

IT'S NOT FUNNY

Written by

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EXT. DAY - TELEVISION STUDIO PARKING LOT

The late-morning air in a Los Angeles parking lot holds that odd stillness, no matter the time of year. LEA--thirty-three, five-foot-four, biracial--sits in her cramped FORD FOCUS, finishing a CIGARETTE. Instead of flicking it away, she thumbs the still-burning tip until it falls from the butt, smoldering, onto the pavement. Lea grabs her PHONE from the dash-mount, her PURSE from the passenger seat, and an empty LANYARD hanging from the rearview mirror. She reaches over and manually locks the passenger door, then exits the vehicle and does the same to each.

INT. DAY - TELEVISION STUDIO LOBBY

Lea approaches the front desk. The RECEPTIONIST is on a call.

RECEPTIONIST
(raising one finger,
smiling)
Uh-huh...no, we no longer offer
studio tours...

Her VOICE continues in the background as Lea notices a LARGE CARDBOARD CUTOOUT advertisement in the corner of the room. The cutout is for a television show called 'The Do-Wrights', and features an all-black family posing with their arms crossed. Lea squints in smug question.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)
Okay; have a nice day. (To LEA.)
How can I help you?

LEA
Hi. I'm meeting Scotty McCabe?

RECEPTIONIST
Name?

LEA
Lea Hoynes.

The receptionist picks up her DESK-PHONE and dials. Beat.

RECEPTIONIST
(to the phone)
Hey, it's Ruby; I've got a Lea
Hoynes for Scotty? Uh-huh. No
problem.

She hangs up the phone.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)
 (pointing down the hall)
 Second intersection, make a left.
 You'll see two sets of double-
 doors, one on either side of you;
 take the right side of the right-
 side set and the studio is the last
 elevator on your right, eighth
 floor.

Lea inhales to make a rhetorical quip, but catches herself.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)
 Oh, here's your pass.

The receptionist hands Lea a STUDIO PASS. Lea puts it in the LANYARD and hangs it around her neck.

LEA
 Thanks.

INT. DAY - RECORDING STUDIO

SCOTTY--white, scruffy, mid-forties--is in his CAPTAINS CHAIR when he hears a KNOCK at the door. He rises and opens it.

SCOTTY
 Lea!

They embrace.

LEA
 Hey, Scotty.

SCOTTY
 (still holding)
 How ya' doing, kid?

LEA
 (easing in)
 I'm...I'm okay.

Scotty goes to sit in his chair, motioning Lea to a COUCH. She sits.

SCOTTY
 What's your count?

LEA
 Eighty-eight days.

SCOTTY
 Snake eyes!

LEA
I think that's two ones...

SCOTTY
I'm an alcoholic, not a gambler.

LEA
You did ask for *me*.

SCOTTY
(smiling)
I did. There's not a lot of you
left.

LEA
Addicts?

SCOTTY
"Laugh-artists."

LEA
(gesturing)
"Ar-teests." You've gotta let that
absent 'e'--

SCOTTY
"Art-teests."

LEA
"Ar-teeeeeests."

They laugh. Beat.

SCOTTY
Please don't be mad at me.

LEA
At you? You're one of like, five
people who text me back--

SCOTTY
No, I mean...don't be mad at *me*?

Scotty rolls his chair to the side to reveal his COMPUTER MONITOR. He presses the spacebar and a television show begins playing. It's 'The Do-Wrights'.

LEA
No. Absolutely not; I didn't even
know that show was physically
tracked!

SCOTTY
It's not. But the studio's not
happy with the AI cut.

LEA
Scotty...

SCOTTY
You said you wanted to get back to
work.

LEA
With artists--

SCOTTY
"Ar-teests."

LEA
People! *Real people*. Preferably
ones not peddling in stereotypes.

SCOTTY
Your whole schtick is a stereotype!

LEA
I--you know what? I do not
appreciate that; my job is ironic.

Scotty takes a beat, staring at Lea.

SCOTTY
(sternly playful)
Get your ass in that booth before I
call your sponsor.

LEA
(sternly sarcastic)
Anonymous.

INT. DAY - RECORDING BOOTH

Lea enters the booth timidly. The walls are lined with
soundproofing foam; an LED SCREEN stands in the center of the
room. Just in front of it is a CASIO KEYBOARD with a pullout
tray underneath, holding a computer keyboard and mouse.
Finally, a blue-glittered DINER-STYLE STOOL.

LEA
My stool!

SCOTTY

(O.S.)

You know I went to high school with
this guy who made an album called--

LEA

'Old Stool'; yes. I swear to God,
Scotty...

Lea sets her purse down next to the stool and approaches the Casio, tracing her fingers along the keys. She takes a beat and sighs.

SCOTTY

(O.S.)

All your presets are loaded; I made
sure it was a Casio.

Lea takes a seat and savors the initial CRUNCH of the coated cushion. She turns the keyboard on, and is greeted with an ELECTRONIC ARPEGGIO.

LEA

(to herself)

Bougie.

SCOTTY

(O.S.)

My washer and dryer do the same
shit.

Lea chuckles. She settles her hands over the keys, framing what looks to be a chord. Gently--almost hesitantly--she presses two keys down on her right hand; a pair of FEMALE LAUGHS play from the speakers. She then mimics with her left hand, and two MALE LAUGHS join the chorus. After a few seconds, Lea releases the keys. She turns her head to her purse on the ground, smiling; then snaps back, catching herself. Lea slowly inhales and exhales; she lets loose on the keyboard.

INT. DAY - RECORDING STUDIO

Scotty smiles and begins adjusting the volume levels on his MIXING BOARD.

INT. DAY - RECORDING BOOTH

Lea finishes her overture, panting.

SCOTTY
(O.S.)
You ready?

LEA
(reaching for the
headphones)
"Something, something, haggis."

SCOTTY
(O.S.)
Hey now, don't go stealing people's
catchphrases.

The LED screen turns on.

SCOTTY (CONT'D)
(O.S.)
Mr. Sulu, you have the conn.

On screen is a middle-aged black couple in their kitchen. CALVIN WRIGHT stands over the kitchen sink, washing dishes; DEBRA WRIGHT, sits at the kitchen table with a LAPTOP, working on the family budget. Lea presses the spacebar to begin playback.

DEBRA WRIGHT
I didn't think you had it in you.

CALVIN WRIGHT
What's that supposed to mean?

DEBRA WRIGHT
You know damn well what it's
supposed to mean.

CUT TO -

INT. DAY - THE WRIGHT KITCHEN

CALVIN WRIGHT
(setting down a dish)
If Shawna wants to move back in, I
am happy to take care of my baby
girl. But him? He ain't gettin' no
free ride.

DEBRA WRIGHT
(to herself)
He ain't the only one not getting
any 'rides' around here.

CALVIN WRIGHT
What was that?

DEBRA WRIGHT
Nothing, baby.

CALVIN WRIGHT
Mhm.

SHAWNA WRIGHT--black, late twenties--enters the kitchen in a huff.

SHAWNA WRIGHT
Are you serious?! You're charging us rent?

DEBRA WRIGHT
Calvin!

CALVIN WRIGHT
No, no--absolutely not. (*Beat.*) I'm charging your baby-daddy rent.

The scene freezes.

INT. DAY - RECORDING BOOTH

Lea shifts uncomfortably. She taps one key, which lets loose a high-pitched SHRIEK LAUGH, clown-like.

LEA
(to Scotty)
Whole episode, one laugh?

SCOTTY
(O.S.)
Come on, it's not *terrible*.

LEA
You wanna go shot-for-shot on tropes?

Beat.

INT. DAY - RECORDING STUDIO

Scotty sighs, then stands and grabs his coat from the back of his chair.

SCOTTY
Yeah...I'm hungry.

LEA
(O.S.)
Scotty, I didn't mean--

SCOTTY
I know you didn't.

INT. DAY - RECORDING BOOTH

SCOTTY
(O.S.)
I'm getting tacos; text me.

The studio mic CLICKS off, and we hear the DOOR SHUT behind Scotty. Lea looks to her purse again, this time lingering. She grabs it, zips it open, and removes a VAPE. We see an AIRPLANE BOTTLE inside the purse, which Lea sets back down on the ground, open. After a few puffs, Lea slides the vape in her pocket. She rewinds the video playback with her mouse and presses the spacebar to begin again.

DEBRA WRIGHT
(O.S.)
I didn't think you had it in you.

CALVIN WRIGHT
(O.S.)
What's that supposed to mean?

DEBRA WRIGHT
(O.S.)
You know damn well what it's supposed to mean.

Lea inserts LAUGHTER.

CALVIN WRIGHT
(O.S.)
If Shawna wants to move back in, I am happy to take care of my baby girl. But him? He ain't gettin' no free ride.

DEBRA WRIGHT
(O.S.)
He ain't the only one not getting any 'rides' around here.

Lea inserts "OOHH"s, cringing.

CALVIN WRIGHT
(O.S.)
What was that?

DEBRA WRIGHT
(O.S.)
Nothing, baby.

Lea inserts LAUGHTER.

CALVIN WRIGHT
(O.S.)
Mhm.

Lea inserts UPROARIOUS LAUGHTER.

CUT TO -

INT. DAY - THE WRIGHT KITCHEN

Shawna Wright enters the kitchen in a huff.

SHAWNA WRIGHT
Are you serious?! You're charging
us rent?

DEBRA WRIGHT
Calvin!

CALVIN WRIGHT
No, no--absolutely not. (*Beat.*) I'm
charging your baby-daddy rent.

LAUGHTER.

SHAWNA WRIGHT
Ronnie doesn't have a job, Dad.

CALVIN WRIGHT
All the more reason for him to get
one, then.

LAUGHTER.

SHAWNA WRIGHT
This isn't funny! Mom, aren't you
gonna' say anything?

DEBRA WRIGHT
Baby, your father and I can't
afford to pay for you, your
problems, your brother's problems,
and Ronnie's problems.

SHAWNA WRIGHT
Problems?! What problems?

DEBRA WRIGHT
Your drinking, sweetie.

The scene freezes.

INT. DAY - RECORDING BOOTH

Lea angrily removes her headphones and stands, pacing. She pulls her phone from her pocket and begins texting.

LEA
(via text)
So that's why you left?!

SCOTTY
(via text)
I left for tacos. Get back to work!

Lea puts her phone away and pulls her vape back out, taking several puffs. She then sits back down, put the headphones on, and resumes.

INT. DAY - THE WRIGHT KITCHEN

DEBRA WRIGHT
Did you think we hadn't noticed?

Shawna Wright is taken aback--hurt.

SHAWNA WRIGHT
Not you, Mom. Not from you.

Shawna Wright exits in tears.

DEBRA WRIGHT
(to herself)
Does she think we hadn't noticed?

Debra Wright takes a beat.

DEBRA WRIGHT (CONT'D)
(to Lea)
Did you, Lea?

CUT TO -

INT. DAY - RECORDING BOOTH

Lea jumps back.

LEA
The fuck?!

On the monitor, Calvin Wright is drying his hands.

CALVIN WRIGHT
Language, young lady.

DEBRA WRIGHT
(to Lea)
Baby girl, I love you to the sky
and beyond; but we both know--

Lea presses the spacebar and the screen freezes. She looks around in disbelief, then pulls out her phone to text Scotty.

CALVIN WRIGHT
(O.S.)
You *need* this job, remember?

Lea looks up in horror; playback has resumed.

CALVIN WRIGHT (CONT'D)
Put the phone down, baby girl.

Lea drops her phone.

LEA
(to herself)
I need to go to a fucking hospital.

DEBRA WRIGHT
You did, remember? I took you.

Lea stands swiftly--the headphones rip from her head and fall onto the keyboard, creating a CACOPHONY OF LAUGHTER. Calvin Wright and Debra Wright cover their ears. As Lea picks up her purse, she takes a beat upon seeing the airplane bottle, LAUGHTER still ringing.

DEBRA WRIGHT (CONT'D)
(shouting)
JUST DRINK IT!

Lea pauses, turning to the monitor. She lifts the headphones from the keys and unplugs them from the monitor.

LEA
What did you say?

CALVIN WRIGHT
(uncovering his ears)
She said to drink it, Lea. Damn!

DEBRA WRIGHT

Calvin...

CALVIN WRIGHT

Don't 'Calvin' me; she's being obtuse.

LEA

They put that word on the Negro SATs?

DEBRA WRIGHT

Don't you talk to your father like that; you are every bit as black as he is.

CALVIN WRIGHT

Today...

LEA

Fuck you! What is happening?!

Beat. Calvin Wright walks to his refrigerator and pulls out a beer. He opens it and takes a long swig.

CALVIN WRIGHT

That was one of my favorites.
(*Mimicking Dwayne Nelson.*) "Hey-hey-hey!"

LAUGHTER.

DEBRA WRIGHT

I loved him! (*She rises and joins.*)
"Hey-hey-hey!"

CHEERS and LAUGHTER.

Lea, bewildered, grabs her purse and heads to the door.

CALVIN AND DEBRA WRIGHT

WAIT!!

CUT TO -

INT. DAY - THE WRIGHT KITCHEN

Shawna Wright stumbles in drunkenly, holding a bottle of liquor.

SHAWNA WRIGHT

"Hey-hey-hey!"

CALVIN WRIGHT

Shit.

Shawna Wright trips, Calvin Wright catches his daughter and lays her on the ground. Debra runs over.

DEBRA WRIGHT

Baby? Baby?

Debra Wright taps her daughter's cheek.

SHAWNA WRIGHT

(slurring)

It's fun-ny; you're fun-ny Mom.

DEBRA WRIGHT

How much did you drink, baby?

CALVIN WRIGHT

(picking up the bottle)

Jesus...

SHAWNA WRIGHT

(imitating the musician

Shaggy)

"It wasn't me."

LAUGHTER. Beat. Calvin Wright and Debra Wright look directly into the camera.

CUT TO -

INT. DAY - RECORDING BOOTH

Lea is on her stool, playing a chord on the Casio.

LEA

You are not my parents.

SHAWNA WRIGHT

Get 'em, girl!

DEBRA WRIGHT

Shut up, LaShawna. (*To Lea.*) Do you have any idea how much you owe us? You would have *nothing* without our inspiration--

BELLOWING LAUGHTER.

LEA

I am *sick* of thinking that. You are a parasite.

DEBRA WRIGHT
Leech!

LEA
Tease!

DEBRA WRIGHT
Skank!

CALVIN WRIGHT
Ladies!

Calvin Wright drops his daughter, she makes an audible THUMP.

CALVIN WRIGHT (CONT'D)
Baby, we just wanted to get your
attention. We miss you. *I miss you.*

LEA
But *I don't miss you!*

CALVIN WRIGHT
Then why am I in your lap, baby
doll?

Lea looks down and sees the airplane bottle in her lap. Mortified--enraged--she jumps up, knocking the keyboard over, which also tips the monitor to the ground, CRASHING. She back-steps until she hits the wall, then slides down to the floor, crying.

INT. DAY - RECORDING STUDIO

Scotty enters the studio quietly, with a BAG OF TAKEOUT. After closing the door as gently as he can, he turns around and sees the scene through the glass window. He drops the food and runs into the booth.

INT. DAY - RECORDING BOOTH

SCOTTY
Jesus Christ, what the fuck
happened?!

LEA
(sobbing)
I don't...I don't know...

SCOTTY
Are you hurt? Are you--

Scotty sees the broken airplane bottle on the ground by Lea's stool. He looks to Lea.

LEA
Scotty, I didn't...

SCOTTY
Get out.

LEA
I swear to God, I didn't--

SCOTTY
Get the fuck out!

Lea grabs her purse and stumbles out of the room, sobbing. Scotty punches the soundproofing.

SCOTTY (CONT'D)
And call your fucking sponsor!

EXT. DAY - TELEVISION STUDIO PARKING LOT

Lea walks briskly to her car, still weeping, but trying to save face as people pass her by. She pulls her keys from her purse to open her door, but drops them.

LEA
God damnit!

She bends down to grab them, and completely breaks down, falling to the ground. People around her try not to look as they walk by, as if passing an unhoused beggar on the street. After a beat, sniffing, she pulls out her phone and dials a number. Her sponsor, BB, answers.

BB
(V.O.)
What's up Lea?

LEA
(sniffing)
I don't know...

BB
(V.O.)
Oh shit. What happened?

LEA
I *legitimately* do not know.

BB
Where are you?

Lea sets her purse down next to her and pulls out another airplane bottle.

LEA

I'm in the parking lot of a major television studio.

She throws the bottle as far as she can. It SHATTERS.

BB

Is it in the valley?

Lea takes out another airplane bottle and hurls it. SHATTER.

LEA

I am in a valley. (*Beat.*) I need to go to a meeting.

CUT TO BLACK.