

"Die Laughing"

by  
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1 INT. MERCY HOSPITAL - EARLY EVENING

1

A busy, sterile, functional city hospital. Lots of white everywhere, especially the walls and the floors. There is a wooden plaque on one wall reading "Mercy Hospital - Boston, Massachusetts." Random doctor pages come over the speaker system. Employees push carts containing a variety of things into and out of the patients' rooms. One elderly woman in a wheelchair is causing a commotion with her unintelligible screaming while a few nurses try to make her stop and calm down.

EMMA Carlson, 22, rushes down the corridor, past several visitors, the nurses' station, and some ambulatory patients - most of them with escorts. She is young, fit, and pretty, though visibly worn down by what life has been throwing at her recently.

She sees the DOCTOR busily writing notes on a clipboard. She motions to him. He sees her and nods. The Doctor, in his 50s, is tall, lean, and sporting a goatee.

Emma finally reaches him.

EMMA  
(eagerly)  
How's Grandpa, Doctor?

He looks down briefly at his notes, as though trying to avoid her gaze, and then slowly up at her.

DOCTOR  
Not well, I'm afraid.

EMMA  
(getting emotional)  
How much. . . time does he have  
left?

The Doctor motions at some empty chairs off the busy corridor.

DOCTOR  
Why don't we sit?

EMMA  
I want to know everything.

DOCTOR  
I'll tell you everything. . . after  
we sit.  
(beat)  
OK?

(CONTINUED)

1 CONTINUED:

She reluctantly nods in agreement. They walk to the chairs and sit. The Doctor takes a moment to settle in. Emma sits and stays, not willing to waste time on comfort.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)  
Can I get you something?  
(beat)  
Tea? Coffee?

EMMA  
Nothing. Just answers please.

The Doctor removes his glasses, folds them, and drops them into the pocket of his white lab coat.

DOCTOR  
You asked how long he has.

EMMA  
I did.

DOCTOR  
(beat)  
A week, perhaps two.

EMMA  
(tearing up)  
Oh no.

The Doctor grabs a box of tissues from a table beside him and holds them out to Emma. She takes a few and dabs at her welling eyes. Some tears escape and roll down her cheeks.

EMMA (CONT'D)  
(sniffs)  
Thank you.

DOCTOR  
The cancer is particularly  
virulent, more than I've seen in  
many years of practice. We've done  
*everything* we can.

EMMA  
I'm sure. . . sure you have. I'm  
grateful.

DOCTOR  
If there's anyone you'd like to  
call. . .

(CONTINUED)

EMMA

No. There's no one else. It's just him and me.

DOCTOR

No other family?

EMMA

My parents died in a car crash when I was six. Grandpa was a widower by then. He raised me.

(beat)

There were some other family members - mostly distant cousins - but they've passed. We're all we have now.

DOCTOR

Your grandfather certainly did a good job raising you. Your devotion to him is touching. Some of my staff have commented on it. We don't see that enough.

She dabs at her eyes and cheeks with the tissues.

EMMA

May I see him?

DOCTOR

Of course - for as long as you'd like.

EMMA

Does he know your prognosis?

DOCTOR

He does.

EMMA

How is he taking it?

DOCTOR

I'll leave that up to you to decide.

They stand together.

FADE TO:

2 EXT. GRANDPA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - MOMENTS LATER 2

Emma pauses outside the closed wooden door, trying to collect herself and control her breathing. As she places one hand on the doorknob, her mind wanders to a much-earlier time.

DISSOLVE TO:

3 INT. GRANDPA'S HOUSE'S KITCHEN - FLASHBACK (16 YEARS AGO) 3

She thinks back to the day she moved in with Grandpa. She is six and wearing a black dress with a ruffled white collar, white stockings, and shiny black shoes. Her Grandpa is in a dark suit, white shirt, and tie.

The kitchen is old fashioned, even for back then. It is functional, not pretty. The stove and refrigerator have seen their better days, but still work.

YOUNG EMMA sits at the oval metal table, her feet not touching the worn linoleum floor. She swings her legs back and forth occasionally, a nervous habit. YOUNGER GRANDPA approaches her slowly, placing a dish (holding a few chocolate chip cookies) and a glass of milk before his granddaughter. He sits beside her with a heavy sigh.

YOUNGER GRANDPA  
How's that, sweetheart?

She sniffs and wipes her nose on the sleeve of her black dress.

YOUNG EMMA  
Good. Thank you.

She grabs a cookie.

YOUNGER GRANDPA  
Emma. . .

YOUNG EMMA  
I shouldn't have done that, right?

YOUNGER GRANDPA  
Done what?

YOUNG EMMA  
On my sleeve.

YOUNGER GRANDPA  
Don't worry about it.

(CONTINUED)

YOUNG EMMA

You're sure?

YOUNGER GRANDPA

Yeah.

(beat)

I wouldn't make a *habit* of it, but  
don't worry about it.

Emma takes a small bite of cookie.

YOUNGER GRANDPA (CONT'D)

We need to have a little talk.

YOUNG EMMA

(through the cookie)

OK.

YOUNGER GRANDPA

But first, I want you to listen to  
me.

YOUNG EMMA

Sure.

She puts the cookie down with the others, swallows what is in  
her mouth, turns in her chair, and looks squarely at her  
grandfather.

He finds it difficult to start speaking.

YOUNGER GRANDPA

I can't tell you how sorry I am for  
what's happened.

YOUNG EMMA

(confused)

You already did.

YOUNGER GRANDPA

Excuse me?

YOUNG EMMA

Last night. We talked after  
suppertime.

YOUNGER GRANDPA

Of course.

(beat)

It's been a long day, but all the  
church stuff is over now.

(CONTINUED)

YOUNG EMMA

Good.

YOUNGER GRANDPA

You and I need to think about. . .  
well. . . *you*.

YOUNG EMMA

What do you mean?

YOUNGER GRANDPA

Your mom and dad are gone, and  
that's *very* sad.

Emma's eyes begin to well up.

YOUNG EMMA

I know.

She wipes her nose on her sleeve again.

YOUNG EMMA (CONT'D)

(quickly)

Sorry. I forgot.

Grandpa smiles at her apology.

YOUNGER GRANDPA

Do you feel sad?

YOUNG EMMA

Really, *really*.

(beat)

Will I always feel this way?

YOUNGER GRANDPA

No. There's an old saying: "Time  
heals all wounds." Do you know what  
that means?

YOUNG EMMA

(beat)

I *think* so: As I get older, it  
won't hurt so much?

YOUNGER GRANDPA

That's right.

(beat)

What a *smart* granddaughter I have.

Emma smiles at his praise.

(CONTINUED)

YOUNG EMMA

Do you miss Grandma?

YOUNGER GRANDPA

Every day.

Emma rises from her chair and gives him a big hug. In her embrace, he wipes an errant tear away on her dress's collar. After a moment, she sits back down and takes a sip of milk.

YOUNGER GRANDPA (CONT'D)

What I'm trying to say is that it's OK to be sad.

YOUNG EMMA

It is?

YOUNGER GRANDPA

Sure. Two wonderful people are gone. That's a sad thing.

YOUNG EMMA

I kind of felt this way when Noodles died.

YOUNGER GRANDPA

Your cat?

YOUNG EMMA

Uh huh.

(beat)

She got out of the house and was hit by a car.

YOUNGER GRANDPA

I remember.

YOUNG EMMA

This hurts *more*.

YOUNGER GRANDPA

Nothing against animals, but death usually does sting worse when people are involved.

(beat)

I've often thought that animals' deaths are practice runs for people - to help you get used to it.

YOUNG EMMA

I'll get used to it?

(CONTINUED)

YOUNGER GRANDPA

Kind of.

(beat)

Every day, you'll feel a little better.

YOUNG EMMA

(anxiously)

You're sure?

YOUNGER GRANDPA

That's the usual way.

(beat)

What we need to think about now is what happens to you.

YOUNG EMMA

Me?

YOUNGER GRANDPA

Where will you live?

YOUNG EMMA

At home.

YOUNGER GRANDPA

All alone?

YOUNG EMMA

(beat)

I hadn't thought of that.

YOUNGER GRANDPA

Do you know how to cook?

YOUNG EMMA

Not really.

YOUNGER GRANDPA

Cold cereal will get boring really fast.

(beat)

What I was thinking is that you'd . . . uhm. . . move in here with me.

Emma smiles.

YOUNG EMMA

Here?

(CONTINUED)

YOUNGER GRANDPA

I'm alone, you're alone. I could use the company. Maybe we'll get a cat.

(beat)

Whaddya think?

YOUNG EMMA

I'd like that.

YOUNGER GRANDPA

Good, good.

YOUNG EMMA

When?

YOUNGER GRANDPA

Right away. You could start tonight.

(beat)

There are some legal things I'll have to work out.

YOUNG EMMA

Like what?

He reaches for her and strokes her brown hair.

YOUNGER GRANDPA

Don't you worry about any of that. You just keep being you.

Emma takes the cookie back from the plate. Smiling a little smile, she takes another bite.

DISSOLVE TO:

Emma returns to the present, her hand still on the doorknob. She puts on her best brave face, dabs at her eyes with the balled-up tissue, and enters the room.

Her frail GRANDPA lies dozing on his twin hospital bed, surrounded by a lot of beeping and flashing equipment which casts flickering, alternating colors on him. His white hair is thin and uncombed.

His thick glasses are balanced on the bridge of his nose. He wears an ill-fitting floral johnnie. The bedsheets and blankets are pulled up to his chest. An oxygen tank audibly pumps air into his nostrils through a two-pronged clear tube.

(CONTINUED)

4 CONTINUED:

Like the corridor, the room is sterile and impersonal. The overhead lighting is harsh. A few get well soon cards sit propped on a night stand to the right of the bed, alongside a small water pitcher and a telephone. We see that the cards are all from Emma.

Grandpa awakens at the sound of Emma's footsteps. He looks up and smiles. She walks to the side of his bed.

GRANDPA

Emma dear, so good to see you!

She eagerly and carefully hugs him close, doing her best to avoid getting tangled in the wire connections to the machines. Her brave face fails her a bit. Some tears run down her cheeks and onto his johnnie.

EMMA

You too.

They separate after a prolonged hug.

GRANDPA

No tears, honey. We knew this day would come eventually.

EMMA

Yeah, but -

GRANDPA

I've had a good, *long* life. I'm glad I had enough time left on the old clock to help raise you into the fine young woman you are.

EMMA

(sniffs)

Thanks. I couldn't have done it without you.

Grandpa smiles and then winces a little.

EMMA (CONT'D)

(urgently)

Are you in pain?

GRANDPA

Not much. That young doctor gave me some pretty strong pills. It's a dull ache now, nothing more.

EMMA

Young doctor? Was there a switch?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

GRANDPA

No, it's the same guy I've always had.

EMMA

Grandpa, he's in his *fifties*.

GRANDPA

To me, he's young.

She grins.

EMMA

Can I get you anything?

GRANDPA

(wistfully)

Oh, I wish you could.

EMMA

What does that mean?

GRANDPA

What I'd *really* like, you can't get. No one can.

EMMA

(eagerly)

What is it? Tell me. I'll find it.

GRANDPA

(longish beat)

Before my time is up, I'd love to hear. . . a joke.

FADE TO:

INT. GRANDPA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Grandpa's bed has been adjusted. He is now sitting up, facing Emma.

EMMA

What's a "joke?"

GRANDPA

You don't know?

(beat)

No, of course you don't. How *could* you? You weren't even born when they. . .

(CONTINUED)

EMMA

Tell me what it is. I'll get you one. I'll get you a *dozen*.

GRANDPA

You can't, sweetheart. They're illegal.

EMMA

Were they dangerous?

GRANDPA

Some people thought so, but then some people are *always* frightened by free speech - going way back before even I was born.

EMMA

Could people hurt themselves with jokes?

GRANDPA

No. They were only words.

EMMA

*Words* were outlawed?

(beat)

When was this?

GRANDPA

*Many* years ago. Before your time.

EMMA

Why have I never heard of jokes? They should be in the history books.

GRANDPA

There's the problem: To write about jokes would mean to *tell* a joke, and to tell a joke would violate the laws against them. We used to call it a Catch-22.

EMMA

Do you remember any?

GRANDPA

I remember the one that got Jim O'Flaherty in such trouble.

(beat)

Boy, oh boy, that was a time! He never saw it coming.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

5 CONTINUED: (2)

GRANDPA (CONT'D)

To be fair to old Jim, I don't  
think any of us did.

Emma pulls a chair up beside the bed. The colored lights from the surrounding monitors start dancing over the sleeves of her dark blouse.

EMMA

Please tell me.

Grandpa glances around uneasily, as much as his ebbing strength and the machinery hooked up to him will allow. Then he looks back at Emma.

GRANDPA

We're in the hospital - probably  
safe. I doubt there's a D.R.  
around.

EMMA

A *what*?

GRANDPA

I'll explain.

DISSOLVE TO:

6 INT. TIM RILEY'S BAR - FLASHBACK (MANY YEARS AGO)

6

A busy, noisy bar on a weekend night. We see a sign reading "Tim Riley's." The bar itself is in the center of a big room with several open windows along the upper walls. It is surrounded by stools. On this particular night, most of them are occupied.

A few tables and booths - mainly in use - lay about the walls. The place is full of laughing, happy customers and busy staff.

We focus on a group of four men in their late 30s and early 40s. Three of them are sitting on bar stools, though they themselves are facing out - away from the bar. All of them are drinking beer and having a good time.

Jim O'FLAHERTY, 41, is holding court on the barroom floor before his friends. He wears suit pants and a dress shirt. His tie is askew around his unbuttoned collar. He holds a half-empty mug of beer in his right hand, leaving his left one free to gesture as he tells his story.

(CONTINUED)

6 CONTINUED:

It is clear that he wants the attention and is eating it up. He speaks a little louder than necessary for his friends to hear him, as though - to him - volume equals importance.

O'FLAHERTY

OK, boys. I have a good one for ya:  
Where does an Irish family go on  
vacation?

He glances at his friends. None of them knows the answer.

O'FLAHERTY (CONT'D)

None of ya?  
(beat)  
To a *different* bar!

His friends laugh at this. O'Flaherty laughs the loudest of all - his own best audience.

O'FLAHERTY (CONT'D)

(chuckling)  
That's a knee-slapper, ain't it?

Suddenly, two muscular, middle-aged ladies in matching white uniforms, OFFICER #1 and OFFICER #2, emerge from the bar crowd. They walk in lockstep, their eyes focused on O'Flaherty, who is so busy enjoying the laughter he is getting for his joke that he hasn't noticed them. A shiny, metal badge is pinned to the center of their white shirts. We can read the letters "S.P." on the badges.

OFFICER #1

Excuse me, sir.

O'Flaherty swallows a swig of beer and looks confused at the ladies before him.

O'FLAHERTY

You two pledging the same sorority?

OFFICER #2

Sir?

Officer #1 looks down at an electronic pad she is holding in one hand.

OFFICER #1

You are James O'Flaherty of 126  
Cedar Road?

O'Flaherty is confused.

(CONTINUED)

O'FLAHERTY  
That's right.  
(beat)  
Who. . . Who are -

OFFICER #2  
Come with us, sir.

The second officer reaches for O'Flaherty's arm. He takes a couple of steps back, raising the hand *not* holding the beer mug in a defensive posture. He speaks again, even louder than when he was telling his joke.

O'FLAHERTY  
Why should I?

The officers try their best to speak calmly and defuse the situation.

OFFICER #1  
I strongly advise you *not* to cause any trouble.

OFFICER #2  
Please come along peacefully.

O'FLAHERTY  
What for?

He puts his almost-drained beer mug down on the bar and approaches the two ladies, gesturing with both hands now.

O'FLAHERTY (CONT'D)  
Is this some sort of a gag? Tim getting back at me for running a tab?

OFFICER #2  
If by "Tim" you mean Mr. Riley - the bar's owner - no. He has nothing to do with this.

OFFICER #1  
We are simply doing our jobs.

O'FLAHERTY  
By harassing law-abiding citizens out for a pint with some pals? C'mon!

(CONTINUED)

OFFICER #1

It is not our goal to harass anyone, sir. We're sorry you feel that way.

OFFICER #2

We've been charged with keeping the peace.

O'FLAHERTY

Who are you two? I've never seen you in here.

One of his friends at the bar speaks up.

MAN #1

And he would know. He's here a *lot*.

O'FLAHERTY

(sarcastically)

Thanks, pal.

MAN #1

Don't mention it.

He silently toasts O'Flaherty.

OFFICER #2

We're officers of the sensitivity police.

O'FLAHERTY

The what?

OFFICER #2

The new federal force designed to see to it that no American is insulted or hurt by the words of another citizen.

O'FLAHERTY

I don't. . .

OFFICER #1

Surely you've read about Congress passing the Sensitivity Act?

Another one of his friends at the bar speaks.

MAN #2

You're making the assumption that Jimmy here can read.

(CONTINUED)

The other guys chuckle.

O'FLAHERTY

(confused)

"Insulted or hurt by". . . Are you talking about my joke?

OFFICER #1

Yes, sir. It was a flagrant violation of the Act - Section 1, Paragraph 1b.

O'FLAHERTY

It was a joke - just words.

OFFICER #2

*Hurtful* words.

O'FLAHERTY

But everybody laughed!

OFFICER #2

Not everybody. We wouldn't have been summoned by a D.R. if no one was offended.

O'FLAHERTY

A "D" what?

OFFICER #1

A designated reporter. Certain anonymous members of the citizenry have been charged with reporting any violations of the Act to government authorities.

(beat)

Fortunately, we were close by and able to respond quickly.

O'FLAHERTY

All this because one guy got his undies in a -

OFFICER #2

We received *three* complaints.

OFFICER #1

Your "joke" was insulting to the Irish.

O'FLAHERTY

But *I'm* Irish!

(CONTINUED)

OFFICER #1

You were born in Ireland?

O'FLAHERTY

No, but -

OFFICER #2

Then you're *not* Irish, sir. You may have Irish *ancestry*, but you're not Irish.

(beat)

Playing on the insensitive stereotype that the Irish are heavy drinkers -

O'FLAHERTY

But we *are*!

OFFICER #2

Sir, I *strongly* advise you to use your right to silence before you get yourself even deeper in trouble.

O'Flaherty throws his hands up in the air.

O'FLAHERTY

This is insane!

OFFICER #1

Are you going to come with us peacefully. . .

(beat)

. . . or do we need to use force?

Officer #2 pats her holstered weapon. O'Flaherty looks at his bar friends in disbelief.

DISSOLVE TO:

Emma is still sitting beside her prone grandfather. She has been listening intently to his recollection.

GRANDPA

They slapped the cuffs on Jim and dragged him out of Tim Riley's. I never saw him again.

EMMA

What happened to him?

(CONTINUED)

GRANDPA

I don't know. Some of the boys and I tried looking into his case. A sensitivity cop told us, in no uncertain terms, to stop before we got arrested too.

(beat)

Word got out. No one told jokes anymore. The bar was never the same. It's been closed for years.

EMMA

That's too bad.

GRANDPA

There's not a day that goes by that I don't miss it. Great people.

(beat)

And Tim Riley himself. . . Now there was a man's man. A better friend you couldn't have.

EMMA

Besides *you*.

GRANDPA

(chuckles slightly)

I'll take some praise - I'm a pretty nice guy - but old Tim outshone me by miles.

EMMA

About that joke. . .

GRANDPA

Yes, dear?

EMMA

Those words *were* hurtful.

GRANDPA

Not really. Jokes were never meant for that. They were to make people laugh, not cry.

EMMA

But to suggest that someone has a drinking problem just because of his national-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

GRANDPA

It was hyperbole: Exaggeration for effect. That's what made the joke funny.

Emma shakes her head slowly.

EMMA

I'm not sure I understand.

GRANDPA

Don't worry about it. You don't have to. No one has to anymore.

EMMA

Were there other stereotypes in jokes?

GRANDPA

Oh sure: Jewish people were money hungry, the Polish were dumb, the Italians -

EMMA

Are they?

GRANDPA

Of course not.

EMMA

Then why -

GRANDPA

I don't know, honey. A long time before even I was born - back when dinosaurs roamed the Earth - some joke teller created those stereotypes. I'm not sure how he decided who was what. Maybe he held some grudges.

EMMA

So they're all lies?

GRANDPA

Of course, though I have known some Irish guys who could put the booze away.

(beat)

Don't believe everything you hear, especially from the current lot in Washington.

(CONTINUED)

EMMA

Did all jokes use stereotypes?

GRANDPA

No, not all.

(beat)

Here's one: Why did the chicken  
cross the road?

Emma thinks about it.

EMMA

I. . . I don't know.

GRANDPA

I *can't* remember. I used to know  
the punchline, but I -

EMMA

"Punch" what?

GRANDPA

Punchline. It was the line of the  
joke - usually the *last* line - that  
made the listener laugh.

(chuckles)

It was the one I often had to  
explain to your grandmother.

EMMA

She didn't understand either?

GRANDPA

No. Beautiful woman, lousy  
audience.

(beat)

I used to *love* a good joke, but now  
- well - you can't tell one without  
the sensitivity police taking you  
away for hurting someone's  
feelings.

EMMA

Why is that?

GRANDPA

No one has a sense of humor  
anymore. Everyone's so damn  
politically correct. Absolutely  
disgusting, I'm telling you.

(CONTINUED)

EMMA

Where did all the jokes go when the government outlawed them?

GRANDPA

(longish beat)

Go?

EMMA

They had to go *somewhere*.

GRANDPA

They were only words, honey. . .  
not something you could hold in  
your hands.

EMMA

My science professor said that  
matter doesn't stop existing. It  
can change its form, but it always  
is. If people told jokes, they gave  
them life - existence. They must  
have gone *somewhere*.

GRANDPA

Since you put it that way, I guess  
so.

EMMA

There must be people around who  
remember them.

GRANDPA

Maybe some old timers like me, but  
they wouldn't talk. They'd be too  
afraid of the can of worms they'd  
be opening.

EMMA

What a shame.

The old man shifts in his bed.

GRANDPA

(sighs)

I'd love to hear just *one* joke  
before. . .

EMMA

I'll find them for you.

GRANDPA

*Don't.* You can get in a lot of trouble. The sensitivity cops are everywhere, and *anyone* can be a designated reporter. You never know! Even someone you thought you could trust will turn on you, especially if it means saving his own skin.

(beat)

I've heard stories. *Terrible* stories.

EMMA

It's just a little research.

GRANDPA

Honey -

EMMA

It'll be my gift to you.

GRANDPA

A parting gift?

EMMA

Stop that! I don't want to hear it.

GRANDPA

You're very stubborn, just like your mother was. I could never tell her anything. Well, I *could* tell her, but she wouldn't listen.

EMMA

Then you know there's no sense in trying to talk me out of it.

GRANDPA

You're her daughter, that's for sure.

He reaches out, grabs her fair hands, brings them - with some effort - to his withered mouth, and gently kisses them a few times. He rests them on his heart.

GRANDPA (CONT'D)

*Please* be careful. I can't bear the thought of you being picked up for trying to do something nice for me.

(CONTINUED)

7 CONTINUED: (6)

EMMA

Don't you worry. I'll be just like  
an itty-bitty mouse.

FADE TO:

8 INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - LATE NIGHT/EARLY MORNING

8

Emma sits on the couch in her apartment. Her laptop is on the coffee table before her. She opens an anonymous search engine. In the find box she types "jokes" and presses enter. The search engine's on-screen text reply reads: "Nothing found. Did you mean 'jukes?'" It shows pictures of jukeboxes.

EMMA

(confused)

No.

She deletes the "s," so the find box now reads "joke." She presses return. The search engine replies: "Nothing found. Did you mean 'juke?'" It shows yet more jukebox pictures.

She sighs, leans back on the couch, and rubs her tired eyes.

FADE TO:

9 INT. SHOPPING MALL BOOKSTORE - THE NEXT DAY

9

Emma walks into a crowded bookstore. Many volumes are on display on tables near the front, most with their covers facing out to be noticed by passing mall shoppers. The lighting is bright. Muzak is playing, and the two clerks behind the counter are busy ringing up customer purchases from their queues.

She gets in the shorter of the two lines - only a couple of customers ahead of her - and anxiously awaits her turn with the male clerk. The telephone behind the desk rings. The older, female clerk (CLERK #1) answers it while continuing to work her register.

CLERK #1

Hello, Commonwealth Books. May I  
help you?

After a short wait, Emma reaches the front of her line. The male clerk (CLERK #2) sees that she has no books and is confused. He smiles at her.

(CONTINUED)

CLERK #2

Welcome to Commonwealth Books.

(beat)

Do you need some help?

EMMA

Yes, please.

CLERK #2

If you'd like, I can recommend a book for you. We have many best sellers that have been widely well reviewed.

EMMA

Thanks, but -

CLERK #2

Just tell me what genres interest you, and I -

EMMA

I was actually wondering if you might have some books on a particular topic.

CLERK #2

Ah, *nonfiction*. I can certainly check. If we don't have any here, we could order them for you from another one of our stores. That would take a day or two.

He turns to the computer beside him and quickly logs into a listing of the store's inventory. He stands ready, fingers over the keys.

CLERK #2 (CONT'D)

Ready.

(beat)

What topic?

EMMA

Jokes.

Alarmed, he turns quickly back to face her, as though she just uttered some vile cuss words.

CLERK #2

I'm. . . I'm sorry?

EMMA

Jokes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CLERK #2

That's what I thought you said.

EMMA

(longish beat)

Is something wrong?

The clerk looks at the man standing behind Emma, who is waiting with book in hand.

CLERK #2

Just a moment, sir, please.

He motions Emma to the side of the check-out desk and speaks quietly so none of the other customers nor the first clerk will hear.

CLERK #2 (CONT'D)

(sotto voce)

As a law-abiding citizen, I'm obliged to tell you that you are looking for books on a forbidden topic.

EMMA

I'm aware of the Sensitivity Act regulations, thank you.

(beat)

This is strictly informational - research for my. . . uhm. . . my thesis.

He sighs, relieved, and goes back to speaking at a normal volume.

CLERK #2

I see. I'm very glad to hear that. Otherwise, I'd feel compelled to report you to Director Tomlinson for interrogation.

EMMA

No need.

(beat)

Do you have any books on. . . that subject?

He quickly logs into the inventory list again. He speaks to Emma after a brief search.

CLERK #2

Not a one. Nothing has been written about it in *many* years.

(CONTINUED)

EMMA

Can you think of anywhere I might find some reference books for my research?

CLERK #2

(longish beat)

A library, perhaps. They'd have older volumes, though I suspect any such books would have been seized years ago.

Emma turns to go.

EMMA

Thank you.

CLERK #2

Are you sure I can't interest you in another book? A nice mystery, maybe?

EMMA

Perhaps later, when I have more free time.

FADE TO:

A large public library jam-packed with books of all ages. Emma stands under a great dome - glittering with sunlight - built over the check-out desk. An oversized clock on the wall loudly ticks off the seconds of the day. Some patrons pass by every now and then as she is being helped.

An older, gray-haired, female LIBRARIAN, her glasses hanging from a string around her neck, looks away from the computer screen before her. She speaks to Emma.

LIBRARIAN

No, nothing on that topic any longer.

EMMA

So you *did* have some books at one time?

LIBRARIAN

So I've heard. That was before my employment here.

(CONTINUED)

EMMA

What happened to those books?

The librarian puts her glasses back on and does some more typing. Done, she lets her specs fall to her chest.

LIBRARIAN

Just as I suspected: They were taken away and destroyed.

EMMA

Books?

LIBRARIAN

Good riddance to them, I say!

Emma is shocked.

EMMA

But they were *books*.

LIBRARIAN

You're kind of young to face this fact, but in life, we must choose.

(beat)

Give me a safe society any day!

FADE TO:

A nervous Agent LAWRENCE, in his mid-30s, stands outside the heavy wooden doors to his boss's office, a file folder in his left hand. The waiting room is plush and imposing. *Objet d'art*, including many paintings and pieces of statuary, lay about - hanging on the walls and balanced on ornate displays. The lighting is harsh.

The sound of busy, dutiful people typing on computer keyboards up and down the adjoining corridor is loud, including from Tomlinson's own nondescript assistant, who sits behind a very large desk mere feet from the Director's office doors.

Barely stopping her work, she motions with her left hand for Lawrence to go in.

He slowly enters, closing the doors behind him. TOMLINSON, a middle-aged man with salt-and-some-pepper hair, sits behind an even larger desk than his assistant. A lone visitor chair, deliberately placed at a lower height than the desk chair, is to his left.

(CONTINUED)

A big computer, a multi-lined telephone, and many file folders lay before him. He is reading from one. His ornate nameplate reads "R. TOMLINSON - DIRECTOR."

Lawrence is unsure of whether or not he should speak and interrupt his boss's reading. He decides to and musters his courage.

LAWRENCE

Excuse me, sir?

Tomlinson glances up from the file he is reading, put out at being interrupted. His look changes when he sees that Lawrence is clearly here to bring something of importance to his attention.

TOMLINSON

What is it, Lawrence?

Lawrence slowly approaches the grand desk.

TOMLINSON (CONT'D)

You look concerned.

(beat)

Something wrong?

LAWRENCE

Maybe.

TOMLINSON

What does *that* mean?

LAWRENCE

We've received two blue alerts.

Tomlinson is surprised to hear the term.

TOMLINSON

*Blue?* We haven't had a suspicion alert in some time.

LAWRENCE

I know, sir. That's why I wanted to bring them to your attention.

TOMLINSON

Who are we looking at?

Lawrence hands him the file. Tomlinson opens it. We see Emma's ID picture on the top left-hand corner of the first page. He skims the file's contents as Lawrence speaks.

(CONTINUED)

11 CONTINUED: (2)

LAWRENCE

Her name is Emma Carlson, age 22.

Tomlinson's face lights up as he sees something in the file.

TOMLINSON

She lives in Sector 009.

LAWRENCE

She does.

TOMLINSON

We've had some trouble there lately.

LAWRENCE

I wasn't aware, sir.

TOMLINSON

You wouldn't be - yet.

LAWRENCE

A solitary case?

TOMLINSON

Not at all. Several members of the citizenry have already been brought in for questioning.

He closes Emma's file and holds it up.

TOMLINSON (CONT'D)

There may be some more pieces to the puzzle.

LAWRENCE

You think Miss Carlson's actions are connected?

TOMLINSON

It can't be ruled out.

(beat)

Are the alerts from Sector 009 as well?

LAWRENCE

Yes, sir.

TOMLINSON

*Hmmm.*

(beat)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

11 CONTINUED: (3)

TOMLINSON (CONT'D)

Beef up the numbers of sensitivity  
police in 009 to Beta Level  
effective immediately.

LAWRENCE

Yes, sir.

TOMLINSON

Do you need more deputies?

LAWRENCE

I don't believe so, Director. At  
least not now.

TOMLINSON

If you change your mind, you know  
where to get them.

LAWRENCE

I do. Thank you.

He re-opens Emma's file and spreads it out on his desk so her  
picture is showing as he talks with Lawrence.

TOMLINSON

What has this little lady been  
doing that concerned the designated  
reporters?

LAWRENCE

Inquiring about a forbidden topic.

TOMLINSON

Which one?

LAWRENCE

Jokes.

TOMLINSON

(longish beat)  
An odd choice.

LAWRENCE

I thought so too.

TOMLINSON

On its own, way down on the  
criminal scale, but *still* a crime.

(beat)

Who are the alerts from?

(CONTINUED)

LAWRENCE

A bookstore clerk and a librarian. Miss Carlson was seeking their help in researching jokes - for a thesis, she said.

TOMLINSON

Well, *that's* a lie! No professor would dare assign a student such a topic.

LAWRENCE

Exactly why the citizens contacted us. They thought her story was flimsy as well.

TOMLINSON

Please pass along this office's thanks to them.

LAWRENCE

I will.

(beat)

We also got a red flag from her Internet Service Provider.

TOMLINSON

Searching the Web for "jokes?"

LAWRENCE

Yes, sir.

TOMLINSON

She sounds like a rookie.

LAWRENCE

Perhaps she's *not* involved in the 009 troubles at all?

TOMLINSON

I suppose her case *could* be separate - something new.

(beat)

If she *is* involved in the existing problem, she's likely not the big cog, but she could have information that would lead us to him.

(beat)

Did you see anything suspicious in her file?

(CONTINUED)

LAWRENCE

I didn't. She has no record to speak of, and she has initiated no trouble for the office until now.

TOMLINSON

No history of governmental dissent?

LAWRENCE

None.

TOMLINSON

Do we know where Miss Carlson is at the moment?

LAWRENCE

No, but it wouldn't take long to find her.

TOMLINSON

She's your job until further notice.

LAWRENCE

I understand.

TOMLINSON

Follow her - close enough to monitor her every move but *not* close enough to give yourself away.

LAWRENCE

Yes, sir.

TOMLINSON

Report everything she does to me.

(beat)

If she's involved in anything suspicious, report it immediately.

LAWRENCE

I will.

TOMLINSON

I think she's small stuff, but she may be of help. I want to be able to bring her in at a moment's notice.

LAWRENCE

For interrogation?

(CONTINUED)

11 CONTINUED: (6)

TOMLINSON  
Whatever it takes.

FADE TO:

12 EXT. FARM - LATER

12

It is beautiful and sunny. Emma walks along the wooden fence penning a variety of animals - cows, chickens, pigs, etc. They are all very vocal in greeting her. She approaches an elderly, white-haired FARMER dressed in dirty overalls.

EMMA  
Excuse me, sir?

FARMER  
Yes, ma'am? What can I do for you?

EMMA  
I have a question about your chickens.

FARMER  
Shoot.

EMMA  
Did they ever cross the road?

FARMER  
(confused)  
Cross the. . .

EMMA  
Even once?

FARMER  
(beat)  
I *suppose* they have.

EMMA  
Why would they have done that?

FARMER  
Excuse me?

EMMA  
Why would your chickens have crossed the road?

FADE TO:

13 INT. GRANDPA'S APARTMENT - LATER

13

Emma turns the key to enter. She walks inside the one-bedroom apartment, closing the door behind her. Though small, the place is packed with books and memorabilia.

To the right is the living room, where she often finds Grandpa when she visits. An overstuffed and overused recliner sits in front of a fairly big TV. Bubbling away behind the recliner is the old man's aquarium, which houses a wide variety of tropical fish.

Emma locks the apartment door and walks to the tank. She puts her keys down beside it.

EMMA

Hi, fishies! Sorry I'm late.  
Grandpa asked me to feed you, but  
I've had a *busy* day.

She removes the tank's lid and picks up the food container. She shakes some fish flakes into the water.

EMMA (CONT'D)

There you go. Eat up.

The fish don't need to be told twice. They all rush for the floating chow.

Emma presses her face up to the tank's glass.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Heard any good jokes lately?  
(chuckles slightly)  
"Blub, blub, blub" to you too.

She puts the fish food container back where it was, clicks the top back on the tank, and plops herself down on the recliner. She closes her eyes briefly.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Now what?

Emma opens her eyes again.

She scans the many pictures Grandpa has lining the walls, several of them bringing back pleasant memories. Some are of him and Grandma, but many feature her as a little girl and growing up.

She looks quizzically at one. It's not familiar.

(CONTINUED)

She rises from the chair and walks toward it. She takes it down from its hook and brings it back to the recliner. The picture shows two men in black tuxedos caught in mid-dance step. Both are holding canes and wearing top hats.

She touches the face of one of the men.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Grandpa?

It is him - though younger and thinner. She turns on the light beside the recliner to better see the writing along the bottom of the photograph. Though faded, it reads, "Bill Walston and Terrence Boone: Song and Dance, Jokes, and Snappy Patter."

EMMA (CONT'D)

*Jokes!*

(beat)

I never knew Grandpa appeared on stage.

She looks hard at the picture.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Mr. Boone could help me!

(beat)

But where. . .

There is a beep as she activates an app on her cell phone. The female voice comes filtered through the device's speaker.

PHONE VOICE

Please state desired service.

EMMA

Phone listings.

PHONE VOICE

Business or residential?

EMMA

Residential.

PHONE VOICE

City and state, please?

Emma crosses the fingers of her free hand.

EMMA

Boston, Massachusetts.

(CONTINUED)

PHONE VOICE

Listing?

She looks down at the picture again.

EMMA

Terrence Boone.

PHONE VOICE

Working.

(longish beat)

Three matches found. Please advise.

EMMA

(sotto voce)

Three?

(hopefully)

Do the listings include the parties' ages?

PHONE VOICE

Yes. Listing the findings, in ascending order, according to your specifications:

Terrence Boone #1, 75 Winston Road, age 37.

Terrence Boone #2, 128 Flamingo Avenue, age 51.

Terrence Boone #3, 54 Barton Court, Apartment 6, age 84.

Emma's face lights up.

EMMA

Call number 3.

PHONE VOICE

Calling Terrence Boone number 3.

We hear the telephone ring several times. Emma cannot control her anxiety.

EMMA

*C'mon.* Answer!

The ringing stops after six times.

PHONE VOICE

Party does not answer. Redial?

(CONTINUED)

13 CONTINUED: (3)

EMMA

No. Repeat address of Terrence  
Boone number 3.

PHONE VOICE

54 Barton Court, Apartment 6.

EMMA

That's only a few blocks away.

She picks up her keys and the picture, and leaves the  
apartment.

FADE TO:

14 INT. TOMLINSON'S OFFICE - LATER

14

Tomlinson is on the telephone with Lawrence, who we hear  
clearly through the phone's speaker.

LAWRENCE

Emma Carlson has left the Standish  
Arms Apartments and is heading  
downtown.

TOMLINSON

In a car?

LAWRENCE

No, sir. On foot.

TOMLINSON

Keep a close eye on her.

LAWRENCE

Will do.

FADE TO:

15 INT. BOONE'S APARTMENT - LATER

15

Like Grandpa's home, this is a cluttered place. BOONE is in  
the kitchen with his orange tabby cat, Sebastian, who is  
walking in and around his human's feet and loudly meowing for  
food.

Boone, who has a full head of white hair, is dressed in a  
cardigan against the cold. He speaks to his cat.

(CONTINUED)

15 CONTINUED:

BOONE

Now, now, Sebastian. It's not your  
suppertime yet.

The tabby lets out another meow of protest.

BOONE (CONT'D)

Have I ever forgotten to feed you?

Another meow.

BOONE (CONT'D)

(chuckles)

You would never let me.

There is urgent knocking on the door.

BOONE (CONT'D)

Now who could that be?

Sebastian meows again.

BOONE (CONT'D)

Don't you worry your furry little  
head. I'll keep the chain on - like  
always.

Amid the occasional meow, Boone walks to the locked door and  
opens it as much as the security chain will allow. Emma,  
desperate, is on the other side, Grandpa's old, framed  
picture in one hand.

EMMA

Oh good. You're home!

BOONE

May I help you?

EMMA

You're Terrence Boone, aren't you,  
sir?

BOONE

(uneasily)

Who wants to know?

EMMA

My name is Emma Carlson.

BOONE

I've never met you before.

(CONTINUED)

EMMA

I'm Bill Walston's granddaughter.

There is an odd, silent beat.

BOONE

Bill who?

EMMA

*This* Bill!

She holds up the framed picture from long ago and taps on it.

EMMA (CONT'D)

That *is* you in the picture, isn't it?

BOONE

(getting nervous)

I'm. . . I'm sorry, but -

EMMA

Of course it's you!

BOONE

I'm afraid I have to go now.

He tries to close the door, but Emma puts her foot in the jam.

EMMA

Please don't. I need your help.  
*Grandpa* needs your help.

Boone slowly re-opens the door to the chain's full extent.

BOONE

What is this about?

EMMA

I. . . I need some jokes.

BOONE

Some what?

EMMA

Jokes. Just one will do.

BOONE

I don't know anything about -

EMMA

Of course you do. It's right here.

(CONTINUED)

15 CONTINUED: (3)

She points to the writing on the picture.

EMMA (CONT'D)  
(growing teary)  
Grandpa is *dying*, Mr. Boone.  
You're the only person who can help  
me. May I *please* come in?

BOONE  
No, you may *not*!

His cat meows.

BOONE (CONT'D)  
Don't you worry, Sebastian. I'll  
get rid of her.

EMMA  
How can you turn your back on your  
stage partner? Weren't you friends?

BOONE  
Do I need to call the police?

EMMA  
Just *one* joke! That was his last  
wish.

BOONE  
I know *nothing* about jokes. I'm a  
law-abiding citizen.  
(fed up)  
You designated reporters - always  
trying to trap people.

EMMA  
I'm not a -

BOONE  
I'm giving you *three* minutes. If  
you're still at my door after that,  
I'm calling the police.

He slams the door violently in her face and locks it. The cat  
meows, seemingly in agreement.

Emma pounds on the door. We hear her call through it.

EMMA  
No, please! *Please*, Mr. Boone!

She knocks even more urgently.

(CONTINUED)

15 CONTINUED: (4)

15

Boone wipes a tear from an eye and, almost reverently, bows his head.

BOONE  
(sotto voce)  
Forgive me, old friend. I'm *afraid*.  
So afraid.

FADE TO:

16 INT. TOMLINSON'S OFFICE - LATER

16

Tomlinson is on the phone with Lawrence. We see them both in a split screen.

TOMLINSON  
How many deputies do you have with you?

LAWRENCE  
Three, sir.

TOMLINSON  
Bring Emma Carlson in. I've decided to nip this Sector 009 thing in the bud.

LAWRENCE  
Right away.

TOMLINSON  
I want you and a deputy to bring her directly to me. Have the other two remain on the scene. That apartment complex is to be Level A searched.

LAWRENCE  
All of it?

TOMLINSON  
Every inch. If she has accomplices in her Act violations, I want to know. Have the deputies bring in anyone they suspect.

FADE TO:

17 EXT. BOONE'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

17

Emma is still rapping urgently on Boone's door.

(CONTINUED)

EMMA  
Please, Mr. Boone. *Please!*

Her cell phone rings. She answers it quickly. We hear only her side of the conversation.

EMMA (CONT'D)  
Hello?. . . Yes, Doctor?. . . I'll  
be right there!

She pushes a button to end the call. She peers at the door, disgusted.

EMMA (CONT'D)  
I hope you can live with yourself.

Picture in hand, she angrily walks away.

FADE TO:

18 EXT. BOONE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

18

Emma hurriedly walks out the front door of Boone's apartment building and onto the sidewalk. She is immediately approached by Agent Lawrence.

LAWRENCE  
Emma Carlson?

EMMA  
Yes?

She is seized from behind by one of Lawrence's deputies, a real bruiser. She tries her best to get free and actually causes him a little trouble.

A dark car squeals to a stop beside them. Some anonymous citizens watch the show, pointing so their friends won't miss the good parts. Lawrence speaks loudly, over the sound of Emma's struggling.

LAWRENCE  
I'm placing you under arrest for  
suspected violations of the  
Sensitivity Act.

The car door is opened from the interior, and she is forced inside by the deputy. She drops the picture in the struggle. The glass shatters on the sidewalk.

(CONTINUED)

EMMA  
(still struggling)  
No! I have to go. I must g-

Lawrence enters the automobile.

The car doors are quickly shut. It squeals away as the onlookers watch.

The picture with the shattered glass sits upright on the sidewalk.

FADE TO:

Boone sits at his kitchen table, a steaming cup of tea before him. A tear rolls down one cheek, drops into the tea, and sizzles away. His mind goes back in time to when the picture was taken.

DISSOLVE TO:

A tripod is holding up a poster of Boone and Grandpa from their "snappy patter" days - the same photograph Emma brought with her.

Down a short corridor is the stage. About a dozen circular tables are positioned in front of it. They are crowded with drinking patrons of both genders and all races.

To a drumroll and some nondescript music, the evening's entertainment comes out to big applause. The younger Boone (TED, in this scene) and Grandpa (BILL, in this scene) soft shoe out of the wings and onto the stage.

They are both dressed like in Emma's picture: Tuxedos, top hats, and canes.

The music ends. They acknowledge the applause. Together, they take off their hats, holding them at their waists. Bill speaks as the applause fades out.

BILL  
Good evening, everyone, and welcome  
to the *gorgeous* Club Wellington.  
We're very happy to entertain you  
tonight and -

(CONTINUED)

20 CONTINUED:

Ted is staring at Bill.

TED  
Hold on a minute.

BILL  
(angrily)  
You're interrupting my  
introduction. You're an  
introduction interrupter.

Chuckles from the crowd.

TED  
Sorry, I wouldn't unless I had to.

BILL  
What's the problem?

Ted reaches out to his partner and removes two black socks  
lying on top of his head.

TED  
What's the idea of these?

The audience laughs.

BILL  
You noticed them, huh?

TED  
I've been in the business a *long*  
time.  
(beat)  
Why do you have socks on your head?

BILL  
I would think that obvious.

TED  
Not to me.

BILL  
They're to keep my head warm so I  
don't catch a cold.

Chuckles.

TED  
Socks?

BILL  
Uh huh.

(CONTINUED)

TED  
On your head?

BILL  
Right.  
(beat)  
If I get sick, pal, people aren't  
gonna pay the big bucks to see just  
you.

Loud laughs.

TED  
I don't think you have to worry  
about catching a cold indoors. It's  
nice and warm in here.

BILL  
You can't be too safe.

TED  
You have your hat.

BILL  
Yeah.

He shakes his waist-high hat.

BILL (CONT'D)  
But it's not keeping my head warm.

TED  
Like socks?

BILL  
Right.

TED  
It would keep your head warm if you  
wore it.

BILL  
Can't.

TED  
Why not?

BILL  
Because I was brought up right.

Chuckles.

(CONTINUED)

TED

So was I.

BILL

(disbelievingly)

Uh huh.

TED

Do you think I was born in a barn?

BILL

Of course not, but it's OK if you were.

TED

That's good to know.

BILL

Some of my best friends were born in barns.

TED

I'm sure they were.

BILL

Bessie Peterson, for instance.

TED

Bessie was a cow.

BILL

But a *barn-born* cow.

TED

I have manners too.

BILL

I know.

TED

You don't see me wearing socks on my head, do you?

BILL

No, you sure don't.

TED

And I was brought up right.

BILL

(beat)

Maybe I was brought up. . .  
"righter."

(CONTINUED)

Chuckles.

TED

Meaning?

He sees a lovely, young lady at one of the tables and gestures at her.

BILL

You see that pretty girl in the black dress?

TED

I sure do.

BILL

Because of *her*, I could get a head cold.

TED

Her? How?

He puts his hat on his head, then tips it, then puts it back on his head, then tips it again.

BILL

Manners.

(beat)

If I tip my hat to all the pretty ladies here - like I was brought up to do - I'll catch cold. . . and probably carpal tunnel too.

He brings his hat to his waist again.

TED

Hence the socks?

BILL

"Hence?"

TED

You know what I mean.

(beat)

So what are you wearing on your feet?

BILL

Huh?

TED

If your socks are on your head, what's on your feet?

(CONTINUED)

BILL

My shoes.

(beat)

Do you think I'm stupid?

TED

Not at all.

BILL

I can't wear my shoes on my head.

TED

Your hat wouldn't fit.

BILL

Right, and they're too big. My hat  
is 6 7/8; my shoes are 12 wides.

TED

Those are some big feet!

BILL

They sure are.

TED

Did you always have big feet?

BILL

Since after birth, yeah.

(beat)

It was pretty tough to find shoes  
sometimes.

TED

I would think so.

BILL

My parents wanted to bronze my baby  
shoes, but they couldn't afford it.

TED

Bronzing is expensive.

BILL

I'm talking about the shoes.

(beat)

My dad used to say that I'd have to  
wear the boxes they came in.

Laughs from the audience.

(CONTINUED)

BILL (CONT'D)

I can't wear my work shoes on my head. They'd fall over my eyes. I wouldn't be able to see the pretty girls to know when to tip my hat, and I'd hate to be rude.

(beat)

You see know?

Laughs.

TED

Makes perfect sense.

BILL

Where are *your* socks?

TED

On my feet.

(beat)

That's the way *I* was brought up:  
"Foot-sock-shoe."

BILL

What did you say?

TED

"Foot-sock-shoe."

BILL

Gesundheit.

Loud laughs.

TED

I didn't sneeze.

BILL

Now I remember! Isn't that the new Chinese place over on Baltimore?

TED

Huh?

BILL

Foot-sock-shoe.

Loud laughs.

BILL (CONT'D)

I brought Candy there the other night.

(CONTINUED)

TED

You're *still* seeing her?

BILL

Oh yeah.

TED

How'd the date go?

BILL

She slapped me.

TED

Getting fresh?

BILL

Trying to.

Laughs, mostly from the guys.

TED

Maybe if you proposed, she'd be more open to your advances?

BILL

I doubt it. She has a way of stopping any movement.

Laughs.

BILL (CONT'D)

She finally met my Mom.

TED

How did that go?

BILL

Better than I thought it would. They're actually very much alike.

TED

A little Oedipus Conflict?

BILL

What?

TED

Oedipus. Surely, you know Oedipus.

BILL

I know some Eds, but none with that last name.

(CONTINUED)

20 CONTINUED: (8)

Chuckles.

BILL (CONT'D)  
Who's he?

TED  
It's not a he.

BILL  
A girl named "Ed?"  
(beat)  
Well, I guess if you can have a boy  
named Sue. . .

Loud laughs.

TED  
The Oedipus Conflict came from  
Freud.

BILL  
Freud who?

TED  
The father of psychiatry - Sigmund  
Freud.

BILL  
The sea monster?

TED  
What are you talking about?

BILL  
I wouldn't put too much faith into  
what that guy said.

TED  
Why not?

BILL  
How'd you like to lie down on your  
shrink's couch and realize the  
guy's a sea monster?

DISSOLVE TO:

21 INT. BOONE'S APARTMENT - LATER

21

Sebastian meows a couple of times and rubs up against his  
master's legs.

(CONTINUED)

21 CONTINUED:

Boone, back in the present day, is sitting at his kitchen table, dabbing at his red eyes with a handkerchief. His tea has gone cold.

As he starts putting on his shoes, there is a knock on the door.

Boone shakes his head.

BOONE

(calling)

Please go away! I told you I can't help you! Now leave me *alone*!

It is his friend, KRAMER. He is heard through the door.

KRAMER

What are you talking about, Ted?  
It's me: Kramer. Open up!

Boone finishes tying his laces, gets up, and hurriedly opens the door. He welcomes his friend inside, then quickly closes and locks it.

Kramer is roughly the same age as Boone, but entirely bald. He walks slightly hunched and carries a metal cane in one hand. He notices his friend's puffy eyes.

KRAMER (CONT'D)

Something wrong?

BOONE

Why do you ask that?

KRAMER

It looks like you've been crying.

BOONE

No, no. Just allergies.

He holds up the handkerchief as though it is proof.

KRAMER

I've known you all of my adult life. Since when do you have allergies?

BOONE

Never you mind that. They're my allergies, and I'll take care of them.

(CONTINUED)

KRAMER

If you insist.

(beat)

What was that about "going away?"

BOONE

Forget I ever said it.

KRAMER

Done. At my age, the less I have to  
keep in my head, the better.

(beat)

What's going on around here?

BOONE

Boy, you're *full* of questions  
today.

KRAMER

Well, it's a good way to get  
answers.

(beat)

Something happened outside.

BOONE

What?

KRAMER

I don't know. I missed whatever it  
was, but the gawkers were just  
breaking up when I got here.

He holds up Emma's framed picture with the broken glass.

KRAMER (CONT'D)

I found this on the sidewalk.

He hands it to Boone.

KRAMER (CONT'D)

What's that old picture of yours  
doing out on the street?

BOONE

(sniffs)

It's not mine.

He draws one finger along his old stage partner's face.

KRAMER

Careful of that glass.

(CONTINUED)

BOONE

Yeah, I. . . I will be.

Boone drifts off for a moment.

KRAMER

You alright?

BOONE

They must have taken her.

KRAMER

"Her" who. . . and who are "they?"

BOONE

The sensitivity cops. I think they grabbed Bill's granddaughter.

KRAMER

Why would they do that?

BOONE

She was here.

KRAMER

How'd she find you?

BOONE

Damned if I know.

(beat)

She told me who she was and said that Bill is . . dying.

KRAMER

Geez, that's too bad.

(beat)

What did she want?

BOONE

A joke. She said Bill wanted to hear one before he died.

KRAMER

Which one did you tell her?

BOONE

(longish beat)

None.

KRAMER

You can't remember even one joke?

BOONE

I don't know. I didn't try.

KRAMER

Why not?

BOONE

Because I'm a *coward*, alright! A meek, terrified, miserable coward.

(beat)

I thought she was a D.R.

KRAMER

Bill's granddaughter?

BOONE

*Anybody* can be one.

(beat)

You remember Paul Osborne?

KRAMER

Sure.

BOONE

Whoever thought that his own sister would -

KRAMER

Let's. . . Let's get back to today.

(beat)

What happened to Bill's granddaughter?

Boone says nothing, just looks uncomfortable.

KRAMER (CONT'D)

(amazed)

You turned her away?

BOONE

(ashamed)

Yes.

KRAMER

And now the cops have her.

BOONE

I think so. She wouldn't have just left this picture behind.

KRAMER

You have to make this right.

(CONTINUED)

BOONE

How's a little guy like me going to  
stand up to the sensitivity cops  
and Tomlinson?

KRAMER

It won't be just you. The Society  
will help out.

BOONE

*Shhhh!* No one can know about that.  
It's supposed to be a secret.

KRAMER

Ted, I'm not a D.R., and neither  
are you. You're a bundle of nerves!

BOONE

Shouldn't I be?

KRAMER

You got anything "medicinal"  
around?

BOONE

That's not always the answer.

KRAMER

Chicken soup.

BOONE

Huh?

KRAMER

It couldn't hurt.

BOONE

The cops have eavesdropping  
equipment all around. They're  
chomping at the bit to bring in  
innocent civilians like me.

KRAMER

Says who?

BOONE

Says everybody.

(beat)

I'd vanish into the woodwork. It'd  
be like no one ever knew me. . .  
like. . . like I never existed.

(CONTINUED)

KRAMER

*I'd* remember you.

BOONE

Great - one old-timer.

KRAMER

I think you're having delusions.

BOONE

(sarcastically)

Oh yeah?

KRAMER

You think that Tomlinson and his gang have nothing better to do than bring an old hooper in for questioning?

BOONE

You never know. They're always watching.

KRAMER

You're talking nonsense. The cops aren't omnipotent.

BOONE

I'm not so sure.

KRAMER

What good is the Society for the Preservation of Jokes if we don't help your old stage partner?

As if on cue, the cat meows.

KRAMER (CONT'D)

You tell him, Sebastian.

BOONE

(beat)

You're right.

(longish beat)

I'm ashamed.

KRAMER

You should be.

BOONE

Thanks a lot!

(CONTINUED)

21 CONTINUED: (7)

KRAMER

I'm too damn old to worry about  
your feelings.

BOONE

What's to do?

Kramer pauses for a moment to think.

KRAMER

We'll talk to Bradley. He's as  
close to a tech guy as we have. If  
anyone knows how to rescue the  
girl, it'll be him.

(beat)

C'mon.

They both head toward the door. Sebastian lets out a loud  
meow.

KRAMER (CONT'D)

He'll be back later.

Boone unlocks the door. He speaks to the cat.

BOONE

You mind the place.

They walk out into the corridor. Boone closes and locks the  
door behind them.

BOONE (CONT'D)

Will Bradley be at the bar?

KRAMER

He should be. It's his watch.

Suddenly, there is a loud commotion down the hall. Furniture  
is being overturned, fragile things are being broken. There  
is unintelligible yelling and some crying.

BOONE

(alarmed)

What the. . .

Kramer looks and sees the white uniforms of the sensitivity  
police.

KRAMER

It's the cops!

BOONE

What are they doing here?

(CONTINUED)

21 CONTINUED: (8)

KRAMER

Probably looking for you. They nabbed the girl outside your building. They must think you're an accomplice.

(beat)

Move!

FADE TO:

22 INT. TIM RILEY'S BAR - LATER

22

The same bar from Grandpa's earlier memory, but in much disrepair. Dusty and dirty, with only a few working overhead lights.

Boone and Kramer speak to BRADLEY, another member of the Society. He is a senior citizen as well, with only a crown of silver hair around his head and pronounced wrinkles on his face.

Seated at the bar, Bradley holds a long, metallic kind of gun before him.

BOONE

A sonic gun?

Bradley picks it up and turns it over in both hands.

BRADLEY

Uh huh. I can rig it to fire a burst that will cover Tomlinson's office building. We'll only get one shot. It uses a lot of power.

KRAMER

What will happen to the people inside?

BRADLEY

The pulse will render everyone unconscious for 45 minutes or so.

BOONE

Or so?

BRADLEY

There's no precise formula. It partly depends on the amount of people in the building.

(beat)

We'll have to move fast.

(CONTINUED)

KRAMER

We'll have enough time to retrieve  
the girl and bring her here.

BOONE

You sure you want to get her  
involved with us?

KRAMER

She pretty much already is.

BOONE

It might cause trouble for the  
Society.

BRADLEY

And if we don't. . .

KRAMER

What choice do we have? Can you  
think of another place to keep her  
out of sight for a while?

BOONE

Good point.  
(beat)  
Will firing the gun hurt her?

BRADLEY

A little, but it should take only a  
minute or so to knock everyone out.

BOONE

How long will you need to prepare?

BRADLEY

About an hour.

KRAMER

Get on it, please.

BRADLEY

Right.

KRAMER

So, who's the rescue party?

BRADLEY

I'm in. I'll need to be there to  
fire the sonic pulse anyway.

BOONE

Me too.

(CONTINUED)

22 CONTINUED: (2)

KRAMER

Me three.  
(beat)  
How can we fail?

FADE TO:

23 INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - LATER

23

Tomlinson paces anxiously in the large room, waiting for his interrogation subject. The walls are lined with video screens and the blinking lights of computers at work. Near the center of the room is a padded chair attached to a strong base. A harsh light shines down from the ceiling onto the chair.

A metal door in the corner of the room slides open. The burly deputy who seized Emma off the street with Lawrence brings her in. She is still kicking and screaming, though with less energy now. He pushes and drags her towards the center chair. Tomlinson slowly approaches, looking pleased.

The deputy forces her into the chair and departs without a word. Emma straightens up. She glares at the Director, who is inexplicably - to her - smiling.

TOMLINSON

Welcome, Miss Carlson.

EMMA

I can't say I care much for your welcome.

TOMLINSON

All that matters is that you are here.

EMMA

*Why* am I here?

TOMLINSON

To offer testimony.

EMMA

About?

Tomlinson looks amused.

TOMLINSON

You know.

(CONTINUED)

EMMA

I don't.

(beat)

I was going about my business when  
your pals grabbed me off the street  
and brought me here.

TOMLINSON

Lies!

EMMA

I don't know what you think I'm up  
to but -

TOMLINSON

Always the first cry of the guilty.

EMMA

I didn't do anything, I'm innocent,  
and I'm leaving.

She starts to rise from the center chair.

TOMLINSON

I wouldn't do that.

EMMA

No?

TOMLINSON

My "pals" - as you called them -  
have orders to kill anyone who  
leaves this room without a formal  
dismissal from me.

She sits back down.

TOMLINSON (CONT'D)

(chuckles)

I knew that would change your mind.

EMMA

(sighs)

Let's get this over with.

Tomlinson begins pacing the room like an attorney addressing  
a non-existent jury. He grabs Emma's file off of a computer  
control panel.

TOMLINSON

Let's start with the basics: Name  
and age?

(CONTINUED)

EMMA  
You already know them.

TOMLINSON  
(adamantly)  
I said name and age.

EMMA  
(sighs)  
Emma Carlson. 22.

TOMLINSON  
I understand you live in Sector  
009.

EMMA  
Yes.  
(beat)  
So what? A lot of people do.

He picks up a remote. As he mentions each of the following names, a picture of the person appears on a video screen directly in front of Emma.

TOMLINSON  
People like:  
(beat)  
James Reese.  
(beat)  
Abdul Pierce.  
(beat)  
Keaton Zamora.  
(beat)  
Zach Stark.

EMMA  
What's the point of this?

TOMLINSON  
All these people live in your  
Sector.

EMMA  
And?

TOMLINSON  
You are friends with them?

EMMA  
Never saw them before.

TOMLINSON  
*More lies.*

(CONTINUED)

EMMA

We're not going to get anywhere if  
all you do is tell me that I'm  
lying.

TOMLINSON

You say you know none of these  
people.

EMMA

That's what I'm saying.

(beat)

What did they do?

TOMLINSON

They and others have been accused  
of anti-governmental sedition.

He indicates the chair Emma is sitting in as he speaks.

TOMLINSON (CONT'D)

Some of them sat only recently in  
that very chair.

EMMA

And where are they now?

TOMLINSON

That is privileged information.

EMMA

Are they alive?

TOMLINSON

That is none of your concern.

EMMA

So you think, because they all live  
in the same Sector I do, that I  
must be part of whatever trouble  
they're causing?

TOMLINSON

Precisely.

EMMA

(chuckles)

TOMLINSON

You *dare* laugh at me?

EMMA

You couldn't be more wrong.

(CONTINUED)

TOMLINSON

So you are the start of a *new* problem then?

EMMA

I'm not any problem. I just want -

TOMLINSON

I am aware of your actions over the past two or so days, Miss Carlson.

EMMA

What are you -

Tomlinson reads from the file.

TOMLINSON

We have been alerted about your Internet activity, and your visits to Commonwealth Books and the local library.

(beat)

We even heard from a farmer, of whom you asked some very unusual questions.

EMMA

All harmless.

TOMLINSON

They would disagree. They all reported their interactions with you to us.

EMMA

Because they're afraid.

TOMLINSON

Because they are good citizens who value a safe society.

(beat)

You have been seeking information that is in direct violation of the terms of the Sensitivity Act.

He holds the file up and then drops it onto the control panel.

TOMLINSON (CONT'D)

We have it all documented.

(beat)

You are in violation.

(CONTINUED)

EMMA

All this because I inquired about jokes?

TOMLINSON

A forbidden topic.

EMMA

Why?

TOMLINSON

I owe no one an explanation - especially anyone sitting in the center chair.

(beat)

The Act is what it is. You are expected to follow it - as is every citizen.

EMMA

You're afraid I'm starting up some trouble along the lines of what the other 009ers did.

TOMLINSON

I am concerned, *never* afraid.

EMMA

Whatever you call it, don't worry. I'm a one-woman show.

TOMLINSON

(disbelievingly)

Really?

EMMA

Time to leave?

TOMLINSON

Not so quickly.

EMMA

But I have someplace important to go.

TOMLINSON

Where?

(beat)

Tell me.

Emma says nothing. Tomlinson grabs the folder again and opens it.

(CONTINUED)

TOMLINSON (CONT'D)

You were not seeking assistance  
with your plan when you visited the  
Standish Arms Apartments?

EMMA

No comment.

TOMLINSON

Who were you going to see?

Emma is silent.

TOMLINSON (CONT'D)

Why were you looking into a  
forbidden topic. . . and don't tell  
me it was for a thesis.

EMMA

I plead the Fifth.

TOMLINSON

(laughs)

The Fifth?

EMMA

My right against self-  
incrimination.

TOMLINSON

I know what the Fifth is!

(chuckles)

What a quaint idea.

EMMA

I have the right not to -

TOMLINSON

You have *no* rights here.

(beat)

It's to laugh. That "right" was  
rendered null and void years ago.  
It may exist on *paper*, but not in  
practice any longer.

(beat)

Why were you looking into a  
forbidden topic?

EMMA

Curiosity.

(CONTINUED)

TOMLINSON

(getting angry)

I warn you, young lady, I am  
invested with *incredible* powers.  
You can be severely punished.

Emma finally understands and is amused.

EMMA

You're afraid of them - afraid of  
jokes.

TOMLINSON

Nonsense!

EMMA

A big, *powerful* man like you is  
afraid of words.

TOMLINSON

They are *outlawed* words.

(beat)

You *will* answer me. Who are you  
working with?

EMMA

I told you: No one.

TOMLINSON

I don't believe you.

EMMA

Then we're going to get nowhere.

(beat)

Why are jokes wrong? What's so bad  
about laughter?

TOMLINSON

I am the questioner, not you!

EMMA

If you want to waste your time  
investigating me, go ahead.

TOMLINSON

We *will* investigate, Miss Carlson,  
and *thoroughly*. Your cohorts -

A sudden, ear-piercing whine, growing steadily louder, fills  
the interrogation room. Emma and Tomlinson scream in great  
pain, jamming their palms against their ears.

(CONTINUED)

23 CONTINUED: (8)

Emma falls from the center chair, unconscious. Tomlinson lasts only a few seconds longer.

FADE TO:

24 INT. AGENCY OFFICES - MOMENTS LATER

24

Boone, Kramer, and Bradley push a wheeled gurney about the office floor. The place is absolutely silent, in comparison to the abundance of typing noise earlier. Some people, men and women, lie unconscious on the carpet. Many more are hunched over their computer keyboards - not having left their spots during the sonic attack.

Boone looks around.

BOONE

This floor?

KRAMER

So I've heard.

Boone points to the right.

BOONE

I'll take the ones on this side.

Unsure of where the interrogation room is, the three men start opening every door along the hall. Bradley wheels the gurney along with him. After a few tries, Kramer finds the right room.

KRAMER

(calling)

Guys, down here!

Emma is lying unconscious on the floor, not having moved an inch since she collapsed from the sonic gun's blast. They easily pick her up, place her on the gurney, and cover her with a blanket.

As they start to leave, Boone notices that Kramer is not with them. He sees his friend slowly walking along the far wall, looking at the computers and video screens.

Boone walks to him.

BOONE

Time to go.

(CONTINUED)

KRAMER  
(longish beat)  
How much time do we have?

BOONE  
I don't know.  
(beat)  
Bradley?

BRADLEY  
Not long.  
(beat)  
Why?

KRAMER  
We may never get access to this  
place again.  
(beat)  
How about giving Tomlinson a little  
something to remember us by?

BOONE  
I don't think so.

KRAMER  
But why? Imagine the blow we could  
strike against these fools!

BOONE  
We came here to rescue Emma. We've  
done that. We should go while the  
getting is good.

KRAMER  
But our chance is now! We could  
take Tomlinson too.

BRADLEY  
*What?*  
(beat)  
That's not what the Society's  
about.

BOONE  
I agree with Bradley. I like the  
idea, and I'd be right with you if  
it was just us. . . but we have  
precious cargo here.

He indicates the young lady on the gurney.

BOONE (CONT'D)  
We owe her safety.

(CONTINUED)

24 CONTINUED: (2)

Kramer looks unhappy, but realizes Boone is right.

KRAMER  
(sotto voce)  
One day. One *fine* day.  
(beat)  
OK. Let's go.

FADE TO:

25 INT. TIM RILEY'S BAR - LATER

25

Boone and Bradley wheel Emma in on the gurney. Kramer, uneasy on his cane, leads the way - making sure everything is clear. He stops at an old couch.

KRAMER  
How 'bout here?

BOONE  
Looks good.

They wheel the gurney as close as possible to the couch. Boone is at Emma's head, Bradley at her feet.

BOONE (CONT'D)  
One, two, *three*!

On "three," they pick up the unconscious young lady. Kramer yanks the gurney away. Boone and Bradley gently place Emma down on the couch.

Bradley pulls a folding chair up beside her. Looking at his watch, he takes Emma's pulse. He barely has time to finish before Boone speaks.

BOONE (CONT'D)  
(anxiously)  
Well?

BRADLEY  
Just fine. She should be coming around shortly.

He spreads the blanket from the gurney over her.

BRADLEY (CONT'D)  
You might want to have some aspirin ready. She'll likely have a headache.

(CONTINUED)

KRAMER

Can you get those, Boone?

BOONE

Why me?

KRAMER

Because Bradley is busy, and you're more mobile than I am.

He taps his cane against the floor.

Boone sighs and reluctantly goes.

He is approaching the men's room when he hears the sounds: A swirling noise like a slow-motion blender, and a ping-ping noise akin to ricochetting bullets.

He walks toward the metal and wood structure the noises are emanating from. It is approximately eight feet tall but only as wide as a closet. A speaker has been built into one wooden support. Boone hears the swirling noise grow, sensing his presence.

There are a few more ricochetting sounds as some things in the closet bang against the heavy-duty window. He looks at the pockmarked glass.

Whatever is inside wants out.

He shakes his head.

BOONE

(sotto voce)

The answer's in there. I *know* it.

FADE TO:

Lawrence, disheveled and still a bit groggy, hurriedly walks into the room. He sees Tomlinson stirring on the floor. He rushes to his boss, kneels down beside him, and begins tapping on his cheeks.

LAWRENCE

(anxiously)

Sir?

(beat)

Sir?

Tomlinson wakes suddenly and sits bolt upright on the floor.

(CONTINUED)

TOMLINSON

What. . . What happened?

LAWRENCE

I'm not sure. I just woke up myself. Everyone in the office was unconscious.

Alarmed, Tomlinson springs to his feet.

TOMLINSON

The girl!

Both men look about.

LAWRENCE

I'll order a search of the entire building.

Lawrence turns to leave. Tomlinson looks at his wristwatch.

TOMLINSON

Don't waste your time.

LAWRENCE

Director?

TOMLINSON

Your deputy brought Miss Carlson in here at noon.

(beat)

It's past 1:00. She's long gone by now.

LAWRENCE

Wasn't she knocked out too from . . . whatever that was?

TOMLINSON

I remember her passing out and falling to the floor. I guess I did the same.

LAWRENCE

Someone must have come and taken her out of here.

TOMLINSON

Exactly - which gives me all the reason I need to believe she's involved in the Sector 009 case.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

26 CONTINUED: (2)

TOMLINSON (CONT'D)

No rookie would have friends  
capable of rendering everyone in  
this office unconscious and then  
retrieving their comrade!

LAWRENCE

We'll find her. They won't get away  
with this.

TOMLINSON

Get a portable comm tracker, and  
tune it to channel 6.

LAWRENCE

A homing device?

TOMLINSON

I thought her cohorts might try  
something. I had it planted on her.  
(beat)  
She'll soon be back in my custody.

FADE TO:

27 INT. TIM RILEY'S BAR - MOMENTS LATER

27

Emma is groggily waking up. Boone stands above her. Kramer  
sits on the folding chair to her right.

BOONE

(gently)

Wake up, miss. Wake up.

After a moment, Emma awakens. At first, she is confused.

EMMA

Mr. Boone?

BOONE

That's right.

Alarmed, she springs up on the couch, wide-eyed, and resting  
on her elbows.

EMMA

Tomlinson!

Kramer reaches out and puts a hand on her left shoulder.

KRAMER

No worries. He's not here. You're  
safe.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Confused, she looks around the room.

EMMA

Where. . . Where am I?

BOONE

Tim Riley's Bar.

EMMA

Grandpa mentioned this place to me.  
Something about a man named. . .  
O'Flaherty.

BOONE

God, that was *ages* ago.  
(beat)  
How do you feel?

EMMA

A bit of a headache.

She slowly sits up. Boone hands her two aspirin and a glass of water, which she happily takes.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Thank you.

She swallows the tablets and looks at him.

EMMA (CONT'D)

I don't understand. Earlier, you -

BOONE

I'm sorry about that. I thought you  
were a designated reporter.

EMMA

How did I get -

KRAMER

We rescued you: The three of us.

EMMA

And that *horrible* noise?

BRADLEY

I'm sorry, but we had to make sure  
everybody was unconscious before we  
moved in.

Emma suddenly remembers.

(CONTINUED)

27 CONTINUED: (2)

EMMA

I have to get to the hospital.  
Grandpa -

She tries to stand, but her legs are unreliable.

BRADLEY

Easy now! The effects of the sonic  
gun don't wear off *that* quickly.

EMMA

I'm fine. Really.

KRAMER

We may be able to help your  
grandfather.

EMMA

(eagerly)  
How?

FADE TO:

28 INT. TIM RILEY'S BAR - MOMENTS LATER

28

Emma holds onto Boone's arm as he slowly walks her towards the swirling noise. Bradley and Kramer are behind them. The sound becomes louder as they approach, the pinging noise more urgent. Emma is startled by the first couple of ricochets.

They stop at the wooden door of the thing.

EMMA

What. . . What is this?

BOONE

A capture closet. It's kind of like  
a safe.

EMMA

What's inside?

BOONE

Jokes. All the jokes known to man.

EMMA

I was right! They *do* still exist.

She admiringly touches the closet with one hand.

EMMA (CONT'D)

How did you -

(CONTINUED)

BOONE

It wasn't me. I don't have the technical know-how to build a marvel like this.

EMMA

Who did?

KRAMER

Bob Chapman, one of our Society members.

EMMA

Society?

BRADLEY

We call it the SPJ - the Society for the Preservation of Jokes.

BOONE

When jokes were outlawed, Bob found a way to gather them all together - like the Pied Piper. He put them in this closet he invented. We've been guarding them for years, keeping them from people like Tomlinson, who would want them destroyed.

Emma notices the speaker on the door frame.

EMMA

Can I hear a joke?

BOONE

Sadly, no. It doesn't work any more.

(beat)

Bob died a few years ago. We don't know how to fix it.

Emma runs a hand along the pockmarked window.

EMMA

The jokes want out.

KRAMER

We know.

EMMA

Tell me a joke. *Please*. So I can tell Grandpa.

(CONTINUED)

BOONE

(sighs)

I wish I could.

EMMA

Why *can't* you? I'm not one of those reporters.

KRAMER

It's not that.

BRADLEY

When jokes were outlawed, the government realized that certain people's livelihoods depended on telling them.

BOONE

Like me.

BRADLEY

They gave us a choice: Have your brain scrubbed of all jokes so you can never repeat them or take the chance of the sensitivity cops overhearing you tell one. . . and face the consequences.

Emma is incredulous.

EMMA

They erased your memories?

BOONE

I chose the procedure over vanishing off the face of the Earth.

KRAMER

So did I.

BRADLEY

(ashamed)

Make that three.

(beat)

Actually, all our members did.

EMMA

How about Grandpa?

BOONE

He never belonged to the SPJ.

(CONTINUED)

EMMA

Did he get the same ultimatum. . .  
because he was half of your stage  
act?

BOONE

I guess so.

EMMA

But he told me a joke in the  
hospital.

BOONE

(confused)

They must have. . . missed him.

KRAMER

Nice to know they're fallible.

BOONE

So Bill *can* remember jokes?

EMMA

Only one.

(beat)

When the speaker *did* work, what  
could you hear?

BOONE

A jumble of words - every joke  
being told at once. Nothing  
distinct.

EMMA

Could you talk to them?

BOONE

No. The speaker only worked one  
way.

EMMA

(beat)

What if *I* went in there?

BOONE

The jokes would escape while the  
door was open.

EMMA

I'd be fast.

BRADLEY

It could be dangerous to you.

(CONTINUED)

EMMA

Or it could be fine.

(beat)

I have to try it. . . for Grandpa.

It's all he wants.

BOONE

*I'll* do it. He was my stage partner.

EMMA

No. You've all done so much already.

(beat)

Me. It should be me.

BOONE

You're *sure* of this?

EMMA

(beat)

Not really.

FADE TO:

Emma quickly steps inside the small structure, shutting the door behind her. The swirling sound is much louder, but the ricochetting has stopped. There is a sudden burst of canned laughter.

Emma sees the jokes soaring around the closet. They look like fireflies, buzzing about each other but never touching. Suddenly, there is a cacophony of voices - male, female, and all accents (particularly brogues) - speaking together in gibberish.

Emma calls above the clatter.

EMMA

I can't understand you!

(beat)

I *want* to understand!

The jokes begin to zoom by her. She hears them all in a kind of echo as they do this.

VOICE 1

Take my wife, *please*.

(CONTINUED)

VOICE 2

This guy walks into a bar.

EMMA

(calling)

I have to talk to you!

VOICE 3

You'll have to sleep in the barn.

VOICE 4

A bear and a rabbit are talking in the woods.

EMMA

(calling)

It's very important!

VOICE 5

Calm down. You're two tents.

VOICE 6

We wanted to wait until the kids were dead.

VOICE 7

I'll drag him over to Main Street.

VOICE 8

Third base!

EMMA

(calling)

Can you hear me?

VOICE 9

Finding half a worm.

VOICE 10

A stick!

VOICE 11

Orange you glad I didn't say orange again?

VOICE 10

So I bit him.

EMMA

(calling)

Please!

(CONTINUED)

VOICE 11

Because seven ate nine.

VOICE 12

Because it was too far to walk.

VOICE 13

Does this taste funny to you?

VOICE 14

Why the long face?

There is a long burst of canned laughter.

EMMA

(calling)

Please! I need to talk. It's very important.

The swirling sound stops.

VOICE 1

Important?

Emma looks at the one flittering joke before her.

EMMA

You understand me?

VOICE 1

Of course. We are words, after all.

EMMA

I need your help.

VOICE 1

For what reason?

EMMA

I need a joke.

VOICE 1

You dare to make a request of us?

EMMA

I don't understand. I haven't caused you any trouble.

VOICE 1

We are prisoners here. Why have you done this?

(CONTINUED)

EMMA

I had nothing to do with it. It happened before I was born.

VOICE 1

Your kind has locked us away. Why?

EMMA

Please. I need -

VOICE 1

Why are we locked in here?

EMMA

You've been outlawed.

VOICE 1

Outlawed?

Three more jokes flutter up.

VOICE 2

Us?

VOICE 3

Why?

VOICE 4

We cause no harm.

EMMA

It wasn't *my* choice.

VOICE 1

Who is responsible?

EMMA

Politicians.

VOICE 1

Ah! They are *well* represented here.

VOICE 2

As are lawyers.

VOICE 3

And doctors.

VOICE 4

And bartenders.

(CONTINUED)

EMMA

I really do need your help. I  
wouldn't be here if -

VOICE 1

Untold, a joke has no life. We live  
to bring laughter to mankind. This  
prison is *not* an existence.

EMMA

Let me give *one* of you life.

VOICE 1

How?

EMMA

Tell me a joke.

VOICE 1

You *really* want to hear one?

EMMA

I do. I *certainly* do.

VOICE 1

What will you do with it?

EMMA

I'll take it with me into the  
world.

VOICE 1

Will you retell it?

EMMA

Yes.

VOICE 1

How often?

EMMA

At least once.

VOICE 1

(longish beat)

We have a better idea.

The swirling sound start again. It grows ever louder as all  
the jokes rise into the air, buzz around, and land on Emma -  
mostly on exposed skin, like her face. Nervous, she tries  
unsuccessfully to swat them away, like flies, but they have  
all latched on tightly. Finally the swirling sound stops.

(CONTINUED)

29 CONTINUED: (5)

Emma utters a piercing scream inside the capture closet and collapses to the floor. When she stops moving, the jokes fly off of her and happily buzz like mad all around the closet, causing a good deal of damage to the structure.

FADE TO:

30 EXT. CAPTURE CLOSET - MOMENTS LATER

30

All three Society members wait anxiously for Emma to step from the closet. Their faces register shock when they hear her scream.

They rise quickly, in time with the ricochetting sounds of the jokes damaging the closet.

Boone rushes to the door. He tugs on it, but the jokes' actions have swelled it. He calls to Bradley.

BOONE

Help me with this!

Bradley does as asked.

KRAMER

What about the jokes? They'll get out.

BOONE

The hell with them.

After a fair deal of pulling, Boone and Bradley successfully open the door. The wood squeaks and cracks as they do so.

Boone sees Emma out cold on the floor. With Bradley's help, he carries her back to the couch. Bradley tends to her.

BRADLEY

She's breathing.

Boone is relieved.

BOONE

Thank whatever God there is for small favors.

Bradley takes her pulse for a minute.

BRADLEY

Pulse is good.

Kramer looks at the capture closet's remains.

(CONTINUED)

KRAMER

Where did all the jokes go?

BOONE

We'll worry about that later.

FADE TO:

Emma lies on the couch. Boone, Kramer, and Bradley are around her. As she starts coming to, she makes a small sound. A giggle?

She moves her head from side to side and lets out another noise.

KRAMER

Is that. . . crying?

Emma comes back to consciousness and, after a short beat, laughs loudly for several seconds.

BOONE

Emma, what -

EMMA

Oh, these are *funny*! "To get to the other side."

She laughs a hearty, prolonged laugh.

KRAMER

I think we've found the missing jokes.

BOONE

She. . .

EMMA

They're a part of me now.

BOONE

How?

EMMA

I have no idea. I told them I needed their help, and *this* is what they did.

BRADLEY

You talked to. . .

(CONTINUED)

31 CONTINUED:

She chuckles again.

EMMA

Please, we have no time. We have to  
get to the hospital!

FADE TO:

32 INT. TOMLINSON'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

32

Tomlinson and Lawrence sit in the back seat, viewing Emma's  
position on the comm tracker.

LAWRENCE

*There, sir!*

TOMLINSON

She's in a *vehicle* now. Her co-  
conspirators must be with her.

LAWRENCE

It looks like they're heading for  
the hospital.

TOMLINSON

Driver, Mercy Hospital, and step on  
it.

FADE TO:

33 EXT. GRANDPA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

33

Emily and the three Society members rush down the corridor.  
The Doctor sees them and is confused. He hurries to Emma,  
avoiding all the obstacles like she did earlier.

DOCTOR

I called you *hours* ago. Where have  
you -

EMMA

I'll explain later.  
(beat)  
How's Grandpa?

DOCTOR

I'm afraid he's lapsed into a coma.

EMMA

Oh no!

(CONTINUED)

33 CONTINUED:

DOCTOR  
Who are these gentle-

EMMA  
I'll explain *that* later too. We  
need to see him.

DOCTOR  
*All* of you?

EMMA  
*Please.*

FADE TO:

34 INT. GRANDPA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

34

All of the medical equipment and monitors are still gathered around the old man's twin bed. The Society members seem surprised at his condition.

Emma, bending over the bed and speaking to her grandfather, is barely holding it together.

EMMA  
(teary)  
Grandpa, wake up! I have what you  
wanted. . . *Please* don't die!

There is the sound of a commotion in the hallway. The room door is quickly opened.

DOCTOR  
I can't let -

Tomlinson, Lawrence, and a couple of burly deputies walk into the room, weapons drawn.

TOMLINSON  
This is state business, Doctor. You  
*will* allow it.

He looks at the other people in the room.

TOMLINSON (CONT'D)  
Well, well, well.

He strides closer to Emma.

TOMLINSON (CONT'D)  
We meet again.

(CONTINUED)

Emma laughs under her breath, unable to silence it.

TOMLINSON (CONT'D)  
You find this *amusing*?

BOONE  
She doesn't find anything funny  
about being at the wrong end of  
*several* guns.

TOMLINSON  
How convenient to find you here  
with all your cohorts. It saves me  
a lot of time and trouble.  
(beat)  
Lawrence, round them up.

Lawrence gestures at his deputies to help him.

There is a loud *whoosh* noise. Emma's body heaves as the jokes  
leave her and buzz around the room like a swarm of bees.

LAWRENCE  
What in the name of. . .

TOMLINSON  
Destroy it!

A few shots are fired, to no avail. The jokes descend from a  
corner of the room and land all over Tomlinson, particularly  
on his face. A moment later, they drop off and fly away to a  
dimly lit area along the floor.

Tomlinson begins laughing hysterically. There is a look of  
fright in his eyes. He has no idea why he is doing this, and  
he cannot stop it.

LAWRENCE  
(very confused)  
Director, what. . .

TOMLINSON  
(trying to speak through  
uncontrolled laughter)  
Lawrence. . .

Agent Lawrence turns to Emma.

LAWRENCE  
What have you *done* to him?

EMMA  
None of us laid a hand on him.

(CONTINUED)

LAWRENCE

(adamantly)

What is happening to the Director?  
Tell me!

BOONE

He's been introduced to *jokes*.  
They're in charge of him now.

LAWRENCE

Foolishness!

BOONE

Have you ever known him to crack a  
smile, let alone laugh like *that*?

Tomlinson is laughing uncontrollably. Lawrence looks at him  
for a few seconds.

LAWRENCE

No.

TOMLINSON

(trying to speak through  
laughter)

I. . . I can't take -

LAWRENCE

Make it stop!

EMMA

We can't, but *he* can.

LAWRENCE

(eagerly)

How?

EMMA

The jokes want to live. They want  
to be allowed back into society.

LAWRENCE

*Impossible*. The Sensitivity Act -

BOONE

(fed up)

We know! We know!

LAWRENCE

Doctor, help him!

DOCTOR

How?

(CONTINUED)

EMMA  
(gently)  
Director, are you hearing jokes in  
your head?

Tomlinson continues to laugh.

EMMA (CONT'D)  
They're not so bad, are they?

TOMLINSON  
(through laughter)  
I. . . I. . .

EMMA  
You need to let them live again.

TOMLINSON  
Out of the question!

Tomlinson laughs a big belly laugh.

KRAMER  
If you don't, they'll never let you  
go.

TOMLINSON  
(through laughter)  
I can't live like. . .

EMMA  
Then you know what to do. You have  
the ear of everyone in Washington.  
Make the change!

No one notices Grandpa awaken from his coma. He takes a few  
seconds to scan the room. He speaks weakly.

GRANDPA  
Emma, what's going on?

EMMA  
Grandpa!

He sees his friends.

GRANDPA  
What are you three. . .

EMMA  
I know the answer.

(CONTINUED)

34 CONTINUED: (4)

GRANDPA  
To what, honey?

EMMA  
Why did the chicken cross the road?

GRANDPA  
Why?

EMMA  
To get to the other side.

Grandpa laughs at the riddle's answer. Soon, Emma and his friends join in.

FADE TO:

35 INT. GRANDPA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - TWO WEEKS LATER

35

Across the screen: Two weeks later.

The medical equipment is still present, flashing many colors. Emma sits talking to her grandfather. The TV is on, but muted, in the top-right corner of the room.

Emma notices a breaking news banner on the screen.

She grabs the remote and turns the volume up. A female newscaster speaks from a news desk.

NEWSCASTER  
. . . bringing you this breaking news.

(beat)  
The House today passed a bill, requested by Director Tomlinson approximately two weeks ago, doing away with *all* the provisions of the Sensitivity Act, which has been in effect for decades. The bill is now on its way to the president's desk. He has said he will sign it.

Grandpa grabs the remote and turns off the TV. He chuckles.

GRANDPA  
Can you *believe* those fools? All the trouble they went through to pass this Act, and now. . .

He laughs loudly for a few seconds, and then. . . nothing.

(CONTINUED)

35 CONTINUED:

The heart monitor flat lines.

Emma jumps from her chair and watches her grandfather pass on. She grabs one of his hands and holds it tightly as she begins weeping.

EMMA

Rest in peace, you dear, *dear* man.

(beat)

I'm. . . I'm glad you got your  
wish.

FADE TO BLACK.