

# Unexpected Turns of Events

A monologue by Pete Malicki

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### Cast

The harried parent of a young boy.

The sound of my alarm not going off wakes me up. Uh oh. Every day my alarm and I have a competition to wake up first and I've never once won so that can only mean it's broken. I check my phone and see it's ten past eight. "Oh no no no no no!!"

Jo stirs next to me and I freeze. It's one thing to be late for an important client, another thing entirely to wake up my murderous spouse before ten AM. After I wait for Jo's breathing to even out again I slide carefully out of bed and tread on eggshells all the way down to the bottom level. I hate having to do this in my own house. I wish Jo would stop throwing eggs at me, or at least clean them up.

Edgard is sitting with perfect straight-backed posture at the breakfast table. "Why aren't we at school, Least Favourite Parent? I'm going to be late for geography and if I get another detention Jo will kill me."

It's not Edgard's fault. Jo *makes* my son call me Least Favourite Parent. Jo also named Edgard Edgard so we both get to feel insulted. "Son, I'm going to be late to an important meeting so we're going to have to skip school today. You can play Pokémon in the car and I'll take you home at three o'clock."

Edgard goes white, "My goodness, that won't do. The Only Parent I Truly Love does spot checks on the school throughout the year. If I'm caught, I may be singing soprano in the choir for the rest of my days if you know what I mean."

I frown. I *do* know what my son means, but I'm fairly disturbed that he understands the threat of castration at seven years old. I don't have time to worry about it so I order an Uber while I throw on my work clothes. It arrives within thirty seconds.

I put my young son in the front seat of a nice toothless man's car. The poor thing must be terribly cold because he can't stop rubbing his hands together. I jump into my own car, start the engine, drive to work, arrive just on time for my meeting, win the heart of the rich client, get a raise, come home to my happy family and live like royalty until I die at the ripe old age of a hundred and twelve.

At least, I might have done all that if Jo hadn't parked my car in. I have an epic fit of swearing. If I so much as breathe near Jo's car and fog up the panelling I'll be dead before I reach the end of the driveway.

I order another Uber but it doesn't arrive. I'm almost desperate enough to call a taxi. Instead, I have no choice but to borrow my neighbour's bicycle.

My neighbour makes Jo look like a pussy cat. Every time I look at her house she's staring at me through the window. She spends a lot of her time in the garage, grinding a range of

objects into smears on the ground. We used to have a lot of neighbourhood cats before she moved in but now the only animals we see are flying well out of human range. Katelyn is turning six next month.

I make the sign of the cross and enter Katelyn's garage. She's not there. I take her bike, cycle madly to work, impress that client and get that raise, go home, get divorced and marry someone who isn't a psychopath.

Except that I get sideswiped by a bus halfway to work and end up with two cracked ribs and a slightly crushed foot. Even worse, my pants get torn right down one side and I'll have to replace them before the meeting. Silver lining? Katelyn's bike is okay. I'm not going to be ground into dust this evening.

I arrive two minutes after the meeting starts and limp to my place at the table. The board of directors, senior executive and personal assistants all glare hatefully at me. The client is a slender woman of around forty years, dressed in a power suit and smiling schemingly at me. I don't like that smile one bit.

The meeting involves a whole lot of jargon that I get paid way too little to understand. They only have me at these things for my mathematical prowess; if anyone needs numbers crunched, I'm all like "BAM, forty-two thousand three hundred and six point three repeater." They love me for my mathematics."

"I'll engage your company for the full procurement scope if you sack that idiot who came in late with torn clothing."

The client is pointing at *me*. What?! "Smith, you're fired," says the CEO. WHAT?!

The PAs take enormous pleasure in escorting me to my desk to clear out my things. I'm almost in tears while I collect a box of Post-It Notes. Sandra doesn't bat an eyelid. She leads me to the elevator and stands behind me with her arms crossed. I can feel her smug smile burning into the back of my skull. I don't know why they all hate me so much – I never did a thing!

On a sudden impulse, I shove my way back past Sandra and march right into the board room. The directors, executives, PAs and clients all turn to look at me in perfect sync, a range of dopey expressions on their stupid faces.

"You want to flex your muscles," I say to the client. "Sack the executives. The company is bleeding money right now and you can cut the costs of their insane salaries then replace them with cheaper, better employees."

There is a stunned silence. A tumbleweed blows across the room. Some crickets jump out of the last second and chirp noisily.

"And appoint me as CEO. I'll do it for half the salary of that clown over there."

I'm pointing at the CEO. Everyone is staring at him. Then everyone looks over at the client as she stands up. "I like your pluck," she says. "I'm in. Directors, fire the executive and appoint Smith as CEO or the billion dollar deal is off."

I can't believe it. I can't believe that worked! Forty-five heated minutes later the entire executive have been sacked and I'm the new CEO. I immediately fire Sandra then take a mental health day and leave the office.

Smiling at my own brilliance, I cycle home, spend my first new paycheque on a luxury yacht, sail off into the sunset and live out my days as an ocean-dwelling Buddhist monk. Or I might have done that if Katelyn's bike was still in the car park.

My heart drops into my stomach, which crawls towards my bowels to make its escape. Katelyn will kill me. She will literally grind my bones into dust on her garage floor. I fight the instinct to pee my pants by walking with as much purpose as I can muster. I am the CEO now. I do not fear a five year old, no matter how psychotic. I will stand up to her, face to face... with a brand new bicycle and maybe three hundred dollars cash.

I stride down to the bike store but it is A surrounded by a gang of youths and B closed. I approach who is clearly the ring leader and declare, "I will give you a hundred bucks if you break into that store and steal me the smallest, pinkest bike they have!"

"That's illegal," says the ringleader. "And immoral. Some poor man or woman is trying to make a living selling people the love and joy that is a bicycle, and you want to facilitate underage criminality to rip this poor person off? What kind of a monster are you?"

I am gobsmacked. The surprisingly articulate ringleader of the gang of youths is right. What kind of person would do what I'm doing? I will face Katelyn with the truth.

Twenty-five minutes later I reach the end of my street. There is a park at the end of my street. A park where children play. Five minutes later I knock on Katelyn's garage door and present her with a brand new bike. She nods indifferently as she mashes a Micro Machine into the concrete floor.

Okay, that was surprisingly easy. I cross the lawn and open my front door. Edgard is nowhere to be seen. Jo is nowhere to be seen. Jo never goes further than the fridge and Edgard should be back from school. I look around and see that Jo's left a note. "Dear censored. I have decided to leave you, because I hate your guts. I have taken the one thing I know you won't be able to live without. Jo."

"No!" I cry. Jo took my beloved son from me! "Yes!" I cry. Jo is gone! "No! Yes! No! Yes!"

This is the very definition of ambivalence: two contrary emotions at the same time. I hate Jo, but I love my son. I wouldn't give Edgard up for anything. But... I *really* hate Jo, so maybe it's okay?

There is a knock on the front door. I open up and it's Edgard. "Hello Least Favourite Parent."

I almost cry with relief. I tell my son that Jo is gone and we go straight out and change his name. "Anything you want it to be, son. Anything at all."

We celebrate this unexpected turn of events by going to Starcrusher the Fourth's favourite restaurant: Pizza Hut. It is the best day of my life. It's only when we get home after midnight that I remember that Jo took "the one thing I won't be able to live without."

Thankfully, it's just my asthma medication. Thankfully, our relationship was so impersonal that Jo doesn't even know about my severe heart condition. I haven't even had an asthma attack in years.

With a smile on my face, I tuck my son in to bed. "I love you, Starcrusher the Fourth."

My son smiles at me. "I love you too, *Not* Least Favourite Parent."

I nod approvingly. It's not perfect, but it's a pretty good start.