

The Solve It Squad to the (Dog) Rescue!

written by

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Tin Can Bros V1

COLD OPEN

1 INT. SOLVE IT SQUAD CLUBHOUSE - DAY

1

The SQUAD is jammed into the old Solve It Squad HQ, a treehouse adorned with maps, drawings, and memorabilia from their childhood exploits. It's way too small for four adults in their thirties. KEITH, a delusional bro who likely peaked in high school, attempts to take charge.

KEITH

Alright, Squad! Let's get to work.

POV of Instagram where GWEN is livestreaming their meeting. She feigns the bubblyness of an influencer with ease, relentlessly shrewd in her pursuit of the limelight.

GWEN

Yes, the rumors are true. The Solve It Squad is back in biz. Keith, tell them what we're doing.

Keith enters frame, and the flurry of hearts on the screen instantly turn to thumbs-down emojis.

KEITH

Sure thing, babe. Looks like we got BIG trouble at the LITTLE Mayberry Zoo. It seems, Fam, that their one and only, *fur-rocious* tiger has gone missing.

SCRAGS, a straight-laced, gangly, and slightly jumpy man, interrupts.

SCRAGS

Easy there, Keith. The details of squad operations should remain within the squad. Bad guys have Instagram too.

Gwen flips the camera back to herself.

GWEN

Ooo. Hot take, Scraggs! What do y'all think? Send a Kissy Face if you agree!!

ESTHER scoffs. They are brilliant, paranoid, and heavily self-medicated.

ESTHER

(sarcastically)

Great idea, Gwen. I'm sure you'll get thoughtful feedback from all those Russian bots.

SCRAGS

(taking charge)

Let's put away the phones and focus up, Squad. We need to debrief from last week's mess before we move on to new business.

GWEN

A post-mortem! Let me handle this. My character ended every episode of *Officer Dr. Cop, MD* with one.

SCRAGS

Well, as the ex-cop of the group, my real-life knowledge is probably a bit more relevant than your experience on a tv show that kinda jumped the shark after Season 2.

GWEN

(getting emotional)

Umm... You watched it?

Scrags stands up, bumps his head on the low ceiling, and hobbles over to a whiteboard.

SCRAGS

One: During the stake out, we needed someone to alert us when the culprit left out the back of his trailer.

KEITH

Ok, I'm sorry I forgot to charge the walkie-talkies!

SCRAGS

Two: We needed someone to sniff out the culprit's cologne at the science fair!

GWEN

It's not my fault mass-market scents all smell like bleach.

SCRAGS

Well, Gwen, we should hold ourselves to a higher standard!

ESTHER

We've been solving shit like this since we were kids, Scraggs! We always catch the bad guy. It's in our blood!

Esther lights a joint, takes one long drag and burns the entire thing. With the remaining filter they do a bump of cocaine, then shotgun a beer, and let out a huge burp. Scraggs grabs the can and throws it out the window. Keith snatches it out of the air.

KEITH

Sports!

Keith desperately tries to shake out the last few drops into his mouth.

SCRAGGS

(aggravated)

Well forgive me if I don't want to make the same goof-ups we made as tweens. If we're gonna do this again, I wanna do it right. We need something or someone to keep us focused and our morale up. For Pete's sake, I'm thirty-five and I don't wanna regret not getting another--Cluebert was such an integral part of our... And yes, totally irreplaceable. But I mean who are we... who am I... without that... dynamic! You know what I'm saying?

Beat. The Squad takes it in.

ESTHER

That... you desperately miss Cluebert and you want us to get a new group dog?

SCRAGGS

(breaking down)

Yes!! Please, God! I want that so bad!

KEITH

Whoa. This post-nordstrom just got REAL, son!

ACT 1

3 EXT. PUPPY RANCH - MORNING

3

The Squad is getting a tour of "Rhoda's Ark" from the owner, RHODA, who wears a tie-dye muumuu dress and bedazzled pink glasses. The ranch is overflowing with dogs, cats, and even farm animals. The animals' dominion over the yard is chaotic and a bit sad.

RHODA

Growing up Catholic, lots of the gals fell hard for the big guy upstairs, but WWND is what I always said... what would Noah do? Animals have souls, ya know, more so than most humans--But you're not here for a sermon! You're here for the dogs, right?

They pass some dogs.

RHODA (CONT'D)

So, that there's Buckwheat. And that's Detective Axel Foley under the porch. There's Sherman Klump coolin' off by the tree there. They're all named after Eddie Murphy characters because he's my favorite.

A CUTE DOG sidles up to Rhoda. She picks him up in profile.

RHODA (CONT) (CONT'D)

Aww! How about little Norbit here?
(under her breath)
Very well adjusted considering his run-in with animal control.

She turns the dog around to reveal a robotic arm and a terminator eye. Keith looks away in fright. Rhoda puts Norbit down and he playfully lolls away.

ESTHER

Actually Rhoda, Scraggs is too nice to tell you this, but we're in a bit of a hurry and he's looking for something very specific.

SCRAGGS

(a little hesitant)
Um, yeah. Do you have any...
talking dogs?

A pregnant pause while Rhoda sizes him up.

RHODA

Talking Dogs? Yeah, we got those,
but I'm gonna have to charge you a
higher adoption fee than, say,
Pluto Nash here.

She holds up a dog-sized iron lung with a tiny wheezy dog
inside.

GWEN

Oh, I don't think... we could
ever... love a dog like that.

RHODA

Suit yourself, honey! Make a left
at the hog pen, a right at the
kitty coral, and they're all in
that sound proof barn. You can't
miss it.

Scrag nods and exits, followed by Gwen. We hear a moo-ing
off screen.

RHODA (CONT'D)

Oop, time to offer some moral
support to a cow who's giving
birth.

4 INT. TALKIE BARN - MOMENTS LATER

4

The barn echoes with animal sounds mixed with the chatter of
talking.

GWEN

Ooh, how about this little sweetie!
She's got eyes like Cluebert.

Gwen picks up NAIVE DOG.

NAIVE DOG

Oh, no, this is all just a big
misunderstanding. My family will be
back to get me any day now.

GWEN

Bless your delusional little heart!

She sets the dog down, repulsed. Scrag walks over to pick up
a HARD-EYED PUP.

SCRAGS

Choosing a dog is an art not a science, Gwen. Sure, you're considering breed, age, and pre-existing health conditions. But you're also looking for that *je ne sais quoi*. That indelible first impression. That memorable meet-cute you'll never forget.

HARD-EYED PUP

I'll suck ya dick if you adopt me!

SCRAGS

And this ain't it.

5 EXT. PUPPY RANCH PASTURE - MOMENTS LATER

5

Esther, Keith, and Rhoda approach the cow pen.

RHODA

Me? I tumbled out of my stroller at 9 months old and lived amongst the squirrels in an old oak tree for 3 days until my parents found me. So, wildlife and me, we have a special connection.

She puts on enormous rubber gloves and enters the pen where BELINDA, a cow, is moo-ing loudly in the efforts of childbirth.

KEITH

Then I'm sure you were pretty bummed when you heard someone in Mayberry stole a tiger from the zoo last night...

RHODA

Folks'll pay a pretty penny to have a big cat of their own. And meanwhile, I can't even pay people to take home these vagrant pups. It breaks my heart. I hope you find the scoundrel.

ESTHER

Well, Mayberry is pretty small. So if we can eliminate the locals it'll just leave everyone else in the entire world as a suspect.

Rhoda has positioned herself near the rear of the heaving cow.

RHODA

I'll keep an ear out for you.

(to Keith)

Will you give me a hand? Gotta make sure Belinda here doesn't slip and crush her calf.

KEITH

(clearly uncomfortable)

I, uh, can't. These K-Swiss are brand new...

ESTHER

Don't mind Keith, he's emasculated around anything that demonstrates a female's biological superiority. But not me! Shall I stick my hand up Belinda's ass?

RHODA

No, but I may need you to administer a sedative.

ESTHER

Ok, rad.

Rhoda hands a syringe to Esther, who squirts some of the sedative in their mouth, swishes it around, and swallows.

RHODA (O.S) (CONT.)

(to Keith)

Careful boy, you're in the splash zone!

Off a loud MOO and a wet PLUNK, Keith's eyes go wide and he promptly passes out.

6

INT. TALKIE BARN - MOMENTS LATER

6

Scrags is on his hands and knees amongst the dogs. Gwen sits on a bale of hay, modeling a cowboy hat for a selfie.

SCRAGS

I don't know, Gwen. None of these dogs are as smart or quippy or cute as Cluebert.

GWEN

We get it; Cluebert is impossible to replace. Soooo... don't?

(MORE)

GWEN (CONT'D)

Maybe you need some cat energy in your life.

SCRAGS

No, it *has* to be a rescue dog. I just don't want to force it...

GWEN

Well if these options have too much... personality?... There's this amazing breeder in Delaware that Goop recommend--

SCRAGS

Gwen!

GWEN

I was joking...?

She wasn't. Scrag considers a few more dogs.

GLAM ROCK DOG

♪ Woof built this city, woof built this city on treats and bones, ♪

GROUCHO MARX DOG

(holding a bone like a cigar)

Hey, Kid. I don't wanna belong to any kennel that would have me as a member.

HARD-EYED DOG

If you don't take me home, I'll still suck ya dick!

Almost ready to give up, Scrag spots the rattiest dog in the bunch cowering near the back of the barn. He instantly feels pity and love for it. Emotional music swells as Scrag walks over and offers his hand up for a sniff. He slowly goes in for the pet.

SCRAGS

Hey little buddy, I'm Scrag.
What's your name?

The dog coughs a couple times to clear his throat, as if he hasn't spoken in ages. When the voice finally comes out it sounds hoarse, like nails against a chalkboard.

DOINKY

Hi, I'm Doinky. Are you my new dad?

7 EXT. ZOO TIGER CAGE - DAY

7

The Squad is spread out near the empty tiger cage speaking with the zoned out Zoo Keeper, KEN. Keith is caked in dry mud from his fainting spell. Scrags has Doinky on a leash.

SCRAGS

Ok, so you went to the bathroom before your final rounds of the night, and in that time, the tiger was stolen?

KEN

Yup. I was on the can reading an article my sister sent me written by some guy named Ronan Farrow. Boy, is he thorough.

GWEN

Ooh, I just retweeted that this morning. I thought it was such a brave... headline.

ESTHER

So after your "break," did you notice if the culprit left anything behind? A bubblegum wrapper? A footprint? Clumps of hair?

KEN

I mean... this is a zoo. I don't think you'd be able to tell what's human hair and what's animal hair.

ESTHER

(patronizing laugh)
Oh!... I'D KNOW.

Keith calls out from the empty tiger's cage.

KEITH

Is it normal for a tiger to take such a big dump?

KEN

Well, they often release their bowels after being tranquilized.

SCRAGS

You sedate the animals?

KEN

Na, I figure the culprit did it
before snatching up the tiger.
Maybe with this dart?

Ken pulls out a small dart. Esther quickly grabs it with
their jacket sleeve.

ESTHER

Gaaah! This is a clue, man! Fuckin'
A! Whatever fingerprints were on
this are totally compromised.

SCRAGS

But the *scent* may not be! Doinky!
Take a whiff of this. Can you pick
up any strange smells?

Doinky gives a hesitant sniff and perks up. Alert, he begins
zig-zagging around the grounds, following a scent.

SCRAGS (CONT'D)

There you go, buddy!!

Doinky sniffs up to Keith's foot.

KEITH

Scrag! I swear I'm being framed!!

Doinky quickly moves on and sniffs elsewhere.

KEITH (CONT'D)

Nice!! Proven innocent!

The Squad follows Doinky past the bathrooms and into the
Zookeeper's office.

8

INT. ZOOKEEPER'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

8

Doinky makes his way over to a small table in the corner with
monitors showing security footage.

KEN

Oooh yeah! The security tapes!
Forgot about those!

ESTHER

Ken, you are the worst witness.

Doinky sniffs around the keyboard and tape deck.

SCRAGS

What is it buddy? Smell something fishy?

GWEN

Was the cat-napper in here?

KEITH

Did they mess with the security footage?!?

Doinky lifts up his leg and starts spraying piss all over the equipment. Everything short circuits and the monitors go black.

9

INT. ZOOKEEPER OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

9

The aftermath: Ken is trying to soak up the piss with paper towels. Gwen is blow drying the tape deck. Keith is dipping tapes in a bowl of rice. Esther is working on salvaging last night's tape. Scrag is consoling Doinky.

DOINKY

Did I do bad?? Are you... gonna kill me?

SCRAGS

What?? No! You're marking your territory. That's a totally normal and healthy thing to do.

KEITH

I wouldn't be so sure about that, Scrag. This piss is thick and kinda red.

GWEN

Looks like Doinky has the UTA of UTIs.

SCRAGS

Well regardless, Doinky led us to our first solid lead! Esther, how's that tape looking?

ESTHER

It's looking like an absolute nightmare. But I'm working on it. Back in the day I used to fix cum-damaged VHS tapes at Blockbuster. This is nothing. Aaaaaand bingo.

Esther pops the tape in and fast-forwards through the previous day's footage.

GWEN

Where are all the guests? Was he just an especially shitty tiger?

KEN

Hmm. Now that you mention it, attendance is probably low because the circus is in town. Hell, that's where I'd be if I wasn't working.

KEITH

Oh my god. WHAT? ALREADY??
(whipping out his phone)
I hope there are still tickets. The Rothman and Ringting Travelling Circus is the best!

KEN

Management wouldn't want me to tell you this... but the circus is our toughest competition. Our animals are probably happier though since we don't torture them into performing deadly tricks.

KEITH

Wowww, way to ruin that for me.

ESTHER

Oh. So NOW you tell us there's an ongoing feud between the only purveyors of big cats in town!! It's like pulling teeth with you, Ken!

KEN

I didn't see how it was relevant.

GWEN

Ken. Sweetie.
(like talking to a baby)
They're called "suspects." And we determine their "motive" to "solve" the mystery. Is this your first time being a witness in a major crime?

SCRAGS

Wait. Stop the tape, Esther!

Two HOODED CAT-NAPPERS appear on the screen next to the tiger's cage, but the damaged footage makes it hard to discern any detail. They break the lock on the cage with bolt cutters and climb inside. As the tiger approaches, they shoot it with a dart and it falls to the ground.

SCRAGS (CONT'D)

Maybe this zoo-circus feud has escalated. And they've resorted to stealing your attractions to improve theirs. Ain't that right, Doinky??

They turn to Doinky who's eating a dry tape out of the piss soaked rice.

DOINKY

My tummy hurts!

SCRAGS

Oh, criminy!

ScragS tries to finger the tape out of his mouth.

KEITH

I spot two guilty parties. Meaning double trouble. Therefore, we should probably get a SECOND opinion. New plan:--

ESTHER

--Two people can work at a circus.

KEITH

(overpowering Esther with volume)

NEW PLAN: We pay a visit to my Uncle Wyatt. He's a big game hunter who tried to take me to Kenya to hunt elephants on my 8th Birthday, but my mom called him a "Pathetic Sociopath" so he ghosted us for, like, 6 years. If anyone could identify the source of this dart it's him.

GWEN

OR...we could just look up local distributors on the tranquilizer dart manufacturer's website.

Gwen starts typing on her phone.

SCRAGS

Fine, Keith. You and Gwen head to your Uncle's house and Doinky, Esther, and I will see what we can find at the circus.

KEITH

Splitting up. But keeping the power couple together. I like your style, Scrag.

GWEN

I have NO interest in meeting your Uncle. I'd rather die. Or worse, go to the circus.

KEITH

Great, it's settled.

Keith tries to put his arm around Gwen and is rebuffed.

SCRAGS

Doinky, this would be the PERFECT time to shout a quirky catchphrase!

Angle on Doinky, who has a disturbingly bulbous mass protruding from his rear.

DOINKY

My anus collapsed!!

Everyone gasps in disgust.

ESTHER

I'd wear that on a t-shirt!

ACT 2

10 EXT. CIRCUS TENT - AFTERNOON

10

Scrags and Esther approach the entrance of a big top circus tent. They are greeted by JEROME, a cheery usher.

JEROME

Step right up, folks! Here to experience an afternoon of sheer wonder?

ESTHER

If we have to. Do you take Bitcoin?

JEROME

Yes, we do. Bitcoin, litecoin, coins as big as your head! The circus industry may be dying out, but we like to stay current, *see?*

Jerome scans Esther's phone, then notices Doinky.

JEROME (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, sir, but no pets allowed.

SCRAGS

He's not a pet. He's a... service animal.

JEROME

Do you have papers? *Notarized* papers?

SCRAGS

Well, no, but I have a very serious case of self-diagnosed anxiety. Look, I promise he'll be no trouble.

JEROME

(suspicious, then)

Ok! A promise is a promise as we circus folk like to say!

Jerome unhooks a velvet rope and welcomes them in. As they pass, Doinky leans over and bites Jerome's hand.

JEROME (CONT'D)

Ow!! You *promised* me no trouble! Get out of here.

ESTHER
Can we get a refund?

JEROME
Security!!

Esther and Scraggs briskly walk away.

SCRAGGS
Gee wiz, Doinky, what'd you have to
go and do that for?

DOINKY
He had big fat sausage fingers!

Two CLOWN SECURITY OFFICERS run out of the tent. Esther and Scraggs hide behind a family photo op, and stick their faces in the cutouts. Esther is the dad, Scraggs is the mom, and Doinky is the baby. Jerome points in the direction they went and the Security Guards turn and crash into each other, falling down like it's a bit. They get up, pantomime getting into a security golf cart, and drive away in the opposite direction.

ESTHER
(trying not to move)
We gotta keep a low profile.

PHOTOGRAPHER (O.S.)
Say cheese!

Camera Flash. A PHOTOGRAPHER snaps a pic of them.

11 EXT. WYATT'S HOUSE - DAY

11

Keith and Gwen walk up a long, unkempt driveway to the front door of a big musty house. Keith rings the doorbell and it makes the sound of a rifle shot and an elephant trumpeting. No answer.

GWEN
I bet Scraggs and Esther are finding
so many good content opportunities.
Meanwhile, I'm stuck here at this
gross ass house that quite frankly
does not fit my instagram
aesthetic.

Keith reaches up to the brass door knocker shaped like an elephant head and pushes in on the two tusks. A spare key pops out of its mouth.

KEITH

We'll scour through my Uncle Wyatt's weapon cache to learn more about our mystery dart. Think of it like a great adventure, babe.

Keith opens the door and it lets out a long creak.

12 INT. WYATT'S FOYER - CONTINUOUS

12

They look around the dim and cavernous entryway. Gwen pushes past Keith and begins recording herself on her phone.

GWEN

(bubbly)

Hey, guys! So we're here in this creepy old house doing some sleuthing! Isn't this fun?

(drops the act)

This really isn't enough light for a decent exposure, even with night mode.

Gwen flicks a light switch on the wall.

KEITH

Gwen, nooooo!

Keith tackles her out of the way as two dozen arrows fire at the spot where Gwen was just standing. Keith ends up laying directly on top of Gwen. She looks at Keith deeply, as her eyes begin to well up with tears.

GWEN

Keith... your chapstick is digging into my hip.

KEITH

Right... chapstick...

They climb back to their feet.

GWEN

A booby-trap! Paranoid much?

KEITH

He started doing it when I was in high school to keep me from raiding his liquor cabinet. But I was unstoppable! Back then I was called Keith the Thief.

Keith gives a disgusting wink at Gwen, grabs her by the hand and runs down the hall, Ninja warrior style, just barely avoiding obstacles. He hop-scotches past a row of enormous bear traps that snap closed as they pass. They rebound off the wall to avoid a trap door that drops open and spews 10 foot flames. Finally, they grab the chandelier and swing across a chasm to avoid a spinning saw blade pendulum. On the other end of the foyer, Keith stands with Gwen in a triumphant, but pained, pose.

KEITH (CONT'D)
 (breathing heavily)
 Easy. Peasy.

Exhaustion immediately sets in and he steadies himself on a table, triggering one last trap. The vase tips over, and a golf ball rolls out, and down a track, activating a series of Rube Goldberg contraptions. Gwen sees where this is going and pushes them one step to the left, just narrowly avoiding a net that falls where they were just standing.

GWEN
 Yah, sure, Indiana Bonehead.

The sound of a gun cocking. Keith spins around and comes face to face with the business end of a blunderbuss aimed by a grizzled old man.

WYATT
 I wasn't expecting company.

13 EXT. CIRCUS BACKSTAGE - LATER

13

Performers are coming and going, warming up, and chatting with each other. A FIRE BREATHER roasts a turkey leg by blowing flames on it and then takes a bite. A HIGH FLYER walks past gossiping to a SWORD SWALLOWER.

HIGH FLYER
 If Julie doesn't shut up about her podcast, I'm literally going to drop her on her head. And it won't be an accident this time.

The Sword Swallower tries to nod in agreement, but gags on the sword that's down their throat. Scraggs and Esther duck behind a trailer.

SCRAGGS
 Damn, we stick out like sore thumbs back here!

Esther grabs some disguises off of a passing rack of costumes. They wrap themselves in a sequined scarf and put a clown nose on Scrag.

SCRAGS (CONT'D)

This can't possibly work.

A UNICYCLIST rides past them.

UNICYCLIST

Hey, Rod. Hey, Monica.

ESTHER

Let's split up and see if we can find that tiger. Why don't you and Doinky look by the *Wheel* of Death over there and I'll go check by that *Cage* of Death.

They split, but Doinky stays frozen between them.

SCRAGS

Doinky, c'mon. What's wrong?

DOINKY

(whining)

But what about mom?

SCRAGS

Huh?

DOINKY

Esthy... is my mom...

SCRAGS

Ha, no Doinky. Esther's more like a kooky cousin!

DOINKY

Mommmmmmyyy.

ESTHER

Scrag, I'm gonna need you to either make it stop or slit my throat right here and now.

SCRAGS

Just a little separation anxiety. C'mon buddy!

He picks up Doinky, and begins a snoop ballet, gracefully transitioning from one hiding spot to the next. They twirl behind a popcorn cart and appear on the other side snacking on some popcorn.

They aikido roll over to a corndog stand and fluidly house a corndog in one bite. Finally, Scrag spins around a Cotton Candy machine, covering himself in fluffy pink candy, which he promptly slurps up in one fell swoop. Scrag licks his fingers and surveys some tents and trailers.

SCRAGS (CONT'D)

Alright, Doinky, looks like we just need to get over to--Doinky?

Scrag realizes he's holding an empty harness. Doinky is gone!

14

INT. WYATT'S HALLWAY - SIMULTANEOUS

14

Keith and Gwen casually stroll down the hallway with Keith's UNCLE WYATT, who is resetting bear traps.

KEITH

Were those saw-blades new, Uncle Wyatt?

WYATT

Yup! Never get to see 'em in action though. Amazon Delivery guys don't make it past the bear traps. But I like to keep things interesting. Speaking of which...

Wyatt's eyes dart to Gwen.

KEITH

Oh right. Uncle Wyatt, this is the love of my--

GWEN

I'm his work acquaintance, Gwen Barrywood. We were hoping to talk to you about the big game trade, pick your brain on ammunition, and see if you had a pastel colored wall that might photograph well. Preferably with natural light.

WYATT

Anything for my most favorite nephew, lil' Kiki!

Wyatt ruffles Keith's hair. Keith, embarrassed, changes the subject to the huge variety of taxidermy animal busts lining the walls. Some of them are famous cartoon animals.

KEITH

Sooo, in addition to his excellent traps, Uncle Wyatt was a world class huntsman.

GWEN

You don't hunt anymore?

WYATT

With regulations increasing every year, it's become harder to hunt exotic animals in the wild. We used to take to the plains and slaughter everything in sight in a furry bloodbath. How we would laugh! But the private hunting parks have taken all the joy out of it.

GWEN

Any chance the animals in those private parks are stolen?

WYATT

Oh, very likely, but you quickly learn to keep your trap shut or risk becoming the most dangerous game yourself...

(long pause)

Because, they'd kill you.

KEITH

(joking)

Not unless you killed them first, right?

Wyatt nods gravely as they walk past the bust of a human head mounted on the wall.

GWEN

(changing the subject)

I can't help but notice that you don't have any lions or tigers.

WYATT

Ah yes, big cats. My white whale. Metaphorically, speaking of course! I've slaughtered countless whales. But lions and tigers were the ones that got away. Speaking of which, Kiki, glad to see you're finally over that gal you were obsessed with in high school.

KEITH

Um... yeah. We don't need to get into--

GWEN

Oh, I'd like to hear more.

WYATT

What was her name? Tiffany? Daphne?

KEITH

Taphany! Her name was Taphany.

WYATT

Kiki, was *obsessed* with Taphany and when she dumped him it broke his little heart. Couldn't get him to stop crying for months. Completely destroyed him and some of my favorite rifles.

GWEN

Of course. Dermatologists say that tears are incredibly corrosive.

WYATT

Ooh she's sharp! Kiki, this one's a keeper. That Taphany girl was a total airhead, though she did cut a nice figure. And actually, Ms. Barrywood, you quite resemble her. Hell, you could even be her mother!

Gwen is immediately irritated.

WYATT (CONT'D)

Ah, the ghosts of our past! They haunt us forever, don't they?

Wyatt turns to look back down the long hallway at all the creatures he's killed. A gust of wind rushes through the hall, echoing with the voices of the dead animals.

GHOST ANIMALS

(whispered)

Murderer...

15

EXT. CIRCUS BACKSTAGE - SIMULTANEOUS

15

Scrags is searching for Doinky in a full blown panic. Behind a crate, he spots Doinky walking up to IDENTICAL TWIN JUGGLERS throwing clubs to each other.

SCRAGS
 (whispering)
 Doinky, get back here!

JUGGLER #1
 Aww, hey little friend.

JUGGLER #1 puts down his clubs and goes to pet Doinky... who promptly bites his hand.

JUGGLER #1 (CONT'D)
 Ahh!! My hand!! I'll never juggle again.

JUGGLER #2
 Finally, I'm going solo!

Scrag runs out into the open and snatches up Doinky. But they are immediately spotted by the Clown Security Officers.

SECURITY OFFICER
 There they are!

The Clowns run towards them, but Esther darts out in front, closes an invisible door, locks it, and swallows an invisible key. The Clowns bang on the "door," unable to get through. Esther, Scrag, and Doinky run around the corner to the animal cages.

DOINKY
 You saved me, Mommy!!

ESTHER
 Sorry to burst your bubble, but I had my tubes tied at 20.

They begin poking around a large empty cage. Inside are broken chairs covered in claw marks. Signs of a tiger. But curiously, they also find black and orange paint residue and foot-long strips of fur.

The Ringleader, MIMI, approaches, fully decked out in a crimson tailcoat and bowler hat.

MIMI
 Hey, this area is closed to the general public!

She notices their ridiculous getups.

MIMI (CONT'D)
 And we don't hold open auditions.

ESTHER

Hi. We're not here to audition.
Although I can do that thumb trick.
(they do it)
Anyway, could you point us towards
whoever's in charge here?

Mimi begins to point away. She then slowly brings her arm
back around to point at herself, grinning slyly.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Cute.

MIMI

When your family's been in the
circus for generations like mine
has, you can't help but clown
around.

A MUSICIAN with a handful of cymbals drops them, making a
"Bad Dum Tsh" sound.

MIMI (CONT'D)

I'm Mimi: ringleader and owner. But
seriously, you can't be here during
showtime.

ESTHER

We know, we know. Security's
already after us, it's cool. I'm
Esther and this is Scrag.

Doinky jumps on a beach ball and tries to balance, but falls
flat on his face.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

And that pitiful rat is Doinky.
We're investigating a tiger thief
in the area. Wondering if you've
seen anything suspicious, like that
right there.

They point to the empty tiger-sized animal cage.

SCRAGS

We'll need to see the current
registration for your tigers,
wherever they are, so we can
confirm they aren't stolen.

Mimi looks nervously towards the empty cage.

MIMI

Why don't you step into my office?

16 INT. WYATT'S DEN - SIMULTANEOUS

16

Wyatt stands behind a counter, polishing a shotgun.

WYATT

So, what can I do you for? 22mm
long rifle? 9mm short? Novelty
sized ACME bullet?

KEITH

We're actually looking for
information about this.

Keith plunks the tranquilizer dart from the zoo on the counter. Wyatt examines it with an oversized magnifying glass.

WYATT

Ah yes, looks like you've got
yourselves a Big Honkin' Whopper
Popper there. Heavy duty shit. You
can buy these at any Meijer,
Target, or Walmart. Have you called
them to cross reference their
recent sales?

GWEN

(rolling eyes at Keith)
Well, I suggested that, but Kiki
said he had a better idea. So, how
long would this dart knock out a
tiger for?

WYATT

Long enough to maul 'em, haul 'em,
and stuff 'em. Around 12-18 hours.
But to land one, you'd have to get
real close to those ferocious
felines. This baby can't fly much
further than I can.

(clarifying)

Oh, I'm on a no-fly list.

(then)

Point is, whoever shot this dart
either knows animals, works with
animals, or hunts animals.

GWEN

(sarcastically)

Well that certainly narrows it
down. Looks like we've finally
blown this case wide open!

The shotgun Wyatt is polishing suddenly goes off, blowing a puff of smoke into Keith's face. When it clears, Keith is covered in soot, with his hair shooting backwards.

WYATT
(chuckling)
Now, imagine if that was loaded!

17 INT. CIRCUS OFFICE - SIMULTANEOUS

17

The trailer is full of circus equipment and the walls are adorned with memorabilia. Esther wobbles back and forth on a small balance board. Scraggs bounces gently on a ball with Doinky on his lap. A CHIMPANZEE sits in a corner of the office, doing a crossword puzzle.

MIMI
Rothman and Ringting isn't the operation it used to be, but as long as there are ladies and gentleman, boys and girls, children of all ages who still want to be amazed, the show will go on!
(suddenly, with flourish)
To business! I don't have any paperwork for you. Because we stopped performing with animals when I became ringmaster.

SCRAGGS
Then what's with the cage filled with animal fur?

ESTHER
This some kind of la cage aux fur...?

MIMI
Exactly, its faux fur. We don't own performing animals anymore!

ESTHER
What about the chimp?

MIMI
Oh, Reginald?

REGINALD
I do payroll.

SCRAGGS
So, the paint and fur are just--?

MIMI

Theatrical magic, my dear boy. See for yourself.

Out the window, PERFORMERS in patterned leotards rearrange themselves into different animals with amazing dexterity.

MIMI (CONT'D)

Our secret? French Canadians. Supple and slippery as silk. They can use their bodies to form any shape imaginable; Tiger, Giraffe, Elephant, Bear. Even a hybrid of all four: A Ti-giralephant-bear. They're so good that audiences forget they're watching 6 garçons from Montreal. Plus, they're cheaper to feed than the big cats were.

CHEF (O.S.)

Poutine is ready!

The performers all cartwheel and backflip away.

SCRAGS

So, looks like you wouldn't have a use for a stolen tiger, then.

Esther suddenly convulses and falls off the balance board.

ESTHER

Whoa. Brain blast! Mimi, how much advertising have you been doing? Do most people know you're in town? Has an influencer ever done spon for your show?

MIMI

We don't have much of an advertising budget these days, but word of mouth works alright for us.

ESTHER

Hmm, maybe we can help each other out...

ACT 3

18 INT. CIRCUS TENT - LATER THAT NIGHT

18

Gwen signs autographs for a line of fans as guests clear out from the evening show. A FATHER snaps a picture of Gwen posing with his DAUGHTER.

FATHER
Say Solve It Squad!!

GWEN DAUGHTER
Solve It Squad! Solvent Smog!

FATHER
Wow. Glad we caught your insta post, Gwen! You sure gave a single dad a reason to put on pants and do something nice for his little girl!

GWEN
I just couldn't stand to think of anyone in town missing the rare and nearly-extinct Canadian Lion!!

She gestures towards a cage in the center of the tent. Inside is a REALLY bizarre looking "Lion." Its limbs are lumpy and baggy and its movements are jerky and erratic.

FATHER
I can see why. It looks very... ill.

GWEN
Well, as my character Officer Colleen Maxwell MD was wont to say, "I don't know whether to arrest it or diagnosis it."

FATHER
My ex-wife LOVED you in that show!

He gives a too-big laugh. Gwen joins, uncomfortably. Over by the cage, Keith is setting a net trap and watching Gwen intensely.

KEITH
Guys, when was the last time you remember me telling a REALLY funny joke that made Gwen laugh?

The head of the Lion turns to its butt and speaks.

SCRAGS

You know what? I'd feel better if we just reviewed the plan one more time.

The butt chimes in.

ESTHER

Please for the love of a non-existent God, NO. I WILL piss in this suit if I have to hear it again. That's a threat.

SCRAGS

It's just, if Doinky can't fit in the suit with us, I want to make sure he's going to be ok!

Angle on Doinky in an animal carrier strapped to the back of the motorbike next to Keith. He's gnawing at his tail and looks up, ripping off a huge portion of it. He swallows.

DOINKY

It'll grow back!

KEITH

Relax Scrag. This little D-bag is safe with me.

He reaches over to the carrier and notices that Doinky isn't inside. He spins around and spots Doinky about to chew on a frayed electrical wire. Gwen snatches Doinky up and returns him to Keith.

GWEN

Alright. So what's my role?

KEITH

Ok, let's review. After all, the plan is impressive and complex. Like Ocean's 12!

As Keith explains, his fantasy of the whole plan going off without a hitch plays out.

KEITH (CONT'D)

Scrag and Esther are hiding in the lion costume in human centipede child's pose--

SCRAGS

Gross.

ESTHER

Kinky.

KEITH

--while Doinky and I are waiting patiently on the motorbike, hidden from view. I'm gently revving the engine and making that baby purr. My hair is perfectly coiffed. I don't have time for helmets--

DOINKY

I had to wear a helmet once when I scratched my head till my skull shown.

KEITH

--Once the thieves make their way to the cage and onto the hidden net trap, I twist that torque and pull a sick wheelie across the bigtop, tightening a rope that tips over this bucket, which pours water down a twisty slide, creating a current for that tiny sailboat, so the single needle on its bow pricks the butt of the narcoleptic clown, who startles awake and opens the tubes connecting the helium tank to a bunch of balloons that fill up, lifting the cage formed by a dozen French Canadians far into the sky, setting Reginald free, who walks over and flips the lever, triggering the trap!! Uncle Wyatt would be so proud.

GWEN

So, my part is... after the monkey?

Reginald glares at her.

KEITH

Gwen, you have the most important job of all: Filming this whole thing so we can go viral on TikTok. And I don't want to risk losing... the footage.

SCRAGS

Doinky! I'm gonna be right here in the cage, ok? You'll be able to see me the whole time!

DOINKY

And if anything unusual happens, I'll be sure to scream!

SCRAGS

Don't do that. Just stay quiet, ok?

DOINKY

Yup! Unless I'm triggered by any sudden movements, sounds, or unfamiliar faces. *Then* I scream!

ESTHER

No, you idiot. That'll blow our cover.

One of the French Canadians who makes up the human cage speaks up.

FRENCH CANADIAN

So, eh, do we have a time for a smoke before showtime?

19 INT. CIRCUS TENT - LATER THAT NIGHT

19

Everything is quiet. The "Lion" is "sleeping" in its cage. Inside the suit, Scraggs scrolls through photos on his phone. Behind him, Esther draws a stupid face on Scraggs's ass with a sharpie. Scraggs finally finds a cute photo of Doinky... where he's only a little blurry.

At the other end of the tent, Doinky is laser-focused on his Dad in the Lion suit. He has a crazed look in his eyes. Keith sits on the motorbike, looking at Gwen's Instagram. He leaves a comment of two heart eyes emoji. A new comment appears from "SadDad77" with THREE heart eyes emoji. Keith glares.

At the top of the bleachers, Gwen considers both comments from Keith and SadDad77. She clicks SadDad's profile. It's the FATHER from earlier and, honestly, he doesn't look half bad. On a whim, she "likes" his most recent post.

20 INT. FATHER'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

20

The FATHER lounges on recliner in a schlubby robe and boxers, staring longingly at Gwen's "like." He glances around to see if he's alone and slowly moves in to kiss Gwen's picture on his phone screen. His daughter appears in the doorway behind him.

DAUGHTER

Daddy?

Startled, he throws his phone and shatters a window.

21 INT. CIRCUS TENT - CONTINUOUS

21

Two cloaked CAT-NAPPERS slink into the big top and creep toward the edge of the trap. Keith pockets his phone, and preps for his big moment.

Scrags finishes his photo caption and posts it. DING. Gwen has immediately liked the photo. The notification echoes through the tent. The Cat-Nappers stop in their tracks. Scrags tenses up and holds his breath. Then, he farts... right into Esther's face.

ESTHER

(loud whisper)

UGH. Did you really just butt burp into my face?

Esther shuffles around, wiggling the butt of the Lion. Cat-Napper #1 takes out a tranquilizer gun. Doinky begins a low growl.

KEITH

Doinky, chill.

Cat-Napper #1 shoots the butt of the lion.

ESTHER

Ow! What the fuck??

Doinky starts barking and scratching VICIOUSLY at the sides of his carrier. Keith tries to stop him, but Doinky bites through the mesh and charges at the Cat-Nappers.

KEITH

Doinky!! Bad! Sit! SHIT!

Keith accidentally hits the throttle on the bike, hard, and pops a wheelie, which launches the bike into the air before crashing down onto the ground with a huge cloud of dust. The force of the fall immediately collapses Keith's complicated Rube Goldberg machine. Hearing the noise, Gwen finally looks up from her phone at the chaos. Reginald the chimpanzee sits atop a pile of French Canadians, eating a banana, and reading *An Actor Prepares*.

GWEN

Amateur.

Cat-Napper #1 steps closer to inspect the talking Lion. Esther unzips the butthole, squeezes their torso through, and grabs the dart to check the label.

ESTHER

500 mg? Do I look like a squirrel
to you?

Scrags pokes his head out of the Lion's mouth.

SCRAGS

Get 'em, Doinky!!

Doinky rushes at Cat-Napper #2 who makes a **hand gesture** that IMMEDIATELY stops him in his tracks. He sits and begins licking his wiener.

SCRAGS (CONT'D)

Aaaaahhh, shit.

Cat-Napper #2 runs off, leaving Cat-Napper #1 staring down Esther. They shoot Esther with another dart.

ESTHER

I think you underestimate the
tolerance I've built up.

They shoot Esther again.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Is there even anything in these?

Again.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

This is like acupuncture for me.

They rapid fire their rounds.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Wait. Hold on...

(wavering, then)

Sorry, I thought I was gonna
sneeze.

Just then, the net is triggered, snatching Cat-Napper #1 up. Gwen has pulled the lever. She walks over to the dangling criminal.

GWEN

(in her *Officer Dr. Cop MD*
voice)

"Looks like you need a prescription
for... a stint in the slammer."

REGINALD

Boo!

22 INT. CIRCUS TENT - LATER

22

Two POLICE OFFICERS, Mimi, and the Squad stand around masked Cat-Napper #1, who's still tangled in the net.

SCRAGS

Alright, pal, time to let the cat out of the bag.

He whips off the mask.

SQUAD

HOLY CRAP, IT'S--... the guy from the zoo!

KEN

I have a name! It's Ken!

KEITH

Not anymore. Now, you're just another crime statistic to feed into the system!! Consider the choices that brought you to this point! Was it worth it?? WAS IT?!

GWEN

Someone's a little testy because their P-L-A-N didn't work out.

ESTHER

I should've known that whole "Zoo vs. Circus" thing was bullshit. It even *sounds* like a made up feud. Like "Pillow vs. Curtain" or "Mayonnaise vs. Dua Lipa."

SCRAGS

But why steal your own tiger? Like, you work at the Zoo, man. You can pet it anytime you want.

KEN

I don't give a shit about the animals, I was just trying to make a quick buck, so I could quit this stupid job.

POLICE OFFICER #1

Well, good news: you've been hired... at prison! The hours are long and the pay is shit. We'll take it from here.

SCRAGS

But officers, we still need him to give up the identity of his accomplice.

POLICE OFFICER #2

Don't you worry. We got ways of making him talk.

The Officers escort Ken out. After a moment, Police Officer #1 steps back in.

POLICE OFFICER #1

He's talking about torture. We're gonna torture the living shit out of this guy. You got that, right?

SCRAGS/KEITH/GWEN/ESTHER

Oh yeah, loud and clear./For sure, for sure, for sure./I was trying to pretend like I didn't hear it./There is a systematic problem with law enforcement in this country.

He exits and the Squad is left milling about.

SCRAGS (CONT'D)

1 outta 2 bad guys caught! Not bad! 50% success rate!!

GWEN

That would be "rotten" on the FreshMeter.

ESTHER

Scrags. We all agree. And I hate to be the bearer of bad news--

SCRAGS

Then don't be!

ESTHER

--but also I don't care what anyone thinks, so: Doinky is a liability.

SCRAGS

(he knows they're right)
Whaaaaaat?

GWEN

C'mon Scrags. All day he's just been a huge obstacle.

KEITH

Gwen's right. If he hadn't ruined my rock-solid plan, we'd be TikTok famous right now.

ESTHER

This just isn't gonna work.

Scrags takes a moment to consider. He lifts up Doinky and looks him square in the eyes. Doinky is making the absolute CUTEST face. This is gonna be hard.

23

EXT. PUPPY RANCH - THE NEXT DAY

23

The Squad waits impatiently as Scrags kneels next to Doinky. Rhoda stands across from them, rapidly petting a dog that may or may not be dead. A little mutt is tearing away at the hem of her dress. Another is humping her calf.

RHODA

It's like I always say, "Dogs are for everybody. But not everybody... is a noble person who can care for another living creature."

DOINKY

Are you mad at me, Dad?

SCRAGS

Nooo. Doinky... I ain't mad. I never been mad. 'An I ain't now. That's a thing I want you to know.

DOINKY

What about mommy? Does she hate me?

Scrags turns to Esther who is nodding their head "yes."

SCRAGS

...No.

A loud roar comes from behind the barn. A bunch of dogs run around the corner and begin barking incessantly at Keith.

RHODA

Got a Great Dane out back squirting out a litter of 12... Never fuck with a girlboss, and all.

GWEN

Preach, girl!

The barking gets louder and angrier.

KEITH
 (terrified of the dogs)
 Scrag, can we wrap this up...

SCRAGS
 Sure, one sec.
 (collecting himself)
 Doinky, I want you to look out past
 that... dog eating a pigeon head
 over there... and lemme tell you
 about us someday... We're gonna get
 a little place...

DOINKY
 How's it gonna be?

SCRAGS
 We'll have a cow... And maybe some
 pigs and a chicken. And down the
 flat we'll have a little patch
 of... alfafa.

DOINKY
 For the rabbits?

RHODA
 Is this guy about to shoot my dog
 or something?

More dogs arrive to bark at Keith.

SCRAGS
 That's right, Doinky. For the
 rabbits.

DOINKY
 And... And I'm a rabbit, right
 Scrag?

SCRAGS
 No. You're... you're a dog, Doinky.
 (then)
 You can almost see this place,
 can't you?

Keith is now completely surrounded by barking dogs.

KEITH
 Am I the only one who feels
 straight up unsafe right now?

SCRAGS
 We just can't go there... right
 now... Ok?

DOINKY

Wha--? What did I do?

ESTHER

SCRAGS. PLEASE END THIS.

SCRAGS

Nothing! It's nothing you did. It's just... who you are...

The barking has reached a climax.

RHODA

Mushu, Dolemite, James "Thunder"
Early! Take a chill pill, will ya?

Rhoda does a simple **hand gesture** that immediately causes all the dogs, including Doinky, to stop barking and start licking their private parts. Scrag catches it instantly.

RHODA (CONT'D)

(to the dogs)

Can't you see a man's trying to
break a dog's heart right now?

SCRAGS

Thank you Rhoda... That sure was a
nifty trick.

RHODA

First thing I teach the little
heathens when they land: Shut your
yap and beat your meat.

SCRAGS

You teach it to all the animals
staying here?

RHODA

Sure do!

SCRAGS

What about the Zoo's missing tiger
you're hiding out back?

RHODA

Crap.

SCRAGS

Freeze, Rhoda!!

She immediately bolts across the yard. Scrag pulls out his gun and aims. BANG! Rhoda hits the dirt hard.

Scrags looks at his gun, bewildered. He peers back to see Esther twirling the tranquilizer dart gun like a gunslinger.

ESTHER

Lightweight.

Esther shoots a dart into their neck, winks at Scrags, and lets out a sigh of relief. All the dogs begin to wander over to Rhoda's body and sniff it.

SCRAGS

She really had me with the whole "animal lover" act.

KEITH

I, for one, saw right through it.

GWEN

I mean, this place might as well be a zoo.

ESTHER

Kinda obvious in retrospect.

More animals come from the backyard and begin to sniff and piss on Rhoda.

SCRAGS

Guys, when you think about it, without Doinky knowing that command back at the circus... we never would've caught Rhoda! Maybe he's not so useless after all!

Doinky waddles over to the gang, a long turd dangling from his butt and dragging across the ground.

DOINKY

Dad? Can I have an idea for the next case?

SCRAGS

Let's hear it, bud!

DOINKY

Well, Rhoda's been watching these YouTube videos about 9/11. And they make some good points! I mean, THINK about it! There's NO way jet fuel could melt the steel in the World Trade Center and the Israeli government...

Doinky continues rambling about conspiracy theories, dragging his poop with him. Scraggs stands up and solemnly looks at the group.

SCRAGGS

You're right, he's useless.

ESTHER

'Atta boy.

The TIGER from the zoo saunters out from behind the barn. The other animals scatter as it approaches Rhoda's body. The Squad watches, then their eyes go wide.

KEITH

OH, SHIT! It's got her foot!

SCRAGGS

Call Animal Control!!

Keith and Scraggs run off. Esther is laughing uncontrollably. Gwen, staring in horror, slowly pulls out her phone to film a TikTok.

END OF EPISODE