

A KILLING ON THE CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR

by

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FADE IN:

INT. LOFT APARTMENT - DOWNTOWN OMAHA - DAWN

It is a nice and cloudless day in late spring. Near the loft windows looking out onto the street, EMIL CONARD, 35, the internationally famous private detective from Flanders, is snoring lightly on an air mattress on the floor. EMIL sports a handlebar mustache and slicked-down, jet-black hair.

A bird flies onto an open, screenless windowsill and begins to chirp very loudly. EMIL snorts angrily and rolls over. He tries to cover his ears but to no effect. He then throws a pillow at the bird, misses, and the pillow flies out of the window onto the sidewalk, three stories below.

EMIL

Vile bird!

Almost immediately thereafter, a kitchen timer begins beeping on a nearby coffee table. The bird starts chirping along, in tune with the beeping timer. EMIL shakes his fist at the air and bolts upright.

EMIL

Vile kitchen timer!

EMIL grabs the kitchen timer and throws it at the bird. He misses and the timer, still beeping, flies out of the window and onto the street.

EMIL

Is there no peace to be had in
this godforsaken charnel house of
malaise and skullduggery?! This
hive of villainy? Why forsooth am
I to be accursed like a winter
lion in summertime, with no shade
to hide in, nor cool breeze in
which to waft? Gah!

EMIL slowly gets up off the air mattress and finds his glasses and puts them on. There are six empty glasses of wine and three empty bottles of wine also on the table. EMIL walks to the bathroom door, but it is locked. He then staggers around the kitchen past RICHARD RIPSHAW, 35, EMIL's manservant, who has been quietly working on a laptop at the dinner table, unnoticed by EMIL.

RIPSHAW

Mister Conard, will we have time
for your side-by-side donut
tasting today?

EMIL slides to a stop and turns around.

EMIL

I do not know! You always ask me
questions which I do not know the
answer to.

RIPSHAW

You mean, I'm always asking you
questions for which you do not
know the answer?

EMIL (gracious)

Yes! Correct. I must learn to
not end my sentences with
prepositions! But what time is
it? How much time do we have for
our side-by-side donut challenge?

RIPSHAW starts to look around his laptop screen for the clock, but before he can state the time, from below them, through the vents, they hear their neighbor drunkenly singing.

DRUNKEN NEIGHBOR (O.S.)

It's five fifty-three in the
mornin'! It's five fifty-three in
the mornin'!

EMIL (surprised)
Egad! Mr. Ripshaw, the California
Zephyr arrives in but thirty short
minutes! We must anon and
forthwith cease to tarry! Get the
Conard-mobile ready and warmed up!
It is imperative! Yo-ho and a-ha!

EMIL runs to the other bathroom door around the kitchen, which
is also locked.

EMIL (exasperated)
Vile locked bathroom doors!

CUT TO:

EXT. DONUT SHOP

RIPSHAW is sitting in a beat-up 1980s Chevy Cavalier
convertible, top down, with the car parked in getaway style,
parallel to the door. After a few seconds, EMIL, wearing a suit
and bowler hat, runs out of the donut shop and tries to leap
over the passenger door. He simply runs into the door instead.

RIPSHAW
Mister Conard, I thought we went
over this before. No jumping
before lunch. Your legs just
aren't ready until after lunch.

EMIL adjusts his bowler hat and mustache, and graciously opens
the door and sits down. RIPSHAW hands him a second bag of
donuts from the backseat and puts the car in gear.

EMIL
Finally! Side-by-side donut
challenge!

EMIL devours one donut from one bag and then another donut from
the other. He makes a mess of things and crumbs are in his
moustache.

RIPSHAW
Well?

EMIL (upset)
I can't tell! I like them both so
much!

RIPSHAW reaches for the bags.

RIPSHAW
Let me try.

EMIL greedily pulls the bags out of RIPSHAW's reach.

EMIL
That's my lunch!

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAIN STATION

RIPSHAW speeds the car to the station and screeches it to a halt. A young couple is making out heavily on the corner.

EMIL
Ripshaw! Much like that
inimitable eponymous character,
Rain Man, you are truly an
excellent driver!

RIPSHAW
I do my best, Mister Conard.
Don't forget your umbrella. There
is a forecast of showers all next
week in Chicago.

EMIL grabs an umbrella from behind his seat. He looks disdainfully at the young couple making out.

RIPSHAW
Have a safe trip, Mister Conard.
And be sure to keep this trip
purely pleasure. The last time on
vacation you solved four murders
and didn't once get to see the
opera.

EMIL (rolling his eyes)
 I know! But what can one do when
 murder is constantly afoot? Why,
 it was so afoot last time, it was
 practically . . . a-*feet!*

RIPSHAW stares blankly, and EMIL chortles at his own bad joke.
 EMIL steps out of the car with the two sacks of donuts and his
 umbrella.

RIPSHAW
 Did you not pack luggage, Mister
 Conard?

EMIL
 Mister Ripshaw, you certainly
 remember that I have my very own
 cat-bird's nest in Chicago? A
 place with all I need, including
 extra underwear in case of . . .
 the sharts!

RIPSHAW
 Just remember the doctor's advice.

RIPSHAW and EMIL (unison)
No more cheap canned beer!

They laugh together and RIPSHAW drives away. EMIL walks up to
 the young couple and swats his umbrella between them.

EMIL
 Get a room!

The young couple stares at him with astonishment.

CUT TO:

INT. OMAHA AMTRAK STATION

There are about thirty people in the station waiting fairly quietly for the train to arrive. EMIL walks up to a kiosk which clearly reads "OUT OF ORDER" on its electronic screen. He tries to shove in several credit and debit cards in an attempt to print out a boarding pass but with no luck. Behind him, the STATION MANAGER, 55, fat and bald, is trying to get EMIL's attention.

Eventually, another customer, SALLY CARRUTHERS, 27, young and pretty, gets his attention.

SALLY

Mister Conard! Emil! The man at the counter is yelling for you. That kiosk is broken.

EMIL turns around and smiles graciously.

EMIL

My fair maiden. I am quite used to people yelling at me. But it is a broken kiosk that I was quite unprepared for.

SALLY

You mean, it was the broken kiosk for which you were not prepared?

EMIL (brightens)

Good girl! I shall endeavor to end all my sentences forthwith and not with prepositions!

EMIL reaches into his inner suit pocket and produces a delicious piece of beef jerky, bowing and handing it over to SALLY.

SALLY brightens and takes a big bite.

SALLY

Delicious! You really do know your beef jerky! They always mention that in the stories about you.

EMIL (wryly)
Unfortunately, my dear miss . . .

SALLY
Sally! Sally Carruthers!

EMIL
Miss Carruthers, unfortunately,
sometimes the press is correct!

SALLY greedily finishes off the beef jerky. EMIL strides to the counter to meet the STATION MANAGER.

STATION MANAGER
Mister Conard, pleasure is all mine to meet you. But as you can see the kiosk is out of order today.

EMIL
Ah, modern times, as they say.

STATION MANAGER
Pardon?

EMIL
Modern times. Modern . . .
problems. No doubt in the past, such a problem as an out-of-order kiosk would not have a whisker's chance of arising, for there would not be such a kiosk here! It would be years before such a thing would be invented!

STATION MANAGER (leery)
Yes, Mister Conard. Very observant. I can see why you have been so successful at solving murders in the past.

EMIL (appreciative)
 You cannot always rely on science
 and DNA and forensics. Sometimes
 one has to use one's noodle.
 One's medulla oblongata. One's
 organic computer. One's captain's
 nest. One's high . . . *top*.

EMIL points to his hat and wiggles it a bit to emphasize the point. The STATION MANAGER nods with false understanding. SALLY begins to floss her teeth in the background.

STATION MANAGER
 Mister Conard, I still have to do
 my investigative part, too. I.D.,
 please.

EMIL's eyes brighten and he reaches for his wallet to pass his I.D. through the opening under the glass.

EMIL
 Aha! A fellow detective! Leave
 no stone unlooked at!

STATION MANAGER
 Er. You mean, don't unlook at any
 stone?

EMIL stares blankly.

STATION MANAGER
 The preposition. At the end of
 your sentence? "Leave no stone
 unlooked *at*?"

EMIL
 Right! Right-o! At leave
 unlooked no stone!

The STATION MANAGER smiles awkwardly. And hands EMIL a boarding pass.

STATION MANAGER
 Have a great ride to Chicago,
 Mister Conard. And don't let
 anyone get murdered on that train.
 The bad press would never end.

EMIL

The only bad press is no press at all!

EMIL sits down in a cramped space between two children, CINDY DURLER, 6, and BILLY DURLER, 9, who are playing at times, fighting at others. Their mother, DARLA DURLER, 33, a dumpy and messy woman wearing fleece, is sitting across from EMIL and chatting on her cell phone, and even as she talks she is eating peanut butter crackers. She seems oblivious to her children fighting and EMIL sitting between them.

EMIL tries to get DARLA's attention to get her to stop her children from fighting. She continues talking on her cell phone. EMIL stands up and approaches her.

DARLA (drawl, lisp)

Oh, I know. We had ta get up so early dat tha cat was still stuck ups on tha bookshevas. He go up dere allatime, but den he cain't get hissself down right. Oh, I know. I know. Spray 'im with a water bottla. Shee-oot. That dumb cat like it now. He turn his mo-fo face to the spray and act like he all like it.

EMIL takes off his hat, holds it in his hands, and interrupts ever so kindly.

EMIL

Ahem. Miss?

Meanwhile, BILLY has gotten CINDY in a full nelson and CINDY is turning blue in the face.

DARLA

Hold on, some beaner wanta talk at me.

DARLA holds her phone down and covers the microphone.

DARLA

What!?

EMIL (taken aback)
Miss, I am not a bean, ahem, -er.
I am of *Flemish* descent, not that
it should matter one way or the
other, but . . .

DARLA picks up her phone.

DARLA
Okay, hold on. I'll have-ta call
you back. Some *frog* here talkin'
crazy-like. Oh, I know. Always
crazies at tha station. Get me a
sleeper car getta way way from *dis*
guy.

DARLA hangs up.

DARLA
Well, what it be den you Frenchy-
frog? Watyouwant galdurnit? Up
an' out wit' it! Sha-oot. I a
busy lady.

Darla slaps her hands on her lap for emphasis.

EMIL (nonplussed)
Madame. I can see you are busy.
A busy . . . *lady*. But I am not
French, I am Flemish, yet an
American citizen, for I have
passed your citizenship test.
Lincoln is the capital of
Nebraska, and it is the only state
with a unicameral!

DARLA (confused)
Flem-*ish*?

EMIL (exuberant)
 Flemish. Not phlegm-ish, as in
 not phlegmatic. Well, sometimes I
 can be phlegmatic. But Flemish to
 the core, with an American coat!

Madame, I was just trying to hail
 you to show you that your children
 are engaged in a most vicious
 fight that should be stopped.
 Clearly, the older boy has the
 upper hand in this fight, and,
 well, it's simply not fair to let
 it go on.

DARLA
 You mean: it ain't fair to let go
 on the fight?

EMIL
 Yes! Of course! No prepositions
 ending sentences!

DARLA's eyes open wider. She looks astonished.

DARLA
 Oh! Yoo-a tha famous dateckive-
 solver I saw on da tevee last
 night! I'm so sorry I didna
 reckonize ya urler.

EMIL puts his hat back on, satisfied that he's finally been
 recognized as the internationally famous detective that he is.
 CINDY gets loose from the full nelson, gasps, and then sets upon
 BILLY with vicious fervor. CINDY pins BILLY and she lets a
 loogie dribble down near his face, only to suck it back up.

EMIL
 Why, Madame . . .

DARLA
 . . . Durler. Madame Darla
 Durler.

EMIL takes DARLA's right hand and kisses the back of it.

EMIL

Madame Durler, it is a pleasure to meet you as well.

DARLA

And you be Emily Canard.

EMIL

Ahem. *Emil*. Emil Co-nard.

DARLA

Right. What I said. Emily Canard.

EMIL sits down next to DARLA.

EMIL

I am traveling on the California Zephyr today on vacation to Chicago to see the opera!

DARLA looks suspiciously at EMIL.

DARLA

Yew kin jus' watch dat Oprah on tevee. Evraday at three pee-em.

EMIL

Ah, yes! Oprah! No! I am going to watch *op-er-a*. Not *Oprah*. I have almost every major *opera* on tape.

DARLA

She puttin' dat show out on DVD? Yew gotta be kiddin'. Who wanna watch that crap all again?

EMIL

My tape collection is nearly complete!

DARLA

Den why go ta Chicago?

EMIL

Madame Durler, it is but a mere trifle of fancy for me. I enjoy certain divertissements, some more expensive than others, of course. But now that you know why I am going to Chicago on the California Zephyr, would you care to tell me why you are riding?

DARLA (sketchy)

Eh. I don' think we have da tahm fer dat.

STATION MANAGER (O.S.)

Attention, ladies and gentlemen. Attention, ladies and gentlemen at the Omaha Amtrak station. The California Zephyr is experiencing some mechanical problems and is now scheduled to arrive here approximately two hours late.

There is a great groan, harrumph, and malaise from the customers.

STATION MANAGER (O.S.)

Once again, the California Zephyr is scheduled to arrive here two hours late.

BILLY is now loose from the loogie hold and has taken to weaponry. He has stolen EMIL's umbrella and opened it up against CINDY, who has a small suitcase for defense.

DARLA (peeved)

Oh, you gotta be kidden. I woke up urly, way urly for dis.

EMIL

Ah, Madame Durler, I awoke earlier, for I had to do the ultimate side-by-side donut challenge!

DARLA (interested)

And?

EMIL

Let me say that the results are
decidedly . . . *inconclusive!*

EMIL produces two bags of donuts from his jacket and offers
DARLA a donut from each. EMIL also takes a donut from each.

DARLA (beaming)

You know, you ain't nearly half as
creepy as on tevee.

EMIL (beaming)

Madame Durler, the television adds
exactly one extra *patina* of
creepiness.

DARLA

Patina? I wenna high school wit'
her. Patina Jones.

EMIL (graciously)

No doubt a great woman.

EMIL and DARLA kill their donuts in their grills.

DARLA

Oh, I dunno. Bofe dese donuts was
dalishious.

EMIL

I concur! "X" gets the square!

DARLA stares at EMIL blankly.

EMIL

It's a "Hollywood Squares"
reference.

DARLA (dryly)

Oh. Ha-ha. I get it now.

EMIL

Given the delay, we certainly have
time for you to tell your story
now, that is, of course, if it's
not too personal.

DARLA

Oh, naw. Nat sa much. I goin' to a funeral.

EMIL

I am so sorry to hear that, Madame Durler.

DARLA

It okay.

DARLA grabs some more peanut butter crackers and stuffs them in her mouth, then begins to tell her story with crumbs falling out of her mouth.

DARLA

I run a bar here in Omaha. I goin' to a funeral of one da reg'lar cust'mers. He was from Chicago 'riginally.

EMIL

He must certainly have been one of your best customers, to cause you to bring your children across the country on a long train ride to Chicago, to cause you to close the bar for a few days.

DARLA

Eh. Tha bar's closed-closed. No more business after them "Golden Nose" murders.

EMIL

Ah, yes, the infamous "Golden Nose" murders, still unsolved, if I recall. Perhaps if they'd had a better detective on the case . . .

DARLA

And the kids, they alright when dey get on da train and into the sleeper car.

CINDY is letting loose wild flurries of punches on BILLY. The STATION MANAGER comes up to DARLA.

STATION MANAGER

Ms. Durler?

DARLA

Ayuh?

STATION MANAGER

I'm sorry to be the one to inform you of this, but the mechanical problems are all in the sleeper cars.

DARLA

And?

STATION MANAGER

For the rest of the way, from Omaha to Chicago, there are no sleeper cars available. Everyone boarding here is going to have to ride coach.

EMIL looks at CINDY and BILLY fighting.

EMIL

Perhaps an exception could be made for this fine family?

STATION MANAGER (matter-of-factly)

Sorry. I can't do anything about it. On the bright side, it's only about a ten-hour ride. And you'll be able to make friends with everyone because you'll be seeing them the whole way. Spend some time in the dining car. Have a beer! What could go wrong on a ten-hour train ride?

EMIL

My dear sir, let me assure you that plenty, plenty indeed, can go awry in even something so short, so miniscule, so tiny as a one-hour train ride!

STATION MANAGER

Mr. Conard, it should be of great comfort to the other passengers that such a famous detective will be riding along with them, ready to unravel the entire ten-hour mystery.

DARLA (disdainfully)

Oh, cripes! He's jus' on da train to go see *Oprah*!

CUT TO:

EXT. OMAHA AMTRAK STATION - TRAIN TRACKS - LATE MORNING

Some of the customers are out on a concrete pathway which runs along the train tracks. From the pathway, the customers see a rather industrial scene, with graffiti on abandoned warehouses and run-down buildings. Off in the distance are piles of gravel. An announcement comes over the PA system.

STATION MANAGER (O.S.) (deadpan)

Attention Omaha Amtrak customers. The coach cars will be at the end of the train. Please move all the way to the end of the concrete pathway for the coach cars. The coach cars are at the end of the train, and because all of the sleeper cars are currently experiencing mechanical difficulty, you will all be riding in the coach cars to Chicago. Please be careful as you make your way to the end of the concrete pathway. The California Zephyr is scheduled to arrive in five minutes.

Leaning against a metal girder, in the middle of the concrete pathway, is TAPAU SHAKURA SHABAZZ SHABAT, 48, a stately African-American woman with maximum afro. Standing close to her is CONTESSA BASIE, 54, another stately African-American woman who has an enormous booty. They appear miffed.

TAPAU

Shoot. Can you believe this?
First two hours late. Then no
sleeper cars. All this just to go
to Jocko Mahaka's funeral.

CONTESSA

It's always something. If
everything went fine, we wouldn't
have anything to talk about. But
Jocko would've appreciated it, you
know. And think of it like this:
we'll get to meet more people. It
will make the trip go by faster.

EMIL strolls up to TAPAU and CONTESSA, tips his hat, and introduces himself.

EMIL

Greetings, ladies. It sounds like
we'll all be getting to know each
other a little better on the way
to Chicago—or should I say, *mo*
betta—so let me break the ice
first, allow me to open up the
doors all the way, oblige me to
endeavor to crack that dark shell
of strangeness, that penumbra of
nebulous enigmas, that infested
and doomed abattoir of malaise and
despair of unknowing that can so
often impede friendship among
fellow riders.

TAPAU and CONTESSA trade horrified glances.

EMIL

I am Emil Conard, private detective. Perhaps you've seen me on the television? Or in the papers? On a social networking website?

TAPAU and CONTESSA shake their heads apprehensively.

EMIL

Well, maybe someday soon. Would it be too much bother for you to tell me your names?

TAPAU (unsure)

Um. Yeah. Right. My name is Tapau Shakura Shabazz Shabat. This here is my friend Contessa Basie.

CONTESSA warily extends her hand, which EMIL lightly kisses. EMIL then produces a piece of beef jerky from his inside jacket pocket and extends it to CONTESSA. CONTESSA does not immediately accept the offering.

CONTESSA

Is that teriyaki?

EMIL (shocked)

Heavens, no! What kind of knave, what type of skulldugger, what brand of rascalion do you take me for?

TAPAU (confused)

You mean, for what brand of rascalion does she take you?

EMIL (brightens)

Yes!

CONTESSA gladly accepts her beef jerky and eagerly takes a bite. EMIL graciously offers TAPAU a piece, which she accepts and bites.

CONTESSA

That is some good jerky.

EMIL

The best I know. Straight from
the Farmers' Market, fresh!

TAPAU (gnawing, gnashing)

Just the right amount of salt and
spice.

EMIL

Madame Shabat, I challenge you to
find better.

TAPAU

Maybe in Chicago I will.

EMIL

It sounds like there is a game
afoot!

CONTESSA (beaming)

Or maybe there is a *game a-mouth?*

CONTESSA points to beef jerky chewed up in her mouth. CONTESSA, TAPAU, and EMIL laugh heartily. Most of the other customers walk past them with quizzical looks on the way to the end of the concrete pathway.

Off in the distance, customers at the end of the concrete pathway can actually see the California Zephyr lumbering down the line. There are hoots and hollers indicating such.

EMIL

Ooooh! Can it be? Is the
California Zephyr at last anon?

CONTESSA

At hand, even?

TAPAU

Hey, do you have any more of that
jerky?

EMIL

Why, yes, of course, even. But I don't just hand out my cherished beef jerky upon request. It must be *earned* each time.

TAPAU (dawning)

Oh, I get it now. You're that weirdo who solves murders and hands out beef jerky all the time.

EMIL

Not all the time. That is, I don't hand out beef jerky all the time. But I do solve murders all the time. Yes. Mr. Emil Conard, internationally famous Flemish detective, yet American citizen, at your service.

CONTESSA

Flemish?

EMIL

Yes, I originally hail from Flanders.

TAPAU

Are there a lot of murders in Flanders?

The train is getting very close now. EMIL motions TAPAU and CONTESSA toward the end of the concrete platform toward the other customers.

EMIL

I can tell you all about the great Flemish murder mysteries of 2005 later. But let's first get ourselves onboard the California Zephyr!

EMIL, TAPAU, and CONTESSA join the ever-tumescent throng of customers at the end of the concrete platform. The California Zephyr pulls in to a grinding halt, and some of the customers on the platform cheer it on. They line up right in front of the doors, but when the doors open, an onrush of exiting smokers ensues. The smokers immediately light up and a massive cloud of smoke envelops everyone.

CUT TO:

INT. CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR COACH CAR - NOONISH

The train has not quite yet taken off. The uniformed STEWARD is trying to help the mass of new riders get their luggage stored and sorted. EMIL is sitting smugly in a seat watching it all, with an open seat beside him.

The STEWARD is having a particularly tough time sorting and storing two extremely large suitcases of LORD FOND DU LAIT, 66, a British Lord with a massive nose who has his bodyguard, MITCH FURMIN, 42, always closely at hand. MITCH walks with a pronounced limp, caused by a childhood accident.

STEWARD (Chicagoan accent)
 Cripes! Heck-jeez! What's the deal here?! Whaddaya got crammed inta dese bags!

MITCH (Brooklyn accent)
 Take it easy there, mister. This here's the precious luggage of the Lord Fond du Lait himself, and he's not in the mood for any guff.

LORD FOND DU LAIT (Dickensian)
 Now Mr. Furmin, I am sure that I have admonished you before not to carouse with the help.

STEWARD
 Who you callin' "the help," you old creep? And where'd you get dat schnozz from, da Huge Noses Store?

LORD FOND DU LAIT (shocked)

I have never been treated this way
in my entire life! Mr. Furmin, I
insist that you upbraid this churl
right now!

The STEWARD stops messing with the bags and stands up in a pugilist stance. MITCH counters with a karate stance and waves the STEWARD toward him.

EMIL has been watching this exchange from his seat, pretending not to notice, but just as it looks to become violent, he bolts up out of his seat and blithely interposes himself between them.

EMIL

Whoa, there! What is the *problem-*
o? We are surely all friends
here, we gadabouts traipsing upon
this fine, fine California Zephyr.

MITCH and the STEWARD drop their hands and stare quizzically at EMIL. LORD FOND DU LAIT steps closer and exhales with a miffed look.

MITCH

Gadabouts? Who you callin' a
gadabout? I'm a bona fide
Pinkerton detective. And I detect
a knuckle sandwich comin' at you
real soon.

LORD FOND DU LAIT (sarcastic)

Mr. Furmin, please stand down.
I'm sure you will be most
embarrassed, most embarrassed
indeed, when you realize you are
in the presence of the *greatest*
detective in history, Mr. Emil
Conard, Flemish detective *extra-*
ordin-aire.

EMIL straightens his bowler and reaches into his pocket for a piece of beef jerky. But he is shunned before he can produce the morsel.

LORD FOND DU LAIT

Oh, no, Mr. Conard. I do not want any of your . . . *jerried* beef. I partook of the complimentary breakfast at the hotel.

MITCH looks hurt.

MITCH

Geez! I didn't get any free breakfast, Lord Fond du Lait. I sure could go for some beef jerky.

LORD FOND DU LAIT (aloof)

If you must eat Mr. Conard's *jerried* beef, I will not stop you. I would simply like to rest now, for our journey is a long one, and no doubt even longer than scheduled, now that we have ever-so-kindly been embraced by the presence of Mr. Conard.

EMIL hands MITCH a chunk of beef jerky, who begins to chew on it greedily. The STEWARD goes back to sorting luggage.

EMIL

My dear Lord Fond du Lait, how is the *fine art* business these days? I'm guessing even Mr. Furmin here does not know the truly precious nature of your baggage?

MITCH

Hey, this jerky is great! Where'd you get it?

EMIL

The Omaha Farmers' Market.

MITCH

You got any more?

LORD FOND DU LAIT

Calm down, Mr. Furmin. Mr. Conard does not hand out his jerky for any old reason. No, he uses his jerkied beef more like . . . a *cattle prod*. Isn't that right, Mr. Conard?

EMIL (daring)

Lord Fond du Lait, while you may assert that I use my beef jerky as a *cattle prod*, let me remind you that you often use your *beef* to *prod cattle*.

LORD FOND DU LAIT gasps.

LORD FOND DU LAIT

How dare you bring up ghosts of the past! You have crossed the line Mr. Conard! Fie! Fie on you!

EMIL

Crossing the line, my dear Lord Fond du Lait, is the only way I know by which one can *move* the line.

The STEWARD finishes stowing the luggage.

STEWARD

Okay, crikey! That's that. You guys all going to Chicago?

MITCH

All the way.

STEWARD

If you wouldn't mind, find yourselves some seats and I'll stop by to confirm your tickets.

LORD FOND DU LAIT

I will be keeping an eye on you, Mr. Conard. You cannot continue to cross me without repercussions!

EMIL

Indeed, Lord Fond du Lait, indeed.
Knowing that you are keeping an
eye on me is most assuredly *bo-*
vine!

EMIL swivels around with a smug smile only to find his seat and the one next to it occupied by TWANIA SHAWAYNE and BEV MOORE, a pair of 40-something friends who are stinking drunk. TWANIA dons fake furs and costume jewelry. BEV dons similar accoutrements, but richer, and boozier.

EMIL approaches them and tries to charm them.

EMIL

Dear ladies, ahem. I'm sure you noticed my bag above you when you sat down. I was sitting here but a moment ago and was wondering whether you would be so kind as to let me reoccupy my most humble perch, my simple seat, my unassuming spot, my modest post of repose.

TWANIA looks at BEV, and then looks up at EMIL.

TWANIA (slurring)

Uhhhh.

BEV (slight Southern accent)

Y'know, I don't even know who you are. What in the tarnation do you expect from me?

EMIL

Madame . . .

TWANIA

Hmmm? Whassis name?

BEV

I don't know. He's a freak-a
somekind. Funny hat. Funny face.
Mister. You got a funny face.

The train lunges and lurches forward. EMIL checks his balance and resigns himself to a minor defeat. He sits down in a seat across from BEV and TWANIA, placing his hat on the empty seat next to him.

EMIL

Ladies, I must first extend my utmost sincerity in friendship and I am sure that this fantastic journey to the Second City will be nothing but pure and unadulterated dynamism.

TWANIA

Dinosaurism?

BEV

Shhhh! Don' encourage him! He's hittin' on you!

EMIL (blushing)

Oh! Ahem! Yes! No! No, my dear ladies. Let me assure you that I would not be interested sexually in such fine specimens as yourselves. I am saving myself for the holiest of holies, the holy matrimony of marriage!

TWANIA

Oh! He's romantic! Tell him come over.

BEV

Oh shoot. No winnin' ever with you! Scoot!

BEV tries to shoo TWANIA over. She doesn't have much room to move. BEV lifts up her armrest and she scoots the other way. She then slaps her hand at the uncomfortably small space between her and TWANIA.

BEV

Well! Git! Git on over here you sassy Valentino!

EMIL pauses at first. He then arises and shimmies himself into the space.

BEV

Now. That wasn't such a big Act of Congress now was it now?

EMIL

Certainly not. But I would appreciate it if we could introduce ourselves to each other. You know, share names? It is not that much to ask of those who are sharing a common journey?

TWANIA reaches below her seat and produces a rubber hot water bottle. She shakes it in front of EMIL's face.

TWANIA

Hey. You wanna Manamahasset?

EMIL

Ahem. A . . . Manamahasset?

BEV

A Manhattan. She's got fixins for making Manhattans. It's the only drink that keeps her demons away.

EMIL checks out TWANIA up and down, sees her drooling a bit and in a bit of a zombie daze.

EMIL

Yes. I see that. The Manahass . . . Manhattan. It's all in the . . . water bottle?

TWANIA

This the whiskey.

BEV pulls a hot water bottle from below her seat.

BEV

And this is the sweet vermouth.

EMIL

So where are the bitters and the cherries?

BEV and TWANIA in unison shove their hands down their rear ends and BEV produces a small jar of cherries and TWANIA produces a small bottle of aromatic bitters.

EMIL

I see. As they say, "when in Rome . . . "

TWANIA

Shoot. This ain't no Rome. This is Omaha.

EMIL looks out the window and sees downtown Omaha in the background.

EMIL

This *was* Omaha, madame

TWANIA

Oh. Twania. Twania Shawayne.

BEV

And I'm Bev. Bev Moore.

EMIL

Ms. Shawayne and Ms. Moore, it is indeed a pleasure to meet you both. I look forward to . . .

TWANIA

Hey! I reckonize you now. Yer . . . yer that murder guy.

BEV

What?! You kill people?!

EMIL (startled)

No! No! Not at all! I *solve* murders! I don't commit them!

TWANIA

Okay. Thas's fine, then.

EMIL

Bev, before we make any more *beverages*, might I ask you what you and Twania are visiting Chicago for?

TWANIA (really slurred)

You mean, for what are we visiting Chicago?

EMIL

Yes! Right! For what are we visiting Chicago? I mean, for what are the two of you . . . ahem . . . visiting Chicago?

TWANIA

I'm a ss-sa-singer. Karaoke contessstt.

EMIL (brightens)

Exciting! What song do you plan to sing?

TWANIA

"Crazy" by Passty Cline.

BEV

I'm her sponsor.

EMIL

Indeed. Indeed.

BEV

I sell apple butter. Bev's apple butter. I sponsor Twania at her karaoke contests. And I see apple butter wherever we go.

EMIL

Apple butter! Ms. Moore, you'll have to let me trade you some beef jerky for apple butter before this trip is over!

BEV

Sure. Let's make some drinks.

TWANIA pulls out some plastic party cups and EMIL looks horrified.

EMIL

My ladies, you cannot possibly dream of drinking such a royal drink as a Manhattan from such inferior . . . receptacles!

TWANIA

You brought proppper glassssssware?

EMIL (frowns)

Er. No. Maybe Lord Fond du Lait has some glassware.

LORD FOND DU LAIT, who's been overhearing the whole conversation from a nearby seat, looks up with a scowl.

LORD FOND DU LAIT

Do not even think of asking, Mr. Conard. I would rather rub my anus with searing-hot magma than loan you any glassware.

BEV (rolls eyes)

He's a downer, isn't he?

EMIL (serious)

You have *no* idea.

The overhead speakers come on with a soft ding and the CONDUCTOR speaks.

CONDUCTOR (O.S.)

Okay, everybody. Omaha travelers, welcome aboard the California Zephyr. Final stop Chicago. We are now serving hot breakfast for the next hour or so and we'd love to see you in the dining car.

As always, you can find other items in the club car, such as a cup of noodles or a Chicago style hot dog.

CONDUCTOR (cont'd.)

Once again, thank you for choosing Amtrak and we hope you enjoy your ride. Estimated arrival in Chicago in about eleven hours.

TWANIA

Eleven? We didn' bring 'nuff booooooze fer that.

EMIL

Ladies, I shall venture forth into the dining car! They no doubt have the proper glassware at hand.

EMIL bolts out of the seat and walks toward the stairs up, but looks confused. He absent-mindedly pulls open the door to the bathroom, and fortunately no one is inside. He looks back at BEV and TWANIA, who both signal to go up the narrow stairs.

EMIL

Right. Up we go! Excelsior and what-not!

EMIL ascends the stairs.

BEV (to TWANIA)

I think he likes you.

TWANIA

Shoot. He's too drunk to . . .
you know.

BEV and TWANIA sit in silence for a bit.

TWANIA

He is kinda . . . cute. For a booozer.

There is another bit of silence. Then TWANIA develops a deep frown and starts bawling.

TWANIA

Oh! I want a man! I want a man who will treat me right! Show me things!

BEV hugs TWANIA and consoles her.

BEV

Oh, it's okay, hon. He'll be back soon. With proper glassware.

TWANIA gently pushes off BEV.

TWANIA (sniffling)

I don't want proper glassware.

TWANIA then shakes some bitters into the mouth of her hot water bottle and sucks at it with her mouth. BEV does the same.

CUT TO:

INT. DINING CAR

The dining car has just a few people sitting at tables who are generally not speaking, looking at short menus and occasionally out the windows at the countryside moving by.

Of particular note and looking rather conspicuous are MORTIMER CRANSTON, III, 83, a withered man who looks even older than his age wearing a monocle and a tuxedo. Sitting with him is DR. LIVERMORE SANDSTROM, 56, a jelly of a man, who is wearing a white lab coat.

EMIL enters the dining car, looking around with an air of being lost. He sits down at an empty table at the opposite end of MORTIMER and LIVERMORE. EMIL surreptitiously scans the tables for appropriate glassware, but doesn't see any.

He patiently waits for the WAITRESS, 26, a cute woman with sass, to stop by. She does so and places a paper placemat and silverware wrapped in a napkin in front of him at the table.

WAITRESS

You know what you want, mister?

EMIL

Uhm. Yes! I do! I have a special request, and I know this might seem eccentric or odd or unusual or beyond the ordinary or even unnatural or strange, even unfamiliar. I would simply love to have a glass of grapefruit juice, but it only tastes right when served in the proper glassware.

WAITRESS

We got juice glasses, mister. That's pretty proper if you ask me.

EMIL

Yes! No! I suppose that a *juice* glass would be the proper glassware in most situations, but because this is a special occasion, the proper glassware would be a cocktail glass.

The WAITRESS looks a bit angry, but tries to put on a pleasant face.

WAITRESS

I don't know what you guys are up to, but whatever it is, just keep me out of it, alright?

EMIL (shocked)

Madame, I have no idea what you're talking about. I'm a simple man with a simple request.

WAITRESS

Yeah, and so was your buddy over there.

EMIL (confused)

My . . . *buddy*?

WAITRESS

The creepy old guy over there?

The WAITRESS points to MORTIMER. EMIL cannot see anything of interest until LIVERMORE shifts his huge frame a bit, revealing a cocktail glass filled with apple juice in front of MORTIMER.

EMIL (under his breath)
Mortimer Cranston the Third. Our
paths cross once again.

WAITRESS
See? I knew you two knew each
other. So do you want to have
breakfast normal-like, or do you
want to continue to act like this
is the Ritz and you're some fancy-
pants special guy?

EMIL looks a bit ashamed.

EMIL
Ahem. I'm sorry for the
confusion. Let me take a rain
check for now. I promise no
shenanigans, monkeyshines, nor
tomfoolery is currently underway
or even afoot.

The WAITRESS is now the one who appears a bit ashamed.

WAITRESS
Look, I'm sorry mister. I didn't
mean to come down so harsh on you.
It's been a strange ride and I've
been on this train from the start
at Emeryville.

EMIL stands up and reaches into his pocket to produce a piece of beef jerky, and offers it to the WAITRESS.

EMIL
I hope there are no hard feelings.
May I offer you the best beef
jerky of which I am aware?

The WAITRESS takes the beef jerky and sniffs it. She then bites into it and smiles.

WAITRESS

Hey! You're right! This is the best beef jerky.

EMIL then sits one booth closer to MORTIMER and LIVERMORE. The WAITRESS steps over.

WAITRESS (chewing)

Are you sure you don't want anything?

EMIL now tries to engage the WAITRESS in confidence, speaking in hushed tones.

EMIL

If you wouldn't mind, don't attract any attention to me. I believe that Mortimer and Livermore over there have not yet seen me. Go about your usual affairs, your normal business, your customary . . . customs, and I will attempt to infiltrate their little cabal.

The WAITRESS looks a bit confused, but nods her head and wanders away to attend to the other tables. EMIL then scoots one more table closer. He grabs some unfolded newspaper sections from this table and thrusts them up, upside down, to provide cover for his face. He peers around the papers, and is satisfied that MORTIMER and LIVERMORE have not yet notice his presence.

EMIL then scoots one more table closer, and there is now only one empty table between him and MORTIMER and LIVERMORE. He ruffles the paper up to his face, but a bit too hard and it tears down the middle, exposing his face.

EMIL

Ooooh!

EMIL ducks down into the booth and then peeks around the seat. MORTIMER and LIVERMORE act as though nothing is strange. EMIL ruffles the torn halves of paper and scoots across the aisle into the table directly across from MORTIMER and LIVERMORE, the whole time holding the papers up to the side of his face.

The WAITRESS steps by and EMIL beckons her. She still has a look of confusion, but smiles and walks over. EMIL lets down the papers a bit incautiously as he talks.

WAITRESS

You hungry now?

EMIL (sotto voce)

No. But I am most humbly in need of your help. We must distract Mortimer and Livermore thither over yonder there and somehow create enough confusion so as to thereby allow me to be able to acquire the cocktail glass out of which Mortimer is drinking his apple juice.

EMIL looks up intently at the WAITRESS's eyes.

EMIL

But why on Earth do you think he's drinking *apple juice* out of a cocktail glass, anyway?

WAITRESS (softly)

I don't know, mister. He's just a customer like everyone else. And he just so happened to order before you.

EMIL (brightly, yet hushed)

Oh! Let me assure you, my fair lady, that Mortimer Cranston the Third is not a customer like anyone else. He's a retired world-champion competitive eater! He used to be able to eat mayonnaise by the bucket! Pad Thai by the pound! Matzo balls by the . . . matzo ball!

WAITRESS

I guess that's why he ordered three bottles of ketchup with his toast.

EMIL

Yes! Most certainly. Although he is in semi-retirement, he likes to show off in an attempt to reclaim some of the golden years of his salad days, a sort of swan song or final curtain call, a last hurrah, if you will.

At this point MORTIMER coughs and looks over at EMIL and the WAITRESS.

MORTIMER (thick Louisiana accent)

Ahem, there my dear Mr. Co-nard. I do believe it only Southern gentlemanly of myself and Dr. Sandstrom here to advise you that we have heard every word you have said.

EMIL looks up guiltily at the WAITRESS.

EMIL (whisper)

He's not talking about us, is he?

MORTIMER

Yes, Mr. Co-nard. We're talking about you. And we saw you come up the stairs. In fact, we saw you darting around the tables and booths like a shoeless frog on a hot pan set out on black asphalt in the . . . *summertime*.

MORTIMER sighs. LIVERMORE hands MORTIMER a white kerchief, which MORTIMER uses to pat sweat beads from his forehead.

EMIL looks at the WAITRESS with an assuring look.

EMIL

I'll handle this.

EMIL stands up with the newspapers clutched in hand and steps up to the table of MORTIMER and LIVERMORE.

EMIL

How good to run into you, Mortimer
and Dr. Livermore Sandstrom, I
presume?

LIVERMORE (high-pitched effeminate)

Yes. Your presumptive skills are
still sharp, Mr. Conard.

EMIL

I just came up here to read the
papers . . .

EMIL shakes the papers for emphasis, but he loses one half of
the torn pages onto the floor.

EMIL

. . . but yes! As you can see, a
new paper is in order. They just
don't make newspapers like they
used to. I remember the good old
days, when you could read the
entire paper without having half
of it fall into tatters, shreds,
pieces on the floor.

MORTIMER takes a big gulp of his apple juice and sets the
cocktail glass at the edge of the table.

MORTIMER

Here you go, Mr. Co-nard. I
believe you were wanting this for
some reason?

EMIL (shrugging)

My dear Mortimer, I simply do not
know what your are referring . . .
Ahem, to what you are referring.

EMIL takes up all the papers from the floor and gathers them in
a messy pile.

EMIL

Gentlemen, this unfortunate happenstance of the torn papers hath given me an unforeseen opportunity to show you a magic trick, one I learned during my travels to Cairo, where the great Zahini himself showed me his famous trick, The Great Mystery of the Torn Newspapers!

EMIL crumples up the newspapers, throws them into the air over the table, and quickly grabs the cocktail glass and hides it behind his back.

EMIL

Ta-da!

LIVERMORE

Can you please explain *why* you just did that?

EMIL (gloating)

That, Dr. Sandstrom, is The Great . . . *Mystery!*

EMIL smiles greedily as he walks back down the stairs.

CUT TO:

INT. COACH CAR

EMIL steps down onto the floor of the car and sees BEV and TWANIA slouched on their seats. He walks over to them and proudly holds out the cocktail glass and beams with self-satisfaction.

EMIL

Ladies! Here we are! A cocktail glass! The proper glassware to drink a Manhattan with.

BEV (slurred, eyes close)

You mean, " . . . with which to drink a Manhattan."

EMIL

Yes! Of course! Let's get to it!

BEV doesn't move. TWANIA's head rolls over to one side.

EMIL (miffed)

I see you've started without me.

EMIL grabs the hot water bottle from TWANIA's lap, and pours its contents into the cocktail glass. Just a few drops are left. EMIL frowns and then does the same with the hot water bottle from BEV's lap. He finds a bottle of bitters at their feet and tosses a couple of dashes into the tiny drink.

He swirls the tiny amount of liquid about the glass, puts it to his lips, but then takes the glass away from his lips before drinking it.

EMIL

This drink needs a cherry!

EMIL cradles the cocktail glass in his elbow joint. He then looks at BEV and TWANIA, but doesn't see the jar of cherries anywhere. He gently lifts their arms up and ultimately finds a nearly empty jar of cherries under TWANIA's arm.

EMIL opens the jar and fishes around in the red liquid with his fingers. He manages to find a small piece of a cherry and drops it into the cocktail glass. After thinking a bit, he puts the jar back under TWANIA's arm.

EMIL

Ah! Bottoms up!

EMIL gulps down the drink and the cherry, but swallows to greedily and starts choking on the cherry piece. He hacks a bit and then coughs out the cherry piece with a violent force and it sticks fast to BEV's forehead.

EMIL (shocked)

Ooooh!

EMIL looks at the empty cocktail glass and doesn't know what to do with it. He darts off to the bathroom door but it is locked. He frantically runs back to BEV, who is unconsciously rubbing at the cherry on her forehead.

EMIL pulls out his handkerchief and tries to daub off the cherry, but BEV has it in her fingers and she absent-mindedly sniffs it and then puts it in her mouth and chews it.

EMIL

Waste not, want not!

EMIL is still uncomfortable holding the cocktail glass, and looks around for a place to set it down. Then the speakers overhead come on.

CONDUCTOR (O.S.)

Good afternoon everyone. We hope you've enjoyed the trip so far.

EMIL

I *have*!

CONDUCTOR (O.S.)

We'll be pulling in to Ottumwa, Iowa in just a few minutes. Please keep your smoke breaks short as we are just a little behind schedule.

And I'm proud to announce that we are trying out something new today in the lounge car at the front of the train. We've brought on some karaoke equipment and invite you all to flex your vocal chords to help entertain and pass the time.

Our karaoke DJ has informed me that there is some good news and bad news about the song selection. The bad news is he lost most of his song selection somewhere back in Nebraska. The good news is that the song selection left on the train is the entire discography of Billy Joel.

So get on over to the lounge car and don't have a heart attack-ack-ack-ack!

EMIL looks around the car and doesn't see anyone getting up to go to the lounge car. He tries to stir BEV and TWANIA.

EMIL

Ms. Moore! Ms. Shawayne! The lounge car has Billy Joel karaoke! Doesn't that sound like fun? It's a great chance to practice before your contest!

TWANIA burples a bit and a thin stream of clear liquid drips out of her mouth and down her face. It slowly trickles down her neck and begins to puddle there.

BEV (semi-conscious)

We hate Billy Joel.

EMIL frowns.

EMIL

But he wrote "Allentown"! "The Stranger"? "I Go To Extremes"?

BEV and TWANIA show no response. Frustrated, EMIL heads over to LORD FOND DU LAIT and MITCH. Before he can say anything, MITCH speaks up.

MITCH

You just fuggedaboutit. I ain't singin' nuttin'.

EMIL

But you don't have to sing! You can just sit and watch the other singers sing.

LORD FOND DU LAIT (patronizingly)

Mr. Conard, I'm sure you'll understand that we are very tired from travelling all day. We simply don't have the energy to make it all the way to the lounge car for Billy Joel karaoke. Maybe tomorrow after we've rested a bit.

EMIL

But tomorrow . . . they might not have karaoke! Mr. Furmin, if you want to come along, I will offer you some beef jerky and buy you a can of beer.

MITCH (interested)

Really? Okay, then.

MITCH stands up and he and EMIL walk up the stairs. LORD FOND DU LAIT snorts in disapproval.

CUT TO:

INT. KARAOKE LOUNGE CAR

EMIL and MITCH are sitting at a table and looking over a piece of paper with all of the Billy Joel songs available. They each have cans of beer and EMIL has the cocktail glass in front him. They are both chewing beef jerky. EMIL occasionally pours some of his can of beer into the cocktail glass to drink it.

Up on a small makeshift stage is RANDALL FACKLER, 41, a blind man of smaller stature who has a white walking cane which he uses to keep time, tapping the floor in front of himself. He is dressed in a tuxedo and is singing "For the Longest Time." Sitting nearby is the karaoke DJ, MAGIC MINSTON, a 40-something bearded man with a mullet, painter's cap, and tie-dye T-shirt.

RANDALL

Whoa, oh, oh, oh. For the longest time. Whoa, oh, oh, oh. For the longest time.

I do dee a doobie doobie doo.
Something something something
doobie doobie doo. I do doo do
doobie doobie do.

EMIL (to MITCH)

What do you think, Mr. Furmin?

MITCH

This beef jerky is great, Mr. Conard!

EMIL

No! What should I sing?

MITCH

I dunno. I guess I like his earlier stuff. "Uptown Girl" or what was that one about the wine? Bottle of rosé instead?

EMIL

Ah, yes. "Scenes from an Italian Kitchen." A true masterpiece. But I want to sing something that will get the audience going, either something more up-tempo or something with familiar lyrics for a sing-along.

MITCH looks around and sees that no one else is in the car. But then LORD FOND DU LAIT slowly comes up the stairs and sits down.

MITCH (surprised)

But Lord Fond du Lait, I thought you hated Billy Joel?

LORD FOND DU LAIT (pensive)

I know. I know. I was just getting a little . . . bored all by myself. That's all.

EMIL punches LORD FOND DU LAIT lightly in the shoulder.

EMIL

That's the spirit!

BEV and TWANIA come in next, a bit stumbly, and sit down at a nearby table.

EMIL

Ms. Moore! Ms. Shawayne! What a pleasure to see you again! Let me buy you a drink!

BEV

Oh, don't worry.

BEV and TWANIA hold up full hot water bottles of a different color.

TWANIA (slurred)
 We're prepared for the long haul.
 And I wanna sing "We Didn't Start
 the Fire."

EMIL stands up and gulps the beer from his cocktail glass and walks it over to BEV and TWANIA.

TWANIA
 Hey! Thanks! We been lookin' for
 this.

EMIL
 My pleasure.

As EMIL walks over to his table, LIVERMORE and MORTIMER show up and sit down. EMIL gives them the evil eye and sits down with MITCH and LORD FOND DU LAIT.

EMIL
 Keep an eye on those two churlish
 knaves. They always try to steal
 my thunder by singing my songs
 before I get the chance.

DARLA, CONTESSA, and TAPAU also enter and find their own table. EMIL nods to them and they wave back.

EMIL
 Ms. Durler, where are your
 children?

DARLA
 Beats me.

EMIL
 Indeed! Indeed!

EMIL looks at the list again and scribbles down a song on a piece of paper and takes it up to MAGIC MINSTON.

MAGIC MINSTON
 Sweet, dude. You're up next.

EMIL

Excellent.

EMIL sits down with MITCH and LORD FOND DU LAIT, almost shivering with excitement.

MITCH

Wha'd you put in?

LORD FOND DU LAIT

Now, now, Mr. Furmin. We don't want to ruin Mr. Conard's surprise.

EMIL

Yes. It's a secret! But you'll know soon enough. I'm next. Livermore and Mortimer cannot steal my thunder today!

Everyone in the car enjoys the rest of RANDALL's song as he continues to butcher the lyrics. As the song ends, RANDALL continues to sing the title of the song in an effort to make up for not knowing the lyrics.

RANDALL

For the longest time. For the longest time.

MAGIC

Okay! That was "For the Longest Time" by Mr. Randall Fackler!

There is a smattering of applause, with EMIL clapping the most enthusiastically.

RANDALL

Okay, that one was for free. The next one someone has to buy this poor blind man a beer.

EMIL stands up.

EMIL

I'll buy that man a beer!

RANDALL nods in appreciation and fishes his way to a seat with his cane. The WAITRESS from the dining car walks over with a beer, and then gets some cash from EMIL, including a modest tip.

MITCH

Gee, that was awful nice of you, Mr. Conard, offering that poor blind man a beer.

EMIL

Pshaw! Do you have any idea who Randall Fackler is?

MITCH

A poor blind man?

EMIL

No. Well, no and yes. Or, yes and no. He *is* blind. But poor? Far from it! Mr. Fackler is one of the preeminent bookies in the Midwest. His underground organization takes bets on all major sports, and he doesn't stop there. He even takes bets on competitive eating and dwarf tossing!

MITCH (confused)

I don't get it, Mr. Conard, why would you buy such a no-goodnik a beer?

LORD FOND DU LAIT

Simple, Mr. Furmin. Mr. Conard often needs Mr. Fackler's underground connections in order to solve his famous cases. Without Mr. Fackler, Mr. Conard would be a traffic cop.

EMIL (flustered)

Ahem. Of course that's not true. I bought him a beer because I thought he did a fine job singing. But speaking of famous cases, Mr. Furmin, have you ever seen the pictures from my famous case involving Lord Fond du Lait? The pictures of the case which I like to call "The Horse Who Needed to See About a Man?"

LORD FOND DU LAIT blushes and coughs.

LORD FOND DU LAIT

We don't need to bring up the past, Mr. Conard.

EMIL

The past? You mean you've given up on . . .

MAGIC

Next up is Mr. Emil Conard, and it says here that he's the most famous Flemish detective! Get on up here, Emil, and sing us "Just the Way You Are"!

EMIL glares at LORD FOND DU LAIT and twists his mustache, and heads up to MAGIC and grabs the wired microphone. The audience claps lightly.

EMIL

This one goes out to all of the ladies in the room.

TWANIA

Oh! He means me! He means me!

EMIL

And I also want to congratulate all of you for not murdering anyone yet. You've set the record! This is the longest train ride I've enjoyed without a murder!

There's another light smattering of applause. Then the intro to the song plays. EMIL sways a bit to the music.

EMIL

Don't go changin' to try and
please me.
You never let me down before. M-
m-m-mm.
And don't imagine you're too
familiar.
And I don't see you anymore.

MITCH chomps on his last piece of beef jerky. DARLA, CONTESSA, and TAPAU rock their heads with the beat. LORD FOND DU LAIT acts disinterested. BEV and TWANIA make more drinks and share the cocktail glass. RANDALL is enjoying his beer. MORTIMER is scratching a song to sing on a piece of paper and he hands it to LIVERMORE to take up to MAGIC.

EMIL

I would not leave you in times of
trouble.
We never could have come this far.
M-m-m-mm.
I took the good times. I'll take
the bad times.
I'll take you just the way you
are.

At this point, EMIL starts sauntering down the aisle to sing more closely to the members of the audience. Closest is RANDALL. As he sings by RANDALL, he surreptitiously takes a quaff from RANDALL's beer can.

EMIL

I need to know that you will
always be the same old someone
that I knew.
Oh, what will it take 'til you
believe in me the way that I
believe in you?

EMIL moves on to MORTIMER and LIVERMORE. As he sings to them, he grabs the piece of paper with MORTIMER's song, and sees that he had written down "Just the Way You Are" but had to scratch it out and instead has down "The Stranger." EMIL rolls his eyes at MORTIMER and tosses the piece of paper at him.

EMIL

I said I'd love you and that's
forever. And this I promise from
the heart. M-m-m-mm.
I couldn't love you any better.
I love you just the way you a-a-a-
a-a-a-a-are, baby!

Just before the saxophone solo, EMIL heads over to DARLA, TAPAU, and CONTESSA, and seemingly magically produces a small toy saxophone from a pocket and pretends to play along. The women giggle with joy. They pretend to faint.

EMIL

I don't want clever conversation.
I never want to work that hard.
M-m-m-mm.
I just want someone that I can
talk to.
I want you just the way you a-a-a-
a-a-a-a-re.

EMIL then walks up to BEV and TWANIA, extending the microphone cord taut. TWANIA is beet red from excitement and anticipation. He brings out the toy saxophone again to finish the song. BEV and TWANIA try to reach out to the saxophone and touch it as if it were an idol to worship.

Suddenly the train hits a sharp curve or bump and the whole car is jerked up a bit and to the side. It's a strong enough jolt to make EMIL fall down and the toy saxophone is lost in the aisle. The lights go dim a bit and only clouded sunlight offers any glimpse inside the car, creating dusky shadows.

There is quite a bit of commotion as all the passengers stand up and seem to be helping each other. "The Stranger" comes on the karaoke machine with no one singing. EMIL is stunned a bit, and then he hears a scream.

He struggles to stand up and then the lights come on. He stands up to find all of the passengers crowded around a pale MORTIMER, who has the mouthpiece end of toy saxophone stuck into his bleeding neck, a mouth stuffed full of beef jerky, and the broken stem of the cocktail glass shoved into his heart. He also has a hot water bottle protruding from his pants.

EMIL looks at MORTIMER with a cautious eye and shrugs, then looks at his pocket watch.

EMIL

Let's see, looks like we made it precisely four hours and twenty three minutes before a murder on this train ride. That beats the old record by twenty minutes!

LIVERMORE

Aren't you going to solve this murder now?

The crowd looks to EMIL for leadership.

EMIL

Forsooth! And anon! And soon!
But it is nap time!

The crowd grumbles in agreement.

EMIL

I have had an enjoyable trip so far, and I need to rest my bones, including the most important bone
. . .

TWANIA

I know which bone *that* is!

EMIL

Yes, the *brain* bone. We must all rest our *brain* bones and come back to this scene of the crime! They say the perpetrator always returns to the scene of the crime!

And let me warn you all: you are all suspects!

EMIL wanders away, and heads down the stairs.

MAGIC

Does anyone want to sing "The
Stranger"?

CUT TO:

INT. COACH CAR - AFTERNOON

EMIL is sleeping soundly in a seat with a sleep mask as the train is slowing down. It is slowing down because it is pulling into Union Station in Chicago, and the rail yards and skyscrapers can be seen outside his window.

The train comes to a stop with a slight jolt and EMIL snorts and licks his lips. He opens his eyes slightly and smiles, then sits up and claps and looks around for acknowledgment, but none of the other suspects are nearby.

EMIL

Of course!

EMIL jumps out of his seat, and sees everyone grabbing their belongings to leave the train.

EMIL

Wait! You can't all leave yet!
I've figured it out! I know
exactly who killed Mortimer
Cranston the Third, and why!

The STEWARD steps up to EMIL and tries to calm him down.

STEWARD

Mr. Conard, we got it under
control.

EMIL (hurt)

You . . . solved the murder
without me?

STEWARD

No, but we got the conductor to phone ahead and the Chicago police sent a detective to meet us right now. You are free to go because they said you weren't a suspect. All the other suspects are staying behind to be interviewed in the karaoke car.

EMIL

But the police will never figure it out! I'm the only one who can handle this case! And the suspects, they all need to get off the train and enjoy Chicago! Some have a funeral to attend! Some are competing in karaoke contests! Some have dates at the Lincoln Park Zoo!

The train doors open and DETECTIVE SAM MERSHY, 43, with a cop moustache and black suit, boards as other passengers disembark onto the platform. He flashes his badge at EMIL and the STEWARD.

MERSHY

Mr. Conard, a pleasure. I'm Detective Sam Mersh. Most people just call me Mersh or Mershy.

EMIL

Mershy, I've got to put a hold on your investigation! I already know who committed the murder, and why!

MERSHY

Okay, then. Just tell me who and I'll go arrest them. Sounds simple.

EMIL

But it's not! Although I quite already know who committed the foul and smelly deed, we do not yet have enough evidence piled and amassed and gathered, collected, even, to make an arrest!

The STEWARD raises his eyebrows and shrugs his shoulders, then goes about his job cleaning the train and helping passengers out.

MERSHY

Okay, try me, Mr. Conard. What you say sounds like Grade-A Hooey.

EMIL

I do not blame you Mershy. I have oft been accused of being full of hooey. But you must trust me on this one. The most important thing you can do is to keep a close eye on the body of Mortimer while the rest of us gadabout Chicago and return here tomorrow.

MERSHY

You mean leave him in the train? Rotting here?

EMIL

Normally I would say "no," but Mortimer's body has been so pickled by heavy alcohol and drug use that he won't begin to fully decompose for at least 36 hours. That will give me and the suspects plenty of time to do our business and then we shall return.

MERSHY

But won't the murderer just leave? Hightail it for the hills?

EMIL

Normally I would say "yes," but this is a special case. The person who committed the murder did so because Mortimer's body has something very valuable about it. I swear, promise, and oath to you that none of the suspects will run away. There is too much at stake!

And besides, if Mortimer starts to smell funny, you can just pour some booze on him. He would've wanted it that way.

BEGIN MONTAGE

--EMIL and all of the other SUSPECTS joyously step out of UNION STATION into a bright and sunny late afternoon, pointing around in various directions and unfolding street maps.

--EMIL leads the way into MR. BEEF and they all have an Italian beef sandwich and fries.

--EMIL leads them all up to the Hancock Observatory for a drink. BEV and TWANIA have Manhattans.

--They all attend the filming of a daytime show, asking questions from the audience. They participate in an all-out brawl onstage.

--They all have deep-dish pizza. EMIL hands the waiter some beef jerky, and he later returns with a beef jerky pizza. Everyone applauds.

--They all get a huge ice cream sundae at Margie's Candies. BEV shoots whipped cream on EMIL's face, and then adds two cherries for his eyes.

--They all get some caramel corn at Garrett's popcorn.

--They go to Navy Pier and ride the Ferris Wheel.

--They all bend over and purge into Lake Michigan.

--They get some beer and hot dogs from a street vendor.

--They all go to a funeral at a nice cathedral.

--They all go to a karaoke contest to watch TWANIA compete. She wins a second-place trophy.

--They end up at a leather bar and do cocksucker shots with some liquor dribbling down their faces. Some of them look tired, but then EMIL hands out some energy drinks and they all shoot them and perk up.

--They all take a train out to Arlington Park and watch a horse race. Randall Fackler wins a bunch of cash and buys everyone beers.

--They all take a river taxi tour of downtown architecture.

--They all head to Hamburger University and sit in on a class.

--They all eat some hamburgers and fries at Hamburger University.

--They all eat chips and guacamole at Frontera Grill.

--They all run down Michigan Avenue chasing EMIL.

--EMIL chases them all running past Wrigley Field. EMIL stops to look at the Harry Caray statue and cringes in fear. He then puts a can of beer at the base of the statue and runs after them again.

--They all ride on the Ferris Wheel again, but this time they have barf bags in hand.

--They all ride The El back to Union Station.

--They all have tacos at the Union Station food court.

--They all wander to the train platform and board, high-fiving and laughing the whole time.

END MONTAGE

CUT TO:

INT. KARAOKE LOUNGE CAR - NOONISH

All of the SUSPECTS are in a casual mood, as if they'd forgotten that a murder had occurred, as if they'd forgotten MORTIMER's dead body wasn't there in one of the booths. Occasionally, a suspect will douse MORTIMER's body with some whiskey.

MERSHY is hovering at the sidelines, antsy.

MERSHY

Alright. You cavorters have had your shindig and your . . . cavorts. It's time to play out this charade and fess up. The gig's up.

The SUSPECTS look around at each other pensively, visibly sad that their fun must come to an end. EMIL, however, has a wide smile.

EMIL

Not so fast, my dear Mershy. While I agree that the gig is up, over, done with, finished, and kaput, you must grant us with a small indulgence, a minor diversion, a miniscule distraction, as each of us recalls and retells our favorite parts of the Chicago trip!

MERSHY

Is that all all-that important? I mean, you been screwin' around this whole time and I got my job on the line, lettin' you all go roustin' about.

EMIL

Let me assure you, my dear Mershy, this exercise in confabulation will be no idle fancy! The perpetrator of the dastardly deed will be exposed by this very endeavor!

EMIL hands some beef jerky to MERSHY.

MERSHY

Thanks. This is good stuff.

EMIL nods with satisfaction.

EMIL

Enough table setting! It's time for the meat eating! To make it fair, I suggest we go around the room, in a roundabout style, or *roustabout* style, one by one, and discuss our individual experiences from our Chicago trip.

If at any point I feel like the speaker is sand-bagging, holding back, playing hard to get, or otherwise being coy, I will ask pointed questions! If anyone disagrees with these rules, they are free to leave right now!

MERSH

But Mr. Conard!

EMIL

Fear not, Mershy! The true evil-doer here among us will not quit until the full dastardly goal is achieved. I have no doubt that we are all still being played for fools. But we are not fools. It is we who are fooling the fooler!

BEV (drunkenly)

Can we at least listen to some Billy Joel while we're at it?

EMIL (excited)

Yes! No! No, this is too important. This is the end of the rising action! This is the penultimate denouement! Even the most miniscule distractions will be . . . distracting!

I suggest we start with volunteers. Who's first?

There is a very short moment when the SUSPECTS all look at each other. But DARLA is quick to raise a hand.

DARLA

I want to go first and be done.

EMIL

Excellent!

DARLA stands up and slightly sheepishly takes a place in the middle of everyone and talks slowly and tries to turn around to make eye contact with everyone. Her drawl and lisp seem to be much less exaggerated, and even gone at times.

DARLA

I wanna say first dat dis was by far the best little vacation I ever been on. You peopla are a lot of fun to hang out with, even if one a you done killed Mortimer. Whoever killed Mortimer, I won't hold it agin you and I want you all to know that I consider you all my good friends. It's not too often I meet some strangers and like 'em a whole lot. But you are all a diff'rent kinda stranger, like I met you all before.

The SUSPECTS smile and nod and generally grumble approval of this statement. EMIL raises his eyebrows at her last statement.

DARLA

And I want tha murderer to know that I'd like to maintain our friendship, even when they're in prison. I promise ta write and maybe visit sometimes, depending on where the prison is, of course, and how far away it is from where I live.

The SUSPECTS nod and again grumble general approval.

DARLA

And maybe if the murderer turns out to get executed, I'd appreciate it if whoever that is, if they'd put me on the list of the witnesses to the execution, so's I can see what that's all about. I've been a-wantin' ta see an execution for awhile now, and it's not because I've got a sick mind or nothin'. I jus' wanta see it cuz I heard it was somethin' real innerestin' to see.

The SUSPECTS again not and grumble their general approval. MERSHY jots down a note in a small notepad.

DARLA

But if they don' get the executed, I'll still visit and maybe we can some-a those prison pen-pal friends, like you always see on those movies when the hot guy's in prison but the lady on the outside, she's gonna change him, and then someday they'll meet and they kin all start all over again.

The SUSPECTS pause, consider this last statement, and then generally nod and grumble approval.

DARLA

But if it's not meant to be, den I kin take it. I understand.

EMIL takes the chance to interject.

EMIL

Ms. Durler, thank you for your statement. But did you want to talk about anything we did while in the city? Did anything in particular stand out?

DARLA

Oh! Right! Sure. The best part, and I know this is gonna sound weird, but the best part for sure for me was waitin' in line to get the caramel corn.

EMIL brightens up and tries to calm her.

EMIL

It's not strange at all, Ms. Durler. But what about it was so special?

DARLA looks at her hands for a second, and becomes pensive, but is still eager to talk.

DARLA

I dunno. You know, I guess it sorta reminded me of my childhood, you know? Waitin' in line all the time? Standin' around with nothin' to do. Standin' around with not a care in the world!

Now, you gotta have a job and you gotta pay rent on time, and you gotta pay the electric compnee and den Christmas rolls 'round and everyone wants somethin' and the smell of that caramel corn . . . it was jus' so . . . so . . . so.

DARLA settles back down to her seat and looks lost in her own world.

EMIL

Indeed, madame. The caramel corn was divine, a heavenly smell wafting through our proboscises, a sublime scent nearly numbing our nares, an odiferous treat for sure!

Thank you so much for going first. I know that it can be hard in such situations, knowing that everyone here is a murder suspect. But I suspect now that the ice has been broken, the dam has been burst, and more of you will be at ease!

So, who's next?

BEV and TWANIA raise their hands at the same time and they look at each other.

BEV

Oh, you go.

TWANIA

Fine.

TWANIA stands up to talk where DARLA did. She is a bit drunk, but not too drunk, and has it together pretty well.

TWANIA

First, like Darla said, I wanna thank all you people for being my new friends. I don't care, either, that one of you killed Mortimer. And I don't care why. You're all solid people and I'll visit you in prison, too. But I don't think I want to be a pen pal or anything like that.

And I gotta admit that I was surprised by how much fun we had at the leather bar. And I still can't believe how many of my old friends I ran into there.

The SUSPECTS nod in support.

TWANIA

But of course my favorite part of the trip was coming in second at the karaoke contest.

EMIL

Twania, you most certainly deserved first place.

The SUSPECTS nod general agreement. TWANIA grabs the second-place trophy from her seat and admires it.

TWANIA (blushes)

Shoot. I don't know. It's always hard to win a contest when you bungle the lines. I know I only forgot a couple of words, but I didn't cover it up very well. And a couple of times I sang a harmony part instead of the melody part.

And I really liked that water taxi tour of the downtown architecture. I learned a lot about all kinds of things and I think I'm gonna go to the public library after all of this and check out some books on skyscraper architecture.

The SUSPECTS nod approval.

TWANIA

And I guess I'll never forget all the food. I think I had three tacos, two slices of pizza, a couple of hot dogs, an Italian beef sandwich, some meatballs, a cheeseburger, and some chips and it was all pretty good. That huge ice cream sundae was kind of overkill, though, but hey, we were on vacation!

The SUSPECTS nod and grumble loud approval.

TWANIA

I guess that's it.

TWANIA sits down and cradles her trophy.

EMIL

Excellent! I, too, was contemplating a need for larger pants after the ice cream sundae, but it's like that old joke.

RANDALL

What joke is that?

EMIL

You know, the one where the man goes to the local haberdasher and tells him he's invented something that will run him out of business. And the haberdasher says, "Oh, is that so?"

And then the man says, "Yes, it is. I have invented something that will make your belt and suspender sales vanish! I can make belts and suspenders obsolete with my new invention! It's called, 'Pants That Fit!'"

EMIL looks around for laughter, gets none.

EMIL

Pants That Fit! Pants that fit? You see? No one would need a belt or suspenders if they just wore Pants That Fit!

BEV stands up and takes the place amid the SUSPECTS.

EMIL

Yes, Bev. Do tell your story. I hope it fits!

BEV

Well like Darla and Twania said,
I'm sure glad I got to meet you
all. I had a real good time and
whoever dunnit, I definitely will
visit you in prison, and we can be
friends until you get executed.
And I suppose I'll go to the
funeral and buy some flowers for
your grave.

BEV starts crying a bit, and EMIL hands her a tissue which
accidentally has some beef jerky in it, and BEV unwraps the beef
jerky, eats it, and then tosses the tissue aside without using
it to wipe her tears.

BEV (sad, but controlled)

I guess it all seems like a dream,
you know? Just yesterday morning,
Twania and me were heading to
Chicago for her karaoke contest.
And I was trying to find new
stores to sell my apple butter,
you know, expand my market. But I
guess Chicago isn't an apple
butter kind of town.

The SUSPECTS frown and nod in sympathy.

EMIL

Bev, I would be glad to acquire
some of your apple butter if you
would care to sell me some.

BEV lightens up, and pulls a small jar of apple butter from her
back pocket.

BEV

Sure! Five bucks.

EMIL

It's a deal!

EMIL hands BEV a fiver and takes the jar of apple butter. EMIL
then opens it and dips some beef jerky in it, tastes it, and
smiles.

EMIL

Fantastic apple butter!

BEV

Oh, it's the best. But I guess my favorite part of the whole trip was when we ate that Chicago style pizza and Emil here asks for a beef jerky pizza and then the waiter was all confused and Emil, he's just so cool he pulls out some beef jerky and the waiter takes it back to the kitchen and wouldn't you know, he returns with a beef jerky pizza!

The SUSPECTS nod and grumble general approval.

BEV

And I didn't even think it would taste any good, with all that salt from the jerky and all that salt in the cheese, and I guess that sauce must have quite a bit of salt in it, too, but with a beer or two it's all good and you really don't even notice how salty it all is until a little later and then it's all, "Gimme some water!" and stuff.

RANDALL stands up, uses his stick to guide himself to BEV and hands her a glass of ice water. He then guides himself back to his seat and BEV takes a big drink.

BEV

And it was funny being in that leather bar and seeing all of Twania's old friends. But that just goes to show you that good people always find each other, no matter what city or place or country or whatever.

The SUSPECTS grumble and nod approval.

BEV sits down. MERSHY is visibly perturbed and antsy.

MERSHY

Do we really gotta go through everyone? Don't you know who did it yet?

EMIL

Of course!

MERSHY

Then why are we wasting our time on these story-telling shenanigans?

EMIL

Because the true killer has yet to make the critical mistake! I know who the killer is, but we still don't have all the evidence in place!

MERSHY shakes his head.

MERSHY

I just don't get it. You fancy Flemish detectives sure screw around a lot.

EMIL (wryly)

It's called *detective work*, Mershy. The killer will spend a life in prison, and possibly face the death penalty. What's a few more hours of freedom?

MERSHY calms down a bit.

EMIL

Alright, who's next?

RANDALL steps up, guiding himself with his stick.

RANDALL

I s'pose I'd like to go and be done with it all.

EMIL

Excellent.

RANDALL

So like everyone's said up to this point, I'm really glad to meet you all. I don't know what you people look like, but I can tell by the way you talk that you're all generally good people . . . except for the one of you who murdered Mortimer here.

RANDALL tries to point at MORTIMER's body with his walking stick, but nearly hits EMIL in the head, who adeptly ducks as if nothing happened.

RANDALL

And the food was good, wasn't it?

The SUSPECTS nod and grumble approval.

RANDALL

The Italian beef sandwich, even though it was messy to eat and I had to use several napkins to clean up myself afterwards, was close to perfect. The bun was fresh and spongy to soak up the meat juices, the beef itself was thinly sliced and cooked just right: tender and not overdone. And then the hot relish, you gotta have the hot relish on the sandwich.

The SUSPECTS nod and grumble approval.

RANDALL

That ice cream sundae kinda tore me up all on the inside, though. And I think that's okay, because everyone needs a good colon cleansing now and then. Maybe about once a month.

The SUSPECTS nod and grumble approval.

RANDALL

Or maybe more often, maybe once a week.

The SUSPECTS pause, furl their brows, and the grumble approval.

RANDALL

And my favorite part, I think you know what it was, was winning all that mazuma at the racetrack. You just never know when your ponies are gonna come in, and with that provocative trifecta wagering system made so famous by my mentor, Jimmy "The Schmitt" Shiner, you can turn a little into a lot in no time flat!

The SUSPECTS nod and grumble approval.

RANDALL

Aw, heck! Cans of beer for everyone! It's gonna be the last beer for one of us, so let's do it up right!

RANDALL pulls out a c-note and waives it in the air. The SUSPECTS look around. Eventually BEV grabs the c-note.

BEV

I'll go get some beers from the lounge car.

RANDALL

Don't forget my change, now.

BEV rolls her eyes.

BEV

No finder's fee?

RANDALL

You get a free beer!

BEV

I'm getting two for me.

The SUSPECTS nod and grumble approval.

BEV

You all want two? Two cans of
beer?

The SUSPECTS nod and grumble approval.

BEV

I'll go buy a case. That oughtta
do it.

BEV wanders off to find beer.

CONTESSA whispers something to TAPAU, who nods in response, and they stand up together and take the spot. CONTESSA holds out, palm up, a silver service bell which she lightly slaps and it rings,

CONTESSA

I thought we'd do something a
little different. Mix it up, you
know?

TAPAU

Right. We are gonna play the
sentence game where we each
alternate words, and then whoever
wants to end the sentence, that
person hits the bell.

TAPAU hits the bell.

CONTESSA

And then the other person starts a
new sentence.

EMIL's eyes brighten.

EMIL

Yes! A fantastic idea. I like
the originality.

MERSHY rolls his eyes and takes a bit of jerky.

CONTESSA and TAPAU now speak alternating words, with TAPAU in boldface. They occasionally have trouble anticipating what each other is trying to say, and they giggle a bit at times.

CONTESSA/TAPAU

We. **Are.** Very. **Glad.** To. **Have.**
Gone. **With.** You. **All.** On. **This.**
Wonderful. **Trip.** To. **Chicago.**
[Ding]

BEV shows up with a case of beer and hands everyone two cans and sits down with the rest of the case. RANDALL bugs BEV for change, which she grudgingly hands over.

CONTESSA/TAPAU

Thank. **You.** Bev. **For.** Getting. **Us.**
Each. **Two.** Beers. [Ding]

BEV nods and tips a beer to them.

CONTESSA/TAPAU

We. **Especially.** Want. **To.** Thank.
You. All. **For.** Going. **To.** The.
Funeral. With. **Us.** Because. **We.**
Know. **That.** Funerals. **Are.** Not.
Fun. And. **Jocko.** Mahaka. **Would.**
Have. **Appreciated.** It. [Ding]

LIVERMORE cracks open a beer somewhat loudly.

CONTESSA/TAPAU

Our. **Favorite.** Part. **Of.** The.
Trip. Was. **The.** Ferris. **Wheel.** At.
Navy. Pier. **Because.** It. **Was.** Our.
First. Time. **Ever.** On. **A.** Ferris.
Wheel. [Ding]

It. **Was.** A. **Lot.** Of. **Fun.** And. **We.**
Want. **To.** Go. **On.** The. **Ferris.**
Wheel. **Again.** But. **Maybe.** Next.
Time. We. **Will.** Not. **Eat.** So.
Many. Hot. **Dogs.** And. **Ice.** Cream.
And. Deep. **Dish.** Pizza. **And.** Beef.
Jerky. And. **Ham.** Burgers. **And.**
Italian. **Beef.** Sandwiches. **And.**
Beer. [Ding]

EMIL claps his hands. CONTESSA and TAPAU take a drink of beer.

EMIL

Wonderful! Is that all?

CONTESSA and TAPAU look at each other. CONTESSA raises her finger.

CONTESSA/TAPAU

Oh! **And. We. Will. Also. Visit.**
 The. **Murderer. In. Prison. As.**
Long. As. It's. Not. Too. Far. Of.
A. Drive. And. We. Would. Write.
 But. **Are. Terrible. At.**
 Remembering. **That. Kind. Of.**
 Thing. [Ding]

And. **We. Also. Liked. The.**
Leather. Bar. [Ding]

CONTESSA and TAPAU walk back to their seats. EMIL gulps about half a can of beer.

EMIL

That was a treat! And if my calculations are correct, there are only three people left to speak: Dr. Sandstrom, Mr. Furmin, and none other than Lord Fond du Lait himself.

MERSHY

Cripes. And then can I arrest someone?

EMIL

For sure! Forsooth!

MITCH FURMIN stands up and takes the spot, bringing both of his beers, one in each hand. He drinks from each can while he talks.

MITCH

I'm not really good at public speaking.

EMIL

Fear not! We are not in the public! We are inside, on a train!

MITCH

Right. Well, so I figured I'd go now because I didn't want to seem suspicious by going last. And I didn't want to seem suspicious by going first.

MERSHY

This whole thing seems suspicious.

MITCH

But honest, I didn't want to be under the heat lamp here. I mean, I didn't even want to go on this trip!

The SUSPECTS grumble disapproval.

MITCH

I mean, I sure was glad that I went on the trip, because I got to meet you all. I had a fun time, especially if you take out the whole murder part.

The SUSPECTS grumble approval.

MITCH (hesitant)

And I gotta be honest. I know how you all have said you'd visit the murderer in prison and everything. But that's just not my thing.

The SUSPECTS grumble loud disapproval.

MITCH

I mean, I guess I could be convinced to write or be a pen pal.

The SUSPECTS grumble light disapproval.

MITCH

Okay, maybe I'll visit. But if I visit then I don't have to do that pen pal thing.

The SUSPECTS grumble light approval.

MITCH

Okay. I'll be a pen pal.

The SUSPECTS grumble heavy approval.

MITCH

So. Now that that's over, can I be done?

EMIL

But you haven't even talked about the trip yet?

MITCH

Oh! Sure. Lemme do it real quick-like.

MITCH takes a big drink of beer.

MITCH

First, I was real surprised by how much fun I had at the leather bar.

The SUSPECTS grumble approval.

MITCH

I mean, I'm sure we all had a buncha preconceived notions about such places—except for Mr. Fond du Lait.

LORD FOND DU LAIT is disinterestedly picking at something on his feet.

MITCH

But I gotta admit I was pleasantly surprised. It wasn't nearly as freaky-crazy as I was led to believe, and they had a lot of good beers on tap.

The SUSPECTS grumble approval.

MITCH

And man was that beef jerky ever good. It was a bit salty, which is why I didn't want to add any Parmesan. But it all washed down pretty good with some beer.

MITCH looks around the SUSPECTS for approval. There is silence, but then the SUSPECTS grumble approval after a short pause.

MITCH

The best part for me was being in the audience for that TV show. It's totally different when you're in the crowd instead of just watching it at home in your underwear.

The SUSPECTS grumble approval.

MITCH

I mean, I thought it was all faked. Fake people with fake problems and a bunch of fake people in the audience. But now I know that all those people really have a passion for what they do and if it still is all somehow fake, they're doing a top-notch, aces job of it all.

The SUSPECTS grumble loud approval.

MITCH takes a big gulp of beer and then sits down.

EMIL

Wonderful! That leaves just Lord Fond du Lait and Dr. Sandstrom.

LORD FOND DU LAIT waves a hand.

LORD FOND DU LAIT

Do I have to stand up? I'd rather just sit here and drink some beer while I talk.

EMIL

I don't see what's wrong with it. Any objections?

The SUSPECTS grumble no, shaking their heads.

LORD FOND DU LAIT

Well, then, let's have at it.

BEV pours some whiskey onto MORTIMER's body.

LORD FOND DU LAIT

Ahem. I know that it has become recently *fashionable* to poke fun at me, because I have, or at least am alleged to have, certain unusual . . . *proclivities*.

The SUSPECTS grumble with uncertainty.

LORD FOND DU LAIT

But whatever it is that you think of me, let me assure you that none of my . . . *proclivities* . . . are in any way against the law, at least in America. There are a few . . . *proclivities* . . . which, especially in the Arabian states, would bring the penalty of death, or something else equally unsatisfying.

The SUSPECTS grumble with confusion.

LORD FOND DU LAIT

Something like getting your hands cut off, or public beheading at a soccer match. You know.

The SUSPECTS grumble with approval.

LORD FOND DU LAIT

And I suppose, out of all of us, if we'd made a yearbook out of this trip, I most assuredly would've been voted "Most Likely to Have Done the Killing" or whatever it is you think I've done.

EMIL

Lord Fond du Lait! Hush your nonsense. No one has been accused specifically. You are all merely generally accused of the murder at this point. You are all equally suspect, each with a hidden motive and each with opportunity to commit the crime.

LORD FOND DU LAIT

But of course, Mr. Conard. This is, and always has been, your little show. We are all simply characters to you, objects to be manipulated for your greater glory.

EMIL takes a drink of beer. The SUSPECTS grumble their loudest approval yet.

EMIL (blushing)

Ahem. Well, that's just fine. But, ahem. Well, let's just keep the ball rolling, shall we? Talk about the fun times we had!

LORD FOND DU LAIT

Alright. I had fun. But I really am not going to visit whomever of you did it. And don't think about grumbling with disapproval.

The SUSPECTS start to grumble with disapproval, but then abruptly stop.

LORD FOND DU LAIT
 And I'm not going to be any pen
 pal. And I don't know how to
 email, so don't get any bright
 ideas about that, either.

The SUSPECTS act like they want to grumble with disapproval, but refrain.

LORD FOND DU LAIT
 So the best part of the trip for
 me was, not surprisingly, the
 leather bar. It was a real treat
 to catch up with old friends and I
 managed to get some new leads on
 where to find some cheap jewel-
 encrusted canary Christmas
 ornaments.

The SUSPECTS grumble general approval. LORD FOND DU LAIT takes a slow sip of beer.

LORD FOND DU LAIT (sighing, introspective)
 I also enjoyed the Ferris wheel, I
 suppose. But then again, I've
 always enjoyed Ferris wheels.
 Ever since I was a little boy I've
 been fascinated with them. Riding
 up to the top, being on top of the
 world, if for only a brief moment
 in time. And maybe up there, on
 top of the world, you're where no
 one else can see you, truly alone
 where no one can get to you.

LORD FOND DU LAIT drifts off. The SUSPECTS look at each other and drink beer.

EMIL
 Well! That was just fine.

LORD FOND DU LAIT
 I've changed my mind. I will
 visit the murderer in prison.

The SUSPECTS erupt with joy and toast their beers together. Beer sprays everywhere.

EMIL

And last and possibly least, Dr.
Livermore Sandstrom.

LIVERMORE waddles up to take his place where all the SUSPECTS can see him. He seems a bit tipsy, but collected enough.

LIVERMORE

I'll visit you in the prison and I
didn't do it.

LIVERMORE turns to sit down, the SUSPECTS grumble disapproval, and then LIVERMORE keels over, next to MORTIMER's body. RANDALL dumps some whiskey on LIVERMORE's face, but he is unresponsive.

BEV

Oh, great.

TWANIA (half-concerned)

Is he dead?

EMIL jumps up and checks for vital signs. There is no pulse and no sign of breathing.

EMIL

Strange, but not so strange. Dr.
Livermore Sandstrom is dead. Such
a sudden death, given his figure,
is likely attributable to heart
disease.

MERSHY looks at his watch and then writes down the time in a notepad.

MERSHY

Mr. Conard, please tell me he was
the murderer and then we can just
all go about our business.

EMIL turns around, sits back in his seat, drinks a beer, and then takes a deep breath. The SUSPECTS look unhappy but anxious.

EMIL

Alright, Mershy. The fun is over.
It's time to settle up, pay the
piper, and drive the cattle home!

EMIL stands up and takes the spot in the middle of the SUSPECTS.

EMIL

Everyone here had adequate motive
and opportunity to kill Mortimer.
But Livermore quite possibly had
the most motive.

The SUSPECTS breathe a sigh of relief.

BEV

I knew it.

EMIL

Livermore generally lived in the
shadow of Mr. Mortimer Cranston,
the Third. What many of you do
not know, or possibly all of you
do not know, is that both
Livermore and Mortimer were
celebrity rhinologists.

The SUSPECTS grumble slight surprise.

EMIL

You see, Livermore had endured the
last straw. Mortimer was about to
unleash upon the reach and famous
of the world a brand new line of
designer noses . . . in gold!

The SUSPECTS gasp.

EMIL

But Livermore saw his chance on this very train ride. If he could kill Mortimer and fake his own death, then he could introduce the line of golden noses himself. And might I add, Livermore intended to steal all of the golden noses from Mortimer as well, because Mortimer just happens to keep all of the model golden noses in his pockets for good luck!

MERSHY

You mean Mortimer has a buncha golden noses in his pockets?

EMIL

Precisely!

MITCH

And Livermore faked his own death? Just now?

EMIL

Precisely!

EMIL kicks LIVERMORE, who snorts, looks up, and then sits up.

LIVERMORE

Oh. I guess I should've taken a double-dose of that stuff.

EMIL walks over to MORTIMER's body, fishes around in his pockets, and produces seven golden noses, some with diamonds at their tips, or rubies for nostrils. The SUSPECTS "ooh" and "aah" at the fine jewelry. EMIL puts the noses in his pockets.

MERSHY

I guess that's that.

MERSHY approaches LIVERMORE with handcuffs. EMIL puts up his hand.

EMIL

Not so fast!

MERSHY

What? This guy killed Mortimer
and you just proved it.

EMIL

Ah, but there's more to be said
about this vile crime. Isn't that
right, Darla Durler?

DARLA gasps.

EMIL

Yes. Did no one ever wonder what
happened to Ms. Durler's children?
Or shall I say, *rented* children?

DARLA

It's not true!

EMIL

Oh, but where are your children
now? They are, in fact, back at
the rental center because Ms.
Durler couldn't *afford* to rent the
children for the whole trip. And
she can't afford a full weekend
rental of children because she's
addicted to fine Swiss chocolates
and aged imported cheeses!

DARLA shakes her head in shame.

DARLA (lisp gone)

I always wanted to have kids!
Really!

EMIL

And where oh where did your lispy-
lisp go, Ms. Durler? Has anyone
noticed that her lisp is so
conveniently missing now that her
paper-thin ruse has been ripped
into little tiny pieces and thrown
up in the air so that they could
be scattered around the room and
all over the floor?

MITCH

But how did she know Mortimer had any loot on him to steal?

EMIL

That's just it! She didn't. Ms. Durler is nothing but a train-wise pickpocket! She travels on the California Zephyr quite frequently, often with rented children, whom she teaches to purloin valuables from anyone who looks like they have valuables!

CONTESSA

You dirty rat! Did you steal my Elton John scented stone collection?

DARLA frowns and produces some dark brown rocks from her back pocket and hands them to CONTESSA. CONTESSA examines them closely.

CONTESSA

Oh, these aren't them.

CONTESSA sniffs the stones.

CONTESSA

And they don't even smell right, anyway.

CONTESSA throws the stones on the floor. MERSHY moves over to DARLA to arrest her.

EMIL

But not so fast!

The SUSPECTS groan.

EMIL

Mister Mitch Furmin, who claimed to be so abhorrent to public speaking.

MITCH looks down at the ground.

EMIL

Mister Mitch Furmin, who took second place in high school at his state tournament for extemporaneous public speaking!

MITCH (begrudgingly)

It's true.

EMIL

And do you think he could fool us by claiming to never have been in a leather bar, when he in fact *owns* a leather bar in Council Bluffs?!

The SUSPECTS grumble approval.

EMIL

Mr. Furmin was actually visiting Chicago with the express goal of scoping out his competition! And when he overheard Mortimer talking to Livermore about his line of golden noses, he couldn't help himself, isn't that right?

MITCH

Those noses would've been a real hit at my leather bar.

MERSHY moves to arrest MITCH.

EMIL

But hold your horses!

The SUSPECTS loudly groan, and a couple even make retching noises.

EMIL

Ms. Twania Shawayne, the budding songstress. Winner of second place. But she couldn't even remember the words to her favorite song? And she was surprised to have met so many old friends at the leather bar?

When in fact she works for Mr. Furmin as assistant manager at his leather bar!

The SUSPECTS gasp.

EMIL

What started out as a clandestine mission to scope out the competition turned quickly into an insidious plot: seven golden noses for one murder.

TWANIA

Yeah, yeah. But you can't pin this whole thing on me.

EMIL

I don't have to. Isn't that right, Ms. Beverly Moore?

The SUSPECTS gasp, and a few more make retching sounds. EMIL looks a bit concerned about the retching sounds. BEV frowns.

EMIL

Didn't you notice that Ms. Moore never bothered to actually sell any of her apple butter? And she never actually ate the salty beef jerky pizza because of her hypertension, which she developed from eating too much of her own over-salted apple butter, which is so extremely high in sodium at 1,500 milligrams per serving that it's practically a health hazard by itself!

BEV

People like the salt!

EMIL

And perhaps you'll enjoy the most sordid detail of all, that she was Mortimer's secret consort!

Most of the SUSPECTS gasp and retch. Several spit up a little beer onto themselves or the floor.

EMIL

And Mister Randall Fackler, who is actually a prolific bookie who always has tips at the track! He's famous for never buying anyone drinks! Yet he bought us all two cans of beer!

RANDALL

That don't mean nothin'.

EMIL

By itself, no. But coupled with the fact that Mortimer owed you nearly one hundred thousand dollars makes it easy to see why you would want to get to his golden noses.

And Contessa Basie and Tapau Shakura Shabazz Shabat! Who were actually going to Chicago not for a funeral, but to visit a potential buyer for the golden noses! They visited Monsignor Elderberry under the guise of attending Jocko Mahaka's funeral, but in fact they only wanted to talk to him in his capacity as an infamous underground mover of valuables on the international black market! Isn't that right?

CONTESSA and TAPAU frown.

EMIL

And the only reason you wanted to play the sentence game is because the both of you hadn't quite had enough time to get your stories straight!

MERSHY moves towards CONTESSA and TAPAU. But EMIL holds up his hand again.

EMIL

Which leaves Lord Fond du Lait, who is actually an expert on Arabian law, and quite adept with all of the latest technology! In fact, he started an alternative-dating website during the tech boom for . . . *proclivitists*.

The SUSPECTS groan and retch up more beer. MERSHY starts to retch, too.

MERSHY

I don't get it. I gotta arrest all of these people? And visit them all in prison and be all their pen pals?

EMIL

Of course not!

MERSHY

Why not?

EMIL

Because Mortimer Cranston the Third is not dead! You can wake up, now, Mortimer.

The SUSPECTS and MERSHY all cough up beer. MORTIMER sits up, soaked in whiskey and beer foam.

MORTIMER

You've figured it all out again, Mr. Conard.

EMIL

Indeed. You see, Mortimer wanted us all to think all of you murdered him so that he could drum up a bunch of false publicity for his new golden nose line! What celebrity or famous person wouldn't want to have a golden schnozz after all of *this* hit the fan?

MERSHY

So I don't get to arrest anyone?

EMIL

No. No one has been murdered. Yet.

The SUSPECTS, MORTIMER, and MERSHY violently retch and throw up large amounts of beer.

EMIL

You see, all of you are retching beer because you are all afflicted with acute botulism poisoning.

BEV

What?

EMIL

The beef jerky you've eaten is a special brew which will cause you all to die in just a few minutes.

The SUSPECTS grumble disapproval.

DURLER

But why?

MERSHY

Simple. Plain greed.

EMIL

No! Not plain greed! Well, some greed, but plain boredom! Do you have any idea how tiresome and tedious and monotonous it is to solve murders on trains? I thought to myself: what if I could perpetrate the biggest murder in train-ride history, and get some golden noses to boot? After all, specialty beef jerky is getting expensive these days.

MERSHY

You'll never get away with this!

MERSHY reaches for his cell phone, but buckles over in pain and throws up beer.

EMIL

Do you really think anyone would believe you? That I, Emil Conard, internationally famous Flemish detective would murder an entire train full of people?

RANDALL

You what?

EMIL

Oh, didn't I mention that I've been giving everyone on the train beef jerky? Sure some of them are in Chicago now. Some got off in Iowa. But they'll all be dead soon.

MERSHY

But you'll be the first suspect! Everyone will have beef jerky in common!

EMIL

Will they? You've all digested the jerky and it's long gone from your bodies. It will all get attributed to food poisoning. The simplest answer is the best answer.

In fact, I believe after today I will have murdered exactly one person for every murder I've solved. It's sort of a yin/yang thing, don't you think?

BEV

This is horrible. This was the worst vacation ever.

CONTESSA

This is the worst America's ever been!

EMIL

Anyway, I've got to go now.

EMIL pulls a golden nose from his pocket and admires it.

EMIL

Ah, perfection. Good job, Mortimer. Too bad you won't see how popular these noses will become.

The SUSPECTS, MORTIMER, and MERSHY retch violently. EMIL steps off the train onto the platform. MERSHY crawls out and shoots EMIL in the middle of the back. EMIL collapses forward, and the golden noses spill out in front of him.

MERSHY

That's for murdering all these nice people, you asshole. You *Flemish* asshole.

FADE TO BLACK