

The Actor's Lament

By Thomas Sullivan

Believe me, I've done all the usual crap any aspiring actor suffers through – soap commercials, where I pretend to be exhilarated about the chinaware being spotless; two bit parts in third rate soap operas, where confused doctors aggravate already hectic lives with imprudent on-the-job romances; ads for Progressive.com, where I prance around the set wearing a blue, foam-rubber word; other assorted humiliations. Quickly filmed one-day stuff, that's been my forte so far. This garbage usually requires the wholesome look of a middle-aged man who is attractive up to, but never crossing into, the realm of being sexy.

Wanted: clean cut, trust-inspiring, American every-man for low-paying, dead-end work.

That's me.

So you can imagine my interest in a job that paid unusually good money to do something entirely different. The audition for the role was pretty strange. It wasn't held out in the Valley, so I knew beforehand that it wasn't for a porno, but it also wasn't near the studios like usual. It was in the city at a visibly struggling Holiday Inn. I showed up a bit early, went into a room where the bedspreads matched the walls, and met three squirrely looking guys in expensive suits. They gave me a little background, had me read a speech, and liked what they saw. They hired me on the spot (I'm impressive under pressure, if I do say so myself). The job involved appearing before four hundred real-life employees at a software firm and playing the role of an investor backing the new owners. A day later the owners emailed me a plane ticket and a reservation for a hotel in Seattle.

Before getting on the plane yesterday I did a little research on these guys and their business (you never know these days, and I didn't want to end up as an unwilling donor to some organ harvesting ring). I also called my older brother, who works for a pension fund, and asked him what he thought. It seems they're a typical private equity group – they pony up a bit of money, use it to secure a load of bank debt, and buy a company. They lay off a bunch of people to jack up profitability and cover the first few debt payments. Then they turn around and sell the debt-laden company for a quick profit. Basically, they flip companies the way your now-bankrupt uncle in Vegas once flipped homes. From what I've uncovered, they've done this with three companies so far, and their reputation is now starting to catch up to them. My role is apparently to help smooth the transition at the fourth.

So now I'm backstage, standing in front of a mirror and checking my appearance one last time. I lick a finger and wet an errant hair back into place. I check out the creases on my sharp, pin-striped suit and work out the last little kinks in my small-knot tie. I'm looking good and feeling good. I'll be feeling even better in a half-hour, when I walk out of here \$8,000 richer.

A guy in a charcoal suit struts off the stage, smiles, and then points at me. In an obviously fake British accent he says "You're up, mate". I recognize the guy from the tryouts for that prostate supplement ad I almost got. I take one last look at my hair and then stride onto the stage.

I enter a high-ceilinged atrium with a huge bronze sculpture of a fish in the middle of the room. Three semi-circular open hallways rise away from the floor. Employees are packed into every available bit of space. I look out upon a mass of people dressed in shorts, tee-shirts, and sandals. There's enough facial hair in the audience to feed a dinosaur. It looks more like a Woodstock reunion than an actual company.

The crowd quiets down as I approach the mic.

I step behind the podium, clear my throat, and begin.

"Good afternoon everyone. First, let me say how proud I am to be a major investor in this company. Rick and Dave asked me to come up from LA to discuss the success I've had with Constrained Resource Optimization at my other company."

I feel just like Alec Baldwin in Glengarry, Glen Ross.

"I know it seems counterintuitive that sharply reducing inputs can lead to..."

"Hey, wait a minute!"

I look up toward the balconies and see a burly guy leaning over the railing, pointing a finger at me.

"That's the guy from that Dove ad! He's no investor, he's a fucking actor!"

I swallow hard as the employees look at one another and start murmuring. My stomach churns and my ears start heating up. Beads of sweat pop onto my forehead. I feel just like Milli Vanilli at his last concert. I have absolutely no idea what to do, so I just stare straight ahead and continue. Maybe if I finish, I'll still get paid.

"Our experience in resource re-allocation has improved profitability by fifteen percent in just..."

"I cannot believe this shit!!!"

Something enters my peripheral vision. I look up just as the Birkenstock is inches from my face. I duck down, slamming my forehead on the edge of the podium. Stars start dancing in front of my eyes. I

spin on my heels and stumble toward the back of the stage under a loud chorus of jeers and insults. A water cooler materializes out of nowhere and shatters inches from my feet.

I scream and race off the stage, my suit drenched. I see an orange EXIT sign and sprint towards it, hoping there's enough left in the checking account for a cab ride out of hipster hell and a bus ticket home.

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