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**“Knock. Knock.”
“Go away! I’m not here!”**

By Curtis Seltzer

BLUE GRASS, Va.—Some people can tell a joke, and some can’t. Some people know how to receive a joke, and some don’t.

My late father and I shared a rare talent for mangling both telling and receiving.

I offer one example of the many available.

Dad: Cork, did you hear the one about the two fruits knocking at your front door?

Me: I missed that one, Dad. What kind of fruits were they?

Dad: One was a banana.

Me: Organic?

Dad: I don’t know. Just assume it’s a regular banana.

Me: Is the banana symbolic of something gender-related?

Dad: No, it’s just a banana, which is not the most important fruit in this joke. ‘Orange’ is the punchline.

Me: I don’t get it.

Dad: Well, I haven’t told the joke yet.

Me: What kind of orange is it?

Dad: Just a regular orange. Why would world-class fruits be standing at *your* front door?

Me: What’s funny about a normal orange?

Dad: It’s what the orange sort of says that’s funny.

Me: This is a talking orange?

Dad: Well, it could be, I suppose. But I’m the one who’s talking in the joke. The banana doesn’t say anything. The orange keeps its mouth shut, too.

Me: I'm confused. You and a voiceless banana are standing at my front door. Then a mute orange appears out of nowhere. Then I'm supposed to laugh?

Dad: This is a Knock-Knock joke. I tell you that a banana is at your front door. But a banana doesn't actually have to be there. I just need to say that a banana is there. Orange is the same way—it may or may not be at your front door. I just have to tell you that it's there.

Me: Are there any other fruits in this joke?

Dad: Could be, but they don't have speaking roles either.

Me: How does the joke start, Dad?

Dad: I have this banana and this orange. And we are at your front door.

Me: Is it snowing or raining outside? Why do you want to come in?

Dad: We don't. I never said we did.

Me: So the three of you are standing on the porch looking poor and pitiful. And why did the two fruits pick my door?

Dad: The banana and the orange did not pick your door. I picked it, because I'm telling *you* a joke...which starts like this.

Me: Like what?

Dad: Like what I'm about to say if you just let me tell the joke the way it's supposed to be told. I say, 'Knock. Knock.'

Me: OK. You say, 'Knock. Knock.'

Dad: See, I'm knocking at your front door.

Me: Do you actually knock on my door or just make knock-knock sounds, pretending that you're knocking-knocking?

Dad: I'm not actually knock-knocking. I'm just saying I'm knock-knocking. But I could actually knock-knock, if you insist.

Me: So why are you knock-knocking at my door, either actually or orally?

Dad: To tell you the joke about the two fruits.

Me: The door's unlocked. You can just come in without any knocking. Why don't you just walk into the kitchen, put the banana and orange on the counter and start the joke?

Dad: I can't. I have to say, 'Knock. Knock.'

Me: Why don't you ring the doorbell instead? Then you don't have to say anything.

Dad: Look, this is a Knock-Knock joke. There is no such thing as a ding-dong joke. I'm supposed to say something, then you have to say something, then I say 'orange,' then you laugh. So I say, 'Knock. Knock.' Then you say...

Me: Go around to the back door.

Dad: No you say...

Me: I gave at the office.

Dad: Gave what?

Me: Gave money to the collection person disguised as my Dad who's bothering me with an anvil chorus of Knock-Knocks.

Dad: No, you have to say, 'Who's there?'

Me: I already know who's there. It's you there.

Dad: No, it's banana and orange who are there. I'm here, telling you the joke.

Me: So you're not there with the two fruits?

Dad: Yes, I am there with the two fruits, but I'm also here telling you the joke.

Me: So where am I? Here or there?

Dad: It doesn't matter where you are! Just ask, 'Who's there?'

Me: Who's there?

Dad: Banana.

Me: I don't need any today. Maybe tomorrow.

Dad: I'm not selling bananas door to door!

Me: So why did you say banana?

Dad: Because that's what I'm supposed to say. Now we do this again. Knock. Knock.

Me: But I now know who's there—it's a banana, probably looking for a cream pie.

Dad: Even when you know who it is, you're still supposed to say, 'Who's there?'

Me: Say! Who's there? And stop knocking. I hear you.

Dad: No, you don't say, 'Say who's there?' Just say, 'Who's there?' You don't need to say what you're saying.

Me: How do I say, 'Who's there?' without saying it?

Dad: WHO'S THERE?

Me: Beats me.

Dad: LIKE THIS! Knock. Knock.

Dad: Who's there?

Dad: Banana.

Dad: Then you say, 'Banana who?'

Me: OK. 'Banana who?' Why don't I just open the door? I'm not afraid of a talking banana.

Dad: This is not a talking banana. I'm the talking banana! You can't be *this* dense.

Me: Do I open the door?

Dad: No you just stand behind it and say, 'Who's there?' and 'Banana who?' Four easy words.

Me: I think you have all the good lines.

Dad: Then we go through it a second time. And when you ask 'Who's there?' I say, 'Banana.' Then you ask, 'Banana who?' again.

Me: This joke would work better with a dimpled eggplant knocking at my door.

Dad: You're right. It doesn't have to be a banana who does the heavy lifting. But the orange has to stay. You can't get rid of the orange.

Me: Dad, I'm just going to open the door the next time through...and get this over with.

Dad: No! The banana doesn't want to come in.

Me: So why are you and this produce section knocking at my door? Why don't you just say, 'Dad's here.' Why are you pretending to be a banana? I know you're not a banana.

Dad: The banana is a figment of your imagination and mine. Now, let's run through the whole routine one more time. Knock. Knock.

Me: Who's there?

Dad: Banana.

Me: Banana who?

Dad: Knock. Knock.

Me. Who's there?

Dad: Banana.

Me: Banana who?

Dad: Now this is the last time.

Me: Thank heavens.

Dad: Knock. Knock.

Me: Come in.

Dad: Not come in! Who's there?

Me: I know who's there. It's banana. You told me twice that banana was there.

Dad; Banana is not there. Orange is there the third time.

Me: What happened to the banana?

Dad: I ate it! How do I know what happened to the banana? Maybe it got tired of dealing with you and split.

Me: OK. So now orange has scared off the banana.

Dad: Yes, orange is there by himself. That *is* the joke.

Me: When I say, 'Who's there?' why don't you just say that 'Dad's here, with some fruit for you...and a bad joke.'?

Dad: I don't have any fruit. I'm just saying I do.

Me: So when I say 'Who's there?' the third time, what do you answer?

Dad: I say: 'Aren't you glad I didn't say banana, because orange is here!'

Me: That's the joke?

Dad: Orange is there instead of the banana. Get it? You thought I would say banana a third time, but I said orange instead.

Me: Did you hear this one from a three-year-old at a daycare center? This joke isn't funny. Jokes are supposed to be funny.

Dad: This one is funny, because you know that it's me at the door. But I don't say, 'It's me, Dad.' I just say, 'Banana.' See, I'm throwing you off the track that orange is there, too. Good jokes are supposed to juke around and mislead.

Me: After your third 'Knock. Knock,' *orange* you glad I didn't say that I *graped* at the office?

Dad: Hey, that's pretty good. Want to run through the whole thing again? This time I'll tell you that grape is there instead of orange.

Me: That's not very appealing.

Dad: Orange you glad that my bananas, at least, have stopped bothering you?

Me: I'm glad that we don't tell each other jokes very often.

Dad: This one might need a little tweaking. By the way, I have some kumquats in the car. I could bring them in.

Me: No thanks. I'm full.