

"Volunteers and Parameters"

(Lights up. It is a Monday morning. GAYLE, TAMMY and AC are seated with their overnight baggage near them. LEE enters, a backpack hanging from his shoulder, sees everyone.)

LEE

Given everyone's size, I must be in the right place.

(He holds up his camera phone and snaps a picture of the room.)

GAYLE

(agitated) Excuse me?

LEE

Well, I mean... I didn't mean to be insulting. I'm just as big as...

(Gayle glares. Lee looks DSR.)

Oh, look. A window. I'm sure the drop will kill me instantly. This'll just take a sec.

(He crosses to it. Tammy and AC chuckle.)

Lee Delano, by the way.

(He holds a hand out to Tammy. She shakes it.)

TAMMY

Tammy Perdita.

LEE

Cool name.

TAMMY

Think so?

LEE

Sure do. It says something when you hear it.

TAMMY

Like what?

LEE

Don't know. I wasn't listening.

(He crosses to AC, putting his pack down.)

LEE

Lee.

AC
(Shakes Lee's hand.)

A-C.

LEE

What's that stand for?

AC

People just call me A-C.

LEE

That's your name or what?

AC

Nickname. Albert Casper.

LEE

Albert? That must have sucked. Kids call you "Fat Albert" growing up?

AC

No. They called me A-C.

LEE

Why A-C again?

AC

It's a nickname.

LEE

(long beat) Cool.

(Awkward silence. MAGGIE enters from USC with a couple of duffle bags. Lee sees her.)

LEE

Thank gad, another person.

(Lee crosses to her.)

MAGGIE

Hello.

LEE

Here, let me get this.

(Lee assists her into the commons.)

MAGGIE

(Looking around.)

This is it? I imagined it'd be bigger. How many of us are there?

TAMMY

They haven't told us yet.

LEE

(Shakes Maggie's hand.)

Lee Delano.

MAGGIE

Maggie Rudd.

LEE

Can I call you Mags?

MAGGIE

No.

TAMMY

(Waves.)

Tammy.

LEE

That's A-C. Albert, but no one ever called him "Fat Albert."

(AC holds a hand up. Lee gestures to Gayle.)

And I don't know HER name, but I think she wishes me a painful accident.

MAGGIE

Why's that?

LEE

I think I called her fat.

MAGGIE

You deserve it then.

LEE

I know.

(Maggie crosses to Gayle. They shake hands.)

GAYLE

Gayle Flowers.

MAGGIE

Maggie Rudd, but you can call me Mags.

LEE

Hey.

(DR. MARKUS enters from USC,
holding pamphlets, looks around.)

DR. MARKUS

We're missing one.

(Looks at her watch.)

Well, we better get started. I can fill him in on what he misses.

(Handing out pamphlets.)

My name is Dr. Jeanne Markus. I'm the director of testing here at the facility. Each of you have been selected to participate in our clinical trial for a new fat burning remedy.

LEE

What is this?

DR. MARKUS

This is a pamphlet which describes the trail, your rights as a volunteer and the parameters of the project.

LEE

(Looks it over.)

There's no information on what you're looking to achieve.

DR. MARKUS

That's because the client has deemed that information confidential.

LEE

Well, that's no help to us.

TAMMY

Shouldn't we know what results to look for? Wouldn't that help YOU.

DR. MARKUS

We already know what results and effects to anticipate. All I am allowed to tell you is...we're attempting to modify an appetite suppressant, which our client already has in phase four, to develop a medium more aggressive at burning away fat cells.

MAGGIE

Using natural herbs?

DR. MARKUS

(beat) That's correct.

LEE

How'd you know that?

MAGGIE

Sunstar HERBAL SCIENCE Group.

LEE

Oh, duh.

GAYLE

What phase are WE in?

DR. MARKUS

Phase two.

LEE

What's phase one?

DR. MARKUS

Phase one is where our technicians work with cells and non-human subjects.

AC

Like what?

DR. MARKUS

Hamsters, mice. We eventually graduate to dogs and monkeys. If we get positive results there, we graduate to phase two.

TAMMY

Interesting.

DR. MARKUS

Everyone has a pamphlet, correct? Please take a look at the first inside panel.

(They do so, as those standing take a seat.)

This describes the trial. As you've been told already, it is a four week trial and is designed to study the media's potential influence on research participants' health and motivation regarding its results.

TAMMY

Is that English?

DR. MARKUS

We're looking for health defects which the media may cause.

AC

What do you mean "the media?"

LEE

The pill.

DR. MARKUS

Correct. We're also looking to see if there is a point where you, the participant, wish to discontinue the trial due to effects of the media.

GAYLE

Discontinue. As in...

MAGGIE

If we give up.

(DEAN enters from USC with a canvas Army sack over his shoulder.)

DEAN

(Seeing everyone.)

Is this where they want fat people?

GAYLE

Oh great, there's another one.

DR. MARKUS

What is your name, sir?

DEAN

Dean Rafferty.

DR. MARKUS

Rafferty? Yes, this is you're group.

DEAN

Great. If I had to hump this bag another leg, I'd be here testing for hernia reduction.

(He tosses his things to the ground.)

What'd I miss.

DR. MARKUS

I was just explaining the parameters of testing, Mister Rafferty.
(She hands him a pamphlet.)

DEAN

Ooh, literature.

DR. MARKUS

I was just explaining what our technicians will be looking for, as far as health responses to the media,...

MAGGIE

The pills.

DR. MARKUS (cont)

It's all on the first panel of the pamphlet.

DEAN

Cooky.

(He crosses and sits on the sofa between Gayle and Tammy.)

Hi. Dean.

TAMMY

I know. I heard.

DR. MARKUS

If we can continue... Everyone take a look at the next panel.

(They do so.)

This describes the kind's of physical specimens we will be taking from you over the next four weeks. You will also be required to weigh in every day, and your technicians will be measuring your body fat percentile.

AC

Did you say specimens?

GAYLE

Blood. Urine.

DR. MARKUS

Among others. Spore. Tissue.

LEE

How do you sample tissue?

DR. MARKUS

To perform a biopsy, we typically take tissue samples from the back of your arms. I expect no more than twice over the entire trial.

MAGGIE

Ouch.

DR. MARKUS

It will be a bit discomfoting, but your technicians will help you through it. Moving on.

(Lee holds up his camera phone to snap a picture.)

I'm sorry. We can't have you taking pictures in here.

LEE

Why not?

DR. MARKUS

Sunstar and its clients do not want industry and trade secrets to leak out.

(Lee puts the camera away.)

AC

How much are we getting for this?

DR. MARKUS

(beat) I had hoped to go into that after we went through the information.

AC

I think if you're gonna' keep me from walking out of this place right now, I need to know how much money we'll be looking at.

DR. MARKUS

(beat) We determined participants in THIS trial will receive forty-five hundred dollars.

TAMMY

Wow.

AC

I'll stay.

DEAN

Good for me.

MAGGIE

Me too.

DR. MARKUS

Let's keep going, please. (beat) The third panel discusses the parameters of the trial. This is to ensure our control group, meaning all of you, is not compromised with some sort of variable. A difference in diet, environment, which may separate you from other groups we currently have testing the same media, but for a different set of results.

DEAN

Give an example.

DR. MARKUS

Well, we don't want anyone from this group having any excessive snacking between the meals we provide. You are not allowed to have foods we did not provide for you directly.

LEE

So, the box of Twinkels stuffed in my underwear is off limits.

GAYLE

I'd say ANY food kept in your underwear is now off limits.

DR. MARKUS

Yes. Twinkels as a snack is a variable we can not have in this group.

AC

How about Twinkels as a meal?

DR. MARKUS

(ignoring) This actually brings me to an interesting point. It is VERY important everyone here realizes the need to keep this group controlled. Our contract with our client is very specific. If we have no concrete results, positive or negative, Sunstar does not get compensated. If this happens, participants do not get compensated.

MAGGIE

So, there's a chance we won't get the money?

AC

This is where I go.

(He stands.)

DR. MARKUS

As long as everyone eats the meals provided, follows the parameters of the trials and provides us with the appropriate samples, the facility will have all the information it needs and you will all receive your stipend.

(AC pauses a moment and sits again.)

LEE

(reading) "Bowel movements will be collected in designated containers at least once a day."

DEAN

How big are the containers?

DR. MARKUS

About the size of a Cream Whip container. They are located under the sinks in both facilities.

DEAN

I don't know. Mine get pretty hefty. I once took a shit so big, the federal government tried to give it a social security number.

TAMMY

Yummy.

MAGGIE

(Reading on.)

We're getting LOCKED IN?

(Everyone else checks the pamphlet.)

DR. MARKUS

Yes. This is standard practices for groups like this one. Diet is the utmost importance, and we can not have desperate participants sneaking out to break into the cafeteria. We've had that happen once at our west coast facility.

LEE

You don't think that's a little extreme?

DR. MARKUS

Yes, I do. Unfortunately, these are the parameters set by the client to ensure their results.

TAMMY

Are there phones in our rooms?

DR. MARKUS

There is no telephone in housing, no.

MAGGIE

Some of us have kids we'll need to check on.

TAMMY

Yes.

DR. MARKUS

Between the hours of seven A-M and ten P-M, you can use the call box by the entrance if you wish to request anything. If you need to make a phone call, you will be escorted to the technician's lounge. We ask you keep your calls under ten minutes and limited to once a day.

DEAN

What about visitors?

DR. MARKUS

There are none. There are no outside items after this point. All your bags have been checked downstairs when you signed in.

GAYLE

Do we have to press use the call box when we need to use the facilities?

DR. MARKUS

No, women's facilities are on the left there.

(She gestures USR.)

Men's are on the right.

(Same USR.)

AC

What do we do if we want out? Say a week from now, when I'm tired of crapping in a Cream Whip can, and I'm ready to go home... What do we do?

DR. MARKUS

(beat) Technically, you are free to excuse yourself from testing at any time. However, there is no payment if there are no results.

MAGGIE

Wait. NO ONE gets paid if only ONE of us decides to quit?

DR. MARKUS

Our client's contract is very specific. Only the client or the facility can terminate a clinical trial for either positive or negative reasons.

DEAN

That's kind of jacked.

DR. MARKUS

I'm sorry. (beat) At this point, you all need to be sure you want to participate. After today, it will be very difficult on everyone if you do not finish the trial.

(Long silence.)

LEE

How many trials does this facility run at the same time?

DR. MARKUS

Well, we generally do not give that information out liberally, but this week we have three trials administered in THIS facility. We have several other facilities in the country.

LEE

What kinds of conditions is the facility usually looking into?

DR. MARKUS

Without going into too much detail, we've aided several research projects for media involving obesity, diabetes, asthma, eczema and other skin conditions, some neurological disorders, chemical dependancies...

(Suddenly, in the corridor, a
VOLUNTEER runs up to the USC
entrance, banging on the door.)

VOLUNTEER

(yelling) DOES ANYONE IN HERE HAVE A CIGARETTE?!

(He sees TECHNICIAN LANCE approach
and runs away. Lance runs after
him.)

DR. MARKUS

(pause) Would you excuse me for a minute?

(She quickly crosses USC, exits and
follows the chase. All
participants sit in silence a
moment.)

LEE

So...what's everyone gonna' do?

AC

Well, I need the money. I'm staying.

MAGGIE

Me too.

DEAN

Me too.

LEE

(to Gayle and Tammy) Ladies?

TAMMY

I'm staying.

GAYLE

(beat) I will too.

MAGGIE

(to Lee) What about YOU, fatboy?

LEE

Well, I'M not gonna' be the one to ruin it for everyone else.
I'm in.

DEAN

Did they already assign which bedroom is who's?

TAMMY

No.

(Dean leaps off the couch.)

DEAN

If there's one with a wet bar, it's mine!
(He grabs his sack and crosses DSL,
exits. The others stand with their
things. Lee crosses to Gayle who
carries a large piece of travel
luggage.)

LEE

Can I please help you with this?

GAYLE

(beat) Fine.

(Lee takes it, crosses DSL. One by
one, the others exit DSL, as lights
fade out.)

End of Scene Two.