

# Combover

by

Michael Bettencourt

67 Highwood Terrace #2, Weehawken NJ 07086

201-770-0550 • 347-564-9998 • [michaelbettencourt@outlook.com](mailto:michaelbettencourt@outlook.com)

<http://www.m-bettencourt.com>

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## DESCRIPTION

Dual McKenzie confesses to his barber, Clay Harrison, that he is a little worried about what his wife will think about the "thinning thatch" on his head, especially since she seems to be pursuing life with a gusto that unnerves him.

## CHARACTERS

- CLAY HARRISON, male, a barber
- DUAL MCKENZIE, male, a customer—he should wear suspenders

## SETTING

- Barber shop

## MISCELLANEOUS

- Radio music in the background
- Two chairs
- A painted barber pole, on cardboard
- All actions will be mimed. A simple chair serves as the barber's chair. MCKENZIE does not need to have an actual combover; it, too, can be mimed, or a piece of fake hair glued to the pate is also effective.
- Irish accents must be used.

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*A barbershop. HARRISON is seated in one chair, the barber's chair, reading a newspaper. A second chair is nearby. MCKENZIE enters.*

HARRISON

(not looking at him)

By the sound of the shoe, and—

(checking watch)

—the time of day, I would guess it to be that faithful pup, Dual McKenzie.

MCKENZIE

Son of the sunrise himself.

HARRISON

(sweeps himself out of the chair)

Your pleasure bucket is waiting.

MCKENZIE

I'll have the usual.

(hesitates, then sits down)

The usual.

*HARRISON flings open an apron, settles it over MCKENZIE.*

HARRISON

Do I detect some hesitation?

*Does the usual barber things: tuck in the collar, get his "tools," etc.*

HARRISON

Might we be going in for something different?

MCKENZIE

Clay Harrison, how long have we known each other?

HARRISON

(starts to cut)

I started cutting your hair when you had some.

MCKENZIE

Wait. You know exactly how to cut it without my telling you.

HARRISON

You've had it done the same way every two weeks or so for years.

MCKENZIE

Or so.

HARRISON

It's not clockwork, no, not like an atomic clock. But pretty regular.

MCKENZIE

Regular. Like someone's innards.

HARRISON

Like a purgative laxative. [pronounces it as "purr-gay-tive"]

MCKENZIE

I don't want to expand the metaphor.

HARRISON

I'm sorry, my lordship. May I proceed?

*MCKENZIE gestures assent. HARRISON begins the trim.*

MCKENZIE

It's just that Joanie said something the other day, in jest, of course—

HARRISON

(stops cutting)

Joanie always means no harm. She's the most harmless woman I know. What did she say?

MCKENZIE

Barely a whisper.

HARRISON

It's the little gnats that vex the most.

MCKENZIE

She meant nothing by it.

HARRISON

But it means something by you.

MCKENZIE

We were standing in the kitchen, finishing the dishes, and she turned to me, put her hand on the top of my head, and said, "You have enough forehead for four heads." I'm bald, aren't I?

HARRISON

Not quite.

MCKENZIE

No thatch on the roof.

HARRISON

No shingle over the dingle. Unless you mean this bit of dog's tail across your pate.

MCKENZIE

(claps it back to his scalp)

That's just the point, isn't it? Looks foolish, doesn't it? What if she's thinking— well, just thinking!

HARRISON

The dilemma of the combover. All of us—well, some of you, not us richly coiffed types—have to face this dilemma at some point in life: Do I, or do I not, comb over?

(begins his trimming again)

I've seen all species of attempts, going right and going left. What some men won't do—

MCKENZIE

It's not anything to laugh at!

HARRISON

No—but it is.

*HARRISON puts his scissors and comb down to illustrate.*

HARRISON

Some have a mild-mannered combover—like you. A few wisps, like cobwebs, patiently separated to get the maximum spread. If you did a little aerial photo, you could count them like logs laid out in the middle of a field. That's really a kind of last-ditch combover, based on the hope no one will notice what's plainly before their eyes. But some of them—God's grandmother!

MCKENZIE

I hope you're enjoying this.

HARRISON

Immensely. A lot depends on where you start the combover, what latitude. Some start pretty high up, near the North Pole, so to speak, while some are equatorial! It all depends on that “laurel wreath” of fur you have to begin with. I’ve seen some combovers start lobe level and reach a good foot or so as they circumnavigate the skull. No one’s fooled at all, of course, especially in a snapping breeze when it’s flapping like a loony flag. And then there’s the partial combovers—not really combovers at all but little “fluffs” or “poofs.” I get them all the time in here, young men, in their thirties, having that little monk’s pate begin to show, that silver dollar of scalp, and they want me to inflate the surrounding hair so that it kind of domes over it. A little mousse, a slick of gel, the hope of a windless day, and the pretense goes over pretty easily. For a while. Would you like me to continue?

MCKENZIE

Cut hair and clip your tongue.

HARRISON

I will, but now I have to ask you.

MCKENZIE

What?

HARRISON

(lifting the “dog’s tail”)

What will you want me to do with this?

*MCKENZIE gets up and takes off the apron.*

HARRISON

You’ll get hair all over yourself.

*MCKENZIE gives him a dismissive gesture.*

MCKENZIE

You’ve known Joanie a long time.

HARRISON

I knew Joanie, in both senses of the word, before you knew Joanie in both senses of the word.

MCKENZIE

I know. Would she— Would she ever—

HARRISON

Want someone with a full head of hair, so to speak?

*MCKENZIE nods yes.*

HARRISON

I can't say. People change. You two have been together for many haircuts.

MCKENZIE

Her joke—

HARRISON

Was probably just a joke, the kind of thing between people who know each other very well. A trust joke.

MCKENZIE

Was she trying to tell me something, you know, under the table?

HARRISON

You'll have to sit tableside and ask her that one.

MCKENZIE

It's just that—

(indicating himself, his body, his hair)

It's not at a particularly good point.

HARRISON

C'mon, let me finish with you.

MCKENZIE

Wait. When she said—what she said, I suddenly felt two tons old. Her laugh was like granite piled on for punctuation. I looked at myself in the mirror—really, for the first time in a long memory. Kind of lumpish, you know, pearish. And these threads across a scalp that's as white as a pie top before baking. I didn't like what I saw. And why should she?

HARRISON

You're not all on your outside. Give her some credit.

MCKENZIE

The outside isn't nothing.

HARRISON

(sitting him down, re-doing the apron)

You have bran for a brain. If the outside were the only thing, we'd all be flotsam at thirty—some earlier. The best sex organ is between here—

(touches on ear)

—and here—

(touches the other ear)

It can even love your four-headed forehead.

(starts trimming again)

So, is everything okay between you and the Laughing Girl?

MCKENZIE

Things are fine—as can be expected.

HARRISON

I see.

MCKENZIE

See what?

HARRISON

Just a figure of speech, a way of agreeing.

MCKENZIE

Agreeing with what? I said as fine as can be expected. What's to agree with there?

*HARRISON uses the electric razor to trim MCKENZIE's neck; he pushes his head forward.*

HARRISON

I'm just accepting "as fine as can be expected" without knowing any of the details. Courtesy of the common tongue. So what are some of the details?

MCKENZIE

As fine as can be expected.

HARRISON

Except for your hair.

*MCKENZIE sits up abruptly; the razor nicks him.*

MCKENZIE

Damn, be careful.

HARRISON

Don't erupt!

MCKENZIE

(standing up again)

Know what I found on her dresser the other night? One of those catalogues for lingerie. With several—items—circled.

HARRISON

Such as?

MCKENZIE

Keep your drool to yourself. I asked her about it, and she said she thought she'd get something for herself just for fun. A bustier—for fun? [pronounces it "bus-tee-er"] Looked—painful. And I always thought a teddie was a bear.

HARRISON

That it?

MCKENZIE

She's cut her hair—short. Started lifting weights—she says to increase her calcium.

HARRISON

Could be.

MCKENZIE

Book discussion group—they're reading something about Celtic women running with coyotes. She never took an interest in any of that before.

HARRISON

Who says she can't? She always did have a taste for the fringe. Which is why she liked you.

MCKENZIE

I was never fringe!



HARRISON

How easily you forget! Sit down and let me finish. You were going to learn German to read Rilke in the original—and we had put up with all that gutturalizing. Phlegm flying everywhere! The marches you went on, the flaming arguments you'd get into about justice and art—you didn't do body piercing or kidnap rich heiresses for ransom, but you skated along the edge in your own way. There, done. She found it most attractive.

(takes off the apron)

You can get up now.

*MCKENZIE sits there.*

MCKENZIE

She found it most attractive. Which is why she left you?

HARRISON

(indicating the shop)

She knew I had no more ambition than this.

MCKENZIE

And I had more?

HARRISON

Twenty thousand leagues more.

MCKENZIE

So where did it go? Clay, when I looked at my body I felt ashamed. Because I felt as if I'd gone back on a promise to stay young. It's just gotten thicker without me seeing any of the inches creep up.

HARRISON

We all tend to settle a bit, like the leaning tower.

MCKENZIE

Everything's become soft, like a beanbag chair. I galumph. Things whoosh by me sometimes, and I find myself cranky and geezerish, like I was already wearing lime-green golf pants. I'm an every-two-weeks haircut guy who can't pronounce his wife's underwear. Twenty thousand leagues straight down.

HARRISON

You're just peeing in your pants now with self-pity.

*MCKENZIE chimes in on the saying.*

BOTH

It feels warm for a moment, but it gets uncomfortable pretty quickly.

HARRISON

I've said it before, obviously. So what? Still true. Stop it. You should be proud of Joanie. It looks like you're going to learn some new words.

MCKENZIE

Is this how it feels to feel mortal?

HARRISON

How?

MCKENZIE

Holding back.

(pats his head)

Holding on.

(snaps his suspenders)

Holding up.

*HARRISON sits in the other chair.*

HARRISON

Life is crude, isn't it? Ill-fitting. We have all these fine glimmers up in the grey swamp and then this funky apparatus to carry them out. Like a one-legged man on a unicycle with a flat tire. And some of us get hair, and some of us don't, and we act like that really matters because we're distracted by random sparks. The only good thing, maybe, is that we can use that grey swamp to recall our crisper salad days and do something to approximate them again. That's all the Laughing Girl is doing.

(snaps MCKENZIE's suspenders)

No pity parties. Look at what hair didn't do for Samson.

MCKENZIE

Would you have wanted to stay with her?

HARRISON

Of course. But things worked out just fine as they are. That's been long settled.

MCKENZIE

I would hate to lose her.

HARRISON

You'll lose her if you don't do something about your paunch, your pate, and your palaver. She just wants someone who's alive, and she'd like that to be you. If the Speedo calls, wear it.

MCKENZIE

(sitting up straight)

Let the truth begin now. Take it away. Cut the dog's tail.

HARRISON

(puts the apron back on)

Good choice, monsieur.

MCKENZIE

And cut the rest really close—quarter-inch. If I don't like it—if she doesn't like it—I'll grow it back.

HARRISON

Joanie will love all of you, top to bottom, like she always has.

MCKENZIE

I'm going to start loading the dice a little. Mortality is remarkably uncomfortable.

HARRISON

Which is why we don't wear it well.

*Picks up the "dog's tail" in his fingers, prepares to cut it.*

HARRISON

Ready.

MCKENZIE

Let the four heads begin.

*HARRISON cuts it and flings it away with a laugh. MCKENZIE raises his hands and arms as if he were a priest, then laughs as well. HARRISON continues to cut until...*

BLACKOUT

