

# TOUGH AS NAILS

TEN-MINUTE PLAY

By **Matthew Thompson**

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## **TOUGH AS NAILS**

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**SYNOPSIS:** Tara, an overachieving young go-getter, is getting raked over the coals by the C.E.O. of one of the world's largest ad agencies. Determined to make an impression, she shows the boss what she's made of during her interview. Just when she thinks she's landed the job, a twist of fate reveals that it might take a bit of creativity to land this highly touted position!

### **CAST OF CHARACTERS** *(THREE WOMEN)*

- **TARA POMPERNOT**
- **KELLI CAMPBELL**
- **JULIE SOTAY**

### **SETTING:**

*We are in an office. There is a desk with many papers.*

### **AT RISE:**

*KELLI, a slick-talking, tough-as-nails corporate executive stands behind her desk, briskly organizing papers. Beat. TARA enters. She is a bright, smart, bubbly young lady. Although she is dressed for an interview, it appears the elements have taken their toll on her a bit. She's just a tad disheveled. At first, KELLI does not see TARA.*

**TARA:** Excuse me?

*KELLI jumps.*

**KELLI:** Oh!

**TARA:** Excuse me! I am so sorry! I didn't mean to frighten you. I'm here for the interview.

**KELLI:** Oh, yes of course. Please come in.

**TARA:** Uh . . . thank you. My name is Tara. Tara Pompernot.

**KELLI:** And what time was your appointment?

**TARA:** 12:15 p.m. I didn't see the secretary out front so I just walked in.

**KELLI:** Yes, I sent her to lunch. She'll be back in an hour. And by my clock, it's 12:20. You're late.

*KELLI goes and sits at her desk and begins to do paperwork.*

**TARA:** Well, you see I - -

**KELLI:** I'm sorry, I can't see you right now Miss Pumpkincue.

**TARA:** Pompernot.

**KELLI:** I'm very busy as you can see. Next time be on time.

**TARA:** Well, could you please just take my resume?

**KELLI:** Just leave it on my desk.

**TARA:** Thank you.

*TARA puts her resume down on KELLI's desk. KELLI doesn't blink an eye, does not look at it, and continues working on paperwork.*

**TARA:** I think that you'll find that I have a plethora of qualifications. I've been watching Starbound Innovations for months now. Since going public the company has outperformed Kraken and McGrady in total revenue. (*Changing the subject.*) Boy is it raining hard outside. Quite a storm, huh?

**KELLI:** (*Still writing.*) Hmmm-hmm.

**TARA:** You know I was reading about the hurricane of 1938 and I read about how - -

**KELLI:** (*Looking up with a plastic facade.*) Very interesting. We'll keep you on file. Thank you for stopping by.

*KELLI goes back to her desk, puts TARA's resume down and begins to do paperwork. TARA looks at KELLI for a moment before she turns and slowly starts to leave.*

**KELLI:** (*Looking down, writing.*) On your way out, could you tell my secretary that I'm not to be disturbed.

**TARA:** Uh -

**KELLI:** Thanks.

*TARA stops and then takes a few more steps towards the door. TARA turns around, facing KELLI, but before she can respond, KELLI speaks.*

**KELLI:** (*Still looking down.*) Please close the door on your way out Clara.

**TARA:** That's Tara.

**KELLI:** Right. Thanks.

*KELLI goes back to writing as TARA turns and walks towards the door. She is now at the door. She opens it. KELLI picks up TARA's resume, crumples it up, and throws it in the trash. The crumpling sound stops TARA in her tracks. TARA makes a strong decision. She closes the door, and turns to confront KELLI.*

**TARA:** *(With a little bit of attitude.)* Mrs. Sotay -

**KELLI:** *(Annoyed.)* Yes.

**TARA:** *(Backing down a little as she comes forward.)* Mrs. Sotay, please. *(TARA reaches into the trash can, pulls out her resume as KELLI watches her.)*

**TARA:** Mrs. Sotay, I live on the outskirts of town, seventy-two miles away. I had a very good friend drive me through intense traffic in the pouring rain for this interview. About half way here her car broke down, and I nearly drowned taking the subway. Not to be dissuaded, I took a cab with a driver who had a death wish. As I approached this building, I passed a hot dog stand, where some freckly-faced kid with red hair and a renegade mustard bottle decided to squirt a large portion of the seed-based condiment all over my \$200 business outfit, before he scurried away on his skateboard with this "homies." So, forgive me if I'm a little rude, but I believe I deserve a minute of your time.

**KELLI:** I don't have a minute.

**TARA:** Please, I am begging you.

**KELLI:** Look, young lady, I'm a very busy woman. If I sympathized with every person who came in for an interview I'd be richer than Dr. Phil. *(Beat.)* Wait a minute. I am richer than Dr. Phil.

*KELLI stops and looks up. She let's out a small smile and chuckle. Beat. Her happy demure vanishes as she drops back into her stern demeanor and goes on writing, ignoring TARA.*

**TARA:** Mrs. Sotay, please, just a few minutes.

**KELLI:** *(Stopping what she's doing.)* I'm not going to get rid of you, am I? Okay, have a seat Sara.

**TARA:** Tara.

**KELLI:** Whatever.

*KELLI takes the resume from TARA.*

**KELLI:** Have a seat.

**TARA:** There's no chair.

**KELLI:** There is a chair, I'm just sitting in it. Would you like this chair dear?

**TARA:** Yes, thank you, very much.

**KELLI:** Chairs are reserved for closers. You become a closer here at Starbound Innovations and we'll give you a chair. Heck, we might even give you a desk. In the meantime, no chair, no desk, no Chia Pet. No free lunch get it? Let me lay it straight for you. Starbound Innovations is one of the largest marketing firms in the nation. We don't hire just anybody. We need fighters. We need tigers. We need people who can take a punch in the gut and keep on going.

**TARA:** Then you've come to the right person.

**KELLI:** I'll be the judge of that. (*Looking at TARA's crumpled resume.*) It says here that you can type 90 words per minute.

**TARA:** Yes.

**KELLI:** Hmmm. And you are fluent in French, Spanish, German, Russian, Greek, Latin and In - doit?

**TARA:** (*Correcting her.*) Inuit.

**KELLI:** Inuit. You mean like the Eskimos?

**TARA:** Native Americans.

**KELLI:** Native Americans.

**TARA:** I lived on a glacier in Alaska for eight months. Through total immersion of the mind and body I cultivated all aspects of the Inuit culture. I scrupulously studied the delicate technique of throat singing, the harsh realities of hunting for narwhal with only a harpoon, and ingested the mental tools needed to survive in the middle of a snowstorm by sheltering myself with a dead caribou as a sleeping bag.

*Beat.*

**KELLI:** Huh. Well. (*Standing up.*) If you were in my position as the third highest ranking officer in one of the largest marketing corporations in America, what color would you paint my office?

**TARA:** What color would I paint your office?

**KELLI:** Yes.

**TARA:** Is this a trick question?

**KELLI:** Do I look like I play tricks.

**TARA:** No. Well . . . uh . . . well, I believe I would paint my office, I mean *your* office Burnt Sienna.

**KELLI:** What's that?

**TARA:** What's what?

**KELLI:** Burnt Sienna.

**TARA:** It's a - color.

**KELLI:** Is it like a greenish-yellow?

**TARA:** More like a brownish-red.

**KELLI:** I see. Anything else you would add to this office?

**TARA:** Yes, in fact I would embellish the sense of colonial style with some white-paneled wainscoting.

**KELLI:** Wainscoting?

**TARA:** Sure. You know it would break up the room and give the impression of both professionalism, old world charm, and besides it's very relaxing because - (*She stops.*) Sorry. When I built my house I really got into wainscoting. It made all the difference in the world.

**KELLI:** Oh, you recently bought a house?

**TARA:** I recently *built* a house. All by myself.

**KELLI:** You built a house? An entire house? All by yourself?

**TARA:** Out of recycled orange peels.

**KELLI:** Orange peels?

**TARA:** Yes. I read this incredible book titled "The Elimination of the Tortoise Shell" by J. M. Alpinate. It's truly an amazing read. I simply read this book and when I was done I fabricated my house. The blueprints were emblazoned in my mind and I just built it! It was that easy!

**KELLI:** That sounds like quite a book.

**TARA:** Oh, it is. The book goes on to say that as a simple analogy, a western artist sculpts with clay, assembling an entire work, piece by piece, while an eastern artist sculpts in stone, eliminating everything that is not part of the final goal. Essentially there are two fundamentally different approaches to a similar point in an attempt to reach the same goal. You see the western sculptor may shape clay all day long, but the eastern sculptor sits in front of his stone and meditates on it. Then, at the end of the day, he picks up his chisel and hammer and makes one strategic hit, revealing all at once a whole portion of his art which comes directly from the heart!

*TARA is grinning ear-to-ear while KELLI is slack-jawed.*

**KELLI:** I see. And it says here that you graduated from Harvard? Cum laude.

**TARA:** *Summa cum laude.*

**KELLI:** Summa cum laude, of course. Then after your undergraduate work you went to Cornell University and took some classes in the neurological sciences?

**TARA:** The brain has always fascinated me.

**KELLI:** So, you interned there?

**TARA:** Oh, no, I got my PhD in the neuroglocial sciences.

**KELLI:** You're a doctor?

**TARA:** (*Smiling.*) Actually a surgeon.

**KELLI:** (*Dumbfounded.*) A surgeon. A . . . brain surgeon?

**TARA:** Yeah, but I found out I didn't really enjoy being a brain surgeon, so I gave it up.

**KELLI:** Why?

**TARA:** It interfered with my wine and cheese parties.

**KELLI:** I see. Any other special skills that are not listed on your resume?

**TARA:** Well, let's see I'm a helicopter pilot, I'm an electrical engineer, I passed the Lawyer's BAR and, oh, I'm a kidney donor.

**KELLI:** Of course you are.

**TARA:** Other than that, I'm just your average run of the mill girl next door looking for a job.

**KELLI:** Yes, of course. Well, Miss Pumpernickel.

**TARA:** Pompernot.

**KELLI:** Yes, of course. You have amazing credentials, incredible skills, and you appear to be overtly talented, but I want to ask you one last question: why do you think you are the right person for this position?

**TARA:** I, Tara, am right for this job because I am smart, ingenious, and above all, exceptionally creative. And that is why I will receive this position.

*Beat.*

**KELLI:** Tara, as you know we are interviewing a very limited number of candidates for this position. It's a huge responsibility and requires a person of great determination, skill, and talent. (*Beat.*) Congratulations. You appear to be a perfect fit. (*KELLI stands and extends her hand. They shake. TARA is excited.*) I'll pass on your resume to my business partner and you should hear from us in a couple of days.

**TARA:** Oh, thank you so much Mrs. Sotay. You won't regret this decision. I know that I can learn so much. Thank you again! You are so kind! Thank you!

**KELLI:** My pleasure. Now if you don't mind, I really am quite busy.

**TARA:** Of course!

**KELLI:** We'll be in touch.

**TARA:** Okay, thanks! Bye-bye!

**KELLI:** Good bye.

*TARA exits. KELLI takes a deep breath, shakes her head in amazement, and looks at TARA's resume as she walks out from behind the desk. Beat. JULIE enters.*

**JULIE:** Excuse me? Are you here for the interview?

**KELLI:** Yes.

**JULIE:** Oh wonderful.

*JULIE goes and takes her righteous place behind the desk.*

**JULIE:** Hi, I'm Julie Sotay.

*From behind the desk, she extends her hand. They shake.*

**KELLI:** Kelli Campbell. Your secretary wasn't out front. So, I just let myself in. I hope that's okay?

**JULIE:** That's fine. You look like an awfully honest person to me.

**KELLI:** Oh, I am.

**JULIE:** Sorry I was running late. It's pouring rain out there.

*JULIE notices the resume in KELLI's hand.*

**JULIE:** What's that in your hand?

**KELLI:** Oh, that's nothing. Just trash.

*KELLI crumples up the paper.*

**JULIE:** Well, Kelli, let me be the first to welcome you to Starbound Innovations.

**KELLI:** Thank you.

**JULIE:** (*Picking up TARA's resume from her desk.*) Kelli Campbell, Kelli Campbell . . . oh, here you are; right at the top. As you know Ms. Campbell, we are interviewing only a few individuals for this highly touted position. So, Ms. Kelli Campbell, tell me: why do you think that *you* are the perfect person for this position?

**KELLI:** Because I am smart, ingenious, and above all exceptionally creative.

*KELLI smiles as the lights fade to black.*

**THE END**