four years learning how to fall, and he still can't let go of anything.

HAL

(ignoring this)

First principle. *Seiryoku zen'yō*. Maximum efficiency, minimum effort. You don't push against a larger opponent. You use his momentum. Morty, stand up.

MORTY

No.

HAL

Stand up.

MORTY

Not the chair again.

MORTY stands with the weariness of a man who has done this many, many times. HAL takes his lapel and sleeve. MORTY pushes, halfheartedly. HAL steps, turns, and pulls in exactly the direction MORTY was already going. MORTY tips off balance, drops neatly into his rolling office chair, and rolls across the basement until he bumps gently into Cabinet C. He lands correctly.

MORTY

(from across the room)

Thirty-five years.

HAL

He pushed. I agreed with him. That's kuzushi. Breaking balance.

NADIA

So Devin's the one pushing.

HAL

Devin's not an opponent. Devin's traffic. You don't fight it. You time it. The organization is the opponent. Devin is just the part of it that comes downstairs.

MORTY

(rolling himself back)

He's got a taxonomy for everybody. He's never once revised it. *(beat)* Rule one. Never say no.

NADIA

You both said no to him on Monday. Like, four times.

MORTY

Those were walls. All three. That was for you.
You get maybe three a year.

NADIA

Wait. Who's counting?

MORTY

Nobody. But any more than three, and people start
to notice.

NADIA

You blew a whole year's worth of walls in one day?

MORTY

This is Q4. Nothing serious ever gets done in Q4.
(beat) Everything else, you make somebody else say
no. Say yes, then say what yes costs. "Sure,
Devin, we'll scan Cabinet C. That's a hundred and
five hours, so the timeline slips three weeks.
Want me to cc the VP?" And then whose idea is it
to never mind?

NADIA

His.

MORTY

Everybody keeps their dignity.

HAL

Or let the system say it. You don't say "I
won't." You say "HR intake runs through
CLAIMS-II."

NADIA

(quietly)

I know that one.

*HAL and MORTY exchange a look. It is
not a comfortable one.*

HAL

Rule two. Ask for the requirement. Most requests
are anxieties hiding in plain sight. Make them
write it down, and see what's left.

MORTY

Rule three. Cite the procedure. Rollback plans, change control, audit trails. The organization can't win an argument with itself.

NADIA

But you don't speak to change control.

HAL

That's not judo. That's a grudge.

MORTY

Since 1996.

HAL

Grudges also run on minimum effort.

NADIA

And the backlog?

MORTY

The backlog isn't a rule. It just is. Nobody says no. Nobody gets hurt. The request has simply been *prioritized*.

HAL

A queue with an enqueue operation and no dequeue.

NADIA

So it's... write-only memory?

HAL turns and looks at her with something approaching awe.

HAL

Write-only memory. Morty, write that down.

MORTY

I'm not writing anything down. I've never written anything down.

HAL

Then I will.

He writes it on an index card and

files it in a small metal box on his desk.

NADIA

What's the box?

HAL

Correct things other people have said.

NADIA

It's not very full.

HAL

No.

NADIA

Okay. Honestly? This sounds like a system for getting out of work. Or out of paying somebody's claim.

HAL AND MORTY

No.

MORTY

Second principle, Hal.

HAL

Jita kyōei. Mutual welfare and benefit.

MORTY

You use this to protect things. CLAIMS-II. The four thousand people it pays. A kid who came here to learn something real. The day you use it to get out of work, you're not doing judo anymore. *(beat, to NADIA)* You're just "the system."

NADIA

Then why aren't you fixing the three lines? Really.

MORTY

Eleven things have come through that line since 1987. Most were garbage. Two were real. In '93, claim payments headed for a closed bank account. In 2008, a whole regional office nobody set up

after a merger. I rekeyed six weeks of claims by hand.

NADIA

Did that go through change control?

MORTY glances at HAL. HAL does not look up.

HAL

It was reviewed.

NADIA

By who?

HAL

Someone who noticed.

MORTY

And the eleventh one's sitting at the spare desk.

NADIA

So it's not a bug.

MORTY

It's a smoke detector.

HAL

It's an undocumented feature, which is a bug with good press. We'll fix it properly. Monitored queue, alerts, a rollback plan. Before you leave.

MORTY

Before I leave.

HAL

That's a promise, not judo.

NADIA

How do I tell the difference?

HAL

A promise has a date.

DEVIN reappears in the doorway.

DEVIN

Nadia! Super quick favor. Could you move the two hundred tickets from the old Jira project into the new one? Copy-paste, basically.

NADIA glances at HAL and MORTY. Both are suddenly, intensely absorbed in their screens.

NADIA

Happy to! Quick question so I get it right. Copy-paste loses the audit trail, and forty-one of those tickets touch production. Should we check with the admin team first, or do I loop in compliance after?

DEVIN

Oof... audit trail. Good catch. Can you put that in an email? I'll check with the admin team.

NADIA

Want me to put it in the backlog in the meantime?

DEVIN

Love that.

DEVIN exits. HAL, still facing his screen, nods in approval.

MORTY

(to NADIA)

Is there really an audit trail problem?

NADIA

Yes. It's technically my department. I read their whole Jira board on Tuesday.

SCENE TEN

Wednesday, 7:05 a.m.

Two weeks later. The basement is empty. NADIA lets herself in, still in her coat, unzips her backpack, and eats a granola bar standing up.

On HAL's desk sits the small metal box: CORRECT THINGS OTHER PEOPLE HAVE SAID. She looks at it for a long moment.

NADIA
(quietly, to herself)
"Someone who noticed."

She looks at the door. She looks at the clock: 7:07. She opens the box.

She flips through the index cards. She smiles at one near the back and reads it under her breath.

NADIA
"Write-only memory."

She flips to the first card in the box and reads it aloud, half to herself.

NADIA
"You'd notice a leap second, Harold. You didn't notice I left two years ago."

On "Harold," the door opens. The clock reads 7:12. HAL stands in the doorway.

NADIA
(finishing before she can stop herself)
J.P., March fourteenth, 2011.

Silence. He crosses the room, takes the card from her fingers, files it at the front of the box, closes the lid, puts the box in his desk drawer, and locks it. It takes him three tries to find the right key.

NADIA

Hal, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have--

HAL

That's not in your scope.

NADIA

I know.

HAL

Then we agree.

He sits. He logs in. He types for a long time.

HAL

Read me the byte at offset 4C.

NADIA

...E2.

HAL

Which is?

NADIA

S.

HAL

Correct.

SCENE ELEVEN

Wednesday, 8:55 a.m.

MORTY enters with three coffees. He hands one to NADIA, one to HAL, and sets down a Tupperware and a folded note. HAL and NADIA don't look at each other.

MORTY

You two still talking in hex?

HAL

E8 85 A2.

NADIA

(flatly)

Yes.

NADIA sets her coffee down on the 3270.

HAL

(without looking up)

Not on the 3270.

NADIA moves her coffee off of the 3270.

NADIA

(surprised)

No?

HAL

E8 85 A2.

MORTY

Split pea. Ruth sent it. She says, and I'm quoting, "Tell Hal the ham hock was three hundred fifty grams and he can stop calling to ask."

HAL

She rounded. I'll weigh the next one.

MORTY

Half up?

HAL

Sunday.

MORTY

And this one's for you, Nadia. She's heard all about you.

NADIA unfolds the note and reads it aloud.

NADIA

"Nadia, don't let these two make you old before your time. Ruth." *(She keeps reading. Her voice doesn't change at all.)* "Nadia, don't let these two make you old before your time. Ruth."

She folds it and smiles.

NADIA

She must really mean it.

MORTY's face does something complicated. HAL answers for him.

HAL

She does.

DEVIN bursts in, radiant.

DEVIN

Great news! HR found a workaround! Nadia, you can move up to six on Monday. Kombucha, standing desks, the whole vibe.

NADIA looks at HAL and MORTY. They say nothing. MORTY becomes very interested in his coffee lid. HAL stares at his screen.

NADIA

Would it be... Can I stay? Down here?

DEVIN

Down here?

NADIA

I haven't finished packed decimal.

DEVIN

I mean... love that. Love the ownership. I'll just need to loop in HR on the--

HAL

HR intake runs through CLAIMS-II.

MORTY

Could be risky.

DEVIN

...Backlog?

HAL, MORTY AND NADIA

Backlog.

DEVIN

Love a backlog.

DEVIN exits. NADIA raises her cup.

NADIA

Thanks for the coffee, Morty.

MORTY

Don't mention it.

A long pause. HAL does not look up from his screen.

HAL

Thank you, Morty.

MORTY freezes, cup halfway to his mouth.

MORTY

...Are you having a stroke?

HAL

It seemed stranger not to.

MORTY

Thirty-five years.

HAL

Thirty-five years, four months, and eleven days.
I've been counting.

*NADIA looks from one to the other,
then quietly opens a new file and
begins taking notes. Nobody asked
her to.*

Lights fade.

SCENE TWELVE

Sunday, 4:30 p.m.

The Kesslers' kitchen in Westerville. Warm, cluttered, forty years of magnets on the refrigerator. On the counter sits a digital kitchen scale, HAL's, brought from home, next to a legal pad where he records every ingredient to the gram.

RUTH stirs a pot. NADIA sits at the kitchen table peeling carrots. From the next room, the Browns game.

RUTH

(to NADIA)

Did Harold drive you all the way from the Hilltop?

NADIA

Forty minutes. He said four words.

HAL

(not looking up from the scale)

Five. "Seat belt" is two words.

RUTH

How's Kermit, Harold?

HAL

Unchanged.

RUTH

(to NADIA)

Morty says your people are from the Philippines.

NADIA

Batangas. My parents have been on the Hilltop since 2001. My dad did HVAC until his back went. My mom runs a daycare out of our living room. Nine kids under five, every weekday.

RUTH

Lord. And you're the one who does the letters.

NADIA

(surprised)

How'd you know?

RUTH

You read my recipe card before you picked up the peeler. Like it was a lease. My students who did that were always the ones doing the family's paperwork. *(beat)* They'd miss a lab because they were down at the county office with a grandmother, translating a Medicaid denial. Then they'd make it up in half the time, because they'd already learned the hardest thing in school.

NADIA

What's that?

RUTH

That the grown-ups don't always know what they're doing.

RUTH tastes the soup, adds pepper, and turns back to the table, as if seeing NADIA for the first time.

RUTH

Now, Morty says your people are from the Philippines?

HAL looks up from the scale. NADIA doesn't miss a beat. Not a flicker.

NADIA

Batangas. Since 2001. My mom runs a daycare. Nine kids under five.

RUTH

Nine! Lord.

HAL writes nothing down. He watches NADIA peel a carrot.

RUTH

You know who sat right there, peeling carrots exactly where you're sitting? Janet. Every Sunday for twelve years.

HAL

Ruth.

RUTH

Oh, hush, Harold. I'm allowed to remember things. The old ones are the only ones I've got a good grip on. (to NADIA) Janet used to say--

She stops. She looks at HAL.

RUTH

Well. She used to say a lot of things. Most of them were right. That was always her problem.

NADIA keeps peeling.

RUTH

And her mother. Dorothy. She wrote to Harold every Christmas for fifteen years after the divorce. Didn't she, Harold?

HAL

Fourteen. She missed 2019. She was in the hospital.

RUTH

Did you write back?

A pause.

HAL

I kept them.

RUTH

That's not what I asked.

HAL has no answer. RUTH lets it go.

RUTH

You went to her funeral, though. I was so proud

of you for that.

HAL

Claire was there. She said I looked old.

RUTH

(looking at NADIA, not at HAL)

Did she.

MORTY

(offstage)

Ruthie, where'd you hide the good bowls?

RUTH

Where they've been since 1985, Mortimer. *(She goes, wiping her hands.)*

HAL and NADIA are alone. The soup ticks on the stove.

HAL

You didn't correct her.

NADIA

About what?

HAL

She asked about your parents twice. You answered twice. The same way.

NADIA

(shrugging)

First time was for the information. Second time was for her.

HAL considers this for a long time.

NADIA

Can I say something about Claire? You can tell me it's out of scope.

HAL

...Proceed.

NADIA

Okay. So when my dad hurt his back, I was eleven. He came home from the clinic, and my tita took one look at him and said, "You look old." And I was like, rude? But she didn't mean old. She meant, like... you look like you're carrying something by yourself, and I don't know how to say that in front of the kids. *(beat)* I think it's what people say when the real thing is too big. And a funeral's a pretty small room.

Silence.

HAL

I told her it was consistent with the passage of time.

NADIA

I know. It was accurate.

HAL

(quietly)

It was a bad translation.

*RUTH comes back with the good bowls.
She looks at the two of them and says
nothing at all.*

HAL sets the ham hock on the scale.

HAL

Three hundred forty-five.

*Later. The Kesslers' driveway, dark.
HAL stands beside his car, waiting to
drive NADIA home, phone in hand.
Through the kitchen window behind
him, RUTH and NADIA are laughing at
something.*

*He opens his Drafts folder, scrolls
to the top of the one email there,
and speaks as he types.*

HAL

Hi. It's Dad.

*He doesn't delete it. He doesn't
deliberate. He sends it.*

*Then he takes a blank index card from
his coat pocket, writes on it against
the roof of the car, and reads it
back to himself.*

HAL

"Second time was for her." N. Reyes.

Lights fade.

SCENE THIRTEEN

Monday, November 16, 7:40 a.m.

The basement. HAL at his terminal, NADIA at hers. Three coffees on the desk. NADIA brought them.

HAL's phone buzzes on the desk. He grabs it too fast.

NADIA

You've checked that thing every ten minutes for a week.

HAL

It's a voicemail. *(He presses something. Nothing happens. He presses something else.)* It wants me to set up something called visual voicemail.

NADIA

Do you want help?

HAL hesitates. Then he hands her the phone. She taps the screen once. It plays, on speaker.

CLAIRE

(voice only)

Hi, Dad. It's Claire.

HAL reaches for the phone, then stops. He lets it play.

CLAIRE

(voice only)

I fixed the DST bug. And your RFC's out of date, by the way. 9557 extends 3339 for zone suffixes. *(beat)* Come for Thanksgiving. Cincinnati. Bring... whatever it is you'd bring. *(beat)* Mom's coming. I wanted you to know before you said yes. Okay. Bye. *(beat)* Hi, Dad.

The message ends. NADIA sets the phone down on his desk, carefully.

NADIA

She corrected you.

HAL

She corrected me. *(He cannot keep the pride out of it, and does not really try.)*

NADIA

"Mom's coming."

HAL

Mom's coming.

NADIA

That's Janet.

HAL

That's Janet.

A pause.

NADIA

Are you going?

HAL looks at her for a moment before he answers.

HAL

It's a hundred and seven miles. *(beat)* I'll bring the turkey. And two thermometers. For redundancy.

Time passes. The clock reads 9:10. MORTY enters.

HAL

You're late.

MORTY

I'm late.

HAL looks up.

NADIA

Is Ruth okay?

MORTY

She drove to the Kroger Saturday. Same one she's gone to for twenty years. Called me from a gas station in Circleville. Didn't know how she got there. *(beat)* I took the keys Sunday. She was mad at me. She was right to be mad, and I was right to take them. Both of those are true.

HAL

I was in the kitchen when he took them. She made the pot roast anyway. She told me the onions were none of my business.

MORTY

(beat)

Neurologist called Friday. There's a trial. Infusions, once a month. It could slow things down. *Could.*

HAL

Is it covered?

MORTY

Retiree medical covers it. The bridge plan, till we both hit Medicare. It's the only reason I didn't go at sixty-two.

HAL slides his own coffee across the desk to MORTY.

MORTY

That's yours.

HAL

I've been drinking coffee since seven twelve. I need a cardiologist.

HAL returns to his work.

DEVIN appears in the doorway. For once, he isn't smiling.

DEVIN

Hey, legends. So. Big one. The board wants the migration business case locked by year end. Marcia Dahl's running it herself. She's had her eye on CLAIMS-II since that Ohio letter in September.

MORTY

Enterprise Risk.

DEVIN

Enterprise Risk. She needs a data-lineage report on CLAIMS-II. Every production change, every manual adjustment, back to '83. Where the money moved and who moved it. *(to NADIA)* And she asked for you, by name. She read your Jira email. The audit-trail one. *(beat)* I forwarded it.

NADIA

Me?

DEVIN

Due December fourth, straight to Marcia. You'd sign it as preparer of record. That's the board's rule: whoever did the work puts their name on it. And, off the record? HR has a return offer drafted for you. Full-time after graduation. On six. It's real money, Nadia. The kind that pays off loans. It just needs a strong finish.

NADIA looks at HAL and MORTY. They say nothing. HAL keeps his eyes on his screen.

NADIA

What's the requirement? Precisely.

DEVIN

Every change. Every adjustment. Accurate and complete.

NADIA

(after a moment)

Then it's real work. I'll do it.

DEVIN

Love that. *(beat, quieter)* Genuinely.

He exits. MORTY watches the doorway for a long time. MORTY looks at HAL nervously.

MORTY

Every manual adjustment back to '83.

HAL does not look up from his work.

HAL

I am old, not deaf.

There is a brief silence. HAL bolts upright. He still does not make eye contact with MORTY.

HAL

(sharp, low)

Morty.

MORTY

I know.

SCENE FOURTEEN

Wednesday, November 25, 2:00 p.m.

The day before Thanksgiving. The building is half empty. NADIA sits with a printout, her desk buried in paper. HAL and MORTY stand on either side of it.

NADIA

April 2008. Six weeks of claims payments for the Fort Wayne office. Three point eight million dollars. Keyed by hand, in a batch, outside the normal pipeline. No change request. No committee approval. Just this.

She holds up a page from 2008, yellowed and scanned. At the bottom, in HAL's handwriting: "Reviewed. H.P."

NADIA

Every payment was correct. I checked all nine hundred and twelve. It took me four days. It should have taken an afternoon.

MORTY

Eighteen years. Nobody ever flagged it.

HAL

(quietly)

Nobody ever looked. Audits check the payments. Not how they got there.

NADIA

The migration has to look. You can't move a record if you don't know where it came from. These are under your user ID, Morty. They're all in the same batch and there's no ticket. And the only approval is two initials on a printout. *(beat)* On paper, it looks like three point eight million dollars just... walked out the door, and

I'm the one signing it.

MORTY

But nobody took anything. I didn't take anything!

NADIA

I know that, and I can prove it. I literally spent all of section four proving it.

NADIA sets down the page and starts squaring the stack of her report, tapping the edges against the desk.

MORTY

Fort Wayne didn't exist in the system. Change control was six weeks out. Nine hundred people needed their checks on Friday. *(beat)* It was my batch. My fix. My name goes on it.

HAL speaks to the printout, not to MORTY.

HAL

April seventh, 2008. Two ten p.m. You brought it to my desk for change control. I didn't take it. I initialed it and told you that was sufficient. *(beat)* It was a grudge.

MORTY

You had eighteen years to fix it.

HAL

Fixing it meant change control. *(beat)* After a while, it seemed stranger to bring it up than not to. *(beat)* You had eighteen years too.

MORTY

You told me it was sufficient. *(beat)* I believed you.

HAL has no answer.

MORTY

You didn't key it.

HAL

You didn't initial it.

MORTY

Hal, if it's on me, I'm sixty-four with three weeks left. Worst case, they walk me out early.

HAL

Worst case, they walk you out *for cause*. It's in the code of conduct. Unauthorized movement of funds outside financial controls. Intent isn't a field on the form.

MORTY

Every dollar went where it was supposed to.

HAL

And for eighteen years, nobody knew that but us. That's the violation.

MORTY

So they walk me out. I'll survive.

HAL

(beat)

If they walk you out for cause, you lose retiree medical. No bridge plan. No infusions.

MORTY

You read my benefits plan?

HAL

(wheeling to face MORTY)

I READ EVERYONE'S BENEFITS PLAN! IT'S THE MOST IMPORTANT DOCUMENT IN THIS BUILDING AND NO ONE READS IT!

NADIA's hands stop.

MORTY

You've got nothing else, Hal. You've got this basement and a cat named after a file transfer protocol. This place is all you are. I've got Ruth.

Silence. NADIA starts squaring the stack again.

HAL

(turning back to the printout; evenly)

The average after a diagnosis like hers is somewhere between four and eight years. You'll need every dollar. And you'd spend it on a gesture, because in the thirty-five years I've known you, you have never once let anyone carry anything for you.

MORTY

That's not what this is.

HAL

It's precisely what this is.

MORTY

Then you know what, Hal? Be precise by yourself.

MORTY takes his coat and leaves. The door closes harder than it needs to. HAL doesn't watch him go. He stays exactly where he is, facing the desk, his back to the door.

A long silence.

NADIA

Is it true? About the grudge?

HAL

Yes.

NADIA

What do you want me to do?

HAL

(turning to her fully)

Write it down. All of it. *(beat)* Accurately.

NADIA

And the two of you?

HAL

That is a separate defect. It's not in your scope.

NADIA looks at the door MORTY went through. HAL does not.

Lights fade.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWOSCENE ONE

Monday, November 30, 12:20 p.m.

The basement. HAL is at lunch. He eats at 12:15 in the break room. MORTY sits at his terminal with a legal pad he isn't writing on. NADIA works on the lineage report.

MORTY sets a coffee beside her. He brings two now: one for her, one for himself.

NADIA

Thanks. *(She looks at him properly.)* You look terrible.

MORTY

Thank you.

NADIA

Ruth?

NADIA walks toward Cabinet C and begins checking for something.

MORTY

She was up at three, looking for the good bowls. They were where they've always been. She'd labeled the cabinet herself. She labels everything now. "Good bowls." "Morty's pills." "Front door." *(beat)* She put one on the bathroom mirror that just says "Ruth." She says it's so she doesn't have to ask me where things are. She hates asking.

NADIA continues to look through the cabinet drawer. She doesn't look up.

NADIA

Sounds familiar.

MORTY

Meaning what?

NADIA closes the drawer she is currently looking through. She still hasn't looked at MORTY.

NADIA

(letting it go)

Nothing.

NADIA begins looking through the next drawer in Cabinet C.

MORTY

(beat)

Hal came yesterday.

NADIA

You're not speaking.

MORTY

We're not speaking. He came anyway. Stood in my kitchen for three hours weighing celery. Didn't say one word to me. Talked to Ruth the whole time. *(beat)* She was the best she's been all week.

NADIA closes the current drawer and opens the third, final drawer of Cabinet C.

NADIA

Why would he come if--

MORTY

Sundays are Ruth's. He wasn't going to let me take them from her.

MORTY sighs and shakes his head, almost smiling.

NADIA closes the third drawer of Cabinet C. She finally looks at MORTY.

NADIA

I know we're having a moment, but I need the 1993 routing logic for section two. The closed bank account. There's nothing in Cabinet C.

MORTY

There wouldn't be. *(He taps his temple.)* Cost center came through with a routing number from a bank that folded in '91, so--

NADIA

(writing fast)

Slower. Can you write it down for me?

MORTY

I'm not writing anything down.

NADIA

Why not?

MORTY

Forty-two years, I've never written anything down. That's why they need me.

NADIA

In three weeks you walk out that door.

MORTY

I know when I leave.

NADIA

So forty-two years of this just... walks out with you. *(beat)* Okay, can I say something? Ruth's labeling the cabinets so she can keep living in her own house after she forgets. And you're doing, like, the opposite. You're leaving, and you're taking all the labels with you.

It lands. MORTY looks at the empty legal pad.

MORTY

That's a hell of a translation.

NADIA

It's what I do.

MORTY

If I write it all down, what am I for?

NADIA

(gently)

What's Ruth for, if she labels the cabinets?

A long pause. MORTY picks up the pen. He writes, slowly, for most of a page. He tears it off and hands it to her.

MORTY

1993. One page. Don't get used to it.

NADIA reads it and nods. MORTY watches her for a moment.

MORTY

How's your dad's back?

NADIA

Fine. It's handled.

MORTY

Prior authorization?

NADIA

Denied. I'm appealing. I've got it.

MORTY

I've spent forty-two years inside the kind of system that denies those. I could--

NADIA

I've got it.

MORTY

Kid. Just because someone lays something down at

your feet doesn't mean you have to pick it up.

NADIA

Somebody does.

*MORTY looks at her for a long moment.
He doesn't push.*

SCENE TWO

Wednesday, December 2, 11:00 a.m.

The basement. HAL and MORTY sit eight feet apart and have not spoken in a week. MORTY brings two coffees now: one for NADIA and one for himself. HAL brings his own thermos.

HAL files a new index card in the box. He starts to lock the drawer, stops, and leaves it unlocked. Across the room, MORTY pretends not to see.

HAL

Nadia.

NADIA

(reflexively)

Offset?

HAL

No. How was your Thanksgiving?

NADIA turns in her chair. Across the room, MORTY's typing stops.

NADIA

...Good, actually. My dad threw his back out again carrying the folding table, so I spent Friday at urgent care. Translating "prior authorization" for him, and "my dad is too proud to say it hurts" for the nurse. Then my mom made pancit for the whole waiting room.

HAL

Is he all right?

NADIA

He's fine. He's mad about the table.

HAL

What was wrong with the table?

NADIA

(smiling despite herself)

Nothing. That's why he's mad.

HAL nods. Across the room, MORTY resumes typing very slowly, the way a man types when he's listening to something else.

DEVIN enters. He isn't smiling.

DEVIN

Nadia. Marcia wants to see you. Six. Now.

NADIA

Now now?

DEVIN

Now now. *(lower, as she grabs her bag)* She loved the draft. She has edits. She's cutting section four.

NADIA stops.

NADIA

Section four?

DEVIN

I know. *(beat)* Listen. If you don't sign, she won't fight you. She won't have to. She'll buy a report from someone who will. There's a consulting firm on retainer. Fast, expensive. And that money comes from somewhere. This quarter, somewhere is my new-grad headcount.

NADIA

My offer.

DEVIN

Nobody's going to *pull* it. It'll just stop being funded.

NADIA

Wow. Okay.

DEVIN

It's the only way anyone up there will say it.
(beat) It's a *good* offer. It's the kind of thing
that changes a family's--

NADIA

I know what it is, Devin.

*DEVIN looks at her. For a moment, he
isn't performing.*

DEVIN

For what it's worth, I think you're right. I'll
tell her that. (beat) It's probably not worth
much.

NADIA

It's worth something.

*She goes. Across the room, neither
man turns around.*

SCENE THREE

Wednesday, December 2, 11:20 a.m.

The sixth floor. MARCIA DAHL's office: glass walls, a view of the Scioto. NADIA's report lies open on the desk, red ink on every other page. MARCIA doesn't stand. She gestures to a chair. NADIA hesitates, then sits.

MARCIA

Ms. Reyes. I have ten minutes. Do you know why I asked for you by name?

NADIA

The Jira email?

MARCIA

Nobody in this building has used the words "audit trail" voluntarily in ten years. I wanted to see who did. *(beat)* The report is very good.

NADIA

Thank you.

MARCIA

That wasn't a compliment. It was an assessment. It's thorough, it's clear, it's well sourced. Section four is the best-written part of it, which is unfortunate, because it's coming out.

NADIA

Can I ask why?

MARCIA

Because the board asked me a question: where is the risk in this system? Not who was right in 2008. Section four answers a question nobody asked.

NADIA

If the board wants to know where the risk is, they should know where it isn't.

A small pause. MARCIA didn't expect that.

MARCIA

Every report is a selection, Ms. Reyes. Deciding what goes in isn't dishonest. It's the job.

NADIA

Happy to make edits. Quick question so I get it right--

MARCIA

Don't. *(beat)* I know where you learned that. I've been on the receiving end of it for fifteen years. Say what you actually think.

NADIA takes a breath.

NADIA

Okay. *(beat)* I translate stuff. For my parents. Since I was eleven. Insurance letters, mostly. And the thing I learned is you can translate every single sentence right and still get the whole thing wrong, if you leave out the part that changes what it means. That's section four. Without it, every sentence is true, and the report says a man stole three point eight million dollars.

MARCIA

The board can read it however it likes.

NADIA

Then present whatever you want to the board. That's your job. I get that. But I'm not putting my name on it.

MARCIA

You're an intern. Why does your name matter to you?

NADIA

(beat)

Because nobody ever signs the letters my parents get. They just say "the system." *(beat)* If my name's on something, I want it to be true.

A long pause. MARCIA studies her.

MARCIA

You understand what happens if you don't sign.

NADIA

Devin explained it. Very cleanly.

MARCIA

Devin has never explained anything cleanly in his life. *(beat)* So I'll say it. I'll engage a firm that will sign. It will cost money I don't have, and I'll find it where I can.

NADIA

My headcount.

MARCIA

That's where it is this quarter.

NADIA

(quietly)

Okay.

MARCIA

That's it? "Okay"?

NADIA

What do you want me to say? You're going to do it either way. I don't want my name on your decision.

MARCIA closes the report.

MARCIA

That's all, Ms. Reyes.

NADIA stands. At the door, she stops and turns, as if to say something more. She doesn't. She goes.

MARCIA sits alone for a moment, looking at section four. Then she takes a sticky note, writes REYES on it, and presses it to the edge of her monitor. She turns to the window.

Lights shift to the basement. NADIA comes back down, puts the report in her bag, and sits at her desk. She doesn't look at either man.

SCENE FOUR

Monday, December 7, 9:30 a.m.

The basement. Still eight feet of carpet between HAL and MORTY. NADIA is at her desk. Her bag sits beside her, zipped.

HAL

How was your weekend?

NADIA

Fine.

HAL waits. Nothing more comes.

HAL

HRINTAKE flagged a malformed packed field overnight. Would you check it?

NADIA

(looking)

Four bytes. Seven digits and a sign. The sign nibble's wrong. Should be C, it's F.

HAL goes very still.

HAL

You said bytes.

NADIA

What?

HAL

Four bytes. For eight weeks you've said octets. Your networking professor would fail you. You said bytes because you weren't listening to yourself. *(beat)* Your report was due to Marcia on Friday. You've mentioned it every day for three weeks. Since Wednesday you haven't mentioned it once. Your bag is zipped. You always unzip it when you come in, so you can get to the granola

bars. You haven't eaten.

NADIA

(quietly)

That's not in your scope.

It lands. HAL takes it.

HAL

No. It isn't. *(beat)* I'm asking anyway. What happened?

A long pause. Across the room, MORTY has stopped typing.

NADIA

Marcia wanted section four cut. I wouldn't. So she hired consultants to write one somebody would sign, and paid for them out of my headcount. So. The offer's gone as of Friday. They're calling it "headcount realignment," which, sure. It's a punishment with a spreadsheet attached. And Devin fought it! He said "I want to flag some concerns." Twice. In writing. Against his own budget. Honestly, it's the bravest thing I've ever seen him do. *(beat)* I didn't tell you because you'd do something about it. And you don't have anything left to do something with. Either of you.

She picks up her bag and goes out.

HAL and MORTY look at each other across eight feet of carpet.

MORTY

How'd you know?

HAL

I noticed.

MORTY

You don't notice. You've never noticed anything that didn't come with a checksum.

HAL

I've been practicing.

MORTY

Since when?

HAL

Thanksgiving.

MORTY looks at him for a long moment.

HAL stands. He crosses the eight feet of carpet and, instead of anything a normal person would do, takes MORTY's lapel and sleeve in a judo grip. MORTY looks at the hand on his lapel. Then he takes HAL's sleeve in return. They stand like that for a long beat. Neither of them pushes. Then they let go.

MORTY

How many walls you got left this year?

HAL

None.

MORTY

Me neither.

HAL

Six.

MORTY

Six. *(beat)* You ever been up there?

HAL

Once. 1991. Orientation. I didn't care for the carpet.

MORTY

It's worse now. There's kombucha.

HAL opens his desk drawer and takes out a thick typed document,

single-spaced.

MORTY

What's that?

HAL

A disclosure. The 2008 batch, all nine hundred and twelve payments, each one reconciled. The review, the grudge, the committee I refused to see. My name, my signature, my responsibility. I wrote it the night you left.

MORTY

You wrote it that night?

HAL

I should have written it before I opened my mouth. I led with arithmetic instead. It's a character flaw.

MORTY

I said you had nothing else.

HAL

It was accurate. *(beat)* It was also unkind. Both of those are true.

MORTY

It wasn't accurate. You've got Claire. You've got Sundays with Ruth. You've got the kid.

HAL

Then it was neither. Which is worse. *(beat)* It isn't valid until change control logs it. Procedure.

MORTY

You'll have to talk to them.

HAL

Rule three. You cite the procedure. Even when it's pointed at you. *(He picks up the disclosure.)* Can we agree to be wrong in the elevator? I want to be correct upstairs.

MORTY

(picking up his coat)

After you.

SCENE FIVE

Monday, December 7, 9:50 a.m.

A conference room on the third floor. A long table. Twelve chairs. Eleven of them are empty. In the twelfth sits GARY LINDGREN, 30, in a quarter-zip, with an open laptop and a stack of change requests squared precisely in front of him.

HAL and MORTY stop in the doorway. HAL looks at the room for a long moment: the table, the chairs, the one young man. Then, before he steps across the threshold, he bows. A small, correct standing bow from the waist, the way you bow before stepping onto a mat.

MORTY

(low)

Did you just--

HAL

Yes.

MORTY

(low)

This isn't judo.

HAL

Everything is judo. Until six.

MORTY

What happens on six?

HAL

Arithmetic.

GARY looks up, startled. After a moment, he half-rises and gives a

small, uncertain bow back.

GARY

Hi! Sorry, are you the HRINTAKE thing? Did that come through the portal?

HAL

Harold Pruitt. Legacy Operations.

GARY

Gary. Hi. *(beat)* Have we met?

HAL

No.

MORTY

He hasn't been to change control since 1996.

GARY

Oh, wow. 1996? That's the year I was born.
(genuinely curious) Was it different then?

HAL looks at the eleven empty chairs.

HAL

It was full.

GARY

Yeah, it's mostly just me now. There's a quorum waiver. I think it's from before I started.
(brightly) Honestly, it's pretty chill.

HAL takes this in. He says nothing.

HAL

(setting down the disclosure)

The 2008 Fort Wayne batch. Nine hundred and twelve payments, keyed outside process. I authorized it. Procedure says a disclosure isn't valid until it's logged here. *(He sets down a second document.)* And the HRINTAKE fix. Three lines. Forty-one-page rollback plan. I'd like it deployed on December eighteenth at six a.m. Not a Friday afternoon.

GARY

(flipping through the rollback plan, increasingly delighted)
Okay, this is the most thorough rollback plan I have ever seen. Can I use it as a template?

HAL

...Yes.

GARY

It's for three lines?

HAL

It's for three lines.

GARY

That's so cool. *(He signs and stamps both.)*
Logged. Approved. Witnessed. *(beat)* Hey, would you ever want to sit on the committee? We literally need people.

HAL

I'm about to be unavailable.

GARY

Oh, totally. I'll put you in the backlog.

HAL and MORTY exchange a look. MORTY is trying very hard not to laugh.

MORTY

Could be risky.

GARY

(not getting it at all)
Ha. Yeah. Everything is.

They go. At the door, HAL stops, turns, and bows again. GARY, a little faster this time, bows back.

In the hallway, MORTY looks at HAL.

MORTY

Thirty years.

HAL

He'd never heard of it.

SCENE SIX

Monday, December 7, 10:15 a.m.

The sixth floor. The office of MARCIA DAHL, SVP Enterprise Risk. Glass walls. A view of the Scioto River. MARCIA is precise, unhurried, and entirely unafraid of them.

MARCIA

Mr. Pruitt. Mr. Kessler. I have eleven minutes.

MORTY

Could be risky, the way you're handling this migration. The business case leans awful hard on one report from a--

MARCIA

Please don't do that with me.

MORTY

Do what?

MARCIA

I've been in enterprise risk for twenty-six years, Mr. Kessler. I know what "could be risky" is. I've used it myself. Say what you came to say.

MORTY glances at HAL.

HAL

(laying the disclosure on her desk)

The 2008 batch. Full reconciliation. I authorized it outside change control. Not Mr. Kessler. Not the intern. Me.

MARCIA reads the first page, then the last.

MARCIA

You understand what you're handing me. A

disclosed control failure needs a remediation.
The board will ask who was responsible, and
whether they're still here.

MORTY

I keyed it. If anybody--

HAL

(cutting him off, to MARCIA)

You'll need a line for the board slide. "The individual responsible has separated from the company." I'm sixty-seven. I've been eligible to retire for two years. Voluntary, effective December eighteenth. Put a letter in my file.

MARCIA

And if I'd rather terminate you for cause?

HAL

Then you'll explain to the board why a man who disclosed his own violation, with nine hundred reconciliations attached, was fired for it. And every person in this building will learn never to disclose anything again. That's a precedent you can't afford.

A pause. MARCIA considers him with something new: professional respect.

MARCIA

Voluntary.

MORTY turns to stare at HAL.

HAL

(to MORTY, quietly)

I'm on Medicare. My retiree supplement is worth about fourteen hundred dollars a year. The arithmetic favored me. That's why it had to be me.

MARCIA

It doesn't change the business case. Legacy risk is legacy risk.

MORTY

Then you don't need to cut section four. And you didn't need to punish her.

MARCIA

I didn't punish anyone, Mr. Kessler. I don't have time to punish interns. *(beat)* I need a signed lineage report in front of the board by December twenty-first. If I walk in without one, the next remediation line on that slide is mine. Ms. Reyes declined to sign. To my face. So I engaged a firm that will. Their fee is two hundred and ten thousand dollars, and it came out of Platform Modernization's new-grad headcount, because that was the only unallocated line I had this quarter. Her offer wasn't pulled. It was spent.

Silence. HAL and MORTY exchange a look.

MORTY

Devin flagged concerns. Twice.

MARCIA

He did. Against his own budget. I noted it. *(beat)* Noting it doesn't create money.

HAL

(slowly)

So what you're paying for is a signature.

MARCIA

What I'm paying for is a signature from someone accountable.

HAL

(tapping the disclosure)

Last page. Signed by the person accountable. Logged and witnessed by your change-control chair at nine fifty-eight this morning. It's more thorough than anything your firm will produce, and it's free.

MARCIA turns to the last page. She

reads it. She turns back to the first and reads that again.

MARCIA

Gary witnessed this. *(beat)* It is more thorough.

HAL

Then you don't need the firm. Leave section four in, and she'll sign it. Cancel the engagement, and the headcount comes back. The offer comes back with it. That isn't a favor. It's arithmetic.

MARCIA

There's a cancellation fee.

HAL

Eleven percent. Standard. Still cheaper than explaining to the board why you paid two hundred and ten thousand dollars for a worse document.

A small pause. MARCIA very nearly smiles.

MARCIA

You didn't both come up here for arithmetic. What else, Mr. Kessler?

MORTY

Her report published the way she wrote it, section four and all. Her offer funded. And my retirement on December eighteenth, clean, in writing.

MARCIA

The offer is arithmetic. The rest isn't. Why would I give you the rest?

MORTY

Because your migration fails without me, and you know it.

Silence. MORTY sets it down plainly, the way he sets down coffee.

MORTY

CLAIMS-II has forty-three years of undocumented behavior. The new system has to reproduce every bit of it or people get paid wrong. The binders stop in 1996. Nadia's report is a map of the damage, not the logic. The logic is in my head. You've tried to replace this system twice and failed twice, and both times the people who knew how it worked walked out the door first.

MARCIA

So you're offering--

MORTY

Eighteen months. As a consultant, after I retire. Three days a week. I walk your new people through every paragraph I wrote. And I write it down. All of it. Forty-three years, on paper, so the next time somebody tries this, it isn't all in one man's head. *(beat)* That's what I've got. It's all I've got.

HAL goes very still.

HAL

Morty.

MORTY

I called Ruth on the way up. *(to HAL, quietly)* I asked her first. Took me forty-one years to learn that one.

MARCIA

(to MORTY)

And your wife agreed?

MORTY

My wife said, and I'm quoting, "Don't you dare let them spend that girl on a slide deck."

MARCIA looks at the disclosure. Then at the two men. Then out at the river for longer than she has to.

MARCIA

Mr. Pruitt's retirement is effective December eighteenth, as offered. I'll cancel the engagement. Ms. Reyes's offer will be funded. Section four stays. Mr. Kessler, HR will send you a consulting agreement. Eighteen months.

MORTY

Three days a week.

MARCIA

Four.

MORTY

Three. Or I get sick. I'm sixty-four. It's very plausible.

MARCIA

(the smallest smile)

Three.

She stands. The meeting is over.

MARCIA

For the record, I don't like your system, gentlemen. It's a liability held together by two men's memories and a comment that says "temporary."

HAL

For the record, neither do we.

They leave. In the elevator, going down, neither of them speaks for three floors.

HAL

Eighteen months.

MORTY

She's going to be furious with you.

HAL

Ruth or the kid?

MORTY

Yes.

SCENE SEVEN

Friday, December 18, 1:00 p.m.

Darkness. A single light rises on DEVIN, alone downstage beside a television on a rolling cart, remote in hand. He faces the audience. For the length of his speech, the audience is the party.

DEVIN

Hi, everybody. Thanks for coming. So today we're saying goodbye to two legends. Sort of. Morty's back in January on retainer. And I went through the archives, so. *(He clicks the remote.)*

On the screen: a photograph captioned 1991. HAL and MORTY in the basement, at their desks. HAL in a cardigan, upright, both hands on the keyboard. MORTY in a sport coat, leaning back, coffee in hand. Beside them, the spare desk holds a small stack of binders.

DEVIN

1991!

Click. 1999. The same two men, the same cardigan, the same sport coat, the same posture, at the same desks. The only difference: the stack of binders on the spare desk is taller.

DEVIN

Y2K!

Click. 2008. Identical, except the binders on the spare desk now reach halfway to the ceiling.

DEVIN

2008!

Click. 2016. Identical. There are now multiple towers of binders. DEVIN lets the laugh build.

DEVIN

2016!

Click. A photo from this fall. HAL and MORTY, same clothes, same posture. The binders are gone. In their place, at the spare desk, sits NADIA, turned toward the two men, mid-sentence.

DEVIN looks at it for a moment before he speaks.

DEVIN

And... this one's from October. *(He turns back to the audience.)* Hal, man. Thirty-five years. Love the precision. Morty, forty-two. Love... all of it.

Lights rise on the full room: the sixth-floor break room, a sheet cake, and against one wall a gleaming stainless-steel kombucha tap. HAL stands against the wall farthest from the tap, MORTY beside him. NADIA stands across the room with her arms crossed, looking at the photo still on the screen.

MORTY

(low)

She still not talking to us?

HAL

(low)

Only about packed decimal.

DEVIN, beaming, pulls a cup from the kombucha tap, crosses the room, and

presses it into HAL's hand. DEVIN has a cup of his own, already half gone.

DEVIN

On the house! Literally. It's on tap.

DEVIN's phone beeps. He looks at it, delighted.

DEVIN

Oh! The surprise is here! Legends, stay right here. You're going to love this.

DEVIN hurries out.

HAL extends the cup to arm's length and holds it there, level and perfectly still, regarding it with suspicion. He will hold it exactly this way for the rest of the scene. MORTY and HAL look at each other.

RUTH appears in the doorway, DEVIN's hand at her elbow, a thermos in her hands.

MORTY

Ruthie.

RUTH

I'm not driving, Mortimer. I'm attending. Devin sent a car. He's so sweet. *(She crosses the room with great purpose and stops in front of HAL.)* Harold.

HAL

Ruth.

RUTH

You look old.

HAL

That is consistent with the passage of time.

RUTH

It's consistent with getting yourself fired to save my husband's health insurance.

HAL

Retired. Voluntarily. With a letter.

RUTH

Mm. Claire called me last week. For the pumpkin pie recipe, she said, which is a lie. She has it. She wanted to tell somebody. She said your turkey was cooked to exactly one hundred sixty-five degrees, verified by two thermometers, and it was the driest thing she ever ate.

HAL

Food safety is non-negotiable.

RUTH

And she said after dinner you sat with Janet on the back step and asked her about the cello. For forty minutes. And you listened to the answers. (beat) She said it was the best day she's had with you in fifteen years. Both of those are true, Harold.

HAL has no response to this. NADIA, across the room, watches him not have one.

RUTH holds out the thermos. HAL, one hand still occupied, takes it with the other and holds it against his chest. The soup close; the kombucha at arm's length.

RUTH

Split pea. Your specification.

HAL

You followed the specification?

RUTH

To. The. Gram. It was the most joyless hour of my life. (beat) Thank you, Harold.

HAL

Ruth.

RUTH

Harold.

HAL

On January second, 2000, I found a bowl of this soup in the break room fridge with my name on masking tape. I never thanked you. After a while it seemed stranger to bring it up than not to. I was wrong about that. Thank you.

RUTH looks at him.

RUTH

You ate it cold.

HAL

Heating it seemed like an imposition.

RUTH

On the microwave?

HAL

On the soup.

RUTH

Oh, Harold. *(She pats his cheek. He permits it.)*
Did you like the soup?

HAL

Very much. It was the best thing I ate that year.

RUTH notices the cup at the end of HAL's outstretched arm. She takes it, sniffs it with a chemist's suspicion, and sips.

RUTH

Kombucha. Symbiotic culture of bacteria and yeast. Acetic acid, a trace of ethanol, and a great deal of marketing.

HAL

Someone figured out how to make tea worse.

RUTH

Someone tricked people into drinking vinegar.

RUTH hands it back. HAL returns it to arm's length. RUTH drifts toward the cake. NADIA crosses the room, finally, and plants herself in front of both men.

NADIA

I didn't ask you to.

MORTY

I know.

NADIA

I made the choice. Me. It was mine, and it cost what it cost, and I was-- I was fine with that. And you just went upstairs and bought it back. With his wife's-- with eighteen months of *Ruth*, Morty. And your whole career, Hal. And nobody asked me. Nobody even asked me.

HAL

No.

NADIA

You told me you get three walls a year. *Three!* And you spent them on me. You didn't even have them to spend. That's not fair.

HAL

No.

NADIA

(her voice breaking a little)

You're both out of walls. Was it judo?

HAL

No.

NADIA

Then what was it?

MORTY

Everything else.

NADIA

Did it have a date?

MORTY

Eighteen months. Three days a week. I'll bring coffee.

RUTH appears at NADIA's shoulder, holding cake.

RUTH

Honey. I've known these two for thirty-five years. Well, that one for forty-one. Three walls a year since the first Bush administration, and nothing worth spending them on. Don't take that away from them by feeling guilty.

NADIA

I'm allowed to be mad.

RUTH

You're required to be mad. Be mad for a week. Then take the job and be wonderful. *(She takes NADIA's hand.)* And don't let anyone spend you on the small things. You're not a small thing.

MARCIA appears at the edge of the room with an envelope. Stuck to it is the sticky note from her monitor: REYES. She crosses to NADIA and hands it to her.

MARCIA

I wanted to deliver it personally.

NADIA opens it. She looks at the bottom of the page.

NADIA

You signed it.

MARCIA

Of course I did. It's my cost center.

MARCIA nods once to HAL. He nods back. She goes.

RUTH turns back to HAL, looks at the thermos in his hand with fresh, pleased surprise.

RUTH
Oh, good, you got the soup. Did you like the soup?

NADIA holds her breath. MORTY goes still.

HAL does not hesitate.

HAL
Very much, Ruth. It was the best thing I ate that year.

RUTH beams.

Across the room, DEVIN edges up to MORTY holding two plates of cake.

DEVIN
Can I ask you something? Hal doesn't like me.

MORTY
Hal doesn't like anybody. He likes about four people, and he'd deny three of them.

DEVIN
He called me traffic. Nadia told me.

MORTY
(taking a plate)
Means he thinks you're predictable. That you'll never change.

DEVIN
(a long pause, staring at his cake)
...Huh.

He eats a bite, thinking about it.

Later, RUTH sits with HAL at a folding table and sets a shoebox in front of him.

RUTH

Recipe cards. Forty years of them. Mortimer can't cook. He's a genius at reheating, and I'd rather he didn't live on it. I'll be able to taste things for a while yet. You'll have time now. I will see you on Sunday. Weigh everything. Write it down in that awful handwriting, so when I can't tell him, the cards can.

HAL

(reading one)

"Pot roast. Onions, a good pile. Cook until done." I'll have to calibrate "good" and "pile."

RUTH

I taught chemistry for thirty-one years, Harold. The kitchen was the one place I got to stop measuring. *(beat)* Now it's your turn to measure. And when I'm further along, and he's no good, and he starts watching golf--

HAL

I'll schedule something.

RUTH

Don't schedule it. Just show up.

HAL

Every Sunday. That's a date. It's a promise.

RUTH

I don't know what that means, and I don't need to.

As the room empties, HAL crosses to a potted ficus in the corner, the cup still at arm's length. He considers the ficus. He considers the cup. He walks the full cup back to the kombucha tap, and sets it down

exactly where it came from.

On the television, the slideshow has stopped on its final photo: HAL, MORTY and NADIA in the basement. HAL stops and looks at it for a long moment.

The image on the screen fades to black. Then the room does.

SCENE EIGHT

Friday, December 18, 3:30 p.m.

The basement. Two desks are being emptied. HAL's holds nothing but the small metal box. MORTY's holds a cardboard box and, beside it, a new three-ring binder, empty, labeled in marker: D. Beside Cabinets A, B and C stands a fourth, new and empty, with a hand-lettered label: D. NADIA is at her desk.

NADIA

The HRINTAKE fix went in at six oh-four this morning. Clean. Monitored queue, live dashboard. Alerts go to me. And Gary.

HAL

Gary.

NADIA

He asked. He said anyone who writes a forty-one-page rollback plan for three lines is someone he wants noticing things.

HAL

Gary notices everything. It's insufferable.

MORTY

You keep my comment?

NADIA

I updated it. *(reading from her screen)* "Routes unknowns to someone who will notice. Original logic M.K., 1987. Do not remove. This is not a bug. This is a smoke detector."

MORTY doesn't say anything for a moment. Then he taps the empty binder.

NADIA

What's that?

MORTY

Cabinet D. Starts January fourth. Three days a week. Everything up here *(he taps his temple)* goes in there.

HAL

You're writing it down.

MORTY

Somebody translated something for me. *(He glances at NADIA.)*

NADIA hesitates. Then, with visible difficulty, she takes a folded letter out of her bag.

NADIA

Morty. *(beat)* Okay. So. It's my dad's appeal. The prior authorization. They denied it again Tuesday. I've read it, like, eleven times, and I can translate every single word, and I still don't know what it wants. *(beat)* Could you... Would you look at it?

MORTY and HAL both go still.

MORTY

(taking it, reading, with a grim little smile)

Code 4-17. "Insufficient documentation of conservative therapy." They want six weeks of physical therapy on record before they'll pay for the MRI. It's not a no. It's a form.

NADIA

That's it?

MORTY

That's it. Forty-two years I've watched them write these. *(He pulls a legal pad over and uncaps a pen. He glances at the empty binder, then starts writing.)* I'll draft the appeal. You

check my English. Your dad signs it.

NADIA

You're writing it down.

MORTY

I'm told that's what you do when you won't be around to explain it.

HAL stands. He slides the box across the desk to NADIA.

NADIA

Hal, I can't--

HAL

You've read it before.

NADIA

Only the first card.

HAL

Read it again. With permission this time. Then read the other one from Janet.

NADIA opens the box. She reads the first card aloud.

NADIA

"You'd notice a leap second, Harold. You didn't notice I left two years ago." J.P., March fourteenth, 2011. *(She finds the other one and reads it.)* "I took up the cello at sixty. I'm terrible at it. It's the best hour of my week." J.P., November twenty-sixth, 2026. *(beat)* She plays the cello?

HAL

Badly. She started at sixty. I asked.

Pause.

HAL

I filed the first card the day she left. Then I didn't speak to her for fifteen years, because I

couldn't forgive her for being right. (beat) A
grudge is a cached value. It's cheap.

NADIA

And now?

HAL

Now I check. It's expensive. It's the most
expensive thing I do.

*She doesn't say anything for a
moment.*

NADIA

I'm still mad at you.

HAL

That's accurate.

NADIA

Thank you.

HAL

For what?

NADIA

The granola bars.

*At 3:41, HAL puts on his coat. MORTY
puts on his. MORTY slides the empty
binder into the top drawer of Cabinet
D, closes it, and picks up his
cardboard box. At 3:42, HAL stops at
the door.*

*But instead of leaving, he crosses
back to the 3270 and rests a hand on
top of it.*

HAL

The coax to the controller in the closet is still
live. Don't let them pull it.

NADIA

Principle.

*HAL looks at her for a long moment.
Then he takes a blank index card from
his coat pocket, writes on it, and
files it in the box on her desk,
reading it aloud as he does.*

HAL

"Principle." N. Reyes.

He goes back to the door.

MORTY

Sunday?

HAL

Sunday. Pot roast. I'm bringing a scale.

MORTY

She'll hate that.

HAL

She'll hate it correctly. *(beat)* And Tuesdays,
Wednesdays and Thursdays, lunch. Parking lot.
Twelve fifteen. Turkey on rye.

MORTY

You don't have a badge.

HAL

The parking lot isn't in scope for the badge
system.

MORTY

You'll argue with me about leap seconds.

HAL

Someone has to.

*They leave together. NADIA is alone
in the basement. She looks at the
box for a long time. Then she takes
a blank card, writes, and speaks it
aloud as she files it.*

NADIA

"Just because someone lays something down at your feet doesn't mean you have to pick it up." M.K.,
November thirtieth, 2026.

Lights fade.

END

COLOPHON

This script was set in Courier at twelve points using pdf_{La}TeX. It was compiled on October 4, 2026.

All dates in this play have been checked against a calendar. All times are Eastern. Traffic data referenced in Act One is the character's and should not be used for navigation.