



DECEPTION



BAMBI EVERSON

DECEPTION

One act, approximately 65 minutes

CHARACTERS

MADDIE (Female age/race flexible) Guarded, hopeful, a film geek to the nth degree.

RICHARD (Male age/race flexible) Charming, possibly a liar, if so, a good one.

JAN (Female, older than Richard age/race flexible) Hard working and enthusiastic HR employee. Hidden secrets. Hides her unhappiness well.

OFFICER (Male) New to the job. Careful and sensitive. Can double as MAN in last scene.

PLACE: New York City.

TIME: The present.

SYNOPSIS: A brief encounter in a bar leads to a complicated entanglement. Dishonesty and lying are rampant, but who is doing what?

SCENE TWO

Next day. MADDIE is being walked around her new job by JAN, the office manager.

JAN

So this is your area. We try to keep things pretty tidy around here. Mr. Haloren is a bit of a stickler. You can put up a picture of your pet, or your kid, of course, just... you know, don't plaster the sides with them. The last woman used her dog pictures as camouflage, so we couldn't see she was sleeping or watching Netflix. Your workload is sent to your office email daily. Surveys, audio transcriptions, Honestly, it's pretty boring. You can keep your phone on, in case of emergency, but no inter-office texting, or candy crush, obviously.

MADDIE

Obviously.

JAN

The gender-neutral bathroom is down the hall. Hope you are ok with that.

MADDIE

Of course.

JAN

You'll need a key, which is at my desk, so I'll know if you are in there longer than it takes for your average...

MADDIE

Got it.

JAN

In case you missed this in the manual, you get a half hour for lunch. Most of us eat at our desks but you are welcome to leave the building. The lines around here are crazy, though, so I recommend brown-bagging or ordering in. You get two 15 minute breaks during the day. Some people string them together for a one hour lunch, but I really think you'll need a break from screen time, so I recommend taking them and chilling out in the staff lounge which is-

MADDIE

The big room at the end.

JAN

Right. There is a vending machine, but the guy who refills it hasn't been around for months. You didn't hear it from me, but I think he's been arrested. He had bad teeth, and his pupils were pinpoints. But we try to avoid gossip around here.

Office relationships are strongly discouraged. But look around, present company excluded, of course. It's pretty slim pickings around here. I knew right away you seemed like a cut above our average research assistant. I'm glad to have you aboard, but can I ask what made you say yes?

MADDIE

Is this a necessary part of my orientation?

JAN

Nope. Just curious. I know you were a teacher. Quikster Analytics is radically different. No kids. Deathly quiet. Isolating.

MADDIE

Sounds good.

JAN

It can be hard if you are a social animal. I go weeks without having a conversation. We have bagel Mondays, but nobody really talks about their weekends. Most of us don't have much of a life. You seem different.

MADDIE

Different good?

JAN

I'm hoping so.

MADDIE

I'll save my sad story for another time.

JAN

A sex scandal?

MADDIE

God, no.

JAN

Stealing school supplies?

MADDIE

Not even toilet paper. I was a girl scout.

JAN

No shit! Me too! Troop 3-261. Come on... off the record. Girl scout's honor.

MADDIE

It's just I was privy to some information about my former employer. An investigator asked us all questions privately and I told the truth. I'm a really crappy liar.

JAN

Ooh! A Sex Scandal?

MADDIE

Life must really be dull here around the water cooler.

JAN

You have no idea.

MADDIE

Admissions bribery. The principal got in some hot water. Fired, actually, I guess I was responsible. I left because I felt the hatred from the other teachers. Apparently, I should have protected her.

JAN

You did the right thing. The truth always wins in the end. Shows you have character.

MADDIE

Well, my character got me blackballed from teaching.

JAN

Your story is safe with me.

MADDIE

Are you the person in charge or...

JAN

Mr. Haloren rarely socializes with staff, but he's accessible. A regular Lou Grant. His office is over there. You have a problem, it goes through me first. I'm HR, among other things, and then if it can't be solved in-house, it goes to the boss.

MADDIE

Is he...

JAN

He's great. A peach. Of course, I am paid to say that.

MADDIE

Right.

JAN

I'm one of those people who takes their work home with them. Jan Haloren. Married to the boss.

MADDIE

Oh!

JAN

Way before he started this company. He said he couldn't do it without me, but I think I'm cheap labor. Anyway... Works out. We don't have kids or pets, so the long hours don't bother us. How 'bout you?

MADDIE

I guess I can handle long (ish) hours...

JAN

I meant kids... I know we aren't supposed to ask..

MADDIE

No, I am ridiculously and emphatically unattached.

JAN

Any other questions?

MADDIE

I guess not. Thanks. Should I...

JAN

Oh, right. I should have you go in and meet Mr. Haloren.

JAN goes to her desk and picks up the intercom phone.

JAN (cont'd)

Madeline Mckenzie is here. She's up to speed now. She'll be starting with the Edwards account. Do you want...

(to MADDIE)

Go on in. Don't worry, honey. He's gonna love you.

MADDIE thanks JAN and goes to the door.

LIGHTS TRANSITION TO OFFICE

Oh crap.

MADDIE

Carol Brady! What are the odds?

RICHARD

Richard Burton... Guess I'll be leaving now. I was really hoping my next job would last longer than Rudolph Valentino's first marriage. My karma sucks.

MADDIE

She starts to exit. RICHARD jumps up, closes the door and makes sure no one can hear.

No. No. Don't go! Please...

RICHARD

This is ridiculous.

MADDIE

You can't leave now.

RICHARD

Well, I can't stay. I just met your wife.

MADDIE

Awkward, for sure.. But... nothing happened!

RICHARD

We kissed. A lot. I don't consider that nothing, thank you very much.

MADDIE

Oh! I didn't mean it like that. And technically, you kissed me first.

RICHARD

That's your reasoning? I started it?

MADDIE

Of course not. The kissing... was... lovely. A lovely mistake on my part. I take full responsibility.

RICHARD

So now I am a mistake? I am outta here.

MADDIE

RICHARD

How do I explain it? I suffer from foot in mouth disease. I can be a dunderhead, a jerk. But I am not a bad person. Jan does the hiring. She said you were the most qualified applicant to walk through these doors in years. Can we just move on from the fact that we both had momentary lapses in judgment?

MADDIE

Speak for yourself. I didn't have any regrets... Until a few moments ago.

RICHARD

I still want you to work here. You are a very unique and unusual human. I like you.

MADDIE

So... What? I start this job lying? So much for me being whoever I want to be.

RICHARD

You are the kind of person we need around here. Someone with a brain, and a sense of humor, not just Google skills. Besides, if I fired you today, you could claim unfair termination. Jan would find that really strange.

MADDIE

You don't know me. I wouldn't do that. Don't you think it would be harder on you if I stayed? You'd be walking on eggshells, wondering if I'd ever spill the beans about our romantic ride from Kenny's bar.

RICHARD

You would certainly have the upper hand. Hey, can I ask a stupid question?

MADDIE

Why stop now?

RICHARD

Valentino...

MADDIE

Really?

RICHARD

...

MADDIE

Fine. His first marriage ended at the reception. Never consummated.

RICHARD

Were they able to stay friends?

MADDIE

How should I know? It was 1919.

RICHARD

Are we? Able to be friends?

MADDIE

It's going to be weird.

RICHARD

Only if we make it so.

MADDIE

I was really looking forward to this fucking job.

There is a knock at the door and JAN enters.

JAN

Geez, what are you two doing in here? Getting married?

(laughing uncomfortably)

RICHARD

(annoyed)

What is it? Ms. Mackenzie and I were just ironing out a few things.

JAN

Sorry. Benny has an IT issue that is beyond me. Can you take a look? And shouldn't Maddie get started on the Edwards account? You know how he is about meeting deadlines.

RICHARD

Edwards is an ass. It can wait. Throw the account to Ian. He'll be glad of the extra work. I'm putting Ms. Mckenzie in charge of stock footage. Apparently she's quite the history buff.

MADDIE

I'm not sure ...

JAN

(to MADDIE)

You got some sins you need to atone for? Come on, Richard, We don't want to lose her. She'll bring some cheerfulness into this joint. God knows we need that.

RICHARD

I am aware. Ms. McKenzie? It's up to you. I'm fine either way. Because of your level of proficiency in this area, we can offer you an extra \$100 a week and commissions on any project that you have specifically spearheaded.

JAN

Sounds like bribery to me. Just kidding! Take it! Nobody else around here wants or is even capable of doing it. I'll show you the ropes.

MADDIE

Maybe it's not ...(the right fit...)

JAN

For an extra \$100 a week I'd do it myself, if I could, But I can't. Are we still negotiating? How about we throw in free snacks from the vending machine? I had a key copied in case of a nuclear disaster.

MADDIE

I guess...

(looks at RICHARD)

Are you sure?

RICHARD

Never surer.

MADDIE

Ok. Then.

JAN

Stale Doritos for the win!

RICHARD

Welcome to Quickster Analytics.

JAN

Thank goodness that's settled, then. We have about a thousand hours of old celebrities we can't identify, and hundreds of hours of old commercials. The past keeps increasing so you could easily get lost in there.

MADDIE

“The past is a ghost, the future a dream, and all we ever have is now.”

RICHARD

Cool quote. Who said that? Nietzsche?

MADDIE

Bill Cosby. Weird, huh?

RICHARD

Jan, Lunch is on me today. Everyone can take a full hour. No lost time. To welcome our new employee. Send a memo. Conference room, 12:30. We'll order from Capital Diner. Get some veggie, and turkey burgers, a few salads, some desserts and uh... four orders of cheese fries.

JAN

Cheese fries? Ew! Heart attack on a plate. Who is going to eat those?

MADDIE and Richard exchange a glance.

BLACKOUT