

## Performer.



Alan and Luke were the first into the office, and after the post-weekend pleasantries, Alan took the initiative. It was a new working week, and he was determined to get the chat off to a good start.

He regaled Luke with a tale. Alan had been in a long running dispute with his electricity company over a change in tariffs. He had been charged incorrectly, he felt - but had struggled to get the power supplier to see things from his perspective! It was a real David and Goliath tussle, to hear Alan tell it, but he had finally assembled sufficient evidence - emails

containing promises and assurances, online advertisements concerning the payment plan Alan *should* be on, and the smoking gun: screengrabs of a conversation with a helpful operative.

Alan had won.

It was no epic story, but for first thing on a Monday, it did the job. Alan's telling was confident and fluid, with moments of levity, righteous indignation, and ultimately triumph. Luke felt honoured to have shared in this experience with his colleague, a man he got on with just fine, but couldn't rightly say he truly *knew* - until now. They fell into a comfortable, respectful silence (this was a place of business, after all), but with an unspoken connection now forged between them, from Luke's perspective anyhow.

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A short while later, Georgina arrived at the office, and the three early birds exchanged polite greetings as Luke fetched his first (but most likely *not* last!) coffee of the day. What happened next, though, sent a greater jolt through his system than any caffeinated beverage ever could: Alan locked a twinkling eye on the newcomer, and started his story again.

It wasn't a word for word rendition, but the key beats were the same, the rhythms just as crisp and engaging - indeed, it might have been even *better*, improved after the polish of the earlier dress rehearsal. Was that all that Luke was? A sounding board, a curtain twitcher before Alan got to the main event: Georgina, deemed a more receptive audience, perhaps, more deserving of perfection?

Alan had seemed so natural during his first rendition, so in the present. Luke - stupidly - had been convinced that this was a moment plucked out of time and shared between the two of them. Intimate, meaningful.

For Alan to feign that same closeness with another, immediately after? Luke was staggered. Here was a man, a colleague, who could simulate a connection with two separate people at the drop of a hat. It was twisted, sickening.

And yet - perhaps this was the true face of a master orator? Perhaps it was only by tapping into this seam of deceit that Alan could spin his masterful tale. Maybe all great storytellers had this streak, this two facedness, a gnawing dishonesty that allowed them to spew such gripping yarns. In that moment, Alan hated the artist - but he loved the art. And as he gazed across the office, he saw that Georgina did, too. He watched as she lobbed a gentle follow up question (one Luke himself had considered, but - alas - decided against asking), and chuckled at Alan's response (at last, a moment of spontaneity - unless this too was preordained!).

He couldn't wrench that joy from her by demasking the monster who made her feel this way. The power was in his hands to expose Alan, to rightfully shame him as a man without honour - but he couldn't do that to Georgina. It wasn't her fault.

He did scurry over to her once Alan was out of earshot, though, to ensure she was aware that he had heard the story first. He made that absolutely fucking clear.