

Worker Bee

By Andrew McGregor

It was 9:33pm. He's usually home by now. He could excuse 8:00. Maybe even thirty minutes thereafter. But he had no reason to be away from home this late. Tomorrow's work could wait. But the moment could not. Love, real love, was the Lord of the present. Passion and lust permeated the office space as he placed her on his desk, spread her legs and began making love to her. He tried to resist this moment. Circumstance was no match for the raw inevitability of now. Her subtle advances were always recognized, yet never acknowledged. The scent of her desire for him drove him mad, yet he didn't let it dictate his actions. He swore he would never succumb to this destiny. Slowly but surely she chipped away at his defenses until he was left with no choice. The conversation in the lunch room, the kiss in the board room, was the final line of defense to be overcome. She was now his Master. Even though lying on her back, she was in full control. She had his mind and his heart. He was no longer married to someone else. He was no longer her direct supervisor. They were lovers. For the time being, they were Infinity.

He got lost driving home. He's lived in the same home for 13 years, worked at the same place for 15 years, and he still managed to drive past the street he lived on. He doesn't remember what he said to his wife that night. He doesn't remember if he saw his son. All he could think about was her. Here. Now. What has happened. What it means. He now feels like a stranger in his own home. "I don't belong here", he says to himself. "This is somebody else's life. I should leave."

He looks in the living room. He sees the old country furniture that he had no input in choosing. He looks at the family portrait. With a determined eye he examines it, to remind himself that he is the man in the picture, and the woman in the picture is his wife. The boy is his son. "This is your family," he says to himself. "This is your home."

He wakes up the next morning, eager to go to work. He's never looked forward to going to work. It's a reasonable paycheck – he's senior management in his division. He doesn't complain aloud. He had no intention of staying there so long, but when his wife fell pregnant, he felt there was no choice. He was only with her out of duty. He did not love her, but she bore his child. He did not want his son raised in a fatherless home, so he married her when she told him she was pregnant. He knew of the importance of a father in the home. His father died when he was young, and that made him well aware of the vacuum his absence could cause in his son's life. A good job was difficult to come by, and he didn't want his child raised in a financially struggling household.

None of that mattered now. He was on his way to the rest of his life. To an ecstasy he did not know existed. His wife said something to him this morning. And his son was still sleeping when he left for work.

He pulls into the parking lot with the excitement of triumph in his heart. This institution, which he has trudged through for the past 15 years, now seems like an oasis fit for a pasha. As he enters the building, he hopes not to see her immediately. He hates the idea of seeing her, yet he needs to see her. He needs to be reminded of what has brought him to the state of joy he is experiencing.

She enters his office. He is on the phone. "Ok, I'll take those financials and see why they won't upload. Bye." He is looking at her while he places the phone on the receiver. They are talking business, yet their eyes are holding a different conversation. They are in love. She is ready to pursue more. He is afraid. She is prepared to experience this joy. He has more to lose. She only sees possibilities. Has more to reflect on than he does to look forward to. His love is cautious and skeptical. She is absolutely fearless.

He gets home late again that night. He doesn't undress and shower. He simply lies down on the couch and falls asleep. He feels safe on the couch. Away from the two strangers he shares this home with.

He doesn't remember arriving at work today. He is just there. He is dressing a little bit sharper than usual. The burn marks show around his upper lip where he dyed his mustache a dark brown. He doesn't notice his drastic change in appearance, but everyone in the office does, especially her. Their talk is still professional, yet their stares are full of fire. She knows without saying to meet him in his office at 8:00 pm. They enjoy each other up against the wall, and on the floor.

His wife knows something is wrong. She knows he never loved her. She knows he married her because she was carrying his child. She knew the only reason they landed in bed together in the first place was to upset a man she had been dating. When he arrives home, he showers. He checks before and after to make sure his wife is asleep. He lies down next to her and stares at the ceiling.

The next day at work is a busy one. He has three meetings to attend. She will be making presentations for the board of directors in all three meetings. Her performance is crucial and flawless. They talk they decide to go to lunch. The unspoken debate rages on. She wants more. He can't deliver. She wants less anonymity. His home life is falling apart. She wants their love declared to the world. He regrets the fact that he has no regrets.

He knows he needs a way out. He knows his wife would not accept it. He knows his son wouldn't understand. He is scared. The Human Resources manager is a friend. He knows he can turn to her. He tells her that he wants to bring clarity to the rumors enveloping the office. He places an affidavit in his lover's professional file. He makes it clear he is not filing a sexual harassment allegation against her, just simply

establishing the pattern that led to his straying from his wife. For the next few weeks he will systematically report to the HR office that his lover is stopping by his office after hours. He states that she is making advances toward him. He does not mention that her advances are accepted. He makes no mention in his affidavits of anything physical taking place: that would require the accused to be notified. "I would be in my office after regular business hours. She would stop by, bringing fast food. She would offer some to me, and I would politely decline." When he was with her, he was a warrior ready and willing for anything. She made him feel invincible. When he was filing reports to the Human Resources manager, he was a man with a wife and child he needed to take care of. Their needs came first.

He felt no malice toward her. It was a dispassionate decision on his part, to protect the blameless parties that may be affected should this affair harm his career.

He didn't view what he was doing as an act of deception but rather an act of vigilance, because he knew there was only one possible outcome to this, and he had to prepare himself. She sensed something was in the air. Their private times became more routine, their lovemaking more dutiful. He was physically present, yet emotionally he was a galaxy's distance away from her. He had created a third reality for himself. One devoid of either woman. One that could give him the chance to operate from a clear conscience.

He took up prayer. He had always prayed, but now his prayers were backed with a spiritual urgency that demanded a positive resolution to what he was facing. He began attending church with a sense of expectation. His years of obedience to doctrine warranted dividends. He began studying the bible. The book of Job resonated with him. He began viewing both his wife and lover as square punishments for misdeeds unknown to others.

The HR manager expressed to him her concern. She reminded him of the fact that if one more affidavit were placed in his lover's professional file, it would trigger the company's mandate policy; where disciplinary action would be taken against the employee, as well as disclosure of the accusations levied would be made known to the accused. He was understanding of her concern, and stubbornly stated his way was the only way to cover his bases.

He began to wonder if this was even love at all. He wondered, he hoped that it was just an addiction. That he could understand. His mother had a gambling problem, so he could accept the possibility of an addictive personality being passed down to him. That would be less trouble. His intention was to fortify his defenses. He was being cautious for the sake of his son. If he were to lose his job over this, it would threaten his potential to provide for him.

There were previous instances where he felt the need for caution. When interviewing candidates for the marketing position, one of the board members insisted their son receive the position. He felt threatened by the board member's demands, and from that moment forward took up the habit of secretly recording all conversations he had with the board member. He now had evidence of threats, overt and insidious. He felt the same in this instance. He was trying to establish a pattern, that she instigated the matter, that she was the hunter. He didn't know if he was filing these affidavits to protect his career or as more to assuage his conscience. Maybe he was trying to convince himself that he was the victim. Maybe he was trying to tell himself that the circumstances were not his doing, no matter how untrue this was.

He was amazed at his ability to compartmentalize. He played his role as father, husband, chief officer, friend to his employees and lover to one. He felt as if no role poured into the next. Nearly everyone played along. His employees did their best to feign ignorance, waiting for him to realize how blatant his assignments had become. His wife offered less than subtle clues of her disgust. She would call him on his cell phone, leaving voicemail messages of her vomiting into the toilet; her self immolation a weapon used to chastise him.

The rumors grew. First his employees from his department were warning him of what they overheard. Then he began to hear them directly. He backtracked all events. His fury almost got the best of him, but he remained focused enough to remind himself of how high the stakes were. If her were to be found out, his life dynamic would change for the worse.

He began telling his employees lies. He would mention something untrue to see if the false information would spread. Depending on which lie was told to which individual, he would be able to filter out the culprit spreading gossip. At the next Senior Management meeting he proposed a staff meeting concerning the perils of gossip. The meeting would be used to admonish employees concerning company policy on gossip: to remind all staff that if they stood by and listened to gossip, they can be found just as liable as the person spreading it.

The next staff meeting was a subtle farce. The video they watched, "The pitfalls of office gossip", only garnered yawns and whispers from the staff. Everyone knew why this meeting was unique. It wasn't about the company at all – it was only about one man.

The inevitable eventually did take place, when he told her it wasn't going to work out between the two of them. She was beside herself. In a passionate rage, she stormed out of his office crying. The relationship was over, but he knew the trouble was just beginning. He had found out the identity of the person spreading the details of his affair: his wife. She told a member of her church, who then told a friend

that was employed at the company. He couldn't confront her on the matter, lest he admit to what she was accusing him.

The atmosphere at the office grew unstable. Their relationship was beginning to affect the dynamic of the entire staff for the worse. Everyone having to act as if they didn't know of the affair was beginning to take a toll on company morale.

He was in a dark warehouse. Every woman he had ever been with was in there with him. They circled him, yelling inaudible accusations at him. His mother was in the background, shaking her head in disappointment. He was trying to speak, yet no sound was leaving his voice. His face began to grow red. He fell to his knees with his arms around his neck, choking. The women looked down at him while his asphyxiation increased. He woke up from his dream to thin hands wrapped around his throat. His wife was straddled atop of him, doing her best to choke him. He managed to push her off, causing her to knock over the nightstand lamp. The loud crash of the lamp shattering woke their son, who came to see what was going on. "Your father attacked me. Call the police." The little boy started to cry. He knew his mother was lying. He knew his father would never attack her.

Enough was enough. He made it a priority to never be in a room alone with his beloved employee. He kept all interactions professional, and stopped returning her texts. It was difficult because her frustration poured over into her work: reports were being handed in late, she would show up to work disheveled, her anger apparent in her tone. He capitalized on her inability to hide her feelings by writing her up for dereliction of assignment. She tried confronting him after work, but he escaped out of the side entrance of the building. One week later, another citation: excessive tardiness. That combined with the previous affidavits placed in her file so many months ago led to her suspension.

Thus began the war of what took place versus what could be proven. She was no match for him. She came into the relationship seeking adventure and fell in love. His motives were so powerfully concealed that even he was unsure of his next move. She was surprised at how fast she was pushed out of the company. Her assignments and responsibilities were stripped from her one by one. This ambitious young marketing superstar had been relegated to door greeter in a matter of weeks. Everyone knew what had taken place but no one dared intervene. She was whipsawed by her sudden plunge in status. It was so immediate. Her anger, however justified, began to show in her demeanor. The customers began complaining to Senior Management about the mean girl that works the front door. His plan was working perfectly. Like a sudden gust of wind her dismissal was swift and forthright. Her friends wanted to help but there was nothing they could do. He had the complaints. He had the excessive tardy notices. He had the

affidavits.

He won. He had his cake. He ate it. He wrote it up, suspended it, and ultimately dismissed it. His fear of his actions coming to light were removed after her last day at work. He waited outside of the building during her exit interview, smoking a cigarette. What was she saying in there? What was she telling the HR manager?

She exited the HR office, and he was not asked to enter. He successfully managed to nail her to his cross, all the while making himself appear to be the victim. The experience was a loss for both parties, but only one knew it. He was incapable of learning. His wisdom lied in his ability to use. He was the existential consumer, nothing more, nothing less.

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