

Paul and Pauline

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“Please tell me this isn’t true,” said the principal. He had sunken eyes accompanied by a drooping mouth. His body expression, however, was that of a healthy man. Suddenly, his shoulders became less tense, his chest was deflated of its pride, and his whole body matched his face. “How was that?” he asked, turning to a seemingly empty sofa.

“Meow,” answered the sofa. “Was it too intense, or the opposite?” he asked, waiting for another response. “Merrrrr,” came yet another wordless sound from the sofa. “You don’t have to be so mean about it,” answered “*the principal*”. “What would you know about it anyways? Did you attend all those courses? No, no you didn’t. You lounged on the window sill all day,” retorted the man. As he was talking, out from the corner of the sofa appeared a gray ball of fur. It jumped to the floor and uttered only one sound, “Rowr!” and walked into the next room, indignantly, with its tail pointing to the ceiling. “Fine, be that way!” yelled the man, then, lowering his volume, he murmured, “Women.”

By now, the reader has surely figured out at least two things. One, the great ball of fur is a cat, a Persian cat to be exact. Two, this man, who has been introduced as “the principal”, is deeply disturbed. What we cannot yet figure out is that this man is no principal. He is an actor called Paul. Presently, he has been chosen to star in Thomas Berger’s latest film The Good-Bye Principal. Please, do not get the idea that this is a great honor, it certainly is not. Thomas Berger is a multi-millionaire who decided a long time ago to become the next Woody Allen. When Woody Allen got wind of this he was deeply insulted and demanded that Berger change his idol to Stephen Spielberg. This created a huge scandal, but was wrapped up by Berger’s one million dollar donation to

both directors. It was with the same amount of money that Berger started The Good-Bye Principal, written and directed by him, might I add.

Well, back to Paul. The scene, was on the day before the film first shooting. By shooting I mean in cinematic and literal terms. Paul, who had just had a fight with his cat (the equivalent of a girlfriend), was rehearsing the scene where the principal, also known as the “Good-Bye Principal”, is told that there is a serial killer in the school (whose name I will not write because it is simply too ridiculous to even TRY to write) is killing all the geniuses (whom are called nerds in this school, but I prefer geniuses, mainly because I used to be one of these “nerds” in high school). Following the panic that is shown among the geniuses, the Good-Bye Principal is forced to take out his machine gun and threaten all the geniuses to “Quiet down, you puny nerds!” (Note: the principal, who should be proud of intelligent students, has just insulted the few that obey the school rules). Paul also noticed this injustice, but did not wish to question the man who would be paying him two million dollars for the whole movie. He decided to do whatever Berger told (and not asked) him to do. This, in case you haven’t already predicted, could be the end of his career. Minds such as that of Berger’s are so kitsch and ridiculous and so unreachable that it is impossible to guess the horrors that might spring forth from them.

Once again, back to Paul. After his cat, Pauline, walked out on him he sat down and reread his lines. A sudden depression overtook him at the moment when he realized that he had sunk so low as to take a horrendous role just because of the fat paycheck. He remembered a time when he dreamed of acting in a movie that made a through break in cinematography. But that was a long time ago; there was no way of fixing all the bends and zigzags. Paul was faced with the decision that all actors one time or another faced in

their lives: to act for the wrong reasons or not to act for the right reasons. This poor Shakespearian actor (which means that Paul was in fact quite an actor) fumbled over these 14 words. What could he do? He needed the money since his girlfriend (cat hater) left him. The apartment she had talked him into buying was too expensive for two people to pay for, much less one. His parents had disowned him because of his “preposterous ambitions” (family law firm). Paul could not take it anymore, he needed some air. He put on his worn out, faded jeans jacket and his hole-infested baseball cap and left the room.

As he walked out of the door the landlady yelled to him, “One month’s rent. Don’t forget!” Paul pretended not to hear her, just as he did any other day. He walked by the record store, loathing everyone inside, since they had enough money to buy that Billy Joel album. If only he had twelve extra bucks to spend. Where could he go? He didn’t want to spend money on a taxi, and the thought of taking a bus disgusted him, but he had to. Finally, he decided to wait and when the bus came he reluctantly got on. He made sure to not sit beside anyone who looked as if they... he made sure not to sit beside anyone. After a while he noticed an old, plump lady with a Hispanic looking girl getting on the bus, “Squirrel Hell?” said the old lady to the bus driver (the old lady meant to say “Hill”, but her accent did not permit it), “As always Ms.Arrevalo”, replied the bus driver. Paul had no idea where the bus went, but what he least expected was that the bus’s final stop was in the Jewish neighborhood. When he stepped out of the bus he walked amongst people whom he had despised from an early age. He saw two men with beards and girls as old as his sister Sunny, wearing dresses that belonged to 80 year old ladies and those idiotic cloths on their heads (the phrase “those idiotic cloths” are his opinion, not mine. So is the phrase “dresses that belonged to 80 year old ladies).

While he stood on the street in front of the movie theatre he heard some of the best music he had ever heard. When he turned around he saw a crowd, among which were the old woman and the Hispanic girl, whom, he had just noticed, was holding a violin case. He approached the crowd, trying not to get too close, and what he saw was a gypsy-looking woman, playing a red violin. He recognized the piece, Tchaikovsky's 6th Symphony, 3rd movement. Why was this woman in the Jewish neighborhood? As he finished thinking this, the woman finished the piece and got a big round of applause from her audience. Most of the crowd dispersed, and the only ones listening to the woman were the old lady, the Hispanic girl, and Paul. It started to rain unexpectedly. The violin-playing woman took cover under the theatre's triangle-shaped front where the names of the movies are placed; so did the old woman and the girl, Paul followed them after a while. As time passed, more and more people gathered. The rain became denser and denser as it came down faster. Wind seemed to fight against the rain. From the front view autumn leaves could be seen flying here and there, about three umbrellas were seen knocked out of their owner's hands. "Serves them right", thought Paul to himself.

The weather worsened by the minute. Suddenly, the huge piece of plastic that held the letters spelling out the names of the movies at the theatre fell to the floor with a gigantic crash. The lady who worked at the cinema became frenzied; she went around asking if everyone was okay. When she came to Paul and noticed that a piece of plastic had pierced his hand she shouted, "Doctor, we need a doctor!" One of the bearded men whom Paul had seen came from the back of the crowd and observed his hand, "I can heal that quickly, no charge," he said smiling at Paul. "No! Don't you dare touch me you Jew!" cried out Paul. The face of the doctor and of the rest of the crowd looked at him in

amazement. The Hispanic girl was telling her grandmother what Paul had just said, after the girl was done the old woman walked over to Paul and said something in Spanish angrily, then she asked the girl to translate for her. The girl said, with the same vigor, “My grandmother says that if you don’t let the doctor take care of that hand she’ll do it herself, and she won’t be so gentle.” Paul looked around at everyone, many of which were not looking amazed, but hateful. The girl addressed him again, talking as herself, “Listen, I saw the way you tried to keep away from everyone else in the bus, and the look you gave every single person in the street. I could recognize that look from a mile away, it’s something I’ve gotten used to among many high classed Americans. And I understand that it’s simply because of my skin and my hair, but most of these people are Americans as you are. So why do you hate them? The doctor who just offered you his services is one of the best doctors in Pittsburgh, and he even said that he wouldn’t charge you. And what did you do? You called him a Jew. Now, do you want my grandmother to help you with that wound this, I promise you, will be painful. Or do you want a real doctor to do it?” she said calmly. Paul thought for a long while and finally stretched his bloody hand to the doctor. The doctor quickly took out the plastic and cured the wound, then put a piece of cloth over it, “You were lucky,” he said, “it was not deep. Just make sure to wash it every day for the next week or so, and don’t cover it up the whole time.” Then, the doctor whispered in his ear “Hatred only deepens the wound. Think about that.”

After a while the rain and the wind stopped. The old lady and the girl walked up the street, toward Squirrel Hell (sorry, I couldn’t help myself), and the doctor walked across the street to join his family in the store where he had left them. Paul walked all the way

back to his apartment. While he was walking past Squirrel Hill he saw a “For Rent, \$200 a month” sign on a building window. It was late at night, but he wasn’t tired. When he got home he left on his jacket and cap and started packing the few things that his girlfriend had left him. Once he had all of it packed he picked up Pauline and put her in her kitty bag and put the bag on his shoulder. He picked up the phone and the only thing he said to whomever he called was, ”Hey, this is Paul, find yourself another idiot for your idiotic movie!” He skipped down the stairs and onto the pavement, took the bus and got off at the last stop. After talking to his new landlady, Jane, he put all of his things on the floor and let Pauline out. Pauline investigated and then gave out a meow and cocked her head to the side, as if asking where they were. Paul didn’t feel like discussing anything, so all he said was, “I’ll tell you tomorrow”, and went to sleep on of the sheets he had brought with him. The next morning Pauline did the same thing, and Paul answered her, with much difficulty, “Sweet heart, I’ve quit my job and moved us to Squirrel Hell, whether you like it or not.” Pauline simply closed her eyes and, for the first time in their relationship, she purred.

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