

A WALL STREET TYCOON SEES THE ERROR OF HIS WAYS

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Candy hearts remind me of my first day on Wall Street. One of the senior traders convinced us interns to crush up and snort twenty-five boxes of them. He made it into a competition, a grand going to the winner. We snorted down lines of that chalky confection like it was our job. I ended up inhaling more than anyone else so I won. I have suffered from chronic nosebleeds ever since, so I also kind of lost. What can you do? That's just the way things are.

Nosebleeds aren't the only chronic problem that I've developed as a result of my years in the financial sector. Herpes flair ups have plagued me ever since that trip to Thailand, my appetite for seafood has never rebounded from that bout with puffer-fish poisoning, and my left eye has never fully recovered from being shot with that paintball — I probably should have been wearing a facemask but in my defense the guy running the place had made it very clear that we were only to shoot at the hot women in bikinis. Stupid Zack from risk management must have missed that part. I would still be mad at him if he hadn't given me that info on Collateralized Debt Obligations. I made eight figures shorting those piles of shit, which slightly assuaged my feelings of animosity toward him. Even better, it allowed me to strike out on my own.

At my place we don't make the interns snort candy hearts. Sophomoric. Instead, we have them do lines of crushed-up Sweet Tarts. It's far more entertaining. The candy's sourness wreaks havoc on their nasal passages. They spend weeks trying to wash out that space between their mouths and their noses. A neti pot would fix the problem, but I don't tell them that and they're too corporate minded to figure it out on their own. Homeopathic remedies and high-risk finance do not go hand-in-hand. Indeed, the only reason I know about neti pots is because my weird hippy brother told me about them. Alternative nasal treatments and opening my eyes to the profitability of organic food stocks: the only two worthwhile things my brother has ever done.

Hopefully it goes without saying that Sweet Tarts are not the only way in which I have improved upon the practices of my previous employer. My place is better in almost every imaginable way. Better perks, better food, better entertainment, better work environment, better everything—especially profits. The investment bank that I used to work for was far too concerned with the quality of the stocks that they bought. That's not to say that they were extremely concerned, because they weren't. Indeed, they were barely concerned at all. But in my book any concern is too much concern. Concerns hinder the moneymaking process. The greater fool theory is all that matters. I don't care how shitty a stock is, so long as there is some poor bastard that will buy it off of me for more than I paid.

Take for instance this company that makes female condoms for women in third world countries. It's a terrible fucking company. I mean come on, female condoms? Seriously? Who the fuck is going to use those things? No one, that's who. Shit, they look like gross plastic hoagie bags. Who wants to stick their dick in one of those? Or shove one of them up their vagina? Again, no one, and certainly not women from third world countries—countries where the education system is crap, the societal norms are oppressively sexist, and misinformation regarding health issues is rampant. Those women wouldn't even know why they should use a female condom let alone how to use one. The whole business is laughable. Worst company ever. Worst stock ever. But that doesn't matter. I don't care that the

company is a festering pile. I bought that shit anyway because I know someone who does care and I'll be able to unload the stock onto him for a massive profit. That's the greater fool theory.

Elias is the idiot's name. He manages the Mississippi Public Schoolteachers Fund, He wears fair trade suits, and sprouts his own lentils, and uses organic soap, and shit like that. He once told me that he got into investing to help out the working class; to ensure that their retirement money is safely and ethically invested; to support morally commendable companies; blah, blah, blah. Dear god, he might as well have put a fucking target on his back.

I've been gaming this dude for a while now, giving him legitimate tips on some worthwhile eco-conscious companies. Gaining his trust. Setting up my play. It's been almost too easy. Like stealing candy from a legless armless baby.

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"Elias! Hey bud, how's it going?"

It was kismet. The shit stock that I had bought with him in mind had just hit the price target that I had set. His call couldn't have come at a more perfect time. Of course, if he hadn't called me I would have called him, but now I didn't have to, he was doing my job for me, initiating his own demise.

Elias babbled on in my ear as I stepped forward in line. His voice was barely audible over the cheers of my coworkers. I probably should have taken the call in my office but there was no way I was going to miss my shot at midget curling. As three time midget bowling champion, I didn't know how I felt about the change to curling, but whatever. Either way, I got to toss a little person down a slip-and-slide.

"Yeah, Elias."

"Blah, blah, blah."

"Uh huh. I'm totally sympathetic."

"Bullshit, bullshit, bullshit."

"No, I agree, it's really a shame. Borderline criminal."

"Whine, whine, whine, blah, blah, blah, bullshit, bullshit, bullshit."

I wasn't paying any attention to the words coming out of Elias's mouth. So long as I responded with vague and generic understanding he would be placated. I grabbed the one handle located near the base of the midget's spine and the other located between his shoulder blades, swung him back and forth three times, and then let go. He went flying down the slip-and-slide, overshooting the button by at least five yards. Shit.

There was a brief pause on the other end of the line, so I spoke up as I leaned over to pick up my next midget. "Elias, buddy, listen. Your end-of-year returns are going to be fine, great actually."

“I don’t see how, unless you’ve got something for me.”

“Oh, I’ve definitely got something for you.” My second midget went careening into the ass of one of my opponent’s midgets. They both went sliding passed the backline.

“What’s that?” Elias inquired hopefully.

“This birth control company that’s getting huge in developing countries. It’s got an incredibly bright future.”

“That sounds wonderful.”

“It is. It is. Unfortunately for us, they’re becoming a serious competitor with Jackson and Jackson, and since I sit on the board of Jackson and Jackson I’m going to have to unload my shares.” My next little person skittered off the side of the slip-and-slide and onto the carpet. He ended up with rug-burn on his cheek—so much for trying to curl my midget around my opponents.

“That is unfortunate,” Elias commiserated, “but if you’re looking for someone to take them off your hands I would be happy to help.”

“Alright. I mean if I have to sell them off, it would be nice to sell them to you. That way at least somebody I like will reap the profits.”

“Someone you like and tens of thousands of hard working teachers.”

“That’s true... I mean... I guess...” I said, feigning deliberation. “Okay, I’m in.”

“Excellent.”

“But it’s a ton of shares you know. It’ll take up a decent amount of your portfolio.”

“That’s okay. Good actually. I need to be overweight a winner.”

“Alright, then it’s a done deal.”

“Done deal,” Elias echoed. I hung up the phone and tossed my final midget. He went the way of my first, sliding swiftly passed the button.

Having lost, I headed back to my office, grabbed a cigarette, and stepped out onto the patio. I was halfway through my smoke when a price alert popped up on my phone. The female condom company was down thirty five percent. “Shit,” I thought. “Already? That intern must have posted my condemnatory article the second we unloaded the stock. Elias didn’t stand a goddamn chance.”

A soft drizzle began to descend as I took another drag off of my cigarette. The rain was cold but it felt good, certainly not enough to drive me indoors. Leaning over my phone to guard it from the falling droplets, I scrolled through the article that accompanied the price alert notification. It identified Elias’s Mississippi Public Schoolteachers Fund as one of the primary investors in the stock. As I was reading

the article, it updated, adding various quotes from retired Mississippi schoolteachers to the body of the piece. Whoever was reporting the story was on the ball.

Lighting a second cigarette, I continued reading, lingering on the quotes from the schoolteachers. They were bleak. Many of the old educators relied heavily on money from the fund, some of them, exclusively. Compounding the misery further was the comments section. The article had only been up for twenty minutes, but it was already littered with tales of woe, each worse than the last. "Goddamn," I thought. "Some of these retirees are going to be in a world of hurt."

Having reached the bottom of the page, I returned my phone to my pocket and tilted my head toward the sky, letting the rain descend onto my face. It was picking up a bit, but I didn't mind. It felt good, cleansing, clarifying. Thoughts of candlestick charts and P/E ratios and short-term call options evaporated from my mind, replaced by snapshots of human faces adorned with expressions of disappointment, pain, and frustration—expressions that mirrored my own feelings. That's when it hit me: it didn't have to be this way. There was still time to fix the situation. Determined, I stamped out my cigarette and headed inside. Marching through my office, I walked passed the televisions and trading stations and over to the slip-and-slide. Looking down I saw the faces of the men that had haunted my thoughts moments before.

"Don't worry guys, I got it this time. My grip was all wrong before. Curling is about accuracy not power."

The midgets nodded apathetically. I don't think they fully appreciated my insight. Whatever, I didn't need them to. I just needed their stubby bodies to slide across the floor.

Utilizing my new grip I remained undefeated for the remainder of the day. Now the midget curling trophy rests beside my three midget bowling trophies on the bookshelf in my office. Thank god I saw the error of my ways. I shudder to think what would have happened had I not.

THE END!