

[00:00:00]

Transition: Three gavel bangs.

Jesse Thorn: It is the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast. I'm Bailiff Jesse Thorn. With me is the great Judge John Hodgman.

John Hodgman: Hello.

Jesse Thorn: We've got a brand-new episode recorded live on stage in your neck of the woods, John. Portland, Maine.

John Hodgman: We talked about being nekkid (*naked*) at home, glasses—both drinking and wearing—doing needle crafts in bed, and writing dream sequences in your short stories. And we were joined by our friends Joel Mann and the Night and Day Jazz Trio. Right, Joel? You were there!

Joel Mann: I was there.

John Hodgman: And it was a good time, right?

Joel Mann: Wonderful time.

John Hodgman: Thank you.

Jesse Thorn: Let's go to the stage at the State Theater in Portland, Maine.

Transition: Three gavel bangs.

Jesse Thorn: People of Portland, Maine, 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.)

Let's start our first case. Please welcome to the stage Emily and Nicky!

(Cheers and applause.)

Emily brings the case against her husband, Nicky. Emily likes to embroider in bed, but Nicky wants to keep needles as far away from their bed as possible.

(Laughs.)

Who's right? Who's wrong? Only one could decide. Please rise as Judge John Hodgman enters the courtroom.

(Cheers and applause.)

John Hodgman: Emily and Nicky, you may be seated. Thank you for joining us. Who seeks justice in my fake court?

Emily: I do, your honor.

John Hodgman: You would be Emily?

Emily: That is I.

John Hodgman: Well, tell me about your hobby. It's embrooooidery, right?

Emily: Yes, I embroider, I knit, I quilt, I mend. I also sell some of the work I make. So, it's more than a hobby.

John Hodgman: Okay. Do you have a website you wanna buzz market?

Emily: My business is Bell—

John Hodgman: *(Loudly “boop”ing.)* Sorry.

(Laughter.)

I don't know what that was. An audio problem. Try it again.

Emily: Belleearth Studio.

John Hodgman: Say it again?

John Hodgman: BOOP!

(Laughter.)

No, honestly, I do want to know what it is.

Emily: Belleearth Studio.

John Hodgman: Bell-earth?

Emily: My last name is Bellharth. It's German. It's hard to pronounce. And that's always how I—

John Hodgman: Ooh. *(Sarcastically.)* That's great for URL!

Emily: Yeah. *(Laughs.)* So, “bell earth” is how I teach people to pronounce my last name.

John Hodgman: Bell earth. Now, I have a question. Nicky, you can probably take a walk.

(Laughter.)

Embroidery versus croooooss stitching... What's the difference?

Emily: Super different.

John Hodgman: Yeah? Go on.

Emily: Cross stitching comes with a sort of interface with a grid on it. You can sort of work within that grid. Embroidery is—

John Hodgman: Oh, right. It's got a picture on the thing. And so, you're filling it in with little—okay.

Emily: It's a little paint by numbers.

John Hodgman: A little paint by numbers. You should tell that to my wife, who's a whole human in her own right.

(Laughter.)

Emily: Yeah. Embroidery, more freeform.

John Hodgman: What kind of things do you embroider?

Emily: I do sashiko embroidering. So, it's a Japanese style of embroidering. I use it to create sort of—

John Hodgman: Is that when you smash the pottery and put it together with gold vein?

(Emily confirms.)

Emily: Exactly, with the needle. *(Laughs.)* No, it's like quilting together different things. I naturally die fabric, and then I do these patterns on it that I make into pillows. Or I will use to like mend a quilt, in this case.

John Hodgman: That's very impressive! *(Sarcastically.)* Nicky, I can see why you don't wanna share a bed with this person.

(Laughter.)

Nicky, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to malign you. You haven't even had a chance to speak for yourself? What is your side of the story?

Nicky: Um, I mean, I just fundamentally don't think that there should be super sharp things in the bed.

(Laughter.)

In case that they escape from her—

John Hodgman: They're not alive.

Nicky: —and end up in me.

(Laughter.)

John Hodgman: I see. And embroidery, you use a sharp needle?

Emily: Well, specifically, the case— The actual incident that led me to bring this case is that I've been mending a quilt that we have. We have a puppy who would sometimes make holes in our quilt, and I do the sashiko embroidering patches over these holes. And I was using pins to hold the patches down before I would embroider.

John Hodgman: Mm-hm. Okay. The pins are sharp is what you're saying.

Emily: The pins and the needle were sharp, yes.

John Hodgman: Right. And what style of pin are you using? Safety pin or danger pin?

Emily: Danger pin.

(Laughter.)

But with the big, colorful circle on top. So—

Nicky: *(Stammering.)* So, I came up to bed one evening. And I was about to get into bed, and Emily was like, “Oh, wait! Hold on, hold on, hold on. I lost a needle. Like, let's find it together.”

Emily: And we found it, *(unclear)*!

John Hodgman: And you sleep in a haystack, yes or no?

Nicky: What'd you say?

John Hodgman: Do you sleep in a haystack? Yes or no?

Nicky: *(Laughs.)* Indeed, no.

John Hodgman: Alright. Regular bed?

(Nicky confirms.)

Yeah. Probably a mattress you got from a podcast ad.

Nicky: Probably, yeah.

John Hodgman: I mean, it's a mattress. You probably did. Has it happened that you've been stuck then?

Nicky: Not in bed, but yes. On the couch.

John Hodgman: Yes, in life?

Nicky: Mm-hm. I sat on a pin, actually, yeah.

John Hodgman: You sat on a pin?

Nicky: Yes I did.

John Hodgman: One of your pins?

Emily: This was many years ago, and I don't have a distinct memory of it.

Nicky: Mm. That's convenient, isn't it?

(Laughter.)

[00:05:00]

Emily: But for a larger context—I, uh, have suffered a traumatic brain injury in the last five years.

John Hodgman: I'm sorry to hear that.

Emily: It's caused me to have a lot of bed rest. So, a lot of my crafts—

John Hodgman: How can I get some of that?

Emily: Yeah. *(Laughs.)* Hit your head super hard. No, I do not recommend.

John Hodgman: I sorry. I'm sorry that happened to you. You doing okay now?

Emily: I couldn't read. I'm still rehabbing. I'm much better. But I was multiple years stuck at home, not allowed to read, not allowed to watch TV. And so, handcrafts—

John Hodgman: Nicky wouldn't allow you to read or watch TV?

Emily: *(Joking.)* Yes. Nicky, also my doctor.

And so, I was stuck in bed, and doing handcrafts was like super important to me. And I still have times where that's important to me. So, I really want to be able to do my crafts in bed. And I am—I knew I'd lost the pin. We communicated, and no one got hurt!

John Hodgman: Nicky, did you ban needles in bed? Formally?

Nicky: I did. Unfortunately, she has—without my knowledge—been using them in bed since this incident.

Emily: And no one's been hurt!

(Laughter.)

Jesse Thorn: This is why we need to eliminate the civil service.

John Hodgman: When you banned the needles in bed—what, did you go to the town office or something?

(Nicky laughs.)

Did you let Emily know that you had banned needles in bed?

Nicky: I think I asked her—yeah—not to.

John Hodgman: Well, okay. That's different than banning. You said, “Please don't use needles in bed”?

(Nicky confirms.)

And Emily, did you agree at that time?

Emily: I did, but I also used some needles to make this sweater.

(Scattered “ooh”s from the crowd.)

Which I would argue is not only benefiting him, but all of us. 'Cause it's so beautiful!

John Hodgman: Nicky, I do I have—may I touch your sweater?

(Nicky confirms.)

OW! EUGH! GEE! It's full of needles!

(Laughter.)

No, it's a beautiful sweater.

Nicky: Thank you. If you were to judge in my favor, I would not ask you to ban knitting needles. They're not very sharp.

John Hodgman: Sure, that's true. But they gouge pretty good.

Nicky: Eh. I'm not too worried about that.

John Hodgman: Don't ask how I know.

(Laughter.)

But they're probably less dangerous, right?

(Nicky agrees.)

So, how did you feel when you learned that Emily had gone against your ban? Or shall we put it more nicely? Your request.

Nicky: I was surprised, but also happy to know that, you know, she hadn't lost another one.

(Laughter.)

John Hodgman: Emily, is there anywhere else you can work on these projects other than bed?

Emily: Sometimes I work on the couch. Sometimes I—

John Hodgman: That's a danger zone too!

Emily: Yeah. Also a danger zone. And sometimes I— I have a small, little studio space that I work in. But specifically this quilt project, it's the only space in the house I can get the quilt flat on and work on it.

John Hodgman: So, you're not using the bed for bedrest in this case. You're using it as a workstation?

Emily: It is my mending station.

John Hodgman: Alright. I'll tell you what. I've gotta keep this justice swift, 'cause we're in bulk justice mode. I will not deny you your right to work on projects in bed, so long as you patrol the needles. I will say that your bed is for your marital companionship, not for your arts and crafts.

(Laughter.)

And I will also say that if your husband asks you not to use needles and you agree, you actually have to agree and not do it.

(Laughter.)

So, I'm going to fine you \$1,000.

(Laughter and scattered applause.)

Emily: Oh dear!

John Hodgman: Sentence suspended, of course. You're on probation.

You can work on your crafts in bed, but you absolutely have to patrol those needles. And what I ask you to do— And no longer put the quilt on the bed; you gotta find another work area for that. Maybe go to someone else's house or something like that.

Emily: Someone else's bed.

John Hodgman: Yeah, exactly. Go to someone else's bed. You've driven her into another person's bed, Nicky.

(Laughter.)

I hope you're happy. And I order that your next craft be a little doll of Nicky, so you have a place to put your needles when you're done for the night.

(Laughter.)

This is the sound of a gavel. Thank you. (*Bangs his gavel.*)

Jesse Thorn: Thank you, Emily and Nicky.

(*Cheers and applause.*)

Please welcome to the stage Sam and Charlotte!

(*Cheers and applause.*)

Sam thinks his wife, Charlotte, needs glasses. But Charlotte says she has perfect vision. The eye doctor told her so... eight years ago.

(*Laughter.*)

Sam wants a second opinion.

Judge Hodgman?

John Hodgman: Welcome to the Court of Judge John Hodgman. You may be seated, Sam and Charlotte. Sam, you bring this case?

Sam: I do.

John Hodgman: You think that Charlotte needs glasses?

Sam: I definitely do.

John Hodgman: What is your career, sir?

Sam: So, when we started living—

John Hodgman: What is your career, sir?

Sam: Sorry?

John Hodgman: What is your— (*Beat.*) Maybe you need a hearing aid.

Sam: Maybe!

(*Laughter.*)

John Hodgman: Is this getting through to you?

Sam: Much better.

John Hodgman: Do you have an occupation or a vocation?

Sam: I do. I work in politics.

John Hodgman: I see. *(Sarcastically.)* What fun for you.

[00:10:00]

(Sam agrees with a laugh.)

Are you perhaps a part-time ophthalmologist?

Sam: I am not.

John Hodgman: Can you spell that word?

Sam: Probably.

John Hodgman: If you can, I will rule your favor right now.

Sam: O-P-T-H-A—

John Hodgman: WRONG! *(Bangs his gavel.)* O-P-H-T-H-A-L!

(Sam “wow”s.)

M-O-L-O-G-I-S-T. It's a tricky one.

(Sam agrees.)

It's a tricky one. It's a stumper.

Sam: Surprising.

John Hodgman: Alright. So, you are not medically licensed to diagnose your wife's vision. And yet, you have made observations that her vision might be declining, correct?

Sam: That is correct. And I wear glasses, for the podcast listeners, so I have a lot of personal experience with how big a difference they make.

John Hodgman: Not when listening to podcasts, I'm sure. But good.

(Laughter.)

Sam: For the people who can't see me, I'm saying.

John Hodgman: No, no. I understand.

Jesse Thorn: When he says he wears glasses for the podcast listener, what he means is that he wears glasses so that the four-eyed nerd who listens to podcasts can relate to him.

John Hodgman: That's exactly it.

(Sam agrees.)

(A single whoop from the audience.)

What have you observed in Charlotte's vision or lack thereof? What is it giving you concern, suggesting that she needs vision—a correction?

Sam: Yeah. So, what originated all of this was that when we moved in together around eight years ago, it became quickly apparent that Charlotte could not read things on the TV. Not just the—not the subtitles. Those were okay, but when we were looking at what to watch, and there are the different menus and descriptions of things, she couldn't read them at all.

John Hodgman: Is that true that you have difficulty reading not subtitles, but other captions and stuff?

Charlotte: Yeah, the little Netflix blurbs. I couldn't read those on our TV.

Jesse Thorn: *(Joking.)* You're really missing out. They're really beautiful writing.

(Laughter.)

John Hodgman: It says here that you also have difficulty reading the oven clock. Is that true?

Sam: Yeah. Digital clock. Sometimes she'll ask me what it says when we're both in the kitchen standing next to each other.

(Laughter.)

Charlotte: That's just laziness.

John Hodgman: Okay, I'll allow that. We'll dismiss that evidence right away. You should be lazy. Have you ever worn glasses?

Charlotte: I had a pair of glasses when I was a teenager.

John Hodgman: And then you stopped wearing them. You saw this eye doctor eight years ago. What did they say?

Charlotte: The eye doctor, when I told him that I couldn't read the descriptions on Netflix, told him [me] that I had, quote, “unreasonable expectations for what the human eye can accomplish.”

(Laughter.)

And—

(John “wow”s.)

Jesse Thorn: Imagine if your cardiologist told you that.

(Laughter.)

John Hodgman: Totally. I would love to hear that from my personal trainer. If I were paying an eye doctor for that, I might want a bit of a refund. But you bought this, right?

Charlotte: Well, he also told me to get a bigger TV. So, we got a bigger TV, and the problem is solved. In my opinion.

John Hodgman: Uh, did—there's something here about bagging your glasses?

Charlotte: Yeah. I had a very old pair of glasses, and I showed them to him, and he said, “Bag 'em.”

John Hodgman: Bag 'em.

Charlotte: Bag ‘em.

John Hodgman: That is, throw them away.

Charlotte: Throw them away. They're useless.

John Hodgman: And you’ve never worn glasses since.

Charlotte: Never. Never.

Jesse Thorn: Did you go to an eye doctor, or did you go to a character on a police procedural?

(Laughter.)

John Hodgman: When you first heard this story about this eye doctor, Sam, what did you think?

Sam: I definitely think he was a quack. I don't know how qualified he was.

John Hodgman: Should we do a buzz market for him too?

Charlotte: I don't remember his name. It was a long time ago. *(Laughs.)*

(Sam agrees.)

John Hodgman: Eight years. That's true. It's a lifetime. I mean, it really is.

(Laughter.)

Charlotte, have you noticed a difference in your vision since you stopped wearing your glasses?

Charlotte: Not particularly.

John Hodgman: Really? What—? I mean, I don't know what your prescription was. Are you nearsighted, farsighted, what?

Charlotte: Well, *(chuckling)* I have one eye that can see really good distance, and one that can see pretty good closeup. So, I solve most problems by closing one of them.

John Hodgman: May I recommend an incredible eye patch that you move from eye to eye?

Charlotte: I would love that. Yes.

John Hodgman: Sam, Charlotte's the one who has to tolerate the discomfort of not reading these things. What does—how does this affect you? Why don't you just let her enjoy her vanity eye patch or whatever she's trying to do?

Sam: Well, for the record, I would be happy with an order for an eye patch as well. But—

John Hodgman: So ordered. *(Bangs his gavel.)*

Sam: *(Laughs.)* But I do think it impacts her quality of life. Sometimes— It is partly that she asks me to read things, and I'd like her to be able to read them, for myself. But recently we went to see *Book of Mormon*, and she was unable to see a lot of the people on stage, and I could see them very clearly. And so, I was thinking that she would enjoy things like plays and also a lot of other things in life better if she could see better.

Jesse Thorn: Could I suggest? Have you thought about getting a bigger *Book of Mormon*?

(Laughter and applause.)

[00:15:00]

John Hodgman: It does seem like it would be a solution.

Charlotte: Just to be clear, I just couldn't see their faces very well. So, I think we should have gotten better seats!

John Hodgman: Wow.

(Booing from the audience.)

Did you see *Book of Mormon* in New York, or were you watching it from Portsmouth, New Hampshire?

Charlotte: It was here in Portland, Maine!

Sam: They came to Portland.

John Hodgman: Oh, in Portland, Maine. I see. Look, I am not an ophthalmologist of any kind. Never mind a quack. And yet I am going to—I do want to evaluate your vision. So, Charlotte, could you turn to the screen and take a look at this chart?

(Laughter.)

Charlotte: Oh no. *(Laughs.)*

John Hodgman: Could you read the lines—the letters above the green bar? You see the green bar?

Charlotte: I can see the green bar, yes.

John Hodgman: Okay. You're not colorblind?

Charlotte: No, I'm not. But he is actually.

(Sam confirms.)

John Hodgman: Okay, well luckily he's not on trial.

(Laughter.)

Charlotte: Yes, I can see those letters.

John Hodgman: Would you read them out for me please?

Charlotte: P-S-W—

John Hodgman: No, from the top please, if you don't mind.

Charlotte: Oh. A-G-A-L-L-O-N-O-F-S-C-A-L-L-O-P-S-W-E-R-U. I can see them all.

John Hodgman: And what does that spell?

Charlotte: Um...

John Hodgman: Aaalright.

Charlotte: *(Stammering.)* I don't know.

John Hodgman: Do you not—? Okay! That's fine. Can you read the line?

Charlotte: A gal—? Oh, a gallon—a gallon of... cal-ups?

Jesse Thorn: Scallops.

John Hodgman: Scallops.

Charlotte: Oh, scallops! There we go. There we go, yes.

John Hodgman: WERU, our cosponsors for the evening.

Charlotte: Took me a minute there.

John Hodgman: Can you read the letters below the green bar, the two lines there?

Charlotte: Bring back scrapple?

John Hodgman: At the Hannafords.

Charlotte: At the Hannafords—?

John Hodgman: Yes. That's—

(Laughter and applause.)

Joel, they used to have scrapple at the Hannafords near my house, and then they just took it away for some reason. Used to have it in the freezer case. Bring back scrapple.

Does anyone in the audience have a brick of scrapple or an eye patch? I'll take either one. Just bring it to the foot of the stage.

(Laughter.)

Well, Sam, I'm sorry to say that Charlotte nailed that exam pretty well. Not only did she see all the letters, but she was able to put them together and read my secret messages. I would say however though, Charlotte, you should go and see an eye doctor for real. It's up to you whether you want to wear glasses. But I would ask you to consult a doctor who actually wants to do their job. And make sure that your eye health is good, because there have been people in my life who have had detached retinas all of a sudden, and you just want to keep on top of that. 'Cause it's a part of your body that you rely upon. In that case, I find in Sam's favor. *(Bangs his gavel.)*

Jesse Thorn: Thank you, Sam and Charlotte.

(Cheers and applause.)

Transition: Three gavel bangs.

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[00:20:00]

Transition: Three gavel bangs.

Jesse Thorn: Please welcome to the stage Safiya and Shira. Shira loves to be naked in the privacy of her own home. Her girlfriend, Safiya, has no problem with this, except for one thing. Safiya can't stand it when Shira sits naked on the couch. Shira just wants to be free.

John Hodgman: Safiya and Shira, welcome. You may be seated. May I ask who here is Shira, and who's Safiya?

Safiya: I'm Safiya.

John Hodgman: You are Safiya. And you are the non-naked one. I mean, you're both clothed, for the listeners right now.

(Laughter.)

Safiya: We are. We are clothed.

John Hodgman: Shira, you like to lounge in the nude.

Shira: Who doesn't? *(Laughs.)*

John Hodgman: Wow! I think I've heard everything I need to!

(Laughter.)

Oh! That's true. Jesse, you do enjoy wearing clothes and knowing about clothes.

(Jesse confirms and so does Safiya.)

Clothes can be wonderful. So, Safiya, you have an issue with Shira's nakedness. Tell me how this started.

Safiya: Well, it really starts when Shira comes home from a long, sweaty bike ride.

(Laughter.)

And she comes in the house, and she strips off her bike shorts, and she sits right down on the couch.

(A single, manic giggle from the audience.)

And I just think about all the absorption happening, and I don't love it.

John Hodgman: What, uh... what kind of couch are we talking about here? What is the surface? Is it plush? Spongy?

Safiya: It's like upholstery, like a—

John Hodgman: It's not leather, for example.

Safiya: It's not leather.

John Hodgman: Not easily wiped down from sweat and wet.

(Safiya confirms.)

Right, I gotcha.

Safiya: It's also a secondhand couch.

(Horror from the audience.)

John Hodgman: Oh! So, it's full of secretions already, so who cares?

(Laughter.)

Jesse Thorn: Much more intimate secretions than mere bike sweat.

(Laughter.)

Safiya: Yeah, it's possible.

John Hodgman: Shira, tell us about the pleasure that you get sitting naked on the couch.

(Laughter.)

Shira: It's a summertime pleasure.

John Hodgman: Yeah, go on!

Shira: *(Laughing.)* I don't know. You go on a bike ride, and it's like—the bike shorts, you gotta get 'em off and you! And then what, you sit on like the uncomfortable, wooden kitchen chair when you get home? It's like, no. You—yeah.

John Hodgman: Yeah. I'll say this. I don't exercise very much. But I do sweat a lot.

(Laughter.)

Shira: I'm not the party who sweats a lot.

John Hodgman: Ohhh!

(Safiya confirms.)

You sweat more than Shira does?

Shira: Way more. Like—

John Hodgman: Well, what I was going to say is that when I am very sweaty—me, personally—I don't find it refreshing to get as close to upholstery as possible.

(Laughter.)

Is there something about—maybe you don't see it this way, but is there something about the transgression of being naked in furniture in your own home that just feels fun and empowering to you? Or is there something else at work?

Shira: It definitely wouldn't have been acceptable in my childhood home, yeah. So, maybe there's a freedom there.

John Hodgman: Now that you're an adult, you just want to do whatever you want.

Shira: Sure. Yeah. Sure.

John Hodgman: And you don't need Mommy Safiya telling you what to do anymore.

Shira: Well, it should be said that when this first came up months ago, and we had this discussion—and then I haven't sat on the couch without any clothes on ever since.

John Hodgman: Yeah, but it's wintertime now.

Shira: No, it started in the summer! It started in the summer. And we had this conversation, and I've been at least underwared ever since.

Safiya: She's been abstaining.

John Hodgman: So, it sounds like the whole thing has been resolved.

Safiya: Well—

Shira: Well, no, I was hoping you'd rule in my favor.

(Laughter.)

John Hodgman: Alright, alright. Safiya, the couch is second hand. It's not pristine. I'm sure it's a lovely piece of furniture, but it's also a piece of junk at this point. Why not let your partner just enjoy themselves?

Safiya: Ohhh, it just icks me out! *(Laughs.)* And think about anybody else who comes over. They don't know that Shira's been sitting naked on the couch.

John Hodgman: *(Conspiratorially.)* But that's part of the fun, isn't it?

(Laughter.)

Shira: And they have clothes on!

Jesse Thorn: Just like you didn't know about all the juices that had been placed in the couch before you obtained it!

(Laughter.)

John Hodgman: If Shira were freshly showered, would that make a difference, Safiya?

Safiya: It's a really good question.

(John thanks her.)

I think it's better.

John Hodgman: Someone wrote it down for me. Thanks, Jennifer Marmor. Great question.

Safiya: I think it's better and like less offensive, but I still would wish that Shira would have underwear on.

[00:25:00]

That's my bare minimum for clothing on the couch.

John Hodgman: Is this compromise acceptable to you, Shira?

Shira: *(Beat.)* I can live with it. Can I just share one other piece of evidence?

John Hodgman: Yes, of course, please!

Shira: Yeah. Safiya has shared her deep desire to sit on the couch after a bike ride naked with me before.

Safiya: But I have—

John Hodgman: Is this so?

Shira: Yes. It's so!

John Hodgman: Safiya, how do you respond to that? Is that true?

Safiya: It's true. I admit, I have felt the urge, and I have... held myself back. I've sat on the rug instead. *(Laughs.)*

(Laughter and scattered applause.)

Jesse Thorn: We're gonna—Judge Hodgman, we're gonna need that ophthalmologist from the crime procedural to bring a blacklight over to their house and...

John Hodgman: Absolutely. Was that exciting, to sit on the rug nude?

Safiya: Maybe a little.

John Hodgman: Not so much? Do you resent Shira her freedom and imagination and just going for it?

(Beat.) I'll let that silence speak.

(Laughter.)

One last question before I make my verdict. Do you have a dog or a cat?

Shira: Cat. Desdemona.

John Hodgman: Fantastic! Does Desdemona wear diapers when hanging on the couch?

Safiya: She does not.

John Hodgman: I think it's pretty clear that anyone can be nude on this couch if they want.

(Laughter.)

Out of consideration for your beloved, Shira, I would suggest that you put a towel down on the couch. Just to— Because you don't want your partner being skeeved. And by the way, Shira? You should sit naked on that couch. But here's the thing, even if you want to and you don't do it, don't let Shira call you a hypocrite. Because the truth is we're all fucking hypocrites. Doesn't prove anything. I find in Shira's favor, plus towel. *(Bangs his gavel.)*

(Cheers and applause.)

Jesse Thorn: Thank you Safiya and Shira.

Transition: Three gavel bangs.

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Jesse Thorn: Portland, Maine. Are you ready for... mega justice?

(Cheers and applause.)

Let's bring out our litigants. Please welcome to the stage Emily and Judd!

(Cheers and applause.)

Tonight's case: "I Was Dreaming When I Wrote This, So Sue Me if I Judge Too Fast". Emily was previously a litigant at our live show here in Portland in 2016. Now she's back for more justice. She and her friend, Judd, are in a local writing group. Emily likes to write fiction that includes dream sequences. Judd thinks dream sequences are cheating. He wants to ban dream sequences from all writing.

(Laughter and scattered boos.)

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.

(Cheers and applause.)

John Hodgman: "Never talk about how you slept. Nobody cares. Don't talk about your health either. Nobody cares. Root talk. Root talk is when people tell you how they arrived or how they came, how they got on the road, which road, how long it took. That is the top of my list for what you don't talk about. And also, your dreams. Nobody cares about your dreams."

(Laughter.)

Bailiff Jesse Thorn, please swear the litigants in.

Jesse Thorn: Emily and Judd, 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 dreams of electric sheep?

(Laughter.)

(They swear.)

Jesse Thorn: What does it even mean?

Judge Hodgman, you may proceed.

John Hodgman: Emily and Judd, you may be seated. For an immediate summary judgment in one of yours favors, can either of you name the piece of culture that I referenced as I entered this courtroom? Emily, nice to see you again. Welcome back to the court. I'll let Judd guess first, because he's new here.

Judd, what's your guess?

Judd: That's someone's mother on an episode of *This American Life*, talking about the seven or eight things she doesn't want to hear about.

John Hodgman: That's an interesting guess, Judd. Do you have a guess, Emily?

Emily: I think it was, uh, Andy Rooney?

John Hodgman: No.

(Laughter.)

And Judd, I have to say, you got it exactly right.

(Laughter and raucous applause.)

Almost.

[00:30:00]

It was, specifically, seven things. Not seven or eight. And you did not name the year in which this episode came out, which was 2013, a year that I'm feeling very nostalgic for.

(Laughter.)

You did not mention that it was Maria Matheson as told to her daughter, *This American Life* and *Serial* producer, Sarah Koenig in the episode entitled “The Seven Things You're Not Supposed To Talk About”. These are the topics, as you identified, in Sarah's mom's world should be avoided at all costs, because they're boring and nobody cares. You can talk about them among families, perhaps—such as when Sarah asked her mom, “Well, what if I get sick, and I wanna talk about my health? Do you not care?”

And she replied—the mom replied, “No, I care. And I'd say, ‘Well, I'm terribly sorry, you poor thing.’ And then I'd forget about it and go on with my life as most people would.”

(Laughter.)

That's a—that, by the way? Spot on. Great guess. I wish I could give it to you, but we got a show to do. So, you'll forgive me for not offering you a summary judgment. But I'm going to give you a bit of a head-start to make your case. What's going on here?

Judd: Well, dreams are boring, and no one wants to hear about them. They're tedious and non-narrative. But I think my real objection is that fiction—

John Hodgman: All the goodwill you build up just died in my heart.

(Laughter.)

Lemme turn to Emily for a second here, and then I'll give you a chance to make your case.

Emily, last time you were here, you had your friend Danny. *(Gently.)* Danny seemed really nice.

(Laughter.)

What was that case? That involved not a writing group, but a—a—a—?

Emily: A reading series.

John Hodgman: A reading series. Called?

Emily: Word Portland.

John Hodgman: And that was “Go Set a Tip Jar”, right?

(Emily confirms.)

And it was about whether or not to charge for the reading series. And I said, your work is worth money and compensation; you should charge for it.

Emily: Ultimately, yes.

John Hodgman: And you won, didn't you?

Emily: I won live.

John Hodgman: You won live. But not in life?

Emily: There was a recorded episode where Danny won, and you overturned it in my favor in the live.

John Hodgman: Well, I don't remember these things.

(Laughter.)

Emily: That's why I'm telling you. *(Laughs.)*

John Hodgman: Thank you. I appreciate it. So, now you're back again with Judd, who's very much a smarty pants.

(Laughter.)

I'm a little intimidated, frankly. Emily, tell me about this writing group that you and Judd are in.

Emily: So, we have been meeting roughly monthly—with some gaps, but roughly monthly for about seven years.

John Hodgman: Group of about how many people?

Emily: Four to five. It's been four consistently for the past couple years.

John Hodgman: And are you writing novels, short stories?

Emily: It started out as novel writing, and we've drifted a little. So, sometimes it's short stories, sometimes essays, but fiction narrative for most—

John Hodgman: Mostly narrative fiction.

Emily: For the most part, yeah.

John Hodgman: Okay. Right. And are you working on something now?

Emily: I am.

John Hodgman: And does it involve a dream sequence?

Emily: The current project does not involve dreams. I don't always write about dreams.

John Hodgman: No, no, of course. You have a wide repertoire. But in some of your work you have—

Jesse Thorn: Dreams, roots. *(Chuckling.)* What were the other things?

John Hodgman: Yeah, root talk, illness, health.

(Jesse says something unclear.)

Right, exactly. But in some of your work, you do have dream sequences?

(Emily confirms.)

And Judd, why do you hate Emily's dreams?

Judd: (*Beat.*) Fiction's job is to represent life, to take our reality and skew it somehow to make it more visible, more real, more—to help us understand the human condition. And so, you have all the tools available to you—

John Hodgman: You're saying humans don't dream. It never happens.

Judd: (*Laughs.*) Humans in real life do dream. But on the page, you don't need dreams to do something dreamlike or otherworldly. Indeed, your whole project is to do something dreamlike or otherworldly.

John Hodgman: Well, wait a minute! If you have a character and a piece of fiction, and that character has a dream, and the character talks about the dream—maybe, and it's the first-person narration—is that not real life?

Judd: Oh, that's a— The existence of dreams is different than the portrayal of a dream sequence on the page.

John Hodgman: What specifically—?

Jesse Thorn: I'll give you an example, John. Your wife, who of course is a whole human being in her own right, is an English teacher.

(*John confirms.*)

Has she ever taught the famous short story, *The Public Life of Walter Mitty*?

(*They snicker.*)

Yeah, so no dream sequence.

John Hodgman: No dream sequence. No dreams whatsoever. No inner life at all. That's right.

What, specifically—what piece of writing of Emily's did you have an issue with?

(*Judd clicks his teeth but hesitates, chuckling awkwardly.*)

Well, I mean, look. This is writing group, right? You critique each other.

Judd: It is a writing group. It is a writing group.

Emily: In Judd's defense, this is a long-standing argument. So, it's been a few years since the initial dream sequence pieces.

John Hodgman: Oh. He didn't think that he had to do his homework before he came to class today?

(Laughter.)

Didn't think about—didn't think about an argument? Okay.

Judd: I have a blanket stance. Emily's a wonderful writer. I have no—I take no objection to her work—

[00:35:00]

—other than her inclusion of dream sequences, which are unnecessary and pointless.

(Emily “hm”s doubtfully.)

John Hodgman: But neither— You're not answering the question. Is there a specific dream sequence that Emily wrote, for example, that illustrates—*(chuckling)* bad writing, I guess?

(They laugh.)

Judd: No, there's not a specific dream sequence.

John Hodgman: Not—? Alright. Alright. Overall.

Judd: It's just the—it's the existence of any dream sequence.

John Hodgman: Would you say that you are in the majority, in the writing group, of people who feel this way?

Judd: It's a group of four. We're divided right down the middle.

John Hodgman: Right down the middle. So, today we're gonna decide whether to ban dreams from writing group forever.

Judd: Well, from all fiction, I think. Written by anybody, anywhere. That's my understanding.

John Hodgman: I'm not sure that that's my remit. But I'll do what I can. I do have George RR Martin's telephone number.

I don't know if there are any dreams in—I mean—

Judd: I'm sure not.

John Hodgman: Okay.

(Discord from the crowd.)

Truly, your assurance is making me very nervous. So. But I do take your point, in the sense that—you know—I do dream. And all of my dreams are boring and dumb. In fiction and in film—I presume you are against dream sequences in film as well for the same reason.

Judd: *(Clicks teeth.)* Yes.

John Hodgman: Those dream sequences often have heavy portent, and are highly symbolic of something that's going on in their life. Whereas my dreams are mostly like, “Yeah, I was walking down 7th Avenue, and then I went home.” And that's the end of my dream. But Jesse, you know what I'm talking about. Right? Dreams are rarely representational in the way they are in fiction and so forth.

Jesse Thorn: Exactly. Yeah. I think often they're just sort of like transactional or just processing little things that you're worried about. Whatever.

John Hodgman: Yeah. Like, I'm going to have a terrible nightmare about you tonight, Judd.

(Laughter.)

Judd: Do not write about it.

John Hodgman: Not even in my dream journal?

(Laughter.)

Judd: That is the appropriate place.

Jesse Thorn: Honestly, what blessed relief it would be if all our nightmares tonight were about Judd.

(Laughter and applause.)

John Hodgman: Yes, it's true. You're the villain Gotham needs. No, I'm sorry, Judd. I don't mean to pick on you.

Emily, when this comes up in writing group it's divided. Judd, when you read a dream sequence, do you offer critique on it? Or do you just skip over it?

Judd: Oh no, I offer critique. I think— My point is that there's always some other way to do whatever you're trying to accomplish in the dream. You have all the tools of fiction available to you.

John Hodgman: Go on.

Judd: Well, again, reality on the page does not have to mirror our reality. If you want to create something dreamlike or surreal or—

John Hodgman: You're saying the work itself is a dream!

Judd: Exactly! That's what we're doing. We're trying to create an illusion on the page. So, why needlessly bring in this other illusory element?

John Hodgman: Emily, have you ever had a dream with a dream? Have you ever woken up or thought you had woken up, and it's still a dream?

Emily: I think definitely. Yes.

John Hodgman: Yeah, me too.

Emily: *(Laughs.)* Pretty cool.

John Hodgman: Was Nathan Lamont in your dream?

Emily: I don't—I don't know who that is. So, maybe?

John Hodgman: He's someone I knew in high school.

(Laughter.)

I think I was in high school, and I woke up, and Nathan Lamont was standing ominously in my bedroom.

Emily: Yeah, I've seen him.

John Hodgman: And I said, "What are you doing here?" And then I woke up again, and he wasn't there.

Now that's a dream within a dream. Or a cover memory for alien abduction. I don't know. And would you—*(Judd starts to speak then stops)*. I'm sorry.

Judd: I was just gonna say, not great story material. I wouldn't write it down. I wouldn't write it down.

(Boos from the audience.)

John Hodgman: Great. *(Giggles delightedly.)* No, this is good. This is good. When you're a writer, you need thick skin! You need to be able to take critiques, even on your own show.

Alright! Didn't like the Nathan Lamont part. Didn't work for Judd. Nathan Lamont's gonna be thrilled, but I guess I'm not just writing for him. I guess I'm writing to describe the human condition.

(Laughter.)

Emily, how would you defend the use of dream sequence—not in only in your work, but in fiction overall?

Emily: For one thing, humans dream, so why not have that as an option for something to write about? I don't think all dreams should be written about or that it's always interesting, but I think it should be on the table of options that we could write about. *(Trails off.)* And... *(Laughs.)* And—

Jesse Thorn: This *Judge John Hodgman* crowd, first crowd ever to be horny for writing options.

(Laughter and cheering.)

Emily: And second, I think if you're doing a good job at writing, you can use a dream as a tool to show something that's happening in the story.

[00:40:00]

It's not just a way to show something weird happening, but it can add to the story in various ways.

Jesse Thorn: Is there an example of that you're thinking of?

Emily: Thanks for asking. *(Laughs.)* I've thought of a few examples of widely celebrated—

John Hodgman: Oh, wait! You did your homework and brought some examples to class?!

(Emily confirms.)

Thank you. I appreciate that.

Emily: There's a story that a lot of people have heard of called *The Christmas Carol*.

(A whoop followed by scattered laughter.)

Largely dream-focused.

John Hodgman: Okay, easy does it. It is A *Christmas Carol*. You're right.

Jesse Thorn: We're about to have a librarian revolt in here.

(Laughter and cheers.)

Emily: A couple examples—

John Hodgman: But we're the ones on stage, and we've all been shaken up by Judd. So, just give us a little grace here! Judd's remarkable self-assurance. God!

Emily: A couple examples of movies that a lot of people have liked: *Inception*.

(A whoop.)

John Hodgman: That's a movie about dreams and dreams within dreams.

Emily: *Nightmare on Elm Street*.

John Hodgman: That's a movie about dreams. Nightmares in particular, yeah.

Emily: There's a comic book series called *The Sandman*.

(Mixed response from the crowd.)

John Hodgman: Moving on. Yeah. That's right. *Inception* and the other one you mentioned are the only two I can think of as well.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, Judd! What about if your character—and then there's—a fucking river of blood shoots into the air outta that bed in that movie! That's nuts!

John Hodgman: *Nightmare on Elm Street*, you're talking about. That's right.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah! Holy cow! That's awesome. I don't even like that kind of thing!

John Hodgman: Judd, do you feel that—

Jesse Thorn: *(Interrupting, not for the first time.)* My daughter made me watch that. It was bananas!

John Hodgman: It's scary.

Jesse Thorn: No wonder people like it. It's wild!

John Hodgman: It's a scary movie.

Jesse Thorn: It's not even—it's like medium scary, but you're just like, "How do you think of all this different (*censor beep*) to do?"

John Hodgman: Are you talking about Wes Craven or Freddie Krueger?

Jesse Thorn: Wes Craven! Yeah, no, do you have like a list of like, "If I get to make a movie, I'm gonna put this wild shit in it!" Then he is just like, "Well, if there's like a dream scissor guy, I could probably fit all this stuff into my movie."

(*Laughter.*)

That's a little something called storytelling.

(*Laughter and cheering.*)

John Hodgman: Do you think culture would be better if there was no *Nightmare on Elm Street*, Judd?

Judd: Well, certainly not. I think in all those examples, actually, it's fairly important that we believe the dream is actually the reality of the fictional world. So, in *A Christmas Carol*, like we need to kind of believe this is real. He's actually being visited by these ghosts. We can't dismiss it as just a dream. That's part of the problem is dreams are so easy to dismiss.

John Hodgman: If any of the experts out there on *A Christmas Carol* know— It never occurred to me that was a dream that Scrooge was having. Is that true? Does he wake up?

(*A loud "yes" from the crowd.*)

Oh, he wakes up at the end. But isn't it plausible that he—?

Emily: Well, he goes to bed, and then sees a ghost, and then wakes up.

John Hodgman: Yeah, 'cause that's when the ghosts come out!

(*Laughter.*)

Judd: Think how much less interesting the story would be if it was just a dream!

Jesse Thorn: They're a lot like freaks in that sense.

(*Laughter.*)

John Hodgman: I was gonna say! The ghosts and the freaks come out at night! We all know this!

Jesse Thorn: What I like about ghosts is that they're really good lovers.

(Laughter.)

That's another thing from “The Freaks Come Out at Night”, John.

John Hodgman: Oh. Judd, is there an example of a dream sequence in a movie or a book that you find particularly offensive?

Judd: *(Beat.)* All of them.

Jesse Thorn: So, no?

(Booing.)

John Hodgman: Okay, everybody relax.

(Laughter.)

Remember, we're all having a good time.

Jesse Thorn: Judd is clearly used to just traipsing his way through life on his B grade Hugh Grant charm.

(Laughter and cheers.)

And he thinks he can do a Hugh Grant heel turn, like in that horror movie Hugh Grant's in right now.

John Hodgman: Oh, that one? Yeah. Is there dream sequence in that?

Jesse Thorn: You know what? You're getting real close to Oompa Lumpa territory.

John Hodgman: How do you feel about dream sequences in movies, Judd? Do you find them to be a cheat? Sometimes they feel that way, right?

Judd: I think it is always a kind of cheating, yeah. Movies at least have the visual— I am struck by *The Big Lebowski*'s dream sequence. I will admit that.

John Hodgman: You are struck by it?

(Judd confirms.)

Turns out there's a guy who likes *The Big Lebowski*.

(Laughter.)

Alright. Alright. I'm gonna go a little easier. Emily, are you working on something right now that has a dream in it?

Emily: I'm not currently working on something with the dream in it.

[00:45:00]

But I do have an example of a dream from the first time this came up.

John Hodgman: Would you be willing to share it with us?

Emily: *(Beat.)* Yes.

John Hodgman: Wonderful. Before we do that, I'd like to ask: if I were to rule in your favor, Judd, what would you have me rule?

Judd: Oh, to ban all dream sequences from all fiction for all time. *(Beat.)* Thank you.

Jesse Thorn: You're welcome?

(Laughter.)

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

Emily: I think that any dream sequence in a piece of writing should be considered as something that should be read and taken in just as any other part of the writing and—be it good or bad—critiqued appropriately. *(Laughs.)*

John Hodgman: But I mean, writing groups are about critiques. Has anything that Judd has said—or other members of the anti-dream coalition within your writing group—made you rethink the way you use dreams and fiction? Has it been helpful at all?

Emily: There is another member of the writing group who just announces that she skims the dream sequences. And—

(John “whoa”s softly.)

Judd does read them, but I think generally agrees with her that they are less important.

John Hodgman: And so, just— And how does it feel when you learn that the writing group just skims over your dreams?

Emily: Well, it feels like maybe my dreams will be less well-written, because no one has given me critique on them. *(Laughs.)*

John Hodgman: Got it. Well, we're going to hear from you, and I will listen carefully. And Judd, you will as well. And Jesse, you will as well.

Emily: So, this is from a novel, so I have to explain what happened first.

John Hodgman: Great.

Emily: So, this is from the beginning of chapter four, and the main character—Patrick—has been taking a mind-altering drug and erasing his memories. And so—

(John “whoa”s.)

His dreams come into play because of the memory erasing.

John Hodgman: He's recovering memories in his dreams.

Emily: He hasn't properly erased the memories, and some of them are reappearing in the dreams.

John Hodgman: Is there a science fiction element to this or—?

Emily: Yeah, the memory erasing drug.

John Hodgman: The memory erasing drug is your own invention.

Emily: Yeah. Yeah, exactly.

John Hodgman: It's something you dreamed up.

Emily: If you will. *(Laughs.)*

John Hodgman: I will. And by the way, thank you for practicing willingness and sharing. It's very vulnerable of you, and I appreciate it.

(Cheers and applause.)

So, I look forward to hearing more.

Emily: So, there are a few short dreams. I'm just gonna share the one where he realized that he's erased the memory of his mother. And about—

John Hodgman: Pretty much everyone's dream.

(Laughter.)

Emily: About a paragraph before this, he acknowledges that he dreamed about being on the beach. So.

“It was the beach again, along the tide line. Patrick Lloyds was young: a boy in yellow swim trunks that he pulled all the way tight around his lean frame. He stood just in the water, back to the ocean, letting the waves pass over his feet, pushing at his calves, petering out a foot or two on, and then receding.

“It's a game someone taught him—a mother. The big waves almost knock him over. When they recede, they pull a little bit of the beach back with them, muddying the water and burying his feet in a wave-made hole that gets a little deeper with every swell. Or at least, that's what's meant to happen. He watches as each wave passes and leave his feet still on top of the sand as solid as hardwood.

“He looks up to see where the mother is, and sees only a growing vastness that scratches at his brain and makes his skin crawl. A blankness, a painting painted over smooth before it's dried. No brush strokes, but he's only young. He hasn't erased a memory yet. How can these ones be gone? He's never erased his mother. That's her there.

“And he woke up with a small shout.”

And then it continues.

(Cheers and applause.)

Jesse Thorn: Do you mind if I reveal how it continues? Basically, the bed like turns into like a puckered—like, the stuff goes—and then a freaking geyser of blood comes up outta the bed!

(Laughter.)

It's amazing. It's wild.

Emily: *(Laughs.)* True.

John Hodgman: Emily? I'm sorry, that was terrible.

(The audience boos him.)

No, it was great! I enjoyed that quite a bit. *(Mockingly.)* Any critiques, Judd?

(Laughter.)

Judd: I love the device of this book, the memory erasing drug. I like recovering the memories, trying to hold onto that memory of the mother. I'm for all of that. The—I don't think it needs to be buried in a dream, necessarily.

[00:50:00]

John Hodgman: How would he recover the memory, if not—mmm, going into a subconscious via dreaming?

Judd: Well, now I guess we're getting into sort of semantics about what a dream is. But a memory is not necessarily—a recovered memory is not necessarily a dream.

Jesse Thorn: So, Judd, you're saying that if he was like gazing out the window of a bus and in an idle of some kind, that would be an okay way for him to sort of recover these memories?

John Hodgman: Yeah. Judd, you're not against idles, are you? What about reveries? *(Rolling the L.)* Fllights of fancy?

(Laughter.)

Never rolled my tongue that way in my life.

Let's say, for example, your dream came true, and I had the power to ban dreaming and dream sequences from all narrative fiction. What way would you suggest that your writing group partner, Emily, portray the recovery of these memories, if not a trip into the nightly unconscious? What mechanism would you use plot wise or otherwise?

Judd: I actually don't think it has to be that different. That's kind of my point. I think some sort of fragmented mosaic-like structure where these memories are intruding on this guy as he is trying to live his life, and he doesn't know what they are or where they're coming from. These flashes of this other reality could be quite effective.

John Hodgman: Okay. I see what you mean. Like—okay, gotcha. Like, you see someone in the corner. Oh! It's my mom! But I don't remember my mom! That kind of thing. Alright.

Fragmented mosaic. Do you write experimental fiction?

Judd: Y-yes.

(Laughter.)

John Hodgman: *(Speaking quiet and hurriedly.)* I've heard everything I need to in order to make my decision. I'll be back in a moment with my verdict.

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

(Cheers and applause.)

Emily, how are you feeling about your chances?

Emily: I'm feeling great!

(Laughter.)

Jesse Thorn: Why is that?

Emily: I came in knowing that I was correct, and I continue to feel that way.

Jesse Thorn: What's giving you that feeling? The fact that this entire time the crowd's just been chanting, "Emily! Emily!"

Emily: That's helped! *(Laughs.)*

The Audience: Emily! Emily! Emily! Emily!

Jesse Thorn: Stop! *(Laughs.)* This is really getting into a *Lord of the Flies* thing here. Anyway. Uh, Judd. Or should I say, the pig? Why should we not kill you and spill your blood?

(Beat.) That's what they say in *Lord of the Flies*.

How are you feeling about your chances, Judd.

Judd: Great. Now seems like a good time to stake out really absolute positions and just dig in.

(Laughter.)

Jesse Thorn: Everyone's feeling really receptive to that.

(Applause.)

Well, we'll see what Judge Hodgman has to say about all this when he returns.

Transition: Three gavel bangs.

Promo:

Music: “My Life is Better With You (*My Brother, My Brother and Me* Podcast Theme Song)” by Montaigne.

Travis McElroy: You know, we've been doing *My Brother, My Brother and Me* for 15 years. And maybe—

Justin McElroy: (*Interrupting.*) CHRIST. (*Laughs.*)

Travis McElroy: Maybe you stopped listening for a while. Maybe you never listened. And you're probably assuming “Three White guys talking for 15 years. I know where this has ended up.” But no!

Justin: No! You would be wrong. We're as shocked as you are (*chuckling*) that we have not fallen into some sort of horrific scandal or just turned into a big crypto thing.

(*Travis and Griffin agree.*)

Travis: Yeah. We don't even really know how crypto works!

Griffin McElroy: The only NFTs I'm into are Naughty Funny Things, which is what we talk about on *My Brother, My Brother and Meeee*.

Justin: We serve it up every Monday for you—if you're listening. And if not, (*laughing*) we just leave it out back until it goes rotten!

Travis: So, check it out on Maximum Fun or wherever you get your podcasts.

(*Music fades out.*)

Promo:

Ella Hubber: Alright, we're over 70 episodes into our show, *Let's Learn Everything*. So, let's do a quick progress check. Have we learned about quantum physics?

Tom Lum: Yes, episode 59.

(*Pencil scratching.*)

Ella: We haven't learned about the history of gossip yet, have we?

Caroline Roper: Yes, we have! Same episode, actually.

Ella: Have we talked to Tom Scott about his love of roller coasters?

Caroline & Tom: (*In unison.*) Episode 64.

Ella: So, how close are we to learning everything?

Caroline: Bad news. We still haven't learned everything yet.

Ella: Awww!

Tom: WE'RE RUINED!

Music: Playful synth fades in.

Ella: No, no, no! It's good news as well. There is still a lot to learn!

(*They cheer.*)

I'm Dr. Ella Hubber.

Tom: I'm Regular Tom Lum.

Caroline: I'm Caroline Roper, and on *Let's Learn Everything*, we learn about science and a bit of everything else, too.

Ella: And although we haven't learned everything yet, I've got a pretty good feeling about this next episode.

Tom: Join us every other Thursday on Maximum Fun.

(*Music ends.*)

Transition: Three gavel bangs.

Jesse Thorn: Judge John Hodgman, we're taking a quick break from the stage of the State Theater. What's going on with you?

John Hodgman: Well, Jesse, I'm headed back to New York City where I live in September. And while it's bittersweet to leave Maine, I am looking forward to seeing perhaps you and all your wonderful faces when I host a special screening of the John Carpenter film *They Live* at the Nighthawk Prospect Park on September 18th.

[00:55:00]

That's right. It's Rowdy Roddy Piper and Keith David having a fist fight in an alleyway for almost 40 minutes over whether one of them is gonna put on magic glasses that allow them to see that our world is controlled by an oligarchical alien culture.

And that's the best description I have of *They Live* that I can offer you, and it's pretty accurate. If you wanna learn more—and you should—come and see the movie. I'm hosting it. I'll be introducing the screening and hanging around at the bar afterward. Go get your tickets now at bit.ly/OBEYHODGMAN. That's bit.ly/OBEYHODGMAN—obey Hodgman is all one word, all capital letters—to grab your seats now for a fun night in the early fall at the Nighthawk!

Jesse, what's going on with you,

Jesse Thorn: John, you know when I first saw *They Live*?

John Hodgman: Yeah? When?

Jesse Thorn: I saw it in high school in Mr. Crawford's English class. That's the same English class where Theresa Thorn, then Theresa Hosfeld, decided she had a crush on me. And that led to us making out and then becoming boyfriend and girlfriend, which we still are to this day.

John Hodgman: That's— And even in a legal sense, I believe! You're married to one another, correct?

Jesse Thorn: That's correct. And it's all thanks to Rowdy Roddy Piper. *(Laughs.)*

John Hodgman: Unfortunately, I was unable to attend your wedding, but I know that Rowdy Roddy Piper was there, at least in spirit. Wearing special glasses.

Jesse Thorn: I have so much new stuff in the Put This On Shop. You know, the autumn is right around the corner. The autumn is time for cozy clothes. Not only do we have a huge, new—let's say—shipment of scarves. I'm a big fan of a colorful rayon scarf from the 1940s/1950s. We have a bunch of those in the shop. We also have a lot of vintage flight jackets. So, you can find those. If you like a leather jacket, if you're looking for something to just wear all autumn, all spring, all winter with a sweater underneath, hit the Put This On Shop. Plus a lot of various tweeds. If you just want a knock-around tweed sport coat, go to the Put This On Shop at PutThisOnShop.com.

That's in addition to all of the many beautiful ladies' clothing and jewelry that we've added to the shop. And of course, all of the incredible vintage and antique decor items that we are famous for. You can find all that online in the Put This On Shop at PutThisOnShop.com.

John Hodgman: What could be more autumnal than a Cooperstown Oakland Oaks fitted baseball cap size seven? That beautiful red cap with an oak leaf on it? Ooh! Jesse Thorn, I'm gonna get it. Where do I go? PutThisOnShop.com. Where do you go? Same place. PutThisOnShop.com. Go do it.

Jesse Thorn: I got this—we got this t-shirt that I really like. And it says, “I can't be overdrawn. I still have checks left!”

(John laughs.)

That at PutThisOnShop.com. Find that there.

John Hodgman: That one got a chuckle from Joel even. Right, Joel?

(Joel chuckles.)

Geez.

Jesse Thorn: *(Laughs.)* Let's get back to the stage of the State Theater.

Transition: Three gavel bangs.

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

(Cheers and applause.)

John Hodgman: Once upon a time—

(Scattered laughter.)

I left my work at the Coolidge Corner Theater in Brookline.

(Cheers.)

And I went to get my hair cut. I went to go see the stylist that my mom saw.

(Laughter.)

His name was Reno. He was cutting my hair, and I said, “Oh, damn, I think I left my wallet at the movie theater.”

I called up the movie theater, and they said, “We don't have it.”

And then I realized it was in my back pocket. And the hairdresser said, *(softly)* “John, you are a dreamer. Keep dreaming.”

(Laughter.)

TRUE STORY! Not a dream sequence! Care to offer a critique, Judd? There is part of me that wants your approval.

(Laughter and scattered applause.)

You come into my courtroom dressing like a sexy creative writing professor from a movie or something.

Jesse Thorn: Let’s be honest. A B level Hugh Grant is still like an A++ level us.

(Laughter and cheers.)

John Hodgman: It's true. It’s true. I mean, the way you're jauntily sitting on that stool, I feel like you might be hosting a PBS woodworking program or something.

(Laughter.)

I mean, I know you're sitting on a stool right now.

[01:00:00]

But in my mind's eye, you definitely are sitting in a chair backwards.

(Laughter and scattered applause.)

You got that obscure cultural reference correct. Really cut me off at the knees there. My own courtroom. You were very brave actually to come here, I must say. Because your position is unpopular, and it is basically indefensible. And—nor did you really defend it!

(Laughter.)

The supreme confidence of Judd comes in and says, “Mm, I think dream sequences are dumb.”

And when I ask, “Do you have any examples?”, you say, “No, they're just dumb.”

And the thing that gets me Judd, is you are not entirely wrong. Because *A Nightmare on Elm Street* aside, dream sequence is—particularly in film, in my experience— I don't actually read a lot of them in fiction. But then again, whoa, I don't read a lot of books. Surprise. But they are often cheats. They're often cheat-feeling. They feel a little too on the nose. They often feel

and are deployed as trickery when you think something's actually happening to a character, and then they go, “*(Gasps.)* Oh, I'm glad that didn't happen!” And then sometimes they do it again and wake up from that dream within a dream within a dream, or whatever it is.

They can be a little mawkish. They can be a little cliched.

And a point that I made—not you, I did—they often in film and fiction have big portent and obvious meaning that our actual dreams don't tend to have, because our actual dreams are a little bit of a mishmash of memory and anxiety and desire or whatever it is in weird combinations. And anyone who's ever woken up and tried to explain their dream to even their own mother, that person turns to them and says, “Nobody cares.” And they sound dumb the moment you describe them. They can feel really, really magical in that moment. And when you wake up, they're often very mundane and kind of don't connect and everything like that.

So, when they have meaning within fiction in the way that they often do—and I'm talking about all narrative, here—it often feels a little bit phony and fake. And I appreciate that you're trying to stand up for a kind of honest fiction writing that is true. And that's a good impulse to have.

And I would also say that while—you know, that any writer should take that as a warning before deploying the tool of dream sequence, and make sure that it is really serving the story in the most honest way. And also, in a way that is honest to your own voice. So, you were brave to take that position and to take the ridicule that went with it. And you did so very good naturedly, and I thank you for that. But you are not as brave as Emily, who actually read her work. Which takes enormous bravery.

(Cheers and applause as the audience tries to ramp back into chanting “Emily”).

Okay, okay, okay.

Jesse Thorn: You don't have the conch!

John Hodgman: Mob justice is the next segment.

(Laughter.)

It makes me very, very—three-part chants like that make me nervous.

But first of all, I just wanna thank you for your bravery, and I really liked the work that you shared. And it did not feel cheap to me. It did not—I mean, I don't know the whole context of the story, but it didn't have the hallmarks of a bad dream sequence. It seemed like a perfectly reasonable dream sequence. I mean, I hate to offer you this council, but you know, when you're in a writer's group and people say stuff that really bites at your core, and especially if it's coming from an overconfident dude, you want to reject it. Lord knows I do. God-or-Whatever knows I do. But usually it's the criticism that bites the hardest that you kind of wanna listen to a little bit before you reject it.

(Laughter.)

Now, I've offered you both a lot of praise. And now, Judd, I'm going to destroy you. Because it's dialectic. It can be both things. It's not one or the other. You deserve praise. But I mean, I also caution you. I mean, for reasons that should be very obvious, one should not be out there in a writer's group or in society advocating the banning of a certain kind of expression.

(Raucous cheers and applause.)

And even if we just keep it right within the realm of storytelling and creative writing.

[01:05:00]

You know, the truth is that you gotta be able to use all of the tools, even tools that you have devised that no one else understands. Yes, you need to learn the rules of storytelling before you can break them and bend them and so forth. But the rule can never be “you must never do this.” If at best, you should do it with caution or with care, whatever “it” is. But you always have to have all of the tools at your disposal, because otherwise we never get anything new! We never get anything new. And we need new stuff in this world. We need a lot of new viewpoints, and we can't be shutting down just— Even if the dream sequence is dumb, you gotta be able to use it in order to express yourself.

And that's where I land on this. So, perhaps it's obvious. You're not dreaming. I find in Emily's favor.

(Cheers and applause.)

Judd, thank you for your good humor and your winning demeanor. Though, perhaps you deserved a summary judgment in your favor, I find in Emily's favor all the same. This is the sound of a gavel. *(Bangs his gavel.)* Judge John Hodgman rules. That is all.

(Cheers and applause.)

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

Transition: Three gavel bangs.

Jesse Thorn: That's it for this episode of the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast. Thank you to Reddit user u/TurduckinEverest for naming the case in this episode. Make sure to follow us on Instagram at [@JudgeJohnHodgman](#). We're on YouTube and TikTok at [@JudgeJohnHodgmanPod](#). The *Judge John Hodgman* podcast was created by John Hodgman and Jesse Thorn. This episode was recorded by Matthew Barnhart. AJ McKeon is our podcast editor. Daniel Speer is our video editor. Our producer's Jennifer Marmor. We'll talk to you next time on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast.

Transition: 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!