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## Bull Market

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## BULL MARKET

The hard part about starting over is all the telling. New faces and new places — sure, that can be a rush, but all the talking and telling — the same-old/same-old bullshit of your life over and over — you get tired. You just want to write it down and give them a list. You've got to try to remember who you told what cute story because you don't want to repeat it and come across dense. After a while, every office looks the same—plush lobby, the perky receptionist, and those damn beige telephones. One face blends into another — even the pretty ones. Explaining yourself to people—you did this, you did that, but you really want to do *this* — this job right here. It's like there's a VCR trapped in your head that keeps playing and rewinding and playing and rewinding. Hell, I've still got Beta.

Then all the polite crap — you can't say how it really was — how you really feel. They'd think you were gonna go postal or something and maybe they're right, but that doesn't make what happened any less true. Like they say, some folks are born crazy and life just brings it out in others. Me, maybe I'm a little of both. But you've got to pretend and play along—pretend like all the bad things only happen to other people because you're too cool to be one of the victims. Sometimes they buy it.

They said they'd get back to me. Yeah, that's what Jill told me last month—the old kiss-off. *We can still be friends*. Sometimes you want to just say *screw it all* and improvise—start pretending you're that dynamic guy of your daydreams, the one who says just the right line at just the right time, and knows just how to act in every circumstance. The truth isn't important, it's

pretending that counts. And it must work. Just look at all those marketing guys.

So after my third interview for a job I didn't really want, but a job I really needed, that's just what I did. I pretended.

I saw her in the almost-empty coffee shop on LaSalle that afternoon. She was sitting one table away reading the Wall Street Journal—definitely not my type. Tailored, blue-blazered, and all-business — classy, with straight dark hair curving and parenthesizing her face — a pale, pretty face in the middle of summer that said she was all work.

“How about those bears?” I nodded at the paper.

“Bears?” She gave me puzzled. “Oh, this isn't...” she started, then a wry smirk.

“Bulls,” she grinned. “Yesterday was *bulls*.” She looked back down at the paper.

“Only two animals,” I said. “Small zoo. What that place needs is some variety. Get some peacocks in there—some monkeys to liven it up.”

Her head dipped and the hair swayed. I heard a chuckle. ~ She looked up and smiled. Nice.

“Trust me, they have plenty of monkeys as it is,” she said. “And pigs and sharks. They just dress up like bears and bulls to be presentable.” She held my eye for a moment and then went back to her reading.

“Some bad-tempered mammals you got there—horns, hooves, fangs and claws. Not a petting zoo.”

She kept looking down. “It is a jungle out there,” she said, gesturing absently out the window. Yellow cabs flashed by, afternoon sunshine glancing of the windshields.

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“Yeah. A jungle. That’s what I wanted to be — a jungle explorer. Gimme a pith helmet, a machete, and an undiscovered country.”

She looked up. “Well, there are days when the machete would be useful,” she said.

“What jungle do you explore?”

“I’m between expeditions right now,” I said, puffing up with unwarranted confidence. “But you’re right. It’s all one big wicked jungle. Eat or be eaten.” I took a long sip of my coffee, watching her over the brim of my cup. The cup was empty, but she didn’t know that. Attitude is everything. I gave her my best French roast look — savoring the rich, fictitious liquid. Wary eyes watched.

She glanced at her watch, smiled politely and folded up the paper. I noticed blue ball-point scribbling in the margins.

“Nice doodles,” I said.

“Thanks,” she said. Flat and dry, but a tinge of amusement. She stashed the paper in a blue valise and pulled out a copy of Barron’s.

“Bear tracks?” I asked.

“More like the running of the bulls,” she muttered. The blue eyes looked up and smiled over the top of the magazine.

I swirled my imaginary brew, hoisted it to my lips and smiled into the empty cup.

—Ron Edison

## THE SECRET

Autumn’s Trees  
With burnished leaves  
Saluting to the Sun.

Fermented Breeze  
With fragrant ease  
Whispers what’s to come.

— Cindy DeFranco