

Five Ways to Say “F*ck Off!” In Our Post-Modern Era

by Andrew O. Dugas

1.

He had just finished the dishes when she came home from work, iPhone in hand. He dried his hands and leaned in for the welcome-home peck.

“Another long day, huh?”

“End of the quarter.” She set down the phone and shook off her coat. “How's everything here?”

“Good, good. Honey, can I show you something?”

She made a face. Once upon a time that question would've have piqued her interest instead of her dread. “What?”

Her phone chimed.

“Is that a text?” he asked. The damned thing went off all the time.

“It's just the office.” She unclasped her auburn hair and shook it loose. Once upon a time that gesture would have fanned the flames of his longing. “What did you want to show me?”

He lifted a white coffee cup from the sink and tilted it like a cannon, pointed right at her.

“What?”

“Look.” He handed it to her. “Look inside.”

She tilted it for better light, already knowing what to expect: the brown circle of coagulated coffee at the bottom. She sighed. “And?”

“And?” He crossed his arms. “We've talked about this a million times --”

“Oh for Chrissake! This is how you greet me after a hard day?”

He rolled his eyes. “C'mon honey, is it too much for you to just rinse out the cup?”

“I can't believe you're doing this.”

"Honey, honey." He tried to take her hand but she pulled away.
"This is about the cup. Don't make it about us."

"Whatever." She grabbed her phone and left the kitchen.

"Honey!"

She shouted back, "WHAT. EVER!"

2.

Later, after The Bachelorette and after she'd been too quiet for too long, he snuck a peek into the home office. She was curled up asleep on the futon loveseat.

He thought about gently rousing her and leading her to their bed, where they would mingle in their body heat and make slow love.

Then her iPhone chimed.

He picked it up. Someone named Randolph wanted to know: "R U still there?"

"Can I help you?" She'd awakened and was staring at him.

"Yeah, you can help me. You can tell me who the fuck Randolph is and why he's texting you at eleven o'clock at night."

She grabbed the phone. He tried to hang onto it but she dug her nails in.

"It's work stuff."

"At eleven o'clock at night?"

She sat up, her fingers dancing across the small screen. "I told you, it's end of quarter. Some people are pulling an all-nighter."

"Oh really? I don't remember any Randolph and why is he in your address book in the first place?"

She handed him back the phone. The screen asked for a password he didn't have.

"Are you going to answer me?"

She stood up and stretched. "I'm over this conversation."

"What?"

She looked him in the eye. "I said: I. AM. OVER. THIS. CONVERSATION."

3.

In the morning, he still felt bad enough to prepare a special breakfast while she showered.

When she came into the kitchen, she went straight to the coffee and filled her commuter cup. Her iPhone beeped and she pulled it from her coat pocket, her thumb sliding and tapping on the screen.

"Aren't you going to have any breakfast? I made your favorite. Waffles with fresh blueberries."

She glanced at the kitchen table, frowned. "I can't. I'm late."

He sat down and patted her chair. "Come on. I even heated the maple syrup."

"Honey, I don't even have time to put on my makeup. I'll have to do it on the bus." She didn't look up from her phone.

He crossed his arms. "I made this breakfast for you. Don't be rude."

"Hah! So now I'm rude?" Her smile tightened and she shook her head.

"Can you put down the phone for one second?"

"Honey, I'm director of channel sales, I'm busy. That's the way I roll."

He slapped the table with both hands, making the plates jump. "Really? Really?" He pulled the phone from her grip and smashed it against the table.

"Are you fucking crazy?"

He smashed it again and again. Pieces came loose and tumbled into the hot maple syrup and across the stacks of purple-smudged waffles.

"No, I'm not crazy." He dropped the phone carcass and kicked it into the corner. "THAT'S. JUST. THE. WAY. I. ROLL!"

4.

That afternoon, he drove to his wife's office. A little surprise visit.

The receptionist, a thirty-ish man wearing a tight pink Oxford shirt and a single diamond stud earring, eyed him warily when he entered. "And how may I help you, sir?"

He stated his name and that he was here to see his wife.

The receptionist transformed. "Oh my goodness! So you're the mysterious hubby! We've heard so much about you, it's such a pleasure to finally put together a face with the name."

"Uh... Yes... I..."

"Just wait one little second." He picked up his desk phone and tapped the keys. "Hi, it's Randolph in reception. I hope this isn't a bad time... Your husband's here... Well, that's what he said... Fifteen, brunette, handsome in a kind of Ben Affleck meets young Bruce Willis way... Okay, sure, of course."

The receptionist made a face and hung up.

"They are SUPER busy--end of quarter and all that--but she said she'll be right out."

He looked more closely at the receptionist. "Did you say your name was Randolph?"

"That's me." The receptionist crooked his eyebrows. "I hope she isn't gossiping about me behind my back!"

"No, no. Nothing like that." He looked around. To either side he could see cubicles and office workers in mid-scurry. "Is there another Randolph that works here?"

"Just me, sweetie." The receptionist smiled like the devil. "She has been talking about me, hasn't she?"

His wife appeared. "What are you doing here?"

He straightened and cleared his throat. "Hey honey, I was just in the neighborhood and I thought we'd get lunch..."

"I told you we're crazy busy. What is it? Did something happen?"

"No... I..."

She took him by the elbow and walked him back to the elevators. "You have to leave. I can't talk right now." She pressed the Down button.

He gestured back to reception. "So that's Randolph, huh. Nice fellow."

One of the elevators opened with a ding. She said. "I can't have this conversation right now."

"Maybe we can have a quiet dinner tonight. Watch *Casablanca*."

She pushed him into the elevator. "I said: I. CAN'T. HAVE. THIS. CONVERSATION. RIGHT. NOW."

5.

That evening he prepared salmon filet and arugula salad. He chilled a nice Blanc that the wine shop guy recommended. He put *Casablanca* into the player. They'd watched *Casablanca* at the Red Vic on their first date and on his last birthday, she'd given him the blue ray disc.

Then he waited.

When seven o'clock came and went, he tried calling her cell phone, then remembered. He called her office instead, pressing this number and that until her extension was ringing.

"Yes?" she answered.

"Hi."

"What is it? We're very busy."

"Sorry, sorry. I, uh, I made dinner and I'm just wondering..."

She didn't let him finish. "I'm not coming home tonight."

He bit his lip. "You guys pulling an all nighter, huh?"

"Yes, but that's not it."

"But you are coming home at some point, right?"

She was silent. Then: "I think we're done here."

"If it's about the phone, I'm really sorry. Please." For the first time in his marriage, he was afraid.

"Honey, you're not hearing me. I said: WE'RE. DONE. HERE. WE ARE DONE!"

