

The Laugh

Revision 1

By

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EXT. BROOKLYN COFFEE SHOP-DAY

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A sunny day at a hip Brooklyn coffee shop, hipsters galore

The outside seating is packed, the sound of people talking is deafening, there is no way anyone could ever get any work done here

Except CHRIS LEVIN, he sits in the center of it all intently typing on a MacBook.

As we get closer the

SOUND BEGINS TO DULL

until we are right in front of the late twenty-something and it is

COMPLETELY SILENT

He finishes typing, smiles and looks up from his computer for the first time in hours, satisfied with what he has accomplished

His smile disappears when he spots the MAN next to him, shoulders bouncing from uncontrollable laughter but now in Chris's world no sound leaves his lips

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*
*

The man holds a BOOK with Chris's face on the cover and 'Chris Levin' printed above it.

*

He stands to leave when

The man notices Chris, immediately recognizes him, and rushes over to greet his favorite humorist

He speaks words of silent admiration that Chris graciously accepts

*

CHRIS (SIGNING)

Thank you very much

EXT. BROOKLYN STREET-DAY CONTINUOUS

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Chris walks down the street and all remains silent

*

His initially brisk pace is slowed as he notices all the couples around him

*
*

walking hand in hand

kissing on the corner

(CONTINUED)

pushing their young children in carriages

The final nail in the coffin of loneliness comes as Chris approaches his apartment building...

INT. CHRIS'S APARTMENT-DAY CONTINUOUS

He enters his spacious loft apartment, the high ceilings exaggerate the emptiness of the room which just contains a desk, couch, TV, and a few boxes still waiting to be unpacked

Chris navigates around the boxes, sits at the desk and opens his computer

Already on the screen is his twitter feed full of mentions from countless notable comedians:

Congrats on the NYTimes Best Seller @chrislevin - @jimmyfallon

@chrislevin wrote a NYTimes bestseller that's actually funny, buy it - @louisck

He slowly closes his computer

Chris has done well for himself, but looking around his dark DESERTED apartment it's hard to appreciate his success

He relocates to the couch, slumps into the dead center and turns the TV on

The Simpsons plays, closed captioning scrolling across the bottom of the screen

Chris sits ALONE in the dark apartment, illuminated only by the blue light from the TV

INT. BRIAN'S OFFICE-NEXT DAY

BRIAN, a middle aged publicist in an expensive suit paid for with Chris's bestseller sits behind a large desk in his chic corner office

Chris sits across from him looking small and out of place in such a corporate setting, he absently stares out the giant floor to ceiling windows

They are bathed in the normal silence save Brian's incessant nagging

(CONTINUED)

BRIAN

Now that you are a 'name' it's time
to start doing appearances.

He waves his hand in front of Chris's face until the tired
writer turns to look at him

BRIAN (CONT'D)

(speaking much louder)

Read my lips Chris, PRESS TOUR

Chris let's this sink in for a moment then shakes his head

CHRIS (SIGNING)

I can't

BRIAN

Don't give me that. You can't build
a fan base and then deny them your
presence, Chris. Your career will
end here if you don't do this.

Chris's relaxed posture immediately stiffens as this reality
sets in

EXT. MIDTOWN MANHATTAN STREET-SAME DAY

Chris walks down the crowded street still visibly tense from
Brian's unwelcomed career advise

The street is so hauntingly silent that it feels like Chris
is the only person in the world, even as we follow him
through the thick throng of people

Then he hears it

THE LAUGH

After almost 30 years of total silence Chris is stopped dead
in his tracks as the laugh echoes up and down the packed
street

It is the most beautiful noise in the entire world

He frantically searches the crowds looking for a source but
at lunch hour in Midtown it's hard to see more than three
feet in front of him

He stands on the tips of his toes and spots above the crowd

a GROUP OF GIRLS a block away walking away from him walking
toward the subway entrance, the magical laugh seems to hover
around them

(CONTINUED)

He starts to move towards them but the push of SUITS on their lunch break works against him

He moves off the sidewalk into the bike lane where he breaks into an all out sprint

BIKERS fly towards him gesturing angrily but Chris can't pay attention to anything but that sound

The girls move down the stairs to the platform and pull the laugh with them

Desperate to keep up Chris runs straight into the intersection

A speeding taxi comes to a complete STOP just in front of Chris, completely cutting him off

He SLAMS his hand against the hood and continues his sprint down the stairs into

INT. SUBWAY STATION-CONTINUOUS

The laugh becomes louder for a moment as Chris bursts onto the platform

The train's doors come to a close and the entire station is plunged into a deafening silence

Chris throws himself at the doors but it's too late

The train pulls out of the station as Chris watches, standing ALONE on the platform, defeated

INT. DOCTOR'S EXAM ROOM-DAY

Chris sits in on the exam table, legs in stirrups surrounded by posters of anatomical drawings of lady parts, he clearly doesn't belong.

HENRY, late twenties enters the exam room, somehow not even the white doctor's coat can make him look professional

CHRIS (SIGNING)

Is it a boy?

Henry talks out loud as he signs to Chris

HENRY

Yeah, that gets funnier every time, Chris.

(CONTINUED)

CHRIS (SIGNING) *
So what's the word Doc? What's
happening to me?

Henry opens his chart.

HENRY
Well...you're definitely still
deaf.

Chris is frustrated

HENRY
Oh, I'm sorry man. I meant 'audibly
challenged'.

CHRIS (SIGNING) *
Fuck you. I swear I heard it
though, it was the most beautiful
laugh I've ever heard.

HENRY
It's the *only* laugh you've ever
heard.

He gives Henry the middle finger.

HENRY *
Alright, alright I'm just fucking
with you. Jeez, where did your
sense of humor go?
(he takes out a business card)
Here, this is my buddy Ted from med
school. He's a therapist. Your
problem seems like it might be more
his speed. As a doctor I'm more pap
smears, less hearing phantom
laughs.

Chris gets up to leave *

CHRIS (SIGNING) *
I swear I'm not crazy

HENRY *
Whatever. *
(beat) *
Oh yeah! You remember Holly Winters *
from high school? Big boobs, *
terrible teeth? Well she messaged *
me on Facebook about you. She says *
she thinks its hot that your quote *
"so sucessful and so deaf." *

(CONTINUED)

CHRIS (SIGNING)

How sweet, but I'll pass

Chris leaves as Henry takes out his iPhone and begins typing

HENRY

(to himself)

Well she got those teeth fixed so
don't mind if I do.

EXT. MIDTOWN MANHATTAN STREET-DAY

Brian and Chris walk down the same crowded Midtown street as
before

All we hear is Brian's booming voice

BRIAN

What about NPR? You don't even have
to be in front of people

Chris stares blankly at him before he corrects himself

BRIAN

Oh, right. You know, you're just so
talented that sometimes I forget
that you're deaf. Let's go up to my
office and I'll give you some more
options.

Brian's voice begins to fade out as they walk into the
revolving doors of the building and the packed street it
filled with

THE LAUGH

Chris tries to get back out but is swept into the building
by the push of the suits running late for work

plunging back into the silence of the packed foyer he is
furious

He stops dead in his tracks, Brian keeps walking, looking at
his phone unaware of his clients possible mental break

Brian waits for the elevator and realizes Chris is not in
tow

BRIAN

Jesus...I hate writers.

He goes back and pushes Chris into the now open elevator

At wit's end, Chris pulls the therapist's card out and types a plea for sanity to the number on the card. *

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE-DAY *

Chris sits on a couch opposite DR. DANZIG, a middle-aged balding psychologist, in a room carefully designed to seem comforting

Dr. Danzig speaks aloud and signs as he shrinks, he is quite the talent

DR. DANZIG

This sound that you are '*hearing*,' are you quite certain that it is a laugh?

CHRIS (SIGNING)

I don't see how it could be anything else. Dr. Danzig comedy has always been a part of my life, it's been my coping mechanism, but whenever I see people laughing at my work it always seems like something is missing. Now with this sound, this amazing laugh, it feels complete. I feel complete.

(beat)

Oh my god I can't believe I just said that, I must be going insane.

DR. DANZIG

You're not insane, Chris. But I do believe I know what is going on. It seems this '*laugh*' is an audible manifestation of your stress regarding the sudden success in your career.

CHRIS (SIGNING)

Is it terminal?

The doctor continues, unamused by his sarcasm

DR. DANZIG (CONT'D) *

Based on what you have told me, the idea of doing a press tour makes you very uncomfortable.

CHRIS (SIGNING)

Yes, I've never had to do public appearances before and honestly the

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CHRIS (SIGNING) (cont'd)
idea of having to do TV makes me
regret ever writing that book.

DR. DANZIG
Then don't do it.

CHRIS (SIGNING)
I have a very persistent publicist,
he has made it very clear that that
is not an option

DR. DANZIG
What appearance would you be
comfortable with?

Chris shrugs

DR. DANZIG
My suggestion, find a setting where
you would be comfortable and start
there.
(beat)
Okay, well time's up. Same time
next week?

CHRIS (SIGNING)
Probably not

INT. CHRIS'S APARTMENT-DAY

Chris and Henry drink beer at the kitchen island in the
perpetually dark and silent apartment

Henry's voice echoes through the empty space as he signs to
his friend

HENRY
I never said he was the best
therapist. He's just the only one
that I know that can sign...

CHRIS (SIGNING)
You could have told me that before.

HENRY
Hey, his suggestion wasn't all that
bad. Start small, what about that
place on 3rd in Williamsburg?

(CONTINUED)

CHRIS (SIGNING)

Book Thug Nation? They just asked me to do a reading. I told Brian I wasn't up for it.

HENRY

Wrong. You're doing it.

CHRIS (SIGNING)

I feel like you are constantly forgetting the whole deaf thing.

*
*

HENRY

Fine, I'll do the reading. You just stand next to me and look pretty.

Chris shakes his head as he sips his beer, taking the suggestion as a complete joke

HENRY

This is how you can repay me for not dedicating your book to me!

*
*

Realizing that Henry is not joking he sets down the beer

CHRIS (SIGNING)

NO.

*

Henry picks up Chris's phone and begins to dial

HENRY

Yes. I need to benefit from your fame somehow.

(to himself not signing)

Maybe I can bang some hipster bookstore chick...

(to Chris again signing)

I'm calling Brian now.

INT. BOOK THUG NATION-NIGHT

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Chris and Henry stand at the front of a packed bookstore, all the chairs are taken and people are standing seven deep in the back, yet the only sound heard is

Henry finishing a passage from Chris's book he looks up and

winks at the GIRL with short bangs and lensless glasses in the front row

(CONTINUED)

HENRY

Alright, now I've been told we have time for some questions for the author. I, as Chris's longtime best friend, will be interpreting for him.

He directs this last part solely to short bangs, she smiles and raises her hand

HENRY

Yes, the beautiful young lady in the front row.

GIRL

Based on this reading it seems like you two are just soooo close. Do you just do *everything* together?

CHRIS (SIGNING)

If you're asking for a threesome the answer is definitely no.

*

Before Henry can even get one word out

THE LAUGH

rings loud through the bookstore seeming to vibrate the once silent space

Chris is instantly paralyzed, never has the laugh been this close, this time he not only hears it

He feels it...he feels it so intensely that

His vision goes blurry and he falls to the ground

INT. CHRIS'S APARTMENT-SAME NIGHT

*

Chris lies on his couch with a towel on his forehead, Henry paces in front of him signing wildly and screaming

*

HENRY

This laugh thing is really getting old, dude. I had that girl in the bag!

CHRIS (SIGNING)

Short bangs? I think I saved you there.

(CONTINUED)

HENRY

Yes, the bangs weren't great. And neither were the leg warmers. But if I were as picky as you I would never get laid...kinda like you.

Chris sits up, ignoring Henry's insensitivity

CHRIS (SIGNING)

She was there Henry, I know it. That laugh is real.

HENRY

Oh, so it's a 'she' now. I don't know what's going on with you but you really need to figure your shit out. Maybe the bookstore reading was a little too much for you.

Chris is clearly dejected

CHRIS (SIGNING)

Maybe.

INT. BRIAN'S OFFICE-DAY

Brian leans against the front of his desk and Chris sit directly in front of him, looking up awkwardly at his had-it-up-to-here publicist

BRIAN

Clearly the reading did not go well so we won't make that mistake again.

Chris is visibly relieved that Brian finally understands

BRIAN

What we need to do is start even smaller, work our way up to TV.

Chris is shocked, this was not the next step he was expecting or wanting

BRIAN

I got a call from some nasally teacher at Lexington School for the Deaf, she wants you to do a reading to her high school creative writing class.

(CONTINUED)

CHRIS (SIGNING)

Do I have to?

BRIAN

You know I don't know what that means.

(beat)

Anyway, she said she likes the way you

(doing air quotes)

"use comedy to cope with your deafness" or some bullshit like that. I told her you would be there.

Chris shakes his head, no way is he putting himself in another situation like the bookstore

BRIAN

Come on, can't disappoint the kids. and it can't be all that bad, just do your whole signing thing and get out of there. No biggy.

Based on the look on Chris's face this is definitely a biggy

INT. LEXINGTON SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF HALL-DAY

Chris walks slowly down the silent hallway wearing the same face from Brian's office

He is flanked by Henry on his left and LAUREN (late 20s), the teacher that Brian had mentioned before, is stunning but Chris is too nervous to notice

She is visibly excited by Chris's presence and walks a few paces in front of him as she signs excitedly, but she does not speak out loud

LAUREN (SIGNING)

I am so excited that you came today! Your book is by far the funniest thing I've ever read, the kids are just going to love you.

Chris gives her a quick half smile

Henry checks out her ass, smiles and nudges his friend who pays him no attention

Lauren leads them into the classroom

INT. LEXINGTON SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF CLASSROOM-CONTINUOUS *

Chris stands at the front of the classroom clutching his book in both hands *

In front of him sits a GROUP OF BORED TEENAGERS, unfazed by his new found stardom *

Lauren stands in the back next to Henry, they both smile encouragingly at him *

Chris nods and opens the book on the podium, he looks up one last time at his forced-to-be-there audience and begins signing

This time no subtitles are shown for his words, calling attention to the unnatural silence of the room

Chris keeps his eyes on the page as he signs, beads of nervous sweat running down his forehead

Then it happens

THE LAUGH

At first he is paralyzed, just like the bookstore

But then he looks up and finally sees her *

Lauren is laughing so hard her body shakes, she is laughing as if nothing else in the world exists except this moment and it is beautiful

Chris just stares, taking in her beauty for the first time *

Henry looks at his friend, then Lauren, then his friend again as he realizes that Chris has found his laugh. He is dumbfounded *

Chris can't help it he walks towards her, transfixed

Lauren finally stops laughing as she locks eyes with Chris for the first time *

The whole room can feel the moment, deaf or not *

Chris stands directly in front of the woman of his dreams *

He smiles for the first time since we first met him at the coffee shop

(CONTINUED)

CHRIS (SIGNING)

It's you.

*

EXT. BROOKLYN STREET DAY--WEEKS LATER

Chris and Lauren walk together down a crowded street, he smiles and she has her head thrown back laughing at whatever joke he just told her

People glance at them with annoyance, but they don't notice

All we hear is her beautiful laugh

As we follow them the sounds of the outside world finally make their way back

*

birds chirping

crosswalk signs beeping

car horns

general chatter

dogs barking

As these sounds grow louder we hear

THE REAL LAUGH

for the first time and we realize why they are getting those annoyed looks--it's awful, think Fran Drescher meets Urkel, a laugh only a deaf man could love

THE END