

SPLIT

A Radio Play

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1 Parking

[A parking lot. Sound of birds.]

MARK: I was feeling the slightest bit peculiar as I backed out of my normal parking space, sixth from the end.

[Car is started, shifted into reverse. Engine noises.]

I always park in the same row, the seventh from the end nearest the highway entrance.

[A thump. Sound of a car running over a yelling man.]

There's a nice stand of trees there, even if it's a bit far from the entrance.

[A crash. Mark has backed into another car. Far off yells.]

But my doctor always said that exercise was what I needed.

[Shifting into drive.]

Exercise was what I needed. Exercise.

[Guns the engine and takes off.]

2 Doctor

[A doctor's office. Ambient beeps. Sound of an intercom.]

FRANZ: *[A thick German accent.]* Mark was always my favorite patient. My first and . . . my favorite. He was so funny. He would tell jokes. Always! Always, always. He was sitting on my examining table, covered with spots. Mumps or pox, some silly thing. Even on his tongue. And he was mumbling something, his tongue swelled up so big! Well. It took me quite some time, I am telling you, to make out what it was. It was a joke he was saying! Yes. He was trying to say knock-knock. You know, knock-knock. The knock-knock joke. Well, I laughed and laughed. *[He laughs.]* Some time later I remembered the response I was supposed to say: whos-there. I said it then, but he was not there.

I would tell him to exercise. Exercise-exercise, I'd say to him. That's what you need. But he was always complaining he had the wrong type of shoes. Just like Robert Xavier, I said. Robert Xavier. The man with three shoes.

3 Satellite

[In outer space. Sound of a satellite, beeping.]

ROBERT: Why does no one know the story of Robert Xavier?

[But we hear nothing. We are in outer space.]

[A short time later we hear the freezing sound of a man exposed to the cold vacuum of space.]

4 Cactus

[Driving down an Arizona highway. Engine sounds. Sound of cactus.]

MARK: I was feeling just the tiniest bit perturbed as I drove my Chevrolet Caprice on the left-hand side of the road.

[Horns approach, blare, and recede.]

I could not shake the unmistakable feeling that, today, I was not myself.
No. Today, I am Robert Xavier.

5 Space Shuttle

[In outer space. Sound of a missing space shuttle.]

ROBERT: Why does no one tell the story of Robert Xavier?

[We hear nothing. We are in outer space.]

[A short time later we hear the pathetic pop of a man exposed to the sucking vacuum of space.]

6 Road-runner

[Driving down an Arizona highway. Sound of a road-runner being hit by a car.]

MARK: I was feeling a wee bit annoyed as I drove my Buick over the road-runner.

Robert Xavier was never said to have run over a road-runner. Therefore I have not run over a road-runner. Contented with logic, I, the man with three shoes, drove on.

7 Dentist

[A doctor's office. Sound of a dental drill, whining.]

FRANZ: Mark was such a wonderful boy. Even when he was grown up, he was a wonderful boy. *[He guns the dental drill.]* He was always so funny — even when I had to drill all but two of his white teeth, he was funny. He was sitting there with his mouth pried open, gesticulating wildly with his hands. It was not until my deaf nurse interpreted that I understood he was using sign language. Tears were running out of his eyes because of the drilling, but he was saying:

A cowboy, a gynecologist and a postman go into a bar.

Such a funny boy.

8 Sombreros

[A highway in Mexico. The sound of men with sombreros dancing by the side of the road.]

MARK: I was feeling slightly pleased with myself when I finally remembered the joke. Then I remembered who I was. Robert Xavier. The man with three shoes. I quickly composed myself.

Being Robert Xavier is not easy. Heavy weights drag on me. I do not think I am quite myself.

Inexplicably, space-age concrete overshoes float through my mind.

9 Strait

[An asylum. Sounds of white-coated men bouncing on rubber walls.]

FRANZ: I laughed when Mark came to visit me at the institution. He was always so funny. I did not know why he was struggling in his jacket as I examined his ears for signs of brain, until I realized it was interpretive dance. He was saying:

The conspiracy begins with a joke of three shoes.

Even the stern-faced warden thought my Mark amusing.

10 Ocean

[The pacific ocean. Sound of King Neptune, attended by mermaids.]

MARK: I was feeling quite relieved when I drove my Honda into the ocean. I was afraid the fish would resent my intrusion, but they seemed quite unfazed. I knew then that I was Robert Xavier.

11 Two Thousand Four

[In outer space. Sound of the moon monolith, looming.]

ROBERT: Why does no one fear the story of Robert Xavier?

[We hear nothing. We are in outer space.]

[A short time later we hear the dying dessication of a man exposed to the dry vacuum of space.]

12 Attendant

[The death chamber of a midwestern state. Sound of an electric chair, crackling.]

FRANZ: My Mark, he was funny even when he told me of the Great Conspiracy. So many details wrong! *[He laughs.]* I can laugh now, I almost could not help it then. He had the same stricken look on his face as he did seeing a night-stained mattress for the first time. Where did it come from, hoo-hoo! Not from him, no-no!

I even grinned when I realized what he was trying to say. He meant:

The traitor Robert Xavier must always die.

Entirely correct. Such a funny boy.

13 Pacific

[Sounds of ocean, fading up.]

[Sound of Robert Xavier, drowning.]

[Sounds of ocean, fading out.]