

My Two Bits

"Hello."

"Who's there?"

"Hi, Honey. The home has been arrived at."

"Oh. Is that you, George?"

"Yes. The home has been arrived at by me."

"From work?"

"Yes. The home has been arrived at by me from work."

"Oh, dear, George. You look so stressed!"

"Yes. This day was not enjoyed."

"By whom, honey?"

"By me. The day was not enjoyed by me. I should just be looked at."

"By me?"

"Yes, by you. Who else should I be looked at by?"

"Well, don't get so testy, sweetheart. I'm just trying to be supportive. What happened?"

"A writing expert was brought in."

"To the office?"

"Yes. To the office."

"By whom?"

"By the boss. A writing expert was brought into the office by the boss."

"So, what did he say?"

"Well, our writing was looked at. Our proposals and reports."

"By this expert?"

"Yes. And can it be guessed by you what was said?"

"By the expert?"

"Yes. By the expert. Can it be guessed by you what it was that was said by the expert?"

"No."

"Well, 'The passive voice is being used way too much by you,' it was said."

"By the expert?"

"Yes. And in addition to that, it was said by the expert, 'Death was visited upon the passive voice many years ago.' It was characterized by him as 'zombiespeak, voice of the dead.'"

“But the passive voice is so beautiful, George. It’s scientific style.”

“That sure is agreed to.”

“By the expert?”

“No, by me! That is agreed to by me what was just said.”

“By me?”

“Yes. By you.”

“Oh.”

“And whether or not it is believed...”

“By me?”

“...by you, the scientific style was characterized...”

“By the expert?”

“Yes, by the expert. The scientific style was characterized as ‘crap.’”

“Crap?”

“‘Crap’ was the word that was used.”

“Oh my. By the expert?”

"Of course by the expert. Surely it is known by you that such a terrible thing never would be said by me!"

"Of course, dear. How silly of me. And what else did he say?"

"It was said by him that 'technical writing' and 'the scientific style' are just names that were invented by engineers, and geologists, and others like that in an effort make it seem that something that was grown up with by them has been recognized as having some aura of specialness. It was said by him that having a belief in that would be no different from having a belief that 'scientific TV is represented by a sixty-year-old black-and-white Zenith television.'"

"But I love our Zenith."

"And is there any awareness on your part of what else it was that was said?"

"No."

"It was said by him that 'academic style' was named that way, and it is quoted by me, 'because effective writing was an impossible task for a bunch of semi-literate professors with an addiction to the passive voice by whom it was decided that glorification of bad writing could be accomplished by having a good name like "academic style" ascribed to it by them a hundred years ago. Or more.'"

"Well, he doesn't sound like any expert to me."

"That is known by me, let it be told to you by me. And do you know what else it was that was said by him to us in the office at work? This needs to be listened to by you because it will not be believed."

"By me?"

"By you. It was said by this expert that 'legalese' was named that way by a bunch of lawyers the inferiority of whose writing was so significant that a step up would have been comprised even by academic style, so it was decided by them to have the result be made even more unintelligible by having Latin phrases like *ex post facto* and *stare decisis* thrown into every other sentence so the resulting 'crap' – and 'crap' actually wasn't quite the word that was used..."

"By the expert?"

"...by the expert, so understanding of their words could be accomplished only by other lawyers, sometimes with the help of a judge in court, so payments to them by clients would be charged at \$400 an hour."

"Well, I just don't understand, George. Does this expert not like the passive voice just because it's so old-fashioned?"

"Well, it was said..."

"By him?"

"Yes, by him. Whom else is it thought by you that it might have been said by? Santa Claus?"

"George. That was uncalled for."

"This is known by me. Forgiveness is requested of you by me. Oh, the day that was had. An apology is given by me."

"To me?"

“Yes. To you. Now, what place in thought had been gotten to by me?”

“You were telling me why the expert thought the passive voice was so awful.”

“Yes. Information is omitted.”

“When the passive voice is used?”

“Yes. And – this must be gotten by you – awkwardness and additional and unnecessary words are employed when the passive voice is used in reports and other written materials, it was said by him, and liability risk can be created by that because it is considered by judges that the best evidence is reflected by the written word and if understanding of the written word is not easily accomplished, then legal difficulties could be experienced by the writers and the firms by which the writers are employed.”

“Oh dear.”

“More was said. The passive voice was called unnatural! Can that be believed by you? Unnatural! The passive voice is not used by people in their thinking, it was said by him. The passive voice is not used by people in their talking, it was said by him. So why is it that the passive voice should be used by people in their writing?”

“So, what does he want you to use?”

“The active voice. ‘The active voice must be used by you,’ it was said by him. ‘Subject. Then verb. Then object. The active voice even was used by cavemen,’ it was said by him.”

“Well, I never. You must really disagree with that.”

“Are the woods used by bears in need of gastrointestinal relief after a big meal has been consumed?”

“By the bears?”

“Yes. By the bears.”

“So what are you going to do?”

“A plan has been developed. A call will be made tomorrow to a college classmate of mine by me. A major client of our firm is represented by him. Friendship still exists between us. The passive voice has been loved as much by him as it has been loved by me ever since college. A request will be made to him by me. He will be asked if a telephone call can be made by him to my boss. It could be said by him to him that the passive voice is used by all the firms in town and by all the true engineers, geologists, and so on, and that assignments by his company will be made only with firms by which the passive voice is used in proposals and reports.”

“And why will he say that’s so necessary?”

“Policy. It can be said by him that that way has always been used and must always be used.”

“Oh. That doesn’t seem like much of a good reason, sweetheart. Policy is where bureaucrats go to hide.”

“That is known by me, but that reason is the only one possessed.”

“By you?”

“Yes. By me.”

“Well. Tomorrow is another day. It’s time to go to bed.”

“What? Time to go to bed? The home was just gotten to.”

“Not really, sweetheart. This conversation has lasted four hours.”

“Oh. Well, in that case, seeing that the bed is going to be gotten to by us...”

“Not tonight, George. A headache is had.”

“By you?”

“By me.”