

THE MEETING

by

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CHARACTERS

FRANK A man in his fifties.
STRATTON A man in his forties.
COLE A man in his twenties.
ELLEN A woman in her thirties.

ONE Stratton's office, Monday morning.
TWO Stratton's office, Tuesday morning.
THREE Stratton's office, Wednesday morning.
FOUR Stratton's office, Wednesday evening.

ONE

An office. A door upstage centre, flanked by bookshelves and cupboards.

Left, a big desk, computer, phones, a high-backed chair.
Right, two sofas around a low table.

Enter Stratton, fortyish, suit, tie, carrying a laptop bag and talking on his mobile. Goes to the desk, puts down his bag. Sniffs the air.

STRATTON
(into phone)
So then she -
(...)
Wait, wait, was this before or -

Stratton goes to a cupboard, takes out a can of air freshener, sprays it around.

STRATTON
(into phone)
So then what did she -
(...)
So, so this was while you were still there -
(...)
She what?

Stratton freezes.

STRATTON
(into phone)
What did she -
(...)
What?
(...)
In the eye? Christ -
(...)
Darling, what do you mean, 'she didn't exactly hit him'?
(MORE)

STRATTON (CONT'D)

(...)
 So is he okay?
 (...)
 Well, of course I'm worried about her, but what -
 (...)
 No, I don't always side with the other -
 (...)
 Well, you remember what happened with that other boy, whatsisname -
 (...)
 No, darling, sorry, the teacher said -
 (...)
 I was there, darling, and the -
 (...)
 Okay, okay. Okay. I know, I'm sure this is different -
 (...)
 Well, alright, if she's -
 (...)
 Okay, the thing is I've got this meeting, this rather important -
 (...)
 Yes, of course, I'll ring the school but I can't now, I've got this, this very, actually rather crucial -
 (...)
 Okay, okay, I'll -
 (...)
 I'll -
 (...)
 I promise -
 (...)
 Talk later. Bye. Love you. Bye, bye.
 (...)
 Bye.

Stratton hangs up. He returns the air freshener to the cupboard.

Stratton goes to his desk, patting his pockets, looking for something. Checks the desktop, then starts opening drawers, hunting. No luck. Stratton picks up his desk phone, punches a single number.

STRATTON

Lucy, have you seen my pen? You know, the one that -
 (...)
 Yes, exactly -
 (...)
 Okay -
 (...)

(MORE)

STRATTON (CONT'D)

No, no, no, it's probably at home.
Thanks, Lucy.

Stratton hangs up, starts searching his pockets again. The desk phone rings. Stratton grabs it eagerly.

STRATTON

Have you found it?
(disappointed)
Oh, okay.
(...)
Yes, put her on ...
(...)
Claire, if you're after Jack, he's
not here yet, we're seeing him in -
(checks watch)
- in twenty minutes, so -
(...)
What? He what?
(...)
He can't?

The door opens and COLE sticks his head in. Thirtyish, casually dressed, headphones, shoulder bag. Stratton beckons him in.

STRATTON

(into phone)
- well, it's very short notice -

Stratton paces. Cole sits on one of the sofas, puts his feet up on the table. Takes a laptop out of his bag, opens it.

STRATTON

- and Cole's already here and,
you know, we really need to move
on with this -
(...)
Yes - no! No, no, totally not
your fault. We'll just have to
reschedule for tomorrow, then.
Why don't you talk to Lucy and -
what?
(...)
He's not coming in at all?

Stratton has moved over behind Cole on the sofa. He pulls off Cole's headphones to get his attention.

STRATTON

Jack isn't coming in at all?
(...)
Jack's gone?
(...)
You mean 'gone' as in -
(...)
- as in 'gone', right.
(MORE)

STRATTON (CONT'D)

(...)
 They what?
 (...)
 My God.
 (...)
 So, so, what do we, where does
 that leave us? Because we were
 about to -
 (...)
 Okay, but we've been working on
 this, me and Jack -
 (a look from Cole)
 - and Cole - we've been working
 on this for - for -
 (...)
 - exactly, and Jack has just been
 fantastic, so, you know, I'm a
 little concerned by the whole, I
 mean, where is he? Can I call him,
 give him my - what?
 (...)
 Really? My God. Well, okay, if
 that's the, the -
 (...)
 Okay, right, right. Okay, thanks.

Stratton hangs up.

COLE

What?

STRATTON

Jack's not coming in.

COLE

What, he's ill or something?

STRATTON

No, he's gone.

COLE

Gone? How do you mean, gone?

STRATTON

Gone! This morning, first thing.
 He was escorted, security
 escorted him off the, off the -

COLE

Jack? Security escorted Jack?

STRATTON

- they marched him out, they had
 him by the arms apparently -

COLE

What did he do, Stratton?

STRATTON

I don't know, he can't talk,
there's an injunction, he can't
talk to anyone, there's a gagging
thing, a, I don't know, a
confidentiality thing, we can't
call him or, or -

COLE

What the fuck did he do?

STRATTON

I don't know! We have to make
some calls, find out what the,
the -

COLE

- so the meeting's off -

STRATTON

I'll have to, I'll have to talk
to Frank, see what he, see what
we -

COLE

So the meeting's off -

STRATTON

They're going to call me back and
reschedule -

COLE

How can they reschedule if Jack's
gone?

STRATTON

I don't know, Cole!

COLE

They said they'd reschedule? Are
you sure?

STRATTON

That's what she, you know, Jack's
umm -

COLE

Thing, yeah -

STRATTON

- Claire, that's what Claire
said. But she's in bits, she was
babbling, so who knows -

COLE

What the fuck did Jack do,
Stratt?

STRATTON
Who can we call? Who do we know
over the road?

COLE
Jack, that's who we know over the
road -

STRATTON
Beth. Call Beth.

Pause.

COLE
Beth? What would Beth know?

STRATTON
I thought she had a friend over
there -

COLE
Yeah, well -

STRATTON
A friend in HR -

COLE
Yeah, well, the thing is -

STRATTON
If anyone knows anything, it'll be
someone in HR -

COLE
Thing is, I really don't want to
call Beth -

STRATTON
Why not? What's happened?

COLE
Nothing's happened.

STRATTON
Cole, please, we, we need to, to -

COLE
It's just a bit, you know, a bit
wossername -

STRATTON
Come on, we need the, the back
story -

COLE
Okay, okay, I'll call her, for
fuck's sake -

STRATTON
You call Beth, I'll call Frank.

COLE
I'm calling her, alright?

Cole fingers his mobile. Stratton dials his desk phone.

STRATTON
(into phone)
It's Stratton, is he there?
(...)
Okay, I'll hold.

Pause. Both waiting. Then:

COLE
(into phone)
Hey.
(...)
Yeah, yeah, okay, don't start -
(...)
No, no, I did not - hey, don't
hang up! I - what?
(...)
No! The place was rammed, I went
home didn't I?

Cole stands, walks as far away from Stratton as possible.

COLE
(into phone)
Oh really? You didn't look bored to
me -
(...)
Yeah, doing shots with whatsisname,
(...)
No wait, that is so, you are so -
(...)
Well that's where you're wrong,
isn't it, cos that's why I'm
ringing ...

STRATTON
(into phone)
Yes, I'm still here -
(...)
Well, it's important that I, that
we -
(...)
No, no, no, I'll hold -

COLE
(into mobile)
Okay, okay -
(lowering his voice)
'Sorry'. Okay?
(MORE)

COLE (CONT'D)
 (a little louder)
 'Sorry', alright?

STRATTON
 (into phone)
 Yes? Good, good. Great. Thanks.
 Bye.
 (hangs up)
 Frank's popping down -

COLE
 So we're okay now, yeah?
 (...)
 Okay, sweet - hey, wait, did you
 hear about Jack Holland? Apparently
 he's -
 (...)
 Absolutely! He's gone! That's what
 we heard, so we're totally -
 (...)
 What?

Stratton gets up from his desk, walks over to Cole.

COLE
 He what?
 (...)
 Joking. Joking -
 (...)
 Wow.

Stratton hovers over Cole, trying to listen in.

STRATTON
 What?

Cole waves Stratton away.

COLE
 (into phone)
 No way!

STRATTON
What?

COLE
 (into phone)
 It's Stratton, I'm in his office,
 we were just -
 (...)
 No, that's not why I -
 (...)
 - I rang to -
 (...)
 Will you just listen? I rang to -
 (...)
 Oh fuck off Beth -
 (...)
 (MORE)

COLE (CONT'D)

Okay, you know what, I retract my apology -

(...)

Retract, look it up -

(as she hangs up on him)

Bitch! Fuck's sake!

Pause.

STRATTON

What? What?

COLE

He was naked.

STRATTON

Jack?

COLE

Yes, Jack! was naked. They found him naked in a meeting room.

STRATTON

Naked in a meeting room?

COLE

That's what Beth heard. The room was trashed, he was raving apparently.

STRATTON

Raving? Jack?

COLE

Shouting and screaming, apparently -

STRATTON

Jack? Raving?

COLE

According to Beth -

STRATTON

No, I'm sorry, that can't be -

COLE

According to Beth. Bollock-naked, raving like a madman -

STRATTON

No, no, Jack is one of the, Jack is about the sanest guy I know -

COLE

I'm just saying, that's what they're saying -

STRATTON

That's what Beth's saying -

COLE

That's what Beth's mate over the road was saying -

STRATTON

Jack? Ranting and raving?

COLE

Waving his bits around -

The door right opens and FRANK - fiftyish, impeccably booted and suited - enters.

FRANK

Put my out of my misery,
gentlemen, I beg you. Take me out
and shoot me -

Frank collapses elegantly on the sofa next to Cole, puts his feet up on the table.

STRATTON

Frank, have you heard about Jack Holland?

FRANK

Let me paint the picture. I'm in a meeting with a man, a man who has come to me with a proposal. Now this man is a rising star, he's not just flavour of the month - Cole, dear boy, do I have your attention? - he's flavour of the year, of the decade even, so it behoves me to pay attention to his proposal which may shower us - you, me, this great organisation of ours - with untold riches, so there he is, proposing away, and there I am, listening away, but in fact - 'in reality' - I am looking at Mr Flavour's suit which is a perfectly respectable suit in itself: a single-breasted, three-button, dark blue worsted. A suit, in other words, which could cause no offence to anyone, but then I notice -

STRATTON

Frank -

FRANK

- then I notice his pocket handkerchief.

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)

Now I have no objection to the pocket handkerchief *per se*, but not - emphatically not - when it matches the tie -

COLE

Oh my God.

FRANK

Wait! When it matches the tie - and the shirt.

COLE

Oh. My. God.

FRANK

Suddenly my world is turned upside down, I am *completement bouleversee*, I am seeing Mr Flavour in an entirely new light. As I listen to his, his - Cole, what's that phrase that gives me cancer?

COLE

'Mission Statement'.

FRANK

Exactly. As I listen to his, his ... 'thing', I find I can no longer take it seriously, I am now convinced that within it must lurk a failure of taste, a matching handkerchief as it were, a fatal flaw that renders it worthless, and despite the fact that I was unable to detect this flaw, I sent Mr Flavour packing. On what grounds? A sartorial indiscretion, nothing more. How will that play on the Tenth Floor, do you think, when I'm called to account for my actions? The man who turned down the Beatles, the man who turned down Microsoft!

COLE

His handkerchief matched his tie, Frank -

FRANK

- and his shirt!

COLE

The man was a cunt, end of.

STRATTON

Can we, can we just talk about the rather pressing matter of Jack Holland?

FRANK

Ah. The matter of Jack.

STRATTON

Because we should be sitting down with him now, this very minute, signing off on the, the -

FRANK

Indeed you should -

COLE

Jack's gone -

STRATTON

Security escorted Jack off the premises -

COLE

Dragged him off bollock naked, screaming the odds -

FRANK

Hush, children. You are getting overexcited.

STRATTON

But he has gone, hasn't he?

FRANK

Yes, Jack has indeed gone.

STRATTON

What did he do, Frank? What's the story?

FRANK

Jack, as I understand it, was under a lot of pressure.

STRATTON

We're all under pressure, Frank, but Jack wasn't the kind to, to -

FRANK

Marital pressure, Stratton.

STRATTON

Marital pressure?

FRANK

It transpires that his wife kicked him out -

STRATTON

Sarah? Sarah kicked him out?

FRANK

If 'Sarah' is his wife, then, yes, 'Sarah' kicked him out.

STRATTON

But Jack is, is - I mean, his family is everything to him -

FRANK

But not he to them, it seems. He was given his marching orders. So he camped out in a meeting-room. Where he became a tad over-wrought. This did not go down well with the powers that be -

STRATTON

Sarah kicked him out? Why, for God's sake?

FRANK

It seems he was conducting an inappropriate relationship -

COLE

He what?

FRANK

- with a colleague -

COLE

No way -

FRANK

- which they tend to frown upon over the road.

STRATTON

But this, this is - Frank, are you sure about this?

FRANK

I must emphasise, gentlemen, that it is completely unsubstantiated. Gossip, in other words, which of course we all deplore blah blah blah -

STRATTON

Jack? Jack?

FRANK

Stratton, please remove the look of stunned horror from your face, it's beginning to grate.

STRATTON

But I've known Jack for years, and this is completely out of character.

COLE

A secret shagger -

STRATTON

Completely out of character -

COLE

The old perv -

FRANK

I must admit, even I was mildly surprised, but please, can we not allow this shattering news to distract us from the matter in hand-

Stratton's mobile rings.

STRATTON

Sorry, sorry ...

Stratton checks the number, answers it.

STRATTON

Hi, hi, I'm - yes, I'm in a -
(...)
Okay, just, just -

STRATTON makes an apologetic gesture to FRANK and COLE, and exits.

FRANK

Talk to me, Cole.

COLE

Jack's gone? Best news in ages.

FRANK

Really?

COLE

Absolutely. We've been sitting here for weeks -

FRANK

Months, actually -

COLE

- sitting here for months, and round and round they go, Jack and Stratt, the licensing, the revenue stream, Asia for fuck's sake, round and round, doing my head in.

(MORE)

COLE (CONT'D)

Jack was risk averse, a classic
jobsworth. Jack's gone?
Hoofuckinggray.

FRANK

And Stratton?

COLE

Getting worse. Micro-manages
everything to death. And his wife,
silly cow, rings him five, ten
times a day. We're in a meeting
last week, she rings him, major
crisis, her car's running out of
petrol, she can't fill it, got a
phobia about petrol pumps or
something, he has to send Lucy,
wife won't let Lucy drive her car
without wearing surgical gloves,
it's a fucking circus, Frank -

STRATTON enters, talking into his mobile.

STRATTON

Open the cupboard and -

(...)

On the left, the switch on the
left, darling. Alright?

(...)

Yes, I promise -

(...)

Okay, bye, bye.

(quiet)

Love you -

(...)

Bye.

(hangs up)

Sorry, sorry -

FRANK

Stratton, Cole here was saying that
Jack's unseemly exit may not be
such a bad thing.

STRATTON

How so?

COLE

Look, Jack's gone, poor Jack, cry
me a river, all I'm saying is,
bottom line, now he's gone, maybe
we can crack on, push this fucker
through with someone else.

STRATTON

I'm sorry but I've known Jack for
years, I've been to his house -

COLE
Oh purlease -

STRATTON
No, listen Cole, there's got to be
room in what we do for, for -

COLE
For what, Stratt? Tell me.

STRATTON
- some sort of mutual respect -

COLE
Mutual bollocks, Stratt -

STRATTON
You know, Cole, sometimes you, you -

COLE
What? What?

STRATTON
Sometimes you, you -

COLE
Spit it out, mate -

STRATTON
I - I -

FRANK
Children, children -

And Stratton's desk phone rings. Silence for a beat. Then
Stratton goes to answer it.

STRATTON
(into phone)
Yes, Lucy.
(...)
They said what?
(...)
Really?
(...)
Tomorrow? Are you sure?
(...)
Well, I - I - what's in the diary?
(...)
Okay, well I, I suppose that's
okay, then -
(...)
Who? Say again? Hold on, let me,
let me write that down ...

Stratton looks in one inside pocket, then another. Then
clicks his fingers, makes a writing gesture at Frank and
Cole. Cole shrugs.

STRATTON
 (into phone)
 Hold on, what was it again? Helen?

Frank stands, takes out a pen, gives it to Stratton.

STRATTON
 (into phone)
 Helen ... what? Davis? Okay -
 (...)
 Okay, thanks, Lucy.
 (hangs up)
 They've rescheduled. They're
 sending someone else. Tomorrow
 morning, ten-thirty.

Frank holds out a hand for his pen. Stratton gives it to him.

COLE
 - someone else? Who?

STRATTON
 A woman -

COLE
 A woman?

STRATTON
 Helen something -
 (reading his note)
 Helen Davis?

COLE
 Who the fuck is Helen Davis?

FRANK
Ellen. Ellen David.

STRATTON
 You know this woman, Frank?

FRANK
 She's one of Jack's team -

COLE
 - great, a minion -

FRANK
 - she wrote the original report -

COLE
 They're sending a minion, it's
 bullshit bollocks while they re-
 group -

STRATTON
 - she wrote it? I thought Jack
 wrote it.

FRANK

Jack doesn't write his reports any more than I do.

STRATTON

But he never, he never mentioned her name -

FRANK

Why would he? When Cole here pens one of his stream-of-consciousness rants, I brandish it at meetings as if it were my own -

STRATTON

- no, but seriously, Frank -

FRANK

- having rendered it into something approximating the English language -

COLE

A fucking minion -

FRANK

Cole dear boy, you are so not a minion.

COLE

Her. She's the minion. Wotsername, Helen.

FRANK

Ellen.

STRATTON

What's she like, Frank?

FRANK

No idea, old sock -

COLE

Time-wasting until they find someone to take over from Jack -

STRATTON

Do they know about Jack on the Tenth Floor?

COLE

- trying to keep us on-message -

FRANK

- oh yes. They know.

STRATTON

So what do they, I mean, how do we play this?

FRANK

What was it you said, Cole? 'Crack on, push this fucker through'?

COLE

Totally -

STRATTON

But, but we don't know whether this woman, Helen -

FRANK

Ellen -

STRATTON

We don't know whether this 'Ellen' has the authority to, to sign off on the deal -

COLE

She's an underling, Stratt!

FRANK

Well, at ten-thirty tomorrow you'll find out, won't you? We must 'go with the flow', as my darling wife used to say.

STRATTON

Maybe, maybe you should sit in on this one, Frank.

FRANK

Me? Certainly not.

COLE

Frank's not going to meet with a minion, is he?

FRANK

We'll see. In the meantime, a gentle shot across your bows. You know I love you all, in my twisted way.

COLE

Yeah, we're all loved up, Frank.

FRANK

Except on the tenth floor where they are not loved up at all, I'm afraid. In fact, alarm bells are ringing up there. They think that the abrupt and undignified manner of Jack Holland's departure means that our little project is about to go ... Cole, what's that phrase that gives me cancer?

COLE
'Pear-shaped'.

FRANK
Exactly. Let that not come to pass,
I beg of you. Because if it does, I
will cease to love you, the sky
will fall in, and darkness will
reign.

Frank exits. Silence as Stratton and Cole reflect.

COLE
Shit.

Pause.

COLE
What was her name again?

STRATTON
Ellen. Ellen David.

Pause.

COLE
Bitch on wheels. You wait and see.

BLACK OUT

TWO

Stratton's office, the following morning.

Stratton enters, talking on his mobile. Sniffs the air, goes to the cupboard, sprays air freshener.

STRATTON
 (into phone)
 Yes, darling, I'm listening ...

Stratton returns the air freshener to the cupboard.

STRATTON
 So how did she -
 (...)
What?

Stratton freezes.

STRATTON
 Bleeding? Bleeding? My God -
 (...)
 You mean profusely or, or -
 (...)
 So, more of a graze, then -
 (...)
 No, I'm not trying to play it down,
 I'm just -
 (...)
 I'm just -
 (...)
 Well, she's got to learn, she
 mustn't destroy other children's -
 what?
 (...)
 Well, where did she get the lighter
 from, that's the -
 (...)
 I'm just asking, darling, because -
 (...)
 Okay, okay, but I've got this very
 important meeting, darling -
 (...)
 Yes, as soon as I come out of the
 meeting -
 (...)
 As soon as I come out of the -
 (...)
 As soon as I -
 (...)
 Okay. Okay. Give her my love, tell
 her Daddy is, is -
 (...)
 No, just say -
 (...)

(MORE)

STRATTON (CONT'D)

Okay, okay, I was just -
 (...)
 Okay, bye. Love you. Bye -
 (...)
 Bye.
 (...)
 Bye, bye.

Stratton hangs up, puts his mobile on the desk. Sticks a hand in an inside pocket, then remembers. He picks up his deskphone, punches in a short number.

STRATTON

(into phone)
 Lucy, any sign of my pen?
 (...)
 Did you look in the -
 (...)
 No? Okay, fine -
 (...)
 No, I looked everywhere at home -
 (...)
 Don't worry, I'm sure it will turn
 up -
 (...)
 No, don't! Seriously, Lucy, it's
 not the cleaner, absolutely not,
 Mblele would never -
 (...)
 Well, I don't agree and anyway, I
 don't want to go down that road,
 really. I'm sure it will turn up -
 (...)
 Okay, great, thanks Lucy.

Stratton hangs up, goes to the sofas and low table, starts straightening magazines, arranging glasses, water etc.

Enter Cole.

COLE

Hey, Stratt, guess what?
 Unfuckingbelievable. I was in
 Treats last night with Beth and her
 mate -

STRATTON

I was thinking I should sit here -

COLE

Guess what she told us -

Cole sits, gets his laptop out of his bag.

STRATTON

No, no, you sit here -

Stratton indicates the end of the other sofa.

COLE
Stratt, you've got to listen to
this -

Cole moves.

STRATTON
- and I'll sit here -

Stratton sits at the other end of the same sofa as Cole.

COLE
- it's unfuckingbelievable -

STRATTON
- and she can sit there -

Stratton indicates the empty sofa.

STRATTON
- maybe that's a little
intimidating. Better if I sit here -

COLE
It was her!

Stratton moves to the empty sofa.

STRATTON
- then she can sit there -

Stratton indicates the angle where the sofas meet, i.e.
between the two men.

COLE
It was her, Stratt!

STRATTON
Who, Beth? What about her?

COLE
No, no, whatsername. Helen.

STRATTON
What about her?

COLE
It was her. It was her Jack was
having a thing with. His
'inappropriate relationship',
Stratt! It was her! Whatsername,
Helen!

STRATTON
Beth told you this?

COLE

Beth's mate! It started on some bonding weekend - you know, get your team over the river with a piece of string and a plank. Beth's mate was there.

STRATTON

Beth's mate?

STRATTON

Beth's mate in HR over the road. She was there for some of it, anyway.

STRATTON

Her mate?

COLE

Yeah. Or Beth's mate's mate, I dunno, whatever, anyway she was in the same group as Jack and wossername -

STRATTON

Beth's mate's mate -?

COLE

- yeah, and she says wossername was shagging Jack cross-eyed -

STRATTON

Beth's mate's mate was shagging Jack -

COLE

No! Keep up, Stratt, fuck's sake! This Helen was shagging him, shagging him like he's never been shagged before, epic sex, Jack's cross-eyed with it, he loses the plot completely, goes home one night, tells the wife he's 'in love', guess what, the wife kicks him out - then, then, wait for it, wossername, Helen, knocks him back, she's had second thoughts right, he's a married man, it'll never work blah blah, thanks for the memories, we'll always have Paris, bosh, poor old Jack is now truly fucked - goodbye marriage, goodbye house, hallo lawyers and, insult to injury, no more epic shagging. Cue music -

STRATTON

- this is just, this is just -

COLE

- no wonder poor old Jack goes ape
in a meeting-room -

STRATTON

- this is just gossip, and anyway -

The phone on Stratton's desk rings. Stratton gets up, goes to answer it.

STRATTON

(into phone)

Yes, Lucy.

COLE

Tell her to wait.

STRATTON

(into phone)

Ask her to wait, please Lucy. Thank
you.

(hangs up)

It's hearsay and anyway, it's none
of our business and -

COLE

Listen, Beth's mate says two years
ago this Helen was temping, temping
for Jack, next thing she writing
his reports, now she's taking his
fucking meetings! What did I tell
you, Stratton? A piece of work, a
bitch on wheels -

As he talks, Cole takes his coat off, flings it on one of the sofas along with his bag, adds magazines from the table until there's only a small space left at the upstage end of the sofa.

STRATTON

- and even if it's true, it has no
bearing on this meeting -

COLE

- so she can sit here -

Cole indicates the small space left at the end of one sofa.

COLE

- and we'll sit here because, and
excuse me for stating the obvious
Stratton, but the whole fucking point
is to intimidate her!

STRATTON

Cole, this is a meet-and-greet -

COLE
 Absolutely. Totally. I can't wait
 to meet-and-greet this bitch.

STRATTON
 - and I don't want it to be
 confrontational -

COLE
 I'm saying nothing, mate.

Stratton goes to his desk, picks up his phone, punches a
 number.

STRATTON
 Seriously, Cole.

COLE
 Not a word.

STRATTON
 (into phone)
 Show her in, please Lucy.

COLE
 Totally stumm -

The door opens and Ellen David stands on the threshold.
 Fortyish, soberly dressed. She's carrying a laptop bag and
 wearing a laminated visitors' badge.

STRATTON
 Ellen, come in. I'm Stratton -

Stratton extends his hand. Ellen shakes it.

STRATTON
 Good to meet you.

ELLEN
 And you. I've heard a lot about
 you.

Stratton guides her towards the sofas.

STRATTON
 And this is Cole.

Cole nods without looking up from his laptop.

ELLEN
 Hallo.

STRATTON
 Take a seat, please.

Stratton indicates the small space at the end of the sofa
 strewn with stuff but Ellen sits on the same sofa as Cole.

Cole looks up from his laptop. Ellen smiles at him, gets out her laptop. Cole moves further away from her.

Stratton clears a space for himself, sits at the end of the other sofa.

STRATTON

Ellen, can I get you anything?
Coffee? Water?

ELLEN

No, thank you -

COLE

So what's the story with old Jack then?

ELLEN

Well, that's, that's -

STRATTON

Cole, let's not -

COLE

I'm only asking -

ELLEN

No, no, I quite understand -

COLE

- I'm only asking because we've been working with old Jack for months, and suddenly, bosh, old Jack's gone 'cause he was bollock naked in a meeting-room -

ELLEN

Well, that's not quite -

COLE

'Allegedly' -

STRATTON

What Cole's trying to say is -

ELLEN

It's alright, really. It's been a very difficult time for all of us -

STRATTON

Of course, of course -

ELLEN

- but for legal reasons I can't discuss Mr Holland's current situation -

COLE

What's to discuss? Jack's gone.

ELLEN

Actually, he's on sick leave, indefinite sick leave, and there's every possibility that Mr Holland will return to work at some time in the future -

COLE

Joking -

ELLEN

- and of course we wish him well in that respect -

STRATTON

- as do we, as do we -

ELLEN

- and that really is all I can say about the matter, I'm afraid.

STRATTON

Well, I've been working with Jack for some time now and during that time, Jack has become a valued colleague and friend, so this is a genuine, a genuine blow, business aside of course -

ELLEN

Of course -

STRATTON

- and if there's some way you could pass on our best wishes to Jack -

ELLEN

Well, there are legal restraints which prevent me - us, that's to say any employees of the company, from communicating with Mr Holland. And he with us, of course -

STRATTON

Of course -

ELLEN

But that's contractual, nothing should be read into it -

STRATTON

Absolutely not.

Silence. Ellen crosses her legs, sits back. Cole hunches over his keyboard. Stabs at a key.

STRATTON

Would you like some water? There's still or sparkling.

ELLEN

No, thank you. I'm fine.

COLE

(not looking at her)
Okay, look - Helen, right? - can we move on please Helen and get a couple of things sorted?

ELLEN

Of course. But first, can I just say we're still absolutely committed to this deal?

STRATTON

Well, that's good to hear -

ELLEN

Subject, of course, to all the elements being in place -

COLE

They are in place, that's the thing, that's what we've been doing here -

STRATTON

- Jack was very happy, we were all very happy with the final agreement -

COLE

- what we've been doing, with Jack, is getting the elements in place, and yesterday, right, we were going to sign off, Jack was going to sign off on the deal, end of story, cue music -

STRATTON

Yes, that's pretty much where we're at - ready to sign off on the deal -

COLE

You see, what I, what we want to know is, can you?

STRATTON

Cole, it's perhaps a little early to -

COLE

I just want to know, Stratt - can she?

ELLEN
Can I what?

COLE
Can you sign off on the deal?

ELLEN
Well, the thing is -

COLE
Because if you can't, what we need,
no disrespect Helen, is to be in
the room with someone who can.

ELLEN
I take your point, but the problem
is, Mr Holland didn't keep me in
the loop regarding the
negotiations.

COLE
Okay, so what we need, you see, is
to be in the room with someone who
was in the loop and, and can sign
off on the deal -

ELLEN
The problem is, Mr Holland didn't
keep anyone in the loop.

Pause.

STRATTON
We'd - we'd be happy to talk you
through the whole thing, show you
the projections, the research -

COLE
Can you sign off on the deal,
Helen?

ELLEN
I'll need to familiarise myself -

COLE
Can you?

Pause.

ELLEN
Yes, I can.
(beat)
And it's Ellen.

COLE
That's what I said.

ELLEN

Did you? I'm sorry.

STRATTON

This is, this is excellent. As I said, we, I, both of us, whichever, would be very happy to take you through the contract step-by-step -

ELLEN

Thank you, that would be very helpful.

STRATTON

In fact we could crack on immediately -

ELLEN

Unfortunately I've got meetings for the rest of the day -

STRATTON

Well, whenever you, you -

ELLEN

Tomorrow would be good -

STRATTON

Absolutely, let's pencil in tomorrow -

ELLEN

In the meantime, perhaps you could email me the contract as it stands so that I can look it over.

STRATTON

You mean you haven't read the latest draft?

ELLEN

No, I haven't.

STRATTON

But surely your legal people have seen it -

ELLEN

He hadn't communicated with the legal department for some weeks.

(beat)

Or anyone else for that matter.

COLE

Perhaps he had something else on his mind.

ELLEN

Well, he was - is a very busy man.

Cole laughs.

STRATTON

But surely it's on his, his ...

COLE

- database?

ELLEN

It seems it was inadvertently deleted.

COLE

'Inadvertently'!

ELLEN

There have been problems with the new system. Which is why, in view of the time-frame, the sooner I can see what's in the contract the better.

STRATTON

Of course, absolutely -

COLE

'Time-frame'? What 'time-frame'?

ELLEN

I don't think this should necessarily be a problem, but the option runs out in ...

Ellen hits a key on her laptop.

ELLEN

... in two working days, i.e. tomorrow.

COLE

The option? The option?

Cole gets to his feet, agitated.

COLE

The option runs out?

ELLEN

But you knew that -

COLE

Of course I knew that. But it was not an issue.

(MORE)

COLE (CONT'D)

Because - excuse me for pointing out the glaringly obvious - because we were going to sign off on it yesterday. Therefore it was not an issue. You see what I'm saying? It was not an issue. And now you're saying it's an issue.

ELLEN

I didn't say it was an issue. In fact, I said it shouldn't be a problem -

Cole sits.

STRATTON

- of course not. But it's something we have to keep in mind -

ELLEN

- exactly -

STRATTON

- in fact it may only serve to keep us focussed -

ELLEN

That's a very useful way of looking at it, Stratton.

STRATTON

Thank you.

The door opens and Frank enters.

FRANK

Forgive me for intruding, people -

Frank goes over to Ellen and extends a hand.

FRANK

You must be Ellen David. Frank Hanson.

ELLEN

Hallo.

They shake hands.

FRANK

Thought I'd drop in, see how things were progressing down at the coal face. And of course to say how sorry I am to hear about Jack Holland. Jack's a good man, I'm sure he'll be back amongst us in no time.

ELLEN
Yes, I'm sure he will.

Pause.

FRANK
So. How are things progressing?
Cole dear boy, you look a tad
peaky. Have you been burning the
candle at both ends again?

COLE
I'm good.

STRATTON
Frank, we were, we were discussing
a slight anomaly -

FRANK
An 'anomaly'. Oh dear.

Frank smiles at Ellen. She smiles back.

STRATTON
Well, not so much an anomaly as a,
a -

COLE
- fuck-up.

FRANK
Well, that's what 'anomalies' often
turn out to be, in my experience.

STRATTON
Jack's data has, has been lost -

COLE
'Inadvertently' -

STRATTON
- so we must bring Ellen up to
speed, obviously, before she can
sign off on the deal.

FRANK
Well, of course we must. And we
must bear in mind that the option
runs out in -
(to Ellen)
- two working days?

ELLEN
Yes.

FRANK
Tomorrow, in fact.

STRATTON

Yes, the option, exactly -

FRANK

Well, this should only serve to concentrate our minds, shouldn't it?

STRATTON

That's exactly what I, what we were saying -

ELLEN

Yes, that's exactly what Stratton was saying -

FRANK

- and hopefully your legal people will expedite matters.

ELLEN

Well, lawyers, you know what they're like, they don't always see the big picture -

FRANK

- so true -

STRATTON

- yes, yes, absolutely -

ELLEN

- and sometimes they forget they are working for us and not the other way round -

FRANK

- so true -

STRATTON

- absolutely -

ELLEN

- but I'm a lawyer myself, and I have some experience with these contracts, so that should speed things up.

A beat as they digest this. Then Frank and Stratton start talking simultaneously.

FRANK/STRATTON

Well, that's marvellous-/That's, that's, that's, that's -

FRANK

- very good news, excellent news -

STRATTON

- excellent news indeed.

(to Frank)

Ellen has to go to another meeting,
so we're pencilling in tomorrow.

(to Ellen)

Shall we say ten-thirty?

ELLEN

That should be fine. I'll get
Claire to check my diary and call -
it's Lucy, isn't it?

STRATTON

Lucy, absolutely -

ELLEN

- to call Lucy and confirm.

(to Frank)

As you can imagine, things are a
little frantic over the road.

FRANK

Yes, I can imagine.

Ellen stands, Stratton follows suit with alacrity. Cole
remains seated, hunched over his laptop.

Ellen extends her hand to Stratton, who shakes it.

ELLEN

And you'll email me the draft
contract.

STRATTON

Right away.

FRANK

Kiss of death to say it, Ellen, but
I've got a very good feeling about
this.

Ellen shakes hands with Frank.

ELLEN

Me too.

Ellen turns to Cole who's on his laptop.

ELLEN

Good to have met you, Cole.

COLE

(not looking up)

Yeah, okay.

ELLEN

I'll see you both tomorrow then.

No response from Cole.

STRATTON
We look forward to it -

Stratton escorts Ellen to the door, opens it.

ELLEN
Thank you. Goodbye.

FRANK
Goodbye.

STRATTON
Bye. See you tomorrow. Bye ...

Ellen exits and Stratton closes the door.

Silence.

STRATTON
Well? Frank?

Frank doesn't answer.

COLE
Nightmare. 'I'll get Claire to check my diary'! Purleease! She hasn't got a fucking diary, Jack's only been gone five minutes -

STRATTON
What do you think, Frank?

Frank doesn't answer.

COLE
'Subject to all the elements being in place'. Bitch on fucking wheels, mate! And since when was the option an issue?

FRANK
The option has always been an issue.

COLE
Do what?

FRANK
The option has always been an issue.

STRATTON
Well, it's always been there, yes -

COLE

Always 'been there'? What are you talking about, Stratton?

STRATTON

Well, you know, the time factor has always been a, a factor -

COLE

You're joking me! The 'time factor'? With you and Jack fanning around like a pair of old women, arguing this, arguing that, arguing the kitchen fucking sink, and now you give me 'time factor'!

STRATTON

Yes, well -

FRANK

Alright, Stratton. Allow me.

(beat)

The feeling on the Tenth Floor was that we might suggest, late in the day, a couple of amendments, apparently innocuous amendments, Cole, which contained - how can I put this? - the tiniest of traps, and dear old Jack, in his eagerness to sign off the deal, would accept them.

Silence.

COLE

You were letting the clock run down.

STRATTON

Well, in a sense, I suppose you could say -

COLE

And you didn't tell me about this?

STRATTON

Cole, there's a sense in which -

COLE

Yeah, there's a sense in which you can both go and fuck yourselves! You didn't tell me?

FRANK

It wasn't necessary, Cole. In fact it was preferable. Your natural impatience gave proceedings an admirable credibility.

COLE

All that time without telling me?
How's that supposed to make me
feel?

FRANK

Dear boy, we were only trying to
protect you from the nasty
machinations of the grown-ups.

Beat.

COLE

Last minute amendments?

FRANK

Tiny, tiny amendments, Cole. And
tucked away inside them, a
delicious little trap devised,
camouflaged and curlicued by
Stratton in his inimitable way.

COLE

Okay, okay, we can still do it,
can't we? This is even better for
us, isn't it? She doesn't know if
she's coming or going, we nail her,
she's gets her little pen out last
thing tomorrow, bosh, we fucking
hit her with the amendments -

STRATTON

I don't know, Cole -

COLE

Come on, they're gagging for it,
aren't they?

STRATTON

Well, I'm not sure about that -

COLE

Come on, they want the deal!

STRATTON

Jack wanted the deal.

COLE

They want the deal!

FRANK

Not the same thing.

COLE

What? What?

STRATTON

You heard what she said. Jack wasn't talking to anybody over there -

FRANK

- because he was afraid they'd pull the plug on him. He liked the deal, they didn't. The fact is, dear Jack was on the slide which we thought was to our advantage. It's a matter of perception, Cole -

STRATTON

Yes, that's it. The way things are, are perceived -

COLE

I understand perception. You don't have to lecture me about fucking perception -

FRANK

- the perception was that they wanted the deal more than us. The perception now may be that we want the deal more than them.

COLE

More than her, you mean.

FRANK

Yes, Ms. David may well be in the driving-seat. The question is, does she know it?

COLE

Course she does, bitch on fucking wheels -

STRATTON

Cole, will you please, I'm sorry, but will you please stop it?

COLE

Stop what?

STRATTON

The language, the - the verbal abuse, it's not helpful -

COLE

Oh please -

STRATTON

Seriously, Cole. We have to deal with this situation and creating an atmosphere of, of, creating an adversarial atmosphere is not -

COLE

Oh speak fucking English mate -

STRATTON

- is not helpful. She's trying to do her job, like us, and I thought she handled it very well -

COLE

You are such a push-over, Stratt, it's fucking tragic.

STRATTON

What, what are you saying, exactly -

COLE

She does eye contact, smiles, uses your name - 'That's a very useful way of looking at it, Stratton' - and next thing you're bending over, arse in the air, 'Do me now!' -

STRATTON

No, no, that's - that's -

COLE

- which is no doubt how she mullered poor old Jack -

STRATTON

No Cole, you can't, you can't -

FRANK

Wait. 'How she 'mullered' poor old Jack'? Translate, please.

COLE

It was her! Jack's 'inappropriate relationship! It was the bitch on wheels!

FRANK

And this information comes from where?

STRATTON

Gossip, Frank, tittle-tattle -

COLE

Beth. Beth's mate -

STRATTON

Beth's mate's mate -

COLE

Whatever! Who cares? It's true!
She was doing a number on us,
Stratt! Come on, you saw the way
she waltzed in here, parked her fat
arse practically on top of me,
invading my space, fucking nerve of
the woman. Crossing her legs in her
fuck-me fucking shoes -

STRATTON

Crossing her, her -

COLE

- crossing them, uncrossing them,
waving them all over the shop, she
was coming on to me. You too,
Stratt.

STRATTON

Coming on to me?

And Stratton's mobile rings.

STRATTON

No Cole, seriously, you're way off
the, the -

Stratton answers it his mobile.

STRATTON

(into phone)
Hallo?
(...)
Hold on, darling, hold on -
(...)
Yes, it's over but -
(...)
Okay, okay, hold on -
(to the others)
One minute ...

Stratton gestures apologetically and exits.

COLE

The oven's on fire. The cat's stuck
in the catflap -

FRANK

Talking of Beth.

COLE

We weren't.

FRANK

We are now.

COLE

Why?

FRANK

Unlike our friends over the road,
we take a liberal view on these
matters.

COLE

What matters?

FRANK

Colleagues who see each other out
of office hours. Who engage in
'social interaction not directly
related to the workplace'. The view
is that it's none of our business
as long as it doesn't - I can
scarcely bring myself to say this -
as long as it doesn't 'impact on
good working practise'.

COLE

Yeah well, me and Beth ...

FRANK

Yes?

COLE

I knocked it on the head.

FRANK

Really?

COLE

End of. Cue music.

FRANK

Is that what last night's tantrum
in Treats was all about?

Pause.

COLE

She threw a wobbly, didn't she?
Silly bitch.

FRANK

From what I hear, the wobbly was
thrown by you.

COLE

What? Who told you that?

FRANK

Strange choice of venue to effect a *rapprochement* with one's girlfriend.

COLE

Yeah, well.

FRANK

A bar where naked Eastern Europeans cavort in gloomy booths.

COLE

It's a laugh, Frank, it's jokes. You wouldn't get it.

FRANK

Hopefully not, but I believe Beth has become rather fond of the place.

Pause.

COLE

She goes there with me. For a laugh. Why?

FRANK

There are rumours about Beth on the Tenth Floor.

COLE

What rumours?

FRANK

One does not want to be the subject of rumours on the Tenth Floor. You might mention it next time you see her -

COLE

What rumours? Come on, Frank, what's the story?

FRANK

I have no idea, Cole and frankly, I couldn't care less. I simply mention, in passing, as a friend, that there are murmurs on the Tenth Floor about your raggie-taggle chum in the ever-so-slightly too short skirts -

Stratton enters, on his mobile.

STRATTON
 (into mobile)
 Okay, okay.
 (...)
 Okay. Bye -
 (...)
 Yes, bye -
 (...)
 You too. Bye. Bye -
 (...)
 Bye.

Stratton hangs up.

STRATTON
 Sorry, sorry.

FRANK
 As I was saying. In my view there is no point in trying to second-guess Ms. David. For what it's worth, I think she will take this to the wire. In which case we'll stick to the strategy devised for dear old Jack.

COLE
 She's going to rub our noses in it and she's going to love every minute.

FRANK
 I suspect you're right, but we must grin and bear it. Tomorrow therefore, all will be sweetness and light. Eat a decent breakfast at home, break early for lunch, send out for sandwiches. Make the afternoon a long one. Be pedantic, spare her no detail. Let blood sugar levels plummet. Then I will arrive with the amendments. I will be apologetic - 'It's the Tenth Floor, completely out of my hands' - but brisk. I will offer to go over the amendments with her. They are utterly straightforward. Will she want to confer with her colleagues over the road? Possibly, but my instinct tells me no. She will lose face if she has to seek advice on such plain fare. Ms. David, it seems to me, is not a woman who likes to lose face. Will she sign? Maybe, maybe not, who knows? Let the cards fall where they may, we will have done all that we can.

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)

And now, Cole, if you don't mind, I want a word with Stratton.

COLE

Frank, can I talk to you -

FRANK

No, you can't.

COLE

Frank -

FRANK

Bugger off, there's a good boy.

Exit Cole, already thumbing his phone.

FRANK

Everything alright at home, old sock?

STRATTON

Yes, yes, fine. Mostly fine.

(beat)

Well, actually, not entirely, no.

FRANK

Oh dear.

STRATTON

There is a slight, there is a cloud or two on the horizon as it happens.

FRANK

As what happens?

Pause.

STRATTON

Well ... Claudia has a, an aggressive streak, you see, she gets into fights -

FRANK

My God. Did you know this when you married her?

STRATTON

No, Claudia is my daughter -

FRANK

- of course she is, Claudia, yes -

STRATTON

- and we've been seeing a counsellor, and things do seem to be improving -

FRANK
I'm sure it's just a phase,
Stratton. Hormonal, perhaps.

STRATTON
- but Vanessa is having, well,
trouble coping with the, the -

FRANK
Vanessa?

STRATTON
My wife -

FRANK
Vanessa, of course, forgive me -

STRATTON
- Vanessa is having trouble coping
with the, you know, the whole
situation and she, well, she's an
emotional woman, there are issues,
you see -

FRANK
'Issues'? Oh dear.

STRATTON
- but you know, apart from that,
things are pretty good, a lot to be
positive about -

FRANK
Well, as my darling wife used to
say, fate plays us for a fool,
doesn't she? I could weep sometimes
- no, that's going too far, I
couldn't weep to be honest, if only
I could, but anyway, listen, the
thing is, the wife's not the full
shilling, the daughter's a
psychopath, and I feel your pain
Stratton, I really do, but I must
ask you, when I'm in your office
and, more importantly, when Ms
David is in your office, will you
turn your fucking phone off!

Silence. Eventually:

STRATTON
It isn't going to work, Frank.

FRANK
What?

STRATTON

Hitting Ellen David with last minute amendments. She'll be suspicious. She's a lawyer for God's sake! Last minute amendments to the Secondary Licensing? She'll take them apart comma by comma, and if she's smart, which I think she is, she'll find the trap.

FRANK

So what do you suggest?

Stratton doesn't respond.

FRANK

Stratton, please don't make me threaten you, you know how it upsets me.

STRATTON

Put the amendments in the draft contract now, before we send it to her.

FRANK

But you said she'd find the trap.

STRATTON

Yes, and when she does, we distract her.

FRANK

Distract her? How?

STRATTON

We give her more amendments.

FRANK

More amendments? What do you mean?

Stratton doesn't answer.

FRANK

TALK TO ME, STRATTON!

BLACK OUT

THREE

Stratton's office, the following morning.

Cole is pacing around, texting on his mobile. Presses 'send' emphatically, sits on one of the sofas, puts his phone down, stares at it. Picks it up almost immediately. Stands, paces, texts, presses 'send'. Puts phone in pocket, sits. Takes phone out, stares at it. Stands again, starts texting and pacing.

Stratton comes in, talking on his phone. Stratton and Cole dodge ineptly round each other - Stratton talking, Cole texting - as Stratton makes his way to his desk.

STRATTON

(into mobile)

No, I'm there, I mean I'm here,
I've just walked in -

(...)

What?

(...)

What?

Stratton freezes.

STRATTON

(into phone)

In the mouth?

(...)

But how did she - ?

(...)

She had a, a - ?

(...)

A garlic press? What was she doing
with a - a -?

(...)

Yes, 'show and tell', I understand,
but a, a garlic -

(...)

But he is conscious -

(...)

Thank God, but - what?

(...)

Well, yes, I am a little concerned
about Toby's teeth actually. How
many did she -

(...)

Alright, alright -

(...)

Darling, I told you, I'll be in a
meeting until lunchtime, I have to
turn my phone off -

(...)

I know -

(...)

(MORE)

STRATTON (CONT'D)

I know -
 (...)
 Yes. You too. Bye, bye -
 (...)
 Of course I do. Bye, bye.
 (...)
 Bye.
 (...)
 Bye.

Stratton hangs up, sniffs the air.

COLE

Stratt, can I ask you something?

Stratton takes the air freshener out of the cupboard, sprays it around.

COLE

You know Beth?

STRATTON

Beth?

COLE

Yeah, Beth -

STRATTON

What about her - wait, isn't she on the fourth floor? Because there's security all over the place down there, there's been a break-in or something -

COLE

Have you heard anything about her? You know, rumours.

STRATTON

Rumours? What rumours?

COLE

About Beth -

STRATTON

Rumours about Beth?

COLE

Frank said they were talking about her on the Tenth Floor. I just wondered if you'd heard anything.

STRATTON

No, no, nothing. What kind of rumours? Rumours relating to what?

COLE

It doesn't matter ...

STRATTON

(checks watch)

Okay, right, the meeting. Cole?
This is what we'll do. If she sits
here, where she was yesterday, I'll
sit here, directly opposite,
because I'll be doing most of the
talking, and you, you sit here,
next to me but to one side. And
it's the usual routine, okay? I
deal with specifics, you only talk
if she has concerns about the
bigger picture, and Cole, please,
could you, could you dial down the,
the - could you be, you know,
amiable?

COLE

Rumours relating to: is she seeing
anyone in the building, that's
what.

STRATTON

Sorry?

COLE

Beth. Who's she shagging, Stratt,
that's what I want to know -

STRATTON

Well, I - I - how would I know?

COLE

They're talking about her on the
Tenth Floor.

STRATTON

Cole, I'm, I'm -

COLE

Frank might have said something to
you.

STRATTON

About Beth? Why - why would he? We
don't, we don't talk about that
sort of -

COLE

Maybe it's someone on the Tenth
Floor. Maybe she's shagging someone
on the Tenth Floor.

STRATTON

Someone on the Tenth Floor? That
seems, that seems highly -

COLE

You know what? It's my fault, Strat. When I met her she didn't know her arse from her elbow, but I took her to Treats, I let the genie out of the, the wossername -

STRATTON

- the bottle -

COLE

- and now she's totally out of control -

STRATTON

- but I thought you and Beth were - the thing is, Cole, I can't keep up, are you together or not?

COLE

Yes. No. Does it matter? They're talking about her on the Tenth Floor, which means they're talking about me! Jesus, Strat, don't you get it?

STRATTON

Cole, are you alright?

COLE

I'm good, I'm great -

STRATTON

No, seriously, are you? Because if you're not, maybe you should go home, let me deal with -

COLE

Oh no, you're not rowing me out of this, this is my fucking baby -

STRATTON

I know that, Cole -

COLE

- my fucking idea -

STRATTON

- I know, I'm just saying, if you're, if you're upset -

COLE

Fuck's sake, I'm fine -

STRATTON

Because this has got to work, Cole, you heard what Frank said -

COLE

I just want to know what they're saying about me on the -

STRATTON

Will you please for once LISTEN TO ME?!

Silence.

STRATTON

Look, Frank as good as spelled it out yesterday and I daresay you weren't listening as usual but we - you, me, Frank - we're hanging on by our fingernails here and if we don't push this through, they're going to shut us down, this department is gone, we're gone. And you're younger than me Cole, the others will be lining up to hire you, because you have good ideas, this was your idea, and it's a great idea, what a shame Frank and I couldn't make it work, that's what they'll say, young talent betrayed by old farts who can't think out of the box. Well, I've got a family, I've got a - a wife who elects not to work, a decision I wholeheartedly support by the way, I have schooling and, and a mortgage, and overheads, many, many overheads, and what I want to say to you, Cole, with all due respect, is I am not going to let you sabotage this meeting, my meeting, because your ex-girlfriend is having sex with somebody else in the building.

(beat)

Your ex-girlfriend who, hitherto, you have treated with utter contempt.

(beat)

From what little I have observed.

(beat)

I'm sorry, but -

The phone on Stratton's desk rings. Stratton is still holding the air freshener. He puts it down on the desk and answers the phone.

STRATTON

(into phone)

Hallo.

(...)

One second, Lucy.

Stratton covers the mouthpiece.

STRATTON
 (to Cole)
 She's here. Are we, are we okay?

Beat.

STRATTON
 Cole?

Cole finally nods.

STRATTON
 (into phone)
 Ask her to come in please, Lucy.

Stratton hangs up the phone, goes to the door, opens it.
 Ellen is standing there.

STRATTON
 Ellen, come in.

ELLEN
 Thanks.

STRATTON
 Sit down, please.

Stratton ushers Ellen to the sofas.

ELLEN
 Thank you -
 (to Cole)
 Hallo.

Cole gives her a minimal nod.

ELLEN
 Sorry I'm a little late. Your
 security people are being very
 thorough today.

Without prompting, Ellen sits where she sat previously.
 Stratton sits opposite her.

STRATTON
 Oh God, sorry about that, there's
 been some sort of problem on the
 fourth floor -

At this point, Cole is still on his feet.

STRATTON
 Cole?

Cole sits where Stratton previously indicated. All three
 deploy their laptops.

STRATTON
Can I get you anything? Coffee?
Tea?

ELLEN
No, I'm fine thanks.

STRATTON
Help yourself to water if you ...

ELLEN
Thank you.

STRATTON
So, so how do you want to do this?
Shall I start from the top -

ELLEN
No, that won't be necessary,
Stratton. I really only have a
couple of small queries -

STRATTON
Great, excellent -

COLE
So everyone's in the loop now, are
they?

ELLEN
I'm sorry?

COLE
Your lot. Over the road. You were
saying yesterday that Jack hadn't
kept anyone in the loop.

ELLEN
Yes, everyone's well and truly in
the loop now.

STRATTON
Excellent. Very good.

ELLEN
Shall I kick off then?

No response from Cole.

STRATTON
Yes, absolutely.

Ellen turns to her laptop and hits a key.

ELLEN
Okay, my first query is just a
question of phrasing -

STRATTON

Phrasing?

ELLEN

Yes. The clause in question is on page -

And the phone on Stratton's desk rings.

STRATTON

Sorry, sorry -

Stratton gets up and goes to his desk, picks up the phone.

STRATTON

Lucy, I'm in the middle of - what?

(...)

What, now? Really?

(...)

But I've got Ellen David here and we're just -

(...)

Alright. Okay, tell them I'm on my way.

Stratton hangs up.

STRATTON

Look, I'm really sorry. Heads of Department have been called in, it's about this break-in on the fourth floor. It'll only take five minutes.

ELLEN

(checks her watch)

Well, I was hoping we could get through this as quickly as possible.

STRATTON

Five, ten minutes maximum, I promise.

ELLEN

Okay, not a problem.

STRATTON

Anything you want, just ask Lucy.

ELLEN

Thank you.

STRATTON

(beat)

Alright, Cole?

COLE

Yeah.

Stratton goes to the door, pauses. Reluctant to go.

STRATTON

Cole?

COLE

What?

STRATTON

Nothing.

Stratton exits.

Cole picks up his phone, starts texting.

ELLEN

So. This looks very promising.

No response from Cole who's texting furiously.

ELLEN

Don't you think?

COLE

Yeah, it's sweet.

Ellen hits a key on her laptop.

ELLEN

The only real problem I have is with the Secondary Licensing clause.

COLE

(texting)

You'll have to wait until Stratt gets back. I don't do clauses.

ELLEN

Alright.

Ellen sits back, crosses her legs. Cole jumps to his feet, moves away. Presses 'send'.

ELLEN

You're the ideas man, right?

COLE

Something like that.

ELLEN

Leave the nuts and bolts to others.

COLE

Yeah, sort of thing.

ELLEN
Making the entry-level kit free of
charge, that was you, was it?

COLE
Yeah.

ELLEN
Very, very clever.

COLE
Yeah, well.

Cole sits, looks at his phone, then chucks it down on the
table, frustrated at the lack of response.

COLE
You know what pisses me off?

ELLEN
No, I don't.

COLE
Mysteries.

ELLEN
What kind of mysteries?

COLE
When people won't tell you what's
going on.
(beat)
You know what I think?

ELLEN
No, I don't.

COLE
It's worse than lying.

ELLEN
How?

COLE
Someone lies to you, at least
they're making an effort.

ELLEN
That's ... interesting.

COLE
Well, I'm an interesting guy,
Helen.

ELLEN
Ellen.

COLE
That's what I said.

Silence.

ELLEN
I think I know what this is about.

COLE
You do?

Ellen uncrosses her legs, leans forward and opens a bottle of mineral water. Pours herself a glass, holds up the bottle to Cole who shakes his head. Ellen has a drink, puts the glass down, crosses her legs and sits back.

ELLEN
There's a problem, isn't there?
Here. Between us.

Cole doesn't answer.

ELLEN
Isn't there, Cole?

COLE
Maybe.

ELLEN
Yes. And it's to do with Jack Holland. Someone you worked closely with. Someone you trusted. Someone who became a friend. Now he's gone. And you think I'm ... implicated.
(beat)
I'm aware that things are being said. Bad things about Jack, bad things about me. Hurtful things which, at the moment, I can't comment on, as I explained yesterday. But I want to clear the air here, Cole. So, in the interests of peace, goodwill and future ... good relations, I'm going to tell you a story.

COLE
A story. Excellent.

ELLEN
But it's not about me and Jack.
It's important you understand that.

COLE
Yeah, I get it.

ELLEN
Okay ...

Ellen uncrosses her legs, takes a drink of water. Stands, walks a few feet, turns to face Cole. She will pace, on and off, during the following:

ELLEN

... a woman gets a new job. New job, new boss. The new boss is an intelligent, hard-working man. He's good at his job, and so's she. He encourages her, gives her lots of responsibility. They work well together. They put in long hours. There are trips.

(beat)

There are moments, obviously. Their hands brush when he passes her a document. Their heads touch as they lean over a laptop on a plane. Once, getting out of a taxi, the woman stumbles and her boss grabs her arm to steady her. These moment, they don't mean anything.

COLE

'Course they don't.

ELLEN

Meanwhile, on the domestic front ... things aren't going too well with the woman and her partner.

COLE

Why's that then?

ELLEN

Take a guess.

COLE

Umm ... she's working too hard?

ELLEN

Yes. And there's something else. What's the really bad thing she's doing?

COLE

Ummm ... she earns more than him?

Ellen laughs.

ELLEN

Yes! She's more successful.

COLE

Bad girl.

ELLEN

Bad, bad girl.
 (beat)
 So they split. It's messy.

COLE

Money. The mortgage.

ELLEN

The espresso machine, everything.
 But she doesn't tell her boss any
 of this, she puts on a 'brave face'
 and works even harder.

(beat)

Then, one weekend, there's a
 conference.

COLE

Right. The country hotel. The team-
 building.

ELLEN

No, a conference. The Chinese, the
 Germans. It's hard work.

COLE

Course it is.

ELLEN

Afterwards, the woman and her boss
 go for a drink. They drink more
 than usual. Suddenly, somehow or
 other, she's telling him about the
 change in her circumstances. Matter-
 of-fact. Business-like. A wry joke
 here and there. But the woman's
 boss is upset. This is terrible, he
 says, I'm so sorry. Are you
 alright? She reassures him, she's
fine. 'Are you sure?'. Yes, fine.
 Really. Then he puts his hand over
 hers -

COLE

Whoah -

ELLEN

- but only for a second. Then the
 moment is past. And the evening
 progresses without incident. They
 part as usual. An air kiss on the
 pavement, a taxi for her, a taxi
 for him ...

COLE

Go on then.

ELLEN

It's the weekend after the conference. Sunday evening. She gets a text from him. He's never contacted her on a Sunday before. He's scrupulous about such things.

(beat)

The text says 'Are you alright?' She ignores it. An hour later, another: 'Is everything alright? I'm concerned'. She eventually replies: 'I'm fine. Goodnight'. An hour later the entryphone buzzes.

COLE

Ah, the old late-night buzz on the entryphone.

ELLEN

She can see his face in the monitor. He's smoothing down his hair. She tells him she's going to bed. He's insistent. There's something he wants to talk about, it's important, he says it's about work -

COLE

Work! Right.

ELLEN

She believes him. She wants to believe him -

COLE

- so she lets him in -

ELLEN

- so she lets him in. He's distraught. What's the problem? she asks. I want to talk about us, he says.

COLE

Aha.

ELLEN

He tells her he's madly in love with her, has been since the day he first saw her, he thought he could deal with it, but things have changed.

COLE

Changed how?

ELLEN

Now he knows that she feels the same way about him -

COLE

- oh excellent -

ELLEN

- he's decided the time has come to 'admit to their feelings'. Only then can they 'move forward' -

COLE

'Move forward', excellent -

ELLEN

She tells him he's mistaken. She respects him as a colleague, that's all. She has done nothing, nothing to suggest any more than that -

COLE

- course she hasn't -

Pause.

ELLEN

As she talks, he becomes increasingly distressed. The woman is starting to get frightened. Is he going to get violent? Will she have to call the police? To have her boss removed from her flat?

COLE

Oooh, tricky -

ELLEN

He doesn't become violent, but he becomes highly emotional. In the end he agrees to go but only after she promises to meet him in the morning. To discuss their 'future'.

COLE

Oh. My. God.

ELLEN

The woman is in shock. What's she to do? Make an official complaint? To her boss's boss? Who's worked with her boss for twenty years? Who's also a man?

(beat)

She can't sleep, needless to say ... in the early hours of the morning, she decides to give up her job -

COLE

No way!

ELLEN

She's writing her letter of resignation when the phone rings. It's her boss's boss, asking her to come in right away. Something's happened -

COLE

Old Jack's gone ape, bollock naked in a meeting-room, howling at the moon. Yess!

Silence.

ELLEN

This isn't about me and Jack.

COLE

Course it isn't. Sorry, I forgot. It's a story.

ELLEN

Yes.

COLE

So the woman doesn't resign.

ELLEN

No.

COLE

She gets promoted. Wahey. Happy ending.

ELLEN

You think that's a happy ending?

COLE

Course it is. That's why it's a good story ...

Cole gets up.

COLE

... but I've got to tell you Ellen, no disrespect love, but I don't believe a fucking word of it. It's a fucking fantasy! She shagged the poor fucker, definitely, she shagged him and it wasn't even a mercy shag, it was a 'fuck him then fuck-him-up' shag. I'll fuck him, then I'll fuck his job, I'll fuck his salary -

Ellen slaps Cole very hard.

COLE
I'll fuck his meetings -

Ellen slaps him again, very hard.

COLE
I'll fuck his pension -

Ellen slaps him again, very hard.

COLE
Yeah. Okay. Excellent.

Shaken, Cole sinks back on the sofa. Ellen hands him a glass of water. Cole takes it, has a drink. Ellen reaches out, touches Cole's cheek.

ELLEN
Alright?

Cole nods. Drinks more water. Eventually:

COLE
There's a bar near here. Treats.

ELLEN
Yes?

COLE
Dancers, you know. We go there now and then. It's ironic. You know?

ELLEN
I know.

COLE
If the day pans out, we could go for a drink -

And Stratton hurries in.

STRATTON
Sorry, sorry. Lot of fuss about nothing as far as I can see, soon as IT are involved, everyone panics. So. Everything alright? Cole's been looking after you, I hope?

ELLEN
Yes, he's been taking good care of me.

STRATTON
Good, good. Have you had coffee?

ELLEN

No, I'm fine thanks, but if you could tell me where the Ladies is -

STRATTON

Of course, down the corridor and left, Lucy will show you.

ELLEN

Thank you.

Ellen exits.

STRATTON

Everything alright, Cole?

COLE

Yeah, yeah.

STRATTON

You're very pink. Are you okay?

COLE

Yeah, I'm good.

STRATTON

And it was, it was alright with Ellen?

COLE

Oh yeah.

STRATTON

Did she - was she -

COLE

- it's all good, Stratt. We bonded.

STRATTON

Really? Seriously?

COLE

Yeah, we're mates now.

STRATTON

Good, good! You see? Basic social skills, Cole. They work.

COLE

Yeah, they do, you're right.

STRATTON

Did she talk about the contract?

COLE

Yeah, she mentioned something.

STRATTON

What?

COLE

I dunno, something about Secondary Licensing.

STRATTON

What? What? Secondary Licens - are you sure?

COLE

Yeah, think so.

Stratton hurries to the desk, picks up his desk phone, punches in a number.

COLE

What's the problem?

STRATTON

(into phone)

It's Stratton, is he there?

(...)

No, it's urgent, I've got to speak to him ...

(...)

Yes, now!

(...)

Frank, listen - yes, we're -

(...)

No, we haven't actually started yet-

(...)

Because I had to leave the meeting to -

(...)

No, but she'll be back any minute.

Look, while I was out of the room,

she asked Cole about Secondary

Licensing -

(...)

Yes. No. Exactly.

(...)

Well, get them down here -

(...)

Yes, soon as you can, Frank.

(hangs up)

COLE

We're going for a drink later.

STRATTON

What? Who?

COLE

Me and Ellen. Thought I'd take her to Treats.

STRATTON

Cole, I'm not in the mood for one of your wind-ups -

COLE

No, she's bang up for it. You know what? There's more to that woman than meets the eye.

STRATTON

Cole, remember what I said, don't -

And Ellen enters. Cole jumps to his feet.

COLE

(to Ellen)

Alright?

ELLEN

Fine, thank you. Sorry to keep you waiting.

COLE

No problem, Ellen. You were saying, Stratton?

Ellen sits.

STRATTON

Nothing.

COLE

Don't what, Stratton?

STRATTON

Nothing, it's okay, nothing.

COLE

Nothing. Alright.

This time Cole sits down next to Ellen. Stratton hesitates, then sits down facing them.

ELLEN

I think we'd better press on, don't you?

STRATTON

Absolutely.

COLE

Absolutely.

Ellen and Stratton refer to their laptops. Cole watches Ellen. She notices.

ELLEN
Is everything alright, Cole?

COLE
Absolutely, Ellen.

ELLEN
Good.

STRATTON
So, so where were we?

ELLEN
Halfway down page forty-five -

STRATTON
Page forty-five?

ELLEN
Yes, relating to Third Party Costs.

STRATTON
Third Party Costs?

COLE
Jesus Strat, are you deaf or something?

ELLEN
Clause 2(c).

COLE
(loud)
Clause 2(c)!

STRATTON
Yes, yes, here we are, got it. So what can I - what is the - the -

ELLEN
I want to insert a phrase.

STRATTON
You want to - okay, fine, good, what is the - what's the, the -

COLE
Stop waffling, Strat. She wants to insert a fucking phrase.

ELLEN
I just want to insert the phrase 'and all other Third Party Costs' in line three, after 'deferred payments'.

STRATTON
 'And all other Third Party Costs'.
 Right, let me just ...

Stratton reaches into an inside pocket, then remembers.

STRATTON
 Sorry, I need a, a -

Stratton stands, is about to head for his desk.

COLE
 Fuck's sake, Stratt, here.

Cole is holding out a pen. Stratton takes it. Looks at it.

STRATTON
 (looking at the pen)
 Thank you.

Stratton sits down again. Uncaps the pen. Starts to write.

STRATTON
 'And all other Third Party ...'

Stratton stops writing, looks at the pen.

STRATTON
 (to Cole)
 Where did you get this?

COLE
 What?

STRATTON
 This pen. Where did you get it?

COLE
 Beth gave it to me.

Pause.

STRATTON
 It's the same as mine.

COLE
 Oh really.

STRATTON
 (to Ellen)
 'And all other Third Party Costs'?

ELLEN
 Yes.

Stratton writes.

ELLEN
After 'deferred payments'.

Stratton is looking at the pen again.

STRATTON
(to Cole)
Cole, can I, can I ask you - when exactly did Beth give this to you?

COLE
I dunno. The other night.

STRATTON
(to Ellen)
Sorry. After 'deferred payments'?

ELLEN
Yes.

Stratton makes a note.

STRATTON
(to Cole)
The other night?

ELLEN
I'm sorry, are we discussing the contract, or -

STRATTON
Ellen, excuse me, one minute.
(to Cole)
Cole?

COLE
Yeah, the other night in Treats.
What's the problem, Stratt? Aren't I allowed a pen like yours? Is it like a hierarchy thing? The hierarchy of writing instruments?

STRATTON
No, no, it's - it's -

COLE
(to Ellen)
I split with my girlfriend.

ELLEN
I'm sorry to hear that.

COLE
Don't be, I'm delighted. Anyway, she gave me the pen before it all kicked off. So what do you think? Should I give it back?

(MORE)

COLE (CONT'D)

What would you say is the etiquette on that, Ellen?

ELLEN

I would say it was a matter for your conscience.

COLE

Umm. I like that. Got a nice retro feel to it. 'A matter for my conscience' -

ELLEN

So. Moving on, if we may -

COLE

- but you know what?

STRATTON

Cole -

COLE

- I think I'm going keep it.

STRATTON

Cole?

COLE

Yes, Stratton?

Pause.

COLE

What?

STRATTON

I -I -

Pause. Then Frank enters carrying a document.

FRANK

Bonjour tout le monde, salut,
forgive me for interrupting the flow, but I come with urgent news from the Tenth Floor, news both good and bad. Ellen, are these hooligans looking after you?

ELLEN

Yes, they are, thank you.

STRATTON

What news, Frank?

FRANK

Well, the air may be rarified up there, the tone a mite sombre, 'uneasy lies the head' and so on, but they love what you're doing down here and could not be more excited. That is the good news.

STRATTON

And the bad?

Frank holds up the document.

FRANK

Some amendments relating to Secondary Licensing ...

Frank hands the document to Stratton.

FRANK

... which I bring to you with grovelling apologies from the Tenth Floor. I am assured that they are minimal, merely a question of 'phrasing'.

ELLEN

A question of phrasing?

FRANK

Yes, with grovelling apologies.

Stratton holds out the document for Ellen.

FRANK

Ellen, I suggest you use one of our conference rooms to go over the amendments in private.

Pause. Ellen takes the document from Stratton.

FRANK

Unless of course you want to take them over the road and confer.

ELLEN

That won't be necessary.

Cole stands.

COLE

I'll show you the -

FRANK

No, Cole. Stratton, will you take Ms David to the conference room on the sixth floor please -

COLE
It's alright, I'll take her -

FRANK
No, Cole. You stay here. Stratton.
Please.

Stratton stands.

STRATTON
Right. Of course.

Ellen stands, follows Stratton to the door. Stratton opens the door. Ellen pauses, holds up the document.

ELLEN
This is ... I know what's going on here. I'm not impressed.

FRANK
What can I say? I am merely the -

ELLEN
Don't. Don't blame it on the 'Tenth Floor'. It makes you look weak.

Ellen exits followed by Stratton.

COLE
Ooooh Frank, she's got you down.

Silence.

FRANK
Talk to me, Cole.

Beat.

COLE
I had this teacher, Miss Farley. Everybody hated her. She wore black. Cardigans, skirts. She was probably what? Forty? but to me, then, she was ancient. She'd come and stand by my desk, point at my work. Big white hands with blue veins. I could smell her, Polo mints and fags, disgusting.
(beat)
And I'd get a major hard-on. Major.
(beat)
Very confusing for a young lad trembling on the brink of sexual awareness, wouldn't you say Frank?
(beat)
I never told anyone. I couldn't. Getting a boner off Miss Farley, that would've been so gay.

Silence.

FRANK

Talk to me, Cole.

COLE

'Trembling on the brink of sexual awareness' - I'm starting to sound like you, Frank. What an influence you've been on me. Like a father. Almost.

FRANK

Talk to me about the break-in on the fourth floor.

COLE

What?

FRANK

Talk to me about breaking in to Beth's desk. Talk to me about hacking in to her computer.

COLE

Fuck off.

FRANK

They're going through the CCTV footage now.

COLE

First off, I didn't do it. Second off, the cameras haven't been recording since the cut-backs, everybody knows that. So fuck you in a fucking hat, Frank.

FRANK

One in four, Cole. One in four cameras are recording. Maybe you were lucky. Maybe you were out of shot.

(beat)

Either way, we have to address this now. We have to make a pre-emptive strike. I can talk to them on the Tenth Floor, tell them there are mitigating circumstances. I'll tell them you were under extreme emotional pressure. I'll tell them you have 'issues'.

(beat)

I might be able to make this go away.

COLE

Why would you do that?

FRANK

Because I want to keep you on my team.

COLE

Because you love me, right?

FRANK

Yes, I love my team. I love you all.

Silence.

COLE

I saw them, Frank.

FRANK

You saw what?

COLE

The emails. On Beth's computer. I saw the emails.

Silence.

COLE

Frank. Really. You old saucy. What were you thinking?

FRANK

Those emails are relating to work and work alone.

COLE

You? Emailing Beth about work? Purrlease!

FRANK

There is nothing in those emails that could be construed as inappropriate.

COLE

Well, it's all a question of 'perception', isn't it?

FRANK

You'll find it's my perception that counts on the Tenth Floor.

COLE

Not sure about that, Frankie boy.

FRANK

Oh, they hate you up there.

COLE

No, they're frightened, that's all. The world's changing too fast for them. And you, Frank. Whooosh! All gone. End of. Cue music.

Silence.

COLE

It's alright, I know you're not doing her, Frank. Someone is, I still don't know who, but it isn't you. She doesn't like you Frank, she thinks you're a perv. I told her, no, he isn't a perv, he's just old, but they're one and the same thing to her you see, there's no talking her out of it.

FRANK

And you really believe her, don't you? What a sweet, trusting boy you are, Cole, under all that foul-mouthed urchin swagger. Just a sweet, anxious boy hiding his darling erection under the desk, hoping teacher will come along and finish him off -

And Cole punches Frank in the stomach. Frank collapses on a sofa, doubled up, winded.

Stratton enters.

STRATTON

Sandwichs or sushi, what do you think? Shall I get Lucy to order something now? Or is it too early? What does everyone want? What about you, Frank? Or are you having lunch on the Tenth Floor?

Stratton goes to his desk, sits, checks his watch. Then notices Frank's discomfort.

STRATTON

Frank, are you alright?

Frank sits up straight with an effort.

FRANK

Stomach cramps.

STRATTON

Stomach cramps?

FRANK

I'm alright.

STRATTON
Did you - did you eat something -

FRANK
I'm alright, Stratton -

STRATTON
I could send Lucy out for something, because you don't look -

COLE
Stop fussing, Stratt, for fuck's sake.

STRATTON
What's going on? Has something happened?

FRANK
Everything is absolutely ... Cole, what's that phrase that gives me cancer?

COLE
'Hunky-dory'.

FRANK
Exactly.

STRATTON
Well, it doesn't feel like it. Cole?

No response.

FRANK
Cole and I had a slight disagreement. Which is now resolved.

STRATTON
A disagreement?

FRANK
Which we have resolved. Haven't we, Cole?

No response.

STRATTON
Is this about the amendments? Because if it is, I think you should tell me what the, what the -

COLE
It's personal, Stratt, alright?

STRATTON
Personal? Personal?

FRANK
And is no longer a problem. It's gone away. Hasn't it, Cole?

COLE
I'm not sure, Frank. I'm not sure it has gone away.

STRATTON
Look, sorry, but this is -

FRANK
- none of your business, Stratton.

STRATTON
I - I - I -

COLE
Shut the fuck up, Stratt.

FRANK
Do you know what you've got here, Cole? You've got one of those moments.

(beat)
One of those moments in which you have to make a choice. Which is it to be, old sock? The High Road or the Low Road? The Sunny Side of the Street or the Vale of Tears? Scary stuff, Cole. Grown-up stuff. Are you up to it? Are you - I think I can ask the question here, among friends - are you man enough?

Ellen enters, holding the document.

FRANK
Ah, Ellen. We were just discussing the decision-making process.

ELLEN
Really.

FRANK
Some say that decisions are best made instantaneously. 'First thought, best thought' and so on. They say that 'mulling things over' and 'thinking things through' leads only to chaos and confusion. What's your view?

ELLEN

I don't know. I'll have to mull it over.

STRATTON

I was, I was going to order in some lunch. Sandwiches, or sushi perhaps, there's a very good place -

ELLEN

Not for me, thanks.

Ellen sits, tosses the document down on the table. Crosses her legs.

ELLEN

I am very disappointed - no, let me rephrase that. I am actually very angry -

FRANK

Ellen, if I could just -

ELLEN

Do you mind? May I finish what I was saying?

Silence.

ELLEN

Thank you. This ...

Ellen picks up the document, tosses it down again.

ELLEN

... this is - I mean, are you serious? Really? You want all the Secondary Licensing? All of it?

STRATTON

I - I - I -

ELLEN

Am I supposed to flutter my eyelashes like a good girl and sign away the whole package, just like that?

STRATTON

No, the thing is -

ELLEN

- and you know what the really insulting thing is? -

STRATTON

- can I just - may I -

ELLEN
- you would not have done this to
Jack Holland.

COLE
Actually -

FRANK
Shut up, Cole.

ELLEN
Good old Jack. Your 'mate'.
(beat)
This ...
(the document)
... is about putting me in my
place. This is macho point-scoring,
nothing more.

COLE
Dick-swinging, Frank, is what she's
saying.

FRANK
Ellen, I can only apologise on
behalf of the Tenth Floor. They are
past their prime, testosterone
levels are declining, and yes, they
are prone to outbursts of
inappropriate machismo -

COLE
Dick-swinging by the dickless,
Frankie -

STRATTON
I - we - we could perhaps - I would
be happy to -

And the phone on Stratton's desk rings. Nobody moves for a
beat. Then Stratton goes over to his desk and answers it.

STRATTON
(into phone)
Lucy, we're in the middle of -
(...)
What?
(...)
What, now? Are you sure?
(...)
But did they say what -
(...)
Well, it's very, I mean, we're in
the middle of -
(...)
I see.
(...)
Alright. Thank you, Lucy.

Stratton hangs up, then:

STRATTON

Frank, they want to see you on the Tenth Floor.

FRANK

I'll go up shortly -

STRATTON

No, they want to see you now.

FRANK

Well, will you ask Lucy to tell them, ever so politely, that I am in the middle of a meeting and will be up as soon as it's over.

STRATTON

They want you now. This minute. You too, Cole.

COLE

Me?

STRATTON

Both of you. Right away.

(beat)

Frank, what's going on?

FRANK

Calme-toi, Stratton. Ellen, so sorry but it seems Cole and I must attend another meeting, and it would help us, that's to say Cole and I, if you could give us some idea of your intentions.

ELLEN

My intentions?

FRANK

Yes. Is there the slenderest chance, do you think, that we could find a way to heal the damage done by this unwonted interference -

(the document)

- and retrace our steps?

ELLEN

You're leaving this meeting to go to another meeting?

FRANK

Yes. And I sincerely apologise.

ELLEN

A meeting that is obviously more important than this one? And you want to know my 'intentions'?

FRANK

It would be immensely helpful, yes.

ELLEN

Well, I am still in this meeting, and I have to say that I resent your crude attempt to pressurise me. So no, Frank, I will not give you any indication of my 'intentions'.

FRANK

Of course. And once again I apologise. Cole?

Cole doesn't move.

FRANK

Cole, come along.

Cole doesn't move.

STRATTON

Frank -

FRANK

Later, Stratton.
(to Cole)
I need your help, Cole.

Cole doesn't move.

FRANK

And you need mine. Let's go and sort this out. As a team, yes?

Cole eventually stands. Goes to the door which Frank holds open for him.

FRANK

(to Cole)
Alright?

COLE

Hunky-dory, Frank.

FRANK

Dear boy, you are such a tease.

Frank and Cole exit. Ellen and Stratton sitting opposite each other on the sofas.

STRATTON
I'm sorry, I - I ...

ELLEN
Have you any idea what's going on here?

STRATTON
With them? No. No, I don't.
(beat)
But what Frank was saying ...

ELLEN
Yes?

STRATTON
About negotiating some sort of compromise -

ELLEN
Negotiating?

Ellen leans forward, picks up the document, holds it aloft.

ELLEN
Negotiating on the basis of this piece of, of - blatant robbery?
Absolutely not.

Ellen tosses the document on the table, opens a bottle of water, pours for herself and Stratton. Drinks, sits back. Crosses her legs.

ELLEN
Over the road they've already lost confidence, okay? You know, and I know, that once upon a time there was a good deal here. But in their eyes, it's been seriously compromised by Jack Holland's behaviour. It's a question of perception.

STRATTON
Perception, yes.

ELLEN
So what I cannot do is go back over the road and tell them I have signed off on the deal having made concessions. Any concessions whatsoever, Stratton.

STRATTON
Yes, Yes, of course, I - I -

ELLEN

So we're done here. I'm not going to negotiate anything, okay? For business reasons primarily, but also on principle.

STRATTON

On principle?

ELLEN

Stratton, I think you're a good person, a 'good bloke'.

STRATTON

Well, I - I -

ELLEN

- but you've been seriously let down by senior management - yes, we've all been there - but you, you have also been let down by your colleagues.

STRATTON

My colleagues?

ELLEN

Yes. I'm talking about the spirit in which these negotiations have been conducted.

Beat.

ELLEN

Do you understand? I'm talking about the way in which I've been treated. That's to say ill-mannered, obtuse and, on at least one occasion, abusive in the extreme -

Then the phone on Stratton's desk rings.

Stratton lets it ring for a beat or two.

STRATTON

I'm sorry.

Stratton gets up, answers the call.

STRATTON

(into phone)

Lucy, I'm still -

(...)

What?

(...)

But - but -

(...)

(MORE)

STRATTON (CONT'D)

Alright, I'll, I'll talk to her.

(to ELLEN)

Sorry, will you give me a minute?

Ellen gestures: be my guest.

STRATTON

(into phone)

Hallo? Are you -

(...)

No, I'm still in this meeting -

(...)

No, I told you darling, I had to -

(...)

I had to turn it off because of the meeting -

(...)

No, not because -

Ellen puts away her laptop, quietly prepares to leave during the following:

STRATTON

(into phone)

Please, Vanessa, not that again, please -

(...)

Where are you? It sounds like -

(...)

Is that Claudia? Why isn't she at school?

(...)

Why did you do that? We talked about -

(...)

Let me talk to her -

(...)

Just let me talk to her.

(...)

Hallo, sweetheart. What are you -

(...)

I know, Mummy's upset because -

(...)

Don't worry, sweetheart. I'm in a meeting now, but as soon as it's over, I'll come and get you -

(...)

No, she's just in one of her funny -

(...)

Straight away, but first sweetheart, you've got to tell me where you are -

Ellen, about to leave the office, pauses. Looks back at Stratton.

STRATTON
 (into phone)
 What?
 (...)
 What's the hotel called?
 (...)
 Claudia, is that the TV? Could you
 turn it down, I can't -
 (...)
 I need to know where the hotel is,
 so I can -
 (...)
 Let me talk to Mummy again -
 (...)
 No sweetheart, I really didn't do
 that, Mummy's just in one of her
 funny -
 (...)
 Claudia, don't -
 (...)
 Don't! Let me, let me ...

Pause. Stratton hangs up. He leans over his desk, supporting himself with his arms, head bowed. Hyperventilating.

Ellen puts down her bag, goes over to Stratton.

ELLEN
 Are you alright?

No response.

ELLEN
 Stratton?

STRATTON
 I'm okay.

ELLEN
 Maybe you'd better sit down.

STRATTON
 Yes, I think I'll sit down.

Ellen leads Stratton over to the sofa. He sits. Ellen hands him a glass of water. He drinks.

ELLEN
 Alright?

STRATTON
 Would you mind staying for a moment
 or two?

ELLEN
 Alright.

Ellen sits. Stratton's breathing starts to ease.

The he laughs.

ELLEN

What?

STRATTON

I was just remembering ...

ELLEN

Yes?

STRATTON

Fourteen years ago I was going out with this girl, we'd been going out for a year, we got on well some of the time, but she was often very upset, very angry with me ... and I couldn't, I couldn't work out why...

(beat)

... but she was very attached to me, despite the fact that I upset her. Very attached to me ... it seemed that the more I upset her, the more attached she became. So I was very, very unhappy. And I decided that I would have to split up with her. Which of course I dreaded because I knew it would make her ... very upset.

Stratton drinks some water.

STRATTON

But I was determined to do it, so one evening I went to her flat to tell her.

(beat)

It was as if she knew what I was going to say because she was already - she was already very upset. We'd been out with friends the night before and I'd said something, or done something, which had upset her. She said 'How could you humiliate me like that, in front of everyone?'. The fact that I couldn't remember saying or doing whatever it was only upset her even more. I apologised. She shouted at me 'I don't want an apology, I want an explanation!'

(beat)

I'd brought a bottle of wine with me because I knew I'd need a drink. She insisted on opening it.

(MORE)

STRATTON (CONT'D)

Her back was to me, she was crying,
her whole body was shaking while
she tried to open the bottle ...
then she let out a terrible - a
terrible cry, and turned round and
I saw that the corkscrew was
impaled in the ball of her thumb
and she was trying, she was trying
to pull it out ...

(beat)

... so I rushed to help her ...

(beat)

... and then I realised that she
wasn't trying to pull the corkscrew
out, she was digging it in even
deeper ...

Silence.

STRATTON

... so I grabbed her, I grabbed her
hand and tried to stop her digging
it in, and finally she let go and I
managed to get the corkscrew out.
There was blood. She was crying and
crying, so ...

Silence.

STRATTON

... so I asked her to marry me.

Silence.

STRATTON

To stop her crying. And she did.
And she held on to me very tight,
and there was this, this explosion
in my head ... and it dawned on me,
yes, I must love her. I must. It's
the - it's the only explanation for
all this pain.

ELLEN

I'm sorry -

STRATTON

No, no, no, it's alright, you don't
have to ... it's alright.

Stratton drinks some more water.

STRATTON

Ellen.

ELLEN

Yes?

STRATTON

I want to ask you something.

ELLEN

Yes?

STRATTON

Would you have signed the original contract? Without the amendments?

ELLEN

Of course I would. That's what I came here to do.

(beat)

But that isn't going to happen, is it?

STRATTON

I've got the original contracts over there, on my desk. We could do it. You and I, we could do it,

ELLEN

What would the Tenth Floor say?
What would Frank say?

Stratton stands up, goes to his desk, picks up two contracts.

STRATTON

It's a good idea, isn't it?

ELLEN

It's a fantastic idea.

STRATTON

And it's a great deal.

ELLEN

Yes, it's a great deal but -

STRATTON

Never mind Frank. Never mind the Tenth Floor. Never mind over the road. Fuck 'em.

Stratton sits down next to Ellen with the contracts.

ELLEN

Can I ask you something?

STRATTON

Anything.

ELLEN

It's none of my business, but you seem to be under some sort of personal pressure. In your life?

(beat)

(MORE)

ELLEN (CONT'D)

I mean, are you sure you should be making a decision like this now? Bearing in the mind the possible consequences?

STRATTON

Do you care?

ELLEN

Yes, I do.

A moment. Stratton and Ellen looking each other in the eye.

STRATTON

Thankyou. Really. But I know what I'm doing.

(beat)

Frank will be back any minute.

ELLEN

Then let's do it.

Stratton opens one of the contracts at the relevant page.

STRATTON

The top copy is yours.

Stratton pats his pockets - no pen. Ellen takes a pen from her bag, holds it up.

ELLEN

Definitely not yours.

Stratton laughs. Indicates:

STRATTON

You sign here. And here. And then here. Now my copy.

Stratton opens another contract, opens it, hands it to Ellen.

STRATTON

Here. And here. And here.

Ellen signs.

ELLEN

The Tenth Floor, over the road - they don't deserve us, that's the truth of the matter. Your turn.

Ellen hands Stratton the pen and the contracts. Stratton is about to sign. He pauses. His breathing is becoming heavier again.

ELLEN

Are you alright?

Stratton doesn't answer.

ELLEN
Stratton?

No answer.

ELLEN
Are you ...

Ellen glances anxiously back at the door.

ELLEN
... are you going to sign?

STRATTON
Would you, would you come out with
me for coffee?

ELLEN
What?

STRATTON
It's such a lovely day. We could
sit outside, in the sun, and talk.

ELLEN
That would be nice. After you've
signed the contract?

STRATTON
I think it's important that we talk
before I sign the contract.

Pause.

ELLEN
Are you saying -

STRATTON
We need to talk -

ELLEN
- are you saying that you won't
sign unless I come out with you?
For 'coffee'?

STRATTON
We need to talk before I sign the
contract.

ELLEN
'We need to talk'? Wait a minute,
are you, is this -

STRATTON
To talk, that's all. Please.

ELLEN
Is this a proposition?

STRATTON
Please.

A moment while Ellen regards Stratton. Then she stands.

ELLEN
Forget it. Can I just say for the record, that I'm -

STRATTON
Sorry, I - sorry, I wasn't, I was just -

ELLEN
Can I just say how -

STRATTON
It was, I was, it was a sincere -

ELLEN
Really? Really?

STRATTON
Sorry, sorry. I'm signing, okay? Here and here and here. Okay? Now my copy. Here and here ... and here.

Stratton finishes signing, stands, hands a contract to Ellen.

STRATTON
I'm sorry.

ELLEN
Of course you are.

STRATTON
No, really. I am.

There's something unfamiliar in Stratton's voice. A hardness, perhaps. Ellen looks at him for a moment.

ELLEN
If you're expecting me to throw myself at your feet in gratitude, forget it.

Ellen gathers up her stuff -

ELLEN
Goodbye, Stratton.

- and exits.

Stratton stands motionless. The deskphone rings. Stratton goes over to the desk, looks at the phone for a moment, then picks it, whacks it against the desk. It keeps on ringing. Stratton chucks it on the floor and stamps on it. It continues ringing. Stratton stamps on it until it stops. It's amazingly resilient.

Then Stratton picks up his computer, throws that across the office.

The can of air freshener is still on the desk. Stratton picks it up, sprays it in his eyes. Cries out.

Stratton, in a blind frenzy, starts laying waste to the office.

Frank enters, followed by Cole. They circle Stratton warily, waiting for a chance to grab him. Which they finally do. Stratton resists them at first. Then gradually calms down. Clapsed in Frank and Cole's arms.

FRANK

There, there.
It's alright now.
There's a good little soldier.

BLACK OUT

FOUR

Stratton's office, the evening of the same day. The first time the office has been seen at night and it should have a very different ambience: shadowy, ominous.

The office has been tidied up. Stratton's been tidied up too: clean shirt, tie etc. He sits on a sofa, staring straight ahead.

Light from the corridor as Cole comes in, a bottle of beer in his hand. While the door is open, we hear a thumping beat and the sound of partying a few rooms away.

COLE

Hey, Stratt!

Cole sits next to Stratton, puts his arm round him.

COLE

Major respect, Stratt, you are top fucking geeze, seriously. And I just want to say, anything I said earlier, it was just, you know, wossername. Are you coming? There's drinks in the conference room.

Stratton doesn't respond.

COLE

The little Ukrainian's coming, the one with the piercings. Frank's tab, would you believe?

Still no response from Stratton. Cole stands, heads for the door, pauses.

COLE

Did you hear about Beth?

Stratton turns his head to look at Cole.

COLE

She's gone. As in 'gone'. Escorted off the premises. She was bang at it apparently, shagging in the offices, nicking stuff. Frank's sorted it, thank fuck. What a piece of work she turned out to be, eh?

Cole opens the door: light, the sounds of music and partying. Cole holds up his beer -

COLE
Hey! Stratton the man!

- and exits.

A beat as Stratton sits motionless.

Then: light and the sound of partying again as Frank enters. He's carrying a bottle of champagne and two glasses.

As Frank pours two glasses:

FRANK
I hear the wife and daughter are safely returned. You must be very relieved.

Frank hands Stratton a drink. Stratton downs it one, holds out his glass for a refill. Frank obliges.

FRANK
Why don't you talk to me about these things, Stratton? I'm mystified, and not a little hurt. Though I doubt I could say anything instructive, I doubt I could give you 'good advice'. But that's not really the point, is it? My darling wife used to say 'Frank, you have many faults but you are a good listener'. She would talk and I would listen. Well, that's not strictly true. I wasn't always listening. Hardly ever in fact. But I gave every appearance of listening, and that's what matters. She talked and I would appear to listen, and it was a source of great comfort to her in her darkest hours. Of which there were many towards the end.

Beat.

FRANK
I'm going to take you to Huntley and Wakes, get Mr Price to cut you a suit. A wool-cashmere mix, say. Something with a whiff of decadence. My treat.

Beat.

FRANK
Everything disappoints in the end, Stratton, particularly if you're of a romantic disposition. Money, love, sex. Sex! Don't start me!

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)

It's a shitstorm out there, a
raging shit storm of
disappointment, and one might as
well face it in a decent suit.

Frank hands Stratton the bottle and heads for the door.

FRANK

Join us when you're ready, yes?

Frank pauses, raises his glass to Stratton.

FRANK

Here's to you, old sock.

The sound of partying as Frank exits.

A beat. Then the door opens: light, the sound of partying.

Ellen stands in the doorway. Stratton turns his head to look at her.

Ellen enters but leaves the door open.

ELLEN

The circle-jerk in full swing, is
it?

Ellen walks up to Stratton, takes the bottle from him, drinks from it.

ELLEN

So. What larks, eh? There I was,
all hot and bothered about last
minute amendments. 'This is
outrageous, I'm not giving away all
this!' And guess what, that's
exactly what I end up doing!

Ellen takes another swig from the bottle.

ELLEN

And the joke is, I was going to
query the Secondary Licensing, I
really was. Then there was the
business with the pen. My oh my,
the famous pen! And then the phone
call. 'Sweetheart, where are you?
Tell Daddy where you are,
sweetheart!' Fabulous!

Stratton holds out his glass. Ellen fills it.

STRATTON

I tried to warn you.

ELLEN

What, 'come out for coffee'? That was a warning, was it? Well, silly me, how could I have possibly misread that?

Beat.

ELLEN

I came here tonight to ask you if there wasn't some way in which ...

Ellen takes another drink.

ELLEN

... some way in which we could restructure the schedule, maybe adjust the cut-off dates.

(beat)

Something I can take back over the road. Something to soften the blow.

(beat)

Because otherwise I'm finished.

(beat)

That's why I came here. To ask if there's anything you can do -

STRATTON

Did you fuck Jack Holland?

ELLEN

What?

STRATTON

Did you fuck Jack Holland?

ELLEN

I beg your pardon?

STRATTON

Did you?

Beat.

ELLEN

No.

Beat.

ELLEN

Yes.

Beat.

ELLEN

No.

Beat.

ELLEN
What's the right answer, Stratton?

STRATTON
Did you?

Beat.

ELLEN
No, I did not fuck Jack Holland.
Now will you help me?

Beat.

STRATTON
Dance for me.

ELLEN
What?

STRATTON
Dance for me.

During the above, the thumping music has gradually increased in volume. The light from the corridor begins to pulsate in time with the beat.

Ellen stands over the seated Stratton, bottle in hand.

BLACK OUT

END
