

TYPE A

Based on the book

"Assholes: A Theory" by Aaron James

Written by

Lesley Wake Webster



Fourth Network Draft
January 27, 2017

CHARACTERS

AXLER (30's) THE RIGHT-HAND WOMAN: hot, smart, ambitious, a complete badass. She'd be a feminist icon, if only she liked other women. Axler is at war with her inner "nice girl."

GARLAND (30's) THE SHARK: a handsome, charming attorney. Garland is simultaneously full of shit and completely sincere; whatever he's saying, he believes it, even if he argues the exact opposite ten minutes later.

LUDERMAN (40's) THE BOSS: the Danny Ocean of this Ocean's Eleven of assholes. He's got a gift for making money and spotting talent. Luderman makes Machiavelli look like a sweetheart.

BEN (30's) THE CONSCIENCE: Luderman's step-brother, a sweet guy who lacks killer instinct. Ben served in the Army... as an accountant. He annoys everyone else by questioning their generally terrible ethics.

TORRES (20's) THE GENIUS: a cheerful, agreeable tech expert. If she wore a name tag, it would say "Hello I am... not actually listening to you." Torres loves fixing broken computers and broken people.

CARSON (40's) THE MUSCLE: a former thug and an intimidating physical specimen (think John Cena). He can be surprisingly sentimental and will do anything for his show poodle, Evangeline. Carson has a weakness for gossip.

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

AXLER, TORRES and CARSON sit across from an agitated, middle-aged sad-sack, RANDALL.

RANDALL

You're firing me? But I don't even know you.

AXLER

Yes, that's kind of the point. Being fired is painful and awkward, which is why companies outsource it to us.

RANDALL

But... it's a family business. My whole family wants me gone?

AXLER

Just your mother, father and sisters. Your cousin was very conflicted.

RANDALL

Oh god...

AXLER

Deep breath, Randall. We are experts. We will get you through this.

(re: Torres)

Torres here is your tech guru. She is top-notch.

TORRES

I can help you find an online support group, install controls so you don't post angry rants on social media, or just hook you up with real good porn.

RANDALL

Oh, I don't--

TORRES

Sure you do. I already checked your browser history.

(winks)

No judgment.

AXLER

(re: Carson)

Carson is actually here for my protection, not yours, but he does have a dog you can pet if you find it comforting.

CARSON

(snaps, calls off)

Evangeline!

A large poodle, EVANGELINE, enters.

RANDALL

I don't really like dogs.

Carson SNAPS again and Evangeline drops her head, sad.

CARSON

(sotto, to dog)

It's not you, baby. He's a bad man.

Evangeline exits.

RANDALL

This is the worst day of my life.

AXLER

I know it seems that way, but you're going to come out of this better than ever. Quick, tell me three things about yourself.

RANDALL

I'm fired. I fart under stress. I'm probably fired because I fart under stress.

(inspired)

That's a medical condition. I could sue for discrimination.

AXLER

No, there's a very clear paper trail that shows this is not related to your IBS. You don't want to get sucked into an expensive lawsuit you can't win. You want to move on. Walk with me.

She escorts him from the room and we RESET TO:

INT. BULLPEN - CONTINUOUS

They walk. Axler's gait is off-kilter.

AXLER

Getting bad news puts your body into fight-or-flight mode, which is why it's good to get the oxygen flowing. Also, my right leg was asleep. That's double Spanx for you.

She pounds her wobbly leg with her fist to wake it up.

RANDALL

It's just so humiliating.

AXLER

I've been where you are. Five years ago, I walked in on the man I thought was my soul mate sleeping with my best friend. Then I had to retell the story the next day at my perfect sister's wedding when people asked why I didn't have a date.

RANDALL

That's terrible.

AXLER

No, it was the best thing that ever happened to me. Getting screwed over by Jabba the Slut was a wake-up call.

She stomps her leg to shake out the pins-and-needles.

AXLER (CONT'D)

It made me toughen up and finally start looking out for myself, which is why I'm now at the top of my game.

Axler leads him through a doorway. RESET TO:

INT. PRIVATE OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

It's the office of a very successful person - big desk, bay windows, baby grand piano in the corner.

RANDALL

Wow.

AXLER

Exactly. Whenever I feel weak, I list three things about myself that are strong. One: I'm a kick-ass businesswoman. Two-

She picks up a DONUT off a side table and takes a bite.

AXLER (CONT'D)

I lost forty pounds and kept it off.

She makes a show of dumping the donut in the trash.

AXLER (CONT'D)

Three: I have punched a shark. It might have been a dolphin, but the important thing is, at the time I did it, I believed it was a shark.
(then)

Your turn. Tell me something strong about you.

RANDALL

I've hated my job for fifteen years.

AXLER

Yes! Today, you start a better life. A stronger life that leads you to success beyond your wildest dreams, whatever your heart de--

SFX: a TOILET FLUSH. Moments later, LUDERMAN enters from a private bathroom.

LUDERMAN

Axler, what are you doing in my office?

RANDALL

I thought you said this was your office?

AXLER

Damn it, Luderman. Now I've got to do a whole different speech.

(to Randall)

Come on, let's go up on the roof and talk about all the people who'd miss you if you died.

She escorts Randall out of the office. Luderman notices the donut in the trash, retrieves it and takes a BITE.

MAIN TITLES: "TYPE A"

INT. BULLPEN - THE NEXT DAY

Carson, Torres and Evangeline (the dog) are there. Axler enters, in last night's leather miniskirt and messy make-up.

TORRES
Morning, Axler.

CARSON
I'd say "walk of shame," but you don't have any.

AXLER
I'd say, "don't be a dick," but you don't have one.

CARSON
Solid burn. Respect.

They fist-bump. Axler goes to her desk and pulls a business skirt over her miniskirt, which she shimmies out of.

TORRES
Someone had an exciting night. Did you go home with that hot guitar player?

AXLER
None of your business.

TORRES
Because you don't kiss and tell.

AXLER
Because you and I are not friends, sweetie.

TORRES
(cheerful, undeterred)
You are so funny! I love that we can joke like this.

AXLER
Torres, you know it's not personal - I just don't "do" girlfriends. Or boyfriends. Attach the word "friend" to anything, I don't do it.
(beat)
Except cocaine-friends.

TORRES

Come on, don't you ever want a nice, dependable guy who'll sit on the sofa and watch TV and eat burritos with you?

AXLER

No. The only thing a man should eat on my sofa is me.

BEN approaches.

BEN

Staff meeting in five.

(to Axler)

Luderman wants to see you first, privately.

AXLER

About what?

BEN

Something private, I assume.

CARSON

Ha! "Private." Respect.

Carson extends his fist for a bump, which Ben ignores as he crosses off. Evangeline lifts a paw to bump Carson's fist.

CARSON (CONT'D)

(to Evangeline)

You're the only one, baby.

TORRES

A private meeting? Oh my god, this is it. You're getting the promotion!

AXLER

You could be right. Luderman's been hinting at it for months.

CARSON

Last week, he asked me to rate your strengths.

AXLER

Seriously? What did you say?

CARSON

Upper body: crap. Abs: crap. Legs-

AXLER

Work strengths.

CARSON

I told him you're the best, which he took seriously since he knows how much I personally dislike you.

AXLER

Aww, Carson, thanks. I can't wait til I get my own office and don't have to constantly see your face.

CARSON

Right back atcha. Go get 'em!

Carson and Torres cheer and hoot as Axler crosses off.

INT. LUDERMAN'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Axler enters. Luderman holds up a finger: "Just a minute."

AXLER

Sorry. You on a call?

LUDERMAN

No, I just like making people wait.
(then)
Axler, you've been close to getting a promotion for a long time. So close. But I had this nagging feeling you weren't quite ready.

AXLER

So what changed?

LUDERMAN

Nothing. You're still not ready.

AXLER

What? I outperform everyone in this office.

LUDERMAN

I know. But you've got back-of-the-shirt issues.

AXLER

(looks over her shoulder)
He said it didn't get on my shirt.

LUDERMAN

Not that. You know I don't judge what a body does in a bedroom or on top of a piano.

(then)

It's a business framework. Front-of-the-shirt is what everyone sees when you walk into a meeting -- smart, charismatic, driven. Back-of-the-shirt is what people say when you're walking away. It's the fault you're not aware of, but everyone else is.

AXLER

And what exactly does the back of my shirt say?

LUDERMAN

It says, "Secretly Weak."

Axler reacts with a shocked SQUEAK.

LUDERMAN (CONT'D)

Don't freak out. I know your history. Before my tutelage, you were soft, and I don't just mean physically. Your inner nice girl might still be alive.

AXLER

Not possible. She died when I stopped eating food.

LUDERMAN

Our reputation lives or dies on strength. When we handle a firing, we guarantee our client that the employee won't sue.

AXLER

I'm aware of the sign.

She gestures to a SIGN on the wall: "764 days without a lawsuit." On a POST-IT, someone has added "Or pooping."

AXLER (CONT'D)

(re: post-it)

You should try flaxseed.

LUDERMAN

But if those employees sense a shred of weakness, suddenly they think they have a fighting chance.

(MORE)

LUDERMAN (CONT'D)
They get litigious, like the
nurses' union at St. Jo's.

Luderman heads out. Axler follows. RESET TO:

INT. BULLPEN - CONTINUOUS

AXLER
That's what this is about.

LUDERMAN
Nurses are selfless, which makes
them nice-person kryptonite.
They're like puppies rolled in
babies topped with Mother Teresa.
Ace the negotiation today, and I'll
reconsider your promotion.

AXLER
I will. There will be no problems,
no weakness. Because the only
thing the back of my shirt says is
"kiss my ass."

They head into the staff meeting. RESET TO:

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - SAME

Axler and Luderman enter. Ben hands them cups of chili.
Torres and Carson sit at the table with chili.

LUDERMAN
What is this?

BEN
Mom's recipe. Mostly. I left out
the can of Fancy Feast.

LUDERMAN
I know it's Mom's chili. Why is it
stinking up my conference room?

BEN
I need honest feedback before I
enter it in the veterans' cook-off.
The one good thing about this
office is that no one sugarcoats
anything.

LUDERMAN
The "one good thing"?

BEN

(re: everyone else)

Yes. You hire sociopaths and narcissists--

(off group's reaction)

-- who I'm proud to call my friends.

LUDERMAN

We have to be tough. Nice people can't handle the stress of delivering bad news. They get ulcers and heart attacks. And also because nice people are boring.

BEN

Thanks.

(to group)

So? Thoughts on the chili?

CARSON

Not bad. It's missing something. I think it's... a leg?

Torres and Carson crack up.

BEN

Another great joke about my artificial leg. For the record, people with disabilities don't like being mocked.

CARSON

It's a sign of respect. I gave you crap when we were kids and you had two legs, I give you crap now. Not to mock you would be the disrespect.

TORRES

Yeah, the rest of the world thinks horrible stuff but doesn't say it. We have the decency to say it to your face.

AXLER

Because we care.

TORRES

And it's fun. But mostly the caring thing.

BEN

For the record--

AXLER

Here we go.

(imitating Ben)

"For the record, if you don't pay for something, it's stealing."

LUDERMAN

(imitating Ben)

"For the record, buying drugs in Mexico is not a business expense."

BEN

It's called having ethics.

CARSON/TORRES/AXLER/LUDERMAN

Boooo! / lame. / Boring. / Pass.

LUDERMAN

Let the record show my brother continues to drag us all down.

(then)

These nurses you're talking to today, their union loves to sue. I'm bringing in an attorney as a consultant, just as a precaution.

AXLER

We don't need the help. I've been prepping for months.

LUDERMAN

This guy specializes in crisis management. Remember that huge lawsuit against the company with the lawn mowers that kept beheading gophers?

(off their blank looks)

Right, you don't. Cause this guy was their consultant.

GARLAND appears in the doorway.

GARLAND

Hey, I didn't know which spaces were yours, so I just parked diagonally across them all.

LUDERMAN

Speak of the devil. Garland, get in here.

Garland enters and starts shaking hands with Carson and Ben.

GARLAND

Good to meet you, I'm--
(recognizing her)
Dorothy Axler!

AXLER

(stunned)
Jabba the Slut.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWOINT. CONFERENCE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Axler stares at Garland as Carson, Torres, Luderman and Ben watch, intrigued.

GARLAND

Dorothy Axler, look at you. What's it been, five years?

CARSON

(to Axler)

Your first name is "Dorothy"?

AXLER

And my middle name is "Don't call me Dorothy."

(to Garland)

What a small world. This is crazy.

LUDERMAN

You two know each other?

GARLAND

Would you believe, we used to date?

AXLER

It was a fling. I'd hardly call it dating, more like our genitals got in a car accident.

LUDERMAN

Well, there's a lot on the line today. If your past relationship is going to throw either of you off your game, I need to know.

GARLAND

Not an issue.

LUDERMAN

(eyeing her closely)

How about you, Axler? Need to get anything off your chest, or the back of your shirt?

AXLER

I'm fine. If anything, I perform better when I work with a friend.

TORRES

Like me!

AXLER

Nope.

TORRES

Girl power!

She holds Axler's arm up, Rocky Balboa-style.

INT. EMPTY OFFICE - LATER

Garland sits at a desk, feet up, strumming a guitar. Axler enters.

GARLAND

Hey, I was just taking a little music break. I was hoping you'd come by for a personal catch-up.

AXLER

Or, I could take you through the psychological profiles of the union reps we're facing off against.

GARLAND

Nah, there are two types of people at a negotiating table - the ones who are scared of me and the ones I haven't met yet.

(cajoling)

Come on, tell me about you.

AXLER

Fine, let's see: I work here, I'm about to get a promotion and when I do, this office will be mine, so don't get too comfortable.

(re: guitar)

I see the ship has sailed on "don't get too douchey."

GARLAND

Dottie, Dottie, what's with the hostility? I get the sense you're not a hundred percent happy to see me.

AXLER

Let's get something clear: you don't get to call me "Dottie." You lost that privilege when you entered my best friend's vagina.

GARLAND

By that logic, I can still call you Dottie.

(helpful)

Because we only did butt stuff.

He exits with his coffee mug. She follows. RESET TO:

INT. BULLPEN - CONTINUOUS

AXLER

Still spinning everything. You haven't changed at all.

GARLAND

And yet you've changed completely. I know women try on different personalities like lip gloss, but this "corporate bad-ass" thing? It's not you. Where is the sweetness, the vulnerability? What happened?

AXLER

You happened.

GARLAND

Well, that's kind of a mean thing to say.

AXLER

No, it was a good thing. Because you helped me realize that I'd rather be surrounded by (gesturing to office) people like this, who might be rough around the edges but will always have my back. So thank you.

GARLAND

So I single-handedly shaped you into the woman you've become?

AXLER

No, that's not what I said.

GARLAND

It's not what I would've picked for you, but if it makes you happy--

AXLER

(raising her voice)

It does. I am very happy. I love my life!

REVEAL: the whole office has stopped to watch, including Luderman.

CARSON

Could you tone down the happiness?
You're scaring the dog.

Evangeline peeks out from behind Carson's leg, scared.

AXLER

(for Luderman's benefit)
Maybe she senses I'm an Alpha.

CARSON

If that were true, she wouldn't pee
in your purse. By the way, you
need a new purse.

INT. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A rattled Axler gives herself a pep talk in the mirror.

AXLER

Three reasons you are strong. One:
You are a kick-ass businesswoman.
Two: You lost forty pounds and kept
it off.

She picks up a pastry, takes a BITE, drops the rest on the counter.

AXLER (CONT'D)

Three--

She stares longingly at the pastry, then picks it back up.

TORRES (O.S.)

No!

A HAND slaps the pastry to the floor. REVEAL Torres has entered.

TORRES (CONT'D)

You've come too far to crumble
under pressure!

AXLER

You're right. Thank you.

TORRES

Oh my god, you're so welcome! You
want to know what I really think is
going on, relationship-wise,
between you and--

AXLER
(exiting)
Nope.

TORRES
There's my girl!

INT. BULLPEN - A LITTLE LATER

Carson shoots a MINI BASKETBALL at a HOOP mounted on the wall as Luderman waits his turn. Nearby, Ben doctors a pot of chili amidst other games -- foosball, air hockey, etc.

BEN
You know a great place to play
basketball? Not at work.

LUDERMAN
You know a great place to make
chili? Not at work.

Luderman shoots the ball directly into the pot of chili.

CARSON
You didn't make the same shot I
did, you owe me fifty bucks.

LUDERMAN
Worth it.

Ben's phone DINGS. He picks it up as Carson reads over his shoulder.

CARSON
Wow. That is rude.

BEN
(pointed)
Reading someone else's messages?

CARSON
No, this text from "Sergeant
Dodds."

LUDERMAN
Let me see.

Luderman takes the phone.

BEN
Seriously?

Ben tries to grab the phone away, but Luderman holds it high above him, like they're kids again.

LUDERMAN

(reads)

"Your chili." That's not chili.
That's a steaming pile of--

BEN

It's just a joke, from this crazy
vet who likes to get in my face.
It doesn't mean anything.

LUDERMAN

No one insults my little brother.

BEN

You do. All the time.

LUDERMAN

That's different. We're family.

BEN

Carson's not family.

CARSON

That's hurtful.

LUDERMAN

Text back, fight fire with fire.
(typing)
"Eat this."

BEN

No, Dodds is crazy, I don't want to
escalate this--

Luderman sticks the phone down his pants, and we hear the
"click" of a photo being taken.

LUDERMAN

Problem solved.

EXT. HOSPITAL PARKING LOT - LATER

Axler, Garland, Carson and Torres approach the hospital.

AXLER

...so the union sees reduced
benefits as a no-go, but the
hospital's original plan was
massive layoffs.

GARLAND

Obviously, you lead with the threat
of losing jobs. You want them
shaking in their ugly shoes.

AXLER

Not with this group. Look, you're late to the game and I have a plan, so do me a favor: hang back, let me lead and don't get in my way.

GARLAND

So, same rules as taking you swing-dancing. Got it.

AXLER

Nurses are caretakers. We're going to reframe this issue using their emotional vocabulary: "feel, love, heal, nurture, family." Words to avoid: "think, cost, bottom line, robot."

TORRES

Now all I want to do is say "robot."

AXLER

Don't, it'll create fear and anger.

GARLAND

My two favorite negotiating tools.
(off her look)
But today, we do it your way.

AXLER

Thank you.

They walk in silence for a beat.

TORRES

Robot.
(then)
Just getting it out of my system.

INT. HOSPITAL MEETING ROOM - LATER

Axler, Garland, Torres and Carson face a room full of hostile nurses. Axler stands at the front holding a cellophane-wrapped gift basket.

AXLER

Most people -- including me, I'll admit -- avoid the sick and injured. They make us feel guilty, so we throw money at the problem.
(indicating basket)
(MORE)

AXLER (CONT'D)

Eighty-five bucks at the hospital gift shop. For what? Is the teddy bear stuffed with oxy?

A few nurses laugh.

GARLAND

If it is, I'm legally obligated to confiscate it.

Garland makes a show of taking the bear, ripping its seam and sticking his finger in the stuffing. He rubs his finger on his gums, like a cop in a movie.

GARLAND (CONT'D)

(mock disappointed)

Ah, that's just cocaine. Should I leave it in the surgeons' locker room?

This gets a bigger laugh.

AXLER

But nurses, you know what really creates healing: human connection, love, family.

GARLAND

And sometimes catheters.

The nurses chuckle, into Garland. Axler rolls with it.

AXLER

Your current benefits package is like this basket - big, yes, but full of garbage no one needs. If you take a moment to read the hand-out, you'll see that the new package might be smaller, but it delivers what you actually want.

GARLAND

I just used that line last night.

The nurses hoot with enjoyment as they look over their handouts. Axler turns to Garland as Torres watches.

AXLER

(sotto)

Remember the part where I said to stay out of my way?

GARLAND

(sotto)

Yeah, but our dynamic is working -
I bring the naughty, you bring the
nice, they're excited to get a
little taste of both.

AXLER

(nods, sotto)

Like that waitress in Vegas who
wanted to sleep with both of us.

GARLAND

(sotto)

We never went to Vegas.

AXLER

(sotto, realizing)

Oh, wow, you're right, that wasn't
you. Huh. I've been giving you
credit for someone else's skills.

She turns back to the nurses, leaving Garland stewing.

ANGLE ON: Carson and Torres.

TORRES

(sucking in air)

Oh, snap.

CARSON

(sotto)

What's wrong?
(scanning crowd)
Do you see a threat?

TORRES

(sotto)

Yeah, Garland's ego. Axler just
pulled the pin on a psychological
grenade. Only a matter of time til
he blows.

BACK TO Axler, Garland, and the nurses.

AXLER

So, who's got questions?

JAMIE (40's, short-haired, androgynous) raises a hand.

AXLER (CONT'D)

Yes - it's Jamie, right?

JAMIE

Yeah, have we met?

AXLER

No, I'm just a fan of your blog.

JAMIE

That means the world. Thank you.

AXLER

Your blog taught me, "If we work together with open hearts, we can find a win-win solution."

JAMIE

I don't write sappy crap like that. You're thinking of Jemma's blog.

ANGLE ON: JEMMA, 40's, also short-haired and androgynous.

AXLER

Oh, my bad. Sometimes I mix up my inspiring women.

JAMIE

"Women?" I'm a man.

AXLER

You are? You are. Of course. I guess I thought--

JAMIE

That a man wouldn't do this? Cause it's "woman's work"? Maybe that's why you think it's okay to pay us less.

GARLAND

I have a question. Why are we sugarcoating reality for this union? The job market is shrinking. Guess who never dispenses the wrong medicine or makes a mistake because they're tired? A robot.

The nurses grumble angrily.

JAMIE

(to Axler)

I thought you were on our side.

AXLER

I am. He doesn't speak for me.

GARLAND

But I do speak for our client, the hospital, which has the power to fire you all. So take the benefits deal.

AXLER

(sotto, to Garland)
Stop. You're creating an atmosphere of hostility.

GARLAND

(sotto)
No, you did that when you insulted Captain Androgynous. I'm just turning it to our advantage.

JAMIE

(to nurses)
They're switching strategies and fighting amongst themselves. Their hand must be weak. I say we fight this thing in court!

The nurses cheer in solidarity.

INT. LUDERMAN'S OFFICE - LATER

Axler and Garland wait for an agitated Luderman to finish a phone call.

LUDERMAN

(into phone)
...Dr. Harrison, I promise I will get to the bottom of this.
(hangs up, then)
Axler, what the hell happened?

AXLER

There was one wobble, and your consultant hijacked my negotiation.

GARLAND

Wobble? I grabbed the controls and set the flaming wreckage safely on the ground. I can't believe you haven't thanked me.

AXLER

Wow. Nothing's ever your fault, is it?

GARLAND

Legally? No. But personally? No.

INT. BULLPEN - SAME

Carson and Torres watch the argument from a safe distance.

CARSON

I don't get it. I thought he agreed to follow her lead.

TORRES

Until she confused him with another man, which hurt him and made him act out because he wants to be important to her.

CARSON

Why? He cheated on her.

TORRES

I'm pretty sure he sabotaged the relationship because he knew she was "the one" and he wasn't ready.

CARSON

(dramatic gasp)
Ohhhhhhhhh.

TORRES

I know.

INT. LUDERMAN'S OFFICE - SAME

Luderman changes the sign to "Zero Days without a Lawsuit."

AXLER

Send me back without him.

LUDERMAN

No, this is now a legal issue. I'm going to grab a drink with Garland and try to clean up this mess.

AXLER

Him? He's the problem. I'm the solution.

LUDERMAN

No. Cause you know what's on the back of your shirt? Footprints where those nurses walked all over you.

As Axler reacts, stung...

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREEINT. "CHURCH" - A LITTLE LATER

START ON A STAINED GLASS WINDOW and pan down to Axler, head resting on her hands in a prayerful pose.

AXLER

Lord, what do I have to do--
(lifting head)
-- to get a refill down here?

WIDEN TO REVEAL we are in a bar (converted from an old church). Ben joins Axler as a BARTENDER refills her glass.

BEN

Rough day?

AXLER

Oh, god, if you're taking pity on me, my career really is in the toilet.

BEN

You know why I work here?

AXLER

Your brother feels bad because you lost your leg in the army?

BEN

Technically, I was serving in the army when I lost my leg, but I was on leave when I visited the tide pools where I got the bacterial infection, so I didn't lose my leg "in the army."

Luderman, getting a refill, hears the end of this.

LUDERMAN

You were in the army and you have no leg. Just say you lost your leg in the army! It's the only thing you've got going for you.

Luderman crosses back to a table to sit with Garland.

BEN

My brother doesn't need my help with accounting; he needs my help acting like a human being.

(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

He's got no idea how to express his feelings, which run deep - like how protective he is when it comes to you, for example.

AXLER

You say "protective," I say "psychotic."

BEN

My real job is caring about stuff - like whether you guys are happy - so he can pretend he doesn't.

AXLER

He told you this?

BEN

Oh, no. He can't even admit he feels feelings. So I let him think he's doing some good deed by rescuing me in my time of need.

Axler slams down her drink, inspired.

AXLER

That's brilliant.

BEN

It is?

AXLER

Yes. You're a genius. Hey, do you have any more texts from that Sergeant Dodds?

BEN

(shows phone)

Tons. It's gotten so bad, I'm skipping the cook-off. Why?

AXLER

I need to borrow this, thanks.

ANGLE ON: a table, where Luderman sits with Garland, papers spread in front of them. Carson and Torres sit nearby.

GARLAND

...it's good there was a blow-up. Now we're playing hardball, which is my specialty. It's not a real win until the other side cries.

LUDERMAN

I like that. You think I can get it laser-engraved on a smooth rock?

Axler approaches.

AXLER

Hey, Luderman! You talk about strength, but you let some bully hassle your brother?

(shows phone)

Read this text from Sergeant Dodds.

LUDERMAN

"Don't see you at the cook-off. Oh, wait, is this you?" There's a photo.

(off photo)

Either someone dropped pink playdoh on the floor of the hair salon, or these are some lady parts.

CARSON

He's calling Ben a vagina. And not in a good way, like he's capable of bringing forth life.

AXLER

We can't stand for this. At the end of the day, we live by a code:

LUDERMAN

"Ass, grass or cash."

TORRES

"Live off the grid."

CARSON

"Ten percent body fat."

GARLAND

(to Carson)

So impressive, I want to ask about your workout--

AXLER

"We take care of our own." We are a family. A rude, loud family that fights all the time and ruins mini-golf for other families. And no one picks on our crippled stepbrother but us.

CARSON
Cause we love him!

TORRES
And it's fun!

LUDERMAN
Axler's right. If Ben won't stand
up to this jackass, we need to do
it for him.

BEN
To clarify: I don't want or need
your help.

EXT. PARK - LATER

The whole team watches as Ben reluctantly sets up his crock
pot. A banner reads "Veterans' Chili Cook-Off."

LUDERMAN
(calling out)
Dodds! Anyone seen Sergeant Dodds?

BEN
This is wrong, today should be
about the chili.

A voluptuous, tough WOMAN approaches.

TOUGH WOMAN
Who's looking for Dodds?

LUDERMAN
The guy who's gonna kick his ass.

TOUGH WOMAN
"His"?
(to Ben)
Damn, Corporal, just when I think
you couldn't suck any more, you
suck in completely new ways.

BEN
Thanks, Dodds.

AXLER
She's Sergeant Dodds?

LUDERMAN
Aw, come on! You're getting
bullied by a girl? How are we even
related?

SERGEANT DODDS

You brought your big brother? Did you lose your balls along with your leg?

People nearby laugh. Sergeant Dodds pushes past Ben.

AXLER

We can't let her do that. This demands a response.

LUDERMAN

Ben, what are you waiting for? Fight back!

BEN

I'm not going to fight a woman.

TORRES

Sexist.

AXLER

(for Luderman's benefit)
Ben might not fight dirty, but I do!

Axler picks up a paper BOWL of chili and THROWS it at Sergeant Dodds. Dodds freezes for a beat, stunned.

AXLER (CONT'D)

Not so tough once someone stands up to you, are you? Like most bullies, you're a big--

Dodds TACKLES Axler, and they go flying into a table.

AXLER (CONT'D)

Aaaaaaaaaaah!

Axler and Dodds grapple with each other, smashing chili in each other's faces and slipping and sliding as they try to gain the upper hand. The rest of the office reacts:

GARLAND

Ohhhh, that stings.

BEN

Carson, you're the muscle, aren't you going to stop them?

CARSON

Nah. They're tiny. How bad can they hurt each other?

LUDERMAN

Ten to one, Axler gets a broken nose.

TORRES

Five to one, she's a biter.

They exchange cash as Axler and Dodds wrestle.

LUDERMAN/GARLAND/CARSON/TORRES

C'mon, Axler! / Naughty Dottie! /
Protect your face! / Bite her!

Dodds rolls on top of Axler and begins choking her.

AXLER

I-- can't-- breathe--

Garland sees Axler's panic and can't resist helping her.

GARLAND

(to Carson)

Hold my coat? And my watch? And
this tie is nice...

Garland wades into the mess and pulls Dodds off Axler.

GARLAND (CONT'D)

Okay, scrappy, that's enough.

GUY IN CROWD

Booooo!

ANOTHER GUY

It's not cool to stop a fight
between women, dude!

AXLER

Enough! I can't take anymore.
Dodds, my problem isn't with you.

(re: Garland)

It's with him. At least I thought
it was.

(to Garland)

All these years, I told myself you
were a monster, but you're not.
You're smart and charming and
somehow you got even better
looking, which is really unfair. I
said that thing about Vegas on
purpose to hurt you because I'm
petty and insecure and--

She buries her face in her hands and begins to CRY.

AXLER (CONT'D)

Weak.

(to Luderman, tearful)

You were right. The old, nice me is still in there. Deep down, I just want to be

(ugly crying)

L-ooooooooooooooved.

GUY IN CROWD

Uch, let's go.

The crowd disperses. Axler wobbles toward Luderman.

AXLER

You don't have to fire me. I quit.

GARLAND

Wait. You're being too hard on yourself.

AXLER

What do you mean?

GARLAND

You had a plan, and I messed with it. If I hadn't been there, the negotiation would have gone fine. You're amazing at what you do.

AXLER

You think so?

GARLAND

I do. And--

(looking for privacy)

Step into my office, will you?

He takes her hand and leads her a few steps away.

GARLAND (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. For more than just today.

AXLER

That means a lot.

She looks down at his hand, still holding hers, then up into his eyes. She leans in, and so does Garland. They are inches away from a kiss when:

AXLER (CONT'D)

I--

Her knees buckle in a very unsexy, "I have a concussion" kind of way. A surprised Garland catches her in his arms.

AXLER (CONT'D)

I might need to see a doctor.

GARLAND

I'll take you to the hospital.

TORRES

(rushing over)

Back off, she's my best friend.

AXLER

We're not friends.

TORRES

Shhh-shh, you don't know what you're saying.

Torres leads a wobbly Axler away by the arm. As they go:

AXLER

I might need to lean on you.

Torres BEAMS with delight, arm around Axler.

ANGLE ON: Sergeant Dodds approaches Ben.

BEN

Enough is enough, Dodds. I don't know what your problem is, but I will never fight you.

DODDS

What?

BEN

But I will listen compassionately, for as long as you need to talk, because you are obviously experiencing some kind of Post-Traumatic Stress or adjustment disorder.

DODDS

You think I actually wanted to fight you? God, you are clueless. And cute.

She SLAPS his butt and walks away.

DODDS (CONT'D)

Ask me out, dummy!

Ben stares in wonder, a chili-colored handprint on his butt.

INT. HOSPITAL - LATER

Axler waits in an exam room. Jamie the androgynous nurse enters, looking distractedly at a chart.

JAMIE

Miss, I'm flattered you asked for me personally, but I promise all the nurses here are equally good.

AXLER

Yeah, but you're the one the union listens to.

(holds out hand to shake)

Dorothy Axler, we met earlier today. Can we talk business?

INT. LUDERMAN'S OFFICE - LATER

Luderman is there. A cleaned-up Axler enters with a box.

AXLER

Well, I'm ready.

LUDERMAN

Listen, Axler, you bit it hard today, but you don't have to quit.

AXLER

I know. I meant, I'm ready to put my stuff in my new office.

LUDERMAN

What? You don't get a promotion - you just had a nervous breakdown.

AXLER

Did I? Or did I only seem to in order to defeat my enemy, using the one weapon he never expected?

LUDERMAN

You cried. Those were real tears.

AXLER

Caused by jalapeño juice.

EXT. CHILI COOK-OFF - FLASHBACK #1

AXLER (V.O.)

During the fight, Dodds threw me into a table full of condiments.

Dodds mashes Axler's face down near a bowl of jalapeños. Axler notices and grabs a handful.

EXT. CHILI COOK-OFF - FLASHBACK #2

AXLER (V.O.)
Which I squeezed into my eyes at
the moment I needed to cry.

Axler buries her face in her hands, then looks up, TEARS streaming down her cheeks.

INT. "CHURCH" - FLASHBACK #3

AXLER (V.O.)
Because Ben reminded me, a person
with a giant ego can be manipulated
by it.

Axler and Ben talk at the bar.

BEN
...I let him think he's doing some
good deed by rescuing me.

EXT. CHILI COOK-OFF - FLASHBACK #4

AXLER (V.O.)
Garland needed to feel like he was
powerful and I wasn't.

Chili-covered Axler stares up at Garland.

AXLER
I said that thing about Vegas on
purpose to hurt you--

AXLER (V.O.)
Not true. Honest mistake. I
really thought he was the guy in
that threesome.

INT. HOSPITAL EXAM ROOM - FLASHBACK #5

AXLER (V.O.)
All that left was to clear up the
mess at St. Jo's, which I did,
using my injuries to get access to
the key decision-makers.

Chili-covered Axler talks to Jamie and other nurses.

INT. LUDERMAN'S OFFICE - BACK TO PRESENT

As they were.

AXLER

Once they knew I wasn't out to get them, the union backed off the lawsuit.

LUDERMAN

So when you were winding me up about the cook-off, you knew you were going to get into a fight?

AXLER

I knew someone was. Dodds being a woman made me improvise, but I enjoyed getting my aggression out.

LUDERMAN

That is some sociopath-level stuff.
(then, big smile)
I'm so proud. You just earned your promotion. Congrats. I knew hiring your ex-boyfriend would bring out your killer instinct.

AXLER

You knew he was my ex when you hired him?

LUDERMAN

Of course. You're good, but I'm better.

AXLER

That's messed up. What if you'd been wrong about me?

LUDERMAN

Then the stress of this job really could kill you, and that's not okay with me.

AXLER

It's not? Why not?

LUDERMAN

(with difficulty)
Because I... care about you.

Axler smiles. She's never heard anything like this from him.

LUDERMAN (CONT'D)

I want you to live a long life and die naturally, murdered by someone you cut off in traffic.

They exit to the Bullpen and we RESET TO:

INT. BULLPEN - CONTINUOUS

Carson and Torres see Axler and begin exchanging money.

TORRES

Told you she wasn't leaving. Pay up.

CARSON

(handing over money)
Fine.

BEN

For the record, gambling at the office is illegal and dehumanizes--

CARSON

Ben nags about the bet, that's twenty back to me.

Torres passes back some money as Garland approaches Axler.

GARLAND

Hey, doll, you hear the exciting news? I'm full-time now.

AXLER

What?

LUDERMAN

You guys make the perfect team. Like a yin-yang, or a black-and-white cookie, or a couple of hookers who hate each other but make more cash together.

GARLAND

Normally, I don't like to be tied down, but you guys are my kind of people.

TORRES

(sotto, to Carson)
Smokescreen. He's staying for her.

CARSON
(sotto, to Torres)
Full body chills.

GARLAND
Plus, Luderman gave me that great
office.

He gestures to the empty office that should be Axler's.

AXLER
A thousand kinds of "no."

GARLAND
I know it's hard, but in time, you
will get over me.
(whispers)
We can still sleep together, as
long as you understand it's no
strings attached.

AXLER
(considers)
Well, that night in Tokyo was the
best night of my life.

GARLAND
Wait, we didn't--

AXLER
No, you're right, that was someone
else.

Axler crosses away, and Garland continues to his office.
Torres, Carson and Luderman exchange a look.

LUDERMAN
Five to one, they do it in the
office, inside a month. Side bet
on location.

CARSON
Break room.

TORRES
In the butt.

As Torres, Carson and Luderman exchange money...

FADE OUT.

END OF SHOW