

ELBERT

"Nobel Gases"

Pilot Episode

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1 **EXT. ABERDEEN COLLEGE CAMPUS - DAY**

Aerial: Early sunrise over the Aberdeen College campus. The usual stately columns. Daddy's big pocket. Mortgage-sized student loans.

Looks like it's going to be one of those rare, perfect days.

A few people are already strolling on the campus grounds.

From our vantage: a lone figure with a disheveled gray mass of hair bobbing on an attached body strides with determination across the open space.

Now at ground level. Someone passes him.

 SOMEONE
 Congratulations!

Unfazed, he continues walking.

A short while later, someone who looks like a faculty member deliberately steps into his path. The Figure with the gray afro is forced to briefly stop--the person shaking his hand.

 SOMEONE 2
 Congratulations!

Not convinced, the Figure continues his confident stride.

Crossing his path, someone calls out to him...

 SOMEONE 3
 Congratulations, professor.

 FIGURE
 For what?

 SOMEONE 3
 (waves him off)
 Ah.

A JANITOR makes his way out of the building with a cart loaded for bear.

The Figure, with a spring in his step, and playing along with the strange game unfolding this morning, greets the Janitor...

 FIGURE
 Congratulations!

The Janitor turns--stupefied--continues. Shakes his head.

The Figure jogs up the steps to the Richard P. Feynman Building.

Come hell or high water, this ball of hair is going to have a great day--maybe his best day ever.

2 **INT. MAIN OFFICE (PHYSICS DEPARTMENT)**

The Figure makes his way down the hall to the main desk, heading toward the faculty mailboxes.

He ignores another faculty member, GARY GARGARIAN, holding court with those assembled around him.

Gary Gargarian: debonair, ultra-chic, jet-black-haired pretty boy. More politician than physicist, he always wears a blazer and a tie. Picture some self-styled wanker you would love to hate.

GARGARIAN

I know. It was the dumbest thing.
This guy wakes me up at three o'clock
in the morning. I couldn't understand
what the hell the guy was saying. He
was talking fast...and worse: he had
an accent. I don't think you should
talk fast if you have an accent.

The people around him graciously laugh at this.

The Figure grabs his mail, not giving any credence to Gargarian.

GARGARIAN (CONT'D)

The way he was carrying on, I thought
they renamed the proton without his
permission. He sounded like some
kook suffering from birth trauma
making a prank call.

The assembled laugh.

The Figure shakes his head, heads out glass doors, up some stairs.

3 **INT. CORRIDOR**

He finds himself in a long corridor lined with closed doors, save for one emanating a soft, yellow-orange glow.

He peeks in...

FIGURE

What's going on with Gary?

Now, almost with glee...

FIGURE (CONT'D)
One of his papers get rejected?

Finally we see who he is talking to--and why.

4 **INT. SECRETARY'S OFFICE**

MANDY is a cute brunette who got hired for her perfect tits--real and imagined--not her brains. She is wearing one of those macaroon cream, super-soft rabbit hair sweaters--the closest thing to taking a bunny to work. Maybe it's subconscious.

She gets up, the Figure having already brushed past her door.

5 **INT. CORRIDOR**

She stands in the hallway, cheerleader-turned-secretary.

In a hushed tone, earnest, as if someone had died...

MANDY
Haven't you heard?

Proceeding to his office...

FIGURE
Heard what?

MANDY
Oh my God.

This stops him cold.

FIGURE
Please don't mention God.

He slowly turns around--we now see him for the first time.

HOLY SHIT! IT'S ALBERT EINSTEIN!

Except it isn't. SOMETHING'S SEVERELY WRONG: Oh, it's Elbert. Elbert Einstein. Maybe Albert's twin...shaken, not stirred.

MANDY
Didn't they tell you?

ELBERT
Tell me what?

MANDY
Doctor Gargarian just won the Nobel Prize.

Turning ashen...

ELBERT
What?

MANDY
They called him this morning.

ELBERT
Who?

MANDY
Doctor Gargarian.

ELBERT
No, who called him this morning?

MANDY
Somebody from the stock room.

ELBERT
You mean Stockholm?

Mandy looks confused--as if someone just blew a dog whistle.

ELBERT (CONT'D)
They called him? Gary?

MANDY
(coy)
I'm sure they called him Doctor
Gargarian.

ELBERT
I think we're having two different
conversations.

Mandy tries to process that.

Trying to save her...

ELBERT (CONT'D)
It's okay to call him Gary.

Impressed, or just now getting the previous conversation...

MANDY
Wow!

Without judgment of how bubblegum stupid she is...

ELBERT
May I go into my office now?

Mandy clearly a deer in the headlights.

Slack-jawed, she shakes her head--it's not clear if that is a yes or no.

A door slams.

6 **INT. ELBERT'S OFFICE**

Inside his office, Elbert braces himself against his door to take a breather.

His face red, he looks angry as all hell.

His eyes dart around.

On the wall is an array of photographs of famous physicists looking back at him in great disappointment.

Upon closer inspection (and we could swear it wasn't there the first time) there is one...one unfortunate face that stands out: a glossy photo of Albert Einstein sticking his tongue out at him.

In a fit of anger he lunges forward, rips the picture off the wall and push-feeds it into his paper shredder as if driving a plank into a machine shop planer.

The machine can't shred fast enough.

The shredder makes an unbelievable racket...sharp, snapping, popping, and grinding noises as glass and wood are agonizingly devoured by the overloaded machine.

The machine looks like it is trying to barf and eat at the same time.

7 **INT. CORRIDOR**

The perplexing sound resonates throughout the empty hallway.

Mandy looks out of her office: no idea what is going on.

The strange noise clearly above her paygrade, she goes back inside: total ditz.

8 **INT. MAIN OFFICE (PHYSICS DEPARTMENT)**

Gary Gargarian and his entourage head through the glass doors and up the stairs.

GARGARIAN
We should tell Elbert.

Adding...

GARGARIAN (CONT'D)
It'll piss him off.

He stops at the top of the stairs, stopping the train...

GARGARIAN (CONT'D)
You know, George told me this story.
He was working at Los Alamos as the
lead chemist on the shaped charge...

ENTOURAGE 1
George who?

He stops in his tracks.

GARGARIAN
Kistiakowski.
(incredulous)
Who else would it be?

He continues walking; the rest follow.

GARGARIAN (CONT'D)
Here was this chemist getting really
ribbed by the physicists on site, so
one day he went up to Oppie and
said...

ENTOURAGE 2
Oppie?

Stopping briefly to answer...

GARGARIAN
Oppie.
(obviously)
Oppenheimer.

A mild shake of his head in disbelief. Walking...

ENTOURAGE 2
Oh.

GARGARIAN
So he went up to Oppie and said,
"The other physicists are giving me
a really hard time because I'm a
chemist."

Stops.

GARGARIAN (CONT'D)
And Oppie says to George--get this--
"We love you, George. We think you're
a third-rate physicist."

By this time they are making their way down the corridor with the strange noise.

GARGARIAN (CONT'D)

Elbert must know what that feels like.

ENTOURAGE 3

Being loved?

They stop in front of Elbert's door.

Staring at the entourage...

GARGARIAN

Being a third-rate physicist.

Gargarian knocks.

Nothing.

He looks at the entourage.

He knocks again.

The strange sounds stops.

They wait with bated breath in front of the door.

Nothing happening.

Dumbfounded.

They head back.

The sounds starts up again.

They all stop.

The sounds stops.

They head out this time in earnest.

The sound starts up again.

That registers with Gargarian.

9 **EXT. (DREAM IN BLACK & WHITE) NEWTON'S GARDEN - DAY**

Isaac Newton is sitting against a young apple tree.

NEWTON

You think you've got problems?

Elbert is walking around picking up rotten apples, inspecting them, and letting them drop back to the ground.

NEWTON (CONT'D)

I'm dealing with Leibniz on one hand,
trying to lay claim to the calculus
I invented, and then I'm still dealing
with Bob Hooke.

ELBERT

Robert Hooke?

NEWTON

He hates it when I call him Bob.

Elbert picks up another apple, rotates it...about to take a bite, realizes it too is rotten, lets it drop.

Changing strategies, Elbert jumps, trying to swipe a low-hanging apple with his hand...failing...

ELBERT

Yeah, but didn't you say, "If I've
seen farther than others, it is
because I've stood on the shoulders
of giants."

Elbert stops, winded.

NEWTON

I was being ironic.

Elbert shakes the tree.

ELBERT

Or sarcastic?

NEWTON

Both. I was talking about Hooke.

ELBERT

Shoulders of giants?

NEWTON

Didn't you know? Hooke is a hunchback.

Elbert gives the tree another jolt.

This time, a single apple falls out of the tree, right in front of Newton, who observes the whole spectacle.

Elbert walks over, picks it up, and immediately sinks his teeth into it---taking a juicy, cracking bite of the apple.

He abruptly stops chewing when he spies Newton intensely staring at him.

ELBERT

What?!

Newton diverts his gaze to the apple in Elbert's hand.

Elbert "gets it."

Newton knocks his head with his closed hand. It sounds wooden...

SMASH CUT TO:

10 **INT. ELBERT'S OFFICE**

MAX BERTELMAN is knocking on Elbert's open door.

He leans against the frame.

Max is lanky and wily. Probably the smartest guy in the room right now. No ego. No politics. Just mismatched socks.

Elbert sits at his desk: pathetic. He looks up, clearly a beaten man.

They look at each other knowingly.

BERTELMAN

Coffee?

Elbert gets up.

Whiffing something...

BERTELMAN (CONT'D)

What's with the ozone? Somebody burn out a transformer?

ELBERT

I don't want to talk about it.

11 **EXT. CAFE PATIO - LATER**

Elbert and Bertelman are sitting outside at a table shaded by an umbrella. A few other patrons scattered about.

BERTELMAN

Cheer up. You're in good company.

Elbert waves off his comment. Re-engaging...

ELBERT

Yeah? Like who?

BERTELMAN

Me.

ELBERT

Do you realize people were
congratulating me this morning?

Indulging him...

BERTELMAN

Terrible.

(beat)

Listen, they never gave a Nobel to
Nicola Tesla. Nor to Dmitri Mendeleev.

ELBERT

True.

BERTELMAN

Then there's the ladies: Lise Meitner.
And Chien-Shiung Wu. Both screwed.

A restaurant patron looks over: mortified.

ELBERT

Or Fred Hoyle.

BERTELMAN

Should have insisted on Frederick.
They're never going to give a Nobel
Prize to someone named Fred.

ELBERT

What about Copernicus?

BERTELMAN

Now, he surely would have gotten the
Nobel on his name alone.

ELBERT

Isaac. Galileo. Tycho. All those
guys.

BERTELMAN

Or the guy who invented the wheel.
Lots of folks didn't get it. Like I
said, you're in good company.

(beat)

Feel better now?

ELBERT.

No.

BERTELMAN

Come on. I'm running out of names.

ELBERT

Do they award it posthumously?

Playing along, but earnest...

BERTELMAN

I think you have to die first.

12 **EXT. GARGARIAN'S OFFICE - LATER**

Mandy approaches Gargarian's office.

She's got a sprightly air about her.

She knocks on his door.

GARGARIAN (O.S.)

Enter!

With trepidation, she glides in...

GARGARIAN (CONT'D)

Yes?

MANDY

Gary?

GARGARIAN

(as if he's never
heard this before)

Gary?

MANDY

Gary, I just wanted to say...

GARGARIAN

And you are...?

MANDY

Congratulations! I'm Mandy.

GARGARIAN

I don't care what your name is, doll.
I was attempting to ascertain your
relative importance in the scheme of
things.

MANDY

I don't understand.

GARGARIAN

Already ahead of you. I was asking
what your position is here...

(MORE)

GARGARIAN (CONT'D)

(nodding, as if
prompting)

...in the department. Wondering what
misinterpreted authority would give
you the false impression that you
can disturb me with some mind-numbing
approbation that is both irrelevant
to me and of no strategic advantage
to you. In fact, did you get an okay
from the department chair to knock
on my door?

(not waiting for a
response)

No? I bet not.

(stern)

Ergo, I would like you to report
yourself for this violation, and be
so kind as to close the door on your
way out.

(pointing)

Vamoose. End of conversation.

It takes a second to register.

When it does, Mandy slowly retreats and closes the door.

13 **EXT. RESTAURANT ROW - LATER**

Elbert is walking with Tarantella, a curvaceous, beautiful,
black-haired woman. Total knockout and totally out of his
league.

Perhaps he's figured out how to exchange brains for sexual
favors.

They are holding hands. Very cute.

ELBERT

There's an inherent problem to being
a participant.

Unlocking hands, he slows as she continues. Looking back...

TARANTELLA

What are you doing?

ELBERT

Just keep on walking.

TARANTELLA

Elbert?

ELBERT

If I walk beside you, I'm forced to look at other women...

TARANTELLA

No one is forcing you to do anything.

ELBERT

...but if I walk behind you, I get to watch your magnificent ass.

TARANTELLA

You mean my big butt?

ELBERT

I'm a better judge than you. I can be objective. You cannot.

14 **EXT. RESTAURANT PATIO - LATER**

Elbert and Tarantella are seated.

TARANTELLA

You need anything while I'm gone?

Eyeing the waiter who is ogling Tarantella.

ELBERT

Just don't fall in love with a stranger.

Pointing at her menu.

TARANTELLA

No chance of that happening.

(handing the menu
back)

It's Dayton, for crying out loud.

(beat)

Is Gary rubbing it in?

ELBERT

Like total internal reflection.

A quizzical look.

ELBERT (CONT'D)

Zero attenuation.

TARANTELLA

Maybe people can't understand your work. Half the time I don't understand what you're saying.

As if a light went off...

ELBERT

Erica.

TARANTELLA

You'll need to give her a lift. Which reminds me: you can use my car for the rest of the week if you want.

CUT TO:

15 **EXT. PARKING LOT - LATER**

Tarantella and Elbert are standing next to her shiny, black Jaguar. Close and tender...

ELBERT

My consolation prize?

TARANTELLA

That you don't get until I get back.

She kisses him.

ELBERT

Have a safe flight.

She gets in, immediately rolling down the window. He walks off.

Privately...

TARANTELLA

Nice ass.

Perturbed to the point of embarrassment...

ELBERT

Hey, don't do that!

TARANTELLA

Double standard?

ELBERT

(subtly referring to
his butt)

They are.

16 **EXT. RIVER BANK (MAGICAL REALISM) - LATER**

[Wistful, child-like music (prototype: Alexander Desplat's "Marilyn's Theme") plays over this MOS sequence of magical realism.]

Elbert walks along the banks of a river feeling sorry for himself.

A wind smacks a piece of neon-orange paper against his leg.

He struggles to pry it off.

No matter what he does, he can't seem to create any distance between him and the playful, puppy-like, magnetic paper...

On his leg...

Then on his arm...

Now on his groin...

He tries running, but the enthusiastic paper catches back up to him, smacking him in the face the minute he looks back.

17 **INT. STAIRWELL (PHYSICS DEPARTMENT) - LATER**

Mandy is in the stairwell, crying.

Elbert, holding the rolled-up neon-orange paper in his hand, walks up the stairs...

ELBERT

Tears?

MANDY

I went to Doctor Gargarian's office.

ELBERT

Why?

MANDY

To congratulate him. I called him "Gary."

Woah.

ELBERT

I said you could call him "Gary" around me, but it shouldn't have prompted you to go to his office.

MANDY

I know. I'm stupid. Dad says I'm stupid. B.F. says I'm stupid.

ELBERT

B.F.?

MANDY

My boyfriend.

ELBERT

Better than dumb.

(MORE)

ELBERT (CONT'D)

(beat)
Stupid sounds temporary. Dumb sounds
really permanent.

MANDY

My mom calls me dumb...A dumb bland...
(as if he wouldn't
get it)
...You know, because...
(indicating her hair)

ELBERT

That's enough self-pity.

Extends his hand and heaves her up...

ELBERT (CONT'D)

Here.

Gaining composure, she notices the rolled-up paper in his
hand...

MANDY

Are you putting up the flyers?

ELBERT

What flyers?

SMASH CUT TO:

18 **INT. PHYSICS HALLWAY - LATER**

Elbert confronts an army of neon flyers plastered all over
the department.

He looks at the neon paper in his hand. Same color. No text.

He walks up to one of the flyers on the wall:

DEPARTMENTAL MEETING 3:14 PM

CAKE AND CHAMPAGNE

CONGRATULATING DR. GARY GARGARIAN

ON HIS NOBEL PRICE

Elbert tightens his grip on the neon paper.

Walking, he crunches it up.

Spying a trash can framed by an open door, he throws it.

Looks like it's going to make it...