

SET FOR A NEW START

By Jeff Dunne

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CHARACTERS

CARL	An overworked, underpaid social worker at the unemployment office.
SET	The Egyptian god of destruction, storms, and mayhem
JACKIE	An even more overworked, underpaid social worker, and Carl's supervisor.

SETTING

An unemployment office during the year 2020.

SCENE

(Carl, an overworked and exhausted social worker, is sitting behind a desk. Set, the Egyptian god, is standing nearby. He has been waiting in line for hours, and is finally at the front. Carl waves him over to take a seat as he finishes a phone call.)

CARL

No, Mr. Jones, it can take up to four weeks before you receive any leads. *(Pause.)* Because there aren't that many jobs available right now. It's called a recession. Perhaps you've heard of it? No? Well, try staying conscious for a few minutes, I'm sure someone will mention it. *(Pause.)* We don't know when, Mr. Jones. That's why we ask that you to give it a few weeks. I suppose you could try calling everyone who's already waiting and see if they'd mind your jumping to the front of the line— *(Pause.)* Excellent. We'll send those twenty-five million names along. Please hold.

(Carl pushes a button on his phone and puts down the receiver.)

Alright.

(Carl holds out a hand, palm up, expecting a form. Set just stares at him. Carl stares back. Set holds out his hand in a similar way. Carl shakes his head in disgust.)

Form?

SET

Human.

CARL

Oh, wonderful. A comedian. Nothing an underpaid social worker likes more than someone dishing out crap while asking for help. What's that? Never mind. Yes, I'll just fill it out for you, shall I? Here we are. Name?

SET

Set.

CARL

Seth?

Set.	SET
Set.	CARL
Yes.	SET
As in game, match, set?	CARL
I don't know what that—	SET
Spell it.	CARL
S...	SET
Yes.	CARL
E...	SET
Yes, yes.	CARL
T...	SET
I don't have all day here—	CARL
H.	SET
S, E, T, H?	CARL
That's right.	SET

CARL
That spells Seth. I *said* that, and you said—

SET
Set.

(Carl gives a glower, followed by an epic sigh.)

CARL
Right. Anyway, *Set*. Last name?

SET
Yes.

CARL
Your last name is Yes? You're Set Yes?

SET
Yes. Set.

CARL
Are you screwing with me? You are, aren't you? Are you seriously telling me that your first name is Yes, and your last name is Set?

SET
No.

CARL
I'm not playing twenty questions here, *Set*. Is that your first or last name?

SET
It hasn't changed.

CARL
Right. Great. Alrighty, let's try it this way. What does your wife call you when you're in big trouble?

SET
What does Nephthys call me...

CARL
...when she's angry. Yes. You know, 'get in here right now Oliver Wendell Jenkins!'

SET

Usually she just calls me Set. Or brother. Or husband. Sometimes she calls me 'little Jackal tushy' when I—

CARL

Stop! Stop stop stop. TMI. Way, way TMI. So... Your wife calls you "brother"?

SET

Well, she is my sister.

CARL

As in... "you have the same parents" sister? Like she's... You know what? Never mind. I don't need that to complete the form. Forget I asked. So you don't go by any other names?

SET

Well, sometimes people have called me Set the Destroyer...

CARL

Oh, excellent. You're a celebrity, aren't you?

SET

In a manner of speakin—

CARL

Are you one of those rap artists? Here. Sign this. It's for my sister's kid. Loves all that crap. Make it out to Andi. Anyway, let's get on with this. Place of birth?

SET

I sprang from the forehead of Nut, and fell to the Earth—

CARL

Of course you did. Who didn't these days? I'll write New York. That's where you find most nuts. Previous employer?

SET

Excuse me?

CARL

Previous employer. You know, who hired and fired you?

SET

I'm not following.

CARL

Who's been sending you paychecks for— Forget it. It's too late on a Friday for this.

(Carl hits another button on his phone, picks up the receiver, and says...)

I'm going on break. *(Pause.)* No, I didn't. I didn't—

(Jackie enters, holding a receiver with a cord that stretches offstage.)

JACKIE

Yes, you did. Twenty-five minutes ago. Right as Mrs. Trundelow insisted on showing someone pictures of her late cat.

CARL

But—

JACKIE

If you make me cover for your sorry ass—

CARL

But he's—

JACKIE

CARL!

CARL

Fine!

(Jackie exits. Carl carefully hangs up the phone.)

Okay, Mr. Set with no previous employer, what kinds of skills do you have?

SET

Well, in the early dynastic period I used to distribute love, but then—

CARL

Are you telling me you were a gigolo?

SET

I don't—

CARL

Are you seriously trying to claim unemployment benefits from losing a job as gigolo? Look, if anyone should understand the subtleties of the phrase “laid off”, I’d think it would be you. Now I’m trying to help, but I can’t very well write down ‘gigolo’ on the form, can I. So for God’s sake—

SET

Yes?

CARL

Do you have any other marketable skills?

SET

Well, back in those days I was responsible for the sun rising each morning, but I haven’t done that for quite a wh—

CARL

I’m sure that’s what all the ladies told you, but there’s no need to brag about it.

SET

I don’t think you understand—

CARL

Oh, I understand perfectly, Mr. Set. Our jobs aren’t all that different, really. We both get fucked on a daily basis, only *I* amassed huge student loans for the privilege. And no one says thank you afterwards.

SET

I really made the sun rise. I would pull it up into the sky and then push the moon—

CARL

Great. Good to know. Let’s keep it off the form, though, shall we? We’ll call that plan B and jot it down here on this parking ticket I got during lunch. Alright. Have you got anything else?

SET

Well, after I murdered Osiris, my responsibilities shifted into—

CARL

Hang on, buttercup. Rewind a bit. Did you just say that you murdered someone?

SET

Osiris. My brother.

CARL

You're a felon? Great. Just great. That's something you might have mentioned right from the get-go. There's a totally different form for that. Alright. When were you released?

SET

Released?

CARL

Yes. Released. Like a movie. You're released into the theaters, and then on opening wee—

SET

Theaters.

CARL

Judy deliberately puts all of you nutjobs in my line, doesn't she...

SET

Nut was my mother—

CARL

Of course she was. I swear, you forget to bring potato salad to a pot luck *one* time, and... (*Huge sigh.*) No, Mr. Set. Not theaters. That was a joke. Released from prison. When were you released from prison?

SET

I've never been to prison.

CARL

Didn't you just say that you killed your brother?

SET

Osiris. Yes. I tricked him into getting into a box, and then locked it up and threw it in the Nile. We haven't gotten along very well since then.

CARL

No kidding.

SET

Even after Isis reassembled him—

CARL

Let's just concentrate on the form, shall we? Job skills?

SET

Well, ever since that happened, I've mostly just focused on chaos, storms, and war.

CARL

Look. It's been a long day at the end of a long week, and I don't have time for this. It's nearly three o'clock, and there are still fourteen people behind you who are waiting—

(Set makes a casual gesture, and from offstage we hear a cacophony of agonized screams followed by thuds as dead bodies drop to the ground. Carl looks off in that direction, and his eyes grow wide.)

SET

There you go.

CARL

(Holding up a finger...)

Just a moment.

(Carl hits the button again and picks up the phone.)

Jackie? Could you... could you come in here for a moment? I really need—

(Jackie enters, irate. Carl points towards the dead bodies.)

JACKIE

I'm not going to tell you this again, Carl. I've got my own caseload to handle. I can't solve every little problem for you, so unless you want to get written up again, I suggest...

(Jackie stares, shocked at the dead bodies. Then...)

I'll call janitorial services.

(Jackie exits. Carl just stares at Set, the silence growing palpable.)

CARL

Sooo...

SET

Yes?

CARL

Ummm.... (*nervously checking the form...*) Do you... ah... d-do you have any letters of reference or recommendation from previous employers?

SET

I don't have any previous employers.

CARL

I see.

SET

Frankly, up until this year, I was doing just fine. Now, though, I'm having trouble finding work. Everything seems to be on fire or in complete mayhem by the time I can even get there...

CARL

Yeah. It's, uh, been a tough time all around, hasn't it...

SET

So can you help me?

CARL

Well, honestly, it's like you said. There isn't a lot of call right now for more chaos or... storms or... mayhem in general. Would you be okay with something a little more... low key?

SET

Loki? I'm Egyptian, not Norse.

CARL

M-maybe something like gardening?

SET

Well, I used to ensure that the sun rose each morning—

CARL

Yes, you said that, but as fate would have it, we just filled that position last Thursday. I was thinking more like watering plants or—

(There's the sound of a loud thunderclap, and then the pelting of heavy rain just outside the building. If possible, water starts dripping from the ceiling, increasing from a slow drip to a steady stream until Set stops the rain a few lines later.)

SET

I think I could handle that.

CARL

Ummm,,,

SET

Yes?

CARL

What I had in mind was something a little more... localized.

(There's another loud crack of thunder. The lights flicker, and suddenly there's a distant scream – followed by a car crash – from out in the street.)

Maybe just a flowerbox or... Could you, maybe... t-t-turn it off? For a bit?

(Set stares at Carl, who makes a general "all this" gesture. Set shrugs, and suddenly the rain stops.)

Okay. Okaaay. Okay. We can write that down... as... weather forecasting. Sure. Forecasting. Anything else?

(Set starts to make a gesture, but is interrupted by...)

Y-you don't need to demonstrate. *(Carl glances over at the dead bodies for a moment.)* Just describe it in a few words.

SET

I can transform into a hippopotamus.

CARL

A... hippo—

SET

Or a griffin.

CARL

Okay. I think that's... employable.

SET

So you've got something for me?

CARL

Unfortunately, there is a... uh, short... line of about twenty-five million people who—

(Set has raised his hand to make another gesture, but stops at...)

Whoa whoa whoa whoa!! D-don't... Just... I think...

(He shuffles papers...)

Yes, I think I... have something that just... might... work. Here we are. Barnum and Bailey... They've been struggling, and could use something new. You did say you could transform into animals, right? Yes, right. Good. I think this would be an excellent fit.

SET

(Standing...)

Thanks.

CARL

Don't mention it.

(Set exits.)

I'm ready for the next person in li...

(Carl remembers that the rest of the queue are lying dead just offstage.)

Oh.

(He stares in bewilderment for a while, then finally snaps himself out of it and picks up the phone.)

Right.

(He hits a button to retrieve a call that was on hold.)

CARL (CONT)

Mr. Jones? Thanks for holding. *(Pause...)* Of course I understand how frustrating it is to be put on— *(Pause...)* Yes, well, we almost have the list assembled. What's that? You're breaking up, Mr. Jones.

(Carl makes static noises into the phone.)

Mr. Jones? Are you still there? I'm sorry, we really need to get these phones repaired.

(Carl hangs up the phone, hits a button, then picks it up again.)

Jackie, I'm going to take off early, I think.

JACKIE (OFF)

Don't you dare—

CARL

(Pulling the phone back away from his ear like she just screamed into it.)

Sorry. Can't hear you very well. You said "you don't care"?

JACKIE (OFF)

If you leave...

CARL

These phones really are terrible. Definitely need to get them fixed. Well, see you next week.

(Carl hangs up while grabbing a lunch bag, briefcase, or something similar.)

JACKIE (OFF)

Carl!!

(Carl rushes off stage. An instant later, Jackie comes rushing on after him, a big stack of papers under one arm and some in her hand as well. She rushes across, exiting after Carl. Lights out.)