

**SELLING STEVE JOBS' LIVER: A STORY OF STARTUPS,
INNOVATION, AND CONNECTIVITY IN THE CLOUDS
MERRILL R. CHAPMAN**

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Cover and Logo Illustration

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Dedication

To Ruth, Lili, Jim, LuluWinston, Hunter, Daphne and Charlie (in Heaven)

Preview

“You’re late,” I said. “You were supposed to be here at nine.”

“The subway train from Brighton was slow.”

“Forty-five minutes slow?”

Boris said nothing and refused to make eye contact with me or Ignacio. After a second, I said, “OK. We’ll let it pass this time. Did you send me or Ignacio your resume? Your CV?”

“I didn’t receive anything yet,” Ignacio said. I hadn’t either.

“Here is resume.” He reached into the pocket of his jacket with his large, furry hand, pulled out two crumpled paper documents consisting of three pages stapled together, and handed one to each of us.

I scanned the resume and sighed internally. It was barely English and littered with misspellings. It also sported a yellowish stain I assumed was either tea or coffee. This would not be a long interview.

“Why didn’t you email this?” Ignacio said.

“Uncle Illarion said I should be careful about sending out too much information about myself online. He has asked me to keep a low profile.”

“Boris, I don’t think he meant paper resumes,” I said. “Let’s go into the conference room and find out more about your skills and if you’re a fit to the Reliqueree culture.” We walked into the conference room and seated ourselves around its oblong table. In his chair, Boris began a slow, barely-perceptible rocking motion.

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Prologue

The West Side traffic brought the limo to a standstill, leaving me, Ignacio, my partner and co-founder of Reliqueree, and Sheridan, the firm's PR head, stranded in a long line of idling cars. After a couple of minutes, I decided to put the wasted time to good use. I pulled out my iPhone and checked our social media dashboard. "uLivv," "TransLivvient" and "Reliqueree" were all trending on Twitter. The media coverage of the grand opening of our first store had generated almost a million more likes on our Facebook page. The CEO of HP had asked to connect with me on LinkedIn yesterday. Traffic on our Pinterest site was going to explode once video and pictures of the gala event hit the Cloud and the blogs.

Next I accessed our accounting system and compared December's sales against November. I smiled as the numbers displayed onscreen. We'd killed it. And even though the holidays were over, January sales were projected to exceed December's by 200 percent. Hmm. We'd calculated we had enough stock in reserve for years, but even I hadn't forecast this level of demand.

"Call Michael," I instructed the phone. Michael was my fiancé's brother and also responsible for our important processing operations. He'd left early for the store with Angie to enjoy a private tour of the store. He answered.

"Hi," he said. "Where are you?"

"Stuck in traffic just a few blocks away." I knocked on the Plexiglas window behind the driver. It rolled down.

"Yes, Mr. Pennington?" he said.

"How long before we clear this? Should we just get out and walk? I'm from New York. I know where I am."

"GPS says we should work through this in about 20 minutes. That enough time?" the driver said.

"Yes." I'd given us an hour to reach the store and was ready to stop the limo and lead everyone on foot to 14th Street if need be. As I'd told the driver, I was native stock, nobility so

far as the rest of the region was concerned. New Yorkers were arguing Thomas Paine when the hillbillies from New Jersey and Connecticut were still making their mark.

I resumed my conversation with Michael. “Have you seen the sales figures?” I said.

“I did. I had my doubts about this whole thing earlier, but it’s amazing how it’s taking off and...”

I interrupted him. “I’m worried about inventory. Are you sure we’ll be able to meet demand?”

“Relax. We have enough material to stretch from the Earth to the Sun two times and back. And that’s factoring in the estimated wastage. Years of sales.”

“Yes, but 25 percent is ‘dark matter.’”

“Still more than enough. And aren’t you planning a ‘Plus’ Edition?”

“Yes. It should be a killer if it’s positioned and marketed properly.”

“Angie says ‘Into the Blue’ orders are flooding in,” Michael said. “The platform is growing. I know I’m not a marketer, but I’ve learned a few things watching you in action. People are buying into the company’s vision. I’m not sure you’ll need the rest of the inventory.”

He was right, but I worry a lot. It’s because I care. Steve Jobs cared.

If you’re an entrepreneur, your middle name is “Worry.”

“What’s the turnout like?”

“The place is packed,” he said. “Every press invite was picked up half an hour ago. Pogue, Mossberg and Alison are here.”

“Terrific. How about Boris? Has anyone heard more about May?”

“Angie spoke to Illarion. He says it appears ICE screwed up. O’Connell is working on it. Should only be a couple more days. She spoke to Boris and he said he’d be there on time. She said he sounded fine.”

“Excellent.” With May gone, Boris’ stress levels had gone stratospheric, but with everyone’s help, he seemed to be coping. Once she was back, I was sure he’d calm down. “We should be there soon. Talk more then.”

“Wait, Angie wants to speak to you. She wants to know...”

Another call came in. I looked at the number. Todd Birnbaum. Amazon’s top biz dev guy. I hadn’t thought this day could become any better, but apparently I was wrong.

“Tell her I’ll see her in a few minutes. Amazon just called. I’ll fill her in when I get there.”

“OK,” he said. I disconnected and took the call.

“Nate Pennington. How’s it going, Todd.”

“Hi, Nate. Look, Jeff wants to discuss purchasing. And I want to clear up any misunderstanding from DEMO.”

The last DEMO had been held in September in Phoenix. Both Bezos and Birnbaum walked out on our presentation a couple of minutes after it began.

“Tell him not to worry about it. I’m sorry we didn’t communicate our vision to you more effectively. By the way, Forbes just moved Reliqueree into the number 15 spot in their top international brands list. I’ll bet we crack the top 10 within six months.”

“What’s wholesale going to look like?” Todd said.

I’d been looking forward to this moment for months. “I’m sorry, Todd. We’re not doing straight wholesale. We’re going wholesale plus MAP. We’ll be reasonable on the discounts. No problem with the non-disclosure agreement. But we control our pricing and brand equity.”

In the MAP model, the manufacturer controls and set their pricing. In straight wholesale, the retailer. Amazon enjoys controlling pricing models and regards MAP as a Tool of Satan. Only companies with strong brands and sky-high demand can insist on MAP.

“Amazon doesn’t buy under MAP. You know that, Nate. We buy straight wholesale.”

All Apple products are sold to Amazon under strict MAP agreements. The reason is if you can’t buy an iPhone from Amazon, the customer will go somewhere else. And then keep returning to that somewhere else to buy other stuff.

“Yes, Todd. You know, there’s an industry rumor going around that your boss and Tim Cook crossed paths at a TED talk in Vancouver and Jeff muttered the words ‘straight wholesale’ where Tim could hear it. The next day, Jeff gets a phone call and after it’s over, leaps on a plane to Cupertino, takes a taxi to One Infinite Loop, changes into a wetsuit, and is escorted up to Tim’s office where he sits in a chair and balances a colored rubber ball on his nose while clapping his hands together going ‘arf,’ ‘arf,’ ‘arf.’ But I’m sure it’s just idle buzz.”

There was a long pause on the line, then Birnbaum said, “Uh, yes. Let’s connect tomorrow and resume our talk. We’re going to be looking for 40 points. Good luck with the store opening.”

“Thanks, Todd. Talk to you.”

I disconnected and looked across the seat opposite me at Sheridan Bettar. A native New Yorker like myself, Sheridan was of Irish/Lebanese extraction and very attractive, with long

silky black hair, blue eyes, and an excellent figure. She was a top-level PR operative, with a strong background in high-tech and excellent knowledge of where the industry was trending. When she contacted someone in the industry, they answered back.

“Have you heard anything from The Woz yet?” I said.

“Yes. I’ve heard back from Mr. Wozniak.”

“And?”

“And I warned you to let it go. He’s not a fan. We’re fortunate he’s been quiet during the launch. One of the first rules of effective PR is that when a rattlesnake bares its fangs at you and you hear a ‘skritch, skrticha, skritch’ sound, you don’t ask its motivations. Be grateful it’s allowed you to back away without being bitten.”

“What did he say?”

She pulled out her phablet and read. “Please inform Mr. Pennington I’m not interested in participating in or commenting on his company and product. Inform him that I believe he represents what is evil about technology today. He is a ghoul and his product a travesty. And do not send me anymore uLivvs.”

I leaned back, disappointed. Since the launch, I’d been trying to persuade The Woz to engage with us and give the uLivv a chance. It just seemed right to virtually reunite the Two Steves, but right now the second wasn’t interested. I pushed the whole issue out of my head until tomorrow. I wasn’t going to let it spoil today.

The limo remained stuck in traffic and I began to mentally review my “to do” list for the next several weeks. There were three major tradeshow Reliqueree would be exhibiting at in January and February. I was scheduled to visit Shenzhen in a couple of weeks to look at prototypes for the next generation uLivv. After my discussion with Todd Birnbaum, a trip to Seattle also needed to be added to my itinerary.

And in March, the wedding.

I looked to my right at Ignacio, who was typing on his laptop. After several seconds, he felt my eyes on him.

“What?”

“What are you working on?” I said.

“Running some tests of Boris’ latest code and analyzing the emulator results. So far, no problems.”

“Good.” I paused, then said, “Ignacio, I need to ask you. Am I doing the right thing by marrying Angie? Am I being fair to her and our child? Doesn’t she deserve better?”

“I’m not sure what you mean.”

“Reliquere’s growing fast. You’ve seen the sales figures. You know that for the next several years, I’m going to have to play the role of hard-charging, high-tech startup CEO. Long hours on the road, more hours spent on marketing, social media, pitching the IPO, leading the team. I don’t want to be a phantom husband and a stranger to my child. After Lisa was born, Steve Jobs didn’t have time to be a good father to her for years.”

“Didn’t he claim he was sterile and that she wasn’t his kid?” Ignacio gave me a friendly punch on the shoulder. “Not going to work today. They didn’t have DNA testing in the 70’s.”

“Aren’t they going to induce next week if she doesn’t go into labor?” Sheridan said. “‘Fair’ isn’t relevant anymore. From Angie’s perspective, ‘long overdue’ and ‘I’ve been more than patient waiting for you to do the right thing’ are more germane.”

“Besides,” Ignacio said, “this is the 21st century. No need for you to be a phantom anything. You can work anywhere productively, including home. We can set up video conferencing, server access, file synchronization, anything you need from any location.”

“I prefer a more hands on management style.”

“You don’t have to compromise,” Sheridan said. “You can video conference **and** pitch in with diaper changing. That’s as ‘hands on’ as it gets. Besides, if you try to back out of the wedding, her uncle will be upset and this is a bad time to anger your primary supplier.”

She made sense. On our last trip to Shenzhen to inspect the first uLivv prototypes and discuss the manufacturing schedule, Tony Song had met us at Hong Kong Airport, taken a close look at his niece’s swelling baby bump, flashed me a genial smile, and personally driven us to SongTech HQ. From a business standpoint, the trip was a huge success. At the factory, a uLivv planning and implementation team was waiting to work with us on quality control and fulfillment. From the first decisions on the early prototype through final production, we’d enjoyed nothing but fast turnarounds and flawless execution from our Middle Kingdom partners. Family matters in China.

Tony had made his point about Angie’s impending motherhood before we’d boarded our flight back to the U.S. At the airport, he’d presented me with a lovely personal gift, a custom-bound, richly illustrated hardcover history of China. Bookmarks had been placed in the sections dealing with the importance of marriage and “face” in Chinese culture. Another was placed in

the chapter describing the Chinese justice system and the execution of malefactors via the traditional “death by a thousand cuts.” Formally known as “slow slicing” (“*lingchi*” in Chinese), the process involves tying a person to a wooden frame and cutting the flesh from their body a chunk at a time until they die. *Lingchi* was banned in China in 1905, though periodically a revival of the practice is recommended in the case of telemarketers, spammers, and Jehovah’s Witnesses.

“You’re both right,” I said. “After all, 40 is rushing up on me. It’s probably time I settled down and embraced new challenges and responsibilities.”

I looked out the window to see a leggy young girl stride by on the sidewalk wearing jeans, boots, and a stylish jacket draped over a very attractive figure. She appeared to be in her early twenties, her profile sharp against the crisp winter air, honey-brown hair glinting as the weak afternoon sun caught the highlights. Internally, I sighed.

Finally, traffic began to move and five minutes later we were pulling up in front of the store, one of dozens planned over the next 36 months. Reporters, cameras, and news trucks were camped around the entrance. Buyers were lined up several blocks down both sides of 14th Street. Camera drones buzzed above capturing aerial views of the scene. New York may be the Big Apple, but when it comes to technology, it’s small chips in comparison with the Left Coast and the Valley. Reliqueree was the biggest high-tech news to hit the City in decades.

Sheridan had worked hard to ensure the Mayor would attend the grand opening and as I watched, His Honor’s limo drove up to the front of the store and he stepped out. The press and cameramen rushed over and cut him off momentarily from our view. It was a good opportunity for me and my retinue to slip quietly past the crowd and inside. The security guard scanned our passes and we were in.

The inside, as Michael had said, was packed, with the invitees wandering about gazing at the uLivvs on display, picking up various accessories, scanning the software kiosks, and inspecting the “Into the Blue Bistro.” A microphone and podium were placed in front of the Bistro and a symbolic yellow ribbon stretched across the main cashier’s station. I spotted Angie surrounded by several reporters, who seemed fascinated by what she was saying. Either that, or they were trapped in the gravitational field she exerted on nearby objects as she came to the end of her ninth-plus month. We briefly made eye contact, and I moved on.

I also picked Gruezén out from the crowd, scanning the interior with an expression of faint dissatisfaction. Designing and merchandising our first store had been a rush job and we'd had to cut more corners than he'd liked. He pulled out his phone and took voice notes as he threaded his way through the aisles.

A group had made their way to the rear of the store and was staring upwards. What drew their gaze was "Digital Remembrance," a majestic oil mural being projected onto the ceiling at Retina resolution. It was a tableau rendition of Steve Jobs surrounded by other famous figures in high tech and sure to be widely discussed and streamed.

The lawyers and I had tussled over the use of Jobs' likeness, even though I'd reminded them repeatedly New York does not recognize a right of publicity after a celebrity's death. When you care about something deeply, you fight for it. After all, Steve Jobs had cared so deeply about creating a great company called Apple that when he named it Apple, there was **already** a great company named Apple founded by The Beatles. And even though Apple (Steve's) promised Apple (The Beatles) it would stay out of the music business, that didn't stop Apple (Sculley's) from adding a music synthesizer to its computers in 1986. Apple (The Beatles) sued. In 1991 (Apple, The Beatles), sued Apple (still Sculley's) again over the issue of packaging music with the Macintosh. Then, in 2001, Apple (Steve's again) released the iPod. I'm pretty sure Apple (The Beatles) sued over that as well, but I've lost track. If you find this difficult to follow, imagine what the attorneys on both sides of the cases had to endure.

But the important lesson is the one Steve Jobs taught us all. "*Your time is limited,*" he wrote. "*Don't let the noise of other opinions drown out your own inner voice.*" I was following Steve's sage advice and not allowing legal lemmings to prevent me from listening to **my** inner voice. And given the uLivv's sales and the outcome of our recent legal battle, I thought it a good bet Jobs' estate would eventually be open to a licensing deal.

I checked my phone. 12:55 pm. The whole event was scheduled to kick off in five minutes. I went over to Sheridan.

"Everything on track? Any problems? Have you seen Boris?"

"No, but Michael told me he's here," she said. "It's all going off like clockwork. At 1 pm the Mayor's going to speak for a few minutes, then hand the podium off to you. There's an iPad with a teleprompter app loaded with your remarks. You're scheduled for five minutes. Don't go overtime. Then the Mayor and you will cut the yellow ribbon, we'll let the general public into

the store, and you'll be available for on camera and streaming interviews for the next 30 minutes. After that, we're done. By the way, Illarion's just arrived."

Illarion Antakov was Reliqueree's principal (well, only) investor. His varied business interests led to him keeping a low social profile and he'd been noncommittal when I'd invited him to the grand opening, but it was gratifying he'd shown up. Illarion was a tall man and dressed in his usual expensive white suit and silk tie, he stood out among the attendees. He saw me as I stood surveying the crowd and nodded and smiled.

"Excellent." I continued looking out at the store floor and did some press spotting. After a few seconds, I identified Farhad Manjoo, the Time's chief technology columnist, who'd written several uncomplimentary articles about Reliqueree and the uLivv. He'd somehow managed to get his hands on some early interior photos of the store and had referred to the Into the Blue Bistro as the "Sepulcher Strip." To my tremendous joy, he was skulking around with a uLivv draped around his neck. Not that he had a choice. The grand opening units had been placed in a special case with a metal loop to which we locked the attendees' ID lanyards. Security was under strict instructions to toss out anyone not wearing the ensemble. We'd unlock the units at the end of the ceremony.

I pulled out my phone and snapped a couple of pictures of Manjoo before he could hide behind someone. Sheridan would post the pictures on our corporate blog, Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest before the day was over. PR gold such as this is only valuable when it's mined instantly.

The clock showed 1 pm and the Mayor stepped up to the mike and began to talk. I didn't pay any attention to the brief speech, just watched the store's digital display and waited for His Honor to relinquish the floor. At 1:08 pm he was done and I stepped up to the microphone.

"Thank you, Your Honor. First, let me say what a privilege it is to have you appear and speak. I grew up in Riverdale and if you'd told me when I was a kid that one day I'd be welcoming New York's Mayor to the grand opening of Reliqueree's first retail store, I'd have said you were dreaming."

I paused a second to allow everyone to chuckle politely at this standard banality, then continued.

"As you all know, Reliqueree is built around a singular passion, a new vision of remembrance, connectivity, and interactivity with those who have departed and moved on to the

post life. Some in the media and blogosphere have criticized our vision, but today the market is speaking with a different voice. Why? We believe the answer is found in a question every one of us has asked, first as small children to our parents, later to the universe at large as adults. This query is ‘When we depart this world, is that all there is? Will we one day be forgotten and vanish forever into time?’

“Prior to Reliqueree, millions have found the answers provided by current systems and processes dispiriting and unsatisfactory. There is a tremendous desire for new technologies and better answers. Reliqueree’s success is proof we are satisfying that desire and providing those better answers.”

Out of the corner of my eye, I glimpsed Boris, our chief programmer, at the rear of the room. Ignacio was standing next to him, using his phone to stream live video out to his social network. Boris had a faint smile on his face and looked more relaxed than I’d seen him in weeks. Angie and Sheridan were seated in the front row to my left, with other Reliqueree employees scattered around the store and in the audience. I looked for Boris again, but he’d moved and I’d lost him. For a second, I contemplated asking him to step up to the microphone or at least give him a call out, but decided against it. We were on a tight schedule. I glanced back down at the iPad and resumed.

“The uLivv has been described by some as an extended monument to Steve Jobs, but that’s a cramped and narrow view. Our goal is to honor one of history’s great entrepreneurial spirits and open up new channels of communication and companionship with anyone who has touched your life. We were fortunate to be able to take advantage of a unique opportunity to bring Steve directly back into the lives and hearts of millions of people worldwide. Doing this has been an immense privilege.

“But this is only the beginning. Today, I’m happy to report that over 100 thousand subscribers have signed up for our new TransLivvient ‘Into the Blue’ service. These sales reflect our passion and commitment, the same type of passion and commitment that inspired Steve Jobs to build iPods, iPhones, and tablets thousands of people were willing to line up for days in advance to purchase at **full retail** regardless of cold, snow, and rain. The same type of passion enabling me to tell you that since the uLivv first went on sale only three month ago, the Reliqueree Team has sold over **eight million** units.”

I paused to allow the crowd to react to the applause line, and looked up. Boris was now standing directly in front of me, smiling broadly. He reached into his jacket, pulled out a small pistol, pointed it at me and fired. There was a loud **bang** and I felt the bullet plow into my left shoulder with a wet splatting sound. Stunned, I took a couple of steps back. Several women screamed. Simultaneously, every member of the press stampeded towards the door or dived for the cover of the counters. Ignacio disappeared under the tide heading for the exit. Angie tried to run towards me, but tripped over Sheridan, who was scrambling madly over the back of her chair in an attempt to escape the mayhem.

Bois pulled the trigger again but the gun misfired. I stared at him in disbelief.

“Boris,” I said. My voice was a croak. “What are you doing? You’re ruining the grand opening. I thought you believed in Reliqueree.”

“I do believe in it,” he said. “That is why I am doing this. You are demons. Steve Jobs has ordered me to kill you all.” He aimed at me again, but before he could pull the trigger, Michael, trapped in place by the press horde struggling to escape, grabbed one of the faux marble busts of Steve Jobs we’d placed around the store and launched it at Boris.

Michael’s aim was true, but as the statue caromed off my attacker’s hairy head, I realized I’d fallen short of the master. Jobs had always incorporated first-class materials into his products and business operations. Who could forget his heroic insistence on using magnesium for the case of the first NeXT when anyone else would have settled for steel? The MacBook’s solid aluminum chassis? The stunning glass walls of the Apple stores?

Several pounds of highly-polished crystallized ancient sea bed impacting against Boris’ skull would have knocked him out, but when buying the busts, I’d opted for the terra cotta model over Gruezén’s vehement opposition, and the best a cheap ceramic could do was stun him for a moment. (In my defense, the busts had looked **exactly** like marble and we were over budget and running out of time.) He wobbled in place and turned towards Angie, who had struggled to a sitting position and was looking up at him in shocked disbelief, her arms wrapped protectively (well, not around — her wingspan couldn’t encompass the circumference, but the tips of the fingers of each hand definitely touched) in front of her stomach.

I’d read some time ago that when someone you love is threatened, time freezes and you see past, present, and future with perfect clarity. This is true. As Boris raised his gun at Angie, the

past and present flashed bright neon signs in my forebrain. They weren't terribly relevant to the situation, so I skipped past them to the future.

It was disorienting. I seemed to be writhing slowly on a white expanse stretching out around me to the horizon. The lower part of my body felt as if it was on fire, while my head was cool, though I kept gasping for air. As I considered my predicament, the scowling face of Uncle Tony Song loomed above me. Reaching down with a pair of chopsticks, he tore a chunk of fried flesh from my lower body and ate it in front me with evident relish. I realized what was happening. Somehow, Uncle Tony, via Chinese black magic, had transformed me into a *ying yang yu*, a dish consisting of a fish whose bottom half is fried alive for consumption while the head lives on for as long as half an hour. I was receiving a strong spiritual warning my and Angie's continued survival were interlinked.

And besides, the petite Chinese snow globe about to be assassinated **was** carrying my son. That counted for **something**.

I threw myself on my knees in front of Angie. Boris pulled the trigger. I felt a huge hammer hit my chest, and then I didn't feel anything at all.

Eight Months Earlier...