

BY THE BOOTSTRAPS

PILOT

A perpetually overlooked retail employee climbs a corporate ladder he'll never actually reach – at a boot company whose executives divine corporate strategy through its cryogenically frozen founder.

Half-hour Adult Animated Comedy

INT. HOUSEDOWN BOOT CO FLAGSHIP STORE - FRONT ENTRANCE- DAY

The store is neat and organized, even with the dump bin full of sock bargains near the entrance. There are aisles full of shoes, with mirrors and benches bookending them. Large speakers hang from the ceiling, pumping corporate music.

AXEL (20s), an enthusiastic employee at the flagship store, is the first in. He's got a stylish messy hairdo and he's wearing the company polo with dark jeans. On his feet: the company's newest hero product, the Strut.

AXEL

It's like rayaaaain on your wedding
day.
It's a free riiiiide when you
already paid.
It's the good adviice-

He dances over to the wall and the dance is... off. He flips the store lights on, then he takes his earbuds out and pockets them, revealing the corporate approved store soundtrack. (Something a funeral director would license.) He keeps dancing and humming to the music in his head.

**INT. CORPORATE OFFICE OF HOUSEDOWN BOOT CO - BOARDROOM -
MOMENTS LATER**

SUPER: ELSEWHERE, AT CORPORATE

The boardroom is dark and ominous, lit only by the faint glow of founder SOLOMON HEEL'S (170s) cryo-tube. He's spending the day floating in gel. Like always. He looks good for his age, like a zombie with an excellent plastic surgeon.

There's an oversized painting of him in his youth above the coffee, right next to the expansive window. He's seen with his foot on someone's head, showing off his classic boot.

ACHILLES HEEL (40s) is the acting CEO of the company. His slicked back hair and tailored suit are the first thing entering the room. He's wearing a top hat with his overcoat.

He walks in and flips the light on, then smiles at his ancestor. It sours to a grimace and he sits down at the head of the conference table. And drapes his overcoat next to it.

ELIZABETH (30s), executive assistant to Mr. Heel, is just outside the door. She's petite and mousy, but quietly exhausted.

ACHILLES

Bitty!! Get my black and sugar!
Solomon looks like he's been up
since dawn.

He puts his top hat on the conference table.

ACHILLES (CONT'D)

(To Solomon)
Are you watching closely?

Elizabeth scurries in and heads to the table in the corner. With uncanny speed, she pours coffee from the pot into a cup and dumps sugar. She stares at the painting.

ELIZABETH

He's so proud.

(To Solomon)
Aren't you, Mr. Heel?

Achilles turns toward her as she puts the cup in front of him, then blows into it before she walks out.

Solomon's tube burbles over the slight hum of the motor. Achilles looks up at the tube, startled and knocks over his cup.

**INT. HOUSEDOWN BOOT CO FLAGSHIP STORE - STORE OFFICE -
MOMENTS LATER**

The office is stark white with enough room for a handful of people. There are shelves with binders, a monitor and keyboard on the desk, and a fast food mascot bobble head. There's a single black chair in front of it.

Axel is hunched over in the store vault, to the left of the desk. He pulls out a cash drawer and shuts the vault with his foot.

FELIX (30s) the store manager, heavysset and wearing a button up shirt with a too short tie, walks in.

He's got his tablet in hand and he's chewing on the last bit of his breakfast.

Axel bumps into Felix's belly and it forces him to spit out the food, landing it in the cash drawer.

Axel looks down at the tray and back up at Felix.

AXEL
You gonna finish that?

Felix grabs the food chunk from the drawer and pops it in his mouth, then scoots Axel out of the office and shuts the door with a violent thud. On the door is a poster of Solomon Heel in his youth with the caption: KICK YOUR HEELS UP!

**INT. HOUSEDOWN BOOT CO FLAGSHIP STORE - FRONT REGISTER -
MOMENTS LATER**

Axel is cleaning the front desk, wiping it down, and lifts his head when he hears the front door unlocking again.

ISABEL (20s) walks in. She's the part-timer and today she's sporting a pixie cut and the company polo shirt over a long sleeve shirt with holes cut at the thumbs.

She's smiling at Axel and taps on the advertisement on the glass door.

ISABEL
Sale starts today. Shit. Huh?

Axel chuckles.

AXEL
Shit, indeed.

I hear someone with a big ass is
climbing the ladder today.

Axel points his finger at the air.

ISABEL
Should be you.

Axel tosses the rag he was cleaning with at Isabel. It hits her chest, makes an audible wet squish and falls off and they both laugh.

AXEL
No mames. I'd be the first one in
the family with a title.

ISABEL
You asked that cochinote how many
times? I keep telling you you're
too pasivo.

Axel opens his mouth and raises his pointer finger. No sound, and he closes his mouth.

JAMES (20s) the other full-timer, barges in behind Isabel. He clumsily knocks her off balance.

She trips and catches herself. Then she raises her hands just over her head and sweeps them down and out with a scowl on her face.

ISABEL

You didn't see all this five foot
and three inches of beauty in your
way, douche?

JAMES

Add three inches and I would notice
you.

ISABEL

Worry about the three inches you're
missing.

James goes slack jawed and shakes his head, then closes the door behind him and turns the lock.

**INT. CORPORATE OFFICE OF HOUSEDOWN BOOT CO - BOARDROOM -
MOMENTS LATER**

CLOSE ON: A SPIDER WALKING

A hand slams down, squashing the spider.

RICHARD (60s) is the COO. He's earned every grey hair and his barrel chest is large enough to actively threaten his pink collared shirt.

He wipes his hand on the edge of the table, then reclines in his chair. Then he starts tapping his finger as he watches.

VANESSA (40s) is the CFO. She walks in with a face that stops conversations mid-sentence. Her pencil skirt and sport coat with long hair are both loud in color and minimalist in design.

She lays eyes on Solomon in the tube and her jaw lowers.

VANESSA

Who showed Solomon numbers? The
sale only started forty-five
minutes ago. How is he already
livid?

Richard leans back in his chair and extends his hand to Vanessa's.

RICHARD

Sit down, Vanessa. He'll catch fire again if you call more attention. The Strut will do big numbers and Heel will do a jig in there by the time the sale ends. Isn't that right, Achilles?

Your great-great grandfather is ready.

Achilles curls his mouth upward into a smile.

The tube glows in bright green ambient light. The entire room is green and everyone stands at attention.

The gel in the tube starts to drain, and Solomon goes limp as the gel lowers. New gel is deposited through piping above. Everyone smiles and hugs one another until Solomon floats and the light turns off.

ACHILLES

The flagship is the one to watch. Then the coasts will rally and in the end you'll all kiss my feet.

Vanessa pulls her chair out and sits.

VANESSA

You can start with my ass.

If we'd launched at full price, the boot would do the same volume with more profit.

Richard nods along.

RICHARD

You want a Maserati strategy when we should be selling Rolls.

Another significant matter: A DM in the flagship's region was beaten last week by a customer wielding the Strut's predecessor, the Stomper. Reporting indicates the customer mistakenly believed the Strut's release was last week.

At least we have data proving demand is high.

Achilles shakes his head in disgust.

ACHILLES

Those savages.

RICHARD

The manager at the flagship has been hitting quota and he's up for promotion. The DMs in the region will preside over the ladder trial this evening. He could make a suitable replacement.

Elizabeth runs in with folders and puts them in front of Vanessa.

Vanessa purses her lips and narrows her eyes. She looks at Elizabeth and slowly, calmly pushes the folders off the conference table. Papers fly everywhere.

VANESSA

This could've been an email.

Achilles points at the tube. His blunt pointer finger goes rigid... then starts to violently shake.

ACHILLES

His eyes fluttered. Don't treat Bitty like that.

Decorum, Vanessa.

Achilles walks to the tube, presses a few buttons on the console and taps on the glass. Solomon floats and bobbles in the tube as the gel sloshes around. His face presses against the glass and startles Achilles.

He talks under his breath to Solomon.

ACHILLES (CONT'D)

You let peasants and vultures hollow out your company. I'm left with the pieces and I'm supposed to make this company iconic again. Fffft.

VANESSA

Can't hear you if you're mumbling, Heel. What are you two conspiring over?

Achilles turns to Vanessa.

ACHILLES

Bitty is a person. Get that shit off the floor and have some class.

Vanessa looks at Solomon, who is now settled in the tube.

VANESSA

Elizabeth. Please don't waste time
or money like this again. Email
when you can.

The motor on the tube grows louder and Solomon's body rotates toward Vanessa.

Vanessa clutches her chest, stands and drops to the floor to pick up the papers before handing them to Elizabeth.

She stands up and pulls her skirt back over her knees before she starts lowering herself back in her seat. She stops and looks at Solomon. The volume of the motor lowers and she sits all the way.

Steam exits from the vents at the top of the tube.

ACHILLES

Fuck!

**INT. HOUSEDOWN BOOT CO FLAGSHIP STORE - FRONT REGISTER -
MOMENTS LATER**

The team is huddled in front of the front register. Felix has his arm around James's shoulder and he reaches to put his other around Isabel's and stops himself.

FELIX

Lot of commotion from corporate,
guys. East coast numbers have
Solomon spinning in his tube.
They're depending on us to knock it
out of the park.

Axel takes a sip from his paper cup and rolls his eyes.

ISABEL

Solomon spins anyways. My numbers
are fine.

FELIX

You're fifth in the store and
there's four of us that work here.

JAMES

Ha! The day the DM covered your
lunch and sold to that group of
little people attorneys!

Axel spits his drink back in his cup laughing.

Isabel mimes a bat swing and a miss.

AXEL

Pinche pendejo. They were Jehovah's
Witnesses.

Isabel laughs.

JAMES

Witness this.

James flips Axel off.

Felix pulls a rubber ball from his pocket, bounces it off
Axel's forehead, then taps on his watch.

Axel rubs his forehead.

FELIX

Enough of this. Let's get to work.
I want eighteen Struts out from
everyone today. If I have to defend
anyone's performance to the DM,
keep in mind, shit rolls downhill.

The group breaks up and Felix goes to unlock the front door.
Isabel heads towards the back while James and Axel walk
behind the register.

A montage shows the store from empty to chaotic. Customers
rush in, Felix scurries to the office and James and Axel ring
customers up until a small lull happens with a single
CUSTOMER left in line.

James leans on the counter with the customer in front of him.
He's looking at Axel though.

CUSTOMER

Don't I get more off with my
points?

JAMES

So, Felix is gonna replace that DM
that got stomped?

AXEL

If he can make the climb.

JAMES

I'm gonna run this place like
Alcatraz when he's gone.

The customer snaps her fingers at James.

CUSTOMER

Points. Bigger discount. I'm a returning customer. At least I was.

James grabs at his hair as he groans and lets it go.

JAMES

You get the sale price or your points. You can't stack. If you shop with us regularly, you know that.

Axel's eyes widen and he steps toward the two. He shoos James over.

AXEL

Ma'am, you're getting a bigger discount with the sale.

Axel lifts his leg over the counter height, almost kicking James, showing off his Struts. James leans back and scowls.

CLOSE ON: STRUT BOOTS. ANGELIC CHORUS SINGS

AXEL (CONT'D)

Let me tell you, I love my Struts. Wear them every day. Sometimes in the shower.

The customer chuckles.

AXEL (CONT'D)

Save your points for when there's no sale.

He grabs the shoebox and puts them in the bag, then tears the receipt from the register and hands it to her.

CUSTOMER

(To James)
Out of curiosity, what are you wearing?

JAMES

The official shoe of kidnapppers everywhere: White Vans.

The customer contorts her face and walks off.

JAMES

The cameras don't have sound, kiss ass. Felix is gonna get promoted and he'll put me in his seat. Stop trying to impress.

AXEL

Tsss.

Axel moves over to his register and reaches down, and pulls out a step ladder. He unfolds it and steps up a few rungs.

Isabel steps up to the ladder.

ISABEL

At it again?

She steadies the ladder.

AXEL

I wanna be ready when the DMs say
I've earned my promotion.

ISABEL

Still pasivo.

Isabel shakes the ladder, but not enough for Axel to lose his balance.

AXEL

Ok, fool.

Axel climbs down and stretches his legs and climbs back up.

James pulls his phone out and taps and swipes. Two ladies are heard moaning from the phone speakers and James's eyes grow. He taps the phone to mute the sound.

Axel shakes his head.

AXEL

You think you deserve to manage
this store?

Axel jumps off the ladder and Felix walks over and puts a pile of boxes on the counter without lids.

FELIX

Go-backs. Find the lids, Axel.

Felix stretches his legs and rubs his hands.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Any bets on how fast I reach the
top rung tonight?

AXEL

I'm more interested in knowing why you brought me these boxes if you know they're going right back in the aisles.

James pushes the boxes closer to Axel. Axel grabs a spray bottle from beneath the counter and spritzes James and laughs. James smacks the bottle out of his hand.

JAMES

Ugh. You better set a record, Felix. I've been working my ass off to take over the store.

Axel rolls his eyes and grabs the boxes off the counter.

AXEL (CONT'D)

Apuesto a que ninguna de sus mamás les pegó con una chancla.

FELIX

Corporate keeps dangling the carrot over my head. I move up and, well... rising tides—

James does a mock oar rowing gesture.

Axel talks under his breath.

AXEL

Carrot? You know damn well they dangled a buffet before you lift a finger.

The computer chimes and Isabel walks over from behind Felix.

ISABEL

I've got these, get the email.

She takes the boxes from Axel and James pouts and cranes his neck towards Isabel as she walks off.

Axel runs to the computer and clicks a few buttons. His eyes scan the screen and his eyes widen as his dimple forms.

AXEL

Solomon's raising hell. I did my part. Three membership cards and 10 Struts.

FELIX

Tell it to someone who cares.

AXEL
You're my manager.

Felix grabs the monitor and swings it around. Axel sighs.

FELIX
Must be Chernobyl at corporate
right now. We've got a little
daylight left.

Felix starts clapping and customers look at him with shock
and annoyance.

FELIX (CONT'D)
Let's go boys and girls. You're
burning daylight at both ends.

Isabel walks past him with a pile of socks in her arms,
higher than her head.

ISABEL
I swear. Sé que eres un pendejo
porque no sale nada más que mierda
de ti.

Felix shrugs and Axel laughs. Then he turns the monitor back
around.

AXEL
The DMs are showing up right before
close. Ladder ceremony's gonna be
fire, Felix.

I've got ten dollars riding on you.

FELIX
I didn't expect you—

AXEL
Ten dollars that says you'll fall
on your ass.

Isabel steps behind Felix and eyes him up and down.

ISABEL
Put me down for twenty-three.

Axel gives Felix a forced smile.

FELIX
Just get me my numbers so we can
get out of each other's hair.

Felix walks off and waves his arm down, dismissing Axel.

Axel runs up behind Felix and grabs his shoulder.

AXEL

Felix, hold up. Let's talk a sec.

Axel looks around. Felix exhales.

AXEL

Let's go to your office.

Felix gestures for Axel to follow and starts walking.

**INT. HOUSEDOWN BOOT CO FLAGSHIP STORE - STORE OFFICE -
MOMENTS LATER**

Felix is in his chair while Axel stands. There's a Solomon mask, laying on its side on Felix's desk, next to the monitor.

Axel is reaching behind his back, then lowers his arm and stands straight.

AXEL

Ay, look, there's Solomon, looking like a spry hundred and two year old.

Axel grabs the mask and tries standing it up, but it collapses.

Felix folds his arms.

AXEL (CONT'D)

Ok. I know James is your boy, but look at how he is with customers. You wanna put your reputation on that promotion when you get the DM role?

Felix holds his hand up, palm first.

FELIX

You trying to throw James under the bus right now?

AXEL

No. No... No. Not like that. Look. I'm good. I hit quota. Customers leave happy. Shouldn't that be the guy you have climbing the ladder after you?

Felix looks at his watch. Axel lowers his eyes.

AXEL (CONT'D)

You keep looking at your watch like you've got something better to do.

FELIX

I've got a list.

No promises. Talk to me after I hit that top rung and I'm in a good mood.

Axel nods his head and steps out.

**INT. CORPORATE OFFICE OF HOUSEDOWN BOOT CO - BOARDROOM -
LATER**

Vanessa and Richard are the only ones left in the boardroom. Solomon is turned towards the window overlooking the skyline in the tube, drifting up and down.

Vanessa is sitting at the table, typing on her laptop. Richard is pacing.

VANESSA

You're triggering my vertigo. Also, where did the second top hat come from?

There's a second top hat on the conference table now.

RICHARD

Who cares?

I've run out of patience. Achilles's only value comes from his name. There's a reason quotations haunt the word "acting" in his title.

Vanessa inhales deeply and she stops typing. She nods her head toward Solomon.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

He doesn't fucking care. Look at the stock. You think Solomon wants Achilles leading this company into the iceberg?

The tube's motor hums as ice crystals form on the glass and blur Solomon. A hiss of air sounds off as it vents out, clearing the ice. Solomon doesn't move.

VANESSA

You're talking about mutiny. What are you—

RICHARD

Don't defend the indefensible.

He shuffles his feet and points at Solomon, then raises his voice.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

He's one hundred seventy-three.
What's Solomon—

He turns all the way towards Solomon.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

What are you gonna do, fire me? I'd love to see you try. I made you billions. And all you do is—

A siren sounds off from the tube, while Solomon's body sloshes around erratically in the gel. Achilles runs in.

ACHILLES

What's wrong? G.G.PA?

Achilles knocks on the tube and puts his open palm on the glass. The siren grows louder.

Vanessa puts her hands over her ears.

VANESSA

EDC wasn't this loud!

Richard walks to the console on the tube and punches a sequence of buttons.

The alarm stops and Achilles stares at the tube. Solomon's body settles, turned away from Achilles, who then rests his forehead on the glass.

ACHILLES

This isn't the first time he's suggested you're soulless. Dead inside.

(To Vanessa)
You're a raver?

VANESSA

Richard was a club kid. Who cares?

Richard growls and starts walking towards the door.

Achilles walks over to Vanessa, closes her laptop and leans over her desk. She looks up at him.

ACHILLES

What set off Sol-

VANESSA

You, Achilles. You set Solomon off. We're all in agreement. It's time for change.

She looks at the clock on the wall, then back at Achilles.

VANESSA (CONT'D)

Looks like the markets are done trading for the day.

What kind of asshole releases a new product and immediately puts it on sale?

Vanessa stands and walks around the table to Achilles. She starts tapping on his chest and Achilles backs himself against the tube with Vanessa in lockstep. He turns his head to see Solomon facing him.

VANESSA (CONT'D)

It would be one thing if the Strut was flying off the shelf, but these numbers make me think Elizabeth could have planned a better launch. Or maybe the shoe is just so fucking tacky you wouldn't catch a dead man wearing them.

Air hisses from the tube vents again. Vanessa pauses and Achilles turns and looks at the tube.

Achilles wipes Vanessa's hands away.

ACHILLES

Tacky? What would you know about design? Where the hell is your dress from? Is burlap trending in Milan?

Richard steps in and pushes Achilles with a single hand, then turns to Solomon and takes a step.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

(To Solomon)
Your great-great toddler is going
to run your company to the ground,
sir. He can't be allowed to keep
making bat-shit crazy decisions.

Richard's eyes widen.

ACHILLES

I'm the only reason this company
still means anything.

Richard walks to Achilles and pins him back to the tube. The
sound of glass being scratched makes Achilles's eyes narrow.

RICHARD

Let's pressure test that theory.
The Clodhopper? Terrible name. Sold
three pairs. The Das Boot had the
stores flooded with Germans and
nobody else would touch them! And
your Stompers, just plain garbage...
What's after the Strut, Achilles?
Shit on a stick?

ACHILLES

I'm right here, Richard. I'm here
because I deserve it. I have every
right. Stock dip or none. This
company kills competition because I
will it into fucking existence.

Richard takes pressure off Achilles. He steps back and
unbuttons his jacket.

RICHARD

You think using the word fuck makes
you a big man. This company needs
real leadership and Solomon knows
it as much as you do.

He points at Solomon.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

I'm gonna save your ass from this
dime store Heel.

He turns and walks out. Vanessa follows.

Achilles looks at Solomon and holds his gaze.

INT. HOUSEDOWN BOOT CO FLAGSHIP STORE - BREAK ROOM - LATER

The break room is stark white and several HR posters line the walls. Everything you expect is there. A fridge, microwave, sink and coffeemaker. A long dining table and several chairs are in the middle.

James is standing by the sink, sipping from a styrofoam cup while Isabel watches her phone at the table. A game show is blaring from the speakers.

Felix walks in wearing a Solomon Heel mask, the skin is rotted and thin. There are eye cutouts and a couple strands of hair that might as well not be there.

FELIX

More! Hit your KPI so I can finally rest!

Felix grabs James's arm and flexes his bicep and pinches it until James pulls away and his coffee spills from the cup.

JAMES

Ugh, fucking zombie. Back off, Solomon. It's my ten.

Felix grabs James by the neck.

FELIX

Sell more so I- Felix can leave this shit hole and not deal with customers!

Isabel doesn't look up.

ISABEL

Hey Solomon. Felix still has to deal with them as a DM. And it's always gonna be when they're bitchy and mad. So I hope he has fun with that.

She does a zombie gesture.

ISABEL

Raaah. Let us have our ten.

JAMES

I've watched you run this place. It's in good hands. Now just let me cook. In seven minutes.

Felix drops his hands and walks off, mumbling under his breath.

JAMES (CONT'D)

(to Isabel)
Thanks.

He's a lot. He thinks he's my training wheels and I'm over here trying to prove I can pop a wheelie.

Isabel's phone volume is back up. She starts laughing at a buzzer from the speakers.

JAMES (CONT'D)

-Aaaaand you're not listening.

James tosses his cup in the trash and walks out.

**INT. HOUSEDOWN BOOT CO FLAGSHIP STORE - FRONT ENTRANCE -
LATER**

Axel catches Felix in Solomon-face and grabs his arm.

AXEL

Ay, Solomon. I found a bunch of Stompers across the floor and put them on a clearance carousel. Figured you'd look better in front of your... uh... what are the DMS to Solomon?

FELIX

Do I look like I give a shit about last season's boot?

The Solomon mask shows a tear at the jaw now.

Axel pokes at the tear in the mask and tries to get it to hold in place.

AXEL

A little spirit gum or some orangutan glue would fix that right up.

Felix smacks Axel's hand away and groans, then walks off.

Axel joins James at the register.

JAMES

He's checked out... Felix. Can't blame him. This shit is cyclical.

Axel turns and looks quizzical.

AXEL

Huh. Bigger word than I gave you credit for.

James nudges Axel.

JAMES

I heard one guy climbed his ladder and the rungs snapped under him. Fell and ended up breathing through a tube.

Axel blinks and stares at James.

JAMES (CONT'D)

How soon do you think they'll let me climb after Felix?

AXEL

I don't know. I sell more than you. I'm nicer to customers. I-

JAMES

Don't suck up to Felix, like... ever. And you're kind of a pussy about asking to get noticed. You want a ladder? Get in his face. Rub the lil area between his toes on a long day. Whatever. But when you're done... tell him you deserve to climb.

A customer steps up to the register in front of Axel.

Axel helps CUSTOMER 2, who puts a box of Struts on the counter.

He types on the computer and takes pauses to smile at her.

CUSTOMER 2

My baby just got promoted. Couldn't be more proud.

Axel gives a one sided smile.

AXEL

I'm sure you couldn't be more proud.

She reaches in her purse and fumbles around as she talks.

CUSTOMER 2

He's my everything. Been at his job eight months and they saw my baby for the brilliant boy... man- he'd correct me- that he is.

Axel shakes his head. She hands him a credit card. A receipt prints and he hands it to her and he leans in.

AXEL

I'm sure he loves making you proud.

Axel pauses and looks down.

AXEL (CONT'D)

That's what good kids do.

You tell him congrats from me. Have a great night.

CUSTOMER 2

Ooooooh.

She puts her hand over his while it's on the counter and Axel purses his lips.

The customer walks around the register and gives Axel a bear hug as if he asked her to crack his back.

Axel's eyes shift back and forth while the hug lingers. She lets him go, fixes his polo collar and smiles at him before walking out.

A group of four step out of a black SUV in front of the store. They walk towards the entrance in unison.

Matthew (40s) is the most senior district manager. He's buzzed his head and wears khakis and a collared blue shirt under a sport coat, as well as a disarming smile.

Mary (50s) is newer to the company. She left a managerial role at another company to follow her passion: masochistic discipline.

Tom (30s) and Jerry (30s) are brothers who co-manage the largest district in the state.

Axel and James are still behind the register, watching. Isabel is picking up go-backs.

Matthew is the first at the door and holds it open for the others. Axel waves as Matthew takes off his glasses.

AXEL

Hi, Matthew. Been a while. Good to see you.

MATTHEW

Aaaa...

Axel contorts his face.

AXEL

Axel.

Matthew does a finger gun at Axel.

Felix runs from the office and has a similar outfit on as Matthew, but still in Solomon cosplay.

Matthew turns his head to either side, nodding it at the brothers.

MATTHEW

Tom. Jerry.

Tom and Jerry clap their hands in unison. James steps out from behind the register, swinging his keys on a lanyard.

JAMES

Everyone out! It's that time. Leave your shi-stuff where it is. Come back tomorrow. We love you. We'll miss you. Good night!

Three customers leave, all with annoyed looks on their faces.

James closes the door behind them and locks it.

MATTHEW

Axel, great numbers. You're an asset to the store. James. Good enough. Do better.

James curls the corner of his upper lip.

FELIX

Sir-

Matthew puts his hand up.

MATTHEW

Isabel.

Isabel strolls in.

ISABEL
Tiny and mighty.

Matthew nods at Mary. Mary walks to the dump bin and grabs socks and tosses them to the floor.

MARY
Is this the way you leave your house? I should be able to see my reflection on the floor while I eat off it.

Isabel leans back and whiffs at her nose.

ISABEL
Ooo. Ma'am. I'm part-time. No es para tanto.

MARY
Es bastante pinche serio.

Isabel lets out an audible gasp. Axel purses his lips.

MATTHEW
You know we're here because you applied to be one of us. You run the flagship within acceptable margins.

James. Robes.

James runs to the SUV in the lot.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)
The customer feedback you pay for on Yelp is mostly positive and your store sold three Clodhoppers. So you can attempt the Corporate Ladder.

James comes back with robes in hand.

JAMES
Hey, I found this laser pointer in the car. Does it belong to Jerry? Does he make Tom chase it?

Tom and Jerry tilt their heads and sneer. James puckers his lips, sucks in air, and puts the robes on the front register.

Mary walks to the wall and turns off the lights. Rows of torches, risen from the floor, burst into flames. They're lighting the store back up.

The four DMs are in robes with hoods over their heads, two across from each other, all next to torches.

Axel, Isabel, and James are near the entrance.

MATTHEW

Felix. Take off the ridiculous jacket.

Matthew reaches in his robe and pulls out a remote.

Felix takes off the jacket and tosses it to the floor.

The faint sound of drums crescendo on the loudspeakers.

He cracks his knuckles and runs in place.

The drums continue getting louder.

EVERYONE IN UNISON

Climb.

Climb.

Climb.

MATTHEW

Felix. If you reach the top of the ladder this evening, you will take your place among the district managers. You will enforce the will of Solomon Heel, and receive vacation pay and sick time.

Are you ready?

Felix rotates his head and shakes it.

Matthew presses the button.

CUT TO: CEILING PANEL

It illuminates at the edges and recedes. The light glows and a ladder descends with the sound of metal on metal.

Axel rubs his palms together and smiles.

AXEL

(To himself)
Yes. This.

James wears a crooked grin.

Isabel stares at her nails.

Felix walks to the ladder and grabs a rung just above his head. He begins to climb as the drums beat faster. He stops for a second, exhales, then continues. He grabs a rung and his hand slides.

He stops and raises an eyebrow, then looks down. He inhales and reaches another rung and his hand slides more aggressively.

Axel looks at Matthew, then Felix, then James, then back at Felix. He clenches his fist.

Felix reaches for another rung and slips entirely, hitting his chin on the ladder and falling back down all the way. The sound of a bone cuts off the drums.

FELIX

Yaaaaaaaaaaa!

The ladder ascends quickly and the torches snuff out. Then the house lights turn on.

Felix's arm is mangled and limp, a bone is poking through. The mask is on the ground beside him.

JAMES

That... could've been me.

ISABEL

It really couldn't.

Matthew steps forward and pulls his hood back off his head. The other DMs do the same.

Axel steps towards Felix and reaches out.

Felix waves him away with his other arm.

FELIX

Fuck you. Get off me.

Matthew steps back as if he took a punch.

Axel recoils and Felix sucks in air through his teeth, then looks at Matthew.

Matthew points at Felix with conviction.

MATTHEW

Terminated.

Felix seethes and uses his good arm to prop himself up.

Isabel walks up to Matthew with a roll of bills. She licks her thumb, counts off a stack and presses it into Matthew's hand.

ISABEL
Your payout.

FELIX
You can't do this! Workers comp!
I'll sue your ass into next week!

JAMES
Shut up, bro. You cost me sixty
bucks and my cattle prod.

Mary laughs and taps the prod in her palm.

MARY
What kind of attorney can you
afford? Solomon's army of lawyers
could occupy France and they'll
bury you in paperwork.

Isabel chuckles.

ISABEL
Damn.

JAMES
We all know this store can't run
itself. I know every corner of this
store and how it runs. I-

Matthew turns to Axel.

MATTHEW
Axel. We need to talk. Give me a
moment while I call corporate.

Axel's eyes widen.

CLOSE ON: JAMES'S FACE.

James's eyes narrow and he growls.

INT. HOUSEDOWN BOOT CO - CORPORATE BOARDROOM - LATER

Achilles stands at the window and looks out, his arms in his pockets.

CLOSE ON: PUMPS AND FLATS ENTERING THE BOARDROOM

Vanessa walks in with a big smile on her face.

VANESSA

Have you seen the numbers?

You don't have to answer. I can see it on both your faces.

The smile on her face disappears.

VANESSA (CONT'D)

And where the hell are these god damn hats coming from?

There are four top hats on the conference table. Achilles turns towards Vanessa.

ACHILLES

Hats? It's the first day of the sale. I really don't want to hear-

RICHARD (O.S.)

It's a coup.

Richard walks in, curling his fingers individually.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

A takeover. The hostile kind.

Achilles walks to Richard and pokes his chest.

ACHILLES

What are you bellowing about now?

Richard grabs Achilles by the wrist and twists, forcing him to the ground.

RICHARD

I've been exhausted by you for some time. We all have. So there's going to be some changes.

Richard pulls out his phone and walks to the tube, showing it to Solomon.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

No point in being subtle now. It's all a matter of concession.

He walks back to Achilles and shows it to him.

A blade raises from the floor of the tube and begins spinning the contents inside, including Solomon.

ACHILLES

Thirty seven percent? To my thirty two.

Richard lowers his brow.

RICHARD

Yes. I've been quietly buying while you've made asinine decisions. You would ruin us all, left unchecked. Today, I acquired shares from Vanessa, and finally... Elizabeth.

Achilles clenches his fist and his teeth, then stands. He wipes his chin.

ACHILLES

Et tu, Bitty?

Rrrraaaaaah!

Achilles runs to Richard and throws a punch that connects to Richard's jaw. Time slows when it hits and the skin on his face reverberates. Richard takes a step back to catch himself.

Richard takes off his jacket and throws it to the ground. With a laser pointer in hand, he blinds Achilles long enough to grab him by the shirt and toss him against the window. Richard charges him, shattering the glass.

RICHARD

Fall! Like the fucking stock!

Achilles plummets out of the window. In one slick motion, he undoes his tie and swings it overhead, then tosses it as a grapple. It wraps around the window mullion and Achilles's boots make contact with the building. He uses the tie and climbs hand-over-hand back to the board room.

Once he reaches the window, he grabs the frame, bloodying his hand on the broken glass, grimacing the whole time.

Achilles swings his leg and then body into the board room.

He grins and a shoe string wraps around his neck, choking him.

ELIZABETH

It's Elizabeth, sir!

Achilles speaks while gasping for air.

ACHILLES

You... wear... flaaaats.

Richard punches Achilles in the gut. He drops to one knee, doubled over.

Richard turns, and with his fist, breaks the coffee table and grabs a leg. He raises it above his shoulder and takes a fighting stance.

Achilles raises his head and tilts it to either side and smiles. He reaches down and grabs a table leg of his own. He stands and gestures for Richard to come forward.

CLOSE ON: CLASHING LEGS

RICHARD

This sale ends now!

Richard swings the leg from above his head, down at Achilles.

Achilles blocks the attack with his leg, but it splits in two. He sneers and tosses his leg to the side.

Richard, drops his body slightly and swings his table leg at the back of Achilles's heel. Sweeping him back to the floor. Richard stands over Achilles and points the leg at him.

RICHARD

Yield.

The blade in the tube stops spinning and lowers back into the floor. The speed of Solomon's body spinning slows until it stops. Forced air shoots into the viscous gel, making it bubble and then it settles.

Achilles closes his eyes and stands up. He inhales.

ACHILLES

The parking space is still mine.

Vanessa steps forward.

VANESSA

Let him keep it. We'll just swap your signs.

Richard nods.

ACHILLES

It's only money. You've won a responsibility you can't handle.

(MORE)

ACHILLES (CONT'D)

I'll have controlling interest again and next time I won't settle for a title with air quotes.

RICHARD

Yes, Achilles, you're a shoe-in.

VANESSA

Jesus, Richard. Tell him to get off your lawn next.

RICHARD

Get the voting members on the phone.

INT. HOUSEDOWN BOOT CO FLAGSHIP STORE - FRONT ENTRANCE - LATER

Felix has his belongings in a box, his tie is hanging from the side. His bone, still poking through the skin in his forearm.

James is in front of the register, aggressively wiping down the counter.

Mary steps behind Felix with gloved hands, wielding an electric cattle prod, which is giving off a low hum and a visible current, and Felix's tablet. She pokes Felix and he yelps.

Matthew tugs at the lanyard around Felix's neck until it snaps. He reaches in his robe and pulls out a paper.

MATTHEW

You've been emailed a copy as well.

Felix squints and frowns. Matthew reaches to hand it to Felix and stops himself, then places it in the box and taps it and smiles.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

This is your exit survey. Please review it and sign and submit your response in a timely manner.

Felix hangs his head.

FELIX

There's-

Mary moves to poke him again and he scoots forward.

Matthew puts up his hand, palm first.

MATTHEW

Buh-buh-buh. We appreciate your efforts and look forward to a continued relationship with you as a loyal customer.

Matthew pushes Felix through the door and closes and locks it. Felix drops his box and turns around.

Everyone freezes and watches him.

He bangs on the glass with no sound. Every time his broken arm lands his face contorts in agony.

He gives up and starts walking away while pushing his box forward with his feet.

Matthew turns to Axel. He gestures for Axel to come forward.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Frank was a disappointment. But dwelling on the past is silly.

JAMES

I think you mean Fel-

Tom drags his finger across his neck, cutting James off.

MATTHEW

In light of everything that's happened here, we've made some decisions.

James rubs his hands together and smiles.

Tom and Jerry move to either side of James. He turns to either side. Jerry leans over and shakes his head at James.

Axel's eyes grow and Isabel puts one hand on his shoulder. She clenches her other fist against her chest.

James taps his feet until Tom puts his hand on his shoulder.

Felix picks up his box and walks away.

AXEL

I'm ready to help in any way I can.

Matthew raises his hand and snaps his finger. Mary hands Axel Felix's tablet.

MATTHEW

Good. You're going to take on some new responsibilities while the store goes through its transition.

You've demonstrated responsibility, respect and commitment to the customers and company.

Axel smiles from ear to ear.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

We've processed a digital gift card as a thank you for your hard work.

Axel looks at Isabel, who rolls her eyes.

James bites his lip and chuckles.

Axel contains a sigh and smiles.

AXEL

I appreciate that.

MATTHEW

I'll be managing the store while we look for Felix's replacement.

I still have my district to run, so your new responsibilities will include running the store when I can't be here. That means overtime once in a while.

Matthew smiles a big toothy grin.

Axel smiles back, no teeth.

AXEL

I appreciate the faith. Does this mean I should- Can we go to the office?

MATTHEW

Let's.

**INT. HOUSEDOWN BOOT CO FLAGSHIP STORE - STORE OFFICE -
MOMENTS LATER**

The door swings open and Matthew walks in first, then Axel. Axel shuts the door.

Matthew rolls the chair out from the desk and sits. His robe opens at the bottom and Axel winces and raises his hand to block his eyes but stops himself and lowers it.

AXEL

I'm happy to... learn everything I can and take on these new responsibilities. And I a-

Is there any chance you could cross your- or close...

Matthew looks down.

MATTHEW

Oh hell. My apologies.

Matthew slowly closes his legs. Axel lowers his eyes and turns towards Matthew.

AXEL

I appreciate the gift card. Is there a chance we can talk about a raise?

Matthew stands and puts his hand on Axel's shoulder. He smiles and half nods.

MATTHEW

No. Not yet. Not the appropriate time. Show me how you handle these new responsibilities and maybe there's a ladder for you.

Axel looks at Matthew and then scans the office.

AXEL

You've seen my numbers. I'm not trying to sound pushy. I do good work he-

Axel reads Matthew's face as the warm smile lowers to an expressionless mouth.

Axel stops.

MATTHEW

I respect that. You didn't take the first no. Good sales instinct. The answer doesn't change though.

You're a good kid. You're gonna do great. It's the flagship location.

(MORE)

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Maybe with good numbers they'll know you by first name at corporate.

Axel lights up.

AXEL

What's corporate like?

Matthew rubs Axel's head and winces. He looks at his hand and opens the door, then stops and looks back at Axel.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Oh! It can wait til morning, but you'll need to take the sale signage down. Word from corporate is that Richard is now acting CEO and killed the sale. Apparently Solomon wasn't pleased either.

I'll be seeing you soon to check on your progress.

Matthew shrugs and leaves, the office door is still open.

Axel heads to the computer and taps a couple keys. Trumpets sound off from the speakers on the monitor and a picture of the digital gift card pops up on the monitor.

He drops his head and it lands on the keyboard. He shakes his head and turns off the monitor, then turns and looks at the door.

CLOSE ON: POSTER "KICK YOUR HEELS UP"

Axel looks at the poster of Solomon Heel and takes a deep breath.

AXEL

I see you.

You'll see me.

He looks down at his Struts. He pulls his keys out of his pocket and tosses and catches them, clenching his fist around them. After a moment, Axel looks up and a dimple forms at the left side of his mouth.

He kicks his heel up and it squeaks on the floor, then he walks out and closes the office door.

**INT. HOUSEDOWN BOOT CO FLAGSHIP STORE - FRONT ENTRANCE -
MOMENTS LATER**

James intercepts Axel on his way to the door.

JAMES

I heard they added to your chore list. They didn't give you a chance at the ladder because you're not me. Don't think you're more than their pet.

Axel laughs and covers his face.

AXEL

I didn't see you climb the ladder tonight.

Go home, James.

Axel heads to the door and meets up with Isabel. He stops in front of the door and rocks on his feet.

She smiles at him, pulls him down to her level and fixes his hair, then shakes her head.

ISABEL

Aye, puto.

AXEL

Tsss. Oh, please. You were afraid of a chica.

They both laugh.

ISABEL

Did you see that fuckin' cattle prod? ZAP! I wish I could get one for when you get sassy.

Axel shakes his head. He opens the door and lets her out first.

**EXT. HOUSEDOWN BOOT CO FLAGSHIP STORE - FRONT ENTRANCE -
CONTINUOUS**

Isabel and Axel stop a couple feet in front of the store. Isabel backhands Axel's shoulder.

ISABEL (CONT'D)

You gonna run this place or what, bitch?

Axel laughs.

AXEL

If so, would you still slap me and
call me bitch?

Isabel gestures like she's about to slap him.

ISABEL

Whaddayu think?

Axel raises his head and shakes it at the sky.

AXEL

I'm gonna show them why I should've
run this store from ages ago. Fuck
a new manager. There's a ladder for
me.

Isabel nods and they continue walking.

James steps out last, holding the Solomon mask and locks the
door.

He turns and clenches his fists, watching Axel and Isabel
leave.

THE END