

Mark Probert

Bairstow-Minghella

A short comedy for the stage

Cast

Charlotte (23) Intern

Jenny (22) Intern

Oz (48) Accounts Director

The action takes place in a small meeting room in the offices of advertising, PR and marketing company, Bairstow-Minghella.

*Lights up to reveal CHARLOTTE & JENNY sitting at a table c/s. There is a flip chart and a chair s/r. They have been there for some time. Jenny, relentlessly perky, has a pad and paper ready and is busying herself retouching her make-up.*

*Charlotte, more cynical and world-weary, is unenthusiastically scrolling through her phone. Distracted by Jenny's preening, she stares at her. Jenny notices her staring, flashes her a smile and goes back to primping. Charlotte shakes her head, slumps forward and bangs her head on the desk with bored frustration. After a time, OZ bursts in s/l and both girls jump up.*

OZ            Ah, this is where you two are hiding. Right, well, come on. Time and tide wait for no man.

*He strides over to the flip chart: the girls gather up their stuff and move towards the door.*

OZ            Where are you going?

CHARLOTTE Um, well we thought -

OZ            Off for a tea break already, ladies? There's work to be done.

*The girls retake their seats, Charlotte with a sigh.*

OZ            We can have a cuppa and a celebratory custard cream when we cracked this and not before. Right, you.  
*(Indicating Charlotte)* What's your name? Paula, any ideas.

CHARLOTTE Um, er, sorry, it's -

OZ Never apologise. Never explain.

CHARLOTTE Right. But my name -

OZ What's wrong with it?

CHARLOTTE Nothing. But you called me Paula.

OZ And?

CHARLOTTE That's not my name. I'm Charlotte.

OZ Are you sure?

CHARLOTTE Well, yes, unless my parents have been lying to me all these years.

OZ Because you look like a Paula.

CHARLOTTE Er.

*Charlotte looks lost. Jenny shoots up her hand.*

OZ Yes?

JENNY You can call me 'Paula' if you like, Mr Minghella.

OZ That won't be necessary. I know your name. It's Ginny, isn't it?

JENNY *(Nodding enthusiastically)* That's right, Mr Minghella.

*Charlotte frowns.*

OZ Please call me Oz. Everybody does. Short for Osberto. Besides, you look nothing like Paula.

*Oz turns to the flipchart and writes 'Staybright' in large letters.*

CHARLOTTE *(Whispering)* I thought your name was Jenny not Ginny.

*Jenny furiously motions for her to keep quiet.*

OZ Right. 'Staybright'. You. *(Indicating Jenny)* Thoughts.

JENNY Um.

OZ Too slow. Time is money. What about you? *(Indicating Charlotte)*

CHARLOTTE What about Staybright?

OZ 'What about Staybright?'

CHARLOTTE I thought that was all signed off.

OZ Well, you thought wrong, Not-Paula. We've got the clients upstairs and they're none too happy. We need a new strap line pronto. So do something to justify your wages and get with the programme!

CHARLOTTE We don't get wages.

OZ What?

CHARLOTTE You don't pay us. We're interns.

OZ Explain it to her, somebody.

JENNY As interns, while we are not actually remunerated in monetary terms, we are paid in kind. The name of Bairstow-Minghella on our CVs and a favourable reference will guarantee us a position in any advertising, marketing or public relations company in the world we would wish to apply to.

OZ Correct!

CHARLOTTE *(Under her breath)* Some little swot's done their homework.

OZ So, while there's no cash, there is cache.

CHARLOTTE Ok, well, in that case give me a job.

OZ What?

CHARLOTTE If the name Bairstow-Mingella guarantees me a job in any advertising, marketing or PR company in the world and this is indeed an advertising, marketing and PR company, give me a job. A proper job. For real money.

OZ *(Suppressing his annoyance)* I suppose you think you're very clever.

CHARLOTTE I got a first at Oxford which tends to imply something of the sort.

OZ Well, Miss Magna Cum Laude, as Geraldine has pointed out, any appointment would also be dependent on a favourable reference, a favourable reference from me: which at the moment is a dim and distant dream. Right, so back to the matter in hand. Staybright. You have thirty seconds to brainstorm as many strap

lines as you can. (*Using his phone as a stop watch.*)  
On your marks, get set, go!

*Jenny starts writing furiously. Charlotte has no paper or pen. She tries to attract Jenny's attention by tugging her sleeve. Jenny shrugs her off. Charlotte hisses at her: Jenny covers her ears.*

OZ (*Staring at his watch*) Ten seconds.

CHARLOTTE (*In an urgent whisper*) I haven't got a pen. (*Jenny ignores her. She leans closer.*) Lend me some paper. (*Jenny shuffles away.*)

OZ I hear whispering: I don't hear scribbling. Twenty seconds.

*Charlotte makes a grab for some paper. Jenny's hand immediately shoots up.*

JENNY Mr Minghella.

OZ (*Without looking up*) What is it, Jilly?

JENNY Charlotte's copying.

OZ What?

CHARLOTTE No, I'm not.

OZ Well, what are you doing all over her side of the desk then?

CHARLOTTE I wanted to borrow a pen and paper.

OZ Haven't you got your own?

CHARLOTTE No.

OZ Why not?

CHARLOTTE I wasn't told I'd need any.

OZ Gerry managed to bring some.

*Jenny looks smug.*

CHARLOTTE I wasn't told anything except to come here and wait for you. And that was forty-five minutes ago.

OZ Oh, so it's my fault.

CHARLOTTE What?

OZ I'm obviously to blame for not giving you clear instructions and keeping you waiting, am I?

CHARLOTTE That's not what I said.

OZ Well, I have you know, young lady, that I was in Meeting Room One, Meeting Room One, with the head honcho from Staybright trying to persuade him to keep their account with us. I was working hard to ensure we all have a future. What were you doing might I ask?

CHARLOTTE Nothing.

OZ Precisely!

CHARLOTTE I wasn't told to do anything.

OZ Well, I'm telling you now. We have the time it takes him to drink a skinny latte to come up with a slogan for Staybright or we're all for the high-jump. *(To Jenny)* Right, what have you got?

JENNY *(Standing)* Well, it's still work in progress.

OZ Not expecting Sistine Chapel straight off.

JENNY But I thought, 'Staybright'.

*There is a pause while the others wait for more. Jenny sits looking pleased with herself.*

OZ Right.

CHARLOTTE Is that it?

JENNY It's short and to the point.

CHARLOTTE But all you've done is restate the product's name.

JENNY I said it wasn't finished.

CHARLOTTE It's not even started.

JENNY Well, it's more than you've written.

CHARLOTTE I haven't written anything because you wouldn't give me one of your precious pens.

JENNY It's not my fault you're unprepared.

OZ Girls, girls, please! That's quite enough of that. *(They fall sulky silent)* Thank-you. Now, we're not there yet, Genevieve, but you've made a start. A journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step.

JENNY *(To Charlotte)* See.

CHARLOTTE But all she's -

OZ            You've put down a marker in the sand and out of such small acorns who knows what mighty oak trees will grow. Not the finished article yet but A\* for effort.

JENNY        Thank-you, sir.

OZ            And as you rightly point out, where's Not-Paula's contribution eh?

JENNY        (*Giggling*) 'Not-Paula'.

CHARLOTTE   (*Mumbling*) The dog ate it.

OZ            What?

CHARLOTTE   Just give me a moment.

OZ            We're waiting.

CHARLOTTE   Um... How about, er...

OZ            It's your time you're wasting.

CHARLOTTE   'Stay white, stay light with Staybright'.

*Pause.*

OZ            Rubbish.

JENNY        I agree.

CHARLOTTE   What!

OZ            Total garbage.

CHARLOTTE   It's better than hers.

OZ            (*Hushing her*) Tut-tut. Wait... wait a moment... I'm getting something. I'm getting something. Ah! Got it! 'Stay white, stay light, Staybright'!

JENNY        (*Clapping*) Oh, well done, sir!

CHARLOTTE   But that's what I said!

OZ            No, you didn't!

CHARLOTTE   Yes, I did!

OZ            You said nothing of the sort.

CHARLOTTE   I did. That's precisely what I said.

OZ            Are you arguing with me, young lady?

CHARLOTTE   Well -

OZ            You said, 'Stay white, stay light with Staybright'. My strap line used no such conjunction and is therefore altogether punchier and more successful.

CHARLOTTE 'With' is a preposition not a conjunction.

OZ            It's one bloody word too many is what it is. How dare you try to take credit for my creativity?

JENNY        Yeah, and I even gave you 'Staybright'.

CHARLOTTE No you didn't; that's the name of the bloody product!

OZ            Don't use such language in front of me. Now write out a hundred times. 'I must not steal other people's work and pass it off as my own'. Well? Get on with it.

CHARLOTTE I would if I had a pen and paper.

JENNY        Here, you can borrow mine.

OZ            Thank-you, Jezebel.

JENNY        And would you like an apple, sir?

OZ            Oh, er, how very kind, Jocasta. One of my five a day, eh? I'll save it for later if you don't mind.

*Jenny sticks out her tongue at Charlotte.*

CHARLOTTE *(Under her breath)* Teacher's pet.

JENNY        *(Under her breath)* Thicko.

CHARLOTTE *(Under her breath)* Creep.

JENNY        *(Under her breath)* Smelly.

CHARLOTTE *(Under her breath)* Arse-licker

JENNY        *(Putting up her hand)* Sir, Not-Paula swore.

CHARLOTTE She started it. She stuck her tongue out.

OZ            My star pupil? She wouldn't dream of doing such a thing. Right, Not-Paula, I've just about had enough of you today. You can just jolly well sit there quietly with your hands on your head. Julia, you can get a book out and do some private reading.

JENNY        Oh, goody.

*Jenny gets a copy of 'Black Beauty' out and starts to read. Oz sits on the chair s/r and lights his pipe.*

CHARLOTTE (*Under her breath*) Just you wait till break time.

*They sit in silence for some time. Smoke begins to drift on to stage. Charlotte is the first to notice it.*

CHARLOTTE Er...

OZ Little girls should be seen and not heard.

*Charlotte tries to attract Jenny's attention who thinks it's part of the threatened assault and takes out a pair of compasses to defend herself. Jenny eventually notices the smoke.*

JENNY Er, Mr Minghella.

OZ Yes, Jocelyn.

JENNY There's smoke.

OZ Yes, I know: it's just my pipe. Back to work.

*The girls are silently panicking. A fire alarm sounds. The girls are wide-eyed with fear. After a moment's hesitation, they get up.*

OZ The bell is a signal for me not to you.

*OZ indicates they should sit down. Confused and conflicted the girls retake their places. Smoke fills the stage. The girls begin to choke. 'We have all the Time in the World' by Louis Armstrong plays as the lights fade.*

Mark Probert graduated from Exeter with a BA in Drama back in the eighties. He worked in the professional theatre as a performer and as a technician for several years before taking a PGCE at The Central School of Speech and Drama. He has been a drama teacher in schools for the past fifteen years, writing and devising many shows, often with the collaboration of pupils.