

CONFESSIONS OF A SECOND-RATE COMEDIAN

by

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INT. COMEDY CLUB - NIGHT, FLASHBACK

A cluster of small, round tables surround a black stage that sits in front of an exposed brick wall. The stage is empty except for a microphone that rests on a tall stand. The room is well-occupied but by no means to its full capacity.

Suddenly an ANNOUNCER'S voice can be heard.

ANNOUNCER

Please give a warm welcome for our first act of the night. He's just wrapped up his first regional tour, is billed by the "Weekly Standard" as one of the ten up-and-comers of the year, and has appeared on a television commercial once...the aptly named HARDY WINER!

The crowd claps politely, lacking enthusiasm.

A bespectacled man in his early thirties approaches the stage with his head down, hands in his pockets. He has red hair, a poorly landscaped beard, and is slightly overweight. This is HARDY WINER. He takes the mic and begins his act.

HARDY

Thanks, thanks a lot. I'd like to apologize in advance to everyone for showing up here tonight. Especially my beautiful wife Jillian sitting right back there. Wave hello.

Hardy points back towards his wife. JILLIAN smiles and giggles at her husband. She is a slender blonde in her thirties, as well.

HARDY (CONT'D)

Jillian and I were just married and I know what you're all thinking: "she's much too attractive for this guy, he must be hilarious." And you know, it's true. I mean, not that I'm hilarious, but when we appear in public together, I do tend to receive preferential treatment. And, being seen with such an attractive woman makes me feel very self-conscious. For example, we were eating dinner last week in kind of a fancy place, and we finish our meal. I pay with a

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

HARDY (CONT'D) (cont'd)  
credit card, fill out the tip, the total, and sign the receipt. And just after I sign it, Jillian, of course, announces that she has to use the ladies' room.

The crowd starts to warm, but Hardy remains visibly nervous.

HARDY (CONT'D)  
And I say, "Jillian, can't it wait? We'll be home in five minutes, we'll catch a cab--" And she says, "I've got to go, Hardy. What's the big deal?" So I explain to her that I've already filled out the receipt and if we don't get out of here in the next thirty seconds, the waiter is going to come by and see how much I've tipped him and it's going to create a very uncomfortable situation for me. And let me just say that I am not a bad tipper-- I'm generally in the ten and a half to eleven percent range. And she shrugs me off and tells me I'm crazy. So she leaves, and in swoops the waiter, picks up the little folder thing--I don't know what it's called--and he does:

Hardy acts out the motions of the snobbish waiter. He pretends to be holding a receipt folder, gasps a little bit, looks at the audience (who are supposed to be placed in the situation Hardy has created), snorts, and adjusts his glasses.

HARDY (CONT'D, ALTERNATIVE)  
And under his breath he says: "Must be good in the sack." And I know what he's implying--that with a tip like that I can't be famous or a billionaire, so the only reason why my beautiful Jillian would be with me is if I'm wonderful in "the sack." And in a way, I guess that should boost my confidence, but I'm still very self-conscious being with a beautiful woman.

The audience laughs. Jillian smiles and claps from her seat.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - AFTERNOON, PRESENT

Hardy lies next to DALIA, a woman in her early twenties with dark hair and skin who is very much not Jillian. Hardy and Dalia appear to be a bit winded.

Hardy exhales. He is dejected. Beneath the covers, Dalia curls up next to him.

DALIA

What's wrong, darling? Was it not good for you?

HARDY

Just nervous. Doctors appointments always make me nervous.

DALIA

Darling, you always have doctors appointments.

HARDY

I'm just being cautious.

DALIA

Why? You're a young man. Your body is strong.

(sarcastically)

You have a membership to my gym. Make use of it and come to my pilates class.

HARDY

I consider time spent with you making use of it.

DALIA

You've only been once. Three years ago.

HARDY

Oh God. That was before I was cheating on my wife.

DALIA

You've only been married for two years.

HARDY

I've been sleeping with you since before I met her.

(beat)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

HARDY (cont'd)  
Listen, I'm not going to say it  
again--let's not talk about my  
personal life.

DALIA  
But I am your personal life.

HARDY  
No, you're my secret life.

DALIA  
Is that why I don't get taken out  
to candlelit dinners?  
(beat)  
I don't think you know who you're  
cheating on.

At this statement, Hardy looks down and shakes his head. He  
is disgusted with himself and changes the subject.

HARDY  
Men have a lot to worry about. I'm  
just being cautious.

DALIA  
Really? Breast cancer? Ovarian  
cancer? Cellulite? Believe me,  
Hardy Winer, worse men than you  
have lived much healthier lives.

HARDY  
Ovarian cancer. You should be on  
the lookout out for that one. The  
"silent killer."

DALIA  
"Silent killer?"

HARDY  
Yeah. It grows inside of you so  
quietly that by the time you start  
having symptoms, you're as good as  
dead.

DALIA  
I thought heart disease was the  
"silent killer."

HARDY  
My mother always said it was  
ovarian cancer.

(CONTINUED)

DALIA  
Is she a doctor?

HARDY  
No, she's a hypochondriac.

DALIA  
Mr. Comedian Man. Turn on the  
comedy channel. Let's see if you're  
on.

At this Hardy appears a bit guilty and becomes sly.

HARDY  
No...I don't usually come on until  
much later. My act is very R-rated.

Dalia abandons her idea and snuggles closer to him, kissing  
him on the neck. He isn't interested in being affectionate.

DALIA (CONT'D)  
I think I love you.

Hardy remains unresponsive.

DALIA (CONT'D)  
Do you love me?  
(beat)  
Do you love me?

HARDY  
You just asked that.  
(beat)  
I should brush my teeth and get  
ready. I have to see the doctor in  
less than an hour.

Hardy goes into the bathroom and shuts the door behind him.

INT. COMEDY CLUB - NIGHT, FLASHBACK

Hardy continues his act.

HARDY  
I mean, I don't believe in karma or  
anything. What I should say is that  
I know the whole idea is complete  
nonsense, but I cannot help being  
convinced that it is absolute fact.  
And I know it sounds crazy, but I  
believe that everything I do that  
is remotely amoral will come back  
in the form of a physical ailment.

(CONTINUED)

The crowd laughs.

HARDY (CONT'D)

So a few years ago, after I had given up on working out, my paranoia about this became so consuming that I decided after every bad thing I do, I'm going to go see the doctor. Obviously I don't believe that every time I let the elevator close in someone's face, a tumor will pop up on the side of my head.

(beat)

But maybe a mild skin rash will. So I devised a system. Every time I commit a bad deed, I have a corresponding doctor who I make an appointment with. If I go over the speed limit, I call the podiatrist or the chiropractor...because they didn't have to go to medical school. If I don't help an elderly person cross the street, maybe I'll call the dermatologist.

(beat)

If I look at a woman in a certain manner who doesn't happen to be my wife...I call the urologist.

The crowd erupts at this.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON, PRESENT

Hardy sits across from DR. THEOS, a "distinguished gray" type, who examines X-ray negatives very closely. Silence pervades for several seconds before Dr. Theos abruptly takes off his reading glasses and looks directly at Hardy.

DR. THEOS

I have to be frank with you, Mr. Winer. I don't see how you've gone on this long.

Hardy has a defeated air to him.

HARDY

I see...

(CONTINUED)

DR. THEOS

There are four of them; fully developed. How long did you say you were experiencing these symptoms?

HARDY

About six hours. Seven, maybe.

DR. THEOS

For someone who's at the hospital as often as you--I just don't see how this could have gone undetected. A simple X-ray...

HARDY

I try to avoid X-rays, Doctor. Unless I think I've broken a bone.

Beat. Dr. Theos stares blankly at him.

HARDY (CONT'D)

The rays cause leukemia, Doctor.

DR. THEOS

We need to get these out as soon as possible. Before they start causing problems elsewhere.

HARDY

Yes, whatever you think is best.

CUT TO BLACK:

INT. HARDY'S CAR - DAY

Hardy is in a state of panic, sweating profusely and driving recklessly. He picks up his cell phone and dials Dalia.

DALIA (OS)

Hello?

HARDY

Listen, Dalia it's me. We really shouldn't do this anymore.

DALIA (OS)

What did the doctor say?

Hardy scratches the back of his head and wrinkles his face.

(CONTINUED)

HARDY

It's not good. I have to have an operation.

Dalia gasps in horror.

HARDY (CONT'D)

Listen, we've got to stop this.

DALIA (OS)

But I'm in love with you, Hardy!

HARDY

I have to right my wrongs. This has to end, Dalia.

DALIA (OS)

Meet me. Just to say goodbye. Where are you now?

HARDY

Just off Route 31.

DALIA (OS)

Meet me at the mall. I can be there in twenty minutes.

The phone clicks. Hardy drives past signs that indicate an exit for the mall. After brief hesitation, he switches on his blinker and exits toward the mall.

INT. MALL - DAY, TEN MINUTES LATER

Hardy stands in front of a pair of 25-cent machines. One holds gum balls, the other holds cheap prizes.

He inserts a quarter into the machine with the prizes. Out pops a plastic orb containing a temporary tattoo. He throws that in the garbage and inserts another quarter into the machine. This time it releases a plastic orb containing a fake gold ring. He is satisfied with this and walks away.

Hardy passes a jewelry store. He stares at it blankly for a moment and then enters the store.

INT. COMEDY CLUB - NIGHT, FLASHBACK

Hardy continues his act.

(CONTINUED)

HARDY

People find it strange that I never bought my wife an engagement ring. But the engagement ring concept always confused me. I mean, in addition to devoting the rest of your life to a woman, you have to drop four grand on a diamond ring. To me, it makes much more sense to give a woman a ring when you break up with her, so you don't have to deal with the crying and the questions about infidelity. A "consolation ring," if you will.

The crowd laughs.

HARDY (CONT'D)

Just think of how much easier a break-up would be if you followed up the bad news with a diamond ring. At best the girl is thrilled by the present, which, in my experience she prefers over me, and at worst, she is just baffled--

INT. MALL - DAY, PRESENT

Hardy walks out of the jewelry store with a black velvet case in one hand and the prize ring in the other. He quickly inserts the 25-cent ring into the velvet case and sits on a bench outside of the store.

Before long, a frantic Dalia runs up to Hardy and sits next to him. She attempts to hug him, but he pushes her away.

DALIA

Is it serious? The operation?

HARDY

They'll be using anasthesia. Always a chance of cardiac arrest with that.

DALIA

Cardiac arrest?

HARDY

Quiet. I got you something.

Hardy reaches into his pocket and hands her the velvet box.

(CONTINUED)

HARDY (CONT'D)

Here, I want you to have this.

Dalia looks at the box in disbelief. She opens it and pulls out what she assumes is a gold diamond ring. Her jaw drops. She is stunned, excited, and very stupid.

DALIA

An engagement ring? From you to me?  
Why you are giving me this when  
you're telling me to leave?

Hardy laughs condescendingly.

HARDY

Um, listen Dalia, try to think of  
it more as a consolation ring.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. OPERATING ROOM - THE NEXT DAY, PRESENT

Hardy lies on an operating table, belly up. SHEILA WINER, Hardy's mother, a heavy-set woman with dark brown hair, hovers over her child with one hand on his hand and the other on his forehead.

SHEILA

My poor son. My poor, poor son.

HARDY

Please, mother. It would make this  
much easier if you could show as  
little emotion as possible.

SHEILA

No emotion? It's very difficult for  
a mother to see her child in this  
position.

HARDY

I'm going under the knife, yet  
between the two of us, I'm in the  
enviable position. I didn't choose  
to have this operation. You're  
making me feel guilty.

SHEILA

If only you had a child of your  
own, then you'd understand.

(beat)

Is it Jillian? Is she not capable--

(CONTINUED)

HARDY

Please just let me get through the operation.

Sheila bows her head and shakes it in disappointment.

SHEILA

So angry at everything. Did I raise you to be such an angry person?

Sheila runs her hand through her son's hair and kisses his forehead.

SHEILA

You'll be in my prayers.

Hardy suddenly becomes tense; almost threatened.

HARDY

Prayers? No thank you. I don't want to be in anyone's prayers. I've been a devoted atheist since my Bar Mitzvah.

SHEILA

Oh enough with this atheism garbage. How can you talk like that? In your position?

HARDY

Mother. Praying for me undercuts everything I don't believe in. Please do not do it. Doctors are about to open up my body. I mean, you don't tell Billy FUCKING Graham that you hope the devil gets him while he's lying on his deathbed.

SHEILA

Billy Graham? The DEVIL? Where do you get this? Jillian?

Hardy hangs his head and retreats to his defeated state.

SHEILA (CONT'D)

Hardy. You're my son and I love you. No matter what you think you know.

HARDY

Thank you, mother.

Sheila kisses Hardy on the forehead one last time before leaving the room.

(CONTINUED)

After several moments, the door can be heard opening.  
Jillian walks in and stands above Hardy. She takes his hand.

HARDY

Listen, sweetheart. If anything  
happens to me--

JILLIAN

Hardy...

Jillian rolls her eyes and giggles. His anxiety amuses her.

HARDY

Just listen. If anything happens to  
me. Like if I become paralyzed, or  
a vegetable of some kind--

JILLIAN

Oh, my little Winer. It's just a  
few wisdom teeth.

(beat)

This is overboard...even for you.

HARDY

They're using anesthesia, Jillian.  
They're making me unconscious.  
There is always a chance of cardiac  
arrest when anesthesia is involved.  
We went over this last night.

JILLIAN

I know we did, but I don't know a  
single person over the age of  
sixteen who hasn't had this  
"procedure," as you seem to think  
it is.

HARDY

Oh, really? Ever been to Africa?

(beat)

Things can happen, Jillian.

Though not angry, Jillian's nurturing attitude fades.

JILLIAN

I'm sorry, your ridiculousness  
distracted me from another part of  
your ridiculousness. Did you say  
you give me permission to leave you  
if you come out of this "procedure"  
as a vegetable?

(beat)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JILLIAN (cont'd)  
Two years of marriage and I still  
don't quite grasp how your  
beautiful little mind works.

HARDY  
I was just trying to  
be...considerate.

Jillian is genuinely amused and proceeds to humor him.

JILLIAN  
Considerate? Meaning...you'd want  
me to do the same for you if, God  
forbid, I ever become crippled?

HARDY  
Well...it sounds bad when you put  
it like that...

JILLIAN  
I'm going to go easy on you because  
I've always thought of myself as a  
representative of reality when it  
comes to you.  
(beat)  
And your mother, for that matter.  
I'm just going to pass this off as  
the pre "operation" jitters. Let me  
just promise you that you'll come  
out of this in absolute perfect  
condition.

HARDY  
I feel I have to confess something  
to you, Jillian.

JILLIAN  
Oh, here we go...

She shakes her head and rubs her forehead with her hand.

HARDY  
(raising his voice)  
Now, it's going to sound a lot  
worse than it actually is--

JILLIAN  
There's no need to get  
philosophical, Hardy. You're just  
getting a couple of teeth pulled.

HARDY

I've been cheating on you.

Silence. Jillian is incredulous and does not believe him.

JILLIAN

Please tell me you just said that  
to get my attention.

HARDY

In a way yes, in a way no. With the  
position that I'm in, I just feel  
like I have to be a man. As I may  
never get that chance again--

She is slowly beginning to lose her patience.

JILLIAN

Ok...I'm listening, Hardy. Get on  
with it.

HARDY

(rhetorically)

Have I been cheating on you?

(beat)

Well. To the layman...yes. In a  
conventional sense.

JILLIAN

Have you been with another woman,  
Hardy?

HARDY

Only in the physical sense.

Jillian takes a step back from Hardy, shocked.

HARDY (CONT'D)

Sweetheart, like I said, it sounds  
much worse than it actually is.  
Now, if you just approach it from  
my perspective, it will be much  
more digestible.

Jillian is holding back her tears, but her voice cracks when  
she speaks. She averts her eyes from Hardy's.

JILLIAN

And what perspective is that?

HARDY

Don't think of it as cheating, per  
se. Think of it as interactive  
pornography.

(CONTINUED)

She can hold back no longer and sniffles loudly.

JILLIAN  
How COULD you?

HARDY  
It was not emotional. There was no love. I never wanted to start a new life with her.

JILLIAN  
Interactive pornography?

Jillian loses her cool.

JILLIAN (CONT'D)  
WHAT THE HELL?

HARDY  
YES. That's the perfect way to approach it...interactive porn. No one takes their *Hustler* magazines out for a candlelit dinner...

The door swings open to reveal Dalia, distraught and wearing her "consolation ring" on her left ring finger, which has developed a sickly green hue. Neither Jillian nor Hardy notice.

HARDY (CONT'D)  
No one takes their Jenna Jameson DVD on a honeymoon to the French Riviera. The women I've been with have essentially served the same purpose. Just look at it from where I'm coming from...

JILLIAN  
WOMEN?! WHERE YOU'RE COMING FROM?

DALIA  
Hardy?

HARDY  
Dalia? What are you...

Jillian looks from Dalia to Hardy, connecting the dots.

JILLIAN  
Hardy...a confession was more than enough. An introduction isn't necessary.

(CONTINUED)

HARDY

No...I didn't...Dalia, what are you doing here?

DALIA

I had to come and say goodbye. In case...in case...

JILLIAN

Is hypochondria contagious now? He is just having his wisdom teeth pulled!

DALIA

But there's anesthesia involved. Whenever there's anesthesia involved--

JILLIAN

Yes, yes, I know, there's always a chance of cardiac arrest.

Jillian catches a glimpse of the ring on Dalia's finger.

JILLIAN (CONT'D)

What's this? You're married, too? And here I thought he was just taking advantage of some poor little--

DALIA

Married? No, I'm not married.

(beat)

Hardy gave this to me.

She drags Dalia to Hardy and sticks her hand in his face.

JILLIAN

Interactive porn, huh? People don't take their *Hustler* magazines out for candlelit dinners, but they buy them engagement rings?

HARDY

Jillian, to the layman, that would definitely APPEAR to be an engagement ring, but you know my--

Jillian has become frazzled. She wants to be angry, but is too shocked to feign any other emotion.

(CONTINUED)

JILLIAN  
SAVE IT, Hardy. I've heard enough.

DALIA  
Interactive porn? What's  
interactive porn?

HARDY  
(to Jillian)  
It's a consolation ring! You must  
have heard my bit a hundred times!  
You even agreed with me.

JILLIAN  
(to Dalia)  
It means you meant about as much to  
him as the shoe box full of adult  
entertainment in the back of our  
closet!

DALIA  
A shoe box?

HARDY  
Jillian, if it's about the ring,  
it's not even real gold. Look at  
her finger. It's green! I love  
you--

Jillian leaves the room. Hardy hangs his head.

DALIA  
Fake gold?  
(beat)  
But you're a "Comedy Network" star.

HARDY  
No, Dalia. I was never on  
television. I mean, I was on a  
commercial for Petrov's plumbing  
that got a lot of air time. That's  
probably why you thought I looked  
familiar the first time we met.

Dalia pouts furiously and leaves. Hardy is left alone. He  
reclines on his dental chair and looks up into the light of  
the lamp above his head. It appears as though he is now much  
more relaxed.

Dr. Theos walks in with the ANESTHESIOLOGIST and NURSE.

(CONTINUED)

DR. THEOS

How are you feeling, Hardy? Are you nervous?

HARDY

No. Not anymore.

ANESTHESIOLOGIST

You had a lot of visitors out there for such a routine thing.

HARDY

Not anymore. I'm all alone and that's probably how it should be.

DR. THEOS

Do me a favor and count to ten.

HARDY

One, two, three, four, five...

INT. COMEDY CLUB - NIGHT, FLASHBACK

Hardy continues his act.

HARDY

This is a tough town to be alone in, isn't it? And I don't mean not having a significant other, but just walking down the street. It's tough to walk down the street alone, not talking to anyone. I mean, the looks you get, people pitying you like you're a widower...or a child molester. Sometimes I just feel the need to just have a brief conversation with the groups of people I pass telling them that I live a very normal life, I have a mother, a father, a wife, never actually been convicted of sexual misconduct of any kind...

Crowd chuckles.

HARDY (CONT'D)

But, you know, a brilliant solution is the cell phone. Every person you pass on the street who isn't with someone is on a cell phone. And that gets very expensive, so I've just decided to start having

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

HARDY (CONT'D) (cont'd)  
conversations with myself on the cell phone. Never do I walk down the street without pretending to talk on my cell phone and it's become such a habit. And it's interesting because just on my way to this dump--I live ten blocks away, for those of you who haven't laughed yet tonight--so on my way here, I started talking as a normally do. This time to my "mother."

Hardy puts his fist up to his ear, his thumb and pinky finger pointing outwards.

HARDY (CONT'D)  
So I ask her, "how's the weather in Florida? How have you been doing since aunt Rosy passed away?"

(beat)

"No, no I didn't make it to temple for the high holidays...listen, mother, I cannot have this same conversation with you every single year!"

(beat)

And at this point, just out of mere habit, I reach my hand into my pocket, feel my cell phone, and realize I had just been talking into my bare hand.

(beat)

I never took out my cell phone. I had just walked to work, in front of dozens, possibly hundreds of people, having an imaginary argument with my mom into my pinky finger.

The crowd laughs

HARDY (CONT'D)  
And I think that really speaks to how fearful I am, and probably most of us are, of being completely and helplessly alone, that we'd risk appearing totally demented to the rest of the world...

The crowd claps. It is the end of Hardy's set.

(CONTINUED)

## HARDY (CONT'D)

Thank you, thanks very much. Hope everyone enjoys their evening.

## MONTAGE - HARDY'S OPERATION, PRESENT

- 1) NURSE prepares and inserts an IV into Hardy's forearm.
- 2) Hardy continues to count to ten and quickly passes out.
- 3) Dr. Theos opens Hardy's mouth and inserts a variety of dental tools, handed to him by the nurse.
- 4) The machines can be seen indicating Hardy's heart rate and blood pressure are steady.
- 5) Dr. Theos yanks out four wisdom teeth with great force.
- 6) The procedure is over. The nurse wipes the blood from an unconscious Hardy's lips, and stuffs his mouth with gauze.
- 7) The nurse rolls a wheelchair next to Hardy. Still woozy, he looks at it in horror, fearing that he is paralyzed and refuses to get into it. After a moment, he realizes he can still move his toes and gets in the wheelchair.
- 8) Sheila receives him from the nurse in the waiting room. She kisses his forehead and fixes his hair.
- 9) In the parking lot, Sheila puts her son in the car, easily defeating his flaccid resistance. He lies down in the back seat.
- 10) Sheila drives Hardy to her home. Hardy blathers incoherently, possibly speaking about Jillian or Dalia.
- 11) Sheila drags Hardy through the house and into an unoccupied bedroom, presumably the one from his childhood.
- 12) Sheila tucks Hardy in and pulls out his gauze.
- 13) In the kitchen, Sheila pours salt into a glass of water and stirs it so it is all dissolved.
- 14) From bed, Hardy gargles the salt water. She places new gauze into his mouth, tucks him in, and kisses him on the forehead. As she leaves the room, she turns off the light and then closes the door.

CUT TO BLACK