

The Last Word

by
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CHARACTER LIST:

Emily Downing: Female; early 30s; blind date
Rob Forrester: Male; early 30s; blind date

SETTING:

Restaurant

SCENE ONE.

Afternoon. A corner area of a casual restaurant with a table set for two.

A woman, EMILY DOWNING, early-30's, fidgets uncomfortably between sips of iced tea.

A man, ROB FORRESTER, mid-30's, enters, glances nervously around, then approaches her.

ROB

Are you the SWF?

EMILY

I beg your pardon.

ROB

SWF - the single white female.

EMILY

(nervously smiling)

Oh. Yeah. And you must be the SWM.

ROB

That's me.

(then looking her over)

So ... ah ... attractive, history/philosophy major, spontaneous and adventurous, full of fun and laughter.

EMILY

(slightly embarrassed)

I didn't know I'd be quoted.

ROB

It is your description of yourself, after all. Who you are.

EMILY

Yeah ... well ... I'm starting to reconsider the spontaneous and adventurous part.

Rob extends his hand.

ROB

Rob Forrester.

Emily shakes hands with him.

EMILY

Emily Downing.

ROB

May I sit down?

EMILY

We've come this far.

ROB

And join you for lunch?

EMILY

Dutch treat.

ROB

Of course.

He sits down opposite her.

EMILY

Have you ever done this before?

ROB

Eat lunch?

EMILY

(smiling)

No. Respond to a personal.

ROB

No. You?

No. EMILY

They pick up menus and busy themselves by self-consciously studying them.

Ah ... if I remember correctly, you're a writer? EMILY

Yes. ROB

What type of things do you write? EMILY

She takes a sip of tea.

Obituaries. ROB

She chokes on her tea, spraying a mouthful back into her glass.

You find that unappealing? ROB

No, no. A little surprising is all. Writing about people who just died, you know. EMILY

I don't really write about dead people. I mean, strictly speaking. I write obits about living people. Before they die. ROB

You mean like famous people? The way they have obits prepared in advance for Bill Clinton or Paris Hilton? In case they buy it over the weekend? EMILY

No. Not celebrities necessarily. I write obituaries for anyone. I could write one for you, for instance. ROB

EMILY

I don't think so.

ROB

Why not? You could consider it ... well ... almost like an exit strategy.

EMILY

A little too morbid.

ROB

Very sensible, really. If you leave it to your family, they'll put something in the paper that says you were a devoted wife or a loving mother or a friend to everyone you met. Nothing unique there. It could be anyone - Eleanor Roosevelt or Lady Macbeth. We'd never know who you really were. That you were spontaneous and adventurous.

EMILY

Let's forget the spontaneous and adventurous.

ROB

Okay, then full of fun and laughter.

EMILY

How many of these have you done?

ROB

Well ... actually ... you'd be my first. Why? Interested?

EMILY

No.

ROB

It's only \$250 for 500 words.

She stares at him dubiously.

ROB

Fifty cents a word. Not bad for something that can stand the test of time. You'll have a say-so as to how you'll be remembered. You'll have the last word.

EMILY

Are you trying to make a sale here?

ROB

(shrugs)

Only if you're interested.

EMILY

Well, I'm not.

(beat)

Sorry. I don't mean to be critical. Maybe it's just that I don't have a degree in journalism.

ROB

I don't either.

She stares at him for a moment, then pulls a folded piece of paper out of her purse and glances at it.

EMILY

But your personal says you do have a degree in journalism.

ROB

(uncomfortable)

Oh, that. Ah ... I can explain.

EMILY

I can, too. You lied.

She reads from his personal.

EMILY

"Enjoy long walks along the countryside, keeping company with the breeze and the meadowlarks." How about that? Are you a nature boy?

ROB

I hate the outdoors.

EMILY

"Confident and self-assured, I do the New York Times crossword puzzle in ink."

ROB

Not even in pencil.

She tosses his classified on the table.

EMILY

Is there anything true here?

ROB

The WSM part.

EMILY

So what was your plan? Lure me over to your apartment and then have your way with me?

ROB

Good, Lord, no!

EMILY

Then what the hell were you doing?

ROB

Okay, so I thought the personals would be a good source of clients. They're sort of alike, really - obits and personals. Both concerned with presenting people in the best possible light. I figured a person writing a personal might also be interested in a good obituary. Especially someone with a degree in history and philosophy.

EMILY

You want to write my obituary. I'll tell you what. I want to write your personal. It'll even be free - Single white con artist, manipulative, crass and a compulsive liar, seeks naive, vulnerable female to give him \$250 for stupid writing scheme.

ROB

I really didn't intend --

EMILY

In fact, I'll throw in a free obituary as well - While prospecting for business at a local restaurant, Mr. Forrester was stabbed to death with a salad fork.

ROB

Actually ... that wasn't the only reason I tried a personal ad. I was hoping to meet someone.

EMILY

You're kidding.

ROB

No.

EMILY

Just a thought - next time, you might consider not lying through your teeth.

ROB

People wear makeup, have photos retouched, hedge on their resumes, wear clothes that push up this or flatten down that. Deception for the sake of appearance. How's that so different?

She rises to leave.

EMILY

Goodbye, Mr. Forrester. It's been interesting.

He also rises.

ROB

Please don't go. Please.

(beat)

Let me tell you what an honest personal would have said - Single white male, who's somewhat insecure, bookish, not always well-groomed and not very confident around women, seeks single white female who can appreciate him in spite of these obvious inadequacies. Is that what you recommend for improving my social life?

EMILY

All right, so maybe you have to do a little whitewashing. But to use it as a way to peddle obituaries ...

ROB

Okay, maybe the obit thing was a mistake. But when I get nervous, I start yammering. I guess I thought it was something to talk about. A conversation piece. I'm an idiot.

(beat)

But have you ever read a good obituary? I mean, a really good one. It's like a magical snow globe ... capturing the true essence of a person ... what makes them unique ...

so when they die, they won't just disappear ... lost forever.

(beat)

Please stay.

EMILY

Why should I?

ROB

To prove that you are a little impulsive and adventurous, and weren't just making it all up. Like I did.

EMILY

(slightly smiling)

That was nicely done.

She slowly eases back down in her chair, and he joins her.

EMILY

Only till I finish my tea.

She takes a sip.

EMILY

If you've never sold an obituary, have you ever actually written one?

ROB

Yes.

EMILY

What? For a friend? A family member?

ROB

Ah ... I should warn you. I'm a bit eccentric.

EMILY

Imagine that.

She takes another drink of tea.

EMILY

I suppose I might be considered a little eccentric myself.

ROB

The only obituaries I've written have been for my pets.

EMILY

Dog? Cat?

ROB

The last one was for a rat.

EMILY

You had a rat?

ROB

Afraid so.

EMILY

Still?

ROB

Yeah, a white one, with a black streak running along her back.

EMILY

A Husky Hooded?

ROB

Ah ... yeah. A Husky Hooded. How'd you know that?

EMILY

I have a rat. A Husky Hooded.

ROB

I ... ah ... don't recall seeing that in your personal.

EMILY

Yeah ... well ... I was paying by the word.

ROB

So how about lunch?

EMILY

I don't know. I'm not sure how much I want to encourage this arrangement.

ROB

Nothing fancy. Maybe something light. An appetizer. Something special to celebrate our mutual affinity for pet vermin.

EMILY

What did you have in mind?

ROB

The cheese platter.

EMILY

(slowly smiling)

I suppose it's the least we can do.

CURTAIN