

# **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?!

BRIAN

Your county...

LEE

Yeah?

BRIAN

Your county... It's toxic.

LEE

What??!

BRIAN

Yeah.

LEE

What does that mean?

BRIAN

LEE

(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.

BRIAN

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.

LEE

I do.

BRIAN

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.

BRIAN

With you, I would.

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.

LEE

In the past two years, I used “Sick of” thirty-seven times! You never used it once!

BRIAN

But you had the flu both years, remember?

LEE

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!

BRIAN

That’s just silly.

LEE

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...

BRIAN

Stop! You’re making yourself crazy.

LEE

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!

BRIAN

You hate sports.

LEE

Emotionally stable people talk about sports!

BRIAN

Really?

LEE

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.

BRIAN

You just said it twice.

LEE

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...

Yeah?  
What? What hon?

BRIAN

Your county is still really toxic.

LEE

Ugh. You're so crazy. Essentially.

BRIAN

End of Play.