Business
By Adrastos Omissi

When Christ comes again in glory, he’ll ask to borrow this suit. He’ll appear to me first, approach me with his eyes away, like he’s got some big favour to ask, and he’ll say, “Tony, how broad are you across the shoulder?”

It’s cut like a diamond, buttoning just where the lats start to open the torso up, and the shoulders are just square enough to pick out the traps and deltoids without making me look like a throwback to the eighties. The trousers have a crease so sharp you could shave with it and the fabric (Italian wool the price of spun gold) is blue-grey, like a storm cloud, run with a narrow pinstripe in silver that catches the light like a new nickel. If I die in this suit, I pray I’m not shot. The future deserves this suit.

It might sound trivial to you, but in what I do, the way you look matters. You’ve got to walk into the room and everything about you has to instantly tell every single person that looks at you, “Hey, I’m doing you a favour by being here, so cut the crap and save it till I’m gone.” Without opening your mouth – without even looking at someone – you’ve gotta tell every single person there that you could buy and sell them like they were trading cards, that nothing they could say
or do matters. This suit has helped me close more deals, solve more problems, and silence more timewasters than I could count.

I wore it today because I knew this one was big. This is the kind of job you can make or break a career on. Hostile takeover doesn’t even cover it. This morning, I had less time than you’d spend choosing a dessert to convince one of the biggest players in the whole business that I was the guy, that if he wasn’t going through me, then why was he going at all? And you’d think – you’d think it ‘cause you don’t know nothing – that I do that by my pitch, by my methods, and by what I had to offer. Two words. Hell. No. The second I walked into his big corner office, the moment he saw me in the frame of his door, it happened then, or it didn’t happen. I might have to pitch it up, twist it round, and make him see it different than how he saw it before, but if I didn’t win him round to my way of thinking the moment I walked in, then I might as well have stayed at home.

I gestured to Marco and Damien to come as well, like it was my office too. Damien stood by the door and Marco moved over to the window, a little behind his desk. Our client opened his mouth to speak, and moved in his chair as if he was gonna stand, but I waved my hand. Not necessary. You stay put, stay comfy.

I looked across the city skyline and considered my move, considered how to phrase this. People – idiots – think its muscle. Throw everything you’ve got, show the client that you mean business and that you are the only thing in town. But if you haven’t figured it already, there’s more to it than that. That’s the whole point about the suit. It’s to tell them that their life – their whole future – is you and
you alone, without actually saying it. But when that mouth flaps open, you've gotta know what's coming out, and it can't just be some useless industry schtick. Most of these guys have heard it all before, and all of them have seen enough movies not too be suckered in too easily.

So I took my time. He knew where we were headed. But I didn't try to chow straight down on it. You don't go to dinner and tuck straight into a steak. Build the appetite first. Savour it. And keep the client guessing. Show someone a deal and he can take it or leave it. Make him wanna see a deal, and you've got him before you turn a single card.

I took out my lighter – this incredible little Medici number that my girls bought me, with the ace of spades acid-etched into the titanium – and I lit a cigarette. Slowly. Like this was the most boring thing I'd ever done. Like if the whim took me, I could walk out of the room without a backward glance and not even think about it. God damn, it was perfect! He just watched me like a virgin on her wedding night. Then I leaned in, but I made sure to blow the smoke away from his face. I don't hate you. That's what it says. I'm not a thug. This is business. Business scares people, even businessmen. They know that business cuts, cold and hard.

Don't go straight to the pitch. Dance.

“Your wife is a beautiful woman, Franky. And your kids – don't even get me started! The youngest one, with those blonde curls. I can't believe how fast
she’s growing up. But you know, I’ve been telling everyone how much she looks like her daddy. I mean, she’s an angel! But hell does she look like her daddy!"

Those eyes never left me, not once. The suit never fails.

“It’s true,” I said, drawing deep on the cigarette and letting nicotine rush my head like it was the last play. “Do you know, I went on about it so much, that Marco and Damien here said they had to see. Had to see for themselves. ‘Cause they couldn’t believe it. Last time they saw her, she was a little red ball, screaming in Maria’s arms. And now she’s all grown up. A little lady. So do you know what we did? We got in the car and went over to her school to see her. To see all your girls.”

I could see in his eyes he didn’t believe me. But I didn’t let it phase me. I had my suit on, and I sold it right. So I just slowly let out the line. You get what you want in the end, and you get it all the easier.

“That’s right,” I said, nodding away and puffing on my cigarette again. I smiled, wide and warm. “St Margret’s Catholic School for Girls, out beyond Lynbrook.” Now I saw it. Now he knew I wasn’t lying to him. That’s their school, alright. Yes I’ve been there. Now you know. “Great place, really nice. Pine trees, and the smell of the sea. I thought to myself, God, this is the kind’ve place you just don’t wanna leave. In fact, Kenny – you remember Kenny, right? – Kenny loved it so much, that when I told him to get back in the car so we could head on over here, he said he wasn’t gonna come. Do you know what he said?”
Franky shook his head but didn’t say a thing. ‘That’s right,’ I thought, as I brushed a little wayward ash off my Italian wool, ‘eat it out of my hand.’

I laughed. “Well, Kenny said he liked it so much out there, that he was gonna spend the rest of the day out there. He’s there right now, do you know? Just at the other end of the phone, just taking his ease out beyond Lynbrook, just near St Margret’s Catholic School for girls. And do you know what I promised Kenny?” now I let the smoke roll from beneath my teeth as I leaned in real close to Franky. “I promised Kenny that as soon as we were done here, I’d give him a call, see how he’s getting on.”

Franky looked as if he was reaching for the courage to speak, but I raise a finger as I absent-mindedly stubbed my cigarette out in the ashtray on his desk. Time for the pitch.

“But anyway, Franky, I didn’t come here to make noise about schools and seaside air. You’re a busy man and I don’t want to take up any more of your time than I absolutely have to. I’m just here to talk business, mano-a-mano. Not even business, really, just here to check on something. You see, I heard this crazy rumour that you had decided to alter the terms of the 3rd-Street development, portion it out into separate plots and sell it off in a little… bidding war, would that be the term, Marco?”

For effect, I looked up at Marco, standing behind Franky with his arms folded.

“That was the term I heard, yeah,” Marco said.
“Bidding war. Now right away, I hate that term,” I went on. “It just smacks of violence. And I hate violence, I hate it more than anything. Not like Kenny though – pheeewwiiieee!” I whistled between my teeth. “But, ah hell, I’m getting distracted again. Kenny, Kenny, Kenny. Anyway. So I heard this crazy rumour about the 3rd-Street development, and I just came up here to just check with you that I’d heard wrong, that everything was going ahead just as we’d agreed. I mean, I just couldn’t believe it when I heard that your company might be going back on the terms of our deal. ‘Not Franky,’ I said. ‘He’s not that kinda guy. He’s straight as an arrow,’ I said. ‘Family man.’

Franky didn’t make a sound, but he had turned that sweet colour I love to see, kind’ve chalky white but run with yellow, snow with a vague hint of urine.

“So all I just wanted to check, Franky, is that when I call Kenny and go to pick him up from your kids’ school, I can tell him – I can look him in the eye – and tell him that you and I have got the same arrangement we ever had, and that no matter what any third party might have to say on the matter – news, mayor’s office, police – that development will be going ahead just as we agreed. Can I do that?”

Slowly, as if he had the weight of every dollar he’d tried to cheat me out of in a bag tied around his neck, Franky nodded. I leaned forward and kissed his cheek, giving him a couple of healthy pats – none too gentle – to go with.

“Well that’s just great news,” I said, and I reached for another cigarette, grinding the wheel of my lighter and smiling broadly. “I knew I could count on you. Sorry
to have taken up so much of your time, Franky. You have yourself a good day. Don’t get up, we’ll see ourselves out.”

I stood and gestured to the door. The others moved away. I was the last to leave the little office, flooded with the afternoon light. Almost as an afterthought, I turned at the door and smiled again.

“Tell Maria I said ‘hi’.”

In the elevator on the way down I cracked a little smile. Deal closed without a raised voice or a drop of blood. No fingers could be pointed, no unnecessary accusations made. And it was all thanks to my beautiful goddamn suit.

Adrastos Omissi was born in Jersey in 1986. He recently completed his PhD in Roman History at St John’s College, Oxford and now works for a small social enterprise consultancy. In his spare time he writes short stories and is currently working on a collaborative project with his brother, Antiochus, who is an illustrator. He has been shortlisted for various short story competitions, including the 2011 Oxonian Review. He also writes non fiction, much of which appears in his blog (www.the-diluvium.com). He is about to become a father for the first time.