

BEHIND THE WORDS

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. D.C. TRENDY RESTAURANT - DAY

Lunchtime and the tables are full in a eatery close to Congress. SENATOR TAME, 60, sits by himself. He looks senatorial as he reads his iPad.

CHIEF JUSTICE (O.S.)
Mind if I join you?

Tame looks up to CHIEF JUSTICE SMITH, 50s, smiling, glib, bright.

TAME
Sit down, Chief Justice, sit down.

CHIEF JUSTICE
(sitting)
Popular place today. I'm not interrupting anything, am I?

TAME
Just catching up on your latest ruling.

CHIEF JUSTICE
How do you like it? Read my finding?

TAME
Not yet. Just getting the lay of the press.

CHIEF JUSTICE
Oh? What are they saying? I don't mind telling you that the case required some of my finest work. I don't really care how the talking heads see it. I'm secure with the totality of the holding.

TAME
The Journal points out that several justices didn't agree with the holding.

CHIEF JUSTICE
Nothing is unanimous anymore. Quite frankly, it's always easier to oppose. Justifying the legislature's tortured language is the real challenge.

TAME
Some have pointed out that the
language was quite clear.

CHIEF JUSTICE
On the surface, Senator, on the
surface.

A WAITER arrives, ready to take orders.

WAITER
Have you made a decision?

TAME
As a matter of fact, I have. Bring
me a ham and cheese on rye with
fresh fruit.

WAITER
Good choice, Senator.

CHIEF JUSTICE
(to Waiter)
Belay that, he doesn't want it.

TAME
I don't?

CHIEF JUSTICE
It sounds OK on the surface, but
it's not what you meant.

The Waiter half smiles, wondering which man to obey.

CHIEF JUSTICE (CONT'D)
(to Waiter)
Come back in five minutes.

TAME
I don't--

CHIEF JUSTICE
(shooing)
Go, go, this won't take long.

The Waiter leaves.

TAME
What are you trying to pull?

CHIEF JUSTICE
Nothing, nothing, I just couldn't
let you order the wrong thing.

TAME

Like you couldn't let us write our own laws?

CHIEF JUSTICE

Bear with me, Senator, bear with me. I'm very good at spotting the meaning behind the words.

TAME

Meaning?

CHIEF JUSTICE

Ham and swiss on rye. Pretty obvious code, don't you think?

TAME

I thought it was a pretty obvious order.

CHIEF JUSTICE

To the uninitiated. Now, ham is pork, and I happen to know there's an anti-terrorism bill before your committee. What kind of message are you sending by eating ham in a crowded DC restaurant?

TAME

That I'm hungry?

CHIEF JUSTICE

That you're sending a message to a every Mideast devout man, woman, and child, a message that you don't give a rat's patoot about their beliefs. You want to send that message?

TAME

Ham sends a message? What about the cheese? Am I disrespecting the Swiss?

CHIEF JUSTICE

(chuckling)

No, no, it's not about the Swiss, it's about the holes.

TAME

Holes?

CHIEF JUSTICE

Holes, big, fat holes. Holes say a lot. Holes say you're not sure of yourself. Holes say that your plan to become President is a pipe dream. You don't really have a plan if you're eating swiss.

TAME

Are you for real?

CHIEF JUSTICE

I do this for a living, Senator. I look past the obvious.

TAME

You are amazing. I'll give you that. What about the rye?

CHIEF JUSTICE

Ah, the bread. You see the problem with the bread, don't you?

TAME

Rye isn't in this year?

CHIEF JUSTICE

Rye is never in. Rye is the bread the poor eat once a year--at Christmas. Rye is the bread of the suburbs, not the city, and you want urban, all urban.

TAME

So far, I'm batting zero. Did I score with the fruit?

Chief Justice shakes his head.

CHIEF JUSTICE

Fruit, Senator, fruit, what does that tell you?

TAME

I like to think it shows I eat healthy.

CHIEF JUSTICE

No one cares how you eat. What they care about is the connotation. Ever hear 'as nutty as a fruit cake'? What is the worst gift ever? Fruit cake! What they call gays not so long ago? Fruits.

(MORE)

CHIEF JUSTICE (CONT'D)

Fruit also conjures up pictures of Juan cutting down bananas and harvesting watermelons. No, Senator, no fruit.

TAME

I suppose coffee means I favor Columbia?

CHIEF JUSTICE

Don't be silly. Coffee is the only stable thing about your lunch. More American than apple pie.

TAME

Presidential?

CHIEF JUSTICE

Exactly.

TAME

Then, what am I supposed to eat?

CHIEF JUSTICE

What's the one meat that offends no one?

TAME

Beef?

CHIEF JUSTICE

Hindus.

TAME

Chicken?

CHIEF JUSTICE

Yes, sir, chicken. Everything tastes like chicken.

TAME

With?

CHIEF JUSTICE

American cheese, Velveeta if they have it. No holes, just whole milk goodness.

TAME

And fries.

CHIEF JUSTICE

Do you really want to be President?

TAME
Apparently not.

CHIEF JUSTICE
Cole slaw or potato salad. What everyone eats on the Fourth of July. Say cole slaw and you can smell fireworks.

TAME
That's amazing.

CHIEF JUSTICE
It's not magic. Just years on the bench sussing out the meaning behind the words.

TAME
And all this time I thought words meant what they meant.

CHIEF JUSTICE
In the old days maybe, not anymore.

The Waiter arrives, ready for orders.

CHIEF JUSTICE (CONT'D)
Go ahead.

TAME
(to Waiter)
Ham and swiss on rye with fresh fruit.
(to Chief Justice)
Sometimes, a ham sandwich is just a ham sandwich.

FADE OUT.