

# shaggy dog stories

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**O**ne kind of American humor is the “shaggy dog story” a long-winded tale that gradually works up to a surprise ending—an ending that is outside the limits of reality or logic.

The *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* defines a shaggy dog story as “a long, drawn-out anecdote depending for humor upon an absurd or anticlimactic punch line.” The *World Book Dictionary* describes a shaggy dog story as “a story which relates, usually at great length, a number of unimportant incidents in building up to an unexpected or ridiculous climax.”

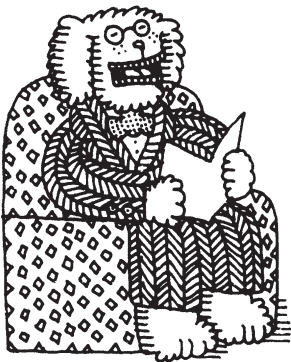
One writer has compared life to the pattern of a shaggy-dog story: both have a lead-in, build-up and let-down. “Nothing turns out as expected, and in the end, the joke is on us” (Botkin, *Treasury of American Anecdotes*, p. 256).

Shaggy dog stories were reportedly told as long ago as the days of ancient Greece, but Americans tend to think of them as their own because people like Abraham Lincoln and Davy Crockett told so many of them.

**TEACHING TECHNIQUES.** Shaggy dog stories can be used for traditional listening comprehension activities or for oral practice involving retelling and dramatization. Before playing the recording (or reading the story themselves), teachers should treat difficult vocabulary items and provide background information that might help their students make the transition from the sensible world to the nonsense world of shaggy dogs.

Each of the ten stories included on pages 163-168 of this section can be used as a strip story activity. Teachers should cut each sentence into a strip and give one to each of the students. The students have one minute to silently read and memorize the sentence that they have been given before returning the strip to the teacher. Then within their group, they share their sentences with one another. Collectively they try to reconstruct the story. Once they have done this, the students recite their sentences (as they recall them) in the order they think most logical. The rest of the class and the teacher will determine if the group has put the sentences together correctly.

## TEN SHAGGY DOG STORIES



### THE INTELLIGENT DOG

I'm going to tell you about an extraordinary thing that happened the other day. The day before yesterday, about eight o'clock at night, a young woman approached the box office<sup>1</sup> of the best movie theater in the city. She had with her an enormous dog with a beautifully groomed coat.<sup>2</sup> She bought two tickets and went toward the door, followed by her dog. The manager of the theater spoke to her, saying:

**Manager:** I'm sorry, miss, but dogs aren't allowed in this theater.

**Girl:** But I have a ticket for him.

**M:** I'm very sorry, but animals aren't permitted.

**G:** You don't understand. This is a special case. My dog is so well trained and so intelligent that he's almost human.

**M:** I see that you have an exceptional animal, but...

**G:** I promise you that if there is any problem we'll leave the theater immediately. I assure you that this dog isn't like any other dog you've ever seen.

**M:** Well,<sup>3</sup> all right. I'll let you go in, since the theater is almost empty tonight. Nevertheless, your dog will have to behave himself, or you will have to leave.

Several hours go by, and now the people are leaving the theater. The manager sees the girl with her dog.

**M:** I congratulate you. You were right; your dog behaved very well. I've been watching him, and it's amazing how quiet he was.

**G:** I told you that he's well trained and very intelligent.

**M:** He certainly is. It even seemed as if he was enjoying the movie.

**G:** Oh, he did enjoy it. He liked the film very much. However, he liked the book much better.<sup>4</sup>

### THE MOST AMAZING ACT IN THE WORLD

**Peter:** Hello, John. What are you doing here?

**John:** Hi, Peter. I've come to see Mr. Brilliant.

**P:** Mr. Brilliant, the famous theater agent?<sup>5</sup>

**J:** The same.<sup>6</sup>

**P:** Then you've finally perfected<sup>7</sup> your act?

**J:** Yep,<sup>8</sup> after two years of hard work, at last I have done it! I've finally succeeded in training an ant.

**P:** So you've trained an ant! Amazing!

**J:** I have worked sixteen hours a day on this act. But Little Andy is sensational...

**P:** Yes, it's worth all that hard work to produce an act like that, my friend! Just think! You're the first man in history who has trained an ant.

**J:** I'm sure Little Andy will soon be known throughout the whole world.

**P:** You're a lucky man. You'll be famous. You'll be rich.

**Secretary:** Excuse me, Mr. Miller, you can go into Mr. Brilliant's office now.

1. **box office:** a small office (in a theater, stadium, etc.) where tickets of admission are sold. 2. **beautifully groomed coat:** the hair or fur of an animal that has been carefully cleaned and brushed. 3. **Well:** a word used to introduce a remark, resume the thread of a conversation, or simply gain time to collect one's thoughts. 4. **He liked the film... he liked the book much better.** When a person has seen a moving picture that has been made from a popular book (having read the book earlier), he often comments, "I liked the movie, but I liked the book better." 5. **theater agent:** a person who acts as a representative for actors and other performers in obtaining sponsors and occasions for their performances. 6. **The same:** Yes, that very person. 7. **perfected:** Notice that the verb *perfect* is stressed on the second syllable, unlike the adjective, which has a first-syllable stress. 8. **Yep:** yes (slang).

- J:** Thank you. (*Pause.*) Oh, miss, Mr. Brilliant isn't at his desk.
- S:** He's in the other office. He'll be back right away.
- J:** Look, Peter, this is perfect! I'll get Little Andy's act ready while Mr. Brilliant is out of the room.
- P:** Good idea! He'll be surprised when he sits down at his desk and sees your ant doing his act.
- J:** O.K. Little Andy is ready to begin. First, he'll stand up on his front feet on top of his little ball.
- P:** Amazing! Can he really do that?
- J:** Sure. And that's not all! He waves a flag with his hind feet at the same time.
- P:** Incredible! But...I can't see what he's doing.
- J:** Oh...I almost forgot the magnifying glass. With the magnifying glass you can see the whole thing and really enjoy his act.
- P:** O.K. Where's the glass?
- J:** Let's see...it was here in the suitcase...
- Brilliant:** Good afternoon, gentlemen. What can I do for you?
- J:** Good afternoon, Mr. Brilliant. I'm John Miller. I'm here to show you the most amazing act in the world!
- B:** Marvelous! Show me what you have.
- J:** All right! Take this magnifying glass...
- B:** Oh! ... uh ... there's an ant on my desk ... I'll get him ... (*slap!*)
- J:** Ohhh! Nooooo!...
- B:** There! I got it.<sup>10</sup> And now, my friend, let's see this amazing act!
- J:** Ooohhhh!
- C:** I'm still not sure how it happened. You know how shy I am with girls. I guess I got flustered<sup>12</sup> when I was with her.
- H:** Yes, I know you're shy when you're with girls.
- C:** Well, I finally managed<sup>13</sup> to get up enough nerve<sup>14</sup> to ask her to dance. But I couldn't say a word to her. Nothing came to me.<sup>15</sup>
- H:** Man! I would have thought of *something* to talk about!
- C:** When the music stopped, I was able to say a few words to her.
- H:** But you didn't ask her name?
- C:** I tried to...Listen to what we said to each other, and then maybe you can understand why I didn't get her name.<sup>16</sup>
- C:** Thank you very much for the dance.
- Girl:** You're welcome. I enjoyed it very much, but now I must go.
- C:** Oh...uh...miss!
- G:** Yes?
- C:** Can I call you tomorrow?
- G:** Of course, if you want to.
- C:** Will you give me your phone number?
- G:** You can find it in the telephone directory.
- C:** But...uh...uh...I don't know your name.
- G:** You can find my name in the telephone directory too! Goodbye!

### THE UNKNOWN GIRL

- Henry:** Hello, Charles.
- Charles:** How goes it, Henry?<sup>11</sup>
- H:** Fine, thanks. But what's the matter with you?
- C:** Oh, nothing. I was thinking about what happened to me at Peter's party.
- H:** Oh? What happened?
- C:** I met the most beautiful girl in the world.
- H:** Really? What's her name?
- C:** Her name? Her name! I wish I knew!
- H:** Do you mean to tell me that you don't even know her name? How can that be?

### THE HUNTER AND THE LION

- When I was in Africa last year, a man told me about an incredible experience. The conversation went something like this:
- Hunter:** The other day the most extraordinary thing happened to me!
- Tourist:** I suppose that you professional hunters have interesting experiences everyday.
- H:** I'm not a professional hunter; quite the contrary. My sport is to shoot at fixed<sup>17</sup> targets, a great distance away.
- T:** That seems like the best way to learn to shoot well.
- H:** But it didn't turn out to be.<sup>18</sup> I've decided to quit hunting animals and go back to my own country.

9. **I'll get him:** I'll catch (or trap or kill) him (in this case, kill the ant). 10. **I got it:** I killed the ant. 11. **How goes it?** An informal greeting, meaning "How is everything with you?" 12. **got flustered:** became nervous and confused. 13. **managed:** was able (by making an effort). 14. **get up enough nerve:** become bold enough. 15. **nothing came to me:** nothing occurred to me; nothing came into my mind to say. 16. **get her name:** learn her name; find out what her name was. 17. **fixed:** stationary, not movable. 18. **it didn't turn out to be:** it didn't have that result; it didn't prove to be so.

- T:** Oh, why?
- H:** I'll tell you. The other morning<sup>19</sup> I was walking through the jungle, and suddenly the blood froze in my veins!<sup>20</sup>
- T:** What happened?
- H:** Less than three meters away, hidden in the grass, was an enormous lion. With a terrible roar, he leaped toward me with a great bound.<sup>21</sup>
- T:** No!
- H:** I kneeled down, aimed my rifle, and shot—boom!—but as I had no practice in shooting at moving targets at such a short distance, I didn't hit him.
- T:** And you're still alive!
- H:** Only by the grace of God. You see, the lion made such a long leap that he went flying over my head, and landed some five meters away from me.
- T:** What happened then?
- H:** Well, the other hunters came running, and the lion quickly disappeared into the jungle.
- T:** And this experience cured you of hunting?<sup>22</sup>
- H:** No. It was what I saw later that made me decide to quit hunting.
- T:** And what was that?
- H:** Listen ... I returned to the camp and immediately began to practice shooting at moving targets at close range,<sup>23</sup> in order to be able to kill a lion if another one should attack me. One of the boys tossed tin cans into the air and I shot at them...
- T:** Yes, yes, go on.
- H:** It was going well, and I was beginning to get my confidence back. I believed that I already had the advantage over the lion, and I was anxious to meet him again.
- T:** Then what happened that made you decide to quit hunting?
- H:** Well, I'll tell you. As soon as I stopped practicing, I heard strange sounds coming from the jungle. I heard a pum, pum, pum ...
- T:** What was it?
- H:** I looked up over the fence, and there at the edge of the jungle was the same lion.
- T:** And just seeing it was enough to make you decide to go back to your own country?

- H:** No. It was what the lion was doing that made me decide!
- T:** What was that?
- H:** Believe it or not, the lion was practicing short jumps!

### THE PRACTICAL COUNTRY BOY

It's a cold winter afternoon. A car comes along a little-traveled<sup>24</sup> road. The motor is not working well, and it finally stalls.<sup>25</sup> The automobile slows down until it stops. Two men get out, and they begin to talk:

- 1:** What happened?
- 2:** I guess we ran out of<sup>26</sup> gasoline.
- 1:** What awful<sup>27</sup> luck! It's ... it's cold here. Look, there's nothing in sight.<sup>28</sup> We can't make a phone call. And there's no traffic on this highway.
- 2:** We'll have to walk to the nearest town and find a gas station.<sup>29</sup> Let's go on ahead, because the last town we passed was more than a hundred kilometers<sup>30</sup> back.
- 1:** But how do we know there's a town any closer in this direction?
- 2:** Yeah,<sup>31</sup> you're right! We don't have any idea how long it will take us to get to the nearest town. And I don't have a map of this area.
- 1:** Well, the best thing to do is walk to the nearest town—if it isn't too far. On the other hand, if it's more than two hours away, it would be better to stay with the car.
- 2:** Wait a minute! Here comes someone. Maybe he can tell us how far it is to the nearest town. Let's wait till he gets here.
- 1:** I beg your pardon,<sup>32</sup> can you tell us how long it would take us to walk to the nearest town?
- 2:** Do you suppose he's deaf? He just stands there and looks at us without saying a word.
- 1:** Maybe he didn't hear me. I'll try to explain our problem to him again. Look, son,<sup>33</sup> if it doesn't take more than two hours to walk to the nearest town, we want to go there. If it would take longer to get there, we'll stay here in the car. Now can you please<sup>34</sup> tell us how long it will take us to walk to that town?
- 2:** He still doesn't answer. The best thing we can do is stay here.

19. **the other morning:** one morning recently (several days ago). 20. **the blood froze in my veins:** a metaphorical expression denoting great fear. 21. **bound:** leap; jump. 22. **cured you of hunting:** made you want to stop hunting completely. 23. **at close range:** at a short distance. 24. **little-traveled:** not having much traffic; not used by many travelers. (The opposite of *little traveled* is *well-traveled*, not *\*big-traveled*.) 25. **stalls:** stops working; fails to function. 26. **ran out of:** exhausted (used up) the supply of; had no more. 27. **awful:** extremely bad; terrible. 28. **in sight:** that can be seen. 29. **gas station:** place where gasoline (petrol) is sold. 30. **kilometers:** This word is often pronounced *kilometers* (with major stress on the second syllable). 31. **Yeah:** yes (informal). 32. **I beg your pardon:** excuse me (an expression used preliminary to asking someone—especially a stranger—a question). 33. **Look, son:** an opening remark used to obtain the boy's full attention. 34. **Now can you please ... :** a restrained impatient utterance introducing a repeated request.

**1:** I suppose you're right. Come on, let's go back to the car. The travelers walk quickly toward the car, which is about twenty-five steps away. The boy remains silent, gazing at them intently. He keeps watching their movements while he calls to them in a loud voice:

**Country Boy:** Hey, mister!<sup>35</sup> You can get to town in forty-five minutes!

**2:** Oh! Then you're not deaf, after all.

**C:** No, of course not!

**1:** Then why didn't you answer us before?

**C:** How could I answer you, without knowing how fast you walked?

### THE EXCESSIVE BILL

Once a man received an exorbitant<sup>36</sup> bill for legal services. He considered the amount excessive, so he went right<sup>37</sup> to the lawyer's office. As I understand it, the conversation went like this:

**Client:** Is this really my bill?

**Lawyer:** Isn't this your name on the bill?

**C:** Yes

**L:** Who handled<sup>38</sup> it?

**C:** One of your secretaries. The tall one with blonde hair and...

**L:** Yes, yes, Miss Thompson. She's very accurate. There's no doubt that the bill is correct.

**C:** But this bill is too much for the service I received from your office. I didn't even have the professional services of a real lawyer.

**L:** That doesn't have anything to do with it.<sup>39</sup> Here the charge is the same, whether I do the work personally or a secretary takes care of<sup>40</sup> a routine matter such as yours.

**C:** But... but it's too much!

**L:** Sir, you take care of your business and I'll take care of mine!

**C:** Obviously you don't know who I am!

**L:** And who are you, sir?

**C:** Now I understand this exorbitant bill.

**L:** What do you mean?

**C:** Simply that I belong to the same profession as you do.

**L:** Oh, well! Then there was an oversight.<sup>41</sup> My secretary didn't make a note of that fact. I'm very sorry about the mistake.

**C:** Oh, that's all right. It could happen to anyone.

**L:** So you're a member of my profession, eh?<sup>42</sup> Well, in that case, I'll give you a discount of seventy-five percent.

**C:** That's better! Now that the bill is for a reasonable sum, I'll pay it right away. Here's the money.

**L:** Thank you very much. I hope that you'll forgive this mistake.

**C:** Naturally.

After taking the money, the lawyer sees his client<sup>43</sup> to the door with great respect and courtesy, and says:

**L:** But tell me, friend, where is your office?

**C:** Oh, I don't have an office.

**L:** But you just told me that you had the same profession as I do.

**C:** Yes, I did. I'm a thief, too!

### THE HAYSEED AND THE TAXI DRIVER

It's a dark, cold, dreary, rainy night. The taxi driver hasn't had a single fare<sup>44</sup> all day. When he goes by the entrance of the main railway station, he sees a young man from the country<sup>45</sup> coming out, carrying two suitcases. "Aha!" thinks the taxi driver, "here's an opportunity to make up for<sup>46</sup> the rest of this bad day." He quickly parks the taxi and opens the door.

**Driver:** Where do you want to go, sir?

**Hayseed:** To the Continental Hotel.

When the taxi driver hears that, his hopes of a profitable trip vanish. The Continental Hotel is scarcely<sup>47</sup> two blocks away. The most the hayseed<sup>48</sup> will give him is fifty cents, which is the minimum fare.<sup>49</sup> Only fifty cents. What bad luck! Then the idea of taking his passenger by a longer route occurs to him—a route that goes all around the city and then back to the Continental Hotel. This he does, and after a long time the taxi finally arrives at the entrance to the hotel.

**Driver:** You owe me fifteen dollars, sir.

**Hayseed:** What? Fifteen dollars? Do you take me for<sup>50</sup> a fool? You're trying to cheat me.

35. **Hey, mister!:** an attention-getting phrase, shouted from a distance. 36. **exorbitant:** excessive; much larger than it should be.

37. **right:** immediately; straightway. 38. **handled:** dealt with; managed; took care of. 39. **doesn't have anything to do with it:** has no bearing on the matter; has no connection with it; is not a factor. 40. **takes care of:** manages; handles; deals with. 41. **oversight:** unintentional omission or careless mistake. (Note the strong stress on *was*, indicating a contrast with his previous assertion that there had been no mistake.) 42. **eh?:** an interjection added at the end of a statement to ask for confirmation or express inquiry. 43. **client:** customer of someone who performs professional services. 44. **fare:** paying passenger. (For another meaning of *fare*, see note 49.)

45. **from the country:** from a rural, or farming, area (as opposed to a city or urban area). 46. **make up for:** compensate for. 47. **scarcely:** hardly; barely; only just. 48. **hayseed:** a person from a farming area not wise in the ways of the city. (Also called *yokel* or *country bumpkin*.) People in the city sometimes try to take advantage of these rural types, who seem awkward and unsophisticated.

49. **fare:** price charged for a trip. (For a different meaning of *fare*, see note 44.) 50. **take me for:** think I am.



- D:** How dare you accuse me ...
- H:** You must think I don't know my way around.<sup>51</sup>
- D:** But...
- H:** Only last week I took a taxi from the station to this hotel. I know how much the trip should cost!
- D:** Oh ... oh ... all right. Now... now look<sup>52</sup>... uh ...
- H:** I have a notion to<sup>53</sup> call the police.
- D:** Oh, no! Please don't do that! I have a sick wife and four hungry children.
- H:** All right! This time I'll let it go.<sup>54</sup>
- D:** Oh, thank you, sir. And you're right. The trip isn't worth fifteen dollars<sup>55</sup>...
- H:** You don't have to tell me that. I may come from the country, but I'm as smart as you city folks, and I know how much the trip ought to cost.
- D:** Yes, sir.
- H:** I just won't be cheated. I won't pay you a cent more than I paid the other taxi last week ... thirteen dollars!<sup>56</sup>

### THE SECRET OF A LONG LIFE

I'm John Doe. I'm a journalist with an important magazine. The other day I saw a white-haired man sitting on the porch in front of his house. I could see the wrinkles in his face and neck, and his wrinkled hands. Articles on the secrets of living to an advanced age are always popular with our readers, so I decided to pursue<sup>57</sup> this story and discover the secret of this man's long life. As I approached him, I said:

- John:** Sir, would it bother you if I talked with you for just a moment?
- Man:** Not at all. On the contrary<sup>58</sup> it would delight me. I get very bored sitting here, even for a short time. Until a little while ago I lived a full and active life without a moment's rest.
- J:** Well,<sup>59</sup> they say that a lot of activity helps one to live a long time.
- M:** That's true, very true. I still feel very well, although my step has slowed down a little.

The conversation continued in that vein<sup>60</sup> for a while. Although I try to be very considerate about obtaining information from older people, it seemed to me that it would now be all right to begin to ask some discreet<sup>61</sup> questions.

- J:** Would it bother you if I smoked a cigarette?
- M:** Not at all.
- J:** I'd offer you one, but I suppose you probably don't smoke, or drink, or ...
- M:** On the contrary! I've always smoked my head off.<sup>62</sup> And until a little while ago I went dancing every night. And as for alcoholic drinks ...
- J:** Do you mean to say that you've done these things all your life?
- M:** Of course. Why does that surprise you so much?
- J:** I've always been told that doing those things is bad for the health.
- M:** Ridiculous!
- J:** I suppose that you have another secret... a lot of fruit... vegetables<sup>63</sup>... a lot of exercise in the fresh air...
- M:** Don't be silly! I hate exercise in the fresh air, and I don't like any kind of vegetables.
- J:** This is incredible!
- M:** What do you mean, incredible? What are you talking about?
- J:** It's just that I can't understand how you've been able to live like that and to have lasted so long. Tell me, how old are you?<sup>64</sup>
- M:** Me? I'm twenty-seven. Why?

### THE DOCTOR AND THE PAINTER

A famous painter was very worried about his sick dog, which had a badly inflamed<sup>65</sup> throat. But he knew that a doctor wouldn't examine a dog. So, in order to get a specialist to come to his house to look at his dog, he decided to pretend that he himself was the one who was ill. This artist was a very selfish man, so in spite of<sup>66</sup> the fact that it was past midnight, he called a prominent<sup>67</sup> throat specialist.<sup>68</sup>

**Doctor:** Hello! This is Dr. Knowitall.

**Artist:** Oh, Doctor Knowitall, you must come to my house immediately.

**D:** Sir! I am a famous throat specialist. I only see patients during the day, and by appointment.

**A:** But... but doctor, I'm the celebrated<sup>69</sup> portrait painter, Raphael DePictor, and this is an emergency.

51. **don't know my way around:** don't know how things are done. 52. **look:** a stalling and calming word meaning something like "Let me explain" or "Please try to understand" 53. **have a notion to:** feel inclined to; think I should 54. **let it go:** forget it; overlook it; excuse it. 55. **The trip isn't worth fifteen dollars:** notice the strong stress on *isn't*, indicating confirmation of the hayseed's implied negative statement. 56. **thirteen dollars:** Note the contrastive stress on *thirteen* (as against *fifteen* dollars). The surprise element in this story is that the hayseed ends up cheating himself. In most stories that begin as this one does, the man from the country outwits the "city slicker." 57. **pursue:** follow up; try to find out more about. 58. **on the contrary:** quite the opposite. 59. **well.** See note 3. 60. **in that vein:** in that way; along those lines. 61. **discreet:** proper; inoffensive; prudent 62. **smoked my head off:** smoked a great deal. 63. **vegetables:** Notice that this word has only three syllables. 64. **How old are you?** Note the strong stress on *are*, indicating anticipation of an answer different from what might normally be expected. (For the neutral question *How old are you?* the major stress falls on *old*.) 65. **inflamed:** red and painful. 66. **in spite of:** despite. 67. **prominent:** well-known; famous. 68. **throat specialist:** This compound noun regularly carries the strongest stress on the first element: throat specialist. 69. **celebrated:** widely known; famous.

**D:** I've had a busy day, and I have to operate<sup>70</sup> very early tomorrow morning. Can't you wait until tomorrow afternoon?

**A:** Oh, no, doctor! That would be too late. I beg you, please come right away.<sup>71</sup> And hurry!

**D:** Very well.<sup>72</sup> Since you are Raphael DePicter, I'll make an exception.<sup>73</sup> I'll come right away.

When Doctor Knowitall arrived at Mr. DePicter's house and saw that the patient was not the artist but his dog, he was furious. But immediately he thought of a plan to get even.<sup>74</sup> Hiding his anger, he said calmly:

**D:** I can't tell you right now<sup>75</sup> what's the matter<sup>76</sup> with your dog, but this medicine will alleviate it. I'll study the case and call you when I've made the diagnosis.

At midnight of the following day Mr. DePicter was awakened when his telephone rang.

**A:** Who is it?

**D:** This is Doctor Knowitall. Mr. DePicter, come quickly to my house. It's urgent!

**A:** But doctor, it's past twelve! Besides, early tomorrow morning I have an appointment to paint the portrait of a very important person. Can't you wait until tomorrow afternoon?

**D:** Oh, no! That would be too late! And what I have to say is too important to discuss over the telephone. Please hurry!

Mr. DePicter, thinking it was about his dog's illness, jumped out of bed, got dressed, and ran to the doctor's house.

**A:** Doctor, doctor! What's the matter? Why did you call me at this time of night?<sup>77</sup>

**D:** I'm very concerned about something, and I must know the answer right now.

**A:** All right, all right. What is it?

**D:** Please tell me: how much would you charge to paint my house?

**P:** Please don't try to soften the blow.<sup>81</sup> Tell me the truth, no matter what<sup>82</sup> it is.

**D:** I'm convinced that we can keep you alive. Yes, and I can even say that you are definitely going to get better!

**P:** Wonderful! But I don't understand how you can be so sure. Up till now all the other doctors have told me that the disease is fatal. How can you be sure that I'm going to get better?

**D:** I'm a scientist in the art of medicine. I've studied your case carefully.

**P:** Yes, yes ... I know all of that, doctor...

**D:** In the latest medical journals they've published the results of a long study on this disease.

**P:** And what does this study show?

**D:** In your case, I'll continue the present treatment and I'll trust in the scientifically proven statistics.

**P:** And do these statistics show that I'm going to get better?

**D:** Exactly! It's been proven that ten percent of all the patients with this disease get better.

**P:** What? Only ten percent? But that's terrible! Does that mean that I have only one chance in ten of getting better? Are you trying to deceive me when you tell me that I'm going to get better?

**D:** Calm yourself! Calm yourself! You don't understand these things. It's a scientific problem.

**P:** Please, doctor, explain.

**D:** All right. As you will see, there are other factors that have to be considered.

**P:** What other factors? Please, tell me!

**D:** Listen to me. You are the tenth patient that I have treated for this disease ...

**P:** Yes, yes, go on. So I'm the tenth patient that you've treated for this disease.... I still don't understand.

**D:** Simple mathematics, my good man. You, being the tenth, have to get well,<sup>83</sup> because the other nine died!

### THE PATIENT And The DOCTOR

A very optimistic doctor is standing beside the bed of one of his patients,<sup>78</sup> who has been in the hospital for several weeks. The worried patient asks him:

**Patient:** Am I going to get better,<sup>79</sup> doctor?

**Doctor:** As you know, you are still quite ill.

**P:** Yes, I know, doctor, I know. But please don't let me go on<sup>80</sup> with ... with false hopes. Tell me the truth!

**D:** I've been studying your case in my medical books, and I've done a lot of research on your problem.

70. **operate:** perform surgery. 71. **right away:** immediately. 72. **very well:** all right. 73. **make an exception:** be willing to do something different from the usual rule or pattern. 74. **get even:** take revenge. 75. **right now:** at this time. 76. **what's the matter:** what's wrong. 77. **at this time of night:** at this very late hour. 78. **patient:** someone under the care of a doctor. 79. **get better:** improve in health. 80. **go on:** continue. 81. **soften the blow:** make a sudden unexpected shock or calamity seem less severe. 82. **no matter what:** whatever. 83. **get well:** become well.

## Shaggy Dogs for strip stories

### A. THE POKER GAME (Strips for 9 students)

A man went away for the weekend.

He arrived rather late, after dinner.

The other members of the house party were all sitting around in the living room.

At one end of the room a game of poker was in progress.

One of the players was a dog.

After he had been introduced all around, the man said to his host:

“What a wonderfully intelligent dog to be able to play poker!”

“Well, he’s not a very good player, really, “ replied the host.

“Whenever he gets a good hand, he wags his tail.”

### B. THE DOG AND PARROT SHOW (Strips for 10 Students)

A dog and a parrot are brought into a bar one day by a regular customer.

He orders a drink and says to the dog, “Now Fido!”

And the dog starts a lively conversation with the bird.

After five minutes the performance ends.

One of the other customers turns to the owner of these remarkable creatures:

“Say! That’s really something.” He marvels.

“Well, it’s not as cute as all that,” the owner says.

“You see, the act isn’t on the level.”

“What do you mean?” the customer asks.

“The dog is a ventriloquist.”



## C. CHESS (Strips for 7 Students)

A man went to visit a friend in Chicago.

He was amazed to find him playing chess with his dog.

He watched the game in astonishment for a while.

"I can hardly believe my eyes," he exclaimed.

"That's the smartest dog I've ever seen."

"Aw, he's not so smart," the friend replied.

"I've beaten him three games out of five."

## D. THE DONKEY (Strips for 6 Students)

A professor tried to train his donkey to get along without eating.

Each day he reduced the amount of hay he gave the animal.

From one bale of hay a day, he reduced the donkey's intake to nothing.

The donkey dropped dead of starvation.

"What an irreplaceable loss!" the professor lamented.

"Just when he had learned not to eat, he died."

## E. THE LATE FRIEND (Strips for 6 Students)

A professor met his friend on the street one day.

"I heard you had died," he exclaimed.

The friend smiled at these words.

"But you see I am alive," he said.

"That's impossible," decided the professor.

"The man who told me is much more reliable than you are."

## F. THE AMAZING PARROT (Strips for 10 Students)

A man saw an amazing parrot in a pet shop one day.

It could recite lines from *Hamlet* and sing arias from *Tosca*.

Stunned by its intelligence, the man paid the shopowner \$1,000 for the remarkable bird.

When he got home, he waited for the bird to entertain him.

After one month the parrot had not uttered a word.

Upset, the man returned to the pet shop.

The shopowner reminded the man that the parrot was reciting Shakespeare when he bought it.

“I’ll take the bird back and out of the goodness of my heart I’ll even refund you half of what you paid.”

Reluctantly, the man agreed and left the shop \$500 poorer than he was one month earlier and without the bird.

Then the parrot turned to the shopowner and said, “Don’t forget, my share is one-third!”

## G. THE SMOKER (Strips for 7 students)

A tobacco-company executive traveled the country to find long-time smokers who were in good health.

He found one man who had smoked a pack a day for the last 30 years.

“If you do a commercial for us telling everyone how strong and healthy you are, we’ll pay you \$20,000.”

The smoker gladly agreed and asked when they’d do the filming.

The executive told him to be ready at 10 am the next morning.

Disappointed, the smoker shook his head.

“Sorry, I can’t do it then—I don’t stop coughing until noon.”