

The Machine

by

Peter B. Sonenstein

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Peter B. Sonenstein  
212 Dean Street  
Apt. #1  
Brooklyn, NY 11217  
(718) 596-3704

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Cast of Characters

0.....Man, 50-70.

1.....Man, 15-35.

Setting: The systems department.

SCENE 1

Setting: the systems department.

(A small, industrial-looking control room. The room is dominated by a large computer console. The console has many lights and buttons, but there is one large, red light and one large, red button which stand out from the rest. Also in the room is an enormous bookcase which is filled, top to bottom, with red three-ring binders. 0 sits at the console, looking intently at the large, red button. 1 ENTERS.)

1  
Hello? Hello?

(0 gestures that 1 should wait. 1 waits.)

1  
I-

(0 gestures again. Pause. THE LARGE, RED LIGHT GOES ON and there is a FRIGHTFUL HONKING NOISE. 0 presses the LARGE, RED BUTTON. The LIGHT goes off, the HONKING stops.)

0  
There we go. Much better. Hello.

1  
It's loud.

0  
What? Oh, yes. You get used to it.

1  
I see.

0  
So... First day?

1  
Yes.

0  
Not to worry. You'll get in the swing very quickly.

1  
I hope so.

0  
Yes, I'm sure you will. I'll show you the ropes.

1  
Thank you.

0  
Get you started.

1  
Great.

0  
There's a lot to learn, obviously.

1  
Obviously, yes.

0  
I won't go too fast, I hope. If I go too fast, just let me know.

1  
Ok.

0  
Have you ever operated one of these before?

1  
One of these?

0  
Yes.

1  
Well, it depends... on what one of these is.

0  
Oh. They didn't tell you?

1  
No the ad just said "operator."

0  
What ad?

1  
The ad in the paper. I answered an ad. It just said "operator."

0  
Yes, well, not to worry. I's quite simple, really. You have operated things before I take it? I mean, you answered an ad for an operator, so you must have some experience operating things.

1  
Like what?

0  
Like anything.

1  
Like machines?

0  
Yes, machines are good. Any kind of machine, really.

1  
Like a... toaster?

0  
Sure, a toaster. Yes, a toaster, a light switch, a linear particle accelerator.

1  
Is that what this is?

0  
What? A toaster?

1  
No, the last one. The long one.

0  
A particle- Oh, heavens no. No, no. I was just offering examples of things one might operate. You know, a toaster, a light switch, a linear particle accelerator-

1  
All but the last one.

0  
The toaster and the light switch?

1  
Yes.

0  
Excellent.

1  
Really?

0  
Yes, yes. You'll do fine. In fact, you're probably over-qualified.

1  
I don't know about that.

0  
Shall we get started?

1  
I'd like that.

0  
Would you like to get a drink or something before we begin?

1  
No, I think I'm OK.

0  
Use the facilities?

1  
No, I'm ready.

0  
I can tell already that you are a hard worker.

1  
I try my best.

0  
All right. Well, first we'll get our bearings-

1  
(Digging around in pockets.)  
Oops!

0  
What is it?

1  
(Producing a pencil and small pad of paper.)  
Notes.

0  
Very, very good. An excellent way to start. Ready?

1  
(Licks pencil tip.)  
Ready.

0  
OK. Where were we? Ah yes, bearings. Now, all this here is the machine, you see?

1  
(Taking notes.)  
The machine.

0  
Yes. Buttons, lights, more lights over here. There are a few dials and knobs under this panel here.

1  
Dials, knobs.

0

And this is where you sit when you are operating the machine. We call it the console operator's station.

1

Operator's station.

0

Right. And over here is where I sit to supervise you. We call it the shift supervisor's station.

1

Supervisor's station.

0

So when you're operating the machine, you will sit at the console operator's station. And if, for some reason, you cannot operate the machine-

1

Cannot?

0

Well, if you are incapacitated in some way. Or if you want to go get a drink, let's say. Or need to use the facilities.

1

Ah.

0

In such a circumstance, I would move from the shift supervisor's station to the console operator's station and operate the machine in your absence. Then when you return, you would resume your post-

1

At the console operator's station?

0

Very good. And then I would move back to...

1

The shift supervisor's station.

0

Exactly. And we would continue on as before.

1

I see.

0

Do you think you've got it?

1

I think so.

0  
Excellent. I will be here with you most shifts,  
except on Wednesdays when I have my weekly shift  
supervisors advisory meeting. That only lasts an  
hour. But if you need assistance, you can pick up  
the red phone and someone will help you.

1  
Red phone for help.

0  
Right. Would you like to give it a try?

1  
Right now?

0  
No time like the present.

1  
All right. I sit here and you sit there?

0  
Except for an hour on Wednesdays.

1  
Right. OK.

(1 sits at the console operator's  
station. 0 sits at the shift  
supervisor's station.)

0  
Excellent. Very good.

1  
Really?

0  
You're a natural.

1  
What do I do now?

0  
You're doing fine.

1  
Yes, but... Do I do anything else?

0  
No, you're doing very well.

1  
Ah.



Very good. 0

Thank you. 1

(THE LARGE, RED LIGHT GOES ON and there is a FRIGHTFUL HONKING NOISE.)

Oh! I'll get that. 0

(0 presses the LARGE, RED BUTTON. LIGHT goes out, HONKING STOPS.)

There we go. Not to worry. 0

So when the light goes on and the horn goes off, I push the button? 1

How did you know that? 0

I was just watching- 1

You've done this before? 0

No but- 1

Then how do you know? 0

No, I- You- I saw you. The sound and the light, and then... 1

You saw? 0

Yes. 1

You are very good. 0

Yes? 1

I wasn't even going to get to that until next week. Very, very good. 0

1  
Thank you.

0  
Well, I can see you are right on top of things. So  
when the light goes on and the horn sounds...

1  
I push the button?

0  
You're going to do very well here.

1  
I hope so.

0  
Well, well, well. Would you like to try a little  
solo flight maybe?

1  
Sure.

0  
Only if you feel ready, of course.

1  
I think I'm ready.

0  
You're sure?

1  
Yes.

0  
All right. But I'll be right over here if you need  
me.

1  
Ok.

(They sit and wait for the light and  
the horn.)

0  
You're doing very well.

1  
Thank you.

0  
Exceptional for a first day.

(They wait some more.)

1  
May I ask-

0  
Certainly, certainly. Ask whatever you like.

1  
Ok-

0  
No such thing as a stupid question.

1  
Right. Well, I was wondering-

0  
Would you like me to cover?

1  
What?

0  
Would you like me to sit in for you? While you ask?

1  
Why?

0  
In case it goes off?

1  
Does it happen that much?

0  
That's why we're here.

1  
Oh. No, I think I can manage.

0  
You're sure?

1  
Yes.

0  
Because it could go off at any moment.

1  
Yes, but-

0  
And then you would have to-

1  
Push the button, yes, I know.

Very good. 0

Thank you. So I was wondering- 1

Yes? 0

What does it do? 1

What does what do? 0

The machine. What is it that the machine... does? 1

What does the machine do? 0

Yes. 1

Well, when then light comes on and the horn blows,  
we push the button... and they both turn off. 0

Yes, I got that part. 1

Which is very good for the first day, did I mention? 0

Yes, you have. But when the light goes on- 1

Exceptional. 0

Thank you, but when the light goes on- 1

Sorry? 0

When the light goes on- 1

You press the button. 0

Yes but when it goes on- 1

You press the- 0

1  
Yes but-

0  
You press-

1  
But what does it mean?

0  
What does it mean?

1  
Yes.

0  
I don't think I understand.

1  
What does it mean when the light goes on?

0  
What does it mean?

1  
Yes.

0  
It means it's time to press the button.

1  
We're not communicating.

0  
I'll say. I thought you understood that part.

1  
Let's try again.

0  
I'd never have let you go solo if I thought you didn't understand-

1  
Let me ask you this: What is it that makes the light go on and the horn blow?

0  
Oh.

1  
Yes.

0  
What makes the light go on?

1  
Yes.

0  
And the horn blow?

1  
Yes.

0  
Why do you ask?

1  
Why?

0  
A little ambitious, aren't we?

1  
I like to know what I'm doing.

0  
Must be nice, always knowing what you're doing.

1  
I didn't say that.

0  
You can't know everything all the time. It's a luxury nowadays.

1  
I don't always know. I just thought I'd ask.

0  
Well, it's not that important. Trust me.

1  
I was just thinking-

0  
Oh I wouldn't do that. Nothing good ever came from thinking.

1  
But what if there was some problem?

0  
A problem?

1  
What if there was a problem with the machine. Wouldn't knowing how it works help us to fix it?

0  
 Listen, I have been here a long time. Twenty three years. And I spent all of them in that chair right there. And I can tell you this: that in all that time, there has never been any problem with the machine that pressing the button didn't fix.

1  
 I see.

0  
 Good.

(They sit and wait.)

1  
 (Looking at the bookshelf.)  
 What are those?

0  
 We are full of questions, aren't we?

1  
 Sorry. I like to learn.

0  
 Of course you do. They are documentation.

1  
 Of what?

0  
 Of nothing. Just documentation.

1  
 I see. Documentation for the machine?

0  
 It has something to do with the machine. But it's for the engineers. Not for us.

1  
 Oh. So you haven't read any of them?

0  
 They are not for us.

1  
 I see. Do you think, maybe on a break, I could-

0  
 They are not for us.

1  
 I know, but-

0  
 They are all in order. If I let you do that, and then they got out of order, when the engineers needed them they wouldn't be able to find the right one-

1  
 I could be careful-

0  
 You should be manning the button-

1  
 I am manning the button, I just want to know if I could-

0  
 You need to concentrate-

1  
 All I want to know is-

0  
 You're not watching-

1  
 I just want to know-

(THE LARGE, RED LIGHT GOES ON and there is a FRIGHTFUL HONKING NOISE. 1 is startled. 0 reaches over and presses the large, red button. The light goes off, the honking stops.)

1  
 Sorry.

0  
 Don't worry. First day. It takes a certain amount of experience. Let's get back to work, shall we?



## SCENE 2

Setting: the systems department.

(The same control room, Wednesday afternoon. 1 sits at the console operator's station. 1 is reading one of the red binders. 1 pores over the pages, amazed at the facts they contain. The door opens and we hear 0 outside.)

0 (O.S.)

That was an excellent point you made about productivity. I'm sure we'll get very positive feedback from upstairs. So long.

(1 quickly returns the binder to the bookshelf. 0 ENTERS with two sodas.)

0

I'm back. I brought you a-

1

Yes?

0

I brought you a cold drink.

1

Really? Thank you.

0

Yes. Why aren't you at your station?

1

I was just stretching my legs.

0

Did you call for back up?

1

No, I was just about to sit back down.

0

(Offering the drink.)

I see. Well, as long as you're up.

1

Thank you.

(1 goes to sit behind the console.)

0

No no no. You can't have any liquids at the console. No.

1  
Right, I forgot.

0  
(Hands 1 his soda.)  
Here, hold this. I'll cover for you.

1  
Ok.

(0 sits at the console operator's station.)

1  
So how was the meeting?

0  
(Inspecting the lights and dials.)  
Hmmm?

1  
The meeting?

0  
Very good, thank you. A lot accomplished.

1  
That's always good.

0  
Yes. It was a good meeting.

1  
Great.

0  
Everything OK here?

1  
Nothing I couldn't handle.

0  
Good.

1  
You know, I heard some engineers talking in the  
break room the other day-

0  
Did you?

1  
Yes, talking about the machine?

0  
Ah.

1

Did you know that the machine is tied into the city's civil systems computer?

0

Is it really?

1

Yeah. Controls it, actually. Power grid, water supply, sewage, traffic lights, subway-

0

Fascinating.

1

I think so. Did you know that it did all that?

0

I must have forgotten.

1

Makes you wonder what else it does, huh?

0

Not really.

1

You're not even a little curious?

0

No.

1

Because it makes me think it must be a pretty important machine, you know?

0

Well, obviously. All the lights and knobs...

1

Right, but I mean, it makes you wonder what else it does, right?

0

Not really.

1

Not even a little?

0

I'm sure it does what it is supposed to do.

1

Yeah, but what do you suppose that is?

0

It's not my job to know.

1  
Yeah, but you've been here so long.

0  
I'm sure it's not important.

1  
Not important? Control of the civil systems  
computer. That means it controls the water, the  
steam, the power grid-

0  
Yes, you mentioned that.

1  
And?

0  
You think it's a big deal?

1  
Pretty big, yes.

0  
Are you finished with your drink?

1  
Yes. Sorry.

(1 takes a seat behind the console and  
0 goes to the shift supervisor's  
station.)

0  
What I know or don't know about the machine is not  
relevant. I know my job. I know every aspect of my  
job and I do it well. Twenty three years.

1  
I didn't mean to imply-

0  
Twenty three. I have forgotten more about this  
machine than you will ever learn.

1  
I just thought it was neat.

0  
Nothing good has ever come from thinking. Let's  
get back to work.

1  
Of course.

0

People know what they need to know. If they don't know it, they learn it. Then they know. Just be happy you know all you know. Be happy you have a job.

1

I do my job.

0

When it suits you.

1

I do. Am I supposed to just sit here and stare at the console of this machine, this machine that controls Lord knows what, everything maybe, and not wonder what it does. I mean just sit here like a monkey, like a robot, like...

0

Like what?

1

Like I don't know. Like something. Forget it. Forget the whole thing, OK? I'm sorry I brought it up.

0

You don't think very much of me, do you?

1

I didn't say that.

0

You think I'm pretty stupid don't you?

1

I don't think that.

0

That's alright. Really. It's OK. You see, we don't have to like each other to do this job. It is not a pre-requisite. In fact, we can do this job any number of ways, friendly is only one of them.

1

That's not what I want.

0

We don't always get what we want.

1

Fine.

0

Just do your job.

(THE LARGE, RED LIGHT GOES ON and there is a FRIGHTFUL HONKING NOISE. 1 presses the LARGE, RED BUTTON. The LIGHT goes off, the HONKING stops.)

Happy? 1

(They sit quietly. 0 goes to the bookshelf and moves the volume that 1 was reading to it's proper place.)

Now I am. 0

(0 returns to his seat.)

I just got curious. 1

You're young. It will go away. 0

(They sit.)

You didn't overhear any engineers, did you? 0

No, I didn't. 1

You read all that. 0

Yes. 1

About the traffic lights, and the power grid. 0

Yes. 1

And the water... thing? 0

The water supply system. Yes. I'm sorry. 1

You read all that in those books. 0

Yes. 1

And you understood it? 0

1  
I'm pretty good with machines. I mean, with the  
manuals and such.

0  
I see. It controls them?

1  
Yes.

0  
For the whole city?

1  
And most of the surrounding suburbs. Listen, I'm  
sorry. I mean, I know you told me not to, but... I  
was just so curious, and... I need this job.

0  
I understand.

1  
It won't happen again.

0  
Ok.

(They sit.)

0  
So what else did it say?

## SCENE 3

Setting: the systems department.

(The red manuals are open all over the console. 0 is looking through one them.)

0

Incredible.

1

(Under the console)

Isn't it?

0

I had no idea. Twenty three years, and I had no idea.

1

(Appearing from underneath the console.)

That's not all. Did you see that it is also the central repository for all domestic intranets? You know, the household networks?

0

I don't understand.

1

Here, Volume 9. See? It controls people's coffee pots, vacuum cleaners, self-cleaning ovens.

0

Amazing. You read this?

1

Yes. I think this part over here controls parks, trees, grass, shrubs. This part controls ambient temperature, wind, rain.

0

Incredible.

1

(Ducking back under the console.)

As far as I can tell, it's tied into every conceivable aspect of the city. I mean, for all intents and purposes, it is the city.

0

I never knew.

1

It's pretty cool.



0  
What are you doing?

1  
I'm looking for something.

0  
For what?

1  
Something I read about.

0  
What?

1  
(Coming back up.)  
Well, here. Look at this. These volumes here are the setup guides. They detail the connections, the wiring, stuff like that. Now this larger set here is the operating guide, covering day to day operations and maintenance; what to push, when to push it.

0  
I see.

1  
And then these ones here are some sort of cross reference. Like an index. Understand?

0  
Ok.

1  
Now, in looking through all this stuff, there was one thing I couldn't find. Not once, in all these volumes did I find any mention of the light, the horn, or the big red button.

0  
That's three things.

1  
What?

0  
You said there was one thing you couldn't find.

1  
Yes, well-

0  
And that's three things.

1  
Yes, but they all seem to go together don't they?

0

Perhaps, but they are still three independent things.

1

Anyway, I couldn't find a single reference to any of them, so I thought, well, I'll look through the big index, right? And when I opened it, this fell out.

(1 holds up a little green book.)

0

What's that?

1

It's a manual. Another manual. For something called the biologic maintenance control unit.

0

The what?

1

The biologic maintenance control unit.

0

What's that?

1

I don't know. It looks like it was added to the system later. Some sort of option or upgrade or something.

0

What does it do?

1

I'm not sure, but it's a big deal. I mean look: energy transfer, cell modulation, life force... This is big stuff.

0

Where are the rest of the pages?

1

Some pages are missing, but the light, the horn, and the red button are all part of this.

0

How can you tell?

1

Well, there's a diagram, here. See, that's the light, that's the horn, and that's-

0

The button.

1  
Exactly. And they all connect in a box somewhere,  
but I can't seem to find it. What's this?

(1 ducks under the console again.)

0  
What are you doing?

1  
I'm just looking.

0  
Don't touch anything.

1  
I'm not. I'm just looking.

0  
Be careful. What are you touching it for?

1  
I'm trying to read-

0  
Don't touch it!

1  
It's dusty, I can't read-

0  
Don't!

(THE LARGE, RED LIGHT GOES ON and there  
is a FRIGHTFUL HONKING NOISE. 1  
scurries out from under the console,  
banging his head. 0 quickly slaps the  
LARGE, RED BUTTON. The LIGHT goes off,  
the HONKING stops.)

0  
I told you.

1  
That wasn't me.

0  
I told you this was a bad idea.

1  
I didn't do anything!

0  
You were touching it!

1  
I was just reading, I didn't touch anything.

0

I saw you, you were touching. Touch touch touch!

1

Calm down. I was just brushing, just a little, so I could read.

0

You're going to get us both in a lot of trouble.

1

We're not doing anything.

0

This is sensitive equipment. You can't just go around touching it anytime you want to.

1

(Leaning against the console.)

Listen. Listen to me. Are you listening?

0

Stop touching it!

1

OK, OK. All right? I'm not touching it. OK?

0

OK.

1

Ok?

0

All right.

1

Good. Now listen, why are we in here?

0

What do you mean?

1

Our jobs. What is it we do?

0

Well when the light goes on-

1

Yes?

0

And the horn blows-

1

Uh huh...

0  
We press the button.

1  
Exactly. And when does the light go on and the horn  
blow?

0  
What do you mean?

1  
When does it happen?

0  
Well, there's no way to know when- Oh.

1  
So conceivably, it was just going off, right?

0  
Oh.

1  
And I had nothing to do with it.

0  
I see.

1  
Ok?

0  
Still...

1  
I had nothing to do with it.

0  
I am not a young man.

1  
I understand.

0  
My heart is weak. And the pressure, you understand?

1  
I do.

0  
It is sensitive equipment.

1  
Do you want something to drink?

0  
No, I'm fine. Thank you.

1  
You're sure?

0  
Yes, I'm fine. It just makes me nervous.

1  
Of course.

0  
All this touching.

1  
You feel OK now?

0  
Yes. Much better.

1  
All right, let me ask you something.

0  
Yes?

1  
You've spent twenty three years in this room, right?

0  
Well, I go home at night.

1  
Right, but-

0  
And I don't work weekends.

1  
OK, but you've spent your entire career in this room, right?

0  
Yes.

1  
(Holding open the little green book.)  
Have you, in all that time, seen a box that looks like this?

0  
You never give up, do you?

1  
I have my reasons.

0  
I think you should put that thing away.

1  
Just look at it.

0  
(Putting the red books back on the shelves)  
We should put it all away. Enough for one day, hmm?

1  
Just one more thing. Look at it. Please. Please?

0  
If I look at it, will you stop all this foolishness?

1  
Just look.

(0 looks at the picture.)

0  
This is what you're looking for?

1  
You've seen it?

0  
This is silly.

1  
This, with the two knobs here, and the rounded top?  
You know where it is?

0  
Yes.

1  
Where?

0  
If I tell you-

1  
Tell me!

0  
If- If I tell you, will you sit down and go back to work?

1  
Yes yes yes.

0  
I'm serious. I'll only tell you if-

1  
I will sit right down and go right back to work.

0  
 Promise?

1  
 I promise.

0  
 All right then. You promise?

1  
 I promise.

0  
 OK. But you should know, the item pictured here is not some bio-whosie-whatsit. It is, in point of fact...

1  
 Yes?

0  
 This is our coat rack. See?

(0 points to a SMALL BOX on the wall by the door. The box has two knobs on the front, and from each knob hangs a coat.)

1  
 Oh my God.

0  
 There. Now, back to work.

1  
 All this time, it was right in front of my face.

0  
 Funny how things work out.

1  
 You don't understand.

0  
 Are you ready to do your job?

1  
 You don't understand. This, this is our job.

0  
 There is work to be done, now, you promised.

1  
 Aren't you even curious?

0  
 I've had enough curiosity for one day.



1

You've spent a whole lifetime answering to this thing.

0

It was not a lifetime.

1

At it's beck and call, every day.

0

I don't work on weekends.

1

And you're not the least bit curious about what it is?

0

I know what it is. It's a coat rack. Now are you ready to sit down and get back to work or...

1

Or what?

0

Well, I may have to put some less than pleasant comments in your Spring evaluation.

1

I'll take that chance.

(1 walks over to the box and takes the coats off of it.)

0

What are you doing?

1

I'm going to look inside.

0

Oh no you're not! Now you are going too far.

1

You'll thank me for this.

0

I most certainly will not! Please, you are making me very upset. Please, don't touch it. It's just a coat rack.

1

If it's just a coat rack, then what are you so afraid of?

0  
Well, you might break it, and then where would we  
put our coats?

1  
I'm opening it.

0  
Please stop. Please. Don't do that. Please.

1  
Almost...

0  
You're going to far! Stop! You'll-

1  
There!

(The top pops off the box revealing a  
whole mess of glowing and pulsing  
wires. In the middle of the wires is  
a large switch, like a circuit breaker,  
and a flashing red light.)

1  
Some coat rack, huh?

0  
You've gone too far this time.

1  
It's a breaker panel. Look.

0  
This insubordination.

1  
I just need to flip this-

0  
What are you doing?!

1  
(Straining against the switch.)  
The fuse is tripped. I just need to-

0  
Stop!

1  
Almost-

0  
Stop!

(1 flips the switch, the machine suddenly bleeps and bloops as alarms go off all over the system. The flashing red light inside the panel has turned off.)

1  
And back-

(1 flips the switch back and the alarms all turn off, there is a whirring and a slight pause before the light in the panel turns a steady green with a final contented chirp.)

1  
See?

0  
What have you done?

1  
(Putting the cover back on the panel.)  
The main fuse. I just tripped it back.

0  
What have you done?

1  
It's all over. No harm done. See I read in the manual-

0  
The manual? The manual is not complete! You said so yourself!

1  
It's pretty complete.

0  
Incomplete! Incomplete! You don't know!

1  
It's just the last few pages.

0  
You don't know! What if on the last few pages it says never ever ever under any circumstances real or imagined should you remove panel cover and flip switch back and forth. You don't know!

1  
It wouldn't say that at the back of the manual.

0  
I'll have your job for this.

1

It wouldn't say-

0

Your job! You have gone too far!

(0 picks up the RED PHONE.)

1

Listen, listen to me. Think about it-

0

Nothing good has ever come from thinking!

(Into phone.)

Security!

1

Wait- No- Listen- The fuse- The fuse was tripped.  
I haven't done anything wrong. Please- Don't- I  
need this job!

0

(Putting down the phone.)

You're in a lot of trouble mister.

## SCENE 4

Setting: the systems department.

(It is early in the morning two weeks later. 0 sits in the operator's chair, he looks like he has been up for days, tired and broken. 1 ENTERS, knocking on the door frame.)

0

(Looking up and seeing 1 standing in the doorway.)

Oh, it's you.

1

Hello. How have you been?

0

Fine. I'm just fine thank you. And you?

1

I'm well.

0

So good to hear it. So.

1

So.

0

So you're back are you?

1

Reinstated today.

0

I see. And they sent you here?

1

Just for the day. I'll start a new post tomorrow.

0

I see.

1

Shall I...

0

(Getting up and going back to his supervisor's seat.)

I suppose so.

1

Ok.

(They sit.)

0

Nice to be back?

1

Yes. Yes it is. Thank you.

(They sit.)

0

Fun, isn't it? Nice, quiet, peaceful. Yes. We can sit here all day. It will be fun.

1

Like the old days.

0

Almost.

1

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to-

0

Excuse me?

1

I just wanted you to know that, you were right. I was in over my head, I let my ambition cloud my judgement. I was wrong. You were right. And I am sorry.

0

Apology accepted.

1

Thank you.

0

Think nothing of it.

(They sit.)

1

It's quiet, huh?

0

Yes. Funny you should mention it, the quiet.

1

Why's that?

0

No reason.

1

Oh.

0  
Just funny. Ha ha ha. You know, quiet is a strange thing.

1  
I guess so.

0  
I mean, there are lots of kinds of quiet. There's a tense kind of quiet. A quiet of anticipation. Quiet filled with anxiety, with danger, possibility, purpose.

1  
Well, sure but-

0  
And then there's the calm quiet. The prolonged, empty quiet. Relaxed, without end. Miles and miles of quiet. Nothing. Just silence. Death. Would you like something to drink?

1  
Would you? I'll go get you a soda.

0  
Oh, you don't have to.

1  
Well, after all, you're the supervisor. Only you can cover the console operator's station while I go.

0  
Ah the console...

1  
I've learned my lesson. I understand the rules now.

0  
Oh, that's funny too, yes.

1  
No, really. I am OK now. I understand.

0  
You don't understand anything.

1  
Look, I said I was sorry. I'll go-

0  
Go. Go if you want. You go, I go, it doesn't matter, does it? It's not like it's going to do anything. It's not like it's going to make any noise. Oh yes. It hasn't made a noise in weeks. Not a peep.

1  
No horn?

0  
No horn. No light. Silence. Do you understand?

1  
Do the engineers know?

0  
Know? They're thrilled. You've really set their minds at ease.

1  
Me?

0  
Yes. You're somewhat of a hero around here. They're saying you fixed it.

1  
Fixed?

0  
Yes. "He fixed it." That's what they're saying.

1  
But they suspended me-

0  
Suspended, but not fired.

1  
I don't understand.

0  
It takes a big man to admit that. Insubordination. You were insubordinate. To me.

1  
Oh. I'm sorry-

0  
Not to worry. It's not a big deal. They have big plans for you. A smart guy like you. You're going to go far. I mean, I should have known, the toaster and the light switch?

1  
I thought they were mad at me. Angry.

0  
The suspension was just a slap on the wrist. They were trying to appease an old dog who got bit. But, well... Congratulations, you fixed it.



1  
Are you OK?

0  
Me? Sure. Well, I'm a little tired, you see. I've been here a while.

1  
Oh?

0  
Yes. Day and night for two weeks, actually. Two. No relief. Just me and the machine. Do you know why? I've been waiting. Waiting for something to happen. Funny, huh? Ha ha ha. I mean, it's fixed, right? But I have spent twenty three years in this room, waiting for something to happen, and the machine has never let me down. Never. Until now. Until you.

1  
Me?

0  
You. It's so quiet.

1  
It's not my fault-

0  
Oh but it is, you see. It is. It's all your fault. You came in here with your toaster and your light switch and your thinking and now all I wait for is... nothing. Dead. It's dead. And you broke it, you killed it.

1  
I didn't break it! I fixed it! It's not my fault you sat here forever servicing a broken machine!

0  
It was not broken!

1  
It was!

0  
Not to me! To me it was alive! It was unpredictable! It was my life. And you killed it. Why would you do that?

1  
That's why we're here, that's our job! We fix things.

0  
They fired me.

1

What? Why?

0

It's fixed! They don't need me to watch their fixed quiet machine do nothing, do they? Look, look here, they even took out the whosie-whatsit you found!

(0 pulls his coat off the wall to reveal that the breaker panel that was there in the previous scene has been replaced with a simple coat rack.)

1

But... But...

0

But what? You fixed it. It's fixed. It's over.

1

What if it's not fixed?

0

Not fixed? Oh it's fixed all right. It hasn't been quiet for more than fifteen minutes at a stretch in twenty three years. It's fixed. You fixed it. Everybody's happy and I hate you.

1

I'm sorry.

0

I hate you for coming here. I hate you for fixing it. I hate you for being young, and smart, and better and- Where am I supposed to go now? What am I supposed to do? Am I supposed to start all over? Am I supposed to just sit at home? What about me? Who would do something like this?

1

That's what people do, we go forward. I think-

0

(Banging his hands on the console)

Nothing good has ever come of thinking!

(turning to the machine.)

And you! How could you leave me? After all I've done for you. Kept you clean and safe and- Listen to me! Listen! You will to listen to me! I will not be ignored! I will not be swept away! I was important for twenty three years! I have a place! I have a purpose! You will not leave me here alone! You speak to me! Speak to me! Speak to me! Speak! Speak! SPEAK!-

(Suddenly, THE LARGE, RED LIGHT GOES ON and there is a FRIGHTFUL HONKING NOISE. The machine screams for 0.)

(0 and 1 are stunned. Then, slowly, 0 looks at 1. With great dignity 0 stands, removes his coat from the coat rack, and with one final look at 1, EXITS.)

(1 sits in the noise, letting it wail. As the LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK, he reaches out to press the LARGE RED BUTTON.)

End of play.

