### Logic Is Logic

Isaac Asimov

George was not one of those craven souls who felt that the fact that he was not paying for a meal deprived him of the right to criticize it. He expressed his disappointment to me, therefore, with as much delicacy as he could — or as much as he thought I deserved, which is not quite the same thing, of course.

“This smorgasbord,” he said, “is distinctly inferior. The meat balls are not hot enough, the herring is not salty enough, the shrimp are not crisp enough, the cheese is not sharp enough, the deviled eggs are not peppery enough, the —”

I said, “George, that's the third heaping plate you've de­voured. One more bite and you will have to undergo surgery to release the gastric pressure. Why are you eating so much of this inferior material?”

George said haughtily, “Is it for me to humiliate my host by refusing to eat his food?”

“It's not my food; it's the restaurant's.”

“The owner of this miserable hovel is he to whom I am refer­ring. Tell me, old man, why don't you belong to some good club?”

“I? Pay enormous sums for dubious returns?”

“I mean a *good* club, which I can then grace as your guest in return for a sumptuous meal. But no,” he added querulously, “that is a mad dream. What good club would compromise its position by allowing you to be a member?”

“Any club that would allow you as a guest would certainly allow me —” I began, but George was already lost in reminis­cence.

“I remember,” he said, eyes glistening, “when I dined at least once a month at a club that featured the most lavish and the most intricate buffet that ever graced any groaning board since the days of Lucullus.”

“I presume you freeloaded as someone's guest.”

“I don't know that that is a necessary presumption, but by sheer chance you happen to be correct. It was Alistair Tobago Crump, VI, who was actually the member and, which is more important, my occasional host.”

“George,” I said, “is this going to be another story in which you and Azazel combine to hurl some poor soul down a declivity of misery and despair in your misguided efforts to help him?”

“I don't know what you mean. We granted him his heart's desire out of sheer kindness and the abstract love of humanity — and my somewhat more concrete love of the buffet. But let me tell you the story from the beginning.”

Alistair Tobago Crump, VI, had been a member of the Eden from birth, for his father, Alistair Tobago Crump, V, entered his son's name on the rolls as soon as a personal inspection assured him that the doctor's initial estimate of the infant's sex had been correct. Alistair Tobago Crump, V, had similarly been entered by his father, and so on back to the days when Bill Crump, while sleeping off a drunken stupor, had been pressed into the British Navy just in time to find himself an indignant member of the crew of one of the ships of the fleet that captured New Amster­dam from the Dutch in 1664.

The Eden, as it happens, is the most exclusive club on the North American continent. So haughty is it that its very exis­tence is known only to its members and a very few guests. Even I do not know its location, for I was always taken there blind ­folded, in a hansom cab with opaque windows. I can only tell you that for a period of time during the final approach, the horse's hooves passed over a stretch of cobbled road.

No one could belong to the Eden whose ancestry did not extend into the colonial period on both sides of the family. Nor is it ancestry alone that counts. There must be no smudge on the escutcheon. George Washington was blackballed by unanimous vote since he had undeniably rebelled against his sovereign lord.

This same requirement was maintained for any guests, but that did not exclude me, of course. Unlike you, I am not a first-generation immigrant from Dobrudja, or Herzegovina, or some equally unlikely place. My ancestry is impeccable, since all my forebears have infested the territory of this nation since the sev­enteenth century, and since they, one and all, avoided the sins of rebellion, disloyalty, and un-Americanism during the Revolu­tionary and Civil wars by cheering both sides impartially as their armies marched past.

My friend Alistair was inordinately proud of his own mem­bership. Many a time and oft did he say to me (for he was one of your classic bores and frequently repeated himself), “George, the Eden is the bone and sinew of my being, the core of my existence. If I had all that wealth and power could bring me, and had not Eden, I would be as naught.”

Of course, Alistair *did* have all that wealth and power could bring him, for another requirement for membership at the Eden was great wealth. The annual dues, if nothing else, made that imperative. And again that, in itself, was not enough. The wealth had to be inherited, it could not be earned. Any trace of actually working in return for payment made one clearly ineligible for membership. It was only because my father had thoughtlessly forgotten to leave me several millions of dollars that kept me out of the club, even though I had never undergone the disgrace of working for —

Don't say “I know that,” old man. There's no way you could know that.

Naturally, there was no objection to a member's augmenting his income by interesting methods that did not involve labor for pay. There were always such things as stock manipulation, tax evasion, influence peddling, and other clever devices that come as second nature to the rich.

This was all taken seriously by members of Eden. There had been cases of Edenites who, having lost their money through unaccountable attacks of momentary honesty, preferred to starve slowly to death rather than go to work and lose their membership. Their names are still mentioned in hushed tones and plaques in their honor are to be found in the clubhouse.

No, they couldn't borrow money from fellow members, old man. It's so like you to suggest that. Every member of Eden knows you don't borrow from a rich man when there are un­counted numbers of poor people waiting anxiously in line for the chance to be defrauded. The Bible reminds us that “ye have the poor with you always,” and the members of Eden are nothing if not pious.

And yet Alistair was not entirely happy, for it is an unfortu­nate fact that the membership of the Eden tended to avoid him. I have told you he was a bore. He had no fund of conversation, no cleverness, no opinion of note. In fact, even in the midst of a membership whose total fund of wit and originality was on a fourth-grade grammar-school level, he stood out as remarkably dull.

You can imagine his frustration as he sat there night after night at the Eden alone amidst the crowd. The ocean of conver­sation, such as it was, washed over him but left him dry. Yet he never missed a night at the club. He even had himself carried there during a violent attach of dysentery in order not to break his record as “Iron Man Crump.” This was abstractly admired by the membership, but, for some reason, not widely appreci­ated.

To be sure, he had the occasional privilege of having me as his guest at the Eden. My ancestry was impeccable, my aristocratic record as a confirmed non-earner was the admiration of all, and in return for the finest of food and the most cobwebby of ambi­ence, all at Crump's expense, I went to the trouble of talking to him and laughing at his perfectly terrible jokes. I found myself pitying the poor fellow from the very bottom of my capacious heart.

Somehow there ought to be some way of making him the life of the party, the toast of Eden, the man with whom ever member longed to be. I pictured aged and respectable Edenites engaged in spavined fisticuffs for the honor of sitting next to him at the even­ing meal.

After all, Alistair was the very picture of Respectability, and all that an Edenite should be. He was tall, he was slim, his face had the look of a ruminative horse, he had lank blond hair, pale blue eyes, and the dull look of formal conservative orthodoxy of a man whose ancestors had all thought sufficiently well of them­selves to marry within the clan. All he lacked was any trace of anything in the least interesting to say or do.

But that could surely be fixed. It was a case for Azazel.

For once, Azazel was not annoyed with me for calling him forth from his mystical world. He had been at a banquet of sorts, it seemed, and it had been his turn to pick up the check and I had pulled him away five minutes before that check was clue to arrive. He chuckled in a falsetto ululation for, as you know, he is only two centimeters high.

He said, “I will return fifteen minutes later, and by that time someone else will have committed himself to pay that check.”

I said, “How will you account for your absence?”

He drew himself up to his full micro-height, twitching his tail. “I will tell them the truth: that I was called away to a conference with an extragalactic monster of extraordinary stupidity, who was in dire need of my intelligence. What do you want this time?”

I told him, and to my amazement he burst into tears. At least he sprayed tiny red spicules from his eyes. I *suppose* they were tears. One got into my mouth and tasted terrible — rather like cheap red wine, or like cheap red wine would taste if I ever allowed myself to taste it.

“How sad,” he said. “I know the case of a worthy entity who is constantly snubbed by others who are far his inferiors. I find there is nothing more tragic.”

“Who would that be? The entity snubbed, that is.”

“I?” he said, thumping his tiny chest till it squeaked.

“I can't imagine that,” I said. “You?”

“I can't either,” he said, “but it's true just the same. What does this friend of yours do that shows any promise?”

“Well, he does tell jokes. Or he tries to. They're awful. He drones them out, circles the point aimlessly, then forgets it. I have fre­quent­ly seen a joke of his make a strong man weep.”

Azazel shook his head. “Bad. Very bad. Now I happen to be an excellent joke-spinner. Did I ever tell you about the time a plocks and a jinniram were engaged in mutual andesantoree and one of them said —”

“Yes, you did,” I said, lying strenuously, “but let us get on to the case of Crump.”

Azazel said, “Is there any simple technique that can improve the telling of a joke?”

“A certain glibness, of course,” I said.

“Of course,” said Azazel. “A mere divalination of the vocal cords could take care of that — assuming you barbarians have such things.”

“We do. And then, of course, the ability to handle an accent.”

“An accent?”

“Substandard English. Foreigners who have not learned the language as infants but who pick it up in later life invariably mispronounce the vowels, miss out on word order, break up the grammar, and so on.”

A look of sheer horror crossed Azazel's tiny face. “But that's a capital offense,” he said.

“Not on this world,” I said. “It should be, but it isn't.”

Azazel shook his head sadly. “Has this friend of yours ever heard these atrocities you call accents?”

“Certainly. Anyone living in New York hears accents of ail types at all times. It is correct English such as my own that one hardly ever hears.”

“Ah,” said Azazel, “it is then only a matter of scapulating the memory.”

“*What* the memory?”

“ ‘Scapulate,’ a form of sharpening, from the word ‘scapos’ referring to the teeth of a zum-eating dirigin.

“And that will make it possible for him to tell jokes with an accent?”

“Only with those accents he has happened to hear in the course of his life. My powers, after all, are not unlimited.”

“Then scapulate away.”

A week later I met Alistair Tobago Crump, VI, on Fifth Ave­nue and Fifty-third Street, and searched his face in vain for any signs of recent triumph.

“Alistair,” I said, “have you been telling any jokes lately?”

“George,” he said, “no one will listen. There are times when I think I don't tell jokes any better than the average man.”

“Well, then, I tell you what. You come with me to a small establishment I know. I will give you a humorous introduction and then you stand up and say anything that's in your mind.”

I assure you, old man, it was not easy to persuade him to do this. I had to make use of the full force of my magnetic personal­ity. In the end, though, I won out.

I took him to a rather crummy dive I happened to know. I can describe it best by saying it is rather reminiscent of the places jou take me to dinner.

I also happened to know the manager of the dive, which was its great advantage, and I persuaded him to allow me to experi­ment.

At 11 a.m., when revelry was at its height, I rose to my feet and cowed the audience with my air of dignity. There were only eleven people present, but I felt that was enough with which to experiment.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” I said, “we have in our presence a gentleman of great intellect, a master of our language, whom I'm sure you would all love to meet. He is Alistair Tobago Crump, VI, and he is Emersonian Professor of English at Columbia Col­lege, and author of ‘How To Speak Perfect English.’ Professor Crump, will you arise and say a few words to the assembled intellectuals, please.

Crump arose, looking rather confused, and said, “Leesten, denk you ull var' moch.”

Well, old man, I've heard you tell jokes in what purports to be a Yiddish accent, but you could pass for a Harvard graduate in comparison to Crump. The thing is that Crump *looked* exactly as you would expect an Emersonian Professor of English to look. And to stare at that woebegone inbred face and suddenly hear a phrase in pure Yinglish knocked the breath out of every person there simultaneously. Such an aroma of alcoholic onions filled the air as you would not believe. And that was followed by a roar of laughter that built up into hysterics.

A look of mild surprise crossed Crump's face. He said to me, in a beautiful Swedish singsong which I won't try to reproduce, “I don't usually get quite *this* strong a reaction.”

“Never mind,” I said, “keep on talking.”

It meant waiting for the laughter to stop which took a while, and then he began telling jokes in Irish brogues, in Scottish burrs, in Cockney, Mitteleuropean, Spanish, Greek. His spe­cialty was clearly Brooklynese, however —your own noble, nearly native tongue, old man.

After that I let him spend some hours at Eden every evening and after dinner I would take him to the establishment. Word of mouth spread the tale. That first night, as I said, the audience had been a sparse one, but in no time at all we had people outside clamoring to get in — and in vain.

Crump took it calmly. In fact, he seemed downcast. He said, “Look, there's no point in wasting all this excellent material of mine on ordinary yokels. I want to show my skill to my fellow members of Eden. They wouldn't listen to my jokes because it had never occurred to me to tell them in dialect. In fact, I didn't realize I could, which just shows the unbelievable self-underesti­mation into which a quietly humorous and witty fellow such as myself can fall. Just because I am not raucous and do not push myself forward —”

He was speaking in his best Brooklynese, which grates un­pleasantly on any delicate ear, if you don't mind my saying so, old man, and so I hastened to assure him that I would take care of everything.

I told the manager of the establishment of the wealth of the members of Eden, neglecting to mention that they were as parsi­monious as they were rich. The manager, drooling slightly, sent out complimentary tickets to lure them in. This was on my ad­vice, for I well knew that no true Edenite could resist a free show, especially as I carefully initiated a rumor that stag films would be shown.

The membership showed up in force, and Crump expanded at the sight. “Now I can do it,” he said, “I've got a Korean accent that will kill them.”

He also had a Southern drawl and a Maine twang that had to be heard to be believed.

The men of Eden, for a few minutes, sat in stony silence, and I had the terrible notion that they didn't understand Crump's sub­tle humor. But they were only paralyzed with astonishment, and as the astonishment wore off they began to laugh.

Portly bellies shook, pince-nez fell off, white muttonchops waved in the breeze. Every possible disgusting sound — from the dry falsetto cackles of some to the oleaginous base mumblings of others — that could serve to make life hideous proceeded to do so.

Crump expanded at this proper appreciation and the manager, feeling certain that he was at the entrance gate to countless wealth, rushed up to Crump at the intermission and said, “My boy, my boy, I know you asked only for the opportunity to display your art and that you are, and remain above, the filth that people call money, but I can't allow that any longer. Call me foolish. Call me mad. But here, here, my boy, take this check. You have earned it, every penny of it. Lavish it as you will.” And with the generosity of the typical entrepreneur who expects millions in return, he pushed into Crump's hand a check for twenty-five dollars.

Well, as I see it, that was the beginning. Crump went on into fame and satisfaction, the idol of the nightclub circuit, the ad­mired of all beholders. Money poured in on him and since he was wealthy beyond the dreams of Croesus due to the industri­ous orphan-defrauding of his ancestors, he needed none of it, and passed it all on to his business manager — in short, me. Within a year I was a millionaire, and so there goes your charac­teristically idiotic theory that Azazel and I bring only ill fortune.

I stared at George sardonically. “Since you are several million dollars short of being a millionaire, George, I presume you are now going to tell me it was all a dream.”

“Not at all,” said George haughtily. “The story is perfectly true, as is every word I utter. And the ending I have just out­lined is precisely what would have happened if Alistair Tobago Crump, VI, had not been a fool.”

“A fool, was he?”

“Certainly. I leave it to you. Overcome by pride in the munifi­cent twenty-five-dollar check he had received, he framed it, brought it to the Eden and fatuously displayed it to all. What choice did the members have? He had earned money. He had been paid for his labors. They were forced to expel him. And Crump, deprived of his club, went to the injudicious length of having a fatal heart attack in consequence. Surely none of that was the fault of Azazel or myself.”

“But if he framed the check, he wasn't really taking any money.”

George raised a magisterial right hand as he shoved the bill for the evening meal in my direction with his left. “It is the principle of the thing. I told you the Edenites were strong on religion. When Adam was expelled from Eden, God told him that from then on he would have to work in order to make a living. I think the exact words were ‘In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.’ It follows then that, in reverse, if you work to make a living you have to be expelled from Eden. Logic is logic.