

Equal. Separate.

by

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DESCRIPTION

Pat, white, and Chris, black, long-time friends and survivors of being “women in the building trades,” lose their friendship when, over a shot and a beer, Chris finds out that Pat wouldn’t let her daughter date Chris’ son.

CHARACTERS

- Pat, white woman, mason—works best if she has an Irish accent
- Chris, black woman, framer/carpenter

SETTING

- Bar, after work, in a large city. They carry hard hats as well as wear tool belts. Jeans, work boots, shirt, sweatshirt: anything else that establishes the bona fides of these women as “women in the building trades.”

ACCENTS

- The actors can choose whatever accents they want; they can also abbreviate words (such as dropping the “g” in “-ing”) as feels natural. However, if possible, PAT should use an Irish accent.

* * * * *

*In darkness, 5 to 10 seconds of music builds **loud but not uncomfortable**, felt in the body, then cut **abruptly**. At the same moment, lights bump up on PAT and CHRIS at a bar, seated or standing; appropriate background music and sounds. Each drinks two bottles of beer and two shots of Bushmills through the scene. They can also smoke.*

PAT

Ready?

CHRIS

Ready.

They raise a beer and toast.

CHRIS
It was a bitch today.

PAT
A bitch today it was.

CHRIS
Today I built the formwork.

PAT
Today I built the brick shithouse. So—

CHRIS
To the first sip.

PAT
To the first sip past the lip.

BOTH
With a maximum of zip.

They drink.

PAT
Even shit-brewed beer like this tastes good cold, first guzzle—

CHRIS
On to the second, then.

They drink beer, then sip the shot. They continue drinking through the scene.

PAT
I think— I think my throat just released. Beer as roto-rooter.

CHRIS
Beer as confession.

PAT
Bitch of a day.

CHRIS
Bitch of a day it was.

So— PAT

So— CHRIS

So—Doherty— PAT

I know— CHRIS

I saw— PAT

I know— CHRIS

Doherty's getting worse. PAT

I'm handling him. CHRIS

The man who sprayed "Property of the Cunt" on your locker? PAT

I'm handling him. CHRIS

He's handling you. PAT

I told him— CHRIS

Like handling a pit viper. PAT

I told him— CHRIS

PAT
To Doherty, “handle” only means one thing—

CHRIS
Yeah—

PAT
—and it ain’t the George Frederick fucking “Water Music”
Hallelujah chorus.

CHRIS
I told him—

PAT
Yeah—

CHRIS
—one more pass of his hand across my ass—

PAT
Yeah—

CHRIS
—and I was going to clamp it ‘tween my cheeks and use it for a
wipe.

PAT
Could be he’d like that.

CHRIS
And then I’d shit nails.

PAT
Good, yeah—

CHRIS
Yeah—

PAT
—good scum-back to that cum-chum. Useless, though. Words.
With chuckleheads like him.

CHRIS

I know. Wasted. I know. I really would have to shit nails on him.

PAT

If you want to really shit nails on him, talk to the steward. File on him.

CHRIS
(chuckles)

File on him.

PAT

You should file. Go to the union—

CHRIS

File for “hair-ass-ment.”

PAT

He’s grabbing you for his gusto—

CHRIS

File—

PAT

—his gutso, gut-bloated fat fucker—

CHRIS

—for hair-ass-ment.

PAT

You file—and it’ll be like with a mule, a two-by-four cranked between the eyes.

CHRIS

Her-ass-ment. His-ass-ment. My-ass-ment—

PAT

Your ass means a lot, honey.

CHRIS

Please.

PAT

It's the battleground.

CHRIS

So, now I'm spread out, like some field of grass—

PAT

Get serious.

CHRIS

Serious.

PAT

You know, like I know, the Dohertys of this fucking world only
obey hard objects against their soft parts.

CHRIS

File.

PAT

It's your two by four.

CHRIS

And “you know, like I know” the follow-up—you seen this!—an
“accidental” cinderblock or I'll be a perforated sandwich on some
rebar or, or, or

(indicates the palm of her hand)

—ten-penny Christ with a nail gun—bam, bam, bam! Dee-nied
testosterone—one dangerous bodily fluid.

PAT

Doesn't matter—

CHRIS

Doesn't matter?

PAT

Doesn't matter if he's hung a foot. You have rights—civil rights—
like it or not, your ass—our ass—is the battlefield. Has been, will
be. We've known that since we were a day-one apprentice.

CHRIS

I know. I can't. I know I should but—I can't.

PAT

No use fighting to get in if you can't get on—

CHRIS

Impact, you know, though—impact— I got the boy—

PAT

I got the kid, too.

CHRIS

You'd risk it?

PAT

I'm saying I'd at least consider.

CHRIS

You'd bat for me?

PAT

Solidarity forever.

CHRIS

Easier for you, though.

PAT

Yeah?

CHRIS

Yeah.

PAT

Why?

CHRIS

Color.

PAT

Think so?

CHRIS

Know so. We—use the word “bitch,” lovingly, you know—

PAT

A bitch ain't a bastard—

BOTH

Whoo-wah!

CHRIS

—but out there, there's bitch, you know this, there's bitch, and that's you and me, we can handle that—and then there's black bitch, that's just me, and I get to be what the dog kicks when the dog gets kicked—

PAT

All the more reason, then—

CHRIS

The right thing's got a double-edge, Pat, it cuts back and forth—and my skin ain't that thick. It's easier for you to say "Go forth."

PAT

I say this about that: That's a whine. A whine. I can say that to you—

CHRIS

I'm whining?

PAT

—yeah, I think I can say that to you, we been through basic and beyond. It ain't as bad—

CHRIS

It?

PAT

Color thing.

CHRIS

Not bad?

PAT

As bad.

CHRIS
As what?

PAT
Look at the laws.

CHRIS
As what?

PAT
Black millionaires now.

CHRIS
Pat—don't—

PAT
Granted, some are left behind, some got left—

CHRIS
—another level—

PAT
—every engine's got some sludge—

CHRIS
Pat, this ain't the shot—

PAT
Look at you and this job.

CHRIS
Are you hearing the undertone of that?

PAT
You don't have it just because— I'm not saying that, Chris—
c'mon!

CHRIS
Then what are you— Park it. I'm tired—I can't do the curriculum
today with you.

PAT
The curriculum?

CHRIS
Never mind. Look, I gotta go—

PAT
So fine—you don't want to see the advances, fine.

CHRIS
The advances.

PAT
Yeah.

CHRIS
You really think—

PAT
I do.

CHRIS
Really?

PAT
I do.

CHRIS
Big steps.

PAT
Giant.

CHRIS
Because some few brothers and sisters own seven figures?

PAT
And joint chief—joint chief of staff, don't forget that. A ten-billion-dollar athlete. Judge. Judges. Arts. Entertainment. Everywhere. Lot of crime, too, but hey—you know. Bound to be—

—sludge— CHRIS

—in the engine of progress. PAT

Slavery— CHRIS

Gone. PAT

Jim Crow— CHRIS

Flown. PAT

Affirmative action— CHRIS

Affirmed. It's a new paragraph. PAT

Better world? CHRIS

By far. PAT

Never guessed you an—optimist. CHRIS

It doesn't always pay to run things down. PAT

I never guessed any of this about you. CHRIS

Some things are pretty shitcan, I'd agree, but not all bad. Not even half, I'd say—quarter-bad, a quarter-shit. More or less. PAT

Let me ask you then— CHRIS

Anything. PAT

A test. CHRIS

Whoo-wah! PAT

Your Leslie— CHRIS

Yeah? PAT

Your Leslie. CHRIS

Yeah. PAT

My Jamie. CHRIS

You mean— PAT

I mean your new paragraph. CHRIS

What? PAT

CHRIS
I mean mix it up. I mean “mix”-cegenation. Well?
(softly)
Whoo-wah. I’m getting your silence loud and strong.

Uh— PAT

Uh— CHRIS

Uh. No. PAT

CHRIS
Any nouns or adjectives with that?

PAT
It wouldn't work—

CHRIS
You know him. I know her. They know each other. They like each other. They like each other. Genuine lay-down-the-foundation like each other. So.

PAT
Damn!

CHRIS
I gotta say the obvious here, Pat—if the world smells so good to you, then why—

PAT
She wanted to, you know—Jamie. Go with Jamie. I said— I said no.

CHRIS
And why did you say that?

PAT
The children—

CHRIS
Children?

PAT
If they had—children—it wouldn't be a good world for them—

CHRIS

Light coffee not your color?

CHRIS

People would see mixed race, they wouldn't see them! Mixed race—I believe they'd get, they'd get eaten alive. I really believe that. I wouldn't. You wouldn't. But—well—Doherty would.

CHRIS

Doherty?

PAT

The likes of. Doherty. Taking their sheets to the tailor.

CHRIS

And so he wins the battlefield? You give it up to him?

PAT

It's protection.

CHRIS

So—because we, you and me, we're gutless—

PAT

Gutless?

CHRIS

—then Jamie and Leslie have to lose. Is that where all this we've done has got us to? So that's where we are. So—Doherty—Doherty wins again— Is the office closed?

PAT

What?

CHRIS

Is—the—office—closed?

PAT

Project manager's there, usually—paperwork.

CHRIS gets up to leave.

PAT

Where—

CHRIS takes money of her pocket.

CHRIS

You—you and Doherty—are not going to win. Jamie and Leslie are going to have a shot. I have some paperwork to do.

PAT

Let me go back with you. I'll back you up.

CHRIS

Back off.

(softens)

As you said, you have a daughter to get home to. I get this one on my own.

PAT

Chris—

CHRIS

Don't— Don't start lying—

CHRIS throws money on the counter.

CHRIS

We can't go back, Pat. In the space of two beers—Christ! Just fucking amazing how time flies! In the space of two beers we can't go back to the back we used to have. I gotta go.

PAT

Tomorrow?

CHRIS

We got a job to finish.

CHRIS starts to walk out and then returns.

CHRIS

I used to be able to watch my back with you. That was the gift, Pat. No more.

CHRIS starts to walk out again, and pauses.

CHRIS

So, again, what was the point of going through the battle?

PAT is silent.

CHRIS

Right.

CHRIS leaves. PAT continues to drink her beer. Marvin Gaye's "What's Goin' On?" comes up loud. Lights and music out abruptly.