

MANSPLAINING MOBIUS

by

J.E. Clarke

**FADE IN ON:**

**INT. CORPORATE BOARDROOM - DAY**

As prissy as boardrooms get. A MONITOR graces one wall.

A circular table dominates the room: SNACK-PLATTER laid out mid-center: popcorn, cookies, cake and more.

EXECUTIVES line the circumference, in chairs. All but one of them... male.

SARAH (30s) is the odd woman out. She fidgets in her three piece suit, checks her cell.

SARAH

The presentation's supposed to start at one.

TODD (50s), in charge, fiddles with a LAPTOP. Static's the best he can muster on the hi-def screen.

TODD

No need to get emotional.

Executives snicker. Sarah lifts an eyebrow. Growls.

SARAH

Excuse me. What's that mean?

TODD

(frustration growing)  
In the big leagues, technical difficulties are NBD. For christ-sakes, Sarah, keep your pants on.

SARAH

(dry)  
Oh, there's no doubt I will.

TODD

We're just ten minutes in!

SARAH

Why wasn't this set up before?

ROGER (30s) eyes rolls at colleague AUSTIN (40s).

ROGER

Who cares? Where else do we need to be?

SARAH

Well, I've got budget prep at two.

AUSTIN

If you have to leave early - consider yourself free to go.

Sarah sits up, visibly irked.

SARAH

And miss the product roll-out? No can do!

Todd shakes the laptop, smacks it. More static skitters across the monitor - nothing else.

SARAH

Careful, Todd! That's a 2020 Thinkpad, not a Chevy. Lord knows, I'm not IT...

Austin whispers dramatically to Roger.

AUSTIN

Well, she got that much right.

SARAH

So consider it an educated guess, but kicking tech makes things worse.

CLIFF (20s, Xennial) grabs a handful of cookies from the snack plate. He slides it across the table to Sarah's side, a let's-be-friends smile on his face.

CLIFF

Hey, try the cookies. They so rock. And make the wait worthwhile. It's on management's tab, so why not?

Sarah eyes the junk food. Considers... shoves it back.

SARAH

Not today. I'm trying to eat healthy.

Patting his stomach, Roger stage-whispers to Austin:

ROGER

Sounds like *someone's* on a diet. Cranky.

Sarah shoots Roger a look. She didn't fully hear it - but gets the drift. Cliff sits up. HE sure did.

CLIFF

Hey! Cool it, middle management. Body shaming's not cool.

Cliff fist-bumps Sarah. She awkwardly reciprocates.

CLIFF

Comrades in arms? Booyah!

Spotting the problem with Todd's project, Sarah deflects.

SARAH

OMG, so obvious! How did you - I mean, we  
- not see this before?

She wiggles a wire on the Thinkpad. Problem solved. The monitor on the wall springs to life!!

And displays a LOGO: "Keener Toys - Fall Line-up!" Goofy, cheerful kid music plays.

A few executives clap at Sarah's victory. Unhappy at being "shown up", Todd frowns - checks his watch.

TODD

One fifteen. Works for me. We'll be sampling THREE rollouts today. First, let me introduce you personally to two pre-existing Keener toy lines which just required a tiny - but creatively genius - reboot!

Todd taps a button: the logo fades. Replaced with a picture...

"Binary Spud Head": A generic Mr. Potato Head. Both female and male facial sets at its plastic feet.

TODD

Here's our offering for the preschool niche. How's THIS for woke and cool?

Sarah raises her hand, squints.

SARAH

Uh, all you did was combine two toy packages. I don't see the "genius" there.

ROGER

Don't be hatin', Sarah!

SARAH

I mean, the LGBTQIA nod - that's great. But isn't this a creative no brainer?

TODD

Once you've been here longer, you'll realize branding matters.

(mutters)

Amateur.

TODD

We're *all* sure to love this next entry.  
Remember how kids want to be doctors when  
they grow up? Well, here's Keener's  
classic career line, reimagined for the  
COVID world!

CLICK. Spud Head's replaced with:

Front Line Hero Worker: a smiling LITTLE GIRL holds a  
plastic "Doctor" kit - with VENTILATOR and SYRINGE!

Todd waits for Sarah's praise. It never comes.

TODD

Sarah, in case you haven't noticed... the  
"Doctor" in this ad's a GIRL.

SARAH

Yes, well, that's... nice. But do we  
really want to send the message to kids  
that COVID's-

ROGER

Gender positive. Terrific, right?

SARAH

Since when are plagues fun?!?

Todd freezes the presentation. His expression darkens -  
even more than the screen.

Austin hisses at Sarah across the table.

AUSTIN

What a party pooper you turned out to be.  
What Einstein in HR thought you had the  
skill set to analyze toys?!?

Todd snaps to attention.

TODD

Now, don't judge 'til the fat lady sings.

ROGER

(snorts)

And I'm the body shamer?

TODD

Keener's all about new products. So,  
behold our brand new line of outdoor fun!

He reaches under the table and whips out:

TODD

We call this the "Mobius Slip N' Slide!"

It's a colorful strip of plastic. That's all. Todd drops it on the table. THUNK.

Everyone except Sarah and Cliff "ooh and ahh."

Sarah pokes the plastic with a finger.

SARAH

"Party pooping" aside, I see *several* problems with this.

Todd's face puckers up; as if he sucked a lemon or worse.

TODD

It's a *miniature*, Sarah. You are aware this isn't full size?

SARAH

You said it was a "Slip N' Slide"?

TODD

Do I stutter? Of course it is!

SARAH

Which means - real kids are going to play on this?

ROGER

I think it's brilliant! Meta-genius at its Keener best!

Picking up the prototype, Roger waves it in Sarah's face - makes damn sure Todd hears every suck-up word.

ROGER

It's only got one surface: that's the game changer. Do you even know what a Mobius Strip is?!?

Sarah's eyes flare.

Cliff grabs a handful of popcorn. Chowing down, he eagerly watches the back and forth, amused.

SARAH

I'm WELL aware what a Mobius Strip is. My graduate degree is theoretical mathematics.

AUSTIN

And you're working here... why?

SARAH  
(grits her teeth)  
These days, the economy isn't... ideal.  
(beat)  
That's why - ironically - I'm heading up  
that budgeting meeting at two.

She double-checks her watch.

SARAH  
Which appears to be twenty oddly long  
minutes away.

Austin stage-whispers to Roger.

AUSTIN  
Ooooooh, the lady's playing with numbers.  
We'd better watch out.

TODD  
But not toys. And that's what counts!

Snatching the prototype back, Todd holds it up.

TODD  
I can't expect new employees to "get it",  
but the magic of this new product is  
seamlessly blending math with play.  
Effortlessly, children can learn first  
hand about topology. While enjoying the  
innocent thrills of summer, too!

Todd points out tiny jets on the prototype. And talks to  
Sarah if she's the child.

TODD  
With a Slip N' Slide, water comes out  
HERE. Kids of all ages can ride it,  
because the friction's reduced.

AUSTIN  
Infinitely, too. That's so cool!

SARAH  
That's not the problem!

CLIFF  
I hear you, sister! The real problem is  
everyone in this room!

Mouth chipmunk-cheeked with popcorn, Cliff rips the  
prototype out of Todd's hand.

Standing up, he addresses the room - as if he's clutching the conch shell from *Lord of the Flies*.

CLIFF

Do you cavemen not see what's going on?  
Sarah knows whereof she speaks!

SARAH

THANK you!

ROGER

(groans)

Jeez Fucking Louise. Xennial peak  
wokeness streaming. Here we go.

Cliff thrusts a trembling finger at Roger.

ROGER

Sarah knows *exactly* what a Mobius Strip  
does! She's a mathematician, asswipe!  
What's your degree?

ROGER

(beat)

Business admin. Practical and smart -  
that's me.

CLIFF

Business bullshit, that's what it is.

Sarah nods. This is getting fun. Until Todd interrupts.

TODD

Cliff Turkleson, settle down. At Keener,  
name calling and performative speeches  
are absolutely not allowed.

CLIFF

Old man, I was saving you for last!

Cliff stuffs several cookies in a pocket, swings around.

CLIFF

Cisgendered white elites like you are the  
worst! You can't even plug a Thinkpad in.  
But you're schooling Sarah over a Slip N'  
Slide? Those of us not drowning in  
privilege see the problem with clear  
eyes.

Sarah grins, clears her throat.

SARAH

It's simple really. Gravity-



CLIFF  
It's mansplaining. What else?

SARAH  
...mansplaining?

She double-checks her watch.

SARAH  
Well, sure. But I mean - the toy....

Cliff zips around the table, bear hugs Sarah. She stiffens, confused. Earnest, he stares into her eyes.

CLIFF  
Sarah, forgive me for talking over you.  
But I can't let a meaningful teaching moment like this pass by. Consider yourself lucky for never experiencing the misogynistic toxicity until now. Mansplaining is when a man assumes a woman can't understand a topic... so he describes it to her, like a child.

Sarah tries to stay calm. But sputters; the irony's just too much.

SARAH  
Wait. Tell me I have this right. You're teaching ME about mansplaining? Here? Now?

CLIFF  
I have to. You deserve the truth!

Sarah snatches the prototype. Examines it from several angles. Chokes.

SARAH  
You can't see that - but you think - oh, fuck... never mind!

Dropping the prototype, Sarah snatches papers off the table - flees the room.

TODD  
Wait, the meeting's not over!

SARAH  
You said I could leave any time!

She slams the door.

Awkward. In the room of men, silence reigns.

Cliff blinks at the poor lost prototype on the floor.

CLIFF

Well, we know it's durable. That's good.

Executives blink at each other across the table.

TODD

Don't hold it against Sarah for missing  
the point. Maybe girls don't play with  
Slip N' Slides as much?

ROGER

(shrugs)

She was just too emotional. Why they let  
her handle money is beyond me...

FINAL FADE OUT: