

THE MANAGER

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"Good morning, Mr. Denken," the guard said, holding open a door to the lobby of the corporate tower. Harold Denken did not reply, but kept his eyes fixed toward a tree growing in the middle of the spacious atrium. Every morning on a bench under the tree, a boy set up a shoeshine stand. And every morning, Harold had his shoes shined.

"Hello Bobby!" He greeted the tousle-headed, fifteen-year-old.

The boy glanced up at him, smiled, and said softly: "Morning, sir."

Harold sat down and plopped his left shoe onto the cast iron stand. Then he took out a comb and ran it straight back through his hair, while he patted his hair into place with the other hand. With his head tilted back, he noticed the dead leaves on the branches above him.

"That tree doesn't look like it's going to last much longer," he said. "I should have it sprayed with acrylic to preserve it -- before it's too late."

"But they say trees give off oxygen," noted the boy.

"Oxygen? Why, the air entering this building is filtered a dozen times," Harold replied. "There's nothing a tree could do to improve the air in here."

"Of course not, sir."

When the boy finished shining his shoes, Harold folded up a couple dollars and handed it to him. Bobby looked up at him and nodded thank-you. As he watched Harold walk toward the elevators, the boy stretched out his leg and stuffed the bills into his jeans pocket.

"Good morning, Mr. Denken," said the receptionist cheerfully, although Harold rarely acknowledged such courtesies. It was not politeness that moved him up the corporate ladder. His stubborn attitude, though born of a basic lack of creativity, was greatly admired in management circles. He believed in setting one's goals -- money and power in his case -- and then ruthlessly pursuing them.

While climbing the corporate ladder, Harold made sure he was never too useful in any one department, so the only way he could be removed was through promotion. He learned how to delegate most of his responsibilities to others, while taking credit for anything of value they did.

Thanks to such simple strategies, Harold had the time and energy to concentrate on company politics. From his entry level position in the accounting department, he soon moved into the Controller's Office and from there into upper management.

When the Board elected him CFO, Harold began eliminating all those jobs he knew to be unnecessary. He transformed the corporation into a lean and mean machine. With what was left of the employees, he formed "a corporate family with each member responsible for our mutual success." In practical terms that meant the elimination of hourly workers and individual job descriptions, while making salaried employees feel insecure unless they were working long hours to bring up the slack.

Eventually, the corporation grew to the point where it had to employ dozens of lawyers just to figure out how to keep all the money at home. Since everybody knew the goal was money and power, there were no distracting discussions about right or wrong, no lingering doubts about what really counted. The machine grew so efficient that it practically ran itself. In fact, if he had been completely honest, Harold would have eliminated his own job.



Later that day Harold emerged from the corporate tower into the bright, afternoon sun. He decided to seek a little excitement and stroll through the park on his way home. One of his hobbies was touring the underground toilets at the edge of the Central Park.

Easing down the grimy concrete steps, he descended into the stale, humid air of the mensroom. Furtive glances between strangers and sudden, compulsive movements at the urinals revealed passions out of control.

Of course, Harold never participated in the goings-on, but the temptation and danger made him feel strong and alive. He often thought, *What do these men need more – satisfaction of their obscene desires or someone to take charge of their pitiful lives?*

Here – in this filthy, dark place – Harold felt he could observe firsthand the raw energy that was driving the whole city. Sex, money, power – they all came from the same instincts, the same source of wild desire deep in the human soul. Visiting the underground toilets had become one of Harold's favorite pastimes.

Harold emerged again into the light of day and continued his walk home. He could not help feeling superior to the people scurrying about on the sidewalks around him. They had not the courage to test themselves in the toilets. They would never

deliberately descend into chaos of human desire, never look to see what was hidden in the shadows. They had no idea what went on in the bowels of the city, nor were they even aware of the dark forces at work in the depths of their own souls. He had no use for any of them.

Harold's only real comrades on the streets were the ATM's he came across every few blocks. They were always ready to interface, to give him a few bucks if he needed it. What more could one ask of any friend? When he arrived at his penthouse, there was only the doorman there to greet him.

A cold blustery wind greeted Harold the next morning as he left his hotel. For a moment he thought about returning to his suite to fetch an overcoat, but he decided to walk more briskly to try to warm himself. Although he reached the office in half the normal time, he was a little disheveled and out of breath. Once again, the guard greeted him and opened the door to the lobby. Once again, he ignored the guard and walked straight for the shoeshine boy.



"Hi, Bobby." He sat down and lifted his shoe on the stand.

"Good morning, sir. How are you today?" said the boy, slapping a gob of black polish on the shoe.

"A little out of breath, I'm afraid."

"Because of the tree, sir? It looks completely dead."

"I thought I told you we don't need that tree," Harold said. "I think I'll have the owners remove it."

"But *you're* not the owner?" the boy asked in astonishment.

"Why, no," Harold replied.

"I thought you owned this place!" The boy stopped shining the shoe and glared up at the man.

"Of course not." Harold was puzzled by the anger in the boy's eyes.

"Then you were just pretending you owned it," the boy said with a surly grin.

"Nonsense. How could I own a 300-million-dollar building? I'm the Chief Financial Officer of the corporation that leases it."

"You're just a boss. Someone's over you." the boy said, spitting into his shine towel. But before he could start rubbing the shoe, Harold yanked his foot away.

"It's the way business operates," Harold told the boy, "Managers and owners have different posi- . . ." Harold stopped to catch his breath, then realized how unseemly it was for him to be making excuses to a child. Abruptly, he got up and scurried to the elevators. Tiny globs of the polishing paste spun off from his shoe, leaving black stains on the marble floor behind him.

That afternoon, Harold decided to leave early to get some air. He found himself strolling through the park toward the underground toilets. Easing down the grimy steps,

he came upon two men together in a corner. The younger man suddenly bolted up the stairway, but the older man stood where he was and looked right at Harold. For some reason, Harold could only take very short breaths, like his heart had swollen and was pressing against his lungs.

The man moved forward and touched him, then whispered into his ear: "It'll cost you." Harold slowly opened his wallet and gave the man a twenty-dollar bill. The man moved closer and pressed his stale, open mouth directly over Harold's pursed lips.

Harold's mind went blank. But as the man knelt before him, Harold started feeling in charge again. This was how things should be, he thought. Then only one thought surfaced in his mind, over and over again. It was a prayer in the darkness and a homage to management. *Money and Power! Money and Power!*