

The Last Survey

Nicholas O'Brien — Script Sample

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SCENE 10 [waitingDrink_v3]

I was trying to savor my complimentary drink, a facile attempt to ice my nerves.

1. My twitching knees belied any sense of composure.
2. Even in the ample air condition, sweat beaded at my temples.

I had met Victor Ferreira on two separate occasions. Once was at the aforementioned balcony celebration. ↵

But our first encounter was at a geoscience conference hosted by The University of Melbourne sponsored by BHP. It was atypical for senior executives to attend academic gatherings, but he was on a personal recruitment mission. ↵

He approached me after I had delivered a paper on alloy yield degeneration using current extraction methods. We walked through Carlton Gardens and had dinner staring up at the spot lit Parliament Building. ↵

After a barrage of questions about my research, he offered me a consultancy with a retainer that made me blush. I tried to be coy and said that I'd have to think it over, but I found myself accepting the position even before he ordered desert. ↵

I rarely get nervous in these scenarios, but for some reason the severity of my concerns have got me on edge more than usual. ↵

Earlier in my career I used to take beta-blockers on a semi-regular basis before teaching lecture-hall seminars. The mere thought of hundreds of freshman staring at me with drowsy, hopeful, and naïve eyes can dampen my palms. ↵

Time and experience have given way to a generally calmer disposition and I wouldn't say that I'm a particularly nervous person. ↵

But I am a scientist after all. We're not a naturally charismatic bunch. ↵

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SCENE 11 [victorDescribe_v3]

It seemed as though more than enough time had passed for word of my arrival to reach Victor's inner chamber. I supposed I should expect the natural delays that plague operations of this magnitude. ↵

I've come to expect Victor's attention being pulled in a million directions at once. It comes with the territory of the 19th floor. ↵

You can't be up here if you aren't juggling several meetings simultaneously; writing an email while talking on speaker phone; reading a report while watching the stock ticker; signing off on public memos while placating shareholders. ↵

Victor—like most executives I've met—was a quarry of cognitive dissonance; you could smell the miasma of doublespeak seeping out his pores. ↵

Like most men in power, he could talk at length without really saying anything; hurling countless syllables and sentences at your general direction without taking a position one way or another about any particular topic. ↵

The breeze of words that wafted from his mouth could be interpreted as chilly or balmy; it would merely depend on your temperature and temperament. ↵

His talk was engineered to be that way; manufactured out of a careful verbal lexicon of convincing neutrality. For Victor, language was a mirror: a shield of glass that could tilt this way and that to re-present the best vantage of yourself back to you. ↵

But somehow, every time I hear him speak I find myself forming an opinion. I'd instinctively react, formulating responses and criticisms, assuming I was in the midst of a conversation. ↵

It's only much later, only after trying to digest his shards of discourse that you realize—as I do time and time again—you were mostly talking to yourself. ↵

In truth, he was more magician than executive. ↵

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SCENE 12 [doorwayEnter_continue_v3]

The door to the waiting room squealed on its hinge. The original assistant who greeted me at the elevator asked me to follow her to Sr. Ferreira's office. ↵

She didn't wait for my confirming reply and started down the hallway before I had fully gathered my binder-filled briefcase. The swish of my linen pants and the clatter of the assistant's heels reverberated in the vacuum of the hallway. ↵

I was lead to a massive set of double doors flanked by identical receptionist desks. My guide stood to the side and gestured for me to advance through the midnight stained teak doors. ↵

My hour had come...

CHOICE — SAVED [statusCheck] — enum

CHOICE — SAVED [knockedObj] — BOOL

1. I cleared my throat and walked in... [bad++] [false]
2. I knocked lightly... [good++] [true]

The weight of the wood — presumably sourced from an Amazonian plantation — felt almost as heavy as the burden of my binders. I felt the need to sit down quickly, given the effort I exerted by crossing the executive threshold. ↵

But I was stymied by a brusque command to halt any further entry. I scanned the room in search of the owner of my hostile welcome but Victor was not to be found. ↵

I realized the shout came from behind a cracked door that must've led to an even more private room: the executive bathroom. I heard sharp turn of a facet handle and water splash into a hidden basin. ↵

Almost immediately the running water ceased and Victor's office became a cavern of stillness. He threw open the door with a scowl and without speaking gestured for me to take a seat. ↵

...leaning into the door as its hinges creaked slightly. A distant voice from inside barked for me to wait a moment. I stood in the doorway facing the floor. ↵

I refused to merely retreat back into the glass-encased limbo I had just escaped from, so I sheepishly turned my gaze downward, making clear my kowtow gesture of apology. ↵

I projected my humility into every corner, squeezing the door handle as tightly as I could, imagining the force of my clenching fist directly correlated to the strength of my modesty. ↵

A door from within snapped shut, and Victor beckoned I enter. ↵

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SCENE 13 [victorIntro_v3]

Attempting to regain some composure, I shuffled into the room and took the most immediate seat I could find. Victor stood. He loomed there like the stratocumulus formations I saw in the Malacca Strait; a high pillar, ready to rain down on me. ↵

His face was the picture of stress: deeply lined with worries, under-colored from poor eating habits, ruddy from overactive socializing. ↵

Yet he held himself in a way that was more than mere confidence. His countenance was a challenge, an invitation to best wits, a barrier of power. ↵

He was an offspring of Prometheus, a bringer of fire, the trickster/sculptor who forged civilization as an act of defiance. ↵

But his physical person belied these projections, for his stature wasn't what you would call imposing. Victor was the model of executive physique: bland. He wasn't tall or short, wide or trim, barrel chested or sunken. ↵

He was a man in-between: perhaps at one point more chiseled, but not fully in a state of decline. A passing glance would say that he was handsome, but it was more inoffensive than picturesque. ↵

But that was Victor: an anonymous silhouette encased in an unmistakable presence. ↵

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SCENE 14 [bagLap_victorSpeaks_v3]

My bag rested on my lap like a corpse. I folded my hands over the damning contents inside, as if preparing for the final sermon of my research before sending it into the great beyond. ↵

This is how I imagined I must've looked, because I took in a deep breath to launch into a speech when Victor interjected: ↵

IF knockedObj is TRUE

VICTOR

-Keep it short.

IF knockedObj is FALSE

VICTOR

-Tell me everything