# HERB CLEARY MEANT NO HARM

A play in two acts
By Craig Houk

PERUSAL

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Synopsis

In present-day Clarksville, Tennessee, Cleary's Delicatessen has been a beloved institution for nearly fifty years, built on family pride and Grandma Cleary's legendary potato salad. But as business falters and a flashy new competitor opens across the street, owner Harlan Cleary pins his hopes on his socially awkward, unpredictable son Herb, who "means no harm" but keeps leaving chaos in his wake. When Herb takes liberties with the sacred potato salad recipe, a series of increasingly absurd mishaps spirals into catastrophe: food poisoning at a family picnic, bodies in the restrooms, a suspicious fire, and police at the door. As loyalties fracture and the Clearys scramble to contain the fallout, the play hurtles toward darkly comic disaster, asking how far a family will go to protect its legacy and whether good intentions are ever enough to save it.

Characters

**DERECK HICKS** Mid to Late 20s, Male
**ERIN BARNES** Mid to Late 20s, Female
**HARLAN CLEARY** Mid 50s, Male
**HERB CLEARY** Early 20s, Male
**EMMA CAMPBELL** Late 40s/Early 50s, Female
**JUDY BOYD** Mid to Late 30s, Female
**CLAYTON BARKSDALE** Mid to late 60s, Male
**REE REE TATE** Mid 20s, Female
**ARLENE DANIELS** Mid 20s, Female
**BERNADETTE SWEETS** Early 50s, Female
**SARABETH MILLARD** Late 20s/Early 30s, Female
**REED CALLAWAY** Late 20s/Early 30s Male
**TINA ESPOSITO** Mid 20s, Female
**ANGIE CABRERA** Mid 20s, Female
**JOELYN PITZER** 50s, Female

Suggested Character Groupings/Tracks

Dereck/Reed
Erin/Sarabeth
Emma/Bernadette/Joelyn
Ree Ree/Tina
Arlene/Angie

Casting Notes

Diversity in casting is strongly encouraged.

Setting

Cleary's Delicatessen. Clarksville, TN. A smattering of tables and chairs, perhaps a grocery section, a service counter, display refrigerator and a cash register. The swinging door behind the counter opens into a kitchen, except the only thing visible in that area is a small office with a glass window and door with a glass panel. There is also a hallway serving as an exit to the restrooms.

Time

Present.

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# ACT 1

*Summertime. Noon. At rise, we see Dereck Hicks and Erin Barbes, likely on a casual date, seated at a table in Cleary's Delicatessen.*

**DERECK**

You know Cleary's has been around since 1975.

**ERIN**

Oh, yeah? Well, that's a very long time.

**DERECK**

Named "Best Deli" in Clarksville almost every year since.

**ERIN**

Mm hm.

**DERECK**

Others have won the title, here and there, but none have lasted as long. Ain't nobody better than Cleary's.

**ERIN**

I've heard good things. Mostly from you, though.

**DERECK**

Best potato salad you'll ever eat.

**ERIN**

Is it? Because it's not that hard to make.

**DERECK**

Bite your tongue, Erin.

**ERIN**

Well, it's not. You boil some potatoes, throw in some mayo, maybe some mustard, some chopped onions and celery. And then you just mix it all up. It's not that difficult. Maybe you add hardboiled eggs or some bacon. But it's pretty darned tricky to screw up potato salad. Except if you add too much salt, of course.

**DERECK**

Did you order it?

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**ERIN**

I did not. I ordered the sesame garlic green beans.

**DERECK**

Well, I got the potato salad. So, you can try mine.

**ERIN**

If it's got eggs or bacon in it, I'll have to pass. Otherwise, I'm happy to give it a try.

**DERECK**

And you'll be honest? About how it tastes?

**ERIN**

Well, of course. I'm sure it's good, but I do doubt it'll be the best potato salad I've ever eaten.

**DERECK**

Fair enough. Oh. And the guy that took our order?

**ERIN**

The balding, middle-aged man with the unusual facial hair?

**DERECK**

Mm hm. Well, he's the owner: Harlan Cleary. Inherited the business from his father who inherited it from his father. And let me tell you, Harlan is the nicest guy you'll ever meet.

**ERIN**

Here we go again. The nicest guy I'll ever meet. Are you sure? I mean, he seemed nice enough, but how do you actually know.

**DERECK**

Fine. Point taken but not appreciated. Anyway, he's a really nice guy.

**ERIN**

I believe you.

**DERECK**

By all accounts, his father, Hersh, and his grandfather, Herman, were really nice guys as well. Well, Hersh is still around – he's not dead. Herman is, though – dead, I mean. But not Hersh – he's retired, moved to Kiawah Island several years back. Both of 'em were and are really nice guys. Just like Harlan over there.

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**ERIN**

That's probably why they've lasted so long.

**DERECK**

That and the potato salad. And their fine selection of deli meats.

**ERIN**

I ordered the tuna melt.

**DERECK**

I know. I'm starting to feel like you're trying to make me look bad in front of Harlan.

**ERIN**

It's on the menu, Dereck.

**DERECK**

Yeah, but it's not a proper deli meat.

**ERIN**

It's tuna. And tuna's a classic.

**DERECK**

You just don't get it.

**ERIN**

Maybe I don't. Never mind. Here comes your pal, Harlan, with our food.

*(Harlan Cleary arrives with two plates.)*

**HARLAN**

Alright. Here we go. One tuna melt with a side of sesame garlic green beans. And one beef schnitzel, horseradish mayo and pickles, with a side of the best potato salad you'll ever eat.

**ERIN**

You don't say.

**HARLAN**

I do say. I say it on the windowfront, on that sign over there, in all the menus, and all over, what do they call it, the social medias. Also got it tattooed on my left butt cheek.

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**ERIN**

I'm sorry, you grandmother's potato salad recipe is tattooed on your–?

**HARLAN**

No, no. Just the slogan.

**ERIN**

On your butt cheek.

**HARLAN**

That's right.

**ERIN**

Okay, setting aside the questionable placement of that tattoo, who's actually seen it and benefited from its intended purpose? Which I assume is to promote the potato salad.

**HARLAN**

They don't call me "Half Moon Harlan" for nothing.

**ERIN**

I'll take your word for it.

**HARLAN**

Anyway… Glad you ordered the sesame garlic green beans. It's very popular right now. Very popular.

**ERIN**

Haven't had a chance to try it yet, but it looks tasty.

**HARLAN**

Oh, it is. It's very tasty.

**ERIN**

Well, I'm looking forward to it.

**HARLAN**

Good. Because it's coming off the menu tonight.

**ERIN**

Coming off the menu? I don't understand.

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**HARLAN**

Our regular customers… well, they think it's a little, I don't know, froufrou, I guess. It's real popular with the, uh, vegetarians or the vegans, I think. Never was able to tell the difference between the two.

**ERIN**

There is a difference, though I suppose either would be okay with green beans. And while I am neither of those, I am a pescatarian, so I do appreciate a meal that doesn't come from animals or animal biproducts.

**HARLAN**

You new to Clarksville?

**ERIN**

About nine months now. Why?

**HARLAN**

Seems to be a lot of young folks moving in lately.

*(A set of dishes crashing to the floor off. All are startled. Calling off.)*

Gosh darn it, Herb! Take it easy back there! Those dishes don't come cheap, you know!

*(To Erin and Dereck.)*

Sorry about that. That's my son Herb. Bit clumsy, but he means no harm. Anyway, look. While I certainly want to make sure that my customers are taken care of, that they're getting what they want, getting their needs met, so to speak, I've come to realize that it's best to just stick to the way we've always done things. We've been in the deli business for nearly fifty years and frankly, at this point, this place practically runs itself. So, why fart around with it? And that's why I'm eighty sixing the sesame garlic green beans.

**DERECK**

Well said, Harlan.

**HARLAN**

Thanks, Dereck. Looks like I've taken up way too much of your time, though. Enjoy your meals. Seems I've got some broken dishes to clean up, so I'll get out of your hair now.

*(Harlan exits.)*

**DERECK**

Like I said. Nicest guy you'll ever meet.

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**ERIN**

That is what you said.

**DERECK**

I'm gonna wash my hands.

*(Dereck rises.)*

**ERIN**

What? Nooo. Our food's been sitting here for about five minutes now because the "nice guy" kept yammering on about his butt tattoo and how he's yanking my sesame garlic green beans off the menu.

**DERECK**

They're not your sesame garlic green beans.

**ERIN**

I'm paying for 'em. I'm eating'em.

**DERECK**

Fair point. Anyway, I'll only be a minute.

**ERIN**

No. Now sit down and eat. I've got some hand sanitizer in my bag here.

*(Reaches for her bag.)*

**DERECK**

It's just not the same. There ain't no substitute for good old-fashioned bar soap and hot water. I'll be right back. You go ahead and start without me.

**ERIN**

Oh, don't worry, cowboy, I will.

*(Dereck exits. Erin prepares to dig in. Before she can, Herb appears with a bussing bin. He drops it on the table with a thud, takes Erin's dish and scrapes the sesame garlic green beans into the bin, but leaves the tuna melt. He resets her dish and walks off with the bin.)*

What the heck was that?

*(She looks off to see what Herb is up to. A moment passes before he returns with a bowl of potato salad. He scoops out a large portion of it and slaps it onto Erin's plate before he walks off again.)*

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That little son of a–

*(Dereck enters.)*

**DERECK**

Here I am. Took almost no time at all. Except there wasn't any hot water or–

**ERIN**

Did you see that? That Herb Cleary punk just scraped my sesame garlic green beans into a bin and then replaced 'em with that blasted potato salad.

**DERECK**

You're kidding.

**ERIN**

I am not. And I'm about to say something to your good buddy Harlan.

**DERECK**

Yeeeaaah… I get why you'd be upset. But maybe you could just… let it go.

**ERIN**

Let it go? That little jerk took a very large serving spoon, dug real deep into that potato salad, and then slapped it onto my plate without my consent.

**DERECK**

Yeah. Well, what I mean is… You see… Herb… can't… really help himself.

**ERIN**

Oh yeah? Why's that?

**DERECK**

To be honest, I don't know exactly what's wrong with him, but… well… he's a little different, if you know what I mean. So, I'm sure he meant no harm by it.

**ERIN**

I see. Well, that does explain it. You're right. I should let it go. Thank you, Dereck. That's very thoughtful.

*(Emma Campbell enters the deli, jovial. During the following, Erin and Dereck eat and chat and eat quietly.)*

**EMMA**

Good afternoon, Harlan!



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*(Harlan appears at the service counter.)*

**HARLAN**

Good afternoon, Mrs. Campbell!

**EMMA**

And what did I tell you about calling me "Mrs. Campbell"?

**HARLAN**

That you don't want me to.

**EMMA**

That's right. We're practically the same age.

**HARLAN**

And I will contend that that right there is an outright lie, Emma.

**EMMA**

Harlan!

**HARLAN**

Now you let me finish. What I mean is, there ain't no way we're the same age because I got at least fifteen years on you.

**EMMA**

*(Emma giggles.)*

Get outta here.

*(Herb arrives with a large to-go order for Emma.)*

**HERB**

You look just like Julia Roberts in Pretty Woman, Mrs. Campbell.

**HARLAN**

Herb!

**EMMA**

Well, that's sweet. Thank you, Herb.

**HARLAN**

Back to the kitchen, Herb.

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*(Herb exits.)*

**EMMA**

Wait a minute. Wasn't she a hooker in that film.

**HARLAN**

What? No. Maybe more like a high-class escort. Doesn't matter anyway. I'm sure Herb meant it as a compliment. Julia Roberts is indeed a fine-looking lady. As are you of course.

**EMMA**

Oh, you stop. Anyway, Herb's a good boy. And do you know what? Good for you for giving him the opportunity to make something of himself. I mean what else is he gonna do except work here? And can you imagine there was a time when parents would have had children like him locked away?

**HARLAN**

I imagine it all the time.

**EMMA**

And he's next in line to inherit the business, right?

*(Silence.)*

So, is that my order right there?

**HARLAN**

Oh. Yeah, it sure is. Though I noticed you didn't order any potato salad this time.

**EMMA**

Right. Well, about that… My husband and his friends were in the other day…

**HARLAN**

Fun group. Bunch of jokesters.

**EMMA**

Yes, they are. And of course, they all ordered the potato salad…

**HARLAN**

Of course.

**EMMA**

But they just didn't like it. Said it tasted… different.

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**HARLAN**

Different how?

**EMMA**

Just not the same. But they didn't want to say anything to you because it's your signature dish. So, if you don't mind, we're gonna pass on it this time around

**HARLAN**

Understood. And I think I know what the problem is. You see, I've been letting Herb help out in the kitchen lately.

**EMMA**

Oh my.

**HARLAN**

And I guess I figured if he just followed the recipe… Well, between you and me, it's pretty hard to screw up potato salad.

**EMMA**

Well, perhaps it isn't my place, and of course I don't know the actual extent of Herb's… issues, but maybe he has trouble reading.

**HARLAN**

Well, he does struggle with that. But that's not the problem.

**EMMA**

Then what is?

**HARLAN**

I didn't write the recipe down. It's never been written down. I expect you can imagine why.

**EMMA**

Well, of course. Top secret.

**HARLAN**

Exactly. So, if anyone's to blame, it's me. I really oughta keep my expectations in check when it comes to Herb. Asking him to help out with something as precious as my grandmother's potato salad recipe was a step too far.

**EMMA**

Oh, Harlan, now I feel just awful.

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**HARLAN**

What? Why on earth would you–? Now, look, I didn't mean for you to feel that way. Confound it, I should've kept my mouth shut.

**EMMA**

No, no. You were right to speak up. Tell you what. I'll take some potato salad after all.

**HARLAN**

Come on, Emma, you do not have to–

**EMMA**

I insist. We've got about forty people coming this afternoon.

**HARLAN**

Forty!? Well! You're gonna have your hands full for sure.

*(He thinks on it.)*

So, I'd say right around ten pounds should do it.

**EMMA**

Make it fifteen.

**HARLAN**

*(Calling off.)*

Herb! Fifteen pounds of potato salad! And make it quick!

*(Judy Boyd enters from the kitchen. She's shivering and looking rough.)*

Judy, you're late. Do you know what time it is?

**JUDY**

I arrived at seven this morning, Harlan.

**HARLAN**

I hardly think so. I expect I would've seen you if that was the case.

**JUDY**

Normally you would've, yes. Except I've been in the walk-in cooler the entire time.

**HARLAN**

What the heck were you doing in the walk-in for five hours?

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**JUDY**

Mostly just freezing my butt off and trying not to die. I was stuck, Harlan. Otherwise, I try not to spend too much time in there.

**HARLAN**

How do you mean stuck?

**JUDY**

I went in first thing to pull some meats and some sides for the day, but then when I tried to get out, I couldn't. Turns out, Herb stacked a bunch of delivery boxes against the door. I was hollering for help for nearly an hour, but then I just gave up. Spent the rest of the time carving my last will and testament into an eighteen-pound ham.

**EMMA**

Oh, that's awful, Judy. Are you alright?

**JUDY**

Aside from the uncontrollable shivering, yes.

**EMMA**

Glad to hear it. Though I have to ask. How did you get out of the–?

**HARLAN**

*(To Judy.)*

Well, the good news is you're alive. And I've got just the thing to warm you up.

**JUDY**

The afternoon off?

**HARLAN**

Not at all what I was thinking. I suggest you put Emma's potato salad into a container and then carry her order to her car. What do you think about that? That should get the blood flowing.

**JUDY**

I can feel my blood heating up already.

**HARLAN**

Alright then! So, let's get a wiggle on!

*(Judy exits into the kitchen.)*

Potato salad is on the house, Emma.

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**EMMA**

Oh, Harlan, you don't have to–

**HARLAN**

I most certainly do. So, listen, I'm just gonna check on my other customers. Judy won't be long.

**EMMA**

Sounds perfect. Thank you, Harlan.

*(Emma looks around or checks her phone. Harlan moves to Dereck and Erin's table.)*

**HARLAN**

And how're we doing here?

**ERIN**

Well, since you asked, I wanted to talk to you about this potato–

**DERECK**

I noticed there wasn't any hot water or bar soap in the restroom, Harlan.

**HARLAN**

That's right. Trying to keep costs down.

**DERECK**

Oh. Things not going well?

**HARLAN**

No, no. Business is good. Just being cautious.

**ERIN**

Maybe I'm mistaken, but I'm pretty sure you're required by law to have soap and hot water.

**HARLAN**

Dereck, you really have your hands full with this one.

**DERECK**

I'm thinking about getting an extra pair.

*(Dereck and Harlan chuckle.)*

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**HARLAN**

Truth is, we'd have to raise prices if we turned the hot water back on and stocked soap.

**ERIN**

Well, I'd gladly pay a little more if it meant I might not get hepatitis.

**HARLAN**

*(Chuckling.)*

You are a piece of work, young lady. A real piece of work. Excuse me.

*(Harlan crosses to Clayton Barksdale, who is seated quietly at a corner table with his coffee and an electronic tablet. During the following, Judy appears with Emma's potato salad and helps her carry the order to her car.)*

**CLAYTON**

Business is in the toilet, Harlan. And you know it.

**HARLAN**

That's happening all over town, Clayton. Everyone's taking a hit.

**CLAYTON**

Except that deli across the street. They're the ones taking what's left of your customers.

**HARLAN**

But not you.

**CLAYTON**

What? No, I had breakfast there this morning. Good stuff. Oh, and the owner? Bernadette? Have you gotten a look at her. Because she ain't hideous?

**HARLAN**

Are you suggesting, Clayton, that she's the opposite of hideous?

**CLAYTON**

Polar.

**HARLAN**

So, in addition to providing her customers with some darn good food, you're saying she's easy on the eyes?

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**CLAYTON**

That's what I'm saying.

**HARLAN**

And you think maybe I ain't got much going on in the looks department?

**CLAYTON**

You're alright. Shave whatever that is on your face and get a decent haircut, and one might say you're a reasonably good looking fellow.

*(Herb arrives with a bussing bin.)*

**HERB**

Shave and a haircut…

**CLAYTON**

Two bits! You here to bus my table, Herb?

**HERB**

Sure am, Mr. Barksdale.

**CLAYTON**

Alright then. Everything but the coffee cup, though. I'll take a refill.

*(Clayton lifts his cup just before Herb drops the bussing bin onto the table with a thump. Dishes rattle. Herb clears the table and exits to get coffee.)*

He's a good boy.

**HARLAN**

He's no boy. He's a grown man.

*(During the following, Judy reenters and goes to the kitchen or behind the counter.)*

**CLAYTON**

On the outside, sure. But up here…

*(Taps his head.)*

… He's still a boy.

**HARLAN**

That's my point. I don't think his mind's ever gonna catch up with his body.

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**CLAYTON**

Well, the one ain't talking to the other, that's for certain. And Harlan, don't take this the wrong way, but maybe you oughta find something else to keep Herb busy. Instead of working here. You know, before something happens.

**HARLAN**

Before what happens?

*(Ree Ree Tate and Arlene Daniels enter mid-conversation and head toward the counter.)*

**REE REE**

And can you believe he ghosted me?

**ARLENE**

Now, hang on, Ree Ree. Which guy are we talking about now? I mean, because you juggle more men than a circus clown juggles balls. That's a lot of balls, Ree Ree. A lot of balls.

**REE REE**

I'm talking about Wade Birdwell.

**ARLENE**

*(Taken aback.)*

Wade Birdwell? Oh, my.

**REE REE**

Anyway, he was supposed to pick me up last Saturday. We were gonna check out a matinee over at the Clarksville Regal.

**ARLENE**

Good Lord, Ree Ree. Didn't you hear? Wade Birdwell's dead. Crashed his Silverado into a telephone pole. No seat belt. Airbag failed. He hit the windshield pretty hard.

**REE REE**

When?

**ARLENE**

Just last Saturday actually.

**REE REE**

Really? Well, do you know what this means?

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**ARLENE**

I've no idea.

**REE REE**

It means Wade Birdwell literally ghosted me.

*(A seemingly somber moment passes before the two of them burst out laughing.)*

**ARLENE**

"Literally ghosted me". That is just too darned funny. You are out of control.

*(They reach the counter. Judy is there.)*

**REE REE**

Hey, Judy.

**JUDY**

Hey, Ree Ree. Arlene.

**ARLENE**

Hi, Judy.

**JUDY**

What can I get for you two today?

**ARLENE**

Is Herb in?

*(Herb enters with a coffee carafe and walks past them to refill Clayton's coffee.)*

**JUDY**

As a matter of fact, he is. Why do you ask?

**ARLENE**

No reason, I guess.

*(She giggles.)*

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**REE REE**

*(To Arlene.)*

Do not tell me that you have a crush on Herb Cleary. You know that boy ain't wired like the rest of us.

**ARLENE**

I do not have a crush on him. I only asked if he was here. Doesn't mean that I'm smitten. And even if I was, it's not as though he isn't a handsome young fella, you know. I mean, there are plenty of other girls around here who think he's cute.

**REE REE**

You seem pretty uppity about it.

**ARLENE**

Well, maybe you oughta shut your fat mouth.

**JUDY**

Anyway… today's featured item is a wedge of cheddar delicately positioned between two slices of buttered whole wheat, pan-fried, served with hand-shredded iceberg lettuce, tossed with oil, vinegar, and a pinch of pepper.

**REE REE**

So, a grilled cheese sandwich and a side salad.

**JUDY**

Yes. But on whole wheat. And I made the dressing myself.

**REE REE**

I'll pass.

**JUDY**

And you, Arlene?

**ARLENE**

I just had a turkey club sandwich over at Bernadette's.

**JUDY**

Oh, you did?

**ARLENE**

Best I've ever had.

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**JUDY**

Good to know.

**ARLENE**

I love turkey club sandwiches. In fact, to date, including Bernadette's, I've been to fifty-four delicatessens across the U.S., and Bernadette's has, by far, the best turkey club sandwich of all of 'em. Anyway, I'm full. Couldn't eat another bite.

**JUDY**

Right. Then what the heck are you two doing here?

**REE REE**

My goodness, Judy. You're in a mood. Did somebody stick a popsicle up your backside this morning?

**JUDY**

Close. But you make a fair point. What I should've said was, if you're not gonna eat here, then get out.

*(Harlan has just arrived at the counter.)*

**HARLAN**

Alright, thank you, Judy. I think you're overdue for a break. Why don't you head out back and have yourself a smoke? But don't be letting Herb bum any cigarettes off you.

**JUDY**

*(As she exits into the kitchen.)*

Herb! I'm going out back for a smoke! You want one?

*(Herb returns from refilling Clayton's coffee.)*

**ARLENE**

Oh hey, Herb.

**HERB**

*(Without looking at her.)*

Hey, Arlene.

*(Arlene giggles as Herb follows Judy into the kitchen.)*

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**HARLAN**

So, ladies. What can I do for you today? Looks like you already had a nice meal at Bernadette's. Maybe dessert?

**REE REE**

No, thank you, Mr. Cleary. We actually stopped by to see if you might be interested in sponsoring our women's softball team. The Clarksville Cluckers. Now, before you ask, we're fairly certain we don't have any lesbians on the team. Unless, of course, you'd prefer that we do. Then perhaps we could recruit a few or see if any of our current members might be willing to out themselves. We wouldn't want to shut down any potential funding sources. We're inclusive that way.

**ARLENE**

Sponsorships start at a hundred dollars. Top tier is twenty-five hundred.

**HARLAN**

Maybe I can take a look at the sponsorship levels. To check out the perks for each.

**REE REE**

Well, of course. Go on, Arlene. Show him the QR code.

**HARLAN**

I'm sorry, the what?

**ARLENE**

The QR code.

*(She pulls out her phone, taps at it, then holds the screen up to him.)*

Go ahead. Scan it.

**HARLAN**

Scan it? Scan what? I'm not even sure what the heck I'm looking at here.

*(Squints.)*

Is that a crossword puzzle?

**REE REE**

Right. Well, don't you worry, Mr. Cleary, we came prepared. We printed a few brochures for those who might be just a teensy bit technically challenged.

*(Hands him a brochure.)*

PERUSAL

**ARLENE**

*(Quietly to Ree Ree.)*

Bernadette knew what a QR code was.

**REE REE**

She sure did.

**HARLAN**

Bernadette bought a sponsorship?

**REE REE**

Oh yeah. Grand slam package. She gets her restaurant logo on the front and back of our jerseys.

**ARLENE**

And guess what color they are?

**HARLAN**

Pink.

**ARLENE**

*(Deflated.)*

Yes, they're pink.

*(Erin rushes toward the restrooms, on the verge of vomiting. Dereck follows close behind.)*

**HARLAN**

Jesus. She okay, Dereck?

**DERECK**

Uh, no. No, she is not okay. And I ain't feeling so great myself. Excuse me.

*(He exits urgently, cupping his rear. Judy enters from the kitchen and begins clearing their table.)*

**HARLAN**

Hey, Judy. When you're done there, can you head to the office and make out a check to the, uh….

*(To Ree Ree.)*

What is it?

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**REE REE**

The Clarksville Cluckers.

**HARLAN**

Right, right. And, uh… How much did Bernadette give you?

**REE REE**

Thirty-five hundred.

**HARLAN**

*(Quietly.)*

Jesus.

*(To Judy.)*

Make it out for four thousand.

**JUDY**

Four thousand?! Have you lost your dang mind?

**ARLENE**

That's very generous, Mr. Cleary.

**REE REE**

It sure is. Though I expect Bernadette won't give up that jersey logo without a fight.

**HARLAN**

Make it forty-five hundred, Judy.

**JUDY**

One straitjacket coming right up!

*(She joins them, nodding toward the restrooms.)*

Looks like those two did a little eat-it-run.

**HARLAN**

No. No, they're both in the restroom.

**JUDY**

Oh yeah? What's the matter with 'em?

PERUSAL

**HARLAN**

Nothing's the matter with 'em.

**JUDY**

You sure? Because you're looking pretty darned anxious right about now.

**HARLAN**

They're fine. Now go get me that check.

**JUDY**

*(To herself as she exits.)*

Forty-five hundred dollars… I hardly make that much in three months.

*(She enters the office and shuts the door behind her. Finding the checkbook will not be easy… the office is a mess.)*

**HARLAN**

Ree Ree. Arlene. Why don't you two grab a seat at one of the tables? I'll bring you a soda while you wait. What'll you have?

**REE REE**

I'll have a diet, thank you.

**ARLENE**

Regular's fine for me. I'll burn those calories playing softball.

**REE REE**

You're the substitute left fielder, Arlene. You'll be spending most of your time on the bench.

**ARLENE**

Well, then maybe I'm allergic to aspartame.

**REE REE**

Whatever you say.

**ARLENE**

You know, I'm starting to think Wade Birdwell crashed his truck on purpose.

**REE REE**

And what's that supposed to mean?

PERUSAL

**ARLENE**

It means maybe he'd rather snap his neck than go on a date with you.

**REE REE**

You better pipe down, turkey club.

**HARLAN**

One diet and one regular coming right up!

*(Harlan heads behind the counter. Arlene and Ree Ree take a seat. At the same time, Bernadette Sweets enters. Clayton perks up, straightens his shirt, runs a hand through his hair.)*

**BERNADETTE**

Well, good afternoon, neighbors!

**CLAYTON**

Good afternoon, Miss Bernadette.

**BERNADETTE**

Clayton Barksdale, you handsome devil. Did you enjoy your breakfast sandwich this morning?

**CLAYTON**

I sure did.

**BERNADETTE**

One egg over easy, bacon – extra crispy, Swiss cheese, arugula, hillbilly tomato, extra mayo, all on a lightly toasted sesame seed bagel.

**CLAYTON**

Now, how in the world did you remember all that?

**BERNADETTE**

Because I'm the one who made it.

**CLAYTON**

Well, I'll be. Best breakfast sandwich I ever had.

**BERNADETTE**

Well, we source everything locally. And we make our bagels onsite.

*(Harlan returns with sodas for Ree Ree and Arlene.)*

PERUSAL

And my goodness. Ree Ree Tate and Arlene Daniels. I expect you two are up to no good. Trying to stir up a rivalry between me and Mr. Cleary over here? You are Harlan Cleary, I assume.

**HARLAN**

I am indeed.

**BERNADETTE**

So, how much did you give these ladies for their softball team?

**HARLAN**

Oh. Well, uh… forty-five hundred.

**BERNADETTE**

Forty-five hundred!? Well, my goodness.

**REE REE**

Which means Cleary's Delicatessen gets their logo on the front and back of our jerseys.

**HARLAN**

*(To Bernadette.)*

Sorry about that.

**BERNADETTE**

What? No. Nothing to be sorry about. Tell you what. How about I match your forty-five hundred, and maybe we put both our logos on that jersey? What do you think?

*(To Ree Ree and Arlene.)*

Can we make that happen, ladies?

**REE REE**

/ I don't see why not.

**ARLENE**

/ That's a great idea!

**BERNADETTE**

Well, that settles it. Front or back, Harlan?

**HARLAN**

Come again?

PERUSAL

**BERNADETTE**

Front of the jersey… or back?

**HARLAN**

Oh, I don't know. Doesn't matter, I guess. Whatever works best for you.

**BERNADETTE**

How about you take the back, then? Hm? That way everyone behind the backstop'll get a really good look at it.

**HARLAN**

Sounds good.

*(During the following, or perhaps beginning slightly earlier, Herb enters with a cigarette dangling from his lips. He lingers outside the office, watching Judy for a moment. Unseen by her, he quietly drags a chair over and wedges it under the door handle, trapping her inside. He then grabs a nearby wastebasket and flicks his lit cigarette into it. The contents catch fire. Herb lifts the now-burning basket and walks off with it.)*

**BERNADETTE**

*(To Harlan.)*

I would've come over sooner to introduce myself, but things have been absolutely nuts at the deli since we opened. And I hate leaving my staff to fend for themselves at lunchtime, but it was important that I make time to meet you, Harlan.

**HARLAN**

Well, that's very kind of you, and of course you're welcome here anytime, but you know, you could've waited until things slowed down across the way.

**BERNADETTE**

*(A warm, easy laugh.)*

If I waited for things to slow down, I'd never have made it over. We're busy morning, noon, and night.

**HARLAN**

Oh, yeah, that's right. I did notice you keep evening hours as well.

**BERNADETTE**

Mm hm. Some bar food, beer, and wine. Live entertainment, local talent. Nothing too fancy.

PERUSAL

**HARLAN**

Right.

*(Bernadette takes in the room.)*

**BERNADETTE**

Listen, Harlan. I hope you don't mind me saying but it seems a bit slow over here. And it's barely even one o'clock.

**HARLAN**

Well, you're right about that. I'm gonna fix it, though. Planning some renovations, spruce the place up a bit–

**CLAYTON**

You've been saying that for the last five years.

**HARLAN**

Oh, now come on, Clayton. That ain't true.

**CLAYTON**

Come to think of it, it's been more than five years.

**HARLAN**

Alright, that's enough outta you.

*(To Bernadette.)*

Anyway, I'm gonna start adding some new things to the menu and–

**CLAYTON**

What the heck are you talking about? You just told that young lady you were getting rid of those sesame garlic green beans–

**REE REE**

He didn't mention green beans to me.

**ARLENE**

Me neither.

**CLAYTON**

No, not you two. The young lady in the restroom.

PERUSAL

**REE REE**

Oh, right. She's been in there a while.

**ARLENE**

Her boyfriend too.

**REE REE**

I hope they're okay.

**HARLAN**

They're fine!

**BERNADETTE**

Do I smell smoke?

**CLAYTON**

She's right. Something's burning.

**REE REE**

Doesn't it always smell like that in here?

**HARLAN**

*(He sniffs the air.)*

Oh, crap.

**BERNADETTE**

Everything okay?

**HARLAN**

Of course, of course. I'm sure everything's just fine. Excuse me. Just a minute.

*(Harlan rushes into the kitchen. Judy is now trapped in the office, pounding and struggling with the door. Harlan grabs a fire extinguisher and disappears off. We hear it discharge. After a beat, the noise stops. Harlan reappears and frees Judy.)*

**JUDY**

Where's that little son of a biscuit? I'm gonna kill him.

*(She bolts through the kitchen and out the back.)*

PERUSAL

**HARLAN**

*(Calling after her.)*

Leave him be, Judy! I'm sure he meant nothing by it!

*(A tightly contained eruption.)*

Son of a… Ahhhhhh!

*(He reins it in, resets himself, returns out front.)*

Alright. That's all taken care of.

**BERNADETTE**

What happened, Harlan?

**HARLAN**

Oh, just a small grease fire. Nothing serious.

**ARLENE**

I'm thinking maybe Ree Ree and I should come back for that check, Mr. Cleary. Sounds like you've got your hands full.

*(Ree Ree shoots her a look.)*

**HARLAN**

No, no, no. Everything's under control. You just hang tight. Judy'll be right out with your money. And while you wait, let me grab a complimentary potato salad for the two of you. Freshly packaged, right behind the counter.

*(He moves behind the counter, gathers the containers.)*

**REE REE**

That's very sweet, Mr. Cleary. I'll pass it along to my grandmother. She loves your potato salad. Says it's delicious and easy to chew.

*(Harlan returns and hands them the containers.)*

**HARLAN**

Alright, here you go. Do whatever you like with 'em. Long as somebody's able to enjoy 'em.

*(Herb bursts in through the front door. Judy barrels in after him.)*

**JUDY**

You're a dead man, Herb Cleary! You hear me? A dead man.

PERUSAL

*(They tear through the space in a chaotic game of cat and mouse, around tables, behind chairs, before Herb bolts out the back again, Judy in pursuit. Harlan calls off after them.)*

**HARLAN**

Judy! When you and Herb are finished horsing around, maybe you can get that check for these young ladies?

*(A crash off.)*

You know what? I'm gonna go ahead and get it myself.

*(He starts off.)*

**BERNADETTE**

Harlen?

**HARLAN**

Yes, ma'am?

**BERNADETTE**

I'd really like to speak to Herb. If he's not too busy.

**HARLAN**

I'm sorry, you wanna speak to Herb?

**BERNADETTE**

Yes. If he's not too busy. I was hoping to thank him.

**HARLAN**

Thank him for what?

**BERNADETTE**

Well, he's a sweet young man. Earlier this morning, he dropped off several large containers of your world-famous potato salad. And I have to say, you all are way too generous with that potato salad. Anyway, I thought, wouldn't it be a great idea to promote your deli by sharing samples with my customers? So, we've been adding a small container to each of our takeout orders. The idea being, of course, to drum up a little extra business for you over here. A bit of cross-marketing.

**HARLAN**

Oh… I see. Well, that's very kind, Bernadette.

PERUSAL

**BERNADETTE**

It was sort of Herb's idea.

**HARLAN**

Nonetheless, I appreciate it.

**BERNADETTE**

Well, it's certainly my pleasure. So, do you think I might see him? I didn't get a chance to chat with him this morning.

**HARLAN**

Right. Well, I don't know if you could tell, but Herb's kind of shy. Really shy, in fact. Frankly, I'm surprised he paid you a visit at all. That's certainly out of character for him.

**BERNADETTE**

Really? Because my deli manager said they had a lovely conversation. Said he was quite the charmer, actually.

**HARLAN**

I see. Well, maybe another time then? Because I've gotta get these ladies their money, and it sounds like I may need to clean up some kind of mess in the back as well.

**BERNADETTE**

Oh. Right. Of course. My apologies, Harlan. I don't want to be a nuisance.

**HARLAN**

A nuisance? What? No, ma'am. Not at all. Like I said, you're welcome here anytime–

**BERNADETTE**

It's alright, Harlan. You've got things to take care of. I only meant to say, I think it's time I got outta your hair.

**CLAYTON**

*(Quietly.)*

What's left of it.

**BERNADETTE**

But I will certainly be back. And I hope you'll stop by for a visit soon. I'd love to show you around.

PERUSAL

**HARLAN**

You bet.

**BERNADETTE**

Have a wonderful afternoon, everyone!

*(They all exchange goodbyes as Bernadette exits.)*

**HARLAN**

*(To Ree Ree and Arlene.)*

Alright, ladies. Forty-five hundred smackaroos coming right up.

**REE REE**

Thanks again, Mr. Cleary.

**HARLAN**

My pleasure.

*(Harlan exits into the back and heads into the office. As he does, Judy enters from the front.)*

**JUDY**

Is that little crud muffin in here?

**ARLENE**

Last I saw Herb; you were chasing him out the back.

**REE REE**

Looks like he's got you running in circles, Judy.

**JUDY**

The only circles I see are the ones under your eyes, Ree Ree.

**ARLENE**

Well, that's not very nice, Judy…

**REE REE**

No, it is not.

**ARLENE**

… I mean, it's not Ree Ree's fault. I think it's just genetics.

PERUSAL

**REE REE**

You are the absolute worst, Arlene.

*(Harlan reenters from the kitchen area with the check.)*

**HARLAN**

Alright. And here you go. Couldn't remember who to make it out to, so I left that part blank.

*(He offers the check to Ree Ree but Judy snatches it mid-transfer.)*

**JUDY**

Gimme that.

**HARLAN**

What the hell are you doing, Judy?

**JUDY**

I've had just about enough of this nonsense.

**HARLAN**

Last I checked, you weren't the one in charge around here.

**JUDY**

Last I checked, neither were you.

*(To Ree and Arlene.)*

Ree Ree. Arlene. Time to skedaddle.

**REE REE**

Of course, Judy. So, if you don't mind, I'll just take that from you–

*(She reaches for the check but Judy stuffs it into her bra.)*

**JUDY**

I'm gonna give you five seconds to get outta here.

**ARLENE**

Come on, Ree Ree, let's go. Oh, and thank you for the potato salad, Mr. Cleary. That was very generous.

**REE REE**

Was it, though?

PERUSAL

*(Arlene grabs her and pulls her toward the door.)*

Bye!

*(They exit.)*

**JUDY**

Have you checked the restrooms lately, Harlan?

**HARLAN**

I have not. Why do you ask?

**JUDY**

You know darn well why I– Never mind.

*(She grunts and heads down the hallway.)*

**CLAYTON**

Uh… Harlan.

**HARLAN**

Yeah, Clayton?

**CLAYTON**

*(Gesturing to his tablet.)*

Something just popped up on my news app that might interest you.

**HARLAN**

*(Moving to Clayton.)*

What is it?

**CLAYTON**

Here. Let me just play the clip.

**JUDY**

*(Off, knocking.)*

Excuse me? Young lady? Everything alright in there?

**CLAYTON**

Dang it. I lost the page. Hang on.

PERUSAL

**JUDY**

*(Off, knocking.)*

Young man? You okay? You've been in there quite some time now.

**CLAYTON**

Here we go.

*(He taps the screen. As the clip begins, Judy reenters briefly, crosses to the office for keys, then heads back down the hall.)*

**NEWSCASTER**

*(Voiceover.)*

We have breaking news of a possible mass poisoning involving approximately forty people at a picnic just outside Clarksville. Reports indicate the home belongs to Floyd and Emma Campbell, who were hosting dozens of friends and relatives when, one by one, guests began to fall ill. No deaths have been confirmed at this time, though several individuals are in critical condition, and some are not expected to survive. We will continue to provide updates as more information becomes available. In the meantime, we have an official statement from Clarksville Mayor Joelyn Pitzer…

**JOELYN PITZER**

*(Voiceover.)*

Good afternoon. First and foremost, we ask that everyone remain calm. We're fairly certain this is an isolated incident, perhaps not unlike Jonestown or the Branch Davidians. Or possibly the result of a middle-aged man in an "I Cook As Good As I Look" apron being overly confident about the temperature of his kabobs. Regardless, we have the situation well in hand and will continue our investigation until we arrive at answers that best align with our preferred narrative. I will not be taking questions at this time.

**HARLAN**

Oh… crap.

**CLAYTON**

Oh, crap indeed.

*(Judy reappears from the hallway.)*

**JUDY**

Harlan…

**HARLAN**

Not now, Judy. We've got a big problem on our hands.



PERUSAL

**JUDY**

Oh yeah? Bigger than a pair of corpses in the restrooms?

*(End of Act 1.)*

PERUSAL

# ACT 2

*Cleary's Delicatessen. Not long after the previous scene. The deli is empty.*

**JUDY**

*(Off.)*

Have you lost what's left of your dang mind, Herb Cleary? Do you have any idea what you've done?

*(Judy bursts in, shoving Herb through the front entrance. He's clutching a cardboard box. Judy drags a chair center and plants it down.)*

Now, you sit down. And don't you move if you know what's good for you.

*(Herb sits. Judy crosses to the door, locks it, flips the sign to CLOSED. Clayton enters from the kitchen, followed by Harlan.)*

**HARLAN**

You okay, Clayton?

**CLAYTON**

Yeah, I'm fine. Lower back's seizing up a little, though.

**HARLAN**

Well, I'm sorry to hear that, but I do appreciate the help.

**JUDY**

So, where are the police, Harlan? They should've been here by now

**HARLAN**

Right. Well, I didn't call 'em. Not just yet anyway.

**JUDY**

And why the heck not?

**HARLAN**

Because I think we need to come up with a plan first, Judy.

**JUDY**

A plan? We've got two dead customers in the restrooms, Harlan.

**CLAYTON**

Not anymore, we don't.

PERUSAL

**JUDY**

Oh, is that so? Then where the heck are they?

**CLAYTON**

I'll let Harlan field that one.

**HARLAN**

Well… the young man, he's still in the restroom. We need to take care of him. But the other one, the young lady, she's in the walk-in cooler.

**JUDY**

The walk-in…? What is wrong with you people?

**HARLAN**

And what do you think the police are gonna do when they find out we've poisoned half the town, Judy?

**JUDY**

We? We? Oh, no. No, no, no sir. I had nothing to do with any of that. And as a matter of fact, your primary culprit is sitting right there.

*(She points to Herb.)*

**HARLAN**

That "culprit" is my son.

**JUDY**

Exactly. And that makes him your responsibility, Harlan. Not mine.

**HERB**

Clementine was my responsibility.

**JUDY**

What? What the heck is he talking about? What are you talking about, Herb?

**HARLAN**

Clementine was his dog.

**HERB**

She was twenty-five percent Miniature Pinscher, twenty-five percent Great Pyrenees, ten point seven nine percent Afghan Hound, and ten point nine percent Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever. She's dead now.



PERUSAL

**HARLAN**

She was a good girl.

**HERB**

She was the best girl.

**HARLAN**

Yes, she was Herb.

**HERB**

She liked being in the kitchen because there was food in there. She didn't like loud noises, though, so I'd put earmuffs on her during thunderstorms and the Fourth of July. We'd lay on the bathroom floor together until the noises went away. She didn't like the earmuffs. She was always giving me kisses with her tongue. And just because I liked her kisses didn't mean I was a pervert, though Grandpa Hersh claimed otherwise. She barked a lot. I used to think nobody in the neighborhood liked her barking… but I learned differently. The Whittakers across the fence loved Clementine so much that one day Mrs. Whittaker cooked up a ham loaf, filled it with metallic mercury, and fed it to her.

**JUDY**

Jesus, Herb. That isn't love. You know that, right?

**HERB**

Grief comes from love.

*(To Harlan.)*

That's what you told me, isn't it?

**HARLAN**

I did, Herb, but–

**HERB**

Grief is love. And Clementine caused the Whittakers a lot of grief.

**JUDY**

That's now how things work, Herb.

**HERB**

Mama was overcome with grief when Clementine died. And that's why she left us.

PERUSAL

**JUDY**

*(To Harlan.)*

You told him / that?

**HERB**

/ I know what people say about me. Because I'm always listening. And I have feelings too. There's a whole lot of love inside of me. And I just felt it was time to share that love with the good people of Clarksville

**JUDY**

Did you put something in that / potato salad, Herb?

**HARLAN**

/ What's in the box, Herb?

*(During this, outside the front door, Sarabeth Millard and Reed Callaway appear. They try the handle, but it's locked. They peer in. Knock.)*

**SARABETH**

Hello?

**HARLAN**

Sorry, we're closed.

**SARABETH**

The sign says you're open until six.

**JUDY**

That other sign says we're closed.

**SARABETH**

Seems like we've got ourselves a bit of a contradiction, then.

**REED**

We were hoping to grab some lunch.

**CLAYTON**

You might try that new place, Bernadette's, across the way.

**REED**

We thought about it but there's a line out the door.

PERUSAL

**SARABETH**

Everything alright in there?

**HARLAN**

Oh, yeah. Everything's just… hunky-dory.

**SARABETH**

You sure about that?

**HARLAN**

Truth is, business has been a little slow today, so we figured we'd close up early.

**REED**

Well, you've got two paying customers standing right outside. And we brought our appetites.

**CLAYTON**

I think maybe you oughta let 'em in, Harlan.

**JUDY**

Oh, Jesus. What the heck am I doing? I am not complicit in this.

*(She heads for the door.)*

**HARLAN**

Judy–

**JUDY**

Hush! And you know something? You made a big mistake, Harlan, when you moved that body.

**HARLAN**

Herb, get outta here.

**HERB**

Where should I go?

**HARLAN**

Kitchen. And keep quiet. You understand?

**HERB**

Yes, sir.

*(Herb exits with the box. Judy unlocks the door and lets the officers in.)*

PERUSAL

**JUDY**

Sorry for the inconvenience. Come on in. We're happy to have you.

*(Reed steps in ahead of Sarabeth.)*

**REED**

Thank you, kindly.

**SARABETH**

*(To Reed.)*

What's the matter with you?

**REED**

What? What'd I do?

**SARABETH**

You just pushed in ahead of me.

**REED**

Oh. Right. Sorry. I just didn't think that sort of thing mattered to you.

**SARABETH**

What sort of thing?

**REED**

You know. All that feminist liberation hoo-ha. Didn't figure you were the type to expect a man to hold the door for you.

**SARABETH**

I happen to be your superior, numbnuts. So, no. I don't need you to hold doors. But I do expect to walk through 'em first. Understood, officer?

**REED**

Yes, detective.

**CLAYTON**

Detective?

**JUDY**

Why don't you two have a seat wherever you like, and I'll grab some menus.

PERUSAL

*(She moves to the counter.)*

**HARLAN**

I'll get your drinks. What'll you have?

**REED**

I'll let the lady order first.

**SARABETH**

*(She shoots him a look. To Harlan.)*

Cherry cola, please.

**HARLAN**

We charge extra for that.

**SARABETH**

I'm sorry, you what?

**HARLAN**

We, uh… charge extra… for flavored sodas.

**SARABETH**

Why would you charge extra for a flavored / soda?

**HARLAN**

/ You know what, never mind. One cherry cola for the… detective. That right?

**SARABETH**

That's right.

**CLAYTON**

Uh oh.

**HARLAN**

Settle down, Clayton.

*(To Reed.)*

And for you?

**REED**

Cream soda. Unless that comes with a surcharge.

PERUSAL

**HARLAN**

One cherry cola and one cream soda. On the house.

*(He moves behind the counter as Judy passes with menus.)*

**REED**

*(Gesturing grandly.)*

After you.

**SARABETH**

You are a full-on dip stick. Just sit down.

*(They sit.)*

**JUDY**

Alright. Here are your menus.

*(She hands the menus to Sarabeth and Reed.)*

We do have one special today. A wedge of cheddar delicately positioned between two slices of buttered whole wheat, pan-fried, served with hand-shredded iceberg lettuce, tossed with oil, vinegar, and a pinch of pepper.

**SARABETH**

That sounds an awful lot like a grilled cheese and a side salad.

**JUDY**

Well, how'd you guess?

**CLAYTON**

She's a detective.

**HARLAN**

That's enough outta you.

*(He sets down the sodas.)*

And here you are.

**SARABETH**

Thank you kindly.

*(They look over menus.)*

PERUSAL

**HARLAN**

You know, I gotta say… I'm pretty familiar with the police around here. A lot of 'em come in for breakfast or lunch, so–

**SARABETH**

You are Harlan Cleary, correct?

**HARLAN**

Uh… that's right.

**SARABETH**

Owner and operator of Cleary's delicatessen.

**HARLAN**

Guilty as charged.

**SARABETH**

Then I expect you know why we're here.

**HARLAN**

Because you're hungry?

**SARABETH**

Well, yes, we are hungry. But there's a more specific reason. Tell him why we're here, officer Callaway.

**REED**

Oh, he doesn't know?

**SARABETH**

Apparently not.

**REED**

Right. Well, it's come to our attention that a crime has been committed.

**HARLAN**

A crime?

PERUSAL

**JUDY**

*(Quietly.)*

Well, crap.

**REED**

Yes. And in this very establishment.

**HARLAN**

I see. And, uh… what might be the nature of this… alleged crime.

**REED**

Well, I don't want to give away too much; it's an ongoing investigation. At the moment, we've got more questions than answers, so it's probably best if we just sit back, make a few general inquiries, get your responses… and then see where that takes us. Sound fair?

*(A crash off. Everyone jumps.)*

**HARLAN**

*(Calling off.)*

Gosh darn it, Herb! How many times do I have to tell you to be careful back there!?

**SARABETH**

Jesus. What was that? Is he alright?

**HARLAN**

Oh, I'm sure he's fine. Herb's just a little clumsy, that's all.

**REED**

Maybe someone oughta check on him?

**HARLAN**

No, no. He's always breaking something or other. I don't like it, of course, but he means no harm. And frankly, I shouldn't have raised my voice. Certainly not appropriate. But I can assure you he's fine.

**REED**

Mm hm. Well, if you don't mind, I think I'll just take a look myself.

**JUDY**

No! No, there's no need. And anyway, Herb's… well… he's a little… awkward. He gets anxious. He does better around someone he knows, someone familiar…

PERUSAL

*(She looks to Harlan. Nothing.)*

Nevertheless, I'll go check on him. Won't be a moment.

*(She exits.)*

**HARLAN**

Right. So, uh… Oh. Hey, listen. While we're waiting, why don't I get you two a nice big bowl of my Grandma Cleary's world-famous potato salad.

**CLAYTON**

Harlan–

**HARLAN**

What is it, Clayton? You want a bowl too? We've got plenty to go around now, don't we.

**CLAYTON**

No, Harlan. As a matter of fact, I would not.

**REED**

Well, I'd be happy to try it. I've been hearing quite a bit about that potato salad. Mostly from Detective Millard here. And in fact, that's why we're here.

**HARLAN**

Oh, yeah?

**SARABETH**

That's right. I'm just a little curious, I guess. From what I understand, your family's built quite the reputation on that potato salad. Carried you through some tough times over the years.

**HARLAN**

Well… yeah, I suppose it has, Detective… Miller, is it?

**SARABETH**

No, no. Millard. M-I-L-L-**A**-R-**D**.

**HARLAN**

What a coincidence.

**SARABETH**

How so?

PERUSAL

**HARLAN**

That was my grandmother's maiden name. Millard. Ruth Ann Millard.

**SARABETH**

Seems we might be related then.

**HARLAN**

Seems like it. So… what do you say? Care to give that potato salad a try?

**SARABETH**

Don't mind if I do. I'd like to see what all the fuss is about.

**HARLAN**

Alright then. By my count, that's two potato salads coming right up.

*(He heads to the counter. He will purposely take his time during the following.)*

It's an interesting story, you know? About my Grandma Cleary.

**SARABETH**

Oh, yeah?

**HARLAN**

Yeah. You see, Ruthie – that's what most folks called her – well, she wasn't really much of a cook. Could never quite get the hang of it. Things came out either raw or overdone, and she never could season anything properly. Frankly, she didn't have much patience for it. But, you know, she had her reasons for not wanting to spend time in the kitchen. When she and my grandfather, Herman, got married, they first lived in a trailer home. Tiny little kitchen, tiny little gas stove. And one day, late afternoon, she was getting supper ready for the two of 'em when her good friend Lillian stopped by. Unannounced, of course, because that's how Lillian operated. She was outside honking her horn like a madwoman because she had something real important to share, probably some foolish gossip, but she was too lazy to get out of the car and come to the door like a respectable person. Anyway, Ruthie had just turned on the stove before heading outside. And just as she stepped onto the ground, the oven exploded. Blew straight through the front of the trailer while all four burners shot the other direction, through the living room and into the bedroom, jamming themselves into the headboard. I mean… had Lillian not shown up when she did, Ruthie most assuredly would not have survived.

**REED**

*(Quietly.)*

Holy crap.

PERUSAL

**HARLAN**

So, people understood why she didn't much care to be in the kitchen after that.

**SARABETH**

And yet, against all odds, she was able to come up with the world's best potato salad. All on her own.

**HARLAN**

By all accounts.

*(He sets down two bowls.)*

There you go. Enjoy.

**SARABETH**

Thank you. So, you know Ruth Ann had a sister, right?

**HARLAN**

Uh… yes. Rhonda Lee Millard. Bit of a recluse. Never married. Unusual, in some ways. Kind of like my son, I guess.

**SARABETH**

Mm hm. And from what I understand, unlike Ruth Ann, Rhonda Lee was quite handy in the kitchen.

**HARLAN**

Something like that. Unsubstantiated, of course. She kept to herself. So, who's to say, really?

*(During the previous, Tina Esposito and Angie Cabrera, two young women from North New Jersey, enter. Tina carries a small backpack or tote bag.)*

**TINA**

*(To Angie.)*

Oh, thank God. It's dead in here.

*(To the room.)*

Excuse me. Any of youse work here?

**ANGIE**

Those two look like cops, Tina.

PERUSAL

**TINA**

Right, right.

**ANGIE**

*(To Sarabeth and Reed.)*

Not that we don't like cops. I mean, you're fine under the right circumstances. It's just that what we need right now doesn't exactly rise to the level of official business, if you catch my drift.

*(To Harlan and Clayton.)*

So, what about you two?

**TINA**

It's urgent.

**HARLAN**

I'm the owner.

**SARABETH**

Now, hang on a second. Are you ladies alright?

**ANGIE**

I guess you didn't hear what I just said. But since you're so interested… Tina here got puke on her skirt, and she was hoping to use the restroom, and maybe rinse it out in the sink.

**REED**

Are you sick?

**TINA**

Oh, no. The guy who threw up on me was, though.

**ANGIE**

Just across the street there.

**TINA**

Admittedly, that's a regular Friday night in Hoboken for me but I didn't expect to have some knucklehead hurl on me in the middle of the day in… where are we?

**REED**

Clarksville, Tennessee.

PERUSAL

**TINA**

Right, right.

**ANGIE**

We're just passing through. Thought we'd grab some food. Bernadette's was hopping, so we figured we'd try there, but as soon as we stepped out of the car and up onto the curb, some moron… well, I think you know where I'm going with this.

**TINA**

Yeah, so where's the john? Through here?

*(She starts toward the hallway.)*

**HARLAN**

The restrooms are out of order.

**TINA**

You're the one that's out of order, mister.

**HARLAN**

Excuse me?

**ANGIE**

She's just kidding.

**TINA**

Yeah, I'm just kidding. It's not the toilet I need. Just the sink. I'll make it quick.

**HARLAN**

There's no hot water.

**TINA**

Don't matter. And anyway, only a Neanderthal would rinse a silk skirt in hot water. You a Neanderthal, mister?

**HARLAN**

Uh, no. No, I am not.

**TINA**

Good to hear. I'll just be a couple minutes.

*(She heads down the hallway, tote in hand.)*

PERUSAL

**HARLAN**

Wait, wait, wait. Hold on.

**TINA**

What?

**HARLAN**

Why don't I just show you where to go?

**TINA**

I'm pretty sure I can find it.

**HARLAN**

Right, right. Well, uh… just make sure you use the restroom at the far end on the right. Okay?

**TINA**

Got it.

*(She exits. Harlan hovers, watching her go.)*

**HARLAN**

No, no. The next one down on the right there. That's it. Yeah, that's the one.

**TINA**

*(Off.)*

You're creeping me out, mister.

**HARLAN**

Oh, and there's no soap either.

**ANGIE**

Jesus. What kind of place are you running here?

**SARABETH**

That's a great question.

**ANGIE**

Ain't it, though? No soap, no hot water… seems a little unsanitary if you ask me.

PERUSAL

**HARLAN**

*(Rejoining the group.)*

Oh no, not at all. Everything's above board around here. You have my word.

*(To Sarabeth and Reed.)*

Anyway… How's that potato salad? Best you've ever had, right?

**REED**

Little hard to dig into without utensils.

**HARLAN**

Dang it. Sorry about that. Let me grab those for you.

*(Harlan heads to the counter.)*

**ANGIE**

Potato salad, huh?

**REED**

That's right.

**ANGIE**

Yeah, well, between you and me, it kinda looks like what Tina got on her skirt.

**REED**

Oh, Jesus.

**ANGIE**

Or maybe I just think that because I don't like potato salad.

**SARABETH**

You don't?

**ANGIE**

Oh, God no. I hate mustard. Smell alone makes me gag.

*(Harlan returns with utensils.)*

**HARLAN**

We don't use mustard. Only mayo with a secret blend of vegetables, herbs and spices.

PERUSAL

**ANGIE**

Well, I'm sorry, but mayo is disgusting too. The taste, the texture… it's nasty. And it's what killed my Uncle Giancarlo.

**SARABETH**

I'm sorry, what?

**ANGIE**

I said, it killed my Uncle Giancarlo.

**SARABETH**

Mayonnaise did?

**ANGIE**

That's what I just said, yeah.

**SARABETH**

How so?

**ANGIE**

Well, Uncle Giancarlo was very well-known in the competitive eating world: hot dogs, Italian sausages, tacos, chicken wings, gyros, oysters, jalapeno peppers, pig brains–

**REED**

Pig brains?

**ANGIE**

You heard me. Deep-fried asparagus, deep-fried twinkies, deep-fried turkey, deep-fried pie, stinging nettles… You name it, he ate it.

**REED**

Holy Christ.

**ANGIE**

Yeah, so about ten years back, he entered this mayonnaise eating contest. And I mean, they had everything: lime, wasabi, barbecue, smoked lemon, honey, chimichurri, sriracha, Korean, wattle seed…

**SARABETH**

Wattle seed?

PERUSAL

**ANGIE**

Maybe I should speak up.

*(She does.)*

Mango chutney, smoked cheddar, teriyaki, caramelized apple, pomegranate… I mean, it just went on and on…

**HARLAN**

If only it didn't.

*(As she continues, Harlan subtly drifts toward the hallway, checking on Tina.)*

**ANGIE**

Anyways… First day of competitions. They're running behind, still setting things up. And Uncle Giancarlo, he liked to show up early. Get his bearings, scope things out, check out the competition–

**REED**

Of course.

**ANGIE**

Yeah, you get it. You seem like the kind of guy who likes to be prepared.

**REED**

I sure am.

**ANGIE**

Maybe we put a pin in that then. Huh? Circle back later. Discuss it privately.

**REED**

Oh, uh–

**ANGIE**

You're cute.

*(To the others.)*

He's cute. Anyways… Where was I? Right. So, at the far end of the grounds, under this big, secured tent, there's a group of what I can only assume were illegals mixing mayonnaise in these massive vats–

PERUSAL

**SARABETH**

You can't be serious.

**ANGIE**

What? What'd I say?

**SARABETH**

Sorry, I shouldn't interrupt. It's just… I'm pretty sure I know where this is going. And I gotta say, that's one hell of a way to die. Drowning in a vat of whipped eggs and oil.

**ANGIE**

Some detective you are.

**SARABETH**

How do you mean?

**ANGIE**

That ain't how he died.

**SARABETH**

No?

**ANGIE**

No. See, Uncle Giancarlo always carried toothpicks on him, on account of all the food getting stuck in his teeth. Usually had one in his mouth. You know, like a tough guy. So, he's admiring these vats, real impressed, and not watching where he's going. Slips in a puddle of mayonnaise, lands flat on his ass… and swallows the toothpick whole.

**REED**

Oh, Jesus. So, he choked to death.

**ANGIE**

Not even close. You two are really bad at this. No. The man could eat anything. That toothpick was no problem. Until it made its way through his lower intestine and tore a hole in his rectum–

**CLAYTON**

Peritonitis!

**ANGIE**

Bingo!

PERUSAL

**HARLAN**

Perito what?

**CLAYTON**

Peritonitis. It's an infection. In your belly.

**HARLAN**

So, it was the toothpick that killed him.

**ANGIE**

I'm sorry, what?

**HARLAN**

It was the toothpick, not the mayonnaise, that killed him.

*(Tina reappears from the hallway wearing a fresh skirt and shoes, bag in hand.)*

**TINA**

*(To Harlan.)*

Oh, geez. No, no, no. It was unquestionably the mayonnaise, mister. Believe me. It's in everyone's best interest if we all agree on that.

*(Something catches her eye. She goes to the window and looks out.)*

**HARLAN**

Except it wasn't.

**ANGIE**

Except it was. Because none of it would've happened without that mayonnaise eating contest.

**HARLAN**

Yeah, well… listen. I don't know much about storytelling. Don't read many books, don't go to the movies, got no interest in live theater, that's for sure. But I do know this: if you're gonna tell people your relative was killed by a condiment, it oughta be the condiment that kills him. You follow me?

**ANGIE**

Oh, I follow you alright. And what I'm hearing from you is a load of horse–

**REED**

Radish!



PERUSAL

**HARLAN**

I'm sorry, what's that?

**REED**

Radish. That's one of the ingredients in your potato salad, right? Chopped radishes? Of course, I'm right. There's no mistaking that taste.

**TINA**

*(In an urgent whisper.)*

Angie.

*(Angie turns. Tina waves her over to the entrance.)*

**SARABETH**

Now hang on a second. While I do agree there are radishes in there, I'm fairly confident they're not chopped.

**HARLAN**

What makes you say that?

**SARABETH**

My guess? You put all those special vegetables, herbs and spices into a blender and then you give it a nice, long whirl until all those flavors come together just right.

**HARLAN**

Well, I will neither confirm nor deny that there are radishes in that potato salad, but I am glad you're enjoying it. So, go on. Eat up.

**REED**

It's delicious.

*(Keeps eating.)*

**SARABETH**

You know… Rhonda Lee Millard…

**HARLAN**

*(Quietly.)*

Oh, Jesus.

PERUSAL

**SARABETH**

She kept a garden…

**HARLAN**

Is that so?

**SARABETH**

Mm hm. Entirely root vegetables…

**HARLAN**

Interesting.

**SARABETH**

And one of the more prominent root vegetables in that garden? Radishes.

**TINA**

Oh, my God.

*(Sarabeth rises.)*

**SARABETH**

What? What is it? What's happened?

**TINA**

You're gonna want to see this for yourself.

*(Sarabeth moves to the door and looks out.)*

**SARABETH**

Officer Callaway?

**REED**

*(Shoveling potato salad into his mouth.)*

Yeah?

**SARABETH**

Put the fork down and get your butt over here.

**REED**

What's going on?

PERUSAL

**SARABETH**

Looks like we've got multiple civilians on the ground out here.

**REED**

You serious?

*(He moves to the door.)*

**SARABETH**

Deadly serious. And two more just went down. Call for backup!

*(She exits.)*

**REED**

*(Looking out at the commotion.)*

Holy crap!

*(He fumbles with his radio, maybe drops it, then follows her out.)*

Clarksville Five, code three. Franklin between First and Second. Requesting all available units, plus medics and fire. Multiple unconscious persons, cause unknown…

*(He's gone. Harlan, Clayton, Tina, and Angie gather at the door, looking out.)*

**CLAYTON**

*(To Tina and Angie.)*

I think maybe you two ladies oughta be on your way.

**TINA**

Oh yeah? And how exactly do you suggest we do that? It's a full-blown circus out there.

**HARLAN**

*(Calling off.)*

Herb! Judy!

*(Herb enters from the kitchen.)*

Herb, where's Judy?

*(Herb shrugs.)*

Oh, Jesus. Alright. Listen to me. I need you to get these two young ladies out of here…

PERUSAL

*(To Angie and Tina.)*

Which car is yours?

**ANGIE**

*(Pointing.)*

Blue metallic Civic convertible.

**HARLAN**

You see it, Herb?

**HERB**

Mm hm.

**HARLAN**

Good. Get ‘em safely across the street, into their car, and on their way. You understand?

**HERB**

Mm hm.

**HARLAN**

Alright. Go.

**TINA**

Oh, wait. Hang on a second.

**ANGIE**

What is it?

*(Tina pulls out her phone.)*

**TINA**

We should get a picture before we go.

**ANGIE**

Oh! Yeah. Maybe a little video too.

**TINA**

Love it! This’ll put our social media engagement rate through the roof.

*(To Herb.)*

Herb, right?

PERUSAL

**HERB**

Mm hm.

*(She hands him the phone.)*

**TINA**

Would you mind? Just outside?

*(Herb nods, takes the phone.)*

**ANGIE**

And make sure you get our good side.

**HERB**

How would I know?

**ANGIE**

Know what?

**HERB**

Which side is your good side.

**HARLAN**

Herb!

**ANGIE**

You're a funny man.

*(Angie and Tina exit.)*

**HERB**

I guess I'll just get both sides.

*(Herb exits after them. Judy enters from the kitchen. Her hair is hacked to bits.)*

**HARLAN**

Jesus, Judy. What the heck happened to your head?

**JUDY**

Oh, I had a little free time on my hands, Harlan, so I stopped by the beauty parlor for a new look. Herb cut my hair, you bonehead. He cut my dang hair!

PERUSAL

**HARLAN**

What? Why?

**JUDY**

I don't know, Harlan. All he said was that he needed "the practice".

**HARLAN**

The practice? What does that even mean?

**JUDY**

You remember he came in earlier with that box?

**HARLAN**

Yeah.

**JUDY**

Well, it was full of hair cutting supplies: clippers, shears, shaver, a straight razor… You name it, he's got it.

**HARLAN**

I don't understand.

**JUDY**

Maybe he's planning to open a barbershop. Who the heck knows? Doesn't matter anyway, because when it comes down to it, I don't give a darn. I've had enough. You're a menace, Harlan.

**HARLAN**

Me?!?

**JUDY**

Yeah, you! You and Herb. Always making excuses for him… "Herb Cleary meant no harm." Well, that's hogwash, because that's exactly what he means to do. And you let him get away with it. Every single darn time. And I've been warning you for years, Harlan. Clayton too. But you didn't listen. And I don't understand why. Unless you're just plain stupid. Well, let me tell you something. I want nothing more to do with it. Nothing more to do with you, this dadgum deli, that cursed potato salad, and I sure as heck want nothing more to do with Herb. He's your problem now. This is all your problem now. And I hope you both go to jail. I hope they lock the two of you up for the rest of your miserable lives. So, I'm leaving. But before I go…

*(She pulls the check from her bra.)*

PERUSAL

I'm putting my name on this here check. And you better not try to stop me from cashing it, Harlan. You understand? Because if you do, I'm gonna not-so-delicately wedge a piece of cheddar between your whole wheat buns. You get what I'm saying? Good riddance, Harlan Cleary

*(Judy exits.)*

**CLAYTON**

You alright, Harlan?

**HARLAN**

What's that?

**CLAYTON**

I asked if you were okay.

**HARLAN**

Uh… yeah. Yeah, I'm just fine, Clayton. And you know, I should probably be grateful.

**CLAYTON**

Grateful?

**HARLAN**

Yeah, why not? Look at how things have turned out. They're sure as heck gonna shut this deli down. And this might surprise you, Clayton, but I'll be happy to see it go.

**CLAYTON**

I don't understand.

**HARLAN**

That detective was onto something. About my great-aunt Rhonda Lee and that potato salad. That's been hanging over the Cleary family for years. Like a storm cloud. We always suspected Ruthie stole that recipe from Rhonda Lee. Seemed harmless at the time. She only made it for family gatherings. Holidays, birthdays, that sort of thing. Until one day she and Grandpa Herman got invited to a fancy company picnic. Herman was up for a promotion – worked at a bookbinding factory – and they were considering him for management. So, Ruthie brought the potato salad. She did more than impress 'em with it, though. She knocked their socks clean off. It's all anyone talked about. And you know what? Herman never got that promotion. What he did get was some seed money… to open a deli. Featured item? Ruth Ann Cleary's world-famous potato salad. Later rebranded as / Grandma Cleary's world-famous potato salad.

PERUSAL

**CLAYTON**

/ Grandma Cleary's world-famous potato salad. Of course. Well, I suppose it makes sense you were reluctant to take over the business. All that success. And at what cost? Poor Rhonda Lee.

**HARLAN**

Rhonda Lee was barking mad, Clayton. And frankly, it didn't make much difference to me either way. I never wanted this business.

**CLAYTON**

No?

**HARLAN**

No, sir, I did not.

**CLAYTON**

So, what did you want to do with your life, Harlan?

**HARLAN**

Who the hell knows? I never got the chance to find out. And now here I am… in my fifties. No wife, no money… harboring a homicidal maniac in a gosh darn delicatessen.

*(Herb enters, passes them silently, exits into the kitchen.)*

But you know. If I play my cards right, it'll just be Herb they haul off to prison. Not me.

**CLAYTON**

Oh, you can't mean that, Harlan.

**HARLAN**

No. No, you're right. And Judy was right too. I need to take responsibility for what's happened. Come to think of it, a six by eight cell, a bed, a toilet and three meals a day sounds like heaven.

**CLAYTON**

Unless they execute you.

**HARLAN**

Even better.

*(Erin enters from the kitchen, disoriented, shivering.)*

Holy–

PERUSAL

**CLAYTON**

Are you alright, young lady?

**ERIN**

Uh… yeah. I think so. I… I must've gotten turned around on my way to the restroom. I wasn't feeling too well, but… I think I'm okay now.

**CLAYTON**

Well, that's good to hear.

**ERIN**

So, I'm just gonna head out. Go home, crawl into bed. Maybe sleep for a month. Maybe two.

**CLAYTON**

Sounds like a good idea.

**ERIN**

Oh. And if you see, uh… Dereck. Would you mind telling him I did not enjoy our time together and that I don't ever want to see him again?

**CLAYTON**

Well, the chances of that are pretty good, though not entirely impossible, given recent events.

**ERIN**

Thank you. Oh. And Mr. Cleary?

**HARLAN**

Yeah?

**ERIN**

Your potato salad sucks.

**HARLAN**

Fair enough.

*(Erin exits. Immediately, Joelyn Pitzer appears outside, flanked by two suited figures. They enter.)*

**JOELYN**

Harlan Cleary?

PERUSAL

**HARLAN**

Yes, ma'am.

**JOELYN**

My name's Joelyn Pitzer. Mayor of / Clarksville.

**HARLAN**

/ Yes, ma'am, I know who you are.

**JOELYN**

And do you know why I'm here?

**HARLAN**

You've got a hankering for potato salad?

*(Joelyn lets out a long, hearty laugh… then a measured sigh.)*

**JOELYN**

We know what's happened here, Mr. Cleary. We've been following it closely – news, social media – and we've conducted a quick and comprehensive investigation of our own. So, no, I do not have a hankering for potato salad, though it is directly relevant to my visit. Is Herb here?

**HARLAN**

Uh, yes, ma'am. He's, uh… in the back.

**JOELYN**

Would you ask him to join us, please?

**HARLAN**

Surely.

*(Harlan calls out.)*

Herb! Herb, you need to come out here! And make it quick!

*(Herb enters from the kitchen and joins the group.)*

**JOELYN**

Herb, do you know who I am?

**HERB**

Joelyn Pitzer. Mayor of Clarksville. Married to Levi Pitzer, Deputy Director of the CIA. Born Joanne Hawkins of Winterset, Iowa. You changed your first name to "Joelyn" to sound more

PERUSAL

Southern and adopted a Tennessee twang when you began your political career nine years, five months, two weeks, and three days ago. Most notable scandal: charged with one count of campaign finance violations after redirecting tens of thousands of dollars toward personal expenses, including luxury goods. Charge was later dropped, coincidentally at the same time your opponent was charged and convicted of improper conduct of a sexual nature. I did not vote for you, Mrs. Pitzer. But good on you, even so.

**JOELYN**

You are… a unique young man, Herb Cleary. So, listen. I need your help with something.

**HERB**

My help?

**JOELYN**

Yes. I've come to talk to you about your great-grandmother Cleary's potato salad.

**HERB**

World famous.

**JOELYN**

If it wasn't before, it certainly is now. Now, your father gave you that recipe, is that correct?

**HERB**

Yes, ma'am.

**JOELYN**

And you've committed it to memory?

**HERB**

Yes, ma'am. It's never been written down.

**JOELYN**

Except you've recently made some… adjustments to it. Isn't that so?

**HARLAN**

If I may–

**JOELYN**

No, you may not. I'll be with you in just a moment, Mr. Cleary.

*(To Herb.)*

Here's what I need from you, Herb: I need you to continue making that potato salad–

PERUSAL

**HARLAN**

No, no, no–

**JOELYN**

Not another word, Mr. Cleary.

*(To Herb.)*

Except I need you to make it exactly as your great-grandmother intended. No extra ingredients. Have I made myself clear?

**HERB**

Yes, ma'am. You have.

**JOELYN**

Good. Now, you're excused.

*(Herb exits into the kitchen. To Harlan.)*

You're trending, Mr. Cleary.

**HARLAN**

Oh, geez.

*(He instinctively checks his zipper.)*

**JOELYN**

Uh, no. That's not what that means. What it does mean is that Cleary's Delicatessen, and your potato salad in particular, has generated a great deal of attention online. And we strongly suspect it's about to go viral. So, we'd like to get ahead of that, if we can.

**HARLAN**

And how do we do that?

**JOELYN**

Well, the good news is that the majority of those who've fallen ill have made a full recovery. Those who haven't are expected to recover eventually with some minor long-term side effects. Now, of course, there are a select few who have, well, to put it plainly, succumbed. And frankly, that isn't ideal. But don't you worry. We're experts at handling delicate situations.

**CLAYTON**

Interesting you should say that, because Harlan happens to have a "delicate situation" in one of the restrooms down that hallway.

PERUSAL

**JOELYN**

Oh, dear. I see. Well, my fine colleagues here can take care of that in short order. I trust we have everything we need in the van?

*(The two suited figures nod and exit.)*

Alright then. Now, Mr. Cleary?

**HARLAN**

Yes, ma'am.

**JOELYN**

Let me explain this as clearly as I can. You see, people nowadays are drawn to things that are unexpected… and dangerous. In fact, it's what they crave. It's what they demand. And at this moment in time, the most dangerous thing out there is your potato salad. It's captured national attention, Mr. Cleary. Not the kind it used to bring, and certainly not the kind we'd hoped for, but attention, nonetheless. Now, we've taken a close look at the data, and what we've inferred is this: we're about to see a significant influx of tourists into Clarksville. And guess where they're headed. That's right. They're coming here. To Cleary's Delicatessen. And they're coming for that potato salad. And why? Because there's a very real chance it might kill 'em

*(The suited figures reenter with cleaning supplies and carrying a body bag. They move down the hallway.)*

**HARLAN**

Why in the world would anyone risk their life like that?

**JOELYN**

Because people enjoy a challenge, Mr. Cleary.

**HARLAN**

A challenge?

**CLAYTON**

Oh, I know what that means. All these youngsters doing foolish things and putting it on the internet for the world to see. Some of it downright deadly.

**JOELYN**

That's right. Except in this case… we're not gonna stop 'em.

**HARLAN**

Well, that hardly seems prudent.

PERUSAL

**JOELYN**

You need to pay very close attention now, Mr. Cleary. Because I don't think you quite understand what I'm saying. We're not here to simply scrub your restrooms clean. We're here to scrub everything clean. Because we need that revenue, and there isn't a thing we won't do to get it. So, as long as you and your son do exactly as you're told, there will, of course, be no consequences… for any of us. And you can rest assured… Cleary's Delicatessen will be around for many, many years to come. With you at the helm.

**CLAYTON**

*(Quietly.)*

Oh, boy.

**JOELYN**

So, we're just gonna – now, how shall I put this so there's no uncertainty – squash the truth and then let the rumors fly. It's a win-win for everyone really.

**CLAYTON**

Except for those who've kicked it.

**JOELYN**

Of course. And may they rest in peace.

*(The suited figures return, now hauling the body bag, and exit.)*

Alright! Well, it looks like our business here is done… for now. Of course, we'll be keeping a close eye on things, and we will most assuredly be in touch if anything goes awry. So, you all enjoy the rest of this beautiful day, you hear?

*(She turns to leave.)*

**CLAYTON**

Oh, uh… excuse me, Mayor Pitzer…?

**JOELYN**

Yes, sir?

**CLAYTON**

I was just wondering if you might know what's happened to Bernadette.

**JOELYN**

Bernadette?

PERUSAL

**CLAYTON**

Yes. Miss Bernadette Sweets. She owns the deli across the street.

**JOELYN**

Oh. Right. Bernadette. Well, it's a shame what's happened to her. Bye now.

*(Joelyn exits. Herb enters, pushing a metal cart. His barber tools are neatly arranged on top.)*

**HERB**

Shave and a haircut…

**CLAYTON**

*(Quietly, melancholic.)*

Two bits. What've you got going on there, Herb?

**HERB**

It's time for a new look.

**CLAYTON**

A new look? For who?

*(Herb points to Harlan.)*

Oh… I see. And what do you think about that, Harlan?

*(A quiet moment.)*

Harlan?

**HARLAN**

I think it's a great idea.

*(He grabs a chair, sets it beside the cart, and sits.)*

**HERB**

Which first?

**HARLAN**

Which what first, Herb?

**HERB**

Shave or a haircut?

PERUSAL

**HARLAN**

Ohhhh, let's start with a shave.

*(Herb drapes a barber cape over him.)*

How close do you think you can get, Herb?

**HERB**

As close as you like.

*(Herb dips a brush into lather and carefully works it across Harlan's face and neck. Then he picks up a straight razor and steps into position.)*

**CLAYTON**

Not too close, Herb.

**HARLAN**

Oh, leave him be, Clayton. He means no harm.

*(Herb places the razor at Harlan's throat. End of play.)*

PERUSAL