

Stars of Standup Comedy

I am sexually attracted to fat women. Has this ever happened to you? I don't mean voluptuous women, curvy women, the women from those paintings, okay. I mean women who are fat in a way that endangers their health. You know these women? Am I right?

And you're thinking— I know— what a great fetish to have! Right? Because where's the competition for fat women? It's like being the only guy with a license to fish in a fish-farm! You're a goddamn king!

Well there are two problems. And the first is the woman. Because what three hundred pound woman is just going to open herself up to you, just because you ask her? No matter how skillfully? These women have serious issues with their bodies. There's going to be problems of trust for a woman who's spent a lifetime being fat and shamed by everyone who's not fat. Am I right? And one guy is going to undo all that? Just because he's totally sincere and he's got a legitimate and inborn and burning need?

And you know what the other problem is? Well let me ask you this: how many people out there have ever tried bringing your three hundred pound date to a dinner party? I mean, I'm a normal guy, in other ways, I've got normal friends. You try explaining this to normal people. I'm serious! Goddamn you try it! Everyone thinks you're being generous, or you're being mean, or there's some secret reason why you've brought this whale to their party. Well there is! There is a reason! There is a reason you've brought her!

I'll tell you something. Your skin's got to be a foot thick. What choice do you have? Your choices are: you deny a biological impulse you didn't ask for and have no control over, okay, you spend every day trying to hide it from yourself knowing that it's just going to come back twice as urgent. And *angry*. So that's choice number one. Choice number two is— what? You rise above people's prejudices like a winged angel escorting your lover to a land free of judgment and inhibitions where the only currency is pure love?

Or what's the other choice? What is the third choice?

It's not funny. I was born like this.

I'm known for doing visual humor. That's my specialty. Making puns with my face? You may have read about this on the internet.

But I'm always trying to push boundaries. I know this makes people uncomfortable, nobody likes their boundaries pushed. But think about it, you're in my shoes, you realize: the visual humor will only get you so far. You've got to diversify. All the greats— they diversified. You've got to have a *repertoire*. What if I injure my face? They put one-trick ponies to sleep.

So with your permission tonight, I'd like to try out a new form of comedy humor that is going to take the internet by storm. You will have never seen anything like it. I'm predicting that it's going to be huge.

Ready?

I'm telling you, the internet is going to literally catch fire with this and kill like a billion people.

Ready?

Okay. I need you to hold hands with the person next to you. I'm serious! Don't be shy. Do this for me. Okay.

Now, I need you to kiss the person next to you. No!— no!— it doesn't have to be a real kiss, a passionate kiss— just a little kiss, like they do in Europe. Come on. I need you to be part of history tonight. Can you do this?

Okay. Now, I need you to passionately kiss the person next to you.

Come on! Don't fuck this up for me!

I'm a substitute teacher. That's my job. That's my other job. Do any of you out there have jobs? You know what I'm talking about.

I got into substitute teaching because I'm basically a smart and capable guy, but I don't want to commit to having an actual job, an actual career.

Why is this? Am I scared of commitment? Okay, but that's not why. The real reason is— I've thought about this— I'm hindered by ambition.

Then why are you a fucking substitute teacher? Ha HA!

Because my ambition is, I want to be a standup comic!

You are a standup comic, you point out. True. This is true.

You know what the difference is between an underground comic and an actual professional touring comic?

Eleven years of substitute teaching, that's what.

You like that punchline? Yeah?

How old do you think I am? Guess. Guess.

Forty five? Fuck you, sir. I'm thirty six. Forty five? What are you, three hundred pounds? Can you even see your dick? Fuck you, sir. You're a heart attack waiting to happen.

No, I'm thirty six years old. Thank you. Yes.

It's a weird thing. By most conventional measurements, my life is a massive and unmitigated failure, but because I'm striving for something, there's like this asterisk. *My failure is in the service of something*. Somehow, underperforming in life somehow makes your ambitions more credible. This is my hope, anyway. Like, substitute teaching sends this message: my true ambitions are so important to me that this is what I'm willing to do for it. Right? Would *you* degrade yourself like this? I've been a substitute teacher for eleven years.

Hold on a minute, you say. That's bullshit. What about all the examples of people who, while following their ambitions, could also afford to fix their cars when they started breaking down and maybe even rent an apartment with a full bedroom or even generally maintain a lifestyle that would allow them to keep a woman in their life for more than two months?

I'm thirty six! I've been doing stand up since college!

Yes, I went to college, asshole.

Ambition: it's a fucking disease. It's a fucking affliction. Because you know how many people get to have their ambition satisfied? You want to know the statistics on this?

Yes, that man right there. Suck my cock, sir. Thank you. Who's the comedian here?

Blessed is the man who aspires to middle management. Right? Blessed is he who follows his heart's calling into law school.

Eleven years of substitute teaching.

No, but I love children.



I just got married. Thank you. Yes.

People say getting married is the worst thing you can do for your sex life, but you know what? I'll tell you something. Cheating on your new wife, and then getting caught: *that* is the worst thing you can do for your sex life.

Or syphilis!

That guy knows what I'm talking about!

I've only dated one big girl in my life. It lasted two months. She broke up with me. Want to know why?

Yeah, I want to know why too.

I have theories, though. I think I pushed things too fast, too hard. You ever do this? You ever find yourself, suddenly, unexpectedly, in a place you've worked your whole life to be, and you've got this one shot, and you can't seem too eager or you'll blow it, and you can't seem too disinterested or you'll blow it, you have to pretend that your attitude is, hey, this seems pretty nice, potentially, why don't we just see where this goes? Right? And every second you're with her you're thinking, play it cool, don't blow this, play it cool, don't blow this, fucking play it cool. It's like

bluffing in a card game where the winner gets a million dollars and the loser gets shot in the face. You're supposed to focus on making the right play?

Well I guess I'm a shitty card player. Boom.

I think of most of my bits in the shower, when I'm having imaginary arguments with famous people. You know what I'm talking about, right? Celebrities?

I'll tell you, these dickhead celebrities are so fucking stupid. I take them apart. I take them *a-part*. They think they're so high and mighty— what gives them the right? The world would be better off if they just shut the fuck up. Am I right?

You guys ever read books? I love books. I l o o o o ve books. Give me a good book, and a comfy chair, and a glass of scotch, and a whore, and a mound of cocaine as big as my fist, and a basement of antique torture machines, and some prescription medicine to make my dick hard for like four hours—

Can you taste it? Can you taste that cocaine?

Goddamn!

Goodamn I love books!

My girlfriend is normal. Funny, right? She's actually in pretty good shape. She even goes to the gym! Can you believe that? So I try subtle ways to discourage her, to *thwart* her. She'll say, Honey, I'm going to the gym— and then that's the moment I'll pretend I'm horny. You ever do this?

One time she was getting ready to go to the gym, I called her mother from our phone and then hung up. But her mother's got caller ID— I know this— and she just calls back, Did you just call me? And they end up talking for an hour.

This isn't sustainable. I'm around a lot, because I work at night, but I'm not around all the time. But I can't, like, defeat her desire to be healthy. It's me against women's magazines, television, doctors, vanity, nature, all of society.

How did I get involved with someone like that? It's complicated. It's complicated. The problem is now, she's a sweetheart, and she loves me, and I'll tell you what: here's the goddamn killer: I love her too! I do!

Oh god.

I think about comedy. Because this is my job, I do this every day. It'd be weird if I *didn't* think about this. Right? *I wonder how this laser-eye-surgery actually works... or, you know, whatever. BZZZZZZZZT.*

I've been to comedy conventions. I don't mean comedy *festivals*, like film festivals, where comedians come together to showcase their stuff to huge and appreciative audiences, and they're treated like rock stars, a different groupie every night for two nights. That's not what I'm talking about. I mean, like, academic conferences of comedy. That's right. And they're about as funny as you're imagining right now.

Are you imagining them now? Academic conferences of comedy? Go ahead and take a moment to imagine them, richly and completely. Because having that in your head is going to make me seem funnier.

There are books on standup comedy you can buy— mostly how-to books. Be Funny Now: that is an actual title I am not making up. Written by Douchebag McSucks-his-own-dick. That part I'm making up. And you thought a comedy conference was the height of awesomeness? These books— Jesus Christ. How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Never Bomb. Douchebag McSucks-his-own-dick.

But I'm interested in the actual philosophy books, the philosophy of humor, which are discussed at those conferences. What makes people laugh at poop jokes? That— that is what I'm interested in.

Which is actually too bad, because being a philosopher and being a comic, it turns out, have nothing in common. They are actually adversarial, in fact. You will see that this actually makes me a lot less effective, as a comedian. I am sorry about this. But try to think of it like I am using you, audience, to hone my theories and help science. Your disappointment is for the greater good.

I've got some experiments lined up.

My ultimate goal, though, is to write a computer program that writes jokes. Then, I'm going to wire that computer up to a dog's brain, and he's going to tell

those jokes on stage. And then, during his routine, a monkey is going to come up to the computer dog and poop on him. And then a robot clown is going to chase the monkey around the stage, round and round, and then poop on him.

Right?

See?

I mean, I might not be funny now, but *just imagine*.

Anti-depressants? Have you tried these? Are you with me?

You ever think about what the world'd be like if popcorn weren't the only thing that acted like popcorn?

I have a list.

You ever have premonitions? Not the kind where you foretell important events of future history— nobody has those— sorry *Vladimir Nostradamus*. I mean the kind of premonitions you get where you see yourself in the future, what your life is going to be like. A little flash, it lasts for a fraction of a second: *pfffttt*. Like reverse déjà vu. You ever have this?

The first time I had it I was in ninth grade math class. I was sitting there at my desk, and *pfffttt*, I had this vision of myself in thirty years. There I was, in my mid-forties, sitting on a couch, reminiscing about when I was in ninth grade math class. Huh? What kind of a childhood was I having?

It's happened other times. One time, I had a premonition of what my divorce would be like. Yeah— right? Right? This was before I even got married! Before I even *thought* seriously about *asking* this girl to marry me! I was just dating this girl at this point, the relationship was still fresh and lovely— we were in the stage where cooking dinner together actually felt like romance, you know? Where the fights you have are about, like, philosophy? And you're having sex, like, three times a week? I mean, there was absolutely no reason to have this premonition.

That half-second was terrifying. In real life, right, she's smart and funny, but in that fraction of a second I see her turning her intelligence on me, like a weapon—

vindictive, nasty. And I find that, in this premonition, I'm not the kind of guy who gets angry, rages right back at her. Nope. I'm the kind of guy who just sits there feeling hollowed out and bewildered and impotent. You know this? She's stabbing me and stabbing me, laying out everything I've done wrong, all the ways I've come up short— it's like going on trial for committing war crimes, and the prosecutor actively, viciously hates you for what you've done, and you're not getting off, she's not letting you off, and, AND, and *you're guilty*— you know she's right, and you're guilty— which, added to the mix, pretty much casts you down into a despair so black and complete that you can't function.

I saw that in half a second, *pfffttt*, while we're watching an antiques show on TV together.

What the fuck was that?

Half a second!

Fucking Jesus.

Anyway, that's the last time I'm ever going to ignore my premonitions, is the moral of that story.



So on top of all this, something's been going wrong with my brain. Don't get me wrong— I don't have major brain damage. That would be a whole other comedy experience, believe me.

What I got is subtle, and you wouldn't know from listening to me talk, even if we grew up together. I can still be a perfectly effective substitute high school teacher, for example. There are ways to cover it, compensate for it. Life moves on.

What?

It started a year ago. I got these headaches, these dizzy spells— all of sudden, no reason. I thought maybe it was a brain tumor— I was kind of rooting for a brain tumor, because at least then I could turn it into something— I could be the comic who makes brain tumor jokes. You know, like the midget comic, who makes jokes about how she's a midget, and what that's like? The gay Mexican comic? Whatever the fuck?

That shit's never funny, but at least it's something.

Anyway it wasn't a brain tumor. A few months later the headaches were gone, just as randomly as they'd showed up. Leaving me with a brain that, now, doesn't work as well as it used to.

Like what? Like I have to think longer to write bits, and the words don't come easy. They used to come naturally. I have to take advantage of the moments of lucidity, like the twenty minutes of internet time they give you in prison.

I came up with that line in a moment of lucidity.

Maybe this is a natural part of getting older, part of life.

I'm thirty six.

I'm waiting for it to get worse. For the moments of clarity to shrink, for me to not even appreciate what I used to be like.

And my memory— it affects my memory.

I only wanted to be a standup comic, that's it, I never had any ambition other than that. And the bitch of it is, whatever damaged my brain didn't damage my ambition. Can you picture this? I still want to be a comic as bad as I ever have, but I don't have the jokes anymore. I can't make the jokes. I sit in my room trying to force jokes into existence like a blind man willing a lump of clay to talk. I don't know if I was lucid when I wrote that. I do routines from three years ago. I'm not confident I know what's funny anymore.

This is a new routine. I'm trying it out.

I mean, what do you do? What do you do if you're in my place?

So I kind of secretly feed her. I mix mayonnaise in with the mustard and tell her I made honey mustard. I pretend to use Pam but I use Crisco. I add vegetable oil to her soda, a little bit.

We've been together for three years. She's exactly six pounds heavier now than she was when we met. Six pounds. She weighs one thirty four now. She's five seven.

I convinced her that NutraSweet will damage her brain, give her cancer. You can find bullshit about it on the internet. Splenda, Saccharine, all that shit. She drinks regular Coke now.

This is kind of unethical: I am aware of this. I am. But it's not like I'm *poisoning* her. And if she really loves me, which all signs point to, and she wants to keep me in her life, a little sacrifice is not out of the question.

And what kind of a sacrifice is it, really? Wouldn't it be sort of liberating to be free of society's unrealistic, oppressive standards? She can live how she wants, eat what she wants, and I will love her *double*. Aren't I lifting a weight off her?

What I'm hoping is, one day it'll be her decision.

Your man ever fuck you so long you fall asleep?

Girls, you know what I'm talking about!

You ever run into an asshole ex at a party? But he doesn't just how much you hate him, still? So you play him like, hmm, we're both a little drunk and it wouldn't be the first time two people get back together for one night— we both have *needs*— and so you're getting it on in your bedroom, the asshole, and you're going down on him, and instead of swallowing you go to the bathroom and spit it into a cup that you save to use in muffins that you bake for him the next morning?

You know what I'm saying?

That fucker hit me once.



You know what the engine of comedy is? This is the first part of my Grand Unified Theory. I haven't worked everything out. But I have the core— I have the first part. You know what powers comedy?

Rage. Comedy is about rage. Poop jokes are funny because they're about *shit*. Observational comedy— observational comedy is the number one most practiced kind of comedy today, and you know why? Because people endlessly disappoint us, and things endlessly frustrate us— infinitely!— creatively!— and maybe highlighting some of the more egregious examples would be better than smashing things or murdering yourself. This is my theory.

For instance. The subtext of *what's the deal with airline food*, really, is *fuck you, airline food*. Right? *All I'm asking is to eat a passable meal in this oppressively uncomfortable environment that I'm trapped in for the next five hours, and instead I get you. And you suck. So go fuck yourself, airline food.*

You buy that? Yeah?

Now, remember, the theory isn't finished. I need more data before it's ready to stand up to the scientific scrutiny of my peers. I have more tests to conduct.

So. Who's ready for some science!

I'm going to need some volunteers tonight for a scientific test, about my theories. I need you to be my empirical evidence.

So. I need someone to come up on stage and get punched in the face by me.

Come on! It'll be enlightening, and, if my theory is right, hilarious.

No? The world was flat for a thousand years because of assholes like you. Stop opposing science.

Fine. No one for getting punched in the face— fine. Then— who's going to let me shit on him? Doesn't have to be a guy— come on up here. Come on. One person?

No?

No?

Well let me tell you something. The next time you see a comedian tell the same goddamn jokes about the differences between men and women, between white people and black people, about the little things in life that are just *adorably* annoying, I want you to look at yourselves in the mirror and say, *I did that. I made the world a little worse for everyone*. I hope it makes you puke.

I gave you a chance tonight to do something. Go to hell, all of you.

What if I pour my beer down your pants? No one? Anyone

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You want to know why my marriage fell apart? You want to know my wife's theory? My ex-wife's?

She goes, why is it, do you think, that you're talking to a bunch of strangers every night? Where does the impulse come from to avoid talking to the people who matter, and instead talk to a bunch of people you've never met and you'll never see again?

My ex-wife likes riddles.

She goes, and it isn't really a conversation, is it? You're the only one talking. You're on stage, three nights a week— if you're lucky— repeating the same one-sided conversation about the breakdown of our marriage to a different set of total strangers. And you really want to know why our marriage is falling apart?

She said this while we're still married. Before we got divorced.

You don't talk to me, she goes. You won't get therapy. You say it's like public therapy, but what you do is the opposite of therapy— it's vain, it's self-indulgent, it's self-serving. All I want is for you to stop talking to strangers, start talking to me, she goes. Why won't you talk to me, she goes.

So.

My wife divorced me six years ago. You know how many times I've done this routine since then?

Fuck her. Fuck her.

I haven't done any black jokes yet. Does that make you nervous? *There's a black man on the stage doing relationship jokes! What is that about? Who does he think he is?*

All right, motherfuckers. All right, bitches.

You want to know the difference between black people and white people?

Asian people. Now go fuck yourselves. Thank you very much and goodnight.



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You know they invented Viagra by accident? They were trying to make like a cholesterol drug. Giant, lingering boners were a surprise side effect. *May also cause upset stomach, diarrhea, skin rashes and GIANT, LINGERING BONERS.* Could you imagine this? Can you imagine being the guy at Glaxo-Bristo-Phizo-Com assigned to oversee... Viagra testing....

Whatever.

Is anger everything? No. Of course not. You have to remember the underlying thing about comedy, about the architecture of humor— what it's built on. If comedy is a catharsis machine, then anger is only one fuel, it isn't the *only* fuel. Anger isn't the only thing we need catharsis for.

Okay. Take something that's sad, like death, something that makes you feel like you're walking around with your gut constantly punched, your wind knocked out and your brain so numb that you can't hold onto a thought for more than a few seconds, like you want to throw up but you've already thrown up everything and there's nothing left to throw up. Situations where you'd get angry but you can't muster it, there's no one to get angry at. Can you picture this?

This is where comedy comes in.

And I'm pretty sure she's got no idea about my secret desire. If I recognize a single face in the audience, I've got a whole other backup routine I do, about men and women and sports. My computer is pretty clean. I'm pretty careful.

You think I should tell her? You think I should?

You try being me for a day, we'll see what you think then.

So, my conclusion is, unhappiness, it's a genetic necessity. If people were happy, if people were satisfied, there would be no striving, no need for ambition.

Great, right? Everyone's thinking: *great!*

But nobody would do anything. People would just sit around all day with their physical and emotional needs being met. And then, slowly or quickly, the species would die out.

That's it.

That's the end of the joke.