

The Tits of M. Emmet Walsh
by Eric Cecil

As I wait to take the stage, preparing for my standup comedy debut, I'm compelled to wander the halls of the venue: a dank, labyrinthine building hollowed by impossibly long hallways. I explore these neverending passages with a distracted indifference. I am, after all, apprehensive about my set. Maybe I need to rest and collect my thoughts. Or maybe I need a place to hide. I stop at one of the many doors thronging the interminable hall and enter without knocking.

The room is poorly lit, uninviting. And it's occupied. A small crowd shadows the periphery of a grand polished table: the kind that might inhabit a corporate boardroom, or perhaps the employee lounge of a bank. Surrounding the table are a number of lavish highbacked chairs. These spin as freely as merry-go-rounds. Their movement is so strong, so propulsive, that it obscures the appearances of those seated.

Suddenly, I am among them, sitting with purpose at the head of the table. I notice a young man directly to my right. His face is shiny, leonine, inscrutable. The thin strands of a bolo tie hang from his neck. He readies a pen at the surface of a lined notepad and urges me to describe my act.

What have you got so far? he asks.

I reply without thinking: The tits of M. Emmet Walsh.

Pardon? he says.

I repeat the phrase, smirking. The man lowers his pen and glares at me. I look to the others for help, turning to a woman sitting at my left. She crosses her shapely legs, which are adorned in sheer black hose, and folds her arms in apparent disdain. Disgust narrows her eyes. Revulsion purses her mouth.

Undeterred, I declare it again, louder this time: The tits of M. Emmet Walsh. I meet the following silence with nervous laughter, my hands clasped before me. Okay, I acknowledge, addressing the group, the bit does need work. But the punchline is indispensable. It stays.

The delegates remain nonplussed. Another young man in trim business attire, several seats away, regards me with raised eyebrows. One of his older and less charitable colleagues drops a sheath of papers to the floor and mutters: Oh, Christ. Someone snickers.

Just ahead, at the very opposite end of the grand table, I spot an elegant and matronly woman in a pinstriped pantsuit. She fixes me with an intense stare. Her brow furrows against the thick black frame of her glasses, and her face prunes with indecision. Or maybe it's the weight of disapproval. I can't tell which.

Neither can she. It's interesting, she says. But what does it mean? Emphasizing the last word, the woman leans forward, supporting her chin with a finely manicured hand.

I tell her that it doesn't mean anything. The very point, I explain, is emptiness, absurdity. It's the tits of M. Emmet Walsh.

She pauses to consider this, then shakes her head. No, she says. It's stupid, and it doesn't make any sense.