

**CONJUGULAR VISIT**

by

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## CONJUGULAR VISIT

### Characters

JANIS, 30s-40s, a wife.

ARNOLD, same age, overweight, her long-time husband.

### Time

Present.

### Setting

A prison visiting area, with two chairs facing each other, separated by a clear plexiglass barrier equipped with a telephone handset on each side.

## CONJUGULAR VISIT

A prison waiting area. JANIS, in an orange DOC jumpsuit sits SR before a clear plexiglass barrier. She rakes a hand through her unkempt hair as she fidgets in her chair. After a few moments ARNOLD, also wearing an orange jumpsuit, enters SL and approaches the barrier from the other side. He stands beside his chair, staring sullenly at JANIS through the plexiglass.

JANIS locks eyes with ARNOLD as she grabs her phone. She waits. She gestures impatiently to ARNOLD to pick up his phone. She waits. She angrily bangs her phone against the glass.

JANIS

*(Shouting.)*

Arnold! Pick up the goddamn phone!

ARNOLD grins broadly and sits. Finally he picks up the phone and holds it to his ear. JANIS clutches her handset as if it were ARNOLD's neck.

JANIS (CONT'D)

You bastard! You always gotta do this. Making me wait. You son of a bitch!

ARNOLD

*(Gloating now.)*

You never let me down, Janis. Sooner or later your violent urges always win out.

JANIS struggles mightily to control herself.

ARNOLD (CONT'D)

I ever tell you how lovely you look in a homicidal rage?

JANIS

Go to hell.

ARNOLD starts to get to his feet.

JANIS (CONT'D)

Not now! Jesus! Sit down.

ARNOLD pauses to let his petty victories sink in.

ARNOLD

You still got a temper on you, Janis, I give you that. All these years you still find the energy to fly off the handle at the drop of a hat. How do you do it?

*JANIS grits her teeth and steams.  
Eventually she takes a deep breath.*

ARNOLD (CONT'D)

Better now?

JANIS

Yes.

ARNOLD

Getting any sleep?

JANIS

Some...No, not really.

ARNOLD

Sorry to hear that. Taking your medication?

JANIS

Yes, goddamn it.

ARNOLD

Good. So am I, and I see mine's working better. You should ask for it.

JANIS

Arnold, we need to talk.

ARNOLD

Now why do you want to spoil this nice conversation with a threat like that?

JANIS

You been avoiding the subject for the past six months.

ARNOLD

That's just a coping mechanism. My therapist says we all got 'em. It's healthy.

JANIS

Not when it makes the problem worse.

ARNOLD

Sez who?

JANIS

I sez who. Me. Your wife.

ARNOLD  
*(Sarcastically.)*  
 Who loves me, right?

JANIS  
 Yeah, who loves you, even through you're a selfish prick  
 bastard doesn't know a good thing when he has one.

ARNOLD  
 You call this good.

JANIS  
 It could be. Again.

ARNOLD  
 Assuming it ever was.

JANIS  
 You shit. Of course it was. How can you say such a thing?

ARNOLD  
 Truth is, Janis, we were never right for each other.

JANIS  
*(Anguished.)*  
 That's cruel. How can you say that? Were you lying on our  
 wedding day?

ARNOLD  
 Hah, there's that word, lying. You were lying in the weeds.

JANIS  
 No.

ARNOLD  
 Just waiting to begin your personal reclamation project.

JANIS  
 It was never like that.

ARNOLD  
 Determined to make me over into a guy worthy of your  
 affections. Your hidden agenda.

JANIS  
 I always loved you.

ARNOLD  
 Then why the constant pick, pick, picking at me? First my  
 taste in clothes. Then my friends. My family. My job.

JANIS  
*(Feebly.)*  
 You're exaggerating.

ARNOLD

Remember the promotion I got last year? The move back from the field, into the office. I was having the back pains, remember? Working the pipeline. I had to get off my feet or the job was going to cripple me. And the travel. I told you how excruciating it was to sit in those airplane seats. I told you that.

JANIS

Constantly. And I tried to help.

ARNOLD

Oh, aromatherapy. Like I could fix a herniated disc by smell.

JANIS

Well, the drugs weren't working.

ARNOLD

Point is, I had to get a desk job to save my life, and you criticized me for taking the promotion.

JANIS

It's not a promotion if you don't get more money.

ARNOLD

Jesus, don't you remember I also told you about Beasley.

JANIS

Which you also failed to rectify.

ARNOLD

I couldn't. It was impossible.

JANIS

*(Pointedly.)*

Sez who?

ARNOLD

There. Your values. What's important to you. Nothing about me was ever good enough for you.

JANIS

No, it wasn't!

*This takes ARNOLD by surprise. He thought he was on an unassailable roll.*

ARNOLD

Oh?

JANIS

You and your fucking pity. You know how poorly pity looks on you when you really are a loser?

ARNOLD

I'm...I'm sorry you feel that way.

JANIS

How else am I supposed to feel when every day I got to hear about stuff like how Beasley screwed you out of credit for your idea with the pipe valve thingie.

ARNOLD

The actuator. It's call an actuator.

JANIS

The fuck do I care what it's called? You let Beasley walk all over you with that.

ARNOLD

Hey, what could I do? It was work politics.

JANIS

Well, it's not just work, is it? It's your sister, too, and your father. Family politics.

ARNOLD

Here we go...

JANIS

You're the family punching bag. They're the ones keep calling you a failure, you don't live like them. What more can I say.

ARNOLD

That you haven't already said. Admit it: You hate my family.

JANIS

Like a pack of wild dogs chasing a fat pig, yeah.

ARNOLD

Oh, great. Now with the weight. Let's get more personal.

JANIS

Like that's gonna happen. The way you take care of yourself. Not exactly a turn-on.

ARNOLD

That's not my fault!

JANIS

I don't see you doing anything about it!

ARNOLD

What do you want me to do?

JANIS

Oh, I don't know. Start with the back hair. Then your fat ass.

ARNOLD

Maybe I would if you skimmed some of that cheese off your thighs.

JANIS

My thighs wouldn't matter if your actuator actually worked.

ARNOLD

*(Appalled.)*

You're bringing that up again! One time, Janis, one time. And my doctor said it was the medicine, a side effect.

JANIS

That your excuse? What else you got?

ARNOLD

What do you mean?

JANIS

All the other times, Arnold. What's your explanation for all the other times, I had to bring things to a close myself.

ARNOLD

*(Afraid of what's coming.)*

Yourself?

JANIS

I been a regular Meryl Streep in the sack for you.

ARNOLD

Since when?

JANIS

Since forever. I didn't always wrap things up after a reasonable length of time, you'd lay pipe 'til I was raw.

ARNOLD

You...you never said you were unhappy in that regard.

JANIS

How could I? How could I bring myself to tell a loser one more thing he's lousy at.

*ARNOLD slumps back in his chair, stunned.*

ARNOLD

Why now?

JANIS

I'm having a bad day. Then you came along.

ARNOLD

Why didn't you ever leave?



JANIS

Are you kidding? The kids. My religious upbringing. I'd never escape the recriminations. Trade one torture for another.

ARNOLD

Well, maybe I want out.

JANIS

You don't have the guts.

ARNOLD

*(Beat.)*

No. No, I guess not.

JANIS

Truth is, neither one of us can walk away. We're stuck. Stuck in a routine with each other.

ARNOLD

You laying into me. Me laying into you. Sick.

JANIS

Yeah, it's sick. You feeding off your resentment. Me getting my rocks off calling you out. After all this time, it's all we got left to keep us going.

ARNOLD

Bracing sort of. Like fresh air.

JANIS

I feel better.

ARNOLD

Again in two weeks?

JANIS

Yeah, sure. I can't wait. Looking forward to it already.

*ARNOLD hangs up the phone. Stands up and waves through the glass.*

ARNOLD

Bye, Janis.

*ARNOLD exits, shuffling a little.*

JANIS

Yeah, 'til next time. That's why they say, "Life means life."

*JANIS hangs up. Fade to black.*

THE END