

MAKING LIGHT sides

IN ADDITION TO A SIDE, PLEASE COME PREPARED WITH A JOKE TO TELL.
PREFERABLY NOT SUPER SHORT.

EZRA (Rising stand-up comedian. Can get any room to laugh. Under confidence is real terror that there's nothing else there.)

You're a piece of shit. Everyone hates you and you suck. You think you're funny? You're not. You're fat and ugly and the least funny person who ever lived. You're nothing. And you've always been nothing. You've wasted every good thing anyone ever gave you. You are exactly as talentless as you've always feared and everyone around you has known it for longer than you have, they just didn't want to say it, because you're too pathetic to make it worth the awkwardness. You are a waste of resources. You take up space that could be doing something, anything, else. Nobody is coming to see you. Nobody has ever been coming to see you. You are small, used up, unnecessary, and unlovable.

My grandma's ninety-two. I love her. But loving an old person is expensive. Last week my family spent fifteen thousand dollars on a surgery for her. Fifteen grand. I was like, "Shouldn't insurance be covering this?" And my mom says, "They consider breast implants elective." So I said to my grandma, "Grandma,

you're 92, what do you need with breast implants?" And she said, "They're for your grandfather. I want to greet him in the afterlife with the tits he used to know." Who wants to argue against that? But now she's saying she wants a hymen reconstruction. And I'm like, "Grandma, it's not like you were a virgin when he died..." And she says, "No, but I don't want him to know what a filthy whore I've become."

The other day I was walking by one of those animal activism groups. They were protesting against dog breeders. I thought that was a little strange. I mean can you imagine what the dogs think about that? 'The humans are protesting the free handjob store again.' 'So odd. Maybe they're sick of giving handjobs.'

VERONICA (Gifted poet who stops believing in her own talent. By the end she's revealed to be the true author who pulls the strings of the rest of the characters.)

He wanted to be needed. I really think that was at the bottom of it. So he chose humor, because people will always need to laugh, just as they'll always need water and oxygen. But as he got a little bit older, and became an adult, everything did become a

little bit less funny. Everyone around him seemed to laugh less and practice seriousness. I thought we were going to get married. Maybe I was being stupid. I don't know. He thought I didn't really find him funny. He told me that he had fantasies about making the most serious people on Earth laugh: Greta Thunberg, Vladimir Putin, bald eagles. He wanted to make God laugh. But he couldn't make me laugh, not really. I tried to fake it, but he knew. The person who supposedly loved him the most. There were other problems, but what killed us was his realization that I would never be his greatest audience.

The night I first met him, he wasn't a comedian---we were both audience members at an open mic. All night he asked me questions that seemed childish, but questions that most adults are too nervous to ask. How does Advil know which part of the body to target when you take it? Why is the alphabet in that order? Why do we say "bless you" after a sneeze, but nothing after a cough? He was so purely curious about the world. Or confused by it. When we broke up he didn't know what to do with his confusion. So he put it into a new project: comedy. The night we met I fell asleep with his name running through my head. E for Eggshells because he is delicate. Z for Zephyr, I don't know why. R for Radical, maybe, or something more precise, like Radius. A for-

JONAH (Comedian whose persona is sincerity and vulnerability.

Wears his heart on his sleeve as a calculated technique.)

I once knew this archaeologist. The kind of guy who would disappear for weeks at a time. One summer, he took me on a trip with him to Greece, to a massive field outside of Athens. For ten days we found nothing. Shards of pottery, a belt buckle, cow bones. But on the tenth day of digging---the sun was blazing---his shovel hit something hard in the ground. We kept digging, and soon uncovered a massive marble statue of a boxer---posed as if he was in the middle of a fight. It was extremely damaged--missing both its legs and its head. And yet, after unearthing the statue, tears suddenly started flowing from the archaeologist's eyes. My first instinct was not compassion. I thought he'd lost his mind. I asked him why he was crying over something so broken. It had lost its beauty, and was a shell of its former self. He told me that he found beauty in the damage. That it conveyed something that whoever created the statue didn't intend: that everything we make---even things we think are going to last forever---is eventually destroyed by people or time. In our eyes the broken boxer represents both the height and the destruction of a great civilization.

And indeed, as I looked at the boxer, half sunken in the dirt, surrounded by machinery with his arms brandished in the air, I realized he was picking a fight with time itself: an honorable one, but one he knew he would lose.

It seemed the archaeologist had spent so long digging up damaged things, that he no longer wanted to find something whole.

Charlotte (Ezra's roommate, eccentric, easy to underestimate.

But back to the point. I started to get to know this one pigeon. I'd always see him near the river. And I got this idea in my head: this was no ordinary pigeon. This was a Nazi pigeon! And not just any Nazi pigeon, but an ancestor of Adolf Hitler's very own carrier pigeon! He had this fascinating kind of ancestral memory, because he had these weird habits that only a Nazi pigeon could have. One night, he shattered all the glass lamps in the park with his beak. It was like a little birdie Krystallnacht. He never waddled, he only marched. And he'd get his pigeon friends around a little piece of food and I could just imagine him saying "today we reclaim the Eastern half of this sandwich!" Once I got close enough to him when I was feeding him some schnitzel, and I *almost* spied a little

toothbrush mustache above his beak. But it turned out to just be a bit of dirt.

BO (Ezra's roommate. Funny, loyal, first to name uncomfortable truths.)

One day, I show up to this old guy's house in Blue Ash. That week, we had this torrential downpouring, and his house flooded. I go down to the basement, and that's when I find his lifetime collection of matchboxes. The basement is covered in a foot of water---I had to go down in rainboots. I felt like Paddington Bear. But everywhere I looked, there were these little matchboxes, floating around, slowly disintegrating. I mean he had every kind of matchbox. There was one he had gotten from a strip club on the night of his bachelor party, with a lady in lingerie on the front. There was one his parents had given him from a restaurant in Paris they went to on their honeymoon. One from an airline that went bankrupt, one he had gotten off the dead body of a Vietnamese teenager he had stumbled across in the jungle. He kept showing me each matchbox and telling me the story behind them, as they sank to the bottom of the sewage.

After each matchbox he named I gave him a monetary value for it, somewhere in the range between 5 cents and a dollar, even though they were pieces of cardboard. He nodded to every estimate because he knew that they were worthless.