WORDS WORDS WORDS WORDS

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(A Zoom screen. Brian is walking around his living room, searching for something he misplaced. He’s so happy, humming to himself. He comes to the screen, peers in to see if Lee is on yet. She’s not. He turns up the volume so he’ll hear her, and continues his search. At last, he looks under some newspapers and finds it! (Hah!) His journal. He comes back to the screen, pages through it and laughs to himself.

Lee’s anxious little face appears. She sees herself on screen and notices what looks like a bald spot on her head. Alarmed, she comes in closer to look.)

BRIAN
Lee!! Hey! How are you?

LEE
Oh! Hi Bri.

BRIAN
You stoked for Sunday? I’m so stoked for Sunday!

LEE
/Yeah…

BRIAN
I essentially spent every minute of the last five days emptying out closets and drawers.

LEE
(Quietly to herself. Jotting it down.)
“Essentially.

BRIAN
You will not believe the stuff I found. Look! My middle school journal!

Lee
Huh!

BRIAN
It’s so crazy looking back at what you were like then, you know?

LEE
(Writing it down)
“Crazy.”

BRIAN
What?
LEE
No! Yeah, it’s…it’s crazy. To um, to look back. Yeah.

BRIAN
Here. Look at this.

(Flipping through, showing her.)
Basketball. Basketball. Basketball… Baseball!

LEE
Hah.

BRIAN
Then… winter --- Hockey!

LEE
Hah.

BRIAN
You would never have gone out with me if you’d read this first.

LEE
Yeah. It might have been predictive.

BRAIN
What?

LEE
No. No, it is, “crazy” to look back. As you say.

BRIAN
Anyway, cleared all that stuff out! You’ve got loads of room now. You essentially have your own closet and a whole chest of drawers. God. I can’t wait to see you.

LEE
(Jotting it down. To herself.)
“Essentially.”

(A beat.)

BRIAN
Are you analyzing my speech?

LEE
No! I can’t wait to see you too. But /listen…
BRIAN
You said you’d stop…

LEE
I know. I’m sorry.

BRIAN
You said it had no real…

LEE
(Increasingly beating herself up.)
Relevance. It doesn’t. It’s stupid. It’s just a terrible habit and and.. absolutely nothing could be
determined from that kind of tiny, random sampling of language. Nothing. I’m sorry. It’s stupid.
It’s a bad habit and…

BRIAN
It’s ok, honey!

LEE
It’s not. It’s neurotic and intrusive and…

BRIAN
Stop! You’re just anxious about the move!

(She sighs, heavily)
Oh, Lee. It’ll be fine. I got the movers those special masks you wanted, we’ll keep all the
windows open, we can disinfect everything as we put it away. I’ve been isolating completely.
You certainly have. We’ll be fine.

LEE
Yeah.

BRIAN
You pretty much packed up?

LEE
Listen. Bri.

(Beat.)

BRIAN
Uh oh.

LEE
I don’t… I think it’s not actually… a good idea.
BRIAN
What? No! It’s a great idea! This is just cold feet.

LEE
Uch.

BRIAN
It’ll be so great! I’m gonna wake up every morning and see that little scowl.

(She scowls. He laughs.)
Look, would it make you feel better to wait until the study comes back? I can do that. Three more weeks, right?

LEE
I didn’t even want to do that study! You wanted that study! I didn’t even want to do it!

BRIAN
Well, ‘cause I know how much statistics relax you.

LEE
I said it was a bad idea! I said it’s not what my research is for!

BRIAN
Ok ok! But, it’ll prove that we’re perfect for each other.

LEE
It’s not Match.com, Brian! It’s computational psychology. And it really shouldn’t be used in this manner!

BRIAN
Ok.

LEE
I think you should modify your expectations. About what it’ll tell us. When it comes back.

BRIAN
Expectations modified.

LEE
And… ugh.

BRIAN
What?

LEE
I have some bad news.
Oh no. What?!

Your county…

Yeah?

Your county… It’s toxic.

What??!

Yeah.

What does that mean?

(Deep breath. Then, rapid-fire)
I did an analysis -- two years of Facebook and twitter posts originating from the citizens of your county. The usage of the words, “drama”, “bored”, “why” “hate”, and “exhausted” are far above the national average, and highly indicative of a community under stress, and it’s been shown statistically that when your neighbors are angry, you’re more apt to die of coronary heart disease, hear me out, of course it’s not the people who are tweeting and posting who are dying, of course not, it’s the older population, who aren’t on social media to the same extent, who are dying -- they’re the canaries in the coal mine, if you will, but it does indicate that living amongst people who are experiencing those negative social relationships and emotions can kill you. Well, perhaps that’s not entirely accurate, it could be conversely true, that living amongst people who are dying of heart disease may cause more anger. Or… that there are underlying factors that lead to both anger and heart disease. But chicken or egg, it’s toxic.

I don’t know what any of that means, but we’ve got the park, like two blocks away, and the best Greek food anywhere, essentially, (she mouths “essentially” to herself after he says it), and the schools are awesome. I thought you loved it here.

I do.

So?
LEE
Sorry.

BRIAN

(A deep breath.)
Ok. Listen. Lee. If you don’t want to live here, you don’t have to do a whole elaborate… study. Just say so. I mean, this house… I get it. It’s old. And creaky. I get it.

LEE
It’s not that…

BRIAN
Would you rather I move into your place? It’s smaller… but… I don’t care. I really don’t. We could live in a cave together. I’d be happy.

LEE
You would. You’d be happy in a cave.

With you, I would.

BRIAN

LEE
(Emotional.)
Oh God. You’re so sweet, Bri.

BRIAN
So… I’ll move in there...

(The doorbell rings.)

LEE
What’s that? Was that the doorbell? Someone’s at your door?!

BRIAN
Be right back!

(He leaves the screen.)

LEE
No! Don’t answer it! Brian! Bri!
Well, at least put on a mask! Before you open it!

(We hear him faintly talking to someone in the background. She listens in to hear what they’re saying. She can’t. She’s very thrown by all of it.)
LEE (Cont.)
Oh my God. What is going on?
Brian? Are you ok?
Brian??

(He comes back to the screen.)

BRIAN
So… should I move in there?

LEE
What was that?

BRIAN
Lefteris. Best Greek in the country!

LEE
You ordered delivery?

BRIAN
I’ll eat it later. It’s just a salad.

LEE
It’s not even cooked!!

BRIAN
I thought you’d be happy I ordered a salad. And no fries!

LEE
Who knows if the chef is sick? Or the delivery guy?

BRIAN
Honey, everyone I know is ordering in but you. They say it’s essentially impossible to get it from food.

(She doesn’t say anything.)
So… would you rather I move in there instead?

LEE
(Getting weepy.)
No.

BRIAN
Oh shit. Is your county toxic too? (haha.) Let’s cook up some algorithms and find ourselves a happy neighborhood!

(A beat.)
BRIAN (Cont.)
Or… it’s not really the neighborhood at all.
You just don’t want to live together.

LEE
Brian. I lied. The report doesn’t take three weeks. It’s instantaneous. I just… I was afraid to do it. But, last night I pulled the trigger. As it were.

BRIAN
So… what? Am I toxic now?

LEE
It’s not you, it’s me.

BRIAN
I haven’t heard that since college.

LEE
No, really.

BRIAN
You know… it’s all kind of nonsense, anyway.

LEE
You’re the one who wanted me to do the study!

BRIAN
But like you said, it can’t really tell if we’re compatible. It’s all kind of bullshit.

LEE
It’s my life’s work.

BRIAN
Sorry. I always kind of thought it was a little bullshit. I mean, you can’t tell anything by looking at social media. Everyone puts on a persona there. Like life is so perfect. So, analyzing the words we use…

LEE
Of course everyone puts on a persona there! We put on a persona in life! What is the true self? Can a person ever really know another person? Can we ever even really know ourselves? We’re born alone. We live alone. We die alone.

BRIAN
Ok. Ok, honey.
LEE
You can’t question the validity of these studies. They’ve been more predictive than questionnaires at anticipating emotional stability. The hard data is remarkably determinative.

BRIAN
Well… hard data.

LEE
Yes, hard data! Using the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count on 15.4 million Facebook messages, we’ve predicted flu epidemics before the CDC confirmed them. By weeks! We can tell a person’s age within a five-year margin. We can determine gender up to 93% accuracy.

BRIAN
Gender is fluid! And it’s not binary!

LEE
(Realizing)
Maybe that accounts for the 7% differential.

BRIAN
Lee. What’s really going on here? Are you gonna tell me that after four years together, you run some algorithm and now you don’t love me?

LEE
I do love you. You’re wonderful. On the Five Factor Model, classifying personality traits by extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness, you’re abnormal you’re so wonderful. Abnormally agreeable and outgoing and active and optimistic and artistic and talkative and generous and kind and conscientious and open and extraverted and healthy and and and cute. (getting weepy.) You’re so cute.

BRIAN
Honey.

LEE
It’s me! I’m a neurotic, depressive, closed, anxious, touchy, disagreeable, depressive, introverted mess!

BRIAN
You’re wonderful.

LEE
I’m sorry, but the data doesn’t support that assertion.

BRIAN
The data. I’ve “liked” every one of your Facebook posts.
In the past two years, I used “Sick of” thirty-seven times! You never used it once!

But you had the flu both years, remember?

Sick OF, Brian! Sick OF! Sick OF! You know how abnormally neurotic that makes me? I used “ANYMORE” twelve times which indicates depression. “PROBABLY” “TRYING” “APPARENTLY” “DON’T”. All above the national average. I use “I” more than you do!

That’s just silly.

It’s science! Ugh. I can’t talk about it anymore. Oh my God! I just said “anymore” again! And I said Ugh! Highly indicative /of…

Stop! You’re making yourself crazy.

I am crazy! Which is not a medical term and is stigmatizing and isn’t really a word we should be using in normal parlance anymore. And you do say it a lot. Which always gives me hope that maybe we’re somewhat compatible. You also say, “essentially” all the time, which might indicate introversion. But then, you posted “The Lakers” eighteen times in the past two years, which is a real sign of stability and positivity. And I never wrote “The Lakers” once! Not once!

You hate sports.

Emotionally stable people talk about sports!

Really?

You used the word “chillin’” five times! The only time I’ve ever said “chillin’” is in this conversation!! Or “blessings”! I have never said “blessings” in my life.

You just said it twice.

I’m sick and neurotic and introverted. I’m not good for you. I’m not.
BRIAN
Honey. I love you. I love that you’re… analytical. I learn something new from you every day. I love that you’re an introvert – you taught me how great it is to just stay home and chill. I even love that you’re neurotic -- though, today might be a bit much. We’re good for each other. Opposites… right?

LEE
I don’t know.

BRIAN
I know. And I’ll essentially say “crazy” essentially every second I essentially talk, if it’ll make you happy.

LEE
I’m going to take five years off your life.

BRIAN
No.

LEE
If you were a smoker, it would be just about as unhealthy as living with me.

BRIAN
I love you Lee.

LEE
I love you too, Bri.

BRIAN
I want to live with you.

LEE
I want to live with you too.

BRIAN
Good. Can I come help you pack? I’m very good at wrapping dishes.

LEE
I don’t know.

BRIAN
I can be there in two hours!

LEE
But…
BRIAN

Yeah?
What? What hon?

LEE

Your county is still really toxic.

BRIAN

Ugh. You’re so crazy. Essentially.

End of Play.