
WORKING GIRLS

A PLAY

A Battle of the Sexes.
A War between the Generations.

A Romantic Comedy...
without the Romance.

WORKING GIRLS

A Play

By
Bob Perry

Working Girls

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Working Girls

SETTING

Interior of a furniture store circa 1970s

CHARACTERS

Patti

Shapely secretary at the store

Alton Davis

Gruff World War II veteran and experienced salesman

Andy

Young, energetic salesman

Toni Neal

Young professional woman

Mr. Ernest Hightower

Husband of Mary Hightower and shrewd negotiator

Mrs. Mary Hightower

Customer and wife of Ernest Hightower

Delores Wannamaker

Madam of the upper floor of the Walcott Hotel

Mrs. Elizabeth Davis

The overbearing wife of Alton Davis

Act I

Scene 1

(PATTI enters. PATTI puts purse on the shelf and prepares the office.)

(ALTON enters.)

PATTI

Good morning, Alton.

ALTON

Morning, Patti.

PATTI

Could you watch the office for a second? I need to get some things from the back room.

ALTON

Sure.

(PATTI exits.)

(ALTON pours a cup of coffee and sits down to read the newspaper.)

(ANDY enters and he's more energetic.)

ANDY

How's it goin' Big Al?

ALTON

(Grunts.)

It's going.

ANDY

Patti in yet?

ALTON

She's in the back.

ANDY

The new guy?

ALTON

(Puts down his newspaper.)

Look around. It's you...me...furniture...no one else.

ANDY

Just trying to make conversation.

(ANDY pours himself a cup of coffee.)

I won't say another word. I'll just leave you to your thoughts. You might as well be in solitary confinement because...

(ALTON puts down the paper again to glare at ANDY.)

You won't hear another word out of me.

(ANDY is quiet for a few seconds.)

I don't get it.

(ALTON puts down his paper.)

You've been number one salesman at this store as long as anyone can remember and you're as cantankerous as an old mule. You get all the breaks. Mr. McGee gives you this new guy to train, and he'll follow you around like a puppy dog while you get half his commission for the month. It's not fair.

ALTON

Life's not fair. Besides, the trainee's an inconvenience...they always are...just like you.

ANDY

He'll be doin' most of your work.

ALTON

The new salesman will bird-dog customers for me and I'll close the sale. He'll learn and someday he'll be irritating me...just like you do.

ANDY

You're about as likable as a rabid skunk and yet you can sell ice cream to an Eskimo. I don't get it.

ALTON

I'm a people person.

(ALTON puts his nose back into the paper and ignores ANDY. ANDY shakes his head and walks away.)
(PATTI enters.)

PATTI

Good morning, Andy.

ANDY

Mornin' Patti.

PATTI

Is the new guy in?

ANDY

Not yet.

PATTI

Will you let me know when he shows up? I got some forms he needs to fill out.

ANDY

Sure. Hey...would you mind grabbing that tape measure for me...It's on the top shelf.

(ALTON lowers his paper to watch the shapely PATTI reach for the tape measure. The pleasant PATTI hands the tape measure to ANDY. ALTON resumes reading the paper.)
(PATTI exits.)

What's the new guy's name...Tony?

(ALTON grunts but continues with his paper.)

I don't know why Mr. McGee thinks he needs another salesman. It's been dead as a doornail this month.

ALTON

(ALTON puts down his paper as he realizes ANDY will continue to talk.)

He's the boss.

ANDY

I barely made my draw last week and now I gotta share my ups with this Tony guy. I knew a Tony in high school. Didn't think much of him.

ALTON

I knew a Tony in Patton's Third Army. Big Italian guy...from Brooklyn I think. Tough as nails...Tony'd crush a loud mouth like you.

ANDY

I'm not a loud mouth, I just like to talk. Besides the Tony I knew was a jerk.

ALTON

Brooklyn Tony was no jerk.

ANDY

I didn't say he was...I'm just not too excited about sharing my ups.

(Bell rings.)

ALTON

If you're so worried, take the first customer.

ANDY

Thanks, Al.

(ANDY quickly combs his hair and starts for the door as ALTON exits. Before ANDY gets across stage, Toni enters.)

Good morning little lady. It's a nice day to redecorate that living room. Can I show you our selection of new sofas or would you like to look at something else...maybe a new bedroom set or a dining room?

TONI

(TONI looks around. TONI is dressed professionally with glasses and hair pulled back.)

Is Mr. McGee in?

ANDY

Not this morning, darling. He's the owner...he don't come around that much.

TONI

You must be Andy.

ANDY

(Confused.)

Well, yeah, but...have we met?

TONI

No...I've just heard about you.

ANDY

(ANDY smiles and is pleased that the woman has heard of him.)

I hope it's all been good.

TONI

Some of it.

(TONI looks at ANDY.)

Not really that much of it, though.

(TONI walks by ANDY.)

Is Mr. Davis in?

ANDY

Excuse me...are you a customer?

TONI

No. I'm the new salesperson Mr. McGee hired.

(TONI tries to shake hands, but ANDY doesn't react.)

I'm Toni Neal, I start work today.

ANDY

(Laughs.)

You must be mistaken. Mr. McGee hired a salesman...we've already got a girl in the office.

TONI

I can assure you; Mr. McGee hired me as a salesperson to begin today and I'm no "girl in the office." I'm highly trained, educated, and motivated for success. He told me Mr. Davis would show me the ropes...mentor me.

ANDY

Alton! We have...a situation!

(ALTON enters.)

TONI

I've heard a lot about you, Mr. Davis. You're a legend in this business.

ALTON

Thank you...what can we help you find this morning. Bedroom...Living Room...Dining?

TONI

Oh...I'm not a customer...I'm the new salesperson. Mr. McGee hired me last week and said you'd be training me.

(TONI extends her hand, but ALTON doesn't respond.)

ALTON

(Bell rings indicating a customer has entered.)

I got a customer.

(Whispers to ANDY.)

Handle this.

TONI

Mr. Davis, I was told to follow you around...you know...so you can show me the ropes.

ALTON

Andy will take care of you...I got a customer.

(ALTON starts to exit.)

(PATTI enters.)

ANDY

Patti, hand me that dust rag.

(ALTON stops to watch Patti reach for the dust rag then

ALTON exits.)

(ANDY hands the rag to TONI.)

Here. The new guy...I mean gal...dusts the place in the morning. Enjoy...I'm sure you're qualified for the job.

TONI

Mr. McGee didn't hire me to dust. I have a degree in Marketing with a minor in Fashion Design. You dust!

(Throws the rag back at ANDY.)

ANDY

Listen, sales-gal. I dusted when I was the newbie. Heck, even Alton probably dusted when he was new...although I'm not sure the dust had settled by then. I don't care about your degree in dressing Barbies. The new guy...gal dusts.

(ANDY throws the rag back at TONI. Bell rings.)

I've got a customer...so enjoy.

(ANDY exits.)

PATTI

(Watches the agitated TONI for a moment.)

Hi...I'm Patti.

TONI

Hello. I'm Toni.

PATTI

You know, Andy's right...technically that is. The newest person does usually dust the showroom.

TONI

I don't like his attitude.

PATTI

Andy's all right. He was just expecting something different.

TONI

He's a male chauvinist pig. I don't know how you put up with it...I wonder why you put up with it.

PATTI

I like my job and Andy...he's not so bad.

TONI

Compared to what...a caveman? Doesn't it bother you how they talk to you? "We've got a girl in office." "Oh Patti, grab that rag."

PATTI

He don't mean nothing by it.

TONI

He asked you for the rag so he could leer at you when you reached for it.

PATTI

I know.

TONI

Doesn't that bother you? That should bother you.

PATTI

Not really. Showing off my shape is something I'm really good at. Andy has me reaching for stuff all day...it's like an exercise class right here at work.

TONI

You're as bad as those two. This is the 1970s and you people act like it's the fifties. If I had showed up in high heels, wearing a polka dot dress, and wearing a pearl necklace to dust, old Andy and Alton would wonder why I hadn't baked cinnamon toast for them as well!

PATTI

I've got a polka dot dress and Andy likes it.

TONI

I'm betting it's tight?

PATTI

How did you know?

TONI

(Throws up her hands.)

He's treating you like an object...he has no respect for women.

PATTI

Do you like him...I mean he is awfully cute.

TONI

No...I don't like men like Andy.

PATTI

You know there's a reason the new salesman...I mean salesperson is given the job to dust.

TONI

You must be kidding me.

PATTI

It's a great way to get to know the showroom and the merchandise. After a salesman has been here a week they take turns.

TONI

Oh.

PATTI

I have some payroll forms for you to fill out in the back.

(PATTI and TONI exit.)

(ALTON enters followed by MR. HIGHTOWER and MRS. HIGHTOWER.)

ALTON

Do we have a deal, Mr. Hightower?

MR. HIGHTOWER

Not at that price.

ALTON

Mr. Hightower, that's the best price in town. I assure you, you're getting the bottom dollar price.

MR. HIGHTOWER

If that's the best price in town, I may have to go out of town.

ALTON

It's a free country, but I'll put a sold tag on it until you make up your mind.

MR. HIGHTOWER

Let's go Mary

(MR. HIGHTOWER leaves. MARY HIGHTOWER hesitates and ALTON gives her a nod and she nods in reply.

MARY HIGHTOWER follows her husband.)

(PATTI and TONI enter.)

ALTON

Do we have delivery times for this afternoon?

PATTI

At two o'clock.

ALTON

How about later?

PATTI

Last truck leaves at four.

ALTON

That'll be great. Reserve me the spot.

TONI

Did you make a sale?

ALTON

(Brusquely.)

Not yet.

TONI

But you've set up the delivery time before the customer has told you what they want. He didn't look like he was that close to making a decision.

ALTON

I know what the customer wants...before they do. Trust me, I've done this before. I need to have a word with Mrs. Hightower before they leave the store.

(ALTON exits.)

TONI

Is he always so confident?

PATTI

No, but he is always right.

TONI

Always?

(PATTI nods as ALTON enters.)

Did you make the sale?

ALTON

Not yet, but the deal will be done by four o'clock.

(ALTON sits down. TONI takes a seat next to ALTON making him uncomfortable.)

TONI

How do you know?

(ALTON does not answer and seems agitated at the question.)

ALTON

Huh?

TONI

How do you know that customer will be back?

(ALTON does not respond.)

Mr. Davis, you're the best salesperson...salesman in this city. Everyone knows it. We got off on the wrong foot, but I would really like to learn from the best.

ALTON

First...you need to understand that I don't think much of women in the workplace. It's just asking for trouble.

TONI

Mr. Davis...

(PATTI motions TONI to be quiet and not argue.)

I see your point, but some of us women need to work...not having husbands and what not.

ALTON

Women at work was fine during the war...

TONI

What war?

ALTON

World War II...the big one. It was fine for women to work during the war years when we needed them, but now...an attractive girl like you should be finding a husband and starting a family.

TONI

(Struggles to maintain a civil tone of voice.)

You're right, but in the meantime, I would really like to learn some of your...techniques. Who knows...it might even help me find...that husband.

(PATTI nods approvingly. PATTI exits.)

How do you know that customer will be back and how can you be so sure that they'll want delivery by four o'clock?

ALTON

(Puts down the paper to instruct TONI.)

The furniture business is different than other industries. On a car lot, the man makes all the decisions...that's why everyone wants to be a car salesman. In a dress store or a men's store it's an individual shopping decision. Furniture is about the family...it's about home. Men make the money and pay the bills, but...here's the secret most people miss...women make the decisions on the furniture.

TONI

I'm a woman...do you think that might be why Mr. McGee wanted me as a salesperson?

ALTON

No. Women don't want to take advice from another woman. They need a man's guidance...someone that understands the female mind.

TONI

Like you?

ALTON

(Nods.)

I understand that women make the decisions, but it's all psychology.

TONI

I took a class in psychology in college. It was very interesting. I also studied consumer behavior. We learned...

ALTON

I'm not talking about some silly college class, I'm talking about real psychology...knowing how and why people think.

TONI

That's how you know the customer will buy today...by four o'clock?

ALTON

Absolutely. Mary Hightower has been looking at this sofa for two weeks. Here's what I know. Mary's mother-in-law is visiting from out of town tomorrow. Now for a woman that is one of the biggest fears, because she knows the mother-in-law doesn't think she's good enough for her son and that she'll be judging her and her home...and her furniture. Now listen...because most people miss this. Men and women are different.

TONI

Mr. Davis, I think I understand the differences...

ALTON

Do you want to learn or not?

TONI

I'm listening.

ALTON

Men get poked in the rear end with a broken spring and that's how they know they need a new sofa. They'll put the checkbook in their pocket and buy the first thing that will fit through the door and go with brown. A man reasons that he's looking away from the sofa most of the time so it don't matter much what it looks like...Very logical. Women are the complete opposite.

TONI

Illogical.

ALTON

Exactly. For a woman to buy is a major thought process. They'll look through magazines, shop every store in the state, try to figure out the best time of year to get a sale...just figuring out what they want. By the time they get to me, the poor things are so confused they need real help. So I make it simple.

TONI

How so?

ALTON

First thing I do is show them the most expensive thing in the store...that way everything else is saving them money. Pure logic. Next I take them to the ugliest and most shoddy thing we have in the store. I tell them immediately that they would never want that...Right there they know I'm their friend and I'm going to save them money.

TONI

How do you ever sell the shoddy merchandise?

ALTON

To the men...I tell 'em it's rustic.

TONI

Oh.

ALTON

After I've showed 'em the most expensive to show 'em how much they'll save, and proved I'm their friend by steering them away from the cheap stuff, I take them to the merchandise they will buy.

TONI

Just like that?

ALTON

Well, I ask a few questions about the size of their house and color, but yeah...just like that.

TONI

Amazing. But, how do you know Mrs. Hightower will be buying today at four o'clock?

ALTON

Mary...Mrs. Hightower...brought in her best friend to look at the sofa last week. Now when the woman brings in her friend...that's when the selling really starts, because you're no longer selling the customer, you're selling her friend. Shopping is very social with women. For some reason they feel compelled to bring in a...cheerleader...someone that will make them feel good about their purchase and convince them everything will be great. The friend of the shopper will usually come in and be adversarial to a salesman like me just to show how much she knows or to show what a good friend she is...and sometimes just because she's jealous. This can be very tricky.

TONI

How do you handle that?

ALTON

The first thing the friend says, I completely agree with...no matter how idiotic it is. Right there the friend knows that I know my stuff, because people don't disagree with their own opinions. That leaves one last little hurdle.

TONI

What?

ALTON

The husband.

TONI

But you said women make the decisions.

ALTON

They do, but men...well men have to be...maneuvered. Men are like animals...very instinctive. For a man to buy a coat...he goes outside...decides it's cold...goes into the store...buys a coat...brown or black...and five minutes later he's not cold anymore. Problem solved. Very logical. For a woman...she'll have to shop just to decide which kind of coat to buy...what color...what style...what brand. Then the woman will study the cycle of sales to plan her purchase. After months of fretting about it...they'll buy a silly coat even if it's in the summer time. The whole time she's fussing about her old coat as if anyone cares. Don't even get me talking about the pain they put themselves through to purchase a purse. Men...they're simple.

TONI

That seems like an overly simple stereotype about customer behavior.

ALTON

I've been doing this for the best part of three decades, girlie. The simpler the better...heaven help you if you confuse a woman.

TONI

I would think men and women want the same things. A quality product that meets their needs and a value added price.

ALTON

Keep thinking like that...and you'll be selling purses...the purgatory of salesmanship.

TONI

So in your mind, men are easier to deal with?

ALTON

That's an absolute fact. For men, shopping is a pain, for women it's a sick kind of pleasure. My job is to ease the pain for the poor men and enhance the perceived pleasure for the woman.

TONI

But you said husbands were the last hurdle to a sale.

ALTON

Men need to think they're in charge. I let them think that so I can ease their pain and suffering.

TONI

How so?

ALTON

(Laughs to himself.)

For example, I got a customer that lives out in the country whose husband is a farmer. A real bargainer this guy is. The wife...she comes in a couple a days before to pick out what she wants. She has me take off any sales tags and reminds me that Elmer...that's the husband...won't buy until I come off the price two times. Elmer comes in and negotiates me right down to the price his wife has already got...sometimes old Elmer even pays a little more for his bargaining.

TONI

Is that ethical?

ALTON

In sales? Of course...Everything is ethical if it achieves a result. Elmer's wife gets what she wants, I get my commission, and Elmer...well Elmer gets what he wants too...in a way. He gets to win...or at least thinks he's won. Winning is real important to some people. Elmer's wife actually won the contest a long time ago; he just hasn't figured that out yet.

TONI

(Looks skeptically at ALTON.)

But how do you know Mrs. Hightower will buy that sofa at four o'clock this afternoon?

ALTON

Mrs. Hightower's a three-day gal.

(TONI is confused.)

Mary found her sofa two weeks ago. She brought her friend to get her approval one week ago. She brought her husband in three days ago and I know the mother-in-law's coming in the morning.

TONI

That doesn't make sense.

ALTON

Because you don't understand psychology...you've just taken the class.

TONI

So Mr. Hightower said yes?

ALTON

Mr. Hightower said no...emphatically.

TONI

But you still think he'll change his mind?

ALTON

Absolutely. Think about it. Women make the decisions. Mrs. Hightower wants this sofa and wants it before the mother-in-law comes to town. Now Mrs. Hightower may not be a fashion model, but she's a good enough looking gal and a lot better looking than Mr. Hightower. The last three days the Hightowers have come to the store, Mrs. Hightower's skirts have gotten shorter and Mr. Hightower is looking more...desperate.

ALTON cont.

If Mr. Hightower doesn't want to be sleeping with his mother this weekend, he better get that sofa. Mr. Hightower looks like an intelligent fellow...he'll figure it out. Before four o'clock, I'm betting.

TONI

(TONI is slightly disgusted at the response. PATTI enters.)

That's...that's about the most base and stupid premise I've ever heard about customer decision-making. In your mind, the buying decision on a major piece of furniture revolves around the...lack of sex for poor Mr. Hightower.

ALTON

Watch your mouth, young lady.

TONI

What did I say?

ALTON

S-E-X...you shouldn't talk about some things.

TONI

Sex is not a bad word.

ALTON

Maybe it should be. Anyway...that's psychology. It's all about...S-E-X.

TONI

It's not all about sex...It should be about professionalism, product knowledge, and helping fulfill customer needs.

ALTON

Exactly! I'm helping Mr. Hightower fulfill his needs and the poor guy is fighting me every step.

ANDY

(ANDY enters.)

What are we talking about?

PATTI

Sex.

ANDY

And here I've been wasting my time with another be-backer.

TONI

We aren't talking about sex...and what's a be-backer?

ANDY

You are green as a gourd. A customer comes in...wastes your time and says "I'll be back,"...a be-backer.

ALTON

Three-dayer?

ANDY

Three-weeker more likely.

ALTON

Ewww!

ANDY

Poor lady was ugly as the wrong end of an armadillo and had the personality to match.

TONI

You guys are terrible. I thought you were chauvinistic, but I think you're genuine woman-haters.

ANDY

I don't hate women...unless they burn my biscuits.

(Bell rings.)

You're up, Big Al.

ALTON

Come on missy. I'm supposed to be training you, so get a clipboard and take notes.

ANDY

Patti, would you grab an extra clipboard for Toni?

*(PATTI reaches for the clipboard, while the men watch.
TONI shakes her head angrily. ALTON exits followed
by TONI.)*

That Toni's a piece of work, isn't she.

PATTI

I think she's kinda nice.

ANDY

You think everyone's nice.

PATTI

Everyone is...usually...if you give them a chance.

*(ANDY sits down and starts reading ALTON'S
newspaper.)*

Do you see me as an object?

ANDY

Huh?

PATTI

Toni said you treat me like an object.

ANDY

Don't listen to her. She's one of those women-libbers. She don't know nothing about me.

PATTI

She says you treat me like an object...and that you have no respect for women and that you just give me jobs to do so you can leer at me when I have to reach.

ANDY

(ANDY puts down the paper and stands up.)

Now Patti, you know you're not an object to me. I don't stare at you when you're reaching for things as far as you know.

PATTI

But I do know.

ANDY

Really?

PATTI

I've known a long time.

ANDY

And it bothers you?

PATTI

Not particularly...I mean if you're not seeing me as an object.

ANDY

I don't really mean anything, but I'm kinda embarrassed that you know and all.

PATTI

So you don't mind staring at me, but you don't like that I know?

ANDY

I guess.

(ALTON and TONI enter.)

ALTON

Patti, do we still have that two o'clock delivery time?

PATTI

Yeah.

ALTON

Schedule a delivery then. The saleslady here got her first taste of making a sale.

TONI

What if they want delivery later?

ALTON

I told you, four o'clock is reserved for the Hightowers.

TONI

I forgot.

(TONI hands the ticket to PATTI.)

PATTI

Split commission?

TONI

(TONI and ALTON answer together.)

No.

ALTON

Yes.

TONI

What split commission? I made that sale while you sat down and read a magazine. You didn't say anything, but "thank-you" after I made the sale!

ALTON

Saying "thank you" to the customer is very important. You're my trainee and we split all the commissions until you're trained. That's how it works.

TONI

I don't mind if I was being trained, but I did all the work on that sale.

ALTON

What work? Patti could've made that sale.

TONI

I identified the customer's needs, found a solution, explained the features and benefits...You did nothing.

(ANDY comes in to listen.)

ALTON

That guy came in with his checkbook in his back pocket and a mark where his ring used to be.

ANDY

Oh.

ALTON

Asking for a recliner, a television, and a mattress. He's obviously been kicked out of the house and needed those things for his new apartment. The fact that you were a dame probably didn't hurt, but even old Andy here could have made that sale.

TONI

That's not fair.

ALTON

Life's not fair. Split it Patti.

(Bell rings.)

I've got a customer. Remember keep that four o'clock delivery time open. In fact...that's the Hightowers now. Mr. Hightower didn't have as much self control as I thought.

(ALTON exits.)

TONI

That's not fair.

ANDY

Welcome to 20 West Main. That old codger's been stealing my commissions for years. If he's ever talked to a person...even to gripe at them...he'll claim the sale.

TONI

I won't put up with that. Put my name on that ticket, Patti.

PATTI

I don't know. Mr. Davis won't like that and Mr. McGee doesn't like fights.

ANDY

It's your funeral. Big Al doesn't get even...he gets ahead. Alton has Mr. McGee wrapped around his finger and the alley is full of salesmen that Alton has chewed up and ran off.

TONI

I'm not running. Put my name on the ticket and I'll deal with Mr. Davis if needed.

ANDY

(Bell rings indicating a customer has come in. ANDY looks before speaking to TONI.)

You're on a hot streak. Why don't you take this customer?

TONI

Really?

ANDY

Looks like an easy sale.

(TONI exits.)

PATTI

It's not like you to give up an up.

ANDY

It's Delores. I've got to see this.

Scene 2

(DELORES enters.)
(TONI enters.)

TONI

Good morning. What can I help you find?

DELORES

(Looks over TONI.)
I need some workbenches, honey.

TONI

(Looks around the store.)
I'm sorry, we don't have any workbenches. We're a furniture store...not a hardware store. You might want to try across the street.

DELORES

Is Andy around? He usually helps me.

TONI

(TONI looks around.)
He's not around, but I'm sure we don't have any workbenches.

DELORES

(DELORES looks over TONI again.)
How long have you worked here?

TONI

Started today. My names Toni...Toni Neal.

DELORES

A boy's name?

TONI

It's a man's or woman's name...I guess...I've never thought about it before.

DELORES

Ever considered another line of work, Toni? I'm always looking for good help.

TONI

Well, it's my first day, but...I'm always interested in opportunities. My professor in college always said, "Almost every experience in life is a learning opportunity...If you're looking for a true education."

DELORES

I can vouch for that. Now you're not a bad looking girl, but we'll need to do something with your hair and make-up. Guys don't want a girl looking as pale as you.

TONI

What kind of business are you in?

DELORES

I run the top floor of the Walcott Hotel. That's why I came to see Andy about some new workbenches.

TONI

Workbenches?

DELORES

Mattresses, dear. My girls go through 'em like a carpenter goes through lumber. I need six beds by this weekend. I like the firm ones. Some of these customers are pretty big and besides I don't want 'em to get too comfortable. Time is money.

TONI

You want beds for your...girls...and you want me to be one of your...girls.

DELORES

Honey, I don't got all day. I've got some errands to run. Tell Andy that Delores Wannamaker will be back in a while and...you really look like you could use some sun. My girls get out plenty in the day...most their work's at night.

TONI

I...I...I'll tell Andy.

DELORES

See you around.

(DELORES leaves.)

(ANDY and PATTI enter.)

ANDY

You didn't make the sale?

TONI

That woman is a...prostitute.

ANDY

Naw...Delores is the madam. The girls work for her and they prefer to be called ladies of the evening. Must be a good business...I wouldn't know, but she orders about a dozen mattresses every six months.

TONI

She asked me to work for her.

ANDY

Really?

(ANDY walks across stage as if looking at the departing DELORES.)

She's usually pretty picky about her girls.

PATTI

It must be a real honor to be asked.

TONI

No! It's not an honor, it's degrading.

(TONI points at ANDY.)

You set me up. You knew she would embarrass me.

ANDY

I had no idea she would want you to go to work for her...I still don't see it.

(ALTON enters.)

ALTON

What's going on?

ANDY

Toni just got asked...

(TONI interrupts.)

TONI

Nothing...nothing at all is going on.

(Bell rings interrupting the conversation.)

ANDY

The Hightowers are back again.

ALTON

I wish Mr. Hightower would hurry up and give in...he's taking up my whole day for no reason at all.

ANDY

Want me to create a little sense of urgency?

(ALTON nods. PATTI, ANDY, and TONI exit.

MR. HIGHTOWER and MRS. HIGHTOWER enter.)

ALTON

Mr. Hightower...Mrs. Hightower. Do we need to set up a delivery time on that sofa?

MR. HIGHTOWER

Not unless you're going to come down on the price.

ALTON

Not on this piece. It's one of our best sellers.

(TONI enters but stays out of the conversation.)

MR. HIGHTOWER

So you're telling me I'll be getting the same sofa that everyone else in town already owns?

ALTON

No. No. No...This is one of our best selling frames, but this is a new fabric application.

(TONI interrupts.)

TONI

If you'll notice, Mr. Hightower, the stripes on this piece match front and back. The floral design has multiple colors to coordinate the entire room.

MR. HIGHTOWER

And who are you?

TONI

I'm Toni...

(ALTON interrupts and gently pulls TONI out of the way.)

ALTON

She's a trainee...and is just leaving.

MR. HIGHLAND

She's very informative.

ALTON

Yes...she's learning.

(TONI moves with a little nudge from ALTON.)

ALTON cont.

You need to be learning in the back room with Patti, right now.

(ALTON speaks to TONI as he walks toward the exit.)

Stay out of my way...or else.

TONI

Or else what?

ALTON

I'll deal with you later.

(ALTON turns back to the HIGHTOWERS.)

(TONI exits.)

So...How about that sofa? Would you like to pay cash or charge it?

MR. HIGHTOWER

About the price...

MARY HIGHTOWER

Can we just buy the divan?

MR. HIGHTOWER

Hush now...we're doing business. I'm negotiating.

ALTON

There's no negotiating.

MR. HIGHTOWER

I've been married fifteen years...everything is negotiable.

(ANDY enters and interrupts.)

ANDY

Excuse me, Al. Is that floral Mastercraft sofa still for sale? I got a customer interested.

(ALTON turns to the HIGHTOWERS.)

ALTON

Well?

(MRS. HIGHTOWER is nervous, but MR. HIGHTOWER is irritated.)

MR. HIGHTOWER

(MR. HIGHTOWER shakes his head.)

Do you think I was born yesterday?

ALTON

What?

MR. HIGHTOWER

I can't believe you would try a cheap trick like threatening to hang a sold tag on my sofa!

ALTON

I don't know what you mean.

MR. HIGHTOWER

(Speaks to ANDY.)

What's the customer's name?

ANDY

Huh?

MR. HIGHTOWER

The name of the customer that so conveniently wants to buy my sofa.

ANDY

I...I...I don't know.

(ALTON glares at ANDY. MR. HIGHTOWER smirks.)

ALTON

(Speaking to ANDY.)

Don't you have somewhere to go?

(ANDY exits.)

(ALTON speaking to MR. HIGHTOWER.)

ALTON cont.

Just so there's no confusion, I'll put a hold on that sofa until four o'clock for you.

MR. HIGHTOWER

And the price?

ALTON

I've given you the low dollar price.

MR. HIGHTOWER

Let's go Mary.

MRS. HIGHTOWER

But Ernest...

MR. HIGHTOWER

I have spoken...let's go.

(ALTON signals to MRS. HIGHTOWER, and she nods back.)

(The HIGHTOWERS exit.)

(ANDY, TONI, and PATTI enter.)

ALTON

He'll be back.

TONI

How can you say that? He's as hardheaded as you are! You blew it. He wanted to know the features and I had his attention. He needed an excuse to buy and you wouldn't let me sell him.

ALTON

Sell him! You nearly cost me the sale.

TONI

Cost you the sale! He left...without the sofa.

ALTON

He'll be back.

TONI

There's a difference between confidence and arrogance.

ALTON

Trust me...he'll be back...by four o'clock.

TONI

How could you possibly know that?

ANDY

He knows...he always knows.

TONI

(TONI ignores ANDY and speaks to ALTON.)

How? How can you be so cocked sure he'll be back?

ALTON

(ALTON struts and answers.)

When the agitated Mr. Hightower...agitated because you interrupted... accused me of having Andy tag the sofa...

TONI

But that's exactly what you did!

ALTON

Anyway...when he scolded me he said...and I quote, "hang a sold tag on MY sofa." He said it twice. Mr. Hightower's already bought that sofa...he just doesn't know it yet. Besides, I have Mrs. Hightower on my side.

TONI

You're stubborn and...I think you're wrong.

ALTON

(ALTON straightens up.)

That sounds like a challenge.

TONI

It is.

ALTON

Well then...Let's make it interesting.

TONI

What do you mean?

ALTON

If the Hightowers don't come back and buy that sofa by four o'clock today...I'll quit complaining about you working here...and I'll give you your ups.

TONI

Okay...

ALTON

But...If the Hightowers come back and buy today...you quit!

TONI

That's not fair!

ALTON

Just like I thought. You're not up to a man's world.

TONI

You're on!

PATTI

Toni! Don't you think we need to go to lunch...now? Maybe go shopping...come on.

(TONI reluctantly exits with PATTI.)

ANDY

She fell into that one!

ALTON

I guess so.

ANDY

You know that Mr. Hightower is going to buy...right?

ALTON

As sure as you can be.

ANDY

You can call him back and make him a deal, though.

ALTON

I won't need to do that.

ANDY

Of course you do. Don't you see? We can get rid of this little chickadee before she can really cause problems.

ALTON

Oh...Shut up! You make me tired.

ANDY

But we've got her.

ALTON

You've got nothing...I'll make the sale like I always do and we'll see about the rest.

ANDY

Like I said, you've got her. I'm on your side on this one Big Al.

ALTON

If only it was as easy to get rid of you.

ANDY

Why are you sore at me?

ALTON

Because...you make it easy.

(ANDY is quite for a moment, while ALTON relaxes.)

ANDY

Want to listen to the game?

ALTON

That's the first good idea you've had today.

ANDY

(ANDY tunes in the radio.)

Guess we should've let the girl take her ups during the game.

ALTON

Shut up...I'm listening to the game.

ANDY

I'm just saying, she could be useful...during the game that is.

(ALTON glares at ANDY.)

(Brief silence.)

The game will be a blow out.

ALTON

I know, but I would so much prefer listening to the announcer than to you.

ANDY

I still think you should call that Hightower guy and give him a deal.

ALTON

I already made him a deal. He'll be back.

ANDY

But the girl...

ALTON

Shut up. I don't want to listen to you and I don't want to hear about the girl.

(ANDY looks like he will speak before ALTON stares him down.)

ANDY

I won't say another word.

Scene 3

(PATTI and TONI shopping during lunch.)

TONI

I really stepped in it, I guess.

PATTI

Yeah...you really did.

TONI

(TONI looks nervously at PATTI'S blunt reply.)

He just makes me so mad. He reminds me of....

PATTI

Your dad?

TONI

How did you know?

PATTI

Women always overreact to men that remind them of their dads.

TONI

What was your dad like?

PATTI

My dad was kind of a teddy bear...I don't really overreact that much.

TONI

My dad is just like Alton and that just gets under my skin...he really knows how to push my buttons.

(TONI asks nervously.)

Do you think he'll make Mr. Hightower a special deal?

PATTI

No. That's not his style. Alton really likes money. He doesn't like to discount...it cuts into his commission.

TONI

So...he might not make the sale and I might keep my job?

PATTI

No. He'll make the sale...but don't worry about your job. I have a secret weapon.

TONI

What is it?

PATTI

It wouldn't be a secret if I told you, silly.

(TONI starts to respond, but realizes she cannot argue with the logic.)

TONI

It doesn't involve working for Delores, does it?

PATTI

Of course not. Don't worry. I like you and you'll keep your job...in the furniture store. Now let's shop. I'm going to treat you to a makeover, if you'll buy something that looks a little less...

TONI

Revealing?

PATTI

Masculine.

TONI

Oh.

PATTI

It won't hurt to soften your look, a little. Look at me. I work with the men and can get them to do anything for me...well, almost anything.

TONI

Those guys treat you terribly. Alton's a bully and Andy...well Andy's kind of a jerk.

PATTI

I don't think so.

TONI

(TONI looks at PATTI suspiciously.)

You like him, don't you?

PATTI

Who?

TONI

Andy.

PATTI

Maybe...Maybe a little...Okay, maybe a lot.

(TONI looks at PATTI.)

Like I said, I can get the guys to do almost anything. Change my tire. Cover me with an umbrella when it rains. Start my car when it's cold. Cover for my long lunch hour...except...I can't get Andy to ask me out.

TONI

Just ask him out.

PATTI

What! No...I couldn't do that. It wouldn't be lady-like.

TONI

I swear, this furniture store is stuck in the 1950s. You like him...which I don't understand...but just ask him to dinner or a movie or both.

PATTI

I'd like to, but...what if he says no?

TONI

That's the chance we take to be liberated women.

(PATTI is still unsure.)

Besides...he won't say no.

PATTI

How do you know?

TONI

It's a secret.

PATTI

Oh, you.

TONI

Let's get that makeover.

PATTI

You'll feel a thousand percent better.

(TONI and PATTI start to exit.)

(DELORES enters carrying a shopping bag.)

DELORES

It's Toni, ain't it?

TONI

Yes ma'am.

DELORES

I'm no ma'am...just call me Delores.

TONI

Okay...Delores.

DELORES

Did you talk to Andy about my...mattresses?

TONI

I checked the inventory and we have a dozen in stock.

DELORES

Great...I'll be in later to settle up.

PATTI

Hello, Miss Wannamaker.

DELORES

You keepin' those men in line at the furniture store?

PATTI

Every day.

DELORES

Just like me.

PATTI

Well...not just like you.

TONI

(TONI is anxious to get away from DELORES.)

We better get going, Patti.

DELORES

You thought about my offer?

TONI

Offer?

DELORES

You look like a smart girl...I could teach you the business.

PATTI

How about me?

TONI

Patti!

DELORES

(Speaking to PATTI.)

You're too sweet.

TONI

I'm not sweet?

DELORES

Naw...you're sassy. I could use that in my inventory.

TONI

Miss Wannamaker...I graduated from business school and have no interest in...selling myself...

DELORES

Business is business...the product's just a little different. It's all about supply and demand...and sometimes asking for the order.

TONI

I...I...

DELORES

Relax...I wasn't thinking of you working...with the customers. You don't quite have the look. I need someone to help run the business. Cash flow, expenses...how to invest the profits.

TONI

I...I don't think I would be qualified.

DELORES

Suit yourself. We're all working girls after all...and we've got to stick together. Just remember, you can't be bashful about asking for what you want. I've learned that in my business!

(DELORES exits before TONI can say more.)

TONI

I've got it!

PATTI

What do you have? I've got pills for almost anything. Cold. Flu. Is it cramping?

TONI

I'm fine. I know how to beat Alton. Delores just told me how.

PATTI

I don't like the sound of this.

TONI

No...it'll be fine. She said you can't be bashful about asking for what you want. I'll beat Alton at his own game. I'll sell Mr. Hightower, before Alton has a chance. When does Alton go to lunch?

PATTI

He eats in the store.

TONI

The old buzzard. I should have known he wouldn't take a chance at having someone take a sale.

PATTI

He'll be listening to the Saturday game. He doesn't like to be interrupted during the games.

TONI

Perfect! Can you get me the Hightower's phone number?

PATTI

It's in the phonebook.

TONI

Great...I'll call from that payphone. Let's go get that makeover now! I can't wait to see Alton's face when I make that sale!

(TONI leaves.)

PATTI

(PATTI sighs heavily.)

I can.

INTERMISSION

ACT 2

Scene 1

(ALTON and ANDY listen to the ballgame on the radio in the store.)

(PATTI enters carrying a shopping bag.)

ALTON

Aaugh!

(ALTON reacts to the radio.)

PATTI

What's wrong...your team losing?

ALTON

No. They won big today.

PATTI

What's the problem?

ANDY

His other favorite team lost.

PATTI

Who's the other team?

ANDY

Alton has two favorite teams: his team and whoever is playing Notre Dame.

PATTI

What do you got against Notre Dame?

ANDY

There's a long...long list of things Big Al doesn't like. Commies, pinkos, hippies, The Big Ten Conference...but Notre Dame is at the top of his list.

PATTI

I still don't know what you got against Notre Dame?

ALTON

(Grunts.)

The Streak.

ANDY

It's all about "The Streak."

PATTI

The Streak? You mean like the kids streaking through college campuses with no clothes on?

ANDY

You shouldn't have asked.

(ANDY walks away but stays on stage.)

ALTON

The Streak has nothing to do with a bunch of hippies running around neck-ed.

PATTI

You mean naked.

ALTON

Like I said, neck-ed.

PATTI

You said neck-ed...not naked.

ALTON

Necked.

ANDY

You're saying neck-ed...not naked.

ALTON

Neck-ed.

ANDY

Not neck-ed...na...ked.

ALTON

Are you trying to make me look foolish?

ANDY

You're an old man with near constant flatulence that can't hear and can't smell. I can't make you look any more foolish, but you're saying it wrong.

(ALTON looks unconvinced.)

ANDY

You don't "beck" you bake. You don't "reck" you rake. You don't eat a "ceck" you eat cake. It's not "neck-ed" it's naked.

ALTON

Quit wasting my time. The Streak has nothing to do with "naked" hippies running around without their clothes on.

(ALTON talks to PATTI.)

You've never heard of The Streak?

(PATTI shakes her head apathetically.)

What's the country coming to! It's...It's historic. It's like the Norman Conquest. It's like Ike beating Hitler. The American Revolution...DiMaggio. It's the University of Oklahoma winning 47 straight games...in a row!

PATTI

So?

ALTON

What's become of this younger generation? You don't understand. Bud Wilkerson built the greatest college football team the world had ever seen from the ashes of the Great Depression and the Great War.

ALTON cont.

These young warriors that Wilkerson put together won 47 straight games...A streak that has never been broken...and will never be broken.

PATTI

So...your team won some games.

ALTON

(ALTON speaks in an impassioned voice like a preacher.)

My team won every game from 1953 to 1957. I listened to every game on the radio...in this store.

ANDY

And then Notre Dame broke The Streak.

ALTON

(ALTON appears heartbroken and repeats ANDY's line.)

And then Notre Dame broke The Streak.

ANDY

That's why Al pulls for any team playing Notre Dame. If Notre Dame played Russia with Satan himself at quarterback, Al would cheer for the Russians.

PATTI

The Russians? You told me they were the Commies, Alton.

ALTON

(ALTON answers defiantly.)

That's right...I would pull for the commies before I'd give Notre Dame the satisfaction.

ANDY

Al takes The Streak real serious.

PATTI

Good thing it's only a game.

(Radio announcer says, "And the Fighting Irish of Notre Dame win another thriller in South Bend.")

ALTON

Yaugh! You're killing me Purdue!

ANDY

(ANDY puts his arm around ALTON to console him.)

It'll be okay, Big Al. Switzer's got the Sooners up to a 28 game winning streak. Maybe this team will get it done.

ALTON

Yeah...We play Kansas next week. That'll be an easy win.

(ALTON realized ANDY's arm is around him.)

Get your hands off me. Have you gone light in the loafers or something?

PATTI

You boys play nice...and be nice to Toni. She's had a tough day, but she's feeling better after some shopping and I don't want you two picking on her any more.

ANDY

We won't have to pick on her at all after Al makes that Hightower sale.

PATTI

Alton, you're not going to run her off.

ALTON

She made the deal.

PATTI

I'm warning you. I like Toni.

ALTON

She's a big girl...she can make her own choices.

PATTI

I'll make the call.

ALTON

You wouldn't.

PATTI

I would and I will.

ANDY

What call?

ALTON

(ALTON speaks to ANDY.)

None of your business.

(ALTON speaks to PATTI.)

You don't play fair.

PATTI

I'm a working girl and we've got to stick together...I learned that at lunch.

(TONI enters. TONI's hair is down, her make-up is better, she's wearing a more flattering yet professional dress. TONI looks different except for her glasses.)

ANDY

Wow!

ALTON

Wow!

PATTI

(PATTI speaking to TONI.)

There you are. You look great. Don't you feel fantastic after a little shopping?

TONI

I guess.

PATTI

(PATTI speaks to ALTON and ANDY.)

Doesn't Toni look nice, boys?

ANDY

Wow!

ALTON

Yeah...what he said.

PATTI

Toni, let's lose those glasses. They're hiding your eyes.

TONI

(TONI removes her glasses and walks elegantly for a few steps before stumbling over something she cannot see.)

(TONI gathers herself.)

I think I'll keep the glasses.

PATTI

Suit yourself...but sometimes you have to sacrifice for beauty.

ANDY

Uh...Toni...would you mind grabbing that calculator for me?

(TONI reaches for the top shelf as ANDY and ALTON watch.)

PATTI

Hey!

TONI

(TONI realizes the men are watching.)

Hey!

PATTI

(PATTI pushes by TONI to reach for the calculator.)

That's my job.

TONI

You two are terrible.

ANDY

Don't blame us...we had no idea you were...attractive.

PATTI

(PATTI walks to ANDY.)

Here's your calculator.

(PATTI roughly sticks the calculator into ANDY'S chest and glares at TONI as she walks by.)

I need you to come change my typewriter ribbon, again.

(PATTI and ANDY exit.)

ALTON

I know what you're up to.

TONI

What?

ALTON

It won't work...it won't work on me.

TONI

I don't know what you're talking about.

ALTON

Yes, you do. You can sashay around in that tight skirt...wiggling your hips...and batting your eyes. That might work on a dimwit like Andy, but I'm immune. I've been to war in Europe, saw Marilyn Monroe in her prime, and been married for 30 years!

TONI

Why don't you like me? I'm really trying.

ALTON

It's not personal. If you were a customer or showed up to marry my son...I wouldn't fuss. You seem decent enough.

TONI

But not as a co-worker?

ALTON

Not as a co-worker. That's where I draw the line. Once women are in the workplace...that will be the end of civilization as we know it.

TONI

You can't be serious.

ALTON

Women are fine as teachers, nurses, secretaries, dental assistants...telephone operators. But they just don't have the sensibility for other jobs.

TONI

That's the most ignorant...fat-headed statement I've ever heard!

ALTON

Since we gave you women the right to vote, we've had three wars, a Great Depression, Hippies, Commies, the Edsel and now...ladies at work. I like my woman at home. Life works well that way.

TONI

For you! I bet you're upset that "we women" aren't still in veils.

ALTON

It works for the Arabs. They seem to have all the money these days.

TONI

What's your wife like?

ALTON

Leave her out of this.

TONI

I feel sorry for her. She must live in terror of you.

ALTON

You don't know anything about my wife.

TONI

I bet you don't know much about her either.

ALTON

You don't know anything about my wife or my life.

TONI

You're right...I don't. I don't know anything about you. You won't let me. You won't share anything with me. What are you afraid of?

ALTON

Leave me alone.

TONI

That's it! I wouldn't have guessed it. You're afraid of me!

ALTON

That's ridiculous! I landed in Normandy, drove a tank into Bastogne with Patton, and sold furniture to menopausal women for a quarter of a century. I'm not afraid of anything.

TONI

You're afraid of me! I can see it, now.

ALTON

Where's Andy gone to?

TONI

You're afraid of me!

(ALTON and TONI face each other and slowly move face-to-face.)

ALTON

Am not.

TONI

Are, too.

ALTON

Am not.

TONI

Are, too.

ALTON

(ALTON is talking loudly and is face to face with TONI.)

Am not!

TONI

Would you like some Dentyne?

(TONI hands ALTON a stick of gum and he takes it as the two back away from each other.)

ALTON

It's never a good idea to turn down a piece of gum.

(PATTI and ANDY enter laughing.)

Where have you been?

ANDY

I've been helping Patti replace the ribbon on her typewriter while she made some phone calls. What's going on here?

ALTON

(ALTON is defensive.)

Nothing. I don't know what you mean.

TONI

We've been exploring Alton's phobias.

ANDY

Huh?

ALTON

Everyone needs to get back to work.

TONI

Alton has just shared that he's afraid of me.

ALTON

I've shared nothing with you.

ANDY

Big Al's not afraid of anything.

TONI

He's afraid of me.

ALTON

You don't know anything about me!

TONI

You don't know anything about me, either!

(TONI walks away to gather herself before continuing.)

Did it ever occur to you that I need to work? Did you ever consider that I might prefer staying home and raising a family? Did you ever think that maybe I'm here working because my husband abused me and then left in the middle of the night?

(ALTON does not respond, but looks guilty.)

PATTI

Toni, I had no idea. Why didn't you say anything?

TONI

(TONI is surprised by PATTI's concern and answers in a nonchalant tone.)

None of that's true, I was just wondering if he had ever thought about it. I want a career. I can't stand staying at home. I'm pretty sure I don't like kids. And I'm not ready for a husband...but when I am he'll marry me on my terms.

ALTON

You...You deceiving Dolly. I almost felt sorry for you...almost. Now I'm going to close that deal with Mr. Hightower and send you out of here!

PATTI

Alton, I warned you.

ALTON

She started it with her lies.

PATTI

I've already made the call.

(The bell rings indicating someone has entered the store.)

MRS. DAVIS

(MRS. DAVIS shouts from off stage.)

Al-*ton!*

ALTON

You didn't.

PATTI

I did.

ALTON

What have you done?

MRS. DAVIS

(MRS. DAVIS enters.)

Al-ton!

ANDY

I'm out of here. You're on your own Big Al.

(ANDY exits.)

MRS. DAVIS

Al-ton!

TONI

Who is it?

ALTON

(ALTON answers TONI in a defeated tone.)

It's my wife.

MRS. DAVIS

There you are, Alton. Why are you hiding back here? I've been calling for you.

ALTON

(ALTON in a very polite tone in speaking to his wife.)

I'm working dear...You know I shouldn't be bothered at work.

MRS. DAVIS

You can't be serious. There's nothing going on down here today. What I want to know is why you didn't bother to tell me you had a new trainee? I have to find this out from Patti?

ALTON

It just happened today.

MRS. DAVIS

Patti dear...is that true?

PATTI

Yes ma'am.

MRS. DAVIS

Oh my, what's wrong with your dress?

(MRS. DAVIS steps to PATTI and starts tugging on the hem of her dress trying to lengthen it. PATTI endures the inspection uncomfortably.)

Surely it's not meant to be this short?

PATTI

I'm afraid that it is...it came off the rack that way.

MRS. DAVIS

No wonder you don't have a man yet...Dear, no man's going to want to marry a girl showing that much leg for free. You got to save a little mystery for the sale. Isn't that right Alton?

ALTON

(ALTON tries to guide MRS. DAVIS toward the door.)

Nice of you to stop by dear, but I've got a lot of...dusting to do.

MRS. DAVIS

You're such a hard worker, but...oh my...what is the matter with your hair. Didn't you check the mirror this morning?

(MRS. DAVIS licks her hand and starts to pat down ALTON's hair.)

Are we going to have to have you check with me before you leave the house?

ALTON

No dear.

MRS. DAVIS

Now, where's this new salesman?

ALTON

I don't know...

TONI

(TONI interrupts.)

Hello, Mrs. Davis. I'm Toni...I'm the new salesperson Alton's training.

MRS. DAVIS

She's a girl.

ALTON

I've noticed.

MRS. DAVIS

(MRS. DAVIS carefully looks over TONI.)

Oh my, dear...you're not thinking about trying to get a night job at the Walcott Hotel dressed that way, are you?

TONI

No, but you are the second person that's suggested that today. Patti, took me shopping at noon.

MRS. DAVIS

(MRS. DAVIS starts tugging at TONI's clothes.)

That figures. That girl has the taste of a tramp.

PATTI

I can hear you.

MRS. DAVIS

(Ignores PATTI.)

I'll take you shopping next week. Alton, why didn't you tell me they had hired a salesgirl down here?

ALTON

Like I said, I didn't know until this morning.

MRS. DAVIS

It's about time. I've been saying they've needed a woman's touch down here for years.

(MRS. DAVIS speaks to TONI.)

I'm Elizabeth Davis...Alton's blushing bride. I've told Alton that he needed to talk to Mr. McGee about putting me to work down here. I could put some spark in this sales floor, but...I guess Alton doesn't have much stroke with Mr. McGee because he's been asking for years and can't convince him.

(MRS. DAVIS stops as if an idea has come to her.)

Maybe I need to talk to Mr. McGee myself. If one salesgirl is good, two would be great.

(MRS. DAVIS speaks to ALTON.)

Wouldn't that be wonderful, Alton? We could share a ride each morning. We could spend so much quality time together...both of us chasing our dreams.

(ALTON looks at PATTI for some help.)

PATTI

Alton's tried and tried, but Mr. McGee is really worried about having too many family members around.

TONI

Mr. McGee mentioned in my interview that he didn't allow nepotism. He has a very strict policy.

ALTON

He's very strict about nepotism.

PATTI

I don't even know what nepotism is, but I'm against it.

MRS. DAVIS

That's too bad. Can't you just imagine us working together, Alton?

ALTON

It keeps me up at night...with excitement.

MRS. DAVIS

I could add so much class to this place.

ALTON

It would be indescribable.

MRS. DAVIS

Yes...It would be a dream come true.

ALTON

Something close to that.

(PATTI mouths the word "nightmare" to TONI.)

MRS. DAVIS

I'm glad to see that Alton's training you, Toni. I'm into all the women's lib stuff. I would burn my bra in a minute to work down here.

TONI

I...I really hope it doesn't come to that.

MRS. DAVIS

Well, if Alton doesn't train you well, give me a call. I've taught him everything he knows about dealing with difficult people.

TONI

I can see that.

MRS. DAVIS

Thank you for calling, Patti. It's been such a wonderful time. I'll try to come back and give you some pointers about dressing for success sometime.

PATTI

I...I can't believe that you would do that.

MRS. DAVIS

It would be nothing. I'm always happy to share my expertise.
(*MRS. DAVIS starts to leave, but shouts at ALTON.*)
Don't be late Alton. It's meatloaf night.

ALTON

(*ALTON cringes, but answers politely.*)
Yes, dear.
(*MRS. DAVIS leaves. PATTI, ALTON, and TONI sigh together in relief. ANDY reenters.*)

ANDY

Is it safe?

ALTON

Not for anything that runs into her...but she's gone.

TONI

You shouldn't be afraid of women in the workplace...you should be terrified. I am.

ALTON

She hasn't always been like that.

ANDY

She used to be loud, domineering, and really scary.

ALTON

Yeah, but she's...well let's just say she's a very strong and...passionate woman. A very passionate, affectionate woman.

TONI

ANDY

PATTI

(*TONI, ANDY, and PATTI speak in unison.*)

Too much information.

Don't say more!

That'll be hard to forget.

ALTON

I know she's a little rough around the edges, but she's mine...and she's kept me in line for thirty years.

(ALTON looks at the others and tries to regain some of his former bravado.)

I'm usually safe here at the store, but someone thought they had to put their nose where it doesn't belong.

PATTI

I warned you. Be nice to Toni or I'd make the call.

ALTON

If you're not careful, she's going to corner Mr. McGee on the wrong day...

PATTI

And get you fired?

ALTON

Worse, he'd probably hire her. It doesn't seem natural, but no man can resist her. My wife would be the ultimate salesperson making the rest of us obsolete.

ANDY

I would be in hiding.

PATTI

Are we going to play nice the rest of the day?

(TONI, ANDY, and ALTON look at each other before nodding.)

Good, I don't want to have to go through that again.

(ANDY and PATTI exit.)

Scene 2

(TONI and ALTON on stage.)

TONI

Alton, you aren't really going to expect me to leave if the Hightowers come back for the sofa, are you?

ALTON

A deal's a deal.

TONI

That was a bad deal.

ALTON

You overacted and got angry. Hey, I actually taught you something today. You can't do that with customers. You have to stay in control.

TONI

I guess it doesn't matter. It looks like the Hightowers aren't going to make it by four.

(ALTON looks at his watch and shakes his head.)

ALTON

I don't understand. I saw all the signs. I can't believe that customer didn't buy.

TONI

I think they will...it's just...

ALTON

It's just what?

TONI

It's a funny story, actually.

ALTON

How funny?

TONI

Over lunch, I called Mr. Hightower and...I kind of told him if he would come in a little after four o'clock, I'd make him a better deal.

ALTON

(ALTON seems shocked and surprised.)

You what?

TONI

I called Mr. Hightower.

(ALTON's demeanor changes from shock to anger.)

Now don't blow a gasket. I'll get you your commission...I...I just didn't know what else to do. You threatened my job and...it was self-defense.

ALTON

(ALTON does not respond for a moment.)

I can't believe this.

TONI

I'm sorry.

ALTON

All day, you've accused me of being mean, and manipulating, and unfair. You even lectured me on ethics. You may not think so now, young lady, but I've been trying to give you some valuable lessons today. You and I don't see eye to eye, but you've...you've got a lot to learn.

TONI

I know, I know. I can learn so much from you about sales.

ALTON

I'm not talking about sales. I'm talking about life. Trust is something you earn...it's something you build over years...and you spent all of yours up in one day.

TONI

I'm so sorry.

ALTON

Saying you're sorry might work for the politicians, but this is real life. This is my livelihood you're messing with. You said earlier today that I was the best.

TONI

Yes, sir. That's what everyone says.

ALTON

You wanted to learn from me, but yet you don't respect anything about me. You see my old fuddy-duddy clothes and my way of dealing with people and just assume I don't know anything. You want to know why I'm the best? It's because I've been doing this for thirty years. I'm proud of what I do. I help make people's houses into homes. I know things are changing, but putting customers first will never go out of style. I've spent thirty years building trust with my customers...they deserve that. I may be old-fashioned in your eyes, but I care.

(TONI does not respond.)

Do you know why I didn't discount that sofa to Mr. Hightower?

TONI

You didn't want to cut your commission.

ALTON

Life's not always about the money. I've sold three of those sofas this month. If I let a bully like Mr. Hightower whittle me down on the price, just because he's willing to be a bigger jerk than the others, that's not fair...not to my other customers and not to Mr. Hightower. Sure, he might find a sofa close to that price. Heck, if he's lucky he might save a buck or two, but what has he learned? If he comes into a store and acts like a jerk and a bully there's a reward at the cash register?

TONI

But, you're a bully.

ALTON

Is that what you think of me?

TONI

That's all I've seen.

ALTON

I'm set in my ways and not used to change. I guess I never thought how I looked to someone like you.

TONI

So, maybe you learned something today?

ALTON

Girlie, I learn something every day. I've earned a PhD in human behavior and psychology in this job. I know being a salesman is not...what do the kids say... "The bee's knee."

(TONI laughs.)

TONI

I get your point, but I don't think anyone's said "bee's knee" since...I don't think I've ever heard anyone say that.

(ALTON doesn't respond.)

But I get your point. You are the best, Alton. I have learned things today...and...you're right. I probably have prejudged you as much as I thought you were prejudging me.

ALTON

Then we've both learned something today.

(Bell rings and the HIGHTOWERS enter.)

But I'm about to teach you how to close a sale.

(TONI watches ALTON move toward the HIGHTOWERS for a second, before racing to try to beat him. When ALTON sees what she is doing he blocks her way and gets to the HIGHTOWERS first.)

ALTON

I see you made it back.

MR. HIGHTOWER

I'm not here to see you; I'm here to see the girl.

ALTON

(ALTON replies in a dejected tone.)

Oh. Toni, Mr. Hightower's here to see you.

TONI

(TONI speaks to ALTON.)

I'm really sorry. I will do the right thing.

(The bell rings indicating another customer is in the store.)

ALTON

Excuse me, I have a customer.

(MRS. HIGHTOWER does not want ALTON to leave and looks disapprovingly at how the more attractive TONI is attracting the attention of her husband.)

(ALTON exits.)

MR. HIGHTOWER

You mentioned that you would make it worth my while if I came back after 4 o'clock today.

TONI

Yes. I think the sofa you're considering is a wise choice for your home. It has expert tailoring, the coil springs make it sit firmly, and the double-doweled frames will last...for years.

MR. HIGHTOWER

(MR. HIGHTOWER speaks to his wife.)

Mary, why don't you go look at those lamps you've been bothering me about.

(MRS. HIGHTOWER exits.)

Now...let's get down to business.

TONI

Yes, sir. Like I said, this is a wonderful addition to your home.

MR. HIGHTOWER

(MR. HIGHTOWER moves in uncomfortably close.)

You said you would make it worth my while to come see you. Were you talking about a discount...or did you have something else in mind?

TONI

Discount...I thought I could give you a discount.

MR. HIGHTOWER

That's a little disappointing, but let's hear what you got, little lady.

TONI

(TONI sighs heavily before answering.)

This isn't going to work.

MR. HIGHTOWER

What? My discount?

TONI

You're Alton's customer.

MR. HIGHTOWER

Forget that old geezer. I'd much rather talk to you.

TONI

I'm just a trainee. I thought maybe I could give you a discount, but...but I'm just learning from Mr. Davis this week. I'll go find him.

MR. HIGHTOWER

(MR. HIGHTOWER grabs TONI by the arm.)

I'd rather look at you than Mr. Davis...discount or not.

TONI

(TONI breaks away from MR. HIGHTOWER.)

I'm going to get Mr. Davis...and find your wife.

(TONI marches off. A nervous MR. HIGHTOWER follows.)

(PATTI and ANDY enter. TONI joins them in a few moments.)

ANDY

Long day?

TONI

Yeah.

ANDY

I see the Hightowers are back. Big Al better hurry up if he's going to get that last delivery of the day.

TONI

I...I think I messed that up...I think I've pretty much messed everything up today.

PATTI

Don't be so hard on yourself.

ANDY

Don't sell old Al short. I've...I've messed up plenty of times but that old guy always makes it work.

TONI

Thanks...things just aren't...things just aren't what I thought they would be.

PATTI

They never are, Toni. That's why God created make-up.

(Bell rings.)

ANDY

Why don't you take this up? I've had an okay day and I can help Patti with some things in the back.

TONI

Thanks.

(ANDY and PATTI exit and DELORES enters.)

DELORES

I'm back and...you've...you've upgraded your look a little since this morning. Maybe you could work with my customers.

TONI

Hello Miss Wannamaker. I'll go find Andy for you.

DELORES

No...you'll do. I still need those workbenches...I mean mattresses.

TONI

I'll write up the ticket.

DELORES

Are you okay?

TONI

I don't know.

DELORES

Tough day?

TONI

Yeah.

DELORES

I've had plenty of those. I've always found that tough days go away, but tough people never do.

TONI

I don't think I'm so tough...at least not today. You know...you've treated me nicer than anyone today.

DELORES

Bein' nice is always free...and good business. People look at me and well...let's just say the decent people don't think much about how I make a living...even when their husbands and boyfriends...and occasional preacher-man keeps me in business. You can't let other people choose how you feel about yourself. Business is tough...life is tough...but so are us working girls.

TONI

You're pretty smart, Miss Wannamaker.

DELORES

You get a lot of time to think in my line of work. Now, go check your inventory and let's make a deal.

TONI

I'll be right back.

(TONI exits.)

(DELORES looks around.)

(ALTON, MR. HIGHTOWER, and MRS. HIGHTOWER enter.)

ALTON

I don't care what you thought. That's the price on the sofa.

MR. HIGHTOWER

That little tart you tried to throw at me promised a discount. Your salesgirl thought she could snuggle up to me and I'd throw money away on a bad deal.

ALTON

You're not dealing with the salesgirl...salesperson. You're dealing with me.

MR. HIGHTOWER

So...how about the discount.

ALTON

Mrs. Hightower, did you hear anything about a discount?

MRS. HIGHTOWER

(MRS. HIGHTOWER shakes her head.)

Can't we just get the divan, Ernest?

MR. HIGHTOWER

(MR. HIGHTOWER talks sternly to MRS. HIGHTOWER.)

Stay out of this! I make the financial decisions in this house.

DELORES

Ernie?

(MR. HIGHTOWER notices DELORES for the first time.)

MR. HIGHTOWER

Uh, let's go take another look at the sofa.

(MR. HIGHTOWER leaves abruptly followed by ALTON and MRS. HIGHTOWER.)
(TONI enters.)

TONI

I checked the warehouse and we have six of those beds in stock and can deliver them Monday morning.

DELORES

That'll be great...but not too early. My girls work late on the weekends.

TONI

I'll see to it. Will that be cash or charge?

DELORES

Cash, honey.

TONI

Of course.

DELORES

Is that Ernie Hightower over there?

TONI

(TONI looks off stage.)

That's Mr. Hightower and his wife.

DELORES

I thought so. He's put on a little weight over the years.

TONI

Do you know Mr. Hightower?

DELORES

Intimately. So that's his wife?

TONI

Yes.

DELORES

Poor lady.

TONI

What do you mean?

DELORES

Ernie was a regular upstairs at the Walcott before he was married. That's back when I was in production not management, if you know what I mean.

TONI

I think I get it.

DELORES

Ernie would strut in like God's gift to women...a real big talker. But...he had...let's just say he had some performance issues. We called him the weeper, because he generally would just break down and cry...for the whole hour sometimes.

TONI

Mr. Hightower?

DELORES

Ernie Hightower.

TONI

Miss Wannamaker would you like a discount on those workbenches?

DELORES

I've got a firm rule about discounting on my end...but I'm not opposed to taking one, I guess. What's the catch?

TONI

I need you to stay here for just a minute. I'll give you 10 percent off the purchase and...I'll have Andy deliver it for free...with his shirt off.

DELORES

Knock off the sales tax and Andy can keep his shirt on. There ain't nothing on a man I haven't seen, but I hate paying taxes.

TONI

Deal! Just stay here and I'll be right back.

(DELORES shrugs as TONI exits.)

(TONI reenters followed by ALTON, MR. HIGHTOWER, and MRS. HIGHTOWER.)

ALTON

Haven't you caused enough trouble for one day? You can't interrupt me when I'm talking to a customer.

TONI

I'm sorry, but I think this is important.

MR. HIGHTOWER

What is it now? Am I getting my discount or not?

MRS. HIGHTOWER

Can't we just get the divan, Ernest?

MR. HIGHTOWER

Silence woman! You're ruining my negotiations.

TONI

Mr. Hightower, I met a friend of yours.

MR. HIGHTOWER

Delores?

DELORES

Hi Ernie.

MRS. HIGHTOWER

Do you know this woman, Ernest?

MR. HIGHTOWER

No!

MRS. HIGHTOWER

You called her Delores.

MR. HIGHTOWER

A lucky guess?

(DELORES walks up to MRS. HIGHTOWER as if examining her.)

DELORES

You've done alright for yourself, Ernie.

MRS. HIGHTOWER

Ernie?

DELORES

Ernie and me used to do...some business together.

ALTON

(ALTON talks to TONI.)

What are you doing?

TONI

Letting you close the sale.

MRS. HIGHTOWER

What kind of business?

MR. HIGHTOWER

Uh...we need to buy that sofa.

(ALTON looks at TONI.)

ALTON

Split commission?

TONI

(TONI nods.)

Take no prisoners, Big Al.

(TONI talks to DELORES.)

Miss Wannamaker, why don't we finish up your ticket and get you your discount.

MR. HIGHTOWER

She's getting a discount?

DELORES

Come see me sometime, Ernie.

(TONI and DELORES exit.)

MRS. HIGHTOWER

Who was that woman, Ernest?

MR. HIGHTOWER

No one...just someone I knew a long time ago.

(MRS. HIGHTOWER now looks sternly at her husband.)

Let's get back to this sofa business...about that discount.

ALTON

No discount...Ernie.

(ALTON pushes by MR. HIGHTOWER to speak to MRS. HIGHTOWER.)

Would you like your divan delivered this afternoon, Mrs. Hightower?

MRS. HIGHTOWER

Yes...yes I would.

ALTON

That's okay with you...right Ernie?

MR. HIGHTOWER

Okay...Okay.

ALTON

I noticed you were looking at those beautiful Stiffel lamps.

MRS. HIGHTOWER

They're gorgeous.

ALTON

They would really set off the room.

MR. HIGHTOWER

Could you maybe throw in a couple of lamps in the deal?

ALTON

No. I'll throw in the cushions.

MR. HIGHTOWER

The sofa comes with cushions!

ALTON

It does now...if you're nice.

(ALTON speaks to MRS. HIGHTOWER.)

Mary, my wife says you can never have too many chairs in a house. How are you set for chairs?

MR. HIGHTOWER

We don't need any chairs!

MRS. HIGHTOWER

We need three. Remember your mother is coming. We'll need two that match and one...for the corner.

ALTON

The two over there are the most expensive.

MRS. HIGHTOWER

We'll take them.

MR. HIGHTOWER

You're killing me.

MRS. HIGHTOWER

Not yet.

ALTON

Is there anything else?

MR. HIGHTOWER

No!

MRS. HIGHTOWER

Yes!

ALTON

I'm listening.

MRS. HIGHTOWER

We're going to need twin beds...delivered tonight.

MR. HIGHTOWER

Twin beds?

MRS. HIGHTOWER

I don't want Mr. Hightower wrinkling my new sofa. And can you open up a revolving charge account?

ALTON

Absolutely.

MRS. HIGHTOWER

Good. I'll be back for some other projects. Any problem with that...Ernie?

MR. HIGHTOWER

No, dear.

MRS. HIGHTOWER

And we can get that delivered this evening? I'll pay extra.

ALTON

I've already reserved the time.

MRS. HIGHTOWER

Write the man a check...Ernie, before I look at bunk beds.

MR. HIGHTOWER

Yes, dear.

(ALTON hands MR. HIGHTOWER the bill and MR. HIGHTOWER writes the check and hands it to ALTON.)

ALTON

It's been a pleasure...really.

(MR. HIGHTOWER walks off. MRS. HIGHTOWER exits after giving a smiling wink to ALTON.)

(ALTON exits and is in a noticeably better mood.)

(PATTI enters with ANDY.)

ANDY

Could you believe the ticket Big Al wrote for the Hightowers?

PATTI

The biggest sale we've had in a month...and he split the commission with TONI.

ANDY

No way.

(PATTI nods.)

That's not like Big Al. He never splits commission.

PATTI

Things are changing.

ANDY

Not for the better.

PATTI

What do you mean by that?

ANDY

This whole women's lib thing...it's going to change everything.

PATTI

I'm a woman.

ANDY

You're different.

PATTI

How?

ANDY

I don't know...you're just different.

PATTI

Do you know the hardest part about being smart?

ANDY

(ANDY thinks for a second before replying.)

No.

PATTI

I didn't think so.

ANDY

What do you mean by that?

PATTI

You're not too bright.

ANDY

Hey!

PATTI

I've been working here a year and you've never once asked me out.

ANDY

Well...I've been meaning to.

PATTI

Really?

ANDY

I guess I'm afraid you'd say no and then...working here and all...it would be awkward.

PATTI

A woman told me that you can't be bashful about asking for what you want. Toni said that I should ask you out.

ANDY

Toni said that? I didn't even know she liked me.

PATTI

She doesn't...she just said this is the 70s and women shouldn't be afraid to ask for what we want.

ANDY

Why didn't you...I mean...why didn't you ask me out?

PATTI

I was afraid you'd say no.

ANDY

A fine pair we are. I guess we're neither one too smart.

PATTI

Hey!

ANDY

I mean...I'm crazy about you. I have been for a while.

PATTI

Really?

ANDY

Really and truly. Patti, would you like to go out tonight?

PATTI

I would.

(ANDY and PATTI hug.)

Andy, would you mind grabbing my purse?

(ANDY reaches for PATTI's purse as she leers at him.)

ANDY

(ANDY turns around to notice that PATTI has been admiring him.)

Hey!

PATTI

I told you things are changing. But don't worry...you're more than just an object to me.

(PATTI and ANDY exit.)

(TONI enters. ALTON enters.)

TONI

Been quite a day.

ALTON

Yeah. Where's Andy?

TONI

I think he and Patti already left.

ALTON

Together?

(TONI nods.)

It's about time.

TONI

You knew they like each other?

(ALTON does not answer.)

I forgot...you're a people person.

ALTON

More than you might think.

TONI

Congratulations on that big Hightower sale.

ALTON

You know you don't have to quit your job.

TONI

Oh...I wasn't...I...just wanted to let you know it was a nice sale.

ALTON

I couldn't have closed it without you...I mean I could have, but not with as much flair.

TONI

I thought I probably owed you that.

ALTON

I split the commission with you.

TONI

Really...on the whole thing?

ALTON

The whole thing. You're my trainee after all.

TONI

I split Delores's commission with you, too. I gave her a discount, but she did buy six workbenches...I mean beds.

ALTON

You know how much I hate discounting.

TONI

I thought it was for a worthy cause.

ALTON

It did seem like some karmic justice.

TONI

What do you know about karma?

ALTON

I know people get what they deserve...eventually.

TONI

Next thing I know you'll be sharing your feelings.

ALTON

Maybe.

TONI

I...I want you to know that I really learned a lot today...I learned a lot more than I bargained for. You were right...I didn't really respect your years of experience like I should have.

ALTON

I learned some things today, too. I think Mr. McGee's right...this industry needs a woman's perspective.

TONI

Don't you get a woman's perspective from Mrs. Davis?

ALTON

My wife motivates me to get out of the house and come to work, but I don't get much perspective.

TONI

Your wife is...an interesting person.

ALTON

She is and I've got to go. It's meatloaf night and...well let's just say there's something about meatloaf that...lifts my wife's inhibitions.

TONI

That's sharing a little too much, Al.

ALTON

I'll see you Monday, kid.

TONI

See ya Monday, Big Al.

Curtain

If you enjoyed *Working Girls*, look for these Bob Perry novels:

The Broken Statue

Mimosa Lane

Brothers of the Cross Timber

Guilt's Echo

The Nephilim Code

Lydie's Ghost

Return from Wrath

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