

By Kate Merchant



Making
OUR OWN WAY

Chapter 1: One fine summer's day...

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I looked at the street signs, E. 60 and 3rd, right location. A glance at my watch told me that I needed to move as I had an interview in ten minutes at the main research building. Having worked at Kellermans for five years, I was familiar with how the institution functioned. I started as an administrative assistant and moved up to executive assistant. During that time, I had worked on my different grants that the physicians in our department used. The experience had taught me the ins and outs of grant management.

On my thirtieth birthday, I realized, I had hit that proverbial glass ceiling since having had my kids. In the past six months, I had been passed over for two promotions. After each promotion passed, my boss said that there would be another opportunity. When I turned 30, I finally admitted to myself that they were stringing me along. I started to apply to other departments. This grants manager job was exactly what I had in mind. It was my second interview, this time with the physician herself, Dr. Jennifer Bower. Finally, I made it to the research building and found the office.

Knocking on the door, I heard a hushed come in. I walked in. A woman in her early forties opened the door. She walked over and extended her hand.

"Dr. Bower?" I asked shaking her hand.

"Yes, Tracy?" Dr. Bower asked. I nodded. "Glad to meet you, please call me Jennifer, let's go into my office."

I nodded and smiled, noticing another young woman in the corner, looking at me with curiosity. Jennifer walked beside me to block my view from her.

"That's Kara," Jennifer explained. "She's my AA."

I wasn't sure, but I thought I saw Jennifer shudder. "I'm assuming that you already have one, but here is my CV and letters of recommendation," I said handing her a folder with my personal information.

She took it and started to read the dossier that I prepared. *This isn't so bad*, I thought taking in my surroundings. The setting was not dissimilar to my office. The furniture was standard hospital issue stuff, favoring the light honey color scheme, seen in the administrative areas. What I could not get over was the number of plants in the office. They were everywhere, there had to be at least twenty of them. Dr. Bower's office reminded me of an atrium.

"So Tracy, you have been at Kellermans for the last six years," Jennifer said looking at my resume.

"Yes, I started with Michael Devlin as his AA," I explained.

Jennifer squealed, like a fangirl. "Really! Dr. Michael Devlin?" she asked excitedly.

"Yes, I was his administrative assistant before he went on sabbatical."

"Oh, he is one of my oldest, dearest friends from medical school," she told me. That worried me a little as Dr. Devlin had a reputation. In fact, one of the promotions I lost went to another colleague who hadn't made it a secret that she was "helping" him recover from his divorce.

"Small world," I commented after a moment. "I was promoted to my current position two years ago."

"You have a master's degree?" she asked.

"Yes, I completed it two and half years ago from Hunter. And I got my bachelor's degree in the University of San Diego."

"Really? You're from California?" she squealed again. "Why did you ever leave?"

"Actually, New Jersey, I went to California for school," I explained.

She clucked her tongue at me. *Okay*, I thought, *that is definitely odd*. "Well, Tracy let me explain the job to you," Jennifer said, "I need someone to manage the financial aspects of my grant. I have an U36".

I nodded, remembering why I applied here. *Think promotion, Tracy*, I chanted to myself.

"Yes, I have experience with that at my current job. I designed six different budgets and was in charge of distributing funds to the subcontracts," I explained going further into my skill set. Jennifer nodded, giving me the visual cues I needed to think that I was making a good impression.

"I also need someone to manage my calendar," Jennifer explained, when I finished describing my background.

That threw me for a loop. "Doesn't your AA do that," I asked, a little concerned. Why would she need that help if she already had a secretary? For a moment, I had an uncanny feeling that she was looking for a secretary. I did not need to leave a job I was comfortable at to take another one with a boss who was strange. Weird bosses were one thing, I could live with that, but a weird boss and gaining nothing? As my husband would say: *Hell, no*.

"My AA is terrible with it. I need someone to do it," Jennifer said batting her eyes a little.

"I don't mean to overstep my boundaries, but that is usually the AA's responsibility. May I ask why she is still on staff if she isn't fulfilling a basic duty?" I asked not wanting to be in a situation where I did my job and half of someone else. That's what I did right now with my current boss Jodi, Dr. Devlin's love tool.

"I can't answer that," Jennifer responded, her face growing cold. It was almost frightening. *Crap*, I must have offended her.

"My apologies," I replied, I could feel myself turning red. "The answer is yes, I am comfortable with scheduling."

"Don't worry," Jennifer said her face brightening up. Our interview went back and forth for a few more minutes. She walked to the door, the AA had long since left.

I walked to the subway, feeling disoriented from the experience. My good manners kicked in and I composed a thank you letter on the train, which I planned to type up when I got home. The interview threw me for a loop, so I stuck with the standard politeness and well wishes. I wasn't that desperate and she gave me a bad feeling. I knew from previous job experiences to go with your instincts.

When I got off at my stop, Scott was waiting for me by the turnstile to walk me home.

"Hey baby, how did the interview go?" he asked, kissing my cheek.

"Weird," I answered. "How was your day?"

"I got a bonus check and a plea from my manager to spend it," he told me as we walked to our building.

That was the nice thing about having a husband on Wall Street. He got his bonuses like other people got library books. Scott was a contradiction, he hated his job but loved the perks that came with it. In fact, I had been one of those perks, his favorite, he claimed. We met when he had been a guest lecturer in my master's classes. One of the degree requirements had been a general education finance class. It was the most boring of my requirements, a fact which I never failed to remind Scott.

Six years ago...

I raced up Lexington Avenue aware how late I was going to be, when I finally saw the Hunter building. This finance class was killing me, both in time and subject matter. To top it off, Jodi, the other AA in the office, held me up by going out for an extended lunch. That bitch knew that it was my day to leave early and she needed to be back on time.

Seeing Hunter inspired me to increase my speed and I finally got into the building. When I walked into the classroom, they were introducing the speaker, a Scott something or other. The cursory glance I gave him told me that he was good looking and had that whole Wall Street vibe - clean cut with a swagger. The Wall Street guys gave me the creeps as they reminded me of Dr. Devlin who was always on the make. Those guys liked to slum it up in the uptown bars and they liked to hit on us during happy hour. My opinion didn't change as Mr. Griffith started to speak. His bio stated that he was some sort of whiz kid from Wall Street with an Ivy League

education. While I was sure that to the people in his industry he was fascinating, but he was boring me to tears. I grabbed my notebook and started to write a paper that was due this Friday to stay awake. His voice was soothing and putting me to sleep.

Two hours and about twenty-five self-pinches later, Mr. Griffith dismissed the seminar. I got up, ready to start the two hour long trip home to Staten Island. Last spring, I bought a townhouse and was renting out half the place to pay for it. So far it was working out pretty well, but the commute was hell.

As I got up, I felt a tap on my shoulder. Turning around I gasped and saw it was Mr. Griffith in the flesh. Up close, I realized my vantage point didn't do him justice. He was absolutely gorgeous with his dark blond hair and green eyes. Smiling at me, he handed me something.

"I thought you might want my notes, since you were late getting in and weren't paying attention," Mr. Griffith said with a mega-watt grin. I wondered if this is what he used at Lehman's.

"I'm good, thanks," I replied and gave him back the papers.

"You don't want to fail, do you?" he replied, still sporting his perma-grin.

I held up my micro recorder. "I'm good. I'm a secretary and transcription is second nature."

*"You have a Bachelor's?" he asked surprised. I'm guessing he never saw **Working Girl**.*

"Yes," I replied dryly, wondering if he read the syllabus and realized this was a Master's level class.

"What the fuck are you doing working as a secretary if you got a Bachelor's?" he asked.

"Read the papers, we're in a recession and it was the only job I could get. Not all of us go to the Ivy League and get a junior executive position out the gate."

He laughed. "You read the bio. How about we grab some coffee and you can tell me about your goals."

"That's the worse pick up line I have ever heard and I have a two hour commute ahead of me," I told him, grabbing my backpack. I was so out of there I could see the tire marks.

"Whoa, can I give you ride? Make that a thirty minute commute for you?" Mr. Griffith asked following me.

"I live on Staten Island, I doubt you slum it down there," I replied.

"You live in Staten Island? I didn't think those people actually came to the city," he said in shock.

"You're batting a thousand – I'm out of here," I replied hitting the fresh night air.

"Wait! You have at least a two hour commute. Let me drive you to the Ferry. It's late," he said coming out with me.

"I'm good, I've been doing this for a while," I told him, entering the subway with my metro pass. I was pretty sure that Mr. Wall Street didn't have a metro pass or exact change. What a jerk, I thought waiting for the train. Over the loudspeaker the announcer called out a minor delay due to a police incidence.

"Good, I thought I missed you," I heard a voice behind me a few minutes later.

I gasped and elbowed the voice not thinking twice. "Umph," the voice said.

Turning around I realized that I had elbowed Scott Griffith and his Brooks Brothers covered ass was on the filthy subway floor.

"I'm so sorry," I said bending down to help him up.

"Sorry enough to go on a date?" he asked when he got the air back into his body. Scott stayed with me the entire commute including the ferry ride. He bought me a coke and a hot dog on the boat. We went on our first date the Friday afterwards. Here we were six years, one wedding and two kids later. We lived on 93rd Street and 3rd Ave in the Upper East Side. The location was worth the amount of money we spent on rent, but we both needed to work to maintain the expenses. As I found living with Scott, middle class in Manhattan was different then middle class across the river where I had grown up. We had a rental property on Staten Island, the townhouse I had purchased during my single days.

Scott wanted to buy a new place in Manhattan. I was holding out, mainly due to expenses. If we stayed in Manhattan, the cost of an apartment didn't include the private school expenses for Charlie and Lily. Also with the price of gas and the real estate market being so erratic, I wanted to wait. While our apartment was expensive and the size of a postal stamp,

it was those two little words every New Yorker loved to hear: rent controlled. I made frequent pilgrimages to the Container Store or Ikea, trying to squeeze more into our space.

I had bought my townhouse in Staten Island for a steal, and the location to the subway and ferry made it attractive. The people renting it were stable and paid like a slot machine. It didn't make sense to sell at the moment, as the property had generated income. Scott and I had two different money philosophies. He liked to spend, hence the dependence on his job and me; I liked to squirrel every cent under a rock. Blame it on the fact that my parents could be featured on an extreme couponing program, I didn't care. My dad was a mechanic and my mother had managed their garage. Those careers didn't bring in millions of dollars like my father-in-law Phillip who was a retired financial advisor. My mother-in-law Helen was a socialite who volunteered for charities. "30, 30, 40 plan," Scott asked looking at me, anticipating what I was going to say about his bonus.

I nodded, 30% for fun, 30% for bills, 40% for savings, was the formula we had to come to agree over the years. When I first met Scott, his personal finances were a mess, ironic since he was an investment banker. After dating for several months, I sat him down and showed him where his money was going. Needless to say, he was shocked.

We walked into our building and relieved our babysitter Lisa. I bathed our twins while Scott cooked dinner. After I got the twins bathed and fed, I put them down for the night. Scott had dinner ready and a glass of wine for the two of us.

"So, what was so weird about the interview?" he asked me, pulling out my seat. You had to love his chivalry. My mother-in-law Helen had trained him well.

"Well, for one thing the boss was a little hyper. She reminded me of the Energizer Bunny," I explained.

"What? Did she suggest that you keep going and going?" Scott asked with a straight face.

"Haha, no, she all but body slammed me from looking at her secretary," I told him.

"That is a little weird," Scott conceded. "What else?"

"I don't know. Honestly, it was the vibe I got from her. She knows Devlin."

Scott grimaced at that one. He knew that Devlin first hit on me when I started working at Kellerman while he was still married. In fact, I had to put up several knowing sneers from him when Scott and I first started dating. Scott had been on an assignment in my area and took me out during my lunch hour. Those dates usually consisted of going to the hotdog vendors or grabbing a sandwich from the deli.

Scott would come up to my office and hang out for a few minutes while I set phones to voicemail. Every now and then Dr. Devlin sauntered by and looked at us like we were having sex on my desk. It stopped finally after he started sleeping with Jodi, our office manager and I got engaged to Scott.

"Also, the job they advertised is different than one she described. She asked me if I would be okay with scheduling for her," I said.

"I thought this was for a grants manager job," Scott said, spearing a ravioli with his fork.

"That sounds secretarial, Tracy. You don't need to do that."

"Yeah, I know, that is another weird part, she already has a secretary. She got upset when I pointed that out. What's bothering me is that I think that her AA is going to be fired. I don't need another secretarial job. I have one of those. There is no point in a lateral job move."

"Then don't. We're doing well. Hell, you could quit if you want and do the stay at home thing," he said.

"You know how I feel about that."

It was a discussion we had many times before. Scott and his family didn't make it a secret that they rather I stay at home. However, I was proponent that you never knew what could happen and two incomes were better than one. Scott learned to accept it. He knew I would never be a trophy wife. That was another thing that appealed to him, I was different than the others he had dated before me. I wanted to make my place in the world, not marry into it.

"I know, just reminding you that there are other options. But you shouldn't take this job because you're bored with your other one," he said taking my hand.

"Thanks sweetie, anyways this is all a moot point. I wasn't offered the job, and I don't think she appreciated it when I called her out on the clerical issues," I said taking a sip of wine.

After dinner, I loaded the dishwasher and typed out my letter to Jennifer. Scott checked it out and gave me his seal of approval. I was mildly dyslexic so it helped to have someone who was a double major in business and English around. Finishing it up, I sent it over and turned my attention to my husband who was playing with my strap on my pajama top.

"About time," Scott growled, nipping on my shoulder. "Put that fucking computer down."

"Hmm, you gonna distract me," I purred turning to sit on his lap.

"Let me show what I can do," he told me pulling me close to him and his bare chest. I was rewarded with a brush of his erection on me. Instant pleasure flooded me, making me tingle all over. Scott pulled up my tank top, exposing my chest.

"Perfect," he hissed, palming my breast with his hand and my nipple with his mouth.

"Oh, Scott," I moaned rubbing against him. "I love you." With that I kissed him back.

"Good, because I love you beyond reason," he told me kissing me back.

With that I pulled down his PJ bottoms and realized he was commando.

"You planned this," I said with a smirk, caressing him.

"When you have two kids, you gotta be prepared," he replied positioning himself between my legs and entered me.

The intrusion shocked me even after all these years and two kids. "Move," I commanded wanting to feel Scott move in me. The anticipation was killing me.

"Hell yeah," he replied and started to move. We didn't have time to indulge in the sex we had before the twins, but Scott was good at getting us there in a timely fashion.

"Scott," I panted, as I got closer.

"You feel so good! Wow, you always feel so good," he replied and then slammed into me one more time making me come. He shattered right after me.

"I feel better," I told him, we both came down, wearing dopey grins.

"Me too, baby," he replied, "I love you."

I remember that night because of how beautiful it was, lying next to Scott. There was a touch of humidity in the air and I opened the windows to allow the air in. At that moment I felt that there was nothing that could touch us.

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