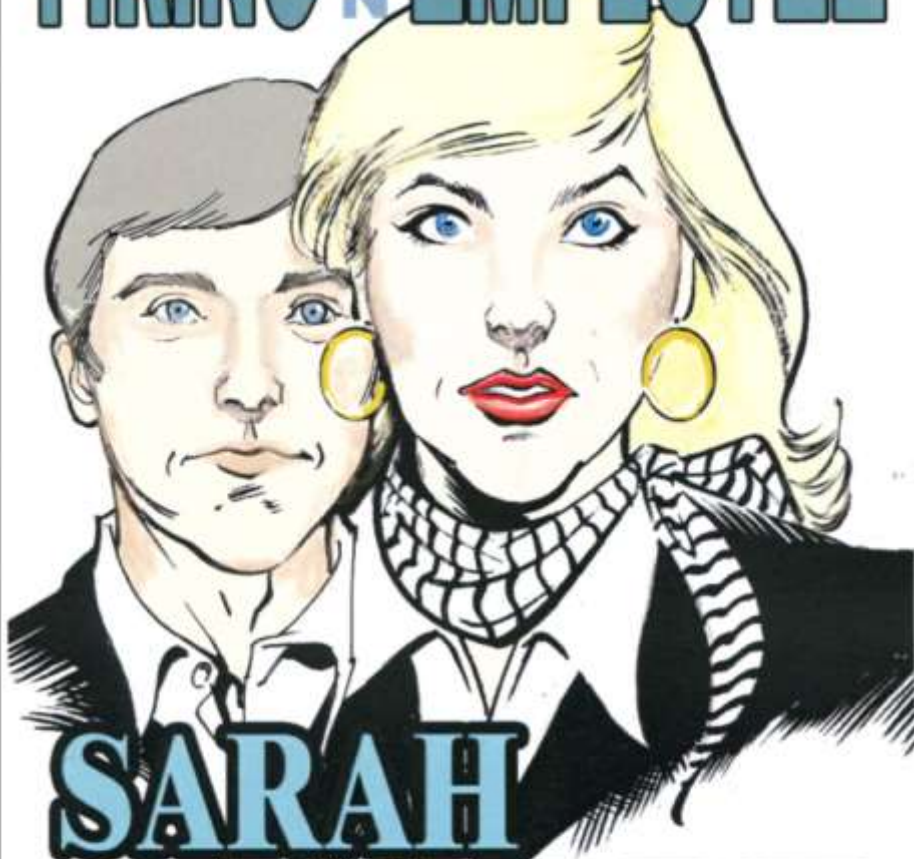


THE DANGERS OF
FIRING AN EMPLOYEE



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The Dangers of Firing an Employee

by Sarah Thorpe

Chapter 1

Sam Collins leaned back in his chair and smiled. He glanced once more at the computer screen in front of him to check the numbers. It was Friday afternoon and he saw once again that he had made a hell of a lot of money during the week. His employer would be pleased and he would receive a fat bonus. He looked over to his partner, Maxine Peters, and said: "Max, we sure did great this week. Didn't we?" Sam was 25 years old and had worked for Tony Ziennick since he left college. He shared an apartment with three other Ziennick employees.

"Yes, Sam, we did. Tony will be pleased. I think we will both hear about it at the office party tomorrow. Then you can take it easy and enjoy your holiday. You've done great and you deserve this holiday." Max looked at Sam. She was a red headed woman of Scottish decent. She was in her early thirties. She was one of most beautiful women Sam had ever seen. Her ancestors sure had given her some good genes. She had worked for Tony Ziennick ever since she graduated from college and was now the company's most trusted stockbroker. This had made her filthy rich.

Sam had also made good money since he joined AZ Finance. He knew that he from time to time acted on some kind of inside information, but his mouth was sealed. He had been sworn into secrecy when he joined the company so he couldn't tell anybody about what he knew. Even if he left the company for one reason or another, he was bound by the secrecy act. The same was true for his two roommates. They were Leroy Brown, an African American lawyer who was dating Maxine at the moment and Adam Ruiz, a broker like himself, but he worked at the main office while Sam was mainly at Wall Street. Adam was dating a girl named Maria. She worked as a clerk at the company. The same did Sam's girlfriend Alice.

Sam thought about what had happened this past week. Six weeks earlier someone had given him a tip about a company that was about to receive a large Government contract. The stocks in that company had a very low value at that moment and many other brokers thought they would go bankrupt in a few weeks. But Sam acted on the tip and silently bought lots of shares in the company. So when the contract was awarded last Tuesday, the value of the shares skyrocketed and AZ Finance was left with a large profit. He had sold some of the shares to other brokers on that Tuesday. Maxine had had a similar

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experience, she sold a lot of shares in a company that was thought to be very solid, but who filed for bankruptcy on Thursday. Again a huge profit for AZ Finance. But most of the time the both acted on their own instincts.

They left Wall Street together a little after six. They looked forward to the AZ Finance monthly party that would take place at a fancy restaurant the next day. There all their colleagues would celebrate them. After that Sam was supposed to spend the night at his girlfriend's house before they both went on a two-week vacation to Hawaii and Las Vegas.

In another building in New York eight people were gathered to discuss the latest developments at Wall Street. The fact that AZ Finance once again was able to catch huge profits had to be more than a coincidence. It had happened too often.

Teri Harris, top executive at J. P. Hawthorne, chaired the meeting. At her side was J. P. VI who was about to take over the whole Hawthorne enterprises as soon as the present boss, J. P. IV turned 70. J. P IV was present via speakerphone. Ms Harris opened the meeting and said: "We have now seen once again that AZ Finance managed to grab a huge profit from something that happened at Wall Street. This has happened too often and I think we need to look closer into what's going on. In almost all cases it has happened in connection with Governmental contracts. This might indicate that they receive classified information from someone in the Federal hierarchy. We all know that this is acting upon illegal information and that it is a Federal offence to do so. I will now ask Carl to give us the fact behind the recent events."

Carl Fredericks took the word and said: "Thank you Ma'am. As you all remember, a little over one year ago the Department of Transportation announced that they would introduce a Federal Toll Road system. This was supposed to be a system where the motorists could pay toll on all Interstate Highways with an electronic chip instead of stopping at a gate and use coins. Various options for paying should be available. All Interstate Highways should be part of the system and States and Cities could join if they wanted. Similar systems have been installed in Europe with great technical success.

"As soon as the news were out several electronic companies jumped at the idea. Two European companies also joined in by establishing subsidiaries in the US. After a relatively short while many of the companies withdrew from the bid. They said they couldn't make in such a short time frame. In the end there were four companies left, two from US and two from Europe. Their bids were evaluated and two, one US and one European, were declared non-compliant. That left two competitors, one large US Company and one relatively small European. Everybody was sure that the US Company would get the bid. That was in the cards, so to speak. As we came closer to day for announcing the winner, the market was sure that they had a winner. The value of the US Company started to increase while the value of the European one stayed low. At this point AZ Finance, with their brokers Sam Collins and Maxine Peters, started

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to sell stocks in the US Company while they were buying stocks in the European one. They did so even if the US Company was on a rising curve. Now we know the result, the contract was given to the European Company NoQ and the value of the company skyrocketed. AZ Finance sold half of their stocks with a huge profit. The value of the US Company went down and AZ Financing was left with a huge profit. They couldn't have done this without inside information."

"Mary, how did we make it here?"

"Ma'am, we did fairly well. As soon as it was down to only two contestants we decided to saddle both horses. We lost some and we gained some, but in the end we gained more than we lost. I think we came out pretty well."

"And Pete, can you tell us what this technology is all about?"

"With pleasure Ma'am. What will happen is that every motorist that wants to participate in this electronic toll system will receive an electronic chip to put on the inside of his windshield. Every chip is unique and has information about the vehicles registration and the owner's name and address. Every time he passes a tollgate his passing is registered in a computer. You can either have a subscription for a certain number of passes or for a certain duration. In the first case your number of passes are counted and when you're empty you will be urged to renew your subscription. In the latter case you will be notified when the period you have paid for is coming to an end. Your subscription is linked to a particular area.

"If you for instance drive up and down the New Jersey Turnpike every day for work, you get a subscription for New Jersey Turnpike. If you happen to drive in another area, your pass will be registered and you will be billed later. Such passes will be charged to, in this case, New Jersey Turnpike, and they will bill you. Normally they will send you the bill after you have accumulated a certain number of passes. It works beautifully.

"The NoQ Company made a very good demonstration on the turnpike two months ago. They even took representatives from DoT to Europe to show them the system. There it has been in action for several years already and it works like clockwork. This system was easily adaptable to US Standards. I think that was the trick that convinced DoT. The US Company also held a demonstration on New Jersey Turnpike. They demonstrated a system with lots of flaws and it was very complicated. They still need lots of development while the European system is already up and running over there. I've heard rumors that the US Company will challenge the decision."

"Thank you Pete. I will now open the floor for open discussion."

They talked for an hour before Teri concluded: "Thank you all for a very interesting discussion. I think we all have the issue well in hand by now. It's nothing we can do, we have no evidence of foul play, and besides, we are not the police or the FBI. I will, however, ask Carl to use his contacts in Washington

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and see if they can give us any clues to the informant. The rest of us will keep an open mind to all possible eventualities. The meeting is adjourned.”

After the meeting Teri and J. P. VI took contact with J. P. IV. “Well done Teri,” he said, “I couldn’t have done it better myself. I’m confident that Tony Ziennick is dirty. I have followed him since he started his company more than 15 years ago and I still don’t quite understand that man. There’s something about him that I can’t find out. And that’s the only person I’ve been in contact with that still keeps his secrets from me. I’m a very good judge of character and except for Tony I have read them all. I can’t penetrate him and that bothers me. I know that he grew up in a foster home with his twin brother. His twin committed suicide when he was 23. He jumped into the Niagara. His body was never found, but he left his car there and everything pointed to that he had jumped. He has never been seen again and no one else has been reported missing. I also know that Tony was a transvestite and a homosexual in his youth, but that seems to be over now. He is after all married and has two children. There are no records that show that his wife Belinda is anything else but a genuine woman. I want to know the truth about him.”

“We need a mole in his organization, I think.”

“You’re damn right. If you can find one, go ahead.

“I think I have a plan. If it works it might give us three moles if we’re lucky and none if we fail. I can’t see any risks involved.”

“Go ahead, but be very discreet.”

“I will. The plan is already discussed with J. P. VI and she agrees. It might take a year before we see results, but we think it’s worth it.” J. P. VI nodded and confirmed she agreed. They closed down the speakerphones. Teri and J. P. VI went on to fine-tune their plan.

Sam was smiling from ear to ear when he left Wall Street that Friday afternoon. He was on his way to a pub not far away where he would meet some of his friends for a night on the town. His friends included Adam and Leroy, of course. Their girlfriends would have to wait that night, or they would be on the town by their own.

They were six guys in total round the table. Sam bought the first round; he really could afford it after a week like this. The other five followed course. The night ended at a strip club. Sam and his roommates weren’t home before four in the morning. They were all stone drunk.

Next morning Sam woke up with a major hangover. He felt real bad. He stumbled to the bathroom and took a long, cold shower. He dried himself, put on shorts and t-shirt and went to the kitchen. He put some bacon and eggs in the pan and along with some toast and jam he had a solid breakfast. This made him feel much better. The clock was now almost noon and he didn’t have too much time.

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He dressed in shirt and a pair of jeans and went to pack his suitcase. Sunday at noon his flight for Hawaii left from Newark Airport and he was going to spend the night with his girlfriend Alice. She lived on the Jersey side, much more convenient for a ride to the airport.

When he had packed everything he needed, he left the apartment. Adam and Leroy had just started on their breakfast. Out on the street he grabbed a taxi to join Alice at her place.

Sam took Alice in his arms as soon as he passed through the door. They fell down on the bed together for some heavy hugging and kissing. They talked a little bit about what they did the night before, telling each other that they did not fool around. At the end Sam asked Alice: "Was Maxine there with you?"

"No she wasn't. She never comes to town with us. I don't know why, but she always seems to have an excuse."

"That's strange. I swear I heard her mention that she would be out on the town last night, and thereby I assumed she was with you."

"As I said, she wasn't. If she was out there, she must have been with another crowd." (If Alice and Sam had known where Maxine really was the night before, they would have been in for the surprise of their lifetime.)

The clock was now almost three and it was time to get everything ready. They had both packed for the vacation; it was just to check if everything was there. They checked each other and saw that everything had been taken care of. They had packed what they needed to have fun in both Hawaii and Las Vegas.

Next step was to get ready for the evening. It had been announced that this would be a formal evening so a tuxedo was required. That meant a long gown for Alice. Fortunately none of these garments were required for their vacation.

Alice and Sam arrived at the restaurant at 7:30. Alice in an ankle length strapless gown and Sam in his tux. At the entrance to the dining hall they were served a cocktail. They noticed where their seats were and started mingling. At precisely eight everybody was called to the table. When they all were seated, Tony Ziennick stood up and said: "My loyal employees. Welcome to this semi-annual formal banquet fully sponsored by AZ Finance. This last month has been very good for us; in fact it's the best month in the company's history. We have two people we can really thank for this wonderful result and we will do their honors later tonight. Now I just want you to enjoy the meal and have a good time tonight. When dinner is over there will be dancing in the room next door. So once again, welcome to the banquet and enjoy yourself." He gave a toast to his employees and sat down. Next to him at the table were his wife Belinda and their two kids, Amy (16) and Brad (13). Several other employees had also brought their children to the banquet.

It was close to midnight when Tone once again called for attention. This time it was to give the honors to Maxine Peters and Samuel Collins whose efforts at

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Wall Street was a major contribution to AZ Finance's success the last months. They both received standing ovation from the other employees.

Alice and Sam left the restaurant a little after one. They had a long day ahead of them tomorrow and wanted to be as fresh as possible. Back at Alice's place they hung up their clothes and went straight to bed. They fell asleep in each other's arms.

They were up at eight the next morning. They both had a shower before breakfast. After the dishes were stacked away they dressed and were ready to go. A taxi picked them up at ten and took them straight to Newark International. It was only a 15-minute drive. At the entrance they were met by a porter who helped them to the United check-in desk. They both made good money so they had decided to go for a business class tickets. The flights would be so much more comfortable that way.

The check-in went quickly, it was the next step that took some time. Security was tight and they had to stand in line for almost 30 minutes before they were through. From then on it was just to find their gate and wait for boarding.

The aircraft took off on schedule. It was a non-stop flight to Honolulu and the duration of the flight would be around eight hours. The plane was packed with people looking forward to a vacation on the beautiful islands of Hawaii.

Alice and Sam had a comfortable flight. The plane arrived on time and a limo took them straight to their hotel. They checked in and went to their room. The room had a beautiful view over Waikiki Beach. It was still early afternoon in Hawaii so they decided to take a walk through the streets and on the beach. The weather was warm and that called for a loose shirt and shorts. On their feet they had sneakers.

They walked around for almost two hours. Then they found a nice restaurant and had dinner and some wine. When the meal was over it was starting to get dark and they both felt tired. Their biological clocks were still on New York time and spelled past midnight. They decided to take one more walk down the street before they decided to take an early night.

During their week in Hawaii Alice and Sam explored as much as they could of the island of Oahu. They rented a car and drove around the island. Had a nice lunch at a restaurant on the North Shore, had a ride on the old Sugar Cane Railroad, visited the Pearl Harbor museum, walked deep into the forest to find a beautiful waterfall with a deep pond underneath it. Sam even took a swim in the pond. They also spent a lot of time on the beach. They both tried surfing with very limited success. All in all they had a very good time.

So on Sunday morning, one week after they arrived they flew back to the mainland. They landed in Las Vegas around four local time. Now the time difference was in their favor, their biological clock was only 1 PM. They still had many hours before they would feel real tired.

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A limo took them to their hotel. It was right on the strip in the middle of all the action. They checked in and went to their room. On the bed was an envelope with Alice's name. "What's that?" Sam asked.

Alice picked up the envelope and looked inside. She smiled. "It's only two tickets for a Vegas show tonight," she said, "I booked them as soon as I knew when we were going and which hotel we would stay in. It's my surprise to you."

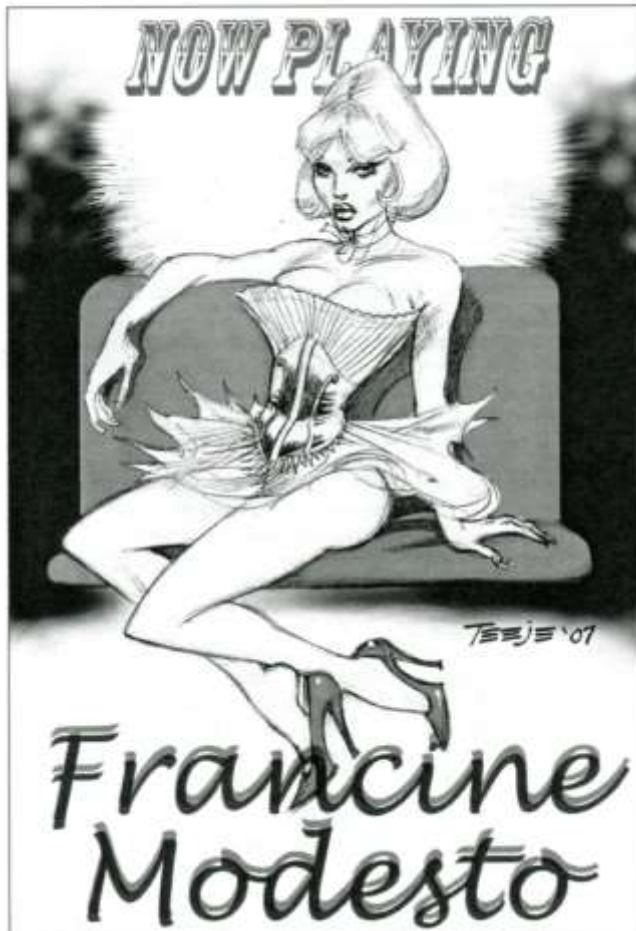
"Thank you darling," Sam said, "I like surprises like that. What time is it?"

"The show starts at nine, but we should be there at least 30 minutes before. We have very nice seats."

"What kind of show is it?"

"It's typical Vegas. Showgirls and all. The main star is Francine Modesto, the world's most famous female impersonator."

"A drag show, you mean."



"No. This is much more sophisticated than a Drag Show. Francine Modesto has style. A friend of mine went to his show and she fell in love with the show right

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away. The guy puts on so many gowns and wigs. He imitates several famous women and he does it with his own voice. You will love him.”

“I doubt that. All I know is that I love you and I want to make love to you right away.” Sam had felt that something was happening inside his pants, something he had to get out. Alice understood, she had become hot and wanted Sam right away. So it didn’t take long before they were tangled in heavy lovemaking. And this happened before they had unpacked their suitcases.

After the lovemaking had finished, they stood up and took a shower before they unpacked their things. They found some new clothes and decided to take a walk down the strip to look at life and have something to eat. Sam even tried his luck on some slot machines, but he lost all the quarters he had in his pocket.

They were back in their room around seven. It was just time for another shower and to change before they had to leave for the show. They arrived at the theater at 8:15. Alice wore a red knee-length dress with a wide skirt and a v-shaped front. Sam wore pants, shirt and a loose jacket. The Vegas night was still chilly this time of year. Sam looked at the pictures on the board outside the theater and said: “Is this person really male? He looks like a real woman to me.”

“He’s a man all right. Take a good look at him later when he walks through the audience and see if you can spot the small telltale signs that give him away. They are very well hidden, but if you look close you can find them. You see, there are a few things a man can’t hide totally when he’s dressed as a woman. I’ll give you one hint; look at his throat.”

Throat? Then it dawned on Sam. Of course, the Adam’s apple. And then even his voice might give him away. He didn’t say anything to Alice. He would wait until he was really sure.

They entered the hallway and had a drink before the show. The doors had opened at 8:30 so it was to take the drinks and find their seats.

During the whole show Sam sat mesmerized and looked at the star. It was unbelievable that this beautiful woman could be a man. She looked so natural. She hurried in and out of stage and came back wearing a new dress every time. Once during the show she took the microphone and walked down amongst the audience. She talked to some of them and even gave some of the men a kiss. When she came to Sam she stopped and looked at him and said in a very neutral voice: “Where are you from, honey?”

Sam turned beet red. He tried to answer, but the tongue was stuck in his mouth. Finally he managed to clear his throat and answered: “I live in New York, but I grew up in Portland, ME.”

“I love people from the east coast,” Francine said and sat down on Sam’s lap. Sam turned even redder and had a hard time hiding the fact that he had a rising bulge in his pants. Francine couldn’t help notice this and said to Sam: “Is it a roll of quarters in your pocket or are you just happy to see me?”