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Gadzooks! Dispatches from English in Universe 268091027

In universe 268091027 of the multiverse, we have an earth where English didn't evolve the same way as it did in our universe. The typical dialect across universe 268091027 sounds a lot more British and a lot older than what we are used to, to the point where their conversations sound funny and almost ridiculous to us.

On our Earth, English trundled from **Old English** (stirred by Norse) to **Middle English** (Norman French everywhere), then vaulted through the **Great Vowel Shift**, slurped up Latin and Greek during the Renaissance, standardized its spelling (more or less), and scattered worldwide—shedding *thou/thee*, trimming *-eth*, and relaxing into umpteen colloquials. In **Universe 268091027**, by contrast, the dial got stuck on “ecclesiastical pageantry meets tea-time banter.” Archaic auxiliaries linger, courtly fillers flourish—notwithstanding, nevertheless, nonetheless, be that as it may—and everyday talk arrives in powdered-wig prose that is, to our ears, gloriously daft yet quite intelligible.

Scene: The Tittle & Tattle Coffee-House, Borough of Upper Widdershins.

A rain the locals describe so elegantly as “**raining cats and dogs**” drums upon the panes. Inside, oak tables host arguments of the most **steadfast** and **ardent** variety.

Lady Nonetheless: “**Good morrow**, Sir Percival. Thou art late, and, **pray-tell**, by what sorcery? I have warmed thy chair **whilst** thou wert **dilly-dallying** and, I dare say, **frolicking about**.”

Sir Percival: “Madam, **be that as it may**, my tardiness was dealt a **double whammy**—first, a gaggle of geese engaged me in outlandish **shenanigans**; second, a mesmerist street-performer proved, well, **mesmerizing**. **Gadzooks!** I awoke beside the bandstand reciting couplets to a lamppost.”

Constable Tomfoolery (*entering, dripping*): “**Aforementioned** geese stand accused of public disorder. Also, Sir Percival, the bandstand for the couplets shall be reimbursed by **you and what army?**. They were **nonetheless** extremely slant.”

Miss Beatrice Aforementioned: “**Nimrod**—pardon, Constable—have a bun. It is not meet that a man be nimrod both in name and comportment.”

Constable: “I take no offence, Miss. In this borough, insult and endearment are **two sides of the selfsame sixpence**, **nevertheless**.”

Narrator: Observe how their adverbs march about like beadles at a fête, and how every simple claim dons a waistcoat. They do not say “I’m late.” They declaim, “Notwithstanding meteorological vagaries, I arrived belated, **nonetheless** unbowed.”

Sir Percival: “Now then, to business. Our rival guild proposes that the town clock should bong not **thrice** but thrice and a half at **half past**. Thoughts?”

Lady Nonetheless: “Preposterous. **Be that as it may**, I remain **steadfast** in opposition to half-bongs. If one must half-do anything, let it be the sugar in my tea.”

Miss Beatrice: “Hear, hear. To half-bong is to proclaim to the world, ‘We have time, **and yet none**.’ It is pure **tomfoolery**.”

Constable: “I shall record: *Motion to prevent fractional bonging*. Should there be unnecessary **any dilly-dallying**, I shall clack my truncheon in a manner **none too subtle**.”

Sir Percival: “Prior to votes, a brief perambulation **notwithstanding** the weather.” (He peers outside.) “**’Twas** brighter ere the clouds arrived. If the sky continues such **frolicking about**, the lanes shall be soup.”

Miss Beatrice: “Soup, yes—but of the **aforementioned** geese.”

Lady Nonetheless: “We digress. The calendar presses upon us **betwixt** Michaelmas and the Grand Fête of Sensible Footwear. The clock must be **ardent** in its regularity, **nevertheless** soothing to the populace.”

Constable: “Then let it be settled—bongs whole, biscuits plentiful, and rain **raining cats and dogs** only upon those who park astride two bays.”

Narrator: You may perceive a pattern: the talk is embroidered, yet the meaning lands. The flourishes serve as social oil: nobody states a thing without cushioning it in **be that as it may**, tying it off with **nevertheless**, popping in a **notwithstanding** for good measure, and tossing a **pray-tell** like confetti. Their present-tense is riddled with **whilst**, their past with **’twas**, their interjections with **gadzooks!**—and every accusation of delay is accompanied by a charge of **dilly-dallying** or **shenanigans**.

Miss Beatrice: “Before we disperse, one last order: the annual pamphlet against **dilly-dallying** shall be retitled *A Modest Plea for Making Haste Slowly*.”

Lady Nonetheless: “A smashing compromise. **Nonetheless**, let us append *On the Avoidance of Half-Bongs*.”

Constable: “And a notice: *No **frolicking about** near the canal after dusk, save by licensed frolickers*.”

Sir Percival: “Splendid. Then, **good morrow** to all who say it at any hour.” (He bows with a flourish.) “**Be that as it may**, I shall away, for my boots desire a puddle.”

Narrator: And off they go, clip-clopping into a universe where everyday errands are dressed like Shakespearean matinees; where a simple “okay” is **d’accord**, nay, **d’accord notwithstanding**; where **nonetheless** is the butter, **nevertheless** the jam, and **be that as it may** the extra scone nobody ordered but everyone eats. Ridiculous? To us, yes. But incomprehensible? Not a whit. Meaning survives the brocade, which—if we’re honest—was ever the business of English, in any universe.