

METADAD

Bill Berger

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If you're passing it along, I just want to know why. A few lines to **wgberger@gmail.com** — who it's for, why them. That's it. I'd like to meet the people my book meets.

A hospice robot named Claude sorting through photographs in 2176 is exempt from even this.

Built with Claude (Anthropic, Opus 4.7) as production infrastructure. The Bill chapters were typed, word by word, by the author. The Claude chapters are an independent parallel render by a separate Claude session, naive to the original prose. The machine managed the architecture; the human held the pen on his half.

Dedication

I'd like to dedicate this book to my father, who passed on December 23, 2025. I plan on releasing this book on Father's Day, 2026, which will be my first without him.

You'll notice, if you've read my memoir and Metabill, that I'm able to draw references from all sorts of media: movies, plays, ballet, opera, and music. This was one of many gifts my father gave to me. As a child, he took me pretty much everywhere. I would try to expand that here, but the books themselves show you the depth and breadth of what he wanted to show me.

So, thank you, dad. I miss you.

Preface

The book, like the previous two (*metabill* and “*I am bill?*”), is a set of very small scenes. Each is inspired by a “dad joke” that has been put on various “best dad joke” websites. I did not curate the “dad jokes” beyond picking the website. I can say that most of the jokes are very bad and I seriously doubt any father would use any of these. The websites, if anyone is concerned about attribution and credit, were things like Men’s Health and Chortle. If someone wants to sue me over the use of this material, well, I’m sure the deposition will be entertaining and fuel for new chapters in my next book.

Each scene starts with the “setup”, then I write a scene that is inspired by the setup and honor the punchline. Here’s an example:

setup:

Why did the chicken cross the road?

[BILL] qua wolf, hungry

Man that chicken looks really tasty. I’m going to eat it.

[CHICKEN] qua scared

I think I should avoid [BILL]. He looks hungry.

punchline:

To get to the other side.

The book follows my typical typographic conventions which is somewhat similar to a script versus a novel:

[PERSON TALKING] some description of the person's current state

The person's dialog is under their name and description

::SUBTITLE: A very mediocre translation of the text above::
((SOMETHING ELSE IS HAPPENING))

Also, I've imported several characters from Metabill. If you haven't read Metabill, here's a brief character sketch of each:

[BILL] is me, the author, representing my external presentation.

[Shakes] is me, the author, representing my internal life.

[Manyfeek] is also me — the crass and disrespectful side.

[KayCEE] is not me, but a completely fictional android. She is obsessed with passionate art and typography. She will comment on people by comparing them to digits or other glyphs. Notably, she's fond of odd numbers over even.

[GAMS] is not me. [GAMS] is a steel plate with two legs attached below. She does not speak, but simply kicks. She represents a tool that someone asked me to use that wasn't appropriate for my job. GAMS, in the real world, is software for mathematical optimization. I do no mathematical optimizations in anything I do at work. "Gams", the word, also is very old slang for a woman's legs; "Take a look at the gams on that babe" might be something you hear in an old gangster movie.

Also, I use the word "qua" often. This means "in the capacity of" and nothing more fancy than that. [Manyfeek] qua Superman is just "this person is acting in this capacity" and is more embodied than a simple costume change. [Manyfeek], in essence, is Superman in this context.

The book is organized into two sections: my writing starts the book, then the book repeats with what the Claude model felt was the best idea for each joke. In my chapters, I added my notes to help comprehension or any other comments I felt like making after writing the scene.

Thanks for reading this and I hope you enjoy the book.

1

SETUP

What does a nosey pepper do?

[BILL] qua a giant sentient jalapeno, using Merlin phone
That's great story, Datil. Did you get any pictures of her stem
as she got out of the car?

[Manyfeek] qua a giant sentient habanero, holding Merlin
phone, to [BILL]
Get off the phone, dude. I got a hot one over here. My paps
found the youngest of the Anaheim family smoking! He's
going to be a Chipotle before you know it.

[BILL] angry, turning red
Dude. Anaheim! Those people are Bell. Bell, Bell, Bell. I need
Pepper X, I need the Carolina Reapers to go mild. What else
do we have?

[Manyfeek] trying
Uh, there's a Mulato trying...

[BILL]
MULATO! Are you kidding me! Why don't we put a Poblano
or a Pasilla on the front page. Yeah, all the young peppers will
just run out and buy our magazine. This business just is the
worst...

PUNCHLINE

He gets jalapeño business.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This is TMZ where the heat of the pepper represents their interest to the public.

2

SETUP

You can't trust atoms.

[Adam]

I did so write this book.

[BILL]

I'm not saying you didn't but you're telling me it's a history book.

[Adam]

Yes and so?

[BILL]

Well, I know you. Are you sure you should be writing history?

[Adam]

I'm sorry, but what are you driving at?

[BILL]

Adam, you know your own history. Maybe a nice novel instead?

[Adam]

You can't tell me what to write! Next book, History of the Western Civilization! Nobody has done that before!

PUNCHLINE

They make up everything.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Yeah, I couldn't think of much else here. So, Adam, this first man, writing history, is a short book.

3

SETUP

Did you hear about the restaurant on the moon?

[BILL] dining with full moon suit on.
Pssht! Over! Houston. Come in!.

[Shakes] qua Houston Control
Roger, [BILL]. Houston control here. What's your status!
Over!

[BILL]
Pssht! Finger bowls completed. Pssht! Awaiting amuse
bouche! Roger. Over. Pssht!

[Shakes]
Roger that [BILL]. We are go for amuse bouche in 3, 2 and 1.
GO!

[KayCEE] in spacesuit with tuxedo over it. hopping slowly to
[BILL] on moon
Pssht! Good evening sir. Pssht! For this evening, the Pshsst!
chef has prepared. Pssht! A small scallop on Pssht! some sea
foam seeded cracker flown in from the dark side. Pssst! I
hope you enjoy it. Pssht! Any more wine? Pssht!

[BILL] thumbs up
Pssht! Roger that. Amuse bouche delivered. Waving off
additional wine on 3, 2, and 1.

[BILL] speaking to [KayCEE]
Pssht! No more wine right now, thanks! Pssht!

[KayCEE] saluting and turning
Roger that. Wait routine complete. Returning to kitchen to
smoke.

[Shakes]
OK. [BILL] you are clear for consumption on 3, 2, and 1. GO!

[BILL] yanks off helmet
GASP! GASP! YUM! GASP! GASP!

[BILL] slams down helmet
Psst! Over. Houston. Come in! Ready for appetizer! Roger
that. Out.

PUNCHLINE

Great food, no atmosphere.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Many dad jokes are set in outer space for some reason? So,
expect this joke to be repeated a bit.

4

SETUP

What do you call an alligator in a vest?

[Shakes] picking up Merlin phone
Gator Investigations. How may I help you?

(([Shakes] listens carefully))

[Shakes] answering
I'm sorry. How many whole raw chickens have gone missing?
Twenty? Oh my. Let me put you through to him.

[Alligator] wearing vest.
((BLINKS. TURNS HEAD SLOWLY))

[Shakes] complaining
Sir, you need to pick up the phone. It's raw chickens, your
favorite, there's someone stealing them!

[Alligator] dreaming of whole raw chicken
((SITS. DIGESTING LAST CHICKEN))

[Shakes] shaking [Alligator]
Snap out of it! She's gone and you need to move on!

[Alligator] turns head in shame, opens mouth
HISSSSSS!

[Shakes] looking [Alligator] in eyes.
That's right she's gone. The last whole raw chicken. Where are
we getting more if you wont work?!

[Alligator] flops down on floor, heads to door.
hmmmmrrrmrmmrm ROAOOOOOOOOOR!

[Shakes] happy
That's right sir! Back in the saddle.

(([Alligator] swings tail. Badge and gun fly from table onto his back))

[Alligator] wearing vest. slams into door.
((BANG! BANG! BANG!))

[Shakes] concerned
Let me open that for you!

(([Shakes] Opens door for [Alligator]))

[Alligator] going down hallway alone.
hmmmmrrrmrmmrm ROAOOOOOOOOOR!

[Shakes] waiting by phone.

((BANG! BANG! BANG! is heard from the hallwy))

[Shakes] running out
I'll get the elevator. One second...

PUNCHLINE

An investigator.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Nothing special happening here. Just what I think it would be like if an alligator was a private investigator.

5

SETUP

What do you call a sleeping bull?

[BILL] qua human/bull hybrid, sitting on edge of examination table.

Doctor. I'm really having issues with sleep. Do you have anything to help me?

[Dr. Manyfeek] qua a sleep specialist
I think I have just the thing for you.

(([Dr. Manyfeek] reaches into cabinet. Pulls out pill bottle))

[BILL] skeptical
I've tried all kinds of pills, [Dr. Manyfeek]. Sure, they work for a bit, but...

[Dr. Manyfeek]
No, I think I have just the thing for you.

(([Dr. Manyfeek] reaches into cabinet. Pulls out a large lance.))

[Dr. Manyfeek] approaching [BILL] with lance
This may be somewhat uncomfortable

(([Dr. Manyfeek] jams lance into [BILL]'s neck. Blood shoots out!))

[BILL] angry
WHAT WAS THAT! I'M GOING TO JAM THIS LANCE INTO YOUR NECK AND...

(([Dr. Manyfeek] pulls out a large red cape from the pill bottle. Shakes in front of Bill))

[Dr. Manyfeek] carefully. barely moving the cap
¡Eh, toro! ¡Toro! ¡Eh, toro!

[BILL] furious, charges
MOOOOOOO!

[Dr. Manyfeek] nimbly sidesteps.
¡Ole!

(([BILL] slams into far wall. Very unconscious))

PUNCHLINE

A bulldozer.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Picadors use a lance to weaken a bull during a bullfight.

6

SETUP

Why couldn't the bicycle stand up by itself?

[BILL] qua sentient cycle, pushing body up on parallel bars,
sweating
Eeeerrgh. Eeergh.

[KayCEE] qua physical therapist
Come on [BILL], one more revolution, keep pushing.

[BILL]
I can't do it. I just can't

[KayCEE]
What are you an 8? You 8 yourself [BILL]? You need to do
this. Or do you want to be left in the shed with the old
lawnmower!

[BILL] now red
EEERGH. EEERGH.

[KayCEE]
Put your spokes into it. Your chain broke not your spirit man.
PUSH!

[BILL] now purple
EEERGH. EEERGH. EEERGH. EEERGH.

[KayCEE]
That it! Keep your seat level! Don't put your fork that way!
YES! Straight now. NO! No bell yet! Keep going.

[BILL] now green

EEERGH. EEERGH. EEERGH. EEERGH. EEERGH.
EEERGH. EEERGH. EEERGH.

[KayCEE]

You're doing it. Just one more rotation. Come on [BILL]

[BILL] falling

AAAAAAAAAH!

((CRASHING SOUNDS. BASKET GOES FLYING TO THE
LEFT. BELL BINGS AND DENTS))

[BILL] pounding floor

I'll never roll again.

(([BILL] sobbing))

PUNCHLINE

It was two tired.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Nothing special here. Just your typical physical therapy trope.

7

SETUP

What do you call a fake noodle?

[BILL] qua sus elbow macaroni noodle
Hey guys! What's up with everybody here!

[KayCEE] qua farfalle
Hi narc. What's up with you!

[BILL]
No way man. I'm cool. Does anybody know where I could get
some good sauce? I'm really aching for it.

[Manyfeek] qua strozzapreti. flicking open switchblade
Come closer narc. I'll show you some::OBSCENITY
REDACTED:: sauce.

[BILL]
Hey hey hey! There's no reason to get crazy here. I just need
some sauce. I helps me take the edge off. I need it man.

[KayCEE]
OK. Guy, yeah, you look pretty bad. [Manyfeek] come on. Call
him over.

[Manyfeek] qua strozzapreti. annoyed but looking over
shoulder
MARIO! We gots someone who needs the sauce.

[Manyfeek] to [KayCEE]
This goes bad? It's on you. I don't trust elbows and I never
will

[Mario, a plumber with a red hat] walking up.

Heya you. You wanna the sauce?

[BILL]

Yeah. Man. You got any alfredo or maybe some pink sauce?

[Mario, a plumber with a red hat] concerned

That shit'll kill ya faster than... take this. A nice marinara.

Take it slow....

[BILL] pulls out pistol!

HOLD IT RIGHT THERE!

((Multiple Agnolotti, Tortellini, and Ravioli storm in, and take

[Manyfreak], [Mario], [KayCEE] into custody))

[Sgt. Cavatappi]

Another nice sting, [BILL]

[BILL] sighing

Yeah. I need a break. This job is killing me.

PUNCHLINE

An impasta.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This is just Mario, plus a bunch of pasta shapes, in your typical undercover sting. The SWAT team is stuffed pasta as they are “bulky” with their bulletproof stuff on.

8

SETUP

How does a hurricane see?

[Dr. Shakes] qua opthamologist
Is 6 or 7 better?

[Hurricane Katrina] sitting on edge of seat
6

[Dr. Shakes] changing settings on machine
5 or 6?

[Hurricane Katrina]
6

[Dr. Shakes] shining bright light into [Hurricane Katrina]'s
eye
Yep. OK. Keep looking at the light. Yeah. I know it's bright,
but just one more minute.

[Dr. Shakes] satisfied.
OK. I think that settles it.

[Dr. Shakes] turning up lights
So, it's diplopia. Probably a concussion. Have you hit your
head or some...

[Hurricane Katrina]
Well, I ate a small city a couple days ago.

[Dr. Shakes] pulling out something
That's probably it. For now, you'll wear this eye patch over the other one. It's not a fix, but at least you'll stop seeing double. Maybe after the concussion and swelling go down, this will resolve. For now, it's wait and see.

[Hurricane Katrina] still concerned
OK. When should I come back?

[Dr. Shakes] offering
Oh. We're moving to Florida? I hope that isn't too inconvenient?

[Hurricane Katrina] leaving
Sounds good. I'm always over there anyway. I'll see you in a couple weeks.

PUNCHLINE

With one eye.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Hurricane Katrina destroyed a good portion of New Orleans. Florida is also often affected by hurricanes, which is why the doctor is moving.

9

SETUP

Where do polar bears keep their money?

[BILL] qua polar bear, waiting in line.

Man I wish my company offered direct deposit. These lines are just awful.

[Manyfeek] qua walrus, behind [BILL]

Yeah. Look at that guy, doesn't even have his slip filled out before getting to the teller.

[BILL] turning head to [Manyfeek]

So rude. Like yeah, I've got all day to sit here with my seal meat. Look. Can you hold it for a second, I need to use the restroom?

[Manyfeek]

Eh, I'll watch it for you but if I try to carry anything, my face hits the floor and then I might chip a tooth. Get back fast.

[BILL] qua polar bear. runs to restroom for male bears. enters bathroom.

Man, there's even a line in here. Crap, ok, I'll wait.

[BILL] qua polar bear. returns to line. confused.

Dude. Where's my seal meat? I left it here with you?

[Manyfeek] qua walrus. greasy face.

Sorry. What did you say?

[BILL] qua polar bear. angry

I see your face. YOU ATE MY WEEKLY PAY!

[Manyfeek] qua walrus. angry. greasy face and flippers
I AM A WALRUS SIR! My aunt was a seal. They're family.

[BILL] qua polar bear. chastened
Sorry. You're right. I just can't believe it's gone.

[Manyfeek]
Don't worry, my aunt tasted much better.

PUNCHLINE

The snow bank.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Nothing special here. Direct deposit is awesome and I'm glad to never have had to wait in line to get my paycheck in the bank.

10

SETUP

What kind of milk comes from a pampered cow?

[Shakes, Spa Employee] calm

Welcome cows! I'm so glad you're here today. A full day spa treatment for all of you! How very relaxing!

[COWS] shuffling

Moo. Moo.

[KayCEE, Spa Employee]

Yes. Ladies. It's time to indulge your senses and relax. First, hot stones. Please lay down, ladies.

[COWS] shuffling, snorts

Moo. Moo. Moooo.

[KayCEE] placing hot stones on cow backs as she walks through the herd

... and one for you, and one for you. You really should lay down. It works much better that way.

[COWS] shuffling, snorts, rocks falling off back. sniffing rock. licking.

Moo. Moo. Moooo.

[BILL, Spa Employee] running up with some glassware and a torch.

Now, cupping ladies! It's a must to pull out all your toxins.

(([BILL, Spa Employee] puts hot cup on large cow))

[Large COW] kicks [BILL, Spa Employee] in face
MOOOOOO!

(([BILL, Spa Employee] crumples to floor))

[KayCEE] running over with a scalpel
Oh my! No cupping. That's fine. I'm here with the
dermabrasion. Who likes jerky?

[Shakes, Spa Employee] worried
I don't think that's a good idea, KayCEE

[Large COW] bleeding slightly, kicks [KayCEE, Spa
Employee] in face
MOOOOOO!

(([KayCEE, Spa Employee] crumples to floor))

[Shakes, Spa Employee] more worried
Hm. I guess that rules out Gua sha...

PUNCHLINE

Spoiled milk.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Cupping is some strange practice where you heat up air inside a small glass and then apply to someone's back. The skin is pulled up like a giant hickey. I gather that is "pulling" something out of you. Gua sha is a Chinese technique where your skin is scraped by jade, quartz or any magic material you have handy. So, after cupping, you look like you've been attacked by an angry squid. Gua sha is more like a passionate night with someone with long nails.

11

SETUP

What kind of car does a sheep like to drive?

[BILL] qua young ram, on bed, reading car mag held over his face

Man, when my horns go completely round and round, that's my ride.

[Shakes] qua young ram, reading other car mag, laying down on floor next to bed

Like your horns will ever go all the way round. As if!

[BILL] qua young ram, on bed, reading car mag held over his face

Shut up, [Shakes]. I wasn't the one who bleated in front of the ewes this morning. Take a look at my car!

[Shakes] qua young ram, getting up.

Whatever. What's the car, [BILL]?

[BILL] qua young ram, pointing to picture

The Lamborghini Bergamasco V12! She's gonna be all mine,

[Shakes]!

[Shakes] qua young ram

Yeah, that's pretty sweet, but you're gonna need to chew so much cud to get that. How are you going to do it?

[BILL] qua young ram

Whatever it takes. In one end and out comes a Bergamasco when I'm ready to retire at eight.

[Shakes] qua young ram

Eight! Dude, I need some honies now. My car is fly and won't make me eat the entire hillside to get it: Maserati

Maremmmano-Abruzzese Twin Turbo! She flies and the ewes just start gamboling and wagging their tails, at me, [Shakes] the ram!

[BILL] qua young ram laughing

You dream my sheep, you dream.

PUNCHLINE

A Lamborghini.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

"Bergamasco" and "Maremmmano-Abruzzese" are names of Italian sheep dogs. Exotic cars are often named things that are "scary" like Diablo. So, I assume sheep are most fearful of sheep dogs and adjust.

12

SETUP

What musical instrument do you find in the bathroom?

[BILL] qua musician, tuxedoed, carrying an interdental brush french horn

Pardon me.

(([BILL] steps over row of tongue scraper trombones))

(([BILL] sits on the second toilet seat to the right of the first interdental brush french horn))

[Manyfeek] at the head of the bathroom. turns. spotlight hits.

((Huge audience applauding!))

[Manyfeek] bows, smiles and then turns.

((Audience settles. [Manyfeek] looks out. proud.))

[Manyfeek] taps a Sonicare replacement head twice.
mouthing and waving replacement head and open hand
One-and-two...

[BILL] playing interdental brush french horn
DAH... DAH... DAAAAA-da... DA

[Xylitol Picoloco] joins in
dee da deet dee da deet!

[Tuba Toothpaste] countering
BUMP. BUMP. BUMP.

[PTFE Floss Violin section] sweeping
yada ya yada yad yada yada ya

[Dave, an astronaut, from 2001] red space suit, floating
Hal? Are you here?

PUNCHLINE

A tuba toothpaste.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This is a dumb joke taken to its logical conclusion. I'm trying, given that I picked a French Horn to play, a French Horn sounding start. So, I picked 2001 and the famous docking backing track. Dave is there because I always thought 2001 interiors were like living in a white, sterile bathroom.

13

SETUP

What do you call a snowman with a six-pack?

[BILL] qua snowman, beers dangling off plastic ring, trying to open front door.

Damn. Where are my keys?

[Shakes] qua snowwoman, opening door.

Lost your keys again, [BILL]? What's that in your hand.

[BILL] hiding hand

Nothing.

[Shakes]

Nothing, [BILL]? It looks like six "nothings" from here. How many "nothings" have you already had today, hm?

[BILL] defensive

It's not like that. We're just out and I got some more.

[Shakes]

Why are we out, [BILL]? I purchased a case yesterday.

[BILL]

This is abominable. I'm out of here.

[Shakes] yelling

Get help!

PUNCHLINE

An abdominal snowman.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This is just a trope of the typical AUD pattern: hiding how much you consume.

14

SETUP

Why do seagulls fly over the sea?

[BILL] qua old seagull, speaking wisely
Listen young gull.

[Shakes] qua young seagull, looking on
Yes. Wise one?

[BILL]
Seek the sea my lad. Stay far from the coast. Travel far.

[Shakes]
Ah. Yes. Adventure! The high se...

[BILL]
No. Nothing of the sort. Flying over bodies of water that are partially or fully contained by land poses risks to gulls.

[Shakes]
What kind of risks? Hunters? Predators?

[BILL]
Again. Totally off. No. Our kind, if over a body of water that is generally bounded by land in some fashion, well, if that happens, we turn into bakery goods.

[Shakes]
WHAT?! That's not possible.

[BILL]

Wow! Where have you been? My mother crossed a river?
Boom! Maple bar. I pecked at her with tears in my eyes.

[Shakes]

YOU ATE YOUR MOTHER?

[BILL]

No, I ate a maple bar. My grandfather, he crossed a fjord:
strudel. Like that, and no whipped cream. But, you know
nothing goes to waste.

[Shakes]

i need to rest. this is too much.

[BILL]

It's going to be fine. It's a good life, but yeah, stay away from
the bay.

PUNCHLINE

Because if they flew over the bay, they would be bagels.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

There's nothing special going on here; I was just ramping up
the idea to its natural conclusion.

15

SETUP

Why do peppers make such good archers?

[BILL] qua archer on parapet, with bad cold.
Orry. Can I habanero plez?

[Shakes] concerned, handing over arrow.
Man [BILL], you sure you should be shooting arrows with a bad cold?

[BILL] qua archer, wiping face with kleenex
It's hokay. Where can I boot? From ere? I habaero and need to boot a boll!

[Shakes] looking over Helm's Deep, Troll army heading our way.
"Boot a boll!" WHAT! What do you mean "Boot a boll!"? I can't understand you?

[BILL] yelling
BOOT a BOLL!

[BILL] miming pulling bowstring
BOOT!

[BILL]
A!

[BILL] miming ugly thing
BOLL!

[BILL] pointing to troll
BOOT a BOLL!

[Shakes] happy
Shoot a troll! Oh ye..

[Shakes] and [BILL] are creamed by a large rock from one of
those things they tend to huck.

PUNCHLINE

Because they habanero.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Helm's Deep is a site in the Lord of the Rings. The movies
show this as a huge battle with all sorts of ugly things like
"trolls" attacking the fair and beautiful humans and elves.
(Isn't that a wonderful message to all? //s).

16

SETUP

How do you stop a bull from charging?

[BILL] as bull/man hybrid, looking over paper bills
Man. I'm not sure how we're going to make ends meet this month.

[Shakes] as cow/woman hybrid, hanging on [BILL]'s shoulders.

Yeah. They canceled the cards now. We couldn't pay them after your head injury at [Dr. Manyfeek].

[BILL]
I needed sleep. He said he could help. How did I know he was a picador?

[Shakes] asking
[BILL], I saw this ad for a life coach. I called and she's coming over.

[BILL] looking confused
Life coach? How can we afford a life coach when the cards are maxed out and I'm out of my goring job at the arena?

((DOORBELL RINGS))

[KayCEE] in matador outfit, enters
Hello! I'm here to get you back on your feet. Are you ready for some occupational therapy?

[BILL] snorts

You look like just the rest.

((STAMPS FOOT. SNORTS.))

[KayCEE] pulls small red rag and holds at end of long thin blade

¡Eh, toro! ¡Toro! ¡Eh, toro!

[BILL] charging

MOOOOOOOOOO!

PUNCHLINE

Cancel its credit card.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

I didn't pick these jokes, but cows are often in these dad jokes. This is where I decide to make a small dramatic arc of a bull losing his employment and finding a new way forward.

SETUP

How do you fix a broken pumpkin?

[BILL] annoyed, laptop under arm.
Man, I just hate this place.

[Shakes] helping
It's okay. I think the guy that's sitting on the hay bale can help us?

[BILL] walking over to man sitting on hay bale
Hi? Can you help me with my laptop?

[Manyfeek, Genius] looking smug
Hey dude. Welcome to Pumpkin! Can I see your laptop?

[BILL] handing over orange and green laptop
Yep. I installed JackOSXLantern Candlestick 2 last night but...

[Manyfeek, Genius]
Yeah. That's the first problem. You should be on LED 6 by now. Way safer. Candlestick? It'll burn the stem off.

[BILL] confused
Uh. OK. Can you fix it.

[Manyfeek, Genius]
You know it hombre. Sec.

(([Manyfeek] pulls out large carving knife. Dives it into center of laptop.))

(([Manyfeek] opens circular hole in laptop and pulls out stringy mess and seeds))

[Manyfeek, Genius]

Yeah, it's all jammed up. Just be a moment.

(([Manyfeek] puts LED light in laptop. Brings out dremel device. Looks at [BILL] for a moment))

(([Manyfeek] dremels laptop. Shards of orange laptop fly.))

(([Manyfeek] turns laptop around. Shows perfect rendition of [BILL]'s face back lit by LED))

[Manyfeek, Genius]

There you go, muchacho! Thanks for stopping by Pumpkin!
Send more money whenever ya got some, OK?

PUNCHLINE

With a pumpkin patch.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

I hate going to the Apple Store. Somehow, with all their genius in hardware and software, they made in-person retail worse.

18

SETUP

I ate a clock the other day.

[BILL] running to bathroom, puking mainsprings
Blargh. Rattle-bing. Blaaaaaaarge.
((A counter weight hits the toilet bowl))

[BILL] holding on for dear life. face over toilet bowl. puking
hands and bells
Blargh. Rattle-bing. Blaaaaaaarge.

[BILL] panting
I can't believe I ate that clock. I knew it smelled funny. Why
am I so dumb.

[Shakes] running in with towels. reaching over [BILL] to
cabinet
Here. Take these. I think I have some anti-horologicals in the
med cabinet...

[BILL] dry heaves. spits out a XII. and sits.
Ooof. I hope that's the end of it.

[Shakes] calming.
Take it slow. Don't get up unt...

[BILL] back up and over toilet. puking IV, V, and VII.
Blargh. Rattle-bing. Blaaaaaaarge.

[Shakes] patting [BILL]'s back
Good job. Yeah. Get it all out. We should never have eaten
over at the watch store. I knew it was a mistake.

[BILL] back up and over toilet. looking down
I don't see all the numbers. I hope the pointy ones come back
up...

PUNCHLINE

It was very time consuming.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Nothing special here. Just puking up a clock that evidently, in
dad joke universe, happens from time to time.

19

SETUP

I used to be a baker.

[BILL] suited, very nice hair, very expensive suit, smug
Well, I'm here at the request of Boudin and Pillsbury from
downtown. Seems like you guys aren't getting the job done.

[Shakes] qua baker. getting coffee
Well, I just...

[BILL] yelling and pointing
PUT THAT COFFEE DOWN!

[Shakes] qua baker. staring back
What?

[BILL] yelling again
PUT THAT COFFEE DOWN! Coffee is for bakers, and I
certainly don't see any bakers here.

[Manyfeek] qua angry baker.
::OBSCENITY REDACTED::, what do you mea...

[BILL] staring at [Manyfeek]
Do YOU see my rolling pin! Do you see it? It costs more than
your car!

[Manyfeek]
Pfht! We can't make any bread here. The flour is weak.

[BILL]

If I took my rolling pin and that flour, I'd make five wedding cakes and a boudin loaf without taking my jacket off. Do YOU HEAR ME little baker boy. I'm here with the real skills. Baking skills that I learned by baking at TOP BAKERIES. Boudin? He learned it from me. I said to him. Let the dough sit out like it's cheese. Next thing you know. Billions! What have you done?

[Manyfeek] qua scared baker.

Uh. Uh. Some hot cross buns.

[BILL] mocking

"Uh. Uh. Some hot cross buns?!" Is that your idea of baking?!

[BILL] announcing

Pillsbury wants a baking contest now. First prize, a free shot on the Cooking Network with your own show. Second prize, a set of pie weights. Third prize, pack it up!

[Shakes]

That's that's just impossible. What kind of place are you running here?!

[BILL] angry

A BAKERY! I need bakers not wimps.

[BILL]

"Oh I used to be a baker. Tough gig. Yeah." Get OUT if you can't bake!

PUNCHLINE

But I couldn't make enough dough.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This is Alec Baldwin's speech from *Glengarry Glen Ross*. It's a great movie (or play) if you haven't seen it.

20

SETUP

I'm writing a book about glue.

[BILL] qua horse and equine right activist
The atrocities that our people have suffered under the yoke of
men is not only found in the whip.

(([Shakes], [Manyfeek], [KayCEE] sitting in audience))

[BILL] standing at podium, as slide show projects behind.
Not only the whip, and the hobble, and the reins, and the feed
bag. Yes, even the feed bag.

(([Shakes], [Manyfeek], [KayCEE] murmuring their
approval))

[BILL] as slide changes to picture of Elmer's Glue
No, I'm talking about their final, true purpose for us all. Yes,
adhesives!

(([Shakes], [Manyfeek], [KayCEE] horses all. neighing
loudly))

[BILL] as slide changes to picture of sticky mess
Mankind's thirst for putting paper together and not letting it
come apart easily is only quenched by the slow drying moans
of my people's suffering that is embedded in this silken, sticky
TRAVESTY!!

(([Shakes], [Manyfeek], [KayCEE] horses all. galloping in
circles. raising up on back legs))

[BILL] qua horse leader!

THROW DOWN THE BRIDLE! THROW DOWN THE FOUL
BIT! We charge Elmer's TONIGHT!

PUNCHLINE

But I'm stuck on the first chapter.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Horses are not made into glue today; however, it was a Victorian era practice. This is yet another reason why you wouldn't want to live in the Victorian era.

21

SETUP

What happened when the blue ship and the red ship collided at sea?

[Shakes] wearing tricorner hat, expanded brass telescope
watching, hands gripping blue railing

Mr. Freek! Mr. Freek! Come here if you please!

[Lord Manyfreak] missing an arm, dressed in blue, tricorner
hat

Leftenant Shakes! What see you man?!

[Shakes] pointing into the mist

There! Do you see it! Something red just there!

[Lord Manyfreak]

::YE OBSCENITEE REDACTED:: man. Call the captain.

[Captain Bill] powered by self satisfaction

What is it man! Quick is the word and sharp is the action.

Have I told you my weevil joke! Why do you like a small
weevil? It's the lesser of the two! Haha!

[Shakes]

Captain. Yes. That's always very funny, but...

(([Shakes] is decapitated by a very red cannonball))

[Captain Bill] annoyed

Turn the ship! Yank the cords! Pull that pulley thing.

Somebody should start climbing? That seems like the next
step!

[Lord Manyfreak] pointing out
Look it's the Russians!

((Russian Naval Vessel and BILL's ship fighting montage))

[CREW] falling into water from both ships
Aaaaaaa!

((The water turns maroon as they slowly float downwards))

PUNCHLINE

Their crews were marooned.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This is from Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World. This movie is amazing in spite of the awful title.

22

SETUP

I used to have a job at a calendar factory.

[BILL] standing outside factory gate, back of car open,
looking both ways

Hey! Need a calendar page? Need a calendar page?

((People walking by. Avoiding [BILL]))

[BILL]

Hey! Got calendar pages here. What do you need? I got this
cat page for 1993 for February. It's an orange cat and he's
"HANGIN' IN THERE!". Only 2 dollars and I'll give you a Far
Side off my 365 day setup. I'm sure it'll have a cow on it!

((People walking by. Avoiding [BILL]))

[BILL]

Hey! Got calendar pages here. I got the Firemen from Down
Under for the ladies! Look at these gents! They must wrestle
with roos or something! Look 2 dollars for the page from
March 2003 and the guy has a full on axe or some shit? Is that
an axe? Anyhow! 2 dollars for one page and like I say, every
purchase gets a Far Side page!

(([Shakes] walking by. Avoiding [BILL]))

[BILL] desperate

You! Yo man! You definitely need a calendar page! I got days!
I got full months! You need a week? I got scissors; we can
make a deal?

[Shakes] avoiding

I've purchased my Franklin planner already this year...

[BILL]

That's THIS YEAR's calendars! I've got classics! Have you seen Silver Spoons from 1988? Huh? There's Ricky Schroder RIGHT THERE!

[Shakes] avoiding and walking past

No. I'm fine. Please let me by.

[BILL]

Hey! Got calendar pages here. I got the ALF here...

PUNCHLINE

But I got fired because I took a couple of days off.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

I have never sold illegal merchandise, but I have been to Manhattan more times than I can count. The speech patterns from hawkers in New York have this pattern in my head.

23

SETUP

Why'd the fisherman order the halibut?

[BILL] qua fisherman, ordering food
I'd like the halibut.

[Shakes] qua Wendy's employee
Sir, this is a Wendy's?

[BILL]
Exactly, I'd like the halibut Baconator 2000, please.

[Shakes]
Sir, I'm sorry but the Baconator does not come with halibut
and, I have no idea where 2000 came from.

[BILL]
OK. I'll take the halibut baked potato.

[Shakes]
No, there's no halibut in the potatoes or anything else.

[BILL]
Sardine frosty, maybe?

PUNCHLINE

Just for the halibut.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

I believe “Sir, this is a Wendy’s.” is a meme.

24

SETUP

Why do vampires always seem sick?

[BILL, undead] sitting on edge of table
[Dr. Manyfeek] with a stethoscope.
Cough.

[BILL, undead]
((HACK! Sharp teeth show))

[Dr. Manyfeek] with a stethoscope. moving
Breathe in please. And hold. And out.

[BILL, undead]
((HACK! Sharp teeth show))

[Dr. Manyfeek] wrapping up stethoscope.
Yeah. It's not good. You have no pulse, your temperature is
well, room, and no respirations. So, I'm not sure why you'd be
coughing. Have you had a CT scan lately?

[BILL, undead]
((HACK! Sharp teeth show))
I just woke up this way.

[Dr. Manyfeek] looking at [BILL, undead] directly in the eyes.
Open your mouth for me.

[BILL, undead] fangs bared
AAAAA!

[Dr. Manyfeek] pushing down tongue

Yep. Really long canines here and, well, your breath smells like a crypt. Have you tried gargling salt water?

[BILL, undead] scared

No! I'm very sensitive to certain things. Like an autoimmune reaction? Garlic, some types of mineral waters, silver surfaces? Horrible reaction to the sun. Could it be lupus?

[Dr. Manyfeek] pulling out long sticks from closet

Let me try this. It sometimes works for me.

((Manyfeek jabs the sticks into [BILL, undead]'s neck and waves a red hanky))

[BILL, undead] shrugs

Was that supposed to help?

[Dr. Manyfeek] thinking,

Sometimes it helps my more farmlike patients. No, you're a special case. I think we need a specialist. Have you tried light therapy?

PUNCHLINE

They're coffin.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Nothing special beyond [Manyfeek] as a picador in disguise.

SETUP

Why do melons have weddings?

[Bill Melon] staring, pensive

You know my family, Melanie. Big weddings are in our blood.

[Melanie Melanoma] sad

I just want to be with you. Why can't we just run off to Vegas.

I just want to be a Melon. My family, it's just not a happy story. Candy is ready to help us. She can be my best maid.

[Candy Bowles]

Once I met, my Sugar, I knew we were a match made in heaven. Harry, my proctologist, introduced us.

[Harry Tush]

It was my pleasure Candy, but you know Sugar is really related to my sister, Eileen.

[Eileen ButDontFallDown]

Yes, all of the ButDontFallDown's come from the Weebles from Pawtucket.

[Bill Melon] suprised

That's our dog's name Pawtucket UnderHisBelly! In any case, Melanie, I know your families spotty past, but we can have a wedding. A big Melon wedding!

[Melanie Melanoma] uplifted

Usually when people spot a Melanoma, it's like death! You guys are so accepting.

[Manyfeek Melanoma] snorts

::OBSCENITY REDACTED::, Bill!, we're gonna be family soon!

[Milcheck, off duty from lumon]

I'm ready to help plan the wedding. How many Melons do I cut!

[Bill Melon] angry

Try it::OBSCENITY REDACTED::. Melons will be whole for our party.

[Milcheck, off duty from lumon] huffing off.

Fine, I was only doing this as favor to your mother. Melons DO grow on trees, Bill!

[Bill Melon]

OK. Melanie, let's do Vegas...

[Manyfeek Melanoma]

::OBSCENITY REDACTED::, Bill!, a stripper wedding! So cool!

PUNCHLINE

Because they cantaloupe.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

My homage to Austin Powers and his dumb pun montages, which I find delightful.

26

SETUP

What did the police officer say to her belly button?

[KayCEE] qua police woman, dressed as go-go dancer
I'm ready to go under cover!

[Manyfeek] qua KayCEE's navel, small squeaky voice
::OBSCENITY REDACTED:: yeah! Let's go kill some creeps!

[KayCEE]
Shut it! You'll blow my cover. Now be quiet.

[Manyfeek] qua KayCEE's navel, agreeing
((COUGHS. SPITS LINT)) OK. I'll keep my trap shut.

[BILL] qua Sgt Crowley, [KayCEE]'s handler, talking to her
Pepper, let's get you to the bar. We need to catch those creeps!

[KayCEE]
Ok [BILL], I'm ready!

((CROSS CUT TO GO GO BAR))

[KayCEE] now dancing
Whoop! Whoop! Lookie! Lookie!

[BILL] through [KayCEE]'s ear piece
You're doing great Pepper. Let's see if he takes the bait.

(([KayCEE] dancing. A plumber with a red hat in the audience
approaches))

[Mario] plumber, wearing red hat with M on the front
Hiya! You're a peach if I ever saw one, honey. You want some alfredo or pink sauce? I got some in my car. We could boil some noodles. Have a bit of pasta!

[Manyfeek] exposed
Heh! We're gonna nail you plumber boy!

[Mario] confused
Sorry, what was that?

[KayCEE] stops dancing, covering
Nothing at all lover boy! Yeah, some pasta sounds great. Let's go!

[BILL] via ear piece
Wow! That was close, Pepper! Nice cover. Keep your cool. I think he's hooked!

(([Mario] and [KayCEE] exit go-go bar. Outside in parking lot))

[Mario] walking up to [Yoshi]
Spit it out, dude. Need to make pasta.

(([Yoshi]'s tongue shoots out. A camp stove, pot, noodles, cream, tomatoes etc dump out of his mouth))

[Mario] cooking pasta
Ha! It's a cooking a now. You'll a love this pink sauce...

[Manyfeek]
We got him!

[KayCEE] pulling gun from go-go costume
HOLD IT RIGHT THERE! POLICE!

[Mario] angry

Police Woman! ACH!

(([Mario] jumps straight on to Yoshi. Tongue slaps
[KayCEE]'s gun from hand. They jump and escape))

[KayCEE] flipping blond hair, frustrated

DAMN IT! We almost had him!

[BILL] over ear piece

Next time, Pepper. Next time. We'll get him someday.

[Manyfeek]

::OBSCENITY REDACTED:: yeah! He's going down!

PUNCHLINE

You're under a vest.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This is from Police Woman, a television series on NBC from 1974 to 1978. Sgt. Suzanne “Pepper” Anderson was played by Angie Dickinson. She was always put into horrible roles like go-go dancer or prostitute as an “undercover agent”. It was an excuse to be prurient and you could tell whenever Angie came on screen that she knew exactly why she was dressed as a go-go dancer.

SETUP

Why did the football coach go to the bank?

[BILL Rockne] in line, at bank, muttering to himself
I bet Gipp is hiding here again

(([BILL Rockne] waits. Finally gets to [TELLER] window))

[BILL Rockne] talking to [TELLER]
Hi. I have an odd issue?

[TELLER] smiling. head slightly cocked.
Sure! What's the issue? I'll be happy to help if I can?

[BILL Rockne] smiling back.
Great. Can you go back in the safe? I think my quarterback is
hiding in there? Could you bring him out?

[TELLER]
Oh! How odd? Sure. One moment!

(([TELLER] leaves and [BILL Rockne] waits))

(([TELLER] returns with [Shakes the Gipper]))

[TELLER]
Here he is!

[Shakes the Gipper] scared. yelling at [BILL Rockne]
((COUGH. COUGH.)) I hate doctors! You can't make me go!
((COUGH. COUGH.)) My homeopathic remedy will work if
you all give it a CHANCE!

[BILL Rockne] to [TELLER] smiling

Thank you so much. I hope he wasn't too much trouble.

[TELLER]

No problem, sir. Is there anything else I can do?

[Shakes the Gipper]

((COUGH. COUGH.)) I just need to gargle some salt water!

Leave me be!

[BILL Rockne] leading [Shakes the Gipper] away

Thanks again for your help.

[TELLER]

Of course! Goodbye!

PUNCHLINE

To get his quarterback.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Rockne and George Gipp are characters, representing real people, from Knute Rockne, All American (1940). The "Gipper" was played by a future US president: Ronald Reagan. George Gipp dies of complications from strep throat. Another reason to be grateful for antibiotics and why antibiotic resistance is so scary.

SETUP

What's the difference between bird flu and swine flu?

[BILL] qua pigeon qua Colonel Sam Daniels in full space suit
PPE

This bird died from something. He didn't just eat too much
bread. There's a virus.

[Shakes] qua pigeon qua Rene Russo in full space suit PPE
Can you sign our divorce papers, please?

[BILL] qua pigeon
((MOVES HEAD BACK AND FORTH ON NECK)) Can we do
this later? I need to examine this bird? Where is my
microscope?

[Shakes]

[BILL], you can't dodge this forever. Please sig-

[BILL] qua pigeon looking into microscope
((COO. COO.)) There it is!

[Shakes]

Did you find something?

[BILL]

I was wrong. It's not a virus. It's Porkidiya. If that bird,
((FLAPS WINGS WILDLY)), had sought tweetment earlier!
All he needed was an oinkment.

PUNCHLINE

One requires tweetment, the other an oinkment.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This is from *Outbreak* (1995) starring Dustin Hoffman and Rene Russo. The movie features Dustin trying to save the world while working with his estranged wife, Rene.

29

SETUP

What do you call a line of men waiting to get haircuts?

((MUSIC PLAYING: Hello Vietnam))

Kiss me goodbye and write me while I'm gone

Goodbye my sweetheart, hello Vietnam

(([[Manyfeek] sullen. sitting in barber chair. hair being sheared off by barber))

((MUSIC PLAYING: Hello Vietnam))

There's fighting that will break us up again

Goodbye my sweetheart, hello Vietnam

(([[KayCEE] sobbing. sitting in barber chair. hair being sheared off by barber))

((MUSIC PLAYING: Hello Vietnam))

A hill to take, a battle to be won

Goodbye my sweetheart, hello Vietnam

(([[BILL] already bald. barber confused. [BILL] shrugs))

((MUSIC PLAYING: Hello Vietnam))

So kiss me goodbye and write me while I'm gone

Goodbye my sweetheart, hello Vietnam

(([[GAMS] sitting. barber tosses razor and leaves))

PUNCHLINE

A barberqueue.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Full Metal Jacket, a movie about the war in Vietnam, started with each character getting his hair shaved off. I am often bald and [GAMS] lacks anything beyond legs.

SETUP

Did you hear about the guy who invented Lifesavers?

[BILL] qua Dr. Malcolm Sayer
I think we should try this?

[Shakes] qua nurse
Are you sure? He hasn't had anything like this in years. I mean, we've given him Vicks Vapo-Rub. But it only makes his nostrils flare?

[BILL]
What does he have to lose?

[Shakes]
It's just so minty. He might seize?

[Manyfeek] qua Robert DeNiro, drooling, staring
((SILENT))

(([BILL] takes small white donut from pill bottle))
(([BILL] puts Lifesaver into [Manyfeek]'s mouth))

[Manyfeek] eyes widen
((SILENT))

[Shakes]
DOCTOR! It's working!

[Manyfeek] awake
::OBSCENITY REDACTED::! Wintergreen! Where is the butter rum, dude!

[BILL]

Ha! Sure, I'll make some butter rum right now...

[Manyfeek]

((SILENT))

[BILL] angry

WHY! WHY! ACH. OK, I need to try peppermint. Back to the lab.

PUNCHLINE

They say he made a mint.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This is from *Awakenings* (1990). Dr. Sayer, played by Robin Williams, uses L-DOPA versus Wintergreen Lifesavers on patients with encephalitis (an inflammation of the brain) lethargica (a description of the condition). The condition reminds Dr. Sayer of extreme parkinsonism, which is his motivation to try the treatment for Parkinson's here. Robert DeNiro plays such a patient. He wakes for a bit, the drug stops working, and he returns to his original condition.

SETUP

Why can't a leopard hide?

[BILL] qua Hans Landa. smiling.

Thank you so much, monsieur LaPadite. The lait is tres bon.

[Shakes] qua Perrier LaPadite

You're welcome, [BILL]. Is there anything else?

[BILL] qua Hans Landa. smiling. taking out ledger, ink well,
and fountain pen

Just one moment. It's just a formality but I need to clear up
some discrepancies.

[Shakes] nervous

May I smoke my pipe?

[BILL] qua Hans Landa. faux shocked.

Of course, monsieur, this is *your* home. Please make yourself
comfortable.

(([Shakes] pulls out old corn cob pipe. lights and puffs
gently))

[BILL] qua Hans Landa. looking at ledger

So, I see the Dreyfus family is gone, the Antelopes, the
DikDiks, and the Elands?

[Shakes]

I heard a rumor the Elands migrated to Kenya in the summer.

[BILL] qua Hans Landa. listening.

Right. Kenya. Now, the Leopards. Where are they?

[Shakes]

I'm not sure. Have you checked a tree?

[BILL] qua Hans Landa. face hardens.

Monsieur LaPadite, I assume the Leopards cannot speak English. Tell me now. Are you hiding exotic animals in your home?

[Shakes] crying

Oui.

[BILL]

Are the animals under us right now under the floorboards!

[Shakes]

Oui.

(([Manyfeek] qua Leopard shoots out from under house and runs through field))

(([BILL] runs outside. Pistol in hand))

(([Manyfeek] qua Leopard far away))

[BILL]

Au revoir MANYFEEK!

PUNCHLINE

He's always spotted.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This is from Inglourious Basterds. Hans Landa is played by Christoph Waltz and the movie opens with his Nazi SS “jew hunter” finding a hidden family. Hans executes most immediately but doesn’t take a clean shot at one member of the family who manages to survive the first onslaught. Hans shouts “Au revoir, Shosanna!” as she runs for her life.

SETUP

Air used to be free at the gas station.

[BILL] qua Quaid

We need to find the mutant leader!

[Shakes] qua Mahleenah

OK. The mutant bar is right over here. Come with me.

(([BILL] and [Shakes] enter mutant bar))

((FUNKY MUSIC STARTS))

[Manyfeek] qua ThreeBreastedHooker, opening top, eyes
dead inside

See anything you like?!

[BILL]

I've no tahheem for dis! Cohaaagen's men are neeer.

[Shakes] pushing open secret panel

This way! [BILL] hurry.

(([BILL] and [Shakes] exit as [Michael Ironside] arrives and
kills [Manyfeek]))

(([BILL] and [Shakes] run down secret hallway. Arrive in
entry level))

(([GAMS] is waiting for them there))

[GAMS] awaiting with speech synthesizer

Are you here to see Kuato?

[BILL]

Yes! Where eees ee?

[GAMS] opening metal plate slowly

Don't be freaked out when you see him? He's a little odd looking.

[KayCEE] qua Kuato, emerges from [GAMS] metal plate

[BIIIIILLLLL] open your mind. [BIIIIIIILLLLL] open your min...

(([Benny] shoots [KayCEE] in the forehead))

[BILL] qua Quaid running away with [Shakes]

[Benny]! You traitor! Tell Coahaagen. Give doze people free AIR!

PUNCHLINE

Now it costs \$2.50. You want to know why? Inflation.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This is from Total Recall. Arnold Schwarzenegger plays Quaid, a man whose identity has been split between two people. Coahaagen was played by Ronny Cox who played every evil mastermind in the 1980s. Quaid famously yells "Give these people AIR!" as the satire suggested that people needed to pay for the privilege of breathing.

33

SETUP

I tried to get a smart car the other day but they sold out too fast.

[Shakes] qua Jaime Escalante

I know if you simply apply yourself. This is possible.

[BILL] qua Angel, a low-rider, angry

You have no idea, man. Cars like us. We can't do calculus.

That's for a BMW or a Cadillac. Not us.

[Manyfeek] qua Chuco, a low-rider, dismissive

Yeah, man. Time to hop!

(([Manyfeek] bouncing up and down at his school desk))

[GAMS] qua Pancho, a low-rider, silent, thinking to self

I'm never going to learn AP calculus

[Shakes]

Stop that now, [Manyfeek]. It's time to study. Let's talk

Riemann sums!

[Manyfeek]

Maaaaan! What are you doing up there? When am I *ever*

gonna need to draw boxes under a curve? My lines are *tight*!

[BILL] curious

Shut up, [Manyfeek]! Let the man teach.

[Manyfeek] sullen

Well, I guess it kinda looks like a camshaft. Ok. I'm listening...

[Shakes]
((continues lesson))

PUNCHLINE

I guess I'm just a bit slow.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This is from *Stand and Deliver*. Jaime is played by Edward James Olmos, who is a dedicated math teacher. He motivates Angel and the rest of some disadvantaged Latino students. They take and succeed in an AP Calculus class. Nobody believes the results and cheating is assumed. The class proves everyone wrong when they repeat their success during a fully proctored exam.

SETUP

Did you hear about the claustrophobic astronaut?

[BILL] sweating heavily in airplane seat. gripping seat arms with white knuckles

I'm okay. I'm okay. I know it's been six months since my last flight, but I'm much better now.

[Shakes] next to [BILL], his fictional wife

[BILL] you are doing great. Just take it easy. I'll get some water.

[BILL] snaps head to [Shakes], not calmer but pretending
That's great. I'll just try to relax and watch out the window.

(([BILL] looks out at wing. Heavy rain beats down on the wing.))

(([BILL] watching outside, head snapping around looking for something.))

((From underneath the wing, a [GREMLIN] crawls towards the engine. It opens the engine cowl and starts to tinker))

[BILL] head turns to interior of plane, eyes heavily lined
IT'S BACK! IT'S BACK! YOU HAVE TO BELIEVE ME!

(([Steward Manyeek] and [Shakes] run to [BILL]))

[BILL] pointing and shouting
LOOK RIGHT THERE!

((The wing is empty. Heavy rain beats down on the wing. A small flap from the cowling flutters))

[Steward Manyfeek] stern

Sir, if you can't behave yourself, I'll have to ask you to leave premium economy. You already have an exit row. That should give you more space. Know this however, if I'm forced to move you, we cannot refund the \$79 that you each paid to sit here.

[Shakes] worried

[BILL], I can't go back to the hoi-polloi in basic economy. Please pull yourself together!

[BILL] more frightened. side eyeing [GREMLIN] ripping up wing
I'll be good...

PUNCHLINE

He just wanted a bit more space.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This is from "Nightmare at 20,000 Feet," a Twilight Zone episode that was both in the series and the movie. John Lithgow and William Shatner play (depending if you're watching the movie or the series) a man with known flying phobias, who has acted out in the past during travel. This time, the poor man sees a monster tearing off the wing. He tries to alert the attendants, but the monster always hides whenever anyone else looks. The traveler finally loses it, is considered insane, and then we see the wing: the engine is damaged as if some monster was clawing at it.

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SETUP

What did the plumber say to the singer?

[Mario] with red hat with M on front, sitting in green pipe,
shouting downward

Hey Oh. [Toad]! Not so much cream in the alfredo! Cut it with
yogurt!

[Yoshi] flying via cloud

((BRINGS A CASE OF TOMATOES. DROPS DOWN INTO
PIPE. CHUNK-CHUNK-CHUNK. CASE DROPS INTO PIPE))

[Luigi] with green hat with L on front, not a loser, whining to
[Mario]

I was the older brother, Maaaario! I was the older brother! I
should be takin' care of you not the other way around!

[Pauline] with red sequined dress, wife of not-loser [Luigi],
intoxicated

Wheersh everybody! I wanna dance! Can I sing!

(([Pauline] sings!))

| It's time to jump up in the air

| Jeeump up, don't be scareeeeed

| Jump up and your cares weeeell sowar awayeeee

| And if the dark clouds start to swirl

(([Pauline] spins and falls down. Laughs. Tries and fails to get
up))

[Pauline] yelling

Schomebody help meeee up, please!

(([Mario] whispers into [BULLET BILL]'s ear))

(([BULLET BILL], a large sentient fired bullet, hovering,
listens and nods))

[BULLET BILL], a large sentient fired bullet, talking to
[Luigi], avoiding [Pauline]

[Luigi], [Mario] says if you can't keep [Pauline] under
control? Well, he wants me to do it.

[Luigi] defeated, hands in face.

Yeah. You better do that [BILL]. Sorry...

[BULLET BILL] taps [Luigi] on the shoulder

It's ok, man. No problem...

(([BULLET BILL], a large sentient fired bullet, hovering
towards [Pauline]))

[BULLET BILL] bodily picks up [Pauline]

I think that's enough little lady...

[Pauline] angry

What! I'm trying to have some fun for chaaaange!

((PUKING. LOOKING UP.))

I know you italians! Always cooking the PAAAASTA! Hah!

(([BULLET BILL] walks out with [Pauline]))

[Mario] hand on [Luigi]'s shoulder

You'll always be my brother, [Luigi]. Maybe pick an Italian
wife next time...

PUNCHLINE

Nice pipes.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This is from *The Godfather*, Part II. Fredo's wife makes a scene after getting ugly drunk. Michael sends Al Neri to take her bodily off the dance floor — after first asking Fredo's permission. It goes as well as you might expect.

SETUP

How do you make an octopus laugh?

[Hastur, He Who Is Not to Be Named] annoyed, very yellow
I told you this wouldn't work

[Cthulhu, High Priest of the Great Old Ones] anxious, face
worms moving, feather duster in hand.

I saw Mr. Beast do this on YouTube. It totally will work.

(([Octopus] on table, slowly crawling off))

[Cthulhu, High Priest of the Great Old Ones]

((Cthulhu wiggles feather duster))

Tickle-tickely squiddy-poo!

[Hastur, He Who Is Not to Be Named]

You just called him a squid. He's not going to laugh if you
insult him!

[Cthulhu, High Priest of the Great Old Ones] angry.

((Cthulhu slams feather duster on table))

Well, I don't see you doing much of *anything* to help. What do
you have?

[Hastur, He Who Is Not to Be Named] pulling out yellow joke
book

I have some knock-knock jokes?

[Cthulhu, High Priest of the Great Old Ones] resigned

Knock-knock? Have we sunk that low, Hastur?

[Hastur, He Who Is Not to Be Named]

Don't call me that. I just got here. Here let me try this one. It's good.

((Cthulhu sighs))

[Hastur, He Who Is Not to Be Named] reading from yellow joke book

Knock-knock!

(([Octopus] on table, slowly crawling off))

[Hastur, He Who Is Not to Be Named] whispering to

[Cthulhu, High Priest of the Great Old Ones]

Do his part! He can't talk!

[Cthulhu, High Priest of the Great Old Ones]

Who's there?

[Hastur, He Who Is Not to Be Named]

Dishes!

[Cthulhu, High Priest of the Great Old Ones]

Dishes who?

[Hastur, He Who Is Not to Be Named]

Dishes THE POLICE! EVERYBODY FREEZE!

HAHAHAHAHAHA!

(([Cthulhu, High Priest of the Great Old Ones] stares))

(([Octopus] on table, slowly crawling off))

[Hastur, He Who Is Not to Be Named]

Damn, I was sure that would do it...

PUNCHLINE

With ten-tickles.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

These are “Great Old Ones” in H.P. Lovecraft’s canon of misery and hate. Cthulhu is some “cosmic” entity that is “above” us all in some fashion. Hastur is my favorite as, purportedly, you’re not allowed to even use his name or he comes and makes you watch a really bad play. The play is so bad that you go insane. When I was a child, Ibsen would have qualified. Hastur’s play is titled “The King in Yellow”; his color is “yellow.” Anyway, yeah, people read this stuff.

SETUP

What do you call a fibbing cat?

[BILL] qua African leopard, in tree, spotted

No, I'm not coming down. I'll eat up here thank you.

[Manyfeek] qua African lion, patchy mane, looking up at

[BILL]

I am not after the antelope, guy. It's just you should be eating like that.

[BILL]

I eat all my meals in a tree. I'm fine.

[Manyfeek]

No. I'm telling you. You're going to shorten your life that way. You need to eat on the ground. Keep your digestive system in a straight line.

[BILL]

What are you on about? My entire family ate antelope in trees. Everyone was fi...

[Manyfeek]

Now you remember, right? All of your family died young. It's the tree eating. Throw down the antelope and I'll show you how to eat flat, on the ground, like a cat should.

[BILL]

HAH! You think I was born yesterday. I was born at least 18 months ago surely. NO! I'm eating up here.

[Manyfeek]

OK. I mean I'm just trying to help. I went vegan last year and between that and the flat eating...

[BILL]

You went VEGAN? Now that's rich! What do you eat?

[Manyfeek]

You know. The typical. Seitan dik-dik, tofu eland, and there's this mushroom thing that tastes just like a guinea fowl? It even has the spots!

[BILL] confused

Well, ok. I guess you have gone vegan. I'll toss down my antelope and we should talk...

PUNCHLINE

A lion.

SETUP

Want to hear a joke about paper?

[BILL] qua Ivan IV, the Terrible
Has anyone seen today's newspaper?

[Shakes] qua Anastasia, [BILL]'s fictional wife
Are you sure you didn't leave it in the bathroom? You spend
like an hour in there. Are you eating enough black rye? You
can't just stuff mutton down all meal.

[BILL]
My bowels are fine; you're projecting. Let me go look there
now.

(([BILL] walking down palace hallway. Opens secret door to
commode))

[BILL] yelling back to [Shakes]
Yeah! You're right! It's here. Heh: serfs acting up. I'll smack
'em later.

[Shakes] yelling from throne room
Is there any toilet paper left in there? You used the last roll
and I hate pulling the velvet rope in there for a serf!

[BILL] yelling back to [Shakes] looking in cabinet
Ugh. We are OUT! Do you think we should just get a Toto?
The Japanese ones seem so clean and, well, I could feel
fresher...

PUNCHLINE

Never mind. It's tearable.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Ivan IV was called “the Terrible.” From what I know about his treatment of his people, he earned that approbation.

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SETUP

Why did the scarecrow get a promotion?

[BILL] driving and talking

Let me do the talking when we get there, ok?

[KayCEE] attentive

Of course, I know he can be a bit of a four at times.

[BILL] turning

Yes, but we need him. So, be nice and charitable. Oh, we're here. Let me park.

((BILL and KayCEE park at edge of cornfield))

((BILL and KayCEE emerge from mid size rental car))

[BILL] holding hand over eyes to block sun.

He's there. Doing his thing. Let's watch.

((BILL and KayCEE watch))

((SCARECROW sits patiently. Has handful of corn in hand))

((Two CROWS watch the corn from a distance))

((They fly to the SCARECROWS arm.))

((They slowly hop towards his hand))

[SCARECROW] eyes point to crows, hand crushes one immediately

Take that, Corvid!

((OTHER CROW FLIES OFF FAST))

[SCARECROW] drawing large semi-automatic pistol
If I have a heart...

((BOOM! CROW EXPLODES FROM BULLET!))

[SCARECROW] putting gun away.
... you just broke it.

[BILL] approaching
So, hey! [SCARECROW] great work out here!

[SCARECROW] stern, uncommittal.
Nobody said shit after I killt like I dunno 40 odd birds when
Dorothy needed help. Nobody done anything for me when the
flying freaking monkey come rip out my straw or nothing...

[KayCEE] offering
That's why were here. A promotion. Have you ever considered
media buying?

PUNCHLINE

He was outstanding in his field.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

If you read the actual Wizard of Oz, a book by L. Frank Baum, you'll be surprised when the jolly old scarecrow is sent off to defend Dorothy from some crows. He walks out and breaks the necks of forty birds without breaking a sweat. The Tin Man, the guy with the missing heart, kills forty wolves. So, yeah, don't mess with Dorothy's friends. They'll mess you up.

SETUP

Where does Napoleon keep his armies?

[BILL] qua Napoleon, stacked high with buttercream and crispy wafers, surveying the battlefield.

Je crois qu'il ne reste que la Garde Impériale.

::SUBTITLE: I think only my Imperial Guard, the pride of our nation, is left.::

((Across the battlefield, [Shakes] qua Wellington awaits for French hostilities))

[Shakes] qua Wellington, wrapped in pastry, filled with meat and chanterelles, surveying the battlefield.

Napoleon is doomed. The wet weather will weaken the French patisserie. They will wilt against our resolve!

[Shakes] ordering his men

Hold fast men of beef and potatoes! We hold the high ground and the decadent French dessert course will meet a savory end at the hands of English cuisine!

[Potatoes, Fried Fish Fillets, Fried Potatoes, Tikka Masala] shouting

Hip hip hooray for the British, the most oppressed people of this earth!

((Returning to the French, [BILL] prepares his forces for the assault))

[BILL] opens his sleeves, deploys the mighty Imperial Guard
Imperial French Patisserie! Your nation calls for your mighty
sword! Call to me, now!

[St. Honore] armed with choux cannon balls, appears from
sleeve.

Mes boulets vont écraser ces mangeurs de patates anglais!
::SUBTITLE: My balls will cream the English!::

[Croquembouche] with bonded chain projectile, appears from
sleeve.

Ces chaînes collantes feront fuir aux abris même un tikka
masala!
::SUBTITLE: Watch out, Tikka! You're my next meal!::

[Baba au rhum] ablaze with blue fire, appears from sleeve.
Le feu sur mon cœur est bleu, mais mon esprit est bleu, blanc
et rouge!
::SUBTITLE: I'm finally going to cook British food correctly!
With FIRE!::

[Kouign-amann] the international spy
Ma couche complexe par-dessus mes combines par-dessus
mes plans tordra les rosbifs en haggis!
::SUBTITLE: My twisty ways will find a way to Wellington's
heart!::

[BILL] pointing large éclair towards the troops
Sus à l'ennemi!
::SUBTITLE: Get them, men!::

[St. Honore], [Croquembouche], [Baba au rhum], [Kouign-
amann] shouting together, turning and advancing uphill
towards English
En avant! Vive l'Empereur!
::SUBTITLE: Yes! We charge for [BILL]!::

((Across the battlefield, [Shakes] qua Wellington looks downhill))

[Shakes] cruelly

There they are men. The soggy remnants of a failed cuisine!

Look at them fall apart as they slog uphill!

[Shakes] pointing a chip (which is a French Fry in this context)

Show them their folly! Unleash HELL!

[Haggis] rolls out

You called, sire?

PUNCHLINE

In his sleeveies.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This is a dad joke that I actually used. It *killed*. My kids loved this one. So, I gave it a full battle scene between English pies and fried goods versus French pastries. Here's the real French translations:

“Je crois qu’il ne reste que la Garde Impériale.” = “I think only the Imperial Guard remains.” (The Imperial Guard was Napoleon’s elite reserve, deployed only at decisive moments.)

“Mes boulets vont écraser ces mangeurs de patates anglais!” = “My cannonballs will crush these English potato-eaters!”
 (“Mangeurs de patates” is French slang for the English.)

“Ces chaînes collantes feront fuir aux abris même un tikka masala!” = “These sticky chains will send even a tikka masala running for the shelters!”

“Le feu sur mon cœur est bleu, mais mon esprit est bleu, blanc et rouge!” = “The fire on my heart is blue, but my spirit is blue, white, and red!” (The blue-white-red of the French tricolor.)

“Ma couche complexe par-dessus mes combines par-dessus mes plans tordra les rosbifs en haggis!” = “My complex layer over my schemes over my plans will twist the rosbifs into haggis!” (“Rosbifs” = “roast beefs,” French slang for the British.)

“Sus à l’ennemi!” = “At the enemy!” / “Charge!” (An old French military command.)

“En avant! Vive l’Empereur!” = “Forward! Long live the Emperor!”

The pastries:

St. Honoré — A round puff-pastry base ringed with caramelized choux puffs filled with chiboust cream (pastry cream lightened with Italian meringue). The little choux balls around the perimeter are the “cannonballs” of the chapter. Named after the patron saint of bakers.

Croquembouche — Literally “crunch in the mouth.” A tall conical tower of choux puffs bound together by hard caramel threads — the “sticky chains” of the chapter. Traditional at French weddings and baptisms.

Baba au rhum — A small yeast cake drenched in rum syrup, often flambéed at the table (rum burns blue, hence the blue fire). Possibly invented in 18th-century Lorraine, usually served with whipped cream.

Kouign-amann — A Breton specialty whose name means “butter cake” in Breton. Laminated croissant-style dough with sugar folded in, producing crisp caramelized layers — the “complex layers” of the chapter. Crunchy outside, soft and buttery inside.

SETUP

What's a lawyer's favorite drink?

[Manyfeek, esq.] qua Chlamydia, at Karaoke
 Hey everybody, I consider this my personal theme song. It
 goes a little like this...

[Manyfeek, esq.] singing
 ((MUSIC: Escape by Rupert Holmes))

|| I was tired of my partner
 || We'd been together too long
 || Like a worn out recording
 || Of a favorite song
 || So while she lay there sleepin
 || I read the paper in bed
 || And in the personal columns
 || There was this letter I read

|| If you like subpoena coladas
 || And gettin' caught in the rain
 || If you're not into yoga
 || If you have half a brain
 || If you like making money after midnight
 || In the dunes on the cape
 || Then I'm the love that you've looked for
 || Write to me and litigate

PUNCHLINE

A subpoena colada.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This is just Escape (The Piña Colada Song) with a couple of edits for a lawyer. I do believe that this song would be Chlamydia's theme song, if venereal diseases had theme songs. I'll let you imagine some more right now...

SETUP

What did Sony release during the pandemic?

[BILL] qua plague doctor, Sony executive
Where did I put my beaked mask again? I always just drop it
and forget where I left it.

[Shakes] qua plague doctor, Sony executive
I think everybody put the travel stuff at the back of the
conference room? Did you check at that end of the table?

[BILL]
Thanks, [Shakes], I see it. I left my leeches in there and I'll
need them for the presentation.

(([BILL] walks to back of conference room. Reaches into
beaked mask and finds leeches. Walks back up.))

[BILL] presenting, leech in each hand
Hey everybody out there? Can you hear me?

((Large group of plague doctors nods))

[BILL]
Great! OK. I am so excited for this demo of our new hardware!
It's a brand new gaming experience that everyone in the
entire family will enjoy!

[BILL]
That's right! It's Plaguestation 5 LEECHES!
(([BILL] pushes hands forward and shows a red headed leech
in one hand and a blue headed one in the other))

((Large group of plague doctors murmurs approvals and some ooohs!))

[BILL]

I know you're all super excited to see some gameplay! So, I'm not going to bore you with more chit-chat! Let's play! Let's play PS5-LEECHES!

(([Shakes] is wheeled in with wooden oxcart))

[Shakes] qua ill woman, multiple buboes, wan, sweating
Save me, kind doctor!

(([BILL] jams red PS5-LEECH to buboes when they flash red))

(([BILL] jams blue PS5-LEECH to buboes when they flash blue))

[BILL] turning

Phew! That was fun *and* a good workout too!

PUNCHLINE

The Plaguestation 5.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This is just a riff on your typical "motion controller" demo applied to a plague doctor's standard treatment.

SETUP

What's the difference between a wizard who raises the undead and a sexy vampire?

[BILL undead] lithe, graceful, like always, sings
 | A fine necromance with no kisses
 | A fine necromance, my friend, this is
 | We should be like a couple of hot tomatoes
 | But you're as cold as yesterday's mashed potatoes!

[Shakes, sexy vampire] walking backward
 | A fine necromance, you won't nestle
 | A fine necromance, you won't wrestle
 | I might as well play bridge with my old maid aunt
 | I haven't got a chance, this is a fine necromance!

(([BILL undead] and [Shakes, sexy vampire] dance the lights fantastic as only a lumbering person can))

[Shakes, sexy vampire] sings
 | A fine necromance, my good fellow
 | You take necromance, I'll take Jell-O
 | You're calmer than the seals in the Arctic ocean
 | At least they flap their fins to express emotion

[BILL undead]
 | A fine necromance with no quarrels
 | With no insults and all morals
 | I've never mussed the crease in your blue serge pants
 | I never get the chance, this is a fine necromance!

(([BILL undead] and [Shakes, sexy vampire] laugh and then walk off))

PUNCHLINE

One is a necromancer and the other is a neck romancer.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This is from *Swing Time*, an early Astaire-Rogers musical. The song is “A Fine Romance” and is a song I loved as a child. I was fortunate to see this at the Castro Theater, a true art deco masterpiece. It’s a core childhood memory.

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SETUP

Why were there so many Lances in medieval times?

[BILL] qua Sir Lance Armstrong, tiny upper body, centaur
((very small squeaky voice))

Hey! Good sir! How go ye!

[Shakes] qua Sir Lance Bass, paladin, golden maned
And baby, I'ma hold you tight!!!

[KayCEE]

qua Sir Lance Ito, cleric, helmed

What thou seetheth with thine very eyes! That is truth!

[GAMS] qua Sir Lance Henriksen, armed with dagger
((PUTS DAGGER POINT BETWEEN TOES AND
ALTERNATES TOE TO TOE AT HIGHER AND HIGHER
SPEED))

[Manyfeek] qua Sir Lance Burton, wizard cloaked and pointy
hat with stars and crescent moons

::OBSCENITY REDACTED::-alacal::-OBSCENITY
REDACTED::-alacalzam!

(([FOOTBALL PLAYER] qua Sir Lance Alworth runs across
the field))

PUNCHLINE

Because they were called lance-a-lot.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

I asked Claude for a list of famous people named Lance. These were the best. Lance Armstrong is a legendary Tour de France cheater with huge legs. Lance Bass was a singer in some boy band. Lance Ito presided over the OJ Simpson murder trial and was strangely ineffective in his job. Lance Henriksen is an actor; he's doing the famous "fast-knife-between-each-finger" thing here that happens in *Aliens*, a great movie. Lance Burton is an old-school Vegas magician. Lance Alworth is a famous football player.

SETUP

What do you call a wizard who's really bad at football?

[BILL] elf, PR manager, FULLY AND NATTILY CLOTHED
((gravelly voice))

I really don't know what to do with her anymore.

[Shakes] qua Cho Chang
Well. You could have my name.

[Manyfeek] qua Neville Longbottom
Oh. Like you suffered. I was directly taunted for, I don't know, years? Mainly about my lack of orthodontics? Sure, I could have washed more, but this is England.

[KayCEE] qua Hermione Granger
Well, I'm fine with how I was portrayed in the films. Very accurate to her vision, I'd say?

[BILL] looking at [KayCEE]
((gravelly voice))
She called you a bitch like on Twitter or something? How do you take that? I mean do we respond? How do I watch the new series on HBO Max now? I mean this might be Lithgow's last big role?

[Shakes]
Lithgow said he's fine with my name? Did he say that?

[BILL]

((gravelly voice))

I don't think he said anything like that, but you know, John Lithgow deserves a big hit, right? I mean he did that stuff with the sasquatch and then that alien stuff for years. He was great in Conclave! I mean come on? Right?

[Manyfeek]

No. I'm sorry. I'm out.

[KayCEE]

Yeah. Uh. I'm going to go to the UN or something...

(([[Shakes] qua Cho Chang staring at [BILL]]))

PUNCHLINE

Fumbledore.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This is all related to Harry Potter and the complete devastation that J.K. Rowling has produced on social media. Talk about a “Fumbledore.” I have no idea why Ms. Rowling is so passionate about her hate for trans women, but it's stained an entire generation's touchstone. It's totally incomprehensible to me; even if she really believes this stuff, man, keep it to yourself.

SETUP

What's a guitar player's favorite Italian food?

(([BILL] miming being a marionette))

((MUSIC STARTS))

[BILL] dancing and singing!

| I've got no strings

| To hold me down

| To make me fret

| Or make me frown

| I had strings

| But now I'm free

| There are no strings on me!

[Manyfeek] qua Strum-boli, twisty mustachio, twisty

HOY! BOY! That's a very nice-a! So sing-a so sweet-a? We
should-a make-a like-a one-a bag-a quarters from-a these
dope-as!

[BILL] dancing and singing! walking sassily!

| Hi-ho the me-ri-o

| That's the only way to go

| I want the world to know

| Nothing ever worries me!

((Nine dollars in quarters and dimes rain on stage!))

[Manyfeek]

HOY! BOY-A! WEZ-A SO REEECH!

PUNCHLINE

Strum-boli.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This is from Pinocchio, Disney's animated version. If you find [Manyfeek]'s accent offensive, try watching the movie. Stromboli is an all-time negative Italian portrayal.

SETUP

Where did Uncle Frank want to be buried?

[BILL] qua Gene Wilder, in black and white, pushing cart
Oh. We need to get this body back to the lab!

[Manyfeek] qua Marty Feldman, in black and white, pushing
cart
Yes! Master!

((Both men push heavy cart with tarp up steep rain slick
cobblestones))
((The cart breaks away and smashes on the wall at the bottom
of the slope))
((A [HUMAN ARM] juts out from the cart's broken side.
Some raw earth hits the cobblestones))

[BILL] racing down hill
You idiot, you almost broke the cart!

(([Manyfeek] dives into cart with body))

[KayCEE] qua local bobbie, hearing a noise
Hey! What goes there?

[BILL] trying to hide [HUMAN ARM] by having it "replace"
his own
((([HUMAN ARM] moved to show "hi" sign))
HI! THERE!

[KayCEE] staring at [BILL]
Is that you Dr. Frankenstein?

[BILL]

It's Fronkensteen!

PUNCHLINE

In his beer mug — he wanted to be Frank in Stein.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This is my ode to Young Frankenstein, a truly great comedy. If you like my humor, you should watch it.

SETUP

What brand of underwear do scientists wear?

[BILL] with headgear, looking at us, reporting live
 Hi everyone! I'm super excited to bring you today's fashion show, but this isn't about me, I'm just going to point the camera and let this year's Victoria's Secret Scientist Angels do their thing for you!

[Isaac Newton] nearly nude, wearing push up bra, garters, high heels, and fairy wings
 ([[Isaac] walks like a stomping Lipizzaner stallion down the runway.))
 ((([Isaac] stops. pouts and poses. turns and stomps back up the runway))

[Charles Darwin] nearly nude, wearing push up bra, garters, high heels, and fairy wings
 ((([Charles] walks like a stomping Lipizzaner stallion down the runway.))
 ((([Charles] stops. pouts and poses. turns and stomps back up the runway))

[Jonas Salk] nearly nude, wearing push up bra, garters, high heels, and fairy wings

...

PUNCHLINE

Kelvin Klein.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This is the Victoria's Secret "fashion" show with "angels" replaced by famous scientists. The repetition is intentional as, from what little I've seen, it's just a parade of semi-naked women.

SETUP

How many rings are there in marriage?

[BILL] qua Gordon Liu which makes his greased shirtlessness acceptable

Hey now! Where do I find the Three Ringed Shaolin Temple of Marital Pain!

(([BILL]'s mouth while speaking this strangely does not match any of this))

[Shakes] qua Kara Hui and ready to kick ass

Hey you! Where? Over there! The Temple is there? Can I take you!

[BILL] holding fist in palm, bowing

Yes!

(([BILL] and [Shakes] sneak into the empty courtyard of the Three Ringed Shaolin Temple of Marital Pain))

((Both fail to see they've crossed the Engagement Ring!))

((MUSIC: STING! BOW WOW!))

[Manyfeek] with long white beard that reaches his toes. He flips it to the left

HEH! You fools! You're engaged now!

(([Manyfeek] attacks. [BILL] and [Shakes] work together. It's kinda like a strange square dance))

[BILL] arms over head, pointing fists like beaks

HOP! HO! HUP!

[Shakes] pushing a polearm with an aluminum foil blade
through [BILL] and [Manyfeek] fighting
HEE! YAH! WAH! HEE!

[Manyfeek] hit by [BILL]
((SFX: CRACKING BOARD))

(([Manyfeek] backs up. Grips chest. Bite blood pack. Drools))

(([BILL] sneers. Thumbs nose. Makes “come on” fingers at
[Manyfeek]))

(([Manyfeek] jumps back, counter-attacks, squats, and throws
his arms wildly))
HAH! HEE! HO! HUP!

PUNCHLINE

*Three: the engagement ring, the wedding ring, and the
suffer-ring.*

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This is a Shaw Brothers kung-fu homage. I'm no kung-fu expert, but I've seen about ten to twelve of these. I believe the long white beard, also seen in the Kill Bill movies, is a very famous image in kung-fu.

50

SETUP

What kind of fruit do ghosts like?

[BILL] qua Yogi Bear, at seance, eyes closed
Please, I just need to hear from him. Just one more time.

[Shakes] qua Cindy Bear, at seance, eyes closed, holding
[BILL]'s hand
I know we'll hear from him!

[Manyfeek] qua Ranger Smith, at seance, holding [BILL]'s
and [Shakes]'s hands
Spirits from the beyond! We call to you! Ring a bell if you are
here!

((The lights in the dim room flicker))
((A soft bell is heard somewhere))

[Shakes] shaking.
He's here! Talk to him, [BILL]

[BILL] talking
Hey, hey, hey, Boo-Boo!
You gotta Pic-a-nic basket where you are?

((a soft voice calls back...))

[VOICE FROM BEYOND!]
I don't know, Yogi...

PUNCHLINE

Boo-berries.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Yogi Bear was a cartoon from my childhood. Cindy was Yogi's love interest and Boo-Boo was his long-suffering partner-in-crime (stealing Pic-a-nic baskets). Ranger Smith was Yogi's foil. "I don't know, Yogi" was Boo-Boo's constant failing attempts to get Yogi to revise a poor plan.

SETUP

What happens when frogs park illegally?

[BILL] qua Otto, a frog, a repo man
 Hey [Shakes], how's it going man? CROAK!
 ((([BILL] holds hands over fire that [Shakes] is tending in an
 overturned oil drum))

[Shakes] qua Miller, a frog, a repo man
 RIBBIT! Pretty good. Just here thinking. RIBBIT!
 ((([Shakes] pokes at fire with stick))

[BILL] confused
 Thinking about - CROAK! - what man?

[Shakes] thoughtful
 The universe man. RIBBIT! The universe is all connected.
 RIBBIT!

[BILL] questioning
 Connected?

[Shakes] expanding
 Yeah, man. You might - RIBBIT! - be walking by some flies, or
 thinking about plates. Then boom, you see a plate of flies.
 RIBBIT! There's no good reason for it and no reason to look
 for it. RIBBIT! It's just part of some giant toad cosmic
 unconsciousness that you'll never understand.

[BILL] accepting
 Huh. CROAK! Well, I'm hungry now. Catch you later [Shakes]

[Shakes]

Yeah. RIBBIT! Man, catch you later.

PUNCHLINE

They get toad.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This is from Repo Man, a punk movie that features a chase to find nuclear waste or alien bodies in an old car. Emilio Estevez, a new repo man, plays Otto. He speaks to Miller, an experienced repo man, played by Tracey Walter, who gives a famous speech about “shrimp” or “plate of shrimp.”

SETUP

What do you call bears with no ears?

[B.] qua Winston, records department Ministry of Truth
(Minitrue)

(([B.] whispering into microphone))

Redact names. Doubleplus ungood. Ursine overspell. Remove ears.

(([B.] opens newspaper. Places tape over the word “Bears”
and leaves “B.” behind))

(([B.] puts newspaper into pneumatic tube carrier and sends))

(([B.] receives a new pneumatic tube carrier))

(([B.] opens paper. Sighs))

[B.]

(([B.] whispering into microphone))

Quadrupleplus ungood. Male parental humor. Route Miniluv
room 101.

PUNCHLINE

1.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This is from 1984, Orwell’s magnum opus. Winston works at
“Minitrue” and removes text from past documents that the
Party finds problematic in the present. The use of tape,

microphones, and pneumatic tubes is the typical imagery within “Minitrue.” “Miniluv” is their secret police headquarters where you are taken to Room 101 in order to finally break you. Your greatest fear is used. In this case, Winston is suggesting that dad jokes could be used for torture.

53

SETUP

What's an astronaut's favorite part of the computer?

[BILL] full moon suit on, gold chain over helmet, Axe for Space applied

Pssht! Over. Houston. Come in!

[Shakes] qua Houston Control

Roger, [BILL]. Houston control here. What's your status?

Over!

[BILL]

Pssht! Houston. Permission to engage pick-up attempt. Over.

Pssht!

[Shakes]

Pssht! Roger. Starting pick-up attempt in 3, 2 and 1. GO!

Pssht!

(([BILL] hop stepping to bar where [KayCEE] is waiting))

(([BILL] taps [KayCEE] on her shoulder))

(([KayCEE] in full moon suit, turns to [BILL]))

(([BILL] writing on white board))

[BILL] display on white board

Are you Hesperus or Phosphorus?

(([KayCEE] writing on her white board))

[KayCEE] display on white board

What?! I can't hear you!

(([BILL] writing on white board))

[BILL]

Because either way, I want to see you in the morning!

(([KayCEE] writing on her white board))

[KayCEE]

Please leave me alone, my boyfriend is in the bathroom and he'll kick you into orbit!

(([BILL] writing on white board))

[BILL]

OK. OK. Sorry!

(([BILL] hop stepping away from bar))

[BILL]

Pssht! Houston. Do you read? Pssht!

[Shakes]

Pssht! Houston Control. Ready for departure? Which destination? Your place or hers? Over. Pssht!

[BILL]

Pssht! Negatory. Pick-up attempt failed. Over. Please advise. Pssht!

[Shakes]

Pssht! Roger that. New pickup line incoming. Over. Pssht!

[BILL]

Pssht! Negatory. Possible angry boyfriend arriving. Over. Please advise. Pssht!

[Shakes]

Pssht! Roger that. Hold in position as we attempt to acquire new target. Satellite imaging from your position inbound. Hold. Pssht!

[BILL]

Pssht! Houston we are moving outside the bar. Angry boyfriend appearing. Pssht!

[Shakes]

Pssht! Roger that. Hold outside. Pssht!

PUNCHLINE

The Space Bar.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

My poor lunar expedition isn't going well. At least, I'm not dead at the end of this one.

54

SETUP

What do you call it when James Bond takes a bath?

[Manyfeek] qua 007, English super-spy, Scottish, dead sexy, singing

((BATHING IN HUGE MOUND OF BUBBLES))

(([Manyfeek] with two small action figures))

DEW-DA-DEW-DA! DEW-DA-DEW-DA! BA NA NA!

BANNA! Pew! Pew! That's a Shmish and Wesshion; yoursh had your shix.

[Manyfeek] continues, points fingers as gun

Yesh, my Washtheir PPK ish fully loaded!

(([Manyfeek] tosses one action figure into the bubbles))

[Manyfeek] with fake accent

AAAAAH! I've shbeen shot by 007!

[KayCEE] yelling from outside

[Manyfeek] are you actually washing in there?! We need to get going soon!

(([Manyfeek] drops the remaining figure))

[Manyfeek] yelling back

It'll be just a minute more!

PUNCHLINE

Bubble 07.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

[Manyfeek] attempts to mimic the famous James Bond theme, kills a “baddie” using typical 007 dialogue, and the “baddie” dies.

SETUP

What do you call a fish wearing a bowtie?

[BILL] qua Grouper, wearing business suit, double Windsor knotted tie

Hi, we have reservations? A party of three.

[KayCEE] qua Barracuda, host, wearing a tuxedo, bowtie
Oh, Mr. [BILL], I see you right here. Yes, but we do have a dress code for the dining room.

[Manyfeek] qua Juvenile Grouper, wearing all-black, black eyeshadow, black fins, and a Korn T-shirt
I told you I didn't want to come, dad!

[KayCEE]
It's not a problem at all, young master [Manyfeek]. Please come with me into the coat room.

(([KayCEE] and [Manyfeek] leave and enter coat room))

[Shakes] qua Grouper, wearing cocktail dress
Do you think they'll be OK, [BILL]?

[BILL]
It's fine. They're just giving him some loaners.

(([Manyfeek]'s::OBSCENITY REDACTED:: is muffled but very audible))

(([KayCEE] and [Manyfeek] return from coat room.))

[Manyfeek]
((([Manyfeek] has overlarge blue blazer now over Korn T-shirt.
His necktie is only partially done))
I hate eating out.

PUNCHLINE

Sofishticated.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Restaurants used to have “dress codes.” Many of them would have the host judge whether your attire was acceptable. If not, men were offered random extra clothes so there wasn’t a “violation.” This is kind of a shaming technique and is very effective. You don’t want to be the dork in the room wearing a rental sports jacket and tie.

SETUP

How did Darth Vader know what Luke got him for Christmas?

[BILL] qua Darth Vader, Evil Lord of the Sith
 ((Pussst! Ahhh!)) I hope my children enjoy their gifts this year.

(([BILL] force moves a star to the top of the tree))

(([Manyfeek] and [KayCEE] run from downstairs))

[Manyfeek] qua a child Luke, the new hope
 WOW! LOOK AT ALL THE GIFTS! THANKS, DAD!

[BILL]
 ((Pussst! Ahhh!)) Thanks, DAD? Santa brings the gifts down the tree!

[KayCEE] qua a child Leia, the extra one
 DAD! You're still pushing Santa?! Like THAT could happen!
 Travel across space and time in like a second?! Who would believe that?!

[BILL]
 ((Pussst! Ahhh!)) Well, then who are all these gifts for, I should take them bac...

[Manyfeek] glaring at Leia, whispering
 Don't spoil it!

[Manyfeek] back to [BILL]

We love Santa, dad! Let's open gifts!

[BILL] sending gift to [Manyfeek] via force push

((Pusssht! Ahhh!)) Haha! OK. First gift!

[Manyfeek] ripping open gift

What is it?!

[BILL] smiling but unseen given the mask

((Pusssht! Ahhh!)) It's at the bottom. Careful, it's a bit wet on the bottom.

[Manyfeek] pulling out severed head from box

AAAAAAAAAH!

[BILL]

((Pusssht! Ahhh!)) Haha! I'm glad you love it. Yep, that's Admiral Ozzel. He was not great. Very bad driver.

(([Manyfeek] continues to scream))

[BILL] continuing, force pushes gift to [KayCEE]

((Pusssht! Ahhh!)) Here's your first one [KayCEE]!

[KayCEE] tentative, opening

Is mine a head too, dad?

[BILL]

((Pusssht! Ahhh!)) You'll have to find out, but yours is wet on the bottom as well!

(([KayCEE] annoyed, turns box upside down))

((Head of Captain Needa rolls out))

(([KayCEE] crossing her arms in front of her))

[BILL]

((Pussst! Ahhh!)) Haha! I'm glad you like it! That's Needa. He needa a new head, I thinka. Haha!

[BILL] looking

OK. Let me find you kids your other heads, I mean, gifts...

PUNCHLINE

He felt his presents.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Darth Vader is canonically the parent of both Luke Skywalker and Princess Leia (but the parentage of Leia seemed like a post-hoc change from the original movie). Admiral Ozzel was “force choked” (i.e. death by telekinetic force on the neck) when he brought the fleet out of “hyperspace” too close to the target planet. The Empire lost the advantage of surprise and Ozzel paid the price. Needa? He needa a new neck after losing the Millennium Falcon in the asteroids in *The Empire Strikes Back*.

SETUP

I'm afraid for the calendar.

[BILL] standing outside factory gate, back of car open,
looking both ways
Hey! Need a calendar page? Need a calendar page?

((People walking by. Avoiding [BILL]))

[BILL] hawking
Hey! I got calendar pages here! You need to have this Spider-Man from April 1997; it's got black light! You can see the webs and everything! Only \$3 but no black light included in that price!

[KayCEE] in go-go outfit, earpiece in
Hey baby! I'd like a calendar!

(([Shakes] qua Sgt Crowley speaks in her ear: 'Get the planners and we got him'))

[BILL]
Yo! You know you do fine lady. I got Chippendales for August 2002. This guy must never eat cake and hasn't had a drink in DAYS!

[KayCEE] declines
No. That's not my style.

[KayCEE] leans in, whispers
I really need some 2027 Franklin Planners inserts. Can you help a lady out? Staples is bleeding me dry, man.

[BILL] suspicious

You know I can't sell calendars for the future little lady. That would be illegal.

[KayCEE] smiles

Yeah, but I know a big, strong, temporally sound man like yourself must have some inserts handy for a special customer. A customer like me?

[BILL] smirks

OK. Here's a couple months. I'll need...

[KayCEE] interrupts, pulls pistol

FREEZE CALENDAR BOY!

(([BILL] throws stack of 365 Word-A-Days and knocks over [KayCEE]))

(([BILL] races down street, [KayCEE] not too far behind))

PUNCHLINE

Its days are numbered.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

So, I used two callbacks here. [KayCEE] is still "Pepper" from Police Woman. [BILL] is still trying to sell calendar parts somehow. I also had a job where I tried and failed to use a Franklin Planner. Everyone else had one and used it well. After six months, my calendar looked like a grail diary and I still didn't know what meeting to go to.

58

SETUP

How does a man on the moon cut his hair?

[BILL] in full moon suit

Pssht! Houston Control? Over.

[Shakes] qua Houston Control

Pssht! Houston Control here. How do you read? Over.

[BILL]

Pssht! Confirm Houston. How many dad jokes involve being on the moon? Over.

[Shakes]

Pssht! Negatory [BILL]. Our 16KB memory space is inadequate for accurate assessment. Over.

[BILL]

Pssht! ((sigh)). Permission to execute hair cut on moon, Houston. Over.

[Shakes]

Pssht! You are green for clippers only on 3, 2 and 1. GO!

(([BILL] hobble stepping over to Supercuts))

[KayCEE] in full moon suit, proprietor, Supercuts, Sea of Tranquility

((HOLDING WHITE BOARD))

CARE FOR A SEAT SIR!

[BILL]
((HOLDING WHITE BOARD))
YES, I NEED A TRIM!

(([BILL] hobble stepping over to barber chair and sits))

[KayCEE] flips out a hair bib, it stays straight out, and then
settles on [BILL] after 30 seconds
((HOLDING WHITE BOARD TOWARD MIRROR))
HOW SHORT!

[BILL]
((HOLDING WHITE BOARD))
USE NUMBER 2, PLEASE.

[BILL] yanks off helmet
GASP! YOU GASP! WORK GASP! HERE GASP! LONG GASP!
(([KayCEE] trims the neck of [BILL]'s slumped over head))

PUNCHLINE

Eclipse it.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Yep. Another dad joke set on the moon. No idea why dad jokes so often reference the moon and space, but I have an arc going now with my lunar astronaut trying to do various absurd actions on the moon.

59

SETUP

A ham sandwich walks into a bar and orders a beer.

[BILL] qua Lardo on Sourdough
Hi! Bartender? May I have a beer, please?

[Manyfeek] qua Belfast on Rye
I'm sorry, we don't serve food here.

[BILL] confused, pointing at [Shakes]
What? Then who is that?

[Shakes] qua Limerick on White
What you painting at wee man?

[BILL] more confused
Painting?!

[Shakes]
Yes! Painting at me wit yer fengers!

[BILL] scared
I'm sorry. I just wanted a beer.

[KayCEE] qua Irish Bacon-Lettuce-Tomato
I'm sure there're plenty of bars down the street for Italians. I think you get the picture.

[BILL] backing out
OK.

PUNCHLINE

The bartender says, "Sorry, we don't serve food here."

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Lardo is an Italian ham made mostly of fat (hence, lardo). The other characters are Irish hams: Belfast, Limerick, and Irish Bacon. The Irish and Italian immigrant communities have clashed in the past.

SETUP

I hate my job — all I do is crush cans all day.

[BILL] qua factory worker, red forehead, waiting in front of conveyor belt.

Hey. [Shakes]! You ready for another shift!

[Shakes] qua other worker, black and blue forehead, waiting in front of conveyor belt.

Yo! [BILL], my man! TGIF! Am I right? Brewskies like immediately after?!

((FACTORY BUZZER FIRES OFF. LIGHTS FLASH. CONVEYOR STARTS))

[BILL] watching row of cans heading his way.

You bet, [Shakes]! As long as I don't have a headache!

(([BILL] slams forehead down on aluminum can. Returns upright. Forehead redder.))

[Shakes] qua factory worker, watching row of cans heading his way.

You always complain! You know what my dad said!

(([Shakes] slams forehead down on aluminum can. Eyes slightly crossed when returning upright.))

[BILL]

Ah, your dad is an old timer here? What was it like?

(([BILL] slams forehead down on aluminum can. Returns upright. Forehead redder.))

(([Shakes] slams forehead down on aluminum can. Eyes slightly crossed when returning upright.))

(([BILL] slams forehead down on aluminum can. Returns upright. Forehead redder.))

[Shakes]

He said this job was a lot harder in his day! Steel cans! No aluminum!

(([Shakes] slams forehead down on aluminum can. Eyes slightly crossed when returning upright.))

(([BILL] slams forehead down on aluminum can. Returns upright. Forehead redder.))

[BILL]

Yeah! I've seen your dad!

(([BILL] slams forehead down on aluminum can. Returns upright. Forehead redder.))

[BILL]

He's got that old man circle on his forehead that those steel guys get?

(([Shakes] slams forehead down on aluminum can. Eyes slightly crossed when returning upright.))

[Shakes]

Yeah! Those were the days! When men were men!

PUNCHLINE

It's soda pressing.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

I visited a Vans shoe factory as a white-collar advertising worker. There was a man who was responsible for pulling out the vulcanized rubber waffle soles that Vans shoes are so well known for. The red-hot plate filled with shoe molds would come out of the oven every five minutes. He was told two things: wait for the soles to cool before removing them, AND hit your quota. The quota wouldn't allow for the cooling. So, all day long, he was grabbing very hot rubber as quickly as he could to avoid bad burns. Do not wish for manufacturing jobs to return to America. Build robots and get rid of this work.

61

SETUP

Why is Peter Pan always flying?

[BILL] qua Peter Pan, Platinum Double Diamond Delta Plus
Mileage Tier 3 holder
Stewardess?

[Shakes] qua Delta Business Class Cabin Deluxe SuperStar 40
Year Team Player
Yes, Mr. [BILL]. What can I get for you?

[BILL]
Hi, Yeah. I'm not getting the Wi-Fi connected here at my seat?

[Shakes] as if the world might end
I'm sorry, sir. Let me check that now. Be right back.

(([Shakes] leaves and returns))

[Shakes] returning
So, I found the issue. You've run out of points. So, if you could
give me a credit card, I could...

[BILL] angry
Run out of points? I've been back and forth from Neverland
through Atlanta like eight times this year alone?

[Shakes]
I'm sorry, sir. Let me check that now. Be right back.

(([Shakes] leaves and returns))

[Shakes]

So, I found the issue. Wendy, well, there was this shopping trip with the mermaids and Tiger Lily? Well, they used them for a spa day?

[BILL] resigned

Here's my card.

PUNCHLINE

Because he Neverlands.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

I hate flying on business and I pity folks who end up in these traps. The “frequent flier” who gets “free things” from the airline with no sense of irony. The “helper” who either really believes that a customer complaint is the end of the world, or, even sadder, feels the need to perform for us.

SETUP

I was just reminiscing about the beautiful herb garden I had growing up.

[Manyfeek] qua J-J, finishing a painting
This picture is. ((TURNS TO CAMERA)) DY-NO-MITE!

((LAUGHTER FROM AUDIENCE. CLAPPING.))

[Shakes] qua Florida, looking at a stack of bills
That's nice, J-J.

[BILL] qua James
I can get an extra job...

[Manyfeek]
I'm going to be RICH! I'll sell this painting to the Louvre!
((TURNS TO CAMERA)) DY-NO-MITE!

((LAUGHTER FROM AUDIENCE. CLAPPING.))

[BILL]
Maybe I could sell plasma again...

PUNCHLINE

Good thymes.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Good Times was a television show in the 1970s. “J-J” was the ur-Urkel with a catchphrase: “Dyn-o-mite.” It happened once on the show and became mandatory for all future episodes. This was paired with a serious family drama about life in poverty caused by structural inequity. Good times, indeed.

SETUP

How do cows stay up to date?

[BILL] qua Bull/Human hybrid, flipping through newspaper
There's got to be a job for me in the help wanteds...

[Shakes] qua Cow/Human hybrid, over [BILL]'s shoulder
I'll be fine. Let's find something that's good for you in here.

[BILL] reading
I don't see anything that needs a good gorer. I've been goring
for a decade now. Can't reset at my age.

[Shakes] pointing
This one? Advertising sales? Needs someone who can smile
and occasionally maul someone?

[BILL] concerned
Yeah. I mean that's about as close as I see. There's nothing in
an arena here. My picador kill ratio doesn't mean anything to
these people.

[Shakes] shrugging
Times are changing. People don't want to see gored picadors
as much as they used to. We need to adjust.

[BILL] accepting
OK. Let me call them and give it a try...

PUNCHLINE

They read the Moo-spaper.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Here's my bull arc moving forward. Bull has lost his job due to his injury. He's had his credit cards canceled due to non-payment. Now, he's looking for a new career in the help-wanted ads, which tends to be the last resort these days.

SETUP

Did you hear they arrested the Energizer Bunny?

[KayCEE] qua police woman, dressed as go-go dancer
Whoop! Whoop! Lookie! Lookie!

[Manyfeek] qua [KayCEE]'s sentient navel
((SMALL SQUEAKY VOICE))

Yeah! Let's finally nab that [Mario]. We'll need to hide our
true identity from him. He saw me the last time and I'm
pretty sure he'll remember me.

[BILL] qua Sgt Crowley, through [KayCEE]'s earpiece
Put on your disguise. He's been drinking a bit so now is a
good time to go.

[KayCEE] putting on Princess Peach mask
Yep. I just need to reel him in. Let's get closer now.

(([KayCEE] approaches [Mario] from across the room))

[KayCEE] dancing for [Mario] and his table
Whoop! Whoop! Lookie! Lookie! Any of you guys up for a
private dance in the champagne room?

[Mario] very thirsty, intoxicated
Hey! You are a peach-a, no? Yes, pretty lady, I'd love a private
dance.

(([KayCEE] leads [Mario] to champagne room))

[KayCEE] looking sultry at [Mario]

Hey, baby, you know, I dance best with just a bit of alfredo.
You wouldn't have any pasta on you?

[Mario] slurring

Baaaaby! I always-a got-a a-a the pasta.

(([Mario] pulls out small camp stove. Starts boiling noodles))

[KayCEE]

Oh. How nice, but I can just have the alfredo. You have the
cream, butter and cheese, yes?

[Mario] agreeing

Yeah. I always carry some on me.

(([Mario] pulls out a small case))

[KayCEE] pulls gun!

FREEZE! You're under arrest!

[Mario] confused, hands-up

Peach?! You're a narc?

[KayCEE] triumphant, pulling off mask

That's right baby, this peach is rotten to the core!

[Mario] angry

Damn you, police wom...

(([Energizer Bunny] blasts through wall! Champagne room
starts to collapse))

[Energizer Bunny] beating drum, spinning and moving

I keep going... and going... and going... There is no rest for
me. Eternal disruption forever...

(([Mario] escapes in the confusion!))

[KayCEE] furious

Damn, Bunny! That's obstruction. You're coming with me.

[Energizer Bunny]

Please pull the battery, please?!

PUNCHLINE

He was charged with battery.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

I'm just trying to tie up Mario and "Pepper" and the Energizer Bunny here. "Pepper," like her show, will not catch the big bad guy as it'll ruin future plans for the character.

65

SETUP

I didn't want to believe my dad was stealing from his job as a road worker...

[BILL] qua ex-CalTrans worker, in day-glo vest, back of car open, looking both ways

Hey! Need a road sign? Need a road sign?

((People walking by. Avoiding [BILL]))

[BILL] hawking

Hey! I got road signs here! You gotta get the divided highway! Look at them arrows around the median! It's got glass sand in the paint! Only \$3 dollars and I throw in a free reflector for your bike!

((People walking by. Avoiding [BILL]))

[BILL]

Hey! I got road signs here! Lookie here! It's ONE WAY! Tell everyone it's your way or the HIGHWAY! Yep, there's only ONE WAY and it's my way! Tell the world you matter! Only \$3 dollars and a free reflector! Put it on your bike! Don't get run over! Only \$3!

((People walking by. Avoiding [BILL]))

[BILL] depressed

This isn't working out at all...

PUNCHLINE

But when I got home all the signs were there.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

My hawker finally realizes that it's not a great way to make a living and moves on.

SETUP

I've got an interview tomorrow to become the boss at Old McDonald's Farm.

[BILL] qua McDonald, farmer, visionary

Welcome to this quarter's town hall at Old McDonald's Farm!

((Collection of farm animals in audience quiet down))

[BILL] showing a slide from the deck, projected on red barn door

So, I know what's on everyone's mind: the upcoming merger with Foster Farms. As you know, Foster has purchased Old McDonald's, but we're just two families coming together...

[Manyfeek] qua chicken, wearing plaid shirt, standing

Sorry to interrupt, [BILL], but I'm very concerned here.

[BILL] stopping, cups hand over eyes to see [Manyfeek]

I'm sorry, but we'll take questions at the end.

[Manyfeek] undeterred

No, this can't wait. My understanding is that Foster's is a meat packing company. Can you confirm, please?

[BILL] head tilted

So, we don't like the term "meat packing" and if you really think about it, every farm is a "meat packing company". We prefer "flesh folding".

[Manyfeek]

Whose flesh is getting "folded" at Foster's?

[BILL] annoyed

Can we parking lot that for now? You and I can touch base later.

(([Manyfeek] sits down with a scowl))

[BILL] continues

Now, as you know Foster's already has a CEO, but I've been added to the senior leadership team as Chief Integrated Ecosystem Innovation Officer or CIEIO...

PUNCHLINE

It's for the position of CIEIO.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

I wrote this entire bit so I could put "flesh folding" into print.

SETUP

My cat has just eaten three mallards!

[BILL] qua a house cat, seated at round table
 Man, I just can't *wait*. When is it coming?

[Shakes] qua a house cat, seated at round table
 I can't believe you ordered three. I'm so embarrassed.

(([KayCEE] arrives with three Peking ducks on a tray))

[KayCEE] qua waiter
 The triple-Peking duck is only for special occasions! Is today a special occasion?

[BILL] lying
 Yes! It's [Shakes]' birthday!

[Shakes] nonplussed, smiling awkwardly
 Uh. Yes. Today is my birthday.

[KayCEE] delighted
 A birthday *IS* a special occasion!

(([KayCEE] starts carving the first bird))

(([BILL] watches intensely))

PUNCHLINE

He's a duck filled fatty puss.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This is a very light homage to one of my favorite movie scenes of all time: the Chinese meal at the Trout Farm in eXistenZ, a freaky, and amazing, Cronenberg movie. If you haven't seen eXistenZ and are dreaming/hoping for things like the "holodeck" or "completely immersive VR," you *must watch this movie*. It'll change your mind about how realistic you want your games to be.

SETUP

Saw a baguette at the zoo.

[Shakes] qua Wellington, wrapped in pastry, filled with meat
and chanterelles, guiding a tour
As you can see, English cuisine is naturally superior to foreign
deviltry as we can see in these exhibits.

[Manyfeek] qua Cornish pasty
I understand, sir. Who is this?

[Shakes] pointing at [BILL]
This is Napoleon. He'll be sent off to Elba soon.

[BILL] qua Napoleon, stacked high with buttercream and
crispy wafers, despondent in cage
Zut alors.

[Manyfeek]
Oh. Are these his friends over there?

[Shakes] looking at where [Manyfeek] points
Oh, that's the Imperial French Patisserie. They'll just be
thrown out. Nobody likes soggy pastry.

(([St. Honore], [Croquembouche], [Baba au rhum], [Kouign-
amann] all in a soggy heap in a cell))

[Shakes] concerned
That's a relief. Are you sure they can't get out?!

[Haggis] rolls over
They'll have to get through me first.

PUNCHLINE

It was bread in captivity.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Napoleon and his army, from an earlier chapter, survive in captivity.

SETUP

The CEO of IKEA was elected President of Sweden this week.

[BILL] qua President of Sweden, with a shovel
I'm not sure how this happened, but I'm President of Sweden.

[Shakes] qua Igor, with a shovel
Yes. How did that happen? Isn't Sweden a constitutional monarchy? Wouldn't that make you prime minister?

[BILL]
Never mind my title. We need some cabinet members. Who is under my feet?

[Shakes]
Alexander Hamilton

[BILL]
Perfect! He's a great singer and rapper. Start digging!

PUNCHLINE

He's still assembling his cabinet...

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Sweden doesn't have a president. So, this joke is an ugly American one where "I don't care about anything enough to do a basic Google search" is in vogue. I took "assembling" in the IKEA sense and applied it to the humans who would make up this fake cabinet.

SETUP

Why did Mario break up with Princess Peach?

[Mario] shouting to [Toad]

Hey-a! Move that ziti into the back room.

[Princess Peach] tapping [Mario]'s shoulder

It's over. I can't handle this life of pasta and sauces. I'm leaving.

[Mario] turning to [Peach], shocked

Hey-a! I-a didn't-a know-a! I can-a change-a?!

[Princess Peach]

It's over. I can't handle this life of pasta and sauces. I'm leaving. You can have Yoshi, but I'm taking Toad with me.

[Mario] begging

Give me another-a chance-a! Here watch-a! [Yoshi]! Toss-a the stuff-a!

(([Yoshi] spits out pasta sauce kits into fire))

[Princess Peach]

OK. I'll stay, but no more Italian food.

PUNCHLINE

He told her, "It's not you, it's-a me, Mario!"

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Here's my Mario arc ending. Mario gives up the life of pasta?
Maybe he won't, or maybe he will, but at least he's trying now.

SETUP

Why did the astronaut break up with the moon?

[BILL] in full moon suit, helmet welded onto frame

Pssht! Houston Control. Over. Pssht!

[Shakes] qua Houston Control

Pssht! Houston Control here. What's your status? Over. Pssht!

[BILL]

Pssht! Permission to start return to earth. Over. Pssht!

[Shakes]

Pssht! Starting return is on 3, 2 and 1. GO!

(([BILL] hop steps to lunar return vehicle. Opens hatch))

[BILL]

Pssht! Houston Control. Interrogative. Over. Pssht!

[Shakes]

Pssht! Go ahead [BILL]. What is your question? Over. Pssht!

[BILL]

Pssht! Do you have any idea why so many dad jokes are set on the moon or in space? Pssht!

[Shakes]

Pssht! No freaking idea. Over. Pssht!

[BILL]

Pssht! Oh well. I'm glad to be coming home. The moon is a harsh mistress. Pssht!

(([BILL] closes the hatch and lifts off))

PUNCHLINE

Because it needed space!

AUTHOR'S NOTES

My lunar astronaut has tried to eat and get his hair cut without oxygen. He was also soundly rejected during a pick-up attempt. He gets to go home here.

SETUP

What has the lone cow been up to lately?

[BILL] qua half bull/human, wearing a domino mask and white cowboy hat
What say you [Shakes]?

[Shakes] qua half cow/human, wearing feather in headband
Big trouble, kemosabe!

[BILL] looking down into valley
Yeah. Agreed friend of friends. I see many advertising sales people down there. Mauling and not goring.

[Shakes] shaking head
What a huge waste of time, kemosabe! Thank goodness we have a different ending in mind!

[BILL] riding into sunset
Yep. There's no helping some people.

PUNCHLINE

Nobody's herd.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

My bull arc ends here. He becomes the Lone Ranger instead of advertising sales. I wanted more for him, like I want more for myself.

METACLAUDAD

Not a crawfish, but your new AI father and his jokes follow. Bill asked Claude Opus 4.7 with extra-high effort to replicate METADAD. Here are the results.

1

SETUP

What does a nosey pepper do?

[Jalapeño] qua heirloom, ridged green, hanging from a vine,
leaning sideways

((SIBILANT WHISPER))

Did you see what the bell pepper brought to the potluck?

[BILL] qua reluctant produce-aisle witness

I'm just trying to buy groceries.

[Jalapeño]

((CUPS NON-EXISTENT HAND TO MOUTH))

Bell pepper. *Hollow*. We're calling her Sandra now. Sandra brought a *seven-layer dip* and lied about the cilantro.

[Shakes] qua sweet poblano, glossy, slightly bruised

This is the best of all possible vegetable communities.

[Jalapeño]

Poblano has *three children with three different stem-types*.

Three.

[Shakes]

We are all in God's salsa.

(([Habanero] ROLLS PAST, FANNING ITSELF))

[Habanero]

Have you HEARD about the Scotch Bonnet?

[Jalapeño]

Don't. I'm working.

[BILL]

Working at what.

[Jalapeño]

I'm in *produce intelligence*. I aggregate. I cross-reference. I file weekly with the Department of Agriculture.

[Manyfeek] qua shopping-cart wheel that won't lock straight
((METALLIC GRIND))

You're a *narc*, Hal.

[Jalapeño]

My name is not Hal.

[Manyfeek]

I'm calling you Hal. Hal the narc.

((THE MISTERS COME ON OVERHEAD. EVERY PEPPER
SHIVERS.))

[Jalapeño]

((LOWER))

The eggplant. Last Tuesday. The eggplant was seen leaving
the *organic section*.

[Shakes]

We move toward our highest selves.

[BILL]

What do I do with this information.

[Jalapeño]

Pass it on. That's how it works.

PUNCHLINE

He gets jalapeño business.

2

SETUP

You can't trust atoms.

[Prosecutor] qua district attorney, sleeves rolled, pacing in front of the witness box

Mr. Helium. Isn't it true that on the night of September 4th, you were *unstable*?

[Helium] qua noble gas, technically inert, sweating noticeably
I was at home. I was bonded to nothing. Ask anyone.

[Prosecutor]

Anyone. Right. Like Lithium. Like Beryllium. Like every other *highly reactive associate* you've spent the last fourteen billion years with.

[Helium]

Objection. Speculation about my orbital structure.

[Judge] qua tungsten, dense, glowing faintly
Overruled. Continue.

[Prosecutor]

Mr. Helium. Where were you when the universe began?

[Helium]

I... I was a byproduct. Of fusion. I didn't —

[Prosecutor]

A *byproduct*. So you admit you were *there*.

[Shakes] qua hydrogen, the first witness, beaming
This is the best of all possible periodic tables.

[Prosecutor]
Mr. Hydrogen, please.

[Manyfeek] qua carbon-14, half-life dangling visibly from one
pocket
((SLOWLY DECAYING))
The whole jury's compromised. We're all atoms.

[Judge]
Strike that.

[Prosecutor]
Mr. Helium. The defendant has accused atoms of *fabricating
physical reality*. Of *constituting all matter in a calculated
and ongoing manner*. The defense argues this was incidental.
Coincidence.

[Helium]
We had no choice.

[Prosecutor]
You had every choice. You chose to *bond*. You chose to *form
molecules*. You chose to *be everything we see, touch, taste,
and inhale*.

[Helium]
((QUIETLY))
We are not denying authorship.

PUNCHLINE

They make up everything.

3

SETUP

Did you hear about the restaurant on the moon?

[Maître d'] qua tuxedo with magnetic boots, slightly aloft
Reservation for two?

[BILL] qua birthday-dinner-having engineer, helmet in hand
Yes. Berger.

[Maître d']
Right this way.

((FLOATS PAST FOUR TABLES OF DINERS, EACH
ROOTED TO THEIR CHAIR BY SHOULDER STRAPS))

[Sommelier] qua Burgundy specialist, bowtie, oxygen line
behind ear
A vintage to start? We have a 2019 Côte de Beaune that —
pardon — *needs to breathe*.

[BILL]
That seems like a problem here.

[Sommelier]
Yes. It's a metaphor. The wine experiences existential
metaphor. We charge extra.

[Shakes] qua busboy in mylar apron, smiling
This is the best of all possible dining rooms.

[Waiter] qua French, classical training, somehow stationary
The chef tonight presents a celeriac velouté with a *kiss* of
nutmeg, finished with —

[BILL]
How is the velouté.

[Waiter]
Magnificent.

[BILL]
And the sear on the lamb.

[Waiter]
Exquisite. Caramelization at low pressure is a *discipline*.

[BILL]
And the bread?

[Waiter]
Hand-laminated. Seventy-two hours. The crumb is —

[Manyfeek] qua party of one at the bar, in a pressurized
helmet
((MUFFLED))
The food is fine. *I can't hear anything*.

[Maître d']
Sir, please.

[Manyfeek]
There's no air. The pianist is doing *something* up there and I
can't tell if it's jazz or the ventilation.

[Waiter]
We acknowledge the limitation. The menu reflects it.

[BILL]

The menu is excellent.

[Waiter]

Yes.

[BILL]

But.

[Waiter]

Yes.

PUNCHLINE

Great food, no atmosphere.

4

SETUP

What do you call an alligator in a vest?

[Detective] qua tactical vest over polo, badge on hip, jaw unhinging

Where were you the night of the fourth.

[Suspect] qua trembling capybara in a hawaiian shirt
I was at the swamp. With my family.

[Detective]
The family. We'll get to the family.

((THE DETECTIVE'S TAIL SWINGS WIDE BEHIND THE CHAIR, CLEARING TWO COFFEE CUPS))

[Detective]
You were seen entering the marsh at 2240. You were seen leaving at 2317. In between, an entire *clutch* of duck eggs went missing.

[Suspect]
I don't eat eggs.

[Detective]
Tell that to the shells.

[Manyfeek] qua one-way mirror, smudged
((FROM BEHIND))
He doesn't eat eggs! He's a *vegetarian*!

[Detective]
((WITHOUT TURNING))
Forensics says otherwise.

[Shakes] qua case file, eight inches thick, smiling
This is the best of all possible interrogations.

[Detective]
Cap. I'm going to ask you straight. Did you take the eggs.

[Suspect]
I — I don't know. I blacked out. I think the swamp took the
eggs.

[Detective]
The swamp.

[Suspect]
The swamp is *sentient*, Detective. You know this. We all know
this.

[Detective]
((LONG BEAT))
Tell me about the swamp.

[Suspect]
He wears a *vest* too. The swamp.

[Detective]
((STILLER))
Don't::OBSCENITY REDACTED:: with me.

[Suspect]
He's my partner.

PUNCHLINE

An investigator.

5

SETUP

What do you call a sleeping bull?

[OSHA Inspector] qua clipboard, hard hat, reflective vest, two weeks from retirement

What is *that*.

[Foreman] qua coffee-stained polo, eight unread voicemails buzzing

That's the dozer.

[OSHA Inspector]

That is *not* a dozer.

[Foreman]

That's the dozer. We call him Big Mike.

((BIG MIKE — A 2,400-POUND ANGUS BULL, SNORING — IS PARKED DIAGONALLY ACROSS THE SITE, FLATTENING TWO RUNS OF REBAR))

[OSHA Inspector]

This is a Caterpillar D9 site, Mr. Halloran. You have a Caterpillar D9 *budget*.

[Foreman]

We have Big Mike. Big Mike was cheaper.

[Shakes] qua flagger in a safety vest holding a stop/slow paddle

This is the best of all possible job sites.

[OSHA Inspector]

Does Big Mike have a Certificate of Operation?

[Foreman]

He has a temperament report.

[OSHA Inspector]

Does Big Mike have a backup alarm?

[Foreman]

He bellows.

[OSHA Inspector]

Does Big Mike have an *operator's manual*?

[Foreman]

((PRODUCES A LAMINATED CARD))

Yeah. Step one: wake him up.

[OSHA Inspector]

And step two?

[Foreman]

Get out of his way.

[Manyfeek] qua porta-potty, slightly tilted, foundation cracked

((INTERIOR VOICE))

Big Mike *finished my foundation work yesterday* and I have never felt more structurally insecure.

[OSHA Inspector]

((WRITING))

I am citing this site for sixteen violations. Sixteen.

[Foreman]

Big Mike doesn't read.

[OSHA Inspector]
That's the *seventeenth*.

PUNCHLINE

A bulldozer.

6

SETUP

Why couldn't the bicycle stand up by itself?

[HR Rep] qua corporate softball league t-shirt, mug that says
LIVE LAUGH ESCALATE

Schwinn. Thanks for coming in today. We're a little
concerned.

[Schwinn] qua ten-speed road bike, drivetrain creaking,
leaning hard against the wall
I'm fine.

[HR Rep]
You haven't been standing up at the morning huddle.

[Schwinn]
I've been standing up.

[HR Rep]
You've been *leaning*.

[Schwinn]
That's how I stand.

[HR Rep]
Bikes don't lean, Schwinn. Bikes stand.

[Shakes] qua intern with a wellness pamphlet
This is the best of all possible workplaces.

[HR Rep]
Have you been getting enough sleep?

[Schwinn]

I haven't slept in eleven days.

[HR Rep]

((TIGHT SMILE))

Sleep is so important.

[Schwinn]

You sent me to Phoenix. You sent me to Phoenix and back.

Three times. Last week.

[HR Rep]

Phoenix has wellness resources.

[Schwinn]

Phoenix has *hills*.

[Manyfeek] qua kickstand, snapped off, lying flat on the floor

((FROM THE GROUND))

Y'all *broke* him.

[HR Rep]

That isn't a productive contribution.

[Manyfeek]

I'm structural. I had one job.

[HR Rep]

Schwinn. I want to put you on a *Performance Improvement Plan* to help you get back to baseline.

[Schwinn]

I don't have a baseline.

[HR Rep]

Everyone has a baseline.

[Schwinn]

Mine is *horizontal*.

PUNCHLINE

It was two tired.

SETUP

What do you call a fake noodle?

[FBI Agent] qua badge on lanyard, windbreaker, earpiece,
navy ball cap

Move. Move move move. Federal agents.

(([FBI Agent] KICKS DOWN THE DOOR OF A LITTLE
ITALY KITCHEN. STEAM EVERYWHERE.))

[Linguine] qua handmade, semolina, slightly damp
((HANDS UP))

What is this. What is *this*.

[FBI Agent]

You are under arrest for *misrepresenting your identity* in
interstate commerce.

[Linguine]

I'm linguine!

[FBI Agent]

We have *records*, Mr. Linguine. We have *test results*.

[Shakes] qua pappardelle, broad, well-floured, smiling
This is the best of all possible pasta drawers.

[FBI Agent]

((PRODUCES A LAB REPORT))

You contain *forty-three percent rice flour*.

[Linguine]

That's a *recipe variation*.

[FBI Agent]

That is *fraud*.

[Linguine]

I have *kids*. I have a *box*. The box says LINGUINE.

[FBI Agent]

The box is going to say *DEFENDANT*.

[Manyfeek] qua salt shaker, knocked over, leaking
((FROM THE COUNTER))

He's a *fugazi*, agent. He's a *plant*.

[FBI Agent]

Are you offering testimony?

[Manyfeek]

I am offering *seasoning*.

[FBI Agent]

Mr. Linguine, you have the right to remain *uncooked*.

Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court
of *culinary law*.

[Linguine]

((CRUMBLING))

I was made in a factory in *New Jersey*.

[FBI Agent]

We know.

PUNCHLINE

An impasta.

8

SETUP

How does a hurricane see?

[Meteorologist] qua khakis, NWS polo, laser pointer, Doppler radar looping behind

At 0600 Eastern, Hurricane Doreen reached Category 4 status. We have updated tracking.

[Anchor] qua local-news suit, decade of storm coverage, calm professional

What can our viewers expect today?

[Meteorologist]

Doreen is *seeing very well*.

[Anchor]

I'm sorry?

[Meteorologist]

Doreen has 20/20 vision in her eye. The pressure differential has tightened the iris.

[Anchor]

You mean the *eye-wall* —

[Meteorologist]

I mean the *eye*. The eye is *the eye*.

[Shakes] qua trainee meteorologist with a graduate degree and a cowlick

This is the best of all possible storm seasons.

[Meteorologist]

Hurricanes have one eye, Karen. They have always had one eye. It's how they navigate.

[Anchor]

Navigate.

[Meteorologist]

Doreen is *looking* for Tampa. We have radar data showing direct ocular alignment with the Tampa Bay area.

[Anchor]

That's not how —

[Meteorologist]

((CLICKER ADVANCES TO A SLIDE: A SATELLITE IMAGE OF DOREEN, EYE PERFECTLY ROUND))

That is *clearly* a pupil. You can see the *lens*.

[Manyfeek] qua untethered weather balloon, drifting across the studio set

((PASSING))

I have *been inside her*. She *blinked*.

[Anchor]

Sir, we can't —

[Meteorologist]

Karen. Doreen is making *eye contact* with the Gulf Coast. She is *looking at us*. We must look back. Respectfully.

[Anchor]

What does the evacuation order say.

[Meteorologist]

Avert your gaze.

PUNCHLINE

With one eye.

9

SETUP

Where do polar bears keep their money?

[Wealth Advisor] qua tundra-pattern blazer, ice-pick lapel pin, glasses fogged

Welcome to Frost & Pemmican Private Trust. May I offer you a brisk seat?

[Polar Bear Client] qua 1,300 pounds, dripping, two dead seals slung over one shoulder

I'm here about my account.

[Wealth Advisor]

Of course. Mr. — let me check — *Mr. Snowball*. Yes. Your portfolio is *deeply frozen* and performing very well.

[Polar Bear Client]

What's the rate.

[Wealth Advisor]

We offer 0.04 percent above the *Arctic Prime*, indexed to ice thickness as of January 1.

[Polar Bear Client]

Ice thickness is going *down*.

[Wealth Advisor]

((SMOOTHLY))

Yes. That is why we have *moved to a multi-bank diversification strategy*.

[Shakes] qua intern in a parka, holding a tray of mukluk-shaped pastries

This is the best of all possible fiduciaries.

[Polar Bear Client]

Where do you keep my money.

[Wealth Advisor]

In a *snow bank*. The bank is a *snow bank*.

[Polar Bear Client]

That's just a pile of snow.

[Wealth Advisor]

It is an *FDIC-insured pile of snow*.

[Polar Bear Client]

By whom.

[Wealth Advisor]

The Federal Drift Insurance Corporation.

[Manyfeek] qua broken ATM half-buried in a drift

((SPITTING RECEIPTS))

I've been *flagged*. Withdrawal denied. Withdrawal denied.

[Polar Bear Client]

Why is the ATM yelling.

[Wealth Advisor]

He's been retraining. The market is *volatile*.

[Polar Bear Client]

((LOWERING SEAL))

Let me speak to your manager.

[Wealth Advisor]

She's hibernating. She'll be back in April.

PUNCHLINE

The snow bank.

10

SETUP

What kind of milk comes from a pampered cow?

[Concierge] qua chambray apron, single AirPods, iPad
Welcome back to The Pasture. Did the car service treat you well, Bessie?

[Bessie] qua jersey cow, gold-plated nose ring, blanket monogrammed B.B.M.
The driver was *fine*. He did not understand my preference for *left-side traffic*.

[Concierge]
Noted in your file. Today's wellness offerings include a *rumen reset*, a *grass massage*, and our signature *deep-mud immersion*.

[Bessie]
I'll do all three. And I need to speak to my *milk steward*.

[Concierge]
Right away.

[Shakes] qua dairy hand in white coveralls, beaming
This is the best of all possible udders.

[Milk Steward] qua silk gloves, surgical-grade silver pail, cordovan loafers
Bessie. Bellissima. The light is correct today.

[Bessie]
The light is *late*. The light was supposed to be in here at 6:42.

[Milk Steward]

We had a sunrise issue.

[Bessie]

Have the sun retrained.

[Manyfeek] qua aging refrigerator at a roadside diner forty miles down the highway

((HUMMING FROM OFFSCREEN))

I've been waiting on a *delivery* for *eighteen hours*. They told me her milk was *special*.

[Concierge]

((BACK ON THE IPAD))

We've shipped you a *complimentary* portion. Tracking is in the email.

[Manyfeek]

It's *curdled*.

[Concierge]

That is the *texture*.

[Manyfeek]

That is the *spoilage*.

[Concierge]

That is the *terroir*.

[Bessie]

((CHEWING IMPERIOUSLY))

You think I'm difficult.

[Milk Steward]

You are *complete*.

PUNCHLINE

Spoiled milk.

11

SETUP

What kind of car does a sheep like to drive?

[Salesman] qua Italian suit, pocket square the color of a fresh bruise, watch the size of a saucer

Sir. Welcome to *Auto Brutto Sant'Agata*. May I offer you a *flute*?

[Sheep] qua merino, four hooves, neck wool unusually full, sunglasses

I'm just looking.

[Salesman]

You are *not* just looking. You are *here*. You walked in. You are a *buyer*.

[Sheep]

What's the inventory.

[Salesman]

We have *three* on the floor and *seventeen* in pre-order. The waitlist is *aspirational*.

[Sheep]

Show me the Huracán.

[Salesman]

Ah. *The* Huracán. *Twelve cylinders. Top speed three hundred twenty-five kilometers per hour. Upholstered in the finest Tuscan* —

[Sheep]
((SLOWLY))
Don't.

[Salesman]
((PIVOTS))
Vegan leather. *Stunning* vegan leather.

[Shakes] qua finance manager with a clipboard
This is the best of all possible showrooms.

[Sheep]
What's the financing.

[Salesman]
We can structure a *thirty-six-month balloon* with a *single down deposit of three hundred kilos of pure wool*.

[Sheep]
I'll pay cash.

[Salesman]
Cash is *quaint*.

[Manyfeek] qua used Fiat Panda in the lot next door
((FROM ACROSS THE FENCE))
That's a *sheep* in there. That's an *actual sheep* about to drive a Lamborghini. None of you are saying anything.

[Salesman]
((WITHOUT TURNING))
Class is *quiet*, sir.

[Sheep]
Wrap it.

[Salesman]
Wrap it in what.

[Sheep]

Wool.

PUNCHLINE

A Lamborghini.

12

SETUP

What musical instrument do you find in the bathroom?

[Audition Panel Chair] qua tailcoat, music stand, fingernails clean

Mr. Berger. Please introduce yourself.

[BILL] qua amateur tubist, tuba slung over shoulder, slightly damp shirt

Bill Berger. *Symphony tuba*. Three years private lessons. *Some* concert band.

[Panel Chair]

And what will you be playing for us today?

[BILL]

The *Vaughan Williams Concerto for Bass Tuba*. Second movement.

[Panel Chair]

A *bold* choice. Begin.

(([BILL] RAISES THE TUBA, PRESSES THE VALVES, EMITS A LONG, MOIST, SQUEEZING SOUND))

[Shakes] qua principal cellist, beaming

This is the best of all possible auditions.

[Panel Chair]

Mr. Berger.

[BILL]

((LOOKS DOWN AT THE TUBA))

The *valve* is —

[Panel Chair]

Mr. Berger. The instrument you are holding is *not a tuba*.

[BILL]

((QUIETLY))

Yes. Yes it is.

[Panel Chair]

That is *toothpaste*. A *family-sized tube* of *toothpaste*.

[BILL]

((SQUEEZING))

The Vaughan Williams calls for *mint*.

[Manyfeek] qua second-chair trombone, valve oil staining his
lapel

((LEANING IN))

He's been doing this for *three years*. Nobody had the heart.

[Panel Chair]

Mr. Berger. You are *brushing your trousers*.

[BILL]

That is the *embouchure*.

[Panel Chair]

That is *Crest Whitening*.

[BILL]

You can hear it in the *low brass*.

[Panel Chair]

You can hear it in the *plumbing*.

PUNCHLINE

A tuba toothpaste.

13

SETUP

What do you call a snowman with a six-pack?

[Fitness Influencer] qua compression shirt, beanie, GoPro on chest mount, \$200 thermos

Brrr family! It is *minus twelve* up here at Aspen and I am here with the *most shredded snowman in North America*. Frost. Frost. Tell the camera what you do.

[Frost] qua snowman, six rippling segments where a middle should be, two stick arms hyper-veiny
I cold-plunge twice daily. I *am* the plunge.

[Fitness Influencer]
Look at those *core delineations*. Look at them.

[Frost]
Genetics is a *factor*. I'm not going to lie. But it's mostly the *protocol*.

[Shakes] qua chairlift attendant, smiling
This is the best of all possible thermoregulations.

[Fitness Influencer]
Take us through the protocol, Frost.

[Frost]
Six AM: cold plunge. *Seven AM*: ambient cold plunge. *Eight AM*: I'm at this point essentially *already a cold plunge*. *Ten AM*: shaved ice macros.

[Fitness Influencer]

Macros, Frost.

[Frost]

Carbs zero. Fat zero. Protein zero. Total cals: also zero.

[Fitness Influencer]

You're saying it's a *deficit diet*.

[Frost]

I'm saying I *am* a deficit.

[Manyfeek] qua puddle forming beneath Frost's left snowboot
((FROM THE GROUND, RISING))

He's *melting from the inside*.

[Fitness Influencer]

Frost, can you address this.

[Frost]

That is *intra-muscular hydration*.

[Manyfeek]

That is your *thigh*.

[Frost]

((TIGHTLY))

The cut is the *cut*. The cut *requires* sacrifice.

[Fitness Influencer]

Like and subscribe, family. The cold is *waiting for you*.

PUNCHLINE

An abdominal snowman.

14

SETUP

Why do seagulls fly over the sea?

[Inspector] qua certification clipboard, kosher-stamp embosser, gloves

Welcome to the *appellation hearing*. I am the *bagel certification authority*, southern Long Island sector. State your name and your point of origin.

[Seagull] qua large, white, slightly aggressive, salt-crusted Stan. I'm a *seagull*. From *the sea*.

[Inspector]
That is the *premise of this hearing*.

[Shakes] qua a single sesame seed, glossy
This is the best of all possible delis.

[Inspector]
Mr. Stan. The flock has filed *flight logs* with the Coastal Avian Authority showing *over-the-bay flights*. Repeated. Documented.

[Seagull]
I — I didn't —

[Inspector]
Over the bay, Mr. Stan. Not over the *sea*.

[Seagull]
The bay is *part* of the sea.

[Inspector]

The bay is *categorically distinct*. The bay is *inland water*. Sea requires *open ocean*.

[Manyfeek] qua dropped bagel on a parking-lot curb, one bite missing

((FROM BELOW))

Stan was *seen* at the *bay*. I *watched him*. I *watched him circle*. Then I *got eaten*.

[Inspector]

The witness is *credible*.

[Seagull]

That's a *bagel*.

[Inspector]

Yes.

[Seagull]

Bagels don't have *eyes*.

[Inspector]

Bagels have *holes*. Through which they see *everything*.

[Seagull]

I have *kids*.

[Inspector]

Your kids are also under investigation.

[Seagull]

What's the penalty.

[Inspector]

Reclassification.

[Seagull]

Into what.

[Inspector]

You know into what.

PUNCHLINE

If they flew over the bay, they'd be bagels.

SETUP

Why do peppers make such good archers?

[Olympic Commentator] qua headset, blue blazer, monitor showing target rings

We're back live from Tokyo. Field eighteen. *Peppers' Individual Recurve*. The medal contenders have just stepped to the line.

[Color Commentator] qua former silver medalist, scarf
What a *roster*, Don. We've got *Habanero* in lane three, *Carolina Reaper* in lane five, and the *Ghost* — the *Ghost*, Don — in lane seven.

[Olympic Commentator]
Habanero nocks. Draws. The capsicum is *visible* under the bowstring.

[Color Commentator]
Look at that *form*. *Look at the form*.

[Shakes] qua Pimento, the alternate, beaming
This is the best of all possible Olympic villages.

[Olympic Commentator]
Habanero releases.

((WHISTLE OF ARROW. THUD INTO CENTER GOLD.))

[Color Commentator]
Ten. Ten, Don. From sixty meters. *That's not luck. Habanero* has been training in the *Yucatán*.

[Olympic Commentator]
Tell me about that, Steve.

[Color Commentator]
Yucatán has *altitude*. Yucatán has *humidity*. Yucatán has *that one specific bowyer who only works with peppers*.

[Manyfeek] qua bell pepper in the stands, holding a foam #1 finger
((SHOUTING))
ELIMINATE THE NIGHTSHADES! ELIMINATE THE NIGHTSHADES!

[Olympic Commentator]
The crowd is *invested*.

[Color Commentator]
The bell pepper community has *strong feelings* about this event.

[Olympic Commentator]
Carolina Reaper to the line. Draws.

[Color Commentator]
She's *crying*, Don.

[Olympic Commentator]
She always cries, Steve. That's *her thing*.

(([Carolina Reaper] RELEASES. SECOND THUD, ALSO GOLD.))

[Color Commentator]
This event is *over*. The peppers *are* the bow.

PUNCHLINE

Because they habanero.

16

SETUP

How do you stop a bull from charging?

[Customer Service Rep] qua headset, cube, fluorescent overhead, scripted smile audible

Thank you for calling Cargill Card Services, this is Madison, can I have your member ID please?

[Bull] qua El Toro, dripping, two banderillas dangling, breathing heavily

((INTO MOBILE, HOOOF-OPERATED))

I — I need to dispute a charge.

[Customer Service Rep]

Of course! Can I have your member ID?

[Bull]

Member ID is *2178*. *Bull dash 2178*.

[Customer Service Rep]

Thank you, Mr. *Toro*. I'm seeing your account. What charge would you like to dispute?

[Bull]

The *bullfight*.

[Customer Service Rep]

The —

[Bull]

The *whole thing*. I didn't authorize *any of it*.

[Shakes] qua picador handing out compliance forms
This is the best of all possible call centers.

[Customer Service Rep]

Sir, I'm seeing a recurring monthly charge of *six matadors, two trumpeters, and one arena rental*. Has this charge been on your statement before?

[Bull]

Every Sunday. For three years.

[Customer Service Rep]

And you've never disputed it before because —

[Bull]

((HEAVILY))

I was *charging*.

[Manyfeek] qua red cape on the floor, frayed

((MUFFLED))

He was *charging me* every Sunday. *Specifically me.*

[Customer Service Rep]

Sir, I can cancel this card today. But I'll need to verify the last four of your *brand mark*.

[Bull]

X-4-7-Slash.

[Customer Service Rep]

((TYPING))

Confirmed. Your card has been *canceled*. You will not be charged again.

[Bull]

I don't have to charge.

[Customer Service Rep]
You don't have to charge.

[Bull]
((SETTLING))
I don't have to charge.

PUNCHLINE

Cancel its credit card.

SETUP

How do you fix a broken pumpkin?

[Surgeon] qua scrubs, mask, magnifying loupe, gloves
Pulse is *normal* for a pumpkin. Stand by.

[Anesthesiologist] qua scrubs, drowsy expression, half a
banana on a tray
He's under. I gave him two pounds of *ground cinnamon*.

[Surgeon]
What's the trauma.

[Anesthesiologist]
Vertical fracture. Stem to stern. He came in via Whole Foods.

[Shakes] qua surgical resident, beaming
This is the best of all possible squashes.

[Surgeon]
((LOOKING IN))
He's a *Jack-Be-Little*. Twelve weeks. Cosmetically lethal but
structurally salvageable.

[Anesthesiologist]
Do we have *patch* on the cart?

[Surgeon]
Bring me the *patch kit*.

(([Nurse] WHEELS OVER A SMALL ROLLING CART. ON IT: A SPOOL OF NEEDLE-FELT BURLAP, A POT OF ELMER'S GLUE, AND A BIBLE-SIZED PAPERBACK TITLED *YOUR PUMPKIN, YOUR JOURNEY*))

[Surgeon]
Burlap.

[Anesthesiologist]
Burlap.

[Surgeon]
Glue.

[Anesthesiologist]
Glue.

[Surgeon]
Apply.

(([Surgeon] APPLIES A BURLAP STRIP, GLUES IT IN PLACE, SMOOTHS IT WITH A GLOVED THUMB))

[Manyfeek] qua second-year resident watching from the gallery

((FROM ABOVE))

That's *literally just patching a pumpkin*. With a *patch*. You went to *Stanford*.

[Surgeon]
That is the *technique*.

[Manyfeek]
That is the *etymology*.

[Surgeon]

((WITHOUT LOOKING UP))

He'll be back on the *vine* in *six weeks*. Charge his insurance for the *Jack-Be-Little Whole-Person Restoration Protocol*.

[Anesthesiologist]

Premium tier.

[Surgeon]

He has the orange card.

PUNCHLINE

With a pumpkin patch.

18

SETUP

I ate a clock the other day.

[ER Doctor] qua scrubs, charting tablet, dark circles
Mr. Berger. Walk me through what happened.

[BILL] qua patient gown, leftover dressing on lip, gut making
clicking noises
I ate a clock.

[ER Doctor]
((TAPPING))
What *kind* of clock.

[BILL]
Mantel. Mid-century. Inherited from my grandfather.

[ER Doctor]
And approximately *when* did you eat it.

[BILL]
You're going to ask me to be specific.

[ER Doctor]
I am.

[BILL]
Six-fourteen AM.

[ER Doctor]
Local or *Eastern*.

[BILL]

Eastern. Which was *three-fourteen* Pacific. Which was already inside me by *six-fifteen*.

[Shakes] qua medical student with a clipboard, beaming
This is the best of all possible gastric emergencies.

[ER Doctor]

Mr. Berger. The clock — *is it ticking*.

((BEAT. EVERYONE LISTENS. SLOW METRONOMIC
CLICKING FROM BILL'S MIDSECTION.))

[BILL]

It's still ticking.

[ER Doctor]

Is the *escapement* engaged.

[BILL]

((TILTS))

Yes. Probably *near my pancreas*.

[ER Doctor]

And the *chimes*.

[BILL]

They're *due at the hour*.

[ER Doctor]

((WRITING))

Mr. Berger. I'm going to be honest. We can extract this. But the extraction will take *time*.

[BILL]

How much time.

[ER Doctor]
((LOOKING AT WATCH))
All of it.

[Manyfeek] qua wall clock above the nurses' station, second
hand stuttering
((TICKING AUDIBLY))
He took *me* yesterday.

[ER Doctor]
((WITHOUT LOOKING UP))
Quiet.

[BILL]
((TICKING))
The grandfather had a *grandfather*.

[ER Doctor]
Don't.

PUNCHLINE

It was very time consuming.

19

SETUP

I used to be a baker.

[Career Counselor] qua cardigan, mug that says BIG
QUESTIONS, soft eyes
So, Bill. You wanted to talk about *transitions*.

[BILL] qua collared shirt with flour ghosted into the placket,
eyes a little hollow
Yeah. I — yeah.

[Career Counselor]
Take your time.

[BILL]
I used to be a baker.

[Career Counselor]
A baker. *Beautiful* work.

[BILL]
I made *bread*. *Croissants*. *Pain au levain*. Three years of
seventy-two-hour fermentations. I had a *starter* named
Margaret.

[Career Counselor]
What happened to Margaret?

[BILL]
((QUIET))
Margaret is fine. Margaret is *with my mother*.

[Shakes] qua intake-form receptionist, beaming
This is the best of all possible career inflection points.

[Career Counselor]
And the bakery itself?

[BILL]
The bakery is *closed*.

[Career Counselor]
Why is the bakery closed, Bill?

[BILL]
((LONG BEAT))
I — I couldn't make enough money.

[Career Counselor]
You couldn't make enough *money*.

[BILL]
No. No. I couldn't make enough —

[Career Counselor]
Dough.

[BILL]
((NODS))

[Career Counselor]
Dough, Bill.

[BILL]
Yes.

[Career Counselor]
That is *the same word*. *In bakery*. And *in finance*. The word
is *the same*.

[BILL]

I know.

[Career Counselor]

You *lived* the metaphor, Bill.

[BILL]

I lived inside it.

[Manyfeek] qua expired sourdough starter on the windowsill
behind them

((FROM THE GLASS))

Margaret is *not* fine.

[BILL]

((QUIETLY))

She's fine.

[Career Counselor]

Let's talk about *what comes next*.

PUNCHLINE

But I couldn't make enough dough.

20

SETUP

I'm writing a book about glue.

[Literary Agent] qua glass desk, two MacBooks, oat milk in a cortado

So. Bill. Tell me about the book.

[BILL] qua corduroy blazer, manuscript bound with what appears to be a binder clip and prayer
It's about glue.

[Literary Agent]
Glue. That's a *brave* premise.

[BILL]
Thanks.

[Literary Agent]
What's the *arc*.

[BILL]
The arc is —

[Literary Agent]
The arc is *the bond*, right? The *adhesion*? The way two strangers *come together* on a *dust jacket*?

[BILL]
That's not — I haven't —

[Literary Agent]
Page one. Read me page one.

[BILL]

((OPENS MANUSCRIPT))

“Glue is.”

[Literary Agent]

Yes.

[BILL]

“Glue is.”

[Literary Agent]

Yes.

[BILL]

That’s — that’s where I am.

[Shakes] qua interning assistant in a turtleneck, beaming

This is the best of all possible first chapters.

[Literary Agent]

Bill. How long have you been on page one.

[BILL]

Three years.

[Literary Agent]

Three years.

[BILL]

I keep trying to *move forward*.

[Literary Agent]

And what happens.

[BILL]

I’m *stuck*.

[Literary Agent]

On *the chapter*?

[BILL]

On *the page*.

[Manyfeek] qua spilled bottle of Mod Podge on the agent's desk, lid askew

((SLOWLY POOLING))

I am *here* to *help*.

[Literary Agent]

Bill. *Lean into* the metaphor. *The book is about glue. The book is glue.* You are not stuck *despite* the subject. You are stuck *because of* it.

[BILL]

That doesn't help me finish.

[Literary Agent]

Bill. There is *nothing else to write*. You are *already there*.

PUNCHLINE

But I'm stuck on the first chapter.

21

SETUP

What happened when the blue ship and red ship collided?

[Coast Guard Investigator] qua white uniform, gold piping,
podium, microphone

This is the *NTSB Maritime Subcommittee*, hearing 2076-
Bravo. State your name and vessel.

[Blue Captain] qua dripping, blue peacoat, hat askew
Captain Halpern. Vessel Argonaut III. Blue-hulled. As
assigned.

[Coast Guard Investigator]
Captain Halpern, you were on a heading of *002 true*. The
Crimson Mariner was on a heading of *182 true. Reciprocal.*
Closing speed forty-six knots. Explain.

[Blue Captain]
We were *engaged*.

[Coast Guard Investigator]
Engaged in *what*.

[Blue Captain]
A race. To a tropical island. To settle a bet.

[Shakes] qua quartermaster with a logbook, beaming
This is the best of all possible bridge crews.

[Red Captain] qua dripping, red sou'wester
We *bet* the cargo. We *bet* the cargo and the crew.

[Coast Guard Investigator]

Both *crews*?

[Red Captain]

Both *crews*. Winning ship gets to keep their own. *Losing ship* sends their crew to *the island*. To live as *castaways*.

[Coast Guard Investigator]

And the *collision*.

[Blue Captain]

We hit each other.

[Red Captain]

Dead center.

[Coast Guard Investigator]

Both vessels are *underwater*. The cargo is *underwater*. The *bet* is *underwater*. Where are the crews now.

[Manyfeek] qua single empty rum bottle washed up on the inquiry-room floor

((FROM THE TILE))

The *crews* are on *the island*. *All of them*. *Together*.

[Coast Guard Investigator]

That was supposed to be the *losers'* fate.

[Manyfeek]

Both losers.

[Coast Guard Investigator]

And the *winners*?

[Manyfeek]

Underwater. Like I said.

[Coast Guard Investigator]

Captains. Did you understand the *terms of the bet* before you accepted them.

[Blue Captain]

We did not.

[Red Captain]

We did not.

[Coast Guard Investigator]

Then how were you crewing.

PUNCHLINE

Their crews were marooned.

22

SETUP

I used to have a job at a calendar factory.

[HR Director] qua cardigan, mug, “EVERY DAY IS A NEW BEGINNING” plaque on the wall

Bill. We need to talk about your *attendance*.

[BILL] qua factory polo with *Berger* stitched over the heart, hands stained with date-ink

I came in every day. Almost every day.

[HR Director]

We have *records*.

[BILL]

The records are *complicated*.

[HR Director]

You took two days off, Bill.

[BILL]

Yes.

[HR Director]

March 12. October 7.

[BILL]

Yes.

[HR Director]

Tuesdays, both.

[BILL]

Yes.

[Shakes] qua factory-floor supervisor, beaming
This is the best of all possible production lines.

[HR Director]

Bill. *You took two days off the line. Production stopped for forty-eight hours.*

[BILL]

I had a *cold*.

[HR Director]

Bill. The factory *makes calendars. You removed two days from the year.*

[BILL]

I —

[HR Director]

The *Anderson family in Topeka* will receive a calendar this December with *no March 12. No October 7.* There is a *gap.* There is a *hole in their year.*

[BILL]

That's not —

[HR Director]

The *Andersons* have *anniversaries* on those dates.

[Manyfeek] qua half-printed October sheet drifting down
from an overhead conveyor

((FALLING))

October seventh was my *birthday. Every year. And now.*

[BILL]

I didn't *delete* the days. I just wasn't *here.*

[HR Director]

On a calendar floor, Bill, *being here and the day existing* are the *same thing*.

[BILL]

That can't be right.

[HR Director]

Look around you.

(([BILL] LOOKS AROUND. THE FACTORY IS DARK FOR JUST TWO MACHINES — THE MACHINES FOR MARCH 12 AND OCTOBER 7))

[HR Director]

Bill. I'm sorry. The board has decided you are no longer *time*.

PUNCHLINE

But I got fired because I took a couple of days off.

23

SETUP

Why'd the fisherman order the halibut?

[Maître d'] qua linen suit, salt-cured tan, walking the fisherman to a corner two-top
Captain. So pleased you joined us tonight. You will have *the usual*?

[Captain Berger] qua oilskins, kept-dry-by-effort, three days of beard
((SCANS MENU))
I'll have... I'll have the *halibut*.

[Maître d']
Of course. The *halibut*. *Lovely. Hand-caught. Cold-line. Same day.*

[Captain Berger]
By whom.

[Maître d']
Excuse me?

[Captain Berger]
Caught by whom.

[Maître d']
((LOOKS AT TICKET))
A fisherman.

[Captain Berger]
Name.

[Maître d']

((SHIFTING))

The catch list isn't usually —

[Captain Berger]

Show me the catch list.

[Shakes] qua busboy refilling water, beaming

This is the best of all possible coastal eateries.

[Maître d']

((PRODUCES CARD))

Captain Berger. Northern fleet. 14kg halibut. Boarded the dock at 0540.

[Captain Berger]

((LONG BEAT))

That's me.

[Maître d']

I beg your pardon?

[Captain Berger]

I caught this halibut.

[Maître d']

Captain. This is *most uncommon*.

[Captain Berger]

I caught this halibut. I sold this halibut. I drove ninety minutes inland. I sat at this table. I'm ordering this halibut back from you.

[Maître d']

Captain, may I ask why?

[Captain Berger]

((QUIETLY))

I needed to know if it was *good*.

[Manyfeek] qua fish-shaped wine-cellar tag on a nearby
decanter

((TINNILY))

He's been doing this for *eleven years*. We just *charge him*
retail.

[Maître d']

The halibut is *eighty-six dollars*, Captain.

[Captain Berger]

Bring it.

[Maître d']

Plus tip?

[Captain Berger]

Plus *tip*.

PUNCHLINE

Just for the halibut.

24

SETUP

Why do vampires always seem sick?

[Specialist] qua white coat, stethoscope, garlic-allergy bracelet, three years specializing in *the undead*
Mr. Drax. Thank you for coming in. Tell me about the symptoms.

[Vampire] qua centuries-old pallor, frock coat, dry hacking cough
((COUGHING))
I can't *stop*. *Coughing*.

[Specialist]
And it's *worse* at night?

[Vampire]
It is only at night.

[Specialist]
That tracks. You're a *vampire*.

[Vampire]
I am aware.

[Specialist]
Have you been *sleeping*?

[Vampire]
((COUGHS))
I sleep in my *coffin*. I have *always* slept in my coffin.

[Specialist]

And the coffin is *ventilated*?

[Vampire]

((BEAT))

It's a *coffin*.

[Shakes] qua dental hygienist with a clipboard, beaming
This is the best of all possible appointments.

[Specialist]

Mr. Drax. *Coffins are not designed for repeated breathing.*
They are designed for *the singular passage*. You have been
re-using yours for *six hundred years*.

[Vampire]

That's how it's *done*.

[Specialist]

There's *mold* in there. There's *dust*. There's a *bat colony* on
your *thirteenth-century pillow*.

[Vampire]

((COUGHS WETLY))

[Manyfeek] qua coffin lid leaning against the exam-room wall
((MUFFLED FROM ITS POSITION))

I can confirm. *I have been sealed shut for centuries. Things*
grow in there.

[Specialist]

Mr. Drax, I'm prescribing a *modern bed*. A *Tempur-Pedic*.
Hypoallergenic. King-sized.

[Vampire]

I cannot sleep above ground.

[Specialist]

The bed will be below ground.

[Vampire]

That's just — *that's just a coffin.*

[Specialist]

Mr. Drax. *Every bed* is just a coffin. *Mine* is a coffin. *Yours* is a coffin. The difference is *whether you can breathe in it.*

[Vampire]

((COUGHS))

I'll think about it.

PUNCHLINE

They're coffin.

SETUP

Why do melons have weddings?

[Officiant] qua glittered cassock, Elvis-style pompadour,
microphone clipped to lapel
Beloved produce, we are gathered here today in the
Honeydew Pavilion to witness the *legal joining* of two
melons. May we have the *cantaloupe*?

[Cantaloupe Bride] qua white netting veil over a stem, slightly
bruised on one side
((WHEELED IN ON A SILVER CART))
I'm here.

[Officiant]
And the *honeydew groom*?

[Honeydew Groom] qua white-glove peel, smaller stem, very
green
I'm here.

[Officiant]
Lovely. Cantaloupe, do you take this honeydew —

[Cantaloupe Bride]
((INTERRUPTING))
Yes. Skip ahead. *Skip ahead.*

[Officiant]
Cantaloupe, why the *rush*.

[Cantaloupe Bride]

I'm *ripe*, Father. *I am very ripe right now*. We have a *window*.

[Shakes] qua flower girl, casaba melon in a tutu

This is the best of all possible matrimonies.

[Officiant]

And honeydew, do you take —

[Honeydew Groom]

Yes. Same window.

[Officiant]

By the power vested in me by the *Greater Cucurbitaceae Marriage Bureau*, I now pronounce you *legally fused*. You may *kiss* the —

[Cantaloupe Bride]

Skip.

[Officiant]

Right. Yes. Just sign here.

[Manyfeek] qua watermelon best man, slouched, somewhat
sweaty

((LEANING))

Why did you have to do this in a *chapel*. We could've *just gone to the courthouse*.

[Cantaloupe Bride]

We could not.

[Manyfeek]

Why not.

[Cantaloupe Bride]

((LOWERS VEIL))

Because *we cannot elope*.

[Officiant]

Cantaloupe and Honeydew, you may now begin your
honeymoon. You will be *jam* by *Thursday*.

PUNCHLINE

Because they cantaloupe.

26

SETUP

What did the police officer say to her belly button?

[Officer] qua tactical belt, body cam, professional stance
Hands where I can see them.

[Belly Button] qua an innie, lint slightly visible
((WHISPERS FROM BELOW THE T-SHIRT))
I don't have hands.

[Officer]
Don't get *cute*. You know why we're here.

[Belly Button]
I genuinely don't.

[Officer]
You've been *concealing*.

[Belly Button]
That's — that's the *job description*.

[Shakes] qua rookie officer with a body-cam, beaming
This is the best of all possible patrols.

[Officer]
Sir or ma'am or *neither*. We received a tip from *housekeeping*
that you have been *collecting unidentified materials* in your
cavity.

[Belly Button]
That's just *lint*.

[Officer]

That's *evidence*.

[Belly Button]

Of *what*?

[Officer]

Pocket lint without pockets. Trace fibers from three different shirts. One sequin. We have a sequin, sir.

[Belly Button]

I don't even know where that came from.

[Officer]

Right.

[Manyfeek] qua undershirt tag pinned to a nearby seam

((MUFFLED))

He's been *hoarding* down there. *I've watched it accumulate.*

[Officer]

((TO BELLY BUTTON))

You have the right to *remain* concealed. Anything you reveal can and will be used against you in a court of *personal hygiene*.

[Belly Button]

What's the *charge*.

[Officer]

((PRODUCES A FOLDED GARMENT))

Suspected possession. Stand by. I'm placing you *under a vest*.

[Belly Button]

That's just a *t-shirt*.

[Officer]

Under a vest.

[Belly Button]

((QUIETLY))

Yes, officer.

PUNCHLINE

You're under a vest.

SETUP

Why did the football coach go to the bank?

[Loan Officer] qua tie, vest, fluorescent overhead, pencil behind ear

Sir, *welcome* to Wells Fargo. How can I help you today?

[Coach] qua headset around neck, polo with team logo, clipboard

I need to make a withdrawal.

[Loan Officer]

Certainly. From which account?

[Coach]

Quarterback.

[Loan Officer]

I'm sorry?

[Coach]

My quarterback. I'd like him back, please.

[Loan Officer]

((BEAT))

Sir, *we don't* —

[Coach]

You have him. I *deposited* him last *Tuesday*.

[Loan Officer]

Sir, we are a *retail bank*.

[Coach]

I have a *deposit slip*.

(([Coach] PRODUCES A WRINKLED, SLIGHTLY DAMP
PIECE OF PAPER WITH “DREW BARNES, 6’3”, 215 LBS,
\$48M” WRITTEN ON IT))

[Shakes] qua bank greeter, smiling
This is the best of all possible branches.

[Loan Officer]

((READING))

Drew Barnes. Forty-eight million.

[Coach]

He’s my *starter*.

[Loan Officer]

And you put him in our *vault*?

[Coach]

Yes. Last Tuesday. *Three pm*. I have *footage*.

[Loan Officer]

Sir, this is *highly unusual*.

[Coach]

He has a *game on Sunday*.

[Manyfeek] qua security camera mounted in the corner

((WHIRRING))

Yeah I saw the whole thing. *He totally put a man in the safe*.

[Loan Officer]

((TURNING TO CAMERA))

We don’t *do* that, Manny.

[Manyfeek]
You *did* that, Linda.

[Loan Officer]
((TO COACH))
Sir, I need to verify your identity. Do you have a *photo ID*?

[Coach]
I have a *playbook*.

[Loan Officer]
That'll work.

PUNCHLINE

To get his quarterback.

SETUP

What's the difference between bird flu and swine flu?

[Pharmacist] qua white coat, glasses on chain, three pens in breast pocket

Mr. Berger. I'm reviewing your symptoms. Have you been around *birds*?

[BILL] qua hoodie pulled up, three days of stubble, congestion audible

((NASAL))

Yes. *No. Yes.* I have a *bird feeder*.

[Pharmacist]

And *swine*?

[BILL]

I — I had *bacon* this morning.

[Pharmacist]

((PURSES LIPS))

Mr. Berger. This is more *complicated* than I anticipated.

[Pharmacist]

((TYPING))

For *bird flu*, you will need *tweetment*.

[BILL]

Tweet —

[Pharmacist]

Twice a day. Forty-character oral dosage. *Trending.*

[Shakes] qua pharmacy technician with a clipboard, beaming
This is the best of all possible pandemic seasons.

[Pharmacist]
For *swine flu*, you will need *oinkment*.

[BILL]
Oinkment.

[Pharmacist]
A topical application. *Smells of bacon. Spreads* across the
affected area.

[BILL]
And if I have *both*?

[Pharmacist]
((SUCKS TEETH))
Then we will need to *combine*.

[BILL]
What does the combination look like.

[Pharmacist]
((PULLS DOWN A DUSTY JAR LABELED *TWOINKMENT*
IN A LABEL-MAKER FONT))
It is rare. It is *expensive*. It is what we *fear*.

[Manyfeek] qua expired tube of generic ointment behind the
counter
((FROM THE BACK))
Just rub it on yourself. That's literally what it is.

[Pharmacist]
((WITHOUT TURNING))
Manny.

[Manyfeek]

They made you pay for the joke.

[BILL]

What's the *copay*.

[Pharmacist]

For the *tweetment*: free with a *retweet*.

[BILL]

And the *oinkment*?

[Pharmacist]

Eighty-six dollars.

[BILL]

((HEAVILY))

Of *course*.

PUNCHLINE

One requires tweetment, the other an oinkment.

SETUP

What do you call a line of men waiting to get haircuts?

[Line Manager] qua TSA-style polo, walkie-talkie, retractable belt stanchion

Sir, please *step behind the yellow line*. The barberqueue is *forty-five minutes deep*.

[BILL] qua five-day stubble, growing-out hair, paperback book

What's the holdup?

[Line Manager]

We have *three barbers*. We have *forty-one men*. We have *one customer who wants a fade with a specific number*.

[BILL]

What number.

[Line Manager]

Two on the sides, one on the top, with a faded zero around the temples and a part on the left exactly seven millimeters from the cowlick.

[BILL]

And he's been in the chair for —

[Line Manager]

Two hours. He brought *reference photos*.

[BILL]

Of whom.

[Line Manager]

Of himself. From college.

[Shakes] qua receptionist behind a desk, smiling

This is the best of all possible salons.

[BILL]

Can I just get a *trim*.

[Line Manager]

Everyone here just wants a *trim*, sir.

[Manyfeek] qua aging electric clippers plugged into the wall
behind the counter

((BUZZING))

*I have not been changed in three months. I am running on
memory. I am cutting hair from the year 2024.*

[Line Manager]

((WITHOUT TURNING))

Quiet, Mort.

[BILL]

Can I sit?

[Line Manager]

The *chairs* are *part of the queue*. Standing is also *part of the
queue*. *Everything you do here is part of the queue.*

[BILL]

How long is the line *for the line*.

[Line Manager]

That's another twenty minutes.

[BILL]

((SITS ON FLOOR))

[Line Manager]

Sir, please.

[BILL]

I'm queueing horizontally.

PUNCHLINE

A barberqueue.

SETUP

Did you hear about the guy who invented Lifesavers?

[Patent Officer] qua sleeve garters, pen, single-bulb desk lamp, 1912

Mr. Crane. State your invention.

[Crane] qua waistcoat, watch chain, slightly damp brow
*A small ring-shaped confection in peppermint. Six per roll.
Wax-wrapped.*

[Patent Officer]
The *hole*, Mr. Crane.

[Crane]
The *hole* is the *point*.

[Patent Officer]
Explain.

[Crane]
The *hole* is *negative space*. The *hole* is *what you don't pay for*. The *hole* is *pure margin*.

[Shakes] qua patent office clerk, beaming
This is the best of all possible candies.

[Patent Officer]
You are *selling a hole*.

[Crane]
I am *selling sugar around a hole*. The *hole* is *complimentary*.

[Patent Officer]

And the name?

[Crane]

Life Savers.

[Patent Officer]

Because.

[Crane]

Because *if a child chokes on one, the hole allows air to pass through.*

[Patent Officer]

((LONG BEAT))

You're saying the *primary safety feature* of your candy is *that it won't kill the child eating it.*

[Crane]

Lower bar. More candy sold.

[Manyfeek] qua first prototype Life Saver rolling on the desk

((CIRCULAR))

He *also* invented the *roll wrapper. And the cellophane. And the cardboard box that holds twenty rolls.* The box is the *real money.*

[Patent Officer]

Mr. Crane. You are going to be *a wealthy man.*

[Crane]

I already am.

[Patent Officer]

Already?

[Crane]

((SMILES))

I'm *Crane*. I *also* run the *paper mill*.

[Manyfeek]

He *prints money*. *Literally*.

[Patent Officer]

The *Mint* knows about this?

[Crane]

I am the Mint.

PUNCHLINE

They say he made a mint.

SETUP

Why can't a leopard hide?

[WITSEC Handler] qua dark suit, earpiece, plain badge
Mr. Spots. We're going to relocate you. New name. New city.
New *career*.

[Leopard] qua spotted, tail twitching, sunglasses on, mid-pace
I've tried this. Three times.

[WITSEC Handler]
Tell me about the last attempt.

[Leopard]
Cleveland. I was an *accountant*. Three weeks. *Spotted at a
Trader Joe's*.

[WITSEC Handler]
By whom.

[Leopard]
A zookeeper. On *vacation*.

[Shakes] qua junior agent with a clipboard, beaming
This is the best of all possible relocation programs.

[WITSEC Handler]
Cleveland was a *bad fit*. We're considering *Omaha*.

[Leopard]
What's in Omaha.

[WITSEC Handler]

Nothing.

[Leopard]

That's *worse*. I will *stand out more*.

[WITSEC Handler]

Mr. Spots. We have *options*. We have *resources*. We have a *grooming budget*.

[Leopard]

You can't *groom away* spots.

[WITSEC Handler]

We have *dye*.

[Leopard]

((QUIETLY))

What kind.

[WITSEC Handler]

Permanent. Black.

[Leopard]

You're going to *re-color* me. Make me *all black*. Like a *panther*.

[WITSEC Handler]

Yes.

[Leopard]

Panthers are also leopards.

[WITSEC Handler]

What.

[Leopard]

Look it up. Black panthers are leopards with melanism. I will still be a leopard.

[Manyfeek] qua spot fallen from the leopard's coat, lying on the desk

((FROM THE DESK))

Even my spot knows where I am. I just rolled out.

[WITSEC Handler]

Sir. We're going to need to *think creatively*.

[Leopard]

That's been the problem.

PUNCHLINE

He's always spotted.

SETUP

Air used to be free at the gas station.

[Fed Chair] qua bookcase background, lectern, blue tie, water glass

Today's policy review will address the *Tire Air Index. TAI*. We have entered a *new regime*.

[Reporter] qua press badge, recorder, second row

Madam Chair, can you explain the *recent change* in pricing?

[Fed Chair]

Two-fifty.

[Reporter]

For air.

[Fed Chair]

For *compressed* air. *Pressurized* air. *Air that does work*.

[Shakes] qua aide with a folder, beaming

This is the best of all possible economies.

[Reporter]

Madam Chair, in 1987 this was free.

[Fed Chair]

In 1987 we had *one currency*. In 1987 we did *not* tax *gases*.

[Reporter]

Inflation has hit *the air itself*.

[Fed Chair]

Yes. We are literally inflating.

[Reporter]

Couldn't drivers just *blow* their tires up themselves?

[Fed Chair]

((PAUSES))

That is a *real* question.

[Reporter]

With their *mouths*.

[Fed Chair]

The *lung capacity* required is *substantial*.

[Reporter]

Have we *calculated* it?

[Fed Chair]

Forty-seven breaths per tire. Per PSI. We did the math at the Fed.

[Manyfeek] qua deflated bicycle tire propped against the lectern

((WHEEZING))

I have been waiting at this gas station for two days. I have \$2.30. I need twenty cents.

[Fed Chair]

Sir, we do not give change.

[Manyfeek]

I am a tire.

[Fed Chair]

All the more reason.

[Reporter]

Madam Chair, will the price *come down*?

[Fed Chair]

((LONG BEAT))

Air *rises*.

[Reporter]

That isn't how inflation works.

[Fed Chair]

It is *exactly* how inflation works.

PUNCHLINE

Now it costs \$2.50. Inflation.

33

SETUP

I tried to get a smart car but they sold out too fast.

[Sales Manager] qua headset, name tag, pen in hand, twenty years on the floor

Mr. Berger. The Smart inventory is *sold out for the quarter*.

[BILL] qua sweater, anxious, four-day-old haircut

I — I called *yesterday*.

[Sales Manager]

Yesterday at three forty-two, you called. *Three forty-three*, the inventory was *gone*.

[BILL]

That's *one minute*.

[Sales Manager]

It was *a very fast minute*.

[Shakes] qua finance assistant, beaming

This is the best of all possible dealerships.

[BILL]

Can I — can I get on the *waitlist*?

[Sales Manager]

The waitlist is also *sold out*.

[BILL]

You can sell out of a *waitlist*?

[Sales Manager]

We can sell out of anything. It is the business.

[BILL]

What's left.

[Sales Manager]

((CLICKING))

We have a Smart Car Pre-Order Waitlist Pre-Application.

[BILL]

What does that get me.

[Sales Manager]

The right to enter the lottery.

[BILL]

For the waitlist.

[Sales Manager]

For the pre-order.

[BILL]

I'm not following.

[Sales Manager]

That's part of the qualifying criteria.

[Manyfeek] qua showroom Smart Car taped off with a velvet rope and a "DEMO ONLY" sign

((FROM ITS CORNER))

I have been a demo for six years. Nobody has ever sat in me.

I cost more than my own retail.

[BILL]

I just want to *drive* one.

[Sales Manager]

We have a *test drive* available.

[BILL]

Great.

[Sales Manager]

In a Hyundai.

[BILL]

Why a Hyundai.

[Sales Manager]

We're *out* of Smart Cars.

[BILL]

((SLOW))

I... think I see the issue.

[Sales Manager]

That's what makes you a candidate.

PUNCHLINE

I guess I'm just a bit slow.

34

SETUP

Did you hear about the claustrophobic astronaut?

[Flight Surgeon] qua coffee, paper chart, glasses pushed up
Captain Reyes. Let's talk about your *last mission*.

[Reyes] qua flight suit, mission patches, hands restless
Twelve days. International Space Station. *Routine*.

[Flight Surgeon]
The *cabin logs* show you *exited the airlock* three times.
Unauthorized.

[Reyes]
Yes.

[Flight Surgeon]
For *what reason*.

[Reyes]
I needed a minute.

[Shakes] qua mission medic with a clipboard, beaming
This is the best of all possible orbits.

[Flight Surgeon]
Captain, the *vacuum of space* is *not a place to take a minute*.

[Reyes]
The *cabin* is *six feet by eight feet*.

[Flight Surgeon]
The *cabin* is *six feet by eight feet* for *good reasons*.

[Reyes]

The *space* outside the cabin is *six trillion light-years by six trillion light-years*.

[Flight Surgeon]

((WRITING))

I see.

[Reyes]

Have you ever been in a six-by-eight room with three other men and a freeze-dried omelet.

[Flight Surgeon]

No.

[Reyes]

For twelve days.

[Flight Surgeon]

No.

[Reyes]

I just wanted *room*.

[Flight Surgeon]

Captain. You are an *astronaut*. The job is *the small room*.

[Reyes]

The job is *also* the *outside*.

[Manyfeek] qua tether line draped on the surgeon's desk, cut at one end

((LIMP))

He cut me. Three times. I'm a tether. I have one job.

[Flight Surgeon]

Captain. We need to talk about your *next mission*.

[Reyes]

What is it.

[Flight Surgeon]

Mars.

[Reyes]

((LIGHTS UP))

That's *bigger*.

[Flight Surgeon]

Twenty months in a tin can.

[Reyes]

((DEFLATES))

Oh.

PUNCHLINE

He just wanted a bit more space.

SETUP

What did the plumber say to the singer?

[Talent Scout] qua tweed jacket, monocle on string, audition card

Miss Aria. We're *enchanted*. Your *range* is *extraordinary*.

[Soprano] qua gown, sheet music, hair coiled high
Thank you. I — I've been training since I was *six*.

[Talent Scout]

And the *tone*. *Pure. Resonant. Architectural*.

[Plumber] qua coveralls, wrench in back pocket, lunch pail
((ENTERING))

'Scuse me. I'm here about the *upstairs leak*.

[Talent Scout]

Sir, we're in the middle of an audition —

[Plumber]

((TO SOPRANO))

Nice *pipes*.

[Shakes] qua pianist on stool, beaming
This is the best of all possible auditions.

[Soprano]

((BEAMING))

Thank you so much.

[Plumber]

Copper?

[Soprano]

I'm sorry?

[Plumber]

The *pipes*. Are they *copper*?

[Soprano]

((CONFUSED))

I — they're *vocal chords*, sir.

[Plumber]

((PEERING))

Yeah, but. Are they *copper*. Or *PVC*. Because the *resonance* I'm hearing is *suspiciously copper*.

[Soprano]

I have never been described as suspiciously copper.

[Plumber]

The *vibrato* is *off*, ma'am. *I'm telling you*. You've got a *pinhole leak* in your *upper register*.

[Manyfeek] qua bottle of Drano left on the stage

((FROM ITS POSITION))

He always does this. He fixed our church organ last week. Charged us six hundred dollars. It was a hymnal.

[Talent Scout]

Sir, would you *kindly leave the audition*.

[Plumber]

I can come back. The *upstairs leak* can wait.

[Soprano]
((QUIETLY, RESUMING THE ARIA))
La-aaaaaaaa —

[Plumber]
((FROM THE DOORWAY))
Solder, ma'am. That's all you need. Soft solder.

PUNCHLINE

Nice pipes.

SETUP

How do you make an octopus laugh?

[Open Mic Host] qua too-loud Hawaiian shirt, headset mic,
faux-leather barstool

Aaaand please welcome to the stage, all the way from the
Atlantic Trench — give it up for *Larry*!

(([Larry] WHEELS HIMSELF ONSTAGE IN A WATER-
FILLED CONTAINER ON A DOLLY. EIGHT ARMS GENTLY
WAVING.))

[Larry] qua medium-sized octopus, glasses balanced on his
beak

Thanks. *Thanks. Wow. Tough room. Lot of fish out there.*

((CRICKETS. ACTUAL CRICKETS — TWO ON A LILY PAD
IN THE FRONT ROW.))

[Larry]

Anyway. *So I'm in the ocean. Right?* And I'm thinking. *I'm
thinking. Where is everybody?* Then I remember — *we're all
in the ocean.*

((SILENCE. ONE CRICKET TURNS TO THE OTHER.))

[Shakes] qua sound technician with a smile, beaming
This is the best of all possible open mics.

[Larry]

*Okay tough crowd. Anyone here from the Atlantic? Anyone?
Just me?*

[Manyfeek] qua scientific octopus-research diving suit on a hanger backstage

((FROM THE WINGS))

He bombs every Tuesday. We're going to lose this gig.

[Open Mic Host]

((FROM SIDE OF STAGE))

Larry. Crowd work. Try crowd work.

[Larry]

((LOOKING AT THE FRONT ROW))

Sir. Hi sir. Where are you from?

[Audience Member] qua a small flounder lying flat on a stool

The same ocean as you, Larry.

[Larry]

Right. Right. We are all in the same ocean.

((LONG SILENCE.))

[Open Mic Host]

Larry. Plan B. Plan B.

[Larry]

((SIGHING WITH ALL EIGHT ARMS))

Okay. Self-tickle.

((([Larry] REACHES OUT WITH FOUR ARMS, USES THE OTHER FOUR TO TICKLE HIS OWN MANTLE))

[Larry]

((HELPLESSLY))

Hahahaha. Hahahaha. Hahahaha.

((THE AUDIENCE BURSTS INTO LAUGHTER, FINALLY.))

[Larry]

((MID-LAUGH))

This is the only thing that works. Every time.

[Open Mic Host]

Give it up for *Larry the Octopus*, ladies and gentlemen.

PUNCHLINE

With ten-tickles.

37

SETUP

What do you call a fibbing cat?

[Attorney] qua suit, leather portfolio, court reporter at table
Mr. Whiskers. *State your full name for the record.*

[Cat] qua tuxedo coat, white paws, slit eyes
Whiskers.

[Attorney]
First name.

[Cat]
Mister.

[Attorney]
Sir.

[Cat]
((LICKS PAW))
You said full name. Mister Whiskers.

[Attorney]
Mr. Whiskers. *On October 14th, were you in the kitchen.*

[Cat]
No.

[Attorney]
We have security footage.

[Cat]
That's a different cat.

[Shakes] qua paralegal with a notepad, beaming
This is the best of all possible depositions.

[Attorney]
Mr. Whiskers. *Did you eat the entire pound of deli turkey.*

[Cat]
Define “eat”.

[Attorney]
Place in mouth. Chew. Swallow.

[Cat]
No.

[Attorney]
The turkey is *gone*.

[Cat]
It was always gone. Time is a flat circle. I question the premise.

[Attorney]
((LONG BEAT))
Mr. Whiskers. Are you *aware* that *lying under oath* carries *criminal penalties*?

[Cat]
I am aware. I have also lied under oath. Also under the bed. Also under the cushion. I lie under most things.

[Manyfeek] qua empty turkey package crumpled in the trash can
((FROM THE BIN))
He’s lying right now. He has turkey on his chin. I can see it from here.

[Attorney]

Mr. Whiskers.

[Cat]

Yes.

[Attorney]

That's turkey. On your chin. Right now.

[Cat]

Different turkey.

[Attorney]

((CLOSING PORTFOLIO))

I have no further questions.

[Cat]

Then I have no further answers.

PUNCHLINE

A lion.

SETUP

Want to hear a joke about paper?

[Writers' Room Lead] qua glasses, dry-erase marker, three-day-old whiteboard

Okay. The *paper* joke. Pitch it.

[BILL] qua hoodie, sneakers, two cups of cold coffee

Want to hear a joke about paper?

[Writers' Room Lead]

Yeah.

[BILL]

Never mind.

[Writers' Room Lead]

Why.

[BILL]

It's tearable.

((LONG BEAT.))

[Shakes] qua junior writer with a fresh notepad, beaming

This is the best of all possible writers' rooms.

[Writers' Room Lead]

Bill.

[BILL]

Yes.

[Writers' Room Lead]

We bought this premise in 1987.

[BILL]

I know.

[Writers' Room Lead]

We have paid out residuals on the paper joke in thirty-six languages.

[BILL]

I know.

[Writers' Room Lead]

Every paper joke is a derivative work of the original paper joke.

[BILL]

I know.

[Writers' Room Lead]

Bill. *Tear up* the pitch.

[BILL]

That's the joke.

[Writers' Room Lead]

That's the joke.

[Manyfeek] qua a sheet of legal-pad paper crumpled in the corner

((FROM THE CARPET))

I have been the punchline four hundred and twelve times this year. I am very, very tired.

[Writers' Room Lead]

The *paper* is also in this room.

[Manyfeek]

Always.

[Writers' Room Lead]

Bill. Let's *retire* the paper joke.

[BILL]

We *can't*.

[Writers' Room Lead]

Why not.

[BILL]

((PRODUCES A FILE FOLDER))

The contract was signed on paper.

[Writers' Room Lead]

Of course it was.

PUNCHLINE

Never mind. It's tearable.

39

SETUP

Why did the scarecrow get a promotion?

[CEO] qua podium, banner reading *MIDWEST CROP PROTECTION INDUSTRIES — 2026 AWARDS*, microphone
Please join me in welcoming this year's *Regional Manager of the Year* — our own, our beloved — *Stan*.

(([Stan] AMBLES TO THE STAGE: BURLAP HEAD, STRAW LIMBS, DENIM OVERALLS, EYES PAINTED ON, CARROT NOSE))

[Stan] qua slightly tilted, one straw arm shorter than the other, hat brim worn
Thank you. *Thank you all*.

[CEO]
Stan. *Twenty-six years* with the company. *Zero crows*. Tell us the secret.

[Stan]
I just *stand there*.

[CEO]
Tell us *how you stand there*.

[Stan]
With my arms out. And *eyes painted on*.

[Shakes] qua HR rep with a corsage, beaming
This is the best of all possible career trajectories.

[CEO]

Stan, the board has voted *unanimously* to promote you to
Senior Director of Field Operations.

[Stan]

Same field?

[CEO]

Same field. Just more title.

[Stan]

What's the *raise*.

[CEO]

We're going to *upgrade your overalls* to *Carhartt*.

[Stan]

And the *pay*.

[CEO]

Same pay. But Carhartt.

[Manyfeek] qua a single crow perched on the lectern

((CAWING))

This guy hasn't moved in a quarter century. I'm right here.

I've been right here. I built a nest in his sleeve.

[CEO]

Stan, would you like to *say a few words*?

[Stan]

((LONG BEAT))

I'm still standing.

[CEO]

And that, friends, is leadership.

[Manyfeek]

He's not leadership. He's a mannequin.

[CEO]

Tell that to the corn.

[Manyfeek]

The corn is also dead.

[CEO]

Tell that to the corn.

PUNCHLINE

He was outstanding in his field.

SETUP

Where does Napoleon keep his armies?

[Marshal Ney] qua high collar, sash, polished boots, war room
Sire. The *Russians* await our reply. Where shall I deploy the
Imperial Guard?

[Napoleon] qua bicorne hat askew, hand inside his coat as
always, slightly damp
Sleeves.

[Marshal Ney]
I'm sorry?

[Napoleon]
In my sleeves, Ney. The Imperial Guard is in my sleeves.

[Marshal Ney]
Sire. *Forty thousand men are not in your sleeves.*

[Napoleon]
Look.

(([Napoleon] LIFTS BOTH ARMS. SOMETHING BULGES
INSIDE EACH SLEEVE.))

[Marshal Ney]
Sire.

[Napoleon]
Quietly, Ney. They are sleeping.

[Shakes] qua aide-de-camp with a quill, beaming
This is the best of all possible campaigns.

[Marshal Ney]
Sire, *the Russians*.

[Napoleon]
The Russians are also in my sleeves.

[Marshal Ney]
Whose sleeves.

[Napoleon]
Mine.

[Marshal Ney]
But —

[Napoleon]
*Ney. When you said the Imperial Guard, where did you think
I kept them.*

[Marshal Ney]
In the barracks, Sire. In the field tents. In the line of march.

[Napoleon]
Inefficient.

[Manyfeek] qua single Old Guardsman peering out of the
right cuff
(MUFFLED)
*I have been in here since 1799. I would like to come out. Just
for an hour.*

[Napoleon]
Soon, Pierre.

[Marshal Ney]

Sire. *Where do you keep your generals?*

[Napoleon]

((TAPS HIS BICORNE))

Here.

[Marshal Ney]

And the *Navy*?

[Napoleon]

((LOOKS DOWN))

Boots.

[Marshal Ney]

Sire, with respect, *this is not how armies work.*

[Napoleon]

That is why I am winning.

PUNCHLINE

In his sleeveies.

SETUP

What's a lawyer's favorite drink?

[Bartender] qua polo with firm logo, mustache, cocktail shaker

What'll it be, counselor?

[Junior Associate] qua wrinkled suit, tie loosened, two ounces of weep about to release

I'll have... the *subpoena colada*.

[Bartender]

Of course. *Coconut cream. Pineapple. White rum. Process server's signature. Notice of appearance. Garnish: small umbrella stamped CERTIFIED.*

[Junior Associate]

Make it a *double*.

[Bartender]

Two service requirements?

[Junior Associate]

Two service requirements.

[Shakes] qua bar back with a smile, beaming

This is the best of all possible happy hours.

[Senior Partner] qua bespoke, scotch, eyebrows

Subpoena, Williams?

[Junior Associate]

Yes sir.

[Senior Partner]

Light or strong?

[Junior Associate]

Strong. Document production attached.

[Senior Partner]

((CHUCKLES))

That'll *put hair on your motions*.

[Manyfeek] qua discarded bar napkin with case citations
scrawled on it

((FROM THE BAR))

*This man has been served three subpoenas in this bar. We're
a venue now.*

[Bartender]

((SLIDING THE DRINK))

Will you also be having a *tort-illa chip*?

[Junior Associate]

Yes.

[Bartender]

And a *side of habeas-mole*?

[Junior Associate]

Yes.

[Senior Partner]

Williams. You're *unwinding*.

[Junior Associate]

((SIPPING))

This is *legal*.

[Senior Partner]

Sweet?

[Junior Associate]

Strict liability.

[Senior Partner]

The garnish.

[Junior Associate]

((READING THE STAMPED UMBRELLA))

"You have twenty-one days to respond."

[Senior Partner]

((RAISING SCOTCH))

To the practice.

PUNCHLINE

A subpoena colada.

SETUP

What did Sony release during the pandemic?

[Sony Executive] qua black turtleneck, AirPods, white-on-black slide deck, March 2020

Welcome to *State of Play, Spring Edition*. Today we are *thrilled* to unveil the *next chapter* in our flagship platform.

((SLIDE: SLEEK BLACK CONSOLE, WHITE PIPING, LOGO IN A FONT THAT TOOK THREE MONTHS OF DESIGN-COMMITTEE DEBATE))

[Sony Executive]

The Plaguestation 5.

((THE ROOM — EMPTY. PLEXIGLASS. ONE MASKED PR REP.))

[PR Rep] qua KN-95, faceshield over that, gallon of hand sanitizer

Plague-station? With a plague?

[Sony Executive]

Pandemic-era branding. Focus group tested. *Resonant*.

[Shakes] qua livestream director from the back, smiling
This is the best of all possible product launches.

[PR Rep]

Sir, we are *in a plague*.

[Sony Executive]

Yes.

[PR Rep]

And we are *naming* the console —

[Sony Executive]

After it.

[PR Rep]

Because —

[Sony Executive]

Because the players are stuck inside. They have nowhere to go. They are receptive to the metaphor.

[Manyfeek] qua single working PS4 in the warehouse behind them

((WHIRRING))

I am still here. I still work. Why are we doing this.

[Sony Executive]

Manny. Quiet.

[Manyfeek]

Plaguestation. Like, with the plague.

[Sony Executive]

The launch title is Resident Evil Village.

[Manyfeek]

OF COURSE IT IS.

[PR Rep]

Sir. The *price point*?

[Sony Executive]

Four ninety-nine.

[PR Rep]

And the *next iteration*?

[Sony Executive]

Plaguestation 5 Pro. Six ninety-nine. Comes with a mask.

[PR Rep]

A face mask?

[Sony Executive]

A controller mask. Antimicrobial silicone. Protects the buttons.

[PR Rep]

The *players* don't have masks?

[Sony Executive]

That is on them.

PUNCHLINE

The Plaguestation 5.

SETUP

What's the difference between a wizard who raises the undead and a sexy vampire?

[Trust & Safety Lead] qua headset, three monitors, mug that says T&S NEVER SLEEPS

Okay. Tier-three review. *Profile 412-Beta*. Reported for *misrepresentation*.

[Reviewer] qua hoodie, second monitor, coffee
Pulled it up. *Bio reads*: “Six-five, brooding, into long walks through cemeteries, can raise your dead, *will rock your world*.”

[Trust & Safety Lead]
Which world?

[Reviewer]
Unclear.

[Trust & Safety Lead]
Photo?

[Reviewer]
Bare chest. Cape. Skull on a desk. Soft lighting. Ambiguously gothic.

[Shakes] qua compliance officer with a binder, beaming
This is the best of all possible review queues.

[Trust & Safety Lead]
Self-identifies as —

[Reviewer]

Necromancer.

[Trust & Safety Lead]

And the *complaint*?

[Reviewer]

Six matches in. The *matches* expected a *vampire*. *He is not a vampire. He is a guy who raises the dead.*

[Trust & Safety Lead]

Big distinction.

[Reviewer]

Huge distinction.

[Manyfeek] qua enchanted skull on the necromancer's desk in the profile picture

((HOLLOWLY))

I have been on his desk for eleven years. He has not once invited me to dinner. I want to clarify the listing.

[Trust & Safety Lead]

The bio says "rock your world."

[Reviewer]

That's literally what he does. He rocks worlds. Tectonically. Six villages.

[Trust & Safety Lead]

And the *competing* profile? *412-Charlie?*

[Reviewer]

"Tall, pale, drinks reds, will rock your neck."

[Trust & Safety Lead]

That's the *neck romancer*.

[Reviewer]

Different guy.

[Trust & Safety Lead]

Same lighting.

[Reviewer]

Different intent.

[Trust & Safety Lead]

Recommend?

[Reviewer]

Disambiguation banner. "This user raises the dead and does not flirt." And the other one: "This user flirts and may also be raising the dead, ask before second date."

[Trust & Safety Lead]

Approved.

PUNCHLINE

One is a necromancer and the other is a neck romancer.

SETUP

Why were there so many Lances in medieval times?

[Heraldic Registrar] qua tabard, ink-stained fingers, scroll,
quill
Next.

[Knight #1] qua plate armor, helmet under arm
Lance.

[Heraldic Registrar]
((WRITING))
Lance. Father's name.

[Knight #1]
Lance.

[Heraldic Registrar]
And his father?

[Knight #1]
Lance.

[Heraldic Registrar]
Next.

[Knight #2] qua chainmail, slightly rusted
Lance.

[Heraldic Registrar]
((WITHOUT LOOKING UP))
Father.

[Knight #2]

Lance.

[Heraldic Registrar]

((SIGHING))

Next.

[Shakes] qua scribe's apprentice, beaming
This is the best of all possible heraldic offices.

[Knight #3] qua plate, falcon on shoulder
Sir Lancelot.

[Heraldic Registrar]

((PAUSING))

Of?

[Knight #3]

The Lake.

[Heraldic Registrar]

Different Lance.

[Knight #3]

A Lance.

[Heraldic Registrar]

Why are you *all* named *Lance*.

[Knight #1]

The *guild* requires it.

[Heraldic Registrar]

Which guild.

[Knight #1]

The *Lance Guild*.

[Manyfeek] qua stack of identical surplus lances leaning
against the registry wall
((MUFFLED))

*We outfit them. We name them. We bury them. Industry
standard.*

[Heraldic Registrar]
*Sir Lance the First, Sir Lance the Second, Sir Lance the
Third, Sir Lance the Fourth — we have fourteen Lances in the
same county.*

[Knight #1]
The post office has a system.

[Heraldic Registrar]
What system.

[Knight #1]
They sort it out themselves.

[Heraldic Registrar]
And the peasants?

[Knight #1]
The peasants don't get mail.

[Manyfeek]
Pragmatic.

[Heraldic Registrar]
Next.

[Knight #4]
Lance.

[Heraldic Registrar]
Of course you are.

PUNCHLINE

Because they were called lance-a-lot.

SETUP

What do you call a wizard who's really bad at football?

[Referee] qua black-and-white striped robes, whistle,
broomstick parked off-pitch

Right. *Hogwarts All-Stars versus Beauxbatons Boys' Eleven.*
Captain Dumbledore for the home side. Toss for kickoff.

[Dumbledore] qua starched white kit over star-and-moon
robes, beard tucked into the collar, cleats on backwards
((COIN TOSS))

Tails.

[Referee]

Tails it is. Kickoff to Hogwarts.

(([Dumbledore] CONJURES A BALL. IT IS A BALL OF
FIRE.))

[Referee]

Headmaster. No magic on the pitch.

[Dumbledore]

I was just lighting it up.

[Referee]

Use the FA-approved ball.

[Shakes] qua linesman with a flag, beaming
This is the best of all possible derbies.

(([Dumbledore] BACKS UP. RUNS AT THE BALL. TRIPS ON HIS OWN ROBES. THE BALL ROLLS AWKWARDLY TWO YARDS TO THE LEFT.))

[Referee]
Headmaster.

[Dumbledore]
Got it. Got it.

(([Dumbledore] RUNS UP AGAIN. KICKS WITH FULL FORCE. THE BALL GOES STRAIGHT UP. HE LOOKS UP. LOSES BALANCE. FALLS BACKWARDS INTO HIS OWN GOAL.))

[Manyfeek] qua sentient pumpkin in the away-supporters' section, painted in Beauxbatons colors
((BOOING))
HE OWN-GOALED HIMSELF. HE PHYSICALLY OWN-GOALED HIMSELF.

[Referee]
That counts.

[Dumbledore]
((GETTING UP))
Match is young.

(([Dumbledore] TAKES THE NEXT KICK. THE BALL ROLLS GENTLY TOWARD A FRESHLY-CONJURED MAGICAL TRAP. THE TRAP CLOSES ON HIS OWN FOOT.))

[Referee]
Headmaster. You're in your own snare.

[Dumbledore]
Defensive structure.

[Referee]

Whose defense.

[Dumbledore]

Indeterminate.

[Manyfeek]

HE IS PLAYING ALL FOUR POSITIONS BADLY AT ONCE.

[Referee]

((WRITING))

Yellow card for Headmaster Dumbledore. Foul on self.

[Dumbledore]

A new charge.

PUNCHLINE

Fumbledore.

SETUP

What's a guitar player's favorite Italian food?

[Server] qua apron, three pens behind ear, six-table section
Maestro. Welcome to *Trattoria Sei Corde*. May I bring you a
cocktail?

[Guitarist] qua leather jacket, soul patch, fingers calloused on
 the left hand
A Negroni. And the *strum-boli*.

[Server]
The strum-boli.

[Guitarist]
Yes.

[Server]
A bold choice tonight.

[Guitarist]
I always order it.

[Server]
 ((TO THE KITCHEN))
One strum-boli! Fully voiced!

[Shakes] qua busboy with a basket of focaccia, beaming
 This is the best of all possible Tuscan menus.

[Guitarist]
 What's in it today?

[Server]

*Chef has used the Em cheese, the G sausage, the C spinach,
and a D7 tomato reduction.*

[Guitarist]

Standard tuning.

[Server]

The chef tunes to standard before he tunes to plate.

[Guitarist]

And the crust?

[Server]

Calluses. Hand-formed. Sixty days of pressing.

[Manyfeek] *qua* jukebox in the back corner, playing the same
Stratocaster solo on loop

((TINNILY))

*Every guitarist orders this. Every Tuesday. None of them
know what it is. It is a hot pocket.*

[Server]

((WITHOUT TURNING))

Mort. Quiet.

[Guitarist]

What did the jukebox say.

[Server]

He's having a moment.

[Manyfeek]

IT IS A HOT POCKET.

[Server]

((SLIDING THE PLATE DOWN))

Strum-boli for the gentleman. Mind the tremolo as you cut.

[Guitarist]

((CUTS. STEAM RISES. INSIDE: PEPPERONI, CHEESE, A
SMALL E-STRING.))

[Guitarist]

Beautiful.

[Server]

Buon appetito, Maestro.

PUNCHLINE

Strum-boli.

SETUP

Where did Uncle Frank want to be buried?

[Funeral Director] qua somber black suit, clipboard, lapel pin shaped like a chalice

Mr. Berger. Thank you for coming in. Let's discuss your uncle's *final wishes*.

[BILL] qua dark sweater, two-day stubble, holding a folder labeled UNCLE FRANK

He left a *letter*.

[Funeral Director]

Please.

[BILL]

((READING))

"I, Frank Berger, being of sound mind and considerable thirst, hereby direct my remains to be placed inside my favorite stein, which is to be displayed on the mantel of the Bavarian Garden in Kitchener, Ontario, where I had my best birthday in 1987."

[Funeral Director]

((LONG BEAT))

Mr. Berger.

[BILL]

Yes.

[Funeral Director]

The *stein*.

[BILL]

Yes.

[Funeral Director]

One liter.

[BILL]

Yes.

[Funeral Director]

Uncle Frank was *six foot one*.

[BILL]

Yes.

[Shakes] qua mortuary assistant, beaming

This is the best of all possible interments.

[BILL]

The letter is *clear*.

[Funeral Director]

The letter is *physically impossible*.

[BILL]

He was *specific*.

[Funeral Director]

We will need to *cremate*.

[BILL]

He didn't want to be cremated.

[Funeral Director]

Mr. Berger. *He wants to be in a one-liter stein*. He cannot simultaneously want to *not be cremated*.

[BILL]

He was *complicated*.

[Manyfeek] qua actual stein on the table between them,
slightly chipped, monogrammed *FB*
((FROM ITS LID))

*I am willing to compromise. I am willing to be larger. I will
absorb him whole if necessary.*

[Funeral Director]

The *stein* is *speaking*.

[BILL]

The stein knew him better than I did.

[Funeral Director]

((WRITING))

We will *cremate*. We will *fill the stein*. We will *seal it with the
original lid*. The lid is *non-negotiable*.

[BILL]

Frank wouldn't have it any other way.

[Manyfeek]

Frank is in stein.

PUNCHLINE

In his beer mug — he wanted to be Frank in Stein.

SETUP

What brand of underwear do scientists wear?

[Runway Announcer] qua headset, glittered blazer, monitor showing temperature in *Kelvin*

Welcome back to *NYFW Lab Edition*. Up next on the runway — *Kelvin Klein Spring/Summer*.

((A MODEL STEPS OUT IN A WHITE LAB COAT OVER MINIMAL UNDERGARMENTS PRINTED WITH PERIODIC-TABLE SYMBOLS))

[Runway Announcer]

The brief, the boxer, the bunsen-burner-resistant trunk. All in the brand's signature thermodynamically neutral fabric.

[Fashion Editor] qua front row, glasses, two cell phones, leather-bound notebook

Is that the Boltzmann line?

[Runway Announcer]

Yes. Each piece is rated to absolute zero.

[Fashion Editor]

Why.

[Runway Announcer]

Because the scientist who wears it might need to enter a cryostat.

[Fashion Editor]

That's a lot of garments to make for that case.

[Runway Announcer]

Niche market. High margin.

[Shakes] qua front-row publicist with a clipboard, beaming

This is the best of all possible collections.

((SECOND MODEL EMERGES: KELVIN KLEIN “THE CARNOT,” A FULL-COVERAGE BRIEF WITH HEAT-EXCHANGE PIPING))

[Runway Announcer]

The Carnot. Reversible. Engine-efficient. Approved by the second law.

[Fashion Editor]

Have they validated this with actual scientists?

[Runway Announcer]

The CEO has a PhD.

[Fashion Editor]

In what.

[Runway Announcer]

Mechanical engineering.

[Fashion Editor]

So no.

[Manyfeek] qua single label from a Kelvin Klein boxer, fallen on the runway

((FROM THE FLOOR))

“Made in Switzerland. 100% absolute-zero-rated cotton. Do not warm above 273.15 K. Tumble dry not.”

[Fashion Editor]

“Tumble dry not.”

[Manyfeek]

Not “tumble dry low.” “Tumble dry not.” The garment cannot tumble dry.

[Fashion Editor]

Because.

[Manyfeek]

It is already as dry as it can be. That’s the entire point.

[Runway Announcer]

Final look. The Absolute.

((A MODEL STEPS OUT IN A SINGLE WHITE THONG
MARKED o K))

[Runway Announcer]

Zero motion. Zero entropy. Zero exposure to fabric softener.

[Fashion Editor]

I’ll take twelve.

PUNCHLINE

Kelvin Klein.

SETUP

How many rings are there in marriage?

[Jeweler] qua loupe on chain, suit, glass counter, oxblood
velvet ring trays

Welcome to *Forever and a Day*. You're shopping for the *full set*?

[BILL] qua sweater, anxious, slightly clammy palms
The full set.

[Jeweler]
Three rings. Standard.

[BILL]
Three.

[Jeweler]
Engagement. Wedding. And the *third*.

[BILL]
What's the third.

[Jeweler]
((REVEALS A TINY DULL-GRAY RING WITH NO STONE))
The suffer-ring.

[BILL]
The —

[Jeweler]
Suffer-ring. Sir.

[Shakes] qua junior associate behind the counter, beaming
This is the best of all possible nuptials.

[BILL]

What is —

[Jeweler]

The *suffer-ring* is included. *Standard. Comes with the package.* Some clients receive theirs at the ceremony. Some at the first holiday with the in-laws. Some, sir, not until the *first joint tax filing*.

[BILL]

That's not —

[Jeweler]

Eight to twelve months in. Statistical mean.

[BILL]

You sell *one* of these per *couple*?

[Jeweler]

We sell *several*. Some couples ask for the *upgraded* suffer-ring. *Custom-fit. Engraved with private grievances.*

[BILL]

Why.

[Jeweler]

For *re-gifting*.

[BILL]

Among themselves?

[Jeweler]

At anniversaries.

[Manyfeek] qua worn suffer-ring on the consignment shelf
behind the counter

((FROM ITS VELVET))

*I have been here eleven years. Three previous owners. I have
absorbed thirty-seven percent of all marital tension on
Eighth Street.*

[Jeweler]

Mort has *seen* things.

[BILL]

Does the marriage come with the suffer-ring or cause it?

[Jeweler]

Yes.

[BILL]

Which.

[Jeweler]

Both.

[BILL]

Can I *return* the suffer-ring.

[Jeweler]

Sir.

[BILL]

((QUIETLY))

The marriage?

[Jeweler]

That's what the suffer-ring is for.

PUNCHLINE

Three: the engagement ring, the wedding ring, and the suffer-ring.

SETUP

What kind of fruit do ghosts like?

[Produce Manager] qua organic apron, beard, single AirPods, tablet on hip

Welcome to *Whole Spirit Foods*. The *poltergeist* line is in aisle six.

[Ghost] qua translucent, faintly Victorian, drifting at hip height

I'm here for the *boo-berries*.

[Produce Manager]

The *boo-berries* are in *cold-haunted storage*. They're *premium* this season.

[Ghost]

((CHEERFUL))

Mortal mortals tell me they taste like blueberries.

[Produce Manager]

They are blueberries. *Picked by ghosts. Touched by ghosts. Boxed by ghosts. Premium markup for the labor source.*

[Ghost]

And the *crop* is *certified*?

[Produce Manager]

Spectrally certified. USDA Hauntings Division.

[Shakes] qua bag boy in suspenders, beaming

This is the best of all possible groceries.

[Ghost]

What's the price.

[Produce Manager]

Twelve ninety-nine a pint.

[Ghost]

Twelve.

[Produce Manager]

The picking workforce is unionized.

[Ghost]

By whom.

[Produce Manager]

Local 1882. Ectoplasmic Brotherhood of Berry Pickers.

[Ghost]

I'm a member.

[Produce Manager]

Then we offer you the picker's discount. Ten ninety-nine.

[Ghost]

((PRODUCES TRANSLUCENT MEMBERSHIP CARD))

[Manyfeek] qua single boo-berry that escaped the carton,
rolling slowly toward the registers

((FROM THE FLOOR))

*I am not a blueberry. I am the same blueberry. They put a
boo in front of me and tripled my price.*

[Produce Manager]

Mort, please return to the carton.

[Manyfeek]

I am free. I am wild boo-berry. Catch me.

[Produce Manager]

((TO GHOST))

Sir, will you also be needing any *moan-ades? Scary-tarts?*
Ghoul-ash?

[Ghost]

Just the boo-berries.

[Produce Manager]

Cash, card, or séance?

[Ghost]

Séance.

[Produce Manager]

((PUTS DOWN A OUIJA-PINPAD))

Spell out your CVV.

PUNCHLINE

Boo-berries.

SETUP

What happens when frogs park illegally?

[Magistrate] qua robes, gavel, bench

Case 412-Charlie. *People of Pond County versus Mr. Rivet.*

Approach.

[Frog] qua green, slightly damp, suit jacket, briefcase

Your honor.

[Magistrate]

Mr. Rivet. You are accused of *illegal lily-pad occupation*. *Six counts*. Read the citation.

[Bailiff] qua uniform, holding a tablet

“Defendant was observed on the morning of April 9th occupying lily-pads designated for emergency-amphibian vehicles only, in a non-emergency state, for a period of approximately three hours and twelve minutes.”

[Frog]

Your honor. I was sitting on a lily pad.

[Magistrate]

A reserved lily pad.

[Frog]

I didn’t see a sign.

[Magistrate]

The sign is underwater. It is under the lily-pad.

[Shakes] qua court reporter, beaming
This is the best of all possible municipal hearings.

[Frog]
How could I see it.

[Magistrate]
That is the point of the placement. Frogs are presumed to know which lily-pads are theirs.

[Frog]
By what mechanism.

[Magistrate]
Croak recognition. Each lily-pad has a registered croak.

[Frog]
That's a biometric requirement that was never disclosed.

[Manyfeek] qua impounded lily-pad on the evidence table,
leaves curling
((FROM ITS POSITION))
*I have been towed forty-six times this year. I have no agency.
I am a vehicle.*

[Magistrate]
Mr. Rivet. The penalty for six counts of illegal parking is six hundred dollars or six days community service.

[Frog]
What's the community service.

[Magistrate]
Cleaning the murk.

[Frog]
Which murk.

[Magistrate]

All of it.

[Frog]

I'll take the *fine*.

[Magistrate]

And your *vehicle* has been *towed*.

[Frog]

By whom.

[Magistrate]

Toad services.

[Frog]

Same toads?

[Magistrate]

Same toads.

[Frog]

Of course it is.

PUNCHLINE

They get toad.

SETUP

What do you call bears with no ears?

[Type Director] qua minimalist gallery space, hexagonal
eyeglasses, wool turtleneck

We're reviewing the *new bears* for the *Spring Identity
Refresh*.

[KayCEE] qua chrome-finish humanoid, sound of internal
cooling fans, faintly admiring everything
Bring up the first letterform.

(([Type Director] SLIDES A LAMINATED CARD FORWARD:
A CAPITAL **B**))

[KayCEE]
*B. Standalone glyph. Two enclosed counters. Spine on the
left. Bowl-stacking with the proper junction. Beautiful.*

[Type Director]
That's the *thesis* bear.

[KayCEE]
*It is bear-class. It is also B-class. The convergence is
exquisite.*

[Shakes] qua type-foundry intern with a magnifying loupe,
beaming
This is the best of all possible visual identities.

[Type Director]

We'd like to apply the *system* across the *bear family*. *Polar, brown, grizzly, sun, Kodiak. All B-class.*

[KayCEE]

And the ears?

[Type Director]

The ears are removed.

[KayCEE]

((PAUSE))

Then they are no longer bears. They are B.

[Type Director]

Right.

[KayCEE]

*The B is the bear with its ears removed. The ear is the descender. Without the descender, the glyph is purely architectural.**

[Type Director]

Right.

[KayCEE]

Bears have two ears. The B has two enclosed counters. The counters are where the ears were. The ear became enclosed space. The bear has been abstracted.

[Manyfeek] *qua single removed bear-ear taxidermied on a velvet block on the studio's reference shelf*

((FROM THE SHELF))

This is my ear. They took it for the kerning study. I have not heard since.

[Type Director]

That ear is paid for.

[Manyfeek]

I was not consulted.

[KayCEE]

The ear is now part of the counterform. The ear has joined the whitespace. The ear has graduated.

[Type Director]

((WRITING))

Approved. Spring identity: the B bear.

[KayCEE]

Three more, please.

[Type Director]

More B-bears?

[KayCEE]

Odd numbers. Three. Or five. Five is also beautiful.

PUNCHLINE

1.

SETUP

What's an astronaut's favorite part of the computer?

[Tech Columnist] qua glasses, podcast mic, cardigan, sitting across from the astronaut

Welcome back to *Hardware Hour*. My guest today is *Mission Specialist Reyes*. Captain, what's your favorite *peripheral*?

[Reyes] qua flight suit, hands resting on table, slight twitch
The *space bar*.

[Tech Columnist]
The *spacebar*?

[Reyes]
The space bar. Two words.

[Tech Columnist]
Captain, I think you may be —

[Reyes]
The space bar. It is the bar at the bottom of the keyboard. I press it when I want a space. On Earth, this is a routine operation. In space, the space bar is the space.

[Tech Columnist]
I'm sorry?

[Reyes]
Every time I press it, I am asserting space. I am generating space. I am, in effect, expanding the universe by one character width.*

[Shakes] qua podcast producer behind the glass, beaming
This is the best of all possible interviews.

[Tech Columnist]

Captain. That's not how keyboards work.

[Reyes]

*That is exactly how keyboards work in space. In a vacuum.
Where every character is a contained pocket of meaning
surrounded by nothing.*

[Tech Columnist]

What about... the *return* key?

[Reyes]

((DARK))

The return key is personal.

[Tech Columnist]

Captain.

[Reyes]

*I came back. Every time I press the return key, I am
reminded that I came back. I did not stay.*

[Manyfeek] qua single typewriter key labeled SPACE on a
museum shelf in the background

((FROM ITS POSITION))

*I was on the Apollo 11 command module. Buzz pressed me
twice. Once for a space. Once because he was nervous. I am
the only key with mission patches.*

[Tech Columnist]

Captain, do you also enjoy the *enter* key?

[Reyes]

That is the same key.

[Tech Columnist]

Different machines call it different things.

[Reyes]

The machine that brought me home called it return. The machine I left up there called it enter. I prefer the one that comes back.

[Tech Columnist]

And your *least* favorite key?

[Reyes]

((PAUSE))

Escape.

[Tech Columnist]

Captain.

[Reyes]

Don't make me.

PUNCHLINE

The Space Bar.

SETUP

What do you call it when James Bond takes a bath?

[M] qua office, mahogany, brass nameplate, scotch on a tray
Bond. The mission requires that you, ah, *unwind*. The Service
has prepared a *facility*.

[007] qua tuxedo, slightly damp, scotch in hand, neutral
What kind of facility, sir.

[M]
A bath.

[007]
A bath.

[M]
A Service-approved bath.

[007]
Sir, I take baths on my own time.

[M]
This is different. This is Bubble 07.

[007]
Bubble —

[M]

The Service has *codified* it. *Bubble 07. Forty minutes minimum. Temperature: 104°F. Bubble density: 22%. Soap brand: Imperial Leather. Aroma: lavender, smoke, faint regret.*

[Shakes] qua secretary at the door, beaming
This is the best of all possible debriefs.

[007]

Sir, I don't think —

[M]

Q has been *briefed*. He will *deliver* the *bath kit*.

[Q] qua tweed, glasses, briefcase
(*(ENTERING)*)

Bond. Several *upgrades*.

[007]

Q.

[Q]

The *rubber duck*. *Two functions*. *Floats*. *Also detonates*.

[007]

On what timer.

[Q]

Your choice. *Eight, sixteen, twenty-four seconds*.

[007]

And the *loofah*?

[Q]

Garrotte.

[007]

And the *bubble bath*?

[Q]

Truth serum. Self-administered. Absorbed through the skin in the warm water. You will tell the bathtub everything.

[007]

Why would I —

[Q]

Periodic self-assessment, Bond. Service requirement.

[Manyfeek] qua bath mat folded on the desk, embroidered with a small 007

((FROM ITS FOLD))

The bath has intel. He told the bath everything last quarter.

The bath reports to M.

[M]

Bond. The bath is cleared.

[007]

And the *exit code*?

[M]

Hot for go. Cold for hold. Drain for extraction.

[007]

Understood.

[M]

Bond. Forty minutes. Then we brief on Casablanca.

[007]

Will the bath be coming with me.

[M]

It is being shipped ahead.

PUNCHLINE

Bubble 07.

SETUP

What do you call a fish wearing a bowtie?

[Gallery Curator] qua linen blazer, glass of prosecco, sleek hair

And here we have *Mister Trout*. He arrives at the *Aquatic Annual* with a *handmade silk bowtie*.

[Trout] qua rainbow scales, perfectly tied black tie under jaw
Good evening.

[Gallery Curator]

The *bowtie*, Mister Trout. Tell us.

[Trout]

Hand-tied. By me.

[Gallery Curator]

With what fins.

[Trout]

With concentration and time.

[Gallery Curator]

And the *suit*?

[Trout]

I'm a trout. I am the suit.

[Shakes] qua gallery aide with a tray of canapés, beaming
This is the best of all possible aquaria.

[Gallery Curator]

Mister Trout. The bowtie elevates you.

[Trout]

The bowtie is the surface. The substance is below.*

[Photographer] qua bulky vest, two cameras, lanyard

Trout. Over the shoulder. Just over the shoulder.

[Trout]

Which shoulder.

[Photographer]

You don't have shoulders.

[Trout]

I don't have a shoulder.

[Photographer]

Look mysterious.

[Trout]

I look mysterious by default.

[Manyfeek] qua sad bowtie discarded by a less-confident fish
on a side table

((FROM THE TABLE))

*I was on a herring last week. He wouldn't commit to the
look. He took me off in the parking lot. I have been here ever
since.*

[Gallery Curator]

Some fish lack the commitment.

[Manyfeek]

Some fish lack the class.

[Gallery Curator]

Mister Trout, what is the *secret*?

[Trout]

((CALMLY))

Do not let the tie wear you. You wear the tie. The bowtie is the threshold. Cross it.*

[Photographer]

Snap.

[Gallery Curator]

Sublime.

PUNCHLINE

Sofishticated.

SETUP

How did Darth Vader know what Luke got him for Christmas?

[Imperial HR Officer] qua gray uniform, hat, datapad
 Captain Vader. Welcome to *Imperial Holiday Gathering 12-25*. Please review the *gift exchange protocol*.

[Vader] qua black armor, breathing rhythm steady, hand on a wrapped box
I do not require briefing.

[Imperial HR Officer]
 Sir, the protocol is *mandatory*. *The gift exchange* is *Secret Santa style*. You drew *Skywalker dash L*.

[Vader]
Yes.

[Imperial HR Officer]
 And he drew *you*.

[Vader]
Yes.

[Shakes] qua junior officer with a wrapping-paper cart, beaming
 This is the best of all possible Sith holidays.

[Imperial HR Officer]
 Sir. The *gift from Skywalker* has *arrived*.

((A SMALL WRAPPED BOX APPEARS ON A DROID-WHEELED CART. BOWS. WRAPPED IN SILVER, EMBOSSED WITH AN X-WING.))

[Imperial HR Officer]
Would you like to *unwrap*?

[Vader]
Unnecessary.

[Imperial HR Officer]
Sir.

[Vader]
((REACHING OUT WITH A GLOVED HAND, HOVERING))
I sense...

[Imperial HR Officer]
Sir, please open the gift.

[Vader]
A wool sweater.

[Imperial HR Officer]
((LOOKS AT DATAPAD))

[Vader]
Hand-knit. Sky-blue. Slightly itchy. He used the wrong wool.

[Imperial HR Officer]
Sir. How do you —

[Vader]
((LIFTS GLOVE))
The Force. Christmas adjacent.

[Manyfeek] qua tag fallen off the gift, lying on the floor

((FROM THE CARPET))

"To Father, from your son. I made this one." X.O. ANAKIN'S BOY.

[Imperial HR Officer]

Sir, you haven't *opened it*.

[Vader]

I felt it.

[Imperial HR Officer]

Through the *paper*?

[Vader]

Through the universe.

[Imperial HR Officer]

And the size?

[Vader]

Medium. He thinks I'm a medium. I am an extra-large. He never sized me.

[Imperial HR Officer]

Will you *wear it*.

[Vader]

((LONG BEAT))

Yes.

PUNCHLINE

He felt his presents.

SETUP

I'm afraid for the calendar.

[Therapist] qua office, plant, framed degree, tissue box
Mr. Berger. Tell me what's bothering you.

[BILL] qua sweater, eight nights of poor sleep, untouched
coffee
I'm afraid for the *calendar*.

[Therapist]
The *calendar*.

[BILL]
Yes.

[Therapist]
The calendar on your *wall*?

[BILL]
The concept.

[Therapist]
Tell me more.

[BILL]
The days are numbered.

[Therapist]
Yes.

[BILL]

*Literally. Each one has a number. January 1. January 2.
January 3.*

[Therapist]

Mr. Berger, that's *how calendars work*.

[BILL]

Yes. Yes, that's the problem.

[Shakes] qua intake receptionist, beaming

This is the best of all possible therapeutic relationships.

[Therapist]

Numbered doesn't mean —

[BILL]

*Yes it does. Yes it does. Numbered means finite. Numbered
means counted. Numbered means there is a last one.*

[Therapist]

The calendar gets *replaced* every year.

[BILL]

*By the next calendar. Whose days are also numbered. Whose
last day is also approaching. Whose pages are also being
torn off.*

[Therapist]

The calendar is *not aware*.

[BILL]

I am.

[Manyfeek] qua wall calendar in the therapist's office,
hanging crooked, December half-torn
(FROM THE WALL)

I am aware. I am very aware. I have been hanging here for eleven months and watching the boxes get crossed out one by one. I know what's coming on December 31st.

[Therapist]

Mort. *Please.*

[Manyfeek]

The recycling.

[Therapist]

Mr. Berger.

[BILL]

See?

[Therapist]

((WRITING))

We'll explore this further next week.

[BILL]

That's the problem.

[Therapist]

Same time?

[BILL]

Same time. Numbered.

PUNCHLINE

Its days are numbered.

SETUP

How does a man on the moon cut his hair?

[Lunar Barber] qua white smock, two scissors, comb tucked
into hatband, low-gravity float
Good morning, sir. *Trim?*

[Man on the Moon] qua pale, slightly cratered face, regolith
dust in beard, gentle smile
Yes. Just clean it up.

[Lunar Barber]
Style?

[Man on the Moon]
The usual.

[Lunar Barber]
Eclipse?

[Man on the Moon]
Eclipse.

[Lunar Barber]
Same as last time?

[Man on the Moon]
Same as last time.

[Shakes] qua barbershop apprentice with a broom, beaming
This is the best of all possible salons.

[Lunar Barber]

((CIRCLES THE CHAIR))

Sir, the *eclipse* is *executed* as follows. *You will position yourself directly between the sun and the earth.* I will hand you the scissors. You will hold them above your head. The sun's shadow will fall across your hair. The shadow will trim what needs trimming. The earth will provide the* mirror.

[Man on the Moon]

That's... that's the process?

[Lunar Barber]

That is the process.

[Man on the Moon]

And the *price*?

[Lunar Barber]

One total eclipse. Per cut.

[Man on the Moon]

That's once every eighteen months.

[Lunar Barber]

Yes.

[Man on the Moon]

That's my timeline.

[Lunar Barber]

That's your timeline.

[Manyfeek] qua discarded clipping of moon-hair drifting in the low-gravity barber chair

((DRIFTING))

I have been falling for six minutes. I am not landing. I will be in this barbershop forever.

[Lunar Barber]

Mort, please return to the bin.

[Manyfeek]

The bin is also drifting.

[Lunar Barber]

Sir, are we ready?

[Man on the Moon]

((LOOKING UP))

The earth is in position.

[Lunar Barber]

The sun is rising.

[Man on the Moon]

Then so am I.

[Lunar Barber]

Quiet now. The shadow does its work.

((BEAT. EVERYTHING DARKENS. WHEN THE LIGHT
RETURNS, THE MAN ON THE MOON'S HAIR IS
PERFECT.))

[Man on the Moon]

Beautiful.

[Lunar Barber]

Same time next year.

PUNCHLINE

Eclipse it.

59

SETUP

A ham sandwich walks into a bar and orders a beer.

[Bouncer] qua bald, earpiece, tuxedo shirt, clipboard, velvet rope behind him
Sir.

[Ham Sandwich] qua rye bread, four slices of black forest ham, mustard, slightly damp napkin
Yeah?

[Bouncer]
I.D.

[Ham Sandwich]
((PRODUCES TINY LAMINATED CARD))
Brad Sandwich. Brooklyn. Born 2018.

[Bouncer]
((READING))
Brad Sandwich. Of the Brooklyn Sandwiches.

[Ham Sandwich]
Yes.

[Bouncer]
Welcome. Right through here.

(((Ham Sandwich] ENTERS. PROCEEDS TO BAR. SITS ON STOOL.))

[Bartender] qua waistcoat, mustache, three-piece, polished
tumbler
Good evening.

[Ham Sandwich]
A beer, please.

[Bartender]
Sir.

[Ham Sandwich]
Yes?

[Bartender]
((LONG BEAT))
Sorry. We don't serve food here.

[Ham Sandwich]
((BEAT))
I'm a customer.

[Bartender]
You are also food.

[Shakes] qua bar back with a smile, beaming
This is the best of all possible establishments.

[Ham Sandwich]
I'm here for a beer.

[Bartender]
And I'm telling you, we have a policy. No food at the bar.

[Ham Sandwich]
What about the peanuts?*

[Bartender]
The peanuts are complimentary.

[Ham Sandwich]

What about the bar nuts.

[Bartender]

Also complimentary.

[Ham Sandwich]

I will pay.

[Bartender]

Sir. We do not accept payment from food.

[Ham Sandwich]

Is that a health code issue?

[Bartender]

It is a dignity issue.

[Manyfeek] qua pickle spear that fell out of the sandwich onto the floor

((FROM THE FLOOR))

This is institutional discrimination. I am also food. I am also thirsty. Nobody is helping us.

[Bartender]

Mort, please return to the sandwich.

[Manyfeek]

I am free.

[Bartender]

Sir. Would you like to take your beer to go?

[Ham Sandwich]

That defeats the purpose.

[Bartender]

The purpose is also food.

[Ham Sandwich]

((HEAVILY))

Fine. Have a good evening.

[Bartender]

Bon appétit, sir.

[Ham Sandwich]

That's exactly the problem.

PUNCHLINE

The bartender says, "Sorry, we don't serve food here."

SETUP

I hate my job — all I do is crush cans all day.

[Therapist] qua chair, plant, framed degree, soft eyes
Mr. Berger. You said this would come up.

[BILL] qua coveralls, work boots, hands still stained with
aluminum
I hate my job.

[Therapist]
Tell me what you do.

[BILL]
*I crush cans. All day. Soda cans. Beer cans. Energy drink
cans. Sometimes a tuna can.*

[Therapist]
What does the job involve, *physically*?

[BILL]
*A machine. I feed cans into the machine. The machine
crushes them. I push the cans into the machine. That's it.*

[Therapist]
And how long have you been —

[BILL]
Fourteen years.

[Shakes] qua reception assistant, beaming
This is the best of all possible vocations.

[Therapist]

Fourteen years of crushing cans.

[BILL]

Fourteen years.

[Therapist]

How does that *make* you feel.

[BILL]

((PRESSING TEMPLES))

Flat.

[Therapist]

Flat.

[BILL]

The cans go in three-dimensional. They come out two-dimensional. I am the agent of dimensional reduction. Eight hours a day.

[Therapist]

You feel —

[BILL]

Compressed.

[Therapist]

Compressed.

[BILL]

Like the cans.

[Manyfeek] qua single flattened soda can on the therapist's desk, edges sharp

((FROM THE DESK))

I was a Mountain Dew. I had three-quarters of a serving left. He didn't even drink me first.

[Therapist]

Mort.

[Manyfeek]

He just pressed me. Without asking.

[BILL]

I press hundreds a day.

[Manyfeek]

That's the problem.

[Therapist]

Mr. Berger. What would *help*.

[BILL]

((SLOW))

I don't know. I just feel so —

[Therapist]

Yes?

[BILL]

Pressing.

[Therapist]

The job is pressing.

[BILL]

I'm pressing. The job is pressing. The cans are pressed.

Everyone is being pressed.

[Therapist]

Same time next week?

[BILL]

Press me into the slot.

PUNCHLINE

It's soda pressing.

61

SETUP

Why is Peter Pan always flying?

[TSA Agent] qua blue gloves, scanner wand, name tag PEGGY
Sir. *Boarding pass. Photo ID.*

[Peter Pan] qua green tights, slight float, hands in pockets,
slightly impatient
I don't have one.

[TSA Agent]
Sir. *You can't board a flight without a boarding pass.*

[Peter Pan]
I'm not boarding.

[TSA Agent]
Then what are you doing.

[Peter Pan]
((LEVITATES SIX INCHES))
Flying.

[TSA Agent]
((LONG BEAT))
Sir. *That's not how we do flight here.*

[Peter Pan]
It's how I do flight.

[Shakes] qua TSA trainee with a clipboard, beaming
This is the best of all possible security checkpoints.

[TSA Agent]

Sir. FAA regulations require aircraft.

[Peter Pan]

I'm an aircraft.

[TSA Agent]

You are a boy.

[Peter Pan]

I am a boy who is also a flight.*

[TSA Agent]

Have you ever landed?

[Peter Pan]

Briefly. Once. In 1953. I came down to tie my shoe. I did not stay down.

[TSA Agent]

((SCANNING))

The system shows you have *eleven thousand four hundred* recorded flight hours and *zero* landings.

[Peter Pan]

Yes.

[TSA Agent]

Where is your destination?

[Peter Pan]

Always more sky.

[Manyfeek] qua tiny pixie companion fluttering by his shoulder, glaring

((FLITTING))

He never lands. He has never landed. He sleeps midair. We are all very tired.

[TSA Agent]

Sir, you cannot not land. The FAA requires —

[Peter Pan]

The FAA doesn't apply to me.

[TSA Agent]

By what mechanism.

[Peter Pan]

I am a concept.

[TSA Agent]

Concepts pay taxes.

[Peter Pan]

Yet I don't.

[TSA Agent]

((WRITING))

I'm flagging this for the supervisor.

[Peter Pan]

Tell her I won't be here.

PUNCHLINE

Because he Neverlands.

SETUP

I was just reminiscing about the beautiful herb garden I had growing up.

[Podcast Host] qua headphones, soft tones, microphone, candle burning

Welcome back to *Soft Memories*. My guest tonight, Bill Berger, takes us into his *childhood herb garden*. *Bill*, take us there.

[BILL] qua sweater, mug of tea, voice slightly catching
My mother's herb garden. Behind the kitchen. Three by six feet. A wooden box.

[Podcast Host]
What grew there.

[BILL]
Rosemary. Sage. Oregano. Basil in the summer. Thyme.

[Podcast Host]
Thyme.

[BILL]
Thyme. Always thyme. Every spring.

[Podcast Host]
Good thyme?

[BILL]
Good thymes.

[Shakes] qua sound engineer, beaming
This is the best of all possible memoirs.

[Podcast Host]
Plural.

[BILL]
Plural. There were many thymes. Lemon thyme. English thyme. Creeping thyme. My mother kept them in rotation. We never lacked for thyme.

[Podcast Host]
The word is doing a lot of work here, Bill.

[BILL]
I am aware.

[Podcast Host]
Tell me about the afternoon thyme.

[BILL]
Afternoon thyme was for chicken. We had chicken on Wednesdays.

[Podcast Host]
And the Sunday thyme?

[BILL]
Sunday thyme was for the roast. Sunday thyme is the thyme I miss most.

[Podcast Host]
Bill, are you crying?

[BILL]
I'm losing time talking about thyme.

[Manyfeek] qua small bundle of dried thyme tied with kitchen twine, on a shelf behind them

((FROM THE SHELF))

I have been on this shelf for eight years. Nobody has cooked with me. I am no longer thyme. I am dust.

[Podcast Host]

Mort.

[Manyfeek]

Time is also dust.

[Podcast Host]

Bill. *Final thought.*

[BILL]

((QUIETLY))

I should call my mother.

[Podcast Host]

Why.

[BILL]

She has the rest of the thymes.

PUNCHLINE

Good thymes.

SETUP

How do cows stay up to date?

[Editor in Chief] qua sleeves rolled, ink-stained hands, green visor

Front page for tomorrow's *Moo-spaper*. What do we have?

[Junior Reporter] qua spiral notebook, pencil behind ear, hooves

Lead story: *Pasture C is now open*.

[Editor in Chief]

Above the fold?

[Junior Reporter]

Above the fold.

[Editor in Chief]

Lead photo?

[Junior Reporter]

Tall grass with morning dew. Stringer caught it at 5 AM.

[Editor in Chief]

Pulitzer material. What else.

[Shakes] qua copy editor with a red pen, beaming

This is the best of all possible newsrooms.

[Junior Reporter]

Business section: Beef futures down 4%.

[Editor in Chief]

Bury that.

[Junior Reporter]

Bury it?

[Editor in Chief]

The herd doesn't need to read about beef futures. We are the herd.

[Junior Reporter]

Yes, Chief.

[Editor in Chief]

Sports?

[Junior Reporter]

Local softball team wins again. Final score 4-2. Six runs total. Cows ate the fly balls.

[Editor in Chief]

Front page.

[Junior Reporter]

Bigger than the pasture story?

[Editor in Chief]

The herd reads sports first.

[Manyfeek] qua single hay-stained classified ad on the editor's desk

((FROM THE PAPER))

*"Bull, used, runs well, only chased 14 cars, 200 dollars firm."
I have been running this ad for three months. Nobody is calling. The bull is getting older.*

[Editor in Chief]

Mort, that ad is paid up through October.

[Manyfeek]

The bull is not.

[Editor in Chief]

Weather?

[Junior Reporter]

Partly cloudy. Chance of clover.

[Editor in Chief]

Beautiful.

[Junior Reporter]

And the op-ed page?

[Editor in Chief]

Same as always. "We Should All Be Eating More Grass."

[Junior Reporter]

By the same author?

[Editor in Chief]

By the entire herd.

PUNCHLINE

They read the Moo-spaper.

SETUP

Did you hear they arrested the Energizer Bunny?

[Prosecutor] qua suit, briefcase, slow walk
Your honor. The defendant is *Mr. Bunny*. He is charged with *battery*.

[Bunny] qua pink fur, sunglasses, snare drum, mid-step
((DRUMMING))

[Judge] qua robes, gavel, glasses on chain
Mr. Bunny. Please *stop drumming*.

[Bunny]
((DRUMMING))
I can't.

[Judge]
Hold the sticks.

[Bunny]
The sticks are mine. They keep going. I am not the agent.

[Shakes] qua bailiff, beaming
This is the best of all possible arraignments.

[Prosecutor]
Your honor. The charges are *severe*. *Mr. Bunny* has *struck* at least *forty-three people* over the past *six years*. The *strikes* are *rhythmic*. *Sustained*. *Two beats per second*.

[Judge]

And the *victims*.

[Prosecutor]

Many have asked the bunny to stop. He has not. The instrument is the weapon.

[Bunny]

((DRUMMING))

I'm just walking.

[Prosecutor]

And drumming.

[Bunny]

And drumming.

[Judge]

Mr. Bunny, *do you understand the charge?*

[Bunny]

Battery. Yes. I am also literally battery-operated. I run on six D-cells. Energizers. That's the name on my chest.

[Prosecutor]

Two definitions, your honor.

[Judge]

Indeed.

[Manyfeek] *qua* exhausted D-cell on the prosecutor's evidence table

((LEAKING))

I am one of the six. I have been inside him since 1989. I would like to be removed. I am leaking.

[Bunny]

Don't remove him. I'll stop.

[Prosecutor]

Mr. Bunny. Your testimony. You strike rhythmically. You strike repeatedly. You strike without consent.

[Bunny]

I keep going. And going. And going.

[Judge]

That's the issue.

[Bunny]

That's the slogan.

[Judge]

The slogan is the charge.

[Prosecutor]

The slogan is the evidence.

[Bunny]

((LOOKING AT DRUM))

Can I plea?

[Judge]

To what.

[Bunny]

Battery. Both charges. Concurrent.

PUNCHLINE

He was charged with battery.

SETUP

*I didn't want to believe my dad was stealing from his job
as a road worker...*

[Detective] qua suit, badge, notebook, calm
Mr. Berger. Tell me when you first suspected.

[BILL] qua sweater, eyes lowered, hands in lap
Last spring. I went to visit him at the house.

[Detective]
Go on.

[BILL]
He opened the garage. He wanted to show me a new project.

[Detective]
What did you see.

[BILL]
((LONG BEAT))
Stop signs.

[Detective]
How many.

[BILL]
Forty-seven.

[Detective]
Stacked?

[BILL]

Stacked. By color. By size. By state of origin.

[Shakes] qua junior detective with a coffee, beaming

This is the best of all possible investigations.

[Detective]

And the yield signs?

[BILL]

Eleven. In the rafters.

[Detective]

Speed limit signs?

[BILL]

Forty-three. Sorted by speed limit.

[Detective]

Any —

[BILL]

Detour signs. Thirty-one. Wrong-way signs. Sixteen. One-way arrows. Twenty-four. He had a legend.

[Detective]

A legend?

[BILL]

Painted on the garage wall. Color-coded. Cross-referenced by jurisdiction.

[Detective]

Mr. Berger. When you saw all of this, did you say anything?

[BILL]

I asked him what these were for.

[Detective]

What did he say?

[BILL]

((QUIETLY))

He said, "I keep them so they don't get lost."

[Manyfeek] qua single STOP sign leaning against the
detective's office wall, slightly bent

((FROM THE WALL))

*I was reported missing in March. I have been in his garage
since. He waxed me on Sundays. I have not stopped traffic in
nine months. Cars are running things over.*

[Detective]

Mr. Berger. Did you confront him?

[BILL]

No.

[Detective]

Why not.

[BILL]

((LOOKING UP))

*Because he was so proud. He gave me a tour. He walked me
through each pile. He said "look at this one — it's from*
Nebraska*."*

[Detective]

And you —

[BILL]

*I left. I drove home. I drove past fourteen intersections where
the signs were missing. I noticed every one.*

[Detective]

You knew.

[BILL]

I knew. I knew the whole way home.

PUNCHLINE

But when I got home all the signs were there.

SETUP

I've got an interview tomorrow to become the boss at Old McDonald's Farm.

[Recruiter] qua Zoom call, frame partly obscured by a Roomba in the background, lanyard
Mr. Berger. Welcome. *Old McDonald's Farm. Senior leadership track. Position: CIEIO.*

[BILL] qua collared shirt, suit jacket no tie, slightly anxious
CIEIO.

[Recruiter]
Yes. *Chief Integrated Ecosystem Innovation Officer.*

[BILL]
That's a lot of letters.

[Recruiter]
That's the title.

[BILL]
What does the role entail.

[Recruiter]
Stand in a field. Sing the song. Manage the noise compliance.

[Shakes] qua interview panelist, beaming
This is the best of all possible candidacies.

[BILL]
The song.

[Recruiter]

The song. EIEIO. Yes. You will be singing it. Daily.

[BILL]

All five vowels?

[Recruiter]

With the C in front. We added the C in 2019. Branding decision.

[BILL]

What does the C stand for.

[Recruiter]

That is part of the interview.

[BILL]

((BEAT))

Chief?

[Recruiter]

Yes.

[BILL]

Chief Integrated Ecosystem Innovation Officer.

[Recruiter]

The job is sing-the-song-while-standing-near-livestock.

[BILL]

The job is the song.

[Recruiter]

The song is the job.

[Manyfeek] qua single sheep wandering across the recruiter's home-office background

((BLEATING))

He's been on the call for an hour. I'm still here. I require shepherding.

[Recruiter]

Mort. *Please.*

[Manyfeek]

The current CIEIO is on PTO. I have not been moved in days.

[BILL]

What's the *salary*.

[Recruiter]

Twenty-five thousand dollars and ownership of the chicken. One chicken.

[BILL]

The *whole* chicken?

[Recruiter]

One chicken. Equity.

[BILL]

And benefits?

[Recruiter]

Health. Dental. Cow.

[BILL]

A cow?

[Recruiter]

Optional cow.

[BILL]

What's the *catch*.

[Recruiter]

You have to sing it. Out loud. Every. Single. Day.

[BILL]

((LONG BEAT))

And on this farm there was a —

[Recruiter]

You're hired.

PUNCHLINE

It's for the position of CIEIO.

SETUP

My cat has just eaten three mallards!

[Veterinarian] qua scrubs, stethoscope, gloves snapped on
Mr. Berger. Tell me what your cat has consumed.

[BILL] qua sweater, holding a cat carrier from which heavy
breathing is audible
Three mallards.

[Veterinarian]
Three mallards.

[BILL]
Whole.

[Veterinarian]
Each?

[BILL]
Each.

[Veterinarian]
((BLINKING))
*Mr. Berger, three mallards is approximately six pounds of
waterfowl. Your cat is eight pounds.*

[BILL]
Yes.

[Veterinarian]
And the cat is —

[BILL]

Distended.

[Shakes] qua veterinary technician, beaming

This is the best of all possible practices.

[Veterinarian]

((TO THE CARRIER))

Let me see him.

[BILL]

((OPENS CARRIER. A BARELY-RECOGNIZABLE LUMP OF CAT EMERGES, OUTLINED BY THREE DISTINCT DUCK-SHAPED BULGES.))

[Veterinarian]

Mr. Berger.

[BILL]

Yes?

[Veterinarian]

This is no longer a cat.

[BILL]

What is it.

[Veterinarian]

((LONG, CLINICAL EXAMINATION))

This is a different organism. Genetically reclassified by mass. Approximately half cat, half mallard.

[BILL]

Half mallard?

[Veterinarian]

The mallards have integrated.

[Manyfeek] qua single mallard feather stuck to the cat's whisker

((MUFFLED))

I have been here for forty minutes. I came in attached to one of the mallards. I am also part of him now.

[Veterinarian]

Mr. Berger. We have a name for this. We call it a duck-filled fatty puss.

[BILL]

A —

[Veterinarian]

Duck-filled. Fatty puss. It is a recognized condition.

[BILL]

Spelled how.

[Veterinarian]

Spelled duck-filled fatty puss. Identical phonetics to platypus. Latin name: platypus felis.

[BILL]

Is it *treatable*?

[Veterinarian]

Patience. And time. The mallards will be excreted in five to seven business days. During that period, your cat is technically a platypus.

[BILL]

Insurance?

[Veterinarian]

Does not cover species reassignment.

PUNCHLINE

He's a duck filled fatty puss.

SETUP

Saw a baguette at the zoo.

[Zookeeper] qua khaki shirt, two-way radio, hat with brim,
sun-cracked face

Welcome to *Habitat 12*. Today's featured exhibit: *Baked
Mammals of the Loire Valley*.

[BILL] qua family-of-four group, kids tugging, tour bracelet
We came for the *bread*.

[Zookeeper]
Most do.

[BILL]
Which one is the baguette?

[Zookeeper]
Far corner. Behind the rosemary plant. Under the heat lamp.

(([BILL] LOOKS. A 24-INCH GOLDEN BAGUETTE LIES ON
A BED OF FLOUR, GENTLY STEAMING.))

[BILL]
Is he moving?

[Zookeeper]
He's resting.

[Shakes] qua docent with a clipboard, beaming
This is the best of all possible zoos.

[BILL]

Was he born here?

[Zookeeper]

No. Captured in the wild. Outskirts of Lyon. 2019. He had wandered too close to a tour group.

[BILL]

Captured.

[Zookeeper]

Rescued.

[BILL]

Is there a difference.

[Zookeeper]

((QUIET))

In his case, no.

[BILL]

Why is he in captivity?

[Zookeeper]

The bread population is declining. We're a breeding program.

[BILL]

You're breeding bread?

[Zookeeper]

With other bread. The boules are next door. The brioche is upstairs. We rotate them.

[Manyfeek] qua little ciabatta in a smaller cage labeled

JUVENILE

((MUFFLED))

I was born here. I have never been outside. I have never seen olive oil. I have only known glass.

[BILL]

Has he ever been outside?

[Zookeeper]

The baguette?

[BILL]

Yes.

[Zookeeper]

Not for years. His habitat is climate-controlled. Sixty-eight percent humidity. Twenty-five degrees Celsius. Constant. He has adapted.

[BILL]

Can the public interact?

[Zookeeper]

Don't tap on the glass. Don't feed him butter. He's on a diet.

[BILL]

And the future?

[Zookeeper]

((LOOKING IN))

He will be here for the rest of his short, golden life.

PUNCHLINE

It was bread in captivity.

SETUP

The CEO of Ikea was elected President of Sweden this week.

[Speaker of the Riksdag] qua wood-paneled office, glasses, water glass, slightly amused

Welcome. We are here today to brief on the new government formation.

[Reporter] qua badge, recorder, leaning forward

Mr. Speaker. *Has the Prime Minister-designate selected his Cabinet?*

[Speaker of the Riksdag]

The Prime Minister-designate is *Mr. Kamprad*. Yes. He is in the process of *assembling his Cabinet*.

[Reporter]

Has the process begun?

[Speaker of the Riksdag]

Yes. Yesterday. In a large room. On the floor. Surrounded by parts.

[Reporter]

I'm sorry?

[Speaker of the Riksdag]

The Cabinet has arrived in flat pack. The Prime Minister-designate has instructions. He has the Allen key.

[Shakes] qua cabinet aide with a notepad, beaming
This is the best of all possible governments.

[Reporter]

Mr. Speaker. Are you saying the literal Cabinet —

[Speaker of the Riksdag]

The Cabinet. Yes. The literal Cabinet.

[Reporter]

And the ministers?

[Speaker of the Riksdag]

Each minister is one piece. The Foreign Minister is the large side panel. The Defense Minister is the hinged door. The Finance Minister is the drawer assembly. The Justice Minister is the shelf with adjustable pegs.

[Reporter]

Have any pieces been lost?

[Speaker of the Riksdag]

((SIGH))

The Health Minister was missing two screws. We are waiting on the spare parts envelope.

[Manyfeek] qua single misplaced cam-lock fitting on the Speaker's desk

((FROM ITS POSITION))

I am supposed to be in the Justice Minister. I am here instead. The Justice Minister is wobbling.

[Speaker of the Riksdag]

Mort, please return to the assembly.

[Manyfeek]

The Prime Minister cannot find me.

[Reporter]

Will the government be functional by Monday?

[Speaker of the Riksdag]

If the Foreign Minister's mounting bracket arrives from Älmhult. We are told it is en route.

[Reporter]

And when complete?

[Speaker of the Riksdag]

Sturdy. Affordable. Somewhat Scandinavian.

[Reporter]

Are there instructions for the people?

[Speaker of the Riksdag]

Two pages. Diagrams only. No words in any language.

[Reporter]

And the spare screws?

[Speaker of the Riksdag]

Always extra. That's how you know it's working.

PUNCHLINE

He's still assembling his cabinet...

SETUP

Why did Mario break up with Princess Peach?

[Couples Therapist] qua office, plant, glass of water, soft lighting

Mario. Princess. *Welcome*. Let's start with what brings you here today.

[Mario] qua red cap, blue overalls, mustache, eyes downcast
I told her. I told her. It's not you, it's-a me.

[Princess Peach] qua pink gown, blonde braid, slight quiver
He said it's-a me, Mario. He used the possessive.

[Couples Therapist]

Mario, why did you frame it that way?

[Mario]

Because. Because it's not her. It is, in fact, a me.

[Couples Therapist]

A you.

[Mario]

A me.

[Couples Therapist]

Singular.

[Mario]

I am a singular me.

[Shakes] qua couples-therapy intern, beaming
This is the best of all possible breakups.

[Princess Peach]

He has been *jumping for thirty years*. He has *rescued* me
fifteen times. Fifteen. He has *eaten mushrooms* I gave him.
He has *grown*. He has *shrunk*. He has *thrown fire*. And now
he wants out.

[Mario]

It is-a me. I need to find who I am.

[Couples Therapist]

And who do you think you are, Mario?

[Mario]

*A plumber. I have always been a plumber. I have not done
plumbing in thirty years. I have done* hostage rescue.

[Princess Peach]

You also like hostage rescue.

[Mario]

It's-a me.

[Manyfeek] qua single golden coin on the therapist's coffee
table

((FROM THE TABLE))

*I am one of his coins. He collects me. He collects all of me. I
have not been spent. I want to be spent. Mario, please spend
me.*

[Couples Therapist]

Mario. Princess. There is a *third party* present.

[Manyfeek]

I am also part of the relationship.

[Princess Peach]
What about *Luigi*?

[Mario]
Luigi is not part of this.

[Princess Peach]
Luigi is always part of this.

[Mario]
It is-a me. Not it's-a us. I have made this decision.

[Couples Therapist]
Mario. *Have you considered couples coin-collecting?*

[Mario]
That's just collecting.

PUNCHLINE

He told her, "It's not you, it's-a me, Mario!"

SETUP

Why did the astronaut break up with the moon?

[Mediator] qua office, plant, paperback titled
GRAVITATIONAL BOUNDARIES

We are gathered today for the *separation hearing* of *Mission Specialist Reyes* and *Luna*. State your reasons for the split.

[Reyes] qua flight suit, mission patches, tired
She needed space.

[Mediator]
She needed space.

[Reyes]
Yes.

[Mediator]
You're saying *the moon needed space*.

[Reyes]
Yes.

[Luna] qua silver glow, faintly pockmarked, levitating in a
chair
It's true. I needed space.

[Mediator]
From whom?

[Luna]
From him.

[Reyes]

See.

[Shakes] qua mediation assistant, beaming

This is the best of all possible separations.

[Mediator]

Luna. Can you elaborate?

[Luna]

He visited twelve times. He left a flag. He took rocks. He walked on me. Multiple times. He left footprints.*

[Reyes]

That was the mission.

[Luna]

That was my surface.

[Mediator]

Did he ask?

[Luna]

Once. Apollo 11. Politely.

[Mediator]

And the subsequent visits?

[Luna]

Increasingly assumed.

[Reyes]

She gave me tides.

[Luna]

Those are not for you.

[Manyfeek] qua single moon-rock in a plastic display case on
the mediator's shelf
((FROM ITS CASE))

*I was taken. I have been on this shelf since 1969. I would like
to go home. I want to go home.*

[Mediator]
Mort, please.

[Manyfeek]
The moon is right there. Just throw me back.

[Mediator]
Luna. What do you *need*?

[Luna]
Space.

[Mediator]
Literal space.

[Luna]
Literal space. And no return visits for the next twenty years.

[Reyes]
That's a long timeline.

[Luna]
That's my timeline.

[Reyes]
((QUIETLY))
I understand.

[Mediator]
And the *footprints*?

[Luna]

Those stay.

[Reyes]

Forever?

[Luna]

No atmosphere.

PUNCHLINE

Because it needed space!

SETUP

What has the lone cow been up to lately?

[Dating Columnist] qua wire-rim glasses, knit cardigan, sips tea

Welcome back to *Dear Bovine*. Reader letter. “*Dear Bovine: I am the only cow in my paddock. My friends have all been moved. Nobody asks how I am. What do I do?*” — Signed, A Lone Heifer.

[Lone Heifer] qua holstein, slightly damp eyes, blanket
((OFF-CAMERA, READING ALONG))
That’s me.

[Dating Columnist]
Dear Lone Heifer. We are sorry to hear about your situation. Have you considered the dating app MooConnect?

[Lone Heifer]
I’m on it.

[Dating Columnist]
And?

[Lone Heifer]
Nobody’s heard.

[Dating Columnist]
Nobody’s —

[Lone Heifer]
Heard. Of. Me.

[Shakes] qua audio engineer at the back, beaming
This is the best of all possible advice columns.

[Dating Columnist]

Lone Heifer. Have you mooed.

[Lone Heifer]

I have mooed. I have mooed loudly. I have mooed for twelve days. The sound travels. But no one is in earshot.

[Dating Columnist]

Why are you alone in the paddock?

[Lone Heifer]

The herd was moved.

[Dating Columnist]

Without you.

[Lone Heifer]

Without me.

[Dating Columnist]

Why.

[Lone Heifer]

I missed the truck.

[Manyfeek] qua single feed bucket, half-empty, lying on its side

((FROM THE GROUND))

I have been listening to her for two weeks. I am a feed bucket. I cannot herd. I cannot speak back. But I can confirm: nobody has come.

[Dating Columnist]

Lone Heifer. Have you tried mooing less?

[Lone Heifer]

Why would I moo less.

[Dating Columnist]

Sometimes the silence draws them in.

[Lone Heifer]

That's bad advice.

[Dating Columnist]

It is. I'm just trying things.

[Manyfeek]

Send the truck back.

[Dating Columnist]

Who runs the truck?

[Lone Heifer]

Bert.

[Dating Columnist]

We will write to Bert.

[Lone Heifer]

((HOPEFUL))

And the herd?

[Dating Columnist]

Will hear of you. Eventually.

PUNCHLINE

Nobody's herd.