

COMPANY STRESS TEST

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FADE IN:

INT. WISTAR CORPORATION - FOURTH FLOOR HALLWAY - DAY

Security cameras loom above the company logo on a wall with the slogan "We are always on the watch!". Some EMPLOYEES, dressed professional, attempt to either hide from the camera or move past it as quickly as possible.

FELIX (30s) stand out from his colleagues for three reasons. One, his clothes are a size too big. Two, his tie is loosened a bit more. Third, he whistles as he walks past the logo without a care in the world.

Drenched in sweat, BART (late 20s) rushes, catches up to Felix. Walks side by side. Bart takes a breath. They turn a corner. GRETCHEN (mid 20s) bolts out of an office while simultaneously checking her watch without dropping any of the bundle of paperwork she holds close to her chest.

Like Bart, she matches Felix's pace.

They come to a memo haphazardly taped on a door. Felix reads it, moves along. Bart and Gretchen peek at what it -

GRETCHEN

No time! Move it! Move it! Move it!

They rush up to Felix.

BART

What did it say?

FELIX

It said the stairs were out.

Gretchen grits her teeth.

BART

The stairs are out?

FELIX

That's what it said.

BART

"The stairs are out?" What - what does that mean? Was there a fire?

FELIX

Don't know.

BART

Flood?

Felix shrugs.

BART (CONT'D)
What then?

FELIX
Could be anything.

GRETCHEN
Let it go, Bart. Just let it go.

BART
The stairs are never out. You don't
find that strange that the stairs -

GRETCHEN
Let. It. Go.

They get to the ELEVATOR DOOR. Felix pushes the button to go down. Bart and Gretchen, more tense as seconds pass. Gretchen straightens her paperwork. Quickly.

BART
You don't find it odd -

FELIX
You guys are bugging out over
nothing. I don't know what's wrong
with the stairs.

GRETCHEN
"You guys?" I haven't made a big
deal out of it, only him.

FELIX
All I know is I found out about it
same time as you. That's all I
know.

GRETCHEN
I haven't said a thing about it and
I don't want to know.

Felix and Bart have doubts over her statement. She shrugs.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)
I don't want to know.
(beat)
What's wrong with the stairs.

FELIX
Just relax, be cool. Both of you.

The elevator door opens. Dark inside. Muzak plays.

BART
Need to fix the lights.

They file in. NANCY (30s) rushes, pushes her way through. She's already pressing buttons -

FELIX
Hold on a minute -

NANCY's all smiles until she notices that, despite the elevator door and panel they are actually in the

STAIRWAY

Bart and Gretchen - terrified.

The elevator door closes. Descends.

NANCY
What? What just happened?

FELIX
Someone fucked up, that's what.

NANCY
Wasn't me.

FELIX
Been here ten years now and I don't make waves, I follow the rules, and today is the day I get fucked!

NANCY
I thought this was the elevator.

BART
It's supposed to be. But it isn't.

FELIX
No, it is. Listen just a minute -

Four flights down, a DING and elevator doors open up. Nancy looks over, sees the light floors below. Her face goes pale. Someone, a GRUNT of an employee, steps in.

FELIX (CONT'D)
This is the elevator.

GRUNT
(calls out)
What the fuck!

NANCY

Did the door and panel just go down there? How did that -

GRETCHEN

You saw it. That's what it did.

GRUNT

Holy horseshit! What did you guys do up there?

FELIX

(calls down)

Don't press any buttons!

GRUNT

I ain't touching shit! Who's up there?

FELIX

Felix Stone. Got Nancy Wright, Gretchen Freiburg and Bart Hughes here too.

GRETCHEN

Who's down there?

GRUNT

Just another Grunt.

BART

Hey, hold the door for us down there?

GRUNT

Hell no! I'm out of this bitch!

Bart hustles down the flight of stairs, Gretchen and Nancy close behind. Felix doesn't do anything but fold his arms and waits.

As Bart, Nancy and Gretchen pass flights, there are no doors or signs of what floor they are on. The sad bizarre truth is that as difficult it is to comprehend, **yes** the flights of stairs is **the** elevator.

All three shove each other on the way down. Gretchen loses a few papers which fly in three directions.

GRETCHEN

Watch it!

BART

Out of my way!

They are too late. Grunt exits, the bottom elevator door closes. Bart panics, taps the DOORS OPEN button several times. The door does not open.

BART (CONT'D)

Trapped!

GRETCHEN

What the hell did you do?

BART

The hell's it look like?

NANCY

Stop pressing the buttons.

BART

Says the skank who got us jammed up in here in the first place!

NANCY

Yeah, like it's my fault. Point fingers at me, throw me under a bus. Fuck that.

Felix's voice echoes as he strolls down...

FELIX

I want to know. I want to fucking know which one of you lame brained good for nothing fuck ups is responsible for this.

GRETCHEN

Felix, I haven't done anything. I don't know what this is about.

FELIX

Well somebody knows something.

BART

I knew something was wrong. But no "leave it alone" "let it go" "relax and be cool Bart" Now here we are.

FELIX

The stairs becoming an elevator is something which I don't think crossed your mind. Certainly didn't cross mine.

GRETCHEN

Sure it did.

FELIX

Excuse me?

GRETCHEN

Well you read the memo. Maybe you read it, read it wrong or you read the wrong memo or maybe you just flat out lied!

BART

That's right! Maybe the memo said 'don't take the elevator, take the stairs' We should have taken the stairs.

FELIX

I read it right. I didn't lie to you, and I came in here same as you. I wasn't expecting this, none of us were. But one of us - and I'm ruling myself out - one of us is up to the neck in deep shit.

Everyone takes a long stare down look into each other's eyes. Nobody cracks.

BART

Maybe we should just wait for the doors to open and -

The door RISES, along with the panel.

BART (CONT'D)

Mean we have to go back up the stairs?

GRETCHEN

This is the elevator.

BART

An elevator with stairs. Or is the stairs with the elevator? This is freaking me out!

NANCY

Freaking you out? You're freaked the fuck out?

BART

Hell yeah! This shit just doesn't happen every day you know!

The door opens six flights above. The shadow of SHEMP (man, 40s) takes a step forward.

SHEMP (O.S.)
What in the fuck!

BART
Hold the door!

SHEMP (O.S.)
I hate working here...

The Shemp exits. The door closes.

GRETCHEN
Okay. I got this. We stay right here. The door and panel will come back down, someone will let us out.

BART
And what if they don't?

FELIX
One last time. Which one of you fucked up?

GRETCHEN
We all get the same treatment, we are all equal peons in the eyes of the CEOs.

BART
We are the lowest on the pecking order. Why wouldn't the bigwigs mess with us?

Felix coldly stares back -

BART (CONT'D)
Well, okay, maybe this is a bit different, but still -

FELIX
"A bit fucking different."? No shit! I'd fucking think so!

BART
All I can tell you is that whatever went wrong -whatever the hell it was- had nothing to do with it.

NANCY
Maybe you don't know what you did.

GRETCHEN
Yeah. Might be something you didn't do. Something you forgot.

BART

I didn't forget a damn thing. And when the man tells me to do something, it's done.

FELIX

Well it's obvious we can't just leave.

GRETCHEN

Obvious? Yeah, this is freaky and all, but we aren't that trapped. Up or down, that door opens.

FELIX

But when the elevator is the stairs and the stairs the elevator, who says we can get out?

NANCY

And what's wrong with the stairs?

GRETCHEN

Shut up.

FELIX

So nobody knows what -
(eyeballs Gretchen)
What about you?

GRETCHEN

What about me?

FELIX

That bundle you got. What's in there? Files, documents, something?

GRETCHEN

Copies!

BART

Copies of what?

NANCY

You bitch! Telling me to shut up!

FELIX

Gretchen, what of they copies of?

GRETCHEN

I don't know! Copies of copies! I just do as I'm told!

BART

Jesus wept! You didn't even know what they are? Did you even read them? Are you supposed to read them? Are supposed to not read them? What the hell did you do if you did it?

NANCY

Let me see them! Must be a clue!

GRETCHEN

Hell no! How do I know you aren't supposed to read them?

NANCY

How do we know that we have to? It could be important!

GRETCHEN

Of course they are important! But they haven't got anything to do with our situation!

BART

You didn't read them! You don't know what they are! Maybe they don't even know and are stopping you from leaving until they know!

GRETCHEN

Copies of copies have nothing to do with the laws of physics!

BART

You don't know that for sure! You didn't read them!

FELIX

Alright. Let's try to think for a moment. Four of us. Two go up, two stay here. Door opens up or down -

BART

What if it's the wrong two people? What if I'm supposed to be up when I'm supposed to be down? Or you are down instead of up? How are we supposed to know?

FELIX

What difference does it make?

NANCY

It has to make some difference.

FELIX

Someone tried to get on down here,
someone tried to get on up there.
Follow me? At some point, the door
will open.

NANCY

What about the person who messed
up? Sure change your tune in a
hurry.

Felix walks up, picks of a few of Gretchen's scattered
copies. He's tempted - Gretchen shakes her head "please, no."

BART

Maybe it's all four of us. Maybe
getting on this crazy elevator is
how we messed up. Think about it!
There's something wrong with the
stairs. This is what's wrong with
the stairs. Right?

GRETCHEN

Makes sense. So we go back to the
stairs, ride the elevator.

BART

This is the elevator!

GRETCHEN

Whatever.

NANCY

Okay. So there is no right or wrong
answer.

BART

Maybe one of us is dreaming. Or
we're in someone's head! Out of
body experience or something.

All four speechless. Nobody knows what to say.

BART (CONT'D)

Stairs is the elevator, elevator
the stairs. Got to be some way of
explaining this.

Nancy slaps Bart. Bart rubs his jaw.

BART (CONT'D)

Well I didn't say I was the one dreaming! Maybe I'm not the one astral projecting or whatever the fuck I'm on. I'm gonna have a nervous breakdown!

NANCY

Oh please you are not going there. We are all under serious pressure, not just you.

FELIX

What is seriously wrong with you people? I offer a solution, nobody wants to take it?

NANCY

There is no solution. This is a strange phenomenon, we could be abducted by aliens for all we know.

BART

There you see? Another possibility.

Felix reads the piece of paper. Locks eyes with Gretchen, who shakes in fear.

BART (CONT'D)

Oh shit! We're all fucked now! He read the fucking paper!

FELIX

Gretchen? YThe copies. They all say the same thing, give or take? Pretty much?

GRETCHEN

They are copies.

FELIX

And you haven't read them. You don't know what they say. That's your story?

GRETCHEN

I swear on my life!

FELIX

Wonderful. You expect me to believe that? How do you know if you made the right copies?

GRETCHEN

Who pays attention to that stuff?
One slip up, and you are back
beating the street, and it sure
isn't going to be me.

FELIX

You haven't read them. Not one?

GRETCHEN

I just said that. The answer is no.
You shouldn't be reading it either.

Felix crumbles up the paper, tosses it at his co-workers.
Once again, they are at a loss for words.

BART

Well? What did it say?

The question pisses Felix off. Stares Bart down.

FELIX

I don't think I should repeat it.

Felix whips his cell out. Presses number. The other three
nervous, Nancy kneels about to pick up the wadded up paper.
Felix waves her off, she thinks better of it. Nancy stands.
Takes a step back.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Yeah. It's me. We had two no shows.
Yeah, I understand. No, these three
are overworked, underpaid, need
some time off. No, I'm good.

Ends the call.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Well, folks, good news. Be cool, be
calm. We'll be out of the new
company stress elevator in a
minute.

NANCY

You mean it was you all this time?

BART

Come on. What did it say?

FELIX

What do you think it said?

FADE OUT.