

[00:00:00] **Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

[00:00:01] **Jesse Thorn:** Welcome to the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast. I'm Bailiff Jesse Thorn. This week, "Statute of Lamentations". Martha brings the case against her husband, Doug. Doug is a retired high school theatre teacher. His last production was canceled in 2020 due to the pandemic. Three years later, he's still lamenting how good the show would have been. Martha says, it's time to move on. Who's right? Who's wrong? Only one can decide.

(Chairs squeak, followed by heavy footsteps and a door closing.)

Please rise as Judge John Hodgman enters the courtroom and presents an obscure cultural reference.

[00:00:40] **John Hodgman:** "There's a moment right before the second act begins where I would walk out in character and apologize for the show's glorification of reading, setting the dangerous influence of literacy on children. Every night, I'd ask for a show of hands from adults who read books for pleasure, and then I would single out one to berate them publicly. One night, an audience member raised her hand, and I realized it was then Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton. So, I have the honor of mocking one of our most prominent politicians for being, quote, 'a bookworm'."

Bailiff Jesse Thorn, please swear the litigants in.

[00:01:09] **Jesse Thorn:** Martha and Doug, please rise and raise your right hands.

(Chairs squeak.)

Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God or whatever?

[00:01:20] **Martha:** I do.

[00:01:20] **Doug:** I do.

[00:01:21] **Jesse Thorn:** Do you swear to abide by Judge John Hodgman's ruling, despite the fact that he had no part in the landmark School of the Arts's 1998 production of *Little Shop of Horrors*?

[00:01:31] **Martha:** It will be tough, but I do.

[00:01:33] **Doug:** I do.

[00:01:34] **Jesse Thorn:** Judge Hodgman, you may proceed.

[00:01:35] **John Hodgman:** Well, feed me, Seymour. Here we are, Martha and Doug. You may be seated for an immediate summary judgment in one of yours favors.

(Chairs squeak.)

Can either of you name the piece of culture I referenced as I entered this courtroom? Martha, let's start with you. Do you have a guess?

[00:01:50] **Martha:** Wow. I was wracking my brain trying to think of a theatrical piece while Hillary Clinton was Secretary of State, nothing is bobbing to the surface, so I'm gonna take a stab in the dark and say perhaps a memoir by Shirley Jones about a revival of *The Music Man*, while she was playing Marian the librarian.

[00:02:08] **John Hodgman:** Marian the librarian, *The Music Man*. Jesse Thorn, you ever hear of that musical?

[00:02:12] **Jesse Thorn:** Not familiar. No.

[00:02:14] **John Hodgman:** Lemme just make sure that I understand this. You're thinking of a Broadway show, and this case is about a Broadway show. So, you're in the right ballpark. What show is this case about?

[00:02:24] **Martha:** It's about *Matilda*.

[00:02:25] **John Hodgman:** *Matilda the Musical*. Okay. But I'll put in *The Music Man*. Doug, you wanna take a swing at this?

[00:02:32] **Doug:** I have no idea. I don't think it's *Matilda*; I don't remember anything of that from that show. I immediately thought of Olympia Dukakis. I don't know why. But.

[00:02:44] **Jesse Thorn:** I think we're all thinking of Olympia Dukakis most of the time.

(They laugh.)

[00:02:49] **John Hodgman:** Of course, I'm here in the studios of WERU in Orland, Maine, servicing Blue Hill and the area—89.9FM and WERU.org—with our summertime sound mixer and producer, Joel. Joel? Olympia Dukakis?

[00:03:02] **Joel Mann:** No, I think it's *Sound of Music*.

[00:03:04] **John Hodgman:** *Sound of Music* is your guess, Joel. Good guess, Joel. Alright. Here's what I have to say. Martha and Doug, you are both very close, but all guesses are wrong. I led you down that road towards *Matilda*. The quote is about *Matilda*, absolutely, for sure, but it is not a quote from the show *Matilda*. And Doug, your guess with Olympia Dukakis was way on base! If only because Olympia Dukakis, aside from all of the wonderful films and experimental theatre productions she's been in, also is a guest on the TV show *Bored to Death* with me, though I did not share a screen or a bathtub with her, as Zach Galifrinakis did, but also featuring an actor named Matt Harrington. And Matt Harrington was the second Mr. Wormwood in *Matilda the Musical* on Broadway.

(Doug “oh”s.)

And if you remember, at least in the Broadway production and the original London production—(out of the corner of his mouth) which I saw, brag—Mr. Wormwood—that was a brag, Joel.

[00:03:57] **Joel Mann:** *Hamilton*.

[00:03:58] **John Hodgman:** Okay. Mr. Wormwood would come out after the first act and do some crowd work and yell at the audience for liking books, because his position was anti-book.

(Doug gasps as he realizes.)

And I asked Matt Harrington if he had any fond memories of being Mr. Wormwood in *Matilda* on Broadway. And he said this was the memory that he remembered most fondly. And in fact, he got to talk to Hillary Clinton again years later when he was in *Leopoldstadt*—the Tom Stoppard play that just closed on Broadway. She came to see that, came backstage, and he reminded her, “Yeah, I’m the one who yelled at you from the stage.”

And she said, “Hm, I’ve been looking for you.”

(Doug laughs.)

Matt Harrington also said that he tried to corner Bill Clinton to talk to him about UFOs, but he chose not to at that time. Okay. Anyway, let’s get down to this case. And it is a case between you, Martha, and you, Doug. You are a married couple. It says here, married for 35 years.

[00:04:43] **Martha:** Yes, that’s true.

[00:04:44] **John Hodgman:** It says here you are a high school librarian, Martha. And Doug, you are a retired high school film and theatre teacher, both incredibly admirable careers, and at the crux of this particular case. Who brings this case to my court seeking justice? Which one of you?

[00:04:57] **Martha:** I do, your honor. Martha.

[00:04:58] **John Hodgman:** Martha, please step forward and state the nature of the dispute.

[00:05:02] **Martha:** The nature of the dispute surrounds Doug’s final production as a high school theatre teacher. It was *Matilda*, which was scheduled to be performed in the third week of March of 2020. They were in tech week when, if you recall your calendar correctly, all hell broke loose on planet Earth. And schools were closed as a result of covid, so the performances were canceled. That was a very traumatic experience for Doug, rightly so. He had put in a ton of work on the production, and I was very sympathetic to his plight. We are

now three years plus since that event. And I still hear multiple times a week about, (*sadly*) “Oh, if only we had been able to do *Matilda*.” There's a lot—still lots of complaining. “*Matilda* would've been much better than that!”

[00:06:01] **John Hodgman:** (*Laughs.*) What's he talking about in that particular circumstance?

[00:06:04] **Martha:** Oh, it might be a kid singing like on—you know, if we're passing through and seeing a clip on *American Idol* or maybe some dance performance or maybe he sees a set somewhere.

[00:06:14] **John Hodgman:** Could be anything. Could be anything.

(*Martha agrees.*)

You did a great job acting.

[00:06:18] **Martha:** Thank you very much. (*Chuckles.*)

[00:06:19] **Jesse Thorn:** One of those times Jimmy Fallon sings like Neil Young.

(*Martha confirms.*)

[00:06:23] **John Hodgman:** Yeah. For example—*Matilda*. No offense, Jimmy. *Matilda* would've been better than that. Doug's production of *Matilda* probably would be better than that.

[00:06:31] **Doug:** You said it.

[00:06:32] **Martha:** And god forbid we see another high school play. Oy!

[00:06:36] **John Hodgman:** Doug, how did the cancellation happen and how did it make you feel? Tell me about it from your point of view. There you are in tech week.

[00:06:43] **Doug:** Week before tech, and we had everything working. Set was coming along. It was probably one of the more complex things I did when I was at school, and you know, the governor or whoever came on and said—well, it was a whole thing about whether schools and businesses would be closed. And then, things got worse and worse and worse. And I kept thinking they're not gonna close the school. We'll be able to do it. And sure enough, a week before we were to do the show or to have tech week and perform the show on a Thursday, the principal and all the administration, the superintendent, they all came in and said, “We're gonna have to talk to the cast.”

So, I get the cast together, and you know, they told me what was gonna happen. I was devastated. And I got the cast together and told them. We told them what was gonna occur, and they were devastated. I was devastated.

[00:07:39] **John Hodgman:** My impression has always been—and it's pretty much universal—that high school theatre kids tend to be very stoic and unemotional, right?

(They laugh.)

It probably wasn't the worst thing in the world that happened to them. They were probably like, “Mm, it's fine. This is how it goes.”

[00:07:55] **Doug:** *(Laughs.)* Yeah, they sort of sat there for a bit. I guess they were somewhat stoic. Maybe it was more me that was upset about it than the kids were. We did think we might be able to do it in May, but that never happened. So.

[00:08:09] **John Hodgman:** Probably in this particular instance, the truly heartbreaking news that the whole production was canceled may have been offset by the other part of the news, which is school's out. There's no more school.

(Doug laughs.)

Which for about five minutes in the March of 2020 was kind of an exciting prospect until it became clear that it was miserable to not be able to go to school. But Doug, you felt it very keenly, and tell me how you felt inside.

[00:08:35] **Doug:** I felt really sad. I did talk to the superintendent and—you know, hoping and wishing that we would be able to do it at some point. So, yeah, I felt devastated by it.

[00:08:48] **John Hodgman:** Basically, you went to the superintendent of schools saying, “This is all overblown. Masks don't work. It's all a government hoax. *Matilda's* more important than public health. Let's get in there and breathe on each other.”

[00:09:00] **Doug:** *(Laughing.)* Basically, that's a pretty good way of describing it.

[00:09:03] **John Hodgman:** Well, you are passionate. This was your production.

[00:09:05] **Doug:** Yeah, absolutely.

[00:09:06] **John Hodgman:** What were some of the productions that you had done before *Matilda*?

[00:09:10] **Doug:** One that you just spoke of, *Little Shop*, we did. We did have a very large puppet. It was excellent.

[00:09:19] **John Hodgman:** Incredible. I mean, and you taught—how many years did you teach? How many productions did you put up there?

[00:09:24] **Doug:** I came in on it. I had a lot of goofy jobs before that. I've taught about 12 years. So, I would say there at the school that I was, I did ten productions. I did maybe three more at the other high school I was at. And, uh—

[00:09:39] **Martha:** Those are just your musicals.

[00:09:40] **Doug:** Yes, yep. And we did, you know, straight plays. We did a straight play in the fall and the musical in the spring is what most schools do.

[00:09:48] **John Hodgman:** Right now, I wanna focus on the fact that you had done all these productions, all these plays and musicals. Was *Matilda* going to be the best?

[00:09:56] **Doug:** Oh, that's a great question. Um, to me I thought it would be the best. It was—I felt I was gonna have a maybe another year before I retired. I'm thinking this is the musical (*laughs*) that will make me, make my high school career. So, I thought, yes. I thought it would be one of the best.

[00:10:18] **John Hodgman:** And why? Why *Matilda*? Why did you choose it? Why did you think this is the one that's gonna outshine everything?

[00:10:24] **Doug:** Well, I saw it on Broadway. Again, we took a group of kids to see it and I just thought it was excellent. I came home that night, and I remember it was in the—it was cold. It was (*inaudible*) I came in. I was singing one of the songs from it.

[00:10:39] **Jesse Thorn:** (*Singing.*) “Grownups are awful. All grownups are terrible, unless they're perfect angels. I'm every Roald Dahl book.”

(*They laugh.*)

[00:10:49] **John Hodgman:** I am not gonna try to lighten up that Roald Dahl shade. He earned it.

(*They laugh.*)

[00:10:55] **Doug:** So, I thought that this would be a great musical for the kids and a very difficult musical. And so, I went right away and got the rights to it, which took a while, through the school administration, got the rights, and we were ready to go. And once we started working on it, because the tech people were so enthused, it really got—you know, really got me going. I thought it was gonna be fantastic.

[00:11:19] **John Hodgman:** Were you gonna play Ms. Trunchbull, the evil teacher?

[00:11:24] **Doug:** (*Laughs.*) No, we had a really good young man playing Trunchbull. And I taught him everything that I knew, you know, how to play it. So, he was—

[00:11:34] **John Hodgman:** About how to be a cruel teacher?

(*They laugh.*)

[00:11:40] **Doug:** Yes, that's what I did. So, it was—he was excellent.

[00:11:44] **John Hodgman:** So, the rug gets pulled out from under you, and it's three years later, and it's still coming up. You mentioned seeing a child sing on *American Idol*, Martha, as a—might be a *Matilda* regret prompt or maybe there's a piece of paper in the road. Like, what are some of the things that typically produce a groan of regret and what might have been in Doug?

[00:12:10] **Martha:** Well, because Doug went to see the show on Broadway, and because I am a librarian and I frequently go to librarian conferences where there are lots of literary swag, we have *Matilda* artifacts around the house. So, on any given day, he might be triggered by such an artifact. He has a *Matilda* coffee mug that he uses most days of the week, so that can provoke it. He has a pair of *Matilda* socks. That can start it. He has a *Matilda* t-shirt. Or as you say, some—you know—random stimulus might get to him. You know, it could be something entertainment related or maybe a color that he sees. (*Chuckles.*) Something will trigger that memory of *Matilda* and launch the lamentation.

[00:13:00] **John Hodgman:** What's the *Matilda* color?

[00:13:02] **Martha:** Well, on his mug the *Matilda* color—that's a pink mug with purples and blues.

[00:13:09] **John Hodgman:** So, anything in that color range might spark a *Matilda* episode?

(*Martha confirms.*)

Alright. Doug, do you happen to have 200 or more *Matilda* snow globes in your house?

[00:13:20] **Doug:** No, I do not. Although, I wish I did!

[00:13:24] **Martha:** We don't have any.

[00:13:24] **John Hodgman:** I'm not sure that's a good thing. I'm not sure that your relationship with this *Matilda* merch is very healthy.

(*They laugh.*)

Is it still coming to your house or was this all accrued in the runup to the canceled production of *Matilda*?

[00:13:38] **Doug:** It was accrued after the show.

[00:13:42] **John Hodgman:** After the Broadway production that you saw?

[00:13:44] **Doug:** In fact—yes. In fact, I've gone to many librarian conventions, not because I'm a librarian. It's because Martha is. But—

[00:13:54] **John Hodgman:** Yeah. You're not some kind of creep.

[00:13:56] **Doug:** (*Laughs.*) No. And sometimes they would have *Matilda* swag.

[00:14:01] **Martha:** So, the answer to your question, Judge, is it still has the potential to come in. More can come, as long as I'm still working as a librarian.

[00:14:08] **John Hodgman:** And I would imagine that school librarians are pretty hot for *Matilda* because, Joel, you ever see *Matilda*?

[00:14:13] **Joel Mann:** No, I haven't.

[00:14:14] **John Hodgman:** So, it's about this British girl who loves books, and her parents hate books, and she goes to a school where the teacher is really mean, except for one, who's Ms. Honey. She's not a librarian, right?

[00:14:24] **Doug:** That's true. There is a librarian in it, but she's—it's a minor role, but important.

[00:14:29] **Martha:** Just like in a real school.

[00:14:31] **John Hodgman:** Wow. Biting social satire on *Judge John Hodgman the Musical* today. And anyway, and then the girl develops telekinetic powers and gets revenge on all the nasty adults in her life. This musical is very hot for books, really into books. So, I can see why school librarians in particular are into *Matilda*, and so the stuff is still coming into the house.

You know, you can stem that tide, potentially. I'm saying that to both of you, Martha and Doug. You know? I'm not blaming any either one of you for bringing more *Matilda* stuff into the house, but you know, unless you're gonna remount this thing eventually, it might be good to start phasing out the *Matilda* stuff just to be able to go through life without thinking about it too much. You ever think about that? Doug?

[00:15:15] **Doug:** No, I wear the socks from time to time—not now because it's summer, but I'll wear the socks from time to time.

[00:15:22] **Jesse Thorn:** Are they woolen socks?

[00:15:23] **Doug:** No, they're, they're like cotton socks.

[00:15:25] **Jesse Thorn:** You just like to keep the tootsies loose and free during the summer months?

(*They laugh.*)

[00:15:30] **Doug:** I suppose you could—yes, I do! And the mug, I drink coffee out of it every day.

[00:15:36] **John Hodgman:** Doug, I can see you and Martha there in the studio in, I believe, Montclair, New Jersey. Northern New Jersey is where this is all taking place. That is the in medias res of this story, right?

(*They confirm.*)

Since I can see you, I just want to confirm. Can you please confirm by holding up your foot that you are not wearing socks?

[00:15:51] **Doug:** I do have little petty socks or whatever they call it.

[00:15:55] **John Hodgman:** Oh, yeah. Those low-rise socks, they count.

[00:15:57] **Doug:** Yes. Well, I did consider wearing the *Matilda* socks today.

[00:16:03] **Martha:** Yes, he did as me if he should bring them.

[00:16:04] **John Hodgman:** I'm actually a little surprised you're not wearing *Matilda* knee socks pulled up over your calf. What kind of *Matilda* fan are you?

(*They laugh.*)

[00:16:13] **Jesse Thorn:** Let's take a quick recess and hear about this week's *Judge John Hodgman* sponsor. We'll be back in just a moment on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast.

[00:16:21] **Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

[00:16:25] **Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

[00:16:26] **John Hodgman:** So, *Matilda* gets canceled, and then you retire, and then your life in the theatre is over at that point.

[00:16:37] **Doug:** Pretty much. (*Laughs.*) Well, I have—

[00:16:39] **John Hodgman:** Why did you—did you have to retire, or did you want to retire?

[00:16:43] **Doug:** No, we discussed it, and because I did have about three months of Zooming with students, and I could show movies through Zoom, which I did. But trying to do theatre with many of my students was kind of rough with Zoom. So, that summer I decided with Martha—I decided I think it's about time to retire.

I always thought possibly I could get back into community theatre, and I did have in the back of my mind that someday I might be able to do *Matilda*. But that hasn't happened. I haven't—I have designed a set recently, but other than that I've only thought about doing *Matilda*. It was for a show called *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*. And yeah, it was done at a community theatre in Summit, New Jersey.

[00:17:33] **John Hodgman:** You are working at this community theatre. Why don't you try to get a *Matilda* going over there?

[00:17:38] **Doug:** That's a good question, Judge.

[00:17:39] **John Hodgman:** Has Martha ever asked you that question?

[00:17:41] **Doug:** Yes.

[00:17:42] **Martha:** Yes, she has.

[00:17:43] **John Hodgman:** Okay. What's the answer then?

[00:17:45] **Doug:** I think I'm somewhat of a procrastinator. I think I—also, there's not a lot of places where we live where I think I could, you know, get it moving. And it was such a—again, it was such a wonderful experience working with my students that I guess the way I feel is that I don't know how good it could be. I think I would be hearkening back to what was.

[00:18:12] **Martha:** And Doug does have very high standards.

[00:18:14] **John Hodgman:** Well, not only hearkening back to what was, but what didn't happen.

(Doug confirms.)

And Martha mentioned that you have high standards. But Martha, do you think that it—you know Doug probably a little bit better than I do.

(Martha agrees and Doug chuckles.)

Do you think that it's possibly painful for him? Doing *Matilda* again with a new cast would be more pain than relief, emotionally?

[00:18:35] **Martha:** I think it would be more painful only if he couldn't achieve the same caliber of excellence that it seemed that the ill-fated production was achieving. He had a great partnership with an outstanding technical team at the high school, and I think he would be unlikely to find that in a community theatre setting. And in addition to being a bit of a procrastinator—

[00:19:00] **John Hodgman:** You're saying the high school students are better, are better AV technicians than the people at the community theatre?

[00:19:07] **Martha:** Oh, well, no, the technicians—this production, they had full-time tech people at the high school, like professional tech people. So, they were great.

[00:19:14] **John Hodgman:** Adults or kids?

[00:19:15] **Martha:** Adults!

[00:19:16] **John Hodgman:** What kinda high school is this?

[00:19:18] **Martha:** And there were some kids that would help these adults.

[00:19:19] **Jesse Thorn:** I love the idea that it would be full-time kids.

(They laugh.)

That they would pull kids out of high school.

[00:19:26] **Martha:** The kids would love that too!

[00:19:27] **Jesse Thorn:** “Sorry, you're not high school material,” they would say. “However, you could fly in a scrim.”

(They chuckle.)

[00:19:35] **John Hodgman:** Is this a public high school or a private high school that has a—

[00:19:38] **Martha:** It is! No, it's a public high school. Yeah, in an affluent New Jersey suburb.

[00:19:41] **John Hodgman:** It has a full-time—I understand, but you're talking to—

[00:19:46] **Doug:** To be fair, we did have kids running sound and the technical—professional technical people who were there would with them. And—

[00:19:56] **John Hodgman:** They were supervising.

[00:19:57] **Doug:** You know, so that we did have students doing those things. In my previous job at another high school, I did all the tech. So, we taught the students how to build what you needed to put into a set. And I did teach a technical class there, but at the second school, it was really great to have that professional crew to do these shows.

[00:20:21] **John Hodgman:** Are they still there at the high school?

[00:20:24] **Doug:** (*Laughs.*) They are not. They all left. All the tech people that were there have now gone.

[00:20:29] **Martha:** Doug was the linchpin. When he left, it all fell apart.

[00:20:31] **Doug:** No.

[00:20:33] **John Hodgman:** Yes! The answer is yes.

(*Martha agrees.*)

Tell me more about that. I mean, obviously the students graduated and moved on with their lives, presumably. Martha, do you think that the tech crew, like once Doug retired, they were like, “What's the point in being here?”

[00:20:46] **Martha:** Well, from what I understand from Doug, they all have moved on to very interesting jobs still in their field. But I think Doug, wherever he goes, establishes a great rapport with his coworkers. But I think they would all look back on their days as a team together working on these shows as among the highlights of their careers.

[00:21:04] **John Hodgman:** And then Doug just abandoned them all. Decided if not this year, then never. School will never come back.

(*They laugh.*)

I am never—there's no chance that in-person school—there was a time it felt that way! Like, there's no chance anything is gonna be back to normal again. And yet, here I am now, for right or wrong, in the studios of WERU, just spitting in Joel Mann's face as I pass my sentences now.

(*They laugh.*)

[00:21:31] **Martha:** But those factors contributed to Doug's decision to retire. If you take yourself mentally back to August of 2020, we had to have the conversation mid-August. Both of us were getting set to go back into a high school when covid was still raging. We didn't have a vaccine or any of that kind of stuff yet. And we had to make the decision that it didn't make sense for two people, one of whom was of retirement age, to go back into a high school setting.

[00:21:59] **John Hodgman:** Yeah. And for sure, even if you had gone back to school in the fall of 2020, there's no way you could have done *Matilda*. You can't have a theatre show in that circumstance, so I understand that.

[00:22:09] **Jesse Thorn:** Did you think about putting on one of those Zoom tributes to Stephen Sondheim that were popular at the time?

(They laugh.)

[00:22:15] **Doug:** No. But we did—I did get the kids to do some videos that we sent out. They did their songs from *Matilda*.

[00:22:23] **John Hodgman:** What have you been doing in your retirement, aside from drinking your own tears out of your *Matilda* mug?

[00:22:29] **Doug:** When I have the mug in my hand it is wonderful. No, I'm having a great time. I enjoy retirement.

[00:22:35] **John Hodgman:** How do you pass your time? You build a set for the other show. I'm not saying that you have to be busy, because I am married to a high school teacher, and I know that even with summers off, that is an incredibly time-consuming job when you're on. It's very exhausting, and I understand if you're spending your retirement just flat out doing nothing and reading books and farting around or whatever it is you're doing with your time, if you're having a good time, I don't judge it. I'm just curious if you've got anything that you're working on that is preventing you, say, from buying a motorcycle and going around the country to find the members of the old tech crew and all the actors at their various colleges and such, and getting the band back together so that you can finally complete this cycle in your life that has enclosed this wound that is oozing blood into your marriage, obviously. I guess what I'm saying is what are your hobbies?

[00:23:24] **Doug:** *(Laughs.)* Model railroading. I read a lot. But now that you just said that, I do sometimes feel like I wish I was back at school for some reason, just so I could do a final show. *(Laughs.)* You know, so it's very nagging. It nags at me. And you're right about teaching, Judge. It's an incredible, taxing job, as well as being a librarian. So.

[00:23:50] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, model railroading isn't easy.

(They laugh.)

[00:23:54] **John Hodgman:** How big is your set, your model railroad set?

[00:23:57] **Doug:** It's on top of a door.

[00:23:59] **John Hodgman:** One single door?

[00:24:00] **Doug:** Yeah, it's a maybe three feet by eight feet, I guess?

[00:24:03] **Jesse Thorn:** What is depicted or represented in the—?

[00:24:05] **Doug:** It's a farmland in New Jersey. It's basically a rural setting.

[00:24:10] **Jesse Thorn:** Tiny apple picking maybe.

[00:24:11] **Doug:** Pretty much. Yep.

[00:24:13] **Jesse Thorn:** I've been to the farmland in New Jersey. It's beautiful.

(Doug agrees.)

[00:24:15] **John Hodgman:** Yeah. And there's that one railroad that just goes in a circle there.

(They laugh.)

Now, Martha sent in some evidence. Some photographs. You're obviously a very capable builder. Not only do we have a photograph of the model for your proposed stage set for *Matilda*—which looks terrific, and you can check it out at the show page at *Judge John Hodgman* at MaximumFun.org, as well as on our Instagram account, [Instagram.com/judgejohnhodgman](https://www.instagram.com/judgejohnhodgman), but also photos of this dollhouse. Tell me about this dollhouse. What does this have to do with the case, Martha?

[00:24:49] **Martha:** Oh, the dollhouse has been a work—I'm gonna use that term loosely—in production—I'll also use that term loosely—for 34 years.

(John “wow”s.)

It was a gift to me on our first Christmas in the house where we have spent our married life. That was 34 years ago. And it is still incomplete.

[00:25:11] **John Hodgman:** Well, let me say this. Based on these photos—there are two photos. One is of an interior sitting room with two little armchairs and a bird cage. This thing is beautifully appointed.

(Martha agrees.)

And did Doug build this from scratch?

[00:25:28] **Martha:** Well, he built the house. He did not build the furniture pieces. You see the flooring, the floorboards, the wallpaper the electric lights—he put all of that in. And then, he went to the dollhouse shop and he and I—together, I think, we selected these furnishings, and he installed the furnishings.

[00:25:47] **John Hodgman:** I think this room looks terrific, and you obviously have a knack, Doug, for both micro and macro set dressing.

[00:25:59] **Jesse Thorn:** Although, I have to say, Doug, that as I look at this dollhouse, I see a door without an extra tiny New Jersey farmland on it.

(They laugh.)

It's a real disappointment to me.

[00:26:12] **John Hodgman:** And then, it should have an extra, extra tiny little house in it, which inside looks like this house and so on.

(They laugh.)

How does it make you feel, Martha, when you walk by this unfinished dollhouse, this incomplete gift? This house of empty rooms that your husband has failed to furnish for you.

[00:26:34] **Martha:** Well, over the years there have been times where it, you know, did cause a little pang in my heart. Like, you know, maybe he didn't care enough to finish it. But then, I balanced that out with all of the other very wonderful things that Doug is and does for me. And this little lapse is really minuscule in comparison. So, I'm at the point now where if it brings him pleasure to do it, then he can do it on his own time. I've kind of outgrown the interest in the dollhouse myself.

[00:27:02] **Doug:** In my defense—

[00:27:04] **John Hodgman:** There is no defense. You haven't finished it. What is your defense?

[00:27:06] **Doug:** In our house, it's very old and there's no place really to work on it other than, you know, where I've been working on it, which is the dining room. Our basement is a grotto. In fact, the model railroad is in my shed. So, you have a few problems in getting these things done.

[00:27:22] **John Hodgman:** So, Doug, your defense for not finishing the dollhouse is that it's in the dining room? I'm not sure I follow.

[00:27:29] **Doug:** Well, again, some of the stuff that I do is gonna create all sorts of dust and a mess, so I have to work periodically—

[00:27:37] **John Hodgman:** How much mess are you making putting in swinging doors in a dollhouse?

(Doug giggles.)

No! What kind of—? What, are you sweeping up sawdust after you put the swinging doors in?

[00:27:47] **Martha:** Teeny tiny broom!

[00:27:48] **Doug:** Well—

[00:27:49] **John Hodgman:** First, I have to put the straws into the teeny tiny broom. I have to source them, build the broom, then (*makes tiny whooshing sounds*) into a teeny tiny dustpan?

[00:27:58] **Doug:** Well, I have tiny saws that I use. I do have small saws. There's a place that you get saws that I use for my railroad. And—

[00:28:06] **John Hodgman:** Yeah, I think that place is called Small Saws 'R Us.

(They Laugh.)

[00:28:12] **Jesse Thorn:** Doug, this house appears to be fully built. What we're really talking about is purchasing and arranging tiny furniture. Like, can't you just go to TinyFurniture.com and order some tiny furniture and then arrange it?

[00:28:26] **John Hodgman:** I bet Small Saws 'R Us probably can recommend a place!

(They laugh.)

[00:28:30] **Doug:** Actually, it is! It is in New Jersey. It's a place that I get them from.

[00:28:35] **John Hodgman:** First of all, when you say it's in the dining room, is it in the middle of the dining room table?

[00:28:39] **Doug:** It was. Now, it's on the side, this little shelf area, because—again—in our house, we don't have a lot of closets. So, we have a little cabinet that's off to the left, and I've put it there for now, and I will put it back on the table when I start working on it again.

[00:28:56] **John Hodgman:** Obviously, we're on a little bit of a side quest here, but I'm trying to get the sense from both of you—and Martha, maybe you can answer—is the dollhouse itself a nuisance or is what it represents more of a distraction to you, Martha?

[00:29:12] **Martha:** Oh! That's a very interesting question.

[00:29:12] **John Hodgman:** If it's an unfinished project in the middle of a dining room table, then that's sort of annoying, right? 'Cause you can't have people over for dinner or what have you. You put this unfinished dollhouse on display, on a side table in the dining room, then it becomes—I mean, it's pretty novelistic, right? It's like, “Hey, we're gonna have the Waltons over for dinner tonight, and we can dine next to this novelistic representation of where our marriage is at. How you gave me a gift that you never finished.”

(They laugh.)

[00:29:39] **Jesse Thorn:** This is the perfect place to keep your glass menagerie.

[00:29:44] **Martha:** But I think you have hit on something with, you know, what it represents. And I think it is kind of a symbol of the tendency toward procrastination. And maybe that's putting it too gently. And as Doug himself has said, a symbol of the hazards of perfectionism, not being able to ever achieve this level of excellence that you want. So, you just keep putting it off and putting it off. So, it's problematic in both ways. Sort of, you know, physically and emotionally.

[00:30:12] **Doug:** That's true!

[00:30:13] **John Hodgman:** Procrastination tends to be a term that describes not finishing or undertaking a chore or a task because it brings pain or displeasure, like doing your homework—which the theme of displeasure there is self-explanatory. Working on a dollhouse for your wife when you have an affinity for building things and set designing and building things like model railroads, to me it seems like there should not be a pain or displeasure there unless it is an emotional pain or displeasure. Why does working on the dollhouse give you discomfort? Is it perfectionism? Is it a sense that you're never going to get it right?

[00:30:50] **Doug:** Um, oh, that's a good question. I think it's something that's just not a priority, at this point. It was. And I do want to finish it. Not that the railroad was a priority; it's just something I wanted to do, and I always did, and as a kid I had model railroads. So.

[00:31:13] **John Hodgman:** Is the railroad finished?

[00:31:15] **Doug:** It is.

[00:31:16] **John Hodgman:** So, why is the railroad finished and the dollhouse not?

[00:31:18] **Doug:** That's a good question. That's a really good question.

[00:31:23] **John Hodgman:** Mm-hm! I'm waiting for a really good answer!

(They laugh.)

[00:31:27] **Doug:** I guess a model railroad is somewhat more visual, and it moves. It's somewhat like a play or a musical that, you know, you're working on that it's sort of happening. I guess the dollhouse, I always thought I'd finish it by the time I'm, you know, 80. Um, but I don't really have a great answer for that. And it's—I always think that I'm going to finish it.

[00:31:52] **John Hodgman:** I'm gonna try to tie this back into *Matilda*, which is the reason that we're talking here, right? When we talk about *Matilda*, are you sad that it got canceled due to covid, and then you retired, and you couldn't do it? Or are you sad because you are left with an incomplete feeling or lack of closure about the production or your whole career?

[00:32:11] **Doug:** It's an incomplete feeling, but it—

[00:32:13] **John Hodgman:** An incomplete feeling.

[00:32:14] **Jesse Thorn:** Did you feel that your career came to a satisfactory conclusion?

[00:32:19] **Doug:** I did not. But in many ways, I thought that that was the best thing I ever did. Teaching was the best thing I ever did, but I felt that because covid just put an end to everything—and it's not just me. I mean, there's so many other things that were going on. But I felt that other teachers had the opportunity to retire properly, or people had the opportunity to end things or finish things without them being stopped by something that was so horrific. I'm getting too detailed here, but yeah. I feel like I did well in what my career was in the last 12 years. It's just that I wish it ended a little bit better, a finishing point, something that really ended what I was doing and that I felt good about.

[00:33:11] **Martha:** I was gonna say, I think, you know, Doug being a drama teacher—I think his expectation was that he would like to go out with a bang.

(Doug agrees.)

And what happened was he kind of went out with a whimper.

[00:33:21] **John Hodgman:** Mm-hm. And he's not just a drama teacher, he is also a drama king. He's pretty dramatic.

(They laugh and Martha confirms.)

[00:33:29] **Jesse Thorn:** Can I ask you a question, Martha?

(Martha agrees.)

So, the reason that there's a funeral when somebody dies isn't just that they gotta get in the ground somehow. It is a ceremony or a ritual that provides for the living an opportunity to recognize the absence in their life and allow it to be, you know, a fond memory rather than exclusively a loss. Do you think that there is any kind of ritual or ceremony that could give your husband something like that feeling?

[00:34:13] **Martha:** I've wondered about that too, because this is bundled up with not only the loss of the production, but also the loss of his career. Right? His professional life went away at the same time, and often that's marked by, say, a retirement party or something along those lines. You know, maybe we could have a retirement party to sort of put an exclamation point at the end of Doug's career.

[00:34:36] **John Hodgman:** So, that it would be *Doug's Career!*, exclamation point, *the Musical!*

(They laugh and Martha agrees.)

May I ask you a per a personal question, Doug and Martha? Have either of you, either together or separately, been in therapy?

[00:34:50] **Doug:** No.

[00:34:51] **Martha:** I have

[00:34:52] **John Hodgman:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Interesting. Martha, when *Matilda* comes up for Doug, what is your reaction?

[00:34:56] **Martha:** These days, I usually ignore it. Sometimes there might be a physical reaction—like my eyes rolling into the back of my head. But now that we're into this for three years, I don't really give it life.

[00:35:11] **John Hodgman:** Yeah, but when someone does something that annoys you in your marriage—even if it's someone you love very much, and especially if it's someone that you live with—and you don't say anything about it, that doesn't mean that it isn't a problem. That doesn't mean that you don't have feelings about it. For example, when Doug moans and mopes, even though you're not saying anything about it or giving it life, does it make you feel something?

[00:35:32] **Martha:** Yeah, I mean, I find it irritating. It's not the way I work in the world to hang on to things forever and bring them up repeatedly, but it is the way he works in the world. And I know that when he's voicing it, it's going to be short; it's temporary. I know it'll come again, but in that moment, I don't wanna fan those flames and make it something bigger than it needs to be, especially by making it be about me.

[00:35:58] **John Hodgman:** And what would you have me order if I were to rule in your favor? How would I force Doug to look forward rather than what seems to be a fairly ingrained personality trait, which is that he kind of dwells and mopes on the past? Does he dwell and mope on the past in other areas, or just *Matilda*?

[00:36:15] **Martha:** Well, he has a—does have a tendency to mope, but not for this extended period of time. It's usually—there's an end to it. You know, he'll move on to something else. So, this is unusual. I think it could be helpful for him to have a project, to have a plan, to have a deadline for something. So, I don't know if there's anything that you could think of that maybe you could, I don't know, order him to work on with a deadline.

[00:36:42] **John Hodgman:** Mm-hm. Oh yeah. Oh, that's—I'm thinking about that very seriously. Yes, that's right.

[00:36:47] **Jesse Thorn:** Maybe after three months, you could light his door on fire.

(They laugh.)

[00:36:53] **Martha:** Uh, that's, that's a possibility!

[00:36:56] **John Hodgman:** When you moan into your mug, now that you hear what Martha's feelings inside are, how does that make you feel about your behavior?

[00:37:04] **Doug:** It makes me feel like I'm a pest, you know? It's hard to not—I like to express myself her, and I don't always realize that I'm—you know, like, why don't you just keep it to yourself? (*Laughs.*) You know? So... but you know, so I can see what she's saying. And I can be pesty about—we're talking about *Matilda*. I am. I bring it up to friends, even. You know, if we're out, I always bring it up. So—

[00:37:38] **John Hodgman:** Is that true? Like, if you were out with friends, Martha, how does Doug bring it up at the dinner table?

[00:37:43] **Martha:** Oh, it's 100% true. For instance, if we were to have just met you, your honor—as we have—but if we did so in a social setting, usually the idea of, “Well, what do you do? Or what are you retired from?” comes up, and people are often fascinated by the fact that Doug was a high school drama teacher. Once they latch onto that, it's usually within three minutes that the absence of *Matilda* will come up as the topic of conversation.

[00:38:06] **John Hodgman:** The absence of *Matilda*. And are they equally fascinated by that?

[00:38:11] **Doug:** Uh, not so much. Not so much. No.

(*Doug confirms.*)

[00:38:15] **John Hodgman:** Doug, do you want to be over it? I mean, the ruling that you asked for is that you be allowed to continue to mourn. Is this a good feeling for you or would you like to be past it?

[00:38:25] **Doug:** As much as I like the memory, I would love to be past it. I think everything that everyone has said is very true, but sometimes I like to let people know, “Hey, I did this. I did that. I have all these shows that I did, and I have—I like you to know that I did that.”

[00:38:42] **John Hodgman:** Well, this is not a zero-sum game. Yeah. I'm not asking you to give up your memories; I'm just asking if like the feeling of pain around it is something you would like to get beyond. Do I understand that correctly?

[00:38:50] **Doug:** Yes, that's correct. And I'm not quite sure that pain—I think pain might be too strong a word. I think it's—

[00:38:58] **John Hodgman:** (*Interrupting.*) No, it's perfect. It's a perfect word. I gave you the perfect word.

(*They laugh.*)

[00:39:03] **Doug:** But yes. I—

[00:39:05] **John Hodgman:** You feel frustration that it's not as important to Martha or me or your dinner table companions that *Matilda* did not happen—it's not as important to them as it is to you. Is it a feeling of frustration or just a wishing? “I wish it were as important to them.”

[00:39:21] **Doug:** Yeah, I guess it's frustration. I guess it goes back to if people saw the show, then I wouldn't be the—*(laughs)* if we actually did it. I wouldn't be this frustrated about it. So, you know, it's all in my brain, you know? It's all—I saw it up to the point when I was looking at the kids that day and saying, “We're not gonna do it.” So, it all comes back to me that way. But I wouldn't say it's pain so much. It's more it didn't come to fruition that it just in the—it sort of nags at me.

[00:39:50] **John Hodgman:** It's a nagging. It's a nagging feeling.

[00:39:52] **Doug:** A nagging thing, yep.

[00:39:53] **John Hodgman:** Like an itch that you can't scratch.

[00:39:56] **Doug:** Yeah. And I don't know whether I mentioned this before, but when I was Zooming with the kids, I had one meeting with them. They didn't—*(chuckling)* they weren't that interested in doing it.

[00:40:05] **John Hodgman:** Why do you think they weren't as interested in bringing *Matilda* back?

[00:40:09] **Doug:** I think it goes back to what you guys said before. Their minds go to the next thing. You know, it's gonna be the next show next year. We're gonna be able to do it even if we're doing it, you know, with masks. So, I think they go do their own thing, and that's just the way they are. You know, and it's—

[00:40:26] **John Hodgman:** It's like they moved on.

(Doug agrees.)

It's like they moved on like monsters do.

(They laugh.)

Did they wanna do something else? Was there something else in mind? Or just anything but *Matilda*?

[00:40:39] **Doug:** They wanted to do *Clue*. And I said, “That ain't gonna happen.”

(Martha laughs.)

[00:40:43] **John Hodgman:** Wow! Why are you so anti *Clue*? It's not a musical, right? I mean, we're talking about an adaptation of the movie based on the board game?

(Doug laughs.)

I'm asking you. I don't know why you're laughing. I'm asking you a question.

[00:40:56] **Doug:** Yeah, no. I agree with you. That's exactly the reason I said no, we're not doing that. But they went on and did it, so that's fine. You know, and they did whatever they had to do.

[00:41:05] **John Hodgman:** They did what they had to do. *(Building in playful intensity.)* They did what they had to do. I don't resent them. They did what they had to do. If they had to make *Clue*, fine. I have no regrets, no resentments whatsoever! They might want to give up on the greatest production of *Matilda* that ever would've been on the boards in northern Jersey?! That's fine. I'm just gonna be over here with my little saws, grinding a tiny little ax.

(Doug laughs helplessly.)

I've heard everything I need to in order to make my decision. I'm going into my dressing room now. I'll think it over. I'll be back in a moment with my verdict.

(Chairs squeak, followed by heavy footsteps and a door closing.)

[00:41:37] **Jesse Thorn:** Please rise as Judge John Hodgman exits the courtroom.

Oh! Jennifer! Jennifer! Jennifer!

[00:41:44] **Jennifer Marmor:** Yes, Jesse?

[00:41:45] **Jesse Thorn:** What color M&Ms are in his dressing room? Just brown ones, right? Just brown ones?!

[00:41:50] **Jennifer Marmor:** Oh! I thought you wanted the tan ones!

[00:41:51] **Jesse Thorn:** *(Panicking.)* No, no, it said just browns ooones!

[00:41:53] **John Hodgman:** *(Away from his mic, yelling.)* God-or-whatever dammit! Who got this dressing room together for me?!

(They laugh.)

[00:41:59] **Jesse Thorn:** Martha, how are you feeling about your chances?

[00:42:01] **Martha:** Well, I think I am feeling pretty good that there will be a judgment that acknowledges my position. I'm not sure that I'm gonna see a change in the behavior though.

[00:42:12] **Jesse Thorn:** How are you feeling, Doug?

[00:42:13] **Doug:** I feel good about it. I feel good about talking about it, which I haven't really done that much other than to, you know, think about not having it done. So, I think the judge will go to my favor. Yeah, I feel good about it.

[00:42:30] **Jesse Thorn:** We'll see what Judge Hodgman has to say about all this when we come back in just a second.

[00:42:34] **Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

[00:42:38] **Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

[00:42:41] **Jesse Thorn:** The Van Freaks Roadshow is headed your way! That's the most ambitious *Judge John Hodgman* tour in historyyy!

[00:42:50] **John Hodgman:** We're going to Dublin, Republic of Ireland, London, and then London again—with *Jordan, Jesse, Go!*, by the way. That's not even talking about all the cities we're about to hit in the United States, Midwest and East Coast!

[00:43:01] **Jesse Thorn:** Can I see if I can Micro Machines the cities, since it's the Van Freaks Roadshow?

[00:43:05] **John Hodgman:** What would be more van freaky than that?

[00:43:06] **Jesse Thorn:** Lexington, Chicago, Madison, St. Paul, Austin, Atlanta, Durham, Charlottesville, Washington DC, Portland, Boston, and Brooklyn, New York City.

[00:43:14] **John Hodgman:** I wanna—that's fun. I'm gonna do that too. Lexington, Chicago, Madison, St. Paul, Austin, Atlanta, Durham, Charlottesville, Washington DC, Portland, Maine, Boston, Massachusetts, Brooklyn, New York. I got tripped up, 'cause I started adding the states, and that was a mistake.

[00:43:25] **Jesse Thorn:** This really is our biggest tour ever, and we need you not only to come out but to submit your cases at MaximumFun.org/jjho. Aaaaall of the ticket information is at VanFreaksRoadshow.com. We've already booked—we're already booking *Antiques Roadshow* experts on this tour! (*Laughs.*)

[00:43:44] **John Hodgman:** Yeah, yeah. Just to be clear, we're the van freaks, and we're on a roadshow, because we love *Antiques Roadshow*, and we love Mitsubishi Delica Japanese adventure vans. We are currently booking *Antiques Roadshow* appraisers to be on stage. If you have a Mitsubishi Delica and you bring it to the show, I will get in your van. And if you have a case that we hear on stage, then—you know, we'll get to hang out, and you can even, you know, maybe enjoy some of the cheese cubes that they give us backstage or whatever.

[00:44:14] **Jesse Thorn:** If you live in one of those cities, not only should you wrack your mind as to whether you have a problem with anybody, but why not post something on Facebook or Twitter? Jesse and John are looking for people with problems, because I bet that

your like cousin or something that lives in Lexington, Kentucky, or your uncle that lives in Charlottesville, Virginia has a very weird and baroque issue with somebody else that you should be submitting at MaximumFun.org/jjho.

[00:44:43] **John Hodgman:** Yeah, think about your weird dad or your fun uncle, your sibling, your roommate, your mom, your stepmom—whoever's in your life who's doing something wrong whom you love, but you want to have a little fun with them on stage: VanFreaksRoadshow.com. I'm just gonna be very clear here. We have not meaningfully been out on the road like this for a long time. The show is a lot of fun. I dare say that in the past couple of years, we have gained quite a few new listeners who have never, ever, ever been to a *Judge John Hodgman* live show. It is a lot of fun. It is a lot of audience participation. It is also a nice time for young adults to join their parents in a little mutual loving ribbing. We're as clean on stage for the most part as we are here in the studio. So, come on out, join us on the Van Freaks Roadshow by going to VanFreaksRoadshow.com to find a place where we're going. Go get there, and bring us your beefs.

[00:45:43] **Jesse Thorn:** We have stage elements. We have—

[00:45:46] **John Hodgman:** That's right. Songs.

[00:45:47] **Jesse Thorn:** Musical elements. We have costumes.

[00:45:50] **John Hodgman:** Costumes.

[00:45:51] **Jesse Thorn:** We have live cases. We had yelling at—we have yelling at audience members on behalf of other audience members.

(John confirms.)

We have all the things you're looking for in a Broadway smash, but we're bringing it to your hometown.

[00:46:06] **John Hodgman:** Come along with us on the Van Freaks Roadshow! All the tickets, all the details, and of course, the link for submitting your cases is at VanFreaksRoadshow.com. See you out there!

[00:46:17] **Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

[00:46:18] **Jesse Thorn:** Please rise as Judge John Hodgman reenters the courtroom and presents his verdict.

[00:46:23] **John Hodgman:** I'm not coming out.

[00:46:25] **Jesse Thorn:** Judge Hodgman, you—

[00:46:25] **John Hodgman:** *(Interrupting churlishly.)* I'm not coming back!

[00:46:27] **Jesse Thorn:** We need—there's people waiting—

[00:46:28] **John Hodgman:** The M&Ms are wrong! I'm not coming back! The M&Ms are wrong, and the temperature is too cold in here. I'm wearing a sweater, eating the wrong M&Ms, Jesse! How can I work in this environment?

[00:46:40] **Jesse Thorn:** (*Glumly.*) I'm sorry, Judge Hodgman.

[00:46:41] **John Hodgman:** Look, because I'm a professional, I'm gonna come back in. Alright, fine.

[00:46:44] **Jesse Thorn:** Thank you.

[00:46:45] **John Hodgman:** Believe me, you're going to be hearing from my representative.

[00:46:48] **Jesse Thorn:** We have the same representative.

[00:46:51] **John Hodgman:** Yeah, he's gonna be talking to himself.

And scene! You know, I was in my dressing room, and I was thinking to myself about the great career of Olympia Dukakis, and I recalled a little movie she was in called *Moonstruck*, written by John Patrick Shanley. It was a good movie, and everyone should watch it. I feel like people aren't watching *Moonstruck* enough these days. But the point is, I was thinking about Olympia Dukakis, and I think I'm remembering this correctly. Cher's fallen in love with Nicolas Cage, and it's a disaster 'cause she's engaged to Nicolas Cage's older brother, played by Danny Aiello. And she finally confesses to her mom, Olympia Dukakis. "I'm in love."

And Olympia Dukakis says, "Get over it!" That's what Martha wants to yell at you. Get over it. Get over it. Watch that movie. Get over it. And there's part of me that wants to yell at you about that too. Part of me that wants to yell at you about that too. Get over it. But the reality is that mourning and grief take their own time. And it is really challenging to grieve properly for something that is lost when there is no ceremony or, you know, act of putting something to rest, such as a funeral—as Jesse was mentioning. You know, the way you celebrate something coming to an end in the theatre is you put it on stage. You do it, and then you have a cast party, and then you get outta there. Then you get over it. You're over it.

A lot of things that we lost, a lot of time and people and other great losses because of this pandemic, we couldn't properly acknowledge their passing. And that's hard. Obviously, theatre is just a thing. It's a thought. It's a small thing compared to a lot of the other things that were lost. But it's meaningful to you, Doug, and rightly so, because it was something you were very invested in, something you had put a lot of work into. It was coming at the end of a career that you care a lot about and still do. And what makes it even doubly problematic is that a theatre—unlike, you know, film or television or a book—theatre exists in a moment in time. It exists in the moment that is performed onstage. And even if you do the exact same show with the exact same cast the next night, or in your case on March 21st in the matinee 2PM. I have the old poster here! Even if you were to do the exact same performance with the exact same cast, it's not gonna be the same as that night before. And nothing's ever the same

as the final night, the closing night of the show, 7PM March 21st. It never happened at the performing arts center at Redacted-Name regional High School.

(They chuckle.)

There was part of me that thought, “Oh, I got a perfect solution here. He should get that motorcycle and get the gang back together. Not necessarily to remount *Matilda the Musical*, but maybe just do a concert. You know? Maybe get the kids back when they're back from college, visiting their folks or wherever—as much as the cast that will come back, maybe over a school holiday. And book a theatre, just do a reading, a staged reading. The show in concert, as they say in the musical circles. And then, you would have that closure. But then, I learned those kids don't even wanna do that!

(They laugh.)

These creeps have done what you cannot do. They have moved on with their lives, not only to *Clue*, but to other whatever else is in their life! This was a disastrous idea for you to retire, Doug, I have to tell you. When you learned that those kids didn't want to do *Matilda*, it was not time for you to go gently into that goodnight. I realize that it made sense on paper but look at you suffering the loss! I mean, getting through a career and coming to an end—it's not something that I've done, but I know someone who's getting close to it, and you've gone through it, and I've talked to people who've gone through it. It's wildly disorienting. And when you mope around with your *Matilda* mug—I mean, you are grieving that show that you cannot get back. You can never get it back. It would be folly to even try. Even if you were to mount it at the community theatre, I realize now it would be folly to even try. You wouldn't be able to get it back. It's gonna be open-ended for the rest of your life. And when you're moaning around with that mug, you're also moping, you know, that unceremonious—literally unceremonious end to that career, just as your students who are seniors had an unceremonious end to their high school career. They did not have a graduation, you know? But they don't care, 'cause they're young, and they can move forward, and they've got lots ahead of them. Whereas you are just cruising right into retirement, which is a hard enough thing to cope with.

So, my first and very serious sentence—without passing judgment on either of you—is to go to a place of no judgment called therapy and talk this through. You gotta find someone to talk about it. 'Cause I'm in here—you know, I've had a wonderful time talking to you, Doug, and I can tell that you want to talk about this stuff. I'm not a licensed therapist. I'm a fake internet judge.

(They giggle.)

You should speak to a licensed therapist to work through some of these feelings. 'Cause I think that more than any act of a party or a relaunch of the thing or whatever, that's going to help you come to terms with the fact that sometimes there is a—you know, something is lost, and there's no way to honor it properly. And the only thing you have to do is just get over it in time. You know, let that pain subside. Now, I wanna talk to you about procrastination, too. Procrastination is a term that we use, and we kind of sneer at it, right? Like, it's a pedestrian thing that kids do when they don't want to do their homework, or they don't want to do their

chores. People say, “Stop procrastinating!” like it's nothing, like you just turn it off. Right? And I didn't understand how weighty procrastination really is until I heard Lynda Barry, the cartoonist, talk about procrastination. I mean, it destroys you. Why should you put off doing something that you love to do? Why do you put off doing something like finishing a dollhouse when it speaks to all of your pleasures in life? The constructing of little sets, the using of little tools, the expression of love for your wife—whom you clearly do adore. Why can't you finish it? Why are you putting it off?

And the answer is that there is some feeling that is unpleasant when you consider setting down to work at it. The reason that I procrastinate writing, sometimes for years, is the absolute conviction that I have that when I sit down to write, I will not be able to do it. I can't do it anymore. I have no ideas. I will never have another idea. I will never see my way through something. And this has been proven time and time and time and time and time again, when I sit down to write, and I force myself, and I'm uncomfortable, and I don't like the feeling of it, that when I sit down and I start to write, it's fine. Not only is it fine, but it's great. It's actually one of the most pleasurable things I can do in this life, not only because it isn't as hard as I thought it would be. It tends to be fairly easy once you get moving, but also because it is a deep, deep, deep pleasure that far outweighs the superficial pleasure that I get out of reading “Am I the Asshole?” on Reddit. Very superficial pleasure. Can't stop—that I don't procrastinate on. There's no pain going to it.

There's a pain surrounding your memory of *Matilda*, and there's a pain surrounding the finishing of this dollhouse. I am sure of it. And if you explore it with a therapist, I think that you will be able to have a better grasp on what that pain is and how to deal with it. Now, for Lynda Barry, she feels the same anxiety and procrastination around creativity, even though it is the thing that she is the best in the world at, and she loves doing it. When she sits down to draw, she faces that same blank page and is like, “I don't know how I can do it.” And what she does, and I've talked about it on the podcast, again, is to just draw spirals or doodle. Something that has absolutely nothing to do with ideas or creativity. And for whatever reason, the brain locks in and remembers the simple muscle motion of the hands and starts giving feedback that then becomes creativity in the work itself. And then it's easy. There is a measure of forcing yourself to sit down and do it. But what is the equivalent for you when it comes to that dollhouse?

'Cause what you need in your life, Doug, is an opening night. You need a deadline. You said it yourself. If there were a deadline, you probably would do it. You know, when theatre is happening, there is a profound physical transformation. You are stepping out, and the audience is there waiting for you. And it may be terrifying, but the minute you step out onstage, your reptilian brain tells you, “You are going to do this, and it's gonna get done.” And you do it! You need an opening night. You are robbed of that opening night. It nags you to this day. I don't blame you. I don't know that it's fair to continue to bore Martha with your sadness. Go bore a therapist. That's what you pay them for. But you need an opening night. I don't know how to give that to you with *Matilda*. I don't think there is a possibility, but with regard to this dollhouse, I can give you a deadline. It's gotta be done—I don't know, Martha. When has it gotta be done by?

[00:55:47] **Martha:** Well, since it was originally intended as a Christmas present, maybe by this Christmas.

[00:55:52] **John Hodgman:** Christmas. This Christmas. Yep. I would do it—I would get it done by a week before Christmas. You know?

[00:55:59] **Martha:** And then he could have an opening night, because we always host Christmas Eve. And our Christmas Eve could be unveiling of the finished dollhouse.

[00:56:08] **John Hodgman:** Unveiling of the finished dollhouse. I like it! And by the way, you two, I'm gonna put some heat on this. Opening night, I want you to broadcast it on Zoom. I'll be there. I'll be there for the unveiling of the dollhouse.

(They agree.)

I don't know—Jesse, will you be there, yes or no? Maybe.

[00:56:26] **Jesse Thorn:** I don't know. Are there any apples in it for me?

(They laugh.)

[00:56:29] **John Hodgman:** I have a plus one. So, yeah, you can have some tiny apples.

[00:56:33] **Martha:** Okay. We'll do it. Well, I'm committing to it. Are you committing to it?

[00:56:35] **Doug:** Oh, I'm totally committed.

[00:56:37] **John Hodgman:** There we go. This is the sound of a gavel.

[00:56:39] **Sound Effect:** “Feed Me (*Git It*)” from *Little Shop of Horrors*.

Feed me, Seymore!

[00:56:41] **John Hodgman:** Judge John Hodgman rules. That is all.

[00:56:43] **Jesse Thorn:** Please rise as Judge John Hodgman exits the courtroom.

(Chairs squeak, followed by heavy footsteps and a door closing.)

Martha, how are you feeling?

[00:56:53] **Martha:** I feel great. I think the judge did a wonderful job of acknowledging Doug's feelings and coming up with some practical ideas. I hope Doug will take him up on the idea of therapy, and I'm looking forward to the opening night on Christmas Eve of the dollhouse.

[00:57:09] **Jesse Thorn:** Doug, how are you feeling?

[00:57:11] **Doug:** Good. Better! I didn't think I was gonna feel this good at this point, but the judge is a wise person. I'm gonna take his suggestion, and I—as I said before, I like the idea of, you know, getting this done at a specific time. And I think too, if—I have to look through the future and understand that maybe a production of *Matilda* might happen someday, you know. So, I'm very thankful for the judge.

[00:57:37] **Jesse Thorn:** Do you think your door could have like a little hayride and little, tiny apples?

[00:57:45] **Doug:** (*Laughs.*) Absolutely!

[00:57:47] **Jesse Thorn:** Cool.

[00:57:48] **Doug:** Why not?

[00:57:50] **Jesse Thorn:** Doug, Martha, thank you for joining us on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast.

[00:57:53] **Martha:** You're welcome. It was a pleasure.

[00:57:54] **Doug:** Thank you. It was wonderful.

[00:57:55] **Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

[00:57:57] **Jesse Thorn:** Another *Judge John Hodgman* case is in the books. We'll have Swift Justice in just a second. First, our thanks to SkiWalker on Reddit for naming this week's episode, “Statute of Lamentations”. Join the conversation over there at the Maximum Fun subreddit. That's at [MaximumFun.Reddit.com](https://www.reddit.com/r/MaximumFun). We ask for our title suggestions there. Keep an eye out for those. Evidence and photos from the show are on our Instagram account, at [Instagram.com/judgejohnhodgman](https://www.instagram.com/judgejohnhodgman), so you can follow us there. *Judge John Hodgman* was created by Jesse Thorn and John Hodgman. This episode engineered by David Amlen at Sound on Sound Studios in Montclair, New Jersey and Joel Mann at WERU FM in Orland, Maine. Our social media is run by Marie Bardy. Our producer is Jennifer Marmor.

Now, here's Swift Justice. CaseCa1 on the Maximum Fun subreddit says, “I'm a high school English teacher. I teach my students that the Oxford comma is mandatory. One of my students, however, insists it is optional. He takes every possible opportunity to advocate for his false opinion.”

[00:59:18] **John Hodgman:** Well, the Oxford comma, of course—or also known as the serial comma—is when you're listing things and you say like, “I got a bag of chips, comma, an apple, comma, and a soda.” Sometimes that last comma is dropped. So, “I got a bag of chips, comma, an apple and a soda—no comma.” That would be not using the serial comma or the Oxford comma. It was called the Oxford comma because using the Oxford comma when listing items—that last common series of items—is part of the style guide for Oxford University Press, and that's a pretty good university. That said, just because it's used by Oxford University doesn't mean that it is—sorry to say CaseCa1—mandatory. Indeed, it is

not used—it is not part of the style guide for, say, the *New York Times* or the *New York Times Magazine*, where the *Judge John Hodgman* columnette runs every week.

Now, I myself do use the serial comma, because it can clear up some misunderstandings. The misunderstanding that Wikipedia gave for example was particularly good. If you are dedicating your book—and this is Wikipedia's example, you could dedicate your book to “my parents, comma, Ayn Rand, comma, and God.” But if you do not use the Oxford comma and don't put that comma between Ayn Rand and God, it would sound like, “I'm dedicating my book to my parents, Ayn Rand and God.” But very specific.

[01:00:36] **Jesse Thorn:** (*Laughs.*) That's Ted Cruz's campaign book dedication.

[01:00:40] **John Hodgman:** Yeah, exactly. Anyway, the fact of the matter is it is recommended in certain style guides, including *Strunk and White* by good, old E.B. White, resident of Maine. But it is almost never considered to be mandatory, and you can make it mandatory in your classroom CaseCa1. It is the style guide of your classroom, and frankly, I like it. But unfortunately, we are descriptivists, not prescriptivists here. And evidence does not back up the fact that it is mandatory as a worldwide rule. We are creatures who made up language. There is no natural law to it. And unfortunately, as much as it pains me to join your student against you, it is not in the world mandatory.

Hey! We've had talked a lot about the workplace of high schools. A lot of people don't work in a high school! Some people work in an office. Some people are working from home. We're looking for your workplace disputes—disputes about work from home Zoom etiquette. We're talking about break room infractions, shared fridge stealing situations, how casual is too casual for a Friday? Maybe you work in a restaurant. I'd love to hear some disputes between front of house and back of house. Gig workers are also welcome to air their grievances if you drive a DoorDash or Uber or what have you. Let us know what your disputes are with your fellow coworkers, with your bosses, with the world. Just send 'em in, your workplace disputes, to MaximumFun.org/jjho. And that's not the only disputes we want to hear about, right, Jesse?

[01:02:05] **Jesse Thorn:** Wait, hold on. Jennifer is staring daggers at me. I'm pretty worried about this situation.

[01:02:10] **John Hodgman:** Uh-oh!

[01:02:11] **Jesse Thorn:** What are her workplace disputes?

[01:02:14] **John Hodgman:** (*Chuckling.*) Looks to me like she's typing in MaximumFun.org/jjho on her alt account, HighSchoolTeacherJaneDoe.

[01:02:25] **Jesse Thorn:** (*Laughs.*) Send us those workplace disputes. And hey! Any dispute! We'll take any dispute, of course, at MaximumFun.org/jjho. No case is too small. We love to hear what you are beefing about at MaximumFun.org/jjho. We'll talk to you next time on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast.

[01:02:46] **Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

[01:02:48] **John Hodgman:** Hey, it's your Judge, John Hodgman. You'll remember last week, in our episode titled "Diss Bard", I ordered Howie the Bard of the YCC camp up there in Montreal to write and record an apology song for his friend, Mark—whom he had called out in song in front of campers and counselors from three separate camps over 20 years ago.

Howie was very happy to comply and did a wonderful job and offered us lifetime free consultation on matters of Canada's constitutional law, which he is an expert in. But meanwhile, here's the song.

[01:03:24] **Clip:** Howie's apology song, sung by Howie and fully accompanied with a backing track.

The day was filled with all the thrills of Newcomb ball

Hockey was fun, swimming all done

Then it was time to sing our song

And when I sang, "Captain Kinneret, why don't you sit on down"

I failed to think; you didn't share it, as I played the clown

But I see it now

I'm sorry that I hurt your feelings during the festival of sports

I didn't know that you were reeling on the indoor basketball court

It wasn't right, under those halogen lights

So, forgive me, Mark

Forgive me, Mark

(Music ends.)

[01:04:53] **John Hodgman:** Thank you so much, Howie! Thank you so much, Mark. I hope that your camp wounds have healed.

[01:04:59] **Sound Effect:** Cheerful ukulele chord.

[01:05:00] **Speaker 1:** Maximum Fun.

[01:05:01] **Speaker 2:** A worker-owned network.

[01:05:03] **Speaker 3:** Of artist owned shows.

[01:05:04] **Speaker 4:** Supported—

[01:05:05] **Speaker 5:** —directly—

[01:05:06] **Speaker 6:** —by you!