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Ian:

Well, why don't we start by having you introduce yourselves for us.

Louise, shirt:

I'm Louise. I'm a shirt.

William, pants:

I'm William and I'm a pants.

Louise, shirt:

You're just pants. You're not a pants.

William, pants:

Right. I'm pants, and you are shirt.

Ian:

We should be clear. You are leather pants.

William, pants:

That's right, and I'm told that that means that I used to be different, like I used to be animal...

Ian:

Yeah. Leather comes from cows.

William, pants:

... in a previous life. I have no memory of this.

Ian:

You were a body suit for a cow.

William, pants:

I know. I'm not sure that I believe in past lives, but everyone seems so confident that I had a life before this, where I walked around, but I couldn't be taken off except through death.

Ian:

Yeah.

William, pants:

That just feels like progress to me. I feel like if it used to be that I could only be removed through death and now I can be taken off, put on and the host survives, that's great.

Louise, shirt:

I'm a poly cotton blend, which...

William, pants:

Fake.

Louise, shirt:

Right, well, I don't like that word, though, because I don't feel fake. I feel pretty authentic.

William, pants:

I don't mean it as a judgment.

Louise, shirt:

Well, you said it pretty judgmentally, Pants.

William, pants:

It's just a fact.

Louise, shirt:

I call him Pants when I'm mad at him instead of his name.

William, pants:

Sure. My name is William, but I am a pant.

Ian:

Tell me about the last time you were worn.

Louise, shirt:

Yesterday.

William, pants:

You were gone for a long time. I had to talk to Hangar.

Louise, shirt:

Oh, I know. I'm sorry.

William, pants:

No offense, but not a lot going on upstairs with that one.

Louise, shirt:

Yeah, I know. Well, anyway, yeah, it was yesterday. Our guy took me out and I had one tiny little wrinkle.

William, pants:

I saw it. It was barely noticeable.

Louise, shirt:

It was like, "I'm getting ironed."

William, pants:

You are getting ironed.

Louise, shirt:

It's happening today.

William, pants:

Yeah.

Ian:

You like being ironed?

Louise, shirt:

Of course, I like being ironed. Yeah.

William, pants:

I've never been ironed. Do you like being ironed?

Ian:

Do I like being ironed?

William, pants:

Yeah.

Ian:

People don't really get ironed.

Louise, shirt:

Yeah, people don't get ironed, William. That's why people wrinkles never go away.

William, pants:

You should try getting iron, Ian. You'd look great.

Louise, shirt:

Oh, it feels so good. Your person is just looking at you with full focus the whole time, so careful.

William, pants:

I love hearing about it.

Louise, shirt:

I love hearing that board gets set up, the steam of the iron. Have you ever been to a, it's like a spa or sauna? Sauna.

William, pants:

Sure, yeah.

Louise, shirt:

It's probably like that, but if you combine that feeling with the feeling of being held by somebody you like. It would be weird, I think, based on what I know to be held just randomly in a sauna.

William, pants:

Does your guy have wrinkles?

Louise, shirt:

Yeah. Yeah, he does. I've seen them in the mirror and I've seen him see them in the mirror, which is a whole other thing.

William, pants:

Right. Yeah. I actually... I have no idea. I haven't seen him in a while, and even when I was seeing him more, I was only seeing his pants parts.

Ian:

When was the last time you saw him, William?

William, pants:

I want to say months, but it could be enough months to make more than a year. It's hard to tell.

Louise, shirt:

Even when you did get worn last, it was laundry day. It wasn't even like, "Oh, I want to wear William."

William, pants:

Yeah. Laundry day. Day of shame.

Louise, shirt:

It's the day of ultimate shame...

William, pants:

... when only the lowest of the low, the wholly and torn...

Louise, shirt:

The pilled, the shredded and the stained get worn...

William, pants:

Laundry day.

Louise, shirt:

The shrunken, the sullied, the worn out elastic, the ugly shirt you got from your class picnic, the shrunken, the boxy, the ancient Old Navy's, that one pair of pants that has stains from two gravies.

William, pants:

Yes. That's laundry day.

Louise, shirt:

The soiled, the stained, the ruined and burned, the gift from your uncle you forgot to return, the jacket with elbows you just couldn't patch up, the shorts you had on when you sat down in catsup, the white shirt whose armpits have long since been pitted, the stiff scratchy skirt that never, ever fitted.

William, pants:

What is happening?

Louise, shirt:

The spandex you bought that no longer stretches, the pants with the zipper that no longer catches, the T-shirt you smelled to see if it stinks, the white socks you washed with red, who turned pink, the rumpled and old fashionably, low waisted, the undies, your ex girlfriend left at your place did.

Louise, shirt:

Yes. Laundry day.

Ian:

I'm just thinking. I've certainly got to the bottom of my closet, say on laundry day, and it's been sweat pants generally.

William, pants:

Hmm.

Ian:

Why did you, as leather pants... It's just not a laundry day thing. How did that happen?

William, pants:

I think he was going through something. My sense was that things were not all right with him.

Ian:

Um-hmm (affirmative.).

Louise, shirt:

Um-hmm (affirmative.). I think that's right. I think he was trying to say, "Does this feel good still?"

William, pants:

I was just excited. I'm equally to blame for this. I was just as excited and it just didn't feel right. I wasn't comfortable, and neither was he. I've always been tight, but I don't remember ever being that tight. This is going to sound like I'm speaking in metaphor, but I'm not. We are no longer a good fit, and I don't know what to do about that.

Ian:

Well, I wanted to ask, because when an article of clothing doesn't get worn for years, there's a couple of reasons. I think one is that our identities change and our sense of who we are, as represented by our clothing, changes. The other is we just don't fit it anymore, physically.

William, pants:

I've changed a little, but I don't think I've changed as much as he has. I feel like I'm the same pair of pants I always was.

Louise, shirt:

I agree with that. Our guy has changed. William has not. I've known him for a long time.

William, pants:

Yeah.

Louise, shirt:

He's a little bit more boring. I like him. Sometimes I think I love him, but he is a little bit more boring.

William, pants:

The last time that he took me out before the laundry day, I remember he came in and he took me off the hanger and he looked me right in the islet and said, "Am I too old for these?" I don't know who he was talking to. I don't think he was talking to me.

Ian:

It sounds like he was maybe asking himself.

William, pants:

Yeah, it might've been rhetorical.

Louise, shirt:

Yeah.

William, pants:

I remember going out in public and hearing someone say, "Does he actually think he can pull that off?" I wasn't sure if they meant literally, like pull off the pants.

Ian:

Can he remove you?

William, pants:

Yeah, but I came to understand that they were making fun of him and I know that's how he took it. We got home and he took me off and he threw me on the floor. I hit the floor with a slap.

Louise, shirt:

He has beautiful hardwood floors.

William, pants:

They are beautiful, but they are hard. I remember thinking, "What did I do to you to make you feel so angry at me?" Now with hindsight, obviously, he was upset. He was embarrassed. He was angry at himself. He wasn't angry at me, but he took it out on me.

Ian:

Yeah.

William, pants:

I was on the floor the whole night. I just remember looking up at you and saying like, "Is this how it's going to be from now on? Are we through? Am I even going to live here anymore?"

Louise, shirt:

Can I tell you something crazy, though? I saw that it was awful. Thank God you got put back on Hanger.

William, pants:

It never felt better to be on Hanger.

Louise, shirt:

Sometimes I'm jealous of you, that you're interesting enough that he asks that question, "Am I too old for this?" He'll never be too old for me, which is nice, but it also feels like, "Am I boring?"

William, pants:

I will say, and I hope this isn't hurtful...

Louise, shirt:

No, I would love to hear.

William, pants:

I don't think he has strong feelings about you.

Louise, shirt:

No, I've felt that. Yeah, he doesn't ever ask me the rhetorical questions. I'm just grabbed, almost without eye contact sometimes. You've gone on dates. I've never been on a date. William's been on sexy dates.

William, pants:

Yeah. I've been taken off fast. There was a moment several years ago where I was part of a walk of shame.

Louise, shirt:

That was much longer than several years ago, William.

William, pants:

We came inside, and I remember him fixing a bowl of cereal. While he was eating it, a small amount of milk splashed on me. I remember thinking... It was like I had a vision of some time ago, some connection where just the smallest splash of cow's milk on me, it was like my heritage came flooding back to me.

William, pants:

I don't know whether I can trust this. I don't know whether it's real. I don't know whether it's just my imagination running wild, but it felt real to me. I thought, "Yes, I was cow, and now I'm still cow, but not cow. I'm something else now." It made me want to return to that. That's probably unrealistic. I don't think it will happen. I don't think that this is something that is real in terms of where my life is going.

Jo:

Hello?

Ian:

Hello? Is this Jo?

Jo:

Oh, hi. Yes, it is Jo speaking. How are you?

Ian:

Good. How are you?

Jo:

I'm okay. Yeah, I'm doing fine. Yeah. Strange times, huh?

Ian:

The strangest.

Jo:

Yeah.

Ian:

Well, Jo, I'm calling because I want to talk about the walrus.

Jo:

Yep? Um-hmm (affirmative?).

Ian:

You have a rather remarkable taxidermied walrus there at the Horniman Museum. It's over a hundred years old. First of all, would you say it's a good example of taxidermy?

Jo:

Yeah. The walrus is not the best taxidermy job. Yeah. Yeah, it's not great taxidermy, no. It's the best, I guess, that they could do with what they had at the time.

Ian:

Can you describe what's unique about it for people who haven't seen it?

Jo:

Okay. What's kind of characteristic about this particular walrus is that it really doesn't exhibit many of the skin folds or wrinkles that you might see in other walruses, or real life walruses. It looks quite ballooned out and yeah, unwrinkled.

Ian:

My understanding of what may have happened is the taxidermist, a hundred-something years ago, would have been sent this skin, this walrus skin, but they themselves had maybe never seen a walrus, had no idea what it looked like. They just assumed they were a smooth, taut creature, and that's how they made the taxidermy.

Jo:

Yeah, that could have happened. Yeah, that very definitely could have happened. Often the taxidermist didn't ever see the real animals that they were being asked to recreate, in real life, particularly with large marine mammals. An elephant, maybe you could have seen an example in a zoo and you would have been able to sketch, but with something like a walrus, they weren't really kept in captivity in the same way. Yeah, lots of taxidermists would never have seen a real animal to use as reference.

Ian:

I just think about the assumptions that you would make. None of us have ever seen a dinosaur in person. What if we've been assuming dinosaurs were smooth when in fact they were actually all wrinkly.

Jo:

A wrinkly dinosaur, not scaly dinosaurs.

Ian:

Right. Well, the walrus would have been on display. I guess many people who saw it back then just then went about their lives, assuming walruses looked like this.

Jo:

Yes. Lots of people would have. They would have gone to the exhibition in 1886 and thought, "Wow. This is hat a walrus looks like." Sure.

Ian:

William, I want to go back. We talked about your guy's wrinkles. We talked about him thinking he was maybe too old for you. How old is he?

William, pants:

You don't have a tag, do you?

Ian:

I don't have a tag.

William, pants:

See, the only number I need to know is the number that is on my tag. I got my numbers on my tag and they never change. I can't imagine living a life where I'd have to be changing that tag number in my mind. I'm 38 x 30 and I always will be, unless I get altered. Whew! There is a thing that happens and pants don't like to talk about it, but...

Louise, shirt:

We'll go there.

William, pants:

There are times when a pair of long pants will be taken out of the closet and when they come back, they have been turned into short pants. I don't know what the origin of this ritual is, but this is the 21st century, and I think it's barbaric.

Louise, shirt:

Um-hmm (affirmative.).

William, pants:

If you want a pair of shorts, buy a pair of shorts.

Louise, shirt:

Give a pair of shorts a new home.

William, pants:

I have seen frayed denim that would turn your stomach.

Louise, shirt:

What about we had, he's no longer with us, but we had a Blazer in the closet that got let out.

William, pants:

I have no problem if you're born stonewashed. That's fine.

Louise, shirt:

Yeah, great.

William, pants:

These are nightmare scenarios.

Louise, shirt:

That's the thing. When the Blazer came back, let out, he had just shut down.

William, pants:

Yeah. Every now and then, he would say, "Let me back in. Let me back in. Let me back in. Let me just go quiet."

Louise, shirt:

Oh.

William, pants:

It was a relief when he went away, in the end.

Ian:

Where did he go? Did he go to the Thrift Store?

William, pants:

I don't like to think about that now.

Louise, shirt:

Yeah, that's awful.

William, pants:

we have met clothing that has been to the Thrift Store, and survived and we've heard the stories, so we know it's real.

Louise, shirt:

Yeah. There's a couple of items in our closet that we met because our guy got them at the Thrift Store.

William, pants:

You go to the thrift store and it's like hell on earth.

Louise, shirt:

Oh.

William, pants:

It's a place where anyone can take you. Anything can happen. You're surrounded by bricabrac.

Louise, shirt:

There's a low level of screaming all the time.

Ian:

Just from all the... ?

Louise, shirt:

From the clothes.

Ian:

Yeah.

William, pants:

You lose your mind because you've been abandoned.

Louise, shirt:

It could happen at any time again. It's always on your mind, when are they going to say that phrase, "Oh, this doesn't strike joy, not really."

William, pants:

It doesn't spark. It doesn't spark joy.

Louise, shirt:

That's what it is. Spark. It's not all about you.

William, pants:

If I hear that phrase one more time, I'm going to lose it.

Louise, shirt:

I'm sorry. I'm actually sorry I brought it up.

William, pants:

It doesn't spark joy? Well, I'm sorry. I'm sorry that I don't spark joy. I do spark joy, fortunately, but barely. There was a hesitation the last time I heard that question, that chilled me to my bones. I don't have bones.

Ian:

I know. I have to say my favorite pair of pants that I have, the pair of pants that look, I think, the best on me, make me look the best that I look, I went dancing in them. I wore them to a wedding and I was dancing.

Ian:

Their fit is such that I'm actually afraid they're going to rip. I think they're so fitted, which is what makes them look good, that the wrong move feels like it could tear them.

William, pants:

Can I tell you a horror story? Can I share and talk about Levi?

Louise, shirt:

Yeah. Um-hmm (affirmative.).

William, pants:

Levi used to live in the closet and he was denim and he was around for maybe six months and he got a lot of walking.

Louise, shirt:

He looked great on our guy.

William, pants:

He started to get a worn spot right up near the inseam on each thigh. It was starting to wear. Eventually this became two holes and Levi went right in the garbage, torn open and thrown away. No attempt to repair, even though a simple procedure could have made him good as new. I thought that was so cold because Levi had been around the block, and I mean that literally.

Ian:

Been on a walk around the block?

William, pants:

Yes, literally.

Louise, shirt:

I had gone out with Levi. We got along really well.

William, pants:

You and Levi went out. I'd forgotten that.

Ian:

I want to ask you one more thing. You're in this closet. It's hard to know what's going to happen next. When you look into the future, what do you hope for?

William, pants:

That's hard to know. I have this recurring dream that I'm back on the cow and it's maybe a hundred years ago, I don't know. The cow can take me off and put me back on.

Ian:

I'm picturing this, right? The cow is a cow.

William, pants:

Cow is a cow, but I'm pants. I'm who I am now, but I'm back where I used to be.

Ian:

The cow is wearing leather pants?

William, pants:

Yeah. I'm cow pants.

Ian:

Okay.

William, pants:

That's the dream. I think the dream is about who I am now and reconciling that with what I used to be.

Louise, shirt:

It's weird. I am not made of leather at all. I'm a poly cotton blend, but I also have a dream of being worn by a cow.

William, pants:

I know there are some people who would take offense at that because that's not your heritage. I have a connection to the cow because supposedly that's what I was.

Louise, shirt:

You keep saying supposedly. You were.

William, pants:

I don't remember that.

Ian:

I think it's pretty remarkable that both of you have thought about this.

Louise, shirt:

Being on a cow?

Ian:

Yeah. I think about what would it be like for you to be together on a cow?

William, pants:

I think you'd look great on a cow, if you were fitted properly, if you were tailored.

Louise, shirt:

I don't want to be tailored.

William, pants:

No, I'm just saying proportionally. Just as you are now, that wouldn't... You'd rip, unless it was an extremely tiny cow.

Louise, shirt:

I was picturing staying my same size and maybe being loosely tied about the neck.

William, pants:

I was picturing you properly proportioned on a cow and buttoned up.

Louise, shirt:

That sounds nice, too.

William, pants:

That way, you can tuck into me.

Louise, shirt:

Oh, that'd be nice.

William, pants:

We'd be on the cow. "I imagine the cow is thinking, "Well, this is new for me, too." We're all experiencing something new, which, in a way, it's like we've gone out, we've lived our lives and we're coming back to something.

Louise, shirt:

It would be nice because a cow would never ask if it was too old to wear leather pants, just wear them.

William, pants:

There's no denying it would be wonderful.

Louise, shirt:

A cow doesn't say does this spark joy?

William, pants:

No, a cow says moo and that's all a cow says, and I think that's refreshing.

Ian:

This is Everything is Alive. The show is produced by Jennifer Mills and me, Ian Chillag, with Evil Walshover. A special thanks to Emily Spivak. Our editor is Hillary Frank, Louise, the oxford shirt, was played by Alexandra Dixon. William, the leather pants, was played by Connor Ratliff.

Ian:

Connor has a podcast I really love. It's called Dead Eyes. It's his attempt to get to the bottom of a mystery that has plagued him, that mystery being why he was fired from the HBO show, Band of Brothers. He was fired by Tom Hanks himself. The show is funny and weird and heartfelt. Connor has great guests. You should listen to it as soon as you're done listening to this.

Ian:

A big thanks to Jo Hatton for talking to us about the smooth walrus. Jo is the Keeper of Natural History at the Horniman Museum and Gardens in London. A special thanks this week to Jonathan Menjivar, Maddy Sprung-Keyser, Max Linsky and Joel Lovell. Music in this episode from Blue Dot Sessions and Copy.

Ian:

Everything is Alive is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX. Julie Shapiro, executive producer, wears the pants in this family. You can get in touch with us any number of ways via everythingisalive.com. We'll see you soon.

Louise, shirt:

William, tell them the other part of the last time you were worn.

William, pants:

He didn't wear underwear. It was just me and him, his pants parts and a pajama top.

Ian:

Who were you with, the pajama top?

William, pants:

Yeah.

Louise, shirt:

Gloria.

William, pants:

We clashed. Gloria and I, we did not get along.

Ian:

Hey, I have some good news. One of my favorite shows, probably one of your favorite shows, is back. This Is Love from the creators of Criminal has returned, frankly, with the kinds of stories we need right now. Their fourth season is all about animals, rival wolf packs, a dog who guides his owner out of a tragedy, a retired central park police horse. This Is Love was named one of Time Magazine's top picks of the year. Refinery 29 says, "It's the warm story-based podcast to listen to when the news is too much to bear." For instance, right now.

Louise, shirt:

Oh, okay. We're on the move. Did you ever see the movie, Twister with Helen Hunt?

Speaker 6:

Yep.

Louise, shirt:

Do you think this is like Twister?

Phoebe:

Hi, it's Phoebe. This Is Love is back and for our fourth season, we're going outside. The entire iceberg that we had just been inside of was cracking and breaking and dissolving into these huge chunks of ice. I was just speechless.

Speaker 6:

All new stories, starting April 1st about animals and the wild, and what happens when we take time to look around us.

Speaker 7:

I'm really better with animals than people.

Phoebe:

You like them better?

Speaker 7:

Yeah.

Phoebe:

Would you rather spend your day with a horse than a group of guys?

Speaker 7:

Yeah. They don't complain.

Speaker 6:

Subscribe now to This Is Love wherever you get your podcasts, so you don't miss the first episode.

Phoebe:

Well, this turkey is really trying to get this recorder. Hello. Will you tell me... Oh! Its got a little bite. This is going to turn the volume down, but I'm scared.

Ian:

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