



# Doing them like a Donald

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## Doing them like a Donald

Alice smiled at Vince across the restaurant table. He was young, clever, energetic as well as very good looking. It was a shame he couldn't control his anger enough to work in a mental health support organisation, He had developed such an aversion to Donald, their boss, he hadn't even invited him to his farewell lunch. Alice wondered why they had fallen out. She found both men charming.

Alice didn't think this young thing could have much to complain about. Rheumatoid arthritis wasn't making him lame like her. He'd told her that Donald was all technique and no strategy. She was sure this was very clever, but Alice had no idea what he meant.

Alice admired how confident and determined Donald was, appreciated his support for her, and she always knew where she stood. Alice also thought someone who loved a book like "*The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*" couldn't be all bad. She loved books and often talked to Donald about what they were reading. Reading was one of her few escapes from pain and she found Donald literary.

Back from lunch, she wound her way through a rabbit warren to her office. The fibro building had walls as wonky as a Salvador Dalí painting, which reminded Alice of the demountable buildings at her school.

Donald must have heard her because he called out and ask her to come into his office. In his corner office, Donald didn't offer her a seat. As she walked to his desk, she said she wanted to sit down because after her walk she couldn't stand for long. Donald would usually get up from behind his desk and sit with her on his visitors' chairs, but he stayed behind his desk.

Donald shrugged, not looking up at her as he put some paperwork down. 'This won't take long.'

'Okay.'

'I'm organising services for my mother.'

Alice swayed back and forth to stop her knees from seizing up. 'Right.'

'I rang Silver Chain.'

Alice's knees were hurting now. This was taking longer than she'd hoped. 'Is this going to take much longer?'

'Now now, I told you, Alice. It'll only take a minute.' He gave her a big smile. 'Well not much longer, if you don't keep interrupting.'

He paused until she said, 'Okay.'

Donald looked out his windows, which didn't look as cheap and nasty as the ones in the rest of the building. 'Now, what did I need to tell you, before you interrupted my train of thought.'

Alice could no longer stand with any comfort. 'You were talking about Silver Chain.'

Donald turned back to Alice. 'Yes, yes. That's right. I rang Silver Chain to organise services for my mother.'

Alice nodded, not wanting to interrupt him again. She wondered why he was being so inconsiderate.

Donald picked up a pen and turned it between his fingers. 'I told them what she needed and Well "*gyre and gimple in the wabe*", do you know how long it took them to ring me back with an offer?'

Even with the quote from Lewis Carroll's '*Jabberwocky*', the pain was making it hard for Alice to concentrate. 'I have no idea.'

He teased, 'You're our Intake Officer. I expect you to be on top of these things.'

Donald had been light-hearted and derogatory like this when Vince had been angry. She was getting picked on when she wasn't angry. 'So, how long?'

'Three hours. When I told them that this was a quick response, they said that they always respond in less than four hours.'

The pain was bringing tears to Alice's eyes. Maybe Donald was upset because he hadn't been invited to lunch. '*All mimsy.*' Alice quoted the nonsense poem back at him.

Donald leaned closer. 'We should be providing best-practice. You're shilly-shallying is wrecking the reputation of the whole organisation.'

'You know there is only one of me, and I must assess a client's needs and then find a supervisor who can accept them. It often takes supervisors more than twenty-four hours to get back to me. You said it was amazing I could get back to our clients as fast as I do.'

'That was before I knew best practice.'

'How many intake officers does Silver Chain have?'

Donald's stare made Alice's heart feel cold. 'I want you to respond within four hours in future.'

'That can't be done, Donald.'

Any playfulness in him was gone. ‘Make it happen. It’s imperative to inform clients right and without delay.’

Alice wondered if she could lean on his desk to take the weight off her knees. ‘Okay then, you should inform the supervisors that they need to respond to me within two hours.’

Donald threw his hands in the air. ‘The supervisors have enough to do, without me putting more pressure on them. Nothing is less forgiven than setting targets people have no mind to follow. We are here to support the supervisors, not make their jobs harder. You should understand that and grasp this opportunity.’

Alice noticed the irony but was now in too much pain to argue.

Donald frowned up at her. ‘Since you are resistant to making these improvements, I will performance manage you every week until you can do it. Your role must be carried-out at the highest point of excellence.’

Alice remembered how he’d performance managed Vince. She hobbled back to her office. When the pain subsided, she remembered what Vince had said about all technique and no strategy. She hoped he was wrong, and Donald was just pissed about not being invited to the lunch and would go back to his charming self.

In the meantime, Alice was worried that she was being set an unachievable target. She wrote Donald an email saying what impact his new target would have on the supervisors.

The next day, Donald’s director came into Alice’s office and said that Donald had made a complaint about her. Alice stared at the director. ‘Sorry?’

‘He said you were refusing to follow his instructions.’

She knew she couldn’t get angry. ‘What instructions?’

‘It was something to do with the call back protocol. Donald is in my office. I want to settle this right away.’

‘Right, let me print some stuff off first.’ When Alice and the director got to the office, she found a seat without asking. Donald spoke, with his usual passion, about providing services at a level of best practice and how Alice was standing in the way of him making the organisation the best in the country.

It was an impressive speech. If he was supporting her, Alice would have liked it, but it had little relevance to what had happened. Alice realised that his speeches rarely did. When he had finished, Alice handed the director the email she’d sent Donald and explained what would be required to meet Donald’s four-hour target. Donald played golf with the director, but to Alice’s surprise the director nodded, and said that they should go back to a twenty-four-hour response target.’

Donald agreed with the director, but when he turned to Alice his eyes widened just enough for Alice to know that Donald was even more furious with her now that she’d shown him to be wrong.

Later that day, Alice and the other divisional managers were sitting around a conference table chatting as they waited for Donald as they often did. They looked up when Donald arrived an hour late.

Donald looked at his managers. ‘Have you got the agenda? You’re all so hopeless at remembering.’ They all nodded and smiled at Donald’s normal joke. Donald sighed in mock relief. Alice wondered if he said this to stop them complaining about him being late. ‘Now guys and gals, there are a

couple of items I'd like to add.' They nodded again, so he continued. 'I want to resurrect the company's image. It will be beautiful, a flawless campaign. You'll be writing books about this. How's about that?'

Alice put his agenda to one side and breathed out in relief. This was the old charming Donald back again. She was interested in Donald's campaign. His energy always made his ideas fun to do and unified the team. 'What do you think is wrong with our image?'

Donald took a drink of water and looked away from Alice.

Alice sat back and decided to make her question more positive. 'I was wondering what sort of image you were looking for.'

Donald cleared his throat. His upbeat mood had disappeared like a conjurer's coin, 'Now then, now then. You can hardly think that we are at the forefront of prestige and glamour.'

'Okay. What sort of profile were you looking at giving us?'

He rolled his eyes and leaned towards Alice. 'An image that would enhance the way customers perceive us. Your office furniture, for example, is disgraceful rubbish. What type of corporate image does that give our customers?'

Alice shrugged. 'Are you giving me a budget to update it?'

Donald smiled, as he moved in jerky motions. Alice knew this was to mimic her arthritic gestures. No one else seemed to notice. 'As it happens, I don't want our customers to realise how hopeless you are.' He laughed as if this was a joke and turned to his other managers. 'Maybe I've prodded Alice out of her comfort zone enough for one day. I shouldn't let this slow

the rest of you down. I'll keep her in suspense and spell it out to her later. So, I'm hearing great things about our training program.'

Alice spent the rest of the meeting watching Donald complement and laugh with the other managers. He spoke with a smile and chatted with them to explore their comments, never advising unless it was asked for. Now his energy was uniting the team against her. He was charming them like he had charmed her when it was Vince who had got on his wrong side. The other managers looked at Alice as if she was a leper. Like they had looked at Vince. Well, like she too had looked at Vince. She had no idea how to appease Donald.

That night Alice woke up. Familiar sights and sounds of her bedroom surrounded her. She'd been dreaming about how Vince had warned her that Donald was a psychopath and she should leave, but at the time she couldn't believe that anyone would lie and coerce just so they could deceive and control.

She hated that Donald had torn enthusiasm out of her with the resolve of a dog gutting a cushion. she wanted to be strong and get her feelings of worth and enthusiasm back, but her mind was numb and unsure of what to do to get herself out of this dark place.

She reached to her husband for comfort. The trauma of the day had made her feel damaged and unworthy. Everything now seemed as remote to her as a house she no longer lived in. She turned away and got out of bed, putting weight on her painful legs and waddled towards the bathroom.

Alice sat on the toilet. She understood now what Vince meant when he said that Donald was all technique and no strategy. When she hadn't understood, she'd blamed Vince's anger for Donald's harassment, because it was the only thing that could explain it. Donald behaving like this, just to

be a bully was unthinkable. Alice sighed. Unthinkable, but true. It was happening to her.

She now admired Vince for giving up and leaving. Donald had been crushing him like he was now trying to crush her, and like Vince, she should leave. She knew now that evil is confident, good is unsure. Bullies are persistent, victims lack direction. She could no longer trust Donald to give her a good reference, and even if employers weren't put off by how pain crippled her, they wouldn't consider her for a job if Donald had made her miserable, unsure and directionless. She'd be lucky to get an opening with an automatic door.

Thinking about Vince's clash with Donald, made Alice aware of how showing a bully anger, was as unwise as punching a tar-baby. She didn't want to be angry but didn't want to be crushed either. This was like the hero facing the Jabberwocky, only without a Vorpal Sword.

The next day, Donald scuttled into Alice's office, with the anger and angles of a giant praying mantis. 'You are letting the side down again. There's too many inactive relief staff. It takes too long to find a replacement for our people who are sick. We need relief staff who are ready to work. I want you to sack all the inactive people on the relief list.'

The relief staff would fill in when permanent staff were on leave. They couldn't expect relief staff to wait for their call. They had other jobs and would go through times when they were not available, because if they didn't, why on earth would they be relief staff. It was a long process to engage and train them and they'd have to use contractors, who were untrained and twice the cost if they lost relief staff.

He was close enough for her to smell his hot breath. This was a blow, but she told herself to turn the other cheek. Arguing would be as pointless

as taking on the Jabberwocky with a toothpick. This was about crushing her, rather than fixing the relief. She couldn't stop him destroying the relief, any more than she could stop the pain in her body, but she didn't have to let either crush who she was.

She calmed herself to answer him. 'Sure, will do. I'll work with human resources to put together a protocol. I'm reading Michael Ondaatje's *Warlight*'. Have you read it?'

'I've heard about it, of course.'

Alice smiled, hoping to restore their previous relationship. 'You must read it! You'll love it.'

'Right.'

Alice smiled at him sweetly. Donald glared at her with such hatred, she knew he wouldn't be able to read the book now she'd recommended it. She blinked. Well, this would work too. She knew hundreds of other books he'd love to read. 'What are you reading now?'

Donald narrowed his eyes and moved away from her. '*A Gentleman in Moscow*.'

'Isn't it a lovely book? Have you got to the friendship he makes...?'

Donald shook his head and retreated out the door, his arms raised as if to protect himself from blows. Alice whispered, 'Snicker-snack.'

Whenever she saw him Alice would energetically recommend a book to him. He couldn't risk bad-mouthing her if she was in earshot.

A month later Alice was smiling across a restaurant table at Donald. He didn't smile back. This was his farewell lunch. He was leaving.