CHARM CITY
a comedy

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CHARACTERS

MEGAHAY…male, any race, any age.
MISS ...female, any race, any age.

TIME
The present

SETTING
An office.

SYNOPSIS
A conflict of cultures occurs when a resident of Charm City---that would be Baltimore---seeks UNESCO designation for her hometown.
Lights up on MEGAHAY sitting at a desk across from MISS.

MEGAHAY

You can’t be serious.

MISS

Do I appear in any way amusing to you?

MEGAHAY

I didn’t mean that.

MISS

Then what precisely do you mean?

MEGAHAY

Miss, please.

MISS

Please?

MEGAHAY

The history of this organization is long and illustrious. Surely, you don’t mean to---

MISS

Have I said something disparaging about it?

MEGAHAY

No.

MISS

Something demeaning?

MEGAHAY

No, but---

MISS

Harmful, hurtful, anything remotely that would indicate I have anything but the utmost respect for the foundation? All I’m asking for is the petition form.

MEGAHAY

But our history precludes petitions that are, well…frivolous.

Pause.

I did not mean to imply that you were in any way frivolous.
Thank you.

MEGAHAY
I only meant that your proposal…really now, it would be well nigh impossible to take it to the review board.

Because?

MEGAHAY
Because it’s…let’s take a moment to review the idea.

By all means.

MEGAHAY
You are suggesting that the esteemed board of the UNESCO World Heritage organization, renowned around the globe for preserving, protecting and advocating for future generations, committed to holding in perpetuity all manner of the most treasured sites both man-made and natural, this list which includes Machu Picchu, Mont-Saint Michel, the Taj Mahal and the Great Barrier Reef, that these treasures are now to be joined by…

MISS
Charm City. Exactly.

MEGAHAY
On what grounds?

Pause.

MISS
All right. I see I’m going to have to drill down a bit. First, is there in the lengthy list of UNESCO World Heritage sites any other city which is in any way defined as having “charm”?

MEGAHAY
Of course not.

MISS
Then, what is your objection?

MEGAHAY
My objection is…you can’t just come in here and demand that merely because Baltimore is called “charm city” that it merits the cultural homage we accord say, The Palace at Versailles? It can’t be done. It simply can’t be done.
MISS
Well, just because you haven’t done it in the past, doesn’t mean you couldn’t do it in the future. In the entire world, only one city has been deemed to have charm.

MEGAHAY
By who?

MISS
Whom. Baltimore was officially declared Charm City by Mayor William Donald Schaefer in 1975.

MEGAHAY
On what grounds?

MISS
On the grounds that…well, it’s obvious, isn’t it?

MEGAHAY
But charm is…it’s an ephemeral term. To use it in reference to a city of bricks and mortar, how can that be?

MISS
Mister…

MEGAHAY
Megahay.

MISS
Mr. Megahee---

MEGAHAY
Megahay. It’s Canadian.

Pause.

MISS
Sir, I think we’ve gone down a blind alley here. Charm does have several definitions.

MEGAHAY
Then, please choose the one most applicable. I don’t have all the time in the world.

MISS
But you’re the gatekeeper for UNESCO.

MEGAHAY
One of them, yes.
MISS
All I’m asking for is the form to make a petition. You must take time. What if some historical or cultural icon were to be overlooked merely because you “don’t have time”?

MEGAHAY
Nothing is being overlooked, I assure you.

MISS
What about when you’re late for work?

MEGAHAY
I am never late for work.

MISS
Never?

MEGAHAY
Well, almost nev---

MISS
And when you take a few extra minutes returning from lunch ---

MEGAHAY
I do not return from lunch late.

MISS
But even if that were true---

MEGAHAY
It is true. How dare you impugn my work habits?

MISS
I was merely alluding to the fact that this esteemed organization which you represent hangs by the slender thread of your due diligence.

MEGAHAY
It’s not a slender thread at all. I am extremely diligent. My annual work reviews are exemplary.

MISS
No room for improvement?

MEGAHAY
None.
MISS

Oops.

MEGAHAY

What do you mean “oops”?

MISS

If your supervisor leaves the line that says “room for improvement” blank, you may not be around here very long.

Pause.

MEGAHAY

Miss, I have had quite enough of your assaults on my work proficiency, my diligence, my timeliness. You have no right to come in here and launch personal attacks against me.

Pause.

MISS

Webster calls charm a trait that fascinates, allures or delights. Also, to affect as if by magic, to compel or control or---

MEGAHAY

There is a limit to what a person in my position can take. We both know that this entire conversation has been a ludicrous exercise on your part to distract and confuse the issue.

MISS

The---

MEGAHAY

The ridiculous, pointless issue you have presented. A petition for the conference of UNESCO status on the city of Baltimore merely because somebody happened to call it---

MISS

He was the mayor.

MEGAHAY

Nevertheless, just because he said it was “charming”---

MISS

Mr. Monahee---

MEGAHAY

Megahay.
MISS
I’m afraid there’s a misunderstanding.

MEGAHAY
There certainly is.

MISS
I never said that he said the city of Baltimore was charming. What I said was, he issued a declaration, clearly because the city is known widely, universally, I might say---

MEGAHAY
You might say anything.

MISS
It is known as “Charm City.” The adjective “charming” would accurately refer only to a person. A person can be charming, agreed?

MEGAHAY
All right, yes. You can be charming, I can be charming…

MISS
Possibly.

Pause.

MEGAHAY
Let me be perfectly clear. What you’re asking for---

MISS
The petition form?

MEGAHAY
There’s no point. It’s simply not possible.

MISS
I must contradict you.

MEGAHAY
That’s all you’ve done since you walked in here.

MISS
But it is possible. You may think it unlikely, but it is possible. All you have to do is give me the form. We’ve agreed on one thing. Can we also agree on this?
MEGAHAY
All right, I’ll concede the possibility. But it’s highly unlikely. I mean, really, there is just no way---

MISS
No---

MEGAHAY
No possible way that the UNESCO federation will confer World Heritage status on the city of Baltimore because of its supposed “charm.” It is completely and totally out of the question.

Pause.

MISS
(meekly)
I…see.

MEGAHAY
Do you? Finally.

MISS
So, this interview is at an end?

MEGAHAY
I’m afraid it is.

MISS
Well, if that’s how it has to be.

MEGAHAY
Yes, I’m afraid so.

MISS
You keep saying that.

MEGAHAY
I’m trying to be sympathetic.

MISS
That’s nice of you. Which is why I’d like to make one small request.

MEGAHAY
What do you want?
MISS
Could you provide me with something stating that UNESCO considered the designation but that for reasons beyond your control…

MEGAHAY
You want a rejection letter?

MISS
Oh.

MEGAHAY
What?

MISS
That word. It’s so, so…

MEGAHAY
Rejection?

MISS
The sound of the syllables, the combination of “re,” then the cold, hard “jec” and then the final “shun.” It’s so…brutal. I mean, who came up with something so devoid of, of...

MEGAHAY
Humanity?

MISS
Exactly. How perceptive of you to see it that way.

MEGAHAY
Well, I can provide the paper but we call it a rejection let---

MISS
Please! Not that word again!

MEGAHAY
All right, I’m sorry. I apologize for offending your sensibilities but that’s what it is.

MISS
A revered organization like UNESCO and this is the best you can do?

MEGAHAY
Once we have made a decision, we cannot concern ourselves with---

MISS
You, the judgmental arm of an organization renowned for preserving---
MEGAHAY
Enough! You don’t want the rejection letter, don’t take the rejection letter. Now would you please just go?

MISS
I’m being dismissed?

MEGAHAY
Yes.

He rises, points to the door.

No more words, please. Just leave.

She rises and moves toward the door where she stops. Pause.

MISS
Wood Buffalo National Park…Mistaken Point…Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump…

What?

MEGAHAY
These places in Canada are all on the list of UNESCO World Heritage sites. Explain to me please, how Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump made it? What value does it hold?

MEGAHAY
It met the criteria.

MISS
How exactly?

MEGAHAY
I do not need to explain to you---

MISS
Oh, but you do.

MEGAHAY
It is the only place like it on the face of the earth.

MISS
Charm City is the only charm city on the face of the earth. How can a place where buffaloes waddle and jump be a cultural icon?
MEGAHAY
Buffaloes do not waddle.

MISS
I’ll bet the people out there waddle just like the buffaloes.

MEGAHAY
How dare you denigrate the fine citizens of Alberta, Canada? For your information there are several excellent universities in Alberta. The Banff School of Fine Arts is known internationally and there’s a very rich cultural legacy preserved by an extensive number of museums and art galleries. We are renowned for---

MISS
Ah, yes, that’s it.

MEGAHAY
What’s it?

MISS
You…are from Alberta.

Pause.

MEGAHAY
What if I am?

MISS
So, this is how a World Heritage site is chosen? It’s where little boy Manahay took his first stumbling steps.

MEGAHAY
Megahay. If you please.

MISS
Of course, Mr. Megahay.

She returns to her seat.

And now I will have that petition form. If you please.

He throws the form at her.

Blackout.

END OF PLAY