

"THE CARPENTER"

FADE IN:

Before we begin our present-day odyssey, let us step back a moment to clarify some pertinent history:

EXT. REFLECTION ON A RIVER SURFACE (1813) - DAY

We discern the shapes of SHAKER MEN sawing logs. Of course, that familiar harbinger of progress, the SCREECH-SCREECH of saw teeth, cuts into nature's otherwise harmonious melody of the river flowing, blue jays warbling, etc.

EXT. SHORE OF CONCORD RIVER, MASSACHUSETTS - DAY

As we take a closer look, it's obvious that these are destroying their backs using blunt, inadequate pit saws. The lurching back and forth, back and forth is almost too much to watch. We thank God for OSHA. As for turnaround time on the new home, don't even ask.

Fortunately, on a slight hill overlooking these masochistic endeavors lies a single, solitary --

LOG CABIN.

On the porch, SISTER TABITHA BABBITT sits spinning wool with a view of the shore. She quietly observes the grueling labor of her countrymen. Then looks down at her spinning wheel. And an idea occurs to her.

EXT. SAME PORCH (A FEW WEEKS LATER) - DAY

Sister Babbitt directs a BLACKSMITH as he mounts her new prototype circular saw blade onto the spinning wheel. The saw men all gather around as she demonstrates the concept.

EXT. SHORE OF CONCORD RIVER (A FEW YEARS LATER) - DAY

The first lumber mill in the world makes its debut. Powered by the river current, the planks roll effortlessly through the rotating blade and get stacked like hot cakes. No longer lurching around, the shaker men have a bounce to their step. The entire process is a smooth one and even the warblers have picked up the syncopated can-do rhythm that prevails. Standing off to one side, Sister Babbitt glistens at her important contribution to mankind.

EXT. EIGHTH FLOOR, OFFICE TOWERS UNDER CONSTRUCTION,
OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA (PRESENT DAY) - DAY

The whir of a micron carbide blade rotating at 360 rpm on a large panel saw dazzles the human eye as it rips a 3/4 inch miter off a veneered, four-by-eight-foot panel. As the board glides by, a pair of guiding human hands comes into view.

But these are not the big, gruff, calloused, hairy mitts of your typical tradesman. They belong to one WYLIE FERGUSON, 28, female, with a sturdy curvature and the eyes of a serial killer. Now to you or me, a saw blade spinning at 360 rpm translates into ten bloody stubs at the knuckles. To Wylie, it's a walk in the park. She lifts the panel off the saw, carries it over to a load-bearing column. Then she positions it between the edges of two other panels already installed. It's a perfect fit.

ELSEWHERE ON THE FLOOR,

TRADESMEN are busy installing plumbing, running wires through conduit, or attaching sheet metal ducts, sprinklers and drywall. Looking out the highrise windows, we see a CRANE lifting a steel girder onto a twin office tower under construction.

EXT. PARKING LOT, SAME - DAY

Dirt-splattered pick-ups and SUV's are parked across the newly poured blacktop. Nestled among this rustic cornucopia is a newer-looking domestic sedan bearing U.S. Government plates. It's from that direction that a cell phone RINGS.

INT. SEDAN - DAY

A body stirs to life in the back seat from beneath an apparently absconded airline blanket. A hand searches for the phone. Then the gorgeous head of KATHERINE BRENNER, 38, emerges from slumber. Katherine bears a marked resemblance to Sister Tabitha Babbitt. After checking the caller I.D., she answers in a hoarse monotone.

KATHERINE

You're in trouble... Yes, I found the place. (gazes out at towers) It would be hard to miss. So, Ricky, the superintendent here isn't coming in till nine. Your schedule said to get here at seven.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. OFFICE OF CONGRESSMAN MARK DOLAN, CANNON HOUSE OFFICE
BLDG., WASH. D.C. - DAY

Beneath the great seal of California, a prickly office
receptionist, RICKY, cradles the phone while he sorts mail.

RICKY

I see there was some miscommuni-
cation. This is what happens when
we turn off our cell phone.

Still in the car, Katherine flips the rear-view mirror into
position and adjusts her look.

KATHERINE

My mother turned it off at dinner
last night.

RICKY

Sounds like a raucous evening.
John left a message at your hotel.

KATHERINE

Really? Well, no one gave it to
me.

RICKY

I must say, Ms. Brenner, you'd
never cut it at a temporary agency.
Anyway, the state Division of
Apprenticeship Standards heard you
were in town. And apparently they
have this longstanding agreement
with the Department of Labor, which
provides for written notification
in the event of an inspection, and
then one of their agents has to -

KATHERINE

Ricky, can we cut to the chase?

RICKY

Someone named Ronald's waiting for
you on the steps.

Katherine spots a balding bureaucrat, RONALD BERGER, pacing
at the entrance like a caged orangutan. He's carrying two
hard hats.

KATHERINE

Swell. Remind me what I'm doing
here, again.

RICKY

You're supposed to be finishing the
survey for that affirmative action
bill.

KATHERINE
 (alighting from the car)
 It's not affirmative action. So
 yesterday...

RICKY
 Excuse me, "The Equal Access to the
 Nontraditional Jobplace" bill. Like
 I would know anything about that.

EXT. SEDAN - DAY

Katherine opens the driver's door, snares a leather-encased
 notepad, locks the car and starts walking toward the tower.

KATHERINE
 Don't you think it's strange how
 that person from E.T.A. bailed out
 on us?

RICKY
 John said something about her
 taking stress leave.

KATHERINE
 I wonder what brought that on.

The sound of PILE DRIVING commences. Katherine looks over at
 puffs of smoke on the site of a future third tower.

KATHERINE (CONT.)
 Never mind. Are you still picking
 me up at the airport?

RICKY
 Actually, the Congressman asked for
 that esteemed privilege.

KATHERINE
 (wry smile)
 Is he? You know, this equal
 opportunity stuff can get extreme,
 even for me. The idea of defending
 a woman's right to be - (looks up
 at an ironworker) a roofer.

RICKY
 Oh, I know. Imagine a man who
 thinks he can multi-task. The idea...

Ronald's waving the hard hats to get her attention.

KATHERINE
 Alright. Look, I gotta go.

RICKY

Sure thing.
(after she hangs up)
Like I was keeping you.

EXT. ENTRANCE TO TOWER ONE - DAY

On her way up the steps, Katherine retrieves a pill bottle from her purse. A GARDENER waters some new landscaping.

RONALD

Have trouble finding the place?

KATHERINE

No. Do you think I could get a glass of water before we start?
(flashes the pills) Allergies.

Ronald considers the request doubtfully. Then he lights on an idea: the gardener's running hose.

KATHERINE (CONT.)

It can wait.

INT. EIGHTH FLOOR, SAME - DAY

The elevator doors open and Katherine bolts out like a thoroughbred from the gate and starts inspecting. With her sleek dress, dark shades and appearance of conviction, she's an immediate sensation with the tradesmen. Ronald shuffles behind her like a disabled grinch.

KATHERINE

So, Ronald, you're with the free state of California. Tell me - what's wrong with this picture?

Ronald sees nothing wrong, just a lot of white, working class men hard at work. Well, some of them are hard at work. Twenty-four other pairs of eyeballs are locked on the legs of the visitor. Katherine takes notes.

RONALD

A head count proves nothing. You do recall the two electricians on the fourth floor, the laborer... and now this carpenter.

He means Wylie Ferguson. She's installing another panel on a column. Holding one end of it as she slips in support blocks underneath. Helping her is a gaunt, retirement-age carpenter, HENRY. Wylie tightens two bar clamps to secure the glued panel, then turns to find Katherine watching her.

KATHERINE

You made that look so simple.

WYLIE

Yeah, well, you get a lot of practice around here.

Wylie indicates other columns she's finished.

KATHERINE

Amazing.

WYLIE

Is this about my back dues?

KATHERINE

God, no. I'm investigating gender discrimination. Here, let me give you my business card.

(commences search of purse)

Do I look a union rep?

WYLIE

You look like you're from Disney World.

KATHERINE

Washington. Same thing. So, is everything going OK out here?

Still searching, Katherine fumbles her nail polish, lipstick and a prescription bottle out onto the subflooring. She scoops it all back into her purse.

WYLIE

Lady, I got to get back to work.

Katherine stops and takes off her sunglasses. She's mystified by the hostility. A beat.

KATHERINE

Alright. *(proffers card)* Call me if you need anything.

WYLIE

Do I look like I need something?

KATHERINE

I don't know. Maybe a semester of charm school. Sorry to bother you.

Leaving Wylie to her column, Katherine and Ronald withdraw and resume their inspection of the site. Henry takes the business card from Wylie and reads it.

HENRY

Aide to Congressman Mark Andrew
Dolan. Sounds pretty important.

WYLIE

I'd like to boot her snooty, slack
ass down the elevator shaft.

HENRY

Nah, I think that gal wants to help
you.

WYLIE

Nobody's ever helped me do
anything. Let's go.

HENRY

You the boss..

They head off to the saw and the stack of panels beside it.

INT. CORRIDOR APPROACHING ELEVATORS, SAME FLOOR - DAY

Still on the move, Katherine and Ronald maneuver around
CARPETLAYERS working on the concrete floor.

KATHERINE

The Subcommittee is not going to be
happy when I testify.

RONALD

A foregone conclusion.

Katherine hits a groove in the cement and steps right out of
one of her high heels. As she backtracks to reclaim it:

KATHERINE

Ronald, why are we the only ones
wearing hard hats?

RONALD

Regulations.

Katherine removes the hat, fluffs her hair. This generates
WHISTLES and CATCALLS from all around. They resume their
trek.

KATHERINE

So let's talk regulations. Let me
see. I don't have my calculator,
but four women out of a workforce
of say, two hundred...

RONALD

Ms. Brenner, blue-collar jobs rarely attract a large pool of females.

KATHERINE

Ronald, for twenty-six-fifty an hour, nuns would be leaving the convent. I had no idea the situation was this bad.

Overhearing these feminist musing, a PAINTER intentionally bumps Katherine, streaking her dress with paint.

KATHERINE (CONT.)

Damn.

RONALD

The bottom line is that the state cannot order any contractor to hire nuns, nor may it compel a labor organization to recruit them.

KATHERINE

Then tell me then, what exactly does the state Division of Apprenticeship Standards do?

RONALD

You mean, besides following federal interns around and inhaling sheetrock dust.

She assesses the paint damage gain, checks her watch, and pushes the elevator button.

KATHERINE

You called us, remember? And I'm not an intern. Ronald, look around. This isn't some trashcan burning on the sidewalk. We're talking obstruction of civil rights...

EXT. A PASSENGER AIRLINER - DAY

Lifting off from San Francisco International airport.

KATHERINE (V.O.)

In particular, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964...

INT. COACH CABIN, EASTBOUND AIRLINER - DAY

Katherine swallows two pills with a glass of wine.

KASEY (V.O.)
 Title IX of the Education
 Amendments of 1972...

EXT. CAPITOL HILL, WASHINGTON D.C. - DAY

A summertime sizzling post card shot.

KATHERINE (V.O.)
 The Job Training and Partnership
 Act...

INT. HOUSE HEARING ROOM, WASHINGTON D.C.

The SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMPLOYER-EMPLOYEE RELATIONS is meeting. Its chair is the distinguished, good-looking California Democrat, CONGRESSMAN MARK ANDREW DOLAN, 47. A lot of not so good-looking, brick-faced LABOR LEADERS fill the chamber. At the witness table, Katherine reads from her report.

KATHERINE
 Let's see, the Nontraditional
 Employment for Women Act of 1991.
 That requires recipients of federal
 funds to set specific goals for the
 training and placing of women into
 nontraditional assignments.

She stops to drink some water and stifle a yawn - jet lag. Also yawning are members of the all-male PRESS CORPS covering the session. Most are diverting themselves with video games on their laptops. Another doodles a cartoon: Katherine as a scrawny soapbox agitator at the height of her oratory; Big Labor dead asleep behind her.

KATHERINE (CONT.)
 In 1992, the Women in
 Apprenticeship and Non-traditional
 Occupations Act was passed,
 authorizing over a million dollars
 to help both employers and unions
 integrate women into the trades.
 But let's go back to 1978 for a
 second. President Carter issued an
 executive order that established a
 goal of 25 percent for integrating
 women into the trades workforce.
 Hardly a giant leap towards parity.
 By the mid-1980s, the auto
 manufacturing industry actually
 reached a respectable 20 percent.

Mark Dolan's chief of staff, JOHN DECKER, 32, enters the chamber, notices the doodle on the way to his chair behind Mark. It gives him immense joy to see Katherine lampooned.

KATHERINE (CONT.)

Meanwhile, in the construction trades, the figure has catapulted from a pathetic 2.4% in 1970... to a staggering 2.5% today. (glancing back at audience) The penalties for violating the law, some of you may not be aware of, range from 3 to 5 years in a federal penitentiary and fines of up to \$15,000 per offense.

In the audience, a crew-cut, overweight union representative ROY CRAWFORD, leans towards the man beside him, EDDIE KENT, 60. Eddie has thick brows, a creased, teddy bear face, and is dressed like a Ponderosa rancher.

ROY

Is she serious about this stuff?

EDDIE

Nah, what she needs is a little executive order up in my hotel room later.

An elderly Republican on the committee, CONGRESSMAN YATES, questions Katherine in a mint julep drawl.

CONGRESSMAN YATES

Young lady, let me stop you for just a second. I read somewhere that in order to accomplish true gender parity in America, 77 percent of the labor force would have to change jobs.

KATHERINE

Sounds about right. Would you mind if I took yours?

Some muffled LAUGHTER among the committee members.

CONGRESSMAN YATES

Well, first you'd have to move to Alabama. Now, could you explain to me the relevance of Title Nine?

KATHERINE

Of course. Most trade unions and employers participate in joint apprenticeship programs. The apprentices get classroom training, typically at a local community college.

CONGRESSMAN YATES

I see. So you're suggesting that because there aren't many women in these programs, that a crime is taking place.

KATHERINE

Exactly.

Some of the reporters look up from their laptop games.

CONGRESSMAN YATES

But what do the trade unions have to do with it? Don't the companies do all the hiring?

KATHERINE

No. Let me explain how it works. Say you want to work for a company that's unionized. First, you have to go down to the union hall and sign up on a list. The company calls the union, says they need someone, and the union calls the next guy - or woman - whose name is on the list.

CONGRESSMAN YATES

So then the companies don't control who gets hired.

KATHERINE

Usually not, and especially in the case of apprenticeships.

CONGRESSMAN YATES

(indicates Chairman Dolan)

So this bill your boss is promoting will now regulate the hiring procedure?

KATHERINE

It allows the Employment Training Administration to intervene in cases where a pattern of discrimination is indicated.

CONGRESSMAN YATES

Where a "pattern of discrimination" is indicated.

The labor leaders are becoming increasingly agitated by this line of inquiry. In fact, their hostility is palpable in the room. Behind Mark Dolan, his chief aide JOHN DECKER, 39 -- a rather peevish and cerebral fellow -- confides something into the chairman's ear.

KATHERINE

If the joint apprenticeship committee doesn't correct the problem within a reasonable time period, then the E.T.A. will cut off its funding.

CONGRESSMAN YATES

Well. Sounds to me like the end of apprenticeship in America.

KATHERINE

I suppose some would call it a radical step. I call it law enforcement. I mean, given the track record of--

CHAIR MARK DOLAN

Congressman, this is a chance to open up the trades to sectors of our population that are associated with the welfare rolls. Young minority men, single mothers -

CONGRESSMAN YATES

Ex-convicts, the homeless, refugees from Guatemala. Who else must we accommodate? No siree, this bill is nothing more than an attempt to reinstitute quotas. I'm having none of it, and I suspect neither will the Supreme Court.

Feeling vindicated by this retort, the labor leaders burst into APPLAUSE and a long standing ovation. Katherine closes the report, lobs her pen down on top of it. A discouraging turn of events, but not unexpected. What's worse, she's discovered a paint stain on her panty hose. As she waits for the clamor to subside, she notices something else.

A LONE TRADESWOMAN

Sits between two fat union officials. She wears a denim jacket, a John Deere Hat and the white knuckles of someone just sentenced to death. For Katherine, that affirmative action survey has a face, and it's not Wylie Ferguson's.

The clock on the wall reads a quarter to twelve.

CHAIR MARK DOLAN

Ms. Brenner, I think that about covers it. Can we go ahead and insert the report into the record now?

Katherine reopens the document, flips madly through the pages.

KATHERINE

Just one moment. I think perhaps a few hard numbers would underscore the problem.

CHAIR DOLAN

Okey-dokey.

KATHERINE

Consider, shall we, the case of the Plumbers, Local 9 in Philadelphia. Its current president for life is one James Dean Callahan.

In the audience, CALLAHAN, an old geezer with liver spots, snaps to attention at the mention of his name.

KATHERINE (CONT.)

In his 22-year tenure, not a single woman has completed an apprenticeship in Local 9.

The press corps lights up with this impassioned disclosure. The video games onscreen are replaced with Microsoft Word and the sound of many nimble fingers laying into keyboards.

KATHERINE (CONT.)

Then there's William Mahoney, president of the Ironworkers Local in Tallahassee. Not one. Jeremy Quinn, Sprinkler Fitters, Local 2 in Charlotte; Martin O'Shaughnessy, Cabinet Makers Local 109 in Jackson. Grady Mulligan, Plumbers Local 16 in Sparks, and Eddie Kent, Carpenters Local 50 of San Francisco.

Unlike his outraged peers, Eddie smiles proudly at being acknowledged for his despicable feat. But around him, the irate GRUMBLING reaches fever pitch. Mark Dolan has his gavel in the air but can't bring himself to lower it. John Decker stares at Katherine and contemplates murder.

Turning to face her detractors:

KATHERINE (CONT.)

No gentlemen, none of you can escape the inexorable zero.

Emboldened, the woman in the John Deere cap leaps to her feet.

TRADESWOMAN

Yeah! It's about time you creeps got busted. You don't train us at all, and you fire us after three months once you get your statistic.

The buffalos are on their feet. Mark pounds the gavel. FEDERAL PEACE OFFICERS storm the room and sweep the agitator away in a most uncomfortable fashion.

Katherine cringes at the sight of her rough handling. Eddie Kent smiles, taking all the commotion in stride.

EDDIE

She's right about us, you know.

ROY

Yeah, Eddie, the President's gonna send in troops.

As the dust settles over the chamber:

CHAIR DOLAN

This seems like a good time to break for lunch. If there's no objection.

CONGRESSMAN YATES

Why, Mark, she's just getting warmed up.

CHAIR DOLAN

May I remind the ranking member of our full agenda today.

The other Democrats are already clearing out of the chambers. Yates kicks back in his chair and savors the Pandora's Box he's just opened.

CONGRESSMAN YATES

I can't wait to see Act Two.

CHAIR DOLAN

This meeting is adjourned until one p.m.

The labor leaders file out like an oppressed race as Katherine's ambushed on all sides by the reporters. As they plaster her with question, she manages to catch a glimpse of the chairman's astounded, if not livid gaze.

End excerpt

Copyright © 2017

For info:rregello@thecityedition.com