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(ADVERTISEMENT)

Transition: Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.

Promo: *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

Music: “Huddle Formation” from the album *Thunder, Lightning, Strike* by The Go! Team—a fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.

Jesse Thorn: It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. When my guest, Ego Nwodim, sat down for this interview, everything started out pretty ordinary. She said hi to my producers. She checked to make sure she looked alright on camera. Then she grabbed an ice pack and threw it onto her shoulder.

She told us that, a few months ago, she dislocated it—slipped on the subway. It's something she should probably have in a sling, maybe even get surgery on. But—life. You know? Look, I'm not a doctor. I haven't examined Ego Nwodim. I'm not gonna weigh in on whether or not that is an advisable recovery strategy for broken or dislocated or whatever shoulders. But what I will say is this: if anyone on this green earth could be too busy for a dislocated shoulder, it might be Ego Nwodim.

She just wrapped up her sixth season as a cast member on *Saturday Night Live*, one of the most demanding shows on TV—and also, a show that this year was celebrating its 50th anniversary. So, you know, double the demands. She's appearing on TV shows like *Poker Face* and *Mr. Throwback*, doing voices for animated shows like *Be@rbrick* and *Futurama*, appearing in movies like the upcoming big screen adaptation of *Gabby's Dollhouse*. And she's doing press—well, like this!

(*Chuckles.*) Honestly, I hope I'm not standing in between Nwodim and an orthopedic surgeon.

Nwodim is great in just about everything she does, from her regular spots on *Saturday Night Live* to her time on LA comedy nerd shows like *Comedy Bang Bang* and Paul F Tompkin's *Spontaneanation*. So happy I get to talk to her. Let's get into it: me and Ego Nwodim.

Transition: Bright, cheerful synth.

Jesse Thorn: Ego Nwodim, welcome to *Bullseye*. I'm so happy to have you here on the show.

Ego Nwodim: Thank you for having me! Thank you so much.

Jesse Thorn: You mentioned that you were powering through, as we were preparing to have this conversation.

(Ego confirms.)

You had an ice pack on your shoulder.

Ego Nwodim: I did.

Jesse Thorn: *(Chuckles.)* And a dream in your eye.

(Ego laughs.)

Are you a powering through type? Are you the kind of maniac that you described yourself as very briefly before we hit record?

Ego Nwodim: Well, I didn't call myself a maniac. You just called myself a maniac. And you can't—you just called me a maniac.

Jesse Thorn: To be clear, you did call yourself a maniac. I do—I said you don't—

Ego Nwodim: I just wanted to throw you under the bus. *(Laughs.)*

Jesse Thorn: But to be clear, you did call yourself a maniac. And I do have tape of that. It was a metaphorical—

(Ego laughs.)

I wouldn't play it, 'cause obviously you didn't understand yourself to have been recorded.

(Ego laughs.)

But if necessary, in a court or whatever, I'll be glad to play back you calling yourself a maniac.

Ego Nwodim: I wanted to throw you under so badly, but only playfully. I was gonna say, you can't call women maniacs, but that's okay. I did call myself a maniac. I am a maniac! So, yes, to answer your question in long and short, *(chuckling)* yes; I am that kind of maniac who powers through.

I ran a half marathon last season—season 49. That was insane while we were working. That wasn't wise. And I was kind of—I feel like I was sort of— Not “I feel like,” I was sort of injured through that training program, but I was so hellbent on running the Brooklyn Half. And I'd never been a runner in my life. And I was so hell bent on it that I decided to do that and power through, and I think my knee was—*(stutters)* my knee was messed up. I almost

said a bad word. My knee was messed up, and I pushed through. But you shouldn't do that, kids. I don't think that people should do that. I just wanna say, don't do what I do. I don't think it's safe, nor is it wise. (*Chuckles.*)

Jesse Thorn: You said you did this training while you were in season, in production, on *Saturday Night Live*?

Ego Nwodim: I did say that, yes. That is true.

Jesse Thorn: How did you work it into your life? It's a famously all-consuming sort of six-day-a-week job.

Ego Nwodim: Mm-hm. Some days we go in a little later than others. So, like a Thursday I might get a run in. And on Sunday, which is our day of rest, I would do my long runs. (*Laughs.*) I never thought I'd talk like a runner.

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I have not run since doing—well, that's not true. I ran one mile one day this season before the show, just to like shake things up. But I hadn't run since the half marathon—so, in April 2024. But I would do my long runs on what was supposed to be my day of rest. I would then do the other runs—again, me— What is a long run for those who don't run? (*Chuckles.*) And I would've been included in that before I started training for that half marathon. It's just your longest run of your training program for that given week, I think is the best way to describe it. And it was all unnecessary, frankly.

(*They chuckle.*)

It was all remarkably unnecessary. But, hey, that's me!

Jesse Thorn: There's a great *Saturday Night Live* sketch in which you play a Nigerian American mother; Chris Redd plays your son, and he's announced that he's changed his major from pre-med to creative writing.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Father (*Saturday Night Live*): Creative who?

Son: (*Annunciating.*) Creative writing.

Father: (*Shocked.*) God forbid!

Mother: What is creative writing?!

Son: Something I'm really passionate about! I actually won the Promising Young Writer Award.

Speaker 1: (*Warmly.*) Oh, that's fantastic.

Speaker 2: Nice, buddy!

Mother: (*Sarcastically.*) Oh, yes, very nice, buddy.

(*Audience laughter.*)

An award?! Can you pay the bills with an award?

Father: Will you buy a house with an award?

Mother: Promising Young Writer. Who promised you what?!

(*Laughter.*)

Son: When Nick said he won an award, you guys said he was gonna be famous!

Mother & Father: (*Shouting in unison.*) We were lying!

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: (*Chuckles.*) Was that reflective of your own experience?

Ego Nwodim: Not quite. Not my experience, but I do remember having like a not real cousin—more like a family friend—who grew up, was like a cousin, changed her major to creative writing. And I believe she went to Hopkins. And I was like in middle school when this happened, and it was just like, “Oh my gosh! She's thrown her life away! She's absolutely thrown her life away. What is she doing?” And with all the adults being like, “Well, this is crazy. What's going on? What is she gonna do?” So, not my experience directly.

My mom was actually very supportive. So. But I do know this was—saying I wanted to be an actor was a wild thing to tell her and something it took her some time to wrap her head around, but was always—honestly, the truth is—always supportive. So, it was a bit of like an exaggerated—quite exaggerated—version of my experience with my mom. But I do know just the energy of that sketch is an experience I had witnessed, and I know some of my friends and family members had experienced with their own parents.

Jesse Thorn: How old were you when you chose to become an actor?

Ego Nwodim: Well, I've been wanting to do it since I was like 12 and 14. I was like, "That's what I wanna do." I watched a lot of TV growing up. And then, you know—then I went to college and studied biology and got a biology degree. But I went to college in LA very intentionally to be where the acting happens. 'Cause I was like, "Maybe I can figure out how to create a career while I'm out here, since this is where the stuff happens."

Jesse Thorn: And it was actor, not comedian, that was your goal?

Ego Nwodim: Yeah. I didn't know the specialties. I just was like, "Acting. Like, this is so foreign to me. It's foreign to anyone I know, but I know I wanna do that thing." Even though I'm consuming this thing, I didn't know. So, I just knew I wanted to be an actor, and I found my way to comedy organically, if you will, but also sort of in a—I'm a little bit of a woo-woo person. Quite spiritual. I think it was kismet in many ways. I was going to find my way to comedy. This is—One time I was asked to do, I think around 2015, a character reel for *SNL*. And I was like by my agent at the time, and I was like, "What is that? What's a character reel?" Yeah, I think 2015 or '14, I said, "What is a character reel?"

And then they sent me 10 examples of people's character reels, and I was like, "I think I still don't understand what this is," but then I did my best take on what a character reel was.

Most of my college friends were not in the arts world. So, lots of science majors, lots of business majors. And I showed one of my college friends, who was my roommate at the time—so, this is post-college—and she was like, "This is the most—" When I made the character reel, she was like, "This is the most you thing I have ever seen you do since you said you wanted to be an actor." Because she lived with me, and I'm very, very goofy. Whether people know that or not. I know I do sillies on the show. I'm even sillier on podcasts, and I'm even sillier than the podcasts in real life. (*Laughs.*)

And so, my friend, she was like, "This is the most you thing I've seen you do so far. This is it." And so, I then started taking improv not too long after that—or maybe I had just started improv? But yeah, then I landed in comedy, and I was like—

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"This feels natural. This feels fun and playful. It almost feels illegal that anyone would pay me to do this."

Jesse Thorn: So much more to get into with Ego Nwodim. Be right back. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

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Transition: Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with Ego Nwodim. She's been a cast member on *Saturday Night Live* for six seasons. *Saturday Night Live* also just celebrated its 50th year on the air. Maybe you heard about that. And hey, just so you know, this conversation with Ego Nwodim is—like all of our conversations—available to watch on video as well. We have a YouTube channel. [@BullseyeWithJesseThorn](#). Search for *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* on YouTube. You will find it. You can check out this conversation, clips, full interviews from past guests. It's real fun over there, I promise. And it's also a great way to share the show with others. Anyway, back to Ego Nwodim.

So, you made a character reel before you had started doing comedy stuff?

Ego Nwodim: Yeah! I did not know what it—I literally was like—I feel like you could—You'd see the email—I can't remember if it was a phone call or an email, but certainly received an email with 10 example character reels. Because I was like, “What is a character reel? Huh. (Laughs.) What is that?”

And then my sister, who does have 1,000 degrees—very Nigerian of her—she helped me write my first character reel. Like, I wrote it, but she was like, “This could be fun, or that could be fun.” Yeah, I started doing comedy in this sort of roundabout way. But once I got there, I took my first improv class—which I've said a bunch of times—begrudgingly. I really didn't wanna take it. But once I took it—and I was sure—I was like, “I'm gonna take this eight-week, stupid class. And I don't want anyone to tell me again that I should take an improv class. I'm tired of hearing it.” And this is the time when improv was like saturated, and it was like everyone booking commercials is in an improv class. It's the key to getting a commercial.

And I was not interested in doing the thing that everyone seemed to be doing, and I certainly wasn't interested in doing what I felt like was potentially just busy work to make me feel like my career was developing. But I took this class, fell in love in the class—fell in love with the class, I should say.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, it's an incredible feeling when it's working, doing improv.

Ego Nwodim: Oh, it's like drugs. It feels so good. It's so great. And when it's bad, it feels really bad. But truly, so much fun. And some of my friends that I made in that first improv class are still some of my closest friends today. And so, that's particularly special, and I'm glad I took it. Because I then was like, “Oh, I want to take every improv class available to me, and I wanna be on the main stage here. And like, this is what I wanna do. I love this.” And if someone paid real money for improv, I would do it for a career.

Jesse Thorn: It's an incredible feeling, even leaving aside a laughing audience—which is unusual in comedy. Like, usually in comedy, if you say, “Well, it feels so great to be doing comedy,” it's because you've got an audience laughing at your jokes. But when improv is going right, it feels good in a, you know, rehearsal studio with six other people in there and, you know, two of them are on stage, and four of them are quietly respectful.

Ego Nwodim: Mm-hm! Yeah. Yeah.

[00:15:00]

Having an audience is amazing, and that is its own drug. But then truly getting to improv sort of—not sort of, but very much—rooted in play, I think is so enjoyable because of that, because it's about play. And then there are rules that you, once you learn, get to break intelligently, I think. But yeah, it's—I think everyone should take an improv class if they can. I think everyone should do improv. I started a program with one of my high school teachers back in Baltimore that has brought improv to kids in Baltimore City, but then also has made it part of the curriculum at some schools in Baltimore City. So, big proponent, whether you wanna be a performer or not, of improv.

Jesse Thorn: Tell me a little bit about growing up in Baltimore. I lived in Washington, DC a little bit, so I visited. But I haven't lived there. I've mostly just like been to that great Baltimore Art Museum. And eaten grabs.

Ego Nwodim: Of course. Oh! Well, then you've done it! You've done it!

(They laugh.)

That's the—that's all there— That's Baltimore, is crabs and the museum and the aquarium. And then if you were at the—if you were at the museum, like then you were also at the Inner Harbor, and then you have completed Baltimore. Check!

(They laugh.)

But I love it. I'm so proud to be from there. I throw little like Easter eggs in sketches that I write at the show that are like nods to Baltimore—sometimes aren't taken as nods, but they're very much nods and just a function of me loving where I'm from. I haven't lived there—

Jesse Thorn: What's an example? What's an example of that?

Ego Nwodim: Most recently, “Midday News 2”. Well, “Midday News” one had nods to Baltimore, and that was with Phoebe Waller Bridge. But “Midday News 2”, most recently in Season 50 with Shane Gillis, lots of the street names and town names that are mentioned in that sketch—which is a news-based sketch—are Baltimore nods.

There was one moment I almost named one of the crime stories. I was like, “Let's say it took place in this particular town.” And then we put it in for table read, whatever, and we gave the town to me. 'Cause it's kind of—I feel like if you are not from Baltimore, you'd look at the word and be like, “What is it?” So, I gave the word to me at table read. Then we went to—the sketch got picked. Che and I went to rewrite the sketch. And when we were rewriting it, I was like, “Can we—by the way, you might roll your eyes at me—” “Cause I can be so type A when I'm writing sketches, and I don't know that you need to be. But again, maniac or whatever other—likes a challenge, how I put it. I do care about the details.

I said, “Tim.” I go, “Hey, we need to change the name of this town, because it's predominantly Black, and so we're gonna change the name. Because based on what we're saying here, I feel like any Baltimore—only Baltimore people know.” But yes.

Jesse Thorn: In part, because this sketch is about a panel of four morning news anchors on a morning or a midday news show, and two of them are Black, two are White. And they're essentially keeping track of the races of the criminals and the—

(Ego chuckles and agrees.)

And you've got a gotta sort of quiet scoreboard going on of the races of the criminals in the news broadcast.

Ego Nwodim: Yes. Playing a different kind of ball. Yes, correct. That's the sketch. So. Little nuggets for the people who know that know, and otherwise you're just hearing street names and town names in that sketch. But yeah, that's some nods to Baltimore.

But I loved it. I went to public school my whole life. Loved that for me.

Jesse Thorn: Did you ever have those compound vowels? Like the guy that played Prop Joe on *The Wire*?

Ego Nwodim: Did we—? I remember Prop Joe. My friend does an impression of him, really good impression of Prop Joe. *(Chuckles.)* But not even a Baltimore friend!

Jesse Thorn: That actor was a Baltimorean, right?

(Ego confirms.)

I mean, I think he was originally from Baltimore, taught acting in Baltimore.

Ego Nwodim: Yes. I didn't get to take one of his acting classes, but God rest his soul, and that is very cool. Also, Snoop from *The Wire* is actually from Baltimore. I mean, you watch *The Wire* if you're from Baltimore, you can tell who's from Baltimore and who's not from Baltimore. 'Cause other people are doing sort of a vaguely New York accent, if anything. I can't imagine an actor who's not from Baltimore being really good at a Baltimore accent. The time I have seen it, though—'cause it's so specific, and you know it when you hear it, and you know when you're hearing *(dramatically)* a fraud—but you know who was good at it?

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I still stand by what I said, and this is to speak to how rare of a talent this person is. Kate McKinnon in the first “Thirsty Cops”, which is my first sketch ever at *SNL*. Okay?

(They laugh.)

Yeah. My first sketch ever. My third week of *SNL*, I wrote that sketch. It's a sketch I performed in LA at CBS Diversity Showcase. I rewrote it for *SNL* to be for me and Leslie Jones. Kate McKinnon comes in at the end of that sketch as a cop.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Speaker 1: Paula, you nasty girl!

Speaker 2: You nasty!

Cop: I'm gonna have to go ahead and call this in. Excuse me. Car 51 to dispatch. Subject is recklessly hot. Little sweetie, bad boy, puppy dog, but bites. He will hurt me. But you can't break what's already broken. Over.

(Audience laughter.)

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Ego Nwodim: Kate came in that sketch and, just being the brilliant performer she is, did a Baltimore accent. And I said—I did not tell her to do that. I didn't ask her to do it. Would've been fine if she didn't, but I was like, “Damn, you really killed that.”

Jesse Thorn: Growing up in a city as Black as Baltimore—and Baltimore is a very African American city—where was your identity in the like connection between African American and American descendant of African immigrants?

Ego Nwodim: I wanna just pause real fast to say: when you said, “growing up in a city as Black as,” and I thought—I was like, “Well, any city I'd grow up in, I'd be Black.”

(They laugh.)

I was like—I wanted to be like, “Jesse!” *(Chuckles.)* Okay. Anyway, just had to pause to say the whole time I was like, “What?” In Phoenix, I would've been Black. Okay. Um.

Jesse Thorn: *(Laughing.)* You're like, “Jesse, I know you're White, but I got *(unclear)*.”

Ego Nwodim: *(Laughs.)* That's actually how it works, how the melanin works. No, I—listen, when I walk down the street, I am a proud— So, first of all, let's start from scratch, start over. I am a proud Nigerian American first-generation child of a single, wonderful mother. I am

also a Black woman, right? Black being the race. When I walk down the street, no one goes, “That Nigerian girl,” unless they happen to recognize me from the show and are so enthralled by how Nigerian I am. But a stranger who's walking down the street and we're crossing paths is either not gonna think about me at all, but when they see me, they may go, “They’re Black. I just walked past a black woman.”

So, I—for me—don't feel some grand distinction between the two. Because it's all part of my identity, frankly. I'm Nigerian, and I'm also Black. That's a fact. And I'm proud to be both of those things. And so, I'm grateful to have grown—and I've said it already, but I'm deeply grateful to have grown up in Baltimore, because I think it gave me perspective. I think it gave me street smarts. I think it taught me so much about being a friend, caring about your community. And so, yeah. I think I feel very fortunate in that regard. I'm fortunate to have grown up in a city like Baltimore, where I feel very, very clear on my identity regardless of what others might say or perceive. I know who I am. And I think I attribute that to growing up in Baltimore, but also being raised by my incredible mom.

Jesse Thorn: We'll wrap up with Ego Nwodim in just a minute. After a short break, a long, detailed discussion about her regular character, Lisa from Temecula. A character who has basically one defining trait: she eats steaks so overcooked that the table shakes while she's cutting them. (*Chuckles.*) We'll also talk about why that character is one of the show's best. It's *Bullseye* for MaximumFun.org and NPR.

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Promo:

Music: Playful, exciting synth.

Ellen Weatherford: People say not to judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree.

Christian Weatherford: Which is why here on *Just the Zoo of Us*, we judge them by so much more.

Ellen: We rate animals out of 10 in the categories of effectiveness, ingenuity, and aesthetics, taking into consideration each animal's true strengths—like a pigeon's ability to tell a Monet from a Picasso or a polar bear's ability to play basketball.

Christian: Guest experts like biologists, ecologists, and more join us to share their unique insight into the animal's world.

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Ellen: Listen with friends and family of all ages on MaximumFun.org or wherever you get podcasts.

(Music ends.)

Transition:

Jesse Thorn: It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with actor, comedian, and *Saturday Night Live* cast member Ego Nwodim.

You are very silly on *Saturday Night Live*, and silliness on *Saturday Night Live* is my favorite thing on *Saturday Night Live*.

Ego Nwodim: Well, thank you.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, you know. I'm glad everyone enjoys when someone is doing an impression of a politician; it's fine, and they're doing a good job. But I like it when someone is acting ridiculous. And you are re are really unafraid to go to ten in that mode.

There is a recurring character that you play named Lisa from Temecula.

(Ego agrees with a knowing chuckle.)

Which is a sketch essentially based on— I mean, this character does have characteristics, but the real genesis of—the nut of the character, the heart of the game of this particular character is—

(They both struggle to contain laughter.)

—woman aggressively cutting steak. Like, you can say—

Ego Nwodim: Because say it's extra well done. *(Laughs.)*

Jesse Thorn: Like you can say, this is like a woman that doesn't observe social conventions or like says what's on her mind or something like that. But mostly, what's happening in this three/four-minute sketch (*giggling*) is you're knocking a table around, and peas flying off your plate!

Ego Nwodim: *(Laughing.)* Yeah, you know, I think you understand Lisa from Temecula. I could say all those things about her. And I think those other things about her—being that she doesn't observe social conventions and is kind of in her own world doing her own thing and unbothered by whatever is going on with anyone else. But truly, Alex English, the brainchild behind that sketch—it was written by Alex English, Gary Richardson and Michael Che.

Alex English will say, “This sketch was born of the fact that I was at dinner with my family during the holidays, and my cousin ordered a well-done steak, and it was shaking the table while she was trying to cut it.” And he is like, “I think that could be a sketch.” And so, that's

the truth of Lisa. And that sketch, “Lisa from Temecula”, was originally called “Birthday Dinner”. And Lorne asked us on Friday night, before it went up, to find a more memorable name for the character. And in the sketch, her name was Lisa. You know, when it was originally “Birthday Dinner”, her name was Lisa. In the morning I come to work, and Gary and Alex have decided she's Lisa from Temecula. And I thought, “What?” *(Laughs.)*

And I lived in Southern California. I lived in LA for 12 years, so I know Temecula. And I was like of all—like, Temecula, how specific. But specificity like that does tend to be funny. And that's how Lisa from Temecula was born. So, then we try to go, “How else can she disrupt people when she's eating food? Where else can she—you know, where else can she take this disruptive behavior?” Maybe next we see her in court. You know, like what does she look like in the courtroom? But I really wanted to see her at Korean barbecue, where you do, in fact, have to cook your own meat.

(They laugh.)

Jesse Thorn: Your vision for her was not to find new horizons for this character, except in the sense that you wanted to find new tables for her to shake.

Ego Nwodim: Yes. Exactly. Exactly.

(Jesse giggles.)

And that could be a table, again, in the courtroom. It was at a wedding once. Again, really would've loved to see her at Korean barbecue. And what does that actually look like? She's starting a fire, 'cause her meat's not done, but she's like still trying to keep up regular conversation while there's like—people are catching on fire. But how do we make that sketch happen? It's maybe gotta be in a movie. Yeah. But anyway. *(Chuckles.)*

Jesse Thorn: I say this with just the absolute greatest admiration, and I hope that you'll take it in that spirit: it is one of the dumbest things I've ever seen on television.

(They laugh.)

Ego Nwodim: I'm honored. Thank you. Correct. Thank you. That is the highest praise and the greatest honor to have that character we called—or that sketch be called—one of the dumbest things you've ever seen on television. Thank you! Yeah. It's meant to be. It's meant to be silly, stupid. But we also all recognize it and go, “Yeah.”

You know, I used to order my steaks well done and get made fun of, and I stopped. But I go—we always are kind of—people who do order their steaks well done are getting made fun of. And I don't think it's right!

[00:30:00]

No, I'm kidding. That was a little hat tip for the people who get upset about things that aren't necessary to get upset about. But anyway, some people like their steaks well done—like I once did—and we get made fun of. And I'm like, “Yeah, I guess if you're cutting a steak that's extra, extra well done...” (*Laughs.*) I think my mom would order a steak—one extra. I wouldn't go two extras. I think she would go one extra well done. Yeah. How disruptive that is, and how ridiculous that is, and how—at that point—you are, in fact, eating a hockey puck. When I was doing that sketch and the steak fell off the table, that was not planned. I couldn't cut through it. And then—

Jesse Thorn: It's a real steak.

Ego Nwodim: It's a real steak that I was like, “Please cook it thoroughly.” Because at dress rehearsal, there was a bit of a hiccup. It was a T-bone steak, which was random as hell, and I was like—we couldn't do the physicality. It was—(*stammering*) everything went awry at dress rehearsal, for some reason.

Jesse Thorn: The sawing, the strokes of the sawing, aren't long enough on a T-bone steak.

Ego Nwodim: You understand! So, I don't know why who made the—we never rehearsed with the T-bone. I don't know what happened. (*Chuckles.*)

Jesse Thorn: I mean, it reads best—it's the steak that reads best as a steak. I mean, I think that's why—I would presume that's why that choice—if you lift up a T-bone steak, that's a cartoon steak that you're feeding to a dog so that you can, you know, get on the other side of a fence to do some burgling or whatever. (*Inaudible.*)

Ego Nwodim: Yeah. But you can't saw properly. You can't big saw. So, that sketch, when the steak fell, it really did fall when—and it sounded like a hockey puck. I think you maybe heard it at home hit the table. My God, I couldn't cut through it. But then I knew a line when I had—I knew a line was coming up where I had to say, “It tastes so good,” but I haven't tasted it yet. So, then I was like— This is what's fun about it. So, that sketch was not improvised. Another high honor is when people ask me if we were improvising in it, and I go, “No, none of that was improvised.” Besides some of the physicality of like the steak falling. I couldn't have planned for that. And then me having to suck on it. Yeah.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Lisa: (*Eating sounds.*) Mmm, sis.

(*Scrabbling sounds and audience laughter.*)

Girl—sis, I gotta cut you a piece of this steak! This steak is bussin'.

Speaker: Li-Li!

(Laughter.)

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: I think that the most wonderful specifics in that sketch are the part where she is in from Temecula, and the part where she is a litigator.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Lisa: I don't wanna see not one speck of red! I can't be getting sick tonight. I gotta be in court in the morning.

Speaker 1: Wha—you're a lawyer?!

Sister: Uh yeah! She's actually the lead litigator on a class action shoot against Walmart! *(Chuckles.)*

Lisa: Yeah. A couple of their Coinstar machines exploded. I ain't gotta tell you what happened next.

(Audience laughter.)

Speaker 2: Wow. That's really amazing of you. I really admire that.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: Because it would be easy to have— You know, I think we have seen sketches about outrageous Black women who are from the hood or like work at the hair salon or something. And certainly there are outrageous Black women at hair salons in the hood, as there are in any other place, you know. But like the fact that she is situated as this kind of weird, upper middle class insane person, rather than being presented as like, “This is what people who aren't classy are like,” really powers it. You know?

Ego Nwodin: I think it's—yeah. I love that they made her a lawyer. I love that they made her a lawyer. I love that she's a litigator. I love that she wins her cases. Like, she is enigmatic.

And that's, I think, reflective of humans, and that makes her more exciting, I think. It makes her more interesting to me. Because also the notion that a person that is a lawyer—and yes, this successful litigator, does quite well for herself—wouldn't have a quirk? (*Laughs.*) And her quirk being—and in her case—"I like my steaks extra, extra well done. I don't care what anyone at this table says."

She's sitting at a table, by the way, of strangers—with the exception of her sister. She just met these people. (*Laughs.*) This is a woman who does not care. She's so confident. And I think that that's cool. So, thank you for recognizing that, 'cause I do think the writers did a fantastic job with the sketch itself, but also the details of the sketch in that way.

Jesse Thorn: I get the impression that you really enjoy the big silliness that you get to do on the show.

Ego Nwodim: I do! I don't think people—which is totally fine—don't perceive me as silly. I think I can—Lorne said something to me in a meeting recently, but I'm not gonna articulate it properly, so this is not a direct quote. But the essence of what he was saying to me was like—

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"When people look at you, it's clear there's a brain in there," (*laughs*) essentially, "and that you're smart." And so, he is like, "You're not gonna play like a dumb girl well." Not even he said "well". Like, he's like, "It's just clear that this is a smart person." And I appreciate that. That's really cool. I'm also incredibly silly, and so I don't think— You know, I don't think people perceive that when they meet me.

But I've had—like, my day job when I was coming up as an actor, I wasn't a server. I served for four days. Well, I did the training program to serve at Houston's, which is now Hillstone's. Which Hillstone—this is evidence, I used to work there for four days—Hillstone was the like mother company, the parent company of a bunch of restaurants—Houston's being one of them. They scrapped the Houston's now, and Houston's are now called Hillstone. Anyway, worked there for four days. But aside from that, my day jobs were like babysitting. That's fun. I got to be silly with kids. But I worked as like an admissions counselor, a part-time admissions counselor, like at Second Chance University and at a medical research company. To supplement that income, I worked as an admin there in the like late afternoons. And they hired me 'cause I had a biology degree.

But I can pretend to be serious. That's the real pretending, I think. When you see me being serious, it's like, "She's pretending." I think that's a really—yeah. It's just coming to me right now in this moment. (*Chuckles.*) And I'm like, "Oh yeah, that's me pretending to be very serious. That's not really—" I don't think you—if you've only seen serious Ego, I don't think you know her. Spiritual Ego, you might know her. Serious Ego? I don't know. Silly Ego? That's your friend. You're a friend.

Jesse Thorn: Ego, thank you so much for taking the time to talk to me. It was so nice to meet you and get to know you.

Ego Nwodim: So great to talk to you too, Jesse!

Transition: Bright, cheerful synth.

Jesse Thorn: Ego Nwodim. She's one of the stars of *Saturday Night Live*.

Transition: Harmonious synth with light vocalizations.

Jesse Thorn: That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is created in the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun—as well as at Maximum Fun HQ, overlooking beautiful MacArthur Park in Los Angeles, California. Right now, here at my home in Northeast LA and at our office in Los Angeles's Westlake District, we are thinking of and loving our neighbors, all our neighbors.

Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers are Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey. Our production fellow at Maximum Fun is Hannah Moroz. Our video producer is Daniel Speer. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music comes from our friend, Dan Wally—also known as DJW. You can find his music at [DJWsounds.bandcamp.com](https://djwsounds.bandcamp.com). Our theme music was written and recorded by The Go! Team. It's called “Huddle Formation”. Thanks to The Go! Team; thanks to their label, Memphis Industries. Special thanks this week to Jacob Derwin at Technica House in New York City for recording our interview with Ego Nwodim this week, along with Neil Roush and the team at NPR New York for recording our conversation with Matt Wolf.

You can follow *Bullseye* on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, where you'll find video from just about all our interviews—including the ones that you heard this week. If you heard something you enjoyed, why not skip over to YouTube and hit that share button? Send it to a friend who might like it.

I think that's about it. Just remember, all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

Promo: *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

(Music fades out.)

(ADVERTISEMENT)

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