

881 SEVENTH AVENUE

By Lauren Tunnell

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A WOMAN is seen walking across a bare stage representing a New York City sidewalk. SHE is sharply dressed, professional looking, and carries herself with confidence. SHE is carrying shopping bags. A MAN enters. HE is walking the opposite direction, looking confused, frustrated, and hurried, with his head buried in a map. HE stops the WOMAN to ask her a question.

MAN: Excuse me Miss, could you tell me how to get to Carnegie Hall?

WOMAN: Did you just ask me "how to get to Carnegie Hall"?

MAN: Yes, do you know how to get there?

WOMAN: Ha ha. I get it.

MAN: Get what?

WOMAN: The joke. "How do you get to Carnegie Hall?"

MAN: So how do you get there?

WOMAN: Are you ... serious?

MAN: What?

WOMAN: You like... really want to know how to get to Carnegie Hall? Like where it's located?

MAN: (*frustrated*) Yeah, like ... how you get to Carnegie Hall!

WOMAN: This isn't a joke?

MAN: A joke?

WOMAN: Yeah. You know. The joke. The one where the first person says, "How do you get to Carnegie Hall?" and the other person says...

(SHE searches the MAN for some sign of recognition, but finds none.)

You've really never heard this before?

MAN: Heard what before?

WOMAN: Like, only the oldest joke in the universe.

MAN: Are you speaking in some kind of secret code that only you and your mother ship can understand?

WOMAN: You don't *sound* foreign.

MAN: Who said anything about me being foreign?

WOMAN: I just didn't realize you could grow up in America without hearing that whole Carnegie Hall bit?

MAN: No way I'm the only man in the country who is confused by your ... unique style of communication.

WOMAN: Yeah, pretty much.

(A *PASSERBY* enters, walking briskly.)

Watch this. (to *PASSERBY*) Excuse me, ma'am. How do you get to Carnegie Hall?

PASSERBY: Practice, practice, practice. (exits without stopping)

WOMAN: See! What did I tell you?

MAN: What *did* you tell me?

WOMAN:: *Everybody* knows that joke!

MAN: Is that supposed to be a punchline or something?

WOMAN: Yeah. You know. "How do you get to Carnegie Hall?" It has a double meaning. It can mean you're asking for directions but it also can mean ... (*SHE eyes the MAN suspiciously.*) Okay, now I *know* you're putting me on.

MAN: What?

WOMAN: I'm onto you. You're doing that thing where you pretend to be stupid, so that I'll keep flapping my jaw until I say something incredibly stupid myself.

MAN: I'm not pretending to be stupid.

WOMAN: I have a tendency to do that. Say something stupid, that is. I hate those little uncomfortable pauses, so I just keep talking and talking, and sometimes I say the dumbest things. And the truth is, it never makes anything less awkward.

MAN: I'm not *pretending* to be stupid! So I must actually *be* an incredible moron! Is that what you're saying?

WOMAN: Oh my God, you're serious.

MAN: You're finally catching on.

WOMAN: Oh dear. I'm terribly sorry. I didn't mean to offend you. Really, I didn't.

MAN: You never do, do you? You just "keep talking and talking" until you've insulted everybody, right?

WOMAN: I didn't mean it that way. You really shouldn't take it so personally.

MAN: What, are you my shrink now?

WOMAN: No. I just, thought *you* were playing a joke on *me*. I didn't mean to say that you were an idiot.

MAN: But you thought it.

WOMAN: What?

MAN: You *thought* that I was an idiot—or rather, you *think* that I *am* an idiot. You didn't intend to vocalize that thought, but you thought it nonetheless.

WOMAN: I think you're reading too much into this.

MAN: Oh do you? I can read into things. You know why that is? Because I'm not as *stupid* as you think I am.

WOMAN: I just assumed that you'd heard that joke. That's all.

MAN: I can't believe it. I cannot believe it! All I do is ask for simple directions, and I'm ridiculed by some verbally incontinent sorority girl bimbo who can't even answer a simple question!

WOMAN: That is completely uncalled for! I actually made an effort to be polite to you.

MAN: That is what you can an "effort to be polite!" You really are as dumb as you seem to think I am.

WOMAN: If lashing out at other people is something you need to do in order to feel better about your own inadequacies, that's your problem—not mine.

MAN: You people are all the same aren't you? You think the entire planet revolves around you. Everybody in America is expected to know how your city works and all your stupid inside jokes and secret handshakes and where your concert halls are located. It never even occurs do you that the rest of the country couldn't care less about you people.

WOMAN: "You people"? Who are "you people"?

MAN: New Yorkers.

WOMAN: You think I'm a New Yorker. Oh, that explains it.

MAN: Explains what?

WOMAN: Why you thought I might know where Carnegie Hall is.

(*pause*) It's this suit, isn't it? People always think I know what's going on when I'm wearing this suit.

MAN: It's lovely.

WOMAN: Thank you.

MAN: So you don't live in New York.

WOMAN: No.

MAN: Do you come here often?

WOMAN: No, first time. Well, my Mom brought me here when I was a little kid, but I really don't think that counts.

MAN: So I take it you have no idea where Carnegie Hall is.

WOMAN: Nope. None whatsoever.

MAN: You couldn't have said that five minutes ago?

WOMAN: It didn't really come up.

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