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The Understudy

by
Joseph P. Krawczyk

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CHARACTERS

HEATHER: *Female, mid-20's*

MARK: *Male, mid-20's*

SETTING

Heather & Mark's NYC Apartment; Present Day

The Understudy
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AT RISE:

MARK and HEATHER in their NYC apartment. In darkness we hear HEATHER doing yoga exercises, moaning and groaning, spreading her legs in erotic positions, trying to get MARK's attention. Ignoring her, as LIGHTS RISE, MARK continues to play a video game. HEATHER tries again to get his attention by more erotic poses. Frustrated, HEATHER approaches MARK.

HEATHER

You want some breakfast? Toast, eggs and bacon?

MARK

No, thanks.

HEATHER

Some juice, then?

MARK

I'm good.

HEATHER

You want to see a movie today?

MARK

Not really.

HEATHER

How about the International Mac and Cheese Exhibit at MOMA?

MARK

I do love Mac and Cheese.

HEATHER

You get to eat it all after the exhibit. Yum, yum, how about it?

MARK

Sounds really tempting, but no.

HEATHER

There's that Chinese troupe of lesbian acrobats from Shanghai at Lincoln Center.

MARK

(Intrigued)

Lesbian acrobats?

HEATHER

I hear they're very erotic, bordering on the pornographic.

MARK

Erotic?! Pornographic?! Hmm...I'll pass.

HEATHER

C'mon, Mark, it's Sunday. We've got all of New York City at our feet. That's what makes this place so exciting. Much to see, much to do. What do you have in mind today?

MARK

I don't know, maybe nothing.

HEATHER

What's going on here? You've been moping around all weekend.

MARK

Just feeling a little blue today, that's all.

HEATHER

Didn't you go to the doctor the other day for your physical?

MARK

Yes.

HEATHER

Alright, out with it. Did you receive some bad news?

MARK

Except...for the heartbreak of crotch itch, everything's just fine.

HEATHER

Well, that's good. You've got your health, that's important.

MARK

I guess.

HEATHER

(Pause)

Do me a favor.

MARK

Yes?

Exasperated, she pushes him off the couch.

HEATHER

Will you please come out of your inner man cave for a moment?

MARK

What the hell. I'm trying to crawl out on my hands and knees, but it isn't easy.

He crawls on his hands and knees and then rises to his feet.

HEATHER

Mark, just tell me what's troubling you.

MARK

You know I'm a person of few words.

HEATHER

Yes, and many times that's a blessing...but not right now, not today.

MARK

Okay, okay, I've come to the realization that it's time I do something really, really significant with my life.

HEATHER

You're creative. You write.

MARK

I write ad copy, Heather.

HEATHER

And it's a talent you have. You created the character of Flo for Progressive Insurance. They're really good, and they're funny. Who can forget Geico's Happier Than a Camel on Hump Day.

MARK

"Mike, Mike, what day is it? Hump Day! Hump Day!"

HEATHER

I love it.

MARK

That's not exactly a high point in my life. I need something more fulfilling.

HEATHER

So, what's really bothering you?

MARK

For one, there's my boss; two, my co-workers; three, my work load; fourth, my tiny cubicle; and fifth, the stress of working at the agency itself. Add to that the city's unbearable noise, the sirens wailing day and night, the dense crowds, and the lack of privacy in our apartment.

HEATHER

That's the big apple, honey.

MARK

The big apple has taken a bite out of me.

HEATHER

What do you expect? We live in a studio apartment.

MARK

Yeah, five hundred square feet, and I feel confined.

HEATHER

This is what we can afford for the time being and that's why we need to get out and do things – visit museums, go to the theater, take a stroll along Central Park.

MARK

That all costs money.

HEATHER

Not the park.

MARK

It requires effort.

HEATHER

I see, you want to be free of your job, your apartment and the city. Do you want to go back to living in Ohio?

MARK

No, not quite.

HEATHER

You sound unhappy about everything.

MARK

Sounds about right.

HEATHER

Can you be a little more specific?

I wish I could.

MARK

You want fame?

HEATHER

Not necessarily.

MARK

More money?

HEATHER

Not exactly.

MARK

You want to be a celebrity like those people on Jersey Shore?

HEATHER

Something with far more value than that, thank you.

MARK

I believe that's me, and you have me.

HEATHER

Yes, you're right.

MARK

He goes over to her.

Of course, I am.

HEATHER

He kisses the back of her neck.

Oh, stop, you know that's my upper G spot...No, never mind, please, please continue.

MARK

I was the one who found it.

HEATHER

Purely by accident.

MARK

Well, actually, I learned its location from Doctor Oz.

HEATHER

He's so informative, isn't he?

MARK

But since you've drawn me out of my man cave, there is something I need to talk to you about.

HEATHER

Really?

MARK kneels.

MARK

Yes.

HEATHER

Oh, wait a minute, I don't I think I'm ready for this.

*She holds out her hand,
anticipating a marriage offer.*

MARK

Communication is paramount in every relationship, right?

HEATHER

Absolutely.

MARK

And one should choose words carefully.

HEATHER

Tact is important.

MARK

And that's what I'm trying to be – tactful.

HEATHER

Alright, stop, what is it?!

MARK stands up.

MARK

This is not easy for me to talk about.

HEATHER

Please, just say it.

*MARK, about to speak with
hesitation, stammers.*

MARK

Well...I met someone else.

HEATHER

You've been cheating on me?!

MARK

No, no, no...Not yet.

HEATHER

Not yet? What does that mean?

MARK

Look, like a Golden Retriever, there's no one more loyal than me. I have never cheated on you as long as we've been together. And that's the honest truth.

HEATHER

Then what is this about?

MARK

Let's be clear. I haven't developed a new relationship.

HEATHER

Oh...okay.

MARK

It's sort of in the wings.

HEATHER

What does that mean?

MARK

I'm only in the preliminary, planning stages.

HEATHER

You've thoroughly lost me.

MARK

I was a boy scout once...

He flashes the Vulcan "live long and prosper" sign.

HEATHER

Live long and prosper? Were you a member of the Vulcan boy scouts?

MARK

Huh?

MARK glances at his hand and changes it to the three-finger boy scout salute.

MARK, *Continued*

No. The boy scout motto is “be prepared”.

HEATHER

Be prepared for what?!

MARK

For the worst possible outcome.

HEATHER

That’s if you’re going on a camping trip and you get lost in the woods and you’re confronted by a mama bear with three cubs.

MARK

No, no, no... For the unexpected. You see, you’ll never know who you’ll meet along the way as you tiptoe through life.

HEATHER

I know what I’m about to say is really crazy, but are you planning on starting a new relationship with someone else?

MARK

I...may be about to –

HEATHER

What?!?!

MARK

It’s complicated.

HEATHER

Then simplify it for me.

MARK

Alright, I’ll level with you. Her name is Lorrie.

HEATHER

Who?

MARK

Someone I met.

HEATHER

From work?

MARK

No.

The gym?
HEATHER
He shakes his head no.

Then where?
MARK
A department store.

When did this happen?
HEATHER
MARK
Yesterday.

Yesterday?! Saturday?!
HEATHER
MARK
Yes.

You were with me all day. We were shopping at Macy's.
HEATHER
MARK
Right.

That's where this happened?
HEATHER
MARK
At the perfume counter.

You're losing me, Mark.
HEATHER
MARK
Don't you remember, she was showing you some samples.

Who was?
HEATHER
MARK
The woman who sprayed each sample very gently on your wrist, and you sniffed each one. And then I looked up, and there was this incredible sparkle in her eyes.

HEATHER
That's because there was so much perfume in the air that her eyes teared up, you idiot.

MARK

Those were Lorrie's limpid, blue eyes.

HEATHER

How did you get her name?

MARK

Hi, my name is Lorrie. How can I help you?

HEATHER

Come again?

MARK

That was on her lapel.

HEATHER

Yes, I remember now. She had fingernails that reminded me of a God damn raptor.

MARK

I just want to be perfectly honest with you.

HEATHER

Please do.

MARK

You see –

HEATHER

Wait a minute, are you prepping me for a breakup because of a woman you casually met at Macy's perfume counter?

MARK

No, I'm being totally upfront. I just want to know where this could go with her. I don't want there to be any surprises. It wouldn't be fair to you. I love you too much.

HEATHER

You love me too much?!

*HEATHER hyperventilates.
MARK gives her a Macy's
shopping bag to breathe into in
order to remain calm.*

MARK

Even though I may not say it as often as I should, I do.

HEATHER

You have a surreal way of showing it.

MARK

I know, I know, it's –

HEATHER

Wait, wait...Just let me get this straight. You want me to wait in the wings while you figure out if you're going to have a long-term relationship with Lorrie?

MARK

What can I say? It's really baffling, isn't it? But the answer is Yes.

HEATHER

What am I? The understudy?

MARK

No, no, you're the lead, and what I'm saying is that if this doesn't work out between Lorrie and me – and let's be clear, there's no guarantee that it will – I don't want to jeopardize our current relationship. That would be such a waste for all the time we've spent together.

HEATHER

But we live together.

MARK

Yes, and we will continue to do so.

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