

**MISS UNDERSTANDING**

*Excerpt*

Written by

Caitlin Scherer

**INT. CLINIC - HALLWAY - DAY**

Lamaze-style breathing. Forceful pushing. A few high-pitched moans. It sounds like a woman in labor. We stop outside a door with a sign: "UNDERSTANDING AWAITS."

**INT. CLINIC - UNDERSTANDING ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

A clinical procedure room. The "woman in labor" isn't a woman at all: it's a man. But red cheeks puffing hard, it sure looks like he's birthing something.

Dotting his temples and chest are a series of smooth silver nodules that act as sophisticated electrodes.

HUSBAND

Okay, okay, I believe you now.

His PREGNANT WIFE watches with arms crossed.

PREGNANT WIFE

Sorry, I couldn't quite hear over your "overreactions".

A floating touchscreen monitors the man's physical response and brain activity. Flashing hotspots in his abdominal and pelvic region suggest intense pain. Through gritted teeth:

HUSBAND

I shouldn't have said that. I'll let you win this one, okay?

PREGNANT WIFE

Oh, you'll let me win? Is that thing maxed out?

She addresses the green-scrubbed technician who administers the procedure: MAISIE DURAND (black, early 30s), a gift-wrapped bundle of happiness.

MAISIE

Maxed? We're just getting started!

HUSBAND

No! NO! Honey, please--!!

MAISIE

--here we go!

On the touchscreen, Maisie hits "INITIATE MEMORIES". The nodules on the Husband's temples glow. The Husband's eyes widen as we go...

THROUGH THE NODULES...

INTO THE MAN'S BRAIN...

...where a series of electrical impulses race along his neural network, until--

**HUSBAND'S EXPERIENCE OF MEMORIES:**

--the Husband "lands" among a series of LABOR PAIN MEMORIES:

-A contraction rockets through a woman's pelvis!

-A woman emits a blood-curdling shriek of pain!

But the Husband doesn't simply watch these memories as a bystander: he EXPERIENCES THEM as if he were actually the memory holders themselves.

-A baby's skull crowns, stretching out of the woman's (read: the Husband's) vagi--

--**BACK IN THE ROOM.**

HUSBAND

--OKAY! Make it stop! MAKE IT STOP!

PREGNANT WIFE

Then say it!

HUSBAND

Labor is-- *mother-of-GOD*-- more painful than a torn ACL!!!

Triumphant, the Wife nods at Maisie. Maisie hits "TERMINATE UNDERSTANDING". As she removes the Husband's nodules:

MAISIE

I get one every week.

PREGNANT WIFE

Hello, patriarchy. We mamas have to stick together.

MAISIE

Oh... I'm not...

PREGNANT WIFE

What: you didn't want all of this?  
Smart woman.

The Husband regards his Wife with newfound admiration.

HUSBAND

I can't believe you've done that  
twice. God, you're sexy.

The couple love-doves. Maisie smiles.

MAISIE

Happy understanding.

**CUT TO WHITE.**

MAISIE (V.O.)

*Feelings. They're everywhere.*

**INT. EMPATHY CENTER - LOBBY - DAY**

Bright, approachable interior. Comfy chairs, sunshine  
streaming through skylights-- wait: there are no skylights.  
It's manufactured beams of light. But hey, it feels the same.

MAISIE (V.O.)

*Just look at some of the world's  
greatest hits: MJ's "The Way You  
Make Me Feel", Dylan's "You Don't  
Know How it Feels", Elton's "Can  
You Feel the Love Tonight?", even  
"Man! I Feel Like a Woman" -- which  
we can do, by the way...*

A sign heralds: "WELCOME TO THE EMPATHY CENTER". An employee,  
DEACON (40s) - diplomatic, unflappable - gives a tour. His  
name-tag reads: "UNDERSTANDING AMBASSADOR."

DEACON

Here at the Empathy Center, our  
groundbreaking "understanding  
therapy" makes it possible to feel  
what someone else is going through -  
literally.

A CURMUDGEON MOTHER and TEENAGE SON are in the tour group.

CURMUDGEON MOTHER

You're trying to read my thoughts,  
like mind control!

TEENAGE SON

No one wants to read *your* mind,  
Mom.

DEACON

It isn't mind control, but it can  
be mind altering.

(MORE)

DEACON (CONT'D)

The Dalai Lama even gave us his endorsement! Now we always recommend that clients pair their "understandings" with our in-house integration sessions--

CURMUDGEON MOTHER

--what about that secret Implant Prototype Study you guys did last year? Stealing people's memories - I saw the FOX special!

DEACON

If I may, that Study was completely misconstrued by the media, and--

CURMUDGEON MOTHER

--Nobody's hooking me up to a memory stealer!

She beelines for the door like a prisoner with a window out of Alcatraz. She pushes out-- Smash! It's an in.

DEACON

(to Teenage Son)

We get that all the time.

MAISIE (V.O.)

*Empathy can bring us together, help us connect and give us meaning. That's what life is really about...*

Maisie bounces up to Deacon with a BIG SMILE.

MAISIE

Gooooood morning!!

DEACON

Every day, so goddamn cheerful. It's like your default setting.

MAISIE

Part of my charming personality. Or the coffee. Or the drugs.

DEACON

Whatever it is, it's working.

(hands over a chart)

Standard PTSD understanding today. I hear Faizan got a hypothalamus.

MAISIE

Wife trying to understand her husband's sex addiction?

DEACON

*Husband* trying to understand his  
*wife's* sex addiction... which  
somehow includes his sister.

MAISIE

God, Faizan has all the fun...

Nearby, a woman in blue scrubs steps over the Curmudgeon Mother. This is GWEN OSTER (late 20s). Bright. Awkward. Hopelessly indelicate. She fishes a bottle of St. John's wort oil out of a ratty carpet bag and offers it to the Mother.

GWEN

For the headache. Trust me: I run  
into doors *all* the time. Like,  
concussion protocol all the time.  
It's a problem.

Maisie's face fills with surprised recognition at the sight of her... and not the good kind. She slinks away.