

# ***A Leave of Absence***

*by*

*Joseph Arnone*

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Cast of Characters

Mr. Putnam:

40's

Leslie:

40's

Place

Mr. Putnam's Office

Time

1 PM

Setting: The play takes place inside the small office of Mr. Robert E.L. Putnam. A giant desk filled with scattered papers and folders sits two feet high, center stage. The place hasn't been renovated since its original inception twenty years prior.

At Rise: The play opens with Mr. Putnam sitting at his desk, trying to look like he's tidying up when Leslie enters the doorframe.

*Leslie doesn't knock. She stands inside the doorframe.*

*Mr. Putnam notices her and stares at her before -*

MR. PUTNAM: ...Oh yes, come in Leslie, come in, come in.

*Leslie enters with hesitation.*

Do sit down, please, right...

*Awkward pause.*

I'm somewhat relieved that you asked to see me. *(Pause.)* How are you doing today? Is today a fine day for you?

LESLIE: Today's a fine day...not for me.

MR. PUTNAM: Pardon?

LESLIE: I believe it's a fine day for all of us. But then again, what exactly makes a fine day? And does that fine day apply itself to animals? Do you think animals know the difference between a fine day and a not so fine day? What about us?

MR. PUTNAM: Us?

LESLIE: Humans...

MR. PUTNAM: Oh, humans?

LESLIE: Some of us aren't tuned in enough to know the difference between a fine day or a lousy day. And sometimes there can be a very fine day, the finest day but it gets smashed to smithereens from some rule that accuses it of doing something minutely wrong. What's the ratio on that?

MR. PUTNAM: Ratio?

LESLIE: Between a fine day and a lousy day.

MR. PUTNAM: Uh -

LESLIE: Sixty-forty? Seventy-thirty? Eighty-twenty? You ask a difficult question, Mr. Putnam.

MR. PUTNAM: I see...well, I wasn't trying...uh...well, how are you keeping Leslie? Are you doing okay?

LESLIE: (*Laughs.*) How does a person do okay? What a strange question. Isn't that a strange question in the literal sense? For all our sophistication with language, we are still quite a ways off before we communicate the strength of our ideas..don't you think? I'm fine. There's that word again. Fine, fine, fine, all because I'm having a fine, fine, fine day...Mr. Putnam.

MR. PUTNAM: Yes?

LESLIE: Huh?

MR. PUTNAM: You said my name just then.

LESLIE: You weren't really listening to me, were you Mr. Putnam?

MR. PUTNAM: No, I'm listening, I'm, I'm very carefully listening Leslie, but uh, I'm not entirely certain as to, ah, as to what, uh, I'm not really sure I follow you...completely.

LESLIE: Most people don't. (*Beat - she bursts out laughing.*)

*Mr. Putnam laughs uneasily at first but then joins in on the hysterics.*

MR. PUTNAM: (*Warmly.*) It's okay.

LESLIE: Yes.

MR. PUTNAM: You're okay.

LESLIE: Yes.

MR. PUTNAM: Good, good...ah...Leslie.

LESLIE: Yes?

MR. PUTNAM: What did you need to see me about?

LESLIE: (*Beat.*) I need time off.

MR. PUTNAM: ...Oh, good! (*Smiling brightly.*) That's good. That's a good thing to do, Leslie.

LESLIE: It is?

MR. PUTNAM: Sure!

LESLIE: Why do you think it's a good idea for me to take time off? I mean, I know why I need time but I never told you why I need the time...why do you think I need the time?

MR. PUTNAM: Why do I think you need the time?

LESLIE: Off!

MR. PUTNAM: Off, right. Because you asked.

LESLIE: I did.

MR. PUTNAM: Yes, you did.

LESLIE: I definitely did.

MR. PUTNAM: ...How much time would you like?

LESLIE: Two weeks, four days, four hours.

MR. PUTNAM: Oh.

LESLIE: I'd like to come back on a half day.

MR. PUTNAM: That works! (*Smiles.*)

LESLIE: Wonderful!

MR. PUTNAM: Wonderful!

LESLIE: And you?

MR. PUTNAM: Me?

LESLIE: Are you relieved?

MR. PUTNAM: Relieved?

LESLIE: When I first stepped foot in here you said and I quote, "I'm somewhat relieved that you asked to see me." And I was wondering if you were still *relieved*?

MR. PUTNAM: Oh! Well, let me explain. I wished to see you also..today, in fact..I was going to call you in to my office after lunch, well, to see if you had a moment to talk.

*Awkward pause.*

Sometimes a person has something planned out Leslie but in the final hour something else happens and the original plans change...a person can still go forward with the original idea, plan that is, but there are times when one isn't certain which way to go.

LESLIE: Are you uncertain, Mr. Putnam?

MR. PUTNMAN: Umm, yes, yes I believe I am -

LESLIE: About me?

MR. PUTNMAN: Pardon?

LESLIE: Are you uncertain about *me*?

MR. PUTNMAN: Well. Perhaps it's not, well, there is not much else -

LESLIE: You are a good man, Mr. Putnam. There is no need to worry in what you wish to communicate. We are alike, in the sense that I, like you, am not drawn from the weak, I'm not among those who take pleasure in seeing someone fret. You are sitting very uneasily in your chair. Shifting your whole body from one position to another. You've moved your arms about, crossed your legs twice, slouched a few times, but have yet to sit firmly, confidently like you usually do. This isn't your usual nature, only when there's something wrong, you tend to sit awkwardly, as such. I hope you do not take offense, I'm stating my opinion based on my observational history.

I have been working here for many years now. You've always been so kind to me. As I was saying, I'm not one of those people who take pleasure in another's distress. I'm not fond of those people. I usually jump right in to spare another from humiliation. I think it's on account of compassion or hope that one day someone will throw me a lifeline before I drown. Who knows, right? Karma.

MR. PUTNAM: Was I -

LESLIE: You were.

MR. PUTNAM: Sorry.

LESLIE: No need to apologize, least of all to me. I understand, honestly I do. Whatever it is your struggling to tell me, I want you to know that it's best you just come out and say it. No matter how horrible or terrible it may be to you, I can take it. I'm tough. You know that about me, don't you?

MR. PUTNAM: I do. I most certainly do, Leslie.

LESLIE: I'm tough.

MR. PUTNAM: You are, dear.

*Mr. Putnam hands Leslie a cleanex.*

*Leslie takes the tissue to her eyes.*

LESLIE: I'm ready.

MR. PUTNAM: Ready?

LESLIE: Go ahead.

MR. PUTNAM: Leslie, I'm quite fond of -

*Leslie takes in a deep breath and holds it with her cheeks puffed out.*

MR. PUTNAM (cont'd): Leslie?

*Leslie gives Mr. Putnam a nod of affirmation to continue.*

Uh...right...that's making me a bit, um...

*Leslie refutes Mr. Putnam's words and gestures for him to continue.*

(Nervously.) I originally asked you, WANTED to ask you in here on account of, of, of, of...uh, I wanted to know if you were doing well. That's all, I only wished to see for myself if, ah, if you ah...Leslie, LESLIE, please don't hold your breath. Your face is changing color and I - you are making me a bit nervous, actually. Leslie? Leslie?? LESLIE, do you *hear me*?

*Leslie almost runs out of breath. She breathes heavily.*

*Leslie begins to recover. Her face fills with sadness.*

LESLIE: (Distant.) I am grateful for your honesty, Mr. Putnam.

MR. PUTNAM: (Tries to talk but nothing comes out.)

LESLIE: Perhaps I should leave today? I'll finish out the clock and then...gather my things and go?

MR. PUTNAM: Yes, yes you may.

*Leslie stands up.*

LESLIE: It's been a very long time since I have taken this large amount of time off.

MR. PUTNAM: I believe it has been.

LESLIE: Well. It should be a good thing then. Thank you...

*Leslie hugs Mr. Putnam who seems deflated.*

I will be back in exactly two weeks, four days, four hours.

*Leslie kisses Mr. Putnam on the cheek and leaves the office.*

*Mr. Putnam gathers his thoughts.*

*Lights out.*

**END OF PLAY**