

00:00:00	Sound Effect	Transition	Three gavel bangs.
00:00:02	Jesse Thorn	Host	Welcome to the <i>Judge John Hodgman</i> podcast. I'm bailiff Jesse Thorn. This week, "Misdemeanor". Haley brings the case against her partner, Jonathan. Haley and Jonathan have a nonexistent child named Belinda. Belinda started as a joke, but she has since become a symbol for their future together. Now, Haley and Jonathan are talking about having an actual child together. Jonathan thinks the name Belinda would be perfect, but Haley disagrees. Who's right? Who's wrong? Only one can decide. Please rise as Judge John Hodgman enters the courtroom and presents an obscure cultural reference.
00:00:44	John	Hodgman	<i>[The squeak of chairs followed by heavy footsteps and a door closing.]</i> I came home one day from a friend's house holding a book that seemed like it might help me change my life. I hid it under my sweatshirt and went straight to my bedroom. I felt a tingle of excitement as I slipped it out and looked at the cover. <i>The Satanic Bible</i> , by Anton Lavey. I read bits and pieces, and although I understood very little of the author's rant against Christianity, I focused on terms like exorcism, evil, and black magic, thinking I could find out how to cast spells and take control of my life.
00:01:20	Jesse	Host	Bailiff Jesse Thorn, please swear the litigants in. Haley and Jonathan, please rise and raise your right hands.  <i>[The squeak of chairs.]</i>  Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God or whatever?  <i>[They swear.]</i>  Do you swear to abide by Judge John Hodgman's ruling, despite the fact that his two human children are named Hodgmino and Hodgmanilla?
00:01:38	Haley	Guest	<i>[Chuckling.]</i> I do.
00:01:39	Jonathan	Guest	Even more so.
00:01:40	Jesse	Host	Judge Hodgman, you may proceed.
00:01:41	John	Host	Hail Satan. Haley and Jonathan, you may be—oh! Haley Satan, indeed!
			<i>[They laugh.]</i>  Haley and Jonathan, you may be seated for an immediate summary judgement in one of your favors. Can either of you name the piece of culture that I did not merely reference, I quoted directly? I changed not one word of this passage. Where is this passage from? Who wants to guess first? I'll say Haley, you guess first.
00:02:03	Haley	Guest	Um, I genuinely have no idea, so I'm gonna go with some sort of teen beginner's guide to Wicca.
00:02:11	John	Host	A teen beginner's guide to Wicca. Okay. That's just something we made up—or you did.
00:02:18	Haley	Guest	<i>[Giggles.]</i> There are many that exist. I don't know the titles of any offhand.

00:02:20	John	Host	That's true. That's true. You conjured it. Okay, that's fine. Good, I've put it into the book, and I have cast my intention to the universe. Should come back at me sevenfold? I don't remember. Wiccans, let me know. Meanwhile, Jonathan.
00:02:31	Jonathan	Guest	I was going with like a—one of the young adult novels that was popular when I was a kid. So, I'm gonna go with like an unpublished Judy Blume novel.
00:02:42	John	Host	Unpublished Judy—how old are you?!
00:02:45	Jonathan	Guest	You know, they were popular when I was a kid. That doesn't mean that that was when they—
00:02:48	John	Host	Of course! They're always popular.
			<i>[Jonathan agrees.]</i>
00:02:53	Jonathan	Guest	Yeah, okay.
00:02:54	John	Host	Just struggling for one.
00:03:00	Jonathan	Guest	I don't even know why it would have to be unpublished. You think Judy Bloom's afraid of writing about the Church of Satan? Of course, she isn't.
00:03:03	John	Host	I don't recall, but she's pretty inclusive. Are you there, Satan? It's me, Margaret.
			<i>[Jonathan snorts.]</i>
			'Cause of—that was the sequel.
			<i>[Jesse chuckles.]</i>
			All guesses are wrong. All guesses are wrong. What I was quoting from was a memoir entitled <i>Lips Unsealed</i> . <i>Lips Unsealed</i> . Do you have a guess as to who that one's by? It's a memoir. No? Yes? No, maybe so?
00:03:24	Jonathan	Guest	No. No, not at all. I feel so vacant. No, nothing.
00:03:28	John	Host	It has something to do with this case.
00:03:30	Haley	Guest	Is it written by someone named Belinda.
00:03:32	John	Host	Oh! Jennifer Marmor's got an idea. Do you wanna guess, Jennifer Marmor? I saw you light right up.
00:03:37	Jennifer Marmor	Producer	It's by, uh, Belinda Carlisle.
00:03:39	John	Host	Belinda Carlisle!
00:03:41	Haley	Guest	No joke, lyrics to a song by the Go-Go's was my backup guess, but that didn't sound like a song.
00:03:46	John	Host	No! But it is—but Belinda Carlisle of course was the lead vocalist and cofounder of the Go-Go's—also known as the Go-Go's, I don't know why I said it that way. And author of the memoir <i>Lips Unsealed</i> . But! Haley and Jonathan, why is it—and look, no offense to Belinda Carlisle, very, very talented person. But why is it somewhat inappropriate for her book to be named <i>Lips Unsealed</i> ? I'll tell you why. Because the song that that is referencing, "Our Lips Are Sealed", was written by Jane Wiedlin! My—no offense. Again, no offense to all the Go-Go's, but you know what I'm talking about. I love Jane Wiedlin. I've always had a crush on Jane Wiedlin. Hi Jane, I hope you're listening. Jane Wiedlin wrote "Our Lips Are Sealed". Who did she cowrite it with? Terry Hall of The Specials, who very sadly just passed away.

They had a secret love affair when the Go-Go's were opening for The Specials, in England. And they wrote about it, and they wrote the song "Our Lips Are Sealed" about their secret love affair. And then, the Go-Go's performed it—very famous song. But then, Terry Hall performed it—a completely different, very downbeat version of it, with his post-Specials group, Fun Boy Three. And fun as that three sounds, it's actually a very, very mournful version of "Our Lips Are Sealed". Both versions are fantastic. Both were cowritten by Jane Wiedlin. And Jane, by the way, is a terrific name. It was my backup name. If I were not John, I would've been Jane. So, your entire case is founded on a false premise, which is that your future child should be named Belinda. Which is wrong. It should be Jane.

By the way, shoutout to Kathy Valentine, another of my favorite—all of the Go-Go's are my favorites. The Go-Go's are one of the greatest groups. Agreed? Can we all agree on that?

00:05:29 Jesse Host  
00:05:31 John Host

So stipulated.

Thank you very much. Go listen to the Go-Go's. If you haven't listened to the Go-Go's in a while, go listen. They're incredible. Meanwhile, we have some justice to dispense. Who seeks justice before me in this fake courtroom today?

00:05:42 Haley Guest  
00:05:43 John Host

I do, Judge.

And you are Haley, correct?

*[She confirms.]*

00:05:48 Haley Guest

And what is the nature of the justice that you seek?

Sure. So, Jonathan and I have this fictional child. Her name is Belinda.

*[John chuckles and affirms.]*

00:06:13 Jesse Host

It started as a joke that was told to me on the New York subway about six and a half years ago, but has since kind of grown into a shorthand for us to talk about parenting and children. I recently learned that Jonathan would like to actually name our firstborn daughter Belinda, and I am opposed.

Is this a thing that happens on New York subways? Like, those kids who come on and they say they're raising money for their—you know—boys and girls club, and then they dance on the subway poles and go around with a hat and sell chocolate bars or whatever?

00:06:27 John Host

Yo, yo, yo, it's name time! And then they just go around, and they suggest names to couples.

00:06:34 Jesse Host

In the form of jokes. *[Laughs.]*

00:06:36 Jonathan Guest

That would be less weird than the real version, but yeah! Let's go with that.

00:06:40 Jesse Host

What actually happened?

00:06:43 Jonathan Guest

Uh, well, so, saying it out loud, I've realized sounds pretty horrible. We were riding the Subway, and there was a small child—a baby—who was—yeah. I mean, usually *[stammering]* which are usually small children. And she was just really cute. The mother poured Cheerios onto the little part of her crib so that she could have a snack while they were on the subway, and the baby was doing a terrible job of eating the Cheerios. We were both watching sort of fascinated by the process. She was particularly cute. And I don't

think it was so much a joke that I told as, you know, like an alternate history of the future of our family—the idea that we would—and this is where it gets weird—abduct this child, move to Newfoundland, Canada, raise Newfoundlands with her, and she would be the princess of the Newfoundlands of Canada and have a happy childhood.

And it really grew from there, and it's taken on a whole different life of its own, at this point.

00:07:44 Jesse Host

The giant dog, Newfoundlands?

*[Jonathan confirms.]*

00:07:48 John Host

Not Newfoundlanders, the people who live in Newfoundland.

*[Jonathan confirms.]*

00:07:54 Jesse Host

Or New Found Land. Right.

Judge Hodgman, is that the fantasy of all New Yorkers, just to have multiple giant dogs?

00:08:01 John Host

Well, it's a dream come true for many New Yorkers who pack them into apartments, because the larger the dog the less the energy. And they just flop around. One thing, though, that is not—what trainline was this?

00:08:13 Jonathan Guest

Uh, this would've been the 4 or the 5.

00:08:16 John Host

Yeah. Yeah, you can't bring a whole crib onto a 4 train.

*[Jesse laughs.]*

00:08:18 Haley Guest

He meant those—he meant her stroller.

00:08:19 Jonathan Guest

I said crib?

00:08:20 Haley Guest

You left out some details.

*[They chuckle and Jonathan agrees.]*

00:08:23 Jesse Host

They had set up a nursery on the 5 train.

00:08:26 John Host

It's really frowned upon on even the B or the D trains, and they're much larger. But a 4 train? Forget it. That's the oldest line. Can't bring a whole crib on there. Nice plug for Cheerios as well. Okay, so were you two dating at this time?

00:08:38 Haley Guest

We were dating and I was still living in Boston and Jonathan was still living in New York, so I was down for a visit. And we were going to the Brooklyn Bridge, which is where we saw this very, very cute baby. And Jonathan was staring at her really hard, because he's baby crazy.

00:08:54 John Host

This is not a different cute baby. This is the same cute baby you saw on the train on the way to the Brooklyn Bridge.

00:08:57 Haley Guest

Yes. And he was staring at her so hard. Then I nudged him, and I said, "We have to stop staring at this baby. People are gonna think we're trying to kidnap her."

And then he looked at me, deadpan, and was like, "Well, no we are gonna kidnap her." And that was the lore.

00:09:10 John Host

Oooh. How long had you been dating at this point, Haley?

00:09:14 Haley Guest

Two years. Ish. Two and a half?

00:09:17 John Host

So, you were an established couple.

00:09:19 Haley Guest

Yes. Yeah.

00:09:20 John Host

And how long ago was this?

00:09:22	Haley	Guest	This was—I don't know the date, but the first text message mention of Belinda is July of 2016. So. Or—2015.
00:09:32	John	Host	You were so established that you are now seriously considering, perhaps, having a child together. Is that correct?
			<i>[Haley confirms.]</i>
00:09:38	Jesse	Host	That's the natural progression of romantic relationships, Judge Hodgman. It goes from dating to kidnapping to having children.
00:09:48	John	Host	It's your classic meet cute.
			<i>[Jesse agrees with a chuckle.]</i>
			And where did the name Belinda come from, Jonathan? How did this specific name become part of your non-maritime province of Canada fantasy?
00:10:02	Jonathan	Guest	Uh, you know, I couldn't—I think it was pretty much off the dome. We frequently play the game of make up stories about people you see. And there's just a lot of spontaneity in that. So, I don't think there was any particular idea. Maybe I had Belinda Carlisle in the back of my head, as I often do. But it's possible. But I think it was just a name that I picked off the dome. And it had alliteration with the last name that we'd chosen, which was Belinda Barnes. I don't know why we chose that last name, either. But they're all fictional.
00:10:34	John	Host	It's not either of your last names.
00:10:36	Haley	Guest	No. Jonathan made it up completely on the spot, and I think he just said it because he thought the two Bs together sounded funny.
			<i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:10:41	John	Host	That's pretty cool. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Double Bs. That's pretty cool. Are you an improviser, Jonathan?
00:10:46	Jonathan	Guest	No. I am not an improviser. We both work in theatre, and Haley works at an improv theatre. But no, neither one of us is actually improvisers.
00:10:55	John	Host	Tell me about yourselves. Right now, all I know about you is that you've been dating for some time, you're thinking about having a child, and I can see via our teleconferencing program that you're sitting at the bottom of the pit, which is fantastic. Because I've wanted the guest pit for a long time, and we finally—we finally got one built, I guess. Is that true? Where are you in the world?
00:11:13	Haley	Guest	We live in Philadelphia.
00:11:15	John	Host	Now you live together in Philadelphia.
			<i>[Haley confirms.]</i>
			Okay. And you work at an improv theatre in Philadelphia? What's the name of that theatre and what do you do there, Haley?
00:11:22	Haley	Guest	It's called Philly Improv Theatre! Which is exactly what it sounds like. And I'm the operations director. So, I keep the trains running.
00:11:30	John	Host	Okay, and you also work in Philadelphia theatre, Jonathan?
00:11:33	Jonathan	Guest	Yeah, I work at a regional theatre just outside of Philadelphia.
00:11:37	John	Host	And it says in here that you belong to a group called Shakespeare on Tap?
00:11:41	Jonathan	Guest	That is our personal project, which is we go to bars around Philadelphia, and we have a group of actors who work really hard. We do one read through, one rehearsal, and then put up an off-book, fully staged, Shakespeare play with just the one rehearsal.
00:11:59	John	Host	In bars?

00:12:00	Jonathan	Guest	In bars, yeah.
00:12:01	John	Host	Are you invited or are you—is this just a—is this a—
00:12:04	Jonathan	Guest	Just show up.
00:12:05	John	Host	Shakespeare invasion?
00:12:07	Jonathan	Guest	No, we usually work out with the bars in advance rather than just inflict Elizabethan drama on people who are just looking for a night out.
00:12:15	John	Host	And how many 9 volt batteries have you accidentally inhaled during performances?
00:12:21	Jonathan	Guest	<i>[Jesse laughs.]</i> We've been fortunate! People tend to enjoy it.
00:12:24	Haley	Guest	Yeah, it's pretty darn popular. It's—we do it for free or for pay what you can. So, the bar makes money because people buy food and beverage. You know, nobody has to pay for a ticket. So, we usually sell out. And it's more like—it's more like a party where a play just happens to be happening. And it's interactive. We play games. It's a fun time.
00:12:44	John	Host	You ever do it at Bob & Barbara's, on South Street?
00:12:46	Jonathan	Guest	No! Although, that would be the dream! It's a—that's a super fun space. Great Philly knowledge, there.
00:12:52	John	Host	It's absolutely my dream. I dream about it every night. So, Jonathan, <i>[sighs]</i> the name Belinda doesn't have a specific meaning. It's not a favorite character. It's not one of the many Australian athletes who are named Belinda that I saw on Wikipedia. It's just a—it's Belinda Barnes popped into your mind as a good name for a fictional child.
00:13:14	Jonathan	Guest	Yeah. At that point, it didn't have any significance. I would argue, at this point it's taken on a great deal of significance.
00:13:20	John	Host	How so? How has it wormed its way into your life over the past years or so?
00:13:25	Jonathan	Guest	Yeah, so like we said, this started out as a joke. We weren't serious about the child abduction. That—
00:13:30	John	Host	You weren't serious about kidnapping a child? Oh, good know. Thank you.
00:13:33	Jonathan	Guest	Yeah, no, that was—that much was—that was a joke. And it started from there, but increasingly over the years it became the go-to name we would use when talking about what the future looks like and how we wanna be as parents. And I think particularly during the lockdown, when there was nothing to do but—you know, talk to each other about what the future might hold someday and watch—
00:14:00	John	Host	Well, there was also Monopoly Deal. You could've played that, yeah.
00:14:01	Jonathan	Guest	<i>[Laughing.]</i> Right. Right. Yeah, we did—we did a lot of those things, but you burn through them pretty quickly. And you know, when we were watching shows about parenting, about parent/child relationships, frequently we would say, "Well, what would we do if Belinda were in this situation? How would we deal with it if Belinda wanted to do this?" And so, it became—you know, really—it became very real at that point for me.
00:14:27	John	Host	Did Belinda ever become real to people outside of your circle of two? Did you talk about Belinda with friends, family, that sort of thing?
00:14:35	Haley	Guest	So, as far as I know, the only people that really know are my two oldest friends. We floated it past—I mentioned it to my mom when we were home for the summer for my sister's wedding. And part of

			the reason why I'm opposed to this name was her reaction to me telling her that. Um. Jonathan also contends that his brother-in-law, Joe, has been told about it, but I do not recall this.
00:15:00	John	Host	So, Jonathan, are you lying or did you tell your brother-in-law, Joe?
00:15:03	Jonathan	Guest	No, we actually—my family is at a point where they're really starting to have kids. My eldest brother and his husband have a son that is now almost two, and my step sister is pregnant and is giving birth soon. So, it's something that's come up for us more. But part of that, as we've had many conversations about baby names over the course of the last two years than I think we were having—well, obviously, we were having this conversation for a while, but this was the first time we really started to have the conversation with other people. And Joe and Adam—Adam is my brother, Joe is his husband, remember our having this conversation and are very attached to their prospective niece.
00:15:50	John	Host	They love the idea of their niece, Belinda Barnes.
			<i>[Jonathan confirms.]</i>
00:15:56	Haley	Guest	So, tell me about your mother's reaction to the name Belinda. We were home over the summer 'cause my sister got married. And we were sitting in the car, and we mentioned Belinda. I don't remember why. And she said, "Huh! Belinda. That's an interesting name. Where does that come from?" And I didn't wanna lie. I didn't wanna say we got it out of a baby name book or something, because that's not true. So, I told her the story, and she didn't have a bad reaction. She just sort of tilted her head to the side and said, "Huh!" Which, if you know my mother, speaks volumes.
00:16:22	John	Host	And Haley, would you say that your reaction to the name Belinda is also "huh"?
00:16:26	Haley	Guest	I feel very conflicted about it, because I actually love the name, and I really love everything that it represents. And Jonathan would probably tell you that, of the two of us, I talk about Belinda way more. But—but it's not—it's not—people name people things for all sorts of reasons, but one of them is not typically "someone told me a joke on the subway once". Normally, when you name a baby together, you have a conversation about it and it's not just something that someone made up one day without consulting you. So, I feel conflicted because I adore the name, but I think it's a weird way to name a baby.
00:17:05	Jesse	Host	My wife and I named our third child Lindbergh Baby.
00:17:09	John	Host	That's true. I've seen the—I've seen the birth certificate.
00:17:11	Jesse	Host	Yeah. Kidnapping plots are a common source of baby names.
00:17:15	John	Host	That's right. Patty Hearst Hodgman is—never mind.
00:17:18	Jesse	Host	My middle child, Frank Sinatra Jr.

*[John chuckles.]*

			Let's take a quick recess and hear about this week's <i>Judge John Hodgman</i> sponsor. We'll be back in just a moment on the <i>Judge John Hodgman</i> podcast.
00:17:30	Sound Effect	Transition	Three gavel bangs.
00:17:33	Sound Effect	Transition	Three gavel bangs.

00:17:35 John Host Haley, you mentioned that you love all that Belinda represents. And that's something I'm not clear on. What does Belinda represent?

00:17:44 Haley Guest Sure! So, when we first started talking about Belinda, it was just casual stuff like, "Oh, I really loved *Where the Wild Things Are* when I was a kid. I can't wait to read that to Belinda." Or you know, "You know, once we have Belinda, you're gonna have to take us both to the park even though you really don't like going to the park!" Like, we just used her as a placeholder to talk about things we wanted to do.

*[John affirms.]*

And so—but then, as time went on, we started talking about more serious things, like—you know—how are we gonna talk to Belinda about gender? Or what would we do if Belinda got in really big trouble? Like big, important stuff. And so, she's just kind of really evolved over time into everything we wanna be as parents. And so, that makes her feel very symbolic and significant.

00:18:33 John Host Aside from her residency in Canada and her raising of dogs and her different last name from yours, does—is there more Belinda imaginary mythology than that? Other adventures that she has had in your minds, Jonathan or Haley? Or is she more just a placeholder for the future?

00:18:55 Jonathan Guest Yeah, so I think—I will object to the term placeholder, which Haley used. I think she is a—

00:19:01 John Host No, no, no. I used it, and it's overruled.

*[Jonathan agrees with a laugh.]*

00:19:03 Sound Effect Sound Effect One gavel bang.

00:19:04 John Host It was a great use of that word, but you go ahead and say what you were gonna say anyway.

00:19:07 Jonathan Guest Yeah, I think it started as that—like we said, as that mythology. I think that joke ran for—knowing us—longer than it should've, but eventually did move into something more real and more tangible for us. I think after six months of talking about our imaginary child, we started talking about her in very real terms and like had serious conversations about if we stayed in New York, would we do private school? Like what would that look like? And would that ever happen, given that we work in theatre and that's not feasible? And so, you know—

00:19:43 John Host You do Shakespeare in bars.

*[They chuckle.]*

00:19:49 Jonathan Guest You're invited buskers.

00:19:55 John Host There's a company that already does it, in New York. So, we really wouldn't even have a market for that.

00:20:02 Jonathan Guest You're the second-best invited busking Shakespeare barfly company in the east.

00:20:02 Jonathan Guest We're not egotistical about it. I think "second-best" might be a little aspirational for us.

*[Haley laughs.]*



However—but it—the mythology kind of stuck to that one joke. But again, we had very serious, lengthy conversations about like—like, I went to a private school in New York and Haley has very strong feelings about that based on the portrayal of Chilton Academy, in *The Gilmore Girls*. And so, it was just conversations about that. And now, it really like—I don't know that—it's somewhere in between mythology and real life, for me at least, at this point.

00:20:37 Jesse Host How much of your future planning is based on the noted social realist text, *The Gilmore Girls*?

00:20:43 Haley Guest *[They chuckle.]* Jonathan is making fun of me, because I am perhaps the foremost amateur scholar of *The Gilmore Girls* in North America.

00:20:48 John Host Oh, I see!

00:20:49 Haley Guest I have seen it many, many, many times. And while I do not think it is realistic or in any way indicative of how we should be as parents, they do—because she grows up over time, you get to like tackle different subjects like trouble at school or trouble with the law or, you know, mother/daughter fights. Like stuff like that. So, it is an easy gateway to like talk about these sorts of things. Also, as Elliot—Jonathan's nephew—has been going from being a baby to being a toddler, these sorts of conversations just sort of naturally come up, and it always falls back to us saying, "Well, if we had to deal with what Joe and Adam are dealing with with Elliot with Belinda, what would we do?" So, these things come up.

00:21:31 John Host So, from a *Gilmore Girls* perspective—let me just understand this—you probably would prefer for your child to be named Yale University.

00:21:37 Haley Guest *[Jesse laughs.]* Yes, but not after *The Gilmore Girls*, after you.

00:21:40 John Host *[Chuckling.]* Thank you very—thank you very much. I had to donate a lot of money to have Yale University named Yale University, so appreciate that.

00:21:49 Jesse Host To be fair, John, you have an almost infinite supply of money from your padlock fortune.

00:21:55 John Host Also, combination locks now, Jesse, thank you very much.

00:21:58 Jesse Host *[Through laughter.]* Fair enough!

00:22:03 John Host But also—I'm not a scholar of *The Gilmore Girls*, Haley, but am I remembering correctly? This is about a woman raising a daughter without an interfering husband? Is that part of the fantasy?

00:22:15 Haley Guest No! No, it's not! *[Chuckling.]* I did not expect this to become a *Gilmore Girls* fancast, but no. No, no, no. I do not fantasize about raising Belinda without Jonathan at all.

00:22:26 Jonathan Guest I would like to be part of the picture, too.

00:22:27 Jesse Host My mother-in-law, Judge Hodgman, is a marriage and family therapist. And she can't even watch *The Gilmore Girls* because she gets so upset about the dysfunctional family.

00:22:38 Haley Guest Right, but that's part of why it's good for this conversation is because if every—no! I'm just saying, if everything in your childhood and your parenthood is going perfectly, then what is there to talk about? But because they have all these problems—it's just a good gateway for you to talk about how you solve problems.

00:22:54 John Host And what are you gonna do if Belinda gets in big trouble? That was one of the hypotheticals that you were talking about. What kind of

trouble were you talking about and how would you resolve Belinda's trubs?

00:23:06 Haley Guest What did we say? We talked about this the other night.

00:23:08 John Host What if Belinda kidnapped a child from the subway and then got in trouble with the law, for example? 'Cause that runs in the family, that kind of stuff.

00:23:15 Jonathan Guest Yeah. Weird, eccentric—we come from a long line of weird, eccentric parents, and I think we'll try to pass that on someday. I think, uh—yeah, I mean, I think we have a policy that has been long considered of making sure that our child feels, no matter what situation they find themselves in—whether it's they've stayed out past curfew or have abducted a subway baby—that they can call us without fear of repercussion, to make sure that they know first and foremost—

00:23:42 John Host Oh, Jonathan, these are not subway babies. These are babies that have families. They happen to be riding the subway.

*[They giggle.]*

00:23:54 Jesse Host This is a very weird worldview you have. This is gonna be one of those situations, John, where the local news is interviewing Haley and Jonathan after their child has abducted a subway baby, and they're gonna say, "My child—my child, abduct a subway baby? Yes, I always figured something like that would happen, because we come from a long line of eccentric parents.

*[They laugh.]*

00:24:14 John Host They have parents, too, who love them and want to reassure them that they will always be loved. They're not just subway babies waiting to be plucked by you and your—and Belinda! But okay, I understand what you're saying. And what about gender? What if Belinda decides that Belinda isn't Belinda? Do you have a backup name?

00:24:33 Haley Guest Yeah, so that's another one of the reasons where I'm a little bit opposed to this name, because it is so overtly gendered. And also, I'm slightly concerned that a child might not like the name, because it has—I think—a little bit of a grandmotherly feel to it. I think that we are both—we're both on the same page about like leaving gender a very open question until Belinda's old enough to know a little bit better about themselves. But if you do name someone something that is overtly gendered, and then there comes a time where that needs to be changed, that is something that someone has to figure out and has to go through.

Whereas, if you pick something that is not so overtly gendered, they might wanna decide on a different name anyway, but it's not—it's not so inherent in what they are called and what is on their ID card and how the legal system knows them that they would necessarily—if you go with a slightly less gendered name, the transition, perhaps, would not be as difficult.

00:25:34 John Host Well, and then also—setting aside for a moment that question—I mean, wouldn't Belinda have a Belinda to live up to that a non-Belinda wouldn't? I mean, you have this fantasy of a child that you are then putting onto a real human being who is in your life.

*[Haley agrees.]*

00:25:59	Haley	Guest	What do you think about that? Obviously, you're agreeing with me, Haley, so please do so. This is my biggest objection to naming her Belinda Barnes. It— <i>[chuckles]</i> it is not that I do not love the name. I do love the name. And it is not that I'm against the symbolic nature of it that we have—the meaning that we have created around it. It's that I think we have talked about Belinda for so long, she is very much a representation of what our relationship was when we were in our 20s and all of our hopes and our dreams and—you know—things that we fantasized about that we couldn't afford back then. I think that's a lot of meaning to put on a person who doesn't exist yet. And I worry that it would be—it would be selfish or perhaps putting too much expectation on real Belinda to name her after a fantasy that we had a really long time before she was ever born.
00:26:53	John	Host	Jonathan, let's say that you have a daughter, and she loves being a daughter, and she loves the name Belinda, and she loves the pronoun she, and all is right in the world. And let's say that she doesn't grow up to raise large dogs in Canada or wear Amelia Earhart leather cap and goggles or have all the other steampunk adventures that you imagined for her. Don't you feel you might feel a little let down or confused?
00:27:20	Jonathan	Guest	No, only because at this point, it's moved so much beyond the Newfoundland riding toddler surveying—
00:27:32	John	Host	Oh, wait, she was gonna ride around on the dogs?!
00:27:34	Jonathan	Guest	Well, that was part of the charm of a really big dog.
00:27:35	John	Host	Alright, I think I've heard everything I need to in order to make my decision.

*[Jonathan laughs.]*

00:27:44	Jonathan	Guest	Belinda it is. Fantastic! Belinda Barnes and her Newfoundland steed. What's the name of the Newfoundland steed? We hadn't really gotten that far. We envisioned so many that names were kind of irrelevant for the dog, just not for the person. Uh.
00:27:51	John	Host	I know, Yale University, the dog.
00:27:54	Jesse	Host	<i>[Jonathan laughs and agrees.]</i> Hambone.
00:27:55	John	Host	Hambone! Of course, Hambone! Belinda Barnes and her noble steed, Hambone of the North! Sounds pretty good! Anyway, you were saying something serious. I apologize.
00:28:08	Jonathan	Guest	I don't know that I was. No, I mean I think— <i>[laughs]</i> I think I was basically saying that it's gone—it's gone so far beyond that initial fantasy, if we could even describe it as a fantasy. I think now it's become how we think of our child someday. And regardless of whether or not we use the name, the ideas that we've had don't go towards what we hope that this child will become. And of course, like I'm aware there's a 50/50 chance that Belinda is not born female and may not wanna stay with that, but I think there's also a—Lin is a version of Belinda. That's a gender-neutral name.
00:28:48	John	Host	Oh, like Lin-Manuel Belinda. Yeah.
00:28:50	Jonathan	Guest	<i>[Laughing.]</i> Yeah, exactly. Exactly. It's no longer about values we ascribe to her; it's just how we think about it. And I imagine every couple thinks about, at some point, what their life with a child will be

like. We just happened to have a name that we've glommed onto that has special significance. And I would posit that even if we didn't go with this name, in her heart of hearts and in her mind, Haley will still use that name in thinking about and talking about her child.

00:29:18 John Host Oh, Haley, Jonathan just told you all about your hearts of hearts and your inner mind. Did you know that? It's a good thing he's around.

00:29:24 Haley Guest Yes, I think that Jonathan is just another in a long line of *Judge John Hodgman* litigants who say, "Well, I think if you really thought about it, you do agree with me."

00:29:33 John Host *[They laugh.]*  
Hey, Jesse Thorn, do you know what I decided is the best sort of male spectrum version of the name Belinda, if Belinda is on—sort of tilted toward the female spectrum, do you know what the best male spectrum version of that would be? Backup name?

00:29:47 Jesse Host What's that?

00:29:48 John Host Delroy Lindo.

*[Jesse laughs.]*

00:29:54 Jesse Host Named after the actor, Delroy Lindo.  
I just assumed you were gonna say, "*Belly*, named after the Hype Williams film."

00:29:58 John Host Oh, sure, there you go.

00:29:59 Haley Guest We call her Belindo when we talk about her as a boy.

00:30:02 John Host Very nice. In your heart of hearts and in your mind of minds, Haley, do you think you will always think of this child as Belinda?

00:30:12 Haley Guest Y-yeah.

*[John "hm"s.]*

00:30:18 John Host *[Laughs.]* Well, so—*[sighs]* part of—  
So, Jonathan was right. Good. That's good! That's pretty interesting.

00:30:19 Haley Guest No—but—but I—but I think—I think thinking of her—I think—so, one of the arguments that I was going to make is that I don't have a problem with Belinda being a family name or a pet name or a nickname. I just don't think it should be her legal name on her birth certificate. And Jonathan, in his defense, is not wrong that to completely keep from thinking about her as Belinda and maybe occasionally accidentally calling her Belinda would be difficult for me.

00:30:50 John Host Do you have another name that you—that you like for this—I mean, this child is still hypothetical.

00:30:57 Haley Guest I think what I'm arguing for is pretty reasonable in that I just wanna have a conversation about what this baby should be named, like all other, normal adults do. Jonathan's mother really likes the name Harper. It's got a lot of important family history. It's her maiden name; it's Jonathan's middle name, and I like that I think it goes either way, gender-wise. My big objection to that is that I think right now, it's in like the top five most popular baby names. And I really—I really—I grew up in—I grew up in a school with five other Haley's, and I hated it. And I doubt I have to explain that to the contingencies of Johns that are here. But I really didn't like having a bunch of other people who had my name.

00:31:40	John	Host	There's no one else named John. I don't know what you're talking about. Haley, were you—were you with a bunch of Haleys 'cause there was a Halley's Comet thing going on? I don't know if the timing matches; I'm just curious.
00:31:49	Haley	Guest	I don't know.
00:31:50	John	Host	Or is it just—just happened?
00:31:52	Haley	Guest	I don't know. It was a very trendy name when I was born. I'm 31 now. And for whatever reason, when the 31-year-olds of my region were being born, it was just a very popular name. 'Cause I lived in a really tiny town and went to a very small school, but there were five Haleys.
00:32:07	Jesse	Host	Yeah. It was Jessicas when I was that age.
00:32:11	John	Host	And did you all have matching platinum blonde bowl cuts and weird eyes? And you all wore the same clothes to school every day?
00:32:19	Haley	Guest	[Giggles.] No, we were actually very different. But because I've—most of the Haleys I wasn't really good friends with, but I was really good friends with one other Haley, and she was very short, and I have always been quite tall. And so, we got ascribed the names Big Haley and Little Haley, and I did <u>not</u> enjoy that.
00:32:37	John	Host	Hm. Big Haley. I feel you.
00:32:40	Haley	Guest	It's—it's a wonderful thing to tell a teenage girl, right?
00:32:43	John	Host	So, you just want—but you wanna postpone this whole conversation until it is germane, which is also a pretty good name now that I think about it. And you want—do you want me to order that Belinda is off the table if I were to find in your favor?
00:33:00	Haley	Guest	I—if you found in my favor, I would like it argued that we shouldn't—that it should not be considered as the legal, given name. And instead, some other name should be selected through a normal selection process.
00:33:15	John	Host	Wh—yeah, but you're—so, you're saying that the name could be something like John Hodgman, but the nickname is Belinda?
00:33:22	Haley	Guest	Yeah. So, yeah. Yeah! I think so. Everyone in my family has a nickname. There's nobody in my family who doesn't also have a family name. And several of them are silly and several of them are names that don't sound silly. So.
00:33:36	John	Host	Give me some of the silly nicknames. I wanna hear about them.
00:33:39	Haley	Guest	Sure. [Laughs.] So, I'm Chi-Chi Rodriguez. And—or Chi-Chi Banjul Diagne. My sister is Gooch or Goocherama. My brother is Pick Bill Rufus Dog. And my other brother is Buh-one.
00:33:54	Jesse	Host	How come you're the only one named after a professional golfer.
00:33:57	Haley	Guest	You would have to ask my father. I have no idea. I wasn't—I wasn't old enough to remember when I was given this name.
00:34:03	John	Host	Jonathan, if I were to take Belinda off the table today, how would you feel?
00:34:09	Jonathan	Guest	I would be a little bit crushed. And I think it would be particularly confusing, because Haley is often the one who instigates conversations about what life with Belinda will be like and how we'll deal with Belinda, and often prefaces it with, "What will we do about Belinda if—" "How will we deal with Belinda, this?" And so, it's—I'm not good with sort of inconsistencies. And that would be introducing—I imagine—I mean, I would think that the conversations would still center around that name, and I'm a simple man. And it would be confusing to me. So, it would introduce a whole lot of chaos into my life, personally.
00:34:47	John	Host	Big Haley, let me ask you this question.
00:34:49	Haley	Guest	Doon't, John.

00:34:51 John Host I'm sorry. Your Own Size Haley, let me ask you this question. Is this true what Jonathan's saying that he's a simple man who might get confused? Is this true? Or is this what they call on the internet weaponized incompetence?

*[They laugh.]*

00:35:14 Haley Guest *[Dopily.]* "I'm sorry, I just can't remember any other name! And you're the only one who's good at cooking!"  
Uh, Jonathan may be playing it up a little bit, but it is actually quite true that Jonathan is not good at two conflicting realities. It is—it is a regular conversation that I have to have with him where he will say, "Oh, you don't like that thing." And I say yes, I do. And he says, "No, you don't." And I said since when? And he said, "You told me six years ago that you didn't like this thing." And I have to say it doesn't occur to you that people's minds can change overtime? He really—he's very black and white.

00:35:42 John Host No! He knows your heart of hearts and your mind of minds!  
00:35:45 Haley Guest He's very black and white. I don't think he would be—I don't think he would be harmed by me calling her Belinda, but knowing that he couldn't actually name her that, but I do think he's very black and white about things. *[Chuckles.]*

00:35:58 Jonathan Guest Specifically with reference to the family names things and this idea about inconsistency being my personal bugaboo, I think there's something too to the idea that if—we've established, I think, that there is a possibility that Belinda will be the name we use to refer to the child even after they are born. And it's possible that it might slip out from time to time, and Haley's right that her family has a tradition of nicknames. But not all of those, I think, are nicknames that were enjoyed—to my understanding of what's been reported—and if this child gets stuck with a nickname that we hate—that they hate that we inadvertently slip into from time to time, I worry about the ramifications of that as well.

00:36:44 John Host "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds." You ever say that in a bar in Philadelphia?

00:36:51 Jonathan Guest No.

00:36:52 John Host You know who said that?

00:36:53 Jonathan Guest Not off the top of my head, which is embarrassing I feel like.

00:36:56 John Host Delroy Lindo. Famous actor Delroy Lindo. It was not Shakespeare. It was Ralph Waldo Emerson.

I was sort of expecting, though—honestly, when I said, "If I take Belinda off the table, how would you feel?" not like I'm worried that I'll be confused in the future, but like I'm worried—I feel like I'll be losing someone I know and care about.

00:37:18 Jonathan Guest I think that's true too. I mean, I think it's been—you know, I think people have children for a lot of reasons. People have real children for a lot of reasons. I can only imagine not being a parent yet, myself. I think part of it is wanting to share something with your partner and the idea of taking on the adventure of raising someone together. But I also think there's something about a child that is like—about having a child that is aspirational. And particularly for us, this idea about our future that is centered around this name, it's been an aspirational thing to look forward to. It's been sort of the person we wanna bring into this world. And to lose that would feel like losing something that is already—in some ways for us, I think

			very real. And it would be a loss. And Haley kind of nodded in some way there, I feel like. I don't know if you can see at the bottom of the pit, but.
00:38:13	John	Host	Haley, do you—do you nod in some way in agreement, there?
00:38:17	Haley	Guest	Yeah. I mean, like we're all having a little bit of fun making fun of the fact that like theatre kids don't make any money, but it's true. And when you consider—you know—when Belinda was born, Jonathan and I were young and madly in love and working artists in two different cities, and hooorribly, horribly broke. And we couldn't do things that people who are madly in love sometimes get to do, like get married and buy houses and have babies. So, we made up this imaginary one partially to talk about parenting decisions that are important, but also just to like feel a little better about something that we desperately wanted but couldn't have.
			So, in that way, yeah! She's very real to me. She's very important to me. I love her very much. And if this—and if this court were to order that we never say the word Belinda again, kill the fictional child right now, I would be deeply sad too! But I don't think—
00:39:15	John	Host	Well, I would never order a fictional child killed, simply taken from you while you weren't looking while riding the subway with your daughter.
00:39:21	Haley	Guest	No, but she is real. She is real. I love her very much. She's very special to me.
00:39:27	Jesse	Host	Officer, I left the subway nursery for just a second to get something from the subway kitchen.
00:39:34	John	Host	Yeah, you went to the dining car for a moment, and you left Belinda in the crib on the 4 train. When you came back, a young couple had stolen her! That's all I would ever order. A simple subway baby kidnapping.
00:39:47	Jonathan	Guest	The Solomon of the subways.
00:39:49	John	Host	What do you see happening to Belinda once you have an actual child?
00:39:53	Haley	Guest	Well, so if we don't end up naming her that—I mean, if we ended up naming her that, obviously that would be her name. And then she would be Belinda for real instead of Belinda for pretend. If we didn't end up—if the court orders us to not use that as the legal name, then yeah. I think we would call her that in our hearts and maybe even sometimes out loud. But it wouldn't be—it wouldn't be the name she had to learn to write in grade school. It wouldn't be the name that she carries on her ID someday. It would just be—it would just be a little private joke between Jonathan and I.
00:40:27	Jonathan	Guest	I think—just to offer my own two cents on it—again, we don't have children yet. I know that raising children is difficult. I watched my parents do it. It seemed like a real tough gig for them. That might've had something to do with me! But I think part of what it is for me is that like the life we have now is not what we would've envisioned at this moment in our lives. It's somehow even better. The reality is even better, and to think about what we plan and to see where we are now doesn't cheapen either one. It only makes what we have now even greater. And I'm so fortunate that we have that. And I think this idea of the fictional child that we have, I don't think it would be disappointing to have a child come into the world and be in conflict with this fiction. I think it would be—you know, a way of actually improving on the fantasy that we already have, because the reality is inherently so much more wonderful than just the fantasy.

And I think too, there is a way in which this fictional child is very much so already a part of our lives and we've made a place for her in our family. And yeah, I think—I think it would represent, when it actually happens, the completion of something we've been talking about for a while, but not something that negates the future we have conceived of.

00:41:58 Haley Guest Yeah, sometimes Jonathan says like, "First we dreamed her and then we made her." Which is very, very, very sweet.

*[John "woah"s.]*

But—well, it's very sweet. It's a very sweet thought. I love it. I love it when he says it. But I don't think that that is necessarily a good enough reason to make this kind of decision for a person who doesn't exist yet and can't put their two cents in.

00:42:20 John Host First we dreamed her, then we made her! Forsooth! That is some Shakespeare in a bar type stuff! Whooo! I think I've heard everything I need to in order to make my decision. I'm gonna go forward into my private car of the F train that only I am allowed to enter, with my plush wingback seats—leather wingback seats and my legal tomes, and I'll consider for a moment, then I'll be back in a moment with my verdict.

00:42:40 Jesse Host Please rise as Judge John Hodgman exits the court room.

*[The scrape of chairs followed by heavy footsteps and a door closing.]*

00:42:51 Jonathan Guest Jonathan, how are you feeling about your chances here? Uh, pretty—pretty—pretty bad. I know that it's a ridiculous thing, and we joke about being eccentric, but yeah. I feel like it's gonna be—it's—Haley has a bunch of really good points, and of course, it's a conversation we would wanna have. I just hope it's not taken off the table entirely, and it's something we can continue to talk about, because it's been something that's brought us so much joy.

00:43:17 Jesse Host Haley, how are you feeling?

00:43:19 Haley Guest I feel okay. I think I—I think I stated a pretty good case, but I don't know. Jonathan's so poetic.

00:43:25 Jesse Host Given that you've already given up on the Newfoundland dogs and moving to Newfoundland, how many of these Belinda dreams do you think are realistically achievable for unnamed future child?

00:43:36 Haley Guest Well, I think something that Jonathan was trying to say, but maybe we didn't quite make it clear—we never say she will be like this. We never say, "It's important to me that she goes to college. It's important to me that she become an artist too." Or specifically not, because we know what that life is like. We only ever talk about it as regards to ourselves—what we can bring and who we should be. I think that who Belinda or future unnamed child is, is a completely open book, and we'll love her no matter what she decides to do.

00:44:03 Jesse Host Yeah, I can tell you, my one hope for my children was that they not go into comedy, and I'm pretty worried about my middle kid.

*[Chuckles.]*

00:44:10 Haley Guest Oh, we're shaking in our boots, but we're not gonna say anything to her about it. *[Laughs.]*

00:44:13 Jesse Host I mean, if you're lucky, this unnamed child will go into some highly remunerative profession like improv.



[Jonathan chuckles.]

Improv is the only artistic career less well-paid than Shakespeare in bars. Well, we'll see what Judge Hodgman has to say about all this when we come back in just a second on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast.

00:44:33	Sound Effect	Transition	Three gavel bangs.
00:44:35	Sound Effect	Transition	Three gavel bangs.
00:44:37	Jesse	Host	Judge Hodgman, we're taking a break from the case, and we are headed out on tour imminently. I need folks to get their tickets!
00:44:45	John	Host	Yes, some bad news for the people of Port Townsend, Washington. We are sold out! If you slept on those tickets, I don't know—I don't know, you might have to go to Seat Geek or something to buy some resale tickets.
00:44:58	Jesse	Host	There's gonna be scalpers outside this fort where we're performing. [Laughs.]
00:45:04	John	Host	But if you are—but if you're in Port Townsend and you didn't get a ticket, you're not that far from Seattle, where we're performing the very next night on the 29 <sup>th</sup> , at Neptune Theater in Seattle. Then, you can take a little road trip down to Portland, Oregon, where we'll be performing at Revolution Hall, which is an incredible venue where we haven't ever been before. Then, a city we've never been before! Denver, Colorado! The mile high city! For the very first time.
00:45:27	Jesse	Host	Judge Hodgman, I just talked to my buddy, David Gborie—who is one of the world's funniest comics, one of the hosts of the very hilarious podcast <i>All Fantasy Everything</i> , and lately the voice of Comedy Central.

[John "wow"s.]

00:45:46	John	Host	And David is living in Denver, Colorado—where he's from—and he's agreed to come on our show! That's incredible! I can't wait to meet all of the people in Colorado that we've never gotten to see before and hear their cases live onstage, at the—no less, at the Gothic Theater, in Denver, Colorado. That's my kind of cozy goth.
00:45:58	Jesse	Host	John, did you know that <i>Judge John Hodgman</i> listener, Corin Tucker of Sleater-Kinney, is gonna come on our show in Portland, Oregon?
00:46:06	John	Host	I did know that! But I wanted you to reveal it, and so you have. We'll have all sorts of fun surprises at all of our stops. And here's a surprise maybe you didn't know about if you didn't listen to the very beginning of this episode: in San Francisco—at San Francisco Sketch Fest, not only are we performing live, at the Sydney Goldstein Theater, which is a beautiful theater which I hope you come to. But we're streaming the whole show all over the world! That's right! It's streaming! You can go watch a stream. Maybe you're in Port Townsend going, "Wah, I didn't get tickets." Well, why don't you watch the stream of the San Francisco show? All you gotta do is go to San Francisco Sketch Fest website, <a href="http://SFSketchFest.com">SFSketchFest.com</a> , on the <i>Judge John Hodgman</i> page, you'll see the link for the stream right there.

00:46:47	Jesse	Host	Yeah, project it on the wall of your nerd bar. I know that most <i>Judge John Hodgman</i> listeners own nerd bars. Some people think it's Stewart from <i>The Flop House</i> who owns a nerd bar, but most of our listeners own nerd bars. Granted, some are librarians and graphic designers, but <u>most</u> own nerd bars. So, project it on the wall of your nerd bar! This is gonna be a great Saturday night. Get yourself a bottle of whatever you like to drink, put your feet up on your coffee table, cuddle with your cat, dog, or other creature, and watch <i>Judge John Hodgman</i> live! It's gonna be a hoot and a half!
00:47:22	John	Host	<a href="https://www.sfsketchfest.com">SFSketchFest.com</a> . Go to the <i>Judge John Hodgman</i> page, and you'll see the streaming button right there, and you can get your streaming tickets. Then, finally, we're rounding it out. We're bringing old Jesse Thorn back home from his real home in San Francisco to his fake home in Los Angeles, to the Hollywood Forever cemetery where we are performing in Los Angeles, inside a masonic lodge. It's truly a dream come true for me. I can't wait to go on tour and see everybody for the first time in several years. It's gonna be a terrific time, and we hope you can join us wherever you can join us.
			To get tickets, go to <a href="https://bit.ly/JJHOWEST">bit.ly/JJHOWEST</a> . That's J-J-H-O-W-E-S-T, all capital letters, <a href="https://bit.ly/JJHOWEST">bit.ly/JJHOWEST</a> . Or just go to the events page at <a href="https://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a> . They're all linked there.
00:48:12	Jesse	Host	And if you're listening to this show on release day, at 4PM Pacific, 7PM Eastern, Judge Hodgman and I will be live streaming on the AITA subreddit—the legendary Am I The A-Hole subreddit. We'll be deciding who is and isn't an a-hole. I think it's gonna be a lot of fun.
00:48:34	John	Host	Yeah, it's really exciting. Mark—one of the founding moderators of the Am I The A-Hole subreddit, which I am a big fan of, heard us talking about it on the podcast, contacted us, and said, "Do you wanna do a livestreaming event where we present you with cases from our subreddit, Am I The A-Hole, and you can decide who is and who is not the a-hole?" And we said <u>yes</u> ! So, if you're listening to day, on the 18 <sup>th</sup> of January, check us out right over there on Reddit—on the subreddit Am I the A-Hole. But it's not a-hole; it's a—you know. You know what I mean. The word. You know what the full word is. You gotta type it in. Sorry, kids.
00:49:09	Jesse	Host	Judge Hodgman, Mark has thrown down the gauntlet. I wanna do a livestream on my favorite subreddit, which is Dogs on Roofs.
			<i>[John laughs.]</i>
00:49:27	John	Host	So, moderators of Dogs on Roofs, if you're at r/dogsonroofs, Judge Hodgman and I stand ready to livestream with you. Meanwhile, go over to r/amitheasshole. There, I said it. And listen to us tonight, 7PM Eastern, 4PM Pacific. If you're listening on the 18 <sup>th</sup> . And if you're not, I bet it's—I bet it's archived. I bet you can listen to it after the fact.
00:49:55	Jesse	Host	Okay! Whether it is on the road, on the streams, or on the boards, we are out there. Can't wait to say hello to you. Can't wait to see you again. <a href="https://bit.ly/JJHOWEST">Bit.ly/JJHOWEST</a> .
00:49:56	Sound Effect	Transition	Let's get back to the case! Three gavel bangs.
00:49:59	Jesse	Host	Please rise as Judge John Hodgman reenters the courtroom and presents his verdict.

00:50:07 John Host

*[The squeal of chairs followed by heavy footsteps and a door closing.]*

Quote, "One can never anticipate how audiences will respond. One of the lessons that I've learned over the years is that no matter what my feeling or opinion might be about a given film, once you give it to the audience, they own it." End quote. I am quoting, of course, the actor Delroy Lindo. First quote that I was able to find.

*[Jesse laughs.]*

Googling frantically while Jesse was asking you about how you thought you were going to do. And yet, of course—you know, fate sometimes offer these things, because Delroy Lindo is absolutely correct. What little I know about acting—and I've not even performed any Shakespearian bars. I know that what you offer in your performance can be very, very, very personal. But the moment that it is outside of your body, it belongs to the audience. And you cannot take it back, nor can you control it, nor can you control how they feel about it—similarly, a work of writing. I was educated in literary theory at Rory Gilmore University. And there, I learned from Roland Barthes—not on purpose; supposedly he wrote this down, but who knows, because according to Roland Barthes, the author is dead. And the text that the author gives, no matter how invested they are emotionally and personally into the story that they are trying to tell, the story that is received by the reader is necessarily going to be different, personal, and outside of them.

We cannot write our stories onto the world the way we might want to. We can only offer them, and then they are changed after that by those who receive them. Same is true of names. Naming a child, of course, is really the last and only act of pure control that a parent has over a child. You decide arguably before the child comes into the world screaming, you put it on a piece of paper and then that child becomes a whole human being who denies any effort on your part to control their lives and personhood. Often, those names are rejected, of course. For all kinds of reasons. Most—you know, one would argue, a majority of people hold onto the names that they are given, but many don't for a whole host of different reasons, including issues of gender. But of course, sometimes it's just an issue of wanting to be your own person. It's taking a middle name instead of a given name or taking on a nickname, such as Chi-Chi Rodriguez instead of having to suffer *[chuckling]* under the unfair name of Big Haley.

Naming is control, of course. And I think that it's true that every child who has a name feels probably a mixture of pride in that name and then wonder if perhaps they are not someone else. And I anticipate—you know—the crux of this for me was how would this child feel to be told the story of Belinda. You were named after a baby that we almost kidnapped off the subway in New York City who became the repository of our hopes and dreams—not for you—who became a training version of you, essentially a training dummy that we practiced our parental theories on until you were here. I mean, quite honestly, I think that if and when you do have a child, you will almost immediately forget all about Belinda. For our

first child, we had a kind of a token name, a myth name for this child, because we didn't know who this child was. We hadn't agreed on a name. We were going back and forth on a couple of options, and we were obviously not sure about gender. And we discussed gender in a different way at the time that this child was born.

And the moment that the child was born, that token name disappeared. We did name our child. She did not name herself. And she continues to be angry about it. She doesn't really love her name, it turns out.

*[They chuckle.]*

Hasn't changed it so far! But that fantasy child that preceded her did not exist the moment that she arrived. To some degree, I think my ruling will be immaterial, because I think that Belinda is a wonderful fantasy child that you have together. But like—as in all fairy stories, the changeling will be replaced by the real child. I don't think that's how it actually works in more fantasy stories. I think in most fairy stories, the real child is replaced with a fairy. Sooo, this is a reverse story.

00:55:12 Jesse Host  
00:55:13 John Host

That's start of the fairy's journey.

That's part of the fairy's journey. Exactly so. Look, it's a midwinter's afternoon podcast, and I don't know how all fairy stories work, but I'll say this: I think that once your actual child arrives, Belinda will recede. Everything that you think that you know about parenting, you will learn is—not wrong and probably your conversations will bear good fruit, in terms of establishing what your values are as parents ahead of time and sharing them with each other and stress testing them with each other before you actually have a life to take care of, which is terrific. But then, all of that will be put to a new stress test, which is this other human being. Honestly, I really think you're both very adorable and I'm very grateful that you're in the guest pit in Philadelphia. I can't wait to see you both when you interrupt my drinking at Bob & Barbara's someday with some monologue or dialogue from Shakespeare.

And I understand where you're coming from. And I hope it won't be painful when I say Belinda is off the table. I'm sorry. I'm sorry, Jonathan, but I'm not sorry. Also, that's a Shakespeare quote, by the way. He invented that phrase. Much like all that glistens is not gold and there's the rub and so many other things that we didn't know that Shakespeare invented. In a pickle. He invented sorry, not sorry. Shakespeare. *[Beat.]* I know that it will be painful to let go of Belinda, and perhaps in your heart of hearts and minds of minds, you will think of Belinda. But I think that it's not right for a new human being to have to live up to this fantasy that you conjured, as wonderful as the idea of Belinda Barnes atop her mighty Newfoundland dog, Hambone, in northern Canada—northeastern Canada is. The child needs to develop their own legend.

And it also happens to the be case that Belinda is a very female gendered name, and if you happen to have a child who is gender assigned at birth male and that person feels like a male all of his life, there will not be a Belinda. And I think that that will be a different kind of mourning that you will have to go through

eventually. But you'll have to go through the mourning of Belinda no matter what, because the child you have will be whoever the child is. Whoever the whole human being is. And they deserve a fresh, new name of their own. That has to be agreed upon 100% by both of you. This is one of those things, being in a spousal partnership or a spousal—I don't even know if you're married. Who cares? Being in a parental partnership means—you know, lots of times—you know, you have to come to a consensus. There is no majority rule. And there is no consensus here around a Belinda, which is all the more reason why Belinda should not be the name.

I think most of all, emotionally you need to prepare yourself to let go of this child that you saw on the subway one time and let that child—that imaginary child—continue their journey in their crib with their Cheerios so you may begin your journey with this new human being who's going to surprise and delight you in so many ways and deserves a name of their own. Therefore, I have to say Belinda is off the table. Which is more than Big Haley even asked for. I apologize—Haley even asked for. Make a list of names, find one that speaks to you, and don't do it until you're expecting. Belinda hangs in there until you are absolutely ready to go. Prepped and—as best you can be, which is barely at all—and actually expecting. And then, you can sit down and start brainstorming up some non-Belinda names.

00:59:04 John Host

But once that happens, you may say goodbye to Belinda. Choo-choo! Farewell, 4 train! You're going aall the way... now I should've looked up the biggest city in Newfoundland. Hang on one second.

*[Loud typing.]*

New-found-land. Okaaay. Provincial capital is Delroy Lindville! Wow! Okay.

*[They laugh.]*

No, it's St. John's, named after me. See you in St. John's, Belinda. Until then, this is the sound of a gavel.

00:59:36 Sound Effect Music

"Lullaby" played on gentle music box chimes.

00:59:42 John Host

Judge John Hodgman rules. That is all.

00:59:44 Jesse Host

Please rise as Judge John Hodgman exits the courtroom.

*[The squeak of chairs followed by heavy footsteps and a door closing.]*

00:59:52 Jesse Host

Jonathan, how do you feel?

00:59:53 Jonathan Guest

Uh, it was a very well-reasoned decision. It was very patient and kind. I haven't processed it all quite yet, but I understand the reasoning even if my heart breaks a little.

01:00:08 Jesse Host

Haley, how are you feeling?

01:00:09 Haley Guest

I feel good. It is bittersweet, but I think it's the right decision. I think it'll be fine.

01:00:14 Jesse Host

Haley, Jonathan, thanks for joining us on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast.

01:00:18 Jonathan Guest

Thank you.

01:00:19 Sound Effect Transition Three gavel bangs.

01:00:21 Jesse Host Another *Judge John Hodgman* case is in the books. In just a second, we'll render a decision in *Swift Justice*, but first our thanks to redditor SuperSoftBDayParty for naming this week's episode, "Misdénomér". Join the conversation over at the Maximum Fun subreddit. That is [MaximumFun.Reddit.com](https://www.reddit.com/r/MaximumFun). We'll be asking for title submissions there too, so keep an eye out for those. Got a lot of response last time.

Evidence and photos from our show are posted on our Instagram account. That's at [Instagram.com/judgejohnhodgman](https://www.instagram.com/judgejohnhodgman). Follow us there. *Judge John Hodgman* was created by Jesse Thorn and John Hodgman. Our producer is Jennifer Marmor. Our editor is Valerie Moffatt.

Now, *Swift Justice*: where we answer small disputes with quick judgment. Pedro says, "My wife swears that if you don't make eye contact with a deer, it won't try to cross the road in front of your car. I disagree."

01:01:20 John Host Mm, I would say that if you are making eye contact with a deer, it's too late. Whatever's gonna happen is going to happen.

*[Jesse laughs.]*

I don't think you need to be worrying about making eye contact with the deer one way or the other. If you're driving on a country road at dusk, just go slow and keep an eye on the side of the road. Those deer are gonna wander out into the middle of the road whether they're looking at you or not. 'Cause they are not—they're really lovely, but they're not smart. Just be careful. Don't worry about staring them down.

Hey, I'm glad to report we have multiple disputes lined up for our live shows, including our live show in Port Townsend, Washington—which is sold out! And at least two of the disputes that we've received are grievances against the mayor himself!

*[Jesse laughs.]*

Which is very exciting. We're really gonna get to the bottom of some deep Port Townsend issues, here. If you've submitted cases for our tour, thank you! If you haven't yet submitted cases for our tour, it's not too late! We hear multiple cases per show, and we always feature open court, when you can just yell stuff out. So, if you're coming to the show or you know someone who is, send in your Portland, Oregon disputes about food trucks or whatever. Your Seattle disputes about salmon tossing techniques. If you're in Denver and you've got a dispute about which one of you or your roommates is the mile highest, you can send in a dispute. That's appropriate for Colorado, in a way. If you have San Franciscan disputes about marinating burrito stumps or whether it's it really are it or you're in Los Angeles and you've got disputes about cemeteries or masonic lodges, such as the masonic lodge in a cemetery that we're performing in. Hey! Send them in, won't you? [MaximumFun.org/ijho](https://www.MaximumFun.org/ijho). That's where you always send in all your

disputes, and if you've got disputes that you want us to consider for adjudication live onstage on tour—which is coming right up, by the way—make sure you let us know what city you're submitting for, whether it be Denver, Portland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Seattle, or even Port Townsend. We look forward to them and all of your disputes, right Jesse?

01:03:18 Jesse Host Absolutely! Any dispute, any subject, no case too big or too small. [MaximumFun.org/ijho](http://MaximumFun.org/ijho). We live and die by your submissions! So, [MaximumFun.org/ijho](http://MaximumFun.org/ijho). Tell us your beeves!

*[John snorts a laugh.]*

01:03:38 John Host We'll talk to you next time on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast. Beeves!

01:03:39 Sound Transition Three gavel bangs.

Effect

01:03:42 Sound Transition Cheerful ukulele chord.

Effect

01:03:43 Speaker 1 Guest [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org).

01:03:45 Speaker 2 Guest Comedy and culture.

01:03:46 Speaker 3 Guest Artist owned—

01:03:47 Speaker 4 Guest —audience supported.