

Everywhere All the Time

Marcie's trouble began when she got promoted. Before then, she was getting along just fine ignoring the calls she was supposed to be answering in the basement of the office building and planning her wedding between nine and five. But then Marcie came home early one day to surprise Todd, her fiancé, with the hedgehog he'd been wanting; she found him on his knees at the foot of their bed with his face pressed between their neighbor Charlotte's legs, her tuft of light brown pubic hair showing above Todd's head like a dirty halo. Marcie set the hedgehog down on the bed beside Charlotte, who squealed, and grabbed Todd by the hair on the top of his head. She thought about slapping him across his slimy face, but couldn't bring herself to do it. Instead, she let go, gathered the hedgehog, and then quietly told Todd to leave the house while she packed her things.

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The next day, Marcie brought the hedgehog, whom she'd named Erin, to work with her and really put her nose to the grindstone. It was the first time in her almost six years with You-Biquitous that she actually did her job with any gusto whatsoever and she was surprised to find herself enjoying it.

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She'd gotten the job at You-Biquitous a week before she graduated from her Masters program. Marcie was a good student – willing to work hard but also naturally adept at predicting the material each professor would find salient and include on the exam. She was never the smartest student in the classroom, but she was frequently the one with the highest final grade. She was an English major, though, so of course her

options were limited. She'd met Todd in her first year of graduate school. He was getting his Masters degree in Computer Engineering and he joined in with the chorus Marcie had heard her whole life when she told people she wanted to study literature because she liked reading and writing:

“Well what are you going to do with that?”

“Same thing you're going to do with your degree: find a job and work.”

“Good luck,” Todd said. Marcie started applying and interviewing for jobs the semester before she graduated.

When You-Biquitous invited her back for the fourth of five interviews, she stood in front of the full-length mirror in their bedroom as Todd got ready for his first day at work for SeemLess, a tech company whose mission it was to eliminate human beings from any and all retail interactions.

“Looks like I'm not going to be unemployed,” Marcie said, turning to the side to ensure that her skirt hugged her hips outlining the slope of her ass tightly, but not so tightly that one could make out her cellulitic dimples.

“Don't count your chickens before they're hatched,” Todd said, ever the pessimist, “but yes, step four of five is further than I'd've predicted. It is a sales job, though, so they're probably willing to take anyone on to push product.”

“Gee, thanks.”

“Oh, Marce, I'm sorry,” Todd backpedaled, his engineer's bluntness and calculating analysis of all situations once again leading the charge before his tenderness and true care for her. “You really are tearing it up out there. And you're still two weeks out from graduating!”

“Who would’ve guessed it. There are things to be done with a literature degree.”
Marcie pulled the hair elastic off her wrist and tied her thick brown hair into a high and tight bun on the top of her head. “I hope you have a fun day making robots to replace Geoff!”

Geoff was her favorite barista at Crack o’ Dawn, the coffee joint across the street from her classroom building on campus.

“Geoff can have a new job manufacturing bots that will prevent him from ever having to take some bitch’s order for a medium extra hot skim latte with four pumps of sugar free hazelnut no foam in a large cup.”

“True, but a robot won’t be able to spit in it.”

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In the fourth interview, a panel of four managers questioned Marcie on what she’d do in certain situations.

“We are trying to sell people our management system. If a company is willing to pay us \$8,375 per month minimum, we will man-handle their advertising, from email to direct to paid search to in person to organic online to word-of-mouth all of it top to bottom. But they have to believe that they are currently failing and that we will make them succeed. In dollars and cents we will improve their bottom line by X amount, inclusive of our management fee. You are trying to convince a person, whether or not it is true, that they are bleeding money, that they don’t just want us, they need us. Now go.”

“Okay, well I guess I would probably bring up competitors. Maybe find out what they’re doing and try to make the prospect feel like they’re missing out on something obvious that other people are doing.” Marcie looked around the room for affirmation, but

her interviewers were just furiously typing notes on their tablets. She wondered whether the notes were about her, or unrelated altogether. Maybe she'd already failed somehow. Maybe that answer was dumb. "I'd also definitely talk about my own experiences and how integrated advertising (a buzzword she'd picked up online while researching the position) affects my own perceptions about a company and decision to purchase and become a loyal customer." She was deep in bullshit territory, and going full throttle. The panel had stopped typing. A couple of the interviewers were actually making eye contact with her. She wasn't sure if that was a good thing or not, but it was too late to back out now. Besides, this was territory she knew well. Writing papers in school had always been an exercise in convincing herself of something she made up and then convincing someone else of that same thing. That was all she was doing now. "If I'm going to buy a different soap brand, it's going to be because a series of marketing moves convinced me so completely that that's the soap to use that I didn't even think about switching soap brands."

"Yeah, exactly," one of the interviewers said from behind his tablet. Marcie was afraid it was a sarcastic exactly, but they invited her back for a "final discussion" the following week. They offered her a full time job starting the Monday after she graduated. They showed her around the office, the modern, deconstructed upper floors, the snack room with a view of the city and free fresh juices made from things like kale, carrots and dates. They didn't show her the cubicle that would be hers: down in the basement with no windows underneath flickering lights. A typical swivel office chair, a single desktop computer, a cup for pens and pencils she'd never use. The day she started, her supervisor took her to her desk and, perhaps sensing a bit of disappointment, assured her that she'd

move up to the land of tablets, laptops, bean bag chairs and windows as soon as she'd put in her time in sales.

“Everybody’s got to shovel shit sometimes, Marce,” Todd told her when she’d described her dank workspace that first night.

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She realized after losing Todd and coming to work with a fresh perspective that she’d actually not been shoveling shit at all, but had instead been kicking it around uselessly.

She opened six new accounts with desired clients that week, which caught her supervisor’s attention. He gave her a few pointers via email, as well as a few new leads she begged him for, and by the end of that month, she’d broken the single-day sales record and Gerard came down to the basement to offer Marcie a promotion. He was tickled by the hedgehog.

“That’s great,” he said. “Very quirky.”

“Sorry,” Marcie said, “I’m just in between places right now and I can’t leave her in the car.”

“Grab the creature and your stuff,” he said. “And come with me.” He led her to the elevator and they rode it up to the fifth floor. The doors opened into a sea of desks on wheels, portable screens, whiteboards, laptops, tablets, chairs on wheels. There were clusters of people working all over the room, laughing and eating hard candies. There were tall windows that looked out onto treetops and blue sky and a sizeable parking lot.

“Welcome to the big leagues,” Gerard said.

“Thanks,” Marcie said, setting her things on a thin white table with wheels. She wondered what she’d be doing up in strategy. Calls and emails were less frequent she knew. Invented terminology was rampant.

Gerard set his hand on Erin’s carrying case and leaned against the flimsy table, letting it roll toward a metal wall and come to a halt. “Here’s the deal,” he said, checking his wrist, which was empty and then his iGlassEye. He looked like a man with an aggressive tic or a stray nose hair he couldn’t quite get rid of. “You’re joining Strategy Team Go All the Way. Obviously the mission there’s to just guerilla market until the cows come home. Like, we’re talking, take the sloughed-off budget from a big paid search campaign and then put every penny to use until we’re red in the face. We’re talking cutting freaking edge. You haven’t lived ‘til you’ve run a campaign with Strategy Team GATW.”

Gerard looked at Marcie. “Questions?” he asked.

“Sure, sounds exciting. Will I start today? What will I be doing?”

“You and your quirk are starting right now. Write yourself an online dating profile, get together some legit pictures, no catfish, and send them to me by the end of today. Make yourself irresistible. And CC Sloane. He’s my head of Team Go All the Way.”

“Just, like, a normal dating profile? For dates?”

“Obviously. How else would you meet new targets face-to-face and guerilla them?”

“Oh, I guess I just thought we used social media to influence our networks.”

“Social media is shit. People know it’s not real, and they smells ads a mile away. No—this team is about doing what no one else thinks to: interact IRL with targets to push clients’ brands.”

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Writing her profile did not feel like work; it felt cathartic, like jumping into a frigid pond on a warm day, or hammering loose nails into a deck. Marcie had always turned her nose up at online dating, because it seemed forced and put-on. But now she wished she’d tried it before. She felt self-possessed in a way she never did in real life. In real life, Marcie was the kind of girl who took whatever people offered her: when a man in a bar bought her a beer, she drank it, though she preferred wine; when her fellow sales callers in the basement of gave her a chocolate cake for her birthday last year, she ate it, though chocolate icing gave her a headache. But online, she had whole lists of likes and dislikes, whole columns of things she was looking for, things she could not tolerate, things she could not live without.

Under “favorite foods,” Marcie wrote, “Armchair Chicken sandwiches with extra pickles, frozen bananas, thick cut potato chips, Moo-Moo Miss Lou’s cherry white chocolate ice cream, and green apples. I also really like watermelon, but only outside on a hot day near water.” This, incidentally, was true.

Under “favorite restaurants,” Marcie wrote, “Armchair Chicken, obviously, and Sea-Do Sushi and Westbound Burgers. I could go on...”

For her photo, Marcie chose one from the day Todd proposed. Marcie had felt it coming, and so she’d worn a nice dress and eyeliner. The dress was purple and she’d cried when Todd got down on one knee, so her brown eyes had a nice glimmer to them in

the photos. She cut Todd out. She also cut out her stocky legs and soft, dimpled arms. Might as well put my best foot forward, she thought.

When prompted to describe what it was she was looking for, Marcie explained that she'd just gotten out of a six-year long relationship that ended with two excruciating years of engagement. She wanted a long-term relationship, but forever wasn't really on her mind at the moment. She wanted someone kind and funny, preferably one who would not lie or cheat. Someone who wanted to get out and experience their city, try new foods and do adventurous things.

Within hours of activating her profile on Sayokay.com, Marcie had a dozen messages. She sifted through them keeping her principles in mind. She wanted a good return on her time investment and so would only respond to profitable potentials.

Mac had not gone to college. Zeek had "Rastafarian" listed as his religion. Carlos claimed to be "an entrepreneur working on a start-up," which Marcie knew was code for "unemployed." John wrote that he was a janitor for a local elementary school so he could support his real calling, which was playing video games. Doug wrote in his message that he wanted Marcie to "sit on his face," so he was out. Jeremy was working on a "pretty promising novel," so he was out, too.

Marcie settled on three to respond positively to: Paul, Leo, and Mitch.

To Paul she wrote, "Thank you! I liked your profile too. I work for a jewelry company. I'm one of the engagement and wedding ring consultants so my job consists of watching happy couples parade their love in front of me all day LOL ;-). But yes, I would love to go out sometime. Maybe one night this week after work? Have you ever been to Sea-Do Sushi off of Highland Dr.? It's pretty good. I also like this bar called Clear-

Headed but it's right by the college so sometimes it can be kinda crazy. You decide whether you want to just do drinks or spring for dinner and then let me know! I'm free any day but Thursday. –Kaitlyn.”

To Leo, who described himself as reserved, she wrote, “I appreciate that! It was taken last year at a Fourth of July party. I'd love to meet up—what are your thoughts on some cheap takeout and a movie at my place? Do you happen to like Armchair? My name's Kristin, by the way.”

To Mitch, an accountant, who had written the least in his initial message and who Marcie was having the most difficult time getting a read on, she wrote, “I work for a data analytics consulting firm, so I actually do know a little about number crunching! I mostly help companies find where they can trim the fat and ignore the fact that I'm part of the fat ;-) LOL not really. But yeah I would be willing to give me your number—so long as you give me yours and are willing to have your inbox spammed with updates on how loud my coworker's cough is and VidAddict videos of people waking up from anesthesia.”

Marcie began going on dates the following week. She closed with Paul and Leo within the month, before she'd even gone on a first date with Mitch. She'd gotten four new people into her rotation and was going out every night of the week except Sunday, which was her day off, and was Erin's bath day. Erin loved baths.

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Gerard called Marcie in for a performance review meeting at the end of the fiscal year.

“You still bringing that creature in? Taking it to all your off site assignments?”

Gerard leaned back in his swivel chair and folded his hands over his round, hard stomach.

He looked just like bosses always did in movies. He had to be doing that on purpose. “No, sir. I’ve got a place now, an apartment by the river, so I just leave her there,” Marie explained.

“Big mistake, sister, Gerard said. “Big fucking mistake.”

“Um.”

“That creature added like a thousand points to your quirk score. We promoted you to help handle some of our alternative accounts. You know that! You’re in here wearing black slacks and stilettos. What is this blue button down shirt you got? I mean, what the hell are you doing. Where’s those old beat-up khakis that looked like they were for men?”

“They are with Todd, my ex-fiancé; they belong to him. I was wearing them during a rough period in my life.”

“Well, get ‘em back. Or better yet, get some colored pants. Like orange pants. Very alternative, no?”

“Are you allowed to base my performance review on my attire and whether or not I bring my pet to work?”

“You’re in person-to-person ubiquitous advertising. You’re overseeing some of our less mainstream accounts. You’ve got Armchair, Clear-Headed, Sea-Do, Moo-Moo Miss Lou Dairy and what’s this YumFruits! Skin Care? What even is that? I mean, hell, Marcie I can base your performance review on whatever I want.”

“Fair enough,” Marcie said. Lately she’d been jealous of some of her fifth floor counterparts. The Internet, email, social media advertisers. They could clock in, do their work, write ads and content pushing their clients, driving immediately measurable results

without having any one-on-one interaction with consumers. VidAddict pop-up ads, search engine stuff, MeBook anonymous ubiquitous advertising. She was getting sick of all the dates, all the sneaky mentions, the restaurant and food suggestions, the line, “I just love the way a man’s skin smells and tastes after this blueberry oatmeal body scrub.” Leo had even bought some of that scrub, and used it, and it had smelled terrible. He claimed he could already see his crow’s feet disappearing. She’d been encouraged to send a boilerplate response to every man who messaged her explaining that she’d actually met someone at this great gym (link included) and so she was sorry but would not be interesting in pursuing anything. It seemed so obvious to Marcie, who never even clicked on links her friends sent her, but apparently memberships to RadBod gym had skyrocketed.

“So?” Gerard said.

“So what?”

“How’s the in person online dating stuff going?”

“Oh, you know. It’s strange. I feel like people are going to start blowing the whistle on us for this.”

“No, that won’t happen. It’s also totally not illegal. We’ve got enough different people on different sites and we’re starting to spread out over more and more person-to-person stuff. Just complete saturated brand exposure. I mean, it’s great. We really are making our clients’ brands ubiquitous. Frankly, it’s more effective than the shit they do on fifth floor. Our shit cuts deeper. Lasts way longer than one online buy, right?”

“Everywhere all the time,” Marcie said.

“Everywhere all the time,” Gerard answered.

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Soon Mitch became Marcie's pet project. As Marcie's success with all other potentials rose, her failure to close with Mitch bothered her more and more. Gerard encouraged her to just send the "ending things" message to men she'd pegged as potentials but hadn't met in person and just keep going. And Marcie did, for most of them, but not Mitch.

Marcie and Mitch exchanged upwards of two-dozen d*chats a day. Marcie was using her personal D*awdle account for those messages, which she knew was not protocol. She also knew that if Gerard found out that she was spending precious one-on-one time with potentials doing anything other than pushing brands, he'd be furious. He'd also point out that twenty-six d*chats a day with no close was an awfully bad return on our time investment, was it not? Marcie figured Mitch was only postponing asking her out because he was worried about getting hurt, or disappointing her. He was so charming over d*chat, and so attentive. He was savvy, too, and had suggestions for making her moveable workplace more ergonomic: make everything stay still, lock a chair in front of a desk that doesn't roll away, get uphill of the rolling whiteboards, sit up straight, and work. He made Marcie laugh and he'd even sent her a facEmotion of a smiling dog with a heart floating above its head. She had him locked in.

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Marcie was out at Sea-Do trying to get this guy named Guy addicted to their special roll. It wasn't that hard, really. They used panko as the crunch around the tuna, plus a killer combination of hot sauce, mayonnaise, lemon juice, and vanilla as the

signature dipping sauce. With Sea-Do, Marcie considered it a close once she'd taken a consumer there twice.

"I love that they use crushed peanuts in this," Guy said.

"So good," Marcie said."

"Do you want a bite?"

"Oh, no thank you. I've had it a thousand times." That was an exaggeration. It was probably getting close to a few hundred though.

"So would you be interested in coming back to my place tonight? I've got a bottle of wine and some cheesecake."

"God damn it," Marcie said.

"Oh, I'm sorry, I just thought things were going--"

"No, no. It's not you. Sorry. My ex just walked in with someone."

"Maybe I should go, or... Is it the blonde?"

"Shut up." Marcie was never supposed to be either rude or threatening with consumers, but in this instance she could not help it. She saw Todd notice her. She saw him register that she was out with a Guy. She saw a look of perfect indifference on his face, the click back into attention when Charlotte addressed him. "Let's go."

Marcie took Guy's hand when they stood and she made sure they walked directly in front of Todd and Charlotte. That'll show them, she thought, though what she was not so sure.

In the Sea-Do parking lot, Guy told her he thought it would be best if he went home alone. He said it just didn't seem like Marcie was really ready to move on. Marcie

resented that because she was so close to closing with Guy, but she really wasn't in the mood to work right now anyway.

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When she got home, Marcie took all her clothes off and got her computer and got in bed went straight to Dawdle.com, before even checking her Sayokay account. She was hoping for the neon blink of a waiting d*chat. She closed her eyes while the page loaded and then opened them slowly. Sure enough, the neon blink greeted her. She clicked the icon and up popped a message from Mitch.

Would you want to meet up sometime this week?

Marcie sat up, her face warming.

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Thursday came quickly and Marcie overslept her alarm, so her plan to shave her legs and armpits, blow dry her hair, and apply makeup was thwarted. She settled for the slightly mussed look that she knew she only really pulled off when she'd put in hours of prep work. Todd used to comment on her greasy hair, saying it was good he liked the grunge look. At the time, it hadn't bothered her. Todd had a somewhat sunken chest, a rapidly receding hairline, and a soft, comfortable stomach; she felt confident she was the better-looking one of the pair. Now, though, she found herself constantly looking at herself in mirrors, in the chrome walls of You-Biquitous, in the camera of her phone. On dates, she felt pressure to be desirable and likeable. Her confidence, which had wavered after the cheating incident, was falling as the marketing dates consumed her life. Mitch was the bright spot in her days now, and she was nervous to meet him in person. She'd stopped thinking of him as a job and had entered into what Gerard called the "No-No

Danger Zone,” wherein his employees stopped being effective guerilla marketers because they failed to remain sufficiently emotionally detached from targets.

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Mitch had a deep dimple on his left cheek. His eyes were a bright brown and their whites were so white Marcie leaned in to check if they had veins. He laughed and nodded at the waiter who came swiftly over to take their order. He then nodded at Marcie, with a panache she’d not expected from a man she considered an introverted accountant.

“I’ll have the Sea-Do special roll,” Marcie said, “light on the panko, and another Chardonnay.”

“Have you had that before?” Mitch said as the waiter shifted over to take his order.

“Yes, hundreds of times; it’s so good. I recommend.”

Mitch narrowed his eyes and said, “Same.”

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They spent several hours at their table, split two bottles of wine, and had two rounds of dessert. Every time Marcie made Mitch laugh, she felt a rush of pride and power akin to how she felt when she used to earn high marks in school. When their server brought the check, Mitch and Marie both lunged for it, each of them grabbing an end. With her free hand, Marcie dug around in her bag for her company card. To pay for this meal on her company card would violate several best practices, but Marcie knew she could find a way to explain the cost to Gerard whenever he asked. She couldn’t afford to take this one on her own, but she didn’t want Mitch to have to pay either. He seemed just as determined to treat her, and refused to even entertain the idea of splitting the check. He

claimed to have eaten more sushi, but Marcie had her doubts, and she was certain she'd drunk more wine. He threatened to make a scene if she tried to pay and so she surrendered. She'd not treated him like a normal target for months, so she saw no reason to start now.

Mitch paid the bill mechanically, finished his water, and invited Marcie home. She happily agreed, wondering if this was perhaps the first of many dates, the beginning of something good.

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His apartment was sparse and streamlined. He had only sparkling water and beer in his fridge, and they each had a couple of waters. They talked and watched reruns and eventually Marcie fell asleep on the couch, her legs resting on Mitch's lap, his hand stroking her knee absently.

She woke in the middle of the night with a headache and a dry mouth. The faucet in the kitchen sink didn't work, so she quietly gulped a sparkling water. It went down stinging and had an acidic aftertaste. She was cold and Mitch's bedroom door was cracked. Her plan was to grab a blanket and go back to the couch, but she couldn't find one, so she got into bed beside Mitch. Even his bed just had a thin sheet. Still cold, she rolled over to try to harvest warmth from Mitch's sleeping body, but even he wasn't warm.

Her eyes adjusted to the room's darkness slowly, and little by little she realized the truth: his bright eyes were open, his head was perfectly centered on his thin, rubbery pillow, eking out the steady current that flowed from the wall to the charging pad to his

brain, the whirl of his breath was inhumanly steady and she wondered how she'd missed that before.

Sickened, Marcie crawled from the bed. Her purse and coat were still on the couch. She gathered them and ran, as if he were chasing her, from his apartment and out into the predawn air. She was several miles from home, and even farther from the restaurant where her car was parked. She thought of calling an iDrive, but her phone was dying and she didn't want whatever company Mitch was made for to see her whereabouts, which she had set to automatically post on her D*awdle account, for safety reasons. She walked in the direction of home, feeling lost and alone, but knowing that the days in which a person could actually be lost and alone had been over for some time now, and that the truth was she would never be alone again.