

THE INITIATION

SCENE I

Dorothy: (singing to herself on the way to the Chairman's office):

Someday after graduation
When school's through
I'll get to do all of the things
That I want to do.

Well, I never thought that day would arrive, but I finally have my PhD in Epidemiology from the University of Kansas. Alright!!!

And, I've just been made a research assistant professor in the Department of Epidemiology. There are so many research topics I want to pursue. Now that I'm out of grad school, I'll have the time to pursue them. (looking at watch) Whoops! I'm almost late for my meeting. I wonder what the Chairman wants to see me about?

(knock on door; Chairman is sitting at his desk making paper airplanes before Dorothy walks in. Hurriedly puts them out of sight when she knocks.)

Chair: Yes?

Dorothy: Hi, my name is Dr. Dorothy Gayle. I have an appointment with you this morning.

Chair: Come in, come in, sit down, sit down. Nevermind, I'll stand up. You caught me in the middle of some important paperwork.

Welcome to the Faculty. Oh! Excuse my manners! Would you like a cigar? I like to keep some around in case my wife has another baby.

(weighing the folder) I see you have an impressive C.V. for such a recent graduate. Another few ounces and I'll put you up for promotion. I expect you will continue to do quality research here in the department.

As a new faculty member, we want you to have as many opportunities as possible to learn and grow professionally. One way to grow professionally is to interact with students on a regular basis. Here is a list of your student advisees (several pages worth of names). You will find that you will learn as much from them as they learn from you.

Dorothy: I hope to spend at least an hour a week with each student.

Chair: That's very good. In addition, you will, of course, want to practice your teaching and administrative skills. Therefore, you will have the opportunity to teach the introductory epidemiology course in both the fall and spring terms.

Dorothy: How many students usually take that course?

Chair: Only about 200 students each semester.

Dorothy: That's great. I really enjoy teaching.

Chair: Now, as you know, serving on Departmental Committees is an important way to meet other faculty and develop collegial relationships. Therefore, I ask that you consider serving on the following committees: There's the Amissions, Space, Reserach, Computer, and, oh yes, the Graduate Studies Committee.

Dorothy: Which committee would you suggest I serve on?

Chair: All of them. Each committee has its own rewards.

And lastly, since conducting quality research is our primary focus, I'd like you to look over these RFAs and have them ready for submission by the first of next month.

--This one concerns the role of frog exposure and wart formation. My hunch is that it's the amphibian papilloma virus.

--Here's an interesting one, do frightening experiences cure hiccups? I find therapeutic trials to be particularly uplifting!

--Another winner: Do broken mirrors cause 7 years of bad luck? Probably need a randomized design for this one, or you'll be plagued with confounding.

Dorothy: They're very interesting, Sir.

Chair: Don't be so formal, just call me Doctor.

I would like you to pay especially close attention to these RFAs from the private sector. NIH funding may be getting sparse these next few years.

--Here's one from Phillip Morris: Does lung cancer cause cigarette smoking? They may be on to something, pretty strong association there.

--And Calvin Klein wants to fund a study of oncogenes! There's a few more, but I don't want to overburden you. And when you're writing your budgets, just remember: The Buck Stops Here. Any questions?

Dorothy: No, I think I understand.

(Dorothy leaves Chairman's office and finds a seat. She pulls out her calendar to figure out her schedule. Chairman slips off the stage.)

Dorothy: I sure feel lucky to have all of these professional opportunities available to me.

OK, let's see.

Monday morning, I meet with student advisees.

Monday afternoon, I meet with the graduate studies committee.

Tuesday morning, I teach class.

Tuesday afternoon, there's a faculty meeting.

Wednesday morning, I meet with the Space Committee.

Wednesday afternoon is the Departmental Seminar.

--mumbles--

There, that means I can start my research at 4 o'clock on Friday.

(MLF enter comparing watches.)

Dorothy: 4 O'clock on Friday?!! I must have made a mistake. This can't be right.

MLF1: No, I'd say you've caught on to the system quite fast.

Dorothy: How am I supposed to get any research done?

MLF1: Well, research should be your highest priority if you want to be successful here. You just need to learn a few shortcuts for your other activities.

Dorothy: Like what?

MLF2: Take your committee meetings, for example. It's a good idea to schedule them within a half hour of each other on the same day, so you can leave each one early.

MLF3: Or better yet, schedule them at the same time, apologize for the mistake, and don't go to any of them!

MLF1: I used to do that, but they caught on after a few years.

MLF2: And teaching, this can be a real drain. You must find way to save time there.

Dorothy: Like how?

MLF3: Well, try giving the same exam year after year. That always seems to work for me. You should change the order of the questions, though. These students aren't as dumb as they look.

MLF1: I always try to get a copy of each student's transcript. Then I can come up with a reasonable-sounding course grade without having to grade all those exams and papers.

Dorothy: Don't the students get suspicious when you don't return their papers?

MLF1: Of course not! I just say that they blew out of my car window on a bridge, or that my dog ate them. You know, those excuses you used as student still work now!

MLF3: Whatever you do, make sure your TAs give all of the lectures. A real time-saver!

MLF1: Yes, but try to show up at least on the first day of class. The students really appreciate that.

MLF2: Don't get us wrong, though. You don't want to shortchange your students, even if they're not important.

MLF3: Right! I always arrange to meet with my students regularly. At least 5 minutes a semester--maybe 7 minutes if they're doctoral students.

Dorothy: That doesn't sound like much time!

MLF1: Of course not! That's the whole point! You've heard about our admissions process. We only admit students who are smart enough to get by without us.

MLF2: You'll probably want to make some adjustments in your daily routine, also.

Dorothy: Like where?

MLF3: Take lunch, for example. It's a good idea to eat yogurt for lunch. Then you only need 5 minutes for lunch.

MLF1: Even less if you're in a hurry, and you'll always be in a hurry. It's great if you're meeting other faculty or students for lunch. 5 minutes and you're off to do research!

Dorothy: But I hate yogurt!

MLF2: That's even better! You can eat Velamints for lunch!

MLF3: Or cookies for lunch!

MLF1: Or don't eat lunch! People will think you're important if you skip lunch every day.

MLF2: You'll probably want to adjust your sleeping habits, too. I only sleep every other night! Saves lots of time.

MLF3: You do like coffee, don't you?

Dorothy: No! I can handle the workload. I won't need to resort to those shortcuts.

MLF(all): We'll see.

SCENE II

(Someone walks across the stage with a sign that reads, "SCENE II - 2 YEARS LATER.")

(The scene opens with Dorothy, looking a bit bedraggled, sitting at her desk which is piled high with journals and papers. One by one people hurry by with reminders of work to be done or journals to read and pass along.)

--- Don't forget the faculty meeting at 2 o'clock today.

X--- Could you fill out this phone log and return it to me as soon as possible?

--- I'm sorry to bother you again, but I need your updated CV.

X--- Here are a few journals to read. Pass them along to the next name on the list when you are done with them.

--- Your husband called. He wants to know, if you'll be coming home from work tonight. If not, send him your picture.

X--- You need to write an exam before the TA meeting this afternoon.

--- Are you done writing the course description, yet?

X--- Better fill out the computer money request form or you'll be doing logistic regression on your fingers.

--- Here are a few journals to read. Pass them along to the next name on the list when you are done with them.

X--- The library called, they're waiting for your list of books to put on reserve.

(Phone rings) (People keep coming by with journals.)

Dorothy: Hello, Department of Epidemiology, Dorothy Gayle speaking.

Ramona: My name is Ramona Fussbudget. I'm with the NIH contracts and grants office. There seems to be a problem with your grant application.

Dorothy: Yes, what is the problem?

Ramona: Under travel, you listed a trip to Vancouver as domestic travel when, in fact, it should be listed as foreign travel.

Dorothy: Is that it?

Ramona: Nooooo. You put a computer cable under miscellaneous supplies. It should be listed under equipment.

Dorothy: Is that it?

Ramona: Nooooo. When I added up your total budget, I came up with 1 million, 400 thousand, 72 dollars, and 16 cents. Your application reads 1 million, 400 thousand, 72 dollars and 12 cents.

Dorothy: Is that it?

Ramona: Nooooooo. You only sent us 16 copies of the grant application when we specifically asked for 17 copies. We cannot process your application until we have received the completed set. That's it.

Dorothy: When do you need the corrected application.

Ramona: By yesterday of course, but tomorrow will do. You will need to fly to Washington to make these changes on the original copy.

Dorothy: (Hangs up the phone and Screams!!)

Offstage someone whispers - No screaming.

I can't take it anymore!!!

No matter how much time I spend, I can't seem to get it all done.

(WISE OLD PROFESSOR ENTERS)

FACULTY SKIT

p.6 - after Dorothy's scream and "I can't seem to get it all done"

Wise Old Professor Do I detect a note of frustration in your voice, Dorothy.

Dorothy Yes, Wise Old Professor, I think it's time to throw in the towel.

Wise Old Professor No, no, Dorothy. We senior faculty - the Full Professors no less - have been watching your struggles over the past couple years. Now you've earned the right to know the secret of success in the world of academia. You can come in at 10 in the morning, leave at 2 in the afternoon, just like we do, and still get all your work done, be promoted and achieve tenure easily.

Dorothy But how is that possible, Wise Old Professor?

Wise Old Professor First, you have to learn to have other people do your work for you. You've got to learn to let the TAs do the teaching, the GRAs to write the grants, the SRAs to do the research, the SPAs to produce the manuscripts, while you are the PI on the grants and get credit for the FTEs and all the publications in AJE. It's all a matter of knowing your alphabet.

Dorothy But then where do we come in? What does the faculty actually do?

Wise Old Professor What do we do? [Pauses to reflect on whether there is anything positive to say]. We make it all possible by our knowledge of, and access to, the solution to the pressures of academic life. Now that you've struggled with these pressures, you are ready to appreciate the solution and to use it wisely.

Dorothy Solution. What solution?

Wise Old Professor Come with me, Dorothy. I will introduce you to the Sorcerer of Software. He has the answer to your problems. He has the secret of academic success.

[Knock on door of Sorcerer of Software]

Erwin

Sorcerer of Software: Well, hello! What can I do for you today?

The Wise Old Professor: I have here one very tired faculty member. I think Dorothy's ready to be initiated into the wisdom of our profession.

Sorcerer of Software: Very well, then. I have been working on the latest in academic software. What seems to be the problem.

Dorothy: I just can't keep up. I like everything I'm doing, but there's just so much of it. How does one cope?

Sorcerer of Software: You let the computer do it for you. For example, the best way to protect your time is to have meetings with people and committees that don't really exist. The VAX Calendar program can arrange them for you. Why one time I even drove to Durham for a meeting that never existed!

Dorothy: But what about the masters theses and (gasp) the dissertations. Thanks to computers, I got 25 drafts of my last masters' students' thesis!

Sorcerer of Software: No problem. Tell your students to give you their theses on floppy discs. Then use this (gives Dorothy a floppy diskette). I call it EPIDWriter. It catches mistakes about incidence, prevalence, odds ratios, P-values, study design, bias, and grammar. Of course you should always read the student's abstract, to give your comments a personal touch.

Dorothy: Sounds like a real time-saver! Do you have anything for teaching?

Sorcerer of Software: Sure. (Hands her a diskette.) This is PROC TEACH. It has the latest in electronics to produce lifelike 3-D holograms of you and guest speakers of your choice. You can even import big names like Sir Richard Doll or Sir Arthur Conan Doyle at no extra cost! Makes the syllabus look impressive.

Dorothy: Wow! How about research?

Sorcerer of Software: Here (gives her another diskette). Here's PROC ANAL - It does all of the analyses taught in EPID 268 and EPID 269 and sends tables and results to PROC MANUSCRIPT.

The Wise Old Professor: That's the best invention since indoor plumbing.

Sorcerer of Software: You might also be interested in CVEDIT my little curriculum vitae editor (gives Dorothy another diskette). Just run this every few months on your CV. You'll have believable citations in the right journals. You'll get your first editorial after five years, your first invited address after eight. Why in a few years you're CV will be virtually indistinguishable from those of our most respected colleagues.

The Wise Old Professor: (Thumbs phone book) I don't know where I'd be without CVEDIT!

Sorcerer of Software: And then there's one last thing. (Gives Dorothy another diskette.)

Dorothy: What's this diskette for?

Sorcerer of Software: That's PC Golf. Once you've got the hang of all these time savers, you'll have extra time on your hands. You know, being in academia doesn't mean that you shouldn't have fun.

Dorothy: (Warming up) I had almost forgotten what fun was. But I think I'd rather devote the time I gain to working with students and doing research. That's what I really enjoy doing. (Pause) Well, Sorcerer of Software, I can't thank you enough.

(Dorothy and the Wise Old Professor leave the Sorcerer of Software. In enters a new faculty member.)

New Faculty: Excuse me. Can you tell me where to find the Chairman's office? I've just accepted a position as a new faculty member in the Department of Epidemiology.

(Dorothy and The Wise Old Professor smile and give each other a knowing glance.)

Dorothy: Come with us. We'll take you there.

Dorothy