

# *Plated with Gold*

By

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## Cast of Characters

M. Sidney Harshbarger – 50s. Managing Partner in Harshbarger, Ellis, Lipman, Lewes, Norris & Orenstein, a firm founded by his revered late father. Bit of a martinet.

Nancy Goldstein – 50s. Partner in Harshbarger, Ellis, Lipman, Lewes, Norris & Orenstein. Poised, accomplished, and at the end of her tether.

## Setting

M. Sidney Harshbarger's office.

The present.

## Synopsis

A carelessly misdirected email causes a partner to reconsider her values and her place in the firm at which she has worked for thirty years.

“Through tattered clothes great vices do appear;  
robes and furred gowns hide all.  
Plate sin with gold and the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks.  
Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw does pierce it.”

- William Shakespeare  
*King Lear*, Act 4, scene 6

## Plated with Gold

Setting:

The office of M. Sidney Harshbarger, a partner in the boutique law firm of Harshbarger, Ellis, Lipman, Lewes, Norris & Orenstein. The Harshbarger in the name of the firm was M. Sidney's father.

The present. A little before 6 a.m. on a Tuesday morning.

At rise:

M. Sidney Harshbarger, the managing partner, in his late 50s, known to friends and associates alike as "Mr. Harshbarger," is at his desk. He may have removed his suit jacket, but he is otherwise impeccably dressed down to the monograms on the French cuffs of his crisply starched shirt.

Nancy Goldstein, a partner, also in her 50s, appears in his door clutching a small sheaf of printed emails. Nancy is wearing a polished business suit with pants.

M. Sidney doesn't acknowledge her.

NANCY

I need to see you for a moment.

M. SIDNEY (not looking up)

Have Jennifer check my calendar.

NANCY

Jennifer isn't in yet.

M. SIDNEY

And this can't wait?

NANCY

No.

M. SIDNEY

Well then, go ahead.

NANCY enters the office and moves to a chair.

M. SIDNEY

Are you not feeling well?

NANCY

I'm fine.

M. SIDNEY

I wasn't aware we'd changed the dress code.

NANCY

A woman in slacks is the least of your worries this morning.

M. SIDNEY

We set the tone. The associates and staff see us abandoning standards and total disorder is sure to follow. Women in pants were abhorrent to my father.

NANCY

So many things that were abhorrent to your father are now allowed to thrive.

M. SIDNEY

Ah.

NANCY

Ah?

M. SIDNEY

I guess you're still having your monthly visitor?

NANCY

I'm not going to be diverted this morning.

M. SIDNEY

That would explain your disregard for protocol and the pants.

NANCY

Protocol can kiss my ...

M. SIDNEY (truly shocked)

Nancy! (a beat) There is no need for such coarseness. It pains me to see a lady sink to ...

NANCY

Listen up, Sid. This email of yours may sink all of us.

M. SIDNEY

Excuse me?

NANCY

This defense of Junior ... (reading) ... "I am relieved to note that, while *Big Game Humpers*, may be distasteful, perhaps even approaching the bounds of normalcy, there is nothing illegal in the activities depicted and none of the participants are or appear to be under-age."

M. SIDNEY

I know what I wrote. It's quite accurate. The women involved are all clearly beyond the age of consent and the ... activities ... are clearly simulated. Elephant tusks and stuffed tigers and the like.

NANCY

You watched ...

M. SIDNEY

It was distasteful, but I had to be sure of what we were dealing with.

NANCY

What about the fact that there are tens of thousands of dollars' worth of charges on a corporate card in his name for this outlier porn?

M. SIDNEY

Young men make mistakes.

NANCY

He's forty-six years old! And at \$89 a pop that's a lot of porn.

M. SIDNEY

The corporate card is our salvation.

NANCY

How?

M. SIDNEY

He didn't make those charges. He's appalled and embarrassed that a rogue assistant got hold of his card and made these horrifying, unauthorized charges.

NANCY

From Junior's cell phone and laptop? Those addresses can be traced.

M. SIDNEY

We stand by the denial.

NANCY

You've made that difficult.

M. SIDNEY

Have I?

NANCY

Yes, Sid. You sent this email to four people. Jennifer, Alec, me, and ...

M. SIDNEY

And Walter. Yes, I know.

NANCY

No, Sid

M. SIDNEY (third time is too much)

I do not go by "Sid."

NANCY

Well, Sid, the fourth person on the distribution list isn't our partner Walter M. Rothschild. You sent this note to me, Alec, Jennifer and Walter N. Rothschild of the goddamned *Washington Post*.

M. SIDNEY

That's ridiculous.

NANCY (dropping the email print out on his desk)

Have a look. (As he does.) Sheer carelessness, Sid. Irresponsible and damaging to the firm. Auto-fill is not your friend.

M. SIDNEY

This is a privileged communication. He can't ...

NANCY

You're not a child, Sid. I'm not a child. This is fair game, and you know it. Although it also raises the interesting question of how much contact do you have with Mr. Rothschild of the *Post*?

M. SIDNEY glares at her but doesn't respond.

NANCY

It seems odd that auto-fill would go to Rothschild, Walter N. of the *Post* before Rothschild, Walter M. of your own firm. How long have you been an anonymous source?

M. SIDNEY

Keep your friends close and your enemies closer.

NANCY

How do you think the President is going to react when he sees your email confirming his son's very odd porn predilection in the *Washington Post*?

M. SIDNEY

He won't.

NANCY

Oh?

M. SIDNEY

You're not a child, Nancy. I'm not a child. Walter won't compromise a valuable and long-term source for one sensationalistic cheap hit.

NANCY

This one is pretty sensational, Sid.

M. SIDNEY

He may find a way to embarrass Junior with *Big Game Humpers*, but it won't be attributed to me.

NANCY

Maybe that won't be up to Walter.

M. SIDNEY

Our understanding is solid.

NANCY

That may be, but his editor is going to make sure he runs with it.

M. SIDNEY

Is that some kind of threat?

NANCY

Not at all, Sid. Purely out of my deep concern for the reputation of the firm, I called the political editor of the *Post* this morning ... woke her at 4 a.m. ... Who is still in bed at 4 a.m.?

M. SIDNEY

Why ...

NANCY

To beg her not to let Walter run with this salacious nonsense. I'm afraid my call may have backfired. She seemed eager to speak with Walter about the email she didn't know he received. She kept referring to it as a "two-fer." I guess referring to you as well as to Junior.

M. SIDNEY

If you were so concerned why didn't you call me?

NANCY

And disturb you at home, Mr. Harshbarger? Not that I have your number. If I need to reach you I have to call Jennifer, Mr. Harshbarger. I have her cell. I have to call her and let her determine if my calls are important enough to bother you.

M. SIDNEY

But you had the cell phone number of the political editor of the *Washington Post* at hand?

NANCY

I went to Wellesley with her mother. She's like a niece to me.

M. SIDNEY

It really chafes Walter to have an editor half his age.

NANCY

I'm sure.

M. SIDNEY

So you can call her back and tell her you were mistaken. That the email in question was an office joke.

NANCY

No, Sid, I can't.

M. SIDNEY

That was a direction from your Managing Partner.

NANCY

I'm done lying, Sid.

M. SIDNEY

This will come before the disciplinary committee.

NANCY

You sent the email, Sid.

M. SIDNEY

An honest mistake. A typographical error. I will be more careful in the future. You compounded the damage and are now refusing to take steps to undo it.

NANCY

That sums it up, Sid.

M. SIDNEY

After 30 years the firm means that little to you?

NANCY (after a beat)

There was time when the firm meant everything to me. I waited until I had been partner for two years before having a child. I didn't date for a dozen years after my divorce because I barely had time for both the firm and my child. And I don't resent any of that. I made those choices, but it was for a different firm.

M. SIDNEY

That's not true. I have always been keenly aware of my father's legacy.

NANCY

I worshipped your father, Sid. Still do. He was a man of his generation, so the women in pants thing wasn't worth fighting. But he hired women in skirts, Sid. And he nurtured women in skirts. And he kept his hands off women in skirts. And he made short shrift of others who didn't. In the 80s and 90s I felt safer here in a skirt than most women I know would have felt in full battle armor in their offices.. They truly don't make them like him anymore, Sid.

M. SIDNEY

He was a man of great principle and accomplishment.

NANCY

He was a principled conservative, Sid. He believed in small government and the right to life, but he also believed in science and responsibility and simple human decency. The best illustration I can give of how far we've fallen from his standard is that we have fewer than one-third as many African American associates and partners now than we did in the nineties. We've gotten whiter in the last 15 years, Sid.

M. SIDNEY

Are you making some sort of accusation?

NANCY

Sid, rumor is you have the Israeli flag tattooed above your hip. But you can remain completely silent and can enable the silence of others when torch bearing thugs march through the streets yelling "Blood and Soil" and "Jews will not replace us." As a Jew, it made me sick. But not as sick as my own complicit silence.

M. SIDNEY

Perhaps you would be happier joining the lefty rabble in the streets.

NANCY

I believe I would.

M. SIDNEY

Is this your resignation?

NANCY

I believe it is, Sid. I lay awake for about an hour this morning before I made my phone call. What came into focus for me was that I was part of a world where my wearing pants was an affront to decency but where I would spend hours protecting the patron of *Big Game Humpers* while his father destroyed the social fabric of our nation.

M. SIDNEY

So like a woman to make everything personal. The principles of limited government, strong national defense, and a tax code that doesn't penalize success tru ... take precedence over some little shortcomings that might make me uncomfortable.

NANCY

Sid, I can honestly say that your father would be sickened if he saw what this firm stands for today and what you have become.

M. SIDNEY

My father was a pragmatist as well and would have done what was necessary to advance our core values and the firm.

NANCY

He had core values that he would have defended against the true barbarians. It is in defense of his legacy as well as my own conscience that I have to say, "Enough. No more. This can't go on."

M. SIDNEY

It will go on. Unimpeded. Without you. The side you've joined makes great speeches, the side I'm on gets things done.

NANCY

We'll see, Sid. We'll just have to see.

M. SIDNEY (exiting)

Please wait here. When Jennifer gets in I will have her notify security to take you to your office. You will have thirty minutes to remove cleared personal belonging. Please don't even think about turning on your computer or removing any files.

NANCY

Of course.

M. SIDNEY exits.

NANCY

Nice working with you, too, Sid.

Lights Fade to Black.