

Dear Miss Peters,

I've never written a fan letter before, and I feel a little silly doing it now. It's just that I love your work, and your show, "Sandy!" is so much fun to watch.

Leslie put down the letter. "Why the hell did I decide to read fan mail?" she thought. Still, it did feel good to read. "What an ego!" She smiled and picked it up.

I'll bet you get thousands of letters like this.

"Like hell, I do!" People rarely write letters anymore. Leslie glanced at the small pile of fan mail on her desk.

I wrote partly to offer congratulations for your excellent work and partly because there is something about you I can't get out of my thoughts. When you smile, your face lights up, and I feel warm inside.

It may be your acting ability. I hope not. You have an inner glow that I've never seen before. When you hug someone on your show, you close your eyes, and it looks like you are the happiest woman in the world.

"Damn right, I'm a good actor."

I don't want to come off like an insane fan. I just want you to know that you reach me in a way that makes me happy. That is a beautiful gift, and I'm grateful.

In case you wondered, I am a 33-year-old small business owner. I have a consulting business here in Seattle. I'm divorced and live with my dog, Pete. It was his idea to write to

you. You probably wouldn't give me a second glance if we passed on the street. Pete says he's sure you would stop and pet him for a long time.

Pete and I would love an autographed picture if you don't mind taking the time to send one to us. We both (me mostly) love watching your show.

To be fair, I am enclosing a picture of Pete and me.

Your fans,

Pete and Steve

(steve@PeteTheDog.net)

There was a small picture in the envelope. It showed a handsome man kneeling next to a golden retriever. Both looked happy. They were on the deck of a modest house.

Leslie looked at the picture for a long time. There was something about the relaxed, happy pair that felt inviting and warm. She could imagine herself in front of a fire with her head on his lap and the dog napping in front of them on the floor.

“Holy Crap! Am I losing it? This guy could be an ax murderer. No, he isn't,” she thought. “He is just a nice-looking guy who took the time to send me a fan letter.”

She picked up the letter and picture and started to drop them in the wastebasket. She stopped just before letting them fall. Instead, she looked at the picture again. Steve might think her face sent warm feelings to him. Wouldn't he be surprised to discover his did the same for her? She put them back in their envelope and deposited them in her top desk drawer.

Les, that's what everyone calls her, lives alone in a modest- for-a-TV-star, four-bedroom house in the Hollywood

hills. At one time, it belonged to an architect. It was all glass and wood. The windows went from floor to ceiling, affording a spectacular view of the city below.

She loved her house. It cost her nearly all of the money she earned for the show's first season. It was worth every penny. Like many actors, she perpetually worried that she would never work again after her show was canceled. That's why she used cash to buy it. As long as she paid her property taxes, she would always have a home.

Her living room took up almost the entire first floor. Les bought a baby grand piano with some of season two's money. It stood in one corner.

Les couldn't play a note. She bought it on a whim, a \$100,000 whim. Every time she looked at it, she smiled and shook her head. Maybe it was an investment. Perhaps during a hiatus from shooting, she would take lessons. Meantime, it looked classy in its corner.

A colossal home entertainment system dominated the wall opposite the kitchen. It featured a 96-inch UHD TV with a state-of-the-art sound system. She had 275 channels of satellite TV plus subscriptions to every streaming service. Attached was a DVR capable of storing 10,000 hours of HD TV. It was good to be a TV star!

Unlike most of her fellow show-business colleagues, she didn't entertain. Les avoided as many social functions as she could. She loved staying home and indulging her secret vice: watching TV. Leslie was a sitcom addict. She loved old sitcoms like "I Love Lucy" and the "Beverly Hillbillies." Even after seeing each episode a hundred times, she would still laugh out loud.

She was sure that her addiction to old TV was the secret of her sitcom success. She believed her sense of timing and her ability to know what's funny came from those thousands of hours watching TV.

A door near the windows opened to the master bedroom. It was nearly as large as the living room. It also had floor-to-ceiling glass. A king-size bed dominated the wall opposite the door. There was a loveseat, coffee table, and two chairs between her bed and the door. It was so perfect it almost looked like a hotel suite.

Her house could have been part of a hotel. There wasn't a single personal picture to be seen. All the walls had beautiful landscape photographs hung on them. They looked like a decorator selected, framed, and placed each one. That was how they got there. She hired a decorator to do everything. Other than the piano, her decorator selected the rest.

Les moved from a small Hollywood studio apartment into this house. Not one stick of her old furniture came with her. She didn't want anything that reminded her of those starving-actress days.

There were three more bedrooms upstairs, each with its own bath. There was also a large home gym. She used the professional exercise equipment at least three times a week. The house was built on a hillside. The entrance was on the second floor.

Even though she had been living here for three years and had enough money invested to support her for the rest of her life, Les couldn't allow herself to believe that all this was hers.

Her fellow cast members imagined she was lonely and attempted to fix her up with men they knew. That never

worked out. The men were usually superficial show business types who wanted to use her to get ahead. Star fuckers!

Les was stunningly beautiful, a 5-foot 2-inch powerhouse. She had long, blonde hair that she usually kept in a ponytail. Her eyes were bright, sky blue. Her body was compact. She was small-breasted with narrow hips and one of Hollywood's most beautiful backsides. Her producers made sure that in every episode, she wore tight jeans to highlight her gorgeous butt.

A little voice inside her told her not to get close. She had been hurt too many times to believe that it was safe to trust anyone, especially a man. Unlike other stars, she didn't surround herself with an entourage of hangers-on to flatter her and fetch her drinks. She could take care of herself. Thank you very much.

Les moved from her desk to a couch, looking out over the city. It was still early, and the air was clear. She decided to have some coffee and then work out in her gym.

There was an automatic espresso machine in the kitchen. She got a cup and pressed the buttons for two shots of the potent brew. The machine went to work grinding the beans and brewing the coffee.

While it was working, Les got some 2-percent milk from the refrigerator and put four ounces in a small, stainless steel pitcher. When the coffee maker finished brewing, she pressed the "Steam" button, and pressurized steam bubbled loudly into the milk. When the sound changed from a scream to a low bubbling, Les turned it off and poured the hot milk and froth into her cup.

She was on her way back to the couch when the phone rang.

“Hello.”

A deep male voice replied, “Hi, Les.”

It was Mike Wilson, her agent. Her stomach jumped a little. Hearing from him this early in the morning was very unusual.

“How are you doing, Les?”

“OK, you?”

“I’ve been better.”

This can’t be good news. Oh crap.

Mike continued, “I just got a call from Chris.”

Chris Warloff is the executive producer and creator of her show. He’s not an early riser during hiatus.

“I’m afraid I have some bad news.”

Oh shit.

“The network decided to cancel your show.”

“Wait for a second! We are supposed to start shooting in just two weeks.”

“I know. There’s been a shakeup with the network brass. Andy Carter was just promoted to senior vice president of programming. He said there are too many sitcoms.

“I’m sorry, Les. I’m sure you will have a ton of offers once this news goes public. Chris will probably call you this morning. He likes you and loves your work.”

Shit, shit, shit, shit, shit.

She must have been quiet for a long time. Mike broke into her thoughts, “Les, are you there?”

She sighed loudly, “Yes, I’m here. We’ve only had three seasons. That’s not enough for syndication. My career is over.”

“No, it isn’t! Are you kidding? You are one of the most loved stars on TV. You’ll be fine. By this time tomorrow, you will have ten offers.”

“I need to go. Bye.” Without waiting for Mike to say anything, Les hung up.

She sat quietly. Her breathing was uneven, and tears formed in her eyes. “I thought I had it made,” she thought.

Her phone rang again. “Fuck it!” she said aloud, “Let it go to voicemail.”

“Andy Carter?” she said aloud, “Not Andy Carter!”

Les felt lost. She expected her show to run for ten years. That was Chris’s batting average. It was just her luck to be in one of his very few failures.

Les appeared at the annual “Up-Fronts,” a yearly event where the network previewed the next season’s programming just a month ago.

It was held in a convention hotel at Disney World: the famous Grand Floridian. Les had a beautiful suite looking out over Bay Lake fronting the Magic Kingdom. She had never been there before.

Andy Carter asked her to meet with him in his suite. Les expected to discuss promotion for the next season of her show. He greeted her dressed only in a white terrycloth robe. Les had a sinking feeling when she saw him.

Andy smiled and invited her in. He didn't waste any time. "I want to congratulate you on your wonderful show." He moved closer and quickly opened his robe. He was fully erect. He hugged her and attempted with one hand to reach under her t-shirt.

Les had enough. She brought up her knee and kicked him squarely in the balls. Andy dropped to the floor. He started retching. Les didn't waste any time. She ran out of his suite.

"I did this," she said out loud. She believed that Andy killed her show as retaliation for her unwillingness to have sex with him. She felt guilty and angry.

Les absently wandered back to her desk. She liked to make lists. Ever since she was a little girl, she got a sense of security when she listed things. It was time to create a to-do list of things she had to do to save her career.

She opened the top drawer to get a pad. She saw Steve's fan letter and picture. Instead of getting her notepad, she picked them up. "The dog has a great smile," she thought as she looked at the picture. "The guy is pretty cute too." She smiled. It was her first smile since she got that phone call canceling her show.

Les reread his letter. She noticed the email address at the bottom of the page `steve@PeteTheDog.net`. "Maybe I'll send him a note." She grabbed her laptop from its case leaning next to the desk. While it booted, she chuckled at "`PeteTheDog.net`."

When the main screen came up, Les opened her email program and started an email to Steve:

To: `steve@petethedog.net`

From: `Leslie@imaluckyducky.net`

Hi Steve,

You aren't the only one with a silly email address!

Thank you for your kind note. It came at a tough time for me. I just found out that my show has been canceled. Seeing you and Pete smiling out at me made me feel a little better.

Thank you!

Are you sure you still want my picture? I'm an unemployed actress now.

Les looked up from the computer. She was crying again. She felt so lonely right now. Why is she writing this guy?

Maybe I need a vacation. It can't be doing me any good to be sitting here brooding about my future.

Anyway, right now, it sucks being me. I know. You are wondering why I am whining to you. It's because Pete has such a friendly face, and I know he will understand exactly how I feel when you read this email to him.

Les smiled again.

Take care, and thank you for making me smile.

Les

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Steve's alarm went off. As soon as he heard it, Pete bounded out from his favorite sleeping spot at the foot of the bed and woofed happily at Steve.

Steve silenced the alarm with "Alexa, Stop!" Pete wasn't so easy to quiet.

"Quiet, you big puppy," he said as he reached over to scratch Pete's ears. It didn't matter how cloudy the weather or how bad the news, Pete could always make Steve smile.

Pete wriggled happily. Then he stopped and woofed again. "OK, I get it. You need to go out."

Pete gave him a look that said, "Of course, dummy. Let me out now before I pee on the floor!"

When Pete saw that Steve was getting out of bed, he charged out of the bedroom, through the main room, and stood expectantly at the glass sliding doors to the deck, the same deck Les saw in the picture.

"OK, OK, I'm going as fast as I can." Steve opened the door, and Pete charged out full speed. The house was chilly. Steve said out loud, "Alexa, ask Ecobee to set the temperature to 75 degrees."

A voice from somewhere in the room said, "Setting temperature to 75 degrees until the next activity."

Steve loved gadgets. His house had Alexa in every room. He could control his lights, TV, furnace, and some appliances with his voice.

He shivered. Steve always slept naked. He padded back to the bedroom to get something to wear. He settled on an old University of Washington sweatshirt. It was nearly long enough to cover his butt.

Feeling a bit warmer, he went to the kitchen and started his coffee maker. Like most people in the Seattle area, Steve was a coffee snob. He had a Cuisinart Grind & Brew coffee maker. Steve put a filter in place and poured a quart of water into the tank in the back. He set the pot for 6 cups and pressed the “Brew” button.

The sound of coffee grinding filled the room. Pete must have heard breakfast noises and came charging back through the open sliding door. He stopped at the table and sat, waiting expectantly next to Steve’s customary chair.

Steve got two English muffins out of the bread box. He split them in half and placed them in the toaster oven. While they were toasting, he got butter from the fridge and put a pat into a small glass bowl. He put the bowl in the microwave and set it for 30 seconds.

He got a jar of his homemade raspberry jam out of the fridge and set it on the table. He put his mug and a knife at his place. When the microwave finished, he put the bowl on the counter and took a pastry brush from a drawer. The coffeepot beeped, and Steve put the pot on a trivet on the table. Just then, the toaster oven signaled that it was finished.

Steve put the muffins cut-side-up on a plate. He used the pastry brush to slather each muffin half with melted butter. Finished, he brought the dish to the table and took his seat.

Pete immediately scooped over and put his head on Steve’s leg. That is the universal dog food-begging position. Steve spread jam on all four halves. He tore one of the halves

into quarters and immediately presented one of them to Pete. The piece disappeared instantly.

Steve and Pete finished breakfast at a more leisurely pace. When he was finished, Steve cleared the plates and put them in the dishwasher. He refilled his coffee mug and left it on the table. It took him a few minutes to wash the coffee pot and sponge off the kitchen counter.

According to Pete, Steve's next chore was the most important of the day: dog treat and dog food time. Pete was anxiously pacing as Steve finished the breakfast cleanup. He woofed as Steve picked up his food bowl.

“Easy, puppy. I have to wash it first.”

Pete woofed again. “Noisy dog!” Steve laughed. Not quite fast enough for Pete, Steve filled his bowl with kibble and gave Pete a morning Milk-Bone biscuit.

That chore done, still barefoot, Steve built a fire and sat on the couch facing it. Pete made himself comfortable on the oval braided cotton rug between the sofa and the fireplace.

Steve grabbed his laptop and opened it to check his mail. He saw an odd email message. He wondered who in the world had an address like “iamaluckyducky.net.” “Funny,” he thought.

He opened it and found it was from Les. Holy shit! She wrote to me. He read it and immediately clicked “Reply.”

Hi Les,

Wow! I never expected to hear from you. I figured I would be lucky to get a machine-signed studio picture. Pete said that he was sure you would send him a personal note. I guess he was right. He usually is.

I'm very sorry to hear about your show. We both love it and were looking forward to the next season. I don't watch much TV, but I never miss a single episode of yours. Pete says I have a crush on you. He may be right.

It makes sense for you to get away for a while. How can you do it without adoring fans mobbing you? Do you go around in a baseball cap and sunglasses?

I am thinking of getting away too. The cold, damp, and cloudy weather here is getting to me. I just lit a fire, and I'm sitting in front of it with my computer on my lap. Pete is sleeping on the rug in front of the fire.

I can imagine you in a lounge chair next to your pool. A servant has brought you a breakfast burrito and some iced coffee. What a life a star must lead!

Jealous Steve and snoozing Pete

Les found herself chuckling out loud. Some TV star life! Here she was, sitting in just a t-shirt. Pool, indeed!

“I’ll set the record straight.”

Hi Steve,

I hate to burst your bubble, but I don’t have a pool or a servant. I live alone in the Hollywood hills. I am sitting at my desk wearing a t-shirt. Yes, that’s all. If you have a girl-in-a-t-shirt fetish, I guess I just made your day.

“Maybe I should get rid of that last line,” Les thought. “Nah! Be a brave girl!”

OK, now you know what I’m wearing. What about you?

Les

Les got up and headed upstairs to her gym. She was wearing a Mickey Mouse t-shirt and nothing else. She hadn’t even brushed her teeth. Mike’s call had ruined her morning.

Les didn’t notice the absence of pants until she sat on her spinning bike. The seat grabbed at her skin. “I’m not sure this is a good idea,” she thought. “Oh, the hell with it!”

“Alexa, play my spinning music.”

“Playing your spinning music list,” the device responded cheerfully.

The music started with some driving techno. Les could feel the bass thump in her chest as she began pedaling. She pushed

harder and harder. The bike's computer turned up the resistance. She was climbing a steep hill.

Sweat poured off her face. She didn't bother wiping it off. She went faster. It was as though she could outrun the bad news. They can't cancel her show if they can't catch her.

Her heart was pounding. Her legs were getting heavy. She had to slow down. "No, I can't!" she yelled out loud. By sheer force of will, she pushed herself harder. Faster! Faster!

Finally, she had to stop. Her legs felt like lead. She could barely lift them. It took all of her strength to get off the bike. To make things worse, she stuck to the seat. She made a nasty Velcro sound as she broke free. It felt like ripping a bandage off of a cut.

"Ow!" she screamed.

"I'm going to keep a pair of panties up here," she thought. "This day is turning into a real shit storm."

As she descended the stairs to the living room, she could hear her cell phone ring. It stopped, then started again. She wondered how many voicemails had piled up in the half-hour she was in the gym.

Just as she got to the bottom of the stairs, the phone rang again. She picked it up before it stopped ringing.

"Les? Les?" a frantic male voice shouted. It was Chris Warloff, her producer. "I must have called 50 times! Where the hell..."

"I'm here."

"I assume you heard the news."

Les sighed, “Yes. What the fuck is going on? Our ratings were good last season, even better than season 2.”

“I know. All I can tell you is that Andy Carter called me to break the news. He said there was a major shakeup in management and that the network decided to go in a new direction.”

“So that’s it? No more show? Can’t you sell it to another network?”

“I can’t. Our contract forbids moving for five years. We are only getting ready to start year four.”

“Oh, Chris!” Les wailed. She couldn’t hold the tears back.

“Don’t worry, Les. We will both be fine.”

“Easy for you to say,” she sniffed, “You have three other hit shows. I have nothing.” She started to cry again.

“It isn’t as bad as you think. You have an interest in the show and will make money every time it reruns.”

“No one syndicates a three-season sitcom.”

“Not true! Our first two seasons are on Hulu now.”

Les brightened. “Really?”

“Yup. Les, why don’t you take some time off and relax. Mike and I will look at opportunities for you. I’m sure things will be fine.”

“Thanks, Chris. Bye.”

“Bye.”

Les set her phone to “vibrate” and put it back on the table. No sooner did she put it down then it started to buzz. Les turned it off. She had a lot to think about.

“Alexa, turn on the television.” The device made a bong sound, and her component system came alive. “Alexa, tune the television to channel 2.” Another bong and the local CBS station appeared. “The Price Is Right” was on. It was at the final showcase segment.

...A trip to Maui! You'll fly coach from Los Angeles to Maui and spend seven nights at the Napili Kai Beach Resort! You'll be staying in a Garden View Hotel Studio. Breakfasts and a whale-watching cruise are included...

“Maui. Sounds nice,” Les thought. “I do need to get away.” Before she could change her mind, Les called her travel agent.

Fifteen minutes later, she had a first-class flight to Maui on Friday and a seven-night stay at the Four Seasons. Since today was Wednesday, she had to start getting ready.

Les didn't like to admit it, but she was a bit compulsive. Whenever she traveled, she had to list everything she might need before starting to pack. Then, she would lay it all out, checking items off her list. Then and only then did anything get put in a suitcase.

Les got out her pad and started to make her travel list. Her laptop was still on her desk. She saw that there was a new email. Since almost no one had her lucky duck email address, she wondered if it was from Steve. Her heart speeded up.

It was from him!

Hi Les,

Just a t-shirt? OMG! I do have a Les-with-no-pants fetish. You don't want to know what happened when I read your last email. Let's just say my heart rate went up.

Les smiled broadly.

I'm not sure what this news will do for you, but all I have on is a University of Washington sweatshirt. I also have a cup of coffee. Like you, I live alone and make my own beverages (and everything else).

Ahem. I would love a picture of you now, even if it isn't signed. 😊

Steve

Les laughed out loud.

Steve,

I'm not going to do that! What if it got out? I do have to be careful. What about you? I would like to see you and your sweatshirt.

L

Les clicked "Send."

"Bing"

Les,

You win. Here is my picture.

S

A picture was attached to the email. It showed him from his head to his knees. The sweatshirt covered all. He had his hands crossed in front of him.

“Very sexy!” she thought. He was turned a bit to the side so that she could see a little of the curve of his butt. He was looking directly into the camera and smiling broadly.

Sexy Steve,

Great picture! We are pretty naughty. I'm never like this. Do you think it's because today has been so bad for me? Am I just letting off steam?

I don't think so. I'm having a lot of fun with you. I am pretty sure you are enjoying yourself. You did have your hands crossed in front of you. 😊

L

“Holy Crap! Did I just send that? What will he think of me?” Les wasn’t really worried. She knew he was having fun too.

“Bing”

I took off my sweatshirt.

S

A picture was attached. Les felt her heart jump. She waited a minute before opening it.

There he was. Well, not all of him. He had taken off his sweatshirt and then sent a picture of his head and chest. The photo ended just below his belly button. He had a mischievous grin on his face.

“I like his body,” she thought. He has a nicely developed chest without too much hair. She was in trouble. She wanted to meet him.

S,

OMG!! Nobody ever sent me a nude picture before. Well, you sent the top half of one. It's perfect! I love your grin.

Do you mind if I keep it?

L

“Bing”

L,

Of course, you can keep it. I am not asking you to reciprocate. If you decide to, I will either delete the picture or guard it with my life. I have to admit I would love to see what's under that t-shirt and below. I also understand the risk you would be taking. I'm happy letting my imagination fill in the details.

S

Les looked down; her nipples were hard. She reached between her legs. It was unmistakably damp down there. She liked Steve, no doubt about it.

S,

You are very brave and strong! I'm not as courageous. You will have to use your imagination.

L

“Bing”

Holy crap!!!! My imagination works! I can close my eyes and see you naked. You are the most beautiful woman in the world! I don't want to seem shallow, but right now, all I can think about is making love to you.

Les felt a little gush. That's what she wanted too.

It's been a long time since I have been this turned on.

S

Steve,

I'm aroused too. I hope that doesn't mean you will do something naughty with yourself.

L

“Bing”

Les,

If that means I can't get myself off until you let me, I agree. I don't know why, but I do. I hope you don't make me wait too long.

Wow!

S

Les was surprised. She didn't think she was telling him not to do something. Apparently, Steve likes letting me take charge.

Les had just two lovers in her 27 years. One was her high school boyfriend. They went together in her junior and senior years. He sort of led the way. Sex was a bumbling experiment.

Her second lover was a director she met at a party. That liaison didn't last long. He was a very selfish lover. When he was done, it was all over. He never even checked to see if Les had an orgasm.

Yes, this is brand new.

Steve,

Thank you. I won't make you wait too long — just the right amount of time.

L

Les had no idea what the “right amount of time” was. She was a little surprised he took her tongue-in-cheek instruction seriously.

Almost instantly, “Bing.”

Les,

I understand. I have to get moving. I need to calm down and take a shower. I have an online meeting in 45 minutes. I can be back at my computer when it's done. Is that OK?

s

Steve,

That works for me. I'll try to have an email waiting in your inbox by then.

L

“Bing”

Les,

I can't wait...

S

Les sat back in her desk chair. She shook her head. What in the world got into her? Whatever it is turned me on.

She realized she was still in just her t-shirt and didn't smell very good. Steve wasn't the only one who needed a shower. Les smiled to herself and headed to the bathroom.