

LET GO

a short play

by Eric Pfeffinger

eric@ericpfeffinger.com

THE TIME

Today.

THE PLACE

The office.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

MANAGER

EMPLOYEE

ANOTHER EMPLOYEE

All of these characters can be played by actors of any age, racial or ethnic background, or sexual identity.

EMPLOYEE in MANAGER's office.

MANAGER

—so as you know, times are unusually tough and budgets are tight. Everyone's cutting to the bone and beyond. That is absolutely the only, the *only* reason — and I am so sorry to be having to say this — that I'm afraid we're going to have to let you be drawn and quartered.

EMPLOYEE

I underst—
(beat)
Excuse me?

MANAGER

It's absolutely nothing personal. There are some forms for you to sign, purely legal boilerplate, nothing I'd worry about overmuch, and you'll want to take some time to collect your personal belongings...

EMPLOYEE

What did you say?

MANAGER

About the budgets?

EMPLOYEE

You said you're afraid I have to be...?

MANAGER

Be drawn and quartered, correct. It's a semi-standard measure in times of financial crisis.

EMPLOYEE

Like with *horses*?

MANAGER

Typically, sure. But you know, there's room for variance...

EMPLOYEE

Like pulled apart, violently, by horses.

MANAGER

You know that is a common misconception? No. The "drawn" part merely means you're delivered to the appropriate location by horses, as by dragging. Then you're converted into four pieces any number of ways. Could be the horses but could also be —

(mimes chopping/slicing)

So I absolutely would not worry about that overmuch. You haven't yet signed the—

EMPLOYEE
Why?

MANAGER
 (checking the time)
Why...?

EMPLOYEE
Why drawn and quartered? Why? Why?

MANAGER
 Honestly it is one hundred percent a regrettable consequence of current conditions. We can't afford to continue to keep our entire current staff on payroll, so...

EMPLOYEE
But why drawn and quartered?

MANAGER
Because you can't work here any more!

EMPLOYEE
Your explanation is missing a step!

MANAGER
 Look, the fact is, every organization contends with force reductions in different ways. Furloughs. Layoffs. Firings. Early retirements. Immolations. Beheadings. Sabbaticals. The truth is in the end the details don't particularly matter, it's all the same result.

EMPLOYEE
Not precisely.

MANAGER
 But from management's standpoint. You see what I'm saying. And so this firm has traditionally tended to opt for the drawing and the quartering. Part of the corporate culture here, I suppose, like casual Fridays and fight club Thursdays. Ultimately it's six of one, half-dozen of the other really.

EMPLOYEE
 But — I'll die.

MANAGER
 Presumably. — That's not the intent of the exercise. Though it is a likely outcome.

EMPLOYEE
Can't I just leave?

MANAGER

I mean, well, no. Read the paperwork, it's all pretty straightforward.

EMPLOYEE

I don't want to READ THE FUCKING PAPERWORK.

MANAGER

Well then there are going to be some things that are frankly going to be a little unclear.

EMPLOYEE

Are any of the executives getting drawn and quartered?

MANAGER consults screen.

MANAGER

I don't think so.

EMPLOYEE

Figures.

MANAGER

Well, there's a reason they're paid so much money. They're very necessary.

EMPLOYEE

How do you know that?

MANAGER

Well why else would they make so much money? —Oh, wait, here's one executive vice-president who is getting... no, sorry, he's not getting drawn and quartered, he's getting a bonus. Getting a bonus. Got the columns mixed up. My bad.

EMPLOYEE

Well I'm not signing anything.

MANAGER

That's a little frustrating for me.

EMPLOYEE

Good!

MANAGER

Nobody's ever refused to sign before.

EMPLOYEE

How is that possible?

MANAGER

Everyone who works here — well, you're all pretty docile. You're all usually big team players.

EMPLOYEE

Well not today, motherfucker. *Not today!*

MANAGER

Really?

EMPLOYEE

If that's okay.

MANAGER

(big groaning sigh. Beat. Then:)

I do not need this headache. Look. Ugh. Okay. I suppose... if it's really that important to you...

EMPLOYEE

Not being drawn? Not being quartered? It is. It's been my passion for, like, forever.

MANAGER

I suppose, as an exception, just this once, we could skip that one step. Just fire you. No severance package, no references. How would that sound?

EMPLOYEE

Oh my gosh. That would be — *so* great. *Thank* you. *Thank* you. I'm sorry for all those times I called you a toadying douchebag.

MANAGER

When did you say that?

EMPLOYEE

So many times. Thank you again. I'm really grateful. If there's ever anything I can do for you or the company — well. You know where to find me. At least until I lose my house. Aaaagggghh, quit talking! Okay, all right. You have a good day. I mean it. Bye now.

EMPLOYEE exits.

MANAGER picks up phone:

MANAGER

I am killing it up in here. Send in the next one, please.

ANOTHER EMPLOYEE enters.

I'm so sorry but I'm afraid we're going to have to have you squished.

End of play.