

(37 gestures to the empty chair for Intern and they sit down.)

INTERN

I haven't really been told what my duties will be.

37

You'll get the hang of it.

12

(to 44)

Were you here for that one?

44

Again, before my time.

12

(chuckling)

There was quite a debate.

37

(taking charge)

As there might well be today. Let's go to work. 44, I understand that you have an expression that you're quite excited about. The floor is yours.

12

"The floor." That one was--

37

Let's stay focused now. 44, what have you got for us?

44

I think you're going to like it. It's new. It's fresh. It's got style. Here it is: "I ripped him a new one."

(Long pause as the three others ponder the phrase. They exchange puzzled looks.)

44

"I ripped him a new one."

37

We heard you. Give us a chance to think about it.

(to Intern)

I should explain, Intern. The important question, the *only* question really, is can the proposed language be understood? That's our job. Before we approve an expression for circulation, it must pass this test: can it be understood?

INTERN

"I ripped him a new one"?

44

It sounds good coming from you. I like it.

12

I *might* like it once I understand it.

INTERN

(tentative)

If I may . . .

37

Yes?

INTERN

If we do give it our approval, how does it get introduced?

37

We have a network of volunteers. They ease the expression into conversations.

INTERN

Who are they? And isn't it awkward for them to just . . . throw these things out there?

37

Not at all. It's thrilling for them. They're on the front lines. As for who they are, we don't know! They use pseudonyms. We use numbers for the same reason. The entire process is anonymous—from approval to introduction to popularization. After all, where these expressions come from is a mystery, isn't it?

(to 44)

But their meaning *cannot* be a mystery. Can you give us another sentence, 44?

44

Yes. This one should help. It'll probably make it *too* easy. Here it is: "Shelly was so mad at Frank that she ripped him a new one."

(Another pause of puzzled looks. Intern suddenly looks inspired.)

INTERN

(to 37 as if 37 is "Frank")

"Grr, you make me so mad, Frank."

(Intern seizes one of 37's sheets of paper, rips it in half, and extends one of the halves to 37.)

INTERN (CONT.)

Here's "a new one" for you.

12

She's good.