Make the Smooth Road Straight

Make the Smooth Road Straight — John the Baptist Skit (15 min)

WHAT

A road crew shows up to a stretch of broken highway in fluorescent vests. Their foreman tells them the King is coming this way and the road must be made smooth and straight before He arrives. Each worker pulls a sign out of their toolbox naming the obstacle on their stretch — pride, fear, bitterness, addiction, doubt. They argue about whose section is worse. They start working. As they do, John the Baptist appears on the shoulder of the road, shouting Isaiah at passing drivers and calling out each obstacle as it is removed. By the end, the highway is clear, John is kneeling, and the foreman is standing with the radio in his hand, listening for the One coming behind him.

THEME

> *Advent is a road crew. The King is coming, and every obstacle in your chest has to come up before He gets here.*

WHO

FOREMAN HALE — Forties. Construction veteran. Has run a thousand jobs. This one is different and she knows it.

DEACON — Fifties. Pride. Wears the vest like a uniform he earned. Quietly competitive.

MARA — Thirties. Fear. New to the crew. Keeps looking down the road like she expects bad news.

RUFUS — Sixties. Bitterness. Veteran worker who has been passed over for promotions twice. Talks like sandpaper.

TAMMY — Forties. Addiction. Sober four years. Calm. Doesn't pretend it isn't her sign.

ELI — Twenties. Doubt. New convert. Asks questions the others stopped asking.

JOHN — On the shoulder. Camel-hair coat. Crying out Isaiah. Sometimes addresses the crew, sometimes the unseen drivers, sometimes the King.

RADIO VOICE — Dispatch on the foreman's radio. Female. Warm. Increasingly urgent as the skit progresses.

HOW (STYLE / TONE)

An open stretch of highway suggested by traffic cones, a single sawhorse, and a faux pothole. Crew enters in safety vests, hard hats, gloves. Each carries a folded handheld road sign in their tool bag. JOHN stands on a raised platform stage right — a rock, a low riser, anything elevated. The foreman holds a two-way radio. Sound design is minimal: a distant car passing, wind, the click of the radio. As each

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obstacle is removed, the actor turns their sign face-down and sets it at the edge of the stage, building a small graveyard of obstacles by the end.

PROPS

- Five fluorescent safety vests
- Five hard hats
- Six orange traffic cones
- One sawhorse with a striped barrier
- A foam 'pothole' or chalk circle on the floor
- Five folded handheld signs reading PRIDE, FEAR, BITTERNESS, ADDICTION, DOUBT
- A two-way radio with a clip-on speaker
- John's camel-hair coat and leather belt
- A rolled scroll of Isaiah for John
- Work gloves, a clipboard, a coffee thermos for the foreman

TIME

15 minutes

Scene 1 — The Job Briefing

(Lights up on a stretch of highway. Cones in a rough arc. A sawhorse blocks the back. The CREW enters single-file, hard hats on, vests glowing. FOREMAN HALE checks her clipboard.)

FOREMAN HALE

Listen up. New job. Different than usual. We've been told the King is coming down this stretch. Today, tomorrow, this week — we don't know exactly. Our orders are simple. Make the road smooth. Make it straight. Every valley filled. Every mountain leveled. Every crooked place made plain.

RUFUS

What king.

FOREMAN HALE

The King.

DEACON

Hale, with all due respect, this stretch is in good shape. I worked this section last spring. I know this road.

FOREMAN HALE

Deacon. Look at the road.

(Deacon looks. He scuffs the toe of his boot at a crack. He says nothing.)

FOREMAN HALE

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Each of you has a section. Each section has a sign. Pull your sign. We work the obstacle on the sign.

Scene 2 — The Voice on the Shoulder

(JOHN appears on the elevated platform stage right, rolled scroll in hand. His voice carries above the crew.)

JOHN

The voice of one crying in the wilderness — Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low. The crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken it.

MARA

Hale. Who is that.

FOREMAN HALE

He's been here since dawn. He's the one who told us the King was coming.

RUFUS

And we believed him?

FOREMAN HALE

I believed him. The job's mine to call.

DEACON

He looks like he sleeps in the cab of a truck.

JOHN (overhearing)

I sleep in the wilderness. The King sleeps in heaven. Soon He will sleep on a hillside. Get the road ready.

Scene 3 — Pride

FOREMAN HALE

Deacon. Your section. Sign.

(DEACON unfolds his sign. PRIDE. He stares at it. He laughs once, dry.)

DEACON

Of course.

FOREMAN HALE

Get to work.

DEACON

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Hale. I've been on this crew nineteen years. I trained half of you. I don't know what to do with this sign.

JOHN (from the platform)

Lay it down. Pride is a mountain. The Lord said the mountains have to come down before He can walk through. Lay it down, Deacon.

DEACON

How do you know my name.

JOHN

Hale called you Deacon. The Lord called you something else. The first name is the one that has to go.

(Deacon stands a long time. He kneels. He sets the PRIDE sign face-down at the edge of the stage. He stays kneeling for a beat.)

JOHN

And the mountain came down.

Scene 4 — Fear

(MARA pulls her sign. FEAR. She holds it close to her chest like she does not want anyone to see.)

MARA

Mine. Mine is fear.

FOREMAN HALE

I figured.

MARA

It's not — it's not just one thing. It's the whole road. It's the cars I haven't seen yet. It's every shift I worry I'll mess up.

JOHN

Fear is a valley. Valleys have to be filled. The Lord fills valleys with His own steadiness, child. He has more steadiness than you have fear.

MARA

What do I do.

JOHN

Walk into the middle of your section. Set the sign down. Trust that He fills the hole when you let go.

(Mara walks slowly to the foam pothole. She sets the FEAR sign face-down inside it.)

MARA (whispering)

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Fill it, Lord.

(She steps back. The crew watches. Hale nods, once.)

JOHN
And the valley was filled.

Scene 5 — The Radio

(FOREMAN HALE's radio crackles to life. She unclips it.)

RADIO VOICE
Hale, dispatch. Status check on the King's road. He's leaving the camp. Estimated arrival at your stretch — could be hours. Could be sooner.

FOREMAN HALE
Copy, dispatch. We're working obstacles. Two down. Three to go.

RADIO VOICE
Pick up the pace, Hale. The Lord doesn't run late but his road crew sometimes does.

FOREMAN HALE (to crew)
You heard her. Move.

RUFUS
I haven't even pulled my sign.

FOREMAN HALE
Then pull it, Rufus.

Scene 6 — Bitterness

(RUFUS pulls his sign. BITTERNESS. He grimaces.)

RUFUS
Yeah. Yeah, that tracks.

FOREMAN HALE
Talk to me, Rufus.

RUFUS
I been on this crew thirty-one years, Hale. Twice they put a younger man over me. Both times I held it like a stone in my mouth. I have been chewing this stone for a decade. I do not know how to put it down.

JOHN
Bitterness is a crooked place. The Lord is making the crooked straight. He does not pull the bitterness out of you, Rufus. He straightens you around it

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until it falls out.

RUFUS
How long does that take.

JOHN
As long as you let Him work. Sometimes a year. Sometimes a Tuesday.

RUFUS
And what do I do today.

JOHN
Today you set the sign down. Tomorrow He starts on the bend in your spine.

(Rufus walks heavily to the edge of the stage. He sets the BITTERNESS sign face-down. He stands a moment with his hand still on it.)

RUFUS (gruff)
All right, Lord.

JOHN
And the crooked began to straighten.

Scene 7 — Addiction

(TAMMY pulls her sign. ADDICTION. She looks at it without flinching.)

TAMMY
Mine. Sober four years. The sign still has my name on it.

FOREMAN HALE
It does not have to.

TAMMY
It does today. Some days more than others.

JOHN
Addiction is a rough place. The Lord said the rough places must be made plain. He does not pretend they are not rough. He plans the road around the truth of them, and then He smooths them with His own foot.

TAMMY
What do I do with the sign.

JOHN
Set it down where the King will walk over it.

TAMMY
And then?

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JOHN

And then four years from now, when somebody hands you a new sign, you set that one down too. The road crew never quits. We just keep removing what is in His way.

(Tammy lays the ADDICTION sign down in the middle of the highway. She steps back into the line of cones.)

JOHN

And the rough place was made plain.

Scene 8 — Doubt

(ELI pulls his sign. DOUBT. He turns it over and back, like he is checking the printing.)

ELI

Mine is doubt.

FOREMAN HALE

Tell me about it, Eli.

ELI

I been on this crew six months. I keep waiting to feel sure. Everybody else seems sure. I am not sure. Some mornings I am not sure He is coming at all.

JOHN

Doubt is the gravel under the road, son. It does not stop the King from coming. It only makes the ride bumpy.

ELI

How do I get rid of it.

JOHN

You do not. You confess it. Out loud. Today. To this crew. Doubt left in the dark grows. Doubt brought into the light gets walked on. Tell us, Eli.

ELI (slowly)

I doubt sometimes. I doubt that He is coming. I doubt that He sees me. I doubt that this road matters.

(The CREW does not move away from him. Hale puts a hand on his shoulder.)

FOREMAN HALE

The crew has you, Eli. Set the sign down.

(Eli sets the DOUBT sign down at the edge of the stage.)

JOHN

And the gravel was packed.

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Scene 9 — The Last Stretch

(FOREMAN HALE's radio crackles again, more urgent.)

RADIO VOICE

Hale, the King has left the camp. He is on the road. Repeat — He is on the road.

FOREMAN HALE

Copy, dispatch. Last cones coming up. Crew is on the shoulder. Asphalt is clear.

RADIO VOICE

Hale, listen. The instructions for the last stretch are simple. Step out of the way. Do not try to greet Him. Do not try to direct Him. The road belongs to Him now. You belong on the shoulder. Do you copy.

FOREMAN HALE

Copy that, dispatch. We will stand down.

(The CREW moves the cones, the sawhorse, the striped barrier off to the side. They move with surprising tenderness, like ushers in a sanctuary. JOHN watches from the platform, scroll in hand. He nods once at Hale. She nods back.)

JOHN

Every valley filled. Every mountain low. Every crooked place straight. Every rough place plain. The road of the King is ready. The crew is off the asphalt. The dispatcher is silent. The radio is in the foreman's hand. The signs are face-down at the edge.

DEACON (quietly)

Is He going to walk by us. Is He going to see us in our vests.

JOHN

He is going to walk past every one of you. He is going to stop. He is going to know your names. The new ones. Not the names on your time cards. The names the Father wrote on you before the world was poured.

MARA

And the signs we set down.

JOHN

He will walk over them. He will not pick them back up. That is the whole job, Mara. He walks. They stay down.

Scene 10 — John on His Knees

(JOHN steps down off the platform. He kneels in the middle of the cleared road. He sets the rolled scroll of Isaiah on the asphalt in front of him.)

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JOHN

He is mightier than I. The strap of His sandal I am not worthy to untie. I am the voice. He is the Word. I prepared the road. He walks it.

FOREMAN HALE

What do we do now, voice.

JOHN

You stand on the shoulder. You take off your hard hat. You wait.

(The CREW removes their hard hats slowly, one by one. They line up on the shoulder. Hale stands at the front, radio in her hand.)

Final Moment — Footsteps

(From offstage, very faint at first, footsteps. Steady. Unhurried. Coming closer. The lights warm. JOHN's head bows lower. The CREW looks up the road. The FOREMAN clicks her radio one last time.)

FOREMAN HALE (into radio, quietly)

Dispatch. He's here.

RADIO VOICE

Then step aside, Hale. He knows the way.

(The footsteps grow louder. Just before they enter the stage, the lights dim — except on the row of face-down signs at the edge: PRIDE, FEAR, BITTERNESS, ADDICTION, DOUBT — and on JOHN, kneeling. Hold. Lights down.)

END

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