

O.U.T.



By Ron G. Rosenfeld

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SYNOPSIS

David, a middle-aged man, visits O.U.T., the federally-mandated Office of Unfortunate Termination, to make arrangements for his scheduled death.

Cast of Characters

David	A middle-aged man
Jessica	A young woman
Intercom Voice	

Scene

The offices of O.U.T.

Time

Sometime in the near future

SETTING: A typical government office. There is a desk with a chair behind it and a chair in front of it. On the desk is a computer and several stacks of papers. On the rear wall is a sign saying "O.U.T.," with the image of the Great Seal of the United States. A door to the office is on the left.

AT RISE: The office is empty. DAVID appears from stage left, He is wearing a suit and tie. He walks towards the closed door and rings a bell, which chimes. A voice is heard.

VOICE

Welcome to O.U.T., the Federal Office of Unfortunate Termination. Today's date is June 21, 2028. It is 2:00 pm, Pacific Standard Time. You are hereby notified that this visit is being recorded by security cameras. If you have come for a scheduled appointment, please place the five fingers of your right hand on the panel next to the buzzer.

*(DAVID places his five fingers on the panel.
A buzzing sound is heard.)*

Mr. David Atkinson. Social Security Number 088595280. If this is correct, you may enter.

(DAVID opens the door and enters the office.)

Please take a seat. An agent will be with you shortly.

(DAVID sits in front of the desk. JESSICA enters from stage right and sits behind her desk. She is an attractive young woman, wearing a business suit. DAVID starts to rise from his seat, but JESSICA beckons him to remain seated.)

JESSICA

Please, just stay seated. It's fine.

(She leafs through the papers on the desk, then logs onto the computer.)

DAVID

Hi. I was hoping I'd get to see you. I'm here for my 2:00 o'clock appointment. Well, of course you know that. I was really worried that I'd be late. The darn bus was delayed and I had to run the last few....

JESSICA

No explanation is necessary. Please just bear with me. As you know, uh, uh, Mr. Atkinson, the government has mandated that we proceed through this interview in a set manner. Sorry about

that, but these are the rules. No distractions or unnecessary interruptions, please.

Beat.

OK. Would you please state your name for the record?

DAVID

Really? David Atkinson.

JESSICA

And can you confirm your address for me?

DAVID

1515 Bradford Street, Portland, Oregon.

JESSICA

Thank you, Mr. Atkinson. And your social security number?

DAVID

088595280. Is this really necessary?

JESSICA

I'm sorry if this seems redundant, but we are required by policy to confirm all of this information. We wouldn't want to make a mistake, would we? Date of birth? Month and day, please.

DAVID

June 22.

JESSICA

Tomorrow.

DAVID

Yes, of course. Tomorrow.

(JESSICA looks at him for a minute and smiles. She looks through the papers on her desk and at the computer screen.)

JESSICA

Well, then. Happy birthday, I guess.

Beat.

All of your paperwork appears to be in order. Do you have any questions for me?

DAVID

Not really. I've been preparing for all this quite a while, naturally.

JESSICA

Have you made out your will? Gotten all the necessary signatures? The notarization?

DAVID

Yes, of course. I took care of all that months ago.

Beat.

I do have a question, actually, if you don't mind.

JESSICA

Sure. Go ahead. We have time.

DAVID

What arrangements should I make for my funeral?

JESSICA

No burial, of course. I thought you understood that.

DAVID

But we've bought the plots. Our religion...

JESSICA

Nobody is buried anymore. You will be cremated. It was all explained in the brochure.

DAVID

Brochure?

JESSICA

You should have received a 4-page color brochure explaining all of these details.

DAVID

Oh. Yes, of course. But I just don't understand. Why am I not allowed the dignity of a proper burial?

JESSICA

Do you realize how much precious space is taken up by cemeteries? When you add them all up? All wasted. And nobody ever goes. Not anymore. Not really. After the first few weeks, nobody visits. After that, once a year, at most. A total waste. Not to mention the cost of coffins and funerals. It makes so much more sense to simply cremate.

DAVID

But I've already bought the plots. They're all paid for. There's space for me, my wife, and, uh, the rest of my family.

JESSICA

Nothing I can do about that. It's the law.

DAVID

The law? What kind of law is that?

JESSICA

Come, now. You know it just as well as I do. And it's all spelled out in the brochure. Everybody must die on his or her 50th birthday.

DAVID

Tomorrow?

JESSICA

Of course, tomorrow. June 22.

DAVID

I ask again, then. What kind of crazy law is that?

JESSICA

The kind of law that will save our country. The kind of law that will save humanity.

Beat.

I know it must seem harsh. It must appear that way to everyone your age. But be honest. We just don't need old people, do we? We can't afford them anymore. The country can't. The planet can't.

DAVID

I'm sorry. Fifty is not old.

JESSICA

But it is, actually. Do you know that the average lifespan for men in the United States in 1900 was only 46? And at the time of the American Revolution, it was just 38. Fifty is actually a luxury. From the point of view of evolution...from the perspective of survival of the species, once you've reproduced, you've done your duty. You've shot your wad, to be frank. After that, you're just a burden.

DAVID

I don't care what you say. Fifty is not old.

JESSICA

Don't be naïve. You may not like it. I can understand that. But you are old. It's not your fault, God knows, but it's still the bitter truth. Just look at your paunch. Look at your receding hairline. Before long you'll be needing hearing aids. And cataract surgery.

DAVID

I guess I could work out more. Watch my diet better. But what you're describing is all normal at my age.

JESSICA

Exactly. That's my whole point. It's totally normal. Totally to be expected. Unavoidable, in fact. And believe me, it's all downhill from here. Heart disease. Cancer. Diabetes. Emphysema. Dementia. Do you have any idea what the cost of healthcare for the aged is?

DAVID

No, but I'm sure you'll tell me.

JESSICA

People over the age of 50 make up 30% of the population, but account for 60% of the healthcare cost.

DAVID

Naturally. That's to be expected.

JESSICA

Expected, yes. Appropriate, no. Affordable, definitely no. And who do you think pays for all this?

DAVID

I'll have Medicare.

JESSICA

And who do you think will be paying for that? My generation. And the one coming after me.

Beat.

Look, why is this policy any different than age limits on dialysis? Or on transplants? Nobody argues about the need for setting age limits on those procedures.

DAVID

Dialysis? Transplants? You're talking about heroic measures.

JESSICA

Believe me, taking care of the elderly is a heroic measure. Besides, even if you're lucky enough to beat cancer, then a heart attack is waiting right around the corner.

DAVID

That's ridiculous.

JESSICA

On the contrary. It's commonsense. Look, the healthcare budget can only stretch so far. As a society, we have to be willing to make tough choices about how to allocate it. One way or another, we'll always need to ration healthcare. In your generation, the choice was to pay for the wealthy and to hell with the poor. In the future, everyone will have access to healthcare.

DAVID

Unless you're over fifty, I guess.

Beat.

Tell me. How can you all be so utterly heartless?

JESSICA

I know it may seem that way, but be logical. Your generation uses up all the resources and contributes so little. You need to make room for the next generations.

DAVID

Contribute so little? What about all the great statesmen, generals, presidents.

JESSICA

And look where they've gotten us. The younger generations can do better. We need to do better.

DAVID

Yeah, sure. Every generation thinks it's got the answer. Every generation spits on its ancestors and vows to make the world anew.

JESSICA

And we will. We've learned from your mistakes. We need fresh, young leadership. That's why all presidents now must be under forty years of age when they begin their first term. That allows them to complete two full terms before they reach the age of fifty.

DAVID

Then forget statesmen. What about Picasso. Monet. They did great work in their later years.

JESSICA

Their best work was already behind them. And don't try to throw Bach in my face. For every Bach, there's a Mozart, a Chopin, a Schubert, a Gershwin. Great composers who died young.

DAVID

*(He gets up from his chair and begins
pacing in the office.)*

But people my age still have so much to offer. Look at me. Just look at me, damn it. I'm a professor at the medical school. I train the next generation of doctors. My research in cancer is all cutting edge. You know that. Just look me in the eye and try to deny that.

JESSICA

Yes. All true, But, what can you do that a younger generation couldn't do ten times better? You can't even compete with us. In fact, you don't even really speak the same language as us.

Beat.

And heaven knows, we don't want you to reproduce anymore. Most women over fifty can't anyway, thank goodness. And just think how selfish, how incredibly egotistical it is for men your age to father children. Can you guarantee that you'll be there to help take care of them when they're teenagers? Or trying to decide about college? How unbelievably self-centered can you be?

DAVID

Still, there are lots of men my age, or even older, who would make great fathers.

JESSICA

You really think so? Really? And who would the mothers be? Who wants to go to bed with an old man? That's all a myth, you know. A myth propagated by male egos and Hollywood-style romance. Old men, with their tired bodies and old man odor.

DAVID

There's no need to be vulgar.

JESSICA

I'm not being vulgar. Do you have any idea how much money is expended each year on erectile dysfunction? Billions of dollars. Not to mention testosterone and estrogen supplements. Old men anxious about their sexual prowess. Old women worried about breaking their hips. Don't you think that money could be better spent?

DAVID

Perhaps. I'm not going to argue about that. But if this is money that people have worked hard for...worked all their lives to earn and save....shouldn't they get to decide how it's spent?

JESSICA

Saved? Don't you mean hoarded? Squirreled away in retirement accounts, sheltered from paying any taxes, so that people could live in luxury in their old age? While millions of people go hungry, homeless, destitute.

DAVID

We aren't hoarding. That's not fair, at all. Stop twisting my words. People like me worked all our lives in order to save for retirement. To save for what we thought would be our golden years. And beyond that, in order to leave something behind for our children and grandchildren when we die.

JESSICA

But why only your descendants? What, exactly, have they done to justify that kind of gift? What about all the other people who might benefit?

DAVID

All the other people? Three hundred million other people? Just let me worry about my own family, for Christ's sake. That's my real responsibility and, believe me, that's more than enough.

Beat.

So that, I suppose, is your justification for this crazy inheritance tax?

JESSICA

Of course. That's why this is called the Office of **UNFORTUNATE** termination. We are uncoupling you from your fortune. Unfortunating you, so to speak, if there really is such a word.

(DAVID returns to his seat.)

DAVID

After all we did for you. Gave birth to you. Raised you. Clothed and fed you. Sent you to college. Saved and scrimped for you and your children. The grandchildren that we'll never get to see, by the way. And this is our thanks?

JESSICA

But we are grateful. Don't try pulling all that King Lear moaning and groaning on me. We appreciate everything you've done for us and always will. And we expect to do the same for our children, when the time comes. This is how we will make a better world. The money you have hoarded, the fortunes that you wish to leave to descendants who will barely remember you, will, instead, provide universal healthcare, free college education, shelters for the homeless. The start of a better world.

DAVID

A better world? I'm not so sure. A colder and more heartless world? Definitely. Who would ever even want to have children in your world?

Beat.

You have such tunnel vision. The narrow perspective of the young. Just wait until you start approaching your fiftieth birthday. You'll see. You'll think differently then.

JESSICA

I'm afraid our time today is running out. I have another appointment scheduled for 2:30.

DAVID

Thirty minutes? That's what I get?

Beat.

OK. OK. I understand.

JESSICA

To be honest, these final sessions are largely courtesy appointments. As I said, your paperwork is all complete and you're ready to go.

DAVID

Yes. Ready to go.

JESSICA

(reading from a sheet of paper from her desk)

Our office has sent you detailed instructions, as well as the necessary supplies. Sometime tomorrow, June 22, 2028, at an hour of your choice, you must consume the vial of hemlock that was provided. We recommend wearing comfortable clothes and, if you wish, taking some sedatives thirty minutes before consuming the hemlock. Be sure that you are wearing the government-issued Apple watch with the O.U.T. logo. It will record your heartrate and transmit it to our data center. O.U.T. recommends that, after drinking the hemlock, you lie down on a comfortable bed or couch. Once we have been notified that the protocol has been completed successfully and that termination has been achieved, our agents will come to your house to remove your body.

DAVID

Termination? I assume you mean the end of my heartbeat.

JESSICA

The end. The end of your heartbeat. Of course.

Beat.

I really am so sorry that we have to meet under these circumstances. It's not what I would have chosen. They're not really the words I would have wished to say. I hope you understand and can forgive me.

DAVID

Of course, Jessica. You're just doing your job. I know that. But you must realize that this is going to break your mother's heart. I don't know how she will possibly cope. You'll need to be there for her.

JESSICA

(trying to keep her emotions in check)

I know. I know, Daddy. How could I not know? Of course, I'll do my best to be there. And not just tomorrow. But mom knows that she, too, will be in this very office in less than six months.

DAVID

Yes. Yes, of course. Of course she understands.

Beat.

I guess, then, it really is time for me to go.

(DAVID rises from his chair. He stands and

looks at JESSICA.)

Is it OK if I give you one last hug?

JESSICA

Of course. I wouldn't let you leave without one.

(They hug each other, awkwardly at first, but then with more spirit. DAVID starts to leave.)

DAVID

You take good care of your mother, Jessica. Promise me that. And yourself, too. I've always been so very proud of you. My little girl. Since the day you were born. You must know how much I've always loved you.

JESSICA

It couldn't possibly be as much as I've loved you, Daddy. I'm going to miss you so much.

Beat.

I thought of buying you a cake, and, you know, some candles. Fifty candles. But it just didn't seem right.

DAVID

I'm glad you didn't, Jessica.

JESSICA

But, Daddy.

DAVID

Yes, sweetheart?

JESSICA

Happy birthday.

(DAVID turns around at the door, looks at JESSICA, and throws her a kiss. He opens the door, and exits the room, closing the door behind him. He exits, stage left.)

VOICE

Next, please. Welcome to O.U.T., the Federal Office of Unfortunate Termination. Today's date is June 21, 2028. It is 2:30 pm, Pacific Standard Time. You are hereby notified that this visit is being recorded by security cameras. If you have come for a scheduled appointment, please place the five fingers of your right hand on the panel next to the buzzer.

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