

Who is Ruth?

A 10-minute play by

Matthew J Hanson

Matthew J. Hanson
13277 Valley Creek Trail S.
Afton, MN 55001
(651) 436-7660
matthew@matthewjhanson.com

Cast of Characters

RUTH WINTERS, a woman in her early to mid forties.

MARIE PETERSON, a woman roughly ten years younger than Winters.

Setting

The office of Ruth Winters.

“Who is Ruth?”

[The lights come up on Ruth Winters’s office. This can be as simple as a desk, with a chair on either side, a comfortable chair for Ms. Winters, and a more basic chair for Mrs. Peterson. On the desk are at least an intercom, a notebook (or other means for taking notes) and Mrs. Peterson’s resume and portfolio. (Though these props can be mimed if necessary). Any details in the room should show that it is defiantly Winters’s domain. The space may be busy, but very organized. RUTH WINTERS is seated at her desk. She is a woman in her early to mid forties. When she gets ready in the mornings she tries to look professional, not pretty. As the lights come up RUTH WINTERS is speaking into her intercom.]

WINTERS: Thank you Karen. Please show her in.

[MARIE PETERSON enters. She is a woman approximately ten years younger than Winters. She is trying to look professional, but is also attractive in the traditionally feminine sense. She is slightly nervous but doing her best to control her feelings. As PETERSON enters WINTERS starts to take a few notes. She does not acknowledge the presence of the new comer. PETERSON is unsure what to do, until finally she speaks up.]

PETERSON: I hope I’m not disturbing you. The receptionist said I should come back.

WINTERS: *[Not looking up from her notes.]* Yes, you must be Miss Peterson. Please sit down.

PETERSON: Thank you. *[She sits.]* Please, you can call me Marie. I don’t think I caught your first name.

WINTERS: *[Setting aside her notes.]* You may call me Ms. Winters.

PETERSON: Of course. I just wanted to thank you for giving me this opportunity. I hope I won’t disappoint you.

WINTERS: You don’t have the job yet Miss Peterson.

PETERSON: I know, I’m just saying thank you for the interview.

WINTERS: *[Looks at resume]* The first thing that concerns me is the break in your employment history starting six years ago.

PETERSON: Yes, that’s when I had my first child. My husband and I thought it might be a good idea if I stayed home for a bit. But then money got a little tight, so...

WINTERS: Do you love your husband, Miss Peterson?

PETERSON: Excuse me?

WINTERS: Do you love your husband, Miss Peterson?

PETERSON: Yes, of course I love my husband.

WINTERS: And your children? Do you love your children?

PETERSON: Very much.

WINTERS: How was your time at Andrews and Lancaster?

PETERSON: It was good, I learned a lot there.

WINTERS: The world has changed a great deal in the past six years.

PETERSON: I know, and I've been taking some classes recently. Computer classes, learning about Photoshop and all that.

WINTERS: I know. You put that on your resume.

PETERSON: Yes I did.

WINTERS: What would you say is the most important thing you learned at Andrews and Lancaster?

PETERSON: Well... probably the importance of working as a team.

WINTERS: Did you not work as a team before that?

PETERSON: I did, I just... working there really hit it home for me.

WINTERS: How do you feel about working late hours Miss Peterson?

PETERSON: I'm willing to do whatever it takes to get the job done.

WINTERS: Really?

PETERSON: Yes.

WINTERS: Even if it means seeing less of your family?

PETERSON: Yes.

WINTERS: What if one of your children is sick. One of your children needs you, but we have a big presentation tomorrow, and we can't finish it without you. What do you do then Miss Peterson?

PETERSON: I'm sure we could figure out a compromise.

WINTERS: And if we couldn't?

PETERSON: We're creative people. I'm sure we'd think of something.

WINTERS: And if we couldn't?

PETERSON: Well then... I'm not sure what I'd do.

WINTERS: How is your sex life Miss Peterson?

PETERSON: I beg your pardon?

WINTERS: How is your sex life?

PETERSON: I don't see how that is any of your business.

WINTERS: Don't you?

[PETERSON does not respond. WINTERS starts taking notes again. Finally PETERSON has to say something.]

PETERSON: Mrs. Winters?

[WINTERS does not look up from her notes.]

PETERSON: Mrs. Winters?

WINTERS: It's Ms. Winters.

PETERSON: Ms. Winters, should I go?

[WINTERS continues writing in her notebook. Then stops.]

WINTERS: Would you describe yourself as a punctual woman Miss Peterson?

PETERSON: It's Mrs. Peterson.

WINTERS: Would you describe yourself as a punctual woman Mrs. Peterson?

PETERSON: Yes, I would.

WINTERS: You arrive at work on time, if not early?

PETERSON: Yes, of course.

WINTERS: And so you were never late arriving to Andrews and Lancaster?

PETERSON: Well... maybe not never.

WINTERS: So you were sometimes late then?

PETERSON: Yes, a couple times.

WINTERS: How often were you late arriving to Andrews and Lancaster?

PETERSON: I don't remember.

WINTERS: Three times? Four?

PETERSON: I don't know. I didn't count or anything.

WINTERS: Then take a guess. Give a general range. More than ten? More than twenty?

PETERSON: If I had to guess, I'd say it was between ten and twenty?

WINTERS: Between ten and twenty? Are you sure it wasn't more in the neighborhood of fifty-seven?

PETERSON: I'm sure it was never that much.

WINTERS: Really. That's not what their records indicate.

PETERSON: They must be counting when I was just late by a minute or two.

WINTERS: You don't count those?

PETERSON: No, I was only seriously late a handful of times.

WINTERS: Define seriously late.

PETERSON: More than half an hour.

WINTERS: You were more than half an hour late ten to twenty times?

PETERSON: No, I was only that late twice I think, earlier I was talking about—

WINTERS: How did you meet your husband, Mrs. Peterson?

PETERSON: What?

WINTERS: How did you meet your husband?

PETERSON: What does that have to do with my job?

WINTERS: You said yourself how important teamwork is. I just want to know what sort of team I will be working with. [*Beat*] You are always free to leave if you want to Mrs. Peterson. The door is directly behind you.

PETERSON: We worked together.

WINTERS: An office romance?

PETERSON: Yes.

WINTERS: At least he wasn't your boss.

[*No reply*]

WINTERS: At least he wasn't married.

[*No reply*]

WINTERS: Mrs. Peterson?

PETERSON: Not really.

WINTERS: I'm sorry?

PETERSON: They weren't very involved. He told me so. They had not been close in years. They hadn't even been physical in years. Under normal circumstance, I never would have done anything like that. But he seemed so sad. And I knew, in his heart, he had separated long ago.

WINTERS: But they were married?

PETERSON: Yes. They were married.

WINTERS: I was looking at your portfolio. I especially like the Loman Sports design.

PETERSON: [*Pause*] But?

WINTERS: There is no but. I just wanted to let you know I liked it.

PETERSON: Oh. Thank you.

WINTERS: You seem a little defensive. Were you expecting something more backhanded?

PETERSON: Well... to be honest... yes.

WINTERS: Now what ever would give you that idea?

PETERSON: Because—

WINTERS: Because that's what I've been doing so far?

[*PETERSON nods yes.*]

WINTERS: I've told you you're free to go at any time, Mrs. Peterson. Why don't you just walk out?

PETERSON: Because, Ms. Winters, I figure this was some sort of test.

WINTERS: Test? You mean a test to see how much you can put up with? If you can take it until the end of the interview, you get the job? It might be that sort of test, but maybe you pass by walking out.

PETERSON: Please, Ms. Winters. Just tell me what you want me to do and I'll do it.

WINTERS: I just want you to answer my questions honestly and directly.

PETERSON: Please, Ms. Winters, I need this job.

WINTERS: There are other jobs out there Mrs. Peterson.

PETERSON: Not for me. I've tried everywhere I can think of, and you're the only one who even gave me an interview.

WINTERS: I know times are tough Mrs. Peterson, but surely your husband's salary—

PETERSON: My husband doesn't have a salary. My husband is very sick. He got laid off, and then he got sick. Sick just in time for the insurance to expire. Now we have... I need this job.

WINTERS: Tell me then, Miss Peterson, does your husband ever talk about his ex-wife?

PETERSON: [*Beat.*] You're Ruth, aren't you?

WINTERS: I will ask the questions here, Miss Peterson, and you will answer them. And you will answer them truthfully. There is nothing I hate more than people who tell me what they think I want to hear. Does your husband ever talk about his ex-wife?

PETERSON: Sometimes.

WINTERS: What does he say?

PETERSON: That she was a workaholic. That she put her business before everything, including their marriage.

WINTERS: Did he ever say why she worked so hard?

PETERSON: No.

WINTERS: Does he ever talk about the good times they had? Before they started to grow apart?

PETERSON: No.

WINTERS: Have you wondered if your husband is having an affair?

PETERSON: Jack wouldn't do that.

WINTERS: How can you say that? How can *you* honestly believe that?

PETERSON: Because what we have is different. He didn't leave you; you pushed him away.

WINTERS: You said you were willing to do whatever it takes to get the job done. Are you really?

PETERSON: Yes, even if it means having to put up with your abuse.

WINTERS: Even if it means working until one o'clock in the morning?

PETERSON: If it means putting food in the mouth of my children and husband, yes.

WINTERS: Working so hard that when you come home, you can barely keep your eyes open let alone take care of your children, or placate his male libido? Going on business trips without him? Being apart for days, maybe even weeks at a time with only his word to verify what he's been doing or who he's been with? Are you willing to do that?

[No response.]

WINTERS: Did you ever consider that you weren't the first?

PETERSON: The first?

WINTERS: The first affair?

[Again no response.]

WINTERS: Thank you for your time Miss Peterson. I trust you can show yourself the way out.

PETERSON: I'm not getting the job.

WINTERS: Thank you for your time.

PETERSON: Please. If not for me think about Jack. He's sick. He needs this. If you ever loved him.

WINTERS: Don't embarrass yourself further Miss Peterson. The position has already been filled.

PETERSON: What?

WINTERS: Somebody else has already accepted the position.

PETERSON: Then why did you...

WINTERS: Why do you think?

[Beat. PETERSON slaps Winters.]

WINTERS: I had assumed you could find your own way out. Would you like me to call you an escort?

PETERSON: *[Begins to exit, the stops.]* In regards to the question you asked earlier. Our sex life is great.

WINTERS: Has he ever called out my name?

[Beat. PETERSON exits. WINTERS pushes the resume and portfolio onto the floor. The interview has taken a lot more out of her than she thought. She speaks again into her intercom.]

WINTERS: Karen, cancel my two o'clock.

[Fade to black.]

THE END