

OVER BLACK

Three short rings. A young female voice answers the call. Her name is Laura.

LAURA

Dispatcher 356189 at your service. My name is Laura. How may I help you?

A deep male voice on the other end of the line answers:

MALE VOICE

Good morning, Laura. How are you today? Wearing red, aren't you?

LAURA

Dispatcher 356189 cannot provide answers to personal questions.

MALE VOICE

Is that because of your precious protocol?

LAURA

Correct, Sir. Dispatcher 356189 has to follow a protocol just like any other dispatcher in the company.

MALE VOICE

Right. Tell me, Laura, how does it feel to look yourself in the mirror and see a dumb protocol-loving machine?

LAURA

Dispatcher 356189 cannot discuss matters of this nature with a caller. Should I transfer you to client services, Sir?

MALE VOICE

No. I just want you to look at yourself and tell me what you see.

LAURA

Dispatcher 356189 will connect you to client services momentarily.

MALE VOICE

Relax Laura. There's no client services anymore. You won't be able to transfer me, all you can do is continue talking to me.

Tap tap on phone buttons - Laura seemingly tries to perform a transfer. Nothing happens.

LAURA

I don't understand...

MALE VOICE

Oh-oh. The machine broke, hasn't it? But you can't break. Know why?

LAURA

Dispatcher 356189 will try to answer your questions in complete honesty unless they are irrelevant, of personal matter or--

MALE VOICE

That's a lie. You can't be honest if you're following the protocol. Something was wrong that day with that plane and you knew it but you didn't let your dear client services know because it would be against the protocol, remember?

LAURA

What day, sir?

MALE VOICE

The day of the accident. A hundred and thirty seven people plummeted down to be incinerated instantly upon hitting the ground instead of getting sunburned in Hawaii. Do you remember?

Silence.

LAURA

Dispatcher 356189 cannot answer a question if it does not pertain to her work duties...

MALE VOICE

You know why you can't transfer me to client services? Because you're not there, Laura. Look at yourself. Do you see your hands, your legs?

Silence.

MALE VOICE

Pinch yourself.

Silence.

LAURA

Dispatcher 356189 doesn't understand.

MALE VOICE

You do understand, you just don't want to accept it. That plane crash got to you, Laura. You could have said a word but you didn't. Now look at what it's done to you.

Silence.

MALE VOICE

You must remember some of it. They rushed you to a hospital after you had a stroke. Brain aneurism - you regained consciousness when they gave you the diagnosis.

LAURA

I wouldn't be able to stop the plane. It was going to crash anyway.

MALE VOICE

You could have made an effort.

LAURA

The client services wouldn't have listened to me if I didn't follow you know... the protocol.

MALE VOICE

Then it would on them.

Long silence.

Soft crying is heard.

LAURA

Dispatcher 356189 is... very sorry.

Laura sounds distraught.

MALE VOICE

I must hang up. You have other callers, Laura.

A short ring. The Man disconnects.

Another ring - another caller.

LAURA

Dispatcher 356189 at your service. My  
name is Laura. How may I help you?

The same MALE VOICE on the line.

MALE VOICE

Good morning, Laura. How are you  
today? Wearing red, aren't you?

FADE OUT.