

ONE

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

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

But little of this is visible because the office is in darkness.

Barely discernible, a woman straddles a man on one of the sofas. Both in dishevelled business clothes. They have just had frantic sex and are catching their breath.

It's too dark to make out their faces.

Finally the woman hoicks herself off the man, adjusts her skirt. The man lies motionless, exhausted.

The woman turns towards the desk. And the high-backed chair swivels just enough to indicate that someone else is sitting in it. The glow of a cigarette. The woman leans over the desk, takes the cigarette. She inhales hungrily.

BLACK OUT

TWO

The same office the following morning.

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'?

(...)

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 - then the phone on the desk rings. Stratton answers it.

STRATTON

Yes, Lucy ...
 (...)
Oh, okay. 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, earphones, shoulder bag. Stratton beckons him in.

STRATTON

 (into phone)
Well, that's a little -
 (...)
- it's, you know, rather -
 (...)
- well, yes, exactly, 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
out one of Cole's earphones to get his attention.

STRATTON

Jack isn't coming in at all?

(...)

Jack's gone?

(...)

You mean 'gone' as in -

(...)

- as in 'gone', right.

(...)

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

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

Well, don't call her if it's a, a, it's just, we, we need to, to -

COLE

Okay, okay, -

STRATTON

Security escorted Jack off the premises, 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 -

(...)

I - I - 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,

(...)

Fuck's sake -

(...)

No no no -

(...)

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)

No, no, it's okay, I'll hold -

COLE

(into phone)

... I'm ringing to -

(...)

Yes, you stupid -

(...)

I just did!

(...)

I just told you, 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?

(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!

COLE

(into mobile)

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, no -

(...)

No, that's not why I -

(...)

- I rang to -

(...)

Will you just listen? I rang to -

(...)

Oh fuck off Beth -

(...)

Okay, you know what, I retract my
apology -

(...)

Retract, look it up -

(as she hangs up on him)

Bitch! Fuck's sake!

Pause.

STRATTON

Sorry, I didn't mean to, you know -

COLE

He was naked.

STRATTON

What?

COLE

Jack was naked. In a meeting room. 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

Bollock-naked, raving like a madman -

STRATTON

No, no, someone's got their, you know, I mean, come on, 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 -

STRATTON

That I do not buy, not for one nanosecond -

COLE

Screaming, apparently -

STRATTON

It's completely out of character, Cole -

COLE

Totally -

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: charcoal grey worsted, single-breast, two-button, peaked lapels. A suit, in other words, which could cause no offence to anyone - though one might detect a hint of latent foppery in the peaked lapels - but then I notice -

STRATTON

Frank -

FRANK

- then I notice his pocket handkerchief. 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 bouleverse*, 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.

Cole

Well, boo hoo -

STRATTON

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

FraNK

Marital pressure, Stratton.

Pause.

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 stoat -

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.

Pause.

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 Stratton, the licensing, the revenue stream, Asia for fuck's sake, round and round, doing my head in. 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.

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.

Pause.

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

Well, I'm sorry, I don't see it like that -

Cole

It's an opportunity, Stratt! Don't you get it?

StratTON

An opportunity? Look, 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

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 -

CoLE

She's an underling, Stratt!

STRATTON

- to, to sign off on the deal -

CoLE

- a minion.

FRANK

Well, at ten-thirty tomorrow you'll find out, won't you ...

Frank is about to leave.

FrANK

Gentlemen, you 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

I'm sure you two are more than capable of dealing with Ms. David. However, there is one thing I would

like to bring to your attention.

Pause.

FRANK

They love us on the Tenth Floor.
Well, they love me, anyway. For the
time being. And I in turn love you,
in my own twisted way. So we're all
loved-up, aren't we, Cole?

COLE

Totally.

FRANK

Let's keep it that way. Let's please
not fall out of love. Which will
most certainly happen if this
goes ... Cole, what's that phrase
that gives me cancer?

COLE

'Pear-shaped'.

FRANK

Exactly. Let that not come to pass,
I beg of you.

Frank exits. Silence.

STRATTON

Frank's worried.

COLE

Frank's good. Frank's cool.

Pause.

COLE

What was her name again?

STRATTON

Ellen. Ellen David.

Pause.

COLE

Bitch on wheels. You wait and see.

BLACK OUT

Three

The 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 -
 (...)
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 Stratt, 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, two years ago she 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 fucking 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.

Pause.

Then the door opens and Ellen David stands on the threshold. Fortyish, soberly dressed, a little uncertain. 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? Tea?

ELLEN

No, thank you.

Pause.

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?

Pause.

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.

COLE

Yeah, but can you sign off on the

deal?

StrATTON

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

Cole

Can you?

Ellen

I'll need to familiarise myself -

COLE

Can you sign off the deal, Helen?

Pause.

ELLEN

Yes, I can.

Pause.

ELLEN

And it's Ellen.

Cole

That's what I said.

ELLEN

Did you? I'm sorry.

Pause.

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 our legal people can look at
it.

STRATTON

Well, I rather thought Jack had
already done that -

ELLEN

Apparently not.

STRATTON

You mean he, he didn't discuss the,
the ...

ELLEN

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

Pause.

ELLEN

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 we 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. 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 -

STRATTON

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

STRATTON

Great, excellent -

Ellen then shakes hands with Frank.

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

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 I thought that went very well.

Frank
You did?

STRATTON
In the circumstances.

Cole
Are you serious?

STRATTON
I thought she seemed fine.

COLE
You are joking, I hope -

STRATTON
In the circumstances, I thought she handled it extremely well -

COLE
'I'll get Claire to check my diary'!
Purleease! She hasn't got a fucking diary, Jack only went this morning -

STRATTON
No, no, I think she could be good news. Don't you, Frank?

Frank doesn't answer.

COLE
'Subject to all the elements being in place'. Bitch on fucking wheels, mate!

STRATTON
No no, she handled it well, don't you think, Frank?

Frank doesn't answer.

Cole
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 fannyng 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.

Pause.

FRANK

The feeling on the Tenth Floor, Cole, was that we might suggest, late in the day, a couple of amendments - very minor amendments - 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

(to Stratton)

You knew about this?

STRATTON

I, I -

FRANK

That's not the point, Cole. The situation has changed and we must adapt accordingly.

STRATTON

Exactly.

COLE

You can both go and fuck yourselves. All that time. Fuck me.

Pause.

Cole

These amendments, was it the Third Party Costs?

STRATTON

Yes, the, well, in that area, yes -

COLE

'In that area'?

Frank

Yes, 'in that area', Cole. Tiny, tiny amendments.

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 -

StrATTON

- no, Frank. A bad patch, that's
all, a blip -

FRANK

- 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!

STRATTON

Well -

COLE

And you know it's true!

Silence.

StratTON

Well, I don't know, I thought she was -

COLE

She was doing a number on us, Strat!

STRATTON

- very professional I thought, and she was, she was ...

COLE

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 legs?

COLE

- waving them all over the shop. She was coming on to me. You too Strat, with all that smiling and 'Stratton you are so right' bullshit. Are you fucking blind, or what?

STRATTON

Coming on to me? No Cole, seriously, you're way off the -

And Stratton's mobile rings.

Cole

That's probably her, wants to know what you're doing this evening.

Stratton checks who's calling, then answers.

StratTON

(into phone)

Hallo ...

COLE

Wants to take you out, Stratt, get a booth at Treats, have that little Ukrainian dance for you -

STRATTON

(into phone)

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.

Pause.

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 raggle-taggle chum in the ever-so-slightly too short skirts -

Stratton enters, on his mobile.

STRATTON

(into mobile)

Okay, okay. Now I really must -

(...)

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. Agreed?

STRATTON

Agreed.

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 speak to her legal people? 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.

STRATTON

Yes. Yes, that's right.

FrANK

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. Pause.

FrANK

Everything alright at home, old sock?

StrATTON

Yes, yes, fine. Mostly fine. 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!

BLACK OUT.

FOUR

The 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 -

(...)

Darling, I told you, I'll be in a
meeting until -

(...)

I told you, I'll call at lunchtime -

(...)

No, darling, I have to turn it off -
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 -?
(...)
Well, you know, I have to say,
taking one to school is -
(...)
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 Tommy's teeth. How many did
she -
(...)
Toby, Toby's teeth -
(...)
Alright, alright -
(...)
Yes, at lunchtime, I promise darling
-
(...)
I know -
(...)
I know -
(...)
Yes. You too. Bye, bye -
(...)
Of course I do. Bye, bye.
(...)
Bye.
(...)
Bye.

Stratton hangs up his mobile, 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, Stratt. 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 out of fucking 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? Does that give her the right to, to - I'm talking about respect, Stratt.

STRATTON

But if you've split up -

COLE

Even more reason. I'm talking about how to behave! You of all people should understand that -

STRATTON

Me?

COLE

- Mr Fucking Impeccably Behaved.

STRATTON

Well, that's - I don't see how you can -

COLE

They're talking about her on the Tenth Floor. Which means they're talking about me! Jesus, Stratt, 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?!

Pause.

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, it's, it's toast, it's
history. And you're ten years
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. Perception, right? Well,
I've got a family, I have 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.

Pause.

STRATTON

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

Pause.

STRATTON

From what little I have observed.

Pause.

STRATTON

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 -

ELLEN

The first is just a question of
phrasing, really.

STRATTON

Phrasing?

ELLEN

Yes. The wording of the clause in
question which is -

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.

COLE

So these queries. They come from
your legal department, do they?

STRATTON

Cole, that's neither here nor -

ELLEN

Yes. And from me.

Cole
From you?

ELLEN
Well, actually I am a lawyer. At least I trained as one. Please don't hold it against me.

Pause.

ELLEN
Obviously I'm not here in that capacity. But I do have some experience with licensing agreements.

Pause.

ELLEN
So, yes, I think we're all pretty much 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 on page five
-

Stratton hits keys on his laptop.

STRATTON
Page five -

ELLEN
Concerning Third Party Costs -

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

Once we've sorted Third Party Costs.
And I have a question about the
Secondary Licensing clause.

COLE

(texting)

You'll have to wait until Stratton
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.

Pause. Cole sits, looks at his phone, then chucks it down on the table.

COLE

You know what pisses me off?

ELLEN

No, I don't.

COLE

Mysteries.

Pause.

ELLEN

What kind of mysteries?

COLE

When people won't tell you what's going on.

Pause.

COLE

You know what I think?

ELLEN

No, I don't.

COLE

It's worse than lying.

Pause.

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.

Pause.

ELLEN

I think I know what this is about.

COLE

You do?

Pause. 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?

Pause.

COLE

Maybe.

ELLEN

Yes. And it's to do with Jack
Holland.

Pause.

ELLEN

Someone you worked closely with.
Someone you trusted. Someone who
became a friend. Now he's gone. And

you think I'm ... implicated.

Pause.

ELLEN

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. If today goes well, and I believe it will, we're going to be working together for some time to come, not just on this, but on other projects. That is my sincere hope, anyway. 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.

Pause.

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, but that's fine, he isn't threatened by her. On the contrary, he encourages her, gives her a lot of responsibility. They work well together. They put in long hours. There are trips.

Pause.

ELLEN

The woman and the man acquire routines, habits. There's a restaurant they go to, sometimes with colleagues, sometimes alone. There's a bar they go to at the end of the week. The most they ever drink is two rounds. They don't discuss their personal lives, it's strictly need-to-know, but she's aware that he's married with children, that's he devoted to his family. He's aware that she's in a long-term relationship with a man, that they live together but don't have children.

Pause.

ELLEN

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 moments are uncontrived, there's no way they are exploited. 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 neglecting him. Actually, what he says is that she's neglecting 'the relationship'. Which is good, isn't it? Because if he said she was neglecting him, that would sound needy. But it's not him, it's the 'relationship'. Poor relationship! How could she do such a thing?

COLE

Bad girl.

ELLEN

But actually, the bad thing she's done is ... what? What's the bad thing she's done, Cole?

Cole

Ummm ... she earns more than him?

Ellen laughs.

ELLEN

Yes! She's more successful.

COLE

Bad girl.

ELLEN

Bad, bad girl.

Pause.

ELLEN

So they split. It's messy.

COLE

Money. The mortgage.

ELLEN

Everything. The espresso machine. The woman loses most of the battles. She doesn't even fight some of them. She hasn't got the time. And it's demeaning. Let him have it all, let him stew in his ... things. She doesn't tell her boss any of this, she puts on a 'brave face' and works even harder.

Pause.

ELLEN

Then, one weekend, there's a conference.

COLE

Right. The country hotel. The team-building. Build a bridge with a bucket and a rubber band. Leadership bollocks.

ELLEN

No, a conference.

COLE

Okay, a conference.

ELLEN

The conference is hard work. The Germans, the Chinese. You know.

COLE

Right, the Germans, the Chinese.

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. Really. 'Are you sure?'. Yes, fine. It's a little weird, but she's moved by his reaction. Maybe he feels responsible. For making her work so hard.

Pause.

ELLEN

She's fine, she says. 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, mwah, a taxi for her, a taxi for him ...

Pause.

ELLEN

The woman will go over the events of this evening many times. Was this when it happened? Was this when the world turned upside down? Or was it much earlier, way back, the first time they went to a restaurant on their own? Was that when she crossed the line? Where is the line, anyway? The thing is, the line is always moving, it's here, it's there ... but it's okay, you haven't crossed it yet ... or maybe you have, you just didn't know it at the time.

Pause.

ELLEN

Things go on as usual. Until the following weekend. When she gets the first text. On a Sunday. He's never contacted her on a Sunday before. He's scrupulous about such things.

Pause.

ELLEN

It says 'Are you alright?' She doesn't answer it for hours. When she does, she says 'Yes thank you'.

Pause.

ELLEN

The next day, at work, they're busy, there's no reference to the text. Or the next day. The woman relaxes. Then, one evening, she gets another text, the same as before: '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.

Pause.

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 tries to calm him, tells him he's tired, he should go home and rest. He tells her he can't go home, his wife has thrown him out.

COLE

- perfect -

ELLEN

- because he's told her 'everything'
-

COLE

Tosser -

ELLEN

- he had to, he never lies to his wife -

COLE

Tossaah!

ELLEN

- 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?

Pause.

ELLEN

Her boss has done nothing. There's the late night visit to her flat, but that could be spun any which way.

COLE

He could say she invited him round.

ELLEN

Exactly.

COLE

He could say she invited him round and made a move on him.

ELLEN

Exactly. Her mind is spinning. She's beginning to wonder if it happened at all.

COLE

I bet.

ELLEN

One thing she knows - she doesn't want to see the man again, ever. She can't bear the thought of being in the same room with him ... she can't sleep, needless to say. In the early hours of the morning, she texts the man. She's not going to meet him, she doesn't want to see him again, she's not coming in to work today, in fact she's not coming in any day, she's resigning -

COLE

No way!

ELLEN

It's the only solution she can think of.

COLE

What, run away?

ELLEN

Yes. Run away. 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!

Pause.

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. Pause.

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, why?

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 -

(...)

I don't know what he said -

COLE

Nothing -

StrATTON

(into phone)

He says he said nothing -

COLE

I said nothing!

STRATTON

(into phone)

Yes. No. Exactly.

(...)

Well, get them down here -

(...)

Yes. No. 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, your jokes -

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,
Stratt?

Ellen sits.

StrATTON

Nothing.

COLE

Don't what, Stratt?

STRATTON

Nothing, it's okay, nothing.

COLE

Nothing. Alright.

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

ELEN

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.

ELEN

Is everything alright, Cole?

COLE

Absolutely, Ellen.

ELLEN

Good.

StratTON

So, so where were we?

ELLEN

Halfway down page five. Third Party Costs, Clause 2(c).

COLE

Clause 2(c).

StratTON

So what can I - what is the - the -

ELEN

I want to insert a phrase.

STRATTON

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

Cole

Stop waffling, Stratton. She wants to insert a fucking phrase.

ELEN

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

Stratt.

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.

COLE

Same as yours, isn't it?

STRATTON

Yes, it is.

(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

Last night. In Treats.

STRATTON

(to Ellen)

Sorry. After 'deferred payments'?

ELLEN

Yes.

Stratton makes a note.

STRATTON

(to Cole)

Last night?

ELLEN

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

STRATTON

Ellen, excuse me, one minute.

(to Cole)

Cole?

COLE

Yeah, last night. What's the problem, Stratton? 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 last night.

ELLEN

I'm sorry to hear that.

COLE

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

ELEN

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

Cole, you are positively glowing
with health. It can't be hormonal,
even in one so young. I assume it
must be a 'lifestyle' change. Are
you - I can hardly bring myself to
say this - are you 'working out'?

COLE

No.

FRANK

Delighted to hear it.

(to Ellen)

The cult of fitness is a cry for
help, don't you think -

StratTON

Frank, what's - what's -

FRANK

- a cry for help in a Godless world,
though God in some form or other
seems to be making something of a
come-back these days. Now then,
where are we?

Frank bends to examine the screen of Stratton's laptop.

FRANK

Ah, page 5, Third Party Costs. How appropriate, because I have here some amendments here relating to that very matter ...

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.

Pause.

ELLEN

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.

Pause.

FraNK

Talk to me, Cole.

Pause.

COLE

I had this teacher, Miss Farley.
Everybody hated her. I 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.

Pause.

COLE

And I'd get a major hard-on. Major.

Pause.

COLE

Very confusing for a young lad
trembling on the brink of sexual
awareness, wouldn't you say Frank?

Pause.

COLE

I never told anyone. I couldn't.
Getting a boner off Miss Farley,
that would've been so gay.

Pause.

FraNK

Talk to me, Cole.

COLE

I am. I am sharing my innermost
secrets with you, stuff I've never
told anyone. You should be
flattered.

Pause.

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.

Pause.

COLE

Anyway, I'm taking Ellen out for a
drink later. I was right about her,
wasn't I? She's piece of work, that
one. She's a bitch on fucking wheels
alright, but you know what? I like
her. Does that mean I'm growing up,
Frank?

Pause.

COLE
The way she crosses her legs.

Pause.

COLE
I like that. Oh yes.

Pause.

COLE
Nah, not grown-up really, eh Frank?

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.

Pause.

COLE
Fuck off.

FRANK
They're going through the CCTV
footage now.

Pause.

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.

Pause.

FraNK

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'.

Pause.

FRANK

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.

Pause.

COLE

I saw them, Frank.

FRANK

You saw what?

COLE

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

Pause.

COLE

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

Pause.

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. Whoosh! Oh
dear. All gone. End of. Cue music.

Pause.

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-

mouthered 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.

STRATTON

Do you think she'll rumble us? She's bright, that much is pretty obvious. Trained as a lawyer! We didn't see that one coming, did we? Probably would've gone about things differently had we known, I suppose. Oh well. Too late now.

Pause.

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.

Pause.

STRATTON

What's going on? Has something
happened?

FRANK

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

Pause.

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

A difference of 'perception', shall
we say. Which we have reconciled.

Pause.

Frank

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, Stratton, alright?

STRATTON
Personal? Personal?

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

Pause.

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

STRATTON
Look, sorry, but this is -

FRANK
- none of your own business,
Stratton.

STRATTON
I - I - I -

COLE
Shut the fuck up, Stratton.

Pause.

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

Pause.

FRANK
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, puts the document down on the table. Crosses her legs.

ELLEN

I have to confess that I'm a little disappointed. No, let me rephrase that. Actually, I'm angry -

FRANK

Ellen, if I could just -

ELLEN

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

Pause.

ELLEN

Thank you. This ...

Ellen picks up the document, tosses it down again.

ELLEN

... what does this amount to? A tweak, that's all. A tweak that is almost invisible to the naked eye. For what? To what end? Over the years you might claw back a few K here, a few K there. Or you might not. Who cares? It's nothing. It's cosmetic - no, it's worse than that. It's insulting.

StrATTON

Insulting? I - I - I -

Frank

Alright, Stratton. Ellen, you have found us out as I thought you would. The amendments do indeed amount to nothing. They are ... how can I put this? Vanity, nothing more. The Tenth Floor, stepping in at the last moment to save the day. We will swallow our pride and thank them for their brilliance, for their superior management skills. That is why they're on the Tenth Floor, after all.

Cole

Is that why you're on the Tenth Floor, Frank?

FRANK

Oh, I'm a fraud and an interloper up there. My heart and soul are down here, with my team -

ELLEN

Well, the vanity of senior management knows no bounds, we all know that, but I think there's something else going on here.

Pause.

STRATTON

Something else?

CoLE

Look, pardon me for stating the obvious, but if it's 'cosmetic', hey, what the fuck, let's sign the fucker, go out and get shit-faced -

FraNK

Cole, do you mind? I am curious to know in what way we have insulted Ellen.

ELLEN

Do I really have to spell it out?

FRANK

Yes, I think you do.

ELLEN

I am insulted because you would not have done this to Jack Holland.

Cole

Actually -

FrANK

Shut up, Cole.

ELLEN

Good old Jack. Your 'mate'.

Pause.

ELLEN

This ...

(the document)

... is about putting me in my place. This is macho point-scoring, nothing more. You bully me into signing off on this, this ... nonsense which is frankly nothing more than dick-swinging, then head off to the - what's it called, this watering-hole of yours?

CoLE

Treats.

ELLEN

Head off to Treats, order up the champagne and hey, let the circle-

jerk commence. 'We stuck it to her'
- no, wait, 'We fucked her'. That
would be the default phrase, I
suspect. 'We fucked her cross-eyed
over Third Party Costs'.

(raises an imaginary
glass)

'Cheers!'

STRATTON

I - I - I -

FraNK

Stratton -

STRATTON

I - I - I -

FRANK

It's alright, Stratton -

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.

(hangs up)

A beat, 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.

Pause.

StrATTON

Frank, what's going on?

FraNK

Calme-toi, Stratton. Ellen, so sorry but it seems Cole and I must attend another meeting.

ELLEN

If it's more amendments, I warn you, I won't even look at them.

FraNK

No, it isn't more amendments. It's about another matter altogether, but it would help us, that's to say Cole and me, if you could give us some idea of your intentions.

StrATTON

What other matter, Frank?

FRANK

Stratton, please.

Pause.

ELLEN

My intentions?

FRANK

Yes.

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, as far as I'm concerned this meeting isn't over, we are still discussing the so-called 'amendments'. And I have to say that I resent your attempt to pressurise me. So no, Frank, I can't give you any indication of my 'intentions'.

FRANK

Of course. And once again I apologise. It's just that, well, frankly Ellen, I ... we are getting just the tiniest bit desperate.

ELLEN

Not my problem.

FRANK

Indeed not. 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?

A pause, then Cole 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.

Pause.

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

Pause.

ELLEN
You have no idea what's going on, do
you?

STRATTON
With them? No. No, I don't.

Pause.

STRATTON
But ...

ELLEN
Yes?

STRATTON
Cole has a point.

(beat)

Not a sentence I find myself saying very often. But he has. Yes, the amendment is bullshit, bullshit bollocks as he would say, but the deal is still good. We all stand to gain. So, so why not sign?

Ellen leans forward, opens a bottle of mineral water, pours for herself and Stratton. Drinks, sits back. Crosses her legs.

ELLEN

Well, here's the situation. It may still be a good deal but over the road they are disillusioned. In their eyes, it has been seriously compromised by Jack Holland's behaviour. You know, and I know, that the deal is still good. But in their eyes it is tainted. It's a question of perception.

STRATTON

Perception, yes.

ELLEN

But I could sign off on the deal, and I could go back and persuade them that it's still a good deal. And they would accept that. And in the fullness of time they would be pleased.

Ellen leans forward, has another drink of water.

ELLEN

Or I could go back over the road and tell them I hadn't signed off the deal, and they would be equally pleased. Because the deal, in their eyes, is tainted.

Pause.

ELLEN

But what I couldn't do is go back over the road and tell them I have signed off on the deal, having made concessions on Third Party Costs. They would be very unhappy indeed.

Even though the concessions are ...
bullshit bollocks.

Ellen drinks.

ELLEN

So here it is: I'm not going to sign
off on the deal, okay? For pragmatic
reasons primarily, but also on
principle.

StrATTON

On principle?

ELLEN

I'm not going to sign off because of
the spirit in which these
negotiations have been conducted.

Pause.

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.

Pause.

Then the phone on Stratton's desk rings.

Stratton lets it ring for a beat or two. Then gets up to
answer it.

STRATTON

(into phone)

Lucy, I'm still -

(...)

What?

(...)

But - but -

(...)

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

(to ELLEN)

I'm sorry, I have to take this.

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 -

(...)

I had to turn it off because of the meeting -

(...)

No, not because -

(...)

Please, Vanessa, not that again, please -

(...)

No, please -

(...)

Where are you? It sounds like -

(...)

Vanessa, where are you?

(...)

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

(...)

What?

(...)

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

-

(...)

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 -

(...)

Sweetheart, tell her I want to talk
to her -

(...)

I told her I was sorry -

(...)

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 stands, goes over to him.

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. Starts to breathe easier.

StrATTON

Ellen.

ELLEN

Yes?

STRATTON

I want to ask you something.

Pause.

ELLEN

Yes?

STRATTON

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

Pause.

ELLEN

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

Pause.

ELLEN

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

StrATTON

Why not? We could do it. You and I, we could do it. I've got the original contracts. Over there, on my desk.

ELLEN

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

STRATTON

It - it doesn't matter. I would be more than happy to sign the original contract.

Pause.

ELLEN

Do you mind if I make a personal observation?

STRATTON

Alright.

ELLEN

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

STRATTON

Oh, I don't know about that -

ELLEN

Oh yes, I think you are. And it's
none of my business, but you seem to
be under some sort of personal
pressure. In your life?

Pause.

ELLEN

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

That's nice. Thank you.

Stratton stands up, goes to his desk, picks up two contracts.
He holds out them to Ellen.

StrATTON

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

ELLEN

Yes, it is.

STRATTON

Then let's do it. Frank will be back
any minute.

ELLEN

It's a very good deal.

STRATTON

It's a fantastic deal. Never mind
the Tenth Floor. Never mind over the
road. Fuck them.

Ellen takes the contracts. Stratton hands her the pen.

ELLEN

Yes, absolutely.

Stratton sits down next to her. Opens one of the contracts.

STRATTON

The top copy is yours. You sign
here. And here. And then here. Now
my copy. Here and here. And here.
Thank you.

Ellen signs.

ELLEN

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

Ellen hands the contracts to Stratton. Stratton opens the
first contract, is about to sign - then stops, pen poised.

ELLEN

Stratton?

No answer.

ELLEN

Are you alright?

ELLEN

Are you ...

Ellen glances 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 - it's 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 would really like to talk to you before I do that.

Pause.

ELLEN

Is this, is this a proposition? Are you saying -

STRATTON

For coffee, that's all.

ELLEN

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

STRATTON

To talk. I would just like to talk to you.

ELLEN

Wait a minute, are you -

STRATTON

To talk, that's all.

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, I've never -

STRATTON

Here, 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

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

BLACK OUT

FIVE

Evening. A gloomy passage at the back of Treats.

Left, a door to the street with an illuminated EXIT sign. A sign saying TOILETS.

Right, a door to the club. Thumping music audible from the other side.

Plastic beer crates along the wall. Stratton is sitting on one of them, an empty champagne glass in one hand, handkerchief in the other. Dabbing at his eyes.

The music is suddenly louder for a moment as the door to the club opens and Cole enters, beer in hand.

Cole

Stratt?

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

Cole

Jesus fuck, Stratt, I don't know
what to say!

Cole clinks his bottle against Stratton's glass, drinks.

COLE

You alright then?

StratTON

Yes, yes, I'm -

COLE

Cos you are top fucking geeze, mate. Seriously. And I just want to say, anything I said earlier, it was just, you know, wossername, bullshit bollocks, okay?

STRATTON

Well, thanks, I - I ...

Pause. Cole gives Stratton a hug.

STRATTON

Love you to bits, man. Truth.

Cole stands.

COLE

Are you coming through? Frank's even running a tab! Can you believe it?

STRATTON

What, what happened about Beth?

COLE

Beth? Beth's gone.

STRATTON

Gone?

COLE

Gone. As in 'gone'. Escorted from the premises. Didn't you hear? She was bang at it, according to Frank.

STRATTON

Bang at it?

COLE

You know. Shagging in the offices, nicking stuff. Ask Frank. Anyway he's sorted it, thank fuck. What a piece of work she turned out to be!

Pause.

COLE

Are you coming or what? We've got

the little Ukrainian, and the blonde
with the piercings, we've got them
for an hour on Frank's tab.

StrATTON

Later maybe.

Cole heads for the door to the club. Pauses.

COLE

Hey. Stratt the Man!

A loud blast of music as Cole goes into the club. Then
Stratton fumbles in an inside pocket as his mobile rings.

STRATTON

(into phone)

Hallo -

(...)

No -

(...)

No, not yet ...

(...)

No, I'm in a meeting.

(...)

It's a different meeting.

(...)

As soon as it's over, Vanessa.

(...)

Yes, as soon as it's over.

(...)

Is she in bed?

(...)

Vanessa, is she in bed?

(...)

Alright. So tell her goodnight from
Daddy. Tell her Daddy will take her
to school tomorrow.

(...)

I've got the day off.

(...)

Well, I have.

(...)

Yes, it is nice.

(...)

Does there have to be a reason?

A loud blast of music as Frank comes in from the club. Bottle
of champagne in one hand, glass in the other.

STRATTON

(into phone)

I've just decided to take the day
off, that's all -

(...)

Music? What music?

(...)

Well, it's not coming from this end.

(...)

I can't talk anymore. I'm in a
meeting -

(...)

I told you. As soon as it's over -

(...)

Vanessa, I've got to go -

(...)

I'm hanging up now, Vanessa.

(hangs up)

Frank fills Stratton's glass, tops up his own.

FRANK

So. I take it the wanderer has
returned.

STRATTON

Yes.

FRANK

Is this a frequent occurrence? The
phone call from the airport hotel?
The threat of flight?

STRATTON

It's happened before, yes.

FRANK

Stratton, why don't you talk to me
about these things? I'm mystified,
and not a little hurt. Because I do
love you, you know, in my twisted
way. You could talk to me to your
heart's content. You could talk to
me 'till the cows come home. Long
after they come home, if you so
desired.

Pause.

Frank

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 appeared to listen, and it was a source of great comfort to her in her darkest hours. Of which there were many towards the end.

Pause.

FRANK

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

STRATTON

You - you don't have to do that, Frank.

FRANK

No, but I'm minded to make a 'gesture', so indulge me ...

(drinks)

Everything disappoints in the end Stratton, particularly if you're of a romantic disposition. Money, love, sex. Sex! Don't start me! It's a shitstorm out there, Stratton, a raging shitstorm of fucking disappointment, and one might as well face it in a decent suit.

Frank heads for the door to the club, pauses.

FRANK

Are you going to join the party?

STRATTON

In a minute.

Frank raises his glass.

Frank
Here's to you, old sock.

A blast of music as Frank exits. Stratton drinks, tops up his glass from the bottle that Frank has left.

The 'EXIT' door opens. Ellen stands on the threshold, looking at Stratton. She enters.

Stratton looks up as the 'EXIT' door closes. He stands.

StrATTON
Hallo.

Ellen approaches.

ELLEN
The circle jerk in full swing, is it?

StrATTON
Would you like a drink? I'll get you a ...

Ellen picks up the champagne, takes a swig from the bottle.

StrATTON
... a glass.

ELLEN
So. What larks, eh?

Pause.

ELLEN
There I was, all hot and bothered about Third Party Costs. 'Oooh, last minute amendments'.
(drinks)
'Ooooh, last minute amendments from the Tenth Floor!'. And it was the Secondary Licensing all along. Enjoyed that, did you?

StrATTON
Well, actually -

ELLEN

And the joke is, I was going to query the Secondary Licensing, I really was.

Ellen takes another swig.

ELLEN

Then there was that business with the pen. 'Where did you get this pen? It looks like my pen!' 'My girlfriend gave it me, honest!' Fabulous!

StratTON

Actually, that was -

ELLEN

And then the phone call?
(miming a phone)
'Sweetheart, where are you? Tell Daddy where you are, sweetheart! Daddy will come and get diddums, yes he will!' Was it Frank on the other end? Hilarious -

STRATTON

Actually, no, that was -

ELLEN

Oh, no disclaimers, please. No false modesty.

Pause.

ELLEN

So. The deal. Plenty of revenue for everyone over the first five years. But then, guess what, the secondary rights revert to you, ever so quietly, tip-toeing away one by one, and our revenue dwindles, penny by penny, pound by pound, until ... it dries up altogether! Fabulous.

Stratton sits back down.

ELLEN

The first commandment: 'Always be closest to the till'.

Pause.

StrATTON
I tried to warn you.

ELLEN
What, 'Come out for coffee'? That
was a warning, was it?

Pause.

ELLEN
'Oooh, what a lovely day, let's go
and sit in the sun, I really want to
'talk''?

Pause.

ELLEN
That was a warning?

StrATTON
Yes.

ELLEN
Well, silly me, how could I possibly
have misread that?

StrATTON
I suppose it's a question of
perception.

ELLEN
Oh fuck off, Stratton.

StrATTON
Yes, well, I - I -

ELLEN
Just fuck right fucking off.

Pause.

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

StrATTON
What?

ELLEN

Some way in which we could ...
restructure the schedule, maybe
adjust the cut-off dates. Something
your people on the Tenth Floor
wouldn't object to.

Pause.

ELLEN

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

Pause.

ELLEN

Because otherwise I'm finished.

Ellen takes another swig of champagne.

ELLEN

That's why I came here.

Pause.

ELLEN

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?

Pause.

ELLEN

No.

Pause.

ELLEN

Yes.

Pause.

ELLEN

No.

Pause.

StrATTON

Did you?

Pause.

ELLEN

Does it really matter?

Stratton doesn't answer.

ELLEN

No. I did not fuck Jack Holland.

(beat)

Now will you help me?

Pause.

ELLEN

Stratton?

Pause.

STRATTON

Dance for me.

ELLEN

What?

STRATTON

Dance for me.

They regard each other, not moving.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK