

SAFE SPACES

By

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Characters

Madison, editor of a university newspaper

Garner, head of the university's cafeteria

Dawes, a member of the university's Safe Spaces Advisory Board

Person

Setting: modern day, at a university

A small room with three padded walls is arranged on the stage with Madison sitting inside the room. (In a black box setting, this can be accomplished with painted lines on the floor or other way to show demarcation.) Garner abruptly stumbles into the room.

GARNER

(confused)

What is this place?

(hitting the walls and yelling)

Let me out of here. I didn't do anything wrong.

MADISON

You didn't do anything wrong, huh? You're probably in the right place then.

GARNER

Who are you?

MADISON

Just your neighborhood freedom fighter.

GARNER

I don't understand.

MADISON

Never mind. It's nice to have some company, though. I've been here by myself for a while. I'm Madison.

(Madison reaches out to shake the hand of the doubtful Garner.)

GARNER

What kind of place is this?

MADISON

They call it the safe space.

GARNER

Safe space?

MADISON

Yeah. Four padded walls. It's pretty safe. Who it's trying to protect is an entirely different question.

(Garner upset and starts pacing back and forth)

So what are you being charged with?

GARNER

(pauses awkwardly)

I don't even know what happened. All these people were yelling at me. Security whisked me away to the Dean's office, and the next thing I know he keeps talking about how insensitive I am, and he charged me with ...

MADISON

With what?

GARNER

(backing away)

It's kind of embarrassing.

MADISON

Embarrassing for who? You or the person that put you here?

GARNER

I honestly don't know.

MADISON

Go ahead and tell me. I won't laugh.

GARNER

A third degree micro-aggression.

(Madison starts laughing hysterically.)

I don't even know what that is, but I'm charged with it. Hey, you said you wouldn't laugh.

MADISON

Sorry, but it's too darn funny. It's all right. Birds of a feather.

GARNER

I don't understand.

MADISON

Get comfortable. I'm in for the same thing.

GARNER

You work in the cafeteria too?

MADISON

No, no. I'm the editor of the campus newspaper.

GARNER

"The Freedom Beacon"? What are you doing here?

MADISON

Last week, I wrote an op-ed, and it caused quite the ruckus.

GARNER

Sorry. I didn't read it. What did it say?

MADISON

It was about free speech. I wrote how the first amendment doesn't guarantee you from hurt feelings. I lambasted free speech zones on universities, saying they were unconstitutional. I also wrote that criminalizing dissent on climate change is no different than Hitler burning books. I also may have said something about pop music or immigration. I can't really remember. It's all the same.

GARNER

Then what happened?

MADISON

I was brought here.
(patronizing)
It's my safe place.

GARNER

Safe from what? Where are we, and when can we get out?

MADISON

You might as well sit down and lean against the padding. It's quite comfortable actually.

GARNER

(turning towards the audience)
I didn't do anything. Let me out!

MADISON

It's no use. This place is completely soundproof. It's meant to provide optimal safety for those both inside and out. I knew a student who was in here last year for about three weeks. By the time he got out, he had been completely and utterly realigned.

GARNER

What was he in here for?

MADISON

Oh, he was caught carrying a copy of *Atlas Shrugged* with an exposed cover around campus.

GARNER

What's that? I don't understand.

MADISON

Never mind.

GARNER

How do you know so much about this place?

MADISON

I did a story on the safe space holding cell last year for our newspaper.

GARNER

I don't remember reading about it.

MADISON

It was edited out of the paper.

GARNER

I thought you were the editor.

MADISON

Now you're catching on. So, it's spread itself to the cafeteria, huh?

GARNER

What?

MADISON

You said you worked in the cafeteria, right?

GARNER

Yes, that's right.

MADISON

What kind of micro-aggression happens in the cafeteria? Let me guess. You accidentally put chicken salad in the vegan sandwich bar.

GARNER

No, nothing like that. You know every Tuesday evening is ethnic night in the dining hall. Yesterday we had Vietnamese *banh mi* sandwich on the menu.

MADISON

Yeah, I like those a lot. Pate, pickled vegetables, baguettes.

GARNER

The problem started when our shipment of pate didn't arrive over the weekend. So on Monday I'm scrambling, trying to figure out what to do, so I decided to make some pulled pork, and we served the pulled pork on the baguettes instead of pate.

MADISON

Yeah. Then what happened?

GARNER

That's it.

MADISON

That's what?

GARNER

That's what happened.

MADISON

You didn't get to the part of your micro-aggression.

GARNER

Yeah, I did. The next thing I know I have twenty students protesting around the *banh mi* station and before I knew what happened, campus police had thrown me into this ...

(looks around)

safe space.

(Madison starts laughing like crazy.)

What's so funny?

MADISON

At least I was thrown in here for the first amendment.

GARNER

So?

MADISON

You're in here for a pork sandwich. This is getting better and better. You don't happen to have some pen and paper, do you? I would really love to write my next op-ed.

GARNER

A minute ago you said the guy, the one from last year, was re-aligned.

MADISON

That's right.

GARNER

What does that mean?

MADISON

Just wait for it.

(Points to his right.)

Here comes Dawes.

(Dawes enters the room wearing black and white, carrying a folder of documents.)

DAWES

Greetings, Garner. Welcome to your safe space. Our university strives to provide all students with spaces where they can be themselves, without any threat of micro-aggression. The regrettable incident in the cafeteria not only created a disturbance, it defamed the cultural heritage of the *banh mi* sandwich, which was very upsetting for our Vietnamese students. Therefore, to create a safe space for them, we needed to remove the aggressor from the situation.

Me?
GARNER

DAWES
You did make the pulled pork, didn't you?

MADISON
He admitted it to me. He definitely was smoking pig, all day.

GARNER
Yes, I made it.

DAWES
So we put you here for your own good. You should feel happy to have your own safe space.
(memorized)
Our university strives to provide all students with spaces where they can be ...

GARNER
So how do I get out of here?

DAWES
Simple. I have a few straight forward documents for you to sign, stating how you will not culturally appropriate any other ethnic food item.

MADISON
Wait, wait, wait. Before you sign anything, I have a question for Ms. Safe Spaces.

DAWES
My name is Dawes.

MADISON
Yeah, yeah. I'll call you whatever I like inside my safe space. You are saying that Garner misappropriated the *banh mi* sandwich, but can't we also so the Vietnamese did the same thing?

DAWES
I beg your pardon?

MADISON
Baguettes. They're French. The Vietnamese have colonized the baguette, claiming it for themselves, putting their Asian marinated pickled vegetables and spices on French bread. How can you sit back and let the French be disparaged in such a way? This is an outrage.

DAWES
You are completely misrepresenting reality.

MADISON
Am I?

DAWES

Yes, you are.

MADISON

I want an answer. Is the baguette French or not?

DAWES

The Vietnamese suffered under eighty years of French oppression. The French have French privilege, which cancels out their right to claim that French bread is French.

MADISON

French privilege?

DAWES

Yes.

MADISON

You know what I think? I think you're full of crap. That's what I think. And what do you say to that? Am I allowed to say that?

DAWES

Yes, yes you are. Inside this safe space, you are allowed to say whatever you like. Now if you don't mind, I'd like to make sure Garner understands the gravity of his error.

(to Garner)

Are you clear on what you need to do from now on?

GARNER

(looking confused)

Could you explain it to me again?

DAWES

Certainly. Pulled pork sandwiches are fine, but they must be called pulled pork.

MADISON

Wouldn't pork be considered micro-aggression against Muslim and Jewish students?

DAWES

(thinking deeply)

He brings up an excellent point. We shall bring this up in our next Safe Spaces Forum to see if we need to make additional changes.

GARNER

So no pork?

DAWES

We don't know yet.

GARNER

I still don't know what I'm supposed to do.

DAWES

Oh, yes. Make sure that when you serve *banh mi* that a cultural informant pre-inspects the meal to make sure it is done authentically. We can provide these experts for you. We don't want to misinform the school-at-large about Vietnamese culture.

MADISON

What about tacos?

DAWES

Excuse me?

MADISON

What about tacos? Shouldn't someone from Mexico be inspecting them?

DAWES

I'm assuming this is already happening?
(looks at Garner)

GARNER

(looking nervous)
But of course.

MADISON

What about Tex-Mex? What's the percentage needed for the cultural inspection? One pure bred Texan and one pure bred Mexican would make the perfect balance, but in the case of mixed blood, is there a certain percentage that the school has approved? Example, 40% Mexican and 60% Texan. Is that acceptable? And what about 30-70?

DAWES

You bring up some excellent points. When you decide to leave your safe space, I would like to invite you on the Safe Space Forum Advisory Board to provide us with some additional insight. I have big hopes for you, Madison, as soon as you've been re-aligned.

MADISON

(facetiously)
Oh, thank you. Your confidence in me is what makes me want to improve myself.

GARNER

I'm a little confused.

MADISON

You are most definitely in the right place then.

DAWES

Garner, are you willing to sign these documents to symbolize your willingness to take cultural sensitivity to new heights in the cafeteria?

GARNER

If I do, does it mean I can leave?

DAWES

Of course. This is not a prison. It's a safe space so that you can be yourself. And when you're recovered, you can join the rest of society.

(Garner signs the paper.)

GARNER

No more pulled pork with *banh mi* sandwiches.

DAWES

Excellent.

(to Garner)

And while I have you here, there is one other thing I wanted to talk to you about. We've been wanting to recommend changes to the names of the salad dressings for quite some time.

GARNER

Salad dressings?

DAWES

Yes. We feel that "Ranch" inappropriately glorifies the Manifest Destiny nonsense that brought cowboys westward, resulting in the genocide of the indigenous peoples of this land.

GARNER

So what am I supposed to call it? White dressing with garlic, dill, and other herbs?

DAWES

Of course not. The term "white" would show angst towards the non-caucasians on campus. We were thinking that "dressing 1" would be appropriate.

MADISON

I don't know. Wouldn't the word "dressing" disparage those folks in the world who don't like to wear clothing?

DAWES

Hmmm. I'll take that up with the advisory board. Perhaps we should just call it "1."

GARNER

"1"?

MADISON

Would you like some number "1" on your salad?

DAWES

That has quite the special ring to it, doesn't it? Well, we don't need to decide everything today.

(to Garner)

Would you be willing to come by the office next week and hash-out the dressing controversy?

GARNER

Sure.

DAWES

Excellent. You're all set. You can leave now.

MADISON

See you in the funny papers.

GARNER

I hope you'll be back to writing soon.

MADISON

Don't bet on it. I'm feeling quite safe inside these four walls.

DAWES

Madison. You know that you too can re-enter regular university life as soon as you acknowledge that you will not use free speech as a justifier for saying whatever you want.

MADISON

I guess I just need a little more time.

DAWES

Very well.

MADISON

Garner, what's for dinner tonight?

GARNER

Stir fried vegetables with rice.

MADISON

White or brown?

DAWES

Madison, we cannot categorize rice along colored lines.

MADISON

My apologies.

DAWES

Have a good day. And enjoy your safe space.

(Dawes and Garner exit. The door closes and Madison is once again alone. He starts laughing and after a few seconds, the door opens and another person is tossed inside. The person looking around in a confused manner.)

MADISON

What did you do?

PERSON

I don't even know. I was walking down the sidewalk outside the student union singing a Rihanna song.

MADISON

Let me guess. You're not from Barbados, are you?

PERSON

No.

MADISON

Welcome to your safe space.

THE END

The 4th Annual Davenport Theatrical
10 Minute Play Contest