

Reality

A story based on a card deal from a story-telling deck. Details can be found on the www.techmonkeybusiness.com/python-and-scribus-scripts-to-deal-story-cards.html webpage.



“Heads it is.” said the Hillbilly triumphantly. He lifted his leathery hand to reveal the coin.

“I swear that coin is rigged,” muttered the Jester. “Maybe I should learn that trick.” With a sour look he extracted himself from his seat and stomped towards the bar, his bells jingling merrily with each step in stark contrast to his mood.

“I’ll have the same as last time,” the Hillbilly called after him.

The Jester returned shortly with a tankard of thick black ale for the Hillbilly and a Rosé for himself. The Hillbilly took a deep draw from his tankard and burped appreciatively. “You brew a good imaginary beer.”

“Yeah, yeah,” grumbled the Jester nursing his wine.

“So if I’m imaginary, why did you buy me a drink?” asked the Hillbilly with a self-satisfied expression.

“It is my job to make people happy,” the Jester’s bright smile was like sunlight through ice. “Besides if I’m going to have imaginary friends, why would I want ones that get grumpy and nag me if I don’t buy them a drink too. Mind you I think I would have been better to imagine someone who was bit easier on the eye and not a complete slob.”

“How 'bout this for a theory then?” the Hillbilly watched a branch of ivy growing up one of the ancient wooden support pillars near the grease stained window. “I’m imagining you, and your little glass of whatever it is.” With an unsteady sweep of his hand he took in the other patrons, few that there were on a weekday mid-afternoon. “You’re the most outlandish one here. Is there anyone else here wearing red and yellow motley, with bells attached?”

“By your own reasoning then how did you manage to get a drink?” snorted the Jester.

“Well, I imagined this tavern too, so I haven’t actually had a drink,” the Hillbilly was smug.

“Gawd! This is getting needlessly existential,” the Jester rolled his eyes.

“Quite right!” the Hillbilly drained his tankard. “Another round?”

“Put that filthy coin of yours away,” sighed the Jester. “I don’t trust it.”

“Alright. We’ll use one of yours then.”

“I’ve barely started my own drink,” the Jester was indignant.

“Some chips then?”

“You don't give up do you?”

“No. Chips then?”

The Jester sighed, and pulled out a coin. “Okay. Heads or tails we get some chips. Call it.”

“Heads.” said the Hillbilly. He watched the coin as it flickered through the dusty golden sunlight filtering through from the garden.

The Jester deftly slapped the coin down on the back of his hand. He sneaked a peek under his hand and then reluctantly revealed the coin. “Heads it is. What's it to be?”

“Chips. Those spicy wedges are great.” grinned the Hillbilly.

While the Jester was off ordering some spicy wedges, the Hillbilly amused himself observing the other patrons. They were generally drab office workers escaping the office for a meeting. In the dimness of the tavern their features were indistinct, but then, if you've seen one office worker you've seen them all. He hadn't noticed there were quite so many of them. Beyond them, through the greasy squares of glass he could see the luxuriant green of the garden in one direction, and the blocky shapes of the dull gray street in the other. A white flecked red dome added a touch of otherness to the scene of leaves and greenery behind a window overlooking the garden. A toadstool maybe.

“The chips will be here shortly,” said the Jester, plopping down into his seat with a jingle.

“Tah.” said the Hillbilly. “Hey, where do you do your Jestering here?”

“Where do you think?” the Jester was surprised. “The lords and ladies of the realm.”

“What realm?”

“Metaphorically speaking of course,” said the Jester.

“Ah. Corporate strategic documents,” the Hillbilly nodded. “That makes sense.”

The Jester looked confused, then shrugged.

A bowl of spicy wedge chips appeared on their table, quickly enveloping them with the welcoming thick aroma of hot oil, and dangerous spices. The Hillbilly helped himself. “Mmmm, these are good.”

The Jester picked out a chip and loaded it with sour cream. “Agreed. There's nothing quite like a pile of hot spicy wedges.”

“Yes there is. Hot spicy wedges with sour cream and a tankard of ale.” said the Hillbilly.

“I'm still going on my Rosé,” said the Jester. “You can get it yourself.”

“That I will,” said the Hillbilly disappearing into the gloom near the bar.

The Jester frowned, there was something he needed to do. He patted around his pockets and glanced around the room. The ivy and flowering jasmin spreading along the walls and occupying the booths closest to the garden obscured much of the décor on that side of the room.

“Do you have the time on you?” asked the Jester when the Hillbilly returned with a tankard in hand.

"Sure." the Hillbilly took out an antiquated pocket watch and squinted at it. "Quarter past two."

The Jester relaxed. "Phew! I thought it was a bit later than that. I have to be somewhere at half past four," he helped himself to some more chips. "Plenty of time. So you actually paid for your own drink?"

"Nah. Don't be silly," said the Hillbilly. "I wagered that if I could win six consecutive throws of a coin the barman would give me a drink for free."

"Hmmmf." the Jester shook his head.

"I can't help it if I'm lucky." said the Hillbilly from around another spicy wedge.

"That's not luck.." said the Jester. "That's just weird."

The garden was lush. Huge leaves drooped over the paths, wisteria tangled frames and pergolas, and giant puffballs clustered on the mossy banks of the small stream that glittered and flowed under the small stone bridge they were standing on. The Hillbilly fished a chip out of his pocket and happily munched on it. "You know I never knew this garden was here."

"Really? I thought you said you had imagined everything." smirked the Jester.

"And I thought you didn't want to get into existential arguments," said the Hillbilly through another handful of chips.

"My reluctance is on your behalf," said the Jester. "I wouldn't want you getting upset when you find out that you're not real."

"I'm not worried," said the Hillbilly. "I'm real enough. It should be you who is worried. What happens to you when I stop imagining you?"

"Well," the Jester pondered for a little. "I guess I would stop imagining you and we would both disappear. Then where would we be? Such pressure eh?"

"So what's this thing you need to be at?" asked the Hillbilly.

"I have a gig entertaining the King," said the Jester.

"King?"

"Yes. The King."

"I think you have just proved you are the imaginary one," the Hillbilly watched a bright orange fish lazily cruising above the currents in the stream flowing through the shadow of the bridge. "There's no King here."

"Sure. Whatever."

The sky was beginning to redden and the shadows had grown long as they meandered along an overgrown path leading between ancient stone walls made uneven by the press of gnarled apple trees and all but claimed by the ivy and weeds. A smartly dressed couple wandered past them arm in arm. The Jester nodded to them recognising the coat of arms on the man's doublet.

"How's that time going?" asked the Jester.

The Hillbilly extracted his watch again, "Quarter past t...tarnation!"

"Quarter past tarnation?"

"My watch has stopped," the Hillbilly put the watch to his ear. "Nah. Nothing."

"Oh Crap!" said the Jester. "This is going to be am major problem."

He tapped the watch smartly on the corroded remains of a large industrial mixer jutting its flowering weed be-decked bulk out into the path. He listened to

his watch again. "Nah. Still nothing."

Just about to tap his watch again, a sudden change made the Hillbilly and look up. The old rusty "Chillby's Sweet's Factory" sign that had been hanging precariously over the path from one remaining screw broke loose and started slowly turning in the air.

"Oh no." the Jester was aghast.

Around them a silvery mist gushed in upon them. Obscured by the swirling and flowing mist, the outlines of the ruined garden and sweet factory floated, shifted, and changed. Light and colour ebbed and then flooded back with a shock and crackle of sound. A reality folded in around them. The world settled. Only one of them was left.



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