

## TELL ME HOW YOU REALLY FEEL by Betty Cayouette

### Excerpt

#### ONE

*Maeve*

"You two are just going to have to find a way to work together. There's no way around it."

Even though I can hear the words coming out of my agent Shazia's mouth ... they're not registering. Because they just *can't* be what she means.

"Sorry, sorry, question here," I interject. I catch Finn's eye for a moment and ... *Is he smiling? Smirking?* He doesn't get it. I am here through some massive fluke in the universe and need to desperately clutch this stroke of luck while keeping everyone happy with me. He, on the other hand, is a nepo baby who didn't even want to work in entertainment. He would walk away tomorrow, like it was nothing, if he didn't want our millions of listeners to stroke his ego every Sunday. I tear my eyes away from his arrestingly blue ones and continue to plead my case to Shazia. "There has to be some work-around. I get that it needs to be *our* show, but can't we do solo episodes? It's not in the contract that we have to record together, right?"

Finn's agent, who looks like he's a member of every old boys' club out there, stops texting. Apparently, he has deigned to answer this one. "No solos. Both members of the party have to contribute to each episode."

My ears perk up. "Contribute! Not record together." I glance at my agent, who's flipping through the contract that is spread out across the massive boardroom table. The table that Finn and I, and our respective teams, are sitting at opposite ends of.

"Maeve is correct. They don't have to record together."

Finn scoffs. "There's video! It's not like we can just Frankenstein our voices together."

Which is true. But since when does he care about, or even *know* about, our production value?

Finn's eyes are still locked on me. I look out the window. Because I *can't* keep looking into those

eyes. They are so pale blue it shocks me. They're the eyes everyone and their mother grew up watching since *his* mother has starred in every rom-com under the sun. But on him—with his square jaw and wavy dark brown hair and freckled skin and a mouth that I had become so used to seeing smile an extra-wide grin that, until Cassidy, was reserved for me—it's lethal. He takes my breath away, even now.

Back in college I was surprised he wanted to talk to me. Now, I'm desperate to avoid having to say two words to him. I still can't believe he let our friendship implode like it was nothing.

*Tell Me How You Really Feel* started as something fun for Finn and me to do on Sunday afternoons. We'd both moved to New York after graduating from Carnegie Mellon, and since we both lived in the city, we'd gone from being in the same college friend group to being genuinely close. After completing my MA in clinical psychology at Columbia, I was scraping by during my supervision years in the Columbia Counseling Center while he was rebelling against his actor-screenwriter parents by living with his frat brothers and working at Morgan Stanley in a soul-crushing consulting job. I was tired of giving relationship advice to rich eighteen-year-olds who wouldn't take it anyway, and so I decided, why not put my psychology degrees to good use with a sex-and-relationships-advice podcast? I was obsessed with true crime podcasts; every day I walked around New York with stories of grisly kidnappings running through my ears, jumping when someone turned the corner too fast right when I was hearing a woman describe how she escaped death. With my anxiety, it didn't quite make sense that *that's* what I liked to listen to for fun, but for some reason getting wrapped up in an episode made me feel relaxed rather than on edge. I loved when the storytelling was so good that I audibly gasped or laughed aloud on the subway. But I had no idea how to start my own show, or if anyone would even want a sex-and-relationships podcast from me. So, I asked Finn if he wanted to join and jazz things up with a guy's perspective. At least if we did it together it would be fun even if it was a total flop. If he had said no, I don't know that I would have had the guts to actually sit down and record.

In episode one, we sat in my closet of a room and recorded on our iPhones as we dished on first dates we'd been on and gave advice; in episode two, we talked about our past relationships and ... *drumroll please* ... how we really felt about each other's exes. But it was episode three that went viral. Like, *really* viral. Because while he was baked and I was buzzed, we recorded an episode that was everything anyone needed to know about how to go down on their partner. We hit Upload before we'd sobered up, it went viral, we got fired from our day jobs, and now, two years later, we have one of the biggest podcast deals in the world. Because suddenly, podcasts are *cool*.

"Since when do you know how the recording works?" I snap at him. "Last I checked, I'm the one

setting up the cameras and mics. You don't even care about the show." We started out filming on our phones, then in the brief period before I was fired from my counseling job I signed out cameras from Columbia for us to film on, and once we got the first few big sponsors (Trojan, Airbnb, and Urban Stems, thank you very much), I upgraded us to Sony cameras, Sennheiser lav mics, and one giant SkyPanel light. I had never been so grateful to have taken Intro to Film Production as my creative arts requirement back in undergrad. Finn leans back in his chair and shakes his head, his dark brown hair falling into an agonizingly perfect flop when he returns to glaring at me. "Don't be mean, Maeve, it doesn't suit you."

What an arrogant prick. From the way my heart is pounding in my throat, I can tell a panic attack is on the horizon if I don't get out of this room in the next few minutes. "Do you even hear yourself?" I whisper. "Just let me do this my way because I cannot deal with your bullshit anymore." We said the show was about helping each other find Mr. and Mrs. Right, and I thought it also gave him a creative outlet he was secretly desperate for, but now ... I think maybe it was all just an ego boost for Finn. I don't know him anymore.

"You can't be serious. Our fans want to see *us*. Maeve, we're good together, and you know it."

I lean across the table, positively snarling at him. "Save. Your good guy act. For. Cassidy."

Finn's jaw drops, and I can tell he's seeing red. "Are you fucking serious right now? I can't believe this. You—"

"That's enough," Shazia interrupts smoothly. "There is nothing in the contract that says you can't record separately. It's my understanding that Maeve takes the lead on tech, while Finn, you take the lead on social, so if she can find a way to do it, I see no reason why it wouldn't be amenable to everyone."

Finn completely ignores her, his eyes still locked on me. I stare right back at him, and even as I start to feel like I might cry or combust, I keep at it. I've spent the entire summer preparing for this, and I don't want him to see me falter.

"Maeve," Finn says finally. "Come on. You've worked so hard on this show. Don't you want to make it the best it can be?"

And just like that, he's playing on all of my anxiety and insecurities. I still can't believe he's *that* awful. "I can't believe you," I whisper. And then I stand up and stalk toward the door.

Right as my hand touches the doorknob, Finn calls out to me. “Maeve, Cassidy is—”

“Save it!” I shout. I know they’re done. But it doesn’t fucking matter. I *slam* that door behind me and wish I could erase the past few months from my memory.

And this is why we shouldn’t record together. Because we don’t have a spark; we have a forest fire. And we bring out the worst in each other. Or, rather, Finn brings out the worst in me, while he gets everything he’s ever wanted and more. I can’t believe we went from ... *something* to desperately trying to not be in the same room—even though we’re being paid millions of dollars to do exactly that.

Once I’m outside the CAA conference room, I have no idea how to get out of the building. I lean against the wall down the hall and do the breathing exercises I learned in therapy years ago. I arrived in LA approximately one month ago, and instead of celebrating this life-changing three-year deal, I’ve spent most of that time crying into my brand-new overpriced pillowcase while my sister Sarah tells me what trash Finn is. She’s a sophomore at USC on the premed track, and thanks to this podcast deal I can now pay her tuition and live in an awesome house. Actually, I can do a whole lot more than that ever since the first installment hit my bank account. But I can’t wrap my head around that amount of money and that is a champagne problem I don’t think I’ll make it to in my weekly Zoom therapy sessions for at least a month, given my current state of affairs. I walk in the general direction of where I think the reception desk is, but before I get too far Shazia catches up to me, her Nikes silent behind me until suddenly she’s pulling me into another conference room and kicking out the people who were eating lunch in it.

I shift my gaze toward the ceiling and try to blink back the tears that are forming. “I’m sorry,” I offer immediately. “I don’t know what it is about Finn; he gets to me.” Except I do know. It’s that until exactly 105 days ago, I was in love with him. And he threw me out like I was some one-night stand gone wrong, to date Cassidy, who was actually girlfriend material.

“That was nothing,” Shazia laughs. “You should see what some of my other clients pull. Besides, he deserves a few doors slammed in his face. It’s a novelty for him.”

Copyright © 2025 by Cayouette Media LLC.