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**Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

**Jesse Thorn:** Welcome to the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast. I'm Bailiff Jesse Thorn. This week, "Reading is Fun-Defendant". Hannah brings the case against her mother, Emily. Emily is part of five different book clubs. Hannah says that's too many book clubs. She worries Emily is wasting her retirement on stressful obligations. But Emily likes to keep herself busy. 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.

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

**John Hodgman:** Hannah and Emily, the sentence of the court you hear is that you are banished from out of our jurisdiction as being women not fit for our society.

Bailiff Jesse Thorn, please swear them in.

**Jesse Thorn:** Hannah and Emily, please rise and raise your right hands. Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God or Whatever?

*(They swear.)*

Do you swear to abide by Judge John Hodgman's ruling, despite the fact that he was too lazy to write a book club guide for his recent books?

**John Hodgman:** Very recent. Very recent books. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Stand by for—

**Jesse Thorn:** Relatively recent books. You know how sometimes there's a book club guide?

**John Hodgman:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Stand by for *Vacationland: The Teacher's Edition*, with guided discussion questions in the back. Did they say yes? They've agreed to the oath of the court?

*(Jesse confirms.)*

So, may I proceed?

*(Jesse confirms.)*

We're all excited here, because I'm sitting in a small, hot room with Jesse Thorn here at MaxFun headquarters in Los Angeles for the first time in a minimum of four years.

*(Jesse confirms.)*

For those of you listening, you can check out the video. We're wearing our outfits.

**Jesse Thorn:** We're wearing our outfits.

**John Hodgman:** And just a quick tour. We have here the big gavel that I promised to bring from New York. I'm going to have to bring this back to New York. And that means I have to check a bag, because I don't think they want me carrying this on.

**Jesse Thorn:** (*Laughs.*) It's a very large gavel.

**John Hodgman:** It's a very large gavel here. Can you see it, Hannah and Emily?

**Hannah:** It is very large.

**John Hodgman:** One of you is going to get the gavel later. (*Thump, thump.*) And then we have the nice MaxFun license plate. That's street legal, right?

**Jesse Thorn:** That came from my Volvo.

**John Hodgman:** And look at our Webby bouncing up and down! This is our 2020 best podcast Webby that we won. We got an award!

(*Jesse confirms.*)

And it's very exciting to be here and joining us from all the way in Copenhagen, Denmark, is Hannah. And Emily, are you in Chicago or Florida?

**Emily:** I'm in Chicago.

**John Hodgman:** It's basically the Denmark of Illinois.

(*Emily agrees.*)

In any case, you may be seated for an immediate summary judgment in one of yours favors. Hannah, Emily, can either of you guess the piece of culture that I referenced as I entered the courtroom? Hannah, what do you—why don't we start with you? What's your guess?

**Hannah:** I'm gonna say it's an outtake from *Book Club 2: The Next Chapter*.

**Jesse Thorn:** I've seen *Book Club 2: The Next Chapter*.

**John Hodgman:** Which book do they read in *Book Club 2*?

**Jesse Thorn:** John, they read the philosophical self-help book, *The Alchemist*. I know that, because I interviewed Mary Steenburgen on *Bullseye*, and I'm still in love with her.

**John Hodgman:** Was she in this room too?

*(Jesse confirms.)*

Woah. I knew I felt a little Steenburgen-y. Oh, wow.

**Jesse Thorn:** Radiant and brilliant. She went downstairs on the elevator, then came back upstairs, knocked on the door, and said, “I just wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed that interview.”

**John Hodgman:** Wow! I'm not going to do that today. Okay. I'm sorry. I mean, I'll tell you, I'm going to—I just don't want to spend that much time in the elevator. So, I'm just going to preset it and say I really had a great time.

**Jesse Thorn:** It's okay. I'd rather spend that time that you would have been complimenting me thinking about the time that Mary Steenburgen complimented me. *(Giggles.)*

**John Hodgman:** Fair enough. In any case—alright, Emily, it's your turn to guess. Hannah, your daughter, guessed *Book Club 2*.

**Emily:** I have no idea.

**John Hodgman:** You have no idea. What is the latest book you read in your book club?

**Emily:** Oh, the last one I read was *The Silent Patient* by Alex Michaelides—

**John Hodgman:** Alright, I'll put that in as your guess. *The Silent Patient* by Alex Michaelides. And Emily, guess what? You're not correct. All guesses are wrong.

**Jesse Thorn:** The book club guide of that book said, “Which of these patients is silent? Discuss.”

**John Hodgman:** *(Laughs.)* Obnoxious. Obnoxious. Don't tell me how to read. That was actually—so, I was thinking about a quote from either *Book Club* or *Book Club 2*, but I realized that was going to be quite on the nose, and Hannah would win the case. So, that's actually—I misquoted, because obviously the person speaking was a historical figure. John Winthrop, the governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the 1600s, was not casting you, Hannah, and you, Emily, out of that community.

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But when passing that sentence, I messed up the quote. The first words were not Hannah and Emily, they were Mrs. Hutchinson, referring specifically to Anne Hutchinson the famous early feminist and advocate for women in the clergy and as well the Antinomian. Jesse, you remember the Antinomian controversy of the Massachusetts Bay Colony?

**Jesse Thorn:** If they were anti gnome, what were they pro? Goblin? *(Laughs.)*

**John Hodgman:** Smurfs. Down with Gnomes, up with Smurfs. Antinomian controversy was Anne Hutchinson—the Puritans believe that you earn salvation through works. And Anne Hutchinson said nay. Probably said nay, I think that's something they said.

**Jesse Thorn:** Probably at the time they said nay, yeah.

**John Hodgman:** You can achieve salvation through faith alone! So, go ahead and sin a little. You can get back—you can get up there to heaven. And John Winthrop was like, “Ew! You got to get out. You got to get out of here.” And she was exiled. Do you know where?

**Jesse Thorn:** Where?

**John Hodgman:** Rhode Island.

**Jesse Thorn:** Oh, man. Just like our friend, Ted Leo.

*(They laugh.)*

**John Hodgman:** Yeah, exactly. In any case, the reason I quoted anything about Anne Hutchinson is that she is also arguably the creator of the first English language book club in that she led—and this is controversial too for the time. Starting enroute in 1634 to the Bay Colony, she started a group for women to read sermons and discuss them, which also made John Winthrop and the male clergy of the Bay Colony, very nervous. Because they didn't want to have women tell them what to do, particularly not Anne Hutchinson. So, off to Rhode Island she went.

In any case, that brings us to this case, which we must now hear, and it is our pleasure to do so. Hannah, I believe you seek justice in this court, correct?

*(Hannah confirms.)*

So, your mom is in five book clubs. You don't think she should be. What do you have against books? Why do you hate reading so much?

**Hannah:** *(Flatly.)* Well, I do hate reading. No, I think the issue for me is that she spends a lot of time complaining about the book clubs and about how much time she spends reading books for the book club when she could be reading books that she actually wants to read.

**John Hodgman:** She complains to you?

**Hannah:** Yes, and my sister and my dad.

**John Hodgman:** Oh, everyone around her. I see. And do an imitation of your mom complaining.

**Hannah:** “Oh, I don't know. I just—I have to read this book for Tuesday, and then I've got another book to read, and then I've got to go to an opera, and I've got a meeting of AARP. And—”

**John Hodgman:** Oh, stop, stop! I can't bear it anymore!

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, this is a nightmare.

**John Hodgman:** (*Shuddering.*) Oh, how do you put up with it, Hannah?

**Hannah:** It's a nightmare, yeah.

**John Hodgman:** Emily, is that an accurate impersonation of you, more or less?

**Emily:** It's pretty accurate, although I tend not to characterize those things as complaints. They're just a list of what's going on in my life at the time.

**John Hodgman:** Are you really in five book clubs?

**Emily:** Well, when I'm in Illinois, that's the maximum. Because—

**John Hodgman:** Because of state law?

(*Emily agrees with a laugh.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** No, because the outdoors are a frozen nightmare!

**Emily:** Well, that's why I'm in Florida when it's cold, usually.

**John Hodgman:** Right, right. Where the law is “never read a book”. That's a little diss on Florida. I know there are lots of literate people in Florida. Come on.

**Emily:** Florida's got its problems.

**John Hodgman:** We all do. One of them's Florida. But the point is, at your peak, you have belonged to five book clubs simultaneously. Break them down for me. What are they? What are the genres? How'd you get into all these book clubs?

**Emily:** Okay. First of all, there's the library here in my little suburb of Chicago. They have a fiction book discussion group, and they have a nonfiction book discussion group. And I'm in both of those, but what I do is I get the list, and if I want to read the book, I do. If I don't want to read it, I don't. And sometimes, I read the book and don't go to the discussion. I mean, you know, it's not a big deal commitment—just that I have to turn the book in on time, and I'd rather finish it than not.

**John Hodgman:** So—but why five clubs? How did that happen?

**Emily:** Well, I'm also in a neighborhood book group, just my neighborhood, that I basically run. And it only meets when I say it's gonna meet, and I pick all the books, and usually I either pick a book that I've already read or a book that I really want to read, so that one's not a big deal. And then my AAUW branch here in Illinois, I'm in a book group with them. So, that's four.

**John Hodgman:** That's three. I heard three. Library?

**Emily:** Two library. Two library.

**John Hodgman:** Oh, two library clubs. Right, fiction, nonfiction. Emily's Book Club, then the AAUW—the American Association of Unaffiliated—

**Jesse Thorn:** (*Mumbling alongside John.*) AAUW—association of underpants workers.

[00:10:00]

**John Hodgman:** Wildcats, right? What is the AAUW, if I may ask?

**Emily:** It's the American Association of University Women.

**John Hodgman:** Wonderful! That's pretty dope! And then five, what's the fifth one?

**Emily:** My AAUW branch in Florida has a book group. (*Chuckles.*)

**John Hodgman:** Is it devoted to dinosaur romance novels?

**Emily:** No, it reads pretty much the same books everybody else does. (*Chuckles.*) There's a lot of overlap.

**John Hodgman:** So, these books—these are all general fiction, nonfiction book clubs, not genre specific.

(*Emily confirms.*)

Now, your favorite has got to be the one you run, right? 'Cause you're in charge.

**Emily:** Actually, that's my least favorite, because it's a lot of work.

**John Hodgman:** Oh! Well, you can fire yourself, you know?

**Emily:** Well, I've been told that, and I only run it when I'm in Illinois. So, that's only four or five months out of the year.

**John Hodgman:** What was your most recent pick for your book club?

**Emily:** I think it was *Lessons in Chemistry*.

**John Hodgman:** I don't know that book.

**Jesse Thorn:** It's a popular book that people like.

**John Hodgman:** The first pick of the Judge John Hodgman Emily Book Club is *Lessons in—* nah, I changed my mind. It's *Vacationland* by John Hodgman, the new teacher's edition.

**Emily:** I have that on my list now, because I looked you guys up. (*Chuckles.*)

**John Hodgman:** Oh, thank you very much! I appreciate that. I love to get a little internet search of my name. I get a little buzz in the back of my neck anytime it happens. Not that often is the answer. So, alright—so, Emily the least favorite book club is the one that you have.

**Jesse Thorn:** What are the challenges of that book club? What do you have to do to get a session going?

**Emily:** Well, I have to send out email to everybody in the group telling them when the meeting is, and then I have to send them out another email to remind them, because they can't remember something for as long as two weeks. And I have to find somebody to host the darn thing, which quite often ends up being me, because even though there are a lot of people in the group, they don't always come. They don't always read the book, and a lot of them refuse to host.

**John Hodgman:** Why don't you cut these losers off?

**Jesse Thorn:** Drop them from the email list.

**John Hodgman:** Yeah, cut them. Cut these people from your life.

**Jesse Thorn:** Sorry, new group chat.

**Emily:** Well, I think that would probably eliminate the whole thing, because we're down to only three people who are willing to host. And since we only meet for four or five months, somebody has to double up, and that usually ends up being me.

**John Hodgman:** There are three people who are willing to host, including you. How many people are in that club though?

**Emily:** Who actually do anything? Maybe eight. Eight or nine.

**John Hodgman:** So, that's at least five people who refuse to host but will attend the club.

**Jesse Thorn:** And then the rest of the people on the list are just garbage people?

**Emily:** Well, there's actually—when I send out the emails, I think there's about 22, because they're all these people saying, “Yeah, I want to join,” but then they never come!

**John Hodgman:** Alright. So, I'm now hearing a complaint in real-time. And I'm gaining sympathy for your point of view, Hannah. Because when I looked at this original brief. I'm like, “Uuh, what standing does Hannah—get out of your mom's business, Hannah. Let your mom do whatever she wants. Why do you care? You're over there in Copenhagen, you know. What's the—? You know, put your nose to your own grindstone or your own—do they do raclette in Copenhagen?”

**Jesse Thorn:** No, but they have a nice store where you can buy generic products with sans serif fonts on them. And there's a lot of cute little toys that are very affordable.

**John Hodgman:** Yeah, but why don't you pay more attention to your Danish modern furniture? You know what I mean? Before you criticize the speck in your mother's eye, take the teak armchair out of your own eye. That's a biblical reference that Anne Hutchinson would really like, I think.

**Jesse Thorn:** Go buy some cool mid-century modernist stereo equipment that I couldn't bring home from a secondhand store, astonishingly affordably.

**John Hodgman:** Yeah. Why don't you eat some delicious open-faced little sandwiches?

**Jesse Thorn:** Oh, those sandwiches are so good! (*Laughs.*)

**John Hodgman:** What are the sandwiches called, Hannah?

**Hannah:** Smørrebrød.

**Emily:** Don't you have to eat them with a knife and fork?

**Jesse Thorn:** It's fine. They're so good. Not a problem.

**John Hodgman:** Yeah. They're not hot dogs, I'll tell you what. Yeah, they're open-faced sandwiches. There are all kinds of things you could be doing in Copenhagen besides what you're doing in Copenhagen for your life, which I hope is interesting and rewarding. Anyway. That was my attitude, Hannah, coming into this small, hot room with my friend, Jesse, to judge you. But now that I hear your mom complain in real-time, I do feel a certain sympathy for your point of view, because clearly, your mom is having trouble with these book clubs. Why do you think your mom is not enjoying her retirement?



**Hannah:** She's always been a very hard worker, and she's always been very dedicated to making a difference and participating in the community, which is something that I admire very much.

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But I think sometimes she sort of internalizes that she has to do a thing and may not always evaluate the amount of reward she's getting out of that thing. So, in addition to the book clubs, she's also the president of at least one organization at the moment.

**John Hodgman:** Emily, when you hear Hannah say that maybe you feel your obligations a little too keenly to the point that you're not able to evaluate whether you're still getting enjoyment out of them, how do you feel about that?

**Emily:** I think there's a lot of truth to that. I think we have to weigh what we do. I mean, some of the things we do because we feel it's making a difference, and I don't want to just be a leech on society. I want to contribute.

**John Hodgman:** That's where you and I differ.

*(They laugh.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** That's basically what I aspire to! I'm like, ugh, I've been thinking too much! I want more hammock time.

**John Hodgman:** Yeah. As I hurtle towards the grave and think about my own impending retirement—just absolutely disappearing into the dark woods of Maine and producing nothing ever again and giving everyone a God-or-Whatever damn break from me. It seems wonderful!

**Jesse Thorn:** I'm like wouldn't it be cool if I had a surround sound system for watching movies?

**John Hodgman:** Yeah. Wouldn't it be great if I could have gotten that stuff from Denmark? You are retired. What was your career?

**Emily:** I had two. For 22 years, I was a computer programmer, but then my husband was transferred out of state. And I started over and got into accounting and went back to school, passed the CPA exam. And I did that for 15 years. And that's why I do volunteer tax returns. I've been doing that for—this is my 10th year.

**John Hodgman:** And you enjoy that? You take pleasure in doing other people's tax returns as a volunteer work? If not pleasure, then satisfaction.

**Jesse Thorn:** That's what they call the greatest gift of all, to do someone else's taxes for them.

**John Hodgman:** Yeah. I mean, that's quite a beautiful thing to do.

**Emily:** You know, sometimes there are some negatives. Some people can be difficult, but most people are lovely.

**John Hodgman:** Who's being difficult when you're doing them the favor of helping them with their taxes?!

**Emily:** You'd be surprised.

**John Hodgman:** What are they complaining about?

**Jesse Thorn:** Taxes?

**John Hodgman:** That they have to pay them?

**Jesse Thorn:** My first guess is going to be taxes, John.

**John Hodgman:** Yeah, that or death.

**Emily:** Well, it was like if they owe money, it's my fault. I did it to them personally, and I can't have done it correctly. (*Chuckles.*) Or you know, it's just like give me a break. You know? It is what it is.

**John Hodgman:** Hannah, are you aware of these deadbeats who are getting your mom to do her taxes, and then they complain about it? Have you heard this story before, Hannah?

**Hannah:** Yes, your honor, and I would like to point out that she also doesn't always get a lunch break, and sometimes she has to stay longer than she thought she would.

**Emily:** Yeah, poor Hannah got—Hannah was in Gainesville during tax filing season, and she ended up almost being late for an interview, because I got stuck and had to stay like an hour late. Because it just turned into a mess, you know. Like, they didn't bring everything. We had to make phone calls to get information. It just dragged on and on.

**Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

**Jesse Thorn:** You're listening to *Judge John Hodgman*. I'm Bailiff Jesse Thorn. Of course, the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast always brought to you by you, the members of [MaximumFun.org](https://MaximumFun.org). Thanks to everybody who's gone to [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join), and you can join them by going to [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join).

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**Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

**John Hodgman:** Hannah, what are you doing in Copenhagen, if I may ask?

**Hannah:** I'm an assistant professor at the University of Copenhagen.

**John Hodgman:** Are you a member of the DAAUW?

**Emily:** She is!

**John Hodgman:** The Danish Association of Underwear Wildcats.

**Jesse Thorn:** Of Underwear Workers.

**Hannah:** That, and also, mom recently conned me into joining the Gainesville branch of the AAUW, because she raised me in a certain way.

*(Jesse cackles.)*

And I also can't say no to things.

**John Hodgman:** Oh! Did she raise you to be unable to say no?

*(Hannah confirms.)*

I mean, that's what you just said. I'm just restating it to clarify and underline it and—yeah.

**Hannah:** And this is something that I'm working on, and this is why I would like to suggest to her that she may want to also consider reevaluating some things.

**Jesse Thorn:** Hannah, do you belong to any organizations in your life or have any demanding hobbies?

**Hannah:** Well, I'm a member of several professional organizations which take up varying amounts of time, including the American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists.

**Jesse Thorn:** Sweet. That rules.

**John Hodgman:** Here we go. Here we go.

**Hannah:** I'm also a member of IBS, which is the International Biogeography Society.

**John Hodgman:** They need to change—they need to change their name right away.

*(Hannah agrees.)*

Let's just not—

**Jesse Thorn:** It really could be the International Society of Biogeography with no problem.

**John Hodgman:** Yeah, there's just—why? Don't they know? That's wild.

**Jesse Thorn:** Some scissors and some paste, and the letterhead has changed.

**Hannah:** Yeah. It's not even that old of an organization, but you know, we did it. We're sticking to it. And then I'm also—well, I don't have to learn Danish anymore. The government said so. So, that's good.

**John Hodgman:** What do you mean the government said you don't have to learn Danish? I'm not up to date on all of my Danish news.

**Hannah:** In order to get permanent residency in Denmark, you have to learn a certain level of Danish, and you need to pass an exam, and you also need to pass like a mini citizenship exam. So, that's been taking up a lot of my time.

**John Hodgman:** But—so, did you pass those tests? Is that why the government is off your back now, or did they loosen the requirements?

**Hannah:** Yeah, they're off my back because I passed the exams, and so now I have all this free time. And I'm like, yes, now I need to do the things that I enjoy doing, and I would like to suggest that mom do the same.

**John Hodgman:** Now that you have experienced free time, you know what it's like, and you want to give the gift of it to your mom through a punitive judgment on a podcast. Got it. I hope your Danish is up to snuff a little bit, because I may ask you to say some things in Danish later, Hannah.

[00:25:00]

*(Hannah affirms in Danish.)*

What was that? Was that a Danish sound? Or just a non—

**Hannah:** It was a Danish sound.

**Jesse Thorn:** That's Danish for go suck a lemon. “Take a long walk off a short pier,” is what that one means.

**John Hodgman:** Either Danish words or a nonverbal expression of exasperation.

So, Hannah, now that you have this extra time to do the things you like to do, what's a hobby that you enjoy?

**Hannah:** Well, I've recently gotten into hula hooping here.

**John Hodgman:** You know, for kids.

**Jesse Thorn:** (*Absolutely giddy.*) Ye-e-e-es! Oh man, this rules!

**John Hodgman:** So, wait a minute, are you telling me that you are literally Hannah, the hula hooping herpetologist of Copenhagen?

**Hannah:** Sadly, I'm an ichthyologist. I need to change.

**John Hodgman:** Oh, you're not a herp? You're an ichth?

**Hannah:** No, I'm an ichth.

**John Hodgman:** You never got into the herps?

**Hannah:** I dabbled in herps, but I've never published in herps, so I can't really call myself a herpetologist. Unfortunately.

**John Hodgman:** Alright, but I'm talking about your passions. Obviously, hula hooping. Also, ichthyology, also anti-herpetology.

**Jesse Thorn:** All I'm saying is hula hooping and ichthyology are natural partners.

**John Hodgman:** Go on.

**Jesse Thorn:** In what context have you seen someone performing hula hoops where there were not at least some snakes and stuff?

**John Hodgman:** Well, those are herps.

**Jesse Thorn:** Those are herps?!

**John Hodgman:** Ichths are fish, right?

*(Hannah confirms.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** Well, what's a turtle?

**John Hodgman:** Herp. Right?

**Jesse Thorn:** Okay. What about a dolphin?

John Hodgman: Ichth. Oh, is it though? Is it mammal?

**Hannah:** Well, so if you call a dolphin an ichth, you can also call a turtle or a snake an ichth.

**John Hodgman:** You can call a turtle or a snake an ichth?

**Hannah:** Yep. We're all fish.

**John Hodgman:** I hear there's no such thing as a fish. That's a famous podcast from England.

**Jesse Thorn:** There we go. Now we're talking about—

**John Hodgman:** Wait a minute. If a turtle—this is worse than “is a hot dog a sandwich”. If a turtle is a—if a snake is a fish, then a hot dog's a sandwich. Explain yourself.

**Hannah:** Now we're going to get into the evolutionary biology stuff. Um—

**John Hodgman:** I'm here for it.

**Jesse Thorn:** Make sure and be clear, because no nerds listen to this podcast.

**Hannah:** It's alright. I've already doxed myself. They'll be able to find me. So, if you consider sharks to be fish—

**John Hodgman:** What else would I consider them to be?

**Hannah:** —and you consider fish to be fish—

**John Hodgman:** And I do.

**Hannah:** —and you consider everything that's related to sharks and fish to be fish—

**John Hodgman:** There I don't, because then I would—like, is Richard Dreyfuss a fish now? He's related to sharks from *Jaws*.

**Jesse Thorn:** What about Kool Keith's famous half-shark, half-alligator man? Half-man, half-shark.

**John Hodgman:** Yeah, exactly. What about King Shark played physically by Steve Agee in the *Suicide Squad* movie? So, you have some more free time. You're learning hula hooping. Any other hobbies that I should know about, Hannah?

**Hannah:** I homebrew beer.

**John Hodgman:** Now, see, couldn't you be a herpetologist? Because then you could be Hannah, the homebrewing, hula hooping herpetologist of Copenhagen. That's a lot of H's. But I guess—

**Hannah:** Yeah. It's time for a rebrand.

**John Hodgman:** I guess we just gotta observe the truth. What kind of beer do you brew? What's your—what are you working on there?

**Jesse Thorn:** And what's your roller derby name?

**Hannah:** I've resisted so far. I've been tempted. (*Chuckles.*) I've mostly been brewing IPAs but also an occasional Saison, because that's a style that's hard to get here.

**Jesse Thorn:** John, IPA is International Phonetic Alphabet.

**John Hodgman:** Right. I'm glad you're brewing IPAs and not IBSSs.

(*They chuckle.*)

But you chose not to go into roller derby, because you realized that your time is not limitless, and you want to focus on the things that you enjoy and maybe not take on too much, which is what you are accusing your mother, Emily, of doing.

(*Hannah confirms.*)

Emily, I have heard you complaining about the book clubs. I mean, the first thing—when I said what are your five book clubs? Which is your favorite? Which is your least favorite? You immediately said, “Well, my least favorite is this one, because all these people don't carry their own weight in the book club. And then lots of the book clubs, I don't even read the book if I don't feel like it.” There wasn't a lot of joy being expressed there.

Do you feel that you are overwhelmed by book clubs? And why can't you shed one or two in order to spend your time a little bit more happily?

**Emily:** I think I am going to have to shed the neighborhood one, because—since I've done it since 2004, maybe I'm done. (*Chuckles.*) Maybe 20 years is enough.

**John Hodgman:** Emily, do you have any other hobbies that you have difficulty making time for?

**Emily:** I like to play bridge. I do a lot of gardening. I'm happiest when I'm digging in the dirt. And I just like going for walks in the nature preserves of beautiful Florida and beautiful Northwest Illinois.

**John Hodgman:** Hannah, your mom is living this wonderful, engaged, vibrant lifestyle. She has many hobbies, which include gardening, university associations—

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—book clubbing, and perhaps her favorite hobby, complaining about her hobbies. What's going wrong? What's the evidence you have that she's suffering more than taking pleasure?

**Hannah:** So, the first is the complaining, for sure. Another symptom of stress that I've noticed is that sometimes, especially after she has led a meeting, she has a migraine and can't do anything for a day.

*(Emily confirms quietly.)*

As somebody who also has migraines from stress, I've learned to avoid that stress, so I don't get migraines.

**John Hodgman:** Emily, do you think that if you wound down a book club or two, that the migraines would be less frequent? Or no?

**Emily:** Well, I really don't get them very much anymore. That's one of the benefits of old age, but she's correct. When I was president of the branch up here in Illinois, it was like clockwork. If I led a meeting on a Tuesday night, I had a migraine on Wednesday. It was like clockwork. But I'm not president of that group anymore.

**John Hodgman:** Hannah, tell me more about the time you went to Gainesville, and you were gonna go to an interview, but you couldn't because your mom was too busy doing someone else's taxes.

**Hannah:** Well, it wasn't an interview. I was meeting with a former boss to talk about projects that we still had ongoing.

**John Hodgman:** Fish projects?

**Hannah:** Butterfly projects.

**John Hodgman:** Come on, Hannah!

**Hannah:** Butterflies are not fish!

**John Hodgman:** Give me a break. Okay. You were going to talk to somebody about a butterfly project. What was the project? Starting cyclones on the other side of the world?

*(They chuckle.)*



**Hannah:** No, I used to also live in Gainesville, and I worked at the University of Florida. And when I moved to Denmark, it was a little bit sudden. And I continued the projects that I had in Florida from Denmark.

**John Hodgman:** But what was the butterfly project itself? What was the project?

**Hannah:** So, it was trying to understand why biodiversity of butterflies is concentrated in some places and not in others. And I was working with a professor at the University of Florida who had a permanent position there, and I was helping them map butterfly distributions.

**John Hodgman:** So, there you were. You were gonna meet with an old boss to talk about butterflies. But you were foiled by your mom's charitable tax work, right? What happened?

**Hannah:** Yes. Yeah. So, I didn't have my own car, and I was visiting my parents in Gainesville for my dad's 70th birthday.

**John Hodgman:** Happy birthday.

**Hannah:** Yep. So, mom left the car with dad and I, and I drove to pick her up. The idea was I was going to pick her up from the library where she was doing her tax work, and I would then drop her off—or she would drop me off at the museum to meet with my boss, and then she would go home.

**John Hodgman:** But she couldn't, because she was embroiled in a dispute with her own pay-nothing client.

*(Hannah confirms.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** She was arguing with a sovereign citizen about whether he had to pay federal taxes, according to the constitution. *(Chuckles.)*

**John Hodgman:** So, you missed your meeting with your old boss.

**Hannah:** I didn't miss it. I was late.

**John Hodgman:** Yeah, but I think safe to say the geographical biodiversity mystery of the butterfly is unsolved, because your mom was doing someone else's taxes.

I think that's fair to say, right?

*(Hannah agrees.)*

And how did that make you feel?

**Hannah:** It came in waves. So, first I was like, well, it's not that big of a deal. So, I sat there doing a crossword on my phone. The weather was nice. Got to enjoy some sunshine and just being out and looking at birds and stuff like that. Then I looked at the time, and it was like 20 minutes before we were supposed to be there. And I'm like, alright, this is still fine. This is still fine. Now it's not fine.

At one point I had to—I went in the library, and I was like, “Uh, can I talk to my mom? We need to figure this out.” Because I either had to leave her there or leave the car keys under a tire and call an Uber or—I was trying to figure out how I was going to get to this meeting. Because I was only going to be in Gainesville for a week, and I had a lot of engagements during that week.

**John Hodgman:** Sure. Very frustrating. The library wouldn't let you see your own mom?

*(Hannah confirms.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** Are you confident this was a library?

**Emily:** Well, you have to understand, they don't let people wander in when there's people's personal tax returns lying out. They limit how many people can wander in off the street and start peering over your shoulder.

[00:35:00]

**John Hodgman:** Oookay, I understand. Is this part of a pattern, Hannah, of your mom giving time and consideration to strangers and non-Hannah people that you wish that she were giving to you?

**Hannah:** I would say in the instances where I am actually there in person, especially if I've flown over an ocean to be there, sometimes I wonder if the priorities are not the ones that I would choose.

**John Hodgman:** When you come visit from Copenhagen, does your mom generally clear her schedule to spend time with you? Or does she keep all the book clubs and everything going?

**Hannah:** She keeps most stuff going. She might skip—I don't know, have you ever skipped band rehearsal because I was in town?

**John & Jesse:** Band rehearsal?!

**Emily:** Yep, I'm in two bands.

**John Hodgman:** Wh—?! Why?! I mean, yes! But—wow!

**Emily:** I love playing my flute.

**Jesse Thorn:** By the way, the first band is like a neighborhood marching band. The second band is Jethro Tull.

*(They laugh.)*

**John Hodgman:** What are the two bands?

**Emily:** Well, there's an organization called New Horizons Band, and they have bands in most of the major cities of the US and Canada and a few other countries. It's for people over 50, primarily who—they were in the band maybe in high school or—you know, and they haven't touched their instrument, and they decide that they want to do it again. So, we get together and we play music. We do a couple of concerts. I'm in a New Horizons band up here in Illinois, and I'm in a New Horizons band down in Gainesville, Florida.

**John Hodgman:** And you're a flautist?

*(Emily confirms.)*

Did you play on André3000's new album?

**Emily:** Uh, no. *(Chuckles.)* But seriously, the only reason I don't—what I do is I find out what Hannah's schedule will be. And if I know she's tied up, I go ahead and do whatever I would have done. If she has free time, I definitely clear my schedule. But the only obligation that I kind of feel I really have to do is this tax thing. And that's only one day a week.

**John Hodgman:** You literally don't have to though. It's all voluntary, right?

**Emily:** Yeah, except, you know, that we schedule all these appointments, and it's based on how many people are there to do them. And...

**John Hodgman:** I understand. I understand. This just—it seems pretty clear that this is just something that happened one time as opposed to something that happens every time.

**Emily:** Well, we could have worked the logistics differently, and it wouldn't have been a problem. It was the only time I ever had to stay late like that. The only time.

**John Hodgman:** Who are the kinds of people that you're volunteering to do tax help for?

**Emily:** We have a pretty broad spectrum, and we have some very elderly people who—I mean, they're really poor. They really are poor. But we also have some people that could well afford to pay to have their taxes done. And—

**John Hodgman:** Ooh. Why don't you just say—why don't you say no to them?

**Emily:** We don't do that. AARP has no restrictions on age or income.

**John Hodgman:** I see. Well, it's very valuable work. I'm sorry that it messed up the butterfly project, but I understand that's just a thing that happened. Do you feel stressed for time, Emily? Do you feel like you can't do everything you need to or want to do?

**Emily:** Sometimes. Yeah. I do like to be busy, but I think sometimes I have overdone it.  
(*Chuckles.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** Hannah, your mom is participating in so many activities. Are you interested in being a part of any of those activities?

**Hannah:** Well, as previously stated, I did join the Gainesville chapter of the American Association of University Women.

**John Hodgman:** What happens at those meetings?

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, are you videoconferencing in from Copenhagen?

**Hannah:** Mostly right now I'm just remotely operating their website.

**John Hodgman:** But as a member, what are your obligations and what do you get out of it?

**Hannah:** So, there are no real obligations per se. I think at this point it's mostly—it's nice for me to know what's going on in the community. I like knowing what they're doing. They do some great advocacy work regarding legislation in the state of Florida, which I'm all for.

**John Hodgman:** Are they working to keep universities in the state of Florida?

(*They chuckle.*)

Well, I really appreciate all of the sort of civic-minded work that you both do, including the hula hooping, because you're setting an example. You're setting an example of hooping.

**Jesse Thorn:** That's a perfect description, John.

**John Hodgman:** When your mom reads a book in her book club that she doesn't like and complains about it, how does that make you feel, Hannah?

[00:40:00]

**Hannah:** Mostly, it just makes me concerned, because she spends so much time on this that she could be doing things that she actually enjoys doing. And like, I understand the impulse to finish a book. I also have a very, very hard time finishing a book.

**John Hodgman:** Mm-hm, mm-hm. Is that why, Emily, you got into the book club world? Because it helps you to finish books, or read books that you might not otherwise read? Or what was the original impulse?

**Emily:** Well, the original impulse is just finding a wider variety of books, because left to my own devices, I might happen upon a book I like, and then I just maybe read another book by the same author. But—

**John Hodgman:** That's a fate worse than death. I mean, what if you did that? What if you just read books you wanted to read on your own?

**Emily:** But I don't find the best books by just floundering on my own. These library book groups have been fabulous introducing me to stuff that I never would have read otherwise.

**John Hodgman:** What are your top recommendations for our audience?

**Emily:** *Lessons in Chemistry*, for sure.

**John Hodgman:** I've heard so much about that book today, Emily! Alright, I'll read it!

**Emily:** There's a book called *River of Doubt*. It's a nonfiction book. There's a period in Teddy Roosevelt's life after he—you know, he attempted to return to the presidency and lost, and so he went and explored a tributary of the Amazon, and it's just—it is such a great book. It's disturbing and upsetting but so interesting. And would I have ever happened on that book on my own? Probably not. But—

**John Hodgman:** That journey to the Amazon that that Theodore Roosevelt took was very notable, Jesse, because he was traveling by a boat that was powered entirely by his own pushups. *The Strenuous Life* was the name of the boat. And I bet he saw a bunch of herps and ichths down there too.

*(They affirm.)*

Hannah, what's wrong with your mom's life? Come on. This is great. What do you care?

**Hannah:** Perfect. I would like to submit that Mom is capable of obtaining direction to find books that she might enjoy. Because my sister, her daughter, is a librarian and manages several book clubs.

**John Hodgman:** Right. And is she also an amateur zeppelin-ist and piccolo player in a prog rock band? And—?

**Hannah:** She mostly does distance swimming and yoga.

**Emily:** Yeah. She's swimming to the moon and back.

**John Hodgman:** Yeah, but I don't know that—I don't know, Hannah, that you've proved harm in this case.

**Hannah:** Aside from the migraines.

**John Hodgman:** Well, but your mom says it doesn't happen anymore. Is she lying?

**Jesse Thorn:** She said it happens less.

**John Hodgman:** It happens less. So, it's still happening, right, Emily?

*(Emily confirms.)*

Is it a price you're willing to pay for all of these different book clubs and other—the hassles of civic engagement?

*(Emily confirms.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** Us migraineurs are born into a life of suffering, *(chuckles)* and if we want to do anything, we just kind of got to eat it.

**Emily:** Yeah, I could get a migraine just by looking at the legislation pending in the Florida legislature right now. I was just in Tallahassee advocating for four bills and against one. And I couldn't even get an appointment with the legislator. I had to meet with their aides, even though I'd been emailing for over a month. And they'd never heard of these bills, because they were just five out of—or six out of 1,700.

**John Hodgman:** You know, Jesse Thorn, I feel like a real lazy jerk right now.

*(Jesse affirms.)*

I have never lobbied for a piece of legislation in my life.

**Emily:** Well, neither have I. It's just my first.

**John Hodgman:** I don't belong—well, okay, but I wasn't planning to, let me put it that way. Ever. I mean, other than doing some—I don't know, like phone banking, but I've never gone to the state capitol to.

**Jesse Thorn:** I used to work at the mayor's office in San Francisco, but I just operated the autopen on proclamations.

*(John laughs.)*

And I mostly did that to make novelty proclamations for my friends!

**John Hodgman:** What better use is there for government than that?

Emily, does any of Hannah's critique resonate with you—that you are perhaps overcommitted or that your enjoyment of these hobbies and pastimes and civic obligations sometimes is overwhelmed by the responsibility and the annoyance?

**Emily:** Oh yeah. It can be stressful, and I had a whole bunch of stuff all come at the same time.

[00:45:00]

**John Hodgman:** Hannah, you know your mom better than I do. If I were to rule in your favor, what would you have me order that she cut out of her life?

**Hannah:** I would suggest that you rule she drop two book clubs, and I am willing to make a concession that if she still wants to use book clubs as a mode of discovery and discussion and social connection, that we can start a family book club with her and me and my sister.

**John Hodgman:** You want to do a family book club with your two daughters, Emily?

**Emily:** I think it would be fabulous!

**John Hodgman:** (*Surprised.*) Oh! Okay.

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, some people love their children, John.

**John Hodgman:** Emily, Hannah requests that you drop two book clubs and maybe add a family book club. And Hannah, you don't want me to cut out anything else? One of the bands? No, flouting on Sundays?

**Hannah:** I think the bands are something that she actually does enjoy doing, and she doesn't complain about them. So, she can still do those. And I'm not—I do not want you to rule that she does not complain. Because I think it's nice that she feels that she can express herself.

**John Hodgman:** Emily, as you talk about a lot of your hobbies—including the book clubs—you're vice president of the UAW—the UAW—no, whatever.

**Jesse Thorn:** A&W, 'amburgers and wootbeer.

(*They chuckle.*)

**John Hodgman:** You're vice president of the AAUW. You lead discussions at the at the library for your book clubs over there. Your home neighborhood book club, where only three people—you being one of them—is willing to host. You're obviously an important organizer of the entire affair. Why is it important to you to be the boss of these things?

**Emily:** Oh, I don't want to be the boss.

**John Hodgman:** And yet you are! So how does this happen?

**Emily:** I think because by and large people don't want to have to run stuff. They would rather be a participant than a leader.

**John Hodgman:** Some are born book club leaders. Some achieve book club leaders, some have it thrust upon them.

**Jesse Thorn:** Just imagine how many book clubs Teddy Roosevelt was president of.

**John Hodgman:** Just imagine how many book clubs—how many books Teddy Roosevelt would pile on his chest to strengthen his lungs as he slept.

Emily, it says here that if I were to rule in your favor, that you'd like me to rule that Hannah and her sister, quote, “tone down the crap-giving”, end quote. Do your daughters give you crap?

**Emily:** Um, yeah. Hannah's usually a little more gentle. Franny's a little bit more pointed. (*Chuckles.*) And the thing is that they call it complaining. (*Sighs.*) I guess I don't really see it as complaining. It's like this is what's going on in my life. I'm not really shading it one way or the other. I'm just saying, “Oh, I was up till two o'clock in the morning, because I needed to finish a book in time for the discussion this morning.” And they'll say, oh, that's complaining. And I'm like, no, I was having a ball! I wouldn't have stayed up till two o'clock in the morning to finish the book if I didn't want to finish the book. (*Laughs.*)

**John Hodgman:** Right. So why do you take it as complaining, Hannah, if your mom is asserting that she's having a ball?

**Hannah:** It doesn't always sound that way.

**John Hodgman:** Hm. You're saying that she's not a reliable narrator of her own life?

**Hannah:** It's one of these things where maybe in the moment it feels like it sounds more negative than in retrospect. Because it's very convenient to forget exactly how upset you are or how stressed out you are when you're doing something.

**John Hodgman:** Yeah, but it's her life. She can decide how to spend her own life.

(*Hannah agrees.*)

Right? Let me ask you this, is this causing you harm in the sense that—we once had a couple on the podcast or we discussed their case where one spouse loved to read and read aloud real estate listings in the neighborhood, just because they were fascinated with all the houses in the neighborhood. And the other spouse, it drove them a little bananas and made them



anxious, because they felt like spouse A was insisting that they move soon or buy a new house.

**Jesse Thorn:** Wait, was this case between me and my wife?

*(They giggle.)*

**John Hodgman:** It might've been actually. I mean, I've heard it a couple of times to be honest. And it's just like some people's fun is actually another person's anxiety. And I'm wondering if, you know, it might be a situation where your mom's like, "Hey, I stayed up till 2AM reading—" What was the chemistry book that I'm supposed to read again, Emily?

**Emily:** *Lessons in Chemistry.*

**John Hodgman:** "*Lessons in Chemistry* last night. Oh, I could barely wake up this morning cause I was reading all night." And she's saying like isn't this fun? And you're feeling like is this a problem that I need to solve for you, Mom? Is that what's going on here?

**Hannah:** It's possible that might also be part of it. Yes.

**John Hodgman:** What form of crap does your sister Franny give your mom, if you're the delicate one, Hannah?

[00:50:00]

**Hannah:** I think she, instead of saying maybe you need to reevaluate the value you're getting out of some of the things that people don't appreciate you doing, Franny would say, "Why are you still doing that? Stop doing it."

**John Hodgman:** Right, blunt. Blunt. Alright. I think I've heard everything I need to in order to make my decision. I'm going to go in my chambers and think it over. I'll be back in a moment with my verdict.

**Jesse Thorn:** Please rise as Judge John Hodgman exits the courtroom.

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

Hannah, how are you feeling about your chances in the case?

**Hannah:** I'm not feeling terribly good, because I know there is settled law in this court that kids need to not meddle with what their parents want to do. And I may not have made a strong enough point for why participating in all of these things is harmful. On the other hand, she's in too many book clubs.

**Jesse Thorn:** If your sister Franny were here right now, what would she say to you?

**Hannah:** Quit being so nice.

**Jesse Thorn:** (*Laughs.*) Classic librarian move. Emily, how are you feeling about your chances?

**Emily:** I'm kind of hoping that I lose, because I like Hannah's idea of a family book group. It would give me a chance to spend some time with my kids, and if Franny picks the books, it's gonna be great.

**Jesse Thorn:** What if you pick the books?

**Emily:** Still great, but maybe not as great. (*Laughs.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** You know what I bet you would pick? Just guessing here. *Vacationland* by John Hodgman.

**Emily:** There you go!

(*They laugh.*)

I think as an homage to what we're doing today, that should be our first book.

**Jesse Thorn:** We'll see what Judge Hodgman has to say about all this when we come back in just a moment.

**Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

**Promo:**

**Music:** Playful, quirky music.

**John-Luke Roberts:** *Sound Heap with John-Luke Roberts* is a real podcast made up of fake podcasts, like *If You Had a Cupboard in Your Lower Back, What Would You Keep in It?*

**Speaker 1:** So, I'm gonna say mugs.

**Speaker 2:** A little yogurt and a spoon.

**Speaker 3:** A small handkerchief that was given to me by my grandmother on her deathbed.

**Speaker 4:** Maybe some spare honey?

**Speaker 5:** (*Seriously.*) I'd keep batteries in it. I'd pretend to be a toy.

**Speaker 6:** If I had a cupboard in my lower back, I'd probably fill it with spines.

**John-Luke Roberts:** *If You Had a Cupboard in Your Lower Back, What Would You Keep in It?* doesn't exist. We made it up for *Sound Heap with John-Luke Roberts*, an award-winning comedy podcast from Maximum Fun made up of hundreds of stupid podcasts. Listen and subscribe to *Sound Heap with John-Luke Roberts*, now!

*(Music ends.)*

**Promo:**

**Music:** Relaxed, lo-fi synth.

**Brea Grant:** Oh darling, why won't you accept my love?

**Mallory O'Meara:** My dear, even though you are a duke, I could never love you. You... you... borrowed a book from me and never returned it!

**Brea:** *(Gasp!)* Save yourself from this terrible fate by listening to *Reading Glasses*.

**Mallory:** We'll help you get those borrowed books back and solve all your other reader problems.

**Brea:** *Reading Glasses*, every Thursday on Maximum Fun.

*(Music fades out.)*

**Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

**Jesse Thorn:** It's the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast. I'm Bailiff Jesse Thorn. Judge Hodgman, you're headed out on the water with our friend, Jonathan Coulton!

**John Hodgman:** I am. It's been five years at least since I was on the Jonathan Coulton cruise. I'm so excited to be returning.

**Jesse Thorn:** Does your Scrabble offer still stand?

**John Hodgman:** It does, yes. If you go—if you haven't yet booked, go to [JoCoCruise.com](http://JoCoCruise.com) and use code “hodgman24”—the numbers 2, 4, and my name—“hodgman24” at checkout. And I will be alerted that you did this. And if you wish, as a thank you, I will play Scrabble with you in the crow's nest one evening, or at the time of your convenience, on the Jonathan Coulton cruise. And if you don't want to play Scrabble with me and just want to hang out on the cruise, that's fine. I'll be around to say hello. Obviously, lots and lots of entertainment. I might be sneaking on stage for a thing or two, but it's just a wonderful vibe. And I hope that you will join us. Go to [JoCoCruise.com](http://JoCoCruise.com) and check out what the code “hodgman24”.

**Jesse Thorn:** I want to say something, John. When we were on tour, which we were recently.

*(John confirms.)*

Did a lot of meet and greets.

**John Hodgman:** Meets and greets.

**Jesse Thorn:** Love to meet and greet. A lot of folks told me that they started listening to *Judge John Hodgman*, because they heard me talk about it on *Jordan, Jesse, Go!*.

**John Hodgman:** Oh, that's a wonderful podcast!

**Jesse Thorn:** There were also some people who told me they started listening to *Jordan, Jesse, Go!* because they heard me on *Judge John Hodgman*. So, if you are listening now, you would like to hear just a straight comedy podcast—

**John Hodgman:** Straight up comedy.

**Jesse Thorn:** No content. Just comedy.

**John Hodgman:** Pure nonsense. Swear words.

**Jesse Thorn:** Lots of profanity, a lot of positive vibes.

**John Hodgman:** Vibes.

**Jesse Thorn:** *Jordan, Jesse, Go!*, go give it a listen! And if you're already a listener, you know, review it in your Apple podcast and so forth. But go try *Jordan, Jesse, Go!*. I think you might like it.

**John Hodgman:** It's really a lot of fun.

**Jesse Thorn:** Okay. We'll be back in just a second on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast.

**Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

[00:55:00]

**Jesse Thorn:** Please rise as Judge John Hodgman reenters the courtroom and presents his verdict.

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

**John Hodgman:** Well, first of all—Emily, Hannah, Jesse—I feel like a real lazy dope. Like, I mean, come on. I've never read *Lessons in Chemistry*. I've never helped an impoverished person do their taxes. I've never studied an ichth or a herp. I've never completed one hoop of a hula hoop, even! I certainly don't—I mean, I was a clarinetist for a time, but I'm not playing in two bands. I'm not helping get legislation passed. I mean, I just applaud both of you, and I guess Franny too.

*(Jesse laughs.)*

I mean, I don't know, Franny's just swimming. Like, that's—

**Jesse Thorn:** Well, and library-ing.

**John Hodgman:** Oh, right, I'm not a librarian.

**Jesse Thorn:** John, if we insult librarians, we're out of a job!

*(They chuckle.)*

That's our whole audience base.

**John Hodgman:** Yeah, you get a pass if you're a librarian. You can go and do some sport of personal perfection, like swimming or whatever. But like I just really applaud both of you for living such full and interesting lives. And I really appreciate the amount of thought you, Emily, put into having hobbies and pastimes in your retirement that give back to your community in some form or another. I think that's really, really valuable and something that I think not a lot of people necessarily think about when they retire. They think about, “Well, now it's me time!” But in fact, there's so much help and wisdom that you can offer to people who are coming up.

I mean, this is what we're supposed to be doing as I get older. I'm supposed to be getting out of the way and making room for younger people who can benefit to some degree. So, that's why I'm telling everyone here listening to the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast, I'm giving you all \$100,000. Check your Venmo right now! It should be coming through at this moment.

*(Chuckles.)* Oh, I only wish I could. I mean, the greatest—one of the greatest gifts in life is, if it's possible, is to be generous. Whether—you know, whether with stuff or with your time, and I really value the amount of time that you give to other people. But I do have concern about how you seem to devalue the time that you are giving yourself. Like, you are doing things that you enjoy, right? Like flauting. As we were wrapping up our conversation before I went into my chambers, I did feel like you were talking about those things that you simply enjoy as being somehow less worthy than the things you do for other people. And to a degree, that's true. Do you know what I mean?

Like, playing a flute in a band is just something that gives you pleasure. Which you deserve, by the way. But it is distinctively different than helping a poor person do their taxes, which is a real gift. You can balance these things, but they're equally worthy of your time. Where I think your formula has broken down to a degree is that that maybe you equate giving of your time as necessarily automatically being a virtue, when in fact—when it means organizing a book club for, you know, 12 people, six of whom won't even host the book club in their own home, that's a waste of your time. I'm sorry to be mean to the list of friends that Hannah is going to provide me with—the so-called book club friends. But I—it's coming through the internet now, I'm sure. Right, Hannah?

(Hannah confirms.)

Yeah. I want you to name names. And I want you to share those names with your mom, because this is an area where I do feel like Hannah was able—and you were able to circle for yourself—there's a measure of frustration with the people who aren't carrying their weight in the book club. And doing it for them is not necessarily doing it for society, do you know what I mean? You're just carrying the burden of mental labor for some people who can't be bothered to do it themselves. And that's no fun. That's no fun. It's hard to know what's fun, right? It's like there's stuff that we feel we should be doing. There's stuff that we feel we've always gotten enjoyment from, so we're going to continue it.

But there's lots of times when the fun that we're having isn't any fun at all, or we've moved into a place of our lives where it's like, “Yeah, you know what? It's not fun for me to go out to a bar every night at 2AM. It's more fun for me to sit at home and watch *All Creatures Great and Small* and fall asleep at 9:15.” You know, our lives go through changes. And we think about—sometimes we think about the things that we should do a little bit more than the things we want to do. And it's really important, I think, no matter what age you are, to sit with your decisions and tune in to what's really making you happy.

[01:00:00]

At any given moment, you can do any number of things. And sometimes you're doing things that you think make you happy, but they don't really. That maybe it's time to move on from those things. Or maybe there's a list of people in the neighborhood that it's now time to cut out of your life completely. (*Laughs.*) Or at least or at least think about whether it's worthwhile to continue carrying the bucket for them when it may be time for you to read *Vacationland* by John Hodgman and just have a good time. It's very readable.

**Jesse Thorn:** It's a fun book.

**John Hodgman:** And it is absolutely true that, you know, you're not causing anyone harm—other than that one time when Hannah missed her butterfly project appointment, which frankly probably has changed the fate of the entire geo climate, because of the—they didn't get the butterflies right. But beyond that, it seems to be an isolated incident. So, I'm loathe to interfere with the things that make you happy, but I am not loathe to order you to really, really think about which of these things make you happy and which of them you can let go—without consideration as to their social import—because it does sound to me that you're a little overextended.

The fact that you said you kind of wished that I would order a family book group, to me, gives me leave to find in Hannah's favor in this limited circumstance and say it is time for you to drop two book groups out of your current portfolio of five. I highly recommend that you drop the neighborhood book group with all the deadbeats in it. Just let that go by the wayside and let them host it for a while. I will order you to take up another book group, however, which is the family book group that Hannah suggested. And whether or not it is Hannah or Franny picking the books and leading the discussion, you are not allowed to be in charge of it. You have enough executive duties in your other areas of your life that this is going to be just pure passenger book grouping. You're going to get the treatment that you've

afforded all of your book group deadbeats who won't host a thing. Now you're going to get to be one of them. You're just going to get to coast through this thing.

And the whole point of this book group, Hannah, will be to read books like *Vacationland* that are readable, easy, no big deal—not trying to make yourself better, just trying to enjoy some time reading and spending time with friends. And I hope that that will help you get your schedule organized, Emily, in such a way that you're not staying up until two o'clock in the morning unless you really want to. But I will say that that if you are going to talk about your many obligations and so forth, you have to think about reframing it when talking to Hannah and Franny and saying, “I stayed up ‘til 2AM last night, and it was awesome.” Because complaining about stuff, whether or not you really intended to, does tend to have a corrosive impact on the people around you.

Okay, so that's my ruling. Cut out two book clubs. One family book club starting with *Vacationland*. Second book will be *Medallion Status*. Third book will be *SkyMaul: Happy Crap You Get From a Plane* by Kasper Hauser. And just keep it going from there. Light reading for a good time. This is the sound of a gavel.

**Clip:**

**Music:** Playful, jazzy music.

**Sharon (Book Club):** We started this book club to stimulate our minds!

**Vivian:** From what I hear, this book is quite stimulating.

*(Musical stinger.)*

**John Hodgman:** Judge John Hodgman rules that is all.

**Jesse Thorn:** Please rise as Judge John Hodgman exits the courtroom.

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

Hannah, how are you feeling about this ruling?

**Hannah:** I am very satisfied, and I look forward to reading *Vacationland*.

**Jesse Thorn:** What about *SkyMaul: Happy Crap You Can Buy from a Plane*?

**Hannah:** Also, that. That's been on my list for a while.

**Jesse Thorn:** Everybody needs to have a quick discussion of Banana-ganizers versus Bandana-ganizers.

(They laugh.)

Emily, how are you feeling?

**Emily:** I'm feeling great, and I will take your suggestion that perhaps how I frame what's going on in my life a little more—with a little more positive spin, so it doesn't sound so much like I'm complaining.

**Jesse Thorn:** Well, Emily, Hannah, thank you so much for joining us on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast.

**Hannah:** Thank you.

**Emily:** This was fun. Thank you.

**Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

**Jesse Thorn:** Another *Judge John Hodgman* case is in the books. We'll have Swift Justice in just a second. First, our thanks to Redditor u/CABridges for naming this week's episode “Reading is Fun-Defendant”.

**John Hodgman:** Fun-Defendant. But reading is fundamental!

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah. Fun-defendant.

**John Hodgman:** But I also, I have to give credit to someone else on the Reddit, u/DrColossusofRhodes, for suggesting as the title, “Another Case is On the Books”. I liked it. Anyway, thanks Dr. Colossus of Rhodes.

[01:05:00]

**Jesse Thorn:** Dr. Colossus of Rhodes, also a classic Reddit username and a longtime MaxFun reddit poster.

**John Hodgman:** We have fun over there on that MaxFun Reddit!

**Jesse Thorn:** Join the conversation on the Maximum Fun subreddit. That's [MaximumFun.Reddit.com](https://www.reddit.com/r/MaximumFun). That's where we ask for those title suggestions. Evidence and photos from the show are posted on our Instagram account, at [Instagram.com/judgejohnhodgman](https://www.instagram.com/judgejohnhodgman). Make sure to follow us there. Video from this episode is available on the *Judge John Hodgman* YouTube page. Search for *Judge John Hodgman* on YouTube and you will find it, or just follow the link in the episode description or at [MaximumFun.org](https://www.MaximumFun.org). Thank you this week to CMDM on Apple Podcasts for giving *Judge John Hodgman* a five-star rating.

**John Hodgman:** What?



**Jesse Thorn:** They said, “I love petty, so obviously I love this podcast.” (*Laughs.*)

**John Hodgman:** It is—it gets pretty petty.

**Jesse Thorn:** It's a pretty fair characterization of our disputes.

**John Hodgman:** And we often talk about race car driver Richard Petty. That's who that is, right?

**Jesse Thorn:** That’s absolutely who Richard Petty is. Yeah. if you're listening to us on Apple Podcasts, do rate and review us there. That helps new listeners find the program. *Judge John Hodgman* was created by Jesse Thorn and John Hodgman. This episode, engineered by Jason Luke at dcBelle in Copenhagen, Denmark, and by Julien Haida in Downers Grove, Illinois. Our thanks this week to Valerie Moffat, who helped us set up our video equipment.

**John Hodgman:** Thank you, Val!

**Jesse Thorn:** And to Daniel Speer, who edited our video. The podcast is edited by A.J. McKeon. Jennifer Marmor is our producer. Now, Swift Justice!

**John Hodgman:** Team Judge John Hodgman, best in the biz. Yeah.

**Jesse Thorn:** Exactly. Thank you for your support, audience, for making it possible. Now, Swift Justice, where we answer small disputes with quick judgment.

Jennifer asks us on the *Judge John Hodgman* Facebook page—that's [Facebook.com/judgejohnhodgman](https://www.facebook.com/judgejohnhodgman).

**John Hodgman:** Is it Jennifer Marmor?

**Jesse Thorn:** I don't think it's Jennifer Marmor. I think it's a different Jennifer.

“My husband thinks it's gross when I butter my peanut butter and jelly sandwich. I call it Double Butter Delight.” (*Cackles.*)

**John Hodgman:** I'll say this—

**Jesse Thorn:** It's not an argument against her husband; it's just a great name for the sandwich.

**John Hodgman:** Butter and jam. Even though I don't like sweet stuff, butter and jam, that's a very special taste. Butter and jelly is really good.

**Jesse Thorn:** John, the policeman hates it when I steal jewelry. I call it sparkle time!

*(They laugh.)*

**John Hodgman:** I have to say, everyone likes what they like. Double Butter is the name of the sandwich?

**Jesse Thorn:** A Double Butter Delight.

**John Hodgman:** A Double Butter Delight is absolutely a Double Butter Delight for Jennifer. It is absolutely a Double Butter Disgust for me to think about.

*(Jesse laughs and agrees.)*

So, I mean, Jennifer's partner has the right to find it disgusting, but they can't say anything about it, because it's their God-or-Whatever damn Double Butter Delight. Gross. I say gross, though. It's gross.

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah. we're always looking for disputes. There was a lot of club talk in this week's episode.

**John Hodgman:** Yeah, people belong to a lot of clubs, and I think clubs, organizations, societies, secret societies—they can be fertile grounds for disputes.

**Jesse Thorn:** I want to hear some Kiwanis beef.

**John Hodgman:** Yeah, if you're in the Odd Fellows and someone's taking your favorite chair in the lodge room. You can let us know. If you've got—

**Jesse Thorn:** If you don't think that person really is gonna be a farmer in the future!

**John Hodgman:** Exactly. 4H? Maybe someone wants 5H! In any case, give us your club disputes. Go to [MaximumFun.org/jjho](http://MaximumFun.org/jjho). Book clubs, LARPing clubs. Go ahead and go into the past, like if you got into—if you were in the Drama Society at Brookline High School and you got into a beef with somebody, go ahead and bring it up. I'll probably remember.

Send them all into [MaximumFun.org/jjho](http://MaximumFun.org/jjho). That's where we get them. That's where we look for them. That's where we need them.

**Jesse Thorn:** And let's be frank, John. Local improv teams.

**John Hodgman:** Oh, right! Yes!

**Jesse Thorn:** We want to hear all your disputes! [MaximumFun.org/jjho](http://MaximumFun.org/jjho), whether club-related or otherwise. We'll talk to you next time on the *Judge John Hodgman* Podcast.

**Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

**Transition:** Cheerful ukulele chord.

**Speaker 1:** Maximum Fun.

**Speaker 2:** A worker-owned network.

**Speaker 3:** Of artist owned shows.

**Speaker 4:** Supported—

**Speaker 5:** —directly—

**Speaker 6:** —by you!