

AN AIR OF EFFLUENCE

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FADE IN

INT. BEAUMONT SEWAGE TREATMENT FACILITY - BREAK ROOM - NIGHT

EARL (60s), smarter than your average bear, and just about the size of one, sits and nibbles at a loaf of banana bread in the center of the table.

ROY (50s), Earl's coworker and best friend, and dumber than a load of bricks, bursts in.

ROY

What the fuck, Earl?! You just said "Code Blue" and hung up. I don't hear the alarms. They offline?

EARL

Nope.

ROY

The aeration tanks? Jesus, if they overflow--

EARL

All levels normal, Roy.

ROY

Then there better be a stripper. Two strippers. And a mountain of blow...

Roy looks down. On the floor behind Earl lies CHARLIE (40s), with sludge pouring from his mouth, partially caked now.

ROY

Oh. My. Jesus. Is he--

EARL

...gonna make our lives a living nightmare anymore? That answer would be no.

ROY

Earl! What the hell?

Roy starts pacing.

EARL

I've been taking shit from this man, and this town, for decades. Literally. How long have we been saying we want to see him dead?

ROY

That was just talk! I said I wished a pox on his entire family. I didn't put an ad out on Craigslist for a gypsy. What happened?

EARL

Fate. He took me out for a drink after work last night.

ROY

Charlie. Took you.

EARL

That's what I thought. He went on and on about county cutbacks, full automation--

ROY

He was gonna fire you?

EARL

Fire us. So I bought some shots. And kept buying.

Earl rises and opens a cabinet. He grabs a tub labeled Rice Cakes and pulls out a fifth of Jack. And two shot glasses.

ROY

You can drink a tankful.

Earl pours. Sits again.

EARL

And Charlie's a lightweight. I brought him back here. Figured if they found him hammered in the break room...

ROY

...he'd get fired. Genius!

EARL

That's how we roll in Mississippi.

ROY

We work with some nasty stuff but what the hell is coming out of his mouth?

EARL

Opportunity.

Roy slumps into a chair across from his friend. Dumbfounded.

EARL

He passed out. You know what they tell you when someone has too much to drink?

ROY

Turn 'em on their side so they don't ass...fix....

EARL

Asphyxiate. Read a book, Gomer.

ROY

He's face up.

Earl knocks twice on the table and grins.

ROY

Opportunity.

Earl raises a shot glass.

EARL

With a little help from a friend.

Roy grabs his glass but does not clink. They toss them back.

Roy reaches for the bread. Earl slaps his hand away.

EARL

Molly made this for me.

ROY

What are you gonna do?

EARL

What are we gonna do?

Roy folds his hands and lays his head on the table. Like they used to at Beaumont Elementary after recess.

ROY

Dump him in the Digestion Tank?

EARL

I can bench a Chevy block but I can't lift a four-ton lid. Can you?

ROY

No...

EARL

You know it's full of microbes, not hydrochloric acid.

Roy looks up, his head tilted like a labrador retriever.

EARL

You have no idea how things work here, do you? Microbes may eat shit all day but they still wouldn't touch Charlie. It would offend their palate.

Earl chuckles. Roy sits up.

ROY

Brother, this is serious.

EARL

(nods)

Mmm. Dead serious. I know.

ROY

What about Molly?

EARL

I don't know. Maybe you could look after her.

ROY

I guess... How are you so calm?

EARL

I'm not panicking because I'm not covering this up. I'm not gonna hide the body. I'm not gonna deny a thing. When I fuck up, I admit it. You know what I mean, Roy?

ROY

Yeah. No. Not exactly.

EARL

When a man wrongs another man, he's not a "man" unless he owns it. I hated Charlie. I let him die.

Roy stares off, absolutely floored by the events that have transpired. He grabs a slice of bread and eats.

Roy looks at his watch. Earl watches every chew.

ROY

My shift starts in an hour! What are we going to do?

EARL

Nothing.

ROY  
(really confused)  
Everyone's gonna start showing up.

EARL  
Yep.

Sweat beads on Roy's forehead. He tugs at his collar.

ROY  
I can't breathe.

EARL  
I believe it's called asphyxiation.

Earl grabs a big chunk of banana bread and stuffs it in his own mouth.

EARL  
(spits through the crumbs)  
Here's some advice, buddy. If  
you're gonna fuck another man's  
wife, be better at it than him.

Roy's eyes widen in total realization. His chest slows to a crawl, then goes still. Roy is dead. Apparently deader than Charlie, who begins to stir.

Earl glides a hand over Roy's face, shutting his eyes, then moves to Charlie.

Earl pops out his handkerchief and wipes Charlie's mouth clean. He grabs his boss and throws him over his shoulder.

CHARLIE  
(slurs)  
That was some night...

EARL  
I told you to slow down, Charlie.  
We better get you home.

Charlie sees Roy slumped over the break table.

CHARLIE  
Fuckin' Roy. Sleeping on the job  
again.

Earl carries Charlie out of the room. A few minutes pass.

Earl runs back in. He slides a post-it note under the foil of the banana bread. It reads: CONTAINS NUTS.

FADE OUT