

## Waltz

First 1,000 Words

My fatal flaw is my unwavering honesty.

I know. I know. Anyone who describes themselves as being “unwaveringly honest” sounds like a self-congratulatory prick.

As one of these self-congratulatory pricks, I’d like to begin this saga with a disclaimer: I hold myself in high regard not because of my condition, but in spite of it. I derive zero pleasure from being socially handicapped, unlike people who take pride in “telling it like it is,” “being real with people,” and throwing tact by the wayside to burn every bridge in sight with unsolicited comments.

Honesty isn’t a virtue, it’s a curse—especially when it can’t be turned off.

“Have a seat, Max.”

The waltz begins in typical fashion. I give a calloused, leathery hand two firm shakes before sinking into a swivel chair, all while resisting the urge to fling myself through a nearby window and race down the building’s 800-foot side.

The man follows suit, plopping down in a chair across from mine that looks like it had far better lumbar support. An ache begins to pulse through my lower back at the mere thought of my chair’s inferiority. *Please don’t ask how I’m doing.*

“How are you doing today?” His gums peel apart, baring a toothy smile as artificial as the soulless fluorescent lighting engulfing us.

As soon as the question escapes his lips, my heart sinks. This interview, like each one before it, is about to end mere seconds after it’s begun. In record time, too, before I’ve even learned the name of yet another interviewer who is about to either hate me or grow deeply concerned for my well being. It won’t come to a literal end, of course—this poor sap will likely humor me until the very end, the 45th minute—but he’ll undoubtedly stop taking notes, retire his smile to its gummy quarters, and stare through me with a dead expression that’d scream “I’m thinking about how to confront my cheating wife.” The dreaded, ever-too-direct “how are you” is damning enough that I won’t be able to

dance around it. Any slim chance I have at weaseling my way to the next round is about to meet a tragic end.

As bleak as the situation seems, I still owe it to myself to try to tango. Even if my efforts don't pan out, the experience will make good practice for my next interview. My strategy has never actually worked in my favor before, but until I can come up with a better workaround (or afford aggressive psychotherapy), stringing together crafty diversions and lies by omission is my only viable option.

"I'm doing an interview," I respond evenly, hoping to come across as a deadpan comic instead of a dead man walking.

My lip twitches ever so slightly in disappointment. No matter how many interviews I attempt, I never seem to outgrow my inability to appease interviewers with the slew of pre-generated responses and platitudes they always seem to expect. Every comment that escapes me, every question I ask, even every facial expression I make, has to reflect my reality.

I just can't lie.

Not because I'm a moral absolutist, not because I feel guilty, just because... I can't, the same way plenty of people in perfect physical condition can't do backflips. I operate within a psychological prison, an impossible mental block with an untraceable cause.

The man's brow furrows, the artificiality of his expression morphing into genuine confusion. I began to grow hyper aware of the sweat lining every fold of my clothing.

"What's your name?" I ask, attempting to deflect from what I hope he construed as a joke. His throat erupts with a phlegmy sound as he clears it with the fervor only a man of his age can muster.

"Dick," he proclaims after his fit of hacks. "Let's begin."

Nope... now I'm screwed.

"Tell me about yourself."

The dingy office room slowly morphs into an expansive dance hall, bathed in the warm, gentle glow of overhanging chandeliers. There is no longer a desk separating me from Dick—we are now locked in embrace, chest to chest, our right hands interlaced while my left cradles his lower back. For the next several minutes, I will dance to Dick's

song as carefully and obediently as I can. As much as the landmines strewn across the glossy floor beckon me to dance with reckless abandon, I will plot my trajectory with the utmost care.

*One, two, three. One, two, three. One...*

“My name’s Max.”

*Two...*

“I went to Florida State University, where I double majored in economics and statistics.”

*...three.*

“I graduated two years ago, traveled for a year, and have been trying to find a job since.”

*One...*

Rattling off bare-bones facts is the safest tactic by far. Not because any interviewer wants to hear dry, biographical information about my life, but because every second I spend reciting objective information is time I can’t spend offending, upsetting, or frightening others with my jarring candor. I tiptoe over landmine after landmine with tidbits about my hometown and my travel experiences, buying myself as much time as possible before Dick changes his tune. It doesn’t take long for him to do so.

“Thank you, Max! Great to meet you, and thanks for telling me about your travel experiences. I’ve always wanted to go to Istanbul.”

*Sure.*

“Why don’t you start off by telling me why you want to work in corporate banking, along with why you want to work here at B.I.G. Bank specifically?”

Mid Dick-spin, I stumble, carelessly allowing my foot to graze a landmine. Though it doesn’t detonate, its sinister clay exterior seems to glint with fury. The demon, now roused from its slumber of indifference, wills its buddies to glide across the room and encircle us. They slowly close in on us, confining us—*me*—to a small patch of floor that allows for little more than marching in place. I scour the ballroom for opportunities, gaps between landmines or nearby havens I can leap into, but I find none.

I cannot conjure a single authentic reason I want to work in corporate banking, let alone for B.I.G. Bank, that will satisfy the corporate Sphinx I hold so tenderly in my arms.