Twitter Thread by Quinn Cummings

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Gather round, Gentle Readers. It is time I tell the story of the worst decision I ever made in an office. Some of you have heard this. Some have not. Whatever you do in your office today, this week, the rest of this year, you can console yourself by recalling this tale.

A long time ago, I was a talent agent. I worked for a woman named Susan Smith, who had her own small boutique agency. She was known for three things:

1. She had fantastic taste in clients. If there is someone you admire, odds are good that at some point, she was their agent,

2. She could negotiate a deal like few who have ever trod the earth. Casting would give her all the money they had budgeted for that part, plus a little more, plus promising to get her dog Barnaby groomed. She was magnificent to watch.

3. She was insane.

I'm sure you're thinking, "Quinn, it's the entertainment industry, they are all insane." Yes, many are. So consider this; if you told someone you worked for Susan, people who worked for insane people would look and you and whisper, "I hear she's insane."

Volatile, capable off toggling between rage-screaming and whispered tears in 90 seconds. An unerring instinct at knowing exactly what you doubted about yourself and musing aloud about it. A level of vitriol to subordinates that was outlawed by the 13th Amendment.

She went through assistants with comical speed. One young man - who had endured the rigors of law school - went to "move his car" after ninety minutes on her desk and never came back.

I was her assistant for six months. If I hear a phone that sounds like the one we had in the office, I still get nauseated.

But oh, did she love her clients. She had no husband, no children; her clients were everything. Specifically, Kathy Bates and Brian Dennehy. She had discovered both of them when they were doing off-off-off-Near Hackensack-Broadway. She adored them. One could argue she made them.

For years, Brian had wanted to do DEATH OF A SALESMAN on the stage, in Chicago. For years, for a number of reasons, it hadn't happened. Finally, with superhuman strength and negotiating prowess on Susan's part, DEATH, with the perfect director on the stage Brian wanted, went up.

Brian got the kinds of reviews he deserved. The play was a huge hit. So huge, in fact, that it went to Broadway. Again, Susan hammered out the seemingly endless details of moving a production to a Broadway theater. She went to the opening. The reviews were love letters to Brian.

Susan was ecstatic. But the real joy came when Brian won the Tony for his performance. I watched it at home and I was 99% thrilled for Brian and 1% thrilled for us at the office. Susan had a tendency to walk in the door screaming instructions and grievances.

I was now an agent, not her assistant, but Susan didn't hold with such distinctions. We all got screamed at, we all became miserable, we all started whatever self-soothing behavior allowed us to not cry in the hallway. At the very least, Brian's win would delight her.

And then Brian forgot to thank her.

The next morning, we walked around with the resigned despair of a tank of sentient lobsters. We were all to be boiled alive, it was just a matter of when. Susan flew in the door, raced to her office, slammed the door shut. The quiet was actually worse.

At lunch, her assistant "Chet" slid into my office. He had the look of a man who had been screamed at for five hours. He asked a favor. Brian had called him; he was aghast he had forgotten to thank Susan, the woman who had made his dream come true. He thought he had a solution.

He would put a full-page ad in both VARIETY and HOLLYWOOD REPORTER, the daily trade papers read by everyone, thanking her. It was to be a surprise. The only thing Brian had needed from the Chet was a picture of her to put in the ad. Problem was, Chet couldn't find one.

I had been on her desk six months, did I know of one?

I smiled, because I did. Susan, like many women of a certain age, wasn't terribly fond of having her picture taken but it so happened there was a picture of her on the side-table in her office. Susan loved decorating, nothing was by chance, she must have liked that picture.

We got it, Chet slid it out, overnighted it to Brian, we crossed our fingers she wouldn't notice the picture was gone for a day. Even if she did, the ad was to appear the following day; after such a loving gesture, who could be angry with us?

The next day, we all waited breathlessly for her to walk in the back door from the parking lot, down the long hallways, past each of our offices. For once, she wouldn't be screaming. I wondered if she would hug me. I decided it was a small price to pay.

The door opened.

I swear to you, even the phones stopped ringing for a second.

Susan inhaled.

"Who the fuck," she screamed, "Gave Brian a picture OF MY MOTHER."