

"On Being Best"  
by P. H. Lin

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### **Cast of Characters**

- MEL: The current First Lady. In her early 50s and starting to look her age.
- MEL-2: MEL's "better angel." Dressed all in white.
- MODERATOR: Male. In his 50s. The Host and Moderator for this virtual PTA meeting. Any race or ethnicity.

The time: the present

The place: A Zoom meeting in progress

Lights up on MEL's video screen. (Her virtual background is one of a solid color.

MEL is winding up an "address" which she has written on note cards.

She delivers this presentation from a real desk that can be seen in front of her virtual background. On this same "real" desk we can see the back of her laptop.

MEL

(Reading from her note card)

And finally, let me speak on behalf of the children. Those cyber-bullied, most vulnerable among us. So pitiful.

(Second screen illuminates MEL-2.

MEL-2 is a "not quite MEL look alike. She is dressed all in white. Her virtual background is identical to MELs)

MEL-2

Have you really fallen so low?

MEL

What the... !?! Why are you in my screen shot and sharing my space?

MEL-2

I'm not. We're virtually distant.

MEL

Identify yourself or I call Cyber-Cops.

MEL-2

I'm your "better angel, ok?"

MEL

My what?

MEL-2

Everyone gets at least one of us assigned to "watch over." Most times though, we don't get called on to make ourselves known.

MEL

Someone called on you?

MEL-2

The First Ladies. The former ones. They asked me to check in with you. To see if you're really so clueless or is it an act.

MEL

The "FLOTUS"es asked this of you? Or would they be "FLO-TI?"

(Quick beat)

Never mind. Please to go away. I'm in midst of very significant presentation.

(She refers to her note cards again)

So where am I leaving off? Ah! With pitiful children.

(Back to her presentation)

These children are asking for help. From me to "Be Best." Like this is outlined in my Youth Initiative brochure.

(She holds up a brochure. MEL-2 makes a rude raspberry sound.)

(MEL continues her note card remarks)

Because all of these children are dear. So dear to my heart. Why I desperately want to make them all "Great Again!"

(Overcome with emotion, she dabs at her eyes)

MEL-2

Oh, boy! This is gonna be tough!

(MODERATOR's screen lights up. His virtual background depicts a backdrop of PTA logos.)

MODERATOR applauds MEL's performance. MEL smiles graciously)

MODERATOR

And we thank you for your fulsome and heart-felt remarks.

MEL

Always happy to oblige. Now, I answer your questions?

MODERATOR

You have time?

MEL

Of course.

MEL-2

No, you don't!

MEL

Anything for these heroic Parents and Teachers.

MODERATOR

What Parents? What Teachers?

MEL

This is not P.T.A. Regional Conference?

MODERATOR

It is... but we're a, uh, different PTA. We're the Passenger Transit Authority.

MEL

Oh. I see. You're in transit. Like me.

(Quick beat)

Seems that someone on my staff is making big boo-boo. I should tell this person "you're fired!"

MEL-2

Stop making a fool of yourself!

MODERATOR

This, uh, meeting's intended to set up an oversight panel. To manage the Covid Funds Public Transit's been promised.

MEL

Oh, I never speak of "Money." I only speak of things that can inspire. Like my Youth Initiative Program to "Be Best."

MODERATOR

And we all support this vision and your effort.

MEL

Thank you very much. Is nice to be appreciated. Respected.

MODERATOR

And please know how this podium is always open. To you or to anyone else that the White House sends over.

MEL

But we just getting started.

MODERATOR

We, uh, weren't expecting your presence. Not virtually or in person.

MEL

Ah. I understand. In such unexpected... how to say... circumstances? You do as you must, while I do... exactly the same.

MEL-2

There may be hope for you, yet!

MEL

But... if social schedule requires for me be here? Even though is wrong PTA? Then here I am... doing job for myself and for country.

(Quick beat)

And so I take questions. Please ask these of me in "Chat."

(MODERATOR's screen goes dark.)

MEL peers at her monitor and reads)

*"Your office released a photo of you yesterday."*

Is true. Taken from right side. Right side is my best.

*"You were wearing a face mask."*

Also true. Is white one. For matching my shoes.

*"Yet wearing a face mask is something your husband refuses..."*

Please to Chat to me about me. Not about him.

(She graciously smiles and reads from the chat log again)

"So why were you wearing a mask?"

Ah. This mask again! This is how I support current CDC recommendation. Everyone should cover their nose and their mouth in public.

(She reads from the chat log again)

"That's very enlightened."

I know. I am much, much enlightened.

(She shows off her "trimmed down" figure, then back to the chat log)

"In a recent interview you said that you'd share handshakes. Yet all of our Health Officials discourage touching. You're not concerned that your husband..."

We never touch!

MEL-2

Shut this down!

(MEL-2 has spoken with such authority, that MEL complies)

MEL

OK. OK. So sorry. Must also run! Chao for now, my friends! Goodbye?

(MEL and MEL-2's screens go dark.

A beat and they come back on but this time both their virtual backgrounds reveal the same luxury boudoir)

MEL-2

That was rough.

MEL

It was. I perspire through favorite Versace.

MEL-2

May I ask you something before you go back to seclusion... I mean "isolation?"

MEL

And then you'll to leave me in peace?

MEL-2

It's no secret you're ambitious, and very pretty. No surprise that you'd want to aspire to live your life large.

MEL

You think I am asking for large on such a scale? All I asking for is good husband to make me happy. Someone wealthy to keep me in first-class... and always in style.

MEL-2

Looks like you got what you asked for.

MEL

I did! Look at where... at how I live!

MEL-2

I can see. But are you happy?

MEL

What question is this!?! Is CNN sending you here? Or fake New York Times paper.

MEL-2

I told you before... the FLOTUSes sent me to you. To preserve the dignity of their positions... and yours.

MEL

I have dignity!

MEL-2

No, you don't. Not since that raincoat you wore when you visited kids in cages.

MEL

That not "coat" at all. Was rain jacket. And most fashion forward statement.

MEL-2

That coat read on its back in capital letters...

MEL

I know what it reads. "*I really don't care, do you?*"

MEL-2

And you were ok with this?



MEL

You are making too much over nothing. I wear once, and then...  
poof... forgotten.

MEL-2

Except that it wasn't.

MEL

I wear what they ask me to wear! Like they tell what to say...  
what to think! And if that makes me "First Lady of Shiny  
Distractions"... but what to do? Can do nothing. Is part of my  
contract.

MEL-2

Say what?

MEL

I said...

MEL-2

Then break it that contract, Girl, before it breaks you!

(Quick beat)

Look, I know you've got a voice. In the quiet, un-edited times,  
I've heard you use it. Use it now to make yourself over. Become  
a First Lady you'd like for us all to hear. A first lady to be  
proud of!

MEL

And what should I say, as this re-conditioned FLOTUS?

MEL-2

Whatever you like.

(Beat)

MEL

I come to this country one half of my lifetime ago. Give up my  
career for this... how to say... freak of nature. And one child and  
one "pre-nup" later? I have what I wish for. What I sacrifice so  
much of myself to gain.

MEL-2

So you do understand.

MEL

Of course. Do you think I am some kind of ditz?

(Beat)

So many things tie together I won't... can't give up. Why I keep myself social distance and under radar... so not to be fired. And to keep small part still inside of me... wholly "me."

(Beat)

You can tell this to former First Ladies. Then leave me in peace.

MEL-2

If that's what you want.

MEL

What I need!

MEL-2

OK. OK. I get it.

MEL

Chao for now, then?

MEL-2

For now.

(Quick beat)

Mel? "Be Best"?

(Both screens go dark.)

End of play)