

SHRINKAGE

By Andrew Messer

Boss: (smoking, reviewing resume) John, I'm gonna be honest... your resume looks great. You've got the job.

John: Really? Wow. I heard quite a few people applied for this position. I thought I might...

Boss: Shut up, you're perfect. (picks up phone) Sheila, will you please give the rest of the applicants a call and tell them we'll be in touch. Then go ahead and throw out their files. Thanks. (hangs up) Anyway, John, before we can officially put you on the payroll, there is one small formality. We need you to take a short psychiatric assessment.

John: Oh, you mean like a written questionnaire or something?

Boss: No, it's only a quick evaluation with the company psychiatrist. Sheila will give you all the information. Oh, and eh, good luck.

Shrink: Oh, hello, John. Come on in. I'm Doctor -

John: Nice to meet you, Doctor.

Shrink: Likewise, let's get started. Tell me about yourself, John.

John: Well, since you already have my resume, what else would you like to know?

Shrink: John, are you hesitant to tell me about yourself?

John: Oh, no, not at all... I didn't want to bore you with repetition.

Shrink: John, I don't find the details of your life boring... quite the contrary, in fact. Even if I did find them boring, I am paid to listen.

John: You probably get paid pretty handsomely just to hear me talk, don't you?

Shrink: Well, now, John. Are you suggesting that people only work for the money? Do you not like working, John? Are you only driven by money?

John: Of course not, I was just trying to make a little joke.

Shrink: Well, John, it wasn't a very funny witticism. If I were only concerned about money, I would have stayed with Chippendales.

John: You were a Chippendale dancer?

Shrink: No, John, that was a joke. But it seemed to have piqued your curiosity a bit...

John: Well, I was just wondering what...

Shrink: Let's start with a few hypothetical questions, shall we? Alright, first... you find a wallet on the ground with one hundred dollars in it. What would you do with it?

John: Ah, well... um... I would try and return the money to its owner.

Shrink: Say the owner was deceased.

John: In that case, I would return it to a relative of the owner.

Shrink: (quickly) Say you had just killed the owner in a botched mugging and picked the wallet up out of a pool of blood.

John: (shocked) I'm sorry, what?! I would never kill someone over their wallet!

Shrink: Oh? So what would you kill someone over?

John: Nothing!

Shrink: You would kill someone over nothing?

John: No, that's not what I...

Shrink: Next question. You and an elderly lady are standing on the deck on a sinking ship, and there is only room for one more person on the lifeboat. Do you allow her to take the last remaining space on the boat, or do you take it by force?

John: Take it by force?

Shrink: Yes. For example, would you bludgeon the lady with an oar to procure safe passage?

John: No! I would give the seat to her. I mean, I'm in pretty good shape, I could swim.

Shrink: The waters are shark-infested, John. There will be no swimming.

John: Alright, then I'll hang onto the side of the lifeboat and take my chances.

Shrink: John, she's quite old.

John: I'm not going to leave an elderly woman on a sinking ship to die!

Shrink: She's going to die soon, anyway, John.

John: Just because she's old? She could live several more years!

Shrink: Not with the ebola virus.

John: She has the ebola virus?! Does she know this?

Shrink: Does it matter? What would you do, John?

John: Okay, fine, I'd take the spot on the lifeboat!

Shrink: Well, John. You are ruthless, aren't you?

John: You forced me...

Shrink: John, one last hypothetical. A friend has two tickets to see Cher live in concert. They offer them to you. Do you take them as a gift, or do you insist on giving them something in return?

John: Um, well... I'm not a big Cher fan, so could I just skip the concert?

Shrink: Correct answer. John! Alright, moving on. This next set of questions is a series of either/or propositions designed to gauge how confident you are in your decisions. Are you ready to begin?

John: Sure. Why not?

Shrink: Question one... milk or cookies?

John: You mean milk and cookies?

Shrink: No, John. This is not a perfect world. You cannot have both.

John: Oh. Well then in that case, um... milk. Yeah, milk.

Shrink: Alright... question two. Romance or fantasy novels?

John: Of just those two? Well... I find romance novels very hard to swallow, so I'd have to say fantasy.

Shrink: Fantasy. Interesting... so you believe in unicorns, centaurs, and the like.

John: No, I...

Shrink: Why don't we try something a little different, eh? I'm going to say a series of words and phrases. As soon as the words have evoked some clear mental image, I'd like you to tell me what that is. Understand?

John: (slightly annoyed) Yes, fine.

Shrink: Alright. Ice skates, toboggan, fireplace, hot cocoa...

John: A winter day?

Shrink: Good, John! Next... Ashlee Simpson, Keanu Reeves, Kevin Federline...

John: No talent?

Shrink: Well, I was expecting 'pop culture icons', but your answer is... quite appropriate, actually... Alright, ah... bikini, thong, g-string, French maid outfit your mother...

John: My mother?!

Shrink: Your mother?!

John: You just said my mother.

Shrink: No, you said your mother during the list of sexually appealing outfits. It was merely a series of words, John, there was no insinuation at all.

John: No, but you...

Shrink: John, you're getting rather worked up about this! Let's do some relaxation exercises, shall we? Just close your eyes.

John: (peevy) Ugh, fine.

Shrink: Good, John. Now, just try to calm down. Take a few deep breaths.

John: (sighs) Okay.

Shrink: Good. Now, I want you to try and create a mental environment, if you will. Your feet are beginning to feel quite heavy. This is because they are slowly settling into the warm sand of a tropical beach. You are surrounded by palm trees. You can hear the waves gently rolling, and the sea birds flying around you.

Are you feeling it, John?

John: (calmer, into the vision) Yes, yes I see it.

Shrink: Alright. You on holiday on this tropical isle with your family. Your father is busily snapping away photos with which to remember this warm, pleasant occasion, and your mother and you while away the time throwing a frisbee disc to one another. As your mother throws the disc to you, you feel the wind gently flow past you and rustle in the palms, and the waves quietly nudge against the shoreline. Just before you are poised to throw the frisbee back, you realize that you are having the most wonderful time of your life on this nude beach...

John: (startled) What?! (ranting) Look, this is ridiculous! I don't hang out on nude beaches with my parents! I'm not attracted to my mother, I don't read fantasy novels, and I wouldn't EVER kill anyone! And "milk or cookies?" It's MILK AND COOKIES! I want BOTH! I'm done with this!

Boss: (enters clapping, still smoking) Excellent, John!

John: Excuse me? What are you talking about? Where did you come from?

Boss: I was watching behind the two-way mirror. It comes standard in every shrink's office. You passed with flying colors, though! Most new hires quit after clobbering the old lady! Very few make it all the way to the... motherly love!

John: You mean this was all a test?

Boss: Yep! We needed to see how you held up, this is a high-pressure job!

John: Well, I don't want it. I don't want a job where one of the prerequisites is this kind of tormented evaluation! I quit!

Boss: You can't quit, you haven't even started yet!

John: Fine! Then tell Sheila to throw away my file, too! Goodbye!

Boss: Well... that was a bit harsh. Hmm... hey, Sheila! You want a promotion? I just need you to come in here for a minute and take a short evaluation...