

“Twists and Turns at the Office”

TOM at his desk again. Working. JEANNIE standing nearby with a file in her hand. Waiting.

JEANNIE . . . So are you bringing her to the thing next month?

TOM Huh? (Looks up.) Oh, yeah. I think.

JEANNIE Not sure?

TOM Ummm, you know . . . she's gotta check if she can get off from work.

JEANNIE Oh. I see. And what's she do?

TOM She's a . . . printed-word specialist.

JEANNIE Ahh. (to herself) Perfect.

TOM What's that?

JEANNIE Nothing. (Points.) Are you almost done there? I need to get those out by five . . .

TOM Yeah, hold on.

TOM goes back to work while JEANNIE glances around. Takes in the space.

JEANNIE No pictures of her up yet.

TOM Nah.

JEANNIE How come?

TOM, frustrated, drops his pen and looks straight at her.

TOM Wasn't the one that appeared on everybody's desktop this morning enough? (*Turns his monitor around.*) You need more laughs than this?

JEANNIE I wouldn't mind.

TOM Great.

JEANNIE Yeah, I'd be up for that.

TOM Jesus . . . you really are awful, you know that? I mean it.

JEANNIE Just keep signing, okay? Your little sermon isn't necessary.

TOM I'm not . . . whatever.

JEANNIE That's exactly right. What-ever.

TOM Jeannie . . . can't we just be . . . ?

JEANNIE Don't bother. *Sign.*

TOM is about to follow instructions but pulls the files from the desk and slips them in a drawer. Shuts it. Sits back as he checks his watch.

TOM No, uh-uh, you've got time. And I want you to tell me . . .

Go on. What the hell I did to you that was so bad. Do it.

JEANNIE Tom, don't be a prick, all right? I need to make FedEx.

TOM You will, just—

JEANNIE No! I'm not obligated to talk with you about shit . . .

We're co-workers, we work together now, and that is all.

Give me the files.

TOM Nope.

JEANNIE You're an asshole . . .

TOM Maybe so. I dunno . . . maybe I am. Or have been to you.

That's what I'm saying! If I have, then tell me. Show me how . . .

It's a standoff for a moment, then JEANNIE makes a move toward TOM. He stands up and holds his ground. She backs off and retreats to one side, hands on her hips.

JEANNIE I don't even wanna discuss your fat bitch, okay?

She's—

TOM Stop that.

JEANNIE So, forget it. I'll just say about us, I mean, what we've . . .

TOM No, let's do the whole . . .

JEANNIE Fuck you! Don't tell me what we'll do. At all.

TOM I'm not. I'm just saying we should probably, you know . . .

JEANNIE We should've probably done a lot of things! We should probably be engaged now, if you weren't such a spineless shit, like every other guy. So . . .

TOM Your mouth is, like, I dunno. Wow.

JEANNIE Yeah, exactly right. "Wow." I'm twenty-eight years old, and I just keep hitting the booby prize, and you know what? After a while, it really starts to get you down . . .

TOM But, I'm not . . . that's not my . . .

JEANNIE Problem? I didn't say that. It's no one's problem, me included . . . it just sucks. That's what I'm saying. (*Beat.*) I thought maybe you were different, but you ended up being the same kind of lame guy that I perpetually date, and it just freaks me out a little. That maybe you're the only type out there. These baby boys who run around in nice clothes, but

all they really wanna do is *breast-feed* for the rest of their days . . .

TOM I don't . . . I can't speak for other people. Jeannie, but I—
JEANNIE I don't care anymore. I don't.

TOM I'm just saying that . . . you and I didn't end up working out, but it doesn't mean . . . I like you. I did always *like* you, but . . . we're . . .

JEANNIE Tom, I know you think that means something to me, but it's really just drivel. Okay? More of the same.

TOM Fine. I'm sorry.

JEANNIE And that doesn't do shit, either.

TOM *nods, then sits and pulls out the files. Signs his name in several more places and then holds them out. JEANNIE goes over and grabs them. Hovers.*

TOM Yes?

JEANNIE I know I said I wasn't gonna . . . but I really need to know.

TOM What?

JEANNIE Her. (*Points at computer screen.*) What's the story with that one?

TOM Jeannie . . .

JEANNIE I mean, I hope it's some mothering thing or whatever, because if not, it's just so off-the-charts gross that I don't know what to say.

TOM We should probably stop now.

JEANNIE I mean, you know what everybody is saying around here, right? I know that you know. And it doesn't even faze you, huh? At all?

TOM I'm . . . I don't wanna do this. Here.

JEANNIE It's not like she's . . . She's really *fat*. Tom! A fat sow and you know it. I can tell you're aware by the way you're acting, which is really the puzzling part . . .

TOM I-like-her. *End of story.*

JEANNIE Yeah, but what the hell? Did you do something bad in some other life that you're making up for? Tell me, because she's . . . well, you know what she's like better than the rest of us . . . I mean . . . is she a good *cook*, or . . . ?

TOM STOP IT! Jeannie, just stop this. I get that you're pissed at me and you needed to blow off some steam, so that's why I, . . . I allowed you to say stuff, but . . .

JEANNIE You didn't "allow" me shit, Tom! I can say whatever I want, *anytime* I want. The whole company is, why should I be any different?

TOM Then talk if you want to! I-DO-NOT-CARE!!! I enjoy her because she's not you, *anything* like you . . . she's not obsessed with looks and money and clothes and useless bullshit like that! OKAY?! (*Beat.*) I like who I am when I'm with her, okay, so just . . . fuck, just leave us alone . . .

JEANNIE Ohhhh . . . "us." So it's "us" now, huh?

TOM Yeah. It is.

JEANNIE And, forgive me for saying it, but she seems a little obsessed with some things . . . like maybe *Cheetos*.

TOM *starts to come around his desk now, determined to put an end to this. JEANNIE stares him down.*

TOM I'm serious here . . . you need to go.

JEANNIE I am going, I *am*, but not because you say so. Because I want to. I want to be as far away from you as I can be . . .
TOM Good.

JEANNIE Yeah, "good." Nice retort.

TOM Just . . .

JEANNIE What an ass. (Beat.) I'm sure you thought this would hurt me, right? Like, "What's the worst thing I'd be able to do to her?" And this is what you came up with, some self-image killer like this one . . . Tom ditched me for fucking Mama Cass! Boo-hoo, woe is me! She's fat, so does that mean that Tom secretly digs fat chicks, does it mean that I'm fat? Huh?!! Is that what all this *shit* is about, getting back at me?!!

TOM Jeannie, get out of here! NOW!!

JEANNIE It doesn't hurt me at all! NOT ONE BIT!! It just makes you look like some creepy fucker and a totally odd . . . AHHHHH!!! I don't care. I hate you. HATE-YOU. So, so much.

JEANNIE storms out of his office, leaving the door wide open. TOM doesn't have the strength to close it; he crosses to his couch instead and sits. Rubs his eyes.

When he opens them, he sees CARTER standing at the door.

TOM Go away. Seriously.

CARTER That's not very neighborly.

TOM Neighbors don't treat neighbors this way. Enemies barely do . . .

CARTER Dude, it's a joke. (Beat.) Think of it as payback for forwarding everybody my e-mail about that one lady at lunch. And I did see the string of her tampon, by the way . . . when she crossed her legs. (Shivers.)

TOM I'm not kidding, Carter . . .

CARTER I thought Helen looked good blown up like that! Several people I talked to said they were gonna keep it . . .

TOM Come on, man. Really. Just leave me alone today.

CARTER Fine.

But instead of leaving, CARTER goes and drops into TOM's chair and starts playing with it, swinging in circles and raising/lowering the seat mechanism.

TOM If Moses had needed, like, another plague . . . I would've given him your number.

CARTER Bad day?

TOM I'm getting used to 'em.

CARTER That's why I'm here. To be, like, a calming influence.

TOM Great. If you're my best chance, then I'm screwed . . .

CARTER Nah. All will be fine, my friend. I promise.

TOM O-kay. (Beat.) I don't even need to ask you why you're here . . .

CARTER Just chillin'.

TOM Uh-huh. Figured.

The men sit in their respective spots for a bit, staring up at the ceiling. Finally, TOM speaks.

TOM So, lemme ask you something, then.

CARTER Shoot.

TOM And honestly now . . . just an opinion is all, so no big deal.

CARTER I'm ready.

TOM What do you actually think of her? Helen, I mean.

CARTER Ummmmm . . .

TOM Not for you or, like, scoping her out down in *Jamaica* or that type of thing . . . just as a person.

CARTER Oh. Like that.

TOM Yes.

CARTER *sits back in the chair, thinking for a moment.*

CARTER You're begging for trouble.

TOM That's . . . why do I even ask you?

CARTER No, and I'll tell you why! I will. I know that I'm not super-familiar with her or anything, like, her *qualities*—of which there may be many . . .

TOM There are . . .

CARTER . . . and that's great. Terrific. But I'm just talking purely as an "Is this a good deal for my pal here?" thing.

TOM Fine. And?

CARTER *And* you got a long road ahead, that's all. Just being honest.

TOM Fine.

CARTER I'm not saying I don't admire you—I do, actually, 'cause I know that I couldn't do it!—but she's gonna end up a weight around your neck. Forgive the *pun* . . .

TOM You're . . . doing that strictly on a "physical" basis . . . which is—

CARTER Of course! Fuck, what else can I go on? (*Beat.*) I don't wanna come off like some *Elton John* here, but you're a good-looking guy. You're successful, bit of a player in the industry . . . I don't understand you taking God's good gifts and pissing on 'em . . .

TOM Carter . . .

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CARTER Dude, you're the one who evoked a *biblical* thing earlier . . . so take a glance at Noah and all that flood shit! He didn't pair up the apes with the antelope, right? It's one of the many laws of nature. "Run with your own kind."

TOM That is so . . . out of whack that I'm, like, completely lost! now . . .

CARTER Hey, it's a free country, and if this is how you really feel, then you are fucking Gunga Din. "Better man than I am" and all that shit. Just don't be surprised when you turn a few heads down at the mall.

TOM But why can't we . . . I mean, shit! I dunno, man, I like her. A *lot*. She makes me happy, and I really wanna make her happy, too . . .

CARTER I'm not saying she can't be happy. That she shouldn't meet somebody, but it oughta be a fat somebody, or a bald one. Whatever. Like her. A somebody that *fits* her . . .

TOM That's crazy . . . things aren't just based on *appearance*!

CARTER Maybe you should snap on the TV once in a while. (*Beat.*) I'm not talking about what people deserve, I'm saying what they *get*. You look one way, you have access to *all* this. Look some other way, all you get is that. Sorry, but it's true.

TOM Yeah, well, it sucks . . .

CARTER It's whatever. Truth. People are not comfortable with difference. You know? Fags, retards, cripples. Fat people. Old folks, even. They scare us or something.

TOM I don't think that's true. I mean, I'm not . . . no, Carter, I don't buy that. We're all . . .

CARTER Come on, be honest! The thing they represent that's so scary is what we *could* be, how vulnerable we all are. I mean, *any* of us. Some wrong gene splice, a bad backflip off

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the trampoline . . . too many cartoons of Oreos! We're all just one step away from being what frightens us. What we despise. So . . . we despise it when we see it in anybody else.

TOM Old people, though? Come on. We're all gonna age. It's . . .

CARTER Not me. I hope I'm a goner before then. The elderly make me sick . . .

TOM This is . . . you're not helping me, Carter! That's the most depressing shit I've ever heard. Seriously.

CARTER *holds up his hands and shrugs.* TOM *sits up on the couch, thinking.* A bit lost.

CARTER All I'm saying is this . . . Do what you want. If you like this girl, then don't listen to a goddamn word anybody says. Not one. (Beat.) But you've got your whole life to be a positive person, okay? To do some good in the community and be a bighearted fellow or whatever. Overlook people's flaws and plant saplings and shit. But you're only young once. Handsome and youthful and vibrant. So don't fuck it up, that is all I'm telling you here. Don't take a complete dump on your one moment in the sun . . . (Beat.) Not for somebody like her.

TOM Carter . . . you're not . . . God . . .

TOM *catches himself, stops.* CARTER *waits, bemused.*

TOM You don't always have to say something. You know? Like, everything that comes into your head.

Silence. After a minute, CARTER yawns and slowly stands.

CARTER Yeah, I should stuff an envelope or two. (Laughs.) So look . . . I wanna ask you this first, I mean, before you hear it from . . . I'm gonna take Jeannie to that beach deal coming up. Is that cool?

TOM Ummm . . . sure. No, of course.

CARTER I mean, no weirdness for us?

TOM None. I think you two could . . . just might be perfect for each other.

CARTER Yeah, me, too! (Beat.) I heard she's started going to a gym, so that's something.

TOM Uh-huh.

CARTER I mean, you know her body, right? Obvious potential.

TOM Course.

CARTER Anyway . . . as long as we're still . . .

TOM Sure. I think we'll remain exactly what we are. You and me.

CARTER Friends, right?

TOM Sorta. (Gestures with his fingers.) About this much . . .

CARTER Good enough for me.

CARTER *starts for the door.* TOM *gets up, and they shake hands awkwardly.* A pat on the shoulder. CARTER *reaches into a shirt pocket and hands TOM the photo of HELEN that he took before.*

CARTER I know you'll do the right thing.

CARTER *exits.*

TOM crosses to his office windows and slowly closes all the blinds. One by one. The room grows darker.

TOM goes to the couch and lies down. Holds the picture in front of him. Brings it closer now, staring at it. Hard.

“One of Those Blustery Beach Days”

A stretch of sand. TOM, in a flowered swimsuit, sitting alone on a towel. Trying to focus on a biography.

After a moment, JEANNIE approaches. She is looking fit and is wearing a skimpy bikini. She towers over him.

JEANNIE . . . Thought that was you.

TOM Yeah. Hey. (*Jumps up.*) You look good. I mean, nice.

JEANNIE Thanks. Yeah . . . I'm doing Pilates now. (*Beat.*) How come you guys are sitting way down here?

TOM Oh, we're just . . . little privacy, I suppose. Edge of the group is all.

JEANNIE Ah. Cool.

TOM So . . . (*Beat.*) You and Carter, huh?

JEANNIE Yeah, how 'bout that?!

TOM It's good.

JEANNIE I hope so. He's actually okay once you get him outta the office . . .

TOM Most people are. That's not, like, the best environment for a person. Those *cubicles* . . .

JEANNIE Probably not. (*Smiles.*) Anyways . . .

TOM Right. Anyway. I hope you guys—

JEANNIE Thanks. You, too, I guess.