

When Hell Freezes Over

A Comedy

by

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By Alan D. Perkins
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INTRODUCTION

When Hell Freezes Over is a comedy in two acts. The required set is a modest and extremely messy living room with a front door, bookshelf, sofa, implied television, a closet and arches to the kitchen and bedroom. There should be a window, sofa, a chair or two, stereo and Greenpeace poster.

CAST

JACKSON PRATT - Male - early 30's. Jackson is an Environmental Lawyer and is happy knowing he'll probably never see the inside of a court room. Happy just going with the flow, Jackson doesn't have a lot of guts.

OTTO - Male - late 30's to late 40's. Otto is a Dark Angel from Hell. He's larger than life and likes it that way - big, broad and loud. He does, however, have a good heart.

RALPH SHAW - Male - early 30's. Ralph, Jackson's best friend, is a bit of a maniac. He throws all caution to the wind and seldom considers the consequences for his actions. As a result he's a bit of a know-it-all who, sadly, doesn't know much at all.

BERNIE - Male - late 30's to late 40's. Bernie is a Dark Angel from Hell. He was a bad, bad boy when he was alive. Now he's a very loyal drone, but uses his experiences to be as menacing as possible.

ANNIE - Female - early 30's to early 40's. Annie is Jackson's cousin, though she has become his surrogate mother, making her a bit matronly. She's very smart and very confident to the point where she rambles on with her own self-righteousness, which winds up just being annoying.

LOU - Male - early to mid 40's. Lou is the Devil. Literally. Imagine if you mixed a stock broker with a lawyer and mixed in a dash of wolverine. Lou is slick as oil and mean as a snake.

WOMEN - At least 5 women. One has lines, the others have actions.

ACTS

ACT 1 - Jackson's living room, early evening, shortly after the freezing of Hell.

ACT 2 - Jackson's living room, the next morning.

*There are four newscasts that take place throughout the play. These can and SHOULD be updated regularly -- per performance if possible.

Act 1

(Music: "Takin' Care of Business" by Bachman Turner Overdrive. Fade in. The view from the window indicates that it has recently snowed. The room looks as if a laundry truck has exploded. Piles of laundry sit in numerous spots in the room with random laundry literally everywhere. Wherever there is NOT laundry lie fast food and junk food packages. On the wall is a Greenpeace poster. JACKSON enters, dressed in a t-shirt and sweat pants, carrying an armload of laundry. He rushes to the stereo and changes the station on the radio. The last section of Saint-Saëns' "Danse Macabre" comes on. Jackson becomes elated as he begins to dance a literal ballet as he throws laundry into the assorted piles. When the piece ends, he takes his bows for his own sake and plucks a letter from the mail slot in the front door.)

JACKSON

Son of a gun - my tax refund. That was quick.

(JACKSON sits on the sofa in the center of the stage and proceeds to toss dirty clothes into piles in different corners of the room. He uses the remote control to turn on the television.)

ANNOUNCER

President Dean accepted President Bush's resignation today and said he would follow congress's example with a fifty percent pay cut as well. The President voiced his regret that the sudden snow storm will hamper most of the Fourth of July activities tomorrow.

On the political front, Al Sharpton has thrown his hat into the ring for Mayor of New York City again. When asked to comment, Sharpton stated that 'this time he just can't lose.'

Locally, High School enrollment swells with returning drop-outs.

(Phone rings. JACKSON starts hunting for the phone by following the cord.)

ANNOUNCER (cont'd)

Temperatures are expected to go down as far as forty below tonight, with another two inches of snow expected nation wide.

(JACKSON turns off the TV and answers the phone.)

JACKSON

Hello? Oh, hi Annie.

(tries to clean up)

Yes, I'm fine ... Yeah, I'm sure. Are YOU okay? ... No, I just thought that you were so concerned for how I was that ... yeah ... uh-huh ... no, everything's just fine ... No, nobody's been around. It's laundry day, you know. Of course I'm using soap ... that was just that one time. I'm here all by myself ... Okay, if anything happens I'll let you know ... honestly, everything is fine ... YOU'RE COMING OVER?! NO! NO! NO! ... See you in a bit.

(As JACKSON hangs up, there is a clatter of garbage cans crashing around. JACKSON rushes to the door to listen.)

OTTO

(From outside) Shit! Damn transporter! ... Shit! NOTHIN' workin' right today!

(The doorbell rings.)

JACKSON

Hello? Who's out there?

(Door bell rings again. JACKSON opens the door. There is a bright light and mist.)

OTTO

(Sounding very "demonic") Are you ... Jack Pratt?

JACKSON

That's "Jackson."

(Bright light and mist go away.)

OTTO

(In a normal voice) Oh, sorry. Must have the wrong house.

JACKSON

No, you have the right house.

OTTO

But you said this was the Jackson residence.

JACKSON

No, I'M Jackson.

OTTO

Hmm. Typical. They must've goofed up the papers ...
Jack Jackson.

JACKSON

No, Jackson Pratt. I don't go by "Jack."

OTTO

Why not?! Nothin' wrong with the name "Jack"! For all
you know, MY name could be "Jack."

JACKSON

I'm sorry. Is it?

OTTO

No, it ain't.

JACKSON

I'm sure "Jack" is a fine name, but I go strictly by
Jackson. When people call me "Jack" it sounds too much
like the old nursery rhyme, Jack Spratt. You know:
Jack Spratt could eat no fat, his wife could eat no
lean ...

OTTO

Wait, you got a fat wife?

JACKSON

No, no! Never mind. I just go by "Jackson." Never
call me "Jack."

OTTO

Oh yeah? And what if I do?

JACKSON

I ... uh ... I won't answer.

OTTO

Well, pardonéz moi! Okay, JACKSON. We got some
business to discuss.

JACKSON

Business? What kind of business?

OTTO

The kind that could take a while. Now if you don't mind, I'M FREEZING MY BUTT OFF! It's cold as hell out there ... so I've heard ...

JACKSON

Oh! I'm sorry! I was just making sure you weren't a Jehovah's Witness or something. Won't you come in? I mean, with the snow in July and all - I didn't mean to make you FREEZE to death.

OTTO

Thanks, pal. You're a real gentleman.

(OTTO bursts in, hops on the sofa and proceeds to walk across it. JACKSON stands in awe.)

OTTO (cont'd)

Nice spread you got here, Jackson.

JACKSON

Thank you, uh ... uh ...

OTTO

You got a problem?

JACKSON

Uh ... Me? No, I just didn't catch your name.

OTTO

Yeah, well I didn't throw it. Call me "Otto."

JACKSON

Otto, like in "Automobile?" I had a relative named Otto once.

OTTO

What are the odds? Well bud, this is your unlucky day.
(opens his satchel, pulls out a folder)
Does the date April 30th, 1989 mean anything to you?

JACKSON

Uh ... Eighty nine. I was almost out of law school, thank goodness. Hmm ... April 30th ... Nope. Can't say it does.

OTTO

I was afraid of that. Here, let me refresh your memory. You were studying contracts with ... let's see ... Dr. Ferguson. You just lost your fourth case in Moot Court.

JACKSON

I try to forget those days.

OTTO

Yeah, yeah, yeah ... so it says Dr. Ferguson asked you if you thought you'd ever present a winning summation and you were recorded as saying ...

OTTO & JACKSON

(In unison) ... when Hell freezes over ...

JACKSON

I mumbled that under my breath. I was frustrated.

OTTO

Yeah, that's tough. But guess what? Did you notice the weather?

JACKSON

Well, I'll admit that snow is a bit unusual in July ... at least near sea level in the northern hemisphere ... but with what we've done to the environment I wouldn't be surprised if ...

OTTO

(Interrupting) Well, pal, time to ante up! Hell. You know Hell? It froze over! Solid! Down there is nothin' but ice and snow. Really gummed up the works. However, after-life goes on and everybody who made the promise now has to make good before it thaws out. Now, had you said something like "when Heaven becomes a steam bath" or "when you can drink out of the East River" things might have been different.

JACKSON

Look, I know it's cold out there, but HELL? Freezing over? You can fool some of the witless saps out there, but not Jackson Pratt! I'm smarter than you think, Otto. I demand solid proof.

OTTO

You DEMAND?!

JACKSON

Did I say demand? I meant ... uh, I'd like to see proof. Please?

OTTO

Proof? Hah! Just watch the TV.

(OTTO snaps his fingers.
The TV comes on.)

JACKSON

Hey! How'd you do that?

OTTO
WATCH!

ANNOUNCER

... Homeless in New York City receive the ample surplus of food grown recently in Somalia while, in yet another surprise move, CitiBank has agreed to forgive the interest in exchange for the Amazon Reforestation Program. And now a weather update ...

JACKSON

Otto, I think ...

OTTO
Shhh! This is important!

ANNOUNCER

Expect temperatures to be continued cold tonight. The mercury is expected to drop to minus forty degrees Celsius. For those of you still confused by the US adoption of the metric system, that's negative forty degrees Fahrenheit. No warming trend is in sight.

OTTO
Hmm. No warming trend. Good.

(OTTO snaps his fingers.
The TV turns off.)

OTTO (cont'd)
All right, hot-shot. Satisfied?

JACKSON

Well, gee ... I don't know what to say ... Hey! Wait a minute! You ... you're a messenger from Hell! You're a Demon!

OTTO
Hey, hey, such strong words!

JACKSON

I'm sorry. It's just that a Demon from Hell doesn't come to visit me every day.

OTTO
Don't sweat it, pal, and watch the "Demon" stuff. Demons are nasty critters. I'm just a messenger.

JACKSON
You mean like a devil or something?

OTTO

You see, that's why Hell has such a bad rep. People think everybody down there is all red with horns, pointy tails and pitchforks. Well, I'll tell ya, it ain't nothin' like that at all. It's more like Fresno without the glitter.

JACKSON

Never been there.

OTTO

I spent a year there one afternoon.

JACKSON

Look, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to, you know, insinuate anything ...

OTTO

(Interrupting) Will you stop apologizing all the time?! It really irritates me!

JACKSON

I'm sor- okay. So, you're really from Hell, huh?

OTTO

(Mocking) Yeah, I'm really from Hell. You got a problem with that? You wanna make something of it, pal?!

JACKSON

Uh, NO! NO! It's just that I don't get to meet a ... a ... Excuse me, Otto, but if you aren't a demon and you aren't a devil, what are you?

OTTO

I'm what we call a "D.A.," or "Dark Angel." Think of me as a working-class guy doin' his job.

(OTTO snaps his fingers.
"Takin' Care of Business"
comes on the stereo and he
starts dancing.)

JACKSON

What the hell?!

OTTO

Exactly.

(OTTO snaps his fingers and
the music turns off.)

JACKSON

(Still a little startled) Now, about your job. Isn't there anything we can do about that? I mean, I said that stuff under my breath out of frustration! I'm a lousy litigator. I was never cut out for the courtroom.

OTTO

No kidding. Your file says you couldn't stand up to anyone.

JACKSON

That's not true!

OTTO

Then why didn't you do Corporate Law? You know, mergers, acquisitions ... that's pretty skeevey stuff.

JACKSON

I was too ethical.

OTTO

An ethical lawyer. Now, there's an oxymoron if I ever heard one.

JACKSON

Besides, I don't practice that kind of Law.

OTTO

Oh? What other kinds of Law are there? Do you defend the laws of Physics? Or better yet, you defend Murphy's law! That's it! (exaggerated laughter)

JACKSON

No, Mister-Smart-Guy-From-Hell. I'm an Environmental Lawyer.

OTTO

Oh, that's rich! You defend the trees! "You're honor, you can't lock up my client for indecent exposure ... it was fall and he lost his leaves!"

(exaggerated laughter)

"It was a Dogwood! Who knew his bark would be worse than his bite!"

(laughs)

JACKSON

No, no, no! I work to make sure factories, industrial storage and waste sites are in compliance with applicable standards and draft new resolutions. It's all paperwork, really. No defending cases or anything like that. I haven't seen a courtroom since Law School.

OTTO

(Sarcastically) Yeah. Sure. Right. Pull the other leg and it plays "Jingle Bells."

JACKSON

Look, aren't there more extreme cases to pursue? I hardly think my desperate comments warrant all this trouble.

OTTO

A promise is a promise. All cases are being covered and nobody's exempt, and that means you, pal. It's not like we don't have the staff ...

JACKSON

Oh, don't get me wrong. It's just that ... well ... I've always been a fairly good person. I go to church once in a while, if that means anything.

OTTO

Like I said, nobody's exempt, not even me. Promises are a pretty strong thing, and at any moment someone could turn around and expect ya to make good. Let me explain something about promises, Jackson. The door swings both ways. Not only are YOU bound by them, but if your promises touch anyone else, they're ALSO bound by them. One loose promise could get an entire nation in trouble. And this rule came from the man upstairs. We tried to find loopholes, but believe me, there ain't any.

JACKSON

But Otto, I spend my life trying to get people and companies to live up to their promises. I'd never break one.

OTTO

Oh really. Well, let me tell ya about YOU, Jackson ol' pal - down there you're what we call a "good boy" ... someone who plays by the rules. There's lots of folks down in Hell that'd love to get their hands on your soul, but fortunately I was hand-picked special to take your case. It took a lot of scraping for me to come up with this dirt, and I ain't leavin' until you make good.

JACKSON

Really? And what if I don't?

OTTO

Just instant death and eternal damnation.

JACKSON

Oh, give me a break.

OTTO

Hey, I don't make the rules.

JACKSON

Yeah, but I just can't up and buy this eternal damnation stuff. It sounds too dramatic to be on the level.

OTTO

Suit yourself. When you're burning in Hell, don't say I didn't tell you so.

JACKSON

Sorry, I don't relate to scare tactics.

(Pause as OTTO circles JACKSON.)

OTTO

Boo!

JACKSON

(Startled) JESUS! DON'T DO THAT!

OTTO

(Laughs) I thought you said you didn't relate to scare tactics! (laughs)

JACKSON

Well ... maybe a little. I still don't believe the eternal damnation stuff.

OTTO

You callin' me a liar?

JACKSON

No, no, no! Look, I didn't mean to let on like I thought you were lying or anything ... I just need some kind of contractual proof. You know, evidence ... burden of proof

OTTO

Jackson ... the point. What's the point. Frequently you need one in order to win a dispute.

JACKSON

My POINT is that something of this potential magnitude needs some backing up. Do you have any kind of written contract or legal papers on this "hell freezing over" bit, or on the alleged promise?

OTTO

Legal papers?! Alleged promise?! Boy, you're good.

JACKSON

You can be a pain in the neck if you want to, but I don't have to put up with this harassment until I see some sort of contract!

OTTO

Okay, okay. Here's your contract. Read it and weep.

(OTTO pulls a contract out of his satchel and hands it to JACKSON. JACKSON reads it to himself.)

JACKSON

... upon the freezing over of Hell, Jackson Pratt must hereby honor his promise present a winning summation or suffer the consequences of instant death and eternal damnation ... blah, blah, blah ... signed ... hey! How'd you get my signature?!

OTTO

In Hell, a man's Word holds a lot of weight.

JACKSON

Maybe so, but I never signed this.

OTTO

Check this out.

(OTTO snaps his fingers.)

JACKSON (VO)

"... Hell would freeze over before I ever presented a winning summation ..."

JACKSON

Hey! How'd you get that?!

OTTO

Let me tell ya something about your "Word," Jackson. Your Word is something that shouldn't be taken lightly or for granted. It's one of the few things in the world that's truly and solely yours. It's actually the most valuable and personal thing anyone has. In fact, when you give your Word you're literally giving a part of yourself -- something so personal that in places like Hell it's worth more than gold.

JACKSON

But how did you get my voice? And where did it play from?

OTTO

Who do you think you're dealing with here? The CIA? We're pros.

JACKSON

What's this other signature? Looks like ... Sam ... Santa ...

OTTO

That's "Satan." He gets caught up with his calligraphy.

JACKSON

No.

OTTO

Hey, Dark Angels NEVER kid about the Boss.

JACKSON

You really know him?

OTTO

Not as well as he knows me. Real touchy guy. Not someone anybody'd wanna mess with ... living or otherwise. But it won't be an issue you'll have to worry about. Just hit the books and defend a case. Then you're off the hook.

JACKSON

You mean you can't automatically have me win a case?

OTTO

Check the wording, Mister Paperwork. It says YOU have to present a winning summation, not ME. YOU have to hit the books. I'll get you the necessary breaks, but it's all up to you. And besides, there are other promises to attend to.

JACKSON

Otto, I assure you, I have NEVER made any other promises that I didn't intend to honor.

OTTO

No kidding. I had to dig through a pile of paperwork up to my neck just to find this one thing. You don't commit to much, do you.

JACKSON

Not unless I have to. It's safer that way.

OTTO

Afraid to take chances?

JACKSON

I wouldn't call it "afraid."

OTTO

Well, Jackson ol' pal, looks like you're gonna take the ultimate chance.

JACKSON

By presenting a summation?

OTTO

Not exactly.

(Doorbell rings.)

OTTO (cont'd)

Right on cue. You'd better get that.

(JACKSON answers the door.
WOMAN #1 is standing with
a cake or pie is there.)

JACKSON

Oh! Oh my goodness! I haven't seen you in ...

WOMAN #1

(Interrupting) Hello, Jackson. It's been a long time.
I know things didn't quite work out between us, but
I'd like it if you'd reconsider.

JACKSON

I ... uh ...

WOMAN #1

In the mean time, I baked this for you. Here's my
number, some naked photos and a hundred dollars to pay
for a date. (hands him an envelope)

JACKSON

Uh ... I don't know what to say.

WOMAN #1

How about "yes" to a date? Eight o'clock? I'll pick
you up.

JACKSON

Uh ... I ... I mean.

WOMAN #1

See you at eight, Jackson. (leaves)

JACKSON

Uh, Otto ... I haven't seen her in years. Is there something I should know?

OTTO

Like I was tellin' ya, the door swings both ways. You know her, don't you?

JACKSON

Oh, no.

OTTO

I thought so.

JACKSON

We dated for a while ...

OTTO

A while?

JACKSON

TWICE!! We went out TWICE!!!

OTTO

And what happened?

JACKSON

Otto, I like my freedom. I'd really rather forget the whole incident ...

OTTO

(Interrupting) Answer the question, Jackie. What scared her off?

JACKSON

(Very quiet - mumbling under his breath) I asked her if she would marry me.

OTTO

What was that?

JACKSON

I ASKED HER IF SHE WOULD MARRY ME!!

OTTO

And she said ...

OTTO & JACKSON

(In unison) ... when hell freezes over.

OTTO

See a trend?

JACKSON

Does this mean what I think it means?

OTTO

(Clearly enjoying this) Wait, there's more!

(Doorbell rings.)

JACKSON

Okay, so I have this effect on women.

OTTO

There's more.

JACKSON

How many more?

OTTO

I got this whole list here of about ... oh ... twenty five names. You don't learn from your mistakes too easily, do you.

(Doorbell rings again, with some knocking.)

JACKSON

This isn't funny.

OTTO

You'd better get that.

(JACKSON answers the door.
3 more WOMEN are there,
each holding gifts.)

WOMEN

(Unison) Hello, Jackson.

JACKSON

Hi. I'll tell you what - leave me your phone numbers and I'll call you to set up a date at my first possible ... uh ... opportunity.

(He takes their gifts and an envelope from each and closes the door.)

JACKSON

(Defeatedly) Okay, Otto. State your business. What do I have to do?

OTTO

There's a lot of dames in the lurch because of you. Every one of them is contractually bound to marry you.

JACKSON

Otto, I can't marry all of them, unless you expect me to become Mormon.

OTTO

Ha ha ha. Just pick one. Then they'll ALL be off the hook.

JACKSON

But Otto ... I don't WANT to get married! I didn't then and I don't now. That was a great scheme I'd worked out to scare them off. There weren't supposed to be repercussions.

OTTO

My heart's bleedin', kid.

JACKSON

Besides, I don't want my life to change. I like my life the way it is. I like being alone.

OTTO

It ain't so bad if you hook up with the right dame. I wasn't up on the idea when I was your age for the same reasons, but it worked out okay for me.

JACKSON

You were married once?

OTTO

What, you think I was BORN in Hell? I was a meatbag just like you once.

JACKSON

So, what do I do now? How do I deal with twenty five ex-girlfriends with wedding bells ringing in their ears?

OTTO

You got the easy part. Just go along for the ride. Go out with all of them and take as long as you like, as long as Hell don't thaw first. That's the deadline. Always keep a watch on those weather reports.

JACKSON

Twenty five dates! I'll never be able to afford it! Is there any way you can help out? You know, with the financial end?

OTTO

Material gain ain't one of my departments. Aw, come on, you're a lawyer! Lawyers make a bundle!

JACKSON

Not when they represent "Greenpeace."

OTTO

Look ... relax. This is THEIR hell. These dames are so desperate to go out with you that they'll go dutch or better! Besides, one of them is cursed to marry YOU.

JACKSON

Hmmm. You've got a point. But twenty five! I don't have the stamina! I'll never hold up!

OTTO

You have to, or die and burn in Hell for eternity.

JACKSON

I'm not sure I want to get over rejection this way. Couldn't I just go to Hell?

OTTO

You don't want to go to Hell. I've been there. It's no picnic. A barbecue, maybe. All you gotta do is marry one of them, win your summation and you AND twenty four women are off the hook.

JACKSON

Okay, you win.

OTTO

I see we need to work on that second part. Till then I'm stuck to you like glue.

JACKSON

Is that really necessary?

OTTO

Actually no, but I could always use a good laugh. Okay, okay, you'll have your privacy. But I'll always be around and I'll always be keepin' some kind of eye on you.

JACKSON

Is this one of those situations where I can see you and everybody else can't?

OTTO

Get real! This ain't the movies. Everybody can see me, though they may not want to see YOU.

WHEN HELL FREEZES OVER - I - 18

(Doorbell rings many times.)

JACKSON

Aw, come on!

OTTO

Can't be helped, pal o' mine.

(JACKSON answers the door. There are more women there.)

JACKSON

Hello everybody. I understand the nature of your visit and I'm very flattered. So if you will just leave me your phone numbers, I'll be sure to spend some quality time with each of you. (they hand him their envelopes) Thank you, thank you.

(As he closes the door, one more WOMAN grabs him and whispers something in his ear. JACKSON periodically nods. She whispers for a long time before she leaves.)

JACKSON (cont'd)

Uh ... I need to get ready for a date.

OTTO

Great! When?

JACKSON

In a half hour. And she doesn't mind paying.

OTTO

I told you so. We Dark Angels can be pretty handy sometimes.

JACKSON

I really have to get ready! If you'll excuse me, Otto ...

OTTO

Hey, it's okay. I'll just make my self nice and comfy here. Got any brew?

JACKSON

Brew? Uh ... sure. I think there's a couple of wine coolers in the fridge.

WHEN HELL FREEZES OVER - I - 19

(OTTO makes a sour face as JACKSON exits. Doorbell rings, OTTO answers.)

OTTO

Ladies, ladies, I'm Mr. Pratt's assistant and ...
YIKES!

(RALPH darts in.)

RALPH

JACKSON!!! HEY, JACKSON!!! LET ME IN!!!

OTTO

Hey, take it easy, pal.

RALPH

Oh my God! It's terrible! It's horrible! Jackson!
Jackson! ... Hey, you're not Jackson.

OTTO

Yeah, and you ain't the Tooth Fairy. But you DO look familiar. Otto. The name's Otto.

RALPH

Nice to meet you, Otto. Where is he?

OTTO

You mean Jack?

RALPH

Call him "Jackson." He hates it when you call him "Jack."

OTTO

Yeah, I know. He's kind of funny with that. Look, Sparky, what's got you all spooked?

RALPH

Where's Jackson?!! I demand to see him right now!

OTTO

Do you realize who your spitting on?

RALPH

I could care less! Where are you hiding him?!

OTTO

Him? He's upstairs gettin' ready for a date.

RALPH

Jackson Pratt? A date? The man doesn't DATE. He's a dweeb. He's got this effect on women. Hell'd freeze over before any of the girls in THIS town'd go out with him again.

OTTO

Maybe you noticed about twenty, twenty five women camped out on the front lawn?

RALPH

Yeah. What's up with that?

(JACKSON re-enters, hunting for a pre-tied tie.)

JACKSON

Ralph! What the hell are you screaming about?

RALPH

Jackson! Boy, am I glad to see you! ... Hide me. You have to hide me!

JACKSON

What have you done this time, Ralph ...

OTTO

THIS time?

JACKSON

Whenever Ralph gets himself into trouble he ends up here.

(JACKSON finds a tie and puts it on.)

RALPH

It's terrible! You gotta help me!

(JACKSON walks to the mirror to examine his tie.)

OTTO

Hey, Sparky. Do you know a D.A. named Bernie?

JACKSON

Bernie?

RALPH

B-B-BERNIE?!!! YOU KNOW BERNIE?!!!

OTTO

Sure! We're old buddies! And I'll be damned if you don't act just like him.

JACKSON

Too late.

OTTO

(A beat) You know, you're a real stitch, Jackie. You ought to do stand-up.

JACKSON

I have my days.

RALPH

What are you two going on about? And how do you know Bernie? Jackson, who is this guy, and how does he know ... AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!!

JACKSON

What's got into you?!

RALPH

Do you ... did you ...

JACKSON

Out with it ...

RALPH

... did you know that ... that ... that ...

OTTO

You really know how to pick 'em, Jackie. With friends like this ...

RALPH

(Interrupting) THAT MAN IS A MESSENGER FROM HELL!!!!
I was salivating all over a messenger from Hell.

OTTO

Dark Angel, actually.

JACKSON

Yes, I know. Okay fellow, too, once you look beyond the surface.

OTTO

Thanks, pal.

JACKSON

Don't mention it. Really.

RALPH

An okay fellow? What's next, tea and crumpets?
Jackson, this guy is a Demon from Hell!

OTTO

Here we go with that Demon mess again!

(JACKSON puts his arm
around RALPH and escorts
him to a formal
introduction with OTTO.)

JACKSON

Ralph, listen to me. Otto is NOT a Demon. Demons are
nasty critters. Otto's a D.A.

(RALPH ducks behind JACKSON
and making a cross with
this fingers.)

RALPH

Get thee behind me, Satan! I'm not afraid!

OTTO

(After a long take) First of all, schmuck, you're
Jewish so the cross bit ain't gonna work. Second; I
ain't Satan, I don't profess to BE Satan and, frankly,
I don't even like bringing up his NAME! And third, you
got nothing to be afraid of ... unless you're as stupid
as you look.

JACKSON

That's my Ralph.

RALPH

I thought you were my best friend.

JACKSON

Lighten up, Ralph.

OTTO

Yeah. Lighten up, Ralph.

RALPH

Jackson, Jackson, I've always known you to be such a
stickler for morality. But I've never known you to
make a promise in your life! I thought you'd be the
last person in the world to get a visit from one of
THESE guys.

OTTO

Well, he's not top of the list. I mean, we're real
busy today. But hey, nobody's perfect.

(JACKSON changes his tie.)

JACKSON

He has proof that I actually made the promise, and you know what I always say ... you're nothing if your promise is worthless.

RALPH

Yeah, but you have to make them first.

JACKSON

I'm just cautious.

RALPH

Life is for the living, Jackson. Try it sometimes. Take a chance. Make an empty promise! It's fun! I do it all the time! 'Gets me action!

OTTO

The signature M.O. for the FAMOUS Ralph Augustus Shaw.

RALPH

Famous?

OTTO

You're a real naughty boy, Ralphie. In Hell, you're a classic! D.A.'s train on your case!

RALPH

Great. I've got all Hell on my case.

JACKSON

What have you done?

OTTO

You name it! This guy is in big with the careless promises. But topside the details are between him and Bernie. And speaking of Bernie; where is the old manic depressive?

RALPH

I think I lost him.

OTTO

Impossible. We got like this built-in homing device. You can never lose us and we'll never lose you.

(The front door suddenly
flies open and a bright
light pours in.)

BERNIE

(Sounding very demonic) RALPH SHAW!!! YOU CAN RUN BUT YOU CAN'T HIDE!!!

RALPH

Oh, crap. I'm busted.

(BERNIE enters.)

OTTO

Bernie! You old pain in the ass! How've you been!

BERNIE

Otto! Good to see ya! How's it hangin'?

OTTO

Has Ralphie been a bad boy?

BERNIE

A bad boy? The minute I turn my back, this coconut ducks out of the house! It even says in his file that he usually hides here. You're a bad boy, Ralphie.

(BERNIE cuffs RALPH on the head.)

RALPH

Ow!

OTTO

You know, Ralphie here kind of reminds me of you when you were in your prime.

BERNIE

That was a long time ago. Now come on, Ralphie. We got an appointment with your doctor for a complete, thorough physical.

RALPH

Please, Jackson, you have to save me from this hellish nightmare!

JACKSON

You're going for a physical? From a DOCTOR?

RALPH

Oh, rub it in, Jello-Man.

BERNIE

Don't forget that after the doctor's you're giving a pint of blood, so try not to get all worked up. Save your strength. And then we get to visit the dentist ... after we rent "Marathon Man" ... and you don't brush regular. Besides, you wouldn't wanna miss that nice sushi dinner I planned.

JACKSON

What's next? Buying Girl Scout cookies?

RALPH

You want any? I got a dozen boxes in the car.

JACKSON

You're amazing.

RALPH

There's a plus side to all of this, you know. I got a monster promotion at work, and I got dates lined up with the hottest babes in town from now to December!

(Now, JACKSON hunts for socks.)

JACKSON

Speaking of dates, I gotta get ready for one. You kids behave yourselves.

RALPH

I still find that hard to swallow. Hell must have REALLY frozen over.

JACKSON

As a matter of fact, it did.

OTTO

Bernie, watch out for him. He's feisty.

BERNIE

I'll keep him in line.

(BERNIE cuffs RALPH on the head.)

RALPH

OW!

BERNIE

Come on, Ralphie. We've got appointments to keep.

(BERNIE starts pulling RALPH out of the house.)

RALPH

But I don't wanna go to the Doctor's.

BERNIE

Shut up. Remember the part about death and damnation.

RALPH

Couldn't be worse than that high colonic.

(The open the door. Many
WOMEN jump to attention.)

BERNIE

Relax, ladies. False alarm.

(The WOMEN look
disappointed. RALPH and
BERNIE exit. Very long
pause as OTTO and JACKSON
looks for his dress shoes
and awkwardly tries to
break the silence.)

JACKSON

This Bernie ... a friend of yours?

OTTO

You might say. We was buddies when we were alive.

JACKSON

He seems kind of scary.

OTTO

All D.A. assignments are done with the utmost
consideration. Ralphie needs someone like Bernie. I
mean, before he died, he was just like Ralph.

JACKSON

And what were YOU like?

OTTO

Me? I was a selfish asshole. We assholes wind up
doin' gigs like this.

JACKSON

It's all starting to make sense now. Funny. I never
really thought about my own mortality.

OTTO

Neither did I when I was alive. That was my mistake.

JACKSON

Gosh, Otto, I've got so many questions to ask ... so many answers I want to find ...

OTTO

And so many women to date.

JACKSON

Oh, geez! I almost forgot! Can't keep her waiting!

OTTO

You're a man after my own heart, Jackie. It's almost like we're family.

JACKSON

Yeah. Almost. Hey look, speaking of family, my cousin is on her way over here. I think we were supposed to go to a movie this evening or something.

OTTO

Annie?

JACKSON

How do you know her?

OTTO

Uh ... research. Yeah, research. I stumbled across her in your file.

JACKSON

Oh. Okay. Anyway, when she shows up do you think you can cover for me? I don't think I could face her.

OTTO

Don't worry, pal. I'll take care of everything.

JACKSON

Thanks, Otto. You know, for a Dark Angel, you're really a pretty good guy.

OTTO

I AM NOT!!! ... Uh ... just be careful who you say that to. It could get me in a peck o' trouble.

JACKSON

You're secret's safe with me.

(JACKSON exits. OTTO props himself on the sofa, snaps his fingers, turning on the TV.)

ANNOUNCER

... United States economy has skyrocketed with Japanese orders for American made automobiles and electronic components ...

(OTTO snaps his fingers, turning off the TV and shakes his head.)

OTTO

What a mess. You'd think it was Judgment Day or somethin'.

(Doorbell rings.)

JACKSON

Oh, no. Look, can you take care of it?

(OTTO opens the door. ANNIE bursts in carrying two grocery bags, which block her face. OTTO stands spellbound as ANNIE moves around the living room.)

ANNIE

Well, it's about time, Mister!

(ANNIE pushes the bags into OTTO's hands, now blocking his face.)

ANNIE (cont'd)

It's freezing out there! I swear, this weather is strictly for the birds, specifically penguins. I've never seen anything like this in my life! And why haven't you shoveled your front walk, Jackson Pratt? I swear, you are one of the laziest people I've ever seen!

OTTO

(Muffled) Annabelle? Is it really you?

ANNIE

What? And what's with all the women on the lawn? They'd better not slip on your front walk. It's a lawsuit waiting to happen, and you'd never be able to defend yourself. I bought you some fresh vegetables. Lord knows how you live off of take-out pizza and Twinkies. Do you even know HOW to cook? And look at this place! Jackson ... Jackson, what do you have living under your sofa?

(ANNIE bends to look under the sofa. OTTO starts to shrug. She starts a long quest to collect laundry.)

ANNIE (cont'd)

I'll tell you what you have, Mister. You have a den of dust bunnies! I swear, these things are too BIG to be bunnies ... they're dust bears! Get me a broom. I'll take care of this in a jiffy. Put away those vegetables! You don't want them turning on you, do you? Is your laundry ready yet? So, did one of those Dark Angels come after you yet? I figure it'll only be a matter of time. I was lucky. You won't see any Dark Angels coming after me, I'll tell YOU! Sandy, my neighbor - you know her - the stock broker? Well, she got one on her doorstep this morning and now she has to join the Peace Corp! Jackson, what are you waiting for! Our movie starts in a half-hour! Come on, slow poke! Time's a' waistin'!

OTTO

Annabelle, it's me ...

ANNIE

(Interrupting) Did you get your winter coat out of the upstairs closet like I told you to ...

(notices OTTO)

You're not Jackson.

OTTO

Annabelle?

ANNIE

Please, call me Annie.

(firmly shakes OTTO's hand)

And you are ...

OTTO

You don't recognize me?

ANNIE

Sorry. I'd remember a face like yours ... no offense.

Say, where's Jackson? We were going to a movie.

OTTO

Otto.

ANNIE

I ought to what?

OTTO

Otto. My name's Otto. And I must say that you ...

ANNIE

(Interrupting) Well, Otto, it's a pleasure to meet you. Are you a friend of Jackson's?

OTTO

Well, I'm sort of a ...

ANNIE

(Interrupting) I'm his cousin, though I feel like his mother. I kind of feel like I have to look after him. I swear, he's just like a little boy sometimes. You always have to watch him or he'll let everything go to waste. If it wasn't for me he'd just waste away. Lord knows he won't look after himself.

OTTO

Lord knows.

(ANNIE exits off stage to the bedroom.)

ANNIE

So ... Otto, did you say it was? What's your connection with Jackson, hmm? Are you an old college buddy, or some bill collector raising a fuss over Jackson's irresponsibility again. I swear, he gets more of you people around here near the first of the month ...

OTTO

No, it's nothing like that ...

(ANNIE starts throwing laundry. OTTO attempts to catch it.)

ANNIE

(Interrupting) Oh, I get it. Jackson's finally hired a cleaning service to come in here and shovel out the filth once a week. I'll tell you what; I get tired of being that boy's maid, cook, mother, father, sister and best friend. If I didn't love the jerk so much I'd probably kill him.

OTTO

(Quietly) That's enough, thank you.

ANNIE

I hope I don't project the wrong idea, you know. Jackson and I grew up together. We do everything together. He's the brother I never had. Between you and me, he has the makings of one of the most wonderful people in the world! I swear, he's got a code of ethics a mile long ... and a yellow streak twice as wide. I just get real possessive over him sometimes. Call it a character flaw, if you will.

(The laundry starts flying fast and furious. OTTO stops catching as the laundry hits him in the head.)

OTTO

Okay, it's a character flaw. Please be quiet.

ANNIE

Okay, okay, he IS a bit of a slob ... and he forgets important things a lot ... and he doesn't take care of himself. That's why I have to intervene all the time. Without me he'd waste away under a mountain of dust creatures that lurk underneath his couch.

(OTTO starts to appear very angry. A low rumble fades in and grows in intensity as OTTO shakes and strains. ANNIE re-enters.)

ANNIE (cont'd)

So, Otto, you never told me exactly why you're here ... and where Jackson went ... and just why exactly did you call me Annabelle? I mean, nobody's ever called me that ... except Jackson's mother. She used to call me that all the time. "Little Annabelle" she used to say. She used to tell me a lot about her grandmother Annabelle. I heard she had a heart of gold and a mouth that wouldn't quit. She used to say I took after her. Between you and me, I don't understand the connection.

OTTO

(As the rumble grows to a deafening din)
SHUT UP!!!!

(ANNIE freezes solid like a statue. Long pause as OTTO slowly circles the stiff ANNIE and examines her carefully.)

OTTO (cont'd)

You never did know when to shut up, did you Annabelle? Always yap-yap-yapping until I'd want to rip your tongue right out of your head ... going on, and on, and on, and on about stuff nobody cared about for days and days and days ... and you always thought you knew better. "Annabelle, the Professional Expert!" Always had something to add ... always had the answers ... could never be wrong about something or make a mistake. The sad part is, you never DID make a mistake ... and, more times than not, whatever you had to say was right on the money. That's why I loved you so much, with your gums flappin' and all. True, I wanted to slit your throat every now and then, but it was only because I knew you were always right and I was just too pig-headed to listen.

(beat as he stops circling and sits)

I knew I'd get to see you again, Annabelle. I knew it. It's just one of those feelings you have, you know? Like you're stuck with something for eternity. Okay, so I went to Hell and you didn't. Bad break. But that was my fault. All my fault. Oh, Annabelle. What we had ... what we felt ... I just knew we'd be together again. Somehow, somewhere. Geez, I sound like one of those sappy songs you used to love. Oh, Annabelle, Annabelle, Annabelle ... it's so good to see you again.

(OTTO snaps his fingers.
ANNIE slowly stirs and
stretches.)

ANNIE

(Disoriented) Where am I?

OTTO

Jackson's place.

ANNIE

Oh ... my head is all fuzzy. I see ... I see things. White things ...

OTTO

It'll all come back to ya in a minute. I zapped the mental block they gave you when they sent you back.

ANNIE

Wait a minute ... it's getting clearer ... I'm on Earth ... I came back ... I know you.

OTTO

Right, right and right.

ANNIE

Otto?

OTTO

Annabelle ...

ANNIE

Oh, Otto! It's finally you! Oh, sweetheart, it's been so long!

(OTTO and ANNIE engage in a long embrace and kiss, then ANNIE punches OTTO in the stomach.)

ANNIE (cont'd)

You bastard!

OTTO

Wha'd I do? Wha'd I do?

ANNIE

You know very well what you did, you pig!

OTTO

Hey, babe, there's lots of things I did. Which one warrants the warm reception?

ANNIE

Well, you ... you ... you ... (etc.)

OTTO

Hallelujah! For once you're speechless!

ANNIE

You died! That's what you did!

OTTO

Of course I died! I was an old man! I drank too much! I had a bad heart!

ANNIE

You left me all alone! You selfish bastard!

OTTO

Hey, that wasn't my idea, sweetie. I didn't plan on kickin' off when I did. But I had to go sometime. I was eighty-three.

ANNIE

I know. But I was alone! You drove the children out of the house and left me with all your filth and your gambling debts! And then ... well ...

OTTO

Then you died, too.

ANNIE

I was old.

OTTO

Yeah, I know. But your gums were flappin' right till the end. When you finally shut up, they knew you were dead.

ANNIE

You were watching.

OTTO

Of course I was watching. I was always watching you.

ANNIE

(Laughs) Oh, Otto. It's really you.

OTTO

You aren't plannin' to sock me again, are you?

ANNIE

No, I'm not. I'm sorry. I missed you so much.

OTTO

You got some way of showin' it! But, hey, I'm in a forgiving mood. I missed you too. Ah, Annabelle. My sweet. How've you been all these years?

ANNIE

Me? I've been great, as usual. And you?

OTTO

Hey, for coming from Hell, I think I could do worse.

ANNIE

I always knew you'd wind up ... you know ... down THERE. Like I always told you; you can't be ...

OTTO

(Finishing the sentence) ... you can't be an Asshole your entire life and expect to get away with it. I know, I know. Down there they got those words ten feet high all over the place. There's lots of assholes out there, ya know.

ANNIE

I know. I wish I could have done something.

OTTO

You did all you could. It was me. I was just too angry at the world to see, too wrapped up in myself. You did more than anybody else would have.

ANNIE

That's right, I did. I think it paid off in the long run.

OTTO

Yeah, it paid off. Just look at you! I'm glad they let you come back. You look just like you did when we were in our respective primes.

ANNIE

I have to say, you look completely different.

OTTO

You like it? Got it off the rack.

ANNIE

Well, it's very becoming. It's different, but still very much you.

OTTO

I'M different. It's been hell ...

ANNIE

A little too late, don't you think?

OTTO

Yeah. Too late. But it can't hurt in my present position. Hey, I got this cool job. Some of the other sick bastards down there are still in a whole lot of trouble.

ANNIE

Hear from your old friend Bernie lately?

OTTO

Bernie? Oh, he's around. I tell ya, he sure got in it deep. He's up topside on good behavior. As a matter of fact, he's helpin' out Jackie's buddy Ralph.

ANNIE

Ralph?! That loser? Then again, Bernie did drag you pretty far down into the gutter. I guess there is some sort of justice in that. Ralph's pretty pathetic.

OTTO

I know. He came by here a while ago cryin' and wailin' like he was doomed.

ANNIE

You've got to admit, he sort of IS doomed.

OTTO

Ralphie? Nah, Bernie'll get him to live up to his promises. I think it'll be good for the guy. He needs a good scare and Bernie's seen enough in Hell to make anybody's toes curl. You know, it seems kind of strange ... Dark Angels from Hell forcing people to do GOOD. I guess it's the nature of the promise. So, how's things ... upstairs?

ANNIE

It was real nice for a while. Then they sent me back.

OTTO

To look after Jackson?

ANNIE

I think so. Of all the people I have to protect Jackson from, I hope it's not my own husband.

OTTO

Ex-husband? Remember "till death do us part?" I got news for you, sweetie ... we're dead. We've parted.

ANNIE

Can't we do something about that? I mean, you're here ... I'm here ... we can still be together, can't we?

OTTO

Are you NUTS?! Just think about the consequences!

ANNIE

What's the worst that can happen?

OTTO

Well, for starters you'll lose your timeshare on cloud nine and wind up with me down in the pit.

ANNIE

I'll be with you. Could it be that bad?

OTTO

Yes, it could! Hell is no place for someone like you. You'd never in all eternity have the time to clean it and you can only speak when spoken to. Now, I don't want to catch you talking stupid like that again! You don't want to go to Hell with me and that's final! Besides, there's one heck of a technicality - you're alive right now and I'm dead.

ANNIE

Oh, you're right. I have to live out this life and look after Jackson. Jackson ... I almost forgot about him. What do you want with him anyway?

OTTO

Hey! He's my great-grandson! Doesn't a great-grandfather have the right to visit his great-grandson?

ANNIE

That's not funny.

OTTO

If you must know, he made the promise that he'd present a winning summation when Hell froze over. So, I gotta see that he does it.

ANNIE

That sounds pretty lame.

OTTO

I told you ... nature of the promise. I ain't happy about it, but I'm even less happy about challenging the Boss.

ANNIE

And what's with all the women outside? Is that something you've done, too?

OTTO

Nope - entirely up to them. It's their problem.

ANNIE

You've come to corrupt him, haven't you. You've come to undo all I've done for him.

OTTO

No. Not my territory. I just do my job.

ANNIE

Then why was I sent back?

OTTO

Again, not my territory, sweetheart. Besides, ol' Jackie's in double trouble. Take a look.

ANNIE

Still using paper work? It's an automated society, you know.

OTTO

Hey, who'dya think came UP with paperwork?

(OTTO shows ANNIE Jackson's file. ANNIE reads and does a series of double-takes.)

ANNIE

This is nuts! But it would be convenient for ME if he did get married, (looks at this list) particularly this one ... or this one ... oh, I know her! This could be okay after all. I can't look after him forever.

OTTO

Only on this plane of reality. On a "higher plane," you could be looking after him for a long time. You were sent to watch him. That don't come with a time limit.

ANNIE

You're right. So, what happens to you ... you know, once he fulfills his contract?

OTTO

Me? I go back. It's real simple.

ANNIE

There's got to be a way. I don't want to lose you again.

OTTO

Hey, Annabelle, what are we gonna tell Jackie? I mean, he'll get a bit suspicious if he sees us groping or ... well, you know ...

ANNIE

Don't tell him ANYTHING! I don't think he could handle it. Besides, who said I'll LET you grope? We'll just have to pretend that ...

JACKSON

(Off-stage, interrupting) Annie, is that you?

ANNIE

Uh ... yes, Jackson. It's me. (whispers to OTTO)
Promise you'll do as I say.

OTTO

(Whispers) Me? Promise? Honey, you don't know what you're asking!

ANNIE

(Still whispering) PROMISE!

OTTO

(Whispering) Okay, okay, I promise.

(Sound of thunder. OTTO reacts as though he expected the sound. ANNIE looks around puzzled, not understanding. Eventually she shrugs it off. JACKSON enters. He's wearing a loud, un-coordinated suit.)

ANNIE

Don't you have anything else to wear?

JACKSON

Hi, Annie. I see you've met Otto. Otto, this is my cousin, Annie.

OTTO

We've met.

ANNIE

Take off that that suit.

JACKSON

Why?

OTTO

Hey, let the little guy make his own decisions.

JACKSON

Yeah.

ANNIE

Well?

(Pause)

JACKSON

I'm ... gonna do what Annie said.

(JACKSON takes his jacket off.)

OTTO

Ooh, that's tellin' her, Jackie. I admire your courage.

(ANNIE takes the jacket to the closet and gets out a better one.)

JACKSON

You're a real scream, Otto. Speaking of screams, Annie, Otto here is a Dark Angel from Hell.

(JACKSON braces himself for a big reaction from ANNIE - which doesn't come. ANNIE checks JACKSON over -- combing his hair, re-ties his tie, etc.)

ANNIE

Yes, I know.

JACKSON

That doesn't bother you?

ANNIE

No, not really.

OTTO

So, Jackie, you never told me your cousin was such a dish.

ANNIE

(Giggles) Oh, Otto ... (changes to mock shock) I mean, Otto!

JACKSON

Dish?! Come on, that's my cousin you're talking about!

OTTO

I know! Such a lovely person she is! If I had a cousin like her, well ... I'd want to marry someone just like her.

ANNIE

Thank you, Otto. That's very sweet of you.

JACKSON

Very SWEET? Otto, we gotta talk.

(JACKSON grabs OTTO by the arm and pulls him away from ANNIE, who takes the moment to clean.)

ANNIE

Jackson?

JACKSON

In a minute. Otto and I have some business to discuss.

OTTO

What's this all about, Jackie?

JACKSON

Look Otto, Annie's my cousin and for some strange reason I love her ... though she does talk up a storm.

OTTO

Yeah, yeah, yeah. What's got you bugged?

JACKSON

Stay away from her, okay?

OTTO

What are you talking about?

JACKSON

It's really for your own good. Give her any encouragement and she'll be running your life in a second. And you're not from this world, remember?

OTTO

Get to the point, hot shot.

JACKSON

Look ... just stay clear of her. She'll drive you crazy and I don't want her hurt.

OTTO

Look, Jackie, you got nothing to worry about.

JACKSON

Oh yeah? I saw the looks you were giving her. I don't know how I'll do it, but if you so much as touch her, I'll be forced to ...

OTTO

Forced to what?

JACKSON

Forced to ... uh ...

OTTO

Are you threatening me?

JACKSON

Yes! ... uh, no. Not exactly.

OTTO

Oh, geez! Stand up for something! Raise a sweat! Kick some butt! It's no wonder you can't win an argument!

JACKSON

Thank you for your confidence. But you WILL stay clear of her, will you?

OTTO

(Irritated) I might and I might not. Frankly, it ain't your problem. Now stay out of my after-life.

JACKSON

NOT UNTIL YOU STAY OUT OF MINE!

OTTO

No can do, party-man. We got a contract, remember? Look kiddo, what I do ain't your business. I just think she's nice. She reminds me of someone I knew once. You got nothing to worry about.

JACKSON

Sorry 'bout that. I'm a little tense, as you could imagine.

OTTO

It's okay. Now, come on and let Annabelle ... Annie finish with you.

(ANNIE continues to
straighten JACKSON up.)

JACKSON

I think I'm gonna have to miss our movie.

ANNIE

That's okay. I'm sure Otto can keep me company.

JACKSON

NO! Uh, I mean, you hardly know him.

ANNIE

Are you kidding? I mean ... I feel like I've known him for years! Isn't that right Otto?

OTTO

Yeah! Years! I tell ya, kid, it's amazing. It's like we knew each other in a former life ... uh ... Annie brought you some veggies!

JACKSON

Again? Annie, I'm a grown man. I can feed myself, thank you.

ANNIE

No you can't! I've seen what you eat. Nobody can live on all that junk. You have to eat real food once in a while. How can you prosecute polluters after what you do to yourself?

JACKSON

I'm sorry. You're right.

OTTO

The girl's got a point, Jackie. You should listen to her once in a while.

JACKSON

I said she was right! Who'se side are you on, anyway?

OTTO

Well, she makes sense.

JACKSON

She ALWAYS makes sense.

OTTO

Don't I know it.

(BERNIE busts in through the door.)

BERNIE

Ralph? Ralph! I know you're around here somewhere!

ANNIE

Bernie?!

OTTO

Annie! Shhh!

BERNIE

Annabelle?! What are YOU doing here?!

JACKSON

Annabelle?

OTTO

"Annie." He meant "Annie." Right?

JACKSON

And how does Annie know Bernie?

ANNIE

Me? Well, I ... uh ... Bernie and I ... oh, I ...

BERNIE

It's a bad sign when YOU can't finish a sentence.

JACKSON

What's going on here?

OTTO

Uh ... nothing, Jackie ... it's just that ...

ANNIE

(Interrupting) So, what's wrong with Ralph?

BERNIE

We just got back from the Blood Bank and Mister Squeamish vanished. I got the "Marathon Man" video and everything. I sense he's here. You seen him Jack?

OTTO & ANNIE

(In unison) Jackson.

BERNIE

You seen him, "Jackson?"

OTTO

He hates being called "Jack."

BERNIE

Something wrong with the name "Jack"?

OTTO

He doesn't answer to "Jack." He's a real weenie when it comes to that.

JACKSON

Weenie?!

BERNIE

You have to admit, it is kind of silly.

(JACKSON starts to say something but catches himself and stops.)

ANNIE

Have you looked for him outside?

BERNIE

He's inside. I'm homed in on him.

JACKSON

You Dark Angels amaze me.

OTTO

Yeah, if we're so amazing, where's Ralphie?

ANNIE

Try the kitchen. At least, that's where I always find him.

JACKSON

(Into the kitchen) Ralph! Ralph, we know you're in there! Come out with your hands up and my refrigerator closed.

RALPH

(Off-stage) No! You can't make me!

ANNIE

Told you so.

OTTO

But how did he sneak past us?

JACKSON

He's got a key to the back door.

BERNIE

Ralph Shaw, DON'T MAKE ME MAD!!!

OTTO

Oh, please! Like that's gonna work.

BERNIE

It terrifies him. He'll be out in a second.

RALPH

(Sheepishly, off-stage) I want to talk to Jackson.

JACKSON

I'll be back.

(JACKSON enters the kitchen.)

OTTO

See? He can handle it.

ANNIE

I don't think so.

BERNIE

Does he know?

ANNIE

I don't want him to.

OTTO

Can you believe this? SHE made me promise I'd listen to her.

BERNIE

Oh, no. You mean after all these years, you still got it for ol' Motor Mouth?

ANNIE

Bernie, that's not a nice thing to say! ... Well? Do you? ... you know ... still "have it" for me?

OTTO

All depends. What about you?

ANNIE

(Lovingly) You're an asshole.

OTTO

I thought so.

BERNIE

Do you two mind?

(JACKSON bursts out of the kitchen with RALPH in tow.)

RALPH

How about a little support for your best pal here?

JACKSON

You want to get rid of the Dark Angels? It's easy. Just do what they say and we can go back to our normal lives. That's MY plan.

RALPH

Easy for you. Bernie's got a whole damn BOOK on me! I'm gonna be poked and prodded until I'm a human pin cushion!

JACKSON

It's your own stupid fault. If you wouldn't always keep your foot in your mouth you might not be in the trouble you're in.

RALPH

Yeah, well at least I take chances! At least I live life, and by my own rules, no less! At least I can make a decision without Anal Annie's approval. But it's all water under the bridge unless I can see to it that my contract is canceled and Bernie is out of my life for good.

JACKSON

You don't know what you're messing with, Ralph. Anything you do to these guys can backfire something fierce. Besides, these Dark Angels aren't bad guys.

RALPH

You idiot! Of COURSE they're bad guys! They're from Hell! Since when does GOOD guys come from Hell?!

OTTO

Hey!

JACKSON

They're just working stiff's like anybody else who have a job to do -- except they're REALLY stiff's. Besides, we put them up to it with our stupid promises. Now, let the poor souls do their jobs, huh? What have they ever done to you?

RALPH

Have you got a few hours? I'm not quite sure where to start.

JACKSON

I refuse to listen to this nonsense any further.

RALPH

You're so disgustingly spineless. You never want to rock the boat. You should have a halo over your pointy little head!

ANNIE

I'm stopping this.

OTTO

No. Let's see what he's got.

ANNIE

I don't like this.

(ANNIE, a little scared,
goes to OTTO, who holds her
lovingly.)

JACKSON

Once again you take the opportunity to take your own problems out on me.

RALPH

Okay ... maybe. But I'm gonna get rid of them and I'm gonna do it with our without you.

JACKSON

You're making an error of potentially monumental proportions.

RALPH

Maybe. But I gotta do it. Life is for the living.

JACKSON

Just go, Ralph. Just go.

BERNIE

Come on, Ralphie, it's teeth time. Then we got a date with a plate of raw fish! And then we get to sign you up for a library card! (laughs broadly)

RALPH

Over my dead body.

BERNIE

Okay, if that's the way you want it ...

(Sound of rumble. BERNIE's hand glows as he reaches for RALPH.)

JACKSON

Uh ... heh ... Ralph was only kidding, right Ralph? (to RALPH) C'mon, Ralphie, you've got to watch your expressions. They're getting you into trouble.

RALPH

Uh ... yeah ... I was only kidding. Mum's the word, Jackie. Mum's the word.

BERNIE

Come on, nut-job. We got business to attend to.

(BERNIE cuffs RALPH on the head. OTTO and ANNIE sit very close together on the sofa.)

RALPH

You haven't seen the last of me, Jackson.

JACKSON

Good. Let's make sure we can enjoy a long life together.

(BERNIE snaps his fingers as the door flies open, then cuffs RALPH again.)

RALPH

WILL YOU STOP THAT?!!!

BERNIE

Stand back, ladies! Comin' through!

(BERNIE and RALPH leave.
The door magically closes
behind them.)

OTTO

What was all THAT about?

JACKSON

Just Ralph being stupid. And what's with you two?

(ANNIE pulls away from OTTO
quickly.)

OTTO

What, you mean ... uh ...

JACKSON

You promised!

OTTO

NO! I promised you NOTHING! I'm not as careless as
some people.

ANNIE

It's not what you think.

JACKSON

It's NOT? Come on, Otto, you're not even alive!
You're a dead guy from the spirit world and Annie's a
live person!

ANNIE

Don't worry, Jackson. It's not like we're talking
about having children or something. We know what we're
doing.

OTTO

Shh! Let him have his say!

JACKSON

Otto, I thought I could trust you!

OTTO

You can, Jackson, you can!

JACKSON

Can I? Then stay away from Annie.

ANNIE

Don't I have a say in this?

OTTO

Let him say what he has to, sweetheart.

JACKSON

Sweetheart?! This is it. This has officially gone too far. Ralph was right. I don't know WHAT possessed me to think I could trust a Dark Angel from HELL!

OTTO

Yeah! Go, Jackie, go!

ANNIE

Jackson, please listen ...

JACKSON

No, YOU listen. He comes into MY home, invades MY life and moves in on MY cousin. You listen to ME. Just because he's dead doesn't mean he can make people do things against their will.

OTTO

(Quietly, to ANNIE) Watch this sweetheart ... (to JACKSON) YES I CAN, YOU SPINELESS MORTAL JACKASS! I CAN DO ANYTHING I DAMN WELL PLEASE AND YOU CAN'T STOP ME!

JACKSON

Look, Otto ... I'm sorry ... I mean ... I'm sorry ...

(JACKSON sits on the sofa and starts to sulk.)

ANNIE

Oh ... no ... Otto ...

OTTO

(Chuckles) Folds like a card table. No wonder he can't win a summation.

ANNIE

Otto, this isn't fair. Go ahead and tell him. It's time.

OTTO

Are you sure?

ANNIE

I'm sure. Tell him.

OTTO

Anything you say, sweetheart. (to JACKSON) Jackson ol' pal, it's time you got caught up on your family history.

Blackout

* END OF ACT 1 *

Act 2

(Music plays: "Sympathy for the Devil" by the Rolling Stones. JACKSON's living room, the next morning. All the laundry is gone and is now filthy with cards, boxes of candy and bunches of flowers, some clearly marked "With Love" and stuff like that. JACKSON and OTTO are lounging on the sofa and watching TV. RALPH is in a chair, sleeping.)

ANNOUNCER

... Michigan's Governor appointed Flint's new mayor, filmmaker Michael Moore, as his designee for the re-opening of the General Motors plant there.

Donald Trump announced his plans today to build low-income housing in New York City. Leona Helmsley and a barefoot Imelda Marcos were first on line for the waiting list.

Coming up, Woody and Mia tie the knot. But first, this apology from Martha Stewart ...

(OTTO turns off the TV.)

OTTO

(Half asleep) Jackson? Hey Jackie, you awake?

JACKSON

Huh? Yeah. I'm just vegged.

OTTO

Don't blame you. Guess it's been a pretty amazing twenty-four hours for ya. Can't expect it to all sink in right away.

JACKSON

Thanks. I'll tell ya, I like attention as much as anyone, but this is getting out of hand. How many women are out there now?

OTTO

I don't know ... twenty, twenty two. I was kind of busy.

JACKSON

I need to start putting in time with the books. I have an argument to defend.

OTTO

Any ideas yet?

JACKSON

As a matter of fact, I'm already putting together an opening statement.

OTTO

For whom? You have no client.

JACKSON

I know, but I'm just trying to get back in the swing of things. Every little bit will help.

OTTO

That's my boy. Let's hear it.

JACKSON

Now?

OTTO

Sure. It's just you and me.

JACKSON

Okay. I feel silly.

OTTO

Confidence.

JACKSON

(Clears his throat) Your honor, ladies and gentlemen of the jury ... Whaddaya think?

OTTO

Needs work. Maybe we should work on this marriage thing first.

JACKSON

Otto, I don't know. I mean, marriage and all ...

OTTO

Marriage can be pretty good if you hook up with the right dame. Hey, I'm living proof that it can withstand the test of time.

JACKSON

You know, I'm kind of confused. If you're my great grandfather and Annie's my great grandmother, who am I?

OTTO

You're Jackson Pratt. I didn't think you were THAT confused.

JACKSON

No, I mean ... well ... am I someone from my past, or something like that? Did my family tree fuse itself into an endless loop?

OTTO

Naw, you're a new soul, just like I was before ... but I messed up big-time.

JACKSON

So, can I call you Grampa?

OTTO

Stick to Otto. The Boss could be watching us, and I don't want to think about what he'll do to me if he knew that I knew that you knew that ... let's just say he'd be pissed.

(Phone rings. JACKSON answers.)

JACKSON

(Clearly bored) Hello, this is Jackson ... yes, I remember you ... no, I busy tonight. Tomorrow?
(looks at OTTO, who holds up a date book)
. . . let's see, I'm booked up 'till eleven ... okay, I'll see you then. I gotta warn you, I'm kind of broke right now ... yeah, I thought so. See you then.
(hangs up)

OTTO

How many does that make?

JACKSON

I've lost count. This is getting old fast.

OTTO

Nobody said it was gonna be easy.

JACKSON

I need a secretary.

(Ralph begins to wake up. He is very groggy).

RALPH

The end is near.

JACKSON

Good morning, sunshine. How's your mouth?

RALPH

The Demerol is working nicely now, thank you. I may never eat solid foods again. Root canal sucks.

OTTO

What's on the docket for today?

RALPH

I have to listen to country music.

JACKSON

I hope you didn't ditch Bernie again.

RALPH

Ditch? Nah. He's supposed to meet me here.

OTTO

Jackson, is your refrigerator well stocked?

JACKSON

Yeah. Annie seems to make sure of that.

OTTO

BERNIE! WHAT'S HOLDING UP THE PANCAKES?!

(BERNIE comes out of the kitchen.)

BERNIE

They're waffles now. You want 'em with pecans or blueberries?

JACKSON

How does everyone wind up in my refrigerator?

RALPH

No time, Bernie. My parents are waiting. I'll need your help clearing my stuff out of their attic. Thanks for letting me crash here last night, guys. I feel a lot better now.

JACKSON

Why were you pounding on my door and screaming at two in the morning?

RALPH

Sorry about that. I guess the Novocain wore off.

JACKSON

It's a new Ralph. I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes.

RALPH

A promise is a promise. I'm ready to do what I have to do to honor my contracts.

(whispers to JACKSON)

Life is for the living, Jackson.

BERNIE

Let's go, Ralphie. You'll pull through with flying colors.

(BERNIE opens the door.)

BERNIE (cont'd)

Mornin' ladies!

(BERNIE and RALPH exit.)

JACKSON

You might be right. Bernie seems to be doing it.

OTTO

There was never any doubt. And you know why? It's because Ralph's a doer. Oh, sure, he talks a good game, but when it all hits the fan he's ready to fight.

He ain't afraid of taking chances. Now, you ... you're another story. If you don't mind my sayin' so, you got no moxie. You let people order you around. People like Annabelle. You really should stand up to her once in a while.

JACKSON

It's not my fault. She's been running my whole life. Whenever I try to do something, there she is telling me how to do it better or criticizing how I did it in the first place. And if I try to stand up to her, she bullies me.

OTTO

Face it, pal. What you need is asshole lessons.

JACKSON

Asshole lessons?

OTTO

Sure! Be a jerk! That way people will respect you, and you'll never get taken for a ride and you'll always get your way -- even with Annie.

JACKSON

Okay, I'm game. What do I have to do to be an asshole?

OTTO

Lesson one. Repeat after me ... I don't give a damn.

JACKSON

I don't give a damn.

OTTO

Good. Now, keep saying that until you believe it. Soon, nobody -- ESPECIALLY Annie -- will give you any crap. And you know why?

JACKSON

I don't give a damn.

OTTO

Exactly! You're catching on fast, kid!

JACKSON

You're a good teacher.

OTTO

Just do what I tell you and you'll be home free, son.

JACKSON

Think so?

OTTO

I know so. Everything'll turn out just fine.

JACKSON

(Facetiously) Gee, thanks Dad. Next do we get to go out and toss the ol' pigskin around?

OTTO

Hey! Great idea, kid! Catch!

(OTTO hurls a pillow at JACKSON, which sails over his head and hits ANNIE as she enters. She is sifting through JACKSON's mail.)

ANNIE

Boys! Boys! Leave you two savages alone for a few hours and you turn this place into a bigger junk-pile than it already is! I swear, what a couple of little monsters you two are! With all I do for you, the LEAST you can do is try to behave like adults and minimize the damage. But instead you choose to throw junk everywhere and turn this potentially nice home into a den of slobs! And Jackson, don't you ever pick up your mail?

JACKSON

I don't give ...

OTTO

(Interrupting) Not now, Jackie. Uh ... sorry, honey. Me and the boy were just horsin' around.

ANNIE

I know very well what you were doing, Otto Pratt, and he's not your boy. Leave you alone for five minutes and you trash the place! I should have known that just because you were dead for two generations wouldn't mean you would learn to pick up after yourself. Anyway, you could make a big enough mess that no one could clean up in a lifetime.

OTTO

Now, Jackie.

JACKSON

I don't give a damn.

(short pause)

ANNIE

(Stunned) What did you say?

JACKSON

I said ... I don't give a damn?

ANNIE

(Flustered) Oh! I ... I'll ... uh ... oh ... well ...

OTTO

See?

JACKSON

Amazing.

OTTO

I'm teachin' him how to stand up for himself.

ANNIE

Well, don't. You already destroyed one family that way.

(OTTO stands and puts his arms around ANNIE.)

OTTO

Hey. Trust me. I know what I'm doin'.

(They kiss.)

JACKSON

You know, I wish you two wouldn't do that so much.
It's nauseating.

OTTO

Love. What can ya do?

(JACKSON sifts through his
mail. He opens a letter.)

JACKSON

Will you look at this! The Environmental Law Journal
finally published my tort article!

OTTO

Chock one up for our side.

ANNIE

Ahem ... So, Jackson, how was your date yesterday?

JACKSON

Pretty bad actually. On a scale from one to ten it
owed me points. I think I can safely scratch her off
my list.

OTTO

You shouldn't get too down at first. After all,
there's lots of time and plenty of women right outside
that door who are itchin' for your affection.

ANNIE

Otto's right. But be patient. You're a very nice
person when you want to be. But, if I were you, I
wouldn't use that "I don't give a damn" line. You'll
end up like Otto.

(to OTTO)

Otto? Don't ever let him say things like that again.
You will keep an eye on the situation. WON'T YOU,
OTTO?!

OTTO

If it takes forever.

ANNIE

Speaking of which ... ask him, Otto.

OTTO

Look, Jackie. There's something Annabelle and I wanna
talk to you about.

JACKSON

Sure. Anything.

OTTO

Well, it's like this ...

ANNIE

(Interrupting) We want you to take your contractual obligations slowly.

JACKSON

Sure.

OTTO

No, you see it's like this ...

ANNIE

(Interrupting) The longer it takes for you to fulfill your obligations, the longer Otto and I can be together. Anyway, we figure that since you two get along so well, that you wouldn't mind having him around for as long as possible.

OTTO

Nobody wants to see you go to Hell, Jackson. We want you to fulfill your obligation, win your case and get married.

JACKSON

Gee. Thanks.

OTTO

Just take your time.

JACKSON

Okay.

(Sound of quiet rumble of thunder.)

ANNIE

Now, we don't want to rush you into a decision or anything ...

JACKSON

It's okay. I'll do it.

(Thunder gets louder.)

OTTO

Don't feel obligated ...

(Thunder rumbles louder and louder as JACKSON speaks.)

JACKSON

Otto, please! I'll do it! I promise! I'll take as LONG as you want! I promise I'll do whatever it takes to keep you two together on Earth as long as possible, even at my own expense. Okay? I don't give a damn!

(Rumble dissipates.)

OTTO

Yeah. Okay, pal. You're a gem. Sorry about gettin' pushy.

JACKSON

There's just one thing I gotta know.

ANNIE

Anything.

JACKSON

Did you and Otto ... well ...

ANNIE

Well what?

JACKSON

Well ... you know ...

OTTO

No. Fill us in.

JACKSON

You two didn't have sex, did you?

ANNIE

For God's sake, Jackson! We're your great grandparents!

OTTO

(Laughs) Forget what I said about not having moxie.

JACKSON

Well? Did you?

OTTO

As a matter of fact, if you MUST know, we did. Twice. Once upstairs and once on the sofa.

ANNIE

Otto!

OTTO

Sorry, babe. I guess the vow that I made to love her forever is binding beyond death. I know you've never been there, but it's a great thing.

ANNIE

Oh, Otto. That's so sweet.

OTTO

Thanks, doll. (kisses ANNIE)

JACKSON

Okay then, it's a deal. I'll do everything in my power to keep you two together. I do have to admit, in a disturbing way having you around is kind of fun. You're sort of like the stepfather I never had.

(JACKSON pulls OTTO aside out of earshot of ANNIE who, as usual, takes the opportunity to clean.)

JACKSON (cont'd)

(Whispers) Besides, Annie won't be on my case as much with you around.

OTTO

She ain't so bad.

JACKSON

Still, could you loan her out every now and then? You know, for cleaning and shopping ... since everyone's cleaning out my fridge ... and stuff like that. Just as long as she doesn't push me around.

OTTO

Haven't I taught you anything? You're a big boy. Annie can't look after you forever.

JACKSON

I thought you said that was her mission ... to look after me?

OTTO

You're confusing it with having a maid.

(ANNIE picks a spool of dental floss.)

ANNIE

Ralph left his new dental floss.

JACKSON

Ralph! I almost forgot! Otto, I gotta ask you something real important.

OTTO

Shoot. You can ask me anything, son. You know that.

JACKSON

Ralph plans on trying to break his contract.

OTTO

He can have fun trying. These contracts are as iron-clad as they come.

JACKSON

You mean there's NO way they can be broken?

OTTO

Aside from fulfilling all obligations? No, not that I know of. Remember, we have the best lawyers who ever lived on retainer.

JACKSON

Think, Otto, think. Is there ANY WAY? Any detail, any loophole that can be used? Anything in the contract?

OTTO

Hmmmm. The mind's a blank, Jackie. I was never good on legal matters. That's YOUR turf. But if Ralphie has some scheme to break his contract it can only make his matters worse. Did he say what his hair-brained idea was about?

JACKSON

I wish he did. It's got me worried. I told him it could all blow up in his face.

OTTO

That's putting it lightly.

ANNIE

Ralph's okay on the whole, but he's got a mouth that starts working before his brain is in gear.

OTTO

We got a word in Hell for people like that. We call 'em Fools ... people who write checks with their mouth that their bodies can't cash. Being a Fool is a pretty serious crime, and the punishment ain't pretty. Just ask Bernie.

ANNIE

I always knew Ralph was a fool.

(RALPH barges in the front door carrying a bag. BERNIE is in tow.)

RALPH
Someone call?

JACKSON
Speak of the devil.

OTTO
NO!!!

JACKSON
Relax. It's just an expression.

OTTO
Yeah, well I wish you wouldn't use it. It has a whole new meaning for the likes of me.

RALPH
It's all yesterday's news. And "why", you ask? I'll tell ya. Because today, Jackson ol' pal, you and me are gonna kiss our problems goodbye.

OTTO
Bernie, what's this idiot talking about?

BERNIE
I wish I knew. Everything was hunky-dory. Then outta nowhere he goes berserk and drags me back here.

JACKSON
Ralph, I've been thinking about this. I'm positive you're making a mistake.

RALPH
How can you be positive I'll be making a mistake when you don't even know what my plan is?

JACKSON
History.

RALPH
Yeah, but it's different this time! We can't lose!

JACKSON
Otto? Any words of wisdom?

OTTO
You can always lose, Ralphie.

BERNIE

You don't want to do this, Ralph. Any fictional representation of Hell you may have seen is nothing compared with the reality that waits for you. Bleakness. Despair. Pain beyond your wildest dreams. The tearing of flesh ... the crushing of bones. See my arms? They're not mine. My original arms were chewed off a beast that resembled a sixty foot dragon and a blister. My body has been rammed, ripped, pierced and beaten by every known substance. And the screams, Ralph. The screams of all those who've you caused any pain ringing in your ears. And since there's no time in Hell, it lasts for an eternity. Hell is NOT a place you want to be, Ralph.

RALPH

Sounds like the makings of a killer thrill ride.

ANNIE

Whatever you're thinking of, it's a disaster waiting to happen. So either accept the fact that you're stuck with Bernie or at least tell us what this is all about.

RALPH

No can do, Miss Retentive. Now if you'll excuse us, I need to see Mister Pratt privately in the kitchen.

OTTO

Sure, Ralph. Anything to help.

JACKSON

I think he meant me.

OTTO

Oh yeah. Right. Sorry.

RALPH

LET'S GO ALREADY!!!

JACKSON

I refuse.

RALPH

Did I hear you refuse me?

JACKSON

It won't work on me any more, Ralph. I don't give a damn!

RALPH

What if I say "please"?

JACKSON
Sincerely?

RALPH
Sincerely.

JACKSON
You ARE a changed man!

(JACKSON and RALPH dart
into the kitchen.
Doorbell. ANNIE answers.
WOMAN #1 is there.)

ANNIE
Yes?

WOMAN #1
Excuse me, but I have an appointment ... I mean DATE
with Jackson.

ANNIE
Is it your time already?

WOMAN #1
Well, I'm a little early ...

ANNIE
That's great, dear. Could you wait just a few more
minutes outside?

WOMAN #1
But it's freezing out there ...

ANNIE
I know, dear. Jackson will be ready in just a few
minutes.

WOMAN #1
Could you ...

ANNIE
Buh-bye now.
(Closes the door on her.)
What a sweet girl.

BERNIE
Poor Jackson.

ANNIE
And Bernie, don't forget to give Ralph back his new
dental floss.

BERNIE

Why that little ... trying to ditch the dental floss
... That'll cost him his teeth.

OTTO

Yo, what gives with the pest?

BERNIE

I couldn't get a word out of him all night. And what's
with you two? The Boss could be watching.

OTTO

We talked. I told her the deal.

BERNIE

I hear ya! She's too busy flappin' her gums to listen!
(laughs broadly) Ol' Motor Mouth stuck in overdrive!
(laughs)

ANNIE

You always were a blow-hard.

BERNIE

And you always had a corn-cob stuck up your ass.

OTTO

Hey, hey, kids! Let's behave.

(JACKSON storms out of the
kitchen. RALPH is in tow.)

RALPH

Come on, Jackson! I need you!

JACKSON

Ralph, you've finally lost it.

RALPH

No I haven't! This will work!

JACKSON

(Angrily) I want absolutely NOTHING to do with this,
Ralph. You hear me? Nothing! And furthermore, I
don't give a damn!

RALPH

Then stop me, you spineless wimp!

OTTO

Jackie! What's goin' on?

JACKSON

Oh, just Ralph planning something STUPID, that's all.

ANNIE

Tell us something we don't know.

RALPH

Then I'll do it all by myself. Some friend YOU turned out to be.

ANNIE

Do WHAT all by yourself?!

(RALPH darts back into the kitchen.)

OTTO

What's going on?

JACKSON

Look, Ralph's being more stupid than usual. Let him try to do whatever he wants. When it fails, he'll settle down.

(RALPH enters from the kitchen. He is wearing a dark robe and is carrying a bell, a book, a black candle and a record album - preferably Michael Oldfield's "Tubular Bells".)

BERNIE

Is it Halloween already?

OTTO

Ralphie, what are you doing?

RALPH

Tell them, Jackson.

JACKSON

Gladly. Ralph plans on summoning your Boss to clear this whole thing up.

(Long pause while OTTO and BERNIE stare at one another. They finally break into hearty laughter.)

OTTO

(Laughing) You're gonna call Satan?! And then what?

RALPH

Uh ... and then ...

JACKSON

He doesn't know yet.

BERNIE

(Laughing) Oh, Ralph! I always knew you were STUPID, but this crosses the line to being totally brain dead!

RALPH

You two laugh all you want now, but when Satan comes in here, he'll give you what-for! Damn it! I forgot the goat's blood! Maybe I can substitute feta cheese.

OTTO

(Laughs) Yeah, like Satan has nothing better to do than answer a call from a Fool like you.

BERNIE

How you plan on callin' him? AT&T? And where'd you get all this junk?

RALPH

There are these guys on TV with one of those nine-hundred numbers who sell Anti-Dark Angel kits. Cost only nineteen-ninety-five.

JACKSON

I can't watch this.

ANNIE

Me neither.

BERNIE

Me neither. Stupidity makes me hungry. (exits to kitchen)

OTTO

Everything makes you hungry. (follows BERNIE)

ANNIE

This doesn't worry you?

OTTO

Relax, sweetheart. Satan could care less!

RALPH

All right, mortals. Stand back while I perform the patented sacred ritual to summon ... dare I say ... Satan, King of the Underworld!

ANNIE

Just watch the carpet, dear. I just had it cleaned.

(RALPH performs an elaborate but silly display showing that he is truly faking this, but with total sincerity. When he is done and nothing happens he repeats his actions, checking them in the manual.)

JACKSON

Do you even know what you're doing?

RALPH

Me? Uh ... of course. Everyone knows how to summon Satan and exorcise Dark Angels. Uh ... by the way, anyone know where I can get a virgin real quick? Annie?

JACKSON

Too late.

(ANNIE smiles. There is a knock at the door. JACKSON opens the door but nobody is there. LOU, who is wearing slick, three-piece suit, enters through the closet. He speaks into a cellular phone.)

LOU

... how's the stock? ... I'm really getting burned! ... What do you mean "chill out?" Oh, sell. Sell it all and let God sort it out ... wait, keep the stock on Morton Salt and Sterno. ... Keep me posted Martha. Put Jez on ... Jezebel, what do you mean you can't get a Maytag repairman 'till November?! And get that damn transporter fixed! I came in through a CLOSET this time!

JACKSON

Sir? Can I help you?

LOU

Sure, pal. I have an appointment to see Ralph Shaw.

JACKSON

RALPH!! IT'S FOR YOU!!!

RALPH

Send him away! I'm busy! ... Damn it, I really need that virgin!

JACKSON

(To LOU) Uh ... As you can see, Ralph is a little busy right now. Could you come back later? By the way, are you a virgin?

LOU

Depends on how you interpret "Rosemary's Baby." Look, I think Ralph really wants to see me as soon as possible, if you know what I mean ... wink, wink.

JACKSON

I'll try to get his attention.

LOU

Hey, you're Jackson Pratt, aren't you?

JACKSON

Do I know you?

LOU

Not yet.

(JACKSON moves over to RALPH, who is still doing the dance.)

JACKSON

Uh ... Ralph ...

RALPH

Don't bother me! Can't you see I'm summoning Satan?!

(OTTO and BERNIE enter laughing and holding food, which they drop suddenly.)

LOU

(To OTTO and BERNIE) Hi, boys. Miss me?

OTTO

Oh, SHIT!!!

(OTTO and BERNIE leap to the floor to bow and grovel at LOU's feet.)

ANNIE

Otto, what's going on here? Do we know you, Mister?

OTTO

Annie, this is the Boss!

JACKSON

The BOSS?!

BERNIE

An' we don't mean Bruce Springsteen.

LOU

Please, call me Lou.

ANNIE

Oh, my God ...

LOU

In your case, sweetie, I'm afraid not.

JACKSON

Wait a minute! You said your name is Lou? Lou, as in "Lucifer"?

LOU

Pleased to meet you. Hoped you'd guess my name.

BERNIE

Oh Mighty One, to what do we owe the honor of your divine presence?

LOU

Bernie, Bernie, please! Bubbala! The sentiment is nice and all, but let's not get carried away! Now, come on. On your feet, on your feet. I hear you've been havin' a tough time with our boy Ralphie over there.

BERNIE

Oh ... uh ... no, sir. Ralph is just ... well ...

LOU

Don't worry about it, Bernie. You did your best. Hey, Ralphie!

RALPH

Leave me alone! I'm in the midst of a sacred ritual!

LOU

I don't think you get the picture, sweetheart.

JACKSON

Uh, Ralph ... I think you'd better talk to this gentleman.

RALPH

I said I'm busy! Leave me the hell alone.

LOU

Hey, it's okay with me. I mean, YOU called ME and all. I'm not into these personal appearances, though, so if I were you, I'd be pretty happy you reached me this easy, what with Hell freezing over and all.

RALPH

What the devil are you talking about?

LOU

Right idea but poor syntax. Ralphie, sweetie, baby. Take off the "schmata" and let's con-fab.

RALPH

Jackson, get this moron away from me.

LOU

Moron? Moi?

OTTO

He didn't mean it ...
Everything's okay ...
He's only joking ...
You're not a moron ...
(etc)

BERNIE

Please, your eminence ...
We mean no disrespect ...
Ralph is a puny fool ...
Please don't hurt me ...
(etc)

(As they plead, OTTO and BERNIE get back on their knees and bow at LOU's feet again.)

LOU

Guys, guys, this really isn't necessary. Don't get me wrong - It's nice, but it's not necessary.

JACKSON

I don't quite know how to say this. Ralph, I'd like you to meet Satan.

RALPH

(A beat) You're joking.

LOU

Not this time, Ralphie. And call me Lou. It takes some of the edge off. You know, makes me seem a little more user-friendly. Nést ce pas?

ANNIE

You look like a corporate raider.

LOU

I got no beef with you, sweet-cakes. Contracts forbid me to mess with people from Upstairs, if you get my meaning.

ANNIE

But how did you know I was ...

LOU

Hey, I know everything. I am deity, albeit a dark one.

RALPH

If you're the genuine article, how come you came before I finished the patented sacred ritual, huh?

LOU

Oh, please! We're not in the dark ages anymore, Ralphie. I knew you wanted to see me, so I came. You asked, I answered. The next best thing is being there, which is more than I can say for the competition.

RALPH

Bernie, is this guy on the level?

BERNIE

Leave me outta this. I don't want the Boss should be mad at me.

LOU

Relax, Bernie. I'm not mad at you ... yet. Let's just say I just ordered in a few new implements of torture that you haven't seen, and maybe won't. All right, Ralphie-boy, what's the deal? What's your beef? What you want from me?

RALPH

I want out of my contract.

LOU

Is THAT all?! Is THAT what all this fuss is about? You pulled me away from supervising clean-up to come up topside for THIS?!

RALPH

Well ... uh ... yeah. Excuse me.

(RALPH tries to run into the kitchen. LOU snaps his fingers and RALPH freezes. LOU "spins" RALPH onto the sofa like a puppeteer controlling a puppet.)

LOU

Not so fast, Ralphie. You started this and you're gonna watch while everybody pays.

RALPH

Hey! Hey! Cut it out! I know my rights!

LOU

The mere sound of your voice makes my ears hurt. Time for you to be seen and not heard.

(LOU snaps his fingers again. RALPH is mute. He tries to talk in vein.)

LOU (cont'd)

Please tell me he's kidding with all this meshegas, Jack.

JACKSON

I don't relate to "Jack." The name's "Jackson."

LOU

You got a problem with "Jack"?

JACKSON

As a matter of fact, I do.

BERNIE

Jackson, let him call you "Jack."

JACKSON

No, I refuse! "Jackson" is the name my parents game me. Not "Jack," not "Jackie," but "Jackson." It's my name and that's all I answer to.

OTTO

Kid, your heart's in the right place but your timing is way off.

LOU

Don't sweat it, Otto. Look, Jack ... let me tell you a little joke. Where does a deity sit?

JACKSON

Uh ... I don't know ...

LOU

I'll tell ya. ANYWHERE HE FUCKING WELL WANTS TO, THAT'S WHERE!! So, if I want to call you Jack, I'm gonna call you Jack. Coppice? ... Jack?

(LOU snaps his fingers and JACKSON runs to the closest wall and smacks into it as though the wall had a strong, unbreakable magnetic pull on him. JACKSON struggles but is noticeably trapped.)

BERNIE

Nobody listens to me ...

JACKSON

All right! All right! You can call me "Jack"! You can call me "Jack"! Please! I insist!

OTTO

You let him go!

(OTTO tries to advance, but LOU is able to freeze him in his tracks with a hand gesture.)

ANNIE

Otto! No!

LOU

Lover-boy! Nice to see you sticking up for your kin-folk, Gramps.

OTTO

Jackson's a good boy. I insist you let him go!

LOU

Oh, you INSIST?! Well, golly gee! Since you insist, I think it's in your best interest to realize your position in all of this, Otto. Remember who's boss. I own your ass, remember?

OTTO

I don't care anymore. Just let him go.

LOU

Otto, Otto, Otto. Mi compadre. What have I ever done to deserve such disrespect? I gave you this cushy job, didn't I? I always kept you on the higher levels, didn't I? I always had you on brown and serve. I never nuked you and now I'm being dissed. (impersonating Marlon Brando) You could have been a Demon, instead of a Dark Angel - which is what you are. It was you, Otto, it was you.

OTTO

I never asked for nothin'.

LOU

I know, I know. But let it never be said that I'm not a fair deity. Now, Jack here is a "good boy" as you say. Right?

ANNIE

The best!

OTTO

He makes me proud.

LOU

Is he living up to his promises?

OTTO

Oh, yeah! Definitely!

LOU

Well, then, I see no reason why I should keep him bound, do you?

(LOU snaps his fingers.
JACKSON falls off of the
wall and OTTO is unfrozen.)

ANNIE

Jackson! Are you all right?!

JACKSON

I think my arm's broken.

OTTO

That's enough! I don't want anyone else hurt. What do you want with us?!

LOU

Otto, baby, sweetie! Remember, the question isn't what I want with you but what you want with me!

BERNIE

Ralph! I swear I'll kill you!

LOU

Trying to speed up the inevitable, eh Bernie? That's why I like you. You're a true company man.

(RALPH wiggles
frantically.)

LOU

Ralph, you look uncomfortable. Try to relax.

(LOU makes a hand gesture
and RALPH crosses his
legs.)

LOU (cont'd)

Now, I'll be a nice guy and release you, but please,
try not to give me a headache.

(LOU snaps his fingers
again. RALPH is free.)

RALPH

Inevitable? What do you mean by "trying to speed up
the inevitable"?

LOU

You see, I may be an unpopular person to some people,
but there are some things that just can't be touched
... by me, by the folks upstairs ... nobody. Law is
law, Ralphie, and you or Jackson or Bernie or anybody
can't change the law. And it's my job to function as
the judge ... and Bernie as your lawyer ... to see that
you don't break the law.

RALPH

What law? What are you talking about?

LOU

You saw the contract. You made reckless promises,
buck-o, and the conditions of those promises have come
to pass. I regret to say it, but you're stuck. In all
truth, I have nothing to do with them.

RALPH

But I though that ...

LOU

(Interrupting) You THOUGHT? You THOUGHT? Working
without tools again, eh, Ralphie?

RALPH

I though I could get you to call off the Dark Angels.

LOU

Why would I want to call them off? They're just
following up on YOUR promises.

RALPH

Look ... Lou ... those promises ... they weren't really promises! I mean, the expression "when Hell freezes over" ... it's just an expression!

LOU

So is "cross my heart and hope to die" - and don't think you won't. It's a condition, Ralph, a condition that you should have been ready to honor should the situation actually arise - which it has. Life may be for the living, but Hell isn't necessarily for the dead.

RALPH

You still got nothing on me. You got no solid proof.

LOU

How quickly they forget. Ralph ... I'm Satan, stupid! To many I'm a god! Every word you say, every thought you think is burned in stone, pal, though it is a bitch to fit in a Xerox.

OTTO

We tried to warn you.

LOU

He did. This man is living proof ... well, proof anyway. How many years did you try to warn him, Annabelle?

ANNIE

Let's see ... about thirty-five?

LOU

Any reflection, Otto?

OTTO

Ralphie, you just don't get it. If I knew then what I know now ... Mistakes don't just go away. All the bad things you do stick like Jujufruits on your teeth. Mistakes with loved ones ... mistakes with your kids. But the good things stick, too. It's like weights on a scale. Which ever way the scale tips is what you get in the end. Imagine Candid Camera that don't take no rest.

RALPH

That means that you know EVERYTHING?

LOU

Sooner or later, Ralphie, you'll be taking a trip "down under." Even if you fulfill your contract, we've got enough on you to keep you away from that heavenly light for eternity.

RALPH

I'm going to Australia?

BERNIE

Unless ...

LOU

Unless you make good on EVERYTHING, but that's no fun. So you're rooked, pal. Tied up, convicted, wrapped, signed, sealed and delivered. Your butt is mine, keemosabe.

JACKSON

There's NO way out?

BERNIE

Yes! There is!

LOU

No! ... well, not really. I mean, he can do a complete turn-around, repent, redeem himself and keep your foot far away from your mouth for the rest of your life and all, but it's all so unlikely. Frankly, he doesn't stand a chance.

ANNIE

Yes he does! Everybody has a chance!

(LOU snaps his fingers and JACKSON smacks against the wall again.)

JACKSON

Ow!

(RALPH tries to run away again. LOU twirls him back onto the sofa.)

LOU

Simon didn't say you could leave the room, Ralphie.

ANNIE

Not again!

LOU

Keep her quiet, Otto, or Mister Save-The-Whales screams.

ANNIE

You can't do that!

(LOU gestures with his hand as JACKSON screams in pain.)

LOU

Zip the lip.

ANNIE

(Anguished) Oh ... zipped.

OTTO

Why you gotta pick on Jackie? What's he ever done to you?

LOU

I think the little woman knows, don't you Annabelle?

OTTO

Annie? What's goin' on?

ANNIE

(Whimpers) Mmmmmmmm!

LOU

Permission to speak freely is granted.

ANNIE

Jackson's been watched carefully his whole life. He's always had lots of guardian angels watching out for him.

OTTO

How come?

ANNIE

I don't know. All I know is that the only way he can lose out is if he fails to honor his contract.

LOU

In other words, this may be the only opportunity I get to play with the little boy scout.

(LOU points sharply at JACKSON, who in return lets out another loud scream. RALPH squirms.)

OTTO
JACKIE!

ANNIE
LET HIM GO, YOU BASTARD!!!

LOU
My, my, such an emotional woman! I understand what you see in her, Otto. Lotta spunk. Hey, Annabelle, what was it like having sex with a Dark Angel? I'll bet it was real hot! (laughs) Get it?! Hot sex with a guy from Hell! I kill myself! (laughs)

OTTO
I think its time for you to leave, Sir.

LOU
You do? Well, lucky for you I do to. But before I do, let me fill you in on what's in store for you once you're done working on the wallflower.

(LOU points and JACKSON screams again.)

LOU (cont'd)
First, for causing me this headache, you get demoted to Demon status.

OTTO
Son of a bitch! You can't do that!

LOU
Oh, I'm sorry. Did I need your permission? Then, for being today's lucky winner you'll get to be my personal slave. And that's not all! As a bonus, you'll get to be subjected to forms of torture that makes what I did to Bernie look like a trip to Disneyland. How's that sound, Otto?

OTTO
It sucks.

LOU
You bet it does. And don't feel that you'll be alone, because your buddy Bernie here will be right at your side.

BERNIE
(Drops to his knees) But your darkness, I've never done anything to anger or disrespect his Excellency.

LOU

True, you've been one of my most loyal Dark Angels. But the price of Otto's disrespect is too high for him to pay alone. Besides, what makes you think you're so special? You're just a cog in the machine, Bernie old boy. Just a cog I can use for my own amusement.

BERNIE

But ... your darkness ...

LOU

Can't help ya, pal. Otto here's dancin'. Somebody's gotta pay the band, and we don't take American Express.

JACKSON

Then let me pay.

(LOU snaps his fingers and JACKSON falls to the ground. He rises slowly, holding his arm. RALPH is also freed.)

LOU

Excuse me?