

Birds Do It

four one act comedies

by
Steve Zettler

© Steve Zettler

Men on Bikes

The scene is a gym. Center stage there are two stationary bike machines. They face down-stage toward the audience. The set can be as extravagant or as bare as production values allow; the only requirements are the two bike machines. At rise MAN #1, a forties-something guy in excellent physical condition, enters and begins plugging his settings into the computer of the stage-right bike machine. Satisfied with his input, he mounts the machine, opens a collection of Elmore Leonard short stories and begins to pedal at a steady pace as he reads. He maintains this pace throughout the play (ideally not working up much of a sweat). MAN #2 enters. He is a thirties-something, slightly overweight, out of shape guy. He circles Man #1 and studies him from head to toe. Man #1 ignores him. Man #2 gets on the other machine, makes his settings and begins to slowly pedal. Throughout the entire play Man #2 only pushes his pedals around fifteen or twenty times. Although Man #2's dialogue could seem aggressive, he's not; he's an affable, likable guy. Likewise, Man #1 does not lose his cool when dealing with Man #2's foibles.

MAN #2

(studying Man #1)

Aren't you the dermatologist guy? I saw you on the news last night, right?

MAN #1

(without looking up from the book)

No, sorry, that wasn't me.

MAN #2

It was the Eleven PM local news. ABC. The Jim Harper Newscast? Are you sure that wasn't you?

MAN #1

Yes, I'm sure. I was home. I saw it myself.

MAN #2

Nah, come on, that was you, right? ABC? Sure it was you. Jim Harper News? Eleven PM?

(slight pause)

Hey, I don't blame you. If it was me? Absolutely. No way in Hell. You don't want to be pestered, I get it. Not – a – problem – with – me. You get your mug on the news and

MAN #2 (con't)

the whole city thinks you're public property. We all know how that works. Tell me about it.

MAN #1

No. That wasn't me. Honestly. You're thinking of Roger Clayborne. He's actually a good friend of mine. A lot of people confuse us. Don't worry about it. Happens all the time.

MAN #2

Right. Roger Clayborne. I thought that was you. Something to do with the outbreak at Saint Bart's. St. Bart's; Jesus. That's why, you know, if I get sick, anything, I don't give a damn what it is, there's no way in hell they cart my ass off to Saint Bart's. Not in a million years. I don't give a shit I'm across the street from St. Bart's passed out on the fucking sidewalk. I'd rather die first. Bury my heart at Wounded Knee.

(pause)

But I'll tell you, that old bastard last night was in a bad way. Looked like death warmed over. Did Bart's get it all cleared up? That infection? Staph? Whatever the hell it was?

MAN #1

I have no idea.

MAN #2

But you'd be the first to know if they did, right?

MAN #1

(smiling)

I'm not Roger Clayborne.

MAN #2

But you know him?

MAN #1

Yes, he lives down the street from me.

MAN #2

So, you're a doctor, too, is that it?

MAN #1

No.

(there's a long pause while
Man #2 ponders this)

MAN #2

Do you know anything about Psoriasis?

MAN #1

(trying to read)

Nothing.

MAN #2

I've had it ever since I was thirteen. It moves around. Sometimes I have it behind my ears; back of my neck; hands; thighs. Yeah, it moves all over the damn place. Then every now and then it just goes away. For no reason whatsoever. Never know when it's going to show up again, though. Bingo, there it is. Embarrassing as hell when you're trying to, you know, get a little something going. Work the magic here at the gym. What do you think I should do about that?

MAN #1

What's that?

MAN #2

The Psoriasis?

MAN #1

Ummm, see a doctor?

MAN #2

I just thought you might have some ideas. I mean, I'm not asking for any freebee advice, I know you guys have to make a living too, but I mean, let's be realistic, doctors are expensive; whether you got insurance or not. See, I look at this place, the gym that is, like a club. I mean, well hell, it is a club, right? You gotta be a member, pay dues and whatnot. Sorta one big family. So members of a club help each other out when they have a problem. Kinda like the VFW. You always hear about those guys helping out one another. Other people too. People they don't even know. Simper Fi, and all that crap. I mean if you needed some advice on corrugated boxes I'd give it to you, being a member of the same club and all. No skin off my teeth. I'm not the type to hold out, not if I can help someone get through a tough time... I build boxes; that's me.

MAN #1

I'm not a doctor. Really.

MAN #2

No, but your buddy's one. He's a dermatologist. Been on the Eleven O'clock News. You guys don't talk about skin rashes, staph infections and whatnot when you see each other on the street corner?

MAN #1

No.

MAN #2

Right, like I believe that. No, no, that's okay. I completely understand. You don't want everyone and his friggin' brother pestering you. I don't blame you, man.

(another long pause. Man #1 concentrates on his book. Man #2 pedals for about five seconds and stops)

MAN #2

You're in pretty good shape. I mean for a guy your age. How come I've never seen you in here before.

MAN #1

I'm here every day. Pretty much the same time. Six o'clock.

MAN #2

Yeah, me too.

(Man #2 pats his stomach)

Love to knock a few inches off this baby. Missed the last couple of weeks though. Damn Psoriasis flared up again. Right on my butt. Fuckin' bike machines irritate the hell out of it. I don't know, maybe it's been a month, now, six weeks since I've been in here. And you don't have any idea how to get rid of it, huh? Psoriasis?

MAN #1

Nope.

MAN #2

I went to a dermatologist when I was in high school. My parents paid for him. He said it's sometimes caused by perfume. You know, cologne, crap like that. Told me to lay off the Brut for a while. I mean, who's going to stop using cologne? Give me a break. Especially in high

MAN #2 (con't)

school. That's nutso. End up smelling like a fucking locker-room all the time? Yeah, sure, this is a gym and all, but let's be realistic; we're here to meet women, am I right? Ya lose a little weight in the process; just one of the perks. I mean, hell, it's working for you, right?

(after a pause)

You mind if I look at your settings?

MAN #1

Pardon me?

MAN #2

You know, what you've punched into the panel?

MAN #1

What for?

MAN #2

Well, look at you, man. Whatever you've punched into that machine is working like a charm. I mean, how old are you, if you don't mind my asking?

MAN #1

I'm in my forties.

MAN #2

Yeah, see, that's what I'm talking about. Don't be stingy, my friend. Spread the wealth around. Let folks in on your secret. Give the little guy a break.

(Man #1 closes his book and leans back so Man #2 can look at his panel, but he continues to pedal at his steady pace)

MAN #1

Knock yourself out.

(Man #2 slides off his machine and peruses Man #1's control panel)

MAN #2

So that's the secret, huh?

(Man #2 goes back and forth between the two machines until he has Man #1's info programmed into his machine)

MAN #2

(pointing at Man #1's panel)

Is that right? Incline at seventeen? Am I reading that right? Seventeen degrees? What? You're climbing Pike's Peak? San Juan Hill? The Matterhorn?

MAN #1

Maybe you want to lower yours a bit.

MAN #2

Fuck, no. What the hell, if works for you...

(Man #2 remounts his machine and finds that he needs to stand on the pedals to get the machine rolling)

MAN #2

Man, this is a bitch. Forget seventeen degrees. That's all I need is a goddamn hernia.

(Man #2 stops pedaling after a half a rotation and returns the settings to their original positions)

MAN #2

By the way, that's what got the fucking Psoriasis going on my ass the last time; setting the incline too high. So be careful; watch your ass. You end up pushing too hard, next thing you know you've got a good sweat worked up between your butt cheeks, and bingo; Mr. Psoriasis comes knocking at your back door. Well, that's not for me, my friend. Especially if some people, people who know a little about the subject, aren't willing to hand out a little friendly advice.

(pause)

What are you reading?

MAN #1

"3:10 to Yuma"

MAN #2

The movie? That was a movie, right?

MAN #1

Yes. That's why I thought I'd give it a read. I subscribe to Netflix. I saw the film cover, so I thought I'd give the story a read before I watched the movie.

MAN #2

Right. I saw that one. A western. Not half bad. Russell Crowe. So they made a book out of it too, huh?

MAN #1

It would seem that way.

MAN #2

Does Russell Crowe die in the book too?

MAN #1

I didn't see the movie.

MAN #2

No. No. Fuck the movie. I'm talking about the book. In the book; does Russell Crowe die? I mean, he doesn't actually die in the movie, but in the end they put him on a train and his ass is being carted off to prison to be hanged... So, it's pretty obvious that he bites it in the end, even though they don't actually show it. So, is that how he gets it in the book?

MAN #1

I don't know what character Russell Crowe plays. Plus..
(he indicates his bookmark)

I just started it, so I'd rather not know what happens in the end, or which character Russell Crowe really does play.

MAN #2

Books. Christ. I don't have time for that shit. In my business? Fuck no. They got me coming and going. Sales, sales, sales. The good thing? Everyone and his brother needs a box sooner or later. (pause) Why the hell didn't you just go see the movie when it came out? Fifteen, twenty years ago? Now you gotta pay NetFlix? Watch it all by yourself? Well, hell, go ahead and watch it. Rather than waste all that time reading a damn book? (pause) I'll bet they added all sorts of superfluous shit just to make the book longer. I mean, how the hell do you make a book that fat out of a two hour movie?

MAN #1

It's a short story collection. "3:10 to Yuma" isn't all that long. There're other stories in the book.

MAN #2

See, just like I said; had to pump it up just to justify the twenty-five dollar price tag. Books. Jesus. You can keep them.

(pause)

What're you? Retired?

MAN #1

(laughs)

No. I'm not even fifty years old.

MAN #2

But you got time for books. Must have a pretty cushy job, you got time for books.

MAN #1

I read here at the gym. When I'm on the bike machine. I find it relaxing. Better than staring at the walls.

MAN #2

Yeah, well, like I said, I don't have time for that shit. I'm a busy man.

(he studies Man #1 once more)

You're sure you're not a doctor?

MAN #1

Positive.

MAN #2

But you watch what you eat, am I right? And your friend the dermatologist, what's his name again?

MAN #1

Roger Clayborne.

MAN #2

Right. He looks to be in pretty good shape too.

(pause)

So, now that we're back on that, do you think it could be dietetic?

MAN #1

What?

MAN #2

The Psoriasis.

MAN #1

Look... What's your name?

MAN #2

Stu.

MAN #1

Look, Stu, I'm really not a doctor. I'm not a dermatologist. I don't think I can help you with your problem.

MAN #2

Have you ever had Psoriasis?

MAN #1

No.

MAN #2

So you must be doing something right. That's all I'm saying. I mean, hell, I'm not asking you to write me a prescription or anything like that.

MAN #1

That's good.

MAN #2

I mean, not without a real thorough physical examination and all. In your office. I wouldn't expect you to make a judgment call here at the gym, for Christ's sake. Hell no.

MAN #1

I don't have an office, Stu.

MAN #2

No, no, that's okay. I mean my company doesn't provide very good health insurance anyway. They've got no coverage for office visits, only hospitalization; the cheap bastards. Can you believe that shit? Gotta get run over by a fucking bus before their policy kicks in. If I've got a problem, I've gotta go the damn emergency room just to get it covered. Can you imagine what that's like? Old Mr. Psoriasis pays me a surprise visit and I gotta go be with a bunch of sick people in the waiting room for eight fucking hours; the whole time my ass is itching like a son-of-a-bitch, like I got spiders having a friggin' jamboree down there. Can't sit; gotta sleep on my stomach all night long. You think the damn nurses at

MAN #2 (con't)

Saint Bart's... (pause) Okay, not Saint Bart's; like I said I wouldn't darken the doors of that dump. But do you think any nurses anywhere would have a little sympathy and move me to the head of the line? Knowing I can't sit? Hell, no. I'll tell you, it is no fun. All that trouble just to get some salve, that for the life of me, I can't understand why it's not over-the-counter stuff? I'd go to a damn doctor's office but you guys get a hundred bucks just for me sticking my nose in your door. And, hell, ever try getting an appointment with a dermatologist in this city? Ten to one I call your office tomorrow morning, bright and early, and your nurse, receptionist, whatever the hell she is, she tells me you don't have an opening until June. And then on top of it she asks me if I've been referred by someone; someone who's already a patient of yours. Am I right?

MAN #1

I'm not a doctor, Stu, honestly.

MAN #2

Okay, fine, but what about what's his name.

MAN #1

Roger Clayborne.

MAN #2

Right. What do you bet he's booked into the summer?

MAN #1

I wouldn't know, but that sounds like it's probably the case. He's tops in his field.

MAN #2

Well, that's all I'm saying. That's why I like to pick up as much information as I can while I'm here working out. From people who are members of the same club as me. Don't like to waste my time. Time's a valuable commodity. I can't sit around twiddling my thumbs waiting for some doctor to fit me into his busy schedule, just so he can write me a lousy prescription that takes him thirty seconds to scribble out, and costs me seven-hundred bucks.

(another long pause. Man #1 goes back to his book, Man #2 stares out, then begins to look around)

MAN #2

Not many women in here tonight. Notice that?

MAN #1

I hadn't paid that much attention.

MAN #2

Yeah, well, hell, Thursday. It's always dead. You haven't hooked up by Thursday there's not much point in coming in here. Sit on the damn bike machine and stare at the walls; like you said; what good's that? Might as well be home watching T.V. (pause) That's another thing I was told... You know... Sex.

MAN #1

Sex?

MAN #2

Or lack there of.

(after forced laugh)

That's another thing that doctor told me back in high school; that Psoriasis can be exacerbated if you're thinking too much about sex, but not getting any. You know, kind of an anxiety driven thing. And apparently jerking off doesn't help, it's gotta be with a woman. What's the consensus on that? You go along with that theory?

MAN #1

You know, I'll bet you anything Roger Clayborne has a website. Google him. There may be all sorts of helpful information on the internet; and all for free.

MAN #2

Yeah, right, you get what you pay for, my friend. Here's a friendly piece of advice for you and it's free of charge; don't believe anything you see on the internet. You get what you pay for. Period. I've gone the internet dating route, and let me tell you, people lie. And women can be the worst practitioners. Me? I want a face-to-face with a professional when it comes to my health. I'm not offering up my physical wellbeing to the internet, or anywhere else. I mean, why do you think I parked myself next to you on the bike machine? You think I'm going to trust a serious condition like Psoriasis to the quacks on the web? I guarantee you, ninety percent of the clowns dishing out advice on the internet don't even have medical degrees, let alone a license.

MAN #1

Well it's not exactly like I have one.

MAN #2

No, no, I know, there's the liability issue. That's cool. I understand that. I've put you in an uncomfortable position. I completely understand. The last thing you need is for those bloodsuckers to hike up your malpractice insurance. Happened to me. Little fender-bender; not my fault of course; some pimply-faced teeny-bopper bumps into me in the Target parking lot, pops the door-panel and bingo, there goes my insurance rates. Through the roof. If I'd known those bastards were going to jack me up another twenty-five percent I would have never reported it, I swear to Christ.

(he looks at his watch)

Okay, look, this is getting us nowhere. Do me a favor, will you? If you run into your buddy, Clayborne, pick his brains for me? I mean, hey, we seem to be on the same schedule here at the gym, so, you know, find out what you can for me, okay? We'll compare notes next time I see you.

(he slides off the bike machine)

Well, I gotta run. Some people can spend their whole life in the gym. Gets to be a habit with them. That's not me. I got bigger fish to fry.

(he takes three or four steps and turns back to Man #1)

Oh, by the way, I don't think Russell Crowe dies in the end. See, he's on the train, the train pulls out of the station and then he whistles for his horse. And so you're kinda left with the idea that the horse maybe saves him; comes up to the side of the moving boxcar maybe and Russell Crowe jumps off and rides into the sunset. You know, a kinda – "Wow, I wonder what really happens?" ending and all that crap. Hollywood, they love that shit.

MAN #1

I see.

(Man #2 exits. After a moment a very attractive WOMAN enters. She wears gym tights and a sport bra. She plugs her settings into the vacant bike machine, wipes the seat with a white towel and sits, draping a the towel over the handlebars. Before she starts to pedal she scratches at something on her right forearm)

MAN #1

Problems?

WOMAN

(with a nice smile)

Oh, nothing really, I went hiking last weekend and picked up a little Poison Ivy. Doesn't want to go away. I tried some Calamine Lotion but it didn't seem to do too much for it.

MAN #1

There's a very good ointment out now for Poison Ivy. It'll clear it up in twenty-four hours. But it's not available over-the-counter; you'd need a prescription.

WOMAN

Really, I didn't know anything about that.

MAN #1

(he extends his hand to her)

Roger Clayborne; I'm a dermatologist.

WOMAN

(somewhat excited)

Oh. of course you are. The Jim Harper Newscast. I saw you on the evening news last night, didn't I?

MAN #1

Guilty as charged. So you caught the program, then? Well, I'm flattered you noticed. Jim and I go way back. Maybe you could stop by my office tomorrow; see what I can do for that Poison Ivy of yours. Just call my secretary; mention you met me at the gym. I'm sure we can slip you in...

CURTAIN

Marko

The scene is a bar. The set is such that the audience would be seated behind the bar with full view of the barkeep's set-up: sink, speed-rack with liquor bottles, ice bin, beer taps, etc. At the stage left end of the bar there is a stainless-steel top-loading cooler where bottled beer is kept. At opening the BARTENDER, a friendly sort, is leaning against the cooler, profile to audience, reading a paperback detective novel. There are no customers. After a moment a MAN enters stage-right and settles into a stool to the right of center-stage. The bartender puts a bar napkin into his paperback to mark his place, sets the book down on the bar and ambles over to the man.

BARTENDER

What'll it be, my friend?

MAN

Um... I don't know. I don't generally drink at bars. I don't think I've been in a bar in ten years. What do you got back there?

BARTENDER

Anything you want, you name it.

MAN

(looks around)

Kinda slow, isn't it?

BARTENDER

(also looks around)

Now that you mention it...

(shrugs)

Eh, Thursday night; it'll pick up.

MAN

You're sure about that?

BARTENDER

Been working here fifteen years. It'll pick up, trust me.

MAN

The place down the street? Dooley's? It was packed to the rafters. I couldn't find a place to sit at Dooley's so I left.

BARTENDER

It'll pick up.

MAN

I'm not complaining. It's no big deal. Nice there's no TV here. I mean, me not being a bar guy, that kind of a crowd in Dooley's can get a little intimidating. Especially if you don't know any of the people. Well, of course I wouldn't know any of the people, not having been in a bar in ten years... Unless it was, maybe, an office party, and even then it would need to be my office, the one where I work, that was having the party, or again, I wouldn't know any of the people... Dooley's? They had a hockey game on the TVs. I didn't want to make the mistake of rooting for the wrong team. Get my head beat in.

BARTENDER

So, what'll be?

MAN

Do many women ever come in here?

BARTENDER

All the time. Like I said, it's early.

(an attractive WOMAN enters stage-right, passes the Man and sits four seats away from him, at the stage-left side of the bar)

BARTENDER

See? All things come to he who waits.

(the bartender pours a glass of white wine and places it in front of the Woman without waiting for her to order)

WOMAN

Thank you, Ernie.

MAN

(to the woman)

You must be a regular here, huh? Bartender knows what you like to drink, and all?

(The woman smiles at him but
doesn't answer)

MAN

(to Bartender)

I suppose I'll have a beer. Maybe a Guinness. Do you have
any Guinness?

BARTENDER

Yep.

(the Bartender crosses to the cooler,
removes a Guinness, serves it to the
man along with a glass, then returns
to the cooler, leans against it, opens
his paperback and begins to read.
There's a long pause)

MAN

I guess I brought this all on myself. That's usually the
way it happens, isn't it? People bring things on
themselves? Some people love to blame other people, but
that's not me.

(shrugs)

Well, you would know, being a bartender and all. Probably
nothing you haven't heard a hundred times.

(no response from the Bartender)

MAN

It's amazing what wives can cherry-pick out of a
conversation... Don't you think? I mean, crap you don't even
remember saying is stored deep in their memory banks and
then it surfaces at the most unexpected moments.

(no replies)

MAN

For instance; I don't know when I said this, but obviously
at one point I must have told my wife how much I loved the
parakeet I had when I was a kid. So last year, on
Valentines Day, my wife brings one home for me. You know,
as a gift. A parakeet.

(long pause)

But she died two days later.

WOMAN

Oh, that's so sad. The poor thing. Did you give it enough food and water? I know birds love fresh water.

MAN

No, no, not the bird, my wife. My wife died. The bird's a he, not a she, and he's still alive.

WOMAN

Oh, good. I hate to see anything suffer.

MAN

We went for a long walk, my wife and I that is, and started throwing snow at one another, all in fun of course, and without any warning she slipped and fell over backwards and hit her head on a huge granite rock and there I was stuck with the bird. Just me and the bird; all alone. I didn't have the heart to give it away. I still don't. He keeps me company. I named him Marko. No, no, hold on, that's wrong, my wife named him Marko. Before she died that is. The man at the pet store told her he was a young bird; you know, easy to train. And he was; still is. She told me that before she died, too. My wife, that is. I never met the guy at the pet store. I buy Marko's food at PETCO. It's just down the street from me. (pause) Marko's a boy. Did I mention that?

WOMAN

Yes, you did.

MAN

Yeah, Marko took to me immediately, no way in hell I could have got rid of him. Perched himself on my finger the very first time I put my hand into his cage. Next thing you know, he's got the run of the house, riding everywhere on my shoulder and flapping around the kitchen chasing wild birds away from the feeder at the window. He's got a particular distain for the cardinals. Though for the most part they tend to ignore his histrionics. Don't get me wrong, it's not an anti-Catholic thing, I think it's just their red coloring that gets his goat. Marko's kind of a yellow color, almost like a canary.

(he sips his Guinness)

Yeah, the parakeet I had as a kid never talked but Marko seems to pick up on certain words and phrases, just like that.

(he snaps his fingers)

MAN (con't)

What do you think the first thing he said was?

(no reply)

Aw, Christ.

BARTENDER

What? What's up?

MAN

No, nothing. That's the first thing Marko said, "Aw, Christ." I'm not making that up, I swear to Christ those were the very first words out of his mouth, "Aw, Christ." I'm not exactly sure when that was that he came out with that, but I would guess it was around last April, maybe tax time. Marko's not a big fan of the IRS.

(he laughs)

But I swear to Christ, I don't know who the hell he got it from, because it seems to me that I don't say "Aw, Christ" all that much... But maybe I do. (pause) The next thing he learned to say was, "Okey-dokey." Now, my wife said that all the time, and I guess I'd been saying it a lot myself in her absence so it makes sense that Marko would have picked up that one. And it turns out that those two phrases pretty much cover Marko's side of all our conversations. I can say something like, "Looks like we're in for a little rain today, Marko." And Marko will say, "Aw, Christ." Or say I say, "I'm going to take out the trash. Be right back." He'll say, "Okey-dokey."

WOMAN

You talk to this bird? You carry on Conversations with him?

MAN

With Marko?

WOMAN

Is there another bird?

MAN

Well, no. There isn't. It's really no big deal. There's just the two of us living in the house; I mean, who else am I going to talk to? Anyway, this kind of banter went on for a month or two and then Marko surprises me by saying, "Big deal." Now, I never say, "Big deal." Not in a million years would I say "Big deal." Not even in my sleep would I say, "Big deal." It's something I would never say, and besides, Marko doesn't even sleep in the same room as me. I cover the cage over and he sleeps in the kitchen.

BARTENDER

(without looking up from his
paperback)

You just said it.

MAN

What?

BARTENDER

Big deal.

MAN

When?

BARTENDER

Just now. You just said, "It's really no big deal."

MAN

Aw, Christ. Did I?

BARTENDER

Yep.

MAN

Okey-dokey... If you say so. I guess Marko had to pick it up from somewhere. Of course the crazy thing is, "Big deal" also fit very nicely into our conversations. I say something like, "Aw, Christ, look at the time, I'm going to be late for work," almost to myself, not thinking anyone is listening, and Marko will say, "Big deal."

WOMAN

(dead-pan)

I know just how he feels.

MAN

Yeah, I'll tell you, birds can be funny sometimes. I don't mean like telling jokes, although Marko does know some pretty good ones.

BARTENDER

(without looking up from his
paperback)

A parakeet walks into a bar...

MAN

No, no, that's not really what I meant by "jokes." Besides I think a parakeet would probably fly into a bar, and not walk. Unless of course his wings were clipped; then, yeah, well sure, he'd have to walk.

BARTENDER

(looks up)

This is my joke... This is my bar. Why don't we just go with the clipped wing scenario? Does that work for you?

MAN

Ah, yeah, I guess so.

BARTENDER

(he imitates a parakeet voice when telling the joke; something the Man seems to disapprove of)

A parakeet walks into a bar... He looks at the bartender and says, "Got any millet?" Bartender says, "No, I don't have any millet. What else do you want?" Parakeet says, "Got any millet?" The bartender says, "I told you, buddy, no millet. What else?" The parakeet says, "Got any millet?" So the Bartender looks him square in the eye and says, "Look, buddy, this is a saloon, you ask for millet one more time and I'm gonna nail your friggin' beak to the bar." The parakeet thinks about this for a minute, then says, "Got any nails?" The bartender says, "No, I don't have any nails." So the parakeet say, "Got any millet?"

MAN

(doesn't laugh)

What I meant by funny is; birds can entertain you in small ways, personal ways, and you can find yourself watching them for hours on end. Example: Marko has a bell. I don't know where the hell he got it from, it just showed up in his cage one day. Actually, now that I think about it, it may have been there since last Valentine's Day. I don't remember, but it must have come from a pet store. I guess it was from a pet store because I don't know where else he could have got the damn thing. I mean, it is a parakeet toy, right? It's no big deal. The point is, he can get the simplest pleasure from that bell. He can stand there and kick it for over an hour just listening to the ringing sound. I've watched him do it. Sometimes he stands on the perch below the bell and sticks his head up into the thing and wears it like a hat for another hour or two. I've

MAN (con't)

watched him do that too. Listen to this, when his food bin gets empty he sticks his head into it and talks to himself. But it's hard to understand what he's saying when he does this because of all the echoing. So I've taped some of this chatter so I can play it back piece by piece but it all makes very little sense. He could be talking to the heavens for all I know.

WOMAN

You mean channeling someone? Conjuring up the dead?

MAN

Nah, I don't believe in that stuff. A lot of B-S, if you ask me. Anyway, after a while I got tired of opening and closing Marko's cage whenever he wanted a little fly around the kitchen, or an afternoon of riding on my shoulder, so I bent the hinges of his cage door and removed it entirely. This way he can come and go whenever he wants. He's a hell of a lot happier with this arrangement, I can tell you. In fact, he said so. If I remember correctly it was the first time he ever said, "That's the ticket," another one of my wife's favorite expressions. But I don't say it all that often and again I had to wonder how he picked it up so easily. Could have been the damn plumber. I heard him say it once when he was fixing that leak under my kitchen sink.

BARTENDER

(not looking up from his
paperback)

I think we use the same plumber.

MAN

Herbie?

BARTENDER

Yeah, that's him.

MAN

Huh. Anyway, the next thing Marko got was a ladder. I hooked it up to where his cage door used to be and it extended down onto the tiled kitchen countertop that his cage sits on. These tiles came from Mexico, and as pretty as they are, my wife and I swore we would never go back to Mexico because of the crummy drinking water. Christ we were sick for weeks after that trip. I guess most of Marko's ancestors come from Mexico but my wife told me the guy in the pet store said Marko was born right here

MAN (con't)

Pennsylvania and that a lot of the parakeets that are trapped in Mexico die before they can even get them to the pet stores. Well, I bought Marko the ladder so there was no real surprise as to where that came from; PETCO. Although it was actually made in Mexico, which is a little ironic.

WOMAN

I got sick in Mexico, too.

MAN

The water?

WOMAN

I guess. But I don't think I drank any; that's the funny thing. I think it might have been the fish.

MAN

(picks up his Guinness and moves
over to the seat next to the woman)

Okay?

WOMAN

I guess. Sure.

MAN

(he sits)

Marko loved this addition to his home but it turned out he could only walk up the ladder and not down. Every time he tried to walk down the ladder he'd bang his beak on the rungs. So he devised this cool method of sliding down on the side supports to get to the tile countertop. Then he strides back up on the rungs to get back into his cage. Very self-satisfied look on his face when he does this. Kinda reminds me of James Cagney in a way. It's a little hard to describe how he actually does do it but he makes it look simple. And amazingly he learned how to do it in only about five minutes after I put the ladder at his cage door. I was reading an article dealing with white rhinos, and their potential extinction, and Marko had worked out this problem of how to get down the ladder without smashing his beak before I was halfway finished the rhino piece. The only reason I looked up at all was because he said, "That's the ticket," after he had it all neatly worked out.

WOMAN

Sounds like you two are pretty chummy.

MAN

Well, Marko's very free with his advice, which is one of the things I like about him. And there's no hypocrisy there, he tells it like it is. It beats living alone, if you know what I mean? And like I said, he has complete run of the house. He can come and go as he pleases. He's his own bird. Really. I think that's what gives him his air of independence. But I never let him out of the house. In the past, I was always afraid he'd fly away and that would be the last I'd ever see of him, him being so independent minded and all. But that turned out to be an unjustified concern. Once last summer I left the back door open by accident while I was mowing the lawn. I do it with a push mower because it's too small to warrant buying a gas mower, the lawn that is, and after a while I felt this light weight on my shoulder and I brushed it off without ever looking. It turned out to be Marko of course. He flew around my head as if to announce himself and then landed on my other shoulder. He stayed there until I finished with the lawn and then I took him back inside and I've never let him out again. I just don't want to take a chance that something horrible might happen to him. I don't think he likes being restricted but I've seen crows go after smaller birds and Marko would be no match or a crow. He's smart, sure, but it's a size thing. And then on top of it, crows also have a tendency to gang up on other birds; not to mention they're a general nuisance with all the damn noise they make. A Murder of Crows – did you know that? That's what they call a flock of crows; a Murder. Yeah, so be forewarned. Hey, here's a conversation Marko and I had on that very same subject of crows.

Me: "Three crows in the copper beech at
two o'clock."

Marko: "Aw, Christ."

Me: "Maybe we should get a BB gun."

Marko: "That's the ticket."

Me: "I'll bet they cost over seventy bucks
now-a-days."

Marko: "Big deal."

Me: "Kind of a waste of money, when you think
about it. They'll be gone by the time winter
rolls around."

No answer from Marko. That usually means he doesn't agree with me. I think at that point Marko was very much in favor of gunning down the crows in a big way. My wife didn't like crows either.

WOMAN

Are you trying to pick me up?

MAN

You know it's funny you should mention that because here's the thing: On New Year's Eve Marko clammed up and said nothing at all for about five or six weeks. At first I wasn't overly worried about him because he seemed healthy. He was eating. He played with his bell, slid on his ladder, flew around the kitchen, rode on my shoulder and basically just kept an eye on everything I was up to around the house. I figured he must have just been in a quiet mood, or maybe he violently disagreed with something I said; which is altogether possible. If he gets annoyed with me it's not unusual for him to get an attitude. But no explanations were offered. Then out of nowhere, a couple of days after Valentines Day; the same day my wife died, to be precise, he said, "I'm getting really sick and tired of the fact that there're no women around here. Don't you think we should do something about that?"

WOMAN

(after a pause)

So, basically, what you're saying is; you're here on behalf of the parakeet?

MAN

Marko. You can call him Marko. And, yes, if truth be known, I am here at his behest.

WOMAN

A sort of humanitarian effort, then?

MAN

Well, he's not a human, really. But I'm certain he would be very happy to meet you.

WOMAN

(she smiles, removes a five dollar bill from her purse, places it on the bar and stands)

Okay... Let's go meet Marko. He sounds like a nice guy.

MAN

(after a long pause)

Umm, I forgot my wallet.

(the Woman studies him for a beat,
smiles, picks up her five dollar
bill, replaces it with a ten, and
they exit stage-right together
arm-in-arm, leaving the bartender
alone reading his paperback)

CURTAIN

The W.B.I.S.A.

The scene is a posh, almost tropical, office. Potted palms, hibiscus and orchids surround a mahogany desk. An overhead fan turns lazily above the desk. There is a three-drawer filing cabinet off to one side. The drawers are marked S, M, and L. An attractive WOMAN sits behind the desk with a clip-board in her hands. A stylishly-dressed "hip" MAN sits opposite her on the other side of the desk. He sits in a comfortably lavish leather chair and wears a "Groucho Disguise"; dark glasses with no lenses, bushy eyebrows and large nose. On his head is a Tiger Woods ball cap with the T.W. logo displayed above the brim. Up-stage stands a heavily armed security GUARD. He has his arms crossed over his chest.

WOMAN

Welcome to Arizona, Mr. Flynn. Our initial interview will take just a few moments. And as you know, since you have arrived at the clinic voluntarily, there is no turning back at this point. We have your signed consent and commitment papers, so you're ours for the next six weeks.

(she gives the Man an almost
sadistic smile)

Though rest assured, at the end of that time you *will* be cured. That is our guarantee, and we stand by it. You will be cured, one way or another. By-the-by, you're not related to Errol Flynn by any chance? I believe he was one of our very first clients; back in the Fifties. Before my time, of course.

MAN

Please, I would prefer if you didn't use my real name. It makes me very uneasy hearing it mentioned around.. (he glances at the Guard) strangers.

WOMAN

Really?

MAN

Anonymity. I would like to keep my time here in the strictest confidence. I have a reputation to consider. You may not be aware of this, but I am a very, very important person in Cleveland.. Ohio, that is. If the Plain Dealer finds out I'm here? I'm screwed. Not literally, of course. That would be quite a different

MAN (con't)

story; a literal screwing. (he winks at the Woman) A literal screwing I'm okay with.

WOMAN

(ignoring the come-on)

And this is why you've chosen to wear the Groucho disguise? To remain anonymous?

MAN

Yes. I'm tired of being compared to Tiger... As natural as that may be, given the circumstances... And my golf... I play golf, of course; quite well really, amateur, of course, but nonetheless I'm sick of hearing those lame jokes out on the links about me not being able to drive my Escalade 300 yards, and being six over par. I own an Escalade for God's sake; it's not funny in the least. Great babe-magnet, the Escalade, though. I miss her already. I'm sure you've seen the ads on TV; a true sex-machine. A lot of people feel the Mustang is the way to go, as far as pick-up wheels go; don't believe it.

WOMAN

Yes, well, I certainly do understand your distaste for off-color jokes. But we don't indulge in that type of frivolity here at the Beatty Institute for Sexual Addiction; or W.B.I.S.A. as we like to call it. We take our work quite, quite seriously. (pause) Though a good Charlie Sheen joke came across my desk the other day.

(she looks up at the ceiling to remember the joke, remembers it and then laughs)

Why don't I save that for later... It's very funny...

(another chuckle)

Okay, so, you'd like to use an assumed name while you're here. Alright. What name would you prefer?

MAN

The great irony in all of this is that my father always called me "Tiger" when I was a kid... And...

(he starts to choke-up)

He taught me how to play golf. How to handle my putter. My mother on the other hand taught me how to... Never mind. I'll save that for later, too. For my therapist.

WOMAN

Right, using *Tiger* as a pseudonym would be hitting a little too close to home, as you yourself have already

WOMAN (con't)

pointed out. How about Oedipus? (she laughs) No, no just kidding... What other name might you like to use?

MAN

Lets' just go with T.W., shall we?

WOMAN

Okay, T.W. it is. I'll make the adjustments on your admission forms. The only individuals privy to your *real* name will be me and Harry.

MAN

Harry?

WOMAN

(cocking her thumb to the Guard
without turning)

The Eunuch.

MAN

Ah, The Eunuch.

(he gives the Guard an uncomfortable
look)

How's it hangin', Harry?

GUARD

(with a shrug)

Can't complain.

MAN

(sotto voce to the Woman)

Is he a real eunuch?

WOMAN

Absolutely.

MAN

Has he always been that way?

WOMAN

You mean a eunuch?

MAN

Yes.

WOMAN

Well, one isn't born a eunuch.

MAN

No, I guess not.

WOMAN

(she moves her index and middle
fingers mimicking a pair of snipping
scissors)

Snip-snip. An irate and cuckolded husband with a hedge
trimmer can often accomplish something in a moment's time
that would normally take our clinic months to achieve.

MAN

Ouch.

WOMAN

And don't forget we have women clients here in Arizona as
well. All of our security personnel are eunuchs.

MAN

Do they come to you that way, or is that one of the
services you provide?

WOMAN

If a fellow wants the job badly enough he'll let nothing
stand in his way. In this economy? We have more applicants
than we can handle. And we have the capability to see that
every one of them meets our qualifications.

MAN

Hedge trimmers?

WOMAN

(laughs)

Oh, heavens no. We haven't used hedge trimmers in our
Eunuch Transformation Campaign, or E.T.C., in over three
years. But it is a necessary evil. We certainly don't want
to create any temptations for our female clients, now, do
we?

MAN

I don't know; temptation can be a good thing. Emotional
foreplay, if you will. For instance, you are a very
tempting looking woman, if you don't mind me saying so.

WOMAN

I do mind. This is exactly the type of behavior in you we
hope to bring to an end.

MAN

So I can only use my imagination?

WOMAN

And I wouldn't use too much of that, if I were you. You certainly don't want to end up in the E.T.C. program.

MAN

No. No, I don't.

(turning his head to give her
his profile)

You don't think the Groucho nose is too phallic, do you?

WOMAN

We try not to use words such as *phallic* here, Mr. Fl- er, T.W. We also refer to intercourse as I.C., and fellatio as F.O. We find that the use of these simple abbreviations creates far less arousal within our clients.

MAN

F.O.? Huh, that's a new one to me, but I like it. I can use it.

WOMAN

Well, B.J. isn't as subtle as we like to be here in Arizona. Now, on your admissions form you've given us a breakdown on your past sexual activity. Impressive numbers, even by our standards, I must say. I can only think of one other client with stronger numbers.

MAN

Tiger?

WOMAN

I'm not at liberty to say.

MAN

Charlie Sheen?

WOMAN

Oh, please.

MAN

W.B.?

(a dreamy look crosses her face
and she sighs seductively)

MAN

Right... There's no B-S-ing a B-S-er. Old W.B. gets around, doesn't he? Listen, my wife doesn't get to see that form, does she?

WOMAN

(regaining her composure)

Absolutely not. Never. Only myself, Harry and a handful of U.P.I. writers ever gain access to our records. Now, we use two approaches here at the W.B.I.S.A. clinic... Well, three, if you count Harry's, ah, *procedure*... But that is of course a last resort. E.T.C. Hopefully with you, it won't come to that. Our two main methods are: Cold Turkey, and Gradual Withdrawal – C.T. and G.W. – Different clients need different approaches, of course.

MAN

I've tried Gradual Withdrawal. It can be intense; with the right partner that is. It's reassuring to know that you offer it... Here in Arizona.

WOMAN

Ah, no, what we're talking about with G.W., T.W., is a regimented reduction of sexual activity over a period of several weeks until you have completely overcome the desire for any further promiscuity.

MAN

Huh. Sounds tough. By the way, Tiger's not here, is he?

WOMAN

'Fraid not.

MAN

Damn. It would have been great to work on my golf game while I'm here; get a few pointers, work on my driver, putter, discuss the advantage, or disadvantage, of a graphite shaft, how to best handle your balls... And at the same time getting the opportunity to straighten myself out.

WOMAN

Straighten Out is also a term we like to avoid here in Arizona. *Ending the Cycle* is what we prefer.

MAN

Okay, *Ending the Cycle* works for me. Probably not so good for Lance Armstrong, though.

(he laughs at this; she remains poker-faced)

MAN

You don't think this desire to bed-down every woman who crosses my path is in some crazy way directly related to golf, do you.

WOMAN

No. Our facility's research department has, over the years, determined that most men play golf to get away from women. And of course, it is a two-way-street; women encourage men to play golf so that they can be rid of them, and thereby find alternative forms of entertainment. And I'm not talking about shopping.

MAN

Good point.

WOMAN

Now for your routine.

(she studies her clip-board)

For the first week we have cut you back to three I.C.s and four F.O.s daily.

MAN

F.O.s?

WOMAN

B.J.s, T.W., B.J.s.

MAN

Right, B.J.s... Hell, that sounds more like Cold Turkey to me - C.T. in the extreme. Can't we start out with a regimen that's a little less severe? Drop in a few more I.C.s?

WOMAN

We leave these decisions up to our medical staff. If, in a few days, we find you can't handle the stress and strain, we can make some adjustments.

MAN

Who exactly administers these... Treatments?

WOMAN

We have a highly trained staff; very knowledgeable in all aspects of our therapy.

MAN

Any Russians?

WOMAN

As a matter of fact, yes. A number of our specialists are Russian.

MAN

Good. I'd like to start out with a few Russian girls. Perhaps two. You do have group therapy, don't you? I understand there are some real benefits to group therapy.

WOMAN

I think you're missing the point, T.W. The idea is to get control of yourself, and begin to scale back.

MAN

Look, I just flew out here from Cleveland... Ohio. I've been on an airplane for four hours, and the flight attendants were all in their fifties and married. No action there at all. I haven't had a brush with intimacy in nearly 24 hours. I'm all ready for my first treatment. Let's get started, already. Time's wasting. You have my American Express Card. One of the highest credit lines in Amex history. I need treatment now!

WOMAN

If you can just hold on for a few more minutes. We need to first issue you your chastity suit, and then show you to your accommodations.

MAN

Chastity suit?

(the Woman opens the middle drawer of the file cabinet marked M and removes a pink jump-suit)

WOMAN

I think a medium should fit you just fine.

(the Woman hands the Man the suit. He stands and holds it up to his chest, studying the front and back.)

The suit has no opening in the front,
a zipper up the back with a large
padlock at the neck, and a back
buttoned flap in the rear end)

MAN

Not very stylish. And the color's a little sweet.

WOMAN

No, not stylish. Nothing that might attract the opposite
sex. Women are issued the *almost* identical suit.

MAN

Almost?

WOMAN

The women's suits are dark greenish gray, and in no way
indicate what kind of physique might be lurking underneath.
Very non-provocative. And the men's version is equipped
with an interior device near the belt-line, similar in
design to a mouse trap. If there's any significant sign of
sexual arousal while one is wearing the suit, the trap is
sprung... Wham!

(she claps her hands together and
smiles)

We find that after about three or four run-ins with the
device, many men are able to control themselves a little
bit better.

MAN

I would guess so.

(examining the suit closer)

Ah... There doesn't seem to be an opening in the front?

WOAMN

No.

MAN

How do I... Ahh... Relieve myself?

WOMAN

Open the back flap and sit.

MAN

Like a girl?

WOMAN

Like a girl.

MAN

I find that somewhat emasculating, to be honest with you.

WOMAN

That's the point, T.W. And a side benefit – the toilet seats in the unisex bathrooms at the W.B.I.S.A. clinic now all seem to be left in the down position.

MAN

The lock?

WOMAN

There is no taking the suit off without proper supervision.

MAN

Supervision? What supervision?

WOMAN

Harry.

MAN

I didn't see any of this stuff mentioned in your brochure. All I saw was palm trees, swimming pools and double beds.

(he looks around)

In fact, where are the women? Your brochure was loaded with attractive women.

WOMAN

Yes, well, we've been planning to re-do those brochures for some time now. Funny how the days can slip away and some things can get lost on the back burner. The new brochure is just going off to the printer this week. Now, we have situated you in suite 721. Harry can show you to your suite at this time if you like.

MAN

Harry? Harry? What is it with Harry? Harry is going to show me to my suite? What's Harry? My shadow?

WOMAN

Let's just say; Harry's someone to watch over you.

MAN

A eunuch?

WOMAN

Please, Harry's a little sensitive about all that. We're trying to work him out of any potential feelings of inadequacy.

MAN

Inadequacy? He's missing his gonads, for Christ's sake. You can't get much more inadequate than that.

WOMAN

But he's such a dear.

MAN

Look, when I travel on business the hotels always arrange for a *woman* to lead me to my accommodations. And a good-looking one at that. This saves quite a bit of time in the long run. I can get down to business much sooner that way.

WOMAN

Sorry, here in Arizona it's Harry.

MAN

Well, what about you? What's on your schedule for the next hour or so? How am I ever going to get a handle on this I.C./F.O./C.T./G.W./W.B.I.S.A. programs, et cetera, unless someone shows me the ropes? Takes me by the hand, as it were. Leads me through it all step by step. Shows me the ins and outs? The ups and downs. What do you say? Maybe I can teach you a thing or two. We can all learn something.

WOMAN

Harry will take you to your suite now.

MAN

Speaking of my suite, there is a hot tub I assume?

WOMAN

No.

MAN

No hot tub? What kind of a place is this? I distinctly remember seeing a hot tub in your brochure.

WOMAN

Oh, that one. That hot tub's in my suite.

MAN

Do I at least get some visitation rights?

WOMAN

(she shakes her head)

Cold showers, T.W. It's cold showers, cold showers from here on out. Welcome to Arizona. The land of the blazing sun and cold shower... Et cetera.

MAN

(he sighs and appears totally
dejected)

Okay, what's the Charlie Sheen joke?

CURTAIN

Good God

The scene is a church with at least one pew that faces the audience. At rise an attractive WOMAN enters from the up-stage door and sits in the center of the pew. She removes a set of Rosary Beads from her purse, clutches them tightly, genuflects and closes her eyes in meditation. After a few beats a PRIEST enters left and sits stage-left of the Woman at the end of the pew. The Priest wears a black eye-patch over one eye. They sit silently for a moment. When the Woman opens her eyes the Priest senses this peripherally.

PRIEST

(focusing down-stage; not looking
at the Woman)

Can I be of help to you, my dear? Are you in need of
comforting?

WOMAN

No, Father, I think I just need to be alone for a while.
Comforting is really something I don't need. I've been
comforted once already today.

PRIEST

Of course, I completely understand. There are many times in
one's life when one feels the need to be alone with one's
Creator. He is, quite naturally, the *great* comforter; the
great healer, perhaps, for those who are not seeking
comforting... Elsewhere... From other sources, that is. From
the clergy, say. Comfort can come from many places, but He
opens our hearts, our minds, our bodies and shows us
answers we might never have discovered on our own. One is
never alone in the House of the Lord.

WOMAN

She.

PRIEST

She?

WOMAN

Yes. God is a she... A woman, not a man.

PRIEST

(with a knowing smile; still
focusing down-stage)

PRIEST

Indeed. Dare I say you are not the first to suggest that theory as a possibility. (pause) As unlikely of a scenario as it might be. It seems to be the type of banter that gets tossed about in martini bars by women lawyers these days. No offense meant if you happen to be a lawyer and not say... A doctor... Or a teacher... Or a... Prostitute?

(there is another pause. A uniformed POLICEMAN enters and crosses to sit in the pew on the other side of the woman. He needs to pass in front of the other two as he crosses, forcing them to stand as he goes by. He also pulls out Rosary Beads. After pause the Woman begins to laugh)

PRIEST

Is everything alright, my dear?

WOMAN

Yes. (pause) A cop, a priest, and a prostitute walk into a church...

(the Policeman and the Priest look at her)

POLICEMAN

I haven't heard that one?

PRIEST

Then you are a prostitute?

WOMAN

So now we have our priorities straight, don't we, gentlemen?

PRIEST

Well, I don't see –

WOMAN

It was a somewhat rhetorical question, Father. Let it go.

PRIEST

Nevertheless, my only concern was for you, and whether you have drifted into a life of sin. We are all God's children; God's angels. Clearly you have entered the House of the Lord searching for help, guidance, if you

PRIEST (con't)

will; and this is my calling, the very reason I have been placed on this earth... Our Island Home.

POLICEMAN

I haven't heard that one? How does it go?

WOMAN

There is no joke, Officer. I was simply musing.

PRIEST

Are you a prostitute?

WOMAN

(with her own knowing smile)

Isn't everyone a prostitute, Father? One way or another. We carry out our duties... And we get rewarded if we are successful, correct? Only some occupations are, shall we say, more unsavory than others? And the rewards more base.

POLICEMAN

There's an old one my Captain used to tell about a priest, a *lawyer*, and a cop; but they weren't in a church – they were in a bar. The punch-line had something to do with a magic lamp and a twelve inch pianist. I'm trying to remember how it goes. It'll come to me.

PRIEST

Prostitutes are God's children as well. We would be awfully narrow-minded, the Church that is, if we were unwilling to offer comfort to those who may have drifted from the path of holiness. (pause) And if it is of any comfort to you, my dear, I have had an opportunity to work with prostitutes many times in the past.

WOMAN

I can well imagine.

PRIEST

Saving their souls, that is.

POLICEMAN

I think all three of them were Irish, maybe. Ducks were involved in the joke some way too. I was funnier than Hell.

PRIEST

Rest assured, there's nothing funny about Hell, Officer.

POLICEMAN

No, Father, I'm not saying that. I'm just saying the joke was funnier than Hell. (pause) Christ, you want to talk about Hell, try pulling an all-nighter with the Narco-boys in this fucking city - In this fucking weather.

PRIEST

We are in the House of the Lord, Officer.

POLICEMAN

Oh, yeah, right.

(he loops his Rosary Beads over his service revolver and rubs his hands together to warm them)

PRIEST

Why exactly did you stop in here this evening?

POLICEMAN

I was freezing my balls off out there. It's colder than Hell.

WOMAN

Isn't Hell supposed to be warm?

PRIEST

The Bible does speak rather pointedly of the flames of Hell, and those who are damned to visit. Though, I would suggest that no one, at least no one I have known, has visited the netherworld and returned to tell of their experience.

POLICEMAN

Sounds like you haven't known enough people.

WOMAN

So it's all make-believe, is that it? Heaven and Hell?

PRIEST

I wouldn't go that far. Clearly *real* sinners are damned for all eternity.

POLICEMAN

That's a hell of a long time.

PRIEST

Indeed.

POLICEMAN

Try pulling an all-nighter with the jackasses in Narco if you want to get a real feel for all eternity.

WOMAN

I understand the word Hell is never mentioned in the Bible.

PRIEST

Don't believe it, dear. That's the type of erroneous trivia that also seems to be popular at martini bars.

WOMAN

Can you cite a passage?

PRIEST

"And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell." Matthew, Nine-Forty-seven.

WOMAN

How about that. Very good. Obviously you know your scripture.

POLICEMAN

Yeah, no way you can duck that kind of irony. (pause) What exactly happened to your eye, Father? If you don't mind me asking.

PRIEST

I stepped in to break up a rubber-band and paper-clip shoot-out between some hostile altar-boys. Gang members, really. Right at Pentecost, so of course we were all wearing red; it was a Bloods and Crips thing. This was in Newark... Tough diocese, Newark. These same little monsters put rat poison in the communion wine. I could have rung their scrawny little necks.

POLICEMAN

Someone fucked with the water cooler at the station-house last year around Christmas time. Laced it with Cialis. Everyone was running around with a hard-on; except the women, that is. Didn't seem to affect them in the least. None of that four-hour bullshit, though. I think that's

POLICEMAN (con't)

all a crock, if you ask me. Four hours? That's nutso... But you sure could have some fun with a four-hour hard-on, couldn't you, Father? We never did figure out who it was; put the shit in the water, that is.

WOMAN

Are you on duty?

POLICEMAN

Yeah. Why? You go a problem? Someone bothering you?

WOMAN

No. Only that I came in here to be alone. Shouldn't you be out there keeping the city safe.

POLICEMAN

What? I can't have some personal issues? I can't be in need of some pastoral comforting? Just because I'm a cop you think I'm perfect, is that it? Cops aren't perfect, angel.

WOMAN

No, but most people have to take care of these "personal" things during their own time. They can't just walk off of the job because they're feeling depressed.

POLICEMAN

I never said I was depressed. I said I have issues, not depression. I said nothing about depression. I'm a happily married man.

WOMAN

(looking straight forward)

Whose wife happens to be cheating on him.

POLICEMAN

Where'd you get that?

WOMAN

You walked right into it. It's written all over your face... Sorry.

POLICEMAN

(after a reflective pause)

Okay, so there is *that* business going on. But other than *that* we're very, very happy. I just wish I hadn't found out about it. Ignorance is bliss, right? Let her do what

POLICEMAN (con't)

she wants; keep me in the dark – I'm a happy guy. But, the whole damn station-house seems to know about it. I'd love to get a hold of the bastard she's fooling around with. If I could find out who he is I'd ring his damn neck. But no one's talking. (pause) Yeah, I guess I am a little bummed out about it.

PRIEST

Well, you've come to the right place, my son. Often things are more easily resolved when kept within the family; the Lord's family. And time can be the great healer.

WOMAN

Time and Cialis. (pause) Well, I'll tell you what Officer...
(she leans forward and studies

his name-plate)

Officer Kranjaneski...

(the Priest nearly chokes upon hearing the officer's name. He leans around the woman to get a better look at the name-plate, then leans back, stares up at the ceiling and genuflects)

WOMAN

Kranjeski? That's Polish, right?

POLICEMAN

Yep.

PRIEST

Your wife's name is Kranjeski, as well?

POLICEMAN

Alice.

PRIEST

(burying his face in his hands)

Ah, shit.

(he then genuflects again. It all goes unnoticed by the Policeman)

WOMAN

(to Policeman)

Out of curiosity; is your gun always kept loaded?

(the Priest shudders)

POLICEMAN

Absolutely. You never know when you're going to have to take care of business. You run into something you don't expect... You'd better be ready.

WOMAN

And you have no compunction about walking into a church with a loaded weapon?

POLICEMAN

What do you suggest, angel? I check it at the friggin' door?

WOMAN

Yes.

POLICEMAN

What? Leave it back by the damn holy-water? Anyone could pick it up. Some whacko comes in, grabs it, starts shooting the place up. Who you gonna call to help you out in a situation like that? An unarmed cop?

PRIEST

He has a point.

POLICEMAN

Thank you, Father.

PRIEST

Though I must admit, I too find it a little unnerving having a loaded gun in the House of the Lord.

POLICEMAN

Get over it; I'm one of the good guys, remember?

WOMAN

You'd actually shoot someone in a church?

POLICEMAN

Fuckin-A.

WOMAN

For real?

POLICEMAN

Abso-fuckin'-lutely. Like, if I caught that bastard who was shacked up with my wife kneeling up there saying his evening prayers? At the altar? Church or no church, I'd tell the son-of-a-bitch to get ready to meet his maker first-hand.

(Priest genuflects)

WOMAN

You'd actually shoot him?

POLICEMAN

(after a beat)

Okay, maybe I wouldn't shoot him, but I'd sure-as-shit make him crap his pants.

PRIEST

Once again, Officer, I must ask you to remember where you are, and watch your language.

POLICEMAN

Fuck you. I come in here because I'm having a personal crisis; I'm looking for a little pastoral advice, or maybe just some quiet time, and you, the person who's supposed to be consoling me sits there and tells me to watch my friggin' language? My cousin's a priest, for Christ's sake. You think he gives a shit how people talk? There's some low-lifes out there who don't know any better. Grew up in shitty families. What are you gonna do? Tell them to take a hike just because they used the "F" word?

WOMAN

Perhaps you should be discussing your issues with your cousin, if he's a priest. Keep it in the family?

POLICEMAN

Can't. He's in Phoenix. Not by choice, mind you, nobody is. That's where the Pope stationed him. That's how it works, right, Father? You go where the Pope sends you?

PRIEST

Well, the Diocese does placement, really.

POLICEMAN

Yeah, right, the Diocese. Bullshit, the Pope says jump, you jump. My cousin told me all about it. (pause)

POLICEMAN (con't)

Phoenix; Jesus, it's a desert, did you know that? Not fit for human life. Lizards and rattlesnakes that's all that's supposed to live there. I've been out there. I've seen how it works. People run from their A/C houses to their A/C cars to their A/C jobs and then back to their houses. Starts all over again the next morning. My cousin's church is eighty percent Spanish. Good thing he studied it high school. Me? I studied German. A lot of good that's doing me. Chinese; that's the way to go now. Make a million dollars overnight, you speak Chinese these days. (pause) Well, what the hell, at least he's warm, right? My Cousin? So what he's gotta speak Spanish. (pause) You really a hooker?

WOMAN

Well, if I was it wouldn't make a lot of sense admitting it to someone in law enforcement, would it?

POLICEMAN

Hey? Who's gonna help you out more in this day and age, a priest or a cop?

WOMAN

I don't recall asking anyone for help. In fact I'm here to help out the two of you. It's the only reason I stopped in.

(the Policeman and Priest think this over for a moment)

POLICEMAN

How could you be here to help me when I walked into the church after you? Makes no sense. How would you know I'd even be here? I mean, if you followed me in here, maybe I'd buy it, but you didn't. You were here first. What? You were waiting for me?

PRIEST

I entered after you had sat down as well, my dear. I was hiding... err, *reflecting* in the confessional and saw you come in. The logical progression of things would suggest that you were the one in need of help long before either one of us.

WOMAN

Is that right?

PRIEST

Yes.

WOMAN

And you honestly believe that?

PRIEST

I do. We approached you, not the other way around. I would suggest that you are not a mind-reader and unable to predict the future.

WOMAN

Well, Father, contrary to what you believe, not everything is what it appears to be on the surface. (pause) I believe you have something to confess to Officer Kranjeski. And right now would be as good a time as ever to do it. So what do you say we get started.

(a confused look sweeps across the Priest's face, his mouth trembles as he almost chokes on his words)

PRIEST

No... I have nothing... I'm... I'm... I'm... Not... a... Priest.

POLICEMAN

So? Who gives a shit?

PRIEST

Why did I say that? I am a priest. I'm a priest. I've always been a priest.

WOMAN

No you're not. You know full well you're not. And you never have been. That was a very good first step; admitting it. Let me hear you say it again.

PRIEST

I... I... I am not a priest.

(he removes his eye-patch and tosses it behind the pew)

POLICEMAN

You got two eyes, too?

WOMAN

Very good. Now you have more to tell the officer.

PRIEST

What? Okay, fine, so I'm not a priest. That's it. Jesus. I'm not a priest and never have been.

WOMAN

I think there's a little more you can share. Like, why you're here?

PRIEST

I... I come in here to pick up women when Father Wilson is eating dinner at my restaurant with the Monsignor. That way I know he's occupied and won't be walking into the church while I'm doing my thing here.

POLICEMAN

Yeah, right, I thought you looked familiar. Adam's Prime Rib? Right?

PRIEST

Right... There, happy? As the officer says, who gives a shit? (pause) Why am I telling you all this? It makes no sense.

WOMAN

It makes perfect sense, believe me. But you're still not finished. You have more to tell Officer Kranjeski. About... Alice Kranjeski?

POLICEMAN

What about Alice?

(the priest gets a sheepish look on his face. There's a long silence as the Policeman puts it all together)

POLICEMAN

You? You're the bastard who's been screwing my wife?

PRIEST

Now hold on. Don't get excited. I can explain the whole thing. It's not what you might think.

(the Policeman reaches for his revolver, tries to remove it from his holster, but it gets tangled up in the rosary beads. He struggles with it for a while and finally frees it, but the gun and beads drop to the floor. He retrieves them, fumbles to separate them, drops the gun once more,

picks it up again, frees it from the beads and tosses the beads onto the Woman's lap. Meanwhile the Priest has jumped under the pew, cowering in fear)

PRIEST

Jesus Christ, take it easy, will you?

POLICEMAN

Come out of there, you bastard.

PRIEST

Let me explain.

(he's now weeping)

POLICEMAN

Explain shit.

PRIEST

Please.

POLICEMAN

You little weenie. Come out of there before I fill your backside with lead.

PRIEST

Please, give me a break. Let me explain it all. It's not what it looks like.

POLICEMAN

I'll count to three. If you're not out of there by then I'm going to blow your brains out right where you are... One. (he cocks the trigger on the gun) Two.

PRIEST

Jesus, why did I open my stupid mouth. Would someone please explain that to me?

WOMAN

(perfectly calm throughout all of this)

Obviously you couldn't help yourself; you could live the lie not longer. You needed to come clean. It's the only way. You saw the light.

POLICEMAN

Three.

(the Policeman pulls the trigger of the gun. It clicks, but no bullet is discharged. He pulls the trigger three or four more times; click, click, click; nothing happens. The Woman casually reaches into her purse and pulls out a handful of bullets)

WOMAN

It's not going to work very well without these.

POLICEMAN

What the hell? How the hell did you get those?
(he inspects his revolver; no bullets)

WOMAN

If you two boys would be kind enough to sit back down.

(she sits quietly as the two men begrudgingly sit back on the pew in their original positions. It's all followed by a long pause)

WOMAN

Officer Kranjeski you love your wife. Your wife loves you. She made a mistake. When you get home tonight talk to her; you'll understand everything. It will take some forgiveness on both your parts, but it will all work out. Trust me.
(she looks to the Priest)
Dressing as a priest. You should be ashamed of yourself.

PRIEST

I am.

WOMAN

I'm glad to hear it. I expect you two boys to treat one another in a civil manner when I'm gone.

(she opens her purse and casually drops all six bullets, one-by-one, into it)

If not, there will be Hell to pay, you have my word on it.
(pause) Now, if you'll excuse me I will be returning to my martini bar. I find the conversation there much more enlightening. Angels do make such good company.

(she stands and slowly exits. The two men stare at one another for a beat, then turn to face the audience)

CURTAIN