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TURNABOUT

One-act Play by Jeff Garrity

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Time: The present

Place: Managing partner's office at a large law firm. A doorway leads into the office, and a chair faces a large, neatly organized desk.

Characters: One woman and one man, both in their early forties.

The play is performed twice and the actors switch roles for the second reading. The woman plays the role previously played by the man, and the man takes the role previously played by the woman. The dialogue does not change. Actors should keep the emotional tone for each character similar in both readings. The characters are described as A and B. Whether the woman or man begins as A is up to the director.

[At rise, B enters office door and A is there to greet B. They shake hands and the grip continues through the first few lines, despite B's mild efforts to disengage]

A: Thanks for coming in! Good to see you!

B: This is a bit awkward.

A: Awkward? Not at all.

B: Last I heard you were still in Denver. At Magnuson Steiner. No one said who I'd be interviewing with.

A: *With whom.* Proper English impresses the judges. It's been ... what? A dozen years? Have a seat.

B: I just remember that you were really pissed off when I broke up with you. We haven't spoken since.

A: Then maybe this is long overdue.

B: This?

A: This ... encounter.

B: [trying for levity] I came here for an interview, not an *encounter*.

A: [gestures toward chair] Please, sit down. [sits behind desk]

B: Nice office. I like the old wood paneling. You don't see that much anymore. Is the hardwood floor original?

A: You only *think* you broke up with me.

B: What?

A: Management is all about manipulation. You broke up with me because I *wanted* you to break up with me. I know how to get what I want from people. Even back then I was a good manager of relationships. All I really wanted from you was sex. I didn't really like you that much. When I was tired of you, I got you to break up with me.

B: And when I did you threw a lamp at me. I still have a scar on my shoulder. [more pleasant tone] But enough about all that. This is supposed to be an interview for the position in your PI department.

A: [ignoring what B just said] I turned on what I call my aggressive indifference. It was a ploy I used pretty often. Just another management tool. Why give up the perks of a relationship until you've got something else lined up? And you were all too willing to provide those perks, even when I was ... less than good to you.

B: [starts to say something but stops] Can we start the interview? Please.

A: But we had some fun, didn't we? Actually, the interview started the second you walked in.

B: [says nothing, maybe sighs]

A: I just want to make sure you don't still have feelings for me. That could be a problem. I want all that off the table.

B: [relieved] Done. Whoosh! It's all swept off the table. Let's move on. I assume you've reviewed my resume.

A: The first thing you said. When you walked in. You remember? You said, 'This is awkward.' If I hire you, you'll be working for me. If this interview is awkward, how will we handle disagreements and difficult decisions? I have to determine whether you'll be a good fit. We need to be productive and focused, not reliving petty animosities.

B: I have no petty animosities. There will be no problems. I'm sure you've reviewed my resume, and you remember how hard I worked when we were in law school. I'm an excellent lawyer and I have nearly a decade of PI experience. I know I would be an excellent addition to your team.

A: You sound so ... earnest. [picks up resume from desk] It's been almost a year since you were employed. Your resume doesn't explain the gap. [drops resume on desk] Or why you left Theisser Wilhelm.

B: It was mutual.

A: Mutual. They wanted you out and you agreed to ... something. Something with terms, I suspect.

B: [no response, maybe a sigh]

A: I worked with Colson for a few years in Denver, before I came back here. I can call him to find out, so you might as well tell me.

B: All I can tell you is that both parties signed a nondisclosure.

A: What happens here never leaves this room. [with emphasis] No matter what. [pause, change in tone] You weren't disbarred, so I have to assume it was something between you and someone else at the firm. Seems unlikely it was job performance. [picks up resume] Partner in four years. Pretty impressive. [drops resume on desk] But then the big fall. Something happened.

B: You're asking me to break the law. Let's move on.

A: Some kind of harassment? Or maybe you were using the nap room to fuck somebody you shouldn't have been fucking? Every time I talk to Colson he has a new nap room story. You know what I told him? I said to him, don't your office doors have locks? I mean, nap rooms are just asking for trouble.

B: This is supposed to be an interview.

A: I did some asking around when I saw your resume and I heard some interesting things. I suppose you could say they're just rumors, but sometimes rumors are true. Or at least substantially true. Sometimes not. But at one time we knew each other quite well and I have to say that, given our history, some of the things I heard seem to make sense. I remember you being very ... aggressive. Not that / minded, but some don't know how to handle that.

B: We both know that passive lawyers are ineffective.

A: I meant sexually aggressive.

B: Please. I came here to discuss a job.

A: Seems you really need one. I don't see a ring on your finger so I assume no one's carrying you, no one you can depend on for rent and groceries.

B: Let's keep on topic please.

A: Here's the nut we're trying to crack: I need to know who I'm hiring and the only way for that to happen is for you to tell me what happened at Theisser Wilhelm.

B: [stands abruptly] You've repeatedly asked me to risk my career by violating a legally binding agreement. This is a waste of time. [takes steps toward door]

A: [LAUGHS] Okay, okay. Please, sit down. That was a little test. We demand integrity here. You've just shown me that we don't need to worry about that. Given some of our history, I wanted to make sure. Please sit down.

B: [remains standing] I don't see the point of continuing. It is extremely inappropriate to keep referring to our past relationship. It was fifteen years ago and has nothing to do with the position.

A: Seventeen years ago. We can't ignore the facts. We're like a family here. Good families acknowledge their history.

B: There are no facts in our history that could possibly make you question my integrity. You are simply wrong.

A: Our memories differ. You did some sleeping around. Yeah, well, so did I. There were some overlaps for both of us. Nothing wrong with that, I guess. But you lied about it. We can't have liars here.

B: You're the one who lied. Which is why I ended it. [exasperated] Listen. You're right. I need a job. It's been a tough year. But that doesn't give you the right to harass me like this.

A: Please, sit down. And let's choose our words more carefully, shall we?

B: This is harassment.

A: [laughs] You ain't seen nothing yet.

B: What the hell does that mean?

A: If you think I'm harassing you ... holy shit, I don't even know where to start. We don't hire weak people. If you can't take this, you won't survive here. You want to litigate? You want to go toe to toe with lawyers from massive insurance companies who are champion assholes, born to intimidate, belittle, mock, ridicule? Those people eat nails for breakfast. If you can't take what I'm throwing at you, you'll never ...

B: [interrupts] I've already shown that I am an effective litigator. I made partner in four years because I'm good. I can take anything. What happened fifteen years ago has no bearing on this job. Let's talk about the position.

A: Seventeen years ago. Everything has a bearing on everything. Maybe the incident at Theisser was so traumatic that it changed you. Weakened you. Put you on the defensive. Maybe you're no longer effective. I don't leave anything to chance. I'm simply being thorough.

B: You're being an asshole.

A: [laughs] Once again, you ain't seen nothin' yet.

B: I've seen it. I saw lots of it fifteen years ago too. I can see you haven't changed.

A: Seventeen years ago. [amused] Then why in the world would you want to work for me? Oh, I remember. You're desperate.

B: Fuck you.

A: That's what I like. We admire directness here. If I act like an asshole, you call me an asshole. I insult you, you say fuck you. Predictable, but I think we're getting somewhere. [firmly, like an order] Please. *Sit down.*

B: I see no reason to stay unless we're going to talk about the position.

A: You mean like missionary? Doggie? That was our favorite, wasn't it? I don't remember. I guess it wasn't all that memorable. For me anyway.

B: You really are an asshole.

A: Yeah? But look what it's gotten me. Managing partner and a corner office. Sure, I stepped on plenty of people along the way, but always for good reason. We almost doubled our billing hours in the last four years. The board thinks I'm a fucking rock star and they pay me like it. I've got five full bathrooms in my new house. [picks up resume] Your address says apartment 17B. [drops resume on desk] How many bathrooms in your apartment?

B: Either we talk about the job or I'm leaving.

A: You keep saying that but you're still here. Okay. Let's talk about the job. What would you do to get it?

B: Okay, that's it. I'm going. [walks to the door and tries to open it but it is locked] Why is the door locked?

A: You've got a big black cloud hanging over your head. The board will have lots of questions. If I hire you I'd be going out on a pretty weak limb. The board hates uncertainty.

B: [still at the door] Unlock the door.

A: Something happened at Theisser Wilhelm. Something, but I don't know what. I'm not asking you to divulge what you legally cannot. I'm just trying to figure out how we get around this problem with the

board. If your behavior at Theisser Wilhelm represents some kind of pattern, and that pattern continues here, I would be considered negligent. I could even lose my corner office. Might have to sell my brand new house.

B: [leaves door and approaches desk] My *behavior*, as you call it, at Theisser Wilhelm was entirely appropriate. If leaving the firm under circumstances you'll never know disqualifies me from consideration, then asking me to come here for this interview is just part of some stupid game you're playing and it's been a complete waste of my time.

A: It seems you've got time to waste. Sending out resumes doesn't take all day.

B: I'm going to make sure the Bar knows about your methods.

A: A threat! Whoa! For the record, this isn't really a job interview.

B: What the hell does that mean?

A: We filled the position yesterday. Great candidate. No clouds. Amazing recommendations. Lots of experience. The board was thrilled. But we already had you scheduled and I haven't seen you in quite a while so I thought it would be fun to reconnect. If there's no job, this can't be a job interview. We're just two old friends having a chat.

B: You brought me here to harass me.

A: There's that word again.

B: [points at door] Unlock the door. Now!

A: I could be an ally, you know. I could get you a job at Coogan Dunlop. They need someone in PI. Smaller firms are impressed by people like you. They don't pull in the same caliber candidates we do and I think they'll overlook the problems you had at Theisser Wilhelm. Actually, I know they would. I already talked to Chris Dunlop. They're very interested. My recommendation would seal it. I told her I was meeting with you today in a sort of career guidance capacity.

B: I don't believe anything you just said.

A: Take off your clothes.

B: What!?

A: Take off your clothes. A little recompense seems reasonable. I'll call Chris when we're done and you'll have a job. Your year of hell will be over. I don't mind helping out an old friend. Just take off your clothes.

[Lights out. When lights are up again the actors have switched roles and the play begins again]