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MERCURY RISING

Sketch comedy by Jeff Garrity

TIME: Present

PLACE: CEO's office at large athletic footwear company

CHARACTERS: CEO

PRESTON

MERCURY

[at rise CEO is in his office and PRESTON enters through doorway]

PRESTON: [concerned] We've surely got trouble. Big trouble.

CEO: Give it to me straight, Preston.

PRESTON: Sales have declined for the third week in a row and we've lost nearly a third of our market share.

CEO: [defiant] We've seen downturns before, Preston. We'll get through this.

PRESTON: The tsunami in Bangladesh flooded four of our warehouses. Sixty million dollars worth of our top-of-the-line basketball shoes floated out to sea.

CEO: We've got insurance, Preston. We'll be okay.

PRESTON: There are forty-three dead baby whales washed up on a beach in Bangladesh and all of them have our shoes lodged in their blowholes. There's viral video of a baby whale's dying gasps and what looks like a tear rolling down the sad-faced infant's cheek. Our company logo is clearly visible on the shoe that led to the baby's death.

CEO: Flash in the pan, Preston. Something else will go viral tomorrow and erase the crying baby whale's sad death from everyone's memory.

PRESTON: We've also received thousands of complaints that our running shoes are causing shin splints.

CEO: Our consultants told us not to use those cheap plastic soles. We'll just go back to what we were using before.

PRESTON: I talked with Marian, the High Priestess in Forecasting, and she's certain that the shin splints are being caused by Nike's new voodoo program. They put more than a thousand needles into a doll made in your likeness and sliced open the shins with tiny knives.

CEO: [first time he seems concerned] Then we need voodoo counter measures, Preston!

PRESTON: We've already landed a team at a remote bay in Haiti.

CEO: Get them jabbing needles into something, Preston. Get our people jabbing!!

PRESTON: We're on it, but I haven't told you the most troubling news. High Priestess Marian spilled the divining toner onto the sacred mylar for our monthly marketing review and her reading of the toner patterns prove that people no longer believe they need trendy, poor quality and over-priced athletic footwear.

CEO: That spells trouble with a capital T, Preston.

PRESTON: Rhymes with P?

CEO: [no concept of what he's agreeing to] It certainly does. We've got to find our way out from behind the eight ball. We need to get the gods back on our side. But who? Who will by my white knight?

PRESTON: There are seventy-six deities in the Pantheon parade. We'll need to be careful who we choose so we don't repeat what happened with Mercury.

CEO: That's exactly who we need, Preston. Mercury!

PRESTON: [surprised] Surely Jones, you're not suggesting ...

CEO: You know I am, Preston. We need Mercury, the god of expediency and commerce. We need his charisma, his spirit, his drive. Otherwise, we're doomed, Preston. Doomed.

PRESTON: I can't believe you'd even consider Mercury.

CEO: Sales have been in free fall ever since we took Mercury's grinning face and golden wings off our footwear. When Mercury was our spokesgod, we could do no wrong! It didn't matter that we make crappy shoes. The market was ours, Preston. Ours!

PRESTON: Maybe we could consider a different god.

CEO: People want what Mercury wants. We need Mercury to tell the world that he wants our shoes again.

PRESTON: But it's just too soon. It's only been three weeks since that incident with Minerva. I still blush when I think about what he did with those snakes coming out of her head.

CEO: I didn't even know that was possible. [cringes]

PRESTON: Five snakes are still in counseling.

CEO: I know my idea is fraught with danger, Preston. But let's not give up on the dream! I built this company with one simple formula: we pay poverty wages and use cheap materials so we can lavish massive amounts on celebrity spokesgods to keep prices up and sales booming. With my formula, everybody wins! But our three-legged stool is missing one of its legs, and you know what happens when you're missing a leg, Preston?

PRESTON: You fall over.

CEO: You fall over! And we're going to keep falling over until Mercury's on our side again.

PRESTON: There are new rumors that Mercury has had a few more ... misadventures with forest animals. And his attacks against us have been vicious since we fired him.

CEO: That's just Mercury being Mercury. He's not misbehaving, he's just expressing his divine personality.

PRESTON: I know you're right about one thing: we won't survive the year unless we do something drastic. [starting to be convinced] And we've always known that Mercury's brash coolness makes him the ultimate influencer. Maybe you're right. Maybe he is what we need.

CEO: I knew you'd come around, Preston. You always do. But to win Mercury back we'll need to appease him like no god has ever been appeased. But how?

PRESTON: He's a god so we'll have to appeal to his vanity. [idea occurs to him] I've got it! He has a weak spot for human sacrifices.

CEO: Of course! Good thinking, Preston.

PRESTON: I suggest we sacrifice two mid-level managers in Accounting.

[CEO shoots a look at PRESTON]

PRESTON: No one will miss them.

CEO: Right. Get word to High Priestess Marian that we need two from Accounting out the window ASAP.

PRESTON: Off the roof would be far better. It's a much richer spectacle. We're trying to impress Mercury, not just get rid of some dead wood.

CEO: All right, all right. Tell Marian to send them off the roof.

[PRESTON turns away to call the High Priestess]

CEO: [dismissive, more to himself] Roof! Sheesh. Whatever happened to a good old fashioned leap out the window? Now we have to make a show of everything, and set up viewing platforms for the live streamers, and then there are the inevitable complaints that we don't sacrifice enough women or people of color.

PRESTON: [finishes his phone conversation] We've got big trouble! Nike and Adidas are trying to steal Mercury away from us. They're both sacrificing three people.

CEO: [angry] Shipooopi! Then we'll just have to sacrifice four!

PRESTON: [gets phone call, into phone] How many? [to CEO] Marketing wants to manage the sacrifice. Martens has four on a list already.

CEO: Is Mr. Indiana one of those four?

PRESTON: [into phone] Including Indiana? [gets response, then to CEO] Yes, she says Gary's at the top.

CEO: All right, let Marketing have it.

[PRESTON on phone to finish arrangements]

CEO: [perfunctorily, not concerned that PRESTON isn't paying attention] And send the usual condolences to immediate family. Spell their names right this time, will you Preston? [hopeful, more to himself] I wouldn't mind seeing Indiana fly by my window.

[body flies by window, PRESTON finished with phone conversation]

PRESTON: I think he just did.

[three more bodies fly by the window during following speech, CEO not watching window]

CEO: Good, good. And make sure the other three aren't married so we don't have to pay out so much to survivors. [wistful] I remember a time when survivor benefits were unheard of. You were proud that someone in your family was sacrificed for the good of the company.

PRESTON: [looking at phone] The sacrifice is complete, except the cleanup. And we're already past six million views on YouTube.

CEO: Good, good. That should get Mercury's attention. Any word from the pantheon?

PRESTON: Nothing yet, but when Mercury moves, he moves fast. [looks at phone again] Maybe this is him. [into phone, very deferential, gives thumbs up to CEO] All right, thank you, thank you your godship ... [mood changes, looks at CEO] Oh, I see. Okay, if that's the way it has to be. Yes, I'll tell him. [off phone, to CEO] I have some good news and ...

CEO: [hopeful] We've got Mercury's endorsement?

PRESTON: That's the good news.

CEO: That *is* good news! I would've sacrificed twenty or thirty of our highly valued employees if that's what it took. Even you, Preston. It was that important.

PRESTON: Mercury won't sign the endorsement contract unless we sacrifice you. He's on his way ...
[ENTER MERCURY wearing winged hat (fedora?), maybe winged shoes]

PRESTON: ... here. Wow, that was fast!

MERCURY: I'm a goddamn it.

CEO: You're a ... what?

MERCURY: [annoyed] I'm a god, comma, damn it. I forget how slow you people are down here.
[CEO and PRESTON to their knees in deference]

MERCURY: Get off your knees, maybe later. And get me a sandwich, willya? I'm starving.

PRESTON: Right away! [gets on phone]

[Mercury sits at CEO's desk and during the following dialogue he picks things up off the top of the desk and pulls things out of drawers, looking at them and tossing them onto the floor if he's sure they aren't edible. He's not sure about everything so he nibbles on pencils, erasers and other things and then tosses them aside once he realizes they aren't edible and keeps searching through the desk]

CEO: [bows to indifferent and distracted MERCURY] As CEO of this venerable corporation I'd like to thank you for your exceptional work on our behalf in the past. We're certain that

once you're onboard again we'll put this company right back on top where we belong. I mean, 'til there was you, we were just another shoe ...

MERCURY: [wasn't paying attention to CEO, finally stops searching and looks up] You're still here? You got a date with the pavement forty stories down. Enjoy the flight. [continues searching through desk]

CEO: [maybe starts to pick things up off the floor that MERCURY has tossed there] Your godliness, I'd like you to think through the idea of sacrificing me. When I founded this company thirty years ago I ...

MERCURY: I'm a needy god. [points at window with whatever he found in desk and is in his hand] Appease me! [tries to eat whatever is in his hand, decides it's not edible and tosses it aside]

CEO: Your divineness, I started this company in my garage and built it into the most powerful athletic footwear company on the planet. You can't just discard all those years of ...

MERCURY: You got a sandwich on you?

CEO: No.

MERCURY: Then you're dead to me. [gestures toward window with something else] Bye bye.

CEO: [MERCURY still not paying attention, still searching for something edible] But your deityness, there's no one better than me to steer the company out of troubled waters and back into the bright blue skies of profit and prosperity. We've had trouble before and my steady hand has always pulled us through. Just give me a chance and I'll get us out of this morass.

MERCURY: [stops searching and suddenly pays attention] More what?

CEO: Ass.

MERCURY: [giggles] That's what I thought you said. [demeanor changes] Out the window.

PRESTON: [off phone and responding to MERCURY's sacrifice demand] Your supernaturalness, perhaps we shouldn't be too hasty about this. I have to agree that his years of experience could be very valuable, especially now that ...

MERCURY: Where's my sandwich?

PRESTON: On its way, your all-powerfullness. [deferential bow]

MERCURY: I like you Preston. How about I double your salary after he jumps and I become CEO?

PRESTON: Well, I ...

MERCURY: Triple.

PRESTON: This puts me in an ...

MERCURY: And you can have his parking space.

PRESTON: [to CEO] They say it's a quick death.

CEO: Preston, how could you turn on me like this? I made you what you are!

PRESTON: Yes, and I always believed you when you said we should take pride in the sacrifices we make for the company. And with one easy leap you can save the business you poured your heart and soul into for thirty years. Could there be a more noble act?

CEO: [last gasp effort to save himself, to MERCURY] What about Preston? We could sacrifice him! He's nothing but a yes man.

PRESTON: He does have a point. [thinks] Wait a minute.

MERCURY: [looks at his phone] Adidas has double the views for their sacrifice and triple the likes. They pushed two people off a mountain in Bavaria with flaming streamers tied to their heels. [watches on phone] Nice. *Very nice!* [stops watching on phone] I'm wasting my time here. [heads toward door]

CEO: [runs to block him from leaving, or grabs his arm] No, no. We'll fly a dozen people to the Rockies and push them off a cliff.

MERCURY: Go ahead. The more the merrier, but the only one that matters is you. Out the window or I'm heading to Bavaria.

CEO: [pleading] I'll get us back on top! I will!

MERCURY: Right, when roses bloom out your ass. [moves toward door]

CEO: No! Please! [dejected, embarrassed] I can't jump. [MERCURY waits for CEO to explain] I'm afraid of heights.

MERCURY: Suit yourself. I'll put a for sale sign on the front door when I leave. [moves toward door again]

PRESTON: [to CEO] With one easy leap you can save a lifetime of hard work. It's for the good of the company.

CEO: [wistful] For the good of the company. [resigned to his fate] All those years of working eighty hour weeks and neglecting my family and friends for the good of the company. I wasn't even at my daughter's high school graduation. Poor Debbie ...

PRESTON: Diane.

CEO: [during this speech CEO prepares to jump by sitting on or straddling the window sill] Diane. Right. I suppose I've already sacrificed my life to the company, this is just the final step in the total and complete defeat a human being by the cruel gods of commerce and prosp ...

[during the above speech, MERCURY nonchalantly walks toward CEO. As he walks past the window he casually pushes CEO out mid-sentence]

MERCURY: All right, now that I'm in charge I want my bobble head on the tops of every shoe we make. But make sure it looks like my earlier self, before I started eating laudanum for breakfast and really let myself go. And I want six-inch wings on every heel of every shoe we make. Made from real feathers!

PRESTON: [concerned] We'll have to meet with design and production, but I have to say your ideas don't sound practical.

MERCURY: I'm a god. Practical is for you mortal fools.

PRESTON: But we can only do what's possible. People can't play basketball with bobble heads on their toes and six-inch wings on their heels, and I don't see runners wanting either of those either.

MERCURY: [dismissive] You figure out how to make it work. Bacchus is throwing a party tonight and I'll be hung over for a couple days. I want prototypes and a complete marketing plan on my desk when I get back. You fail, you're out the window.

PRESTON: [looks out window] Hey, look! There's a cowd down below and they're chanting your name! Look!

MERCURY: [walks to the window] Where?

PRESTON: Lean out a little farther. [pushes MERCURY out the window, looks relieved he's gone]

MERCURY: [bursts back in door as quickly as possible after he's pushed out the window, amused by PRESTON's effort] You really think you can get rid of me? You mortals made us gods and now you're stuck with us. But you got spunk, Preston. You and me, we're gonna go far.

[PRESTON gives the audience an "oh shit" look]

LIGHTS