

THE TEST

A COMEDY IN TWO ACTS

By **Cliff McClelland**

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THE TEST

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SYNOPSIS: A satire of testing in American society, showing the ridiculous hoops we all have to jump through in order to carry out the “No Child Left Behind” mandate. It’s an Indiana Jones whip-snap of scenes that move quickly from one to the next, handing out belly laughs at times and then slowing down for some poignant, thoughtful moments as well. Witness the beginning of testing in prehistoric times! Experience the new testing game show! Be captivated by kung fu test preparation! It’s all here, it’s all fun, and it’s all available to you for the price of two number two pencils and possibly, an itsy bitsy piece of your soul!

CAST OF CHARACTERS

CAVEMEN (3)

BILL BAILEY, a talk show host

ROSE, a housewife

MARCEL MARCEAU, the most famous mime in the world

JONAH, the Old Testament prophet

DANNI, Bill’s gorgeous assistant

ANNOUNCER, name is Johnny (*Recorded or offstage voice*)

ENIGMA SINGERS, a three-girl singing group like the Supremes

ADAM, from the Garden of Eden

EVE, from the Garden of Eden

MODEL, another gorgeous game show assistant

MAN, a husband

WOMAN, a wife

HEAD INQUISITOR, of the Monty Python-esque Inquisition

MARGARET, another inquisitor

GERALD, another inquisitor

SHELLY, another inquisitor

OLD MAN, another inquisitor

WOMAN

ANNE, secretary of the inquisitors

HELGA, a heretic

TEACHER, giving a test

GIRL, taking a test

BOY, taking a test

THE TEST

SECOND GUY, late to the test
POLICE OFFICER, administering a driving test
DRIVING STUDENT, taking the driving test
BEAT TEACHER, a cool cat experimental teacher
LINDSEY, a beat class student
REGINA, a beat class student
MICHAEL, a beat class student
JANICE, a beat class student
TESTER, administering a violent MBA entrance exam
CANDIDATE #1, taking the exam
CANDIDATE #2, taking the exam
CANDIDATE #3, taking the exam
CANDIDATE #4, taking the exam
CANDIDATE #5, taking the exam
CANDIDATE #6, taking the exam
CANDIDATE #7, taking the exam
WOMAN
MAN
KIDS (7)
MOTHER, of an autistic child
FATHER, of an autistic child
ESMIE, an autistic child
DOCTOR, of the autistic child
MERISA, a college student
KATHLEEN, a college biology student
TERRY, a college student
RICHARD, a college student
KISSING COUPLE, man and woman kissing without moving
WORKER #1, a mover
WORKER #2, another mover
STUDENT #1, a female college student
STUDENT #2, a male college student
TRAINER, a standardized test tainer
TEACHER #1, teacher administering standardized tests
TEACHER #2, teacher administering standardized tests
TEACHER #3, teacher administering standardized tests
TEACHER #4, teacher administering standardized tests
ARMY GUY, test security person

OLDER MOTHER, an older woman in a doctor's office for a test
SON, her son, waiting with her
DOCTOR, bringing back the test results
ZOMBIES, the cast dressed as zombies

TIME

Today

PLACE

All over America

AUTHOR NOTES

This play is meant to run with scenes back-to-back, separated only by music and possibly a slide show of cartoons having to do with testing. There are hundreds of them available on the internet! In terms of cast, you can have a huge one or a cast of eleven to fourteen, for which the play was originally designed.

“Thus Spake Zarathustra (also Sprach Zarathustra)” was composed by Richard Strauss (1896). You may also recognize this piece from the Stanley Kubrick’s 1968 film, *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

“(Won’t You Come Home) Bill Bailey,” originally titled “Bill Bailey, Won’t You Please Come Home” was written by Hughie Cannon (1902).

“Where Have All the Flowers Gone?” is a folk song written by Pete Seeger and Joe Hickerson. This piece is controlled by BMI, so you would need to license it for this show, pick another appropriate song, or even write your own original music. Every school has five or six garage bands. Ask them to help out.

Finally, props, costumes, and set should be minimal and representational, because there are so many changes. Find a way to bring out the theme rather than something realistic. This play was performed in front of a whole group of teachers when it was written, and there were so many belly laughs that it was unbelievable.

With various forms of testing in the newspapers every other week, the audience for the show is expanding all the time, so have fun with it!

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE

THE PREHISTORIC AGE, A PANTOMIME

Characters: Three cavemen

THE GAME SHOW

Characters: Announcer, Bill Bailey, Rose, Marcel, Mime, Jonah, Caveman, Enigma Singers (3), Danni

THE GARDEN OF EDEN

Characters: Adam, Eve, Bill Bailey, Danni, Announcer, Enigma Singers (3), Rose, Model

E.P.T. - PANTOMIME (PART ONE)

Characters: Woman, Man

THE SPANISH INQUISITION

Characters: Bound woman (non-speaking), Head inquisitor, Margaret, Gerald, Shelly, Old man, Anne, Helga

THE TESTING TABLE, A PANTOMIME

Characters: Girl, Boy, Teacher, Second guy

ACT TWO

THE DRIVING TEST

Characters: Girl student driver, Police officer

THE BEAT TEST

Characters: Beat Teacher, Lindsey, Regina, Michael, Janice

THE TEACHER TEST

Characters: Tester, Candidate #1, Candidate #2, Candidate #3, Candidate #4 (non-speaking), Candidate #5 (non-speaking), Candidate #6, Candidate #7

E.P.T. - PANTOMIME (PART TWO)

Characters: Woman, Man, Seven kids

AUTISM

Characters: Esmie, Mother, Father, Doctor

THE KISS

Characters: Merisa, Kathleen, Two kissing students (non-speakng), Terry, Richard, Worker #1, Worker #2, Student #1, Student #2

STANDARDIZED TEST PREPARATION

Characters: Trainer, Teacher #1, Teacher #2, Teacher #3, Teacher #4, Army guy

THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE, A PANTOMIME

Characters: Older mother, Son, Doctor

FINALE

Characters: Announcer, Bill Bailey, Enigma Singers (3), Zombie #1, Zombie #2, Zombie #3, Extra zombies (non-speaking)

ACT ONE
THE PREHISTORIC AGE

To the tune of “Thus Spake Zarathustra (Also Sprach Zarathustra).” Three CAVEMEN approach a set of stone tablets on the floor and begin to draw. At the first brass flourish, the 1ST CAVEMAN reveals a picture of a circle. Other CAVEMEN approach, interested in the creation. During the timpani solo, the 2ND CAVEMAN draws furiously. At the flourish, he holds up a picture of the same circle, only detail has been added to create a wheel. The CAVEMEN leap around the floor, hooting and hollering their approval. During the timpani solo, the 3RD CAVEMAN draws furiously, and at the final flourish, holds up a picture of a circle inscribed with the words, “ $A = \pi r^2$ and $r = 5$. Solve for A.” The 3RD CAVEMAN looks incredibly pleased with himself, but the other CAVEMEN just shake their heads. Their confused mumblings morph from discontent to anger, and they finally pick up their clubs, beat the 3RD CAVEMAN into jelly, and destroy his stone tablet. The lights fade on stage as a slide appears. The slide reads, “And thus, the practice of testing was postponed for a few thousand years.”

THE GAME SHOW

Fun, game-show style music fades in as the slides disappear. LIGHTS FADE IN ON: THE GAME SHOW.

Three contestants stand in front of podiums that bear their names. The contestants include an overbearing housewife, ROSE, her hair in curlers and wearing a robe, MARCEL, a mime, and the Old Testament prophet, JONAH, who, from his appearance, seems to have just come from the belly of a giant fish.

The host of the show, BILL BAILEY, stands at his podium, all smiles.

BILL BAILEY: All right, everybody. Welcome back to Enigma, that mysterious game show that combines the brilliance of the most puzzling questions in history with the goofiest people on the face of the earth. I’m Bill Bailey, your host of this top ten Nielsen Ratings’ hit. Now let’s meet our contestants.

First, let’s say hello to a real flower child, Rose McDowell!

An applause track is played. All three contestants look around them, trying to figure out from where the applause is coming from.

BILL BAILEY: Hi, Rosie!

ROSE: It's just Rose, you smiley-faced moron.

BILL BAILEY: And don't I know it! As our current champion, Rose has garnered a whole fourteen dollars and eighty-five cents here on Enigma!

The applause track goes wild.

ROSE: Oh, shut up! It's fifteen bucks. My son brings home more than that just beating kids up for lunch money.

BILL BAILEY: Your son extorts lunch money from other children?

ROSE: Hey, watch what you say about Denny. He's just got some issues.

BILL BAILEY: Okay! Well, moving on, let's all say hello to Marcel Marceau, the most famous mime in history!

Applause track erupts. The MIME opens an invisible door, walks through it, and blows kisses to the audience.

BILL BAILEY: It's Marcel's first time with the show, but I assure you, he had to answer some real toughies to make it into the final selection of contestants. Isn't that right, Marcel?

MARCEL gives him a thumbs up.

BILL BAILEY: And finally, we have an Old Testament prophet, Jonah, who according to some people actually lived in the belly of a big fish for several months.

ROSE: I thought something smelled.

JONAH: Hey, it wasn't my fault. Do I really smell? I didn't have time to take a shower. It was bam, thrown up on the shores of Ninevah, and then I got the call on my cell, got back in the whale and headed for L.A.

BILL BAILEY: You actually rode a whale to America?

JONAH: Have you seen the price of airline tickets?

BILL BAILEY: Good point. All right, you all have your buzzers, right?

All three contestants hit a button, and their buzzers make noise.

BILL BAILEY: Good.

MARCEL continues to hit his buzzer, enjoying making sounds for once.

BILL BAILEY: Hey, Marcel. That's probably . . . hey, big guy. That's enough of . . . Marcel!

A CAVEMAN from the first scene enters and bops MARCEL over the head with his club. MARCEL falls and the CAVEMAN drags him out.

ROSE: Who's that guy with the club? He was kinda cute.

BILL BAILEY: Well, I guess that's it for Marcel. Johnny, do we have another contestant standing by?

ANNOUNCER: *(Offstage.)* We sure do, Bill. But first, let's welcome the Enigma singers!

Three FEMALE SINGERS appear.

SINGERS: Won't you come home, Bill Bailey? Won't you come home? She moans the whole day long. I'll do the cooking, darling, I'll pay the rent; I knows I've done you wrong. 'Member that rainy eve that I threw you out, with nothing but a fine-tooth comb? Yeah, I know I'm to blame, now, ain't that a shame. Bill Bailey, won't you please come home?

BILL laughs.

BILL BAILEY: Johnny, you get me every time. Goodbye girls!

The SINGERS blow him kisses and exit.

ANNOUNCER: *(Offstage.)* All right. Our next contestant on Enigma is . . . *(Drum roll.)* The Rock!

BILL BAILEY: Wow! I didn't know he was coming on the show. Ladies and gentlemen, let's give it up for the Rock!

A Vanna White-like game show babe, DANNI, steps out with a large rock and places it on the podium. She gestures over it, smiles, then exits.

BILL BAILEY: Not exactly what I had in mind . . . but it'll do. All right, for the benefit of the home viewing audience, I want to go over the rules of the show one more time. You're all going to receive questions of varying difficulty, along with six possible answers labeled A, B, C, D, E, and F. Your job will be to decipher which is the correct answer among the letters A, B, and C, or D, which is "all of the above," E, which is "none of the above," or F, "some of the above," but only on days of the week that begin with the letter T. We have ten questions for each of you. Danni?

DANNI appears with three brown Kraft envelopes. She hands them to the contestants, gesticulating appropriately.

BILL BAILEY: Now . . . (*Panicking as ROSE opens the envelope.*) Don't open it yet, Rose! Danni, can you help us out here?

DANNI grabs a roll of tape and reseals the envelope. BILL BAILEY wipes his forehead in mock relief.

BILL BAILEY: Whew! That was a close one. Can't compromise the game show security, folks. Next time, wait until you receive instructions there, would ya, speedy?

ROSE: Whatever.

BILL BAILEY: Now, you'll have ten questions in the first round. If you get at least seven questions right, we'll allow you to go on to the second round. If you get less, I'm afraid we're going to have to send you off to a remedial game show, like Blind Date. Of course, getting seven questions right is only good this week. Next week, you're going to have to get at least eight questions right, and nine the week after that. The option to go to another game show will unfortunately be lost as well, and we will have to keep you here until you get at least nine questions right or we give up and have you turned into Soylent Green. Is everybody with me so far? (*Sounds of mumbled questioning.*)

BILL BAILEY: Good. As long as we're all on the same page. Our motto is: No Game Show Contestant Left Behind.

JONAH raises his arm.

ROSE: (*She grabs her nose.*) Oh, please don't do that!

JONAH: Sorry.

BILL BAILEY: Yes, Jonah?

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JONAH: Umm, how do we answer the questions? Do we have little buttons for A, B, and - -

BILL BAILEY: You didn't bring a pencil?

JONAH: What?

BILL BAILEY: It distinctly said in your instructions that you were supposed to bring two number two pencils.

JONAH: Really?

BILL BAILEY: Yes.

JONAH: Let me check.

He reaches into his bag and pulls out a phone book-sized document of instructions covered in seaweed. He starts flipping pages. After a few moments . . .

BILL BAILEY: Page 4.

JONAH: Ummm.

He finds the page.

BILL BAILEY: Paragraph 8, subsection 3.

JONAH: Yada yada yada, you will be executed in a style befitting - -

BILL BAILEY: Sub paragraph A, little letter i little letter B little letters ii big A and then number - -

JONAH follows along as he speaks.

JONAH: Oh. *(Beat.)* Ahhh! *(He closes the book.)* Sorry.

BILL BAILEY: Danni?

DANNI appears again, this time with two number two pencils and a knife. She hands JONAH the pencils.

DANNI: We're going to want those back after the show.

JONAH: Right. I'll get them to you.

DANNI grabs his hand and lays it on the podium, then carves a (fake) finger off with the knife. JONAH screams and stares at his hand.

DANNI: I'll just keep this on ice in the back until the show's over. Don't forget my pencils!

She smiles and gestures over the severed finger, then walks beautifully off stage.

BILL BAILEY: That is some girl, right Jonah?

JONAH: *(Barely able to talk.)* Uh huh. *(JONAH faints.)*

BILL BAILEY: Oh, well. Rosie, it looks like you've got a real shot today, bringing your status of returning champion to an all-time record of four weeks.

ROSE: Whatever. Can I open the envelope now?

BILL BAILEY: You sure can. *(She breaks the seal. A loud chime is heard.)*

BILL BAILEY: Oh, I'm afraid that's all the time we have for today, Rosie.

ROSE: It's Rose, you idiot.

BILL BAILEY: We're going to have to move you to the gym to finish the show, and then we'll report the results to our audience next week on . . . Enigma!

ROSE: I can't believe I came back here for this.

BILL BAILEY: Bye, everybody!

The lights fade to black.

ANNOUNCER: *(Recorded.)* All representations of real people on Enigma are false and should not be taken for real representations. Please mark B on your answer document for "false." All contestants will be eligible to receive one free dinner at the Macaroni Factory after the results of the show have been tabulated and processed by the National Center for Disease Control. If you experienced a rash while watching this program, please use Preparation H ointment. If an itching-burning sensation occurs, please consult a physician. This program assumes no liability for mild side effects caused by the show. And don't forget, coming in April - - Enigma, the home board game! This has been a DesiLu production.

ROSE: *(In the dark.)* Whatever.

LIGHTS RISE ON: THE GARDEN OF EDEN

ADAM and EVE, dressed in appropriate blue and pink, lie on the ground. A loud thunderclap startles them awake.

ADAM: Hmm? What?

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EVE: Who? Oh, dear!

They look at each other and scream. ADAM gets close to her, sniffing like a dog. She sniffs back. Surprised, ADAM backs away a little. EVE straightens up, smiling as if she's won the battle. Without warning, ADAM tackles her, and they have a huge fight, one dominating the other, and then it all switches to the other dominating. Finally, EVE ends up pinning ADAM. He squeals.

ADAM: Uncle!

She gets off of him, dusting her hands. ADAM sniffs her again.

ADAM: You smell funny.

EVE: Do not!

ADAM screams.

ADAM: You talk.

EVE: Duh.

ADAM: I didn't know you could talk. Why didn't you say so in the first place?

EVE: Didn't know it was important.

ADAM: Oh. Hey, why are you in my garden? You're not a snake, are you?

EVE: No.

ADAM: Okay. I was warned never to talk to snakes.

EVE: Do snakes talk?

ADAM: I guess so. I'm not really sure what a snake is, besides maybe some sort of allegory for the evil of mankind or something.

EVE: Oh. *(Beat.)* Well, I'm not a snake.

ADAM: Good.

EVE: My name's Eve. *(They shake hands.)*

ADAM: Adam. Nice to meet you. So what are you, like a cow or something?

EVE: Does a cow punch?

ADAM: No, but they poke. *(Laughs.)* Get it? Cowpoke?

EVE punches him in the nose.

ADAM: Ow! That hurt!

EVE: It should've.

ADAM: What? It was just a joke.

EVE: You called me a cow!

ADAM: You . . . oh. So you're not a cow, huh? What are you?

EVE: I am woman, hear me roar! (*ADAM waits.*) It's just an expression.

ADAM: Oh. (*Touches his side.*) Ouch.

EVE: What is it?

ADAM: Just a twinge. Had it when I woke up.

EVE: Hmm. You should probably get it looked at.

ADAM: By who?

EVE: (*Correcting him.*) Whom?

ADAM: Whatever.

EVE: Seriously. You could have internal bleeding.

ADAM: Really? That sounds serious.

EVE: Here. Let me check. (*She puts her hand on his ribs.*)

EVE: Here?

ADAM: No.

EVE: Here?

ADAM: Uh uh.

EVE: He - -

ADAM: Owowoh! Yeah, right there.

EVE: Hmmm. Have you had any recent surgeries?

ADAM: Not that I know of.

EVE: Well, it looks like somebody might've taken out your gall bladder. I recommend bed rest and lots of fruit.

ADAM: Awesome. I love fruit.

EVE: I think apples are the best. I've got some here if you . . . what? (*ADAM has started having a panic attack.*) What is it? Are you choking? (*He tries to talk.*) I know the Heimlich. (*He waves her away.*)

ADAM: You . . . you picked the apples?

EVE: Yes. I mean, there's the tree and everything.

ADAM: You didn't get the memo?

EVE: What memo?

ADAM: Corporate, straight from the CEO. Here, I still have my copy. (*He hands her an official-looking letter.*)

EVE: To Whom It May Concern . . . you know, with only two of us, you'd think they could at least personalize it a little.

ADAM: Yeah.

EVE: Ahem. Welcome to the Garden of Eden yada yada paradise on earth yada yada . . . oh, here it is. Due to the fragile nature of the ecosystem established in this biosphere, we must ask that no fruit from the apple tree be eaten. If said fruit is partaken yada yada, capital punishment yada yada, eviction from place of residence yada knowledge of good and evil. *(Folds the letter back up.)* What? You think this is serious?

ADAM: It sounds official.

EVE: No way. This has Irv's name written all over it.

ADAM: Irv?

EVE: Irv. You know. The guy in accounting. He's probably trying to get me back for putting Ex-Lax in his coffee last week at the Eden Invitational One Club Tournament.

ADAM: There was a one club tournament last week?

EVE: You don't get out much, do you?

ADAM: No. I've been pretty busy, what with naming the animals and all.

EVE: Do what?

ADAM: Naming the animals. One of my sacred duties.

EVE: Oh. Sacred duties. Riiiiight. *(Beat.)* Anyway, trust me kid. That memo's just a big joke. You eat whatever fruit you want. *(She holds out a bright, shiny apple.)*

ADAM: Okay. *(He takes a bite. Suddenly, thunder erupts and the lights pulse.)*

EVE: What the he - -

ADAM covers her mouth. The thunder transforms into . . . theme music! BILL BAILEY enters with DANNI.

BILL BAILEY: Those were great reactions. Just great!

ADAM: What?

BILL BAILEY: Don't look now, Adam, but you've just been had by the folks at . . .

AUDIENCE: *(Recorded.)* Pure Punked!

BILL BAILEY: That's right! The newest, most popular reality series online and on time for you, my friend.

ADAM: Eve?

He turns to see EVE shaking hands with DANNI.

ADAM: You were in on this, too?

EVE: Hey, we had to get you to open up somehow. All that wandering around naming animals stuff was boring the pants off of middle-income America.

BILL BAILEY: Oh, wipe off that sad face, big boy. Tell 'em what he's won, Johnny.

ANNOUNCER: *(Recorded.)* I sure will, Bill. But first . . .

The ENIGMA SINGERS appear.

SINGERS: Won't you come home, Bill Bailey? Won't you come home? She moans the whole day long. I'll do the cooking, darling, I'll pay the rent; I knows I've done you wrong. Member that rainy eve that I threw you out, with nothing but a fine-tooth comb? Ya, I know I'm to blame, now, ain't that a shame. Bill Bailey won't you please come home? *(BILL laughs.)*

BILL BAILEY: Johnny, you get me every time. Goodbye, girls!

The SINGERS blow him kisses and exit. A cell phone rings, and EVE steps to the side to answer it.

ANNOUNCER: *(Offstage.)* All right. Adam, you have won an all-expense paid trip to anywhere but here!

Audience applause.

ANNOUNCER: That's right. Because you chose to ignore the memo, you get a one-way ticket out of paradise, where you could've spent eternity plucking flowers and generally doing absolutely nothing!

DANNI: But that isn't all, is it Johnny?

ANNOUNCER: You're right again, Danni. You also get . . . a wife!

ROSE, from the first scene, enters.

ROSE: Whatever!

ANNOUNCER: Two point five children!

A MODEL brings in two-and-a-half baby dolls, who are crying. DANNI goes backstage as this model enters.

ANNOUNCER: A job!

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DANNI reappears with a briefcase, and the MODEL exits.

ANNOUNCER: A drinking problem!

The MODEL re-enters with a cocktail glass, changing places with DANNI again. ADAM tries to drink and turns his head, spilling the drink down himself a la Airplane.

ANNOUNCER: Cirrhosis of the liver!

ADAM grabs his side.

ANNOUNCER: And ultimately, death! Ladies, if you will . . . *(The models escort ADAM to the edge of the stage.)*

ADAM: Wait! What . . . what was this? Some kind of test?

BILL BAILEY: Oh, it's all a test, Adam. It's all a test.

DANNI and the MODEL boot ADAM offstage and return to BILL, who shakes his butt. A snake's rattle is heard; BILL scratches his neck.

DANNI: You about ready to shed that skin, boss?

BILL BAILEY: Yeah. I was thinking something . . . I don't know. Armani? *(Both women nod appreciatively.)* All right. Let's blow this Popsicle stand. Danni, can you get me next week's line up? I think we've got that Mel Gibson guy slated. *(Yells offstage.)* Craft services! I sure hope somebody has my white mice ready for lunch. *(To the WOMEN.)* I am starved.

All three lock arms and exit, leaving EVE talking on the phone.

EVE: *(In the phone.)* Smallville? Hey, the CW's better than nothing. Thanks, Ed. *(She hangs up, then shrugs to the audience.)* It's a living.

LIGHTS DIM TO BLACK.

E.P.T. (PART ONE)

Soft music plays as the lights rise on a WOMAN entering her home. She has a bag in one hand and her purse over her shoulder. She sets the purse down and opens the bag, removing a small box from inside. She opens the box and removes the contents, reads the

printed instruction pamphlet, and then exits opposite the way she entered. After a few moments, a MAN enters with a briefcase. He sets it down and starts to exit where the woman did. Then he sees the box. He picks it up and stares at it curiously, his eyes growing wider by the minute. He looks up in time to see the WOMAN re-enter, wearing a robe and looking down at a small, pink stick. She sees him, and they stare at one another for a moment. He shows her the box, and she slowly shakes her head "no." She looks as if she might cry, and the MAN goes to her, holds her. He holds her face to his and smiles. Eventually, she returns the smile. He kisses her softly, and they hold each other. He whispers something in her ear, and she giggles. He picks her up and exits. As she leaves, she tosses the pink stick on the ground. The music builds to a beautiful climax and ends. LIGHTS DIM TO BLACK.

THE SPANISH INQUISITION

Lights rise on a roomful of INQUISITORS and a WOMAN bound to a chair.

HEAD INQUISITOR: All right, all right. Everyone settle down. Percy! I think you've had enough of the cheese dip. If you'll take a seat. Thank you. Okay, welcome everyone to the first meeting of the Spanish Inquisition. Yes, Margaret?

MARGARET: Will we be taking time out later for a water closet break?

HEAD INQUISITOR: We just started, Margaret.

MARGARET: Well, of course we did. But Samuel brought that wonderful mulled wine . . . *(She golf claps, and everyone else follows suit.)* . . . and you probably know this from the country club, that delicious beverage just runs right through me - -

HEAD INQUISITOR: Enough, yes. Thank you for bringing that to our attention, Margaret. We will certainly take time for a break a little bit later.

MARGARET: I think we still have a bundt cake we haven't sampled, either.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Very good, then. A bundt cake break it is, if I may say so.

MARGARET: You may.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Thank you, I did. Now, our invitations had some promotional materials with them. I hope everyone had a chance to read them? *(Beat.)* Gerald, you're looking at the floor a bloody lot right now.

GERALD: I was just wondering if this tile was new. Seems like the last bit wasn't nearly as shiny and fresh.

HEAD INQUISITOR: So you mean to say that you have read the material.

GERALD: I didn't say that at all.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Then you haven't read it.

GERALD: Didn't say that, neither.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Well, which is it, Gerald?

GERALD: Are you getting cross?

HEAD INQUISITOR: No, I'm not getting cross. I'm just wondering if you had a chance to look over the promotional materials I sent you.

GERALD: I don't think I received them.

HEAD INQUISITOR: You had to of.

GERALD: That's not true.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Yes, it is. I included them with the invitation. If you hadn't received the materials, you wouldn't have received the invitation, and then you wouldn't be here tonight at all.

GERALD: Not necessarily.

HEAD INQUISITOR: What do you mean?

GERALD: I mean that you could be wrong.

HEAD INQUISITOR: I understand - -

GERALD: After all, they're synonyms, really. "Not necessarily" and "you could be wrong." Not perfect synonyms like plunder and loot, but synonyms just the same.

MARGARET: Who brought the synonyms tonight, anyway? I thought they were lovely. *(She leads a golf clap.)*

GERALD: You mean cinnamons, dear. The cinnamon buns we ate earlier.

MARGARET: Oh, right. Very good.

GERALD: Delicious, and almost a homonym with synonym, though not quite. Synonym, cinnamon. Not a homonym like there and their.

SHELLY: What?

GERALD: There and their.

SHELLY: They're the same word.

GERALD: Ah, there's another one. They're!

SHELLY: They're the same word.

GERALD: No, dear. I'm spelling them differently.

HEAD INQUISITOR: For crying out loud.

SHELLY: I can't hear it. Say it again.

GERALD: There. Their.

SHELLY: No. Still not hearing it. Are you sure you're spelling them differently?

GERALD: Quite. You see, the "there" is with an "ere," and the "their" is with an "eir." And there's the third "they're" with an "ey're."

MARGARET: Use it in a sentence.

GERALD: I can do all three.

SHELLY: Cannot.

GERALD: I can do all three in a limerick, which is sort of like one sentence but Irish.

HEAD INQUISITOR: What?

GERALD: Listen. There once was a Queen ripe with age/Who believed her sweet charms all the rage/Til one day, like a fool/She passed wind in the pool/Killing half the king's court and one page.
(*Everyone titters.*)

HEAD INQUISITOR: You didn't do it.

GERALD: Do what?

HEAD INQUISITOR: Didn't use their and they're in the limerick. You only used there.

MARGARET: That's true.

SHELLY: Indeed.

GERALD: Yes. But it was clever wasn't it?

SHELLY: Oh, certainly so.

MARGARET: Grand. (*Everyone golf claps.*)

GERALD: Well? Where were we?

HEAD INQUISITOR: I don't remember.

MARGARET: Who's taking notes? Surely someone is writing all of this down. After all, one day this will be looked back upon as a time when history was made.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Margaret. Dear. One day, everything will be looked back upon as a time when history was made. That's what history is.

SHELLY: I think he has you there, love.

MARGARET: No it's not.

SHELLY: I think he does.

MARGARET: Not at all. Everyone knows my husband Bruno, right?
(*General agreement is ad-libbed.*)

MARGARET: Well, yesterday Bruno shaved his back. (*General ad-libbed disgust.*)

SHELLY: Love, Bruno is the hairiest man in this part of the world.

MARGARET: Agreed.

GERALD: I once saw him without his shirt and almost shot him for a bear.

HEAD INQUISITOR: There aren't any bears in Spain.

GERALD: There's bears in the circus.

MARGARET: So anyway, he shaved his back, which is now as shiny as a baby's little behind. And that was yesterday. So it's history, right? That's history.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Basically.

MARGARET: Hundreds of years from now, people will read about the huge pile of black, greasy back hair sitting on my kitchen table.

SHELLY: Let's not talk any more about this, dear. Too many synonyms.

GERALD: Cinnamons.

SHELLY: Whatever. I'm feeling a bit off now.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Stop!

Everyone turns to him.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Let's try to return to the point, shall we? I think we were talking about the promotional materials I sent you.

GERALD: I didn't get any promotional - -

HEAD INQUISITOR: Would you shut up, you blithering baby?

OLD MAN: (*Whispering.*) That was alliteration right there. Blithering baby.

HEAD INQUISITOR: If those people who received their promotional materials could be persuaded to share with those who did not.

One LADY takes out a pamphlet.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Only one of you brought the promotional materials?

SHELLY: I didn't receive any.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Oh, bloody hell! (*Turns to another woman.*) Anne, you were the one who folded everything and put it in the envelopes. Would you please tell these cretins that they all received promotional materials?

ANNE, a timid young thing, stands.

ANNE: Ummm. I'd like to thank you all for coming . . .

HEAD INQUISITOR: Anne!

ANNE: I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I forgot to put them in the envelopes.

HEAD INQUISITOR: (*Beat.*) You what?

ANNE: Well, it was my turn to bring the snacks for the cricket players, and Manuel was going to be there, and one thing led to another.

HEAD INQUISITOR: You didn't stuff the promotional materials in with the invitations?

The LADY waves hers in the air.

ANNE: I did one.

MARGARET: One's better than none, I always say.

HEAD INQUISITOR: And why didn't you just say so in the first place?

ANNE: Because I knew you'd yell.

HEAD INQUISITOR: I'm . . . not . . . yelling.

ANNE: You will. When everybody's gone and I'm here alone. You'll yell, and then you'll make me play those silly games with you again . . .

HEAD INQUISITOR: Anne . . .

ANNE: Where I dress up like Little Miss Muffet and you get on that spider suit.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Anne!

ANNE: I just hate curds and whey!

HEAD INQUISITOR: Do you have the promotional materials with you?

ANNE: (*Beat.*) Well, of course I do. What kind of a nit do you think I am? (*She grabs a boxful of flyers and shows them to him.*)

HEAD INQUISITOR: If it's not too much trouble, could you please hand them out?

ANNE: Of course. You should've just asked that in the first place.

She hands out the flyers.

GERALD: They're all blank.

ANNE: Oh, I forgot to tell you. The printer said - -

HEAD INQUISITOR: Enough! We don't need any promotional materials. Let's just talk about the Inquisition, shall we? Anybody have any problems with that? I mean, that is the reason we're here today, right?

MARGARET raises her hand. The HEAD INQUISITOR can only bite his lip and nod.

MARGARET: I don't suppose we're close to that break, are we?

The mulled wine . . . it's really starting to hit now.

HEAD INQUISITOR: *(Barely.)* Please . . . feel free.

MARGARET: Thank you. Everyone, let's take ten.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Nooo! *(Smiles.)* Not everyone. Just . . . you.

We'll fight through without you for a few minutes.

MARGARET: Oh. All right. If you're sure.

HEAD INQUISITOR: *(Quickly.)* I'm sure.

MARGARET: All right, then. *(She exits.)*

HEAD INQUISITOR: Now . . . what was in the promotional - -

(MARGARET barges back in.)

MARGARET: Sorry.

She grabs her bag and exits.

HEAD INQUISITOR: - - materials was simply a list of things we needed to talk about if we were truly going to put this Spanish Inquisition thing into motion. For instance, where would we want to set up shop? What sort of methods might we use to extract confessions from the heretics? Should we have matching outfits, that sort of thing.

GERALD: I'd certainly go for the matching outfits. Maybe something in blue with a white stripe down the side.

SHELLY: We could do parti-coloring, like the minstrels in Italy.

GERALD: Exactly. This pattern here . . . *(Points to one side of his chest.)* . . . the same pattern down here on the stomach.

SHELLY: I think that would be wonderfully gay.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Although your ideas are certainly inspired, I'm not sure the bright colors will go along with our themes of terror and abasement.

SHELLY: Oh, it's all how you present it.

GERALD: Quite right. Fishy Johnny used to beat me up every day when we were kids. Wore yellow like he'd just sprung up from a daisy field.

SHELLY: Daisies are white.

GERALD: Well, Johnny never was very good with colors.

HEAD INQUISITOR: So you see, we might want to go with blacks and grays, maybe a dark green thrown in.

SHELLY: Oh, I see. Dark and mysterious, with perhaps a touch of a jungle motif.

GERALD: It might work.

HEAD INQUISITOR: I'm so glad for your confidence. Next subject: location. Where shall we meet?

OLD MAN: What about here?

HEAD INQUISITOR: No, no. Here won't work. Here's too small. We need room to spread out, really get the branding irons cooking, you know. That sort of thing.

MARGARET re-enters.

MARGARET: What'd I miss?

HEAD INQUISITOR: Nothing really. We'll catch you up as we go.

MARGARET: Catch me up.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Yes.

MARGARET: Well, then how am I going to participate in the conversation? I thought this leaving the room was a bad idea, but the mulled wine, you see - -

HEAD INQUISITOR: Margaret! I saved the most important part of the meeting for your return.

MARGARET: Oh, you did?

HEAD INQUISITOR: Of course. There's no way we could have handled this part without you. We needed your creative energies, your fertile mind.

MARGARET: Oh. Well, then. Proceed.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Thank you.

MARGARET: No, thank you.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Th . . . (*Thinks better of it.*) Allow me to introduce tonight's special guest. This is Helga. She's a heretic.

EVERYONE: Hi, Helga. Hello. (*Etc.*)

HELGA: Hello.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Helga has kindly agreed to be our crash test dummy, if you will. She's going to allow us to torture her. You know, work out all the kinks.

HELGA: Torture a *little*, that was the agreement.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Right. There will be no removing of the limbs or full body piercings.

HELGA: Well, we can still talk about the piercings. But I definitely want to walk out of here on all my legs.

GERALD: You only have two.

HELGA: Right. All two.

GERALD: Actually, you would just say both. The word “all” implies three or more.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Exactly what we’re saying. Both your legs, both your arms . . . all of your appendages intact.

HELGA: You could take a little off the nose if you wanted. My mother always said it was a tad large.

MARGARET: But of course, that’s not an appendage, is it?

SHELLY: It sticks out from the body.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Gerald?

GERALD: I believe an appendage must be attached to the trunk of the body. Hence the nose would simply be a sticky-outy thing.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Is that the official word?

GERALD: No. The official word would be poopy-head, which of course would refer to you.

MARGARET: Gerald!

HEAD INQUISITOR: Shut up before I punch you in your sticky-outy thing.

GERALD: Oh, yeah?

HEAD INQUISITOR: Yes, you miserable bag of twit!

GERALD: Nose booger!

HEAD INQUISITOR: Backful of Bruno hair! *(People start cheering for one man or the other.)*

HELGA: *(Yelling.)* I am waiting for a spanking! *(Total quiet.)*

HEAD INQUISITOR: Excuse me.

HELGA: Or something. I volunteered to be tortured for the good of history. Now would someone get a whip?

HEAD INQUISITOR: Well, we would, but we still haven’t voted on how to torture you yet. There are several items on the docket. The rack, fingernail spikes, Iron Maiden . . .

SHELLY: Didn’t they break up in the 80s?

HEAD INQUISITOR: What?

SHELLY: Never mind.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Eviscerations, dunking . . .

HELGA: For apples?

HEAD INQUISITOR: No, just your basic dunking. Push you under, bubble bubble bubble, you almost drown . . . that sort of thing.

HELGA: Oh.

HEAD INQUISITOR: And so forth.

HELGA: I really like apples. I don’t suppose - -

HEAD INQUISITOR: No.

HELGA: Well, it was worth a try.

OLD MAN: What is all this for anyway?

HEAD INQUISITOR: What do you mean?

OLD MAN: This Inquisition stuff? What's it for?

HEAD INQUISITOR: Well, it's kind of like a test.

OLD MAN: What kind of test?

HEAD INQUISITOR: Umm, a test where if you fail, then you die.

OLD MAN: Oh. What happens if you pass? Do you get a prize?

HEAD INQUISITOR: Not really. You die anyway. But your soul passes into the next world free from sin.

OLD MAN: Oh. That's good, I guess.

HEAD INQUISITOR: We thought so.

OLD MAN: I mean, it's not like a new refrigerator.

HEAD INQUISITOR: No.

OLD MAN: Or a trip to Aruba.

HEAD INQUISITOR: I suppose not.

OLD MAN: Is it time for a break yet? That mulled wine is going right - -

HEAD INQUISITOR: Yes! Please! Let's everyone take a break. We'll meet back here in ten minutes. *(Everyone gets up and starts to exit.)*

HEAD INQUISITOR: Please bring your thinking caps back with you. We've still got a lot to decide.

MARGARET: And don't forget that bundt cake.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Right.

Everyone leaves but HELGA and HEAD INQUISITOR.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Well, I guess it's just you and me for a few minutes.

HELGA: I suppose.

HEAD INQUISITOR: *(Beat.)* Listen, have you ever read Mother Goose? I especially like the one that goes - -

HELGA: Not interested.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Oh. Right.

HELGA: I'm not even a heretic, really.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Oh.

HELGA: No.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Hmm. Well, why are you here?

HELGA: Oh, bored I guess. I'm an actress mostly, but the jobs have been few and far in between lately.

HEAD INQUISITOR: I bet.

HELGA: You mind if . . . *(She nods down to her ropes.)*

THE TEST

HEAD INQUISITOR: Oh, no. Feel free. (*She stands up, and the ropes fall off of her.*)

HELGA: Much better.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Right.

HELGA: Hemp just does not breathe.

HEAD INQUISITOR: I imagine. So, an actress, you say?

HELGA: Yes. Well, and a barmaid. A few other odd jobs.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Interesting. I bet you're a wonderful actress.

HELGA: Oh, not bad, if I do say so myself. (*Beat.*) What was that about Mother Goose again?

He snuggles over next to her and puts his arm around her shoulders.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Fascinating work, really. Let me tell you the story of Mary Mary Quite Contrary.

HELGA: Ooh! Sounds scandalous.

They giggle together. LIGHTS DIM TO BLACK.

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