

**ALL ABOARD**

by

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## ALL ABOARD

### Characters

DIANE, female, 30s, a work-at-home mom looking to supplement her income.

TEDDY, male, 30s, a day laborer.

CALVIN, male, 20s, a student.

REYNOLDS, male, 40s, a research scientist.

RICHARD, male, 20s-30s, a research assistant.

FATIMA, female, 20s-30s, a research assistant.

### Time

Present.

### Setting

A laboratory with two enclosed booths, each equipped with a video monitor visible to the audience and headphones. There is also a small antechamber outside the lab.

**ALL ABOARD**

*Lights up on a laboratory with two enclosed booths connected to a central area that holds a table and three chairs. There is a small box on the table. Each booth is equipped with headphones and a video monitor that is visible to the audience. REYNOLDS, in a white lab coat, enters the central area through the antechamber, holding the door open for DIANE, TEDDY, and CALVIN to step inside. They are dressed in street clothes. REYNOLDS follows them, indicating the chairs...*

REYNOLDS

Sit, please. Make yourselves comfortable.

*DIANE, TEDDY, and CALVIN sit, casually and expectantly.*

REYNOLDS (CONT'D)

Thank you for coming in today. You're doing us a great service.

DIANE

We're getting paid, right? The lady said we'd get paid.

TEDDY

Yeah, she told me two hundred bucks.

REYNOLDS

That's right. You'll each get a check after you complete a series of tasks.

CALVIN

Such as? Lady only said something about a research study.

REYNOLDS

It's very simple, really. I'll have you out of here by noon at the latest.

DIANE

It's not drugs, is it? I don't want to be a guinea pig for some pill.

REYNOLDS

*(Smiling warmly.)*

No, no drugs. Now that we're all here, I can explain.

*The three visitors settle in characteristically--DIANE with both hands holding her purse on her lap, TEDDY sprawled with knees apart and arms folded, and CALVIN upright and attentive with his hands clasped on the table. REYNOLDS has some business with his papers and folders.*

REYNOLDS (CONT'D)

*(Trying to control a tendency to officiousness.)*

You're here today to participate in a behavioral study. An experiment, really.

TEDDY

No needles, I hope. I hate needles.

REYNOLDS

No, no needles. In fact, nothing intrusive.

CALVIN

It's something worth two hundred dollars, though. It can't be too easy.

REYNOLDS

Well, it's not for everyone, that's for sure. However, that's why you three were chosen.

CALVIN

With the questionnaires, you mean.

REYNOLDS

That's right. And the interviews. We wanted to make sure we recruited certain kinds of people.

*DIANE, CALVIN, and TEDDY look each other over, wondering what they have in common.*

TEDDY

So why us?

REYNOLDS

You all met the criteria for purposeful action in opposition to social mores.

DIANE

What's that mean? I'm not doing anything icky.

REYNOLDS

Please, hear me out. You all--that is, each of you--exhibited in the pretests a willingness to persevere in the face of adversity when you felt you must. You tend to do your duty despite emotional constraints to the contrary.

CALVIN

You think we're willing to break the law.

REYNOLDS

Many behaviors that are not against the law might still be subject to societal disapproval.

TEDDY

Like what? What are we here for?

REYNOLDS

As I said, an experiment. I want to emphasize that as we proceed you will have numerous opportunities to decline to go further.

CALVIN

We can quit whenever we want.

REYNOLDS

That's correct.

DIANE

Just take the money and leave?

REYNOLDS

Well, no. As your screener should've made clear to you in your initial interview, you must complete all tasks to qualify for full remuneration.

TEDDY

You mean payment?

REYNOLDS

Yes, full payment. Upon completion.

*REYNOLDS surveys them all for a moment.*

REYNOLDS (CONT'D)

Shall I go on?

TEDDY

Sure, doc, let's have it.

REYNOLDS

OK. For this experiment, you will each be situated in a booth like one of these in this room. As you might have noticed when we came down the hall, there are similar booths in the room next door.

*From the box, REYNOLDS extracts a device like a bathing cap with electrodes attached.*

REYNOLDS (CONT'D)

You'll each wear one of these. It's a device to capture and record brain waves.

DIANE

Does it hurt?

REYNOLDS

Not in the least. After 30 seconds you'll forget you have it on.

TEDDY

What you going to do with our brain waves?

REYNOLDS

Well, they'll help us understand the emotions you feel as you perform.

CALVIN

The electrical patterns will tell you how we feel?

REYNOLDS

That's pretty much it.

TEDDY

You didn't tell us what we're doing while we're wearing these fruity bathing caps.

REYNOLDS

First, let me introduce my fellow researchers.

*(To the ceiling.)*

Fatima, are you there?

FATIMA (O.S.)

*(A click, then...)*

Yes, Dr. Reynolds.

REYNOLDS

And Richard?

RICHARD (O.S.)

Standing by.

REYNOLDS

Fatima and Richard will be assisting me--and you--during the experiment. They'll be speaking to you through headphones, giving you instructions and encouragement as you proceed with the tasks you'll be assigned.

CALVIN

So tell us--what tasks?

REYNOLDS

Perhaps it will be easier to show you.

*(To the ceiling.)*

Fatima, please ready recording X-347.

FATIMA (O.S.)

Just a moment.

*REYNOLDS adjusts one of the booth monitors so that everyone can see it clearly.*

RICHARD (O.S.)

Here you go.

*The monitor springs to life, showing a coarse black-and-white image of a man lying on a gurney with his head beneath a pipe. His face is covered with a cloth. After a few seconds, water pours from the pipe onto the cloth. The man sputters and struggles, moaning with great distress. After a few horrifying seconds, REYNOLDS turns the monitor off.*

DIANE

Oh, my God...

TEDDY

Fuck...

CALVIN

Is that...waterboarding?

*REYNOLDS pushes the monitor back, then turns to them with a scholarly demeanor.*

REYNOLDS

That's a name some use. Others consider it an "enhanced interrogation technique."

DIANE

You want us to do that?

REYNOLDS

It's nothing more than our government asks of its security personnel. Ordinary people just like you.

TEDDY

That's different. They're under orders.

REYNOLDS

You're absolutely right. But they're also under stress. And you can help us alleviate that strain.

TEDDY

No way. That waterboarding's fucked up, man. It's torture.

REYNOLDS

Well, that's a matter of point of view. You must be aware that our country is at war with an implacable foe. An enemy that will resort to any--and I mean any--means to destroy you and your family and our way of life.

DIANE

But how can this possibly help?

REYNOLDS

The more we know about the emotional impact of doing one's duty, the easier and more effective we can make it to do what needs to be done.

TEDDY

Like I said--that's fucked, doc. I'm out of here.

*TEDDY starts to rise, but...*

REYNOLDS

Please. Don't make a rash decision. All I ask is you think about it for a moment. About what you can do to help your country by helping the people whose job it is to keep you safe.

*(Beat.)*

Tell you what. I'll step out for a minute and let you talk. Perhaps you can help each other understand the value of what I'm asking.

*REYNOLDS gathers a few papers, then exits through the antechamber.*

DIANE

This creepy or what?

TEDDY

I think I saw a horror movie like this once.

DIANE

*(Hugging her purse.)*

Are they going to hurt us?

TEDDY

Not if I got something to say about it.

DIANE

We have to get out of here! Escape!

CALVIN

*(Calmly, firmly.)*

I'm in.

DIANE

What?!

CALVIN

I said "I'm in." I'll do it.

TEDDY

You out of your fucking mind? Some kind of sicko?

CALVIN

*(Strangely confident.)*

Not at all. 'Cause I just realized something.

TEDDY

The fuck...?

CALVIN

It's fake.

TEDDY

Huh?

CALVIN

Yeah. Reynolds. This lab. The recording and the voices overhead--they're all fake.

TEDDY

Now you're crazy as well as sick.

CALVIN

No, hear me out. My psych class last semester. We studied this psychologist, Stanley Milgram, I think his name is, who did a famous experiment. He got people off the street, like us, and put them in a room like this. And he tested them by asking them to give other people electric shocks.

TEDDY

Oh, man, you want to be part of something like that?

CALVIN

If I know it's fake, why not? The victims of the fake shocks in Milgram's experiment and the people who told the subjects to fake-shock them were actors. One set of actors pretended to give wrong answers to simple questions while the other set of actors told the subjects to turn on the fake juice that made the actor-victims scream. Just like the fake guy in the fake waterboarding we just witnessed.

DIANE

But why? What's the sense of that?

CALVIN

It's like Reynolds said: They just want to record our emotions under similar circumstances. To understand what our soldier interrogators are going through, I guess. They don't need to use real victims as long as we think they're real.

TEDDY

But why should we go along if it's fake?

CALVIN

Well, what's the harm? It'll be interesting. Like a video game. Knowing no one's really getting hurt.

DIANE

And there's the two-hundred dollars.

CALVIN

That too.

DIANE

I can use the money, that's for sure.

TEDDY

And you're positive it's fake. I have to say it looked real enough.

CALVIN

I bet that's why the picture was so crappy. To hide the deception. All we saw was some shape that looked like a guy wiggling and moaning. It's probably just a dummy, rigged up to act like a prisoner, which is what we accept because the video is so bad. It's all a charade, just to get us to believe and then feel like we're torturing somebody when we really aren't. Get it?

TEDDY

I'll be damned.

DIANE

Well, it's only a couple of hours.

TEDDY

You're right. I can do two hours for a hundred bucks an hour.

CALVIN

Listen, though. When Reynolds comes back, we have to totally play along. Pretend we believe that the whole thing is genuine. Make him think we're really upset or whatever.

DIANE

For that much money, I don't have a problem.

TEDDY

Yeah, me neither.

CALVIN

Great. This is going to be fun. I can't wait to tell my buddies.

*After a moment, REYNOLDS returns.*

REYNOLDS

Well?

TEDDY

I'll do it.

DIANE

Me too.

*CALVIN nods.*

REYNOLDS

Great. You're doing a real service for your country.

*REYNOLDS goes to the door and opens it. FATIMA and RICHARD, also dressed in lab coats, enter. Each carries an electrode apparatus.*

REYNOLDS (CONT'D)

Diane, Ted. You two will be in these booths. Fatima and Richard will get you set up. Calvin, come with me. You'll be next door.

*FATIMA and RICHARD lead DIANE and TEDDY, respectively, to their separate booths where the two assistants prepare the two subjects. REYNOLDS picks up the box and leads CALVIN into the antechamber, closing the door behind them. Once they are out of sight and hearing...*

REYNOLDS (CONT'D)

That didn't take long. You're getting good at this.

CALVIN

It's amazing what a little sleight-of-hand patriotism and two-hundred bucks will do to pull some wool.

REYNOLDS

Just in time. They tell me there's a couple of hardnoses ready to go at Langley. Pakistani terrorist and some guy they picked up in Yemen last week.

CALVIN

Jesus, I'm glad it's not me pulling the lever. This new boarding activation system is great.

REYNOLDS

No shit. I know I'm sleeping better than when I had to do it myself.

CALVIN

They'll sleep too--Diane and Teddy. Strange how well it works out for all of us.

REYNOLDS

The beauty of symbiosis: They think it's make-believe and consequently have no guilt. We know it's real, but it's out of our hands.

CALVIN

Leaving us guilt-free as well.

REYNOLDS

And hungry. They'll be boarding those poor fucks for the next two hours at least. You up for breakfast?

CALVIN

Famished. Nothing like saving the Free World to work up an appetite.

*REYNOLDS and CALVIN exit. RICHARD and FATIMA exit. DIANE and TEDDY, staring intently into the bright monitors, get down to work, making the bodies writhe and moan...*

*Fade to black.*

THE END