TYPE A

Based on the book

"Assholes: A Theory" by Aaron James

Written by

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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-
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 till 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.
LUEDERMAN
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?

LUEDERMAN
It says, “Secretly Weak.”

Axler reacts with a shocked SQUEAK.

LUEDERMAN (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.

LUEDERMAN
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.

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

(MORE)
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.”

LUEDERMAN
(imitating Ben)
“For the record, buying drugs in Mexico is not a business expense.”

BEN
It’s called having ethics.

CARSON/TORRES/AXLER/LUEDERMAN
Boooo! / Lame. / Boring. / Pass.

LUEDERMAN
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.

LUEDERMAN
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.

LUEDERMAN
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 TWO

INT. 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.

LUEDERMAN
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.

LUEDERMAN
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.”

LUEDERMAN
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
INT. BULLPEN - SAME

Carson and Torres watch the argument from a safe distance.

C\n
I don’t get it. I thought he agreed to follow her lead.

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

C\n
Why? He cheated on her.

T\n
I’m pretty sure he sabotaged the relationship because he knew she was “the one” and he wasn’t ready.

C\n
(dramatic gasp)
Ohhhhhhhhh.

T\n
I know.

INT. LUDERMAN’S OFFICE - SAME

Luderman changes the sign to “Zero Days without a Lawsuit.”

A\n
Send me back without him.

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

A\n
Him? He’s the problem. I’m the solution.

L\n
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 THREE

INT. "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!

LU德MAN
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.”

LU德MAN
(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?

LU德MAN
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?

LU德MAN
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.

LUERMAN
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)
Aaaaaaaaaaaaah!

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 toCRY.
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-oooooooooooved.

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.

LUDEMAN
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.

LUDEMAN
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?

LUDEMAN
Of course. You’re good, but I’m better.

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

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

AXLER
It’s not? Why not?

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

Axler smiles. She’s never heard anything like this from him.
LUEDERMAN (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?

LUEDERMAN
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
TORRES
Break room. In the butt.

As Torres, Carson and Luderman exchange money...

FADE OUT.

END OF SHOW