

Bad Joker

By

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INT. UPSIDE-FROWN COMEDY CLUB - NIGHT

HIRO, 19, in a long red vest over a white long-sleeve shirt; red baseball cap; and tight gray pants, is the audience member of the comedy club.

PENNY, 17, pink hair; green blouse; and and baggy blue jeans; stands on stage, telling jokes.

PENNY

What did the old man say to the girl scout selling cookies?

PENNY pauses

PENNY

I'm diabetic. BWONK!

Crickets chime.

HIRO claps reluctantly.

PENNY (BOWING)

Thank you, thank you. I'll be here all week.

HIRO

Wait, are you the only act tonight?

PENNY hops off the stage and walks to HIRO's table.

PENNY

I'm the only act every night, kid!

HIRO

Oh.

PENNY

Yeah, I guess all the other comedians don't wanna to be overshadowed.

HIRO

Overshadowed?

PENNY

By my awesome performance! Also, it might be that I don't book any other performances. BWONK!

HIRO

You're in charge of that?

(CONTINUED)

PENNY

Management, waiting, comedy...I'm
in charge of it all! The
Upside-Frown's my club.

HIRO

Cool. I used to study comedy back
when I was younger.

PENNY

Is that so? Then what did you think
of my show, oh student of comedy.

HIRO

It was...

PENNY

Be honest!

HIRO

That entire act was really really
morbid.

PENNY

Morbid?

HIRO

Well, yeah.

PENNY

Nailed it!

HIRO

I'm beginning to see why this place
is so empty.

PENNY reaches a hand for a handshake.

PENNY

Penny Pierrot.

HIRO

(Shaking PENNY's hand)
Just call me Hiro.

PENNY

So, Mr. Hiro, what brings you to a
run-down dump like this?

HIRO

Instinct, I guess.

(CONTINUED)

PENNY

Just drawn to quality
entertainment, huh?

HIRO

More of a business trip, really.

PENNY

What kind of business would that
be?

HIRO

I'm a company keeper.

PENNY

Company keeper?

HIRO

When there's someone who feels
lonely, I come to keep that someone
company.

PENNY

Oh, I met one of those before.

HIRO

Really?

PENNY

Yeah. Had to call the cops on him,
though.

HIRO

For what?

PENNY

Stalking. BWONK!

Silence.

HIRO

There's that humor. Speaking of
which, why go with all the gloomy
jokes?

PENNY

First, tell me, Hiro. What do you
like about jokes?

HIRO

Well there's the stimulation from
the release from dopamine in the
brain from learning the answer to
the proposed question or scenario.

(CONTINUED)

PENNY

Lemme guess, you studied science when you were younger too?

HIRO

Extensively.

PENNY

A less geeky response, please.

HIRO

I like getting a good laugh from the punch line.

PENNY

Well, to me, the best part of a joke is the reaction to the punch line. The BWONK on the audience's faces when I tell my jokes gets my dopamines stimulated!

HIRO

Um...that's not how--

PENNY

Shut up with the science.

HIRO

Alright, fine. But let me get this straight. You tell jokes not for the entertainment of the audience, but for your own entertainment?

PENNY

Not quite. It's that for a moment, I have the power to take hold of the audience's emotions and take them for a pretty awesome ride, experiencing emotions they don't always get to feel in their everyday lives.

HIRO

That sounds pretty nice, but the fact still stands; you have no audience.

PENNY

That is true, isn't it.

HIRO

Yeah. Why not take the audience on a different emotional ride.

(CONTINUED)

PENNY

Different, huh? Alright. I'll work on it before I hit the hay.

HIRO

Cool. I'll come see you tomorrow so you can test your new material.

PENNY

Why, thank you. I look forward to hearing from one who studied comic science.

HIRO

Comedy and science.

PENNY

Science comedy.

HIRO

That sounds more like a movie genre.

PENNY

BWONK.

HIRO exits through the front doors. PENNY stays and starts cleaning tables.

INT. UPSIDE-FROWN COMEDY CLUB - NIGHT

HIRO takes a seat at a table, being the only audience member again. PENNY stands on stage ready to start her show.

PENNY

Alright, Mr. Hiro, get ready to get your socks rocked!

HIRO applauds.

PENNY

A guy walks into an empty bar and orders a drink. When he realized that he was the only customer, he asked the bartender, "Dude, why isn't anyone here today?" The bartender answered, "Because the customers don't like you." After handing the guy his drink, the bartender started heading out the door. The guy asked "Why are you leaving?" The bartender answered,

(MORE)

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PENNY (cont'd)
"Because I don't like you either."
BWONK!

Crickets chime.

HIRO stares blankly.

PENNY
So, how'd you like that one?

HIRO
Wha...

PENNY
Oh, it was so good you're
speechless? Don't worry, there's
more!

PENNY clears her throat.

PENNY
One highschool boy turns to his
buddy in class and shows him a box
of chocolates and says "Check out
these imported chocolates I got for
my girlfriend for Valentine's Day.
They were \$50 excluding shipping.
What did you get your girlfriend?"
The other boy says "I don't have
one," and scarfs down the
chocolate. Nothing like comfort
food from a friend! BWONK!

Crickets chime.

PENNY
So, how do you feel about that one?

HIRO
Both of those made me
feel...lonely.

PENNY
Flawless victory!

HIRO
Why were you going with 'lonely'
out of all the emotions capable of
the human psyche?

PENNY

I was inspired by a story I read while surfing the interwebz last night.

HIRO

What kind of story?

PENNY

It's some sort of creepy pasta about monsters that appear to devour people who feel an intense sense of loneliness. It made me have a bit of an existential moment where I start wondering what does it mean to be lonely? After pondering that story, the jokes just swarmed into my head.

HIRO

Penny, this routine is a bad idea. Didn't that story explain that loneliness is a bad thing?

PENNY

What are you worried about? It's just a story some 15-year-old probably threw together after getting a big head from a couple complements about his fan fictions. That story had punctuation and grammatical errors up the wazoo.

HIRO

Not everything you read on the internet is a lie, Penny.

PENNY

Just most things. Out of all for the crappy stories on the internet, what are the chances of this one being true?

HIRO

High.

PENNY

You're high.

HIRO

I'm serious.

(CONTINUED)

PENNY

Jeez, Hiro. What's your problem?

HIRO

Well, jokes that make people lonely kinda go against everything that I am.

PENNY

Oh yeah. You have that whole Company Keeper thing going on, huh?

HIRO

Yeah, and that internet story is the essential reason I am a Company Keeper.

PENNY

Then it sounds like you're in for one bodacious BWONK!

PENNY starts heading toward the exit.

PENNY

Oh yeah. Did you order any food? If not, you should go ahead and leave. I have to go do some commercializing.

HIRO

But, Penny-

PENNY

No time to waste! The show will be in two weeks!

PENNY exits.

EXT. JESTER CITY - DAY

PENNY is putting up fliers for her new show.

A pebble is tossed at PENNY's head from the left. PENNY looks. There is a gigantic bag of googly eyes.

PENNY

Holy bag of comedy gold, Batman!

PENNY sets the fliers down to her right to pick up the bag.

HIRO comes from the right and swipes the fliers and flees.

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HIRO

Bwonk.

HIRO finds a trashcan that is almost completely full and puts the stack of fliers on top of the garbage and leaves.

A couple fliers flutter away in the wind. CUSTODIAN, standing a few yards away from the trashcan frowns at the sight.

HIRO returns. CUSTODIAN perks up a bit.

HIRO takes out a match and lights it. CUSTODIAN ruffles his brow in dispair.

The wind blows out the match. CUSTODIAN grins.

HIRO pulls out another match and lights it. CUSTODIAN's jaw drops.

HIRO reaches his hand over the trashcan, ready to drop the match. CUSTODIAN's head hangs low.

HIRO retracts his hand and strokes his chin with his free hand, looking at the fliers. CUSTODIAN's head rises back up.

HIRO picks up the papers and leaves to look for a recycling bin.

CUSTODIAN actions removes his cap and places it over his heart.

CUSTODIAN

There goes a true American hero. Go on. Recycle, lad!

EXT. JESTER CITY PARK - LATE AFTERNOON

HIRO walks through the park and bumps into a MAN walking the opposite direction.

HIRO

Excuse me, sorry.

MAN

Hey, man you goin' to use all those papers?

HIRO

Actually, I'm looking for a recycling bin to put these in.

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MAN

If you're just gonna throw them out, mind if I take some? There's the coolest thing down over there that I've been itchin' to sketch.

MAN takes some fliers from the top of HIRO's stack and notices the advertisement.

HIRO

Wait, don't-

MAN

Whoah, man! I know this girl. I went to one of her shows a few months ago...I've never been the same since.

HIRO tries to take the papers back, but MAN evades the swipes.

HIRO

You can just ignore that flier.

MAN

But it says she has a completely new routine. Did she decide to stray away from the morbid stuff from before? Man, that's trippy stuff.

HIRO

It really isn't much to see. Her routine actually hasn't changed at all.

MAN

How do you know, man? The show didn't even happen yet. It says the show is in two weeks. Man, my buddies thought she was kinda cute aside from that sick sense of humor. If she changed that, then they'd be psyched to check her out again.

HIRO

Believe me, no one will be psyched for this performance.

MAN

Don't tell me what I can be psyched about, man!

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MAN shoves HIRO out of his way, causing HIRO to drop all of fliers. MAN exits.

HIRO

Shoot!

HIRO starts gathering the scattered papers. A WOMAN notices him and starts helping him pick up the papers.

WOMAN

I saw that guy shove you. Totally rude.

HIRO

You really don't have to worry about it. Just go about your park business and ignore me and my fliers.

WOMAN

I won't just ignore a person that I've already started to help.

WOMAN notices what is on the fliers.

WOMAN

What? This girl totally has a completely new act? I saw her show a few months ago...I was never the same since.

HIRO

She doesn't actually have a new show. That flier's a lie.

WOMAN

Like, don't joke around. Fliers don't lie. Who would waste money on paper and ink printing lies? If it were an internet ad, I'd totally think it's a lie. Wait until I tell my friends about this! They totally love comedians.

HIRO

Please don't tell your friends about this.

WOMAN, ignoring HIRO, whips out her cell phone and quickly sends a text.

HIRO's eyes widen as he hears a stampede approaching.

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A wave of people rushes HIRO, taking many of the fliers with it.

WOMAN leaves, taking the fliers she collected with an accomplished look on her face.

HIRO finally comes to a recycling bin beside a restroom and surveys his surroundings. He places the remaining fliers in the recycling bin. HIRO begins to walk away. A CUSTODIAN walks out of the restroom and starts collecting the recycling.

CUSTODIAN

Oh my, quite the lot of paper today.

HIRO turns back immediately.

HIRO

Sir. Please continue to do your job and pay no mind to what is inside this recycling bin.

CUSTODIAN grasps HIRO's shoulders. HIRO's glance shifts from the CUSTODIAN's eyes to the CUSTODIAN's hands, then back to the eyes.

CUSTODIAN

For you, lad...Anything.

CUSTODIAN ties up the bag of recyclables and HIRO walks away rubbing his shoulders and glances back at the CUSTODIAN.

Rationale

From these first few pages of the screenplay, I worked to set up a strong comedic tone using physical actions to add some quirkiness to the characters.

I tried to develop Penny as a character who is care-free, following the beat of her own drum. I wanted to show that she is quite dedicated to her comedic art by making her able to construct an entire comedy routine overnight and also by having her acknowledge the empty audience of the club. Factually, Penny's comedy is not good, although I did spend time writing the jokes myself so that the discomfort from her jokes may cause a bit of laughter.

Hiro is actually a reoccurring character in my writing and this screenplay is actually a continuation of his quest to rid loneliness in the world and stave off the loneliness monsters, so I did not want to spend much time with a description of him and his background. What I wanted to be prevalent in Hiro's character is his straight-edge morality, thus I made him ultimately decide to try to recycle the fliers. I also wanted it to be understood that Hiro is a

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very educated individual, making him into a person who is sensible in addition to being moral. By exposing Hiro as that kind of character, I hoped to make a clear conflict with the contrast he has with Penny's nonsensical performances and her disregard for the consequences of the upcoming performance.