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SF PERUSALS

THE BOOMERANG EFFECT

MATTHEW LEAVITT

SAMUEL FRENCH

The Boomerang Effect

Matthew Leavitt

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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CHARACTERS

PAUL – mid 20s. A bag-boy at Trader Joe's, he's a lazy, emotionally stunted, underachieving slacker. Fortunately, he has a playful, ingratiating charm that has allowed him to float through life unscathed thus far. He is the boyfriend of Stephanie.

STEPHANIE – mid 20s. Slightly uptight and easily annoyed, she possesses a pragmatic intelligence that enables her to readily find fault with everyone she meets, making her, at times, unpopular.Her good intentions are often obscured by her blunt and candid nature. She is Paul's girlfriend and a close friend of Renee's.

RENEE – mid 20s. A graduate student. Although she is not naturally bright or talented, she compensates with a strong desire to better herself. Her lack of self-awareness is actually part of her charm, along with her youthful innocence and generally optimistic outlook. She is dating and living with Andrew, and is old friends with David

ANDREW – mid 20s. A bit high-strung and neurotic, often irritated with the various inconveniences of modern life, he works to support himself and Renee while she finishes graduate school. He can be whiny and argumentative, and once a particularly aggravating topic piques him up, rarely will he ever let it go.

NICK – early 30s. Reasonable, reserved and even-keeled by nature, he has a difficult time initiating uncomfortable conversations, and instead, tends to internalize everything. He is rarely in touch with his real feelings, which often times prevents him from understanding the motivations behind his behavior. He is married to David.

DAVID – early 30s. Recently unemployed, he's since fallen into a lazy, sedentary lifestyle. He is witty, playful, and constantly dreams up fantastical and unrealistic solutions to his problems. He is married to Nick and is the son of Alexander.

ALEXANDER – late 50s. A finance executive at the end of a long career, he's knowledgeable, worldly and clever. A true salesman at heart, he can also be remarkably calculating and manipulative. He is the father of David.

JULIE – mid 20s. A new assistant at the company Alexander works for, she's a youthful, lascivious party girl whose lack of classic intelligence is compensated by her fiery ambition. For better or worse, she lives by instinct and is entirely driven by her emotions. She is the younger sister of Janetta.

JANETTA – early 30s. A single woman who invests all her time into her work and has no personal life to speak of. She lives alone and leads a very ordinary but honorable life, partly due to her strong moral fiber and partly out of a great fear of rejection. She has always played it safe, yet is secretly envious of people like her sister Julie who are able to throw caution to the wind and live a wild, carefree existence.

MARCUS – early 30s. A co-worker of Janetta's, he's a selfish egomaniac whose deep unhappiness often leads to self-destructive errors in judgment. He has enough intelligence to get what he wants out of life, but lacks any self-restraint or general empathy.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I encourage anyone performing or producing this play to update any cultural references they feel are outdated or no longer relevant. (For example, Candy Crush and Maurice Jones-Drew).

This play is dedicated to the memory of Sharyn Lane

Chapter 1. The Birthday Present

(Mid-morning sunlight softly illuminates a shabbily maintained apartment bedroom. One door, stage left, leads offstage, presumably to the living room. Another, upstage left, leads to a partially dressed bathroom. A queen sized bed rests upstage center sandwiched between two nightstands. A comfortable chair sits next to the stage left exit, and a small desk rests against the stage right wall. The furniture is all generic enough to work in all five settings.)

(PAUL, a young man in his mid 20s, lays in bed under the covers looking very relaxed and content. He is shirtless, as his comforter covers him from the chest down. His hands are interlocked between his head and pillow and he wears a huge grin.)

(We hear the sound of two horns quickly honking and Paul glances to the nightstand beside the bed. Without shifting his position he reaches out, grabs his cellphone from the nightstand and checks it. He has a new text. He reads it and smiles.)

PAUL
Oh, that’s nice.

(He types a quick response and sets the phone back down, his grin having grown twice the size. He closes his eyes and lightly chuckles to himself before releasing a wonderful sigh. A beat later, a lump rises up from under the covers and begins moving. Paul is too happy to acknowledge it. The lump moves out of the bed and a young woman in her mid 20s, STEPHANIE, emerges from under the covers. She wears a nightie and is not nearly as pleased as Paul.)

STEPHANIE
(Wipes her mouth.) God I hate your birthday.

(Stephanie crosses through the bathroom door, pours herself a shot of mouthwash and starts gargling.

(Paul's phone honks again. He turns on the lamp that rests on the nightstand and checks the text.)

PAUL
I love my birthday. Although I do hate getting older. The idea of being another year closer to my thirties depresses the hell out me. I'll tell you though, that really helped take the sting out of it.

(Stephanie spits out the mouthwash.)

STEPHANIE
Much like jury duty, I'm glad I don't have to do that again for another year.

PAUL
You don't have to be so sour about it. I mean it can't be that horrible.

STEPHANIE
I don't see you trying it.

PAUL
You know what I mean. You know, some girls like doing it.

STEPHANIE
It's a lie. Like the female orgasm.

PAUL
I knew it!

(Paul types away on his phone as Stephanie reenters the bedroom. She has changed into a t-shirt and sweatpants.)

STEPHANIE
Who are you texting?

PAUL
Just thanking Andrew for texting me happy birthday. (He looks up, disappointed.) Already in the sweatpants?

STEPHANIE
You'll be lucky to ever see me again without them. Texting while I'm giving you your birthday present?

(Paul guiltily sets his phone down.)

PAUL
No I didn't.

(She smacks him with a pillow.)

STEPHANIE
I heard you you liar. What the hell is wrong with you?

PAUL
It's my birthday, people are texting me. It's rude not to respond.

STEPHANIE
But it's not rude to text during sex?

PAUL
(Thinks a beat) I admit, you have a point there.

STEPHANIE
God you're such a prick.

PAUL
Well if I'm such a prick, how come I'm getting so many birthday texts?

STEPHANIE
Because everyone's Facebook is reminding them it's your birthday, and the fact that they're texting and not calling you proves you're a prick. If they liked you, you would be getting actual phone calls, not texts. Prick.

PAUL
I'm not so sure about that. If I was a prick they would just post on my Facebook wall and not even bother with a text. But the fact that they went to the trouble of texting me proves how un-prickish I must be. Besides, you can't be mad at me on my birthday.

STEPHANIE
Keep it up and it'll be the last one you ever have.

(She smacks him with a pillow again.)

PAUL
Oh that's it. You're in for it now.

STEPHANIE
Oh am I?

PAUL
That's right. You can only push a man so far.

(Paul begins tickling Stephanie and she laughs.)

STEPHANIE
(Giggling) Oh my god, you'd better stop it...

PAUL
No can do.

(She tries to make him stop as they playfully wrestle and laugh. Paul continues tickling her, then pins her hands onto the bed, leans down and places his mouth near her stomach.)

STEPHANIE
(Laughing) No zerbert. Not a zerbert.

PAUL
'Frad so. Geronimo!

(Paul begins to blow and Stephanie leaps out of bed, incredibly annoyed and out of breath. She folds her shirt back down to cover her stomach.)

STEPHANIE
(Sharply) I told you no zerbert!

PAUL
What the hell? Are you seriously pissed off about a zerbert?

STEPHANIE
I said no.

PAUL
You were laughing, I thought we were having fun. Don't worry, I won't make that mistake again. Jesus Christ...

(Stephanie crosses to her purse which rests on the chair. She sifts through the purse and pulls out a patch. Paul's phone honks again.)

STEPHANIE
For the love of God can you please shut that thing off?

(Stephanie puts the patch on her arm. Paul puts down the phone.)

PAUL
Is something wrong? I'm sensing something might be wrong.

STEPHANIE
Yes. Something is very wrong. I'm in a relationship with a boy. A man-child who refuses to acknowledge that he's an adult, out of college, and should have more serious priorities other than birthday texts, video games and Fantasy Football. I mean, doesn't it bother you at all that you're just wasting your life and all your potential?

PAUL
Not really, no. And even if I am, it's not my fault. Our whole generation is developmentally stunted. I mean, we're the first real children of the internet age, inundated with information and thrust into a dire economic situation where there are no jobs and unreasonable expectations. Forgive me if I want to play a video game every now and then to unwind.

STEPHANIE
Unwind from what? You bag groceries at Trader Joe's. What possible stress could you need to assuage from saying "Paper or plastic"?

PAUL
First off, we discourage the use of plastic bags at Trader Joe's. And second, I work there because it's the only job I could get. And I find it fascinating that the one time I never hear this lecture is when you use my discount for your muffins and Joe's-Os.

STEPHANIE
Because the discount is awesome.

PAUL
It totally is. So where's the problem?

STEPHANIE
The problem is that job doesn't lead anywhere. I'm not trying to be a snob or anything. I'm just saying maybe you could work harder at finding something more substantial. Make better use of your time by taking some classes or researching different internships and programs instead of playing video games all day. That's all.

PAUL
I wish you'd never quit smoking. You were so much nicer then. Smellier, but nicer.

STEPHANIE
I quit smoking because I'm starting to think about the future, just like you should be doing. You're twenty-five today. Doesn't that mean anything to you?

PAUL
Of course it does. It means today is my birthday. A day when I should be celebrated, complimented, and made to feel special. I should be opening presents, returning birthday texts, getting wasted, eating cake and having a good time. Not be bludgeoned by the same miserable lecture you've been nagging me with for the last few weeks about how I'm wasting my life.

STEPHANIE
Well you are.

PAUL
So what? Jesus Christ, where the hell is all this coming from? I'll bet this is Renee's doing. Have your friends been talking shit about me?

STEPHANIE
No. I mean, yes, of course they have, but that has nothing to do with this. This is about you still living like a fifteen year old boy. Grown men shouldn't spend all their free time researching Fantasy Football stats and jerking off.

PAUL
Alright. First off, stop making me out to be some horrible degenerate loser. Contrary to what you may think, I'm no different than any other guy. All guys play Fantasy Football, all guys love video games and all guys jerk off. A lot.

STEPHANIE
Not all guys.

PAUL
(emphatic) All guys. In fact, I bet you if the government charged us just ten cents every time we deleted our internet history, not only would we be out of debt, we'd have a surplus that would last us the next thirty years.

STEPHANIE
So that's why I always have to log back into Amazon every time I use your laptop...

PAUL
Just ten cents and we'd be deficit free.

STEPHANIE
You know, maybe if you took all the effort you've clearly put into "solving the debt crisis" and applied it to something more productive, you'd be the CEO of some huge corporation by now instead of just another fuck-up whose desire for instant gratification has squelched any ambition he may have once had.

PAUL
Look, I wish things were different, but they're not. Believe me, I would love to go back in time and tell myself not to major in creative writing, warn myself about the impending recession and tell me it's probably not the best idea to take a year off and backpack through Europe instead of trying to seek respectable employment in the last viable job market we'll have for at least a decade, but I can't. So to answer your question, no. This is not where I wanted to be at twenty-five. I did not want to be bagging groceries and be nagged to death by my emotionally crazed psycho girlfriend.

STEPHANIE
I'm not nagging you. I don't nag.

PAUL
Are you kidding me? Ever since you quit smoking it's like your most favorite thing in the world, your personal national pastime. I warned Andrew about this with Renee. The first year is all lovey-dovey, let me make you dinner, laugh at all your jokes, everything's peachy. Then the millisecond they realize you're not going anywhere, the rest of your life is an endless marathon of being nagged to death.

STEPHANIE
You're such an asshole.

PAUL
Come to think of it, you should turn it into a competitive sport. You and your friends could make team names, get jerseys, sell some tickets. Then I could start a Fantasy Nagging Bitch League and keep track of your stats everyday, because I have no doubt you would be the number one overall draft pick, hands down.

STEPHANIE
You are such an asshole!

(Paul's phone honks. He reaches for it, but Stephanie grabs it first, crosses to the bathroom and dangles it over the toilet.)

PAUL
You wouldn't dare.

STEPHANIE
Geronimo!

(Stephanie drops the phone into the toilet. Paul leaps out of bed and immediately fishes it out.)

PAUL
Jesus Christ, what the hell is wrong with you?

(He frantically begins drying his phone with wads of toilet paper.)

STEPHANIE
Even though it's your birthday I thought I'd give myself a present.

PAUL
Where the fuck is this coming from? This can't just be nicotine cravings, this is more than that.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Is it your parents' doing? Some bullshit article you read on the Huffington Post? An insane life coach I don't know about?

STEPHANIE
I don't have a life coach, whatever that is.

PAUL
Then what the hell is it? I'm not sure how much more of this I'm willing to absorb, so seriously, what the hell has gotten into you?

STEPHANIE
I'm pregnant.

(Paul stands motionless and stunned as Stephanie awaits his reaction. A beat later we hear Paul's phone emit a distorted, fuzzy version of his previous honking text alert sound. Paul struggles not to check the message as Stephanie shoots him a stern look. Light shift.)

Chapter Two. Pillow Talk

(RENEE and ANDREW, late 20s, enter the bedroom. They are heavily making out while inching their way closer to the bed. While carefully stepping backward, Andrew kisses her while unbuttoning her blouse and Renee follows his lead. They finally reach the bed and Andrew playfully tosses her onto it. She sits up and sticks out her leg, implying Andrew should remove her knee-high boots. Andrew grabs the boot and begins to pull. It doesn't budge. He keeps tugging at it but it refuses to give.)

ANDREW
You've got to be kidding me.

RENEE
Pull harder.

(Renee grabs onto the end of the bed as Andrew gets a better grip. He pulls with all his strength and still can't get the boot off.)

ANDREW
Why on Earth do you have to wear boots that are impossible to take off?

RENEE
Because they look really cute.

ANDREW
Why can't they have a zipper or something? This makes no sense.

RENEE
They wouldn't look good with a zipper. Just pull harder.

ANDREW
If I pull any harder I'll rip your foot off, and in it's place the doctors will put a nice wooden stump and you'll never be able to wear boots again.

RENEE
Don't even joke about that. Try gripping it from the heel.

(He grips the boot at the heel and tugs. Nothing.)

ANDREW
(Between tugs) I think women have an abusive relationship with shoes.

RENEE
Keep pulling. I think it's loosening.

ANDREW
Seriously, the worse the shoes treat you the more you love them. They beat and bludgeon your poor feet to a purple pulp, but no matter how horribly they abuse you, you just keep wearing them anyway.

RENEE
You don't understand them like I do.

ANDREW
And yet these instruments of torture are your favorite things on the planet.

RENEE
(In pain) I love these boots.

ANDREW
You love them more than you love me, don't you?

RENEE
(Moans) It's not even close.

ANDREW
That's exactly what I'm talking about. It's an abusive relationship. Wait, I think it's moving.

RENEE
I feel it too. Keep going.

ANDREW
It's coming.

RENEE
That's it. Don't stop. Don't stop!

ANDREW
Here it comes!

(Andrew pulls the boot off and falls back from the force. He is exhausted.)

RENEE
Oh that feels amazing. (She leans forward and rubs her foot.) Look, it's all mangled. Two of my toes are numb. I can't feel them at all.

ANDREW
(Catches his breath) I'm sure they're fine.

RENEE
I don't know. It's really weird. Maybe they're broken.

ANDREW
They're not broken.

RENEE
I think they are. (then) Okay, I'm ready for the other one. (She sticks her other foot out for Andrew to grip.)

ANDREW
Let's just leave it on. I don't think I can go through that again just yet.

RENEE
I'm not having sex with one boot on.

ANDREW
I'm going to need a nap if I attempt another boot removal right now. Can't we cut it off?

RENEE
Stop being such a baby and help me get this boot off. The sooner it's off the sooner we can have sex.

ANDREW
Fine, fine. Give me your foot.

RENEE
Thank you.

(Renee sticks out her foot. Andrew grabs the boot and braces for battle. He takes a deep breath, then pulls. The boot easily slides right off and Andrew staggers backward, boot in hand. Renee sits up and starts massaging her feet. Andrew sits on his knees stunned at how easily the second boot came off.)

RENEE
Oh my God my feet are killing me.

(Andrew throws the boot aside and kneels next to the bed.)

ANDREW
Now where were we?

RENEE
Look at this blister.

ANDREW
I don’t want to look at your blister. I want you to forget about your feet.

(Andrew climbs on top of her and they resume kissing.)

RENEE
Wait. You have some eye-gunkies.

ANDREW
I do?

RENEE
Yeah, under your right eye.

(Andrew wipes his eye, then presents it to Renee for approval.)

RENEE
All gone.

ANDREW
Thanks. I can see much clearer.

RENEE
You’re welcome.

(Andrew unbuttons his shirt and throws it to the floor, still wearing his undershirt. Renee looks at it as he resumes kissing her.)

RENEE
Did you know there are holes in your shirt?

ANDREW
What?

RENEE
Right there, under your armpit.

(Andrew checks his shirt under his armpit and sees a small hole.)

ANDREW
So what? I only wear it as an undershirt.

RENEE
So you shouldn’t be wearing shirts with holes in them.

ANDREW
Okay, fine. I’ve got an easy fix.

(Andrew takes off his T-shirt and throws it to the floor.)

ANDREW
See? Problem solved.

(He leans over her and begins kissing her neck.)

RENEE
You know, Macy's is having a twenty percent off sale next weekend. I'm going to go and buy you some new shirts.

ANDREW
Forget the shirts.

RENEE
It's okay. I think I have a coupon too. Then we can throw away all your shirts that have holes in them.

(Andrew stops kissing her and sits up.)

ANDREW
Okay, we need to talk.

RENEE
What about?

ANDREW
About this. This pestering during sex. Paul warned me about this.

RENEE
About what?

ANDREW
How once girlfriends know you're settled and not going anywhere they all start to find fault with every single thing you do.

RENEE
That's the most insulting, misogynistic nonsense I've ever heard. I'm embarrassed for you.

ANDREW
Think about it. We're supposed to be having sex and you keep pestering me about eye crusties and holes in my shirt. Looking at all the evidence it seems either Paul's right or you're not interested in sex anymore.

RENEE
I guarantee you, neither is true. And you're an idiot for listening to Paul. He works at Trader Joe's for God's sake.

ANDREW
You've never given him a chance. At least I'm nice to your loser friends.

RENEE
My friends aren't losers.

ANDREW
What about David?

RENEE
What about David?

ANDREW
He doesn't even have a job. At least Paul has one, even if it is at Trader Joe's.

RENEE
He's not a loser. He's just going through some hard times.

ANDREW
Whatever. And even though I know he's always telling you to break up with me, I still make an effort to be nice to him.

RENEE
A, that is not true at all. And B, how exactly are you nice to him? All you do is make fun of him.

ANDREW
That's not true.

RENEE
What about last month when he was wearing skinny jeans and you told him he looked like he was smuggling hundreds of pancakes out of I.H.O.P.?

ANDREW
First off, I said liberate pancakes from I.H.O.P., not smuggle. You always ruin my jokes. Second, skinny jeans are made for skinny people under twenty, not pudgy gay men in their thirties. And third, I totally make an effort to be nice to him. Like a few weeks ago I challenged him to a game of Words With Friends, just to make him think I actually like him. All for you.

RENEE
Really? I appreciate that.

ANDREW
See? I make an effort because I love you and would do anything for you. So how come when I'm trying to arouse you, you just want to show me the blisters on your foot or make small talk?

ANDREW (CONT'D)
Like last week when we were making out on the couch and you started telling me how we need a new dishwasher.

RENEE
We do really need one, and it was driving me nuts that I kept forgetting to tell you. So when I suddenly remembered while we were making out, I wanted to make sure I told you before I forgot again.

ANDREW
Well how about a few weeks ago when I was going down on you and you started telling me all the reasons we shouldn't go to my brother's for Easter?

RENEE
We can't afford it. And I knew it was the one time you wouldn't interrupt me.

ANDREW
I'm telling you, this is rapidly becoming a trend. Every time we have sex recently you keep talking like we're having dinner.

RENEE
I can't help the thoughts that pop into my head.

ANDREW
You're missing the point. You shouldn't be thinking about that stuff during sex in the first place.

RENEE
Okay then. Tell me, what am I supposed to be thinking?

ANDREW
I don't know, sexy thoughts. Like, "Ooh, that feels good" or "I'm going to rip his shirt off with my teeth."

RENEE
You want me to rip your shirt off with my teeth?

ANDREW
I don't know, sure. Anything would be better than this. All I'm saying is when we're having sex, we should talk about sexy stuff or not talk at all. That means no more talking about shoes, boots, blisters, dishwashers, eye-crusties, Easter, my brother, our finances, and most of all, no talking about the holes in my shirts. Is that really asking too much?

RENEE
Fine. Fine. You're right. Why don't we try this again?

ANDREW
With no talking about boring, everyday stuff?

RENEE
Only sexy things. I promise.

(Andrew smiles and they kiss, resuming where they left off. They continue making out when suddenly Andrew screams and recoils back.)

RENEE
Are you okay?

ANDREW
What the hell was that?

(Andrew holds his chest.)

RENEE
I was trying to rip your shirt off with my teeth.

ANDREW
You bit my nipple!

RENEE
I'm sorry.

ANDREW
It really hurts. (He looks down) There's blood on my shirt.

RENEE
Don't worry, I'm getting you new ones at Macy's.

(Off his incredulous look, light shift.)

Chapter 3. Words With Friends

(The stage is dark.)

MAN'S VOICE
I'm going to fucking kill you Ian Chang!!

(The lights come up revealing DAVID sitting in bed playing on an iPad. NICK enters from the bathroom, wearing a T-shirt and sweatpants. Both are in their 30s.)

NICK
Are you still playing that stupid game?

DAVID
It's not stupid. It's Words With Friends. Renee's loser boyfriend Andrew challenged me to a game and now I'm obsessed with it. You know, I think he finally likes me.

NICK
You've been playing it for hours. I think it's finally killing what few brain cells you have left.

DAVID
Au contraire, it's an intellectual stimulant that keeps my mind agile and sharp.

NICK
It also prevents you from getting anything done and turns you into an obsessive lunatic.

DAVID
A small price to pay for the opportunity to decimate Ian Chang in the ultimate battle for intellectual supremacy.

NICK
Who is Ian Chang?

DAVID
I don't know. Some guy on Words With Friends. He's always available for a game. I don't know who he is or where he's from, but I've become absolutely obsessed with playing against him. He's become my arch-nemesis. Like Sampras is to Agasi, or a salad to Chris Christie. All I know is everything that once mattered to me exists only in the shadows of yesteryear. All that matters now is defeating Ian Chang.

NICK
So you beat this guy all the time?

DAVID
His win percentage may be slightly higher...

NICK
So then Ian Chang is your intellectual superior?

DAVID
No. That is not the case. He is not now nor will he ever be my intellectual equal, let alone superior.

NICK
Then why does he beat you all the time?

DAVID
He beats me because he cheats.

NICK
How can he cheat? Isn't it just Scrabble over the internet?

DAVID
Yes, but he uses the most obscure, obsolete words that only exist in the dictionary. Like on this last game, he won using the word X-U. I don't even know how to pronounce that. Zu, Tu? It's cheating.

NICK
I don't see how that's cheating.

DAVID
You would take his side, wouldn't you?

NICK
I'm just saying...

DAVID
Well maybe it's not cheating in the literal definition of the word, but it's definitely unsportsmanlike.

NICK
So when you win you never use obscure two letter words.

DAVID
Of course I do. I have to. It's the only way I can compete with him. God I hate him!

NICK
This always happens to you.

DAVID
What does?

NICK
You get obsessed with one of these games for like a month and then you move onto the next one. Like last month when you wouldn't stop playing Candy Crush.

DAVID
It's not my fault they make you get three stars on every level.

NICK
They don't make you do anything.

DAVID
That's not true. They have a way of infiltrating your sub-conscious and making you feel like if you don't get three stars on every level of Candy Crush, you can never live a happy, fulfilled life.

NICK
And now that you've got three stars on every level is your life happy and fulfilled?

DAVID
No, because Ian Chang is destroying any sense of peace and well-being that I received from defeating Candy Crush.

NICK
Good night David.

(Nick gives David a gentle kiss on the cheek and turns out the light. David puts down the iPad, moves closer to Nick and starts kissing him. After a few beats, Nick lightly shoves David off him.)

NICK
Not tonight. I'm really not in the mood.

DAVID
Come on, please?

NICK
Not tonight. I'm sorry but I'm really tired and I have a headache. Not tonight.

DAVID
Fine, fine. Not tonight. Why should tonight be any different?

(David sulks to his side of the bed and resumes tapping away on the iPad. Nick takes a deep breath.)

NICK
So, any luck finding a job today?

DAVID
(Not looking up from the iPad.) Nope.

NICK
Did you at least look online for new jobs or send follow-up e-mails to any of the people you interviewed with?

DAVID
Nope.

NICK
Why not?

DAVID
Because I did other stuff instead.

NICK
Like get your ass kicked by Ian Chang in the ultimate battle for intellectual supremacy?

DAVID
(Looks up.) I did not get my ass kicked, thank you very much.

NICK
At least now I know how to get your attention. All I have to do is mention Ian Chang.

DAVID
That is an unholy name and I forbid it be spoken in my home.

NICK
David, we need to talk. I can't live like this anymore. I'm tired of financially supporting us both while you play games all day and refuse to take the slightest initiative to get a new job.

DAVID
I resent that implication. You know I've applied for like sixty jobs and haven't got even one second interview.

NICK
Then obviously sixty isn't enough. Whether it takes a hundred or two hundred you can't give up.

DAVID
I have not given up. It's like I've told you a thousand times, I can't find a job. I'm just trying to make the most of my time so I don't sink into a horrible existential depression, which happens to lots of guys in their thirties.

NICK
And how exactly have you been making the most of your time? Besides getting your ass kicked by Ian Chang.

DAVID
Well smart-ass, for starters I've been taking a good, hard look at my life, and I've decided to see my present unemployment as an opportunity to pursue a dream I've had since I was a kid.

NICK
The world record for the most unused gym membership?

DAVID
Acting.

(Nick stares a beat.)

NICK
Acting? As in being an actor?

DAVID
I knew you wouldn't be supportive.

NICK
Be supportive? You're joking right?

DAVID
I'm as serious as a dead baby.

NICK
I don't think that's an expression...

DAVID
Give me one good reason I can't be an actor.

NICK
Well, for starters you're in your mid-thirties, which is too old to start. It takes years of studying and practicing just to get to the point where you even can start auditioning and get rejected.

DAVID
That's why I'm giving myself five years to make it.

NICK
Five years?

DAVID
Exactly. If I haven't made it in five years, then and only then will I resign myself to getting another boring, soul-sucking nine-to-five job.

NICK
Do you even act?

DAVID
Well, every night when you whine about how stupid everyone you work with is, I act like I give a shit.

NICK
I'm serious. You have to get just how ludicrous this is.

DAVID
I'm not delusional. I realize there's at least a fifty percent chance I won't make it. That's why I have a plan B.

NICK
Which is?

DAVID
Pastry chef.

NICK
You don't even cook.

DAVID
But I love cookies, and they say you should do what you love.

NICK
Okay, just shut up for one second. Have you stopped to think about the fact that all your new career paths involve years of very expensive classes? How do you expect to pay for them?

(David thinks a beat.)

DAVID
I don't have all the answers. It's just something I've been thinking about. And don't worry, I'm still applying for horribly boring, normal jobs in the meantime, which in this economy is about as practical as an acting career anyway.

NICK
I still don't understand why you don't just ask your father for a job.

DAVID
And sit through that lecture? No thanks. Besides, with his heart condition I don't want to upset him.

NICK
You haven't told him yet?

DAVID
Nope.

NICK
But it's been months.

DAVID
I know how long it’s been.

NICK
You should call him right now and tell him.

DAVID
I can’t. He’s not even around. He’s on some business trip in Des Moines.

NICK
Should he really be travelling in his condition?

DAVID
Probably not, but I told him to go anyway. He’s been really getting on my nerves lately and I need a break. Besides, Des Moines is probably the safest place to be if you’re looking for the number one place guaranteed not to excite your heart rate. Well, maybe number two if you count this bedroom.

NICK
And what is that supposed to mean?

DAVID
You know exactly what that means. We haven’t done it in like three weeks. Seriously, it’s like we’re turning into a straight couple.

NICK
Come on, it’s not that bad. We’re just going through a dry patch. It will pass. Just like one day you’ll get another job and this current spell of you being unemployed will also pass.

DAVID
I find it interesting that no matter what we’re talking about it always seems to come right back to my job situation. Am I crazy, or could our recent “dry patch” have something to do with me being out of work?

NICK
Of course not. Why on Earth would you think that?

DAVID
Because now that I think about it, our sex life pretty much slowed to a complete stop about the time I lost my job. In fact, the pity sex I got the night I was fired was the last good fuck I can remember.

NICK
Look, I promise this... hiatus will end soon. Just not tonight. And don’t make me out to be the bad guy here. I’m not the bad guy, I’m just trying to help.

DAVID
You have a funny way of showing it, making fun of my dreams and bringing up that stupid gym membership.

NICK
I know, and I'm sorry. I only care about you getting back on your feet and being happy again.

DAVID
I know you do. And that's why I love you so much.

(David kisses him and Nick winces.)

NICK
I love you too, but your breath still smells like the shrimp tacos from dinner.

DAVID
I was just going to brush my teeth.

(David gets out of bed and heads for the bathroom. The iPad makes a beeping noise and Nick picks it up.)

NICK
He-who-must-not-be-named challenges you to a rematch.

DAVID
Just ignore it. I need a break from all that spelling. It's exhausting.

NICK
Maybe I want to play him.

(David reenters the bedroom holding his toothbrush.)

DAVID
You can't be serious.

NICK
I think I'll accept the challenge.

DAVID
You think you can take on Ian Chang?

NICK
What are you implying? That I'm not as smart as you?

DAVID
No, I'm not saying that at all. You're just not as experienced. You don't understand the nuances of the game.

NICK
It’s Scrabble. I’m sure I’ll do fine.

DAVID
Just try not to lose too bad. If you lose to Ian Chang and ruin my win percentage I will never forgive you.

NICK
Don’t worry. I promise you won’t lose face to your great adversary. I’m in it to win it.

(Nick starts tapping away on the iPad as David brushes his teeth.)

NICK
What the hell. K-I is not a word!

DAVID
(muffled by the toothbrush) Told you.

NICK
You’re right. He’s making up words, that’s so not cool.

DAVID
(muffled) He’s pure evil.

(David spits and wipes his mouth with a towel. Nick taps furiously.)

NICK
Two can play that game. Do you think H-M is a word?

(David gets back into bed and puts his arms around Nick.)

DAVID
H-M as in Hmmm... how did you get so sexy? (He starts kissing David’s neck.)

NICK
Not now.

DAVID
But I brushed my teeth.

NICK
I’m just really into the game. You were right, it infiltrates your brain and I must defeat Ian Chang.

DAVID
Great. Now even Ian Chang gets more attention in this bedroom than I do.

DAVID (CONT'D)
I hope you realize that all this sexual neglect and passive abusive behavior is only going to drive me into the arms of another, someone much hotter might I add, and you'll be all alone and have no one to blame but yourself.

NICK
(Thinks a beat.) You know what, you're right.

DAVID
What was that? I heard a very unfamiliar sound just now.

NICK
I said 'you're right'. I suppose I have been neglectful of certain husbandly duties as of late and I'm sorry. I'll tell you what, let me make it up to you.

(Nick smiles lasciviously and sets down the iPad. David's face lights up.)

DAVID
Really?

NICK
Really.

(They start to make out. Nick begins kissing David's neck, then moves down toward his chest. David starts to get comfortable as Nick moves lower down his stomach, when the iPad makes a loud beeping sound.)

NICK
What was that?

DAVID
I don't know and I don't care.

NICK
I think it was the iPad.

DAVID
It's probably low on batteries or something. Ignore it.

NICK
(he reads off the iPad) "Ian Chang has sent you a message."

DAVID
Oh my god, let me see.

(David excitedly looks over Nick's shoulder at the iPad.)

NICK
He says, “What’s taking you so long? I don’t have all night.” I forgot to end the game.

DAVID
Oh my God. What should we say?

NICK
We should tell him we forfeit the game.

DAVID
And destroy my win percentage?

NICK
Our win percentage. I’m taking over now that you’re on a spelling break.

DAVID
Fine. Tell him that so he doesn’t think it’s still me playing. Tell him that whenever he wins it’s because he’s playing against you and not me.

NICK
I’ll just send that first part. (He types.)

DAVID
I can’t believe we’re actually talking to Ian Chang.

NICK
There. Sent.

DAVID
Crazy. (They stare at the iPad a beat. Then) Now where were we?

NICK
Ian Chang’s message sort of killed my mood. I think I’m going to go to sleep. Good night.

(Nick kisses him on the cheek and lays down. David stews for a long beat.)

DAVID
Damnit. I hate you Ian Chang.

(Light shift.)

Chapter 4. Des Moines

(The lights are brought up on a quaint, unimpressive hotel room with all the accoutrements of a typical hotel chain. Sitting behind the desk is ALEXANDER, a man in his sixties, who wears a suit and tie. His jacket is draped over the desk chair, where he presently sits snacking on a Toblerone while looking at the laptop perched on the desk. We hear a very light knock on the door. Alexander reads unphased by the noise.)

ALEXANDER
(Off computer) You don't say...

(Again, there's a knock at the door, slightly louder than the previous one but hardly imposing. It is enough however to get Alexander's attention.)

ALEXANDER
Come in, it's open!

(Alexander looks back to his computer as the door gingerly opens and JULIE, an attractive girl in her late-20s, cautiously enters the room. She is dressed professionally and carries a large purse over her shoulder.)

JULIE
You wanted to see me sir?

(Alexander glances at her.)

ALEXANDER
That's right. Please come in. Have a seat.

(Julie enters, shuts the door behind her and sits.)

ALEXANDER
(Looking at his laptop.) Don't you just hate Des Moines?

JULIE
It's my first time here.

ALEXANDER
And don't you hate it already? I hated Des Moines the first time I came here and it gets worse each time I come back.

JULIE
I'm sorry...

ALEXANDER
I mean it's a state capitol and the best hotel you can find is an Embassy Suites. And I've been looking for a decent restaurant online for a half hour and the best thing I've found is the Spaghetti Factory, and that only got three and a half stars from sixteen reviews, which let's face it is pretty much half the city population.

JULIE
If you like I can get a recommendation from the concierge.

ALEXANDER
You mean the high school kid who checked us in? There's no concierge, it's just the front desk. Thank God they have Toblerones or I may have starved to death, that is assuming I don't hang myself out of boredom first.

JULIE
I'm sorry, but was there something you needed sir?

ALEXANDER
Certainly. I didn't call you in here just to wax poetic on the shortcomings of Des Moines. No, I gave Jennifer the night off to go to some Corn Festival thing and I need some things taken care of.

JULIE
Of course sir. (She gets a pen and pad of paper.) I'm ready.

ALEXANDER
Great. First move my meeting with Mitchell to ten o'clock, nine thirty is just too early. And tell Janice to rewrite the new business proposal by Thursday morning. She writes a business proposal like she's texting her fucking boyfriend, all casual and shorthand. Next thing you know she'll be putting smiley face emoticons at the end of inter-departmental memos. And... I'm sorry, what's your name again?

JULIE
Julie.

ALEXANDER
Julie. You're new here, right?

JULIE
Kind of. It's been almost three months.

ALEXANDER
That's nice. How do you like it so far?

JULIE
It’s terrific, just great. I’m really learning a lot, I get to travel to new places...

ALEXANDER
Like Des Moines?

JULIE
Like Des Moines.

ALEXANDER
And you’re in Garth’s department?

JULIE
That’s right.

ALEXANDER
Could you come over here a moment?

JULIE
Um... sure. Of course.

(Julie sets her things down and walks toward Alexander’s desk.)

ALEXANDER
Stop right there. That’s fine.

(She stops in the middle of the room. Alexander looks her in the eye.)

ALEXANDER
Sleep with me or you’re fired.

JULIE
(Stunned, frozen) Do what?

ALEXANDER
(Plainly) Sleep with me or you’re fired.

(After a beat, Julie erupts.)

JULIE
(Rapidly, infuriated) Are you fucking kidding me? I can’t believe you said that. In this day and age to just come out and put it like that as if you’ve never even heard the term ‘sexual harassment’. I mean what age do you think we’re living in?

ALEXANDER
Whoa. Calm down.

JULIE
Calm down? You’re asking me to calm down?

(Alexander closes his laptop and stands up. Julie spits off her tirade without stopping for air. Alexander tries his best to defuse the situation.)

JULIE

I can't believe you just asked me to calm down. You must be out of your fucking mind if you think for one minute that I'm going to calm down. I could sue this company for millions. I'll sue you within an inch of your life until I'm your boss and you have to beg me to keep your job, you slime. You weasel. I can't believe this. When the company learns what a PR nightmare you've caused them you won't even have a job here anyway. Seriously, how dumb can you be? I'm going to fucking sue you for everything you own!

ALEXANDER

Hey, hey. Hey. Calm down. Whoa. Whoa, hey now. Seriously, hey, let's just calm down for one minute. One minute. Hey.

(Alexander throws up his hands as if there's been a complete misunderstanding. He looks Julie square in the eyes. She looks at him, still shocked but finally out of breath.)

ALEXANDER

Whoa, whoa. Whoa. Okay? Just hold on one minute and catch your breath.

(Julie takes a couple deep breaths.)

ALEXANDER

Okay?

(Julie nods. Alexander smiles.)

ALEXANDER

Okay. You're fired.

(Alexander sits back down and opens his laptop as if nothing happened. Julie is in disbelief.)

JULIE

I'm what?

ALEXANDER
(Simply, without looking up from his computer.) You're fired. Gather your things and close the door behind you, t-h-x. Apparently that means 'thanks'.

(Alexander continues playing on his computer.)

JULIE
You do realize I'll be suing the company for millions, right?

ALEXANDER
Have fun with that. We've got like twenty lawyers on retainer so I hope you like long, costly legal battles.

JULIE
You'll lose your job.

ALEXANDER
I really don't see that happening.

JULIE
Look at me when I'm talking to you!

(Alexander stops fiddling on his laptop and looks up at Julie. She is furious.)

ALEXANDER
I thought I fired you.

JULIE
You did. Because I wouldn't sleep with you.

ALEXANDER
That's not true at all.

JULIE
Of course it is. You just did that, I was here.

ALEXANDER
I'm afraid you're mistaken. I fired you because you were a terrible employee. I have a status report in my e-mail here from your supervisor Garth. (Reads off the laptop.) He says, and I'm quoting, you're "slow to learn, constantly making mistakes" and you "show a great amount of attitude and insubordination. Not a team player." That's not a very glowing estimation.

JULIE
When did he send that to you?

ALEXANDER
This morning. There's more if you want to hear.

JULIE
That’s bullshit. I’m great at my job.

ALEXANDER
You couldn’t even find me a decent restaurant in Des Moines.

JULIE
There are no decent restaurants in Des Moines.

ALEXANDER
You see it’s that sort of defeatist attitude that got you fired from here in the first place. I’m sorry things didn’t work out, but I’m sure there’s a Denny’s somewhere in desperate need of a cranky hostess. Best of luck to you.

JULIE
No no no no, you’re not getting off that easy. You threatened me and made unwelcome advances toward me and I can still sue you and this company for millions.

ALEXANDER
Of course you can. You can sue anyone for anything you want. But what you don’t understand is how much it will cost you to sue us. Let’s say for the sake of argument you do decide to sue me and the company for sexual harassment. You’ll have to find a lawyer, and one that will be working night and day for at least a year dealing with all the legal nonsense our lawyers will be throwing their way. Which means if you don’t win your lawsuit, you’ll have to pay your lawyer tens of thousands of dollars I’m guessing you don’t have. Have fun with that.

JULIE
It doesn’t matter. It’s an open and shut case. You’re so god-damn stupid you blatantly threatened to fire me if I didn’t sleep with you.

ALEXANDER
Did you record that?

JULIE
No.

ALEXANDER
Then I’m afraid it’s your word against mine. And I’m a tad skeptical as to just how far your word will go. (He types on his laptop.) Let’s start with your Facebook page. Your profile photo is you in an bikini chugging a beer.

JULIE
I was on spring break.

ALEXANDER
Not to mention the dozens of other dubious photos of you partying in some rather revealing outfits.

JULIE
So? That doesn't mean anything.

ALEXANDER
And according to my friend in HR you're on anti-depressant medication. Is that true?

JULIE
Who isn't these days? What is your point?

ALEXANDER
My point is given your shaky mental state, lascivious lifestyle, poor work record and discouraging assessment from your department head, I would think your lawsuit would look like an obvious money grab from a clearly disgruntled employee who couldn't cut it at her job.

JULIE
You son-of-a-bitch. That's a lie.

ALEXANDER
Look, I'm not the bad guy here. I just want you to sit down, take a deep breath and think about what you're going to do in the next five minutes, because that's going to determine how the rest of your life is going to play out. You'll have to decide whether you're going to be an angry, unemployed party-girl who'll lose everything paying for her baseless lawsuit that will take years of her life and go absolutely nowhere. Or, will you be a rising star at this company, head of a new department with a huge salary and well on your way to becoming one of the youngest VPs in company history? Oh, it's a toughie alright.

(Julie pauses and weighs his words.)

JULIE
Just a one time thing?

ALEXANDER
Just this once.

JULIE
And then I get a promotion?

ALEXANDER
All you have to do is get me through tonight in Des Moines. That's it. Come on, sometimes in life you have to throw caution to the wind and just go for it.

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