

## *My Bright Idea*

I head over to my table as the office begins to fill up. Not only do we have an open office plan, but also community tables as if we're publishing's version of *Le Pain Quotidien*—though don't expect any fresh bread to be found at *Hey NY!* Some companies are smoke free, we are carb free; I feel like a pariah whenever I eat a sandwich. I'm half Italian, carbs come with the culture—if it means another half hour on the treadmill every day, so be it.

I'm not in my chair for thirty seconds before Keith Niblick comes to bother me—he's got elfin features including pointy ears, a long, thin nose, and a sharp chin that makes it look like he's got the blade of a pitching wedge underneath his skin. Because of this, and the fact that he's barely five feet five inches tall, I've nicknamed him Frodo. Naturally, he protested the moniker, but it's too perfect given his features and personality, so it stuck.

"Hey Grinch, how was your weekend?" His voice sounds like he breathes helium instead of oxygen.

"Uneventful." I find that one word answers tend to encourage shorter conversations, though Frodo's not dissuaded.

“I got fucking stupid hammered on Saturday night.” He’s from long island so hammered came out like hammed.

“Too much Butterbeer?” I don’t know for a fact that he’s into Harry Potter, but I’m guessing by his age and physical appearance that he’ll get the reference.

“Good one, Grinch. I didn’t know you were a Potter fan.”

I’m not, but I robbed the cradle when I rebounded after the end of my engagement. Jimmy Peters was a big Harry Potter fan and made me watch all the movies.

“Expecto Patronum,” I say and point my index finger at him as if it is a wand. I was hoping it would make him disappear, it doesn’t but thankfully he’s just making the rounds and goes on to greet someone a few tables over.

I try to bury my head into my laptop and catch up on emails from my sources, but then remember that it’s not really necessary considering my job just changed about ten minutes ago. It’s then Cara Martucci, our Senior Manager of Advertising Services and Sales, plops down in the seat in front of me.

Cara’s nickname is W2, which is short for Welcome Wagon—let’s just say she has a certain zest for living and there are few people who have walked through the doors of *Hey NY!* that she hasn’t slept with; male or female as she’s a gender fluid millennial. The few exceptions being myself, Ginger, and Frodo—even Cara has standards. Other staffers, clients, and delivery people have all gone a round or two with W2.

“You look like shit,” she observes. And here I was thinking I looked good today.

“Well, you’re about to find out why.”

W2 raises an eyebrow, “Do tell.” She says it seductively and I can’t tell if the eyebrow thing is appealing or creepy. I’m leaning towards creepy.

“Ginger will break the news shortly, I don’t want to steal her thunder.”

“What kind of gossip columnist are you if you can’t spread a little gossip?”

The kind that’s not needed here anymore. I think it, but don’t say it.

“You know what I think would do you good?”

I’ll bet my measly savings account this involves sex.

“What’s that?” I reply.

“You need to get laid.”

There it is. Well, sure, it’s been a while since I’ve enjoyed the company of a man in my bedroom, but I’ve got a battery operated buddy that keeps me satisfied. While it’s not as good as the real thing, my vibrator only hums, it doesn’t snore.

“That’s your answer to everything,” I reply.

“Seriously, when’s the last time you...”

She’s cut off by the sound of Ginger clapping her hands; shortly thereafter everyone follows suit. Frodo actually starts beating his chest—clearly he’s seen *Wolf of Wall Street* too many times. This odd clapping (and now chest thumping) ritual happens at the start of every week.

“Welcome to another Monday, Hey New Yorkers!” She sounds so positive it makes me a little sick. “Are you ready to kill it and crush it today?”

She reminds me of a cheerier version of Alec Baldwin in *Glengerry Glen Ross* and I wonder if she’s about to tell us how expensive her watch is.

“Big news to share today. First off, Frodo is being

promoted to Junior Director of Analytics. As you all know, his data is what we use to make sales stories for our advertisers and he's proven himself quite competent in this regard. We will be having a prosecco tasting at five o'clock this evening to celebrate."

Everyone claps for Frodo while I secretly wish he burns in Mordor—he gets a promotion and I get assigned a goddamn human interest column, that shit ain't right.

Once the clapping dies down, Ginger continues. "More good news to share, W2 is promoted to Director of Advertising Services and Sales."

When I hear this title, I have to fight from laughing out loud because it's abbreviation could be Director of ASS.

"She and her team have been bringing in new advertisers left and right and have grown ad sales by thirty percent. Keep them coming."

The double entendre isn't lost on anyone and those assembled start laughing. Millennials seem to be okay with promiscuity, when I was coming up in the business, being vocal about your sex life was frowned upon, now it seems to be admired and considered empowering.

Frodo gets prosecco, I wonder what W2 will get.

"To celebrate W2's promotion, everyone will receive a code to download the *Fifty Shades of Grey* movie trilogy from iTunes."

The laughter continues and some of the guys high five each other. Gross.

In the #MeToo and #TimesUp era, I can't believe those films, and the books they are based on, have sold so well. That's ironic, even by Alanis Morissette standards.

"And since good things happen in threes," Ginger continues, "I'm really excited to announce that we are

starting a new column here at *Hey NY?*” She pauses for dramatic effect and looks around the room to see to see how good of a job she’s done in teasing this news. “One of our investors has encouraged me to consider a human interest column, profiling everyday New Yorkers doing extraordinary things. We are still working on a pithy title for it, but for right now we are calling it PONY short for People of New York.”

“Are we bringing a new team member on board?” Frodo asks, and Ginger looks at me.

“Nope. We’ve made a strategic decision to stop producing the gossip column that Grinch writes and have her run with this.”

An uncomfortable silence comes over the room and it’s a minute before someone makes a snarky remark—given my reputation in the office, I’m surprised it takes this long.

I have no problem hunting for stories about celebrities because, in my mind, they are more like brands than they are people, and I treat them as such. Real people, on the other hand, have feelings, and I’m not exactly the touchy-feely type.

“You can’t be serious. You are assigning a human interest column to someone who isn’t interested in other humans.”

The voice belongs to Brock Flanders, our Nightlife editor, who earned the nickname OP, short for one-pump, after a one-nighter with W2. I knew he’d be the first to question this assignment as I know he hates my guts—repeatedly turning down his advances has put me on his shit list.

“Watch your tone, OP. I have faith in Grinch that she can handle this new role and perhaps even learn from it.”

While Ginger encourages debate amongst the staff, she absolutely hates having her own judgement questioned.

“Do you care to say a few words, Grinch?”

While I didn’t expect that she would put me on the spot like this, I’m not surprised—Ginger does shit like this and claims it is for our benefit as it keeps us on our toes. I know that, regardless of how I feel about this new assignment, when I start talking I need to sound confident.

“Thank you Ginger, I can assure you that, despite the nickname that you bestowed on me, I can handle this new assignment, but admit I will miss hunting celebrities.”

“Any thoughts?” OP asks. This guy is a real douchebag. He went to a super high end prep school followed by an ivy league college—which in and of themselves doesn’t lead to douchebagery of the Brock Flanders kind. No, his is influenced by the air of superiority he carries with him. That, and his 90’s haircut and preference for Zima. The fact that he’s pushing me on whether I have any ideas is an attempt to make me appear weak in front of my colleagues should I not have an idea to put forward.

Here’s the thing, I’m not a weak person and I’m super competitive—two factors that encourage me to blurt out the following without really thinking about it.

“As a matter of fact...” I pause for dramatic effect (and also to buy myself some time). Suddenly, my mind flashes back to G.I. Joe and his questionable service dog. For better or worse, I blurt out the following, “I do have an idea. This morning I ran into a guy who was just discharged from the Army. He’s looking for a ride down the East Coast so he can personally deliver some letters from the guys previously under his command. I was thinking I could offer to drive him down and write about

the experience, provided this would be fully reimbursed by *Hey NY!* that is.”

This last part is key, I don’t own a car and imagine a rental plus hotel rooms would be very expensive. I can’t afford to do it unless *Hey NY!* foots the bill.

I look around the room and people seem genuinely shocked at what just came out of my mouth. To tell you the truth, so am I. This is so not like me, but I refuse to lose face because One Pump Flanders tried to best me in a staff meeting.

“Fucking, fucking, fucking brilliant,” Ginger says. Three fuckings translates to high praise from the boss—the only person to get more fuckings in one day is W2.

“When can you start?”

I didn’t think she’d actually go for the idea on the spot—I figured Ginger would want to talk about logistics some more, but then I remember that she’s a millennial and they subscribe to the ready, fire, aim approach to decision making.

“First I have to call him to see if he’s into the idea. Let me do that and get back to you.”

What the hell am I getting myself into? What if he actually says yes? Will I actually be spending the holidays driving down the east coast with a guy I don’t know and his alleged service dog?

“What are you waiting for? Call him now,” she commands. “Staff meeting adjourned. Get to work people.”

I walk back to the communal table where I sit and call Noel. I pray that he doesn’t pick up, but no such luck.

“Karen?” he says in a surprised tone.

“Noel, I’m glad I got you. There’s something I want to

talk about.”