

THE POWER FORCE

A play in one act

**By Ryan Millar
rsmillar@gmail.com**

THE POWER FORCE

Lights up on a sparsely decorated office. There are two desks with phones and computers on them either side of centre stage. A slightly ajar inner office door is upstage left. A coat rack stands in front of an exterior door downstage right. At one of the desks sits STACY JEAN GRAY. She is early twenties and plain in a pretty kind of way, or pretty in a plain kind of way.

STACY: *(answering the phone, which has not rung)* Hello MaxCap Publishing, this is Stacy Jean Gray speaking how may I direct your call? *(Shaking head)*No. *(Hangs up)* Hello MaxCap Publishing. *(Hangs up)* Hey. MaxCap. Intern Stacy, unpaid, inexperienced, and overenthusiastic. *(Hangs up)* Hello, MaxCap Publishing, a wholly owned subsidiary of Walt Disney Enterprises: burning stereotypes into your child's imaginations for 80 years. *(Hangs up. Suddenly furious. Snatches phone)* Yo. This is Stacy, what the fuck do you want? *(Hangs up. Smiles sweetly.)*

During the above sequence ALICE CHAMBERS has entered through exterior door and is hanging up her jacket and scarf.

ALICE: So? What the fuck did they want?

STACY: Uh. Hello. Ms. Chambers...I didn't hear you come in. There was nobody there, I swear. I'm so, so...sorry. Ohmigod. *(Slumps)* DAMMIT! I can't believe it, it's ridiculous. I mean of course she would walk in at the moment I'm swearing on the phone to an imaginary client on the second day of my internship. Welcome to my life AKA 'one long bout of foot in mouth disease.'

ALICE: It's ok.

STACY: I was just practicing my phone manners, Ms Chambers, and you know I thought I'd practice, uh, what not to do. You know, like "Hi this is MaxCap Publishing, Holocaust Deniers and cookbook publishers." Things you wouldn't ever say, partially because they're not true (except for the cookbook part) but also partially because they're so deeply offensive. I mean, Ms Chambers, we need to know what not to do, so that the things we do are the right ones. Righ—

ALICE: First of all, please, pretty please... you need to address me as Alice, or Ali, not Ms. Chambers. Secondly, relax, you're doing fine. Day one was good, and today's going to be even better.

STACY: OK. Great. Thanks, I was worried there for a minute. I'm really sorry.

ALICE: Look: I know you wouldn't answer the phone with a blatantly offensive greeting; otherwise I probably wouldn't have hired you. And thirdly, stop apologizing. We're trying to enjoy ourselves here. At least I am anyway, and your hysteria is not helping. Just because this is a job doesn't mean we have to work. Especially you, you don't even get paid. So relax.

STACY: Um, OK. I'm going to take a few deep breaths, that always helps. *(Takes some deep breaths)*

ALICE: Good, that's it lighten up. We publish cookbooks, self-help titles and autobiographies, which means by the time you're finished here you should have quit smoking, actualized your true potential, be able to make 45 different casseroles and have met a dozen ghost-writers. Not everybody gets to meet a ghost-writer y'know.

STACY: It does sound pretty exciting...

ALICE: It is.

STACY: And I don't smoke you know.

ALICE: See? It's already paying off.

STACY: Yeah. I really like it here so far.

ALICE: This job is great experience for you: we've got a great office here, nice co-workers, easy-going boss, central location and GREAT lighting.

STACY: It is pretty well-lit...

ALICE: You bet. We get a lot of freedom here. Wayne (Mr. Blumenthal to you) is really so sweet, and since his personal life has been so shit, he hardly even comes in anymore. We just have to keep coasting.

STACY: Coasting...

ALICE: While you're here: enjoy it. Besides, this is an unpaid internship so if you really fuck it up, your net loss is minimal. Your income actually doesn't change. Anyway, it would only take a day or two for a smart, pretty girl like yourself, fresh out of college to find someone else to exploit your labour. Speaking of days, how'd those apartment viewings go yesterday?

STACY: Oh, good, actually. I looked at a couple places yesterday after work. One downtown with a really nice guy doing his Masters in Journalism at City College. The other for a studio apartment over on Bellaton.

ALICE: And?

STACY: I don't know. I kinda like the idea of having a room-mate- and near the college there are lots of students. Plus Tim (the potential room-mate) is kinda cute. Buuuuut, Bellaton is such a nice area. It feels more 'city,' y'know, kinda gritty, and lots of pubs and it's actually cheaper.

ALICE: Look I'll tell you something: get the studio. Yeah you like the idea of a room-mate, but the fact is you're going to have a boyfriend so fast it'll make your head spin. Its better that you don't live with him.

STACY: OK, I can see how that...

ALICE: And it's not like you need to move in with the first cute guy you lock eyes on. Trust me you'll have a boyfriend in no time: pretty doe-eyed girl like you-hell! You probably won't even need to use the internet.

STACY: You think? Great.

ALICE: Sure. And this boyfriend... you're going to need a place to hide out from him eventually, so it's best you don't live with him. But for now a place where

you can have noisy, experimental sex without disturbing anybody will suffice. It's a no-brainer really. Get a place on your own.

STACY: I guess you're right.

ALICE: Of course I'm right. Truthfully though, do it. Get the studio. *(Pause)* How's living at your aunts place? Tired of living out of your suitcase yet?

STACY: Yeah. Well, I do have a closet. But still, I don't want to settle in out there; I didn't move to the city so I could live in a distant suburb with people who are like my parents.

ALICE: No. You even lived at home while you were at college, didn't you? *(Stacy nods)* It's time to spread your wings.

STACY: Exactly, I can't wait to get out of there. Plus it'll be closer to work if I move to the city.

ALICE: This is isn't work. It's an internship.

STACY: Right!

ALICE: Is it one of those rental agencies renting out that studio?

STACY: Yeah.

ALICE: Ah, it'll be fine. Rent it anyway. You got the number? *(Stacy nods.)* Call them.

STACY: I will. *(Reaches for the phone)* Wait, when's Mr Blumenthal coming here?

ALICE: I don't know, he should be in very soon. If he comes in today. You are going to love him, he is such a sweetheart.

STACY: I know I can't wait. I just don't want his first impression of me to be some dumb girl making personal calls on company time.

ALICE: Don't worry, you're not dumb. Anyway, Wayne's very good with his employees. Very sweet.

STACY: That's great, really I'm so happy. When I was working at the campus library, the head librarian was a complete power freak. She once literally tried to bite a student's head off.

ALICE: Working with books is very stressful.

STACY: It's all I ever cared for. Ever since I was little I knew I wanted to part of the industry. The spines, the ISBN number, the fonts, the different paper sizes and textures, I love it all.

ALICE: It has to be a labour of love.

STACY: It is. And you? Are you a book-lover?

ALICE: I guess. I started here 7 years ago as a reader, but discovered I had a real flair for layout and design, now I do all the graphics for our whole division.

STACY: Wow.

ALICE: Autobiographies and self-help books are not the most progressive design-wise, but still there's room for some innovation.

STACY: What do you mean?

ALICE: Well, lately I've been 'ghosting' everyone in Photoshop. Men and women. They're getting more and more transparent. Look at any of our books lately and you'll see, the authors are disappearing.

STACY: Is this a joke about ghostwriters?

ALICE: Started out like that, now it's just standard practice. Other publishers are doing it too.

STACY: Fascinating.

ALICE: I guess so. Anyway you should make that call.

STACY: OK.

ALICE: Oh, by the way, when Wayne gets here, don't mention the 'ghosting'. It's an 'unofficial' policy.

STACY: I understand.

ALICE: And we'll also try not to mention his wife. He's really going through a rough divorce.

STACY: No problem. *(Pause)* I heard you talking about it on the phone yesterday. Sorry, I didn't mean to. *(Pause)* I hate to pry but what's the story about his wife?

ALICE: She left him. She moved out on him. Moved into their spare bedroom with some young loverboy.

STACY: What? They still live together? In the same house?

ALICE: For now.

STACY: How awful.

ALICE: Yeah, his pool boy and his wife. Gross.

STACY: Totally.

ALICE: He's looking for a place too. Maybe you should give him the number of that Masters Student.

STACY: Really? Sure.

ALICE: No. Not really.

(Phone rings)

ALICE: Find out what the fuck they want.

STACY: Hello Maxcap Publishing, autobiography, cookbook and self-help division... Uh huh... Well, Mr Blumenthal's not here right now. I can patch you through to the Assistant Manager.... Ok... Ms. Cham- uh, Ali, it's a Mr Reading from head office.

ALICE: OK Patch him through. Hey Carl... Yeah that was the new intern... Stacy... No she's pretty good I guess. Cute too... A little naïve but I think she's going to be alright... Yeah things are fine here, a little slow right now, but it always slows around this time... No, Wayne's not here yet, I expect him soon though... I will... I know... Huh?... OK. Is that necessary? I see... Alright. Well bye then.

STACY: What was that all about?

ALICE: Apparently head office wants to send somebody over today to audit our operations.

STACY: What? Why?

ALICE: Things are not as profitable as they could be in this office.

STACY: I see...

ALICE: So they want to...

STACY: Fire everybody?

ALICE: ...assess ways to make this division stronger.

STACY: Oh.

ALICE: Not fire everyone. Though that would certainly cut overhead. *(Pause)* You could stay though, as you're unpaid.

STACY: But, this is only my second day.

ALICE: I know, but you're going to have to behave like you've been here at least a week. When he gets here we'll need to convince Mr Reading that everything is under control and that this office is firing silver bullets.

STACY: And if it doesn't work?

ALICE: Well, I suppose they'd close the office. You could look for another internship. You'd be fine. Probably. Me and Wayne though, we'd be out on the streets.

STACY: But I'd be fine?

ALICE: I hope so sweetie. But in reality, even an unpaid internship takes time to find. How long were you sending out CVs before we hired you?

STACY: Three and a half weeks.

ALICE: You see? Stuck at your aunts, or back to parents place.

STACY: Oh shit.

ALICE: Don't worry. This is publishing, this shit happens all the time.

WAYNE BLUMENTHAL enters. He is older, balding and rounding out a little bit, much like an old tire. He is carrying a tray of three coffees. And a shopping bag carrying his tracksuit. He is full of vigour.

WAYNE: Hi Ladies. Good morning good morning. Nice to see you all here so fresh. I brought some coffees, doubles, so we can get this show on the road. *(Pointing)* Stacy. It's Stacy right? Great to have you on board. Why don't you run down and get some coffee?

STACY: But you brought coffees.

WAYNE: I mean for you two.

STACY: Um, OK.

(exits)

WAYNE: Here you want a coffee?

ALICE: Sure.

WAYNE: Sorry. I mean yeah I brought us all coffees, but then I got here and I looked at her, and I realized: that girl is an intern. I can't have her seeing me, the B-O-S-S, bringing up coffee for her. That's not right. It's just not a good way to start off our working relationship. It doesn't set the balance correctly.

ALICE: Actually, it's kind of a nice thing to do. You're a nice guy. Being nice doesn't hurt.

WAYNE: Ah ha! That's where you're wrong. That's where I was wrong too. I thought being a nice guy was good, I mean it got me this far. But it's not taking me any further. I've been with MaxCap, what? Fifteen years now. And my last promotion was a decade ago. I got all the way to Office Manager and now that's it. I'm stuck here in this tiny office managing fad-driven loss leaders and the vanity projects of retired politicians. Meanwhile younger, savvier, more ruthless men and women are being promoted over, above, and around me. I used to be a Harlem Globetrotter and now I'm a Washington General.

ALICE: We have a great office. I thought you were happy here.

WAYNE: I was. Or so I thought. Working late last night I started reading this self-help manuscript I found on my desk- THE POWER FORCE. By some unknown by the name of Charles Bell, with a Masters in Folk Psychology. I stayed up all night reading it; it helped me realize my problem: I'm just too nice.

ALICE: That's the best thing about you.

WAYNE: Exactly. I need a little something else, something that won't make me finish last, to define me. I need the POWER FORCE. So I'm working on it. But it's tough to change overnight. He talks about it in the first chapter: ARRANGE YOUR

CHANGE. He says the change needs to be slow, But DECISIVE!! That's why I made her go get coffee: I'm assertive!! *(Pause)* Poor girl.

ALICE: That book sounds flaky. And dumb. Even by our standards.

WAYNE: I know.

ALICE: Why are you reading it then? Better yet, why are you following the instructions?

(Stacy re-enters with a tray of coffees and a bag of pastries)

WAYNE: Well, I am an editor, so reading it is technically part of my job. But last night I was listening to my wife loudly fuck our pool boy and I realized nothing has been going right for me in my life. In fact it's an all-time-low. And like they say: "if it's broke, fix it." So it's time for some POWER MOVES, like it says in chapter two.

STACY: Good for you.

(Wayne turns around to see Stacy standing in the doorway)

ALICE: Stacy, this is Mr Blumenthal. Wayne this is Stacy. She's on a four month internship. Unpaid. You'll be teaching her how to vet manuscripts, so she can become a reader. You can also bring her a coffee, and she won't think less of you.

STACY: Sorry to hear about your wife.

WAYNE: Thanks. Forget it. I've turned over a new leaf. Now my personal life isn't important anymore. Its work, work, work, all the time. Like the POWER FORCE says: THE PROS IGNORE THE CONS! And right now my family life is a con. So forget it. It's time to take the publishing world by storm!

ALICE: Great: you can begin by teaching Stacy to vet manuscripts.

WAYNE: Perfect! I thought up a new system on the tram over here. I can teach you in about five minutes. I call it the 'New Approach.'

ALICE: Listen, you've got an appointment at 11 with Carl Reading from division. It's going to be a very good chance to road test your theories and make your *(making air quotes)* 'power moves.' They're seriously concerned about the sales figures and are questioning some of the editorial policies over here. In fact they vaguely threatened to pull editorial control back to head office.

WAYNE: Bah! No problem. I am fighting fit and this office is too. A couple of missteps sure, but wrinkles get ironed out. We grow out of growing pains. NO PAIN NO GAIN (chapter 3). We're going to right this ship. This meeting is an opportunity in disguise. In the chapter PUNCH YOUR LUNCH it explains that when you see an opportunity you've got to just grab it, and squeeze it and hit the shit out of it until it cries. In that way you make it yours.

ALICE: So what should I tell division? They want a confirmation on this meeting for this morning.

WAYNE: I'll give them a call, from my office.

(Wayne exits)

(Stacy holds up the tray and bag)

STACY: I got coffees. And muffins. And sugar and cream.

ALICE: That's fantastic. Drink up. All of them. We're gonna have to get down to some work today. Things are not going to go well, I'm afraid. Mr Blumenthal is not OK. He's not himself. He's actually a nice guy, not the self-involved, ignorant dipshit you just met. Unfortunately he's swallowed some terrible self-help bullshit.

STACY: But isn't that what we do here? The self-help bullshit thing I mean?

ALICE: Yes. But the real 'Secret' is that the whole self-help industry is full of crackpots and opportunists. In fact, autobiographies aren't much better. Come to

it, most cook-books are just pretty pictures and useless filler text. Just like autobiographies. It's all bullshit Stacy, and it's probably not that hard to imagine that we need to protect ourselves around here. Seeing how those are the three topics we deal with.

STACY: OK. I'm ready to help.

ALICE: Good. Now when Mr Reading gets here I'm gonna need you to flirt with him. A lot.

STACY: What do you mean?

ALICE: No! God no, just make him feel at ease. This isn't that type of book club. Just use your feminine wiles on him.

STACY: OK.

ALICE: If he's feeling cosy, he's going to be less aggressive. It's basic human nature.

STACY: Right.

(WAYNE pokes his head around his office door)

WAYNE: I just want to let everybody know that it's not Gary coming down here. It's that new hotshot, Mick Stone, that'll be coming. Blowhard. I don't want to have to fist-fight him to prove I'm in charge, but I will. If need be.

(WAYNE disappears)

(ALICE raises her eyebrows)

STACY: But how come he's gone off the deep end, hasn't he been here for years? Shouldn't he be immune to that stuff?

ALICE: Well, it's been a rough patch for him. That self-help market is all about vulnerability. He's vulnerable right now. Very. Especially if he has to listen to his wife fuck the pool boy. Can you imagine? Clearly something in him snapped.

STACY: Yeah. That would be hard.

ALICE: That's why you need to get your own place. You see.

(WAYNE reappears, dressed in a tracksuit)

WAYNE: Before anything else goes on here I want to spread the wisdom. I'm going to teach Stacy about vetting manuscripts.

ALICE: What happened to your suit?

WAYNE: New me, new look. Lesson 1: where's the pile of manuscripts?

STACY: I haven't even unwrapped them yet. I'm sorr—

WAYNE: Don't be sorry. An apology is a novelty. Cute once in a while, but never to be taken seriously. I'm starting to get good at this.

STACY: Good at what?

WAYNE: Arranging my change. Uh, Sorry is for suckers!

STACY: Huh?

WAYNE: Hey! It's working; I'm feeling better, and more self-assured. And making up vague, pithy mottos. *(Quietly)* Sorry is for suckers...yeah, that's good.

STACY: I don't understand.

WAYNE: Doesn't matter. This is what's important. The work.

STACY: Right. That's why I'm here. I used to do a lot of editing in college. I worked at the Campus Chronicle as the Current Events Editor. And had a part-time job at the library. I'm really keen to make the jump to the big time.

WAYNE: Are you done?

STACY: With what?

WAYNE: The grandstanding.

STACY: Yes.

WAYNE: Good. *(Pause)* Look I'm sorry, I'm struggling to arrange my change, but it feels right for me right now. Right to fight. I've got the right to fight... *(Pause)* Where was I?

STACY: The manuscripts.

WAYNE: Right. We get a lot of manuscripts through here. Too many for just us to read, but here's what I've discovered: that doesn't matter! The public is so fickle that it's almost impossible to predict what they will like and what they won't.

STACY: What about market research and focus groups. I took a lot of classes on qualitative research in college. That's why Alice hired me.

WAYNE: Aaah, forget about that stuff. It never works. The only two things that matters are drive and luck...STRIVE NOT TO SUCK. Two keys: DRIVE and LUCK.

STACY: OK, so what are we supposed to do here? I'm lost.

WAYNE: Well the drive is clearly here, in each and every one of these. You don't finish a manuscript, print it out, wrap it up, and mail it off without a will to succeed. But only half of these are lucky. *(Divides pile into halves, points at one)*. This half. *(Sweeps other half of manuscripts onto the floor.)* Clean those losers up later. Right now we got some manuscripts to arbitrarily sift through.

STACY: But...you're not even going to read those?

WAYNE: Why would I bother? They don't have what it takes. That certain *je n'ai sais quoi*. Oh wait, yes I do know what: Blind luck. They don't got it. Now the other half, there's how many here?

STACY: Fifteen.

WAYNE: Half of these are decent, good even. But they'll never sell. This half. *(Takes top eight manuscripts and dumps them on the floor)*. This means you're left with about seven or so. Of which half again, the big half, that means this one, this one and this one. And this one. *(He drops each manuscript on the floor as he picks them up)* They are only good enough to have the cover glanced at in passing, and the others, well there's just not time in today's fast-paced editorial world to be that that...

STACY: Thorough?

WAYNE: No.

STACY: Careful? Detail-oriented?

WAYNE: No. *(Thinks.)* Weak.

ALICE: Weak?

WAYNE: Weak.

STACY: So, I don't even read the manuscripts before selecting one to go with?

WAYNE: I used to, but it's not really worth it. This way we can head right out for a coffee break and then begin prepping this book *(picks up and holds aloft the randomly selected manuscript)* for publication.

ALICE: What's it called?

WAYNE: It says here "101 recipes for better self-esteem. Colon, eating your way to a better you." You see! It's perfect. This book, selected using my new method,

actually fits not just one, but two sectors, which means the cross-promotion opportunities increase by a factor of 2.

ALICE: They double.

WAYNE: Exactly!

ALICE: Is it any good?

WAYNE: Is anything we publish any good?

ALICE: Point taken. *(Pause)* Alright I'll begin drawing up some graphics for the pre-screening. It'd be nice to have something in the works when that Mick guy comes. I'll get in touch with the author.

WAYNE: Nah. Don't bother. They just slow things down.

STACY: Alright, well I guess my manuscript vetting is done. What's next?

WAYNE: Well, even with all this free time I just earned, I'm still too busy for, uh little people. No offense.

STACY: Hardly any taken.

WAYNE: Good. *(Announces)* I'm tough. *(Pause)* Now this Mick Stone character should be coming along shortly, so I'm going to need to prepare. *(Thinks. Drops down and begins doing push-ups)*. This is the thing: I've gotta be TOO FIT TO QUIT. Like it says in the book: a sound mind needs a sound body, you gotta be tough to act tough. Etc. That kind of thing.

ALICE: Alright, so you toughen up, I'm going to help Stacy here get set up in the city.

WAYNE: Right on. Gotta get tough girl, or this city will tear you apart like a pack of wild dogs and then make a necklace out of your teeth to wear around their neck when they go out clubbing.

STACY: OK. Thank you.

WAYNE: No problem, save yourself the 20 years of disappointment I've been living. Don't ask, take. C'mere and sit on my back, I need to get these biceps buff double quick.

ALICE: Listen Wayne, why don't you go 'Earn your Burn', or whatever it is, in your office. That way we can carry on with the work required to keep this office functioning.

WAYNE: Nice! *(High-fives himself)*

(Wayne exits)

ALICE: Honestly! I am so sorry. That man is such a sweetheart, he's just really struggling these days. He's been missing something in his life to latch onto, and now he's latched onto something I'm afraid he won't let go.

STACY: Like a dog.

ALICE: I'm going to pretend you didn't say that.

STACY: Thank you. *(Pause)* He's not at all how you described him.

ALICE: No. He's not. He's not normally a raving lunatic. *(Pause)* Shit! I wonder how it's going to go down with this Mick Stone from head office. It could be a complete disaster.

STACY: Uh-oh.

ALICE: I think he's gone into shock. Yeah that would explain it.

STACY: Maybe we can calm him down in time for his meeting. I'm trying to remember from my first aid class. Ah, if somebody is in shock... Aaah. Um... *(Snaps fingers)*

ALICE: Yes? Go on.

STACY: OK, I think we need to lay him flat on the ground and cover him with a blanket.

ALICE: I'm not sure he'll agree to that.

STACY: You're right. Maybe we could—

ALICE: And I don't think he's going to go for any deep breathing either, unless it was in his book.

STACY: Oh.

ALICE: I've never seen him like this, but I have seen other people who are like this, and they do not take suggestions very well. Unless it's their suggestion. Or a suggestion that they agree with and then take credit for later.

STACY: Yeah. My dad's like that a little.

ALICE: Wrong. Men are like that.

STACY: I have a lot to learn about publishing.

ALICE: Yes. Yes you do.

STACY: Well I've got an idea, why don't we let this Mick Stone come in, and then explain how good this "Power Force" book is, and let him decide what to do?

ALICE: That's a good idea, unfortunately one that would backfire completely. We're not supposed to fall for this pulp we sell. "Don't get high off your own supply." Cardinal rule of publishing.

STACY: I have a lot to learn about publishing.

ALICE: Yes. Yes you do. Any other ideas?

STACY: No.

ALICE: OK. Then there's only one thing left to do. *(Puts feet on desk and pulls out a magazine.)*

STACY: What are you do—? Ah, I see. *(Carefully puts her own feet on her desk)*
We just let this sort itself out.

ALICE: If there's nothing we can do. And I'm pretty sure there isn't. Then we just sit back and hope. If we're lucky it might be entertaining. If we're unlucky, we'll be drunk and jobless by noon.

STACY: Drunk?

ALICE: I don't know what you're going to do if your whole working life turns into an empty blank, but me, I'm going to get blind drunk and go to the strip club.

STACY: Well, I might do that as well. I know how to party y'know. I did go to college.

ALICE: Excellent, my place is about a three block walk from here. We can head there for the Star Wars drinking game before we hit the 'Nipple Tipple.'

STACY: I'd love that. Man, Yoda has really bad grammar.

ALICE: And Luke whines all the time.

(Phone rings)

STACY: Maxcap Publishing Intern Stacy, unpaid, inexperienced, and overenthusiastic answering... I see, OK Send him up.

(They take their feet off their desks and prepare themselves for MICK STONE'S arrival)

ALICE: So this is it.

STACY: I guess so.

(WAYNE appears)

WAYNE: Is that him? He's coming up isn't he? No fucking problem. I learned some great tactics about how to FORCE YOUR COURSE. Strategies to make them agree with you! If I can remember everything from the book it will all go very, very well. *(He does some shadow boxing).*

ALICE: Well, we're here, and we'll do our best to support you.

WAYNE: Thank you ladies, that's very sweet. You know Stacy, I think you're a really quick study; Alice has really taken a liking to you.

(ALICE nods)

STACY: Aww. Thanks so much you guys.

WAYNE: Now: one of you so much thinks about stepping out of line here I'll fire you so fast you'll be begging for change before lunch.

ALICE: You know what Wayne? This has gone on long eno—

(MICK STONE enters; he is mid-to-late thirties and wearing a Cosby sweater. Throughout the following scene he continues to steal glances at Stacy.)

WAYNE: Hello, Mick. Mick Stone. Mr Stone. Mick, can I call you Mick?

MICK: Of course.

WAYNE: Great. Mick it's nice to meet you, I've heard so much about you. Thanks for coming down here on such short notice.

MICK: Actually I've been trying to contact you for over a week.

WAYNE: Yeah, I've been extremely bus—

MICK: (*Forces a laugh*) Like hell you have! Too busy to respond to inquiries from Senior Management? You haven't answered emails or phone calls. My assistant Carl told me—

WAYNE: Carl's your assistant? Like, Carl Reading? The Carl who hired me?

MICK: Yes. What the— Look, the point is this place needs a strong hand to guide it, and some absentee loser isn't going to cut it—

WAYNE: (*Crumpling*) Look things have been going really poorly for me at home. My ex-wife's moved in with our pool boy. Into our spare bedroom. I bought a track suit...

MICK: My heart goes out to you.

WAYNE: Thank you. That means alo—

MICK: But my *head* is focused on turning this office around.

WAYNE: Right.

MICK: And if you're not the man to do it, then I need somebody who is.

WAYNE: I think I am the man. At least I could be. I mean I'm trying to be.

MICK: (*Continuing to stare at Stacy*) Hardly. Look at yourself. It's a nice tracksuit, but I'm not sure you can hand—

STACY: (*Standing up*) You're looking at the man.

MICK: What?

STACY: Me. I'm the fucking man around here. And you're staring at me.

MICK: No. I haven't been staring at you.

STACY: Yes. Yes you have. Since you first got here.

(Mick shuffles uncomfortably)

Its ok, I'm alright with that. I find it flattering.

MICK: Oh. Ok. You're very pretty.

STACY: And I'm new here, and I'm young. But I can see those aren't strikes against me, are they?

MICK: Not necessarily...

STACY: Good I thought not. Now I don't know who told you to come in here guns a-blazing and start yelling at a long standing employee who is clearly in a lot of pain, but I'm not sure it's the right play here. In fact I've only been here a day and *(Checks clock)* 2 hours, but I think we can handle this situation like sensitive book-loving adult professionals. Do you agree?

MICK: Yes.

STACY: Good. So quit being such a fucking dick. *(Covers mouth)*

MICK: *(Regaining composure)* Now listen up a second. You're young, you're pretty and you got a mouthful of sass, but what the hell do you do here?

STACY: I'm an unpaid intern. Started yesterday.

MICK: Ah. Great.

STACY: Sorry about the 'fucking dick' comment. It just slipped out. Or I didn't mean it. Take your pick.

MICK: I'm going to go with you didn't mean it.

STACY: Thank you very much. What I was trying to say is, I've picked up a whole lot of useful information tips and strategies from these two here, in a very short

amount of time. And I'm convinced we're going to be able to take this office to the next level, firing silver bullets the whole time.

MICK: Really?

STACY: Yes really.

(Wayne and Alice shrug and nod)

STACY: In fact, we're already drafting up a proposal to launch our new book "101 recipes for better self-esteem. Colon. Eating your way to a better you."

MICK: Interesting.

STACY: And the fact that it actually fits into two criteria means double the marketing opportunities, twice the shelf space, and for half the production costs.

WAYNE: She's right

ALICE: She's good.

MICK: She is good.

WAYNE: I taught her that assertiveness stuff, this morning.

ALICE: I watched him do push-ups. While he was teaching her that stuff.

MICK: Very impressive. Well, my oh my. I'm convinced. *(To Wayne)* I say we have a fistfight: you win: you keep your job, I win: I get to date Stacy.

STACY: What?

WAYNE: It's on. It's on like it's never been.

(Elaborate slow motion fistfight ensues, complete with sweep kicks, karate, and climactic music)

ALICE: *(Finally pulling a whistle from underneath her blouse and blowing it)*
Stop, stop it! *(Breaks the fight up)* That was a great fight, a clean fight.

(The two men huff and puff and check their respective injuries)

MICK: Thank you.

WAYNE: Thanks.

ALICE: But there's got to be another way to work through this. And ensure that Wayne can keep his job.

MICK: I call that fight a draw. *(Long pause)* So he can stay.

(Wayne celebrates like a prize-fighter)

ALICE: Unless...

MICK: Unless what?

ALICE: ...you want to promote him.

MICK: Why would I do that?

ALICE: Well, I saw his New Approach to manuscript vetting, and while I wasn't convinced it was a good idea. It worked. It worked quite well, in fact.

WAYNE: *(Nodding emphatically)* Yes it did.

(They all look to Stacy)

STACY: It was weird, and unethical. But yeah. It is effective. It even makes a strange kind of sense. It's 'street smart' more than 'book-smart.'

MICK: So on the basis of that we give him a promotion?

ALICE: That and fifteen years of exemplary service. Service that has seen the demand for self-help and cookbooks explode by 4% per annum. And he has managed to taper off demands for autobiographies by 15%.

WAYNE: At this rate autobiographies should be extinct within a decade.

MICK: Oh thank God!

ALICE: It would be so nice, wouldn't it?

MICK: Yeah.

STACY: Wait a second, what's the problem with autobiographies?

WAYNE: Oh Stacy. Trying to run before you can walk. (*Shakes his head*) All in good time.

ALICE: Listen, the point is: this man is damn good at his job, and he deserves more responsibility.

WAYNE: And I did land a couple solid right hooks.

MICK: True.

ALICE: So what do you say?

MICK: Well, why not? I thought this would be an unpleasant visit, but between meeting the bewitching Stacy, having a good old fashioned fist-fight, and seeing what capable hands this office is in, I'm going to let this cream (*gestures at Wayne*) rise to the top.

WAYNE: Really? Thank you sir. See ladies, this assertiveness stuff really pays off. I'm going to the happiest place on Earth: Head Office!

MICK: Alice you're going to be in charge around here. You're promoted to whatever Wayne was before he is what he is now, and Stacy, you're whatever Alice was before she took Wayne's job so Wayne could come work with me at

head office. And also, if you're free tonight I know a fantastic restaurant in Bellaton.

STACY: That's a really sweet offer. I'm honoured.

MICK: Well, thank you.

STACY: But I don't think that's a good idea. Don't shit where you eat. Second rule of publishing.

MICK: *(chuckles appreciatively)* I like this girl. She's sharp.

WAYNE: Look Mick, we better get out of here. A promotion like this means a four-martini lunch. On expense.

MICK: At least.

WAYNE: Race you down the stairs.

MICK: Nah, I'm still a little hurting from the— *(he sprints out the door, giggling like a child. Wayne takes off in hot pursuit, waving as he exits)*

ALICE: Wow! So...

STACY: What just happened?

ALICE: That was very surreal. But good news. Wayne's got his promotion, and we're free to run this shop as we see fit.

STACY: So does this mean I get an actual job. What about my internship?

ALICE: It means you get an actual job after your internship. If it goes well.

STACY: That is complete garbage! I put myself on the line back there. I fought for this arrangement. What bullshit!

ALICE: Yes it is bullshit. Welcome to the world of publishing. Now call for that apartment would you?

STACY: Oh right. I will absolutely.

ALICE: And because today's a special day, I think we should still go get drunk at lunch.

STACY: That would be fantastic. *(Tries a Yoda impression)* 'Get drunk at work you will, enjoy job you do.'

(They laugh. Stacy picks up the phone and begins to dial, the lights fade to black)