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Writers' Runaround

By

THOMAS HISCHAK

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FURNITURE AND PROPERTIES

Happy Hour, Part One and Part Two

Long bar
4 barstools
Teacup and saucer (Austen)
Beer glass (Hemingway)
Whiskey glass (Parker)
Wine glass (Wilde)

Homer Nods

Desk with piles of papers, scripts
2 chairs
Cellphone (Penelope)

I Don't Get Out Much

Stone sarcophagus
3 or 4 tombstones

From the Wastepaper Basket of W. Shakespeare

Table
Wastepaper basket
Letters, bills, brochures, crumpled papers

Penguin Encounter

2 or 3 card tables
5 or 6 boxes of paperback books with covers cut in half
Homemade sign saying "Free Books"

COSTUME SUGGESTIONS

Happy Hour, Part One and Part Two

Ernest Hemingway: Thick, woolly, brown sweater; dark trousers; boots.

Jane Austen: Yellow, early 19th-century dress and matching bonnet; white gloves; brown shoes.

Oscar Wilde: Purple velvet suit; pink shirt; bright yellow cravat; purple shoes.

Dorothy Parker: Black 1930s cocktail dress; black high heels.

NOTE: The characters can be dressed in contemporary clothes appropriate to their personalities.

Homer Nods

Penelope: Flowing, off-white, Grecian dress with string belt; sandals.

Homer: Tan tunic; black tights; sandals.

NOTE: The characters can be dressed in contemporary clothes appropriate to their personalities.

I Don't Get Out Much

Emily Dickinson: Dark maroon, 19th-century dress with white collar; black shoes.

Edgar Allan Poe: Gray, 19th-century suit with vest; white shirt; black tie; black shoes.

NOTE: The characters can be dressed in contemporary clothes appropriate to their personalities.

From the Wastepaper Basket of W. Shakespeare

There are a variety of ways the four historians (either gender) can be costumed: in formal Elizabethan garb, in academic robes, in cliched professorial clothing or in contemporary clothes.

Penguin Encounter

Ernie: Blue shirt with a collar; jeans; tennis shoes.

Rita: Green sweater; black slacks; sandals.

Happy Hour, Part One

CHARACTERS

ERNEST HEMINGWAY: Masculine, rough, passionate.

JANE AUSTEN: Smart but timid, refined, delicate.

OSCAR WILDE: Quixotic, thoroughly enjoying himself.

DOROTHY PARKER: Stylish yet slangy and blunt.

SETTING: A sports bar.

TIME: The present but not really.

(There is a bar with four stools facing the audience. ERNEST HEMINGWAY drinks a beer. JANE AUSTEN has a cup of tea. OSCAR WILDE has a glass of wine. DOROTHY PARKER drinks a martini. All sit at the bar and sometimes speak to an unseen bartender. The four often look up and out at a flat-screen television, which is over the audience.)

HEMINGWAY. There's no question in my mind. Episode Two is direct, straightforward, and brutal.

AUSTEN. When you say Episode Two, Mr. Hemingway, do you mean the second movie made or the second film in the sequence?

HEMINGWAY. The one with Yoda in the jungle.

WILDE. *The Empire Strikes Back.*

HEMINGWAY. Yeah. Ain't that Episode Two?

AUSTEN. To be chronologically correct, Mr. Hemingway, Episode Two is *Attack of the Clones.*

HEMINGWAY. I'm talking about the movie with those gizmos that look like elephants. And where they turn Han Solo into a statue.

AUSTEN. Definitely *The Empire Strikes Back*. That is actually Episode Five. Strictly speaking.

WILDE. And Episode Two is *Attack of the Clones*.

AUSTEN. Correct, Oscar.

PARKER. Is that the one with that goofy kangaroo? Jo-Jo-
Something?

AUSTEN. Jar Jar Binks. And he's not a kangaroo, Miss Parker. He's a Gungan.

PARKER. Well, whatever he is he annoyed the hell out of me. Reminded me of some Hollywood producers I knew.

HEMINGWAY. I'm just saying that *The Empire Strikes Back*, whatever number it is, is the best *Star Wars* movie.

WILDE. A revealing choice, Hemingway. I believe that film has more fighting and violence than any other in the series.

HEMINGWAY. Could be why I like it. That battle in the snow reminded me of the Spanish Civil War. I tell you, we could have used some of those elephant machines—

WILDE. Imperial Walkers.

HEMINGWAY. Yeah. Those things. A couple of them would have come in handy when we were fighting Franco.

PARKER. I don't remember any elephants in *Star Wars*. Of course, I might have missed one or two of the films.

WILDE. Not only were there no elephants in any of the *Star Wars* films, Miss Parker, but there were no other actual real animals. No dogs or cats or horses or whatever.

PARKER. Whatever. (*Drinks her martini.*)

AUSTEN. What's your favorite *Star Wars*, Oscar?

WILDE. Oh, that's an easy one. Episode Two, of course.

HEMINGWAY. The same one I like?

WILDE. No no no. The real Episode Two. *Attack of the Clones*.

PARKER. Is that the one with Jabba the Hutt?

WILDE. No no no. It's the film that mostly takes place on the planet of Naboo. Oh, those costumes! The hair styles! And the decor! It is by far the most stylish of all the films in the series.

HEMINGWAY. Stylish? Who goes to *Star Wars* to see style?

WILDE. I do. Style is to the cinema, as singing is to the opera. It's not what one does, it's the panache with which one does it.

HEMINGWAY (*to others*). Does he always talk this way?

PARKER. Endlessly.

AUSTEN. Which is your favorite, Miss Parker?

PARKER. *Star Wars*? I don't rightly know. I get them all mixed up. I can tell you the one I hated.

WILDE. Which was that?

PARKER. The one with Ricardo Montalbán as the villain. Kahn, I think his name was.

WILDE. That was *Star Trek*.

HEMINGWAY. *The Wrath of Kahn*. I kinda liked it.

PARKER. *Star Trek*. *Star Wars*. What's the difference? All I know is none of them have enough wit or sex in them for my tastes.

WILDE. Miss Dorothy Parker is looking for wit and sex! How delicious!

PARKER. In the movies. In real life I can do without the wit.

AUSTEN. That leaves you out, Oscar.

HEMINGWAY. We ain't heard yet from the great Jane Austen. What's your favorite?

AUSTEN. Episode Six. By which I mean the chronological number six. *Return of the Jedi*.

HEMINGWAY. The one with all those little hairballs who live in trees?

WILDE. I think he means the Ewoks.

HEMINGWAY. Whatever they are called, I wanted to hunt down those little critters.

PARKER. Why *Return of the Jedi*, Jane?

AUSTEN. Well, I like tidy endings. I think a novel should conclude with full resolution, and I believe movies should as well. All the loose ends of the plot are pleasingly resolved at the end of *Return of the Jedi*.

WILDE. How very interesting. And characteristically consistent of Miss Austen.

HEMINGWAY. I hate resolutions. There ain't no tidy resolutions in life. You just keep going on until you're dead. That's the only true resolution: death.

AUSTEN. My books, I'm afraid, usually resolve with marriage.

HEMINGWAY. Death. Marriage. Same thing.

PARKER. On that thought I want another drink. (*To unseen bartender.*) Bartender, I'll have another dry martini.

HEMINGWAY. And I want another beer. What are you drinking, Wilde?

WILDE. Claret.

HEMINGWAY. I should have known. (*To bartender.*) Another claret for him and more tea for Jane Austen here.

AUSTEN. Should I? I've already had two cups.

HEMINGWAY. Live a little.

PARKER. I used to drink tea. Then someone told me there was water in it so I swore off.

HEMINGWAY. And, bartender, change the channel, will you? I'm sick of CNN. Put on a sports channel. This is a sports bar, ain't it?

WILDE. Ah, sport! The invigorating activity in which brawn and bravery are celebrated without restraint. Much like war ... but without all that annoying patriotism.

HEMINGWAY. Is there something the matter with you, Wilde?

WILDE (*smiling*). Nothing you couldn't fix, Mr. Hemingway.

HEMINGWAY. Did you fight in the Spanish Civil War?

WILDE. Not that I recall.

HEMINGWAY. Just what I thought. Have you ever fought for anything?

WILDE. Once I had to wrestle a maitre d' to get a good table at the Savoy Grill.

AUSTEN (*looking up at the TV*). Is that cricket that they're playing?

PARKER. Baseball, honey. You can tell by the way they chew their gum.

HEMINGWAY. Bartender, see if you can find some boxing. Or wrestling will do. (*Pause.*) Hey! That's better! The heavyweight championship!

AUSTEN. Sporting activity is so complicated today. In my day it was cricket or golf. And I could never understand the point of either. But I suppose women weren't supposed to.

HEMINGWAY. The point is to win!

WILDE. Spoken like a true American!

HEMINGWAY. You win or you die. Figuratively speaking. The only true sport is bull fighting. There you either win or you really die.

PARKER. I say we look for a bullfighting channel!

HEMINGWAY. There aren't any. I've looked.

WILDE. In my day, one dressed when attending a sporting event. The clothes somehow made it all bearable. But today people watch sport at home on television and no one dresses. Pity.

PARKER. My ex-husband watched the ball game in his underwear. I got even. I threatened to go to the opera in my swimsuit.

AUSTEN (*laughs*). Miss Parker, sometimes you say the most shocking things!

PARKER. If you'd had three martinis, Jane, you might raise a few eyebrows yourself.

WILDE. Miss Austen raised more than a few eyebrows in her time. Didn't you, madam?

AUSTEN. I just wrote about what I knew.

WILDE. Women with brains dealing with brainless males. Too delicious!

PARKER. If I wrote about what I knew, no decent publisher would risk it!

AUSTEN. But Miss Parker, you write with such honesty!

WILDE. "Men seldom make passes / At girls who wear glasses." You can't get more honest than that.

PARKER. What about Hemingway here? Brutally honest. He doesn't even use adjectives because they are not honest words. Isn't that right, Ernest?

HEMINGWAY (*involved in watching the TV*). What?

WILDE. Miss Parker says you write with honesty.

HEMINGWAY. I just tell it like it is. (*Shouts at the TV*.) Don't just stand there, you ape! Hit him with your left!

WILDE. I, on the other hand, pride myself on never having written an honest word in my life. The soul of wit is to never get too close to the truth.

AUSTEN. Do you really mean what you say, Oscar?

WILDE. Madam, I never mean what I say and I rarely say what I mean.

HEMINGWAY. This fight is fixed! Look at them up there! It's a disgrace! Bartender, change the channel before I punch in the screen!

PARKER. Easy does it, Hemingway. You're not in the bull ring here. Bartender, another dry martini. I think the last one evaporated.

HEMINGWAY. And another beer for me.

WILDE. Oh, look! (*Refers to the TV.*) It's PBS!

HEMINGWAY. Oh! Anything but PBS!

PARKER. Your kind of channel, Jane. You too, Oscar. English stuff.

HEMINGWAY (*staring at the TV*). What is this? A bunch of people talking. It's either a commentary program or a pledge drive. Change the channel!

PARKER. We Americans love PBS because it's practically all British. It's a kind of subconscious revolt against American entertainment.

WILDE. I love American television! It's mostly advertisements, which is very much the only thing worth one's attention.

HEMINGWAY (*referring to the TV*). Now what the hell is this?

PARKER. *Jeopardy*.

AUSTEN. I've seen this. Quite interesting, actually. But in many categories I rarely know what they are talking about.

HEMINGWAY. I watched this once. It gave me a headache.
(*To bartender.*) Try ESPN.

WILDE. ESPN. PBS. BBC. Don't you just love television acronyms!

HEMINGWAY. That's more like it. Hockey!

WILDE. FBI. IRS. POW. ASAP. In my day they spelt everything out. It was so dreary.

HEMINGWAY. They're down to the last minute. Look at that score! A tie!

WILDE. I wonder if it is possible to write an entire novel using only acronyms.

PARKER. It's been done. It's called *Finnegan's Wake*.

HEMINGWAY (*still focused on the TV*). To the left, idiot!
To the left!

AUSTEN. I once tried to write a novel without using the word *lovely*. I think that word is used far too often.

PARKER. How did it turn out?

AUSTEN. A literary catastrophe! There just aren't enough synonyms for *lovely*.

WILDE. I understand that American writers are having the same problem with the word *awesome*.

PARKER. I never used it. If something happens that inspires genuine awe, then it's awesome. But today? Everything is awesome. I order a quarter pounder at McDonald's and the kid behind the counter says to me—"awesome!"

HEMINGWAY. You got forty seconds left, you moron! What are you doing way over there?

AUSTEN. Mr. Hemingway sure takes his sport seriously.

PARKER. He's a guy. It's the only thing they take seriously.
Another martini, bartender.

WILDE. A good game, Mr. Hemingway?

HEMINGWAY (*not hearing anything but the game*). Now go for it! Go go go!

PARKER. Can you believe that's the same guy who wrote *A Farewell to Arms*?

AUSTEN. Such a lovely novel. Oh, there I go again. *Lovely!*

PARKER. Yeah. Downright *awesome!*

(They both laugh.)

WILDE. I haven't seen anyone get so excited since Robbie caught me wearing my red cravat with purple socks.

HEMINGWAY. Only twenty-four seconds left! Stop playing tiddlywinks!

AUSTEN. Which team is he rooting for?

PARKER (*a bit drunk*). What does it matter? As long as there's blood, there's hockey!

HEMINGWAY. Yes! Yes!

WILDE. I'll bet I can divert his attention away from the game. (*To HEMINGWAY.*) Mr. Hemingway—

PARKER. Good luck!

OSCAR. Is it true that you stole the plot for *The Sun Also Rises* from F. Scott Fitzgerald?

PARKER. Ouch!

WILDE. I've heard you prefer Mickey Spillane over Leo Tolstoy ...

HEMINGWAY. Go around the other way! The *other* other way!

AUSTEN. I'm afraid he is temporarily gone from this world, Oscar.

WILDE (*still to HEMINGWAY*). Is Jamaican rum a finer quality than Hispaniola rum?

HEMINGWAY. Seven seconds!

WILDE. Who's your favorite *Star Wars* character?

HEMINGWAY. Yes! He does it! He scores! They win! What a game!

WILDE (*to others*). Gone from this world ...

HEMINGWAY. Hell of a game! (*Turns to WILDE.*) That's an easy one, Wilde. Boba Fett. Who else?

PARKER (*raising her glass*). Here's to Boba Fett. Whoever the hell he is!

(*Blackout.*)