

THE PAPER CUT

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Logline: When a middle-aged legal secretary has a meltdown at work, she's forced to chart another course or lose it all.

INT. CAR - DAY

FRANCINE, 50, drives in LA morning rush hour through Hollywood. HORNS HONK. CARS ZOOM. She stops at a red light. She checks rearview mirror with cheesy smile.

FRANCINE

Welcome everyone to Francine's Hollywood experience. Today you will see all the glamour of Hollywood until we reach our final destination! -- Why yes, I was a zombie in 2004. Recognize this?

She rolls down the window.

FRANCINE (CONT'D)

Aaaarruuuggggghhh!

She resumes driving, hits brakes. TIRES SCREECH. HOMELESS WOMAN crosses in front of the car staring at her.

FRANCINE (CONT'D)

Terribly sorry about that. They have the right of way even though my light's green. We'll just sit here and let her safely cross.

Homeless woman shuffles past the car. Francine resumes driving.

FRANCINE (CONT'D)

If you quickly look to the right you will see the very tree that Johnny Depp stood under when he got the call to be in his very first pirate movie.

HAROLD, navigation system voice, interjects.

HAROLD (V.O.)

In one thousand feet, turn right.

FRANCINE

Thank you Harold! Everyone, this is Harold

*(points to dash)*

He will help navigate us quickly and efficiently to our final destination without a freeway, because there's nothing free about it.

EXT. - STREET - DAY

Francine turns right onto a bridge crossing over the freeway of bumper to bumper cars.

INT. CAR - DAY

Francine drives through Beverly Hills.

FRANCINE

Welcome to Beverly Hills. Directly to your left is the very spot where Julia Roberts said her famous lines, 'you work on commission, right? Big mistake, huge!'

HAROLD (V.O.)

In five hundred feet, turn left.

FRANCINE

Roger that, Harold!

HAROLD (V.O.)

You've arrived at your destination.

INT. PARKING GARAGE - DAY

Francine turns into the parking ramp of an office building.

FRANCINE

We have arrived at our destination. Or rather, mine.

She drives in circles down to the bottom level.

FRANCINE (CONT'D)

This is our final destination today. Thank you for coming. I hope you enjoyed the tour.

She pulls into a parking space. She looks in the rearview mirror.

FRANCINE (CONT'D)

Please be careful when exiting. I hope you'll join me again. Good-bye. Oh, love your shoes! Nice hat, sir! Thank you.

Francine sits quietly and then turns to look at the back seat. Empty. Her imaginary passengers have exited.

FRANCINE (CONT'D)

Not an actress. Not a tour bus driver. Legal secretary, guilty as charged. Time to punch the time clock and join the monkeys. It's a zoo, I kid you not. God help me!

INT. OFFICE - FRANCINE'S DESK - DAY

Boxes of files line her cubicle. File stacks on the desk. Paper stacked on her chair. Francine moves a stack on her desk. JASMINE, 30's, co-worker, pops up from next cubicle.

JASMINE

Good morning!

FRANCINE

Morning, Jasmine.

JASMINE

It's going to be another day in paradise, busy, busy, busy.

Francine sits to turn on her computer. RANDY, 60's, copy center worker, approaches Francine and hovers over her desk.

FRANCINE

Yes, Randy?

RANDY

Uh, we don't have any blue card stock. Can we use the green?

FRANCINE

No. The court requires blue.

RANDY

We have a lighter shade of green that's close to blue.

FRANCINE

I need blue.

RANDY

We ordered blue, but won't be on the truck until tomorrow.

FRANCINE

I need blue. Today.

RANDY

But the truck --

FRANCINE  
Randy! I need blue. Today.

RANDY  
Okay.

Randy turns to walk away.

FRANCINE  
Randy. I'm sorry, I know it's not  
'your' fault but I need blue  
covers. Today. Thank you.

Francine turns to move more papers from her desk. PHONE LINE  
RINGS.

FRANCINE (CONT'D)  
Good morning, Mr. Charleston's  
office. I'm sorry he's not in -- I  
can -- yes, he will be shortly.

Another phone line RINGS.

FRANCINE (CONT'D)  
Hold please. Francine  
speaking -- Yes, I had  
identical packages delivered  
to different addresses --  
Pick up the package where you  
left it and deliver it to the  
correct address at no extra  
charge!

RECEPTIONIST (V.O.)  
Francine, please dial  
extension 201, Francine 201.

Francine hangs up the phone.

JASMINE  
Francine, they're paging you.

Francine picks up the previous line and hangs up.

FRANCINE  
Great! They hung up!

JASMINE  
You were paged.

FRANCINE  
Thank you, Jasmine.

Phone line rings. Francine ignores it. She loudly drops  
stacks of papers from her desk onto the floor. She picks up a  
box.

JASMINE

*(on phone)*

Okay. Thank you.

*(hangs up)*

Francine, there's a court reporter downstairs at security. They won't let her up without sending someone down. She's not on the list.

Francine drops the box. BOOM! It busts apart on the floor. Paper contents go everywhere.

Francine picks up a stack of papers and gets a nasty paper cut. She throws the papers in the air.

FRANCINE

Holy cow! Mother may I!

Auuuuugghh!

Francine shakes her hand and spins in a circle.

JASMINE

Francine! It's okay. I'll send someone down for her.

FRANCINE

No! Paper cut!

Francine points to her finger. Jasmine pulls several tissues out of a box and throws them at Francine. Francine wraps them around her finger. Jasmine follows and wraps the tissues in scotch tape.

CASEY, 40's, co-worker, carefree and oblivious to anything happening in the office, walks by the commotion.

CASEY

Oh wow! Are we doing finger puppets today?

JASMINE

Paper cut.

CASEY

Oh? Does she still have a finger?

FRANCINE

Yes I still have a finger!

Casey hurries away passing Randy.

RANDY

What's going on?

CASEY

Paper cut. But she still has her fingers.

Randy makes an about-face turn and heads the other direction. Francine rants.

FRANCINE

*(her voice escalates)*

In the midst of three court filings yesterday I forgot to call security and put the court reporter on the list! I have a brief to file by three o'clock pm with blue covers but we have no blue covers!

CO-WORKERS and ATTORNEYS come out of their offices toward Francine.

FRANCINE (CONT'D)

I have to pack up two boxes of documents for shipping to Europe and there they are all over the floor! Out of order! I have a three o'clock pm deadline on another filing which means I'm not eating lunch today! And I'm losing blood as I speak!

She rummages through a box. Phone line RINGS

FRANCINE (CONT'D)

The phone won't quit ringing! It just ringy, ringy, rings and I'm not answering it anymore!

MR. CHARLESTON, 65, dapperly dressed in a dark suit, walks down the hall toward Francine as she rummages through more papers. She does not see him.

FRANCINE (CONT'D)

Monkeys on the loose! I hate my job! I'd really love to quit! I chose to live in the land of glitz and glamour but I'm sick of this! Dare I mention raises? Not!

She picks up a box of plastic clips she can't open because of the tissues around her finger. She pulls harder. A rainbow of plastic clips fill the air.

Mr. Charleston approaches behind Francine's back. She picks up a stapler and addresses the CROWD now standing around her desk.

FRANCINE (CONT'D)  
 You see this? Pretend it's a  
 microphone!

She drops the stapler on the desk. CLANG. Attorneys and co-workers scurry to their respective offices/desks.

Francine turns right into Mr. Charleston, seeing him for the first time. SILENCE.

She turns back to grab her purse and knocks the stapler to the floor, CLANG, it busts into pieces. One piece flies across the floor landing at the tip of Mr. Charleston's shoe.

FRANCINE (CONT'D)  
 Morning, Mr. Charleston. Excuse  
 me.

She walks out.

INT. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE - DAY

SECRETARIES, ATTORNEYS, Casey and Jasmine gather by the window watching Francine walk to the courtyard below.

Francine lies down flat on her back and makes motions of a snow angel with her feet and arms.

ATTORNEY ONE  
 What is she doing? Yoga?

CASEY  
 She's gone bonkers. Do you think  
 she's gonna quit or get fired?

ATTORNEY TWO  
 I hope there's no dog poo in that  
 patch of grass because a paper cut  
 would be the least of her worries.

EXT. BUILDING - COURTYARD -DAY

Francine cries as she lies still in a small grass patch lined by concrete.

FRANCINE  
 Okay, God. I snapped. I can't  
 handle it anymore. I applied for so  
 many jobs and I'm still here. If  
 you love me you would open doors,  
 right? Please get me out of here! I  
 don't want to go back.

Francine sits up and dries her tears with her hand of tissues.

FRANCINE (CONT'D)  
It might be a good idea to leave on my terms instead of theirs.

INT. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE - DAY

Secretaries, attorneys, Casey and Jasmine continue watching Francine.

ATTORNEY ONE  
Looks like she's getting up.

ATTORNEY TWO  
Is she heading back to the building?

ATTORNEY ONE  
I don't know. Looks like she just dropped something.

JASMINE  
She's praying, or I hope she is. Come on people, show's over.

Jasmine walks out. Others follow.

INT. OFFICE - FRANCINE'S DESK - LATER

Francine calmly returns to her desk. Jasmine, Casey and OTHER CO-WORKERS are picking up the mess. Francine holds a package of blue covers.

FRANCINE  
I'm so sorry you guys.

Casey neatly stacks files on Francine's desk.

CASEY  
Don't be sorry. You just said pretty much what we were all thinking. So out of your character but way to go! Sorry about your paper cut.

FRANCINE  
Thanks. I have to get this work done. I just wasted thirty minutes. On a good note I picked up some blue covers for my briefs.

Jasmine grabs Francine. They walk around the corner to a storage room.

INT. STORAGE ROOM - DAY

Francine sits on bench surrounded by office junk.

JASMINE  
Welcome to my office.

FRANCINE  
Nice digs.

JASMINE  
Francine, you need to fix this quickly.

FRANCINE  
Major meltdown, crazy lady gone off the deep end can't be fixed. No rewind. No do-over. Not no way.

JASMINE  
I'm serious. Do you still pray?

FRANCINE  
Non-stop for God to open doors for me elsewhere. But I'm stuck!

JASMINE  
Then get un-stuck. Do you remember the precise moment that set you off? -- You got a paper cut! You were already upset but the second you got the cut, you snapped.

Francine starts to unravel the tissues and tape from her finger.

JASMINE (CONT'D)  
It hurt really bad but it got your attention, right?

Francine nods and flinches as she finishes unraveling tissue and tape revealing a tiny dot of blood. She sniffles and blows her nose in the tissues.

JASMINE (CONT'D)  
It reflects what God is doing in your life that you don't even see.

FRANCINE  
God nearly sliced off my finger?

JASMINE

Not the actual paper cut. He allowed you to reach a point where you were forced to change.

FRANCINE

My mind is not in any condition to understand anything you're saying.

JASMINE

Okay. Your favorite verses. Trust him when you don't understand. Acknowledge him and he will direct you. Proverbs 3:5-6. I actually prayed that this morning but God took me further.

Jasmine hands her a cell phone from her pocket and pulls up the verses.

JASMINE (CONT'D)

Go down to verse 11.

FRANCINE

*(slowing down)*

My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline, and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.

JASMINE (CONT'D)

*(joining in)*

Verse 12 because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.

She hands the phone to Jasmine.

JASMINE (CONT'D)

What do you think he's teaching you?

INT. OFFICE - FRANCINE'S DESK

Francine picks up her phone.

FRANCINE

Hi Randy, can you come by my desk and help me with something? Thanks.

MONTAGE - FRANCINE DELEGATES WORKLOAD - SERIES OF SHOTS

-- Francine hands Randy a stack of documents to copy.

-- Francine asks RECEPTIONIST to stuff envelopes.

-- Francine instructs Casey to redact documents.

-- Francine hands RANDY the blue covers.

INT. OFFICE - FRANCINE'S DESK - LATER

Francine sits alone at her desk and closes her eyes. Mr. Charleston approaches.

MR. CHARLESTON

Francine, may I have a word with you?

FRANCINE

Mr. Charleston. I didn't mean to disrupt the office. I am very sorry. It was unprofessional and I'm quite embarrassed. Am I fired?

Mr. Charleston picks up a few pieces of the broken stapler.

MR. CHARLESTON

Well, for starters, this is not a microphone.

FRANCINE

Of course. I apologize. You can take the expense out of my final check.

Mr. Charleston throws the stapler pieces in the trash.

MR. CHARLESTON

I watched how you composed yourself after your outburst today and I realize you aren't crazy, just a bit neurotic. You bounced back, pulled a team together and got all your projects out the door before the deadlines. That's admirable. That's leadership.

FRANCINE

Thank you, I think.

MR. CHARLESTON

It's been quite the day. You can go ahead and leave.

FRANCINE

Yes, sir.

Mr. Charleston walks away and turns back to Francine.

MR. CHARLESTON

Be sure to stop by my office in the morning so we can discuss how you can stick around long enough to whip this department into shape -- and a raise. Good-night Francine. Take care of that paper cut.

FRANCINE

Yes! Thank you, Jesus!

Mr. Charleston walks away. Francine unfolds a note on her desk.

FRANCINE (CONT'D)

"because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the daughter he delights in." Love, Jasmine.

She tacks the note onto her cubicle wall. Picks up purse, turns off desk lamp and exits.

INT. PARKING GARAGE - NIGHT

Francine adjusts her rearview mirror with a cheesy smile.

FRANCINE

Welcome to Francine's awakening experience. Boy did I put on a show today! You should have been there! I'm talking Oscar worthy performance! You see, I nearly lost my finger, I totally lost my temper, and I could have lost my job! That's a lot of losing, but I gained understanding of God's mysterious ways. A little, anyway.

HAROLD (V.O.)

We're all set. Drive safe.

Francine pulls out of parking space talking to her imaginary passengers.

FRANCINE

Yes, Harold. Let's go home! -- Now see this parking attendant to your right, he's the long lost father of the step-sister of Justin Bieber who used to work in a circus act with elephants and . . .

FADE OUT.

