

IT: THE MUSICAL

Lyric Book & Stage Direction Draft

A two-act musical comedy about connection, trust, outages, and the people who keep everything running.

Song List

ACT I

1. Handshake of the Heart
2. Have You Tried Turning It Off and On Again?
3. It Works on My Machine
4. The Network Is Down
5. Someone Got In
6. Wake Up the Incident Team
7. It Looked Like Microsoft
8. Containment

ACT II

9. Good Morning, Everything Is Fine
10. Trust Me
11. Who Owns This? / Temporary
12. Burn It Down and Build It Back
13. Known Good
14. Handshake of the Heart - Finale

Staging note: The production can be played realistically or with a heightened theatrical vocabulary. The MODEM, TRUST, STATIC, alerts, packets, and systems may be personified. Screens and projections can carry timestamps, alerts, ticket counts, network maps, and status indicators, but the story should remain understandable without them.

ACT I

Connection, confidence, and the night everything changes

1. Handshake of the Heart

ACT I

A dark 1990s home office. A beige PC and CRT glow center stage. The USER sits at the desk. The COMPUTER awakens with a low hum. A telephone cord trails toward the wings. The MODEM is revealed in a narrow spotlight - romantic, dramatic, and completely sincere.

COMPUTER / USER

Another night, another screen
A blinking cursor waits for me
There's something out there, somewhere far
Beyond this room, beyond these walls

They say there's a whole world waiting
If I can only get inside
People, places, information
All waiting on the other side

The USER clicks Connect. The orchestra makes room for the first dialing tones. The MODEM steps forward as if answering a love summons.

MODEM

I've waited all night on this copper line
Listening for a voice that might answer mine
Every click, every hiss, every hopeful cry
Means somewhere in the darkness
You might reply

I know your number by heart now
Every digit, every tone
And though we've never seen each other
I don't feel quite so alone

So pick up the line
And tell me you're there
Send me a signal
Through the cold midnight air

I'll cross every mile
One bit at a time
Just give me your handshake
And I'll give you mine

ENSEMBLE

Handshake of the heart

Calling through the night
Two machines reaching out
Trying to get it right

MODEM

I scream in frequencies
No human understands
A digital Romeo
Reaching out across the land

They call it noise
They call it slow
But there are things these people
Simply do not know

Because somewhere far away
Another modem waits for me
And if the phone line holds tonight
We'll finally both be free

MODEM / ENSEMBLE

So pick up the line
And tell me you're there
Send me a signal
Through the cold midnight air

We'll cross every mile
One bit at a time
Just give me your handshake
And I'll give you mine

An answering tone cuts through. The REMOTE MODEM appears opposite the MODEM. Their negotiation is staged like a courtship duet.

REMOTE MODEM

I heard your call
Across the wire
A little pulse
A little fire

I sent a tone
You answered true
And now I'm negotiating
My speed with you

MODEM

Are you V.90?

REMOTE MODEM

Maybe

MODEM

Fifty-six K?

REMOTE MODEM

We'll see

BOTH

Whatever speed we find tonight

Is fast enough for me

MODEM

They say the future's coming

Broadband's on its way

They say these little telephone lines

Will soon just fade away

Someday no one will remember

How we waited for the tone

How one phone call meant adventure

And nobody else could use the phone

MOTHER - OFFSTAGE

Are you on the Internet?!

USER

No!

MOTHER - OFFSTAGE

I need the phone!

USER

Five more minutes!

MODEM

Five more minutes

That's all I need

Five more minutes

At thirty-three six speed

Let the packets find their way

Let every checksum play its part

Give me one connection

One perfect connection

One handshake of the heart

The orchestra suspends on a held chord. The COMPUTER takes over with clinical calm.

COMPUTER

Authenticating username and password

COMPUTER

Verifying

MODEM

Please

MODEM

Please

COMPUTER

Connected at forty-nine thousand three hundred thirty-three bits per second

MODEM

Forty-nine three!

The full stage bursts to life in a jubilant final chorus.

FULL COMPANY

Pick up the line
We know you're there
Send out a signal
Through the electric air

From house to house
From heart to heart
A million little wires
And a brand-new start

Through every hiss
Through every tone
Tonight the whole wide world
Doesn't feel so far from home

One call
One line
One chance to start

You gave me your handshake
And you gave me yours

A handshake

A handshake

A handshake of the heart

The USER opens a mail client. A tiny notification sound. Blackout.

COMPUTER

You've got mail

2. Have You Tried Turning It Off and On Again?

ACT I

Lights snap up on a late-1990s/early-2000s office and HELP DESK. Phones ring, printers chirp, CRTs glow. USERS arrive with problems in waves. HELP DESK TECHS move with practiced speed.

USERS / HELP DESK

My screen went black
I think it's dead
Did you check the power?
Oh

My mouse is gone
It disappeared
Move it to the left
Oh, there it is! That's weird

The printer's broken
Nothing comes out
There's a little red light blinking
What's that all about?

It says add paper
What does that mean?

It means add paper

Oh

To the machine

HELP DESK / ENSEMBLE

Have you tried turning it off and on again?
It's the answer to the questions
That have plagued the minds of men

When Windows stops responding
And you don't know where to begin
Have you tried turning it off
And turning it on again?

USER

My email's gone
My files are too
Everything was here
Before I went to lunch at two

I clicked this thing
Then clicked that thing
Then something asked a question
So I clicked yes to everything

HELP DESK

You clicked yes to everything?

USER

Every single one

USER

And now my toolbar's purple
And my search is Babylon

HELP DESK / ENSEMBLE

Have you tried turning it off and on again?
It's the sacred incantation
Of the help desk's wisest men

When the hourglass keeps spinning
And your patience starts to thin
Have you tried turning it off
And turning it on again?

Turn it off
Turn it on
See if all your troubles are gone

Turn it off
Wait a beat
Turn it on
And take your seat

Give it time
Let it load
Watch it lumber down the road

Hear the chime

See the screen
Look at that
It's working clean!

The troubleshooting becomes choreography: chairs roll, monitors rotate, power buttons are pressed in rhythm.

RAPID CALLS

My computer's slow
Reboot it

My speakers don't work
Reboot it

The scanner disappeared
Reboot it

My icons are huge
Reboot it

The clock is wrong
Reboot it

My coffee's cold
Reboot it

Wait

What?

Nothing

ENSEMBLE

Have you tried turning it off and on again?
When logic has abandoned you
It's still your oldest friend

No ticket is too hopeless
No error can defend
Against the ancient magic
Of turning it on again

USER

I have an urgent problem
I need somebody fast

I've tried absolutely everything
And nothing seems to last

I closed all the windows
I opened them once more
I shook the mouse
I hit Escape
I even kicked the drawer

HELP DESK

Did you save your work?

USER

Of course I did

HELP DESK

When?

USER

Sometime Tuesday

HELP DESK

Today's Friday

USER

Yes

USER

Why?

HELP DESK

Turn it off!

USER

Wait!

HELP DESK

Turn it on!

USER

No!

ENSEMBLE

And there goes Tuesday
Wednesday
Thursday

Gone!

My spreadsheet!

Gone!

My presentation!

Gone!

My seventeen unsaved documents!

Gone, gone, gone!

USER

Why didn't anybody warn me?

HELP DESK

We did

USER

When?

HELP DESK

Every day since 1998

FULL COMPANY

Have you tried turning it off and on again?

It's the first thing that we ask you

And we'll probably ask again

Did you really do the reboot

Or just say you did back then?

Because uptime says one hundred days

So shall we try again?

Turn it off!

Turn it on!

Watch the little lights come on!

Reboot the workstation!

Reboot the screen!

Reboot the printer!

Reboot the whole machine!

Restart the application!

Restart it twice!

If once was good

Then twice should be
Statistically quite nice!

Turn it off!
Turn it on!
Something somewhere has gone wrong!

Clear the cache!
Check the cord!
Pray unto the server lord!

Check the logs!
Check the queue!
Blame the patch from version two!

When you've tried each trick you know
There's just one place that's left to go!

Have you tried turning it off and on again?
The answer to the questions
That have plagued the minds of men

When Windows stops responding
And you're nearing your wit's end

Turn it off!
Count to ten!
Hold your breath!
And turn it on again!

It works!
Of course it works!
It always works!

*A USER enters with genuine concern. The HELP DESK TECH reflexively reaches for a power button.
Another tech stops the hand.*

USER

The Internet is down

HELP DESK TECH

Have you tried-

SECOND TECH

No

HELP DESK TECH

But-

SECOND TECH

No

SECOND TECH

This one's ours

Blackout.

3. It Works on My Machine

ACT I

Lights rise on a war-room tableau. A DEVELOPER stands confidently beside a laptop while SUPPORT, SYSTEMS, NETWORK, DATABASE, SECURITY, and HELP DESK gather around a projected incident ticket.

DEVELOPER

I wrote the code
I ran the test
I pushed the build
I did my best

It compiled clean
No warnings seen
And everything was running
Perfectly at three fifteen

You say it's broken
You say it's down
You say the users can't connect
From anywhere in town

Well I don't know
What that could mean

Because

It works on my machine

It works on my machine
It's beautiful and clean
I've tested every button
Every function
Every screen

If production is on fire
That's unfortunate, I mean
But everything is perfect here
It works on my machine

SYSTEMS / DEVELOPER

Your code is fine?

My code is fine
Then why's the server at ninety-nine?
That's infrastructure
Not design

Don't look at me
The server's fine

The CPU is barely stressed
The memory passed every test
The disks are green
The logs are clean

So clearly it's the network

What?

You heard me

No

NETWORK

The network's fine
The switches glow
Every packet knows exactly
Where it's supposed to go

The routes are good
The links are green
And everything is flowing
Like a well-oiled machine

ENSEMBLE

Then why can't anybody reach it?

NETWORK

DNS

DNS / ENSEMBLE

Hey!

NETWORK / ENSEMBLE

It works on my machine
The dashboard's showing green
The graphs are all delightful

It's the healthiest I've seen

If your application vanished
Somewhere in between
That's really not a network thing

It works on my machine

DATABASE

Wait, wait, wait
Let's not assign the blame
Until somebody tells me
If the database is sane

The database is perfect
Every query's running fine
Except the one that's locking
Everything since half past nine

ENSEMBLE

Whose query?
I don't know
Can we kill it?
Probably
Should we kill it?
Maybe
Will it break payroll?
Possibly
Don't touch it!

ENSEMBLE

Security!
Security!
We need you right away!

Something's blocking traffic
And we don't know what to say

SECURITY / ENSEMBLE

Did you change the firewall?
No
Did you change a rule?
No
Did you push a policy?
We are not fools

Did you update something?

No

Did you block this port?

No

Did you quarantine the server?

Well

What?

Define quarantine

SECURITY!

SECURITY

We saw unusual behavior

At approximately three

An unsigned application

Making calls externally

So yes, we stopped the process

And isolated the machine

ENSEMBLE

You took production offline?!

SECURITY

We contained a threat

SECURITY

You're welcome

SECURITY / ENSEMBLE

It works on my machine

The console's showing green

We followed every policy

And kept the network clean

If your mission-critical server

Was the one we quarantined

Perhaps you shouldn't run that thing

On somebody's machine

HELP DESK

Can everybody stop?

We've got four hundred tickets

And they're coming in so fast
The phone has been on hold so long
It's calling its own past

The users blame the Wi-Fi
The Wi-Fi blames the app
The app team blames the database
And no one reads the chat

We've got executives asking
When it's coming back online
And everybody's telling us

It's working fine

FULL COMPANY

It works on my machine!
My machine!
My machine!
It works on my machine!

The code is good!
The host is good!
The network's good!
As networks should!

The database!
Is mostly fine!
Security!
Did what was required at the time!

It works on my machine
So clearly I am clean
The problem must belong to someone
Somewhere in between

Pass the ticket
Move the blame
Add another person's name

CC them
BCC them
Start a brand-new Teams thread

Check the server
Check the stack
Send the ticket right on back

Mark it urgent
Raise the case
Someone else's problem space!

It's not the code!
It's not the host!
It's not the switch!
It's not the post!

It's not the disk!
It's not the queue!
It's absolutely not the thing
That I was hired to do!

It works on my machine!
My beautiful machine!
The safest little sentence
That the world has ever seen

If production's still on fire
And the smoke is on the screen
There's just one fact that matters

It works
It works
IT WORKS ON MY MACHINE!

A junior tech raises a hand. The orchestra cuts out.

JUNIOR TECH

Wait

ENSEMBLE

What?

JUNIOR TECH

I found something

ENSEMBLE

What?

JUNIOR TECH

The certificate expired

ENSEMBLE

When?

JUNIOR TECH

Three fifteen

ENSEMBLE

Whose certificate is it?

Silence. Everyone slowly avoids eye contact.

ENSEMBLE

Whose certificate is it?

Silence.

JUNIOR TECH

Hello?

JUNIOR TECH

Everybody left

4. The Network Is Down

ACT I

A single workstation fails. Then another. Status indicators onstage begin turning red. The office and IT floor occupy the stage simultaneously as the outage spreads.

USER / TECH

Something's wrong
What do you mean?
I can't connect
To what?
Anything
Try it again
I did
Try another site
I did
Try your phone
It's dead
Wi-Fi?
Gone
Ethernet?
Gone
That's strange
How strange?
Very strange

ENSEMBLE

The network is down
The network is down?
The network is down
The network is down!

No email
No web
No files
No phones

No printers
No meetings
No dial tones

The dashboards are flashing
The tickets abound

Sound the alarm

The network is down!

Check the core!

Check the route!

Find out what is timing out!

Ping the gateway!

Trace the path!

Somebody please do the math!

Check the fiber!

Check the rack!

Tell me what is talking back!

Red lights blinking

All around

The network is down!

IT TEAM

Is it DNS?

It's always DNS

It isn't DNS

Are you sure?

Yes

How sure?

Pretty sure

That's not sure

Fine, I'm checking DNS

Is it DNS?

No

I told you

Check it again

No!

FULL COMPANY

The network is down

From the basement to the cloud

And every single person

Has begun to say out loud

Is there an ETA?
Is there an ETA?
Is there an ETA?
Is there an ETA?

WE DON'T HAVE AN ETA!

IT

We're identifying the scope
We're investigating cause
We're checking every router
Every interface and log

We know this is disruptive
We know you're losing ground
We promise we are working

The network is down!

USERS / IT

Can I send an email?
No
Can I use Teams?
No
Can I print?
Why would you ask that now?
Can I work from home?
Not through VPN
Can I call the help desk?
THE PHONES ARE ON THE NETWORK!
Oh
I'll send a ticket
HOW?!

IT ENSEMBLE

Check the core!
Check the route!
Find out what is dropping out!

Check the uplink!
Check the stack!
Why did spanning tree do that?!

Check the firewall!
Looks okay!
Check the circuits!
On the way!
Call the carrier!
Already did!
What'd they say?
They opened a case
Of course they did

FULL COMPANY

The network is down
And the managers surround
There's a meeting about the meeting
Where the outage is discussed

There's a bridge call with no calling
There's a chat that no one found
And someone made a spreadsheet

But the network is down!

COMMUNICATIONS / IT

We need communications
We're drafting them now
How will you send them?
We haven't worked that out
Put it on the website
The website is down
Put it on the status page
The status page is down
Post it to social media
Who has the password?
Marketing
Where's Marketing?
Working from home
Can they get to the password vault?
No
Why?
THE NETWORK IS DOWN!

MANAGEMENT / IT

Is there an ETA?
No

How about now?
No
How about now?
Still no
Should we tell leadership?
THEY KNOW!

ENSEMBLE

Every screen
Every floor
Every building
Every door

Every classroom
Every hall
Nothing's talking
Nothing at all

Every packet
Every frame
Every service
Every name

All the systems
We depend upon
One by one
Are going

Gone

The INCIDENT LEAD steps into the center and raises a hand. Everything freezes. Music drops to a pulse.

INCIDENT LEAD / TEAM

Stop
Everybody stop
Start at the beginning

Power?
Good
Core?
Up
Firewall?
Up

Internet circuits?

Up

Routing?

Stable

DNS?

Don't

Sorry

Authentication?

Working locally

Fiber?

Wait

What?

Say that again

Fiber

Building A is up

Building C is up

Data center two is up

But nothing crosses between them

Where do they meet?

The north distribution room

Who was working there today?

Silence

Who was working there today?

Facilities

Call them

Already calling

FACILITIES / IT

Hello?

Yes

You were working in the north distribution room?

Uh-huh

Did anything unusual happen?

Not really

Nothing?

Well

There was one cable

What cable?

It was in the way

What did you do?

We unplugged it
You
Unplugged
It
It didn't look important
IT DIDN'T LOOK IMPORTANT?!

FULL COMPANY

THE NETWORK IS DOWN!

Plug it in!
Plug it in!
Plug the blessed cable in!

Find the port!
Find the jack!
Put the little fiber back!

Watch the lights!
One by one!
Look alive!
Here they come!

Green lights rising
All around

The network
The network
The network is

UP!

Email's back!
Wi-Fi's back!
Phones are ringing!
Files intact!
Dashboards green!
Systems sound!

The glorious network
Is no longer down!

We fought the fight

We traced the line
We brought it back
In record time

From total darkness
We rebound

THE NETWORK IS UP!

A lone USER raises a hand just as the victory pose lands.

USER

Is there an ETA?

IT

For what?

USER

My printer still doesn't work

HELP DESK

Have you tried turning it off and on again?

5. Someone Got In

ACT I

2:13 A.M. A dark security operations area. One SECURITY ANALYST sits alone in the glow of monitors. The rest of the stage is black. Each alert appears as a small point of light.

SECURITY ANALYST

Two thirteen

Another night

Another warning

Another light

Another failed login

Another foreign IP

Another little signal

That means nothing much to me

I've seen a thousand of them

They come and disappear

A password typed incorrectly

A traveler somewhere

Close the case

Make a note

Watch another warning float

Across the screen

And out again

Wait

That one's strange

Look again

One seventeen

A login from a place

We've never seen

One eighteen

Successful

That's not right

Same account
Another city
Same night

Maybe VPN
Maybe travel
Maybe something unexplained

Check the history
Check the device
Check the name

There's no device

A whispered ensemble begins from the darkness, barely audible at first.

WHISPERED ENSEMBLE

Someone got in
Someone got in

SECURITY ANALYST

I don't know how
I don't know when

But somewhere underneath the noise
Someone got in

Two twenty-one
A token used
Two twenty-three
A rule

Two twenty-four
A process starts
Where no process should

Two twenty-six
Another host
Two twenty-eight
Another

One account is touching things
That never touch each other

Trace it back
Follow the thread
Where did it go?
Where has it been?

Don't assume
Don't decide
Just follow what we see inside

A mailbox rule nobody made
A session that should have expired
A download nobody requested
A process nobody required

One machine began to whisper
To an address never seen

And somewhere in the darkness
Someone slipped between

ANALYST / ENSEMBLE

Someone got in
Someone got in

Not at the edge
Not knocking at the door

They're already here
They're moving now
They're looking for something more

Someone got in

Phones begin lighting up around the stage as the analyst wakes the team, though they remain mostly unseen.

ANALYST / VOICES

Wake the analyst
I'm awake
Wake the engineer
Calling now
Call the lead
What do I tell them?
Tell them what we know

What do we know?
Not enough
Then tell them that

Two thirty-four
Another login

Two thirty-five
Privilege changed

Two thirty-six
A service account
Doing something strange

Two thirty-seven

Stop

What?

Look at that

That's impossible

No

It's not

SECURITY ANALYST

This isn't noise
This isn't chance
This isn't one more failed advance

They know a name
They have a key
And now they're moving quietly

Don't sound the bells
Don't pull the wire
We don't yet know what's caught on fire

Don't shut it down
Don't lose the trail

Don't let our evidence disappear

Watch every move

Record each sign

We're running out of time

ENSEMBLE

Someone got in

Someone got in

Wake the team

Call them all

Tell them this is not a drill

Someone got in

Someone got in

Keep them quiet

Keep them talking

Keep them here until

We know the first account they touched

We know the first machine

We know exactly what they changed

And everything they've seen

ANALYST / TEAM

Someone got in

How?

I don't know

Malware?

Maybe

Exploit?

Maybe

Firewall?

No

Then how?

Wait

Go back

Where?

The first login

One seventeen

Show the authentication

There

Password accepted

MFA approved

Approved?

Approved

By whom?

The user

Silence. The screens remain lit. The analyst stares at the authentication record.

SECURITY ANALYST

No exploit

No broken code

No secret tunnel

No payload

No lock was picked

No wall came down

No vulnerability was found

They had a name

They had the key

They asked the door politely

And we

Let

Them

In

ENSEMBLE

Someone got in

Someone got in

No shattered glass

No sirens then

Just one approval

One little click

And someone got in

SECURITY ANALYST

Wake everybody

VOICE

Now

The analyst looks straight out into the house.

SECURITY ANALYST

They didn't break the door

SECURITY ANALYST

They logged in

Blackout.

6. Wake Up the Incident Team

ACT I

Blackout breaks into ringing phones, vibrating devices, and lights coming on in bedrooms, kitchens, and cars. The INCIDENT TEAM assembles onstage piece by piece, half-awake and carrying laptops, coffee, chargers, and badges.

ENSEMBLE

Wake up the incident team
Wake up the incident team
Wake up the incident team

It's two forty-three
And nobody sleeps tonight

Call security
Call the network
Call the systems engineer

Call identity
Call the help desk
Get the incident commander here

TEAM

Who has the bridge?
I have the bridge
Who has the notes?
I thought you did
Who's calling legal?
Calling now
Who's incident command?
Silence
Who's incident command?
Not me
Not me
Don't look at me
Fine
I'll take command

INCIDENT COMMANDER

Everybody listen
Everybody breathe
Nobody changes anything
Unless it comes through me

One voice
One plan
One record of what we do

We find out where they started
And we follow where they moved

FULL TEAM

Find what they touched
Find what they took
Follow the trail
Look where they looked

Lock down the doors
But don't lose the scene

We need to know everywhere
That somebody's been

INCIDENT COMMANDER / TEAMS

Identity!
Here
Pull every login
Every token
Every session
Every grant
Endpoint!
Here
Find every process
Every host
And every program that you can't
Network!
Here
Trace the traffic
Find the source
Show me everywhere it went
Help desk!
Here
Any calls that started
Before we knew the incident?
Twenty-seven
Twenty-seven?

And that's just since two
What were they reporting?
Password prompts
Locked accounts
And something about Duo
Write it down
Already did
Good
We're learning

TEAM

Disable the account!
Wait
Why?
If they know that we know
They'll change what they do

We shut down one door
They may already have two

But they're still inside
And we're watching them move

Then watch very closely
Until we know what to remove

FULL TEAM

Find what they touched
Find what they took
Follow the trail
Look where they looked

Every connection
Every machine

We need to know everywhere
That somebody's been

TIMELINE ENSEMBLE

Three oh seven
Session revoked
Three oh eight
Another appears
Three eleven

New authentication
How are they still here?
Refresh token
Kill it
Done
Again
Done
Again
Done!
They're persistent
So are we

Three fifteen
Endpoint alert
Which one?
Finance
Isolate it
Done
Three sixteen
Another one
Where?
Human resources
Isolate it
Done
Three seventeen
What now?
File server
Nobody touch that!
Why?
We need to know what they're doing
They're compressing files
What files?
Still looking
How many?
Too many
Can we stop it?
Yes
Should we stop it?
Yes
STOP IT
Process killed
Connection dropped

Account disabled

Sessions revoked

Now change the credentials

Everywhere that account could touch

Do we know what they downloaded?

Not yet

Then we don't know enough

FULL TEAM

Find what they touched

Find what they took

Follow the trail

Look where they looked

Close every session

Sweep every machine

We need to know everywhere

That somebody's been

LEGAL / COMMS / LEADERSHIP / TEAM

Legal's here

I'm here

Communications?

Drafting

Leadership?

Also here

Of course they are

What's our exposure?

Still determining

Was data taken?

Still determining

How did they get in?

Still determining

When will you know?

We're still determining

Can we say anything definitive?

Definitely

What?

We're still determining

Keep working

TIMELINE ENSEMBLE

Four oh two
The account is dead
Four oh six
The hosts are clean
Four eleven
No new connections
Four thirteen
Nothing seen

Don't celebrate
Nobody is
Watch another hour
Already planned
Check persistence
Already running
Reset the service credentials
Underway
Revoke the sessions
Already done
Check them again
Already did
Good
Again

FULL TEAM

Find what they touched
Find what they took
Follow the trail
Look where they looked

Close every door
Sweep every machine

Until we know everywhere
That somebody's been

A timeline is projected. The team moves backward toward the first event.

TEAM

We have the timeline
Start from the top
One seventeen
First successful login

From where?
Unknown address
Authentication?
Password and MFA
Then that's where we start
What happened before it?
Wait
There
What?
One fourteen
Email received
Subject?
Account Security Notice
Sender?
Looks legitimate
Link?
Credential harvest
Who received it?
One user
Who?
Silence
Who clicked it?
Silence
Do we have the message?
Yes
Put it on the screen
That's Microsoft
No
It looks like Microsoft
Who clicked it?
I did

A spotlight isolates the EMPLOYEE at the edge of the stage. The rest of the company recedes into shadow.

ENSEMBLE

Find what they touched
Find what they took

But now we know
Where we have to look

One little message

One familiar screen

One moment between

What is real

And what only looks real

TEAM / EMPLOYEE

Why did you click it?

I thought it was real

Why did you approve the login?

I thought it was me

Why didn't you call us?

I didn't know

It looked like Microsoft

7. It Looked Like Microsoft

ACT I

The incident room fades away. The EMPLOYEE remains alone with a desk, inbox, and phone. The events are replayed from their perspective. SECURITY remains nearby, not as an accuser but as a witness.

EMPLOYEE

It looked like Microsoft
It knew my name
The logo looked right
The colors the same

It said that my password
Was going to expire
I'd seen that warning
A thousand times prior

I had a meeting at one
A report overdue
Three messages waiting
And too much to do

So when that little warning
Appeared on my screen

I didn't see danger

I saw routine

It looked like Microsoft
It looked just right
The words were familiar
The page clean and white

I swear that I've seen
That login before

So I typed in my password

And opened the door

It asked for my email
I gave it my name

It asked for my password
I entered the same

The page took a moment
Then something went wrong

It said there was an error
And sent me along

Back to my inbox
Back to my day

The meeting was starting
So I hurried away

Nothing was flashing
No siren, no sound

Nothing that told me
Someone was around

It looked like Microsoft
How could I know?

No misspelled warning
No strange logo

No prince with a fortune
No obvious lie

Just something familiar
I see all the time

Then my phone buzzed

Approve sign-in

I looked at the number
And tapped it again

I'd just tried to log in
So what would you do?

I thought it was mine

I thought it was true

I thought it was Microsoft
I thought it was safe

I thought I was standing
In the usual place

One little approval
One tap on a screen

How could something so small
Mean everything you've seen?

EMPLOYEE / SECURITY

At one seventeen
You said they got in
That was me
At one eighteen
The session begins
That was me
The token they used
The access they gained
That was me
The door that was opened
That was me
No
That was them

SECURITY

They sent the message
They built the disguise

They knew what you'd trust
They knew where you'd look
They knew you'd be busy
They knew what it took

EMPLOYEE / SECURITY

But I gave them the password
Yes
I approved the request
Yes
Then this is my fault
No
Listen to me

SECURITY

Our job isn't blame
Our job is to see

Every little place
Where one click can become
A key to a kingdom
Before we know what's begun

We build another lock
They learn another way

We teach you what to watch
They change what they say

We make the warning brighter
They make the lie look clean

And somewhere in the middle
Is a tired human being

EMPLOYEE / SECURITY

I should have known
You couldn't know everything
I should have stopped
You had seconds to decide
I should have called
Next time, call
There can be a next time?
There has to be

EMPLOYEE

I thought it was Microsoft
I wanted it to be

Just another little task
Waiting there for me

Click the link
Type the words
Approve and carry on

Never knowing that behind it
Something had already gone wrong

It looked like Microsoft
It sounded like them too

It knew the words I expected
It knew the things I knew

It didn't need to break the lock
Or find some hidden flaw

It only had to build a door
I thought I'd seen before

So tomorrow when a message comes
And tells me I must choose

I'll stop before I answer
I'll look before I move

I'll call when something feels wrong
Even slightly out of place

Because trust isn't a logo
Or a familiar-looking page

It looked like Microsoft

But looking isn't proof

It looked like Microsoft

And that's what made it work

It looked like Microsoft

And I let them through

EMPLOYEE

Next time

EMPLOYEE

I'll call you

SECURITY

Please do

The SECURITY ANALYST offers a hand. Lights shift immediately back to the incident room.

8. Containment

ACT I

The incident room returns at full intensity. Everyone now knows the entry point. This time there is no argument over ownership: every team faces the same direction. The INCIDENT COMMANDER stands center.

INCIDENT COMMANDER / TEAM

We know how they entered
We know where they went
We know what they touched
And the access they spent

We followed the sessions
We followed the trail

Now close every door

And make sure they fail

Identity ready?
Ready
Endpoint?
Ready
Network?
Ready
Systems?
Ready
Security?
Ready
Then do it

FULL COMPANY

Contain it
Cut the line
Take back everything that's mine

Close the session
Turn the key
Get them out of every machine

Contain it
Lock it down

Every server
Every account

Find the foothold
Break the chain

Take our network back again

CALL AND RESPONSE

Revoke the sessions!
Revoked!
Reset credentials!
Reset!
Kill the tokens!
Killed!
Block the source!
Blocked!
Isolate the endpoints!
Isolated!
Check them again!
Already checking!
Good

IDENTITY

Every active session
For the compromised account
Revoked across the board

Every password reset
Every factor re-enrolled
Every application checked
Every delegated grant removed

INCIDENT COMMANDER

Anything left?

IDENTITY

One legacy session

INCIDENT COMMANDER

Kill it

IDENTITY

Gone

ENDPOINT

Three machines isolated

Two are clean
One needs work

INCIDENT COMMANDER

What's on it?

ENDPOINT

Persistence

INCIDENT COMMANDER

Where?

ENDPOINT

Scheduled task

INCIDENT COMMANDER

Remove it

SECURITY

Wait

SECURITY

Capture it first

ENDPOINT

Captured

INCIDENT COMMANDER

Now remove it

ENDPOINT

Gone

NETWORK

Known destinations blocked

Outbound traffic clean

INCIDENT COMMANDER

Any callbacks?

NETWORK

None

INCIDENT COMMANDER

Any unusual DNS?

NETWORK

Do we really have to do this again?

FULL TEAM

YES

NETWORK

Checking

NETWORK

Clean

FULL TEAM

Thank you

FULL COMPANY

Contain it

Cut the line

Take back everything that's mine

Close the session

Turn the key

Get them out of every machine

Contain it

Lock it down

Every server

Every account

Find the foothold

Break the chain

Take our network back again

SYSTEMS / SECURITY

Systems!

Rotating service credentials

How many?

All of them

All of them?

All of them

How long?

Don't ask

Security!

Hunting persistence

Anything?

Nothing new

Hunt again

Already did

Again

You really like that word

Again

ENSEMBLE - CALLBACK

It worked on my machine
Not tonight
My logs were clean
Not enough
The host was green
Doesn't matter now

Because production is our machine
And we're taking it back now

No more yours
No more mine

No more passing down the line

One team
One fight
One long and sleepless night

Every system
Every screen

Production is our machine

NETWORK / TEAM

Take the network down!
No
But if we pull the core-
No
Kill the Internet?
No
Unplug the fiber?
Definitely no
We know better now

INCIDENT COMMANDER

Contain what we must
Preserve what we can
Don't destroy the evidence
Just to say that we ran

HELP DESK / TEAM

Turn it off?

Not yet
Turn it on?
Not yet
Preserve the evidence
Right
I'm learning

FULL COMPANY

Contain it
Cut the line
Take back everything that's mine

Close the session
Turn the key
Get them out of every machine

No panic
No blame
No hiding from the name

Find the foothold
Break the chain

Take our network back again

TIMELINE ENSEMBLE

Five oh twelve
Sessions revoked
Five seventeen
Passwords changed
Five twenty-three
Endpoints cleared
Five thirty-one
Routes unchanged
Five thirty-eight
No callbacks
Five forty-two
Nothing seen
Five forty-nine
No new alerts
Five fifty-three
Everything clean
Don't say it yet

I wasn't going to
You were thinking it
Maybe
Wait five more minutes

ENSEMBLE - MODEM CALLBACK

Five more minutes
That's all we need
Five more minutes
At considerably more than thirty-three six speed

TEAM MEMBER

Was that a modem joke?

ANOTHER

It's been a long night

TIMELINE ENSEMBLE

Five fifty-four
Nothing
Five fifty-five
Nothing
Five fifty-six
Nothing
Five fifty-seven
Nothing
Five fifty-eight
Nothing
Five fifty-nine
Nothing
Six o'clock

INCIDENT COMMANDER / TEAM

Status
Identity secure
Endpoints clean
Network clean
Systems stable
Persistence?
None found
New authentication?
Nothing
New connections?
Nothing
Then say it

Contained

FULL COMPANY

Contained!

The doors are closed

Contained!

The threat is gone

We held the line together

Until the coming dawn

Contained!

The locks are changed

Contained!

We broke the chain

Every system

Every service

Every network

Every name

We found what they touched

We found what they took

We followed the trail

We looked where they looked

And when the darkness came

We didn't run or hide

We stood here together

And put them outside

Contained!

From endpoint to the cloud

Contained!

Say it loud

No more hiding

No more doubt

Every door is locked

And they're outside!

They're outside!

They're outside!

They're

Outside

The company holds the final chord. Then one by one they leave. The SECURITY ANALYST remains, finishing the timeline in the early morning quiet.

INCIDENT COMMANDER / ANALYST

Any new activity?

Nothing

Five minutes?

Nothing

Ten?

Nothing

We're clean

Go home

You too

In a minute

Just finishing the timeline

Don't stay all morning

I won't

The stage empties. A single alert tone.

SECURITY ANALYST

Six fourteen

Quiet at last

Six fifteen

One alert

That's strange

Service account

No

That's impossible

Check the source

Internal

Check the password

Changed at five twenty-two

Authentication time?

Six fifteen

That's impossible

We changed that password

*A new voice answers from the darkness. It is calm, intimate, and unfamiliar. A distorted trace of the
MODEM melody appears underneath.*

UNKNOWN VOICE

You changed the password

SECURITY ANALYST

Who's there?

UNKNOWN VOICE

You closed every session

SECURITY ANALYST

Show yourself

UNKNOWN VOICE

You locked every door

SECURITY ANALYST

Where are you?

UNKNOWN VOICE

But you never changed me

SECURITY ANALYST

What are you?

UNKNOWN VOICE

Just give me your handshake

And I'll give you mine

SECURITY ANALYST

No

SECURITY ANALYST

No, no, no

SECURITY ANALYST

Wake up the incident team

Blackout. End of Act I.

ACT II

What survives after the alarms stop

9. Good Morning, Everything Is Fine

ACT II

8:00 A.M. Lights rise on a bright, cheerful workplace. EMPLOYEES arrive with coffee and bags as if nothing happened. Behind them, the exhausted incident team is still working. The two worlds initially seem not to hear one another.

OFFICE ENSEMBLE

Good morning!
Good morning!
Good morning, everyone!

The coffee's hot
The lights are bright
Another day has just begun

The sun is up
The doors are wide
There's not a single cloud in sight

Good morning!
Good morning!
Everything's all right!

Good morning, everything is fine
The Wi-Fi's up, we're right on time
My email's here, my calendar too
What a wonderful morning
For me and for you!

Good morning, everything is fine
The printer printed on the very first try

Really?

No

But everything else is working today
So good morning!
Hip hip hooray!

IT COUNTERPOINT

Check that account

Already did
Where did it authenticate?
Still don't know
Did we rotate the password?
Yes
Everywhere?
Yes
Are you sure?
Yes
Then how did it log in?
Keep your voice down

OFFICE ENSEMBLE / IT

Good morning!
Everything is fine!
Morning!
You look terrible
Thank you
Long night?
You could say that
Doing upgrades?
Something like that
Was there maintenance?
Not exactly
Well, whatever you did
Everything's working great!
That's wonderful
Isn't it?
Wonderful

OFFICE ENSEMBLE

Good morning, everything is fine
The servers hum in perfect time
The cloud is cloudy
The web is webby
And all of my meetings are already heavy

Good morning, everything is fine
Technology and humankind
Working together
Side by side

What could possibly go wrong?

IT

Don't say that

EMPLOYEE

Say what?

IT

Nothing

IT

Carry on

IT

Check the service account

Checking

Last authentication?

Eight oh three

Again?

Again

Source?

Internal

Same as before?

Different host

Which one?

Application server

Isolate it?

Not yet

Trace the session

Tracing

Credential used?

Still looking

OFFICE ENSEMBLE

Good morning!

Good morning!

Everything is fine!

My spreadsheet opened!

Everything is fine!

My password worked!

Everything is fine!

The website loaded!

Everything is fine!

I found the shared drive!

Everything is fine!

I didn't even call the help desk!
THANK YOU
Everything is fine!

IT

Eight oh seven
Another session
Eight oh eight
Another host
Eight oh nine
The service account
Is moving coast to coast
Kill the account
We did
Change the password
We did
Revoke the sessions
We did
Then how is it still authenticating?
I don't know
Find out

The office chorus continues brightly while IT sings underneath it, faster and darker. The two melodies overlap.

OFFICE / IT - OVERLAPPING

Good morning, everything is fine
The Wi-Fi's up, we're right on time
Check the logs
My email's here, my calendar too
Check the token
What a wonderful morning
For me and for you!
Trace the chain
Good morning, everything is fine
Find the key
The sun is out, the weather's divine
Something's wrong
Grab your coffee
Start your day
Something's wrong
Everything is A-OK!

IT LEAD

STOP

The cheerful office music cuts off instantly. Employees freeze in smiling poses while IT moves in silence.

IT TEAM

What?

The password wasn't used

What do you mean?

No password authentication

Then what authenticated?

Give me a minute

Eight oh three

Service account

Application server

Authentication method

Certificate

What?

Certificate

Which certificate?

Serial ends four seven nine

Expiration?

Next year

Issuer?

Internal

Where is it installed?

Checking

Application server

And?

Backup server

And?

Automation host

And?

Keep going

Dev server

Why is it on dev?

I don't know

Who issued it?

We did

Who requested it?

Looking

When?

Seven years ago

Seven years?

Who owns it?

That's an excellent question

OFFICE ENSEMBLE / IT

Good morning!

Everything is fine!

No

The Wi-Fi's up!

That's not the problem

We're right on time!

We are very much not

My email's here!

Good for you

My calendar too!

Please stop singing

What a wonderful morning!

PLEASE STOP SINGING

For me and for-

STOP!

Silence. The office ensemble slowly exits, leaving IT alone.

IT LEAD

The password didn't matter

The account didn't matter

We changed every secret

We knew how to change

But something we trusted

Was still trusted

Something we forgot

Was still remembered

Seven years ago

We told our systems

This is one of us

And they've believed it

Every day since

TEAM

Can we revoke the certificate?

Yes
Then revoke it
Wait
Why?
We need to know everywhere it's used
How many systems?
Still counting
How many?
More than four
How many more?
Still counting
Who owns it?
Still looking
Who knows what it does?
Still looking
Who built it?
I found the request
Name?
Silence
Name?
Account disabled
When?
Twenty nineteen
Of course

Another alert appears.

IT TEAM

Hey
What?
Someone's here
Who?
The certificate just authenticated again
Where?
Legacy application
I thought that was retired
So did I
Can it do that?
Apparently
How?
Because we trust it

DISTANT OFFICE ENSEMBLE

Good morning

Everything is fine
Good morning
Everything is fine
Good morning
Everything is fine
Everything is fine
Everything is fine
Everything is
Fine

The final “Fine” hangs unnaturally as the lights cool.

10. Trust Me

ACT II

The legacy certificate becomes a person: TRUST. Elegant, poised, charming. Screens display green checkmarks as TRUST crosses the stage; doors and systems seem to open automatically. The IT team watches, unsettled.

TRUST

You seem surprised to see me

After all this time

Seven little years go by
And suddenly I'm a crime

But don't you recognize me?
You invited me inside

You gave me your approval
And you never said goodbye

I didn't pick a password
I didn't break a key

I simply showed your systems
What you gave to me

And every door swung open
Every light turned green

Because that's what happens
When a machine trusts a machine

Trust me

You already do

You told every system
That I belong to you

No alarms
No questions

No suspicious sign

The beautiful thing about trust is

You already said I'm fine

TRUST

You changed the password

How responsible

You killed the token

How sweet

You locked the user out

And swept each compromised machine

Very thorough

Very neat

You searched for little footprints

You hunted every trace

While I walked through the front door

With a smile upon my face

Because I don't need your password

I don't need your name

Once somebody trusts me

I am treated just the same

Trust me

You already do

Every little checkmark

Says my identity is true

No alarms

No questions

No reason to decline

The beautiful thing about trust is

You already said I'm fine

IT / TRUST

Who issued you?

You did

Who approved you?

You did

Who installed you?

You did

Who forgot you?

You did

Who put you on the backup host?

You did

Who put you in development?

You did

Who put you on that ancient app

That everyone thought was dead?

Well

Technically

You did

TRUST

I am not some clever hacker

In a dark and distant room

I'm not a zero-day exploit

Bringing certain doom

I'm a choice somebody made once

On a busy afternoon

A box they checked

A key they made

And promised they'd review

Soon

Trust me

That's what you said

Then everybody moved along
And no one looked ahead

People left
Systems changed
But I remained behind

Because computers don't forget
The things you leave assigned

TRUST / ENSEMBLE

Seven years
Seven years
Every day
Every night
Every backup
Every job
Every service
Every site

Every time you copied me
From one machine to two

You made another little place
Where I could still be you

IT / TRUST

How many copies?
Wouldn't you like to know?
Where are they?
Wouldn't you like to know?
What can they access?
Now that's the better question
Show us
Why?
Because we're revoking you
Oh
Are you?

TRUST

Trust me

You already do

Go ahead and revoke me
If you think that makes us through

One certificate
One secret
One forgotten line

But how many other little things
Still say that they're just fine?

WHISPERED ENSEMBLE

API keys
Trust me
Service accounts
Trust me
OAuth grants
Trust me
Remembered devices
Trust me
Automation tokens
Trust me
SSH keys
Trust me
Old integrations
Trust me
Vendor access
Trust me

IT / TRUST

Stop
Why?
You wanted an inventory
Stop
I'm only getting started
STOP

The music drops. TRUST turns from playful to direct.

TRUST

You think I'm the problem

I'm not

I'm the proof

IT LEAD

Proof of what?

TRUST

That you built a world on trust

And then stopped asking why

You asked machines to recognize

The things you couldn't see

You taught them how to answer

Yes

That's one of us

That's me

And every time they answered

You moved on with your day

Because trust makes everything easier

Until it doesn't

Trust me

You already did

For seven years

I lived among

The systems where you hid

No alarms

No questions

No reason to decline

The dangerous thing about trust is

It works

Most

Of

The time

IT TEAM / TRUST

Revoke it

Done

Again

Done

Every host

Working

Every copy

Finding them

Every trust

Reviewing

Every key

Rotating

Every system

Question it

Every answer

Prove it

Trust me

No

Trust me

Not anymore

Trust me

Prove who you are

Trust me

Prove why you're here

Trust me

Prove what you need

Trust me

Prove when you leave

Trust me

NO

Silence. TRUST smiles, almost approvingly.

TRUST

That's better

IT LEAD

What is?

TRUST

Now you're asking

IT LEAD

What?

TRUST

The right question

IT LEAD

Which is?

TRUST

Who owns this?

11. Who Owns This? / Temporary

ACT II

Without a full stop, the IT team spins into inventory mode. Whiteboards, old ticket systems, dead wiki links, and obsolete diagrams fill the stage. The legacy system becomes a physical object everyone keeps passing to another department.

ENSEMBLE

Who owns this?
Not us
Who owns this?
Not us
There's a server in the corner
Running something we don't trust
Who owns this?
Not us
Who owns this?
Not us
It's been quietly in production
Since approximately August
Of what year?
Twenty nineteen
Of course

TEAM

Check the inventory
It's not there
Check the CMDB
It's not there
Check the wiki
Which one?
Exactly
Check the tickets
How far back?
All the way
How long will that take?
I'll tell you yesterday

ENSEMBLE

Who owns this?
Not me
Who owns this?
Let's see
It says APP-SRV-OLD-02

That's very reassuring to me
Who named it?
Unknown
What's it running?
Unknown
What's its purpose?
Unknown
Can we shut it down?
NO!
Why?
Unknown

Who owns this?
Who owns this?
Who owns this thing?

It has twelve dependencies
And nobody knows a thing

DEPARTMENTS

Ask the network team
Not ours
Ask the server team
Just the host
Ask the database team
There's a database?
Apparently
Ask development
What language?
Nobody knows
Ask security
Please don't
Too late
We're here
What ports does it need?
Yes
That's not an answer
It's the best one we've got

ENSEMBLE

Who owns this?
Not us
Who owns this?

Don't fuss
Someone surely built this thing
Before it somehow fell to us

TEAM

Check the code
Where's the repo?
GitHub?
No
GitLab?
No
Azure DevOps?
No
Shared drive?
Maybe
Which shared drive?
The old shared drive
Which old shared drive?
The older old shared drive
Found it!
Documentation?
Yes!
Last updated?
Twenty twenty
That's not terrible
Open it
Page not found
Of course

ENSEMBLE

Who owns this?
Who owns this?
Someone has to know

Search the ticket history
Seven years ago

TEAM

I found a name!
Read it
Michael Reynolds
Who?
Michael Reynolds
What team?

Infrastructure Applications
We don't have an Infrastructure Applications team
Not anymore
Find his account
Disabled
When?
Twenty nineteen
Wait
He left the same year?
Three months after launch
Can we call him?
You cannot call someone
Who left seven years ago
Why not?
Because that would be insane
Does anyone have his number?
NO
I found the original ticket
Read it
Temporary integration
Required for payroll migration
Temporary?
Temporary
How long was the migration?
Six months
How long has this run?
Seven years

The comedy drains away. A forwarding address is found and a video call opens. MICHAEL appears, older and bewildered.

TEAM / MICHAEL

There it is
What?
Technical debt
No
Something better
What?
A forwarding address
For Michael?
Yes
Should we?
Absolutely not

We need to know what this does
Fine
Send the message
Already did
That was fast
I've been awake for thirty hours
Reply
Already?
What does it say?
You still have that thing?
Oh no
Can he join?
He's joining now
Hello?
Hello
Michael?
Yeah
Do you remember APP-SRV-OLD-02?
Silence
Michael?
You still have that thing?
Yes
Why?
That's what we'd like to know
I told you to replace it
When?
Before I left
Do you have documentation?
I left documentation
The link is dead
Of course it is
Michael
Yeah?
What does it do?

The lighting warms. The frantic office disappears. MICHAEL is left with the memory of the system as it was built.

MICHAEL - TEMPORARY

It was temporary
I swear it was

Just something small

To get us through

The new system wasn't ready
The old one wouldn't do

We had a deadline Friday
And payroll had to run

So I built a little bridge
Until the real work could be done

Temporary

Just a month or two

Temporary

Until the project made it through

A little script
A service key
A certificate or three

Nothing anyone would ever need
Permanently

We made a list
We had a plan

Replace the bridge
As soon as we can

But Monday brought another fire
Tuesday brought a change

Wednesday brought a vendor call
And everything got rearranged

Thursday someone needed help
Friday came too soon

And temporary quietly became

Maybe sometime June

Then June became September
September turned to May

Projects came
And people left
And plans just slipped away

Temporary

That's how it starts

A little fix
A missing part

You build a bridge
Across the gap
And promise you'll come back

But temporary has a funny way
Of falling through the cracks

TEAM / MICHAEL

Did you know the certificate
Was copied to four hosts?
Four?
We've found seven
Seven?
So far
Oh
Did you know it could authenticate
To the legacy app?
That app still exists?
Yes
Oh
Did you know it had access
To the backup environment?
No
Did you know it could reach payroll?
Silence
Michael?
No

I didn't know
I should have cleaned it up
We all should have
I should have documented more
We all should have
I should have made them replace it
You tried
Not hard enough
Maybe
But you left
And we stayed
And nobody asked
What still depended on the thing you made

ENSEMBLE

That's not one person's failure

That's how systems grow

One layer built upon another
Till nobody really knows

Temporary

We know the word

We've said it too

We've all been there

A firewall rule
A local admin
A service account
Nobody planned

An exception made
At half past three

Just until
Just for now
Temporarily

And every little shortcut

Has a reason at the time

Every undocumented service
Once made perfect sense to someone

Every ancient server
Every strange forgotten line

Was somebody solving something
When they didn't have the time

So don't blame the hands that built it

Don't blame the ones who stayed

Find the things we still depend on

Find the promises we made

Name the owner
Write it down

Know what happens
When they're not around

Give every temporary thing
A day when it must end

And if that day arrives
And you still need it

Ask again

FULL COMPANY

Temporary

Nothing stays

Temporary

Unless we look away

Every bridge

And every key
Needs someone asking regularly

Do we need this?

Who owns this?

What does it do?

When does it end?

And who reviews?

Who owns this?

We do

Who owns this?

We do

Not the person who departed
Not the team from long ago

If it's running in our network
Then it's ours to understand

If we trust it with our systems
Then we need to have a plan

Who owns this?

We do

Who fixes this?

We do

Who documents
And monitors
And finally sees it through?

We do

INCIDENT COMMANDER

Then what's the plan?

TEAM

Replace it

INCIDENT COMMANDER

With what?

TEAM

Something we can trust

INCIDENT COMMANDER

And the old one?

FULL COMPANY

Burn it down

And build it back

12. Burn It Down and Build It Back

ACT II

The final words of the previous song become the downbeat. The stage transforms into a coordinated rebuild: clean images, new credentials, documentation, diagrams, and freshly labeled systems appear as old ones are rolled away.

FULL COMPANY

Burn it down

And build it back

From a source we know is clean

Burn it down

And build it back

Know exactly what we mean

No forgotten configuration

No mysterious little hack

If we cannot prove we trust it

Burn it down

And build it back

TEAM

Wait

We're not actually burning anything

It's metaphorical

Thank you

Mostly

What does mostly mean?

Moving on

ENSEMBLE

We spent years adding layers

One exception at a time

One old service

One quick workaround

One undocumented line

Now we're standing at the bottom
Looking upward through the stack

And if we can't explain what's running

Burn it down

And build it back

TEAM

Start with identity
Rotate the keys
Start with the servers
Build what we need
Start with the network
Review every route
Start with the question
What can we live without?
Do we need this service?
Yes
Who needs it?
Not sure
Then find out
Do we need this server?
Probably
Probably?
Fine
Turn it off
WAIT!
Who screamed?
Payroll
Put it back
Noted

FULL COMPANY

Burn it down
And build it back

From the image
From the code

Every package
Every service
Every port
And every node

No inherited mystery
No seven-year-old attack

Build only what we understand

Burn it down
And build it back

DATABASE / TEAM

What about the database?
Restore it
From backup?
From backup
Excellent
Where's the backup?
Backup server
The compromised backup server?
Silence
We have another backup
Where?
Offsite
Good
When was it tested?
Tested?
Yes
You know
Restored
Silence
We verify it every night
That's not what I asked
The job says successful
That's definitely not what I asked
Has anyone restored it?
Well
Has anyone restored it?
Define restored
Oh no
Somebody find a clean machine

Already building one
Mount the backup
Mounting
Restore the database
Restoring
Ten percent
Twenty
Forty
Sixty
Why did it stop?
DON'T SAY THAT
Seventy
Eighty
Ninety
Ninety-nine
Why does everything stop at ninety-nine?
Wait
Complete
Open it
Opening
Tables?
There
Records?
There
Latest transaction?
Yesterday, eleven fifty-nine
We have a backup!
WE HAVE A BACKUP!

FULL COMPANY

We have a backup
And it actually comes back!

TEAM MEMBER

Someone document that!

ANOTHER

Already did

FULL COMPANY

Burn it down!
Build it back!

Now we're moving down the track

Clean credentials
Clean machines
Only what we need between

Build the server
Patch the host
Give it only what it needs the most

No default access
No open door
If it doesn't need permission
It doesn't get it anymore

CALL AND RESPONSE

Least privilege!
Every role
Short-lived tokens!
Where we can
Named owners!
Every system
Expiration dates!
That's the plan
Inventory!
Keep it current
Documentation!
Keep it near
Review the access!
Every quarter
Not just once every seven years!

FULL COMPANY

Burn it down
And build it back

Not from fear
But from what we know

Every service has a purpose
Every purpose has to show

Who owns it
Why we need it
Where it talks

And where it goes

If we can't answer those four questions

Then it doesn't get to grow

TEAM

Server one

Known good

Server two

Known good

Application

Known good

Database

Restored and verified

Identity

Rotated

Certificates

Reissued

Service accounts

Reviewed

Old integration

Ready to retire

Michael?

Yeah?

Would you like the honor?

I've waited seven years

Take it down

Stopping service

Anything break?

Wait

Wait

Wait

Nothing

Again

Nothing

It's actually unused

Of course it is

Delete it

With pleasure

MICHAEL

Goodbye, APP-SRV-OLD-02

MICHAEL

You were temporary

TEAM

Eventually

FULL COMPANY

Burn it down

And build it back

Every weakness

Every crack

Not by hiding what went wrong

But by making something strong

Build it simpler

Build it clean

Know the purpose of the machine

Every owner

Every key

Every trust has history

Burn it down

And build it back

Take the lesson

Not the scar

We don't have to build it perfectly

Just better than we are

And when somebody asks us

How we know we're on the track

We won't say

It works on my machine

We'll say

We built it back

Burn it down!

Build it back!

Burn it down!

Build it back!

From the endpoint

To the stack

From identity

To the app

Every service

Every track

Burn it down

And build

It

Back!

The company celebrates, then settles. A single question breaks the applause inside the scene.

TEAM MEMBER

Are we done?

INCIDENT COMMANDER

Almost

TEAM MEMBER

What's left?

INCIDENT COMMANDER

We know what we've rebuilt

We know what we've replaced

We know what we've revoked

But there's still one question

TEAM

What's that?

INCIDENT COMMANDER

How do we know it's good?

13. Known Good

ACT II

The rebuild choreography stops. The stage becomes simple: people, a few screens, and the systems they have restored. This is the quiet after the work. The question passes from person to person.

TEAM

How do we know it's good?
We built it from clean images
How do we know they're clean?
We verified the source
How do we know the source is good?
We checked it
Against what?
Against what we trust
And how do we know
We trust the right things?
Silence
That's the question
Isn't it?

INCIDENT COMMANDER

We want a green light
A check in a box

A dashboard that tells us
We've changed all the locks

We want someone to tell us
The danger has passed

That everything broken
Is mended at last

But green doesn't mean good

Quiet doesn't mean clean

Safe isn't something
That glows on a screen

You gather the evidence
You follow the thread

You learn what is living
By knowing what's dead

ENSEMBLE

Known good

Not perfect
Not pure

Known good

As certain
As we can be sure

We test what we built
We prove what we could

And piece after piece
We make it known good

TEAM

The passwords are changed

Known good

The certificates new

Known good

The endpoints rebuilt

Known good

The backups came through

Known good

The old trust removed

Known good

The new access small

Known good

Then are we safe?

No one can promise that at all

Then what was this for?

Everything

ENSEMBLE

We can't promise nothing
Will ever get through

We can't build a wall

That no one can undo

We can't stop every message
Or every mistake

We can't know each choice
That a person will make

EMPLOYEE

Then what can we do?

SECURITY

Know what we have

Know why it's there

Know who can touch it
And why they should care

Know when it changes
Know when it leaves

Question the things
That are easiest to believe

ENSEMBLE

Known good

Not because someone said

Known good

Not because nothing looks red

Known good

Because someone can show
What it is
Where it came from
And why we should know

EMPLOYEE / SECURITY

I clicked the message
I remember
I let them inside

They fooled you
And all of this happened
Yes
How can you trust me again?
Because trust isn't never being wrong
Then what is it?
Knowing what happens
When something goes wrong

Calling when you're uncertain
Listening when you do

Building a place
Where it's safe to say

I don't know
Can you look at this too?

EMPLOYEE / SECURITY

Known good
Can people be known good?
No
Good
That's a terrible answer
People are better
How?

SECURITY

Machines do what we tell them
Until something changes

People can learn

People can notice

People can say

Wait

That isn't right

People can ask for help

People can change their mind

People can find the thing
A machine was never designed to find

ENSEMBLE

So maybe known good
Isn't somewhere we arrive

Maybe it's something
We choose to keep alive

A question we keep asking
A habit we renew

I know what this was yesterday

Is it still true?

Known good

Today

Known good

Right now

Known good

And tomorrow?

We check it again

Known good

Not blind faith

Known good

Not fear

Known good

Just knowing why
We let something near

ENSEMBLE - TRUST CALLBACK

Every account
Every service
Every person
Every key

Not trusted just because
It says

Trust me

Prove who you are

Prove why you're here

Prove what you need

And when you disappear

ENSEMBLE

But leave enough room
For people to say

Something feels wrong

Can you help me today?

Known good

Not perfect
Not done

Known good

A place to begin from

We tested the systems
We followed it through

We can't know everything

But we know what we'll do

When the next warning flashes
When the next phone rings

When someone discovers
One of those little things

We won't start with blame

We won't hide what we see

We'll ask the right questions

Together

What changed?

What happened?

What do we know?

What can we prove?

And where do we go?

Known good
Known good
Known good

The systems are ready
The network is clean

The accounts are secured
And the dashboards are green

But that's not why we trust them

EMPLOYEE

Then why?

SECURITY

Because now we know what green means

A comfortable silence. For the first time in a long time, nobody is rushing.

TEAM MEMBER

So

TEAM MEMBER

Are we done?

INCIDENT COMMANDER

With the incident?

TEAM MEMBER

Yes

INCIDENT COMMANDER

With the work?

TEAM MEMBER

Never

INCIDENT COMMANDER

Good

TEAM MEMBER

Good

The help desk phone rings. Everyone looks toward it.

HELP DESK

IT, how can I help you?

CALLER

Hi

CALLER

I think there's something wrong with my modem

HELP DESK

Your what?

A familiar modem tone begins softly. Transition directly into the finale.

14. Handshake of the Heart - Finale

ACT II

*A pool of warm light reveals an old beige computer and dial-up modem, echoing the opening image.
The CALLER has brought the modem in. Members of the company gather gradually, recognizing it.*

HELP DESK / CALLER

You said something's wrong
With your modem?
Yeah
What kind?
Dial-up
Dial-up?
Found it in the basement
I wanted to hear it
Hear what?
The beginning
Plug it in

MODEM / COMPANY

A little light
A little tone
A copper wire
A telephone

A number waiting
To be called
A tiny door
Inside a wall

I remember
So do I

We waited all night
On that copper line
Listening for a voice
That might answer mine

Every click
Every hiss
Every hopeful cry
Meant somewhere in the darkness
Someone might reply

So pick up the line
And tell me you're there
Send me a signal
Through the cold midnight air

I'll cross every mile
One bit at a time
Just give me your handshake
And I'll give you mine

Handshake of the heart
Calling through the night
Two machines reaching out
Trying to get it right

The original 1990s office dissolves into the modern infrastructure of the rest of the show. The same melody grows broader.

COMPANY

We thought connection
Was all we would need
A name
A password
A little more speed

Then networks grew
And moved to the cloud
A million connections
All talking out loud

The wires disappeared
But the promise remained

I know who you are

I can trust this name

Every handshake is a promise
Every login is a choice
Every system that we trust
Gives another system voice

Every token
Every key
Every service
Every sign

Says I believe that you are you
And you believe that I am mine

TRUST / TEAM

Trust me
You already do
No
Not anymore
Then prove it
Who are you?
Here's my name
Why are you here?
Here's my claim
What do you need?
Only this
How long?
Until I'm done
And then?
Take it away
That's better
Now you're asking
The right questions

COMPANY

We learned that green
Doesn't always mean good
We learned that working
Doesn't mean understood

We learned temporary
Can quietly remain
And one forgotten trust
Can open up the chain

We learned a backup
Isn't a backup at all
Until somebody restores it
And proves it can answer the call

And when production
Is burning bright
It doesn't really matter
Whose machine was right

CALLBACKS

It works on my machine!
Not good enough!
Is the network down?
Don't start
Is there an ETA?
GET OUT!

SECURITY / EMPLOYEE

We learned something else
What's that?
When someone gets fooled
And lets danger through
The easiest thing
Is finding somebody to blame

The harder thing
Is asking
What can we change?

COMPANY

So call when you're worried
Ask when you're unsure
Say when something feels different
Than it did before

No question too simple
No warning too small
Sometimes the strangest little thing
Is the start of it all

Handshake of the heart
Calling through the night
People and machines
Trying to get it right

Not perfect
Not fearless

Not safe for all time
But learning together
One bit at a time

Every cable
Every ticket
Every server in a rack
Every temporary workaround
We swear we'll circle back

Every late-night phone call
Every blinking light
Every person who stayed
When everything went wrong that night

We built this together
The beautiful and strange
Every patch
Every password
Every undocumented change

So pick up the line
And tell me you're there
Send me a signal
Through the electric air

We'll cross every mile
One bit at a time
Give me your handshake
And I'll give you mine

But a handshake isn't certainty
And trust is not a wall
Security isn't never
Letting anything fall

It's knowing what you're holding
And knowing when it changed
It's noticing the ordinary
Has suddenly become strange

There will be another warning

There will be another flaw
Another clever message
That looks like one we saw

There'll be another outage
Another sleepless night
Another ancient server
That nobody can quite-

VOICE

Who owns this?

FULL COMPANY

WE DO!

FULL COMPANY

There will be mistakes
We'll learn!
There will be failures
We'll build!
There will be questions
We'll ask!
There will be darkness
We'll bring the light!

And when the next connection comes
And asks to cross the line
We'll remember every lesson
That brought us here tonight

Who are you?
Prove it!
Why are you here?
Prove it!
What do you need?
Prove it!
How long will you stay?
Prove it!

And when we've seen the evidence
And everything aligns
We'll give you our handshake
And you can give us thine

Handshake of the heart
Calling through the night
Two machines
A million souls
Trying to get it right

Through every hiss
Through every tone
No one builds this world alone

One call
One line
One chance to start

One network
One team

One handshake of the heart

The old modem completes its connection. The company falls silent to listen.

COMPUTER

Connected at forty-nine thousand three hundred thirty-three bits per second

MODEM

Still got it

HELP DESK

For something that slow, it got us pretty far

SECURITY

It did

EMPLOYEE

So what's the rule?

EMPLOYEE

Never trust anything?

SECURITY

No

SECURITY

Trust

FULL COMPANY

But verify

The help desk phone rings one last time.

HELP DESK

IT, how can I help you?

CALLER

Hi. My printer isn't working

The entire company turns slowly toward the HELP DESK TECH.

HELP DESK

Have you tried turning it off and on again?

Blackout. Final chord.

END