

An Old Joke

by daniel coshnear daniel coshnear daniel coshnear daniel coshnear

WHY I LIKE IT: *Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes... Daniel Coshnear's "An Old Joke" is clever, witty, and pleasantly fourth wall breaking.*

Oscar and Louise sit around with Oscar 2 and Louise 2 as Oscar attempts to tell a joke to the group. What ensues could be described as Abbott and Costello meets Monty Python.

The lines are quick, the characters most certain have their quirks, and the scenario in which they live has allowed Coshnear a space rife with room to set up and punchline this joke within a joke.

What I love about this story is its ability to talk to the audience – it is both fiction and drama. While reading, I could imagine setting up this work in a small community theater as a scene that showcases a director's abilities or I could simply enjoy reading over the dialogue and noticing what was happening. The more you read this story, the more commentary about our lifestyles you can parse out, the more satire presents itself, the more joke becomes about the reader than the actual joke itself (a joke, by the way, that did actually make me shake my head and laugh).

What this piece does well is to make you fall for it while, at the same time, transcending a joke into becoming literary. On its surface, you can be tickled by how amusing it is, as you look deeper into how well this piece was crafted you will almost want to shake your head and look at the author and go, "oh, you."

"An Old Joke," but a good joke.

Take a look at Daniel Coshnear's story, you won't regret it.

QUALITY QUOTABLE (for the love of language)...

Louise: Foul mouth meant he used bad language.

Oscar: Bad language was usually about sex.

Louise: I read that some words were okay, but some others were seen as vulgar, even though they meant the same thing.

Oscar: Take tits and cock.

Bewildered expressions

Oscar: Sometimes the words were said in anger, I guess.

Oscar 2: You are a tit!

Oscar: Imagine that.

Louise: Misinformed as a cock!

An Old Joke

Oscar: Here's an old one I found on the library disc.

Oscar 2: Oh please, this is so offensive.

Louise: I want to ... I love jokes.

Oscar: It's not that funny, but I think it is revealing in a way.

Oscar 2: Reveals how tasteless you are.

Louise 2: Would you call that a revelation?

Oscar 2 and Louise 2 press the backs of their hands together.

Oscar: All right. This man, he's very busy. Very, very busy. And he's wealthy.

Louise: That's funny right there, wealthy and busy.

Oscar: And he decides on doubling, but back then they called it cloning.

Oscar 2: See what I'm saying? And doubles used to be called clones!

Louise 2: That's awful!

Oscar: It's just an illustration. It just shows how far we've -

Louise: Are we going to hear the joke or not?

Oscar 2: I'm sure we are.

Oscar: This man has two jobs and a life-partner and a mistress.

Louise 2: What's a mistress?

Louise: I think I've read about this. It was like a secret partnership. It was mostly for sex.

Louise 2: Gross.

Oscar: Yeah gross, but look at the literature. People were obsessed with sex -- it was all they thought about.

Louise: Well, yes, but it served a real function before --

Oscar 2: And I heard people used to hunt animals for food.

Louise 2: Didn't they like eat cows?

Oscar *shrugs, looks exasperated*: Can I tell this joke or not?

Oscar 2: Cow--eating, sex--having people, you can just imagine what kind of humor --

Louise: So ... he's very busy.

Oscar: They used to have this expression -- I can't be in two places at once.

Oscar 2: Sad.

Louise 2: Hard to imagine.

Oscar: So, the man had a clone made. In a laboratory!

All laugh

Louise 2: This really is awful.

Oscar: And the clone was identical to the man in every way.

Oscar 2: Why?

Oscar: I don't know why. That's how they did it then.

Louise: Or how they imagined it, anyway.

Oscar: Good point. An important point. Surely this joke was conceived before doubling was properly understood.

Louise: Long before it was a common practice, I would imagine.

Louise 2: Can you excuse me? I want nutrition.

Oscar 2: It won't take that long.

Oscar: The clone was exactly like the man except that he had a foul mouth.

Louise: That's going to need decoding.

Oscar 2: Infection? Open sores?

Louise 2: I pictured a chicken mouth, like a beak.

Oscar and Louise press the backs of their hands together, chuckle.

Louise: Foul mouth meant he used bad language.

Oscar: Bad language was usually about sex.

Louise: I read that some words were okay, but some others were seen as vulgar, even though they meant the same thing.

Oscar: Take tits and cock.

Bewildered expressions

Oscar: Sometimes the words were said in anger, I guess.

Oscar 2: You are a tit!

Oscar: Imagine that.

Louise: Misinformed as a cock!

Oscar: Something like that.

Louise 2: Duplicitous cocks!

Oscar: That's the general idea.

Louise 2: What's a cock?

Oscar: Anyway, this clone, if you will, stands in for the man in a variety of situations because the man, for a variety of reasons couldn't be there.

Louise: And it's like no one can tell the difference?

Oscar: Exactly. For example, the clone might show up at the man's job while the man is recharging, or what they used to call relaxing.

Louise 2: This is way over my head.

Oscar: Or, say the man is having sex with his mistress and the clone, at the same time, is having sex with the man's life partner.

Oscar 2: For more offspring?

Oscar: It's not always clear. For pleasure?

Louise 2: Gross. I'm going to evacuate.

Oscar: In which manner?

Louise 2: Likely both.

Oscar 2: Enjoy yourself.

Louise: Wait, wait. Can you wait?

Louise 2: For a short time.

Louise: We could go together.

Louise 2: I would like that.

Oscar 2: So, the double, or clone, says bad words.

Oscar: Thank you, yes. And each time he does, he upsets people -- the life-partner, the mistress, the co-workers. And when the man returns to life-partner, etc. he/she/they are angry at him.

Louise: That would seem to defeat the purpose.

Oscar: Purposes being increased efficiency, more time for leisure.

Louise: Lower stress?

Oscar: Back in the days of heart failure, they believed stress was a cause.

Louise 2: I think I can see why a clone might have been desirable.

Louise: But a foul-mouthed clone?

Oscar 2: Tits and cock all day.

Oscar: Increasing stress and, as they believed, the risk of heart failure.

Louise: No, this really is pretty funny.

Oscar: I haven't gotten to the punch yet!

Louise 2: I'm a little afraid where this is leading.

Oscar 2: Rightly so.

Oscar: So, the man decides he's going to have to terminate the clone.

Louise 2: Dispose of him?

Oscar: Correct.

Oscar 2 and Louise 2: This is awful. How could this be funny?

Louise: You have to remind yourselves that doubles didn't exist yet, nor did cloning, except as an idea. It wasn't practiced.

Oscar: So, the man invites his clone to join him on a ski trip.

Oscar 2: And the clone says, Tits yes! Cock yes!

Oscar: Very good ... and the man and his clone are together alone on a ski lift high over a steep cliff.

Louise: The skis could only go down hills then.

Louise 2: That wasn't so long ago.

Oscar 2: I've seen pictures, these bench like things that sailed high above the snow on cables.

Louise 2: Ski down and ride the bench back up.

Oscar: It was fairly common, believe it or not.

Louise: I kind of think it would be fun. Like riding on an animal. Gawd!

Louise 2: Like preparing nutrition in an oven? *Laughs.*

Oscar 2: Like having sex! *All laugh.*

Louise 2 : Like using foul language! *Perplexed looks.*

Oscar: Oh, you reminded me. Foul language was also called obscene. That's important.

Oscar 2: Like all the wars? Or like locking people up in prisons?

Louise: No, that's not how the word was used. Better to think of tits and cock.

Oscar: BTW, they called testicles balls.

Oscar 2: I guess I can picture that.

Louise 2: And people were offended? I really have to evacuate.

Louise: These old jokes have the same effect upon me.

Oscar: So, they sail up high on the lift overlooking a cliff and the man gives his clone a shove.

Louise: And the clone falls?

Oscar: Yes.

Oscar 2 and Louise 2: And the fall terminates the clone?

Oscar : Yes, it does.

Oscar 2: See, what did I tell you?

Louise 2: This is funny? This is awful!

Oscar 2: Homicide as a joke!

Louise: Is that all?

Oscar No, there's more. When the man gets off the ski-lift, he is immediately arrested.

Oscar 2 & Louise 2: I should hope so.

Oscar: The man says, what are you charging me with officers?

Louise 2: I sure hope this is the punch because I feel the shit coming out of me.

Oscar: Yes, here it is.

All: Well?

Oscar: **You, sir, are under arrest for making an obscene clone fall.**

Oscar 2: That only seems to beg the question.

Oscar: Well, you have to understand --

Louise 2: The whole idea is absurd.

Louise 2: I have to admit, it does seem rather inane.

Oscar: Well, back in the day people used to communicate with little devices they held in their hands and apparently --

Oscar 2: I heard that all the old jokes started by saying knock knock.

Louise 2: Which meant what?

Louise: It meant, prepare yourself because here comes a joke.

Oscar: They didn't all start with knock knock.

Louise: They really should have.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *Well, everyone knows that when you explain a joke, you ruin it. But, if you explain it badly enough, something good might come of it ... I didn't think I'd ever publish this piece. I wrote it and put it away and forgot about it for years. Thanks Fleas on the Dog!*

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