

We are bombarded by advertisements every day of our lives.

Most of them are soon forgotten.

Some we remember for a short while because they are humorous,

and some stir our interest enough to be considered helpful.

Rarely, there is that one advertisement that captivates us

and changes our lives forever.

This is the story of one such ad.

Chapter 1

They're looking right at me. Why can't they see me? Every damn day - morning, noon, and night - this happens. No one knows I'm here. How can that be? They all can see me. I want to wave my hands to them, but I can't move at all. I can't call out to them. My mouth feels stuffed with something, yet I can't move my fingers to get it out.

“Hey, YOU, there; yeah, YOU GUYS; you people sitting there staring at me, HELP ME!”

Chapter 2

“*Get Fit, Eat Fast Food!*” read the poster above the subway window. Bobby noticed the advertisement posted across the aisle several seats in front of him. The ad seemed to leap out of its metal frame and demand his attention.

Bobby Fastow had ridden the subway to and from work for most of his adult life. As a low-to-middle-income, unskilled factory worker with a wife and two daughters, he had struggled from paycheck to paycheck. Sometimes, he felt there was something unfair about it all. It didn't matter if his knees ached, he had a terrible cold, he felt down and out, or there was a foot of snow on the ground. No circumstance seemed to warrant a day off because every dollar earned was a dollar needed for survival.

So, Monday through Friday, he boarded the 6:04 a.m. subway, sat down in whatever seat was available, nodded his head, and tried to catch as much shuteye as possible. “Shuteye” was different from sleep. Bobby didn't always nod off because he was tired, but closing his eyes meant he could shut out the real world around him and enter another level of consciousness more of his choosing.

Today, he was going to close his eyes, but there, in front of him, was an advertisement illustrating a most attractive woman whose features were conjuring up feelings he'd had only when younger. He let his overweight body slide forward in his seat, rested the back of his head on the subway window behind him, and closed his eyes. He imagined this woman sitting next to him in a bar.

She's reaching across and taking my hand, bringing it to her lips,

lowering my hand onto her thigh, and then leaning slowly forward, puckering her lips.

The emotion from this fantasy was so inviting, almost real. Maybe, too unbelievably real for Bobby Fastow! Just before her lips touched his, the subway swayed and jarred his eyes open. He knew from experience that another stop was imminent. Suddenly anxious, Bobby checked the station sign to be sure he hadn't missed his stop. He was not sure how long he had been daydreaming. Noticing he had a few stops remaining, he wiped his damp, shiny forehead, sighed with relief, and straightened his bulbous body back upright in his seat. He had gone into this make-believe world deeply several times over the years and passed by his destination. It wasn't the embarrassment, hassle, or frustration of getting back to his exit that bothered him but the sustained ribbing he had to endure from his fellow employees for being late. This was what he really dreaded. He had never been late in his twenty-plus years of work.

"Get Fit, Eat Fast Food!" What in the hell is that supposed to mean?

Bobby let his gaze drift from the headline to the photograph beneath it depicting a young, strikingly slender girl in her late twenties. She was dressed in a black pantsuit and white blouse, ruffles around her neck. He noticed her silky nylons but was surprised she had no shoes on. She was sitting at the end of a long oak conference table with her legs crossed, Indian-style, her right elbow placed on her knee, her forearm and hand supporting her chin. The table was not unique and could have been found in countless board rooms across the country. Bobby gazed at her face: beautiful, soft, but with minimal makeup. She was looking at the other end of the table at a hamburger and fries smothered in ketchup.

Below the photo were dishes of salad, fruit, and broiled chicken, and a message that read:

FitnFast, Inc.

The Food You Crave Without the Guilt

We will select the finest ingredients with your tastes and health in mind. We will make your dining choices easier by providing delicious and nutritious choices to suit all tastes and budgets.

Today, FitnFast, Inc. is synonymous with the words “healthy dining”, quality food, and, of course, fast personal service.

Our ability to deliver unique, quality foods in a time-sensitive, fast, and casual environment is unrivaled.

(Formerly BurgerBlast, Inc.)

Bobby assumed the model ate the healthy selections rather than the traditional burger and fries. That certainly seemed to be the obvious message the ad meant to convey; however, Bobby was amazed that BurgerBlast, Inc., the fast-food, take-out restaurant that had hawked greasy burgers, fries doused in sugar to make them sweet, and gaseous sodas for years had now become FitnFast, Inc., a health-conscious corporation.

In spite of its new name, Bobby knew he would continue to refer to the restaurant as The Greasy Spoon. He knew it well because he had eaten hundreds of meals at BurgerBlast, Inc., and now it was copying other restaurants of its type and advertising the hell out of it. He also knew that hundreds of gullible folks would go to the restaurant to stand in line and soon become captives of smell of their greasy burgers and

fries and conveniently forget the healthy food.

It has to be just a ploy to get them into the joint.

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The forty-six-minute subway ride was over, and Bobby exited the subway, along with the hordes of other nine-to-five working stiff, to enter his private purgatory of work orders, printing presses, and drudgery. This was his world, where nothing changed from day to day, and everyone watched the clock until quitting time.

The memory of that young woman on the conference table with no shoes continued to stir his imagination. As he exited the subway terminal and walked up the concrete steps to the street, the heat of the day engulfed him.

It's going to be a hot one today.

As he hustled across the street and into the Page Newspaper Company's print shop, the image of the woman in the ad to whom he had been so physically attracted just minutes ago gradually disappeared but not for long.

Chapter 3

Charles Winfred Hamilton II, CEO and chairman of the board at BurgerBlast, Inc., spent some time reviewing the report handed to him by his financial officer while the seven board members seated around the table waited for his reaction. As Charlie read through the disappointing figures in front of him, he could feel the heat and redness on his chest rising to his face.

Dressed in a three-piece pinstriped suit, he gradually lifted his six-foot frame from his chair at the head of the conference table. His black hair, combed straight back, shone in the reflection of the overhead lights. His sharp facial features magnified the anger in his face. Throwing the report into the middle of the table, he growled, “You have to be shitting me. These are some of the worst quarterly figures I have ever seen. In fact, the figures for the last few years really suck! Why is that?”

Charlie had been the genius behind the name, BurgerBlast. He hadn’t given a damn that none of the original board members had liked his choice for the corporation, but they hadn’t been in a position to argue. After all, Charles had put up the money and felt he deserved to rule as he saw fit. He had replaced most of the original board over time, and now it consisted of seven men who obeyed his every demand.

“What the hell are we going to do to stop this loss of revenue, guys?” Before anyone could answer, Charlie answered his own question. “Well, I’ll tell you what we are going to do. We are going for a fresh and fit look. We will now start offering healthy foods.”

Everyone nodded in agreement as if they understood.

Yes, if I want it, you will give it to me. Otherwise, I’ll fire every

one of your asses in a minute and get people who will.

The board consisted of Hank Fiedler, a bank president; Samuel Vernton, a retired attorney; George Hunn, a food supply wholesaler; Billy Huffnagle, an entrepreneur; Henry Butler, a physician; Kevin Munhouse, an accountant; and Peter Brocker.

Peter, one of Charlie's oldest friends and the only one left from the original board, asked from the far end of the conference table, "How do you propose we change over from a burger palace to a health food store?" He could afford to ask Charlie challenging questions because he knew a few personal secrets that Charlie would rather not have divulged, but there also was a loyalty in their friendship that everyone respected, and Peter was committed to Charlie, his philosophy, and his tactics.

"Advertise, advertise, advertise," Charlie said. "That's part of the answer, but our advertising will have to be different. We'll have to do more than follow the others in the fast-food industry if we want to survive. We don't have to reinvent the wheel, but we do need to be different." He strolled slowly over to the large window overlooking the busy street below. "We have to create a niche for ourselves and do it better than all the others."

"So what are we – I mean, *you* – proposing?" Peter asked.

"I'll tell you what we're going to do," Charlie answered, stroking his dimpled chin with his thumb and forefinger as he continued looking at the street below. "We are going to create a new image. One that tells our customers and the public that BurgerBlast is health conscious." He swung around wide-eyed and stared directly at each individual. "That's exactly what we're going to do. We are a small corporation, but we've been successful because we don't throw away our profits." He leaned on

the table with his left hand and counted to three on his other hand as he continued, “We don’t have high-paid executives who do little work, we don’t throw extravagant business meetings in expensive resorts, and we don’t have an ad agency on retainer. It’s imperative that we launch a new advertising campaign to boost our profits and make BurgerBlast a new household name without breaking us financially.”

“Charlie,” George Hunn said meekly, “it sounds maybe like a scheme more than a plan to me.” George was a rotund, red-faced food supply wholesaler who had been on the board for six years. “You know, Charlie, no one on this board has any expertise in advertising.”

“Bullshit,” Charlie said. “We’ve done it before. Granted, I did a lot of it myself, but no one is getting off the hook this time. It’s *we*, not me now! You are businessmen, aren’t you? You must have made contacts with someone, somewhere who knows advertising or knows where we can turn. This is the bottom line. Or else, we’re down the tubes.”

Charlie circled the table, placing his hand on each of the board member's shoulders as he walked. “I want everyone on this. We need to get an advertising campaign launched as soon as possible if we want BurgerBlast to be as profitable as in the past.” He returned to his position at the head of the table. “Listen up. I am announcing a special board meeting to be held here at 9 a.m. sharp, two weeks from today to discuss your proposals. In two weeks from today, we are going to get this campaign started in one way or another. Okay? Any questions, gentlemen?”

Charlie didn't really expected any discussion. Everyone simply nodded in agreement, and the meeting broke up. Without saying a word to one another, the board members collected their pens and notepads and

left the room with quizzical looks on their faces. Few of them had contacts in the advertising arena. They didn't want to admit it, but they were at a loss as to where to start. Charlie knew it. He figured it was up to him, but he was hoping against all odds that one of them might come up with something unique.

Hank Fiedler was the last member to leave.

"Hank," Charlie called out to him, "I really need your help here."

"What can I do for you, Charlie?" Hank asked, seeming a little hesitant that Charlie had singled him out.

"Well, I hesitate to bring this up," Charlie said, sensing that Hank had a pretty good handle on BurgerBlast's financial condition. "But we may not be able to hold up our commitments this month and may be a little late on the payments. That means late fees, and I'm wondering if you could be a little flexible in the next month or two until we get the funds to kick off the advertising campaign. I think I can get the rest of the board to ante up some funds to kick off an advertising campaign, and I'm convinced it will dramatically turn things around. But I need you behind me, Hank. Your opinion goes a long way with the other board members!"

"This isn't some scatterbrain idea, is it?" Hank pointedly asked Charlie. "I mean, it has teeth, doesn't it?"

"It will be well thought out, Hank," Charlie quickly responded. "The basis of the whole idea makes good sense, but I need someone in advertising who is imaginative, someone who will create a powerful message. Do you know anyone?"

"Meaning . . . ?" Hank asked suspiciously.

"Nothing illegal or unethical, Hank, I can assure you!" Charlie answered, pointing his finger at Hank. "But this ad will need to be

extraordinary. Something that has high impact, gets one's attention, pulls the reader into the ad, and gets them to react. That's the tricky part, and we don't have the funds to hire a big agency."

"Sounds like it has to be one powerful ad, if not a little over the top," Hank said as he looked at his watch.

"Yeah, I suppose that's one way of looking at it, but I believe this approach is absolutely necessary if we hope to beat the competition."

"Okay. I'll work on it," Hank replied, again glancing at his watch. "But I can't give it a lot of my time. We've been inundated with loan requests and refinancing, and my time is limited. I'll review some of my files and get my assistant on some. We've made loans in the past to customers who are in the advertising business. I'll try to get a list to you."

Hank turned to leave the room. He turned back and raised his finger, pointing to Charlie. "By the way, if I can get up a list, it is confidential, so don't tell anyone where you got their names."

"Great. Thanks, Hank." Charlie sighed with relief, but still an uneasiness overcame him. He knew something needed to be done soon, or he was going to lose ground in his fast-food business that he had almost single-handedly built.

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Dr. Butler sat alone at his desk with his balding head in his hands. It had been a long day of office visits. He was exhausted. Wrinkles from years of worry were prominently displayed on his face. A small, linear mustache quivered above his upper lip. He stood and removed his long white coat and carefully hung it up while staring at a bookshelf stuffed with medical publications and textbooks. Today, he had solved most of his patients' medical problems, and now he was wracking his brain over

who could help with the BurgerBlast advertising. A longtime physician and friend of every board member, he also knew half of the town's population. If only he could remember someone who might have the skills Charlie was searching for. He picked up the phone and dialed George Hunn's number.

"George, you got a minute?"

"Glad you called, Henry," George responded. "What the hell are we going to do about this advertising campaign Charlie has thrown in our lap? I thought we would be going along for the ride, and Charlie, as usual, would take care of everything. Now it sounds like he really wants help."

"I have a full time medical practice that keeps me hopping," Henry replied while organizing charts on his desk. "I don't have time for this stuff. Charlie handled the original advertising with his friend, and they did very well. Too bad the guy died."

"Hey, you're preaching to the choir, Henry," George replied. "So what do you propose we do? Do you know any advertising gurus who would work off the cuff? We can't afford to pay the retainer costs an ad agency would charge."

"Can't say that I know anyone," Henry said in a matter-of-fact tone. "There isn't much advertising in the health care field, you know."

"Yeah, I'm stumped," George replied. "The only advertising we do is in the Yellow Pages. Have you had a chance to talk to the other guys yet?"

"No, George, I thought I'd talk to you first. One thing is certain. When it comes to advertising expertise, I guess we all are in the same boat."

“Henry, how about getting the others together before our next special board meeting,” George suggested. “Let’s shoot for tomorrow night. Tell them to drop whatever they had planned and be there. Okay?”

“Okay,” Henry said, “I’ll let you know what happens.” Henry immediately dialed Sam Vernton’s number after hanging up.



Peter Brocker, feeling annoyed and impatient at giving up his evening at home, pulled his Toyota van alongside the curb in front of Henry Butler’s driveway. On this warm summer’s night, he saw two- and three-year-old Chevrolets and Fords of the other members who had been invited to the 7:00 meeting lined up in the driveway. He slowly pulled his tall, lanky body from his van, paused for a moment, and then started across the front lawn, surveying the house and property as he walked.

Nicely kept, not ostentatious. Kind of quaint. I thought he would have had a larger home.

He rang the doorbell and was greeted by Mrs. Butler, who ushered him into the living room and disappeared. He saw three of the board members on the sofa and the rest in chairs scattered about the room. They all turned toward him as he entered the room.

“So what’s going on?” Peter asked, looking at his wristwatch as he sat next to Billy Huffnagle in the last empty chair. It was a few minutes after 7:00, and Peter was fidgety. He was anxious to leave before the meeting had even started.

“God,” Billy Huffnagle said as he leaned to whisper in Peter’s ear. “Is this a waste of time, or what? I didn’t come up with any contacts in the advertising business. I know how to sell real estate, rentals, and some sex,” he said with a chuckle, “but I’ll be damned if I know anything

about fast-food advertising. What does good old Charlie want from us, anyway?"

"He obviously wants a concentrated effort from all of us to come up with something powerful. Maybe, he feels this thing is just too big for him alone," Peter whispered as he leaned back toward Billy.

Billy sat up straight and spoke in a normal voice. "We all have our own jobs to worry about, except Herby. We don't have time to fiddle with ad men, so who could we get without going to an ad agency?"

"All right," Peter said forcefully as he stood and positioned himself in the middle of the room. "Let's get on with it and see what we can come up with. We need to convince the public that our burgers are not just delicious and mouthwatering, but we will now be offering healthy foods as well. The keyword is 'healthy,' and the message is 'You Can Eat Healthy at BurgerBlast, Inc.'"

"Bull honky, Peter," Billy responded. "We have never sold anything healthy, and everyone knows it."

"You hit it right on the head, Billy," Peter replied. "It will be a tough sell, so we need to present something unusual, eye-catching. We can't continue the course we're on now, obviously."

"Yeah, we ought to have Billy use one of his porn girlfriends to make a sexy ad," said Kevin Munhouse with a huge smirk on his gaunt, pocked-marked face. "Some sleek sweetie eating cabbage or something."

Laughter broke the air of seriousness in the room.

Peter joined in, but silently resented Kevin's lazy, loose attitude toward work, as well as life. Kevin prepared personal income tax returns and gave financial advice to his clients but never overextended himself. He worked only as much as he needed to get by and save for retirement.

January through April was his biggest income-producing stretch, and he worked long hours. “Good money for four months’ work,” he always said.

“Hey! Come to think of it, I do know a few girls..., semi-legit, you know..., not really whores. Porn stars!” Billy interjected. “Several are lookers, and one of them may go for it if I asked her.”

The laughter became louder.

“No, really, guys, I do,” Billy continued in an excited tone, “And Charlie might go for it. You know: unique, creative, healthy-looking, and a real attention-grabber. That’s what he wants, right?”

“But, wouldn’t that be the same type of pitch the others are selling? Sexy women eating salads?” Hank Fiedler asked.

“Well, it’s a starting point,” Billy said, sitting confidently upright in his chair. “We can say this special meeting wasn’t wasted. At least, we will show Charlie that we are trying to work as a team. The worst that can happen is Charlie telling us how damn dumb we are again, and we’re used to that, right?”

“Okay, Billy,” Peter interrupted and walked over toward Billy. “You talk to some of the girls you mentioned. Bring it up casually, and see if any of them seem interested. Please, no whores!”

“Well, I guess I agree,” George Hunn added. “But it won’t hurt to keep our eyes and ears open for other advertising alternatives.”

“You got it, gentlemen. I’ll put out feelers to the girls tomorrow,” Billy said as he raised his thick eyebrows and snickered.

They all laughed again.

“Well, we have a terrific start!” Peter exclaimed, trying to inspire the board members and instill some confidence in them. “I say we

adjourn, keep thinking, and let's show Charlie we can be a proactive board."

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As Peter turned the key in the ignition of his Toyota, he watched the other members milling about their cars and talking.

Well, I certainly didn't expect this tonight.