

Miss Yemie  
By  
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FADE IN:

EXT. TOWN OF PEELER - WATERFRONT STREET - DAY

A sidewalk borders a row of structures set on pilings. Steps lead up to each: seafood dealer, hardware store, the Red Onion Tavern, the Peeler Municipal Building.

Opposite, moored oyster boats and runabouts knock against a series of wooden piers. Seagulls and terns occupy each post. A light wind blows from the salt-marsh harbor.

SUPER: Virginia Eastern Shore, February 1961

INT. PEELER MUNICIPAL BUILDING - MEETING ROOM - DAY

Three MEN in white shirts sit at a small table.

Mayor CECIL BAXTER (51), crewcut and glasses, sorts some papers. He reads the top one to himself.

MARVIN WALSTON (63), balding, gray mustache, sips coffee.

FRED CLARK (24), smooth-faced, pencil on his ear, watches Baxter, fidgets in his chair.

The door opens. Chief DONNIE HUGHES (43) enters, removes a coat from his stocky frame, sits. He wears a police uniform. With a cold-reddened hand, he pats down his tossed black hair.

The mayor holds up document, addresses the group.

BAXTER

The U.S. Government has chosen our Machipongo Island over all the other sites, the main one being Merritt at Cape Canaveral.

(reading)

We also beat out Georgia, the Bahamas, even White Sands.

WALSTON

I can't believe they didn't stick with expanding Canaveral.

BAXTER

They had some problem with the Air Force over jurisdiction of the property. In any case, I'd like us to vote on this today.

CLARK

Don't we need more members here?

BAXTER

No.

(to all)

The White House wants us to get the ball rolling ASAP.

WALSTON

Why the hurry, if I may ask.

HUGHES

Kennedy found out the Soviets are trying yet again to launch their Sputnik satellite. He believes they'll succeed this time.

WALSTON

Old Sputternik.

BAXTER

He wants to announce plans for construction of the new Space Port before the Sputnik launch.

Baxter pauses for effect.

BAXTER

The goal is to send our Mercury astronauts to the Moon.

CLARK

All seven?

WALSTON

Mr. Mayor, with all due respect to the President and the Moon, have we looked hard enough at the downside for our little town?

BAXTER

There isn't any downside.

WALSTON

What if one of those big Saturns blows up, like the Sputnik rocket did? What about the risk to our citizens, to Peeler itself?

BAXTER

Machipongo Island is four miles from here, Marvin.

WALSTON

You're avoiding my question.

Hughes scoots his chair, clears his throat.

BAXTER

Chief?

HUGHES

I know of another downside--

CLARK

I do, too. No more hunting out there. The Atlantic Flyway has always been our bread and butter.

BAXTER

Mr. Clark, let's just say a Space Port on Machipongo will do more for Peeler than all the ducks and geese in the world.

CLARK

I'm just making a point.

BAXTER

You're too new to know this, but Kennedy's father, Joe, used to goose-hunt with his sons at Machipongo. Every year, at least for a while.

Clark appears unimpressed.

BAXTER

What I'm saying is: The President knows Machipongo. If he wants to go to the Moon from there, we best get out of the god-damned way.

WALSTON

A lot of folks in Peeler aren't going to like it. The ones who used to live on Machipongo.

BAXTER

They'll get over it.

CLARK

People lived there?

WALSTON

Yes, at one time. The island is stable now, but in the thirties a good bit of it was washing away.

BAXTER

There aren't many of those people left in Peeler, Marvin.

Walston ignores this.

WALSTON

(to Clark)

They brought everything to Peeler by barge. Houses. The Red Onion. They even dug up the cemetery and brought the graves.

The mayor raps his papers on the table top.

WALSTON

About all that's left is the old hunting lodge.

BAXTER

All right, I think we--

HUGHES

Mr. Mayor, if you don't mind? Hunting is not the downside I had in mind.

BAXTER

Oh, I thought it was, Chief.

HUGHES

No. I meant Miss Yemmie.

BAXTER

Oh, Lord.

(pauses)

Well, Miss Yemmie's going to have to move. She can't have many customers these days anyway.

Walston purses his lips.

HUGHES

You'd be surprised. January's always a good season for her.

BAXTER

You have to talk to her, Donnie.  
She can't stay there.

EXT. PEELER BAY - SALT MARSH - DAY

A motorboat slows to negotiate a tributary that winds through clumps of cedar and elder. A willet rises from a tide pool. The driver, Hughes, lowers his earflaps.

The boat reaches a wider section of water, and Hughes accelerates. An island materializes in the distance.

EXT. MACHIPONGO ISLAND - PIER - DAY

Hughes shoves a cardboard box up on the warped planks and climbs from the boat. He carries the box to shore, where a post with an iron bell on top stands in the sandy detritus.

He rings the bell four times.

EXT. MACHIPONGO ISLAND - MARITIME FOREST - DAY

A path leads through mockernut hickory, white ash, and swamp dogwood. The branches form a desolate cross-hatch against the low, gray sky.

Hughes, the box in his arms, stops after twenty yards.

From the other direction, MISS YEMMIE (48), clad in a black overcoat, approaches to meet him.

HUGHES

I didn't know how you were stocked,  
so I brought you some things.

MISS YEMMIE

Uh-oh.

Her wide mouth forms a hesitant smile. Her features are sharp, her skin the color of bronze.

HUGHES

Why uh-oh?

MISS YEMMIE

You don't usually wear your uniform  
when you visit, Donnie.

INT. MACHIPONGO ISLAND - HUNTING LODGE - FRONT ROOM - DAY

A woodstove attached to a stone fireplace radiates heat. The pine walls are bare except for a framed hunting print here and there.

Hughes sits in a frayed upholstered chair. Miss Lemmie, clad in a flimsy house dress, stands over him. She waves her arms as if trying to stop oncoming traffic.

MISS YEMMIE

How can you even say this to me!

HUGHES

I have to.

MISS YEMMIE

It's that asinine Cecil, isn't it.

HUGHES

There's no way around this, Yemmie.

MISS YEMMIE

Oh, you better believe there's a way around it. I'm not going nowhere, not ever. I never have, and I never will.

She stops to catch her breath.

HUGHES

We'll get you set up in town, find you a new place--

She makes a spitting sound.

MISS YEMMIE

I don't need anybody to set me up or find me a place. If I wanted to, I could. You have any idea how much money I've made over the years?

HUGHES

I expect you--

MISS YEMMIE

You expect. Ha. I said I could go if I wanted to, and I don't want to. Are you deaf?

Hughes waits a moment.

HUGHES  
You know this couldn't go on  
forever, Yemmie.

MISS YEMMIE  
The hell with forever. You think  
the people I've known wouldn't take  
care of me?

Her voice breaks. Tears appear. She sits down in a chair  
opposite, wipes her eyes.

MISS YEMMIE  
I'm not crying, dammit. I'm wet  
mad, that's all.

HUGHES  
This comes from the President.

She pauses, shakes her head with a despondent flourish.

MISS YEMMIE  
Old Joe. That's what this is.

HUGHES  
You can't stay.

MISS YEMMIE  
This is home. My parents are here.

Hughes appears taken aback.

HUGHES  
Yemmie, they moved the cemetery.

MISS YEMMIE  
They didn't get them all. Mom and  
Daddy are still here. A quarter  
mile out in the bay now, but here.  
(pause)  
Every now and then I go ring the  
bell and talk to them.

Wind rattles the windows. Miss Lemmie opens the stove, puts  
in another piece of wood.

MISS YEMMIE  
You going to stay over?

HUGHES  
I can't.

MISS YEMMIE

Gotta report back to Cecil, I guess. I could tell you things about him, but you know I won't.

HUGHES

I guess you could tell things about a whole lot of people.

She laughs a little. She pours herself a whiskey, offers one to Hughes. He declines.

MISS YEMMIE

How do you think Cecil will take it when you tell him I'm not leaving.

HUGHES

Yemmie.

He takes a deep breath of frustration.

MISS YEMMIE

Mom and Daddy aren't the only family I have here.

(pause)

I'm going to tell you something only one other person knows.

Hughes pours himself a drink.

MISS YEMMIE

One November, like always, the Kennedys were here for the early duck season.

(pauses)

A while after they left, I found out I was in the family way. Lord knows how I let that happen.

HUGHES

My God...Did Jack know?

MISS YEMMIE

Oh, it wasn't Jack. It was old Joe, and, yes, he knows. When he came back alone in January for goose season, I told him.

HUGHES

What did he say?

MISS YEMMIE

Nothing. He just looked at me. Then he left and never came back.

She pours a little more whiskey, sits, says nothing for a few moments. She seems to be gathering herself.

HUGHES

What about the baby?

MISS YEMMIE

Oh, I had the baby. James. Little Jimmy. When he was about seven months, he got sick with something. I didn't know what to do....

(pause)

He was so cold. I wrapped him in three blankets, but it didn't help. So I put him on the stove...just for a little while.

The tears come again.

MISS YEMMIE

I shouldn't have done it, but I didn't know any better. I didn't know what else to do.

She cries softly. Hughes moves to the arm of her chair, tries to comfort her.

The wind subsides a moment, then rises again.

Miss Lemmie goes to a closet, removes a suitcase. She places it on the floor and opens it. Atop a blanket lie a half-dozen Christmas cards and a few letters.

MISS YEMMIE

All from Joe...before the baby.

She unfolds the blanket, bit by bit.

Hughes gasps at the sight of a little skeleton.

MISS YEMMIE

I wonder what old Joe might say when he sees this -- James, his youngest son.

INT. TOWN OF PEELER - RED ONION TAVERN - NIGHT

Light from the bar casts a murky glow over a dozen deserted tables scattered across a bead-board floor.

SUPER: One Week Later

Hughes sits at the bar with a plate of food. He and the BARTENDER (44) watch a small black-and-white television mounted on a shelf.

Now and then, Hughes glances at the door.

HUGHES

Turn it up.

BARTENDER

Sure, chief. News time.

Walston and Clark enter, stand at the bar.

HUGHES

Gentlemen.

WALSTON

Cecil can't come. He's tied up.

ANNOUNCER (TV)

This is the CBS Evening News with Douglas Edwards.

EDWARDS (TV)

The White House today announced a step forward in the nation's space program by unveiling plans for a major new launch facility.

Walston and Clark exchange glances.

EDWARDS (TV)

Construction will begin in a few weeks on a Space Port on Merritt Island adjacent to Cape Canaveral on Florida's Atlantic coast.

Walston puts a hand on Hughes's shoulder.

WALSTON

My, my. Cecil didn't say a word.

Hughes shrugs, eats a French fry.

EDWARDS (TV)

Acquisition of the property was concluded today after successful negotiations with the Air Force.

CLARK

I don't understand. What happened?

HUGHES

Who knows?

EDWARDS (TV)

In a statement, President Kennedy said the facility is expected to open in June 1964. It will be known as the James Yemmie Space Port.

FADE OUT.