

Where Do You See Yourself?

The city bus rumbled over a rough spot in the road, jerking Larry back to attention. Larry's mind had been spinning on the most mundane of subjects: his socks. He was taking the bus to another job interview, the tenth one in less than a month, and the process had approached routine. He had identified the pair of slacks in his closet that gave him the most professional appearance and made sure they were laundered and ironed. He had chosen a neutral necktie that would paint the prettiest picture. All the kinks had been worked out, but the devil always seems to creep out of the details, and so Larry was stuck with this sock problem.

Larry always felt like he possessed an endless supply of dark socks, starting in the days when he was attending college prep school and his mother delivered a laundry basket to his room every week, a basket topped off with a heap of neatly paired socks. In the years since then, due to the nonchalance of college classes and summer jobs, the dark socks had been lost by attrition. Over the course of the month, he had already worn every pair that remained, and they lay stinking in the clothes hamper even now, as he made the trip downtown for yet another interview. The sock drawer told Larry the news: he had no choice but to wear a blue cotton pair with pilled and faded

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fabric. White socks were out of the question, certainly, and he could not stomach the thought of wearing sweaty, crumpled ones out of the hamper; so he went with the faded ones and hoped that no one would notice. That would never happen, would it? And even if anyone saw that his socks were not A-1 choice, would that have an impact on his eligibility for hire?

He didn't know.

Larry arrived in the lobby of his prospective employer's building with ten minutes to spare. The commute had been remarkably swift. All of these urban office parks had a bus stop at the front door, it seemed, and he wondered why anyone would take the trouble to drive to work when the bus was so convenient. Then again, not everyone lived on a bus line as he did, so it would not be as reasonable for them. He projected the bus ride as a daily event and imagined it would be tolerable. A pleasant commute meant a great deal to Larry. He considered it to be a deciding factor, along with the assurance of a flexible schedule, not to mention a friendly group of co-workers; also, it would be ideal if he would be working with a variety of attractive single women. He pushed the call button for the elevator.

Spinning on his heel to view the lobby, Larry watched the seasoned corporate professionals stride across the shiny floor with purpose. Some of them took to the stairs—perhaps they worked on a low floor?—while others bunched around the elevator. A few visited the newsstand near the door and picked

up a newspaper which would, presumably, reveal mysterious information about the stock market. Not everyone bothered with the paper, but coffee was another matter. These professionals, all of them, clutching their cups of coffee: Larry found it amusing. A sharp smile made an appearance on his face.

The elevator emitted an electronic ding and reminded Larry of the task at hand. He was now surrounded by professionals, all of whom appeared to know where they were going. He took care not to rub shoulders or make eye contact with these neighbors; this seemed to be the professional way. The doors slid open, and Larry stepped into the elevator.

Larry had become accustomed to these crowded elevators, having taken interviews in several skyscrapers. One person, usually a tall and well-dressed man, says "What floor?" and passengers quickly state their destinations as their self-appointed conductor confidently punches the buttons in a quick sequence. Larry was pleased to see that this ride was no different.

"Thirteen," said Larry, smirking. Stopping on the thirteenth floor was somewhat notable, as he had noticed that a surprising percentage of the taller buildings in town skipped from twelve to fourteen in a charming show of superstition.

The doors slid open once again, and Larry stepped onto the thirteenth floor. Cool air invaded the space around his body. He had arrived at the headquarters of The Bradbury Group, as confirmed by a smart-looking brass plaque on the opposite wall. Everybody, including the woman who called to schedule his appointment, referred to the company as "Bradbury," as if it

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had its own personal identity. Larry didn't buy that, but he liked what he knew about Bradbury. He had done his research and saw that they were making a transition from marketing across traditional media to digital marketing. In a perfect world, he would be paid to recite poetry or twiddle knobs in a recording studio, but Larry knew that compromises become inevitable with the passing of time. He used one hand to smooth his necktie down his chest, keeping the other casually hidden in his pants pocket. He felt cool, confident. Socks were the last thing on his mind.

The receptionist spoke quickly and smiled with great sincerity. Her name, according to the nameplate on the desk, was Sheila Masters. "Welcome to Bradbury," she said. Larry considered this woman, Sheila, to be the most impressive receptionist he had encountered across all the stops on his job hunt. Not only did she face the drudgery with vivacious energy, but she also had an attractive figure and a sweet face. And no wedding ring. Larry was starting to get better at noticing those details. When a man is single at age 25, it becomes more important. She provided him with a clipboard and a number of application forms. As he sat in the reception area and filled out a non-disclosure agreement, Sheila made some indiscriminate phone calls around the office. Larry heard the name O'Leary. He remembered scribbling that name on a slip of paper earlier in the week. Was O'Leary a man or a woman? He couldn't recall. Larry preferred being interviewed by women; he could fall back