

# BEST FOOT FORWARD

By Daniel T. Roberts

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### **STORY OF THE PLAY**

In this audience-pleasing comedy Aristotle, the dentist's son, and Jennifer, the habitual screwup, are fighting over the last copy of a self-help book that they are sure contains all the answers to their problems. He just knows *Success in Excess* will help him avoid a bleak future of looking into peoples' mouths, while she is equally desperate, thinking it will help her avoid a future of always putting her foot into her mouth. But other patrons at the bookstore, including the clerk with an attitude, create amusing situations leading up to the moment when Aristotle and Jennifer meet the author himself. An experienced psychiatrist? No, actually a foot doctor!

## **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(4 m, 3 f, 1 flexible)*

**JENNIFER BROOKS:** A habitual screwup with low self-confidence.

**ARISTOTLE PHILCOX:** A young man with high aspirations for himself.

**STORE CLERK:** A helpful, but odd clerk in a bookstore.

**SHEILA:** Aristotle's menacing cousin.

**PASSERBY #1:** Innocent victim with contact lenses.

**PASSERBY #2:** A computer enthusiast.

**DR. HARRISON:** The all-knowing author who knows nothing.

**CUSTOMER:** Witness to the madness.

**Playing Time:** 35-40 minutes.

## **SETTING**

The self-help shelves in a bookstore. One bookcase is CS with a sign on it which reads "Self-Help" sitting or hanging on it. The bookcase is filled with books.

## **COSTUMES**

Normal, present day dress. Passerby #2 wears sort of nerd clothing and the Store Clerk wears a vest or some other article of clothing associating him with the bookstore.

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*(AT RISE: JENNIFER is standing in front of the bookcase with her back to the audience, scanning over every title as if her future depended on it.)*

STORE CLERK: *(Enters SR and talks to off SR.)* Here you go, sir...the self-help section.

ARISTOTLE: *(Hurriedly enters SR.)* Shhh. I'd really prefer that no one know that I'm looking in the self-help section of the bookstore. *(HE looks around nervously.)*

STORE CLERK: Why is that, sir?

ARISTOTLE: Well, you know how some people are. They see you looking at self-help books and automatically think you're a nut or something. *(HE looks around nervously.)*

STORE CLERK: *(Sarcastically.)* Really? Well, no one could think that of you, now, could they, sir? *(HE exits SL.)*

*(ARISTOTLE watches the STORE CLERK leave, then goes over to the bookcase and starts looking over the books. JENNIFER and Aristotle see the same book on the bookcase and grab it at the same time. Both are holding onto the book.)*

JENNIFER: Excuse me. *(SHE tugs on the book.)*

ARISTOTLE: Excuse me. *(HE tugs on the book.)*

JENNIFER: I believe that I was here first.

ARISTOTLE: So what? I saw the book first.

JENNIFER: *(Irritably.)* No, you didn't. I did.

ARISTOTLE: Listen, Miss, it's really important that I get this book, so let go of it.

JENNIFER: No, I need this book, too. *(SHE tugs on the book, but ARISTOTLE won't let go.)*

STORE CLERK: *(Enters SL.)* Is there a problem here?

JENNIFER: *(To STORE CLERK.)* Yes, there is. This man won't let go of this book.

STORE CLERK: *(To ARISTOTLE.)* Sir?

ARISTOTLE: Why should I? I saw it first.

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JENNIFER: How could you have seen it first, when I was standing right here?

ARISTOTLE: I don't know. I just did.

STORE CLERK: Sir, why not just give the young lady the book?

JENNIFER: Yeah. Be a gentleman.

ARISTOTLE: No. I have as much right to this book as she does. She only claims to have been here first.

JENNIFER: (*Angrily.*) Claims to have been here first? I was here first. Ask anyone. Ask this clerk.

ARISTOTLE: (*To STORE CLERK.*) Well?

STORE CLERK: (*Timidly.*) I really wasn't paying attention.

JENNIFER: Oh, what would he say? He's a man.

STORE CLERK: What does that have to do with it?

JENNIFER: You're all alike. You'd do anything to keep a woman from reaching her goals. Including agreeing with this guy.

STORE CLERK: (*Shocked.*) What?

JENNIFER: Admit it. Subconsciously you want to see women oppressed.

STORE CLERK: (*Insulted.*) You're crazy.

JENNIFER: Exactly why I need this book. (*To ARISTOTLE.*) Now, give it to me. (*SHE tugs on the book unsuccessfully.*)

ARISTOTLE: Oh, no you don't. I'm more screwed-up than you are. (*HE tugs on the book unsuccessfully.*)

STORE CLERK: Wait a minute. Let me see which book is so important that you two would fight over it. Maybe there's another one in back. (*HE leans in to get a look at the title.*) *Success in Excess*, by Dr. A. Harrison. (*HE pauses for a moment to think.*) Uh-oh.

ARISTOTLE: (*Worried.*) What do you mean, uh-oh? You do have other copies, don't you?

STORE CLERK: No. We had several, but they all sold out weeks ago. This is the only copy left.

JENNIFER: What?

STORE CLERK: What can I say? I guess there are a lot of desperate losers out there.

ARISTOTLE: Well then, I guess that this young lady will just have to give up this book. *(HE tugs on the book.)*

JENNIFER: Only if you kill me with your breath first. And even then you'll have to pry it out of my hands.

STORE CLERK: *(To JENNIFER.)* Look, there are a lot of other books here, why not choose one of them?

JENNIFER: Have any of these other authors helped turn the life of a rock star around? *(Simply.)* I don't think so.

ARISTOTLE: What are you talking about?

JENNIFER: Dr. Harrison helped save a very prominent rock star from the brink of oblivion.

ARISTOTLE: How do you know?

JENNIFER: Because Dr. Harrison was on my favorite talk show the other day, telling the country how he helped this poor superstar.

STORE CLERK: Hey, I saw that one. It was right after they showed the vegetables that most resembled former presidents. *(HE describes the size of the squash with his hands.)* They had this summer squash that was the spitting image of President Carter. *(ARISTOTLE and JENNIFER stare at the STORE CLERK in wonder. Embarrassed.)* I think I'll go wait on the other customers now. *(HE exits left.)*

ARISTOTLE: You don't understand. This book will save me from a life of dentures and root canals.

JENNIFER: What are you talking about?

ARISTOTLE: It's my parents. They want me to become a dentist and follow in my dad's footsteps.

JENNIFER: Let me guess, you don't want to be a dentist.

ARISTOTLE: It's not that it's a terrible job. I mean, it has put food on the table. It's just that I can accomplish so much more with my life.

JENNIFER: There's no lack of confidence here, is there.

ARISTOTLE: I just know that I was meant to be someone great. Someone who enters a crowded room and instantly causes all of the other conversations to stop. I want people to see me walking down the street and be in awe of my presence.

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JENNIFER: Try growing another arm and a long tail. I bet people would notice you then.

ARISTOTLE: I'm serious about this.

JENNIFER: Then why don't you tell your parents that you don't want to be a dentist?

ARISTOTLE: They have their hearts set on it. If I told them now, it would crush them. That's why I need this book. Once my parents see how happy and successful I am using Dr. Harrison's proven formula, they'll forget all about wanting me to be a dentist. Hopefully, I'll never have to look at the inside of someone's mouth again.

JENNIFER: It can't be that bad.

ARISTOTLE: Trust me, once you've seen someone's uvula you can never look at them the same way again.

STORE CLERK: *(Enters SL.)* Bad news, guys. I just checked on ordering another book and even if I ordered one today, it wouldn't be here for at least two weeks.

JENNIFER: What are we supposed to do until then?

STORE CLERK: *(Shrugs HIS shoulders.)* You've got me.

ARISTOTLE: *(Irritably.)* No one wants you.

STORE CLERK: *(Insulted.)* Well, excuse me for trying to help you two wackos. I don't need the stress that goes along with this job, you know. The manager over at the Pizza Shack has been luring me over there with free breadsticks for the past month.

JENNIFER: *(Sincerely.)* We're sorry.

ARISTOTLE: Yeah, we're sorry.

STORE CLERK: That's better. Now, can't one of you wait two weeks?

ARISTOTLE: No! We need simple answers now, so that we can change our lives. We're not going to suffer through two weeks.

JENNIFER: Besides, a lot can happen in two weeks. We could ruin any chance we have at a normal life. Then we would have to take meaningless jobs like cashiers or gas station attendants or worse...actors whose only joy is faking their way through a bad script.

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