

Paradigm Shift

by

Anna Gordon

Paradigm Shift

FADE IN:

INT. BRINKBRIGHT OFFICES, FLOOR 59 - DAYTIME

A bleak open-plan office with rows of nondescript cubicle desks. Every desk is occupied by someone in a white shirt and blue tie.

SUPER: Monday morning, 9AM EST

EMPLOYEE 198 (25) sits at his desk cubicle. He wears the same white shirt and blue tie, and small glasses. He is sharpening a yellow pencil with a mechanical sharpener, the rough scratching accompanying the clicks of keyboards surrounding him.

He pulls the pencil out and inspects the sharp tip.

His desk phone rings.

EMPLOYEE 198

Hello?

AUTOMATED VOICE (V.O.)

Employee 198 to the Manager's office, please.

EMPLOYEE 198

Shit.

AUTOMATED VOICE (V.O.)

Employee 198 to the Manager's office, please.

Employee 198 looks over his desk's cubicle. He adjusts his glasses.

AUTOMATED VOICE (V.O.)

Employee 198 to the-

He puts down the phone and stands up.

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INT. MANAGER'S OFFICE, FLOOR 59

Employee 198 stands in front of a large wooden desk. There is a frame with no photo inside and a plastic potted plant. A golden plaque reads "MANAGER OF MARKETING". The MANAGER OF MARKETING (55) is behind the desk, balding, his tie a cerise pink. He has a thick bandage on the bridge of his nose that extends to his forehead.

MANAGER OF MARKETING

Thank you for joining me today.

EMPLOYEE 198

No problem, sir. May I inquire what this meeting is-

MANAGER OF MARKETING

Take a seat.

Employee 198 sits in a black armchair opposite the desk.

MANAGER OF MARKETING

We've been impressed with your work, 198. You've been diligent and loyal. Always thinking outside of the box. A busy little bee, one could say.

The Manager of Marketing leans over the desk, smiling. Employee 198's fingers sink into his own thighs.

MANAGER OF MARKETING (CONT'D)

After careful consideration and discussion of where your strengths lie and how we could better utilise them, we've made the decision to promote you.

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Employee 198 swallows and nods fervently.

EMPLOYEE 198

Thank you, Sir, really, thank you, I won't let you-

MANAGER OF MARKETING

You'll need to move up a floor, to Sixty. The promotion is immediate. Take the elevator. You know our protocol.

EMPLOYEE 198

Yes, sir.

MANAGER OF MARKETING

Wonderful. Do you have any questions?

Manager of Marketing's nose twitches.

EMPLOYEE 198

What are my, um, additional responsibilities? Will I get a new title or- or something?

MANAGER OF MARKETING

Well, that's the cushy part, I'd say. You'll be working within the [BLEEP] division. Overseeing project [BLEEP]. No new title, I'm afraid. There's no need for that until you're floor Seventy at least.

EMPLOYEE 198

I'm overseeing project [BLEEP]? But I've never been told-

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MANAGER OF MARKETING
You'll be briefed by the
Manager of [BLEEP] when you
make the transition.

There is a brief silence. The Manager of Marketing smiles obscenely. A clock on a wall behind the desk is ticking.

MANAGER OF MARKETING (CONT'D)
Well. Goodbye, marketing! Eh?

Blood dribbles from the Manager of Marketing's nose, seeping through the bandage.

EMPLOYEE 198
Goodbye, marketing...

MANAGER OF MARKETING
You've been a real team
player. Brilliant synergy
with your colleagues. And we
really feel we can trust you.
Do you feel you can trust us?

The blood pools onto his white shirt, staining a deep maroon.

Employee 198 nods. His hand subconsciously comes to his own nose.

INT. BRINKBRIGHT OFFICES, FLOOR 59 - DAYTIME

Employee 198 is at his desk, a small cardboard box in front of him.

He places his desk objects into the box. His pot of yellow pencils, all freshly sharpened. A plastic potted plant. A white Rubix cube. Some plain printing paper. A photo frame with a yellowing picture inside, of Employee 198 and a family. He is holding a dog. The family members have had their faces carved from the photo.

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He slides his ID card into his palm and looks over it. The information is blurred. His ID picture's eyes have a censor bar over them.

His desk phone rings.

AUTOMATED VOICE (V.O.)
Employee 198 to floor Sixty,
please. Employee 198 to floor
Sixty, pl-

INT. BRINKBRIGHT ELEVATOR - DAYTIME

Employee 198 stands in a dark metal elevator, his box of desk objects in his arms. There is a pad of over one hundred floor number buttons, and he struggles to press Sixty with his thumb. The button lights up red. The elevator doors close.

His fingers tap the box anxiously and he looks around him. There are four CCTV cameras blinking red in each corner of the elevator. This is the only light.

On the elevator door, there is a poster that reads: "WARNING! TO KNOW IS TO BE IMPLICATED. DISCRETION IS LAW." An illustration of a man's terrified eyes accompanies the message.

Above it, a digital clock reads 09:01.

Employee 198 steps forward, his hand reaching for the poster when the elevator doors ding open. He stumbles out...

INT. BRINKBRIGHT OFFICES, FLOOR 60

...And into the open-plan office space of floor Sixty. A HANDLER (30) stands outside of the elevator, waiting for him. He wears a black utility vest, and a censor bar covers his eyes.

HANDLER

Mr. 198?

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EMPLOYEE 198

That's me!

HANDLER

I'll help you with that.

The Handler takes Employee 198's cardboard box and sets it aside. Employee 198 points at it.

EMPLOYEE 198

I need that. That's my stuff.

HANDLER

We'll take it from here, Mr. 198.

EMPLOYEE 198

But those are my things! For my new desk? I can carry it over, it's fine. Let me just-

Employee 198 goes to lift the box, but the Handler grabs his forearms firmly and pulls him back.

HANDLER

This is for us to handle, Mr. 198. Please allow us to follow protocol.

EMPLOYEE 198

I just don't understand why I can't-

HANDLER

If you resist protocol any more than you already have, Mr. 198, I'll have to take this further.

Employee 198 swallows.

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HANDLER (CONT'D)

Are we clear?

EMPLOYEE 198

Yeah. Clear. All clear.

HANDLER

Follow me, please.

Employee 198 follows the Handler to a new desk cubicle, identical to his last one. The Handler pulls out the black office chair for Employee 198 to sit down.

HANDLER

You'll be called to the Manager's office in a second. Do you have any concerns I can assist you with?

EMPLOYEE 198

No. No, I don't think...
Well. Would I be able to-

HANDLER

I'm afraid that will be all,
Mr. 198.

The Handler leaves. Employee 198 stares at his blank desktop, fingers sinking into his thighs again. His desk phone rings.

AUTOMATED VOICE (V.O.)

Employee 198 to the Manager's office, please. Employee 198 to-

Employee 198 opening the Manager's office door...

INT. MANAGER'S OFFICE, FLOOR 60

A BALDING MAN with a censor bar over his eyes

Chair scraping.

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Blood soaking into a white shirt.

Skin peeling from a cheek, muscle and blood visible underneath.

Fingers digging into thighs.

INSERT - TEXT OVER BLACK

THIS FOOTAGE HAS BEEN CUT DUE TO THE SENSITIVITY OF THE INFORMATION DISCUSSED.

DISCRETION IS LAW.

INT. BRINKBRIGHT OFFICES, FLOOR 60

Employee 198 stands outside of the Manager's office, visible sweat on his forehead. His breathing is laboured.

INT. BREAKROOM, FLOOR 60

A sparse breakroom. Employees stand in a static queue and are dressed the same: white shirts, black slacks, and blue ties. They pour coffee from a coffee machine successively.

A digital clock on the wall reads 09:20.

Employee 198 is second in the queue. He appears sunken and tired. When it is his turn to use the coffee machine, the machine whirs and beeps.

EMPLOYEE 198

Oh.

He thwacks the machine with his palm. It beeps again. He turns to the employee behind him.

EMPLOYEE 234 (mid-20s) is a scrawny man with sallow skin. He looks terrified.

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EMPLOYEE 198
I think it's broken.

EMPLOYEE 234
(quietly)
It's fine.

Employee 198 blinks a few times. He thwacks the machine again.

EMPLOYEE 198
No, it's definitely not
working. I should go and find
a-

He makes to leave the breakroom, but Employee 234 catches him by the arm. Employee 198 startles.

EMPLOYEE 234
It's fine.

Employee 234 hits a palm against the machine and it rumbles and begins to pour black coffee. The machine screeches. From the spout, several bloody clots plop into the paper cup.

Employee 198 breathes heavily.

EMPLOYEE 234
See? It's fine.

He takes the cup from under the machine, a large blood clot floating at the top of the coffee. He hands it to Employee 198.

The digital clock on the wall now reads 09:04.

INT. BRINKBRIGHT OFFICES, FLOOR 60

Employee 198 sits at his desk, working on a spreadsheet that is censored by pixels. A digital clock on his desk reads 09:01. A calendar stuck to his cubicle has half of its boxes crossed off in red ink, but there are no discernable dates

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and the month at the top is also censored by pixels.

Employee 198's eyes are bloodshot. He sips at a coffee beside him, and his lips come away smeared red. He chews on the coffee as if he's swallowed a lump of something.

From the back of his desktop monitor, large bulbous maggots crawl onto his screen.

Employee 198's hands pause on his keyboard and retract slowly. He shivers violently.

The maggots keep appearing, falling from his monitor and onto his desk, plopping onto his lap.

He flails, gagging loudly. He picks up his desk phone, shaking maggots from it.

EMPLOYEE 198

Can I be connected to-

AUTOMATED VOICE (V.O.)

Welcome to Brinkbright. Here at Brinkbright, we strive for excellence and transparency between the business and our consumers. To be forwarded to a customer helpline, say "HELP." To be forwarded to IT, say "IT." To be-

EMPLOYEE 198

IT!

AUTOMATED VOICE (V.O.)

You have now been connected to IT. Please wait.

EMPLOYEE 198

Come on. Come on.

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Static noise on the other end of the phone as it connects.

IT INTERN (V.O.)
Hello, 198. What seems to be the issue?

EMPLOYEE 198
Uh, maggots? Maggots. Everywhere. Like, crawling around my computer - I think they came from the router? They just started-

IT INTERN (V.O.)
Well, that just won't do, now, will it? Is your desktop switched on?

EMPLOYEE 198
Uh- what? Yeah, it's on! But there are maggots coming out of it, man.

IT INTERN (V.O.)
Good, good. Maybe try switching it on and off again?

EMPLOYEE 198
Excuse me?

IT INTERN (V.O.)
I feel like it could be your cache. Maybe try clearing your cache, yeah. I'll talk you through it. Open 'Settings'-

EMPLOYEE 198
No, yeah, I know how to clear my cache. This isn't that. These are maggots.

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IT INTERN (V.O.)
Have you deleted your recent
cookies? They can really
stack up without us
realising! Bogs down
sometimes, so-

He slams the phone onto the telephone base, which
a maggot has crawled into. It squishes under the
handset, white goo oozing.

INT. BREAKROOM, FLOOR 60

Employee 198 sits in the busy breakroom, a few
maggots clinging to his white shirt while he sips
a lumpy coffee and eats a croissant. His
croissant's jam is liquidated. Blood.

He turns to the employee beside him, flicking a
maggot off his shoulder.

EMPLOYEE 198
Can you see these? These
fucking maggots?

His colleague, EMPLOYEE 316 (30s), has her hair
neatly pinned back and is eating a similar
croissant. She doesn't turn to look at him.

EMPLOYEE 316
What? What am I supposed to
be seeing?

EMPLOYEE 198
These!

Employee 198 lifts a maggot from his chest and
holds it up between his fingers. He gags.

EMPLOYEE 316
(with humour)
We've all had a Monday
morning like that.

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Employee 198 stares at her.

EMPLOYEE 316 (CONT'D)
Have to take the hardships in
your stride.

EMPLOYEE 198
We need to get a pest
terminator in here. Actually,
we should kind of report this
place for, like, gross
misconduct?

EMPLOYEE 316
Did you clear your cache?

EMPLOYEE 198
Did I... what would that have
done? How would that have
helped?

Employee 316 shrugs.

EMPLOYEE 198 (CONT'D)
(whispering)
I'm not crazy, right? We're
all just acting like this
to...to stop mass hysteria,
right? Like, I'm not insane?

EMPLOYEE 316
I don't know what you mean.

EMPLOYEE 198
Yes, you do. Come on. Give me
something. Tell me I'm not
the only one freaked out by
all...this.

He gestures to a Handler that stands by the door.
As they've been talking, the breakroom has been
cleared out. They are the only two in the room.

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Employee 316 reaches one of her hands over and places it atop Employee 198's hand. She turns toward him, revealing she has a bulging tumour emerging from the side of her head.

Employee 198 reels back, knocking his cup onto the floor and standing to his feet.

EMPLOYEE 316

Get out. Get out. Get out.

GET OUT! GET OUT!

She continues screaming as the Handler approaches her and grabs her by the biceps, pulling her off of her chair and onto the floor. She is restrained, and the Handler produces a large knife-like rod from his utility vest.

HANDLER

Please return to your desk,
198. Your break is over.

Employee 198 stumbles backwards, running for the door...

INT. BRINKBRIGHT OFFICES, FLOOR 60

And onto the office floor. The door shuts behind him, muffling Employee 316's screams.

He flaps his hands and starts walking toward his cubicle, panicking. He doubles back and starts to jog to the elevator.

INT. BRINKBRIGHT ELEVATOR

Employee 198 is panting in the elevator, his hands braced on the wall.

The digital clock on the wall reads 09:04.

EMPLOYEE 198

Christ.

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INT. BRINKBRIGHT OFFICES, FLOOR 60

The elevator dings and Employee 198 walks out. He starts to breathe heavily when he realises he's still on the same floor. He spins around and gets back in the elevator.

The elevator doors close for a beat. The elevator dings again, and Employee 198 bursts out. He looks around himself frantically, before his sight lands on black double doors, painted with a hazard symbol. On the doors, a poster reads:

HANDLERS ONLY. NO EMPLOYEES BEYOND THIS POINT.

He pushes through the doors...

INT. BRINKBRIGHT OFFICES, STAIRWELL

...And into a white stairwell. There are keypads on the walls and digital clocks showing the real time: 02:46. Employee 198 pauses briefly to stare at a clock.

He begins to scramble down the stairs, hands slapping the handrail. Once at the bottom, he bolts for a black door that is half open at the end of a corridor.

He reaches the door...

INT. BRINKBRIGHT ELEVATOR

Employee 198 stands in the elevator, staring at the poster on the doors. He is sweating. The digital clock on the wall reads 09:02.

INT. BRINKBRIGHT OFFICES, FLOOR 60

Employee 198 sits at his desk cubicle. He reaches for the calendar pinned to his cubicle wall in front of him and flips through it. Only the current month has days crossed off in red ink.

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He searches on his desktop: 'WHAT DAY IS IT?' His desktop brings up a '404: ERROR' page.

Frantically, he grabs a sharpened pencil from a pencil pot on his desk and begins to shade in the days on the calendar from previous months. In his haste, the pencil lead snaps, and he throws the pencil down.

Employee 198's hands are shaking. He picks up the broken pencil and a sharpener on the desk and begins to quickly sharpen the pencil, rough scratching coinciding with his heavy breaths.

He takes another sharpened pencil from the pencil pot and holds them both up to his eye level, inspecting the sharp lead.

Employee 198 nestles a pencil in each nostril, lead tip first. He shimmies them about in his nose, sniffing, and then breathes deeply. He closes his eyes and braces his hands on the table.

He brings his head down fast and hard toward the desk. Just before impact...

CUT TO BLACK:

INT. BRINKBRIGHT OFFICES, FLOOR 60 - DAYTIME

Employee 198 sits at his desk cubicle. There is no calendar. He has a thick nose bandage on that extends up to his forehead and his eyes are bloodshot.

His desk phone rings.

EMPLOYEE 198
(muffled)

Hello?

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AUTOMATED VOICE (V.O.)
Employee 198 to Conference
Room 5, please. Employee 198
to Conference Room 5, please.
Employee-

Employee 198 slams the phone down.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, FLOOR 60

There are around fourteen employees around a grey conference table and the MANAGER OF [BLEEP] (mid-60s) sits at the head, a censor bar over his eyes.

Handlers are stood behind every employee. Employee 198 is squeezing his own thigh, white-knuckled.

MANAGER OF [BLEEP]
And I'm sure you're all aware
of-

INSERT - TEXT OVER BLACK (GLITCHING)

THIS FOOTAGE HAS BEEN CUT DUE TO THE SENSITIVITY
OF THE INFORMATION DISCUSSED.

DISCRETION IS LAW.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, FLOOR 60 - DAYTIME

The Manager of [BLEEP] stands at the head of the conference table. The censor bar is gone and his eye sockets are empty and red. On the table, his eyes are soaking into the paperwork, their tendrils curling around the pages.

MANAGER OF [BLEEP]
It's about devotion.

He gestures to his eyes.

