The Last Word

by

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CHARACTER LIST:
Emily Downing:  Female; early 30s; blind date
Rob Forrester:  Male; early 30s; blind date

SETTING:
Restaurant
SCENE ONE.

Afternoon. A corner area of a casual restaurant with a table set for two.

A woman, EMILY DOWNING, early-30’s, fidgets uncomfortably between sips of iced tea.

A man, ROB FORRESTER, mid-30’s, enters, glances nervously around, then approaches her.

ROB

Are you the SWF?

EMILY

I beg your pardon.

ROB

SWF - the single white female.

EMILY

(nervously smiling)

Oh. Yeah. And you must be the SWM.

ROB

That’s me.

(then looking her over)

So ... ah ... attractive, history/philosophy major, spontaneous and adventurous, full of fun and laughter.

EMILY

(slightly embarrassed)

I didn’t know I’d be quoted.

ROB

It is your description of yourself, after all. Who you are.
EMILY
Yeah ... well ... I’m starting to reconsider the spontaneous and adventurous part.

Rob extends his hand.

ROB
Rob Forrester.

Emily shakes hands with him.

EMILY
Emily Downing.

ROB
May I sit down?

EMILY
We’ve come this far.

ROB
And join you for lunch?

EMILY
Dutch treat.

ROB
Of course.

He sits down opposite her.

EMILY
Have you ever done this before?

ROB
Eat lunch?

EMILY
(smiling)
No. Respond to a personal.

ROB
No. You?
EMILY

No.

They pick up menus and busy themselves by self-consciously studying them.

EMILY

Ah ... if I remember correctly, you’re a writer?

ROB

Yes.

EMILY

What type of things do you write?

She takes a sip of tea.

ROB

Obituaries.

She chokes on her tea, spraying a mouthful back into her glass.

ROB

You find that unappealing?

EMILY

No, no. A little surprising is all. Writing about people who just died, you know.

ROB

I don’t really write about dead people. I mean, strictly speaking. I write obits about living people. Before they die.

EMILY

You mean like famous people? The way they have obits prepared in advance for Bill Clinton or Paris Hilton? In case they buy it over the weekend?

ROB

No. Not celebrities necessarily. I write obituaries for anyone. I could write one for you, for instance.
EMILY
I don’t think so.

ROB
Why not? You could consider it ... well ... almost like an exit strategy.

EMILY
A little too morbid.

ROB
Very sensible, really. If you leave it to your family, they’ll put something in the paper that says you were a devoted wife or a loving mother or a friend to everyone you met. Nothing unique there. It could be anyone - Eleanor Roosevelt or Lady Macbeth. We’d never know who you really were. That you were spontaneous and adventurous.

EMILY
Let’s forget the spontaneous and adventurous.

ROB
Okay, then full of fun and laughter.

EMILY
How many of these have you done?

ROB
Well ... actually... you’d be my first. Why? Interested?

EMILY
No.

ROB
It’s only $250 for 500 words.

She stares at him dubiously.

ROB
Fifty cents a word. Not bad for something that can stand the test of time. You’ll have a say-so as to how you’ll be remembered. You’ll have the last word.

EMILY
Are you trying to make a sale here?
ROB

(shrugs)

Only if you’re interested.

EMILY

Well, I’m not.

(beat)

Sorry. I don’t mean to be critical. Maybe it’s just that I don’t have a degree in journalism.

ROB

I don’t either.

She stares at him for a moment, then pulls a folded piece of paper out of her purse and glances at it.

EMILY

But your personal says you do have a degree in journalism.

ROB

(uncomfortable)

Oh, that. Ah ... I can explain.

EMILY

I can, too. You lied.

She reads from his personal.

EMILY

“Enjoy long walks along the countryside, keeping company with the breeze and the meadowlarks.” How about that? Are you a nature boy?

ROB

I hate the outdoors.

EMILY

ROB

Not even in pencil.

She tosses his classified on the table.

EMILY

Is there anything true here?

ROB

The WSM part.

EMILY

So what was your plan? Lure me over to your apartment and then have your way with me?

ROB

Good, Lord, no!

EMILY

Then what the hell were you doing?

ROB

Okay, so I thought the personals would be a good source of clients. They’re sort of alike, really - obits and personals. Both concerned with presenting people in the best possible light. I figured a person writing a personal might also be interested in a good obituary. Especially someone with a degree in history and philosophy.

EMILY

You want to write my obituary. I’ll tell you what. I want to write your personal. It’ll even be free - Single white con artist, manipulative, crass and a compulsive liar, seeks naive, vulnerable female to give him $250 for stupid writing scheme.

ROB

I really didn’t intend --

EMILY

In fact, I’ll throw in a free obituary as well - While prospecting for business at a local restaurant, Mr. Forrester was stabbed to death with a salad fork.

ROB

Actually ... that wasn’t the only reason I tried a personal ad. I was hoping to meet someone.
EMILY
You’re kidding.

ROB
No.

EMILY
Just a thought - next time, you might consider not lying through your teeth.

ROB
People wear makeup, have photos retouched, hedge on their resumes, wear clothes that push up this or flatten down that. Deception for the sake of appearance. How’s that so different?

She rises to leave.

EMILY
Goodbye, Mr. Forrester. It’s been interesting.

He also rises.

ROB
Please don’t go. Please.

(let)
Let me tell you what an honest personal would have said - Single white male, who’s somewhat insecure, bookish, not always well-groomed and not very confident around women, seeks single white female who can appreciate him in spite of these obvious inadequacies. Is that what you recommend for improving my social life?

EMILY
All right, so maybe you have to do a little whitewashing. But to use it as a way to peddle obituaries ...

ROB
Okay, maybe the obit thing was a mistake. But when I get nervous, I start yammering. I guess I thought it was something to talk about. A conversation piece. I’m an idiot.

(let)
But have you ever read a good obituary? I mean, a really good one. It’s like a magical snow globe ... capturing the true essence of a person ... what makes them unique ...
so when they die, they won’t just disappear ... lost forever.

(beat)

Please stay.

EMILY

Why should I?

ROB

To prove that you are a little impulsive and adventurous, and weren’t just making it all up. Like I did.

EMILY

(slightly smiling)

That was nicely done.

She slowly eases back down in her chair, and he joins her.

EMILY

Only till I finish my tea.

She takes a sip.

EMILY

If you’ve never sold an obituary, have you ever actually written one?

ROB

Yes.

EMILY

What? For a friend? A family member?

ROB

Ah ... I should warn you. I’m a bit eccentric.

EMILY

Imagine that.

She takes another drink of tea.
EMILY
I suppose I might be considered a little eccentric myself.

ROB
The only obituaries I’ve written have been for my pets.

EMILY
Dog? Cat?

ROB
The last one was for a rat.

EMILY
You had a rat?

ROB
Afraid so.

EMILY
Still?

ROB
Yeah, a white one, with a black streak running along her back.

EMILY
A Husky Hooded?

ROB
Ah ... yeah. A Husky Hooded. How’d you know that?

EMILY
I have a rat. A Husky Hooded.

ROB
I ... ah ... don’t recall seeing that in your personal.

EMILY
Yeah ... well ... I was paying by the word.

ROB
So how about lunch?
EMILY
I don’t know. I’m not sure how much I want to encourage this arrangement.

ROB

EMILY
What did you have in mind?

ROB
The cheese platter.

EMILY
(slowly smiling)
I suppose it’s the least we can do.

CURTAIN