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**Dirty Words:
The Writing Process of “Smutshop”**

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The Writing Process of “Smutshop”**

by

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Report

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Abstract

Dirty Words: The Writing Process of “Smutshop”

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2015

Supervisor: Cindy McCreery

This report details the writing process of “Smutshop,” a half-hour television comedy pilot, from its inception to the completion of its final draft in order to demonstrate its progress and delineate the decision-making process that led to each new draft.

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Introduction

The building was small and pink, with the ambiguous word BookStop plastered across it—so ambiguous, in fact, that we had to start locking our door because several times a day, an unwitting passerby would stumble inside, look around with confusion, and fail to understand that we weren't a bookstore. Thirty people worked inside, six or eight apiece to the giant tables in the center of each room, leaving little room for the Coke machine, copier, refrigerator, microwave, and two single-stall bathrooms that were also crammed inside the space. Sound carried in the building, so talking and listening to music were verboten. Instead the office echoed with the sound of sixty hands typing and the occasional laugh when someone read a funny passage or perhaps just came across a particularly absurd homonym.

It was basically a sweatshop, except instead of making clothes, we published porn.

I worked at Siren-BookStop, Inc. for three years, cleaning up manuscripts with comments like "Please revise. This says his cock is wearing sweatpants" and penning gay werewolf erotica under a pretentious literary pseudonym. It was the best and worst job I've ever had—the best because I got paid to write and spend my workday making dirty jokes, and the worst because real sex isn't porn sex, and real women aren't romance heroines, and love and relationships are messy and complicated and when you spend all day boxing it into the confines of a highly formulaic genre, you're bound to start getting some messed-up ideas about how your love life ought to be.

Mine wasn't anything like it was in the romance novels. I got a divorce the last year I worked at Siren.

I've been writing about this experience, in one form or another, since it happened, from angry essays about how my job ruined my marriage to a lighthearted rom-com about a cynical writer who learns to open herself to romance by writing erotica. I penned the rom-com, "Erotic Romance," in Cindy McCreery's first-year screenwriting seminar, and she later mentioned to me that it might make for a good workplace comedy. Almost a year later, I finally heeded this advice and the result was the first draft of "Smutshop."

Chapter One: Some Things I Have to Do Before I Can Write

Excerpts from my journal, one week prior to the inception of “Smutshop”:

9.27.14

I know you can do this. You didn’t think you could do this last week, or the week before, but you did. You thought your first pages of “Erotic Romance” were garbage, but they weren't. You didn't think you could write 2000 words the first day you were at Siren, but you did. Just keep moving. Just keep moving your fingers. Just write with confidence, and you’ll find the jokes. You wrote the outline so fast because you were under pressure. You have the ability to write quickly. It was easier last week than it was the week before, and easier the week before than the week before that. The worst possible thing that can happen is that you write lousy pages, and if that happens, you’ll just fix it in workshop.

Write one page, right now, and then you can have your coffee. Try to do it in the next hour. Just trust that you'll get it done and listen to your gut. You can do this.

9.29.14

Here is the deal: you have to work on your script right now. You don’t have anything else to do and you need to make this time productive so that you’re not just screwing around. **YOU DON'T WANT THIS WEEKEND TO SUCK LIKE LAST WEEKEND DID.**

9.30.14

“Erotic Romance” straight from my own life, and you only get one autobiographical story, right? I mean, at a certain point, if you’re not making stuff up, you’re not really writing, because writing is supposed to be difficult and miserable.

Isn’t it?

I was engaged in one such difficult, miserable, unproductive task when I started the semester in Richard Lewis’s second-year screenwriting seminar. I had just finished a very difficult, exhausting summer co-producing a webseries and, after considering several less complicated options, committed myself to writing not one, but two pilots over the course of the semester, the first of which would be a network sitcom about a doomsday cult.

Most show bibles focus on plot, characters, and themes; mine included a highly detailed theological doctrine and forty years of cult history. I knew nothing about cults or what it would be like to live on a compound, so I researched constantly. And when I realized none of the stuff I’d found in my research (Group marriage! Child molestation! Mass suicide!) was even remotely fertile inspiration for a network sitcom, I researched more, certain that the problem was not the show’s concept, but my work ethic. I doubled down on my library hours, effectively halving the time I had to write. During the week, I’d spend twenty-odd hours in the PCL stacks and during my three-day weekends (thank you, grad school), I would engage in 72-hour writing marathons in which I would sit at my desk, racing the clock to complete the week’s requisite fifteen pages and barely eking out a single page for every three hours I spent writing.

This routine lasted about six weeks, all of which were terrible. In spite of my overwhelming exhaustion, I still hadn’t managed to turn in a full draft of the thirty-minute pilot. With pages of screw-ups and do-overs and false starts, I’d barely cracked the first act. And it was

time to start pilot number two. I knew the semester would kill me if I finished the way I started it. There had to be an easier option.

And then I remembered that pilot that was too easy to write.

Chapter Two: Outlining

It was all so easy. Everything from my days at Siren went in: the way the lights flickered when we ran the microwave, the writer who hotboxed in her car every morning before work and afterward left for her night job at Hooters, the way everyone flipped out and vied for attention the first time a guy was hired, my feelings of intense writerly jealousy every time one of the writers hit #1 on the bestseller list. I wrote the entire bible and outline (Appendix A) in a single twelve-hour day of furious typing, rarely hitting backspace and throwing nothing out. It was as if the crippling critical lens that had paralyzed my writing for the last four months had gone missing, or better still, I had somehow birthed a complete, perfect series from my mind onto the page. I was a genius! I was brilliant!

I would later walk into workshop and realize this was not the case.

Still, I had plenty to work with as I began the bible and outline. Not only were my personal experiences ripe for plundering, I had already concocted a fictionalized version of my time at Siren in “Erotic Romance.” One of the primary elements I wanted to carry over from the screenplay was the disconnect between the erotica Allie was reading and her own fledgling sex life. The irony inherent in Allie’s struggle had served as a great hook for the script, so I endowed Lainey, the protagonist of “Smutshop,” with a similar struggle.

Another aspect of the screenplay I wanted to maintain in the pilot was Allie’s frustration with the conventions of the romance genre, given her background as a literary writer. Along the same lines, Lainey begins the series as a frustrated writer, unable to make a living off of the short stories she’s writing (and only occasionally publishing). As a result, Lainey’s snobby attitude toward the books she’s editing is mitigated by her jealousy of the authors who are making six

figures a year writing full-time. I figured one of these women would make a fitting antagonist for Lainey, serving as the embodiment of everything she hates about her job: an author who can barely string together a coherent sentence but whose knowledge of the genre endows her with a storytelling ability that deeply resonates with romance fans. Better still, Lainey's longstanding conflict with Trish could draw on the inherent antagonism that writers and editors have with each other—if I made Lainey an editor at the start of the series. This would allow Lainey to suffer the humiliation of not only reading, but fixing the sentences of a woman she considers herself to be a superior writer to—then watching her succeed in a way Lainey couldn't as a literary writer. As Lainey moved from the editing department to the writer's room at the end of the first episode, she would face a new struggle: proving that she could outwrite Trish as a romance author.

I knew I needed Lainey's arc to push her toward taking a job as an in-house writer, but the logistics of how this would come about weren't clear yet. If Lainey's goal was to become a romance author (an unlikely one given her disdain of the genre), what ignited this desire? And what prevented her from having it in the past five years she's been working as an editor? Why now?

I made a similar transition from editor to writer while working at Siren, an event that occurred as a result of me trying to quit. After putting in my two weeks' notice, I was called to my boss's office, where she asked why I was quitting and tried to persuade me to stay. I informed her that I'd recently made a little money as a freelance writer, and wanted to see what I could accomplish with more time to focus on my work.

“What if I offered you a job writing for Siren?”

It was not an offer I was expecting. “Um...”

“We pay a \$1000 advance against royalties for one book a month with a \$500 bonus if you write two books in a month. You would spend four hours a day editing bestsellers similar to the books you’re writing, then write the other four hours of the day.”

“Um...”

“Think about it.”

A thousand dollars wasn’t a lot of money for a 30,000 word novella—at least not at the pace I could write—but the lure of spending half my workdays writing proved too good to pass up. I wondered if Lainey could be put in a similar circumstance: intending to quit, then persuaded to stay on as a writer. To make her goal of quitting more difficult to accomplish, I gave her a longstanding history of attempting to quit and failing. On the day of the pilot, she truly, really, absolutely is quitting this time, no matter what happens. Only when she finally manages to do so, in spite of the obstacles she faces, she’s thrown a spectacular curveball.

After settling on a protagonist and figuring out her goal, I needed characters to populate my series. I’d never been entirely happy with the characters Allie worked with in “Erotic Romance.” Too many of them seemed like one-dimensional jokes; in fact, there’s a moment in “Erotic Romance” when they function as such, when Sam refers to them as “the pregnant teenager, the conservative Christian, and the dominatrix.” Although I came to find them charming and funny, they weren’t nearly developed enough to carry a series on their backs. To fix this problem, I considered the women I’d worked with in real life, and what I might steal from them. The publisher definitely attracted a certain type of woman: without exception, my coworkers were all college-educated, newly graduated Austinites with enough of a punk rock vibe to be cool with reading about butt plugs all day. Everyone bought their clothes at Goodwill and maintained a Pinterest page and listened to The Smiths or Neutral Milk Hotel and drank craft

beers and attended classes for yoga instruction or belly dancing or creating an Etsy for all the DIY crafts they were making. In other words, we were all a bunch of hipsters.

In spite of this homogeneity, I wanted my principal cast to represent a variety of departments—Lainey would be a writer, Phoebe and A.J. would be editors, and Katie would work in production—and have different attitudes toward what they did. A.J. needed the money from the job but detested the books' inherent misogyny, Phoebe, as chief editor, needed to keep her staff in line, Lainey was incensed by the simplistic storylines and poor grammar of romance novels—and insanely jealous of their authors—and Katie was a romantic and unabashed fan of the genre. In this version of the show, I envisioned it as akin to “Girls” or “Sex and the City.” Sure, the women were the same age and race and sexual orientation and socioeconomic group, but they had a diverse range of perspectives. That was enough, right? For many critics of the shows, it wasn't. Nor was it enough for my workshop group.

“I just feel like they're all hipsters and they're all in their twenties—”

“Katie isn't a hipster,” I defended myself. It seemed like a weak defense.

Going into the first draft, I knew I had to add more variety to the characters in the show. I also discovered I had to diversify the story beats, particularly those surrounding Reese's first day of work. It was bedlam inside Siren the day a boy first entered our office. The day was marked by a flurry of furtive, giggly IM conversations and an unnecessary number of trips to the soda machine to spy on him as he worked. After years of spending the workday talking about orgasms and ogling the Hot Naked Cowboy of the Month wall calendar, someone with an actual penis was about to enter the office, and we responded like a bunch of twelve year olds at a slumber party. We wanted to judge his attractiveness on a scale of one to ten. We wanted to vet him as a potential workplace romance. And we wanted to test him like a sort of lab rat, seeing how he'd

react to our stories about the weirdest lubricant we'd come across in the books we were editing, or the weirdest sex toy, or the weirdest pillow talk. Admittedly, our reaction was less than mature. But please keep in mind this was a job where we were getting paid to read about sexy werewolves.

I put all this into the pilot outline, knowing it was comedy gold. What I didn't consider was that it might not make for the most dramatically compelling scenes. There was a lot of women giggling and ogling Brian (later renamed Reese) in the outline, and even more of them testing him with raunchy anecdotes, but not a lot of movement in the beats. The reaction to Brian was relatively static (both in terms of dramatic movement and in terms of its lackluster visuals), as was Brian's reaction to them. Rather than acting in response to the behavior of his coworkers, he merely stood around looking uncomfortable. I knew this, too, had to change in the first draft.

Chapter Three: The First Draft

The primary problem with my initial outline was that it pulled too much from my own experience. It was a mistake I'd always been careful not to make in the past, knowing the lives of twentysomethings, mine included, are notoriously boring and that autobiographical stories are painfully lambasted in every known screenwriting text. But this was all pre-working-at-Siren. The experience of working in the smutty book industry was so inherently funny that I figured I got a free pass on the whole life-as-art schtick. As Billy Wilder put it, "If you're going to tell the truth, make it funny or people will kill you." The truth, in this case, was funny, so I figured I was safe. But after my outline and bible had been workshopped, I realized I wanted more from my audience than survival. To accomplish that, I knew I would need to make some changes to ensure that the characters were distinct, the visuals were engaging, and the plot maintained a sense of movement and causality. The resulting changes can be seen in the first draft outline (Appendix B).

Establishing Distinct Characters: As was the case in my real-life workplace, too many of the principal characters in the show shared similar personality traits. For this draft, I wanted a greater sense of diversity in the characters I was creating. To start, I went to work on the primary character list. Although the four principals I had listed in the first draft of the bible fit the "Sex and the City" model, they shared similar problems with cast diversity. Furthermore, the four principals seemed to lend themselves to storylines separate from, rather than intertwined with, Lainey's. I was able to correct both issues by making an adjustment to which characters I categorized as primary vs. secondary. AJ was demoted to secondary cast, while Trish, the show's antagonist, and Reese, Lainey's love interest, were promoted to principals. In addition, Phoebe's

character was given a major overhaul: although still relatively uptight, I aged her up to mid-thirties and pushed her character farther in the direction of the meddlesome sycophant. Similar to Dwight in *The Office*, the new Phoebe would take her menial job entirely too seriously, but conversely be somewhat squeamish about the books Scarlett published. Since this last quality was hardly complementary to the job of chief editor, I moved Phoebe to the HR department, allowing me to promote Lainey to chief editor—a job that would more clearly situate her as the center of attention in the office at the start of the script, and subsequently give her more agency in her work.

Creating Engaging Action and Visuals: The meeting in the cold open, the party for Trish’s release day, Brian getting coffee, lunch, and the blackout all featured a bevy of women standing around the office. Sometimes eating cake, sometimes getting coffee, sometimes ogling Brian, but always standing, always talking, and rarely engaging in action that moved the plot forward. I knew as I began my first draft, I would have to find a way to create visual gags and force the women (and man) of the show to act, rather than react.

The first scene I tackled was the cold open. A fear of mine with the series was that it would spend too much time discussing, rather than showing, what the books were about. This meeting fell prey to that problem. As I considered ways to fix it, I thought about what visuals and actions I could draw out of the books. The books about shapeshifters were ripe with interesting visuals, particularly as many of the authors at Siren had taken to writing anatomically accurate genitalia for their shifters. Thus, cheetah penises would be covered in spines that trapped women during sex—a situation that I often brought up when attempting to explain to my friends how weird my job was. In draft one, I changed the incest meeting to a bestiality meeting, using the whiteboard to first demonstrate what a cheetah penis would look like, then X it out as forbidden

under the new guidelines. This scene led to the inception of one of the funniest scenes in the pilot, where the women drawing penises on the whiteboard has snowballed, filling the entire board just in time for Reese to walk into the office and see exactly what kind of job he has in store for him.

Humiliating Reese in general was a task that I needed to add visual resonance to. In the initial draft, his initiation mainly consists of women fawning over him and trying to psych him out by telling him about the books. In draft one, I replaced these scenes with the betting montage, plus two visual gags: Reese's failed entry into the men's bathroom, which is being used as storage for sex toys and tampons, and his embarrassment upon using the women's bathroom, only to find "Hi Reese" written on the backside of the toilet seat.

Finally, I moved the Lainey and Peter scenes out of the office and gave them some action in their discussion with each other. The lunch scene where Lainey licks queso while she and Peter joke about the sexy books she's been reading gave a visual cue to how their no-frills relationship contrasted with the overt sexuality of the books Lainey edits, and Peter eating the Styrofoam to prove his love to Lainey gave a sense of the depth of his love for Lainey—while simultaneously showing that love to be utterly unsexy. In addition, the vibrator scene at their apartment gave a visual demonstration of how Lainey was hiding what she really felt about romance novels from Peter. In addition, the new scenes had the added benefit of opening up the script and avoiding the visual monotony of a single location.

Crafting Causal Links: My boss at Siren was a bit of a recluse. She maintained an office in an adjoining building that she rarely left and employees only ventured into when summoned by her. She would disappear for weeks on end, then, upon returning, show up every day to micromanage the decisions of the senior editors and lower management. Her moods were

erratic, her trust was hard-won and fleeting, and raises and promotions were distributed seemingly at random. When, after years of refusing to hire male staff, she finally disbanded the policy, we didn't think to ask why and wouldn't have expected an answer if we did.

As a result, there was no rationale given as to why Margaret would suddenly hire a male employee for her all-female office; stealing from my own experiences, I didn't think to provide one. But events in screenplays don't just happen without cause or reason. I knew I had to explain why he was hired in my first draft, but I also knew I had to show, not tell, the reason. To do that, I had to go back, before Brian was hired, and show the interview that won him the job—and better yet, give a reason for why he got the interview in the first place.

Enter Reese, Brian's new counterpart, with a name gender-ambiguous enough for Margaret to assume he was a woman. Since it was an easy joke to make, I decided to push it farther: not only did he have a feminine name, but a feminine resume. Reese went to Sarah Lawrence and majored in women's studies. Of course Margaret would assume he was a woman. The reason for hiring Reese, however, proved to be a bit harder. It seemed fitting to make the only man in a female space to fit into the fish-out-of-water trope, but doing so meant he couldn't be the kind of guy who was used to being bombarded with female attention. Being surrounded by women—moreover, women constantly discussing sex—had to be a foreign event for him, and that couldn't happen if he was an alpha male. Instead, I made him “the type of guy who didn't get hot until after college.” This allowed for the women at Scarlett to pay him a great deal of attention while clarifying that Reese wasn't entirely used to getting it. Over the course of the season, he would get used to the attention, and transition from a self-described nice guy to a bit of a jerk.

The problem with this characterization, however, was that nice guys of Reese's ilk didn't tend to be overly assertive, and as a fish out of water, he couldn't have any prior experience editing erotica. Besides, simply giving him a stellar resume wasn't the most interesting explanation for why he was hired. Instead, I thought to use the moment he won the job to foreshadow the type of guy Reese would become. To do this, I crafted a scene in which Margaret eviscerated him during the interview, mocking him for being a nice guy and pushing his buttons until he threatened to sue the company for sexual discrimination.

Although I had successfully found a way to show why Reese was hired, there was still one nagging problem with the Reese plotline. Sure, it was the first event in a chain of events that would cause Lainey, over the course of the season, to dissolve her marriage, but the event, as it was presented, had nothing to do with Lainey. Not only did she do nothing to bring it about (fine for an inciting incident but less than desirable for a scene occurring in the middle of Act I), she wasn't even present during the scenes in which Reese was interviewing. As a result, the scenes felt disconnected from Lainey. But what if Lainey did cause the interview? I had already established at the top of Act I that Lainey was quitting; perhaps Reese could be brought in as her replacement. This would further push Lainey and Reese into sexually tense situations as she was forced to train him on editing erotica, and solve one of the more prickly problems pointed out in workshop: Reese's earlier counterpart, Brian, was hired as a production assistant. This low-level job hardly made him a threat to the office environment. But as chief editor, his male perspective would be directly influencing the books Scarlett was publishing, creating more of a disruption to the ordinary world.

Chapter Four: Pitching the Show

My first experience meeting with Hollywood industry folk was back in 2011. The timing couldn't have been worse: I was a month out from being legally separated from my husband and I had just finished a five-month stint in which I was contracted to write four romance e-books. I'd finished all four, and I was exhausted—but determined not to blow the opportunity I'd been given, an opportunity I viewed at the time as My One and Only Chance to Finally Get My Foot in the Door. I'd won top honors in a national screenwriting competition, which led to a series of phone calls from a prospective agent during which I committed every professional blunder a naïve screenwriter can make when faced with the following questions:

Do you want to work in television or film?

What I should have said: Television.

What I did say: Both? Either? I don't know, whatever I get the opportunity to do. I'm happy doing anything.

What types of scripts do you usually write?

What I should have said: Comedies.

What I did say: Kind of everything. Um, short stories, plays, I wrote a webseries a while back, short scripts... I kind of started just doing anything I could to try and get someone to notice my writing, which is how I wrote the script for this competition, so I guess that wasn't a total bust, right? Oh, you meant what genre do I write in. I mean, I'll write anything. What kind of movie do you think I should write?

What are you working on now?

What I should have said: The logline of a script I'm currently working on.

What I did say: Kind of nothing right now.

Come up with three to five ideas and pitch them to us next week.

What I should have done: Write 3-5 loglines and be prepared to answer story and character questions for them.

What I did do: Came up with five things that were decidedly not loglines (“there’s this thing called facial aphasia where you forget or switch around what people’s faces look like and I think maybe I could write a thriller about that, like I don’t know, maybe the protagonist has it?”) and rambled about them until Prospective Agent Guy finally cut me off with, “That’s not a story. Do you understand what I mean when I ask about the story?” Luckily one of these ideas stuck, but only long enough for me to shoot myself in the foot when asked...

When do you think you can have an outline for us?

What I should have done: Underpromised and overdelivered.

What I did do: The exact opposite.

Needless to say, I blew it.

In my eagerness to please, I’d made myself look dilettantish, with no clear sense of how I saw my career, or what my influences were, or what I wanted to work on next. I had badly overshared (I haven’t written anything in months!) while refusing to share any details about my personal life that might mitigate my faux pas (I’m in the middle of a divorce!) Worse, I’d committed to an impossible deadline and was emotionally and mentally unprepared to deliver.

Luckily, the One and Only Chance to Get Your Foot in the Door is a totally bogus concept. Hollywood is an engine that runs on meetings, and talented people who write good scripts are going to get them—even the talented people who are prone to self-sabotage. As my second year in the graduate program came to a close, I was provided with a slew of such

meetings as one of the winners of UT's Longhorn Screenwriting Award. I was nervous as hell, but ready to learn from my painful past mistakes. I got ready to brand myself as a TV comedy writer and speak articulately on past scripts I'd written and new ideas I was kicking around. I thought about movies and television shows I liked and some smart observations I could make about them. I stored away a few small-talk topics for the start of the meeting and sorted through my wardrobe for my best shabby-chic apparel. And I worked like hell on my pitch.

In First-Year Screenwriting and Adaptation, I had been given a crash course on how to pitch my scripts. Start with a personal connection if you have one—that was easy for “Smutshop.” So was establishing the world of my script, a part of the pitch I perhaps hit too hard, resulting in notes from several execs that I might tone down the sex a bit (I'll get to those later). Next, introduce the primary characters and hone in on the protagonist's arc by giving tent pole moments of your script. If I were pitching a feature script, this would be the meat of the pitch; since I was pitching a show, I shortened this to make room for material about my supplemental characters and providing a few examples of future episodes.

With my finished pitch in hand (Appendix C), along with two years of practical advice from screenwriting faculty and the wisdom I'd gleaned from several hours of Googling “How Not to Embarrass Yourself in Hollywood Meetings” I was as well-prepared as could be expected. I went into my meetings ready to pitch the hell out of “Smutshop,” uncertain of what opportunities those meetings would yield. As is the case with most meetings, no new opportunities presented themselves. Instead, what I emerged with was a few solid industry connections and an overwhelming spate of notes.

Chapter Five: Synthesizing Notes

Between Beau and Cindy's thoughts on the first draft, my notes from workshop, and notes from the various industry meetings I'd attended, I had a lot to process. As a fairly sensitive and egotistical person who has nevertheless weathered a lot of writing workshops, I've worked out the following process for synthesizing notes:

Organize everything. Get everything onto one (or several) pages, and group notes on similar topics together. The most immediate benefit of doing this is that it provides some solid visual clues for what's working and what's not by virtue of seeing what notes get clustered together. Many of the notes from my thesis committee centered on further developing characters. I got this same note in several of the meetings I sat in—albeit in a different manner. In those meetings, I was told by an exec who hadn't read my script that I needed to foreground my characters more in my pitch. After reading my script, however, Beau and Cindy both felt the characters themselves needed further development. Grouping the notes about characters together, however, I started to suspect the two notes were more identical than I originally imagined. I hadn't foregrounded my characters because there wasn't enough *to* my characters yet—all the more reason to work on developing them in the next draft.

Look for contradictions. Occasionally two different people will give me conflicting notes about a particular part of the script. When that happens, I know that the moment has produced strong feelings in the reader—but that the moment also needs some finessing. When I workshopped the first draft of the script, I received conflicting notes on the scene in which Lainey and Reese smoke cigarettes outside the building. While one workshop member strongly felt it was the best scene in the script and did an excellent job demonstrating the chemistry

between Lainey and Reese, another felt it should be cut, believing it tipped things too far toward Lainey and Reese getting together by the end of the season. While I didn't necessarily need the viewers to be surprised when Lainey and Reese got together, I did suspect that the conflicting reaction meant it may need to be reimagined in the next draft.

Deal with notes that I'm deeply offended by. Unlike my readers, I always have strong feelings about my scripts, and when I'm told something I feel pretty good about isn't working, I tend to get a little defensive. But once I've nursed my bruised ego, I try to look at the note with fresh eyes. With "Smutshop," I was told by two industry members and my entire thesis committee that the show might work best on network, rather than cable television. The note irked me. My experience with *Siren* had involved a lot of dirty jokes and f-words. Hell, the word smut was in the title of the show. Putting my feelings aside, however, I tried to imagine what a network version of the show might be. What kind of humor would it rely on? What kind of plots? What was the tone? And most importantly, was this the best possible version of the show? While I couldn't honestly answer yes to that final question, imagining "Smutshop" as a network show forced me to consider why some of my readers had misunderstood the tone. There's a difference between cable humor and network humor, and my pilot was currently splitting the difference. To move forward, I would need to hone in on a clear, specific tone.

Consider the things that confused readers. One commonly observed rule of the writing workshop is for the author to remain quiet while her work is being discussed. I adhere pretty strictly to this rule when I'm running workshop, even when the class is tempted to ask a direct question of the writer. When that happens, it not only derails workshop, turning it into a Q & A session with the writer, but robs the writer of one of the most valuable type of notes: ones based on incorrect assumptions about the script. Notes about how that heinous villain you thought you

were writing is “totally endearing,” or how a scene intended to be terrifying was read as gut-bustingly hilarious. I like these notes because they not only cue me to look for places in the script that might have prompted the reader’s unintended reaction, but consider whether that unintended reading is actually better than the scene I had in mind. One such moment was Richard Lewis’s characterization of Reese as a “smarmy businessman.” Theoretically, he was right—I’d made a choice to give Reese some smarmy moments in the script to foreshadow his season one arc—but I wasn’t exactly thinking of Reese as the guy who goes to school for business and joins a frat of likeminded suits. I tucked this note away, not sure what to do with it yet, but knowing it likely meant Reese needed work.

Make a wish list. The last thing I do before I start working on a rewrite is to make a list of things—some big, some small—that I want to correct in the script. Depending on how big the big problems are, I’ll either return to the outline to start making changes or dive straight into the script if the structure is sound enough. In this case, it wasn’t just the structure, but the characters that were problematic. Before I could start in on the revised outline, I needed to do some intensive character work.

Chapter Six: Character Interviews

One of the primary notes I was getting was that a number of my characters' voices were running together. Although I had tried hard to diversify my cast, they were coming across on the page as highly similar. I resolved to tackle this problem in two ways. The easy fix was to add better character descriptions (those in the first draft were somewhat paltry), introduce them one at a time or in smaller groups to make their distinct traits more memorable, and look for places to incorporate their unique qualities. I made a note in my wish list to work on this in the second draft. The hard fix was developing distinctive voices for each character. To help with this matter, I set out to interview my characters.

Interviewing characters is a writing technique that was introduced to me in Stuart Kelban's second-year screenwriting course. Rather than merely brainstorming to develop a personal history for each character, interviewing my characters forced me to solidify their voices and consider the extent to which they are willing to share information. The things a character might lie about or avoid answering can say a great deal about her personality, and this kind of knowledge can be invaluable to character development.

One character this was particularly useful for was Maryanne. In my bible and initial draft, Maryanne was one of the least developed characters. At the time, I needed more characters to round out my cast and a seventy-something erotica writer was an easy joke to make. In this draft, I knew I needed to spend time fleshing out Maryanne's character. My vague idea of Maryanne was as a seemingly sweet but dirty-minded old woman, but the sweet old lady bit didn't feel right in the character interview. I felt compelled to make her more open and honest—even blunt about the sort of things most people would avoid in conversation. She didn't mince words and

didn't tolerate any bull; she was too old to be coy or play games. This version of Maryanne was not only more interesting, but made sense: if she was in her seventies, she would have been part of the Baby Boomer generation, a former hippie whose interest in erotica was only natural after coming of age in the Summer of Love.

This revelation prompted me to interview other characters about their sexual history. In a workplace where employees are discussing sex all day, their unique perspectives would be shaped, in large part, by the types of relationships they've had and how they feel about those relationships. This deeply informed my changes to the series bible as well as the ideas for future episodes. For example, one of the more upsetting aspects of working at Siren was the extent to which authors were reminded that interracial books and books with women of color as the heroine rarely made it onto the bestseller list. I knew that I wanted an African-American editor to challenge this rule, and I liked the idea of Chacole being the one to do it, as a woman who was fairly laid-back about her job and perhaps forced to change her perspective as a result of the situation. As I interviewed Chacole's character however, the question came up as to whether she'd ever had an interracial relationship. This gave me the idea to refine her episode: instead of having her merely react to the rule or bring it up with Reese, she might channel her frustration about the dismal sales of an interracial book into her own sex life. The revised episode would then center on Chacole's quest to turn a handful of mediocre dates with a white guy into a steamy relationship after witnessing the dismal sales of an interracial book. Not only did the revised logline give Chacole more agency in reacting to the situation, it was also considerably funnier than the previous version.

Finally, I wanted to hear each of my characters speak until I was certain they didn't sound too similar to each other. I knew this was a problem with several of the supporting cast

members, but I didn't anticipate it with Reese and Peter. In the current draft, the two men had sufficiently different worldviews to function as opposite ends of a love triangle. Reese was very establishment while Peter believed in bucking the system. As Lainey went farther down the rabbit hole of romance writing, a more stable guy—and one she had better sexual chemistry with—would appeal to her. However, the differences between Peter and Reese seemed to diminish as I interviewed their characters. Both spoke in the awkward, unassuming cadence of self-conscious twentysomething guys, making them sound entirely too similar. When this happened, I recalled Richard's note about Reese. Perhaps Reese's distinct worldview wasn't coming across strongly because he was too mild-mannered to be a believable corporate go-getter. I figured if I made Reese more, as Richard suggested, of a smarmy businessman, and more gung-ho in wanting to conquer his job, it would not only solve this problem, but give Reese more agency as a character and provide him with a clear-cut goal for the pilot. I re-did my character interview with this in mind, and his voice came across as much more distinct and compelling this time around.

Chapter Seven: The Second Draft

The three primary areas I wanted to work on in my second draft were the characters, the plot, and surprisingly, the world of the show. As someone highly familiar with the romance publishing business, I hadn't expected to get notes about the setting. Both my bible and first draft were full of minutiae about the erotica business; the problem was I was plunging my audience into the world too quickly. Basic elements of the world—such as descriptions of the office, how a publishing office functioned, and how the books were written—were missing. In the second draft, I wanted to add more description to the office, clarify the various departments and where each character worked (this would also help with keeping the characters straight), and give more of the basics of romance writing. For the last of the three, I turned to “Erotic Romance.” The scenes where Allie was trained to write in her first days of work were straight out of my own training at Siren, and they had always been a high point of the script for readers. Since I had a similar setup with Reese's first day, I set up a walkthrough of the office for him that borrowed heavily from “Erotic Romance” to give a clearer sense of what the day-to-day mechanics of working at Scarlett would be like.

In terms of plot, I had always been somewhat frustrated with the lack of causality in the first act; it was clear that Reese was being hired because Lainey was quitting, but the rest of the act—the bestiality meeting, Maryanne's woes about her cover art, and Lainey's exit interview—had either no relation to what preceded them or no effect on what followed. In the second draft, I wanted to ensure that there was a clearer link between each scene in the script. To do this, I examined each scene in the act to see what could be cut and what could be better connected to the rest of the show.

In the new draft (Appendix D), I axed Maryanne’s scene and Lainey’s exit interview—neither seemed to have any impact on what followed. And although the bestiality meeting was similarly disconnected from the rest of the script, it was simply too much fun to cut. Instead, I revised the meeting to make it about Trish and Lainey’s animosity toward each other and use it to set up Lainey’s outburst in the third act. This choice had the added benefit of highlighting Trish as a primary cast member and introducing her in a more memorable way. I also wanted to connect Reese’s scenes better to the rest of the first act. Although Lainey quitting resulted in Margaret hiring Reese, it was a thin connection. However, if Lainey was more involved in the hiring process—recommending Reese to Margaret as a stellar candidate—it would strengthen this link and also serve as a setup for the second act. If Margaret was taking a chance on Reese as her first male employee, and Lainey had a hand in hiring him, it would place more burden on Lainey to ensure his training went well, giving her more incentive to adequately train him in spite of the mounting obstacles thrown in her way.

Lainey’s goal itself, however, needed some work. In the previous draft, she merely wanted to finish Reese’s training so she could quit her job and obtain a good recommendation from Margaret, the latter of which was somewhat skimmed over and not introduced until the third act. I knew that I needed to establish earlier on the necessity of Lainey getting a good recommendation, and it would also help if I amped up the stakes. Rather than having Lainey quitting her job to write (something she hardly needed a recommendation for), Lainey would quit her job in this draft in order to take a job at a “real” publisher, one that represented the more literary types of books Lainey was interested in writing. Moreover, this new job could be something of an in for Lainey with the publishing world, giving her the connections she needed to find an agent and get her own work published.

In terms of characters, I not only needed to highlight the main characters, giving more screen time to Reese, Trish, and A.J., but find better ways to introduce and distinguish the supporting cast. This is where the character work I had already done paid off. The new Reese yielded a much better interview with Margaret (Appendix E), and additionally served as a better antagonist for Lainey. In the previous draft, his tiff with Lainey in the third act had previously been the result of the work he'd done with Trish off-screen, but now Lainey and he were butting heads throughout the script. It seemed only fitting to have the biggest of these clashes take place as Reese, Lainey, and Trish went over her manuscript together. With Lainey firmly placed within the scene itself, I was able to better communicate the deeper reason behind her clash with Reese and Trish: both characters forced her to acknowledge that she was turned on by a type of writing she claimed to hate, and a type of guy who was the polar opposite of her husband.

For A.J., establishing her as a primary cast member meant amping up her and Lainey's friendship. Rather than beginning the first act with Phoebe's reaction to Lainey leaving, I began with A.J.'s reaction—and a clearer sense of the way women in the office were accustomed to discussing sex. Throughout the script, the scenes I added or amended to highlight A.J. additionally demonstrated her opposition to romance writing (a trait that would create conflict for Lainey over the course of the first season) and the extent to which Lainey (or at least the Lainey of the pilot episode) agrees with her. The desire to show off this dynamic led to the composition of one of my favorite scenes in the script. Rather than having Lainey and Reese smoking together at the end of the script, I revised the smoking scene with A.J. taking Reese's place. The way these two women interacted with each other, here and throughout the script, felt much more natural and compelling than they had in the previous draft, and showed a depth of character from both women that earlier versions of the pilot seemed to lack.

Finally, I had to tackle the biggest note of distinguishing my supporting characters from each other. I knew that Reese's walkthrough of the office would present an opportunity for this. As I walked him through the writer's room, I gave some screentime to Maryanne as she inquired about his sun sign while reading *Sextrology*. I also gave a character moment to Jamie at the top of Act II. I loved the idea of her being a pot-smoking mother/Hooters waitress, but the opportunity to provide this exposition hadn't presented itself in the first draft. Here I made certain to show this trait off, clarifying her as a much more interesting character than she appeared to be in draft one. For all the characters, I gave concise, memorable descriptions to them as I introduced them, something I had failed to accomplish in the previous draft.

On the whole, I felt much better about the second draft of the script. I knew it was shaping up and hoped it would soon be ready to show to agents and managers—assuming, of course, I was provided with that opportunity. What I didn't realize was how quickly that opportunity would present itself.

Chapter Eight: Finding Representation

Rachel Kondo, a friend of mine from Intro to Screenwriting course who was around for the genesis of “Erotic Romance” used to inquire about the screenplay on a semi-regular basis. It’s done, I told her, I’m happy with the draft, I submitted it to some screenwriting contests, we’ll see what happens. The script advanced in some competitions, didn’t in others, but neither scenario really led to anything. I was more or less resigned to my fate; Rachel was not. She gave the script to her husband, Justin Marks, who had just finished writing the live-action “Jungle Book” for Disney. Justin gave the script to his manager, who supposedly liked it and passed it on to another manager at his company, who supposedly really liked it, but I didn’t expect it to lead to anything. And then the improbable happened: it actually led to something.

The call came at 5:15 p.m. on a Wednesday. I was at Hole in the Wall, writing and drinking when it happened, and the noise of the bar drowned out huge swaths of the conversation. Other parts of it are kind of an excited blur, but the gist of it was that by the time I hung up, I could officially say that I was represented Kendrick Tan of Madhouse Entertainment, although I offhandedly (and possibly annoyingly) referred to him only as “my manager” in casual conversation for weeks afterward. My manager is reading over the new draft this week. My manager wants me to send him some loglines. Oh sorry, guys, I have to take this. My manager is calling.

It was just too pleasant a phrase to avoid repeating.

My manager did want me to send him some loglines. A lot of loglines. More loglines than a person could reasonably be asked to submit, knowing that the answer to every one of those loglines was some variation of the sentiment, “There aren’t enough buyers for that.” No

one was buying romantic comedies. No one would take a chance on a workplace comedy about politics that alienated an entire political party. HBO and Netflix aren't going to buy anything from an unknown. No one was going to buy an indie comedy about suicide. There isn't an audience for a show about the New York drag ball scene in the 1980s.

It was a lot of rejection to take. In the meantime, I had emailed Kendrick all of my scripts and works-in-progress, and he had yet to say anything about "Smutshop" other than that we would discuss it when I met with him and Robyn Meisinger, the Co-President of Madhouse, when I got to Los Angeles. I moved to Hollywood under a cloud of uncertainty, terrified that I would get into the meeting and hear the same refrain about "Smutshop" that I'd heard about all my other material.

As it turned out, there weren't enough buyers for "Smutshop."

My immediate instinct was to deny this news. I was convinced "Smutshop" was the best and most marketable idea I'd ever come up with and worried I'd never come up with anything this good again. The night after the meeting, I emailed Kendrick a desperate, overdramatic email at one in the morning titled "Two Things about 'Smutshop' before You Crush My Dreams" that included two different proposals for page-one rewrites of the script, reimagining it for network and basic cable or alternately, changing the format to an hour-long dramedy, or some combination of the two which might work for any number of buyers which I then proceeded to list out for him.

Fortunately, Kendrick was aware that being bipolar and having just moved halfway across the country might be affecting my judgement in terms of what was and was not an appropriate way to handle professional relationships, and responded to my panicked bargaining with as much grace and delicacy as possible, arranging a call for the next morning.

“It’s not that it’s a bad idea or needs retooling or there aren’t enough possible buyers for it. It’s that I spend most of the day speaking with those buyers and they aren’t interested in picking up a show like this now. And when you only have so many hours a day you’re able to devote to writing, you want to make sure that you’re working on something that will sell. ‘Smutshop’ isn’t going to sell right now. But I think you have another show that will.”

“Sugar” was a logline I’d recently submitted to him, along with a batch of other loglines that I’d assumed were all getting the boot. The idea was for a half-hour cable show about Sugar Daddies and Babies. And although I hadn’t gotten much farther than that, Kendrick and Robyn agreed that the concept was very much in the zeitgeist. To boot, the conversation I proceeded to have with him about the show got me excited about writing it.

But...

“You’re sure there’s no chance of selling ‘Smutshop?’”

“There is no chance of selling that show right now.”

Frustrated silence. Then, from Kendrick:

“You’re going to write ‘Sugar’ and we’re going to send it to execs. It’s going to get you meetings that are going to lead to paid work. And you’re going to take the cachet from that work and use it to sell ‘Smutshop.’”

‘Smutshop’ is on hold for the time being. I have a lot of work to do before I’m ready for it.

Chapter Nine: Final Thoughts

In the waning days of my employment, when *Les Miserables* was still in theatres and we'd all identified way too much with the factory workers singing "At the End of the Day," my coworkers and I came to refer to our office as a smutshop. Everyone was crammed together, working for minimum wage and producing words that were quick and cheap and according to set specifications. As a romance writer, I only got an advance if I turned in a book a month, which meant there was only one way to write: as quickly as humanly possible.

While studying at UT, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to slow down and take the time to pause over my writing, to listen to readers tell me what wasn't working, to learn new ways of approaching plot or character, and most importantly, to screw up, dust myself off, and start over, knowing the script would be all the better for it. Although I'm grateful that the experience of working at BookStop provided such a great inspiration for my script, I know that without the knowledge and practice of screenwriting I gained at UT, the show wouldn't be half as good.

As I begin this new phase of my career in Los Angeles, I am frequently riddled with anxiety: that I will never again think of a good logline, or can't create well-developed characters, or will finally come up with great characters and come off like an idiot when I try to talk about them in meetings, or that one of these days, I am going to finally succumb to the people honking at me in rush hour traffic to make a left turn on a red light and once and for all total the car I spent so much of my students loans on. When this happens, I remind myself of all the times during graduate school when I was similarly panicked, and when I learned that my coursework had slowly, quietly prepared me to come up with a great idea, or write an amazing character, or

prepare for those meetings I get so nervous about. This reminder helps me to calm down, take a breath, and understand that although writing is a difficult journey, it is one I take with a top-notch compass and an excellent roadmap. Los Angeles is a hell of a lot bigger than Austin, but I know with these tools, I will never get lost.

Even if I have to deal with some pretty heinous traffic.

Appendices

APPENDIX A: ORIGINAL OUTLINE AND SHOW BIBLE

SMUTSHOP

by Rachel Kempf

A workplace comedy for premium cable set at an erotic romance publisher.

THE WORLD OF THE SHOW

INTEROFFICE MEMO: OCTOBER 18, 2014

Some authors have been taking too many liberties with sex scenes in shapeshifter books. Effective today, authors must adhere to the following guidelines:

Sex must always take place in human form, even when both characters are fully shifted. Readers do not want to read about two animals having sex.

The emergence of claws and fangs during arousal is acceptable. Fur is not.

All discussion of beast-like genitalia during sex is no longer acceptable. If the animal in question has specialized genitalia (cougar with knobbed penis, etc.), please refrain from mentioning such details in your manuscript.

Under no circumstances will anamorphic changes to bone structure (hind legs, protruded snout, etc.) be present during sex scenes.

Editors, please enforce these guidelines strictly. Given Amazon's recent move to pull e-books with themes of bestiality from their store, it is imperative that we maintain clear boundaries.

Welcome to Scarlet Letters Publishing—quality erotica for the sophisticated reader.

Founded in the late 1990s when Danielle Steele and Harlequin red-backs reigned supreme over the genre, Scarlet Letters began as a typical romance publisher, offering sexy books for the average housewife or slightly adventurous grandma. But when Amazon Kindle hit the market, smut readers everywhere were provided the opportunity to discreetly read ladyporn at their lunch breaks, on the bus, and on the bleachers at their kids' soccer games. Business boomed. The books got weirder. MF (guy and a girl) romances were replaced by MFM (two guys and a girl), MMMF (three guys and a girl), shifter (girl and a werewolf), and tentacle (girl and an alien) books. As a result, Scarlet Letters was forced to change its book offerings along with market tastes and hire a slew of new employees, forcing it to take on a burgeoning corporate infrastructure with four main departments:

THE EDITORS: Pride themselves in knowing the correct hyphenation of balls-deep. These college-educated, anal-retentive twenty and thirtysomething hipsters spend their workweek pouring over badly punctuated, plot-hole-ridden manuscripts to liberate them of grammatical errors, marking each with polite and professional notes (“Please revise. This suggests his cock is wearing sweatpants”) which make them the mortal enemies of—

THE WRITERS: Older, less educated, hardworking as hell. They have husbands, they have kids, and they make more money than anyone else in the office. They write quickly—two books a month, every month—and they know what readers want, because most of them have read three or four romances a week since junior high. They’re suspicious of their editors, who aren’t fans of the genre but are prone to quoting their favorite moments from the books they read—possibly out of admiration, but probably ironically. And they will fight to the death to avoid compromising their art (i.e. change the words “throbbing purple lovestick” to “hard cock”).

THE PRODUCTION TEAM: Is in charge of distribution, cover art, social media, marketing, and acquisitions. They keep the office running and the production schedule on time. And they try their damndest to keep the peace between the writers and editors.

THE FREELANCERS: Mysterious men and women who send in manuscripts and are outsourced some of the less important cover art, editing jobs, and programming.

Together, they work at a place where standard water cooler conversation topics include which books feature the most original shapeshifter (trees), the creepiest sex toy (dildo couch), the funniest homonym (fourteen carrots diamond) and the weirdest lubricant (power gel). They wonder aloud whether certain sex scenes are physically possible and debate the question based on personal experience. On the walls are a monthly wall calendar featuring the naked cowboy of the month and a whiteboard detailing common grammatical mistakes with highly explicit examples.

It’s not all fun and games though. The office is small, cramped, and badly lit (every time someone runs the microwave the lights flicker), the pay isn’t great, and editors are reminded with each new job interview that it’s hard to find work when every sample in your resume includes the words “cock,” “pussy,” and “cunt.” Reader reviews, which rip apart heroines for being too slutty, too smart, and too dominant remind everyone in the office that the most obnoxious stereotypes about what it means to be “feminine” are not only alive and well—but that writing a bestseller means actively enforcing them.

Like it or not though, their shop talk is the highlight of every party they go to and each new job opening results in a flood of resumes from every hopeful English BA to move to the live music capital of America in search of hipper life experiences. It’s not all women clamoring to be hired, but the boss has long believed that men might not be the best judges of what women find sexy and a coed office might lead to rampant sexual harassment lawsuits. As a result, the slowly growing employee roster has always been composed of women.

Until today.

Scarlett Letter's first male employee is about to start his first day of work.

THE CHARACTERS

PRIMARY:

LAINY (writer): The daughter of a well-regarded nonfiction authoress, she's wanted to be a writer since she was a little girl, but hardly imagined success would look anything like this. Although she's determined to write "smart, feminist porn," professional jealousy and her overactive ego will eventually lead her to fall in line with market trends in the hopes of becoming a bestseller. Five years ago, she might have clung a little harder to artistic integrity, but now she's twenty-eight and saddled with student loans and sick of sharing a studio with her underemployed live-in boyfriend and furniture they found outside of their apartment building's Dumpster. She's always been a person who thinks way too much about everything, and since taking this job, has developed an increasing number of sexual hang-ups that are beginning to take a toll on her relationship.

PHOEBE (chief editor): Smart, driven, anal retentive. Her hard work and mad editing skills helped her quickly work her way up the ladder at Scarlet Letters, but her willingness to kiss ass is what keeps her in Elaine's good graces. She runs the editing team with an iron fist and reports back to Elaine on everything—a task that takes an increasing toll on her office friendships as she's given more responsibility over her coworkers. Outside of work, her romantic life is a messy tangle of one-night stands, fuck buddies, and bad dates arranged through Tindr and OK Cupid.

KATIE (head of production): The office's most senior employee, she has a deep and abiding love for romance novels. Universally described as "nice," she's something of a doormat in her dealings with subordinates, and frequently picks up the slack for them rather than report their misbehaviors to Elaine. Has been thirty pounds overweight since high school and is terrified of never getting married. As a result, she's a serial monogamist, jumping from one long-term relationship to the next. When the show begins, she's just been dumped by her latest beau, the most recent in a string of guys she's believed to be "the one."

A.J. (junior editor) Phoebe's college roommate and best friend since sophomore year at UT. As a lesbian working at a place that celebrates traditional gender roles and heterosexual romance narratives, she is constantly frustrated by the books she reads, but knows that with her job history, she's lucky to have it. Her struggles with bipolar disorder have left her with a somewhat checkered job history, and it was only by Phoebe's recommendation she was able to get this job—a recommendation that Phoebe is frequently hard-pressed to defend when A.J.'s issues with the romance industry reach a boiling point. As a result, their friendship has become somewhat strained by their working relationship.

SECONDARY:

BRIAN (production assistant) good-looking nerd who girls almost instantly trust due to his 2010-Michael-Cera vibe. Like all self-described “nice guys,” however, he’s considerably more of a dick than he thinks he is. Polite and charming, but also entitled and a little manipulative, he’s totally willing to use Katie’s crush on him and her easygoing attitude to avoid work and courts a super-close friendship with Lainey in spite of her marital status.

ELAINE (owner): Brassy, unselfconscious, tough as nails. Refers to her employees as “her girls” and runs it a bit like a house mom would supervise a sorority or a strip club. She has a stay-at-home husband who looks after her elementary-school-age kids and occasionally has to bring them in to work when he comes in to visit her. Like everyone else in the office, he looks at her with equal parts admiration and abject terror.

SHARON (writer): fiftysomething former housewife who writes MM (gay) fiction at a breakneck pace, seemingly without any outlining or planning beforehand. Has a gay teenage son who she talks about constantly, and their mother-son dynamic is the subject of much speculation around the office.

TRISHA (writer): The company’s number one bestselling author and demands to be treated as such. A know-it-all who never finished high school, she constantly fights with the editing staff despite her myriad grammatical deficiencies and considers the feminist tendencies of her younger coworkers a character flaw.

JAMIE (writer): single mom, works a second job at Hooters to support her kid, routinely wakes and bakes before coming to work. Her first book debuted to much success over a year ago, but since then hasn’t been able to hit another homerun.

DINESH: Peter’s best friend, but in many ways his polar opposite. As the co-creator of an increasingly successful dating app, he’s got money to burn and spends a lot of it on booze, drugs, and impressing women. Sleeps with a *lot* of women. His spirit of recklessness and irreverent sense of humor is a big part of what unites him and Peter, but he thinks of his friend in equal parts as a fuckup and a shaman. Occasionally gets high and wants to engage in longwinded conversations with Peter about the meaning of life. Occasionally gets drunk and wonders if he’d be happier if he was less of a douchebag and found some nice girl to marry. Will deny all of this fervently in the sober light of morning.

PETER: An experimental filmmaker and sometimes member of a noise band, he’s been with Lainey for six years and loves her deeply. Believes deeply in Lainey’s talent as a writer and realizes he’d be completely lost without her to anchor him, but romanticizes the lifestyle of being a starving artist. He’s doted on by her artist mom and an extremely smart and thoughtful person in spite of the fact that, to any outside observer, he needs nothing more than to grow up and get his shit together. He and Lainey are best friends and get along great on a day-to-day basis, but talk as little as possible about their increasingly divergent values and non-existent sex life.

As the series progresses, we’ll meet other members of the staff—the girls in charge of social media, acquisitions, covers, and a handful of other editors—and Scarlet Letters will hire a few

more men as some of the minor characters move on to different jobs and the company expands to fill the demands of the booming industry.

THE THEMES

Sex is complicated. And it's made all the more so by every Victoria's Secret ad, Cosmopolitan article and Internet porn video that tells us how it's supposed to be. Have you ever worried that all those romantic comedies you grew up watching have warped your expectations about relationships? Imagine filing for divorce and walking into work the next day to read about happily-ever-afters for eight hours straight.

In the vein of *GIRLS* and *SEX IN THE CITY*, this is a show about sex and relationships as seen through the eyes of twenty- and thirtysomething women struggling to figure it out. Only in *SMUTSHOP*, figuring out sex, love, and romance doesn't just happen through blind dates and one-night stands—it's hashed out nine-to-five in department meetings and interoffice memos.

As editors, writers, and publishing assistants, these women are not only defining themselves through their relationships, but also through their work. These are young professionals, struggling to be taken seriously in a weird, ridiculous business. They're struggling to figure out whether success justifies selling out, the difference between being a team player and a doormat, and what happens when you're promoted to be the supervisor of your former drinking buddies.

THE FIRST SEASON

CHARACTER ARCS:

- Lainey will get moved to writing staff and decide she's okay with selling out.
- Lainey and Peter's relationship will dissolve as she becomes close friends with Brian.
- The tensions between Phoebe and A.J.'s will come to a head.
- Katie will gain confidence and lose her fear of being single.
- A.J. and Katie's friendship will deepen.
- Phoebe will juggle friendships with professional responsibility and hookup with Dinesh.

EPISODE SYNOPSES:

1. **PILOT:** The office is abuzz as the first male employee begins work. Amid relationship issues with Peter, Lainey plans to quit, but is persuaded to stay when she is offered a job as an in-house writer.
2. **CLOGGED:** Lainey struggles with writer's block when she is given one day to outline her book. The toilet breaks when everyone is on their period, forcing everyone to go to the 7-11 for bathroom breaks. Phoebe hooks up with a 7-11 cashier.

3. S & M: The girls attend a BDSM club to help Lainey with research for her book and are horrified to see Trish there. Katie balks when a male clubgoer labels her a “natural submissive.”
4. SEX THERAPY: Peter persuades Lainey to see a sex therapist and Lainey takes out her sexual frustrations by composing red-hot sex scenes. Katie discovers Brian’s struggle to combat workday erections.
5. COMING OUT: Sharon and her son have a falling out over her books. After handing in her completed manuscript, Lainey struggles with “coming out” to her mom as an erotica author. AJ gets in trouble with Phoebe for failing to remove a lesbian kiss from the manuscript she’s editing.
6. COMPETITION: AJ gets jealous when Phoebe takes another junior editor under her wing. Katie asks Brian on a date. Lainey and AJ butt heads when she’s assigned to edit Lainey’s manuscript.
7. V-DAY: A huge mistake of Phoebe’s comes to light on the biggest sales day of the year. Peter is forced to admit he cares about Valentine’s Day when Lainey ditches him and stays out all night at the office happy hour.
8. THREESOME: AJ and Phoebe have a crazy night out in an attempt to rekindle their friendship and end up in a threesome with Dinesh. Katie, Lainey, and Brian are forced to work together on Lainey’s marketing materials.
9. GOD HATES PORN: Katie is tasked with handling picketers when a local church group shows up to protest pornography. Phoebe shows up to work hungover after her late night and is caught by Elaine, then takes her frustrations out on AJ in an epic fight.
10. ASSHOLES: Phoebe continues to hook up with Dinesh but considers calling it off when he wants to have anal sex with her. When Katie complains to Elaine about Brian’s lack of productivity, Elaine discovers Lainey and Brian’s flirtatious IM conversations and cracks down on workplace professionalism.
11. VACAY: Phoebe has to fire Jamie when Elaine leaves for vacation. Lainey’s book goes on sale for pre-order, but is quickly pulled from Amazon due to themes of bestiality.
12. SELLOUT: Lainey and Peter call it quits on the eve of Lainey’s book release. Phoebe scrambles to keep the staff in line when AJ instigates a walkout.

THE PILOT

COLD OPEN:

Office meeting, led by Phoebe. Ménage books where the heroine is with two brothers are hot right now, but please remember, they can't both be going down on the heroine at the same time. There is no way for them to do that without their mouths touching, and we draw a hard line on incest. No incest. Just two brothers having sex with the same girl at the same time. At the end of the meeting, an announcement: a new employee will be starting tomorrow, and he's a guy. Commence freaking out amongst all the employees.

ACT ONE:

Lainey clocks in at work via the fingerprint scanner which doesn't work unless you press it just right. Every time she presses it wrong, it says: please try again. Intercut with: Lainey and Peter having very awkward sex. It's going in at a weird angle, or the position is weird, or he said something in an attempt to be sexy that reminds her of some creepy thing in one of the manuscripts she was reading at work.

At the end of the sequence: Lainey and Peter, post (sort of) coitus. Lainey blames the bad sex on her job. Peter: you should quit. For real this time. She can take a break from working, use the time off to finish her novel. Lainey is dubious: do we have the money for that?

Cut back to: Lainey at the fingerprint scanner. A line is forming behind her to clock in, with Phoebe at the head of it. Everyone offering advice on how to press the scanner to make it work. Lainey to Phoebe: I can't fucking do this anymore.

Lainey and Phoebe getting coffee at the 7/11. Phoebe to Lainey: you're *quitting*? Lainey: yes. And for real this time. Phoebe begs her to reconsider. Lainey thinks it's because Phoebe is going to miss her around the office, but it's actually because Phoebe doesn't want to have to replace her as senior editor.

A.J. and Phoebe talking in their desk clump. Phoebe can't believe Lainey would do this to her, particularly with the production schedule the way it is right now. Establish underlying tensions between A.J. and Phoebe, given that A.J. just asked for an extension on her manuscript. But it's okay, because Phoebe loves her, right? Establish that Phoebe does love her. Then A.J.: but if she does quit, you're going to put me up for senior editor, right?

[Need to establish early on that every time someone runs the copier, the microwave, or the fax machine, the lights flicker. The building is old, the electric circuit needs repair, and the fuse in the building has blown more than once due to overuse. Will start setting this up somewhere around here...]

We see Lainey, A.J., Katie, and Phoebe together and get a sense of their group dynamic as everyone gathers in the breakroom eating cake to celebrate Trish's new book release. The sales are already rolling in, and it looks like it's going to be another bestseller. She's hardly the center of attention, however, as the vast majority of the office conversation is speculation about the guy. Wasn't he supposed to be starting today? Katie: he's running late. A coworker overhears this—what did he sound like on the phone? Did he sound hot? Establish Lainey's bitterness toward Trish and the other writers—not that she'd want to write this crap. She writes actual literature.

Katie: did you hear back about that story you sent to the Kenyon Review? She did. Another rejection.

Lainey in the bathroom, practicing what she will say to Elaine when she quits. Calls Peter for moral support. Peter offers moral support. Asks Peter to remind her they'll be okay for money. His job is enough for a few months, right? Peter: don't get mad but I kind of...got fired. Intercut with: outside the bathroom, Brian has arrived. The entire office has gone dead silent. Over the silence, Lainey in the bathroom: you did WHAT?

ACT TWO:

Lainey in the bathroom, angrily whispering at Peter on the phone. A coworker waiting to use the bathroom outside yells in: it's been five minutes. Lainey: I'm changing a tampon! Coworker: You need both hands for that and I can hear you talking on the phone! Another coworker: she could do it if she was on speakerphone. Lainey to Peter: I'll call you back. Third coworker: Don't talk about tampons. The guy will hear. Lainey exits the bathroom in time to hear this. The guy is here?

The guy is named Brian, and he is hot—in a nerdy, accessible sort of way. He's training under Katie, and everyone is staring at them as she explains to him about important office stuff like [something super sexual here]. Katie is flustered and self-conscious but Brian is equally awkward. Katie is totally smitten.

Brian stands in the kitchen, getting coffee, surrounded by four different girls who all suddenly decided they needed caffeine at the exact same time. Katie eyeing them jealously. Everyone is simultaneously sharing office anecdotes about the books with the weirdest sex position, the weirdest lubricant, the most orgasms... Brian is starting to get a little overwhelmed.

Lainey is outside on her break, talking to Peter on the phone. He promises they'll be fine for money. He's got this. Intercut: Peter waiting to be screened for a medical study. Lainey is not impressed with this plan for their income, but whatever, it's fine, she just won't quit. Brian walks outside to smoke (but also hide from his flock of intimidating admirers) and catches the tail end of Lainey's conversation. A brief conversation between Brian and Lainey to show the beginnings of a spark between them—she needs to do or say something that kicks off his season-long interest in her.

Lunch: Phoebe, A.J., Katie, Lainey at a local café. A.J. makes fun of Brian's flock of admirers. Katie reacts weirdly. A.J. points out that if the girls had been working here as long as the four of them had, their conversation would have been way different: creepiest BDSM scene, rapiest hero... Phoebe, more sensitive to A.J.'s quips than usual: if you hate it so much here, why don't you quit? Lainey: I'm not quitting. No one is surprised.

Lainey goes over the manuscript she's editing with Trish, whose book is now at #3 on the bestseller charts. Should be #1 soon. She frequently refers to this information as evidence that she shouldn't have to listen to Lainey's editing notes for her next book, as Trish obviously knows what readers like and Lainey "isn't a writer."

Lainey, furious is IMing A.J., Phoebe, and Katie simultaneously: fuck Trish. She's quitting. The four of them give her divergent advice on how to prepare to tell Elaine, and in the midst of juggling multiple IMs at once, Lainey accidentally sends Elaine a snarky IM meant for A.J. about why she's quitting.

ACT THREE:

Lainey flipping out: how does she come back from this? A.J.: you're quitting. You don't need to come back from it. Lainey protests: what if future employers want to call her former boss to ask about her work performance? What if she can't find another job and has to come crawling back here? A.J.: I thought you were going to be a writer? Lainey: I'm not going to make money writing, no one makes money writing, I was just going to take some time off! A.J.: so to be clear, all that stuff about quitting was actually bullshit? Lainey is panicking, A.J. calms her down: Phoebe says Elaine isn't even at her desk half the time. She probably hasn't even seen the IM yet. Lainey: What am I supposed to do, hope her computer crashes before she sees it?

CUT TO—Lainey and A.J. simultaneously running the microwave, making copies, and sending faxes. Phoebe: who are you faxing? The lights flicker, the power goes out, and every computer in the building shuts down. Jackpot.

Everyone standing around in the dark, biding time while the electrician fixes the fuse. Several coworkers debating the hotness of the electrician vs. the guy who brings the water cooler refills while Brian tries not to overhear. Phoebe's frustrations with A.J. come to a head—everyone's lost work is going to royally fuck the production schedule. Lainey defends her: it was her fault. Katie desperately trying to keep the peace among them. Trish checking the bestseller charts on her iPhone—it happened! She's #1! In the middle of the chaos, Peter shows up looking for Lainey, trying to find her in the dark and unfamiliar office. The lights go back on. Lainey sees Peter. What is he doing here?

Lainey and Peter in the parking lot. Peter: came to tell her she should quit and finish her novel. No matter what. He'll figure out a way to make money. Maybe not enough money to get boushey matching furniture, but... One nice moment between Lainey and Peter to show that, in spite of whatever sexual awkwardness between them, they do love each other. Lainey departs the conversation ready to talk to Elaine.

Lainey goes to Elaine's office: I'm giving you my two weeks' notice. I'm quitting. Elaine: I know. She saw the IM. Oops. Lainey internally freaking out, but Elaine wants to know: why are you quitting? You don't like this job? Lainey does like the job, actually, but wants to write. Elaine remembers Lainey's resume: you have an MFA in fiction writing, don't you? How long ago was that? Lainey, embarrassed: four years. Hasn't done much with it since then. That's why she needs to take time off. Going to finish her novel. Elaine offers her a job as an in-house writer and Lainey accepts.

APPENDIX B: DRAFT 1 OUTLINE

COLD OPEN:

Lainey goes through her daily ritual of clocking in at work, only to be met with the fingerprint scanner's endless rejection: "please try again, please try again." The process is intercut with Lainey and Peter's sexual foibles, showing them in a variety of unsatisfying positions. At the end of the montage, Lainey gives up on clocking in, uttering with frustration: I can't fucking do this anymore.

ACT ONE:

Lainey completes her exit interview with Phoebe, an overly officious H.R. rep. Lainey is suspicious of the exit interview as a means of trying to get her to stay—which it is, kind of. Lainey refuses to play along, insisting that she's certain there are plenty of capable women who can take over the job, one of whom Margaret is interviewing right now.

Reese--a decidedly male candidate--is interviewed by Margaret to fill her chief editor position. Margaret tells Reese he's not what she expected, given his resume (degree from Sarah Lawrence, majored in women's studies). Does he know what kind of books they publish here? Reese insists he's comfortable with the material. And he doesn't deride romance as trash at all. It's not just sex, after all.

Maryanne storms Katie's desk with a giant mockup of her book's explicit cover—sexy stuff, except the hero is missing a foot. She insists that Jamie redo her cover, which Jamie refuses. There's no time before the release date and she's already fixed it once. Katie: what was wrong with the first cover? Maryanne holds it up. The hero's foot is strategically placed so that it looks like a giant dick. Before Katie can make a ruling on the foot-dick issue, her eyes land on an email—and widen. Shit. She storms downstairs: Lainey! We have a situation!

Lainey holds court in the writer's room: As of today, Amazon is pulling all its e-books with themes of bestiality from the store. From here on out, heroes must be in human form during sex scenes. No fur, no beastlike snouts, and no... Her eyes wander to the whiteboard, which contains a drawing of a giant dick with spikes coming out of it. The dick drawing belongs to Trish, who feels this accurately represents what a cheetah-shifter's dick would look like, given the way cheetahs trap their mates during sex (Sharon: that's so romantic!). The women debate over a way to make the dick human without compromising Trish's artistic integrity.

Reese assures Margaret he will handle the job with the utmost professionalism. Margaret: the girls will be a handful, but if you think you can keep them in line, the job is yours. Reese thanks her for opportunity. Margaret: I'm not giving you an opportunity, I'm throwing you to the sharks.

Margaret leads Reese into the writer's room, where he is introduced as the new chief editor and greeted by a whiteboard full of cheetah dicks and a roomful of women staring at him. Welcome to Scarlett Publishing.

ACT TWO

Lainey comes home after work. Knows she should be writing. But... Her eyes wander to her dresser drawer. Then she reaches in and grabs her vibrator. She's under the covers and halfway naked when Peter enters. Lainey attempts to hide what she's doing but fails. Peter, hopeful, asks if she wants to—Lainey: *no*. No, she should be writing. But the vibrator's there, and Peter's unconvinced. So...when you're at work, are the books that you're reading—Lainey cuts him off, insists that the books are badly punctuated, misogynistic, and cheesy. And if she were the least bit turned on by them, she wouldn't be quitting.

Lainey sits at her desk, lips parted, thighs anxiously rubbing together as she reads. Chacole interrupts: good book? Lainey: shut up. Chacole is starting a betting pool to see who the new guy hooks up with. Want in? Lainey begs her not to. She has three days to train Reese and needs to minimize distractions—but as Reese arrives, the sexual tension between them is already palpable and they've got a long day of talking about sex ahead of them.

Around the office, there is nothing but distractions. The editors and production staff place their bets with Chacole while Trish schemes to use her womanly powers to get the new chief editor to let her have final say in her manuscripts. Meanwhile, things are heating up between Lainey and Reese as she tells him about house rules regarding oral sex and rimming.

Upstairs, Phoebe scrambles to devise a sexual harassment policy for the office, but Lainey begs her to stop—things are already chaotic enough. Phoebe insists that a meeting is necessary, showing Lainey the bet sheet she confiscated from Chacole. Horrified to find out she's a frontrunner in the bet, Lainey agrees to let Phoebe hold a sexual harassment meeting.

At Phoebe's meeting, she introduces the new sexual harassment policy to the office, which goes way overboard in restricting how employees discuss the sexual content of the books they're publishing. Reese tries to take over the meeting and assert himself, but only makes things worse. Lainey attempts to stop the chaos: no need for Draconian policy, just be professional...but in the process makes an inappropriate comment about Reese. Phoebe reasserts if anyone feels violated, come to her.

Lainey rushes to A.J.'s desk to borrow a cigarette. A.J.: You don't smoke. Lainey explains that she needs to pretend to smoke in order to get out of awkward situations. Chacole: Is this about Reese? Reese enters, and Lainey attempts to excuse herself, only to find out Reese is a smoker. He offers to go with her, but she resigns herself to stay and work with him. The sexual tension becomes palpable as Lainey discusses market trends—apparently office romances are selling well this month—and just as things have become sufficiently awkward, Peter arrives. Apparently Lainey didn't tell him Reese was a guy. Lainey excuses herself and Peter follows after her. A.J.: is it too late to change my bet to Lainey? Reese: What bet?

ACT THREE

Lainey and Peter sit outside at a Mexican restaurant eating queso. Peter: tell me all the sexy things you read at work while you shove your mouth full of melted cheese. Lainey tells him about some of the more absurd Trish-isms (cancer sores instead of canker sores). The discussion about work segues into a discussion of Reese—Peter’s jealous, but doesn’t want to admit he is. Lainey teases him: “I’m a man and I’m jealous.” Peter and her engage in schtick, pretending to be a stereotypical couple but Lainey’s offhand comment “I’m a woman and I want to get married and have babies” lands a little too close to home.

Back at the office, Reese now realizes he’s the butt of every joke in the office and desperately needs to escape all the eyes on him. He goes to the bathroom, only to find the men’s bathroom stuffed full of tampon boxes and office supplies. Forced to use the women’s room, he is relieved that no one is inside until he lifts the seat and sees “Hi Reese” written on the underside.

Reese exits the bathroom and sees Bella smirking at him. He goes off on her, sarcastically commenting that of course there are tons of jobs for a liberal arts graduate in the middle of a recession, so obviously he took this job specifically because he’s gay, and also inexplicably trying to fuck everyone in the office. At the end of his tirade, Bella responds: I’m seventeen. Reese stammers that he was being sarcastic, but it’s too late. And as Bella leaves, she points out the reason she was smirking: he has a tampon wrapper stuck to his shoe. Reese bends down to pick it up and comes face to face with Trish’s stiletto heels. Trish preys on his insecurities, complimenting him as a manager, and sweetly asks if he might go over her manuscript with her.

Lainey returns from lunch to find that Reese has let Trish walk all over him and he’s already sent the barely-edited copy to Margaret. Lainey is furious, insisting that Trish needs a heavy editorial hand seeing as she doesn’t know what a semicolon is. Trish tells Lainey that Reese is a good editor; Lainey just needlessly meddles in Trish’s manuscripts because she’s jealous of Trish’s writing. This enrages Lainey, who goes off on Trish, romance novels, Scarlet Publishing, the fingerprint scanner—until she realizes Margaret has entered the room and heard the whole thing.

Lainey is panicked, frantically apologizing and begging Margaret that this one incident not sully five years of good work as chief editor. Margaret is confused: if Lainey is leaving in order to be a writer, does she really need Margaret’s recommendation in her back pocket? Hell, why not just quit without notice and burn all her bridges? Unless of course, she figures this writing isn’t going to make her much money. Lainey agrees that it isn’t. Margaret: then why bother trying to make a living at it? And why rip into Trish for writing books that are going to pay her bills? Margaret challenges Lainey to do better than Trish. When Lainey insists she could—she’s been rewriting Trish’s sentences for years—Margaret asks her to prove it. Royalties only, no advances or base pay, but she can stay on as an editor part-time if she wants to. Lainey: you are trying to get me to stay. Margaret: your first book is due in a month. Lainey insists she hasn’t agreed to anything yet. Margaret gives her until the end of the day to decide.

Lainey goes outside to try and clear her head and make the decision. Reese comes out for a cigarette, then offers her one, assuming that it’s why she came out here. Lainey takes one tentatively. Reese apologizes for selling her out. Lainey forgives him. Selling out is something

she's been considering herself. She explains her job offer, uncertain if she should take it. It's just not the kind of writing she pictured herself doing. Reese interrupts: are you going to smoke that cigarette or not? Lainey lets him light it for her. Reese watches her take a drag. It's weird, he says, when you mentioned you were a smoker. I didn't picture you as one. Lainey nods. I didn't picture me as one either. Reese: you are now. He heads inside. Lainey bursts into a horrible coughing fit.

Trish sees Lainey packing up her things from her desk and is gloating until Lainey unpacks in the writers' room. Hope Trish doesn't mind a little friendly competition. Off Trish's look of horror it's the--

END OF SHOW.

APPENDIX C: PITCH NOTES

I want to start by having you remember the weirdest office meeting you've ever had.

Got it? Great. Mine's weirder.

I was working as writer and editor at a place that published erotic romance novels, and among the types of porn we published were romance novels about woman and a werewolf. And at one point we had to have a meeting to define exactly how wolfy heroes could be in sex scenes. So we were getting notes like: during arousal, the hero can have claws and fangs, but it is not acceptable for him to have a beastlike snout or fur. And it was IMPERATIVE that we strictly enforce these guidelines because Amazon had started pulling all e-books with themes of bestiality from its store.

Welcome to the world of--

SMUTSHOP. A workplace comedy for premium cable set at an erotic romance publisher.

Scarlet Letters, the publisher in question, is a place where standard water cooler conversation topics include which books feature the creepiest sex toy (dildo couch) and the weirdest lubricant (power gel). Editors are taught the correct hyphenation of balls-deep and writers constantly fight them for their artistic integrity by demanding "swollen meatstick" is not amended to read "hard cock."

The boss has long believed that men are not the best judges of what women find sexy. As a result, the slowly growing employee roster has always been composed of women.

Until today—Scarlett Letters' first male employee is about to start his first day of work.

As you can imagine, a huge part of the pilot is adjusting to the appearance of REESE (Zac Efron, a ridiculously handsome, straight-A frat guy). HR has the worst day ever trying to formulate sexual harassment policies, forward-thinking employees worry his presence will lead to misogynistic books, and office jokesters take bets on which coworkers he'll end up sleeping with.

The unexpected frontrunner for this bet is LAINEY (Anna Kendrick—the show's protagonist and the former chief editor of Scarlet Publishing). For last five years, she's been reading porn all day and at night having a really awkward, unsatisfying sex life with husband PETER (Jesse Eisenberg). Concerned that Lainey is losing interest in him, Peter offers to take a second job so Lainey can pursue her dream of writing feminist, highbrow literature.

When Reese arrives to replace Lainey, she has to train him as chief editor, telling him, for example how many scenes of double penetration are needed in ménage books. She totally hates him, thinks he's misogynistic and arrogant, but he's also really, really hot. Lainey's not worried about her attraction to him hurting her marriage since she's got one foot out the door but—

When she's offered a job as an author to work as a writer for Scarlet Letters, she realizes this is only the beginning of their sexual tension.

OTHER CHARACTERS & EPISODES:

TRISH: Bestselling author who is basically Lainey's nemesis. When Lainey was an editor, Trish was infuriated by the brainy, feminist girl who was tasked with "fixing" her sentences. Now that Lainey is her competition, Trish's disdain of her has only increased. Their working relationship will get even weirder in the episode--

S & M, where Lainey goes to BDSM club to research her book and is horrified to see Trish among its patrons.

KATIE: a serial monogamist who loves romance novels, she's head of production, but something of a doormat in her dealings with her subordinates. At the BDSM club, she's displeased when one of the men calls her "naturally submissive." Over the course of the show she'll go from picking up everyone's slack to standing up for herself such as in--

GOD HATES PORN, where Katie's tasked with handling picketers when a local church group shows up to protest pornography.

SHARON: a fiftysomething former housewife who writes MM (gay) fiction at a breakneck pace, seemingly without any outlining or planning beforehand. She has a gay teenage son who she talks about constantly, and their mother-son dynamic is the subject of much speculation around the office and explored in--

COMING OUT, where Sharon's son tells her off for writing MM books and, after handing in her completed manuscript, Lainey struggles with "coming out" as an erotica author to her husband Peter.

Basically, the show is SEX AND THE CITY as a workplace comedy. It's a show about sex and relationships seen through the eyes of women who are sexual tastemakers.

Things are about to get very unprofessional.

APPENDIX D: DRAFT 2 OUTLINE

COLD OPEN:

Lainey goes through her daily ritual of clocking in at work, only to be met with the fingerprint scanner's endless rejection: "please try again, please try again." The process is intercut with Lainey and Peter's sexual foibles, showing them in a variety of unsatisfying positions. At the end of the montage, Lainey gives up on clocking in, uttering with frustration: I can't fucking do this anymore.

ACT ONE:

Chacole and A.J. discuss the weirdest lubricant they've ever come across in a book while getting coffee. Lainey approaches in search of coffee and Tums. As the girls discuss Lainey's impending resignation, Chacole offhandedly mentions that Lainey is quitting because her marriage is falling apart. Lainey attacks A.J. for sharing the information (and for thinking her marriage is falling apart), and A.J. apologizes, while attempting to continue the discussion about the new chief editor. Are the women up for the job more like women's studies majors or women who claim *50 Shades* changed their life? Lainey insists that she's quitting because she has an opportunity to work for a "real" publisher and pursue more literary ambitions, not because her marriage is in trouble—which it's not. You can have a good marriage and bad sex. Besides, every guy she's had great sex with has been a total asshole.

Katie opens the door to the office and is greeted by Reese (29, super hot, probably an asshole). Reese claims he's here for an interview.

Katie approaches Lainey: Reese is here for his interview. Lainey balks: *his* interview? She didn't put any men up for an interview. Then realizes: Motherfucker! Why would you name your son Reese? Lainey panics, knowing she's fucked up badly—Margaret never hires men, and Reese is underqualified to boot. Lainey only gave him the interview because she thought he was a woman leaning in. A.J. stops by Lainey's desk just in time to hear the end of this and comment: *Lean In* is victim-blaming bullshit. As she leaves, Lainey whispers to Katie: Do *not* tell her about this. Katie, clearly smitten by Reese, speculates on how weird it will be to have a guy in the office. How are they supposed to talk about sex furniture and bestiality around him? Lainey: Why would we be talking about bestiality? Katie: You didn't get the email from Amazon?

Reese interviews with Margaret, who is skeptical about hiring him. Does he realize what kind of books they publish here? Reese does, and he understands her skepticism. But he applied for this job because he's impressed at the way the company flourished during the recession. He's a businessman, and he knows how to help them sell even more books. And as far as knowing what women want goes...

Inside the writer's room, Lainey draws a massive red X over a crude drawing of a dick with spikes coming out of its head. Trish, the company's number one author and Lainey's sworn enemy, has penned a book about cheetah-shifters and deemed it necessary for the heroes' dicks

to be anatomically accurate. Cheetahs have spines on the end of their dicks they use to trap their mates during sex. Bella: That's so romantic! Lainey insists that the spines be taken out. Amazon is pulling all its books with themes of bestiality from its store. Trish balks that this will make the books less factually accurate. Isn't that what Lainey is always complaining about? Lainey points out that Trish's books shouldn't have characters staring out their New York penthouses at the Pacific Ocean, not penises that reflect what a made-up human-animal hybrid's dick would look like. Bella chimes in that maybe Trish's heroes could have human dicks, but with knobby heads that function like the spines. Lainey: it's a knobby head or a head that becomes knobby during sex? Sharon, as she walks in to hear the end of this conversation: maybe you should draw a picture...

Margaret is impressed with Reese and gives him the job. Reese thanks her for the opportunity. Margaret: I'm not giving you an opportunity. I'm throwing you to the sharks. She walks Reese downstairs to where a gaggle of women are now surrounding the whiteboard arguing about the nature of the penises. Cheetah and human dicks cover the whiteboard. Margaret's voice booms over the chaos as she introduces Reese to the office. The women turn to stare at the male interloper who has arrived.

Lainey sits in the sleek office of a publishing house that couldn't present a greater contrast to Scarlet. She shares a smarmy pretentiousness with her interviewer and her fawning obsequiousness is greatly appreciated. The publisher extends an invite to read some of Lainey's work once she's settled in to the office. Lainey: Does that mean...? The job is hers if she wants it. Of course they'll have to check her references, speak with her current employer... Lainey's face falls. Shit.

In the parking lot, Lainey repeats to herself in the mirror that she is going to get this job. She is a good employee, and a smart capable woman who isn't going to let the arrival of one untimely penis derail five years of exemplary work. But it looks like the trouble is already beginning. In the car to her left, Jamie is hotboxing *and* wearing her Hooters uniform. And as Lainey begs Jamie to put on a sweater, Chacole approaches and tells Lainey she's starting a betting pool to see who the new guy hooks up with. Want in?

In the office, Lainey rushes through Reese's training at lightning pace, trying to avoid a fiasco. Reese strong-arms her into slowing down. He intends to do well at this job and can't do that if he doesn't know his team or how to do his job. And if Lainey isn't going to help him with that, well, he can always go over her head to Margaret. Lainey agrees and braces herself for the ensuing day of training.

A series of short scenes depict Reese's training and walkthrough, along with the reaction Reese is causing among the women of the office. While Chacole collects bets and elicits gossip, Trish schemes to use her womanly powers to manipulate Reese's treatment of her manuscripts. Meanwhile, sexual tension abounds as Lainey teaches Reese the sexiest words for genitalia and how making Barbies engage in explicit acts can help authors with consistency in their sex scenes. At the end of the montage, Phoebe catches a gaggle of women gathered around the water cooler, placing bets on Reese.

Upstairs, Phoebe scrambles to devise a sexual harassment policy for the office, but Lainey begs her to stop—things are already chaotic enough. Phoebe insists that a meeting is necessary, showing Lainey the bet sheet she confiscated from Chacole. Lainey stares at it, horrified. Why is my name on this list?

Lainey rushes to A.J.'s desk to borrow a cigarette. A.J.: You've already brought one poisonous phallic object into the office. Now you want me to give you another? Chacole: You don't smoke. Lainey explains that she needs to pretend to smoke in order to get out of awkward situations. Chacole: Is this about Reese? Lainey: A.J., stop bitching about the patriarchy. Chacole, stop stirring up gossip. And somebody please give me a cigarette. A cigarette appears in front of Lainey. She looks up to see Reese holding it. Smoke? Lainey: No thank you.

Lainey sits amid a pile of pretentious literary books in the library, coming to terms with her newly crushed dreams. Peter, who works there as a librarian, finds her and comforts her with his sexy librarian schtick. Lainey: Just tell me sexy library things. Peter: Late fees. Microfilm. Digital archives.

Reese: Bondage, spanking, BDSM. That's what women are interested in. Lainey, stuck between Reese and Trish as they go over Trish's manuscript together, attempts to protest but Trish couldn't agree more. Women want asshole alpha males, even when they protest. Lainey protests. Reese: *Especially* when they protest. Flustered, Lainey can't deal with the subtext anymore and excuses herself to not smoke a cigarette. Bella: is it too late to change my bet to Lainey? Reese: what bet?

To Lainey's dismay, Trish follows Lainey to the break room, insisting that the real reason Lainey left was because she was upset that Reese is so much better at her job than her. And because Lainey is jealous at Trish because she's a writer and Lainey's not. Lainey, with a mouth full of Tums: Of you. Jealous of you. And I am a writer and I'm not jealous.

In the writers' room, Bella apologizes to Reese, they're just all so used to objectifying men all day... She realizes she's holding a pen with a penis-shaped eraser on it. Case in point. Then absently catches sight of the Hot Naked Cowboy wall calendar. Ooh, and again! Reese excuses himself to the restroom, unable to deal with the conversation. Phoebe sees this going down and rushes over to chastise Bella: *this* is why they need a sexual harassment meeting.

Reese goes to the bathroom, only to find the men's bathroom stuffed full of tampon boxes and office supplies. Forced to use the women's room, he is relieved that no one is inside until he lifts the seat and sees "Hi Reese" written on the underside.

Back in the writers' room, Phoebe is distributing pamphlets with a big X'd out "SEX" scrawled across them. Jamie: I feel like this is going to be kind of hard to enforce. Reese storms out of the bathroom, talking over Phoebe to try and get control of the room and reassert his authority. Hard on his heels, Lainey enters, still arguing with Trish. The meeting descends into chaos, with the argument between Lainey, Reese, and Trish escalating until Lainey finally goes off on the both of them, flinging Barbies at them until she manages to land one right on Margaret's chest. She'd

come out of her office when she heard the commotion and heard just about everything negative Lainey had to say about the company.

Lainey follows Margaret into her office, begging that she not let this momentary lapse in judgment negatively reflect on her five years of service. Margaret insists that it does as the phone begins to ring. It continues to ring as Lainey pleads. As if to answer Lainey, Margaret picks up the phone and hangs it back up. The dial tone is the best review of her work she's going to get. As an editor, Lainey should have had the trust of her authors and now Margaret knows why Lainey didn't. She thought she was better than Trish. Lainey: I am better than Trish. Her books sold because of what I did to them. And you know it. Margaret tells her to prove it—try writing a romance novel, see how well you do competing against her. You'll edit in the mornings, write in the afternoons. Royalties only on the first book. Lainey says she doesn't think she can write this kind of stuff. Margaret: then I guess you have your answer.

Lainey goes outside to try to clear her head. A.J. is out there smoking. She holds out a cigarette: awkward situation? Lainey: fuck it. She takes the cigarette and puffs experimentally. A.J. apologizes that her militant feminist griping fucked up Lainey's bougey job offer. Lainey confesses to A.J. that she was right—she is quitting because of her and Peter's shitty sex life. It just sucks reading books all day that equate great sex with great relationships. Why can't there be a romance novel where the relationship is great but the sex is terrible? And that's the problem they have to work through? They buy sex toys, they go to BDSM clubs... A.J.: Are you actually considering—? Lainey: Oh, no, I wouldn't— A.J.: Going to a BDSM club? No judgement, I just didn't think you were the type. Lainey considers this. Then: You know, deep down, I have always secretly wanted to smoke cigarettes but never did because I didn't think I was the type. A.J.: Well. You are now. She puts out her cigarette and heads inside just in time for Lainey to burst into a horrible coughing fit.

Trish sees Lainey packing up her things from her desk and is gloating until Lainey unpacks in the writers' room. Hope Trish doesn't mind a little friendly competition. Off Trish's look of horror it's the--

END OF SHOW.

APPENDIX E: REESE'S INTERVIEW: TWO VERSIONS

DRAFT 1:

INT. MARGARET'S OFFICE - DAY

Margaret continues to stare down Reese.

MARGARET
Listen, you seem like a sweet boy,
but I don't think this is the right
job for you.

His face registers the disappointment. Not used to
being disappointed.

REESE
Can I ask why not?

MARGARET
Half your job is figuring out what
women find sexy and making sure it
gets into these books.

REESE
You don't think I know what women
find sexy?

MARGARET
Very few men do.

REESE
So that's it? Just because I'm a
guy, you're not going to hire me?
Because my dad's a lawyer and that
sounds an awful lot like sexual
discrimination to me.

Margaret sits back. A little defeated, a little
impressed.

MARGARET
I don't know if you're ballsy or
just entitled, but I'll give you a
week to show me what you can do.
And bring a little of that gumption
to the job, show me you're not
bluffing about the lawsuit.

DRAFT 2:

INT. MARGARET'S OFFICE - DAY

MARGARET (50s, tall, brassy, intimidating) eyes Reese
with obvious disdain.

MARGARET

You know what kind of books we publish here, right?

REESE

You're probably used to female applicants and that's totally understandable. But I think a different perspective can be a great asset for--

MARGARET

Sweetheart, half of this job is knowing what does and does not turn women on. In my experience, that's a subject most men know very little about.

REESE

If you're discriminating against me because I'm a man--

MARGARET

Why do you want to work here?

REESE

You publish books that sell. In a dying industry in the middle of a recession, you built a successful company. I want to be a part of that.

He hands her a sheaf of papers.

REESE (CONT'D)

This is a list of the top twenty books on your bestseller list, cross-referenced by title keywords and subgenres. There are some serious trends that you're not capitalizing on. I majored in English because I like books and I wanted to meet girls. I got an MBA because I know how to move product. If you hire me, I can help you do that. And in terms of knowing what women want...I did a pretty good job in English class.