

A Writer's Room

written by Justin Borak

punch-ups by  
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Funded through the Sean Cercone Playwriting Grant in partnership  
with *Broadway Licensing*.

## CHARACTERS:

STEVEN - wrote for a right-wing political show similar to Alex Jones or Steven Crowder if they were comedy-centric. Self-proclaimed Libertarian. Dressed casually, possibly has an American Flag tattoo or socks, something small, nothing over the top.

AMBER - wrote for a Daily Show/John Oliver type political-satire centric show. Dressed casually (like she's done this before). A little jaded but truly loves this craft.

DEREK - primarily sketch/improv comedian based out of Chicago. Wearing jeans and a flannel open over a tee shirt. Excited to be there.

TOBY - 20, comedian on the newest short-video app, DITR (Diamond in the Rough). Dressed in free branded merch and Jordans. Trying to prove himself, but sometimes a childish douche. Has asthma.

HOLLY - writer for an early morning show. Dressed well in business casual. Kinda ditzy but great writer, peace-keeper.

MAN IN WHITE COAT - Any age, a worker bee in a white coat. Helpful, straight forward.

WOMAN IN WHITE COAT - Any age, colleagues with Man in Coat. Silent but in control of the situation.

## SETTING:

A unit-set of a blank gray conference room in a generic city.

The modern room is decorated sparsely with boring art that looks like it was pulled from a doctor's waiting room.

There isn't much in the room. A large conference table with five nice office chairs. There is one door that the Man in White Coat comes in and out of.

There is a small "kitchenette" area stage left including a small countertop, a mini fridge, a sink, a few glass bottles of water, a basket of snacks, and a platter with some eclairs and a glass cloche covering them. The room can have few other basics within (a small side table, a coffee maker on the counter, etc...) but it should still feel somewhat sterile and empty. A *12 Angry Men* vibe in the room.

The room also has a keyboard and little piano bench in one corner, as well as a working clock on the wall.

Finally, on the table in the room there are yellow legal pads and newspapers stacked up surrounded by different pens (black, blue and red) and pencils.

Throughout the show we see the Man and Woman in the White Coats on a platform above the room, they are just observing and quietly talking to each other, they should never be heard. The woman should be the dominant of the two.

**OPEN JOKE SECTION** - Put together an improv-based section surrounding topical information lines within the theme. Write a few two line jokes for some of the writers to "pitch" in real time. Make sure the characters are pitching jokes in their voices.

"/" indicates where the next line of dialogue begins.

"-" indicates that a line has been cut off before it's finished

Any references that have become irrelevant can be changed for the joke.

Don't feel trapped at the table, the writers should move around the room as much as they or the director feel is natural.

This is a comedy that reads at the speed of a sitcom. If given the choice, go for the faster, funnier option. This play dies a shameful death without tight pacing.

**ACT 1**

The room is empty. We hear voices from outside the door.

MAN (O.S.)  
-the work room will be right up here-

STEVEN (O.S.)  
Why does it feel like we're in the hallway of a dentist?

MAN (O.S.)  
I'm sorry about it but...

The door opens and a MAN IN WHITE COAT leads five people into the room, AMBER, HOLLY, STEVEN, DEREK, and TOBY.

MAN  
...hopefully this is better.

STEVEN  
Yes. Now, it's the waiting room of a dentist.

STEVEN crosses to the chair at the "head of the table". TOBY sits behind the keyboard and begins to play the first minute of *Für Elise* by Beethoven. For the rest of the play he will only play this one minute cut of *Für Elise* when he sits to play and nothing else. Holly finds a seat and quietly settles in while Amber and Derek both walk around inspecting the room a bit.

MAN  
Looks like you found the piano you asked for. Over on the counter you'll see an assortment of snacks and beverages, and your tools are on the table.

DEREK  
(at the counter)  
They have eclairs.

AMBER  
Tools being...

MAN

Today's *Times* and notebooks. Pens and /  
pencils.

HOLLY

Is there red ink?

MAN takes out a red G2 pen from his  
coat and hands it to her.

MAN

Yup, and here is the G2 like you wanted.

HOLLY

Wonderful.

AMBER

I still don't understand why we can't have our  
laptops, the *Times* might not have everything  
we /need-

MAN

The producers feel that a good writing staff  
can put together a monologue with the tools we  
have supplied. You all have some time, I'll  
come back sporadically to see if I can get you  
anything.

AMBER

Is that all?

MAN

Yes, *please be funny.*

The MAN closes the door behind him  
as he leaves and the writers  
quietly spread around the room  
until Steven attempts to take  
charge.

STEVEN

Ok, let's get to /work-

AMBER

This is weird, right?

DEREK

I guess.

HOLLY

It all feels sort of clinical.

AMBER

Exactly!

TOBY

Yeah, I kinda expected a comedy writers room to have like kombucha on tap and unnecessary neon signs, you know?

STEVEN

And I don't know why we're doing this together-

DEREK

Is that weird?

STEVEN

Yeah, usually you just send packets in. I've never had an in-person, group...audition-thing before.

TOBY

Maybe it's normal for this show?

HOLLY

Does anyone even know what show we're trying to get a job at?

AMBER

Nope, my agent said they're keeping it under wraps. Don't even know the network.

DEREK

So maybe this whole thing IS normal...secret stuff can be confusing. Like what's in a chicken nugget? We don't know.

TOBY

It's all still weird.

Beat.

AMBER

Whenever we brought in a new writer, we would try them out as a guest pen. Bring em' in, see if the chemistry was there. Our room didn't look like the set of *12 Angry Men*, but maybe it's like that? They wanna test chemistry?

STEVEN

What show did you work on?

AMBER

The Simon Show. Five years.

TOBY

I loved the Simon Show, when he would dump slime on celebrities at their family members funerals...I would die.

AMBER

It was fine, lots of bullshit segments in those final years.

STEVEN

I thought that SNL guy who took over kept the /writers-

AMBER

No, he kept a few but mainly brought in his own staff.

HOLLY

That sucks.

DEREK

You would think being on that show for five years, you'd get offered /something better-

HOLLY

Jesus, man-

DEREK

Oh, sorry, I didn't mean to be a /dick-

AMBER

It's fine. I got offered some sitcom job my friends are working on, but I wanna stay in late night. Where did you all work last?

Beat.

AMBER (CONT'D)

Any of you work on *Colin*?

Beat. Derek adjusts awkwardly in his chair.

AMBER

Why is no one talking? (To Derek) You, where you coming from?

DEREK

Chicago. Well, Chicago and Amsterdam. And I wrote for my undergrad's satire magazine so, Baton Rouge too.

TOBY

LSU? I'm looking there.

DEREK

It's pretty. Lots of bridges.

HOLLY

Like railroad bridges or /bridges for-



AMBER

Who'd you write for in Chicago?

DEREK

...*Second City*. And my sketch team, *2 Wrongs Make a KITE*. We all met in a park-

STEVEN

Holy shit, that's dumb.

AMBER

You've never written before?

DEREK

(grasping at straws)

Not monologue jokes, and not for money but I've taken classes before and one of my pieces won Best 90s Themed Sketch at LaughLaugh Fest last year in Milwaukee!

TOBY

Milwaukee?

AMBER

It's fine, you know how to write a two-line joke right?

DEREK

(getting out of his chair)

YES! Especially if we improvise a bit before, even just a game gets me going like WooshWhoa or Story /Circle-

STEVEN

Nope. I'm Steven-

DEREK

Oh, yeah, I'm Derek.

AMBER

Wait, we never said our names? Amber-

TOBY

Toby.

HOLLY

My name is Holly and I'm really /excited to get to know-

STEVEN

(Sarcastic)

That's so exciting, Holly! Let's all sign each other's yearbooks and not get asked to prom.

Steven's rude comment quiets the room. He comes back calmer.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

Steven. Wrote for Miles Daxx when he was on and the last 4 years been writing comedy for the Internet.

TOBY

Is that it?

STEVEN

That's it. Next-

AMBER

Where on the Internet?

STEVEN

It doesn't matter /where on-

AMBER

Ok, now I wanna know more-

DEREK

It's fine man, if you wrote for some shitty web-show, we've all been there.

TOBY

And it can't be as bad as the guy who did improv in the park-

DEREK

We *rehearsed* in the park, not performed.

HOLLY

Where'd you perform?

DEREK

Laundromats and the back of biker bars mainly-

AMBER

Back to the ominous Internet writer, where'd ya work?

STEVEN

Like I said, it doesn't matter-

AMBER

The more you say that, the more intrigued I get.

HOLLY

Yeah, just tell us.

STEVEN

Fine. I don't give a shit. I wrote for *The 11 Were Right*.

The whole crew reacts to this as though Steven has put something toxic on the table. Amber gets out of her chair.

AMBER

Jesus-

TOBY

Oh /man-

AMBER

SERIOUSLY?

TOBY

That's so funny.

DEREK

I thought all those writers were Fox News people who got Me Too'd.

STEVEN

Fuck you guys, a job is a job.

HOLLY

I'm sorry, what is /*The 11*-

AMBER

*The 11 Were Right*...like the states in the Confederacy

HOLLY

They have a show about that?

DEREK

It's like a right-wing comedy show-

TOBY

Kinda like Fox News and Eric Andre had a very racist /baby-

STEVEN

Ok, I didn't name it. I just worked for them, I didn't even write any of the shitty jokes. I wrote lines for the field reporter.

DEREK

That guy doesn't write his own stuff?

STEVEN

Nope. I was in a squad and I followed my orders. As /comedians-

AMBER

You would think someone throwing eggs at a Planned Parenthood would be able to come up a few "libtard" filler jokes on their /own-

STEVEN

Ok, well they couldn't and I did. It paid well and I followed my chain of command. That's the end of it.

Beat.

AMBER

Did you agree with it?

Beat.

STEVEN

No.

Beat.

DEREK

So, you're not a Republican?

STEVEN

NO. Not that it would be a bad thing, there's a large difference between a far-right extremist and a fiscal /Republican-

AMBER

Jesus.

TOBY

You sound like my dad-

HOLLY

So, what are you?

Beat.

AMBER

What are you?

STEVEN

I don't have to answer /that-

AMBER

Come on.

STEVEN

No one in this room has to disclose what they /are politically-

DEREK

Liberal.

HOLLY

Liberal.

AMBER

Liberal.

TOBY

Whatever my friends tell me is the nicer one...

Beat.

TOBY

Uh, the one with women.

AMBER

Steven?

Beat.

STEVEN

Jesus, fine. I'm a Libertarian.

Amber walks away from the table annoyed and goes to the kitchenette. Holly and Derek also seemed a displeased with his anticlimactic answer.

STEVEN

WHAT?

DEREK

Being a Libertarian is like being agnostic.

HOLLY

(searching)

It's just kinda something someone says when they don't exactly want to make a /decision-

AMBER

It's a COP-OUT.

STEVEN

Whatever, I'm here. You're stuck with me, and I'm pretty sure we wouldn't all be in this nondescript, clinical fucking room if we didn't all need the work.

Silence.

STEVE

Exactly. Let's just move on and realize I won this argument.

AMBER

(to herself)

Shut up.

DEREK

Alright, let's boost the mood, who's next?

AMBER

Kid at the piano, why are you quiet /now?

TOBY

I'm not a kid. I'm 20.

AMBER

(mocking)

Not a kid?

TOBY

And maybe I don't wanna talk because you've just went in on the last guy and this doesn't seem like the most fun ice breaker /game-

STEVEN

Don't people your age love to talk about themselves?

HOLLY

(To Toby) Wait, I know you.

DEREK

You do?

TOBY

Come on, dude.

HOLLY

Yeah, you were on my last show. Aren't you @BRObyToby? (pronounced: at-Bro by Toby)

AMBER

(bursting out in laughter)

The fuck is that?!

Everyone kinda chuckles a bit. Toby get defensive.

TOBY

It's my username on DITR.

STEVEN

What the hell is "Deeter"?

TOBY

Diamond in the Rough, dude.

DEREK

Isn't that mainly like middle schoolers dancing?

TOBY

(over-compensating)

There is ACTUALLY an impressive comedy scene on there!

AMBER

(To Holly) What does he do?

HOLLY

Sketches a lot. I remember a lot of like wig stuff- OH, and he does pranks!

TOBY

You're killing me, lady.

DEREK

WAIT. I fucking know you, you're the dude who moans in people's ears on the beach.

Beat.

AMBER

...what?

STEVEN

Is it like sexual?

TOBY

NO. It's not sexual- it's funny and, fucking, I don't know, man. It gets views.

AMBER

(To Derek) Are his sketches any better?

DEREK

Uh, (To Toby) are you the guy who does "My Dumbass Girlfriend"?

AMBER

WHAT?

TOBY

NO... Not anymore!

STEVEN

God, that sounds bad.

AMBER

(laughing)

AND THAT'S COMING FROM HIM.

TOBY

I tossed on a wig and made fun of my ex? Just dumb jokes.

DEREK

You did that stereotypical girl voice too.

TOBY

Are you all trying to make me lose my shit? Why do you think I got my agent to get me in this room in the first place?

HOLLY

I don't know! To make a video about throwing water balloons at "old" writers?

DEREK

Jesus, is this a prank?

AMBER

Kinda explains why this place feels like a cheap set rented out of an office building-

TOBY

NO. Look, I haven't posted in 6 months. I got my agent to get me a REAL writers job because I've grown out of that. I wanna do real comedy. I wrote a packet to get in here and everything.

Everyone seems to be skeptical,  
Toby quickly reaches into his bag.

TOBY

I can PROVE it. Here's my packet...

TOBY tosses his packet to Amber who chooses one and reads aloud.

**OPEN JOKE SECTION.** One full two-line joke written by Toby. Can be either a Gen-Z take on politics OR a joke on a Gen-Z topic (Gaming, College, technology).

They chuckle a little. Toby gains a bit of confidence.



TOBY

You like that one? Read the one on page 3-

**OPEN JOKE SECTION** Another joke from Toby, this one should be a little childish, using a female stereotype of some kind.

The rest of the room is embarrassed and a little disgusted after hearing the joke.

TOBY

Come on, that's funny.

DEREK

Is it though?

AMBER

None of that shit in our monologue. You know the format, just don't punch down.

TOBY

You know what, maybe you guys should respect me a LITTLE bit more because I highly doubt any of you have won an award.

STEVEN

You won something?

HOLLY

For being funny?

TOBY

Choice comedian of the Year. Suck it, losers.

DEREK

What award show?

Beat.

TOBY

Ok, let's move on /to someone-

AMBER

Obviously, it wasn't that /great-

TOBY

It was the Kid's Choice Awards-

They all start laughing at him as he gets more defensive.

DEREK

(Laughing)

Oh my god, did you get a surfboard?

TOBY

NO. That's the teen choice awards, I got a big orange blimp.

They all laugh harder.

TOBY

-but I got to sit next to some pretty major names.

DEREK

Did you get slimed!?

TOBY

Yeah, but only on the pre-show.

They all laugh harder, he starts to play the piano.

TOBY

You guys fucking /suck.

AMBER

Oh I gotta ask, why do you need the piano for this anyway?

TOBY

(yelling over the music)

When I get stuck I like to play. AND, it's a part of my creative process. See, I have a creative process... that's pretty impressive.

Some still stifle laughter and Toby tries to take control again and steps away from the piano.

TOBY

Just shut up and take me seriously. Like the racist guy-

STEVEN

Not a racist, I'm Steven.

TOBY

Like Steven said, we're all here because we want something. I don't wanna be the joke anymore. You know how many times I've been made fun of on shows like this? Too many. Let me be on the other side.

(MORE)

TOBY (CONT'D)

My dad always says if you work hard and immerse yourself into what you want, you'll always succeed and over the last 6 months I immersed myself. I hate Florida, watched a Vox video on Congress the other day, and argue with family members about what year SNL started sucking. I'm a real comedian.

DEREK

(slightly sarcastic)

Those are the prerequisites.

TOBY

(Ernestly)

YES. See? So, treat me with the same respect you give to, Steven.

AMBER

So, we have an improviser, a Youtube troll, and a 20-year-old who probably makes more money than all of us because of a brand deal with some energy drink.

TOBY

It's actually canned water-

AMBER

(To Holly) Help me out here girl. Tell me you worked in TV before coming here.

HOLLY

I did work in TV!

AMBER

Thank god.

HOLLY

I wrote scripts for a morning news show.

AMBER

(exasperated)

God damn it.

DEREK

Like a comedy morning show?

HOLLY

No, *The Early Early Show*.

STEVEN

Oh, you guys did a piece on the least dangerous way to fry a turkey for Thanksgiving.

Beat.

STEVEN (Cont.)  
Changed the game for my family.

HOLLY  
I wrote that piece!

AMBER  
Why are you here then?

HOLLY  
I'm actually only on vacation with *Early*, I'm just bored writing fluff pieces.

AMBER  
So, you don't even need this job?

HOLLY  
No, but I don't really need ANY job, my husband /is-

AMBER  
Your husband?

TOBY  
You're married?

HOLLY  
...yes?

TOBY  
Damn. That's just like...old.

DEREK  
Who's your husband?

HOLLY  
He's a doctor. We met in college at a career fair. Well, I was at the career fair. He was walking to the medicine building next door-

AMBER  
The medicine building? Do you mean the hospital?

HOLLY  
That's what civilians call it.

AMBER  
...alright.

HOLLY  
But what I'm saying is he does really well, I don't even need to work. I do it for the love of /it-

STEVEN  
Where's he work?

HOLLY  
(thrown off)  
What?

STEVEN  
What hospital does he work in? I know a bunch  
of doctors.

Amber looks at him confused.

STEVEN  
Some doctors belong to my hunting club.

TOBY  
Doctors hunt?

STEVEN  
Their precision is killer.

AMBER  
God, I hate that.

STEVEN  
(to Holly)  
So, where's he work?

Beat.

HOLLY  
ABC.

Beat.

DEREK  
ABC?

TOBY  
Is that a medicine building?

STEVEN  
ABC? Like the channel?

HOLLY  
Yes, ABC like the channel /because-

AMBER  
Oh my god, who's your husband?

HOLLY  
Ok, I don't need to-

AMBER

(poking fun)

Who's your rich and fancy hubby? Who's the famous man in your life who pays for-

HOLLY

Ok, David doesn't pay for everything /he-

DEREK

DAVID OLSTER?

TOBY

WAIT, like the dude from *The Olster Hour*?

AMBER

Holy fuck, that's amazing.

HOLLY

He's a good man, and a great doctor and people love /his show-

AMBER

Yes, people love a *kinda* doctor giving weight loss advice sponsored by WeightWatchers.

HOLLY

He does a wonderful job and people have been watching for years.

DEREK

He's the guy who did the tapeworm thing, right?

TOBY

Oh my god yes, a girl at my school got a tape worm before prom last year. I'm pretty sure it laid eggs in her.

HOLLY

David's producer really screwed him over with that story, *she* was fired right after.

AMBER

Yes, because *David* fact checking something he is about to say to millions of people would be insane.

HOLLY

Ok, that's not on him.

DEREK

(To Toby)

What happened to the girl at your school?

TOBY

I don't know. I think she popped open like that weird alien from the movie?

STEVEN

A Xenomorph and the movie, *Alien*.

TOBY

The fuck is a Xeno-morph?

DEREK

Like, a chest-buster alien.

TOBY

OH SHIT. Yeah, that probably happened to her.

AMBER

She could probably sue Mr. Olster if she wanted. Maybe Holly fucked Judge Judy in college, she could help /us-

Derek and Toby chuckle along with Amber.

HOLLY

Come on, it's not my fault he got a TV show. He has a medical degree /and-

TOBY

From University of Phoenix: Online?

DEREK

Did he take a masterclass from Dr. Oz?

AMBER

Wait, isn't *The Early Early Show* on ABC

Beat.

HOLLY

Yup, but I got that job /BEFORE-

AMBER

Wow.

HOLLY

... What.

AMBER

Just, wow.

Toby, Amber and Derek laugh in a judgmental way, Steven obviously begins to take offense.

STEVEN

Just cause she has a successful husband  
doesn't mean she's some suburban bimbo. Lay  
off.

HOLLY

Thank you, I think-

AMBER

Of course you are sticking up for her.

STEVEN

Why's that?

AMBER

Backwards catholic chivalary ideals, a need  
for 1950s gender roles, who knows? Is Mr.  
Olster a hunting buddy of yours?

HOLLY

He doesn't hunt unless he's on the ABC Summer  
Retreat.

STEVEN

(to Amber)

How about just respecting family dynamics. Her  
marriage is her marriage and has nothing to do  
with any of us.

DEREK

You married?

STEVEN

Why?

TOBY

It just feels like the only person who would  
say something like that is someone who is  
married. Like super married.

DEREK

Like married to their highschool sweetheart-

TOBY

Or their middleschool girlfriend-

STEVEN

My WIFE and I met in college, we've been  
together for over 20 years and have three  
kids. Love em' all to death.

Beat.

TOBY

You have kids?



STEVEN

Yeah.

TOBY

...that's insane. How old are they?

STEVEN

Three girls. 13, 11, 6.

Beat.

TOBY

(chuckling)

Bet the 13 year-old follows me.

DEREK

Who is your demographic?

TOBY

Like teenage girls and old men pretending to be teenage girls.

STEVEN

She doesn't follow you. We don't do phones in our house.

TOBY

Like no phones at all?

STEVEN

Nope. My wife and I leave ours in a basket in the foyer.

DEREK

That's...that's really impressive.

STEVEN

We're a no-tech household. It's nice, just / talking-

AMBER

Wait, like no TV?

STEVEN

No.

DEREK

But that's your job.

HOLLY

Yeah, I don't have kids but I definitely have a TV. We have like three TVs.

TOBY

Wait, your wife knows what you do right?

STEVEN

Of course.

AMBER

Do your kids?

Beat.

STEVEN

They know I write.

AMBER

Oh they are gonna be confused when they're older.

STEVEN

Alright, shouldn't have brought it up. Don't talk about my kids.

AMBER

Just saying, they look your name up on google and you're done. Better hope they don't go to liberal arts college or try to be an activist, than you'd be lonely on holidays.

STEVEN

I'm sorry, Amber, who do you have to go home to?

BEAT.

DEREK

Ok, let's just-

STEVEN

No, really. You have someone?

AMBER

I don't need /anyone.

STEVEN

Sounds like you don't-

AMBER

I have people in my /life-

HOLLY

Maybe we don't talk about families.

STEVEN

Fine with me.

AMBER

Got it.

DEREK

Ok, so maybe we just-

AMBER

(To Holly)

Just nice to know how you "became" a writer.

HOLLY

I have a degree in Journalism from Syracuse University and I was hired at ABC before my husband was so I'm just as much of a writer as anyone in this room.

AMBER

(Sarcastic)

I'm sure.

HOLLY

Just because I'm doing okay for myself doesn't mean I'm not allowed to switch it up. If I wanna try comedy, I'm allowed to try comedy.

Amber groans and turns away.

HOLLY

Look, I'm sick of writing stories about who wore the best scarf this weekend in the park and how to dress a wine bottle up like a traffic cone for a construction-themed girls night. I want to write something with a little more weight.

Amber lets out a quick, almost elitist, laugh at Holly's suburban hope.

HOLLY

You don't need to laugh-

AMBER

I'm not /trying-

HOLLY

Because you also seem to be the person who is the most embarrassed to be here.

Silent agreement from the other writers on Holly's statement.

AMBER

I'm don't wanna be an asshole, I just kind of expected more actual comedians with TV / writing experience-

STEVEN

Again, wrote/ for-

AMBER

Whatever. I just want this to work.

HOLLY

Well, if you want this to work, try being nicer.

AMBER

Don't tell me to be nicer, god, how many times will someone tell me to be nicer, or smile or shit. I don't-

HOLLY

I know, I know. I'm sorry. Let's just... let's get on the same page and do this.

DEREK

(too enthusiastically)

And who knows, maybe when we combine our different perspectives and all give it our 110% we can write some jokes that we're ALL proud of!

They all take a stab at Derek and slowly get on the same page.

TOBY

You sound like the main character of a Disney Channel Original Movie.

AMBER

How are you a guy and *STILL* a "pick-me" girl?

STEVEN

Your optimism would be too much for Ted Lasso.

HOLLY

You're like a rejected animated character come to life.

Roasting Derek seems to get them on the same page. Even Derek accepts the jokes after a moment.

The two people in white coats write a few things down and silently talk to each other. Obvious change in the energy.

Steven is the first to pick up a newspaper.

STEVEN

So, does anyone have any idea of the target audience of the show?

AMBER

I'm assuming like every late night show.

STEVEN

Yeah, but it is like soft, bull shit like *Corden* or *Fallon*? Political like *Noah* or *Meyers*? Is it long-form like *Oliver*-

DEREK

Oh, I like James Corden!

AMBER

Yeah, Carpool Karaoke is riveting shit-

HOLLY

(earnestly)

And when he made Harry Styles eat a scorpion, massively changed television.

AMBER

(laughing)

Oh god, so embarrassing, right?

HOLLY

(earnestly)

Oh, I'm being serious. I loved that segment.

TOBY

ME TOO. And have you seen that show Fallon? Uh-

HOLLY

OH, CELEBRITY LIP-SYNC?

TOBY

YES.

DEREK

When Rami Malek does a "If you Wanna be my Lover"-

TOBY

Or when Kid Rock reenacts Miley Cyrus's "Wrecking Ball".

HOLLY

God, TV is back in it's golden /age-

STEVEN

Who cares?

(MORE)

STEVEN (CONT'D)  
 (References newspaper) What are people feeling like starting with?

AMBER  
 Probably front-page. That's what they'll wanna see at the top of the show and then we can fill in whatever we want later on.

HOLLY  
 The headline is about the Mets.

AMBER  
 (sarcastically)  
 Well, great.

TOBY  
 What?

AMBER  
 Making fun of the Mets is about as original as making a joke about Canadians loving Tim Hortons.

DEREK  
 Who made you god of late-night?

AMBER  
 I'm the only one with any /experience-

TOBY  
 Jesus, we know-

STEVEN  
 Technically you're also the only one who's been fired from a comedy /job too-

HOLLY  
 Didn't you-

STEVEN  
 I chose to leave and took a severance package out of respect-

TOBY  
 Like a parting gift?

AMBER  
 Yeah, like a parting gift from a January 6th after party-

Laughter and surprise that Amber "went there".

STEVEN  
Jesus Christ, seriously-

AMBER  
Sorry, I shouldn't disrespect one of your  
cultures national holidays.

STEVEN  
(under his breath)  
Fucking /bitch.

DEREK  
(looking through the paper)  
Alright, alright. You know, there isn't much  
on the front page. What if we tried an improv  
game? I /think-

AMBER  
No, Let's just flip around and see if we find  
anything.

The writers all begin to read  
through the newspaper. After a few  
beats, Toby laughs out loud.

HOLLY  
What are you laughing at?

TOBY  
I was looking at the funnies.

STEVEN  
Come on, /kid-

TOBY  
That's what you guys used to call them when  
the printing press was invented, /right?

STEVEN  
Shut your mouth, Nickelodeon-

TOBY  
(getting pissed)  
Nickelodeon? Wow, real good joke Tucker /  
Carlson-

STEVEN  
Honestly, impressive you know who Tucker /  
Carlson is-

TOBY  
I don't need to know shit, I have a /process-

STEVEN

Oh yeah, having a panic attack on the piano really seems to be /working-

TOBY

God, you're such an old /asshole-

STEVEN

Couldn't think of something better than, "old asshole"?

TOBY

Oh, I can think of a bunch of shit to call you if you turn your hearing aid /up-

AMBER

(shutting them down)

Settle down. Put your dicks away before you start comparing how many V8's your Mustangs have.

TOBY

I actually drive a /Tesla.

AMBER

Anyone find a good story-

The Man in White Coat pops in like a jump scare.

MAN

How is the writing coming, everyone?

STEVEN

Just fine! Chugging along-

HOLLY

We haven't written anything.

AMBER

I do have a question, it feels like we're all /here for-

MAN

You're all here because you were the writers chosen by the host that have the best comedic voice for the show. Now, what can I do to help get this moving?

AMBER

You could tell us who the host is?

STEVEN

What network this is for?



TOBY

And you could bring me Twizzlers.

Beat.

TOBY

They're a good thinking snack.

MAN

I can't answer those questions, they haven't been announced to the public and you don't have the job yet. We wouldn't want a situation where one of you sells the information to TMZ for a quick buck. What I CAN do is get you your Twizzlers, Tobias. Anyone else need anything?

Beat.

STEVEN

(Light razing towards Toby)

Tobias?

TOBY

I'll kill you.

MAN

I'll take that as a no. Feel free to have a snack from the kitchenette area. The eclairs are lovely. I'll be back. *Please be funny.*

Man in White Coat leaves. Derek gets up and grabs an éclair from the counter.

AMBER

(annoyed)

Enjoying your pastry?

DEREK

Yeah, he wasn't kidding. Kinda feels like a crispy cloud you can /eat-

AMBER

Let's get back on track.

Amber grabs a newspaper and flips to a random section.

AMBER

Ok, Entertainment Section.

**OPEN JOKE SECTION\*\*** Amber reads a headline about the anything

relevant in pop culture  
(Kardashians, the Biebers, Will  
Smith slapping the shit outta Chris  
Rock, etc...).

*Toby shouldn't partake too much in  
this one.*

TOBY

Is this even relevant?

STEVEN

Oh, sorry that we aren't referencing Yo,  
Gabba /Gabba-

TOBY

I'm just saying this show might not be looking  
for expected shit. Like we could write  
something that maybe they haven't read today  
and so we'll stand out.

HOLLY

Do you think there are other groups writing?

TOBY

If there weren't, wouldn't that mean we have  
the job?

Beat. This is the first time Toby  
says something insightful.

TOBY

If we were the only ones left, then we would  
have a job and wouldn't be in this fake-ass  
looking room.

DEREK

He kinda makes a lot of /sense-

AMBER

Ok, hold on-

STEVEN

Shit, all those rooms we passed probably have  
more writers in there.

TOBY

Oh, for sure. I pitched ideas to Amazon for  
branded /content-

AMBER

(Responding to Steven)

That makes /so much sense.

TOBY

-AND afterwards I learned a bunch of my friends were in the building at the same time doing the same fucking thing.

DEREK

What did you pitch?

TOBY

I said they should give Siri a hotter voice-

HOLLY

Siri is Apple, you're thinking of Alexa.

TOBY

Fuck.

AMBER

I wonder how many other writing groups they have.

DEREK

We walked by like 5, maybe 7 doors in the hall-

HOLLY

I guess I don't know, is this competitive? Should we be, like competitive?

AMBER

(looking intently through the paper)

Not all of us have rich husbands to fall back on if we don't have work so yes, it's competitive.

DEREK

(nervous)

Ok, it's fine, it's fine. We just need to make a good monologue. A great monologue.

STEVEN

We should be maybe writing some stuff they aren't expecting though-

TOBY

What if we did a prank segment?

AMBER

Jesus Christ-

TOBY

Seriously, they fucking kill online. That shit goes viral in a /second.

STEVEN

It's not about clicks and tweets and pokes-

TOBY

God, are you 70?

STEVEN

-it's about being topical and getting good, classic, funny jokes on the page.

HOLLY

I mean, it might make us stand out?

AMBER

What? Pouring maple syrup on random passerbys? You *really* wanna pitch that?

HOLLY

No, but like, play to our strengths! Like I could-

AMBER

Write a story about where to get the puffiest jacket for the winter? Or how to put on a DIY Brisk /in your-

HOLLY

NO, I mean, like, I don't know. Just do things that will make us stand out as a group-

AMBER

What will make us stand out is having the strongest material, let's just focus on that.

HOLLY

Fine.

DEREK

(trying to appease)

I like the idea of playing to our strengths but maybe we do it *within* the structure of the monologue.

HOLLY

Yeah, yeah, that makes sense.

STEVEN

We should just try to hit everything they want-

TOBY

Like?

HOLLY  
 (thumbing through paper)  
 Entertainment, sports, lifestyle- OH. Here.

**OPEN JOKE SECTION** Holly reads a lifestyle headline (look into Southern Living and Women's Day).

While they do this, Steven thumbs through the newspaper, then tosses one on the table.

STEVEN  
 Sports story.

**OPEN JOKE SECTION** Steven reads a sports headline (ESPN, Bleacher Report, etc...).

The group seems to be working well through a few and are writing the jokes down that work.

AMBER  
 Ok, can we move into politics. It's easily the most talked about topic in late night. Our packet should be primarily that.

STEVEN  
 We don't need it to be the majority.

TOBY  
 Well, we know you don't like minorities /so-

Steven, frustrated, steps away from the table as the other four laugh and ad-lib their surprise in his quick-wit.

STEVEN  
 I'm not shitty. At least, I'm not a dumb ass / kid-

TOBY  
 I'm NOT a kid, /I'm 20-

HOLLY  
 You're 20. We know-

AMBER  
 That's like 3 months away from being a kid.

TOBY  
 Well, I'm an adult now so let's go /back-

STEVEN

Anyone who has to say outlaid to a group of strangers, "I'm an adult now" is for sure not an adult.

TOBY

Shut up-

AMBER

And anyone who brings up their dad multiple times on a first day of work might still be a kid-

TOBY

Ok, will you guys just shut the fuck up about this.

DEREK

Come on, Toby, relax-

TOBY

Don't tell me relax, poor man's Michael Cera. I don't need to keep being the butt of the joke here so let's all just shut up. I did everything, LITERALLY everything, you all did to get here so stop picking on me-

STEVEN

(laughing)

"Picking on me" like we're at fucking recess-

TOBY

FUCKING COME ON.

DEREK

(To Toby)

Seriously, kid, relax.

Toby pulls an inhaler out of his bag.

TOBY

Whatever.

STEVEN

(stifling laughter)

An inhaler?

TOBY

(starts to cry like a kid)

WHATEVER. Just stop fucking...fucking with me. Ok?

STEVEN

No way you're crying-

AMBER  
Come on, Steven.

STEVEN  
What? He's /crying?

TOBY  
I'm not crying!

HOLLY  
(becoming maternal)  
Hey, hey toby. It's okay don't-

TOBY  
(composing himself poorly)  
I'M NOT CRYING. I'm...I'm fine. Can we just  
move on, please?

Toby sits at the piano and composes  
himself as the other writer  
awkwardly get back on track. Toby  
comes back, a bit better, before  
the next *Open Joke Section*.

AMBER  
(redirecting the room)  
Yes. YES, where were we?

HOLLY  
Politics.

AMBER  
Yes, we good to do politics?

STEVEN  
I just don't think we need to-

AMBER  
We do.

STEVEN  
We can try to be a little /original-

AMBER  
It's not about "being original" and "coming up  
with the new form". It's about taking current  
events and making jokes. If we don't hit  
politics we're just ignoring the biggest thing  
happening every day-

STEVEN  
Or we are focusing on better, simpler things /  
that-

HOLLY

We should probably do something on politics.

DEREK

I concur.

AMBER

We can make it simple, here. Big Pharma. Literally the worst people, we all hate them, right?

Everyone but Steven immediately nods in agreement.

AMBER (CONT'D)

(to Steven)

Right?

STEVEN

(begrudgingly)

YES, but I /respect their right too-

AMBER

Wonderful.

**OPEN JOKE SECTION** \*Amber reads a headline about some Big Pharma related issue (Vaccines, Insulin Prices, Federal Perks, etc...).

Amber looks to Steven to see if he will tack on a joke. He doesn't seem to have anything.

AMBER

You aren't making yourself seem like a good "collaborator in the workplace", Mr. Libertarian.

STEVEN

I don't need to prove myself to any of you. I just don't have a joke on this.

AMBER

Would it be better if tried making jokes about A.O.C.?

STEVEN

Jesus, that's not what this is about.

AMBER

Then what is it about?

DEREK

Ok, let's all calm /down-



AMBER

Don't tell me to calm down-

DEREK

(immediately shuts up)

Yes ma'am.

AMBER

(To Steven)

What's your deal, man? We gotta make jokes together so come /on-

STEVEN

(pushes off to Toby)

The kid didn't make a joke either!

TOBY

I never got my Twizzlers, so-

Toby gets up and goes to the door to see where the man is.

AMBER

Alright, so you're both not funny, or you're trying to hide some problematic thoughts you got running-

STEVEN

I'm not problematic! I'm sorry I don't have a joke for every topic under the /sun.

Toby tries for the door and realizes it's locked.

TOBY

The door's jammed.

AMBER

Use the knob.

TOBY

I did asshole. It's the first thing I tried.

DEREK

What do you mean it's jammed?

TOBY

I mean the door won't open. It's locked or something.

DEREK

(going to door)

Let me try-

STEVEN  
The door is locked?

AMBER  
Bullshit.

DEREK  
No, it really is-

STEVEN  
How could they just lock the door? That's illegal, it can't be-

HOLLY  
(playing peacekeeper)  
Doors can be weird. I did a piece on knobs last year, and did you know that some knobs in work buildings like this can be overused and worn down to the point where they stop-

Holly tries to open the door and help out, but it won't open for her either. At this moment, the man goes back up on the platform with the Twizzlers in hand. He sees the Woman in White Coat is watching the writers come to this realization, and she quickly sends him back to solve the issue in the room.

HOLLY  
-oh, well, no. No, this is locked. Isn't that weird?

STEVEN  
(springing up)  
What?

HOLLY  
Or broken or something. Hm, weird.

STEVEN  
Weird? No, not weird! Fucked up. Did that guy lock us in here? The hell kinda job /is this?

AMBER  
Ok, relax Alex Jones. Nobody is trying to infringe upon your freedom. I'm sure something is just up with the door.

TOBY  
What's taking him so long with the Twizzlers anyway? They're Twizzlers. Most vending machines have them.

STEVEN

Who cares about your candy?

Steven is now at the door. He bangs on it and yells.

STEVEN

(staccato)

HEY. GUY. IN. COAT. YOUR. DOOR. IS. BROKE-

Right then the Man in White Coat bursts in with the candy.

MAN

Sorry for the wait, here you go Tobias.

TOBY

(under his breath)

It's fucking Toby /how many times-

MAN

Is everything all right, anyone need anything else?

STEVEN

No, everything isn't alright. You trapped us in here like fucking /rats-

DEREK

The door is broken.

HOLLY

We tried leaving, but it wouldn't open.

MAN

Ah, yes. It's an old building, I'll find someone to fix that as soon as possible. The jokes coming along?

DEREK

You could say that-

AMBER

Can we know *anything* else about this dude we're writing for?

TOBY

Yeah, like what's the demo for this show?

HOLLY

And why specifically did you put us together?

MAN

You five had the most intriguing packets so that's why you are in this room. Keep writing and I'll get someone to look at that door. Please be funny.

The Man leaves quickly and Steven gets up to follow him.

STEVEN  
Ok, but just leave the door-

Door shuts in his face.

STEVEN  
-cracked.

Beat.

DEREK  
Well, he said he will get someone to fix the door, let's get back to /work.

AMBER  
(disregarding Derek)  
Why won't they tell us anything?

TOBY  
(baffled)  
And how have we not talked about why the dude is wearing a fucking lab coat?

STEVEN  
I told you when we came in here, this place is like a fuckin' dentist office!

HOLLY  
It's a bit strange.

STEVEN  
Strange? It's more than strange, it's a fucking- uh, fucking-

TOBY  
What is it?

STEVEN  
I don't know, a conspiracy-

AMBER  
Are you *serious*, dude?

STEVEN  
It could be-

HOLLY  
We're getting ahead of ourselves, it's just strange, that's /all-

STEVEN  
(aggressively pulling at the door)  
Why won't this open?

TOBY  
 (to Steven)  
 Jesus, will you relax over there?

DEREK  
 I have an idea. Let's play a game!

Beat.

DEREK  
 I said, "I have /an"-

TOBY  
 We heard you.

STEVEN  
 I'm not a 13-year-old at youth group trying to  
 make friends-

DEREK  
 OH. No, not like a kid game. An improv game-

STEVEN  
 I'm still not a 20-year-old loser in Chicago  
 trying to make /friends-

DEREK  
 Come on, get our brains moving.

STEVEN  
 (under his breath)  
 Why the fuck are they keeping us in this god  
 damn /room-

DEREK  
 The faster we write jokes the faster we can  
 leave.

Beat.

AMBER  
 Fine.

DEREK  
 Alright!

HOLLY  
 You know, I took an improv class once. The  
 teacher said I was "quick-witted."

STEVEN  
 Was the teacher a lonely-looking, 30-year-old  
 man in a flannel?

HOLLY  
How'd you /know?

AMBER  
Because they all are-

HOLLY  
(to herself)  
Oh.

Steven and Amber have a rare moment  
of sharing a joke.

DEREK  
Well, perfect, Holly you've probably played  
this before. We all know Zip-Zap-Zop. Let's  
stand up and-

Holly is the only one to stand up,  
excited, for the game.

DEREK  
-Or let's stay sitting and start passing it  
around. Make eye contact with your partner,  
keep the vibes up and flowing.

The group proceeds to play Zip-Zap-  
Zop. The writers does about two  
rounds before someone sends it to  
Toby who doesn't respond.

DEREK  
Toby, you gotta Zop-

TOBY  
I don't wanna pop.

DEREK  
You have to Zip, /bud-

STEVEN  
Just play the game, kid.

TOBY  
I'm not a kid and I don't wanna play the game!  
This is so fucking dumb, what are we doing  
this for?

DEREK  
Well, it'll enhance our group /think-

TOBY  
This isn't an acting class at the YMCA, I  
mean, come on! I can't be the /only one-

AMBER

Why don't we do something different?

Beat.

DEREK

OH. One-Word Story!

TOBY

Every word you say sucks-

STEVEN

What is that?

HOLLY

I know it, we go around the room, each say a word and make a story right?

AMBER

It's easy. Like-

Amber readies herself and makes it clear this is the beginning of the story.

AMBER

The-

DEREK

-dog-

HOLLY

-had-

STEVEN

...a-

TOBY

-bad-

AMBER

-day.

DEREK

See, that was amazing! Let's try a longer one-

TOBY

This is truly the dumbest shit I've ever done.

AMBER

This "too cool to be here" attitude isn't doing much for me-

TOBY

I'm not "too cool" this is just gay-

Whoa! HOLLY

Come on- DEREK

WHAT? TOBY

You can't use that word in a derogatory way- HOLLY

Seriously, you can't- DEREK

Come ON- TOBY

You can't say that anymore, kid. STEVEN

And that's him saying that. AMBER

Fine, this is just *dumb as shit*. TOBY

It's just to get the creative juices flowing, HOLLY  
(defusing the situation)  
I love it. Here, I'll start!

Holly takes a long moment and  
thinks.

I'm drawing a blank. HOLLY

That improv teacher was right, you're a  
natural. STEVEN  
(sarcastic)

Give me some inspiration. HOLLY

Use the newspaper- AMBER

Oh, yes! We can make this an organic bridge  
directly to writing jokes! How exciting! DEREK  
(overly excited)

Beat.



TOBY  
Somehow, I hate you more than the racist-

                  DEREK  
                  (under his breath)  
Fuck /you-

                  STEVEN  
Again, Bieber, I'm not /racist.

                  AMBER  
                  (to Holly)  
Just start.

Holly looks through the newspaper  
and stops on a headline.

                  HOLLY  
Got one. *The Environment*.

                  DEREK  
That's two words.

                  HOLLY  
Oh.

                  TOBY  
Who cares?

                  AMBER  
Just try again.

                  HOLLY  
Ok, *The-*

                  STEVEN  
*-environment-*

                  DEREK  
                  (under his breath)  
Jesus.

                  AMBER  
*-is-*

                  TOBY  
*-full-*

                  DEREK  
*-of-*

                  HOLLY  
*-APPLES!*

Beat. Holly is more excited for the outcome than the rest of the group.

HOLLY  
What?

TOBY  
THIS IS DUMB AS SHIT.

AMBER  
It's not dumb as shit-

TOBY  
(going to the piano and beginning to play)  
Seriously what are we doing here, we are supposed to write jokes and no one is god damn-

STEVEN  
You look like a crazy person on that thing.

TOBY  
Fuck you!

AMBER  
(to Derek)  
Maybe we just try to get back to the monologue.

Derek tries to save the game by grabbing the newspaper.

DEREK  
(finds something)  
Wait, wait, wait, one more try! Here, we'll use the newspaper! Comedy stuff.

Derek tosses the paper on the table and points at a story, Amber grabs it and looks at the story, laughs. Toby stops playing and goes back to the table.

AMBER  
(laughing to herself)  
Oh, I love this-

HOLLY  
(grabs the paper)  
Ok, YES. Something more serious, I watched a bunch of John Oliver last night so I /think-

STEVEN  
(snatches paper from Holly and reads the headline)  
Absolutely not-

HOLLY  
Why?

STEVEN  
(referencing the article)  
We aren't going from apples to gun control.

AMBER  
Oh, you don't /like-

STEVEN  
I don't like when people who don't know shit  
about something try to make jokes about it.

TOBY  
That's the majority of what I do.

AMBER  
(sarcastically)  
And he's sponsored by *Red Robin*.

TOBY  
So, you DO know who I am!

STEVEN  
I'm not letting you all trash something I  
believe in.

DEREK  
Come on, Steven. Let's just try it.

Beat.

DEREK  
I'll take your silence as a yes- (*catches  
himself and spirals*) Not that that's okay to  
do in any other situation. Yes means yes, of  
course we all know that- let's just start the  
game. Toby?

TOBY  
(thinks for a moment)  
The-

AMBER  
-uncle-

HOLLY  
-from-

DEREK  
-Alabama-

STEVEN  
Come on-

-went- TOBY

-to- AMBER

-the- HOLLY

-gun- DEREK

-range- AMBER

-for- TOBY

-lunch. AMBER

Steven steps away from the table.

He- DEREK

-got- HOLLY

-a steak- TOBY

-a soda- AMBER

-and a side of- DEREK

HOLLY  
(Overly excited)  
-PATRIOTISM.

STEVEN  
Seriously, how's this funny?

HOLLY  
(seriously)  
Because you can't order a side of patriotism.

AMBER  
(To Steven)  
Can you really not deal with jokes that don't  
lean your way? You want us to rip on the  
 Clintons and re-hash Monika Lewinsky /bits-

STEVEN

No.

AMBER

Because making fun of gun owners in a writer's room is as inevitable as *your* friends crying over critical race theory-

STEVEN

Come on man, I just don't make /jokes about it.

AMBER

But, we're here to make jokes, not solve a domestic crisis.

Beat. Steven adjusts his pants.

AMBER

What?! We're not.

Beat. Amber squints and begins to have a realization.

STEVEN

(collecting himself)

I just don't want to talk about all this, it's unnecessary. Let's /move on.

AMBER

Are you carrying?

STEVEN

Let's just move on-

AMBER

Are you carrying right now?

TOBY

Carrying what?

DEREK

I'm assuming a gun.

HOLLY

It's an open carry state technically.

Beat.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

My brother is a doomsday prepper.

AMBER

Well, are you, Steven?

Beat.

Steven calmly pulls out a gun from under his jeans near his ankle. Steven never should seem violent or threatening while holding the gun. The Man in White Coat goes to rush down off the platform but is held back by the Woman and they continue to watch. The dialogue speeds up.

STEVEN

(defensive)

Like she said it's an /open carry-

The other four steps away from the table and ad-libs a "Jesus", "fuck", "Jesus fuck", etc...

STEVEN

(matter of fact)

It's an open carry, and it's /not-

DEREK

-not loaded. It's NOT loaded, right??

STEVEN

Of course it's loaded, why would I carry a gun that isn't loaded-

HOLLY

My god, throw it away!

STEVEN

Throw it /away?!

TOBY

Why would you bring that here?!

AMBER

And isn't it CONCEALED and carry? CONCEALED-

STEVEN

YOU ALL ASKED ME ABOUT IT?

DEREK

IF SOMEONE BRINGS SOMETHING UP, YOU DON'T JUST WHIP IT OUT.

TOBY

SERIOUSLY-

HOLLY

YOU HAVE KIDS.

STEVEN

SO, WHAT? THAT'S WHY I HAVE IT.

TOBY

YOU HAVE A GUN FOR KIDS. DO YOU HEAR HOW CRAZY THAT SOUNDS?!

STEVEN

I have it to PROTECT my kids! And again, you all would have never seen it if (to Amber) you hadn't ask me about it!

AMBER

I DIDN'T THINK YOU'D PULL A LOADED GUN OUT IN A FUCKING OFFICE BUILDING.

More ad-libs of "put it away," etc.

STEVEN

I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I thought we could have a calm discussion about /it-

TOBY

Said the guy holding a gun.

DEREK

Is this what being robbed feels like?

Steven goes to put the gun back in his pants.

STEVEN

HERE, GOD, HERE-

AMBER

Don't put it back!

STEVEN

Where should I put it?!

TOBY

I don't know, what if someone calls you racist again and you go fucking "Grand Theft Auto" on em'.

STEVEN

Fine. Jesus, here.

Steven makes a show of making sure the saftey is on, and places it in the middle of the table.

STEVEN

Now what?

Beat.

STEVEN

Can we just get back to writing?

AMBER

This isn't your old qAnon web series-

STEVEN

I just want to get back to work-

AMBER

Well, you pulled out a gun so that's not just gonna happen-

HOLLY

(sure of her idea)

I got it.

Holly goes over and grabs the glass cloche off the pastry tray and places it over the gun. Man in White Coat leaves the platform.

HOLLY

Problem solved.

AMBER

PROBLEM SOLVED?

HOLLY

Now there is a barrier, so he can't get to it if he gets mad-

STEVEN

I'm not gonna shoot any of you-

HOLLY

-because if he wanted to, he can't. The cloche is in the way.

DEREK

That doesn't feel like the best protection system.

HOLLY

Well, there's a gun in the room, and we're kinda locked in. So, do we wanna write and all get a job, or do we wanna tell white coat that our Republican-

STEVEN

-libertarian.



HOLLY

-libertarian friend pulled a gun and no one gets a job.

Beat. Toby and Derek walk back to the table. Toby grabs a paper.

TOBY

I saw a funny story about Facebook on page 11-

AMBER

COME ON.

Beat. They all sit in silence for a moment while Amber considers her options.

AMBER

(to Steven)

If you shoot me, I'll be pissed.

STEVEN

(pissed)

Noted.

Amber makes her way back to the table and they all slowly grab their legal pads, pens, and papers. They thumb through silently for about a minute, each one taking a moment to eye the gun under the cloche during. There is a thick, uncomfortable tension in the room emanating from the middle of the table.

STEVEN

What if we did something on the Wild Fires in California?

TOBY

I don't see an article on any wild fires-

STEVEN

(trying to make a joke)

I mean, they're always happening.

Awkward silent beat.

STEVEN

(finding new article)

Oh, ok, how about this one. Legalization in another state.

Awkward silent beat.

STEVEN (Cont.)  
 (tyring to start a joke pitch  
 session)

Maybe we do something about legalizing  
 something crazy too, like, I don't know, um...

Awkward silent beat.

STEVEN  
 Come on, we were having fun before can't we go  
 back to writing like a minute ago?

TOBY  
 (nervous)  
 What are you talking about? I'm having gun-  
 FUN. FUN, I'm having fun-

STEVEN  
 Seriously?

AMBER  
 Let's just keep reading, I guess.

Longer awkward silent beat.

DEREK  
 There's an article on page seven about the UN.

HOLLY  
 (goes to that page)  
 Oh yeah, we could do something /with-

STEVEN  
 I don't have a page seven in mine-

DEREK  
 Come here.

Steven gets up to go to Derek and  
 the door begins to jiggle a bit.  
 Quickly, Steven goes and gets in  
 front of it.

MAN (O.S.)  
 Hello, Hello, is something blocking the door?

STEVEN  
 (frantic)  
 NO! No, weird! I guess it's extra jammed now  
 or something-

Steven looks at the group, and  
 makes an obvious silent plea to not  
 throw him under the bus for the  
 gun.

MAN (O.S.)

Um, are you sure? I feel like something might be in the way-

STEVEN

NOPE! No, nothing. We're all sitting at the table. Right, guys?

Derek, Toby, and Holly all ad-lib weakly ("all good", "that's right", etc...). Amber looks shook.

MAN (O.S.)

...are you sure?

TOBY

(annoyed)

YES. We're fine, nothing weird going on in here.

HOLLY

(under her breath to Toby)

Stop talking. Just stop talking, please-

MAN (O.S.)

Uh, alright. We'll find someone to fix this door as soon as possible. Just keep working and please be funny.

TOBY

We get it.

The sound of footsteps going away.

STEVEN

Why does he keep referring to himself as "we"?

DEREK

What are you talking about?

STEVEN

"We'll find someone"? "We'll get you those Twizzlers"? Who is /we-

HOLLY

Probably his bosses, will you please relax.

STEVEN

"Will you relax", why does everyone just wanna RELAX?

DEREK

So, this UN story-

AMBER

What was that?

STEVEN

I thought we talked about not wanting to lose this /opportunity-

AMBER

So, now we're all lying for this asshole-

DEREK

What are we supposed to do?

TOBY

It's not like that-

AMBER

How's it "not like that?"

TOBY

We are sitting in a room with a gun under a glass pastry case, we're all kinda culpable anyway.

STEVEN

"Culpable," someone did some SAT prep before coming /here.

TOBY

Are you seriously going to try and come at me while it's your fault we're in this mess?

STEVEN

This isn't a mess, we just /need to focus on-

TOBY

THIS ISN'T A MESS? THIS IS THE LITERAL DEFINITION OF A MESS.

STEVEN

DON'T RAISE YOUR VOICE AT ME, /KID.

TOBY

I'M NOT A KID, DAD-

STEVEN

Dad?

TOBY

I didn't say, /dad-

STEVEN

Did you seriously just call me dad?

TOBY

Shut the fuck up dude-

STEVEN

If you don't wanna be a kid so bad, *TOBIAS*, maybe don't call someone your fucking dad-

TOBY

I'm gonna kill you-

Toby lunges at Steven, but Derek holds him back, Steven is laughing. Holly is progressively getting more stressed. Amber snaps.

AMBER

How are you laughing right now?

STEVEN

Come on, it's funny, he's like 5 foot.

TOBY

I'm 5'5", dick.

DEREK

(to Steven)

Come on, man, just stop.

STEVEN

JESUS. Can we all really not take a joke? We are supposed to be comedians and everyone is freaking out-

DEREK

Well, its hard to be funny with-

STEVEN

With the gun, I KNOW. So, let me put it back.

ALL

NO.

STEVEN

But this was all fine before I took it out, I put it back and we go back to normal. This can still just work out.

AMBER

Maybe now I don't want it to work out.

Beat.

STEVEN

What are you talking about?

AMBER

What's the best case scenario? You put the gun away and we all get hired then I get to work with you all for the next five years? I'd rather write for Lifetime.

DEREK

Is Lifetime hiring?

TOBY

She's right, god you're all just a bunch of fucking boomers. This would suck so hard.

STEVEN

This wouldn't suck.

TOBY

Literally, why am I doing this? I could be in my bedroom making videos in ten minutes and get more money from that then I ever would here-

STEVEN

I thought it was about "becoming an adult"-

TOBY

I would rather be treated like a child than ever have to work with you again.

STEVEN

Ok, this is-

DEREK

Well, I need this job.

STEVEN

Thank you-

DEREK

I'm not agreeing with you *at all*. But I don't have anything else. This is the first time my packet got me anywhere so I really can't mess this up-

AMBER

Just go back to Chicago and work there-

DEREK

(blurting out)

I NEVER WON LAUGHLAUGH FEST.

Beat.

STEVEN

The fuck is Laugh Laugh fest?

DEREK

The comedy thing I said I won-

TOBY

Seriously, dude?

DEREK

I came in fourth. And Second City hasn't staffed me in like two years. I'm trying out there but I can't find my niche. Last month, my dad got me a job as an administrative assistant for his painting company back home, in Cleveland. (Sarcastic) The pinnacle of comedy. This was literally the only response I got to my packet all year. I need this. I'm not on Steven's side but this is all I have. If this job doesn't work out I will not have a reason to say no and I'll be in a shitty apartment down the street from the Browns in like two months. I'll be doing sketch shows at the rec-center and begging for time at the one shitty comedy club in the entire city. We need to find a solution or, personally, I am so fucked.

STEVEN

(to Amber)

You really wanna fuck over some Chicago nerd who will probably never get another shot again?

DEREK

Come on-

STEVEN

Am I wrong?

Quick beat.

STEVEN

And how about the suburban mom who wants a little more fun in her life?

HOLLY

Please don't bring me into this.

AMBER

Don't bring you into- what are you talking about, we're all already in this-

HOLLY

No, I'm not, I'm just a bystander-

AMBER

How are you a bystander? You lied for this guy too. You're the one who said it was an open carry state. You-

HOLLY

I KNOW. But I'm not involved, I don't want to-  
I'm not dealing with this.

Beat.

DEREK

What do we do now?

STEVEN

Try and be funny like the guy said-

TOBY

I'm not writing jokes with you.

STEVEN

You're being a pussy.

TOBY

I'm NOT /a pussy-

DEREK

Jesus.

AMBER

Don't say that /word-

STEVEN

(begins his final break)

You know what? Stop policing what I wanna say.  
Just because something isn't cool in Chicago  
or on *The Simon Show* doesn't mean it's not  
cool everywhere else.

AMBER

It's about respect.

STEVEN

OH, I respect you. I respect the fuck out of  
you! You don't respect me.

HOLLY

This is too much.

DEREK

Steven, chill out-

STEVEN

Don't tell me to chill out. You ALL need to  
*respect* my right to say what I want. If I want  
to say something, I can say it. If he wants to  
say "gay", he can say /that-

TOBY

Don't pull me into this.



STEVEN

No one is PULLING you into this. You said what you said, and that's fine! Come on, grow some balls-

DEREK

You can't say that-

STEVEN

Say what?

DEREK

Balls. It's, like, a gendered term.

STEVEN

Are you kidding me?

DEREK

No, for real. You can't say that. Why do you think you couldn't say pussy-

Derek catches himself.

DEREK (CONT'D)

The p-word.

STEVEN

God damn it! I can't say balls, he can't say gay. What's next?!

TOBY

(really trying to be good)

No, that was shitty of me. I shouldn't have used that word in a d-ur-rah-ga-

DEREK

(helping him)

Derogatory.

TOBY

-derogatory way. (To Derek) Thank you. (To Everyone) I'm sorry.

STEVEN

YOU DON'T HAVE TO APOLOGIZE. That's the point of all of this. We are comedians. A comedian is a soldier and words are our weapons. We need to use every single word in our arsenal or we are going to lose every single fight.

AMBER

You sound insane.

HOLLY  
 (meekly)  
 Everyone, quiet down-

STEVEN  
 (getting in Amber's face)  
 It's cause I'm right, YOU sound insane.

AMBER  
 Get away from me-

TOBY  
 This is the fucking worst.

Toby goes for the door, forgetting  
 it is still locked. The Woman in  
 White Coat exits the platform.

DEREK  
 We all need to sit down and just figure this  
 out before that guy comes back-

AMBER  
 We're past that-

TOBY  
 WHY WON'T THIS DOOR FUCKING OPEN-

STEVEN  
 BECAUSE THIS IS ALL A GAME TO /THEM.

AMBER  
 WHO?

STEVEN  
 I DON'T KNOW. THEM, FUCKING THEM.

DEREK  
 Can everyone just CALM DOWN?!

TOBY  
 STOP TELLING US TO CALM DOWN.

DEREK  
 What do you want me to say?! Let's keep  
 screaming so everyone can hear us!?

TOBY  
 (still attacking at door)  
 Who gives a shit?! It's too late now. I JUST  
 WANT TO GO HOME.

STEVEN  
 YOU CAN'T. NONE OF US CAN. We're stuck in here  
 like RATS. JUST LET ME TAKE THE FUCKING GUN /  
 BACK-

AMBER  
Don't you fucking touch it.

                  STEVEN  
COME ON.

                  TOBY  
Maybe he should just put it /away-

                  AMBER  
DUDE.

                  TOBY  
WHAT?

                  AMBER  
You're really taking his side?!

                  TOBY  
NO. NO, I'm not! I'm just SAYING /that-

                  AMBER  
TOBY.

                  TOBY  
FINE. Don't! Don't put the gun away.

                  STEVEN  
Then solve this, Amber. Fix this issue so we  
can all get everything we want.

                  Beat.

                  STEVEN  
For the first time today, she shut the fuck  
up. How /exciting-

                  AMBER  
I don't know, I don't know what I'm supposed  
to do here-

                  STEVEN  
                  (referencing the gun)  
I know one thing-

                  AMBER  
OH, WILL YOU SHUT THE FUCK UP?

                  HOLLY  
                  (weakly)  
Everyone, just stop-

                  TOBY  
I JUST WANNA LEAVE.

STEVEN  
WE ALL WANT TO LEAVE.

DEREK  
This is bad.

TOBY  
(stepping away from door and  
pacing)  
NO SHIT, IT'S BAD.

DEREK  
DON'T YELL AT ME. I'm the only one not being a  
GODDAMN dick.

TOBY  
YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO ISN'T A DICK? FUCK  
YOU, MY GUY-

In the midst of the screaming match, Holly pounces out of her stillness and goes for the cloche. Pulls it off and for a moment it seems like she is going for the gun but she tosses the cloche instead.

While this is happening, MAN IN WHITE COAT, opens the door and the cloche flies through it. The sound of glass shattering and a moment of stillness. The MAN stumbles through the door, holding the knob to keep up and sporting a large bloody gash on his head where the cloche broke. As he stumbles in, he pulls the door behind him, shutting it and then falling to the ground in a bloody mess.

Long Beat.

Derek rushes over to the body. Toby slinks down at the piano bench.

AMBER  
Is he-

DEREK  
He's not breathing. Oh, fuck. He's bleeding so much.

AMBER  
Can you stop it?

STEVEN

No way.

DEREK

I don't- I don't- I don't-

STEVEN

(defeated)

The fucking mom killed him.

DEREK

WE DON'T KNOW THAT.

AMBER

Uh-

DEREK

We don't! We don't. He could be, uh, fuck, he's really bleeding.

TOBY

(exasperated)

Oh my god.

Toby begins playing the first minute of Für Elise.

The end of the play should show the five writers fully break down. Holly begins to clean intently. Toby should be muttering to himself and playing the keyboard intensely. Steven goes into a dead stare, takes all the blame onto himself. Derek starts shouting medical jargon here and there (suggested dialogue below to inter splice while Amber rants) and attempts to save an already dead MAN IN WHITE COAT. Amber begins to rant, taking over the role Steven was playing as the aggressor.

At some point in Amber's rant, she should begin to shift from going in on Steven and Holly to the door and desperately attempt to escape.

AMBER

This is on you. No doubt this is fucking on you, man. You're fucked. Your Libertarian ass is going to jail and I'm gonna help them send it there. And the fucking quiet mom in the corner, it's on you too!

(MORE)

AMBER (CONT'D)

Say goodbye to the suburbs and going to the outlets cause you're gonna go to fucking JAIL. FOR MURDER. (Shift to door). And I'm not, I'm gonna get the attention of people, I'm gonna get them in here and let them know I had nothing to do with is at all. This is on fucking you and if I can just get out. Just GET OUT I WILL BE FINE. HEY. SOMEONE LIKE ME THE FUCK OUTTA HERE. GET THIS DOOR AND GET ME THE FUCK OUTTA HERE-

DEREK (Suggested)

How do you stop bleeding with a flannel!? -- Do someone have a FUCKING bandage!? -- SHUT THE FUCK UP, AMBER. -- Why is no one here a FUCKING doctor!?

After the panic speeds up and Amber begins to conclude her dialogue, Derek finds something in the coat of the (now confirmed) dead Man in White Coat.

DEREK

(cutting off Amber's rant)

The fuck is this?

Derek pulls out a bloody ID badge. Everything slows down. Should feel exasperated.

TOBY

What?

DEREK

Mercy Thomas Research Facility.

AMBER

The fuck are you talking about?

DEREK

Mercy Thomas Research Facility.

TOBY

Dumbass, the fuck are you saying?!

TOBY runs over to Derek and rips the ID Badge from his hand. The Woman in White Coat comes back to platform with coffee. Sees the dead body below and them holding the ID Badge. Drops the coffee and runs down

TOBY

Mercy Thomas Research Facility. The hell is  
Mercy Thomas Research Facility.

STEVEN

(to himself)

Them. Fucking them.

TOBY

Are they like a TV research company?

DEREK

What the fuck is a "TV research company"

TOBY

I DON'T KNOW. (To Amber) Have you heard of  
them?

AMBER

I don't know. Don't fucking ask me-

TOBY

(over-zealous)

WELL, YOU'RE THE ONE WHO HAS WORKED IN COMEDY  
BEFORE.

DEREK

(to Amber)

You've never heard of them?

AMBER

NO.

STEVEN

Me neither.

DEREK

Jesus Christ.

TOBY

So what? What do we /do?

STEVEN

What do you mean what do we do? Nothing, the  
answer is nothing. That's it.

TOBY

No, come on. No /way-

AMBER

Toby, seriously /just stop-

TOBY

No, there is literally no way we are just done here.

DEREK

We don't even know where "here" is.

Beat.

TOBY

So, where the FUCK are we?

DEREK

Who knows.

Beat. Holly has silently picked up the gun and looks at it, dazed and confused.

STEVEN

(quietly to the others)

The fucking mom has the /gun-

AMBER

We can see that, prick.

TOBY

(to himself)

Fucking where are we-

DEREK

(to Holly)

Put down the gun, Holly. We'll figure this all out just put down the gun.

Beat.

STEVEN

She's got some fucking look in her eye-

AMBER

Seriously, you need to shut the fuck up-

TOBY

I just want my dad-

DEREK

Holly, please put the gun /down-

Holly moves the gun a little and it makes everyone tense.

TOBY

(almost in tears)

Fuckin' fuck man. Fuck-



DEREK  
Holly please /just-

AMBER  
Give the gun back to Steven.

Shock. Steven looks at Amber  
confused.

STEVEN  
Are you serious right /now?

AMBER  
(To Holly)  
He knows how to use it. It's fine. It's his.  
Just give it to him-

DEREK  
Why would we-

AMBER  
We don't know where we are.

Amber, scared, references the dead  
man on the ground

AMBER  
We don't know who is here.

DEREK  
So we give the guy who started all this the /  
gun?

STEVEN  
I DIDN'T START SHIT-

AMBER  
(To Holly)  
Just, just give him the gun. Ok? Let's just  
put things back to normal for a moment.

Holly eyes everyone, tense. She  
starts to hand Steven the gun but  
before they do, The Woman in White  
Coat bursts in.

Beat.

WOMAN  
This isn't funny.

**End of play.**