

The right side of the table was going to be the problem. Immediately next to me was an older, round-faced man, the quiet, smart sort who listens and takes in every detail. Not what I needed in a presentation where I'd be inventing a professional persona on the fly, but at least he wouldn't take me on right there, face-to-face. That was the job for the man behind him, the "Little Guy" with his hands folded over my résumé.

Law is the world's biggest repository of fragile male egos, and some of the worst belong to "Little Guys." It's a bit unfair to use that adjective, of course, since they come in all shapes and sizes, but there's no better description for these congenital Napoleons. I'm a little over six feet tall, 200 pounds, and moderately decent-looking, or so I've been told. Nothing fancy. Not a male model or the picture of athletic fitness, but I keep up appearances. And though I'm not the funniest person in the room, I can tell a story or a joke. It's hard not to form some "salesman's charisma" growing up Irish. We're bred to work the room, and for a lot of us, decent looks and a fast mouth are our only means of survival. Held against society at large, I'd place myself on the high end of the "utterly average male": smart enough to know my limitations, with no urge to prove myself to every other man I encounter. The last thing I'd ever be interested in is a dick-size comparison with someone who still had an ax to grind for having to stay home on prom night. I'm the sort of person who just wants to make money so I can live the life I want to, away from the people who live for all the bullshit of the office.

That attitude put me at odds with a lot of lawyers, starting most immediately with this Napoleon. He was the size of Dennis Kucinich, with an Eric Estrada haircut and one of those strange upturned noses, with wide, flared nostrils. Think Henry Waxman, the obnoxious congressman from California, with a roupee. And from the way he dropped his voice and spoke like a drill sergeant to his deliberately strong handshake, it was obvious he took everything about his job—even this silly interview—very fucking seriously. But then, how couldn't he? We all know his type—you could recite his yearbook profile from memory.

When I got back to the waiting area, the receptionist smiled and pointed me to the conference room just off the lobby. "They're waiting in there." The space was a claustrophobic's worst nightmare, stuffy and cramped with four lawyers sitting around a conference table far too large for the room, leaving barely two feet between the walls and any of its sides. After we did the introductions, I sat at the head of it, smiling and waiting for the inquisition. To my immediate left was a tall Italian-looking man with a permanent grin and tie undone, leaning back in his swivel chair. Behind him was a younger, pasty man in glasses, leaning on his elbows and running his hands through the back of his hair. Both of them were reading my résumé when I walked in the door and seemed half interested at best—probably pulled into the interview at the last second by some senior partner. They were the easy side of the room.