



Authentic Voices Productions

"...to give voice"

Casualties

Success had always come easy for him, as natural as sunrise or sunset. Dread drifted in like fog, unsuspected and unsettling. It was his mind he came to fear the most, lifelong ally suddenly turned enemy.

He quickened his pace. Eyes darting nervously, breath shallow, he willed himself not to break into a flat out run. He was, after all, about control over chaos. But lately, chaos didn't seem to care. Arriving unannounced, lingering at will, exiting slowly, only to return without warning. The shock of a mind beyond control was complete.

Early for his appointment, he struggled to keep his composure. Dread drained his energy even as he sat. Startled from inner obsession, he picked up the thread of her greeting, "...good to finally meet you other than over the telephone." Literally forcing himself from his chair, he trailed her into a small conference room.

The room barely held the three of them - him, her, his mind. They were a study in contrasts. He was slight, wiry, retiring in manner. She was full figured, robust, bold in approach. His mind was restless, bored, anxious to be alone again. They examined one another cautiously.

"Are you OK? You actually look a little green." she said with some amusement.

"I'm fine," he replied defensively. His mind gave ground grudgingly, vulnerable to outside distraction.

She sat quietly, examining him, clearly impressed. "I don't normally deal directly with clients seeking employment. But you are persistent, aren't you?" she said smiling.

His wry laugh acknowledged a familiar judgment. "You came highly recommended and I was told you could help," he responded, a heartbeat later adding "...and I can use the help."

She leaned back slowly, studying his contradiction in her presence. Persistence defined every step of his career. He enjoyed early success in a highly technical IT field, with extensive responsibility while still in his early twenties. He was a sudden victim, at age thirty-three, of corporate downsizing despite stiff competition and major promotions.

"What's all this talk of dread and terror?" she probed. "You lost a job, not your life."

He stared at her, his eyes blinking in confusion, dread finally overwhelming him again, his mind clamoring for confirmation of impending doom. "Lost a job? Lost a job? I have lost my life!" he exploded. "Everything I've ever worked for, everyone who's ever counted on me, 'terminated' and gone in a stroke...I could lose everything!"

His mind pulled back, agitating for escape, reminding him she was a stranger. The room's sudden quiet filled the void created by his explosive outburst.

"SO WHAT?!?" She said with a hearty laugh, "Is that what this is all about?"

Stunned, his head snapped back, his mind reeling. "You think this is funny, something to laugh about?" he demanded angrily. "You have no idea what I'm going through right now," he sputtered, rising out of control.

"Sit down!" she commanded with quiet authority. Instinctive respect pushed him back in the chair. "You lost your job, not your life," she repeated firmly, her eyes locked on his, forcing him to deal with her. All hint of humor gone in an instant.

"I was diagnosed with breast cancer seven months ago. In the middle of my treatments, my business fell off dramatically, victim of the same economy that cost you your job." She drew a breath slowly. "My husband's construction business went bankrupt. We drew straws to see who would call the Bank to repossess our home."

She leaned further back into her chair, now laughing heartily. Her sense of pure delight prompted him, reluctantly, into laughing with her.

"Have you ever tried to have anything repossessed? No? My God, what an experience! The bank was furious, they didn't want my house. They wanted their payment. I told them we didn't have the money for the payment and 'round and 'round we went." She paused briefly, lost in thought.

"My point is," she said as she leaned forward, "I completed my treatments, cut my expenses and struck a deal with the Bank. That deal kept my husband and me off the street." She looked at him steadily, eyes softened by shared terror.

"Your family still loves you. You'll find other employment. You may even lose your home. So what? Buy one you can afford, rent if you can't buy, but get on with it. YOU are the biggest fear you face right now."

With a slight lift of her head, she acknowledged the interruption at the conference room door, briefly excusing herself. He sat absolutely still, seared by the reality of her last comments. Afraid to move, he probed, his skittish mind for reaction. Silence.

Weariness vied with relief as he slumped back in his chair. It was as though a great fever had broken, with months of rehabilitation ahead. Warily, he probed his mind again. Silence.

He rose slowly as she reentered the room. "Sherry's ready to meet with you now. Good luck in the months ahead and keep me posted on what's happening," she said, shaking his hand firmly.

"How do you deal with the fear?" he asked quietly and with respect, as they entered the reception area.

"Daily," she replied, "like every other issue in my life. Acceptance is the key for me." She laughed softly. "The old chestnuts are true, you know; be careful what you wish for; live one day at a time; face your fears directly."

That evening, her words echoed in his ear, "...face your fears directly." Battered by vulnerability, exposed to the underside of success, dread had etched him with a lost innocence. His world shifted a few degrees, perspective forever altered like a nasty argument with an old friend. Exhausted, he finally succumbed to an uneasy sleep.

His mind, however, remained on hyper-alert, unfazed by the day's events...

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