

NO SUCH THING  
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CHARACTERS

STEVEN

ALAN

SETTING

A quiet corner of a convention center. Early to mid-2000s.

*(STEVEN and ALAN sit in typical hotel convention center furniture, huddled over the corner of a small coffee table. Their laptop cases or briefcases lean casually against the furniture. Both men are dressed in slacks, jackets, and ties.)*

ALAN

Honestly? I thought it was great.

STEVEN

Yeah?

ALAN

I thought it was probably one of the best things you've ever written. I'm so proud of you. Thank you for sending it to me.

STEVEN

*(letting his grin overtake him)*

That's—That's great. I'm glad you liked it.

ALAN

Confidentially: you may have just saved my job for me.

STEVEN

Nnahn. I was glad to do it. Did your boss say—What did your boss think?

*(Beat.)*

ALAN

Bob...well. Bob liked it, too. Except. The pseudonym. The pseudonym is a problem for us.

STEVEN

It is?

ALAN

That's our policy. You didn't know that, I take it.

STEVEN

No. It's not—when you asked me to submit, you didn't mention—

ALAN

Yeah, we don't do anonymous either.

STEVEN

So...he's—what? He's not going to print it?

ALAN

Oh, no. He loved it, yeah. He's gung ho to publish it in the next issue. But the pseudonym.

*(Beat. ALAN fixes STEVEN with an expectant stare.)*

STEVEN

You told him it was a pseudonym?

*(Pause.)*

ALAN

He would've found out about it sooner or later. And it's your style. I mean, it couldn't get any more apparent that it's your style of writing. But this is cleaner, you know? It's almost a distillation of your style. Like I said, this is some of the best stuff you've ever written. I couldn't wait to show it to Bob.

STEVEN

Did you...Did you...?

ALAN

Um—yeah. That's why I wanted to find you before the conference ended tomorrow, and you left to go back—

STEVEN

*(becoming nervous)*

Oh, God—is he going to—

ALAN

Let me tell you how we can make this work.

STEVEN

I can't come out on this piece, Alan. I can't. I live in—it's Utah. We've got a new Dean at the college, and he's very nice and very supportive and very Mormon.

ALAN

—I know—

STEVEN

And that would be the end of the job for me. They'd fire me in a heartbeat. I can't come out on this piece.

ALAN

*(nodding)*

The Catholics are in the same boat. We're all being drug back into the dark ages. But in all honesty, Bob has a very small subscription base outside of California. And frankly, we need your piece. This is far and above what we normally get from our—

STEVEN

But he can't run that essay without my pseudonym. It'll kill me. You've got to tell him that. It would take away everything.

ALAN

Let me tell you what—

STEVEN

There's no negotiating here! I'm dead serious!

ALAN

Steven. I showed Bob those other things you wrote on the internet. Under the pseudonym. And he loved those, too. He's really impressed with you. He said you could freelance for the rest of your life with absolutely no problem.

STEVE

I don't want to freelance; I want to teach.

ALAN

I know. And let me tellya, Bob was surprised to find out you teach PoliSci in Utah, because you write like someone from—

STEVEN

You told him where I work?

ALAN

Not the exact college.

STEVEN

How much did you out me?

ALAN

Bob said he'd pitch you for other jobs with some of his friends around L.A. That's how much he was impressed. This could lead to something big for you. For all of us. He's asking me how many other friends I have hidden away who can write like you.

STEVEN

I know this is supposed to be a compliment...But if I lose my job because he prints my real name—I can't afford to live in L.A. on freelance work. I've got great benefits in Utah. I like my teaching job!

ALAN

Look, it's a good essay. It's a great essay. You make a million points in it that are smart—God are they smart. Every gay man in the country should be reading this piece. Do you realize how easily you could become a leading national figure for us?

STEVEN

But then all it takes is one Google search or Lexis-Nexis and I'm out of work.

*(Exhale.)*

Forget it, Alan. I'll...I don't know. I'm sorry—I'll submit it somewhere else.

ALAN

Well, Steven...I mean, Jesus. Are you really going to jerk me around like this? You send me your stuff, and I get my boss all excited about it, and now you just decide to take it back?

STEVEN

I'm sorry, but—

ALAN

I mean this isn't about your job alone. We're talking about my job too, here.

STEVEN

Tell Bob I got cold feet. Tell him—

ALAN

Why did you even bother? I mean, this is obviously not about “publish or perish.” If you wanted to just be a teacher, why did you write this piece in the first place? Or anything else for that matter?

STEVEN

Because you asked me to. And I believe in what I wrote. I think it's a good essay.

ALAN

So do I. Don't get me wrong. But you don't think anyone else should know that you wrote it?

STEVEN

It doesn't matter that people know it's me. What matters is the thought.

ALAN

To be perfectly honest, Steven, I think what matters is that you're willing to let these Mormon jerks terrorize you into a corner.

STEVEN

Alan, Dean Burton is not a jerk. He's been very supportive of me and even got me a per diem for my meals here at the conference this year. The last thing that—

ALAN

Because he thought you were straight, buddy. You got a heterosexual per diem. Not a gay one.

STEVEN

They don't make gay per diems.

ALAN

Not in Utah, they don't.

STEVEN

And they don't make heterosexual ones—

ALAN

Don't even kid yourself. Don't even kid yourself.

STEVEN

Burton is a good man. And he supports—

ALAN

Who thinks you're straight.

STEVEN

He supports me—do you know how hard it was for me to get to this conference last year? Do you—do you know how hard I had to fight to get administrative leave from my classes? Burton came on in July and practically handed me the—the travel docs, the per diem—

ALAN

Because he thought you were straight. And this, if I'm not mistaken, is the one of the points in your essay. But in real life, you let him push you into the closet rather than—

STEVEN

Okay, maybe you're right! And if I worked at UCLA or UNLV or U. of A., I could get a—a gay per diem. But I work in the heart of the Mormon Territory—

ALAN

—Good ole Hetero Happy Valley—

STEVEN

—And guess what: I work with people I like. This is a good job for me. And the minute Burton finds out I'm gay, I'll get the axe. Alan, I've got a mortgage.

ALAN

Thank God the man is so supportive.

STEVEN

Okay, this is your cause. It's—it's not mine. I don't wrap myself in the rainbow and do the parade. You know that. You've always known—

ALAN

No, you'd rather pretend to be something you're not so you can get a per diem...A fucking per diem, Steven! Think about it. It's like prostituting yourself for dinner. Wouldn't you rather set an example? I'm sure there must be some little gay Mormon boy in your class needing a role model. Am I right?

STEVEN

Not everyone is you, Alan. Some gay men prefer to be a little more discreet.

ALAN

—give me a break—

STEVEN

My students and co-workers don't have to know everything about me; and here's a little news flash: Having a private life works out just fine for me.

ALAN

You're not acting like a private person when you write essays like the one you just sent me. Don't you think it's time you finally had the courage of your convictions?

*(Pause.)*

STEVEN

Goodbye. Maybe I'll see you here next year.

ALAN

Come on, Steven. Stop running away from this. If you asked everybody at this conference what they thought about a smart, articulate, gay political science teacher—

STEVEN

—Would you keep your voice down?—

ALAN

—who in this day and age—under this presidential administration!—chooses of his own free will to stay hidden in the closet; most of them would say there's no such thing. But this is what you're doing because someone at a Mormon college is promising you a free lunch.

STEVEN

Well maybe you shouldn't have asked me to write something in the first place. You know? Maybe you should have begged an essay from some other ex-boyfriend; some other over-the-top drag queen who needs to be the center of attention at your fabulous L.A. gay soirees. I'll just take my essay and submit it to a magazine that doesn't have your self-righteous mission to out every gay man in America.

ALAN

Well, you can't.

*(Beat.)*

STEVEN

I'll submit it wherever I want.

ALAN

We're running the essay. It's going to print on Monday.

*(Pause.)*

That's why I wanted to talk with you before the conference ended.

STEVEN

I didn't—You can't print it without a contract. I haven't signed anything. I'll sue you so fast, your goddamn head will spin off.

ALAN

We're not running it as a feature. It's in our op/ed section.

STEVEN

...what?

ALAN

All submissions to our op/ed department immediately become property of the magazine.

STEVEN

You sonofabitch, I sent it to you as a feature.

ALAN

I'm not the features editor, you know that.

STEVEN

But you're supposed to be my friend.

ALAN

And I got Bob to cut you a check for the essay. We don't normally pay for the op/ed.

STEVEN

Alan, please—I am begging you: Tell Bob this was all a big mistake. Tell him that it's not an op/ed—

ALAN

It's too good an essay for us not to run it. I personally know men who have been waiting for an essay like this. This is going to make a difference.

*(Beat. STEVEN is crushed, lost, adrift.)*

And you're not the only one with a mortgage, Steven.

STEVEN

You asked me to send you—you said you were. . . Why are you doing this to me?

ALAN

Jesus, buddy. In the big picture, this has very little to do with you.

*(STEVEN throws a right punch and knocks ALAN to the floor.  
STEVEN towers over him.)*

BLACKOUT