

Matador

by
Bruce Dellis

Bruce Dellis
1857 E. Tulane Dr.
Tempe, AZ 85283
(480)831-1196
bruce.dellis@cox.net

MATADOR

INT. OFFICE - ELEVATOR -- DAY

A new office employee, JEFF, and his supervisor, DAVE, are in the elevator on their way to the quarterly staff meeting.

JEFF

So, am I expected to say anything, or do I just listen?

DAVE

Since it's your first staff meeting, you you should keep a low profile. Unless the big guy asks you a question, don't say anything at all.

JEFF

What's he like?

DAVE

Come on, Jeff. You went over this in orientation -- nobody talks about the big guy.

JEFF

Yeah, I know -- but why not? I've been here a week already and nobody has so much as mentioned his name.

Dave is silent.

JEFF (CONT'D)

It's not like I'm talking about HIM here, Dave. I'm just asking you about the RULE.

Dave shushes Jeff as the elevator doors open. As they step out, they are immediately greeted by a craggy secretary, GLADYS, wearing a Mexican serape. She speaks in a halfhearted/bored manner -- as if she's gone through this routine a million times.

GLADYS

Buenos dias, muchachos...

She hands them each a colorful sombrero. Jeff is surprised by this gesture, but Dave nonchalantly takes a sombrero -- he knows the drill.

DAVE

Morning, Gladys...

Confused, Jeff tentatively takes his sombrero. Dave and Jeff place the spangly hats on their heads as they continue to the meeting.

JEFF

(to Dave)

What the hell are these?

DAVE

They're sombreros, Jeff.

JEFF

Yeah, I know they're sombreros. Why are we wearing them?

DAVE

Ah, jeez -- you've gotta stop asking all these questions. I know exactly how you feel -- believe me. But just go with it, Jeff. It'll be a lot easier if you just treat this like any other staff meeting.

INT. OFFICE - BOARDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Dave and Jeff enter the boardroom. Jeff is stunned to see several management-types sitting around the table -- all wearing sombreros. There is a small Mexican mariachi combo in the corner.

Jeff and Dave take their seats. Across the table, one man, STU, seems to be showing off his new spangly Spanish jacket, which is being admired by a couple of other guys. Dave notices him and shakes his head derisively.

DAVE

Brown-noser.

With everyone seated comfortably around the table, the room becomes hushed. Suddenly, trumpets begin playing a "March of the Toreador"-type of tune.

A door is thrown open, and in steps DENNIS, the CEO of the corporation. He's dressed in full matador regalia, and regards the group of cheering staff with the superior air of a matador.

DENNIS

Buenos dias, my friends -- I trust that you are all well rested.

The group responds enthusiastically.

GROUP

Ole!

DENNIS

Before I go any further, I have some unfinished business. As you will undoubtedly recall, I posted a memo in which I challenged each regional

(MORE)

DENNIS (CONT'D)

group to boost their sales. And as a way of "sweetening the pot"...

Dennis gives a wry smile. The group chuckles and nods knowingly. Jeff is confused.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

I proposed that the supervisor who oversaw the highest quarterly earnings increase would win not only my respect -- but the hand of my lovely daughter, Catherine.

Lovely Spanish music plays (from the band) as Dennis turns toward the door and holds out his hand in a gentlemanly manner. CATHERINE, an attractive young woman enters the room and takes Dennis' hand. The crowd whistles and shouts OLE! It is clear that Catherine knows this whole thing is crazy, but seems to just be playing along for Dennis' benefit.

Jeff is shocked to see this happening. He looks to Dave for an explanation.

DAVE

(quietly)

Don't worry -- that's just his secretary. He doesn't have a daughter. Just go with it.

DENNIS

I know you're all waiting with baited breath, so I'll not keep you in suspense any longer. The winner of the quarterly sales challenge -- and the person who will be privileged to become my son-in-law -- is...

Everyone looks a little nervous -- especially Dave.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

...Dave Grelling, southeast region!

Dave is not pleased, but makes a good show of it as the other staff people (who look relieved) slap Dave on the back and shout OLE! Dave rises.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

You are indeed worthy, my boy. Come claim your trophy.

DAVE

Thank you, Dennis. Actually, nothing would make me happier, but...

DENNIS

There's no need for modesty, Dave. Your worthiness speaks for you.

DAVE

(thinking quickly)
Worthiness -- yeah. See, that's the problem here, Dennis. If I was truly worthy, I'd be right up there claiming my new bride. But the thing of it is, I'm not worthy. Not at all.

DENNIS

Not worthy?

DAVE

No, Dennis, I'm...I...Just last night, I defiled myself with a prostitute and brought shame to my family. And I'm worried about how that might reflect on your daughter. And you. So I respectfully...you know...

DENNIS

A prostitute?

(beat)

Perhaps you can commit castration and bring honor back to your family name.

DAVE

I'll take that into consideration. That's very thoughtful.

Dennis unsheathes a long sword from his belt.

DENNIS

Can I offer you my sword to aid you in this purgation?

DAVE

No, thanks, Dennis. I think I've got a staple remover back at my desk. It's a generous offer, though.

Dennis is mildly disappointed as he re-sheathes his sword.

DENNIS

Very well. So then my daughter remains unwed --

(brightening)

But only until the next quarter when we run the new numbers!

The crowd responds enthusiastically ("OLE!") as Catherine exits the room. On her way out she mouths the words, "Nice job" to Dave in a way that is unseen by Dennis. The group also seems impressed with how Dave got out of that jam.

Jeff is somewhat amused by all of this, and he's starting to loosen up a bit. Dennis puts his sword back in his belt.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

So now comes the time to discuss a topic near and dear to every heart in this room -- the changes to the "designated smoking area" policy.

Jeff sees this as a cue.

JEFF

OLE!

But Jeff is mortified to discover that he was the only one to cheer, and all eyes look at him in acknowledgment of his faux-pas. Dennis eyes Jeff warily.

DENNIS

And who is this? I see a new face.

Dave turns quickly to Jeff and whispers to him.

DAVE

Whatever you do -- don't say anything.

Dave quickly rises.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Ah. Yes, Dennis. This is Jeff Penn. He's been in my group for about two weeks. He comes to us from...

DENNIS

Can he not speak?

DAVE

What?

DENNIS

He appears to be a big boy. Let him speak for himself, this "Jeff."

Dave is out of excuses. As he sits back down, he whispers again to Jeff.

DAVE

Try not to be "honorable" or "worthy," whatever you do.

Jeff rises.

DENNIS

So, Jeff. How do you like working here with us?

JEFF

Well, I feel it's a great organization to --

DENNIS

Don't be shy. Let's have a look at you.

Jeff is confused. Dennis pats the table.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

Here. Up on the table. So we can all hear the feelings you share with us.

Jeff looks to Dave for guidance, but Dave's look seems to say that he can no longer protect him. Jeff cautiously climbs atop the table.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

Can you dance, Jeff?

JEFF

Dance? Uh, no...

Based on the response from the group, this is the wrong answer. Dave quickly jumps to Jeff's defense.

DAVE

(nervous laughter)

He's just being modest, Dennis. Of course he can dance --

DENNIS

(to Jeff, angrily) Have you not read the employee handbook?

DAVE

Of course he has, Dennis. He keeps a copy with him at all times...

Dave tosses a book to Jeff. The book is Hemingway's "Death in the Afternoon." Jeff is surprised, but makes his best effort to go along.

JEFF

Sure -- I'm very familiar with the handbook. I think it was required reading in Freshman English.

DENNIS

And that's as it should be. So the question remains: Can you dance, Jeff? As you know, a dance can mean many things. Though in this case, it means physically dancing around like a dancer.

JEFF

Well...I'm not going to dance on this table now, sir, if that's what you're getting at.

Dennis is incensed. The group begins to sense that things are getting a little out of hand.

DENNIS

The impudence! Who are you to come in here and defy tradition. Have you no respect for the "Corrida de Toros?" Does the "Corrida de Toros" hold NOTHING for you?!

JEFF

I don't know. Is that bullfighting?

DENNIS

Yes, of course!

JEFF

Well, honestly? I've never been a big fan. Seems kind of cruel for the bull.

DENNIS

"Cruel for the BULL?"

JEFF

Or maybe I just can't appreciate it because it seems so outdated to me...

Dennis is furious, but restrained. As he speaks, he slowly climbs on the table to confront Jeff face-to-face.

DENNIS

Outdated?! You mean to stand there before me and demean my ancestors? You cry for the bulls - yet I see no tears shed for my grandfather.

The mariachis begin playing a somber tune to set the mood.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

My grandfather was kicked savagely in the head by a bull, which left a deep indentation in his head. And when he'd stand out in the rain - which he did often - this indentation would fill with rainwater and the children of his neighborhood would gather excitedly to drink from this bony reservoir. And still your sympathy lies with the bull?!

The mariachis end on a poignant note.

JEFF

(intimidated)

Well...

DENNIS

And what of my father?

The mariachis, caught off-guard, quickly begin playing again.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

On the morning following his 18th birthday - after a long night of celebration and revelry - my father rose before dawn to milk the cow and provide nourishment for me and my brother. But my father had not quite shaken the previous evening's cobwebs from his tired mind and he set up his stool in the wrong stall. Now, milking a bull is an almost insurmountable task - but my father was a man of a single mind. I don't know if you've spent any time around animals - particularly angry, non-lactating male animals - but suffice it to say a bull is a callous and unforgiving beast. The animal turned and gored my father through the shoulder -- the horn continuing into a deeply diseased pig behind him. The risk of a fatal infection from this diseased pig was so great that my father sawed his own arm off with a length of barbed wire. An arm that to this day is a constant reminder of a savage unwillingness to forgive and forget.

Dennis points to an arm which has been carefully hung on the wall -- like a piece of art -- at the far end of the room. Jeff looks carefully at it. It is obviously a plastic arm from a female mannequin. The mariachis end their tune.

JEFF

Wait -- that's your father's arm?

DENNIS

Yes, torn from his torso so many years ago.

JEFF

THAT's the same arm?

DENNIS

The same. What are you suggesting, Jeff? That such a slender arm is an indication that my father was a "delicate" man?

Dave stands to offer an excuse on Jeff's behalf.

DAVE

Dennis, I'm sure that Jeff didn't mean --

Dennis -- while still fixing his intimidating gaze on Jeff -- swiftly pulls the gleaming sword from his belt once more and levels it at Dave to silence him.

DAVE (CONT'D)

(quickly sitting back down)

I'll let Jeff answer that.

JEFF

No -- no. It just looks...so well-preserved.

DENNIS

You've made yourself clear, though you do not say aloud what you truly feel. Urinating on the graves of my ancestors is not part of the corporate mission statement here. If you were an honorable man I would slice you to ribbons. But I'll not dull my blade on your insolent bones. You have no place here, Jeff. We'll have to let you go.

JEFF

Wait -- you're firing me because I don't like bullfighting?!

DENNIS

Not just that! You also won't dance on the table. And you make insinuations about my father's slender arm.

Dennis gazes sadly at the arm on the wall.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

And when I think of the last thing that was held in this delicate hand, it turns my blood red...Red with anger and vengeance! Now DANCE!

Jeff has had enough.

JEFF

NO! I will not dance! This is all very overwhelming to me! Look at this: You make your employees wear sombreros; You put a mariachi band on the payroll; You're pimping your secretary to the Salesman of the Month; and you justify the whole

(MORE)

JEFF (CONT'D)
 thing by nailing a ridiculous
 mannequin's arm to the wall! No, sir --
 I will not dance!

Dennis is clearly furious, and a few employees (including Dave) jump up in case they need to restrain him. But Dennis manages to hold back. His anger subsides and he speaks calmly to Jeff.

DENNIS
 So, there it is. It's out. You say
 what you're feeling, even though I
 hold your employment -- and a sword.
 Perhaps I've misjudged you, Jeff. I
 mistook you for a coward. But it
 takes a great deal of courage to
 stand before me and say these things.
 I now see you in a different light.

Jeff, who was looking quite shaken, now seems to relax a little.

DENNIS (CONT'D)
 These words you say -- though hurtful --
 have earned you a measure of respect.

Dave suddenly looks pretty nervous about hearing those words.

DENNIS (CONT'D)
 You have proven yourself, Jeff, to
 be an honorable and worthy man.

Jeff looks happily relieved. Dave and the other employees are horrified -- they know what it means when Dennis deems them "worthy."

They quickly jump up on the table just as Dennis lunges with his sword at a terrified Jeff. Dave and the others manage to push the sword away and grab Dennis as he tackles Jeff on the table.

The mariachis quickly and nervously begin playing as a melee ensues with yelling and crashing that echoes on, as we --

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. OFFICE - ELEVATOR -- THE NEXT DAY

Dave and Jeff are in the elevator again the next day. Jeff now wears a neck brace.

JEFF
 His brother?

DAVE

Yup. Apparently, his brother has been trying to get him committed for years. I guess he always had a bad feeling that Dennis would go off the deep end and hurt somebody -- like yesterday. And now the brother's gonna step in and run the company.

JEFF

Yeah? What's he like?

DAVE

I've hear there's definitely gonna be some changes -- thank God. He'll be at this meeting, so I guess we'll find out.

The elevator door opens and Jeff and Dave are greeted by the same craggy secretary, Gladys -- but she's dressed in a black tuxedo. Dave and Jeff are confused.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Gladys?

Gladys hands them each a pair of boxing gloves and takes a step back just as a large microphone lowers from the ceiling.

GLADYS

Okay, boys -- let's get ready to RUMBLE!

Dave and Jeff look at one another, stunned. We hear the sharp "DING!" of a boxing match as we --

CUT TO BLACK