

EXCLUSIVE

# Fierce,



# Fabulous, & Funny

*For Better or Worse's*  
Tasha Smith shows us  
how it's done

Words by Vanessa Pascale · Photo Credit D'Andre Michael

I am off of Wall Street in downtown New York waiting in the cavernous lobby, bathed in white stone and gilded accents, for Tasha Smith, who just phoned to say that she is running a few minutes behind. Minutes later, I watch Tasha walk through the revolving doors dressed in a chic black floppy hat and all-black ensemble. As she nears me on her walk down the lengthy hall she calls out to me, "Vanessa?" She immediately (and unnecessarily) apologizes for her barely-five-minutes-delay. I follow her to the activity room off the lobby and we settle in.

The 5'7" beauty, known from a list of Tyler Perry productions including, *Daddy's Little Girls*, *Why Did I Get Married? Why Did I Get Married Too*, as well as *Couples Retreat*, *Jumping the Broom*, and most recently, *Addicted*, looks flawless in barely a stitch of makeup, and is affable despite coming straight here off a flight from

Chicago. Tasha is in town to film an episode of Starz's *Power*, starring Omari Hardwick and Curtis "50 Cent" Jackson, about a drug dealer trying to go legit, she tells me. The second season of *Power* returns this summer with Tasha in a "three-episode moment" as the mother of Kanan's [50 Cent] son. "It's a very good show!" Tasha beams.

Only a few weeks into 2015, and Tasha is inundated with television projects. “I’ve had a lucky year already,” she muses. Tasha is also playing Carol, Cookie’s [Taraji P. Henson] sister, in *Empire*. “She ran the streets with Cookie back in the day... She knows where all the bodies are buried and probably put a few of them there.” Tasha flashes a playful smile. “Since Cookie is out of jail, my character is trying to see how she can fit in, and get back to how things used to be...” *Empire*’s second episode aired the night before our interview. I tell her it was trending on Twitter. “I heard the bib was trending,” says Tasha, referring to the scene where Rhonda puts on a child’s bib before servicing her husband. *Empire*’s envelope-pushing is definitely getting the FOX show buzz. “The creative team there is just amazing,” Tasha gushes. “Lee Daniels is phenomenal, and Danny Strong, the whole crew and cast. Terrence Howard is magical. I’m so excited about being a part of that show.” But that’s not all that she has to be excited about. Next month, on March 25, Tasha’s hit show *For Better or Worse* returns to OWN.

A spin-off from the *Why Did I Get Married?* franchise, *For Better or Worse* has been a crowd-favorite since 2011.

Tasha still can’t believe how long it’s been running. “Is that crazy? I mean I have lived with Angela Williams for over five years. It’s probably been a seven-year character, from the movies and then the television show. Ohmygod! She’s like a woman that’s just around forever,” she laughs. Audiences can’t get enough of the beloved salon owner’s fiery personality, which has garnered Tasha a 2014 NAACP Image Award nomination for “Outstanding Actress in a Comedy Series.” Would you say you’re anything like Angela? I ask. “I wouldn’t. I feel like a lot of us have pieces of ourselves that we may give to our character, but the kind of stuff that Angela has done, I may not do. I kinda live vicariously through her. She’s like my alter ego. You know how Beyoncé has Sasha Fierce? I can’t say that I’m Angela, but I can see some similarities, ’cause you know, I’m loud sometimes. I’m like the fun friend, honest friend.” Very grateful for the role, the best part, she tells me, is that it’s allowed her to work with people that are like family to her.

*For Better or Worse* is Tasha’s fifth collaboration in film and television with Tyler Perry, who she likens to a brother. The two became acquainted during Tyler’s visits to Tasha’s acting workshop to see new talent. “He was maybe not quite the big film mogul he is now, but he was just on his way. He was rich, I will tell you that,” she laughs. Days on the set with Tyler are easy and quick, Tasha shares. “It’s like a boot camp... Tyler knows how to take advantage of every second that you have.” That’s not to say that

there is not fun being had on set — this is a production helmed by the guy known for his madcap character, Madea.

I tell Tasha that I heard that she pranked Tyler onset. “I punk’d him!” she proudly admits. “My sister came to visit and I put one of Angela’s wigs on her and I had her go to the set to act like she was me. My sister started the scene and Tyler was like, ‘Cut! Something’s wrong, Tasha.’ He couldn’t really figure it out, but he kept it going two or three more times. Then finally I came out from behind the monitor, and was like, ‘Something aint right, because it aint me.’ It was hilarious! I guess he thought he knew us apart, then he realized, I could get tricked.” The pranks didn’t stop there.

“ I am the host, honey! And I want everybody out by 9. Like, I will start it as early as I can. ”

To liven up another day at work, Tasha took a fart machine to bed with her during a scene with Michael Jai White, who plays Marcus Williams, “I squeeze the fart machine, and they [the cast and crew] look like they hear something, but they aren’t sure. I squeeze the fart machine again. They stop and look. I squeeze it again and I say, ‘Oh guys, I’m so sorry.’ Tyler’s like, ‘I can’t believe you’re doing this!’ I do it again while he is talking and he’s like,

‘I am so done with you! Why can’t you hold it!? I am leaving until she is done passing gas!’ And I was like, “Will you stop it? It’s a fart machine.’ It was hilarious,” she laughs. “Could you imagine, we’re just talking and I’m breaking wind?”

Not wanting to be left out, Tyler got in on the bedroom action. As Tasha is getting ready to get into the bed for a scene, she starts in on her usual questions. “I’m always like, ‘Did y’all change the sheets? How long have these sheets been here?’ And they’re like, ‘We changed the sheets, they’re fine. C’mon, let’s just start the scene.’ I’m walking over and Tyler’s like, ‘Start here and go and get in the bed.’ I’m all in the scene, committed to the scene, and when I pull those covers back there was a big fake rat,” says Tasha, who is terrified of rats. “But it looked real! I screamed and ran so far.” She laughs. “They all cracked up.” So now it’s your turn, I goad. “When we go back, I’m going to think of something good. I might even go to the prank store or go online. Muster up something really good.”

Tasha is always game for some fun. But she’s not the party girl fans might think she is. “I’m conservative. Kind of,” she confesses about what fans would be surprised to find out about her. “I go to sleep before 10 and I wake up 5-6 o’clock every morning. I kind of live a semi-quiet life.” What she truly enjoys is having friends and family over for one of the home



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cooked dinner parties she's known for. "I am the host, honey!" she declares enthusiastically, "And I want everybody out by 9. Like, I will start it as early as I can. If it's a weekend I'm like, 'Hey! Dinner's at 4!' Because I know by 9 I can get everybody out, get the house cleaned up and be in bed." Tasha demonstrated her culinary prowess on Food Network's *Celebrity Chopped* last year. "You know what's so crazy? I thought I was the best cook ever until I went on *Chopped*. I got kicked off because I burned the popcorn. But I never ever cooked corn kernels on the cob—I didn't even know what to do with that."

The best time of year for Tasha is Thanksgiving, when she pulls out all the stops for 40-60 of her family and friends. "We have so much fun and I love having all the food. I give myself three days to just be a glutton. Three days! And then I'm done and have to detox. I've been vegan since. Well, not full on vegan, 'cause I'll still cheat and have my little crab [garlic crab is her specialty]. I've been going through my detox ever since Thanksgiving 'cause I'm like, 'Uh, I gotta get all that turkey outta me!' I think it's still there though," she jokes. I'm not sure what she's talking about, as she looks amazingly fit to me.

A nurturer by nature, in addition to ensuring that family and friends are well fed and taken care of, Tasha, an advocate of the arts, has made it her mission to help actors cultivate their talents. In her free time, you can find Tasha at TSAW: Tasha Smith Actors Workshop in Sherman Oaks, which also doubles as her office. Open for over ten years now, her mentor/teacher, Ivana Chubbuck, inspired her to open her own studio. "Ivana just helped me so much with my personal life, learning how to create a character from within and utilizing all of our emotions and physicalities and just understanding scenes and breaking them down," she explains.

Tasha wants to empower actors, and give back what she learned. "There are a lot of actors that have come out of my class that I teach and coach. It's my passion just as much as acting," says Tasha, who also teaches seminars all over the nation. Though Tasha often has fans wanting a photo opp auditing her classes, she is mindful about separating them from her serious students. "Most of the students don't get caught up 'cause they know how much I care about them and they know my passion. We have a great relationship... I say, 'Come in and use me, just use me. Get everything out of me that I have to give you as a teacher and as a coach. That's my main goal.'" **ML**

To keep up with Tasha,  
follow her on Twitter @tashasmith4real,  
Instagram at Tasha4RealSmith  
and [www.tsaw.com](http://www.tsaw.com)



## TASHA TELLS US MORE

### What do you do in your spare time?

"I love to go hiking. I love a bike ride at the beach. I love to travel. This year, I'm planning on going to Paris, London, and picking somewhere in the Caribbean the end of the year. I love traveling, and I love going to Korean spas for a body scrub and a massage, I live for that. They will scrub all of the dead skin off your body, and then you get this honey and milk massage and your skin, oh god, I'll go once a week."

### What are you watching on TV?

"I'm watching *Scandal*, *Ray Donovan*, *Empire*, *Power*, *For Better or Worse* and *CNN*."

### Is there anything on TV currently that you'd love to play a role in?

"*Ray Donovan*."

### What role has been your favorite thus far?

"There's a role that I had done that some people don't really remember in *The Corner*. It was this mini-series where I got to play this drug addict Ronnie Boice and it was amazing. Of course I've had fun with Angela, because that's my girl!"