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**Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

**Jesse Thorn:** It's the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast. I am Bailiff Jesse Thorn. With me, Judge John Hodgman. And this week's episode was recorded live in Washington, DC.

**John Hodgman:** What an incredible night we had in our nation's capital. It was such a fun show, such an incredible audience. The disputes were amazing, including one about an extremely creepy baby portrait. (*Chuckles.*) Check out the socials to see a picture of it. Plus we had two tremendous friends of the court on stage with us. That's right! Linda Holmes and your occasional guest bailiff, Jean Grae.

Now, Linda and Jean have something in common. They're friends of the court. We love them so much. They're brilliant geniuses, but they also have something specific in common.

They both have a book coming out this year. In fact, in the next few months. Linda's newest novel is called *Back After This*, and it comes out on February 25th. And Jean's collection of personal essays is called *In My Remaining Years*, and it comes out March 18th.

I have read an advanced copy of both books, and they're both incredible. So, you should go ahead and pre-order them right now, wherever you get your books. Why not try your local bookseller, or [Bookshop.org](http://Bookshop.org), or Books Are Magic, or go ahead and put it on a hold in your local library. Support these incredible geniuses who came to our stage. Now—

**Jesse Thorn:** Let's go to the stage at Sixth & I, in Washington, DC.

**Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

**Jesse Thorn:** People of Washington, DC! You asked us for live justice, and we are here to deliver it. The court of Judge John Hodgman is now in session.

(*Cheers and applause.*)

(*John bangs his gavel.*)

Let's bring out our first case. Please welcome to the stage Lauren and Jeff.

**John Hodgman:** Lauren and Jeff.

**Jesse Thorn:** Jeff is a civil engineer. His wife, Lauren, works in the Library of Congress and does cosplay in her spare time. Some time ago, Jeff gave his wife, Lauren, a backseat driver's license as a joke, but now he wants to revoke it!

(*Laughter.*)

Judge Hodgman, you may proceed.

**John Hodgman:** Lauren and Jeff, welcome to the courtroom. Lauren—cosplay, you say? Now, I'm wondering, are you actually a librarian, or is that just your *Judge John Hodgman* fan cosplay?

*(Laughter.)*

**Lauren:** So, I am actually a librarian, but I work for the copyright office as a librarian.

*(Scattered cheers.)*

So, it's a little niche.

**John Hodgman:** That's a wild “woo” from the audience for the concept of copyright.

*(Laughter and a single cheer.)*

In the parlance of Richard Scarry, what do you do all day?

**Lauren:** My normal work is to bother publishers and tell them that they have not sent in their required copies that they are supposed to be sending in. And making lists of books from publishers—books and other things, movies, DVDs.

**John Hodgman:** And if publishers are not compliant in sending in the required copies of their books for the Library of Congress, are you authorized to get into some like Lara Croft cosplay and go sneak into Penguin Random House and get what you need?

*(Laughter.)*

**Lauren:** We wished we could.

**John Hodgman:** I understand you can't tell your secrets. That's fine.

**Jesse Thorn:** Are you authorized to send Woody Woodpecker cartoons directly to VHS companies that sell in drugstores?

*(Laughter.)*

**Lauren:** No, we just send nasty letters.

**John Hodgman:** Well, Lauren, you seek justice in this fake court, is that correct?

*(Lauren confirms.)*

What is the nature of the justice you seek? What is a backseat driver's license?

**Lauren:** Well, it's a license that is—well, I mean, it's kind of a fake driver's license. But it says “backseat driver's license” on it. And it allows you to pester the person that's driving.

**John Hodgman:** And Jeff.

**Jeff:** Yes. Hi.

**John Hodgman:** Hello. Welcome to the show.

You gave Lauren a backseat driver's license. Where did you find a backseat driver's license to give? Did you make it yourself, or is it something you bought?

**Jeff:** No, I either got it when I was in middle school at a garage sale.

*(Laughter.)*

Or—I gotta think back to that. Or just after graduating high school, my friends and I went down to Florida and stopped at South of the Border on the way. It's a very giant junk store. All sorts of junk. And I probably saw it there and thought, “This is stupid, let me get it.”

**John Hodgman:** So, either middle school or high school?

*(Jeff confirms.)*

And you are an adult now, shall we say?

**Jeff:** Yes! Yes. Well—yeah.

**Jesse Thorn:** John, the point here is that no matter when and where he got it, he got it in 1962.

*(Laughter.)*

**John Hodgman:** So, when you were in middle school or high school, you were at a garage sale or a junk shop, and you found this. And you looked at it and you go, “Hmm, someday I shall be married.” And you put it in your pocket to save for a rainy day?

*(Jeff confirms.)*

And you ended up giving this keepsake to your beloved Lauren. Why?

**Jeff:** It was probably like five or six years ago. We were just trying to clean up the house, get rid of clutter.

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I saw it and handed it to her and laughed.

**John Hodgman:** Is she a backseat driver by nature?

**Jeff:** Um, occasionally.

**John Hodgman:** What kind—how does she backseat drive? Give me a specific example.

**Jeff:** Sometimes if I drive a little aggressively, she'll note it.

*(Laughter.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** Don't pretend to be reasonable, sir!

*(Laughter.)*

You're under fake oath.

**Jeff:** So, yeah. Yeah, sometimes if—I drive defensively—usually it's when there's somebody driving—

**John Hodgman:** When you say you drive defensively, does that mean that you drive on top of other cars?

**Jeff:** No, no, no! You know, you look ahead. You look two/three cars ahead. You see what's going on, who's next to you, who's behind you, who's in front of you. And usually if there's somebody in the left lane driving at the speed limit or below, that happens a lot in Virginia and the DC area. I will see—

**John Hodgman:** Noooo, Jeff, don't say what you're going to say. If you see someone in the left lane, and they're driving the speed limit or a little under, what do you do?

**Jeff:** Well, see if it's—because there isn't traffic in front of them...

*(Laughter.)*

**John Hodgman:** Yees?

**Jeff:** And they're not the cause of it, or if they just feel like driving whatever speed they want, I will drive—

**John Hodgman:** If they're parking—if they're camping in the left lane, what do you do, Jeff?

**Jeff:** I will get a little bit closer to them.

*(Laughter.)*

**John Hodgman:** Mm-hm, mm-hm.

**Jesse Thorn:** And this is—just to clarify, this is what you call driving defensively?

*(Laughter.)*

Because you're seeing that there's no one up ahead of them?

*(Jeff confirms.)*

Uh-huh.

**John Hodgman:** And do you flash your headlights at them? *(Beat.)*

*(Laughter.)*

I remind you; you're under fake oath.

**Jeff:** Maybe once or twice, but it's like every few years it happens. 'Cause most people will realize that they're driving too slow, and then get over. And then let, you know, me and 50 cars behind me pass them, because they wanted to go the speed limit.

**John Hodgman:** Oh, don't get me wrong, Jeff. They're monsters.

*(Laughter.)*

I understand.

**Jeff:** Right. But I don't flash the beams, honk my horn, or drive—you know, veer over or try to—

**John Hodgman:** You don't flash your beams unless you do.

**Jeff:** Unless I absolutely have to.

**Lauren:** Not... anymore.

**John Hodgman:** Right. Well, alright, so—

**Jeff:** But it's been a while. It's been a long time since I've done that.

**John Hodgman:** Are you a backseat driver, Lauren? I mean, did he hand you this card randomly, or is there something behind it?

**Lauren:** Um, there might be a little bit behind it. I try not to do it too much. Like, it really—it has to be something that's really bothering me. Like, there was that one time when he did flash his high beams, and I was like, “You cannot do that. I do not want to be married to that person. Do not do that anymore!”

But yeah, it's mostly like—you know, when he gets—what did you say? Slightly tailgating, that one time. You know, the slight tailgating, I don't like that.

**John Hodgman:** Okay. Is there anything else that Jeff does as a driver that you don't like that you'd like to get me to yell at him about now?

**Lauren:** Well, sometimes it's after the slight tailgating, he'll like speed around the person, and then like cut back over into that lane. I'm like, “Oh god, please don't do that.”

**John Hodgman:** Oh, you'll pass them on the right and then—I see. Alright. Alright. Jeff, did you know that we were going to get into this today?

*(Jeff confirms.)*

Okay, good.

**Jesse Thorn:** He's just talking about defensive driving here, John.

**John Hodgman:** Lauren, since we have—

**Jesse Thorn:** Ten-and-two, pass on the right.

*(Laughter.)*

**John Hodgman:** Let them know you're angry. Since we have you pulled over here, may I please see your backseat driver's license and registration?

**Lauren:** Yeah, so this is—I do concede this is a problem. I cannot find it.

*(Gasps from the audience.)*

We moved a couple years ago, and I have been looking everywhere for it. I don't know where it went.

**John Hodgman:** So, you don't—so, you've lost your backseat driving license?

**Lauren:** So, I—yeah, I have lost it.

**John Hodgman:** Jeff, you have a countersuit that you want to offer?

**Jeff:** Oh, yes.

**John Hodgman:** What is that?

**Jeff:** Well, first, you know, I told her she didn't have the license. She can't claim to have it; possession's 9/10ths of the law. But the countersuit is—

**John Hodgman:** In other words, because she doesn't have her backseat driver's license that you gave her—this prank thing that you got at South of the Border in 1962—she is no longer entitled to give you her opinions of your driving.

**Jeff:** Correct. Or evoke, saying, “Well, you gave it to me.”

**John Hodgman:** Is that something that you used to do when you had the backseat driver's license? You would say, “Well, I'm entitled to, because I'm a licensed backseat driver.”

**Lauren:** Yes, I have said that a few times.

*(Laughter.)*

Because I feel I'm officially licensed.

**John Hodgman:** Right. But now you've lost it.

**Lauren:** You know, just because you lose a driver's license doesn't mean you're not still licensed. You just need to get a replacement somehow.

**John Hodgman:** Yeah, that's true. You just have to go reapply at the Backseat DMV.

**Lauren:** Yes.

*(Laughter.)*

It's a little trickier for backseat drivers.

**John Hodgman:** You can do a mail-in version as well.

Jeff, so what is your countersuit then?

**Jeff:** Several years ago, Lauren tore her Achilles tendon, had surgery, months of physical therapy. And in that time I drove her everywhere. Drove her to work, drove her to the doctor, you know. And in that time she said, you know, “Thank you so much, I really appreciate it.”

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You know, “Once I get better, I’ll be driving more to make up for it.”

**John Hodgman:** Mm-hm. And that hasn't happened?

**Jeff:** Has not really happened at all. So.

**John Hodgman:** Do you not like to drive, Lauren?

**Lauren:** Yeah, I don't really like driving that much.

**John Hodgman:** If you were driving, you wouldn't have to worry about Jeff's antics on the road.

**Lauren:** Yeah, but then sometimes then he becomes a backseat driver and complains about me driving.

**John Hodgman:** What does Lauren do wrong on the road, Jeff?

**Jeff:** It's mainly when she speeds—

**John Hodgman:** Doesn't flip enough people off?

**Jeff:** Yeah, well, it's mainly when she exceeds the speed in residential areas. You know?

*(Laughter.)*

Highways is fine. You know, if she goes—like, five over is fine. But if she's going like ten over in a residential area, that's when I'll mention, “Hey, you might want to slow down a little.” And that's about it, you know. And that's about it.

**John Hodgman:** How do you feel when Jeff critiques you in this way?

**Lauren:** Yyyeah, I get a little annoyed.

**John Hodgman:** Who's the better driver, Lauren?

**Lauren:** Eh, I think Jeff's probably a little better. Although he does tend to be a little more aggressive.

**John Hodgman:** Is there any other things that he's done that you complain about?

**Lauren:** In general?



*(Laughter.)*

**John Hodgman:** I'll allow it. That wasn't my line of questioning, but we're here.

**Jesse Thorn:** Bear in mind it's a 90-minute program.

**Lauren:** *(Chuckles.)* You know, I don't want to take up the whole night. I feel like—there's always something.

**John Hodgman:** So, what would you have me rule if I were to rule in your favor, Lauren?

**Lauren:** That I be allowed to be a backseat driver, even though I cannot currently find my license.

**John Hodgman:** Lauren, have you ever investigated getting a replacement backseat driver's license? I mean—?

**Lauren:** I have not, because I kind of feel like it's something that you should be given. Like, I feel weird buying one for myself.

**John Hodgman:** Okay, fair enough. Jeff, what would you have me rule if I were to rule in your favor?

**Jeff:** To state that, you know, since she can't produce a license, that she has no grounds to say she's a backseat driver, legally. And also, to remember her promise and to drive more. Not even—you know, not even 50/50, like 25% of the time.

**John Hodgman:** Just do a little bit more driving.

**Jeff:** Just a little bit more. And not nag me or complain whenever I suggest it.

**John Hodgman:** Alright, uhh, I think I've heard enough to make my decision. And here it is.

You both do some terrible things as drivers.

*(Laughter. Lauren agrees.)*

I mean, people who park in the left lane or camp—how we say, camp in the left lane—people who drive the speed limit or under the speed limit in the passing lane, are annoying. And they are doing the wrong thing, because you're just supposed to be passing in that lane. And a lot of times you get the sense—right?—intuitively, that they think they're doing the world a service by blocking traffic, so that no one can drive five or ten miles over the speed limit.

And that is when you, Jeff, decide to become a vigilante, and come up behind them and risk their lives and yours by getting too close, passing on the right. And also signaling to them that they're—what do we call them? Jagoffs?

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, I believe that's correct. Technical term.

**John Hodgman:** And all of this ultimately, you know, causes—increases the possibility of a dangerous interaction on the road at high speed that you don't want to do. That's not a good thing either.

Lauren, don't speed in residential areas. I mean, where do you gotta go so fast that you might touch a person or an animal or a vehicle with your car, and all of a sudden your life is on a completely different path that's ruined forever? Don't do that.

What I'm ordering is for Jeff, you, to go and find a new backseat driver's license for Lauren. And Lauren, you find one for Jeff.

*(Raucous laughter.)*

Because you both have to keep each other honest and be better drivers. This is the sound of a gavel. *(Bangs his gavel.)* Judge John Hodgman rules. That is all.

**Jesse Thorn:** Thank you, Lauren and Jeff.

**Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

*(ADVERTISEMENT)*

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**Jesse Thorn:** Judge Hodgman, we do have some more justice to dispense during our Swift Justice segment, but I think we could use some help in doing it.

**John Hodgman:** Yes, we have a very special guest tonight. One of our favorite guests that we've ever had in DC, and she's back again. Jesse, would you please introduce her?

**Jesse Thorn:** She is a bestselling novelist, most recently of the book *Flying Solo*. She has another book right around the corner. She's one of the hosts of NPR's *Pop Culture Happy Hour*. Please welcome our friend, Linda Holmes.

**John Hodgman:** Linda Holmes to the stage, please.

*(Cheers and applause.)*

Listen to that roar of applause!

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, I just want to say, Linda is wearing a Bryce Harper jersey right now.

*(Boos from the crowd.)*

**Linda Holmes:** Hey! Listen! We all want the same thing. We want Atlanta to lose, so we don't have to watch that chant all through the postseason.

*(Scattered applause.)*

We're all friends here.

**John Hodgman:** Forging connections through coalition. Thank you very much Linda; that's how change happens.

**Jesse Thorn:** In a *Judge John Hodgman* courtroom, Linda Holmes gets a sports superstar level reception. There's like full, "AAAH! LINDA!"

**John Hodgman:** Linda, we're so glad to have you back. You've been a guest on the show a number of times. Not long ago, you coined a term that has taken on real life in the *Judge John Hodgman* universe, which is "little weirdsies". Would you define what little weirdsies are?

**Linda Holmes:** So, I think of a little weirdsie as a small thing that is important to you that you ask the people in your life to accommodate, without any need for a logical justification for it.

**John Hodgman:** Even if they find it a little weird. Like, what would be a good example of that?

**Linda Holmes:** So, one of mine is I have hated loud noises ever since I was a little kid. And if someone in a room that I am in is playing with an inflated balloon—

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**John Hodgman:** A common occurrence.

**Linda Holmes:** It happens at parties!

**John Hodgman:** Yeah, you hang around a lot of children's birthday parties and clown conventions?

**Linda Holmes:** It happens. It happens.

**John Hodgman:** I understand. I understand.

**Linda Holmes:** If somebody has a balloon, I cannot relax. I am like this. (*A tense pause.*)

Because I'm waiting for the balloon to pop.

**John Hodgman:** You're waiting for it to pop.

**Linda Holmes:** And if they make that squeaky noise on the balloon—

(*John imitates the sound.*)

(*Linda makes an unhappy noise.*)

So, that's one of mine.

**John Hodgman:** Yeah. No. No, no, no, no, no. So, that's one of yours, and you ask people to put the balloon away?

**Linda Holmes:** Yes, I would say, “Oh, can you not play with the balloon? It's really—it makes me nervous.”

**John Hodgman:** Can little weirdsies go too far?

**Linda Holmes:** I mean, tailgating is not one.

(*Laughter.*)

But sure. I mean, I think when you're—

**John Hodgman:** I mean, I think that's actually a perfect example.

**Linda Holmes:** I think if it imposes on other people in any way, then you have to go into a different calculus where you're thinking about how important it is to you and what does it impose on other people.

**John Hodgman:** Oh yeah. I mean, I am very sympathetic to Jeff, who we were just talking to. Because, you know, it is a little weirdsie for me, obviously, if someone's going slow in the passing lane. That bothers me irrationally. Like, we're all going to get there eventually. But it creates anger, and that's why I think it's the best.

**Linda Holmes:** And I think that's like so common that it's probably like—I don't even know if I would use that term on it, because sooo many people feel that way about slow drivers.

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, you're pretty basic. Yeah.

**John Hodgman:** Jesse, didn't we ask some listeners?

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, we have some cases where we have to find that line between harmless little weirdsie and “should actually consider the feelings of others”.

*(Laughter.)*

And we were hoping that you could help us with that, Linda.

Here is one from Andrea. She says, “I chew on Tic-Tacs as soon as they're in my mouth. I just love to crunch them. But I've been told this is weird.”

**John Hodgman:** Yeeeah! Chewing—who likes to chew on Tic-Tacs?

**Linda Holmes:** Yeah! So—yeah.

**John Hodgman:** Wow. Well, applaud. This is an audience...

*(They applaud.)*

**Linda Holmes:** No, go ahead.

**John Hodgman:** Now wait, I appreciate your Pavlovian applause. But I mean, applaud if you like to chew on Tic-Tacs.

*(A moderate round of applause.)*

Oh, okay. Jesse, Linda, do either of you have any special way or unusual way you like to eat common foods?

**Linda Holmes:** I don't think so. I mean, I also chew Tic-Tacs, if that counts.

**John Hodgman:** Yeah, I mean, I think so. Jesse, do you?

**Jesse Thorn:** Uh, well, I mean—speaking as a burrito fascist—I believe that burritos should only be eaten from end-to-end. They should not be eaten anywhere in the middle. And I also believe that the whole burrito should not be consumed in one sitting, but rather half to 2/3rds of it should be consumed. Then the rest wrapped up, and put in the refrigerator for tomorrow—which is called “marinating the stump”.

**John Hodgman:** *(Laughs.)* I cannot wait ‘til later on this tour when I find a burrito. First of all, it's going to offend you so much, because it's not going to be a California burrito. And second—

**Jesse Thorn:** Well, first of all, I'm from San Francisco, and California burritos are from San Diego.

**John Hodgman:** Excuse me, I apologize.

*(Laughter.)*

Already getting under your little weirdsie skin. I can't wait to eat a burrito in front of you.

**Jesse Thorn:** *(Chuckling.)* Have fun eating a bunch of French fries in your burrito, John. Honestly, they're pretty good. I had one in San Diego recently.

**John Hodgman:** I can't wait. I can't wait to eat a burrito in front of you, like just a big old corn on the cob.

*(Laughter.)*

Linda, you love to chew Tic-Tacs.

**Linda Holmes:** I do.

**John Hodgman:** What do you think about this as a little weirdsie?

**Linda Holmes:** Well, I would never launch you back into the world of "is a food this thing or that thing?". *(Laughs.)*

**John Hodgman:** Uhhh, I'd love to be in that room.

**Linda Holmes:** But! This is really the question of whether Tic-Tacs are candy or a mint. Right?

Because if they're a mint, then you would tend to like suck on them and let them dissolve, because the idea is to freshen up your breath and everything. But if they're a candy, you would just stuff them into your face and chew.

And I think the fact that—I think that peppermint Tic-Tacs, I would think of as more of a mint, but like orange Tic-Tacs?

**John Hodgman:** You mean the best Tic-Tacs?

**Linda Holmes:** Yes! Those are my favorites.

**Jesse Thorn:** The only Tic-Tacs, yes.

*(Scattered cheers.)*

**Linda Holmes:** Orange Tic-Tacs are just a little orange candy! And so, when you put some orange Tic-Tacs in your mouth—I mean one at a time, obviously, which is the only way I would ever do it—it seems normal to chew a candy.

**Jesse Thorn:** I would argue that orange Tic-Tacs are more—even more specifically, they're a candy with a plausible deniability.

*(Laughter.)*

**Linda Holmes:** That's very true. That's very true.

**Jesse Thorn:** You can whip them out, and you're like, “Who me? I'm just eating some mints.”

*(Laughter.)*

**Linda Holmes:** I wasn't going to say this, but I'm going to say a short version of it now. When I was in high school, I did that liquid diet thing that Oprah did, where you just drink shakes, and you're not allowed to eat.

And I was one of the few people in my group—I never cheated. I was 17 years old. I went 12 weeks.

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I never ate. But! They said that because doing that makes your breath like all screwed up, you are allowed to have mints. Like, you could have Tic-Tacs. *(Chuckles.)* My like one source of pleasure during those 12 weeks was orange Tic-Tacs!

**John Hodgman:** Oh, were you chewing Tic-Tacs very much? Wow!

**Linda Holmes:** Yeah, yeah. I just—I had to when you said the thing about plausible deniability, because that's exactly correct.

**John Hodgman:** I mean, they're very satisfying to chew. And they make—you know, ‘cause I grew up with cats. And chewing Tic-Tacs is like a cat eating kibbles. *(Making crunching sounds.)*

Except I would feel like a space cat in space, ‘cause they're a very space age cat food. *(More crunches.)*

Why don't we hear another one?

**Jesse Thorn:** Taylor says, “My husband leaves dirty dishes on the counter, because he ‘doesn't believe’ in soaking them. In his mind, the sink needs to be clear in case he needs to wash his hands, and a full sink stresses him out. I think this is weird.”

**John Hodgman:** Before we address this particular case, are there any household chores that just weird you out? Like, for example, I love to load the dishwasher, because it's like solving a puzzle that I can do correctly, and everyone else in my house does wrong.

*(Laughter and applause.)*

**Linda Holmes:** For sure.

**John Hodgman:** Whereas I hate I hate to unload the dishwasher, because of the texture of the glasses when they come out with the rinse aid on them. It's really weird to me. And also, it involves frequent bending over at the waist, which I cannot stand.

**Jesse Thorn:** I literally—John, at my house, like if I pull that top rack out, and I see that my kid's therapist has put their cup, helpfully, like in just the wrong place? I have to just—I have to like literally say to myself, *(through gritted teeth)* “They are responsible for my child's developmental health. I can't attack them.”

**John Hodgman:** *(Laughs.)* What about you, Linda? Do you have a household chore or a thought on—?

**Linda Holmes:** I think the—it's interesting that you mentioned the dishwasher, because one of the few household chores that really gives me the heebie-jeebies is cleaning the filter in the dishwasher.

*(They shudder.)*

See? You all know. Some of you have done it. Some of you have cleaned the filter. It's really gnarly. It's really gnarly.

**John Hodgman:** I like it so much!

*(Laughter.)*

It's like the ultra-version of picking your nose.

**Linda Holmes:** That is accurate. That is accurate. I will go with that.

**John Hodgman:** It's so satisfying. I'll even bend over at the waist to do it! But I appreciate why that would be your little weirdsie.

**Jesse Thorn:** John, would you prefer to clean that or a lint trap in a dryer?

**John Hodgman:** Uh. This is a real Sophie's Choice situation.

*(Laughter.)*



I gotta go—I think it's more satisfying to clean out the waste trap in the dishwasher.

It's more satisfying.

**Jesse Thorn:** (*Flatly.*) Wow. That's incredible.

**John Hodgman:** You know what? With the lint trap in the dryer, there are never any surprises.

(*Laughter.*)

You know what you're gonna get.

**Jesse Thorn:** By the way, when you said this was a Sophie's Choice situation, you meant that this is how you're going to win your Oscar. Like, this is—

**John Hodgman:** Linda, what do you think about Taylor's husband?

**Linda Holmes:** I understand both sides of this, because it is nice to have a clean sink. It is also nice not to have a bunch of dishes sitting around on the counter.

I don't enjoy having dishes in the sink either. This is not to say I wash my dishes immediately, it's just that I am angry with myself no matter which way I do it. But my preference is—I mean, I think if something has like egg on it or something like that—

**John Hodgman:** Like my face?

**Linda Holmes:** You gotta soak that thing. If you're not gonna wash it right away, you gotta soak that thing. Because otherwise, you're not gonna get anything off of it. So, some things you have to. I don't like a sink full of dishes either!

**John Hodgman:** Some things you have to soak, it's true. But most things you don't.

**Linda Holmes:** That's true!

**John Hodgman:** If you are going to wash it right away. And if you have a little weirdsie—which is: I feel uncomfortable and anxious, because the sink is full of dishes—then it's on you to wash those dishes right away.

**Linda Holmes:** Yeah, but I think also like whichever way you do it, you're both compromising. Because you're not doing the dishes immediately and loading them into the dishwasher. Which is the, I guess theoretically, ideal way to do it.

But yeah, I mean, I don't—I think when you have a sink full of dishes—like, if I have a sink full of dishes, and the dog wants water, then I got to get the pitcher, and go over, and put it under the sink, and hold it sideways because there's dishes in there.

So, it's inconvenient.

**John Hodgman:** No, I understand Taylor's point of view. But I—

**Linda Holmes:** I feel for the husband.

**John Hodgman:** I feel for him too, but I feel like it's on him to clear out that sink if he wants it clear.

**Linda Holmes:** Yeah, I think that's fair.

[00:30:00]

**John Hodgman:** Hey, we've got another little weirdsie to be presented by another very special guest. Could we invite friend of the court and frequent guest bailiff and all-around genius, Jean Grae, to the stage, please?

*(Cheers and applause.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** Jean has a forthcoming book, called *In My Remaining Years*, that will be in bookstores March 11th and is available for pre order now.

**John Hodgman:** Yeah, this is your wonderful book of memoirs and darkly funny stories from your long career as a creative person in many fields, correct?

**Jean Grae:** Yes, they're all very hilarious.

**John Hodgman:** Good. *(Snorts.)* *In My Remaining Years*; it's available for preorder now. Jean, do you have a little weirdsie that you'd like to talk to us about?

**Jean Grae:** I do, and I'm sorry to stay on the kitchen.

**John Hodgman:** That's where the weirdsies happen.

**Jean Grae:** Yeah, but it is where weirdsies happen. So, I really have an issue when people don't wipe surfaces after they've prepared anything.

And I think people generally tend to like wipe for big crumbs and stuff, but they don't notice if they've salted or peppered anything, and they kind of leave like—you know what I'm talking about, right there.

It's a granular graveyard, and—

**Jesse Thorn:** Jean? It me, I'm that.

**John Hodgman:** You leave a graveyard of dead spices?

*(Jesse confirms.)*

On the counter?!

**Jesse Thorn:** I do. I'm really bad about wiping up the counter, yeah. And I'll do it like at the end of everything, but I don't wipe the—

**Jean Grae:** Closing time is too late! Because then the grains have started to sort of have a life there.

**Jesse Thorn:** I know. I know, my fruit salads end up very peppery.

*(Laughter.)*

**John Hodgman:** What, are you mixing your fruit salads on the raw counter?

**Jesse Thorn:** I DON'T KNOW! It was off the top of my head!

**John Hodgman:** Like it's a Cold Stone Creamery for fruit salads?

*(Laughter.)*

A couple of dough scrapers! Tss, tss, tss, tss!

**Jean Grae:** That's what it feels like when people do that. I'm like what have you—did you go in there with your eyes closed? And just, did you spin around with the cayenne? Like, what are you doing?

**Jesse Thorn:** I mean, broadly speaking, yes.

*(Laughter.)*

It was fun.

**Jean Grae:** Okay, there's that weirdsie, but the one that just turns me into—you know the Elmo, with the fire?

**Jesse Thorn:** Oh, that meme? Yeah.

**Jean Grae:** It's not squeezing out the sponge. What are you talking about?! Why would you just—you finished it, and then it was—it was heavy, and it was wet, and it was—you felt it. You felt it, and you were like, “This is fine. This is fine.”

**John Hodgman:** You don't love it.

**Jean Grae:** “I love how this is gonna smell.”

**Jesse Thorn:** My officemates will appreciate this.

Not that I'm speaking of any particular office at MaxFun.

**Linda Holmes:** I think they just did some testing in like America's Test Kitchen or Serious Eats or one of those. They just did a thing where they reported on, I think, a study that showed that a sponge that has been squeezed out will have like practically no bacteria colonies on it, and one that has been left wet will basically be a (*searching for the right word*) dump.

(*Laughter.*)

**Jean Grae:** That's right. It's a handful of poop, is what it is.

**Linda Holmes:** That's what I was looking for, yeah.

**John Hodgman:** Well, speaking of handfuls of poop, Jesse, I think we have a letter here from Rachel. Is that right?

**Jesse Thorn:** Rachel says, “My 15-year-old daughter Natalie says I'm gross. She thinks it's embarrassing when I say, ‘I have to pee,’ or ‘I'm on my period,’ or ‘I have just committed a bathroom crime.’”

(*Laughter.*)

“I say I'm doing my part to normalize activities that shouldn't be considered shameful anyway. Who's right?”

**John Hodgman:** Well, as the judge, I'm gonna say obviously the mom is right.

(*Scattered cheers.*)

You should just speak about what's going on with your body, that's fine. But let's normalize this—

**Jesse Thorn:** Let the record reflect that Linda cringed—sternly?

**John Hodgman:** Do you disagree? Do you disagree with my judgment?

**Linda Holmes:** I don't disagree that the mom is right. I don't think the mom is doing anything wrong by doing these things, but I also think it's extremely natural and not necessarily shame-based for a kid to not want to hear their parent talking about pooping. I think that's okay, too.

And I think, you know, is there a special reason why you need to tell the kid? I mean, if you have a reason, I don't think you should like avoid it because—

**John Hodgman:** You think my kids don't want to hear about my stools?

*(Laughter.)*

**Linda Holmes:** I—I think they don't! I think they don't.

**Jesse Thorn:** Look, guys, I think Linda has a point. All of us are adults here. Obviously, we want to hear about our parents' movements.

*(Laughter.)*

But think back to when you were children.

**John Hodgman:** Look, I'm not disagreeing that there are contexts in which it is inappropriate to be talking about certain bodily functions.

[00:35:00]

And it's not obligatory to announce them to the world or to your children every time, but nor should you feel shame in acknowledging that they happen.

But let's get back to the real question here. For all of you, what was your last bathroom crime?

*(Laughter.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** John, I'm not going to address that question directly, but I think I can get at it sideways. Last night we had a show—

**John Hodgman:** That would be a bathroom crime.

*(Laughter.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** Last night, John, we had a show where?

**John Hodgman:** Philadelphia, I believe.

**Jesse Thorn:** Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Now—

**John Hodgman:** Woo! Go Phillies. And all great teams.

**Jesse Thorn:** I had eaten what you might call some fresh foods for dinner, before the show. And after the show, we were walking home; it was about 11:30 at night. What did you say to me?

**John Hodgman:** I said, “I’m a little hungry, Jesse.”

**Jesse Thorn:** And I said, gosh, I am too! Then what did we go do?

**John Hodgman:** I said, “Let’s go get cheesesteaks.”

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah. So, we ate a couple 11:30 PM cheese whiz cheesesteaks.

**John Hodgman:** Yeah. Hey! We’re not gremlins. It was before midnight. We’re still mogwai.

**Jesse Thorn:** And then this morning, still in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania—probably eight hours after those cheesesteaks that we ate—I texted you from Reading Station in downtown Philadelphia, sitting at a Dutch breakfast counter.

*(John confirms.)*

And what did I invite you to join me to eat together?

**John Hodgman:** Scrapple.

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah. So, again, I’m not gonna directly address whether any bathroom crimes have occurred in my life recently. I’m just gonna leave it there.

**Jean Grae:** Scrapple is a crime coming out.

**Linda Holmes:** Scrapple is delicious! I love Scrapple.

**Jesse Thorn:** Scrapple is great! On the way in.

**John Hodgman:** Scrapple is the food—it looks like a crime on the way in!

**Jean Grae:** It looks the same coming out.

*(Laughter.)*

**John Hodgman:** I call that efficiency.

**Jean Grae:** It is.

**John Hodgman:** Well, I think that's all the time we have for little weirdsies. Thank you so much Linda Holmes—

**Jesse Thorn:** John, we can't make Linda do it. She's with National Public Radio. In contrast to me, who now used to be with National Public Radio. (*Chuckles.*)

**John Hodgman:** So, the deal is with National Public Radio, employees are not allowed to express political opinions, or talk about their poops.

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, or describe their movements.

**John Hodgman:** I understand. Thank you so much, Linda Holmes, for talking about little weirdsies! You have a book coming out soon, right?

**Linda Holmes:** I do; I do. My book is called *Back After This*. It's coming out in February. It is set in the world of audio and podcasting. It has a very sexy scene involving audio production, so look out for that.

**Jesse Thorn:** I just want to say, I have read both of Linda's previous novels, and they are so fun and beautiful and well characterized, and full of feelings and romances. And they're just—she's such a wonderful novelist. I hope everyone who enjoys her work here or on *Pop Culture Happy Hour* will go out and check out her novels.

And Jean, I'm sure that in the future, I will feel that way. You haven't put out any books yet, but I—

**Jean Grae:** You should feel that way now, Jesse. Just feel that way now. We don't have time.

**John Hodgman:** Yeah, yeah. Let's hear it for Jean Grae and Linda Holmes.

(*Cheers and applause.*)

**Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

**Promo:**

**Music:** Relaxed, playful guitar.

**John Hodgman:** Et ego sum John Hodgman.

**Janet Varney:** Et ego sum Janet Varney!

**John:** And we're the hosts of *E Pluribus Motto*, a podcast dedicated to exploring the mottos of every state in the Union.

**Janet:** Every episode, we will spotlight one state and discuss its official symbols—the motto, flowers, birds, beverages, songs, and even official state muffins.

**John:** Plus, we'll hear from guests whose lives have been inspired by the state's iconography and from residents who call that state home.

**Janet:** Bring some snacks, a map, and your travel journal. Because this podcast is a virtual journey like no other!

**John:** Audi nostrum *E Pluribus Motto*, quaeliba talia lunae du Maximum Fun!

**Janet:** Aaand for the Latin challenged among you and us, listen to *E Pluribus Motto* every other Monday on Maximum Fun.

*(Music fades out.)*

**Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

**Jesse Thorn:** Judge Hodgman, we are just one week away, as this episode is released, from our live show at the Hollywood Theater in Vancouver, British Columbia.

**John Hodgman:** Our grand return to Canada, years in the making, is about to bear fruit at the Hollywood Theater in no-fun city itself, Vancouver. I learned that Vancouver calls itself no-fun city the last time we were in Vancouver. But I had a great time there, and we're guaranteed to have a lot of fun at the Hollywood Theater on the 29th of this month, January 2025.

Please come and join us there, as well as our shows in Seattle, Washington, Portland, Oregon. And of course, Groundhog Day at Sketchfest! We will be returning to one of our favorite venues to perform in: the Marine Memorial Theater, a wonderful and intimate spot.

[00:40:00]

And we're going to be dispensing justice and having a great time. We do have a Los Angeles show. It is long-ago sold out. And I am here to warn you that these shows in Vancouver, Seattle, and Portland, and San Francisco are probably going to sell out as well. Particularly the San Francisco show is going very fast.



So, if you missed out on the LA show, you could make a Bay Area weekend and come up to see us at Marines Memorial Theater in San Francisco on Groundhog's Day, 2/25, as well as enjoy all of the wonderful things that San Francisco and Sketchfest have to offer. A lot of comedy and a bunch of Its-its. Right, Jesse?

**Jesse Thorn:** Indeed. In fact, I would recommend—if you're going to come out to that San Francisco show? Take the Bay Area backroads. That's only for people in San Francisco. Nobody who's not in San Francisco or the San Francisco Bay Area knows what the heck I was alluding to just now.

All of those tickets are available at [MaximumFun.org/events](http://MaximumFun.org/events). [MaximumFun.org/events](http://MaximumFun.org/events). Let's get back to the stage at Sixth & I, in Washington, DC. Washington, DC.

**Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

**Jesse Thorn:** Washington DC, are you ready for Mega Justice?

*(Cheers and applause.)*

Let's bring out our litigants. Please welcome to the stage Marty and Sarah. Tonight's case, "Until Death Drew You Art".

Marty brings the case against his wife, Sarah. Marty has a painting of himself as a baby. He's had it his whole life, and now he wants to hang it in their home. But Sarah says, no way! She wants to get rid of Baby Marty, because he's too creepy.

*(Laughter.)*

Who's right? Who's wrong? Only one can decide. Please rise as Judge John Hodgman enters the courtroom and delivers an obscure cultural reference.

*(Raucous cheers and applause.)*

**John Hodgman:** "Good evening. And welcome to a private showing of three paintings—displayed here for the first time. Each is a collector's item in its own way, not because of any special artistic quality, but because each captures on a canvas and suspends in time and space a frozen moment of a nightmare."

*(Laughter.)*

Bailiff Jesse Thorn, please swear the litigants in.

**Jesse Thorn:** Marty and Sarah, 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 born 42 years old?

*(They laugh and swear.)*

Judge Hodgman, you may proceed.

**John Hodgman:** Marty and Sarah, you may be seated for an immediate summary judgment in one of your favors. Can either be the name of the piece of culture that I referenced as I entered the courtroom? Sarah, what's your guess?

**Sarah:** *(Sighs in confusion and murmurs.)* I have no clue. I know.

**John Hodgman:** You have to make it.

**Sarah:** I know I do.

**John Hodgman:** You must. What's your favorite movie?

**Sarah:** I'm gonna say it's *Psycho*, just because it fits with this painting.

**John Hodgman:** *Psycho*. It fits with the painting. That's a good guess. I'm gonna put—I'll put it in the guess book.

Marty, do you have a guess?

**Marty:** Something from Tom Waits about paintings?

*(Laughter.)*

**John Hodgman:** That would be the last tour we were on. Would it help if I offered you both a hint?

Also from the same speaker: "For those of you who've never met me, you might call me the undernourished Alfred Hitchcock."

*(Beat.)*

**Sarah:** *(Snorts and chuckles.)* The only Alfred Hitchcock I think of is *Birds*.

**John Hodgman:** Oh, there's also *Psycho*.

**Sarah:** Oh, I know, there's *Psycho* too, yeah.

**Jesse Thorn:** No, *Psycho 2* was not directed by Alfred Hitchcock.

*(Laughter.)*

**John Hodgman:** Alright, all guesses are wrong. The answer was, I was quoting Rod Serling as the host, not of the *Twilight Zone*, but his follow-up series, *Night Gallery*—in which every episode started with him describing three disturbing paintings and telling the story behind them.

We have a disturbing painting with us here. Don't reveal it just yet.

Marty, this is about a disturbing painting. You have it here with us. Why don't you go ahead and show the painting to the audience?

*(A mix of “aw”s and laughter.)*

And now, we're getting a mix of reactions there. And not all of them are creeped out. Some are very positive. But maybe it's because it's at a distance. Can we put it on the big screen, please?

**Sarah:** Oh god.

*(Collective horror from the audience.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** It's a sweet painting! I think it's a cute painting!

**John Hodgman:** There's Baby Marty now. And I see the resemblance, even. You've got the same smile.

Obviously, this image will be available on our show page at [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org), as well as our Instagram and all of our social media. Now, this painting is based on a photograph of you, right?

*(Marty confirms.)*

May we see the photo of you?

*(“Aw”s and laughter.)*

Aww. That's a very cute photo. And I love how the painting captures the drool. Look at—

[00:45:00]

*(Laughter.)*

You can just see—yep. Yep. There it is.

**Jesse Thorn:** That's what art is, John!

**John Hodgman:** That's called art! That's a happy little accident right there.

Marty, this painting has been, obviously, in your family since you were this age.

**Marty:** Yes, it's hung in my parents' house since I was that old. It's in the background of old pictures; it has moved around over the years with remodels and things, but it has always, always been there. It was a gift from my aunt.

**John Hodgman:** And when you say it's moved around, do you mean that it's been moved from wall to wall, or just shows up in different rooms around the home?

*(Laughter.)*

**Marty:** No, it's been moved.

**John Hodgman:** Okay. And what do you know about the artist of the painting?

**Marty:** Well, so recently we were cleaning out my mom's house, and I went over to DC—she's in Kansas City. And Sarah goes, “You are not taking that.”

And I said, Why?

And she goes, “It was painted by an insane person.”

*(Laughter.)*

I have a vague recollection of this. And then I asked my mom, and—yep! It was painted by an insane person at an insane asylum where my aunt worked.

*(Shocked laughter.)*

**John Hodgman:** It was painted by a patient in a home for the mentally unwell, where your aunt worked—presumably she provided the photo to this patient, and you didn't sit as a live model as a child.

**Marty:** Not that I know of. The two theories are that—one—she gave the guy the picture and said, “Here, paint this.” Or she had the picture, and he saw it, and just—did it.

**John Hodgman:** Did it of his own accord. And do you know anything else about him? Why he was in the asylum?

**Marty:** Well, so I googled him, and that's where the rails kind of fell off of this thing.

*(Laughter.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** Can I just interject here for a moment, Marty? Just to recap, you had this weird picture with the drool. And it was painted by someone in an insane asylum. So, to that point, the rails were on.

*(Laughter.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** Then you googled it, and the rails went off?

**John Hodgman:** Yeah. Normally you talk about something coming off the rails. In this case, the rails came off!

**Marty:** Yes.

*(Laughter.)*

**John Hodgman:** Content warning. What you learned is a little disturbing.

**Marty:** It is, yes. So, he blew up a courthouse in Union, Missouri and escaped with his brother. They robbed the bank. They blew up the courthouse as a distraction to rob the bank.

**John Hodgman:** Perfect plan.

**Marty:** They robbed the bank and escaped and did the same thing in Connecticut. That's where they got caught.

**John Hodgman:** Yeah, you can't get away with shit in Connecticut, let me tell you. Those nutmeggers do not play.

*(Laughter.)*

**Marty:** So, then he's caught. He claims insanity. He ends up in Fulton, Missouri in December of '75. I was born in November. He was released in May of '76, so there is a very small window there when he could have done it.

When they left town after the first blowing up, they realized that a couple other—

**John Hodgman:** The term is up-blowing.

*(Laughter.)*

When they left town after the first up-blowing.

**Jesse Thorn:** Really, no syntax could change the impact of the first blowing up.

**Marty:** Yes, so there were two members of his family that were missing. They didn't find them until after he was released. Under a concrete slab at his farm in Maryland.

**John Hodgman:** So, the speculation is he murdered members of his family.

**Marty:** Yes, then he was captured, went back to jail. At some point in here, he also tried to escape by carving a gun out of soap. And the only reason that he didn't make it is because the guard forgot his keys.

*(Laughter.)*

**John Hodgman:** I'm just doing a little math here. In other words, the guard was going to let him out, thinking the gun was real?

*(Marty confirms.)*

But then he's like, "Whoops, I forgot my keys!"

**Marty:** Yes. Yes.

*(Laughter.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** That's like the guard was like Don Knotts or something.

**John Hodgman:** Yeah, that was the first time the phrase, "You had one job," was ever used, I believe.

**Marty:** So, that's pretty much the story of the painting.

**John Hodgman:** Why would you find—?

**Jesse Thorn:** Wait, no! You left out where he got such remarkable art training. It really is a canny likeness.

**John Hodgman:** Can we put it back up on screen?

[00:50:00]

Oh, there's little Baby Marty. So, what about this story makes you—what's creepy about this?

*(Laughter.)*

Sarah?

**Sarah:** So, the thing that I find creepy is—where we would sit at his mom's house was on the couch, and this was on the wall next to it. All the other pictures were small, and this one was very prominent.

**John Hodgman:** Sure. Well, it's Baby Marty!

**Sarah:** And I, even right now with this really big right here, I feel like the eyes are staring at me.

*(Laughter.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** Sarah, I don't think you even need to explain to us that the creepy part of this is that this picture was bigger than other pictures!

*(Laughter.)*

**John Hodgman:** Are you an only child, Marty?

**Marty:** No, I have a brother.

**John Hodgman:** But no paintings of your brother?

**Marty:** Apparently no artist was in the institution when he was born.

*(Laughter.)*

**John Hodgman:** Life's unfair. Do you have—but you have children? Correct, Sarah?

**Sarah:** Yes, we have two.

**John Hodgman:** And how do they feel about the painting?

**Sarah:** Our daughter agrees with me that it needs to go away. Our son would be happy to keep it, unless if it goes away by fire.

*(Laughter.)*

Then he would be happy to burn it.

**John Hodgman:** Your son would like to burn it.

I see.

**Jesse Thorn:** Have you checked out the local courthouses?

*(Laughter.)*

**John Hodgman:** Marty says that when you discovered that he had the painting, you said something along the lines of, “Oh, hell no.” Was that correct?

**Sarah:** Yeah, there were a bunch of bad words that I'm not going to say, because there's children here.

**John Hodgman:** I believe that we have some video of you discovering the painting. What's the situation here?

**Sarah:** So, yeah. I did not know he brought it to DC. And what you will see is: I am going through a couple of boxes of stuff that we had stored at his mom's house of my things for teaching. And, um. *(Smacks lips.)* I'll leave it there.

**John Hodgman:** Alright. Let's take a look at this evidence.

**Clip:**

*(A door closing, followed by several small thumbs.)*

**Sarah:** Damn it!

*(A child giggles behind the camera.)*

**Marty:** What?

**Daughter:** DAD!

**Sarah:** I thought it was Pennywise!

**Speaker:** Who is it?

**Daughter:** You brought the insane guy's picture?!

**Sarah:** It's Marty. And this is the picture that was drawn by the guy in the insane asylum who murdered people.

**Speaker:** It's called the nuthouse.



**Daughter:** He murdered (*clap*) his grandmother (*clap*) and (*clap*) his (*clap*) dad! No! (*Clap*) No, (*clap*) no, (*clap*) no! (*Clap.*)

**Sarah:** That is our lovely daughter.

**John Hodgman:** That would be your daughter.

*(Scattered cheers and applause.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** No, no, no, no.

**John Hodgman:** Marty, do you take pleasure in scaring and annoying your family?

**Marty:** Occasionally, yes.

**Sarah:** It's actually just me.

**John Hodgman:** Just you? Do you want—? You want to keep the painting?

*(Marty confirms.)*

And hang it in your home?

**Marty:** I definitely want to keep it. The story is too incredible to get rid of it. Hanging it? It'll probably end up somewhere if we keep it.

**John Hodgman:** What do you mean somewhere?

*(Laughter.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** Down at the courthouse.

**Sarah:** It will end up in multiple locations, so that I don't know where it is, so that when I turn the corner, there's the painting.

*(Laughter and applause.)*

**John Hodgman:** It does seem inevitable, doesn't it?

**Jesse Thorn:** It moves around.

**John Hodgman:** Let the record show that Marty is nodding and smiling.

**Marty:** The one location that was mentioned was, we have an area under our steps that's kind of our storm shelter. We're remnants from Kansas City; we've got to have a storm shelter. And it was suggested that it live in there, and my daughter's like, "What are we gonna do when there's a tornado?! I'm not going in there."

*(Laughter.)*

**John Hodgman:** You would sacrifice your daughter's life. You would send her to Oz, so that Baby Marty could live. Baby Marty is more important than your own child.

**Sarah:** Her exact words were, "I don't want that to be the last thing that I see if something happens to me."

*(Laughter and scattered applause.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** Just fixated on that one little drop of drool.

**John Hodgman:** Aside from this being a delightful weird-dad joke on your whole family, does Baby Marty have meaning to you? Sincere meaning? And it's fine if the answer is no.

**Marty:** I mean, my family's always been big on pictures. My parents' home is just absolutely plastered with family pictures, this being very prominent in there.

[00:55:00]

You saw the wall in the background of the video, filled with pictures. So, yeah. I mean, pictures mean a lot to us. And this is the only painting of me, ever. My parents grew up very poor. There was no way they could afford somebody to do a real paint—you know.

**John Hodgman:** Has Baby Marty ever spoken to you?

*(Laughter.)*

**Marty:** No.

**John Hodgman:** I don't know why I've been prompted to ask you this question, but I do find it an intriguing one, Sarah. Here's the question. Is Marty a hoarder?

**Sarah:** *(Chuckles.)* Just a little bit. No, actually, yes. A lot.

*(Laughter.)*

So, he actually has a whole room of, uh, items.

**John Hodgman:** Haunted items? Curse-ed items?

**Sarah:** No. (*Laughs.*) He does like to collect autographs. So. But he has a whole room full of boxes of them. He does like his pictures, and we actually have the top of a whole closet full of photo boxes of pictures. But he also has what he likes to call—pardon my language—the big ass drive. And it's like a—

**John Hodgman:** Oh, like a hard drive.

**Sarah:** Like a hard drive. It's a terabyte, and it's full of pictures. So, my thought is: why can't that go in that terabyte?

**John Hodgman:** Oh, you mean take a picture of the picture?

**Sarah:** So I never have to see it again.

**John Hodgman:** Then kill it with fire.

**Sarah:** Yeah.

**John Hodgman:** You would like to never see it again. Marty, why don't you keep it in a private place and just look at it—?

**Jesse Thorn:** (*Interrupting.*) Wait, hold on, John. I don't know if you've seen the last *Mission Impossible* movie, but you put that picture in the drive, you're gonna have trouble across the world.

(*Laughter.*)

This thing's gonna be in Berlin nightclubs in a second.

**John Hodgman:** Probably true. Yeah, it's gonna be—yeah.

**Jesse Thorn:** Shutting off power grids.

**John Hodgman:** Marty, what if you were to keep the picture privately to yourself? Go up into the—do you have an attic, for example? You could keep it in the attic, and go up there, and sort of caress it from time to time, and commune with your baby self and its strange history.

Wouldn't that be acceptable to you, Sarah?

**Sarah:** Except it would probably go on the Halloween decorations, and I'm the one who gets the Halloween decorations down.

**John Hodgman:** I see.

**Sarah:** And so, I would see it, and—yeah. Yeah. That's my only fear.

**John Hodgman:** I see. What if the painting started getting older, and Marty started getting younger?

*(Laughter.)*

**Sarah:** I would get to see him without grey hair then, because I've never seen him without grey hair.

*(“Aw”s from the audience.)*

**John Hodgman:** Whoa, you two have fun, don't you?

*(Laughter.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** Let the record reflect that they held hands tenderly while laughing at that joke.

**John Hodgman:** Alright, you want to get rid of it, Sarah. Obviously.

Marty, give me something specific that you want me to rule.

Obviously, you want to keep it, right? But where do you want to keep it? How do you want to keep it? And more importantly to make your case, why is it important that you keep it?

**Marty:** Well, I think—so, one of the things that my dad did was he built all of the picture frames that live in the house. Except for this one. And I did not realize this.

**John Hodgman:** You know the picture frames are not alive. They don't live in the house. Unless there's some—your dad was a warlock or whatever.

**Marty:** But this one, they actually got framed. Like, it's from a framing company in Kansas.

**John Hodgman:** Richard C. Barry and Associates, framers in Prairie Village, Kansas. Okay.

**Marty:** So, this is the only picture that they've ever had professionally framed that I know of.

**John Hodgman:** And it's dated 12, 1978. You ever take it on the *Roadshow*?

**Marty:** *(Snorts.)* No.

*(Laughter.)*

**John Hodgman:** Thing we can get this on the *Antiques Roadshow*?

**Jesse Thorn:** I think I could text Nico Lowry real quick. (*Chuckles.*)

**John Hodgman:** Yeah, you want to do me a favor and take a picture, and text him, and see if he's got an appraisal on this?

(*Laughter.*)

Wait, wait. Here, take a picture of the back, because that establishes provenance. And give him the bare bones of, you know, the bank—

**Jesse Thorn:** I'm texting him.

**John Hodgman:** “Exploding courthouses, murdered grandparents in concrete slab in home.” Et cetera, et cetera. “Caught in Connecticut.”

You know the story. Everyone does. Famous American story.

Okay. So, this one was—(*chuckles*) so, your argument for keeping this personal memorabilia was it was professionally framed?

(*Laughter.*)

**Marty:** I think that showed that it was important to my parents.

**John Hodgman:** Oh, okay. And they displayed it prominently for a long time. Did they ever talk to you about what it meant to have this photo? Or this painting, I should say?

**Marty:** No. I only had a vague recollection of the insane asylum story, and Sarah and my sister-in-law both had very vivid memories of that.

[01:00:00]

**John Hodgman:** So, it was important to your family; it's important to you. Would you like to pass it along to your own children? Sarah is nodding no.

**Marty:** I feel like Bryce would like it.

**Sarah:** No.

**John Hodgman:** Bryce wants to kill it with fire!

**Marty:** If we get rid of it. If we keep it, I think he'd like to inherit it.

**John Hodgman:** Why do you think that?

*(Laughter.)*

**Marty:** Just for the story alone!

**John Hodgman:** What indication do you have from Bryce? I thought Bryce wanted to burn it.

**Jesse Thorn:** John, is this right? “Nico, we're on stage in DC and need a back of the envelope appraisal for this picture. It is of our litigant and was painted by an insane asylum resident who also robbed some banks and murdered a few relatives.” Throbbing heart emoji?

*(Laughter.)*

**John Hodgman:** Send!

While Jesse sends it, I think I have heard enough in order to make my decision. I'm going to go into my chambers. I'll think it over, and I'll be back in a moment with my verdict.

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

*(Cheers and applause.)*

Sarah, how are you feeling about your chances in this case right now?

**Sarah:** I think they're pretty good. I mean, I'm willing to let him keep the frame and get rid of the picture.

*(Laughter.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** Marriage is about compromise. *(Chuckles.)*

**Sarah:** Exactly!

**Jesse Thorn:** And it is a nice frame. We don't know if it's an original or if it's by one of the associates.

**Sarah:** Exactly.

**Jesse Thorn:** Marty, how are you feeling?

**Marty:** Well, the more I speak it out loud, the weirder it sounds.

*(Laughter.)*

But it is an incredible story, and I do love the story with it.

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, I mean, putting it with your Halloween decorations isn't a half bad idea. I mean, I live right near Burbank where all the FX people live, and I think all of those people would trade their entire animatronic homes for one murderer painting.

*(Laughter.)*

**Audience Member:** *(Shouting.)* I'll *(inaudible)* right now!

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, this guy's got cash in hand. Too bad we don't have Nico here to run another one of those auctions. *(Chuckles.)* Well, we'll see what Judge Hodgman has to say about all this when we return in a moment.

Please rise as Judge John Hodgman reenters the courtroom and presents his verdict.

*(Cheers and applause.)*

**John Hodgman:** First of all, you're absolutely right, Jesse. I mean, if Nico happens to write back, we'll obviously reveal what he says. I don't know when that will happen, but it's true that—if we were in Burbank right now—there would be an immediate bidding war between Dana Gould and Patton Oswalt for this.

**Jesse Thorn:** *(Cackling.)* Yeah, that's exactly what I was about to say! I was about to say there's 100 Dana Goulds that would pay for it!

**John Hodgman:** But you know I love Dana, and I love Patton, and I don't think that they collect odd memorabilia. But this is genuinely ghoulish memorabilia—to the point that I actually thought about not hearing the case. Because it's not merely that the origin of the painting is strange and eccentric, but it's also tragic and odd. You know, and disturbing.

And I absolutely acknowledge and appreciate why you don't want to be anywhere near this thing, Sarah. I mean, I get it. Even if it were a beautiful painting—*(beat)* which it is not—

*(Laughter.)*

The story alone weights this thing with some very queasy gravity, which kind of makes it challenging to figure out what to do with it.

I find it interesting that your parents, presumably knowing its origin, were like, “Pride of place. Here we go, Baby Marty. Baby Marty by the murderer. You know, right there.”

And I'm not sure that I would have made the same choice, myself. You know, if I had possession of this thing.

And now it falls to you. You and—you! The two of you. You, Adult Marty and Baby Marty, to figure out what is the appropriate thing. It should not be burned. Sorry. There has been no evidence to suggest that it is actually causing misfortune in your home, or strange accidents to occur, or dogs to whine uncontrollably in its presence. I don't believe that it's a cursed item.

I'm not going to touch it.

*(Laughter.)*

Nor do I think it is an appropriate compromise that he can keep the frame. As fine a professional frame job it is, that's not what gives this piece of art its power.

[01:05:00]

And even with its bad origin story, it is a part of family history. It has to be preserved in some way. I'm sorry, Sarah. It has to be preserved.

And I'm not sure—this really brings us to where and how it should be preserved. It obviously causes you discomfort.

**Sarah:** A lot.

**John Hodgman:** Should there be a tornado— This is in your house in Kansas City or in DC?

**Marty:** DC.

**John Hodgman:** I was gonna say, “This isn't Tornado Valley,” but nowadays everything is! So, who knows?

I wouldn't want it to be in a place where your children would choose not to save their own lives, because Baby Marty scares them.

*(Laughter.)*

The attic seems like the perfect place for it. A little shrine. A little shrine somewhere in the attic where you can sit and look at yourself as a baby. I mean, that's where creepy paintings are supposed to be!

And not every house has an attic, you know.

Sarah doesn't want that to happen, because that's where the Halloween decorations are—which, this is arguably one of them.

*(Laughter.)*



And she has to go up there and get it. I would say if you want to put it in the attic, then you have to get the Halloween decorations, and take that chore upon yourself. And also, check in with your family from time to time and just say, “I just want to check in with you. You know he's up there, right?”

*(Laughter.)*

“Can—can you feel him? Can you feel Baby Marty?”

**Sarah:** He'll be up there with the Pennywise thing that they have that scares me too. So.

**John Hodgman:** There's a Pennywise thing up there? Okay, yeah.

*(Sarah confirms.)*

This is—I mean, you know, we're sending it to Nico. We really should send it to Aiden, the spirit Halloween kid, for his appraisal.

*(Jesse agrees.)*

Yeah, we'll get him.

But here's the thing. You can keep it, put it in a place out of sight—ideally, out of mind—where it will be displayed. I don't think it should be in a drawer somewhere, because that might make Baby Marty angry.

*(Laughter.)*

The attic seems to me like a good place, but another neutral private space is fine. Because it's part of your family history.

I don't think that it should be a Halloween decoration, because I think that that—you know, it diminishes it. But I do think, if—hold it. I will touch it again. I do think it would be a wonderful Halloween costume which you will wear this Halloween. You turn it into a mask, and walk around the neighborhood that way, and see what happens.

That's my judgment. This is the sound of a gavel. *(Bangs his gavel.)*

Judge John Hodgman rules. That is all.

*(Cheers and applause.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** Marty, Sarah, thanks for joining us on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast.

**John Hodgman:** Thank you. And thank you, Little Marty, as well.

**Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

**Jesse Thorn:** That's it for this episode of the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast. Thanks to Redditor u/Strange-Movie for naming the case in this episode.

Huge thanks to two of our favorite people on earth, Linda Holmes and Jean Grae, for joining us on stage in Washington, DC.

Linda's brand new-novel, *Back After This*, and Jean's memoir, *In My Remaining Years*—both available for preorder now. Get those books. Those two are not just hilarious and insightful raconteurs, but hilarious and insightful writers as well. I just really can't recommend their books enough.

Linda Holmes's, like a charming, romantic novel set in the world of podcasting. Jean's book, a charming, hilarious memoir/essay collection set in the world of underground rap.

And other worlds! And other worlds, John.

**John Hodgman:** And growing up in the Chelsea Hotel in New York City. Jean has lived a life so far. And you should read all about what she's going to do in her remaining years in her book, *In My Remaining Years*.

**Jesse Thorn:** You know, Jean grew up—this is something I didn't know. But Jean's mom, Sathima Bae Benjamin, was essentially the person who brought South African jazz to a worldwide audience.

Her first record as a singer was produced by Duke Ellington. It is—all of her records are incredible. I have several of her records. And so, Jean grew up in a pretty extraordinary world. (*Chuckles.*) Like, a pretty unbelievable world as like a first generation born in the United States immigrant in the Chelsea Hotel.

I mean, like it's wild what Jean has been through. Besides being a genuinely legendary rapper. Like, Jean comes on our show and is hilarious and insightful, but like, take it from me—a rap guy.

[01:10:00]

Jean is a genuine legend in the world of hip hop. Anyway, Jean Grae is so cool. And heck, Linda's right up there too!

**John Hodgman:** Less known for her rapping.

**Jesse Thorn:** Less known for her rapping. I'd like to—you know. She's got bars.

Follow us on Instagram, [@JudgeJohnHodgman](#). We're on YouTube and TikTok, [@JudgeJohnHodgmanPod](#). Check out the YouTube version of this show for some of the video footage that Sixth & I captured during this show. That's really cool.

Come see us on tour on the West Coast. Tickets are still on sale for our shows in Vancouver, Seattle, Portland, and San Francisco. You can find all of the ticket links at [MaximumFun.org/events](https://MaximumFun.org/events).

**John Hodgman:** Still on sale, but I will add: going fast. We are almost sold out at all of those shows. So, come get your last tickets, and have a great time with us. We don't know when we'll be on the road again. So, this is your chance to come say hi.

**Jesse Thorn:** The *Judge John Hodgman* podcast was created by Jesse Thorn and John Hodgman. This episode, recorded by Matthew Barnhart. Nattie Lopez is our social media manager. AJ McKeon is our podcast editor. Daniel Speer is our video editor, and our producer is Jennifer Marmor. 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!