

"Good Working with Hands"

By

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Cast of Characters

- :
- Abe, late 30s/early 40s, a team trucker. Full of love, light and enthusiasm.
- :
- John, late 30s/early 40s, a team trucker. Just trying to survive.

Scene

An unemployment office waiting room.

Time

Today.

Abe and John are sitting in the waiting room of an unemployment office, filling out forms. John writes furiously. Abe takes his time. A few moments pass.

ABE

Wow. You're fast.

JOHN

Yeah, well I wanna get this over with.

Abe tries to match John's writing pace, then stops and sneaks a peek at his form.

ABE

Holy shit! Middle initial "C"? Mine too!

John doesn't respond. He keeps writing, his head down.

How is it possible that we've gone six years without this information being revealed?

JOHN

Boggles the mind.

ABE

My middle name is Christopher. Don't tell me yours is too!

JOHN

Ok, I won't.

ABE

It IS????? How did I not know this???

JOHN

No. It's not.

ABE

Oh. What is it?

Quick beat.

JOHN

Carlisle.

ABE

Fancy! That's gotta be a mother's maiden name situation you got there huh?

JOHN

Yeah.

ABE

Thought so. I like it. It's toity. No. Hoity-toity, that's how you say it, right? Yeah, that's how you say it. Carlisle. Makes you sound like you come from royalty, or at least from people who know a lot about china patterns and landscapers and shit.

JOHN

Well I don't. Obviously. Or I wouldn't be here.

ABE

No, I know you don't I just-

JOHN

Abe? Shh.

John continues to write. Abe does the same. Beat.

ABE

So what exactly did they say?

JOHN

What do you mean? You spoke to them on the phone too.

ABE

Yeah, but as soon as I heard "laid-off," I sorta stopped listening.

JOHN

"Slow economy. Too many truckers, not enough routes." Somebody's balls had to get lopped off, so why not ours.

Quick Beat.

ABE

Well, we'll be back out there before ya know it. You and me and the open road.

John is silent. Abe returns to writing. A moment later he sneaks another peek at John's form.

Hey, what does that mean? I've always wondered what that means...

JOHN

What?

ABE

(reading)

"Good working with hands." Why do people say that?

JOHN

Abe, could ya just-

ABE

No, I'm truly curious. Like how do you know you're better with your hands than other people? I'm not saying you're not, you very well may be, but how do you know? Have you received compliments? Do you have a hand practice in place?

JOHN

Jesus, I just mean that I'm "handy," I can fix the truck when it breaks down, I can-

ABE

Oh ok, me too then, me too. Same boat. Thank you for clarifying. I too am (writing) "Good... working.... with.... hands." Though, actually, I did jam my left pinky in a door when I was twelve and now it doesn't straighten all the way. Not sure I ever told you that story. Should I mention that on the form?

JOHN

(writing)

Do what you like, I don't give a shit.

ABE

(considers)

I won't mention it. My business.

Abe writes a moment then gets an idea.

Hey! Maybe we could get jobs as entrepreneurs! That's the thing to do now, isn't it?

JOHN

You don't "get" a job as an entrepreneur, dumbass. You create one. You have to have an idea first, and then you make it happen.

ABE

Well we could do that! We have lots of ideas! We could talk to my high school buddy Mark about it! He's an entrepreneur! I'll send you a link to his online store when I get home. He sells a two-pound gummy bear.

JOHN

What?

ABE

Yeah, apparently there's a real market for that sorta thing. I'm not a fan though. I held one once - one of his two-pound gummy bears - with the intention of

ABE
eating it, but it felt wildly close to the way one feels when they're holding a piglet.

JOHN
When do you hold piglets?

ABE
Whenever I can. So yeah, I was conflicted. Couldn't bite into it.

JOHN
You do realize you order extra bacon every single time we get breakfast at The Eagle don't you?

ABE
Totally different. Crispy. No face. You're a really good listener John. Have I ever told you that? This feels like the right moment to tell you that. I'm gonna miss our talks. I'm gonna miss you. Six years is a long time to work so closely with another human being.

JOHN
It sure as fuck is.

ABE
I'd do six more.

John looks at Abe. Abe smiles. Beat. John goes back to his form. Abe looks at his own form and squints.

God, this fine print shit is a bitch huh? I think it's high time I got glasses. Don't know if I told you this or not, but the past few weeks I've noticed that when I'm driving at night and you're sleeping, I have to really focus on the road.

JOHN
(writing)
Nothing wrong with focus.

ABE
No, but this was like squinting, I had to squint-focus. A lot.

JOHN
Well thank you for risking my safety on a nightly basis. I'm so sorry this chapter is coming to a close.

ABE
No no, trust me, I squinted really hard for you, you were always very safe. Well, there was that one time I nearly hit that guard rail, but that was only because-

JOHN

Oh my god, if I have to listen to you yammer for one more goddamn second, I'm going to slice my face off! SHUT UP!!!

ABE

Whoa.

JOHN

You are the most self-centered person that has ever walked the planet!

ABE

Geez! What? No I'm not!

JOHN

(rapid fire)

I'm not a "good listener," Abe. I've just learned how to tune. you. out. It's the only way to survive the steady stream of inane dribble that is you. Do you know I leave my body when you speak? Every time. I feel your breath coming near my skin in the form of self-obsessed blather and I fuckin jump ship. This has been a six-year onslaught of never-ending nonsense and I couldn't be more pleased that it's over.

Quick beat.

ABE

What?

Beat.

JOHN

You don't know the first thing about me.

ABE

Huh?

JOHN

(softly)

You know, I watched this documentary the other night while we were on hometime? I fuckin loved it. And you were the only person I could tell about it. But I didn't.

ABE

Well why didn't you?

JOHN

BECAUSE I KNEW YOU WOULDN'T LISTEN!!!

ABE
BULLSHIT, I LISTEN!!! WHAT WAS IT ABOUT?!

JOHN
ELMO!

ABE
ELMO!? THE... TICKLE-ME THING??

JOHN
HE'S NOT A THING, BUT YES- ELMO!

ABE
FINE! WHAT ABOUT HIM?!?

Beat.

JOHN
Well-

ABE
(light-hearted)
God I loved Sesame Street as a kid! I just wanted to go there and play with everybody, ya know? That street was just a rainbow of racial awesome. I don't know about you, but no one's ever known "what I am," nationality-wise I mean. They always ask "What are you?" That's how they say it too, just like that, "What are you?" I'm always like, "Well, I'm a *freckly peach-colored human, what are you?" On Sesame Street, it doesn't seem to matter though - race. It's a place where-

(* alternative lines: "I'm a slighty brown-tinted human," or "I'm a red-haired olive-skinned human..." whatever reflects the appearance of the actor playing Abe and stays in the world of comedy.)

JOHN
Yeah, Sesame Street is a real fucking melting pot.

Beat.
Can anything be about me? Anything?

Beat.

ABE
(confused)
Sorry.

Beat.

JOHN

So. It's all about the guy who created Elmo. Traces back to when he was a kid and made his own puppets- all the kids made fun of him for it, but he didn't care-

ABE

Are you saying you wanna be a puppetmaster?

JOHN

-AND IT SHOWS- how this guy knew from the very beginning, he knew exactly what he was meant to do with his life. Not a doubt in his mind. So he took step by step by step toward it and things kept working out for him. Now he's a millionaire, traveling the world with his arm shoved up the ass of the most beloved puppet of all time. And I. I have been driving in circles for years. Clueless.

ABE

But you love trucking.

JOHN

No, you love trucking.

Quick beat.

ABE

Well, what do you love?

Quick beat.

Puppets?

JOHN

Forget it.

John returns to his form. Abe watches him, confused, then returns to his own form

Long Beat. Abe gets an idea.

ABE

How much is unemployment paying us again?

JOHN

(writing)

405 a week.

ABE

Ow.

JOHN

Yeah.

ABE

(softly)

Well, that's gotta be enough for some felt and fur and googly eyes and shit, yeah?

JOHN

I dunno Abe.

ABE

I'm just thinking... it should probably be enough to at least get you started as a puppetmaster-

JOHN

Leave it alone.

ABE

We always pass that Michael's Crafts Store on Route 9, maybe there's a sale or-

JOHN

Abe??

ABE

K.

They both write. After a moment...

JOHN

(deadly serious)

The proper term is puppeteer. Please don't say "puppetmaster" again-

ABE

Puppeteer. You got it...

JOHN

And if I were a puppeteer, I would never use googly eyes. First of all, the puppet would look drunk. Children would cry.

ABE

Can't have that.

John lifts his hand and makes a puppet-like handshape. He keeps his eyes focused on his hand throughout the next speech and moves it as if it's alive.

JOHN

But more importantly, the whole point of puppeteering, the whole magic behind it, is giving the impression that this inanimate thing is really alive. It's all about focus. The eyes have to focus. We have to

JOHN
believe it is actually listening and responding and communicating.

Beat.
This is Bob.

ABE
Bob?

JOHN
Yes.

ABE
Why have you never introduced us before??

JOHN
Abe, go with it.

ABE
Going.

JOHN
Say something to him.

ABE
What should I say?

JOHN
Fucking say hi. Ask him how he's doing.

ABE
Uh... hi, Bob. How ya doin?

JOHN
(in a fully-realized "Bob" voice)
Bob is good. Thank you for asking. He thinks he might go to the zoo today and see some animals. The zebras are his favorites. Or maybe he'll stay home and relax and read a good book. Bob just looooooves to read books! Or maybe he'll-

Beat.

John looks up to see Abe, silent and staring. He drops the "Bob" voice and hand immediately and stands with his form, embarrassed.
Well, I'm done. I'm gonna go turn this thing in and get outta here.

Abe shoots up to stand.

ABE

Hey, listen, if you do decide to go the...puppetmas-a-teering route - and you should, you seem like you'd be really good- maybe I could help. Like be an assistant, or a partner or something. I have some experience. Built a bear once. At Build a Bear. Not sure I ever told you that. My high school girlfriend loved it. Him, I mean. Said he had a lotta character. Named him Paul.

Beat.

Shit.

JOHN

Thanks Abe, but... whatever I do, I'm gonna do it solo from now on.

Beat.

ABE

Even if a new route comes up for us?

JOHN

(gently)

Yeah. Even if.

Beat. John extends his hand to Abe.

It's been a pleasure working with you sir.

Abe looks at John's hand.

ABE

Has it?

John gestures for him to shake.

I don't wanna -- hurt Bob.

John gestures again for him to shake. He does.

JOHN

(in "Bob's" voice)

Ow.

They laugh.

Beat.

(back to his "regular" voice)

I'll see ya.

John leaves. Abe watches him go. After a moment he slowly sits back in his chair.

ABE

Ow.

End of play.