

Rude Awakening

This morning my sleep was ended not by the ringing of the alarm clock but by my wife Carol punching me in the nose.

As I cried out in pain, she offered this: “Oh, I’m so sorry -- I didn’t think you were still in bed.”

“So -- you just struck out blindly, not checking to see if there was still a head nestled atop the other pillow? Because I can assure you there was, and now there is a throbbing and perhaps damaged nose affixed to that head.”

“I *said* I was sorry,” she replied in what I considered to be a tone devoid of contrition. At this point, I got up and went downstairs into the bathroom to see if my nose was broken or bleeding. It wasn’t, but from the force of the wayward blow Carol delivered it very well might have been.

The perpetrator then came downstairs and asked if I’d made coffee yet. I stood speechless for a few moments, incredulous that while I was still recovering from my injury, at her hand, her thoughts were only of breakfast. Then I placed a filter in the basket and started the coffee.

Carol emerged from the shower twenty minutes later, opening the bathroom door to let the steam escape. I said I needed to come in and use the toilet; she responded by asking if I could wait a minute or two. Well, perhaps a few years ago I could have, but these days I find it prudent to address the urge as quickly as possible. I informed her as such; she shot a quick but obviously annoyed glance my way and after a beat moved aside so I could get past. People offer many indications of how well matched they are as a couple -- shared interest in gardening, mutual love of travel, engaging in spirited political debate, sexual compatibility -- but I think the ultimate barometer of spousal longevity is willingness, however grudging, to share the bathroom when one of you requires time on the can.

After Carol left for work I still felt drained from the morning’s events and decided to slip back under the covers to make up for the sleep I’d been robbed of due to the assault at dawn. As I settled into a comfortable position our cat Nate jumped up on the bed and demanded attention. I tried to shoo him away and he responded by poking me in the nose with a needle-sharp claw. I leapt out of bed and ran downstairs to, for the second time that morning, check for damage to my nose. While the puncture was small, it bled for some time and when it finally stopped it looked as though I’d just had my right nostril pierced.

Since the bedroom was no longer a safe haven, I poured myself the last of the coffee and went into the living room to watch the noontime news. No sooner had I settled into the couch than another of our cats, Miles, jumped into my lap and began to head-butt me. I tried to shoo him away and he responded by poking me in the scrotum with a needle-sharp claw. I leapt off the couch and ran into the bathroom to, for the third time that day, check for damage to my person; I feared he may have vasectomized me. Such a procedure may, at this stage of my life, be superfluous but you know what some people say: they feel safer sleeping with a loaded gun, even if they never intend to use it.

By now I’d given up on the idea of getting any further rest and decided to make a fresh start to the day with a shower. After stepping out of the tub I was greeted by the last of our cats, Sophie, who has a foot fetish and loves to rub her face all over my bare feet when they are freshly scrubbed. I tried to shoo her away and she responded by clinging to my ankle with all of her needle-sharp claws. Since I was already in the bathroom there really wasn’t any place for me to escape to, so I stood there screeching until Sophie decided to let go and saunter back to her kibble. She’d left a series of red, raw scratches circling my lower leg, creating a dotted line that will be a helpful guide for the orthopedist when my foot eventually requires amputation once the infection sets in.

By the time I'd dried off, treated this most recent wound, gotten dressed and waited for the pain to subside, the day was more or less shot. I made myself a vodka tonic and tried, unsuccessfully, to work up any enthusiasm to prepare the evening meal. Thankfully, frozen pizza was invented for just this reason. Carol returned from work and walked through the door just as the oven timer rang. I reached in to remove the pizza and accidentally brushed the back of my hand against the upper rack, causing an immediate and painful singe.

"What's that smell?" Carol asked. "Did you burn the pizza?" I stood speechless for a few moments, incredulous that as I recovered from yet another injury her thoughts were only of dinner. Then I pulled the pizza from the oven and served her a slice.

After eating I pled exhaustion and announced I was going to bed. I stood, able to rise only to a crouch, with breath whistling through the extra hole in the side of my nose and, favoring my good leg, hobbled upstairs. Carol came in later, cradling me in her arms while whispering how sorry she was for my ailments and offering hope I'd feel better. I nodded my head and offered a slight grunt of acknowledgment.

Carol ended this very trying day for me on such a sweet note that, before drifting off to sleep, I nearly felt remorse for stuffing catnip in her pillow and resetting her alarm clock two hours early. Fortunately, it's her turn to make the coffee tomorrow morning.

To Speech His Own

Welcome to Part XXIV of my series, “Learn How To Better Espresso Yourself Through Proper Word Choosing.” In today’s lesson, we will review the Parts of Speech and how to combine those parts into a whole.

There are somewhere between six and a gazillion parts of speech, depending on how you categorize them. For this lesson, we’ll go with what I have listed below. If you have any modifications or additions to this list you’d like to suggest, please email me at stuffitinasock@whocares.net.

The Parts of Speech are:

Nouns

A noun is defined as being a *person*, *place* or *thing*. Examples of each:

- **Person:** the *President-elect*, a *xenophobe*; the *milkman* (since both *milk* and *man* are nouns, “milkman” is referred to as a “renoun,” mostly because of the rumors he fathered several children in the neighborhood).
- **Place:** My father often said he would like to put me in my *place*. I’d respond with “Where -- a *volcano*? The *supermarket*? *Moosewood Lake*?” He’d reply, “How about the *hospital*?”
- **Thing:** This one is easy since there are many *things* -- this *thing* over here; that *thing* we were just talking about; “That *Thing You Do*,” let me *thing* about it for a while.

A *proper name* is a noun -- “Hey, *Jim*!” An *improper name* is also a noun -- “Hey, Jim! You *shithead*!”

In later lessons, we’ll get into further depth about sub-categorization of nouns -- abstract, collective, and wait until we talk about the Seven Mutant Plurals! (I believe at least five of them were featured in the last *X-Men* movie.)

Pronouns

A *pronoun* replaces a noun. To illustrate:

- “In high school, my girlfriend Gail informed me she’d be going to the senior prom with *Jim Delaney* instead of me.”

Replacing a noun, especially one who showered his girlfriend with flowers and unrelenting affection, and particularly with a shithead like Jim Delaney, can be devastating.

Verbs

Verbs describe an *action* or *state*. This can be a little confusing since you might think *Maine* and *New Hampshire* are places and therefore nouns, but apparently they are actually verbs. What can I say? Grammar is a rough business. I don’t make the rules; I just follow them.

When we talk about verbs we also must talk about *tense*. This is understandable because the election results have left many of us feeling that way.

As a side note, one of my favorite vocal groups back in the day was Peaches and Herb. They sang “Shake Your Groove Thing” -- in that song title, *Shake* is a verb and *Your* is a possessive pronoun, but what is *Groove*? *Groove* is like “the boogie” -- you’ll know it when you feel it.

Modifiers

There are two basic kinds of modifiers, *adverbs* and *adjectives*:

- *Adverbs* modify verbs. If we were to insert an adverb into the sentence, “See Jack run,” in order to modify the verb *run*, we might say, “See Jack run. *No running inside the house, Jack!*” In that way, we would modify Jack’s action.
- *Adjectives* modify nouns or pronouns. As an example: “Upon hearing he was planning to take my girlfriend to the prom, I *beat the shit* out of the pronoun *Jim Delaney*.” I certainly modified his face, but Gail still wouldn’t go to the prom with me.

Preposition

Prepositions are very common words, such as *in*, *at*, *on*, *by*, *before* and *multitudinous*. Let’s use one in a sentence: “I’ve got a *preposition* for you, Delaney -- leave Gail alone or I’m going to modify your face.”

Conjunction

I had *conjunction* once and was out of work for three days. Symptoms include red, itchy eyes and a very unappealing discharge.

Interjection

An interjection is what I was hoping would happen after attending the senior prom with my girlfriend Gail. As you may have inferred, that plan did not come to fruition.

--

In our next lesson, we’ll explore how to choose between *that* versus *which*, *who* versus *whom*, *love* versus *infatuation*, and how to put up with relative pronouns during the holiday season.

Looking for Quick, Easy, Nutritious Dinners? Keep Looking

Like many of you, I am often drained after getting home at the end of a busy day, exhausted from fulfilling my role as the least-productive member of my team at work, and find myself facing the challenge of preparing a nutritious and appealing dinner for the family. Selecting a recipe, scouring the refrigerator and cupboards for all the ingredients, sharpening the knives, peeling the potatoes, butchering the hog... sometimes everyone else has headed off to bed before I am ready to serve the evening meal at 10:45 P.M. Then the next challenge is waking everyone up and dragging them back to the table to eat.

There are numerous videos online purporting to show easy-peasy recipes, with the illusion heightened by time-lapse photography. “Here are red and green bell peppers / (chop-chop-chop) / And now they’re seeded and diced into identical bite-sized sections.” “Pop open a can of prepared bread dough / (smoosh-smoosh-smoosh) / Ta-da! Beef Wellington!” If you slow any of these videos down to real-time, you’ll find they take 20 times more effort than the hyper-speed version you were just suckered by.

Even the cooking shows on TV are misleading. They are all hosted by professional chefs, using top-notch tools, boundless resources, and possessing a certain *savoir-faire* in the kitchen. What about those of us who are working with dull knives, a gouged cutting board, and the only spices found on the lazy susan are a three-year-old shaker of oregano and a half-bottle of Gravy Master passed down from your grandmother? What tips are there for the home cook who is only *faire-enough*?

I, and I alone, can help you separate the white from the yolk. Let me disabuse you of some common fallacies around simplifying dinner time:

“Many hands make light work.” This proverb may be true, but it applies to the kitchen only when you are demolishing it as part of a home renovation project. If you try to get your family -- especially any children age 12 or younger -- involved with meal preparation, it will take you three times as long to complete and a sticky mess will be spread out to the virtual horizon. Your kitchen is too small for an army of amateur sous-chefs to be milling about. The key to success here is to usher everyone out of your way by sitting them down to watch reruns of *2 Broke Girls* with a package of rice cakes and bowls of raw pinto beans as snacks to tide them over until suppertime. After an hour or so spent sampling these unpalatable choices (both food and program), they’ll be thankful for nearly anything you serve for dinner, including sautéed liver and even Brussels sprouts.

Make use of your crock pot. Again, a common misconception; there is nothing task- or time-saving about using a crock pot. Everyone thinks you can just dump a can of cream of mushroom soup on top of a whole chicken, splash it with some of the Zinfandel left over from the cheap bottle your cousin brought to guzzle from last Easter, set the timer, and come home to an incredible *coq au vin*. Nothing could be further from the truth; you’ll return to find stringy chicken drowning in a pool of murky slime, and now you have to order a pizza. The only useful thing to do with that appliance is donate it to your local Goodwill -- you can take a tax write-off while clearing up valuable counter space. You think I’m kidding? Head over to Goodwill and see how many like-new crock pots they have on display.

Go vegetarian or (even worse) vegan. “Gee,” you think to yourself one day, “if I had to shop only for vegetables, it would save me time in the store, and all I’d have to do is sauté a pan of hacked-up zucchini for dinner every night. What could be better?” Practically anything, that’s what. If you’ve ever read a vegetarian or vegan cookbook, then you know that every other recipe calls for something called “tempeh.” Tempeh is a fermented soy product offering protein and false promise. If you can even find it at your local supermarket, it’s often more expensive per pound than beef, chicken or fish -- but, in fairness, it goes much farther. Often as far as the garbage can.

A strictly vegan diet is even more ridiculous; now your pantry will be filled with ingredients like chickpea flour, coconut oil, flax seeds, agave nectar, quinoa (pronounced, “ugh”), edamame and cashew milk. Want to know something tasty you can make from these ingredients? NOTHING. THERE IS NOTHING REMOTELY TASTY TO BE MADE FROM THESE INGREDIENTS. Your hunger will have to be satiated by the sense of smug satisfaction you derive from conferring the rights of personhood on chickens, cows, and bees.

So what to do? Don’t ask me; I’m weary from another trying day of failure at work. If one more person asks me, “What’s for dinner?” I’m going to lose my tempeh.