

## Synopsis

When a city's libraries are transformed into expensive "Knowledge Lounges," a group of unusually courteous citizens stages a protest outside the council chambers. As a journalist covers the event and political spin takes over, their relentless politeness creates unexpected complications, revealing the absurdities of modern politics, public relations, and civic engagement. A modern comedy for five people + more protestors can be added.

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# Respectfully

Written by Tanya Reddin

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## Characters

**MAYOR JANE THORNE** – A charismatic politician obsessed with public image.

**ALEX** – Organizer of a very polite protest.

**PRIYA** – A journalist looking for a real story.

**GREG** – The Mayor's exhausted communications director.

**MRS. HENDERSON** – Retired schoolteacher and enthusiastic protest participant.

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## Setting

Outside the council chambers, present day.

A banner hangs across a small gathering:

**"WE RESPECTFULLY DISAGREE."**

A table offers tea, biscuits, and feedback forms.

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## Scene

*(ALEX arranges protest signs. MRS. HENDERSON carefully straightens them.)*

**MRS. HENDERSON**

The signs should all face the same direction. We are citizens, not anarchists.

**ALEX**

Good point.

*(Adjusts sign.)*

How's this?

**MRS. HENDERSON**

Much better. Dissent requires standards.

*(PRIYA enters with a microphone.)*

**PRIYA**

I'm covering the demonstration.

**ALEX**

Wonderful. Thank you for attending.

**PRIYA**

That's not usually what protesters say.

**ALEX**

We appreciate all forms of civic engagement.

**PRIYA**

Right.

So what exactly are you protesting?

**ALEX**

The Mayor's new "Efficiency Initiative."

**PRIYA**

The one that closed half the public libraries?

**ALEX**

Yes.

**PRIYA**

And you're angry?

**ALEX**

Extremely.

**PRIYA**

You don't seem extremely angry.

**ALEX**

We sent a strongly worded email.

**MRS. HENDERSON**

With bullet points.

**ALEX**

Seven bullet points.

**MRS. HENDERSON**

Eight after revisions.

**PRIYA**

Terrifying.

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*(GREG rushes out of City Hall carrying a phone and several folders.)*

**GREG**

Okay, everyone, quick request...

**ALEX**

Certainly.

**GREG**

You don't know what the request is.

**ALEX**

We're open-minded.

**GREG**

Could you maybe move the protest twenty feet to the left?

**ALEX**

Of course.

**MRS. HENDERSON**

Provided it doesn't undermine the symbolic significance.

**GREG**

It absolutely does.

**MRS. HENDERSON**

Then perhaps fifteen feet.

**GREG**

Fine.

*(Everyone carefully moves everything over.)*

**PRIYA**

You're negotiating your protest?

**ALEX**

Compromise is democracy.

*(MAYOR JANE emerges confidently.)*

**MAYOR**

Hello, valued constituents!

**PROTESTERS**

Hello, Mayor!

**MAYOR**

What a wonderful civic atmosphere.

**GREG**

Mayor, they're protesting you.

**MAYOR**

I know. Isn't it great?

*(To crowd.)*

Thank you all for participating in democracy.

**ALEX**

Thank you for acknowledging our concerns.

**MAYOR**

Which concerns?

**ALEX**

The libraries.

**MAYOR**

Ah.

Those.

**PRIYA**

Care to comment?

**MAYOR**

Certainly. We didn't close libraries.

**ALEX**

You turned them into "Premium Knowledge Lounges."

**MAYOR**

Exactly.

**PRIYA**

They charge thirty pounds for entry.

**MAYOR**

Knowledge has value.

Look, difficult choices had to be made.

**ALEX**

Respectfully, we disagree.

*(Protesters hold up signs.)*

**ALL PROTESTERS**

Respectfully!

**MAYOR**

That's adorable.

**PRIYA**

Did you just call the protest adorable?

**MAYOR**

It's hard not to.

One sign says "Mildly Disappointed."

**MRS. HENDERSON**

We considered "Deeply Concerned," but felt it was inflammatory.

*(GREG's phone buzzes.)*

**GREG**

Mayor, social media loves this.

**MAYOR**

Really?

**GREG**

People are calling it the nicest protest in history.

**PRIYA**

That's not helping their cause.

**GREG**

Actually, engagement is through the roof.

**MAYOR**

Excellent.

Get lots of photos.

**ALEX**

Could we approve the photos first?

**MAYOR**

Why?

**ALEX**

We have a consent form.

*(MRS. HENDERSON hands everyone forms.)*

**PRIYA**

You brought consent forms to a protest?

**MRS. HENDERSON**

Civilization didn't happen by accident.

**MAYOR**

You know what? Let's take a picture together.

**ALEX**

We're protesting you.

**MAYOR**

Yes, but it'll look fantastic.

**GREG**

The caption could be "Mayor Listens."

**PRIYA**

This is absurd.

*(The protesters reluctantly gather.)*

**ALEX**

Wait.

This feels wrong.

**MRS. HENDERSON**

I agree.

**PRIYA**

Finally.

**ALEX**

We're helping her.

**MAYOR**

You are helping me tremendously.

**GREG**

Polling numbers just went up three points.

**MAYOR**

I am engaging with critics, they like it.

**PRIYA**

You're taking selfies.

**MAYOR**

Modern engagement.

*(A pause. ALEX thinks.)*

**ALEX**

Everyone.

New strategy.

**MRS. HENDERSON**

Oh dear.

**ALEX**

What if we stop being polite?

*(Gasps from protesters.)*

**MRS. HENDERSON**

Good heavens.

**PRIYA**

Now we're getting somewhere.

**ALEX**

Not rude.

Just... firmer.

**MRS. HENDERSON**

How firm?

**ALEX**

Maybe we interrupt.

**MRS. HENDERSON**

Without raising hands?

**ALEX**

Yes.

**MRS. HENDERSON**

Radical.

**MAYOR**

This is getting uncomfortable.

**GREG**

I don't like the energy shift.

**ALEX**

Mayor Thorne.

Will you reopen the libraries?

**MAYOR**

Well...

**ALEX**

Please answer directly.

**MAYOR**

I...

**ALEX**

A yes or no would be lovely.

**MRS. HENDERSON**

If convenient.

**ALEX**

If convenient?

*(The Mayor hesitates.)*

**PRIYA**

Interesting.

No photo opportunity now.

**GREG**

Mayor?

**MAYOR**

I need to review...

**ALEX**

Respectfully, you've had eight months.

**MRS. HENDERSON**

Nine, technically.

**ALEX**

Nine months.

**MAYOR**

Fine.

The libraries were a mistake.

*(Everyone freezes.)*

**GREG**

Mayor!

**MAYOR**

No, it's true.

The lounges are empty.

Nobody wants artisanal reading.

**MRS. HENDERSON**

I told you.

**MAYOR**

You sent seventeen letters.

**MRS. HENDERSON**

Nineteen actually.

**MAYOR**

We'll reopen the libraries.

*(Cheering.)*

**ALEX**

Thank you.

We appreciate your willingness to listen.

**PRIYA**

You won.

And somehow nobody shouted.

**ALEX**

Democracy comes in many forms.

**MRS. HENDERSON**

Sometimes with tea.

**GREG**

I cannot believe this worked.

**MAYOR**

Neither can I.

**PRIYA**

What's the lesson here?

**ALEX**

That citizens should stay engaged.

**MRS. HENDERSON**

That libraries matter.

**GREG**

That I need a vacation.

**MAYOR**

And perhaps...

*(She picks up a protest sign.)*

**MAYOR**

...perhaps "Mildly Disappointed" is more threatening than it looks.

*(The protesters nod solemnly at each other.)*

**ALL PROTESTERS**

Respectfully.

**End**