FADE IN:

INT. D.C. TRENDY RESTAURANT - DAY

Lunchtime and the tables are full in a eatery close to Congress. SENATOR TAME, 60, sits by himself. He looks senatorial as he reads his iPad.

    CHIEF JUSTICE (O.S.)
    Mind if I join you?

Tame looks up to CHIEF JUSTICE SMITH, 50s, smiling, glib, bright.

    TAME
    Sit down, Chief Justice, sit down.

    CHIEF JUSTICE
    (sitting)
    Popular place today. I’m not interrupting anything, am I?

    TAME
    Just catching up on your latest ruling.

    CHIEF JUSTICE
    How do you like it? Read my finding?

    TAME
    Not yet. Just getting the lay of the press.

    CHIEF JUSTICE
    Oh? What are they saying? I don’t mind telling you that the case required some of my finest work. I don’t really care how the talking heads see it. I’m secure with the totality of the holding.

    TAME
    The Journal points out that several justices didn’t agree with the holding.

    CHIEF JUSTICE
    Nothing is unanimous anymore. Quite frankly, it’s always easier to oppose. Justifying the legislature’s tortured language is the real challenge.
TAME
Some have pointed out that the language was quite clear.

CHIEF JUSTICE
On the surface, Senator, on the surface.

A WAITER arrives, ready to take orders.

WAITER
Have you made a decision?

TAME
As a matter of fact, I have. Bring me a ham and cheese on rye with fresh fruit.

WAITER
Good choice, Senator.

CHIEF JUSTICE (to Waiter)
Belay that, he doesn’t want it.

TAME
I don’t?

CHIEF JUSTICE
It sounds OK on the surface, but it’s not what you meant.

The Waiter half smiles, wondering which man to obey.

CHIEF JUSTICE (CONT’D)
(to Waiter)
Come back in five minutes.

TAME
I don’t--

CHIEF JUSTICE (shooing)
Go, go, this won’t take long.

The Waiter leaves.

TAME
What are you trying to pull?

CHIEF JUSTICE
Nothing, nothing, I just couldn’t let you order the wrong thing.
TAME
Like you couldn’t let us write our own laws?

CHIEF JUSTICE
Bear with me, Senator, bear with me. I’m very good at spotting the meaning behind the words.

TAME
Meaning?

CHIEF JUSTICE
Ham and swiss on rye. Pretty obvious code, don’t you think?

TAME
I thought it was a pretty obvious order.

CHIEF JUSTICE
To the uninitiated. Now, ham is pork, and I happen to know there’s an anti-terrorism bill before your committee. What kind of message are you sending by eating ham in a crowded DC restaurant?

TAME
That I’m hungry?

CHIEF JUSTICE
That you’re sending a message to a every Mideast devout man, woman, and child, a message that you don’t give a rat’s patoot about their beliefs. You want to send that message?

TAME
Ham sends a message? What about the cheese? Am I disrespecting the Swiss?

CHIEF JUSTICE
(chuckling)
No, no, it’s not about the Swiss, it’s about the holes.

TAME
Holes?
CHIEF JUSTICE
Holes, big, fat holes. Holes say a lot. Holes say you’re not sure of yourself. Holes say that your plan to become President is a pipe dream. You don’t really have a plan if you’re eating swiss.

TAME
Are you for real?

CHIEF JUSTICE
I do this for a living, Senator. I look past the obvious.

TAME
You are amazing. I’ll give you that. What about the rye?

CHIEF JUSTICE
Ah, the bread. You see the problem with the bread, don’t you?

TAME
Rye isn’t in this year?

CHIEF JUSTICE
Rye is never in. Rye is the bread the poor eat once a year--at Christmas. Rye is the bread of the suburbs, not the city, and you want urban, all urban.

TAME
So far, I’m batting zero. Did I score with the fruit?

Chief Justice shakes his head.

CHIEF JUSTICE
Fruit, Senator, fruit, what does that tell you?

TAME
I like to think it shows I eat healthy.

CHIEF JUSTICE
No one cares how you eat. What they care about is the connotation. Ever hear ‘as nutty as a fruit cake’? What is the worst gift ever? Fruit cake! What they call gays not so long ago? Fruits. (MORE)
Fruit also conjures up pictures of Juan cutting down bananas and harvesting watermelons. No, Senator, no fruit.

TAME
I suppose coffee means I favor Columbia?

CHIEF JUSTICE
Don’t be silly. Coffee is the only stable thing about your lunch. More American than apple pie.

TAME
Presidential?

CHIEF JUSTICE
Exactly.

TAME
Then, what am I supposed to eat?

CHIEF JUSTICE
What’s the one meat that offends no one?

TAME
Beef?

CHIEF JUSTICE
Hindus.

TAME
Chicken?

CHIEF JUSTICE
Yes, sir, chicken. Everything tastes like chicken.

TAME
With?

CHIEF JUSTICE
American cheese, Velveeta if they have it. No holes, just whole milk goodness.

TAME
And fries.

CHIEF JUSTICE
Do you really want to be President?
TAME
Apparently not.

CHIEF JUSTICE
Cole slaw or potato salad. What everyone eats on the Fourth of July. Say cole slaw and you can smell fireworks.

TAME
That’s amazing.

CHIEF JUSTICE
It’s not magic. Just years on the bench sussing out the meaning behind the words.

TAME
And all this time I thought words meant what they meant.

CHIEF JUSTICE
In the old days maybe, not anymore.

The Waiter arrives, ready for orders.

CHIEF JUSTICE (CONT’D)
Go ahead.

TAME
(to Waiter)
Ham and swiss on rye with fresh fruit.
(to Chief Justice)
Sometimes, a ham sandwich is just a ham sandwich.

FADE OUT.