

THE REASON BEING

Pilot

Written
by

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ACT ONE

INT. LARGE MULTIPURPOSE ROOM -- AFTERNOON

A LARGE GROUP OF EMPLOYEES, ALL DRESSED IN BUSINESS ATTIRE,
LISTEN TO THE BOSS SOLEMNLY ADDRESS THE PACKED ROOM.

BOSS

Frank's unexpected departure is gonna
leave a void here at McGrew Stevens.
Frank was more than just our Senior
Vice President of Marketing,
International Acquisitions Group, West
Coast Division. He was our friend. And
now, suddenly, he's "no longer on the
payroll" one might say...

ANGLE ON THE BACK OF THE ROOM WHERE BEN ROGAN (MID 30S)
LISTENS WITH ELI AND ANDY.

ELI

I knew he was depressed but I didn't
see THIS happening.

ANDY

He did spray-paint, "Satan, deliver me
from this Hell," across his cubicle.

ELI 1

The clues seem obvious in hindsight,
don't they?

BEN

I think he was brave to pull the
trigger.

THEY BOTH LOOK AT BEN. DID HE REALLY SAY THAT?

BEN (CONT'D)

16 hour days, getting beeped in the
middle of the night... I don't want to
get old doing this either.

ANDY

Referring to texts as "getting beeped"
means you're already old. FYI.

BEN
(staring off)

I envy Frank. How he was able to say
"enough is enough" and just end it.
Wish I had the guts to do what he did.

ELI

Ben? You okay?

BEN REFOCUSES. DID HE SAY THAT LOUD ENOUGH FOR THEM TO HEAR?

BEN

I'm fine. I was just-- I'm fine.

SFX: CLAPPING

WIDE SHOT OF THE FRONT OF THE ROOM REVEALING A BANNER: "HAPPY
EARLY RETIREMENT." FRANK MAKES HIS WAY UP TO GIVE A SPEECH.

SFX: TEXT BEEP

BEN LOOKS AT HIS PHONE AND SIGHS. HE WEARILY STARTS TO EXIT.

ELI

You're gonna miss the cake.

BEN KEEPS WALKING, GESTURING "WHAT CAN I DO?"

CUT TO:

INT. ROGAN HOUSE - THAT EVENING

THE KITCHEN/LIVING AREA IN A NICE HOUSE IN THE SUBURBS. IT'S CURRENTLY IN MID-RENOVATION. NANCY ROGAN (30S), SMART AND CONFIDENT, SITS READING. BEN ARRIVES HOME FROM WORK.

BEN

Sorry I'm late. The mainframe's backup cache got toasted. I had to manually reassign all the attribute flags.

NANCY

I'm a human.

BEN

The electronic brain machines I'm in charge of? They got confused again.

NANCY

I love when you talk technical.

THEY KISS.

BEN
(sniffing)

Let me guess -- Chicken Vesuvio with garlic and meyer lemons.

SHE'S SURPRISED. HOW'D HE KNOW THAT? BEN PULLS A TO-GO MENU FROM BEHIND HIS BACK.

BEN (CONT'D)

One of your catering menus must've dropped during a pickup. Sounds delicious.

NANCY

It was. We're having pizza.

BEN'S FACE TURNS DISAPPOINTED AS HE SORTS THROUGH THE MAIL. NANCY POINTS TO A SAMPLE TILE HANGING ON SOME DRYWALL.

NANCY (CONT'D)

What do you think? They're imported
from a centuries old quarry in
Barcelona.

BEN TAKES THE TILE FROM THE WALL AND LOOKS AT THE PRICING ON
THE BACK. HE DOES A DOUBLE-TAKE.

NANCY (CONT'D)

They're handmade.

BEN

They have machines that make tiles
now. Somebody should tell 'em.

NANCY

Before I forget -- Janet and Mike want
to take an earlier flight to Aspen.

BEN

Uh..yeah. About Aspen.

SHE RECOGNIZES THAT "UH..YEAH." SHE PREPARES TO BE MAD.

BEN (CONT'D)
(gingerly)

I'm working this weekend. New
scheduling software came in early.
Ironic, huh?

SFX: DOORBELL

BEN (CONT'D)
(relieved)

Can't kill me. Witness.

BEN QUICKLY CROSSES TO THE FRONT DOOR AND OPENS IT.

REVEAL: A PIZZA DELIVERY GUY.

PIZZA GUY

Eighteen dollars.

BEN

It was fourteen last time.

PIZZA GUY
(caught)

Oh. Right. Fourteen dollars.

BEN PAYS AND HEADS BACK AS IF NOTHING HAS HAPPENED.

BEN

This smells great! What would you like
to drink--

NANCY
(thru clenched teeth)

We've been planning this for months.

BEN PUTS DOWN THE PIZZA. CLEARLY HE'S GONNA HAVE TO GO
THROUGH WITH THIS ARGUMENT AFTER ALL.

BEN

Honey, I'm Senior Head of the I.T.
Department. It's my job to be there
during an install.

SFX: TEXT BEEP

NANCY

This was our vacation, Ben! You
haven't had time off in months.

BEN

Think I'm happy? I want to ski too.

SFX: TEXT BEEP

NANCY
(re: text)

Perfect! During an argument about how
your job keeps pulling you away.

BEN PEAKS AT THE DISPLAY.

BEN

Shipping Department's database server
is down. Important. But I'm ignoring
it. This is our time.

SFX: TEXT BEEP

NANCY KNOWS IT IS HIS JOB TO DEAL WITH STUFF WHENEVER IT
HAPPENS. ALTHOUGH FRUSTRATED, SHE HAS TO GIVE IN...

NANCY

Go. Answer your beeper.

BEN

It's not a beeper. Jeez, how old are
you?

BEN THOUGHT THAT WOULD MAKE HER LAUGH. IT DIDN'T. HE CROSSES
TO HIS LAPTOP COMPUTER AND REMOTELY LOGS IN TO SEE WHAT THE
PROBLEM IS.

BEN (CONT'D)

Damn. I can't do this over the phone.

I have to go in.
(off her disappointed look)

I'm sorry, Honey. When I get back
we'll put on pajamas and pour some
wine. Maybe watch some dirty videos on
the Internet. How's that sound?

NANCY

Queer.

BEN

I don't think we're allowed to use
that term anymore anymore.
(off her look)

I'm gone.

HE QUICKLY EXITS.

CUT TO:

INT. RACQUETBALL COURT - NEXT DAY

BEN AND MIKE, HIS BEST FRIEND, HAVE BEEN PLAYING FOR AWHILE.
BEN MISSES ANOTHER SHOT.

MIKE

Really? Can't even return THAT?

BEN

I'm out of practice. We should stop
anyway. I gotta get back to work.

MIKE LOOKS AT HIS WATCH.

MIKE

Actually this is good. I'll have a
chance to nap before Happy Hour.

THEY GATHER THEIR STUFF AND WALK OFF THE COURT, THROUGH THE
LOBBY.

BEN

What do you work now, 2 hours a week?

MIKE
(defensive)

Hey, it wasn't easy marrying the
daughter of a real estate tycoon. I
had to hire detectives to find out
what she likes, pay off potential
boyfriends, get into shape... I put in
long hours in the beginning. Don't kid
yourself, I paid my dues.

BEN

Tycoon?

MIKE
(better word)

Mogul?

EXT. PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

AS THEY WALK TO THEIR CARS...

BEN

Can we still use "queer"? I mean as a saying -- "This is weird." "This is queer."

MIKE

You're asking me about language? Until a week ago I didn't know Muslim and muslin were different words.

BEN

You're kidding, right?

MIKE

Bed, Bath and Beyond threw me out 'cause I asked if I should put Muslims in a hot dryer or just hang 'em outside.

THEY REACH BEN'S LEXUS AND HE PUTS HIS STUFF IN THE TRUNK.

BEN

Sorry about Aspen, by the way. I think I'm gonna put an ad in The Examiner. Sell my skis.

MIKE

Why?

BEN

I never use 'em.

MIKE

'Cause you never go skiing.

BEAT.

BEN

I think we're on the same side of the conversation.

MIKE

If I had a job that kept me from skiing I wouldn't stop skiing, I'd quit that job.

BEN

Sometimes I think about it.

MIKE

What are you, nuts? I'm married to the daughter of a mogul. I don't HAVE to work. You do.
(adding)

I like tycoon better.

BEN

I know I can't *really* quit but I do daydream of walking away.

MIKE

Don't. My uncle tried that. He cashed in everything and bought a Winnabago, drove to Vegas and his wife gambled away their nest egg.

BEN

That was an Albert Brooks movie.

MIKE

Oh, right. My uncle drank himself to death in the Philippines. I always get those stories mixed up.
(then)

If you actually could start over, what would you be? And don't say fireman.

BEN
(considering)

I don't really know.

MIKE

I'd be a fireman.

SFX: BEN'S PHONE

MIKE (CONT'D)

If that's God, tell him I misspoke. I
meant one the guys on Jackass.

BEN LOOKS AT THE CALLER ID.

BEN
(shit)

My boss.
(answering)

Hello?... Yes sir, I am at work. I'm
walking to my office as we speak.

MIKE
(loud)

Ben! Grab some ketchup at the counter!

BEN QUICKLY HANGS UP.

BEN

Why would you do that?

MIKE

Why would I not?

CUT TO:

INT. "THE SEATTLE EXAMINER" OFFICES - THAT EVENING

THIS IS THE MAIN ROOM OF A WEBSITE ALA L.A. WEEKLY OR VILLAGE
VOICE -- ARTICLES CRITIQUING LOCAL GOVERNMENT, MUSIC REVIEWS,
ADS FOR FUTONS AND PLASTIC SURGERY...

BEN ENTERS BUT DOESN'T SEE A WALK-UP COUNTER OR RECEPTIONIST.

BEN

I'd like to place an ad.

JO EASTON (23) LOOKS UP FROM HER DESK AND SEES NOBODY ELSE NEARBY. SHE BEGRUDGINGLY GETS UP AND CROSSES OVER. SHE COULD BE PRETTY IF SHE WANTED TO BE BUT SHE DOESN'T WANT TO.

JO

You could've done this online. They have free computers at the library if you don't have one.

BEN

I was driving by.

HE HANDS HER A PICTURE OF HIS SKIIS.

JO

We don't have a Ski Section. Everything's snowboards now. Welcome to the 90's.

BEN

I can't sell my skis?

JO

You can but they'll go in Miscellaneous along with roller blades and Amish carriages. Fill this out.

AS HE FILLS OUT THE FORM...

BEN

You're a writer? I used to be a writer back in college.

JO

Good story.

BEN

I hope you appreciate how lucky you are. You create something. I wish I still did.

JO

Once a writer, always a writer.

BEN

You think?

JO

Nope. People wouldn't abandon their blogs after 2 months if that was true. But the boss is always saying, "Once a writer, always a writer," so I figured I'd say it also. Something to do.

BEN IS DONE FILLING OUT THE FORM.

BEN

I'm Ben, by the way.

JO

Jo.

BEN

Jo Easton? City Column?
(off her nod)

I send out links to your stuff all the time. You're good!

JO

Thank you.

BEN

I always thought you were a guy. I didn't mean it like that.

JO

'Course not. You meant it the other way.
(tired of explaining)

My real name's Elizabeth.

(MORE)

JO (CONT'D)

I wanted a short name but Liz makes me sound like a lesbian.

BEN

So you switched to Jo. Nobody'll think you're a lesbian now.

BEN SMILES. SHE'S NOT SURE WHETHER TO SMILE BACK OR SLUG HIM.

SAM GARRISON (50S), THE EDITOR ENTERS. HE'S A LEADER AMONG MEN AND HE'S GOT NO TIME FOR YOUR FOOLISHNESS.

GARRISON

I've got the Mayor crawling down my back and only two weeks 'til retirement. Last thing I need is a renegade cop on the streets!

HE LOOKS AT JO. SHE SHRUGS -- DOESN'T KNOW THE REFERENCE.

GARRISON (CONT'D)

LETHAL WEAPON! Haven't you seen ANY movies?
(back to business)

Where's Thompson? He just sent me his Reason Being column.

HE HOLDS OUT HIS IPHONE TO SHOW HER.

JO
(reading his e-mail)

"Why do moths fly into light bulbs?
Answer: Who cares? I quit." Must've sent it from home.

GARRISON LOOKS AT BEN.

GARRISON

Kids today no longer show up to quit.
Good work ethic.

BEN

That quote was from LETHAL WEAPON TWO,
by the way. Not ONE.

GARRISON IS NOT USED TO BEING CORRECTED ON MOVIE TRIVIA. HE
THINKS A MOMENT AND REALIZES BEN IS RIGHT. HE'S PLEASED.

GARRISON
(testing)

"In the year of our Lord 1314,
patriots of Scotland, starving and
outnumbered, charged the fields at
Bannockburn."

BEN

"They fought like warrior poets. Like
Scotsmen. And won their freedom."

GARRISON HAS FINALLY MET A COMRADE AMONG A SEA OF LOSERS! HE
EXTENDS HIS HAND IN FRIENDSHIP.

GARRISON

Samuel Garrison, Editor-In-Chief.

BEN

Ben Rogan.

GARRISON

It's a rare film buff who quotes Mel
Gibson and doesn't feel the need to
follow it with a qualifier. Pleasure
to meet you, Ben.

JO

He used to be a writer.

GARRISON LOOKS AT BEN. IS THIS TRUE?

BEN

Once a writer, always a writer. That's
what I say.

(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

Then again, if that was true, kids today wouldn't abandon their blogs so quickly.

GARRISON LAUGHS HEARTILY. BEN IS NOW HIS NEW BEST FRIEND.

JO

Wow.

GARRISON

Ben, find out why moths fly into light bulbs and give me two hundred words by tomorrow.

BEN
(taken aback)

You want me to write The Reason Being column?

GARRISON

You say you're a writer. Prove it. Unless you're too busy.

BEN

No! I'll do it! I can't believe you're letting me write one of the columns! This is great!

GARRISON

It's not a game show. Calm down. If your writing blows I don't post it. Fair warning.

GARRISON EXITS. BEN STANDS THERE, ALMOST SPEECHLESS.

BEN

I feel like I'm in the movie WALL STREET. "This is your wake up call, Pal."

JO

Never saw it.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - LATE THAT NIGHT

BEN WORKS ON HIS LAPTOP SURROUNDED BY REFERENCE BOOKS. NANCY ENTERS AND BEN GRUNTS TO ACKNOWLEDGE HER PRESENCE BUT KEEPS WORKING. SHE DISCOVERS AN ENVELOPE AMONG THE CLUTTER.

NANCY

You didn't pay the electric bill yet?

BEN
(eyes glued to screen)

I'll get to it. I've been busy.

NANCY

Honey, it's on pink paper. Pink means either breast cancer or a utility's getting shut off. There's no color after pink.

BEN
(eyes on screen)

Working.

NANCY REALIZES THERE'S NOT GOING TO BE A CONVERSATION. SHE LOITERS FOR A FEW BEATS AND PICKS UP THE TILE FROM EARLIER.

NANCY

I like these. This kitchen is gonna be my office, why can't it be nice?

BEN GIVES HER A LOOK - HE'S TRYING TO CONCENTRATE. HE GOES BACK TO WORKING.

NANCY (CONT'D)
(not really)

Sorry.
(back)

It's just that we're spending a fortune already. I don't understand why we can't spend a little more--

BEN

Can I ask you a question?

NANCY

I'm kinda busy but you know what,
you're my spouse so I'll make time.
See how that works?

BEN

If you were me right now, which would
you chose to jam into my eyes -- a
steak knife or a rusty nail?

NANCY

This renovation is important, Ben! I
want people to think we have taste.

BEN

Your father owns a mobile home
dealership. We could buy one for cost.
Isn't the absence of wheels on our
house proof enough?

NANCY

(sincere)

Good point.
(then)

What are you working on anyway?

SHE CROSSES BEHIND HIM TO READ THE SCREEN. BEN COVERS IT.

NANCY (CONT'D)

(playful)

Is it a love letter? You haven't
written me one of these since college.

BEN

It's not done yet. Get away.

NANCY

You're really not gonna show me? I
won't withhold sex?

TEMPTING AS THAT IS, BEN REMAINS FIRM.

NANCY (CONT'D)

At least tell me what it is.

BEN

I'm writing an essay on why moths fly
into light bulbs.

NANCY THINKS ABOUT THAT FOR A BEAT.

NANCY

Why? Let me guess -- out of stupidity.

BEN IS SURPRISED SHE GOT IT RIGHT.

BEN

How'd you know that?

NANCY
(crossing out)

That's why you do a lot of things.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. KITCHEN - NEXT AFTERNOON

NANCY RUSHES IN WITH GROCERIES. SHE QUICKLY LIGHTS THE STOVE
AND STARTS TO CHOP FOOD. A MOMENT LATER BEN ENTERS.

NANCY
(startled)

Ahhhh! Don't scare me like that!

BEN

I live here. I thought you'd remember
that.

NANCY

What are you doing here?

BEN

I left work early.

NANCY

We're not having sex. I'm trying out a recipe and after this I have to make dinner.

BEN

How about after dinner?

NANCY

(chuckles)

You think we'll have time after dinner. I knew you'd forget.

BEN

I didn't forget. After dinner we have... the...

NANCY

(clue)

Thhhhh....

BEN

Theatre! I couldn't think of the word.

NANCY

And we're going to see?

THIS TIME NANCY LEAVES HIM HANGING. HE'S CLUELESS.

BEN

Okay, I'm gonna admit something to you now -- sometimes I forget things on purpose to make you feel superior.

NANCY DOESN'T BOTHER RESPONDING. SHE GOES BACK TO COOKING.

BEN (CONT'D)

So that thing I was writing last night? Guess what?

NANCY

Hand me the soy sauce.

BEN GRABS A BOTTLE FROM THE CABINET.

NANCY (CONT'D)

That's teriyaki.

BEN

There's a difference?

NANCY GRABS THE SOY SAUCE HERSELF.

NANCY
(quick tour)

Soy, fish sauce, teriyaki, balsamic,
rice vinegar.

NANCY GOES RIGHT BACK TO PREPARING THE FOOD.

BEN

I'm not gonna remember that. You know
that, right?

NANCY
(we're even)

Ask me what an attribute flag is.

AS NANCY WORKS, BEN CIRCLES, LOOKING FOR A WAY IN...

BEN

Anyway, they're gonna post it on The
Seattle Examiner. The editor really
liked it. He was really impressed. I
can't remember his exact words but--
Would you listen for a sec?

SHE STOPS EVERYTHING, ANNOYED THIS CAN'T WAIT UNTIL LATER.

BEN (CONT'D)

He offered me the Reason Being column.

NANCY

Honey, that's wonderful. I never heard of it but congratulations.

BEN

The Reason Being. The answer man column!
(she's clueless)

I repost stuff on Facebook from it all the time. How can you not remember?

NANCY
(pointing to cabinet)

Which one's rice vinegar?

BEN DOESN'T KNOW. POINT TAKEN. NANCY GOES BACK TO COOKING. BEN'S BACK AT ZERO. HE DECIDES TO TURN OVER ALL HIS CARDS...

BEN

I'm gonna quit my job.

THAT GOT HER ATTENTION. SHE STOPS EVERYTHING.

NANCY

Come again?

BEN

Writing the column is gonna be a full-time job.

NANCY

You already have a job.

BEN

This one's better.

NANCY

What's it pay?

BEN

Better in that it's a dream job.

NANCY

A dream! Well, we can't put a price on that. But let's.

BEN

I did a little research. The column is currently only posted on 4 other websites. They're good sites but there are a hundred more places we can take it--

NANCY

We?

BEN

I'm getting there. The boss, Mr. Garrison, has never tried to brand The Reason Being column. So he and I made a deal. He'll pay me a small salary--

NANCY

I heard small.

BEN

..and we'll split whatever new money I can bring in. That could be a lot -- syndication, books, board games... The sky's the limit! A few years from now I could easily be pulling in more than I make now. Easily. Maybe.

SHE JUST STARES AT HIM. WHAT'S THE NUMBER?

HE'S GONNA HAVE TO SAY IT EVENTUALLY..

BEN (CONT'D)

He'll pay me a hundred twenty-five a column. Twelve thousand a year--

NANCY

A EIGHTH of what you make now!

BEN

To start. Don't forget we also have your catering business--

NANCY

I just started it!

BEN

It's gonna take off. I have faith in you. Honey, with a little work I can turn this column into a gold mine.

NANCY

And in the meantime?

BEN

We'll belt-tighten. We'll... get Mexican tiles. We don't need Spanish. We're just paying for the name.

NANCY

We have nothing saved. Ben, you have a high-paying job with nice benefits--

BEN

I'm going down the wrong path.

NANCY

So you wanna quit? Just like that?

BEN

I've been feeling this for awhile. If I don't change careers, 10 years from now I'll be buying a Harley and Celilas just to make it through the weekend. A once in a lifetime opportunity fell into my lap here--

NANCY

Honey, you're stressed. We'll take a vacation--

BEN

You're not hearing me! I don't wanna spend 30 more years fixing things. I want to CREATE things.

NANCY

And I wanna be a rock star! But that boat has sailed. And so's the Be A Writer boat. We have a mortgage now. It's time to put the dreams we had in our twenties on the shelf.

SHE GOES BACK TO COOKING.

BEN

What if I just did it for a few weeks?

NANCY

(firm)

You're not quitting.

LONG BEAT.

BEN

Yeah. About that...

SHE STOPS COOKING AND STARES AT HIM.

NANCY

You already quit, didn't you?

BEN'S SILENCE CONFIRMS IT. SHE STORMS OUT.

BEN
(calling after her)

If it makes you feel better, Mike is
gonna be mad too.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN

INT. SEATTLE EXAMINER - NEXT MORNING

THE ROOM IS EMPTY. BEN IS AT HIS NEW DESK DRESSED IN A TIE AND SPORTS JACKET.

BEN
(into phone)

..twelve o'clock it is. See you there.

JO ENTERS FOR WORK AS HE HANGS UP.

JO
(annoyed)

How long have you been here?

BEN

About half an hour. I thought we started at nine.

JO

And if you show up at nine we all have to start showing up at nine.

JO SITS DOWN AT HER DESK ACROSS FROM BEN'S. SHE STARES AT HIM, MAKING SURE HE UNDERSTANDS.

BEN

I'll try to be late from now on. Wish I'd have known. I could'a used the extra sleep. I was up half the night arguing with my wife. She thinks I'm having a mid-life crisis. She might be right of course but the way I see it--
(off her stare)

Am I talking too much?

JO

Morning is quiet time.

JO TURNS ON A RADIO TO A LOUD ALTERNATIVE STATION AND CROSSES OUT. TIM MCWALSH (20) CROSSES IN.

TIM

I hear there's a new guy.
(spotting Ben)

Cool. New guy's an old guy.

BEN

Old? What do I have, 10 years on you?

That's nothing.

TIM

So you wouldn't mind if I took out
your 15 year-old daughter?

BEN

I see your point.

TIM

Do you have a 15 year-old daughter? I
was just guessing.

BEN

No. I have no kids.

JO CROSSES BACK IN, FOLLOWED BY BARRY (19).

JO

I see you've met Tim. Tim writes...
(searching for word)

Oh, what's the best way to say it?

TIM

About sports.

JO
(finding words)

..below average.
(then)

This is Barry.

BARRY

I have a title, ya know.
(proud)

Office Gofer.

TIM

Barr's a vegetarian now. A year ago I
bet him he couldn't give up meat.

BARRY NODS A SAD ADMISSION.

BARRY

I used to love meat.

BEN

So quit the bet.

BARRY

Can't. I already spent the 200 bucks.
Plus that would make the past year of
no meat a total waste.

TIM

So what's your story, Uncle Ben?

BEN

I used to run the Computer Department
at McGrew Stevens.

TIM

Yeah, right. And I was an astronaut.

BEN

I did.

TIM REALIZES HE'S TELLING THE TRUTH.

TIM

Momma! You musta screwed up big time.
What happened?

(MORE)

TIM (CONT'D)

Boss catch you with your hand in his wife's cookie jar? And by cookie jar I mean--

BEN

I know what you mean!

TIM
(checking)

Vagina.

BEN

I got tired of the corporate lifestyle.

BARRY

Corporations suck!
(then; to all)

Starbucks run. Ante up.

AS EVERYBODY GETS OUT SOME MONEY...

BARRY (CONT'D)
(to Tim)

Was the Space Shuttle hard to drive?
Probably, like, 5 times harder than a car, right?

TIM DOESN'T ANSWER. HE'S NOTICING THAT BEN ISN'T TAKING OUT MONEY FOR BARRY'S COFFEE RUN.

TIM

Don't drink coffee? Oh, right, bad for the old prostate.

BEN

I'm trying to save money. I saw a coffee machine in the break room.

TIM

Doesn't work. We just use it as a hot plate to cook bacon now.

BARRY

I DID smell bacon. I knew I wasn't going crazy.

BARRY AND TIM EXIT. BEN AND JO ARE ALONE.

BEN

Can I get your opinion on something?

JO

Yes, lose the tie.

BEN

I think I've come up with a good question for the column -- If apes are so smart, why haven't they learned to ride horses yet?

JO IS SURPRISED -- SHE ACTUALLY DOES LIKE THE QUESTION. SHE NODS IN APPROVAL.

JO

Why do they?

BEN

I don't know yet. I made a lunch meeting today at the zoo to find out. By the way, what's the process to get expenses reimbursed?

JO

Put your receipts in a blue envelope -- it has to be blue -- and then mail 'em to Santa Claus.

BEN

We don't get reimbursed?

SHE CHUCKLES AT HIS NAIVETE.

JO

You're lucky they gave you a desk. In case you didn't read about it, newspapers are dying. Most of the new hires just work from home or Starbucks. My guess is the boss wants you around so he'll have somebody to talk to, you guys being from same century and all.

BEN

So they don't pay our expenses? How am I supposed to do research?

JO

Ever hear of The Internet? I'm pretty sure it was here before those newfangled snowboards came around.

BEN

I can't just parrot up the results of other people's work. Writers should learn about a subject firsthand. Get our fingers dirty. Only then can we hope to form original insight.

SHE STARES AT HIM FOR A BEAT. A SMILE SNEAKS OUT.

JO

You are not gonna fit in around here.

BEN

I'm only going to answer 'Why'
questions.

BEN HANDS JO A PRINTOUT OF SOMETHING HE'S ALREADY WRITTEN.

JO
(reading)

*"When we ask 'Why?' we're aiming high
on the question scale. 'What' and
'where' and 'when' tell us stuff,
sure, but 'why' forces us to really
understand. If you asked 'How did the
universe begin?' we'd talk about The
Big Bang, Einstein, Steven Hawkings...
All good stuff but, hey, we're asking
about the creation of the universe
here. Let's not waste our time with
'hows' and 'wheres' and 'whats.' What
we really want to know is 'Why?'"*

SHE TRIES HARD TO PRETEND SHE'S NOT IMPRESSED BY IT.

JO (CONT'D)

Don't show this to the boss. You'll
mess up the curve for the rest of us.

SHE PUTS THE MUSIC BACK ON AND GOES BACK TO WORK. A BEAT
LATER, SHE PAUSES THE MUSIC AND GIVES BEN A LOOK...

JO (CONT'D)

Also? Don't print. It wastes paper.

CUT TO:

INT. GARRISON'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

MOVIE POSTERS LINE THE WALLS. BEN ENTERS.

BEN

Mr. Garrison, I was wondering if I can clear up something?

GARRISON

I hear you're going to the zoo.

BEN

How'd you know that?

GARRISON

I'm a journalist. I hear things. What's the question for this week?

BEN

You mean for the column?

GARRISON

No. For when you cross paths with Joe Biden at an Aerosmith concert. Time is money, Rogan.

BEN

If apes are so smart, why haven't they learned to ride horses yet?

A SMILE COMES TO HIS FACE.

GARRISON

Perfect! Dumb down your writing, the column posts Tuesday and Friday and office supplies are not to be sold on Ebay. See you at the Christmas Party.

BEN

Dumb down the writing?

GARRISON

That moth piece you wrote sounded like some fancy-pants wrote it.

BEN

You said you liked it.

GARRISON

I loved it. But I'm smart. Good writing makes our readers feel stupid.

BEN

I think you're underestimating them.

GARRISON

Excuse me? I can't hear you over my big pile of money. You think this is The New Yorker? A lot of folks who place classified ads and get hired make that mistake. So here's the lowdown, Rogan -- Our web site is read on tiny screens by bored people in cross-walks. What you write competes directly with car horns and bright shiny objects for their attention so aim for the lowest common dominator and then erase the 4 biggest words. Understand?

BEN

I gotta say this is not the job I signed up for.

GARRISON

Fair enough. Go back to your old one.

BEN

Actually--

GARRISON

Not possible, I know. Told your old boss he was dumber than a manicurist in a spelling bee. Why would you say that? He'll never hire you back now.

BEN

That was my plan. Now I have to make this work.
(then)

How'd you know I did that?

GARRISON

I told you, I hear things.
(then)

My door's always open. Close it on your way out.

NOTHING LEFT TO SAY, BEN STARTS TO EXIT WHEN HE SEES A BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID POSTER.

BEN

In BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID they were on that cliff, right? Sundance was afraid to jump but Butch says, "Trust me." So Sundance did and everything worked out.

GARRISON

And in the end they were outnumbered and died a violent death at the hands of the enemy. Nice try.

CUT TO:

EXT. ZOO - OUTSIDE OF APE CAGE - THAT AFTERNOON

BEN CHECKS HIS WATCH. DR. HARRIS, FINALLY ENTERS.

BEN

Dr. Harris? I was starting to think you forgot about our meeting.

DR. HARRIS

I'm late? Sorry. I tell time by the Sun.

BEN

I guess the Sun's forty-five minutes slow then.
(beat)

That was a joke.

DR. HARRIS

I've dedicated my life to thinking as an ape. Humor is foreign to me now.
(undressing)

Come, we'll walk among them.

BEN

Uh..that's okay.

DR. HARRIS

I sense your anxiety. We're good at that. There's nothing to fear.

BEN

Except a cage filled with 800 pound monkeys.

DR. HARRIS

We are not monkeys!! We are apes!!
(calm)

Sorry. We are quick to anger.

HARRIS PICKS SOMETHING FROM BEN'S HAIR AND EATS IT.

BEN

Oo-kay. I'd love to hang out and groom
but I'm due back in the human world.
Let me just ask you something and I'll
get going -- Why don't apes talk?

DR. HARRIS

I don't know.

BEN

I thought you're an expert.

DR. HARRIS

Yeah? What's a pronoun, Mister I Know
All About Writing 'Cause I'm a Writer?

AN APE GRABS BEN'S SPORTS COAT OFF THE BENCH.

BEN

My jacket! Tell 'em to give it back!

DR. HARRIS

They won't listen.
(admitting)

They don't like me.

CUT TO:

INT. SEATTLE EXAMINER - LATER

BEN ENTERS CARRYING HIS NOW-MANGLED SPORTS JACKET. AS HE
WALKS THROUGH, PEOPLE HOLD THEIR NOSES FROM THE SMELL.

LAWRENCE AND EDITH BERLIN (60S), HIS WIFE'S PARENTS, ARE
WAITING AT HIS DESK. BEN IS NOT THRILLED TO SEE THEM.

BEN

Mr. Berlin. Mrs. Berlin. What a
pleasant surprise.

EDITH

We spoke with our daughter--

LAWRENCE

I'll handle this, Edith. Do you know what time it is?

BEN

There's a clock on the wall--

LAWRENCE

Three o'clock. I had to leave work early for this. Berlin Mobile Homes was rated number one in the state. Did you know that?

BEN

Yes sir. It's printed on those pens you hand out.

LAWRENCE

And how do you think I earned that?

BEN
(realizing where he's headed)

By not leaving work early?

LAWRENCE

Good. That should be a clue as to our level of concern here--

EDITH

What's that smell?

LAWRENCE

Edith! I'm lecturing the boy!

EDITH

I smell something.

BEN

My jacket. It's monkey feces.

EDITH
(vindicated)

I thought so.

LAWRENCE

Let's cut to the chase, son. You're gonna forget this silly writing job. We both know that you and Nancy can't retain your current lifestyle here.

TIM AND THE OTHERS START TO GATHER.

BEN

We're gonna live on less for awhile.

LAWRENCE

Son, listen to me. Once you become poor you don't crawl back. I know. I sell homes to these people.

BEN

Actually I think we'll be okay. Sir.

LAWRENCE

Oh, you can crawl your way out of poverty, is that it? Son, you go down this path and as sure as there's blood in the Pope's diaper, you'll end up buying a double-wide, drinking hooch and watching Nascar. We will not have our daughter drinking wine from a box!

JO

Are you for real? I met this guy yesterday and I already know you're wrong.

LAWRENCE

Young man, this is a private
conversation--

JO

Shush, I'm not done! Ben wrote
something before we even got to work
that would've taken anyone else a full
day to write. If I had to bet on
someone beating the odds, my money
would be on him.

SILENCE.

TIM
(sing-song)

You like the new guy.

LAWRENCE
(dismissive)

Are you done?
(to Ben)

Since you can't return to your old
job, you'll work for me on the lot.
I'll pay your old salary.

BEN

I don't want to sell mobile homes.

LAWRENCE

You have a responsibility to take care
of our daughter. I'm throwing you a
bone here. I'll see you on the lot
tomorrow morning.

LAWRENCE STARTS TO EXIT. BEN LOOKS AROUND AT ALL THE YOUNG
PEOPLE HE'S BEEN WORKING WITH.

DECISION TIME. IT'S STAND UP NOW OR NEVER...

BEN

No. You won't.
(Lawrence stops)

I appreciate the offer, sir. Really.
But I wanna keep this job. It makes me
feel young again. I know it doesn't
pay a lot and, yes, there's no expense
account or health coverage, no stock
options, no assigned parking...

TIM

Keep your focus, big guy.

BEN

But today I had fun. I got to go to
the zoo. And I liked it. I like fun...

TIM

Back the other way a little.

BEN

And for the first time in my life
somebody I work with gave me a
compliment. I'm staying here. I'm
choosing to give up a little comfort
to be happy from now on.

LAWRENCE SEES HE'S LOST THE BATTLE. FOR NOW.
HE TURNS AND EXITS. EDITH FOLLOWS CLOSELY BEHIND.

EDITH

Now I smell bacon.

TIM GIVES A TO-GO COFFEE TO BEN.

TIM

Welcome to the team.
(aside)

(MORE)

TIM (CONT'D)

I know old guys are sensitive to
comments like this but you reek.

You're gonna have to bathe more.

EVERYBODY EXITS, LEAVING JUST BEN AND JO.

AFTER A FEW UNCOMFORTABLE BEATS OF SILENCE...

BEN

Thanks for--

JO

Whatever. That's my coffee he gave
you.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - THAT EVENING

NANCY IS HOME. BEN ENTERS CARRYING FLOWERS.

BEN

Before you say anything, we're a
couple. I should not have walked away
from a good job without asking first.
(then)

That said, I did it again sorta. Your
dad offered me a position on his lot
for my old salary--

NANCY

Don't take it.

BEN

I KNOW I should. We've worked hard to
finally get-- What?

NANCY

I want you to stay a writer. Oh God. I
can't believe I actually said it.

BEN

Are you bi-polar?

NANCY

I was scared yesterday but I'm not
scared anymore.

BEN

Because...you're bi-polar?

NANCY

I read your moth piece. It was
wonderful.

BEN

You liked it? Really?

BEN TRIES TO HOLD IN HIS EXCITEMENT.

NANCY

I knew you were talented but... Ben,
you can really write!

BEN

So I can be selfish and stay a write?
Just to be clear, this is gonna mean
cutting back. Stopping this remodel,
no more trips to Aspen--

NANCY

You trying to talk me out of it? I'm
doing this for me too, ya know.

BEN

I know.
(beat)

How so?

NANCY

I'll have a front row seat to someone chasing a dream that others wouldn't have the gumption to pursue.

BEN

You planned to say that. No one says "gumption to pursue" in real life.
(then)

We're really doing this?

THEY KISS TO SEAL THE DEAL.

BEN SUDDENLY BREAKS THE KISS...

BEN (CONT'D)

This doesn't mean you get to be a rock star. It's gonna be hard enough without adding that to the mix.

NANCY

Don't say it's gonna be hard!

BEN

Hard in a fun way -- coupons, buying in bulk, meat that comes in a can...

SUDDENLY ALL THE LIGHTS GO OUT.

IN DARKNESS...

BEN (CONT'D)

You were right about pink.

BEAT.

NANCY

What's that smell?

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATE NIGHT

THE UNFINISHED ROOM IS LIT BY A CANDLE. BEN SITS ADMIRING HIS COLUMN ON HIS COMPUTER SCREEN AS THE CAMERA SLOWLY PULLS BACK DURING...

BEN (V.O.)

Why do moths fly into light bulbs?
Well, it seems the little guys are pretty romantic -- they look at the night sky, see The Moon glowing brightly and think, "I wanna go there." Filled with impossible dreams they are, these little buggers. Just like you and I. The difference is they actually try to make the trip. As the sun sets they head for the bright light, hope and excitement in their little moth hearts until -- Wait! That light's not The Moon-- Smack! Headfirst into a porch light. The impact knocks 'em senseless. Dazed and blind they struggle, banging against the glass, again and again, with each hit growing more tired, more confused. So, why do moths fly into light bulbs? Because they're stupid. They can't tell a planet from a porch light. But keep watching. Because every now and then, whether by force of will or sheer luck, one will manage to regain his bearings.

(MORE)

BEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

One will somehow learn to distinguish
between a bright light and a magical
glowing one. And while his brothers
and sisters continue to fruitlessly
beat themselves against the glass, he
slowly flaps his way to The Moon.

Free.

WE SEE THE ENTIRE ROOM NOW, BEN LIT BY THE MOONLIGHT COMING
THROUGH THE WINDOW.

THE SAMPLE TILE HANGING ON THE WALL COMES LOOSE, HITS THE
FLOOR AND BREAKS.

FADE OUT.

END OF SHOW