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A comedy ends with a marriage

I spent the summer of 1980 completely broke but absolutely determined not to go back to cleaning restaurants and let that job finish killing me.

I talked to Dog, though I knew no good could come of it. He said he could get me a job as a technical writer at the computer company which had hired him and promoted him rapidly because he looked good in a suit. I knew I didn't look good in a suit, but out of desperation went along with the fantasy anyway. — "Great," I said. "Sign me up." — "It's a done deal," he said, "just submit a résumé." — "You understand that I've never had a real job?" I said. — "Fine," he said, "just slant your résumé to emphasize the experience that shows you have writing skills." — "You don't understand," I said, "I've never even had a job that required me to write my own name. How do I slant that?" — This went back and forth for a day or two, since within the bubble that retains the atmosphere it is difficult to absorb the idea that the vacuum surrounding it does not contain oxygen. — Finally he gained a kind of intellectual grasp of the crux of the matter, that even though *he* knew I could write that didn't mean the bonehead who was going to interview me would. — "What about a writing sample?" I asked. "I could do something technical." — He expressed enthusiasm; muttered something about going to Chicago on a business trip; and, while he was camped out at the Hyatt-Regency running up a company record tab on his expense account which took months to talk his way out of, naturally forgot everything we had agreed upon.

I persevered in his absence nonetheless, and casting about for a suitable subject remembered the Birkhoff/Von Neumann logic of quantum mechanics, which seemed like something I could work

up in short order. But then, of course, it turned out that I got interested in the subject again, and spent five weeks composing an abbreviated dissertation on the foundations of quantum mechanics, about a hundred fifty pages double-spaced, replete with formulas, extensively footnoted, and citing many dozens of references in the precise manner advised by the Chicago Manual of Style. — The end result was that I realized this approach really did resolve the paradoxes of the subject, though of course I never got interviewed and did not gain entry into the white collar world of paid vacations, free drinks, and checks that clear the bank. — Worst of all, I didn't care. I had been reminded, unfortunately, that I had once been meant for better things.

But mark this down, anyway, as probably the only time in the history of the world anyone was naive enough to suppose he could get a job by employing logic.

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Song

Write a rubber check and put it in your pocket
Save it for a rainy day
Write a rubber check and put it in your pocket
Never let it bounce away
For Need may come and grasp you by the tricep
When you most dread it
And if you heed this financial advice, yep
You'll have some questionable credit —

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I gave up and went back to cleaning restaurants for a few more months, but worked less, which left time to make notes on how to carry the project forward, and when I quit for the last time I had about six weeks free, without distractions, all to myself. So I

got up at six every morning (sleeping in this late was by itself enough to make it all seem like a vacation) and worked until ten every night on mathematical logic. — I observed that the best ideas came at the very beginning of the day, when I determined what I was going to work out in the rest of it, and at the end, over the evening Scotch(es), when I figured out where I had gone wrong and how I would fix it on the morrow.

But time ran out and I had to call in a marker from another guy, one whom I knew I couldn't trust but was too desperate not to, and took an even more foolish job, something nebulous involving "marketing research" which in fact turned out to entail writing scripts for telemarketers. — As it turned out I was good at that, in fact I was good at everything they asked me to do, and indeed after a week or two, quick study that I was, pieced together enough information to figure out what no one else there understood, that the company wasn't making any money, and why; knowing that if I confronted my sponsor directly he'd just bullshit me until I dropped the matter, I feigned illness and spent a couple of days writing up a report which detailed everything no one wanted to admit; after I turned it in the principals first claimed everything I said was wrong, and then admitted me to their inner councils, because of course everything I said was right. — So that was the first time I saved the company. — I managed to save it twice more over the next six months; but doing it the last time, unfortunately, entailed taking out a bank loan to cover the payroll, and when the enterprise folded the next morning found myself not simply unemployed, but several thousand dollars in debt. — At least until I started cleaning toilets again to pay it all off. Plus ça change ...

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There's an old joke: a guy dies, goes to Hell, and gets the orientation tour, where he is offered his choice among punishments; he sees the damned roasting over fires, impaled like

shishkabob, branded by burning pokers, staked out in the desert for wild beasts to gnaw upon their entrails — hounded by their creditors, forced to listen to the complaints of former girlfriends. — Understandably none of this appeals to him. — Finally they bring him to a lake of shit, in which people are standing buried up to their necks, but they're holding cups and saucers and drinking coffee. — “This doesn't look too bad,” he says, “I'll take it.” — He gets a cup and saucer, wades out into the middle of the lake, has a sip of the coffee — not all that bad, considering — and is just looking around to see if anyone has a newspaper when a whistle sounds and a voice announces: “Coffee break's over. Back on your knees.”

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The investigation continued off and on, despite many interruptions, and in due course generated a massive stack of notebooks, two or three feet thick. All these were lost, along with half my library, all the rest of my old manuscripts (in excess of a million words), and many prized personal possessions — seized by an irate landlord during an eviction. I never got them back.

I see the pages of formulas sometimes in my dreams, black ink on white unlined paper, sheet after sheet in logical notation. — So lost loves on occasion return to us.

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I retained the original writing sample, however, and after fifteen years during which Dog told everyone I had spurned the golden opportunity he had placed before me, gave it to him as a wedding present. This must have been an empty gesture, since I'm sure he never read it. But just for that reason it seemed peculiarly appropriate.

Anyway, I'm still pissed.