

Truth, Lies, and Groundhogs

by

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Cast:

Mark Lamberti: CEO of the Staten Island Zoo, he's the one who convinces everyone to keep the secret. Mark is egotistical and power-hungry. He comes from old money, and has not had to work hard in life to succeed. He has political aspirations down the line, which is why he is so desperate to keep this under wraps. He understands a scandal this large would totally derail him. Age: late 40s

Dr. Sara Faye: Chief veterinarian of the zoo, she is the one who first breaks the news of Chuck's death. Dr. Faye genuinely cares about the animals under her care, and is uncomfortable with the deceit that is going on. She is whip smart, with her doctorate being from Columbia. Sara came from a lower-class background, and has fought like hell to get where she is now. Age: mid 30s

Chloe Quinn: Chief publicist for the zoo, she is a master media manipulator. She is snide and a little slimy, unafraid to put spin on anything to make herself look good. In reality, she is deeply in debt from years of spending more than she made in an attempt to demonstrate a glamorous lifestyle. Age: early 30s

Eric McCray: Chloe's assistant, he is perky and only a few years out of college. Eric is gay, which Jacob takes advantage of. Eric just wants to help, even if it is helping tell a lie. He loves his job and is hoping to one day take Chloe's job, which can cause friction between them. Age: mid 20s

Jacob Sorenson: A reporter for the NY Post, he can tell that something is amiss, and wants to get to the truth by any means necessary. He is truly an awful person, and cares little for the people around him, consistently insulting them. Age: mid 20s

Katie Girardot: A city assemblyman, she finds out the secret and then faces mounting pressure to keep it. When offered a bribe to keep the secret, she is torn between taking the money and using it to help people versus exposing the truth and hurting the zoo. Age: early 30s.

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio: Bill is a God to the other characters. He controls their funding, therefore their jobs. When we finally meet Bill, he is in a rage. The employees at the zoo have been lying to him and the truth has been revealed. Driven mad by grief, he sees no choice but to exact his bloody revenge. Note: whenever a character refers to him, they say the full title of "New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio."

(In black, we hear the sound of a EKG. It starts at an average of about 50 bpm, but slowly increases until it hits 150 bpm. Suddenly, it flatlines. We hear the sound of attempting to start the heartbeat twice, but neither attempt works.)

SARA:

(the sound of someone who just failed the most important test of their lives)
Jesus Christ.

(The back wall suddenly lights up, showing a timer that says "Seven Days Since The Incident: The Body is Found," before fading away.)

LIGHTS UP

(The Staten Island Zoo conference room is revealed, with a large table in the center and chairs around it. The back wall is filled with screens, which can work independently or combine to show one feed larger. On the table, there is a phone and an intercom. The walls are a muted green with cute animal posters that have motivational quotes. A coffee pot sits on a table in the corner, with a trash can next to it. There are two doors, on upstage left and one center right. DR. SARA FAYE bursts through the upstage door, wearing surgical scrubs and gloves. She has blood spatters over these. SARA strips off her gloves and throws them in the trash can, before walking to the table and dialing a number. She puts it on speaker)

SARA:

Hey Denise, it's Sara. Can you put me through to Mark? It's pretty urgent.

DENISE (VO):

Putting you through now, hon.

MARK (VO):

Hey Sara, it's Mark, what's up?

SARA:

You need to come to the conference room. Now, preferably.

MARK (VO):

Is everything alright?

SARA:

Just get here. I'm calling Chloe too.

MARK (VO):

Jesus, the CEO and the chief publicist, this must be good.

SARA:

Not in the mood for jokes, you really need to come here now.

(SARA hits a button and hangs up on the call, before dialing another number.)

CHLOE (VO):

Chloe Quinn, chief publicist, how can I help you?

SARA:

It's Sara. I need you in the conference room now. Mark is coming too.

CHLOE (VO):

Coming now, can I bring Eric?

SARA:

This is an all hands on deck situation.

(SARA hangs up and begins pacing around the table. She starts to make a fresh pot of coffee, and then paces around the room. MARK comes in through the SR door.)

MARK:

What the hell is this, I was busy.

SARA:

Were you playing solitaire?

MARK:

And I was very close to winning.

SARA:
I'm sure you'll triumph eventually.

MARK:
Is that blood on your apron?

SARA:
Ok first, they're scrubs. I'm not a housewife. Second, yes. Yes it is.

MARK:
Whose blood?

SARA:
Do you just never check your email?

MARK:
I have people that do that for me.

SARA:
I'm waiting for Chloe and Eric, I don't want to go through this twice.

MARK:
Fine. Did you see the quarterly report?

SARA:
Yes. I check my email.

MARK:
Then you saw that costs in your department went up 9%?

SARA:
I won't apologize for trying to take care of my patients.

MARK:
Patients? Christ.

(CHLOE bursts through the upstage door. ERIC follows close behind, typing furiously into an iPad.)

CHLOE:
What's the deal?

(pregnant pause)

SARA:

Chuck died this morning.

(the room is stunned)

CHLOE:

Like Chuck, Chuck?

SARA:

The one and only.

CHLOE:

Goddamn it.

(CHLOE sits at the table and opens a laptop,
beginning to type.)

MARK:

What the fuck happened?

SARA:

Clara was doing her rounds this morning and found him passed out on the floor. We pulled him in immediately, but we didn't catch it soon enough. He was bleeding internally pretty badly. Could have been caused by a fall...

MARK:

FUCK Sara, it was your job to keep him safe!

SARA:

(gesturing to her bloody scrubs)

Don't you think I tried?

ERIC:

Wait. We're talking about Chuck...the groundhog right? Like the one New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio dropped?

MARK:

Don't you say that name.

ERIC:

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio?

MARK:

Yes New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio! Don't say his name!

ERIC:

Fine, Senator Provolone then. Still, what's the issue? It's just a groundhog.

SARA:

Staten Island Chuck was more than a groundhog. He was a symbol. He was hope, he was the future, he was the dream of an early spring.

ERIC:

He was a groundhog.

CHLOE:

He was the 2nd most famous groundhog in America. And if I had three more years with him, we would have blown that bastard Puxatawney Phil right out of the competition. Looks like I don't have that chance now, thanks to Sara.

SARA:

Are you seriously making this my fault?

CHLOE:

Who else's fault could it be? You're the one who had their hand in his guts.

SARA:

What about New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio! He's the one that dropped him!

MARK:

What part of 'don't say that name' do you not understand?

SARA:

I truly thought that was just for Eric.

ERIC:

I mean, how bad is this? We can fix it right? No one got a good video of what happened, at least no one the city didn't pay off. We just say Chuck passed peacefully in his sleep from... diabetes? Can groundhogs have diabetes?

SARA:

No, they burn fat too quickly.

ERIC:

Do they really? That's pretty cool.

MARK:
Not the point.

CHLOE:
(looking at her laptop)
Uh. Guys?

MARK:
What now?

CHLOE:
There's a new video.
(ERIC moves behind CHLOE as they watch it again.)

SARA:
Of New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio?

MARK:
No one listens!

SARA:
Why can't we say it!

MARK:
He has eyes everywhere.

ERIC:
You guys should really see this.

CHLOE:
I'll play it on the wall.

(CHLOE airplays the video to the television. We see a short video of Bill de Blasio on Groundhog Day 2014 when he dropped Chuck/Chuck jumped. There are plenty of options online, just make sure it is a clean angle in which the action is clearly visible.)

MARK:
Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck

ERIC:
That lil guy took a hit.

MARK:

How did we not catch this? How long has it been up?

CHLOE:

Looks like about 6 hours. It's been a week, we didn't expect any more videos to surface.

MARK:

This is your job.

CHLOE:

Technically, it's Eric's job.

ERIC:

Technically, yes. But I may have just made one of the interns do it.

CHLOE:

Dirk or Dwight?

ERIC:

Dirk.

CHLOE:

Well, you should have known better than that!

ERIC:

He deserves another chance!

CHLOE:

He tweeted a graphic that called us the Staten Island Poo! P and Z are very far away on the keyboard!

MARK:

Wait, why is this the first I'm hearing of this?

CHLOE:

You HAVE to start checking your email.

SARA:

He has people to do it for him.

MARK:

I have people to- yeah what Sara said.

ERIC:

Ok so Chuck died, big deal. Will anyone even notice? Let's just swap in another one.

(MARK and SARA share an uneasy glance)

CHLOE:

It's not that simple. Chuck was a celebrity. Do you think people didn't notice when the Mummy franchise swapped out Rachel Weisz for Maria Bello? They were furious.

ERIC:

That's different, Rachel imbued the role of Evelyn Carnahan with warmth and grit, and it all just felt blasè with Maria. Brendan Fraser had to carry that franchise on his back, and the chemistry just wasn't there with Maria.

MARK:

Can we focus? A groundhog is dead.

SARA:

Let's just come clean. We can release a statement of mourning and wipe our hands of the whole thing.

MARK:

You know it isn't that simple.

SARA:

For once, can it just be simple?

MARK:

More than half our funding comes directly from the city. You know how New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio can be. He will see this as a smear campaign and we will be slashed. Especially with Sara's department.

SARA:

I'm taking care of every animal in this zoo!

MARK:

NINE PERCENT

CHLOE:

We need to lock this down. Who else knows?

SARA:

Besides the four of us, just Clara. We operated alone.

CHLOE:

Do you trust her?

SARA:

I do, she still hasn't told anyone about the time Mark fell into the otter exhibit.

MARK:

I slipped on the floor! And that janitor is long gone.

SARA:

Whatever, the point is it was super funny and she still didn't tell anyone. I trust her.

CHLOE:

Mark, how intense do you want to make this.

MARK:

No one can know.

CHLOE:

Then we need to scrub the security footage. The rounds follow a tight schedule right?

SARA:

Yeah, the animals prefer routine.

CHLOE:

Great, just double the footage from two weeks ago.

ERIC:

I don't get it. Chuck seemed fine after the fall.

SARA:

Internal injuries are hard to catch, and they can take a long time to really do some damage. Once they get going...they're hard to fix.

MARK:

Ok, we scrub the footage. Sara, you need to tell Clara to keep her mouth shut. I will fire her if she does. Don't tell her that. But I definitely will. Truly no question about it. Snitches get stitches. Can I say that about an employee?

CHLOE:

You really shouldn't.

MARK:

Ok, even more reasons not to tell her then.

ERIC:

Wait, are we just fully covering this up?

MARK:

What would you think if we were?

ERIC:

Are you kidding? We literally spend like three months on this in my grad program. I haven't had the chance yet to apply those skills IRL.

MARK:

What is IRL? Is there a new social medium?

CHLOE:

One, social media. Two, it means in real life, you KNOW I offer internet lingo symposiums.

MARK:

I'm a busy man!

CHLOE:

Were you playing solitaire before Sara called you?

MARK:

And I was very close to winning.

ERIC:

What do we do about the video?

CHLOE:

Six hours is an eternity for the internet. There's probably memes already.

ERIC:

Oh god, there's one of New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio wearing Pharrell's hat from the Grammys.

CHLOE:

Ok, at the least, that's a super topical meme that should fade out of relevance soon enough. I doubt that in like, I don't know, 2021 most people will even remember that.

MARK:

Do people not like Pharrell's hat?

ERIC:

Did you?

MARK:

Pshh. What? No!

(takes out tape recorder from inside jacket
pocket and whispers into it)

Tell Denise to cancel the hat order. The teens don't like it.

ERIC:

How old do you think I am?

MARK:

Your pants are too tight and you have rings on, 17?

ERIC:

What? Did you not read my hiring paperwork? I have a masters.
Also, that feels like just a little homophobic.

MARK:

Hey! Careful with that! I love all the gays.

ERIC:

(to CHLOE)

You really have a full-time job with him, huh?

CHLOE:

(to ERIC)

You have no idea.

MARK:

No one knows. We tell no one. Remember the first rule of fight
club. We don't talk about the groundhog murder.

ERIC:

I don't remember that part of Fight Club.

CHLOE:

We shouldn't call it murder, even among ourselves. It'll make it
worse if it gets out. Manslaughter.

ERIC:

What? It was a groundhog.

CHLOE:

People prefer manslaughter over animal abuse.

MARK:

Are we all agreed?

SARA:

I'm doing this for the animals.

MARK:

Yeah, whatever. As long as you're doing it.

CHLOE:

Should we like... put our hands in.

(The four awkwardly and slowly put their hands into the center of a circle.)

MARK:

Three...two..one..BREAK

(The four do an incredibly poorly timed lifting of the hands, before looking around nervously at each other.)

ERIC:

Sorry Senator Provolone.

LIGHTS DOWN ON SCENE 1