

TOILET PAPER OF THE APOCALYPSE

by Jerry Rabushka

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TOILET PAPER OF THE APOCALYPSE

A Comedic Duet

by Jerry Rabushka

SYNOPSIS: Are toilet paper jokes still funny? You might say we're on a roll! Willam is doing a story on a deserted small town for his school media when he chances upon a man who's hoarded years' worth of beans and toilet paper. As the interview goes between the silly and the bizarre, Willam has to decide if it's best to tell the story or keep it to himself. What is this man trying to hide?

TIME: 2026.

SETTING: A lonely road in a deserted small town, and inside Royjoe's house.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 males)

WILLAM (m) Willam Cunningham, a Xyborg high school student, reporter. *(45 lines)*

ROYJOE (m) Royjoe Bartholomew, a recluse who's been holed up for five years. He's mid-forties but looks like he's had a hard life. *(44 lines)*

SET

This can all be pantomimed on a bare stage. Royjoe's house is chock full of hoarded supplies. If you've got a curtain, it could be effective to start with the curtain closed, then open it up to show some of Royjoe's interior stash.

COSTUMES

WILLAM – a typical high school student but dressed to be on camera. He can be a little “fashion forward,” since he's trying to create a following. He carries a device such as phone or camera that allows him to take video. ROYJOE – has been wearing the same duds for a while, probably without access to a washing machine. They might fit poorly or have some holes or tears.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

You might make fun of people who are worried about running out of toilet paper – until it happens to you. Because Royjoe is so short-sighted, Willam has trouble deciding if he should be sympathetic or antagonistic, and also if he should make a story around humiliating someone for the fun of it; those are the issues he grapples with outside of his lines. Royjoe may come around to realize that his actions and closed-mindedness have consequences, or he might not; and that's something a director and actor can decide together. But however you play him, it's important to come to the role from his point of view, and not look like you're passing judgement on him as you play him.

WILLAM: *(Comes on stage, looking around the remains of a small town.)* This is Willam Cunningham, your Xyborg High Special Mission Reporter for KXHS, the voice and the power of Xyborg! And, of course, so I can build a social media brand, make a boat load of money and consign Xyborg High and all its inhabitants to the flotsam and jetsam of history the minute I get my diploma. And speaking of the flotsam of history, today we're exploring the jetsam of Cobbletown, a once thriving metropolis of five hundred and forty-two that was ghosted over the pandemic of 2020, the bank rush of '21, and the Super Bowl half time debacle of '24. But what was left behind? Is there some treasure I can find in one of these empty homes? Is it like Pompeii where we can see a once bustling city cut off in the prime of its life? If its life ever had a prime, that is. So far, it's desolate. The school, the diner, Mary's Beauty Salon, Tony's Barber Shop...

ROYJOE enters, from what would be inside his house, beckoning WILLAM.

ROYJOE: Hey... you.

WILLAM pauses, but isn't sure it's him being called.

ROYJOE: Yeah, you. Whippersnapper lookin' fella thing out thar.

WILLAM: *(To his device and followers.)* I think he's talking to me.

ROYJOE: *(Note that ROYJOE hasn't seen anyone out there in a while.)* Yes, you. What you doing out thar?

WILLAM: I'm Willam Cunningham with KXHS. What are you doing in thar?

ROYJOE: I'm Royjoe Bartholomew and I ain't with nobody-XHS. I've been inside for five years. My house and my backyard. Until the pandemic blows over.

WILLAM: The pandemic blew over years ago. *(To listeners.)* We've got ourselves a story here!

ROYJOE: That's what they said. It blew over, then it blew back in. Do you see that hospital up yonder?

WILLAM: I don't even see an "up yonder" in Cobbletown.

ROYJOE: No, cuz there ain't one and never was one. So we all locked up, stocked up, and chocked up.

WILLAM: No one else is here, Royjoe.

ROYJOE: No one? (*Chuckles.*) I outlived ever' last one of them.

WILLAM: You call this living?

ROYJOE: It did seem awful quiet compared to the bustle. Why, Mrs. Longfellow would walk by at least once a week with her piano teacher. Then you'd hear Beethoven's Sonata number 16. In G major. Then it turned into G-flat major when the piano tuner took sick. Come inside. Lemme show ya somethin'.

WILLAM hesitates.

ROYJOE: Come on, Mr. Cunnin'ham. If you're a reporter, I got a story for ya.

They pantomime going inside the old house. WILLAM looks around in awe.

WILLAM: What is all this?

ROYJOE: It's toilet paper, Willam. Ever seen anything like it?

WILLAM: We were raised on the stuff.

ROYJOE: Then why'd you ask, young man? I'm livin' on borrowed hours with no minute to waste on questions y'already know th' answer to.

WILLAM: I mean why so much, Mr. Bartholomew? (*To listeners.*) This should be good.

ROYJOE: Cuz of the pandemic. It's toilet paper of the apocalypse. The end – so to speak. I wanted enough to last through the end of my life, but I don't probably have much more to go. I heard you talking about treasure, so here it is... the booty booty.

WILLAM: You have thousands. And thousands. This is like a toilet paper connoisseur's dream.

ROYJOE: I have all kinds, from squeezably soft to two-ply extra absorbent to prison grade to sixty grit sandpaper.

WILLAM: Who would use that?

ROYJOE: Well, when the going gets rough...

WILLAM: (*Looks around more.*) And beans, I see too.

ROYJOE: Yep. Beans are vegetables, protein, and carbs all in one.

WILLAM: They're legumes.

ROYJOE: (*Aggressive.*) What you say, you whippersnappin' dandy?

WILLAM: Legumes.

ROYJOE: I won't have you use that kind of language around here. I invite you in here and you're cursing up a storm.

WILLAM: It's a noun.

ROYJOE: (*Disdainful.*) A noun. You must be one of them homeschooled kids. Act like you know everything.

WILLAM: Comparatively speaking, you could say a poodle was a know it all.

ROYJOE: Now do you want some or not?

WILLAM: Well, I'm a little hungry.

ROYJOE: Not the beans, Willam, you got the common sense of a rat in a tornado.

WILLAM: It seems like it should be beans first, T-P second.

ROYJOE: And you've got a smart mouth

WILLAM: And you've got a dumb butt. No I'm fine, old man.

ROYJOE: Who you callin' old?

WILLAM: Who else has been here for the last halfa decade? Pandemic's gone but you're sick in the head. Look, I'm trying to get along, Royjoe but you're—

ROYJOE: Impossible? Yes, that's why I'm living in a shack during a pandemic with nothing but toilet paper and canned goods.

WILLAM: You don't even have a bathroom.

ROYJOE: I have a backyard. It's how we do things round here in Cobbletown. Bathroom's a dangerous place. I had a daughter you'd like. She was done in by a toilet plume.

WILLAM: (*Not sure what to make of that.*) No one's ever been killed by a toilet plume.

ROYJOE: One flush and the backlash blew her clean out the roof. It was a geyser. Up she went; never saw her again. She mighta landed in Arizona, mighta landed in South Carolina. Who knows?

WILLAM: Are you for real?

ROYJOE: (*More in his own thoughts.*) Maybe Rio de Janeiro for all I know.

WILLAM: Would you like to share any words with the people out there?

ROYJOE: No, I wouldn't! *(Pause as he changes his mind.)* But if I did, I would want to say that...

WILLAM: You just said you didn't. You just abrogated your first amendment right.

ROYJOE: Yeah, well, my second amendment right will abrogate your first. Never mind, I don't even know how to abrogate.

WILLAM: I guess when you live alone you never have to tell yourself the truth, is that what it is? You're like a politician who gets caught in a motel room slobbering over a T-bone after courting the vegan vote. *(Like a hard-hitting reporter.)* Royjoe Bartholomew, I ask, where are the red lentils?! Our audience wants to hear truth, not threats.

ROYJOE: Then let me talk! If you want me to talk, I'll talk!

WILLAM: Fine, you can have the first amendment if you give up the second.

ROYJOE: *(Thinks, looks at WILLAM quizzically, trying to figure him out.)* I ain't got nothing to say.

WILLAM: Go 'head. It's you and a whole wide world of people hearing of your stupidity for the very first time... and loving it.

ROYJOE: I don't believe it.

WILLAM: Let me show you. *(Shows ROYJOE his device.)*

ROYJOE: *(Looks it over.)* That's not people. That's just pictures of people from before. When people was people. *(Looks closer.)* Wow that's my daughter. I guess she made it.

WILLAM: She's in my class. She did smell funny the first few days, come to think. We asked her where she came from and she wasn't quite sure.

ROYJOE: She looks pretty. Her face broke out and I made her stop eating chocolate and she broke into the cupboard and broke out with the Kit Kats. Told me I was antiquated. Not as antiquated as our plumbing, though.

WILLAM: She broke out from under your iron thumb.

ROYJOE: I gave her a good home. Safe from harm. Now look at her, all educated and stuff.

WILLAM: She always said her daddy was a mess. You been here all this time with Charmin for your best friend?

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