

A REAL TEAM PLAYER

Written by

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INT. RECEPTION - DAY

The luxury reception area is shiny and modern.

MICHAEL, 33, a pale, tired yuppie, sits on a sofa. He fidgets in a wrinkled suit.

His phone buzzes. He pulls it out of his pocket.

It's a text, from Kate: "We got another past due notice today."

Michael sighs, and types back: "I'm waiting for the interview."

The reply, almost instantly: "If someone tries to take the car, don't let them."

The RECEPTIONIST, 19, a young woman working her way through modeling school, sits behind her desk. The phone rings. She picks up. She listens and nods. She hangs up and stands.

RECEPTIONIST  
Mr. Johnson?

Michael jumps out of his seat, knocking over the magazines. He scrambles to pick them up and put them back on the table.

MICHAEL  
I'm sorry! I'm sorry.

The Receptionist smiles.

RECEPTIONIST  
Mr. Franklin will see you now.  
Follow me, please.

Michael collects his bag and coat and follows the Receptionist down a hall.

INT. OFFICES - CONTINUOUS

Clusters of young, tech-savvy EMPLOYEES, 20s, peck away at computers in an open area.

Michael gawks at them. He bites his lip. Not a good sign.

Distracted, he nearly runs into the Receptionist.

MICHAEL  
I'm sorry.

She holds a door open for him. He goes through the door.

The Receptionist slams the door. She rolls her eyes.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Michael stands in the doorway.

The conference room is small and cramped.

A handsome man in a sharp suit, NATHANIEL, 42, rises from the conference table.

NATHANIEL

Welcome, Mr. Johnson. Please come in. I'm so glad to finally meet you in person.

Nathaniel comes around the table, sweeping Michael up, shaking his hand. He maneuvers Michael around the table and pushes him into a chair.

Michael sits, dazed. Nathaniel sits across from him.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)

I looked through your file. You're one of the most qualified candidates I've ever seen.

Michael perks up.

MICHAEL

Thank you. That means a lot to me. Working here is a dream of mine.

NATHANIEL

Having you work here is a dream of mine. This interview is just a formality. To see where you'll fit in the team.

Michael relaxes. He gives a big smile.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)

It says here that you've been unemployed for over a year?

MICHAEL

Yes. That's true.

NATHANIEL

And your credit report?

MICHAEL

I... I've been having a rough time,  
but if I get this job I'm turning  
all that around.

NATHANIEL

You have a lot to lose if you don't  
get this job?

Michael squirms.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)

That's not a bad thing. We have a  
high turnover when it comes to  
programmers. They don't have that  
hunger. They haven't had the time  
to get desperate.

Michael nods.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)

You told the recruiter at the  
Sonoma Job Fair that you would...

Nathaniel checks his notes.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)

...chop off a finger for a chance  
to work here.

Michael laughs.

Nathaniel reaches under the table and pulls out a large,  
cartoon-style meat cleaver. He lays it on the table.

Michael looks at the enormous knife. He laughs.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)

I hate to do this to you, but I  
need to test your dedication.

MICHAEL

You can't be serious--

NATHANIEL

It's purely voluntary.

MICHAEL

What if I don't?

Nathaniel says nothing. He shrugs.

Michael picks up the cleaver. The rectangular slab of steel  
flashes in the light.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)  
This is insane.

NATHANIEL  
It's purely voluntary.

Michael hefts the knife in his hand. He spreads his left hand out on the table. He tips the knife down, sliding the edge gently across his fingers.

He hesitates over the pinky.

He looks up at Nathaniel, who stares at him.

MICHAEL  
Don't make me do this. I'm  
desperate. My wife, my kid, I'm up  
to my ass in debt... Come on, I'm  
about to lose my house.

Nathaniel makes a small note on the folder in front of him.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)  
Please. I'll do anything.

Nathaniel crosses his arms.

Michael looks back down to his hand. He lines the cleaver up across his hand. He raises the knife.

He breathes deep.

He drops his hand. The knife clatters onto the table. Sweat pours down his face. Michael drops his head and cries.

Nathaniel leans over and pats Michael on the shoulder.

NATHANIEL  
It's okay. Some people just don't  
have it in them.

Michael looks up at Nathaniel.

His hand grips the handle of the knife tight. Michael raises it above his head. With a strangled cry, he brings it down.

At the last second, he flinches. Instead of only taking off the pinky, the cleaver goes straight through his wrist. His entire left hand bounces across the table.

A spray of blood arcs across the room. It splatters Nathaniel and the wall behind him.

Michael screams.

MICHAEL  
I'm sorry! I'm sorry!

Nathaniel lunges. He pulls a bandage from under the table and holds it against the stub of Michael's arm.

Michael screams. He looks at his hand, across the table.

NATHANIEL  
It's okay. You did really good.  
We're going to get you to a doctor,  
we're going to get you fixed up.

INT. OFFICES - LATER

Nathaniel watches EMTs strap Michael to a gurney.

The Receptionist approaches Nathaniel. She slides blood splattered paperwork into a plastic bag.

RECEPTIONIST  
What do you want me to do with his  
paperwork?

Nathaniel thinks for a moment.

The EMTs bump the gurney into a wall. Michael screams.

Nathaniel shakes his head.

NATHANIEL  
Don't bother. Even if they reattach  
his hand, I don't think it's going  
to work out.

The Receptionist nods. She takes the bag of bloody files and dumps them into a nearby trash can.