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The Few

Samuel D. Hunter

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION

**SAMUEL
FRENCH**
FOUNDED 1830

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IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

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THE FEW received its world premiere at The Old Globe in San Diego, CA in October, 2013. The production was directed by Davis McCallum, with sets by Dane Laffrey, costumes by Jessica Pabst, lights by Matt Frey, and original music and sound by Daniel Kluger. The Production Stage Manager was Annette Yé. The cast was as follows:

BRYAN.....Michael Laurence
QZ..... Eva Kaminsky
MATTHEW.....Gideon Glick
FEMALE VOICE 2 Jenny Bacon

THE FEW received its New York premiere at Rattlestick Playwrights Theater in April, 2014. The production was directed by Davis McCallum, with sets by Dane Laffrey, costumes by Jessica Pabst, lights by Eric Southern, original music and sound by Daniel Kluger, and props by Andrew Diaz. The Production Manager was Eugenia Furneaux, the Production Stage Manager was Katharine Whitney, and the Assistant Stage Manager was Emily Cates. The cast was as follows:

BRYAN.....Michael Laurence
QZ..... Tasha Lawrence
MATTHEW.....Gideon Glick
FEMALE VOICE 2 Jenny Bacon

Additional development and workshops were done at:
The Playwrights Center, directed by Kip Fagan (February 2012)
2012 Pacific Playwrights Festival at South Coast Repertory, directed by Casey Stangl (April 2012)
2012 Perry-Mansfield New Works Festival, directed by Casey Stangl (June 2012)
Williamstown Theater Festival, directed by Adam Rapp (July 2012)
JAW West at Portland Center Stage, directed by Stella Powell-Jones (July 2012)

CHARACTERS

BRYAN – Late thirties to mid-forties, male

QZ – Late thirties to mid-forties, female

MATTHEW – Nineteen, male

TEN MALE VOICES

SIX FEMALE VOICES

TIME

August, 1999.

SETTING

The inside of a weathered, paper-littered, unkempt office space off of some random exit on I-90 in northern Idaho. The whole room should feel like a manufactured home – maybe even a converted double-wide. There are a few desks with aging desktop computers on top, piles of newspapers, a sad, dying fern here and there. There is an unseen back room and bathroom offstage.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Dialogue written in italics is emphatic, deliberate; dialogue in ALL CAPS is impulsive, explosive.

A “/” indicates an overlap in dialogue. Whenever a “/” appears, the following line of dialogue should begin.

Ellipses (...) indicate when a character is trailing off, dashes (–) indicate where a character is being cut off, either by another character or themselves.

No intermission.

Dedicated to the memory of Seamus O'Bryan

Scene One

(Mid-day.)

(QZ sits at one of the desks, BRYAN sits across from her, mud splattered over his shirt.)

(QZ stares at him coldly. In the silence, BRYAN pulls out a pack of cigarettes.)

QZ. Don't smoke in here.

BRYAN. Since when?

(QZ stares at him. BRYAN puts the cigarettes away. A silence between them.)

(QZ grabs a newspaper off of her desk, reads.)

QZ. *(reading)* "The fact is, when our computers hit midnight in four short months and suddenly their internal clocks think the year is 1900, we don't know what will happen. Will planes fall out of the sky? Will there be world-wide blackouts? At the very least, we can definitely say that the Y2K bug could quite certainly plunge us into a worldwide depression. But whatever happens, I can only hope that we start to re-examine how much of our daily lives rely on these fallible machines."

(QZ puts the paper down.)

BRYAN. Wow, QZ.

QZ. I know. I know it.

BRYAN. That was / really –

QZ. You see how it sounds like an *actual newspaper* now?

You see how it / actually – ?

BRYAN. Sure.

(pause)

QZ. I've been seeing someone else.

BRYAN. Okay.

QZ. I ran my own personal ad in the paper a while ago, we started writing one another. It's amazing, he's actually better than you in every way imaginable. I mean, there is not a single way in which he is not better than you.

BRYAN. That's – good.

QZ. His letters to me are *amazing*. Poetry. For *me*.

(Silence. She stares at him.)

(re: his dirty shirt)

How'd that happen?

BRYAN. Oh, it's just –. Happened last night –

(The phone rings.)

I was trying to get a ride on the side of the highway, truck hit a puddle and / I got –

QZ. You *hitchhiked* here? What happened to the Toyota?

(The phone rings again.)

BRYAN. Oh that thing hasn't –. Stopped running about a year after I – ...

(The phone rings one last time.)

(The answering machine picks up. QZ exits to the back.)

VOICE OF QZ. Hello love seekers! You've reached the message line for *The Few's* personal ad section. Please leave your name, phone number, location, and your personal ad exactly as you would like it printed. Someone will call you back soon for payment information. Happy hunting!

(QZ re-enters. She tosses BRYAN a clean flannel shirt.

BRYAN catches it, changes his shirt.)

(The answering machine beeps.)

MALE VOICE 1. Hey there. Danny callin' again, QZ has my payment info, Eastern Oregon, 541-235-2950. Looking for lady co-pilot to navigate end times. Spacious bunker with comfortable bed, running water, tape deck. Can withstand four-megaton blast. Me: over sixty. You: under forty. Let's ride!

(pause)

QZ. You're thin.

BRYAN. I am?

QZ. Yeah, you –. Yeah.

BRYAN. I guess I – haven't been taking very good care of myself.

(pause)

QZ. Milo died.

BRYAN. Oh, okay. How'd he die?

QZ. Ran out onto the interstate.

BRYAN. Oh, that's –. Did you bury him?

QZ. *Bury* him? How would I get to him? He was in the middle of the interstate. It was awful, too, these trucks just kept driving over him again and again, pretty much spread him evenly from here to mile 436. Didn't rain forever that summer, thank God when it finally did. Washed the stains of him off the road.

(pause)

BRYAN. I remember when we got Milo. That little girl was giving away kittens at the rest stop, and you went up to her / and –

QZ. You don't have anywhere else to go?

(pause)

BRYAN. No, I just –. Really needed to come back.

(Tense silence. They stare at one another.)

BRYAN. (*cont.*) I mean it's –. I mean, it's still my paper.

QZ. Excuse me?

BRYAN. I don't mean –. I'm just saying *legally*, it's still – mine, I still own it. I still own / this trailer –

QZ. This is not the same paper the three of us started here. This is something entirely different. It had to be different, your idea sucked.

BRYAN. C'mon, you believed in it just as much / we did –

QZ. Well, truckers don't want the long-winded, unreadable crap we were giving them. What they want is to post and respond to personal ads.

BRYAN. You used to tell me that we were saving these guys lives, you / always –

QZ. Why are you here, Bryan?

(*pause*)

BRYAN. You said yourself, maybe we don't have much time left. God knows what's gonna happen, the millennium and everything. Maybe I just – wanted to come back before the world blows up.

QZ. You think you're funny?

BRYAN. I'm not trying / to be –

QZ. You can take your stuff, it's all boxed up in the back. If you need a place to stay, there's a new Econo Lodge off exit 425. Ask for Trista, tell her you know me, she'll give you a deal.

BRYAN. I was thinking I would just sleep here.

QZ. What?

BRYAN. I'll just sleep here, **QZ**, in the office. You still have Jim's old army cot?

QZ. *No*, that is not happening, that is not – ...

(*pause*)

You left four years ago without a *word*, without saying anything to me, and now you just want to waltz back in here and –

(BRYAN stands.)

BRYAN. Look QZ, to be honest I'm sort of at the end of my rope here, I sort of –. I know it was awful of me to walk outta here, I know it, but – ...

(pause)

You're the only person I have left?

(Pause. QZ stares at him.)

(Finally, BRYAN turns to the door, grabbing his things.)

I'm sorry, I'll just go, I didn't mean / to –

QZ. No, just – ...

(BRYAN stops. QZ looks at him.)

Cot's still in the closet. Goddammit.

(pause)

Listen, if you're gonna stay here a few nights then you're going to *work*, okay? We're behind with the layouts, you can finish those and help with the drop-offs. You're not just gonna come back here and sponge off me, *no way*.

BRYAN. That's fine.

QZ. And we're not changing anything about the paper, you're not gonna write for it, you're not gonna start inviting any long-haul guys over here. The paper works now, we're not changing it back to what it used to be.

BRYAN. Okay.

(pause)

QZ. We use new programs now. Distribution is a lot more than four years ago. You'll be doing the longer drop-offs. And you'll be paying for your own gas. We go as far as South Dakota now.

BRYAN. Oh neat.

QZ. Shut up.

(QZ grabs a newspaper off her desk, throws it to BRYAN.)

Layout's all different, too. Now we lead off with the personal ads. We've got twelve to fifteen pages of personals, only a couple pages of content. Horoscopes and my column, that's it for content. Thirty percent ad coverage in personals, twenty percent in content.

BRYAN. Where do you get the horoscopes?

QZ. I make 'em up.

BRYAN. Okay.

(pause)

QZ. Bryan, it's not – ... It's not the same paper we started here with Jim.

(pause)

BRYAN. *(looking at the front page)* You kept our title.

QZ. It's a shitty title. "The Few"?

BRYAN. But you kept it.

(looking at the paper.)

It looks good.

QZ. Uh huh.

BRYAN. Formatting's okay. Some of the artwork is pixilated.

(reading.)

You still mix your tenses.

(QZ grabs the paper out of his hand, throwing it back on her desk.)

QZ. There's a few stacks in the Honda that need to be delivered, do that now. The McDonald's off 489, you remember?

BRYAN. Sure.

(BRYAN heads toward the door. Just before he's out the door, QZ stands up.)

QZ. Wait.

(BRYAN stops.)

Bryan, what are you – ...? How long are we gonna do this?

(pause)

Tell me why you're back here.

(Pause. BRYAN turns to QZ.)

Tell me why you're back, Bryan. Right now.

(They stare at one another. An irrationally long silence.)

BRYAN. QZ, I'm –

(The phone rings. BRYAN and QZ continue to stare at one another.)

(The phone rings again. And again.)

I'm gonna go do the drop-offs.

(BRYAN exits. QZ watches him leave.)

(The phone rings again.)

Scene Two

(Later that day. MATTHEW sits at one of the desks sorting mail. BRYAN enters from outside, stops when he sees MATTHEW.)

MATTHEW. Hi!

(pause)

QZ said – she said she'd like you to finish the layout for the ads on page seven? If that's – ...?

(pause)

I'm – Matthew?

(Pause. BRYAN looks away, slowly making his way inside. He sits at a desk, turns on the computer. He waits for it to start up. MATTHEW continues sorting letters.)

(silence)

I've, uh. I've been working here a few years now? Like since you left, I've been working on the paper since you –.

(pause)

The distribution, you know. It started to pick up, and QZ needed, uh – she wanted help with –.

(pause)

It's cool that you're back though! Yeah.

(pause)

BRYAN. Well I can take it from here, so. You can go.

(pause)

MATTHEW. Wait, what?

BRYAN. Look, things are probably gonna get a little jumpy around here, so why don't you just – go home for a few days.

MATTHEW. Oh see – this is kind of like – my *job*. Like, this is how I make money.

(pause)

Were you and QZ, like, married?

BRYAN. She tell you that?

MATTHEW. No, she –. I just never really figured out what –.

(short pause)

I've, uh –. I've read a lot of the articles you used to write. A lot of the articles you and Jim used to write, I used to read them.

BRYAN. What were you, like five years old?

MATTHEW. I'm nineteen, I was like fifteen.

(pause, then quickly)

So – where have you been all this time?! I think I always figured you were traveling, like exploring the country or something, or –. Have you been writing the whole time? I mean if you have *four years* worth of writing then that's – that's amazing, I bet you've / gotta have –

BRYAN. I'm gonna work on the layout for page seven now.

MATTHEW. Oh. Cool, um.

(BRYAN goes back to the computer, pulls out a cigarette, lights it up. He smokes a bit, MATTHEW looks at him.)

Could you – ?

BRYAN. I'm working now.

MATTHEW. QZ says people can't smoke in here.

(pause)

BRYAN. What?

MATTHEW. Like, she doesn't want people to smoke? She says she doesn't want people smoking in here.

(pause)

BRYAN. I own this trailer, I can smoke here if I want.

MATTHEW. The thing is, I'm sort of allergic?

(pause)

BRYAN. No you're not.

MATTHEW. No, I really am.

BRYAN. No one's allergic to cigarette smoke.

MATTHEW. No seriously. Cigarettes and some animals, that's what does it. Went to a rodeo when I was a kid, almost died. Went to the emergency room.

(BRYAN looks at him for a moment, then takes a puff of his cigarette. He continues to smoke as he works on the computer.)

(Silence as MATTHEW goes back to his work, defeated. Suddenly MATTHEW stands up, taking out his wallet. He takes a small newspaper clipping out of his wallet and begins to read, a little nervous.)

(reading)

"You can find us in between Wallace and Mullan, off exit 419, about two miles south of the gas station. If you ask us what our agenda is, we'll tell you that we don't know. If you ask us why we started a newspaper for truckers, we'll tell you it's because we had to. Because after – "

BRYAN. Stop.

(pause)

Why do you have / that?

MATTHEW. I'm Jim's nephew. Was his – ...

(pause)

BRYAN. You're – ...?

MATTHEW. Yeah.

(pause)

I met you, once. At Jim's funeral?

(silence)

(BRYAN puts out his cigarette.)

MATTHEW. And there's actually a nice little memorial near the bridge where it happened, if you've never seen it – it's like this series of crosses, one for Jim, and then a few for the people in the other car, it's really – ...

(pause)

BRYAN. You from Mullan?

MATTHEW. Yeah.

BRYAN. I grew up there.

MATTHEW. Yeah, I know.

BRYAN. You like it?

MATTHEW. It's okay.

BRYAN. I fucking hated it.

MATTHEW. Yeah, well, it's –. I hate it too.

BRYAN. You go to Mullan High?

MATTHEW. Yeah. I fucking hated it.

BRYAN. I thought it was okay.

MATTHEW. Yeah it was okay I guess.

(pause)

BRYAN. I started a poetry club with a friend of mine. Used to publish a little book thingie every semester, they still do that?

MATTHEW. Yeah, actually, I –. I used to edit it.

BRYAN. Really?

MATTHEW. Yeah, it's sort of – my thing. Poetry. I mean I'm not like a *poet*, but I like – write poems?

BRYAN. You drive all the way out here every day from Mullan?

MATTHEW. No, I. I sorta live here.

BRYAN. You – ...?

MATTHEW. Yeah, the old airstream next to QZ's trailer, I sort of –. It's okay, sorta hot in the summer, but –.

(pause)

MATTHEW. *(cont.)* Look, I know I –. It must be weird to show up and I’m here, and you don’t remember me, but –. When I started reading *The Few*, things were pretty bad for me, my step-dad – ... Anyway, I sorta hated life? But I read your articles, and it was like –. I’d never read anything like that, it –. It was really – important to me. Still is.

(BRYAN looks at him.)

BRYAN. Really?

MATTHEW. Yeah, and not just me! Sometimes, when I’m doing drop-offs, I run into some of the truckers who would stop by here during their runs. They see me dropping off copies of the paper, and they come to me and they tell me these stories, how they felt like you and Jim and QZ saved their *lives*, that you –. One guy I met, I think his name was Lance? You remember him?

(pause)

BRYAN. Yeah.

MATTHEW. He told me that when his wife died, and he was doing these seven-thousand mile runs by himself – he felt like you guys were the only family he had. He said he probably wouldn’t even be alive anymore if it wasn’t for the paper.

BRYAN. It was – something pretty special back then.

MATTHEW. Right! And now that you’re here, we can get back to what it used to be! To what it used to do for all these guys. I don’t know where you’ve been, but I bet you’ve, like – I mean I bet you saw, like, the heart of America, and now – you can write about it. Yeah?

(BRYAN looks at him. QZ enters with a stack of mail in her hands and an open envelope.)

QZ. Matty, I need you to call Bruneel Tires, we can't run this ad – the artwork is terrible, you can't even read the copy –

BRYAN. Send him home, **QZ.**

QZ. What?

BRYAN. We don't need someone else here now, so just – send him home.

(Pause. QZ stares at BRYAN.)

MATTHEW. Oh, I – I'm sorry, I didn't mean to –

QZ. *(to MATTHEW.)* I left the backup disk in my trailer on the coffee table. Run up and get it for me?

(pause)

Matty, just give us a minute. Please.

(Pause. MATTHEW nods, defeated.)

MATTHEW. Uh – yeah. Okay.

(MATTHEW gets up and exits.)

QZ. Believe it or not, Bryan, while you've been off doing whatever the hell it is you've been doing, I've had a *life* here, and he's part of it. He's been here for years, he's put more work into this paper than you have.

(pause)

So just – don't mess with him, okay? He doesn't have anywhere else to go.

BRYAN. He doesn't have parents?

QZ. He has an alcoholic step-dad who threatened to kill him after catching him messing around with a boy from his class. You wanna send him home to that?

(The phone rings. Pause.)

When Jim died, he –

(The phone rings again.)

He didn't have anyone left, so just –

(The phone rings one last time, the answering machine picks up. QZ turns to her computer. BRYAN awkwardly sits at a desk.)

VOICE OF QZ. Hello love seekers! You've reached the message line for *The Few's* personal ad section. Please leave your name, phone number, location, and your personal ad exactly as you would like it printed. Someone will call you back soon for payment information. Happy hunting!

(The answering machine beeps.)

MALE VOICE 2. Hello. I'm in Eastern Washington, 509-645-7842. Bradford. I am starting now. Seeking: one Christian lady for one man. I'm not crazy fanatic or using God here. I am a one-man-to-one-lady man. True blue. Looking for healthy relationship through God according to King James Version, not perverted or twisted. No cussers.

(The man hangs up. The answering machine beeps.)

(pause)

BRYAN. Do you want me to...?

(pause)

QZ. What?

BRYAN. You want that one in this week's issue?

QZ. What?

BRYAN. That ad. The one on the machine.

QZ. That's why we have a machine. Can you stop? I'm trying to do Tetris.

(A silence between them.)

BRYAN. So – what's his name?

(QZ glances at him, keeps playing Tetris.)

QZ. Really?

(pause)

Rick.

(pause)

BRYAN. How long? Have you guys been – ?

QZ. Couple years.

BRYAN. Sounds serious.

QZ. It is.

(QZ pauses her game, turns to BRYAN.)

He proposed to me.

(pause)

BRYAN. Really?

QZ. Yep.

(pause)

BRYAN. What'd you say?

(Silence. QZ looks away.)

QZ. Are you – seeing anybody?

BRYAN. Me? Oh, nah. Not since...

QZ. Nobody?

BRYAN. Nope.

QZ. Not *one*?

BRYAN. Not one.

QZ. Bullshit.

BRYAN. Seriously.

QZ. Why not?

(BRYAN looks at QZ.)

BRYAN. I don't know, it doesn't matter. It's all ephemeral
anyway.

QZ. Uh-huh.

BRYAN. It doesn't last.

QZ. I know what ephemeral means, go to hell.

(QZ goes back to her computer. Silence. BRYAN approaches her.)

BRYAN. And I guess I just knew – I could never find someone as good as you.

(Pause. QZ looks at him.)

QZ. What the hell am I supposed to say to that?

BRYAN. I'm sorry –

QZ. You left me here *alone*, you realize that?

BRYAN. I know, I'm sorry –

QZ. Two days after *Jim's funeral*, you leave me here and –

(MATTHEW re-enters. BRYAN and QZ stop.)

MATTHEW. I, uh. I got the zip drive.

(pause)

Did you actually need the zip drive?

QZ. Yes, Matty, thank you.

(Pause. MATTHEW puts the drive on QZ's desk. BRYAN sits down at a desk, his head in his hands. QZ turns to her computer, presses play on the answering machine. It rewinds.)

(MATTHEW cautiously approaches BRYAN.)

MATTHEW. That's, um.

(pause)

It's just. That's sort of my desk. It's sort of my work station?

(BRYAN and QZ don't move. The answering machine beeps. QZ types the ads as she listens.)

(MATTHEW awkwardly finds a folding chair, sets it up in a corner.)

MALE VOICE 3. Wyoming, uh, Bruce, 307-239-5639. All-American in search of American honey. Like long

walks and the second Harry Potter book, I-S-O L-T-R.
All shapes and sizes welcome, please be under 60.
Serious responses only.

(The answering machine beeps. Then suddenly:)

MATTHEW. *(louder than he intends)*

You guys this is so great!

(Pause. BRYAN and QZ don't respond.)

MALE VOICE 4. / Bobby, 406-785-6352. Montana, northwest.
Fat and proud seeking –

MATTHEW. You know I was thinking – maybe we could
invite some people over tonight, some of the truckers
that used to come over here. I know some of them still
live around here, they –

*(QZ hits stop on the answering machine, looks at
MATTHEW.)*

I mean not like –. I mean it doesn't have to be about
the *paper*, I just thought that people would like to see
Bryan, that they'd like to –.

(pause)

It's just so great you're back.

QZ. What did you tell him?

BRYAN. What?

MATTHEW. I mean I was just thinking / that we could –

QZ. Wait, is *that* why you're back here? You think you can
come back here and get me to change the paper?

BRYAN. *I'm not trying / to –*

MATTHEW. I just thought we could let people know that
he's back –

QZ. The paper *finally* works, we're not messing with it.
We're not inviting anyone over here, we're not doing
anything.

BRYAN. Yeah, I mean God forbid – ...

(Pause. QZ looks at BRYAN.)

QZ. I'm sorry, what was that?

BRYAN. Nothing.

QZ. No seriously, what?

(Pause. BRYAN turns to QZ.)

BRYAN. God forbid we try to do anything for these guys, right? God forbid we actually reach out to them like we used to, God forbid we actually put any energy into / making it –

QZ. Oh so I'm *lazy*, is that what I'm hearing? You left me with twelve grand of debt, which I have *almost* paid off, and you have the *balls* to say that I –

BRYAN. Oh congratulations, QZ, it's making money, very impressive. I seem to remember that when we started this paper, it wasn't about personal ads, it wasn't some stupid get-rich-quick scheme –

QZ. Oh yeah, because I'm so *rich* now.

MATTHEW. Oh crap guys, I didn't mean / to –

BRYAN. I don't even know why you still call it "The Few," might as well call it "Hot Trucker Monthly" or "Truckerbang" or – ...

(short pause)

Fuck it, forget it.

(Pause. BRYAN turns away.)

QZ. Fine. Let's do it. Let's invite the old gang over.

(pause)

MATTHEW. Wait really?

QZ. Why not? Haven't seen anyone for years, I bet they'd love to see you, right Bryan?

BRYAN. Look, you're right, the paper's fine the way it is, let's / not –

QZ. *(to BRYAN)* Why don't you go into town and grab some Carlo Rossi, give everyone a call, we'll have a nice little community forum, just like we used to do with Jim. Right?

(pause)

Matty I've got this big headache so I'm gonna lie down for a while. Someone enter the rest of the messages.

(QZ exits. Pause. BRYAN buries his head in his hands.)

MATTHEW. Look, I know she's just being -. But I really think when she sees everyone, when she remembers -

BRYAN. You know I could really use a few minutes.

(pause)

Alone.

MATTHEW. Sure, I can - I can go do a few drop-offs, that's -. If you don't mind, we just need to get the messages entered into the -

BRYAN. Okay.

(pause)

MATTHEW. So you'll - ... You'll make some calls?

(pause)

Bryan, really, when I run into these guys, when I talk to them... They need this. They need it back.

(Pause. BRYAN nods at him.)

(MATTHEW smiles, then grabs a key ring and exits.)

(Silence. BRYAN stands up, looking around the office, takes a deep breath. He thinks.)

(Finally, he goes to QZ's computer and presses play on the answering machine. He types the ads as he listens.)

(The answering machine beeps.)

MALE VOICE 4. Bobby, 406-785-6352. Montana, northwest.

Fat and proud seeking F. Easy going and friendly into all sorts of things. Ask any questions nothing offends me. I like sex it is important for me to have that. Thank you for reading.

(The answering machine beeps.)

FEMALE VOICE 2. It's, uh. Shit, I don't –.

(pause)

Nevermind, sorry.

(The answering machine beeps.)

MALE VOICE 5. Okay, Southern Idaho, Billy's the name, 208-345-0375. Here goes. Hey there! Hi there! Whoa there! Billy here looking for a female co-driver with at least two years experience. Intimate relationship not mandatory but welcome! Want to run 7000 plus miles. No druggies or drunks or fatties don't be offended that's just me. Whoa there!

(The answering machine beeps.)

FEMALE VOICE 2. Okay, uh. It's me, again. Sorry. Cindy, um. Idaho location, 208-347-3497. Cindy.

(pause)

I don't, um. I've never done one of these before, I. If this doesn't make sense, you can just delete it, I don't know what I'm doing.

(pause)

So, I'm a woman. Female. I'm forty-seven, and I used to drive an eighteen-wheeler but I had a little accident and I'm on disability now. Should I say things like that?

(pause)

I just – I think I just want someone who –. Can I start over?

(BRYAN sighs, hits delete on the keyboard.)

Okay, female. Forty-seven. I have been single for—
... Sorry, don't print that, shit. Female, forty-seven.
Looking for good person – good man. I have long
blonde hair and green eyes, and a few extra pounds
truth be told. Please be non-violent, and with a sense
of humor.

(pause)

I'm looking for –. Honesty.

(BRYAN stops typing, listens.)

I mean, I know that people lie, I know that. But I'm
looking for someone who is generally honest. When I
do stupid things I need someone to say "Cindy, don't
be stupid." But when I do things well, when I'm good
at something, I need someone to say, "Cindy, you did
that well. You're good at that thing." And I just don't
think that's asking too much. I think that I deserve that
much. I may not deserve a lot, but – ...

(pause, a hint of desperation)

I guess I just feel like I woke up a couple days ago and
realized, for heck's sake it's gonna be a *new millennium*
in a few months, and what am I even doing? What have
I *ever* done? In my whole life, what have I ever – ...?

(pause)

I'm sorry, just. I'm sorry, I'm wasting your time, I'm
sorry. I apologize. You can delete this, please just delete
this, I'm –.

*(She hangs up. The answering machine beeps, then is
silent.)*

*(BRYAN stares forward for a moment, then hits rewind
on the answering machine.)*

Scene Three

(Later that night. MATTHEW has set up a few folding chairs. A large pile of old newspapers rests on one of the desks. BRYAN enters wearing a backpack and holding two large jugs of Carlo Rossi White Zinfandel.)

MATTHEW. Hey.

(pause)

Party time! Heh.

(BRYAN makes his way inside, puts the wine on a desk. He opens one, finds a glass, pours himself some wine. BRYAN pours a second glass, hands it to MATTHEW.)

Oh, I. I don't really.

BRYAN. You allergic to this too?

MATTHEW. Well, yeah.

(pause)

BRYAN. What?

MATTHEW. Seriously. The tannins or something. My mom gave me a sip of red wine when I was a kid, my throat closed up.

BRYAN. What else are you allergic to?

MATTHEW. Cigarettes, red wine, some animals. That's it.

(pause)

Really, that's it.

(BRYAN takes his backpack off, takes out a large bottle of bottom shelf whiskey. He opens the bottle, hands it to MATTHEW.)

BRYAN. So you're not allergic to this then.

MATTHEW. *(taking the bottle)* Oh, um. Cool.

(BRYAN motions for MATTHEW to drink from the bottle. MATTHEW takes a half-hearted swig of the whiskey.)

BRYAN. Good?

MATTHEW. Yeah, it's -. Oak-y.

(BRYAN notices the old newspapers sitting in the corner.)

Oh, that's. Those are like, mine. All the way back to the first issue. I thought it would be nice to look through some of them when people get here, or -

BRYAN. Yeah or we could just drink.

MATTHEW. Oh. Okay.

(BRYAN sits down, drinking his wine. He takes the whiskey bottle.)

You know, um. I was reading that article that you wrote a few years ago about those motels in western Montana that you had stayed at when you were still trucking and it -

(BRYAN mixes some whiskey in with his wine. MATTHEW watches him.)

Wow. Is that - should you be doing that?

BRYAN. QZ doesn't drink these anymore? She calls it a "Dirty Rossi." Used to be her favorite.

(BRYAN drinks. MATTHEW watches him for a moment. Then suddenly:)

MATTHEW. (quickly) Anyway, the way you wrote about the trucker you had met at that one motel, the guy from the Philippines whose mother had just died the day before you talked to him? That was the one for me that was like - ... I didn't even know that writing could make me -. I'm being weird, *anyway* I was thinking that it could be a cool project or whatever to go back to some of those motels and do like a follow-up piece or whatever, and maybe it could also be a way that we could start getting to know more truckers, and -. Here, let me see if I can find it...

(MATTHEW goes to the stack of newspapers and starts rooting through them.)

MATTHEW. *(cont.)* One of the motels you wrote about closed a couple years ago, but we could find some / other –

BRYAN. Okay look, I'm not –. Shit, I'm not trying to be rude. Please try to understand that I just don't care anymore. I really, really just *don't care*.

(silence)

MATTHEW. Why did you come back here?

BRYAN. You know I'd really appreciate the chance to just quietly get drunk if you don't / mind –

MATTHEW. No, seriously. If you don't care about this paper anymore, then why did you come back?

BRYAN. Frankly, kid, it's because I was tired and this is the only shelter I have legal right to anymore. I needed a place to stay, and if I have to pay my way by doing drop-offs and formatting personal ads, then fine.

MATTHEW. Bullshit.

(pause)

BRYAN. What was that?

MATTHEW. Bullshit. That's such bullshit, it's –

(pause)

Look you can act this way all you want, but – you started this thing for a / reason –

BRYAN. You know I gotta say, Matthew, you're starting to get a little irritating. And despite QZ's claim over this place, the fact is I still have the deed so I could have you out on your ass if it fucking pleases me. Okay?

(Silence. MATTHEW stares at him, hurt. Finally he heads to the door, opening it.)

Sorry. Fuck.

(MATTHEW stops.)

Sorry.

(MATTHEW takes a few steps toward BRYAN, leaving the door open.)

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