

***Push Up 1-3***  
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American English translation by Melanie Dreyer  
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**Characters:**

Heinrich

Angelica

Sabine

Robert

Patricia

Hans

Frank

Maria

**A.**

HEINRICH I work for a pretty big corporation. I sit downstairs, behind a glass window in the lobby, and everyone who works in the building walks by me. Our building is big, really big, sixteen stories, and next to me are monitors displaying images from the security cameras. We work in the central office in shifts, usually in pairs. During the night shift, we walk the building. During our nightly rounds, we check every room, we unlock and re-lock every single room. It takes time. The building is extensive, we have everything you could imagine: executive suites, conference rooms that always smell of cigarette smoke at night, an area for each department and sub-department, management offices, development offices, the artists' department, laboratories, and a giant computer room in the basement that stores data from all over the world: data from our branches in the US, South Africa, India.

Next to the security monitors, I have my own little television set. Of course, that's not officially allowed, but no one says anything. Not even Kramer, who's with the woman who more or less owns the company. Kramer basically runs the place. I don't really know what she does. But when she comes by, I shut the TV off.

Sometimes I even see the commercial for our firm on television— in this ad a man carries a woman over a huge puddle. Then there's a slogan and our logo.

*Pause.*

Seems odd to me. Like it's been stolen from something. In any case, the ad's been running for over a year now and it's time for a new one: maybe something completely different – somewhat more to do with me – or our products, I mean, I just don't get the connection.

We usually work two to a shift. I'm often with Maria. Maria sees the ad completely differently. She likes it, but I'd rather have something with more action. I like action films. Or thrillers.

Maria and I talk about a lot of the things that we see on TV during our shift. About lovers in a film, for example. I mean, in real life it's not at all like that. People don't just get together: it rarely happens that two people see each other and then bang they're in love, that never happens. Or like in our ad, a man in a park carries a woman over a huge puddle. When does that happen. Right? Isn't that right, I ask Maria, I mean, look at us. I'm not going to carry you over a puddle. And she laughs.

**1.1.**

*An executive office. Angelica and Sabine sit across from one another.*

ANGELICA It's great that you're here.

*Short pause.*

I'm so glad. I was so curious how you – I'm so sorry that you had to wait ten minutes. This is really great.

SABINE You don't have to reassure me. I'm not nervous.

ANGELICA There's no reason to be nervous.

SABINE Sure there is. But I'm not.

ANGELICA No? I am a little.

SABINE You?

ANGELICA Yes, of course.

*Pause.*

SABINE You can save it.

ANGELICA What?

SABINE All the pleasantries. We don't need to make small talk here.

ANGELICA Is that what I'm doing?

SABINE We both know the conflict that's here in the room.

ANGELICA Perhaps we see things differently.

SABINE You say that you're glad that I'm here.

ANGELICA Yes—

SABINE You say that you're sorry that I had to wait outside in the lobby with your secretary. But that's not true. You're not sorry. To keep someone waiting longer than five minutes is clearly an act of passive aggression. And you know that.

*Pause.*

ANGELICA Okay. I hope my secretary made it clear why you had to wait, I had to—

SABINE      You're trying to fabricate a specific conversational climate here. You want to manufacture an atmosphere of friendliness, collegiality, and sensitivity that's totally inappropriate. You say you're nervous, although that probably isn't the case at all. You just say that to defuse the situation.  
But the situation doesn't need to be defused. It doesn't matter how you "see things." We obviously have conflicting interests here.

ANGELICA    Wait a minute. Hold it.

SABINE      No—

ANGELICA    Yes—

SABINE      It's absolutely—

ANGELICA    Stop.

SABINE      The course of this entire conversation up to now—

ANGELICA    Stop.

SABINE *stands up, if she's still sitting*      No—

ANGELICA    Sabine!  
*Short pause.*  
Can we begin to talk now?  
*Short pause.*

SABINE      If you like. Go ahead.

## 1.2.

ANGELICA Throwing coffee in her face was a mistake. Loss of control. But she deserved it. That piece of shit really deserved it. She sat there and tried to distinguish herself with impertinence. Tried to simply outplay me. Wanted to show her strength. Self-confidence. A little forced, but not bad at all. In her stupid blue suit. She probably has four just like it in her closet. No taste, just pretension. And success. Sat there and didn't touch her coffee, all upset that she had to wait ten minutes.

Basically, I already knew when she came through the door. I just wanted to see her again. She sat across from me and astonished me with her audacity. Her unbelievable audacity to even ask for this appointment.

How does she do that. How did she win him over – the way she looks. With her pathetic aura of know-how and ambition.

## 1.3.

ANGELICA You're twenty eight. That makes you the youngest department head in the entire company.

SABINE I know.

ANGELICA You have my complete confidence. Even though you've only been working for us for a year and a half. With no oversight from above.

SABINE That's not true.

ANGELICA No?

SABINE No. Kramer regularly reconciles the productivity of my department against the standards, expectations, and requirements of the board. That results automatically in constant quality control.

ANGELICA Yes. Right. The standards and requirements of the board of directors. How could I forget that. He does that. Kramer. Are you happy with this arrangement? It doesn't sound like it.

SABINE Of course.

ANGELICA Are you happy with Kramer?

SABINE Yes. I—

ANGELICA You can be completely open. The fact that Kramer and I are a couple shouldn't inhibit you in any way.

SABINE My working relationship with Kramer is absolutely trouble-free.

ANGELICA Trouble-free. Good.

SABINE I'd like to talk now about your rejection—

ANGELICA Wait, wait. I just want to be sure that we're coming from the same place. That there are no misunderstandings. We don't know one another at all.

SABINE I highly doubt that there's a -- *stops herself*. Alright.

ANGELICA You got your degree in the U.S. and following that worked for two companies in Japan, Korea and Taiwan. Now you work for us supervising your own team of twenty people, some of whom are twice your age, and you produce the best numbers. Correct me if I say something that isn't true.

SABINE No, no.

ANGELICA You're a top employee. Kramer says you're efficient, reliable and innovative. Truly impressive. Truly.

SABINE Yes. And that's why I don't understand why you—

ANGELICA Yes, yes.

SABINE What?

ANGELICA Yes, I know – of course. Not so fast. Coffee?

SABINE No, thanks.

ANGELICA You don't want any coffee?

SABINE No, thanks –

ANGELICA Are you sure?

SABINE No, thanks.

*Nevertheless, Angelica pours two cups. Sabine doesn't touch hers.*  
Please –  
*Pause.*

ANGELICA You think I simply do whatever I like here.

SABINE And that's true.

ANGELICA No. Forget that.

SABINE I wouldn't know how.

ANGELICA Stop.

SABINE No—

ANGELICA Forget about the power structure of the corporate system. Here we're flexible and unorthodox. Like you. Performance is what counts. Or is that not your sense of things?

*Short pause.*

That wouldn't be very fair.

SABINE Why are you telling me this? How can you talk about the power structure of the corporate system and claim that it no longer exists? Of course it exists. When you offer me a cup of coffee. When you allege to have confidence in me, which is clearly not the case. I work for you. You determine what I do. So – let's not deceive ourselves.

ANGELICA Exactly.

SABINE What?

ANGELICA I said: exactly. Let's not deceive ourselves. Good.

#### **1.4.**

SABINE I haven't had sex for two years. And I'm twenty-eight. I get up every morning at six. I take a cold shower and then eat breakfast. Usually fruit. In my bathrobe. With the television on. That's what I do every morning except Sunday. Every morning I watch television from 6:30 to 7:00. The programming isn't very good at that hour, but I sit in front of it and think about nothing.

Then I get dressed. I never put on what I wore the day before.

Never. Although many of my things looks alike. I have a lot of things. Clothes. I chose my apartment with that in mind. Closet space. There are two clothes closets in my current apartment.

I have difficulty deciding what I should wear. It's a problem. I often change my entire outfit several times before I decide what I should wear. Until I finally make up my mind. It's not easy. It's agony.

When I'm finally dressed, I style my hair and put on my makeup. My haircut's ok, there's not much I can do with my hair. Make-up is difficult, especially in winter when it's dark outside. Not too much.

Only expensive brands. From Japan, for example.

*Short pause.*

When I'm done with my face, I take the elevator down to the garage. Now it's 8 o'clock. Halfway there I stop and turn around. I ride back up. Because I feel awful. I can't stand it. I can't stand it. I unlock the two safety locks on my apartment door and go to change my clothes. I no longer like what I have on. I usually wear blue. I don't really like blue, except for maybe jeans or a sweater, but I usually wear blue regardless. I grew into it, somehow, only wearing blue.

Only buying blue when it came down to it. Everything that I buy is blue. So – color-wise, everything goes with everything else.

Nevertheless, halfway down I turn around and then I change my clothes again. I change everything. My pantyhose, my panties, my bra. I feel ugly. I have to hurry, the clock is ticking, and I stand in front of the mirror in the hallway and think I look ugly.

Finally, it's a little after eight thirty, it's high time, I really have to go. I take the elevator to the garage again. I get into the car. I can't turn around again. It would be absolutely impossible to turn around again. Look in the rearview mirror. My makeup is repulsive. I don't like my lipstick. I'm at least able to put on new lipstick during a traffic jam on the highway. I can do my eyes later at the office. Just don't want to look cheap.

I arrive at work and I have the feeling that no one sees me. That's good. That's terrible.

At nine fifteen, I meet with my team. None of the women at the table wear blue. Except for jeans or a sweater maybe, but we rarely see that here. In our meetings. Many of them are ordinary. Really ordinary. Most of them. No one wears blue.

*Short pause.*

I look into the faces around the table and ask myself who among them got laid last night, and how often. Or this morning. While I took my cold shower. While I was watching television thinking about nothing. All of them, I think. Everyone except me.

## **1.5.**

ANGELICA You've made quite a career here. And, of course, you'd like to continue pushing up. I understand perfectly.

*Short pause.*

That's how I was. You're like me. Right?

SABINE Perhaps.

ANGELICA Sure you are.

SABINE If you think so.

ANGELICA We could be friends. No. We couldn't.

SABINE Aha.

ANGELICA You could act like it at best. Because you'd have that power structure in your head the whole time, and how you want to reach the top.

SABINE This isn't about whether or not we could be friends. This is about nothing more than my qualifications, which you refuse to recognize. This conversation is absurd.

ANGELICA Qualifications. Yes.

*Short pause.*

Odd that we haven't run into one another more often in passing. Have you ever been up here on the sixteenth floor?

SABINE A few times.

ANGELICA That's it?

*Short pause.*

In Kramer's office, I would guess.

SABINE Precisely.

ANGELICA Do you like it up here?

SABINE Sure. Are you making small talk again?

ANGELICA Precisely.

*Pause.*

You applied for Delhi.

SABINE And you've rejected my application.

ANGELICA Yes.

SABINE For no reason.

ANGELICA For no written reason.

SABINE For no reason. With no explanation. Conversation. Or phone call. Nothing. That's why I asked for this appointment.

ANGELICA Of course you did. You are, after all, the one who wants something.

SABINE Which means—

ANGELICA I knew you'd come.

SABINE But you haven't given me any answers.

ANGELICA Yes, in a minute. First, I wanted to get better acquainted with you.

*Short pause.*

Our center in Delhi is the heart of our development department.

SABINE I've provided some important initiatives for the development department. Decisive initiatives. You shouldn't do me any favors. You should put me where I can be most useful to the company. In Delhi.

ANGELICA I But I wouldn't dream of sending you to Delhi.

SABINE Why not?

ANGELICA This isn't about being useful to the firm. No one expects that. This is about personal advancement, Sabine. That's understandable.

*Short pause.*

What I don't like are your methods.

SABINE My methods are extremely efficient, as you yourself said. The advantages for the company are clear.

ANGELICA If I give you this job, it will mean I'm promoting you, short or long term, to the top of the company, to the executive level, because with the know-how that you could gather in Delhi, you'd become as good as irreplaceable to us.

SABINE That would be true for anyone who got this job. That doesn't have anything to do with me personally. The way I see it, there are only two possible factors for your not trusting me: first my age, and second my gender. Didn't you just say that the internal power structure no longer exists?

ANGELICA Yes, yes, sure.

*Short pause.*

But what if your own employees use this power structure?

SABINE I don't understand what you mean.

ANGELICA I mean exactly what I said: But what if your own employees use this power structure?

SABINE Whom do you mean?

ANGELICA You.