

IN PRAISE OF BEING LIGHT

By James Still

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NOTE ON CASTING: Everything tells a story. In the same spirit in which I wrote the play, the characters of Riley and Jackie may/can/should be played by an actor of any gender, race, ethnicity, origin and other-abledness. In whatever ways the play is cast, it will tell the story of two friends.

Inspiration:

Zoom earnings roared to nearly \$1 billion in 2020, and the stock is rising again

Last Updated: March 2, 2021 at 7:19 a.m. ET

First Published: March 1, 2021 at 4:23 p.m. ET (MarketWatch.com)

Zoom Video Communications Inc.'s rip-roaring ride resumed its meteoric trajectory Monday, with shares jumping as the company detailed the results of becoming a lifeline for those stuck at home due to the COVID-19 pandemic: Booming profit and revenue.

The video-communications company reported fourth-quarter net income of \$260.4 million, or 87 cents a share, compared with net income of \$15.3 million in the year-ago quarter. After adjusting for stock-based compensation and other factors, Zoom ZM, +1.56% reported earnings of \$1.22 a share, up from 15 cents a share a year ago.

Revenue hurtled 369% higher to \$882.5 million from \$188.3 million a year ago. Analysts surveyed by FactSet had expected adjusted earnings of 79 cents a share on revenue of \$812 million.

Overall for the fiscal year, Zoom reported adjusted profit of nearly \$1 billion — \$995.7 million — after barely clearing \$100 million in adjusted earnings in the previous year, at \$101.3 million. The company added more than \$2 billion in revenue, growing to \$2.65 billion from sales of \$622.7 million the year before.

Zoom became a household name as the COVID-19 pandemic forced lockdowns across the globe, and shares exploded higher early in 2020, but seemed to hit a ceiling in the fall and have come back down steadily since. A steep rise in coronavirus cases during and after the holidays intensified business restrictions and forced many workplaces to reconsider reopening in 2021, however, leading to renewed use of Zoom's services.

While the pandemic has made for trying business circumstances, it has made Zoom "one of the most popular apps of the year," Zoom Chief Executive Eric Yuan said during a conference call with analysts late Monday. The company said it has 467,100 customers with more than 10 employees, up 470% year-over-year.

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The FUTURE:
Far enough into the future that you're
shocked to find how little has changed even
though so much time has passed.

JACKIE and RILEY on Zoom.
They're youngish -- maybe 20.
Age is mysterious.
Especially in a pandemic.

One other thing:
Both of them are Zooming from their
bedrooms -- bedrooms from their
childhoods -- like time stands still.

RILEY

...but you still haven't told me why you're so damn happy.

JACKIE

I seem happy?

RILEY

Yeah.

JACKIE

Huh.

RILEY

Kinda.

JACKIE

Wow.

RILEY

Happier than usual anyway.

JACKIE

Good, that's good, right?

RILEY

No.

JACKIE

Why not?

RILEY

Because it's like you're trying to shame me.

JACKIE

I thought we were talking about me.

RILEY

We're always talking about you. What else is there to talk about?

JACKIE

You want to talk about you?

RILEY

Not if I have to be happy.

JACKIE

You should give it a try.

RILEY

I don't want to give it a try.

JACKIE

OK. But that's why you're not happy.

RILEY

I think you're being a weak-ass pretending to be happy when we both know there isn't one damn thing to be happy about --

JACKIE

I don't agree --

RILEY

We haven't been able to leave home for -- how long is it?

JACKIE

Why are you asking me that?

RILEY

How long, Jackie?

JACKIE

You think I don't know how long we've been in lockdown?

RILEY

How long? If you're going to call me like this just to get up in my face with your fake happiness -- then I don't think you know, I don't think you remember how long it's been like this, how long we've been, you know, DOING this, like this.

JACKIE

Why isn't it possible that I DO remember, that I do know, that I have a complete and deep understanding of this fucked up shit-show of a life that we've been --

RILEY

And what? It suddenly makes you happy?

JACKIE

I never said it makes me happy.

RILEY

How long?

JACKIE

Riley --

RILEY

Seriously: How. Long.

JACKIE

What do you want me to say?

RILEY

Say the words: say how many minutes or hours or days or months or years have we been in lockdown.

JACKIE

...

RILEY

You gotta say the words, Jackie. Say it -- and then tell me why you're so frickin' happy.

JACKIE

OK. I'll play along with your game -- because I think you just like hearing me tell the story.

RILEY

What story?

JACKIE

The story of our friendship.

RILEY

You call this friendship? We haven't seen each other since the fourth grade.

JACKIE

We see each other every day.

RILEY

IN PERSON. We haven't seen each other IN PERSON since the fourth grade. Remember that day?

JACKIE

Sure. School ended just like always but the next day everything closed down and we never went back.

RILEY

So we haven't seen each other since the fourth grade.

JACKIE

I see you every day.

RILEY

This? You're calling THIS -- what?

JACKIE

We talk every day, we see other --

RILEY

Yeah, sure, we "see" each other every day on these dumbass screens.

JACKIE

Why do you have to put like -- "quotations" around it?

RILEY

Because this isn't "normal!"-- this isn't how it was supposed to be.

JACKIE

I agree.

RILEY

So we agree on something.

JACKIE

We agree on a lot of things. We always have.

(...)

Maybe today's the day, you know? Maybe...?

(...)

RILEY

I feel kinda betrayed.

JACKIE

By who, by what?

RILEY

By you.

JACKIE

Oh come on, Riley. We've talked to each other like this every day for -- for a long time now --

RILEY

You still can't say it.

JACKIE

My point is that we're here for each other. Nobody knew it was going to go like this. You and me -- we're in this together, right?

RILEY

Right. But why do you have to be happy?

JACKIE

It's not like I'm happy-happy. I'm just -- ...

RILEY

What?

JACKIE

I don't know how to describe it. It's like being happy-unhappy.

RILEY

So you're kinda happy about being UNhappy. Is that a thing?

JACKIE

...

OK. RILEY

We cool? JACKIE

Yeah. RILEY

(...)
It's just weird if one of us is happy and one of us isn't. I don't know how that would work.

(...)
JACKIE
What are you going to do today?

RILEY
Gee. What am I going to do? My schedule is so packed, who knows how I'm going to do it all. What do you think I'm going to do? Kill time online, play video games, watch porn, order online shit I don't need, try to CrowdFund some cash to buy more BitCoin, maybe I'll talk to that psychic again -- the one who thinks I'm hot, by then I'll be hungry and I'll probably have some food delivered --

JACKIE
They're still delivering on your block?

RILEY
Probably not but I saw some delivery truck out my window this morning, figured I might as well give it a try.

JACKIE
OK. What else?

RILEY
What else what?

JACKIE
What else are you going to do?

RILEY
I'll probably talk to you a couple more times. Are they still delivering the mail?

JACKIE
I don't think so.

RILEY

Wouldn't it be a kick to get a letter or a birthday card?

JACKIE

Is it your birthday?

RILEY

I don't think so. What day is it?

JACKIE

No idea. Wednesday? Maybe.

RILEY

No, I mean the date, what's the date?

JACKIE

No idea. I think it's February. Or March.

(...)

Or August. Thursday.

RILEY

I don't pay attention to time much anymore. Nobody does, right? What's the point? It's light out, I know it's day. It's dark out, I know it's night. What are you doing today? Besides being happy.

JACKIE

Will you let it go? I told you -- I'm not --

RILEY

Happy. Yeah, you said. You're not happy. But you sure as fuck don't seem depressed.

JACKIE

Are you depressed?

RILEY

What do you think? Aren't we all? Don't answer that -- it'll make me feel even worse than I do.

JACKIE

What's worse than being depressed?

RILEY

...

JACKIE

I've been watching old episodes of this nature show, about the world, about the planet, you know -- it was kind of awesome before everything went to hell.

RILEY

So if you're not happy -- what are you? Seriously.

JACKIE

It's hard to describe -- it's just -- light. I feel -- light, you know, less heavy about everything.

RILEY

Why?

JACKIE

I've been meditating.

RILEY

Are you shitting me?

JACKIE

About what? About meditating?

RILEY

I tried that once. I closed my eyes and immediately felt like I was gonna die.

JACKIE

I feel that way sometimes. But something about it works for me.

RILEY

Let's talk about something else. Even talking about it makes me paranoid.

JACKIE

OK. You watch any movies?

RILEY

I've watched them all.

JACKIE

All of them. Every movie that's ever been made.

RILEY

Yeah. A lot of them more than once.

JACKIE

You remember that one called "The Martian"?

RILEY

Ben Affleck.

JACKIE

No, it was Matt Damon.

RILEY

I always get them confused.

JACKIE

Remember the scene where Matt Damon's stranded there on Mars and he's not supposed to be able to breathe, you know, because they thought that life on Mars was a no-go without the space suit and the helmet and oxygen tank and all the other shit. And then one day Matt Damon just takes his helmet off. And it turns out he can breathe just fine. I mean, that doesn't make sense, it's like a convenience for the movie and everything -- but God, I've watched that scene over and over and over -- that IDEA, you know? That we could just -- open a window or walk out the door, go outside, take a deep breath of unfiltered air or whatever and -- and then nothing happens. Nobody dies. Somehow somebody forgot to tell us that the coast is clear, that it's safe, and everybody pours out onto the streets -- all over the whole planet -- the whole world is suddenly awake again, and we're seeing everybody and hugging everybody and standing real close to each other...

(...)

RILEY

And that's why you're feeling -- light? 'cause of Matt Damon? I like him in those Jason Bourne movies.

JACKIE

It's not about Matt Damon! Jesus.

RILEY

OK.

JACKIE

It's just -- I don't know -- something clicked in me. I got up this morning, didn't think it would be any different than any other day, you know -- that it's the same thing, we're all in lockdown, it's just another day. But from the moment I woke up there was something -- this -- feeling. This tiny, teeny-tiny little -- feeling. Like a match was struck, and it put out just enough light to see just enough to know that there's still some really dim and faded reasons not to give up. I just have to -- remember them. And one of those reasons was knowing that I'd see you like this, that we would talk several times today -- just like we have every day since that day in the fourth grade. How old were we?

9, 10? Kids. RILEY

Yeah. Kids. Kids are light. They have a lightness about them. JACKIE

I guess so. Yeah. RILEY

Yeah. (remembering)

(...) JACKIE

(...) RILEY

We gonna talk again later? JACKIE

Sure. RILEY

You OK? JACKIE

Probably. I gotta do my breathing exercises. RILEY
(shrugs)

Me too. JACKIE

That movie -- the one on Mars -- RILEY

Yeah? JACKIE

It had a happy ending, right? RILEY

Yeah. JACKIE

RILEY
Matt Damon got rescued?

JACKIE
Yeah.

RILEY
Good.

JACKIE
But I think it had to end that way -- after everything he did to stay alive. It was the perfect ending.

RILEY
Was it based on a true story?

JACKIE
What?

RILEY
I read that some people thought the movie was based on a true story.

JACKIE
Nobody's gone to Mars, not yet.

RILEY
That's what I thought. People say all kinds of shit on the internet.
(...)

I'd like to go to Mars.
(...)

I'm gonna watch some porn.

JACKIE
Peace out.

RILEY disconnects from the call.

JACKIE lingers, looks at the camera for a long time.

Then JACKIE disconnects too.

END