

Public Assistance

By

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ACT I

Public Assistance Office. Simone, an attractive woman in a skirt suit, is sitting waiting to have her number called. There are a few people in the waiting area from all walks of life. A number is called but no one can hear it and a woman, Denise, who is work dressed like someone threw clothes at her, comes to the center of the room to read off a sheet of paper.

DENISE

Simone Fontana

SIMONE

Simone Fontina.

DENISE

Are you Simone?

SIMONE

Yes, but it's Sim-

DENISE

I don't care. If you are Simone, I need you to get your butt coming with me. I ain't got all day.

SIMONE

Yes, ma'am.

DENISE

Who you calling ma'am?

SIMONE

You, ma'am.

DENISE

I ain't no "ma'am". Don't you be calling me ma'am, again. Got it?

SIMONE

Yes...just yes.

DENISE

Come with me.

They walk just a few feet away from where Simone was sitting. Denise throws her paperwork on the desk and stares at Simone until she awkwardly sits down.

(CONTINUED)

DENISE

You got your ID?

SIMONE

Yes, I brought both my passport and driver's license and also my original birth certificate, however my mother laminated it to protect it from falling apart-

DENISE

I didn't ask for your full life story, just your ID. Just give me your ID.

SIMONE

Drivers' Li-

DENISE

Give it here! (she grabs the driver's license from Simone) You got any kids?

SIMONE

Kids?(she chuckles)No. I don't own any children.

DENISE

Do you think is funny? Like this is some kind of joke?

SIMONE

I'm sorry...I don't...just the very idea of me having children at a moment like this-

DENISE

You lucky you don't. Because you are getting on my last nerve and I would suggest them going to foster care. (beat) Now that is a joke.

SIMONE

My apologies. Really. No, I do not have any children. I do have a dog.

DENISE

Well, you might have to give that dog up.

SIMONE

What?

DENISE

Did I stutter? That dog will have to find a better home.

SIMONE

My dog has a home with me.

DENISE

It says here, you are no longer at your residence and are registered homeless.

SIMONE

That is an exaggeration of my current state. I am staying with a friend until I can figure out where to move to.

DENISE

Are you paying rent to this friend?

SIMONE

No. I am not paying rent anywhere except my storage unit.

DENISE

So you are paying rent? I am going have to denote that on here.

SIMONE

Yes, but it's not a real rent. I don't live there.

DENISE

Rent is rent. I got to document all rents paid.(she writes) Are you employed?

SIMONE

I was...well, I freelance and right now it's slow.

DENISE

(she jumps out of her seat and paces)
Oh help me baby Jesus! Not today, why you gotta give me one of these today. Help me out here!

SIMONE

I'm sorry?

DENISE

Was I talking to you?(she sits down and begins to write)Where do you get your paycheck?

SIMONE

From a bunch of people. I haven't worked in a few months, that's why I'm here-

DENISE

Then you are technically unemployed. Has no job. No job.

SIMONE

(giving up)Yes, I have no job.

(CONTINUED)

DENISE

Are you still in contact with your abuser?

SIMONE

Who?

DENISE

It says here you had some Domestic Violence incident at your last residence? Do you still talk to your boyfriend? (looks her up and down) Or girlfriend?

SIMONE

Boyfriend? Well, I don't have one. He was my roommate and broke my toaster oven.

DENISE

Miss, I don't understand. You don't have a boyfriend and this "man" broke your toaster? That's not Domestic Violence, that's a bad day.

SIMONE

He beat it up like a heavy weight beats his girlfriend. (beat) No one should ever beat up their girlfriend.

DENISE

Are you on drugs?

SIMONE

No, I'm not on drugs. The reason I am here is because my roommate decided to take a hammer to my very expensive toaster oven in a fit of unexplainable rage and I had to move out. Suddenly. I have no money to do a Manhattan move because it's been like 15 years since I had to move anywhere and the rental market is through the roof. I can't even afford a place in Queens and I hate Queens.

DENISE

You'll have trouble finding a decent place in the Bronx from the looks of it.

SIMONE

I know! I just raced through my savings staying in a sublet in Tribeca and haven't had a job in months. Now I am crashing on my friend's couch like I was in college and I haven't slept in 4 days. I even started to look on Craigslist for talent gigs and I discovered that "talent" really means prostitute. Ha. Not that I have anything wrong-

(CONTINUED)

Denise writes for what seems like an hour. Simone starts to tear up and without missing a beat, Denise hands her a box of Kleenex. After a few moments of them just living in each others space, they make eye contact.

DENISE

You done? (Simone nods) Because this is what I got for you. You are going to walk down that hallway and make a left. You do know the difference between your left and your right, don't you? (Simone nods) You are then going to walk down another hallway that opens up to a room with a security guard standing next to another door. That's Rodrigo. Give him a wave and go through that door. After you go through that door, you will see another set of doors which are the nice shiny glass ones and you will go through them too. Here, take this paperwork. You're gonna need it.

SIMONE

(stands to leaving after taking the paperwork)

Wait, the glass doors are are the ones I came through.

DENISE

Yes. You are to exit this building and find your ass a job. Able bodied, single lady like yourself can certainly handle a little rough patch like this. Now have a nice day.

Simone doesn't move.

DENISE

What?

SIMONE

I would think you would understand.

DENISE

Excuse me?

SIMONE

You see so many people who need support. I am looking for that support. It's like what my mother says about judgment and the book-

DENISE

Don't judge a book by it's cover?

SIMONE

Yes. I am the cover of an Taschen art book that is only sold in places like MOMA and people who can afford to

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SIMONE (cont'd)

throw away a hundred dollars do it to look like they are cultured. But inside, I am a bunch of pages filled with tiny digital prints too small to see what the artists was trying to express. Inside, I am just a few words and photos that are remastered but not the real thing. You see, my outfit is borrowed, my handbag is consignment and my bank account has 32 cents in it until the end of the month. I work so fucking-sorry, freaking hard to make ends meet that having my psycho roommate fly off the handle because he went off his meds was not in my plan.

DENISE

Touching. Poetic. But I can't.

SIMONE

Why?

DENISE

Honey, my book is a hand me down used text book that was written in 1962. It's held together with tape and has a bunch of words that no one cares about anymore. But I still get used and make the best of what I've got.

Simone gets up to leave.

DENISE

Stay, I ain't done with your paperwork.

As Simone cautiously sits back down, Denise goes back to her intake work which is a series of typing on her computer, stapling mounds of forms together and stuffing papers in folders. Simone ever so slightly hums the Muppets, Manamana tune as Denise types. After a few tries of covering up her nervous humming, Simone ends it with an audible " MANAMANA!". Denise is not amused.

DENISE

You done?

SIMONE

I wanted to change my attitude, give a little light in here. So I do this thing when I am feeling heavy and well...

DENISE

Well, don't quit your day job. (beat) Oh...

(CONTINUED)

SIMONE

Right, I don't have one. I don't have anything. I am broke and homeless. Voted "Most Likely to Succeed" of my graduating class and all I have to show is this Rent the Runway designer bag and a chihuahua named Paco Taco.

DENISE

Lord, help me.

SIMONE

This is my life right now, isn't it? I thought I was doing it right, following the rules and sticking to my plans. But I fucked up. Somewhere I invited this in. This is all my fault and I never saw it coming.

DENISE

Honey, can I give you some advice? Shut up. You have got to stop all this noise you got going on in your head and just listen.

Denise & Simone sits in the silence for a moment. It's at first uncomfortable but then as they settle, it's easy. Then-

SIMONE

I don't hear anything.

DENISE

Exactly. Today we don't have that woman who just lost her place due to a 4 alarm fire and has to find a new home for her 3 kids. We don't have to financially issue funds to a woman who has been behind on her bills because her abusive husband hides their money or the man who is discriminated against because he lost his limbs in battle overseas and can't find decent work. I could go on but you might hum again and well, I enjoy the silence. That is my light.

Simone starts to cry.

DENISE

Damnit. Ok, ok, you don't need to cry. (Simone cries harder) Shit, ok it's gonna be ok.

SIMONE

It's just...I would read your book...I would...(she looks at her directly) You are beautiful.

DENISE

Shhh, you don't need to lie to me just settle down. You remind me of my daughter.

(CONTINUED)

SIMONE

Really?

DENISE

With you being all sensitive, yes. Look, I have a place you can go to that might help.

SIMONE

Where?

DENISE

Here. Now I know you are in a creative field but we can give you a temporary job until you can get back on your feet. As far as the housing goes, we have a nice woman's shelter that can take you in under my recommendation. They help get woman coming from abused homes get back on their feet.

Denise writes some information on a slip of paper and Simone stands silent.

DENISE

We don't give out money that easy but we...I...oh here. I have two one way metro cards to get you there and back. I expect you at 9am. You can wear the same outfit.

Simone takes the piece of paper, pauses then hugs Denise.

SIMONE

I don't care what Roderigo says about you, you are all heart.

Simone leaves. Denise looks at her desk unchanged until a small smile creeps in.

DENISE

NUMBER 3804!

Lights fade.