

The Weatherman

“I hate him,” I said, perhaps too loud.

“Mommy says not to hate.”

I thought my son was asleep. I sat on the couch in a t-shirt, boxers, and tube socks, like I had most of the day. Aaron was curled up beside me. He wore his Spider-Man pajamas but he, at least, had dressed to go out when Anna left for work and took him to daycare.

“I can watch him,” I had told her the day after I had been fired. She smirked and chuckled.

I rubbed Aaron’s back. “Mommy’s right. Daddy shouldn’t have said *hate*.” Except, I meant it. I loathed everything about John Manning, Channel 9’s evening weatherman. His perfect hair and its business part. His gleaming smile. His charming personality. His dimples. I hated it all.

Because he was me. I had been Channel 9’s evening weatherman until the prior week.

Ken Martin called me into his office. Carley Jackson flanked him on the right and Steph Whitehead on the left. “Tom, we’re sorry,” Ken said after a minute of small talk, “but we’re letting you go.”

“What? Why?”

“Well...”

“You’re terrible at your job,” Carley interjected.

“It’s the weather. Nobody gets it right.”

“We realize that,” Ken replied. “However, we are losing our nightly viewers because your forecasts are so far off. Steph crunched the numbers. Over the past three months, you have not been within five degrees of the actual high once. You tell people it will be sunny and it rains. It has been five months and three days since your last accurate forecast.”

“Okay. So, I’m in a slump. And it’s not all my fault. What about Brent and Shannon? They’re the ones who feed me the model data. Maybe...”

“I’m sorry, Tom. We’ve made our decision.”

I sighed. “Who are you replacing me with?”

“John.”

“Manning?”

Ken nodded.

“Seriously? John Frickin’ Manning? I have a Master’s in Atmospheric Science from Texas Tech. Did he even finish college?”

“He has a great personality,” Steph said.

“And smile,” Carley added.

“You’re not allowed to say that,” Ken replied.

“He has a great TV persona,” Carley offered instead.

I had given three years to Channel 9. It was why we had left Texas for Iowa in the first place. Then, unceremoniously, they showed me the door. I took up residence on the couch, forced to watch John Frickin’ Manning.

“There are other channels,” Anna reminded me.

True.

But I couldn’t seethe with anger watching Kris Kowalski or Brenda Turner.

“This is unhealthy.”

Maybe. But it was my therapy.

“You need to look for another job or we need to move back to Texas.”

She was right. But it was so much easier to sit on the couch in my underwear, downing ice cream and bags of chips, feeling sorry for myself.

I hated John Manning.

“And tomorrow will be a wonderful day. Sunny, with a high of 75 and a low of 59. You should expect some wind but that will be great for those kites.”

My eyes narrowed as I glared at the screen. A soft growl emerged from deep in my throat. Lightning flashed out the window, followed quickly by thunder and the patter of rain against the roof.

“Now let’s go to Live Doppler 9. We have some popup thunder showers in the area. Here’s one over Midtown. These were unexpected but not unusual for this time of year. You can sleep well, though. None of these should turn severe.”

I shut off the TV and rubbed my face. The sound of rain faded.

Aaron had fallen asleep. I wrapped my arms around him, gently, and carried him to bed. I tucked him in and kissed his forehead. Then, I slipped into my room. Anna should have been asleep. She had the early shift at the hospital.

“I heard you watching Manning again.”

“Last time,” I said as I slid under the sheet. “I promise.”

My promise lasted less than two days.

On Tuesday, I had actually dressed and left the house for an interview. The Fox 107 FM had advertised for an on-air personality. It was a part time gig but would give me something to do. They told me they would call back within a week. When I got home, I left my pants on the kitchen table, grabbed a slice of sausage pizza, and flopped onto the couch, still in my shirt and tie. Anna sat beside me.

I shoveled pizza into my mouth and turned on Channel 9.

Anna sighed.

“What?” I mumbled; my mouth full.

“I managed to pull some favors at work. I have next week off. I want to take Aaron to see my mom and dad.”

I swallowed and took a sip of tea. “Great! What day are we leaving?”

“You’re not coming.”

“But...”

“Babe, I’m glad you had that interview and I hope they call, but I can’t do this with you right now. You lost your job. It sucks, I know. But you’re obsessing. It’s been months since Aaron has seen my parents. This will be good for him and them. I want it to be good for you, too. I think you need a few days alone to get yourself together.”

I hung my head. The room darkened as clouds hid the sun and rain started to fall.

“And if I can’t?”

She reached over and lifted my chin. I gazed into her bright blue eyes as she smiled. “I know you and what you can be. You can.”

I nodded.

The first day of my week to *get myself together* did not go well. I slept until noon. Then, I broke out my old Nintendo and spent the afternoon trying to beat Super Mario Brothers. I had never made it past Bowser on level 8-4. I lost track of the number of times one of his tiny hammers sent me falling off the screen. It was enough that I started to cuss at the eight-bit turtle king. I managed to turn off the game before rage got the better of me and I threw the console across the room.

After three beers and two cans of SpaghettiOs for supper, I turned on the TV. I knew I shouldn't. I knew it would only make me angry to see Manning's smiling face and perfect teeth. I should have taken a shower or gone for a walk or read a book.

But I couldn't help myself.

"Again, another beautiful Iowa week. Rain is likely on Wednesday, but other than that, warm and sunny. Now here's my seven-day forecast."

"Lies!" I yelled. "You're a fraud, Manning! *Your* forecast—Brent and Shannon do all your work!"

Maybe it was the fourth beer I had begun drinking, but an idea popped into my head. I would prove my superiority over John Manning. My head swelled with confidence despite my months of failure. I grabbed a pencil and a scrap of paper and scribbled: Monday, 74/49 Sunny; Tuesday 81/53 Light Rain; Wednesday 71/50 Mostly Cloudy...

With Thursday, I laughed as I wrote: 29/17 Snow.

The final three days were akin to the first three. I tossed the pencil onto the coffee table and picked up my scrap. I took a picture with my phone and sent it to Manning, along with the text: *\$100 says my average proves better than yours, even with Thursday.*

An hour later, he sent me three messages in reply.

If you want to troll me at least attempt to be serious.

I'd take your hundred but I know you won't pay.

Don't ever text me again.

I smirked, set my phone on the table, and closed my eyes.

The next several days went better for me. I stayed away from beer and Channel 9. The Fox's manager called and asked if I could start next Monday. Anna called and said she and Aaron missed me and couldn't wait to come home. I couldn't wait to see them either.

Manning was an afterthought.

Until Thursday.

I woke and shivered as I climbed out of bed. Spring had been pleasant. We last switched on our heat in April. That morning, though, I pulled on sweats and wrapped myself with a blanket. Stumbling into the living room, I checked the thermostat. The inside temperature read 54.

I turned on the heat and peeked out the window.

"Holy crap."

It was June 3. Yet, snow blanketed the city.

I plopped onto the couch and scrolled through the morning news. Each meteorologist was in disbelief.

“I, um, I don’t know what to say,” Katie Wilson, Channel 9’s chief meteorologist told her audience. “I mean, no one saw this coming. The National Weather Service calls it a surprise polar vortex. They aren’t even sure what to make of it.”

My phone buzzed. It was Manning.

How did you guess this one?

The slip of paper rested on the coffee table. I hadn’t looked at it since the night I scribbled a forecast half drunk. On my phone, I checked the official data. Every day matched.

“This can’t be.”

Friday was sunny and the high was 68. The snow melted. Saturday was 74 and partly cloudy. The data again confirmed my forecast.

Anna and Aaron returned that evening. I’d have to keep it a secret from Anna, but on Sunday I watched Manning again and wrote my predictions for another seven days.

I started my job at The Fox. They gave me a few weather segments but primarily I served as a foil to Mad Mike Hammond, the semi-profane voice of the afternoon and rush hour. Each day the producer handed me a bullet-point list of topics. Mike didn’t care. We instead discussed the random thoughts that popped into his head, from our hopes for the Hawkeye’s football team to his girlfriend’s shopping habits. Politics was his favorite topic. He didn’t care for elephants or donkeys, but he loved the conspiracy theories on YouTube that blamed everything on the Illuminati.

It wasn’t my dream job but it kept me off the couch. That made Anna happy.

In the mornings, before work, I pulled my forecast sheet from my wallet and checked my numbers. Another week came and went, each day as I had predicted.

That’s when I told Anna.

“You’re kidding, right?”

“No.”

She studied my face. I couldn’t say that I had never lied to her in our nine years of marriage, but I was a terrible liar and she knew it.

“Even the snow?”

“Even the snow.”

“How’s that possible?”

“I don’t know.” I chewed my lip. “I want to do a public forecast this week. You know, like a Facebook video.”

“And if your predictions are wrong?”

I shrugged. “People laugh at me and say that I’m an idiot who deserved to be fired. Then I wake up the next day and go listen to Mad Mike rant about who knows what.”

She nodded, but with skepticism in her eyes. “If that’s what you want to do.”

It was. On Sunday, I scribbled out another seven days. Then I placed my phone on a tripod and went live for the world to see, or at least my six hundred and fifty-nine friends and whoever they decided to share the video with.

“Hey all, Tom Timmins here, former meteorologist on Channel 9. I know few of you will believe what I’m about to say, but I promise I’m not drunk. Don’t listen to everything Brent Paulson says about me.” I tried to look serious as I delivered that line but couldn’t help but grin. Brent was a good guy and one of my few friends from Channel 9.

I showed the camera my old forecast slips. “These past two weeks, I have produced my own seven-day forecasts on my couch while watching John Manning on Sunday nights. I have not been wrong a single day, not even by one degree. That includes that freak snow storm on the third. So... Yes, I see your comment Brenda. I’m not joking. So, to prove myself to you, here’s my predictions for the next seven days.”

I read my list.

The next Sunday I filmed another video. The following Monday, Ken called. He apologized for my dismissal and asked if I wanted my old job back. I told him which part of my body he could kiss. Tuesday, Barbara Hader from Channel 5 called. She informed me that Frank Martin would be retiring in a month and asked if I had any interest in becoming Channel 5’s Chief Meteorologist.

I told her I would be happy to come for an interview.

Friday after work, I stepped out of the station and saw a familiar truck parked beside my Volvo. It was a blue Ford F150 with a dent on the passenger door and a rusted scratch across the hood. My dad reached his hand out the window and waved as I approached.

“Anna said I’d find you here.”

I reached in the window and gave him a hug. “What are you doing in town?”

“Just passing through.”

“You live three states away.”

He grinned. “Can’t a man surprise his son every now and then?”

I smiled. “Absolutely.”

“Get in. I’m taking you to supper. Oh, I also promised my grandson that I’d bring him ice cream.”

I climbed in the passenger seat and the man who had raised me as a single father patted my knee and shifted into drive. Twenty minutes later, we sat inside Culver’s and ate double ButterBurgers, his with bacon, and onion rings.

“I’ve watched your videos,” dad said between bites. “Do you remember doing forecasts as a kid?”

I thought for a moment and remembered clipping weather maps from the newspaper and taping them to the refrigerator.

“Kind of.”

He grinned but his eyes betrayed something else on his mind. “This thing you’re doing—the spot-on predictions, it happened once before, for about two weeks when you were seven.”

I had taken a bite of onion ring and slowly chewed the crunchy batter. I thought hard but didn’t remember that. To be fair, it had been thirty years. “Really?”

Dad nodded. His hands trembled as he set the burger on the tray. “There’s something I need to tell you but I’m afraid of what it might mean for us.” His eyes watered.

“What’s wrong?”

“I love you, son, you know that?”

“Oh no. You’re dying, aren’t you?”

He shook his head, removed his glasses, and wiped his eyes. “I haven’t been honest with you about your mother.”

My heart began to race. I held my breath in a vain attempt to slow its beat. The man across from me had been the only parent I had known. We shared the same long nose but I had brown eyes instead of blue and stood a foot taller. My hair was thick and brown, while his, once blond, was now thin and gray. He often told me I resembled my mother.

He hadn’t kept pictures of her around the house. I didn’t think much of it as a kid, but on reflection I should have realized the oddity. He had told me that her name was Miranda and that she died before I turned one. Whenever he spoke of her, he smiled with a boyish grin of unfading young love.

“Her name is actually Minerva. She is a poet and an artist—those are two of her great passions. I wrote her a love poem once and poured out my heart like never before. I thought it was

wonderful. She responded with a poem about a skunk.” He chuckled. “Its beauty put my poem to shame. That’s when I knew I was in love, truly in love. She still writes me and she asks about you and your family.”

I gulped, my heart beating faster. “She... She’s dead. You’ve always told me she died.”

“It was a necessary lie. She couldn’t be with us. Her father would have been furious if he had found out.”

“Father? What? Why does that matter?”

“Because her father is Jupiter.”

My brow furrowed and my mouth gaped. At the moment, I questioned my dad’s sanity. I wondered if he had a disease that was beginning to play with his mind. “Why are you telling me this?”

“Because it explains you.”

I pressed my fingers together and rested them beneath my nose. “So, my mother is still alive and my grandfather is named after a planet?” I spoke slowly.

“Not the planet. The Roman god.”

“My grandfather is named after a Roman god?”

“Your grandfather is the Roman god.”

I laughed. Loud. People at other tables turned and stared. Seeing their gazes, I composed myself and cleared my throat. “Have you seen somebody about this? A doctor or a psychiatrist?”

“Don’t patronize me, Tomas.”

“I’m not. I just...”

“Have you seen somebody about your forecasts?”

“That’s different.” I snapped.

He sighed. “Do you remember Jack?”

I did. In the third grade I dressed as a pirate for Halloween. I called myself *Pirate Jack* and spoke with plenty of *arrrs* as I visited house after house demanding candy for booty. It was good fun in the spirit of the holiday. Yet, for the next four months, I wanted to wear the costume every day. I even slept in the outfit. Dad forbade me from wearing it to school, but he wasn’t there to stop my demands that teachers and classmates refer to me as *Jack*.

I nodded.

“All your life you have tried to be someone you’re not. Jack was only the start. You have kept running from yourself, but that doesn’t change the fact that you’re a child of the gods.”

I no longer protested. There was something about his words, as crazy as they sounded, that rang true. How else would I have known a month’s worth of weather with unfailing accuracy?

“You’re not predicting the weather, Tomas. You’re controlling it. You get that from your grandfather.”

“Controlling it?”

“Have you ever noticed how the weather changes with your mood?”

He wasn’t wrong. Even as a child, when I grew frustrated or upset, clouds would fill the sky and rain would fall.

“You’ve been doing it subconsciously. That’s your true self trying to emerge.”

I glanced out the windows. It was a sunny afternoon with a clear blue sky, just as I had predicted. I thought about a cloud. I closed my eyes and envisioned a cumulus. When I opened my eyes a puffball of gray and white hung in the air.

My gaze turned back to my father. “What do I do?”

“I’ve taught you to be kind and help those in need. Use your power wisely and help people.”

I nodded.

“I’m proud of you, Tomas. You’re a good man, a good son and husband and daddy. I know with your ability that your goodness will come through.”

I took the job with Channel 5. I tested and honed my abilities but not every day. I used them enough for the station to claim *Iowa’s Most Accurate Forecasting Team*, but I needed to be wrong from time to time. Perfection disturbs people. I loved my coworkers at Channel 5, especially once we hired Brent and Shannon away from Channel 9. Truth be told, when I didn’t control the weather, my forecasts were terrible but I had a good team to cover for me.

Being half-human, a demigod, limited my power. I couldn’t change the weather on a global scale. I also had my wife and son to think about. I didn’t have time to make every day pleasant. Still, I did what I could to counter droughts and floods and avert severe storms.

There was one thing I wasn’t proud of but it gave me a laugh. A month after I started working at Channel 5, I grabbed coffee with Clark Thompson, our morning weatherman. Through the window of the shop, I saw John Manning exit the store across the street. He was alone on the sidewalk.

I grinned.

A bolt of lightning struck the pavement two hundred feet behind him. The boom of thunder shook the building and rattled the windows. Patrons gasped. Several spilled their drinks.

Like I said, I wasn't proud of myself, but Manning had to pick himself up off the sidewalk with fear in his eyes and a wet spot at his crotch. I promised dad that I would be a benevolent weather god. I kept my word and didn't torment Manning again.

As I watched him sprint away, my grin grew into a toothy smile.

"That was out of the blue," Clark said.

I shrugged. "Weather. It's hard to predict."

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