

ROCK THE BOAT III: "CONTENTIOUS AUTHORSHIP"

ERIKA and MARKUS are seated at a desk in a COMMON AREA at the University. They had been (sort of) working on a grant together but clearly Markus has decided it's time to take a break. Erika's laptop is still open and notepad poised while Markus's is closed and surrounded by snacks.

Markus continues pontificating about *The Office* -

MARKUS

... and, really, the big difference
between the British and US
versions, you have to understand...

Meanwhile, Erika is focused on her computer, losing her
(already thin) patience...

ERIKA

Right... yes. Tell me more...

MARKUS

... I mean the British style of,
you know, verbiage and - (*grabbing
a piece of apple and offering the
tupperware container*) apple wedge?

ERIKA

What? No. Shouldn't we get back to
the grant?

MARKUS

Break's not over.

ERIKA

We were barely working in the first
place.

MARKUS

That's not true. We were riffing on
the intro.

ERIKA

We? You were talking about *forestry*-

MARKUS

Yes, clearcutting. As a metaphor.
For injustice...? It's a hook
sentence. We had a good train of
thought going.

ERIKA

It was mostly you.

MARKUS

Oh, well, I thought you were taking notes.

Erika closes her laptop slowly, eyes shooting daggers into Markus...

ERIKA

(slowly, aflame)

I... was supposed to be the one...
"taking notes"?

MARKUS

I thought so, yeah.

ERIKA

Oh. Oh! I'm sorry. But, you know, maybe it was hard to contain all the *brilliance* coming at me...

MARKUS

(agreeing)

They were sophisticated concepts.

ERIKA

Why am I the one who's supposed to take notes?

MARKUS

I didn't say you were.

ERIKA

But you assumed I would. You never even opened your computer. You just started talking.

This actually lands on Markus - she's right.

MARKUS

That's true. I should have checked in with you, we're supposed to be collaborating.

ERIKA

(pleasantly surprised)

That's... that's okay.

A BEAT -

ERIKA (CONT'D)
 I mean... it's not "okay" -
 (*quickly, blurting:*) it's
 representative of something that is
really not "okay", how often women
 particularly women of colour are
 thrown into the more thankless
 tasks like administrative work -
 but *anyway* - we don't need to
 address all that now. We should try
 to get some actual work done before
 Sandra arrives.

MARKUS
 Agreed. Time to get serious.

Markus opens up his laptop, and we hear the sounds of a
 computer game - perhaps a sheep *bah-ing* in distress?

MARKUS (CONT'D)
 Agh! I left my *FarmZone* open...
 (*crestfallen*) Now my crops are
 dead, and I have no ducats. That's
 great.

Markus goes to take a bite of a snack, but he is too upset.

ERIKA
 Wow. Now *that's* a real issue.

Markus has exited the game and gathered himself a bit.

MARKUS
 (*changing the subject*)
 Hey, before we get back to work on
 the grant, awesome work on the
 intro to the article. It looks
 great, and I know Sandra's pleased,
 too.

ERIKA
 Thanks a lot! I spent quite a bit
 of time on it, so that's good to
 hear.

MARKUS
 Oh, really? Not too much, I hope.

ERIKA
 Why? It was worth it. I've only got
 two authorship credits in journals,
 and both were excerpts from my
 thesis and, frankly, (*playful*) I'm
 a different person now.

Some sort of SHIFT within Markus... He goes quiet.

MARKUS

... Did Sandra say you'd get authorship on it?

ERIKA

No, but, I assumed that-

MARKUS

Because I think it will just be Jaspreet, Sandra and me.

ERIKA

You're getting authorship?

MARKUS

The data was from a conference presentation that I helped Jaspreet on last Fall.

ERIKA

Okay but did you actually *write* any of the article?

MARKUS

I did a lot of the data collection and analysis.

(pointed)

Do you want a word count or something?

ERIKA

No, I'm just saying. Sorry, I didn't mean to be blunt, I just didn't know you worked on it.

MARKUS

Well, I did.

ERIKA

Okay... (BEAT) Look, I-

MARKUS

I'm trying to finish up my degree. You have so much more time to get publications.

These two often skirmish but this feels different...

SANDRA comes in, a bit flustered, carrying a computer bag and her thermos. She takes off her jacket and settles in during the following:

ERIKA
Hi, Sandra.

MARKUS (CONT'D)
Hello.

SANDRA
Hello! So sorry that I'm late. I forgot it was my turn to take my daughter to karate. (*sighing, settling*) Hope I didn't miss anything?

ERIKA
(*"nothing's wrong" smile*)
Just spit-balling ideas!

Meanwhile, Markus is staring into his computer.

MARKUS
Yeah, we were just... working on the grant.

Erika tries to smile and pretend like nothing's going on, while Markus is awkward and tries to avoid eye contact. Sandra clocks all of this, but moves on-

SANDRA
Great. (*to Erika*) Before we dive into the grant, I wanted to thank you for the work on the article. The introduction flows really nicely now.

ERIKA
No worries.

SANDRA
I hope it didn't distract you too much from your own projects.

ERIKA
Not at all.

An awkward BEAT. Sandra trying to assess...

SANDRA
Okay - did I miss something before I got here?

MARKUS
(*avoiding*)
No. I mean... not really. We were, uh-

ERIKA

We were talking about authorship. I think I spent too much time on my revisions to the article, and I had the sense I was going to be one of the authors.

MARKUS

The intro is really great, and it's clear you spent a lot of time on it. But it's not actually your research, Erika.

Ouch. This is... very awkward.

MARKUS (CONT'D)

(to Sandra)

But it's totally your call.

Yikes - this isn't a fun position to be in. Sandra chooses her words carefully...

ALT ENDING #1

SANDRA

(to Erika)

When I sent the article to you for feedback, I should have clarified that it would be Jaspreet and Markus's publication.

ERIKA

To be honest, when you sent it to me, I'm not sure you used the word "feedback". You mentioned the intro requiring work, and...

SANDRA

You're right. Sorry about that.

ERIKA

That's all right.

SANDRA

Moving forward, we can discuss more options for you when it comes to publication. Maybe build on the online presentation you gave this past summer?

ERIKA

For sure.

SANDRA
Okay. Should we turn our attention
to the grant?

The team opens up their laptops - Erika is clearly disappointed with the outcome, but doesn't feel like she can say anything...

MARKUS
We had this idea of starting with a
strong image...: A *clear-cut*
forest.

SANDRA
Okay, great...

**FADE OUT ON
ENDING #1**

ALT ENDING #2

We pick up on -

MARKUS
(to Sandra)
But it's totally your call.

Yikes - this isn't a fun position to be in. Sandra chooses her words carefully...

SANDRA
It sounds like this has been a
challenging morning. I want to
acknowledge that, clearly, you both
worked very hard on the article.
(a BEAT, then)
Erika - would you mind if Markus
and I spoke privately for a few
minutes?

Erika is taken aback - but frankly, a breath of fresh air sounds nice right now.

ERIKA
Sure. I'll grab a coffee or
something.

Erika grabs her coat and leaves.

SANDRA
Sounds like there was a bit of
friction this morning.

MARKUS

Yeah, a little bit.

SANDRA

I wasn't clear enough with Erika when I sent her the article for review... I should have been much more explicit in my request.

MARKUS

I know she might be disappointed, but I've been in her situation before, too. I "helped out" on a lot of articles when I was more junior.

SANDRA

Oh, in my day it was worse. They called it "paying your dues" then. I spent hours "polishing" articles for my supervisor and his colleagues.

(then)

But... because of the extent of her work, and my lack of clarity, I think the appropriate thing would be for her to be named as an author.

Markus is thrown, but listens -

SANDRA (CONT'D)

She contributed a lot. Not only is it strong writing, but clearly she engaged with the research, too. Having another writer should not minimize the impact on your and Jaspreet's CVs.

MARKUS

Okay, I understand. That makes sense.

SANDRA

Also, I don't want this experience to have strained any relationships. In the long run it's not worth it, believe me!

MARKUS

That makes sense, for sure. I'll be sure to debrief with her about it on our own.

SANDRA
Great idea. Thanks, Markus.

FADE OUT